

The Intelligent Council: promoting good practice in evidence based decision making

Prepared for the Local Government Association

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Summary

1. This report brings together the main aspects of the work undertaken for the Local Government Association in 2017: “the Intelligent Council: promoting good practice in evidence based decision making”. The full output for the project includes sets of slides, examples of good practice and a database of 100 references.
2. Here is set out how these resources were established and views that were given. It then moves on to indicate possible next steps - as expressed by those who were interviewed.
3. Interviews were carried out with 48 people so they could give their experience on what helps or is needed by Councils to develop their ability to increase their intelligence. Views were also given through workshops and expressed in social media discussions. Those spoken to carried a wealth of experience from both current and previous jobs. Some were Councillors, Chief Executives or heads of service departments and around half worked with research or analysis functions. Those interviewed currently work in differing Local Authorities across England. Some have current roles in organisations outside Local Authorities but interact with them.
4. Key needs for developing and continuing to develop intelligence were seen as looking beyond service provision and establishing better informed decision making - including the achievement of outcomes. With the challenge on resources, intelligence was seen as having a key role in value for money - by working through evaluation and resourcing in different ways.
5. Having determined and stated the need, there followed consideration of what an intelligent Council could look like – how might it be established and has this been achieved? One model given was a Council which:
 - ❖ was open to learning
 - ❖ had an understanding of what it knew and what it didn't know
 - ❖ had open channels - to peers, Universities, informed commentators
 - ❖ knew what others did, and
 - ❖ determined what to do and how impact or success would be measured and evaluated
6. Being an intelligent Council was not seen as a fixed state but a process engaged in. In this there were a number of influences and actions which help develop or maintain this. The report provides a listing of those which interviewees saw as key aspects to be addressed by an intelligent Council.

Key aspects to be addressed by an intelligent Council

- ❖ Communications
- ❖ Comparisons with other Councils
- ❖ Corporate or service planning
- ❖ Council data and IT systems
- ❖ Councillors and elected politicians
- ❖ Culture
- ❖ Data quality
- ❖ Data sharing
- ❖ Evaluation
- ❖ Measuring progress in developing intelligence
- ❖ Organisation
- ❖ Partnerships
- ❖ Piloting
- ❖ Procurement or commissioning of services
- ❖ Resources
- ❖ Skills
- ❖ Timing

7. The key factors as set out are one way of seeing the aspects and attributes which need to be addressed by an intelligent Council. Councils varied in *what* needed to be the focus. What was required depended on where they were now and the processes currently practiced.
8. Having provided one way of examining key features of an intelligent Council the project has supported this by finding examples of good practice. These were valued as ways of communicating and demonstrating intelligence as well as seeing relevant, related activity. Another way of providing a resource of value was assembling references of good practice, examples and theory. A data set of 100 references was put together as a starting point for building and improving intelligence functions and structures.
9. The report concludes by setting out potential next steps that can be engaged in making these resources available to those Councils engaged in developing their intelligence.

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1 Introduction

1.1.1 This note provides a summary of the work carried out in 2017/18 for the Local Government Association (LGA) for the project “the Intelligent Council: promoting good practice in evidence based decision making”. The information gathered for the project is available in a number of different ways – sets of slides and also a spreadsheet with references. This report is not the only way of seeing the findings. It summarises what is available through other means.

1.2 Project aims

1.2.1 The background to the project has been that Local Authorities face a lack of clarity on good practice in evidence-based decision-making. They would be helped by views on the research disciplines and approaches which an excellent Local Authority would be expected to deploy. To help use these they can be accompanied by an understanding *why* they would help. The LGA, Local Area Research and Intelligence Association¹ (LARIA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE)² each had an interest in this and saw the need in supporting their members becoming more intelligent organisations.

1.2.2 The aim was for the project to help understanding of what an evidence-based organisation would look like, how it might assess its current position and understand the benefits of improvement. From this the evidence would be available for a business case for resources and actions to improve. This would help senior managers and Councillors recognise the importance of evidence-based working. A key part would be support for and the best use of their researchers.

1.2.3 To build foundations for the aims of the project it was seen that it should:

- ❖ develop a framework/model of features necessary for effective use of evidence in decision-making by public sector organisations
- ❖ identify the benefits of this way of working to demonstrate its value
- ❖ collate and identify best practice and resources to support authorities in:
 - the collection, identification, analysis and presentation of information and intelligence
 - improving the way in which data, information and intelligence is used within the organisation

¹ <http://laria.org.uk/>

² <http://www.solace.org.uk/>

1.2.4 The value of the work to Local Authorities was its potential to provide a framework which could develop into a maturity model: one that was capable of enabling Local Authorities and others to:

- ❖ assess what *good* and *excellent* looks like
- ❖ measure and compare performance against it
- ❖ learn from each other
- ❖ create improvement plans, setting out the journey to take on the road to improvement

1.2.5 Findings from this work are not intended to be only applicable to or used by Local Authorities: they will be useful to others. It is also the case that developing intelligence can be driven by working in partnership and with others³. The terms Local Authority and organisation are used for simplicity rather than exclusion.

1.3 Timetable

1.3.1 The work began on 24th July 2017. The findings were presented on 2nd November at the SOLACE national conference: “Session DG7 – The intelligent Council: Promoting good practice in evidence-based decision making’.

1.4 Advice and direction

1.4.1 The work carried out reported to a steering group drawn from the LGA, LARIA and SOLACE (the evidence-based policy network⁴). The group met on 28th July 2017, 14th of September and 20th October.

1.5 Report structure

1.5.1 A significant part of the work is the views given on the value of intelligence to a Council, and key elements which can be developed to improve the organisation’s capability. These are given in chapter 3: “Characteristics and elements of an intelligent Council”. Ahead of this chapter 2 explains “How the work was carried out”.

1.5.2 In addition to the views given on the value and key elements of intelligence to a Council this project has developed a resource of 100 references for methods and good practice. Chapter 4: “Further resources to support activities to maintain and develop intelligence” sets out how this was drawn and how the resources are structured for access.

³ Which is one of the views which has been given by a number interviewed

⁴ Further information is available here: <http://www.solace.org.uk/policy/>

2 How the work was carried out

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 The aim of this chapter is to show how the value and components of an intelligent Council have been drawn together from the experience of those with them. One factor given on intelligence was the importance of showing the source and methodology of how the conclusions can be drawn. The intention is for this chapter to do this.
- 2.1.2 Views founded on experience have been given through interviews carried out with a range of different people in different Councils in different places. Views were also sought and provided through discussions on social networks. The next sections describe how the interviews were carried out, the roles held by those interviewed, the organisations and Councils they work for now and where these organisations are located. The chapter then moves on to describe the discussions and contributions through social media.
- 2.1.3 In relation to the interviews, it's important to note that the descriptions of roles, organisations and location of those who have contributed provide an indication of the spread and variety. However when people were interviewed they talked about their *experience* including what they had gained and seen in previous Councils and organisations: so not just those where they held their current jobs.

2.2 How the interviews were held

- 2.2.1 The main source information was from listening through qualitative interviews. These were carried out between 28th July and 11th October 2017.
- 2.2.2 Views were sought and given on:
- ❖ what were key issues to help a Council become more intelligent
 - ❖ what were approaches which had worked
 - ❖ problems those interviewed were trying to tackle
 - ❖ sources of information or knowledge which helped
 - ❖ anything which didn't work
- 2.2.3 The discussion in each interview was treated as confidential - comments and views would not be linked to any specific individual who made them. Interviewees were given this assurance - made to give each the opportunity to be more open. The list of those who gave their views in individual interviews are listed in Appendix 1: Interviewees. Those who gave their views have been thanked and sent a set of

slides which summarise all the views.

- 2.2.4 Each of those interviewed was asked to give their opinions on both their current role and also their experience in different roles and organisations. Some interviewed had experience in a number of different organisations and positions. When interviewed some had only recently moved into their current position and were able to talk about their views on this as well as those they had held previously.
- 2.2.5 Each interview was written up and notes were sent back to those interviewed with the invitation to make changes or additions. Minor amendments were made by six of those interviewed.
- 2.2.6 Most of the interviews were held with one person at a time while some took place with a small number of people present.
- 2.2.7 The qualitative interviews discussions included six voluntary regional organisers with LARIA⁵. For one regional organiser in order to help gather views a set of questions was drafted. These they circulated around their contacts in the region. The questions used are shown in Appendix 2: Questions structured for the LARIA network, South East England. This generated a number of helpful replies and views to be included.
- 2.2.8 Valuable input was also gathered from a workshop held in Manchester on 5th of September. This was attended by eight people from two councils. Views were captured through notes and post-it comments.
- 2.2.9 The next sections show the variety of current roles, organisations and location from those who have contributed - shown in Appendix 1: Interviewees. The results are presented as from 48 individuals. These views were gathered through:
- ❖ 32 phone calls
 - ❖ 13 meetings and
 - ❖ 3 “submissions” in writing
- 2.2.10 The presentation of the background of the views is indicative – for example the workshop in Manchester is counted as one contribution. Similarly the backgrounds of those contributing through social networks are not shown.

2.3 The current roles of those interviewed

- 2.3.1 Table 1 and Figure 1 show the current roles of those interviewed. Just over half have held research or analysis roles in Councils. A Council is an organisation which *uses*

⁵ <http://laria.org.uk/local-network/>

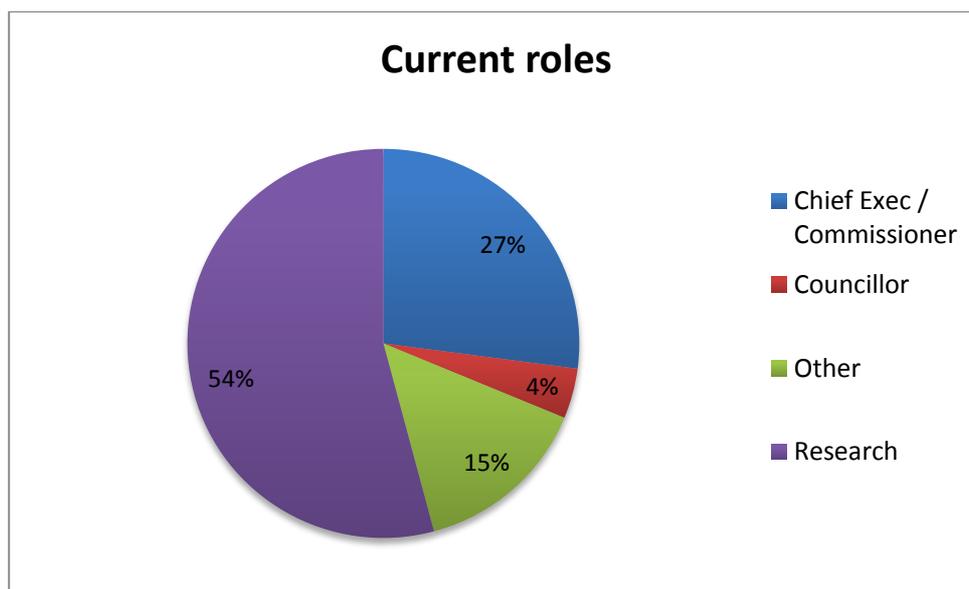
research and analysis as well as *accessing, producing or commissioning* it. To help understand the needs of the whole organisation just over one quarter of those interviewed were a Chief Executive or held a key management role in a service or council “department”⁶.

- 2.3.2 Two Councillors, leaders of their councils also had the time to give their views.
- 2.3.3 The description “other” has been used for some interviewed who were not currently employed in Councils. They included people working in organisations outside Councils - such as academic organisations and some consultancy companies. They had experience of working *with* councils and a perspective from this. Some also gave views based on previous positions in Local Authorities.

Table 1 Roles of those interviewed

Role	Number	Percent
Chief Exec / Commissioner	13	27%
Councillor	2	4%
Other	7	15%
Research	26	54%
Total	48	

Figure 1 Roles of those interviewed



⁶ For example: Head of Corporate Strategy, Director of Economic Development, Enterprise and Skills, Assistant Director of Health Integration, and Training and Workforce Lead.

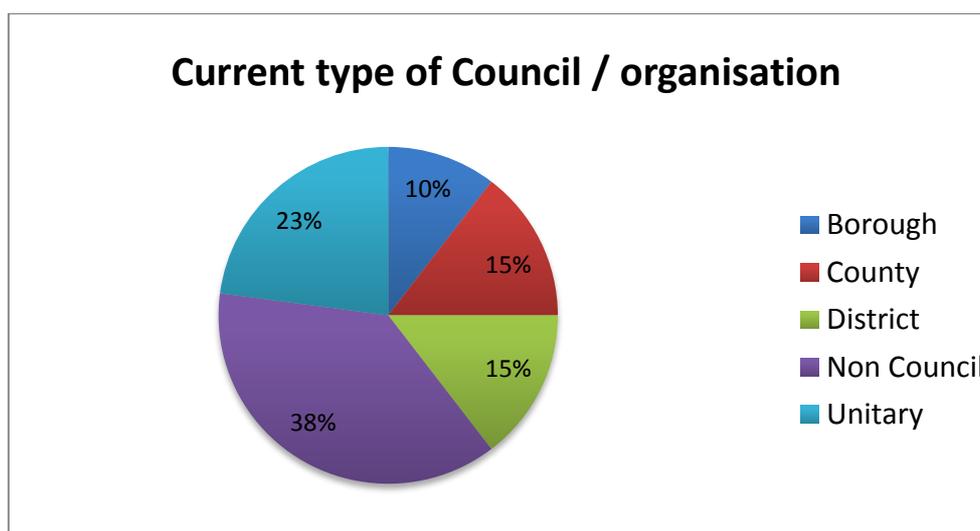
2.4 The current councils and organisations of those interviewed

- 2.4.1 The wide range of Councils and organisations where those interviewed currently hold positions are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2. Invitations to give views were made to people in different types of Council to reflect the different functions and responsibilities they have. These in turn also impact on the size of the Councils as organisations⁷. Those interviewed are from the range of District Councils, County Councils and also Unitary Authorities and Borough Councils.
- 2.4.2 Where the classification “non council” has been used, in terms of the current employment of interviewees, these have frequently been national organisations which interact with councils. Examples include the National Audit Office, the Royal Statistical Society and the Royal Town Planning Institute. The views given by people who work for these *now* can reflect previous employment at councils but also how they see - from an outside perspective - the issues impacting on intelligence.

Table 2 Organisations of those interviewed

Council type	Number	Per Cent
Borough	5	10%
County	7	15%
District	7	15%
Non Council	18	38%
Unitary	11	23%
Total	48	

Figure 2 Organisations of those interviewed



⁷ As one way of illustrating the different size of councils; for those interviewed Kettering is a District Council with a revenue account budget, for 2017/18, of £37.4 million while Hertfordshire County Council have a budget of £1,451.1 million (source <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2017-to-2018-budget-individual-local-authority-data>)

2.5 The locations of the councils and organisations of those interviewed

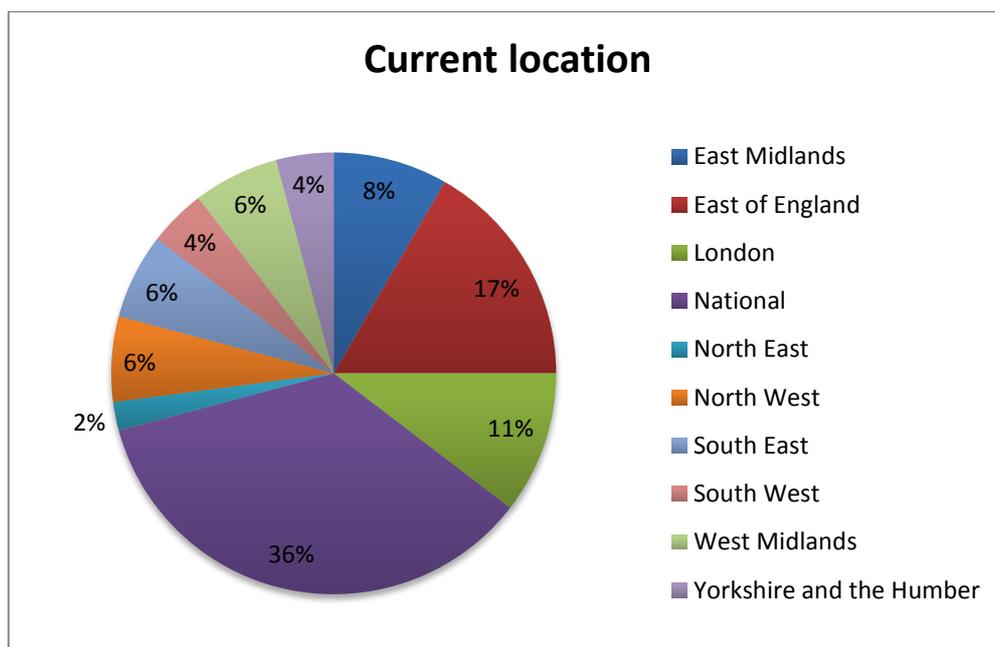
2.5.1 Interviewing those with different roles and from different councils were seen as key factors in drawing out points on developing intelligence relevant for different councils. There are no obvious differences between the needs of different councils in different parts of England. Nevertheless it was felt important not to simply interview councils from only one part of the country.

2.5.2 Table 3 and Figure 3 show the current location of those interviewed. The names of the regions apply to those in England. In a number of cases those interviewed who currently worked for national organisations had previously worked for Local Authorities. One interviewee worked for a Scottish Local Authority and one in Wales.

Table 3 Current location of those interviewed

Region	Number	PerCent
East Midlands	4	8%
East of England	8	17%
London	5	10%
National	17	35%
North East	1	2%
North West	3	6%
South East	3	6%
South West	2	4%
West Midlands	3	6%
Yorkshire and the Humber	2	4%
Total	48	

Figure 3 Current location of those interviewed



2.6 Discussions on social networks

- 2.6.1 Social media were also a source of input and contributions were made through the use of social networks. Knowledge Hub and LinkedIn were used as ways of engaging with those who had ideas and opinions on what would make a Council more intelligent.
- 2.6.2 Knowledge Hub has a LARIA group started in January 2012 and which now has 711 members⁸. A new thread “Developing an Intelligent Council” was set up in July 2017, the start of the discussion is given in Table 4. Valuable contributions were made in discussion with 10 contributors and with 36 posts, comments and observations. These gave views on what worked and also issues where ideas and suggestions were sought. The discussions also promoted awareness of the issues through 435 views.

Table 4 Posting in Knowledge Hub for discussion

The Local Government Association has just begun a project looking at what needs to happen to develop an “Intelligent Council”. What helps or is there. The aim is to look at examples where this works. What support, guidance and resources would help development.

I am starting out to look for views and key elements. This will develop as the work goes on, but if you have thoughts let me know ... so they can form part of this.

Source: Knowledge Hub

- 2.6.3 There is a LARIA group on LinkedIn⁹ with 537 members. A posting made here asked for “any views you have on what makes this work for you, or what you would like to see, let me know. Get in touch and I can speak to you.” This generated contacts leading to two of the interviews carried out.

2.7 Conclusions

- 2.7.1 This chapter has set out how the views on what would make a Council a more intelligent organisation were gathered. It tells interviews were carried out some by phone and some at meetings. Discussions were also held though social media. In order to indicate the variety of experience from which these views have come, it details the current positions, organisation and location for those interviewed. The views summarised and expressed in the next chapter are those aimed to be relevant to all Councils.

⁸ Counted in January 2018

⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/>

3 Characteristics and elements of an intelligent Council

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 The aim of this chapter is to provide the key factors given by those interviewed and through the social media discussions - issues that a Council needs to take into account when developing its capability as an intelligent organisation. These are structured by the views on what could describe an intelligent Council. Following on from this, there is then how an intelligent Council could be recognised. Subsequently there are the key factors needed for intelligence.
- 3.1.2 The key factors to develop their intelligence capability have been placed into 17 categories (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Categories used to show key features needed for an intelligent Council

Communications	Measuring progress in developing intelligence
Comparisons with other Councils	Organisation
Corporate or service planning	Partnerships
Council data and IT systems	Piloting
Councillors and elected politicians	Procurement or commissioning of services
Culture	Resources
Data quality	Skills
Timing	Timing
Evaluation	

- 3.1.3 There are a number of different ways that could be used in structuring the information. More categories could be used, or fewer. Some more detailed suggestions have been omitted from this report e.g. use of iBase or SQL but they can be used as a resource. Further information on some of these are provided in the references set explained in chapter 4. Not every Council will feel the need to address all the issues and may focus on the ones it sees as most important.

Figure 5 A second example of setting out categories of actions and needs for an intelligent Council



3.2 Reasons for developing intelligence

3.2.1 Those interviewed were asked for their views on reasons for developing intelligence. This was seen as a key starting point in considering the characteristics and reasons for its importance. Developing intelligence was seen to enable a Council to:

- ❖ look beyond service provision into outcomes
- ❖ support better informed decision making. So those taken were not knee-jerk reactions (which can waste public money)
- ❖ allow a Council to get best value for money in what it is already doing. This would support meeting more demand with less
- ❖ improve a Council's reputation and its opportunity to pilot improvements and work with others
- ❖ provide evidence needed to bid for additional resources

3.2.2 An intelligent Council would be better able to operate in what was seen as a fast changing and dynamic world.

3.3 How can an Intelligent Council be recognised?

- 3.3.1 If there was agreement on the reasons *why* to develop intelligence then another factor to examine was *what* an intelligent Council would be better able to do. Setting this out helps see whether action has made progress.
- 3.3.2 One clear necessity for an intelligent Council was seen as an adopted direction of travel: a 20/20 Vision. Considering what kind of Borough was being sought for 20 years ahead. This would include the adoption of evidence-based policy. As part of this intelligence would help examine issues to see where the Council was now. There would be recognition that evidence looks at what happened in the past but trends may not help for the future.
- 3.3.3 An intelligent Council was one which would depend on:
- ❖ the political environment
 - ❖ capacity for policy
 - ❖ people skills
- 3.3.4 Intelligence included the ability to carry out scenario planning, answering “what if?” questions. This would include moving away from a simple reaction to data but into asking questions of it and how it can be used. One aspect of this would be the inclusion of trust and confidence in the data – this should resolve the problem that people might see the data but not believe it. Intelligence can be seen as moving beyond “let’s always do the same thing with the data”.
- 3.3.5 A sound evidence base is there to help decisions to be made. But there would be recognition that these decisions should not be not risk-averse. A key feature can be the acceptance to fail if things are tried out. A negative result can be treated as a positive result.
- 3.3.6 A learning Council would review the past, both successes and failures, and learn from other councils, so it can apply this learning to its future decisions and take more considered risks. Evidence is part of the transparency of decisions made – how and where money is spent.
- 3.3.7 Intelligence is needed in analysis, for example placing a value on “time” spent providing services for children. Activity information showing what is happening. And actively linking this to financial data (i.e. not showing the two separately)
- 3.3.8 An intelligent Council would be one where there is practice which has clear guidelines on technique, levels of standards and how need is shown.

3.3.9 One model of an intelligent Council given was one which would:

- ❖ be open to learning
- ❖ knowing what it knows
- ❖ knowing what it doesn't know
- ❖ have open channels - to peers, Universities, informed commentators
- ❖ know what others do, and
- ❖ determine what to do and how impact or success will be evaluated

3.4 Communications

3.4.1 The importance of communications came through many of the interviews. Part of this included the need to vary communications according to who the audience is. The best way of communicating with audiences might also recognise that, within groups of people, there might be different preferences e.g. whether information would be used through a "ward profile tool" or through pdfs. Holding open sessions / briefings was another way in which analysis can be communicated. Communication through social media needed to take account of its openness and speed.

3.4.2 Part of considering different audiences would be a recognition of the time available for the reading of reports – could performance reports be put on one side of A4?

3.4.3 The importance of partners is shown in another section - regular communication was seen to be important in maintaining relations with them. Increasing the knowledge of the research and analysis could be carried out by attending local conferences (e.g. by the voluntary sector) to say what is available.

3.4.4 Narrative was seen as a big help in presenting data. There was value in taking those being presented to on a journey – it was not simply presenting statistics. The importance of the use of infographics was also stressed. The communication should also make sure of the use of correct language (i.e. non-technical).

3.4.5 With narrative communications of research these can also set out the risks and benefits of options being considered. There should be openness about the methodologies used. Uncertainty is a factor in the results from research – the extent and likelihood can be communicated.

3.4.6 If the communication was with the public then consideration should be given on how data can be shared in ways that meet their needs. This would include putting out open data.

3.4.7 The value of intelligence should include its communication with managers. One

question was then whether it was possible to empower or enable managers to have information at their fingertips. Perhaps they could get graphs on their mobile phones? The communication of the information in these ways, which could include live information, would be supported by seeing that managers have the skills and knowledge to interpret it.

- 3.4.8 And one simple point was made from an outside perspective - if one wanted to speak to a person working on research in a Local Authority it would be made easier if a standard job title was used.

3.5 Comparisons with other Councils

- 3.5.1 Opinions were given that an intelligent Council would wish to consider making comparisons with other Councils. The possibility to benchmark¹⁰ was seen to have some value. But also consideration on benchmarking needed to be given as different areas had differing characteristics. Comparing Local Authorities was also seen to be difficult without standard measures that could be used.
- 3.5.2 Comparisons can see similarities as well as differences.
- 3.5.3 Another way comparison could be applied was through peer reviews, which had the potential to measure and develop Council intelligence. Local Government Association peer reviews were seen as providing independent feedback from an external perspective.

3.6 Corporate or service planning

- 3.6.1 An intelligent Council would be an organisation that looked at itself as well as services provided and their outcomes. This could include issues such as staff sickness levels.
- 3.6.2 The use of evidence can be described as helping make decisions on what can or should be done. This would include looking at “things missing” such as unmet need. Evidence can be used for decisions on what to stop carrying out or spending money on. As part of this there was the need for sufficient financial information for service planning so that issues were not avoided.
- 3.6.3 For evidence to be used in service planning the managers (of services) needed the training and skills on the use and understanding of numerical data.

¹⁰ a level of quality that can be used as a standard when comparing other things

3.6.4 The use of intelligence on service provision should include a service manager knowing what they sought. From this discussions can then be on *how* the research needed could be carried out. Communications between services and research were a two-way process:

- ❖ the service manager identifies the need for data and asks for research or evidence
- ❖ the need is met by a research team and results communicated to the service manager

3.7 Council data and IT systems

3.7.1 Much research and analysis would use information on how services were provided and to whom. The IT systems which were used by services were key to this but there was great value in the ability to transfer or follow data between one service or system and another. IT needed to be sufficiently resourced for this to happen. The need and requirements of research and analysis can be considered as part of the early stages of purchase of IT systems.

3.8 Councillors and elected politicians

3.8.1 Members might be more interested in topics where the outcomes are more visible to them and constituents e.g. fly tipping or pot holes and road conditions. Research activity should recognise that Members will know their localities. This knowledge gives views on probable cause to be tested.

3.8.2 Alongside this it helps to provide a strategic perspective on what the evidence shows and what is needed to be done. This could be interpreted as a finding a balance between no interest in evidence and paying too much attention to detail.

3.8.3 The capability and value of research and analysis can be supported through open sessions with elected Members. It could also be included as part of induction for Members.

3.8.4 It was felt that the use of evidence (what was sought and used) would be varied by the political cycle e.g. whether an administration had just begun or an election was near.

3.9 Culture

3.9.1 The importance and significance of culture within an organisation was referred to often as critical for an intelligent Council. It was described as being at least as important as having a written plan (e.g. to develop intelligence).

- 3.9.2 One aspect of culture was the ability to ask “where is the evidence?” when any decision or options was considered. It was also necessary to acknowledge that decision making is not perfect. The use of evidence would stimulate thinking – there might not be one answer, but it did allow different questions to be considered. Exposure to challenge was necessary, as was acceptance that there were “unknown unknowns”. The use of evidence can play a part in testing or moving an organisation’s appetite for risk.
- 3.9.3 Reports to committees – where decisions would be taken – should have a structure which emphasises the use of evidence.
- 3.9.4 The culture of an intelligent Council would recognise that research is needed, but that it takes time. Research should also have independence. The use of open data allows residents and businesses to give their views and contributions: officers and Members are not the only ones with these.

3.10 Data quality

- 3.10.1 Data quality was seen as critical for analysis. The quality of data can vary within an organisation. Examining service provision and need between Council adult service and the NHS might allow 90% of records to be matched while this level might be lower for children’s services.
- 3.10.2 The importance of data quality should be promoted with service departments. Assessing it can be carried out through data audits.

3.11 Data sharing

- 3.11.1 A large number of the Local Authorities interviewed were exploring data sharing; examples given included links between housing, adults in social care and looked after children. The background was that data sharing between different data sets could have the benefit of showing those most “at risk”. Complex data matching can be needed to achieve this.
- 3.11.2 The impact and the main elements around data sharing can be *between* organisations but also *within* an organisation. Where data sharing was being considered between organisations then a joint structure and management of IT can assist.
- 3.11.3 The issue of data protection (general data protection regulation - GDPR) must be taken into account. Part of this benefited from the organisation having a person with a watching brief over this e.g. a chief information officer. This would support the establishment of accountability and governance for GDPR.

3.11.4 The aim for data sharing asked the question of what IT solutions might be needed for this to be possible. Data analysis was better carried out from main systems rather than secondary systems. Moving to a data warehouse or a single data repository were ways of paving data sharing. In terms of how data sharing can take place, a website can present linked data to the public but with locked down areas to share more confidential data. Data security was seen as a key issue to address.

3.12 Evaluation

3.12.1 Perhaps a cultural aspect for analysis was that a pilot project could be seen as something everyone wanted to succeed. But the view should be held that evaluation would find *whether or not* it did work. The view was also expressed that evaluation could be carried out with the team who are implementing the piloting. While this might mean that the evaluation is not quite independent it might also mean that the data used in the evaluation could be more relevant.

3.12.2 Intelligence should also follow the piloting of projects and as they turned into “business as usual”.

3.12.3 Performance measurement, one part of evaluation but also a large part of analysis at the organisational level, needs rigor.

3.13 Measuring progress in developing intelligence

3.13.1 A number who were asked about the possibility for measuring progress in intelligence made reference to the publication by NESTA: Wise Council: Insights from the cutting edge of data-driven local government¹¹. This contains a data maturity model which can be used to assess approaches to handling data.

3.13.2 There was recognition that intelligence scores within a Council might vary in different parts (e.g. services). Balanced scorecards represented one way in which progress can assess this (e.g. Figure 6).

¹¹ Symons, T. (2016) Wise Council: insights from the cutting edge of data-driven local government. NESTA. https://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/wise_council.pdf

3.14 Organisation

3.14.1 The question was asked as to whether there was one form of organisation within a Local Authority which was essential for the development of intelligence. The responses were that there were a number of different structures which can work. A central resource can help:

- ❖ enable data sets from different parts of the organisation be used together
- ❖ set standards across the organisation
- ❖ provide specialised skills such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Figure 6 Example of a balanced scorecard for measuring progress

Service➤ Issue	Service➡	Service➢	Service➣
Sickness➡ levels			
Finance			
Etc.			

3.14.2 Interaction between “the centre” and service departments was seen as giving more flexibility than teams being simply in departments. One aspect of this is that data quality can be better in a distributed model (i.e. with clear links with service departments). Matrix teams, if well managed, also have advantages. The establishment of “service hubs” can be preferred to complete centralisation. And in considering the structure there was also the view that reorganisations can lose organisation knowledge.

3.14.3 Councils have a wealth of data for use, and potential use with external data. The ability to use the Council’s data (as a whole) was easier if there weren’t silos for it.

3.14.4 An intelligence unit could be placed outside the Local Authority – this might secure more political independence or independence from the Local Authority management.

3.15 Partnerships

3.15.1 There is a wide range of potential external partners for sharing to research or with the ability to input to analysis. Examples include:

- ❖ Clinical Commissioning Groups
- ❖ Local Authorities – including District and County Councils
- ❖ Fire Service
- ❖ Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)
- ❖ Police
- ❖ Universities
- ❖ The voluntary sector

3.15.2 Teams (e.g. performance and improvement teams) can work across more than one Council. This shares learning.

3.15.3 When options for partnership are considered the importance of IT systems being able to share data is one aspect to be explored. Different options could be tested in different LAs e.g. within a Combined Authority area, within or across LEP boundaries.

3.15.4 Work with other organisations (e.g. LEPs) can provide richer sources of data and approaches. But with other organisations there can be the need to check the definitions used by services to test if standardisation is needed e.g. what is the definition of a “missed bin” or a customer complaint?

3.15.5 Partnerships can help avoid the duplication of analysis or research. They can work on policy and delivery, and the evidence for these. This can engage the relevant bodies which provide these.

3.15.6 Interaction and relationships are there with Government Departments and organisations such as the Office for National Statistics. Local Authorities have a role in providing feedback on their localities to national bodies e.g. the Bank of England.

3.15.7 The importance of the voluntary sector also gave rise to the question of whether analysis skills can be made available for their work.

3.16 Piloting

3.16.1 Piloting has also been covered in the section on evaluation. The value of testing or piloting change and the analysis of this was seen. These can be at a small scale. Transferability as well as scalability were noted as important aspects for piloting. It was also held that different options could be piloted simultaneously.

3.17 Procurement or commissioning of services

- 3.17.1 Many Councils commission some services in a way that can be seen as making these “external” to them. But the management of these effectively required data from the suppliers. Contracts can be made simple for service provision, allowing flexibility from the providers. But researchers need to be able to see if the contract is working. Research was also seen as more than simply holding service providers to contract, it was also needed to understand the needs service users.
- 3.17.2 Some Local Authorities commissioned analysis work from “outside bodies”, for example surveys. This required skills such that the requirements of the research work fed through into the commissioning.

3.18 Resources

- 3.18.1 For research to be undertaken the capacity was needed that was “above the day job”. This can give room for innovation in analysis. There were a number of suggestions on how this might be achieved. One was for the use of technology for regular or routine analysis. This would reduce demand on analysis staff and they can become more forward looking or specialised. Moving away from handling simple “ad hoc” requests for data can be achieved through sites of dashboards meeting these needs.
- 3.18.2 There were a number of suggestions on ways to increase resources. Community talent can be sought and accessed through “hackathons”. These were enabled by making data available for its use. A Local Authority can be considered to hold “civic ownership” of open data and this can hold value in making deals with other organisations.
- 3.18.3 It was possible for a Local Authority to examine combining of some research functions with another Council or organisation to increase capacity. The organisations which could be considered also included those academic, in a private company or the voluntary sector.
- 3.18.4 A number of Local Authorities spoke of students providing analysis of relevance to them and perhaps using data from within the LA. Value comes from this resource and seeing results presented from this, perhaps through their dissertations.

3.19 Skills

- 3.19.1 Analysis required different skills than “simply” the use of management information.
- 3.19.2 Research and intelligence activity was improved by a range of skills including mathematics and statistics. Some Local Authorities were considering the

employment of data scientists.

3.19.3 Research and analysis also required knowledge of the data and services. This allowed the better interpretation of the data.

3.19.4 Communication skills were seen as important part of research activity – so the results could be known by others.

3.19.5 Within a research function staff were seen to be either “good with people” or to know enough about analysis to carry that out.

3.19.6 One way of improving skills was through the use of free online training.

3.20 Timing

3.20.1 Intelligence was described as analysis that was not “left too late”. The need was to be engaged in the early stages of business planning. This allowed the consideration of plan evaluation before policies were made – including the choice of performance measures.

3.20.2 Business planning and the analytical work benefited from taking account of the timing of committee meetings which would consider these – so that this did not delay the work.

3.21 Conclusions

3.21.1 This chapter has provided summaries of the views given by those interviewed on the key factors for and attributes of an intelligent Council. The points made can be structured in different ways. They have been set out under seventeen headings though many made could appear under more than one of these. The points made can be used by Councils seeking to develop their intelligence capability. There is flexibility in how the views can be applied, recognising that every Council is different and parts within each Council are also likely to vary. The views given show there are steps that can be taken.

4 Further resources to support activities to maintain and develop intelligence

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Important aspects of understanding and improving intelligence come through examples of good practice. Some interviewed gave examples of events and problems as ways of illustrating the points they were making. Others expressed the value that examples of good practice would have for them in communicating the benefits of what had been done.
- 4.1.2 In addition to examples of good practice it was also clear from the interviews and social media discussions that documents giving more detail of practice or theory would be welcome. This chapter gives information on one source of examples and also a reference list put together aiming to start meeting these needs.

4.2 Examples of good practice

- 4.2.1 One key way of supporting activities to develop intelligence is through seeing actions that others have undertaken. A number of those interviewed indicated the value of these for developing organisational intelligence. Seeing the work that others have done can be very helpful in identifying both how similar approaches might be taken and also the value that their use has given. Although a method undertaken in one Local Authority may not be directly transferable to another it can be seen both as an initial pilot and indicative of potential costs and benefits of a similar approach. An approach in another Local Authority can provide an important tool in communicating the value of an approach – it allows a move from the theoretical to the actual and the benefits that can be delivered.
- 4.2.2 An immediate source of examples of good practice comes from the LARIA Research Impact Awards. These are designed to “recognise the impact of research at a local level and showcase the very best work of our members.” LARIA Research Impact Awards have been running annually for a number of years¹².
- 4.2.3 Submissions are invited from LARIA member organisations who are asked to complete a short form providing a synopsis of the work, how it meets the award criteria and the objectives and impact. Important for the adoption of the techniques by others is also that advice is asked for “what should LARIA members learn from your award entry?”

¹² The LARIA website lists winners from 2013 onwards

4.2.4 The categories for the most recent awards¹³ are:

- ❖ best use of local area research
- ❖ best use of social care or health research
- ❖ best use of community safety or policing research
- ❖ most engaging presentation of local area research

4.2.5 The LARIA website has published summaries of 19 winners from 2013 to 2017¹⁴ and some of the entries which were judged as “runners up”. Table 5 and Table 6 show extracts from two of the winning entries - Oxfordshire County Council in 2016 and Manchester City Council in 2017. These summaries of research projects can be used as examples which councils can use and adopt to improve their intelligence.

Table 5 LARIA Award Winner 2016: Oxfordshire County Council – creative responses to local data users’ needs

Data is no longer consumed only by data experts: the public is used to consuming data through apps and webpages. However, simply providing data as a spreadsheet or table doesn’t meet the needs of most users. We found that:

- *When there is a lot of data on a website, such as Oxfordshire Insight, people can be blind-sided by too much choice and information. A vast “sea” of data is unhelpful (how will they know this figure is the key figure for this topic or the latest table?);*
- *Many users of “very local” data want data in a report format, not online pages or dashboards.*

Additionally:

- *As few as 15% of people have studied maths post-16, so we need to design data tools for the needs of the non-data-proficient.*
- *People using mobiles and tablets may struggle to download and use spreadsheets of data.*

Local data provision should be structured around the needs of the audience first, rather than focusing on advanced technical solutions. We think we have demonstrated creative new ways to meet user needs while making use of open data and free (Tableau Public) and open (R) software, and whilst preparing for a low-resource future.

Source: LARIA website <http://laria.org.uk/2016/06/award-winner-2016/>

¹³ The 2013 and 2014 awards include the following categories: best community engagement/consultation and best use of public data. From 2015 onwards these categories ceased to be used and two new categories were introduced: most engaging presentation of local area research and best use of community safety or policing research

¹⁴ Publication is also made of three commended entries in 2015.

Table 6 Award Winner 2017: Manchester City Council – Troubled Families evaluation

We would like LARIA members to take two things away:

- 1. As Researchers, Analysts, Data Scientists we need to question, challenge and engage with policy/decision makers. Ensuring that there is a commitment to appropriate long term performance and evaluation and an appetite to listen and respond to emerging findings.*
- 2. That the Troubled Families programme within Manchester has, unlike some National Headlines, delivered statistically significant and sustained impacts. This has been as much about the evaluation design as it is about actual service delivery. We always knew that at a case level services improved families lives, but the fact that we've invested in systems and analysis to support this work, and used appropriate techniques like cluster analysis to unpick what could be viewed as a blanket approach, means that we can now evidence it.*

The messages from this evaluation have been delivered straight to our Senior Management Team, Full Council, Head of Finance, Operation Leads, alongside feeding back to the Troubled Families Unit nationally.

Source: LARIA website <http://laria.org.uk/2017/06/award-winner-2017-manchester-city-council-troubled-families-evaluation/>

4.3 Reference List

- 4.3.1 The LARIA awards provide one resource which can be used to help Councils develop their intelligence. They can be considered references which can be used. In further redeveloping this, the project has put together a larger list of references which could also be used. These include those that were suggested by interviewees, others have been listed through the social network discussions. A third way of finding references has been to carry out searches based on key issues from the interviews.

4.3.2 This reference resource gives, for each reference:

- ❖ name (or title) of the publication
- ❖ organisation(s) – who wrote or published the material. If the publication was from a company then its name was often given rather than the individuals who wrote it
- ❖ date – when the material was written or published
- ❖ topic(s) – where these could be allocated, names were given for the type of work in the publication in terms of services provided e.g. Social Care, Adults
- ❖ category (1), category (2), category (3). The categories used were those which referred to the part of intelligent council process for which the publication might be relevant e.g. training, standards and governance, data linkage
- ❖ web address – the link to where the publication was available
- ❖ details – some commentary as provided to summarise the publication, and so help judgement on whether it should be explored

4.3.3 Table 7 shows one example of a reference in the list and the resource made available. And Table 8 shows the categories used for the references to make relevant ones easier to find.

4.3.4 The list contains 100 references.

Table 7 Example of reference in database established

Name	Redbridge Adult Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy 2015-2018
Organisation(s)	London Borough of Redbridge and Redbridge Clinical Commissioning Group
Date	2015
Topic(s)	Social Care, Adults
Category(1)	Data
Category(2)	Data Sharing
Category(3)	Plan
Web Address	https://mylife.redbridge.gov.uk/media/20159/redbridge-adult-prevention-and-early-intervention-2015-2018.pdf
Details(1)	The Redbridge Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy builds on existing commissioning strategies and plans to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community, by putting them at the centre of their care and providing support in an integrated way. It highlights areas where shared care pathways and outcome based commissioning can improve service quality, productivity and the service user and carer experience. The Council entered into a Section 75 Agreement with Redbridge CCG to access the Better Care Fund (BCF) monies and deliver the programme of work e.g. video on "what is evidence based practice?"

Table 8 Categories used for references

Category
Communication
Comparison
Consultation
Corporate / service planning
Council data and IT Systems
Culture
Data
Data linkage
Data quality
Data sharing
Evaluation
LARIA Award
Network
Organisation
Partnership
Plan
Practice
Procurement / commissioning of Council services
Progress
Relationships with services
Research organisation
Resources
Service planning
Skills
Standards and governance
Timing
Training

4.4 Conclusions

- 4.4.1 This chapter has shown how resources have been put together which will assist Councils seeking to develop their intelligence. These resources – examples of what has worked and references which can give details needed - are not complete but provide a starting point and which could be added to.

6 Conclusions and possible next steps

- 6.1.1 The aim of this report has been to summarise the factors that Councils see as important in helping them develop as intelligent organisations. The main outputs from the project have been sets of slides, sources for examples of good practice and reference documents and resources. This report is a simple summary of what those contain and how the information was gathered.
- 6.1.2 Although each Council is different and there is a range of Councils of different sizes, locations and responsibilities the same factors were raised by many. The views expressed are counted as from 48 individuals. The number of organisations they have worked for is much larger. Other contributions have been made through a workshop and more through discussions on social media.
- 6.1.3 These resources from the project are there for further steps that can build on them. Part of interviewing was to gather views on what resources would help organisations develop their intelligence capability. There was further seeking of what could be done to turn these factors into a system which worked more than simply slides or a report:
- ❖ presentations were made at the LARIA Annual one day conference in November 2017 in University of Liverpool, Foresight Centre
 - ❖ the LARIA East of England event in Norwich on 6th December 2017
 - ❖ the Public Health knowledge and information forum for the East of England on 18th January 2018
 - ❖ Intelligent Council project – next steps workshop held by the Local Government Association on January 23rd 2018
- 6.1.4 The tools and information which would help a Council progress would include:
- ❖ the ability to see the types of activity considered necessary to develop intelligence as an organisation
 - ❖ a way that a Local Authority could assess its own strengths and weaknesses
 - ❖ being able to see how other Authorities rate themselves in aspects underlying intelligence. Allowing for comparison. Possibly including looking at similar Local Authorities
 - ❖ a way of being able to check with others on what has worked for them. An area for discussion would assist this
 - ❖ examples or stories on analysis and research and the benefits coming from these. This could also provide information on contact and methods used – so a view could be taken on their applicability elsewhere.

- ❖ references where further, more detailed information can be accessed. This could also be a place where Local Authorities could place things which work for them.

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Organisation of interviewee at time of interview	Name	Job Title	Method
Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council	Di Bromley	Research and Policy Officer	In writing
Bath & North-East Somerset Council	Jon Poole	Research & Intelligence Manager, LARIA South West Chair	Phone call
Breckland and South Holland Districts	Tim Mills	Executive Manager (Growth)	Phone call
CACI	Stewart Eldridge	Principal Consultant (Public Sector & Universities)	Phone call
Cambridge City Council	Lewis Herbert	Councillor, Leader	Meeting
Cambridge City Council	Andrew Limb and David Kidston	Head of Corporate Strategy, Strategy and Partnerships Manager	Meeting
Centre for Ageing Better	Rachael Docking	Senior Evidence Manager	Phone call
Coventry City Council	Martin Reeves	Chief Executive (& LARIA Chairman)	Phone call
Datalytics Technology Limited	Hendrik Grothuis	Smart Cities and Urban IoT lead	Meeting
Dudley Metropolitan Council	Andy Baker	Head of Integrated Intelligence, Performance and Policy	Phone call
Fife Council	Coryn Barclay	Research Consultant	Phone call
Future Cities Catapult	Jon Robertson	Project Manager	Phone call
Gloucestershire County Council	Rob Ayliffe	Head of Strategic Planning, Performance and Change	Phone call
Hertfordshire County Council	Chris Badger	Assistant Director of Health Integration	Meeting
Hertfordshire County Council	Melanie Parker	Community Intelligence Team Manager	Phone call
Kettering Borough Council	Liz Wade	Director (Interim), Economic Development, Enterprise and Skills	Phone call
Lancashire County Council	Mike Walker	Corporate Research and Intelligence Manager	Meeting
LARIA / London Borough - Westminster City Council	Neil Wholey	LARIA Chair / Head of Evaluation and Performance	Phone call
Leeds Clinical Commissioning Groups and Leeds City Council	Nichola Stephens	Head of IMT for Health & Care	Phone call
Leicester City Council	Lynn Wyeth	Head of Information Governance and Risk	Phone call

Organisation of interviewee at time of interview	Name	Job Title	Method
Local Government Association	Dennis Skinner	Head of Improvement	Phone call
Local Government Data Unit - Wales	Andrew Stephens	Executive Director, Data Unit, Wales	Phone call
London Borough - Westminster City Council	Graeme Gordon & Jo Lodge	Programme Director, Evaluation and Performance Team, Head of Business Intelligence	Phone call
London Borough Newham	Sir Robin Wales	Mayor of Newham	Meeting
London Borough of Redbridge	Adrian Loades	Corporate Director of People	Phone call
London Borough Waltham Forest	Sherelle Parke	Acting Insight & Intelligence Manager	Phone call
Luton Borough Council	Katy Bodycombe	Information and Intelligence Manager	Phone call
Manchester City Council	Linda Frost & colleagues	Commissioners & researchers at Manchester City Council	Meeting
Manchester Health and Care Commissioning	Sarah Griffiths	Policy & Programme Manager	Phone call
National Audit Office	Abdool Kara	Executive Leader	Meeting
National Audit Office	Andy Whittingham	Audit Manager	Meeting
Newcastle City Council	Louise Crosby	Policy and Communication Business Partner (MCIPR)	Phone call
Public Health England	James Perry	Head of Public Health Intelligence	Phone call
Public Health England	John Battersby	K&I Training and Workforce Lead	Phone call
Public Health England	Sian Evans	Associate Director / Consultant in Public Health Medicine	Phone call
RAND Europe	Tom Ling	Senior Research Leader and Head of Evaluation	Meeting
Regeneris Consulting	Margaret Collins	Director, Economic Development Consultant	Phone call
Royal Statistical Society	Iain Wilton	Director of Policy and Public Affairs	Meeting
Royal Town Planning Institute	James Harris	Policy and Networks Manager	Meeting
Royal Town Planning Institute	Rosslyn Stewart	Director of Professional Standards and Development	Meeting
Social Services Research Group / King's College University	Martin Stevens	Chair of SSRG & Research Fellow at the Social Care Workforce Research Unit	Phone call
Staffordshire County Council	Kate Waterhouse	Head of Insight, Planning & Performance	Phone call
Tendering District Council	Ian Davidson	Chief Executive	Phone call

Organisation of interviewee at time of interview	Name	Job Title	Method
Wakefield Council	Shane Mullen	Public Health Intelligence Manager	Phone call
West Suffolk	Michaela Breilmann	Insight & Data Manager	Phone call
West Sussex County Council	Debra Balfour	Manager Partnerships & Communities Team	In writing
West Sussex County Council	Helen Butcher	Consultation and Engagement Officer	In writing
What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth	Dr. Max Nathan	Deputy Director	Phone call

Note:

The name of the organisation of those interviewed and job title reflect those at the time of interviews. Views given are based on experience in both current and previous roles held.

Appendix 2: Questions structured for the LARIA network, South East England

Developing an Intelligent Council

The Local Government Association would like to help the development of good practice in evidence-based decision making. The aim is to understanding what Local Authorities see working and what might help. This template is there simply to provide a framework where ideas can be given.

The view might be from people with a range of experience, possibly in different organisations. They are not taken as any “official” view of a Council and would not be quoted or attributed to an organisation or individual. They would be put together with others to build a picture on what would help.

The evidence can be broad: it could be for new or existing work, for setting aims or monitoring what is happening. It could be for a Council alone or working in partnership with others.

1. Name of Council:

2. Are there examples of good practice in the use of evidence to help make decisions?
[These could be within the Council or ones seen elsewhere]

3. How was the need for evidence raised? [e.g. how was the need seen, what were the advantages seen anticipated from its use?].

4. What was the evidence collected and how was this done? [This might help others in similar work]. Is there evidence which would have been used if possible? What might have added to the value of the analysis?

5. How was the data needed defined or found? How was it used it and communicated?
[This might include skills or other resources used or those which would have helped]

4. How was the decision based on the evidence made? [e.g. was this from a report, a discussion, in a meeting?]

6. What would help a Council improve its Intelligence capacity? If a Council wanted to help improve its capacity what should it look for?

7. What might help the use of the knowledge collected in this project? [If a Council was looking to improve what would help it do that?]

8. Any other comments you'd like to make? --- End ---