

COMMENTS ON REPORT THEMES

A SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH THEME EXPERTS

BEACONS COUNCIL SCHEME ROUND 5

**Researchers:
Lyndsay Rashman
Dr James Downe
Professor Jean Hartley**

The Local Government Centre
Warwick Business School
University of Warwick
Coventry CV7 4AL
Tel.: 0247 6522 311
Fax: 0247 6572 545

CONTENTS	PAGE
Introduction, research objectives and methods	2
Benefits Administration	6
Better Local Public Transport	8
Early Years and Childcare	10
Housing Renewal	12
Promoting Sustainable Tourism	14
Services for Older People	15
Supporting People	17
Supporting Social Care Workers	19
Transforming the School Workforce	21
Crime and Disorder Partnerships	23

Introduction, research objectives and methods

The Beacon Council Scheme aims to raise standards in local government by identifying 'innovative' and 'excellent' performing councils and helping them to spread best practice. The Local and Regional Government Research Unit (LRGRU) within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), in taking forward its programme of research on Beacon Councils, has commissioned the Local Government Centre at Warwick University to undertake research to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Beacon Council Scheme.

Theme research

The focus of this element of the evaluation is to provide detailed information on each of the Beacon Council theme areas of Round 5, in order to provide guidance to the Beacons Independent Advisory Panel (which includes non-specialists in the themes) and to policy officials. The detailed information, it is expected, will also provide evidence-based guidance to those local authorities, which are considering making an application to each theme.

Warwick was invited to lead the theme research by designing a template for leads in government departments to complete. ODPM identified a policy official or researcher, to take direct responsibility and authorship of each theme report, who provided the information and wrote the theme report according to the template. The list of named officials was passed to the Warwick team for progress chasing as appropriate.

Research objectives:

- To provide guidance to the Beacons Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) and policy officials, which will be utilised in setting selection criteria for each Round 5 theme. In particular to provide contextual information, suitable to non-specialists on the parameters of each theme and the key issues for selection consideration
- To further develop research-based guidance on each theme for the purpose of supporting authorities in applying for the Scheme. This will incorporate findings from objective 1a, provide baselines for each theme and highlight excellent and innovative practices. The research will distinguish between the different contexts in which local authorities operate.

The theme research will also contribute to a baseline of practice.

Round 5 themes

The theme research has focused on the 10 theme areas agreed for Round 5 of the Scheme (to which local authorities will make applications in the summer or autumn of 2003). Round 5 themes are given below.

Beacon Council Scheme: Round Five

- Benefits Administration
- Better Local Public Transport
- Crime and Disorder Partnerships
- Early Years
- Housing Renewal
- Services for Older People
- Supporting People
- Transforming the School Workforce
- Promoting Sustainable Tourism
- Supporting Social Care Workers

Each of these themes is quite complex, with most representing cross-cutting themes in terms of the delivery of local services. Some are inter-service while a number require inter-agency action and service delivery.

Research methods

Template

The Beacon Council Research team at Warwick examined a number of previous theme reports in order to ascertain what information will be most useful to the IAP and policy officials. We designed a template for the theme research, consisting of a set of headings, which each theme report aims to cover. The template is designed to bring consistency to the production of theme reports and is intended as guidance, not a prescription.

We provided guidance on the length of report and the balance of qualitative and quantitative data in the theme report. We suggested that the theme reports are shorter than those delivered last year. As a guide we suggested a maximum of 12 pages and 5,000 words. In terms of the style and emphasis of content, we suggested a focus on the following:

- Description of the **concepts, values and thinking** that underpin evolving innovation and excellent practice in the theme, as well as policy context.
- Description of **current practice**
- **Evidence based** qualitative and quantitative information derived from available literature, research and policy
- Use of **bullet points and summaries**
- Definition of the **essential characteristics** of innovatory and excellent practice
- Observable, measurable **criteria**

We helped to oversee the writing of each theme report and provided advice and guidance where appropriate and time permitted. However, the short timescales mean that the Warwick research team did not undertake quality assurance and quality control.

Interviews

The Beacon Council research team at Warwick also undertook some interviews with officials from peak organizations with knowledge of each of the themes, to ensure that excellent and innovative practices are covered in the theme reports. We interviewed one “domain-relevant expert” for each theme, to enable a cross-check on the theme report.

A total of ten in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with expert representatives of local government, national agencies, non-government and private sector organisations and professional bodies related to the chosen theme over a period of two weeks in April to May 2003. The sample was selected to include informed representatives who were able to comment on one of each of the Round 5 Beacon themes. In nearly all cases, interviewees had considerable contact with local authorities and local authority networks.

They were directly involved in developing best practice, formal or informal assessment of performance and had substantial specialist expertise and knowledge. Confidentiality has been assured by not naming specific individuals or organizations. In a few cases, individuals were able to comment from a number of different perspectives, such as experience as a local authority manager and within a national organization.

We used an interview schedule that included questions on perceptions of the best local authorities in relation to the Beacon Council Scheme. These included features of top performing authorities, characteristics of leading edge authorities in the specific Round 5 Beacon theme and the attractions of the scheme to top performing authorities.

BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee expressed the view that there is evidence of continuous improvement in a number of local authorities, given a 'level playing field' and proper funding. Making distinctions between excellence and innovation, he suggested that innovation may be unusual or specific to a local context or type of authority – for example it may be introduced to help a brand of customer – and not necessarily applicable across the board. He drew out the differences between rural districts and city boroughs with regard to the theme of benefits administration.

He identified a number of obstacles to excellence due to the constant changes in benefit regulations - “the scene is changing daily” – citing tax credits, pension credits and subsidy regimes as current examples. For this reason, he suggested that Revenues might be a preferred option for councils to explore when submitting a beacon application. In his view, Best Value indicators have proved helpful in improving performance.

Indicators of excellence

The interviewee expressed a certain degree of cynicism about leading edge authorities, suggesting that some high profile authorities and past Beacon Council applicants did not always meet up to expectations, when one looked beneath the surface.

Excellent practice in the theme is about meeting performance standards. Innovation in contrast is about creativity, often in response to local problems. An example of innovation provided was of a shire district local authority that was not succeeding in receiving renewals on time. A Standards fund bid was utilised to appoint an additional Rural Visiting Officer who visited customers – with particular emphasis on the elderly and infirm – before the deadline had passed for renewal. This innovation fulfilled two functions: good customer care; and help to improve performance as measured against a specific Performance Indicator.

The interviewee suggested that the national performance standards give a good indication of excellence in practice and combined with the Best Value PIs make a good basis for selection for the Beacon Council Scheme. He proposed in particular those measures that relate to accuracy, speed of processing and change of circumstances but not relating to recovery of debt, which is “fraught with problems.”

In addition, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) reports, where they have 'drilled down' into Benefits and Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) reports on Best Value help to indicate better performing authorities.

The interviewee named one authority as standing out but noted that the Audit Commission conducted the Best Value Review instead of the BFI.

Other awards in this theme include the Local Government Chronicle Benefit Team of the Year and the IRRV award scheme but they may not be a good indicator of excellence as there is a tendency for the same local authorities to apply.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee expressed a degree of scepticism about the continuation of the scheme and did not feel able to comment on the extent to which the top performing authorities apply or succeed. In his view, time constraints are the most likely reason why authorities might not apply.

Interviews

The Beacon Council research team at Warwick also undertook some interviews with officials from peak organizations with knowledge of each of the themes, to ensure that excellent and innovative practices are covered in the theme reports. We interviewed one “domain-relevant expert” for each theme, to enable a cross-check on the theme report.

A total of ten in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with expert representatives of local government, national agencies, non-government and private sector organisations and professional bodies related to the chosen theme over a period of two weeks in April to May 2003. The sample was selected to include informed representatives who were able to comment on one of each of the Round 5 Beacon themes. In nearly all cases, interviewees had considerable contact with local authorities and local authority networks.

They were directly involved in developing best practice, formal or informal assessment of performance and had substantial specialist expertise and knowledge. Confidentiality has been assured by not naming specific individuals or organizations. In a few cases, individuals were able to comment from a number of different perspectives, such as experience as a local authority manager and within a national organization.

We used an interview schedule that included questions on perceptions of the best local authorities in relation to the Beacon Council Scheme. These included features of top performing authorities, characteristics of leading edge authorities in the specific Round 5 Beacon theme and the attractions of the scheme to top performing authorities.

BETTER LOCAL PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

In the interviewee's opinion, there is not a great deal of excellence in the theme and there tends to be more innovation than sustained performance improvement. This is due to a combination of environmental difficulties, for local authorities working in an area of service delivery over which they do not have control but exert an influence. The policy history of deregulation has created a context in which it may be difficult to secure local political commitment required for sufficient prioritisation of resources. An additional dilemma may result from the combination of a good or innovative local authority working with a less good transport operator.

The interviewee perceived a difference between excellence and innovation. He cited one city council as an example of consistency of excellent performance over a long period (over ten years) of setting and delivering to meet targets, with positive feedback from local users. There is little innovation but the authority has delivered well.

In contrast, other authorities have trailed new approaches, which may be successful in part or in specific locations rather than across the whole authority. Examples given included responding to safety and personal security issues in the evenings; personal alarm schemes; and bus stop lighting.

Indicators of excellence

The interviewee suggested that clarity of purpose and definition of partnership arrangements with providers is essential. The differences between the respective social and commercial objectives may require compromise. Each party to the partnership needs to have a clearly defined role and clarity about its contribution. In addition there may be significant corporate challenges to the local authority, which will need to draw together players from different departments to address for example road safety, highway usage, planning and environmental issues, financial and social issues. Corporate management may be one key to success.

Second, there needs to be a sufficient delegation within the local authority (and the necessary simplicity of structures) to enable rapid decision-making, to match the speed of decision-making that exists in the private sector.

Third, there needs to be the requisite skills and expertise, such as management and organizational skills, in each professional or technical area.

Innovation may be expensive and 'sub-optimal.' For example, a county council took an innovative approach to dealing with poor transport links in a rural area two years ago, through the provision of demand responsive mini buses. This has been expensive, difficult and has required a great deal of

energy. If measured in the number of journeys this scheme is not likely to be viewed as successful.

Bigger metropolitan districts and unitaries are best placed to demonstrate excellence, as the fragmentation of the transport role in two-tier authorities and size of some may result in their having insufficient resources or influence to tackle the issues effectively. An alternative approach is for authorities to group together in travel to work areas.

Awards in this theme include the Bus Industry award scheme that recognises the local authority contribution and another sponsored by the Commission for Integrated Transport. Successful authorities include metropolitan councils.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee perceived the main attractions of the scheme to be pride and personal satisfaction but did not think that the best local authorities applied consistently. One deterrent might be the degree of scrutiny and potential for criticism from others. He did not think it possible to say whether the scheme awards the best authorities.

EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee expressed a view that the theme definition was particularly important. He suggested that the theme is about the local authority's wider role in helping to plan, steer and lead services and should focus in particular on integrated provision which reflects the expressed needs of children and parents.

In his view, there is no doubt that there has been progress and improvement in this theme area. There has been a lot of investment in infrastructure to support the sector, improvements in planning and commissioning services, approximately 90% of the provision is provided by private or voluntary sector and there is more support for staff.

Indicators of excellence

The most important indicator of excellence, central to any service provision, is that services meet the needs of children and families in the area. Evidence of parental engagement will indicate this. A good starting point is a clear understanding of what is currently provided and this should be measured against what is needed, based on information from parents.

Determining and maintaining the required level of financial and staff resources may present a major challenge, particularly as regards the quality and retention of staff.

There is movement towards integrated provision, pulling together a range of services, which can be perceived by parents as more accessible and seamless. Some local authorities are developing 'wrap-around' or Early Excellence centres which indicate this type of approach. An excellent local authority will apply this integrated principle to all provision locally, not just in selected areas.

Clear, direct linkages between a Childcare or Early Years Partnership and the Local Strategic Partnership will also indicate integration. The interviewee noted a number of innovative structures, such as those developed in a council in the East Midlands and one London borough. Other authorities suggested included a spread across range and type, such as London boroughs, northern metropolitan councils and one county council.

Other service awards that apply to the theme include the annual Sure Start awards, 'Partners in Excellence' which has 10 categories and in which there were 22 awards last year, in for example information for parents, equal opportunity recruitment and support to the workforce. The successful

authorities have a good spread geographically and by type and the brochure provides useful, practical examples, which would be of use to the Panel.

The interviewee referred to a review of Childcare conducted last year by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit of 150 Early Years and Childcare partnerships which identified 30 that performed well. Distinguishing features of the effective local authority partnerships included:

- Political commitment (not party political but strong drivers and strategic support)
- Focus on delivery
- Leadership and influence - able to pull key levers (for example chaired by Portfolio holder for Education, Director of Education)
- Seen as key to corporate objectives

A further important and difficult issue is about how to intervene in the market (of private and voluntary providers) effectively.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee perceived the scheme to be of value in providing national recognition, highlighting and sharing good practice, a boost for morale and attracting peer interest. He was not able to say whether the best are applying. As in all award schemes, it depends on who applies and schemes take time to build up.

HOUSING RENEWAL

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee perceived changing legislation to be a major driver for improvement in this theme over the last few years and in particular in private sector renewal. In his view, there is a wide range of innovation and improvement with some examples of proactive innovation and pilot programmes.

The interviewee perceived innovation to be different from excellent practice, suggesting that innovation focuses on finding new ways of doing things or of achieving objectives but not necessarily on the extent to which this can be fully put into practice. Innovation may end up as abortive or unsuccessful. Excellence in contrast can be seen as what is delivered.

Indicators of excellence

Within the theme, there is a move away from tenure specific and sector specific approaches. The interviewee emphasised that the starting point for excellent practice is in strategy. A coherent cross-sector housing strategy that provides a framework that fits with regional, sub-regional and local strategies is key. This strategy should link to economic, transport and other broader strategies and should take a long-term perspective about what will be delivered over say, the next 30 years, why, the drivers, the processes to achieve these goals and how to respond to change.

Secondly, there should be clear evidence of the ability to plan and deliver the strategy – its goals, priorities, and sources of funding. One of the critical issues is balancing standards, resource availability and timescales, which in the interviewee's perception, has traditionally been very difficult to achieve due to past policy. An example of this is the 1990's mandatory renovation grant policy in which homeowners are responsible for renovation but eligible for grants. The policy imposed a 6-month timescale to respond to demand but did not provide access to sufficient finance to be able to work within the timescale.

A further issue is the need to construct the big picture, which depends upon collecting and utilising information such as house conditions, an understanding of how housing markets work, demand and aspirational information, work and commuting patterns.

Innovation in the theme is exemplified by using the big picture information to create a 'market area' approach. An authority will plot demand over a given period, overlaying public sector demand on house prices, patterns of migration in and out of the area, patterns of work, commuting and housing

needs and be able to turn this into a housing programme. Examples of this type of approach include large metropolitan councils.

Examples of innovative authorities cited included metropolitan councils in the North-west and the Midlands. A northern metropolitan council was suggested as an authority with excellent systems and a structured approach and an outer London borough as one that used the Houseproud idea (piloted in Birmingham, a partnership between the Home Improvement Trust, private lenders and local authority, helps people repair and adapt their home) in partnership with other London boroughs. The interviewee's knowledge and experience was predominantly of urban authorities.

The main award in the theme is the annual award from the National Home Improvement Council. Best value review, Charter Mark and Housing Corporation awards for innovation and good practice are other measures of success.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

Flexibility and possible relaxation of review and inspection were seen to be possible attractions to the scheme. The interviewee expressed uncertainty about whether the best authorities apply, suggesting that capacity constraints were a real issue for some and that others may not apply unless they considered it likely they would succeed. In his view the scheme probably awards 'good' authorities but not always the 'best.'

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee reported that he had seen considerable innovation in recent years in local government although in his view, much of this has been the result of response to (central) policy imperatives and funding opportunities. Additionally, much innovation has been driven by the desire to identify the best solutions, through networks and knowledge sharing.

The interviewee suggested that excellence denotes “pursuing a known route at the highest level” and innovation in contrast contains an element of risk and exploration of new areas. In his view, local authorities are more inclined towards excellence than “pushing the limits” or working “outside the box.”

Indicators of excellence

The interviewee stressed the importance of recognition that sustainability cannot be represented by a single element, such as environmental issues or public perception. The key concept is that looking after the economy and the interests of visitors needs to be seen as a mix of elements, which together help to construct a tourism product. In some cases, tourism may have been driven initially by a specific environmental problem, such as over-visitation (for example one rural, South-west council) but later developed a much wider, all-embracing approach.

The Sustainable Tourism theme needs to be addressed across the board for excellent practice to be demonstrated – taking account of visitors, people being visited, economy and environment. The interviewee suggested that innovation in this theme tends to be applied to small scale projects - for example energy efficiency schemes in hotels – rather than across the management of the whole area.

The best local authorities are spread across the range and type. Those areas with a large, established tourism product and which have a specific problem to address are most likely to be successful, for example one Southern council, where improvement was driven by over-visitation of coaches.

The interviewee was not sure of other awards in this theme.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee expressed puzzlement about the attractions of the scheme and suggested that the “sheer weight of work” might be a deterrent to some local authorities.

SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee perceived local authorities to be making efforts to innovate and find new ways of working. Some had been successful. Innovation, in her view is not necessarily the same as excellent practice. Excellence denotes continued improvement and a high standard of performance over a long period. Innovation suggests experimentation and risk.

Indicators of excellence

The interviewee identified three aspects that characterise leading edge local authorities.

First, a 'real' partnership approach with voluntary organizations and the not for profit sector, "in the truest sense." Second, consultation and involvement of older people and third, the willingness to take risks and to manage risks, in particular through the mechanisms of partnership and consultation. Local authorities need to be willing to learn from risk-taking.

She emphasised the need to include "the voices of older people." The criteria to be applied include a high level of consultation and involvement of service users from the beginning and throughout a project or development of a service. This consultation needs to include older peoples' perceptions as recipients of services and their proposals for strategy, planning and service design. Local authorities need to be effective at leading and enabling 'joining up' across the sector, a role that she perceived to be often taken by voluntary organizations.

The interviewee provided an example of a county council in the West Midlands, which had taken risks and decided to tackle issues of intermediate care in an innovative way, joining up with two-tier local authorities, the voluntary sector and local health economies. An example of a project from a second county council focused on new ways of identifying needs, consultation and involvement of older people.

A London borough has used community development approaches, especially in identification of new services, and has been successful in attracting funding through the Department of Health to test and evaluate. In this example, the local authority was an active partner but allowed an independent agency to take the lead. Influencing, enabling and endorsing, rather than leading might be perceived as an innovative role for a local authority.

Community Care awards, the government sponsored Health and Social Care awards and the pathfinder scheme are examples of service awards within the theme.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee suggested that the attractions of the scheme lie in recognition and linkage to other initiatives. She did not think that the best local authorities were necessarily applying, partly due to party politics or lack of knowledge at the top of the organization about good practice lower down. In her view, the successfulness of some of the Beacon councils was often demonstrable in practice and in some cases s

SUPPORTING PEOPLE

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee reported a “healthy amount” of innovation in local government in this theme and expressed the view that some local authorities had become successful at learning from the experience of others, capturing and tailoring knowledge and innovative ways of working, to meet local needs. In her view (based on experience acquired in a formal assessment role) about 25% of local authorities were good at innovation and working to meet the needs of service users and a further 25% good at innovation but less focused on the needs of users. The tendency is for local authorities to learn from other local authorities and less so from other sectors.

She distinguished between excellence and innovation suggesting that it is difficult to be excellent without being innovative. It is possible to be very good and not innovative – but not excellent.

Indicators of excellence

Robust, effective and sustainable partnerships with all the key stakeholders are essential indicators of excellence in this theme. Major partners are Health, Probation and local government, all providers (no matter how small an organization) and service users, their advocates and carers. The latter are particularly important as some service users cannot fully represent their own views.

Corporate engagement is important and ‘desirable’ rather than essential to success. The interviewee suggested that 75% of local authorities “have some excellence somewhere” which might be in small pockets, rather than across the board or across a whole service. She cited one northern metropolitan council as one such example. She was reluctant to name authorities that demonstrate excellent practice but examples included metropolitan councils in the North-east and the Midlands and two county councils.

Excellence in the theme is dependent upon “taking the received ideology and orthodoxy”, implementing what is expected to high standards. Innovation is about challenging service assumptions, taking a fundamentally different and radical approach to problems and focusing on outcomes.

The best authorities are spread across the range and type. District councils have severe restrictions in terms of access to resources needed to be able to engage the key players. The theme lends itself to joint applications by districts working together to conduct cross-authority work where they have identified common gaps in provision and have put proposals to the county, for example in hospital discharge and prevention work, intervening early in the process.

The interviewee was not aware of any other awards in this theme.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee suggested that one of the main attractions of the scheme is the enhanced job satisfaction gained from having public recognition of achievement. This can also enhance a sense of corporate pride and identity. In her view, achievement of the beacon council award has encouraged some authorities to strive harder to be innovative and to maintain their market position, rather than lead to complacency. She found it difficult to know whether the best authorities are applying or are successful. She suggested that some might be “bid weary” and that engagement of elected members is crucial. She expressed the view that it is unfortunate that the scheme receives so little publicity outside the public sector.

SUPPORTING SOCIAL CARE WORKERS

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee expressed definite views on the difference between innovation, improvement and excellence in practice. In her view improvement is difficult to define in the context of this theme and she stressed the importance of user participation as opposed to consumer comment and rhetoric in being able to define and measure improvement.

She perceived innovation to be often associated with the ability to acquire additional resources or funding to do things differently. Good or excellent practice depends on sustained and incremental improvement built consistently upon stability.

Indicators of excellence

She identified three specific criteria to apply to the theme:

- Making the job attractive. This requires a tailored approach as different people and authorities require different solutions. One example drawn from practice was of workers' shift patterns being altered to fit with local bus time tables.
- Organizational clarity about expectations. With the exception of specific task related functions, there are vague notions for a lot of workers about what they should be doing and why.
- Job satisfaction within the range of complex activities covered by this theme. Providing people with intellectual satisfaction, a sense of autonomy and judgement, particularly in face to face contact between worker and client.

A number of local authorities were cited as having excellent or innovative aspects of their services in this theme. These included a London borough, three county councils and metropolitan councils in the North-west and North-east. Examples included:

- Refining supervision and appraisal policy ('excellent' – building consistently and with independent evaluation)
- Commitment to learning and NVQ assessment centre
- Innovation in job patterns, employment contracts
- Adult Services provided by user-led organizations (example of equalities in practice)
- 'Innovation' – new fostering schemes which include rewards and training

Good authorities appear to be spread geographically and across different types of authority.

Other awards in the theme include Community Care awards, Department of Health awards and NHS awards for Health and Social Care.

Equality is a core value of the sector and ought to be included as a measure of good practice. The interviewee suggested that currently there appears to be more time devoted to rhetoric than activity.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee suggested that the main obstacle to local authority applications is capacity constraints. In addition, in her experience, individuals and services in this theme may not value what they have to offer or perceive it to be excellent. Authorities that already have high profile may feel that they don't need Beacon status.

TRANSFORMING THE SCHOOL WORKFORCE

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee perceived that innovation tends to derive from schools rather than the Local Education Authority. The LEA has a role in spreading good practice. Innovative practice is new, excites people, tests out new ideas, whereas excellence is tangible and demonstrates impact, for example on pupil performance results and community participation. The interviewee expressed the view that excellence cannot be achieved without innovation.

Indicators of excellence

A leading authority will give personal support and guidance, based upon personal knowledge. LEA staff will work alongside school staff in re-training programmes, offer a menu of services, run by those with practical experience and expertise and who are able to provide practical advice. There would need to be a shift of emphasis within the LEA so that resources can be allocated to promoting and sharing innovative practice, as well as supporting schools giving cause for concern. The interviewee stressed that additional resources are not the answer. "If there had been an advisor who knew the process and had gone through it, they would have opened my eyes."

Examples of innovation and excellence in a school were provided. Innovation in a single-form entry first and middle school derived from discussion about how to make changes that enabled better knowledge sharing across the school. First school staff 'twinned' with middle school staff and working on the theme of assessment, the Year 2 and Year 6 teachers assessed each others' children during a single session on Friday mornings.

Further objectives were identified to extend the project and share ideas across the whole school. Discussions involved support staff. A two-term project was developed in which Year 2 and Year 6 children were set learning targets in language, art and music and were taught in groups for half of the time each by the Year 2 and the Year 6 teacher. Activities included creating music and poetry, putting on a joint performance, writing books for each other and writing letters to each other. There was a significant impact on standards in the school, especially in the SATs results for children with Special Needs and second language learners.

Other practical examples included a focus on those aspects that caused staff anxiety such as ICT skills. A development programme built up staff skills and confidence to use laptops, intranet and interactive whiteboards. By consulting widely with children and parents and by appointing two teaching administrators the headteacher helped staff to re-learn and prioritise activities, redesigned workloads and improve work-life balance.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee saw the main attraction of the scheme to be prestige but expressed some reservations about its impact for service users. She perceived few benefits but, rather, increased expectations of successful authorities.

CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIPS

Summary of interview

Improvement, excellence and innovation

The interviewee suggested that there is quite a lot of innovation in the theme but noted that this is a new profession and a relatively new field, that has grown since the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. He suggested that there is substantial learning, adaptation and sharing of good practice but not devising completely new programmes.

In his view, innovation relates to creative thinking, devising completely new products or services and excellence denotes exceptional performance, delivering on plans and expectations and better performance than others. The interviewee perceived that true innovation tends to create a 'buzz', generate good results, increase motivation and involve other organizations, all of which are likely to produce excellence.

Indicators of excellence

He suggested three main characteristics of leading local authorities and partnerships.

First, **inclusivity** of the number of agencies involved, which are specified in the Crime and Disorder Act. Involving individuals from those agencies is also important, to make them feel welcome and able to perform effectively. Involving communities is quite difficult for local authorities and partnerships, as this is a complex area of work and needs to be broken down into sub-categories and made relevant to voluntary, business and race equality organizations for example.

Second, there needs to be a clear focus on aims and objectives and this must be backed up by clear analysis of the local situation, trends, data-sharing and data analysis, preferably over the longer-term. Data needs to be presented in a form that is easy to understand for different partners. In the interviewee's experience, data collection, analysis and usage have tended to be limited. There have been problems of data collection and application of data across geographical areas that are not co-terminus, definition problems where there have been different recording practices and short-term projections of trends (usually a 'snapshot' of 3 – 6 months, not of 5 or 10 years). National headlines and priorities may influence trend data.

Third, a focus on a few key areas, rather than 'a massive array.' It is important to focus on initial objectives and targets, to learn by experience and refine rather than add to the three-year plan. Changing national targets have contributed to the growth of work.

The interviewee described one example of innovation where communication and media were given a specific focus, ran through the partnership Plan as a central thread and an innovative plan was developed, drawing appropriately on Public Relations expertise. The interviewee was not able to describe tangible evidence of implementation.

Excellence and innovation may occur together, particularly where there has been good identification of the problem and careful analysis. For example, one well-funded three-year project addressed distraction burglary across a number of Crime and Disorder partnerships over a large geographical, rural area. The partnership analysed the problem using advanced problem-solving techniques, shared good practice widely with partners, was innovative in developing an approach to how to use current legislation and produced results in line with its aims.

Another project in a rural area, on vehicle arson, a major national problem that can lead to anti-social behaviour, involved close relationships between Police, the Fire Service and the local authority.

Examples of good practice are not restricted to one type of authority but small councils may lack the resources, skills and expertise to draw on. Certain types of project require the resources that are held by larger, unitary and upper-tier authorities.

The interviewee noted two awards in this service, Problem Oriented Partnerships gives awards for innovation and excellence, mainly aimed at Police but recently including Local authorities and Crime and Disorder Partnerships. Crime Concern makes awards in Community Safety.

Views on the Beacon Council Scheme

The interviewee perceived kudos, recognition, motivation and continuing stimulation to be attractive features of the scheme. Timing, other performance-related activities and the pressure of work were perceived to be the main obstacles to application.