



Northern Ireland
Assembly

COMMITTEE FOR
FINANCE AND PERSONNEL

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)

**Briefing by DFP on the Preparations for
the 2011 Census**

14 April 2010

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Briefing by DFP on the Preparations for the 2011 Census

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Jennifer McCann (Chairperson)
Dr Stephen Farry
Mr Simon Hamilton
Mr Fra McCann
Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
Mr Declan O'Loan
Ms Dawn Purvis

Witnesses:

Mr Robert Beatty)
Dr Norman Caven) Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

The Chairperson (Ms J McCann):

Dr Norman Caven, the chief executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and Robert Beatty, the agency's head of census, will make a few opening remarks. Those will be followed by members' questions.

Dr Norman Caven (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency):

We are here to talk about the SL1 that will accompany the draft Census Order and the detailed census proposals paper, which was lodged in the Assembly Library several weeks ago. Censuses are not new: there are references in the Old Testament to the children of Israel being enumerated at the Exodus. Strangely, however, censuses came late to the United Kingdom and Ireland. It

was not until 1801 that the first census took place in England, Wales and Scotland, and Ireland's first enumeration was not held until 1821. Thereafter, at 10-year intervals up to 1911, there was always a census. In the inter-war years, different parts of the UK did things differently, and it was not until 1951 that the 10-year interval between censuses was restored, and that has continued to date. The one exception was in 1966, when there was a mid-term census of limited scope.

Legislative approval is required before a census can take place. Prior to 1969, that approval was granted by individual Acts of Parliament. In 1969, enabling legislation was introduced that vested responsibility in the Registrar General — under the superintendence of the Ministry of Finance, which was the central authority — to do everything necessary to facilitate a census and for the then governor to direct when a census should take place. That role subsequently transferred to the Secretary of State and is now with the First Minister and deputy First Minister acting jointly. It is they who direct that a census will take place under the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 and through the Order.

All being well, the draft Order will come before the Assembly on 1 June 2010. It will be concerned with three main aspects of the census: the date, which is planned to be fixed for 27 March 2011; the identification of who will make returns and about whom; and the particulars that are to be asked on the census form. We have sent a copy of those particulars to members of the Committee.

I will finish by saying that getting the population count right is of prime importance. Since 2001, the census results have been rolled forward each year, to which we have added the births, taken away the deaths and estimated the level of migration. That has become the mid-year estimate for every year since 2001. That mid-year estimate is important because it not only drives the Barnett formula, for example, but affects the allocation of resources throughout Northern Ireland.

Through the census, we also collect a wide range of socio-economic information on a large number of topics, which also informs the allocation process. In the UK as a whole, between 2001 and 2010, that allocation process amounted to £1 trillion. The census is particularly important in getting that allocation right. In 2011, it will provide a new baseline on which to move forward into the decade.

The census is quite an involved logistical operation. When one census ends, we review it, the idea being to make improvements for the next time. There is also a consultation process on the question content for the next census. We undertake question testing and rehearsal, and we have now reached the legislative stage. Following that, and prior to census day, we will begin the publicity. The census enumeration will involve the employment of almost 2,000 part-time workers over a different period for each grouping. After that, we will carry out a follow-up study on the census before processing and publishing the results. The results will begin with the top-line figures, become increasingly detailed and end with information such as samples of anonymised records that are of more interest to academics, for example. After that, the cycle will begin again.

The Chairperson:

Before I bring members in, do you want to say anything specifically about the contents of the SL1? Should the Committee be made aware of anything in particular?

Dr Caven:

Not specifically because the SL1 is fairly self-explanatory. However, I will say something about the date of the census. There are several considerations when choosing a particular date. We want to maximise the number of people who will be present at their usual residence and the number of students who will be enumerated at their term-time address, because that is where they receive the majority of their services. We want to avoid elections — there will be an Assembly election in early May 2011 — and holiday periods, so that we can recruit enumerators and, again, ensure that people are at home. We also want to ensure that there are sufficient daylight hours, particularly for the follow-up work on those people who do not post their census form back immediately. All those considerations have pushed us towards choosing 27 March 2011, which is the start of British summer time. We hope that we will be out of the field before the election gears up, and we expect to receive approximately 95% of returns by 12 April 2011, which is about three weeks before the election in early May.

The decision on the date is important. We wanted to avoid the St Patrick's Day holiday, which is 10 days previously, as that may affect the number of people who would be away on the Sunday before census day. That is why we did not opt for 20 March 2011.

Ms Purvis:

None of us underestimates the value of the census in commissioning and planning services and tracking societal changes. If you will bear with me, I have a number of questions.

The '2011 Census of Population Northern Ireland: Proposals' document mentions liaising with community groups but provides little detail. Will you outline which community groups or organisations you consulted on the drafting of questions?

Dr Caven:

In December 2004, we began a consultation on the question content. That consultation went out to the standard list of about 1,100 consultees, and it was also placed on our website to enable anyone else who wanted to offer ideas and comments to do so. That was the basis of the consultation process. At the conclusion of that process, we held several information days, at which we explained to those who had replied to the consultation what would happen in the census test.

As you said, the document also mentions the community liaison work on which we are now starting seriously to embark with groups such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and specific organisations for blind people and deaf people, as they may have some difficulty in completing a standard census form.

Ms Purvis:

Have you identified any perceived difficulties in trying to capture everyone, or is that the focus of your work in liaison with the community groups?

Dr Caven:

We have identified what we plan to do in the next period of consultation. For instance, we have identified provisions for blind people, such as making available forms in Braille and in large print. We will provide help for people who need it. When an enumerator calls with someone who needs help, he or she will arrange for someone to come out to that address at a future date. We have identified all of the measures and angles that we think need to be covered. We now want to check those with the various groups to ensure that we have not missed anything.

Ms Purvis:

I have some specific questions on the questionnaire. Previously, Irish Travellers were classed under “white” as an ethnic group. Do they now have a distinct box on the questionnaire?

Mr Robert Beatty (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency):

As you say, Irish Travellers are a distinct ethnic group, and that was recognised in the 2001 census, in which the ethnic group question included Irish Traveller as a separate category and was reported in that way. It remains the case in the proposals that there will be a separate tick box for Irish Travellers.

Ms Purvis:

Will similar provision be made for Roma people?

Dr Caven:

They will be able to write “Roma” on the census form.

Mr Beatty:

The proposed tick box reflects the census of 2001. The nominated group is Irish Traveller. There is a series of tick boxes for the largest groups of which we are aware, and anyone who considers themselves as Roma can write that on the form. There are no plans for a tick box for Roma.

Ms Purvis:

Is the nationality question an open question?

Mr Beatty:

A question on national identity has been introduced as an extension of the question on ethnicity, and it enables people to articulate more broadly their sense of identity. The current plans are that there will be six tick boxes, and people can tick as many of those as they feel are appropriate. As with most of those questions, there will also be an open box for people to complete should they feel that their identity is not covered by one of the six tick boxes.

Ms Purvis:

Is that the section that will be used to identify economic migrants and immigrants?

Dr Caven:

The form will ask questions on ethnic group, national identity, place of birth and passports held. It is a complex subject, and all those questions will be brought together and used to identify various subgroups of the population. The census focuses primarily on the usual resident population, which the United Nations defines as having been resident for 12 months or more. We recognise that many people come in and out of the country. To try to obtain more information on them, we will, therefore, ask people who have been here for three months or more to answer the questions.

Ms Purvis:

Is there a question on sexual orientation?

Dr Caven:

No. During the consideration of questions prior to the census, it was decided that that should not be included on the form.

Ms Purvis:

Given that sexual orientation is designated in equality legislation in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, why is that question not included?

Dr Caven:

Information will be collected from a series of surveys. We will use the labour force survey, continuous household survey and the suite of other surveys that are mainly carried out by government to collect that information. A concern was expressed during the consultation about asking a question on sexual orientation because of the particular way in which census questions are answered. The responsibility for answering a census question is placed on the householder or joint householder. It was considered that that could impinge on the privacy of individuals and that the results that one might obtain from a census-type approach would not be robust. The decision was made that a better way forward would be to ask those questions as part of the range of social surveys. That has already been included in the range of surveys that are due to be reported on later in the year.

Ms Purvis:

I do not see how that question would impinge on someone's privacy. I thought that the whole

census did that anyway.

Dr Caven:

The problem is the interaction between the person who completes the form and the individual whose details are being reported. In a social survey context, an individual interview is carried out, and the interviewee uses show cards to provide an answer. That creates privacy around what could potentially be a sensitive subject, even within an individual's household.

Ms Purvis:

I will not debate that with you. In the religious category, is the question an open one whereby people can fill in their specific religion?

Mr Beatty:

The general approach is to use tick boxes where possible, because that makes it simpler for people to respond. The main approach, therefore, is that tick boxes are provided for the main groups. The religion question has four tick boxes that reflect the four largest religions in Northern Ireland.

Ms Purvis:

What are those?

Mr Beatty:

They are the Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist. Each of those has a tick box because they are the largest. Below that, there is space to specify another religion should people wish to do so. In reporting on that category, all the responses are coded, and we produce an output right down to the level of 10 adherents.

Ms Purvis:

So not every religion is recorded?

Dr Caven:

There is a balance between the length of the census form and trying to make it easy to complete.

Ms Purvis:

A new question was introduced in 2001 about the religion that one was “brought up in”. Around the time that the census data was reported on, I remember that some sociologists made assumptions about some people’s religion. Why was that question introduced, particularly given that people who now classify themselves as having no religion could choose not to answer it?

Dr Caven:

The inclusion of the question at that time and in the consultation on this census is based on a desire to see it included by individuals and groups, such as the Equality Commission.

Ms Purvis:

Is there a reason for that?

Dr Caven:

I am not an expert in equality, but my understanding is that, as part of monitoring equality in a particular organisation or firm, people are asked to answer a question on a monitoring form on whether they are part of the Catholic, Protestant or neither community. In cases in which the person is from neither a Protestant nor a Catholic community, the monitoring reverts to other sources of information to ascribe him or her.

Historically, the census questions on religion and religion brought up in are the only two to which the penalty for non-compliance does not apply should one choose not to answer. The number of non-responses has increased over the years. The combining of the question on religion with the question on religion brought up in gives a more robust estimate as to whether an affirmative action programme is required. The Equality Commission can use that distribution of data as a comparator for monitoring information.

Mr Beatty:

Even if we combine the two, the “none” category remains. It is not as though everyone is channelled into a Protestant or Catholic category.

Dr Caven:

I should also say that the integrity of the census form and the way in which it is kept as a historical record is in no way affected.

Ms Purvis:

I have a couple of questions about data security. The report states that some of the work connected to the census will be outsourced, and there is a detailed chapter on the associated security. How assured are you about the safety of any census data that is outsourced?

Dr Caven:

I am assured that the appropriate systems are in place. We take census confidentiality extremely seriously. In 2001, no incidents transgressed our standards of confidentiality. That is not to say that I slept well throughout the period, but we have the systems in place to give us assurance on security. We recognise that it is extremely important that the public are also assured and not only by the census office. To that end, we are undertaking an independent security assurance review, which will be published before the census. It is hoped that that independent analysis will assure the public that the information that they provide to the census office will be held securely and processed confidentially.

Ms Purvis:

The report states that members of staff who are directly employed, contracted or subcontracted will have UK baseline security clearance. If those staff are based in Northern Ireland, does that mean that their security clearance will come through AccessNI? Do the staff apply for that, or is it the responsibility of DFP?

Dr Caven:

All staff working on the census, including Robert, me and right down to all the enumerators, will have to sign a confidentiality undertaking. There are criminal penalties for divulging sensitive information that is acquired by an individual in the course of his or her duties. That declaration will form part of the contract of employment. All contractors who work for us on the census form have to go through a similar process, and all their staff have to sign a similar declaration. In addition, a range of other security systems is in place. For example, the USB ports will be disabled on all the computers on which processing is taking place so that no one can copy information during that processing.

Ms Purvis:

Will all staff be vetted for the required security clearance?

Dr Caven:

They will be subject to a basic security check, just as if they were entering the Civil Service as an administrative officer (AO) or administrative assistant (AA). On top of that, they will be required to sign the declaration.

Mr McLaughlin:

I am also interested in the questions that were considered for, but not included in, the census. Specifically, I want to address the issue that is, arguably, at the heart of the conflict that we have experienced as a society. Now, happily, we seem to have collectively shaken our heads and come up with a different approach. Let us ensure that that continues into the future.

When the previous census was published, there was a debate about changing public attitudes to the constitutional future. Let me be clear: I am a republican, and I have accepted the status quo until such times as sufficient support emerges for change. The republican community generally has been extremely diligent and robust in its approach to that issue. I hope that that gives reassurance to people of a different political persuasion.

It is interesting that NISRA responded at the time by extrapolating information that had been drawn from questions about religious affiliation and the neighbourhood in which people reside. I suppose that that was an attempt to respond to misinformed or, at least, non-scientific speculation about the extent of change. However, the process was dubious. The questioning of people about their religion is generally assumed also to indicate their political affiliation, but, as I am sure you would agree, that is hardly a scientific or robust approach. Why not simply ask the question? Given that the issue has been divisive up to now, there is potential for it to continue to be so. However, the question will not go away, and, in fact, it might become increasingly relevant. I do not subscribe to the notion that there will be a significant change by 27 March 2011, and, therefore, for the foreseeable future, we will continue to deal with the status quo.

However, in the period between the next census and the one following that, change of some kind will happen. To take the heat out of the situation and avoid any misrepresentation of the facts, why do we not quantify that change? That type of information would encourage democratic, inclusive and peaceful discussion about the potential for change or the fact that there will not be change. By asking people relevant questions, their aspirations and expectations can be

managed. The questioning of people about their religion does not diffuse the possibility of their making grandiose or even apocalyptic claims about change that might create difficulties for us all. We are in a new space, and we should be mature enough simply to ask the question and deal with the answers.

Dr Caven:

I want to be clear: are you asking about including a question on constitutional preference?

Mr McLaughlin:

Why not ask people about their constitutional preference? One thing is guaranteed: it would deal with the problem of low participation in the census.

Ms Purvis:

Does the question about national identity not deal with the matter?

Mr McLaughlin:

No. That question adds confusion, because there are many nationalities here, and we would end up extrapolating what they might do. Some nationalities already have the potential to change election results, particularly in local government. They will be an extremely influential group.

The core question goes back generations, may affect future generations and could be unnecessarily divisive. Why not give people the opportunity to consider scientific data on whether demographic change necessarily implies political, social or constitutional change? By the way, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, the Secretary of State is obliged to address the matter at some stage. However, unless someone asks the question, how will he be informed?

Dr Caven:

I shall attempt to take those questions in two bites.

Mr McLaughlin:

You might need a few bites.

Dr Caven:

First, the question on religion has been included since 1861 —

Mr McLaughlin:

I do not object to that, but as far as the particular question that I raised is concerned, it is simply not fit for purpose to answer it.

Dr Caven:

You suggest that it is not fit for purpose in the context of answering a particular constitutional question. However, it is fit for purpose as far as certain aspects of equality monitoring are concerned, and that is the main rationale for its inclusion —

Mr McLaughlin:

I have no difficulty with its continuing inclusion.

Dr Caven:

I will probably give you a process answer, which —

Mr McLaughlin:

It was not meant to be an ambush. The Executive have agreed how to approach the next census anyway, so I will not be able to get that question included. However, I want to know why it was not included.

Dr Caven:

The process answer is that it did not come up in the consultation as a question that people wanted to be included.

Dr Farry:

You asked the wrong people.

Dr Caven:

It is important to test a question such as that, or any question in a census context, to determine to what extent it is acceptable in itself and to what extent it creates or does not create difficulties for responses to the census as a whole. We approached questions about income along those lines

prior to the 2001 census and are doing so again now prior to the 2011 census. The value of a census is that it provides information for small groups and small areas that cannot be obtained by a social survey. It might be more effective to obtain the answer to Mr McLaughlin's question from a social survey rather than from a census.

Mr McLaughlin:

There is more than one way to skin this particular cat, and the options will be explored. I want to deal with the process of informing social, economic and public policy. That is being managed well at present. However, that has not always been the case, and it could be managed better. Given that people signed a formal agreement in 1998 to deal with that issue, I would have thought that we would have begun to inform ourselves and provide the data on which people will, eventually, make a decision.

Mr Beatty:

I should not run down the census in any way, shape or form, but sample surveys, such as the life and times survey, which asks that question and reports annually, are run regularly. That provides time trends without having to wait for 10 years.

Mr McLaughlin:

I acknowledge that there is more than one way to address the issue. I will not hold up the meeting any longer, but it seems strange that we did not recognise the benefits of managing this difficult and sensitive issue as part of the census operation. It is relevant information.

Dr Caven:

There is a predilection for censuses to avoid attitudinal questions and to record matters of fact. That is the easiest way to collect robust information. Much of the information gleaned from surveys, such as the life and times survey that Robert mentioned, is focused on attitudes. That is probably a better context in which to ask such questions, rather than including an attitudinal question from stage left in the census.

Dr Farry:

I will continue with the general theme of the census questions. Is it possible for someone to declare more than one national identity?

Dr Caven:

Yes; people can declare as many identities as they wish.

Dr Farry:

I presume that you can separate that information and analyse it as appropriate.

Dr Caven:

We will report what people say. We have not decided what further amalgamation to carry out, but we will consult on outputs later this year.

Dr Farry:

Will you report all the different combinations of identity?

Dr Caven:

If someone states that he or she is British, Irish and South African, the statistics will report that.

Dr Farry:

I will return to the issue of sexual orientation. I understand the point that you made to Dawn about privacy. It is possible to have a family situation in which the father or mother of the household asks the children about their sexual orientation. The children may not be prepared to reveal their sexual orientation. Although we accept that the statistics will be flawed or represent an underestimate, is there not value in asking the question anyway? It will provide a basic idea of the figure on the understanding that it is incomplete, and it will provide a floor on which to discuss services and wider policy considerations. Since the previous census in 2001, the law has changed to permit civil partnerships. Therefore, it is worth counting how many people live in civil partnerships.

Dr Caven:

My answer is still the same. In the context of a parent asking a child about his or her sexual orientation, it might be difficult to elicit a true response in the context of the census, and that could depress response rates more generally. As I said, we have found a better vehicle, through the range of social surveys that we undertake, to obtain the same information. Although those may not be better at the finest disaggregation of area, we will be able to produce robust statistics

for Belfast and for the east and west of the Province.

Dr Farry:

Mr Beatty said that the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church, the Catholic Church, and so on, were listed in the statistical breakdown of religions. It may be a pedantic point, but some people in Northern Ireland would argue that religion means Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism, whereas what we colloquially refer to as religions in Northern Ireland are, in fact, denominations of Christianity. There may be an issue of definition about which you should be sensitive.

Dr Caven:

I cannot remember precisely, but I think that we ask to which religion, religious body or denomination a person belongs.

Dr Farry:

That would cover all three, depending on how people wished to interpret the question.

My other question is about how NISRA treats people's description of religion. What is asked in the census form, as it stands, is fair enough, but it is what happens with those results that causes problems. Such concerns would not necessarily be picked up during consultation, particularly through any tests related to the census, because people are happy to tick boxes. I recall a vociferously negative reaction to the residual statistical exercise that was carried out after the census in 2001, when approximately 14% of the population did not specify a particular religious identity. However, through an artificial construct, all but 3% were assigned as members of the Protestant or Catholic community. People made the point that the census should aim to reflect the true Northern Ireland and to respect their identity. Thus they questioned why — pardon me for being pejorative — some faceless bureaucrats should determine their identity on their behalf and do so inaccurately.

Dr Caven:

At one level, I suppose that we are dealing with statistical aggregates rather than individuals. This time, we will probably try still to report religion or religion brought up in, but I do not think that we will use the label of “community background”.

Dr Farry:

So, are you minded not to do that exercise?

Dr Caven:

We will carry out the exercise, but not label it. I think that, in 2001, it was labelled in the census outputs as “community background”. We will produce a table on religion that includes the not stated and non-responses. A further table will denote religion or, if no religion is stated, the religion brought up in, which will provide the relevant percentages. We would be inclined to leave the table at that and not to label it as “community background”. The label that was attached last time might have caused part of the concern.

Dr Farry:

I agree that it was not so much the question that was asked in the census that caused concern, but the subsequent use of the information to label people.

Dr Caven:

Manipulation of the data is the wrong phrase to use, but the use of that information to produce that output was considered unfair. If a particular body, such as the Equality Commission, wishes to use that as a comparator and label it “community background”, that would be a matter for it to explain.

Dr Farry:

That approach would be welcomed. It was an issue not only for people who ticked the box “other” or “none” in 2001 but for those who stated that they were Protestant by religion — or Church of Ireland or whatever — and were then determined to be part of a Protestant community. However, some of those people were saying that they regarded themselves as being much more in community with some of their Catholic neighbours than with some of their supposed Protestant neighbours. There was a notion that people were being put into a box with others and that the state, not they, was determining the community to which they belonged.

Dr Caven:

The word “community” will be avoided.

Dr Farry:

That would be welcome. A census is never an exact science, because there will always be a percentage of forms that are not returned. There will also be anomalies: for example, students who are away at university will fill in a census form and, out of a sense of responsibility, their parents will also tick the box for them at their home address. Some people will be counted twice, and some people will not be counted at all. Do you employ any statistical techniques to try to iron out those anomalies?

Dr Caven:

The census form is designed in such a way as not to break up families. The first seven questions of the form can recognise the fact that a child is away at university, and, after that, no more questions are asked about him or her. We would pick up the individual elsewhere, and the student would be enumerated at his or her term-time address.

More generally, many difficulties arise with enumeration. As some people do not seem to recognise that they have a child until he or she has reached one year old, traditionally, censuses have under-enumerated the number of infants who have not attained that age. We apply some correction to the figures to counter that. Other people fill in parts of the census form but not the parts that they should have done. We input procedures to ensure that the census forms are filled in as well as possible.

The aim at the end of the process is to provide you, as politicians and decision-makers, with the best information that we have on the level and socio-economic characteristics of the whole population. You are right to say that some people, for whatever reason, will not answer a particular question, and we have techniques for dealing with that issue. Around six weeks after the census has taken place, we will carry out an independent exercise to assess the extent of coverage, and we will correct for any under-enumeration.

Dr Farry:

How do you deal with people who have limited written and oral communication skills? Such people may live alone and, through no fault of their own, be unable to comply with the legal requirements to fill out the form. What intervention is available to assist those folks?

Dr Caven:

We hope that people will return their census forms by post. However, that will be difficult for an individual who requires assistance. We will know which forms have been returned and from where. Approximately 10 days after census day, the enumerators will start the follow-up procedure by calling at the properties from which census forms have not been received. If an individual has difficulty in completing a census form on the doorstep, the enumerator will arrange for the provision of whatever kind of help is needed, whether with language or with reading and writing. Someone will come out to help the individual to fill in the form, and that individual will be encouraged to have with them someone whom they know and trust.

Mr Hamilton:

As we are under some time pressure, I will be quick. I wish to pick up on a point that Mitchel raised, although not, perhaps, his substantive point.

Dr Farry:

He has his first convert already.

Mr Hamilton:

I am interested to hear that republicans have moved from ambushes of a very different kind to seeking the inclusion of a question in the census on constitutional preference and checking for any changes in 10 years' time.

Mr McLaughlin:

There is still a long war theory.

Mr Hamilton:

By my calculation, that takes you well past 2016.

Mr McLaughlin:

I am past 21.

Mr Hamilton:

That date is out the window. Norman, in response to Mitchel's point about the inclusion of questions on constitutional preference, you said that that issue did not come up during the

consultation.

I noted a couple of questions that are quite interesting — I love all this sort of stuff, and I will pore over the census outputs at a national and local level when it is published. There is a question about carers and another about voluntary work. Is this the first time that those types of questions have been included?

Dr Caven:

The question on carers was included for the first time in 2001, but the voluntary work question is new.

Mr Hamilton:

What was the process behind that question being included? I can see how valuable a question such as that is. Equally, however, I can think of a thousand similar questions that could be included and would be useful in giving us a better handle on various sectors.

Dr Caven:

The consultation process threw up the fact that that question was wanted. I cannot remember offhand who came forward with the idea, but I can find out and get back to you.

Mr Beatty:

I cannot remember either.

Dr Caven:

The question on voluntary work came up during the consultation process. The consultation process also provided Departments with the same opportunity to request such questions. Pages 31 to 33 of ‘The 2011 Census of Population Northern Ireland: Proposals’ list a range of criteria to which all the questions that came up were subjected and against which they were scored. That is how we came up with the finalised census form that comprises four pages of questions for each individual.

Mr Hamilton:

Once a question has been included, it does not necessarily stay on the form for ever. As you mentioned, a certain question may be useful now to the Departments in developing their

strategies, but it may not be of any use in 10 years' time. Therefore, will you filter that question again in 10 years' time?

Dr Caven:

The same process will take place. A question on lower levels of accommodation was included for the first time in 2001, but is no longer included.

The Chairperson:

I have a quick question that has not yet been asked. If people do not want to fill in the form because they want their privacy to be respected, what happens?

Dr Caven:

It is a requirement in law that everyone must fill in a census form. That requirement falls upon the householder or joint householder, who is defined as the person who pays the rent or is responsible for the bills. It falls on that person to make a return for any individuals who are in the property at midnight on census day. If someone refuses to fill in the form, we will try every means of gentle persuasion that we can. All our publicity before the census will stress the importance of filling in the form, and I hope that people such as you will emphasise that. After the census, someone who has refused to fill in the form will be visited by a more senior member of the census team. Two staff, one being the local enumerator, will return to the household and, if necessary, interview the person under caution. That procedure may, potentially, inform criminal proceedings that could impose a fine of up to £1,000.

The Chairperson:

Members have no further questions, so thank you very much for coming.

Dr Caven:

I stress that we want to resort to that option in as few cases as possible.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much.