



# Local worklessness policy analysis case studies

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This research provides local case study insights into:

- the extent to which analysis is undertaken at the local level to assess local worklessness interventions;
- whether and how local policy analysis is used to inform current and future interventions;
- the range of 'good practice' in local worklessness analysis;
- barriers to conducting analysis;
- the nature, scope and efficacy of existing arrangements to share local analysis; and
- local partners' appetite for a 'framework' for the analysis of local worklessness interventions and for dissemination of findings.

## Background

Typically, evidence gathering of policy impact has been commissioned centrally. It has been appropriately resourced (financially and in terms of expertise) and results have been placed in the public domain.

Recently the emphasis of policy has shifted to reflect the notion that although a national problem, worklessness is local in character and solutions to tackle it are best developed at local level. The fragmentation of local provision with multiple funding pots presents budgetary and other challenges for analysis, learning and evidence-based decision making from locally implemented policies.

## Study methodology

This study of local worklessness policy analysis and dissemination practice is based on a case study approach providing insights into experience and practice of local partnerships and bodies in three areas: Greater Manchester, Lewisham and Cornwall. These areas were selected to reflect experience of implementing local initiatives to tackle worklessness in a range of local contexts in terms of rural and urban areas, and differing partnership arrangements and policy context.

Initial contact was made with a key individual in each of the three areas, who then identified other possible contacts for Web-based survey and/or expert interviews. Interviewees included individuals responsible for design, implementation, and analysis/dissemination of local worklessness policy. In each area between three and six in-depth expert interviews were conducted with individuals with a strategic role in relation to local policy initiatives. Additionally, an electronic survey yielded 44 responses (across the three areas) from individuals with operational roles. Six interviews were also conducted with such individuals. Further interviews were conducted with external experts with experience of conducting local worklessness policy analysis and evaluation.

## Findings

### Analysing local worklessness policies

Analysis is important in understanding how a policy was implemented, the effects it had, for whom, how and why. Assessment and analysis needs to be built in to the design and implementation of a policy from the earliest stage. It can focus on process and/or impact.

Analysis of process is often undertaken using a qualitative approach and is likely to be particularly useful to those with operational responsibilities for informing current and future practice. Analysis of impact is more likely to lend itself to a quantitative approach and is of particular interest to those local actors in strategic roles.

The local case studies revealed a general interest in assessment and analysis (in principle) in order to:

- test innovative ideas;
- improve project/programme delivery;
- meet accountability requirements;
- check value for money; and
- develop future programmes.

From a strategic perspective analysis tended to be most useful when it focused on outcomes and whether the objectives of the intervention were met. However, individuals in strategic roles reported not commissioning as much analysis as they might like.

Whether local policy analysis was undertaken was determined by the mix of internal and external drivers at play in particular local circumstances. The most important external driver was a requirement to undertake analysis as a condition of funding arrangements. In such circumstances the imposition of particular analysis methods by commissioners across local areas has the advantage of ensuring comparability through using a consistent

method. Yet for service delivery organisations this may impose a burden on them in terms of being required to report in different ways for different funding streams. From an operational perspective, analysis is most useful when it can inform current and future practice. A key internal driver for analysis was to drive up organisational performance, but when organisations were required to undertake analysis (as mandated through external drivers) without clear understanding of the purpose and the benefits, it was clear that there was little buy-in to the process.

Lack of resources (financial and expertise) were common reasons for not undertaking as much local policy analysis as respondents would have liked. For small projects and interventions in a fragmented delivery landscape effective analysis can take a large slice of the available budget and sometimes there is reluctance to divert the resource away from operations. Issues with implementing local policy analysis were also apparent, such as the interconnected nature of projects which made it difficult to ascertain what interventions were responsible for particular outcomes.

Some individuals with an operational perspective suggested that university students or community champions could play a role in local policy analysis. From a strategic perspective, there was value in association with national evaluations of local initiatives through exposure to new ideas, access to expertise and sharing of practice.

### Sharing good practice from analysis of local worklessness policies

Motivations for sharing good practice included the desire to enhance awareness of the outcomes of local worklessness policies and what is possible in terms of analysis, consequently driving up demand, interest and expertise. Good practice examples may be sought by organisations to avoid instituting something which did not work elsewhere. Some organisations saw sharing as a way of

promoting their own activities, and through doing so making connections with other stakeholders and potential collaborators for future funding bids.

Sharing of practice occurred at formal and informal levels. Interviews revealed a preference for face-to-face sharing of information, requiring internal and external resources. If this is to occur, other than on an informal ad hoc basis, it may require facilitation from an individual or a group of service providers.

Barriers cited to sharing and learning from good practice included lack of resources, weaknesses in the information provided, uncertainty about the quality of the analysis, and issues regarding the transferability of practice between different areas. However, while these concerns might apply to the results of local analysis, they need not apply to sharing practice in methodologies.

The case study evidence suggests that the types of information which organisations are willing to share may be changing; they are becoming more selective about what they will make public and this could be, in part, attributable to the competitive funding context. Organisations are, on the whole, more willing to receive information than to distribute it.

## **Reflections and recommendations**

There is a demand for analysis of good practice. It was not the case that people were not interested or did not see the value of local worklessness policy analysis.

There are challenges with improving analysis at the local level. Certain recommendations could improve the current situation.

It is important to make clear to those who are collecting the information, what it is for, and how it will be used, so that a greater level of understanding can be fostered. Feedback is important so that the process feels like a joint endeavour, rather than an imposition.

Building in ring-fenced resource for carrying out analysis would help. Expectations about local worklessness policy analysis would need to reflect the amount of resource available.

There is a need to build up analytical expertise, so that the technical aspects are understood.

The case studies and expert interviews suggest that most of those involved are interested in ways to improve practice. Various good practice resources currently exist, but uptake of these resources is patchy. A framework may provide guidance on this and, therefore, the idea of a framework may be given qualified support. The qualification relates to the nature of a framework. Possible options here include:

- 1 a tool that brings together what is already known about 'what works' (from sub-national, national and international evidence); and
- 2 a tool that helps those undertaking local worklessness policy analysis to move up the Maryland Scale of standards of evidence.

The case studies indicate greater support for option 1 than for option 2. To maximise the utility of option 1 it would be necessary to update and promote the tool on an ongoing basis. Organisations such as the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) could play an important dissemination role, with input and support from analysts from relevant national government departments. Some interviewees with a strategic focus, who were interested in policy impact, would welcome technical support from national government statisticians/analysts. This support could be delivered via short-term loans of analysts to local authorities/other local partners, their involvement in action learning sets, and via telephone/email.

Different levels of analytical experience, expertise and capacity at local level suggest that either different frameworks may be needed for different users, or that a facility may be required for different users to engage in different ways, and at different levels, with the same framework. The case studies suggest that appropriateness and adaptability are important underlying principles for any framework. It was felt that any framework should be advisory rather than mandatory. There was agreement that a framework should not set up a particular analytical technique/methodology as 'the only way' or the 'perfect way', so that all other practice is seen as second rate or worthless.

Developing a framework for analysis is only the first step. If a framework is to have a real impact on improving local worklessness policy analysis and sharing good practice across a range of settings it must be accessible and its use consistently and widely promoted.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 909532 44 1. Research Report 844. June 2013).

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