Intelligent Councils

draft interim report for the Local Government Association

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The slides show initial views what helps and is needed for a Council to improve its intelligence.

It forms input into the Local Government Association's project on "The Intelligent Council: promoting good practice in evidence based decision making"

The slides are structured:

1. Findings from the survey

2. A short summary of who took part in the survey

Introduction

Where the information comes from

❖ These slides contain the findings from the interviews carried out

❖ Interviews were written up and sent back to those interviewed

❖ The slides are not based on work carried out by others e.g. NESTA, but clearly there are many points which are similar

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The slides are set up showing

❖ Points made by more than a single Council but there is no particular emphasis by number of Councils making the point – varies according to type & experience of Council

❖ Some points are:
  ➢ issues to be considered, but no single solution seen
  ➢ some are things that are seen to work by a Council

❖ Each point in only one category, but some could appear in more than one or in an alternative category

❖ The classification used could be re-done with a smaller number or a larger number of of these

❖ Some more detailed suggestions e.g. use of iBase, SQL have been omitted

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Findings from the survey - which follow - are structured:

1. What is an Intelligent Council?
2. How can an Intelligent Council be recognised?
3. What can be addressed to develop Intelligence?

What is an Intelligent Council?

The reason for developing Intelligence

❖ The ability to look beyond service provision into outcomes

❖ Better informed decision making – not knee jerk reaction which can waste public money

❖ Intelligence allows a Council to get best value for money in what it is already doing. To meet more demand with less

❖ Intelligence can improve a Council's reputation and opportunity to pilot improvements and work with others

❖ Evidence is needed to bid for additional resources

❖ To be able to operate in a fast changing dynamic world

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How can an Intelligent Council be recognised?

Key features in an Intelligent Council 1/4

❖ Importance in developing
  ➢ Political environment
  ➢ Capacity for policy
  ➢ People skills
❖ Use of a sound evidence base for making decisions, but not risk averse
❖ A learning Council would review the past, both successes and failures, and learn from other councils, so can apply this learning to its future decisions and take more considered risks
❖ A clear necessity for an Intelligent Council is an adopted direction of travel. 20/20 Vision. What kind of Borough in 20 yrs.?
❖ Intelligence in analysis – e.g. placing a value on "time" spent providing services for children
❖ Practice which has clear guidelines on technique, levels of standards and how need is shown

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Key features in an Intelligent Council 2/4

❖ The ability to carry out scenario planning, answering "what if?" questions

❖ Intelligence includes "horizon scanning"

❖ A key feature can be acceptance to fail if things are tried out. A negative results can be treated as a positive result

❖ Evidence is part of the transparency of decisions made – how and where money is spent

❖ Having trust and confidence in the data – resolving the problem that people may see the data but not believe it

❖ Moving away from a simple reaction to data but into asking questions of it and how it can be used

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Key features in an Intelligent Council 3/4

❖ Important is:
  ➢ Performance indicators giving a sense of what is going on
  ➢ Activity information showing what is happening. And actively linking this to financial data (i.e. not showing the two separately)
  ➢ An intelligence function showing the effect of activity

❖ Learning from others and not "reinventing the wheel"

❖ The use of "cost benefit" analysis rather than "cost actual"

❖ The ability in presenting research / data and analysis needs to be made part of management recruitment

❖ The ability to take account of long terms benefits including prevention

Key features in an Intelligent Council 4/4

❖ Having evidence based policy

❖ Moving beyond "let's always do the same thing with the data"

❖ Intelligence can be seen as:
  ➢ Cultural barriers
  ➢ Technical barriers
  ➢ Statistical barriers

❖ An Intelligent Council would:
  ➢ be open to learning:
  ➢ Knowing what it knows
  ➢ Knowing what it doesn't know
  ➢ Having open channels - to peers, Universities, informed commentators,
  ➢ What others do
  ➢ Determine what to do and how impact / success will be evaluated

❖ Evidence looks at what happened in the past. Examine issues to see where you are now. Trends may not help for the future

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What can be addressed to develop Intelligence?

Communications 1/4

❖ Includes communicating the *value* of the research

❖ Communications can include setting out risks and benefits as options

❖ In dealing with uncertainty, what are ranges which evidence can show

❖ Examine how to communicate with the public – how can data be shared in a way that meets their needs

❖ Do (research / analysis) roles have sufficiently clear job titles that they can be contacted?

❖ Having openness about methodologies used

Communications 2/4

❖ Analysis such as JSNAs can contain much good data and research. To be most effective the key findings should be able to be interpreted by those making decisions

❖ (!) use of understood language e.g. don't simply refer to JSNAs

❖ The importance of narrative in presenting data (which can help)

❖ Use of infographics

❖ Performance reports can be asked to be on one side of paper

❖ Vary communications according to the "audience"

Communications 3/4

❖ Regular communication with partners

❖ Can we empower / enable managers to have information at their fingertips?

❖ With managers having access to live information do they have skills / knowledge to interpret it

❖ Holding of open sessions / briefings

❖ Visit local conferences to say what is available e.g. voluntary sector conferences

❖ Putting out open data

Communications 4/4

❖ Variation in how data communicated to same people e.g. members using a ward profile tool or some having information via pdfs

❖ Managers get graphs on their mobile phones

❖ Take those being presented to on a journey to help them understand – its not just presenting statistics

❖ The openness and speed of social media

Comparisons with other Councils

❖ Comparing Local Authorities is more difficult without standard measures

❖ Local Government benchmarking has some value

❖ Note that not everywhere is the same. Data analysis of Partner local authorities needs to take account of the different characteristics e.g. of the population

❖ Benchmarking / peer review can help develop or measure Council Intelligence

❖ Local Government Association Peer Reviews provide independent feedback from an external perspective

❖ Comparison with other Councils can also see if they are doing the same

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Corporate / Service Planning

- ❖ Evidence internal to a Council e.g. sickness levels is important
- ❖ Managers (of services) need training / skills on the use of and understanding of evidence. Heads of Service need sufficient digital skills to handle numerical data
- ❖ Need for sufficient financial information for service planning. In a way that service planning doesn't avoid real issues
- ❖ Communication with service managers needs to be two way:
  - ➢ Service manager identifies the need for data and asks for research / evidence
  - ➢ Need is seen be research team and communicated to service manager
- ❖ Service manager needs to know *what they want* so discussion can be on *how* research would be carried out
- ❖ Evidence can be used on what to stop spending money on

Council Data and IT Systems

❖ Importance of IT means that this needs to be sufficiently resourced

❖ IT systems may use data for the system's purpose, but systems where data can be transferred or shared would have advantages

❖ Helps if research / analysis can be considered at an early stage of the purchase of IT systems

Councillors – Elected Politicians

❖ Helps to find a balance between not interested in evidence and too much attention to detail. Helps to keep strategic perspective on what needs to be done & what the evidence shows

❖ Is evidence expected at Committee when business plans are considered?

❖ The use of evidence will be influenced by the political cycle (i.e. how close to the next election)

❖ Consider induction for Councillors help

❖ Members might be more interested in topics where they can see the outcomes e.g." fly tipping"

❖ Members are connected "locally" and they can have expertise and views on why something happens

❖ Research & analysis can be supported by open sessions with Elected Members

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Culture 1/2

❖ Understanding that research takes time, but is needed

❖ Need for research to have independence

❖ The ability to ask "where is the evidence?"

❖ For evidence to stimulate thinking. There may not be one answer but different questions can be considered

❖ A common culture to evidence is at least as important as a *written* plan

❖ Evidence can show things missing – unmet need

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Culture 2/2

❖ Committee reports can have a structure that emphasis the use of evidence

❖ Decision making is not perfect. Exposure to challenge necessary as is acknowledgment of "unknown unknowns".

❖ Is the work within the organisation's appetite for risk? (& is analysis capable of moving or testing the boundary)

❖ Use of open data allows residents and businesses to give views − officers and members are no the only ones with these

Data Quality

❖ Data quality can be assessed through audits

❖ The importance needs to be promoted within service departments

❖ Tracking can vary between services / departments e.g. adult service might have ability to match 90% of records (with NHS), for children's services this might be much lower

❖ The need to carry out data cleaning

Data Sharing 1/3

❖ This can impact within an organisation as well as between organisations

❖ Linking data sets being considered e.g. housing, adults in social care, looked after children

❖ What IT solutions would be needed for data sharing?

❖ Complex data matching can be needed

❖ Data security important

❖ Data sharing between different data sets could benefit showing those "at risk"

Data Sharing 2/3

❖ A website to present data to the public can contain locked down areas to share more confidential data

❖ Moving to a data warehouse

❖ Establishing "Accountability and Governance" General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

❖ With data sharing between organisations a joint structure & management of IT can help

Data Sharing 3/3

❖ Data analysis better from main systems rather than secondary systems

❖ Is there a person who has a watching brief over GDPR / Data protection e.g. Chief Information Officer

❖ The value of a single data repository

Evaluation

❖ There can be a lack of rigor in measuring performance

❖ Evaluation can be carried out with the team who carried out the service / project. This means it is not quite independent but the data used can be more relevant

❖ With a pilot project it can be seen that everyone wants it to work, is evaluation possible which says it doesn't?

❖ Intelligence should follow piloting as projects turn into "business as usual"

Measuring Progress

❖ NESTA Wise Councils Insights from the Cutting Edge has a data maturity model which can be used to assess data maturity – approach to handling data

❖ NESTA framework can be used for for a Council / partnership to rate itself

❖ Intelligence "scores" might vary between departments in a Council

❖ Use of a balanced scorecards e.g.

Service -> Issue	Service 1	Service 2	Service 3
Sickness levels			
Finance			
Etc.			

Organisation 1/2

❖ A number of structures can work

❖ Central resources can help
  ➢ to enable data sets from different parts of organisation to be used together
  ➢ to set standards
  ➢ Provide specialised skills e.g. GIS

❖ Virtual teams / networks could bring more flexibility than isolation in departments

❖ Matrix teams can work well (but this needs good management)

❖ Organisational knowledge can be lost in reorganisations

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Organisation 2/2

❖ To use of the wealth of data in Councils, with the use of external data increasing value helped if there aren't "silos"

❖ Having the research function central or more widely distributed should be considered. Data quality might be better considered in a distributed model

❖ The Intelligence Unit could be placed outside the LA so that management or political independence is more secure

❖ Establishment of "service hubs" rather than complete centralisation

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Partnerships 1/3

❖ External partners can include:

- ➢ Clinical Commissioning Groups
- ➢ Local Authorities - Districts and County Councils
- ➢ Local Authorities - Neighbouring
- ➢ Fire Service
- ➢ Local Enterprise Partnerships
- ➢ Police
- ➢ Universities
- ➢ Voluntary Sector

Partnerships 2/3

❖ The importance of IT systems being able to share data is something to consider when exploring partnership with another organisation

❖ Different options could be tested in different LAs e.g. in Combined Authority areas, across LEP boundaries

❖ Issues can be tackled by agencies which have different boundaries

❖ Partnership can be on policy and delivery, and evidence used for this. This can engage relevant bodies

❖ Partnerships can avoid duplication of work (i.e. between County Councils and Districts)

Partnerships 3/3

❖ Interaction and relationships with Government Departments, Office for National Statistics etc.

❖ Feed back picture to national bodies e.g. Bank of England, Government

❖ Can skills needed be made available in the work of small organisations e.g. voluntary sector?

❖ Needs for agreement on definitions and standards e.g. what is a missed bin or customer complaint

❖ Teams (e.g. performance & improvement team) can work across Councils - which shares learning

❖ Work with other organisations e.g. LEPs can provide a richer source of data and approaches

Piloting

❖ Test or pilot changes at a small scale

❖ Piloting of different options can be done simultaneously

❖ Transferability and scalability are key issues on piloting

Procurement / Commissioning of Council Services

❖ Analysis of supplier data needs to be possible to manage 3rd party services effectively

❖ Those who commission analysis e.g. write specifications for a survey, need to have skills so the analysis requirements feed through

❖ Intelligence is more than simply holding people to contract, it should be knowing the needs of service users

❖ Contracts can be simple for services (i.e. allow flexibility) but researchers need to be able to see if the contract works

Resources 1/2

❖ Use of technology for regular or routine analysis. This reduces staff need and this can be more forward looking or specialised

❖ Combining some research functions with another Council or other organisation can increase capacity:
  ➢ academic,
  ➢ private company
  ➢ voluntary sector)

❖ Research needs the capacity to take on new work, space needed "above the day job"

❖ Use of "community talent" – how to make this work. E.g. through "hackathons"

❖ Movement away from handling "ad hoc" / simple request for data – this can be done through sites or dashboards

❖ There are sources of free online training

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Resources 2/2

❖ Having room for innovation

❖ Make information available – "here is the information you can use"

❖ Students with Council and are presenting the work on their dissertations

❖ Civic ownership of open data has value in cutting deals with other organisations

Skills

❖ Intelligence improved by the skills including mathematics & statistics

❖ Data interpretation

❖ Knowledge of data and services

❖ Across the organisation different skills are needed for analysis than "simply" use of management information

❖ Within a research function staff need to be either "good with people" or know enough about analysis to manage the processes

❖ Employment of data scientists

❖ Communication skills

Timing

❖ Intelligence is analysis not left too late

❖ Need to be engaged in the early stages of business planning

❖ Plan evaluation before a policies are made, this allows choice of performance measures

❖ Need to have systems in place that can take account of committee meetings so the timing of these does not delay work

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# 2. Summary of those who gave their views in the survey

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Roles of those Interviewed

Current role of those interviewed		
Role	**Number**	**Per Cent**
Chief Exec / Commissioner	13	27%
Councillor	2	4%
Other	7	15%
Research	26	54%
Total	**48**	

Current roles

- Chief Exec / Commissioner — 27%
- Councillor — 4%
- Other — 15%
- Research — 54%
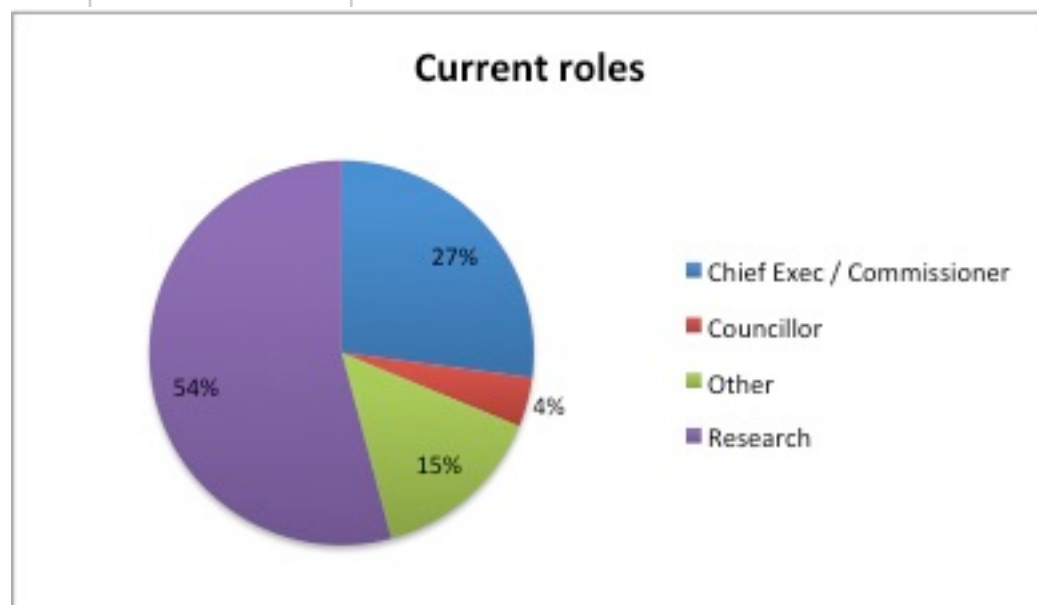
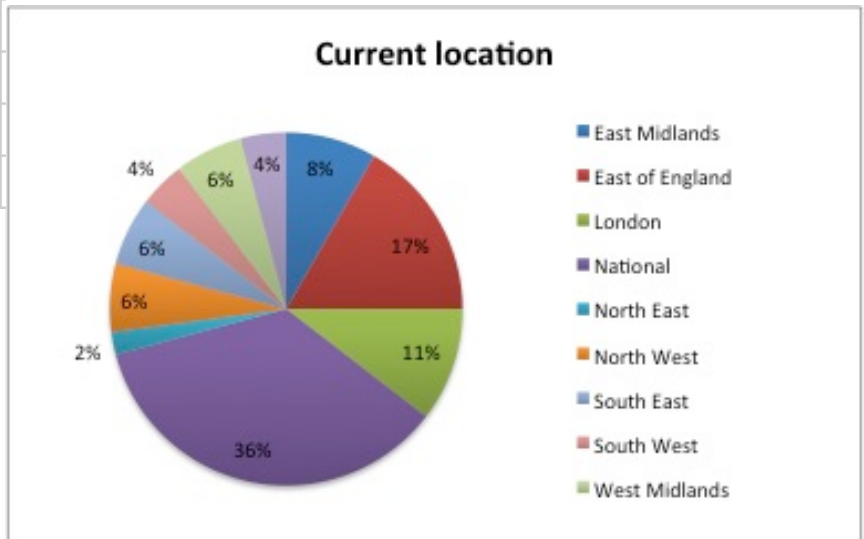# Current type of Council / organisation of those interviewed

Current type of Council / organisation 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**		

Current type of Council / organisation

- Borough 10%
- County 15%
- District 15%
- Non Council 38%
- Unitary 23%

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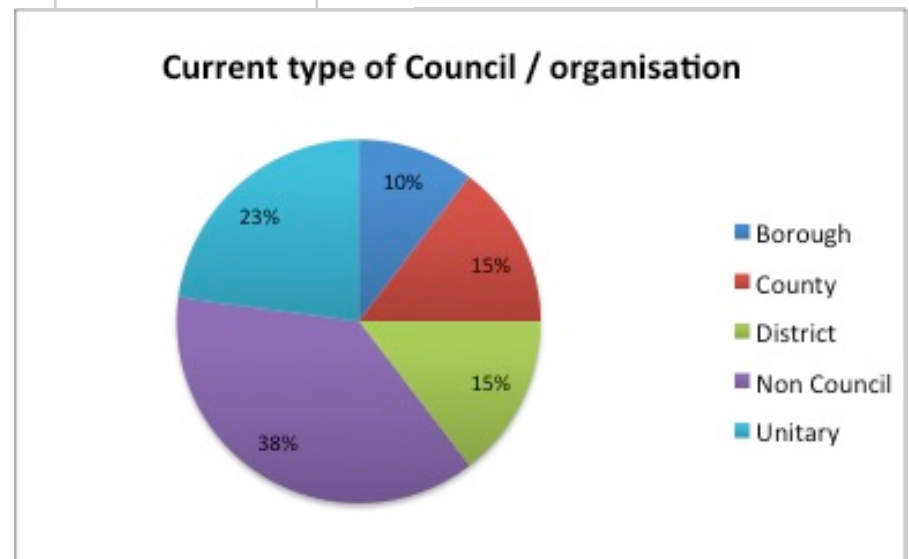
Current location of those interviewed

Current location of those interviewed		
Region	Number	Per Cent
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	

~ end ~