

HOUSEHOLD ANALYSIS REVIEW GROUP: SMALL AREA HOUSEHOLD ESTIMATES**Purpose**

1. At the last HARG meeting in February, HARG members agreed that GRO(S) should contact the IRRV, to pursue the development of small area household estimates from Council Tax systems. This paper describes progress made to date, and the Annex shows the letter that has been circulated to local authorities.

Background

2. In April, the GRO(S) household estimates branch met with Allan Traynor from the IRRV (Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation), to discuss proposals to develop small area household estimates from Council Tax systems. Allan leads the IRRV revenues forum, which has representatives from all councils and meets every quarter. He is also a member of the local tax working group, an adviser to CoSLA on revenues and benefits, and works for Fife Council as Revenue Services Manager.

3. In principal, Allan saw no problems in us obtaining this information from councils. The main concern councils have is over confidentiality, for example if it was possible to identify whether properties were occupied or vacant. In order to avoid this problem, we agreed to ask local authorities to supply data aggregated to data zone level – each data zone contains an average of 750 people. GRO(S) would provide a lookup table linking each postcode to the relevant data zone, to enable local authorities to supply this information.

4. The information we would require, for each data zone, is:

- Total number of dwellings on the valuation list (excluding free-standing private lock-ups and garages)
- Number of dwellings subject to no discounts or exemptions
- Number of unoccupied exempt dwellings
- Number of occupied exempt dwellings
- Number of dwellings subject to a 25% discount
- Number of dwellings subject to second home or long-term empty property discount

5. GRO(S) has written a letter to local authorities, which Allan agreed to circulate (see Annex). It outlines the background to this work, and what information we are planning to collect. It also includes a short questionnaire for local authorities to complete, to identify what work is required to obtain this information, any likely problems that may arise, and the likely time and costs involved. The letter also asks for volunteers to pilot the data collection.

Tenure

6. Ruth Harris, from the Scottish Executive Housing Statistics Branch, also attended the meeting with Allan. Ruth is carrying out a scoping project to determine the feasibility of developing small area estimates of tenure. The likely source of this information will be Council Tax systems, so Ruth is working with GRO(S) on this.

Next steps & action required

7. Allan will collate responses to this letter, and pass them on to GRO(S) – this will help to identify the work that will be involved in arranging this data collection, and the issues that we will face. GRO(S) will attend the next meetings of the IRRV revenues forum and the IRRV software suppliers' groups in June, to discuss these proposals further.
8. HARG members are asked to:
 - (a) Confirm whether the information described here will meet the need for small area estimates of occupied and vacant dwellings, and whether there is anything else that we need to consider or do.
 - (b) State whether they have a preference for the time at which the data collection should be carried out. If the data are collected in September, the figures should match those supplied in the Council Tax returns, which local authority household estimates will be based on. There is a strong advantage to this, but a disadvantage would be that students may not be at their term-time address at this date, which may lead to an over-estimate of the number of vacant dwellings. Alternatively, if figures were collected in late June, to match the mid-year population estimates, the same issue could arise.

GROS: Household estimates
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