

## APPENDIX D : PROBLEMS OF METHOD

### Area-Based Approach to Disadvantage

The effectiveness of and justification for geographic approaches to tackling the problems of social need, as opposed to more closely targeted approaches, have been subject to some criticism. This is largely due to the lack of precision of such methods. Even when areas have been identified, it is likely that there will still be large numbers of people experiencing social need living outside the defined areas, and even within them the probability is that the majority of households are not in great social need. It is often argued that it is better to identify individuals and households with social need rather than to look at areas in which they are concentrated.

Although this study identifies significant concentrations of social need, it is accepted that a great many individuals and households will effectively be 'missed' because they live in a zone which is not one of the 134 identified as experiencing social need. The problem can be illustrated by examining one indicator, free school meals. Table D.1 shows the proportion of claimants of free school meals that live in each category of social need zone.

**Table D.1**

#### Children receiving free school meals by social need of zone

Category of zone	No. of zones	Claimants of free school meals	% of claimants	Total children	% of children	% of children claiming free school meals
Extreme	19	4,694	17.9	9,518	7.1	49.3
Serious	50	7,841	30.0	21,304	15.9	36.8
Moderate	65	6,699	25.6	26,246	19.5	25.5
All above average	134	19,234	73.5	57,068	42.5	33.7
Below average	246	6,921	26.5	77,329	57.5	9.0
All zones	380	26,155	100.0	134,397	100.0	19.5

Nearly three-quarters (73.5%) of children receiving free school meals live in the zones defined as having above average social need. Therefore, about one quarter (26.5%) live in zones with below average social need. However, the proportion of all children living in zones with above average social need is much lower (42.5%), demonstrating that large concentrations of claimants live in these areas.

The last column in Table D.1 shows the percentage of children claiming free school meals. As the percentage for zones in extreme social need (49.3%) is over five times as big as the percentage for zones with below average social need, in

effect children in 'extreme' zones are five times more likely, on average, to receive free school meals than those in 'below average' zones. Using the same comparison, children in zones with above average social need, taken as a whole, are over three times as likely to receive free school meals as 'below average' zones. To some extent this demonstrates the value of an area-based approach.

The definition of areas of social need based upon identifying concentrations of characteristics of the population is a valuable addition to more individual methods of identifying social need for a number of reasons:

- there are restrictions on the availability of data with which to identify individuals experiencing social need, due mainly to the Data Protection Act;
- certain problems, such as poor housing, tend to be geographically concentrated for historic or other reasons;
- many services, particularly those provided by local authorities, serve a neighbourhood or community and decisions on future developments have to be made between areas rather than individuals;
- certain approaches to tackling the problems of social need involve a community-wide rather than an individual approach, for instance Neighbourhood Renewal areas, and there is a need to be able to identify where to concentrate funding for such approaches;
- there is evidence that when disadvantaged people's conditions improve (e.g. by getting a job) they will often move out of the most deprived areas, to be replaced by others who are in need - in this sense, the area remains in social need, even though the people involved may be different.

### **Selection of Indicators**

The selection of indicators was inevitably influenced by the availability of data from the Census and elsewhere. Although a wider range of information is available than for the previous studies, particularly on crime, education and health, there are still some significant omissions.

Two of the Study's themes upon which it would be useful to have more data are housing and income. Although there is a lot of information in the Census on housing, there is nothing which indicates the physical condition of properties, nor is anything available from other sources.

Likewise, there is no direct information on household incomes, so the gap has to be filled by using other indicators, such as car ownership and free school meals.

The lack of access to services is a large part of social need which it has been impossible to include, due to lack of consistent and reliable information and the complexity of analysing it (e.g. the presence of a service within a zone may not be the crucial thing, if there are accessible services in other zones nearby). The geographical aspects of access to services are a particular problem in some rural

areas of Nottinghamshire, so the omission of this factor may lead to the underestimation of social need in these areas. There are, however, other aspects of access to services which are equally important. For instance, although there may be a GP in the area their patients list may be full. Also, there may be cultural reasons why services are not used. Access to services is something which the update of the *Indices of Deprivation 2000* will look at in more detail.

The quality of the physical environment is also something which it has not been possible to include, due to lack of consistent data at the appropriate area level. It could be argued that this is likely to have most effect in the more urban areas.

The indicators used have been chosen carefully to directly or indirectly represent aspects of social need, rather than to analyse a great deal of statistical data to see what relationships occur. Indicators which identify specific sectors of the population, such as large families and ethnic minorities, have not been used, although such sectors may be more likely to experience social need. However, lone parent households have been included as an indirect measure of low income, because this group often experiences economic hardship. The distribution of pensioners and of ethnic minorities are considered separately (see Chapter 7), as they are groups which are more likely to be in social need.

### **Limitation of Indicators**

The 22 indicators selected for the Study are considered to give a balanced view of the measurable aspects of social need. However, as with all studies of this type, a number of limitations exist. Notes on each indicator are given in Chapter 4.

Some of the indicators are not consistent measures of a characteristic across Nottinghamshire. For instance, a particular score for 'households with no car' may have a different meaning in a rural area than an urban one. Rural households may make great sacrifices in order to run a car where an urban dweller would not normally be regarded as having a sufficient income to do so. Conversely, an urban dweller may consider that their access to public transport and the proximity of facilities is such that car ownership is unnecessary, although the household may well have sufficient income for car ownership to be the norm.

Information on the non-Census indicators has been provided by a number of different agencies. It is possible that there are some inconsistencies in the way in which regulations are interpreted between different agencies. Likewise, where benefits have to be claimed, the take-up may vary. Such factors are dealt with more fully in Chapter 4, but the effects on the overall Study are not likely to be significant.

### **Definition of Zones**

It is inevitable that in drawing up zone boundaries a compromise has to be made between having areas of similar size and areas containing populations with broadly similar socio-economic characteristics. This is especially so in rural areas, where, in order to achieve a large enough population, settlements of very different characteristics may be included in the same zone. However, the use of a smaller

population threshold (Chapter 2) should mean that this is less of a problem than in the previous studies.

### **The Measure of Social Need**

All of the indicators have been given equal weight when aggregating their scores to create a single measure of social need. The balance of the different aspects of social need (Chapter 2) relies on the selection of an appropriate number of indicators for each theme. The greater the number of indicators the heavier the weighting for that particular theme. Considerable care has been taken to select an appropriate number of reliable indicators for each theme. This judgment is inevitably a subjective one, but it is based on an understanding of social need gained from the previous studies and elsewhere.

In using this method to identify areas where social need is concentrated, areas are identified where a range of problems exist. What the study cannot do is show whether these problems are experienced by the same households. Although it is very likely that this is often the case, the limitations of the data sources and the methodology mean that this must remain an assumption.