Communities and Local Government

Supporting local information and research: Understanding demand and improving capacity

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Department for Communities and Local Government

The findings and recommendations in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department for Communities and Local Government

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CONTENTS

Section 1: Executive summary 5

Section 2: Introduction and context 10

Section 3: Better information for decision-making: what is driving the demand for local information and research? 16

Section 4: Local capacity: How is research and analysis carried out locally? 28

Section 5: What support is available for local information and research? 39

Section 6: How can support to local partners be strengthened? 50

Section 7: *Faster, better, smarter*: Recommendations for strengthening support 69

Appendix A: Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: key messages from the evaluation and analytical skills research 82

Appendix B: How we have carried out this project: methods and organisations interviewed 103

Appendix C: Acknowledgements 113

Acronyms used in this report

BERR	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
BURISA	British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CDRP	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
CoP	Communities of Practice
Data4nr	Data for Neighbourhoods and Regeneration
DH	Department of Health
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
FTI	Floor Targets Interactive
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
GLA	Greater London Authority
IDeA	Improvement and Development Agency for local government
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
KM	Knowledge Management
LA	Local Authority
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LARIA	Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association
LEGI	Local Enterprise Growth Initiative
LGA	Local Government Association
LGAR	Local Government Analysis and Research
LIA	Local Improvement Advisors
LIS	Local Information Systems
LSOA	Lower-layer Super Output Area
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
NeSS	Neighbourhood Statistics Service
NOMIS	Official Labour Market Statistics, previously National Online (Labour) Market Information Service
NRA	Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors
NRF	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund
OAC	ONS Output Area Classification
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
ONS	Office for National Statistics
ORRION	Online Race Resource for Improving Outcomes in Neighbourhood renewal
RIEP	Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership
RSS	Royal Statistical Society
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency
SELD	Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme
SNR	Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (HM Treasury)
UKSA	UK Statistics Authority

Section 1

Executive summary

1.1 Introduction and context

Communities and Local Government, in partnership with the Audit Commission and the Local Government Association, commissioned this external review to understand better how to strengthen support to local partners in using local information and research in decision-making.

This project has investigated the following questions:

- What are the sources of demand for local information and research?
- How is research carried out locally?
- How is local information and analysis currently supported by national, regional and sub-regional organisations?
- How can support for local information and analysis be strengthened?

Key audiences for this report

This report is primarily aimed at national, regional, and local organisations looking to provide more effective support for information and research undertaken by local authorities and their partners. These include the sponsors of the research, government departments, regional observatories, etc. For each of our recommendations, we have identified those bodies currently best placed to take the initiative.

In addition, the report should be of use for local partners looking to strengthen their local research and intelligence functions.

1.2 *Faster*, *better*, *smarter*: Recommendations for strengthening support

From our findings, there is considerable scope for helping local information and research teams to provide *faster*, *better* and *smarter* support for their decision-makers – and also for decision-makers to increase their appreciation and use of solid evidence.

We have identified recommendations for named national, regional, and local organisations for strengthening support for local partners. The 17 recommendations are grouped under: strengthening support for good quality data; strengthening support for 'fit for purpose' information; and strengthening support for better decision-making.

Below we highlight those recommendations which we consider to be the top priorities.

Strengthening support for good quality data

These recommendations focus on making the most of available data, increasing understanding of the data, guidance on sharing data, and also improving data on specific issues (better population estimates and statistics about migrants provide ready topical examples).

- National departments responsible for producing guidance relating to strategic assessments should work with data publishers and consider how best to package for local users the relevant data that is published nationally (Recommendation 1)
- Communities and Local Government and BERR should consider the recommendations arising from this project when considering guidance on the Economic Assessment Duty. This project has highlighted the usefulness of guidance in (1) emphasising the value of the evidence-base to senior managers in the decision-making process, and (2) strengthening data sharing arrangements between partners (Recommendation 2)
- The major data suppliers – ONS and other government departments – should continue to streamline delivery and open-up access to data, by standardising ways of both finding and downloading data. The accessibility of national statistics has improved enormously. But it does not always go far enough: users still spend significant time downloading and reformatting data from many different systems, reducing time available for analysis (Recommendation 3).

Strengthening support for 'fit for purpose' information

Moving on from data supply, the creation of valuable information involves improving the skills of analysts, coordinating local research and intelligence functions, and also presenting information in ways which will grab the attention of busy senior decision-makers.

- Consider the case nationally for developing and implementing a competency framework, and possible accreditation, for local government and partnership researchers (Recommendation 9)
- Local partners should consider how to organise and develop local research and intelligence functions in order to meet data and evidence needs arising from the Local Area Agreement (LAA), strategic assessments and the drive for improved customer and citizen focus. They should ask, for example, are research and intelligence resources well co-ordinated and geared to improving strategies and performance? Are there analytical skills gaps locally? (Recommendation 10)

- Define the national and regional 'support infrastructure' for local information and research, clarifying the roles and responsibilities and seeking synergies between the various organisations operating at these levels. The role of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships is potentially important in bringing clarity, in conjunction with other regional partners, eg, Regional Development Agencies as key stakeholders in Regional Observatories (Recommendation 11).

Strengthening support for better decision-making

Interviews highlighted several important issues: a gap between research/ analysis and policy and operational functions within organisations and partnerships; senior managers undervaluing the contribution of research and intelligence to policy-making; many managers not knowing what good analysis and statistical presentation could give them; and analysts lacking sufficient authority and skills to influence decision-makers.

- Given the significance of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) as a lever for better use of information and analysis, support for implementation of CAA should facilitate the transfer of learning and good practice relating to information, analysis and research as means of achieving higher performance in improving local prospects and quality of life. (Recommendation 13)
- Include skills in the interpretation and use of evidence within leadership and management training programmes. Research has identified that the commitment of senior management to research is strongly correlated with performance[1] (Recommendation 14)
- Strengthen regional support for research and analysis through a mix of advice, networking, training, analytical products (trends, benchmarks, etc) and jointly commissioned research. A lead by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) offers the *greatest prospects of strengthening action on the ground* to improve the links between analysis and research functions and decision-making. RIEPs should clarify and ensure that they are working closely with analytical support resources within the region, such as Regional Observatories; and develop partnerships and joint commissions to address priorities for research and analysis support (Recommendation 15)
- Ensure that information, research and analysis support needs in the Third Sector are considered when reviewing regional improvement needs and targeting support. This is important in support of national community empowerment objectives (Recommendation 17).

[1] "… there is a relationship between certain indicators of research effectiveness, notably those that relate to research culture, and CPA ratings…" Commitment of senior management to research was the most significant factor in analysis of whether indicators relating to research effectiveness were related to performance scores. LGA (2005). Knowledge is power: the need for effective research in local government.

Recommendations for national and regional, and local partners

Turning to the full list of recommendations in Section 7, each one identifies the organisation(s) which are currently best-placed to take the recommendation forward. These include organisations at national, regional and local level.

Figure 1.1 identifies our recommendations for *national and regional actions* to strengthen support for local partners.

In addition, *at local level*, partners should consider how to organise and develop local research and intelligence functions in order to meet data and evidence needs arising from the LAA, strategic assessments and the drive for improved customer and citizen focus (Recommendation 10). Also, some of the recommendations for national and regional partners are relevant to local partners, for example taking every opportunity to promote the message that in many situations users can legitimately share aggregated data for strategic purposes (Recommendation 5).

Figure 1.1: National and regional actions to strengthen support for local partners

Section 2

Introduction and context

2.1 Introduction

Communities and Local Government, in partnership with the Audit Commission and the Local Government Association (LGA), commissioned this external review to understand better how to strengthen support to local partners in using local information and research in decision-making.

Our investigation included interviews with a wide range of organisations as well as drawing on other research and knowledge, and has probed the following questions:

- What are the sources of demand for local information and research?
- How is research carried out locally?
- How is local information and analysis currently supported by national, regional and sub-regional organisations?
- How can support for local information and analysis be strengthened?

Our analysis leads to recommendations for named national, regional, and local organisations for strengthening support for local partners. There is considerable scope for helping local information and research teams to provide faster, better and smarter support for their decision-makers – and also for decision-makers to increase their appreciation and use of solid evidence.

Key audiences for this report

This report is primarily aimed at national, regional, and local organisations looking to provide more effective support for information and research undertaken by local authorities and their partners. These include the sponsors of the research, government departments, regional observatories, etc. For each of our recommendations, we have identified those bodies currently best placed to take the initiative.

In addition, the report should be of use for local partners looking to strengthen their local research and intelligence functions.

The policy context

The Devolving Decision Making Review announced by the Chancellor in 2003 focused on the key question of how to decentralise delivery, and ensure responsive local and regional services. Reporting in 2004, the Review identified

> *"Central government needs to maintain a strategic role, ensuring national standards are met and maintained, but allowing greater scope locally to determine other priorities and to decide how best to deliver national outcomes."*[2]

Building on this work, the Treasury Sub National Review[3] set out plans for the devolution of responsibility for economic and regeneration programmes to local partners. This was one of a number of relevant policy reviews produced as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review[4]. Other relevant work from the spending review included the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration policy review[5], which confirms government desires to see third sector organisations playing a bigger role in improving and delivering public services, with greater recognition of their role as a voice for change on behalf of the communities they serve.

Draft statutory guidance accompanying the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 was published in November[6] underpinning what is intended to be a revitalised approach to community leadership and place shaping. Of relevance to local information and analysis are:

- a new statutory basis for Local Area Agreements (LAAs) and a formal framework for co-operation
- updated statutory framework for sustainable community strategies
- a new Best Value duty to involve local people in local services and policies
- the duty to co-operate on 'named' partner agencies.

The Act also requires Primary Care Trusts and local authorities to produce a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment of the health and wellbeing of the local community. Meanwhile, local authorities and the police are expected to produce strategic community safety assessments

[2] HM Treasury, Cabinet Office (2004). *Devolving decision making: 1 – Delivering better public services: refining targets and performance management*. Available from www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget/budget_04/associated_documents/bud_bud04_addevolved1.cfm; HM Treasury, Cabinet Office (2004). *Devolving decision making: 2 – Meeting the regional economic challenge: Increasing regional and local flexibility*. Available from www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget/budget_04/associated_documents/bud_bud04_addevolved2.cfm

[3] HM Treasury (2007). *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*, available from www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_csr07/reviews/subnational_econ_review.cfm.

[4] HM Treasury (2007). Comprehensive Spending Review, available from www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_csr07/spend_csr07_index.cfm.

[5] HM Treasury and Cabinet Office (2007). The Future Role of the Third Sector in Social and Economic Regeneration: final report. Available from www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/~/media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/the_future_role_of_the_third_sector_in_economic_and_social_regeneration%20pdf.ashx

[6] Department for Communities and Local Government (2007) Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities Statutory Guidance: Draft for Consultation www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/statutoryguidance

on an annual basis[7], and a duty on local authorities to prepare local economic assessments is currently the subject of consultation[8].

Many of these policy developments and statutory requirements are discussed further in Section 3.2 which reports on drivers of demand for local information and research.

2.2 What do we mean by 'local information and research'?

'Local information and research' broadly covers all activities, carried out locally, to develop, assess and interpret the evidence-base to support local decision-making. The LGA in their work to promote more effective use of research and analysis in local government used the following definition of research[9]:

> *"… the systematic collection, collation, analysis and interpretation of data of relevance to policy or practice, or to increase understanding about future trends, local needs and good practice. It may involve a wide range of methods including: surveys, for example on customer satisfaction or housing needs; qualitative methods, for example focus groups; analysis of existing datasets, for example the Census; review, interpretation and application of others' research findings; reviews of good practice, for example for the purpose of benchmarking; production of statistical estimates, projections and forecasts."*

What do we mean by 'data', 'information' and 'knowledge'?

- *Data* is the raw material that underpins information, for example, facts, observations, statistics
- *Information* is data with some context or meaning attached. It exists in many forms: words or numbers; in electronic or paper form; as text, image, audio or video. It may be structured, for example, records and documents, or unstructured, for example, carried in people's heads. Ideally, the information about the work of an organisation is stored and accessible from its intranet. Information about staff expertise is listed in a people directory
- *Knowledge* is information that has been put into productive use, made actionable. It is only of value when shared and applied

(Improvement and Development Agency, Introduction to Knowledge Management[10])

[7] Home Office (2007) Crime and Disorder (Formulation and Implementation of Strategy) Regulations 2007 www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi_20071830_en_1

[8] BERR (2008) Prosperous Places: Taking forward the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration www.berr.gov.uk/regional/sub-national-review/page40430.html

[9] Local Government Association (2005). Knowledge is Power: The need for effective research in local government. Available from www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publications/publication-display.do?id=22196

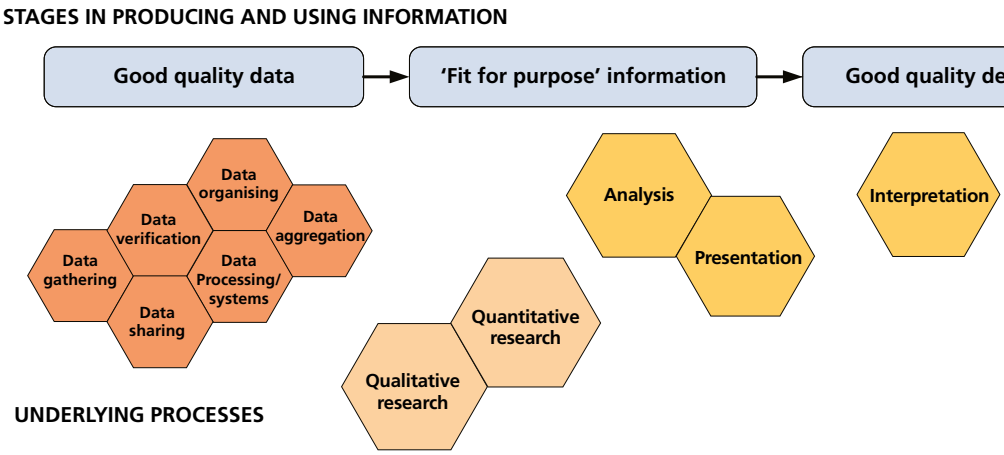
[10] www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8152467

In this project, we have followed the Audit Commission *'In the Know'* discussion paper on using information to make better decisions[11], in framing 'local information and research' around three key stages (See Figure 2.1 below):

- Good quality data
- 'Fit for purpose' information
- Good quality decisions.

Under each of these stages, a range of different processes and activities is involved, each placing demands on local partners. There are *demands on research and intelligence teams*, for example, in developing, interpreting and disseminating the evidence base, as well as *demands on senior managers*, for example in valuing the contribution of research and intelligence to policy-making and understanding how good analysis and statistical presentation can help decision-making.

Figure 2.1: Stages in producing and using information



2.3 How we have carried out this project

Details of the project methodology, including organisations and individuals interviewed are provided in Appendix B.

Interviews with local, regional and national partners:

We carried out in-depth interviews with 16 local authorities and partnerships, and 18 regional and national organisations.

[11] Audit Commission (2008) *In the Know: Using information to make better decisions*, discussion paper available from www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/77C7B4DB-0C48-4038-A93F-DFE3E645A26E/In%20the%20know_report.pdf

Local interviewees were selected using a stratified sampling procedure, to provide coverage across the different types (London Borough, Metropolitan, Unitary, District, County). The sample was checked to ensure coverage of the nine English regions, and of types of geographic area (using the National Statistics Area Classification)[12].

Within each *local* partnership, we made initial telephone and email contact to identify individual(s) in the partnership with a good overview of the local research and policy context. These were typically located in corporate research and policy, strategy, performance, partnership or regeneration teams. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were then carried out. For a full list of organisations and individuals see Appendix B.

The list of interviews with representatives of *regional and national* organisations was agreed with the project steering group. For a full list of organisations and individuals see Appendix B.

Policy literature research

We carried out additional policy literature research to complement the stakeholder interviews highlighted above.

Bringing in evidence from previous work – Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation survey and fieldwork

The national Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) research and evaluation project reviewed how the SELD programme was delivered, and assessed the impact of the four regional SELD pilots and the programme as a whole. It researched analytical skills for neighbourhood renewal and LAAs, in particular seeking to clarify the nature and extent of skill gaps and shortages, and reviewing analytical resources available to partnerships[13].

Research evidence from the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation project included surveys of all Renewal.net and Neighbourhood Statistics users, as well as fieldwork work with a number of local partnerships. As part of this project we have carried out a re-assessment of the survey evidence from the evaluation, drawing out relevant implications. The key messages from the evaluation and our re-assessment of the survey are provided in Appendix A.

Other experiences: evidence from the commercial sector

We have also highlighted evidence from the commercial sector. For example, looking at how value-added resellers of data and information create bigger markets and increase the use made of data.

[12] At the 2001 Census Supergroup level. Details of the classification are available at: www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/area_classification/la/default.asp

[13] For Key Findings, see www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

2.4 The structure of this report

The report is structured around the following sections:

- Better information for decision-making: what is driving the demand for local information and research? (Section 3)
- Local capacity: How is research and analysis carried out locally? (Section 4)
- What support is available for local information and research? (Section 5)
- How can support to local partners be strengthened? (Section 6)
- *Faster*, *better*, *smarter*: Recommendations for strengthening support (Section 7).

The Executive summary is provided in Section 1 above.

The Appendices provide:

- Key messages from the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation and re-analysis carried out for this project (Appendix A)
- Details on the methods and organisations interviewed for this project, including interview topic guides (Appendix B)
- Acknowledgements (Appendix C).

2.5 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Communities and Local Government project team – Wendy Chong, Robert Rutherfoord, Bert Provan and Angela Ruotolo – for their help with the project. We would also like to thank the steering group for their input:

- Adrian Barker, Improvement and Development Agency
- Claire Hardy, Audit Commission
- Juliet Whitworth, Local Government Analysis and Research
- Tom Wraith, Audit Commission.

We would also like to thank all those who gave their time to be interviewed as part of the project. A full list of acknowledgements is given in Appendix C.

Section 3

Better information for decision-making: what is driving the demand for local information and research?

3.1 Mapping the demand for local research and analysis

Introduction

As set out in the Introduction (Section 2), this project focuses on identifying how national and regional organisations can best support local use of information for decision-making. This leads us to look at how, and *why*, information is used locally – in other words, what is driving the demand for local research and analysis? In this Section we highlight the main drivers of this demand.

Our analysis in this Section is based on our interviews with local, regional and national stakeholders, as well as review of the policy and research literature. We also bring in additional survey analysis of local partnership managers carried out as part of the national evaluation of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme[14] (see Appendix A).

The role of research and analysis in improving strategy development, service delivery, and reporting

It is clear that there is significant demand for, and use of, local research and analysis in improving all stages of the planning, delivery and monitoring process at local level. Demand for local research and analysis can come from (and see Figure 3.1):

- *top-down*: for example, government expects local partnerships to set stretching outcome targets – this requires strong awareness of local needs and priorities; and understanding what is required in setting realistic targets. This awareness is tested, and potentially challenged, both by Government Offices (during LAA negotiations), and during Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
- *horizontal:* for example, the emphasis on shared duties across the local partners raises the importance of shared understanding of the evidence base and agreement of strategic priorities

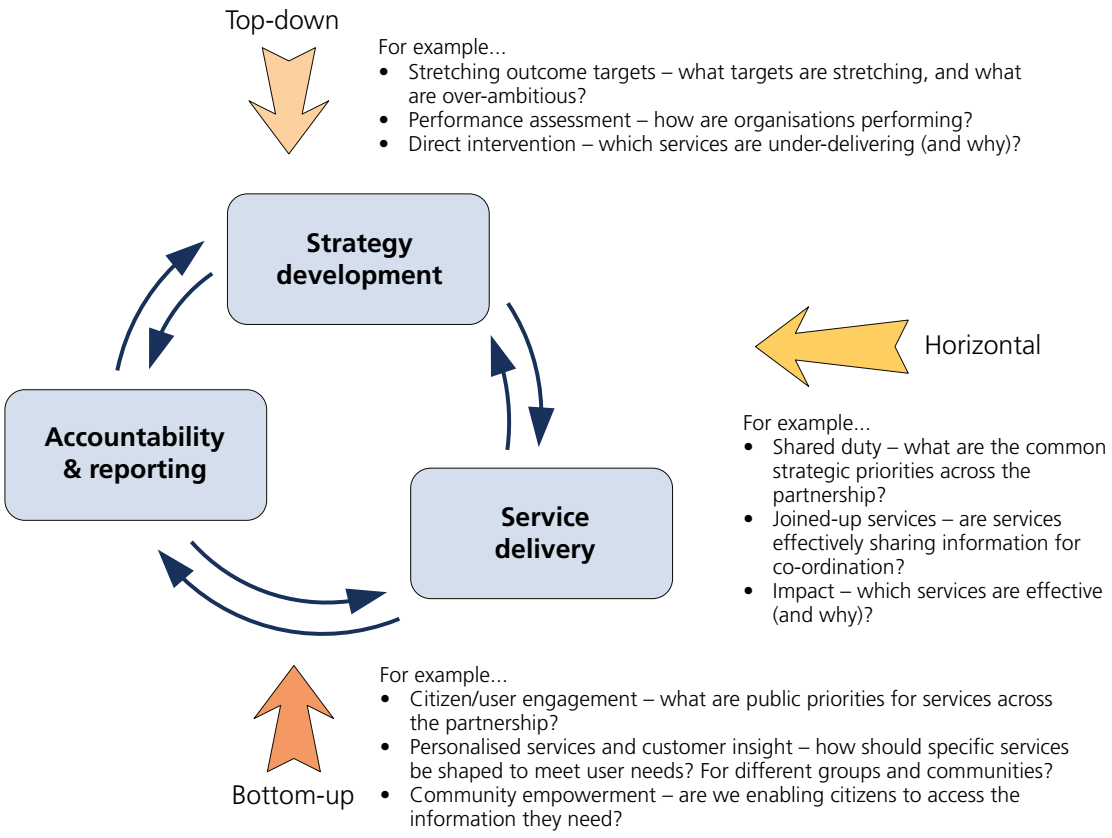
[14] Johnstone et al (2008) *Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: Key Findings* www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

- *bottom-up*: keen understanding of service user needs is needed for shaping services effectively, bringing out needs in relation to different groups and communities. With funding increasingly following user choices – for example, the move to Individual Budgets in social care – this knowledge is increasingly important.

The thrust behind the Local Government White Paper has shifted the emphasis on drivers towards 'horizontal' and 'bottom-up' factors, though 'top-down' reporting requirements remain significant.

The different drivers of demand are likely to have different degrees of impact – for different roles/functions within local authorities and across partner organisations, as well as for different partnership structures.

Figure 3.1: Top-down, horizontal and bottom-up pressure in strategy development, service delivery, and reporting



3.2 The main drivers of demand – current and anticipated

Central role of the Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA

The Sustainable Community Strategy and LAA are increasingly seen as the cornerstone for research and analysis within local authorities and across local partnerships. The process of reaching agreement on shared priorities, and negotiating with Government Office on targets, emphasises the importance of a common evidence base across the partnership and shared understanding of the implications of these priorities.

Local interviewees involved in LAA work all highlighted developing evidence for the Agreement as a significant piece of work, across corporate research functions and individual services. The evaluation of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme found that the *main* driver of needs for better use of information and analysis in Local Strategic Partnerships in areas eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund was the development of the LAA (see Section 3.3 below). The importance of the LAA in setting/identifying local priorities (and allocating funding) meant that services were keen to be recognised in the priority targets.

Interviews highlighted the importance of partners understanding the direction of travel, as well as *why* their area is moving in that direction, with associated questions about how service delivery and wider factors affect outcomes. There can be gaps and uncertainties in local understanding on how different services contribute to a range of LAA outcomes, eg, how business growth impacts on educational attainment and health, and vice versa – "the services recognise a gap in their knowledge, in terms of not always understanding how their service delivery can affect other indicators".

There was evidence that some partners are reviewing analytical needs and capacity for LAA delivery, leading to current or proposed restructuring of research and intelligence functions. For example, in Norfolk, due to the LAA data and analytical requirements, "the Local Information System is now seen as a critical backbone to the decision-making process", with services across the county looking at how to make best use of the system and data team. This issue of restructuring is picked up further in Section 4 (and our findings and recommendations in Sections 6 and 7).

National Indicator Set and local performance management

Local interviewees widely welcomed the National Indicator Set, and particularly the spotlight on outcomes – "the National Indicator Set is focusing a lot of minds on the priorities". However, many recognised that there will still need to be significant effort in reporting on indicators – both inputting to the National Indicator Set framework and in reporting performance locally:

> *"Although overall outcomes are key to the LAA, the underlying information is still needed to improve and reconfigure under-performing services"*

> *"Talking about only 198 indicators is a bit of a smokescreen – it won't reduce our burden"*

There is a general issue here. The removal of *top-down* requirements for reporting, does not remove the *horizontal* and *bottom-up* pressure on research and intelligence to identify how to improve services and outcomes. In other words, reducing the number of key indicators does not lessen the demand for analysis to understand what is going on locally, bringing into play requirements for a wider set of data than simply the key performance indicators. (There is also a link to CAA, which will require evidence that local authorities and their partners are going beyond the statutory indicators in reviewing needs and performance in their areas.) And partners were keen that the removal of statutory reporting did not reduce the level of comparative data available to benchmark themselves against.

Locally, performance management is a big driver behind the need for information and research. In the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation survey, three-quarters of all of partnerships highlighted this as a major driver for local information and analysis (see Section 3.3 below), highlighting needs to improve the use of evidence, including: timely and robust data; the capacity to undertake trend/ trajectory analysis; and the capacity to diagnose reasons for under-performance.

Virtually all local partners interviewed had central performance management teams, many of which provided a wider research role than 'just' performance management data. There was evidence that LAA working was promoting closer links between such teams and other analysts within the council and partner organisations' teams. A number of interviewees highlighted work on identifying those national indicators that were available at sub-District level, bringing together performance analysts and others from, eg, Local Information System teams.

CAA

The new joint assessment framework for local services from 2009, CAA, has a number of key differences to the current Comprehensive Performance Assessment:

- Outcome focused
- *Area-focused*, not just institutionally based
- More *forward-looking* – based on assessing the risk of not delivering future outcomes, rather than assessing past performance
- Greater attention to *local priorities* – in other words, not just looking at the agreed set of national indicators
- *Joint working* by inspectorates – assessment should have meaningful impact on partners other than Local Authorities.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment has been a major driver of demand for local activity, and interviewees were clear that CAA will provide a similar stimulus:

> *"There is a big performance management culture in the organisation, and Comprehensive Performance Assessment is a very strong driver behind council performance. The CAA 'use of resources' and 'direction of travel' elements are significant enough to provide the same drive for council performance."*[15]

The focus on outcomes is important. Use of targets and performance indicators is now generally well embedded at local level, but the spotlight on outcomes means that local partners need strong understanding of how service delivery affects outcomes (as a whole and for different groups in the population); and the barriers that service users face in taking full advantage of services on offer. People are starting to work through what an outcomes approach entails in relation to the baseline and performance/ evaluation data needed, models and methodologies required.

There is an important point for local partners to pick up (and for CAA to examine); "the statutory indicator set is not enough, and local partners need to go beyond this to demonstrate good understanding". Similarly "health and social care services need to demonstrate an awareness of their local population needs". In other words, analysis of a much broader set of indicators and data is needed for CAA, than simply the National Indicator Set – the 'use of resources' lever on the use of information is relevant (this is brought out further in our findings in Section 6).

Other relevant aspects of CAA include how the local authority is exercising its 'community leadership' function. Examples from our interviews included demands on analyst time to assess plans for local service (re)configuration, including Post Office and hospital closures – "a significant part of our Summer 2007 work was on hospital closures consultation".

Statutory requirements for reporting and assessment

Local partners are required to develop, and sign-off with national organisations, several significant strategic assessments, which vary across LAA themes. *Major* statutory requirements for reporting and assessment[16] include:

- *Community Safety Strategic Assessment*: a responsibility of the local authority and police, this is typically undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership team[17]. This rolling annual assessment replaces a requirement for Crime Audits every three years
- *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment*: assessment of local health and social care needs – separate assessments are required for children and adult services, with responsibility shared between the Director of Public Health and the Directors of Children/Adult Services

[15] The most recent CAA consultation proposes combining the 'use of resources' and 'direction of travel' assessments into a single organisational assessment, see www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/index.asp.

[16] There are of course many more statutory duties for reporting and assessment on LAs and partnerships than outlined here. For example, there are Planning Policy Statements covering Development and Flood Risk Assessments, Planning and Pollution Control, Sustainable Development and so on.

[17] This duty applies to unitary and county councils.

- *Local Transport Plan*: required by the Transport Act 2000 for upper-tier councils[18], setting out the local transport strategies and policies, and an implementation programme
- *Local Development Framework*: the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act sets out the responsibility of Districts and Unitaries to develop documents outlining the local spatial strategy[19]. The *Annual Monitoring Report* reviews the progress made in meeting Local Development Framework targets, and the effectiveness of policies against performance criteria
- *Strategic Housing Market Assessment; Housing Land Availability Assessment*: set out in the 2006 Planning Policy Statement 3 on Housing, requiring local authorities to assess housing need and demand, and the land availability for housing[20]
- *Director of Public Health Annual Report*: the NHS Priorities and Planning Framework 2003 – 2006[21] identifies that "NHS improvement, expansion and reform should narrow the health gap by … ensuring that service planning is … supported by an annual public health report by the Director of Public Health"
- *Children and Young People's Plan*: set out by the 2007 Children and Young People's Act, this is the single, strategic overarching plan for all local services for children and young people aged up to 19 years
- *Best Value Performance Plan/Corporate Improvement Plan*: the requirement for LAs to develop their *Best Value Performance Plan* annually was set out in the Local Government Act 1999, and is now superseded by the new performance framework for LAAs
- The duty on local authorities to prepare local *economic assessments* is currently the subject of consultation[22].

The sheer range of required assessments and reporting places heavy demands on local research and intelligence teams – half of all partnerships surveyed for the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation highlighted this as a major driver behind local information and analysis needs (see Section 3.3 below). Overall, however, it was clear that partners would in any case want this kind of assessment and analysis locally, whether or not this was a central government requirement.

[18] This can be emphasised by regional requirements. For example, the GLA Act 1999 requires each London borough to produce a Local Implementation Plan, setting out how the borough plans to finance and improve transport in order to implement the overall Mayor's Transport Strategy.

[19] At regional level, the Planning Act sets out responsibility to develop an overall Regional Spatial Strategy.

[20] Eg, see Communities and Local Government (2007), *Strategic Housing Market Assessments: Practice Guidance*. Available from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/strategichousingmarket

[21] Department of Health (2002). *NHS Priorities and Planning Framework 2003 – 2006*. Available from www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008430

[22] BERR (2008) Prosperous Places: Taking forward the Review of Sub-National Economic Development and Regeneration www.berr.gov.uk/regional/sub-national-review/page40430.html

Comments were raised over scope for further rationalisation of reporting requirements by national government, and the need to help partners align their planning cycles. For example, one interviewee noted that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment requirement has come *after* local commissioning frameworks for health and social care had been signed off.

Impact assessment – eg on equalities, environment

In addition to strategic reporting outlined above, there are requirements on local partners to assess the impact of plans, for example on equalities and environment.

Equalities Impact Assessment is required to identify whether a proposed initiative has an impact from an equality perspective on any particular group of people or community, on the grounds of race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. Impact Assessments provide one form of evidence necessary for local authorities working towards higher levels of the Equality Standard for Local Government[23], with achievement being taken into account in CAA. Other forms include ethnicity monitoring and how such data is used in policy and service improvement.

The requirement for Strategic Environment Assessment is set out by the European Union, requiring programmes/plans that are likely to have a significant environmental effect to assess the likely impact, and consult environmental authorities and the public. This has been highlighted as requiring substantial level of effort – "our Strategic Environment Assessment for the Community Strategy was seen as novel, with lots of interest from others as to what was done".

Strategic assessment, commissioning and joined-up working

There is evidence that strategic assessment requirements are prompting improvements in joined-up working, greater alignment and pooling of funding, and collaborative approaches to commissioning. Joint Strategic Needs Assessments are promoting closer links between Primary Care Trusts and local authorities, and giving impetus to a single combined service[24] – "Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is a huge drive within the Primary Care Trust and Adult Services, and is expected to change the way in which services are delivered, including a joint commissioning agency for health and social care".

Guidance on required data can also be useful in strengthening information sharing arrangements between partners. For example, the duty to co-operate between community safety partners is made more specific in the Strategic Community Safety Assessment guidance, which sets out the datasets that partners must share with the community safety team.

[23] See the Revised Equality Standard for Local Government 2007 – www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=5145192

[24] Such collaboration was enabled by the Health Act 1999.

The push towards strategic commissioning is a significant driver, requiring as it does good quality information on needs, existing provision and service options. Local authorities are increasingly expected to pursue strategic commissioning across a wide range of services[25].

Links between LAAs and Local Development Frameworks

A number of interviewees highlighted a driver of demand as needing to better integrate the LAA and Local Development Framework – "The LA should write the local plans, not just the planning department". There are potential levers for strengthening LAA/Local Development Framework links, for example the 'use of resources' element of the CAA organisational assessment[26].

Good examples of linking the Local Development Framework and corporate priorities include Chichester, where a single manager oversees both the Local Development Framework and the Sustainable Community Strategy, and Plymouth, where a joint evidence base and consultation for the LAA and Local Development Framework is being used:

> *"It is now a given that planners will work with the Local Strategic Partnership, and planners have become more sensitive to the issues that all the sectors are concerned about." [Member, Plymouth 2020 Partnership]*[27]

Service improvement, targeting and reconfiguration

The efficiency and transformational government agendas within local government are also significant drivers of information and research activity. In many areas this was pursued more at individual departmental or service level than by a corporate core addressing more strategic analytical needs.

Central government support for capacity building in local government has historically run on twin tracks of efficiency and of organisational improvement; these now come together under the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy and the new Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, with a focus not only on local authorities but also more broadly on LAA partners. This is stimulating further thought on how the efficiency and improvement strands can be brought closer together, eg, in looking at how pooled budgets can bring efficiencies *and* service improvements.

Neighbourhood level data for services

There are a range of drivers underpinning demand for small area information and analysis at local level. Many of the Local Information System teams specifically focused on small-area datasets, with some local interviewees also having specialist neighbourhood services seen as "the people who do geographical data".

[25] See Communities and Local Government (2008) Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance – www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongsafeprosperous

[26] The CAA consultation papers are available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/index.asp

[27] Plymouth Local Development Framework case study available from the Planning Advisory Service – www.pas.gov.uk/pas/core/page.do?pageId=37925

Although the focus in many areas has been driven by neighbourhood renewal programmes, there are also interests in rural areas in identifying pockets of rural deprivation, as well as more generally from services wanting data and information to understand their local service 'patches'. In Leeds, the Neighbourhood Services team are seen as the first port of call for spatial data to better target services, and the team develops area-profiles produced to a range of service delivery geographies.

From the findings of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation, partnership needs were highlighted around improving the use of data and evidence for the increased focus on neighbourhoods, including support for developments in neighbourhood governance, tracking population turnover/ churn, and assessing the impact of interventions at neighbourhood level.

In addition, the emphases on neighbourhoods and community empowerment in the Local Government White Paper have encouraged local authorities to look more at neighbourhood data from a *corporate* perspective. This in turn has led to work, for example, on identifying which National Indicators are available (either directly, or by proxy) at small area level. A number of interviewees highlighted work on this.

Customer segmentation

Service improvement and efficiency agendas have been prompting an interest in appreciating better the needs, preferences and behaviours of local people. A number of local analysts highlighted work just starting on how to better understand 'customers', linked to customer segmentation and social marketing techniques.

Mosaic and Acorn, private sector sources of small area information, were frequently mentioned by respondents, with the availability of (free) Mosaic data at ward level through the ESD Toolkit[28] highlighted as important. Few users were aware of the freely-available ONS Output Area classification (OAC)[29].

Community engagement and empowerment

Citizen consultation and engagement – including Citizen Panels, Best Value surveys and other consultation – was highlighted as taking up a significant part of local research and intelligence resources. Many interviewees raised the time and expense of carrying out or managing surveys. Some highlighted this as a priority for additional resources – "we would put additional money into boosting survey sizes to obtain sub-District level data".

'Community empowerment' is likely to generate an increasing workload for research and intelligence teams. The Government's aspiration is to embed a culture of engagement and empowerment – and ensure that local people have greater opportunities to have their

[28] Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Toolkit, www.esd.org.uk/

[29] For example, see www.areaclassification.org.uk/

say. The new Duty to Involve[30] comes into force in April 2009 and covers three ways of involving, in the terminology of the legislation, 'representatives of local persons':

- providing *information* about the exercise of the particular function
- *consulting* about the exercise of the particular function
- *involving* in another way.

This is picked up elsewhere: for example, the guidance from the Department of Health on Joint Strategic Needs Assessment guidance[31] emphasises that "Communities should be involved in all stages of Joint Strategic Needs Assessment from planning to delivering and evaluating". Set out in the guidance, Local Involvement Networks (LINks) build on the role of patient forums, and are designed to involve local people in shaping health and social care services and priorities. This mirrors the consultation from Communities and Local Government[32] on how to involve people actively in:

- improving deprived areas through regeneration and promoting work and enterprise
- encouraging active citizenship, and reviving civic society and local democracy
- improving local public services by involving local users and consumers
- strengthening local accountability.

Ad-hoc requests and 'issues of the day'

One-off and ad-hoc requests were identified by many local interviewees as a fairly major part of their workload. Requests were from other services across the partnership, members, and the public (including students). Staffordshire identified roughly one third of their work as ad hoc, with two thirds planned. Leeds Neighbourhood Services identified perhaps 250 bespoke requests per year with, for example, the Citizens Advice Bureau wanting to understand client profiles, developing school catchment area profiles and so on. Coventry identified around 15 requests per day.

Some interviewees highlighted that Local Information Systems can take pressure off ad-hoc requests "making more use of the Web for people to find information – takes pressure off ad hoc queries (although it can lead to more!)"

[30] A provision of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Further guidance is contained in Communities and Local Government (2008) Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance – www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongsafeprosperous

[31] DH (2007), *Joint strategic needs assessment: Guidance*. Available from www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_081097

[32] Communities and Local Government (2008), *Unlocking the talent of our communities*. Available from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/unlockingtalent

'Issues of the day' were highlighted as a big part of ad-hoc requests – many of which can also be LAA priorities. Local interviewees noted recent requests for information on:

- local migration: Size of migration? What is the impact on services, housing, community cohesion, employer needs?
- climate change: What is the impact locally? What can we do about it?
- impact of closing services, for example Post Offices and hospitals.

Other demands for local research and analysis

Other demands for local research and analysis included:

- *Bidding and tendering:* Demands for bids for project funding appear less of a feature, but still arise. For example, regional programmes such as the South East Rural Development Programme and East of England Investing in Communities programme (which channel Regional Development Agency and EU funds) can require significant investment into developing business cases and plans. Third Sector needs were also highlighted, for example in bidding for Lottery funds and a range of national pilot and pathfinder projects
- *Local government reorganisation*: Those partners involved in potential local government reorganisation remarked that developing the case for (or against) reorganisation had been a big recent demand on their time.

3.3 Partnership manager perspectives

Figure 3.2 below summarises the main drivers for – and constraints on – better use of information and analysis within Local Strategic Partnerships, drawn from our additional analysis of the partnership manager survey carried out in 2006 as part of the 'Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery' programme evaluation and analytical skills research[33]. This looked solely at 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding[34].

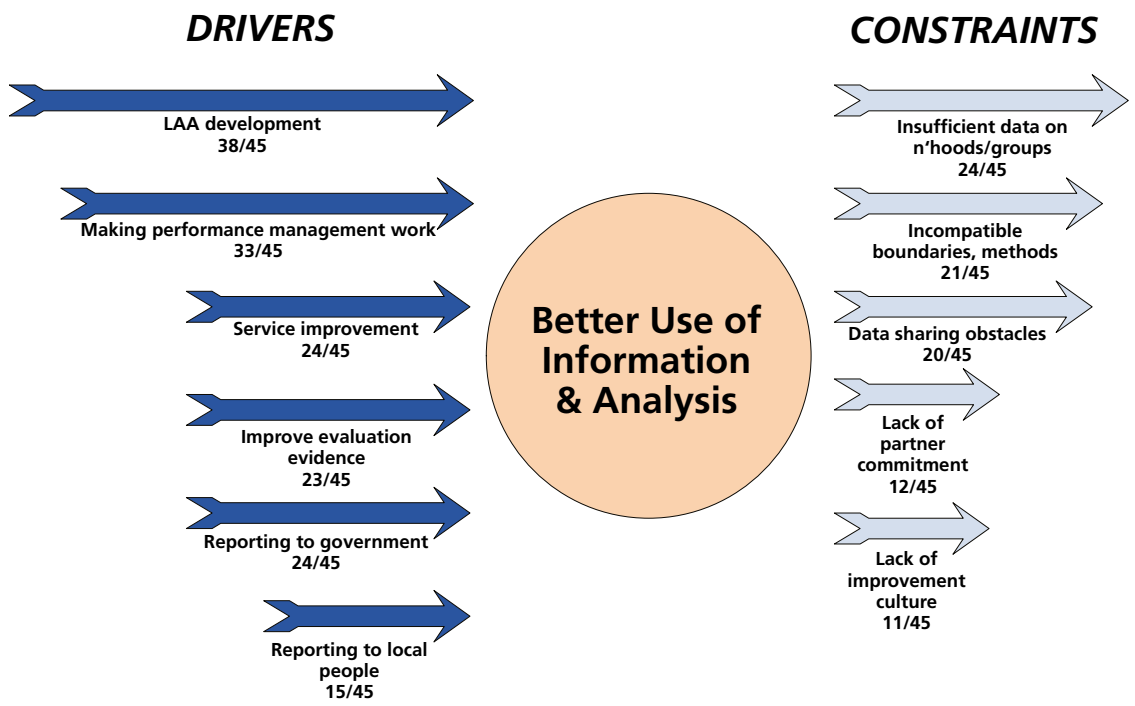
This provides a picture which goes beyond the policy drivers set out above, adding insights into organisational factors as well. The partnership survey found that the *main drivers* of needs for information and analysis were the development of the LAA (38 of 45 LSPs) and the need to make performance management work (33), followed by service improvement priorities, reporting requirements to government and needs to improve evaluation evidence. On a lower level were 'reporting to local people' (15) and [evidence] 'champions within the partnership' (4).

[33] Johnstone et al (2008) Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: National Research and Evaluation – Key Findings www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

[34] These included areas eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the Neighbourhood Element of the Stronger and Safer Communities Fund

On constraints, the *main hindrances* reported were insufficient data on disadvantaged neighbourhoods or group (24); incompatible boundaries, data definitions and/ or partner methodologies (21); and data sharing obstacles (20) – with the first two especially pertinent in Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas where there has been pressure to demonstrate success in closing the gap on key 'Floor Target' outcomes. Weaknesses in partner commitment and performance improvement culture were highlighted by a quarter of respondents, and 'limited research and analytical skills within the partnership' by a fifth.

Figure 3.2: Drivers and constraints on better use of information and analysis in Local Strategic Partnerships in areas eligible for the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding
Respondents were asked to identify up to four drivers and constraints

Analytical capacity emerged as a more potent issue in response to several other questions: four out of five Local Strategic Partnerships considered that there were analytical skills needs within their partnerships and two in five considered that skills gaps had hampered partnership performance. A recurring theme in the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery skills research was "*we don't know what we don't know*", with evidence of partnerships failing to anticipate their future evidence requirements and some practitioners not being aware of what more they could do with the data they have and to what benefit.

Section 4

Local capacity: How is research and analysis carried out locally?

4.1 The aim: use data to create good information for decision-makers

We introduced our view of the stages in producing and using information in Section 2. Section 4 now considers how research and analysis is currently carried out locally, initially summarising the views and priorities of local partners themselves, adding observations made by regional and national organisations, and drawing on other research and knowledge.

These views should be set in the context of trends which have been benefiting analysts during the last decade:

- The availability of powerful desktop computers and software, especially for mapping
- Datasets – more statistics (and also digital boundaries, and directories) are freely available, often through the use of Click-Use licensing[35], most notably the 2001 Census
- Datasets – many new statistics for small areas are being produced from administrative files, for example Neighbourhood Statistics
- The internet – as a means of downloading many datasets, and as a way of finding information and reports, especially by searching with Google.

It is significant that such conspicuous progress has been focused on improving the quantity and accessibility of data and commercial analysis tools, rather than the more subtle matters of understanding the needs and use of information by decision-makers. The unthinking use of performance indicators has been criticised (eg by the Royal Statistical Society[36]) for their sometimes perverse effects, and, despite much support for the idea of evidence-based policymaking, the British public remains deeply sceptical about government's use of statistics (eg see the Statistics Commission[37]).

[35] "Click-Use" licences allow the re-use of Crown copyright information; Public Sector Information; and Parliamentary copyright information. See www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/index.htm for details.

[36] For example, see the Royal Statistical Society Working Party on Performance Monitoring in the Public Services (2003). Performance Indicators: The Good, Bad and Ugly available from www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1222

[37] Statistics Commission. Report No. 38: Official Statistics – Value and Trust. January 2008. www.statscom.org.uk/C_1240.aspx

4.2 Local partners – responsibilities, staffing and organisation

Our sample of local partners was stratified by type of local authority – London Borough, Metropolitan, Unitary, County, and District. This approach recognises the differences in organisations' responsibilities, with the expectation that the resources (especially staff) allocated to research and analysis would vary accordingly.

Our interviews confirmed our broad expectations of typical staff numbers involved in research and analysis: Counties (c.15 staff), Districts (<5), and the assorted unitary councils (5-10 – higher where these areas had received neighbourhood renewal funding).

The Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery partnership survey identifies relatively small numbers for *core LSP analytical resources* – on average two staff per LSP are employed in specific research, monitoring or performance management roles. However *total* local analytical resources are significantly greater than this, including staff involved in analytical work from public health, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, and local authority services such as Children and Young People.

The interviews confirmed the longstanding practices of London Boroughs getting specialist help (particularly expertise on Census and population projections) from the Greater London Authority, and Districts from their Counties. They also illuminated the importance of history to unitary councils, who often value the help given by specialist units set up before reorganisation (such as in Tyne & Wear and Teesside), as well as more recently-established observatories. Such sub-regional support is discussed further in Section 5.

The counties typically have a centralised Research and Intelligence unit, whilst research and analysis activity at District Council level is often concentrated in a small Performance team. However, in the unitary councils, it is common to find dispersed research and intelligence functions and staff, for example:

- Chief Executive (performance; consultation surveys)
- Planning Department (Census; neighbourhood statistics)
- Economic Development Unit
- Other departments (service information)
- Partnership (health, police information).

Several interviewees commented on this situation, and the need to co-ordinate better what they do (see 4.4 below).

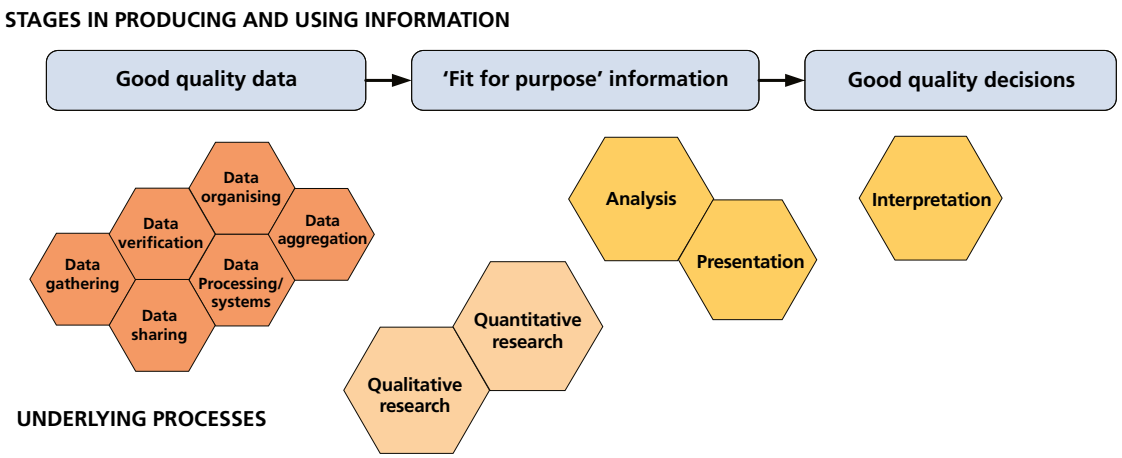
It has already been mentioned that in some areas partners are reorganising their research and intelligence resources to reflect the importance of LAA delivery. Coventry is currently implementing its Chief Executive's decision to "create a Policy and Research Manager with a remit to bring together overall management of research, consultation and knowledge management function". Leeds and Southampton are also reviewing capacity.

4.3 Key messages from local partners

Returning to our diagram of the stages in producing and using information (Figure 4.1 below), the key messages from local partners can be grouped according to the processes involved. The following sub-sections highlight:

- data gathering
- data sharing
- data processing and systems
- analysis and analytical capacity
- presenting and publishing information.

Figure 4.1: Stages in producing and using information



Data gathering: Where do analysts look for data or information?

1) The Council's and local partners' own data

Staff who are responsible for performance management have a very particular role, using the council's own data sources to compile statistics, and often using dedicated software. Several interviewees commented on the importance of being able to make comparisons with other authorities: "the data from the Audit Commission Area Profiles website gives us useful context"; "The Government Office London website is very useful"[38]. Some partners outsource their own local satisfaction surveys, but for others, these absorb a significant amount of staff time.

[38] The Government Office for London produced an Indicator Profiler Tool which brought together a wide range of indicators for London Borough, enabling borough profiles and comparisons.

Several respondents mentioned their local partners as important sources of data, both regular (for example, crime records, teenage pregnancies) and also ad hoc (for example, cases of domestic violence).

2) National and regional sources – websites and expert advice

Local organisations rely heavily on national sources for statistics about their own areas, and also for comparisons with others. As expected, the following organisations were all mentioned as having websites which provide valuable datasets and/or expert advice:

- ONS (especially Neighbourhood Statistics, the Census, and NOMIS)
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Communities and Local Government (especially the Indices of Deprivation)
- Home Office
- Audit Commission (including Area Profiles)
- IDeA, particularly the Communities of Practice forums
- Local Government Association publications.

In several cases mention was also made of sourcing data from websites run by regional bodies such as regional observatories, public health observatories, and the long-established sub-regional research and intelligence units. Such websites usually offer both some straightforward re-packaging of national datasets such as the Census, but also some of their own data and products such as local health statistics, population estimates, and population projections.

In addition to making data and information available over the web, these regional units can also provide a valuable service in giving expert personal advice to users. The importance of advice is discussed below.

3) Commercial suppliers

Commercial suppliers were mentioned sparingly, in the context of outsourcing surveys, particular consultancy expertise (such population projections, housing and retail strategies), and also geodemographic classifications. These neighbourhood classifications, such as Mosaic (supplied by Experian) and Acorn (supplied by CACI) are widely used by commercial companies for profiling and targeting areas and customers (such as 'Blue Collar Roots' or 'High Rise Hardship')[39]. These are being adopted increasingly by local partners too.

[39] These are examples of ways of classifying people by particular sets of characteristics.

4) How analysts hunt for data and information

Interviewee responses built up a picture of how analysts, when faced with a demand for information, start their hunt for what may be available. This involves recalling past experiences of particular datasets, organisations, and expert contacts who may give a lead. Search engines such as Google are of great value, not just to new staff, but also to those with more experience and knowledge, who already have more leads to follow. This process can be accelerated and made more successful if knowledge is passed on through developing networks, and by specific training.

Sharing data is of increasing importance

> *"Sharing data is now a duty under the Safer and Stronger agenda"*
>
> *"A Statutory Instrument places a duty on parties to share"*[40]
>
> *"There has been a change of culture – sharing is now an expectation rather than a favour"*

These views were expressed in a spirit of data sharing providing real value, rather than being a 'box to tick'. However, progress is patchy, with the emphasis being on personal relationships, rather than referring to protocols. The following quotes (which shouldn't be read as definitive views from partners) give a flavour:

> *"The Local Strategic Partnership show a willingness to share data"*
>
> *"Most partners are good at sharing"*
>
> *"It's getting better, but takes a lot of effort – there's little understanding"*
>
> *"There has been some progress, notably in Health"*
>
> *"The Primary Care Trust has limited resources; and issues about confidentiality can cause delays"*
>
> *"Community Safety is really good"*
>
> *"There are problems with police sharing data, often due to staff turnover"*
>
> *"Jobcentre Plus is poor"* (but note that this is only one opinion)
>
> *"Data sharing is all pretty ad hoc"*
>
> *"Sharing relies on links to individual people"*

[40] The Crime and Disorder (Prescribed Information) Regulations 2007 – www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi_20071831_en_1

The interviews also highlighted problems in sharing map data with some other partners in police, health and transport, due to the licensing conditions imposed by Ordnance Survey. This is a longstanding issue, but important recent government reports by the Office of Fair Trading[41] ("The Commercial Use of Public Information"), the Cabinet Office[42] ("The Power of Information"), and the Treasury[43] ("Review of Trading Funds") may result in a change in policy.

Data processing and systems: Technical/software systems

Most local partners have made real progress in realising the benefits of new software systems. Specialist packages are used for performance management. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are heavily used by many organisations, although some feel the need to upgrade. In recent years there has been much progress in implementing Local Information Systems, which have some keen advocates, although some other partners remain to be convinced, citing the effort involved, and the danger of simply duplicating nationally-available data. Further examples of new systems mentioned include software for area profiling.

Gaps were identified– "the performance management and Local Information Systems are located in separate departments, and have grown up in different ways". However, some local interviewees highlighted that work to combine the systems had started up – particularly linked to local work on identifying which of the LAA targets were held at sub-District level. In Nottingham, for example, the performance management and Local Information System developers are currently working on integrating the two systems.

Although not specifically probed, it is significant that statistical analysis packages were not spontaneously mentioned. This may reflect the view that they are now an assumed part of the software infrastructure, and also that much analysis is done using spreadsheets and mapping packages. This mirrors findings from a national Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery workshop attended by analysts, where only a small minority proved to have had experience of SPSS[44].

Analytical capacity – staffing and expertise

As would be expected, given the contrasting numbers of staff in different authorities, there is a great range in analytical capacity. Several of the smaller partners are very appreciative of the help that they get from their county or region on specialist topics such as population projections and economic change.

41 Office of Fair Trading. The Commercial Use of Public Information. December 2006. www.oft.gov.uk/shared_oft/reports/consumer_protection/oft861.pdf

42 Cabinet Office. The Power of Information. June 2007. www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/reports/power_of_information/~/media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/power_information%20pdf.ashx

43 HM Treasury & BERR. Review of Trading Funds. February 2008. www.berr.gov.uk/files/file45136.pdf

44 SPSS – software previously known as Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

The most striking thing is that all authorities, both small and large, believe that much more analysis should be done:

> *"A central government evaluation said that we 'lacked capacity to analyse', which was a valid comment"*

> *"We are often just grabbing information, rather than carrying out research and analysis to inform understanding. We have a real need to analyse trends"*

> *"The Research and Information team lacks expertise"*

> *"As an authority we don't do much research"*

> *"Staff focus on service delivery – there is no corporate research team"*

> *"We find and use research that others have done"*

> *"A lot of research is now about signposting"*

Some specific areas of missing expertise were highlighted:

> *"Our capacity to understand the economy is extremely limited"*

> *"The city doesn't employ a demographer, despite population being the number one priority"*

> *"Our GIS team is currently very short staffed"*

Attempts to set up local networks to share knowledge – within authorities, with other authorities, regional bodies, and local universities – are patchy. Some are well-established, with regular meetings and attendance, but several interviewees mentioned that, whilst such a group existed in principle, it had not met recently.

More broadly, issues were raised about how analysis should be better integrated into policy, and decisions about the delivery of services.

> *"We need to value research and intelligence. It's not just putting information on a website; we need people to tell people what it means"*

> *"It's not just buying an IT system. We need knowledge and deeper understanding, especially what demographics means for services"*

> *"We should be more evidence-led, but we are a political organisation"*

A good example of how analysis and decision-making can be integrated is provided by the GMAC (Greater Manchester Against Crime) partnership performance model, which links data collection and analysis powerfully to decision-making, both operational and strategic, in community safety partnerships in the sub-region. (www.gmac.org.uk/index3.php)

Anticipating demand – publishing local information (especially using the Web)

All the local authorities interviewed have put some statistical information (especially from the 2001 Census) on their own websites. Islington, for example, commented, "About half our enquirers can work with off-the-shelf information, so it is useful to have this readily available. We publish standard reports that anticipate demands – especially the Census". Some also provide more detailed research reports, and regular newsletters.

However, opinions differ about how much effort should be put into this. Some local authorities are enthusiastic about developing Local Information Systems, seeing this as a method of meeting demand (expressed or latent), publishing unique local statistics, and saving time in repeatedly answering similar, ad hoc questions.

Other authorities maintain that Local Information Systems can only be justified if they add new local data, with up-to-date and regular crime statistics for small areas being a typical example of locally held data that adds value, rather than simply duplicating existing national and regional websites. There was also an emphasis on the importance of responding to specific requests by, for example, citizens, members, other departments, and partners.

4.4 Local priorities for strengthening local research and analysis capacity

Two priorities emerged strongly from several interviews:

1) The need for more analysis, and for specialist staff

A powerful theme that emerged from most interviews was the need for more time to be spent on *analysing* information. It was recognised that significant improvements have been made in recent years in the supply of datasets, and in the software to analyse these, but insufficient effort is being spent using them to derive valuable information:

> *"The information is out there – but we lack capacity for finding, using and analysing it"*

> *"Better analytic capacity, then better data"*

> *"Better analysis, and more analysts"*

"It's not that we need a whole research team, rather we need one or two people, eg, Primary Care Trust secondment"

"We need to analyse the future of the area, eg farming, second homes; rural economy."

"Analysis has to be informed by knowledge of local circumstances"

There was also awareness that some topics require skilled specialist staff, especially economic issues (referring to the Sub National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration and the proposed duty to prepare Local Economic Assessments), housing and household projections, and consultation.

2) Better local co-ordination

The second major issue which arose in interviews was a recognition of the need for better co-ordination of research staff. This was particularly apparent when several staff gathered for the interview itself.

"We don't co-ordinate very well"; "we need to look across housing, education, health, etc – but many services are silo-based"

"We need to identify the right research people and bring them together as a research officer group"

In some cases this widened to include the stages of the analysis process – a wish to get closer to understand the needs of users and decision-makers.

"Analysis needs better co-ordination of data suppliers and data users"

"We need to have debate involving officers and members"

4.5 Observations by national and regional organisations

Recent progress and improvements by local partners

National and regional organisations highlighted several positive points about local capacity:

1) Data and information

More and better information is being made available about local residents as recipients of a variety of services. There is increasing sharing of operational data between local organisations and with national bodies too, covered by data sharing protocols. Some police forces make a lot of information publicly available, eg, West Yorkshire (www.beatcrime.info): "you can punch in a West Yorkshire postcode, select a crime and see what offences, if any, have occurred nearby".

2) Local systems

"Even small authorities are using the Neighbourhood Statistics website", but "it is good to supplement Neighbourhood Statistics with local, timely information, and bring it together". "Local Information Systems are being used for more recent and detailed data, eg, crime". "There are good systems – and people are finding new things to do". "Local authorities and partnerships are ahead of central government in information management."

3) Analysis staff

There was some recognition of local analysts for their expertise and renown:

> *"Some local experts are widely known and respected, particularly through the Central and Local Information Partnership. It's good that Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships also have their own specialist analysts."*

Challenges and opportunities

1) The need for more and better analysis

It is striking that, like the local organisations themselves, national and regional bodies also identified this as the top priority. "Target-driven thinking is a block to analytical thinking, for example in crime, important to look behind the figures." "There is a need for intelligence, such as time series analysis, rather than simply churning out monthly reports." Local organisations could make more use of local information, especially more analysis of their own surveys, ideally making this comparable by adopting common questions/definitions."

2) Capacity and expertise

Such a need for more and better analysis naturally led to comments about the need to build capacity. This is more difficult for small organisations and departments, but building networks can be valuable: "They need to be able to have access to experience at the right time" – this was particularly so where "local authorities are struggling on economic issues". It was suggested that there is a consequent "need to develop robust training around information."

3) Efficiency

The concern to increase the effort devoted to analysis also raised the possibilities of increasing efficiency: local organisations "could get more out of existing resources"; "Practice needs to be improved, and management processes need to be embedded". This could be helped by research and intelligence units anticipating standard enquiries/ demands, giving "scope for getting away from routine, and doing more ad hoc projects". The question, "does every District need a research team, and a Local Information System?" was also asked.

4) Communication between analysis and decision-makers: presentation and understanding

Many analysts need to improve their presentation and links with policy. "Upskilling researchers is important: we need better skills for selling research to policy-makers, and better understanding of what policy makers need to know to in order to make decisions", and in parallel, "Upskilling policy makers is also important: they need better understanding of what the evidence can help with, and what the limitations of evidence are". "Chief Execs haven't understood the value of information". Clearly this is a two-way street.

Other experiences: might the approaches used by big retailers be helpful?

All big retail organisations, which are concerned with delivering products and services to individual customers, devote considerable resources to analysing, understanding, and targeting particular localities and customer segments. Tesco, Sainsbury's, Nationwide and Marks and Spencer provide ready examples. Each is faced with the need to make decisions about site location; merchandising (varying products by store); and targeting communication with customers. There are many parallels with public services organisations, and it is no surprise that retailers use government datasets, most notably the Census. Many different sources are used to build understanding/ insight, and particular use is made of customer records and behaviour (response, value, etc.).

Three elements are particularly relevant:

1. Some companies, such as Marks and Spencer, have consolidated their store location, store performance and market research functions into single Customer Insight team (which numbers c.50 people), and those that haven't can see the advantage in doing so. (And so too have local government bodies: the LGA and IDeA have been active in promoting Customer Insight[45].)
2. There is an emphasis on swift operational decisions, responding to changing markets. Pareto's '80/20 Rule' – 80% of the effects comes from 20% of the causes – typically gets mentioned: "we need to have 80% in 2 weeks rather than 100% in 2 months". However, some big strategic decisions (new store formats, new markets) need more exploratory market research, and take longer.
3. Whilst training is available for analysts on particular techniques (such as multi-level modelling) and systems (eg SAS retail intelligence software, and GIS packages), the retailers have had to work together to organise bespoke training on more generic topics such as "Developing as an analyst", and "How analysts can influence the decision-makers".

[45] See www2.lga.gov.uk/OurWork.asp?ccat=1244

Section 5

What support is available for local information and research?

5.1 National, regional and sub-regional support for local research and analysis

Introduction

So far we have looked at the *demand* for local research and analysis (Section 3), and the *local capacity* to meet these demands (Section 4). In this Section we highlight the main *types of support* provided by national, regional and sub-regional organisations to strengthen local capacity for research and analysis, and provide examples.

As set out in the introduction (Section 2), support to local partners should *enable better local decision-making* (to improve services and outcomes). This raises questions on how support can facilitate better interpretation of the local evidence base. For example: where is work duplicated locally? How can support strengthen links between local research/ analysis and local policy? What are the levers that could be used to ensure local decision-makers give greater weight to evidence?

Our analysis is based on our interviews with local, regional and national stakeholders, as well as our review of relevant policy and research literature.

Support for good quality data, 'fit for purpose' information and good quality decisions

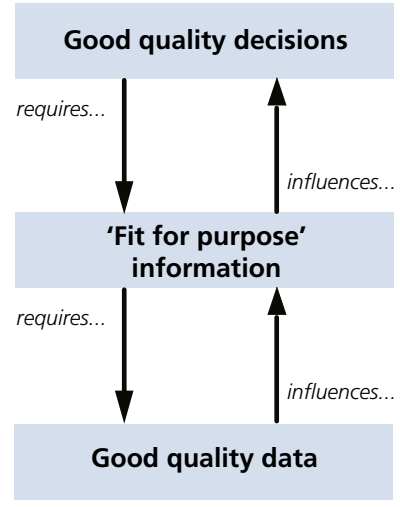
We have grouped the available support under three stages in producing and using information[46]:

- Good quality data (Section 5.2)
- 'Fit for purpose' information (Section 5.3)
- Good quality decisions (Section 5.4).

Below we explore each of these three stages. Under each, there is a range of different types of available (and potential) support which is summarised in Figure 5.1 below.

[46] Matching the three stages outlined by the Audit Commission (2008) *In the Know: Using information to make better decisions*, available from www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/77C7B4DB-0C48-4038-A93F-DFE3E645A26E/In%20the%20know_report.pdf

Figure 5.1: Stages in producing and using information



Data quality
- ☐ accuracy
- ☐ validity
- ☐ reliability
- ☐ timeliness
- ☐ relevance
- ☐ completeness

Data quality
- ☐ local admin data
- ☐ National Statistics
- ☐ service data (inputs, outputs outcomes)
- ☐ qualitative research
- ☐ front line intelligence
- ☐ user/citizen feedback
- ☐ financial

LEVEL & NATURE OF SUPPORT

NATIONAL	REGIONAL	LOCAL/SUB-REGIONAL
* promote/transfer of effective practice (eg, business case benefits) * Knowledge Management systems and Communities of Practice * removal of reporting burdens which detract from performance improvement	* promotion/transfer of effective practice * use of evidence in leadership training, action learning, support for delivery planning, etc	* peer advice on presentation and interpretation
* signposting (on-line, telephone) * on-line systems for manipulating data (eg Floor Targets Interactive)	* advice on specifications (info requests, systems, etc) * packaging data to facilitate analysis (eg trends, benchmarks) * signposting/referrals * training and networking on analytical methods * facilitating peer assistance * improvement grants * provision of Local Improvement Advisors	* peer advice on analytical methods * local networks/CoP * training and guidance in use of LISs * local university collaboration * peer referral to 'experts' * consultancy and LIA assignments
* provision of national statistics * access to national statistics (eg, NeSS NOMIS) * data quality assurance * common system architecture & vocabulary * national data hubs * technical guidance (eg, on LIS) * on-line training	* training and networking on data quality, data sourcing and, research and evaluation design * regional data hubs	* peer advice on data management, systems design, local and national data sources, data sharing, etc * local hubs/information systems * data warehousing

External support accessed by local partnerships

The Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation survey of partnerships identified that partnership needs for better information and analysis translated into various forms of external take-up of information, advice and assistance (for 38 of the 45 LSPs responding). The top five topics for external support were:

- tracking neighbourhood change (half of LSPs using external assistance)[47]
- baselines, indicators and targets (half)
- reviewing trends and trajectories (one-third)
- undertaking evaluation (one-third)
- identifying data sources (one-third).

Sources of external advice and assistance included:

- Local observatory or similar data service (half of LSPs using external assistance)
- Neighbourhood Statistics (half)
- Consultancy (two-fifths)
- Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor (two-fifths)
- Regional Observatory (one-quarter).

Partnerships also identified difficulty in sourcing external assistance, including: lack of time to pursue projects with external sources; difficulty in finding the right specialist source; lack of budget; and finding that specialist sources were not "in tune with our needs". See Appendix A for further detail of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation survey.

5.2 Support for good quality data

Disseminating data to users

Provision and access to nationally-published data

We have moved a long way forward in terms of provision and access to nationally-published data – and interviewees were very aware of the major sources of information at national level. Neighbourhood Statistics, NOMIS and Floor Targets Interactive were widely used, and widely seen as crucial for local research and analysis.

> *"Data provision has improved – we now take NOMIS and Neighbourhood Statistics for granted"*

> *"Three years ago we hadn't got the data. Now there's sometimes too much, and our challenge is to sit down and analyse it all"*

[47] "Tracking neighbourhood change" was taken to refer to measures of population turnover or churn, changes in local conditions, performance, attitude and satisfaction.

It is worth bearing in mind how much the landscape has changed, in terms of the availability and quality of data. Key developments have included: the Census Access Project; development of standard small area geographies; the Policy Action Team 18 report on Better Information (and subsequent launch of the Neighbourhood Statistics service); and the design – and widespread use – of the Indices of Deprivation. These have all highlighted the importance of statistics from administrative records.

Streamlining delivery and opening-up access to data

There is now a very wide range of national and regional data publishers. The feedback from this project (and other research such as the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation) identifies that by streamlining delivery and opening up access to data, the main data suppliers can better meet local user needs. For example, the release of the Indices of Deprivation 2007 resulted in enormous duplication of work for data managers of Local Information Systems, in terms of downloading, reformatting and uploading data into local systems.

Neighbourhood Statistics has recently started testing web-services[48] which enable easy access to their data, by providing standard methods for both *finding* and *downloading* data. In this way, data suppliers can significantly reduce burdens on local users by simplifying the process of finding and extracting data, as well as freeing up data access to other publishers, for example enabling DWP to provide data to other systems such as NOMIS (this is explored in Section 7.2, Recommendation 3). This matches comments raised by interviewees on the importance of rationalising the number of different data sources.

The development of web-services and other standard methods for disseminating data is linked to the general issue of common data standards. Services which provide a standard way to find and download data rely on that data being linked to a common set of metadata (or 'standard schema'). This ensures datasets are tagged in a consistent way that can be recognised by different systems, for example other websites, and not just by the system on which the data is held.

This is crucial in opening up data access (and manipulation) to a wider range of systems, for example, enabling datasets to be searched and returned by search engines, or presented in a visual format by value-added resellers. Government development of, and support for, common data standards is important. All public sector publishers of data should ensure that their data is published to meet the standard schema which were developed as part of the Communities and Local Government Data Hub work.

The Communities and Local Government Data Hub, and other Hubs

The general idea of the Communities and Local Government Data Hub, as a portal to both disseminate the National Indicator Set and collate the relevant indicator data from local partners, was widely welcomed and seen as a good thing: "If it is *the* hub, then there are

[48] Web-services provide data in a common 'xml' format that can be interpreted in a standard way by a range of different systems or websites.

a lot of conceivable efficiencies". However, there was also evidence of less enthusiastic initial reactions, such as "what's this, yet another platform?", suggesting that additional promotional activity would be useful on how the Communities and Local Government Data Hub can (and is) saving time and resources at local level for work on developing performance indicators.

It is important to note that there are other systems using the 'Hub' terminology. The new UK Statistics Authority has launched its 'Publications Hub' to announce new releases to the public, with the aim of demonstrating that National Statistics are free from political interference. It is intended that this will be developed into a portal to provide access to Departmental websites where datasets can be downloaded. Similarly, there are regional versions such as the South East Intelligence Network Data Hub[49], which provides access to a wide range of data across the region, and allows local partners to upload their own local data onto the system in order to develop additional region-wide datasets.

Sharing and publishing data locally

Sharing data is still an area of uncertainty. Some local partners identified the usefulness of guidance[50] in changing local attitudes to sharing; "sharing data is now an expectation rather than a favour". For example, guidance on the community safety assessments specify specific datasets that local partners must share, backed up a Statutory Instrument under the Crime and Disorder (Prescribed Information) Regulations 2007[51]. (This need for guidance is picked up in our recommendations in Section 7.2). Others highlighted that there is still a need for simple guidance on data sharing, and what can and cannot be shared.

Much of the work carried out by Local Information System teams, in aggregating and publishing data from local sources, seeks to facilitate data sharing. Although such outputs should not disclose details of individuals (for example, rounding all outputs, or suppressing small numbers), individual-level data may be required to generate consolidated data in a form useful for analysis (action to tackle this type of barrier to sharing is explored further in Section 7.2).

Quality and reliability of data

National Statistics

The quality and reliability of data are important – and local partners need more information and advice on this. Many of the datasets published by government are identified as 'National Statistics' – a subset of official statistics which have been certified by the UK Statistics Authority (and previously ONS) as compliant with its Code of Practice for Statistics[52].

[49] See http://sdh.see-in.co.uk/

[50] Although concerns were raised over the sheer volume of assessments and related guidance – and whether there was scope for further rationalisation.

[51] See www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi_20071831_en_1

[52] The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 defines 'official statistics' as all those statistical outputs produced by ONS and other central Government departments and agencies, by the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and by other Crown bodies (over 200 bodies in total).

Using indicators to compare change over time or differences between areas

Where indicators are being used for performance assessment and target setting – for example the National Indicator Set – data need to be of a high quality and of sufficient precision to identify whether changes over time and (between areas) are not likely to be due to chance alone. For example, indicators based on a small number of cases can show quite large fluctuations over time; and it may be the case that some datasets are based on too small a sample to reliably identify whether targets have been met (or missed).

Work commissioned by Communities and Local Government on assessing the reliability of neighbourhood-level datasets for target-setting provides help for users to determine what indicators can be used in target-setting[53]. In addition, the ONS Regional Statistics group is undertaking a programme of work to identify methods which can be used to assess whether change over time is significant.

It is worth highlighting that there is also an important role for less reliable or less precise datasets, that are able to give an *indication* of the local picture. This is particularly relevant where some information is available to illuminate specific issues on a shorter timescale than through nationally-published data. Examples of such *just-in-time* (or even *real-time*) data might include information from local schools and GPs on numbers of in-migrants to the area, or complaints from service users on where bins had not been collected.

The importance of geography

The development of standard geographies as part of the Census 2001 dissemination programme was also emphasised as extremely important, particularly the Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA) as a standard unit of output:

> *"When the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 came out, we were able to extremely quickly disseminate the key results to local officers and members, who already understood what the LSOA geography meant locally"*

But, a number of comments were raised about the importance of using LSOA data to aggregate up to local areas, and the subsequent issues with LSOA data which has had disclosure controls applied:

> *"People aren't interested in LSOA-level data – they want it for their own service patches. Data suppliers need to recognise that LSOAs are building blocks to create locally-useful areas, and that rounding data before aggregating is poor practice"*

Finding the key datasets – signposting

Although provision of data has clearly improved, finding relevant data was still seen as a major demand on time – "it's always a headache trying to find the stuff", and support in signposting to datasets was highlighted as important by many interviewees. This links in with the peer advice explored below.

[53] Communities and Local Government (2008). *Assessing Neighbourhood-Level Data for Target Setting*.

At national level, users highlighted "Data4nr.net is really useful signposting, exactly what we need", and at regional level through systems run by, for example, some Regional Observatories. Other good examples were flagged-up – "www.info4local.gov.uk is excellent" (for general news on wider research and policy news, including the release of key datasets up such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation). Looking ahead, the UK Statistics Authority will announce all new statistics produced by central government.

5.3 Support for 'fit for purpose' information

Packaging data as information

There are good examples of packaging data into summary format, either as standard outputs or user-defined. NOMIS provides summary LA and ward profile reports on labour market statistics (with links to more detailed data where available). Neighbourhood Statistics provides a set of summary reports by theme for neighbourhoods. Similarly, Floor Targets Interactive provides summary reports, along with comparisons against other areas as well as trend data.

In public health, Community Health Profiles for each LA District across England[54] were developed by the Association of Public Health Observatories, following the "Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier" White Paper. These summarise a range of indicators that impact on health, and are updated each year. Following launch of the first set of profiles by the Health Minister in October 2006 (covered on the BBC news), there were over 100,000 downloads of individual profiles in the first four days[55]. Other relevant support for public health analysts include the National Centre for Health Outcomes Development, which publishes a detailed compendium of health indicators, with data in download form for each local area.

For social care commissioners, the Projecting Older People Population Information System is part of the range of tools supported by the Care Services Improvement Partnership to support local authority planners and commissioners of social care provision. The system provides local estimates (and projections) for needs groups, eg Learning Disability, based on applying national prevalence rates to local populations by age and gender.

Training, networking and peer advice

It was striking how few of the *local* interviewees highlighted the support provided in the form of formal training. *National and regional* interviewees tended to be more aware of such support, highlighting for example the case studies developed by Neighbourhood Statistics to illustrate key statistical skills, or training run by ONS regional statisticians.

[54] Association of Public Health Observatories, *Health Profiles*, available from www.communityhealthprofiles.info/

[55] Relevant to the debate on informing citizens and community engagement, it is worth noting that the majority of these downloads were from the general public.

Users were generally aware of professional bodies such as LARIA and BURISA, and the value of these in providing networking links to other research and analysts. Others were less familiar, for example the Royal Statistical Society were not recognised as being relevant to local partners.

Networking forums such as the ESD Toolkit[56] and IDeA Communities of Practice[57] were mentioned, generally in the context of disseminating best practice (see below), rather than as a route to developing analyst skills.

Peer advice is a major form of support to local research and intelligence teams. Interviewees highlighted the role of local, and regional, peer advice on which were the key data sources to use, and where to find them.

> *"Too much time is still spent looking for data sources; it's very much dependent on who you know, and what contacts you have. I'm always on the hunt"*

Interviewees invariably identified key support individuals either in the local, sub-regional or regional partnership. For example Districts often looked to County teams (although there were instances where data such as pupil attainment was not routinely shared between County and Districts). However, there can be an issue in that networking and peer advice depends on the strength of networks, and how well they are used. And access and take-up of such advice can vary greatly.

Supporting expertise and building capacity

A range of supporting expertise is provided – and was highlighted by interviewees – to facilitate better information at local level, including:

- *Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors*: provide face-to-face advice to all local partnerships and communities working on neighbourhood renewal. Advisors offer advice on the key neighbourhood renewal themes (education, health, crime, employment, housing and the physical environment) and processes (resident involvement, diversity and equality, community cohesion, project design/ appraisal/ management, neighbourhood management etc.)
- *ONS Regional Statisticians:* were seen as a welcome development, with signs of being useful – although "there seems to be an awful lot for them to do". For example, in the South East, they are helping with quality assurance of local data and research, supporting local partners with bespoke analysis (such as analysis of rural areas and economies), and informing ONS of needs and priorities in their regions

[56] Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Toolkit, www.esd.org.uk/

[57] IDeA Communities of Practice, www.communities.idea.gov.uk

- *Public Health Observatory support* for local public health analysts is a major part of Public Health Observatory work – "Primary Care Trusts regard the Public Health Observatory as the first place to go for help and support", for example providing telephone enquiry service, building capacity through summer schools and ad-hoc courses.

The *Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery* pilots programme was also mentioned by respondents, see box below for details.

Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery[58]

The Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme was introduced in 2005 and ran until 2007 to **promote better use of data, research and evidence in neighbourhood renewal** through technical assistance to Local Strategic Partnerships and neighbourhood renewal partnerships. Such support was seen by the then ODPM as key to improving planning, evaluation and decision-making, leading to greater gains in closing the gap on outcomes for disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The programme involved **pilots in four regions** (North East, North West – Lancashire, South West and West Midlands), testing needs and demand in different settings. The pilots provided **information and expert advice, workshops and seminars, and tailored support for partnerships**. They were also intended to help ODPM learn more about critical issues that local partners face, and support Government Offices for the Regions in their neighbourhood renewal functions. The development of the first round of LAAs became an increasingly prominent focus for the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme.

The evaluation found that raised awareness of data sources was the main benefit gained by participants, followed by clearer definition of their own data/evidence needs and better understanding of what the data could tell them. Personal benefits tended to be of a networking type (new contacts and knowledge shared). The experience of delivering the programme highlighted the need to 'grow' demand for analytical support services, especially through effective publicity featuring compelling hooks for people to engage, and opportunities for practitioners to explore their needs in more depth, looking at practical problems and how different analytical approaches can help overcome them.

The research (covering practitioners in other regions as well as in the SELD regions) drew out interest in a range of analytical support services, especially events, evidence health checks, e-mail up-dates on data and research developments and 'how to' materials, tips and techniques.

[58] Johnstone et al (2008) *Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: Key Findings* www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

Locally-relevant research

Research commissioned at national or regional level can help local partners through providing 'how-to-do' case studies – for example, LGA and IDeA have commissioned guidance for local authorities on the importance of customer insight and how to produce, share and use it[59] – or through developing (and analysing) local-level data on specific issues such as levels of migration[60].

It is worth highlighting that central government can sometimes lag behind regional or local practice – for example much of the initial work highlighting the impact of migrant workers was funded by Regional Development Agencies. Similarly, the main challenges to the ONS population estimates from the 2001 Census came from LAs identifying a significant mismatch against other population indicators.

National evaluations of programmes such as the New Deal for Communities, Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders and Sure Start programmes can provide useful summary evidence to local partners of what works, as can research undertaken for DWP on welfare-to-work programmes.

5.4 Support for good quality decisions

There is less clear evidence on where effective support is available to help local partners in using evidence to make good quality decisions. Areas that were highlighted by interviewees included:

Promotion of effective practice

Robust examples of promoting good practice – in terms of using evidence for decision-making – can be found in public health. For example, the National Centre for Health Outcomes Development publishes detailed case studies looking at working 'from indicators to action'. The online knowledge base[61] developed by the centre is aimed at the 'informed user' rather than the general public, and provides:

- Data in download form by local area (ie packaged data), and interactive atlas
- Detailed indicator specifications (and assessments), and descriptions and assessment of potential indicators in development
- Detailed case studies of analysis – from indicators to action.

[59] See www2.lga.gov.uk/OurWork.asp?ccat=1244.

[60] For example, the LGA commissioned work from the Institute of Community Cohesion (2007), Estimating the scale and impacts of migration at the local level, available from www.lga.gov.uk/lga/publications/publication-display.do?id=22422. The East of England Development Agency are commissioning work on the economic risks of migrant exodus www.eeda.org.uk/968_4304.asp.

[61] The Clinical and Health Outcomes Knowledge Base also provides a detailed compendium of health indicators, along with discussion of potential new indicators in development. See www.nchod.nhs.uk/

User forums such as the IDeA Communities of Practice[62] and the ESD Toolkit[63] were mentioned as providing useful information. But there were a number of comments around the amount of information available – "there's a lot to wade through" – emphasising the importance of regular, and expert, summaries such as those occasionally provided by IDeA staff supporting the Communities of Practice.

Business case benefits

In developing the business case benefits for research and intelligence, national and regional organisations can help enable local partners to think strategically about local research and intelligence functions, and how they support decision-making – "the messages coming out of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation were helpful, and very pertinent to the local debate on local analytical capacity".

> *"Government could do more to promote the value of research and analysis. It's not just a case of saying 'it's a good thing'; the benefits have to be demonstrated. Bring out how spending on this could materially affect the future."*

Research such as the review of Local Information Systems[64] was also identified as helping local partnerships understand the local business case.

Streamlining reporting

The central issue for streamlining reporting relates to reducing the time required to report information to central government, and in doing so, freeing up local analytical resources. The key mechanisms are:

- standardising (and simplifying forms) for reporting – the development of the standard '1App' planning application form[65] is a good example.
- developing data capture systems for local partners to report data electronically. The ideal scenario is where reporting is done directly from within local systems such as performance management tools[66] – with potential for significant savings in local partner resources.

Promoting use of evidence at senior level

It was noticeable that a number of interviewees highlighted senior managers as *not* placing much value on the contribution of research and intelligence to policy-making. Where senior management *were* seen to be giving a clear lead on the importance of evidence, there was often limited understanding of how good analysis and statistical presentation could help, or of the inherent limitations of analysis and research to provide answers to some of their questions. This is explored further in Section 6, where we see CAA as a lever to help tackle these issues.

[62] IDeA Communities of Practice, www.communities.idea.gov.uk

[63] Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Toolkit, www.esd.org.uk/

[64] Communities and Local Government (2007). Local Information Systems: A review of their role, characteristics and benefits, available from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/localinformationsystems

[65] For example, see www.planningportal.gov.uk/england/government/en/1115314697037.html for details

[66] With sufficient scope for local partners to check the accuracy of returns.

Section 6

How can support to local partners be strengthened?

6.1 Introduction

This section draws together the previous analysis, and highlights ways that support to local partners can be strengthened. As with the section on the available support (Section 5), we have grouped our findings under the three stages in producing and using information[67].

- Strengthening support for good quality data (Section 6.2)
- Strengthening support for 'fit for purpose' information (Section 6.3)
- Strengthening support for better decision-making (Section 6.4).

Our recommendations on what actions should be taken to strengthen support are provided in Section 7.

6.2 Strengthening support for good quality data

> *"There is a mountain of free data out there, and we're not yet making the most of it"*

Our findings include:

1) Data should be packaged for policy needs
2) Data suppliers should continue streamlining delivery and opening up access
3) All data suppliers should provide good metadata, including links to denominators and numerators, along with datasets and indicators
4) The usefulness of the National Indicator Set should be strengthened for local users
5) Guidance on sharing data should be promoted
6) Awareness and effective use of the range of geodemographic classifications should be promoted
7) Data on specific issues should be improved

[67] Matching the three stages outlined by the Audit Commission (2008) *In the Know: Using information to make better decisions*, available from www.audit-commission.gov.uk/Products/NATIONAL-REPORT/77C7B4DB-0C48-4038-A93F-DFE3E645A26E/In%20the%20know_report.pdf

We examine each in turn below.

1) Data should be packaged for policy needs

> *"National organisations need to think about whether they are disseminating this in the right way? Could it be better for local users?"*

Local partners spend significant time collating datasets for strategic assessments (see Section 3). Guidance for many of these assessments identifies *minimum core datasets* – and there is often significant overlap between the core datasets for different assessments. As responsibility for the different assessments is spread across a range of local services and partner organisations, there is inherent risk of duplication of local data collation and analysis.

In some cases, there is work at regional or national level on developing the dataset for all areas. For example Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Observatory are collating the minimum dataset for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments for all areas within their region. However, there appears considerable scope to rationalise the core data demands – and link better with data publishers – at national level. For example, it appears a missed opportunity that, in developing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment guidance, DH did not work closely with Neighbourhood Statistics (or signposting tools such as Data4nr.net) to identify and link to the relevant datasets.

As highlighted in Section 5, there are good examples of repackaging data for local users – for example NOMIS[68] and Neighbourhood Statistics[69] summary profiles, Floor Targets Interactive[70] Area Profiles, and Community Health Profiles[71]. Online manipulation of data can be useful here: for example, a standard feature might be to enable users to look at data trends and trajectories where data is available (as is provided by NOMIS and Floor Targets Interactive), or to compare against a variety of standard benchmarks such as 'other LA Districts in your Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Family Group'.

Experiences from the commercial world illustrate the importance of packaging datasets for users (as well as pro-actively encouraging use through marketing), see the Box below.

[68] See www.nomisweb.co.uk/

[69] See http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

[70] See www.fti.communities.gov.uk/fti/

[71] See www.apho.org.uk/default.aspx?QN=P_HEALTH_PROFILES

Other experiences: how do commercial resellers increase the use made of data?

Value-Added Resellers (companies such as Experian, CACI, Equifax, and MapInfo) have become very well established, acting as intermediaries between data suppliers and end users. They make substantial use of datasets created by government, such as the Census, Postcode Address File, County Court Judgments, Electoral Roll, house prices, etc.

How is it that resellers create businesses out of datasets that are sometimes freely available? Two activities are of great importance:

(1) Packaging datasets

- Many potential users retreat when confronted with the prospect of a large dataset in all its detail – they fear spending too much time exploring the detail, and fear that their effort may be wasted. It is far better to start with a simple subset of perhaps 100 key variables, and if this proves of value, then dig more deeply. The availability of datasets in popular formats[72] also makes initial exploration more attractive.
- Datasets can also be packaged by producing summary classifications. The Census only found a mass market when it was used to create geodemographic classifications such as Acorn and Mosaic, with data clusters being given popular names, readable descriptions, illustrative photos, and portrayed as fascinating maps. In the public sector, only the Indices of Deprivation has begun to have a similar impact.

(2) Proactively encouraging use

- The Value-Added Resellers also recognise that there is more than just data collection, and the production of statistics – there is also a need to go 'the last 100 yards' and actively encourage use. This is achieved through both marketing (popularising and publicising), and sales (individual approaches to important target clients) activities. A current excellent illustration of this is the awareness by local partners of Experian's (costly) Mosaic classification, in comparison with the widespread ignorance of ONS's (free) Output Area Classification (OAC).
- These issues receive excellent attention in the Statistics Commission Report No. 33: "The Use Made of Official Statistics"[73].

2) Data suppliers should continue streamlining delivery and opening up access

"There's a plethora of systems, which increases work for local users"

"Now is the time to streamline the data sources"

[72] Such as .csv and Excel, rather than SPSS or SuperTable

[73] Statistics Commission (2007). "Report No. 33: The Use Made of Official Statistics". Available from www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/archive/statistics-commission-archive/research/report-33--the-use-made-of-official-statistics--march-2007-.pdf

There has been good progress in disseminating data, and this project has emphasised the importance of data sources such as Neighbourhood Statistics[74] and NOMIS[75]. There is now a very wide range of national and regional data publishers, with a significant amount of overlap – "each system presents a particular national organisation's view of the world". And each has a very different front-end (and functionality) for users to navigate in order to get to the required data.

The feedback from this project (and other research such as the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation) identifies that by streamlining delivery and opening up access to data, the main data suppliers can better meet local user needs.

It is not clear that all national or regional systems add significant value to local users. Local interviewees identified the overhead in using (and checking the data held by) multiple sources. The further development of Floor Targets Interactive and Neighbourhood Statistics and the evolving roles for national organisations calls into question the number of national on-line services aimed at local users, including the Audit Commission's Area Profiles. There is also a case for the DWP Tabulation Tool to be incorporated into NOMIS, providing a one-stop-shop on labour market and benefits data across all spatial levels (the mechanisms are already in place for this, as NOMIS already receives data direct from DWP, including monthly claimant count data to small area)

Local Information Systems enable local authorities and partners to put a *local perspective* on data. However, a significant part of the data held on Local Information Systems is nationally-published; data managers and teams across different areas are carrying out large amounts of work to repackage nationally-published data[76].

The new UK Statistics Authority's Publications Hub[77], which announces all new statistics produced by central government, presents a major opportunity. This could potentially be developed to enable users to download all the datasets as they are announced.

3) All data suppliers should provide good metadata, including links to denominators and numerators, along with datasets and indicators

> *"It is important to increase understanding of the data provided. Data needs to be trusted, and checkable, otherwise it can lead to an awful lot of duplicated effort"*

[74] See neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk

[75] See www.nomisweb.co.uk

[76] 84 of the 179 indicators found on Local Information Systems were nationally-published. Communities and Local Government (2007). Local Information Systems: A review of their role, characteristics and benefits.

[77] See www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/currentreleases.asp

Good metadata is key to users being able to understand – and trust – the data. This is especially the case where indicators take the form of rates or standardised ratios. Local interviewees highlighted cases where they had not been able to duplicate nationally published indicator data, and were unclear whether they were doing something wrong or whether the national data was in error. In these cases, the minimum standard must be to identify and publish (or link to) the raw data used to develop the indicators, including any population denominators used.

In addition, for various reasons, users may also want to look at Floor Targets Interactive, NOMIS and Neighbourhood Statistics together. But there can be differences in relation to what users find on these sites: they expect to find identical data but for a variety of reasons this is not always the case. This leads to users spending a good deal of time working out what data to use and the reasons behind apparent inconsistencies.

4) The usefulness of the National Indicator Set should be strengthened for local users

Local partners widely welcomed the National Indicator Set, and particularly the emphasis on outcomes. However, interviewees highlighted that the underlying information is still needed to improve and reconfigure under-performing services: many were identifying which National Indicators are available (either directly, or by proxy) at small area level. Other issues were highlighted, for example the lack of National Indicator data for particular equalities groups was raised by interviewees.

Going forward, in the spirit of the Local Government White Paper and shared priorities between central and local government, there should be stronger local involvement in revisiting the National Indicator Set for the next Comprehensive Spending Review period. More generally, ongoing user (and expert) dialogue is a key part of assessment of the quality of indicators – experience with using indicators can highlight problems with particular datasets, as well as improve understanding of how the indicator varies over time and between areas.

5) Guidance on sharing data should be promoted

> *"Data sharing is not an arcane subject, for technical analysts only – but rather a topic which goes to the heart of improving performance"*[78]

Underlying the points raised in this sub-section, is the need for effective approaches and measures to promote data sharing and overcome the barriers, at both strategic and operational levels. Requirements identified in previous research on Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal included[79]:

[78] Communities and Local Government (2005). Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal: Lessons from the North West. www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1604

[79] Communities and Local Government (2005). Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal: Lessons from the North West. www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/publications.asp?did=1604

- senior organisational commitment to removing unjustified barriers to data sharing
- good practice in partnership working, including partnership skills on the part of analysts
- making the case for data sharing, and, potentially, formalising data sharing arrangements.

There is evidence of progress in data sharing – for example community safety and children's services have been the focus of major efforts to drive this forward. However, many interviewees remarked on continued resistance to sharing data at small area level, let alone at individual level. It is important that appropriate data safeguards are in place, and at the same time that data is shared, appropriately, to improve services and outcomes. The duty to co-operate on 'named' Local Strategic Partnership partners is relevant here – a point made in the Communities and Local Government guidance, Stronger, Safer and More Prosperous Communities[80]. Current work by Communities and Local Government to understand and promote data sharing in the strategic partnership context is important.

Guidance on required data can be useful in strengthening information sharing arrangements between partners. For example, the duty to co-operate between local partners is made specific in the Strategic Community Safety Assessment guidance, which sets out the datasets that designated partners must share.

It is worth noting the role played by many Local Information Systems (and other local) teams, who provide value to services by publishing service and contextual data aggregated to locally-meaningful geographies. This typically involves services needing to provide data at individual level (to Local Information Systems or other local teams), with sufficient address information to attach accurate geocoding. It would be helpful for this usage to be explicitly recognised and permitted for the purposes of publishing accurate data to local service geographies.

There are links between this local data sharing, and disclosure control on nationally-published data. A number of comments were raised about the importance of using small-area data to aggregate up to local areas (for example, using Lower layer Super Output Areas – LSOAs – as building blocks), and the subsequent issues in using data which has had disclosure controls applied. For example, adding up a number of small areas, all of which have data values published rounded to the nearest 5, can result in inaccurate values for local neighbourhoods.

Issues with sharing mapping data due to Ordnance Survey licensing were also flagged, for example with partners such as police and health. Linked to this, a number of public organisations are not part of the Pan Governmental Agreement – leading to significant additional costs. For example, in our interviews, London regional agencies estimated £800,000 per year was spent on Ordnance Survey data.

[80] www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/statutoryguidance

6) Awareness and effective use of the range of geodemographic classifications should be promoted

Interviewees at all levels highlighted wide interest in customer insight, customer segmentation and social marketing techniques. Current work commissioned by the LGA and IDeA[81], as well as heavy marketing from commercial vendors of products such as Mosaic and Acorn, were mentioned, also support offered to LAs on customer profiling through the ESD toolkit[82]. It was striking how interviewees easily slipped into using the language of cluster group names – 'affluent greys', 'young transients'.

Many local partners were just getting to grips with developing customer profiling, but wanted to know more about what such systems have to offer for public sector work such as Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

In our interviews, there was little or no knowledge of the Output Area Classification (OAC) – a freely available open-source product developed by ONS and Leeds University, and categorising areas on the basis of key socioeconomic Census 2001 indicators. A Super Output Area classification has recently been published by ONS, and ONS teams are using this to explore how deprivation and population migration levels vary across the different clusters[83]. There is also evidence of commercial research agencies starting to use OAC.

7) Data on specific issues should be improved

There were a number of gaps in data highlighted by interviewees at all levels.

- *Data on equalities groups*: "Data is not adequate to support local priorities on tackling inequality for particular groups". There are relevant information resources, including the ONS 'introduction to sources of ethnicity data'[84] and Data4nr.net signposting to ethnicity and diversity data available at small area level[85] [86]. Recent work commissioned from SEEDA has mapped the availability of data by equalities groups, as well as making recommendations for plugging gaps[87]. One potential area for expanding the available data is benefit datasets – Jobseekers Allowance is currently published to LA District level by ethnicity group, but not other datasets. Owners of other administrative databases should also explore whether ethnicity can be coded on to the datasets (this is also being picked up at national level by ONS)

[81] Customer Insight, available from www2.lga.gov.uk/OurWork.asp?ccat=1244

[82] Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) Toolkit, www.esd.org.uk/

[83] Although Census 2001 data is increasingly out-of-date, commercial products also incorporate a significant amount of Census data.

[84] Available from www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/Info.do?page=EthIntroduction.htm&bhcp=1

[85] Available from www.data4nr.net/resources/diversity

[86] Until recently, these resources also included the Online Race Resource for Improving Outcomes in Neighbourhood renewal (ORRION) but this is no longer available following the transfer of Renewal.net materials from the Communities and Local Government to the IDeA Partnerships and Places Library.

[87] OCSI (2008). SEEDA Equality and Diversity Data Tool. Available from www.see-in.co.uk/researchdatabase/2008/equalityanddiversitydatatool.html

- *Benefits data on 'children dependent on benefits' and 'older people client group'*: DWP publish excellent statistics to Lower-layer Super Output Area level on the Working Age Client Group. These are very useful to local partners wanting to understand trends in local neighbourhoods, including whether the most deprived areas are closing the gap. However, data on the two other main groups – 'children dependent on benefits' children and 'older people client group' – is not yet published, despite the publication of data for each of the individual benefits
- *Sample sizes and robustness of performance indicator data at LAA level*: Issues were raised by interviewees as to whether sample sizes were sufficient to provide robust performance indicator data at LAA level and below. For example, while the new Place Survey[88] will provide the basis for measuring a number of National Indicators and thus LAA targets, unless local authorities boost the survey locally, sample sizes will be too small to provide robust data for analysis and monitoring at neighbourhood level, or for specific groups across the local authority
- *Population denominators:* Creating reliable indicators for tracking over time requires accurate population denominators, often at small area level or for particular equalities groups. The importance of having reliable population estimates at LA level and below was highlighted
- *Weaknesses in National Indicator Set coverage on economic indicators*: There is also a limited match between the National Indicator Set indicators and Regional Development Agency/ Regional Economic Strategy indicators. There are also weaknesses in data on non-VAT-registered businesses (which could potentially be strengthened with Inland Revenue data)
- *Migration*: Virtually all local interviewees raised migration as an important issue, and a repeated theme emerged of 'needing quick intelligence', rather than waiting for annually-published National Insurance Number (NINo) data from DWP, or ONS migration estimates. This is supported by feedback elsewhere – "Number one on my wish list would be to make National Insurance statistics for foreign workers available. Ideally we would like the data available to ward level"[89]. Alongside data needs, there appears a need for national work exploring how local partners can most effectively *use* indicators of migration, such as school and GP registrations, housing assessments, and so on. This is a good example of where there has been a good deal of regional (and sub-regional) work – some duplicating in nature – and where the centre has lagged behind. Additional work here could build on work (and perhaps be led) by the LGA
- *Population and housing projections*: Long-term projections of household numbers, and more detailed breakdowns by household type, would be useful. These are produced by some regions, for example the GLA produces London estimates, as does the North East Regional Information Partnership

[88] Communities and Local Government (2008) Place Survey Manual www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/placesurveymanual0809

[89] NOMIS feedback, see www.nomisweb.co.uk/forum/posts.aspx?tID=236&fID=2

- *Community Infrastructure Levy – standard calculation of impact*: Highlighted by planners, a standard methodology for calculating the impact of development would be helpful in negotiations with developers.

6.3 Strengthening support for 'fit for purpose' information

Our findings include:

8) A skills framework for Local Government researchers would help in tackling analytical skills gaps
9) Economist skills and use of economics tools should be improved at local level
10) Local research and intelligence functions should be well coordinated
11) Regional and national support organisations should be well coordinated

We examine each in turn below.

8) A skills framework for Local Government researchers would help in tackling analytical skills gaps

Nationally, the Government Social Research (GSR) competency framework sets out a comprehensive set of competencies relevant to GSR research work and grades across civil service. The GSR competency framework is consistent and integrated with Professional Skills for Government[90]. The GSR framework sets out a range of skills that are relevant here, including[91]:

[90] The Government Economic Service and Government Statistical Service also identify core competencies for government researchers.

[91] Government Social Research Unit (2005). Competencies for Government Social Researchers, see www.gsr.gov.uk/downloads/professional_development/cpd/gsr_competencies_poster.pdf

Area	Competency
Policy and delivery focus	• Understands and directs effort to meet customer needs • Provides relevant and high quality contributions that add value to government policy decision making
Critical analysis and decision making	• Critically evaluates data and information with accuracy and perception, and is able to synthesise and use data drawn from a variety of different methods appropriately. • Makes sound, evidence based decisions (and/or helps others do so). • Assesses risk and defends decisions and action. • Responds effectively to unforeseen situations.
Communicating with impact	• Communicates written and oral information clearly, concisely and persuasively. • Communicates own viewpoint succinctly and defends it appropriately. • Facilitates discussions effectively to achieve clear outcomes.
Professional expertise	• Demonstrates the detailed knowledge and experience necessary for the job of a government social researcher, expressing the core technical capability, knowledge and awareness in terms of behaviours.

In the public health arena, the Public Health Skills and Careers Framework brings together public health competences, underpinning knowledge, training and qualification routes, registration requirements and a database of job descriptions across nine career levels[92]. The framework was launched in April 2008 to tackle self-assessed gaps in skills and knowledge for public health professionals.

However, there is no such framework outlining the required competencies for local government researchers, and no one organisation currently assumes responsibility for leading on tackling analytical skills gaps. This has also been highlighted in previous reviews, for example the Egan skills review identified skills gaps and recommendations around the core occupations needed to deliver sustainable communities[93].

9) Economist skills and use of economics tools should be improved at local level

National interviewees raised concerns over the level of economist skills in local government, which is likely to come into sharpened focus with the local economic assessment duty.

[92] See www.phru.nhs.uk/Pages/PHD/public_health_career_framework.htm

[93] Communities and Local Government (2004). The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities. Available from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/eganreview

We note that the issue is not only to do with skills in local economic and labour market analysis but also in the use of economics tools such as cost-benefit analysis, for example, in modelling the possible impact of *preventative* interventions. There is a potential role for ONS Regional Statisticians in developing and providing relevant training to local partnership researchers (as already the case in the East Midlands).

10) Local research and intelligence functions should be well coordinated

It was notable that a number of the local interviewees had either recently gone through a restructuring of the local research and intelligence functions, were about to, or were in the process of reviewing capacity. There were cases where this restructuring was explicitly linked to LAA research and information needs. This reflected a recurring theme where our interviewees commented on the needs to overcome silo cultures, with many examples of people not aware of what was going on in their own organisation.

The central question for local partners must be "*are we making the best use of the resources we've got*?" Additional questions follow from this, such as: What is the local capacity to meet LAA research and information needs? Are our research and intelligence resources well co-ordinated? What are the local skills gaps? (The issue of local networking is picked up further below.)

Findings from the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation highlight the role that supporting programmes can have on improving *local networking*[94]. The research further emphasised the importance of promoting 'home-grown' solutions within partnerships: "Local Strategic Partnership partners can gain by reviewing analytical capacity across the partnership to identify and address common skill gaps, and to maximise the use of available analytical resources and expertise".

There is also a question for local partners to consider on whether research and intelligence teams are well-placed to make the most effective use of existing research. For example, a common early stage for research projects carried out, or commissioned, by local partners, is to collect the relevant data on the local area – this can take significant time, and can duplicate work done locally on previous research projects. Some data may be held on the Local Information System (if present), but much will be collected from a range of national sources.

11) Regional and national support organisations should be well coordinated

"Regional infrastructure bodies must come together, and be more coherent"

The role, and coherence, of regional and national support organisations is not always clear to local partners (and on occasion, not clear to regional or national partners themselves). In some cases, local partners were "not clear what support is available regionally", in others regional bodies themselves found it hard to define their role clearly to local partners – "statutory guidance on the Regional Observatory role would be very useful".

[94] Johnstone et al (2008) Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: Key Findings www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

The role of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships is important, and potentially needs clarity for local partnerships. The part played by IDeA also needs to be considered – as a *provider* of support, and a *strategic player* in partnering other support organisations.

There is an important theme here – to explore the 'support infrastructure' at national and regional levels, and use this work to identify and define roles and responsibilities (particularly in relation to supporting local partners). At present, there is potential for regional organisations to overlap and duplicate work. This work will need to include the Regional Observatories, ONS (and regional statisticians), Government Office analytical work, Regional Development Agency research teams, Public Health Observatories, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, and so on.

The example of the regional Public Health Observatories is relevant. Each Observatory leads on a number of agreed themes at national level – for example 'health and inequality', or 'health and ethnicity'. In addition, each Observatory supports local Primary Care Trusts eg both by carrying out research relevant across the region, and by developing local research skills and capacity through training programmes, telephone support and so on.

The role of the regional organisations in developing and strengthening research networks is also important. Although national bodies (such as LGA, IDeA, Central-Local Information Partnership and so on) can promote networking, there is a clear rationale for regional (and sub-regional) networking – not least in terms of travel time, common dealings with Government Offices, and manageable numbers. Critically, what can regional organisations do to improve knowledge sharing and dissemination through such networks?

6.4 Strengthening support for better decision-making

Our findings include:

12) Good decision-making based on evidence needs both 'intelligent customers' and 'intelligent producers' of data and analysis
13) There is a need to promote tools and training for analysts, including skills to influence decision-makers
14) Guidance and toolkits relating to better information, research and analysis should be brought together
15) Support for implementation of CAA should facilitate the transfer of learning and good practice relating to information, analysis and research
16) The business benefits of research and intelligence should be promoted
17) Use of evidence by decision-makers should be emphasised in national training programmes

18) Regional action is needed to strengthen use of information, research and analysis in decision-making

19) Performance management models should embed research and analysis into planning and delivery cycles

20) Research needs in the Third Sector should be considered

We examine each in turn below.

12) Good decision-making based on evidence needs both 'intelligent customers' and 'intelligent producers' of data and analysis

Our interviews highlighted a number of underlying issues[95]:

- a gap between research/ analysis and policy and operational functions within organisations and partnerships
- senior managers undervaluing the contribution of research and intelligence to policy-making
- many managers *not knowing* what good analysis and statistical presentation *could* give them
- analysts lacking sufficient authority and skills to influence decision-makers.

We characterise this as the need to have both 'intelligent customers' and 'intelligent producers' of data and analysis: decision makers that know what to ask for and are confident in their ability to interpret and challenge what is presented to them; and analysts who are skilled in understanding and addressing decision-maker needs.

13) There is a need to promote tools and training for analysts, including skills to influence decision-makers

> *"I am not aware of much help for 'using evidence for policy-making'; what is available could be better signposted"*
>
> *"We are being asked more and more 'what does this mean? How should we use it? What should we prioritise?' We're not massively well-equipped for this work"*

Interviewees expressed frequent concerns about the extent of local capacity to turn evidence into policy. Several, for example, pointed to all the work going into strategic needs assessments, and questioned whether people knew what to do with the analysis[96]. Another common, related theme was, "we know what the Index of Multiple Deprivation is telling us, we just don't know what to do about it".

[95] Also found in the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery research.

[96] This appeared to be less the case for public health partners.

There is a gap in user understanding of what can be done with the data, to support policy and decision-making locally. Toolkits such as the Neighbourhood Statistics Statistical Analysis Toolkit[97] have tended to focus on more basic analytical skills but not the needs of more advanced users. And although there is a good deal of information available to help local users develop information relevant to local policy questions, this is not always well planned and packaged, and there are gaps (and our interviews highlighted lack of awareness of this material).

Users tended to be aware of support organisations such as LARIA[98] and BURISA[99], and saw these primarily as networking organisations rather than providing a strong drive in driving a wider agenda in improving understanding of what to do with data, and how to influence policy and delivery. There seemed to be little awareness of the relevance of Royal Statistical Society training programmes to local users[100]. The Society is keenly involved in the issues covered by this project – the most recent annual conference was "Statistics and public policy-making" – but might be missing an opportunity in not linking better with local partner researchers, perhaps joining up with LGA or IDeA to offer relevant tools and training.

Researchers and analysts also need sufficient authority and skills to influence decision-makers. This is central to the idea of *communicating with impact* – finding ways to effectively disseminate evidence and information to decision-makers, but also, crucially, understanding what information decision-makers need.

The tools used to visualise data are important. Presenting mapped geographical data has had a major impact, with national and local decision-makers readily understanding the rationale for programmes targeting priority neighbourhoods. There are relatively good ways of presenting trend data, eg in the form of 'traffic light' assessments. Proposed Communities and Local Government work on improving visualisation tools for research is welcome, especially if this draws out the impact in terms of influencing decision-making.

14) Guidance and toolkits relating to better information, research and analysis should be brought together

The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy provides the policy context for *improvement support* for local authorities and their LAA partners which will back up their efforts to improve their use of information, research and analysis in pursuit of Sustainable Community Strategy priorities and LAA targets. The Strategy is delivered in part through national level programmes, both general and specific to LAA themes[101], and increasingly through the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships.

[97] www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/Info.do?page=analysisandguidance/analysistoolkit/analysis-toolkit.htm

[98] Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA). See www.laria.gov.uk

[99] British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (BURISA). See www.burisa.org

[100] For example, recent courses at the Royal Statistical Society Professional Development Centre include sessions on presenting data and research, basic and advanced statistical skills for social researchers, and techniques for analysing education and public health datasets.

[101] See the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy, available from www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/efficiency

At *national* level, there is a need for national partners to draw together, plan and co-ordinate better the provision of guidance and toolkits which relate, one way or another, to the use of information, research and analysis in support of LAAs and Sustainable Community Strategies. In the past, many such developments have been poorly linked and instigated independently rather than taken forward as true partnerships between the commissioning bodies. We have highlighted aspects of this imperative in relation to data and 'fit for purpose' information' in 6.2 and 6.3 above but there is a need also to consider what further guidance and support materials are needed, and *are best provided at a national level*. Some LAA themes are better covered than others.

This need can in part be addressed in commissioning content for the Partnerships and Places Library[102] on IDeA Knowledge: eg, notable case studies of use of information and analysis driving performance improvement; 'solving the problem' briefings synthesising related case studies and drawing out relevant research findings. Such commissioning can also cover topics raised in our conclusions in 6.2 and 6.3.

15) Support for implementation of CAA should facilitate the transfer of learning and good practice relating to information, analysis and research

Looking forward, CAA will be crucial as a lever for better use of evidence. The summer 2008 consultation paper on CAA highlights how local authorities and their partners, as part of the 'area assessment' element, will need to provide robust performance and evaluation evidence about how well priority outcomes are being achieved and the prospects for future improvement. At the same time the organisational element applying to local authorities will include a 'use of resources' assessment. One Key Line of Enquiry in this will consider "how organisations produce relevant and reliable data and information to support decision making and manage performance":

> *"The organisation:*
>
> *produces relevant and reliable data and works with partners to ensure the quality of partnership data;*
>
> *understands the needs of its decision makers and provides them with information that is fit for purpose and is used to support decision making;*
>
> *ensures data security and compliance with relevant statutory requirements; and*
>
> *monitors performance against its priorities and targets, and addresses underperformance."*[103]

Attention will be placed in CAA on risks of 'under-performance' (where localities have performed poorly against LAA targets, or where the risks to target achievement are great), and on how partners are reducing inequality and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups in the community.

[102] See www.idea.gov.uk/idk/laa/home.do.

[103] P47 Joint Inspectorate (2008). CAA: Joint Inspectorate Proposals for Consultation. Available from www.audit-commission.gov.uk/caa/consultation.asp

The necessity of a robust evidence base flows from this, including evidence on outcomes, and on proxy indicators and related analysis where the very nature of the outcomes requires longer term action (eg, on life expectancy and on wage levels), which lies beyond the three year horizon of the LAA for prospects of significant progress.

16) The business benefits of research and intelligence should be promoted

> *"Government could do more to promote the value of research and analysis. It's not just a case of saying 'it's a good thing'; the benefits have to be demonstrated. Bring out how spending on this could materially affect the future."*

The need to demonstrate, with strong evidence, the value of investment in local information, research and analysis was a common theme in our interviews. This requires publicity for those case studies with good stories to tell, reinforced by messages from Communities and Local Government, the Audit Commission, IDeA and the like.

One example from our interviews was the Norfolk Data Observatory which provides data at a range of locally meaningful geographies, geared to meeting service needs. The value gained by individual services has reinforced their commitment to supply good quality data, with potential benefits where this can be shared more widely.

Second generation LAAs have also prompted some local authorities and their partners to review local information and analytical capacity (eg Southampton) and seek better ways of using existing resources. This theme was highlighted in the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery research which advocated that Local Strategic Partnerships should pursue 'home-grown solutions' to developing their analytical capacity, making more of expertise across partner bodies.

'Business case' arguments and evidence can help where there are gaps and weaknesses in analytical skills and staff resources – helping to answer managers questions such as, 'If research is so useful, how can it save us money or help us spend more effectively?' (We note current work funded by Communities and Local Government to help make the case for investment in Local Information Systems).

As noted earlier, often analysts have to do a better promotional jobs themselves[104]:

> *"We need to tell people what we do and what it means. We need to value research and intelligence, not just put it on a website"*

Their role can be strengthened by having Local Strategic Partnership board-level champions of research and evidence[105].

[104] Examples of actions taken by interviewees included a monthly newsletter (Coventry), research seminars, and training in the use of Local Information Systems geared to practical applications.

[105] Oldham is one example where such a role was performed.

17) Use of evidence by decision-makers should be emphasised in national training programmes

The extent to which decision-makers appreciate the value of research and analysis – and can judge the quality of evidence presented to them – is a theme that warrants inclusion in the various training programmes at national level for senior and middle managers and for councillors.

Skills in interpreting and challenging data, statistics and other forms of evidence were flagged by respondents to the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery analytical skills research. Over half of Local Strategic Partnership and neighbourhood renewal partnership managers identified needs within their partnerships in challenging data/evidence, two in five, skills in interpreting data and saw these as contributing to poorer partnership performance than could otherwise have been the case.

18) Regional action is needed to strengthen use of information, research and analysis in decision-making

The work of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships offers the *greatest prospects of strengthening action on the ground* to strengthen the links between analysis and research functions and decision-making. The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy Prospectus, jointly produced by Communities and Local Government and LGA states that Communities and Local Government will work closely with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to "agree a package of support to build knowledge, analytical capabilities, and capacity of local authorities and partners to make better public places in particular by promoting effective delivery of urban green spaces, place management, mixed communities; and business engagement and support".

The Strategy goes on to make a commitment for Communities and Local Government "to make resources available to provide training and capacity building advisors to support the better use of information and analytical capacity". This latter point relates in part to the future of the Communities and Local Government 'Neighbourhood Renewal Advisor' (NRA) service where a panel of individual practitioners and consultants has been available to partnerships in neighbourhood renewal areas to improve delivery against 'closing the gap' PSA targets[106].

Much of this work has emphasised the role of evidence-based approaches, and groups of NRAs were recruited specifically with specialisms in data interpretation and data analysis and in performance management and improvement. These skills will be key requirements when the new pool of advisors is recruited in 2008. These 'Local Improvement Advisors' will be deployed through Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships to address LAA improvement support priorities.

The Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership strategies for 2008-11, recently submitted to Communities and Local Government and LGA, show varying levels of recognition of the need for action on information, research and analysis. In these plans,

[106] Educe et al (2005) Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers – Background Report 3 to 'Seeking the Lessons: Skills and Knowledge Programme Evaluation' www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=7

seven have programmes of work specifically relating to LAAs and local partnerships, while the other two (East Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humber) give priority to LAAs and local partnerships through relevant theme programmes (eg, on economic prosperity) and sub-regional improvement partnerships. All have programmes relating to performance improvement, and to varying extents, they state, like London, that they are focusing their work programmes on 'developing shared solutions to the most important issues' (eg, reducing worklessness, tackling climate change)[107].

References to needs in relation to information, research and analysis are relatively few, though implicitly such activities are likely to feature in Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership workstreams, eg, on strategic commissioning or climate change. Several, like Yorkshire and Humber, stress research and intelligence needs in relation to the strengthened role for local authorities in economic development, proposed by the Sub-National Review. Issues of information, research and analysis, that are explicitly highlighted in the strategies include:

- using data and intelligence to support partnership decision-making and actions as part of Local Strategic Partnership/ LAA support programmes (East; North East)
- place profiling (East Midlands; London)
- diagnostic work on customer segmentation and use of customer insight (East Midlands)
- data analysis capability and co-ordinated data gathering (South East)
- Explicit reference is made to needs or actions to improve intelligence at sub-regional level in, eg, Cumbria, Derbyshire Greater Manchester and Northamptonshire.

While still relatively new partnerships, the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships are uniquely placed to help draw together regional 'infrastructure' which supports information, research and analysis, behind LAA and regional priorities. This potentially involves the Regional Observatories, Public Health Observatories, ONS Regional Statisticians, etc, and strengthening networks of sub-regional and local research and intelligence units and Local Information Systems where this does not happen already. There may be scope for joint commissioning of research and analytical services and possibilities for efficiencies through better use of what is typically a limited analytical and budgetary resource currently spread across a number of regional bodies.

Collaborative work at regional level could include, undertaking work to support strategic assessments and performance monitoring across a number of LAA priorities, akin to Public Health Observatory services, eg in support of Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and trajectory analysis on health inequality indicators. Regional activities may supplement what can be gained from use of national tools such as Floor Targets Interactive, in providing further trends analysis and regional benchmarking – intended to save local partnerships time and strengthen the ways in which they use available data.

[107] Typically these relate to the LAA indicators which appear most frequently in 2008 LAA submissions.

There is likely to be scope for Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, with their national and regional partners, to identify where there are common needs and consequently benefits to be gained from *inter-regional* collaboration, where one region might lead in the production of support materials, training packs, etc on particular topics, again as in the case of Public Health Observatories.

19) Performance management models should embed research and analysis into planning and delivery cycles

We strongly argue that a key to bringing research and analysis closer to decision-making is to implement performance management models which *embed* research and analysis into planning and delivery cycles. The Greater Manchester Against Crime (GMAC) model used by community safety partners is one such example already in use, and the principles involved can be extended and adapted to other theme partnerships. The GMAC model shows the value in having common methodology and common language across partners, and has provided a platform for further development[108].

More widely Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships have a key role in identifying and spreading promising and proven practice in local information, research and analysis work, and should naturally link with IDeA's national activities such as the Partnerships and Places Library.

20) Research needs in the Third Sector should be considered

Finally, we note the existence of information, research and analysis support needs within the Third Sector. If the sector is to play a more influential role within Local Strategic Partnerships and a stronger role in the delivery of public services, access to data and knowledge is needed to contribute to strategy and LAAs, to challenge service providers, and to help shape and respond to strategic commissioning priorities – recognised in the 'Communities in Control' white paper[109].

Aside from projects pursued by the Performance Hub[110] at national level, there are very few examples of services directly addressing needs in the sector (though our interviews did point to a valued role of local authority staff providing information to Third Sector organisations on request). This links to the community empowerment agenda at a national level, and to the activities of Regional Empowerment Partnerships[111].

[108] For instance, GMAC is improving data presentation through GIS to increase its value to decision-makers and open up possibilities for stronger community engagement.

[109] The importance of Access to Information' is highlighted as a chapter heading in the 'Communities in Control' white paper www.communities.gov.uk/communities/communityempowerment/communitiesincontrol/

[110] The Performance Hub was one of several national 'hubs', funded by Capacitybuilders to the end of March 2008, to provide strategic capacity building for Third Sector organisations. This has now been superseded by Capacitybuilders' Performance workstream – see www.improvingsupport.org.uk/

[111] These regional consortia have been set up as part of the National Empowerment Partnership, whose task is to "support and inform the government to help implement its vision of a truly participative society and promote the fundamental role of empowerment in achieving a more equal, cohesive and democratic society."

Section 7

Faster, better, smarter: Recommendations for strengthening support

7.1 Introduction

From our findings, there is considerable scope for helping local information and research teams to provide *faster*, *better* and *smarter* support for their decision-makers – and also for decision-makers to increase their appreciation and use of solid evidence.

This section draws together our recommendations for strengthening the support for local information and research that have emerged from the project. As with previous sections, we have grouped our findings under the three stages in producing and using information:

- Strengthening support for *good quality data* (Section 7.2)
- Strengthening support for *'fit for purpose' information* (Section 7.3)
- Strengthening support for *better decision-making* (Section 7.4).

The final sub-section brings together recommendations by tier, with specific recommendations for national, regional and local partners (Section 7.5).

7.2 Strengthening support for good quality data

R1	National departments responsible for producing guidance relating to strategic assessments should work with data publishers and consider how best to package for local users the relevant data that is published nationally
For	National departments and data publishers

Local partners spend significant time collating datasets for strategic assessments. As responsibility for the different assessments is spread across a range of local services and partner organisations, there is inherent risk of duplication of local data collation and analysis.

There appears considerable scope to rationalise the core data demands – and link better with data publishers – at national level. For example, many of the core datasets for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment work are published on ONS websites – and could be directly linked from summary web-pages.

This links to R2, for Communities and Local Government and BERR to consider when assessing the case for Economic Assessment Duty guidance.

R2	Communities and Local Government and BERR should consider the recommendations arising from this project when considering guidance on the Economic Assessment Duty
For	Communities and Local Government and BERR

This project has highlighted the usefulness of guidance in (1) emphasising the value of the evidence base to senior managers in the decision-making process, (2) strengthening data sharing arrangements between partners.

Economic Assessment Duty guidance will need to cover data analysis requirements linked to the LAA, and also the wider aspects of economic development that are captured in Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Development Agency performance indicators. These typically go beyond the National Indicator Set to include, for example Gross Value Added, innovation and property.

R1 is relevant, in ensuring that the core, nationally published datasets are easily available, for example, by being signposted from summary web-pages developed along with any guidance. This would save local users considerable time and effort.

R3	The major data suppliers – ONS and other government departments – should continue to streamline delivery and open-up access to data, by standardising ways of both finding and downloading data
For	All public sector data publishers

Accessibility of national statistics has improved enormously. But it does not always go far enough: the feedback from this project (and other research such as the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation) identifies a continuing message from the field, that much of what is provided is not yet meeting user needs sufficiently well. People still spend significant time seeking, downloading and reformatting data from many different systems, reducing time available for analysis. For example, the release of the Indices of Deprivation 2007 resulted in enormous duplication of work for data managers of Local Information Systems, in terms of downloading, reformatting and uploading data into local systems.

The move to providing standard ways of both finding and downloading data is a major step forward. It is important that the main data suppliers open-up access to the data and metadata (the importance of common metadata which describes the datasets in consistent ways is in enabling standard searches across all data suppliers).

By providing standard ways of both *finding* and *downloading* the data from different data supply systems, suppliers can provide four key benefits:

- Enable easy loading of data into Local Information Systems, using direct machine-to-machine interaction, and avoiding duplication of download, translation and upload of data
- Enable more efficient and wider access to data published by national data suppliers (again using machine-to-machine interaction rather than going through data managers). For example, the NOMIS labour market statistics website would easily be able to include relevant data from Neighbourhood Statistics or the DWP benefits website
- Ensure that signposting and cataloguing systems such as Data4nr, that signpost users to data from a range of different data suppliers, can automatically incorporate new data releases and revisions. These systems could also publicise new data provided by each of the data suppliers
- Facilitate more effective use of data by other (commercial) resellers and agencies, for example enabling: dataset results to be searched and returned by search engines; graphical presentation by value-added resellers; different datasets to be easily combined together; and/or automatically providing the latest statistics on particular issues. This would mirror the way that, for example, news feeds are used by a variety of commercial (and public sector) sites.

Neighbourhood Statistics has recently started testing web-services[112] which enable easy access to their data. Other data suppliers should follow this lead in disseminating their data through web-services, and the framework and methodology developed by Neighbourhood Statistics should be promoted. In some cases, it may be appropriate for data suppliers to provide their data directly in this way, without developing additional user interfaces.

Working case study examples of Local Information Systems and other national data portals taking data direct from the Neighbourhood Statistics web-services should be developed and promoted.

Development of signposting systems such as Data4nr should enable finding and downloading from the different data supplier systems. This relates to existing signposting services such as Data4nr.net, also the role of Regional Observatories – and ensuring that the sites of relevant national and regional organisations consistently signpost users to each other's resources.

[112] Web-services provide data in a common 'xml' format that can be interpreted in a standard way.

Data suppliers should also ensure that good metadata[113] is provided with all data: this is central to local users being able to understand, trust (and in some cases, replicate) the data. Data publishers should always ensure that metadata for indicators identifies (and ideally links to) the raw data used to develop the indicators, including any population denominators used. Where it is not possible to link to the raw data, metadata should highlight why the underlying data is not available and/or specify a time-frame for the publication of this data.

R4	Strengthen the usefulness of the National Indicator Set by identifying and disseminating datasets for small areas and/or equalities groups
For	Communities and Local Government, UK Statistics Authority, IDeA, LGA

Research to identify which of the National Indicators are available at sub-District level, and which are available for key equalities groups, would save considerable duplication of effort at local, regional and national level. Advice on alternative, proxy indicators would also be helpful, where the National Indicators do not lend themselves to analysis at these levels. This research should also provide direct web-links to those datasets that are nationally published, and should also link to the ONS work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and others on equalities data[114].

In addition, when the time comes to refresh the National Indicator Set, it will be essential to involve local partners in considering the range and fitness for purpose of the National Indicator Set (and not just the technical detail on the individual indicators). This should result in an indicator set that is genuinely shared and owned, and is 'fit for purpose' in wider set of ways.

R5	Every opportunity has to be taken to promote the message that in many situations users can legitimately share aggregated data for strategic purposes. National data suppliers should revisit policies in relation to sharing aggregated statistics at small area level
For	Communities and Local Government, ONS, DWP/JCP and local partners

Crucial to making data sharing happen is (1) top-level commitment; (2) partnership working skills; (3) making the case for data sharing; (4) devising effective data sharing arrangements.

There is the potential to spread proven methods into new fields. For example JCP and local authorities could adopt protocols on data sharing to tackle worklessness, clarifying what data is available and can be shared locally, subject to safeguards on client confidentiality.

[113] *Metadata* is the information about the data, for example identifying how the data was collected, the time-point and geographical areas the data relates to, and so on.

[114] ONS (2007) Report from the Review of Equality Data www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/equality-data-review/index.html

National data suppliers should revisit policies in relation to supplying aggregated statistics for locally meaningful areas, with disclosure controls applied to the data *after* aggregation (and not before). For example, adding up a number of LSOAs, all of which have data values rounded to the nearest 5 or 10, can result in inaccurate values for local neighbourhoods. This would assist Local Information Systems teams, who provide value by publishing local service and contextual data, aggregated to locally meaningful geographies. This often requires them to receive sensitive data from local partners, for the purposes of geocoding, aggregating and publishing non-disclosive, aggregated statistics.

R6	Ensure that all relevant public sector partners are included into collective agreements with data suppliers such as Ordnance Survey, to avoid unnecessary additional expenditure in buying publicly-owned data
For	Communities and Local Government, LGA, UK Statistics Authority

Interviewees highlighted public sector agencies, such as Transport for London, which have separate agreements with Ordnance Survey and are not part of the collective Mapping Services Agreement or Pan Government Agreement. It was estimated that £800,000 per year is spent by regional agencies in London on Ordnance Survey licensing alone.

Also of relevance is house price data, which is available at a cost from the Land Registry, and purchased by many local partnerships. There is potential for a joint public sector agreement with the Land Registry, in a similar way to digital map data, to make available regularly updated house-price information at small area level to all local users.

R7	Promote awareness and effective use of the range of geodemographic classifications
For	ONS, IDeA, LGA, Communities and Local Government, local partners

In interviews, there was little or no knowledge of the Output Area Classification (OAC) – a freely available open-source product that categorises areas on the basis of key socioeconomic Census 2001 indicators, developed by ONS and Leeds University. This contrasted with the widespread recognition of commercial products such as Mosaic and Acorn.

Promoting the awareness of the range of geodemographic products should highlight the Output Area Classification (OAC) and Super Output Area Classifications. For example, this could include producing and promoting local examples of using OAC in developing strategic assessments such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

R8	DWP should publish data on the two other main client groups – 'children dependent on benefits' and 'older people client group'- alongside the Working Age Client Group data
For	DWP

Deprivation data on older people and children, based on those people receiving a range of DWP benefits, is vital in helping local partners target and monitor local programmes.

Data on people of working–age receiving DWP benefits is currently published by DWP and widely used by local partners. But data is not published for older people, or for children in households dependent on benefits – despite the publication of data for each of the individual benefits.

7.3 Strengthening support for 'fit for purpose' information

R9	Consider the case for developing and implementing a competency framework, and possible accreditation, for local government (and partnership) researchers
For	IDeA, LGA/LGAR, Communities and Local Government, Skills for Health, other skills agencies

Nationally, the Government Social Research competency framework sets out a comprehensive set of competencies relevant to social research work and grades across the civil service. In the public health arena, the Public Health Skills and Careers Framework brings together public health competences, underpinning knowledge, training and qualification routes, registration requirements and a database of job descriptions across nine career levels.

However, there is no such framework outlining the required competencies for local government and partner researchers, and no one organisation currently assumes responsibility for leading on tackling analytical skills gaps.

IDeA and LGAR are potentially well-placed to work with the relevant sector skills councils on such a competency framework, given their role in workforce development and standards and research. There is a further fit with the IDeA role in emphasising the use of research in the improvement agenda, and reinforcing messages on the importance of research and use of evidence to senior managers.

There is also a potential role for IDeA in bringing together relevant resources around information, research and use of evidence – something that IDeA has not at present developed – and linking this with training and a competency framework. LGAR and other bodies are also likely to be involved. This links to R12 below.

R10	Local partners should consider how to organise and develop local research and intelligence functions in order to meet data and evidence needs arising from the LAA, strategic assessments and the drive for improved customer and citizen focus
For	Local partners

Questions for local partners to consider include: Can core datasets be published on the Local Information System? Should a single partnership data team take responsibility for collecting data for *all* strategic assessments? Are research and intelligence resources well co-ordinated? Are there analytical skills gaps locally?

As part of this, local partnerships should consider how to ensure that data gathered by local research can most effectively be re-used in future projects. For example, this might involve ensuring that all data gathered, and developed, is loaded onto the Local Information System, subject to appropriate data consents on primary research.

Partners should also consider the role and effectiveness of a local partnership data/analyst group (if not already in place).

R11	Define the national and regional 'support infrastructure' for local information and research, and clarify roles and responsibilities of supporting organisations, particularly in relation to supporting local partners
For	Communities and Local Government, LGA, IDeA, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, Regional Observatories, ONS (including Regional Statisticians), Government Offices, Regional Development Agencies, Public Health Observatories

The role, and coherence, of regional and national support organisations is not always clear to local partners, despite the publication of the National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy and Prospectus. At present, there is potential for regional and national organisations to overlap and duplicate activities.

The role of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships is potentially important in bringing clarity, in conjunction with other regional partners (eg, Regional Development Agencies as key stakeholders in Regional Observatories).

A national overview is needed as well, to make efficient use of regional resources and spread knowledge across the country. The example of the regional Public Health Observatories is relevant. Each Public Health Observatory leads on a number of agreed themes at national level – for example 'health and inequality', or 'health and ethnicity'. In addition, each Public Health Observatory supports local Primary Care Trusts for example both by carrying out research relevant across the region, and by developing local research skills and capacity through training programmes, telephone support and so on.

7.4 Strengthening support for better decision-making

R12	National partners should ensure that guidance and toolkits relating to better information, research and analysis are brought together and promoted to local partners
For	IDeA, Communities and Local Government, LGA/LGAR, ONS, LARIA, BURISA, Central and Local Information Partnership, Royal Statistical Society, Social Research Association, Economic and Social Research Council, Government Social Research

There is a need for national partners to draw together, plan and co-ordinate better the provision of guidance and toolkits which relate, one way or another, to the use of information, research and analysis in support of LAAs and Sustainable Community Strategies. We have highlighted aspects of this in relation to data above, but there is a need also to consider what further guidance and support materials are needed, and are best provided at a national level. Forthcoming examples could include adapting to climate change and local economic assessments.

Other support organisations should also be involved in supporting and promoting this to local partners, including: LARIA, BURISA, Central and Local Information Partnership, Royal Statistical Society, Social Research Association, Economic and Social Research Council, Government Social Research, etc.

There appears a clear need for material on "effective use of evidence" (and support). National support partners such as IDeA should consider publishing (and taking ownership of) relevant work carried out for the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation – and incorporating these on IDeA Knowledge with promotion through the Communities of Practice forums. The handbook and support should address analytical and research needs at a 'basic' and more 'advanced' levels in the 'data-information-decisions' chain. This could bring together material from a range of sources, including case studies published on Neighbourhood Statistics.

Commission case study and 'solving the problem' content for the Partnerships and Places Library which provide practical illustrations of effective practice relating to information, research and analysis for LAAs and community strategies, and distil the learning (note that the Partnerships and Places Library has picked up content from Renewal.net, but at the time of writing, not all content has been transferred).

R13	Support for implementation of CAA should facilitate the transfer of learning and good practice relating to information, analysis and research as means of achieving higher performance in improving local prospects and quality of life
For	Audit Commission and other inspectorates, IDeA, LGA, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships

The CAA 'use of resources' assessment identifies "how organisations produce relevant and reliable data and information to support decision making and manage performance" as a Key Line of Enquiry. It will be important that support for CAA implementation (guidance, tools, improvement projects and supporting materials) facilitates the transfer of learning and good practice in how local authorities and partners are developing and managing analytical resources and prospects in order to improve local outcomes and quality of life, eg in commentary on CAA and in the tool for self-assessment.

R14	Include skills in the interpretation and use of evidence within leadership and management training programmes
For	IDeA, Local Government Leadership Centre, Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (and comparable bodies serving local partner agencies)

The commitment of senior management to research is strongly correlated with performance (as judged by Comprehensive Performance Assessment)[115].

The extent to which decision-makers appreciate the value of research and analysis – and can judge the quality of evidence presented to them – is a theme that warrants inclusion in the various training programmes at national level for senior and middle managers and for councillors.

R15	Strengthen regional support for research and analysis through a mix of advice, networking, training, analytical products (trends, benchmarks, etc) and jointly commissioned research
For	Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (the West Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership leads on Local Improvement Advisors)

The work of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships offers the *greatest prospects of strengthening action on the ground* to improve the links between analysis and research functions and decision-making.

Support from the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships could include, for example, promotion and transfer of effective practice, training and networking on analytical methods, and/or packaging data to facilitate analysis such as evaluation of trends and benchmarking. The Supporting Local Evidence for Delivery evaluation demonstrated local partner interest in take-up of this kind of support service (see Box, paragraph 5.3.9).

[115] "… there is a relationship between certain indicators of research effectiveness, notably those that relate to research culture, and CPA ratings." LGA (2005). Knowledge is power: the need for effective research in local government.

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships should:

- clarify the nature of analytical support needs within their region
- ensure they are familiar with relevant improvement support resources within their region (national and regional), identify gaps and address these, where there is added value in regional action
- develop partnerships and joint commissioning to address priorities for support, eg in packaging data and analyses to meet common needs (benchmarking, performance trends, modelling, etc).

When Local Improvement Advisors are recruited, ensure a strong pool of advisers with skills in data analysis and in performance.

R16	Identify and promote effective partnership management models which integrate research, analysis and strategic/operational decision-making
For	Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, IDeA

One way to bring research and analysis closer to decision-making is to implement performance management models which *embed* research and analysis into planning and delivery cycles. The Greater Manchester Against Crime (GMAC) model used by community safety partners is one such example already in use, and the principles involved can be extended and adapted to other theme partnerships. The GMAC model shows the value in having common methodology and common language across partners, and has provided a platform for further development.

R17	Ensure that information, research and analysis support needs in the Third Sector are considered when reviewing regional improvement needs and targeting support
For	Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, Communities and Local Government, National Empowerment Partnership, Regional Empowerment Partnerships

If the sector is to play a more influential role within LSPs and a stronger role in the delivery of public services, access to data and knowledge is needed to contribute to strategy and LAAs, to challenge service providers, and to help shape and respond to strategic commissioning priorities.

There are also links to the community empowerment agenda at a national level, and to the activities of Regional Empowerment Partnerships.

7.5 Specific recommendations for national, regional and local partners

Each of the recommendations above identifies the organisation(s) which are currently best-placed to take the recommendation forward. These include organisations at national, regional and local level:

National action

- National departments responsible for producing guidance relating to strategic assessments should work with data publishers and consider how best to package for local users the relevant data that is published nationally (Recommendation 1)
- Communities and Local Government and BERR should consider the recommendations arising from this project when considering guidance on the Economic Assessment Duty. This project has highlighted the usefulness of guidance in (1) emphasising the value of the evidence-base to senior managers in the decision-making process, and (2) strengthening data sharing arrangements between partners (Recommendation 2)
- The major data suppliers – ONS and other government departments – should continue to streamline delivery and open-up access to data, by standardising ways of both finding and downloading data. The accessibility of national statistics has improved enormously. But it does not always go far enough: users still spend significant time downloading and reformatting data from many different systems, reducing time available for analysis (Recommendation 3)
- Strengthen the usefulness of the National Indicator Set by identifying and disseminating datasets for small areas and/or equalities groups (Recommendation 4)
- Every opportunity has to be taken to promote the message that in many situations users can legitimately share aggregated data for strategic purposes. National data suppliers should revisit policies in relation to sharing aggregated statistics at small area level (Recommendation 5)
- Ensure that all relevant public sector partners are included into collective agreements with data suppliers such as Ordnance Survey, to avoid unnecessary additional expenditure in buying publicly-owned data (Recommendation 6)
- Promote awareness and effective use of the range of geodemographic classifications (Recommendation 7)
- DWP should publish data on the two other main client groups – 'children dependent on benefits' and 'older people client group' – alongside the Working Age Client Group data (Recommendation 8)
- Consider the case nationally for developing and implementing a competency framework, and possible accreditation, for local government and partnership researchers (Recommendation 9)

- Define the national and regional 'support infrastructure' for local information and research, clarifying the roles and responsibilities and seeking synergies between the various organisations operating at these levels (Recommendation 11)
- National partners should ensure that guidance and toolkits relating to better information, research and analysis are brought together and promoted to local partners (Recommendation 12)
- Given the significance of CAA as a lever for better use of information and analysis, support for implementation of CAA should facilitate the transfer of learning and good practice relating to information, analysis and research as means of achieving higher performance in improving local prospects and quality of life (Recommendation 13)
- Include skills in the interpretation and use of evidence within leadership and management training programmes. The commitment of senior management to research is strongly correlated with performance[116] (Recommendation 14).

Regional action

- Define the national and regional 'support infrastructure' for local information and research, clarifying the roles and responsibilities and seeking synergies between the various organisations operating at these levels. The role of the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships is potentially important in bringing clarity, in conjunction with other regional partners, eg, Regional Development Agencies as key stakeholders in Regional Observatories (Recommendation 11)
- Given the significance of CAA as a lever for better use of information and analysis, support for implementation of CAA should facilitate the transfer of learning and good practice relating to information, analysis and research as means of achieving higher performance in improving local prospects and quality of life (Recommendation 13)
- Include skills in the interpretation and use of evidence within leadership and management training programmes (Recommendation 14)
- Strengthen regional support for research and analysis through a mix of advice, networking, training, analytical products (trends, benchmarks, etc) and jointly commissioned research. A lead by the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) offers the *greatest prospects of strengthening action on the ground* to improve the links between analysis and research functions and decision-making. RIEPs should clarify and ensure that they are working closely with analytical support resources within the region, such as Regional Observatories; and develop partnerships and joint commissions to address priorities for research and analysis support (Recommendation 15)
- Identify and promote effective partnership management models which integrate research, analysis and strategic/operational decision-making (Recommendation 16)

[116] "… there is a relationship between certain indicators of research effectiveness, notably those that relate to research culture, and CPA ratings… " Commitment of senior management to research was the most significant factor in analysis of whether indicators relating to research effectiveness were related to performance scores. LGA (2005). Knowledge is power: the need for effective research in local government.

- Ensure that information, research and analysis support needs in the Third Sector are considered when reviewing regional improvement needs and targeting support. This is important in support of national community empowerment objectives (Recommendation 17).

Local action

- Local partners should consider how to organise and develop local research and intelligence functions in order to meet data and evidence needs arising from the LAA, strategic assessments and the drive for improved customer and citizen focus. They should ask, for example, are research and intelligence resources well co-ordinated and geared to improving strategies and performance? Are there analytical skills gaps locally? (Recommendation 10).

In addition, there are recommendations for national and regional partners that are relevant to local partners:

- Every opportunity has to be taken to promote the message that in many situations users can legitimately share aggregated data for strategic purposes. National data suppliers should revisit policies in relation to sharing aggregated statistics at small area level (Recommendation 5).

Appendix A

Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: key messages from the evaluation and analytical skills research

A.1 About the SELD Analytical Skills & Support research

About Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery and the research

The Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme was introduced in 2005 to **promote better use of data, research and evidence in neighbourhood renewal** through technical assistance to Local Strategic Partnerships and neighbourhood renewal partnerships. Such support was seen by the then ODPM as key to improving planning, evaluation and decision-making, leading to greater gains in closing the gap on outcomes for disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The programme involved **pilots in four regions** (North East, North West – Lancashire, South West and West Midlands), testing needs and demand in different settings. The pilots provided **information and expert advice, workshops and seminars, and tailored support for partnerships**. They were also intended to help ODPM learn more about critical issues that local partners face, and support Government Offices for the Regions (Government Offices) in their neighbourhood renewal functions. The development of the first round of LAAs became an increasingly prominent focus for the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery programme.

The national research and evaluation project reviewed how the programme was delivered and assessed the impact of the four pilots and the programme as a whole. It researched analytical skills for neighbourhood renewal and LAAs, in particular seeking to clarify the nature and extent of skill gaps and shortages, and reviewing analytical resources available to partnerships[117].

[117] For key findings of the research, see Johnstone et al (2008) *Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery: Key Findings* www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

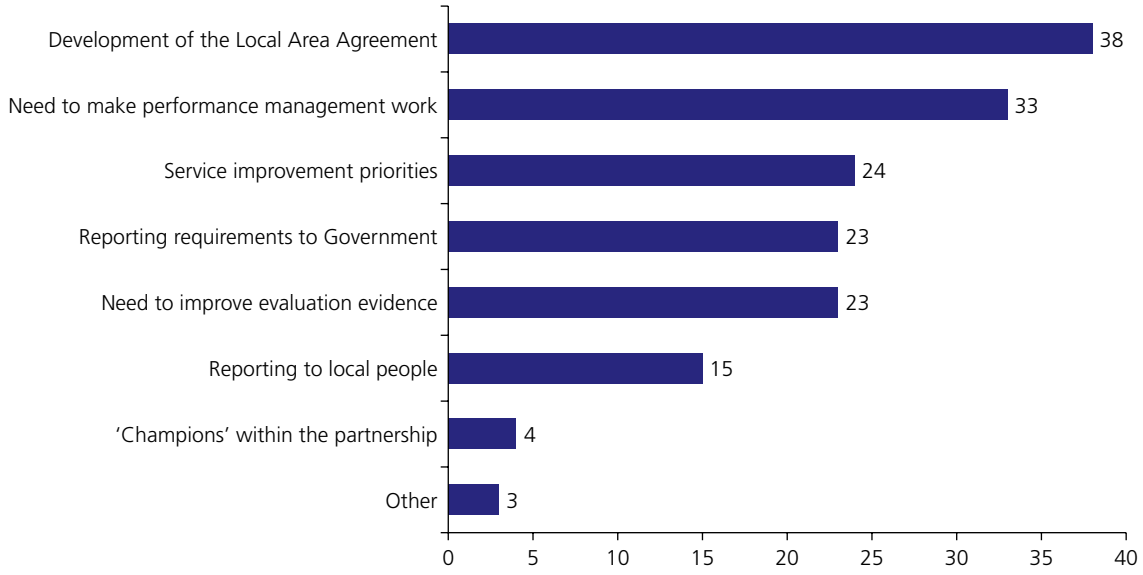
A.2 Demand for research and analysis

Main factors driving and hindering needs for local information and analysis

Drivers of better use of information

The partnership survey found that the main drivers of needs for information and analysis were the development of the LAA (38 of the 45 LSPs) and the need to make performance management work (33), followed by service improvement priorities, reporting requirements to government and needs to improve evaluation evidence.

Figure A.1: What are the main factors driving the partnership needs for information and analysis?



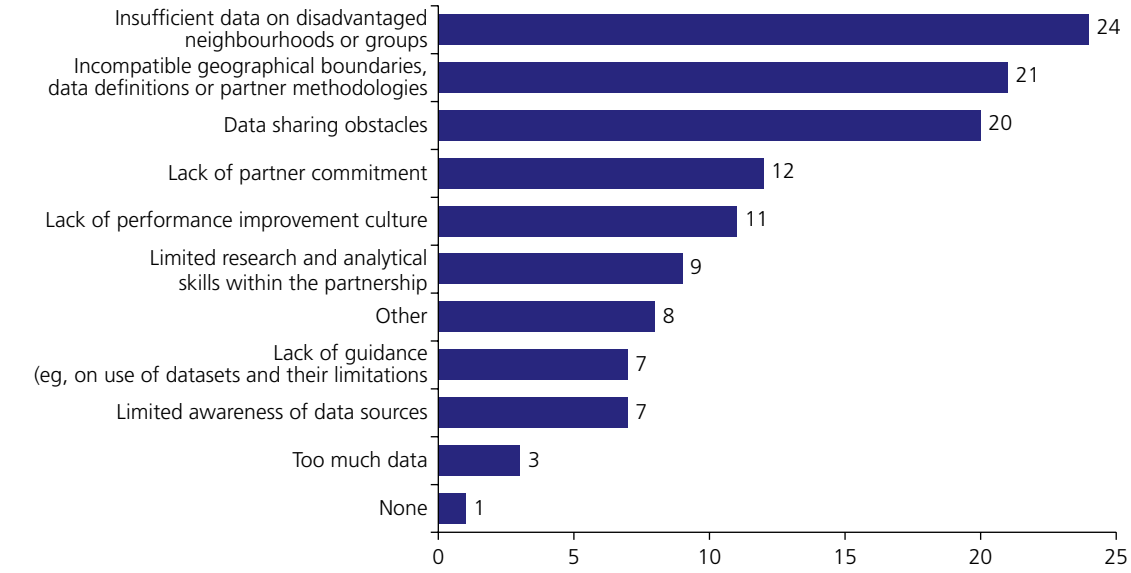
Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding

Hindrances to better use of information

The main hindrances reported by LSP managers were:

- insufficient data on disadvantaged neighbourhoods or group (24 of the 45 LSPs)
- incompatible boundaries, data definitions and/or partner methodologies (21)
- data sharing obstacles (20).

Figure A.2: What are the main factors hindering the partnership in making better use of data/evidence?

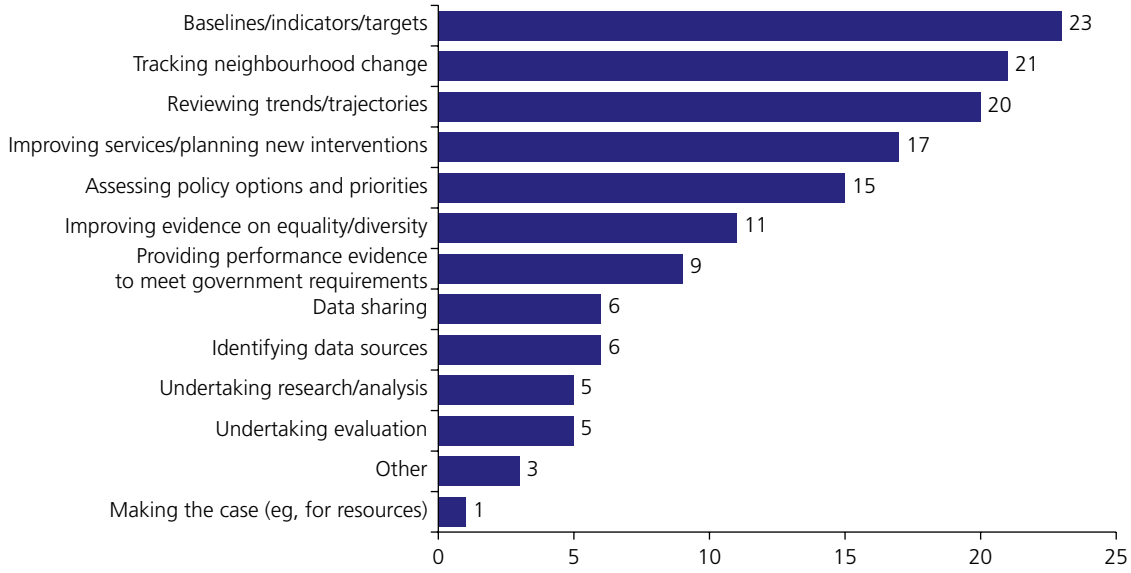


Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding

Partnership organisational development needs

Four out of five LSP managers (37 out of 45) identified critical needs for their partnership in improving its use of data/evidence over the next year or so.

Figure A.3: What activities do the critical needs for the partnership in improving the use of data/evidence relate to?



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding: 37 LSPs stating that they could identify critical needs for the partnership in improving its use of data/evidence over the next year or so

Partnership managers were prompted to elaborate on these critical needs. The most frequent comments related to:

- implementing performance management, with requirements for timely, robust data, capacity to undertake trend/trajectory analysis and to diagnose reasons for under-performance (seven comments)
- work required for LAA development and implementation
- increasing focus within the LSP towards neighbourhoods[118] (including to support developments in neighbourhood governance; tracking population churn; and assessing the impact of interventions at neighbourhood level).

Other survey comments from Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders and New Deal for Communities managers related, for example, to:

- needs to strengthen evidence relating to equality and diversity, including assessment of programme impact on different groups
- establishing the geographical distribution of mainstream funding
- developing evidence to 'influence the mainstream' in improving service delivery.

Actions taken in the past year to address needs

The main actions which LSPs had taken in the previous year (ie, to September 2006) were (Figure A.4):

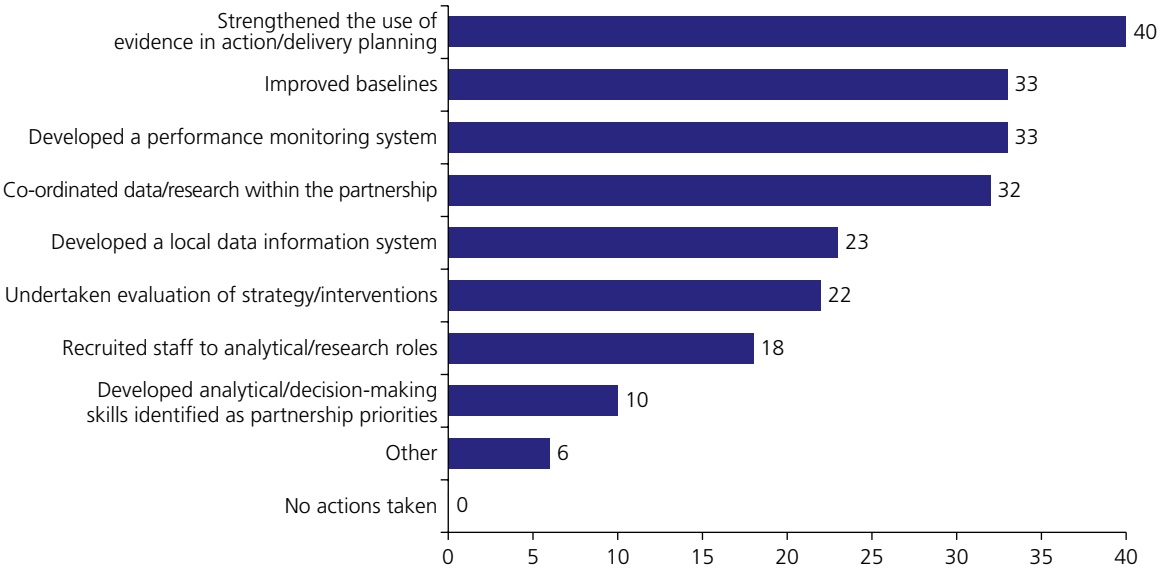
- strengthened use of evidence in action/delivery planning
- development of their performance management system
- co-ordination of data and research within the partnership.

Specific actions reported in the partnership survey included:

- implemented an evidence-based LSP Commissioning Framework
- improved alignment of the work of a research analyst with LSP programme management tasks
- reorganisation within the local authority to create a central Policy, Partnerships and Performance Department, bringing together staff previously working in separate Directorates
- commissioned the development of a business intelligence system which will deliver local data across partnership organisations, performance monitoring and baselining.

[118] Two of the better performing LSPs in the fieldwork highlighted a need in particular to make more use of multivariate analysis, in order to deepen understanding and make more of the cross-cutting links between themes, eg: *"We need to bring various data analysis functions across the partnership together to see how different neighbourhood renewal strands influence each other and impact on the city. "*

Figure A.4: What have you done as a partnership to improve your use of data/ evidence?



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding

A.3 External advice and assistance

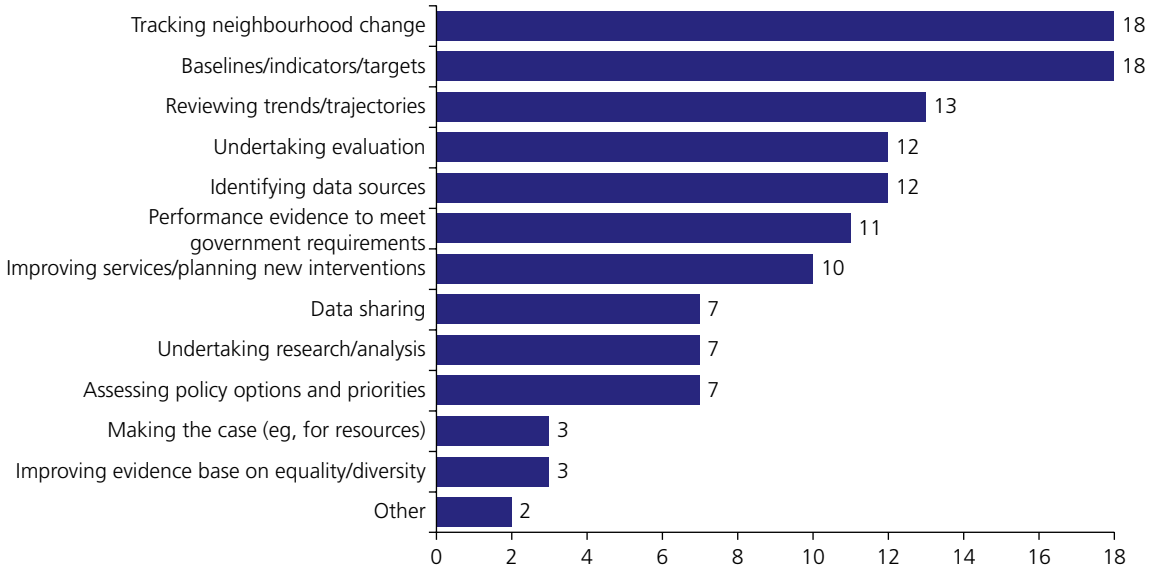
Stimulus to use of external advice and assistance

Identified needs translated into various forms of take-up of external information, advice and assistance (for 38 of the 45 LSPs). The top five topics were:

- tracking neighbourhood change (18 of 38 LSPs using external assistance)
- baselines, indicators and targets (18)
- reviewing trends and trajectories (13)
- undertaking evaluation (12)
- identifying data sources (12).

These needs were reflected in the pattern addressed by services provided by the SELD pilot programme, not least in the top two needs of 'identifying data sources' and baselines/ indicators/targets'.

Figure A.5: What did your need(s) for external advice/assistance mainly concern?

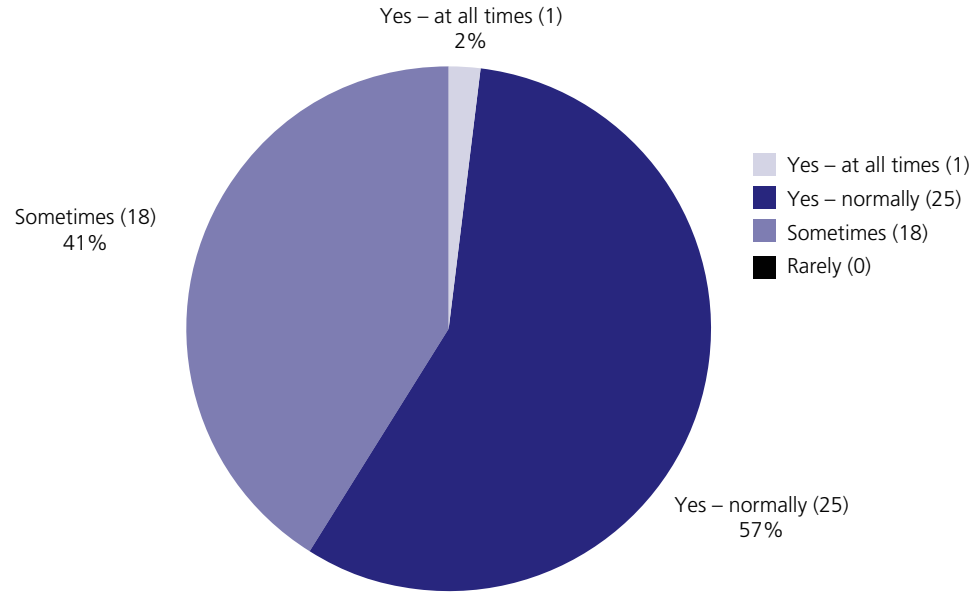


Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding. 38 LSPs stating that they had sought external assistance

Sourcing external advice and assistance

Partnership managers were asked whether they could usually find appropriate advice and assistance on data/evidence *from partner organisations* when they need it, and about what use they had made of *external* advice and assistance in the past year.

Figure A.6: Can you usually find appropriate advice and assistance on data/ evidence from partner organisations when you need it?



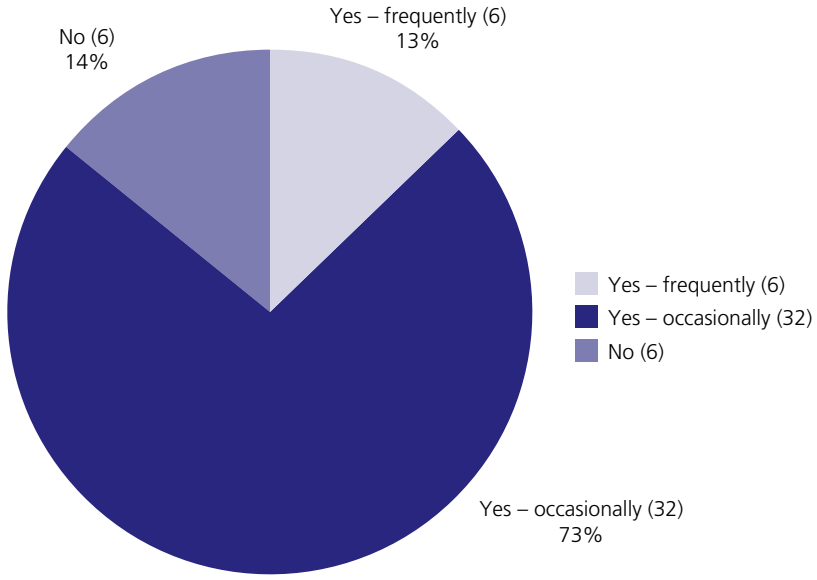
Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding
Advice or assistance' was defined in the surveys to include consultancy projects, training workshops, Neighbourhood Renewal Advisors, use of telephone helplines and informal peer contacts

Responses suggest that over half LSP managers can access the advice and assistance on data and evidence from within their partnership/organisation when they need it[119] – though over a third consider that this is only 'sometimes' the case. Relatively low percentages feel that they can access advice and assistance *at all times* when they need it.

LSP managers were slightly more likely than practitioners to have had recourse to external advice or assistance relating to data, research or analysis over the past year (84%, compared to 76%), with only a minority having done so frequently rather than occasionally (6 out of 45 LSPs). One in seven partnership managers and one in five practitioners had not sought such assistance.

[119] Similar proportion for NDC & NMP managers, and for practitioners

Figure A.7: In the past year, have you sought advice or assistance relating to data, research or analytical tasks/skills from people outside your partnership?



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding

Half the LSP managers had experienced difficulties in finding the external advice or assistance they needed.

Fieldwork interviewees demonstrated preferences for finding answers locally, though with occasional comments recognising that external sources might be better placed in meeting some needs.

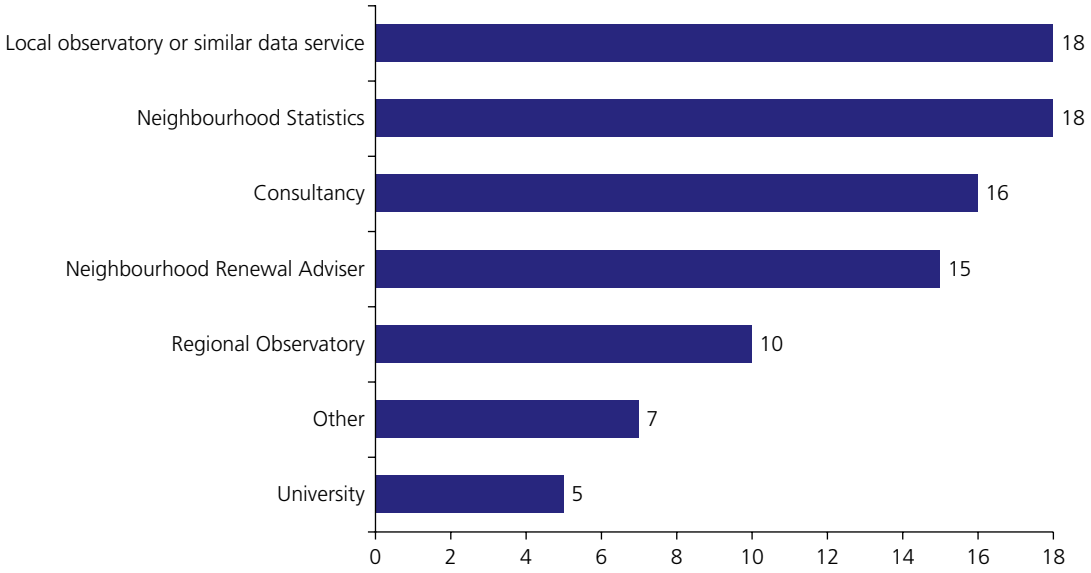
Sources used

Regarding sources of external advice or assistance used (Figure A.8), LSP managers were most likely to cite local data observatories, Neighbourhood Statistics, consultants and NRAs, followed by regional observatories[120] and, in a few cases (five), universities[121].

[120] There was regional variation – some ROs are more geared to locality needs than others. Use also varies by topic

[121] Amongst practitioners, the picture differed in that the were less likely to have made use of a consultancy, local observatory or NRA.

Figure A.8: What sources of external advice or assistance relating to data, research or analytical tasks/skills have you used?



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding: 38 LSPs answered 'Yes – frequently' or 'Yes – occasionally' to question about seeking external advice/assistance in the past year

Amongst the 'Other' category, respondents mentioned the SELD pilot in their region and/or a range of other organisations, including local authority and government departments and helpdesks provided by services such as NOMIS.

Specific needs addressed with the support of external assistance included:

partnership managers

- advice on evidence and sustainability /mainstreaming
- developing a performance management system
- developing a template for creating trajectories.

practitioners

- sourcing good practice on particular approaches to evidence-related issues
- confirmation of analyses, to reinforce messages and recommendations being proposed in-house
- sourcing and interpreting data; "advice on how best to access an indicator – and finding out when the latest data would be available"
- University commissioned to identify the boundaries of local housing markets, using census migration data
- advice on research techniques and software, eg, from LA statistician.

Practices in fieldwork areas

Illustrations of use of external advice and assistance from the fieldwork areas included:

- *consultancy projects*, eg, on Housing Market Renewal (Hull), support for Local Area Agreement preparation (Lincolnshire), LEGI – Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (all areas[122]), and programme evaluations
- *academic research*, involving local universities: eg, on teenage pregnancies (Lambeth, as an input to Floor Target Action Planning); migrants and asylum seekers (Hull)
- *peer contacts* with (respected) neighbouring authorities, through the National Neighbourhood Management Network and collaborative bodies such as the London Analyst Support Site (data warehouse for Metropolitan Police and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership analysts)
- *academic links*, eg, with Kings College and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (Lambeth); public health, Sheffield University (Bolsover)
- *information and (occasional) analysis* from regional and sub-regional observatories (eg, from London Health Observatory – Lambeth; Lincolnshire Observatory – Lincoln)
- *technical advice on very specific questions* from organisations which originate or provide data (eg, incident codes used by the Fire Service)
- *participation in national research and development projects* (eg, Young Foundation 'Transforming Neighbourhoods' programme – Sheffield; Audit Commission Area Profiles – Hull and Sheffield)
- *NRA support* for theme-based Floor Target Action Planning (in three of the areas).

All the higher education links were with *local* universities – a picture reflected in a local authority survey carried out by the ESRC-sponsored Local Authority Research Council Initiative (2005)[123]. Just under a quarter of local authority respondents[124] reported some form of collaboration (including commissioned research) from universities, predominantly with local universities. Only eight of these recorded collaboration with universities further afield. Many more respondents (16 cases) had worked with consultancies, and few reported collaboration with other local authorities or public agencies (11 cases) or Third Sector organisations (only three cases). Analysis of responses showed a statistically significant preference amongst local authorities to use universities rather than consultancies for sociological or demographic studies[125].

[122] All NRF areas were given development funds in 2005-06 to undertake research and develop bids.

[123] Local Authority Research Council Initiative (2005) Local Authority Survey Report LARCI

[124] 24% (N = 283)

[125] Most university projects involved 'general socio-economic studies' such as demographic studies and community profiling, with smaller numbers relating to neighbourhoods and housing, education, tourism and migration. There was also a small proportion of performance management and scientific projects. Amongst projects undertaken with consultancies and other non-university partners, the most frequently mentioned topics were local plans and strategies, market research/opinion surveys, neighbourhoods and housing and social inclusion/community research.

In the fieldwork areas, most examples of consultancy support related to economic regeneration and housing, while universities appeared to be more frequently involved in relation to health and education. Community safety appeared more self-reliant; most calls for external advice and assistance related to data matters.

In almost all cases of research and consultancy, the work was *commissioned* by the local authority or other partner agency, rather than by the LSP itself. Common triggers behind the projects were:

- a need to find additional capacity and expertise to undertake and analyse surveys
- work on strategies/frameworks and bids required in relatively short periods of time (eg, on LEGI or housing market renewal)
- recognition of the need for specialist expertise (eg, developing Local Information System websites; undertaking a knowledge management audit for the LSP)
- a desire to ensure independence in undertaking evaluations.

Many of our interviewees had a very functional approach: there was a task to be done and they saw consultants/researchers as best placed on grounds of capacity, expertise or independence to do it. Relatively few interviewees mentioned a primary purpose in helping to build capacity within their partnership[126].

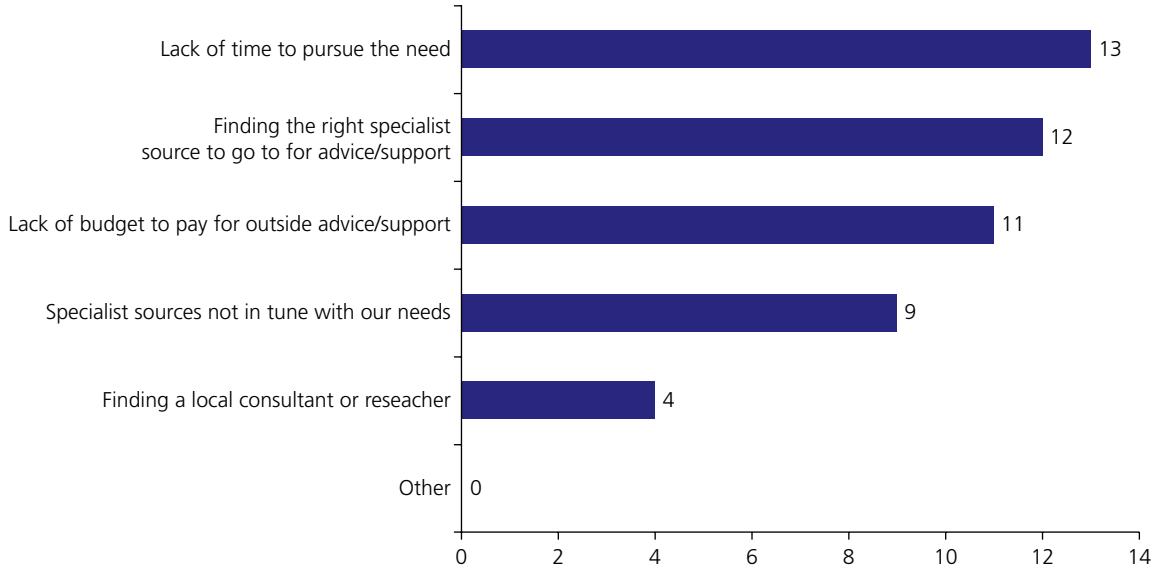
Ease or difficulty in sourcing external assistance

In considering the adequacy of supply of analytical skills *external* to partner organisations, we asked both partnership managers and practitioners if they had experienced any difficulties in sourcing such assistance in the past year.

Nearly half the LSP managers had experienced difficulty, compared to a third of practitioners. Where this was the case we asked them to elaborate (Figure A.9). 'Lack of time to pursue the need' was the most common factor, closely followed by finding the right specialist source to go to for advice/support and the lack of budget to pay for outside support.

[126] The findings on consultancy use relate to those of a survey of clients and consultants conducted by Objective Research in 2005 for Regeneration and Renewal magazine (*Regeneration Consultants and their Clients: A Survey*). This found the following reasons for using consultants: specific skills not contained within the organisation, 98%; independent advice needed to help make decisions, 84%; additional capacity needed ('staff already at full stretch'), 84%; independent advice needed to test or support and decision already made, 68%; and required to satisfy the requirement of a public body, 52%.

Figure A.9: What difficulties did you encounter in sourcing external advice or assistance relating to data, research or analytical tasks/skills?



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding: 21 LSPs answering 'Yes' to whether they had found difficulties in sourcing external assistance

Importantly for small partnership teams, in-house capacity to manage research, consultancy or other technical assistance can be a serious constraint to taking up such services. This has been a factor affecting use of NRAs, where partnership managers have identified needs for assignments but have had to juggle too many other priorities to make fast progress in commissioning the work.

Respondents to the practitioner survey tended to have more to say, especially on the responsiveness of providers of advice/assistance, on two points in particular:

- need for technical staff who understand the subject matter, including demands *across* neighbourhood renewal/LAA themes, and within the Third Sector
- quality of technical support on data.

Many fieldwork interviewees had made no use of the services of consultants or academics at all in the past year. Those who had were reasonably happy with the services they had received. Interviewees favoured using known sources of expertise in local or sub-regional organisations and peer contacts more widely. Where there were closer links with universities, eg, through involvement in university research programmes, there were occasional comments which reflected 'research/practice' tensions: were academic research programmes close – or responsive – enough to evolving needs on the ground?

A.4 Analytical capacity

Staffing

Just over half of the LSPs employ staff in specific research, monitoring or performance management roles. The average is two people, the median one (in the case of 18 partnerships) with a range of 0.3 to five people (excluding CDRP analysts[127] who in some cases are based with the LSP team).

Area	Core LSP-related staff resources for analysis in fieldwork areas
Bolsover	LSP performance officer + input from LA analyst
Hull	LSP performance manager + input from LA Policy & Research Team
Lambeth	2 staff (fte) in Lambeth First (LSP); roles in sourcing and analysing data; performance management
Lincoln	LSP data analyst, primarily sourcing and analysing data for performance management
Sheffield	5 staff in City Council working on neighbourhood renewal data/ research
Tower Hamlets	4 staff: 2 analysts; project manager for the new information system; and performance manager

Table does not include all research/analysis staff in partner organisations – only those most closely associated with the LSP

The table understates 'available' analytical resources in the fieldwork areas; eg, in Lambeth, there were three FTE (full-time equivalent) staff in the PCT (public health analyst; information specialist; and two performance officers) and two (analyst and strategy and performance manager) in the CDRP. Support for the LAA Children and Young People agenda was on another level: in Hull, the local authority and partner organisations had brought analysts together to create one team of about 14, of whom two or three were very highly qualified. In Sheffield, there were around 40 staff on Children and Young People in two teams: on research and analysis, and on performance management.

Budgets

A little under half the LSPs (21) had their own budget for research, monitoring and/or evaluation[128], mainly funded through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). The local authority provided funding in eight cases, and the Primary Care Trust in three. Two had funding through the LAA, one from the police, and one from the Second Homes Fund (created locally from council tax receipts on second homes and used to provide small grants for activities addressing community priorities).

[127] The Home Office provided dedicated funding for CDRP analysts several years ago; this function has since developed, with many CDRPs able to draw on their own analysts as well as analysts in police forces.

[128] Higher for NDCs and NMPs

Some 17 LSPs provided figures for their budgets in the current year (2006-07), totaling £2,029,000 – an average of £119,350 (median £80,000). Two had budgets of £10,000 or less; three between £10,001-49,000, six between £50,000-99,000, four between £100,000-149,000 and three, over £150,000. The fieldwork areas illustrated the extremes of the range.

The combined budgets accounted for 1.4% of the NRF budget for the same areas that year. Percentages of NRF varied from 0.2% to 6%, in the latter case where there was significant IT investment in a local information system.

In three out of four instances where LSPs have a budget, this covers the costs of staffing, research, consultancy and other information services. For half, the costs of IT systems is an item, and subscriptions, for one in seven.

Where partnerships do not control their own purse strings, this does not mean that they may not influence research and evaluation activities undertaken by partners. Coventry Partnership is a good example where partners have sought to embed evaluation practice through requiring evaluation evidence in NRF tendering and providing relevant briefings and skills training.

Budget plans

Responses did not suggest any significant growth in budgets for research, monitoring and evaluation in 2007-08, with the largest proportion (two in five) expecting that their budget would stay the same. Only two expected their budgets to reduce, while six anticipated an increase. Very few interviewees in the fieldwork areas were planning an increase[129].

Analytical skills

Skill needs

Just over half (23) of the LSPs reckon that they tend to 'discover their evidence and skill needs as they go along', and just under a third (16) reckoned that they had insufficient skills or resources to make effective use of data/evidence[130].

Four out of five LSPs (37 out of 45) considered that there were analytical skills needs within their partnership, most notably to the related skills of challenging data/evidence and in selecting indicators and targets (17 of the 37 of partnerships identifying needs) (Figure A.10). The notion of 'challenge' is central to pursuit by partnerships of added value: it is often mentioned in passing (eg, in the context of LSP performance management), but is explored less often in terms of what it means for skills and behaviours[131]. At its heart are skills in assessing the quality of evidence presented, in constructive questioning of partners and in exploring connections – underpinned by cross-cutting knowledge and the

[129] Several fieldwork interviewees and survey respondents mentioned cuts in *training* budgets, affecting their ability to take advantage of workshops and seminars.

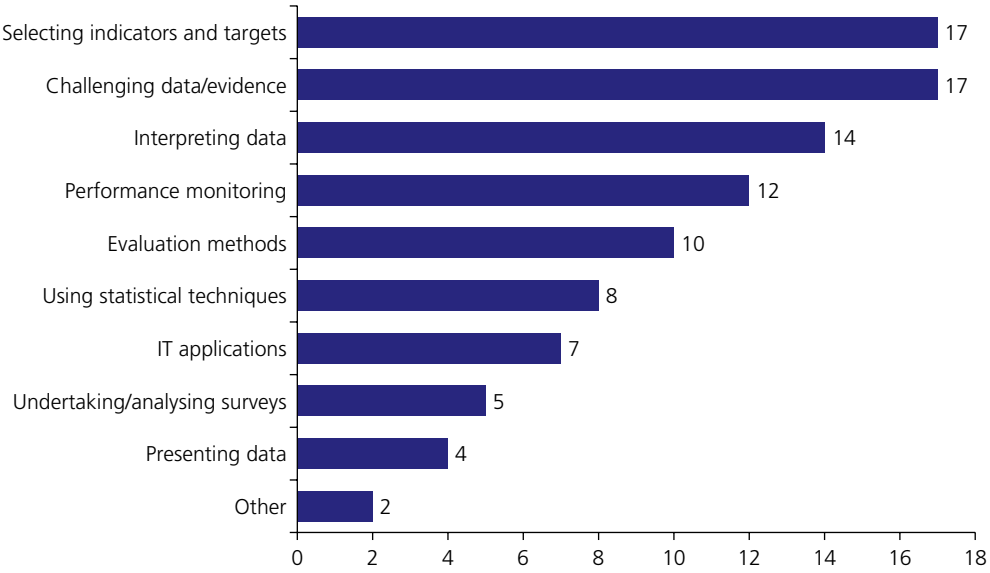
[130] When asked on a scale of agreement

[131] For treatment of 'challenge' skills in a local authority and health context, see the Centre for Public Scrutiny (www.cfps.org.uk/)

confidence to engage in debate and problem solving. Thus equipped, partners can find better solutions and make 'evidence-based policy making' a reality.

These were followed by interpreting data (14 of 37 LSPs) and performance monitoring (12). Technical skills in evaluation (10), using statistical techniques (8), and undertaking/analysing surveys (5) did not rate as highly. Skill needs in IT applications (in 7 LSPs) reflected current needs in developing performance management and Local Information Systems.

Figure A.10: What are the most significant needs for analytical skills within the partnership?



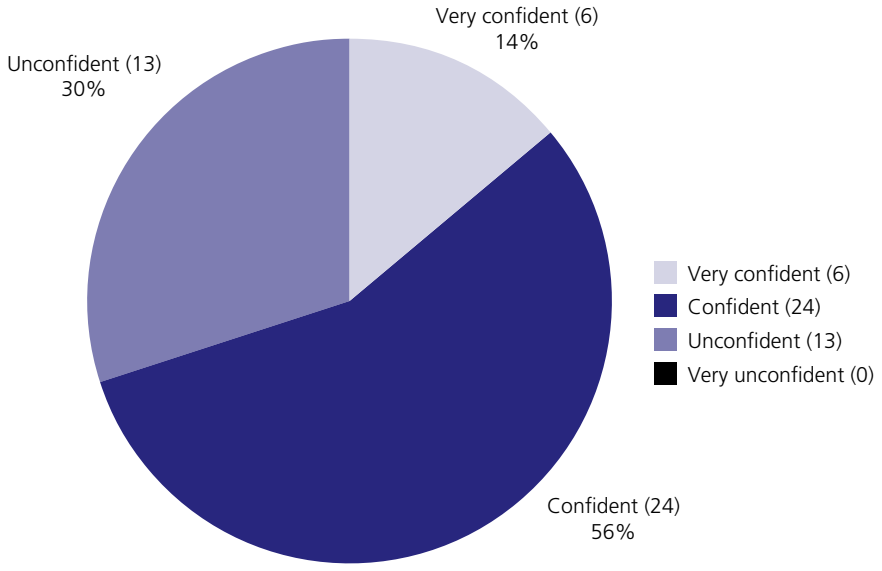
Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding. 37 LSPs stated that there were analytical skills that need to be developed within the partnership

Themes emerging in comments by LSP managers included:

- a) **Analytical capacity** – with widely varying levels reported amongst partners, and a need for uniform approaches
- b) **Skills in interpretation and cross-theme analysis**
- c) **Evaluation**, developing understanding of methods and embedding practice
- d) **Statistical techniques**, eg, in use of multivariate analysis (eg, to consider relationships between family issues, health and learning) and SPSS data analysis software
- e) **Performance management**, eg, in developing better performance measures, and 'refreshing' the LAA, and making new performance management systems work effectively

- f) **Communicating evidence** in convincing ways, especially in ways which make a difference for local residents who are sceptical about agency efforts to turn round deprived neighbourhoods
- g) **IT-related skills**, where a few managers reckoned it difficult to know what IT can do without guidance and/or commented on under-developed use of office software[132].

Figure A.11: Do you feel confident in knowing where to go for external advice and assistance involving data, research and/or analytical skills?



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding

Figure A.11 indicates that seven out of 10 LSP managers are confident in knowing where to go for external advice and assistance involving data, research and/or analytical skills – but this also means that three in 10 are not (on a par with the responses to the Practitioner Survey, though double that for respondents in 'analyst' roles.)

In various ways (eg, in evidence from 'skill gap' questions), the research suggested that this confidence was not necessarily accompanied by in-depth knowledge of the individual sources themselves. While people may be assured in knowing 'someone who can', the experience of the SELD programme and observation of LAA development processes shows that there have been many data access issues which have tripped people up and caused a great deal of work, often duplicated. This has been especially marked for LSPs in seeking appropriate data sources for setting *neighbourhood* targets, which were mandatory for the first generation LAAs covering NRF areas.

[132] The review of Local Information Systems (LISs) for ODPM (Foley et al, 2006), raised a number of development needs amongst LIS managers (relating, eg, to data sharing and securing resources for system sustainability) and amongst users, in how to use the systems effectively (maps and tables, etc) *and* make good use of the data they found.

Impact of skill gaps

Nearly two in five LSP managers reckoned that analytical skill gaps or shortages had hampered partnership performance. When asked to comment on the effects that these gaps had had, the main ones described were:

- slower progress than needed in 'closing the gap' on neighbourhood renewal targets
- longer to determine neighbourhood priorities/targeting – citing, eg, a shortage of capacity to compile neighbourhood profiles; reluctance of some partners to view neighbourhood analysis as important
- improvement efforts undermined
- time costs, eg in gathering reliable, useable and timely data from some partners[133].

Amongst fieldwork interviewees, the proportion reporting adverse impact of skill gaps/shortages was higher, at two thirds – with interviews providing more opportunity to reflect on these issues. That said, several interviewees acknowledged that they *"just did not know"* what effect skill gaps were having, wondering what more might be possible *"if we knew what could be…"*.

Other points raised by interviewees included:

- less understanding and missed opportunities through lack of cross-theme analysis
- "a lot of spinning" allowed to go on, especially in reporting on performance ("The result is that there's a lot less 'bad news' on crime issues than the figures actually show")
- reinforced the bureaucratic inertia amongst the major partners
- little done to date to change delivery or strategies on the basis of hard evidence
- misplaced energy: "There is far too much data, each collected for different targets, and because of this, people tend to spend their time trying to measure progress; the targets seem to be more than a means to the end, people take greater responsibility for targetry than for delivery."

The National Indicator Set for LAAs is a major step forward in addressing this last issue.

Responses to skills and capacity needs

Over half of the LSPs identifying needs (21 out of 40) were acting on these in some way, and a just over a quarter (11) were planning to take steps – leaving a fifth of LSPs where managers recognised needs but were not acting or planning to act on them.

[133] For NDC & NMP, a consequence was also to weaken case for change they could present to mainstream agencies

Examples of actions being taken included:

- recruitment of performance managers/officers and data analysts and/or altering staff roles and responsibilities
- training in performance management systems being introduced by the partnership
- securing greater analyst time from partners for LSP work
- reorganisation within the partnership, typically through new performance management arrangements (eg, formation of an LSP Executive Delivery Group)
- investment in systems (eg, local observatory; information sharing data base)
- skills pooling through joint LSP data team
- ensuring data analyst support for each LSP thematic partnership
- implementing an LSP research and evaluation strategy to pool partner research expertise, evidence and undertake joint research projects, backed up with training and toolkits for evaluation.

A.5 Gaps in provision of advice & assistance, including learning opportunities

Gaps in learning provision

Just under a quarter of LSPs identified gaps in the supply of learning opportunities, and over half were 'don't knows'. (This level of 'don't knows' reflects the marketing experience of the SELD pilots. Fieldwork interviewees – backing up feedback from SELD delivery and stakeholder interviews – provided some evidence of *"we don't know what we don't know"*, with cases, for example, of non-research/analyst staff feeling confident about the data needs and analysis, say, in reporting on performance to the Government Office, but not being aware of what more they could do with the data, to what benefit.

Examples of gaps identified by LSP managers included:

- "evidence and research for LAAs and LSPs"
- "interventions that work"
- effective use of data for performance management
- setting baselines and targets for areas/neighbourhoods
- presenting data, selecting baselines, indicators and targets and trajectory analysis.

There were occasional, generic suggestions about work needed *locally* to build common skills and understanding (eg, *"more cross-sector opportunities to share real information within the local context"*, with the LSP manager concerned noting an intention to address this through an Area Co-ordination approach).

Gaps in learning provision described by practitioners included:

- analysis and interpretation: 12 mentioned gaps relating to analytical skills training *"in general"* or more specifically to interpreting data/statistics. There were suggestions relating to provision for non-professionals, to performance improvement applications, and to needs specific to health
- accessing data – noted by four
- statistical techniques, including
- basic overview/refresh of statistical techniques, *"practical application courses/help"* and updates/recent advances in the application of skills/data for those who have already been trained, but are operating in isolated roles
- use of SPSS or other statistical package (three respondents)
- high quality training on representing and visualising socio-economic data, including GIS techniques
- performance management and evaluation, including:
- *"practical and effective performance management"*, trajectory planning (two cases) and setting targets
- monitoring and evaluation specific to community development/participation.

Concerns were also expressed by Third Sector respondents that there are gaps in research skills training tailored to the needs of Third Sector researchers, and opportunities that are affordable and accessible.

Gaps in sources of external advice and assistance

Over two in five LSP managers (20 of the 45 LSPs) reckoned that there were gaps in sources of external advice/assistance relating to data/evidence that they would like to see filled[134]. Most comments made by LSP managers reiterated or amplified earlier comments relating to data needs (timeliness, coverage, availability at neighbourhood level, and geographical boundaries).

Otherwise, 'gaps' identified included:

- evidence of *impact* in best practice studies which go beyond anecdotal or output analysis
- advice on how and what to measure in less tangible aspects of LAAs, eg, *"stronger communities"*
- a "comprehensive list and objective evaluation on the capabilities of people/groups offering support including NRAs"
- guidance on what should be collected and from whom.

[134] This was the case for less than a quarter of practitioners, amongst whom nearly half responded as 'don't know'.

One related comment from a NMP manager echoed in suggestions in the fieldwork that there is scope to analyse and present information in ways which would save users a great deal of time and reduce duplication across partnerships:

> *"If there is an ideal model why haven't we been issued with it? Why are we all doing our own thing with varying degrees of success? I would have thought a basic template/toolkits which we could customise would have saved us all a lot of pain. Additionally we could have perhaps shared the cost of research, analysis, etc by buying in help for a cluster of projects with all the benefits of sharing good practice and economies of scale."*

Practitioners also raised a range of specific data-related requests, and suggested service gaps in relation to:

- support for establishment of local information systems, and interoperability[135] between local systems and Neighbourhood Statistics
- more effective communication of promising practice elsewhere
- rapid and effective communication of new datasets as they emerge
- more guidance on trajectories.

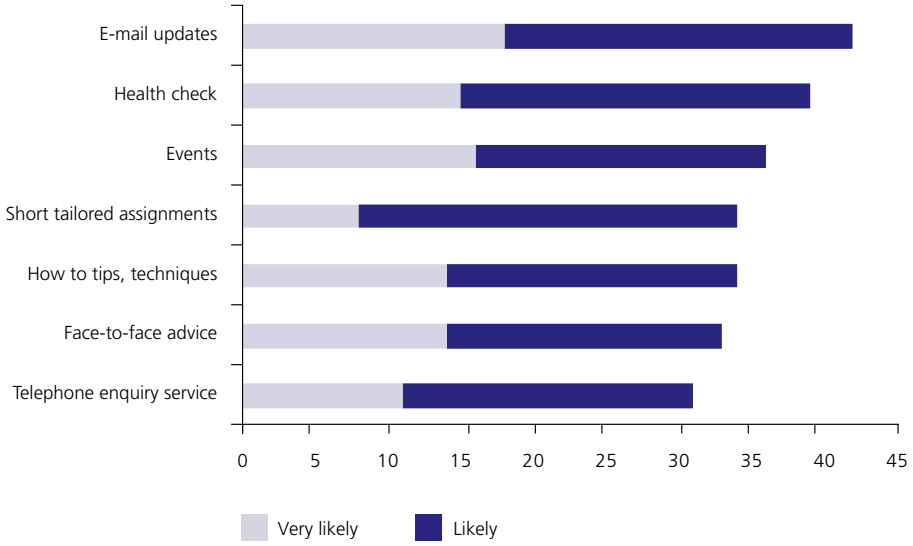
As with gaps in the supply of learning opportunities, suggestions relating to service gaps included some where services *already* exist (eg, *data4nr*).

Likelihood of using forms of external assistance

Responses from LSP managers showed a high level of interest in a range of analytical support services (Figure A.12), with e-mail updates and events being the two 'most likely' to be used.

[135] Interoperability: the ability of two or more systems, or components to exchange information, and to use the information that has been exchanged

Figure A.12: Likelihood of using different forms of external assistance



Based on 45 responses from amongst the 88 Local Strategic Partnerships obtaining neighbourhood renewal funding services suggested were:

- E-mail updates on data and research developments relevant to neoghbourhood renewal and LAAs
- Health check to help your partnership review its use of data/evidence
- Events which help participants develop skills and knowledge in making better use of evidence
- Short assignments tailored to meet your data-related needs
- How to materials, tips and techniques
- Face-to-face advice in helping you to deal with specific needs in sourcing and using data
- Telephone enquiry service on data-related matters

These interests were broadly similar to respondents to the Practitioner Survey and the SELD User Survey. With the exception of 'how to' materials, percentages tended be lower amongst practitioners on each offering, especially for face-to-face advice and the evidence health check. Top three preferences for SELD users were for events, e-mail updates and 'how to' materials.

Appendix B

How we have carried out this project: methods and organisations interviewed

A.6 Summary of how we have carried out this project

Project Stage	Project activities
The demand for information and research	• Identify the drivers from national and regional organisations for local information and research • Identify the range of activities supported by local information and research • Our analysis is based on stakeholder interviews and desk-based research review
Local capacity	• Identify how research and analysis is carried out locally • Summarising the views and priorities of local partners themselves • Our analysis is based on stakeholder interviews
How is local information use supported in local organisations, and how effective is this support?	• Map the range of activities undertaken at local, regional and national level to support local information and research • Identify what systems are used to hold data, and what is the intelligence/analysis capability in the organisation? • Highlight how these activities are linked to local and national goals such as those in the Local Government White Paper • Identify the effectiveness of activities to support local information and research • Our analysis in this Stage is based on stakeholder consultation and desk-based research review
Strengthening the support for local information and research	• Highlight overlaps and synergies between different support initiatives, as well as gaps and possible future developments • Our analysis in this Stage is based on stakeholder consultation and desk-based research review.

A.7 Interviews with local, regional and national partners

Local partner interviews

For the project, we interviewed a representative sample of local partners, rather than focusing just on the 'usual suspects' known to be leading the field.

Using an approach developed for the Statistics Commission, Local Authorities in England were classified by type (London Borough, Metropolitan, Unitary, District, County). Four areas were sampled from each category, using a random start point, giving 20 in all. We then cross-referenced the sample using the National Statistics 2001 Census classification at the Supergroup level, which identifies 8 different types of area[136]. The final sample of 20 local partners was agreed with the Communities and Local Government, with the aim of achieving at least 15 interviews.

We aimed to carry out interviews with individuals in the partnership with the broadest view on the local research and policy context – and likely (although this was not always the case) to be linked to the LAA development work. Initial telephone and email contact was made with the following groups to identify the most appropriate individuals to interview:

- Research and consultation; research and intelligence teams
- Performance management team
- Local Information System managers
- Local Strategic Partnership co-ordinators.

[136] Details of the classification are available at: www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/area_classification/la/default.asp

People from the following 16 local organisations were interviewed:

Organisation	Interviewees
Cheshire County Council	• Gordon Hamilton
Chichester District Council	• Joe Mildred
Coventry City Council	• Helen Shankster • Jenni Venn • Myles Mackie
Hartlepool Borough Council	• Liz Crookston • John Potts
Leeds City Council	• Jackie Pruckner • Martyn Stenton
Leicester City Council	• Adam Archer • Rachel Clarke • Mark Prosser
London Borough of Greenwich	• Peter Savage • Graham Verge • Alex Wood
London Borough of Islington	• Frances Schmocker • Melissa Silvester • Alistair Smith • Robin Hall
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	• Wyn Williams
Newcastle City Council	• Kevin Richardson
Norfolk Data Observatory	• Wendy Pontin
Ryedale District Council	• Phil Hancock
Southampton City Council	• Dennis Gamblin • Joy Wilmot-Palmer
Staffordshire County Council	• Jonathan Adamson • Amanda Turner • Ada Wells
Watford District Council	• Sue Bottomley
Wigan Council	• Steve Lyon

National and regional organisation interviews

As with the local partner interviews, we conduct in-depth interviews with a series of national and regional organisations. The organisation list was agreed with the project steering group, and was made up of the following organisations and individuals:

Organisation	Interviewees
Audit Commission	• Graham Smith • Tom Wraith
Communities and Local Government	• Hamish McGillivray • Sharna Quirke • Angela Ruotolo • Richard Blyth
Greater London Authority (Data Management and Analysis Group, DMAG)	• James Gleeson • John Hollis
Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)	• Alison Kilburn • Margaret McAvoy
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	• Sharon Jones
Department of Health (DH)	• Katie Enock
Government Offices for the English Regions	• James Thomson
Home Office	• Penny Babb • Chris Kershaw
Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA)	• Adrian Barker
Local Government Analysis and Research	• Tim Allen • Jo Dungey • Juliet Whitworth
NOMIS	• Sinclair Sutherland
North East Regional Information Partnership (NERIP)	• Jon Carling • Philip Edwards • Ian Gouldson
North West Improvement Network	• Dennis Artess
Office for National Statistics (ONS)	• Judith Jones • Dev Virdee
Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU)	• Carys Alty
South East England Intelligence Network (SEE-IN)	• Phil Eadie
South East Public Health Observatory (SEPHO)	• Alison Hill
University of Oxford	• Teresa Smith

Topic guides

The interviews were semi-structured using topic guides – see below for the topic guide for national and regional partners, and the separate topic guide for local partners.

A.8 Desk-based research

Policy literature research

We have carried out additional policy literature research to complement the stakeholder interviews highlighted above.

Bringing in evidence from previous work – the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation

The national Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery research and evaluation project reviewed how the programme was delivered, and assessed the impact of the four pilots and the programme as a whole. It researched analytical skills for neighbourhood renewal and LAAs, in particular seeking to clarify the nature and extent of skill gaps and shortages, and reviewing analytical resources available to partnerships[137].

Research evidence from the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery evaluation project included surveys of all Renewal.net and Neighbourhood Statistics users, as well as fieldwork with a number of Local Strategic Partnerships. As part of this project we have carried out a re-assessment of the survey evidence from the evaluation project, drawing out relevant implications. This analysis is summarised in Appendix A.

A.9 Topic guide – National and regional organisations

Supporting local research and analysis: Understanding demand and improving capacity: Topic Guide – National/Regional Partners

About the project

This project is intended to increase understanding of the ways in which councils and partners use local information and research. It will help national and regional organisations improve and strengthen their support to local partners, and help inform strategic policy making in areas relating to local economic renewal and regeneration. Preliminary findings are planned to be completed by Spring 2008. The project has been commissioned by Communities and Local Government in partnership with the LGA and Audit Commission, and funded by Communities and Local Government.

This project has a wider scope than just statutory indicators. We are interested in a range of information and analysis, including for example: performance reporting requirements; local partners wanting to improve service delivery through better understanding of local needs and 'customer intelligence'; development of LAA (indicators and targets); economic development, including local economic assessment; reporting to citizens; and others.

[137] For Key Findings, see www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/seld/

About this guide

This topic guide covers the ground we would like to discuss with you. *It is NOT a questionnaire – we will explore these issues in our discussion.*

A) Organisation/structure

Your role

Your units' position within your organisation, and your contact with local partnerships.

B) The demand for research and analysis (in the last 12 months)

We are keen to understand the main factors driving the needs for information and analysis from local partners (see above for examples of the range of information and analysis we are interested in).

- What do you see as the most important current/future developments driving demand for local research and analysis? For example, what do you anticipate as different in the evidence demands from the ongoing LAA development process, or the CAA?

(For those organisations asking local partners for information and analysis)

- Please think about how your organisation asks local partners to provide information and analysis.
- What information are you looking for?
- Why – for what purpose? Was this mandatory?
- Was this a one-off request, or regularly repeated? What was driving the timetable? (eg statutory returns, LAA refresh timetable etc)
- Was information required for specific geographies (LA or local neighbourhood?), or groups?
- Was there readily available relevant locally-collected data (eg performance information) or national data (eg from Neighbourhood Statistics or Audit Commission Area Profiles)?
- Did you ask for detailed analysis and interpretation, or a few selected numbers?

C) Local capacity: How is research and analysis carried out locally?

- *Overall capacity*: In your view, how well do local partners cope with the demands for information and analysis identified above?
- How has local *capacity been strengthened to meet research demands*, eg from the LAA development process?
- What are the main *factors hindering better use of evidence and research*?

D) How do regional and national organisations support local research and analysis?

We are keen to identify what support is provided to local partners, for example services, funding, resources, advice and so on. We also want to highlight how effective this support is, and how national and regional organisations could better support local research and analysis.

- What *support* do you provide to improve local research and analysis capacity? What other support are you aware of from national/regional organisations (see # below for some prompts)
- Can you provide any examples *where this support has made a significant difference to local partner work*, leading to improved strategies and/or service delivery?
- What do you see as the main *gaps in national and regional support*? What do you see as the priorities for improving this support for national and regional organisations?
- (for those organisations providing support) What are your *plans for improving support* – and how are these linked to anticipated future changes in the demand for information (see Section B above)?

 # Examples of support provided by national and regional organisations include:

- Development of nationally comprehensive datasets, eg population and Census data from ONS, benefits data from DWP
- 'one-stop-shops' for existing data and research, such as Neighbourhood Statistics, NOMIS, Area Profiles, Renewal.net, IDeA, Regional Observatories etc
- The role of the regional ONS statisticians and other Government Office analysis teams
- Carrying out locally-relevant research on topics such as population migration
- Supporting development of local technical systems, such as the network of Local Information Systems
- Work to develop better ways of sharing and exchanging data, such as the pilot for information exchange ('PIE')
- Other means of building analytical capacity, eg through workshops and seminars

Thank you for your help

A.10 Topic guide – Local partner organisations

About the project

This project is intended to increase understanding of the ways in which councils and partners use local information. It will help national organisations improve and strengthen their support to local partners, and help inform strategic policy making in areas relating to local economic renewal and regeneration. Preliminary findings are planned to be completed by Spring 2008. The project has been commissioned by Communities and Local Government in partnership with the LGA and Audit Commission, and funded by Communities and Local Government.

About this guide

This topic guide covers the ground we would like to discuss with you. *It is NOT a questionnaire – we will explore these issues in our discussion*.

A) Organisation/structure

- Your role
- Your units' position within the local partnership
- Who else provides information and analysis within the local partnership?

B) The demand for research and analysis (in the last 12 months)

We are keen to understand the main factors driving your needs for local information and analysis.

We are interested in a range of demands for information, including: performance reporting requirements (both locally, and to central government); local partners wanting to improve service delivery through better understanding of local needs and 'customer intelligence'; development of LAA (indicators and targets); economic development, including local economic assessment; reporting to citizens; and others.

Please think about the time you have spent responding to requests from all sources in the last 12 months, including colleagues, councillors, the public, central and regional government, or other organisations (please think first about the requests that you have spent the most time on).

- Who was seeking information?
- Why – for what purpose?
- What information were they looking for?
- Was this a one-off request, or regularly repeated? What was driving the timetable? (eg statutory returns, LAA refresh timetable etc)
- Was information required for specific geographies (LA or local neighbourhood?), or groups?

- Was there readily available relevant locally-collected data (eg performance information) or national data (eg from Neighbourhood Statistics or Audit Commission Area Profiles)? If not, did you develop your own data sources or proxy measures (how did you go about this, and what if any were the problems?)
- Did you need to provide detailed analysis and interpretation, or a few selected numbers?
- How much time was involved?
- Were there any difficulties in responding to the request?
- Were there areas where you needed to commission external research?
- What do you see as the most important current/future developments driving demand for local research and analysis? For example, what do you anticipate as different in the evidence demands from the ongoing LAA development process, or the CAA?

C) Local capacity: How is research and analysis carried out locally?

We would like to understand how research and analysis is supported within the local partnership, for example through the local authority's central Research and Intelligence unit or partnership data team. We would also like to understand your priorities for improving local capacity.

- What are your own *staff resources*? Does the LA have a budget for research, monitoring and evaluation? Does the local partnership have a (separate) research budget?
- *Finding data*: Where do you look for information? (in-house or Local Strategic Partnership systems, Neighbourhood Statistics, other LA or Local Strategic Partnership systems, Regional Observatories, etc).
- *Sharing data*: Are local partners good at sharing data? Is there good understanding of the legal issues? Do you have data sharing protocols that local partners have signed up to?
- *Analytical capacity*: What are your research and analysis resources. For example, who would carry out work on identifying realistic and stretching targets underpinning the LAA?
- *Technical systems*: Do you have a Local Information System/Data Observatory? Does this system hold locally-developed data, or only nationally-published information? Do you use a central performance reporting system (is this accessible to all partners)? Is the performance system linked to the Local Information System? How well do you think these system(s) support partners locally?
- *Anticipating demand* for local information and research: Are you able to publish standard reports (paper or web) that anticipate some demands, or is most work in response to specific requests?

- *Overall capacity*: In your view, how well do local partners cope with the demands for information and analysis identified above? How has local capacity been strengthened to meet research demands, eg from the LAA development process?
- What are the main *factors hindering better use of evidence and research*?
- What are the *priority needs for improving local use of evidence and research*? (eg better data, better analytic capacity, etc)? What are your plans for strengthening capacity – and how are these linked to anticipated future changes in the demand for information (see Section B above)?
- *Priorities for strengthening local research and analysis capacity*: Suppose in an ideal world there was funding available through the LAA for strengthening research and intelligence activity, what would be your priorities in spending this? If you had £50,000? If you had £100,000?

D) How do regional and national organisations support local research and analysis?

We are keen to identify what support you receive from national and regional organisations, for example services, funding, resources, advice and so on. We also want to highlight how effective this support is, and how national and regional organisations could better support local research and analysis.

How useful do you find the following support provided by national and regional organisations to help local research and analysis:

- Development of nationally comprehensive datasets, eg population and Census data from ONS, benefits data from DWP
- 'one-stop-shops' for existing data and research, such as Neighbourhood Statistics, NOMIS, Area Profiles, Renewal.net, IDeA, Regional Observatories etc
- The role of the regional ONS statisticians and other Government Office analysis teams
- Carrying out locally-relevant research on topics such as population migration
- Supporting development of local technical systems, such as the network of Local Info Systems
- Work to develop better ways of sharing and exchanging data, such as the pilot for information exchange ('PIE')
- Other areas of support?
- Can you provide any examples where this support has made a significant difference to your work, leading to improved strategies and/or service delivery?
- What do you see as the main gaps in national and regional support? What do you see as the *priorities for improving this support*?

Thank you for your help

Appendix C

Acknowledgements

Name	Organisation	Role
Jonathan Adamson	Staffordshire County Council	Principal Research and Intelligence Officer (Corporate Review)
Tim Allen	Local Government Analysis and Research	Director
Carys Alty	Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU), Analytical Capability Team (ACT)	Knowledge Management and Analytical Capability Consultant
Adam Archer	Leicester City Council	Special Projects lead, Partnership Executive Team
Dennis Artess	North West Improvement Network	Manager
Penny Babb	Home Office	Section Head – Recorded Crime Statistics
Adrian Barker	Improvement and Development Agency for local government	Policy Manager
Richard Blyth	Communities and Local Government Local Development Framework/Planning	Local Development Framework Team Leader
Sue Bottomley	Watford District Council	Head of Strategic Services
Jon Carling	North East Regional Information Partnership (Regional Observatory)	Head of NERIP
Rachel Clarke	Leicester City Council	Consultation and community engagement
Liz Crookston	Hartlepool Borough Council	Principal Research and Strategy Officer
Jo Dungey	Local Government Analysis and Research	Policy Officer
Phil Eadie	Association of Regional Observatories/South East England Intelligence Network	Chair ARO, Head of SEE-IN

Name	Organisation	Role
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Katie Enock	Department of Health	Consultant in Public Health (Head of capacity and capability)
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Chris Kershaw	Home Office	Head of Policing Statistics
Alison Kilburn	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform	Deputy Director – Economics and Regions
Steve Lyon	Wigan Council	Partnerships and Performance Support Officer
Margaret McAvoy	Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)	Deputy Director, Regions Directorate
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Name	Organisation	Role
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John Potts	Hartlepool Borough Council	Principal Policy Officer, Community Strategy Team
Wendy Pontin	Norfolk Data Observatory	Head
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Kevin Richardson	Newcastle City Council	Senior Corporate Policy Manager
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Name	Organisation	Role
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Ada Wells	Staffordshire County Council	Head of Research (Dev. Services)
Juliet Whitworth	Local Government Analysis and Research	Head of Commissioning and Research
Joy Wilmot-Palmer	Southampton City Council	Head of Corporate Policy and Performance
Wyn Williams	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames	Head of Business Consultancy
Alex Wood	London Borough of Greenwich	Principal Research and Stats Officer
Tom Wraith	Audit Commission	Performance Information Development Manager

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