LariaNews

LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESEARCH + INTELLIGENCE ASSOCIATION

LARIA NEWSLETTER NO.48 MAY 1995

Dates for your diary

LARIA in Scotland
GIS Seminar 22 June 1995, Stirling

LARIA in Scotland
Seminar on the Internet
23 June 1995, Edinburgh

LARIA in Scotland
The 1991 Census - Value Added for 1996
22 August 1995, Edinburgh

Research in the Community
11 October 1995, Birmingham

(for details of the above see page 19)

Next Issue (September)
Copy should be sent to the editors, (addresses on page 2), to arrive by **Friday, 7th July 1995.**

Future copy deadlines:
January 96 issue - 3rd November 1995
May 96 issue - 8th March 1996

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

In This Issue **Page**

Local Government Reorganisation *3*
A Local Authorities - OPCS Service Level for the 2001 Census *5*
Community Research Project at Hull University *6*
Local Authority R & I News 8
News from Scotland 13
News From Elsewhere 14
Census Rescue Service 15
Operational Research & Local Government 16
Notes & Queries 17
LARIA Events 18
Book Review 20
Noticeboard 22

FROM THE CHAIR

As those who attended the recent Annual Conference in Edinburgh will know, the research project commissioned from Bristol University to inform LARIA's national review of research in local government is in its final stages. Professor Martin Boddy, who is leading the project assisted by Dawn Snape, will be sending his report to the review's Advisory Group at the end of May.

Professor Boddy's research is based on 15 case studies and a postal survey of all local authorities in Britain. The Advisory Group will consider these findings, together with a summary report and recommendations drafted by the chair of the group, Professor John Stewart, at its next meeting on 1st June at the London Research Centre. John Stewart's report, with any amendments agreed by the Advisory Group, will then be sent to the Chief Executives of all new, existing and shadow local authorities, together with key figures in central government, the political parties and professional bodies. The full research report will be available for sale.

The purpose of the review is to facilitate informed decisions about the role and value of research across all local government services in Britain. It is intended that publication of the Advisory Group's report will also stimulate debate about research - its benefits, how it is resourced and organised, training and staff development issues, and its relationship to policy-making and service delivery. To that end, LARIA plans to organise two seminars on the issues raised by the review towards the end of June - one in Scotland and one in England - targeted at key decision-makers. Publicity will be circulated shortly. We then intend to follow up these seminars with a workshop in the autumn for a wider audience.

.....continued on page 3

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LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESEARCH & INTELLIGENCE ASSOCIATION

LARIA was established in 1974 to promote the further development and understanding of research practices in local government. LARIA aims to encourage communication amongst interested persons by providing a national forum for the sharing of technical knowledge and research methods.

Membership is by participation in LARIA's activities: conferences, workshops and publications are organised by the Steering Group which acts as the Association's Management Body. LARIA also publishes this newsletter, **"LARIA News"**, three times a year.

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

CHAIR Alison Smith, Head of Planning & Transport Research, Buckinghamshire County Council, County Hall, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1UY
Tel: (01296) 382793 Fax: (01296) 383990

VICE CHAIR Tim Blackman, Deputy Head, School of Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Gypsy Lane, Oxford OX3 0BP
Tel: (01865) 483750 Fax: (01865) 483937

HON. SECRETARY David Karfoot, Group Leader (R&I), Planning Department, Hampshire County Council, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UE
Tel: (01962) 846787 Fax: (01962) 846776

HON. TREASURER John Hollis, London Research Centre, 81 Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SZ
Tel: 0171-627 9604 Fax: 0171-627 9606

ADMINISTRATOR Sue Gee, 2 Turnstone Close, Winnersh, Wokingham, Berkshire RG41 5LQ
Tel: (01734) 783776

NEWSLETTER EDITORIAL GROUP

Editorial group convenor Marian Howett, Chief Executive's Dept., Newcastle City Council, Civic Centre, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE99 2BN
Tel: 0191-232 8520 Extn5037 Fax: 0191-232 1107

Helen Abraham, Policy Unit, Wrekin Council, Civic Offices, PO Box 213, Telford TF3 4LD
Tel: (01952 202431 Fax: (01952) 291060

John Bancroft, R&I Unit, Cleveland County Council, Melrose House, 1 Melrose Street, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS1 2YW
Tel: (01642) 264950 Fax: (01642) 263406

Tim Blackman, Deputy Head, School of Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Gypsy Lane, Oxford OX3 0BP
Tel: (01865) 483750 Fax: (01865) 483937

Ken Foster, Social Work Department, Fife Regional Council, Fife House, North Street, Glenrothes KY7 5LT
Tel: (01592) 754411 Ext. 3817 Fax: (01592) 760160

James Kelly, Director of Customer Services, North Kesteven District Council, PO Box 3, District Council Offices, Kesteven Street, Sleaford, Lincs NG34 7EF
Tel: (01529) 414155 Ext.400 Fax: (01529) 413956

Tony Smith, Strategic Management Dept., Birmingham City Council, The Council House, Victoria Square, Birmingham B1 1BB
Tel: 0121-235 4550 Fax: 0121-235 1300

Debbie Wilson, Corporate Development Unit, Kirklees Metropolitan Council, Civic Centre 2, Huddersfield HD1 2EY
Tel: (01484) 442048 Fax: (01484) 442738

OTHER MEMBERS OF STEERING GROUP

Graham Atherton (COSLA)
Nicki Baker (Central Regional Council)
Howard Cleeve (Doncaster MBC)
Bryan Hall (Cheshire CC)
Jon Harris (COSLA)
Rosemary Lamport (Arun DC)
Charles Leslie (LGMB)
Steve Little (West Midlands Joint Data Team)
Clive Lloyd (Hereford & Worcester CC)
Knud Moller (Stoke-on-Trent DC)
Paul Noble (LB of Hammersmith & Fulham)
Steve Simpson (Bradford MDC)
Graham Smith (Cleveland CC)
Jill Tuffnell (Cambridgeshire CC)
Paul Vittles (Robertson Bell Associates)
Les Worrall (University of Wolverhampton)

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

.....*continued from page 1*

You are likely to receive your copy of Professor Stewart's report in June, as it will also be sent to everyone on the LARIA mailing list. The seminars and workshop present an opportunity to respond to the report. In addition, we would like to devote some space in the next issue of LARIA News in late September to publishing short responses to the review's findings and recommendations, so please don't keep your views to yourself and write in to the new LARIA News editor, Marian Howett! (details on page 2).

The review is of course particularly important for those local government researchers affected by the current reorganisation of local authorities (see comments in this issue). For many the future is very uncertain. The Advisory Group's report will be timely and hopefully influential in safeguarding the position of research during a difficult period.

The newsletter editorial group has been working its way through the comments and suggestions made by everyone who responded to the last readers survey. Although the newsletter is clearly valued by its readers, we are adopting an approach of incremental change over time to improve the newsletter, its appearance and content. However, we do need writers to contribute features and news, so please do not hesitate to send in material. We are particularly keen to see more authorities contributing news about recent projects and reports. This is your chance to become a published author!

As you will see from the report by Marian Howett and Deb Tyler in this issue, we had a lively, varied and well-attended annual conference in Edinburgh over 10-12 April. It was the first LARIA conference for many participants and we hope a rewarding one. The conference proceedings should be published within the next couple of months and will be mailed to everyone who attended.

Finally, I would like to welcome Alison Smith of Buckinghamshire County Council as LARIA's new chair for 1995/96 following the Steering Group's annual general meeting in Edinburgh, and Marian Howett of Newcastle City Council as the new co-ordinator of the newsletter. Although I am leaving Newcastle City Council to take up an academic post in Oxford Brookes University, I shall be continuing as vice-chair of LARIA during 1995/96. I should like to record my thanks to Graham Smith of Cleveland County Council for his assistance as vice-chair during 1994/95.

Tim Blackman

FROM THE (NEW) CHAIR

On behalf of LARIA, I would like to thank Tim for his year of Chairing the Steering Group. He has contributed greatly to the profile of LARIA, particularly through his work with the Review of Local Government Research and we are sorry that his return to the academic life means he is leaving the Chair.

I am pleased to say that Tim will not get off the hook entirely however, as the Steering Group will continue to benefit from his experience as Vice Chair.

The coming LARIA year was launched with great enthusiasm at the Edinburgh Conference especially by those who took part in the Ceilidh! LARIA events and publications are entirely the work of the LARIA membership, supported by our Administrator Sue Gee. So if you have spotted a gap that needs filling with an event, a publication or an article in LARIA News, please contact any Steering Group member to see how together we can make sure it happens.

Alison Smith

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - THREE VIEWS

THE REORGANISATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SCOTLAND AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH & INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES

Local government in Scotland is facing imminent reorganisation. Next year, on 1st April (an appropriate date!), every council other than the 3 Islands councils (whose total population is less than 75,000) will cease to exist, and 29 new authorities will start to function. Five of the six largest regional councils (with functions broadly similar to those of a county council in England), covering some 83% of the Scottish population, will fragment into 25 new unitary authorities, merging with the district councils covering the same areas. The four non-fragmenting regional councils will each merge with the 4 or more district councils that cover their area.

Despite the obvious losses of economy of scale, the ongoing costs of the reorganisation process itself, and the additional requirements such as decentralisation which are also imposed by the Act, the government is firmly determined to make overall savings of £30m in this process.

On the one hand, the new authorities are going to need R & I services like never before. How else will they get to grips with the circumstances in which they are trying to provide services - the number, nature and location of their customers and their populace, their needs, preferences, and attitudes, and the social conditions and economic circumstances in which they function? Can any authority be so splendidly isolated that it is indifferent to the need to scrutinise all aspects of its performance, both in relation to the standards it sets itself, and in comparison with other similar authorities? In an increasingly harsh financial climate, can any authority afford not to put effort and resources into really exploring where its money is going and to what effect, and into the increasingly sophisticated advocacy required to compete for those all-important funds from government and the EU.

But on the other hand, the capacity to provide R & I services is likely to be severely hit by the disaggregation of the 5 bigger regions. Some of the existing district councils are exceedingly keen to avoid any kind of joint working among the authorities succeeding the regions. But with R & I being an activity with costs that are to a very large extent independent of the size of the area covered, a forced disaggregation of R & I resources will hugely reduce the inherited capacity to deliver the function. The new authorities may recognise this, and wish to augment the service with additional resources - but will they be able to afford to do so?

In the end, a great deal is going to hang on the priorities and attitudes of the incoming authorities and their heads of paid service. If they genuinely appreciate their need for a strong R & I support service, they will ensure that that is available, through whatever mechanisms. If not, who knows?

Nicki Baker
Head of R & I
Development & Planning Services
Central Regional Council
Viewforth
Stirling FK8 2ET

THE FUTURE OF RESEARCH AFTER LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION: A PERSONAL VIEW FROM A SERVICE DEPARTMENT

It is sometimes thought that research in service departments, especially where an authority is amalgamating rather than disaggregating, will be relatively untrammelled by local government re-organisation. To an extent this is a reasonable view as the focuses of research will not disappear; the needs of consumers and communities will continue to be researched as will the effectiveness of services provided.

However, as it is unlikely that significant extra resources will be devoted to research, I believe that the future of research in service departments will be best secured by the development of partnerships. These must bring together the resources of various players to make the research 'whole' considerably greater than the sum of its 'parts'. There are at least three models of partnership which should be developed:

Firstly, existing inter-organisational contacts must be more fully developed. These partnerships might involve key organisational players in the evaluation and delivery of services. For example, in Fife, a partnership was set up between the social work department, housing providers, voluntary sector and the local health board (health authority in England) to explore the attitudes of people about sheltered housing.

Secondly, intra-organisational partnerships must be developed between research and service delivery staff. Although the effectiveness of service delivery and practice increasingly require to be evaluated, the range of services provided makes it beyond the capacity of any research section to do this comprehensively. It is necessary that researchers establish partnerships with staff which assist them through the transfer of expertise to evaluate their own work or practice. For example, researchers in Fife have assisted staff to carry out their own surveys of consumer satisfaction at the point of service consumption.

Thirdly, partnerships must be established between providers, users and their representatives. At one level these may take the form of establishing simple partnerships between voluntary organisations or groups of users to evaluate specific services. At another more challenging level, these may empower users to take greater ownership of research and set their own research agendas. Research through this form of partnership becomes both a means of involvement and of emancipation. In Fife, the process of establishing research links with voluntary sector bodies has begun and we are seeking HORIZON funding for a service users evaluation group.

In conclusion, although local government re-organisation presents significant challenges to researchers, it also offers considerable opportunities to develop new ways of working in partnership. These may in turn considerably improve the degree to which findings are disseminated and acted upon.

The views presented above are the personal views of the author. They should not be taken to necessarily represent the views of Fife Social Work Department on this issue

K J Foster
Regional Manager, Research
Fife Social Work Department
Fife House
North Street
Glenrothes
Fife
Scotland

R & I IN CLEVELAND

In April 1996, Cleveland County Council will be abolished and its functions transferred to four unitary authorities - Middlesbrough, Stockton-on-Tees, Hartlepool, and Redcar and Cleveland (currently Langbaurgh-on-Tees). The County Council's Research and Intelligence Unit, one the Country's largest such units, therefore faces uncertainty about its future.

The current Unit contains a broad mix of disciplines and has worked for all departments of the County Council and many of the departments of the present Borough Councils. Its future as a single entity is however by no means certain. Current thinking within the present Borough Councils is wide-ranging with just about all possibilities being considered. These range from retaining the present Unit as a joint organisation servicing all four authorities to breaking the Unit up and spreading the functions and staff between the four new authorities. Between those two extremes there are of course many other possibilities. An interesting option that is being investigated is some sort of partnership arrangements for R&I between the four authorities and the academic sector.

At the time of writing (end of March) the R&I Unit is undertaking a request from the four Borough Chief Executives to identify where each area of R&I work might most appropriately be undertaken and, in general, indicate how R&I can be tackled in the new arrangements. A report on this will be available to the Chief Executives around the end of April. The exact timing of any decision will not be clear until the new authorities are elected in May. Ideas and recommendations can be formed beforehand of course.

Graham Smith
Director of Research & Intelligence
Cleveland County Council
Melrose House
1 Melrose Street
Middlesbrough TS1 2YW

A LOCAL AUTHORITIES - OPCS SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE 2001 CENSUS

By John Hollis, London Research Centre, LA Side Lead on the IDLG Census Sub Group

Local authorities were dissatisfied with OPCS' performance in delivering goods to schedule and right-first-time for most - if not all - of the major 1991 Census products in which they were interested. Delays and redelivery of output wasted authorities' time and resources and in many cases cost real money, i.e. money paid to third parties for special studies, and income foregone for those LAs which became Licensed Resellers of the Census output.

There is a move to allow free mutual access amongst Government Departments of all their data holdings. If the Census were to be included in any such deal local authorities must be protected against a larger slice of the revenues being obtained from them to make up for within-government losses.

The census market for 1991 products grew and diversified. OPCS are now selling more through Agencies and Licensed Resellers - including several local authorities. OPCS now also have a Business Advisory Group, which works in a similar way as their other four advisory groups dealing with local and central government, the health services and the academic sector. Local authorities will therefore need to work harder to ensure that they get a good deal from the 2001 Census. In this respect all areas of Census activity will require attention, particularly the topics and questions, the output geography, the form of the standard output products, the pricing structure, and the resale and distribution arrangements.

OPCS are soon to co-locate with CSO. It is expected that a closer link will be made before the next Census, and that Agency status is likely. Experience with other Government Agencies is that a higher proportion of costs will need to be covered by income generated on the open market.

OPCS costs of obtaining and processing the data in 2001 may rise faster than inflation and they may be forced to raise prices significantly for 2001 output.

With this background in mind local authorities wish to build on the experience of their Service Level Agreement with the Ordnance Survey to ensure satisfactory arrangements for the 2001 Census. The LA Side of the Full IDLG indicated at the meeting held in November 1994 that they would seek to negotiate an SLA with OPCS to cover the 2001 Census. The first steps were taken at the meeting of the IDLG Census Sub Group in March.

It would be expected that an SLA would put on a proper business footing many of the arrangements which were made for the 1991 Census. For 1991 the single buy-outs by the ESRC - for further and higher education - and the DOH - on behalf of Health Regions and Districts, etc - were examples of moving towards

SLAs in those sectors. Local government wishes to build on these initiatives as well as their experiences from 1991 in order to achieve advantages, such as, but not necessarily restricted to, the following:

1. Specification of the outputs to be received at set prices and with set standards - i.e. delivery timetable, error free, media, etc.

2. Financial penalties if OPCS fail to perform to the standards.

3. The design of purpose built products for LAs.

4. LAs able to select from a menu of optional outputs at set prices.

5. Closer involvement of LAs in planning the output and the geography.

6. LAs involved in QA for the data.

7. Close involvement of OPCS with LAs setting up IT systems (analysis software, GIS, etc.) and the agreed supply of test data for such systems.

8. The free interchange of standard output between LAs.

9. Clear arrangements for resale and distribution of Census statistics and products in advance of their supply.

It is essential that an SLA has benefits to both sides, even if the pressure to reach an agreement is mostly coming from one direction. At the outset the following forms a list of potential advantages to OPCS:

1. Guaranteed income flow.

2. Involvement of LAs in helping with the performance of the Census and in checking output.

3. LAs may take the lead in determining standard output geography.

It is too early to determine the extent of the influence which an SLA for the 2001 Census would achieve. Many issues need to be clarified, such as would an SLA operate solely between OPCS and English and Welsh LAs, or would it be able to encompass the requirements of local authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland? It is clearly desirable to see harmonisation of the three censuses held in the UK and it would be appropriate if an SLA could be extended to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The local authorities, through their dealings with Ordnance Survey, have a body of experience in establishing SLAs. Much of this experience rests with the Local Government Management Board which has led negotiations with OS on behalf of the Local Authority Associations. The next steps are for a meeting between OPCS and representatives from the IDLG Census Sub Group and the LGMB to determine the framework and timetable under which formal discussions will take place.

If anybody has particular experiences with the Census which could usefully be used in the negotiations, or ideas of what should be included in an SLA, please let me know as soon as possible.

Contact: John Hollis, London Research Centre, 81 Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SZ (Tel: 0171-735 4250, Fax: 0171-627 9606)

COMMUNITY RESEARCH PROJECT AT HULL UNIVERSITY

Martha Vahl discusses some limitations of evaluation methods and goes on to describe how constructing indirect models can help communities to improve on existing practices. The example uses work on mental health services in Calderdale.

The research in this project aims to develop methods to help communities (groups, services, etc.) to improve on their own activities. The emphasis is thus not on the actual implementation of improvements, but on designing them and ensuring appropriate implementation. One stimulus to the project was the results of my first study concerning community services (reported in *LARIA News 44*).

I was asked to evaluate the quality of the implementation of a policy decision establishing two community resource teams. The method agreed upon was to compare the original objectives with their realisation. The results were quite clear: most of the objectives had been met. The difficulty was that this did not suggest how to improve on what had been achieved, or even how to maintain the achieved quality.

One may criticise evaluation as a general method in these terms, or even look down upon it (Fuller, *LARIA News 46*). This is not the way I reacted. I am well aware of the fact that evaluation and accounting are necessary facts of life. I am also aware of the fact that evaluation is an important research method by itself: if one cannot predict a priori, as is often the case in the social sciences, one has to check and evaluate a posteriori.

My criticism of evaluation was on a restricted level. The commissioners clearly had a different expectation: they had hoped to get results that would suggest to them what steps to take next. This the evaluation did not do, although I did add some thoughts on how one might arrange studies that would suggest how to initiate further developments.

My Community Research Project is the result of a number of challenges of people who suggested that I work on these thoughts, to make them more accessible to general use. This is what I am doing now. As an example I will describe another, later study that did seem to suggest how to support further development.

The central principle implies an extension of the idea of evaluation. Evaluation is taken to imply a comparison. The usual form is that one tries to make visible the difference between an intended state and an actual state. One may have other comparisons as well. I intended to make visible my study where and how one might improve on present activities.

The criterion has to be that how to improve becomes visible to those involved in the activities. This allows them to generate and experiment on improvements themselves. Such local control will be exactly what was missing in my first study: a comparison only between the intended and the actual does not suggest anything new.

An opportunity to apply this method came when I was commissioned in Calderdale to evaluate 5 schemes funded through the Mental Illness Specific Grant, and when the method was chosen from a set of seven I had proposed. The schemes are offering services to people with mental health difficulties in the areas of housing, employment, respite care, volunteering, and information and support.

Method

To make visible how the workers operated the schemes 'indirect' models for each of the schemes were constructed. Such models describe the way workers order what they see and do. They may differ quite substantially from the way outsiders describe their work ('direct models'). The 'indirect' models can be made to represent how workers understand their objectives, their clients' needs, their resources and the way they prioritise.

The 'indirect' model implies that one looks for 'if...., do....' statements. Activities can be described by stating what workers will 'do', 'if' a particular event is observed. Data were gathered in two rounds. First, all workers were interviewed. This was done individually, together, or in a workshop setting. Next, preliminary models were constructed and presented to the workers for checking purposes.

The models in their final form provided the required information. They also gave rise to discussions with workers about possibilities for changes, as intended. Each model suggests changing the 'if', and maintaining the 'do', or changing the 'do' and maintaining the 'if', or changing both the 'if' and the 'do', or not changing either.

Results

The models were described in a report and presented in a meeting with the Calderdale Social Services Committee. They were well received and proved not to need any further amendments. Even more importantly, a number of workers had already started to experiment on the 'ifs' and 'do's' even before the report was presented to the commissioners.

Example

As an illustration one may consider an 'if..., do...' statement from the employment scheme (CEDAR). The 'if' for finding employment for clients is, of course, that one can find (or observe) potential employers. An obvious first step to improve on this kind of activity is to change the 'if'.

One suggestion made at the presentation was to increase the possibility of observation: the chairperson agreed to use his contacts with employers in a separate part of his life. For a change in the 'do' it was suggested to provide employers with stories about the clients that would make their skills (or lack of specific skills) more easily visible. Another extension of the 'do' involved setting up special businesses for clients. This option needed further re-thinking.

Changes that were initiated involved extending the 'ifs', that is the observability, and hence selectability, of carers in the respite care scheme and of accommodation providers in the housing support scheme. Also some of the 'dos' of two schemes could be combined: training and support in dealing with people with mental health difficulties could be done together.

Conclusion

The method of constructing 'indirect' models seems to have potential in indicating what people can do to improve on existing practices. Another advantage is that they summarise what has been done. This can be used to decide on or apply for renewed funding for such practices: 'indirect' models must make explicit what specific activities have been developed, even when these were not specified in the original objectives.

It obviously is part of the project to improve on this method. There is a need to continue looking for other methods as well, however. Commissioners as well as workers have many different needs. Not all methods of research can fill these needs. It is important, therefore, to continue to look for and to design new methods and to test them.

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Vahl, M., *Improving Mental Health Services in Calderdale. An evaluation of 5 Schemes funded through the Mental Illness Specific Grant*, The University of Hull, Centre for Systems Studies, Hull, 1994

Contact: Martha Vahl, University of Hull, Department of Management Systems and Sciences, Centre for Systems Studies, Newlands House, Hull HU6 7TQ (Tel: 01482 857351, Fax: 01482 857544).

LOCAL AUTHORITY R & I NEWS

City of Bradford Metropolitan Council

Labour Force Projections for Bradford District

To complement recent population forecasts for Bradford District, Bradford Metropolitan Council are currently undertaking a project to create labour force forecasts. The recently completed population forecasts will be used to produce the implied size of a labour force by age and gender and ethnic group for each year 1991 to 2011. The projected trends in economic activity rates will be sensitive to the Bradford experience illustrated in the 1991 census, Employment Department regional and national forecasts of economic activity, and to any perceived trends in ethnic group economic participation over time or over generations.

The labour force forecasts are produced by a model developed in Lotus 123 software. The user is able to set certain parameters and assumptions such as the 1991 economic activity base rate, compound annual growth, the option to use an external trend, and a fertility adjustment option is also included. The program produces a forecast complete with economic activity rates, labour force size and the decomposition of labour force change.

Contact: Steve Simpson or Andrew Peloe (01274) 754252

"Speak Out!"

Bradford Council in conjunction with the local Health Authority, FHSA, TEC, and Community Health Trust, is in the process of establishing a research panel of Bradford residents, which will be used to ascertain public opinion about the services provided in the Bradford District.

A screening questionnaire was sent to a random sample of 25,000 residents, 4,000 have been returned and it is intended to have a final panel size of 2,500. The final panel is being selected from the replies received by using census data to establish quotas on a number of key variables (e.g. ethnicity, age group, employment status).

It is expected that the "Speak Out!" panel will be up and running by the summer and will be managed by a steering group of representatives from the agencies involved. In the meantime guidelines are being established for usage of the panel, and research is being carried out to examine issues such as panel fatigue, panel members becoming experts, etc.

Contact: Mike Barnett (01274) 752221

Geographical Information Systems (G.I.S.)

A project has just been completed which investigated in detail the potential benefits of implementing G.I.S. across parts of the Authority. The investigation focused on both financial and strategic benefits which G.I.S. may bring. The analysis specifically concentrated on a number of functions:

- forward planning
- development control
- drainage
- transportation
- land charges
- housing
- environmental protection

The project established a good case for proceeding with G.I.S., and this will initially take the form of a pilot project as part of a regeneration scheme on a large housing estate. The pilot will particularly provide useful information about database integration (each Council

department uses different database software) and the ability of the Council's current network to cope with G.I.S.

Contact: Mike Barnett (01274) 752221

Cheshire County Council

The Research and Intelligence Unit has carried out the following projects in recent months. Reports of projects are available from the contact listed or from Research & Intelligence Unit, Cheshire County Council, County Hall, Chester CH1 1SG.

ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE IN CHESHIRE

For the past three years a member panel has been established to develop and oversee the County Council's strategy in tackling economic disadvantage. One of its roles is to commission research and steer policy initiatives emerging from that research. During 1994/5 several research projects have been reported to the panel.

Areas of Family Stress 1991 (Revision)

This report updated previous analyses of indicators related to stress among families and young people. This geographical analysis used 1991 data from client records and the 1991 Census. The basic unit of analysis was generally district electoral ward. In some cases the geographical unit related to areas smaller than wards. This work has been used in re-assessing the allocation of resources towards alleviating stress in certain parts of the County, both through main service budgets and through local community action projects.

Small Areas of Family Stress

This report identified the areas smaller than electoral ward which were used in the above analysis. This was done because in some areas ward boundaries can mask concentrations of stress among communities within wards. The analysis used 1991 Census at enumeration district level.

Areas of Stress for Older People

This report used a similar approach to that used in the analysis of family stress work, but with particular relevance to factors associated with stress among older people. The analysis was based on 1991 Census and Social Services client records. The aim was to examine the geographical pattern of the indicators used to see whether any concentration or re-allocation of service resources might be appropriate.

Rural Disadvantage

This report analyses data from the 1991 Census, information about bus services and survey data about village facilities. It aimed to examine the patterns displayed by the geographical analysis of various indicators. It should enable the Panel to assess what service responses might be appropriate in alleviating disadvantage in rural areas. It also provides information which might be incorporated in the development of a Rural Strategy for Cheshire.

Fire Incidences and Economic Disadvantage

Work has begun on looking at the incidence of certain categories of fire call for the Fire Brigade. The analysis is examining whether or not there is any link between the prevalence of these types of call and Areas of Family Stress.

Contact: Gordon Hamilton (01244) 602176.

CHESHIRE ECONOMIC REPORT 1994

The annual Cheshire Economic Report is produced by the Research and Intelligence Unit in co-operation with other Services in the County Council and takes into account the assessments produced by other partners in the Cheshire economy. The 1994 Report links closely with Corporate (e.g. Economic Disadvantage, European) as well as Economic Development Strategies. In line with Cheshire and North West concerns, the themes highlighted in the 1994 Report are:

- changes in the Cheshire Labour Force
- a regional perspective, including Europe

The 1994 Report suggests that Cheshire may be recovering from the recession slightly faster than parts of the rest of Britain, though long-term and youth unemployment remain high.

Copies of the 'Cheshire Economic Report 1994' are available from R&I (£17).

Contacts: For further information, John Risk on (01244) 602064. For copies, Claire Tapley on (01244) 602185.

ADULT EDUCATION IN HALTON SURVEY

Analysis of 1993/94 adult education enrolments indicated that the proportion of people involved in the Halton (Widnes and Runcorn) area of Cheshire was substantially lower than in other areas. The reasons for this are likely to be many and inter-related e.g. historical service and college provision factors; locational and transport issues; the socio-economic

and demographic make up of the Halton population. The Education Service approached the Research and Intelligence Unit (R&I) to carry out analysis of existing data and survey research of non-participants to address such factors and suggest changes to improve participation. The review was carried out in co-operation with Halton College.

The analysis and fieldwork, mostly carried out in November/December 1994, involved

- analysis of Halton College enrolments 1993/1994
- interviews with Service and College staff and practitioners
- analysis of Census of Population 1991 data
- an interview survey of non-participants by type
- 3 Focus Groups
- comparison with a Users Survey carried out by R&I in Autumn 1993 and surveys by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

The questionnaire survey carried out by R&I consisted of 426 interviews in Halton and 207 across Cheshire for comparative purposes. The Focus Groups were carried out by Robertson Bell Associates Ltd on behalf of the County Council and looked at more in-depth and attitudinal barriers to non-participation in Halton.

First results were presented in early January 1995 and a report by R&I will follow, as well as further analysis.

Contacts: John Risk (01244) 602064 and Jean Stelfox (01244) 602027.

OTHER CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PROJECTS

Community Care Feedback

The implementation of the Community Care Act has meant major change in the management of care for people in need. A 'Revised Community Care Plan' was produced by Cheshire County Council in April 1992, defining a set of on-going standards and initiatives to develop a high quality service. A survey was undertaken in May 1994 to obtain feedback from clients in order to establish whether the standards and requirements of the assessment process are being met. The results will assist in the definition of future standards to be set.

Contact: Shannah Long, (01244) 602027

Lapsed Users of Libraries

A postal survey has recently been completed. It attempted to examine reasons for non-use among people who have not borrowed from a library for at least a year. The purpose was to identify whether there are any new issues for service provision. A report will be produced during March.

Contact: Gordon Hamilton (01244) 602176

Quality of Services in Libraries

A major survey is being undertaken at nearly all libraries. At each library self-completion questionnaires are distributed to visitors over periods of one or two weeks depending on size of library. It has been asking visitors about a range of topics concerning quality of services, including views on opening hours to make comparisons across the County as well as identify local problems. Final results will be presented to the Information and Leisure Services Committee in June.

Contact: Gordon Hamilton (01244) 602176

Cleveland County Council

The following is a selection of reports of recent studies undertaken by the Cleveland County Research and Intelligence Unit. They are available at the price shown (cheque with order please, payable to Cleveland County Council) from Cleveland County Council, R & I Unit, PO Box 17, Melrose Street, Middlesbrough TS1 2YW.

Family Planning Services In Cleveland - use of and preferences for provision, CR875, August 1994, £10

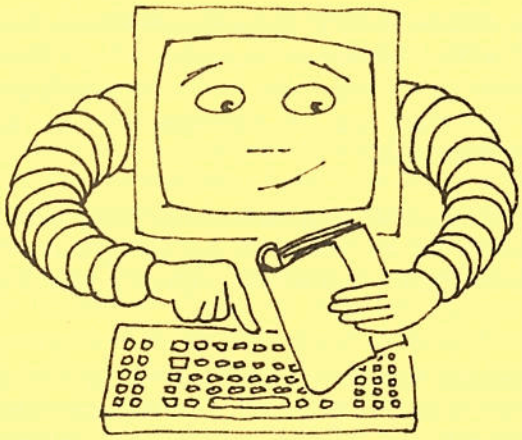
At the request of Tees Health a number of questions were included in the Cleveland Social Survey 1993 which covered the use of family planning and related services by people between the ages of 17 and 59 years. It also looked at their preferences for provision with regard to times of day, days of the week, location of provision and type of professional providing services.

Contact: Liz Crookston (01642) 264979

The Methodology of Allocating School Bus Contracts, CR866, October 1994, £3

Every year the Education Department has to allocate contracts to bus operators for pupil transport from home and school and back. The problem has got bigger and more complicated each year and a purely manual approach has not been appropriate for achieving the cheapest solutions. The R&I Unit has been using Operational Research methods to help the Education Department with this problem for many years, now employing a partially computerised method. This paper explains the methodology used.

Contact: Paul Wilson (01642) 264957



".....employing a partially computerised method".

Evaluation Study: CUDIM 1990-1994, CR872, November 1994, £15

The Credit Union Initiative for Middlesbrough (CUDIM) was established in 1990 as a voluntary sector project with core funding from the Urban Programme to foster credit unions. This report looks at the concept and practice of credit unions and the experience of CUDIM in surpassing its targets. It also gives pointers to the future for credit unions locally and for an organisation with the capacity of CUDIM.

Contact: Eric Smith (01642) 264973

Children and Young Adults in Cleveland, CEN5, November 1994, £15

This report is one of a series of reports on the 1991 Census. It looks at the children and young adults of Cleveland and its constituent districts. It also gives figures for the 94 borough wards of Cleveland. Cleveland had a relatively young population compared with the rest of England and Wales: 22% of the population were aged under 16 years compared to 20% nationally. The report covers five topics relating to children and young adults:

- gender and ethnic origin
- marital status and economic activity
- health and disability
- migrants
- young adults who are lone parents

Contact: Sheila Jefferson (01642) 264965

How Operational Research is Helping the Education Department's Advisory Service, CR869, January 1995, £3

This report describes the work done for the Education Department's Advisory Service from 1991 onwards. It is concerned with two related computer systems. Firstly, it describes a system which stores adviser appointments for OFSTED inspections and also in-house professional development courses. The system checks for double-bookings and provides various printouts. Secondly, it describes a system dealing with appraisal of the headteachers of 264 Cleveland schools. The report explains how the headteachers' appraisers were allocated, how the appraisals were scheduled and how the system has been maintained.

Contact: Malcolm Lofthouse (01642) 264956

The Council Tax in Cleveland - results of a survey of attitudes and experiences in 1994, CR876, January 1995, £6

The 1994 Cleveland Social Survey, in keeping with the practice of previous years, asked citizens about their attitudes towards Council Tax levels, whether they are getting assistance with paying Council Tax and their opinions on the 1994 increases in County Council spending levels.

Contact: Liz Crookston (01642) 264979

Library Awareness Project for Urdu/Punjabi/ Bengali Speakers, CR877, January 1995, £6

The Libraries and Leisure Department runs a project funded by Section 11 money, to raise the awareness and use of library facilities by Urdu/Punjabi/Bengali speakers in Cleveland - particularly women and children. The quantitative data already collected by the Library Service has been augmented by qualitative data collected during discussions with schools and community groups visited by the librarian and a postal questionnaire to Asian community organisations.

Contact: Liz Crookston (01642) 264979

Newcastle Upon Tyne City Council

All the following reports are available, price £10, from Edna Hetherington, Research Section, Chief Executive's Department, Newcastle City Council, Civic Centre, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE99 2BN. Tel: 0191 232 8520 Extn 5036, to whom enquiries should also be addressed.

Financial assessment of social services users

This report evaluates the feasibility of making available income details from Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit records to social workers undertaking financial assessments of clients. It is concluded that sharing of these details will expedite assessments, subject to data protection safeguards. A pilot scheme is recommended.

Impact of Home Care Charges on Users of the Service

This report is based on surveys of the impact of home care charges on users of the service. The first survey is of people who terminated the service following the introduction of charges and the second is of people currently receiving the service.

First Move Study

The report of the first phase of this research looks at the experiences of young people as they attempt to leave home or care and move to their own tenancies. It investigates the problems of living independently and explores possible support services thatwould help.

Housing Needs of Young People in Scotswood

This study identifies the housing needs of young people in Scotswood, a deprived area in the West End of Newcastle, and proposes forms of provision to meet these needs.

Survey of Factory Tenants

This report is of a survey of tenants of factory premises let by the City Council, assessing satisfaction with the premises and with support services provided.

Shopping Survey

This report presents results from a survey of the shopping habits of late night Thursday and Sunday shoppers.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Research in a Shire District

LARIA News seems to concentrate on items received from certain types of authority - in particular, counties/regions and 'mets'. This is understandable given that these are the authorities with the biggest research capacity.

With 2-3 people working part-time on policy matters we are driven by the needs of the moment and 'pure' research is rare. The following gives a flavour of our work.

The **Census** has loomed large and we have produced an 'atlas' of about 150 pages of ward-based maps and background text. This retails at £10/£20 and we have sold several dozen as well as giving away a good few. We have also produced more detailed reports on the ethnic minorities, workplace statistics and a census-derived 'deprivation study'. These go down well with members, students and others. They form part of a range of 'occasional papers', a useful concept for getting junior staff involved in research work, with the incentive of an end product which they can flash around at interviews.

Apart from this our main focus is a **Planning and Economic Monitor**, now up to issue 14, published (we hope!) three times yearly. This picks up regular reports on unemployment, land availability, statistical series of various types, and gives us a vehicle to report work on such issues as house prices, retail performance (via regular floorspace surveys) and anything else which comes up. Its chief value is in securing an audience for this 'background' work and this provides the rationale for keeping on doing it. Members are very fond of the 'monitor' and it goes down well with schools and the various 'key players' in the community.

The profile we have secured in this way has been worthwhile in giving a springboard for our impending unitary status. Our feeling is that keeping a momentum going with a stream of small-scale research projects is a good way of making sure that this important side of local authority work is not neglected. It would be easy in the cash-strapped environment we work in (we maintain it is worse in 'second tier' authorities than in the larger unitaries and county organisations) to let such work go by the board. If LARIA can penetrate through also to smaller authorities and develop a network among them the benefit would, I am sure, be immense.

Contact: Knud Moller (01782) 404347

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND

LARIA in Scotland. OPEN FORUM 15/3/1995. Held at Central Regional Council, Old Viewforth, Stirling, Scotland.

The purpose of the forum was to afford an opportunity for reviewing the activities of LARIA in Scotland before an invited audience of researchers, academics, managers and policy formers from central and local government. The well attended event heard **Nicki Baker**, Chair of LARIA in Scotland, outline the achievements of the Scottish group since its inception nearly two years ago. She went on to argue that the challenges presented by local government re-organisation necessitated a growing role for LARIA in Scotland. This was particularly true in relation to networking activities and establishing channels so that researchers could keep in touch with each other. Nicki also noted the value of workshops, conferences and seminars as means of co-ordinating activities and the need to more fully exploit the potential of skills sharing through these activities. She concluded her remarks with a call to the audience to participate in the activities of the LARIA in Scotland core group.

The themes identified by Nicki were fleshed out by speakers from the various LARIA in Scotland sub-groups and strongly echoed by **Graham Smith**, Vice-Chair of LARIA UK. He went on to describe the remit of the research review commissioned by LARIA UK. The review being conducted by the School for Advanced Urban Studies (SAUS) at the University of Bristol explores:

- the nature of the research profession in local government and its functions,
- the resources allocated to research and the quality of what is delivered,
- the use of research in decision making, the congruence of research 'needs' and activities,
- the perceived value of research for managers and decision makers,
- the future of research in the changing context of local government.

It is anticipated that a draft report will be presented during May to the steering group chaired by Professor John Stewart (Birmingham University).

The forum concluded with a presentation from **Professor Gerry Stoker** (Glasgow University) who attempted to answer three key questions:

- what is research?
- what evidence exists of research having an impact on the policy process?
- what are the challenges facing local government research in the future?

Unsurprisingly, although Professor Stoker had no pat answers to each of these questions, he was able to identify four types of research being carried out:

- basic (knowledge driven),
- strategic (what should be done to resolve problems),
- applied (feeding results into the policy process),
- and action (assimilating results into both policy and practice).

He further argued that basic and strategic research were more commonly the preserve of academia than local government. However, he qualified this assertion by noting that distinctions between spheres of research were becoming increasingly blurred.

Perhaps most importantly for the research professionals present, Professor Stoker presented strong evidence from the 'research utilisation' literature of research having made significant impact on policy formation and practice. Much of this depended on the degree of 'cultural coherence' between the researcher and policy formers; the more they shared values and assumptions about research the greater its influence and *vice versa*. Furthermore he noted that researchers who played an 'advocate role' (for research and its findings) were likely to be more influential among policy makers than if they acted as 'neutral technicians'. The literature suggests that policy makers find research useful: as a means of protecting positions or enhancing the credibility of a policy, as a method of comprehensively defining issues, clarifying goals and keeping them 'ahead of the game', and providing perspectives or information not usually available to policy makers.

Professor Stoker concluded his presentation by noting what he felt were the key challenges to researchers in the future.

Firstly, researchers must find a satisfactory balance between their roles of 'neutral technician', advocate and facilitator.

Secondly, researchers in local government should strive to make better use of information available to them, especially through disseminating and synthesising findings from other researchers for policy audiences.

Thirdly, he argued that much future effort should be focused on explaining the complexities of the emerging networks of organisations with roles to play in local government and in service delivery.

Finally, researchers should strive not only to provide information for the use of citizens and service users, but also to work directly with them. In this form research can assist the empowerment of citizens and service users.

In conclusion it is clear that the LARIA in Scotland Open Forum was a successful means of articulating the achievements of the organisation to a wide audience of policy makers, managers and others. Each speaker outlined the obligations faced by researchers in local government, and of LARIA itself, to respond flexibly and influentially to the dynamic changes which are happening. LARIA in Scotland will continue to develop appropriate methods of networking and communication between researchers These will be informed by the findings of the SAUS study and through continuing debate of the future role of research in local government.

K J Foster
Fife Regional Council

INTRODUCING THE SCOTTISH QUALITY EXCHANGE

The Scottish Quality Exchange (SQE) was founded in January 1992 by a group of quality professionals interested in exchanging ideas on improving service quality in the public sector.

The first meeting was held in the Annan and Eskdale District Council Chambers in Annan on 24 March 1992 and covered various aspects of "Training for Quality".

Since that day the SQE has gone from strength to strength, organising seminars all over Scotland including, Elgin, Fife, Edinburgh, Strathclyde and Stirling and now boasts a large membership from both public and private sector service providers including local government, Health Boards, Universities and Colleges and the utilities.

Because of the need to provide value for money, the seminars are free. Member organisations host the seminars and workshops and can choose topics and speakers to benefit staff in their own organisations, then simply make the session open to other members of the SQE.

Over the years seminars have addressed topics such as BS EN ISO 9000, TQM, Customer Care, The Citizen's Charter, C.C.T., Quality in Healthcare etc. The seminars are organised by a Steering Group and members are informed of forthcoming events by post.

More recently the SQE has given members carrying out research a forum in which to present their findings to the rest of the membership, with a view to being at the forefront of the latest quality developments.

If you feel that your organisation/department would like to get involved, please obtain a membership form by contacting Ms Alison Muckersie, Lothian Regional Council, 12 St Giles Street, Edinburgh EH3 5AF (Tel: 0131-469 3810, Fax: 0131-469 3820)

Linda Hartley, West Lothian District Council

NEWS FROM ELSEWHERE

University of Bristol

New School for Policy Studies

The University of Bristol is to launch a major new venture, the School for Policy Studies, in the autumn. The School will be the largest centre of its kind in Europe. Professor Malcolm Johnson, who has an outstanding record of academic leadership, has been appointed as Director.

Professor Johnson, currently Dean of the School of Health and Social Welfare at the Open University, takes up his post this summer and, in the meantime, is collaborating with members of the University's Department of Social Work, Social Policy and Social Planning, and School of Advanced Urban Studies to build this exciting and innovative centre for research and teaching.

The new School, with a staff of over 150, will be developed around specialist research and teaching centres in key policy areas and seven new professors have been appointed to leadership roles. Areas of particular research interest are:

- the widening gap between rich and poor and the crises of unemployment and homelessness
- the consequences of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public order Act
- the future of local government

- effects of the NHS and community care reforms
- how to respond to increasing levels of domestic violence
- the future of home ownership in a changing society
- child welfare and the impact of the 1989 Children Act
- regeneration of peripheral estates and inner city areas
- international developments in the European Union
- the operation of the family justice system
- professional education in universities

The School for Policy Studies includes the integration of three high profile University of Bristol departments: Social Policy and Social Planning (which includes the Dartington Social Research Centre and the Socio-Legal Centre for Family Studies), Social Work (which includes the Early Childhood Development Unit) and the School for Advanced Urban Studies. It will start operating from 1 August 1995. A launch event will take place in the autumn.

The new School's research work will be organised into five Centres: Family Policy and Child Welfare, Health and Social Care, Professional Studies, Socio-Legal Studies, Urban Studies. Dartington Social Research Centre and the Early Childhood Development Unit will continue to retain their distinct identities.

The seven new professors are:

- Martin Boddy, Chair in Urban and Regional Studies
- Lesley Doyal, Chair in Health and Social Care
- Ray Forrest, Chair in Urban Studies
- Hilary Land, Chair in Family Policy and Social Welfare
- Carol Propper, Chair in Economics of Public Policy
- David Quinton, Chair in Psycho-social Development
- Sophie Watson, Chair in Housing

For further information please contact: Carroll Pierce or Julia Mortimer, University of Bristol, Rodney Lodge, Grange Road, Bristol BS8 4EA. Tel: 0117 974 1117 or Fax: 0117 973 7308. E-mail SPS-PR@Bristol.ac.uk.

CENSUS RESCUE SERVICE

A recent article by Eric Thompson of OPCS will be of interest to Census Rescue Service readers. The paper describes how the 1991 Census was planned and implemented and is being assessed. Some lessons learned for 2001 are also listed and the discussion which took place when the paper was presented at a Royal Statistical Society meeting in October last year is included. (Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A V158 Part 2 pp203-240)

As we reported in the last issue, OPCS consultation about the 2001 Census is gathering pace now and details of the arrangements for consultations with various advisory groups are given in the latest OPCS Census Newsletter. The groups likely to be of most interest to LARIA readers are IDLG Census Sub Group (Contact: John Hollis 0171-627 9604) and the Scottish Statistical Liaison Group (SSLG) Census Sub Group (Contact: Jon Harris 0131-346 1222). Of course, Census users can also give their views direct to OPCS if they wish. If you do not already receive the Census Newsletter, contact OPCS on (01329) 813800 (England and Wales) or 0131-314 4254 (Scotland) to get on the mailing list.

Elsewhere in this issue, John Hollis discusses the possibility of a service level Agreement between local authority and OPCS (page 5).

OPCS tell us that re-supply of Special Workplace Statistics should be complete by 21 April. Buyers of Special Migration Statistics will have received a letter offering a re-supply of this data set to correct errors in the inflow of migrants to the area from outside GB. We do not yet have a date for this re-supply.

Please send your census problems, and solutions if you have them, to:

LARIA Census Rescue Service,
c/o Planning and Transport Research,
Buckinghamshire County Council,
County Hall,
Aylesbury,
Bucks HP20 1UY

NEW LARIA PUBLICATION

CENSUS SPECIAL STATISTICS ON MIGRATION, WORKPLACE, AND STUDENTS

A collection of workshop papers

These papers were originally given at a workshop organised by the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association, 17 October 1994.

The bound collection of papers is available from:

Sue Gee, LARIA, 2 Turnstone Close, Winnersh, Wokingham, Berks RG41 5LQ (Tel: 01734 783776), for £15, including postage and packing (cheques payable to LARIA, or invoice on request).

1991 Census Parish Data

Dear Census Rescue Service,
As a Shire County, parish Census data is of more interest to our customers than ward data. Since OPCS were not planning to produce parish data at an early date, one of our first analyses with 1991 Census SAS was an aggregation from EDs to parishes using the OPCS constitution lists. However we found that because of the modification of statistics and suppressed EDs, we had 'lost' around 300 people when we added together the resulting parishes over the county.

To reduce the effects of modification, we created parishes from SAS for both wards and EDs, where possible subtracting a small number of EDs from wards to leave the parish. This method has a different problem. Some of our parishes now have negative values for certain characteristics and this creates difficulties, for example, when drawing thematic maps with MapInfo. What can we do?

C Bumpkin
Saspacshire County Council

Dear Country
Delivery of OPCS SAS for Parishes is expected by the end of May so if you can wait until then, this should solve the main modification and suppression problems. OPCS are creating the parishes for unmodified, pre-suppression data although the resulting parishes will themselves be subject to the blurring rules.

Martha Matticks
Census Rescue Service

Census Validation Survey Reports

Dear Census Rescue Service
We have the Census Validation Survey Coverage Report but would like to know when the Quality Check Report from the CVS will be published.

Tina Beans
Enumeration Research Centre

Dear Ms Beans
We understand from OPCS that the Quality Check Report is due for publication in early summer 1995. You may also find two other documents useful: the OPCS Monitor SS 94/2 'First Results from the quality check element of the Census Validation Survey' which was published in 1994 and the 1991 Census General Report which will include some information about coverage and quality, and is expected to be available towards the end of March 1995.

Karl Kewlater
Census Rescue Service

AND FINALLY,

An anonymous reader recently ordered SAS and LBS for seven output areas (about 2.8 Mb in total), and the data arrived from OPCS on EIGHT magnetic tapes! Is this a record?

OPERATIONAL RESEARCH & LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Please send contributions for this regular feature of LARIA News to John Bancroft (address on page 2).

Cleveland County Council

LGR: Staff Transition Modelling

As a result of the Local Government Review, Cleveland County Council will be abolished on 31st March 1996 and local government in the area will be undertaken by four unitary authorities based on the present four District Councils. Clearly an enormous amount of work will be necessary in 1995/1996 to facilitate this transition, and the staff of the present five authorities are going to be the key elements in this. Meanwhile Cleveland County Council must continue to deliver its statutory services right up to March 31st 1996.

Cleveland's Director of Social Services is concerned at the effect that appointments of his senior staff to the new authorities will have on his department's ability to deliver

services for Cleveland County Council. It is expected that Chief Executives will be appointed in May, Chief Officers in August, with other senior appointments before the end of 1995. Because many of the senior appointments in the four new Social Services departments may come from senior staff currently in the County Social Services Department, the Director is anxious to explore what effects this might have.

The Cleveland R&I Unit's OR Team has been working on this question with the Director of Social Services and the Director of Personnel Services since early February. Clearly there are many uncertainties such as:

- the departmental structure of the new authorities
- the dates of appointment
- if appointees are Cleveland County Council staff, what proportion of their time will be lost to the County Council and from when

In such an uncertain situation, the OR team has concentrated on modelling the logic of the system using spreadsheets. We have considered the situation for each individual unitary authority as well as a version combining all four. The model shows the various appointments and their expected date, a range of possible outcomes, and the percentage of time subsequently lost by the County Council.

The way the model is operated is that the Director of Personnel Services ensures that the logic of the model complies with the latest thinking and agreements of the five authorities' personnel officers, and then the Director of Social Services sits down with his senior staff to put their feelings about likely outcomes into the models. For example, for the four Chief Officer posts:

- what are the probabilities of one, two, three or all being filled from outside Cleveland Social Services?
- what is the probability of one, two, three, or all being filled from the Cleveland Social Services first tier, (second tier, third tier)?
- what proportion of the time of Cleveland staff will be lost to their new appointments and how will this vary over time?

The model has a number of built in checks to ensure that the probabilities input don't imply that for example, there are currently 1.4 Cleveland Directors of Social Services or more 2nd tier officers than exist. The model can also be run from the new Unitary authority perspective when the build-up of their staff can be 'simulated' taking account of delays in availability if appointments are made from outside the Cleveland staff system.

The model calculates expected values of the losses of resources incurred by each tier of staff for the probabilities input, and this produces interesting and potentially alarming results. But like all models of this kind the main benefit is not the results it calculates but that it can be used to explore different scenarios and, as the structure and the probabilities to be input are discussed by the Director and his staff, facilitate better understanding of what the situation is, how to respond and what scenarios to try to avoid by reaching appropriate agreements between authorities.

Contact: Don Peace, John Bancroft (01642) 264954/3

NOTES & QUERIES

This section takes a sometimes serious, sometimes slightly frivolous approach to problem solving by correspondence. If you have a query related to the research and intelligence field, send it in to the editors and we will print it.

London Borough of Barking & Dagenham

Impact of Housing Association Developments

Over the next few years Barking & Dagenham will be progressively disposing of its land bank, mainly for house-building, with a significant proportion to be sold to Housing Associations for houses to rent. Alongside this, work will start on the major development of Barking Reach, part of the Thames Gateway riverside regeneration.

These developments are anticipated to cause significant migration flows around the borough, and will lead to specific pressures on a number of schools, which are already full or almost so. The decision on whether to add temporary or permanent accommodation will naturally take account of many demographic factors but the 'turnover' of families on Housing Association developments will be a key issue. Has any authority any experience or information they can share with us to help in developing our response?

Contact: Tony Benton, Education Office (Policy and Planning), London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, Education Department, Town Hall, Barking, Essex IG11 7LU (Tel: 0181-592 4500 Extn 3507, Fax: 0181-594 9837)

LARIA EVENTS

LARIA's 1995/96 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The 1995 Annual Conference of LARIA, which also celebrated LARIA's 21st birthday, was held at Queen Margaret's College, Edinburgh, an appropriate venue given LARIA's recent expansion north of the border.

The conference covered a number of themes relevant to R&I practitioners, the principle ones being developments in information and particularly the Information Superhighway, and preparing local authorities for the future. Other topics included demography, local statistics, value added in education, need and resource allocation, and monitoring and evaluating City Challenge.

Around 100 delegates and speakers enjoyed a wide range of plenary and workshop sessions. Speakers were drawn from varied backgrounds, from private companies, local authorities, educational institutions and central government. The sessions were entertaining as well as informative and generated lively debate.

In addition, delegates were updated on the progress of the 'Research in British Local Government' project being undertaken by SAUS, University of Bristol, on behalf of LARIA. Some later volunteered themselves for after-hours discussion groups about training and development needs as part of this project, despite competition from the bar being open! We were later recompensed for this (some might say bribed to participate) by free drinks all round.

During the conference we were taken on a journey down the Information Superhighway. Those of us still ambling along in the slow lane could only stare in awe. We glimpsed a seemingly futuristic world where new technology enables video conferencing, touch screen information systems and other sophisticated information techniques to take place at local, national and inter national levels.

These exciting new developments are already underway in some organisations. However, both speakers and delegates alike recognised the need to strike a balance between taking on board the wonders of modern technology while striving for needs-led service delivery. Change does not necessarily equal progress.

It is unlikely that the next LARIA annual conference will be held in a virtual reality environment, but who knows about the one after that? On the down side, as Professor Gerry Stoker, in a fetching red and black dogtooth number, remarked, 'no video would do justice to this jacket', and we could only agree!

More practically, local authorities will need to learn to use this new technology to best effect in both providing public services and disseminating meaningful information.

The workshops dealing with the use of census and other statistical data, including resource allocation issues, were well-attended given their useful and practical relevance to local authority practitioners. Delegates were able to share ideas, debate the problem areas and explore potential developments.

After the formal sessions, delegates had the opportunity to socialise with their colleagues and discuss the issues in a more relaxed environment. These informal discussions highlighted the diversity of the way research is structured in different authorities but reinforced the importance of collaboration and co-operation.

The social highlight of the conference was a 'traditional' ceilidh, organised by our Scottish colleagues. We had a very entertaining, enjoyable and energetic evening (our departing chair was last seen 'stripping the willow' somewhere on campus). There was almost continuous laughter (both on and off the dance floor) and much less-than-meaningful discussion which went on for some of us until the wee small hours of the morning.

As researchers we all know the importance of quality feedback. Those who have not already completed their 'delegates questionnaire' are urged to do so. In previous years, we are told, the steering group was aptly described as, 'those men in grey suits' by some respondents. This was taken to heart - not only has the gender balance of the steering group changed, but this year they were all much more casually and colourfully attired. Your comments matter! In addition to conference feedback, comments from any interested party in relation to LARIA would be most welcome.

Professor Martin Boddy of SAUS commented on the 'loo roll syndrome' in relation to research: 'you never know it's gone until you need it'. In the light of this, we hope that those of our colleagues affected by the looming local government reorganisation will be back next year to tell us their success stories.

We would like to extend our thanks to the conference organisers, speakers and all delegates for this interesting, informative and enjoyable event. Hopefully, the Superhighway to the future is not a bumpy road besieged by roadworks, contra-flows and cone hotlines.

We look forward to seeing our colleagues next year. Finally, all conference speakers have been asked to prepare papers on their presentations, detailing the key issues relayed and discussed during their sessions. These will be published by LARIA in the near future as the 1995 Annual Conference Proceedings, which will be

a useful reference source for all research practitioners. Watch this space for further details - proceedings of previous annual conferences are still available (see ad in this issue).

Marian Howett and Deb Tyler
Newcastle City Council

LARIA IN SCOTLAND

GIS in Local Government -The Spatial Element in Public Policy

June 22 1995, Business Management Centre, University of Stirling

After the Ordnance Survey Service Level Agreement many councils have adopted GIS for mapping. This seminar will discuss where we go from here. How can digital mapping be turned into fully functional GIS? What are the benefits and barriers?

With local government reorganisation in mind the seminar aims to concentrate on the smaller authority, and to demonstrate from practical examples how GIS has influenced policy formation.

Programme

'Twenty Years of Corporate GIS', *Rob Swainston, Dudley Metropolitan Council*

'GIS in Development Control', *Isabel Page, Gordon District Council*

'Adding Value to GIS Data', *Alan Bourke, Scottish Homes*

'GIS and Asset Management', *Geoff Robson, Highland Regional Council*

'GIS and the Organisation', *Heather Campbell, Department of Planning, University of Sheffield*

Further Information

There will be ample time for discussion of current GIS issues in Scotland. It is hoped to provide wall space for posters showing practical examples of GIS applications.

For further details about the seminar, and offers of posters, please contact Simon Ellis, Lothian Region (Tel: 0131-469 3859). For bookings please contact Sue Gee, LARIA Administrator Tel: (01734) 783776.

Seminar on the Internet

23 June 1995 at CoSLA, Edinburgh

For further details about the seminar please contact Graham Atherton on 0131-346 1222.

The 1991 Census - Value Added for 1996

The LARIA in Scotland day conference on the 1991 Census - What Did We Do With It? will take place on Tuesday 22nd August in the CoSLA offices in Edinburgh. Cost including buffet lunch, teas and coffees will be £90.

The conference continues the theme of preparing for Local Government Reorganisation and will examine work done in different authorities throughout the country on adding value to the 1991 Census. The purpose, as ever, is to broaden the professional skills and expertise of the Research and Intelligence Community through shared experience and the exchange of information.

The topics to be discussed will include:-

- Uses of the '91 Census in '96
- Good practice in using Census data
- Innovations in output
- Special workplace statistics
- Population estimates for small areas

The format of key theme speakers, poster sessions and workshops will facilitate the sharing of best practice and the full exchange of experiences and information.

For further information contact Norman Jamieson at the City of Edinburgh District Council on 0131-529 3508 (Fax:0131-529 7478) or Sue Gee, LARIA Administrator on (01734) 783776.

CONFERENCE WORKSHOP ON RESEARCH IN THE COMMUNITY

A number of individuals and organisations are planning an event in the Autumn to share experiences of and promote research in the community. The people involved encompass a range of statutory and voluntary organisations and the academic sector, and LARIA is giving its support.

The preliminary outline is:

Objectives

- sharing what is going on
- promoting good practice
- moving forward

Target Audience

- local authority/health authority researchers, and those involved in commissioning research
- researchers - independent and university based
- experienced community activists

Date

- 11th October 1995

Location

- Birmingham

Further details later.
Contact: Charles Ritchie (01226) 285426

BOOK REVIEW

Community Works: 26 case studies showing Community Operational Research in action
Edited by Charles Ritchie, Ann Taket and Jim Bryant

Community Operational Research Unit Publications, no.1, 245pp. £5.50 + £2.00 p&p from the Operational Research Society, Seymour House, 12 Edward Street, Birmingham B1 2RX

The editors end their introduction by suggesting that "people who have become involved in community operational research do seem to become inspired by what they do".

The contributions to this book are certain to inspire readers who are concerned with the real impact of their research on the communities affected by it.

The authors describe how their skills helped community and tenants groups, and staff within statutory projects, to express and reflect on their priorities, and plan for effective action. So the case studies are collected under six headings:

- helping groups and organisations run smoothly;
- getting the information you need ... and making sense of it;
- financial and business planning'
- planning a campaign;
- working with other groups and organisations;
- evaluation.

Some of the techniques would be familiar from organisational management, statistics, qualitative methods, financial planning and team-building. Overriding in this book is not the explanation of techniques but a demonstration that (a) self-organisation of communities (of residents or of workers) can be effective in expressing and achieving real solutions that are more than the sum of demands of individuals, and (b) that research methods facilitated by a professional can be an effective aid to this process.

Pressure on local government to treat the population it serves as a collection of individuals who comprise a fluid market of demands, sits at odds with the necessity to place greater responsibility on organised voluntary groups. This book describes tenants' preparations for management of their housing estate; parents' response to consultation over a school closure; the creation of a network of agencies to work together against racial harassment on the streets; a review of funded and unfunded programmes working in an alliance on poverty issues; and 22 other examples of community research in action.

The book is the first in a series from the Community Operational Research Unit at Northern College near Barnsley; the series represents an effort to document and disseminate the Unit's work. It is typical of the Unit and of the approach of community operational research, that the book achieves its aim by providing a platform not only for the Unit's own work but for that of other centres and individuals throughout Britain.

A collection of short case studies by diverse authors could easily be a difficult book to read, but helpful introductory sections to each section and to the book as a whole indicate the studies which deal with specific techniques, and with different types of group and types of problem.

This remarkably cheap (for local authorities) and well-presented book is for practitioners of research with community groups. It will also be useful for those who are thinking of the support needed by community groups and staff when asked to manage, evaluate, or in other ways take responsibility for local services.

Five future volumes include a guide to housing management training, to community-led assessment of health needs, and to getting started in community operational research.

Review by Steve Simpson, Bradford City Council

Urban Policy in Practice by Tim Blackman
Routledge, 1995, ISBN Hb 0-415-09299-X £45, ISBN Pb 0-415-09300-7 £14.99

Good introductions to public administration - and especially local government - are notoriously hard to find. Fortunately, in recent months there have been two books published, which if read together

provide students, practitioners and local politicians alike valuable tools to their field.

Firstly, there was *Local Government in the United Kingdom* by David Wilson and Chris Game (Macmillan 1994); and secondly, Tim Blackman's *Urban Policy in Practice* which was published in 1995.

At a time when issues concerning local governance and accountability are at the fore of the public policy debate - and importantly now in the front of citizens minds - and with the greater fragmentation of services resulting from CCT, those wanting an introduction to current, broad policy issues in local government will find much value in Tim Blackman's book.

Urban Policy in Practice is divided into four parts, covering topics looking at Urban Policy and the State, Approaches to Urban Policy, Key Goals for Urban Policy and Issues for Urban Policy in the 1990s. All chapters are well-written and highly useful.

But one of the most impressive chapters is the seventh, which analyses the current state of urban policy and research. At a time when councils are facing ever tighter fiscal restraint, unfortunately, research is too often seen as a soft target for cuts. Very few councils now retain strong, well-resourced research units. Yet they are essential to advance policy development and locating the needs of their citizens. This chapter concisely shows the importance of research to local policy-making. It will shame those councils which no longer have a commitment to research.

Urban Policy and Practice includes a good use of illustrative quotes and charts, and overall the book can but be recommended. Both beginners and experts will find the text a worthwhile investment.

Review by Christopher Exeter, Newchurch & Company

Home to School. School Leavers Destinations 1993. Association of County Councils 1994

Two papers, recently published by the Association of County Councils, provide interesting accounts of two key policy areas in education.

School Leavers Destinations 1993 is a paper compiled by the UK Heads of Careers Services Associations, and is edited by John Yates. Much of the paper consists of charts comparing the destinations of school leavers in County Council, Metropolitan Borough Council and London Borough Council areas in 1992 and 1993. However, the introduction provides a useful analysis of key trends and strategic issues arising from the results. For example, 83% of all school leavers chose to remain in education and training in 1993. According to the report, this confirms a five-year trend for school leavers to remain in education and training beyond sixteen.

Home to School is a discussion paper on home to school transport written by Dr Sian Thornthwaite, a freelance consultant specialist on school transport issues.

The paper starts by contextualising the situation, and highlights that free school transport was introduced in England and Wales by the 1944 Education Act to facilitate school attendance irrespective of residence or parental means. However, the report also emphasises the fact that providing school transport is becoming increasingly costly to maintain. With longer journeys to school, more children are eligible to receive free transport, but cost councils £400 million per annum.

The paper provides a useful summary of the current issues, such as route safety, parental choice of school and so on, that affect this policy. However, one of the most useful parts of this report is a matrix which summarises and analyses alternative bases of school transport provision.

Review by Christopher Exeter, Newchurch & Company

Publication Received for Review

Involving Older People in Planning and Evaluating Community Care: a review of initiatives by Patricia Thornton and Rosemary Tozer
Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, 1994, 105pp, £7.50, ISBN 1-871713-45-5

Readers interested in reviewing this publication for LARIA News please contact John Bancroft (address on page 2).

Publishers please send books or other publications for review to the Editor, Marian Howett (address on page 2).

NOTICEBOARD

May 25 Birmingham
Operational Research Society Course
"Strategic Choice"
Contact: Chris Barrett 0121-233 9300

May 31 Stirling
ARVAC Training Workshop in collaboration with Volunteer Development Scotland
"Research in the Voluntary and Volunteering Sectors: What makes it special?"
Contact: Pat Marsden (01206) 824281

June 6 London
South Bank University Local Economy Policy Unit Seminar
"Evaluation of Inner City Regeneration Projects"
Contact: Sam Aaronovitch 0171-815 7798

June 6 London
Operational Research Society Process of OR Study Group Meeting
"Ethics and Professionalism"
Contact: Paul Keys (01482) 465731/466330

June 7 London
London Research Centre Seminar
"Breathing Easy - air quality and pollution in London"
Contact: Diane Middleton 0171-627 9611

June 13 London
O.R. Society Health & Social Services Study Group Meeting
Evaluation of Community Care Initiatives"
Contact: Ruth Kaufman 0171-972 5198

June 15 Bristol
SAUS Workshop
"Councillors' Tasks, Skills and Development: A Practical Discussion"
Contact: Lucy Gaster/Margaret Page 0117-974 1117

June 16 Leeds
Leeds Metropolitan University Policy Research Unit Seminar
"Local Economic Assessments: The Way Ahead"
Contact: Jean Richardson (01532) 833225

June 20 Leeds
Leeds Metropolitan University Policy Research Unit Seminar
"Empowering Communities: What Role for IT?"
Contact: Jean Richardson (01532) 833225

June 22 Stirling
LARIA in Scotland Seminar
"GIS in Local Government - The Spatial Element in Public Policy"
Contact: Sue Gee (01734) 783776

June 22-23 Bristol
SAUS Course
"The Enabling Local Authority: Models and Examples"
Contact: Lucy Gaster/Linda Martin/Marilyn Taylor 0117-974 1117

June 23 Edinburgh
LARIA in Scotland Seminar
"The Internet"
Contact: Graham Atherton 0131-346 1222

June 29 London
Association for Survey Computing Conference
"Marketing Analysis for Decision Support"
Contact: Diane Elder (01494) 793033

July 5 London
ARVAC AGM and Annual Seminar
"The Vitality of The Local Community"
Contact: Pat Marsden (01206) 824281

July 11-12 Henley
Operational Research Society/IBM Conference
"The Evaluation of Information Technology"
Contact: Chris Barrett (0121) 233 9300

August 22 Edinburgh
LARIA in Scotland Seminar
"The 1991 Census - Value Added for 1996"
Contact: Norman Jamieson 0131-529 3508 or Sue Gee (01734) 783776

August 30-September 1 Brighton
British Society for Population Studies 1995 Conference
Contact: Louise Johnson (01202) 221014

September 5 London
London & South East O.R. Society Meeting
"Case Studies in Community O.R."
Contact: Lesley Swindley 0171-242 9050 Extn 3530

September 5-7 Stirling
The First SocInfo International Conference on "Technology and Education in the Social Sciences (TESS)"
Contact: Ms Millsom Henry (01786) 467703

September 12-14 Canberbury
Operational Research Society Annual Conference
Contact: Chris Barrett 0121-233 9300

October 11 Birmingham
Joint Conference/Workshop involving LARIA
"Research in the Community"
Contact: Charles Ritchie (01226) 285426

Recent LARIA Publications

Research for Policy 92: Recent Developments in Local Government Research
(Proceedings of the 1992 LARIA Annual Conference),
July 1992 127pp
ISBN 1 85795 025 9 £20

Research for Policy 93: Community Identity, Information Strategies, New Angles on the Census
(Proceedings of the 1993 LARIA Annual Conference),
July 1993 117pp
ISBN 1 85795 075 5 £20

Research for Policy 94: Community Safety; Uses of 1991 Census Data; Housing; Local Government Reorganisation
(Proceedings of the 1994 LARIA Annual Conference),
September 1994 136pp
ISBN 1 85795 046 1 £20

Census Small Area Indicators of Poverty and Deprivation: Methodological Issues
(Papers from the LARIA/Manchester Census Group Workshops held in February and March 1993)
July 1993 80pp
ISBN 0 95076 812 X £10

Research & Intelligence and Change in Local Government: Opportunity, threat or challenge?
(Proceedings of the inaugural conference of LARIA in Scotland)
August 1994 32pp
ISBN 0 95076 813 8 £10

Census Special Statistics on Migration, Workplace, and Students
(A collection of workshop papers)
April 1995 100pp
ISBN 0 95076 814 6 £15

All the above available from:
Sue Gee, LARIA Administrator,
2 Turnstone Close,
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