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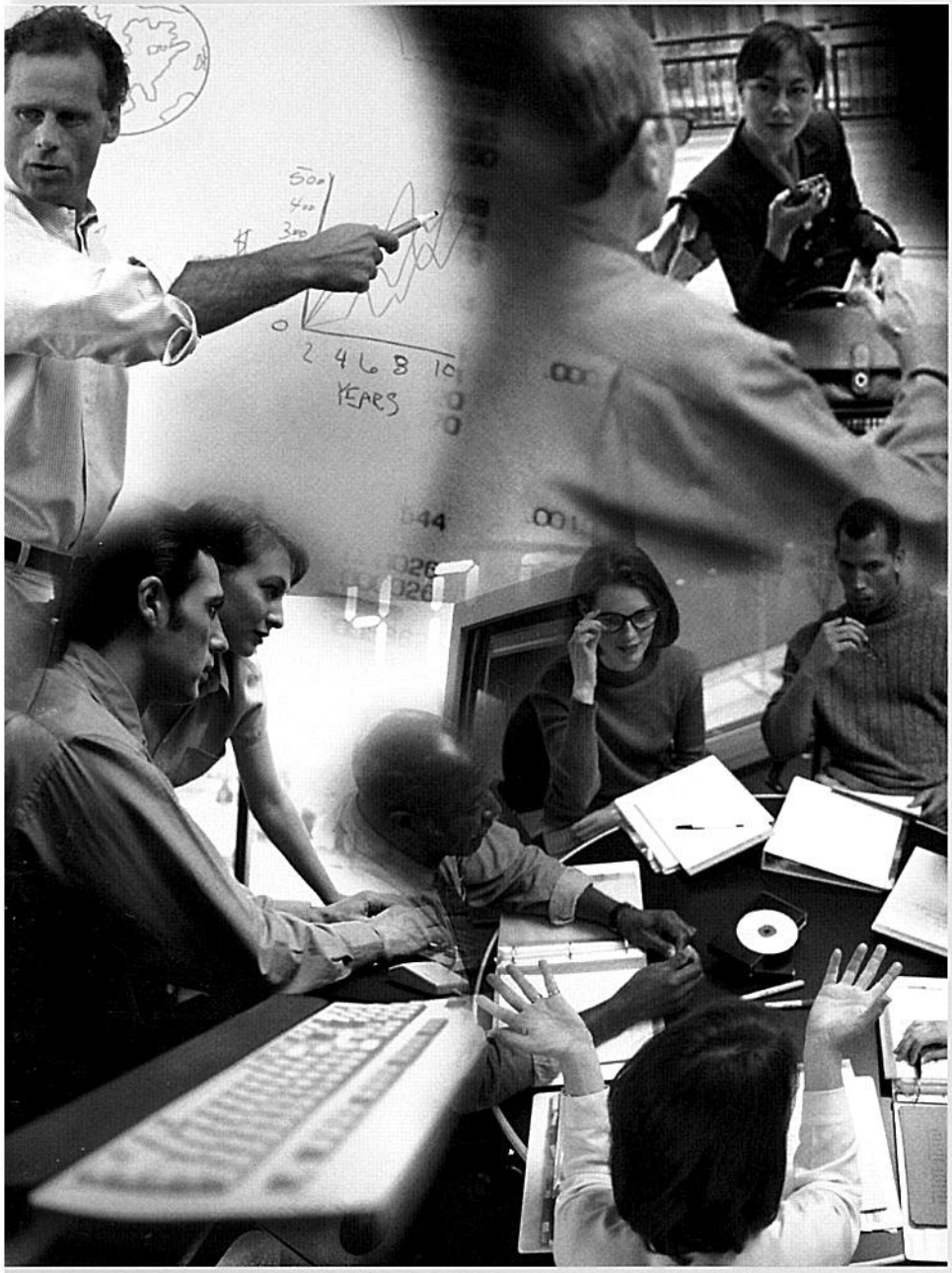
LariaNews



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

Inside this issue ▶▶▶▶ **Research in Staffordshire, LARIA Conference 2004, Best Value**

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

From the Chair – David Karfoot

Men in Suits

At a LARIA event held in York about a decade ago the LARIA Steering Committee (as it then was) was criticised for being dominated by middle-aged men in grey suits – or was it grey men in middle-aged suits? Anyway, hard as it was for the colourless crew to accept such a description, the fact was that there was a degree of truth in the observation proffered. As a result conscious steps were taken at that time to try to increase the diversity of the Steering Group. These met with some success and the Steering Group benefited considerably from an influx of new members – variously younger, female and from the ethnic minorities.

However, time passes. We find ourselves again in an era where the average age of those playing the biggest part in keeping the LARIA show on the road is creeping ever upwards. This is fine for the present. It means that LARIA can count on the services of a range of people who have extensive experience and know what's what. Collectively their wealth of know-how is second to none and their depth of knowledge a valuable resource.

So what's the problem? Well, like any organisation, LARIA needs a continual inflow of new talent, enthusiasm and energy if it is to remain in good health. Otherwise it could well find itself with something of a vacuum at its heart in a year or two's time. So please don't be backward in coming forward if you think you could make a contribution to LARIA's operations.

There are at least two avenues open to those wishing to become more involved with running LARIA. Firstly any member or associate member is welcome to join one (or more!) of our Activity Groups. These are LARIA's powerhouses which keep the organisation energised. There are Activity Groups for member development; marketing and promotion; events; and publishing, while in Scotland there is the LARIA in Scotland steering group. To get involved, all that is necessary is to get in touch with the respective chair. Details of who the various chairs are may be found on the back page.

Secondly members may become involved through participation in the AGM (which will be held during the annual conference at Oxford) and more directly by standing for membership of LARIA's governing body, the Council.

There will be elections (if necessary) during the AGM.

Defining Research

What is research? This is an almost impossible question to answer when you start thinking about things in detail. It came to the fore most recently when the work to produce Statutory Requirements for Research (the joint LGA and LARIA publication) was being undertaken. After all, you can't map the statutory requirements on local government to carry out research if you don't know what you are looking for.

It is not my intention, however, to get bogged down in linguistic analysis just now (you will be relieved to hear). Rather I wish to come at this from a different angle. I have become increasingly aware over recent years that some people (not all, granted) are starting to refer to research in a local government context as if it starts and stops with market research. In my view this is a dangerous development as it diminishes all the other valuable work researchers do in local authorities.

This is not to say that market research is not important. In fact, before the advent of Best Value, it is true to say that the potential contribution of market research was probably under-appreciated by most councils. Happily that is largely no longer the case, due in part to the statutory requirement to undertake surveys for Best Value Performance Indicators. The increasing numbers of citizens' panels being established shows that consultation activity now has a very much higher profile in local government than it did a while ago.

If research is seen as consisting of nothing more than carrying out public attitude surveys, though, other areas of concern to many LARIA members are likely to become neglected. That LARIA members themselves appreciate that research has other dimensions is evidenced, for example, by the high level of attendance at the current series of LARIA seminars about the Census. When submitting bids,

From the Chair – David Karfoot cont...

harder information than data on public attitudes is needed to make the case. When planning new facilities, accurate demographics are necessary.

So what am I asking for? I suppose what I want to see is a sense of balance and a recognition that all types of research are important. So please don't imply (not that you would, of course) that market research is now the only legitimate type of research work, by referring all the time to your council's market research activity as its research activity.

What is your take on this issue? Am I right to be concerned, or am I just making a mountain out of a molehill? If you have a view please write to the editor.

The Research Unit at Staffordshire County Council

By Ada Wells

Introduction

Staffordshire County Council is one of the largest Shire Counties in England and serves a population of around 820,000 people. Located to the north of the West Midlands Conurbation, it has a diverse range of towns and villages, including former coalfield communities, towns still reliant on their traditional manufacturing base, commuter settlements, market towns and villages, all set within attractive countryside. The cessation of coal mining and decline in employment in manufacturing industries have had a marked effect on some of our urban areas, while problems in agriculture, and other rural industries, have caused problems for our market towns and villages. Regeneration and social inclusion is therefore at the forefront of the work of the County Council.

The Research Unit's background has been in strategic planning, but while continuing to make an important contribution to this work, its remit has widened so that the majority of its work now relates to economic regeneration and to supporting the wider corporate policy agenda of the County Council. As such, partnership working is a major component of the Unit's work.

Outlined below is an overview of current and recent work of the Research Unit. Further details can be found on the Staffordshire County Council Website at **www.staffordshire.gov.uk/research**.

Strategic Planning Work

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Bill currently going through Parliament will change the role of County Councils and therefore the contribution of the Research Unit to strategic planning work. However, it is clear that the skills and knowledge of staff involved in this area of work are still essential. Staffordshire County Council provides the policy lead for monitoring Regional Planning Guidance, working in conjunction with other local authority staff from all across the West Midlands Region to support the Regional Planning Body. As such, staff in the Unit work on a range of regional planning studies, including a Regional Urban Capacity Study for housing, an assessment of the potential for developing a regional GIS system and the Annual Monitoring Report for Regional Planning Guidance. E-mail and increased capacity of IT systems now make it possible for 'virtual teams' of staff, who only meet infrequently, to work co-operatively on complex projects.

Staff in the Unit continue to support sub-regional planning work on behalf of the Staffordshire Planning Forum. In particular, a range of land use monitoring studies are compiled and published annually, from information largely provided by the District Councils, and are used locally to support decisions on service provision, as well as being passed to the Regional Planning Body to support regional work.

Economic Regeneration

The Research Unit supports a range of economic partnerships in policy formulation and monitoring work, in particular the Southern Staffordshire Partnership, the Rural Economic Forum and the Staffordshire Economic Development Officers' Group, as well as undertaking research work on behalf of the County Council's Economic

The Research Unit at Staffordshire County Council cont...

Regeneration Unit. As well as one-off publications for these partnerships, regular bulletins are published on labour market trends, together with economic reviews of the County. Support is also given for neighbourhood renewal with the Unit providing the baseline appraisal and ongoing monitoring for the two Neighbourhood Management Initiative projects in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Burton-on-Trent. Research work is undertaken in support of securing eligibility for external funding, as well as to support specific bids. Recently a submission was made to the House of Commons Select Committee on the regeneration of coalfield communities.

Social Inclusion
One of the key priorities in the County Council's corporate strategy is to promote social inclusion and equality of access to services for everyone. One of the main projects of the Research Unit over the past year has been the production of a report on social exclusion in Staffordshire, which highlights the various dimensions of social exclusion in different parts of the County and how these compare with national and regional situations. A companion volume on Quality of Life is currently being produced.

While the Research Unit has traditionally been able to marshal a great deal of evidence with which to identify different needs across Staffordshire, the Unit has not had a similar wealth of information available on how service provision and take-up of services in different parts of the County relates to the identified levels of need. The Unit is currently working on an innovative project, on behalf of the whole of the County Council, to provide a system for officers and councillors to help them to assess whether there are any gaps in their service provision, whether sufficient provision is being made in all parts of the County and whether additional efforts are required to encourage take-up of services by different groups in the population. The project cuts across all services so that it will be possible to investigate whether any specific area or particular groups of people consistently lose out in being able to access County Council services. We are currently seeking external funding support for this work, so if anyone knows of a particular programme that could help us, we would be pleased to hear about it.

Demographic and Social Information
The Research Unit provides a demographic service to the whole of the County Council and through the partnerships with which we are involved, to many outside organisations as well.

The Unit keeps abreast of Government pronouncements and statistics and the effect which these can have, for example, on the Rate Support Grant. Regular reports are produced on small area population estimates and population projections, including the implications for County Council services. The Unit has co-ordinated the receipt of the 2001 Census of Population and SASPAC software on behalf of the authority and has provided training for relevant members of staff. Standard publications such as Census profiles for wards, towns and parishes have been made available. We are eagerly awaiting the Special Workplace and Migration Statistics which are an important component of our strategic planning and economic regeneration work.

Staff in the Unit were responsible for the County Council's submission to the Boundary Committee on proposed changes to electoral divisions.

Survey Work
The Research Unit is able to undertake in-house, small scale survey work such as customer satisfaction surveys, including regular surveys of occupiers of County Council managed workspace and tourism surveys. Larger surveys are, however, contracted out, due to a shortage of staff resources. The Research Unit, for example, is responsible for the management of the ODPM Best Value General User Satisfaction Survey for Staffordshire, the contract for which has been let this year to MORI.

Information Management
All of the work of the Research Unit is underpinned by the management of a vast amount of information, including digital aerial photography and land use information; the Census of Population and Annual Business Inquiry; databases on economic competitiveness; the range of neighbourhood statistics produced by ONS;

The Research Unit at Staffordshire County Council cont...

demographic and social information; and more recently, information on service provision and the take-up of services. All of this information is 'GIS-enabled' so that we are able to 'add value' through statistical analysis at a detailed geographical level.

Contact Details: If you are interested to receive further information on any of the work which is undertaken in the Research Unit at Staffordshire County Council, please contact Ada Wells on 01785 277350 or E-mail ada.wells@staffordshire.gov.uk.

Recent Publications

- Staffordshire Economic Review 2002. Published October 2003
  http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/live/pdf/srin/Economic/Economic%20Review%202002.pdf

- Rural Matters –Staffordshire: State of the Rural Economy. Published April 2003
  http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/live/pdf/srin/economic/ruraleconomy2003.pdf

- Social Exclusion in Staffordshire. Published August 2003 – Available from Jonathan Vining, Tel. 01785 277353
  http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/socialexclusion

- Labour Market Trends (Updated Monthly)
  Latest issue October 2003 **http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/live/welcome.asp?id=1452#labour**

- 2001 Census Information
  http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/2001census

  - 2001 Key Statistics for Local Authorities in Staffordshire. Published May 2003
    http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/live/pdf/srin/census2001/keystatisticsmay2003.pdf

  - 2001 Census Profiles (available for various geographical levels)
    http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/live/welcome.asp?id=3572

- Evidence to Coalfields Community Inquiry – Urban Affairs Sub Committee of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning Local Government and the Regions Committee.
  Published September 2003.
  http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmodpm/1169/1169we41.htm

Learning from our Customers - Research at the DfES

In the first of a series of articles looking at the research activity of Government departments, Debbie Wilson explains how research supports the Department for Education and Skills.

The Department for Education and Skills employs over 130 researchers, economists and statisticians in Sheffield and London, and currently has over 200 projects under way. With an annual budget of over £9 million we are developing a significant evidence-base for education policies.

Research helps us to understand who our customers are, what the problems facing them are, and what the impact of our policies is. The projects that we're involved in cover all aspects of education from pre-school provision and primary and secondary schools, to higher education and lifelong learning.

To give a flavour of the work we do, we've recently commissioned work in the following areas:

- **Early years** – we are funding a major study of the impact of early years provision – the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study. This is one of the largest ever longitudinal studies into the effects of pre-school education on children's development. It started in 1996 when children were aged 3, and will continue until 2008, to allow us to track developmental progress through Key Stage 2 and beyond.

- **The teacher workforce** – support staff and the teacher workforce are key issues. Work is under way on the factors which lead to variations in teacher effectiveness and the deployment and impact of support staff in schools. This will look at the impact of how teachers spend their time, teacher workload and pupil outcomes.

- **Truancy and absence** – there are projects looking at how best to influence parents in their attitudes to attendance, best practice in tacking disengagement, and re-integrating children who have been absent.

- **Young people** – what are the causes and crucial stages leading to young people dropping out of schooling at age 16? We have made a major investment in a longitudinal study of young people, which will track transitions from their time in compulsory education, from age 14 to their early 20s.

- **International comparisons** – one of the best ways of learning is to compare our education system with those in other countries, and we have contributed to major international comparative studies such as the PISA study (the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment), Progress in Internal Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Trends in International Maths and Science (TIMSS)

Of course, the Department is not the only organisation commissioning education-related research, so we also work with other organisations to ensure we make the best use of their research, and where possible influence the work they do.

One of the ways we're learning from existing research is our support of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information (EPPI) Centre. This undertakes systematic reviews of research on a range of educational issues so that we can distil the key messages about 'what works'.

The Department was also instrumental in setting up the National Educational Research Forum (NERF). The forum was set up to provide a strategic direction for educational research, and a sub-group of this is the Funders' Forum, which coordinates the efforts of the major funding organisations.

So, what issues are we looking at for the next few years? We are currently setting our priorities for research through discussions with Ministers and policy officers, together with discussions with academics and external organisations (we recently held a seminar to look at our priorities with the Local Government Association). There are no firm plans yet, but quite a few 'hot issues':-

- Responsibility for children and families has recently transferred to the DfES from the Department of Health, and there is likely to be an extensive programme of research in this area.

- In schools, the issue of assessment is always high on the agenda. An interesting area is also

Learning from our Customers - Research at the DfES cont...

emerging trends from psychology and neuroscience on how we think and learn and implications of this for teaching.

- There may be a need for more research into the curriculum choices young people make, and for more information on adult basic skills, particularly literacy and numeracy.

- In the higher education area there is likely to be a programme of work to evaluate the impact of policies in the recent White Paper.

With such a variety of information available where can you get hold of our research? All DfES research is published on our website - **http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research**.

Full reports and summaries can be downloaded free of charge.

For studies published in research journals there is a website specifically for summaries targeted at teachers, LEA staff, parents and governors – 'The Research Informed Practice Site' (TRIPS). This is available on **http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research**.

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Best Value Surveys – Members' Experiences

Rachel Cossey, Manchester City Council

In the previous edition of LariaNews, we invited you to write in with your experiences and opinions of the Best Value Surveys which have been taking place over recent months. The LARIA Publishing Group also emailed English local authorities asking for their comments on the surveys.

Here are some of the comments received so far – without attributing them to any individual or council.

Support and Guidance

First impressions of the exercise were inevitably heavily influenced by the quality of the printed guidance, website and support provided. Opinions on this were divided. Some were very positive:-

"Website and support from MORI and ODPM was very good. They were quick to respond to any queries."

"We feel the ODPM website has been of great benefit, enabling us to send the templates to Chief Officers and Members at an early planning stage of the survey. The website also contained information on survey requirements, timing of fieldwork, submission of data, how to calculate the BV etc, which benefited all."

Others were less glowing, particularly where the guidance document was concerned:-

"The tools/templates guidance is okay, but could definitely be clearer and better laid out."

"Guidance needs to be clearer as to what is a requirement and what is desirable – for example, we were worried that it was a requirement that we achieve a 50% response rate.

"We felt that the full guidance document was poorly structured. Many of the points across the five surveys were duplicated in each section, and it would have been easier to comprehend and use for reference if there could be a body of guidance applicable to all, then additions to this shown for each survey in separate sections. As it was, it was difficult to use as a quick reference guide."

Best Value Surveys – Members' Experiences cont...

"The accompanying guidance document was a little confusing and perhaps could have been better organised. It seemed that for any particular survey, one had to pick out the relevant information from various points within the document. An issue would be covered in one area, just for it to be revisited in another area... for example information on sampling."

And the website didn't impress everybody either:-

"I think the BVPI website is **** !"

Workload

Respondents emphasised the heavy workload associated with the Best Value surveys, and some made an early decision to contract it out:-

"As a local authority who administered the entire [General] survey in-house, the data input aspect was extremely time consuming and laborious. We will look to introduce some form of scanning option next time and so any template design must facilitate this type of approach."

"...We did contemplate producing the [General] survey in-house using the templates provided by the ODPM on their website, but found this option would put too much of a strain on the Council's staff resources...

Sampling

The sampling regime insisted upon by the ODPM had many critics. The requirement to use pure random sampling was burdensome in itself:-

"...The very dispersed nature of the random sample meant fieldwork was very inefficient and costs increased by many thousands of pounds, particularly for County Council areas. This decision goes against the spirit of Best Value.... We ought to insist that ODPM applies its own medicine and only conducts national surveys on a purely random sample – they would never be able to afford them."

There was also resistance to the obligation to send out at least two reminder letters, even if the required number of responses had been achieved:-

"...Those authorities that were more proactive and issued a survey to all within the sample frame were still burdened with issuing two reminders even if the minimum response was achieved. ...Consideration should be given to simply specifying minimum response targets and removing the obligation to send reminders once this target is achieved."

[Planning Survey] "We are instructed to send out two reminders irrespective of response rate – that is not our normal practice and puts our residents' backs up. We have had complaints about the waste of resources."

Other, more technical points about the sampling frame and regime and subsequent weighting were also raised:-

"The authority had to validate the sample of 5000 properties before it was issued, as a number of the properties listed were actually outside the city boundaries in a neighbouring district. In a number of cases business properties were selected..."

"Using households rather than individuals has led to a bias towards the over 50 age group...."

"ODPM carrying out the weighting means that authorities' results can be compared on a like-for-like basis, but individual authorities cannot compare their own results year on year..."

Best Value Surveys – Members' Experiences cont...

Smaller authorities had problems meeting the sample size for the more specialised surveys:-

[Planning Survey] "As a small authority our sample frame of 239 did not even meet the minimum return rate of 400!!!...When we contacted the ODPM their response was 'just do the best you can'...- not a very scientific response to the issue."

[Benefits Survey] "...For the City Council to achieve approximately 312 responses in each sample frame...necessitated a response rate of 55% from the Benefits survey – an extremely challenging target when compared to large unitary authorities..."

Survey Documents

Sampling was not the only aspect rigidly controlled by the ODPM. There were strict rules also about the content, wording and layout of survey documents. As one respondent put it:-

"If they want things so disciplined why don't they run the surveys themselves?!"

Covering Letters

One tightly prescribed document which aroused criticism from respondents was the 'covering letter' template:-

"We felt that we had to adapt the letter so that it explained more clearly the purpose of the survey..."

"A lot of people thought the survey was compulsory after reading the covering letters. While I am sure this helped boost the response rate, it did lead to many irate phone calls from residents asking if they did have to complete the survey forms."

One council worked around the restrictions in an innovative way:-

"We sent an individual letter to each of the properties in advance explaining the survey and expressing how important their views would be. We also stated that the survey would be received the following week and that they should not throw it away, but complete and return it. ...Of the 5000 properties covered, we have to date received in excess of 3500 responses....."

Use of Language

There were calls for survey documents to be in clearer, simpler and more appropriate language:-

"Vague descriptions of services... . Residents were confused..."

[Benefits Survey] "We felt the language used in this survey was inappropriate and did not reflect the client base. ...The quality of response was poor as people felt forced to try and understand the survey and made many mistakes as a result."

"It was not made clear enough to people that the [Benefits] survey had nothing to do with their claim. We received numerous calls from people confused as they had either received their benefit already or were no longer claiming benefit, and had told us so already !"

[Tenants' Survey] "It would be useful if the survey was readily available in a variety of languages, as the General Survey is, rather than each authority having to facilitate its own translations which is time-consuming and expensive."

Best Value Surveys – Members' Experiences cont...

Question Topics
Some respondents criticised the overall emphasis and balance of the questionnaires:-

"I think more space to give personal, qualitative responses would be beneficial to the councils. Asking open questions personalises the responses and can lead to better insight into the needs of residents. Some residents have commented on the way that the survey forms only seem to look for answers that make the service look good/bad rather than what they would really like their council to do for them."

"By definition the questionnaire is indicator-led, but it is a wasted opportunity to have to ask questions which will do little to aid service improvements...."

"The balance between services within the questionnaire does not reflect spending and priorities - particularly the emphasis on cultural, sports and leisure services and not issues such as social care, education and highways."

Relevance of Questions
There were particular concerns about having to ask questions which were not relevant to the specific council and its services:-

"Guidance issued to support the survey methodology was very specific that each council should not modify the survey template. As a district council without responsibility for a number of services such as libraries, education, museums, guidance therefore implied questions/answer options relating to these services should remain in the questionnaire. Common sense dictated that they should be taken out. ... Assistance from the BVPI helpline was vague and non-specific."

"We expressed serious concerns regarding public transport and local bus service questions. ...The template questions implied our Council was responsible for providing these services. We reiterated that Transport for London has responsibility for bus information and local bus services ...

"We also outlined concerns about questions being asked on services which we do not provide, i.e. theatres/concert halls. MORI/ODPM reiterated that questions or section options cannot be omitted..."

"...In the question on complaints all answers given had to be included even though they have no link with the authority. For example we are supposed to record as a complaint about the County Council, a complaint about repairs by a Housing Association..."

This sort of problem led to the following suggestion:-

"Should there be a one size fits all policy ? There are different issues and priorities facing the different types of Local Government. In the end meaningful rankings will be within types, e.g. Unitaries, Shire Counties, Districts, etc, so it would make sense to have more directly relevant questionnaires."

Some questions were felt to be intrusive:-

[Tenants' Survey] "We did not consider the income question to be relevant, and it may have affected the overall response rate..."

"The ethnic monitoring goes down like a lead balloon in our County – BME population is 0.9%."

Best Value Surveys – Members' Experiences cont...

Other questions tried to extract an opinion from people who had little knowledge or experience of the topic:-

"Views were sought of those who had no experience of services. Several respondents stated that they did not like giving opinions on services of which they had no personal experience, such as local bus services."

"Q10 – people have to answer even if they don't use the bus service. We feel this is a pointless exercise and that this question needs to be routed."

"Not all questions ...have a 'don't know' option. However, not all people have an opinion. It would also be useful if in cases where the whole section may not apply to the person, they could have just one box for 'don't know' or 'not applicable' for all ..."

"Satisfaction ratings are based on perceptions rather than use, as respondents were asked to reply 'whether or not they used the services'..."

"Inconsistency between questions in that some allowed a 'don't know' column and others didn't. In the latter case respondents have chosen 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' as the nearest alternative, which significantly affects the calculation of the rating..."

The last respondent goes on to say that MORI and ODPM would not allow them to change the questionnaire, apparently 'to preserve comparability', and asks: "If a question is badly constructed is this a reason to perpetuate it ?"

Extra Questions

One concession to flexibility was the option to include extra questions, but this too has its limitations:-

"We welcomed the opportunity to ask additional questions, and chose to include many of those from the question bank. However, we felt the relative inflexibility of where we could position these additional questions within the questionnaire did not aid the 'flow' of the questionnaire...."

"The facility to add questions was given but, in practice, it would not have been possible to add many without jeopardising response rates."

Public Reaction to Surveys

Many respondents reported that the surveys had met with less than universal enthusiasm from residents:-

"The elderly and socially excluded are represented in very large numbers in my district. These groups get very worried when they receive letters from their council."

"...As one of the smallest Districts by population, ...we are required to obtain responses from the same number of people as a major city. ...An increasing number of people are fed up with questionnaires and, for various reasons, do not want to fill them in. The Benefits survey has resulted in many calls from benefits recipients, mainly elderly, who get very upset about the questionnaire. ... The reminder letters in general really annoy people...."

[Tenants' Survey] "...We had some abuse from people who didn't want to complete the form and felt it was an invasion of privacy. If it wasn't compulsory then they didn't want to complete it. It scared some of them..."

"Some people have been unlucky enough to receive 3 out of 4 of the surveys. ...This leads to dissatisfaction at being 'bombarded' with questionnaires."

Best Value Surveys – Members' Experiences cont...

"We would favour giving respondents an opt-out slip so that we can avoid sending reminders to people who do not intend or are not able to respond. This will help to reduce the numbers of unhappy people telephoning to complain about receiving numerous copies of the questionnaire."

Was it all worthwhile ?

Respondents varied in their opinions of the overall usefulness of the whole exercise. Some were broadly supportive:-

"The statutory BVPI general resident survey has provided us with valuable resident satisfaction information across a wide range of Council and non-Council services. This information has helped to identify those services and areas where additional intervention is required..."

[Planning Survey] "The good things are that it has proved a few things we already knew about the service – good and bad. ...It has also thrown up a few things we didn't know – again good and bad."

Others doubted whether the surveys were really measuring what they were supposed to measure. Of the Planning Survey, for example:-

"Last time we did this there was a clear link between customer satisfaction and success or otherwise in getting planning permission. Therefore, a suggested action plan to raise satisfaction levels would be to grant more planning applications !"

And some were downright disillusioned:-

"We are getting indications that the surveys, despite real improvements in service, will show a significant decline in satisfaction rates – driven I suspect by national publicity about Council Tax rather than any objective view about local services. Does it all serve any useful purpose ?"

Conclusion

It goes without saying that this is not a scientifically rigorous piece of research. But it gives a valuable practitioner's insight into many of the issues arising from these surveys. LARIA has made representations before about the survey methodology, and may use these anonymised comments to do so again.

Contact : Rachel Cossey, email r.cossey@notes.manchester.gov.uk

2001 Census Update

Origin-Destination Data

Scotland managed to get migration and workplace statistics out relatively early, although the origin-destination matrix data is still awaited. However ONS in England and Wales had to back-pedal on its already delayed timetable due to technical issues on migration, as well as having to sort out the impact of disclosure control on output relating to workplaces that contained only one employer. The Annual Business Inquiry also has to cope with the same rules – so this problem should really have been better anticipated. However, Standard Tables with workplace and out-migration statistics were scheduled for release in early February.

Revised Population Estimates

The Census address matching exercises in Westminster and Manchester have already borne their first fruit with the raising of the already once-revised 2001 Mid Year Estimate for Manchester by some twenty thousand. The Westminster work will not be completed until some time in the spring, but meanwhile ONS have added Middlesbrough and Wandsworth to their studies and are planning to look at further authorities after mid-2004.

The General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) is continuing discussions with Glasgow City on technical issues related to the Census. Manchester Geomatics are to carry out an assessment of the likely undercount in Glasgow for the City Council by comparing Census output with the Postcode Address File (PAF) and Glasgow's own address lists.

2011 Census and Beyond

Attention has been focussed on looking forward to the 2011 Census (widely felt to be the last 'conventional' census in the UK), and the ONS's longer-term vision for an Integrated Population Statistics System (IPSS). These were the main topics at the workshop organised to coincide with the joint meeting of the five Census Advisory Groups in October, and the centrepiece of the two-day conference hosted in November by the ONS and Royal Statistical Society. Both topics were out for consultation until the end of November, and documents are still available on the ONS website:-

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/2011_design.pdf

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/ipss.pdf

Peter Benton, responsible for Census Development at ONS, will be discussing the future of the Census at the LARIA Conference in March.

Part of the development of the IPSS will involve a number of tests. Len Cook, the National Statistician, has already held talks with the GLA about using London (or parts of it) for some kind of survey work in 2007, to check the mid-year estimates and test the linking of administrative records and address registers.

Population Register

On January 6 ONS published a feasibility study on developing a UK population register – one of the three major planks that is planned to support the IPSS. Documents are available at:
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/registration/cip.asp

Detailed development work will proceed over the next 18 months, after which the government will decide whether or not to go ahead with the creation of a register for use by the public sector. Any register will not be a comprehensive database of all the information held about residents by the public services, but it would act as an index to the various records in different databases. No details of formal consultation are yet available, but there will be public consultation on the acceptability of the register and the work will also include drafting appropriate legislation.

CLIP Census Sub-Group

This group is the main channel for discussion between local authorities in England & Wales and the ONS on census-related matters. It has representatives from all types of authority and from most parts of the country. It meets two or three times a year in London, and representatives also attend joint working groups on specific topics with representatives of the four other advisory groups representing central government, academia, health and business.

2001 Census Update cont...

The work programme for the group is now gearing up to the design of the 2011 Census and the IPSS. ONS is keen to ensure that it reaches local authorities as comprehensively as possible, and is concerned at the shortage of census experts from county districts on the group. If any person feels themselves to be suitably qualified and is interested in hearing more about the work of the group please contact John Hollis.

The Scottish equivalent of CLIP is the Population and Migration Statistics Group. This meets twice a year, with a local authority pre-meeting in the morning to which all 32 Scottish local authorities are invited to send representatives. Scotland is a little behind the rest of the UK in planning for a possible 2011 Census. A formal consultation process is expected to begin in the Spring, and PMSG will be keeping a close watch on developments in England and Wales.

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Why The Census Is So Important To Commercial Companies

It is not just the public sector that finds the census to be an essential tool for planning. Here Keith Dugmore, of Demographic Decisions Ltd, tells us why and draws a parallel with the work of local authorities.

Questions which concern many businesses

Use of Census data has exploded in the last two decades. Government has always used the information for allocating resources to local areas, but the major growth has been in the marketing world, where it can help to provide answers to such vital questions as:

- Where are the best places for our new outlets?
- Which branches should we close?
- What products and services should we be offering in each of our existing stores?
- Where should we advertise?
- Who are our best customers?
- Who are our best prospects?
- Which areas and people should we survey?

These issues are typical for the commercial world, but there are also close parallels amongst public services which are seeking to make decisions about locating their hospitals or libraries, tailoring services to local communities, or targeting particular sections of the local population.

The importance of making the right decisions

The Census underpins many decisions involving investments of billions of pounds every year. Very few large companies still rely solely on "gut feel" when reviewing their branch network, or which prospects to target. An increasing number regard the sourcing of good data as so important that they devote significant time and effort to pursuing better information.

Making the right investment decisions is vital to business success. Large companies can each be making decisions about the investment of hundreds of millions of pounds a year. Further down the scale, a new start-up company might sink or swim depending on whether its first outlet is in the best location. The penalties of making bad decisions are severe. Retail investment provides a particularly vivid example of the

Why The Census Is So Important To Commercial Companies cont...

importance of getting decisions right, but it is just one of several areas where the use of Census information helps to target the best opportunities and to avoid those where investment would be squandered.

Targeting local markets

The targeting of local areas takes several forms. One of the most obvious is the evaluation of alternative sites for new enterprises. The big supermarkets put much effort into assessing the potential for new out of town stores in the 1980's by analysing populations within 15 or 20 minutes' drive of possible locations. Entrepreneurs seeking good locations for new golf courses used the same technique. More recently, many retailers have focussed on the opportunities offered by smaller outlets in urban areas – Tesco Metro, Sainsburys Local and Marks and Spencer's Simply Food provide ready examples. As well as openings, companies also have to consider whether they need to close existing uneconomic outlets – this has been particularly apparent in the case of the Post Office and also the financial services sector.

Another element of targeting areas is the importance of tailoring services to particular local populations. It is very likely that customers in Harrogate will have different needs to those in Hackney. Again, some trade is very much driven by the numbers and types of people who work, rather than live, in an area: office workers popping out to Boots at lunchtime provide a good example. Looking more broadly, a leisure organisation such as Whitbread might review whether some of its existing outlets might best be switched between its Pizza Hut, TGI Friday, Beefeater or Brewsters brands.

This usually leads into a further aspect of local targeting. Custom in local areas can be encouraged by local marketing campaigns. Door-to-door leafleting is a well-established approach, and there is increasing scope for more accurate targeting. Local advertising using both newspapers and billboards may also be brought into play, again driven by analysis of the local market.

In each of these cases, Census information is used to measure the size of the local population, and to classify it in various ways; typically by age and measures of affluence - a geodemographic classification - but also perhaps by additional variables such as ethnicity or religion. A frequent further step is the integration of market research or customer information to produce financial estimates of the local demand for particular products and services.

Targeting households and individuals

As well as assessing and targeting areas, the Census is also used to help to classify and target individual households and people. The way in which it is often used in this context is to produce geodemographic classifications of Census Output Areas, the smallest neighbourhood level. It is essential to appreciate that no Census information about identifiable individuals is ever released.

Geodemographic classifications such as Acorn and Mosaic are made available in the form of directories, which comprise a list of each postcode in the country, together with its neighbourhood classification. It is therefore possible to add a geodemographic code to each customer or prospect address, and then analyse customer behaviour according to the type of neighbourhood in which they live. Some customer segments will be far more likely than others to buy, or indeed reject, certain products and services: media such as direct mail can be targeted accordingly. Such segmentation is most frequently done using proprietary classifications, but an increasing number of companies are also using Census statistics to build their own bespoke models to predict customer behaviour.

Designing market research surveys

Much use is made of the Census for targeting small geographical areas, but it also underpins most mainstream market research conducted in this country. The Census provides the bedrock of information about the dispersion of populations and households, which is essential for planning, controlling and executing all types of consumer research. Some populations – such as ethnic minorities or very affluent people – are almost absent from many areas of the country, and targeting can ensure that survey resources are used to maximum effect.

Market researchers use the Census to ensure that they achieve representative samples of particular populations. These may be used to plan interviews of predetermined quotas of people in particular age and sex categories. In other

Why The Census Is So Important To Commercial Companies cont...

instances, the Census is used with the Postcode Address File to draw up sample frames of addresses. In both cases a scientific approach achieves more accurate results at a lower cost.

Turning to the analysis of surveys, the Census can also add considerable value by adding the appropriate geodemographic code to each respondent's record. This approach was pioneered using the Target Group Index survey, and has since been extended to many others. Analysing surveys by geodemographics often creates new insights into understanding markets, and opens the way to calculating market potential for small areas.

Conclusion

The Census helps to provide answers to many key business questions. Whether it is by targeting local areas, households or survey interviews, it provides essential information to enable companies to focus on those areas which offer the greatest return. This does not always mean selecting the most affluent areas or people – factors such as market size and the extent of competition will also determine the size of the opportunity – but the accurate assessment of the population is an indispensable starting point. The Census provides an essential foundation for many business decisions.

Contact

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This article is based on a chapter in "A Guide to the 2001 Census: Essential Information for Gaining Business Advantage" which is sponsored by the Market Research Society and the ONS, and published February 2004 by TSO. ISBN 0 11 621652 2. Price: c£40

County Websites Assessed for R&I Content

Ian Burgess and David Karfoot
Hampshire County Council

Which County Councils have the best websites for R&I information? Essentially this was the question we attempted to answer on behalf of the Strategic Planning Authorities Benchmarking Network during the summer of 2003.

Our Approach

The approach adopted was to assess each of the thirty-five county sites in random order using a standard set of questions to guide the allocation of scores. The investigation was carried out during the period late June to late August 2003 so the results are a snapshot of the position at that time. Any improvements to individual websites implemented since then will not be reflected in the survey results.

The questionnaire used was designed to generate ratings for (a) the ease of navigation within a council's website; and (b) the quality and nature of the content. It should be noted at this point that the subject matter assessed was that relevant to the planning function. It ranged from topics such as population, Census and employment information to air quality, environmental designations and archaeology. In all seventeen topics were looked at.

The results of the assessment are obviously somewhat subjective. However we aimed to minimise the subjective element as far as possible by following a standard procedure for each website. We also ensured that the assessments were all carried out by the same person (Ian Burgess) to achieve consistency of approach. Had the exercise been carried out by a different person over the same period of time, different assessments would almost certainly have been produced at the detailed level, but we would be surprised if the overall results would have been significantly at variance with the ones we obtained.

County Websites Assessed for R&I Content cont...

Good and Poor Practice

One of the main outcomes of the exercise was the identification of elements of good and poor practice. Among the good features found were:

(i) Individual topics that had their own dedicated 'A to Z' facility.
(ii) An option to remove committee reports from the searched information.
(iii) The use of Active Server Pages to allow databases to be queried on line (eg Sites and Monuments and Journey Planning) rather than holding many pre-designed pages.
(iv) County-wide maps that allow the user to zoom in on particular features, for instance Rights of Way definitive maps.
(v) Links to associated sites (e.g. for district council air quality data). Some of those found could be improved still further if the link was directly to the relevant topic pages rather than to the home page.
(vi) Statistics, across all topics, found in one place and prominently signposted.
(vii) Pages for the visually impaired.
(viii) An offer to send out documents in larger print.

The poor features found included:

(i) Several county research units have their pages in obscure locations within the council's site as a whole.
(ii) Important policy documents that were spread over many pages (a menu listing all of them, very usefully, could have been provided on a single page).
(iii) No 'A to Z' feature.
(iv) Data that has not been kept current.
(v) 'Search' facilities that gave links to pages with tenuous data.
(vi) Data with no source given.
(vii) No contact details given for extra information.
(viii) The total exclusion of whole topics – this applied in varying degrees to most counties.

The Best Websites

So which were the best websites? It was not our intention to 'name and shame' so we will only identify those authorities which we believe had the best websites at the time of the survey. The best sites for navigation (in alphabetical order) were, we found, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Dorset, Leicestershire and Warwickshire. The best sites for overall content were Cambridgeshire, Cornwall, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire. It will be noted that a number of names appear in both lists. When we graphed content score against navigation score we did find that, in general, counties with better content also had sites which were easier to navigate. Overall the best sites were (in order) Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, Kent and Leicestershire.

You might be thinking that it is easy for larger authorities to have good web sites as they have more resources. However our research did not bear this out. We could find no correlation between overall website performance and an authority's population.

For further details contact David Karfoot at: david.karfoot@hants.gov.uk

£4m investment in e-democracy - New National Project for Local Government

The power of new technologies is to be harnessed to invigorate local democracy. With the launch of the new, government-funded Local e-Democracy National Project, new channels of participation - especially internet and mobile phone - are to be investigated as part of a £80m National Project Programme aiming to help drive the modernisation of local services.

The project will deliver to local authorities:

- a range of new or enhanced tools and techniques to encourage participation
- better ways to ensure the inclusion of particular groups
- e-democracy information and strategies
- public opinion research
- marketing techniques

The development and piloting of practical multi-channel approaches to encourage citizen participation and help elected representatives work more effectively will be emphasised. Access and inclusion are important themes for the project with the focus on issues that could arise for groups with low connectivity and/or political engagement.

Says Cllr Mary Reid, Project Board Chair and representative from the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames: "This is an ambitious project that aims to make a real contribution to the development of e-democracy in this country with new and exciting advances exploiting technology.

"Local authorities have been busy working in this area in isolation up until now. This is the first opportunity to pool our knowledge and expertise; explore innovation and share our findings with local government nationally."

Approval for the project with a budget of £4m has been granted from the Local Government On-Line Programme Board. This follows on from the government's 2002 public consultation document: In the Service of Democracy, which raised the profile of electronic participation and its potential.

Commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Lawrence Pratchett of De Montfort University prepared the initial business case for the project following a series of well-attended seminars involving national and local government and representatives from the public and private sectors.

The newly formed Local E-Democracy National Project Board, made up of member and officer representatives from a range of local authorities, the LGA, IDeA, Hansard Society, ODPM and the Office of the E-Envoy, met in November to agree the detail of the project. Local authorities represented include: Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames; Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council; Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council; Wolverhampton City Council; North Lincolnshire Council; London Borough of Lewisham and the South East London E-Government Services; Surrey County Council; Bristol City Council; Stroud District Council; St Albans City & District Council.

The National Projects Panel agreed the final business case early in December and it is anticipated that the project will deliver its products by December 2004. Authorities wishing to get involved in the project should approach the contacts below or e-mail **localegov@odpm.gsi.gov.uk.**

For further details contact:
Cllr Mary Reid, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames: 020 8397 1396
mary.reid@councillors.kingston.gov.uk;
Jane Ratford, St Albans City & District: 01727 819317
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Stephen Hilton, Bristol City: 0117 9224644
stephen_hilton@bristol-city.gov.uk

The New Influencers

Graeme Trayner,
Opinion Leader Research

Opening up a newspaper, or reading an opinion poll, can be a rather depressing experience for anyone leading an organisation. It has been widely noted that there has been an erosion of public trust in institutions, whether in politics and the public sector, business or religion. Indeed, people are increasingly sceptical and wary of conventional authority and power, as recently seen with the furore over military intervention in Iraq, concern over the MMR jab, and anxieties about pension schemes.

However, the situation is not as grim as it may seem. Our work at Opinion Leader Research has shown that rather than not trusting anyone at all, people just trust differently. Instead of trusting elites and institutions, people are turning to those they know in their social networks for advice and counsel. This has major implications for local government.

In protagonists we trust

Our research has revealed that in every social network or community there are trusted people others turn to for advice. Opinion Leader Research calls these new trusted figures 'protagonists'.

The power of a protagonist lies in their natural ability to persuade others in their peer group or network of their views. In contrast to the perceived 'spin' of much institutional communication, protagonists are trusted by their peers due to their authenticity and lack of 'agenda'.

Being a protagonist is very much a psychological 'state of mind', rather than a specific demographic or socio-economic type. It is not about gender or age, occupation or level of education. They are everywhere – you find them in the office, on the building site, in the playground, and in the cafe. We estimate that 1 in 15 people in the UK are protagonists.

In relative contrast to their specific peers, protagonists are more articulate, charismatic, and engaged. They tend to be involved in a range of different pursuits and activities, and act as 'connectors' between different social networks. They communicate stances, positions and recommendations through their networks with passion and vigour.

Change is increasingly coming from 'below' in politics due to the power of protagonists. The fuel crisis of 2000, the Countryside Alliance, and pensioners' protests over council tax are all movements that were originally started by a handful of protagonists. In all three cases, conventional leaders and the mainstream media were caught unawares. The emergence of 'unofficial' community websites, like the London Neighbourhoods Online, is another example of protagonists altering how we connect with each other.

How protagonists can help local government research

Opinion Leader Research has developed thinking on how to recruit and engage with protagonists. We use a three-stage approach to locate protagonists in an area. Firstly, we ask people a series of questions on behaviour and attitudes. In particular, we explore levels of social interaction and involvement in informal and formal networks. Secondly, we use peer-referral methods to determine who the most influential people are in an area, and back-check individuals who are referred to by numerous others. Lastly, we audition all potential protagonists in a workshop setting, to ensure they meet our criteria.

We have conducted a range of research consultations with protagonists, involving both traditional approaches such as group discussions as well as more innovative techniques such as ethnography and creative brainstorming. Our experience of engaging with protagonists for major British companies illustrates how local government can also benefit from research with this audience:

The real influencers

Research with protagonists allows local leaders and councils to engage with those who truly influence others in the community. Though the move towards greater public involvement in decision-making is welcome and admirable, there is a tendency for consultation to suffer from "public-meeting syndrome". Local council consultations are often attended by the same 'usual suspects', who though vocal, are not necessarily representative, and are often not the real influencers in an area. By connecting with protagonists, local government can communicate with those who truly shape and mould opinion.

The New Influencers cont...

Ambassadors or detractors

Indeed, listening to protagonists helps local government appear more relevant and in-touch. Though some who are actively involved in traditional civic activity will be protagonists, local councils may not be connecting with the majority of real influencers in the area. Are you listening to the people who have set up a community chat room? Are you engaging with the woman who has organised a new group for young mothers? The OAP whom others listen to in the pub? As influential people, they have the potential to be a council's greatest ambassadors or worst detractors.

Creative strategists

Our work with companies including British Airways and Camelot has shown that protagonists are skilful 'lay' strategists. In workshops, they enjoy coming up with solutions to challenges an organisation may face, and ideas on how to address issues in the future. Working alongside a company's marketing or research team, we have asked protagonists to develop customer strategies, new products and services, and advertising campaigns.

Authorities could yield great results through workshops where community protagonists work with council officials on a major local issue. For instance, protagonists could be asked to develop ideas on how to increase environmental awareness, or how to improve transport provision. A creative and collaborative forum can enhance public involvement, and be a superb communications platform for an authority.

Predictors of change

Protagonists can also act as an 'early-warning system' for local authorities. Our experience is that protagonists are 'ahead of the curve' in terms of mainstream and media opinion. Our ongoing research has shown protagonists taking positions on issues and topics before they were adopted by others, such as scepticism over war aims in Iraq and boredom with reality TV. Ongoing engagement with protagonists in an area can allow researchers to identify opportunities and challenges early on, and improve and enhance local government strategies and communications.

The need for connection

Local government has led the way in terms of public consultation and public involvement. Engaging with protagonists can add a new and innovative dimension to consultation, and help local authorities connect with those moulding opinion on the ground.

Whereas in the past, it was almost impossible to locate the people who shaped opinion on the ground, there is now an opportunity to connect with this most important of audiences. It's time to listen to the new influencers.

Graeme Trayner is a Director at Opinion Leader Research. He can be contacted at gtrayner@opinionleader.co.uk, or on 0207 861 3080.

Book Review – 'Presenting Numbers, Tables and Charts'

Reviewed by K V Moller

The authors do not tell us who in particular might find this book useful, but it appears to be aimed at any person who uses figures for illustrative purposes on a regular basis. It is not about statistics, statistical techniques or about research and research techniques. Rather it is about how you present your results when you have obtained your statistics, done your research and applied relevant techniques. As such it seems to be a very useful and handy reference book for both the amateur and the seasoned researcher.

Nowadays it is so easy to construct tables and charts by the use of appropriate software that I think many of us forget to think about the message we wish to convey or the audience for whom the message is intended. This book makes us stop and think.

It introduces its subject rather charmingly, I think, with the notion: "Numbers are exciting. They tell a story." But later on it warns: "Many people find numbers a trial. One reason is that numbers are frequently presented in a muddled fashion ..." The trick is to know what story you want to tell and to tell it clearly. Doing so will shorten meetings, save time, make for better decision-making, and make a good impression.

The authors urge us to analyse the audience by asking ourselves questions such as: Who are they? Why are they interested? Will they know the subject? Will they be familiar with figures? This seems to be a particular pertinent issue for local government researchers, as our audience will vary all the time. Sometimes it can be assumed to be totally statistically illiterate, but at times it will be specialist committees with specialist knowledge, adept in handling and interpreting numerical information.

For these reasons it seems to me that 'Presenting Numbers, Tables, and Charts' would be an easy reference, and well worth the money. Hopefully it will be close to hand on the bookshelf of most researchers in the future.

'Presenting Numbers, Tables and Charts' by Sally Bigwood and Melissa Spore is published by Oxford University Press, price £7.99, as part of its 'one step ahead' series. 144 pages comprising introduction and 7 chapters with checklist, exercises, glossary and index. ISBN number 019860 7229.

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LARIA CONFERENCE 2004

CHALLENGING RESEARCH – CHALLENGING RESEARCHERS

Tuesday 23rd – Thursday 25th March 2004, St Catherine's College, Oxford

Conference Programme

Tuesday 23rd March 2004

11.00 - 13.45	Registration and Coffee
12.45	Lunch (not served after 13.15)
13.45	Plenary: The Challenge and Value of Research to Local Authorities: **Prof Ian Diamond (Economic & Social Research Council)**
14.50	Conference announcements
15.00	Tea/Coffee
15.20	**Plenary**: Qualitative Research That Counts: Enhancing the Role and Quality of Qualitative Research for Public Sector Enquiry: **Jane Ritchie (Founding Director, Qualitative Research Unit, National Centre for Social Research)**
16.25	Break
16.30	**Plenary**: Promoting Research Across Partnerships: **Chris Fieldsend & Sophie Ross (Local Futures Group) & Pat Fitzsimmons (LB of Waltham Forest)**
17.35	Break
18.30	**Wine Reception**
19.15	**Conference Dinner**

Wednesday 24th March 2004

	Stream 1	Stream 2	Stream 3 (ALGIS in LARIA)
9.00	Towards Better Community Engagement: **Matthew Lund (Questions Answered), Mark Henderson & Cllr Peter Hillman (Northumberland CC)**	Census Under-Enumeration of Households in Bristol: **Jayne Mills & Michael Legg (Bristol City Council)**	
10.10	Coffee/tea		
10.30	eConsultation in East Lancashire – A Collaborative Approach: **Christine Collingwood (Pendle Borough Council)**	The Future of the Census: **Peter Benton (Office for National Statistics)**	**Visit to Bodleian Library** (see note at foot of programme)
11.35	Break		
11.40	Developing a Corporate/Partnership Consultation Strategy: **Patrick Clark (Worcestershire Partnership)**	Valuing Quality of Life Improvements: **Paul Murphy (FaberMaunsell)**	
12.45	Lunch		
13.45	The Good The Bad And The Ugly – A Personal View of Researching in Three Different Sectors: **Debbie Wilson (DfES)**		Printed and Online News Media – Copyright and Licensing Issues: **Laurence Bebbington (Nottingham University) followed by ALGIS in LARIA AGM**
14.25	The Value of Research in Oxford City Council: **Cllr Alex Hollingsworth (Leader, Oxford City Council)**		
15.15	**LARIA AGM**		
16.00	Tea/Coffee		
16.30	**Oxford Bus Tour** (see note at foot of programme)		
18.15	Informal Discussion Groups (with wine provided): CLIP, Regional Observatories, Managing Research/Researchers, Commissioning Research		
19.30	Dinner		

LARIA CONFERENCE 2004

Thursday 25th March 2004

	Stream 1	Stream 2
9.00	How To Get Research Findings Implemented – How To Make Sure Yours Isn't Another Research Report That Just Gathers Dust On The Shelf: **Jude Cummins (Office for Public Management)**	Are Young People Engaging?: **Rebecca Morris (Opinion Leader Research) & Hannah Rapport (LB of Lambeth)**
10.10	Break	
10.30	Mapping Social Capital in the Eastern Region: **Mike Soper (Cambridgeshire CC)**	Race Equality and Diversity – Research on Local Government: **Sarah Morgan & Laura Williams (ODPM)**
11.35	Tea/Coffee	
11.40	Development of a Shared Local and Regional Intelligence Database: **Pip Tucker (South West Observatory) & Sheila Bhatt (Paribus)**	Corporate Really Needs To Sort This Out – A Service Approach to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act: **Adrian Gowan (Medway Council)**
12.45	**Plenary**: Developing Confidence and Competence Through Challenge: **Paul Vittles (RBA Research)** Lunch (Optional)	

- Stream 3 is dedicated to ALGIS in LARIA issues. All delegates are welcome to attend the Stream 3 sessions, but places on the visit to the Bodleian Library are limited and priority will be given to ALGIS in LARIA members – other places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis – places should be requested on the booking form.
- Places on the Oxford Bus Tour will be allocated on a first come, first served basis – places should be requested on the booking form.

Cost: £290 for full three days (other options available). Discounts are available for LARIA corporate members and early bookings.

Venue: St Catherine's College, is on the periphery of Oxford City Centre. It is a 15-20 minute walk from the City Centre, and a 30 minute walk from the train station (a taxi is recommended).

Booking: A booking form is enclosed with this newsletter, or can be obtained from the LARIA website www.laria.gov.uk or from Graham Smith, LARIA Administrator and Events Organiser. Tel 01642 316576 Email: lariaoffice@aol.com

Last year's conference was yet again fully subscribed, so please book early to avoid disappointment.

Sponsors: **Sponsors of the 2004 LARIA Annual Conference include:**

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ALGIS in LARIA Update

Jane Inman

ALGIS aims to promote the value of information work within local government as well as providing networking opportunities for those of us working in this area. With the mass of information being produced today in every area of work, business, government and local government I think it is fair to say that the skills of librarians and information professionals are more in demand than ever before. But are we ready to get involved and to share those skills outside of the conventional library environment?

There are many areas where the skills we take for granted are essential but are often not available because information professionals are not involved. The indexing skills we have can be used for example to help develop the navigation and indexing of web sites, the structure of an intranet, preparation of Freedom of Information publication schemes and filing plans for electronic document management systems.

There is much talk of taxonomies and thesauri as if they had just been invented, and of metadata, but this is what librarians have been doing for generations! We called it cataloguing and classifying. These are the building blocks of information and knowledge management and it should be natural for librarians to be involved because these are some of our basic skills.

AGM

We are planning to hold our AGM as part of the LARIA conference in Oxford and have booked to visit the Bodleian Library as part of the day. To hold our AGM outside of London is a brave move but one which we believe gives us the chance to offer members an excellent day incorporating the visit and a speaker. Book the date now! Wednesday 24th March 2004.

Press Cuttings Service

Do you produce a press cuttings service? We are hoping to tackle the copyright issues which surround newspaper copying at our AGM. We would like to see if something can be done to make the licences for copying and in particular electronic storage more affordable. I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has a licence with the Newspaper Licencing Agency (NLA), either for ad hoc or systematic copying or for electronic storage of press cuttings. I would also be interested to hear if you have considered a licence and decided it is too expensive, and therefore not offered a service. Please email me with any information on this.

Don't forget our web site

ALGIS now has its new web site in place at **www.algis.org.uk**, and is adding material and links to meet its aim of providing a useful resource for anyone working with local government information. Let us know what you would like to see there. Things we have in mind at present are something on copyright issues, using maps on the web, Freedom of Information, legal deposit and e-government.

Contact: Jane Inman,
email: janeinman@warwickshire.gov.uk

R and I News

Aberdeen City Council

Online Surveys

A recent project at Aberdeen City Council is the Aberdeen City Voice initiative. As part of the DEMOS project (see LariaNews 73), Hazel Spalding, Assistant Director for Legal and Democratic Services, has introduced a new initiative to encourage more responses from local residents by offering them the chance to complete surveys over the internet.

There were two main issues to address in order to make the project a success:-

- The speed and efficiency with which questionnaires could be developed and response data entered, processed and analysed
- Finding a suitable solution for hosting surveys over the web.

By creating an online survey tool to complement its paper City Voice initiative, Aberdeen City Council is better able to gauge its 200,000 residents' standard of living and satisfaction with how local services are managed. Putting surveys on the website enables the Council to make considerable savings on printing and postage costs. Surveys which might ordinarily cost in the region of up to £2000 can be undertaken by a mixture of paper and website contact, which could cut costs by as much as half.

If the project had failed, the Council would have lost funding and would have had to repay funds that it had already received. Instead, with the help of SPSS, it increased response rates to 73% and has consequently decided to expand its overall Web strategy.

Contacts:-
Phil Walden, SPSS (UK) Ltd, tel 01483 719 228, email pwalden@spss.com
Hazel Spalding, Aberdeen City Council, tel 01224 522607, email Hspalding@legal.aberdeen.net.uk

Bristol City Council and Ceredigion County Council

When it comes to improving consultation and research - it pays to Think Web!

The recent Government announcement of four million pounds funding for the Local eDemocracy National Project highlights how crucial on-line consultation and participation is becoming to local authorities. The national project aims to ensure that eParticipation becomes as much a part of a local authority's consultation strategy as surveys and focus groups. Many authorities, including Bristol and Ceredigion, are already taking significant steps in this direction.

For a long time, the Corporate Consultation Team at Bristol City Council has encouraged colleagues to "think web". Their commitment led to the development of Consultation Finder. Thanks to the support of LASC (the Local Authority Software Consortium), which aims to enable the use of local authority software innovations across the local government community, Consultation Finder has been made available to other local authorities (find out more at **www.communitypeople.net**).

Ceredigion County Council is a member of LASC and strongly supports its aims. Mark Elliott, Assistant Director Corporate Performance at Ceredigion says, "We were aware of the Consultation Finder and the work undertaken with Bristol City Council. The Audit Commission in Wales had criticised us for not "joining up" our consultation with those living and working in, or visiting, Ceredigion. Our local Community Strategy Partnership has recognised the need for all organisations involved in improving Ceredigion to "join up" all consultations, and this has been the driving force behind our new approach. We are now looking forward to working with all our

R and I News cont...

partners through our Community Partnership, using the Consultation Finder as a central resource. It will assist organisations, and sections within organisations, to avoid consultation overload and duplication, let us all see what consultation is happening where, when and about what, and importantly make it easier for target groups to access relevant information."

Bristol City Council is also pushing ahead the eParticipation agenda. Text facilities have been incorporated into an online consultation facility for young people (**www.bristol-city.gov.uk/doubleclick**), and the council will, for the first time, be using a suite of online tools called eConsult and eDecide to radically shake up the way that consultation is carried out on the council's Corporate Plan.

Of course, this is only the start of the process, and we anticipate these on-line initiatives having an even wider role and greater impact as we gain more experience in their use.

Contacts:-
Stephen Hilton, Bristol City Council, Stephen_Hilton@bristol-city.gov.uk, Tel 01179224644
Lowri Edwards, Ceredigion County Council, lowrie@ceredigion.gov.uk

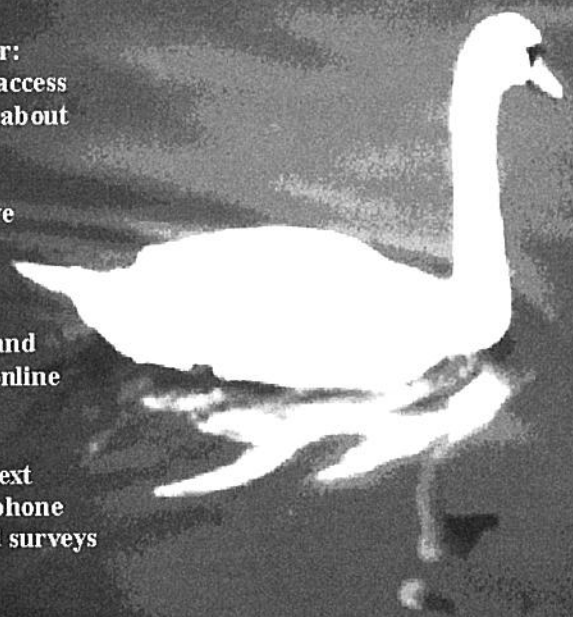
See **www.bristol-city.gov.uk/consultation**

Reflecting the Views of your Citizens and Stakeholders

One stop for dialogue tools and techniques to deliver the right consultation mix

Silver Dialogue and Community People have combined their insight and capability in research, dialogue and communication solutions to simplify your job and to provide nationwide coverage

- Consultation Finder: Enable Citizens to access online information about your consultations
- eDecide: Qualitative interactive polling and debating tools
- eConsult: Publish and manage engaging online consultations
- Mobile Connect: Text messaging mobile phone based dialogue and surveys
- Dialogue Techniques: continuous transparent multi-way discussions with your stakeholders - face to face, online, telephone, postal, mobiles
- Stakeholder Mapping: Determine and analyse who your stakeholders are and what they expect from you
- Creative Development: Facilitating groups and workshops to design shared solutions for the future
- Outreach Communications: Create interest, awareness and generate valuable dialogue



Taking Consultation Further to Understand, Involve and Empower Citizens and Stakeholders

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jim@communitypeople.net

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Mobile: 0776 543 1795
nicola@silverdialogue.com

R and I News cont...

Cheshire County Council

Recent output from Cheshire's Research and Intelligence Unit has involved defining rural and urban areas, population estimation, population forecasting and continuing our 20 years of analysing family stress.

'Clustered around the village green': a look at rural/urban classifications

In the 90's there were many definitions specifying rural or urban areas, mostly based on a range of indicators for 1991 Census wards. However by the end of the decade, data from the 1991 Census was out of date, Cheshire's ward boundaries had been revised, and there was a growing need for an updated classification.

The Research & Intelligence Unit, in consultation with County Council departments and external partners, has produced a new six-fold classification ranging from 'highly rural' to 'highly urban'. This was based on cluster analysis using the following variables:-

- Proportion of buildings as percent of total area (using OS MasterMap[1])
- Percentage of employed people who work in agriculture, hunting and forestry (2001 Census)
- Average number of cars per household (2001 Census)
- Population density
- Percentage of economically active people who are self-employed (2001 Census)
- Index of poor access to service from the 2000 Index of Multiple Deprivation (converted to a new ward basis).

These variables were included because previous research had shown them to be useful indicators of rural character, or because they correlated well with previous indicators. The most novel part of this exercise was the use of Ordnance Survey MasterMap. MasterMap allocates a 'theme' to every land parcel, identifying its usage. One of these themes is 'Buildings', which correlated so well with several other indicators that it could be used as a proxy for them.

The use of the Buildings indicator in the analysis appears to have removed some of the anomalies we had seen in previous similar exercises, where areas with large industrial complexes, or boundaries extending into the Dee estuary, were classified as rural because of the low population density. These areas have been classified, correctly, as partly rural by the new procedure.

This analysis will be valuable for rural planning initiatives, such as Rural Recovery, and for monitoring changes in rural areas. It will also be useful to compare it with Government classifications of areas.
For further details on this analysis and uses of OS MasterMap please contact Stuart Holroyd (Email: Stuart.Holroyd@cheshire.gov.uk or telephone 01244 602117).

[1]MasterMap is a produced by Ordnance Survey and will replace their LandLine product in the next few years. It is available to Local Authorities as part of the Service Level Agreement with OS. MasterMap is Crown copyright.

'Small is Beautiful even using Census data' - A Description of Flexible Geography Population Estimation

The release of 2001 Census data has provided an opportunity to update Cheshire's small area population estimates methodology.

A dwelling base was first of all extracted from the Ordnance Survey product AddressPoint, by excluding all non-residential properties. 'Communal Establishments' (broken down into medical, care home and other) were also identified on AddressPoint. Their populations, and an age structure for each type of establishment, were derived from the 2001 Census and care home information.

R and I News cont...

The second stage was to apply an Output Area code to each of the residential dwellings, a simple task using a GIS system such as MapInfo. A population per dwelling figure was then calculated for each Output Area in Cheshire using 2001 Census information. The age structure of each Output Area was derived from patient records, aggregated by the health authority to unit postcode level. Everything was constrained to the 2001 Mid Year Estimate for each District and 5-year age group, using iterative proportional fitting.

This enabled us to apply a population and an age structure factor to every dwelling, depending on which Output Area it was in. With the communal establishments added back in, properties could now be grouped to any geographical boundary, and a population estimate by age could be calculated. This has enabled us to move away from being restricted to producing estimates by administrative boundaries such as wards.

Comparisons at Output Area level with census counts and with previous estimates have shown a high level of accuracy. Results were also shared with districts for consultation, feedback and adjustment.
For further details on population estimates please contact Neil McSweeney (e-mail Neil.McSweeney@cheshire.gov.uk or telephone: 01244 602889)

Areas of Family Stress 2001/02

In order to inform social and economic improvement in the county, Cheshire County Council has been monitoring the geographical distribution of social exclusion for over 20 years. This research has specifically focused on problems associated with children and families, hence 'family stress'.

Six indicators were used in the latest analysis:

From the Census of Population 2001
- Lone Parents with Dependent Children
- Unemployment

From client records of various services of the County Council.
- Free School Meals,
- Youth Offenders,
- Children and Family Referrals to Social Services
- Children in Need of Care or Protection

Incidence rates per thousand relevant population were calculated for each indicator. These rates were then used to show how each area related to the county average. A composite indicator of "family stress" was produced by combining the six individual indicators. The areas were then ranked according to this overall score.

Nineteen areas out of 164 were identified by this research as areas with levels of family stress significantly above the county average.

These findings will now be of use in reviewing elements of the County Council's Regeneration and Social Inclusion Framework, guiding service expenditure, assisting funding applications, and informing a cross-service approach to tackling social exclusion. Other applications include monitoring aspects of the County and District Community Strategies, and benchmarking future analyses of social and economic disadvantage.

The data will also be used to populate a new area-based Cheshire Local Statistics System for monitoring deprivation statistics at local area level. This can be found at **www.cheshire.gov.uk/localstatistics**.

For further information contact Gordon Hamilton, Principal Research Analyst (e-mail Gordon.Hamilton@cheshire.gov.uk or telephone 01244 602176), or Jean Stelfox, Research Officer (e-mail Jean.Stelfox@cheshire.gov.uk or telephone 01244 602027)

R and I News cont...

Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance

Economic Bulletin

The Cheshire & Warrington Sub-Region is expected to enjoy significant growth in output over the next decade, according to new results just published by the Sub-Region's economic development partnership, the Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance (CWEA).

This forecast is reported in the Autumn 2003 edition of the Cheshire & Warrington Economic Bulletin and shows that the Sub-Regional economy is expected to grow by an average of 2.6% a year between 2000 and 2015. This is well above the 1.9% expected for the North West and higher than the 2.3% forecast for the UK.

As the Bulletin indicates, the Sub-Regional labour market is in a relatively strong position. Unemployment remains low by regional and national standards and local authority data suggests that, between March and September 2003, Sub-Regional job gains exceeded job losses by around 50%. Over the longer term, CWEM forecast data points to a net increase in employment of 12% (52,000 jobs) between 2000 & 2015. However, there is still a need to upgrade the skills of some local people. In particular, nearly one fifth of Cheshire & Warrington's economically active adults lack a qualification at or above NVQ Level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSE passes at grades A-C).

Business activity results, taken from the British Chambers of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey, are also presented. Key findings are that Sub-Regional businesses' domestic sales and orders weakened in the first half of 2003, but export orders recovered in the second quarter and there was relative optimism about future profitability. The global and national economies have picked up in the wake of the war with Iraq, although growth is still very sluggish in the Euro-zone.
CWEA will be monitoring these economic trends ahead of the next Bulletin, which is due out in Spring 2004.

Copies of the Bulletin (16 pages) and an Economic Update (a 2-page summary version of the Bulletin) are available free of charge. To obtain these, or for more information about the Bulletin, please visit www.cwea.org.uk or contact Dave Grainger (Sub-Regional Economic Research Team, Cheshire & Warrington Economic Alliance; tel. 01244 603104; email david.grainger@cheshire.gov.uk).

Enfield Council

We all want tidy streets and parks, don't we? This issue has become an increasingly important priority for the Council Tax payer, especially in Enfield. But how do we know how big a problem it is? How can we measure where and how much litter there is? How do we know where the problem is worst and how do we know that we're improving? Well, a new performance indicator will help to do just that.

All local authorities now have to conduct surveys of litter and detritus[1] occurring on publicly maintained highways and recreation areas. The Performance Indicator (BVPI 199) will be submitted annually by Enfield Council's Street Services team. There is extensive guidance as to the rigorous and systematic surveying to be done, issued by the charity EnCams on behalf of DEFRA.

Finding clean streets in Enfield
...(and who might be spoiling them)

R and I News cont...

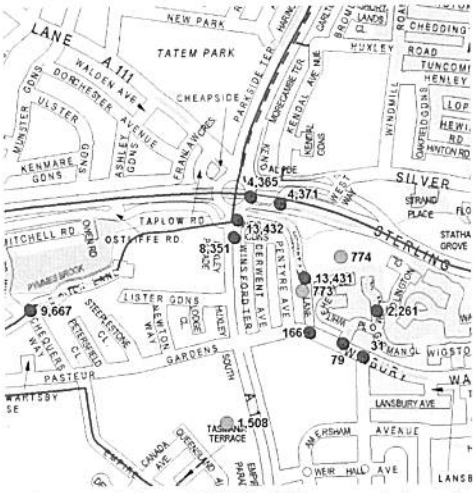
The Council's Information Management Team (IMT) has been able to provide its Street Services team with a good head start in getting the work under way by providing survey maps and associated lists. This has involved constructing 40 random sample sets of 300 sites which were surveyed in the first survey wave in the summer of 2003. These sites were taken from a newly created spatial database in IMT based on the:-

- Council's previous definition of Elementary Street Units (street sections);
- Council's previous definition of commercial areas and Council housing estates;
- Council's Land Use Database; and
- Ordnance Survey MasterMap data

The existence of this 'data infrastructure' has made the job of preparing for the surveys a lot easier than would have been the case without it.

The guidance requires that the sites covered in each survey wave have to be representative of environmental and social conditions throughout Enfield. Firstly, an estimated deprivation index for the current wards was created. The environment is classified by guidance into 10 types: seven land uses plus three types of highways. The surveys are then run on the basis of a socially representative selection of wards and the land uses and highway types within them.

Each survey site is given a reference number, a ward code and a land use code in the master database. Samples are taken from this database and mapped for the surveyors on top of ward boundaries, the land uses and the Borough Street Plan.



Around the A10/A406 roundabout

The surveying
The dark and light dots (highway and non-highway sites, respectively) are the 'start points' from which the surveyors have to walk 50m and back. The surveyors give a grading to both litter and detritus on a scale of:

A	B+	B	B/C	C	C-	D

For litter a grade A means no litter, with a D being "heavily littered, with significant accumulations".

The cleanliness BVPI figure is the combined percentage of sites with litter and detritus that fall below grade B. The Government has set the acceptable level of sites below Grade B at 30%. From the first survey wave covering five wards the percentage was 28%, so bettering the target.

Analysis to be done
Over time, when the whole borough has been covered, the survey results will thus enable a geographic analysis so that managers can see which areas are the tidiest and review how other areas can be brought up to the same standard. In conjunction with the social and environmental classifications the results should also provide a good indication of the circumstances that lead to the least litter and detritus.

The future
The work on this Indicator could easily be enhanced to cover other issues to provide a wider understanding of environmental quality. Additional surveying could cover the impact of abandoned vehicles and graffiti. Post-survey analysis could look at how badly littered areas relate to incidences of crime so that they might be tackled together. This is to be considered further, for probable integration into later survey waves.

R and I News cont...

For further information please contact:
For conduct of the surveys:-
David Roberts on 020 8373 1174; e-mail: DavidKRoberts@enfield.gov.uk
For the database:-
Colin Rumsey on 020 8379 3883; e-mail: Colin.Rumsey@enfield.gov.uk

[1] Detritus is defined as : dust, mud, soil, grit, gravel, stones, rotted leaf and vegetable residues, and fragments of twigs, glass, plastic and other finely divided materials.

Lancashire

MADE Vision

The MADE (Multi-Agency Data Exchange) Project is a capacity building project for sharing and analysing data sets throughout Lancashire. Conceived originally to assist the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in writing their Audits, it is now being developed to inform a wider audience and develop multi-agency working in the County. It is multi-agency funded and run.

MADE Development

Working on a tight budget and using standard office applications, data sets from the census, emergency services, local authorities, probation and health have been collected and grouped into ward-based statistics for the financial year ending 31st March 2003. Dissemination of the data is via a password-protected website.

Workshops have been held to encourage the data mining of these data sets by CDRPs and the Statutory Authorities, to support both strategic and operational decision making. Mapping and statistical tools have been developed to facilitate this.

MADE in Practice

Analyses which have already been undertaken using this data include making an informed decision on introducing an alcohol curfew in a town centre and the assessment of school vulnerability in order to plan sprinkler introduction. It is planned that the MADE products will form the backbone for the 2004 Crime Audits.

If you wish to know more about this initiative, then please contact Melanie Greenslade, MADE Project Officer on 01772 532864 or email melanie.greenslade@css.lancscc.gov.uk.

Leicestershire

Community Information Initiative

The Leicestershire Community Information Initiative stems from the Leicestershire Community Strategy which includes a commitment to "develop a sub-regional website to share information between agencies and with the public about Leicestershire communities" by 2005.

In July 2002, a 'Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics' workshop was organised by Leicestershire County Council's Research & Information Team on behalf of the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership (LLSP). A range of organisations were brought together to share their views on community information provision. The proposed creation of a web portal giving a single point of access to information about communities was strongly supported.

R and I News cont...

From that seminar, a Working Group was established with representatives from the public, private and voluntary sector who were charged with taking the Initiative forward. In the past year the Group has produced and consulted on a Draft Strategy for Community Information and a high level Draft Data Sharing Protocol. Both documents are now nearing completion. The Leicestershire LSP Board has endorsed the Data Sharing Protocol and it is being used as an example of good practice in the region. A Directory of Community Information has also been published.

A further seminar was held in September 2003 to update partners on the progress made so far, and to discuss the way forward. A sub-group will be established early in the New Year tasked with developing more detailed Action Plans. Priority data sets will be defined and work will begin with lead organisations to ensure that the data can be provided in a suitable format for inclusion through the website.

The provision of a Leicestershire Community Information web portal is being piloted using 2001 Census data. Leicestershire County Council has taken the lead in creating an Oracle database and related architecture, which will be able to store and manipulate the data. It will also enable the web portal to 'pull-in' and 'push out' data held by partners. It is hoped that census data will be delivered from spring 2004. Other datasets will follow shortly afterwards.

Discussions are also currently under way with the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership and the Leicester Partnership Information Group with a view to combining resources and working in partnership to deliver a single web portal and meet the aims of the three partnerships.

Further details: www.leics.gov.uk/statistics
Alternatively, contact: Harry Mistry (hmistry@leics.gov.uk) or Sarah Geddes (sgeddes@leics.gov.uk)

Suffolk County Council

Budget Consultation

In February last year, LariaNews carried an article on Suffolk's budget consultation process. Suffolk has recently created many improvements to an already successful process of consultation, which we report on here.

This year, Suffolk County Council was one of the authorities with the highest increases in Council Tax in the country (18.6%), which per se was already a challenge. Through an open and transparent process of consultation, we gathered round the table the views of residents, protesters, the media, staff and councillors to produce a satisfactory way forward for all stakeholders in Suffolk:-

- We ran quizzes with Ask the Nation technology, and asked residents to be a councillor for a day and defend their spending to "full council";
- We asked schools to 'play' with the council's finances through a simplified framework of the council budget on a spreadsheet;
- We ran 12 roadshows to discuss concerns about Council Tax levels, using Welfare Rights support to talk directly to people about benefits available;
- We ran, in collaboration with the media, a questionnaire in the county's biggest paper.

All results were documented and handed over to the Leader of the Executive, and fed into the budget process. This is our vision working of what real empowerment of the people is about.

R and I News cont...

When faced with protests from Protesters Against Council Tax in Suffolk we also pioneered a focus group inviting protesters and the media in for a constructive discussion that proved extremely beneficial for the County Council, PACTS and the media.

Finally we recently introduced a successful and innovative approach of consultation online via our website. It features an online questionnaire, an interactive cartoon and a forum for discussion.

For more information contact Claudia Costa : claudia.costa@comms.suffolkcc.gov.uk

Warwickshire County Council

Quality of Life 2003

The Research Unit has just produced its annual snapshot of well-being and quality of life in Warwickshire. 'Quality of Life in Warwickshire 2003' reports on the county's performance against a number of key economic, social and environmental indicators.

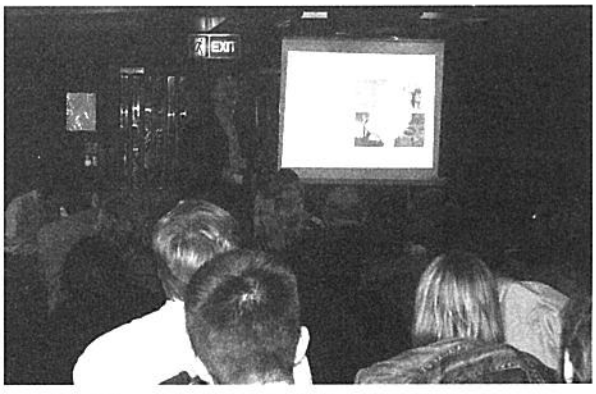
This is the fourth year the report has been produced, and is the first time that the report has been published in CD-ROM format, as well as hard copy and on our website at **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/qualityoflife**. This year's edition has paid particular attention to increasing the range of environmental indicators included in the report, an area where information has been lacking in previous years.

The latest report shows that Warwickshire has continued to perform well, and compares very favourably against both regional and national figures. But while the overall quality of life in Warwickshire is reported as being very good, the report also highlights that differences and disparities exist across the county. These need addressing to ensure that the quality of life in Warwickshire improves for everyone.

For further information please contact Spencer Payne via email (research@warwickshire.gov.uk) or by phone (01926 418645).

Making the Most of the 2001 Census in Warwickshire

Analysis and dissemination of the 2001 Census in Warwickshire is well under way. Approximately 60 people, representing over 10 different organisations, recently attended a workshop for Census users in the County. The workshop examined the local results in detail and some of the technical aspects of using the information as well as providing a forum for users to discuss possible projects and guide the direction of future analysis.



'Making the Most of the 2001 Census in Warwickshire' Workshop

The main point of dissemination of local analysis is our website – **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/census2001** - which includes an area providing details of projects under way in Warwickshire using 2001 Census information. This is designed to provide examples of 'best practice' and facilitate discussion between actual and potential users of the information without necessarily involving the Research Unit.

For more information on Warwickshire's analysis and dissemination of the 2001 Census please contact Ed Dunn or Vicky Porter via email (research@warwickshire.gov.uk) or by phone (01926 412775)

R and I News cont...

Street Lighting Improvements and the Fear of Crime

More than one thousand residents of Rugby have been surveyed after the Benn neighbourhood benefited from a street lighting improvement scheme. The same residents were surveyed one year ago, just before the scheme was implemented. Both surveys examined the residents' fear of crime, with particular attention paid to the practical implications of these fears (i.e. what do people do/not do as a consequence of their fears) rather than the standard 'how worried are you about ...' type questions.

The report is available on our website, **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/research**. The survey unearthed a number of interesting findings. Most notable included:-

- Although the street lighting improvements have been welcomed, in isolation they do not significantly affect fear of crime levels. Residents hope for a combination of measures, including wider coverage of the alley gate scheme and more visible policing alongside the lighting improvements.

- This message reinforces the principles behind Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Only by combining the activity of different agencies would the fear of crime be reduced in Benn. The County Council can improve street lighting, the Borough Council can implement the alleygate scheme and the Police can increase their visibility. Together, these measures would combine to make a noticeable difference to the feelings of security in Benn.

- Since the street lights have been improved, there has been a small reduction in overall actual night-time crime and disorder levels, although there has been a significant reduction in domestic burglary incidents and vehicle crimes. The fact that this is not wholly reflected in the perceptions of crime in the area underlines the mismatch between the fear of crime and the actual risk of being a victim.

- Changes to street lights have not had as significant an impact on fear of crime and behaviour as respondents anticipated they might before the scheme started.

- Levels of nuisance youth behaviour do not appear to have changed much since the street lights have been improved. There is a danger that the lights might attract more youths later at night as their own feelings of safety are increased.

- The fear of crime is slightly less for those people that are aware of Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships. There is clearly a need to raise awareness of what activity is taking place to prevent crime, particularly perhaps among the older age groups.

For further information please contact Spencer Payne via email (research@warwickshire.gov.uk) or by phone (01926 418645).

Coventry, Solihull & Warwickshire Economic Assessment 2003/04

The Research Unit, working with partners through the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Partnership's Researchers' Forum, has recently released its 2003/04 Economic Assessment. The Assessment document, titled 'Driving the Sub-Region Forward', is intended to act as a baseline for the sub-regional economic regeneration strategy while also exploring some of the key challenges facing the local economy. It should be available soon at **www.warwickshire.gov.uk/research**.

The Assessment was launched at a conference held in Coventry. The event took the form of a presentation of the Assessment's key findings followed by a number of themed workshops, aimed at encouraging further debate

R and I News cont...

around specific issues (including the Census, tourism, skills levels and rural development). The event was well attended by representatives from a range of regional organisations.

Overall, the Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire economy performs well, across a wide range of economic indicators, when compared to the West Midlands region. However, the Assessment highlights the need to draw wider benchmark comparisons with other similar sub-regional economies outside the West Midlands, if the local economy is to continue to move forward.

For further information please contact Paul Seamer via email (research@warwickshire.gov.uk) or by phone (01926 418066).

Worcestershire

Historic Parish Maps

Historic Parish maps from the 1850's are now available on the Worcestershire County Council Research and Intelligence website.

The maps show the boundary of each parish in Worcestershire as it was in the 1850's, and will be particularly useful for anyone interested in looking at how their parish has changed over the last 150 years. The boundary of each parish is superimposed onto an Ordnance Survey map, which dates back to around 1945. The maps are available on the research website **www.worcestershire.gov.uk/research** under 'Historic Parish Maps' (found below the Census icon).

For further information contact Helen Clive by email hclive@worcestershire.gov.uk or telephone 01905 728538.

JUIS (Joined Up Information System) website

The recent development work on the JUIS website (**www.juis.org.uk**) is now complete and users can take advantage of additional functionality including a gazetteer search, which enables users to find their own postcode area for analysis. The site is also now linked to our Census Inside website which allows users to access local level data from the 2001 census. The Research and Intelligence Unit are currently finalising plans for the JUIS site to be used across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin as well as its continued development within Worcestershire. This links in to our preparation for the forthcoming Crime and Disorder audits, which each Community Safety Partnership is required to undertake on a three-yearly cycle, the next audit beginning in 2004. The JUIS project team will be heavily involved in the collation, analysis and mapping of this data, which will then be used to inform the new Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy for each District.

For further information please contact Alison Rogers by email arogers@worcestershire.gov.uk or telephone 01905 766712.

Ethnic Projections

As results from the 2001 census become available, there is considerable interest in ethnicity within the county, and how the various levels of ethnic groups that make up Worcestershire are going to develop in future years. To this aim, the R&I Unit have produced some population projections for Worcestershire by ethnic group.

R and I News cont...

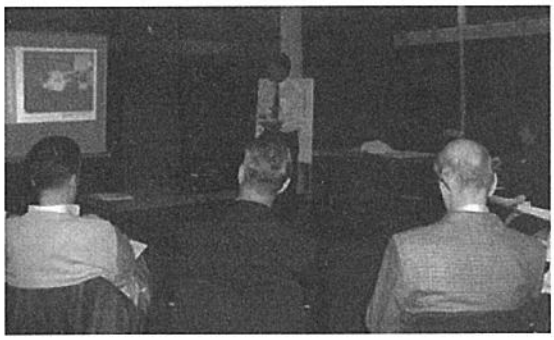
These projections were obtained using a tool called Popgroup, the development of which was part-funded by Worcestershire County Council. It uses data on fertility, mortality and migration levels in the district to project future population growths. The population of each ethnic group has been projected up to 2011, when the next census will be taken. Ethnicity is only accurately recorded during census years.

Work on population projections is ongoing. Data can be added and taken into account as and when it becomes available.

For further information contact Mike Rice by email mrice@worcestershire.gov.uk or telephone 01905 766713.

Second Annual Citizens' Panel Festive Event

On the evening of Tuesday 9th December at County Hall we held the second annual Citizens' Panel Festive Event. Due to space restrictions just 50 of the 300 panel members who wanted to come were invited. The evening began with a buffet where panel members were able to chat informally to Members and Chief Officers of the Council. Nathan Turvey of BBC Hereford & Worcester compered the evening which consisted of electronic voting, focus groups and open discussion. Results of the E-voting and focus groups as well as photos from the evening can be found on our website **www.worcestershire.gov.uk/citizenspanel**



For further information contact Anna Sansom by e-mail asansom@worcestershire.gov.uk or telephone 01905 766715

Web Surveys Launched

The Research & Intelligence Unit is using newly purchased Snap software for the first time this month. The suite of integrated programs will help with questionnaire design, publication of results, data collection and analysis. Snap handles all the steps in the survey process and gives us the capability to easily design surveys and publish them straight to the web. There is no need for data entry, and analysis of results for creating graphs and charts is straightforward. Not all consultation is suited to web surveys; however using this software demonstrates e-government in action, providing for more efficient and cost effective consultation for the public, employees and stakeholders. Take two minutes to fill in our online survey evaluating the Research & Intelligence Unit Website **www.worcestershire.gov.uk/research** - click on the face at the top of the page.

For further information contact Anna Sansom by e-mail asansom@worcestershire.gov.uk or telephone 01905 766715

LARIA People

Continuing our profiles of LARIA Council and Activity Group members, we focus first on LARIA in Scotland Chair, Jack Winchester.

Jack Winchester

Jack trained as a Town and Regional Planner at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Technology [Dundee] in the swinging sixties/seventies. After graduating in 1972 he worked for a spell with Dundee City Corporation as a landscaping assistant, before pursuing his professional training as a town planner with Fife County Council in its policy section.

The opportunity to work closer to home found him successfully landing a development control job with Aberdeenshire County Council in 1973. This provided a very fast learning curve in dealing with all manner of planning applications around the booming 'oil and gas' city of Aberdeen, as well as frequent trips up Royal Deeside in response to a completely different set of circumstances. This all changed with reorganisation of local government in 1975, and he ended up as a Senior Policy Planner in the far-flung reaches of Grampian Region [Banff] for the next four years before returning to the city, Aberdeen City Council to be precise, in 1979.

The following 17 years saw Jack develop his policy planning experience as a Principal Planner in a range of policy areas such as land use planning [both local and structure plans], transportation, retailing, city centre planning and beachfront leisure policy planning, which all required large research inputs. This experience put Jack in the position of being able to fulfil a range of responsibilities at the 1996 reorganisation of local government in Scotland. This is the point when he was introduced to LARIA through a planning research colleague from the former Grampian Regional Council, Maggie Bochel [now with Highland Council].

The last seven years has seen Jack as Head of Corporate Information and Research, now centrally located within the Office of the Chief Executive, which includes responsibility for the Council's web team and GIS. Over this period Jack has also progressed to be initially joint chair of LARIA in Scotland (LiS), and more recently, with the retirement of Norrie Jamieson [Edinburgh], LiS chair.

Jack currently chairs the NE Scotland Datasharing Partnership in relation to Community Planning, which includes strategic monitoring, and manages the only Information and Knowledge Management officer in Scotland.

Outside work Jack enjoys furniture upholstery, attending antique sales, gardening, DIY, reading, watching Aberdeen Football Club! and playing 5-a-side football, golf, walking, films and generally anything that takes his mind off work in his spare time.

Our second profile, of LariaNews Editor Anne Cunningham, continues the Aberdeen theme:-

Anne Cunningham

Anne grew up in the Granite City, took her Statistics degree at Aberdeen University in 1982, and then ventured forth to join Standard Life in Edinburgh – only to come running back twelve months later when it became clear that she was not cut out to be an actuary. After a diploma in Systems Analysis and Design at the then Aberdeen College of Commerce, she found employment as a programmer in an oil service company. This lasted all of sixteen months, until the oil price slump of 1986 rendered her and most of her colleagues redundant.

After four months of fruitless job-searching, it was time to put Plan B into action, and Anne embarked on an MSc in Industrial Programming Technology (otherwise known as computing) at Sheffield University. Her dissertation placement the following summer at Leicester Polytechnic's Water Control Unit turned into a two-year Research Assistantship, writing programs to simulate the operation of urban water supply networks.

LARIA People cont...

When Anne moved to Tameside Council in Greater Manchester in 1989 it was still as an Analyst Programmer, blissfully unaware of the research function within local government. However as she began to specialise in databases and GIS, the Research Unit soon became one of her main customers. The more she saw of its work, the more frustrating it became to have to bow out the minute the computers were working. When an opportunity finally arose to join the Policy Unit (as it had by then become) in 1997, Anne didn't have to think twice.

Since then Anne has been involved in a wide range of research projects within the Unit, including residents' opinion surveys, citizens' panel enquiries and large-scale consultation events. However as a Principal Policy Researcher, the focus of her work is increasingly on secondary analysis of socio-economic and demographic data, from the Census, Neighbourhood Statistics and other sources, and on describing and disseminating what it tells us about quality of life in the borough. She first joined the LARIA Publishing Group in July 2001, and inherited the mantle of LariaNews Editor from Rachel Cossey last year.

Anne persists in commuting from Huddersfield, but when she's not on a train may be found dabbling in languages at evening classes, or pursuing her long-term ambition to pass her driving test...

Dawn Roberts

December 1st 2003 saw the arrival of twins for former Vice Chair of LARIA, Dawn Roberts, and husband Alan. Eleanor and Benjamin weighed in at 6lb 1oz and 5lb 13oz and are doing really well. Dawn is certainly being kept busy, though she plans to return to work at Rotherham Council in May 2004.

London Borough of Camden

Research is a new priority area for Corporate Policy at the London Borough of Camden. In recognition of this, a corporate policy research team has been created consisting of a Lead Research Officer and two Research Officers. The team will be responsible for commissioning, managing and carrying out research to support policy development at the corporate level as well as co-ordinating different aspects of the Council's research work.

The post of Lead Research Officer has recently been filled by **Debbie Lee Chan**, who is also a member of the LARIA Events Activity Group. Debbie Lee trained as a researcher at MORI's Social Research Institute after graduating from the University of Cambridge with a social sciences degree in 1992. Other posts Debbie has held include Associate Director at ORC International, Director at MRUK Ltd, and Fellow in stakeholder engagement at the Office for Public Management.

Outside the office, Debbie Lee is a member of the Social Research Association and sits on the steering committee of the Ethnic Researchers' Network (a Market Research Society sponsored network).

Joining Debbie Lee as Research Officers are **Victoria Harkness** and **Fung-Yee Lee**. Victoria joins us from her post as a Research and Learning Network Manager at Shared Intelligence Ltd., a consultancy engaged in community regeneration, economic development, social inclusion and Government modernisation. Fung-Yee joins us from her post as Policy and Research Officer within Environment and Leisure Services at the London Borough of Southwark. Previous to that Fung-Yee worked at the National Institute for Social Work.

The team at Camden would very much like to hear from peers with ideas of how to develop the corporate policy research function. We look forward to hearing from LARIA colleagues with advice. Please contact Debbie Lee by emailing Debbie.chan@camden.gov.uk or by ringing her on 020 79745133.

LARIA People cont...

MVA

The past year has seen several researchers join MVA at its various offices around the country.

Anita Friend joined the London Office as a Researcher after completing a Bachelor of Arts in Geography, specialising in Human Geography in her second and third years. As part of the course, Anita studied both qualitative and quantitative research techniques which include questionnaire and interview design, and analysis techniques using both spreadsheets and Minitab. Her dissertation on "The effects of popular culture on HIV/AIDS policy in San Francisco" and numerous other coursework research projects gave her the opportunity to put these techniques into practice.

Kate Skellington Orr joined MVA's Glasgow Office having previously worked as both an academic and a government researcher. Kate brings with her specialist interests in Applied Social and Criminological Psychology as well as considerable experience in both qualitative and quantitative research design and implementation.

Kate has a BSc Honours degree in Applied Psychology and Sociology and is currently in the final stages of a PhD in Criminological Psychology for which she carried out a multivariate analysis of interpersonal trust expectancies in the police. She has considerable experience in questionnaire design and carrying out one-to-one interviews.

In her previous post in the Justice Department at the Scottish Executive, Kate was responsible for managing the 2003 Scottish Crime Survey, answering ad hoc requests for crime survey data analysis and managing a number of drug related offending projects. She has experience of preparing answers to parliamentary questions and contributing to policy briefing documents.

Vicky Waller joined MVA's London Office after completing a Masters Degree in Human Geography Research. As a part of the course, Vicky studied both qualitative and quantitative research techniques, which included questionnaire design and analysis techniques using both spreadsheets and SPSS. Her dissertation, 'Newcastle and Gateshead City of Culture Bid', gave her the opportunity to put these techniques into practice.

Since joining MVA, Vicky has been able to develop her skills further through working on a number of projects. She has designed feedback questionnaires as well as facilitating and taking part in telephone semi-structured interviews. She has also undertaken quantitative data analysis, and report and proposal preparation.

Susanne Falp joined MVA's Manchester Office and has worked on a number of both quantitative and qualitative studies for a variety of clients. Susanne has undertaken various questionnaire based surveys, including Citizens' Panel surveys for Birmingham City Council, Trafford Borough Council and Derbyshire District Councils. Susanne has experience in project management, and is currently responsible for managing the Trafford Citizens' Panel and a consultation exercise on behalf of Oldham Borough Council. Susanne has also had experience in qualitative research, largely through moderating and drawing conclusions from focus groups.

LARIA People cont...

Rachel Harding also joined MVA in Manchester. She has undertaken various questionnaire-based surveys, moderated and reported on a variety of focus groups and has completed in-depth interviews. In addition to this, Rachel has worked on transport planning projects using computer software such as MapInfo and ParkMap. Rachel has a BSc (Hons) Geography and has completed a variety of both qualitative and quantitative research projects. Her dissertation was entitled 'Health is where the home is...a comparative research study of two wards in Greater Manchester'.

News from Elsewhere

The Education Management Information Exchange (EMIE)

EMIE is a well established information service for local authorities in the UK. Based at the National Foundation for Educational Research in Slough, the service has operated since the early 1980s, serving first the LEAs in England and Wales, and, later, Northern Ireland's Education and Library Boards. From 2002, the bulk of the Scottish authorities have also subscribed to the service. The full range of EMIE's services are available to all those working in local authority central departments serving education. Schools and other establishments can also obtain its publications, most of which are now freely downloadable from the EMIE website: **www.nfer.ac.uk/emie**.

EMIE holds the UK's largest collection of local authority education management policy and practice documentation, with over 8000 database items which are constantly updated. Each local authority has a link person to act as a central point of contact but all EMIE's services are now also available online to those who are eligible to register. It is a cooperative venture, which relies on authorities contributing information and personal contacts for the benefit of all who use its services.

As well as being able to download local authority documents from its online database, subject searches, which offer a quick way of looking for information on topical subjects, can be conducted through the EMIE website. The website also offers a range of helpful facilities and links to other resources. An enquiry service and electronic discussion forums provide further means by which its local authority clients can both request and share information. The service also benefits its users by the easy access it has to the NFER's library and research departments and to EURYDICE, the information network on education in Europe.

Additionally, EMIE provides a range of publications, including reports and surveys on current policy and practice in local authorities, briefings on current research findings and bulletins on issues of topical interest. Forthcoming EMIE reports look at integrated education and social services for children and their families, and present the findings of a survey of LEA research, statistics and management information functions. *Education and the Human Rights Act 1998* by Simon Whitbourn was widely welcomed in 2003, and a second edition of another well received publication, *What is the LEA for? An analysis of the functions and roles of local education authorities*, will soon be available.

Further details of the EMIE information service can be found on the website or requested from emie@nfer.ac.uk.

News from Elsewhere cont...

South Sefton Pest Control Survey 2003

Mott MacDonald Merseyside Information Service (MIS) carried out the above survey for Sefton MBC's Environmental Protection Department in July/August 2003. The consultation formed a part of a project which, funded out of SRB and NRF monies, aimed to take a systemic approach to the chronic problem of rats in this deprived area of the Borough, including the distribution of secure waste containers to residents.

In order to pinpoint areas where action could be taken, the client required data on residents' views on the production and storage of domestic waste, and on the rat problem (personal sightings and other evidence, and perceived causes and responsibilities), at as local a level as possible. With 2001 Census Output Areas not available at the start of the survey, the sampling frame was all residential properties in the four chosen wards of Linacre, Derby, Orrell and Litherland, plus those Enumeration Districts (as defined in the 1991 Census) within 100 metres of the stated ward boundaries. Before results were available, Output Areas would be produced and published by ONS.

Sampling for the survey, which was to be a census of all households within the stated areas, was carried out at MIS using the Merseyside Land and Property Database (BS 7666). In total 24,363 households were mailed the questionnaire. Despite the lack of a reminder, some 9,466 people chose to respond to the survey, equivalent to a response rate of 38.9%, underlining the importance of the subject to local residents.

All confidential data analysis was carried out at MIS, while in order to enable the client to use the data to its fullest, an anonymised dataset containing data analysable at street level was also passed on to the client. On behalf of the client, Peter Moore, Assistant Director (Environmental Protection) said:-

'The survey has proved to be extremely worthwhile for the project and will prove invaluable in identifying to everyone what action is needed and why. The excellent response rate gives the data genuine weight and provides a sound mandate for action on the issues raised. The ability to analyse the data at several levels (survey-wide, and at Ward and Output Area level), and to map that data through GIS, has enabled us to relate the survey data to other data held (e.g. service requests) and to identify and more effectively show the general and neighbourhood level situations.

'Specifically the combined consideration of relevant survey data, historical and current service request data and additional local knowledge, has enabled the identification of the localised "hotspots" of rat activity that the project aims to target and the areas for the secure waste pilots'.

For more information on the survey please contact Ged Pearson at gedp@merseyinfoserv.com

Research at *sport*scotland

sportscotland (formerly the Scottish Sports Council) has commissioned two surveys which may be of interest. The first is a survey of gender in roles of responsibility in sport, including local authorities/trusts, governing bodies, clubs, universities, local sports councils, institutes of sport and ***sport***scotland itself. The survey is expected to provide useful baseline data and will report early in 2004.

Further information from Kirsty Noble (kirsty.noble@sportscotland.org.uk)

A major household survey of participation in sport is taking place throughout 2003/04. It includes a minimum sample of 800 adults and children in each local authority area, combining to a national sample that will allow Scottish participation in sports to be explored in some detail. Reports due summer 2004.

Further information from Jon Best (jon.best@sportscotland.org.uk)

LARIA Membership Renewal

We would like to remind all readers that membership renewals were due by 31 January. If you have not renewed your membership yet, please do so – if you do not renew your membership (full, associate or corporate) you will no longer receive LARIA News and be informed of LARIA events.

To renew your membership, please write to or email Graham Smith, the LARIA Administrator at 9 Cortland Road, Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough, TS7 0JX (email: **lariaoffice@aol.com**)

On The Road Again

When the Publishing Group get together we inevitably talk about our experiences. Some of them are weird. Many other LARIA members must have experiences that would brighten other members' days. We would love to hear them so please send them in. To start it off Debbie Wilson recounts some of the things that have happened to her when running focus groups.

"A few years ago I ran a focus group in a community centre. I didn't visit the venue beforehand to check layout, but the centre manager assured me that I would have a private space for the group. This space turned out to be half of the main hall separated only by a curtain. Half way through the group an aerobics class started up on the other side..."

"Another group was in the evening in a church hall. There was a yoga class in another room, but this did not disturb us. At the end of the group we realised that the yoga class had gone, and the teacher had locked up behind her. Our efforts to open the door set off the burglar alarm, and after about ten minutes we were rescued by the Vicar and the local police."

What experiences have you had? We'd love to hear from you.

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Next Issue

Copy should be sent or emailed in word format to the Editor (address on back page) to arrive by 8th April 2004.

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

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

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 LariaNews 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.

Notes

Notes

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

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

LARIA is registered as 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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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

LARIA wishes to encourage participation in its Activity Groups, 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.