

POPULATION AND MIGRATION STATISTICS COMMITTEE (SCOTLAND)

Report on the Fifth Meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board

Introduction

1. This note is intended to report back to PAMS members on the business of the fifth SCOTSTAT Board meeting.
2. Papers from the meeting are available on the SCOTSTAT website. (www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/scotstats/board/papers.asp).

Meeting report

3. The fifth meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board was held on Thursday 15th January 2004 at Victoria Quay. The Board was chaired by Rob Wishart, Chief Statistician, Scottish Executive. There was a reasonable attendance at this fifth meeting. However, the representation from the Theme Groups is increasingly coming from local authorities and local authority reps seem to have a better attendance record than others.
4. This meant that some Theme Groups were not represented and those that were, were largely represented by people from local authorities. This is unfortunate since it reduces the spread of opinions expressed. It also tends to turn the meeting into one between the local authorities and the Executive with the local authority reps increasing acting as such, rather than as Theme Group representatives. This is not the purpose of the Board and may need to be addressed if it continues.
5. The papers for the meeting were as follows:
 - Key statistics and performance indicators (Paper SCOTSTAT 1/04);
 - Statistics Commission arrangements in Scotland (Paper SCOTSTAT 2/04);
 - Survey of data/disclosure issues (Paper SCOTSTAT 3/04);
 - Summary of Committee Reports on work in progress for 2003/04 (Paper SCOTSTAT 4/04);
 - 2004 Statistics Plan overview (Paper SCOTSTAT 5/04);
 - Development of ScotStat website and its membership (Paper SCOTSTAT 6/04);
 - Feedback on Income Statistics seminar (Paper SCOTSTAT 7/04).
6. Paper 1/04 Key Statistics and Performance Indicators: Work was still ongoing within the Executive to put together a database of indicators. This will be put on the SCOTSTAT website. A paper will be presented to ministers giving simplified guidance on best practice in development indicators which will flag up the role of the SCOTSTAT committees.
7. Paper 2/04 Statistics Commission arrangements in Scotland: Following a suggestion by Professor Ashcroft at the Fraser of Allander Institute that there should be a separate Statistics Commission for Scotland, this paper set out some options. These were:
 - No change from the status quo;
 - A separate Scottish Statistics Commission;
 - Enhance the Commission's role in Scotland;
 - Develop the autonomy and scrutiny role of SCOTSTAT;
 - Establish a scrutiny panel;
 - A Scottish Parliamentary Committee to scrutinise statistics.

8. Having considered the pros and cons of each of those alternatives, the Board agreed that the third of these options should be pursued. The Commission was due to visit the Executive on 3rd February and enhancing their role in Scotland would be discussed then.
9. Paper 3/04 Data access/disclosure issues: A substantial document from the Department of Constitutional Affairs on legal guidance on data sharing issues was circulated. It was agreed that the main points of this should be distilled and Executive guidance produced which would be cleared with the Information Commissioner.
10. Paper 4/04 Summary of Committee reports: It was agreed that there was a need for more cross committee working. The SCOTSTAT support unit needed to be more pro-active in this regard. The Executive would ask all committees to review their remits, and look again at links to Neighbourhood Statistics. This can be actioned by PAMS when a request is received from the Executive.
11. Paper 5/04 Development of the 2004 Statistics Plan: There was considerable interest in the new, integrated population and social statistics system and the parallel economic statistics system. The links between these need to be considered. It was agreed that a seminar to explain the Scottish elements of the population and social statistics systems would be useful. This is obviously of relevance to the PAMS Committee.
12. Otherwise the 2004 Statistics Plan would concentrate on the topic plans which should already have been discussed in the Theme committees.
13. Paper 6/04 Development of SCOTSTAT website: All the proposals in this paper to improve the use of the SCOTSTAT website and its membership were approved.
14. Paper 7/04 Feedback on Income Statistics seminar: This paper provided a useful report on the seminar held in September. It was agreed that work on income statistics needed to be taken forward by the committees.
15. Other issues: Hervey Gibson circulated a paper on errors in the Annual Business Inquiry which were causing concern. The Executive were aware of the problems. It was agreed to deal with this in correspondence.
16. The next meeting is likely to be held in June. If the proposed date remains – Wednesday 16th – I will be unable to attend, so another PAMS member should be appointed as a substitute.

Conclusion

17. This paper sets out the issues discussed by the SCOTSTAT Board at their meeting in January 2004. I would be happy to provide further information if required.
18. Although progress has been slow, issues are now getting covered in the wider forum.