



Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

LARIA Newsletter February 2024

LARIA Updates

Paul Holme, Head of Performance, Research & Intelligence @ Manchester City Council

Hello all and welcome to this latest edition of the LARIA newsletter. I'm Paul Holme a member of the LARIA council but day-to-day I lead the Performance, Research and Intelligence function within Manchester City Council.

Whenever I'm asked to write one of these I wrestle with where to start and what to focus on. Should I reflect on an interesting research project (there are lots), or talk about the challenges of leading a performance and insight service, or showcase the opportunities coming out of emerging programmes of work. The truth is it could be any of these, as the work that our sector does on a daily basis is varied and embedded in so much that happens in our local areas.

So I thought I would start with that last point and see where it takes me...

I've been thinking about the services priorities for 2024/25 and this made me reflect on the products we've produced and value that they held. In doing this I reviewed my notebook (OneNote these days...rather than the scrappy paper notebook I used to carry around) to see where I'd presented our work and what discussions it had informed. What I spotted was that nearly every discussion at our Senior Management Team over the last 6-months included data, analytics and insight, and made me think about if those discussions could even have happened without my team's [our sector's] support.

Let me give you a flavour of what I picked out.

1. **The refresh of Manchester's [Our Manchester] Strategy for the City.** Whilst this is led by our policy teams and strategic leaders, the whole process is underpinned by data, evidence and engagement. My service produces the annual progress report against the Our Manchester Strategy (State of the City), we've created baselines for the strategy refresh, conducted analytics to spot patterns, and are supporting the consultation process to ensure what we get back is accurate and usable.
2. **The launch of Manchester's New Economic Strategy.** Lots of synergies with above, in that we've been producing an Economic [performance] Dashboard for several years now, and this, coupled with the analysis around any key lines of enquiry from that monitoring, has directly influenced this strategy. We also brought our expertise and understanding of the local economic picture into conversations with the Resolution Foundation, who were looking at Manchester from a national perspective.
3. **The Council's Climate Change Annual Report.** My analysts developed and produced the Performance Management Framework to support this work, with the monitoring and analysis featuring directly as evidence in the annual report. However, we've done more than simply look back at our achievements to date, and have worked with academics and experts to produce projections into the future. We then used these projections to model different options that the Council could take, providing evidence to support informed decision making.
4. **Manchester's Cost of Living response.** Our analysis enabled a rapid and coordinate response, with the data/analysis setting out a consistent baseline that all agencies were able to get behind. Whilst the analysis shows we'll never solve the entire problem, it did enable conversation around options, alignment and where the biggest impacts could be made. A recent review workshop around our overall response saw all attendees agree that data was the centre point for everything they did. It was nice to see it acknowledged in the centre of each tables flipchart.
5. **The Council's Budget.** No surprises here that data and analytics play a massive part in setting our budgets, understanding the pressures, and testing impacts on services... but the data/analytics is not just accountancy, it is also about understanding activity, demand and performance. I have performance & insight managers embedded within key council service areas and they work with services to ensure a performance management culture is

embedded, highlighting where a changing demand might be happening. But we've also worked with the finance managers to model the financial impact of the local trends we see, and this directly feeds into budget setting. We also have a role, as with all of the above, in ensuring that any consultation on options is conducted appropriately.

I've focused here on examples that show the influence on strategic thinking rather than the more operational aspects of a service like mine (statutory reporting, performance management, data governance, naming streets, and managing complaints), but what I take from this is that none of these strategic priorities happen without what we as a sector do being at the heart.

So, that's the positive part but my thinking about service planning also made me reflect on where the barriers to doing this well might be. I dedicate a significant part of my week to 121 time with my managers, so that they have protected time ask me anything, and I have a good understanding of how the service is doing and can react quickly where we need to change things. So I went back to my notes, this time those I'd taken in 121s, and picked out what some of the common challenges and barriers have been.

What I heard related to:

1. **Access to the right tools (ICT/Systems) and data.** We don't always have the access to the right tools at the right time and a changing technology landscape means that we need to be agile, albeit within the framework of a clear roadmap. It's a similar situation in terms of access to data, ensuring we have what we need, but in a safe, legal, proportionate, and ethical way... increasingly we're also talking about integrated datasets that span service areas and partner organisations. All of this means that we must think ahead about what we need as a service [to do our jobs] and set out those requirements to our technology and data partners/stakeholders.
2. **A lack of clarity around the support we are asked to provide.** The brief for a project or piece of analysis is not always initially clear, which adds time and complexity to a project trying to agree what that is. But a bigger issue is agreeing a clear purpose, if a service cannot describe 'why' they want something then these means that any product we produce is likely to have minimal impact. Innovation and the best products come from having a clearly identified purpose, therefore it is important that we take a logical approach

which is why we try to use 'logic models' to understand where data/analytics can best support an end goal.

3. **Changing scope and prioritisation.** Linked to above once we have a clear specification and purpose the next challenge is to understand when the project has been delivered and avoiding scope creep and/or a dependency on my service. Whilst my default position is to always work flexibly with others and focus on adding value over simply working through a to-do list, there are times when this becomes blurred and if not monitored we end up working on something for too long and/or beyond the period where we continue to add value. So, setting those regular review points for honest reflection and discussion are critical.
4. **Reviewing our own performance.** There are times where we've taken the 'we've always done it that way' approach, which whilst that still delivers what we need it may not be the most effective way of doing something. And being honest this may also highlight areas where we have skills or capability gaps, stifling our ability to embrace a new way of working. So important that we also look at ourselves as ask 'could we be more efficient' and 'are we properly dealing with any areas where we are not'?
5. **A finite and contracting capacity.** Like all local government organisations we're constantly trying to do more with less and manage the annual contraction of budgets. This is the nature of the sector we work in, but means we need to constantly manage change alongside delivering against the priorities that we're asked to support. So, it more important than ever than in addition to tackling the challenges (and opportunities from them) above, that we also think about longer term succession planning, ensuring we have the right people with the right skills at the right time. This means that the next vacancy we have may not be a like for like replacement, it may mean investing in different roles now to mirror where our operating model and supporting technologies are heading, and it also means having forward looking conversations with existing staff about their own development opportunities as what we do each year will continue to be different.

This has been a useful exercise for me in terms of summarising some of the things I'm currently wrestling with. Maybe next time I will simply focus on my reflections from a specific bit of research or thinking, rather than an outpouring of a day in the life of a Head of Service, but for now I hope at least some of this resonates with you and sparks some discussion.

It is important that we celebrate and promote those examples of where we as a community add value, but also reflect honestly on some of the challenges we must deal with. LARIA, alongside our many partners, can help us do this collectively, so keep getting involved, share your stories and reach out to colleagues as much as you can.

I'm always happy to chat and explore new ideas, so reach out through LARIA if there is anything you'd like to discuss further.

Cheers,

Paul

News

Data matching with UPRNs to identify likely HMOs in Croydon



HMOs house some of the more vulnerable Croydon residents. It's some of the most affordable accommodation available, and it's Croydon Council's ambition to provide good housing services for residents, making sure they can live in safe, secure, warm and dry homes. Knowing these locations allows local councils to uphold safety standards, plan communities effectively, respond to emergencies, allocate resources efficiently, and address the social impact of these properties on neighbourhoods.

In the autumn of 2023, a small working group was formed, comprising Croydon's Private Sector Housing Manager, its Local Land & Property Gazetteer Custodian, a local Councillor and GeoPlace's Director of Informatics to consider datasets that would be most useful in identifying HMOs and matching locations via UPRNs to develop a ranking with the aim was to extract the top 50 'most likely' unregistered HMOs from the weighted data for visits by officers. Read more at [Using UPRNs to identify HMOs](#).

Consultation on health and social care statistical outputs

In December, the ONS, Department of Health and Social Care, the UK Health Security Agency and NHS England launched



a joint public consultation on their health and social care statistical outputs. The consultation seeks to understand how clear and valuable our users find the health and care statistical system and how we can improve and streamline the system going forward. The consultation closes on Tuesday 5 March 2024.

[Access the consultation](#)

Population projections user needs exercise

Population and household projections produced by the ONS serve a wide range of users across government and beyond. The primary purpose is to provide information on potential future population and household numbers. To help ONS prepare for the set of 2022-based projections, they are inviting you to share your output needs from the projections, to understand what you would like to see in these releases. The survey closes on Tuesday 12 March 2024.

[Complete the survey](#)

A group of local authorities have been meeting since 2020 to share what they are doing in research and analysis. We met again in February and here is a flavour of the topics shared:

- Census – ordering commissioned tables to help on key issues
- Children and schools - gathering data on children and ethnicity for equalities team
- Crime – mapping crime data
- Deprivation – working on needs assessments
- Economy – working with local Growth Board to establish base data set
- Environment – with climate change colleagues to help monitor climate change indicators
- Equalities – slides on the nine protected characteristics
- Finance – working away on potential indicators to show early warnings

*A*nalytics *C*ambridge

- Population – taking account of latest ONS national projections

The breadth of work needed and being done and valued – amazing!

Richard Potter, Analytics Cambridge, Regional co-ordinator for the East of England

Courses, Training Events and Webinars

techUK webinar How local authorities can achieve millions in efficiency savings from location data

On Tuesday 27th February, techUK will host a webinar examining the use of address and street data in improving services and efficiency savings. Based on a [study with](#)



[Nottingham City Council](#), the webinar will give particular insight to the following functions: planning, property tax (council tax and NDR), highways, social care and education, housing and waste management.

It's free of charge to attend. See more at [How local authorities can achieve millions in efficiency savings from location data](#).

Registration for GeoPlace conference now open!

GeoPlace is delighted to announce the return of our annual conference to an in-person format on 21st May at the iconic Manchester United Football Club.

The conference, generously sponsored, continues its tradition of offering free registration for local authorities. Attendees can expect a dynamic agenda focusing on key themes:

- Speeding up Home Buying and Selling
- Connecting Services to Customers
- Healthy and Green Communities
- Journey Towards Excellence and Exemplar Awards Presentation

- Be Inspired by Nottingham City Council's 3D World: Gain insights into cutting-edge 3D city initiatives.

Registration is now [open on the GeoPlace website](#). For those arriving the evening before, GeoPlace extends a warm invitation to a [pre-conference drinks reception and quiz](#).

We hope to see you in Manchester in May.

Jobs

To submit a job advert to appear in the newsletter or on the LARIA website, please download and complete this [form](#) (Full Corporate and Corporate Members only). You can also post Job Vacancies on the Jobs Board in the LARIA [Members' Area](#).

The next newsletter submission deadline is [Thursday 21st March](#).

Are you a Corporate or Full Corporate Member?

The logo for Laria, consisting of the word "Laria" in a bold, teal, sans-serif font.

Local Area Research + Intelligence Association

Your LARIA Corporate Membership entitles you to submit content to the monthly LARIA newsletter, if you have any research, events, job adverts, resources or news which you would us to include please send it to admin@laria.org.uk.

The next newsletter submission deadline is [Thursday 21st March](#).

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