

A county perspective on social vulnerability assessment and its uses Hampshire County Council

1. SUMMARY

This case study outlines how Hampshire County Council initiated and implemented an assessment of social vulnerability. The aims of the work were to:

- gain an understanding of the relationship between social vulnerability and climate change and extreme weather events, particularly heat waves and flooding
- present outputs in a way which would aid decision making in key services throughout the county
- improve the resilience of all core services particularly in, but not limited to Adult Services, and
- target resources and help maximise the effective use of limited adaptation resource

The case study will be helpful for other local authorities wishing to gain an insight into social vulnerability in their area as a means to target resources. It is anticipated that data can also be used across the organisation, enabling managers to focus delivery to vulnerable service users.

2. ACTIVITIES

The Hampshire County Council (HCC) Corporate Sustainability Board identified a gap in HCC's understanding around the true implications of climate change on communities within Hampshire. Although there is a clear link between health and economic well-being and climate change; once degrees of affluence and current support services are taken into account it is not clear who the most vulnerable members of the community are, and where they live. The project aimed to bridge the gap in the Council's understanding of vulnerability to climate change and extreme weather events. It helps the organisation to embed its new responsibilities under both the Public Health Act and Flood and Water Management Act.

By giving HCC a better understanding of the communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, this work delivers aspects of both Chapter 4 of the NAP (Healthy and Resilient Communities) and the cross cutting Chapter 8 (Local Authorities). It also contributes to a number of Corporate Priorities, priorities within the County's Strategic Delivery Plan, and the Transforming the Council programme, particularly around the 'Health and Wellbeing' theme.

A methodology was developed which used a wide range of datasets to produce a series of output maps showing vulnerability across the County to the impacts of climate change. It follows the general principles of the mapping work in the ClimateJust portal but using a different set of indicators and a modified methodology (see related How To document¹).

The work involved splitting data into:

- Social vulnerability factors - The components of vulnerability were broken down into distinct aspects; increased/reduced exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Demographic, health and economic data were also included.
- Environmental factors. - The environmental factors focussed on how the county may be affected by future heat waves and flooding. A number of data sets were mapped including small/ large urban areas, coastal areas and rural locations. Environment Agency flood zones and susceptibility to ground/surface water flooding were also mapped.

The project was originally conceived by the Hampshire County Council Energy and Environment Futures Group (EEF). However, a senior manager in Adult Services recognized that this project would benefit service delivery and agreed to act as a champion/sponsor for the work. Securing a champion in a service delivery role was key to getting the project developed and commissioned. The champion was able to frame the project in a service delivery, rather than a climate change context, and communicate the potential practical applications. The champion helped to ensure that the work was focused on reducing the vulnerability of key service users. The champion proposed the project to the Corporate Sustainability Board, who subsequently commissioned it, lending it high level cross departmental support. A project initialisation document was developed and a multi-disciplinary project team was put together.

¹ Link to How to document A grid based approach to estimating social vulnerability and potential exposure to flood and heat-waves

The project was primarily developed between the County Council's Adults Services and Economy, Transport and Environment Departments, but with support and input from across the Council. Most of the work was carried out by the Research and Intelligence team who were able to manipulate the data and produce the desired output maps.

Although the project did have cross departmental support from the Sustainability Board it was initially focused on Adult Services and a project manager from that department was allocated, (supported by EEF). This approach allowed the project to be developed without requiring large amounts of resource across the organisation. As the project was fairly low in resource and was research based, it was not necessary to engage Members. However, they had been given a presentation on social justice and climate change at the Hampshire Climate Change Commission of Inquiry in 2010.

The business case for the project was built around the assertion that the County Council did not have a complete understanding of vulnerability in its area, in particular this was an issue for vulnerability to the impacts of climate change particularly when considering the three distinct aspects of exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. It was felt that by creating a better understanding of the range of vulnerability to climate change the organisation would be able to improve the resilience of all core services and effectively target adaptive resources.

As well as engaging senior managers through the Sustainability Board, links were also made at an officer level with a number of different teams and partners (see below). Links were often made through word of mouth and informal networks. However, they allowed the potential practical applications of the project to be investigated and the idea of the project to be shared across the organisation.

Due to resource pressures further research and data analysis will not be undertaken. However, the outcomes will continue to be used to improve understanding of how the impacts of climate change and extreme weather events are likely to affect vulnerable communities across Hampshire. The work has also provided datasets that can be used for effective targeting of adaptive resources across a range of core services.

Partners: Hampshire County Council Energy and Environment Futures Group (EEF); Research and Intelligence team; Adult Services; Adults Services and Economy, Transport and Environment Departments, Hitting the Cold Spots project (a HCC and Public Health scheme aimed at keeping elderly and vulnerable residents warm in winter) in relation to their early intervention tools, Children's Services and Hampshire Climate Change Officers Group

Length of Time: Phase 1 took 5 months to compile its initial findings. Once the project team formed, it quickly set about developing the desired approach and methodology and this was approved at the subsequent Sustainability Board meeting. The initial findings were presented to Sustainability Board three months later in May 2012.

Funding: The project was developed and delivered using in-house expertise, and no additional finance was required

4. OUTCOMES

- Mapped evidence of social vulnerability across the county using internal and external data sources.
- An improved understanding of the people and places likely to be most impacted by flooding and heat-waves.
- Better awareness of issues of social vulnerability and social justice across the different partners involved.

5. BARRIERS

- **Language:** Terminology like social justice and community resilience created confusion for some partners, didn't emphasise practical uses and didn't resonate with colleagues in service provision roles. The term community resilience was more meaningful for most departments (and therefore better for ensuring buy-in) but had the drawback of being too broad and unclear in terms of who should take overall ownership.
- **Engagement and communication:** The most effective way of engaging colleagues and partners was to emphasise the physical and practical aspects and focus on explaining the nature of vulnerability. This focus allowed communications to be targeted when talking to different departments and acted as a 'hook' through which further practical applications could be explored. One example was using the project to highlight the differing levels of affluence in urban areas to transport planners when they were planning public transport from urban areas to green spaces/rural areas.

- **Goals and justifications:** There was a need to link the work more closely with the costs of service delivery to be able to demonstrate efficiency savings as a result of better understanding. There is a danger that the work can be viewed as a non-essential 'add-on' to core services rather than acting as a fundamental part of delivering effective core services.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ✓ Find a link to service delivery for the work and engage a Champion from this area. For the work in this case study, HCC identified the champion as someone who:
 - Sat on the appropriate Boards and had already been a champion for climate change adaptation
 - Worked in a service delivery department
 - Was senior enough to persuade the Board to commission the project
 - Would be able to secure time and resource in terms of a project manager to take the project forward.
- ✓ Communicate the aims and objectives of the project widely to ensure buy in across the organisation but start with focussing on one area of delivery and then demonstrate early success to engage other departments. For the work in this case study, HCC started with Adult Services but found uses of output data for a range of other services such as those associated with transport, greenspace and children.
- ✓ Focus on the nature of vulnerability, rather than social justice, when explaining the project.
- ✓ Emphasise the practical applications of the project and where they can save resource and make efficiencies, develop practical examples which are part of core services. Measures can focus on: reducing exposure; increasing resilience and improving the capacity of individuals to prepare for, respond to or recover from an incident.

7. CONTACT

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