

Discussion Note – Socio-economic information / Protected Characteristics

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This discussion note is presented to garner the views and the advice of the Committee regarding the collection of data relating to socio-economic information / protected / special characteristics.

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1 Introduction

There is a desire¹ to begin to collect information around socio-economic / protected characteristics. This would be from the point of view of potentially making some data mandatory fields in the crime data system. For example, data regarding ethnicity is not mandatory which means that analyses on this characteristic may become problematical if large proportions of records don't have this information.

To date, the potential characteristics under consideration are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy & maternity
- Ethnicity
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marital or civil partnership status
- First language
- Nationality
- Country of birth
- Occupation / un-employment
- Annual income
- Education level

Some of these are already collected, for example age can be calculated from date of birth (albeit there are data quality issues around this, especially a preponderance of birth dates on the 1st of January each year, etc.).

Characteristics such as age are required, not least for identification purposes, but also for assessment of the current crime context and changes in that context (e.g. a prioritization to the reduction of youth violence (25 years old and under) would not be possible if the age of nominals was unknown.

As another example, collection of data around disability would be required in order to identify and classify certain hate crimes as well as to allow examination of any changes, patterns, etc. in the context of this type of crime as well as to be able to provide support

¹ Within WMP. Although this may lead to similar work at the NPCC level.

to victims. National reporting requirements are also in place for some of these characteristics (e.g. ethnicity) which can also help WMP to be held to account.

Characteristics such as occupation are required to be collected for the purposes of undertaking DBS checks whereby some occupations are notifiable, i.e. some occupations have a "barred list" so that checks can be undertaken into someone's background as part of the assessment as to their suitability to become or remain in a profession.

Other characteristics, whilst potentially useful from an analysis point of view such as annual income, education level, etc. perhaps have less benefit from a policing point of view.

2 Potential Issues

Potential issues with the collection of such data are:

- The principle – unless otherwise required as part of day-to-day policing activities, should this information be collected?
- Whilst information such as gender reassignment would be required in order to classify and analyse particular hate crimes, could this information lead to a view of differential service provision. E.g. if, for reasons other than their characteristics, a victim of a crime was to receive a poor service from WMP, would they come to think that this was because of their characteristics?
- Would the collection of such data constitute or come to be seen as unwarranted intrusion into people's affairs?
- Should there be different expectations about data collected from suspects and victims?
- Could these requirements deter people from reporting crimes?