

## Case Study - Use of Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics in West Lothian Council

The Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics Database has played an invaluable role in the development of Locality & Community Planning in West Lothian, and the data is now incorporated alongside background and contextual information into the Local Information System at [www.wlinfo.org.uk](http://www.wlinfo.org.uk)

Work on the provision of neighbourhood profiles to inform locality-planning work in West Lothian started in late 2005, and was able to utilise both the datazone geography created for the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, and the growing volume of being made available at neighbourhood level through SNS.

The SNS system has primarily been used within West Lothian as a data repository from which to download data for incorporation into the local information system, and the facility to obtain and map data across a range of topic areas, has been an invaluable in informing and targeting partnership working.

The availability of such a wealth of small area data has also acted as a catalyst for obtaining further data in areas where no data had previously been made available. For example, the local Health Board agreed to create aggregate data on teenage pregnancy at datazone level which assisted with Health Improvement work (although this seems unlikely to be made available again in the future), the police provided crime data for police beats, which have now been matched to the new multi-member wards. Unfortunately there is no exact match between the ward boundaries and datazones but wards have been included as a core geography within the system (and will become a core element in reporting on national outcome indicators).

The SNS system has developed rapidly, and is successfully working to embed the datazone geography as a core building block across departmental systems from population to benefits statistics, health data and hopefully eventually the census and even crime reporting. The range of data items included has grown rapidly, with some being deleted as others come on-stream. As more core reports are now being built around key indicators there is therefore now an opportunity to consolidate the system to ensure data continuity (unfortunately some indicators adopted for local reporting are no longer available). For end users, the database therefore now represents an invaluable common portal to a wide range of neighbourhood statistics, helping to identify areas where partnership working is required.

### Future Challenges

The next challenge lies in finding ways to link the central SNS portal to local information systems, where data will, in future also be stored on a wide range of local measures. Such systems will be used not only for profiling, but also for measuring performance on achieving national outcomes.

The shift from disseminating data on CD to one where data can be downloaded as csv or xml files is therefore welcome, but could now be improved by developing a mechanism for disseminating data based on an inter-operability framework similar

to that currently being piloted in the North West of England by the Department for Communities & Local Government who envisage a data 'podcast' which would automate data updates. This would help to reduce current overheads on time spent re-formatting downloads for use in other systems.

Finally, as such information systems are increasingly being used (and sometimes operated by) non-specialists, there is a growing need to share best-practice, and access background and contextual information on data quality, and methodology beyond that which is available through the metadata. The development of a user group website which will act as a repository for such data and a user 'blog' will therefore be welcome additions.