
Review of CLG LIS Event: 29th January 2009

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Here's my summary of some key points from the LIS Workshop in Birmingham.

CLG LIS Toolkit: There is a new CLG toolkit now available to download from the ESD-Toolkit site to help you make a case for implementing a LIS - it looks well worth checking out although it may be easier to have a read of it in Word doc form first rather than as an Excel based set of tools. There are plans afoot to give it a Welsh and Scottish flavour too. A few people suggested that this tool might actually put off some people new to this area as it highlights all the things they should consider up-front. Hopefully this won't be the case. In our experience it is better to focus Phase 1 of a LIS project on delivering benefits in a few key areas to show its potential, then grow sideways from there. It is then much easier to engage and get buy-in across a wider service delivery spectrum if you can demonstrate tangible benefits. It is also easier to broker funding for a focussed specific remit.

CLG LIS Benefit Calculator Tool: Equally useful is a new web-based tool soon to be released developed by Paul Foley and CLG to allow you to quantify the benefits of a LIS. This looks simple to use provided you can feed it with relevant data - like the (estimated) number of users of your LIS within your organisation or partnership. It gives you some powerful ammunition to build a business case. One LIS they reviewed is benefiting its host organisation to the tune of £500,000 pa. It is not clear how you might quantify the benefits of delivering information to external users. Wendy Pontin comments "I think it would be better to couch the savings in terms of hours saved rather than money saved. This way at least you could advocate how much time could be freed up for other things (eg. more time for actual analysis and interpretation)". Paul also highlighted the significance of the [LGDx XML schema](#) for supporting system to system data interchange - we would agree, this has a lot of potential.

During a break I had a chat with Owen Dallison, the Rocket Science lead on the LIS toolkit, and we agreed there was an over-riding justification for LIS in providing a solid evidence base to support organisations in developing their many strategies - economic assessment, JSNA, Children's Plan, 14-19 Strategy, LAA, Sustainable Community Strategy, Development Framework etc. These strategies are ideal vehicles for getting focussed support for setting up an LIS and also a strong avenue for mainstreaming an existing LIS into the heart of integrated partnership service delivery.

Audit Commission Break-out Group: I attended the breakout group run by Tom Wraith of the Audit Commission. He explained their perspective on the value of local information in relation to the CAA process. Tom briefly explained the new CAA process. My take on this is that the key value of LIS and local information in general in terms of the CAA process appears to be stronger in the Area Assessment process (rather than the Organisational Assessment). Evidence, in both quantitative and qualitative form, is going to be critical and they will be looking for business processes that have evidence at the heart of defining priorities and actions. There is a Key Line of Enquiry specifically around the effective use of data. It was emphasised that the main value of LIS is to help produce the evidence base for targeted service delivery aimed at lessening inequality throughout the local area. Also LIS (public facing) can play a big role in the 'community empowerment' agenda - all issues which will be expected to be evidenced in CAA.

CLG Review of current LIS activity: Post lunch, Bert Provan gave a quick review of current CLG initiatives, highlighting the significance of the Data Interchange work being done by CLG Performance Hub and ONS - an example of "effective joined-up government"! Also a new data visualisation project looking at good practice in presenting information of this kind. He also said a new round of CLG funding would be available in February for their 'Community Engagement' initiative - see note below.

Break-out Group to discuss a new LIS Group: There was general enthusiasm within our break-out group to create a new, distinct LIS Group separate from the CLG initiative. It sounds like this was echoed within other groups. So there is likely to be a proposal to set this up, hopefully with some support from CLG and maybe RIEPs. In terms of lobbying / pressure it was proposed that CLG should give any new group representation on relevant governmental steering groups. This shows this whole area is maturing and the community recognises it would have more power with a common voice - it should also improve communication of good practice, bolster development of standards and reduce the risk of duplication. There was a view that this group should be set up independently of others like LARIA, AGI and ARO but have strong links with them. There was enthusiasm for membership to be broad including differing public agency partners, (both local and regional), suppliers and covering a broad range of traditional work areas / disciplines (eg. research and analysis, policy, performance, GIS etc).

ONS data exchange: Callum Foster from ONS NeSS explained the new NeSS data interchange (see www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/Info.do?page=ndehtm) project and the benefits this should offer. One of our customers, Tower Hamlets, explained how some in-house work has led to them building a loader tool to get data into an InstantAtlas Excel format directly from this NeSS service. Robin Harris, LIS Manager, was very positive about the benefits the service offers for reducing data processing activities.

Data4nr.net: Finally Tom Smith at OCSI gave us an update on the Data4nr.net site which is becoming a very comprehensive sign-posting resource for all things relating to small area data. He saw a future where all government data providers offered data services similar to that launched by ONS NeSS - let's hope he's right!

General points

A couple of general points - if you are in England and interested in seeking additional funds then you should:

- Contact your RIEP (see link below) as they have budgets for this type of work. They also have expertise in a number of relevant areas that you can also get for free.
- Contact the 'Community Engagement' project within CLG - again they have funds to help you target your LIS at an external citizen community. There will be a new round of funding in Feb.

If you are interested in free advice there is a Local Improvement Advisor programme funded by CLG to offer advice, coaching, training and mentoring to support local partnerships in delivery of services through CAA, LAA and MAA. This is really aimed at those working in local information, performance management or research and analysis roles. Developing LIS is mentioned specifically in the remit. For more info contact your RIEP – for details see:

www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8595384

All in all I thought a very useful day and hopefully a new LIS Group will emerge.

Thanks to Wendy Pontin at Norfolk for providing her comments on this review.