

## **CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP**

### **AG (10) 13 Transfer of Housing Stock**

#### **2011 Census –Transfer of housing stock**

##### **Action requested of Advisory Groups:**

This paper has been produced to seek Advisory Group members' views on the issue of outputs relating to housing stock transfers in England and Wales, and how they should be reported in 2011 Census outputs

**Comments will be welcome at the meeting or sent within three weeks to:**

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## Issue

A question has been raised by both the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and from the National Housing Federation (NHF) in England relating to the impact of the transfer of social housing stock between Local Authorities (LA) and Registered Social Landlords (RSL) on census outputs. This is a process known as Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) whereby LAs transfer the ownership and management of their housing stocks to not-for-profit RSLs (e.g. Housing Associations).

The issue of concern relates to the answer given for the Census question "Who is your landlord". The response options include "Council (Local Authority)" and "Housing Association, Housing Cooperation, Charitable Trust, Registered Social Landlord". A risk to the accuracy of the information provided by respondents could be raised if tenants were not fully aware of the transfer details, as they could provide incorrect information about the status of their landlord. The risk is likely to be greater in relation to transfers happening close to 2011 Census day, which is known to be the case in parts of Wales and possibly in areas of England as well. The key outcome would be the provision of inconsistent accuracy in responses covering the landlord question.

It should be noted that different approaches are taken to the adoption to LSVT in Wales and England. Some LAs in England have taken the option to transfer parts of their social housing stock to RSLs using separate LSVTs; whereas local authorities in Wales typically transfer all their social housing stock in a single LSVT.

This concern is not new and was raised following the publication of 2001 census results. ONS received correspondence from several LAs after 2001 arguing that ALL of their publicly owned housing stock should have been recorded as either Housing Association or Council owned, but that their Census results showed a mix, which could be proved wrong. ONS held the position at that time, that the Census reflected the responses given, and that this wasn't something ONS were in a position to correct, as the results had already been produced and published.

## Options

The following options have been identified:

- (a) Use reference information to correct questionnaire returns and use this information in the outputs.
- (b) Publish outputs based on original responses and include footnotes to relevant tables indicating that information is based on individual responses. Provide separate analysis on quality of responses.

### **Option (a) Use reference information to correct questionnaire returns and use this information in the outputs**

Since LSVT in Wales transfer entire local authority housing stocks the option to use information to correct questionnaire returns would be a relatively simple procedure. However in England where some local authorities have taken the option to transfer only part of their housing stock, such routine corrections would not be feasible. The only solution available would entail matching data from the National Register of Social Housing (NROSH); which is not affordable or feasible in the time available. The likelihood, therefore, is that this option

would lead to inconsistencies in the reporting of housing stocks within England and across England and Wales.

It should be noted that although information provided by respondents are corrected using edit rules elsewhere in the census; the nature of the edit rules are to correct instances where it is felt that respondents have unwittingly responded with incorrect information; such as a married five year old. These corrections are very different from correcting the information a respondent may have intentionally given such as recording the local authority as their landlord due to their unhappiness with the outcome of a LSVT. A different example of where data is not corrected in the census is in relation to responses on religion whereby a response given for what would not sensibly be considered a religion is not corrected. The argument could therefore be made that information provided by respondents on their census questionnaire in respect of their landlord should not be amended or corrected and any known difficulties should be reported on via quality information.

Arguments of consistency or the ethical consideration of amending responses have to be weighed against the uses of the data. Where it is known with 100% certainty that a Census response is incorrect, the argument that it should be corrected should be given some consideration.

**Option (b) Publish outputs based on original responses and include footnotes to relevant tables indicating that information is based on individual responses. Provide separate analysis on quality of responses.**

Although outputs based solely on respondent information would be consistent in terms of the how the data was generated, it is likely that the accuracy of information would vary across local authorities. Local authorities who had implemented LSVTs close to the census day would possibly have higher inconsistencies in the data than other local authorities that had transferred housing stocks earlier. However footnotes to census outputs, could be included to indicate that the information is based solely on respondents' knowledge and therefore may be inconsistent.

Where local authorities had transferred entire housing stocks it would be a relatively simple process for the authority to amend census outputs in line with LSVT information and report such information appropriately. Local authorities in England where only partial housing stock transfers had taken place would find such amendments more difficult; however custom built outputs could be made available to assist authorities in these instances.

If option (b) were to be adopted, the inaccuracy of the data could be substantiated in many areas, and may be used to question the validity of the census as a whole.