

Monitoring Brief

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Statistics for Parliamentary Constituencies

For the purposes of official statistics, parliamentary constituencies are the geographical areas in which voters elect candidates to represent them. Parliamentary constituencies, whether for the Westminster Parliament or the devolved legislatures, typically will not have the same boundaries as the standard administrative areas such as local authorities. However this does not prevent the production of official statistics for constituency areas. These are typically produced using estimation techniques that ensure the estimates for constituencies are consistent with the existing published statistics for surrounding areas. Whilst this is not an exact process, it is a well-established one.

A number of commentators, inside and outside Parliament, have noted the patchiness of data at parliamentary constituency level. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics does not contain a specific requirement to produce statistics for special geographies such as these although it does require that statistics be produced to meet user needs where possible and in as much detail as reliable and practicable.

This Monitoring Brief reviews the current position and draws together the case for improving the availability of statistics for constituencies. The Statistics Authority will review progress against the proposals set out in this Brief following the conclusion of the current boundary reviews in 2013.

Summary of conclusions

- i. The Statistics Authority concludes that government departments and other producers of official statistics should, subject to the resource implications being manageable, aim to accommodate the production and publication of constituency statistics along the lines proposed in this Monitoring Brief;
- ii. There would be virtue in a common approach across the various producers of official statistics in the UK - in practice this would mean an agreed set of criteria and processes for the production of constituency level estimates;
- iii. Statistical offices in government departments should aim to consult the House of Commons Library to ensure that the statistical needs of Members of Parliament are understood and taken into account; and establish an appropriate provider-user dialogue with parliamentary, political, media and special interest bodies most likely to value constituency level estimates;
- iv. It would be helpful if producers of official statistics were publicly to set out their plans for the provision of Westminster parliamentary constituency statistics on the new boundary basis, following completion of the current round of boundary reviews;
- v. The publication of plans for the release of recalibrated 2011 Census data using the new parliamentary constituency geography should be arranged as soon as possible after the finalisation of the boundary review process;
- vi. There is, we believe, a strong case for production by ONS of a statistical compendium publication to bring together a wide range of constituency statistics to assist parliamentary

- candidates, voters and researchers; however the associated benefits and costs would need to be examined in more detail first;
- vii. The timing of the publication of constituency level figures for the number of registered electors should be reviewed to try to get both the reference date and timing of publication closer to election times;
 - viii. A user-guide describing what official statistics are available at all local geographies (including parliamentary constituency level) would be of wide value. It could indicate not only whether statistics are available but also the latest date for which they have been produced, and plans for future availability and dissemination; and,
 - ix. The Statistics Authority is aware that the current proposals for new parliamentary constituency boundaries may involve constituencies crossing the boundaries of larger administrative units such as counties, and that this may have implications for the practicability of producing constituency data in some cases. Where these boundary changes present new problems in this regard, this should be explained publicly by the relevant producer body.

The arguments

Statistics for parliamentary constituencies provide elected representatives, their constituents, and analysts with information on the area represented in the legislature. The potential importance of this within the democratic process is mostly self-evident. These statistics can assist voters in holding to account those elected to represent them. And they can also be used by parliamentarians in challenging the Government about the effects of policies in the areas they represent. With such uses in mind, constituency statistics are invaluable to those who provide elected representatives with research and information about their local area and how it might compare with others, and over time, and they can be used by those who report on politics and the activity of government to describe and compare the situation in the areas associated with particular representatives or political parties. These are all valid uses of official statistics and ought to be recognised as such.

For these reasons, parliamentary constituency statistics are, especially for those particularly interested in them, of at least equal consequence to statistics for local authorities and other administrative areas. The reason the latter are more readily available is mainly that public expenditure is incurred and accounted for in relation to the standard administrative areas, and that this is then the basis on which the statistics are collected. But, in terms of debating the impact of policies and public expenditure, it is reasonable for parliamentarians to seek evidence at the constituency level.

Our research on Parliamentary Questions (see Annex 3 below) indicates that there is both a demand for estimates for constituency areas and a mixed picture in terms of what is actually available. It also highlights that in some cases more is available from departments than is currently routinely released.

We conclude that there is a strong case for a common approach across all the producers of official statistics in the UK, establishing an agreed set of criteria and processes for the production of constituency level estimates.

Achieving this may require greater central co-ordination of the production and dissemination of such statistics, to ensure that they are produced to consistent standards, that they are coherent, and are well explained to the user.

A common approach would involve: criteria to guide the decisions of producer departments on whether to routinely produce estimates for constituencies; a set of standards (including guidance

about methods) for their production and dissemination; and a process for considering problematic or controversial cases, involving consultation with the National Statistician.

Under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the Head of Profession for statistics in the relevant producer organisation has 'sole responsibility for deciding on... the content and timing of statistical releases'. Thus the decision as to whether to produce estimates for constituency areas is not a matter for Government Ministers, except as potential users of those statistics. It is not a political decision but one about user requirements and priorities. The importance of Parliament, parliamentary groups and parties as users of official statistics needs to be recognised and accepted. Government departments could usefully consult, or continue to consult, the House of Commons Library to ensure that the needs of Members of Parliament are fully taken into account.

Following completion of the next round of boundary reviews by October 2013, there is likely to be a growth in demand for statistics for the new constituency areas. It would be helpful if those bodies that produce official statistics were each to set out publicly their *plans* for the provision of Westminster parliamentary constituency statistics on the new boundary basis.

Background

The UK's statistical system is substantially decentralised. The largest single producer of official statistics, the Office for National Statistics, produces a wide range of UK-wide economic and social statistics. However, individual government departments, the devolved administrations, agencies and other public bodies retain responsibility for the production of official statistics in their area of policy responsibility, and therefore the geographic coverage of their statistics tends to follow that for which the producing department is responsible in policy or operational terms.

For example, crime statistics produced by the Home Office relate to England and Wales; statistics for social security benefits produced by the Department for Work and Pensions are for Great Britain; while those produced by HM Revenue and Customs relate to the UK as a whole. Official statistics produced by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs typically are for England only, but these are complemented by the corresponding statistics produced by the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The decentralisation of UK official statistics means that there are different approaches to producing parliamentary constituency estimates, between ONS and the administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, between ONS and London-based government departments, and between London-based departments and the devolved administrations on similar topic areas. Below are some examples.

A number of departments do not routinely publish information at parliamentary constituency level. While the Statistics Authority has not directly explored the reasons why this is the case, it would be helpful if departments set out their reasons alongside any plans to change the current position. The lack of a common approach risks giving the impression that political considerations are shaping statistical practice, and clear explanation of reasons will help to avoid that.

Most local area health and health service statistics are available for local authority or primary care trust areas, but not for parliamentary constituencies. While the Association of Public Health Observatories has published a series of health profiles for each local authority, combining a range of local authority level information into a single document to provide a local overview, there is very little routinely published parliamentary constituency information about the population's health and use of health services.

In contrast, the Department for Work and Pensions publishes parliamentary constituency data for a number of different benefits, ranging from State Pension and Pension Credit, to Disability Living Allowance, Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance, and other benefits. However, Housing Benefit data at parliamentary constituency level are not available, although they are available at local authority and regional level.

HM Revenue and Customs has also routinely published data at parliamentary constituency level about the award of tax credits, child benefit and child trust fund take-up.

The Department for Transport publishes annual data on reported road accidents and casualties by local authority area but does not publish data at parliamentary constituency level, although we understand that the department now makes available 'point data' for particular geographic locations which would allow users, with a degree of further work and expertise, to construct constituency level datasets themselves.

External views

The House of Commons Library's statistical research service is the focus for many requests from Members of Parliament and their staff for constituency level estimates, and the Library publishes a range of research outputs using official statistics, including constituency level data, for the wider benefit of the public. There is further evidence of demand for constituency data in the volume of Parliamentary Questions asking for constituency level statistics, and this is discussed in more detail in Annex 3.

There have also been calls for periodic compendium publications to be made available in advance of elections, specifically designed to inform voters and candidates, and also for data in the National Statistics series on registered electors by parliamentary constituency and local authority area to have a reference date that is closer to the time of year in which elections are usually held.

While one or two departments developed plans to produce constituency data on the new boundary basis following the 2010 General Election, these often did not allow for a 'back-casting' of data over a period of time, meaning users could access only a limited time series to measure the extent of change on a consistent geographic basis. Few departments produced constituency statistics on the new boundary basis prior to the 2010 General Election, and following the election there remained a general lack of available constituency data on the new boundary basis for some time. While some users were particularly interested in data on certain topics, others were generally interested in as much data as possible being available and accessible.

Around the 2010 election, some departments continued to publish statistics with reference to the geographical boundaries in existence at the time the data referred to, rather than when the statistics were themselves published. This meant, for example, that one department's constituency level data for the 2008/09 financial year were published on the old boundary basis immediately following the election; data for the next financial year, 2009/10, published in May 2011, also on the old boundary basis; and data for 2010/11 on the new boundary basis would not be available until May 2012, two years after the election.

The data processing systems in another department allowed their parliamentary constituency data to be published in November 2010 on the new boundary basis because the time lag between the reference point and publication date allowed all the administrative data to be captured and quality assured. In other departments, however, few sets of local area data were published using the new constituency geography for some time after the election, and there was a general absence of published plans to do otherwise.

Under current plans, data from the 2011 Census at existing parliamentary constituency level will be published by ONS (aggregated from output area level to constituency level on a 'best fit' basis) in the second release of data in late 2012 or 2013, shortly before the expected conclusion of the next round of boundary reviews.¹ This release is likely to be a 'spine' around which to produce other statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, and could be a useful stimulus for other producers of official statistics. The Statistics Authority would also wish to see plans published for the release of recalibrated 2011 Census data using the new parliamentary constituency geography as soon as possible after the finalisation of the boundary review process.

Producer views

The Statistics Authority has been told that many producer bodies do not regard the production of further constituency level estimates as a priority; and that requests for constituency level statistics appear to them to be relatively rare. We suspect that an apparent lack of requests (at least relative to other types of request) may reflect the fact that analysts and commentators are aware that these statistics are not routinely produced, so do not ask for them. The best way to resolve this would be through dialogue with the parliamentary, political, media and special interest bodies most likely to value constituency level estimates. Where demand is identified, the costs need to be assessed. It is possible that in some cases the information systems in use do not easily lend themselves to the production of constituency level estimates but we think that serious problems should be uncommon. The methods for this kind of geographic estimation are well established. Decisions not to offer constituency level statistics would need to be explained on a case by case basis to avoid any impression of political motivation. Annex 1 considers further the question of how much work is involved in the production of such estimates.

The Neighbourhood Statistics portal managed by ONS (and its equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland) can be a central repository of information about the availability of parliamentary constituency data produced by the statistical service. We would hope this could be further developed as the range of such estimates increases.

Further discussion of the availability, consistency, and timeliness of constituency statistics to users of Neighbourhood Statistics portals is provided in Annex 2. However, in general terms, it is our view that it would help the user of constituency statistics, particularly using portals such as Neighbourhood Statistics and its equivalents, to have a much wider range of constituency statistics available to them, on a consistent basis across the constituent countries of the UK, and more routinely updated. The distinction between standard and non-standard geographies, particularly in an electoral context, could appear unhelpful and can present unnecessary barriers in accessibility to the user.

The Statistics Authority perspective

In view of the requirements of the Code of Practice and the potential importance of constituency statistics within democratic debate, the Statistics Authority recommends that estimates should be published for constituencies, except in cases where there may be compelling technical reasons not to do so – for example, where producing them might expose confidential information, or be judged to be too small a geography at which to disaggregate sample survey data, or otherwise lead to statistics that are too unreliable to be useful. The Statistics Authority recognises that considerations of cost should be taken into account. However, constituency estimates are usually just a further analysis of existing data and we think it should be rare for the costs to be a major obstacle. The Statistics Authority would welcome dialogue with departments where they believe that the cost implications will prove prohibitive.

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/the-2011-census/producing-and-delivering-data/2011-census-outputs/proposed-running-order---2012-census-outputs.pdf>

Judgements about quality must be made with the user interest in mind. Users may prefer to decide for themselves, in the light of sound advice published alongside the statistics, whether the estimates at constituency level are sufficiently reliable for their intended purpose.

Future possibilities

Recent wide-ranging constitutional legislation affords the statistical service significant new opportunities to further develop the availability and accessibility of statistics for parliamentary constituencies.

The *Fixed-term Parliaments Bill* fixes the date of the next General Election at 7 May 2015, and provides for five-year intervals between elections, with a small number of exceptions which are specifically provided for in the Bill. Also, the *Parliamentary Voting and Constituencies Act 2011* provides a new set of statutory Rules for the distribution of seats in the House of Commons. The new Rules fix the size of the House of Commons at 600 members, provide for the number of constituencies in each part of the UK to be determined by reference to the size of the electorate in each part of the UK, and limits the permitted variation in the number of registered electors for a constituency recommended by a Boundary Commission.² The 2011 Act also reforms the process for conducting boundary reviews. Reports are due from the Commissions under this legislation before 1 October 2013 and at regular five years from that point.

Devolution has established constituency areas for elections to the devolved legislatures alongside the constituency areas for elections to the UK Parliament. Since 2004 in Scotland the boundaries of Westminster constituencies and the boundaries of the Scottish Parliament constituencies have been different since the *Scottish Parliament (Constituencies) Act 2004* removed the statutory link between them. In Northern Ireland the boundaries of Westminster constituencies and Northern Ireland Assembly constituencies remain coterminous, as provided for by the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*. In Wales since 2007, the Westminster constituency boundaries and the Assembly constituency boundaries have been identical; although, with effect from the next Assembly elections scheduled for 2016, the boundaries will again cease to be coterminous, as the number of Westminster constituencies is set to reduce from 40 to 30 without a corresponding reduction in the number of Assembly constituencies provided for in legislation in 2006.³

Therefore, the 2011 Act breaks the present link between Westminster constituencies and constituencies of the National Assembly for Wales. We recognise that the statistical services in Scotland and Wales are now expected to produce at least three sets of local area data, for local government areas, devolved legislature constituencies, and the Westminster constituencies in their area.

The provision for fixed-term Parliaments in the 2011 Act should encourage greater readiness in the statistical service to prepare statistical outputs and other relevant material in advance of general elections. Previously, the possibility that an election could be called at any time and, in practice, lengthy periods of media speculation around various dates over a 12 or even 18 month period beforehand, meant that producers of official statistics appeared to find it difficult to plan for the production of, for example, statistical compendia and other outputs designed to assist candidates, voters and researchers alike. A statistical compendium released in early 2015, containing a range of statistical material on various topics of public interest, accompanied by the latest available data

² As exceptions to the principle of electoral parity, the Act provides for two preserved constituencies in Scotland and for two constituencies on the Isle of Wight. The Act places a limit on the geographical size of a constituency, and makes provision to address the potential impact of rounding to a whole number when apportioning constituencies to Northern Ireland.

³ *Government of Wales Act 2006* and *Parliamentary Constituencies and Electoral Regions (Wales) Order 2006*

at constituency level, could usefully be considered. However, the costs and practicalities would need first to be looked at in more detail.

The regularisation of boundary review periods and reporting dates in advance of general elections could allow the statistical service to have a reasonable period of time in which to adjust underlying back-office systems through which local area data are produced, to account for new boundaries. This would allow more timely production of data on the new boundary basis, sufficiently in advance of the general election itself, so as to be of maximum benefit to the user.

The expected degree of change to current boundaries resulting from the ongoing round of reviews will require producers of official statistics to update their systems by importing the finalised new geographical boundaries so as to continue to meet user needs for accurate statistical counts and estimates on a parliamentary constituency basis. This will clearly require a degree of resourcing within departments. The extent of proposed change to the current boundaries is considerable. In England, 78 constituency boundaries will remain unchanged, but only three constituencies in Scotland will be unaffected. None of the constituencies in Wales will be unaffected, nor in Northern Ireland.

Constituency boundaries crossing over the boundaries of local government areas will continue as a feature of the UK electoral landscape under the current Boundary Commissions' proposals. We are aware that the extent of boundary 'mismatching' is of concern to some producers of official statistics in that this places additional resource requirements in the production of local area data, particularly where their systems are focused on the production of data on a local government boundary basis. However, while the extent of mismatching between constituency and local government boundaries is set to increase, boundary mismatching is not a new phenomenon. The statistical service has accommodated mismatching as a result of previous boundary reviews and could reasonably be expected to be in a position to continue to do so, using the range of available resources discussed in Annex 1 below. A summary of the current and proposed extent of boundary mismatching is provided in the table below:

Table 1: Parliamentary constituency boundaries wholly within and crossing over local government boundaries

	Total seats		Wholly within		Crossing	
	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed	Current	Proposed
England	533	502	359	279	174	223
Wales	40	30	32	14	8	16
Scotland	59	52	49	35	10	17
Northern Ireland	18	16	1	0	17	16
United Kingdom	650	600	441	328	209	272

Source: House of Commons Library

The current proposals for changes to the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies mean that, in some cases, proposed constituency boundaries would cross the boundaries of larger administrative units such as counties, and therefore to cross rivers and other significant geographical features. For example, under the proposals set out by the Boundary Commission for England, 29 of the proposed new constituencies will cross county boundaries, and in London 38 of the proposed constituencies will cross the boundaries of London boroughs. In the South West, the

constituency of Bideford and Bude will cross the River Tamar and the county boundaries of Devon and Cornwall; in London the constituency of Richmond and Twickenham will cross the River Thames, and the proposed constituency of City of London and Islington South will contain wards in the City of London administrative area as well as wards in the boroughs of both Camden and Islington. In the North West region, the proposed Mersey Banks constituency will cross the River Mersey with almost one-in-ten of its electors living on the opposite bank in the Wirral.

In Wales, eight of the 30 proposed new constituencies will cross the boundaries of the eight 'preserved counties' set out in the *Local Government (Wales) Act 1994*.⁴ The proposed constituency of Gwynedd will comprise wards in the counties of Gwynedd, Clwyd, and Powys, while the constituency of Glyndwr and North Powys will cross the boundaries of four county boroughs/unitary authorities and consequently the boundaries of the preserved counties of Clwyd and Powys.

As a consequence, statistics for those county areas which include constituencies straddling the county boundaries would no longer be used easily to produce control totals in estimates for parliamentary constituencies. However, it is not yet clear the extent to which this will present any practical problems in the production of those estimates. None of the proposed constituencies would cross the boundaries of any of the 12 standard 'NUTS 1' socio-economic regions in the UK.⁵

We have also concluded that there is a case for changing the timing of the publication by the Office for National Statistics of constituency level figures for the total number of registered electors. In place of data collection in December and publication in late February the following year, the aim should be to get the reference date and timing of publication closer to election times.

While local authorities typically produce a Register of Electors on an annual basis, the recent introduction of 'rolling registration' means that Registers can be updated at more frequent intervals, often monthly. Changing the reference date for the National Statistics series on registered electors ought not unduly inconvenience electoral registration officers in local authorities in terms of the requirements placed upon them to supply data.

Changing the reference date for the statistical series would allow commentators to report the number of registered electors, and to calculate turnout, using the official statistical source more accurately than at present, given that data on registered electors forms the denominator in important calculations of voter turnout and related commentary about political and democratic participation. Official counts of registered electors are typically not immediately available for election day or a period immediately close to it, and therefore users are required to spend time and resources to find alternative sources of voter turnout data, the exact reliability and accuracy of which may not immediately be known.

Annexes:

Annex 1: The practicalities of producing constituency statistics

Annex 2: Accessibility of constituency statistics

Annex 3: Relevant Parliamentary Questions and Deposited Papers

⁴ Clwyd, Dyfed, Gwent, Gwynedd, Mid Glamorgan, Powys, South Glamorgan, and West Glamorgan

⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/beginner-s-guide/eurostat/index.html>

Annex 1: The practicalities of producing constituency statistics

The decentralised nature of the UK statistical system means that there are many different systems used in the production of official statistics. Each producing department will have its own systems for collecting, analysing, producing and disseminating statistical information, advice and commentary to users of official statistics. The variation in such systems may mean that some producer departments will find it easier than others to produce constituency level statistics. Those departments that do not, or cannot, easily produce constituency estimates at the present time, because of the way their systems are designed, may need to consider and evaluate the resource implications of doing so.

The production of local area data requires the underlying dataset to include some geographical information from which either statistical counts or estimates can be produced. This may include a record of the local government district in which the data was collected, a postcode or address for an individual or a household, or some other geographical identifier which would allow such estimates to be produced – for example, using one of the standard geographical identifiers such as Census Output Areas. One or more of these standard geographical identifiers are the building blocks from which all local area data are produced.

The granularity of the data held by departments in their statistical systems will determine the nature of their local area statistical outputs. For example, a dataset containing individual records of all state benefit recipients including their address and postcode would allow the production of local area benefit statistics (subject to the usual confidentiality and disclosure control conditions) by local authority, ward, county, region, and parliamentary constituency. However, statistics produced from surveys with set sample sizes, even where geographical identifiers are recorded, may mean that estimation techniques need to be employed so as to produce local area data, and the extent of confidence intervals and other reliability measures will need to be taken account of by the end-user.

The Office for National Statistics supports both departments and wider users of official statistics in producing statistics at a range of geographical levels, including Westminster parliamentary constituencies. A number of tools are made freely available on the ONS website with a dedicated customer services team who can provide support and guidance on best practice. These tools are typically in the form of 'look-up files', showing the relationship between different geographies, enabling users to directly match data at one particular geographical level to the current constituency level. These include UK postcodes, regions, local authority districts (and their equivalents) and wards, previous Westminster parliamentary constituencies, as well as digitalised boundary files (full resolution and generalised) enabling the production of maps drawing on the dataset concerned.

Also available are a series of 'best fit' look-up files which allow users to assign Census Output and Lower Super Output Areas to Westminster parliamentary constituencies using a standard methodology to assign one to the other as accurately as possible given the potential for overlap with constituency boundaries.

Other look-up files are also freely available to allow users *indirectly* to produce constituency estimates after passing it through other standard geographies. These include: Travel to Work areas, Middle Area Super Output Areas, Primary Care Organisations (England), Counties (England), Health Boards (Wales), National Assembly for Wales constituencies (Wales), and Health Boards (Scotland).

Annex 2: Accessibility of constituency statistics

Principle 8 of the Code of Practice sets out that official statistics should be “readily accessible to all users”. Official statistics should be made available “in as much detail as is reliable and practicable...offering choice and flexibility in the format according to the level of detail required by the user”. The European framework for statistical quality defines the accessibility of statistical outputs as “the measure of the ease with which users can obtain the data.”

Users of official statistics wishing to access available constituency level statistical information are able to access them using a variety of different and disparate sources. These include:

- *Neighbourhood Statistics*⁶ for local-area statistics for England and Wales, and its equivalents in Scotland⁷ and Northern Ireland⁸;
- Local-area labour market statistics through the *Nomis* portal⁹;
- 2001 Census data for the new Westminster parliamentary constituency areas¹⁰ and, shortly, 2011 Census data will similarly be available for constituencies;
- StatsWales for local-area data for Wales¹¹;
- Individual departmental websites;
- House of Commons Deposited Papers¹²;
- UK Parliament – Written Parliamentary Answers¹³ and their equivalents in the Scottish Parliament¹⁴, National Assembly for Wales¹⁵, and Northern Ireland Assembly¹⁶; and,
- Other data provided ‘on request’ by departments – for example, ONS will make available to users, on request, data on mid-year population estimates by single year of age and parliamentary constituency.

The House of Commons Library has prepared a short guide setting out the sources of available data at parliamentary constituency level. While this is published on the UK Parliament website, the primary audience is Members of Parliament and their staff. Users of official statistics more widely may benefit from a similar such guide, regularly updated, perhaps published on the UK National Statistics Publication Hub, describing what official statistics are available at all local geographies (including parliamentary constituency level), where they are available, the latest date for which they have been produced, and any plans for the future in respect of availability and dissemination.

The Neighbourhood Statistics portal and its equivalents appear to pay differential degrees of attention to the various electoral geographies that exist – in Scotland and Northern Ireland, for example, there appears to be a much greater focus on data for devolved legislature constituency areas than for UK Parliament constituency areas.

Users of constituency data can also experience difficulties in being able easily to compare constituencies in England with constituencies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland using the different portals. In a number of subject areas it is difficult for the user to compare individual

⁶ <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

⁷ <http://www.sns.gov.uk/>

⁸ <http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/>

⁹ <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

¹⁰ <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/RP08-38.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk>

¹² <http://deposits.parliament.uk>

¹³ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard>

¹⁴ <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/pqa/index.htm>

¹⁵ <http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-business-fourth-assembly-written-questions.htm>

¹⁶ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/qanda/answer.htm>

constituencies with, for example, local authority areas, given that constituency level data is frequently not available.

For example, a user looking for constituency data in *Key figures for education, skills, and training* on the Neighbourhood Statistics portal is shown 19 variables, but for which constituency level information is only available for four. Given that a range of data in this subject area are routinely published at individual school level, users interested in parliamentary constituency statistics might reasonably expect for them to be readily available at constituency level also.

The *Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics* (SNS) site suggests that Westminster parliamentary constituencies in Scotland are a non-standard geography; users can only find the available information through a 'Specialist Report' and may be required to use the site's search facility for further guidance on where to find data for Westminster constituencies in Scotland. Scottish Parliament constituencies are, however, regarded as a standard geography, and data for these areas are available in a number of different formats on both the 2007 and 2011 Scottish Parliament constituency boundary basis.

The Northern Ireland *Neighbourhood Information Service* (NINIS) provides local area data for Northern Ireland on a number of statistical themes; some summary data are provided in area profile reports while a range of other datasets are provided in the form of web links to downloadable spreadsheets. However, the accompanying guidance to users downloading area profiles based on electoral geography can present a slightly confusing picture:

Please note that the Assembly Area Profile Reports are based on the Assembly Area (1998) boundaries which are the same as the Parliamentary Constituency (1992) boundaries. Following the commencement of the official election period on 25th March 2011 the Assembly Areas in Northern Ireland have been re-aligned with the 2008 Westminster Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries.

In practice the Assembly Area 2011/Westminster Parliamentary Constituency 2008 boundaries are not very different to their predecessors. Six of the 18 Assembly Areas are unchanged. The degree of change, based on the population estimates in 2008, range from a 21.1% increase in population size to a 12.8% decrease in population size. Please see Westminster Parliamentary Constituency Guidance Document for more information.

The following report is based on **Belfast North Assembly Area (1998 Boundary). Belfast North Assembly Area (2011) has a different boundary and a 21.1% larger population than the Belfast North Assembly Area (1998)**, based on the 2008 Population Estimates.¹⁷

Some constituency level data on the Neighbourhood Statistics site are also substantially out of date. For example, the latest constituency data in *Key figures for crime and safety* are for 2005 and 2006. The latest data on the number of notifiable offences recorded by the police at constituency level were last updated in October 2007, covering the period April 2005 to March 2006.

¹⁷<http://www.ninis.nisra.gov.uk/mapxtreme/report.asp?INIT=YES&POSTCODE=BT011AA&DESC=FromGeneral&CurrentLevel=COA&ID=95GG200003&Name=95GG200003&Tab=AA>

Annex 3: Relevant Parliamentary Questions and Deposited Papers

Statistics about parliamentary constituencies are sometimes provided by government departments in response to Parliamentary Questions.

Where data are requested for a single constituency (or a small number of constituencies), and they can be provided within the cost threshold, answers are typically provided in the departmental reply and reproduced in *Hansard*. However, where data for a larger number of constituencies are requested, it is more usual for the department concerned to respond by placing the information in the House of Commons Library in the form of a Deposited Paper.

However, not all written questions seeking constituency data are necessarily answered with a full reply, and some answers do not appear to be consistent with answers to similar questions. For example, in September 2010, information about the number of people in receipt of Child Benefit in one particular constituency was not made available, nor was the data provided for the previous constituency on the former boundary basis:

Mrs Hodgson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are in receipt of child benefit in (a) Washington and Sunderland West constituency and (b) the City of Sunderland. [14301]

Mr Gauke: The constituency referred to in the question-Washington and Sunderland West-was formed after August 2009. The information for the new constituency would be available only at disproportionate cost. The latest information on the number of families receiving child benefit, by each parliamentary constituency, local authority and region is available in the HMRC snapshot publication "Child Benefit Statistics Geographical Analysis, August 2009". This can be found at: http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/child_benefit/chb-geog-aug09.pdf.¹⁸

Similarly, a question asking for the number of people in a constituency who were over state pension age:

Emma Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Wolverhampton North East constituency are over state retirement pension age; and how many receive (a) basic state pension and (b) pension credit. [13366]

Steve Webb: The information requested for those in Wolverhampton North East constituency who are over state pension age is not available. However, the document "Caseloads for selected benefits by 2010 Parliamentary Constituencies, February 2010" is available in the Library and includes figures for pension credit and state pension.¹⁹

But a similar question was answered with constituency data a few days before, albeit the advice provided in the footnotes presented a confusing picture as to whether the data were, or were not, on the new boundary basis:

Heidi Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners receive (a) the basic state pension and (b) pension credit in Lewisham East constituency. [6595]

Steve Webb: The information available is in the following table:
Parliamentary constituency: Lewisham East

	<i>Number</i>
State pension recipients	12,910
Pension credit individual beneficiaries	4,640
Pension credit household recipients	4,020

¹⁸<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100914/text/100914w0003.htm#10091449000090>

¹⁹<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100913/text/100913w0005.htm#10091410000426>

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. State pension figures are for the total state pension caseload. Around 1% of state pension recipients are not in receipt of the basic state pension, but are receiving additional state pension only or graduated retirement benefit only.
3. **Basic state pension only figures are not available by current 2010 parliamentary constituencies.**
4. For pension credit household recipients are those people who claim pension credit either for themselves or on behalf of themselves and a partner. Individual beneficiaries are the number of claimants in addition to the number of partners for whom they are claiming.
5. **Parliamentary constituencies are for the Westminster Parliament of May 2010.**

Source: DWP Information Directorate Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 100% data as at November 2009.²⁰

Another written question tabled shortly before the 2010 General Election sought information about the number of fatal road accidents in a particular constituency in each month of each year since 1997.²¹ The information was provided on the pre-2010 boundary basis for each month between 1997 and 2008 in a table annexed to the reply, albeit the department does not routinely publish constituency level information on road casualties and accidents.

While a small amount of data about road safety is made available on the Neighbourhood Statistics portal for that constituency, it is confined to the time period January 1999 to December 2003, and restricted to counts of the total number of casualties, car occupants killed or seriously injured, and the number killed or seriously injured using two-wheeled motor vehicles. No information is available about the total number of fatal road accidents, as had been provided in answer to the parliamentary question. Data on the number of pedal cyclists and pedestrians killed or seriously injured were also not available on the Neighbourhood Statistics site, nor were data on the number of child casualties and child pedestrian casualties. However, the Neighbourhood Statistics site reported that the number of *elderly* casualties and elderly pedestrian casualties in the period January to December 2003 (the latest available on Neighbourhood Statistics) was zero; yet Neighbourhood Statistics reported that data for the previous year were unavailable, while for the same period in 2001 the total number of elderly casualties in the constituency was reported as 12.²² There is a degree of confusion here which needs to be resolved.

There is some inconsistency apparent between departmental replies to Parliamentary Questions asking for statistics about constituencies; and also some inconsistency in the extent to which clear and up-to-date constituency level statistics are made publicly available, for example through the *Neighbourhood Statistics* portal. If a consistent approach were adopted in the production of constituency statistics it would be much easier to provide constituency level data in answers to Parliamentary Questions and to ensure that online resources such as Neighbourhood Statistics are up-to-date.

A number of deposited papers are placed in the Libraries of both Houses each year that provide constituency level data, particularly where long sets of tables (for a number of constituencies or across long time periods) are required. While deposited papers are freely available online it is not currently possible to select (in an online search) those deposited papers providing constituency level data nor by the broad topic area of the data contained within them. Moreover, the data

²⁰ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100906/text/100906w0004.htm>

²¹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100406/text/100406w0005.htm#1004064001185>

²² <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?adminCompAndTimeId=15478%3A33&a=3&b=6164247&c=North+Shropshire&d=27&r=1&e=3&f=15472&o=34&g=482006&i=1001x1003x1004x1005&l=650&m=0&s=1307288434625&enc=1>

provided in deposited papers are often not easily available or otherwise disseminated in an accessible way. A number of deposited papers are accompanied by data and tables presented in portable document format (.pdf), rather than in files with comma-separated values (.csv) or similar formats which would permit users to easily re-use or re-analyse them. In addition, data made available in deposited papers are infrequently reproduced on departmental websites or on portals such as Neighbourhood Statistics, again restricting their public availability. Examples include:

- number of deaths from (a) liver cancer and (b) other liver disease in (i) England and (ii) each parliamentary constituency for the years 2005 to 2009²³;
- achievements at GCSE and equivalent for pupils by parliamentary constituency of school location for the years 2004/05 to 2008/09, without clear advice as to the boundary basis on which the data are presented²⁴;
- pupils aged 12 to 15 as at 31 August 2009 absent from school without authorisation in each local authority area and parliamentary constituency in 2008/09²⁵;
- entrants from each parliamentary constituency to UK Higher Education Institutions for the years 2005/06 to 2009/10²⁶;
- number and percentage of pupils eligible for free schools meals by parliamentary constituency, broken down by nursery and primary schools, state-funded secondary schools and special schools²⁷;
- out-of-work benefit expenditure by local authority and parliamentary constituency in £million: 1997-98 expenditure based on the November quarter from a 5% data sample and data for 2005/06 to 2008/09²⁸;
- proportion of benefit payments paid into a Post Office card account by parliamentary constituency in July 2009²⁹; and,
- number of overseas electors registered to vote by parliamentary constituency in the UK in 2008.³⁰

²³ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2011/DEP2011-0795.xls>

²⁴ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2011/DEP2011-0432.xls>

²⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2011/DEP2011-0430.xls>

²⁶ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2011/DEP2011-0183.xls>

²⁷ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2010/DEP2010-2058.xls>

²⁸ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2010/DEP2010-0970.xls>

²⁹ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2010/DEP2010-0606.xls>

³⁰ <http://www.parliament.uk/deposits/depositedpapers/2010/DEP2010-0347.xls>