

Scottish Executive needs for official household estimates and projections
Extract from Update Note (12 November 2001)

1 In June 2001 I circulated a paper to relevant Scottish Executive policy and planning divisions seeking views on the need for and priorities for the development of household estimates and projections. A brief summary of responses is set out below:-

Key policy drivers

2. The drivers of the need for household estimates/ projections identified were:-

Support for the planning process. National Planning Policy Guidelines state that official household projections are an important demographic factor in estimating housing need, but notes that other projections may be used provided councils can justify doing so.

Local housing strategies: Household estimates and projections - including estimates/ projections at a sub-local authority level (e.g. Housing Market Context Statement area) are seen as an important component of the suite of information to be used by councils in developing local housing strategies.

Monitoring Social Inclusion Partnerships: Household estimates and trends in numbers of households at a neighbourhood level, set against numbers and trends in the wider area are potentially very useful in monitoring progress of social inclusion partnerships.

Supporting people etc: Estimates, trends and projections of numbers of elderly households - single persons and couples - are likely to become increasingly important in the context of monitoring the impact of policy in relation to care of the elderly.

Note that, in the main, the Scottish Executive policy need is to ensure that local authorities and other agencies (e.g. SIP partnerships) have a sound information base on which to plan and monitor.

Household types for estimates/ projections

3. There were no significant concerns about the range of household types (by size grouping and age of household head) for which projections are currently produced. It was generally felt that it would be useful to provide household estimates for the same split of household types.

Geographical levels

4. A number of the identified needs require reliable household estimates, and possibly projections, at lower geographical levels than local authority. For estimates, the ideal would be a flexible low-level geography which could be aggregated in different ways.

Timescale for projections

5. For general planning purposes a longer timescale would be desirable, but it is recognised that the reliability of projections will fall off significantly over longer periods.

Timeliness of estimates/ projections

6. For all uses, the faster production of estimates/ projections would be welcomed, but it is recognised that it takes time to assemble the necessary base information, and the calculations are quite complex.

Methodology

7. As might be expected, there were no strong views about the present methodology. On the planning side it was felt that the use of stock estimates to derive household estimates limits their value in assessing the match between the supply of and demand for housing.

Conclusion

8. My initial conclusions are that the identified Scottish Executive policy needs to chime in pretty well with the issues raised initially by members of HARG. Hopefully the local authority responses will tend to point in the same general direction:-

The methodologies and published estimates and projections should, if possible, support the development of sub-local authority estimates (and, where sensible, sub-local authority projections).

We need to consider ways of separating household estimates from housing stock estimates, but not at the expense of the timescale for the production of estimates.

For household projections there is no need to move away from the basic disaggregation of households by size and age of head of household.

Extending the period over which projections are produced is not a major priority, and for some purposes (e.g. Housing Strategies) the required time periods are much shorter.