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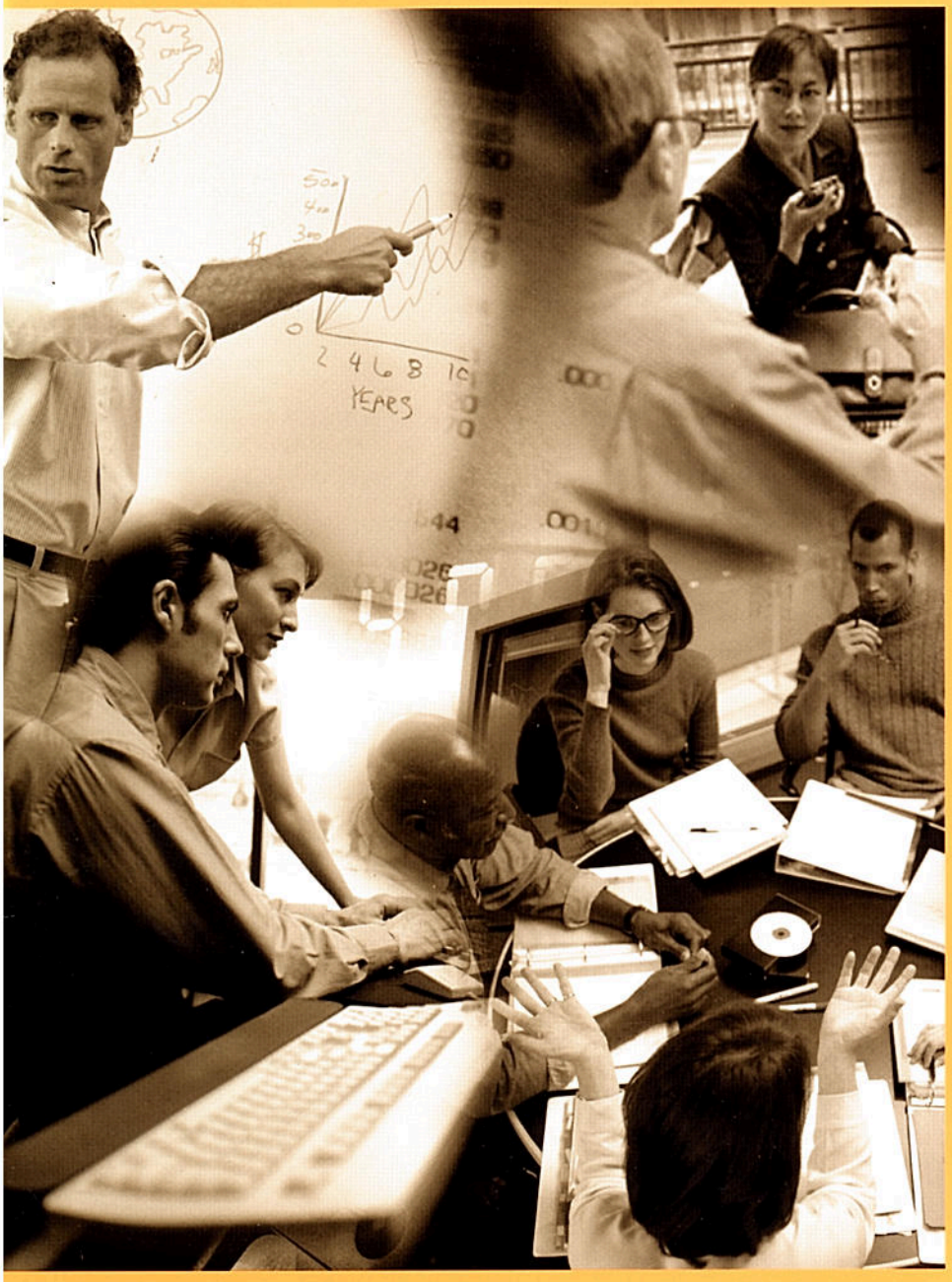
LariaNews



LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESEARCH + INTELLIGENCE ASSOCIATION
www.laria.gov.uk

Inside this issue ▶▶▶▶ **Members Remuneration Panels, 2001 Census Update, Laria Away Weekend**

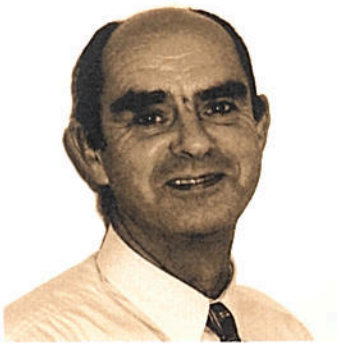
Contents

Contents

	Page
From the Chair	1
Bristol City Council's Consultation Finder	1
Evaluating the South Lanarkshire Citizens' Panel	3
Policy Development in Rotherham	4
2001 Census Update - the Two Number Census?	6
Learning Without Prejudice	7
Independent Members' Remuneration Panels and the Basic Allowance	8
Project Renewal of Deprived Neighbourhoods in Israel (Part 2)	10
Local Government & Housing Conference 2002	14
Laria Away Weekend	15
Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI)	15
Local Authority R&I News	17
Laria People	19
News from Elsewhere	23
Noticeboard	25
Caption Competition	26
Guide to Contributors	27

This edition was produced by
Rachel Cossey, Debbie Wilson, Dawn Roberts, Graham Smith, John Wicks, Richard Stevens, Anne Cunningham.

From the Chair - Bob Cuthill



Bob Cuthill- Chair of LARIA

As LariaNews goes, and it has been going longer than some of us (you) have been around, the July edition was as full an issue as I can remember. Quantity certainly, and - considering it part of my duty to read it cover to cover - the quality was very informative. Long may it continue but that is dependent on you, the contributors, as well as the continuing zeal of the voluntary team that puts it all together – well done.

One item in particular which drew my attention was the call for entries for the Award for Excellence in Local Government Research. Quite how one determines excellence I am not sure. Certainly, it could be as a result of a novel approach, or perhaps the scale of a project, or its application to resolve a problem, or linking across boundaries (even national ones), or whatever. If what you have been involved in qualifies you, let us know by the New Year – contact Gerallt Evan-Hughes at BMG (gerallte@bostock.co.uk).

Something else that I would want to promote is the Forum page on the LARIA Web Site (www.laria.gov.uk). It is a great place to pose a question and hopefully get a number of useful responses. The more of us who make use of it the more useful it will become. Similarly, the job pages are a great place to post research jobs where you know they will be read by people in the business.

Three years ago, LARIA held an Away Weekend to initiate a strategy to take LARIA forward. Those couple of days proved well-spent and led to LARIA becoming a membership-based organisation as one outcome. Other objectives set have been achieved to a greater or lesser extent. It was time to repeat the exercise, and by the time you read this members of the LARIA Council will have got together to plan for the next three years of LARIA's development. Everyone's input into this process is valued and I am always pleased to receive your views: good, bad or indifferent.

Being a voluntary based organisation, LARIA has not been in a position to do much in the way of commissioning or managing its own research. This won't change to any major degree, but in the new spirit of partnership which permeates all our work, it is incumbent on LARIA to explore partnerships with like-minded bodies. One example where we need to add to the body of research is in exploring the statutory basis of research in local government. Working with the LGA we hope to make some progress in this area.

Likewise with our links to other organisations. Although LARIA is sufficiently well-established and supported to stand on its own feet, we have to ensure that we don't miss out on the opportunity to be involved in and spread our message through other bodies with related interests. No person is an island .... and with research having no tangible boundaries, this is ever true for LARIA.

Bristol City Council's Consultation Finder

Stephen Hilton

Not for the first time a local citizen recently e-mailed to ask how can I find out about the consultations affecting people in my area? The only difference was this time we were able to offer a positive response - use Consultation Finder!

Aims of the Initiative

Bristol City Council makes a significant investment in public consultation. Over recent years the council has initiated many high quality and high profile exercises ranging from a citizens' jury to consider the fate of the city's ageing network of swimming pools, through to a complete citywide referendum to determine the future level of Council Tax. The lessons that the council has learned from consultation formed the basis of the Public Consultation Strategy that was adopted by the council's Cabinet in September 2001.

Despite the council's good work in the area of public consultation it was accepted that the risk of any individual or group becoming over-consulted was growing. In reality, the council was not in a position to meet one of the pledges it had signed up to in its own Contract with Consultees (an important part of the Consultation Strategy) – not to unnecessarily ask the same people the same questions over and over again.

The proposal was to plug this knowledge gap by bringing together details of all council public consultations in to one place and at the same time, making it easy for people to access and update information - to see what consultation is planned, what is current and what has been done before. Following six months' work, Consultation Finder emerged as an innovative solution.

Consultation Finder is located on the consultation pages of the council's website www.bristol-city.gov.uk/consultation. It is accessed via a user-friendly interface, which enables an easy search through past, current and future consultations. Searches can be made to find out who is consulting and why by using crosscutting themes as search headings, or to find all consultations impacting on particular wards. A 'look-up' facility is

Bristol City Council's Consultation Finder cont...

included so that people can identify their ward and their ward councillors and find out about schools and local events.

The Council's Consultation Strategy highlights the need to provide sufficient background information about the issues being consulted on, to allow citizens to offer an informed view. Consultation Finder provides on-line access to background papers that are relevant to individual consultations. To make participation convenient, Consultation Finder also includes the facility to link to e-surveys and forms - as an addition to, rather than as a replacement for, more traditional consultation methods.

One of the net outputs of the council's Consultation Strategy over time should be greater public interest in local governance. For this reason, Consultation Finder enables people to register their 'stake' in consultations that have yet to start – subsequently to receive an electronic reminder when the consultation begins. Finally, the council's Consultation Strategy recognises that in order to sustain public interest and involvement over time, the council needs to demonstrate real and tangible outcomes from its consultation programme. Through Consultation Finder people can access brief summaries of consultation results and link to pages showing how consultation is being used to inform and improve council decision-making.

Who was Involved?

A multi-disciplinary project team was established to take the project forward. This brought together the council's project management, database and web development expertise with corporate and departmental consultation champions. A secondment was arranged from the voluntary and community sector to help develop the content of the finder and to build links with those involved in front-line consultation activity. The team worked closely throughout the project designing, developing, testing and modifying the system, which was built up from scratch. This was simply because, as far as anyone could discover, no other Local Authority had developed a similar system before, highlighting that what we were attempting was either very brave or very stupid!

How were Participants Involved?

From an ICT perspective, the initial challenge was to pin down consultation into a system that could be consistently defined, coded, assimilated and accessed. However, it soon became apparent to all that consultation can be a 'slippery notion' and that not every consultation has a start date or every method a response rate (yes - really). Through listening and responding to issues raised in face-to-face meetings and discussions with those involved in consultation activity, the team extended its depth of understanding. The challenge that emerged was to make Consultation Finder broad enough to hold details of all consultation approaches; everything from statutory consultation on planning issues through to community based regeneration schemes, whilst at the same time maintaining accessibility and user-focus.

What Methods are used?

When is a stakeholder conference not a stakeholder conference – when it is a visioning exercise. Included in Consultation Finder, when it went live, was a definitive list of all consultation methods used by the local authority. The list has of course continued to grow, reflecting the authority's healthy willingness to try something new. However, for the first time, the reporting functions that are built into Consultation Finder can identify which consultation methods are being used most frequently by the council at any given time. For example, the first Consultation Finder monitoring report shows that in the first quarter of this civic year 24 public consultations were active and that focus groups, on-line and sample surveys, the citizens' panel and conferences were the consultation methods most commonly used.

What has been achieved?

Consultation Finder went live in May 2002. It currently includes details of more than 60 consultations that the council and its partners have initiated. Council monitoring shows that 500 people (external to the Council) browsed Consultation Finder during its first full month of operation. Whether this is 'good' or 'bad' is a matter for debate but what we do now have is a baseline from which to establish progress in e-consultation over the months and years to come.

In summary, we believe that Consultation Finder is a local authority first. Through the creative work of a multi-disciplinary team we have taken a big step towards co-ordinating information about consultation across the authority and beyond. Over time, we anticipate that Consultation Finder will lead to less duplication in the consultation that is carried out and perhaps less consultation overall. However, we believe this is a good thing but only if those involved in consultation feel confident that their work is genuinely needed and that there is a way to communicate the results and findings to those who are interested or who have been involved. Consultation Finder provides a tool to help the council develop the confidence that its consultation work is needed, and to help local citizens to feel confident that spending time offering opinions to the council is genuinely a worthwhile thing to do.

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Have you seen the new consultation pages ?
http://www.bristol-city.gov.uk/consultation

Evaluating the South Lanarkshire Citizens' Panel

Debbie Wilson and Kathryn Tinney

The South Lanarkshire Citizens' Panel was established in 1998 by South Lanarkshire Council, Scottish Homes (now Communities Scotland), Lanarkshire Development Agency (now Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire), Lanarkshire Health Board and Greater Glasgow Health Board.

In 2000 the Partnership decided to evaluate the panel, and commissioned RBA Research to carry out a thorough and independent evaluation.

There were three strands to the evaluation: desk research to assess the panel itself, interviews with panel members and interviews with stakeholders.

The desk research covered:-

- Interrogation of the panel database to assess the panel's representativeness from a demographic point of view
- Reference to other research that has been carried out in South Lanarkshire to assess the panel's representativeness from an attitudinal point of view
- Assessment of the design of the questionnaires, the sampling techniques used to recruit the panel and the rotation/refreshment exercises

In total, RBA carried out 20 in-depth interviews with panel members, including :-

- current panel members (regular and irregular responders);
- ex-panel members;
- people who volunteered to join the panel but were not invited to do so because the panel already contained sufficient people from those sub-groups, and
- people who volunteered to join the panel but were not initially invited to do so, then were invited at a later date but declined

Further in-depth interviews included:-

- Five members of the Panel Steering Group (one with each Partner organisation)
- Five service providers who have commissioned and/or used the Panel for research (four from South Lanarkshire Council and one from Lanarkshire Health Board)
- Two elected members of South Lanarkshire Council (one of whom is no longer an elected member but was very involved in the panel in its initial stages)

To aid comparison, RBA also carried out some research with other councils in England and Scotland to find out what use is being made of panels elsewhere. This strand of the research consisted of 52 structured telephone interviews (of which 30 were with Scottish authorities, ie virtually a census), followed by qualitative interviews with other local authorities who run panels. RBA conducted four in-depth interviews with authorities who took part in the telephone survey, and with whom we had no previous links.

The evaluation report has a number of recommendations for enhancing the panel approach. Some of these included:-

- work more closely with partners;
- re-structure the sample design;
- publicise results more widely;
- manage service providers' expectations;
- reconsider whether the panel needs to be fully representative as opposed to a "good cross-section" of the population;
- reconsider the de-selection of "over-subscribers";
- consider carrying out refreshment more often;
- consider targeting certain surveys at particular sub-groups rather than sending them out to all panel members;
- attempt to give panel research more of a "local focus"; and
- test the effect that information provision has on the views of panel members (eg by split sampling).

The evaluation has been invaluable in re-focussing the work of the South Lanarkshire Citizens' Panel, and may be of interest to other local authorities.

If you would like further information please contact:

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themarketresearchgroup

The Market Research Group (MRG) is a full service research agency based at Bournemouth University. We are in a unique position to provide cost effective research and consultancy services to the public sector, and have a proven track record in Local Government, including:

- ***Best Value***
- ***Citizens' Panels***
- ***Ad hoc consultations***

We work in partnership with our clients, focusing on adding value and providing flexible, innovative solutions at every stage of our relationship with them. Please contact us at:

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Policy Development - Rotherham

Policy development and the impact on research – a view from Rotherham!

At the 2002 Laria Conference, Dawn Roberts spoke about evidence based policy and steps that have been taken in Rotherham to develop co-ordinated approaches to research and consultation. Here she and Andrew Towlerton outline some of the major policy developments that are driving research activity within Rotherham and elsewhere.

Research and statistics have very much come to the fore in recent months and years.

There have been a raft of initiatives and policy developments - Neighbourhood Renewal, Neighbourhood Management, Local Public Service Agreements, and Community Strategies to name but a few. These reflect the Government's over-arching aim to improve key outcomes for certain disadvantaged groups and areas.

Robust and high quality small area data is a key ingredient to the success of each and every one of these initiatives. Information needs are becoming much more sophisticated, and meeting them involves close partnership working with organisations across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. The pressures and workloads on those involved in research and intelligence are growing, and there is an increasing need for researchers to work collaboratively across organisational boundaries and to undertake increasingly sophisticated analysis.

Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

Perhaps the most well known areas of policy development to impact on the local authority research community is the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. This Strategy sets out the Government's vision for narrowing the gap between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. The aim is to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality education, decent housing, and improved environment and better health to the poorest areas, and by doing so to reduce the inequalities between them and the rest of the country.

Many local authorities in conjunction with their Local Strategic Partnership have developed a Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy for their area. The first stage of this exercise involves the identification of priority neighbourhoods which have the

Policy Development - Rotherham cont...

lowest quality of life in terms of joblessness, crime, educational failure, ill-health, poor physical environment and housing. The Government's guidance states that some areas may "choose to define neighbourhoods on electoral wards (for which there are better statistics) or other small areas". From the Government's perspective, a neighbourhood should be defined as a priority if it is among the top 10% most deprived wards based on the Indices of Deprivation 2000, or if on several of these problems it falls below national minimum standards or is heading that way.

Such deprivation analysis is not new to local government. Most local authorities have an understanding of areas of deprivation and the characteristics of those areas, based on research. The Neighbourhood Renewal agenda does however expect a detailed understanding of issues within priority neighbourhoods – not scratching the surface, but really getting to grips with the key problems in an area. Clearly, research has a vital role to play in developing that level of understanding.

The process of developing a Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy also involves mapping the resources going into the priority neighbourhoods, and developing a set of core and accessible baseline data spanning key outcome areas such as education, employment, crime, health, housing and the environment. The targets aim for a minimum standard below which no area should fall.

Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder

Another good example is the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder initiative. Here different approaches to Neighbourhood Management are tried out with the aim of developing more effective and appropriate co-ordination of public services within particular communities.

There are presently 20 neighbourhood pathfinder areas, with more in the pipeline. The intention is that the successful experiences of the pilots will then be rolled out to other areas. The accompanying guidance is quite explicit about the role of information and research, describing it as crucial to the overall strategy. Securing an effective research base should be one of the first priorities for the pathfinders.

Rotherham has a Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder in Eastwood and Springwell Gardens – a small area that has in past benefited from SRB funding. In the early stages of the Pathfinder, the need to develop robust baselines for the area, developing indicators that can be monitored over time and mapping the level of public sector resource (across organisations) going into the area, posed a significant challenge for those involved in research and intelligence work within the Borough.

Local Public Sector Agreements

The list of policy initiatives / developments goes on. A Local Public Sector Agreement (PSA) is an agreement between an individual local authority and the Government. It sets out the LA's commitment to deliver specific improvements in performance, and the Government's commitment to reward these improvements. Where is the contribution of local authority research and intelligence? Again it is crucial for the development of Local PSAs, especially in agreeing appropriate targets, and the level of stretch attached to them.

Where a local authority wishes to focus an Agreement on a specific disadvantaged group or community the onus is very much on them to make the case. For example in relation to the employability target the guidance states "authorities should identify which of these groups are present in their areas and how many are e.g. people with disabilities, lone parents, ethnic minorities etc." Up-to-date data such as employment by ethnic group or age can be difficult to obtain at any geographical level.

Neighbourhood Statistics

At a national level, there is an array of robust and good quality information. However, the further you go down the geographical tiers the weaker it becomes. In some cases, information at small area level is good (for example for health and crime data). It is a different story however when we look at small area education data or the wider definition of worklessness beyond the discredited Claimant Count.

Developments such as the establishment of the National Neighbourhood Statistics Website are a major step forward. However, there is still some way to go.

Like many other local authorities across the UK, Rotherham has developed its own initiatives aimed at improving the flow of neighbourhood statistics. A Rotherham Neighbourhood Statistics Group has been established which brings together Rotherham's public, voluntary and community organisations, and has secured over £400,000 to take forward and accelerate this important work in the Borough and create a coherent neighbourhood statistics service. Initial work has focused on the definition of neighbourhood areas that are consistent for policy making and meaningful to local communities, and the development of data sharing protocols. Ultimately the aim is to collate, analyse and present up-to-date and robust data at different geographical levels in ways that are appropriate to agencies and the community sector alike. And of course, as part of the development of the Neighbourhood Statistics work, we look forward to the release of the 2001 Census data.

Summary

There are many more examples where policy development nationally and locally is driving the need to refocus research activity. Here, we have highlighted a small number that are currently having a major impact in Rotherham. With a focus on the development of performance indicators and targets, targeted activity in priority neighbourhoods, and the need to demonstrate how action is delivering real outcomes for local people, it is an interesting (and exciting!) time for local authority researchers. Long may it last.

Contacts:

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2001 Census Update - the Two Number Census?

By now you should either be feeling smug or gobsmacked, depending upon whether the 2001 Census day populations and mid-year estimates have confirmed or completely undermined your personal prejudices as to what they ought to have shown for your particular authority. Apart from the first data release there has been much other Census related activity since early summer.

CLIP Latest

The CLIP Census Sub-group met on 17 June. This offered an early opportunity for Joy Dobbs to meet a main set of her census stakeholders, as we are now known. This was a fairly low-key meeting as it fell between the end of consultation on disclosure control and the announcement of the ONS decision. It has now been confirmed that the Special Migration and Special Workplace datasets are included in the Census Access Project. This presumably means that similar arrangements will apply in Scotland and include the Journey to Place of Education data.

ONS are to release a CD containing all output area digital boundaries in February 2003. It is, however, unlikely that ONS will be able to supply a draft release to each authority for rapid QA. ONS are to outline the principles that will be applied in order to subdivide sparsely populated output areas with large numbers of workplaces for use in the workplace statistics. ONS wish to involve local authorities in the process of determining which areas may be split and how. Negotiations have taken place to agree a set of statistics that would be made available for sub-threshold civil parishes and communities. Details of the agreed data can be obtained from Isobel Gibson.
email: igibson@herefordshire.gov.uk.

Disclosure Control

ONS received over 80 responses to its consultation with census users on the preferred rounding/adjustment method to be adopted for disclosure control. The majority of responses expressed a preference, in principle, for neither of the two options to be used, but if there had to be additional measures to protect confidentiality then Option 2 was preferred. This option involves small cell adjustment only.

Supporters of Option 2 preferred it because it will affect fewer cells and it ensured that tables would be internally additive. They felt that the main disadvantage of Option 1 (wholesale rounding to base 3) was that all cells would be rounded and that tables would not be internally additive. The benefit that Option 1 had in providing greater flexibility of outputs was considered not great enough to offset the disadvantages.

There were a small number of users who preferred Option 1, as they expressed a desire for greater flexibility in the output and were concerned that the impact on a particular count could be large in a small number of cases.

ONS recognised the concern that rounded data may appear to be more difficult to analyse and manipulate than unadjusted data and in particular the impact that adjusting small cells will have on origin destination statistics. However, it is claimed that relationships between variables will not be impacted. Strong relationships will still show up in the data and no new relationships will be created. ONS is prepared to work with users to ensure that census data is used to its full potential, that users understand the quality of census data and that it is interpreted correctly.

The ONS decision was to adopt Option 2. In making its decision, ONS listened to the concerns of a wide range of users. It recognised the needs expressed by the majority of users to adjust small counts only and to ensure that individual tables are internally additive. ONS recognised the concerns raised by supporters of Option 1 but felt that Option 2 met the needs of the vast majority of users and that the impact on data quality would be minimal.

ONS will only provide very limited information about the methodology for Option 2. The suppressing of the precise method is part of the confidentiality protection process. There will also be an impact on the level of flexibility that ONS may be able to offer in the future.

Data on CD

To facilitate loading census material into network and database systems, ONS plans a series of CDs or DVDs containing counts for areas in England and Wales, along with digitised boundaries and metadata. These will be supplied through the Census Access project. In recognition that sample census material is required to assist in the development and trials of these systems, Census Division has prepared a CD containing an illustrative sample of the 2001 Key Statistics and Census Area Statistics in both CSV and SuperTable formats. The Output Area based counts within the tables have been generated using test data and will bear no relation to any data collected in the 2001 Census. The tables are supported by a draft set of 2001 Classifications in HTML format and a set of cell numbered table layouts. A set of example Output Areas that correspond to the sample tables will be supplied as digitised boundaries. If you have not yet received this sample CD inform Richard Wooden (richard.wooden@ons.gov.uk) of your interest.

Revised Output Schedule

Finally, ONS has revised the output timetable. The Key Statistics for local authorities are now due for release on 13 February 2003. This is a consequence of ONS being unable to make up some of the time lost earlier in the processing/output timetable. It has also been realised that the Census enumeration and the CCS were not completely independent of each other. Therefore if a person was missed by the Census enumeration it was also more likely that they would have been missed by the CCS. ONS has had to make additional adjustments in the One Number Census process to compensate for this problem. The consequence of this is that when the Key Statistics and other outputs are released there will be some small differences (<1%) in the age structures at local authority level when compared to the Census day populations released on 30 September. However, the good news is that the 2001 mid-year estimates, released on 10 October, will not need to be revised. The revised estimates series from 1992 to 2000 will also be released on 13 February.

John Hollis
Greater London Authority
LA Lead on CLIP Census Subgroup

Learning Without Prejudice

Paul Vittles

Many researchers working in commercial agencies are blissfully unaware of the extensive research carried out these days in local government, and many will probably have images of a slow-moving, dull environment - the polar opposite of their work in Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG).

Many of those working in local government have an image of the commercial world as one where we sit at our desks with calculators checking the profit we're making and helping our clients to push unwanted products onto exploited consumers.

Researchers working in central government, local government, the NHS, etc would have much more chance of modernising public services and carrying the public with them if they looked at good practice research in the commercial world.

Researchers working in commercial agencies and for commercial clients would have access to a better toolkit, and have a better understanding of consumers, if they looked at some of the innovative and exciting research and consultation currently happening in the world of public services and public policy.

Communications is probably the single most important area in which local authorities need to improve, and they could learn a lot from commercial specialists. Agency researchers are so used to using qualitative research to develop publications, pre-testing marketing campaigns, carrying out reading & noting studies, quantitatively testing recall of communications material, etc, they would probably gasp at the amount of literature produced by local authorities with no research whatsoever.

Local authorities send out leaflets with Council Tax bills which virtually no-body reads (but complain they do not have resources after this annual waste). They battle along in an unfavourable media climate without systematic attempts to promote the sector (whilst commercial sectors run generic campaigns). They are only just realising the importance of a positive image, but still feel queasy about the concept of an 'image'. Sensitive and experienced communications researchers and advertising planners could easily plot a sensible course forward.

In return, commercial researchers could learn from the consultation which is currently taking place in local government. Community Planning is a current flagship policy and is attempting to secure 10-20 year visions for each district/borough. Deliberative workshops bringing together all key partners from local government, health, police, voluntary sector and the business community are generating some interesting insights, both in terms of content and methodology.

We are seeing extensive use of panels to regularly involve cross-sections of residents, and use of citizens' juries (a cross section of citizens deliberating, calling witnesses, studying evidence, and reaching considered conclusions).

Young people are being involved in everything from re-designing menus for school meals to re-designing town centres (eg by taking photos of what they don't like and drawing pictures of what it should be like).

Much of this work is carried out in a very open, accountable environment - above-the-line consultation to support below-the-line research.

Recent research into budget consultation, for example, has included an initial phase of group discussions, stratified by lifestage, followed by deliberative workshops, public meetings, and use of board games. At the deliberative workshops, those who attended the groups are invited back for workshop sessions with information available in response to their queries, and a presentation by the Treasurer, which helps to create a well-informed and creative audience.

To get taxpayers to "step outside themselves" and discuss spending priorities from a bigger picture perspective, a board game approach has been tried, with players being forced to discuss issues such as 'free parking' (pay at point of use or Council Tax subsidy?).

If we all occasionally pick our heads up and look at worlds other than the one we usually inhabit, we will be better researchers. A good resolution for the year ahead would be to learn without prejudice!

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Benchmarking the Performance of Local Government ICT Departments

Measuring the Attitudes of Service Providers

Papers by Les Worrall, Martin Greenwood and Terry Madgwick

Wolverhampton Business School has been conducting research into what users think about the quality and service provided by local government ICT departments. The first of these papers analyses the key messages from research with 140 different local authorities to try to understand what shapes and informs users' views.

In the second paper the authors review research intended to look at what it is like for providers to deliver services. While it is important to understand users' views, it is just as important to understand the providers' views if you are trying to improve service delivery. The research examined two large metropolitan authorities with ICT service providers.

Full copies of these papers are available on the LARIA website: www.laria.gov.uk

Independent Members' Remuneration Panels and the Basic Allowance

Considering Methodological Issues in a Political Context

Declan L. G. Hall, Inlogov

Background

The Local Government Act 2000 requires inter alia all local authorities in England to set up political executives and, as confirmed by the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2001, to establish and maintain an independent remuneration panel to review their allowances and provide advice on its scheme. The requirement to review allowances was intended to recompense properly the time necessary and responsibility carried to fulfil these new roles. It was also intended to address the historically low level of allowances that Councillors were receiving by increasing allowances and thereby go some way to ensuring that no potential candidate was deterred from standing for Council by financial considerations.

Now that all English local authorities have set up standing Independent Remuneration Panels they have been faced with the need to produce recommendations that are grounded in research and stand up to Council and public acceptance. While the government has produced guidance on how Panels are to arrive at their recommendations, there is no one way of going about this. Panels more often than not consist of a mixture of laypersons and representatives from partner organisations who are not experts in evaluating Councillor roles and responsibilities. It is often left to the officer servicing the Panel to provide direction on the methodology to be followed.

It must be pointed out that there is no definitive answer to Members' allowances. Councillors rarely stand because of the financial inducements - indeed many are surprised that there are allowances at all. New Members soon find out that the time commitment is more than they bargained for and the responsibility carried can be onerous, especially for executive Councillors. Moreover, Councillors come from many different backgrounds. Many are retired, thus allowances are not a major issue, but for many, especially people of working age, allowances are crucial to remaining on Council. While arriving at recommendations takes place in a political context, there are a number of ways a Panel can ensure that its recommendations are grounded in sound research that helps ensure its report gains political and public acceptance.

Setting the Basic Allowance

Arriving at recommendations for the Basic Allowance (BA) is the easiest part - the government's advice to Independent Remuneration Panels obliges a Panel to consider three variables. These are:-

1. Time: What is the time necessary to fulfil the role of an ordinary Councillor?
2. Public Service: Panels are obligated to discount some of that required time input as a Public Service Discount (PSD), as it is recognised there is an element of public service in being a Councillor that should not be remunerated. Thus, how much of that time should be seen as public service and not remunerated?
3. Worth: What is the remunerated time of a Councillor worth?

There are a number of ways to arrive at answers to these variables. The first thing a Panel should do is administer a questionnaire to all Councillors. Councillors have a strong sense of what their time commitment needs to be, although many will confuse the time they have available to put in with what the role really needs. For instance, many retired Councillors put in up to 40 plus hours per week, as they have the time, and being a Councillor may be a substitute for working. However, to expect all ordinary Councillors to put in 40 hours per week is both unreasonable and unfeasible. Questionnaire responses often give 8-15 hours per week as the necessary time required in district authorities, and up to three days per week in some of the largest authorities, but more commonly assessed at 15-20 hours per week.

The Public Service Discount is a very variable concept. Some Councillors feel that all their time is public service, which would lead to no Basic Allowance (which is illegal), while others feel that none of their time should be unremunerated, which leads to Councillors being paid market rates. However, a rule of thumb is that the amount of assessed time to do the job that should be discounted is between 25-50 per cent. Anything beyond

Independent Members' Remuneration Panels and the Basic Allowance cont...

50 per cent and Councillors are giving most of their time as public service, i.e. unremunerated, while anything less that 25 per cent gives the impression that Councillors are reluctant to recognise the public service element. District Councils tend to discount closer to the higher end of the spectrum, 40-50%, while larger authorities tend to discount from 25%-33%.

The Local Government Association has produced guidance on a Councillor's worth: (www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Circular/48-02.pdf): it suggests that notionally a Councillor's time is worth at least the equivalent of the average male non-manual daily salary, which in 2001 was approximately £108 per day, or £14 per hour. However, for many local authorities this figure appears high, often due to local conditions. Consequently, Panels can access the New Earnings Survey to find local or regional salary rates. The Birmingham Panel utilised the West Midlands equivalent, while the Barnsley Panel utilised the national average salary rate on grounds that a Councillor is worth the national average salary, including male and female and all occupations. Some Panels in the South East utilise a regional average, to take into account local conditions. Once again, a rule of thumb is that a Councillor's time is worth at least the national average salary - all occupations - which was approximately £11.50 per hour in 2001. However, in high and low pay regions Panels often prefer to utilise a regional version of the LGA rate (male non-manual regional average salary) to reflect local conditions. In the South East, this was approximately £16.20 per hour and for the North East approximately £12.50 in 2001. These figures can be found in the annual publication of the New Earnings Survey.

Arriving at figures for these variables provides a formula that Panels can utilise to arrive at their recommended Basic Allowance, which is:

Recommended BA = (Time needed for role – PSD) x hourly or daily rate

This makes the recommended BA transparent, logical, clearly understood and should also be robust enough to withstand political and public scrutiny.

Checks and Balances

As the Panel is operating in a political context, it is important for the Panel members to test the questionnaire responses in interviews with a representative sample of Councillors. For instance, if the questionnaire suggests that in a small district Council Members should be putting 20+ hours per week into their role, then interviews can be used to explore what is a seemingly high figure. In particular, there is a need to ascertain that Members were stating what they thought was necessary for the role, rather than the hours they themselves put in – they often confuse the former with the latter.

The interviews in particular also provide lay members of a Panel with important contextual information on what being a Councillor means. Panels are often surprised by the amount of work Councillors put in, the financial sacrifices made and the on-going costs of being a Councillor, such as purchasing miscellaneous items such as stationery and writing desks. More importantly, it brings out the costs borne by many Councillors in terms of lost overtime, career promotion and pension provision. Another advantage of interviewing Councillors is that it allows all voices that want to be heard to be so. In particular, Panels should ensure that not only leading Councillors are interviewed but a sample of back benchers, including those with special needs, in full time work, from minorities and those with dependents. It has been mostly through the interviews that the two-tier rate for the dependent carers' allowance emerged. Care for elderly and/or disabled dependents is more costly than regular child minding.

Once the tentative recommendation for the BA has been arrived at, a Panel should then benchmark its recommendations against what is being paid elsewhere. There are a number of ways to benchmark. All local authorities are part of an Audit Commission Family Cluster, deemed to be a group of 10-15 authorities that share the most common demographic and socio-economic characteristics. However, this is not the only way to compare. Many districts will compare themselves more readily against other districts in their county rather than the AC Family Cluster. Counties tend to compare themselves with other counties in their region. Fortunately, the IDeA now produces a survey of allowances being paid in authorities that Panels can access via the web which makes the servicing officer's job easier. Previously they often had to ring around comparator authorities asking for this information.

If your Panel's recommendations are way above or below what is being paid in similar authorities, the Panel should be aware. Not that a Panel should cluster around the average, but if the recommendation is high or low, the Panel should be aware of this and check its variables for robustness.
Another means to test for robustness is to ask what the total impact on the authority's revenue budget of the Panel's recommendation will be. The national average is 1.2 per cent. If a Panel's recommendation is much more than this figure, say over 2%, then it may be too substantial for the authority concerned – but this is more of an issue for district authorities.

A final benchmarking exercise is to compare recommendations against payments to members of comparable Quangos. While the analogy is somewhat imperfect, the most common comparison is made with members of NHS Trusts. A non-executive board member typically receives between £5,000 - £8,000 for an expected input of 5 days per month. Most Panels' recommendations are less than this for a greater expected input. Presenting this information in a report does not often alter a Panel's recommendations, but provides a politically soothing comparison that makes Councillors feel more comfortable with what are often startling headline increases.

Conclusion

There is no right way to arrive at a recommended Basic Allowance, but if a Panel goes through the process outlined above then they have a greater chance of their recommendations being accepted and adopted as they are based on sound research within a political context that stands up to public scrutiny.

For more information contact
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The New Earning Survey data can be found at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_labour/NES2001_GB/NES2001_Streamlined_analyses.pdf

The IdeA survey has a very long and unwieldy web address, but can be reached by going on www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk, registering if necessary, logging on and clicking on 'Best Practice Toolkits', then 'Political management arrangements', then 'Member Allowances'.

Project Renewal of Deprived Neighbourhoods

THE ISRAELI EXPERIENCES: Part 2

Zvi Weinstein (Ministry of Construction & Housing, Department of Urban Renewal, Israel)

The first part of this article was published in the previous issue of LariaNews. It introduced us to 'Project Renewal', a neighbourhood regeneration program set up in Israel in 1978, and one of the most ambitious of its kind in the world.

Budgets and Investments

As pointed out in the first part, the Project has spent more than $2000 million during a period of over 20 years. More than 75% was invested by the Israeli Government. About 20% came from the Jewish Agency through the 'Twinning Community Program', in which a Jewish community abroad 'adopted' a distressed neighbourhood in Israel for a period of 5 to 7 years. The money from this scheme was invested mainly to build public institutions – community centres, schools, day care centres, youth and elderly clubs, including their equipment - and also to finance social and community activities. The rest comes from private funds, and from the business sector which has begun to support social partnerships. This tendency is accelerating together with the involvement of the voluntary sector.

The main fields of investment are: physical infrastructure improvements including apartment enlargements and renovations; childhood education; formal education; youth at risk; employment; welfare for families at risk; community leadership and empowerment; health.

Since the end of the 1980s, there has been a constant tendency for budgets to be restricted and reduced, in spite of the fact that new neighbourhoods have been included in the Project. In order to overcome, at least partially, the budget problem, some decisions have been made:-

- Residents who live in apartment blocks were asked to contribute up to 25% of the total renovation costs of their block;
- Local municipalities became active participants in public developments and infrastructure projects, and shared expenses with the government;
- The Housing Ministry has started a unique social program (called 'Momentum') which focuses on specific items such as raising the percentage of students eligible for matriculation, development of human resources and job training, and developing services and programs for the new immigrants from Russia and Ethiopia.

As a whole, the budget invested in the Project comprises only 0.1% of the state of Israel's annual budget and only 4.5% of the Ministry of Housing's budget.

Project Outputs and Achievements

During the years that the Project has been operating, there have been significant positive changes in most of the neighbourhoods. The following are a few of the most dramatic changes:-

- The proportion of residents renting housing owned by public authorities has decreased significantly. Today 76% of neighbourhood residents own the homes they live in.
- Housing stock has changed. Enlarging 36,000 of the 220,000 housing units existing in all neighbourhoods has solved problems of overcrowding in apartments.
- The out-migration of stronger families has been halted by improvements in the image of the neighbourhoods and their social and physical infrastructures.
- The best proof of the success of the Project is the fact that private contractors are building new housing developments in the neighbourhoods to be sold commercially. This guarantees an influx of a stronger population who will enjoy the variety of services developed by the Project.
- More than 600 new facilities have been built in the neighbourhoods, including centres for early childhood education, elderly clubs, kindergartens, community centres, libraries etc.
- The Project has contributed to the increase in income levels of residents by developing employment services and vocational training programs, and especially by encouraging women to enter the workforce.
- Resident involvement has been institutionalised by an organisational infrastructure created at the neighbourhood level and the municipal level. Elected Community Administration authorities and a borough system of municipal administration are outgrowths of the philosophy of the Project. So are parent committees for schools and kindergartens, residents serving on boards of community centres, and resident-established interest groups around mutual issues.
- The Project began a process of decentralisation of municipal functions. Branches of municipal departments, mainly social services, were set up in the neighbourhoods to give the residents closer accessibility to local services. Over 75% of the programs established and developed during the Project activity were integrated into the municipal authorities, including personnel.
- Residents became more upwardly mobile, both socially and politically, within the municipal employment structure. In a few cases, residents have even become mayors and Members of Parliament !
- Project "Momentum", offering programs to residents of neighbourhoods phasing out of the Project, resulted in significant positive changes on a personal level. It offered programs designed to increase the percentage of residents completing high school matriculation and going on to higher education. It also offered courses in vocational training and developed programs for new immigrants. These programs impacted positively on income levels, scope of opportunity, and social and economic mobility.
- Social, community, education and health services in the neighbourhoods are serving residents from other parts of the city due to both the very high level service quality and the

Project Renewal of Deprived Neighbourhoods cont...

equipped professional personnel.

- The phenomenon of the social unrest that characterised the early 1980s is no longer evident in the neighbourhoods. Instead, the residents use collaboration and negotiation strategies with the local municipality.

Stages of Project Renewal Activities in the

Physical sphere	Social sphere	Stage
Mapping housing conditions	Needs survey	Stage 1
	Localisation of activists and/or neighbourhood committees	
	Establishing local steering committees	
Accomplishment of long-term physical renewal strategy	Accomplishment of long-term social renewal strategy	
	Establishing integrative subcommittees	
	Mobilisation of partners and resources for neighbourhood renewal	
Planning enlargement of apartments	Building and extending accessibility to services	Stage 2
Renovation of elderly apartments	Raising consumer awareness of social services	
Accomplishing physical infrastructure (sewage, drainage, lighting)	Preparation of residents for social involvement	
Development of public areas and parks	Developing community frameworks as meeting places for different population groups	
Residents organisation for 'Do it yourself' (blocks renovation) program	Expanding scale of opportunities for the individual (knowledge, education, employment)	
External building renovations and development of yards	Developing residents' consumer awareness of specialised services located outside the neighbourhood	Stage 3
Apartment enlargements	Encouraging and establishment of leading groups	
	Establishment of 'Magnetic Services' in accordance with urban planning	
	Searching out populations at risk and distressed groups, and adjusting services to their needs	
	Expanding scale of opportunities for the individual to acquire technical skills for future employment, and integrate into Israeli society	
Establishing frameworks for maintenance of housing and yards	Establishing alternative organisation to the LSC and transferring responsibility for activity continuation	Stage 4
Creation of permanent negotiation & communication system between neighbourhood residents and local municipality	Attracting outside population to use "Magnetic Services" in the neighbourhood	
	Integrating leading interested groups with the urban networks dealing in the same issues	
	Preparing gradual transfer of programs previously financed by the Project to the local authority budget or to another agency	

Changes in Processes of Project Renewal

Project Renewal has gone through a process of change in concept since it was initiated. The following five processes can be identified in the Project's chronology:

1) The first process involved a universal approach to neighbourhoods in distress, with the emphasis on improving the quality of life, improving physical and social infrastructures, and resident involvement in decision making on subjects involving their lives and immediate environment. This process was in vogue from the beginning of the Project to the mid-1980s.

2) The second process of selective intervention in accordance with criteria of distress began about 1985. Emphasis was given to improving the quality of life for populations in distress (elderly, single parent families, youth at risk, families with multi-dimensional problems).

3) The third process of prioritising need, neighbourhood by neighbourhood (differential approach), and allocating public resources in accordance with criteria of distress, existed for a brief time at the beginning of the 1990s.

4) The fourth process, which aimed at assisting populations that were previously neglected by the Project, came into effect at the beginning of the 1990s. This approach was aimed at assisting the Arab and Druze populations as well as new immigrants, especially from Ethiopia and the ultra orthodox religious Jewish communities.

5) Economic processes affecting the country today influenced the fifth process. Ongoing themes include the integration of the private business sector with the public and volunteer sectors, changes in the real estate market, changes in demand for manpower in the field of technology, and renewal of urban centres.

Dilemmas Awaiting Solutions

Despite the widespread activities of Project Renewal and its contribution to change in the neighbourhoods, the Project is facing serious complex dilemmas that are awaiting solutions:-

1) *The continuous erosion of budget resource for the Project:* Increasing the number of neighbourhoods in the Project on one hand, while freezing the budget on the other hand, has handicapped the renewal process. It has adversely affected the implementation of planned programs, the initiation of new programs, the development of services and the employment of professional manpower.

2) *The length of time the Project remains active in specific neighbourhoods:* This problem is directly connected to the general trend of reducing budgets for the Project. Many neighbourhoods have participated in the Project for more than 15 years for reasons that have nothing to do with the budget or goals of the Project. Political and non-relevant interests are keeping these neighbourhoods in Project Renewal and are a burden to its reducing budget.

3) *Lack of resources for public facilities:* As long as the Jewish Agency, working with Jewish communities abroad, was involved in the Project and was providing funds there was continuous construction of public community facilities. Hundreds were built and they contributed to resident involvement and organising the neighbourhoods for improvement of services. When the Jewish Agency ceased its massive participation in the Project, no other agency took its place and many neighbourhoods were left without physical community facilities.

4) *Changes in national priorities:* Changes in government administration naturally lead to changes in national priorities. Project Renewal is no longer a national priority and, indeed, does not even appear on the public agenda. It must be stated and emphasised here that the hardest cores of unemployment-hit populations live in development towns, many of them still included in the Project. The present government political coalition has diverted national interest to issues that have no application to neighbourhoods in distress.

5) *Adjusting Project Renewal activity to economic and social processes that are currently happening in Israel and the world:* Project Renewal is falling behind the economic and social processes under way in Israel and the world. These processes

Project Renewal of Deprived Neighbourhoods cont...

have to do with globalisation of capital and manpower, advancing technology, digitisation, computerisation, communications and foreign workers. Two main phenomena are evident in Israel: closing down of traditional industries like textiles, and the entering flow of foreign workers from Eastern Europe and the Far East taking the place of unskilled labour.

6) *What is a renewed neighbourhood?* Among all the problems mentioned above, the problem of defining the rehabilitated or renewed neighbourhood is a central basic one. Neighbourhoods find themselves removed from the Project by a decision made by the Ministerial Committee for Project Renewal. These decisions are generally made for political reasons with no relevance to professional criteria. Recently (2000), such criteria based on socio-economic indicators were published, but they have yet to be put to the test.

Facing the Future

The state of Israel is passing through many changes surrounding every sphere of life. That fact has a profound influence on the situation inside the neighbourhoods as well. Taking political, security, economic and social considerations into account, one is forced to the conclusion that the conditions make the running of a national project of the scope and scale of Project Renewal almost impossible.

The variation in the real estate market; the socio-economic weakening of developing towns and settlements on the periphery of the country; the refusal of the government to place Project Renewal at a high level of national and public priority; the increase in the growing social, educational and economic gap between different populations; the reduction in the social programs budget; have all combined to produce an atmosphere ripe for deterioration and distress on a much greater scale than we have experienced to date.

The question to be asked is very straightforward: What should be the next steps ? Whether to continue what already has begun? Or to update the Project's policies ? Or to bring about comprehensive change ?

The answer, on the other hand, is not so easy. Here is a summary of the challenges facing the Project, and some suggestions as to how it might adapt to them:-.

1. The new vision is to give the residents in the distressed neighbourhoods the means, prospects and opportunities to improve their quality of life and to integrate in the society, economy and urban development of Israel.

   Many research findings undertaken during Project Renewal, along with long accumulated experience, point to the fact that a high correlation exists between deteriorating housing and social and economic problems at both the individual and the neighbourhood level.

   Because of that dependency, effective interventions for changing the situation need to be multi-dimensional and integrated.

2. Inequality gaps in Israeli society are developing continuously. There are strong forces at the macro level which increase social and poverty gaps, despite the efforts to limit them by government transaction payments, enhancement of social services, and housing improvements in deprived neighbourhoods.

   This reality suggests a re-examination of Project Renewal's existing physical and social interventions.

3. In the first years of the Project, most of the neighbourhoods were similar in their features. The majority of them were located in the big metropolitan areas. In recent years the Project is characterised by different spatial types of well-founded neighbourhoods where most of the populations suffers from deprivation, with whole settlements included in the Project and geographical areas that include several adjacent settlements.

   The Project has to adapt by making differential interventions, both physical and social.

4. In deprived neighbourhoods located in economic demand areas, market forces can use the existing physical and social infrastructures in order to help the region and its residents to get out of their deprived situation

   Government assistance in demand areas will be given only for incentives to the private market to finance the regeneration operations (exempting of land taxes, quick process of approval housing plans, etc.)

5. Accumulated experience both in Israel and in other countries demonstrates that improvement of a distressed neighbourhood's image depends not only on strengthening the weak populations but on attracting a relatively well-off population. The aim is to change a deprived homogeneous neighbourhood into a heterogeneous one in terms of its housing, demographic, social and economic make-up.

   Each action undertaken to improve a distressed area must relate to three levels: strengthening weak populations; preventing out-migration of strong families; creating opportunities that will attract stronger populations.

   Future social tensions must be avoided, and care must be taken to ensure a modest mixture of different population groups and housing stock.

6. Data analysis by the Central Statistics Bureau shows that there is a high level of mobility in Project Renewal neighbourhoods. Part of the established population moved to other neighbourhoods during the 1990s, and their place was taken by new immigrants. Today 27% of the population in the neighbourhoods are newcomers from Russia.

   This demographic change necessitates re-examination of the Project's interventions. For instance, enlargement of apartments is no longer needed for the new immigrants since the size of their families is small. Instead, one needs to think about renovating them. On the social aspect there is a need to increase the resources aimed at bridging activities between established residents and newcomers.

7. Lack of accessibility to social and public services in the periphery puts an additional financial burden on the residents who are part of the distressed population. This situation contributes to the growing socio-economic gap between the centre and the periphery.

   In weak social settlements located in the geographic

Project Renewal of Deprived Neighbourhoods cont...

periphery, there is a government commitment for public and social services to be more accessible.

8. Intervention at the neighbourhood level in metropolitan cities is less relevant today compared to the past, due to the high levels of communication and mobility. The majority of the population living in deprived neighbourhoods in the cities appreciate the importance of the high level services available.

   In big metropolitan cities, the Project should focus on the ward, and not the single neighbourhood as hitherto.

9. The young population (aged 20-35) will be the infrastructure on which the growth process will be based in the next few years. In distressed areas, a high proportion of this group are less educated, less skilled, belong to low income groups or are unemployed.

   Raising the potential of this age-group may narrow the social and economic gap among Israeli society as a whole, and in the periphery settlements in particular.

Summary and Conclusions

To sum up, Project Renewal has come a long way and collected many achievements and successes in tackling the multi-dimension problems that face many residents in deprived neighbourhoods. The work hasn't finished yet and much is still ahead of us. There is a need to formulate a comprehensive attitude and policy that will adopt a broad perspective with a new vision, new missions and a renewed momentum. It must be remembered that this is a national Project that encompasses one fifth of the total population of the State of Israel.

The Project has created a reservoir of professionals who have accumulated much experience in the fields of physical, social, economic, educational and health improvement, along with the management, policy implementation and community development skills to address the phenomenon of deprivation. It is therefore an urgent mission to formulate a new policy for the next 10 to 20 years of activity that will reflect the social and economic changes happening in Israel and elsewhere in the world.

Dr Zvi Weinstein works at the Ministry of Construction & Housing, Department of Urban Renewal. He is a regional coordinator of the central district of Israel comprising the majority of distressed neighbourhoods. Zvi Weinstein's fields of interest include a wide variety of issues: citizens' participation in decision making; developing of social services; developing of new skills; economic development; best practices to tackle deprivation; effective neighbourhood management; residents' interest groups; redevelopment and regeneration; urban renewal policy.

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Local Government & Housing Conference 2002

Best Practice in Consultation and Research

Abby Wright, from research and consultation consultancy ORC International, outlines the papers presented at the company's first-ever local government and housing conference.

The event took place on 5 September at the prestigious Stationers' Hall in the City of London, and combined papers covering a broad range of issues relating to best practice in consultation and research:-

CPA – A corporate consultation officer's experience - Dorset County Council

Dorset County Council was one of the first councils to undertake the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in May 2002. David Keddie explained that his own role of corporate consultation officer had been created as a result of two external drivers; an IDeA review in 1999 which investigated consultation at Dorset, and a Community Consultation Strategy designed in 2002 by ORC International on behalf of the council.

Dorset found the CPA assessment a useful experience in terms of corporate management, and David reflected that it had helped generate enthusiasm about the council among staff. However, one of the downsides was that as Dorset was one of the first authorities to go through the process, it wasn't possible to learn from or benchmark against other local authorities.

David suggested that to meet the challenge of the CPA, councils should prepare examples of how consultation has affected decision-making processes. He also advised that local authorities need to demonstrate links between consultation and other areas of work; for example Dorset linked its consultation strategy with its overall communication strategy.

In response to the initial outcomes of the CPA, Dorset will now be working towards a joined up citizens' panel to include all six districts, performing a review of existing consultation arrangements with partners and stakeholders, and promoting a more corporate approach to internal consultation. David concluded that the CPA has moved consultation up the agenda at Dorset.

Involving communities - Midlothian Council

Midlothian Council in Scotland has adopted a "Community Visioning" technique to encourage the community to identify their future needs for the area. Community Visioning - a method first developed in America - encourages the community to envisage a Midlothian of the future.

As corporate policy officer, Mike Callaghan, explained at the outset, a visioning workshop was organised to ensure that realistic outcomes were achieved. As the council had decided to integrate their community planning with their LA21 agenda responsibilities on sustainability, the visioning workshop focused on these two important topics. The one-day workshop was deemed to be a success, as those involved claimed to have felt that they were helping to shape the Midlothian of tomorrow.

A draft vision resulting from the workshop was then presented to further members of the community at subsequent consultation sessions. Midlothian used many communication channels to invite residents to attend the consultation sessions and the council was delighted with the level of response. Mike also mentioned that youth involvement was a key priority for Midlothian, and consequently three youth consultation events were organised.

Mike concluded that the final vision has since enabled Midlothian to produce a plan of action with measurable objectives that will guide the council into the future.

Estate profiles - London Borough of Hounslow

Feroza Omar, housing strategy and needs officer at the London Borough of Hounslow, described how the local authority has created a database of Housing Estate Profiles for council homes within the borough. This information has enabled the council to identify the most deprived estates and is also being used to inform policy such as allocations policies.

Feroza managed the research project to collect data on demographics, crime, health and community facilities for each council estate within Hounslow. The data was collated from a number of sources and also included figures from various consultation exercises. Each set of data produced information borough-wide, but also at ward and estate levels; the Ivybridge estate was chosen as a case study for the presentation.

Ivybridge was part of the comprehensive regeneration programme in Isleworth, under the Capital Challenge Funding from the government in 1997. This funding enabled the council to completely regenerate the estate.

The project has given Hounslow the scope to examine the effect of deprivation on many aspects of estate life. It has provided clear evidence of the areas that the council needs to focus on for future regeneration programmes.

Obtaining the Chartermark - Thames Valley Housing Association

The Chartermark is awarded by the government and requires organisations to focus on service delivery and customer satisfaction. Obtaining the Chartermark was an important objective for Thames Valley Housing Association, and chief executive Keith Holloway explained that research and consultation had already been an integral part of the organisation, with many of Thames Valley's service standards being set in conjunction with residents.

Thames Valley used the STATUS survey (the National Housing Federation's standard tenant satisfaction survey) as the main focus for moving towards the Chartermark. The results of the STATUS survey were compared to earlier surveys to analyse trends. Keith explained that Thames Valley was particularly interested in analysing the 'swing' between positive and negative scores, and compared these to the Housing Corporation's national 1999/2000 survey results.

As staff satisfaction is an important consideration, Thames Valley also took part in a syndicated staff satisfaction survey with other London RSL's.

Local Government & Housing Conference 2002 cont...

Following the collation of all this data from the various research exercises, Thames Valley have made a number of changes including the introduction of a new service centre with advanced technology enabling residents to log queries/repair requests on the website, and made improvements to remuneration packages for staff. All this effort was rewarded in February this year, when Thames Valley was awarded the Chartermark.

For further information about any of the papers, or for additional information about ORC International's seminar and conference programme, please contact Abby Wright on 020 7675 1154.

Laria Away Weekend - October 2002

Members of LARIA council and some of its activity groups met in York from Sunday 13th to Monday 14th October for an awayday to consider the future strategic direction of LARIA. A task group will be taking forward some of the ideas that emerged and a report will appear in the next edition of LARIA news. Shown in this picture are: standing left to right, Stephen Hilton, Clive Lloyd, David Karfoot, Gerallt Evans-Hughes, John Hollis, Knud Moller, Dale Hall (facilitator), Philip Randall, Imogen Gray, Bryan Hall, Anne Cunningham, Paul Vittles, Roger Sykes, Robert Cuthill, Tony Todd, John Wicks, seated from left to right, Jack Winchester, Ian Coldicott, Jill Tufnell, Graham Smith, Ann Atkinson, Dawn Roberts and David Allen.

Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI)

By Roger Sykes, LGA and Jill Tufnell, Cambridgeshire County Council

Background

LARCI was established in 1997 to bring together local authorities and the research councils into closer partnership. Over the past 5 years, LARCI has held a national conference and a number of seminars.

LARCI is managed and resourced by senior representatives from the partner organisations - the LGA, the IDeA, LARIA, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Medical Research Council (MRC), Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). In addition Research Councils UK, part of the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade & Industry are a corresponding member.

Local Authority Research Council Initiative (LARCI) cont...

Vision and objectives of LARCI

The vision of LARCI is better informed research and better informed policy

The objectives are to:-

- Promote the value of Research Council funded research to inform and evaluate public policy in local government
- Help local authorities meet their challenges through access to quality research
- Help Research Councils, local authorities and representative organisations to develop strategic partnerships
- Facilitate knowledge exchange between Research Councils and Local Authorities

Future plans

After undertaking a review last year, the LARCI Steering Group has been developing a forward plan of work based on the recommendations of the report. One of the main changes to the way LARCI operates has been to have LARIA as a Steering Group Member (represented by Jill Tufnell from Cambridgeshire), together with Bill Wood from Essex County Council as another local authority representative.

In August 2002, LARCI agreed a Business Plan for 2002-4 framed around the Shared Priorities agreed with Central and Local Government through the LGA and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Shared Priorities are:-

- Raising standards across our schools
- Improving the quality of life of:
- Children, young people and families at risk
- Older people
- Promoting healthier communities and narrowing health inequalities
- Creating safer and stronger communities
- Transforming our local environment
- Meeting local transport needs more effectively
- Promoting the economic vitality of localities

The main activities of the LARCI in the months ahead will be:

- Developing the LARCI network - strengthening links with RCUK; developing links with researchers in Government departments; building links with strategic health authorities and primary care trusts; building links with regional bodies;
- Delivering an effective LARCI website
- Promotional activities - a programme of events on crime; older people; and the local environment; together with a national conference in 2004

Further news on LARCI will be reported regularly in LariaNews in the months ahead.

For further information contact roger.sykes@lga.gov.uk

Local Authority R&I News

Hampshire County Council

Research on Regionalism

Hampshire County Council has won the backing of residents who do not want to see it abolished in favour of regional government. Until the publication in May of the Government's White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", there was little evidence of a groundswell of support for regional governance - at least in the South East. Although over half of 1040 Hampshire residents interviewed by MORI (58%) believed a regional assembly would look after the interests of their area better than central government, notably fewer (45%) supported giving greater powers of government to regions in England.

This dropped to just a quarter (24%) who believed an assembly would look after their interests better than Hampshire County Council, reflecting concerns for example about bureaucracy and regional diversity. Only one in five (21%) would support moves to abolish the Council in favour of an elected regional assembly. These figures are not dissimilar to data MORI collected from a national survey three years ago and it remains to be seen how attitudes change as campaigning gets under way.

Only one of five of Hampshire residents (21%) claimed to know much about proposals for regional assemblies. However, opposition to the abolition of the County Council was higher among those who knew about the proposals (65%) than among those who knew little or nothing at all about them (50%).

Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Ken Thornber, commented: " The research seems to show that on the whole, there is little understanding of what regional government might mean to people in Hampshire and the South East. It shows that while the public would be keen to see powers coming down from the Government to the regions, this must not be at the expense of their county councils"

For more information contact Karen Mann karen.mann@hants.gov.uk.

Kingston Upon Hull City Council

New Research Gives First Impressions Of Life On Changing Hull Estate

A new survey amongst residents of Hull's Preston Road Estate provides the first signs of the impact being made by the £55 million programme being undertaken by the regeneration company, Preston Road New Deal for Communities (NDC).

A summary of the findings of research among 500 households on the East Hull estate has been published in a brochure called Snapshot. The survey covers areas such as the changing population of the estate, security and crime, education, housing, the environment, employment, community and health, comparing the area in 2001 with how life was in 1999, before Preston Road NDC was launched.

Chairman Don Smallwood says: "This Snapshot is of great importance to the monitoring of our regeneration plans. It highlights the areas needing more attention and gives a clear indication of projects that are making a difference. I feel we are on the threshold of starting to deliver the promise of making Preston Road a place where everyone wants to live."

Among the findings, the survey revealed that a third more residents feel safer going out alone at night compared with two years ago. Unemployment has fallen to 18.4%, partly due to Preston Road Works!, the employment and training opportunities arm of Preston Road NDC which had found jobs for more than 30 residents since July 2001. The survey shows just over 75% of residents lack qualifications; however, on a positive note, pupils going on to sixth form or further education rose to nearly 48% in 2001 compared with 29.5% in 1999. The Snapshot also compares examination results in 1999 with 2001.

The survey reveals that the number of community groups increased nearly four-fold and that 91% of residents are on friendly terms with their neighbours. Snapshot highlights new community activities and facilities for senior citizens and local teenagers being provided by Preston Road NDC. Play areas are being built for youngsters, while a new BMX Track and Skateboard Park will be unveiled in April.

Preston Road NDC was launched in May 2000 to tackle economic and social issues on the 6400-population estate, after the area was awarded £55 million under the Government's 'New Deal for Communities' initiative. The regeneration programme, which lasts until 2010, includes creating a multi-million pound village centre. The company employs around 130 staff, of whom just under half are residents.

The research was carried out in the autumn of 2001 independently on behalf of Preston Road NDC. It was the first survey of residents on the Estate since 1999. The exercise will be repeated in two years' time.

For further information please contact: Tony Barker, Marketing and PR Manager, Email: tony.barker@kuhregen.org

Local Authority R&I News cont...

Luton Borough Council

The Research & Intelligence Team at Luton Borough Council is currently working on the following projects:

- Leading the development of the Luton Community Information Observatory - a partnership project aiming to increase the availability of statistical and other information about Luton
- Leading on the corporate BS7666 Land & Property Gazetteer for the Council
- Developing a strategy to disseminate 2001 Census of Population data within the Council
- Undertaking a study into the economic impact of the 2002 Luton Carnival
- Undertaking an Equalities Audit of the Local Labour Market Area with the Council's Equalities Unit as an element in the Generic Equalities Standard
- Undertaking the annual survey of employment at London Luton Airport
- Working with partners on the Luton Health Action Zone to review and update statistical information on the health of the Luton population

The Team produces a monthly Unemployment Bulletin and a Quarterly Economic Bulletin. Along with Bedfordshire County Council, it has also recently published "Population Estimates & Forecasts 2002". The Team also produced the Luton Crime & Disorder Audit 2001/2, published in July by the Safer Luton Partnership.

For further information please contact: Paul R Barton, Team Leader, bartonp@luton.gov.uk

Northumberland Information Network

The Northumberland Information Network was established by the County Council, Northumberland Learning Partnership and Northumberland LSC in September 2001, as a one year pilot project to co-ordinate the collection, analysis and dissemination of information on employment and learning in the County. The project has taken an innovative approach in pooling the resources and expertise of a range of partner agencies to achieve economies of scale and a joined up approach. Significant first year funding for the core team of 4.5 (based in the County Council's Regeneration Division) was kindly provided by One North East's Skills Development Fund and the organisations above, together with Business Link, the Careers Service and the Employment Service.

The continuation and development of the project (including establishing a one year trainee research assistant post) has been secured with the approval of Single Programme Funding, delegated by the RDA to the Northumberland Strategic Partnership, matched by support from the original partners plus in the future the Northumberland Early Years & Childcare Partnership. The Information Network will focus on improving the quality and accessibility of information and research underpinning regeneration policies and initiatives in the County. A website has been launched at: **www.northumberlandinfonet.org.uk** A range of research reports have been published and are all available from the site and efforts are being made to reduce survey fatigue by co-ordinating approaches to, for example, employers.

For more information visit the website or contact: Philip H Hanmer, Project Manager, Northumberland Information Network. PHanmer@northumberland.gov.uk

Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Sandwell Neighbourhood Intelligence Project (SNIP)

The Sandwell Partnership has identified 79 natural geographic neighbourhoods in the Borough, and an initial analysis covering 29 indicators was undertaken during 2000. These were grouped into 6 "domains":-

- access to services
- crime
- economic activity and income
- education
- health
- housing conditions

Funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Sandwell Partnership has recently set up the "SNIP" team to further develop this analysis - the team of 5 are based in the Council's Research Unit. Work has started with the verification of the original analysis, and the development of metadata, to enable us to publish the base data used to create the overall "all domains" index - only neighbourhood rankings have previously been published.

Much of the work of the team will revolve around the aim to build the capacity of partners to collect and analyse neighbourhood level information and to put in place an enduring framework for the future. This will also involve the development of data sharing protocols with the partner organisations, such as the Primary Care Trusts, West Midlands Police, Black Country Learning & Skills Council and the Employment Service.

Further work includes the review of the neighbourhood boundaries, the development and maintenance of a database of operational, statistical and survey data at a neighbourhood level, and liaison with the partners to develop new data sources. There

Local Authority R&I News cont...

will be a rolling programme of regular updates to the neighbourhood analysis, reviewing the indicators included, data capture, and putting IT systems in place within partner organisations to allow the continued production of data in the future.

For more information contact
chris_wheatley@sandwell.gov.uk

South Nottinghamshire

Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs Study across South Notts.

Five local Councils – Ashfield, Broxtowe, Gedling, Nottingham City and Rushcliffe – have joined forces to commission research into the housing and related needs of black and minority ethnic (BME) people living in their areas.

The research will assess the differing housing needs across a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds living within the community. The emphasis is on finding out what problems are faced by these communities in accessing services and support, and what innovative solutions can be developed to improve services. It is hoped the work will lead to future funding for housing projects. The project has been successful in establishing a Steering Group with representatives from all these Councils, as well as representatives from Nottinghamshire County Council, community groups, housing associations, and other interested parties

If any groups want to become involved directly or indirectly with the study, please contact:-

Chris Read, Nottingham City Council,
Telephone: 0115 915 7389
Email: chris.read@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Richard Buckwell, Ashfield District Council,
Telephone: 01623 457 264
Email: r.buckwell@ashfield-dc.gov.uk

Alison Timmins, Rushcliffe Borough Council,
Telephone 0115 914 8510
Email: atimmins@rushcliffe.gov.uk

An information pack is available.

LARIA People

Starting in this issue we are providing pen portraits of those people who are on the LARIA Council or who are involved in the Activity Groups, so that readers can put faces to the names that they may frequently come across. The series starts with details about the LARIA Treasurer, John Hollis and the Secretary, David Karfoot.

John Hollis

John started working life in 1968 with the Greater London Council Intelligence Unit doing general statistical analysis before specialising in demography. In 1969 he became a Ford Foundation Trainee in Demography at the University of California, Berkeley. Apart from gaining post-graduate qualifications he also participated in demographic research for the US government on water resource implications of demographic growth. He returned to the UK - and the GLC - in 1973 and took over responsibility for demographic projections, working on the Greater London Development Plan and on strategic planning in the South East.

After GLC abolition John was transferred to the London Residuary Body where he was involved in persuading the London boroughs to set up the London Research Centre in April 1987. At LRC John worked in a number of non-demographic areas including transport modelling and road accident analysis while retaining demographic interests, including finding SASPAC a home in 1988 and membership of the NLGSLC (now CLIP) Census Subgroup. Since April 2000 John has been Demographic Consultant at the Greater London Authority and is responsible for the demographic forecasts being used in the London Plan and the Mayor's other strategies.

John first got involved with LARIA via the GLC around 1980 and has been the Chair and is now the Treasurer. He is the LA lead of the CLIP Census Subgroup and has been a member of the Council of the British Society for Population Studies and the Social Statistics Section of the Royal Statistical Society.

LARIA People cont...

David Karfoot

After a childhood spent in Ulverston on the edge of the Lake District, David moved on to five happy years at Sheffield University studying first civil engineering and then town planning. His first job was with Northamptonshire County Council helping to prepare the Structure Plan, which was followed by a similar stint at North Yorkshire County Council. Then came eleven years in Dumfries, during which time he added responsibility for statistical information to his town planning duties. He became involved in the work of the Scottish Statistical Liaison Committee and it is from that time that his involvement with things R&I really started.

In 1990 he took up his current appointment as Group Leader (Research and Intelligence) with Hampshire County Planning Department. The R&I Group, as currently constituted, concentrates on demographic, economic and land use information together with IT, GIS, mapping and specialist library services. More recently, David has taken on an additional management role aimed at achieving sustainable development objectives and a current research interest is therefore the collection of meaningful environmental performance information.

David joined the then LARIA Steering Group shortly after moving to Hampshire and took over as Secretary when Steve Little retired a few years later. In addition to his role with LARIA, David is the local authority side lead officer for the Planning Information Liaison Group, a CLIP sub-group.

Rachel Cossey

Congratulations to Rachel Cossey, the LariaNews editor.
She gave birth to Daniel Andrew Cossey on Monday 29th July.

The Market Research Group (MRG)

Kat Watters has worked in the research industry for two years, and has recently joined MRG as a Senior Research Executive. In the past she has worked in the areas of tourism and heritage, but now works as part of MRG's Local Government division. This includes projects relating to Best Value, Citizens' Panels and ad hoc research projects conducted on behalf of MRG's clients. She is a member of the MRS, and is now studying for her Advanced Certificate and Diploma qualifications.

LARIA People cont...

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Corporate Policy Unit

Rotherham MBC's Corporate Policy Unit is relatively new, and the last six months has seen the appointment of three new officers. Appointment of two more over the next few months will bring the team up to full strength.

Located within the new Policy and Partnerships Service of the Council, the Policy Team has responsibility for co-ordinating policy development and analysis, research and consultation activity across the Council and also supports the work of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Dawn Roberts is the Policy Co-ordinator (and also Vice Chair of Laria). Dawn is involved in a wide variety of work largely in relation to the development of the Borough's Community Strategy, Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and research and consultation activity. Supporting this, and working with Dawn, are four Policy Officers, a Consultation Co-ordinator and a Neighbourhood Statistics Co-ordinator.

The four Policy Officers each have a particular area of expertise:

Andrew Towlerton has the lead on national and regional policy, helping to shape the Council's approach to key areas of national and regional policy. He is also involved in a number of areas of policy development within Rotherham - particularly in relation to the development of targets within the Community Strategy and Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy, and the development of Local Public Service Agreements.

Steve Eling is responsible for providing a comprehensive briefing service and keeping track of government policy analysis. As well as co-ordinating regular policy briefings, Steve is currently working with officers across the Council on the development of a corporate policy framework, demonstrating the linkages between new powers and duties as part of the modernisation of local government.

Rebecca Slack leads on social inclusion policy. In the past, Rebecca has led work on the development of a domestic violence policy for the Council and on a review of grant funding to voluntary and community groups.

Sarah Tyler leads on environment and sustainability issues and is currently working with officers across the Council to implement sustainability into working practice, and is reviewing the Council's environment policy. Sarah was formerly a Local Agenda 21 Officer, and joined us on a permanent basis in May 2002.

Dominic Stankiewicz is the newly appointed Neighbourhood Statistics Co-ordinator. On secondment from his research post in the Council's Economic and Development Services, Dominic's work supports the priorities of the Local Strategic Partnership and involves the identification, collation and dissemination of socio-economic data at sub-district level. This work is referred to in the article on page 4.

Emma Heyes has recently joined the team from Barnsley MBC, and has responsibility for the co-ordination of consultation across the Council. As well as managing the Borough's Citizens' Panel, 'Rotherham Reachout', Emma's role involves promoting good practice in consultation, providing consultation training, and co-ordinating the production of the Council's Annual Consultation Plan.

Behind Dawn Roberts reading from left to right are Sarah Tyler, Emma Heyes, Andrew Towlerton and Steve Eling

The team is looking forward to the appointment of two more team members - one to lead on research analysis and the 2001 Census, and another to provide research support for the Neighbourhood Statistics work.

Contact: Dawn Roberts, Policy Co-ordinator, Rotherham MBC, 01709 822785, dawn.roberts@rotherham.gov.uk

LARIA People cont...

Fife Council

Chris Mitchell has taken over as the Team Leader for Research at Fife Council. He can be contacted on Chris.Mitchell@fife.gov.uk.

Aberdeen City Council

Responsibility for research in Aberdeen City Council now lies in the section headed by **Stan Smith** (Head of Social Services Policy), Community Services, email address ssmith@socialwork.aberdeen.net.uk.

MVA

Ann-Marie Barker is an experienced researcher who has recently joined MVA from SPSS. Her particular skills are in the field of customer satisfaction, and she has experience in questionnaire design, organising and conducting surveys and the analysis and presentation of results. Recently she has contributed to the analysis of a pilot survey to assess the social impact of London congestion charging on households.

Rosie Townend has joined MVA as a sociology graduate from the University of Liverpool. She has skills in using SPSS and has studied qualitative and quantitative research. She is currently analysing qualitative data as part of a consultation project on the Fire Service for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

ORC International

Linda Caldwell, Account Manager

Linda Caldwell has joined the Local Government and Housing Research Team as an Account Manager. Given Linda's experience as a buyer of research, having her on the team will add a valuable perspective in terms of serving and addressing the needs of local authorities.

She comes to us from Fylde Borough Council where she worked as Housing Development and Liaison Officer. Before Fylde, Linda also worked at Wyre Borough Council and Wyre Housing Association. Linda has 10 years' experience working with local authorities and housing associations in a diverse number of capacities; in policy, strategy, Best Value, and project management.

Hannah Breitschadel, Associate Director

Hannah Breitschadel has joined ORC International as an Associate Director, specialising in research for Registered Social Landlords and local authorities. Hannah is responsible for the design of housing and regeneration projects, in addition to account management, business development, and the provision of consultancy services.

Prior to joining ORC, Hannah worked as Head of Community Partnerships for Clear Springs Management Ltd. Previously Hannah has worked for Thames Valley Housing and the Riverside Group in a variety of roles which have included housing management, call centre development, regeneration and resident consultation.

News from Elsewhere

The Health Voice Network – A Resource for Researchers

The Health Voice Network is a new self-help network funded by the Department of Health and run independently by the UK Health for All Networks. Launched in March 2002, the Network is open to anyone who wants to help people to have more of a say in planning and improving services that affect their health. Over 500 NHS and Local Authority staff, community groups and individual members of the public are using the Network to explore ways of coming together to put the health back into health services.

The key idea behind the Network is that communication between a wide range of people can benefit all. Just knowing that you are not on your own can give you the encouragement you need to go on. But people can also benefit from sharing experiences and ideas, and the Network enables members to get in touch with other staff, service users and support organisations quickly and easily. The Network is free, and open to anyone.

Everyone has something they can share. It might be information about methods, campaigns or initiatives, or about training or funding resources. Or it might be an idea, or a request for advice – asking questions can be just as important as giving answers. The Network has a flexible range of facilities to enable sharing between members. They can post up information on the Network's website **www.healthvoice-uk.net**, search for others with similar interests, participate in discussions on a variety of topics, and input into government policy and national decisions. Members who are not on the internet can access all of the facilities by phone or by post, and everyone receives a newsletter each month with details of what's going on across the country – events, campaigns, useful books and articles, tips and hints.

During our first year we want to build up the Network so that it has a large and active membership and is widely respected. We also want to gather and communicate people's stories of their experiences of health and health services, and of trying to improve them. Such stories can help organisations to understand how they can better include people in decision-making. They can also encourage and support people to go on trying, through finding out about and making contact with others in similar situations, or simply through getting ideas for new ways of influencing. We are currently commissioning projects to develop the Network further.

Of course, the Network can't do everything on its own. We want to work in partnership with others who also aim to improve the health of communities, through supporting people to play active roles in planning and implementing action. We have established a "Communities for Health" website portal **www.communitiesforhealth.net**, that provides easy access to our partners' websites, benefiting users, partners and ourselves! If you would like your website to be included in Communities for Health, then contact us – it's free, and easy to arrange.

The Network might be useful to researchers in a number of ways. For example:-

- Helping to identify and supply "grey" literature on patient and public involvement in health
- Providing potential respondents for surveys, or participants for focus groups - either members themselves, or their contacts
- As a case study for research into networks and online communities
- As an audience for research findings
- Finally, remembering that researchers are people too, by joining the Network you could help yourself and others to influence health policy and services!

For more information contact Alan Boyd, Co-ordinator, Health Voice Network: info@healthvoice-uk.net

Office for National Statistics

Is there more data out there?

Neighbourhood Statistics' Data Development team has established an impressive list of relevant datasets, some of which are already online and others which are currently being prepared for inclusion on the site.

Many people have told us of the potential to use previously unavailable or unknown data to further extend and improve the content of the Neighbourhood Statistics Service. It is likely to be a massive task, so we have retained Farnham-based consultants Hedra, part of the Cathedral Group, to carry out investigative work. Hedra has great experience of working within central government, including ONS and the Audit Commission, and with local authorities.

The first phase of Hedra's activity is to assess the extent of existing data not yet included in our current activity, and the potential for its use in NeSS. We have no intention of duplicating existing research but to supplement it, so close liaison with potential data suppliers is essential. Hedra is due to present its final report at the end of October.

Local authorities are the obvious source of localised data, but this project will take a much broader view and examine other possible suppliers, including health, police, charity and commercial sources. Some may express concerns over data confidentiality and data sharing, resource implications and technical compatibility issues. ONS is currently developing a series of protocols which will be agreed across government to give us the ability as well as the funding to deal with such issues. We already have the determination; we are convinced that making new, comparable data available alongside that from other sources will have very real benefits for everyone involved.

News from Elsewhere Cont...

The team is currently looking for the unknown, thus the pattern of the investigation is still being developed. I am well aware that in recent weeks Neighbourhood Statistics has asked a lot of its supplier community, but I do hope you will be able to find the time to be involved in this exciting, if challenging, opportunity to unlock new data – an important part of the Neighbourhood Statistics mission.

Neil Lander-Brinkley, NeSS Data Development Programme Manager Please contact us on tricia.parsons@ons.gov.uk

New look for interactive Neighbourhood Statistics

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service (NeSS), national flagship data provider for local areas, has a new look. Its website now uses a live Geographical Information System to support the existing rich data from Government and other sources. The state-of-the-art mapping system provides new search facilities which for the first time will allow users to search areas which cross the boundaries of wards and/or local authorities in one enquiry.

Users can now recognise in which ward a property or street is located; find areas of interest by place name; select areas and generate tables cutting across national and local authority boundaries; select datasets more easily; and arrange table dimensions flexibly in the way that best suits their needs.

In the second quarter of 2003, further development of the NeSS site will mean it becomes the main repository for public use of the results for small areas from the 2001 Census. The first national statistics from the 2001 Census are due to be published on it in late summer with the main bank of key local authority statistics becoming available at the end of the year. This development of NeSS moves away from the 'list' method of searching which is becoming cumbersome as the amount of information in this databank continues to grow.

Using the GIS method users can locate areas at postcode, town or city, ward or local authority levels and then select them by clicking on the map. They can then zoom in to see how particular roads and properties relate to the 1998 ward boundaries, the current reference geography used for NeSS. For those who prefer to use a list, this way of selection will still be available. But whichever method the user chooses, the 'front page' and tables will be easier to use and more interactive.

The Neighbourhood Statistics web pages can be found from the home page of the National Statistics website: www.statistics.gov.uk or from this direct link: www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/home.asp

For more information contact Rob Betts, Programme Support Officer, ONS - Regional and Local Statistics, Neighbourhood Statistics Branch, Phone: 020 7533 (3042) 6062, email: Robert.Betts@ons.gov.uk

First and Final Releases of Census Results

The first results from the 2001 Census were published on Monday 30th September 2002. These specify the population on Census Day (29th April 2001) by age and sex, nationally and for each local authority in England and Wales. They were followed by the mid-2001 population estimates which were released on October 10th 2002. February 13th 2003 is the release date for the next census results - Key Statistics for Local Authorities.

This news, along with other articles relating to the 2001 Census, is available in Census News http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/census_news.asp

Disability Rights Commission in Scotland

Scottish Disability Awareness Survey 2002

The Disability Rights Commission in Scotland have just published their 2002 annual awareness survey. The survey is of 1000 people representative of the population of Scotland and undertaken by Market Research UK. The survey covers awareness of, and opinions on, disabled people's rights. Among the main findings were:-

- awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act up from 37% in 2001 to 51% in 2002
- 85% of respondents are aware it is illegal to discriminate against disabled people because of their disability
- over half the respondents think disabled people are not treated fairly by society.

Copies of the report are available from the DRC website at www.drc-gb.org or from the DRC Helpline on 08457 622633, email enquiry@drc-gb.org.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Promoting Change Through Research: The Impact of Research in Local Government Janie Percy-Smith with Tom Burden, Alison Darlow, Lynne Dowson, Murray Hawtin and Stella Ladi

This report has been recently published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The report examines the impact of research on local government,

News from Elsewhere Cont...

with a view to reconsidering how research is utilised and the impact it has on policy makers and practitioners. It begins with an examination of the way in which the research function within local authorities is structured and organised, and how research is understood in the local government context. It then examines the means by which officers and members gain access to both in-house research and external sources, and how key research findings are disseminated throughout the authority. The role of research in encouraging policy and practice change is analysed, together with the processes through which this takes place and the factors encouraging or inhibiting research utilisation.

The report is available for £14.95 (plus £2 p&p) from York Publishing Services, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ (tel: 01904 430033). Free summaries of JRF reports can be obtained from the JRF website www.jrf.org.uk

The report will be reviewed in the next edition of LARIA News.

Noticeboard

LARIA EVENTS

Ready Steady CENSUS: Preparing for the 2001 Census Data

A joint LARIA/LGA Seminar

Tuesday 26 November 2002, Manchester Town Hall, Manchester

What Is It All About?

The first 2001 Census output appeared at the end of September with the bulk of the output due between February and autumn 2003. This day event aims to raise awareness of the issues surrounding handling census statistics and the challenges and opportunities that are presented by the new ways in which the output will be organised, presented and delivered. Anybody who expects to handle large volumes of census statistics, particularly those with responsibilities for distribution, analysis and interpretation within their authority, will benefit from their attendance.

Programme

9.30	Registration and coffee
10.00	Welcome And Introduction From The Chair: Roger Sykes (Local Government Association)
10.15	The Data: Speaker from Office for National Statistics
11.00	Technical Issues: Eileen Howes (Greater London Authority)
11.45	Coffee/Tea
12.05	Organisation within a Local Authority: Graham Gardner (Nottingham City Council)
12.50	Lunch
13.45	Dissemination and Analysis: Wendy Pontin (Norfolk County Council)
14.30	Special Datasets: Origin-Destination and Samples of Anonymised Records: Ludi Simpson (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council)
15.15	Tea/Coffee
15.35	Panel Discussion/Questions & Answers
16.15	Close

Noticeboard cont...

Cost: **£135 per delegate (including lunch). £115 for Corporate Members of LARIA**

Venue: **The seminar will be held at Manchester Town Hall in the centre of Manchester.**

Booking forms are available from Graham Smith, LARIA Administrator.

Tel: 01642 316576 lariaoffice@aol.com

This seminar is a repeat of the one due to be held at the Local Government Association offices in London on 12 November. At the time of going to print, all places were taken at the London seminar. However, late cancellations do occur, so please contact Graham Smith (details above) to enquire as to whether any places are available at the London event.

LARIA Annual Conference 2003

Next year's LARIA Annual Conference will be held at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh on 28-30 April 2003. Details will be sent to all LARIA members in December/January and will also be posted on the LARIA website **www.laria.gov.uk**

OTHER EVENTS

Market Research Society Annual Conference

The Market Research Society's Annual Conference "Research 2003" will be held on 19-21 March 2003 at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham. For further information, please contact Catherine Bostock or Lucy White at Camargue on 020 7636 7366.

Association for Qualitative Research (AQR) Annual Conference

AQR's "Trends Day", the Annual Conference of AQR, is due to take place on 29 November 2002 at One Whitehall Place, The Royal Horseguards Hotel, London. For further information, please contact Catherine Bostock or Lucy White at Camargue on 020 7636 7366 or refer to the AQR website **www.aqr.org.uk**

Caption Competition

The last newsletter carried this photograph and readers were asked to suggest witty captions.

The editorial group judged the following to be the winning entry:-

"And this next slide shows that the LGA's main objective is to bring all local authorities together" Paul Vittles, RBA Research.

This edition's caption competition shows Debbie Wilson (left), a member of the LARIA News editorial group, enjoying one of her pastimes (Amateur Dramatics!). Your suggestions should be emailed to the LARIA Administrator (see below) by 22 November 2002. The winning captions will be printed in the next edition.

If you have any suggestions for future caption competitions, please post them to Graham Smith, Laria Administrator at the address on the back page or email them to lariaoffice@aol.com

Guide to Contributors

The newsletter editorial group positively encourages and welcomes all relevant contributions - articles, news items, reports about the work of Research and Intelligence units and the work of other organisations/agencies involved in research and policy analysis activities. Details of relevant courses, conferences and services will also be published.

The aim is to make the newsletter of interest and benefit to as wide a range of research practitioners as possible, from those more involved in complex statistical analysis to those more involved in social qualitative research. It is important, therefore, that all contributions are as user-friendly and jargon-free as possible. Explanation of any acronyms used is particularly important. All researchers will then be able to understand and appreciate the work being undertaken in different research fields.

We also seek to make the newsletter visually appealing by incorporating cartoons, graphics, pictures, etc. into the text. So please consider these when submitting your contribution.

From time to time, we receive articles that are longer, more detailed or more academic than is appropriate for a publication that is essentially a newsletter. We are pleased to receive such articles as long as their content is relevant to the aims of LARIA. However, we shall publish only an abstract of them in LARIA News with a link to the full article on the LARIA Website. As a guideline, for publication in the newsletter, news items will generally be around 300 words and feature articles will be around 1000 words. Longer ones will sometimes be published in the newsletter but more usually on the Website as described above.

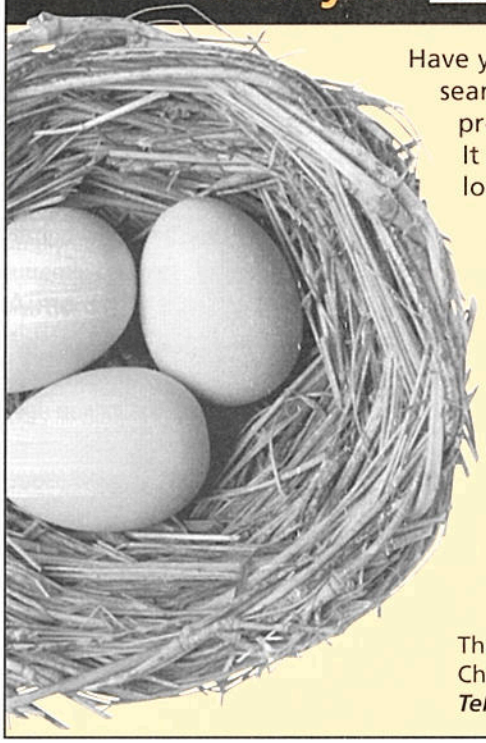
Next Issue

February 2003

Copy should be sent or emailed in word format to the LARIA Administrator (address on back page) to arrive by 8 December 2002.

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.

Now you can put all your eggs in one basket...



Have you ever stopped to consider how much time you and your staff spend searching for companies to cater for your design, print, exhibition and promotional requirements?
It can be a lengthy process and as you know in business lost time means lost money.

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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 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 autonomous group affiliated to LARIA. It represents the interests and concerns of information specialists within local government. The group organises small events and visits, publishes a quarterly Newsletter and undertakes any other activities designed to raise awareness of the potential and actual benefits of the work of information specialists within local government.

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LARIA wishes to encourage participation in its Steering Group, its events and its other activities. It aims to remove barriers to participation associated with race, gender, disability and sexuality. It expects delegates and contributors to help in achieving this aim.