

POPULATION PROJECTIONS WORKING GROUP (PPWG)

Local Authority Use of GROS Projections

Introduction

At the first meeting of the Population Projections Working Group (PPWG), it was agreed to seek the views of the wider local authority user base as to the uses made of the data and, in general, where improvements could be made to the content of the published information. To this end, a questionnaire was sent out to the PAMS representative of all Scottish Local Authorities. A copy of the questionnaire is attached as Appendix B. In total, 16 responses were made.

Respondents

The questionnaire was sent to all Scottish local authorities and responses were made by:

Aberdeen City
 Aberdeenshire
 Angus
 Argyle & Bute
 City of Edinburgh
 Clackmananshire
 Dumfries and Galloway
 Falkirk
 Glasgow
 Highland
 Inverclyde
 North Lanarkshire
 Renfrewshire
 Scottish Borders
 Ayrshire joint structure plan and transport committee
 Strathclyde partnership for transport

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to find out what uses were made of the population projections, whether authorities produced their own projections/forecasts, whether more regular or longer term projections would be useful and whether projections for other geographical areas would be desirable. The section dealing with the uses made of the data was left open, rather than suggesting possible uses. Because of this, some uses are generalised whilst others are very specific. Respondents were also invited to make any other comments on the population projections. Appendix A lists these comments in full.

Results

1. Uses made of the population projections

Table 1 below summarises the uses made by responding authorities. Exact responses have been grouped together, but these groups may not be exclusive. For example, use in

economic development strategy could be regarded as strategic planning, Estimate potential health problems could be regarded as service planning etc.

Table 1. Use Made of GRO(S) Population Projections

Use Made	No. of responses	% all responses
None	1	6
Policy Development - Strategic Planning	9	56
Policy Development - Local Planning	7	44
Examining Situation re Government funding	3	19
Input to own projections	2	13
Put authority into context	4	25
Service planning	8	50
Housing market analysis	3	19
Housing Needs Assessment	1	6
Retail impact assessment	1	6
Housing Strategy	2	13
Economic Development Strategy	5	31
School roll forecasts	4	25
Estimate health problems	2	13
South of Scotland Objective 2 Programme	1	6
General / Information requests	6	38

2. Do you prepare your own population projections/forecasts?

12 of the 16 respondents regularly, or have in the past, prepared their own population projections or forecasts. 8 of these 12 use GRO(S) projections in preparing their own figures. The geographical level at which these projections were prepared varied, but include:

Council Area	(4)
Ward	(2)
Settlement	(1)
School catchment	(4)
Housing market areas	(3)
Local plan area	(2)
Structure plan area	(2)
Retail catchment area	(1)
Community areas	(2)
Others	(5)

3. At present, GRO(S) population projections cover a 20 year period. Would you prefer the projections to cover a longer period?

6 of the 16 respondents said that they would prefer the projections to be made over a longer time period whilst the remaining 10 were happy with the current 20 year projection.

4. Would you prefer the projections to be carried out annually rather than every 2 years?

6 of the 16 respondents said that they would prefer the projections to be carried out annually rather than the current system of production every 2 years. 9 respondents were happy with the current timetable and 1 pointed out that there were pros and cons to both - On the one hand, they are up to date while two year gaps can lead to quite substantial swings in the projections between different sets. On the other hand frequent, i.e. annual, changes can make planning difficult as plans such as Structure Plan take a long time to produce and would be based on out of date projections if they were updated annually.

5. If it were possible, would you prefer population projections for other geographical areas?

13 of the 16 respondents said that they would like to see projections published for other geographical areas including:

Structure plan areas	(1)
Local plan areas	(1)
Transport partnership areas	(1)
Former districts	(2)
Housing market areas	(4)
Localities	(3)
Datazones (or aggregations of)	(6)
Wards	(4)
School catchments	(2)
City regions	(2)

There was concern from several respondents about the validity of producing small area projections in terms of accuracy and margin of error.

6. Summary of other comments

Other comments made on the population projections are listed in full in Appendix A. recurring themes in the comments include:

1. The desire for variant projections.
2. The desire for input data for models such as POPGROUP to be produced and made available.
3. Concern at the potential error margin in producing smaller area population projections.

Appendix A: Further Comments of Respondents

“I would find it useful to have the possibility of obtaining variant projections with different migration assumptions in particular. And of allowing local authorities to see what the effect of changes in policies which influence migration might have.”

“It would be useful to look at bottom up projections which were not controlled to the Scotland total so that we could see the effect of the continuation of current trends at a local authority level.”

“When our own population projections are next updated (which should be in the next few months), I want to ‘experiment’ a bit more with the scenarios that we use. Certainly, there seems to be a demand to produce something akin to variant projections in order to highlight the fact that projections do not produce definitive answers.”

“I, personally, have some concerns about the wishes of other Officers to have projections produced at very small geographies as I think we are already stretching confidence limits with the areas we do use. Perhaps some guidance about confidence limits and reliability would be useful.”

“Small areas are always important to Local Authorities, but it is understood that projections get more tenuous for these areas. In addition this LA has no significant statistical service to deal with formulating sophisticated projections and no corporate information service. Thus a great deal of reliance is placed on GRO’s data. I feel that if there is a choice between a projection every 1 year or better/more small area projections, I would choose the latter.

Consistency is very important for comparison over geography and time. It would not seem to be satisfactory to change Data Zone/Intermediate Area boundaries for future projections (if these are to be the chosen “small area”) if the 2011 and subsequent Census output areas are changed. Yet on the other hand small areas can be dynamic. I am thinking of the 7 burghs in Angus where the Census defines settlement boundaries, but these are already obsolete through developments on the edge of settlements. The Census “settlement” no longer represents the real settlement and I will guess that DZ’and IA’s will become obsolete for this purpose, outwith totally urban LA’s

Thus small areas must represent meaningful areas on the ground such as a town and projections for Arbroath, say, would be representative of a town boundary that changes over time. Rural small areas may less likely to so dynamic.”

“Major capital programmes (such as hospital new-build or re-configuration) take many years to implement. This renders current population data less relevant and population forecasts more relevant.”

“In this council area, there are three distinct divisions which are growing / declining at different rates. When projections were published at former district level this was helpful. In terms of future projections an area smaller than local authority level is welcomed, amalgamations of new wards or similar.”

“Trend based projections could be enhanced through the use of scenario forecasting techniques.”

“The present method of taking net migration average for last five years is unsatisfactory. A closer link is needed between migration assumptions and economic prospects. GROS should have closer link with Scottish Executive - Economic Development and Scottish Enterprise.”

“At Scotland-wide level, consideration should be given to some scenario projections, to reflect uncertainties with respect to future migration flows.”

“Where appropriate, GROS should publish one or two scenario projections for Council areas.”

“GROS should provide standard input for some projection software packages.”

“GROS should consider the effect of changing to migration propensities in the projection model.”

“GROS should use local birth and mortality adjustment factors split by age band. It would be useful for GROS to evaluate the effect of this on the projection results.”

“GROS should publish population and household projections simultaneously, if possible. “

“We anticipate the need to prepare projections for MMWs, despite any reservations we may have about accuracy for such small areas. We are also aware of limitations in our methodology for forecasting future school rolls and wonder whether we should be using a SYOA cohort survival type model for secondary schools, incorporating whatever local migration data we can pull together.

Adding these together, and including uncertainty about future organisational structure, our aspiration is for a general toolkit which will allow us to prepare projections for any small(ish) scale geography, using GIS as appropriate to model the basic building blocks of output area and data zone. SAPE figures by 5 year age bands, plus datazone level migration figures, go a long way towards this but we need to experiment with different approaches to see if we can achieve sensible results.”

“We would make more use of the GROS projections if they were more believable! The cohort survival methodology is fine, and I don’t imagine that anyone is too dissatisfied with the fertility and mortality rates used by the GROS, but there is a major problem with the migration assumptions. The current practice of taking a 5-year average of past migration estimates and assuming this will continue for 20 years into the future is a bit ‘clunky’. It produces some very odd results. It would be better to take a much longer-term perspective.

Taking a longer-term perspective would also give more consistency between one set of projections and the next. At the local authority level, there were some significant (inexplicable?) changes between the 2002-based and 2004-based projections. “

“The knock-on effect of not getting the population projections right is that, in some cases, the household projections will also be suspect. “

"I don't have a strong view on the possibility of the GROS producing variant projections. They could continue to release a single set of projections and supply Councils with the data to run their own scenarios. This shouldn't be a major problem, especially for those Councils that have the POPGROUP software."

"As discussed at the working group meeting, we would like the following from GROS:

The projection/forecast outcome should be what is expected to happen. This would need to consider eg economic prospects and development plans, which seem to have been used more in the past.

If this is not possible or until this is achieved, we would like GROS to facilitate the use of their data by POPGROUP users."

"Consideration should be given to providing population projections based on a number of variable eg high migration high, birth rate these could be issued with BASE projections which currently reflect historical patterns of change."

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Name:

Local Authority:

Department:

What use(s) does your Council make of the GRO(S) population projections?

Please only refer to specific uses of the population projections, not mid-year population estimates or household estimates/projections.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Do you prepare your own population projections/forecasts?

If Yes, at what geographical level?

Do you use the GRO(S) projections in the process?

At present, GRO(S) population projections cover a 20 year period. Would you prefer the projections to cover a longer period?

Would you prefer the projections to be carried out annually rather than every 2 years?

If it were possible, would you prefer population projections for other geographical areas?

If yes, which?

Any further comments: