



Commission for Rural Communities

Tackling rural disadvantage

Locality reporting: spatial disaggregation of the National Indicator Set



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1

Introduction

The National Indicator Set has been designed to offer government (and its partners) a common framework for assessment of conditions, and change in those conditions, across England. The NIs relate to government's priorities and have been developed around quantitative data which is both available and which can be consistently applied at local authority level across the country.

The tables demonstrate the potential for disaggregating the NIs at a spatial level which is relevant to individual communities. They form part of a study which explores more fully :

- how possible it is to report against the NI set at community level;
- what might need to be done to achieve this; and
- the potential benefits of doing so.

The impetus for the study was the recognition that LAAs cover large areas and indicators at this scale can mask great variation, both in policy needs and policy outcomes; working with communities and in neighbourhoods requires intelligence at a finer spatial level. To test out the practicalities of smaller area reporting, we are working with three LSPs to develop a series of case studies, each focused on a different NI or series of NIs (eg the place survey), showing how the partnership has focused their activity at a local level (below the higher tier local authority level), and analysing their experience.

The tables should be used in conjunction with the how to guide which explains further the relevance of sub-LAA indicators and provides some commentary about the extent to which this is feasible.

The availability to develop the indicators has been assessed at three spatial levels:

- local authority district – which will be important in two tier areas, where the LAA operates at the county level;
- rural/urban – whether the indicator data could be matched to the official definition of urban and rural areas (using one of wards, postcodes, grid references or lower or middle super output areas); and
- neighbourhood – whether the indicator data is available at or could be matched to wards or some similarly sized locality geography (again most probably matching postcodes, grid references or super output areas).

At each of these levels a traffic light has been awarded:

- green = indicator is readily available now at this spatial level;
- amber = local re-analysis of data could make it available at this level; and
- red = indicator could not be made locally available at this level (as at date of publication).

Traffic lights have been given purely on the basis of whether, technically, the indicator could be generated at a given spatial level. There may be other issues to consider, such as data confidentiality if small numbers are released. These are commented upon, where they are obvious, but are value judgements and need to be considered locally. Indeed, it may be possible to find ways around such constraints e.g. defining neighbourhoods at slightly higher spatial levels or combining data from different years to avoid reporting very small numbers.

Indicators are only given an amber light if it is within the gift of local (LAA) partner organisations to make them available through some re-analysis. Where such indicators are owned by a national body (central government department, ONS, etc) and it would require a national decision to make them available, they have been given a red light (with a comment in the table if that national data owner could technically re-analyse them).

It should be noted that the extent to which indicator data sets can readily be disaggregated and re-analysed often depends, not just on the specification of that data set, but equally on the capacity, willingness and technical capability of local data owners who would need to undertake that re-analysis. In some cases, there may also be subtle differences in the way that data is collected in different local areas. Inevitably, these tables cannot take account of such local variation.

You can filter NIs by:

- NI reference number;
- LAA theme; and
- shared data source.

This information is as up-to-date as possible and covers the 188 NIs that make up the NI set as revised and amended by CLG in February 2009.

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Why local matters

The settlement between state and citizen

The Government is committed to a new settlement between the state – that is, central and local government and public service providers - and the citizen. To achieve this new settlement, it has developed a range of policy drivers which include:

- place shaping – an imperative for local authorities and public service providers to work with the people and businesses that make up each community in shaping that community's future and improving the lives of citizens;
- improvement – the continuous drive to deliver improvements in the quality and efficiency of public services and the value of the outcomes that they achieve; and
- empowerment – the drive to improve the shape and form of our communities by building their capacity, improving cohesion and the confidence of all citizens through increased engagement, active citizenship and revitalised local democracy.

These policy drivers have been set out in White Papers¹, subsequently enshrined within legislation² and included within the targets and strategic objectives of spending departments. CLG's operational target is to create strong, active and empowered communities³ whilst Defra's is to help achieve strong rural communities⁴.

Government's new settlement is described as a place where:

- power, responsibility and accountability can be shared;
- national and local priorities meet; and
- decisions can be made at the lowest possible level of (administrative) geography.

This aspiration has led to considerable investment from statutory authorities in community engagement and the development of a range of structures - such as area forums and neighbourhood committees - in addition to, and often alongside, existing local town and parish councils.

The Government clearly believes that local matters. Significantly, it also appears to understand and accept that local relates to communities and neighbourhoods, rather than to administrative boundaries or to the operational territory of individual service providers.

1. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/strongprosperous>, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/byelaws>

2. http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070028_en.pdf

3. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr_csr07_psa21.pdf

4. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/rural/pdfs/dso/dso-doc.pdf>

Achieving the Settlement

There are a number of processes designed to help achieve this new settlement. They include:

- the Sustainable Community Strategy;
- the Local Development Framework; and
- the Local Area Agreement.

Together these strategies and plans are designed to facilitate statutory bodies and communities working together to:

- determine and articulate a vision for the future of their place (set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy);
- provide an enabling spatial framework for achieving the vision (the Local Development Framework); and
- to come together to change local conditions through targeted intervention and service delivery (the LAA).

This delivery framework will be supported and tested by a new joint performance management process - the CAA to be implemented from April 2009. All statutory agencies involved will be required to report their progress using a new set of NIs. Particular attention will be paid to the local improvement targets set by each LSP against (up to) 35 of the NIs and agreed between partners and government as their LAA. The NIs will therefore become the main method used to assess progress made to implement government policy at the local level.

Defining local

Sharing information with the customer on the impact (in terms of change against indicators) of public sector activity is an excellent way for statutory organisations to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the communities that they serve. It helps local authorities and service delivery partners to explain their performance and the difference it has made to their customers – the council tax payer – in a way that will connect to their local experience.

In the LAA context, though, local means at the level of geography appropriate to local government rather than local in terms of any individual community or neighbourhood. The CAA will assess performance against the NI set for each higher tier LSP area. There are 150 such areas across England, made up by the administrative territories of unitary and county councils. The performance of each local authority against each indicator will be reported for the authority as a whole and will not be broken down to a lower geographic level.

However, the geography of local government is enormously varied. Virtually all shire LSP areas include more than 500,000 people - many exceed 1 million. Unitary authorities, on the other hand, typically have smaller populations – usually between 150,000 and 250,000 people.

But some are particularly large – Bradford has 470,000 people; and some particularly small – the smallest, Rutland, has a population of only 34,400.

Performance assessment and reporting at the higher tier local authority level may well be appropriate for Government as a means of comparing performance and change in conditions across the country but it will not resonate with local people and individual communities in larger and more geographically diverse territories such as North Yorkshire.

The ups and downs of local reporting

Local reporting will add real value to LSPs, allowing them to deliver against their place shaping responsibilities in way that is relevant to individual citizens and communities. It will:

- ensure that they fully understand and are able to respond to the range of local conditions across their area;
- help them to work with communities in the design and assessment of the impact of service delivery;
- provide valid and relevant intelligence to support the highest possible quality of dialogue between the state, citizen and elected representatives; and
- help local authorities and their partners to achieve Government objectives, for example in respect of strong, active and empowered communities

Performance management exerts a strong influence on service delivery, and a single requirement for reporting at the highest relevant geography can obscure variations in conditions and needs across an area.

Evidence⁵ shows that the use of area based indicators, such as the IMD, obscured disadvantage at more local levels. The same has been shown to be the case when considering the performance of an area against KPIs (for example, the percentage of the population with various skill levels) at a county level. The impression given by a single statistic will be most unlikely to reflect adequately the differential conditions at ward or even district level.

The NIs will become the default tool for government to assess change resulting from public spending, and will be used by the state to communicate the story of that change and the differences that it makes, to the citizen. The NIs will also be used by government to build up a story of place, showing how individual areas compare with others – neighbouring and of similar type and conditions – and how those responsible for creating improved conditions through public spending are performing.

If these uses are to lead to improved conditions across a whole territory, and to justify and attract investment; and if the story of change is to mean anything to the individual citizen or specific community it

5. Reference study <http://www.ocsi.co.uk/>

needs to be made relevant. This means that it should relate (as far as is possible) to separate communities and neighbourhoods, rather than simply aggregating them all into a single, and often artificial, whole.

There is real value to local councils, to delivery organisations and of course to the communities and neighbourhood which they serve in using the information required to report against the NIs to develop the story of place at the community or neighbourhood level.

This view is shared by three LSPs whose experience is documented here, all of whom are interested in breaking down their territory into smaller areas in order to allow them to report their performance in a spatial context that is more relevant to their communities.

Is local reporting possible?

Yes they can! Around two thirds of the NIs can be disaggregated to a lower than LAA level.

People best understand the place in which they live. This sense of place will mean different things to different people. For those living in a town or city it might mean their street, their estate or their neighbourhood. For those living in a smaller town or village it might simply mean that settlement. For those living in the countryside it might mean their valley, dale or estuary. England's statistical geography is not based on settlement geography, but on population density.

It is relatively easy to assess performance of the public sector by measuring change against the NI Set at the local authority level (higher tier or district) as the vast majority of data used is reported at this level. To assess performance more locally against the NIs it is necessary to disaggregate and analyse the evidence (provided by the data) at a lower spatial level. For this to work, the data has not only to be available at lower spatial levels but needs to be sufficiently robust to support reporting at these levels.

The choice of spatial level is important. If local reporting is going to be relevant to people, it needs to relate to a place or an area that they understand. However if the information provided is to be credible, the data on which it is based must also fit the local geography.

Disaggregating the national indicator set

As previously highlighted most of the data sources used for the NIs can be disaggregated to spatial levels below higher tier local authority territory. This is especially true at the local authority district level - useful in areas with three tier local government, where performance assessment operates at a countywide level. Only 15 of the data sources appear not to be capable of disaggregation to local authority district level.

However, even at the level of the Government's rural/urban definition (super output area or postcode) and at the neighbourhood level (ward or postcode) around two thirds of the data sources (and hence indicators) can be disaggregated. That said, almost none of the data sources are disaggregated already to these two levels; this will require some matching of data records to rural/urban and neighbourhood geographies – for example, using address postcodes or site grid references that are attached to the raw data.

On a note of caution, there are some data sources where it is technically feasible to disaggregate them to very small area levels but it may not be sensible or meaningful to do so.

The over-riding findings of this work are however that most of the NI data sources are capable of disaggregation to district, rural/urban and neighbourhood levels, and that local authorities or local partner organisations have access to the data sets that would enable this to be done.

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How to guide: Locality reporting against the National Indicator Set

March 2009

This is a guide to the process of reporting locally. It raises and addresses the questions that need to be answered and the issues that need to be considered. It is based on the experience of three case study LSPs and makes reference to their activity where this adds value.

These practical experiences are also detailed as individual case studies.

Step one – defining your reasons for reporting locally

It is important to define your reasons and drivers for local reporting. Remember that you are not required to do so by the CAA or the reporting and monitoring system for the LAA. So you will have to have a cogent argument to convince partners and colleagues responsible for collating data and reporting against indicators why you are seeking their support. Below, are examples of some of the potential drivers:

- You may have a democratic imperative. It may be that ward councillors or local area boards are asking for more local information;
- You may have an imperative to report locally. For example, there may be a specific need because of the targets set against some indicators within the LAA. In Cumbria, for example, some of the improvement targets in the LAA relate specifically to former Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas in the west of the county; or
- It may be that baseline evidence has highlighted a problem in a particular geographical area. In Essex preparation for the LAA identified poor performance around the skills agenda, particularly in the wards in Maldon.

Whatever the reason, you will need to understand what the drivers for local reporting are and be able to articulate these to partners and colleagues in order to get their commitment and support. Local reporting is not something that you can do on your own, even if you do own the evidence base!

Step two – define the spatial area for reporting

Reporting against the NI set is based on data and data requires that the subject area is precisely defined by some form of geographical unit. Your choice of geographical unit is critical to your prospects of success. The options together with the challenges and shortfalls associated with each of them are set out here. It is important to use the data unit that gives the best fit to the place or area that you want to report on. This decision will be influenced partly by your reason for local reporting and partly by circumstance and logistics. Whatever your position, it's important to bring a large dose of pragmatism to the discussion - and be ready to compromise.

If your objective is to provide improved local intelligence for a local area committee or to support the development of new local governance structures (as in South Lakeland) then it is probable that you will choose the ward as a viable geographic unit.

If you are interested in a particular place or settlement it will be important that you consider whether the best fit to its boundaries will be provided by wards, postcodes or super output areas.

If you are interested in analysing performance across a wider spatial area in terms of rural, then you will need to find the best fit to the rural/urban definition.

The simplest way to decide which approach is best in the first instance, is by eye. Look at the boundaries of each geographical unit overlaid on a map showing your target geography.

Having decided on the most appropriate geographical unit, you will, of course, need to check that data is available which will allow you to analyse and report at your chosen spatial level. The outcome of this check may require a re-think around your unit of geography. In our view, however, it is best to start with the preferred geography and then review the availability of data against it rather than to allow the availability of data to drive the choice of geography.

After all, the purpose of local reporting is to add value to local understanding (to tell the story of place) rather than to cut up data into smaller chunks simply because it is possible to do so.

Step three – identify your NIs and check that they will support local reporting and will fit your chosen geography

Identify which of the indicators in the national indicator set best fits the information you want to provide. You will then need to assess whether the data used to report against your chosen indicator(s) can be reported at the level of your chosen geography.

The NIs are based on a variety of data sources. Some of these data sources will support local reporting and some will not. You can check whether the data will support local reporting at lower tier local authority district level, neighbourhood level and by rural/urban definition here. The technical notes to the analysis can be found here.

You will need to consider whether the data will:

- be timely – whether it is reported sufficiently regularly to add value to local knowledge and inform service delivery.
- be robust – whether the sample is large enough to support analysis at lower levels of geography – it was necessary for South Lakeland to boost their place survey sample to ensure statistically valid samples for their mini place surveys.
- have spatial relevance – whether the geographical units that are available fit your target area for local reporting.
- be suppressed – some data is suppressed at more local levels to prevent it being linked to individuals or households, for example data on teenage pregnancy.

Step four – check with the data owner if they are willing to co-operate

The data used to report against the NIs are collected, collated and owned by a range of providers. Some are provided by national surveys (for example, Sport England's participation in sport and active recreation survey) and are supplied by government departments or non departmental government bodies. Some come from surveys conducted and compiled locally (for example the place survey). But a great deal of data come from service delivery and case records. As such they are owned by service delivery units and organisations such as councils, the Police or PCTs.

These partners collect data as a consequence of, or to support, their operation. In these instances the data tend to be built from the ground up and may not be aggregated to a level of geography consistent with your requirements.

Very often public service delivery organisations collect data because they need it to report against KPIs or targets set by their funding organisation. Usually this reporting will be at the highest spatial level appropriate to them. It is likely, therefore, that there will be additional work involved in analysing and reporting this data for a different geographical area.

Step five – establish an opening position - the baseline

LAs and LSPs reported their baseline performance against as many indicators as was possible¹ at the end of 2008. They will have done this at the level of geography required by the CAA higher tier local authority. It is possible that the data used to develop baseline figures for some indicators was built up from smaller geographical units. But it is far from likely that a ready made baseline will exist for the indicators and geographical unit that you have chosen. If you need a December 2008 baseline it is likely to prove necessary to work with data owners to disaggregate any existing baseline to your local geography.

1. The method of measuring some indicators was not finalised at that time

Step Six – local reporting

Finally, you will need to decide how and where you are going to present your local reporting. It is probable that this will be driven by your objective and/or your customer. South Lakeland will be reporting their mini place surveys to their residents alongside their main place survey. Cumbria plan to provide locally specific performance information biannually to West Cumbria Area Committee against a basket of the LAA indicators in line with the LSP's reporting protocol.

South Lakeland also plan to use their mini place surveys on an ongoing basis as part of their drive to establish a local governance structure based on eight new local area partnerships. In Devon, the service unit responsible for NI4 (% of residents who feel that they can influence decisions affecting their local area) plan to use their detailed spatial analysis of the 2009 place survey response on this indicator as the main tool to plan their next 12 months activity and interventions. In Essex, the Maldon Skills Partnership will use the local reporting outcomes against NIs 79, 117, 163, 164 and 186 to monitor the impact of their delivery plan.

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Case study: Devon - place based reporting

Abstract

Devon County Council has recognised the need for a strong understanding of local conditions. To secure a robust local evidence base, the council has sub-divided its territory into 29 local areas. It is proposing to use these territories for new community boards as the framework for local governance. In order to develop the concept the council is running pilots in parts of the county. The LSP has agreed to support these pilots and has included place focused targets (and related activity) in the LAA. To enable local reporting, the council and its partners decided to aggregate the completed surveys for all eight district council areas. This has allowed them to apply a single weighting and to analyse the responses at a number of spatial levels.

The raw data had only just been received at the time of writing this case study so a full analysis had not taken place. However, initial analysis has shown variation between spatial levels and the aggregated result for Devon.

Context

Devon County Council is a higher tier local authority covering the shire county of Devon; it excludes Plymouth and Torbay which have unitary councils. The council's territory covers an area of 6,707 sq km and hosts a population of 750,000.

The second tier of local government is made up of eight district councils and two national park authorities. The city of Exeter is the county's major settlement and acts as the administrative centre. It hosts a university and major employers including the Meteorological Office. In addition to Exeter, Devon has another 28 service centres, six of which act as local administrative centres (places like Bideford and Tavistock).

The council is committed to providing a good service to all its diverse communities and has recognised the need for a strong understanding of local conditions. To secure a robust local evidence base, the council has sub-divided its territory into 29 local areas. These are based on those settlements which play a role as service centres and serve a wider hinterland. These areas were built up from analysis of the role and function of each service centre and the extent of its influence on neighbouring communities; they are not necessarily co-terminus with local authority territories. Factors considered included:

- Local travel plans – the areas covered by each plan were defined by local travel patterns;
- Shopping catchment areas – the extent to which each service centre attracts retail expenditure from the surrounding area;
- Learning community catchment areas – based on the catchments of secondary schools and the location of feeder primary schools;
- Market and coastal towns initiative areas – the area of influence around market towns as defined by local groups involved in this initiative; and
- Parishes - the boundaries of each town area are based on parish boundaries.

The council developed evidence profiles for each of the 29 town areas in 2006 and has increasingly used these areas as the focus for its community engagement activities. These town areas align with area-based service initiatives such as neighbourhood policing and learning communities.

The Objective

Devon is currently involved in a debate around local government reorganisation. In their representations to the Boundary Commission, the council highlighted how it intended to use the 29 town areas as territories for new community boards. It proposed to develop these boards as the framework for local governance. It believes that the boards offer a viable route to devolve decision-making and enable communities to influence service provision and resource allocation. Each board would have a delegated decision-making responsibility and manage a community development budget.

The proposals have received the support of the Devon Association of Local Councils which believes that they will improve the way that different tiers of local government will work together for the benefit of local people.

Developing the concept, and subsequently the capacity of nascent community boards is therefore a key corporate objective for the council.

In order to develop the concept the council is running pilots in parts of the county. The LSP has agreed to support these pilots and has included place focused targets (and related activity) in the LAA.

The council's LAA team seeks to support effective delivery of the LAA and so secure the maximum possible Performance Reward Grant (PRG) for Devon. It is proposed that PRG funding would be allocated to community boards to invest in projects that would support the LAA. This would support the development of community area agreements.

It is important that the best possible evidence base is developed so that targets can be agreed for the LAA that are challenging but realistic. A strong local element to the LSP's evidence base will underpin this process and will also significantly aid development of community boards.

National Indicators

The work relates to the place survey and therefore covers the 18 NIs included in the survey. These focus on the views and experience of residents relating to a range of service areas and different themes of the NI set.

The Team

The Chief Executive's Community and Strategy Team provides leadership and coordination around the LAA and LSP within the council. Members of this team have also taken the lead on certain improvement targets within the LAA. They are responsible for ensuring that targets are defined and agreed with the Government Office for the South West (GOSW). The team is responsible for performance monitoring of the entire LAA. Two members of the team also have responsibility for delivery plans that are designed to drive and achieve necessary performance levels.

This team works with the council's Corporate Consultation Manager. This post sits within the council's Strategic Intelligence Unit which is responsible for the council's evidence base.

What Was Done

The council has long understood the need to consider its territory as a collection of individual areas rather than as a single entity. It was therefore keen to analyse Devon's performance against NIs in a way that would generate new intelligence for the council and its partners.

The team quickly identified the potential for local reporting offered by the place survey. Reporting the results of the survey at a local level will ensure that the LSP can provide information to local people in a way that is relevant. To enable local reporting, the council and its partners decided to aggregate the completed surveys for all eight district council areas. This has allowed them to apply a single weighting and to analyse the responses at a number of spatial levels including:

- Higher tier local authority district (Devon)
- Local authority district (East Devon, Exeter, North Devon, Mid Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge, West Devon)
- The 29 town areas
- A disaggregated analysis of the 29 town areas showing a separate result for those wards within the urban area and those wards which form the rural hinterland
- Eight part rural/urban classification (based on ONS ward level classifications)

The team has chosen to focus this analysis initially on NI4 (% of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality). This is an improvement target within the LAA and is an issue of significant importance to the council and its partners.

Data/Evidence

At the time of writing, the weighted results from the place survey had only just been received by the council. It is therefore premature to publish specific disaggregated results. We have been able to review the initial analysis however, and several issues are immediately apparent:

- The random sample provided by the Audit Commission has proven large enough to support local reporting for the 29 town areas and to disaggregate the responses for each town between the urban area and its hinterland. There are only two town areas where the numbers in the sample are too small to provide a reliable response;
- There is material variation between the aggregated result (those expressing satisfaction) for Devon and the result for each of the eight local authority districts with the range being six percentage points;
- There is a significant variation in the aggregated results (those expressing satisfaction) for each of the 29 towns with the range being fourteen percentage points;
- Whilst there are some interesting geographical commonalities, there is no dominant spatial pattern to the variance in results. The likelihood is that local as well as geographical factors and issues affect people's experience and consequent response;
- There are some significant disparities between the result (those expressing satisfaction) for urban wards and those making up the hinterland of towns - there are several differences of over ten percentage points; and
- There is no discernable pattern for the urban/hinterland differences – the likelihood is that they are linked to local issues and experience

Impact

The LSP has a mandatory target for NI4 at the county level. This requires an improvement from a baseline of 27.8% positive responses to the NI4 question to 29.07% positive responses in the place survey of 2011 for the target to be met. There is no requirement to agree sub-county targets with GOSW.

The place-based analysis will help the council identify those areas where people are less confident about their ability to influence local decision-making and to work with local partners to understand the reasons.

It will also help the LSP with their focus on Devon's 12 priority towns and provide an opportunity to get some direct feedback on the impact of local community development and empowerment activity.

Next Steps

Although the raw data is of interest, the Community and Strategy Team expects to explore with local agencies and community leaders (eg community planning groups, service managers, town and parish councils) whether there are local circumstances which may have affected the way that people have responded. For example whether there have been local service cuts, imposition of major road schemes, etc.

It is anticipated that the combination of data analysis and local reality checks will provide the partnership with a steer as to what could be done to engage more effectively with people. A similar analysis for the remaining questions in the place survey and across the broader evidence base for each of the town areas will provide high quality intelligence on people's priorities and the quality of their relationship with service providers.

The Community and Strategy Team hope to use this local analysis to engage service units within and beyond the council (i.e. local councils, PCTs, Police and Community Together (PACT) groups etc) in work to improve the local responsiveness of their services.

Learning

It has proven quite straightforward to cut the completed survey response spatially. This has been done by postcode. Each completed survey has a full postcode of the respondent household. The council has a standard software application which allows it to build up the survey responses by postcode. Data is then allocated to spatial areas by matching the postcodes to each unit of geography (ward, town, hinterland etc).

The picture offered by the raw data is fascinating, but it will need some careful analysis, and probably overlaying with local intelligence, before it provides an evidence base which can be used to influence policy and service delivery.

Local reporting against the place survey will add a layer of qualitative data to the existing quantitative profiles that the council and its partners maintain for each town catchment. This will be of value not only to the council, but also as addition to other area specific evidence bases such as joint local area needs assessments.

The local reports will provide a baseline which can be used measure change in people's attitudes over time. It will be possible to compare change across different parts of the county and so identify any specific linkage between people's views on outcomes and service delivery.

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Case study: Essex - improving workforce skills - the Blackwater Vocational Partnership

Abstract

The Blackwater Vocational Partnership (BVP), working in Maldon in Essex, has been tackling low skills levels and poor access to training. They are developing a vocational training centre plus a number of satellite sites in more isolated locations.

Essex included some district baselines and improvement targets within its LAA for 2008-11, including some relevant to the BVP initiative. The county is keen to monitor performance against its LAA indicators at a local level. It has researched the potential for disaggregation to rural/urban and neighbourhood levels. Recent work has mapped baseline data for some NIs (including NEETs) at very local levels, illustrating significant variation within districts.

Context

Maldon is a rural district on the coast of Essex, bounded to the south by the river Crouch and with the estuary of the river Blackwater dividing its northern side. While not far from centres such as Chelmsford and Southend, its geography and poor transport links make it surprisingly inaccessible. The only rail line runs in the far south of the district.

The economy relies significantly on small businesses, with key sectors being marine manufacturing and leisure/tourism, the latter supporting many seasonal jobs. Access to training facilities is a problem, with 98% of 16-18 year old learners having to travel to study outside of the district. For non-drivers, who rely on lengthy bus connections, this acts as a disincentive to continue in education.

The Blackwater Vocational Partnership (BVP) grew out of a realisation by six secondary schools in and around Maldon, that their students were spending anything up to four hours a day travelling to and from training facilities in towns such as Colchester and Chelmsford. Moreover, these schools were paying considerable sums of money for student transport, with one school alone spending nearly £50,000 per annum to fund transport costs. Rather than taking the students to the training, could this money be better spent bringing the training to the students? Key issues, therefore, have been accessibility, educational attainment and skills levels.

The Objective

Essex County Council recognised that countywide indicators could mask considerable variation across its territory in terms of needs and outcomes. They wanted to develop local authority district level NI baselines within their LAA. They also wanted to understand local variations within districts. The council was interested in the potential to monitor and report performance at neighbourhood level, and the potential to explore rural/urban differences (given particular concerns around the sustainability of some rural communities).

The Team

The work to explore disaggregation of the NIs in the Essex LAA has been led by the Partnership Delivery Manager in Essex County Council, operating on behalf of the Essex Partnership (the LSP).

The BVP, which is delivering the policy response in Maldon, is a partnership of six schools in and around Maldon, with three training providers, the adult community learning (ACL) department of Essex County Council and others, including the business community. The activity is overseen by a local group led by the Plume School in Maldon.

In scope NIs

The relevant NIs in the Essex LAA are those measuring:

- achievement of a level 2 qualification by age 19 (NI 79);
- NEETs (NI 117);
- the working age population with level 2 or level 3 qualification (NIs 163 and 164); and
- a reduction in per capita CO2 emissions (NI 186).

What Was Done

Work to disaggregate the NIs has taken place over a period of time. Indeed, much work on the original BVP business case pre-dates the current LAA.

When it launched the 2008-11 LAA (Liberating Potential, Fulfilling Lives) the Essex Partnership included district level baselines for a number of NIs, including two of relevance to the BVP initiative – namely, NEETs and CO2 emissions. District level baseline figures on CO2 emissions were readily available from Defra. District level baseline figures for the NEETs NI had to be calculated locally. This indicator is largely based on administrative data captured within Essex County Council, such as numbers on training schemes and numbers in higher education. This data is updated on a monthly basis and so becomes available quickly.

District level data was not initially included in the LAA for NIs measuring qualifications of the working age population. However, DIUS does provide data at this level and negotiations are underway to include NI 163/164 district baselines and improvement targets within the 2009 refresh of the Essex LAA. These are expected to be signed off by the district LSPs.

There are no plans to develop district level figures for NI 79, (19 year olds with a level 2 qualification), as this complex indicator does not appear to support disaggregation below the upper tier local authority level.

Data used to report against the NIs is recorded in the county's performance monitoring system, PBViews, and is shared with partner organisations through monthly customised reports, including a set produced for the district LSPs. Similarly, at year end, a set of outturn reports are produced, showing progress and comparison with other local authority areas.

Essex has therefore made substantial progress in achieving district level baselines and improvement targets, which are linked back to its governance structures. The further challenge, discussed below, is to analyse data below the district level.

Data and Evidence

As noted above, the Essex LAA 2008-11 was published with some relevant NIs disaggregated to a district level. These showed a high proportion of NEETs within Maldon.

National Indicator baselines and targets appearing in the Essex LAA 2008-11

NI	Definition	Baseline	Target
117	Per cent 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training		
	Essex county	6.6	5.0
	Maldon district	7.8	6.3
186	Per capita CO2 emissions within the area		
	Essex county	6.82	6.0
	Maldon district	6.35	5.5

Other relevant indicators had been set out in the 'Investing in Communities' Mid and West Essex Business Plan¹ 2007-11 – the funding vehicle for the BVP, which is aligned with the economic block of the Essex LAA. It showed that 18.7% of Maldon's working age population had no recognised qualification (the highest of any Essex district and well above the 13% regional average). Similarly, only 39.9% of Maldon students achieved 5 or more GCSEs at grades A* to C (compared with 56.4% in Essex as a whole). The business plan also noted that job density in Maldon (i.e. jobs per working age population) was the lowest of any Essex district.

Research was commissioned in 2007 to explore the skills levels required by employers in Maldon and neighbouring Braintree districts. Further studies surveyed the views of the business community in Maldon and in towns just outside the area, with respect to vocational training and work placements. These confirmed that Maldon had an above average proportion of small businesses, low wage jobs, low skill occupations and people with few qualifications. It identified a need to tackle a low skills culture. A third of the employers surveyed noted skills gaps, with low pay and rurality among contributory factors.

1. The business plan has a theme on 'tackling geographical skills deficits', under which Maldon is a target area. Formal BVP objectives are to improve training provision, improve access to training facilities and reduce the skills deficit among target populations.

Impact

The establishment of the BVP coincided with the arrival of the Investing in Communities programme from the Regional Development Agency, which has provided catalytic funding to cover project management and development costs – money now distributed sub-regionally via LAAs. Funding is also being sought from the LSC capital fund, from the council's adult community learning department and by redirecting some school resources. In all, the planned BVP capital budget is slightly over £6.9 million.

The model of training provision being developed is hub and spoke. It is centred on the Maldon Vocational Centre with a number of training satellites in more isolated locations, focussing on courses in motor mechanics, horticulture, equine and animal care. Two of the spokes are being delivered in March 2009 with others to follow as funding allows.

The BVP approach is seen as one which could be replicated elsewhere in Essex.

Next Steps

There is a desire to achieve more fine-grained information on outcomes, below the district level. Some Census SOA level data was used to inform the business case for BVP activity, with certain localities in Maldon scoring high on skills and employment deprivation as measured by the IMD.

In early 2008, with its new LAA about to come on stream, the council commissioned work to explore the scope for spatial disaggregation of twenty-one of its LAA improvement targets, especially to rural and neighbourhood levels (though Essex did not have defined neighbourhood areas). This project identified considerable scope for re-analysing the NI datasets, most obviously where data was being collated and held by LAA partner organisations.

Data on qualifications comes from the Annual Population Survey run by ONS. The sample size of this survey means that reliable figures cannot be produced for very small areas, though it was discovered ONS will consider releasing unpublished data for groupings of wards.

Data on NEETs is collated by the local Connexions service. This locally owned data has a postcode attached – which can be used to map performance against the rural/urban definition or by neighbourhood. The dataset is complex however; NEETs are counted at their place of residence, whilst those who are in employment, education or training (EETs) are counted at their place of education, employment or training. Re-analysis to small areas is therefore technically feasible, but presents a logistical challenge.

Further research has recently been undertaken to disaggregate 12 of the Essex LAA NIs (including NI 17 on NEETs) and to map the baseline data against the rural/urban definition. Anonymised records on NEETs were extracted from the Connexions database and matched, using postcodes, to MSOAs which are themselves classified as rural or urban). MSOAs were found to be the smallest geographic level to which the data could reasonably be disaggregated. Anything smaller would have risked identifying individual NEETs. To calculate the NI it was also necessary to estimate, at MSOA level, the total 16 to 18 year old population. This was done using ONS small area population estimates (scaling down figures for 15 to 19 year olds).

Learning

The analysis of baseline data for some NIs at district level analysis has proved valuable. Its inclusion within the LAA has enabled targets to be set at district level. This demonstrates an intention that all areas within the county should benefit from improved outcomes.

The technical lesson is that disaggregation has been possible with many of the indicators, certainly to a district level, with the latest analysis disaggregating data for 12 NIs to MSOA level. This has been possible where LAA partners hold raw data.

Some technical challenges were experienced when disaggregating data to MSOA level and certain compromises had to be made to obtain figures relevant to the NI definition. The work is considered a success locally and has resulted in a new set of information which will help LAA partners in Essex better understand their local circumstances. There is a need, initially, to reflect on the results and ensure they are properly understood.

One obvious finding from the maps at MSOA level is the considerable variation, across Essex and within its districts, of conditions as measured by the NIs.

Essex County Council will be using the disaggregated indicators to identify policy questions which require further exploration. For example, whether policies or activities need to be altered for those neighbourhoods which have the worst outcomes? Why areas with much the same level of need appear to be experiencing very different outcomes. The intention is to explore such questions with more qualitative information from partner organisations and local communities. The council is also considering whether to repeat the MSOA analysis exercise at intervals for those NIs which have given the most useful results.

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Case study: South Lakeland District - mini place surveys

Abstract

South Lakeland Strategic Partnership is setting up a network of eight Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) and wanted to develop an evidence-based profile for each area as an important resource to support local determination around service delivery, the use of discretionary and devolved budgets and to support local initiatives such as the development of community plans for each area.

To do this, they boosted the sample size of their first place survey to create mini place surveys for each of the eight proposed LAP areas. The data will also support comparison of the LAP areas with a range of other, larger geographies. The raw data had only just been received at the time of writing this case study so a full analysis had not taken place. However, initial work showed that there were significant variances in responses from different localities.

Context

South Lakeland district is one of six local authority districts in the county of Cumbria. It has a population of 105,000 and is a rural district with a highly designated natural environment; much of the district lies within the Lake District National Park and some within the Yorkshire Dales National Park. It has a coastal element, forming the north shore of Morecambe Bay. The administrative centre is Kendal, but the district contains seven other service centres including Windermere, the 'capital' of the Lake District.

The mini place survey initiative was developed by the Strategy and Performance Unit of South Lakeland District Council. The team wanted to use local reporting against the place survey as a way of supporting the district's emerging local governance structures (local area partnerships - LAPs).

The Objective

South Lakeland District Council is seeking to improve the outcomes achieved for all of its people and communities from its investment in resources and service delivery. It is particularly keen to promote the duty to involve and to empower its communities to influence and engage in service delivery.

To achieve this objective, the council is developing a new approach to local governance for the district. It is working towards the introduction during 2009 of eight LAPs. These partnerships will be run by an executive made up of elected members from all three tiers of local government, representatives from key partners and local residents. They will potentially manage devolved budgets and be empowered to direct and influence local service delivery. Each LAP will operate within a defined geographical area. Their boundaries are based on the topography of the district and on the functional relationship of villages and settlements as opposed to existing administrative (i.e. ward or neighbourhood forum) boundaries. They are initially being developed in consultation with representatives of South Lakeland parish councils.

The council sees the development of an evidence-based profile for each area as an important resource to support local determination around service delivery, the use of discretionary and devolved budgets and to support local initiatives such as the development of community plans for each area.

The Strategy and Performance Unit see their mini place surveys as an important contribution to this evidence base. They hope that this more detailed geographical analysis of the views and experiences of South Lakeland's residents will also be of value to partners such as the South Lakeland Strategic Partnership, Cumbria County Council, the Police and Public Health Partnerships.

The Team

The work has been instigated and led by the council's Strategy and Performance Unit and led by the South Lakeland Strategic Partnership. They have been supported by Cumbria County Council's Community Directorate, Cumbria Association of Local Councils and Action for Communities in Cumbria (the rural community council) in developing the eight LAP areas and emerging policy relating to them. The place survey has been carried out by BMG Research. The consultants helped to design the sample so that it would support local reporting.

In scope NIs

The work relates to the place survey and therefore covers the 18 NIs included in the survey. These focus on the views and experience of residents relating to a range of service areas and the different thematic chapters of the National Indicator Set.

What Was Done

The council and its partners developed proposals around a new approach to local governance based upon LAPs. These discussions included the proposal to incorporate the role of existing neighbourhood forums (operated by the county council) into the new partnerships. Having done this, they prepared draft proposals around the role and function of the partnerships, and their potential geography and boundaries.

These proposals were discussed with district, county and parish councillors and were the subject of detailed consultation in the second half of 2008. Feedback from this consultation led to the proposals around geography being changed slightly, resulting in the current proposals for eight LAPs.

The council then designed a bespoke approach to its first place survey (December 2008) that would enable it to create mini place surveys for each of the eight proposed LAP areas.

The council worked with its suppliers (BMG Research) to agree an increased boost sample that would provide a sufficiently robust response in each of the eight LAP areas to enable local reporting. This was done by looking back at the response rates achieved for the best value indicator survey in 2006 for each ward and assessing how many questionnaires would be needed to ensure a minimum of 200 completed responses for each local area. This meant in practice that the initial sample (provided by the Audit Commission) of 3000 was increased by 850 at an additional cost of £3500 + VAT.

The increased sample has allowed the council to produce a response rate against a stratified sample that is both compliant with Audit Commission requirements, and will allow the council to produce mini place surveys for each LAP.

To achieve this, responses to each question in the survey have been analysed by ward. The responses for individual wards have then been aggregated to provide a response for:

- a) each of the eight LAP territories;
- b) eight key service centres; and
- c) four rural areas¹.

In practice, each completed response has been allocated to one of the LAP areas based on the postcode of the household that completed it. The same weighting has been applied to the district-wide and LAP samples in order to support comparison between:

- LAPs
- individual LAPs and South Lakeland
- individual LAPs and Cumbria; and (if appropriate)
- individual LAPs and regional or national averages.

Data and Evidence

It has not been possible to include in-depth analysis of the outcomes in this case study; it was written within days of the raw data for the full survey being received by the council. It is clear from initial analysis, however, that local reporting within the survey will provide councillors, council officers and service providers with a much improved insight into the views and feelings of local people. Opinions seem somehow more tangible when they have been expressed consistently in different towns and villages. It is immediately apparent for example that the council's focus on affordable housing is shared by its residents pretty much regardless of their location. However, it is also apparent that for those who already have access to decent affordable housing (the majority of respondents), the two most important issues are access to health and education services.

Reporting at local level makes it much easier to identify the influence of place on issues and to factor in the point of view of the people answering the question; this is less feasible at a single, district-wide response. Across different communities, for example, there is significant variance in the level of importance placed on wage levels and local cost of living as being important in making somewhere a good place to live. The importance placed on this issue from those communities with a lower working age population is significantly lower than the district average.

1. Defined by the Cumbria Area Profiler
www.cumbriaobservatory.org.uk/Summaries/profiles.asp

Impact

In-depth analysis of the survey reports will significantly enhance the understanding of local variances. They will provide an excellent starting point for a dialogue with communities and a platform from which the LAPs can begin to shape local service delivery. The detailed nature of the local reporting will make it possible for future surveys to track reactions to changes in service delivery and future interventions.

Local reporting will allow residents to compare the views and experiences of their neighbours with those from other parts of the district. This is likely to broaden their view of certain issues and help them to understand the view point of people living in different conditions and circumstances. It will also mean that local people are far better equipped to engage with councillors and service providers.

The mini place surveys will add value to the LSP. The richness of evidence available at local level will provide a spatial element to the traditional thematic focus of the LSP's working groups. The work will also add value to service units throughout the council (and to partners) by adding a local qualitative element to broader performance measures. It will help:

- build understanding and trust locally;
- engage and support councillors (from all tiers); and
- build local capacity.

Finally the mini place surveys may help in the development of local charters.

Next Steps

Once they are completed, the South Lakeland District Council team will share the mini place surveys with colleagues, partners and the nascent LAPs. It is anticipated that the mini place surveys will help in setting a baseline from which the LAP executives can monitor and assess change. Even if some partnerships choose not to become involved in devolved budgets the profiles offered by local reporting will allow them to:

- monitor service provision;
- get involved in action planning; and
- offer informed and evidence based input to the next iteration of the South Lakeland Community Strategy.

Learning

It was necessary to apply a weighting to the additional survey responses as these were not included in the weighting of the main sample applied by the Audit Commission. This meant the supplier (BMG Research Ltd) working out an approach that was aligned with the process used by the Audit Commission (Cobalt Sky) but which was appropriate to the more homogenous population of South Lakeland.

This process was not without its challenges but BMG Research are confident that they have now developed an approach which could be applied to other boosted samples at district level.

The South Lakeland place survey is not the only place survey to include analysis at lower levels of geography. All the place surveys completed by BMG Research break down the responses to each question by ward. Some - for example survey reports for Cumbria and Dorset - include analysis by key service centre or other defined sub areas within a district such as a neighbourhood forum or priority target area. The boost to the sample has made sure that South Lakeland's mini place surveys are robust and will allow the council to provide a much richer source of intelligence on local conditions and opinion to service units and partners.

It is important to note that the place survey provides data. Additional work is necessary to develop and articulate the story that it tells. It will be essential that the mini place surveys offer a narrative and use data sparingly to support the findings.

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Annexes

Glossary

APACS	Assessment of Policing and Community Safety
ASHE	Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings
BERR	Department for Business, Enterprise & Regulatory Reform
BME	Black and minority ethnic
CAA	Comprehensive Area Assessment
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CDRP	Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership
CLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
CPP	Child Protection Plan
CPR	Child Protection and Referrals
CRC	Commission for Rural Communities
CTSA	Counter Terrorism Security Adviser
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
Defra	Department for Food and Rural Affairs
DfT	Department for Transport
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESOL	English for speakers of another language
FCERM	Flood and coastal erosion risk management
FE	Further education
FRA	Fire and Rescue Authority
FSA	Food Standards Authority
GCSE	General Certificate for Secondary Education
GFS	Grant Funded Services
GIS	Geographical Information System
GP	General Practitioner
GPS	Global Positioning System
HES	Hospital Episode Statistics
HLE	Healthy life expectancy
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
IMD	Index of multiple deprivation
iTRACE	Travel Plan Management Software for local authorities
KPI	Key performance indicator
LA	Local authority
LAA	Local Area Agreement
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LSOA	Lower super output area
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference
MSOA	Middle super output area
NaTSO	National Counter Terrorism Security Office

NDTMS	National Drug Treatment Monitoring System
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NHS	National Health Service
NI	National Indicator
NOMIS	National Online
NOMS	National Offender Management Service
NSVQ	National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications
OASys	Offender Assessment System
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PAYE	Pay as you earn
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PPOS	Public and priority offender scheme
RA	Risk assessment
RAP	Referrals, Assessment & Packages of Care
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SAP	Standard Assessment Procedure
SCANNER	Surface Condition Assessment for the National Network of Roads
SEN	Special educational needs
SOA	Super output area
SSDA	Sector Skills Development Agency
TDA	Training & Development Agency
UKPMS	UK Pavement Management System
UNIFY	The system for reporting and sharing NHS and social care performance information.
VAT	Value added tax

The complexities of geography: The example of North Yorkshire

In the county of Yorkshire there are eleven higher tier LSPs:

- two in North Yorkshire – North Yorkshire County Council (which includes seven district councils) and York City Council;
- four in South Yorkshire – Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield Councils; and
- five in West Yorkshire – Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield.

North Yorkshire County Council area is home to 570,000 people, spread over a vast geographical area from the east coast to the east Lancashire conurbation. It includes a huge variety of settlements and conditions including Scarborough and Whitby on the coast, Pickering and Richmond in the uplands, Harrogate and Knaresborough on the edge of the Leeds City region. In all there are over 900 individual communities¹, represented by councillors working in three tiers of local government. North Yorkshire has one LAA. Government's assessment of the performance of North Yorkshire's eight local authorities and their public sector partners will therefore be based on a single analysis of North Yorkshire as a whole.

York, the city set within North Yorkshire, is home to 180,000 people. York City Council is a unitary council however, so it will report against the National Indicator Set and will be assessed by Government's joint inspectorate in its own right despite the fact that it has a significantly smaller population and is concentrated in a much smaller space than neighbouring North Yorkshire.

1. When defined by a parish council, parish 'meeting' or town council

Technical definitions: postcodes

Royal Mail maintains a UK-wide system of postcodes to identify postal delivery areas. It is possible to use postcodes as a means of collating data for a defined geographical area. As most people know their postcode, the presentation of evidence by postcode geography will allow them to understand how the information relates to places they know.

For this reason postcodes are used by all public sector agencies who collect and submit data to the ONS as the main geographic reference on each data entry; for example the Police will attach the full postcode to each incident report and social services will record the full postcode of their client addresses.

Postcodes therefore offer a viable geographical unit against which to report performance; postcodes also impact in a way that means something to local people. There are some caveats however:

- whilst full postcodes relate to a maximum of 100 addresses, they can relate to as few as 15 addresses. It is possible that data may be suppressed for reasons of confidentiality;
- the boundaries of postcodes are not fixed, they are subject to change in order to accommodate allocation to individual businesses; and
- postcode boundaries are not contiguous with other geographic boundaries. If a unit postcode straddles a ward (or higher level) boundary, it is necessary to decide to which ward to allocate the data.

Technical definitions: rural/urban

The Government introduced a rural/urban definition in 2004. It is based on the measures of settlement size and the density of population in hectare grid squares and provides an eight-part rural and urban classification for every output area, super output area and ward in England and Wales. It is now also possible to get a rural/urban classification for full postcodes.

Application of the rural/urban definition allows users to see differences in conditions and performance across an area subdivided into the eight-part classification. It is possible to apply this rural/urban filter at virtually all levels of statistical and local government geography.

Technical definitions: super output areas

The ONS sub-divided the entire country into tiny pieces called Census Output Areas in 2001. These Output Areas each have a population of 300 (approximately 150 households) and consequently vary in size and geographical coverage substantially, depending on whether they relate to inner city or remote upland areas. All the socio-economic data collected and analysed from the 2001 Census is reported at Output Area level.

In 2004, the ONS introduced Super Output Areas; these come in three size layers, Lower, Middle and Upper, each of which are consistent in size and whose boundaries will not change:

- Lower SOAs are built of 2001 Output Areas - typically five - and so contain on average 625 households, a mean population of 1500 and a minimum of 1000. There are 32,482 Lower SOAs in England.
- Middle SOAs are built from groups of Lower SOAs. They have a mean population of 7200, and a minimum population of 5000. They are constrained by the 2003 local authority boundaries used for 2001 Census outputs. There 6780 Middle SOAs in England.

All statistics collated and reported by the ONS are presented at SOA level; some data sets are available at Lower SOA but many are only available at the larger Middle SOA level.

It is therefore entirely possible to build up a settlement from the best fit of its constituent OAs or SOAs and so aggregate data reported at these levels to your town or village or interest.

This approach is used extensively by consultants involved in socio-economic analysis. It is time-consuming, however, and requires judgements to be taken when (as is almost inevitably the case) the boundaries of OAs or SOAs do not follow the boundaries of the subject settlement.

Technical definitions: wards

Local government geography is predicated not upon place but on concentrations of population. These centres of population are then awarded the status of a local authority territory and sub-divided by population into electoral wards. To the local authority therefore, wards are a lower level of spatial geography than districts. As such, they are often used as the basis for more local analysis of socio-economic characteristics or for local engagement.

Wards do not necessarily resonate with local people as the place where they live, however. This is especially true in more rural areas as the size of wards increases in direct proportion to the sparsity of population. As a result, they often include a number of individual settlements in a group which is not in any way natural to their residents.

Despite this drawback, the importance of wards to the democratic function of local authorities means that they are often used as statistical units. As a result, much of the data which are used to measure performance against the NI Set is collected and analysed at ward level, making them a potential unit for local reporting.

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