

## Community surveys

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Over the past two years, I have been working with community groups in Calderdale, developing household surveys as part of a community development policy. (See Table 1.) These notes describe some of the lessons learned through our successes and failures. For me the work has been a small part of my overall work for Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council. For the Council it has been indicative of a new approach to voluntary groups, to targetting its resources, and to 'localisation' of its services. You will see contradictions. While stimulating the development of community organisations, the Council is a main object of criticism and demands from those same organisations. The Council has its own agenda of committees and budgets for which the main reports of surveys are written by its own officers. The community organisations may have different agendas.

Nonetheless, the work has had a taste of the 'barefoot statistician', a suggestion of Jeff Evans in *Radical Statistics* some years ago; (although I have not been able to find it!). Its success is not only in the immediate results but in the educative and confidence-building aspects of research which the communities might retain even if the Council's policy or personnel turn away from this work (as Cecilio Mar Molinero's piece in RS47 describes for the Housing Department of another authority). It is this aspect of statistics-in-the-community that I would be very willing to work with *Radical Statistics* members to develop. There are others involved in these issues: there is a piece in this newsletter about the Community Operations Research Unit in Barnsley and the Community Operations Research Network.

### Calderdale

The new Fair Shares Community Development section of the Council (Labour since 1988, having been hung for many years), has stimulated most of this survey work, but other major players have been the Housing department, a Town Council, and the strategic information function within a central Strategy Section of the Council.

In opposition the Labour group had been critical of the city-centre facelift and promotion that attempts to make the area's inheritance attractive to incoming business, feeling that the effect on the economy and people's lives was not very

certain. They were determined that this approach should be at least complemented by initiatives in residential communities which are clearly at a disadvantage economically relative to other parts of the district. An audit of facilities and services on one Council estate, Furness, was started at the same time as a social atlas of Calderdale was prepared to give some objective basis to the choosing of subsequent areas for attention.

### A social atlas and its use

The social atlas, published in May 1990 as 'Areas of Disadvantage', was a bringing together of Census and more recent social indicators on benefits and free school meals claimants, crime rates, public transport, mortality and immunisation takeup. The census indicators were chosen to have face validity, that is they directly indicated poverty or disadvantage, such as lack of car ownership and high density of single parent families. These were preferred to indicators only associated with disadvantage, such as tenure.

Analysis of the social atlas helped the Council's approach to gain acceptance. Firstly, monetary poverty in an area, as measured by Census indicators and claimant records is compounded by the worst crime and health conditions (though not lack of public transport). Secondly, the most disadvantaged areas were geographically clustered into four recognisable groups, later labelled the 'priority areas of disadvantage'. Two of these areas included large Council estates, one included the main area of Asian communities, and the fourth is a small area of un-modernised terraced housing. One of the areas included Furness estate, where the audit of services was already indicating that the lack of co-ordination of Council services is a major issue for residents. There were no big surprises. The social atlas will be repeated in 1992 using the 1991 Census results, and taking advantage of an improvement in use of the Council's own records as a source of monitoring social trends. In this respect, local government is far worse than central government in provision of official statistics.

The Council's Fair Shares policy, implemented by its community development unit and Committee of the same name, is 'ecological'. It sees communities of disadvantage. This policy could be complemented by another addressing individuals in poverty, many of whom are outside the priority areas of disadvantage. Fair Shares also continues the other arm of environmental improvement and promotion for business, not tied to residential areas.

The Areas of Disadvantage analysis allowed the Council to ring fence some of the Fair Shares community development resources, ensuring that officers and grants are directed to intensive consultations and projects within these areas. Some Council Departments have also used the areas of disadvantage to prioritise use of their discretionary resources.

### **Furness consultation**

The Furness consultation has been completed. Without the audit of resources and facilities, and the intensive discussions with community activists and leaders, the subsequent household survey would have been a barren exercise. With them, the survey was able to confirm concerns current in the community and identify priorities between them. While the social atlas had brought objectivity and acceptance to the Council's overall Fair Shares policy, the household survey brought the same for the Furness residents' concerns. As council tenancies are a majority in spite of some sales over the last decade, the survey also provided clear evidence of dissatisfaction with housing and repair services. A series of recommendations are to be implemented over the next two years, with an emphasis on co-ordination between Council departments. Furness will gain, but so may other areas if the Furness 'experiment' provides successful ways of working. There is no claim that the survey itself ensured the recommendations - they would not have been possible had the Fair Shares officers not made them, or the Labour Group not wanted them.

### **Household survey**

The household survey owes much of its success to the involvement of local residents in preparing the self-completion questionnaire, circulating and collecting it door-to-door, and collating the results. This last was achieved manually over two all-day sessions, aggregating answers from the 500 responding household (76% response) onto 'analysis sheets' using 5-bar gates to organise the recording. A description of the procedures is available.

This low-technology approach (manual collation, and a census rather than a sample) was appropriate to involving the community. The twenty volunteers undertaking the analysis also discussed the results, having seen the tables build up in their own hands. It is a very different approach from the appearance of tables only when data entry onto a computer is complete.

This approach was also the only way in which support for such a survey could be offered by the Council. It does not have resources for a field-force of interviewers, nor a data preparation team.

The same approach was used for other consultations. When an Afro-Caribbean church group made a demand for a community and training centre, bereft of evidence for the need for such a centre, the Council's response was to offer £3,000 for the group to undertake a household survey of the Afro-Caribbean community, and its support for a community centre. This survey succeeded not only in proving that the community was much larger than the 1981 Census tables indicated and in pinpointing demand for particular facilities (not the ones originally bid for). It also created a network of people beyond the original group, who are interested in facilities and activities based on the Afro-Caribbean community. Those involved in the interviewing also gained in confidence through the experience. The survey succeeded as a means of community development itself.

The current major consultation is in the St John's area of inner Halifax, where scores of voluntary groups represent a variety of linguistic, religious and cultural interests. It has not yet been decided how to proceed from the audit of resources and facilities currently under way, involving consultations with groups and agencies on a one-to-one and fairly unstructured basis. St John's is far too big for a 100% household survey. A sample survey would be possible, but a procedure to find evidence on residents' priorities would be of greater use to the residents themselves if it were all-involving, active and developmental.

## Whose reports?

In both the Furness and the Afro-Caribbean surveys, reports were written by Council officers for Council committees. The reports used residents' views, but were essentially a product that the Council required. The Council's policy is one of community development, and the consultations and surveys have undoubtedly been useful for the residents involved; but the results and consensus of opinions achieved by the community are articulated in reports which are the property of the Council.

A written report is not such an appropriate end-point for the communities involved. The results of the audit, survey and consultation could be a starting point for improved self-organisation and planning future work, which is more the role of political parties and community groups themselves. Insofar as professional support can help in this, it should not now come from the Council, which is the object of much of these organisations' criticism and campaigning. Calderdale has engaged the Community OR Unit for independent work with Furness community organisations subsequent to the Fair Shares consultation.

Professional support in such situations might also come from the likes of the Community OR Network and from Radical Statistics and its members.

Some documents, all from Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council:

*Areas of Disadvantage*, 33pp + exhibits, £2, 1990.

*The Furness Report, an analysis of need and service provision in an area of disadvantage*, 56pp + appendices, £5, 1991.

*The Calderdale Afro-Caribbean Community*, in preparation.

*Calderdale Community Surveys*, 4pp, 1991.

**Table 1. Community household surveys in Calderdale.**

		<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Purposes</b>
1989	Mytholmroyd village	Hebden Royd Town Council	General village appraisal, with emphasis on environmental improvements.
1990	Furness estate North Halifax	Fair Shares CMBC	Recommendations for improvements, particularly in local application of council services.
1990	Lower Mixen-den estate, North Halifax	Housing CMBC	Appraisal and consultation prior to a Council funding bid to the DoE Estates Action scheme for housing and environmental improvements
1990	Ashenhurst Estate, Todmorden	Housing & Fair Shares CMBC	
1990/1991	Afro-Caribbean community	Fair Shares CMBC	To assess size and needs of Calderdale Afro-Caribbean community, in relation to a funding bid for a Community Centre from the New Testament Church of God.
1991	St John's Halifax (proposed)	Fair Shares CMBC	Consultation in a large multi-racial and multi-tenure inner-city area.