Office of the
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Creating sustainable communities

Research Report 18 Summary

Data Sharing for Neighbourhood Renewal:

Lessons from the North West

Neighbourhood
Renewal Unit

Acknowledgements

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SUMMARY

Data sharing: critical to neighbourhood renewal delivery

The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal Action Plan (2001) recognised the critical importance of better information for local strategies and delivery, and set in train national developments such as the Neighbourhood Statistics Service and Floor Targets Interactive. Meanwhile, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), neighbourhood partnerships and individual partner organisations have sought to address local needs for improved availability, access and use of data.

The cross-cutting nature of neighbourhood renewal places a high priority on being able to draw on good quality data across all the neighbourhood renewal themes. Data sharing is thus at the heart of key concerns for local partners, such as:

on strategy

- are we doing the right things?

- are we targeting the right people? the right places? the right services?

- what impact are we having on closing the gap for our poorest neighbourhoods?

- how can we demonstrate to local people the value of what we are doing?

on operations

- are we doing things right?

- are we joining up our activities where this adds value?

- how well are we putting mainstreaming into practice?

Needs in sharp relief

Needs for better information have been cast into sharp relief by LSP Performance Management Framework and Floor Target Action Planning processes, and the Places Project in 2004. These have highlighted a range of weaknesses, eg. in baseline data, the adequacy of some data sets, obstacles to data sharing, and capacity for data analysis within partnerships. Many LSPs have identified in their Improvement Plans needs relating to better use of data, including 'drilling down' to neighbourhood level. Particular challenges have been highlighted further in the piloting by LSPs of NRU guidance on Ethnic Monitoring. More recently, the piloting of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) has also highlighted the need for a sound local evidence base and cross-partner performance management systems.

Data sharing is **not** an arcane subject, for technical analysts only – but rather a topic which goes to the heart of improving performance. The neighbourhood renewal interest does not stand alone, for data sharing is a live issue across the public service improvement agenda, not least for e-Government, crime reduction and children's services.

Scope of the project

This project has sought to:

- establish a clear understanding of the barriers to effective data sharing for neighbourhood renewal at a local, regional and national level.

- provide evidence of good and promising practice

- identify critical success factors to help local partners develop effective approaches to data sharing

- offer feedback to inform national policy development and future guidance

It has involved fieldwork in four LSP areas (Liverpool, Manchester, West Cumbria and Wigan), with 57 interviewees encompassing central research/performance monitoring staff, thematic analysts (eg. on employment, housing or public health), LSP and thematic partnership managers who could comment as data users, and a few with equality and diversity, ICT and data protection roles. We also held group discussions in Manchester, West Cumbria and Wigan, and undertook interviews with regional organisations (eg. NW Regional Intelligence Unit and the Public Health Observatory).

Data sharing in the case study areas

We found diverse data sharing purposes and practices across the LSP areas and the neighbourhood renewal themes within them. Notable themes for data sharing in the case study areas include:

understanding needs and opportunities

- tracking neighbourhood change and developing strategies for housing market renewal (eg. in Liverpool and Manchester)

- undertaking crime and disorder reduction audits (in all four areas)

targeting services

- helping people on Incapacity Benefit into work (in Liverpool and Manchester)

- identifying geographic 'hot spots' for crime and anti-social behaviour (all areas)
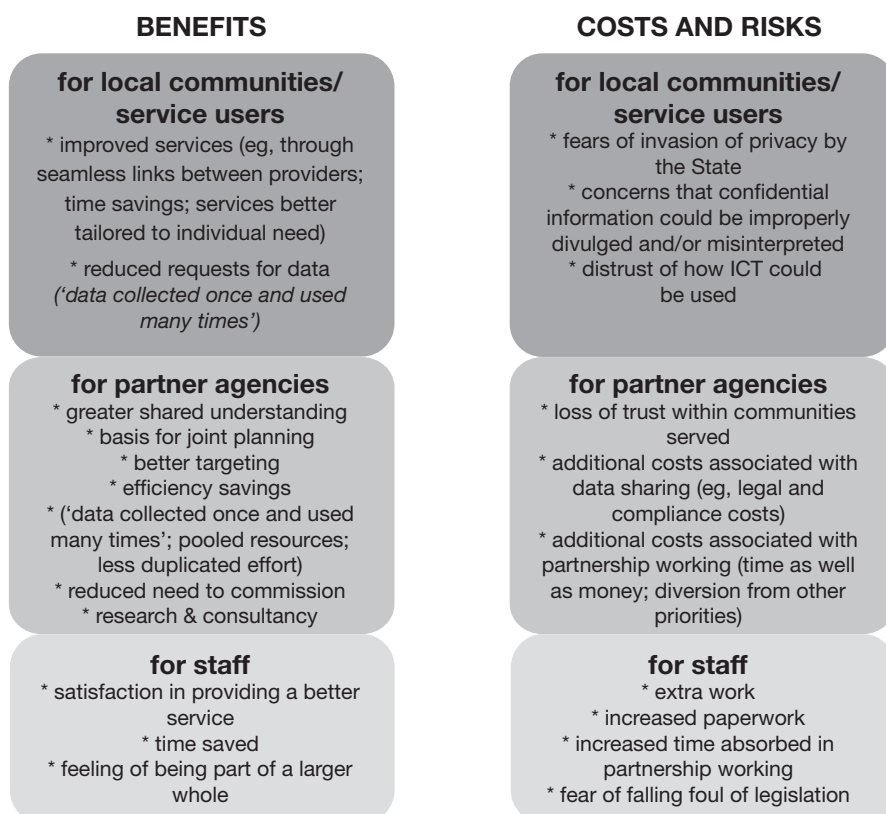
improving service delivery

- developing multi-agency services for vulnerable children and older people, implementing new legislative requirements (eg. under the Children Act 2004)

informing performance management

- undertaking LSP Performance Management Framework reviews and Floor Target Action Planning

- introducing partner-based systems (eg. in Manchester and Wigan) in support of Community Strategies

Figure A summarises the benefits that data sharing can provide, from the standpoints of local communities/service users, LSP partners/agencies, managers and staff.

FIGURE A: BENEFITS AND COSTS OF DATA SHARING

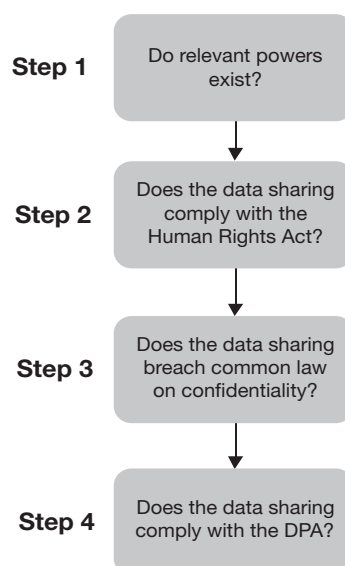| BENEFITS	COSTS AND RISKS
for local communities/ service users * improved services (eg, through seamless links between providers; time savings; services better tailored to individual need) * reduced requests for data *('data collected once and used many times')*	**for local communities/ service users** * fears of invasion of privacy by the State * concerns that confidential information could be improperly divulged and/or misinterpreted * distrust of how ICT could be used
for partner agencies * greater shared understanding * basis for joint planning * better targeting * efficiency savings * ('data collected once and used many times'; pooled resources; less duplicated effort) * reduced need to commission * research & consultancy	**for partner agencies** * loss of trust within communities served * additional costs associated with data sharing (eg, legal and compliance costs) * additional costs associated with partnership working (time as well as money; diversion from other priorities)
for staff * satisfaction in providing a better service * time saved * feeling of being part of a larger whole	**for staff** * extra work * increased paperwork * increased time absorbed in partnership working * fear of falling foul of legislation

The legal context

In the eyes of many people working in neighbourhood renewal, data sharing may seem self-evidently a good thing, essential to successful joined-up working. However, this must be balanced with concerns to protect individual privacy, and ensure that data shared is within the framework of administrative law which governs the work of public bodies. **Trust** is a critical concept in understanding data sharing issues: in appreciating why there need to be limits on data sharing, and in developing ways of ensuring that data can be shared in ways which do not lead to abuses.

The principal legislation is the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) which seeks to strike this balance between individual concerns and the common good, giving individuals certain rights regarding information held about them and placing obligations on those who process

information. The Department for Constitutional Affairs sets out a sequential process[1] (Figure B), covering the existence of powers allowing data sharing, compliance with the Human Rights Act and common law on confidentiality, and observance of DPA principles (on appropriate and fair use, arrangements for keeping the data secure, etc). Importantly, in the neighbourhood renewal context, the DPA allows the further processing of personal data for *research* purposes which relate to the original intentions in collecting the data. This is provided that the data are not used in ways which lead to measures or decisions affecting individuals, nor used in ways which cause substantial damage or substantial distress to them.

FIGURE B: ESTABLISHING THE LEGAL BASIS FOR SHARING PERSONAL DATA

Step 1	Do relevant powers exist?
Step 2	Does the data sharing comply with the Human Rights Act?
Step 3	Does the data sharing breach common law on confidentiality?
Step 4	Does the data sharing comply with the DPA?

Barriers to effective data sharing

The main barriers to effective data sharing we found were:

a) **a lack of confidence in what is lawful**, with evidence of uncertainties in people's minds about what can and cannot be shared. This tended to lead to situations where organisations and individuals said 'no' to data sharing requests. There was also confusion about the legal origins of problems encountered, with several cases attributed to the Data Protection Act where in fact the source of the barrier related to specific powers (eg. under the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the use or disclosure of Council Tax data are limited solely to Council Tax administrative purposes).

b) a closely related factor: **lack of certainty about what can and cannot be disclosed** – for research, in terms of actions (eg. in anonymising or aggregating data) to avoid any prospect of individuals being identified; and in service delivery, the circumstances in which it is acceptable to share data about individuals (eg. in delivering services for vulnerable children or elderly people) in ways which avoid actual or potentially adverse consequences for individuals or families concerned.

c) **legal interpretations limiting sharing** where government organisations take a narrow view of their powers (eg. Department for Work and Pensions, in limiting access to a wealth of data contained in the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, their consolidated system of claimant data).

1 DCA (2003) 'Public Sector Data Sharing: Guidance on the Law'

d) **costs and risks in sharing data** – either *actual* costs in supplying or analysing data (eg. associated with inputting, extracting or reformatting data) and/or *perceived*, which may stem from management concerns about what can be afforded, or from staff concerns about extra work on top of existing priorities. There may also be perceived *risks*, for example, that partners might misinterpret or otherwise misuse the data, or that information supplied to a partner may be made public under the Freedom of Information Act.

e) **differing definitions and methods** have been the cause of many difficulties in data sharing, where partners have operated with different boundaries, terms and geographical units, making aggregation and comparisons difficult or impossible. Experience in Liverpool in piloting NRU guidance on ethnicity monitoring has highlighted especial weaknesses in the availability and quality of data relating to Black and Racial Minority groups.

f) **available resources and capacity** were raised as a constraint on local ability to undertake tasks such as developing collaborative IT systems and data sharing arrangements, larger surveys, and analyses which cut across neighbourhood renewal themes. There were also concerns about the amount of time that can be taken up by tasks such as data cleansing which detract from time available for more 'added value' work relating to strategies or problem solving.

g) obstacles relating to **culture and attitudes** were cited, most notably risk averse behaviours where some people seek reasons not to co-operate or act, or fail to see opportunities. Strong values, such as concerns to protect patient confidentiality in the NHS, can be difficult to challenge even where there is a sound case and safeguards.

Action by partners to remove or reduce barriers

A range of effective approaches and measures has been taken in the case study LSP areas to promote data sharing and overcome the barriers – at both strategic and operational levels:

(i)   Leading players in LSPs have provided **strategic leadership in helping to create the conditions for data sharing to thrive**. This has involved them closely identifying themselves with the need for improved data, promoting connections (eg. between neighbourhood renewal and Local e-Government agendas), asking challenging questions of each other about the robustness of local evidence and about hidden costs where data sharing has not been developed. They have also encouraged collaborative activity and a 'can do' philosophy in pursuit of partnership business, permeating their own organisations.

(ii)   Much of the operational good practice relating to data sharing we encountered reflected **good practice in partnership working** more generally. This was characterised in data sharing initiatives characterised by clearly articulated common goals, mutual advantage to the participating organisations and fair sharing of contributions, risks and rewards. Partners have typically worked hard to build trust – crucial given the nature of some of the barriers described above. They have done this through, eg:

- respecting confidentiality and keeping promises

- being responsive to partner concerns and taking care how shared data is presented in any publication

- giving partners the opportunity to comment on how their data has been used and interpreted

- winning and sustaining the support of their colleagues for data sharing

- policing their own organisation's adherence to partnership agreements, including data sharing protocols

Co-location of services, secondments and 'hot desks' in partner organisations have been ways of fostering such partnership working.

(iii) **Making the case for data sharing** has been a critical skill in building commitment and overcoming barriers, importantly helping other parties see the benefits from their perspective. This has been the key to unlocking partner support, eg. in accessing Accident and Emergency data for crime reduction purposes or in improving services to elderly people. Skills in persuasion are closely linked with skills in communication, with examples where analysts have been able to make the data come to life in ways in which help audiences/readers see the point.

(iv) **Information sharing networks** can play a helpful role in developing collaborative relationships and providing a vehicle for implementing joint projects. In Wigan, such a network created an information sharing database (to help practitioners and analysts appreciate the scope and potential of local data sets) and provided a platform for a range of subsequent data sharing arrangements. Other groups may form the basis for related activity, for example, LSP performance management sub-groups or sub-regional housing partnerships (eg. in planning collaborative research into housing needs).

(v) In all the case study areas, there are examples of partners **formalising data sharing arrangements**, primarily through data sharing protocols. Protocols can be used as a means of helping to build – and maintain – partnerships involving data sharing, clarifying the process and types of information that may be exchanged – important in managing the potential uncertainties about what is legal and what is not. They cover topics such as: the purpose, objectives and scope of the data sharing; principles and relevant legislative powers; partner undertakings; risk management/indemnity; and DPA compliance (including information security). As in Liverpool, they may be set up on more than one level, with an overarching protocol setting out the strategic purposes and principles to be adopted by partners, and more detailed protocols covering more specific themes (eg. community safety or children and young people's services) and operational requirements).

Effective protocols depend on action within partner organisations, to ensure staff understanding and support. Training may be an important part of this – and has been especially important, eg. in the context of children's services where uncertainties over data sharing can lead to serious consequences for vulnerable children and their families.

(vi) Agreeing **common boundaries and definitions** can be a fundamental building block for data sharing – without this, data sharing can be very difficult, very time consuming or impossible. We found various examples where police, fire and local authority boundaries had been aligned at sub-district or neighbourhood level, and progress towards using ONS Super Output Areas (the new building blocks for Census and related geographical analysis, with fixed boundaries) by public agencies. Common

approaches to performance management (eg. Liverpool Single Targeting Framework on employment) have prompted agreement of common terminology (and sought to avoid double counting of outputs).

(vii) **ICT developments** have opened up new possibilities for enhanced data sharing and analysis, sometimes as part of local e-Government strategies. Geographical Information Systems (GIS) are increasingly used in crime mapping, informing strategy review and operational targeting, and in seeking to understand housing market dynamics and neighbourhood change in Liverpool and Manchester. Greater Manchester Against Crime (GMAC) has a particularly well developed example of crime mapping, which brings together information from the health service, ambulance, fire and transport, probation, community safety and drug action teams, youth offending teams and local authorities – along with socio-economic data. Their system has been used by local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to research crime and anti-social behaviour hotspots and devise successful responses. It also frees time for such analytical work, previously absorbed in dealing with data quality problems. ICT-based performance management systems are also being developed by LSPs, eg. Performance Plus in Wigan and the Impact extranet in Manchester.

National projects pursued as part of the national strategy for local e-Government are opening up further possibilities for enhanced data sharing, eg. in developing software to enable data exchange across different systems, in establishing common terminology, and in creating unique reference numbers for individuals, businesses and properties. Several of the national projects have explicit data sharing components (in relation to social services, benefits administration, etc). With appropriate consents built into these systems, the ODPM believes that they can enable data sharing to a significant degree.

Key messages for LSPs

for those in strategic leadership roles

- **Take a strategic view of data for performance improvement**, identifying future requirements for data access and quality to underpin strategic decision-making, service improvement, tracking of neighbourhood change, robust performance management and public accountability

- **Help create the conditions for more effective data sharing**: argue the case for more joined-up approaches to performance management and the use of evidence; foster a 'can do' approach; and promote local good practice in data sharing and analysis

- **Appreciate the high level issues relating to data sharing and data protection** – including powers under administrative law relating to public bodies and the scope for lawful sharing under the DPA. Consider adopting a high level data sharing protocol

for those in delivery and analytical roles

- **Invest time in building relationships with partner agencies**, in ways which will build the mutual understanding and trust necessary for successful data sharing. Behave in ways which give others confidence in the integrity of your use of data (eg. in consulting data sources on use of the data supplied; ensuring data quality standards are maintained in one's own organisation)

- **Ensure that you – and your partners – understand the legal basis for data sharing**, including the specific powers which apply in any given context

- **Develop capabilities in negotiating and persuading**: understand how to make the business case for ICT and other developments which will strengthen data quality; appreciate the concerns of other parties and put forward compelling cases for data sharing – and develop these skills as part of wider skill sets for multi-agency project working (including, eg. change management and stakeholder analysis)

- **Make the most of opportunities for co-location, secondments and 'hot desk' arrangements**

- **Develop action-oriented information sharing task groups**, to plan improvements in data quality and access and act on local data sharing barriers (eg. agreeing common definitions and boundaries; assessing software which can enable anonymised sharing of data)

- **Formulate specific protocols to strengthen data sharing arrangements** (where warranted) and ensure that all staff involved understand the rationale and their personal responsibilities

- **Plan ahead in setting up data gathering systems**: build in consent requirements to cross-agency access, for stated purposes, and flag possible future uses

- **Explore scope for greater collaboration in research and analytical practices** (across themes, across areas)

- **Keep up-to-date on national developments which offer potential for improving data access and data sharing**, especially relating to local e-Government and Neighbourhood Statistics

Recommendations for government

Government Office for the North West

- **Promote collaborative approaches to surveys, data methods and data access** (eg. as emerging for sub-regional housing strategies). Explore with the Regional Intelligence Unit, NWDA and North West Public Health Observatory how this can be facilitated.

- **Promote connections across government policy areas which can reinforce the case for LSP partners giving higher priority to improving data quality and sharing** (eg. through Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery, North West e-Government Group, the Local Government Capacity Building programme, and the ChangeUp programme for voluntary and community sector infrastructure)

- **Ask questions in LSP performance reviews** which challenge partners on how they are seeking to improve data quality and data sharing as an element in developing a performance culture

- **Strengthen in-house ability to alert and signpost partnerships** to developments in data sharing and in local intelligence systems

- **Organise an LSP Network workshop and/or an action learning set** on local intelligence systems/how data sharing can support LSP work on tracking neighbourhood change and assessing impact

- **Publicise national developments which offer potential for improving data access and data sharing**, especially relating to Neighbourhood Statistics and local e-Government

NRU

- **Promote the value of data sharing for effective performance management, improved service delivery and improved efficiency**. Do more to show what can be done: publicise examples of local initiatives which have improved the quality and use of data for strategies, service delivery and performance management, highlighting the contribution of data sharing

- **Strengthen the NRU's ability to influence other departments in resolving critical data sharing issues which affect delivery of neighbourhood renewal** (eg. in widening access to the Jobcentre Plus GIS system and in improving the collection and use of BME data)

- **Consider developing a data quality toolkit on Renewal.net**, including content on data sharing (eg. relevant legal powers; tips on winning support for data sharing; use of protocols; links to local intelligence system sites and related emerging practice; case studies)

- **Disseminate this report** via Government Offices, Academy for Sustainable Communities/Regional Centres of Excellence and Neighbourhood Renewal Advisers – linked to associated learning activities on performance improvement and data analysis

- **Feed into the development of services provided through SELD** (the Supporting Evidence for Local Delivery project), eg. in publicising relevant local e-Government developments and seeking further good practice in data sharing

- **Use the report to inform planning of future Neighbourhood Renewal Delivery Skills courses** (eg. in 'Learning from What Works' courses)

- **Discuss findings with ONS Neighbourhood Statistics Service as an input to their plans for practitioner training and advice**, focusing on how NeSS can best support improved quality, sharing and application of data in the wider context of partnership performance management.

- **Organise an interdepartmental seminar to review the report's findings and highlight where cross-department action is needed** in support of data sharing for neighbourhood renewal

- **Develop and promote a short, Plain English guide, in conjunction with the Department of Constitutional Affairs**. This should seek to spread greater confidence in what is possible and lawful under the Data Protection Act and highlighting specific powers relevant to the neighbourhood renewal themes and their application. It should convey a positive slant in setting out what LSP partners can reasonably expect of each other in sharing data (addressing question such as, "What should I be able to offer? To what can I expect to gain access?") and deal with commonly asked questions.