

Laria

Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

Research Impact Awards

*Winners, highly commended and
shortlisted entries 2015*

April 2015

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Introduction

This edition of LARIA News looks at the winners of our Research Impact Awards 2015. The aim of these awards is to showcase the impact research has at a local level.

The key criteria are that award winners should show us excellence in research that is making a real difference to the people they serve. The awards focus on research impact based on a sound evidence base. We also look for entries that demonstrate citizen/user involvement/engagement, partnership working, delivering positive outcomes, achieving efficiencies, and embracing innovation.

We would like to thank everyone who entered an award this year. All those who have been shortlisted are best practice in our sector and demonstrate that these organisations value evidence-based decision-making and research that makes a real impact.

We will publish all shortlisted, commended and winning entries on our website: <http://laria.org.uk/professional-development/awards/>

Judges panel

We would like to thank the LARIA Research Impact Awards judges for 2015. Each award had a judging panel of 3-4 of the following individuals.

Deana Leadbeter, Health Statistics User Group

Erin Murray, Research and Policy Officer, Scottish Borders Council, LARIA in Scotland Chair

Jen Compton, Research Manager, Westminster City Council, LARIA in London Chair

Juliet Whitworth, Research and Information Manager, Local Government Association

Matthew Lund, Senior Policy and Performance Officer, Leeds City Council

Michael Paul Hughes, Independent public policy research analysis and advice, Member of Healthwatch England committee

Neil Bendel, Head of Health Intelligence, Public Health Manchester, LARIA Council

Neil Wholey, Head of Evaluation and Performance, Westminster City Council, LARIA Chair, Awards Panel Chair

Professor Tony Bovaird, Professor of Public Management and Policy (Emeritus), INLOGOV and TSRC, LARIA Trustee

Richard Potter, Analytics Cambridge, LARIA in the East of England Chair

Best Use of Local Area Research

Sponsored by the Local Government Association (LGA)



Criteria:

Successful entries in this category showed how their research led to a greater understanding of a local area of an issue that is locally important. They also show how this has led to evidence-based decision-making in at least one public sector body. Ideally, the winning entrant also displayed evidence of strong partnership work, involvement of service users, innovative approaches and the achievement of outcomes that are beneficial to the local area.

Judges' comments:

"This year's 'Best Use of Local Area Research' category was a very strong one, with a wide range of entries that spanned complex demographic analysis and forecasting, mixed methods in order to understand communities, and interesting visualisations of data to help decision-makers. It really demonstrated well the mix of skills required by local area researchers today."

Winner: London Borough of Lambeth – Using Randomised Control Trials to Improve Public Service Outcomes

The use of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) is at the centre of a new approach to decision-making implemented by the London Borough of Lambeth. The first of these studies was designed to test how council tax revenue could be increased through the alteration of the bill sent to residents. This is an area of particular importance given the current pressures on public finances: research has shown that a rise of just 1% in the council tax collection rate could generate over £1 million of extra revenue.

As part of the study, some residents were sent a simplified version of the council tax bill, in which attention was drawn to the key information and actions required. When compared to the control group, who received the standard bill, it was found that the simplified bill had yielded a 9% increase in the proportion of residents who paid their council tax on time. As a result, the standard council tax bill has been redesigned, with the potential for a significant increase in the revenue that the council receives.

Building on this initial success, seven additional RCTs are either in progress or are in development. These include studies designed to test the impact of the inclusion of social norms on council tax bills, as well as methods of reducing waste, increasing the proportion of residents who volunteer and improving internal communications.

Judges' comments:

"This entry made excellent use of a research technique that is not regularly used in social science, and in doing so

affected the design of several local services. They could demonstrate that their research had a strong influence on decision-making, and was based on sound methodology. Moreover, they are continuing to apply it to other services to make a difference across a broader range of areas. This was an excellent demonstration of a rigorous piece of research that is having a direct impact on service delivery.”

Commended: Manchester City Council – Welfare Reform Research

Following the passage of the Welfare Reform Act, Manchester City Council established a Welfare Reform Programme Board to oversee the monitoring of these reforms and their impact. In order to provide an evidence base for the board to work from, the council developed a quarterly Welfare Reform Monitoring Report: this brings together a wide range of intelligence held by the council, and presents it in a clear and accessible way.

The report enables decision-makers in a range of departments to target support directly to areas with the greatest need, and to allocate funds effectively. Since it was first developed in 2012, the report has been used to identify ‘hotspots’ of residents affected by the benefit cap, to inform the commissioning of a new delivery model for advice services across the city and to inform the allocation of funding for a project intended to help tackle food poverty.

In addition to its use by a range of council departments, the report has also been used to support research undertaken by external bodies such as Grant Thornton and the University of Manchester.

Shortlisted: Birmingham City Council – Birmingham Active Parks

Local data reveals that life expectancy in Birmingham varies considerably, and that the high prevalence of health conditions such as heart disease, stroke and obesity is leading to preventable morbidity and mortality. The likelihood of developing these conditions is markedly reduced among individuals who exercise regularly: however, research showed that 80% of Birmingham residents do not do so, and that this costs the council approximately £20 million each year.

Further research revealed that the key barriers to regular exercise are cost, time and lack of local provision. In order to mitigate these, primary and secondary research data was used to develop the Active Parks pilot. This was modelled on the idea of a ‘leisure centre without walls’, with free outdoor activities provided in accordance with the interests of residents. Six parks were included in the trial phase of the pilot: these were chosen in order to obtain an overall user pool that reflected the demographic profile of Birmingham’s wider population.

Feedback from participants enabled the scheme to be consistently adapted and improved in the light of local needs, such as the provision of a greater number of weekend sessions or more family-oriented activities. User feedback also revealed that the pilot attracted people of all ages and backgrounds, and was reaching its key target groups: two in every five users were from parts of the city that were within the top 10% in terms of deprivation levels. These successes have led to the roll-out of the scheme to a total of 53 parks across Birmingham, with more to be included in future.

Shortlisted: Oxfordshire County Council Research and Intelligence Team – PopExTrACT: Oxfordshire’s Population Forecasting Tool

In 2013, Oxfordshire County Council found that existing population forecasting tools were not suited to its local needs. The Research and Intelligence team therefore developed and tested an in-house model, the Population Excel-based Trending and Calculation Tool (or PopExTrACT), which was based on local data such as initial ONS mid-year estimates, planned housing growth, and trends in levels of migration, fertility and mortality.

The use of such localised data has helped increase the accuracy of the team’s population forecasting, and the tool has been used to help a range of council departments consider the implications of population growth on services and infrastructure. By making forecasts available to colleagues and to external partner organisations, in the form of written briefings or interactive dashboards, the Research and Intelligence team has supported robust, evidence-based conversations with developers and central government to help secure financial contributions towards meeting the costs associated with population growth. Other external partners, such as Vale of White Horse District Council, have also commissioned the team to provide locally tailored projections using the tool.

Best Use of Social Care or Health Research

Criteria:

Successful entries in this category show how their research has led to a greater understanding of a health or social care issue. They also show how this has led to evidence-based decision-making in the health and social care sector. Ideally, the winning entrant also displays evidence of strong partnership work, involvement of service users, innovative approaches and the achievement of outcomes that are beneficial to the local area.

Judges' comments:

"The entries show a strong understanding of the importance of a broad range of social care and health issues. They also demonstrated the new developments in a sector undergoing substantial change."

Winner: Public Health Intelligence, Kirklees Council – From Conception to Delivery and Beyond: Lessons Learned Through Evaluation of the Auntie Pam's Pregnancy Advisory Service

Auntie Pam's is a local pregnancy advisory service, the aim of which is to improve health outcomes for mothers and pregnant women. The Public Health Intelligence team at Kirklees Council conducted an evaluative study of the service, assessing its impact across six key outcome areas: the number of women accessing the service; the number who successfully train as peer support volunteers; the number who are involved in the planning, development and

delivery of children's and maternity services; the emotional wellbeing and self-esteem of service users; resilience to poor health behaviours and negative lifestyle circumstances; and the extent to which service users are able to access appropriate and timely services.

Through the evaluation project, the council was able to provide evidence of the short, medium and long term health and wellbeing outcomes that the service provides for those who use it, as well as to gather suggestions for improvements in relation to each of the six outcome areas listed above. A new database and reporting system were also designed in order to establish baseline and current performance.

Judges' comments:

"The approach used was sound and innovative – using data from different sources, using both qualitative and quantitative data and reporting the findings in a variety of different ways."

"This provides information not only for the service being researched, but also a framework that can be used for evaluating other services"

Commended: Lancashire County Council and Lancashire Constabulary – Lancashire Drugs Threat Assessment

The Lancashire Drugs Threat Assessment provides a geographical analysis of drug use across the county, identifying areas in which it is particularly common and highlighting emerging trends in use and supply. In order to develop a broad picture, information was obtained from a wide range of partner organisations, including the police, public health organisations, the North West Ambulance Service, treatment

providers and probation officers. By synthesising this information, the team has been able to highlight issues of particular relevance to different stakeholder groups: for example, they have provided treatment services with information regarding patterns of drug use, compiled offender profiles for the police service and investigated emerging issues across the county from a service provision perspective. This information has been used in order to ensure that service provision is targeted at the relevant groups in the correct parts of the county, and to identify issues to which services will need to adapt in the coming years: for example, a key finding from the research was that young people are increasingly likely to use either cannabis or legal highs rather than class A drugs such as opiates, meaning that services will need to adapt their treatment provision in future.

Judges' comments:

“The approach to both the data collection and the analysis was good and fairly innovative – looking at the overall problem and using open source research so that the analysis and results were not constrained by prior assumptions.”

“The approach used has wider lessons for research in other areas by demonstrating the value of working with partner agencies and sharing intelligence.”

Shortlisted: Healthwatch Dudley – A Strong Voice for Local People in Decisions about Urgent Care Services in Dudley Borough

Healthwatch Dudley was commissioned by the Dudley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to investigate the views of local people with regard to the ease with which they are able to access GP services, walk-in

centres and accident and emergency departments. Over a seven-day period, almost 1,000 patients at a walk-in centre and local accident and emergency department completed an online questionnaire, and in-depth discussions were held with stakeholders such as clinicians and managers.

The research, while enabling local residents' voices to be heard, also influenced decision-making around how future urgent care services are planned and delivered. For example, a key outcome has been the increased consideration given to ensuring that the needs of young people, pensioners, the vulnerable and those with mental health difficulties are met. The research project has also helped establish Healthwatch Dudley as a trusted local partner.

Best Use of Community Safety or Policing Research

Criteria:

Successful entries in this category show how their research has led to a greater understanding of a community safety or policing issue. They also show how this has led to evidence-based decision-making in the policing and community safety sectors. Ideally, the winning entrant also displays evidence of strong partnership work, involvement of service users, innovative approaches and the achievement of outcomes that are beneficial to the local area.

Judges' comments:

"This was a new category this year and it is great to see a number of strong entries."

Winner: Luton Borough Council and Bedfordshire Police – soLUTions Community Safety Partnership Gang Profile

During 2012 and 2013, youths in Luton were involved in a number of incidences of serious violent crime, many of which were believed to be gang-related. A number of individuals were therefore identified as being involved in gang violence or gang-related activity. The Gang Crime Profile developed by Luton Borough Council and Bedfordshire Police built on this early analysis of the individuals involved by mapping names against a number of datasets such as crime and incident data, school attainment and exclusion data, housing information, familial violence and

neglect data and the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The analysis revealed certain characteristics that were more likely among those involved in violent crime, and identified demographic factors that correlated strongly with locations of interest. Research into the relationship between victims, offenders and locations revealed that individuals who are victims or perpetrators of violent crime often share similar characteristics. These findings were used to inform a strategy and action plan, and are currently being used to develop a risk matrix.

Judges' comments:

"Excellent news that use of data sharing protocols can be a success, and a great example of the value of being able to share data on individuals between agencies."

"Excellent use of multiple datasets to underpin the strategy."

Commended: Cambridgeshire Research Group, Cambridgeshire County Council – The Use of Strategic Assessments in Planning Partnership Interventions

In partnership with Fenland Community Safety Partnership (CSP), the Cambridgeshire Research Group has developed a new process for the use of strategic assessments to enable timely action planning, meet statutory requirements and save money. In previous years, the Fenland CSP had received one strategic assessment document each year. However, this model has been adapted so that priorities for the partnership are agreed at the beginning of each year, and one of

these topics is analysed in detail in each quarter. This allows the partnership to remain on top of problems before they become entrenched and to target interventions in a timely way. Moreover, when combined, each of the quarterly reports form a sufficiently substantive body of research that they can be used to meet the statutory requirement to carry out an assessment of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Through the new model, Fenland CSP has been able to answer specific questions about community safety issues within the district, and has led to an increased understanding of the profile of individuals who drink on the streets and of the perpetrators of acquisitive crime. In the former case, analysis of these individuals produced a major change in the partnership activity aimed at tackling street drinking, and subsequent monitoring has revealed a reduction in the problem.

Judges' comments:

"Research that demonstrates that sometimes organisations do need more research!"

"The strength of this entry was how research and the use of information had become embedded in the strategy and operation of the Community Safety Partnership."

Shortlisted: Kent Fire and Rescue Service – Human Behaviour: The Kent Study

Alongside several partner organisations, Kent Fire and Rescue Service conducted a study into human behaviour and motivations during the period from the discovery of an accidental domestic fire to the arrival of the fire service or other first responders. These fires account for 10-12% of the total and yet are the cause of 60-70% of all injuries and

fatalities: the study has the potential, therefore, to form an evidence base for the reduction of both the wider impact of these fires and the number of injuries and fatalities that they cause.

Central to the study was a semi-structured qualitative interview process with individuals who had sustained minor injuries during accidental domestic fires, enabling their views and experiences to be heard. The information gained from the interviews challenged existing understanding and provided new insights in a number of areas: as a result, a larger scale survey was undertaken both by post and by telephone.

The study has allowed Kent Fire and Rescue Service to increase its awareness of how it can help people during and after a fire, and has helped shape service delivery projects such as fire safety messaging, using the 999 call as the first intervention, operational response and casualty care, and post-fire support. It has also given them a better understanding of those who are particularly at risk, meaning that resources can be better targeted.

Judges' comments:

"A clear research problem substantiated by the evidence."

"Examining the wider background through a literature review is a strength."

"The way the further research was carried out seemed an excellent and appropriate way of getting the information needed to make changes."

Shortlisted: Lancashire County Council and Lancashire Constabulary – Optimal Forager: A Partnership Approach to Targeting Burglary Risk Areas and Vulnerability

Lancashire's Optimal Forager project is an example of the effective identification of a body of national research, testing the potential impact of this research at a local level and developing a process to implement the principles of the research in the local area. The analysis is based on initial findings from UCL's Jill Dando Institute (JDI), which revealed that when a property is burgled, the likelihood of repeat burglaries on the property or on others nearby is markedly increased.

In November 2013, the Lancashire Community Safety Partnership analysis team used existing burglary data to assess the number of 'near repeat' burglaries across the county and identify areas that were at particular risk of this type of crime. Pilot projects were then implemented in the two areas at greatest risk of this type of crime. The projects involved the development of an assessment tool to more precisely predict the areas that are at particular risk of future burglaries, and local policing and partnership teams then developed actions to target these areas. Both pilot projects yielded a reduction in the overall number of burglaries: it has therefore been recommended that the approach be implemented across all appropriate areas within Lancashire.

Judges' comments:

"A clear programme of activity led by the CSP team, and with clear outputs over the six-month evaluation period."

"What was particularly welcome was the reporting of the impact of the research through measuring the decrease in crimes."

"Technically the work was excellent. It was also good to see the engagement with other agencies through the work of Blackpool Council and Lancashire Fire & Rescue."

Most Engaging Presentation of Local Area Research

Criteria:

Successful entries in this category show how they have presented local area research in an innovative manner in order to aid understanding of a local area, community or health issue. The audience for this presentation could have been senior decision-makers, staff, the media or the public. Submissions should also show a creative approach that reflects the needs of the end audience. Ideally, the winning entrant also displays evidence of strong partnership work, involvement of service users, innovative approaches and the achievement of outcomes that are beneficial to the local area.

Judges' comments:

"An interesting array of submissions for this category covering topics ranging from diversity and local demographics to supporting front-line staff to use evidence to inform local service delivery to better understanding community safety issues."

Winner: Northumbria University Department of Social Sciences and Languages, supported by Newcastle City Council – Imaging Homelessness in a City of Care (Newcastle upon Tyne)

In the context of increases in non-statutory homelessness and rough sleeping, as well as austerity and welfare reform, the spaces and places of homelessness are an increasingly visible object of public and policy concern. Working in partnership with

five homelessness charities, an artist and 30 homeless people, Northumbria University and Newcastle City Council sought to improve local understanding about routes into homelessness and the experience of being homeless, and to give voice to the homeless population, who are still largely marginalised from decision-making.

The research process was comprised of 'life history' interviews and a participant-led mapping and photography exercise. The work undertaken by each homeless participant was then collated into a composite map by the artist Lovely JoJo. The outputs were showcased via a touring exhibition and project blog. The results of the project had a significant emotional impact on the audience that viewed it, and offered insight into the power of emotion to challenge and influence prevailing conceptions and realities.

Judges' comments:

"This entry used an alternative method, ultimately illustrated by the artist Lovely Jojo, to provide insight into homelessness in Newcastle. The project sought to bring issues of importance for the homeless into the public consciousness in ways more powerful than the traditional methodologies and dissemination channels usually allow. In turn, this helped to further develop local understanding of the causes and lived experiences of homelessness, with a subsequent impact on policy and practice."

'Imagining Homelessness' impressed due to its very collaborative, innovative and user-led nature. The presentation of insight to challenge preconceptions and assumptions is a powerful ambition, and this project has had a significant impact.'

Shortlisted: Brent Council – Diversity in Brent: Knowing Your Communities

The Research and Intelligence team at the London Borough of Brent ran interactive sessions with colleagues in order to help staff understand how proposed policy changes may affect residents with certain characteristics. According to equalities legislation, these include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Through presenting the data in the form of infographics, the team was able to increase staff engagement with the material. These sessions were supported by a set of documents designed to present the information in meaningful, accessible and engaging ways, and to encourage staff to re-use content and source data themselves.

Shortlisted: Cambridgeshire Research Group, Cambridgeshire County Council – Cambridgeshire Atlas: Victim and Offender Pyramids

In order to explain the gender and age profiles of victims and offenders in the local area, Cambridgeshire Research Group developed an interactive atlas through which these profiles could be examined by Community Safety Partnership (CSP) area. Through presenting the data in pyramid form, with different levels representing different age groups, the team was able to provide evidence to counter the perception that older people are most likely to become victims of crime. Moreover, exploration of the differences between districts helped inform policy interventions for reducing victimisation and offending rates. For example, the analysis revealed that one

CSP, in contrast to the rest of the county, had a particularly high proportion of offenders who were male and aged 20-24. Policies were therefore adapted in accordance with the patterns of offending seen among this group, and levels of offending in the CSP in question have fallen since these changes were introduced.

New Researcher of the Year

Criteria:

This award is given to a researcher with under five years of experience and who has made a particular impact. Their entry could be based on a particular project they have led, an innovation they have pioneered or a particularly strong skill set. Their career to date should show a researcher who is able to provide insightful analysis, promote service user engagement, present information well and help develop evidence-based decision-making in the public sector.

Winner: Zonni Auburn

Zonni has proved to be a talented and versatile researcher, producing high quality work. Among her projects to date, she has:

- Analysed over 40,000 records in order to develop a profile of victimisation for the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner, leading to significant change in the provision of victim support services;
- Effectively interviewed vulnerable elderly people as part of an evaluation of the Community Navigators project, which was intended to help older people remain within their own homes by recruiting volunteers to signpost them towards local services and activities;
- Delivered a high-quality service for councillors in the run-up to an electoral review, producing detailed instructions on the use of mapping software and sitting down with councillors to create their own maps of their electoral wards.

LARIA Volunteer of the Year

Criteria:

This award is in the gift of the LARIA Council and recognises the work of a volunteer who has progressed the work of LARIA but does not sit on the LARIA Council.

Winner: Alison Monkhouse, Kirklees Council

The winner this year has contributed throughout the year in terms of local networking events in Yorkshire and the Humber as Chair of the local group. She has also promoted greater links with partnership organisations and supporting the 2015 LARIA Conference and Local Area Research Fortnight.

Rules of entry

A form was published on the LARIA website giving full details of how to submit an entry. The key rules were highlighted as:

1. Submissions must be made on the forms provided and within the word limits set out
2. One form must be used for each entry
3. All entries must be made by a LARIA member
4. All entries for awards A-E can be entered by a private sector research company, but they must include at least one public sector body as a client/partner
5. All entries made by a LARIA Corporate member will be made free of charge. If you are not a LARIA Corporate member please join before entering the awards (it only costs £80). If you do not wish to be a member you will need to pay £80 to enter the awards
6. The main contact is responsible for ensuring all permissions have been sought within their organisation or partnership – especially in regards to the publication of information provided
7. LARIA reserves the right to publish all the information provided in this entry in the form of a case study – this includes online – unless otherwise stated
8. The judges' decisions are final. LARIA will not enter into correspondence about why an entry was not selected as a finalist
9. No free tickets to the awards dinner will be provided automatically to entrants. Tickets are available to purchase separately or as part of attendance at conference. If you cannot accept in person we will ask you

to nominate someone who is attending the dinner.

10. Please return to Sarah Welsh at admin@laria.org.uk by 5pm Monday 23rd February 2015

Please note

We decided not to shortlist in the “Best Use of Consultation and Engagement” category this year.