

# SASPAC Advisory Panel



Notes of meeting held 25 February 2005, at City Hall, London.

<b>Present:</b>	<b>Peter Shilson (Chair)</b>	<b>Leeds City Council</b>
	<b>Malcolm Brown</b>	<b>Cornwall County Council</b>
	<b>Paul Graveling</b>	<b>South Tyneside PCT</b>
	<b>Sherman Griffith</b>	<b>West Midlands Joint Data Team</b>
	<b>Sue Lygo</b>	<b>South Oxfordshire PCT</b>
	<b>Eileen Howes</b>	<b>Greater London Authority</b>
	<b>Allan Lambie</b>	<b>South Lanarkshire Council</b>
	<b>Rob Lewis</b>	<b>Greater London Authority</b>
	<b>Dudley Morrell</b>	<b>Citilabs</b>
	<b>Ian Robertson</b>	<b>Leicester City Council</b>
	<b>Hywel Davies</b>	<b>SASPAC Project Officer</b>
	<b>Alan Lewis</b>	<b>SASPAC Support Officer</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Justin Hayes</b>	<b>Manchester Computing</b>
	<b>Ray Brewer</b>	<b>Essex County Council</b>
	<b>Kevin Morgan</b>	<b>Cardiff City Council</b>

## Notes of Previous Meeting.

These were agreed, although, as the meeting was so far in the past members of the Panel had little recollection of the proceedings. There were no issues arising that were not covered by the agenda.

## SASPAC Developments.

Project Officer outlined developments since last meeting of the Panel leading up to the imminent availability of version 7.5. This would be distributed with a consolidated set of 2001 System Files, and contains a few added facilities as well as fixes for known features within the software. The System Files would not contain the Scottish System Files as the raw data for the 2<sup>nd</sup> tranche of Scottish tables was only received a few days before this meeting. These should be available before the end of March 2005.

GLA has processed a large number of commissioned tables for use with SASPAC. These will be announced on the SASPAC website, and where applicable, downloadable from that site. If the files are too big, then they will be available on request from the Helpdesk. Version 8 of SASPAC will allow users to create their own searching files for any tables which they themselves commission and process for use within SASPAC.

Release of version 8 is now anticipated in the second half of the calendar year. There is probably another month of development work required and then there is a requirement for substantial testing of the output – possibly 3 months worth. It is therefore quite probable

that it will be available during July, but given that this will coincide with the start of the summer holiday period, it would appear sensible to aim for September as a release date. This would coincide neatly with the budget setting period, and with suitable information on future plans, could provide an impetus in developing a momentum for continuing support of the project through the natural trough in support that would occur at this point in the inter-censal period.

Version 8 will contain the Geowise web-publisher enhancement. There are certain technical issues associated with this that will need to be addressed. Firstly, each user of the publisher will require the SVG add-in from Adobe. To facilitate installation on user machines, it was suggested that it should be a part of the version 8 installation procedure. The second issue, which requires clarification by Geowise, is the need for Microsoft's .NET framework to be present on the user machines. Finally, again requiring clarification by Geowise, is the issue of compatible browsers. The development has been undertaken in conjunction with Microsoft's IE browser, but efforts should be made to ensure compatibility with other browsers such as Firefox which is gaining an increasing stake in the browser market. All these issues should be resolved by the time that version 7.5 is distributed so that a note on the requirements for version 8 can be distributed with version 7.5.

**ACTION: GLA to resolve issues of additional software requirements with Geowise**

A brief demonstration of the output from the Geowise publisher was provided. Members commented on the readability of the output and asked if blank lines and delimiting solid lines could be inserted.

**ACTION: GLA to investigate user variation of output with Geowise**

In evolving the software towards 2011, consideration will need to be given to a move away from a batch operating environment towards a more intuitive web based environment. In doing this various elements of the current engine could be retained, but linked and interfaced in a different way.

Other issues that will need to be addressed are:

- Effect of e-gif and mandated file formats;
- Methods of interfacing with the data; and
- Printer output style to be redefined to be cell based rather than line based.

Further consultation with users towards 2011 will be necessary throughout any development process.

ONS have already indicated that the 2011 Census will follow traditional lines and so there will still be a need for a product such as SASPAC. Future developments should therefore be geared towards 2011. The GLA will seek to ensure continuation of its support for the product through to 2011 and beyond.

**ACTION: GLA to obtain continuing Mayoral support for SASPAC**

### **Issue of IDeA ownership of IPR.**

Since the retirement of Ian Robertson at the end of March 2004, the GLA have been unable to ascertain who in IDeA is now responsible for the SASPAC project. Despite many complaints to them about out-of-date content on their web-site relating to SASPAC and the census, no response has been received. It was felt that the LGA (via Roger Sykes) should be apprised of the situation. It was agreed GLA would draft a letter (to be agreed with members of the Advisory Panel) for the chair to send to IDeA and copy to LGA. This letter should

highlight concerns about lack of input, and also emphasise the health and robustness of the SASPAC project. It should also refer to the development plans for 2011.

**ACTION: GLA to draft a letter for Chair to send to IDeA (and LGA)**

### **Support Scheme.**

The support scheme continues to have a large number of members (380+), and prices for the next financial year will be kept the same as this year's. However, as the 'quiet time' of the inter-censal period is now being reached, there may be a drop-off in membership, and it will be necessary to develop a strategy for retention of members. The provision of version 8 (as discussed earlier) will act as some incentive, but it may also be necessary to advertise, for example, a 4 years for the price of 3 offer. A note to all users on a future pricing strategy is to be circulated following the release of version 8.

Within the health sector, there is now an increasingly close relationship with local authorities, and there could therefore be grounds for joint LA/PCT licences. This is already in operation in Telford and Wrekin, where the local and health authorities have formed a consortium to share the costs of 2 licences charged at 1½ the standard price.

Paul Graveling commented that there is an increased corporatism within the NHS, and a large amount of new IT spend is on a national basis. In addition information analysis is being centralised in "The Centre". Health Service organisations might be more interested in a web solution rather than a standalone machine solution to the issue of census data access.

This last point could lead to consideration of a model based on a web service with generic software loaded from a central webserver to a desktop in a format compatible with the software preferred by the user. A consequence of this could be that the support scheme contributions would be split into a web service subscription element, and a continuation of the current style of support.

### **Data Issues.**

ONS's (and GROS's) devotion and dedication to the SuperCross family of products has led them into a situation where they can now only service the user community through a closed proprietary format file that impedes direct access to the data. The question was raised as to whether ONS is actually contravening government guidelines on open access to data.

Efforts, possibly with a challenge based on government guidelines, should be made to encourage ONS to rescind their decision to supply 2001 census data only as SuperTable files in future, and it is imperative that no such decision is made for the 2011 census. Data availability in open format is crucial to access to the census outputs.

If the Census Offices are to maintain their link with SuperTable, then they should be encouraged to approach SpaceTime Research (the developers of SuperCross, etc) to provide a more flexible open output from their proprietary format files.

The chair asked for a summary paper detailing the issues to be produced for the Advisory Panel. This could be used as the basis of a letter from the Advisory Panel to the Census Offices. In addition, GLA should approach ONS (through Jill Matheson?) regarding the lack of open format output, and also with respect to ONS representation on the SASPAC Advisory Panel.

**ACTION: GLA to produce summary paper on Census Offices issues**

**ACTION: GLA to write to ONS**

## **Other Issues.**

In order to encourage use of SASPAC in the inter-censal period, closer links with the Neighbourhood Statistics (NeSs) data are being investigated. It has already been shown that this data may be used within SASPAC, and it was agreed that a User Note on this should be prepared.

**ACTION: GLA to produce User Note on use of NeSs datasets**

It has been noted that an increasing number of organisations are moving towards a 'thin client' environment, as in Cytrix implementations for example. This has implications for SASPAC in that there is a need for access to a local drive for the use of temporary files and for location of the initialisation file (SASPAC.INI). Recent investigations however have shown that a few set-ups have their INI file on a network drive, and this discovery may lead the way to clarification of the 'thin client' issues and facilitate such implementations. Northern Software Technology (NST) have already liaised with Vale of White Horse Council on this, and it was agreed that the Project Officer should revisit this case and develop further notes on the issue so that future implementations may be supported.

**ACTION: GLA to discuss issues with NST and Vale of White Horse**

The website and e-mail listings will be used continually to publicise SASPAC developments, but currently there are no plans to instigate any other active publicity or marketing.

It was agreed that the Advisory Panel should meet once a year for the next two or three years, but as the 2011 census approached, there would be an increase in the frequency of the meetings. However, in view of the length of time since the last meeting, and because of the current issues regarding the Census Offices, the next meeting should be held some time in the autumn.

Paul Graveling reported that due to reorganisation within his organisation, he would soon be leaving his post, and would not be able to continue membership of the Panel. He was thanked for his input over the years, and asked to nominate a replacement.

Consideration should be given to inviting a representative from the Regional Observatories, and it was agreed that the GLA should approach Pip Tucker of the South West Regional Observatory.

**ACTION: GLA to contact Pip Tucker regarding membership of the Advisory Panel**

It is important that the Panel should represent as wide a group of users as usual, and it was considered especially important that the academic sector is represented. Justin Hayes' input (and before him Keith Cole) has been invaluable over the years, and it was agreed that if Justin could not attend a meeting, he should be asked to send a substitute from within the academic community.

**ACTION: GLA to ask Justin Hayes to nominate substitute in case of his absence**

**Hywel Davies**  
**SASPAC Project Officer**  
**7<sup>th</sup> March 2005**