

Developing place-aware intelligence repositories for Scotland's local authorities and partnerships: Improving the process of policy formulation, resource planning, performance monitoring and data sharing

December 2007

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Originally based on a paper for AGI Scotland Annual Conference Nov 2007

Background

The last 5 years has seen an explosion in the published volume and usage of statistics and indicators, many of which are now available at high levels of spatial granularity. The days of organisations relying on data at the aggregated level of their administrative area are fast fading. There is growing recognition that geography is a critical data dimension. Spatial patterns of variability in relation to inequality or targeted 'hotspots' are now widely acknowledged in addressing areas of policy, planning and evaluation across almost all sectors of public service delivery.

The policy process in local government is now increasingly being driven at locality level, fuelled by the ability to profile communities and target more effective interventions. The work of Community Planning Partnerships, which previously agreed strategic objectives at authority level, is now being replaced by greater inter-agency cooperation at locality level. For example, in West Lothian the Police have reorganised their beat boundaries to match the locality planning areas - based on the new multi-member wards, and there is joint work ongoing to address community safety issues. In other areas such as health, the creation of data at small area level is more problematic as there are real concerns about confidentiality.

There is a new focus on moving away from piecemeal (often short term) funding based on a variety of different initiatives towards longer term funding based on more integrated services which can achieve real outcomes at a local level. This is driving forward the requirement both to identify the key issues / behaviours which impact on outcomes and also identify and obtain relevant small area data which can be used to target interventions and review progress of driving forward change.

However, this is a work in progress and whilst great strides are being made in collecting data, the challenge now lies in creating the context, agreeing baselines & targets and using the data effectively. Scottish government seminars like that which took place on 6th Nov 2007 entitled 'Using Small Area Statistics to Develop Public Policy' are the latest positive moves in this direction.

Local information: a key evidence base

A wide range of factors contribute to the process of decision-making. These include personal values, political opinions, professional judgement and past experience. These factors will continue to be important and their significance may be under-valued. However, over the last 5 years, 'evidence-based' policy and practice has become an ever more widely used term across government to the extent where it now appears to be a corner-stone of 'best practice' guidance. DEFRA define evidence as any information that can turn its policy goals into something concrete, achievable and manageable. It can take many forms: statistical data, scientific knowledge, research, analysis of

stakeholder opinion, economic and statistical modeling, public perceptions and beliefs, anecdotal evidence, and cost / benefit analyses (Source: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/science/how/evidence.htm>).

We can think of data about localities, made available in a suitable form, as a key ingredient of 'hard facts and figures' to contribute to this melting pot of evidence. It needs to be delivered in such a way that evidence-based decision-makers find it of value – this relies not only on understanding their requirements and effective forms of communication but also a culture and process of decision-making that takes account of it.

Local Information Systems

What is a Local Information System (LIS)? Many local authorities and local partnerships now support web based systems to store, analyse and present locally and nationally held data sets down to small area level. Their main focus is to provide an place-based evidence base for local decision makers to target resources and services. They provide a wide range of data allowing anyone wanting to build a picture of localities and neighbourhoods within their area. Local level organisations can bring together and share their own data thus enabling, potentially for the first time, a wide range of indicators to be made available across the partnership. Information products can be built which combine locally and nationally available data into more meaningful intelligence aimed at specific user groups.

Local information systems can be used to enhance performance at all stages of the policy design, operational delivery and monitoring process (see Figure 1).

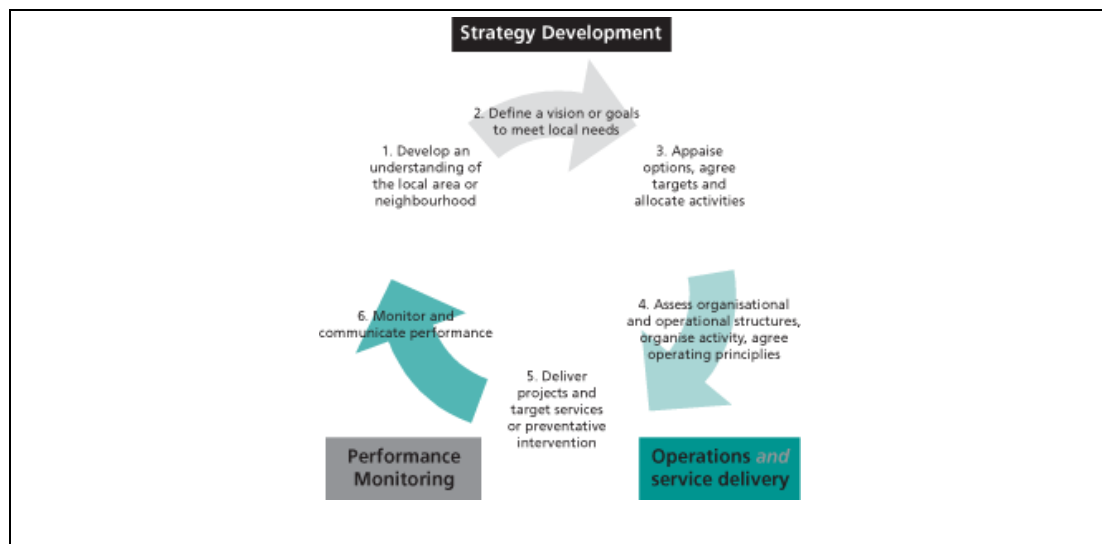


Figure 1: The role of information in the policy design and delivery process

Source: DCLG LIS report <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1508580>.

Local Information Systems: Background

Key high level benefits

1. Provision of a self-service, partnership wide resource of definitive, trusted facts and figures about places to be used by specialists (analysts, researchers etc) and non-specialists – this reduces the 'answering simple, everyday questions burden' for an intelligence unit, leads to better more informed questions when they do arise and overcomes the key problem, highlighted in the CitiStat evaluation report, of different depts. and organisations working from different information bases.
2. Enables organisations across a partnership to free up access to a range of key local (and national) data through a single access channel
3. Platform to allow partners to exchange sensitive and non-sensitive data resources
4. Streamlines the widespread activity of place-based reporting, for example ward based area profiles
5. Tools and content that put intelligence at the fingertips of many different users for purposes such as (a) strategic planning – a factual evidence base to act as a baseline of outcomes to assess impact of policies and shape new policy design; (b) operational practice such as locality and service planning; and (c) performance audit, monitoring and benchmarking of outcomes down to neighbourhood scales
6. Data management repository for holding geo-demographic classification data now becoming widely used for improved customer segmentation
7. Channel for delivering a range of useful information on local areas to external users like students, businesses community groups and citizens – this addresses information gaps or inaccuracies (eg. exaggerated fear of crime) and leads to a more informed and empowered community and therefore stronger local democratic processes

Target User Groups

1. Public sector service managers and policy-makers: who need to understand the nature of local communities and the impact of initiatives in order to deliver high quality, customer-focused services.
2. Partnership officers: who require comparable information from partner organisations to support the development of local and sub-regional partnership plans, strategies and targets.
3. Elected members: who would like to be informed about local initiatives and identify how services are performing in their area compared to neighbouring areas.
4. Voluntary and community sector workers: who require local evidence for funding applications and to help them target their services effectively.
5. Businesses: who require a range of demographic and socio-economic information about areas in which they are planning to set up, expand or invest.
6. Citizens: who require information about the area in which they live or are planning to move into.
7. Researchers/analysts: who require a wide range of qualitative and quantitative information for profiling work and the completion of local projects and studies.
8. Students: who require basic information, charts and maps for project work and research.

Local Intelligence Services

LIS are usually one component of a set of services built around delivery of shared intelligence. The recent DCLG LIS report suggests that the most successful LIS sites are those which are complemented by a range of services. Examples of services that a Shared Intelligence Unit, potentially linked to the partnership rather than a specific organisation, can provide include:

1. Expert telephone 'Help Line' for providing advice on local intelligence and data issues
2. One-to-one face-to-face advice as required
3. Establish protocols and organizational framework for cross-partnership data exchange
4. Processing/cleaning/geo-coding/exchanging data
5. Bureau service for one-off requests for data or outputs (eg. custom maps)
6. Forum for improving understanding of user needs and targeting them with outputs
7. Bespoke analysis / research and report production on key issues
8. Production of regular Policy Briefing reports and annual a 'State of Area' report
9. Production of regular ward profile bulletins for elected members
10. Promotion and training activities including specific sessions for use of the LIS and more general sessions on use/application of local intelligence in decision-making
11. Maintain a wider 'intelligence section' of the observatory
12. Contribute to strategy development and performance reporting as information experts

Data

The range of data managed within a LIS can be wide and classified in many different ways. Most common is some form of domain specific classification where indicators are grouped into top level categories like 'Demography', 'Health and Welfare', 'Crime and Community Safety', 'Education and Childrens Services', 'Environment' and 'Economy'. There may also be cross-cutting themes such as 'Performance' and 'Social Disadvantage'. Key government data sources include Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics, Dept for Work and Pensions, NOMIS, Audit Scotland and ISD (NHS Scotland). However the value of LIS is their ability to combine national data with local data available from a wide range of internal business systems including those of partners. This local data is often not provided to central government and, even when it is, it tends to be in an aggregated form or only provided infrequently or both.

The National Perspective

The public availability of Census data through SCROL (Scottish Census Results Online) in 2003, marked a significant advancement in the availability of local data to the lay user.

In 2004, Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS), like its southern sister ONS Neighbourhood Statistics, was fundamental to revolutionising the landscape yet further. It represents a significant commitment by the Scottish Executive to an on-going programme to improve the availability, consistency and accessibility of small area statistics in Scotland. The uniquely Scottish work of the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) in maintaining a definitive set of postcode, administrative, and census geographic look-up tables facilitated the work by Professor Robin Flowerdew at St Andrews University to create the first national, generic, statistical small area geography – the Data Zone. This now offers us a primary spatial building block for publishing statistics – a key dependency to progressing a spatial data infrastructure highlighted in INSPIRE.

The SNS web site has become a vital data channel to Community Planning Partnerships and public sector agencies across Scotland where the availability of up-to-date high quality information is crucial to the way in which services are delivered and issues of local concern are addressed. In some respects it demonstrates an operationally successful, application-specific data exchange model. Responsibility for data maintenance is devolved to data custodians who manage updates in line with nationally agreed standards. Tools are provided for data to be exchanged in a neutral form (XML). The site in fact demonstrates many of the characteristics of a national Spatial Data Infrastructure.

Also in 2004, the Public Health Institute of Scotland (PHIS) (now Scottish Public Health Observatory www.scotpho.org.uk) nurtured a growing appetite for local profiles through their publication of Community Health and Wellbeing Profiles at both LHCC (Local Health Care Co-operative) and postcode sector level. However, it is only now in 2007 that consideration is being given to updating these profiles, although there is a debate about whether this should be at CHP (Community Health Partnership) or Data Zone level.

The Scottish Indices of Deprivation, produced at ward level in 2003, and Data Zone level in 2004 and 2006, have been instrumental in encouraging policy-makers to focus their attention on area-based approaches to tackling deprivation. The fact that the Index is being used as a basis for the allocation of resources to local authorities across a number of policy areas, for example, the Community Regeneration Fund, has also fed the appetite for appropriate local intelligence to identify priorities and report on progress against outcomes. This focus on the geography of deprivation has perhaps been to the detriment of communities of interest or thematic approaches.

The Local Perspective

The rapid growth in small area statistics availability has been accompanied by a gradual shift towards more evidence-based policy and decision-making. There has been the critical realisation that some problems can be addressed most efficiently by targeting resources at specific areas where there is most need. In England this has led to a rapid rise in the abundance of Local Information Systems (LIS) particularly within local authorities and Local Strategic Partnerships. This development has been

enthusiastically supported by ODPM, now DCLG, particularly under the 'neighbourhood renewal' banner. A national research project was funded to identify examples and disseminate best practice – this reported in 2004. A follow-on initiative is currently on-going through a DCLG Information Management Programme with regular national LIS meetings and a dedicated LIS forum at www.esd.org.uk. DCLG's role as a catalyst in this area is re-enforced through its provision of Neighbourhood Renewal Funds (NRF) to those authorities considered in greatest need. In most of these authorities some of this funding has been used for LIS development. To date over 70 per cent of English top tier authorities now have some form of LIS according to DCLG. In Scotland the equivalent figure is likely to be significantly lower.

Relevant Scottish government reports on effective partnership working and intelligence sharing

(1) *"By recognising the unique part each partner has to play in the Community Regeneration agenda and working towards generating a local evidence base for action planning, partnerships can work to support and develop healthier stronger communities."* Source: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/health-improvement/health/community-regeneration/community-regeneration-community-planning-partnerships.html>

(2) *"Information sharing is essential to the success of Community Planning and better joint working between agencies for the benefit of customers and citizens. Such information may include quantitative information such as aggregated and analysed statistical data and qualitative information gained from research."*

Advice Notes to Community Planning Partnerships by the Scottish Executive on 'Information Sharing', 'Performance Monitoring and Management' and 'Effective Partnership Working' (March 2004) at <http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19167/35264>

(3) *"A key implication [of this report] is the need for making improvements to information systems to support efficient data provision and analysis."*

"Many organisations are data rich, yet knowledge poor; the information is not used to full effect for performance improvement."

"Many of the actions requested by CitiStat related to the provision of new or different data to refine or improve the data available. This produced better information on inputs and outputs."

"The data analysis process has been shown to be crucial to the effectiveness of the CitiStat Panel.. the Panel became more intelligent and more educated and started asking more pertinent questions.. The panels have provided the impetus and identification of priority areas for change. The model has been used to tackle 'hot spots', or areas where there are agreed localised issues or problems that require urgent action.."

"..it may be that by tackling a series of hot spots in some kind of priority order, that respective partners may be brought more readily into the process over time as the data may illustrate graphically to each partner their specific locus on the problem and underline the urgency of tackling it." Source: **What do we measure and why? An evaluation of the CitiStat Model of performance management and its applicability to the Scottish Public Sector** by Scottish Executive Social Research 2006.

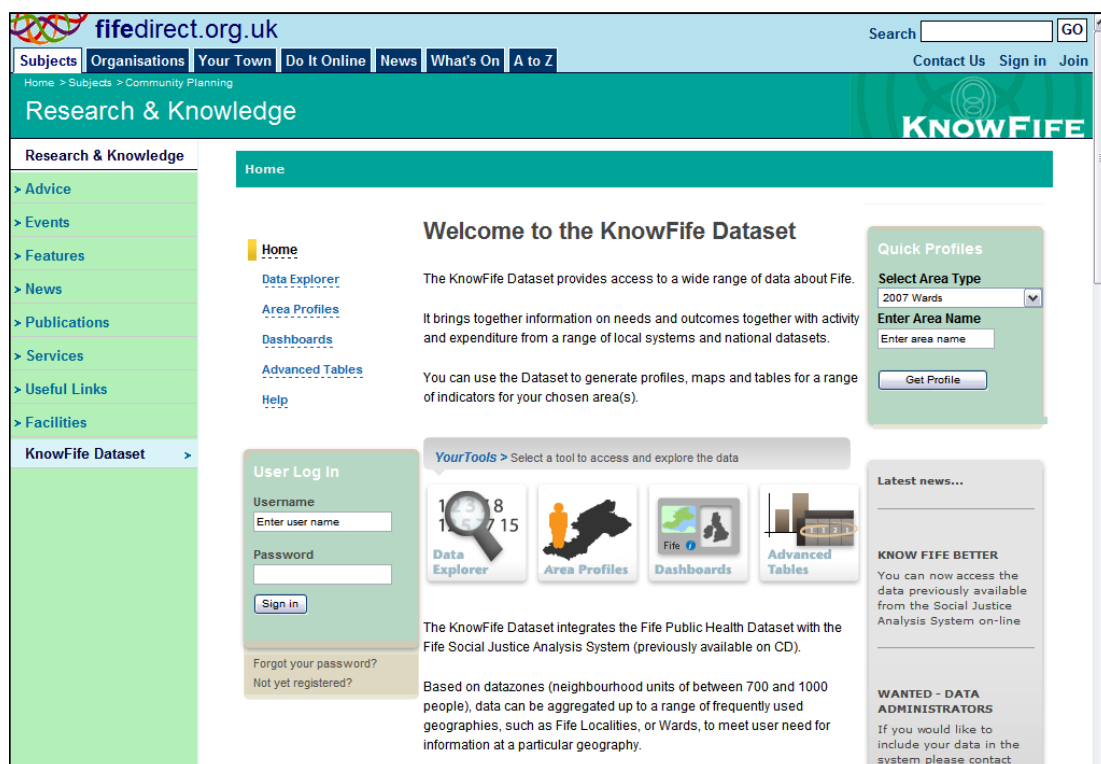
(4) The **Transforming Public Services** report (June 2006) by the Scottish Executive includes a great deal of support for this type of information sharing agenda within CPPs – see <http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/15110925/0> . However it is short on detail about how it would be achieved and talks about existing programmes such as eCare and Openscotland Information Age Framework which are not specific to this business area.

(5) Report on **Public Sector Reform**: integrated service delivery and governance reform by Scottish Executive (March 2007) at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/26092929/0>. **The recent report Improving Health and Wellbeing: developing an integrated approach through community planning** (Nov 2007) stresses the need for a CPP based process with a foundation of shared intelligence in order to have a baseline of local evidence. Source: <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/health-improvement/health/community-planning-partnership-consultancy/cpp-consultancy-work-reports.html>

Local Intelligence: Scottish Context

So what is happening in Scotland? Certainly this type of work is starting to happen although in a rather more ad hoc manner. Two examples, supported primarily through the Community Planning Partnership model, are described below. Fife and West Lothian have both recognised the value of a shared local intelligence base that provides all stakeholders with access to a single definitive evidence-base of facts and figures. The factors that led to the development of these two projects do vary as do their respective approaches to development. Both though share the common goal of delivering many of the benefits described above.

KnowFife Dataset (www.fifedirect.org.uk/knowfifedataset)



The screenshot shows the KnowFife Dataset home page. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for Subjects, Organisations, Your Town, Do It Online, News, What's On, and A to Z. The main header is 'Research & Knowledge' with the 'KNOWFIFE' logo. A left sidebar contains a 'Research & Knowledge' menu with sub-items: Advice, Events, Features, News, Publications, Services, Useful Links, Facilities, and KnowFife Dataset (highlighted). The main content area has a 'Home' section with links to Data Explorer, Area Profiles, Dashboards, Advanced Tables, and Help. A 'Welcome to the KnowFife Dataset' section explains that it provides access to a wide range of data about Fife, bringing together information on needs and outcomes with activity and expenditure from local systems and national datasets. It also states that users can generate profiles, maps, and tables for a range of indicators. Below this is a 'YourTools' section with icons for Data Explorer, Area Profiles, Dashboards, and Advanced Tables. A 'User Log In' form is present with fields for Username and Password, and a 'Sign In' button. There are also links for 'Forgot your password?' and 'Not yet registered?'. A 'Quick Profiles' section includes a 'Select Area Type' dropdown (set to '2007 Wards'), an 'Enter Area Name' input field, and a 'Get Profile' button. A 'Latest news...' section is partially visible. At the bottom, there is a 'KNOW FIFE BETTER' section stating that users can now access data previously available from the Social Justice Analysis System on-line, and a 'WANTED - DATA ADMINISTRATORS' section asking for contact if users want to include their data in the system.

Figure 2. The KnowFife Dataset home page

Fife has a long history of partnership working and sharing information including the State of Fife Index and the Fife Public Health Dataset. An essential ingredient for this work has been a common geographic boundary shared by all partner agencies which has made it a great deal easier to focus and deliver services for the people of Fife rather than from a particular organisational perspective.

The introduction of multi-member wards in May 2007 have reinvigorated debate about local decision-making informed by local intelligence. The 23 new multi-member wards for Fife build on a decentralised local structure which has been in place for several years. What is new is that we now have 7 area committees which are based on groupings of multi-member wards, which aim to take decision-making process closer to local communities (double devolution). Local profiles have helped to inform the early

discussions of elected member about local issues and priorities, and to confirm and challenge local perceptions.

The “KnowFife Dataset”, Fife’s LIS, provides a one-stop web-based information resource for partners and the public in Fife, in support of both the strategic information needs of Fife’s Community Plan and the local information requirements of its citizens.

This was developed through the Community Budgeting initiative, where Fife piloted a number of approaches to better information for better local decision-making and better community involvement. The objectives were to

- Improve co-ordination and planning of service delivery at a local level between Partners through use of common information at common geographic areas,
- Drive the wider approach to local Community planning within Fife
- Increase understanding of service delivery and budget decisions by Customers, Citizens, Stakeholders and partners
- Increase participation by citizens involved with project in service and budget delivery and democratic participation
- Develop a Community Planning and Budgeting Database used by all Community Planning Partners, to collate relevant financial, performance, management and area/customer profiling information

Under the umbrella of Fife Partnership, KnowFife Dataset is used to publish data for Fife from a range of agencies. Users can access data through thematic profiles, and interactive maps, and can also create their own tables, maps and charts based on particular areas/data of interest. The resource includes information on population, the economy, education skills and training, health and well-being, the environment, community safety, levels of public spending and other themes.

Content is sourced both from national data sets as well as local partnership members: Fife Council, NHS Fife, Fife Constabulary, Fife Fire and Rescue Service, Scottish Enterprise, and Fife’s Colleges. Like SNS, partners responsibility for data maintenance can be devolved so local partners maintain their own data using web-based tools.

Benefits to Fife

Coryn Barclay is policy officer with Fife Council and is today responsible for the KnowFife Dataset. “Today, each member organisation of the Fife Partnership seeks information from KnowFife and, critically, each is responsible also for uploading information,” said Barclay. “It has enabled us to break down information access barriers through creating a sharing culture based on reciprocal benefits. It works well.”

A great strength of the KnowFife Dataset is the flexible range of local geographies within the system. Data is loaded to the system at Data Zone level but through a combination of aggregation and apportionment can be built up to a variety of geographies to meet user needs for targeted local geographies.

It is also unique in the inclusion of expenditure data alongside needs, outcomes and service activity data. This is still being developed but will help us to address the question not just about where the need is, but who benefits from what is being spent.

“In KnowFife, Agencies and citizens now have a central, consistent and trusted repository for definitive Fife data. This helps us deliver a highly valued and increasingly

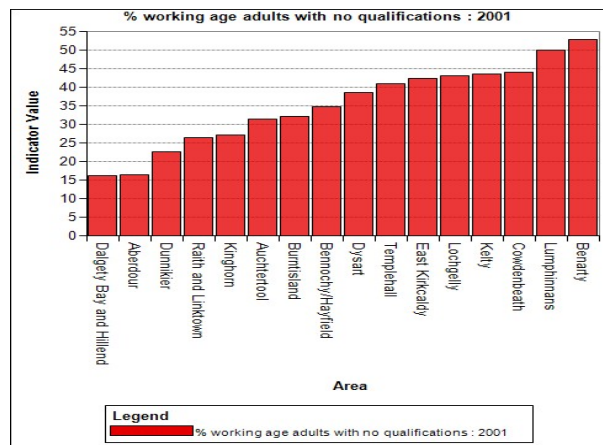
popular service supporting the information needs of decision makers involved in the Fife Community Plan and serving the needs of our citizen users. It also offers a valuable platform for meeting our responsibilities under the Freedom of Information legislation.

This self-service approach means far fewer ad-hoc data requests for each partner. This is saving everybody time and resources and most importantly is making information on Fife so much more accessible to decision makers and our citizens.”

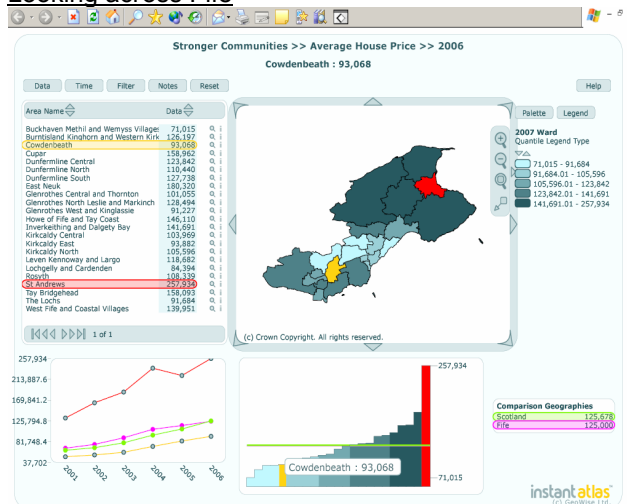
Typical Scenarios

Within and between areas

Differences within areas are just as important as differences between areas as evidenced by looking within Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath Parliamentary Constituency by Community Council Area. On the face of it, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath has similar levels to the rest of Fife of working age adults with no qualifications, but this varies substantially within the area from Dalgety Bay and Hillend, a key commuter zone for Edinburgh, to Benarty, a focus for economic regeneration. This fits with what we know about the geography of poor skills and access to work, with those with higher qualifications able to attract higher wages and having a wider circle of opportunity to access work.



Looking across Fife



Interactive maps, tables and charts enable users to look across Fife to make comparisons between areas and see how an indicator has changed over time. House prices have doubled in Fife between 2001 and 2006, with the average house price in 2006 equivalent to the average house price in St Andrews in 2001. For the first time in 2006, house prices in Fife are below Scotland, which could indicate that connectivity around the Forth Road Bridge is becoming an issue.

KnowFife Dataset: Future Challenges

The KnowFife LIS application is still in its relatively early stages and there are many potential areas of development. Improved linkages between organisational business areas and the intelligence repository need to be developed through raising awareness of the system’s potential, improved understanding of user needs and refinement of outputs.

More technical linkages could also reduce data management overheads. It should be possible, with agreed standards, to 'connect' KnowFife to external data systems like SNS and also internal operational and strategic systems in areas like Performance Management, Planning and Education. Indeed partners in Fife could deliver their local indicators and statistics into SNS (and any other systems) dynamically from their local LIS. This work depends on building effective and standardised data exchange frameworks across Scotland.

West Lothian Information Sharing Partnership (www.wlinfo.org.uk)

Figure 3. West Lothian Information Sharing Partnership home page

The West Lothian Information Partnership website was initially set up on the Council Intranet to support the work of locality planning staff by creating a self-service access point for profiling data and mapping relating to local communities. In 2007, the website was moved onto the internet in order to provide external community planning partner agencies with access. Work on the site is now overseen by an inter-agency group chaired by the Senior Manager for Communities & Information.

The West Lothian Partnership website aims to provide not only access to raw data and thematic mapping structured around the community plan themes, but to incorporate access to the background papers and contextual information which are needed to understand the data presented.

The system is targeted not at technical data analysts with a high level of statistical expertise but at service managers, locality planning officers, elected members and voluntary and community sector workers. The requirement is therefore for a straight-

forward accessible information delivery solution from which users can quickly locate and understand relevant content about their domain and locality of interest.

The ability of a local information system to thematically map small area data has been perceived as enormously beneficial by locality planning officer and health improvement practitioners who, using data supplied at Data Zone by the Health Board were able for the first time to target interventions far more precisely than when working with the previous health profiles created at postcode sector level, The initial work has therefore been well received and the response extremely encouraging.

West Lothian Information Sharing: Future Challenges

At present, every aspect of the West Lothian system is managed by a single staff member, a Senior Research Officer with West Lothian Council Social Policy Services. In the longer term the intention is that responsibility for providing data and background and contextual information will be devolved to partner services. It is recognised that there is still considerable work to be done to engage with partners and promote ownership, but it is seen as essential that if data is to be used to create integrated profiles, this should be done by those who understand the significance of the data they are using and who can make appropriate linkages.

The challenge then lies not just in accumulating & presenting the data but a change in the way people work to get buy-in from multiple partners and ensure they utilise these new processes and platforms in a way which protects and promotes the best interests of citizens.

What are the wider benefits for Scotland?

Perhaps the most significant benefits for Scotland from widespread use of local intelligence across its public bodies come from two areas:

1. Better overall governance by its public bodies including: more capable of 'place shaping'; efficiency savings through reduced information searches; better policy through use of shared evidence repositories; more effective operational service delivery; improved tracking of performance outcomes; and higher levels of transparency on performance to customers.
2. A more information aware citizen audience and thus more informed society (eg. aware of realities of crime rather than perception of crime); better able to deal with actions and decisions that require information (eg. community funding applications); more able to challenge and scrutinise public sector bodies over performance; and generally contribute to a more open information attitude leading ultimately to improvement in trust between citizen and government, enhanced 'localism' and stronger democratic processes.

Specific benefits in relation to widespread adoption of Local Intelligence Systems at the level of CPPs include:

- Organisations within a local partnership should be able to share their critical operational and strategic performance indicators and outcomes providing a vital foundation for joined-up working.
- Major efficiency gains should be achievable at both an operational and strategic level from making a wide range of facts and figures available quickly and easily.

- This dramatically reduces overall time searching for relevant data and supports a self-serve model allowing information specialists to focus on more challenging areas of work.
- With the right levels of political support, information systems of this kind have the potential to free up access to large volumes of previously locked-up data allowing organisations to monitor their performance more effectively.
 - Organisations should be able to monitor the impact their policies are having on the ground over time and tune them where necessary.
 - They should be able to understand the variation in service needs of their customers and target them effectively.
 - They should seek to minimise inequality by targeting intervention at those in most need.
 - They should enable partner agencies and local groups to make well-evidenced applications for external funding
 - They should improve customer transparency to local level information allowing, for example, citizens to easily find out how their partnership is performing in their neighbourhood.
 - They should empower elected officials by keeping them informed with regularly updated information about their specific areas of interest.

Local people, particularly those living in those areas of Scotland which are most deprived, should be able to use this type of information to hold their local community partnerships and elected representatives to account over the impact they have on their lives. A number of different models for achieving this have been trialled through initiatives such as Community Budgeting, with the conclusion that there is no one size fits all approach.

If data can be presented to these public audiences in the right form and with suitable accompanying support, power could start to shift with local community groups raising the challenging questions about levels of progress in their neighbourhoods. Rising levels of local level empowerment accompanied by greater commitment to local democracy would be positive signs of better citizen engagement to close the current gap between public organisations and their customers.

In the last couple of years, there have been a number of pilots of the Citistat model within both local authorities and NHS Boards in Scotland. Originating from Baltimore, the CitiStat approach (on which sites like <http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/> have been developed) uses local outcome based intelligence as the basis for dialogue and challenge between elected members, managers and service providers. There is a key role for LIS in providing the intelligence back-bone on which this model is based.

Future Challenges

Certainly there are valid concerns that need to be addressed in relation to making this type of neighbourhood based information more publicly accessible. These include:

1. Data privacy and sensitivity issues even where information relates to classifying small neighbourhoods into which households are classified anonymously.
2. Further marginalisation of already deprived neighbourhoods eg. ranking Middlesbrough as the worst place to live in the UK according to the recent Location Location Location programme on Channel4 – although it is also argued

- that this 'name and shame' process can encourage 'rebound action' to do something about it.
3. Social segregation issues as 'informed citizens' use information to allow them to live and work in areas where they don't have to mix with other geo-demographic classes of the population. Currently the trend is for increasingly homogenised neighbourhoods according to "Poverty, wealth and place in Britain, 1968 to 2005" reports by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
 4. Further encouragement towards moving from place-based social communities towards place-unaware virtual communities

It should be possible to mitigate some of these effects by providing more inclusive web sites that allow communities to have their say on what they think about their neighbourhoods. This would closely follow current trends (often termed 'Web 2.0') for sites where content is added and maintained by the user audience. A relatively simple example is at <http://channel4bestandworst.com/>.

This needs to be combined with educating and empowering already marginalised communities in the useful application of information to improve their lives and how to use this knowledge to challenge the status quo.

Scotland-England Imbalance

There would appear to be a range of factors that have contributed to the Scotland-England imbalance in this area. We contend that the organisational framework for research and intelligence (R&I) within local government has traditionally been weaker in Scotland than with top tier authorities in England. Many English authorities have well resourced and active corporate-wide R&I units. Critically these tend to be centralised within Chief Executive Depts. They act as the primary organisational repository for developments in this area. In Scottish authorities it would appear this function is rarely resourced centrally and, as a result, the work of significant numbers of researchers and analysts within different departments can be less well co-ordinated and economies of scale in information management do not materialise. The business case for development of intelligence repositories for delivering corporate wide benefits is much tougher to make and there are not the senior level champions required to drive it forward. Even for the two case studies featured above there is a major challenge for these systems to be considered as mainstream sources of business intelligence and funded appropriately.

Scotland has also not had a central government partner actively pushing these developments and contributing funds. Currently there is an on-going Information Management programme being run from DCLG which includes support for areas such as performance related data exchange and Local Information Systems. To date there would appear to be no single Scottish Executive department or programme with a similar intelligence-sharing remit to address this area. It would appear to have fallen through the gaps of Scottish central government to date. Others like it have been picked up through work by the Transformational Technology Division that support initiatives like eCare, Customer First and Digital Inclusion.

The potential benefits for joining-up information have registered on the radar of work by the Scottish Executive Transformational Technology Division in relation to developing a National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI). This initiative is still in its early stages of development. As part of this is a proposal for the formation of a 'Spatial Statistics

Network'. However there are risks to pushing this business area into a niche 'spatial space' merely as a result of much of the data having a locational dimension. In fact it is much wider. Ideally it should be seen as a key strand in transforming the relationship between national government, local government and the citizen. While elements of the work would fit into the Digital Inclusion agenda, for example to better inform and empower communities with useful place-based content, intra-organisational and partnership working areas appear to require a new programme aimed at effective partnership based working through the CPP network.

Work was started under the last Scottish administration to agree key outcomes which local authorities and their partners will be funded to address in the longer term. The new focus on outcomes for citizens rather than just on service process and performance, will require some radical re-thinking regarding the sorts of data which will need to be collected about local communities the services they receive, the resources allocated and the impact that this has on achieving the desired outcomes. For example, Education have previously reported on the performance of their schools, but, given the level of pupil transfer there is now a need to supplement these reports with locality based reports which can be used to identify issues for communities, especially in areas of disadvantage.

A further challenge is the effective use of the data both by trained analysts and non-specialist users to make sense of the accumulating wealth of data to examine the cross-cutting issues that impact on outcomes e.g. for children affected by family disadvantage. The need for basic analytical information skills for non-specialists and a sufficient pool of domain-specific, expert analysts is critical if data is to be used and interpreted effectively. The recent CitiStat evaluation report questioned whether sufficient resources are currently available within public bodies to support the analysis and briefing process. The rapid increase in analysts and usage of data within Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in England is the result of widespread acknowledgement that strategy and operations need to be heavily influenced by intelligence. This is a corner-stone of the Home Office National Intelligence Model. This is a relatively recent example of an area of the public sector which has moved intentionally and significantly towards a more intelligence-driven approach.

In terms of technical challenges, DCLG and ONS are currently operationalising initial interoperability pilot projects in England to deliver the infrastructure and standards needed for the effective exchange of statistics and performance indicators (see Figure 4). In Scotland SNS needs to follow this lead rather than seeking to develop a 'one-size-fits-all' solution. No one central solution will be able to meet the requirement outlined in the recently issued Concordat for local outcome reporting as well as aggregating data to create a national dataset. SNS should therefore focus on interoperability building on data transfer work already underway in Education (ScotXed) with a view to enabling benefits at local level through the existing organisational structure of CPPs and facilitating greater integration with / development of local LIS style platforms.

Figure 4 illustrates one model for data interchange being progressed by DCLG – while this exact model may not be directly transferable to the Scottish context, the vision, intentions and central support to join-up information resources are highly pertinent.

Data Interchange – The New World

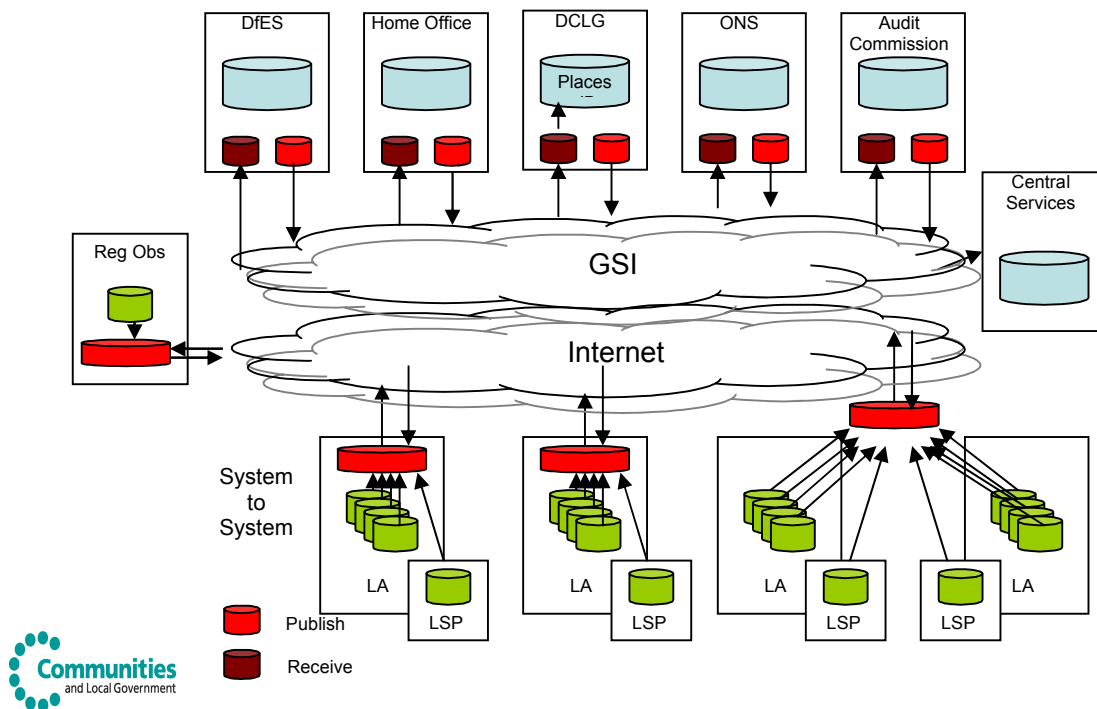


Figure 4. The DCLG proposed model for indicator exchange (Source: DCLG) – for more information see www.esd.org.uk/pie

Concluding remarks

There are signs of positive and innovative thinking in relation to developing evidence-based processes, the pilot CitiStat projects being an example. However, despite reports like 'Common Data, Common Sense' by Audit Scotland published 7 years ago and clear guidelines on data sharing from Scottish government in 2004, it would still appear that information largely remains in closed, organisationally-focused silos rather than being shared effectively for maximum benefit within the context of partnership working. The likely causes are complex but most are likely to end up being tied to an organisational partnership model that is based on a loose set of linkages between independently funded public bodies with potentially different strategic objectives and performance assessment models. With the new Single Outcome Agreement framework emerging in Scotland this may be starting to change.

Major challenges remain not least in building business cases for spending budget on 'behind-the-scenes' strategic processes rather than frontline services. Almost all public sector bodies are in this situation. The Improvement Service in Scotland is actively looking to encourage good practice in the Research and Intelligence area and a recently re-invigorated LARIA in Scotland group is also a positive step in the right direction. The Transforming Public Services agenda of the Scottish Executive appears to be supporting all the right principles (see their 2006 report at <http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/15110925/0>) but appears to lack the ability to deliver coordinated information management programmes that can cut across multiple business agendas and target community-based information sharing.

Perhaps the biggest hurdle facing public bodies is the move away from a culture of decision-making based on political objectives, personal judgement and past experience to one which includes a much stronger evidence basis. The CitiStat evaluation report highlights the dependency this model had on “cultivating an organisational culture conducive to learning from evidence”. Yet, the same dependencies are likely to be true of the framework around the Single Outcome Agreement. This shift is dependent on bridging the gap between those with their hands on the evidence and those that should be asking for it - a culture shift. It is also reliant on those with their hands on the evidence having the time to actually analyse it rather than spending all their time sourcing and processing it into some reportable form.

Without this change management process there is likely to be little improvement in policy, service and monitoring whatever happens ‘behind-the-scenes’ to improve the flow of information and services within and across our organisations. We need decision-makers to be able to trust the data made available, to seek expert advice where necessary and to embed the process of evidence review formally into their decision-making processes. We also need ‘evidence specialists’ to understand the complex business areas and be able to communicate in a way which works for their audience. In our evolving state of public service transformation, with its clear shift towards demonstrating tangible outcome improvements to citizens, we need to ensure that processes are in place to manage and monitor this impact on the ground (to people and the environment), communicate it effectively and, from a customer perspective, empower all citizens to make best use of information and challenge the status quo. This is a vision for Scotland for the next 5 years.

References and useful links:

Improvement Service: Community Planning in Practice - KnowFife Dataset

http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/component/option.com_docman/Itemid,43/task_d oc_view/gid,728/

Improvement Service: KnowFife Dataset case study

http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/component/option.com_docman/Itemid,43/task_d oc_view/gid,1203/

Audit Scotland report "Common Data, Common Sense" http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2000/nr_000811_information_management.pdf

Scottish Executive: An Evaluation of the CitiStat Model of Performance Management and its Applicability to the Scottish Public Sector - Research Findings
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/21102442/1>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation report: Internet-based neighbourhood information systems and their consequences <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/housing/0405.asp>

Joseph Rowntree Foundation report: Poverty, Wealth and Place in Britain 1968 to 2005
<http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/2019-poverty-wealth-place.pdf>

KnowFife Dataset web site: www.fifedirect.org.uk/knowfifedataset

West Lothian information sharing partnership: www.wlinfo.org.uk

DCLG LIS web forum: www.esd.org.uk

GeoWise InstantAtlas web site: <http://www.instantatlas.com>