



# SASPAC Advisory Panel

Notes of meeting held 28 October 2009, at City Hall, London.

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Peter Norris (Chair)</b> <b>Alan Lewis</b> <b>Allan Lambie</b> <b>Chris Ashford</b> <b>David Vallance</b> <b>Richard Cameron</b> <b>Ian Robertson</b> <b>Justin Hayes</b> <b>Paul Savage</b>	<b>Local Government Association</b> <b>SASPAC Project Officer</b> <b>South Lanarkshire Council</b> <b>Office for National Statistics</b> <b>Pecan Tree</b> <b>Greater London Authority</b> (substitute for Eileen Howes) <b>Leicester City Council</b> <b>Manchester University (Mimas)</b> <b>Mott Macdonald</b> (substitute for Sherman Griffith)
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Chris Batsford</b> <b>John Langley</b> <b>Neil Storer</b>	<b>Cardiff County Council</b> <b>East Midlands Public Health Observatory</b> <b>London Borough of Camden</b>

## 1. Introduction

The Chair, Peter Norris, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. The group introduced themselves to other Panel members with a short description of their involvement with SASPAC and the Census.

Alan Lewis described the role and purpose of the Panel.

## 2. Notes of Previous Meeting

These were agreed, although, as the meeting was so far in the past (Feb 2005) members of the Panel present had little recollection of the proceedings.

Chris Ashford commented that the relationship between ONS and SASPAC had improved significantly since the time of the last meeting; a much more open and partnership-working approach is looking likely in 2011.

Alan Lewis reported that Ray Brewer (Essex County Council) was previously a member of the Panel but no longer thinks he is the appropriate person at Essex and is currently looking for a suitable replacement.

**ACTION: Alan Lewis to contact Ray and confirm membership**

There were no further issues arising that were not covered by the agenda.

## 3. SASPAC Ownership

Peter Norris reported that the Local Government Association (LGA) had taken on the ownership of SASPAC from the previous owners: Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA). The management of the software still resides with the Greater London Authority (GLA). A Memorandum of Understanding between SASPAC and the LGA was signed in June 2009 and outlined the responsibilities of the LGA and GLA. He described the LGA's role as ensuring SASPAC meets the needs of its users but emphasised that the LGA could not solely promote the software as the only means of accessing Census data.

SASPAC's Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) still currently resides with the IDeA. Although the IDeA is a subsidiary body of the LGA: the IPR may need to be transferred to the LGA?

**ACTION: Peter Norris to investigate IPR issue with IDeA**

## 4. SASPAC Software Update

Alan Lewis updated the Panel on the components of software releases since the last meeting. There have been four major releases (v7.5, v8.0, v8.5 and v9.0) and the last of these was distributed in October 2008. Since v9.0, two data updates have been provided to users (v9.05 and v9.06); these incorporated the Index of Multiple Deprivation and Mid-Year Population Estimates.

The take-up of SASPAC's Web Publishing tools by users was discussed by the group. There was a general discussion around the lack of intelligence behind some of the Web systems available and that authors need to

have the ability to provide additional guidance and metadata. Technological issues relating to .NET, SVG and Flash were all mentioned as potential hurdles to using SASPAC's publisher along with the implications of Web Accessibility standards.

Looking forward, data visualisations appear to be growing in popularity; ONS have a visualisation team and are looking to produce interesting visualisations of the 2011 Census data. Some of the tools produced by Gapminder<sup>1</sup> were also mentioned and shown over lunch. Data visualisations are an area of potential interest for SASPAC and could represent another future output tool, although, the ability to add 'data intelligence' should be incorporated.

Ian Robertson asked how users could publish KML files from Mapshore without breaching OS copyright. Alan Lewis responded that both vector and raster outputs were possible and SASPAC advised users to publish only raster files online. A general discussion on the licensing restrictions of publishing boundary data followed. David Vallance suggested that SASPAC might be able to use OS' OpenSpace<sup>2</sup> service to help resolve some of these issues in 2011.

Alan Lewis demonstrated the SASPAC/NeSS Data Exchange (NDE) 'proof of concept' development video<sup>3</sup>. This represents the first step towards a 2011 development and will be made available to a small group of users for further testing. The video has also been shown by ONS at the recent Census Outputs consultation events across England and Wales. The technologies involved in this development (machine to machine transfer via an open Application Programming Interface (API)) are similar to those planned for delivering the 2011 Census, and are increasingly being used by other data providers such as: NOMIS, OS and EUROSTAT. As a result, SASPAC's NDE work is a good precursor to future developments involving these technologies. A discussion followed regarding the pros and cons of a 'web only' service in 2011 and some of the implications for SASPAC. Error tracking and management, historic data, restricted datasets, stability of service and 2001/2011 comparison tools were all raised.

## 5. Support Scheme Update

There are currently approximately 240 organisations that are members of the support scheme. This is considered very healthy for this time within the Census cycle – there were 161 members at the point in last decade – and is probably a result of the extra datasets and software enhancements still being provided to users. Peak membership following 2001 was 385 organisations.

The cost of SASPAC has not increased since 2002 and remains at £600+VAT for the annual support scheme and £750+VAT to purchase (public sector fee). Reduced fees are available through consortium purchases of the software. The licence remains organisation-wide, which allows the software to be made available to as many of the organisations' employees as necessary, at no extra cost.

Alan Lewis explained that SASPAC's development fund is built up in periods of high subscriptions and then drawn upon as membership decreased later in the Census cycle. The existing subscription model worked well in 2001 and may still be suitable in 2011. However, with the likelihood of a publicly available Census API in 2011, there is potential for an increased number of Census tools being available to users. Therefore, alternative approaches to this model will need to be considered.

A general discussion around the different funding options for SASPAC followed (free version of 'SASPAC-Lite' and a charged for 'SASPAC-heavy', a charge based on the number of employees or '3 years for the price of 2'). However, no decision on a specific model is needed until the end of the 2010/11 financial year. This should provide users with prior warning when fixing their 2011/12 budgets; the high profile of the Census around this time, due to Census day, may also help with promotion.

## 6. 2011 Census Update

Chris Ashford updated the group on ONS' 2011 Census output plans. Both the 2011 Census Output Working Group (COWG) and Census Web Services Working Groups<sup>4</sup> (CWSWG) have been established. They have just finished a series of output consultation events where the main messages were: a pre-tabular approach to Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC); stable 2001 Output Area geographies; Joe Traynor is leading on table design consultation (initial proposals expected Nov'09); a data cube and publicly available API approach to delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gapminder.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://openspace.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/openspace/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://cswwg.wikidot.com/wiki:video-demonstrations>

<sup>4</sup> <http://cswwg.wikidot.com/>

ONS' Output Strategy is expected to be published any day now and outlines their plans to work closely with partners (specially mentioning SASPAC) in building demonstration applications using the API approach and existing 2001 Census data. These services are expected to be available to partners in the summer of 2010. The Strategy also raises the potential for jointly funded projects. Chris Ashford said that ONS are focusing on providing a raw data stream without new variables or data manipulation; they then expect partners and other end users to build their own applications/products.

**ACTION: Alan Lewis to forward ONS Output Strategy to group once published**

The first outputs from the Census are expected to be Local Authority data in September 2012, ward and output area data should follow throughout the first part of 2013.

Allan Lambie said that the formal GROS output consultation process has not yet begun in Scotland but expects this to start early next year. He also thinks the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) service are investigating the API technologies and expects GROS will follow ONS' lead in the technology used to deliver the 2011 outputs.

David Vallance pleaded for a coordinated approach from the Census Offices on the technologies used to deliver the 2011 data. Chris Ashford suggested that SASPAC should write to both GROS and NISRA to emphasise this point.

**ACTION: SASPAC to write to GROS/NISRA and request a coordinated approach to 2011 output technologies**

Justin Hayes reported on the work Manchester University had undertaken building a 'proof of concept' data cube and demonstration application using the 2001 Census tables. This project has been extended for another year and will build a Web Service application that delivers the current CASWEB (Census application used by the academic community) functionality to their users by summer 2010. The experience from this project has been feeding into ONS' 2011 development work through the CWSWG.

Alan Lewis described how, in 2001, the Census work being undertaken by Manchester University was very similar to that of the SASPAC team. Both teams were struggling with the same data issues and providing a similar service but to different user communities. With this in mind, discussions between the two services about how they could work closer in 2011 have begun and joint development options are currently being explored.

## **7. SASPAC in 2011**

Alan Lewis presented the results of the SASPAC user survey to the Panel – a full report of the results will be distributed with the meeting notes and sent to all survey respondents. The headlines were:

- 104 responses, under-representation from the health sector.
- 70% of users accessed SASPAC on a daily or weekly basis during their peak of 2001 analysis.
- Users' *liked*: data selection/searching, data quantity, export tools and command line syntax.
- Users' *disliked*: metadata output, user interface, lack of error messages/prompts and System file storage structure.
- 70% expected SASPAC to meet their needs in 2011.
- 23% were concerned if SASPAC was web-only in the future.
- Strong support for existing support services in 2011.

**ACTION: Alan Lewis to circulate user survey report to Panel**

A number of discussions around issues raised by the survey results occurred throughout the meeting, these are summarised below:

Since the last meeting there has been an increased demand to run SASPAC in a thin client environment: SASPAC has developed to support this scenario and will continue to do so. However, the potential for a web-only version of SASPAC seems the most likely step in 2011, although, some survey respondents raised issues of Internet performance, security and accessibility. The Panel felt that this was only likely to be an issue for a minority of users but expected the improvement in computing environment in 2012/13 to overcome these issues.

SASPAC will have to be able to handle a large number of historic System files, user created System files and restricted datasets. This is expected to be one of SASPAC's USPs in 2011, so a .SYS file converter – probably into XML – will be required. Data storage files could then be saved/accessed locally (i.e. the users' desktop or network) or via the online Web Service. Today's processing power and storage space will allow this approach and this is not expected to be an issue for the computing environment expected by 2012/13.

The Panel agreed that retaining the command line query syntax was another of SASPAC strengths. This code should still be available in future versions but could be hidden from the user unless requested – similar to MapInfo's MapBasic window.

There was a general discussion around some of the potential online Census applications that could be developed. For example, 'How to... guides'; 'most frequently requested table/variable'; user query case studies; prompts appearing when attempting to compare 2001 and 2011 variables; warnings when tables/variables of interest have been updated by the Census Office. These are all useful development ideas that SASPAC should take forward as it begins to specify a 2011 application. Future Panel meetings will take these issues forward.

**ACTION: Panel to build on application ideas at next meeting**

Alan Lewis concluded this item with an overview of the next steps and key tasks for SASPAC between 2009 and 2013 (slides distributed with these notes). There was specific point made that SASPAC's marketing plan should begin earlier than presented and this has been moved forward to April 2010. Alan Lewis asked the group if they would like to see a more detailed project planner and it was felt this would be useful.

**ACTION: Alan Lewis to circulate SASPAC project plan and slides from today's meeting to members**

**8. AOB**

ONS are currently tendering for a statistics engine to deliver their corporate data solution, including the 2011 Census. The successful bidder is expected to be appointed in the summer of 2010 and will be tasked with building and delivering the 2011 Census data cubes.

Paul Savage asked if the 2011 Output Area boundaries would be freely available to users again in 2011. Chris Ashford replied that this issue is still under discussion by the relevant parties (OS/ONS) but they hope to be able to make them more easily available in 2011.

**9. Date of next meeting**

It was agreed that the Advisory Panel should meet every six months, but as the 2011 Census approached the frequency of the meetings may need to increase. The next meeting will be scheduled for late April/early May 2010.

**ACTION: Alan Lewis to contact Panel for suitable dates March 2010**

Peter Norris thanked all the Panel members for attending and closed the meeting at 15.20.

**Alan Lewis**  
**SASPAC Project Officer**  
**5<sup>th</sup> November 2009**