

Laria News



supporting local researchers in the public sector

Contents

Contents	Page
From the Chair - Andy Davis	1
Research, Consultation and Geographic Information in the Borough of Poole	2
2011 Census taking shape: methodological and technological developments	5
Newark and Sherwood District Council Employee Survey 2008	9
Engage and Review - Community Planning Consultation in Dumfries and Galloway	10
<i>Is there something I should know?</i> - Audit Commission report on local government intelligence	12
Exploring Health, Well-being and Nutrition: Newcastle City Council's Hot Delivered Meals Service Users' Survey	13
Residents have their say on customer service in Telford!	14
Customer Satisfaction Question Bank for Scottish Local Authorities	16
Place and Residents' Surveys 2008 compared: Newcastle's experience	17
North East Lincolnshire Economic Wellbeing Strategy	19
R&I News	21
LARIA People	24
ALGIS in LARIA Update	25
Noticeboard	25
Guide for Contributors, Next Issue and Just the Job	26

This edition was produced by Anne Cunningham, Alan Holcroft, Spencer Payne, Graham Smith, Richard Stevens, Joy Thompson, Mike Towers, John Wicks, David Wilburn.

From the Chair

Hello, and welcome to this edition of LariaNews.

Two very relevant reports have been published so far this year which each highlight the importance of good quality research and intelligence at a local level.

The first of these was published in January by DCLG in partnership with the Audit Commission and the LGA: *"Supporting local information and research: Understanding demand and improving capacity"*. The report provides a good overview and understanding of how to strengthen the support for local partners in the use of local information and research in decision-making processes. The study explores:

- the sources of demand for local information and research;
- how research is carried out locally;
- how local information and analysis is currently supported by national, regional and sub-regional organisations.

The report also includes recommendations for national, regional, and local organisations, including LARIA, around how we could and should strengthen our support for local partners and practitioners. LARIA is very keen to progress the recommendations emerging from the study that are relevant to us.

The second report was published by the Audit Commission in July. *"Is there something I should know?"* looks at how councils use information to make decisions. It encourages chief executives, senior officers and lead members to be more demanding about the information they seek and use when making decisions. The report also suggests ways to improve in both these areas. There is an article on p12 of this edition of LariaNews highlighting the background to the report and its findings.

Both reports are well worth a read; they are of particular value in underpinning the importance of the range of activities that we do as researchers in our local areas and partnerships, and also in providing LARIA with the context to help support you to do your job.

Next, a couple of forthcoming events to note. Firstly, LARIA will once again be exhibiting at the annual conference for local authority chief executives later in October, to promote the effectiveness of research



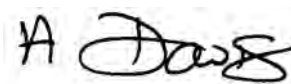
Andy Davis

across the public sector and highlight the expertise that exists within local partnerships. This year we will be taking a joint stand with the LGA and with LARCI (the Local Authorities Research Councils Initiative). I think this demonstrates to the chief executives in a very powerful way the scope and capacity for high quality research and intelligence that exists in their organisations, and also the networks and infrastructure that are in place to support both research and researchers.

Secondly, a date for your diaries is the LARIA Annual Conference 2010, taking place at the Royal Holloway College, between the 12th and 14th April. We are currently finalising the Conference Programme and as soon as details are available they will appear on the website and in the Newsletter.

And finally, the LARIA Events Group is pulling together our programme of events for the next 12 to 18 months. Details will appear on the LARIA website and in our e-mail alerts, so keep an eye out for events you will want to attend and participate in.

Andy Davis
Chair, LARIA



Research, Consultation and Geographic Information in the Borough of Poole

Research, Consultation, and Geographic Information in the Borough of Poole

By Pete Stratford

Poole the Place

The Borough of Poole is an excellent four star unitary council situated on England's south coast between the New Forest and the Purbeck Hills. It is home to the Sandbanks peninsula where some of the most expensive properties in the world can be found.



Not surprisingly a large proportion of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live. However, not everyone feels the same way. By increasing the sample size and consequently the number of responses to our 2008 Place Survey, we were able to explore how views differed by sub-groups within the population. For example satisfaction with local area varied from 75 percent to 97 percent depending on where in Poole respondents live. In fact, for a range of National Indicators, where we had sufficient responses to produce statistically reliable results, we found that the same areas had consistently better results while other areas had consistently worse results. The areas with the worst results coincided with the 2007 Indices of Deprivation most deprived areas.

The population of Poole is elderly; the proportion of 60 plus years in the population is projected to increase from 27 percent in 2006 to 35 percent in 2031. In contrast the proportion of 60 plus years in England's population is expected to increase from 21 percent to 28 percent over the same time period.

Understanding differences within this population group helps us direct services. Compared to England we have nearly four times the proportion of retired wealthy Mosaic Types and the same proportion of retired poor Mosaic Types. Despite having an elderly population we are still experiencing an increase in births. Since 2001 the annual number of live births in Poole has increased by over 20% from a low of 1,339 in 2001 to 1,629 in 2008.

A Corporate Team

Poole's Corporate Research and Geographic Information Teams work together, both reporting to the Corporate Research Manager. The Research Team consists of five Senior/Research Officers and a Consultation Manager. The Geographic Information Team has a Manager and two Officers. We are proud of our LARIA Excellence in Research Award and with the positive feedback we received from inspectors when the Council received its four-star CPA rating.



Poole's Corporate Research and Geographic Information Teams. Back row (l to r): Pete Stratford, Natasha Miles, Heather Kitching, Jennifer Smith. Front row (l to r): Katharine Watters, Steven Campbell. Not shown: Charles Arthurs, Rina Mistry, and Sara Ireland

We work alongside colleagues in the Community Strategy, Corporate Performance, Community Safety and Emergency Planning Teams. Collectively we form a Strategy Team, whose role is to help Poole achieve its ambitions through improved leadership capacity for the Council and Partnerships. An important part of that role is developing a shared understanding of the aspirations and needs of Poole residents. The Strategy Team Manager reports to the Chief Executive.

Research in the Borough of Poole cont...

What we do

Our team undertakes all types of social research, consultation and Geographic Information work using a broad range of quantitative and qualitative research and analysis techniques. For example, we have been successful at combining anonymised data on children from a number of sources to complete an annual Children and Young People's Needs Analysis that informs and directs the Children and Young People Plan (LariaNews 87, July 2008).



Poole receives the 2008 LARIA Excellence in Research Award for its Children and Young People's Needs Analysis

We use PASW (formerly SPSS) for our quantitative analysis. Recently we have used classification trees and logistic regression analysis to identify significant predictors in the 2008 Place Survey. We have also made use of factor analysis to improve the Council's employee survey.

Our surveys are designed and captured using software that can read scanned paper images and host questionnaires on the web. Poole Opinion Panel, the Borough's citizen panel, has a minimum of two surveys each year that include questions from internal and external clients. We are responsible for population estimates and forecasts, and work with colleagues in Bournemouth and Dorset to produce these. Our team also produces estimates and forecasts to aid pupil place planning.

An example of our qualitative research was a project designed to help understand the issues facing Polish migrant workers and their families. The findings were used to provide evidence to support a successful funding bid for new services for migrant workers.

Face-to-face interviews were used and data captured on digital recording equipment and analysed with the help of Nvivo. This equipment and software also helps with the analysis of focus groups. PASW text analysis software is used to help with the analysis of open-ended questions included in our surveys.

The Geographic Information team are responsible for managing the corporate spatial database and map base as well as the Local Land and Property Gazetteer. They also provide the intra/internet-based Geographic Information System and a Geographic Information help desk to support users of geographic information and software. Recent developments are a metadata base to hold details of all the Authority's map layers, and a new web-based mapping service called 'Your Poole'.

Working together, the Geographic Information and Research Teams have undertaken spatial analysis, combined data sets from various sources, reviewed service boundaries and helped to target resources where they are most needed. A recent example is the analysis of a thermal image taken of Poole to direct energy saving initiatives.

How we work

It is a requirement that all research and consultation is coordinated within the Council via an online database that tracks new projects from inception through to publication. The database is used as a basis to inform a research and consultation work plan, as a resource of published research to inform service and policy planning, and as an early warning for any work that requires ethical approval as part of our research governance arrangements. During the next few months a new database will be launched enabling all partner agencies to add their research and consultation projects. By using this database to let each other know about intended and completed work, we will improve our ability to join up our research and consultation, avoiding unnecessary duplication.

A quarterly Research Bulletin and annual seminar help ensure that our colleagues and partners are aware of available research resources and the value they can add in informing what the Council does. These allow us to showcase examples of good practice where our services are adding value to service and policy planning and to prompt ideas of how we could help others.

Research in the Borough of Poole cont...

Much of the work we do is recharged, generating income that is reinvested in our service. Investment takes the form of software and data to help us deliver more for less while continuing to improve what we do. The desire for people within our team to continually improve is matched by investment in their skills. In the past year three team members have completed MSc's in Geographic Information Systems, Social Research Methods and Policy Research. A fourth team member is part way through their MSc. This generates a positive cycle where our team is able to do more to a higher standard, which in turn means we are able to help more services make better decisions. Consequently the more varied the services we work with the more knowledge we acquire that helps add value and build a corporate approach to how the Council and its partners work.

Partnership Working

We work alongside our Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), providing the various theme groups with the evidence they need to guide what they do. We managed the 2008 Place Survey for the LSP, sharing early results and developing a work programme of further analysis based on the feedback they gave us. A new development is the formation of a Bournemouth and Poole Research Information Group led by the two LSPs. This new group of service and policy planners will guide research activity in the area by:

- Ensuring that available research information is shared in a way that is engaging and easy to use;
- Coordinating the collection and publication of new research information;
- Developing the capacity of those undertaking and using research by sharing skills, knowledge and best practice.

Where Next

Our research shows that inequality is an important issue in Poole. Our Local Area Agreement, entitled 'Closing the Gap', made use of research evidence to target actions where they were most needed. In the future the recession will require public services to respond by reducing spending while at the same time meeting increasing demand for our services. Some difficult decisions will need to be made with our partners about where we need to target our resources; the comprehensive research evidence our teams are able to provide will inform these decisions.

For more information, please contact Pete Stratford, Corporate Research and GIS Manager (Tel 01202 633306, Email p.stratford@poole.gov.uk)

2011 Census taking shape: methodological and technological developments

By Ian White, Office for National Statistics

This article summarises the key methodological, operational and technological changes introduced since the 2001 Census (as set out in the White Paper, *Helping to shape tomorrow*¹), the prime aim of which is to achieve and report the most accurate estimate of the resident population in 2011. It follows the report on the proposed topic and question content for the 2011 Census in England and Wales carried in the previous issue of LariaNews.

Collecting the information: the field operation

The data collection operation is always the public face of the Census, and covers a wide range of activities in addition to delivering the questionnaires and collecting the completed returns. Experience has shown that it is increasingly difficult to make contact with households, especially (but not exclusively) in inner cities. These difficulties can be attributed to: an ageing population, growing numbers of one-person households; changing work patterns; increase in access security control systems; numbers of recent migrants; and increased perceptions of disenfranchisement. Ensuring that every household gets a Census form and is motivated to fill it in is, therefore, more than ever a key driver in the strategy and planning for data collection.

A number of key objectives of the data collection operation underpin the broad strategic aims of improving response and minimising difference in non-response across different areas and population groups. These include the following aims:

- to develop an effective enumeration methodology that targets resources and identifies non-response;
- to manage public participation and co-operation through informative publicity; and
- to work with local authorities in planning and executing the enumeration, in particular to make best use of their knowledge of local addresses and residence arrangements and ways of contacting target population groups.

Posting out census questionnaires and developing an address register

Following the successful trialling of post-out as a delivery mechanism for Census questionnaires in the 2007 Census Test², the decision to adopt this methodology as the prime means of form delivery for the 2011 Census has been confirmed. Even with hand delivery in the 2001 Census, enumerators failed to make doorstep contact with households at more than a third of addresses and resorted to delivering the form through the letter box. For 2011, ONS expect to post out Census questionnaires to as many as 95 per cent of households – with the remaining 5 per cent being delivered in the more traditional manner in those harder-to-enumerate areas where there might be significant proportions of households to whom a questionnaire will not be successfully delivered by mail.

The use of a postal service provider for the delivery (and also the return of forms) will help overcome the difficulties of recruiting large numbers of temporary enumerators to deliver questionnaires to every address, and of accessing accommodation protected by security systems. Together with the option of making a return online (see below), this will free up field staff to be more flexibly deployed.

Clearly the pre-requisite for a successful post-out strategy is the availability of a comprehensive, high-quality address register for all areas of England and Wales. In the absence of a single authoritative source of national address information, ONS is developing an address register that meets Census requirements in terms of quality and coverage, and which local authorities can be confident will effectively underpin the Census enumeration and subsequent outputs. Full use will be made of the primary sources of address lists, namely the Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF), and the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG), which is administered by the Information Development Agency (IDeA) through the Local Government Information House (LGIH). Data derived from the Valuation Office records will be used to help improve matching rates.

Research is ongoing to refine the technical approach to developing and maintaining the address register, and more detailed plans for this will be announced over the coming months.

2011 Census taking shape: methodological and technological developments cont...

Address checking

To ensure the Census address list is as complete and up-to-date as possible, address checks will be carried out by field staff in those areas where there is the greatest uncertainty about the quality of address lists – currently expected to cover up to 30 per cent of the country subject to the results of further research. The check prior to the 2007 Census Test, for example, revealed an additional 11,700 or more households within the sampled areas that were not on the Register at that time (equivalent to around 11 per cent of those that were). These tended to be at multi-occupied addresses where houses had been converted into flats.

A Pilot exercise was conducted in July - September 2008 in 27 local authorities in England and Wales to test key elements of the address register design and the methods for updating it. The local authorities themselves actively engaged with the Pilot in a number of ways. Almost all (25 out of the 27) took part in the Pilot seminars and regional workshops organised by ONS to facilitate the address resolution process, and the majority (19) were also able to participate directly in address checking and investigation of unresolved addresses.

To ensure that this preparation for the Census achieves a permanent improvement in existing address lists, it is intended that information on updates to the address list – arising, for example, from new housing development and any changes of status of existing addresses – will be shared with those organisations managing the PAF and NLPG, where such information does not disclose any personal Census information.

Returning census information online

The option of two principal response routes will be available to enable the public to complete their Census questionnaire - either by filling in the printed form and posting this back, or by online completion for the first time in the UK. It is estimated from international census experience that up to 25 per cent of households will respond online, equating to, potentially, over 5 million responses altogether in England and Wales.

The online questionnaire will have the same question set as the paper form, but will allow for up to a

maximum of 30 household members and visitors. There will be no unnecessary changes in the content – in order to minimise modal response bias – but a number of changes in the design will be required in order to facilitate, for example, dropdown menus of response categories for particular questions and automatic filtering of those questions that are not required of every person.

Local authority and community liaison

Research into the types of people missed in the 2001 Census and changing demographic profiles has helped to inform other initiatives needed to ensure coverage of the hard-to-count groups. The Local Authority and Community Liaison Programmes are key components of this research. The 2011 Census is building on the valuable experience gained and lessons learned from the 2001 Census, by placing emphasis on more collaboration with local authorities and other agencies and community organisations.

The need for reliable information provides local authorities with a strong incentive to work in partnership with ONS to identify and reach local target populations. By positively engaging LAs in the development and quality assurance of address lists, and actively encouraging them to promote the benefits of the Census in their areas, ONS is seeking to improve and maximise coverage. Such initiatives aim to target specific disadvantaged groups, such as disabled people, ethnic minorities and very elderly residents, as well as areas known to have the characteristics associated with poor coverage.

It is important for ONS to receive local authority buy-in to the 2011 Census enumeration strategy, especially so at the Chief Executive level, so that potential for disagreement and lack of confidence in the quality of final results can be minimised. As reported in LariaNews³, and at this year's LARIA Conference, ONS have persuaded local authority Chief Executives of the benefit of appointing Census Regional Champions (CRCs), mainly from among the pool of Chief Executives that serve as Regional Returning Officers for European and General Elections. They in turn can then encourage and facilitate the appointment of Local Authority Liaison Managers to work with senior Census staff to help shape the local enumeration. The list of the current CRCs is at Box 1.

2011 Census taking shape: methodological and technological developments cont...

Box 1 - Census Regional Champions

North East	Dave Smith (Sunderland City Council)
North West	Sir Howard Bernstein (Manchester City Council)
Yorkshire and the Humber	Paul Rogerson (Leeds City Council)
East Midlands	Charles Poole (Leicester City Council)
West Midlands	Stephen Hughes (Birmingham City Council)
East of England	David Monks (Huntingdonshire District Council)
London	Barry Quirk (Lewisham Council)
South East	Mark Heath (Southampton City Council)
South West	Paul Morris (Poole Borough Council)
Wales	Bryn Parry-Jones (Pembrokeshire County Council)

ONS will report more fully on progress on liaison with local authorities in subsequent issues of LariaNews.

Publicity

A Census brand with the slogan 'Help tomorrow take shape' (Figure 1) was launched in November 2008 to be the identifiable face of the Census to the general public, and will be adopted at every appropriate opportunity. The brand will be used to promote awareness of the 2009 Census Rehearsal in the selected areas of Lancaster, Newham and Ynys Môn – Isle of Anglesey.



Figure 1: The 2011 Census brand

An explanatory leaflet will be delivered with each Census form, and publicity will increase as Census Day approaches. A Contact Centre, providing a telephone help-line with foreign language interpreters, will be available to answer queries from the public prior to and during the Census. In addition, a Census Help website will be provided during both the Rehearsal and Census operational periods.

The questionnaire for Wales will be available for completion in either English or Welsh, with translations as well as other help and supporting information available bilingually via the Census Help facility. Translations of the Census questions into some 34 or more foreign languages in England and Wales will also be available online to assist respondents whose first language is not English (or Welsh in Wales).

Coverage and data quality

Ultimately, the success of the Census relies heavily on its accuracy, and how well it can estimate the population and its characteristics. By its nature, the Census is intended to cover the whole population, but errors inevitably arise. The improvements which are being introduced in 2011 have been designed to minimise these shortcomings, of which non-response or under-enumeration is the most significant.

While the estimated overall undercoverage in the 2001 Census (6 per cent in Great Britain) was small compared with national government surveys, it was greater than in 1991 (4 per cent), reflecting an international pattern of increasing non-response in the Census. Of more significance was its variation across population subgroups and different parts of the country. A process of coverage assessment and adjustment was undertaken to provide accurate national and sub national estimates of the population. As Owen Abbott reported at this year's LARIA Conference, a similar approach will be adopted for 2011, but with developments focusing on a number of areas to improve the methodology. More information on this can be found in *Population Trends* 127⁴.

2011 Census taking shape: methodological and technological developments cont...

Protecting confidentiality

The importance of achieving maximum coverage in the Census necessitates that public participation should be mandatory. This, in turn, puts an obligation on ONS to ensure that the sometimes sensitive information given in confidence in the Census is treated with the strictest confidentiality. The public must be confident that their personal Census records will be held and processed securely.

A range of extensive systems and processes is designed to protect the security and confidentiality of the data. Among these will be systematic modification of the data when preparing the results of the Census, in order to create a level of uncertainty while maintaining the statistical integrity of the data. The exact threshold of uncertainty required has not yet been decided. The National Statistician and the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland will make this judgement at a later stage, in consultation with users and other experts including the Information Commissioner, having regard to results from research into the balance of protection afforded, and damage caused, by various disclosure control methodologies. The research was completed around mid-summer this year and the National Statistician and the Registrars General have signed-off 'record swapping' as the primary strategy for disclosure control of tabular outputs. Further work is, however, taking place to consider the precise details of the methodology and additional elements related to the output strategy.

Disseminating the results

In disseminating the results of the Census, much emphasis will be put on responsiveness to users' requirements on content, format and the means of access. ONS has started a programme of user consultation (which includes a Census User Roadshow this autumn) to ensure that output formats meet the changing requirements of users, but anticipates that there is likely to be a continued requirement for national, regional and local authority summaries, and for reports on key findings on particular topics.

ONS proposes that all standard outputs should be publicly accessible online, and free of charge, from the National Statistics website. LariaNews will report in more detail on the 2011 Census output programme next year.

Summary

The design for the 2011 Census in England and Wales includes a number of methodological and operational features and innovations aimed at improving the quality of the information collected, and reported, on the resident population. These include: the delivery of Census forms to the majority of households by post; the facility to return the completed information online; the development of a central address register to facilitate improved form delivery and field management; the outsourcing of the recruitment, training and payment of field staff to specialist service providers; closer liaison with local authorities to help tailor the field operation to meet local conditions; a strategy to improve coverage assessment and adjustment; and making publicly available all standard outputs online and free of charge from the National Statistics website subject to an agreed statistical disclosure control process. More details of these and other proposals for the 2011 Census are set out the Government's White Paper *Helping to shape tomorrow*¹.

References

- 1 Cabinet Office (2008). *Helping to shape tomorrow*. Cm 7513. The Stationery Office. ISBN 978-0-10-175132-2. See <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/2011-census-project/legislation/index.html>
- 2 Garnett Compton (2008). '2007 Census Test Evaluation: some emerging findings'. *LariaNews* 86.
- 3 Ian White (2009). '2011 Census: update on local authority liaison'. *LariaNews* 89.
- 4 Owen Abbott (2007). '2011 Census coverage assessment and adjustment strategy'. *Population Trends* 127, pp 7-13. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 978-0-230-52612-9.

Newark and Sherwood District Council Employee Survey 2008

By Anthony Watkin

Background

Newark and Sherwood District Council last carried out an employee survey in 2002, in response to perceived low morale and insecurity among all levels of staff. As in other authorities, changes have taken place across the Council over the six years, which will have impacted on our employees.

Without a new employee survey, it would be impossible to assess how these changes have affected overall job satisfaction, where any outstanding problems are and how to deal with them. For the Council, this risks further low morale, de-motivation and, potentially, higher staff turnover. It also undermines the changing culture of the Council.

Research shows that employee satisfaction has a direct link to business revenue and customer loyalty. Satisfied employees perform better at their jobs. Employees with poor attitudes can also have a negative effect on their co-workers and their customers. With the Council's focus on customer service and enhancing our reputation, employee satisfaction and pride in working for the Council is critical.

We therefore urgently needed a valid and reliable survey to assess levels of job satisfaction and identify problem areas.

There are a plethora of employee surveys but many 'off the shelf' surveys appear to have no, or at least very little, theoretical basis. Identifying the right survey at the right price costs time and money, and with ever increasing budget constraints, we decided to use our own research specialist to develop a bespoke survey.

Survey Design

A list of 65 statements relating to different elements of workplace satisfaction was sorted into ten related groups or 'factors'. A seven point Likert scale was used to measure the level of agreement / disagreement, or satisfaction / dissatisfaction. This allows a finer gradation than the usual five-point scale, while still including a neutral option.

Six further statements relating to overall satisfaction and one question relating to advocacy were also added to act as dependent variables.

Paper and electronic questionnaires were produced. Electronic questionnaires were developed using Adobe Forms and emailed to all employees. The paper questionnaire, bearing the employee's unique identifier, was given to employees who do not have email, and made available to others on request. Both of the questionnaires were identical in content, with instructions for responding electronically and manually included in both formats.

Respondents had the choice of either printing, completing and posting, or completing electronically and emailing. Emailed responses were received in XML format, which was transferred directly to the database. Employees were encouraged to use this method.

Analysis

A total of 578 questionnaires were sent out, with a response rate of 34.4%.

Since original factors were derived using best guess, the responses were subjected to a factor analysis, where responses were re-coded into a measure of importance. First, to determine how many factors were involved and their content, responses were submitted to Factor Analysis using the Principal Components Method. From this, 57 items were retained, falling into nine factors relating to the following aspects of employee satisfaction:

1. **Manager/Employee Relations**
2. **Training and Facilities**
3. **Personal Well-being at Work**
4. **Information and Training**
5. **Communication**
6. **Work Demands**
7. **Culture**
8. **Feeling Valued**
9. **Work/Life Balance**

The responses from the original questionnaire were then re-coded in line with the nine factors, and the degree to which each factor contributes to each of the dependent variables was assessed. A Stepwise Regression was performed to ascertain to what extent each of the factors identified contributed to the mean overall level of satisfaction.

Newark and Sherwood District Council Employee Survey 2008 cont...

Results

We could link five of the nine factors directly to overall satisfaction: feeling valued, communication, manager/employee relations, corporate culture and work demands. Improving satisfaction in these factors could significantly improve the overall satisfaction of employees.

Within these factors we found both strengths and weaknesses. Some of our strengths were:

- Line managers are approachable, trust employees to take responsibility for their work and encourage them to make their own decisions;
- Services are always trying to improve the way they work and the Council does all it can to ensure their safety at work;
- Employees have access to the tools and equipment to do their job effectively, they are able to cope with the demands of their jobs, and they can strike the right balance between work and home life.

However there were also some issues that came to light, and we found that 40% of respondents doubted whether action would be taken in response to the staff survey.

As a consequence, employees were informed of action being taken to tackle their concerns across

areas such as communication about change, staff recognition, access to and sharing of information across services, more opportunities for personal development and supporting 'pressure points' in the organisation.

Future Developments

This first employee survey in six years has given us a useful baseline for measuring satisfaction, and the factors which contribute to employee satisfaction. We now intend to run the survey biennially to track changes. Future surveys will however, be totally anonymous and no attempt will be made to link employees with responses. We feel that this limited the response rates this time.

We are also looking to benchmark our findings with other local authorities using similar questions. With our survey being designed specifically to discover and address issues of importance to our employees, benchmarking, so far, has proved difficult.

For more information, please contact Antony Watkin, Research and Systems Officer, Newark and Sherwood District Council (Antony.Watkin@newark-sherwooddc.gov.uk, Tel: 01636 655255).

Engage and Review - Community Planning Consultation in Dumfries and Galloway

By Denise Kearney

Dumfries and Galloway Council and its community planning partners recently undertook a review of the development of their new Community Plan 2009-12 and Single Outcome Agreement 2009-11, focusing on the consultation and engagement process.

Plan development and consultation

The development of the region's new Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement started in October 2008, and the two documents were finalised and published in May 2009. The process included an agreed consultation programme underpinned by the National Standards for Community Engagement. Consultation activities included an on-line survey and interactive discussion



Consultation workshop session in Dumfries

forum, workshops, face to face surveys and meetings with established groups, involving both formal organisations and communities of interest. These activities were undertaken by a number of community planning partners.

Engage and Review - Community Planning Consultation in Dumfries and Galloway cont...

Structure of review

The purpose of the review was to provide an independent assessment of the consultation and engagement process, and establish the lessons which could be learned from it. This included identifying areas for improvement, and examples of good practice to ensure that any future engagement activity was as effective as possible.

The review process followed the Monitoring and Evaluation Standard to check that the engagement had achieved its purpose and met the National Standards for Community Engagement. It was carried out by an assessor external to Dumfries and Galloway but who had an in-depth knowledge of both the area and community planning. The review involved three elements:

- A desk top exercise to review the formal consultation programme and to track the activities undertaken;
- Telephone interviews with those responsible for leading on each element of the consultation programme;
- An assessment of questionnaires sent to everyone who had been invited to participate in the consultation programme.

Review findings

The strengths of the consultation process were:

- Commitment and co-operation from partners;
- Flexibility;
- Opportunity for target groups to engage;
- Delivering cost effectiveness; and
- Adherence to the National Standards for Community Engagement.

Innovation was also highlighted as a strength. Views were gathered directly from clients through face-to-face surveys carried out at Customer Service Centres across the region, during Fire and Rescue Service home safety visits and in an area identified as a recognised zone of deprivation. This approach was regarded as an innovative and successful way of reaching people who might not otherwise have participated.

Communication was highlighted as one of the main weaknesses of the consultation process. There was initial limited involvement of one of the partners due

mainly to problems with their internal communications and time commitment which led to some amendments being made in order to fulfil the agreed consultation programme. There was also a weakness in the mechanism for contacting Community Councils, and, although steps were taken to provide alternative mechanisms, their participation was more limited than for other groupings. These highlight the importance of ensuring that roles and responsibilities are understood and confirmed by partners before any consultation is undertaken.

Other weaknesses highlighted in the report included:

- Time management of consultation meetings - there may be a need to consider how to maximise the time available for the discussion through, for example, issuing detailed briefing notes in advance; and
- Accessing the interactive website - ensuring good links to external websites and awareness-raising of the website across all the partners is key to successful use.

Conclusions

Overall the consultation process was seen to be comprehensive, with wide engagement from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors. The consensus was that the new Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement were influenced by the process and people therefore will feel they contributed and have ownership of these strategic documents.

An additional benefit is that the engagement process successfully raised the profile of the Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement. Generally the process was seen as an example of good practice which could be followed by other community planning partnerships.

The full report is available on-line at <http://www.dgcommunity.net/DGCommunity/Documents.aspx?id=32992>

For further information, please contact Denise Kearney, Policy Officer, Policy and Community Planning Unit, Dumfries and Galloway Council. Tel: 01387 260274, Email: Denise.kearney@dumgal.gov.uk

Is there something I should know? – Audit Commission report on local government intelligence

By Natalie Penrose, Audit Commission
and Andy Davis, Chair of LARIA

Better information makes better decisions and therefore better and cheaper services. Councils know this, but many don't extract value from the information they already hold, or make full use of the analytical capacity and expertise they have. The Audit Commission report *Is there something I should know?* (published 30 July) illustrates, with examples, how councils across the country have learned to make the most of the information they hold.



Steve Bundred, Chief Executive of the Audit Commission, said:

'It's important that councils have the right information now because many of the decisions that they are going to make in the years ahead will be harder than usual. Information may not sound like an exciting topic, but right now too many councils risk making poor decisions because their information is inaccurate, irrelevant or incomplete.'

This new report finds that councils could and should improve the quality of their information and that problems can be overcome without spending more by good management and learning from exemplar councils. Key findings are:

- Councils do not need to spend more and should instead deploy existing resource more wisely. Thirty-six per cent of analysts' time is spent on routine performance reporting, while only 15 per cent is spent on value added analysis.

- This need not be expensive. A high quality intelligence or information unit can be provided with under 0.2 per cent of a council's expenditure. And the best performing intelligence units are not the most expensive.
- Decision makers need to become more demanding, and analysts more valued.
- Twenty-one per cent of analysts receive no support or development at all, and almost half have no links to professional bodies.

Is there something I should know? is supported by a web-based self-assessment framework that enables councils to benchmark their own position on the information improvement journey. Beneath the framework is a web based toolkit that will help councils drive improvements appropriate to their organisation.

LARIA is pleased with the recommendations highlighted by the report, in particular:

- Developing an environment where decision makers demand relevant, high quality, well presented information.
- Ensuring a two-way dialogue between decision makers and information providers.
- Investing time in recruiting, training and retaining skilled staff.
- Fostering a culture of professionalism in the research, intelligence and information functions.
- Encouraging membership of professional bodies.

The report provides some big challenges for professional bodies such as LARIA, in particular around how to ensure a high profile with councils to encourage membership, networking and opportunities to share good practice. It is important that bodies such as LARIA really do provide a voice for research, intelligence and information functions in local government.

The report and tools are available on the Audit Commission website, <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies/localgov/istheresomething/>. For further information, please contact Natalie Penrose (n-penrose@audit-commission.gov.uk, Tel 0844 798 1114).

Exploring Health, Well-being and Nutrition: Newcastle City Council's Hot Delivered Meals Service Users' Survey

By Louise Reeve

Introduction – what happened

In summer 2007, Newcastle City Council Adult Services Directorate conducted a health and well-being survey of people in the city who use the hot delivered meals service. As the eligibility criterion for the service is that people are unable to provide themselves with a hot meal in any other way, this is a particularly vulnerable group of service users. We wanted to learn more about what they thought about the service, about their nutrition, and their general health and well-being. This included questions about their oral health, footcare, falls, heating, and social isolation. We also aimed to collect data about their weight, health, BMI and nutrition scores, which we collected by weighing and measuring the height of participants and also by observing whether they had lost weight recently.

How we did it, and ethical issues

Firstly, we sent out a letter to people getting hot delivered meals. This explained the purpose of the survey and provided a time and date when an interviewer would call at their house to ask them questions. It also provided details on how to inform us that they did not want to take part in the survey, and how to arrange for a more convenient time or an alternative form of communication (i.e. an interpreter for someone who did not have English as a first language), and stressed that the survey was entirely voluntary and gave assurances that participation (or not participating) would not affect the services they received in any way.

The interviewers (all CRB-checked) then visited the service users at their homes and asked again if they wanted to take part in the survey. If they agreed, the interviewers then carried out a structured interview, recording people's answers on the interview form.

To meet the requirements of both confidentiality and safeguarding vulnerable people, the interview forms had a separate section at the back for interviewers to record any concerns they had about the people they interviewed, including their interviewee's name. This could then be detached from the survey form to enable the interviewer to take the appropriate action, and the survey form (which had only the respondents' unique identity number on, not their

name) be given to the researcher doing the analysis. We explained to people that we were doing this at the start of the survey. We also explained that the only situation in which we would breach confidentiality and inform a third party (such as the Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Unit) that they had taken part in the survey and what they had told us was if this was necessary to protect their well-being.

What we found out

The results from the survey covered a wide range of issues. We found that many service users would like to see a wider choice of hot delivered meals and better presentation of them. With regard to health and wellbeing, we found that heating was not an issue of major concern to the majority of respondents, who had central heating, but getting proper footcare and oral healthcare were important. One finding we had not predicted was the interest many of the service users expressed in going on trips to the coast.

The results of the nutritional screening were particularly significant. We found that the majority of respondents were of normal, or slightly higher than normal, weight, but that 20% of them had recently lost weight unintentionally. Calculating people's nutrition scores revealed that 70% of respondents were receiving adequate nutrition, but that 16% had a nutrition score which was sufficiently low as to indicate that intervention might be required. We are now reviewing the most appropriate way to respond to these findings.

Lessons learned

One issue is that the research method of a structured interview tends to favour people with relatively less severe health problems. The more vulnerable service users in this group – those who are very ill, frail, have severe sensory impairments, are experiencing mental health difficulties, or who have severe learning disabilities or dementia – are relatively less likely to take part, and thus the findings do not necessarily reflect the extent of their needs.

Many respondents made comments to the interviewers about the subjects under discussion, which were recorded on the surveys next to the questions as the interviewer conducted the survey. We therefore found that there was a need for the

Exploring Health, Well-being and Nutrition: Newcastle City Council's Hot Delivered Meals Service Users' Survey cont...

researcher analysing the findings to be sensitive to this and not be too "mechanical" in doing the analysis.

Finally, running this survey shed considerable light on the health, wellbeing and needs of a vulnerable group of our service users. We hope that other local authorities providing hot delivered meals may be able to learn from our experience and to consider running similar surveys themselves, as this has been a very useful piece of research for us providing much-needed information.

You can view more details about the findings of the research online here:

<http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/consultations/healthandwellbeing2008>

If you would like to discuss the issues raised in this article, please contact Louise Reeve, Policy and Research Officer, in the Corporate Planning, Programmes and Research team at Newcastle City Council on 0191 277 7508 (or email: louise.reeve@newcastle.gov.uk.)

Residents have their say on customer service in Telford!

By Caroline O'Reilly and Helen Clive

Background

Having dealt with enquiries from 27,000 people visiting the Council's civic offices, 101,000 calls to the switchboard and 2,500 emails from customers in the last year, the customer service team at Telford & Wrekin Council were keen to find out what customers thought about the service they received when contacting the Council.



In 2008, the customer service team commissioned a mystery shopping exercise to find out about the everyday experiences residents have when accessing Council services. The research was also designed to test how far the Council were achieving the standards set out in their customer charter, which focuses on providing an efficient, personal, professional, fair and informative service to all customers.

Our approach

The mystery shopping programme covered a number of different access channels and service areas in order to provide a good overview of customer service across the Council. The access channels assessed were face-to-face, telephone and email contact. The service areas assessed, in addition to a number of general enquiries, were Planning, Highways, Libraries and Housing. In total, more than 200 mystery shops were carried out over a four month period.

A set of scenarios was designed by the customer service team and M·E·L Research which reflected typical everyday enquiries. In line with Market Research Society guidance, the scenarios were appropriate for each service area and didn't create an undue amount of work for any member of staff. Approval for the project was given by the Council and Unison, and employees were informed that the research was taking place.

The next step was to brief the chosen mystery shoppers, and what was different about this project was that local residents were selected to carry out the mystery shops. Residents were recruited from the local disability forum, young people's forum and the Telford readers' group to take part in the exercise. Having completed and passed half a day's training, the shoppers were tasked with completing up to ten 'shops', each spread out over a number of services and channels.

After each completed shop, residents completed an assessment form to feed back the outcome of their experience; the assessment form could be completed on paper, online or over the telephone. The mystery

Residents have their say on customer service in Telford! cont...

shoppers were asked to assess a number of different things including access to Council buildings (for face-to-face enquiries), the quality of the interaction with the members of staff, knowledge surrounding the enquiry and the quality of follow-up material supplied to the customer.

In addition, the mystery shoppers were also invited to take part in a debrief session after the fieldwork had been completed. At the debrief session, the mystery shoppers got the opportunity to speak to the customer service team about their experiences, and also share their stories with each other.

Findings

Overall, the findings demonstrated that the Council is delivering excellent customer service, and highlighted in particular that members of staff are polite and courteous. The research did identify some areas for improvement, such as consistent response times to emails, ensuring enquiries are dealt with in the first instance as much as possible, and also the importance of staff being seen to 'go the extra mile' for customers. The customer service team is now working hard to develop action plans to tackle these areas for improvement, and hopes to repeat the mystery shopping programme on a regular basis to track improvements in service over time.

An unexpected outcome of the project was the impact it had on the local residents recruited as mystery shoppers. At the debrief session, it was clear that not only had the residents thoroughly enjoyed playing the part of a detective, they had also relished the opportunity to meet new people and go to new places. If the project is repeated, the Council hopes to utilise the skills of these residents to recruit and train a new batch, thus creating a pool of skilled mystery shoppers and giving local residents the opportunity to have their say about customer service in Telford!

For more information please contact

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Customer Satisfaction Question Bank for Scottish Local Authorities

By Martin Brown and Carrienne Hall
The Improvement Service



Background

In Scotland, the work on developing a common standard for customer satisfaction and experience measurement continues. It follows on from the publication in 2008 of *Improving the understanding of customer satisfaction & experience in Scottish local government*¹ – a report from the Improvement Service and Consumer Focus Scotland, which highlighted an appetite in Scotland to collaborate in developing a common standard. The report's key recommendations formed the basis around which a number of practical steps were agreed to take forward:

- the development of a common standard for customer satisfaction and experience measurement of local government services; and
- the provision of support and capacity-building for practitioners involved in customer satisfaction and experience measurement.

This will offer a number of benefits to Scottish councils and their partners - namely a standard that will:

- Be robust, consistent and comparable;
- Be cost-effective and simple to implement;
- Provide clear indications of areas for improvement;
- Enable the tracking of year-on-year changes;
- Support capacity building in customer satisfaction and experience measurement.

Question Bank

A Customer Satisfaction Question Bank of tried and tested questions will form the centre piece of the standard being developed.

Based around MORI's model for public service satisfaction (see diagram below), the Customer Satisfaction Question Bank will provide a means by which services within Scottish councils and their associated bodies can consistently measure and monitor customer satisfaction and experience. The Question Bank will be aimed at customers – that is direct users of services – as distinct from residents or citizens.

An extra feature of the Question Bank is that it closely aligns to the Customer Service Excellence Standard and other self-assessment tools such as Scotland's Public Service Improvement Framework or PSIF (<http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/public-service-improvement-framework-psif/>).

Underpinning the Question Bank will be a comprehensive and, where appropriate, prescriptive User Guide that will offer support to individuals - particularly those who do not have access to research expertise - to design, manage, run and analyse their own customer satisfaction survey using a standard questionnaire.



MORI Model for Public Service Satisfaction

Customer Satisfaction Question Bank cont...

The Question Bank is being piloted with six Scottish councils across selected service areas and services. Following the pilot's completion and evaluation, the Question Bank will be in a position to be rolled out more widely in Scotland around the end of 2009.

Working together

A partnership approach has been critical to the common standard's development and this has involved the Improvement Service, Scottish Government, Consumer Focus Scotland, Audit Scotland and LARIA in Scotland, as well as a number of Scottish councils and associated bodies. SOLACE (Scotland) has been strongly supportive of

the rationale for the development of a common standard, and of the partnership approach behind it and the methodologies used in its development.

**For further information, please contact
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¹ *Improving the understanding of customer satisfaction & experience in Scottish local government*, Consumer Focus Scotland and the Improvement Service, October 2008

Place and Residents' Surveys 2008 compared: Newcastle's experience

By Ann Atkinson and Chris Stephens

Introduction

In addition to the statutory Place Survey (carried out by Ipsos Mori on our behalf), Newcastle City Council undertook a Residents' Survey in 2008. This survey went to a different set of addresses, with a similar set of questions, reflecting our need for ward based results for planning purposes and questions relating to our local indicators.

Therefore, the Residents' sample was ward-based, designed to achieve 100 responses per ward, contrasting with the Place Survey which sampled addresses uniformly across the City. The surveys were carried out using identical postal and follow-up methods. The Place Survey achieved a gross response rate of 37.8% (1520/4019); the Residents' Survey, 39.6% (3055/7706).

Because the surveys had different aims - the Place Survey to understand residents' perceptions of public services, the Residents' Survey to understand and monitor Local Authority services - the questions, and their context, were always going to be similar but with slightly different wording. The Place Survey asked about services as a whole; e.g. questions relating to "What standard of service you should expect from local public services" and "How to complain about local public services". In the Residents' Survey, the Authority wanted to ask questions about "What standard of service you should expect from the Council" and "How to complain about the Council".

The above also implies that similar questions would have different contexts, possibly leading to differing responses. Additionally, the Place Survey slightly changed the wording and response options from the previous BVPI, so we can see if these have made any difference to the responses. Some questions were asked in both surveys to provide the national indicator figures at ward level.

Questionnaires

The Place Survey was 11 pages with 41 questions; the Residents' Survey was 15 pages with 55 questions. The layout and font size of the Residents' Survey is designed for ease of completion.

Responses by demographic group

In terms of response rates, the two surveys did not differ from each other in terms of return percentages from men versus women, from owner occupiers compared with those in rented accommodation, from white compared with non-white ethnic groups, or from those with a disability compared with the remainder. However, there were proportionately more responses from those aged under 49 in the Residents' Survey. Additionally, there was some evidence, that the response rates in the poorer areas were higher for the Residents' Survey.

Indicators and context

We would expect some variation in the results where the same questions were asked, but the extent of some of the differences is exceptional. Further analyses, where differences are evident, suggest that the context has quite legitimately affected the responses.

Place and Residents' Surveys 2008 compared: Newcastle's experience cont...

A question on whether the Council provides value for money was preceded by questions on public services in the Place Survey, but preceded by questions on performance of the Council in the Residents' Survey. The Place Survey had a higher satisfaction score (41%), than the Residents' Survey (34%). The context is different, so these results are not directly comparable.

'Satisfaction with the Council as a whole' was preceded by the value-for-money question in both surveys, and produced the same result (54%) in both cases. In the previous year, the satisfaction question in the Residents' Survey (64%) followed a question on public transport information, so had little context. In the 2006/7 statutory survey the question was preceded by questions about satisfaction and usage of specific services, and so is quite different. The results imply a significant reduction in satisfaction between 2006/7 and 2008/9, but this is not surprising given the change in context.

Another example relates to problems regarding 'local drunk and rowdy behaviour' and 'drug use/dealing'. These were considered more of a problem from respondents to the Residents' Survey than in the Place Survey. However, in the Residents' Survey (as in previous years), these questions came immediately after the heading 'Anti-Social Behaviour', whereas in the Place Survey they came after questions on 'feeling safe' under the heading 'Community Safety'. The positive context of the questions in the Place Survey and negative in the Residents' Survey could have impacted on the responses.

Further analysis was undertaken to test whether where we put a question has an impact on the responses and interactions between questions. An analysis of the relationship between two national indicators - NI1 (people get on well together) and NI23 (people not treating each other with respect and consideration a problem) - shows that whilst the two measures are correlated, the relationship is different in the two surveys. It is therefore clear that where we put a question substantially affects not only the headline figures but the relationship between the questions.

Use of indicators

Clearly we use the Place Survey for National Indicators. If we use responses on anti-social behaviour from the Place Survey, rather than Residents' Survey, there is clearly a comparability issue with previous Residents' Surveys.

The 'satisfaction with council services' questions now have a 'don't know' option and so are not directly comparable with previous results.

The 'value for money' question has a new format. This was asked in both the surveys but gave more positive responses in the Place Survey. In future, if we use the Place Survey question we will need to ensure the same context. (The Residents' Survey does put the question in a more appropriate context, in relation to performance, and as a result produces a lower satisfaction score.)

However, our ward plans use data from the Residents' Survey for City and ward-level data, allowing comparison with the previous surveys.

Conclusions

Undertaking the two surveys has raised a number of issues, particularly regarding location of questions and decisions on the appropriate indicator where the same question was in both surveys. These issues must be considered when devising future Residents' surveys.

The importance of the context of questions and comparability of questions need to be considered and reported upon when making comparisons with previous data and comparing different groups within a survey.

Whilst statutory surveys provide, at a point in time, comparability across authorities, they are subject to question detail and context changes, which must be taken into account when making comparisons year-on-year.

This year we will undertake a Residents' Survey producing ward-level data and enabling us to monitor change in city-wide indicators. The challenge will be to produce a survey that effectively compares with last year's surveys, enabling effective monitoring of key indicators.

For further information, please contact Ann Atkinson (ann.atkinson@newcastle.gov.uk).

North East Lincolnshire Economic Wellbeing Strategy

By Andrea Fitzgerald and David Elverson

Introduction

The North East Lincolnshire Local Strategic Partnership recognises worklessness as a critical causation factor that underpins or influences performance against the indicator set for its Local Area Agreement (LAA2). This has been translated into an ambition for the area to:

- Create the conditions to sustain more and better jobs and enable local people to access these by addressing barriers to participation and raising skill levels;
- Raise aspirations and promote the opportunities made available, encouraging people to make positive life choices.

LAA2 and the Community Strategy aim to tackle these issues by focusing on a long-term horizon and addressing the underlying factors of disadvantage. The ambition is to create improved opportunity, access and life chances. This will in turn reduce social tension and conflict, eventually leading to a stronger community. The community will play its part in improving neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti social behaviour, such as littering and fly-tipping.

To move towards this objective, North East Lincolnshire Council commissioned Spirals to undertake work, in active partnership with our major stakeholders, around the following four elements:

- The nature of the problem in NEL – the story behind the baseline;
- What we want to achieve and how we will know we are getting there;
- A 10-year strategy and a short- to medium-term delivery plan for economic wellbeing;
- A commissioning framework to guide the investment of resources.

The story behind the baseline

The first element – the story behind the baseline - was vital for the partnership to ensure any strategy was based on a robust evidence base and tackled the real issues. This involved three stages of research:

1. Quantitative review of secondary data
2. Literature review of best practice
3. Qualitative research within the community and with key stakeholders

1. Quantitative review of secondary data

Three main lines of enquiry were pursued to develop an evidence base for the economic wellbeing strategy. They were:

- Worklessness trends based on benefit claimants
- Qualification and skill levels
- The employment environment

Data from Nomis, ONS, DfES and the Annual Population Survey were interrogated to uncover trends and patterns in worklessness in North East Lincolnshire. These were compared over time and against other geographical profiles to determine the place-specific issues that needed to be tackled.

2. Literature review of best practice

It was important to develop a new strategy in the context of what works well in other places. A pathway to employment was developed which included engagement activity, barrier removal, skills development, supported employment, enterprise development, inward investment and intermediate labour market activity. A thorough literature review was undertaken to identify best practice against each of these aspects.

3. Qualitative research with the community and key stakeholders

The qualitative research was designed to complement the desk and secondary data collection, taking a holistic “top-down” and “grass roots - upwards” approach for maximum inclusivity.

Researchers engaged with members of the general public in community centres, cafes, waiting areas in employment and training agencies, libraries and bus stops.

Overall numbers of people and projects consulted during this process are shown below:

Respondent Type	No. of respondents
General public	40
Businesses	13
Employment Agencies	14
Projects, community centres	46
Elected Members	12
NEL Council	14
Health/PCT	8
Intermediaries	20
Others	9
Total	176

North East Lincolnshire Economic Wellbeing Strategy cont...

3.1 Mystery Shopping

To gain an effective understanding of the journey undertaken by people seeking work in North East Lincolnshire, researchers visited community centres, job centres, libraries, employment agencies, and support groups, asking about support available for getting a local job. They engaged with members of the public seeking work, and discussed their experiences and, all too often, frustrations.

3.2 Stakeholder Interviews

Face-to-face meetings were the preferred mechanism for engaging stakeholders, but where this was not possible a telephone interview was set up. The interview schedule was open-ended and qualitative. The exact questions were tailored to each respondent but included the following key areas:

- Details of current provision of services
- Understanding of key causes of worklessness
- Hopes and aspirations for changing the situation
- Fears about the future
- Own ideas around improvements

3.3 General public interviews

In order to obtain usable information from members of the community, regardless of literacy and communication skills, an indirect approach was adopted using "H charts".

The researcher asked respondents how they would score their typical day on a Likert scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being disastrous and 10 being fantastic. The score given is written in the top middle box of the diagram below.

Assuming the respondent hasn't scored 0, the researcher then asks why not – as obviously some things are going well in their life. These are listed in the right-hand column.

If they haven't scored 10, then the researcher again asks why not – obviously life isn't perfect! The reasons and issues they raise are listed down the left-hand column.

The respondent is then asked what they need to do to move themselves further along the scale – closer to a "10"-rated typical day. These responses are written in the bottom middle box.

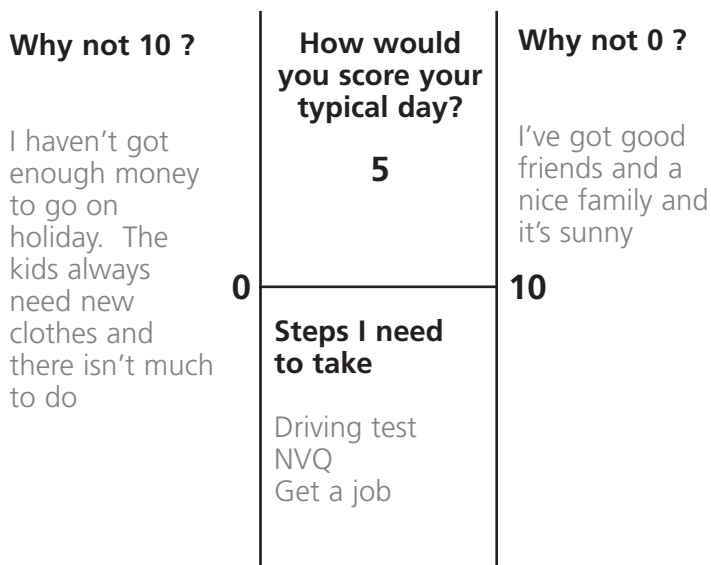
Results

The research described above led to a very robust evidence base to develop the strategy for tackling worklessness. Spending time identifying real local nuances to the issue has resulted in an intelligent strategy and work plan that is proving successful in addressing the problem.

Having a thorough research basis to the work made partnership working easier and encouraged buy-in to the approach from all partners in the region.

Contact details for further information:
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R&I News

Audit Commission

Study Programme 2009/10

Following consultation earlier this year on the topics to be covered (reported in LariaNews 90), the Audit Commission has now agreed its 2009/10 research and study programme, which can be viewed online. We expect to add a limited number of additional studies and projects to the programme over the next few months as they are agreed with stakeholders.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the consultation; it was a valuable exercise and we hope you will find the new programme of interest and valuable to your work.

The health team are currently finalising their 2009/10 study programme and will announce it shortly.

For more information on our current and published programme of work please visit www.audit-commission.gov.uk/nationalstudies

Valuable Lessons - improving economy and efficiency in schools

The Audit Commission recently published research examining economy and efficiency at the level of individual schools, considering what actions they and other stakeholders are taking to improve economy and efficiency. The research involved documentary analysis, data collection and semi-structured interviews in a sample of 23 case study schools in seven local authorities. We also undertook analysis of school-level secondary data relating to finance, attainment and workforce deployment. This included analysis of statistical neighbours to look at variation in spending on similar items.

The key findings of the research were:

- Education expenditure has increased by two-thirds in real terms in a decade, but schools have faced relatively weak incentives to demonstrate they spend money economically and efficiently;
- Schools could save over £400 million through better procurement alone, due to the variation between schools' spending on standard items;
- Nearly 40 per cent of schools have excessive balances despite repeated encouragement to reduce them. More than £500 million could be released nationally;

- Workforce deployment is the most important decision in schools and must be undertaken with economy and efficiency in mind.

In addition to a national report, we produced separate briefing guides on the main issues and the actions that should be taken by local authorities, head teachers and others in schools with financial responsibilities, and governing bodies. We will also be updating our online self-assessment tools for schools. The report and briefing guides are available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/valuablelessons

Building better lives - getting the best from strategic housing

The strategic housing role of councils exploit the links between improving housing and broader community outcomes, for example improved public health and better educational outcomes. This report outlines why an effective strategic housing role matters, and how councils, with their partners, can perform that role more effectively. It also shows how councils and their partners can deal with the impact of the credit crunch and recession. The report is accompanied by a wide range of tools and case studies to help support councils undertaking this valuable role.

The report and tools are available at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/nationalstudies/buildingbetterlives>

Centre for Health Economics (CHE), University of York

Impact of Public Services on Quality of Life Indicators

CHE has completed an ESRC-funded project under the Public Services Programme entitled 'Exploring the Impact of Public Services on Quality of Life Indicators'. The project explored the degree to which public service organisations (PSOs) such as Local Authorities or Primary Care Trusts can influence specific quality of life measures. The researchers looked at the influence of PSOs on aspects of quality of life by considering the degree to which they can influence the quality of life of citizens across a range of measures both within and outside their usual domains of influence. They also examined the degree to which factors outside the control of PSOs (e.g. the 'needs' of the local population) influence quality of

R&I News cont...

life outcomes, and investigated at which level in the organisational hierarchy there appears to be most scope to influence quality of life.

The full report has been published as a CHE Research Paper (46) and a summary of the project has been published as a 'Policy Briefing' (Castelli A, Jacobs R, Goddard M, Smith P. *Geographical variation in quality of life: The role of public service organisations*). Both are available to download free of charge from

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/che/publications/index.htm>

CRLS (ONS Centre for Regional and Local Statistics)

Personal insolvency statistics

Personal insolvency statistics from the years 2000 to 2008 are now available on the Neighbourhood Statistics website (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk). These datasets, made up of bankruptcy orders and individual voluntary arrangements, are available at local authority level and have been supplied by the Insolvency Service (www.insolvency.gov.uk), the organisation that administers and investigates the dealings of those made bankrupt and companies and partnerships wound up by the court in England and Wales.

Publication on Neighbourhood Statistics extends the research value of this data still further because the information can now be investigated using the extensive analytical guidance available on the website, providing local authorities with the means to carry out in-depth analysis. The information can also be cross referenced with other Neighbourhood Statistics datasets, for instance those that detail information on Benefits, the Indices of Deprivation and Business 'Births' and 'Deaths'.

For more information go to www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk or email better.info@ons.gov.uk

Durham County Council

Broken windows theory and collective efficacy

The "Stronger and Safer Communities" National Performance Indicators have concentrated minds on how to address perceptions of community safety. In a recent article, Lawrence Serewicz of Durham County Council suggests that knowledge of contemporary theories about crime and disorder can help to drive practical interventions that improve the quality of life of residents, as well as perceptions of community safety.

Read the article at <http://tinyurl.com/yajwo73> or contact Lawrence.Serewicz@durham.gov.uk for further information.

The ISSUES Project

Population transience:

why cities fail to meet recycling targets?

The EPSCR-funded SUE_WASTE project has undertaken a broad study of kerbside recycling performance in Portsmouth to understand why UK authorities are failing to meet their recycling targets. These failings predominantly arise in cities where medium- and high-density housing causes problems for collections that rely on householder segregation of waste.

A recycling participation survey of 62,299 households was carried out in June - July 2005 and repeated in June - July 2007 in Portsmouth, one of the most densely populated cities in Europe.

Householder participation in the kerbside scheme was recorded over three consecutive collections (6 weeks). There was very little change in overall participation between the two surveys, with 78.4% of households participating in recycling in 2005 and 78.2% in 2007. Although this shows recycling to be the "normal" activity, conducted by most households in both surveys, 10% of households were found to be "new recyclers" and 10% seemed to stop recycling (i.e. they were found to be recycling in 2005 but not in 2007), with the more densely populated areas being "hot spots" of change.

R&I News cont...

To investigate why they apparently stopped recycling, approximately 1300 “stopped recycling” households were surveyed by a team of doorsteppers. Changes in “physical” circumstances were found to be the drivers behind those properties that stopped recycling: a change of address, a change in occupants, a bin going missing. Therefore **population transience** (which is greater in urban areas) was a significant factor in recycling behaviour. However on the positive side, it seems that once the recycling habit is established it is very difficult to break.

The researchers went on to extract a four-group recycling behaviour typology (**sustained recycler, non-recycler, stopped recycler, and new recycler**) from the survey.

It is clear from this study that policies to concentrate population and to increase recycling rates in urban areas could potentially conflict. Since urban areas are likely to become more densely populated, the waste management issues arising in Portsmouth may be illustrative of those likely to be faced by authorities with high rates of population flux and high population densities in future.

Further information, including a relevant paper, can be obtained from Dr Ian Williams (I.D.Williams@soton.ac.uk). The SUE-WASTE project is now finished, but details can still be found at www.suewaste.soton.ac.uk

The Scottish Public Health Observatory (ScotPHO)

The autumn view from the Observatory

The Scottish Public Health Observatory (ScotPHO) collaboration aims to provide a clear picture of the health of the Scottish population and factors that affect it. We communicate this on our website, which is regularly updated, and through a variety of one-off reports. The Observatory also contributes to improved collection and use of routine data on health, risk factors and behaviours, and wider determinants. It has recently published two new reports:

- *Are people in Scotland becoming more active?*
This study analysed data on physical activity from

Scotland’s major national surveys. It showed a modest rise in the proportion of men and women aged 16-64 doing enough physical activity for their health since the mid-1990s.

- *Alcohol attributable mortality and morbidity: alcohol population attributable fractions for Scotland*
This project used the best current evidence in the epidemiological literature and specific estimates of population drinking in Scotland to estimate more fully the contribution of alcohol to deaths and hospital admissions.

We are currently conducting a review of equalities health data needs. This covers routine data on age, gender, ethnicity, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation and transgender. It will identify priorities for equalities data in Scotland. For more information see <http://www.healthscotland.com/scotlands-health/population/review-of-equalities-data.aspx>

New information on population health is coming out all the time, and we capture this in our weekly news alerts. You can sign up for these on the website.

Find out more at www.scotpho.org.uk or contact diane.stockton@nhs.net (ISD ScotPHO team) or david.gordon@health.scot.nhs.uk (NHS Health Scotland Observatory team).

West Midlands Regional Observatory

West Midlands: Fit for the future?

The West Midlands Regional Observatory has engaged the region’s leaders and decision makers in a debate about economic recovery, launching a book entitled ‘West Midlands: Fit for the Future?’

‘Fit for the Future?’ comprises ten chapters, written by ten different authors, reflecting their views on how the region can best place itself in readiness for the economic upturn. They highlight opportunities for future growth, lessons that we need to learn and a number of potential obstacles. One of the chapters, called ‘Local solutions, regional leadership’, focuses upon the local authority perspective.

Free copies of ‘West Midlands: Fit for the Future?’ are available by emailing info@wmro.org

LARIA People

Both unitary authorities within Lancashire have a new face at the helm of research and intelligence:

**Scott Butterfield
Research and Intelligence Manager, Blackpool BC**

Having started my career as a Housing Trainee in Hull, I've completed my epic East to West Coast career journey. It's only taken me 9 years – and 7 of those were spent in Accrington with Hyndburn Council - but I've finally landed in Blackpool, in an office complete with a full view of the tower! Blackpool is a fascinating place to be. The whole town is undergoing a massive regeneration programme to make the most of the stunning Fylde coastline, maintaining our position as Britain's most popular seaside resort. But alongside the fun of the Pleasure Beach and our exuberant nightlife, we have a number of "knotty problems" to deal with centring on the transience of the population and issues around deprivation.



Scott Butterfield

The Council decided to expand the Research and Intelligence Team to ensure our transformational agenda is based on a robust strategic approach. Once we've established the role of the team across the Council, we will work to get maximum value from the research undertaken and the data held by both the Council and our local partners.

Although the team is only three strong - with David Jackson and John Patterson completing the full line-up - we'll be working alongside the Council's Partnership, Performance and Policy team to meet our challenges head on. If anyone wants to get in touch to compare notes and discuss benchmarking opportunities please get in touch with me on scott.butterfield@blackpool.gov.uk

**Ken Barnsley
Head of Corporate Research, Blackburn with Darwen BC**

The new Head of Corporate Research at Blackburn with Darwen is Ken Barnsley, who comes with a background in research and evaluation spanning both the public and the private sector. Coinciding with Ken's arrival, the corporate research team at Blackburn with Darwen becomes known as the Joint Intelligence Unit, with a mission to serve the entire Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).



Ken Barnsley

Ken began his career as a criminal justice researcher, before moving to work in the central Policy Research Unit with Tameside Council. From there he went on to develop his research and consultancy expertise with Opinion Research Corporation International (ORC).

After leaving ORC, Ken set up his own company and spent the next eleven years managing research and consultancy teams throughout the North of England and the West Midlands, exploring the benefits and impacts of services and partnerships across all areas of public policy. Ranging from crime and community safety, to health, to regeneration, to economic development and housing, this experience will all be put to good use in his new role.

Blackburn with Darwen presents a rich mix of cultures, issues and challenges to whet the appetite of any researcher. A firm believer in the importance of research evidence in the development and improvement of services, Ken's early priorities are to develop lasting relationships with the whole LSP, and provide a clear and robust picture of the views, needs and aspirations of local communities and businesses. He can be contacted on kenneth.barnsley@blackburn.gov.uk

LARIA People cont...

Anne Cunningham

Public Health Intelligence Specialist, NHS Blackburn with Darwen

Joining Ken's team from the Yorkshire & Humber Public Health Observatory is Anne Cunningham. A fellow veteran of the Tameside Policy Unit. Anne's new role means she is effectively a member of both the Primary Care Trust and the Council, being employed by NHS Blackburn with Darwen but based within the Joint Intelligence Unit at the Town Hall.

Anne continues in her third guise as Editor of LariaNews - please see back cover for new contact details.



Anne Cunningham

ALGIS in LARIA Update

ALGIS is adjusting to being an activity group of LARIA and beginning to reap the benefits of the closer working this has led to.

As I write we are looking forward to our November seminar on the topic of customer information, which has attracted some excellent speakers. We are planning to cover both information **about** customers and information **for** customers.

We are pleased too that we have signed up two new people to be committee members. More about them in the next LariaNews.

Information management remains a topic which is high on the agenda in the public sector and ranges from the essentials of information security through to what to keep and what to throw away! Freedom of Information legislation, which is now nearly four years old, and other information related legislation, has focussed attention on what we hold and what we should make public.

ALGIS has always represented and supported people who specialise in working in information management. At its beginning this was mainly people working in traditional library roles handling published printed information in a way which meant that it could be retrieved when required. Increasingly we see our skills recognised in areas such as designing web navigations to meet customer needs, indexing electronic information and advising on archiving or disposal.

Please tell your colleagues about us and get them to visit our web site at www.algis.org.uk for more information on future events.

Jane Inman
Chair of ALGIS in LARIA
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01926 418633

Noticeboard

The Place Survey Roadshows

London - Thursday 5 November 2009 - The Local Government Association

York - Thursday 12 November 2009 - The Park Inn

Birmingham - Wednesday 25 November 2009 - The Priory Meeting Rooms

LARIA, CLG and the Audit Commission are organising a series of Place Survey road shows in November 2009. The main objectives are to provide an overview of the national survey results and feedback, discuss the methodological approach, obtain local perspectives and highlight good practice in running the survey and using its results to inform local policies.

For more information, please e-mail Sarah Byrne on laria@mosaicevents.co.uk or call 0845 6434812.

Noticeboard cont...

Managing Customer Information

Local Government Association Offices, London – Friday 20th November 2009
LARIA Corporate Members - £120 Others - £140

ALGIS in LARIA in conjunction with the LGA are hosting an event on **Managing Customer Information, Saving Money and Providing Better Customer Service**. The event will address the issues around keeping within the law when we are managing the personal information we hold about customers. For more details and a booking form, please go to <http://tinyurl.com/yc7g2su>

Guide for Contributors

The LARIA Newsletter Group actively encourages all relevant contributions – articles, news items and reports – about the work of Research and Intelligence units and other organisations involved in research and policy analysis. Details of relevant courses, conferences and services are also welcomed.

The aim is to produce an interesting and informative newsletter which appeals to as wide a range of research practitioners as possible, from statisticians to social researchers. Contributions should be as user-friendly and jargon-free as possible. Explanation of acronyms used is particularly important.

The Group meets shortly after the deadline for each edition to discuss contributions received. We need to ensure the content is suitable for our readership. Articles tailored to LariaNews stand a greater chance of making the final edition than general press releases. We also welcome cartoons, graphics and pictures which illustrate the text and offer additional insights.

As a guide, please try not to exceed about 300 words for a news item, and 1000 words for a feature article. And remember that's an upper limit, not a lower one! We're always happy to receive short snippets of news, or staffing announcements for LARIA People.

We occasionally receive longer academic articles which are less suitable for a newsletter. If the content is relevant to LARIA members we will publish an abstract in the newsletter and a link to the full article on www.laria.gov.uk

Please send any comments about LariaNews to the Editor. We appreciate your feedback and will discuss any material received. Articles may be edited. The Editor's decisions are final.

Next Issue

Copy should be sent or emailed in Word format to the Editor (address on back page) to arrive by 27th November 2009.

Any graphs, tables, photographs or adverts need to be supplied in jpeg or bmp format.

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily of their employing organisation or of LARIA. Readers are advised to ascertain for themselves that courses, conferences or services advertised are appropriate for their needs.

Just the Job

Just a reminder that advertising research jobs on www.laria.gov.uk is free to corporate members of LARIA. And with corporate membership costing only £60, it could soon pay for itself. Look under 'Job Vacancies' and 'Membership' on the website.

Notes

LARIA was established in 1974 to promote the role and practice of research within the field of local government and provide a supportive network for those conducting or commissioning research.

There are three forms of LARIA membership - full membership and associate membership for individuals and corporate membership for organisations. LARIA is managed by a Council, mainly elected by the full members.

LARIA is registered as a Specially Authorised Society under the Friendly Societies Act 1974. Its activities are of interest to all people working on Research and Intelligence activities for Local Authorities or allied fields, and depend upon active participation of such people to promote, maintain and develop professional practices.

LARIA in Scotland (LiS) has its own steering group, whose chair is also on the LARIA Council. It plans workshops, and other events, and is developing networking at a Scottish level.

ALGIS in LARIA is an activity group of LARIA. It represents the interests and concerns of information specialists within local government. The group organises events and visits, publishes a Newsletter and undertakes other activities designed to raise awareness of the potential and actual benefits of the work of information specialists within local government.

LARIA

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ADVERTISING

LARIA welcomes copy for the Newsletter from advertisers, subject to the material not being in conflict with the interests of LARIA's members.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

LARIA wishes to encourage participation in its Activity Groups, its events, its newsletter and its other activities. It aims to remove barriers to participation associated with race, gender, age, faith, disability and sexuality. It expects its members, delegates and speakers at its events, and contributors to its newsletter to help in achieving that aim.