

How the ONS works with local authorities

There are extensive arrangements for ONS and LAs to work together on methods for estimating population and improving those methods. In particular:

- The population subgroup that convenes under the aegis of the Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP) arrangements exists to discuss methodological issues pertaining to the population estimates. There are around 20 local authority representatives who are full members of this group representing all LAs across England and Wales.
- Before subnational population projections are published there is a period of consultation with local authorities and health organisations to provide an opportunity to comment on proposals for the assumptions being made in the projections.
- The ONS is currently leading a cross-government programme of work to improve population and migration statistics and ONS is working closely in partnership with central government departments and local authorities to achieve the vision for this. The LGA are members of the MSI Programme board and several working groups reporting to it. ONS holds progress workshops on a quarterly basis with the LGA to which local authorities are invited to feed views into the programme.
- The quality assurance strategy for the programme includes local insight reference panels (LIRPS) comprising local authority representatives to sense-check impacts of change. In December indicative impacts of the first set of improvements are being published and local authorities will have the opportunity to comment on these.

Information the ONS provides to local authorities to assist in forecasting population changes

The ONS Centre for Demography core business is the provision of reliable population statistics to inform customers of population levels and dynamics. Key outputs include:

- annual mid year population estimates (including components of change), at local authority level by single year of age and sex
- international and internal migration statistics
- national and subnational (down to local authority area level) population projections with a 25 year horizon
- demographic analyses and research papers
- expert statistical and demographic advice

What the ONS is doing to ensure that this information is as timely and accurate as possible

The ONS is leading a cross-government programme of work to improve migration and population statistics in partnership with other government departments. This programme is taking forward recommendations from the

2006 Task Force on Migration Statistics, and subsequent parliamentary reviews, to ensure population statistics are fit for purpose and are trusted as authoritative by highly engaged users. The programme is researching and implementing improvements that will lead to better accuracy covering several areas including

- greater use of timely administrative data in population estimation
- use of new entry/exit schemes (e-Borders) to count migrants into and out of the UK
- improved survey sources
- more coherent reporting of migration statistics
- provision of new products to fill the gaps in the existing outputs suite

The programme is delivering improvements in the short, medium and longer term. In May 2010 ONS will be publishing revised 2002-2008 mid-year population estimates incorporating a package of improvements as announced in February 2009 and has an extensive programme of engagement to ensure users are aware of what the improvements are, why they are being made and what the impact will be on estimate numbers. More information on the programme is available at www.statistics.gov.uk/imps

Challenges and initiatives to improving the quality of information and information sharing

- The use of administrative sources has the potential to be a fundamental improvement to the way in which ONS estimates the population. Such sources can provide better and more comprehensive coverage of particular sub-groups of the population than might be expected in a sample survey.
- There are always some limitations with using administrative sources for statistical purposes since they are not generally designed for this particular purpose. The population groups they cover might not be relevant for population estimation purposes and usually it is not possible to separate out those who are residents according to the definitions underlying population statistics. It is therefore not straightforward to use administrative sources directly.
- However, ONS is developing methods to make the most of the opportunity for improvements that administrative sources can offer, for example it is developing statistical models that use these sources.
- The Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 allows the laying of regulations to permit individual level data sharing between the UK Statistics Authority and other public bodies for statistical purposes. This is a major step forward in removing barriers to such uses and we have already used the legislative powers to share School Census data with Department for Children, Schools and Families. Other sources include Department for Work and Pensions Migrant Worker Scan and Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, Higher Education Statistics Agency data on students, and UK Borders Agency Project Semaphore data.

- Within the MSI programme working in partnership with other government departments that own administrative sources will lead to improvements to data quality and better statistics.

National trends and impact on Leeds

There is quite a lot of variation in trends at local levels due to different area characteristics and drivers of population change. The latest mid-year population estimates published were for mid-2008 and were published on 27 August 2009. At a national level these showed:

- The population of the UK was 61.4 million in mid-2008, up by 408,000 (0.7 per cent) on the previous year and over two million more than in mid-2001
- In the seven years since 2001, the population has increased by an average of 0.5 per cent per year. Increases in births, decreases in deaths and changes in the pattern of international migration into and out of the UK have all contributed to population growth since 2001
- Natural change (the difference between births and deaths) overtook net migration as the main contributor to population growth over the 12 month period for the first time in a decade.
- This change reflects an increase in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) to 1.96 - the highest rate since 1973.
- In the year to mid-2008, natural change accounted for 54 per cent of all population growth in the UK
- The UK population continues to age. The number of people aged 85 and over reached a record 1.3 million in mid-2008, accounting for more than 2 per cent of the total population.

In contrast, the population of Leeds was 770,800 at mid-2008, an increase of 9,700 (1.3%) on the previous year. The majority of this change (67%) was due to net international migration.

Good practice from elsewhere

- ONS works closely with the statistical institutes of other countries to adopt best practice. The cohort component methodology used for population estimation is internationally recognised as being appropriate and robust.
- We are working with academic and demographic experts in developing new methodologies and in quality assuring our methods.
- We have an advisory group (the National Statistics Centre for Demography Advisory Board) made up of learned and experienced experts to provide advice on the work plans for population statistics developments.