

21st March 2013

Dear Ms Tillson,

I am responding, on behalf of the Royal Statistical Society, to your consultation document on the Postcode Address File (PAF).

Summary

The PAF is an important part of our national data infrastructure. We are seriously concerned that it could be put at risk unless this is explicitly recognised and safeguarded in any new arrangements.

Detailed response

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is both a learned society for statistics and a professional body for statisticians. It was founded in 1834 as the Statistical Society of London and became the Royal Statistical Society by Royal Charter in 1887. Today, the Society has more than 6000 members around the world. The RSS is active in a wide range of areas both directly and indirectly relevant to the study and application of statistics.

National datasets of addresses provide an essential element in statistical work done in the public sector, including the national population census, and in the private sector for customer insight, marketing and logistics. They support efficiency in government and profitability in business.

Consideration of the future of the PAF should be an opportunity to think about the importance of moving towards a single, definitive national address dataset. PAF alone does not constitute such a dataset, but it forms an important element of the whole, with the frequent updates embedded in PAF adding value to addressing data overall. A number of bodies have called previously for a move to such a national address dataset, including several Parliamentary Select Committees, the Statistics Commission, The Advisory Panel on Public Sector Information, and this government, in the Open Data White Paper.

We urge you to ensure that the importance of PAF data in contributing to the UK's information infrastructure be considered alongside the statutory requirement to maintain the sustainability of the Universal Postal Service (UPS). While we are not in a position to assess directly the cost recovery model proposed by Ofcom, the broadening out of the assessment beyond the UPS would be beneficial.

We consider that the impact of doing so on the Royal Mail would be minimal. The revenues and profit from the PAF are both small relative to the size of Royal Mail. Published accounts show that RM revenues in total were approximately £9.5bn in 2011/12, producing profits of £211m that year. According to the Ofcom consultation, annual attributed costs of PAF maintenance and marketing were £24.5m and profits were £2.2m in the same year. On this

basis, PAF formed about a quarter of one percent of costs and produced one percent of profits.

Given the significance of this database to the government's Open Data initiative and to pending decisions on the future of the population census, I am copying this letter to Francis Maude and Michael Fallon, and also to Jil Matheson, the National Statistician.

yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Pullinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

John Pullinger
President
Royal Statistical Society