



Preparation for the 2011 Census

In depth scrutiny project
2008/09
Final Report and Recommendations

May 2009
Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee
Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Foreword by Chairman

The Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee decided that its in depth scrutiny project for 2008/09 should be on the preparations for the 2011 Census. The next national Census will take place on Sunday 27th March 2011.

Why the Census matters - the project was chosen because we felt that by undertaking the project we could make a positive contribution to improving local population estimates and ensuring that an undercount of Southend's population does not occur in the 2011 Census. At the last Census in 2001 we believe that (based on other sources of data such as GP registrations) the population of Southend was undercounted by up to 17,000 residents.

The Project Team, the wider Scrutiny Committee, all Councillors, the 2 local MPs, our partners and staff and residents are all aware of the importance of getting an accurate 2011 Census population count for Southend. The Borough's funding from Central Government is based on population and if these 'lost' residents had been counted, the Council would now be receiving up to £8.5 million more every year to improve frontline services essential to our community receiving services they deserve.

I would like to thank all those who have been involved with the project, those who took the time to attend meetings to give their evidence, send in their written comments, and my colleagues on the Committee and the Project Team.

***Councillor Jonathan Garston,
Chairman Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee***

1. SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

- 1.1 In the municipal year 2008/09, the Council's Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee agreed that the in depth scrutiny project would be on the 'Preparation for the 2011 Census'¹.
- 1.2 The Committee felt that by undertaking the project it could make a positive contribution to improving local population estimates and ensuring that an undercount of Southend's population does not occur in the 2011 Census and to help inform the development of the work on having good quality data on communities.
- 1.3 The Scrutiny Committee agreed the project plan for the study in October 2008², with the following agreed objectives and outcomes:
 - 1.3.1 To support the 2011 Census Group in its work and to add value through overview and scrutiny involvement and engagement³.
 - 1.3.2 To contribute to an accurate record of population for Southend -on-Sea.
 - 1.3.3 To act as community champions to help promote - and encourage residents to actively participate in - the 2011 Census, to ensure the best result for Southend-on-Sea.
 - 1.3.4 At the end of the scrutiny project, to make recommendations about the best way to maintain Member engagement, throughout the preparations for the 2011 Census.
 - 1.3.5 The proposed outcomes for the project were for an accurate Census result for 2011 and for:
 - Census form return rate to be above national average;
 - partners involved – maximum coverage and impact;
 - accurate targeting in hard to count areas.

Methodology/Process

- 1.4 The scrutiny study was carried out by the Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee supported by an officer Project Team comprising:
 - Fiona Abbott, Legal & Democratic Services and project co-ordinator
 - Shane Bartley, Project manager from the 2011 Census Group

¹ Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee held on 12th June 2008 (minute 136 refers)

² Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee meeting on 16th October 2008 (minute 556 refers)

³ We viewed this as a 2 stage process – (a) identify what our communities are; and (b) best ways to encourage people to accurately complete the Census form.

- Jo Bates, Legal & Democratic Services, administrative support
 - Jane Whalley, Legal & Democratic Services, administrative support
- 1.5 The following Members were attached to the Project Team in order to provide guidance and to act as a consultative body during the course of the Scrutiny:
- Councillor Jonathan Garston (Chairman),
 - Councillor Chris Walker (Vice Chairman),
 - Councillor Peter Ashley,
 - Councillor Stephen Habermel,
 - Councillor Ted Lewin,
 - Councillor Tania Painton,
 - Councillor Mike Royston.
- 1.6 During the project, the Project Team met on 4 occasions to discuss issues around the Census and this information provided the necessary background information for the two formal public evidence-giving sessions ('witness' sessions) at which the Committee received oral, written and presentational evidence from a number of key stakeholders.
- 1.7 Prior to the commencement of the witness sessions, Members and the Project Team identified, devised and documented the questions which were to be asked of each witness.

Evidence Gathering

- 1.8 The Committee agreed who should be approached as possible 'witnesses' and invitations were sent out for the witness sessions scheduled for January 2009, as follows:
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) – Stakeholder Manager;
 - Post Office (Delivery Manager);
 - The Leader of the Council;
 - Representatives from community groups/ community leaders;
 - 2 local MP's;
 - Chair of '2011 Census Group'.

In order to facilitate the process all witnesses were informed, in writing, of the questions that were to be asked at the witness session.

- 1.9 The Committee also agreed that it would seek the written views from a number of organisations and people. Written evidence was therefore invited from:
- Selected other local authorities;
 - NHS South East Essex;
 - Registrar;
 - Revenues & Benefits (Council Tax);
 - The LEA;
 - Business community (Federation of Small Businesses, Chamber of Commerce);

- Landlord's Forum;
- Older Peoples Assembly;
- Youth Council;
- Essex Racial Equality Council;
- Residents Associations;
- Leigh-on-Sea Town Council.

Stakeholders

1.10 Through the witness sessions, the Committee received evidence from the following individuals and associated organisations, to whom the Council is grateful:-

Witness session 1 – 19th January 2009

- Councillor Nigel Holdcroft – Leader of the Council; and
- Sally Collins – Chair of Census group and the interim Head of Policy and Improvement.

Witness session 2 - 22nd January 2009

- Ron May – Office for National Statistics (ONS);
- Representatives from the community – Tony le Masurier, John Barber and Reverend Peter Neale.

1.11 The Committee was disappointed that Royal Mail was unable to attend a witness session meeting. The 2 local MPs were also unable to attend and raised the profile of the 2011 Census in an Adjournment Debate in the Palace of Westminster on 3rd February 2009.

1.12 The responses to the questions we asked the witnesses are detailed in the [Annex to the Report - Documents 1 and 2](#). A further meeting took place on 22nd January 2009, attended by the 2 local MP's, Councillors and key partners. The responses from ONS to questions raised at the meeting are attached in the [Annex to the Report - Document 3](#).

1.13 Written evidence was also received from the following:

- NHS South East Essex;
- Private Sector Housing;
- Essex Racial Equality Council;
- Older People's Assembly;
- Huntingdon District Council – the Chief Executive is the Census Regional Champion;
- Manchester City Council (successful in their challenge of the 2001 Census result);
- Poole Council (officer view);
- Blackpool Council;
- Lancaster City Council;
- Bournemouth Borough Council;
- Eastwood and St. Laurence Residents Association;

- Leigh Society;
- Kilworth Area Residents Association/ COBRA;
- Mr. Fulford (personal views);
- Hillside Road Residents Association;
- Montague Court Residents Association;
- Gathered views at Cluny Square Residents Association meeting on 16th February and Chalkwell Residents Association meeting on 1st April 2009.

An overview of responses from the written evidence is attached in the [Annex to the Report \(Document 4\)](#).

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since 1801, every ten years the nation has set aside one day for the Census – a count of all people and households in the country. The Census is the most complete source of information about the population we have and it provides essential information from national to neighbourhood level for government, business and the community.
- 2.2 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) (and not the Council) is responsible for carrying out the National Census. ONS have stressed their overriding commitment to ensuring the confidentiality and security of the data for 100 years.
- 2.3 The Census is the only survey which provides a detailed picture of the entire population and is unique because it covers everyone at the same time and asks the same core questions everywhere. This makes it easy to compare different parts of the country.
- 2.4 The most recent Census was on 29th April 2001. The 2001 Census population count for Southend is considered to be flawed by this Council based on evidence of more dwellings being built, GP registrations and HMO's being undercounted and we believe that the population of Southend was undercounted by up to 17,000 residents.
- 2.5 Because of this, the Economic Scrutiny Committee undertook an in depth scrutiny project in 2003/04 to investigate the outcomes from the 2001 Census. The Council hoped to secure a revision to the population count for Southend-on-Sea and worked hard with ONS to try to achieve this. Unfortunately, the Council was unable to convince ONS of its case and no revision to the 2001 Census population count occurred.
- 2.6 The Borough's funding from Central Government is based on population and if these 'lost' residents had been counted, the Council would now be receiving up to £8.5 million more every year to improve services. All Members of the Committee are aware of the importance of getting an accurate Census population count for Southend. Simply put – getting the 2011 Census right will bring more money to the town and will enable us

to provide better services and get better data to help us all plan services better (i.e. Council, police, health etc).

- 2.7 The Member Project Team met on 9th September 2008 and received an outline briefing on the key issues and also received an overview of the work of the 2011 Census group⁴. This information was shared at the Scrutiny Committee meeting in October 2008⁵.
- 2.8 Members were made aware that the next National Census in England & Wales will be on Sunday 27th March 2011 and that ONS will be carrying out a full Census rehearsal in 3 areas during October 2009. The areas which have been chosen for this are - Isle of Anglesey, London Borough of Newham and Lancaster. This is a voluntary test of 110,000 households and there will be no statistical outputs.
- 2.9 The Committee was appraised that the proposed methods of engagement in the Census rehearsal (and also for the 2011 Census) will be through:
- Some by hand delivery;
 - Internet based response option – ONS anticipate a 25% response rate via this method; and
 - Delivery of the Census questionnaire/ forms by post – it is intended that 95% of Census forms will be distributed via mail, with hand delivery focusing on areas which are difficult to reach by post and HMO's etc (where the address list is inadequate or where difficult to engage population groups have been identified).

The postal delivery method will utilise information from the National Local Land Property Gazetteer (LLPG) and will cross match with post office address data (PAF). The pilot will involve checking physically the LLPG/PAF against actual addresses for inconsistencies.

- 2.10 ONS field staff will follow up non responses and this will start 10 days after Census day.
- 2.11 The Committee was pleased that the ONS had already indicated a willingness to engage with Members and the scrutiny process and ONS responded to our request for an opportunity to discuss engagement issues and to talk to the Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.12 As part of the project the Committee agreed that an item relating to training should be added to the Member training programme to assist

⁴ This is the multi agency group, chaired by the Head of Policy & Improvement at the local authority. The Chair of this group attended the first witness session to provide evidence.

⁵ Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee - 16th October 2008 – minute 556 refers

Members in understanding their role in achieving an accurate 2011 Census.

3. EVIDENCE GATHERING

- 3.1 As mentioned in section 1 above, the questions for the witnesses were sent to them prior to their attendance at the Committee. Letters were sent to other evidence givers, inviting them to comment on the questions posed by the Committee.
- 3.2 A detailed record of general comments and specific responses to questions posed by Members of the Committee was prepared. This record of evidence was forwarded to the representative in order to ensure that the recorded evidence was factually correct.
- 3.3 The responses to the questions we asked the witnesses are detailed in the [Annex to the Report - Documents 1 and 2](#).
- 3.4 A meeting also took place on 22nd January 2009, attended by the 2 local MP's, Councillors and key partners. The responses from ONS to the questions raised at this meeting are attached in the [Annex to the Report - Document 3](#).
- 3.5 An overview of responses from the written submissions is set out in the [Annex to the Report - Document 4](#).

4. COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The Census is the most comprehensive single and important survey of the UK's population. Its accuracy is crucial to the planning, development and delivery of local services, resource allocation and decision making.
- 4.2 There are significant financial implications of miscounts (undercounts) in population to local authority funding (and to others) and therefore service planning and delivery.
- 4.3 Through the scrutiny project, there has been early engagement with ONS and communications about the Census have already started.
- 4.4 The majority of Census forms will be delivered by post. It is therefore essential that we have an accurate address register to support the proposed delivery mechanism and the Committee was reassured that this is something which is being actively worked on.
- 4.5 The Committee was disappointed that the Post Office Delivery Manager was unable to attend a witness session meeting. The Committee felt that the winner of the tendering process should be invited back at some stage in the future and the invitation must be addressed to a senior representative at Royal Mail.

- 4.6 We do still have concerns that, potentially, the postal delivery method may produce lower results than in 2001 as less 'human contact' involved. ONS have said that the post out methodology will allow significant savings to invest in targeted follow-up and community liaison.
- 4.7 The Council and its partners (through Southend Together) have already begun preparations to help ONS deliver the 2011 Census successfully. The effective engagement of our communities is crucial to the achievement of accurate population counts. A communications strategy has already been developed and there will be a range of different types of communications with residents over the next 2 years⁶.

The role of communication in the local delivery of the 2011 Census is two-fold:

- to ensure that there is a critical level of awareness of the Census throughout the local population; and
 - to influence positively those who might be suspicious or reticent to take part.
- 4.8 The Committee feels that the responsibility to communicate with the Borough's residents about the Census lies with every single employee or volunteer of the partners within Southend Together.
- 4.9 The Committee also felt that there is a vital role for ward Councillors to help promote and encourage residents to actively participate in the 2011 Census, to ensure the best result for Southend-on-Sea (as community champions).
- 4.10 Following the Census, there will be a Census coverage survey by ONS meaning that 10% of residents will need to complete a further survey. This follow up work will have an impact on residents across the town. ONS expect that the final data from the Census will be released by summer 2013.
- 4.11 The Project Team met on 24th March 2009 to consider the responses from all the witnesses / evidence givers and the conclusions and recommendations it wished to make to Cabinet. The full Scrutiny Committee considered and agreed the draft conclusions and recommendations at the meeting on 9th April 2009⁷.

⁶ Members were advised that an Action Plan is being developed and that this should be firmed up by the end April 2009.

⁷ Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9th April 2009 (minute 1206 refers)

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council consider the in-depth scrutiny report on the Census and agree the conclusions from the study:

- 5.1 The Council and partners ensure that the address register for Southend is as accurate as possible, as this will be the primary mechanism for the delivery of the Census forms.
- 5.2 That Cabinet provides reassurance that the right level of resource is in place to ensure that the Census is accurate.
- 5.3 That engagement and communication with the community needs to start at the earliest opportunity, making best use of communication channels available through the partnership.
- 5.4 Due to the varied nature of the work undertaken by Council/ partner staff and the number of contacts they already have in the community, to encourage and support Southend-on-Sea Borough Council staff in becoming enumerators/ part of the field force.
- 5.5 To support field force of enumerators both prior to and in the follow up work on non-returned forms, by providing administrative and storage space at the Civic Centre to help them coordinate/ develop their staff.
- 5.6 That, during the 6 week period for people to return their completed Census form, the Council investigate ways of providing appropriate face to face support to help residents fill in their Census form. (The support should augment the support which will be available from ONS).
- 5.7 As the field force is being assembled based on the risk of non-return of forms, the Council should develop area profiles - to predict the areas of the town which may be hard to count⁸. This can then be provided to ONS to ensure that enough resources are planned before the Census to carry out any follow up work.
- 5.8 That ONS are invited to share any relevant experiences in order to learn of any problems which may have occurred and strategies to overcome (where applicable) from the 2009 Census Test, so that we can better prepare to support residents in completing the Census form.
- 5.9 That all Southend Together partner staff and Elected Members, carrying out the role of ward Champions, have a critical role in the engagement with the community as they are best placed to be advocates and Champions for the Census.

⁸ This will be through gathering all possible points of view especially including the input from ward Members.

- 5.10 That a Members briefing on the Census be included in the Member training programme to assist Members in understanding their role in achieving an accurate 2011 Census.
- 5.11 That Project Team should continue as a long life / task and finish group, to meet again as and when required.

LIST OF INFORMATION INCLUDED IN THE ANNEX TO REPORT

Document 1	Responses to the questions – witness session 1
Document 2	Responses to the questions – witness session 2
Document 3	Responses from ONS to questions raised at meeting with partners on 22 nd January 2009
Document 4	Overview of responses from the written evidence

CONTACT DETAILS

For further information relating to this report, or general enquiries about scrutiny:

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Copies of previous scrutiny studies can be found on www.southend.gov.uk and click on the 'council & democracy' section of the website.

LIST OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Reports

1. In-depth Scrutiny Project – Report of Corporate Director Support Services – 16th October 2008

Witness sessions

2. Notes from witness session held 19th January 2009 (see Annex – Document 1)
3. Notes from witness session held 22nd January 2009 (see Annex – Document 2).

Minutes

4. Agreement to selected topic – Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee held 12th June 2008 (minute 136 refers)
5. Extract from Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee meeting on 16th October 2008 (minute 556 refers)
6. Minutes of Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee held 19th January 2009 (witness session 1) (minutes 908 – 911 refer)
7. Minutes of Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee held 22nd January 2009 (witness session 2) (minutes 920 – 922 refer)
8. Extract from Economic & Environmental Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9th April 2009 (minute 1206 refers)

Project Team meetings

9. Meetings of the Member Project Team were held on the following dates - 9th September 2008, 13th November 2008, 8th January 2008 and 24th March 2009. The notes are available on request.

Other information

10. Letters and emails from written evidence givers
11. In depth scrutiny report – 2004 project '**Evaluation of Census result for Southend-on-Sea**'
www.southend.gov.uk/content.asp?section=146&content=7858
12. Treasury Select Committee, '**counting the population**', May 2008 -
www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtreasy/183/18302.Htm Eleventh Report of Session 2007-8, printed on 23 May 2008
13. August 2008 – '**Local Counts – the future of the Census**' – report by New Local Government Network www.nlgn.org.uk/public
14. March 2008 - City and Council of Swansea scrutiny review '**Everybody counts!**' www.swansea.gov.uk/scrutiny

15. December 2008 – The Census White Paper, '**Helping to shape tomorrow, the 2011 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales**'
16. Documents and briefing material from the ONS web site (e.g. Census Talk) www.ons.gsi.gov.uk
17. Adjournment debate – Census - 3rd February 2009
18. March 2009 - Southend Together Partnership – Census Communications Strategy 2011 Census
19. CfPS document '**Putting it into practice: the questioning technique**' www.cfps.org.uk/publications

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