

Small area household estimates

1. Summary

GROS has been collecting small area statistics on occupied and vacant dwellings from Council Tax systems. We plan to publish these figures in the Spring, along with small area statistics on dwellings, from the Assessors' Portal. This paper describes the quality assurance work that we do, and plans for publishing the data.

2. Data collection and quality assurance checks

GROS collects the following information from Council Tax systems, for each data zone in Scotland:

- Total number of dwellings.
- Dwellings which are unoccupied and exempt from paying Council Tax.
- Number of dwellings exempt from Council Tax, which are occupied. For example, all-student households and armed force accommodation.
- Long term empty properties.
- Second homes.
- Dwellings entirely occupied by adults who are 'disregarded' for Council Tax purposes, such as people who are severely mentally impaired. This information isn't directly needed for these statistics. However, in the past some councils were not able to separately identify these dwellings from other dwellings entitled to the same level of discount, so it was decided that we should request the data separately.
- Single adult discounts - dwellings subject to a discount of 25%. This may include, for example, dwellings with a single adult, dwellings with one adult living with one or more children.

When the data is collected, GROS carries out a number of quality checks for each local authority area, as follows:

1. A comparison of the total of the small area statistics with the 'Ctaxbase' return. The Ctaxbase return is collected on the same date by the Scottish Government's Statistical Support for Local Government branch. It contains equivalent summary figures for each local authority area.
2. A comparison of the total of the small area statistics in each category with last year's figures. In future years, we will also be able to carry out comparisons with more years' data.
3. A comparison of the Ctaxbase totals in each category, over several years. In some cases, such as the total number of dwellings, we have figures going back to 1996. For second homes and long-term empty properties, the figures have only been collected separately since 2005. Having several years' figures makes it easier to see whether a change is the result of a consistent trend over time, or not. Some councils provide comments on their Ctaxbase figures to explain any large changes since the previous year.
4. Produce a chart which shows the total number of dwellings recorded in each data zone, in 2007 and 2008. Normally, we would expect to see a very strong positive

relationship, and a few data zones which showed an increase or decrease between the two years.

5. Produce a chart which shows the number of dwellings in each data zone as recorded in the Assessors' Portal (December 2007) and the Council Tax system (September 2008). Again, we would expect a strong positive relationship, with a few differences due to the different dates of the data collections. Where there are significant differences, it tends to be because there are dwellings on the Council Tax system which lack a postcode, which means they can't be allocated to the correct data zone.
6. Produce maps which show the percentage of dwellings in each data zone which have single adult discounts, are empty, are second homes, or have 'occupied exemptions' (e.g., all-student households or armed forces accommodation). This is a really useful way of understanding the data and assessing the accuracy of it, e.g., by highlighting student areas in a city. If someone knows an area, it is usually fairly easy to say whether the maps look reasonable, and if you don't know an area, it is possible to check some of the findings, e.g., by checking the locations of Universities or armed forces bases, or using Internet searches to check whether areas with a large proportion of unoccupied dwellings are undergoing regeneration.
7. These checks may also lead us to carry out further checks on any unusual findings. For example, if there are significant changes in one of the categories, we could produce further charts and/or maps to see where these changes are occurring.

GROS then sends a summary of the findings to the person in the local authority finance department who supplied the data, and also the PAMS (Population and Migration Statistics) representative for that local authority. They will know their area and data better than we do, so this provides a further opportunity for quality assurance of the data. It gives them the opportunity to tell us if any of it looks wrong, or if they know of any reasons for differences between the different sources of data, or changes over time.

HARG members are asked to say whether they are content with these checks, or if they can suggest anything else that could be done to assess the quality of the data.

3. Publication plans

We are planning to follow the same publication format as last year:

a) Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) website

We will publish the percentage of dwellings which are occupied, vacant, second homes, have single adult discounts or 'occupied exemptions' on the SNS website. 2007 figures can be seen at www.sns.gov.uk (under 'advanced reporter' and then housing, household estimates). This allows the small area figures to be viewed on a table or as a map, or downloaded to be analysed separately. Data zone figures can be aggregated by the user to provide figures for different geographies.

b) Publication of summary statistics

We will produce a publication showing summary analysis of these figures, and figures on dwellings which are collected separately from the Assessors' Portal. This will follow a similar format to last year's publication, which can be seen here: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/publications-and-data/household-estimates-statistics/estimates-of-households-and-dwellings-in-scotland-2007/index.html>.

This publication contains analysis of the Council Tax data shown in Section 2, and the following data on dwellings:

- Number of dwellings in each Council Tax band.
- Number of dwellings by size.
- Number of dwellings by type of property (detached, semi-detached, terrace or flat).
- Density of housing (number of dwellings per hectare).

The following analysis is included, for each type of data:

- Figures for each local authority area.
- Analysis by urban-rural classification.
- Analysis by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile.
- Maps of Scotland, illustrating some of the figures at local authority level.
- Maps illustrating some of the figures at data zone level. It is not possible to show maps covering the whole of Scotland in this way, in a publication, so a few areas are shown as examples. Users can produce maps showing the areas and topics they are interested in, using the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics website (as described above).
- Boxplots, which illustrate the level of variation seen within each local authority area. The publication also describes what a 'boxplot' is, and gives an illustration.

HARG members are asked whether they are happy with the way in which these statistics were presented last year, and whether they have any suggestions for improving the way in which the information is presented, to make it more useful for users.

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