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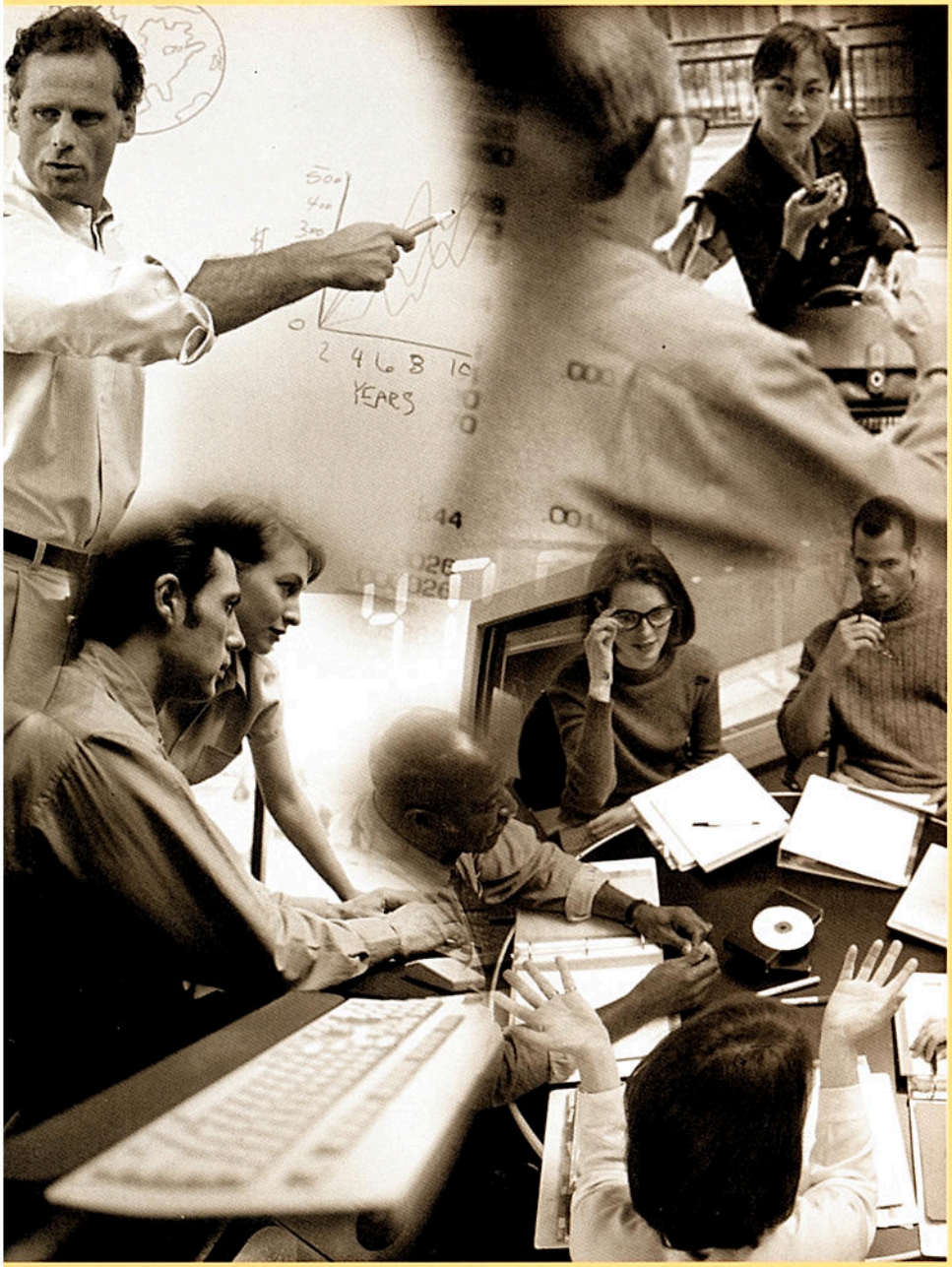
LariaNews



LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESEARCH + INTELLIGENCE ASSOCIATION
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This edition was produced by Rachel Cossey, Debbie Wilson, Dawn Roberts, Graham Smith, John Wicks, Richard Stevens, Anne Cunningham.

From the Chair - Bryan Hall

Widening the Network

As many members will know we are at present well on the way to arranging for the Affiliation of Local Government Information Scientists (ALGIS) to be affiliated to LARIA rather than the Institute of Information Scientists. This will help increase our influence whilst we provide a support and base for ALGIS. If the ballot of our Full Members approves and all arrangements are mutually agreed at the AGM on 26 March, ALGIS will join us from the beginning of April. They will join the 'in' crowd and be known as ALGIS in LARIA.

Surveys and Consultation

This development with ALGIS is in line with the wish for closer working with a number of like minded organisations. Another, but much looser, example is the LARIA link with the Market Research Society where we are jointly running a one day conference on research methods on 7 February.

This in turn demonstrates the demand for training in survey techniques that we identified long ago, but to which we have only recently been able to respond. The LARIA training day on Effective Surveys (see article on page 11) on 13 December was successful but oversubscribed, and will be repeated on 8 March.

Another successful event was the November seminar on Consulting Hard to Reach Groups. This was also repeated on 28 January because of demand. The importance of this topic is shown by the articles in this newsletter. Hopefully some of the issues raised are dealt with in our good practice guide on "Consulting Disabled People", based on work at Kirklees Council.

Consultation on budgets has been a challenging activity involving many researchers over the last few years. The article in this newsletter "Adding Up the Figures" on page 10, considers some of the issues.

Many consultation activities are linked to the increasing use of Citizens' Panels, which were the subject of a recent good practice seminar. An idea that emerged at that workshop was the need for a forum to exchange ideas about best practice in the use and running of citizens' panels. It was suggested that the LARIA web-site would be a good place for this. Perhaps this idea could be developed.

Register of Electors

The future of using the Register of Electors for 'citizen relationship' and research purposes is uncertain following the Robertson Judgement restricting use for anything other than administering elections. In LARIA we have already made representations about use of the Registers for research in local government and thought we were making progress, but the judgement means we will have to continue lobbying. Such developments are all part of a trend of making survey research even harder even though it is increasingly needed. When we get to the next round of Best Value User Satisfaction surveys it will be interesting to see how guidance has changed.

Geographic Information

There will be many authorities preparing their Registers of Electors to the BS7666 standard to conform to the National Land and Property Gazetteer requirements. This should help many researchers as well as service providers and will increase the momentum towards e-government.

Bryan Hall - Chair of LARIA

Geographic Information Systems will be increasingly demanded to analyse and present the vast amount of data that will be available in digital format. A Laria in Scotland event addressed some of these issues (see article on page 12).

Census

We are still uncertain about how we will deal with the 2001 Census when data becomes available towards the end of the year. I hope most local government researchers are involved in plans for receipt of the vast amount of information that will need to be analysed. If we don't get our act together we could be overwhelmed like the Public Record Office when it released details from the 1901 Census.

Networks

One of LARIA's key roles is to provide a network for researchers working in the local government sector. We overlap with other groups operating in the same sector. The article on the SRA conference helps us know what is happening in one of these other groups. The LGA Research Network provides a very useful source of information complementing other networks.

The Annual Conference at Nottingham will provide a useful opportunity for networking. If demand is as high as in previous years it will be sensible to book early.

Members of LARIA have told us they would like a research contact list. This is now becoming available, as described on page 32.

From the Chair cont...

New Blood Wanted

LARIA needs active members to ensure we operate as the research fraternity would like us to. Being an active participant can be enjoyable as well as helpful in giving greater opportunities to learn what is going on.

We need more people to become involved so that LARIA continues to flourish. The Conference and AGM (held on the Tuesday of the Conference) will give opportunities to find out how to participate more.

Stepping Down

This is the last edition of Laria News with my contribution 'from the Chair' as I shall be stepping down at the AGM. The last four years have been most interesting as we have moved from a loose network of researchers to a membership organisation with more defined structures for activity groups and a Council overseeing operations. Our events have been very successful, mostly oversubscribed, generally getting very positive feedback and our products have been updated and well received. We hope we are more influential and respected as being able to speak for the researchers in the modernising local government environment.

I would like to thank the wide range of colleagues and friends for their support over the years. Many have put in a lot of time, thought and commitment to help LARIA succeed. Their efforts are much appreciated.

I wish my successor all the best. He or she will be leading a fine organisation.

Bryan Hall

Consulting Hard to Reach Groups

This edition begins with a series of articles on consulting hard to reach groups. It begins with a report on a LARIA seminar, followed by feedback from the seminar by Bob Willis, then an article from Trescom Research and Consultancy and a paper from two of the speakers at the above seminar.

CONSULTING HARD TO REACH GROUPS - LARIA Seminar – 15th November 2001

Debbie Wilson, RBA Research – Chair of the Hard to Reach Groups Seminar

70 people packed the Lakeside Conference Centre at Aston University in November for the LARIA seminar on 'Consulting Hard to Reach Groups'. It was a timely and thought-provoking day, with a range of different speakers.

Kate Pritchard from ORC International opened the day with a presentation about 'embracing diversity'. In the same way that Councils find groups of stakeholders difficult to reach, there are groups of staff in organisations whose views and opinions employers find more difficult to gauge. To illustrate this she outlined the results of an employee survey in the Civil Service which looked at how far the Civil Service takes account of diversity, equal opportunities and work-life balance among its workforce.

Paul Vittles from RBA Research spoke about 'Consulting the dis-interested and the disillusioned'. He described many of the projects RBA has done with 'so-called' hard to reach groups, and argued that no-one is hard to reach, just more expensive to reach. It is important to put more effort and creativity into reaching these groups.

Paul argued that we tend to use demographic definitions when we talk about hard-to-reach groups (young people, people with physical disabilities and so on). We should also think about behavioural and attitudinal definitions - for example, it can be hard to reach people who think that the Council doesn't care about them, that the Council doesn't listen or even that the Council is irrelevant to them.

Most research with hard to reach groups has to be qualitative, as these groups do not usually figure strongly in quantitative surveys. Recruitment has to be creative and can include advertising in specialist magazines, using carers' groups and other networks. The real big issue is to make research interesting and relevant to the people you want to reach.

Philip Cortese from Kirklees Council described the comprehensive guidelines that the Council has developed to involve disabled people in communications and consultation. Among other things the guidelines cover definitions of disability, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, finding the target audience, physical access, working with groups, communicating with people who are deaf, visually impaired, blind, deafblind, who have learning disabilities, and communicating with speech impaired people. The guidelines also cover sources of further help and advice.

The guidelines are being published by LARIA and will be on sale soon.

In the afternoon seminar delegates could attend two out of four workshops.

In the first, Phil Back of East Riding of Yorkshire Council presented a case study of a project consulting deaf and hard of hearing

Consulting Hard to Reach Groups cont...

people. He undertook a short series of discussion groups with deaf and hard of hearing people recruited through Deaf Clubs and Social Services contacts. The Council provided support through sign language interpretation, lip speakers and an induction loop and had simultaneous translation between all formats. He found there were particular practical issues such as needing a venue with adequate acoustics, providing appropriate support, adequate briefing for interpreters, seating arrangements and being clear about group rules (such as speaking over others). The project provided extremely valuable information from participants about how they deal with the Council.

Joy Warmington from the Birmingham Race Action Partnership (BRAP) described a model for communicating with Black and Minority Ethnic Communities which has been piloted by the Partnership. The consultation was aimed at working beyond the 'usual suspects' and across ethnic boundaries. BRAP recruits 'Community Advocates' and empowers them through training and development to present the views of the community to people from the key institutions in each sector. It ensures a community-driven agenda.

Fiona Gordon and Angela Ferguson from Plymouth City Council described a consultation project between the Council and adults with learning disabilities. They used one-to-one interviews and constructed the questions carefully to ensure that they contained simple language that clients would be able to follow and respond to, and used pictures, photos and symbols. The process was evaluated by the local branch of Mencap, who congratulated the team on their professionalism and the way that interviews were tailored to the needs of each client. They now have a Consultation Officer in post to ensure that consultation is ongoing rather than a one-off snapshot. A more detailed article on their presentation appears on page 6.

Carol Hayden from the Audit Commission described the findings from a Better Government for Older People action-research programme. She described how older people are frequently stereotyped as a 'social services problem' and often ignored by decision takers in the wider policy arena. Her research shows how older people can bring experience and imagination to policy making, and as with other groups, that a little imagination is needed to make consultation interesting and encourage people to attend. (One good example was Peter Mandelson leading a Bingo session in Hartlepool!).

Most speakers were able to stay at the end for a panel discussion to pick up on general points not covered during the day. Delegates completed evaluation sheets before they left and found the day to be thought-provoking and useful.

By the time you receive this newsletter the Seminar will have been repeated on 28th January 2002 - hopefully the repeat will have been as successful as the first one!

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A letter to the editor from Bob Willis of Wolverhampton Council ....

Thank you for the interesting seminar on Consulting Hard to Reach Groups, held on 15 November. There were several interesting presentations, including that by Joy Warmington on the work of the Birmingham Race Action Partnership.

I want to disagree with Joy on one point. In response to a question, she suggested that ethnic minorities should not be asked about their religious background. The reason given was that British born Black and Asian people are moving away from their parents' religious commitment.

I think religious background, particularly within the Asian communities, is important for several reasons.

Firstly, it is one of the major ways in which the different Asian communities define themselves. The alternative way of identifying different communities is in terms of country of origin. This works reasonably well in terms of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, in that over 95% of people originating from those countries are Muslim (The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, Policy Studies Institute 1997). It is not possible, however to distinguish between Sikhs and Hindus within the Indian category in the Census.

Secondly, there is very strong evidence for the different levels of economic disadvantage experienced by these communities (See for example 4th PSI Survey). Looking at a variety of measures (job level, income, unemployment level), Tariq Modood concluded that:-

"The Chinese and African Asians are in broad parity with whites; the Indians and Caribbeans are somewhat disadvantaged, and the Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are extremely disadvantaged."
(Race Relations in Britain, ed. Blackstone et al, 1998)

Modood and others have argued that contemporary racism cannot be understood in terms of a simple colour racism, but that groups are racialised on the basis of alleged cultural traits. The 4th PSI survey found that nearly half of South Asians who complained of racial discrimination in recruitment believed that religion was a factor in the discrimination.

Thirdly, cultures which are defined by religion are important in terms of identity. This is true even though British born Asians tend to attend Mosques, Temples or Gurdwaras less often than their parents. (Still, 65% of 16-34 year old men, and 48% of 16-34 year old women reported attending a Mosque once a week or more).

Fourthly, particularly in the Asian community, religion has provided the basis for alternative social provision (for example in childcare and play provision). This stems partly from the way in which the Asian community was excluded from some social provision (specifically local authority housing, by the residency rule, and the dispersal policy) at the time of large scale Asian immigration.

Finally, an awareness of religious cultural groups is important in drawing up an adequate sampling frame for surveys and consultations.

Consulting Hard to Reach Groups cont...

If you don't ask about religious background at least some of the time, how will you know if particular groups are excluded from, or are underrepresented in your services, or if you are reaching the most disadvantaged groups?

I'm giving my views to encourage debate on what I think is an important issue.

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CONSULTATION WITH 'HIDDEN' AND HARD-TO-REACH GROUPS: METHODS, TECHNIQUES AND RESEARCH PRACTICE

Saeeda Ahmed, Marbat Hussain and Dr Georgios Vournas
Directors of Trescom Research & Consultancy Limited

INTRODUCTION

In relatively recent times, trends in social research, influenced by developments in both social theory and practice, have dictated an increasingly complex approach to ethnicity, ethnic origin and, as a result, consultation with ethnic minority groups.

It is not adequate any more, and quite justifiably so, to refer, for research and analytical purposes, to 'minority ethnic' populations as homogeneous. In the past there were the main distinctions between 'British' and 'ethnic minorities' groups. More recently, there has been a gradual realisation that categorisation of populations in terms of ethnic background has to be more complex if it is going to be meaningful. This complexity has to include not only references to ethnic origin, but also to gender, religion and even social class in order to enrich our understanding of British society.

Traditionally, women in general and women from the working class and minority ethnic backgrounds in particular, were largely, although not entirely, marginalised in research, both as 'subjects' and as contributors to its development. It has been a similar case recently for women from the Asian community and particularly for specific groups more than others, as for example for Bangladeshi and Pathan women, as well as for female political refugees, economic and/or 'illegal' immigrants. Such marginalisation, often unintentional, has serious ethical and practical consequences for all these groups. Despite being the subjects of social policy and heavy government intervention, these minority voices and opinions are unheard, largely misunderstood, misinterpreted or even ignored. This can have serious consequences on the effectiveness of the project and whether the intended recipients take ownership of the initiative.

In this article, we want to refer to some research practices we have used in order to approach hard-to-reach groups, with special references to Asian women groups.

ACCESSING 'HIDDEN' AND 'HARD-TO-REACH' POPULATIONS - METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

A number of methods, techniques and practices can be used to maximise the participation and response rates of hard-to-reach groups in consultation. We will briefly refer to a few techniques which have been used as an integral part of our consultation process.

'Snowballing' or 'Snowball' Strategies

Snowball strategies have been often used in social research and consultation in order to access particularly hard-to-reach and 'hidden' groups, as, for example, is the case with qualitative research on drug misuse. We have used 'snowballing' in the past as a method of identifying hard-to-reach groups of Asian women. These groups do not usually respond to more 'conventional' methods of consultation such as focus groups and door-to-door interviews. In addition, they are difficult to approach through traditional means since they hardly use public facilities such as local community centres, established women's groups and other formal organisations.

'Snowball' sampling is a quite simple technique: one 'subject' provides the name of another 'subject' who, in turn, provides the name of a third, and so on. 'Snowballing' cannot be used as a method in research where a representative sample and replication is required. However, it is increasingly used in qualitative research in order to gather information on a number of people belonging to a 'hidden' population as an insight to the latter. In many cases, in 'snowball' strategies, individuals from within the 'hidden' group are trained to become interviewers themselves, therefore, taking advantage of existing social networks within the 'hidden' group. This technique is based on the assumption that there is a link between the initial sample and other members of the 'hidden' population.

As is expected, there are specific problems with 'snowball' strategies. Firstly, there are issues around the 'gatekeepers bias' and selection bias. In the former case, the initial individuals identified from the 'hidden' population may have a bias according to which they may or may not refer other individuals from the 'hidden' group. In the latter case, there is a bias towards people from the 'hidden' group who have more of some social networks – therefore creating a second, even harder-to-reach group of individuals without social networks within the 'hidden' group.

Another implication with engaging individuals from the hidden group as interviewers exists in relation to the degree of confidentiality. Therefore, while this technique assures initial access to 'hidden' populations and a degree of trust between the individuals of this population, there are serious confidentiality and sample 'quality' issues to be considered and addressed in using 'snowballing'.

Body language/ Cultural awareness

A very important issue in accessing hard-to-reach populations is the cultural awareness of the research body and of the fieldworkers. Issues of how to address individuals of a particular group, how to greet them, as well as understanding of how different cultures conceive individual 'space' and the intrusion of it, eye contact, and so forth are significant factors in influencing groups to participate or not in a consultation. It is not only that

Consulting Hard to Reach Groups cont...

cultural awareness affects individuals and their attitude towards the consultation. In many cases, since hard-to-reach groups are closely-knit, the cultural awareness of the consultation process can influence the attitudes of the group towards other consultations in the future. It is very important, therefore, for the research organisation to 'strike it right' first time in order to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance for future attempts too.

The issues of culture and identity are also important in relation to the perception of the interviewer. This is particularly pertinent in qualitative research as the interview process relies more on the researcher. Researchers, for example, will probe the interviewee where necessary and at some points this will be influenced by the body language of the interviewee and the general awareness of the interviewer. If in such instances the interviewer makes the wrong assumptions about body language and what it says about the interviewee, the research may take a different route. Similarly, at the stage of analysis, the wrong assumptions about body language may lead to wrong interpretations of how the interviewee felt about the consultation process, what non-verbal messages s/he passed on, and so forth.

The gender of the interviewer

The gender of the interviewer is not usually considered as a significant factor in 'conventional' methods of consultation and social research. There are, however, specific cases where it may be necessary to match the gender of the interviewer to that of the interviewee(s), an obvious example being matters of sexual health.

However, in consultation with some female Asian groups it is necessary to provide female interviewers for female respondents. In many cases it is the only means of achieving a response from Asian women. In these groups, although women may be comfortable with participating in the consultation, they will usually have reservations about being interviewed by a male interviewer. In some cases, the clients themselves may even request female interviewers.

Deadlines and Costing

Often the work required for an interview with hard-to-reach groups can be up to five times more than the time normally anticipated. Many commissioning organisations are usually unaware of this. More time may be required due to planning the fieldwork, attempting to reach the 'hidden' population, translation, longer briefings and de-briefings of the interviewers, etc. There are also important issues of introducing the participants from hard-to-reach groups to the consultation process, explaining the significance of it, the reasons why their participation may be essential, as well as explaining to them and reassuring them about confidentiality. This can be a lengthier, more labour and cost intensive exercise than usual, and requires time in order to tailor-make according to the needs and characteristics of each hard-to-reach group.

Language

Another important practice in order to access and/or maximise response rates for female Asian groups is the use of bilingual interviewers. For many Asian women this is imperative since they either do not speak English at all, or their main language is other than English. This is particularly the case with older Asian women, who may live in an entirely non-English speaking home environment. An additional reason for using bilingual interviewers is that it creates an atmosphere of familiarity for many respondents and puts them at ease. Translating a questionnaire, especially verbally during an interview, requires very detailed preparation to make sure the translation is accurate and a detailed briefing of the interviewers for the same reason.

The role of established community organisations

In many cases, specific minority ethnic groups are initially approached in consultation through already established community centres, associations and local organisations. Professionals and individuals in the latter usually act as important 'gatekeepers'. In these cases it is very important to establish a good working relation with such organisations in order to co-operate with them to reach further out in the community and the hard-to-reach groups.

However, such an approach is significantly limited in the case of many hard-to-reach groups. Firstly, many such groups do not have established community organisations. For many, social networks are 'informal', hidden or even 'underground' (as in the case of drug use and prostitution). Therefore, to rely on initial contact through community organisations is, in terms of consultation, unrealistic. Some groups however, may have a degree of 'formal' community organisation. In this case the consultation process can be introduced through these existing organisations. This approach too has specific limitations. One such limitation is the fact that participation in a 'formal' network is usually confined to more 'visible' members of the group such as men, community leaders, and so forth. Many members such as women, deprived people, non-English speakers, 'illegal' immigrants, single parents, may be still excluded. A second problem is that in practice, many community associations may have specific political agendas or be influenced by individual or factional interests. In both these cases there may be a bias towards specific groups within the 'hidden' group.

A number of 'hard-to-reach' groups have formed more 'visible' social networks, although not necessarily in the form of community organisations. These social networks can be extensive familial networks, or networks based on friendship, kinship or specific geographic origin. However, and as a rule, these networks are largely informal and hard to break into. As described earlier, there is a need for an initial 'insider' to introduce the consultation process to the group. Similarly, there are specific limitations to the use of 'snowball' strategies in this case in terms of the 'gatekeepers bias' and selection bias.

CONCLUSIONS

There has recently been an increasing attempt in consultation to reach into what is termed hard-to-reach or 'hidden' groups. The terms cover a large number of groups, from drug users to Asian women groups. However, by definition, these groups are inaccessible to most traditional and conventional methods and techniques. As researchers we must respect that hard-to-reach groups need to be included in the consultation process. However, we also need to examine, adapt and/or develop appropriate approaches so that consultation is more socially inclusive. In this brief article we only started to touch on a few of the flexible methods and techniques we use in approaching hard-to-reach

Consulting Hard to Reach Groups cont...

groups. More can be included or developed to overcome practical and ethical problems in consulting with such groups from the stage of designing to the stage of analysis.

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GETTING THE VIEWS OF THE EXPERTS

Consulting service users about learning disability services
Fiona Gordon & Angela Ferguson, Plymouth City Council.

In April 1998 Plymouth City Council took over the provision of Social Services. As part of its new unitary authority responsibilities, a review of the Learning Disability Service was commissioned. Key to the new process was the need to engage clients/service users both in a consultation process, and in communication exercises related to changes in service.

Social inclusion is high on the government's agenda as is consultation per se, but particularly consultation with hard to reach groups. Our clients weren't hard to reach as such but were a group that were more difficult to communicate with.

As the authority wanted to do this in a meaningful way, it was decided to pilot a new consultation approach for this client group that would make the process accessible to them and would give them a voice in decisions being made about their lives. The exercise was, therefore, both about trying out this new approach and gaining a more accurate picture of clients' views.

A consultation exercise was undertaken with clients who were attending one of four community resource centres under review and took the form of one to one interviews that were conducted in a consistent and objective way by senior care workers who had had no previous direct contact with the clients they were interviewing. The interviewers attended an informal training session and were provided with an information pack. Ten per cent of interviews were assessed by the Plymouth Branch of Mencap who later expressed a high level of satisfaction with the interview process.

The interviews focussed on general themes relating to the recommendations of the Learning Disability Review. The construction of the questions was carefully considered to ensure that they didn't contain too many keywords that clients wouldn't be able to follow and respond to. The whole consultation initiative was underpinned with the use of a 'total communication' approach i.e. using speech with keyword signing, gestures, photographs and symbols. For example, if a client was unable to make a verbal or signed response, a picture choice was offered. This enabled a client group with a range of communication skills to take part.

The initial sample group of ninety people was determined by deciding not to interview any client with: severe and persistent challenging behaviour; profound physical and learning disabilities; and emotional problems that could be affected by being interviewed. This was felt to be necessary due to issues relating to risk management, safety and the need to assess levels of understanding. Ethical considerations played a major part in this exercise with person-centred principles being adopted that took into consideration individual communication and support needs. In addition emphasis on consent was rightly placed with the client rather than the carer, thus each client was asked if s/he consented to being interviewed, and the interview process and the right to end the interview at any point was explained.

Consulting Hard to Reach Groups cont...

As some clients were ill or on holiday at the time of the interviews, or declined to take part on the day, seventy–three interviews were undertaken over a three week period. We discovered that the vast majority of clients valued non-institutional environments and activities; they indicated that they had good relationships with their keyworkers and enjoyed being with them; and clients with varying communication skills indicated differing preferences in relation to the number of people they like to be with. The vast majority also commented positively on the process.

A lunchtime discussion session was held to share the learning across the authority. We also discussed the approach with the Centre for Evidence-Based Social Services at an Evaluation Clinic. They suggested we think about how we might include the 'excluded' in future exercises, and that we adopt a test/retest approach to check stability of view. Overall, however, they regarded it as an 'admirably ethical approach'.

Finally as a direct result of this exercise, the department now has a consultation officer post within the Learning Disability Service in order to develop and promote ongoing rather than periodic 'snapshot' user consultation in the future.

If you would like any further information about this exercise, or have experiences of your own to share, please contact Fiona Gordon on 01752 780321 or Angela Ferguson on 01752 307303.

Citizens' Panels - Pitfalls and Possibilities

Debbie Wilson, RBA Research Ltd

Does your authority have a citizens' panel? Chances are it does, or it is thinking about developing one. Panels come in all shapes and sizes. Some are partnerships between different agencies or authorities; some are developed by just one council. Typically panels are a cross-section of between 1-2,000 residents who complete around three or four questionnaires per year on a range of local issues. Most panel members are recruited by a postal questionnaire, although some authorities use telephone or face-to-face recruitment, and people are asked to take part in regular surveys by post, telephone or face-to-face. Some panels are run in-house, and some wholly or in part by outside agencies.

The explosion of panels over the last few years has mirrored the increasing need to consult residents about all aspects of council services. Good authorities have had well-established programmes of customer research for years, and a panel often forms one element of this. However, as the Government has encouraged more use of consultation through Best Value, Community Planning and a host of other initiatives, some authorities have seen panels as 'the answer to all our consultation needs' – a dangerous outlook.

Panels can be very useful things. Before joining RBA Research, I set up one of the first Citizens' Panels, Kirklees Talkback, back in 1994, together with the local Health Authority, and managed it for over six years. It was established, in common with many other panels, to give the Council a flexible, cost-effective way of consulting with residents on a regular basis. It complemented other research we did using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods. The panel has provided the Council with feedback on dozens of issues over the years: information for service reviews on, for example, refuse collection and car parking; information on cross-cutting issues that affected more than one service such as crime and older people; and information on policy issues such as council structures and local elections. It has generally been used for postal surveys and to recruit people to take part in focus groups or other events.

Some panels, like the one in Kirklees, have been going for some time, and we are clearer about the pitfalls and the potential of them. RBA Research currently manages panels for Lancashire County Council, the London Borough of Bromley and Colchester Borough Council among others, and has recently completed an evaluation of the citizens' panel for the South Lanarkshire Partnership. RBA has also carried out a telephone survey of local authorities to find out how authorities are managing their panels. What are some of the things we have learnt over the years?

There seems to be a clear distinction between those authorities who want to set up a panel because they see it as an effective consultation mechanism, and those who report feeling forced to set up a panel because of a 'pressure to consult' brought about by recent changes in the culture of local authorities or government pressure. There is also a feeling that 'everyone else is doing it, so we thought we should'. Those authorities that have not put as much thought into the development of their panels tend to be the ones that have subsequent problems.

Pitfalls

The myth of representativeness

Most panels were set up with the aim of being 'representative' of the local population. Recruitment questionnaires ask about gender, age, ethnicity and other demographic information, and the panels attempt to match their composition with the profile of their local area. This is an effective way of getting a cross-section of the local population.

However, there is usually no attempt to check whether the panel is actually representative of 'attitudes' or even of 'behaviour'. Authorities who do try to check this (for example by repeating questions asked of the panel using another methodology) usually find that panel members are more 'pro-public service' than the general population, and are generally more frequent users of council services. If you then rely on your panel for information about attitudes to the council and use of its services it will not be a totally accurate reflection of your population's views or behaviour.

Citizens' Panels - Pitfalls and Possibilities cont...

Not only do people who join panels tend to be atypical of the population, they become even more unrepresentative over time as they learn more about council services and other issues, and there needs to be a regular process of refreshing the panel over time.

While your panel may be representative by age, gender or any of the other demographic controls you set at the beginning, it may not be representative of other important demographics. Most panels do not look at socio-economic groups, for example, and further investigation usually shows that the panel is heavily biased towards those in socio-economic groups AB.

There are certain sub-groups of the population who are systematically 'missed' by most methods of recruiting for panels, particularly groups such as homeless people or people with disabilities. Young people are notoriously difficult to recruit onto panels, and tend to take part in fewer surveys and drop off the panel quickly. Panels are not really suitable for groups such as this, and you should consider designing more targeted and dedicated consultation.

As most panel managers have found, maintaining a panel database successfully is difficult and expensive, especially if you are constantly trying to keep the panel 'representative' – monitoring response rates and people who drop off the panel, maintaining 'reserve lists', top-up recruiting and so on. The time and cost associated with this can mean that panels do not meet one of their common objectives – that of being cost-effective.

'The answer to all our research needs'

Panels are extremely useful, but they are not suitable for all your consultation and research needs.

A number of authorities want to use their panels to track changes in attitudes over time. However panels can only be used to track changes if you are looking at how an individual's views change over time. You cannot use the panel to see how the views of all your residents are changing because panel members become more atypical over time, individuals drop out or are replaced and so on. For reliable trend information you need to take a fresh sample each time (which is why panels are not suitable for the Government's Best Value Performance Indicator surveys).

Many authorities operate their panels like an 'omnibus' survey with a wide range of unconnected questions on each wave. While this is often unavoidable, it is better if each wave of a panel survey is 'themed' around one main issue. This makes it easier for the respondent to complete, and for the authority to take action afterwards.

Once an authority has a panel, the temptation is to use the regular panel surveys to ask all sorts of questions rather than using other more appropriate techniques. This is a particular problem for authorities that have not allocated a lot of resources for consultation and who need to justify developing their panel. A postal panel survey is not the best method for asking detailed questions about complex issues such as the allocation of your council's budget, for example, or, as mentioned before, for consulting young people.

Influencing Decisions and Feeding Back

Many organisations are unclear about how the results of panel surveys are used. In our telephone survey of authorities some panel managers could not give a single example of how the data had been put to use! Only a few say that the information has influenced decision-making and strategy and have a clear mechanism for feeding the results of surveys into management or to the political leadership.

Time after time panel members tell us that lack of feedback is a major turnoff, but it is not feedback on the results of surveys that they want, it is feedback about what has changed as a result of them taking part. The quality of your feedback is far more important than the quantity.

Possibilities

Panels are a tremendous resource, and we don't use them to their best advantage.

As it is so difficult to create a truly representative panel, perhaps we should stop talking about panels in this way. This does not mean to say that we should stop using panels. They are designed to contain a good cross section of the local population and can be used as a 'sounding board' for new initiatives, service reviews and so on. In effect, they provide information from cross-sections of the public who are simply slightly more interested and slightly more informed than the public at large.

Let's use some of the drawbacks of panels as strengths. They provide us with databases of people who are interested in the local council and willing to tell us their views. Panel members are usually very keen to be involved in consultation other than surveys, and are willing to look at issues in more detail, take an active role in service reviews and so on. Invite panel members to take part in more qualitative or deliberative research – to be your 'eyes and ears'.

In addition, if we move away from the idea of pure 'representativeness' then there would be no need to keep separate databases of 'reserve' panel members or to agonise quite as much about particular sub-groups.

The way forward

A lot of hard work and money has gone into Citizens' Panels across the country, and many are valuable elements in Council consultation strategies. However, we should never stop learning, especially as panels are a new methodology for many, and experience has shown that they do have some problems . So is it time to review your panel?

This is the text of a paper first given at a seminar 'Citizens' Panels – how to run and make good use of them' organized by M.E.L. Research in Birmingham on 6th December 2001.

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2001 Census Disclosure Control Proposals

John Hollis, Greater London Authority, LA Lead on the CLIP Census Sub-group

ONS distributed 2001 Census Advisory Groups Paper AG (01) 08 the day before the CLIP Census Sub-group met on 13 November. It contains proposals to (a) round all cells in 2001 Census output tables for England and Wales to either zero or a number divisible by 3 and (b) double the proposed thresholding for output areas to 100 persons or 40 households. These proposals have been made to ensure that individual details are protected and to protect ONS from the perception that these details may be released. The proposals do not relate to Scotland and probably not to Northern Ireland.

Although there was little time to react before the meeting I received a great deal of adverse reaction to the proposals from fellow local authority members of the CLIP Sub-group and from representatives of other Advisory Groups. The short time before the CLIP meeting also meant that Census Division officers who attended the meeting were ill prepared to answer our questions and appeared somewhat ill at ease with the decision which had been made by the Registrar General, Len Cook.

Why are users in ONS' long-standing customer sectors so outraged by these decisions? I outline some reasons below.

The output consultations undertaken by Census Division, both through the Advisory Groups and broader approaches to the customers, have concentrated upon the advantages of the One Number Census (ONC). Specifically these are the avoidance of the confusion brought about in the 1991 Census by different population bases and by the disclosure procedures applied at table level. Even as recently as 30 October 2001 Census Advisory Groups Paper AG (01) 05 stated that disclosure control procedures would be applied in the database, rather than to individual tables.

Clearly, disclosure is an important issue. It is believed by local authority users that the ONC methods allowing for missing households, persons and individual question responses by imputation coupled with record swapping is adequate to counter any perception of risks of personal disclosure. Record swapping means that it cannot be claimed with absolute certainty that any individual 'revealed' in output tables was really resident in the particular output area.

The proposals for rounding every cell in every table produced at all geographic levels within England and Wales are not only a contradiction of the consultation process but have no foundation in published research.

Customers welcomed the separation of enumeration geography from output geography and have accepted the originally proposed threshold levels as being appropriate. The smaller target size of 2001 Output Areas (OAs) when compared with 1991 Census Enumeration Districts means that the ONS proposals for a more useful 'building brick' geography for the output have been strongly supported.

The new thresholding proposals mean that there will be no significant output for a very large number of civil parishes in England. It is estimated that around 10% of parishes in some counties could become census non-places. If data for these parishes have to be merged with otherwise above-threshold parishes an even higher proportion of parishes are affected.

The new proposals therefore make a mockery of the consultation that has exercised local authority staff over the past few years. It is clear that the Census Area Statistics will now be largely unfit for purpose as will much of the double-geography output.

The rounding process will mean that users cannot sum OAs to create new zones of interest and have any confidence in the statistics. Since the rounding is 'random', different tables will produce differing figures for the same variable. It will be virtually impossible to check commissioned tables for accuracy against standard output. This will create an enormous burden on ONS and skilled local authority users in having to explain the process to confused non-expert users.

Letters to ONS from many individual census users as well as from the local authority, business and academic advisory groups prompted ONS to organise a meeting of representatives from all five advisory groups – including central government and health – on 13 December.

At the meeting Len Cook was at pains to apologise that ONS had been poor at the process of involving the users and communicating these decisions. There had been an urgent need to communicate the decision to the Advisory Groups, but no time to adequately explain the background. A further 2001 Census Advisory Groups Paper AG (01) 06 on disclosure control had been distributed on 27 November.

John Pullinger described the background to the decision that had been taken over and above the advice of the independent review of disclosure control policy and methods given to all Census Offices. ONS had subsequently run scenarios with data and were convinced that personal disclosure was still an issue. Counts of '1' in tables were the main thrust of the problem of perception of disclosure, particularly when linked with ethnicity. This was a paramount concern due to the use of flexible geography. It was also a concern for other data such as that being planned for Neighbourhood Statistics. ONS wanted to maximise the use of the statistics and to maintain confidence. The risk was enlarged due to planned web-based access. ONS also wanted to 'future proof' their data throughout the decade and to be able to supply for new geographies. Overall it was decided that the risk was too great to ignore, although not major due to the other imprecision introduced in the ONC methodology. The potential disclosure problem is not so acute in Scotland – where thresholds are maintained as earlier proposed and where the target sizes of the output areas are only 20-25% above the England and Wales thresholds – due to less requirement for flexible geography and slightly different table design.

ONS were questioned about the actual rounding process being proposed. 'Random rounding' means that both 1 and 2 could be rounded to either 0 or 3, for example. ONS were asked to provide examples of the mathematics involved. ONS will bring forward papers to describe the potential methods available to them. The process is aimed at bringing about unbiased estimators of the variables. The impact likely on adding through OAs and on table

2001 Census Disclosure Control Proposals cont...

sums would be explained. It was possible that rounding could reduce – but not eliminate – the need for record swapping. ONS will bring forward more detail on the record swapping process, including from where swapped records could be drawn.

The user demand for flexible geography was restated. The principal of unrounded data for one set of OAs nested within the most recently available ward/parish boundaries – with revised boundaries and other areas (National Parks, etc.) being produced by best fit and apportionment solutions - was said to be widely suitable to users. Options for postcode sectors were also requested by business users with best fit solutions acceptable where necessary.

It was clear that ONS had not fully considered a number of issues:

- Origin - Destination (O-D) data could be different depending on whether it is produced by GROS in Scotland or by ONS. Rounded cells in the base O-D geography would make them very difficult to use as building bricks.
- ONS had assumed that rounding would apply to the 2001 Mid Year Estimate (MYE) – in fact ONS representatives were not aware that unrounded unit data by age and gender for local and health authorities were available. It was stated by users that the 2001 MYE would be essential for providing the revised base for modelling purposes.
- Consistency of statistics for UK and GB was also an issue. Users questioned whether, if required, rounding could be implemented only at the OA level.
- The raising of thresholds would mean that perhaps 10% of parishes would receive no Census Area Statistics. ONS would look into the possibility of providing a new limited set of output for such parishes.

ONS have prepared a draft note of the meeting and aim to bring forward a number of papers on methodology, impacts and the knock-on effects mentioned above early in 2002. A further meeting of an ONS/User working group would be convened. It was hoped that a final solution to all aspects of the problem could be communicated to all users by Easter.

The Advisory Group papers are posted on the National Statistics website at
www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/advgroups.asp

Adding Up the Figures

Paul Vittles, Chairman & Managing Director of RBA Research.

It's that time of year when local authorities are putting together 'the budget' and, increasingly, this process involves consulting the public. It is not the easiest topic for consultation, and many lessons have been learned.

One key lesson is that quantitative consultation around spending priorities (or priorities for cuts) tends to raise as many questions as answers. It is essential to carry out qualitative research, involving dialogue and discussion, to gain meaningful insights.

There are a lot of examples of superficial opinion polls and rather flimsy questions on citizens' panels asking people "which services are most important?" to which the answer tends to be "all of them"; or asking "which services should have less money" to which the answer is usually "none of them" or "the arts"!

Local authorities appear to expect too much of questionnaire-based consultation, eg they provide masses of information on the budget position, extending across six paragraphs and then ask a question – but people don't read the supporting information anyway.

We also know that the public think local government is bonkers. When authorities go out and say "do you want to maintain services at their current level with a 15% increase in Council Tax or would you like to have a 7% increase in Council Tax with severe cuts in services?", residents think their council has gone mad!

To try and explain why this choice is being given to them is nigh on impossible in a questionnaire. The public also – rightly – say "if we are going to have to pay an extra 7% Council Tax, we should be talking about more or better services, not cuts".

If only local government could mobilise this public opinion, it would be able to put the Government on the back foot because current policy cannot be defended.

In the meantime, the best option for local authorities is to carry out more in-depth qualitative research to establish expectations, investigate the reasons behind preferences, and generally get guidance on how best to manage a difficult situation.

One lesson from qualitative research is that the general public tends to be conditioned to Council Tax increases. Most people cannot remember what the increase was last year and say "it doesn't matter anyway because you've got to pay it".

This does not mean to say that the Council should not try to consult. What it has to do, though, is strike the right balance between getting the true views of the public at large but providing necessary data to get sufficiently informed views.

Adding Up the Figures cont...

RBA has worked very closely with Bromley Council over the past three years on its budget consultation, and this provides a good practice case study. Undertaking a series of group discussions among a cross-section of the general population, stratified by 'lifestage', we are able to discuss in-depth views, and analyse overall patterns.

We have been able to examine spontaneous views; we have then given residents cards showing the various services and initiatives that are candidates for more or fewer resources and asked them to sort them and explain their reasoning; and we have probed on issues such as how activities should be funded, which services might have room to improve with the same or fewer resources, which services definitely need more money, etc.

This approach works well but there comes a point where residents start asking for more information before they can give meaningful responses. To address this difficult issue of providing the right sort of information in the right way, Bromley Council has been rather bold.

In one year, a workshop was held inviting those who had already participated in group discussions ('warmed up'!) to come along for further discussion. As they arrived, they were asked "what information do you feel you would need in order to be able to make sensible decisions on where the money should be allocated?". Drawing from their responses, and analysis of the earlier research, the Chief Executive (and former Borough Treasurer) tailored a presentation to address each of their questions.

The residents were engaged in dialogue for about an hour to give time to prepare answers to all the questions, and then the presentation was delivered. We then tested initial responses to the information given, and engaged in discussion for a further hour to get considered views on priorities in light of the information provided.

This approach is being refined each year in Bromley. The discipline of trying to come up with information which addresses the public's main questions and which can be presented to the general public tends to lead to the generation of information that is useful for councillors and managers. Ultimately, it leads to better management information systems, and a more citizen-focused organisation.

Despite major advances in the provision of relevant information and the ability to engage residents in meaningful debate, there is still a problem though. People tend to be very defensive about cuts to services and they personalise the discussion, ie how it affects them. They also continue to struggle with the fact that the system of funding local government is fundamentally illogical.

To address this, we need to use other qualitative techniques and learn from both principles and practice established in the qualitative research profession.

One technique which we draw from the world of psychology is to enable people to 'stand outside themselves' so the discussion does not appear personally threatening. A practical application of this technique is to engage residents in a 'game' where they see themselves as players in the game. Some authorities (eg South Lanarkshire) have tried this, and RBA is developing a range of game-based approaches.

In a 'Board Game', it is possible to have positions such as 'free parking' where residents are made aware of the implications of different levels of parking fees. Participants can pick up 'information cards' to guide their progress, and land on 'decision squares' where a decision has to be taken now with currently available information. Those taking part can be 'portfolio holders' and role play through the game.

To the uninitiated, it might sound trivial but it is a tried and tested approach to getting greater insight into the views and preferences of the public. It also means that the information is taken in, and residents make decisions during the exercise whereas in other consultation approaches, people tend to say "that's what we elect councillors for" as a means of avoiding the question.

And it can make budget consultation fun!

This article first appeared in Municipal Journal on 16 November 2001

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Effective Surveys - Training Day

Bryan Hall (Cheshire County Council)

The modernisation agenda has further emphasised the importance of conducting meaningful research in all local authorities. This has long been identified as a significant issue requiring attention by LARIA who set up a training day on the topic of 'Effective Surveys'. We met at UMIST (one speaker suggested, named after Andy Cole) in Manchester on 13 December 2001 and went through the range of processes required to conduct worthwhile surveys. Presenters were researchers from the public and private sector who had extensive experience of local government research. A terrific amount of guidance and issues were presented and discussed.

After a welcome and scene setting from me, Malcolm Brown from Cornwall CC described the research context, emphasising the increasing importance of good information. He described the increase in demand for information about the social context as

Effective Surveys - Training Day cont...

well as traditional information. The problems of under-resourcing, surveys being only part of officers' jobs, lack of awareness of limitations, timetables etc were described. However, despite this we are all making significant progress and the achievements and partnership working in the South West were described.

Paul Vittles from RBA Research drew from his extensive knowledge of the art of asking questions, using examples of good and bad practice. He dealt with the reality of questionnaire design, means of data collection, preliminary design issues, individual questions, designing answer categories and the importance of looking at the questionnaire as a whole. The importance of piloting was emphasised, and the discussion was concerned with complaints about badly designed questionnaires and survey participants' wish to know what happened as a result of taking part in a survey.

Dawn Hands from BMG explored issues around defining populations and selecting samples. She stressed the importance of getting the sampling frame right from the perspectives of adequacy, completeness, avoiding duplication, accuracy and convenience. Issues of Data Protection and permission to survey were raised. The difficulty of getting usable sampling frames was described. Discussion was concerned with electoral registers, young people, quota and probability sampling and ethnic minorities.

Graeme Foster of ORC International covered topics of getting and managing data. The importance of sound project management and data handling were described. Topics related to qualitative and quantitative methods, data collection, postal, telephone and face to face survey techniques. Survey management, data entry, coding and quality were discussed with the message given that project management should not be under-estimated.

John Wicks of MVA gave guidance about getting the most from your data. He looked at analysing data, describing analysis packages (including SPSS and Keypoint who had displays at the event). The benefits of combining packages were shown. Analysis and statistical issues of sampling errors, use of techniques like segmentation, regression and GIS were described. Guidance was also given on choosing research suppliers.

David Allen from the City of York dealt with using survey data. He considered why we consult and the benefits of consultation. He described and gave examples of how research and consultation adds value by enabling horizon scanning, prioritisation, monitoring, options decisions, and service and product development.

At the end the day participants felt that they had covered a lot of ground in a short time. The interest in the topic is demonstrated by the fact that the event was oversubscribed and will be run again on 8 March 2002.

The event was once again very ably organised by Graham Smith and we were all grateful for the way everything ran so well.

LARIA in Scotland Seminar

Using GIS to Inform Policy

Craig McCorriston - West Lothian Council

On 12 September LARIA in Scotland ran a seminar entitled "Using GIS to Inform Policy". 55 delegates attended the event, which was hosted by West Lothian Council at County Buildings in Linlithgow and sponsored by West Lothian Council's principal GIS Contractor - IME-UK of Alloa. The event was chaired by the Joint Chair of LARIA in Scotland - Jack Winchester of Aberdeen City Council.

World events on the previous day conspired to cause some difficulties with travel and two of the programmed speakers were unable to make the event. However, some last minute re-arranging of the programme and a 'fill-in' presentation by West Lothian Council allowed the main subject areas of the seminar to be fully covered on the day.

The first session sought to answer the question 'Why Organise Data?' Tony Black of Intelligent Addressing answered the question with a comprehensive resume of the aims and objects of BS 7666 (address standards) and how this standard is embodied in the principles of the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) and its Scottish equivalent the Master Address Database (MAD). Tony explained that holding an organisation's data against a standard was fundamental to the efficient use, analysis and exchange of geographical information and for meeting e-government targets. He then went on to explore some of the options available to organisations wishing to create a standard address gazetteer.

LARIA in Scotland Seminar cont...

Tony was followed by Richard Teed of Clackmannanshire Council. Clackmannanshire is widely regarded as the leading authority in Scotland in terms of progress in establishing a BS7666 compliant address gazetteer. Richard has project managed this work for the authority. Richard gave a broad insight into the benefits being derived from better organisation of the Council's data, but also some of the pitfalls encountered along the way.

The second session of the day was entitled "Getting Data to Policymakers". The aim of this session was to move away from the technical issues of organising data and look more at the practical issues of getting data and information to decision makers within an organisation. Neil MacKinnon from Scottish Homes (now called Communities Scotland) explained the approach adopted by Scottish Homes to achieve this aim via their WebMapping Project. Scottish Homes have offices across Scotland and need to share data across a wide area and Neil explained how the project is increasingly being recognised as a fundamental tool in delivering mapping, socio-economic, demographic and housing data across the organisation.

The third session entitled "How to use GIS to inform Policy" had two presentations looking at real examples of the use of GIS in policy formulation. The first presentation was from Jon Shepherd of The Highland Council who explained how the Council is using GIS to identify fragile rural areas in the Highlands. This project aims to identify communities in decline, establish policy responses to the problems in these areas and thereafter target resources and initiatives. GIS is used to map an number of key indicators under seven themes as the basis for identifying fragile communities and Jon gave an insight into the process involved in the analysis of the themes.

Finally, Craig McCorriston and Rhonda Watson from West Lothian Council gave a presentation on how GIS is being used to identify residential development sites in response to a large increase in the required land allocations within the authority. GIS is being used to identify potential development sites through a sifting exercise, which includes the analysis of a number of data layers, including landscape designations, ground conditions, public transport routes, land ownership and planning history. This presentation was followed up by a live demonstration by Rhonda of the Council's Intranet GIS application which is making the above datasets (and a significant number of others as well) together with background mapping available to all officers and Councillors within West Lothian Council.

Feedback from the event has been very positive with 79% of questionnaire responses rating the usefulness of all presentations as good or excellent. A further 16% said they were all at least satisfactory in terms of usefulness, with only 5% rating any of the presentations as poor in this respect. 84% of responses rated the quality of presenters as good or excellent, while only 16% rated one or more of the presenters as being satisfactory. No respondents rated any of the presenters as poor.

Availability of facilities from West Lothian Council and sponsorship from IME-UK helped to provide a low cost seminar. From the feedback it appears that it was a very useful and timely event.

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SRA Annual Conference

12th December 2001

Minty Carapiet, MVA

The SRA Annual Conference took place at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre in December on the broad theme of 'Are We Being Served? - Using Social Research to Evaluate Public Services'.

The first speaker to take the platform was Edward Melhuish, Executive Director of National Evaluation of Sure Start who talked about the 'Evaluation of Social Initiatives: Problems or Opportunities?' Edward explained the history of the National Evaluation of Sure Start; it was a scheme to improve services to the 'under fours'. He explained that sometimes those providing the services opposed any evaluation of the scheme and his team had to overcome this attitude. Sure Start now exists as an initiative in 260 communities and this will extend in 2002 to 500. Partnerships operating in designated disadvantaged communities were awarded grants to improve services for 'under fours' but were left to their own devices about how they spent the money.

Edward explained that what was being evaluated was different in each community. The largest part of the study uses a multi-level model to establish community effects, ie are some initiatives doing better in some communities than others. A cross sectional study is collecting data about family demographics, family dynamics, parental health, parenting, home environment, child care, community, child development, services utilised by children and parental economics. The evaluation also incorporates cost benefit analysis, including voluntary costs and donations if appropriate. The evaluation also uses observational methods; for example recording interaction between parent and child while the interview is being conducted. A random selection of families in the community are contacted by letter

SRA Annual Conference cont...

and followed up unless they choose to opt out. The results from the pilot work have been very encouraging. Although some of the questions were very intimate, families were responding well and were happy with confidentiality issues. It is hoped that the evaluation could be followed through until the children reached adolescence, as often the pay off from such interventions is not seen until years later.

In response to a question from the floor, Edward confirmed that Ministers do urge the production of preliminary results and that it can be a problem. He was also asked whether the evaluation found that it was picking up children who were not in poverty. Edward explained that yes they were looking a cross-section of children but the areas the children lived in were deemed deprived. The main problem came in areas where gentrification had taken place. Even so it was established that 70% of children in Sure Start are fairly uniformly disadvantaged.

The next session was an interesting tour of the world of Mystery Shopping, given by Rachel Lopata of ORC. She explained that she was not sure if mystery shopping should be classed as qualitative or quantitative research. Its job was to measure the customer service process, but it was not statistically reliable, just a snap shot view of one person at one time. She addressed the issue of why undertake mystery shopping, explaining that it directly improves service. Staff needed to know that an evaluation was taking place, they would be trying to spot the 'mystery shopper' and frontline service would improve. In the public sector there was usually no named feedback about a particular member of staff, but this would be more likely in the private sector. If telephone calls were to be recorded then the staff involved had to be informed so as not to infringe human rights.
Rachel explained the practical difficulties involved in mystery shopping, providing the shopper with a realistic/practical scenario; the questionnaire must not be too long as they obviously cannot fill it out on the spot. It is better to have two visits than one long one. Verbatim information was found to be very helpful for feedback to managers, if it could be achieved. The 'mystery shopping' could take the form of letters, telephone calls, visits or emails. The person undertaking the mystery shopping needed to be good at improvisation and be given good instructions about dress code.

Rachel talked about a large case study she had been involved in for the Employment Service involving 1000 Job Centres. There were four scenarios each quarter and they aimed to have the results back to the Job Centre Manager within 72 hours. She explained that the frontline staff were very motivated by the exercise and there was great competition between Job Centres to achieve the highest result. Rachel told us how it was important to measure what really matters to customers. Mystery shopping should not be used to replace satisfaction surveys but in conjunction with them. Rachel suggested that this particular mystery shopping exercise has been so successful in motivating staff that it would probably need to be continuous!

After lunch the conference continued with a choice of workshops on the theme of 'Evaluating Initiatives'. I visited Workshop 1: The Impact of Best Value by Steve Martin Professor of Public Policy and Management, and Director of the Local and Regional Government Research Unit at Cardiff University.

Steve had advised in the development of Best Value and gave a history of the scheme, most of which will be familiar to readers of LARIA News. He explained the "4 Cs" and the government's desire to break free of CCT yet provide service improvement. Steve explained that at the end of the BV pilot scheme expectations were high, although he felt that now there was widespread scepticism about the scheme. Local Authorities thought it was about performance indicators and that if their figures were acceptable there was nothing they needed to do. Steve pointed out that was a too sterile an approach and they needed to find ways to improve, perhaps by talking to other councils, not just adopting a scientific approach to performance indicators.

For more information contact acarapiet@mva.co.uk

New Award for Excellence in Research

LARIA's governing body, the Council, has decided to launch an award for excellence in local government research. The award will be given to an authority, whereas it is anticipated that the beneficiary will be the employee or employees who have initiated and have had primary responsibility for carrying out the research. The award, for which the exact form has yet to be determined, will be presented at the Annual Conference and may be a free place at the Conference or even a cash prize. There will be an opportunity to present the research at the Conference or at another appropriate event.

In evaluating the research the judges will have regard to things like relevance to policy-making, innovation, appropriateness of methodology and other matters. Now the really important issue is that we rely on **YOU**, the members of LARIA and readers of LariaNews to nominate research that you consider to fulfil the criteria and give us good reasons why you think they deserve an award. If you know of an outstanding piece of research by a local authority or just wish to know more about the scheme please contact **Geraint Evan-Hughes at BMG (Geraintte@bostock.co.uk). The closing date for nominations is 28th March 2002. All those nominated will receive a FREE copy of the LARIA Education and Training Guide.**

K V Moller

Good Practice Guide

Getting It Right: Including Disabled People in Communication and Consultation

In conjunction with Kirklees Metropolitan Council, LARIA is about to publish a Good Practice Guide concerning consultation and communication with disabled people. This guide, which contains valuable advice for any researcher consulting disabled people, has been written by Philip Cortese and Louisa Nardini from Kirklees Metropolitan Council. The Guide includes sections on models of disability, how to find the target audience, transport, physical access, working with a group, using support workers, using advocates, communicating with deaf and hearing impaired people, communicating with visually impaired and blind people, communicating with people with learning disabilities and with speech impaired people, and good practice in printed, visual and electronic communication.

If you would like a copy of this Guide, please contact Graham Smith, LARIA Administrator (lariaoffice@aol.com) to ascertain the publishing date, price and ordering arrangements. The publishing date will also be announced on the LARIA website **(www.laria.gov.uk)**

Where would YOU take an alien who had just landed in the Wigan area?

Wendy Goodwin from Wigan Council describes Qualitative Research into Cultural Activities and Aspirations

Armed with the above question and a few others, members of Wigan's Cultural Partnership were let loose on the unsuspecting people of the Borough of Wigan in Greater Manchester. They were supported by the Community Research Officer based within Leisure & Cultural Services who facilitated the majority of the sessions on the Partnership's behalf.

We were also armed with neon post-it notes, felt tip pens, flip chart paper, slide projector and tape recorder! The whole package formed the basis of the Cultural Strategy Consultation sessions, which took place with 24 local groups (approximately 500 people) during October and November 2000.

The aim of the sessions was to try to find out what sort of things people already liked to do in their spare time, what sort of things they would really like to do, what sort of barriers they faced in doing these things and what they were proud of in the area where they lived.

The sessions took place with groups as diverse as a pensioners' group and a young women's youth club, a community forum and a boy scout troop. Local people from as young as seven to the elderly were involved in the meetings. Inevitably, some of the groups were much more enthusiastic than others. So much so that at one session the Community Research Officer was almost trampled underfoot by boy scouts eager to tell the world that they would like a "Skate Park" in their area!

A particularly good session was held with Form 9L at Abram Guest High School in Orrell, where the teacher said that this form were not the most co-operative bunch of pupils in the school. With some apprehension, the session began with introductions and the thoughts behind the Cultural Strategy. (Blank faces all around.) The post-it notes were distributed and the flip chart paper stuck up. (A few smiles?) I asked the first question; "what do you like to do in your spare time?". (Heads down, scribble, scribble...). I invited the students to come up to the paper and post their views. (Stampede!!!!!!).

Gill Parry, a teacher at Abram Guest and a member of the Cultural Strategy Steering Group, reported that the form teacher was amazed at the positive response the students made to the session. The pupils themselves said that they really enjoyed taking part and hoped we would keep them involved as the strategy developed! All this from the "unco-operative" bunch!

Where would YOU take an alien who had just landed in the Wigan area? cont...

So, what did people tell us? The broad aspirations of local people fell into two categories. These were the opportunity to take part in "extreme" sports such as skateboarding, blading, BMX biking, snowboarding, skiing, jet skiing, quad biking and every other imaginable "dangerous" sporting activity. The other aspiration was the opportunity to see more "performance" in the Borough. This ranged from theatre and plays to pop and rock concerts, from outdoor events on summer evenings to shows especially for young children.

The barriers people faced in taking part in activities again fell into two broad categories; access and safety. Access issues included that of public transport, cost, information and physical access to buildings. Personal safety was a common theme from young and old participants alike.

When asked the question that got everyone giggling "Where would you take an alien who had just landed in the Wigan area?" local people showed the places they were particularly proud of; the countryside and canals, the J. J. B. stadium – home of Wigan's Rugby and Soccer teams - and Wigan Pier Museums. We also hope that the alien is hungry when he lands, because the pie shop, chippy and McDonalds were also mentioned a lot!

So what happens to all this information now? The Cultural Partnership has now written the first Cultural Strategy for Wigan – "Northern Soul" - which will take the information from the consultation sessions, along with lots of other information about what's happening in the Borough, and form a plan for the cultural life of the Borough for the next five years. Everyone who took part in one of the sessions has been kept informed as the strategy develops and there will be plenty of other opportunities for people to air their views.

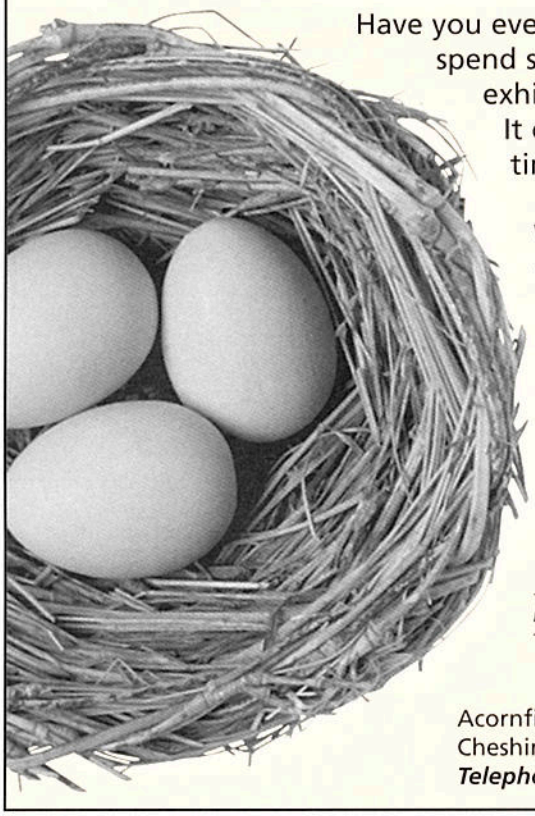
Following the launch of the strategy in July 2001, two significant developments have happened. Firstly, the appointment of an "Extreme Sports Development Officer" for the Borough who will oversee the delivery of skateboarding, blading and BMX facilities for young people and explore other extreme sporting possibilities. Secondly, the "Community Festivals Project" to encourage local people's involvement in festival activity. The officer for this post is due to start early in 2002.

These projects would not have happened without the positive input of local people in the development of the Cultural Strategy! This was just the beginning of an ongoing process of involving local people in the work of the Cultural Partnership. It proved to be a great way of getting lots of information in a fun and interactive way with many different age groups and types of people.

"Northern Soul – a cultural strategy for Wigan" is available on Wigan Council's web site – www.wiganmbc.gov.uk

For more information contact Wendy Goodwin, Community Research & Evaluation Officer
W.Goodwin@wiganmbc.gov.uk

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



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LARIA Conference 2002

University of Nottingham - 25-27 March 2002

Local Information for Neighbourhood Planning

Programme - Monday 25 March 2002

11.00	Registration and Coffee
12.00	Lunch
13.30	Plenary: Lord Best (Joseph Rowntree Foundation) Neighbourhood Renewal – What Research Tells Us
14.50	Conference announcements
15.00	Tea/Coffee
15.20	Plenary: Sir Michael Lyons (INLOGOV) The Government Agenda and the Role Research Can Play
16.30	Break
16.35	Plenary: Jonathan Owen (Suffolk County Council): Making Use of Data/Research for Local Leadership
17.40	Break
18.30	Reception
19.30	Dinner

Tuesday 26 March 2002

	Stream 1	Stream 2
9.00	Rachel Cossey (Manchester Geomatics) The Joined-up Geography Testbed: Results from a Collaborative Research Project	Dawn Roberts (Rotherham BC) Evidence Based Policy - Research, Consultation and the New Policy Agendas
10.15	Coffee/tea	
10.35	Alistair Calder (ONS) Neighbourhood Statistics: Geographic Referencing Plans & Progress	Lisa Green (Cheshire CC) How to use Research and Consultation to feed into Community Strategies
11.50	Break	
11.55	Peter Pearson (Essex CC) Community Profiling: developing a common basis for decision making	Kate Chamberlain (Local Government Data Unit in Wales) Local Data Warehousing
13.10	Lunch	
14.10	**Plenary:** Cllr Alan Clark (Chair of Nottingham City's Environment, Planning and Transportation Strategic Board) From Consultation to Decisions.	
14.55	Tea/coffee	
15.15	LARIA AGM	
15.45	Break	
16.00	Nottingham City Tour	
20.00	Dinner at Nottingham Castle (with after dinner discussion/speaker)	

LARIA Conference 2002 cont...

Wednesday 27 March 2002

	Stream 1	Stream 2
9.00	Anne Green (University of Warwick) Regional Information Needs and Gaps	Gill Swaithes (Herefordshire Partnership) "Importance of Research" - A Case Study in a Rural Environment
9.50	Mark Tranmer and Graeme Davies (Centre for Census and Survey Research) Combining Aggregate and Micro-data to extend Census Tables for Local Areas	Pauline Marshall (Bolton MBC) Bolton Information Map: Research into Policy (a cautionary tale)
10.40	Tea/Coffee	
11.00	**Plenary:** Ludi Simpson (City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council) Reflections on the 2001 Census: A view from the outside	
11.50	**Plenary:** David Prince (Audit Commission) Are Local Government services improving? What has been/should be the role of research?	
13.00	Lunch (Optional)	

Cost: £255 for full three days (other options available). Discounts are available for LARIA Corporate members.

Venue: The Jubilee Campus of Nottingham University is situated about a 15 minute taxi ride from Nottingham City Centre and about ten minutes by car from the M1 motorway.

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

Last year's Conference was fully subscribed, so please book early to avoid disappointment

LARIA Training Day on Survey Methods

*** Please note there are only a few places left on this Training Day***

Friday 8 March 2002
Lakeside Conference Centre, Aston University, Birmingham

What Is It All About?
The Best Value and Modernising agendas more than anything else in recent times have highlighted the value of conducting meaningful research in all local authorities. The analytical and presentation skills needed by researchers in gathering, analysing and reporting data can be daunting. This is especially the case in the many councils where responsibility for research falls on staff who are not fully experienced in the appropriate techniques of survey research.

In recognition of this skills gap, LARIA is putting on a Training Day on Survey Methods. Presenting in partnership with four leading survey research consultancies, LARIA has devised a programme covering the 'why, how and what' of survey research which will provide a valuable insight into the key issues. This will include first hand experience of setting research objectives and making use of the data, presented by two local authorities, and will also contain tips on commissioning survey research

Anyone involved with carrying out survey research should find the day invaluable and excellent value for money.

Programme

9.30	Registration and coffee
10.00 – 10.10	Welcome and Introduction from the Chair: Bryan Hall (Cheshire County Council), Chair of LARIA
10.10 – 10.55	The Research Context – why do a sample survey / setting research objectives / working in partnership: Malcolm Brown (Cornwall County Council)
10.55 – 11.15	Tea/Coffee
11.15 – 12.00	No one expects the Spanish Inquisition! - the art of asking questions: Paul Vittles (RBA Research)
12.00 – 12.45	Finding the right people - defining populations and selecting samples: Dawn Hands (BMG)
12.45 – 1.45	Lunch
1.45 – 2.30	Smooth running: implementing survey research - getting and managing data: Graeme Foster (ORC International)
2.30 – 3.15	Beyond percentages - getting the most from your data: John Wicks (MVA)
3.15 – 3.35	Tea/Coffee
3.35 – 4.20	Using survey data in support of policy formulation and service management: David Allen (City of York Council)
4.20	Close

Cost: £115 per delegate (including lunch). £95 for Corporate Members of LARIA

Venue: The seminar will be held at the Lakeside Conference Centre at Aston University, a ten to fifteen minute walk away from Birmingham City Centre.

Bookings: A booking form can be found on the LARIA Website (www.laria.gov.uk) or can be obtained from Graham Smith, LARIA Administrator and Events Organiser. Tel: 01642 316576 Email: lariaoffice@aol.com

Local Authority R & I News

Manchester City Council

Manchester City Council is currently finalising its "Best Value Survey" which comprises:

- A Citizens' Panel survey on service quality issues (Base - 2075 replies)
- A Resident Survey of 1,000 interviews commissioned from a research bureau on neighbourhood issues
- A series of focus group reports with resident from hard to reach communities
- A Business Survey of 310 interviews on regeneration, transport and the Commonwealth Games
- A Staff Survey commissioned from a research bureau on Best Value, development and job satisfaction (Base - 3176 replies)

The BV Survey is in its third year of operation and provides baselines and trends to inform budget and service planning. It is reported to residents and stakeholders through the Best Value Performance Plan, Ward Performance Plans, the council newspaper and the web. The Survey document will be available in February 2002 once members and officers have commented upon the first draft.

Contact: Kevin Ball, Principal Research Officer k.ball@notes.manchester.gov.uk

Leicester City Council

Improving Consultation in Leicester

On the 19th October 2001 Leicester City Council launched a dedicated consultation site on its Intranet. The 'Consultation Toolkit' will provide managers and officers with a range of tools to help them effectively engage with their stakeholders, enabling them to develop the kind of services that the people of Leicester want and deserve. The key aspects of the site are:

1. Public Consultation Database
2. A Manager's Guide to Consultation
3. A "Guide 2 Consultation"
4. Internal Skills Directory
5. Stakeholder Database
6. "Contracting Out Research" Guide
7. Sources of Relevant Information
8. External Agencies and Consultants
9. Corporate Surveys (Pdf files)

The 'Guide 2 Consultation' was developed by external consultants CHT Solutions to provide practical help to managers. For example, practical help on addressing consultation within the context of Best Value, working in partnerships and outside agencies, consulting 'traditionally excluded' groups, pros and cons of various methodologies, and a rundown of questionnaire design. There is also guidance on the roles of Councillors, which says, "The fundamental role of every Councillor is to ensure the accountability and effectiveness of their local authority. Information that will assist their decision-making and increase their knowledge of their wards will help this role. The traditional routes back to their constituency are through the ballot box, surgeries and campaigning. Consultation provides an additional route that can only help to increase their understanding of their constituents. At the same time consultation will greatly assist Councillors in their decision-making and scrutinising roles."

The guide will also support future training in the Council, e.g. consultation and Best Value. The public consultation database lists past, present and future consultations, providing details ranging from the methodology to the outcome of the project. The stakeholder database details over 600 organisations managers can consult.

The project followed an internal exercise in June 1999 that identified that the Council undertakes over 250 consultations each year, of which about 11 % were with the general public, and the number is growing. Focus groups with officers in the same month identified, among other things, the need to provide training on core community consultation skills for both officers and Members, and the need for greater support for those involved in consultation exercises. The ability to coordinate consultation was another key driver behind the project, with Members and officers both acknowledging the public's frustration with being bombarded with requests for consultation and the lack of awareness on their own part of what was happening where or when.

In support of the project and consultation generally, the Council adopted a policy statement committing itself to good consultation with its stakeholders in February 2000. The setting up of a departmental group followed this with a responsibility "To ensure that the City Council uses consultation and research effectively to help it provide appropriate services and make informed decisions". It has been the responsibility of this group to lead the development of the 'toolkit'.

Departments were involved in the development of the project, helping to devise proformas that support the databases held. Staff were involved by providing their views on the 'Guide 2 Consultation' in workshops and via an e-mail questionnaire. The site will be evaluated after one year.

For more information contact Roy Roberts rober002@leicester.gov.uk

Wakefield MDC

Wakefield New Homes Survey

One major research project being undertaken is "Wakefield New Homes Survey". There is a particular dearth of information regarding residents of private new-build developments. In order to address these gaps in our knowledge the Housing Research Section is carrying out a postal survey of all the new-build schemes in the district. The results will be used as part of our on-going research on housing needs and will feed into the Department's planning process.

The questionnaire uses specific questions to tease out and identify the impact of various issues on why residents choose a particular new-build housing scheme. For example, we will be able to identify previous tenure to analyse any impacts on our own stock. We have worked with both Development and Education departments to include questions relating to employment and education, both important factors in people's choice of housing.

It is the intention to survey all the new-build schemes built in the last five years, approximately 5,000 properties. We have already surveyed about 700 properties in the south-east of the district as a pilot survey. The pilot survey should give us an idea of how well the questionnaire works and the likely response rates. If this is successful, we will roll-out the survey to the remaining schemes in the district.

Local Authority R & I News cont...

Wakefield is also about to embark on a housing needs survey.

For further information contact Tony Todd, Housing Research Officer, ttodd@wakefield.gov.uk

Dudley MBC

Dudley Borough Trends 2001
The research team has just completed "Dudley Borough Trends 2001" - which is an Intranet-resident information base for our Community Plan, under the direction of the Dudley Community Partnership. Trends is a synthesis of data about agency activity in the Borough under these themes:

- Community Safety
- Good Health
- Environment
- Lifelong Learning
- Leisure & Culture
- Jobs

and the overarching theme of Social Inclusion.

We intend to publish it on CD also.

For more information contact Andy Wright, awright.pls@mbc.dudley.gov.uk

Bradford City Council

Community Cohesion - legends and reality

Following several reports on race, racism and riots in northern cities, Bradford Council is collating evidence on the claims regarding demographic and social segregation that circulate in these reports, in the media, and in the street. We would like to pool our evidence with other authorities' work in these areas.

Contact: Ludi Simpson, 01274-754252, ludi.simpson@bradford.gov.uk

Integrated demographic estimates and forecasting

POPGROUP's second version is released in January 2002. POPGROUP now integrates:

- estimates and forecasts;
- population and households;
- County and Districts;
- District and smaller areas;
- ethnic groups and all persons.

A labour force module will be completed in the first half of 2002.

Version 2 allows information from household targets, or from area population estimates, to determine the migration involved in a population forecast. Its reporting and charting facilities are much extended. A 'dump' file includes the age-specific components of a forecast for detailed investigation. Each new function has been specified by a development consortium of five local authorities led by Bradford Council, and is programmed within the Excel environment.

POPGROUP remains a friendly technical framework with which users investigate the implications both of government population statistics and of their own local data and assumptions. Government datasets for Districts in England are available to use in POPGROUP. Scotland and Wales equivalents are being sought by existing users in those countries.

For further details, see http://www.geocities.com/popgp2002/ or telephone Beverley Nuttall, 01274-754793.

Arun District Council

Tenants and Business Panels

Recently the Policy and Research Team at Arun District Council has been involved in two new initiatives. Alongside our Residents Panel, which has been running for nearly two years, we have now set up a Tenants and Business Panel. The first major survey for the Business Panel has just been completed on Business Rates and CCTV; 333 businesses have taken part. The first major survey for the Tenants Panel will be based on feedback from the annual Tenants Conference.

Leisure, Council Tax and Recycling Survey

A survey was conducted with our Residents Panel, Wavelength, for different services' Best Value Reviews. The sample size was a full Panel, with 967 responses. Three focus groups based on leisure activities in the area also took place prior to the survey, to find out some of the key issues.

E-Government Consultation

This survey was also conducted through Wavelength, with a response of 990. The research was carried out to gather public views on the access of information and the delivery of Council Services as part of introducing E-Government. The research was facilitated by the company Questions Answered, with the majority of questionnaires being postal, except for a few phone preferences. Three focus groups were then conducted by selecting specific participants who had expressed an interest in participating in further research. Focus groups were held in three different areas to represent the Eastern, Western and Downland areas of Arun.

Arun Times Evaluation

As part of the first year review of Arun's quarterly magazine, consultation has taken place over the last month. A small questionnaire was sent out with the winter edition of Arun Times, to gather public opinion of the publication. Results were due at the beginning of the new year. Questionnaires were also sent out to Youth Council members inviting feedback on their page and how it puts the message across, and to users who had placed articles in the magazine, and to non users to find out what would encourage them to use Arun Times in the future. There has also been a number of discussion groups, both external and internal. Discussion groups where held with Council Officers on how far Arun Times meets their publicity needs, and with Wavelength Panel members, comparing messages received via Arun Times and the local media. There will also be a number of telephone interviews with a sample of Town and Parish Councils who have taken space in Arun Times, and a sample who have not. Finally, an assessment will be made by an independent PR benchmarking group to assess Arun Times. A full report of all these findings will be reported to Cabinet at the end of January.

Local Authority R & I News cont...

For more information, contact The Policy and Research Team
Helen Kenny helen.kenny@arun.gov.uk
Rachel Jupp rachel.jupp@arun.gov.uk
Karen Crewes
karen.crewes@arun.gov.uk

Milton Keynes Council

The Information, Monitoring and Research team is:

1. Working on the Milton Keynes part of the National Land and Property Gazetteer, checking and amending entries,
2. Analysing the Milton Keynes Stock Condition Survey, a survey of council-rented houses in Milton Keynes in readiness to prepare a 30-year plan for council stock.
3. Producing a Social Atlas using statistics from the Neighbourhood Statistics Service and local data such as postcoded data on children with Special Educational Needs, Teenage Conceptions, Youth Offenders, Family Referrals, Accident and Emergency data, student awards, concessionary fares, domestic fires, neighbour complaints, recorded crime by type etc. to burrow below the ward level data.
4. Keeping the intranet site up to date,
5. Helping with the production of the Crime and Community Safety Strategy
6. Updating the Employment database

For more information contact Jan Howard Jan.Howard@Milton-Keynes.gov.uk

North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire 1999 Ward Residence Based Unemployment Rates

Introduction

The North Ayrshire Monthly Unemployment Report is published in the North Ayrshire Directory of Information & Research (NADIR) in both paper and internet format. Included in this is an analysis of the official workforce based unemployment rates for North Ayrshire and estimates for five Local Areas (Irvine/Kilwinning, Three Towns, Garnock Valley, North Coast and Arran). Workforce unemployment rates show the number of claimants as a proportion of the number of jobs in an area plus the number unemployed.

ONS also publishes the number of claimants in each 1991 ward. These are also provided in the NADIR report. To date only the number of claimants has been published at this level of detail, mainly because workforce rates for wards are not appropriate given that some wards are predominantly residential, and workforce unemployment rates would not be meaningful. The alternative is to produce residence based unemployment rates showing the number of claimants as a proportion of the resident economically active population. The main problem with this has been that neither the claimant count nor economically active population data has been available for current 1999 electoral wards.

Recent developments now allow the Research & Intelligence team to produce 1999 electoral ward claimant count and economically active population figures. In turn this allows the calculation of 1999 ward residence based unemployment rates.

Methodology

The following is a brief description of the methodology used to calculate residence based unemployment rates. A more detailed explanation is available from the Research & Intelligence team on request.

a) ***Calculation of 1999 ward based Claimant Count***
ONS are now able to provide 1999 ward claimant count data to the Council on a monthly basis. Unfortunately there is an undercount each month of between 3% and 4% across North Ayrshire as a result of some data having no valid postcode. In order to ensure consistency with the official 1991 ward based data the Council has devised a methodology that reallocates the missing data. This ensures that the number of 1999 ward-based claimants within any Local Area is consistent with the 1991 ward-based data.

b) ***Calculation of 1999 ward based Economically Active Population***
The most up to date official economically active population figures are from the 1991 Census of Population. As outlined earlier this data is now out of date. Other organisations have attempted to calculate estimates using Voluntary Population Surveys carried out by local Assessor's Offices and the Labour Force Survey. However, the Council has not been convinced that these are accurate at a local level. The Council has now developed a more accurate methodology to calculate the economically active population for 1999 wards using an extrapolation of trends identified in the 1981 and 1991 Censuses together with results of the 1998 Voluntary Population Survey and GB Labour Force Projections.

c) ***Calculation of 1999 Ward Residence Based Unemployment Rates***
Residence based unemployment rates are produced by dividing claimant count data by estimates of the economically active population for 1999 wards. Male, female and total unemployment rates for all 30 North Ayrshire current wards have been calculated as well as changes over the previous month and year.

The development of this methodology has assisted the Council and other bodies with the following:

- Development of economic development and other strategies
- Applications for European and lottery applications
- Social Inclusion Partnership monitoring
- Funding bids eg Better Neighbourhood Services Fund, Digital Communities

For further information please contact either:

Steve Morley smorley@north-ayrshire.gov.uk
Stephen Fraser sfraser@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

An Alternative Measure of Long Term Unemployment

The Research & Intelligence team of North Ayrshire Council has recently produced a paper in response to concerns about the validity of the current measure of long term unemployment.

Local Authority R & I News cont...

Comparison is made between two ways of measuring long term unemployment, namely:

1. Long term Unemployed as a percentage of all unemployed
2. Long term Unemployed as a percentage of the labour force

The paper compares the results produced using both measures for all Scottish local authorities as well as approximations to the European Structural Fund Programme Areas.

The main points arising from the analysis are:

- Highlands and Islands has the highest level of long term unemployment as a proportion of all claimants
- West of Scotland has the highest level of long term unemployment as a proportion of the labour force
- the relationship between long term unemployment and overall unemployment rates as a proportion of the labour force is similar for all areas (ie if an area has high overall unemployment it tends to have high long term unemployment as a proportion of the labour force)
- there are significant differences in rankings for some authorities depending on the measure used. For example North Ayrshire is ranked 21 out of 32 as a percentage of all unemployed, whereas it is ranked 7 (ie +14 places) as a percentage of the labour force. Other areas affected include Inverclyde (+13), North Lanarkshire (+9), Shetland Islands (-22) Orkney Islands (-16), East Dunbartonshire (-10).

On the evidence of the analysis, the paper concludes that it is more sensible to measure long term unemployment as a proportion of the labour force rather than as a proportion of all claimants for the following reasons:

- long term unemployment measured as a proportion of the labour force only takes into account changes in long term unemployment
- long term unemployment measured as a proportion of all unemployed is also affected by short term unemployment, resulting in long term unemployment apparently rising as total unemployment falls and vice versa, and consequently does not reflect real trends
- comparisons of long term unemployment between areas is more meaningful when calculated as a proportion of the labour force (in a similar way to comparisons of overall unemployment)

Full copies of the report are available from: smorley@north-ayrshire.gov.uk

Bristol City Council

"Consultation Finder"

The Corporate Consultation Team sits within Bristol City Council's Cabinet Office. It manages, commissions and advises on a wide range of corporate consultation activities and is responsible for monitoring and developing the Council's Public Consultation Strategy. Recently the team has worked on a major review of the city's secondary schools and has carried out surveys to identify the level by which council tax will increase in 2002/3. A further survey on Bristol's strengths and weaknesses in comparison to other major UK cities was recently carried out for a Best Value review of the way the city is marketed. This showed that Bristol's location, its universities, its history and culture, job opportunities and parks and open spaces are seen as the city's greatest strengths in comparison to other UK cities and that traffic, transport, begging and parking are the worst things about Bristol which are also seen as being worse than elsewhere.

"Consultation Finder" is an exciting new way for Members, officers and the public to keep track of these and the numerous other consultation projects that the Council now carries out. "Consultation Finder" is an interactive, web-based calendar and database, which can be searched to find out what consultations are currently open or planned, in any area of the city and in relation to different areas of interest. Anyone with access to an Internet computer will be able take part in on-line consultations and to register their interest in being notified when future consultations 'go-live'. In addition, anyone will be able to search through an archive of previous consultations to find out what methods were used, what the response was like, what the findings were and most importantly, what happened as a result!

Consultation Finder will be launched on Bristol City Council's website in April 2002. In the meantime, for details of the Council's Public Consultation Strategy visit www.bristol-city.gov.uk/consultation or **contact Stephen Hilton, Public Consultation Co-ordinator on 0117 9224644 or via e-mail to consultation@bristol-city.gov.uk**

Northumberland County Council

Northumberland Information Network

The Northumberland Information Network was launched in September 2001. It aims to research and disseminate information on employment and learning issues. It includes in its work programme research on work-based learning, further and higher education, basic skills and skills shortages. In the past few months, the Information Network has published a paper on Further Education Enrolments in Northumberland and is shortly to produce reports on Basic Skills, Graduates and e-learning. The Info Network is also in the process of commissioning research on Learner Forums and is conducting an Employers' Survey.

The Info Network team are currently collaborating with their partners to have a website on-line shortly after Christmas with statistics and reports available to download. The website will have a "Research Work in Progress" page with details of any research being undertaken in the county. The team is managed by Philip Hanmer and further details can be obtained from Alyson Forster on 01670 534755.

The Info Network is funded by ONE North East's Skills Development Fund and is a partnership with the County Council, the Employment Service, the Guidance Company, the Learning Partnership, the LSC, Northumberland College and Business Link.

For more information contact Andrena Faulkner afaulkner@northumberland.gov.uk

Local Authority R & I News cont...

Cheshire County Council

Cheshire's Voice

Cheshire's Voice is Cheshire County Council's in-house citizens' panel. Approximately 1,200 members were recruited as a random sample as part of the Quality of Life and User Satisfaction Surveys in 2000. A further 300 were recruited from disadvantaged communities and young people. During 2001, the first year of the panel, we sent members postal questionnaires about Information and Advice Issues and Political Structures. We also conducted a household interview survey with them about the Highways service. Subsets of the panel took part in focus groups and workshops about political structures and the Community Strategy.

About three times a year we send the members a newsletter telling them the results of the surveys they've completed, what's coming up and most importantly, what actions we have taken as a result of our consultation with them.

We have had good response rates from our panel members and some positive feedback about how we consult our Cheshire public. In February 2002 we will start the refreshment process of the panel and will be conducting an omnibus survey in the spring. We also intend to develop our qualitative work with panel members.

Contact: Judy Parry
parryj@cheshire.gov.uk 01244 602446

Information and Advice Survey 2001

Information and advice are core elements of the service Cheshire County Council provides with its partners. These were the themes selected for the first full survey using the newly created citizens' panel, Cheshire's Voice. Topics covered were 'Access to Public Information', 'Community Legal Services', 'Libraries', 'Public Transport Information' and 'Trading Standards Service'. Some of the messages received from participants were:

Access to Public Information

Almost a half had contacted the council, either County or District, between one and three times in the last 12 months. The most frequently mentioned information needs were about 'sports and leisure', 'refuse collection', 'waste disposal and recycling' and 'highways'. Most people (84%) prefer to telephone the council, with younger people more likely to chose e-mail. Nearly a half would use a central helpline preferably on weekdays and Saturday mornings and almost a half had access to the internet for personal use.

Community Legal Services

Almost a quarter had problems or disputes within the last year that were difficult to resolve. The most common problems were with 'faulty goods or services', 'neighbours' and 'welfare benefits'. About one in seven (14%) had sought help for a problem mainly from 'private lawyers' or 'local council' (each just under a third of those seeking help). About one in eleven (9%) did not receive help with a problem mainly because 'they dealt with the problem themselves' or they 'sought help but could not obtain it' (45% and 30% of those not receiving help).

Libraries

Users of the largest libraries stated that to 'open Saturday afternoons' would encourage respondents to use a library more, whilst other library users chose 'open more late evenings'.

Three in five said that they might use a Personal Computer in a library; the main reason for not using one was that they had a PC at home. Three quarters of those who would use a PC wanted access to the Internet, with older age groups wanting 'computer training', 'local studies' and 'family history'.

Trading Standards Service

Over half knew something about the Trading Standards Service with another third having heard of it but knowing nothing about what it does. Although over half couldn't say where they had heard of the Service, they 'just knew'. 'TV' and 'newspapers' were the main sources. 'Ensuring safety of consumer goods' and 'maintaining standards on food labelling and content' were chosen by over half as the top priorities for services to consumers. Most people would prefer to get their information over the phone with many young people choosing the Internet.

Public Transport Information

Cheshire County Council provides public transport information to the public. The main ways it does this is by timetables available locally and the Cheshire Bus Helpline (known as Cheshire Busline) which is advertised on buses, in bus stands, in the County Council's A-Z and in telephone directories.

A third had heard of the Cheshire Busline, and those who had used it were mainly satisfied with the service. Almost a quarter used the buses every week with nearly half of the younger people using it weekly. The preferred method of receiving information about buses was by 'phone', including Cheshire Busline, and also on 'bus stop displays'.

Conclusions

When specific information and advice is wanted then the telephone is the main means used by the community to contact public agencies. There is a need to ensure that the telephone service provided meets the needs and expectations of the public through 'one stop shops', directories, information distribution and service on the telephone.

Information and Communications Technology offer increasing opportunities, but there has been only limited penetration of electronic information and advice services to the public. E-government initiatives and general trends in society will increase the wish to use the Internet for information and advice needs.

The opportunities offered by Teletext, Ceefax and Digital Television should be considered as significant sources of information at present. Demand should increase as more of the public obtains access to these services.

Consumer advice and legal services are both important but are only needed by a limited section of the community at any one time. However, access to these services needs to be available to all.

Local Authority R & I News cont...

There was limited demand for Libraries service or electronic information services outside normal hours.

Contacts:
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HamiltonGA@cheshire.gov.uk
(01244) 602176

Jean Stelfox
StelfoxJ@cheshire.gov.uk
(01244) 602027

Judy Parry
ParryJ@cheshire.gov.uk
(01244) 602446

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) – Economic Impact

Data has been vital to help inform Cheshire County Council and its partners about the spread of FMD, its intensity and potential impact. The County Council's Research and Intelligence Unit has made a range of data available and research is ongoing to assess the impact on the Cheshire economy using the County's Econometric Model. Research has included assembly of baseline monitoring data showing the level and geographical extent of FMD in Cheshire. This involved analysis of Agricultural Census Data for Cheshire provided by DEFRA, Farm Business Survey data provided by Manchester University and data provided by CCC Trading Standards.

Briefly this shows that around 13% of farm holdings in Cheshire, covering approximately 1/6 of the agricultural land in production, have been affected by FMD. Also, the County Council commissioned a survey in May from BMG to assess the impact of FMD on businesses in Cheshire. The survey findings indicate that 3.6% of all companies interviewed (5.2% of Agricultural companies) had experienced a decrease in employment levels compared to 12 months ago as a result of FMD.

FMD is estimated to have had an adverse effect on the GDP of £95m and to have put 2,800 jobs at risk.

This information formed part of the vast range of information provided in the Cheshire Economic Report 2001.

Contacts
Don Cunninghame
CunninghameD@cheshire.gov.uk
(01244 602064)

Andrew Pomfret
PomfretA@cheshire.gov.uk
(01244 602889)

City of York Council

The research team is currently nearing the end of a BV review that has proved particularly useful in reminding us why we are here (with all the different agendas around it's not always easy to remember is it?). Fortunately, it would seem we are still of some use.

Air Quality Management Areas

Along with other councils, City of York Council was required to undertake consultation with key stakeholders on Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs). Through partnership with the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), based at the University of York, the council undertook a number of consultation exercises:

- Resident workshops – the SEI ran workshops with residents from the three core wards that would be affected by the adoption of any of the proposed AQMAs.
- Stakeholder focus groups – the SEI ran workshops with key stakeholders, including local business and environmental groups.
- Residents leaflet with short questionnaire – distributed to 6,187 households in the three core wards to be affected.
- Business leaflets – distributed to a sample of 1,000 businesses across York.
- Presentations at ward committees concerning the proposed AQMAs.

Contact: Sophie Gibson on 01904 551022
e-mail: sophie.gibson@york.gov.uk

Crime Reduction Strategy

Crime in the Community – Cracking It Together
As part of the consultation process for the second Crime Reduction Strategy, City of York Council and North Yorkshire Police, along with the Safer York Partnership, broadened the involvement of residents, businesses and local groups. We ran a one day 'stakeholder forum' event held in November 2001 involving a range of communities of interest. The aim of the day was to share information and obtain views not only on the audit and crime reduction strategies but also on other crime related issues. As well as discussion groups and presentations, an on-line survey was available at the event, inviting attendees to give their priorities for action to prevent crime and the fear of crime. The results were projected onto a screen throughout the day, tabulating the views of attendees.

Contact: Sophie Gibson on 01904 551022
e-mail: sophie.gibson@york.gov.uk

Suffolk County Council

Travel Diaries

The results of 1,000 travel diaries kept for one week during the autumn of 2001 will shortly be delivered to the Environment and Transport Directorate's Information Unit. The diaries, needed for updating the outcome performance indicators that monitor the effectiveness of the Suffolk Local Transport Plan, will also enable the Council to gauge prevailing attitudes to transport issues.

Diarists were randomly selected by digital dialling in selected postcode sectors. The survey cluster samples people living in Suffolk's three main towns (Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds and Lowestoft) plus ten market towns where transport Local Action Plans are being prepared. A special effort is being made to include young adults who are often uninterested in completing forms. All respondents receive a Boots voucher for completion of a diary.

Diaries cover origin/destination of each trip - a journey can comprise of many individual trips - distance travelled, start and end time, mode, number in party and trip purpose. Additional questions probe a diarist's reason for choice of a particular mode and seek to establish what would encourage them to leave the car at home and use another form of transport. Past experience suggests that

Local Authority R & I News cont...

1,000 diaries will generate information about 25,000 trips. The data collection is being completed by consultants involved in the Suffolk Transport and Environment Partnership (STEP) although data analysis will be undertaken by the Information Unit. The intention is to write up the results for publication in summer 2002.

Contact: Belinda Godbold
Belinda.godbold@et.suffolkcc.gov.uk
01473 583272

Aberdeen City Council

Youth Strategy Seminar

The Community Development Children's and Youth Strategy Team led the "Your Space!, Our Space!, Whose Space?" seminar on December 11, 2001. Over eighty people attended from the public, private, and voluntary sectors including Councillors, Council officers, Grampian Police, Youth Action Committee members, young people and representatives from the private sector. Young people were involved in the planning, and presented their views creatively through the use of music, video footage, and skateboarding and breakdancing performances. The event involved a 'pledging session' which resulted in six pledges involving partnership working to look into various issues relating to young people's rights to public space.

A follow-up meeting will be organised in the New Year to find out how the pledges have been progressed and to consider future actions including how to involve the private sector more effectively.

'Planning for Real'®

'Planning for Real'® is an imaginative hands-on approach to community consultation. It has proven to be an interesting way of engaging the members of a given community in identifying and prioritising the issues for their neighbourhoods. It is an attempt to break down the communication barriers that exist between professional bodies and the communities whose interests they represent. Community Development's Area Regeneration teams have completed three further 'Planning for Real'® community consultation events in the Northfield, Castlegate, and Gallowgate areas of the city. These events are the first stage in a process of continued dialogue with the community in relation to improvements in service delivery in their area.

There have been three follow up 'Planning for Real'® events in Northfield, Willow Park and Cummings Park, Mastrick. Torry area regeneration team is to hold a 'Planning for Real'® follow-up event at the Torry Community Council Community Conference event in February 2002. The follow-up event is an opportunity for the residents to prioritise the issues that they have raised. It is also an opportunity for the community to be given feedback from the 'stakeholders' on how the main issues are being addressed by the various agencies involved in the events.

Feasibility Studies

A skills audit was conducted in Oldtown / Marchburn as part of a feasibility study into the future introduction of a 'Neighbourhood LETS' Scheme. A survey of residents, shoppers, local businesses, and local authority staff in the Mastrick area was conducted as part of a feasibility study for a 'plugging the leaks' pilot under the guidance of the New Economics Foundation.

Strengthening Local Democracy Strategy

Community Development's Strengthening Local Democracy team conducted a consultation to develop agreed outcomes for the Strengthening Local Democracy Strategy. A series of 'stakeholder seminars' have been held followed by a 'joint stakeholders conference'. The 'stakeholder groups' identified are elected members of the City Council, officers from the Council, partner organisations, and community representatives. The main points raised formed the focus for a conference that brought together the three groups and provided the framework for a Strategy Action Plan. This process gave the opportunity for the stakeholders to remain involved in the implementation of the strategy.

Contact: Kay Geddes
Kgeddes@COMMDEV.aberdeen.net.uk
(01224) 523011

Halton Borough Council

Consultation by email - computer ownership among the citizens' panel

A survey was undertaken recently of Halton's citizen's panel - Halton 2000 - to ascertain the interest amongst members in answering future questionnaires by email. This will become a more important issue as the Government's e-govt initiative gathers pace.

The survey revealed a surprisingly high rate of access to a computer, - with just 1 in 4 not having any access to a computer. Most (60%) had access at home, while 1 in 3 had access at work. One in ten had access through college or school, while a further one in ten used the computers at the local library. Just 2% use an internet café. Of those who do have access to a computer, 2 in 3 also have an e-mail address and access to the internet. Of these, 216 people or nearly 60% said they would be willing and able to complete future surveys via e-mail or the internet. So far about 50 members have agreed by providing their e-mail address, which is definitely a start in the right direction. We've also experimented with on-line surveys, but currently lack the resources to maintain them properly.

Contact: Sue Scott Research Unit
Halton Borough Council 0151 424 2061.
Email: sue.scott@halton.gov.uk

Halton Crime and Community Safety Survey

Halton 2000, Halton Borough Council's panel, have recently completed a re-run of a Crime and Community Safety Survey which was first carried out in November 1998. Extra questions have been added to the survey to assess whether panel members feel more or less safe compared with three years ago, in order to measure the success of the initial Community Safety Strategy. The findings of the 2001 survey will be compared with those of 1998 and the results published in February 2002.

Contact: Sue Scott Research Unit
Halton Borough Council 0151 424 2061.
Email: sue.scott@halton.gov.uk

Local Authority R & I News cont...

Luton Borough Council

Carnival Impact Study

The Research & Intelligence Team at Luton Borough Council have published the third study into the impact of Luton Carnival. The Economic Impact of Luton Carnival 2001 report builds upon the 1999 and 2000 studies and allows comparisons between the three events. As with the earlier studies, the Carnival Officers Forum - organisers of Luton Carnival - were interested in the impact of the Carnival on the local economy, and in particular the town centre, and in the demographic profile of Carnival goers.

The 2001 study is based upon questionnaire surveys of seven distinct populations whose combined activities affect the economic impact of the Carnival. Questionnaires were devised for and administered to the following groups:

- Carnival goers;
- Transport providers;
- Stall holders;
- Emergency services;
- Pubs, clubs and shops in the town centre;
- Internal Council departments;
- Procession entrants.

With the exception of the Carnival goers and Internal Council departments questionnaires, all questionnaires were postal. In the case of the Carnival goers survey, ten surveyors were recruited - based on their previous experience of face-to-face interviews - to interview Carnival goers on the day of the Carnival, 28th May 2001.

The study estimates that an estimated £2.8 million was spent in Luton town centre by Carnival goers and that the majority of this was on food and drink. There is also evidence that the impact of the Carnival is different across sectors with pubs, restaurants, etc benefiting from increased turnover on Carnival day, when compared to retail establishments.

For more information please contact Tanya Ridgeon on 01582 547093 or e-mail ridgeont@luton.gov.uk

News from Elsewhere

DTLR

The DTLR has published the report of a feasibility study on **"Evaluating the Impact of the Modernising Agenda"**. It can be found on their website (see info4local.gov.uk). They are going to go ahead with the project as a series of parallel studies on each element and an overarching one on the agenda as a whole. The study will include:

- Service Improvement - Beacons, Best value, e-Government
- Community leadership - Community strategies, Well-being, Local Strategic partnerships
- Democratic Renewal
- Public confidence - new ethical framework, citizen and user engagement
- Freedoms & Flexibilities - Local PSAs

Local Government Association

"Partners against crime – a survey of local authority approaches to community safety" was published by the LGA in October 2001. It presents the results of a survey that took place over the summer, to develop a comprehensive picture of the work being done by local authorities to promote community safety. The response rate to the survey was 79%. A fifth of authorities reported that they had a corporate strategy to reduce crime and disorder in their area, separate from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership strategy, and further fifth said that work to develop a strategy was in progress.

Respondents were asked to name the top issues of most importance to their authority in terms of its role in promoting community safety. The top issues were anti-social behaviour selected by 53% of authorities; youth crime 37%; domestic burglary 36%, and vehicle crime 26%.

In nearly four-fifths of authorities, community safety was reflected in the new political management arrangements. The most likely way was in the form of a member's portfolio (58%). 96% of councils had some staff dedicated to community safety work, and 81% reported that they had a designated budget for work on community safety.

A summary of the research is available at: **http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/PartnersAgainstCrime.pdf**

"Follow the leaders – a survey of local authority approaches to community leadership" was published by the LGA in November 2001. The report examines the progress local authorities are making on their community leadership role. The research looked at community leadership in broad terms; the development of community strategies; local strategic partnerships; working with partners and the new power of well-being.

News from Elsewhere cont...

The research shows that local authorities are making good progress to develop their community strategies and are progressing well to develop their local strategic partnership. Key survey results include:

- 79% of authorities say they will have published their community strategy by March 2002, with the remainder by March 2003
- 84% of authorities say that the community strategy is badged as one belonging to the partnership through which it was developed
- 76% of authorities say that the existing partnership is the most important driver in developing the community strategy
- 94% of authorities have already, or will in the future develop a consultation strategy as part of the community strategy
- 62% of authorities already have a local strategic partnership in place, and the remaining 38% expect to have this in place by April 2002
- 80% of authorities expect the development of local strategic partnerships to lead to a rationalisation of partnerships
- 62% expect that local strategic partnerships will lead to a reduction in the number of plans which authorities will have to prepare – the most mentioned plans to be subsumed within the community strategy are Local Agenda 21 and economic development plans
- 67% of councils are at some stage of developing a local compact with the voluntary and community sector

The research overall shows that in spite of no additional resources being available to develop this work, local authorities are making good progress to develop their community strategies and building the local strategic partnerships to deliver them.

A full summary of the research is available at: **http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/communitylead.pdf**

"Local strategic partnerships – lessons from the New Commitment to Regeneration" was published by the Policy Press in November 2001. The report was jointly commissioned by the LGA, DTLR and Joseph Rowntree Foundation and was carried out by Hilary Russell from Liverpool John Moores University. The research identifies lessons of good practice for Local Strategic Partnerships by drawing on the experiences of the 22 New Commitment to Regeneration pathfinders. The research identified a development framework for partners seeking to put together a strategic partnership. Included in this is the need for strong leadership; trust among partners; mechanisms for review and evaluation; and co-ordinated planning processes. For more information about the report visit
http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/n51.asp

Current LGA research projects include:

- Local strategic partnerships – the LGA and IDeA have commissioned Inlogov at the University of Birmingham to carry out case study research with seven local strategic partnerships. The research will be published in April 2002. Further information from roger.sykes@lga.gov.uk
- Local strategic partnerships – relationships with the voluntary and community sector – case study research is being carried out by the LGA research team to produce case study good practice examples of working with the voluntary and community sector. Further information from juliet.whitworth@lga.gov.uk
- Evaluating Local Democracy Week 2001 – the LGA have surveyed local authorities to evaluate Local Democracy Week. The research will be published in February 2002. Further information from andrea.sellars@lga.gov.uk
- Research with fire authorities – the LGA research team will shortly be undertaking a survey of all fire authorities in England and Wales. The research will look at partnership arrangements between fire authorities and local councils; data sharing issues; fire authority priorities and priority setting mechanisms. Further information from andrea.sellars@lga.gov.uk
- Cultural services – baseline survey of current and future trends – the research will look to assess the future contribution which cultural services can make to the well-being of local communities. Further information from juliet.whitworth@lga.gov.uk
- Learning Disabilities Partnership Boards – the LGA research team is currently undertaking a short telephone survey to collect basic information on local authorities' progress in setting up Learning Disabilities Partnerships Boards. Further information from juliet.whitworth@lga.gov.uk

Disability Rights Commission

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has recently published a report entitled **"Disability in Scotland: a baseline study"**. The report provides an overview of policy, official statistics and published research in relation to the position of disabled people in Scotland. The report covers Education, Employment, Transport, Housing, Health and Social Care and Access to Goods and Services. The report was researched by the Strathclyde Centre for Disability Research, University of Glasgow. There is a separate Executive Summary also available. The report is available in a range of formats free of charge from the DRC Helpline or downloadable from the DRC Website. (see below for address).

The DRC has also recently published **"Disability in Scotland 2001: key facts and figures"** which is a short booklet that gathers together many of the statistics from the baseline study. This is also available free of charge in a variety of formats from the DRC Helpline and is also downloadable from the DRC Website.

Contact the DRC Helpline on 08457 622 633, textphone 08457 622 644, fax 08457 778878, email enquiry@drc-gb.org.
The DRC Website is at www.drc-gb.org.

News from Elsewhere cont...

Manchester Geomatics

Manchester Geomatics has been working in close conjunction with Manchester, Salford and Trafford Health Action Zone (HAZ) since 1999 to develop an internet-based, publicly available Community Health Information Profile. The second stage of development will be completed by the end of February 2002 and incorporates a whole range of additional functionality and data sources. Improvements have also been made to the user interface to facilitate greater ease of use and create a more robust system.

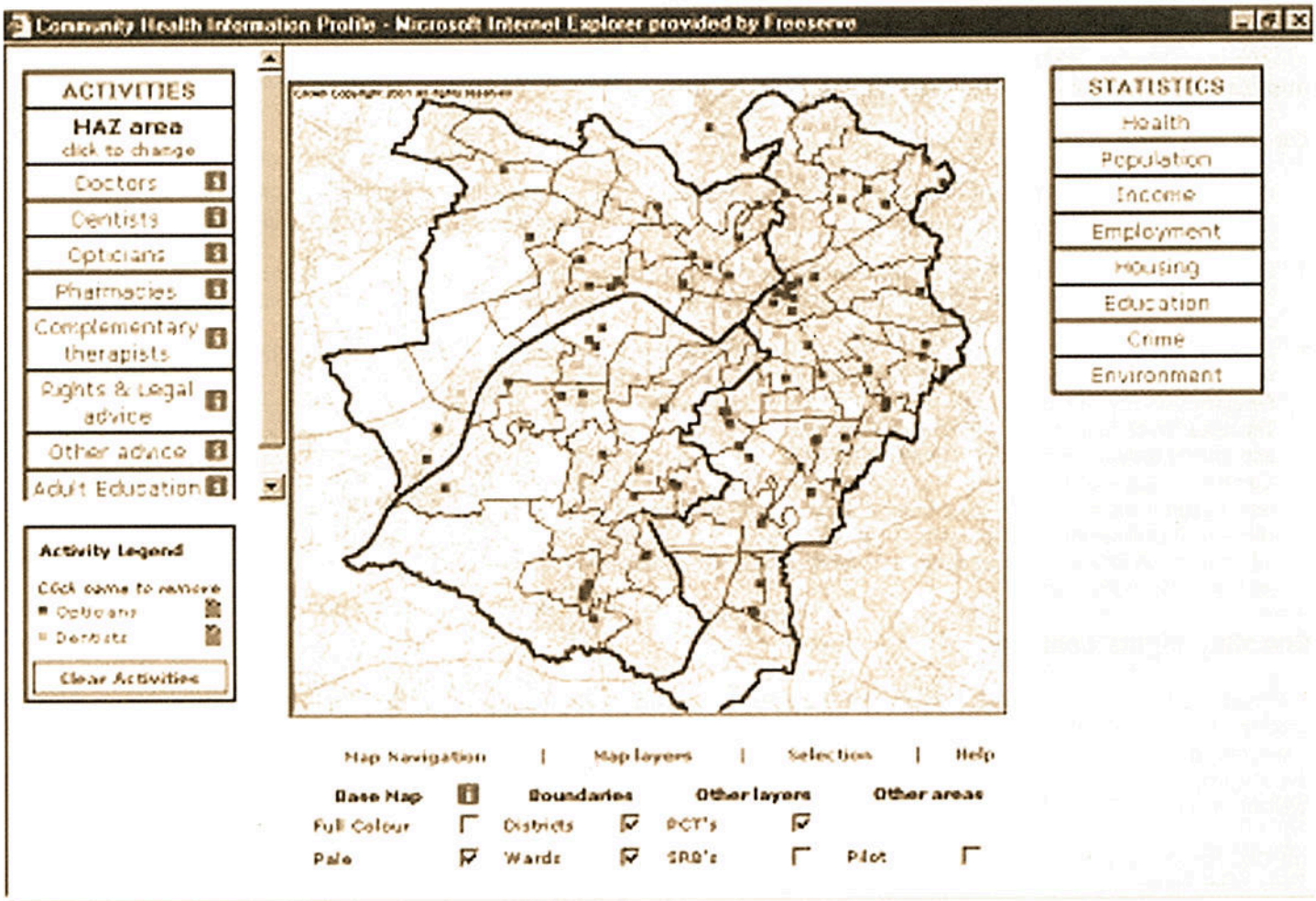
The Community Health Information Profile (CHIP) is a system that puts up-to-date information and statistics at the fingertips of everyone interested in health and health services. It provides easy on-line access to:

- Health inequalities indicators and related social, economic and environmental factors.
- Information about activities that can help to promote good health.

The information comes from agencies in the health, public, and voluntary sectors. CHIP provides information across the whole of Salford, Trafford and Manchester and uses maps to help users to search for information, display statistics and pinpoint local activity street-by-street.

The system is designed to be flexible and can be developed to meet user needs. Log on to CHIP at www.healthprofile.org.uk.

Manchester Geomatics can be contacted at **info@mgeomatics.com or www.mgeomatics.com, or on (0161) 276 8390.**



LARIA People

Tell us about new appointments, promotions and other staff changes and we'll tell all our readers. Send details, with a photograph if possible, preferably in JPEG format, to jwicks@mva.co.uk.

Cheshire County Council

Mark Smith rejoined **Cheshire County Council's** R&I Unit in July. He was a Research Officer who left Cheshire R&I during the LGR uncertainties. Since then he has extended his experiences in the retail sector, at Warrington BC and at Liverpool CC. He has rejoined as a Research Analyst and will be mainly involved with consultation.

Lee Thomson joined **Cheshire County Council's** R&I Unit in September as a Research Officer on the Career Development Scheme. Lee comes to us after working as a research assistant with Cheshire Constabulary.

Cumbria County Council

Sue McWilliams of **Cumbria** moved to a new job last December in the Early Years Development & Childcare Partnership so she is no longer the contact for R&I work. Her replacement has been recruited but may not yet be in post. **Anna Lilley** is the research officer at **Cumbria** for surveys/citizens' panel etc.

Dudley Borough Council

Andy Wright of **Dudley BC** has had his function transferred away from Planning to Dudley's central department, in a move similar to those in other districts, reflecting how "big business" corporate research is becoming.

Gateshead Council

Dylan Griffiths, formerly Policy Officer in the Strategic Policy Unit at York City Council, joined the Chief Executive's Office in **Gateshead** as policy assistant to the Chief Executive, in January 2002.

Hampshire County Council

Kathryn Boyles joined **Hampshire County Council's** R&I Group as Senior Research Officer (Demography) in December. She previously worked for Southampton City Council. She replaces Rebecca Creasey, who has moved on to a job with the Home Office.

IDeA

After three years on the Beacon Council Scheme **Charles Leslie** has been appointed (with effect from 1 December) Business Manager for the Knowledge & Learning Directorate at the **IDeA**. Part of his role is to co-ordinate IDeA's own research activities and to build closer working relationships with other organisations conducting research into local government issues.
Contact chas.leslie@idea.gov.uk

MVA

Carol Riddington has been promoted to Technical Director Social and Market Research in **MVA's** Woking office. She is a Full Member of the Market Research Society and sits on its Professional Standards Advisory Body. Carol is also a Member of the Royal Statistical Society, and has recently become a member of the External Advisory Board for the University of Surrey. She has managed many major public consultation projects, such as Luton Translink and the M27 Integrated Transport Study. She has also recently investigated race crime for the Metropolitan Police and Best Value for several local authorities. She is also Vice Chair of the Social Research Association.

Alan Roach has joined **MVA** following an MSc in Social Research Methods at the University of Surrey. He has skills in survey design, quantitative analysis and the presentation of data using SPSS and Memphis and was responsible for data analysis on the 2001 Public Attitude Survey for the Metropolitan Police Service.

Juliette Harrison is also an MSc graduate in Social Research Methods at the University of Surrey. She joins **MVA** from the telecommunications industry and has worked in Australia and New Zealand. She is currently involved in a project to assess people's transport needs at parish level for the Countryside Agency, a study of partnership working and a project to identify the impact of the provision of multi-modal integrated travel information on the perceptions and behaviour of the public.

Morag Treanor is a qualified teacher and drugs and alcohol counsellor who has joined **MVA** following completion of her MSc in Research Methods at Napier University. Morag has recently worked on projects such as Mortgage Arrears and Repossessions in Scotland for the Scottish Executive, an evaluation of a community development project 'Cultenhove for Change' for Stirling Council and on Leadership and Management Pathways in Teachers' Continuing Professional Development for the Scottish Executive.

LARIA People

Northamptonshire County Council
John Jenkins, Research and Information Manager at **Northamptonshire County Council**, has been seconded to act as Project Manager on the Council's review of business support services. This review is being carried out in collaboration with Milton Keynes Council through exploring the procurement of a public private partnership covering some or all support services. The review has now reached the stage of working with three short-listed companies with a view to identifying a preferred partner by the summer of 2002.

In the meantime, the Council has been reviewing its corporate centre, including the existing research and information group and wider function. In the spring this is likely to involve a exercise to consider the Council's knowledge management requirements and the options for addressing them.

ORC International
Suzanna King has joined **ORC International** as a Research Executive in the Public Sector Division. Prior to joining ORC International in October 2001, Suzanna worked for Braintree District Council as a Housing Research Officer. She has conducted various research projects including analysis for a sheltered housing survey, tenant satisfaction surveys, and housing research for the District's Housing Needs Assessment.

Suzanna is also currently studying for a MSc in Social Research Methods at Middlesex University, which is due for completion in January 2002. This has given her experience of small-scale qualitative and quantitative research projects. Suzanna holds a BA (Hons) in Sociology.

RBA Research
Paul Vittles, Chairman and Managing Director of **RBA Research**, was awarded a Fellowship of the Market Research Society (MRS) in November – he is the youngest person ever to be awarded the Fellowship. Paul has also been invited to join the MRS Professional Standards Advisory Board.

Scottish Executive
Robert McGregor of **Fife Council** is currently on secondment to the **Scottish Executive** for approximately one year from 26 June 2001. For personal and secondment related messages please use robert.mcgregor@scotland.gsi.gov.uk For matters relating to Fife Council please contact Edmund Whiffen
(tel. 01592 416106)
(e-mail edmund.whiffen@fife.gov.uk)

Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Congratulations to **Knud Moller** (knud.moller@stoke.gov.uk) of **Stoke-on-Trent City Council** who was awarded a Diploma in Professional Management from Staffordshire University on the 20th of December 2001.

Swindon Borough Council
Angela Walter has recently joined **Swindon Borough Council** as Research Assistant in the Environmental Services Department where she is working with demographer **Philip Smith**. Angela previously worked for WH Smith in Swindon and is a geography graduate from Bath University.

Worcestershire County Council
The Research & Intelligence Unit at **Worcestershire County Council** has recently appointed two new officers:

Alison Rogers, Partnership Information Analyst and Research Officer, has joined us from Hereford & Worcester Fire Brigade, where she was Management Information Officer, with her main focus being on Best Value and improving information management within that organisation. A combined honours graduate in English and Psychology from Keele University, Alison will be providing research support to partner agencies across Worcestershire. This will involve assisting in the development of the "Joined Up Information System (JUIS)" on behalf of Worcestershire Partnership, as well as being involved with project work for the Worcestershire Drug Action Team and gathering economic intelligence.

In December 2001, the R & I Unit was successful with a bid to the Government Office for the West Midlands, to support Community Safety Partnerships across the County. This is based upon the continual development of JUIS as a GIS-based website to assist policy development. **Gareth Wrench**, an Economics graduate from Loughborough University, has been appointed as Research & Community Safety Officer and will be providing the Community Safety partnerships with assistance in monitoring and evaluating their crime reduction strategies, using the JUIS website.

For more information contact David Onions,
DOnions@worcestershire.gov.uk
The JUIS website can be found at www.juis.org.uk

City of York Council
Gavin Thompson joined the **City of York** research team in January 2002 and is currently working on projects for the housing team and with external clients, assisting them with their citizens' panel surveys.

Noticeboard

'Producing national sets of small area population estimates: where are we now and where are we going?'

A joint Royal Statistical Society and British Society for Population Studies conference.

Afternoon (1.30pm) 15 March 2002 at RSS Erroll Street, London.

The meeting will look at issues in making small area estimates using both apportionment and cohort methods and then feature progress in the ONS small area estimation project.

Speakers from local government, universities and ONS.

Contact: john.haskey@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Social Research Association Training Days for 2002

13th March	Qualitative Interviewing
22nd May	Quantitative Data Analysis
11th September	Focus Groups
6th November	Report Writing and Presentation Skills

All Training Days will be held at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA. Details can be found on our website www.the-sra.org.uk. All queries please contact:

The Administrator, Social Research Association, PO Box 6688, London SE15 3WB

Tel: 020 8670 5460 or email admin@the-sra.org.uk or www.the-sra.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)

Research Contacts List

One of the aims of LARIA is to encourage networking amongst local government researchers, and one way of helping to achieve that is by the publication of a list of research contacts in local authorities and in other organisations where local government research is undertaken. LARIA has therefore decided to make available to its members, extracts from its membership list.

The Research Contacts List (available in Excel format) contains the name, job title, department, organisation, telephone number and research interests of LARIA members (where approval of publication has been given). The listing is intended to help LARIA members make contact with other researchers with similar interests. It is not intended as a mailing list for commercial purposes (no postal or email addresses are contained on the file, only telephone numbers). It is available only to LARIA members, whether they be Full Members, Associate Members or named under Corporate Membership. It will be updated regularly. The Research Contacts List can be obtained free of charge from Graham Smith, the LARIA Administrator on request **(email address: lariaoffice@aol.com)**

Caption Competition

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

The editorial group judged the following to be the winning entries

1. "This isn't what I meant when I asked for a column in LARIA News ..."
   Martin Cummins, Bristol City Council

2. "John Wicks musing on his column for LARIA News"
   David Owen, Vale Royal Borough Council

3. "Hic... Col what did you say your name is?"

4. "It's about time someone put some graffiti on this old column"
   Both by Bob Cuthill, City and County of Swansea.

This edition's caption competition shows Graeme Foster of ORC International speaking at a recent training event, with Bryan Hall, the Laria Chair, in the background.

If you have any suggestions for future caption competitions post them to Rachel Cossey at the address on the back page or email them to Rachel@mgeomatics.com.

Guide to Contributors

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

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

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

Provision of copy by email (email address on back page) to the editor in Microsoft Word or compatible format is preferable, although disks may also be sent to the editor (address on back page).

Next Issue

June 2002

Copy should be sent to the Laria News Editor (address on back page) to arrive by 8th March 2002.

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 constitution and steering group, whose chair is also on the LARIA Council. It plans workshops, and other events, and is developing networking at a Scottish level.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

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.