



## High Level Technical Hubs

Aligned Assets sponsored UK Gazetteer Best Practice Days. This is an opportunity for the gazetteer community to come together and share issues and solutions. Carl Hancock reports on the last London event, where Local Authorities and other public services met in this innovative as well as welcome initiative.

Whether one lays the blame squarely at the feet of the bankers, or whether we just accept that recessions are cyclical, what is fact is that public sector spending is being cut as a result.

On the 6th May 2010, we might be facing a new government, or if the ever narrowing opinion polls are to be believed we may not. Regardless of the victor, the issue of public sector spending cuts will not be going away and will simply be a question of when and by how much.

Whilst the politicians might talk about 'efficiency savings' as a method for not having to refer to cuts, there has never been more need in the public sector for real efficiency savings, ones that can enable the same levels of service at a reduced cost to the taxpayer.

It was from this scenario that the concept of the Aligned Assets sponsored UK Gazetteer Best Practice Days were born – an opportunity for the gazetteer community to come together and share issues and solutions.

The most recent of these 'high level technical hubs', was held on the 24th February in the offices of Southwark Council. In attendance were over sixty people from across the public sector and the buzz word of the day was 'Integration'. They were treated to presentations covering all aspects of gazetteer best practice from the use of web services at Cardiff Council to the integration of the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) with the One Scotland Gazetteer (OSG) by the British Transport Police (BTP).

### System Integration: The Value of the LLPG

Two presentations that offered most in terms of system integration were those by Andy d'Andilly from Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Ewa Platcha from the London Borough of Hackney.

Andy, who had previously presented at the Best Practice Day in

Cardiff, this time offered the audience an update on the ongoing work at Barnsley MBC on their Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG). He detailed the two phase approach they are taking to their integration work, firstly with the process of data cleansing and then latterly with the actual integration itself.

One of main focuses of the presentation was the high level approach that was taken by identifying the key systems to integrate with, a major issue of which was the establishing of data ownership. It was clear from the presentation that a number of hurdles had to be overcome, but through good planning they were able to plan appropriately, and determine well in advance the process of updating the data. It is through this good planning that Andy was able to show how they are successful integrating with their Northgate and Mayrise systems, with other systems from Strand, Civica, Capita and Academy scheduled over the next few months.

Ewa, like Andy showed how their LLPG was at the very heart of their integration plans and was central to Hackney's Award winning 'Citizen Index'. She explained to the audience that, "a Local Authority is a business in which the citizens are the customer, and therefore its success is determined by the quality of the interaction between them".

It was this concept that Ewa showed throughout her presentation, with the groundwork involving the matching and assigning of Unique Property Reference Numbers (UPRNs) to the systems involved in the Citizen Index including the CRM, Council Tax and Electoral Register. She also expanded on how, with the matching process complete it was possible to maintain this synchronicity through automated address exports.

As with the situation at Barnsley, Hackney still have a number of systems still to be integrated but are well on their way to achieving their goal



of gaining corporate use of their LLPG. Through doing this, as Ewa explained, "Satisfaction levels will increase, people will feel more positively towards the Council, and we will be able to serve them more efficiently."

### Geo-demographics and Web Services

A different method of gazetteer integration was given by Matthew Seymour of Cardiff Council, a local authority that has been consistently at the forefront of gazetteer best practice.

Cardiff, like many councils had the peculiar predicament of access to the NLPG via the Mapping Services Agreement, yet many departments still using third party address data. To those working with the LLPG the benefits of using the NLPG corporately were very clear: reduced costs and a reduction in address duplication, yet for these to be achieved there would be a need for 'corporate cultural changes'.

Having already achieved considerable success in using their LLPG as the basis of their online Mapping Portal, Cardiff began the process of using web services to expand this into full NLPG use. Matthew explained that through web services they have successfully integrated the NLPG into their C2C call centre, waste management and even into the Kayak Centre's booking system.

Whilst the topic of integration demonstrated numerous long term benefits, Alex Waugh of Southwark Council presented on how their LLPG was

being used as a "Once in a 10 year opportunity to use it as a driver for wider improvements" through the work they are doing on Census 2011.

After a brief history of how Census delivery methods have moved from the hand delivered methods of 2001 to the postal system that will be used in 2011, he went on to discuss one of the many reasons why the Census was so important to Southwark. With the Census used as a once per decade measure of population, ensuring a high response rate and therefore an accurate population figure could have a significant effect on future funding.

As Alex went onto explain, the 2001 Census had seen Southwark in the bottom fifteen local authorities in the country with a 75% response rate. It was for this reason that so much hard work and determination was being placed into ensuring that the addresses used for the 2011 Census would be as accurate as possible, with their work on the LLPG central to this.

### One Force and one Gazetteer

An organisation with unique addressing needs is the British Transport Police (BTP) and Mike Wallace, their GI Manager, was on hand to explain what they're doing to overcome it.

Due to their transport remit, they have built their own BTP gazetteer that contains all rail-specific locations such as signal boxes and level crossings. This gazetteer was checked against the NLPG and for entries such as bridges the National Street Gazetteer (NSG) was used. Mike described the NLPG as, "...the best gazetteer available" and to date they have achieved an impressive 94% match rate. What this means is that they can effectively integrate the NLPG for addresses, with their own transport-specific gazetteer,

The difficult aspect for the BTP is the fact that they cover the whole of Great Britain so they have a need for Scottish address data, which for them will come from the Scottish equivalent of the NLPG – the OSG. The main difficulty of using the two datasets is that they are in different formats – the NLPG in DTF 7.3 and the OSG in DTF 6.3. Mike explained how they are working closely with Aligned Assets on using the two data sets in the one database until the whole of Scotland moves to DTF 7.3.

Mike emphasised that this is still a work in progress, but as the first organisation to use the NLPG in combination with the OSG, the eyes of the gazetteer world will be watching closely.

### Conclusion

The whole event was best summed up by Stella Morris of Canterbury City Council who said, "A very interesting day with a lot of useful information. I will certainly be taking back some ideas with me to have a go implementing." These sentiments were echoed by the vast majority of attendees who will have all gained through the sharing of ideas and information.

The gazetteer community might be small and their work often goes unrecognised, yet what they do sits at the heart of most organisations. Through best practice and the associated gains in efficiency, the whole of the public sector will undoubtedly gain.

*The next Gazetteer Best Practice Day is scheduled for the 10th June 2010 in Bolton. For more information please visit [www.aligned-assets.co.uk/events](http://www.aligned-assets.co.uk/events).*

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