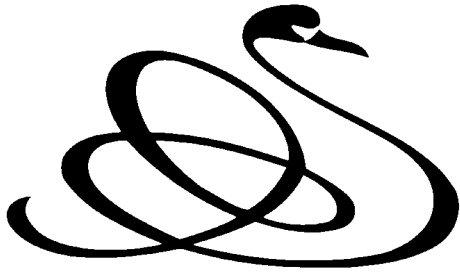


York Consulting

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

**SUPPORTING EVIDENCE FOR LOCAL
DELIVERY PRELIMINARY STAGE**

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PRELIMINARY STAGE

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ANNEX A: LIST OF CONSULTEES

1 INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 York Consulting Limited (YCL) was commissioned by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to conduct the preliminary stage of the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery (SELD) project.
- 1.2 This report sets out the findings of the consultations which composed the preliminary stage of work, and makes recommendations as to the specification of pilot Neighbourhood Research Support Services in four English regions.

The Structure of the Report

- 1.3 In **Section Two** of this report we discuss the evidence based delivery agenda within neighbourhood renewal, and highlight some of the key issues emerging from it. We go on to discuss the activities already being undertaken, by a variety of agents at the national level, and then place the SELD project within this context.
- 1.4 Following on from this discussion, we discuss some of the potential options for the delivery of the SELD project, and the implications of those options. Section Two forms the first part of our findings from the broad consultation process, informed by a series of discussions with lead officers within the NRU.
- 1.5 In **Section Three** we present an analysis and discussion of the regional consultation processes, focusing on the capacities of practitioners and the barriers they face in using evidence to inform the delivery of neighbourhood renewal. This section should be read in conjunction with Section Two, and not treated as a stand alone document.
- 1.6 Finally, in **Section Four**, we set out, based on the full consultation process and our understanding of the evidence based delivery agenda, the roles that the Neighbourhood Research Support Services should seek to fulfil, and a brief discussion of styles of delivery that are likely to be appropriate.

2 THE EVIDENCE BASED DELIVERY AGENDA

Introduction

- 2.1 In this section, we discuss the evidence based delivery agenda and key emerging issues. We then go on to present some of the activities already in place which seek to address this issue, and place the SELD project in context within them. We then present some potential options for the delivery of the SELD project.
- 2.2 Finally in this section, we introduce the purposes of the consultation process in the four possible pilot regions (and/or sub-regions). Our understanding of this issue has been informed by a review of a range of documentary evidence, including project evaluations and specifications, which was complemented by a series of in-depth consultations with NRU officers. A listing of those consulted is at Annex A.

The Need for Evidence Based Delivery

- 2.3 The need for evidence to support the delivery of neighbourhood renewal has been set out in a number of Government documents. Key to these in the specific context of supporting evidence is the report of Policy Action Team 16: Learning Lessons.
- 2.4 The report found that there were key deficiencies in the following key areas:
- strategies were not evidence based;
 - strategies were not outcome driven;
 - there was no effective means of learning from 'what works';
 - there was often a shortage of skilled staff.
- 2.5 These deficiencies have been confirmed through a range of sources, including independent evaluative studies. For example, in the *2002/03 Progress Report on Local Strategic Partnerships in Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas*, York Consulting concluded that, while making use of evidence in the development of strategies and actions is seen as vital to the future success of LSPs and, by implication, effective neighbourhood renewal, there were apparent weaknesses in this essential function.

- 2.6 This finding has been confirmed by a recent study which reviewed Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies, the key documents for the delivery of neighbourhood renewal locally. In this report, the authors state:

“On the whole, LNRSs use some level of evidence to identify needs, identify priorities and inform the allocation of resources...Many also acknowledge that there is more work to do.”¹

- 2.7 The report also highlighted that while LNRSs recognised the importance of monitoring and evaluation, key areas requiring the need of supporting evidence, tackling these areas was at an embryonic stage. It also expressed the concern that there was, in some cases, a lack of systematic analysis of the causes of deprivation and neighbourhood decline.

“They present the statistics but seldom interpret them to explore their causes, significance, and the relative importance of different manifestations of deprivation or their implications.”

- 2.8 These are weaknesses which are being addressed through the promotion of evidence based floor target action planning and other measures to boost the analytical and strategic performance of NRU's partners. We discuss some of these measures below.

The Context for SELD

- 2.9 The SELD project is being delivered in the context of a range of other activities, largely hosted and driven through the NRU, which seek to tackle similar issues. It is the intention that the Neighbourhood Research Support Services will be complementary to existing activities where appropriate, while specialising in an offer which is not duplicated elsewhere.

- 2.10 Within the regional context, neighbourhood renewal teams have been established in the nine regional Government Offices, to develop linkages between neighbourhood renewal practitioners in the field and the NRU and Government itself. Some of the practical responsibilities of the GO include monitoring and assessing performance management among Local Strategic Partnerships, and acting as network facilitators for neighbourhood renewal.

- 2.11 Within the national context, we look at some relevant activities below, placed within the context of the following NRU programmes:

¹ Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies: Document Analysis and Review, ODPM/DoT, 2004

- Research & Development;
- Skills & Knowledge.

Research & Development

2.12 NRU's Research & Development Division is tasked with:

- responding to policymakers' and practitioners' needs for research and evidence and developing a research strategy in a consultative manner;
- ensuring that policies and decisions build on existing knowledge and are evidence based;
- establishing mechanisms to promote and communicate the evidence base widely; and
- developing neighbourhood information and analysis.

2.13 The division works closely with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the maintenance and operation of the Neighbourhood Statistics website (NeSS), and in the production of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. The former service first aimed to draw together a range of small area datasets and other useful information and provide it through a single public access website.

2.14 The future aims for NeSS include the development of more and better quality data on key policy areas, complemented by the introduction of an improved small area geography to ensure that users can define their own geographic areas for data sets and thus obtain data at the correct level for their purposes. The ongoing addition of data should also enable more robust comparison over a time period. Discussions with officers from ONS and within NRU responsible for liaison over NeSS suggested that the next iteration of the web facility, scheduled for early 2005, should significantly address many of these issues.

Skills and Knowledge Programme

2.15 The Skills & Knowledge Programme is aimed at bringing about a 'step-change' in the level of skills and knowledge for those involved in neighbourhood renewal, and is driven through the Learning Curve strategy. The following are examples of key strands within the programme:

- Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers – offering advice on NR themes and processes, emphasising the nature and value of ‘what works’, and who come from a wide range of backgrounds, including service providers and regeneration practitioners.
- Renewal.net – an online guide to what works in NR, providing case studies, guidance and project summaries;
- Regional Networking Project - aiming to ensure that neighbourhood renewal practitioners are able to communicate face to face and/or virtually with regeneration practitioners to share information about what works, and what does not.

2.16 The NRA system, by virtue of its expert advisory/call-off nature, has proven to be of significant help in tackling and overcoming some of the problems encountered by practitioners, and was referenced by some practitioners as part of their approach to overcoming analytical barriers. Consultations with NRU officers however revealed that there were a limited number of NRAs with specific backgrounds in the fields most germane to evidence use (data capture, data analysis etc.), and therefore their scope to provide national coverage on these issues was limited to an extent. We return to this issue later in this section.

2.17 While the activities discussed above reflect a commitment on behalf of ODPM to improving the delivery of Neighbourhood Renewal, and have made extensive progress in achieving this, there was a recognition that much remains to be done, especially in the context of supporting evidence. It is in this context that the SELD project should be placed, as we discuss below.

The Role of SELD

2.18 As discussed above, there is a perception, supported by a variety of evidence, that there is a gap in the analytical skills and capacity function in neighbourhood renewal. It is this gap that the SELD project is aiming to address.

2.19 The SELD project seeks to improve the delivery of neighbourhood renewal through improving the effective gathering, selection, and use of evidence in local neighbourhood renewal activity. The targeted beneficiaries of the project are local practitioners of neighbourhood renewal – including policy makers, researchers, project and programme managers. Ultimately, the key beneficiaries will be the public who will benefit from improved local delivery.

2.20 The SELD project seeks to deliver this aim through the following objectives:

- to support evidence based policy and practice in neighbourhood renewal;
- to provide support to enable local practitioners to develop their skill base and knowledge in gathering, utilising and sharing evidence;
- to enable partners to effectively use evidence in developing strategy, plans and project management;
- to facilitate communication and feedback between research producers and users at the neighbourhood level and the NRU to help focus activities most effectively to support neighbourhood delivery;
- to communicate sources of evidence generated centrally to local partners; and
- to ensure that research conducted at the local level is effectively disseminated and made available to the optimal number of partners.

2.21 The principal output of the SELD project will be the delivery of pilot Neighbourhood Research Support Services (NRSS). The purpose of these services will be to provide expert advice, of a specialist and technical nature, to practitioners engaged in generating social research and evaluative evidence about neighbourhood renewal needs and interventions.

2.22 It is important to state at this stage that SELD, and the NRSS, is only a part of the offer to neighbourhood renewal practitioners. It is not planned to be, nor can it be perceived as, a universal solution to the supporting evidence issue.

2.23 In addition, the consultation process suggested that one of the barriers to effective can include partnership working and political culture. This can result in a disconnection between policy, research and practice. It is not the role of SELD to specifically address these problems, although they may be being addressed through other NRU initiatives.

Options for Procurement

2.24 In this section we briefly set out some of the potential options for delivery of the NRSS that informed consultations, and include a short discussion of the risks and dilemmas associated with each one. This selection is not exhaustive, nor should it be regarded as the consultants' preferred options. They are included here for the purpose of stimulating further discussion and exploration. The options under discussion are:

- delivery through dedicated services (most likely sourced through commercial providers);
- delivery in collaboration with regional partners;
- delivery through the system of Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers.

Delivery through Dedicated Services

2.25 Delivery of the NRSS through a dedicated service model is a practical solution that would most probably be facilitated through commercial providers. To an extent, this model is already in use in the NRA scheme, and has been demonstrated to be robust and practical.

2.26 This model would most likely be provided through specialist commercial consultancies, academic research centres/institutes, or possibly existing regional intelligence providers. Potential providers could be selected in the context of demonstrable skills and competencies in the areas of social data, working with practitioners, and an understanding of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.

2.27 This option could be delivered equally effectively by providers who are discrete to the individual regions, or through national providers with the capacity and regional knowledge to engage with the issues arising on a regional basis.

Delivery in Collaboration with Regional Partners

- 2.28 Key regional partners, including Regeneration Centres of Excellence and Regional Observatories, combine some of the likely skills and expertise that the NRSS will wish to offer to practitioners. These include knowledge of social research, data analysis, and familiarity with neighbourhood renewal practice (often through practical experience).
- 2.29 There will be beneficial effects to the NRSS in linking with these organisations, and this is reflected in the offer set out in **Section Four**. However, given the dynamics of the RCE and Regional Observatory picture, with varying stages of evolution evident across the four proposed pilot regions, it may not be practical to deliver the NRSS in direct collaboration these facilities.

Delivery through Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers

- 2.30 As noted above, the NRA system has met with success in tackling a range of issues in the field of neighbourhood renewal. Although consultations acknowledged that there were limited numbers of NRAs currently possessing some of the technical and specialist skills that the NRSS might need to possess, there was an indication that this skillset did exist in some regions.
- 2.31 Given that NRAs have, in many areas, already started to build strong and effective links with practitioners, it may therefore be practical to link the NRSS to this support stream, by specifying this model of delivery if appropriate in one region.
- 2.32 There would need to be discussions regarding how deployment and assignment of the support would be managed. It will be important for the SELD project manager to liaise with the NRA lead within NRU if this option for delivery is taken forward.

Other Issues

- 2.33 The options for procurement set out above raise two additional and inter-linked issues which NRU will need to consider. They are:
- sub-regional variations in need and demand;

- prioritisation of the client group.

2.34 There is the potential for sub-regional variations in need and demand among practitioners. This may be due to local skills gaps, divergent social geographies, and past experience in neighbourhood renewal. Although we cannot predict or forecast these sub-regional variations with any degree of robustness, it is our recommendation that NRU should explore these issues with relevant parties in the procurement phase, and be flexible in forward planning to reflect them.

2.35 The NRSS are a finite resource, and NRU should seek to ensure that they retain sufficient operational flexibility to be targeted at the areas of greatest need and most urgent priority.

3 REGIONAL FINDINGS

Introduction

- 3.1 A series of structured interviews was held with practitioners of neighbourhood renewal and regional stakeholders (GOs, RCEs, Regional Observatory staff) across the four proposed pilot regions. These were facilitated where possible by focus group exercises for practitioners (North East, North West). In total over 50 individuals were consulted. In order to provide aid navigation of this section we report on each region in turn.
- 3.2 The purposes of the consultation process were to establish some of the skills and competency issues facing practitioners, and to assess in what ways the SELD project, through the NRSS, might be able to impact on them. It is important to note that, although the regional consultation process was robust and reasonably comprehensive, the findings discussed below are not based on a specific needs analysis exercise, nor can they be regarded as entirely indicative.
- 3.3 This section complements the findings of the consultation process with NRU officers which informs Section Two. The two sections should, therefore, be read in conjunction, rather than being treated as stand-alone documents.
- 3.4 Although it has not been possible to quantify, we identified a trend for larger organisations, such as LSPs based in major urban centres, for example, to express greater confidence in their capacity to analyse data and use supporting evidence, than those practitioners based in smaller LSPs, New Deal for Communities Partnerships, and Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders. This issue should be considered by NRU when anticipating the likely target audience for the NRSS (see Para 2.34).

The North East

- 3.5 The consultation process in the North East suggested that practitioners of neighbourhood renewal were analysing data and using evidence to meet the following core aims:
- understanding local problems and needs (baseline);

- strategy development and intervention design (turning intelligence into evidence);
- evaluation.

3.6 Researchers and research users captured in the consultation process *generally* felt fairly well-equipped in using evidence to perform these tasks. However, areas of relative weakness were developing strategies based on sound evidence, and evaluation of actions following intervention.

3.7 In the case of evaluation, the focus group held in Newcastle offered an opportunity to explore this issue in more depth. Discussions indicated that while some respondents found the analytical techniques underpinning evaluation problematic, others recognised that they encountered difficulty in tackling the starting point of evaluation, setting robust baselines and developing indicators in order to implement review and measure progress as strategies and projects developed.

3.8 Further areas of need were established in how to present data when developing strategy, and developing linkages between different streams of data, or 'joining up'.

"Some element of co-ordination in the way in which statistical analysis is presented would be a help."

"It would be helpful to have a consistent approach to data analysis, not just across the region, but linked with other regions as well."

"A national body could co-ordinate the way in which statistical analysis is presented to get it in the same format...this body could sit outside the current regional players."

"The use of evidence is slowly improving, but the linking of issues is only just starting e.g. linking educational factors to health indices."

3.9 Practitioners are currently using a range of resources to help address and overcome some of these barriers. They include NRAs, the internal research capacity of LSP partner agencies (where available and suitable), and commissioning work from the commercial sector. There was no single source of support that commanded a majority of usage or even recognition.

"It would be ideal to have one point of reference...I'm not aware of contacts I could use, or rather, I don't have the contacts."

3.10 Regional providers of intelligence suggested that overall capacity in the region was an issue in terms of knowing what data was available, and how to treat it when obtained.

“Capacity is an issue – not all practitioners at the local level are skilled enough to know what to ask for, where to look, or how to analyse it once they have it.”

“We (local data provider) take data to the LSPs because often they don’t know what to request.”

3.11 These themes were confirmed by discussions with regional stakeholders, who indicated that while there was a broad range of data available, practitioners were not always well-equipped in terms of how to access it and how to use it effectively. This was especially a concern in terms of taking data, subjecting it to interrogation and analysis, and using the results to design interventions and write strategies based on sound and robust evidence.

3.12 Consultees felt that the location and options for delivery of the NRSS should be flexible, although there was a general feeling that placing the function in Newcastle, the principal urban centre in the region, would be practical. There was support for a responsive helpline or web request facility, whereby practitioners could log requests for advice, to be followed up by face to face visits where appropriate. Where practical, and recognising budgetary limitations, this could be complemented by regular ‘surgeries’ on evidence based issues.

3.13 Although consultees recognised the value of linking the NRSS with existing structures, principally the Government Office, there was a feeling that the service should be autonomous and ‘above’ these existing agencies.

“The Government Office is well-placed to act as a broker, but the NRSS needs independence at a regional level.”

“It should link with existing networks and support them, it should not duplicate their existing activities.”

3.14 In the consultation process in the North East the following roles were discussed and highlighted as being of value:

- Signposting to relevant data;
- Guidance and advice on analytical techniques;

- Helping practitioners develop a more consistent approach to analysis, leading to more consistent presentation of data and supporting evidence.

The North West

3.15 The consultation process in the North West suggested that practitioners of neighbourhood renewal were analysing data and using evidence to meet the following core aims:

- understanding local problems and needs (baseline);
- strategy development and intervention design (turning intelligence into evidence);
- evaluation.

3.16 Of these, fewer practitioners are currently using evidence to evaluate their actions than understanding local problems and needs and developing strategies. Practitioners also indicated that they were using evidence to support the process of bidding for funding (from various sources) and in the mainstreaming of neighbourhood renewal activity.

3.17 Although the focus group process indicated that neighbourhood renewal practitioners generally felt themselves very well equipped in using evidence to meet these aims, there were a number of individuals who were less confident, for a variety of reasons.

“Analytical skills can be a problem, it is easy to jump to a simple (and superficially correct) conclusion without really understanding the complexities of the situation.”

“Need to ensure we (practitioners) know what data is available – it needs to be signposted and disseminated where useful.”

3.18 Using evidence to design strategies and inform interventions, and to evaluate actions, were areas where practitioners felt, relatively, less well-equipped than in forming baselines. In addition, a number of consultees cited a lack of the analytical skills to base strategies on evidence of what had worked were a barrier for them.

3.19 Consultations in the North West found that practitioners were involved in designing and commissioning a range of primary research. Practitioners felt that some form of guidance to those less experienced in this field based around the technical requirements and demands of the process would be beneficial.

3.20 One respondent noted that too large a research capacity could also be a hindrance to effective evidence use.

“There are a range of different research functions that are disconnected.”

3.21 It is worth noting in relation to this robust self-assessment of capacity that, during consultations with NRU officers, it was noted that the NRA offer had not been taken up in the North West to any great extent.

3.22 Reflecting this point, practitioners were seeking assistance when they did encounter barriers from a diverse range of sources. These included local partners, Government departments, commercial consultancies, and the Government Office. Similarly to the North East, no single source of guidance was cited with any notable frequency.

3.23 The consultation process indicated that potentially a situation existed where smaller organisations, including LSPs, but also NDCs and NMPs, did not have some of the analytical skills in evidence use enjoyed by larger partnerships represented at the focus groups. Some of these larger organisations suggested that their take up of the potential NRSS offer was likely to be limited. There may therefore be potential for a sub-regional emphasis to the NRSS offer in the North West, focusing on targeted areas of need.

3.24 There was a wide-ranging discussion about the dangers of overlap and duplication in terms of the existing and developing support offer in the region. Consultees recognised that Government Office North West were focusing on performance management, which had links with the evidence based delivery agenda, but that the GO was not necessarily a suitable place to site the NRSS. It was also recognised that this developing support was not focused on the analytical skills required to treat and interrogate data to inform delivery.

3.25 The facility for the NRSS to interact with practitioners, providing them with expert advice on a reactive basis, was seen as essential by consultees. In the regional consultation process in the North West, the following roles were discussed and highlighted as valuable:

- Signposting to relevant data;
- Helping practitioners develop their analytical techniques, including those needed when designing primary research;
- Disseminating good practice and helping practitioners understand the underpinning analysis.

The South West

3.26 The consultation process in the South West demonstrated that practitioners of neighbourhood renewal were analysing data and using evidence to meet the following core aims:

- understanding local problems and needs (baseline);
- strategy development and intervention design (turning intelligence into evidence);
- evaluation.

3.27 Additional areas where practitioners were using evidence were in the provision of information to funding bodies in order to support bidding submissions, and in presenting data to a range of stakeholders, including communities and the wider public.

3.28 The consultation process, supported by a review of documentation relating to other capacity assessment projects², highlighted acknowledged weaknesses in capacity in the areas of locating information, analysis and profiling, and managing and evaluating the success of strategies and projects.

² Towards a South West Regeneration and Renewal Strategy, UWE/Cornwall Business School, 2004; South West Regional Social Data/Information Consultative Exercise, University of Bristol, 2003

- 3.29 In some cases, a lack of familiarity with the wealth of data available was cited as a directly contributing factor to ineffective use of evidence. Stakeholders noted that the level of support need tended to vary depending on the size of the organisations attempting to use social data. Within large organisations the analytical capacity was more developed, but even in these cases there were issues about selection and collation.

“A repository, or something similar, to inform us about what information is/should be readily available, would be useful. It would save time and effort if we knew, in advance of searching, what data can be acquired.”

“Practitioners are being asked to collect evidence which in many cases is not directly relevant to what they are trying to do.”

“Some people are aware of the full range of data out there, but they need help to sort the wheat from the chaff.”

- 3.30 The facility to manipulate and analyse data was a barrier attested to by some consultees, in some cases leading to potentially critical misunderstandings.

“Data errors have caused us problems. A recent example was where data provided from Social Services suggested clear differences in deprivation levels amongst the elderly population in different local districts. On closer inspection however, the differences were found to be due to data collection methods.”

- 3.31 Linked to this is a lack of clarity, particularly among policy makers, about the limitations of some forms of data collection.

“Small sample sizes, which are to be expected when looking at local data, mean that we have to be cautious when drawing conclusions.”

- 3.32 Advice and guidance on a range of evaluation and presentational issues relating to evidence was also mentioned as being helpful to practitioners, linked to some mechanism for sharing practice.

“Advice on common and consistent standards for presentation would be helpful.”

“It would be useful to have external advice on evaluation models and theories, and using evidence to shape action – this is a gap at the moment.”

“There is no mechanism for sharing data or what we have learned, LSPs are not effective at doing this.”

3.33 Sources of guidance for overcoming these barriers in the South West were, according to practitioners, limited. This may reflect the limited operational duration of some of the most likely sources of help, for example, the Regeneration Centre of Excellence is programmed for launch in Autumn 2004. One respondent was making effective use of the NRA scheme, while others were utilising a commercial consultancy option.

“We have used the NRA to help us understand and analyse education data, which can be very difficult to understand. They have been very helpful in assisting with analysis and interpretation, and we have used them on an ‘as needs’ basis with very effective results.”

3.34 The diverse socio-geographical nature of the region is something that needs to be reflected in the practical delivery of the NRSS. Consultees were clear that the facility would require a considerable element of flexibility in operational terms, which should be built into the delivery model.

3.35 In the light of these findings, the potential for delivering the NRSS in the South West through an NRA delivery style could be explored with relevant stakeholders within NRU.

3.36 In the regional consultation process in the North West, the following roles were discussed and highlighted as valuable:

- Signposting to data;
- Advice on the manipulation and analysis of data;
- Advising on the development of consistent standards for data presentation.

The West Midlands

3.37 The consultation process in the West Midlands demonstrated that practitioners of neighbourhood renewal were analysing data and using evidence to meet the following core aims:

- understanding local problems and needs (baseline);
- strategy development and intervention design (turning intelligence into evidence);
- evaluation.

3.38 Participants in the consultation process generally felt well equipped to use evidence in the first two tasks. There was an acknowledgement that, although the facility/capacity to evaluate and challenge data in order to develop policies was critical, it was not always uniformly developed across the region. In addition, a number of consultees expressed the feeling that the monitoring and evaluation of strategies/programmes was a weakness in their skillset.

3.39 Consultations evidenced the issue that there was a wide range of data available, and the difficulties that could arise in targeting what was relevant at the appropriate moment. There was an understanding that no single agency was able to provide all relevant data, but it was agreed that there was a potential for a more coherent mapping and signposting of data to take place.

“No-one can do it all, but it would be helpful to funnel some of the evidence that is out there.”

“There can be too much data, don’t know which to respond to – tendency to just gather more and more, without analysing it.”

3.40 Analysis and understanding were issues raised by a range of consultees, and were not simply limited to smaller partnerships or community groups.

“We’re not good at cause and effect, there needs to be more analysis of the causal relationships that produce data.”

3.41 Similarly to other regions, practitioners were appreciative of developing a commonality of approach in a number of evidence based areas. These included evaluation standards and general data use.

“It would be helpful to have a discussion and advice for users on general usage.”

“A set of common evaluation standards, that we could all work towards, would help consistency and information sharing about what works.”

3.42 One consultee presented a cogent argument for the NRSS to share what worked in real-time, and across regions.

“If something is happening in a local area in another region, which another partnership could benefit from, then this needs to be flagged up and promoted too. It shouldn’t be limited to sharing good practice solely within the region.”

3.43 Although references to regional support were more frequent in the West Midlands than in other regions, the ability of the available agencies to tackle the evidence based issue was perceived as limited, despite testimony to their strengths in other areas.

“There is no specific body in the region driving the evidence based agenda.”

“We’re not aware of agencies providing this kind of specific advice.”

3.44 Regional stakeholders themselves recognised the weaknesses in the capacity of practitioners to use evidence effectively. For the Regeneration Centre of Excellence, Regen West Midlands, key issues revolved around selection of data and analysis to form evidence that supported the development strategies and interventions. Consultations with the Regional Observatory confirmed a similar perception of a skills need in the identification and sourcing of relevant data and using it effectively.

3.45 The largely urbanised and well-connected nature of the West Midlands region would appear to make the siting of the NRSS in a central location, such as Birmingham, practical. However, there is a robust sub-regional structure in place within the West Midlands, and this should not be under-represented in the delivery model that is defined.

3.46 There was an articulated demand for the NRSS to maintain independence from existing structures, while ensuring linkages in order to avoid the potential for duplication. This is an especially critical consideration in the region, as the existing structures such as the Regional Observatory and the Regeneration Centre of Excellence are well-developed, and have been operational for some time.

3.47 The high level of engagement in neighbourhood renewal that was attested to by consultees and regional stakeholders makes it logical to concentrate on developing the NRSS as predominantly a call-off and advisory function in the West Midlands.

3.48 In the regional consultation process in the North West, the following roles were discussed and highlighted as valuable:

- Signposting to data;
- Advice on analytical techniques;
- Linking up and sharing information on what people are doing in the field of analysis and evidence based delivery.

4 THE NRSS

Introduction

- 4.1 In this section we set out, based on the results of the consultation process and informed by our discussion of the evidence based delivery agenda, the offer that the NRSS will seek to fulfil.

Regional Emphasis

- 4.2 There is a recognition, based on the consultation process and on existing evidence, that the take-up of some of the roles contained in the core offer will vary between regions. The offer does not seek to be entirely prescriptive or mandatory, and variations in regional demand for the individual roles will be addressed as they occur.

The NRSS Offer

- 4.3 The roles are set out in **Figure 4.1**, below. We then offer a brief description of how each role could be delivered by the NRSS.

Figure 4.1: NRSS Offer

Role 1 – Signposting Data

Signposting individuals to data sources – linked to specific themes, and improving knowledge of the main sources of data available to practitioners

Role 2 – Advising on the gathering and analysis of data

- (a) Providing advice on the gathering and analysis of data – what data to gather and when, methods and techniques of analysis, how to present data, and how to turn analysis into evidence and then into interventions**
- (b) Bespoke advice on primary research covering methodological issues, and also acting as a regional facilitator – signposting research going on within regions (and nationally) and linking commissioning processes together**

Role 3 – Advising on good practice in using evidence

Highlighting and disseminating good practice in how analysis informs evidence usage – examples of using evidence to write strategies and design interventions, monitor programmes, measure progress etc.

Role 4 – Representing the NRU

To act as a conduit/communication mechanism between practitioners and the NRU and vice-versa – helping to better explain NRU’s mission, providing intelligence to NRU RDD on findings from neighbourhoods, and advice to NRU RDD on the needs and future needs of practitioners

The Signposting Data Role

- 4.4 The consultation process demonstrated that in some areas practitioners would find it helpful, when seeking to select evidence to inform their planning, to access a facility where they could be signposted to relevant sources of data. This would be likely to be targeted signposting, so that a practitioner who was seeking to source data for the development of a project within a certain theme/priority area e.g. healthy communities, could be guided by the NRSS, either through a briefing document or through personal contact, to relevant and helpful sources of data.³
- 4.5 Within the signposting process, it would be helpful to provide advice on the limitations of the data, indicating the quality of the data sets involved, the geographical scope, and the time for which the data is relevant.
- 4.6 This role lends itself to a responsive style of delivery, but there is scope for the NRSS to be more proactive in building and maintaining a portfolio of useful sources ready for users.

Advising on the Gathering and Analysis of Data

- 4.7 There is an increasing recognition among renewal practitioners of the value of using evidence to support the delivery of neighbourhood renewal. The findings from the consultation process confirmed to an extent that the analytical skills required to support this process were not always well-developed.
- 4.8 This role will focus on driving up the analytical skills of practitioners in order that they are better able to use data as evidence to support delivery of neighbourhood renewal, through designing strategies and operational interventions.
- 4.9 This second role within the offer falls into two parts. Part One involves advising on the gathering and analysis of data in order to inform the process of supporting policy through evidence, including when to support statements with data, how to analyse and assess the meaning of certain types of data, and how best to present data as evidence.

³ For an example of this, see *Data Provision for Neighbourhood Renewal*, UWE/NRU, 2004

- 4.10 For some organisations, or even potentially regions, the emphasis on this advice and support might be more relevant in the analysis of data for the evaluation process. For others, it might be more relevant at the formation of a baseline, or the analysis and production of evidence to demonstrate a problem that needs tackling. The NRSS should be in a position to address these variations in emphasis.
- 4.11 This advice could be manifested in a range of ways, from direct face-to-face or telephone delivery, to guiding practitioners through paper-based mechanisms, in the nature of protocols or templates, they could adopt to improve analysis.
- 4.12 Part Two of the second role encompasses a similar advisory role but in the area of primary research. This offer includes advising on some of the methodological issues surrounding primary research that many practitioners may find unfamiliar or difficult.
- 4.13 The NRSS will be positioned to enable practitioners to share information about primary research, both in the design stage and in the review stage. This should facilitate coherence across regions and help to reduce the danger of duplication and overlap. It should also be possible to share good practice across the regional facilities themselves.

Advising on Good Practice in Using Evidence

- 4.14 The dissemination and illustration of good practice in neighbourhood renewal is primarily delivered by renewal.net. The consultation process demonstrated that, in the context of this project, practitioners would appreciate more examples of how data was being analysed and turned into evidence, and then used to support delivery.
- 4.15 The NRSS should, as a starting point, seek to identify examples of good practice in the context of using and analysing data to act as supporting evidence from within their individual regions. These should be set out in a similar fashion to that utilised by renewal.net, and could be distributed to practitioners within the region, and also forwarded to renewal.net itself. In addition, the NRSS should seek to assess some of the current good practice on offer to practitioners in the context of data analysis and use in order to improve delivery.

Representing the NRU

4.16 The NRSS should act as a conduit and communication mechanism between the NRU and practitioners, enabling feedback and dialogue on a range of renewal based matters. It should help the NRU to better explain and disseminate information about their work programmes, acting as a regional representation of RD&D and a structural interface between evidence users and generators at the centre, providing information to NRU from the regions, and advise NRU on how future work might be informed by the needs of those generating and using evidence.

Styles of Delivery and Working

4.17 The consultation process in the regions highlighted that, largely due to operational and development issues, the profile of regional agencies involved in neighbourhood renewal was not universally high. The NRSS should seek to raise the profile of the work being done by these complementary agencies, and link into their development and operation where it is deemed appropriate and would add value to both organisations.

4.18 The NRSS should seek to play an active part in existing regional or sub-regional networks, while being careful to avoid duplication.

4.19 In addition, the NRSS should also play a key role in driving up awareness of and building links with other NRU initiatives, including the Neighbourhood Renewal Adviser Scheme, the Regional Networking Project, and others. There is particular scope and value in the NRSS liaising with the ONS to drive up awareness and usage of NeSS, as this is a key evidence source for local practitioners. This may also link into the ONS outreach/regional statistical service plans.

4.20 The consultation process demonstrated that there was significant support for NRSS delivery through a reactive and responsive interface. This could be facilitated through the use of:

- a web and/or phone based method of logging requests for advice/guidance;
- an NRSS portal/web facility where information can be shared with and between practitioners, possibly facilitated through an email bulletin,

- 4.21 These methods of registering need would then result in an assessment by the NRSS of the most practical means of response. It is anticipated that this would be through an individual 1-2-1 process, whether delivered by phone or face to face.
- 4.22 This advisory emphasis to delivery should not preclude the possibility of the NRSS, possibly in conjunction with regional partners, offering more proactive support to practitioners. This could be achieved through, for example, seminars, and periodical email bulletins on key issues.
- 4.23 We recommend that, through the procurement process, NRU establishes which would be most practical and cost effective for each NRSS.

Steering and Management

- 4.24 Project management for the NRSS should be delivered through the NRU and the contractor supplying the service. This should maintain clear lines of communication and responsibility that will be helpful. Steering could potentially be developed as a joint arrangement between NRU and other regional partners, including Regeneration Centres of Excellence, Regional Observatories, and Government Offices.

**ANNEX A:
LIST OF CONSULTEES**

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

Jon Bright
Bill Feinstein
Carol Hayden
Sophie Hensley
Andrew Maginn
Gemma Penn
Paul Philpott
Robert Rutherford
Grisel Tarifa
Jane Todorovic
Rebecca Wead

Regional Stakeholders

Rose Bird, Government Office South West
Jon Carling, Director, North East Regional Intelligence Partnership
Hazel Catt, RENEW
Rebekah Eden, RDIN Officer, West Midlands Regional Observatory
Barry Errington, Government Office North East
Fran Fahy, regenWM
Karen Gillard, Regeneration Exchange
Kevin Griffiths, Government Office West Midlands
Jane Houben, Government Office South West
Dominic Murphy, creating:excellence
Chris Owen, Senior Intelligence Analyst, West Midlands Regional Observatory
Adrian Passmore, Head of Information and Research, regenWM
Jenny Sheppard, Government Office South West
Pip Tucker, Director, South West Regional Observatory
Helen Williams, Government Office West Midlands

North East

Declan Bahirini, Wansbeck Initiative
Neil Barnes, Sedgefield NHS Primary Care Trust
Nick Brereton, Newcastle LSP
Kerry Corbett, Newcastle LSP
Ernest Dobson, Green Corridor Partnership
Karen Gillard, Regeneration Exchange
Pauline Hopper, Back on the Map, Sunderland NDC
John Horne, Gateshead MDC
Jon Hoskin, Green Corridor Partnership
Steven Hume, Blyth Valley DC
Chris Lanigan, North Tyneside DC
Bev Major, Middlesbrough Council
Kirsty Maguire, Stockton DC
John Murphy, Easington DC
Mark Hodgson, Stockton NMP
Sarah Ledger, Newcastle Neighbourhood Information Service

Russell Morgan, Easington Neighbourhood Management
Dr Norman Reed, Durham County Council
Alan Richardson, South Tyneside Council
Kerry Smith, Stockton Renaissance
Paul Stephens, Sedgefield Borough Council
Anne Timothy, Durham City Council
Sara Watson, Wansbeck Initiative
Dawn Welsh, Stockton Renaissance

North West

Dr Tony Abbott, West Cumbria LSP Learning Group
Brian Astin, Pendleborough DC
Shirley Burns, Poulton NMP
John Eley, Tameside MBC
Ian Gordon, Wirral Waterfront Initiative, Wirral MBC
Melanie Hall, Rochdale MBC
Michael Heaslip, West Cumbria Partnership
Garth Hodgkinson, Blackburn with Darwen BC
Charles Jarvis, Manchester City Council (Market Renewal Strategy & Development Officer)
Chris Kelly, Sefton MBC
Sharon Kelly, Wirral Waterfront Initiative, Wirral MBC
Sean McGrath, Bolton MBC (Manager, Neighbourhood Renewal Policy Team)
Brigid Parkinson, Liverpool City Council
Habib Patel, Blackburn with Darwen MBC
John Pye, Bolton MBC
Hilary Sayers, Manchester City Council (LSP Policy Development Officer)
Lesley Spencer, Manchester City Council (Regeneration Officer, NDC Team)
Anne-Marie Turner, Kensington Regeneration

South West

Muhammed Ali, CENVO
John Forster, Research Team Manager, Gloucestershire County Council
Kate Hathway, Regeneration SW Network
Mike Horrocks, Kerrier DC
Mike Nally, Neighbourhood Renewal Team Leader, Plymouth City Council
Alison Parnell, Plymouth 20/20
Than Quan-Nicholls, Regeneration Research & Evaluation Team Manager, Bristol City Council
Cat Jung, Neighbourhood Management for Springbourne and Boscombe West (Bournemouth)

West Midlands*

Paul Booth, Wolverhampton Partnership
Andy Bywater, Sandwell MBC
Robert Clarke, Birmingham City Council
Peter Cooke, Stoke City Partnership

Baljit Dosanj, Wolverhampton Partnership
Phil Dunn, Coventry City Council
Gillie Evans, Stoke City Partnership
Tim Ferguson, Walsall MBC
Dave Galliers, Coventry Partnerships
Dave Gibson, Stoke City Partnership
Ray Garside, Knowledge Manager, Stoke City Partnership
Paula Hawley-Evans, Stoke City Partnership
Roy Hewlett, Heart of England Primary Care Trust
Jan Hickman, Wolverhampton MBC
Jeff Jervis, Stoke City Partnership
Peter G Jones, Birmingham City Council
Alex Hawley, Sandwell MBC
John Hodt, Dudley Community Partnership
Kam Kaur, Coventry City Council
Steve Laslett, SOPRA Group
Beverley Lockton, WEHM NDC
Jo Lowndes, Walsall MBC
Jason Lowther, Birmingham City Council
Liz Mabley, Sandwell Partnership
Raj S Mack, Birmingham City Council
Jameel Malik, Sandwell MBC
Roger Matthews, Birmingham City Council
Mike Merrigan, Birmingham City Council
Dr Naomi Rees, Partnership Manager, Birmingham City Strategic Partnership
Sam Richardson, Coventry City Council
Cameron Russell, Sandwell MBC
Helen Shankster, Monitoring and Evaluation Development Officer, Coventry Partnership
Janet Simpson, Stoke City Partnership
Roberta Smith, Walsall Partnership
David Swales, LSC Coventry & Warwickshire
Yvonne Thomas, Heart of Birmingham PCT
Sophie Thompson, Research Manager, Black Country Regional Observatory
Joe Wilbraham, Wolverhampton Strategic Partnership
Andy Willman, Sandwell MBC

* The list for the West Midlands includes those who indicated they were attending the regional event on the 6th July. It was not possible to produce a final attendance list, therefore there may be some names on this list that did not directly participate in the consultation process.