Click and collect

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Research has predicted a net benefit of ?202m by 2020 from address and street data that local authorities collect and maintain, reports Gayle Gander

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Accurate spatial referencing is in the spotlight. At GeoPlace?s conference this year, the MP Matthew Hancock ? appointed Minister for Digital Culture by Prime Minister Theresa May ? endorsed the necessity for high-quality and accurate address data, stating that:

> 'Addresses are invaluable to our economy and our public services.'

Frequently regarded as simply a list to allow post to be delivered, addresses are in reality essential to national data infrastructure. Everything that happens has a connection to a physical location, from waste management to flood relief, from service provision for vulnerable people to managing school admissions, from connecting utilities to underwriting insurance, or from planning street works to mobilising a fire crew to a block of flats.

As Hancock said:

> 'The challenge and the opportunity that lies ahead is to ensure that high-quality, precise address data anchors the UK?s digital economy and the transformation of our public services, and is used to improve the lives of the citizens we serve.'

Public-sector savings

The work of local authorities is the foundation on which the country?s address system operates, as it is only they that have the power to change or to create and approve addresses. GeoPlace has worked closely with councils for more than 16 years to develop a national address register. With 2m changes recorded every month, data maintenance is time-consuming and challenging. This level of change also demonstrates the importance of the service for local authorities, being indicative of high usage.

The financial benefits for councils of accessing addressing data through the Public Sector Mapping Agreement (PSMA) have been well documented over the years. The following are just 4 highlights of individual projects or partnerships.

1. Eight local authorities in Wales have generated savings of over ?850,000 by use of addressing. The authorities checked all 135,000 single-person discount claims for verification purposes. The project cost around ?145,000 to run and enabled savings of ?1m, based on additional revenue; the average return across the 7 authorities was ?7 for every ?1 spent. Importantly, this was achieved without any extra pressure on existing staff.
2. South Staffordshire Council has improved routing efficiencies using the Local Land and Property Gazetteer, which has been instrumental in contract savings of ?380,000 per annum for at least the next 7 years.

3. The London Borough of Bromley has made significant savings and service improvements. The project focused on re-engineered street cleaning work schedules, and has led to annual savings of ?800,000. It has also resulted in a 50% increase in inspections to check on the quality of street cleaning.
4. The Multi-Agency Incident Transfer project has reduced operational response times for emergency incidents and improved the quality and timeliness of incident data from more than 4 minutes per call to 16 seconds. In Wales, more than 300,000 calls are made each year to the 3 emergency services, meaning that there is potential to save in excess of 18,000 hours of control room staff time that has been spent telephoning other agencies.

However, up-to-date research on the potential for closer integration of address and street data across local government was not available until a few months ago ? a previous study took place in 2006.

Cost-benefit research

GeoPlace commissioned ConsultingWhere to undertake a wide-ranging cost-benefit evaluation of the impact of address and street data in local authorities, which the former company collates across England and Wales. The research outlines a number of benefits for local authorities, including:

- reduced data duplication and integration;
- greater tax revenues;
- waste management route optimisation;
- using web services and addressing to reduce face-to-face and telephone contact.

The research also identifies how the data can underpin government policy initiatives such as the Troubled Families programme .

The research was informed by international comparative studies in Denmark and Australia, as well as by an examination of the political, economic, social, technological and legislative environments in which local government operates. Individual custodians were also contacted via a questionnaire and invited to attend a workshop to test hypotheses, validate assumptions and provide ideas on how to overcome barriers to wider adoption.

Often viewed as just a list to allow post to be delivered, addresses are in reality vital to national data infrastructure

The headline figure from the research is that there could be a net benefit of up to ?202m by 2020 if better use is made of the address and street data that councils collect and maintain in England and Wales. Based on current rates of adoption, this represents a return on investment after discounting of 4:1.

The wide-ranging evaluation identified the potential of address and street data to optimise operations in most services that a council provides, in particular the following:

- planning and development: neighbour notification, local plan revision, planning consultations, local land charges;
- highways and transport: streetworks planning/permits, optimising inspection

routes, gritting, service interruption notices;
- revenue and benefits: identifying fraud, missing council tax or non-domestic rates collection;
- corporate services: strategic planning, executive dashboard, gathering evidence for decision-making, members support;
- social services: troubled families, home visits and neighbourhood analysis;
- street scene: reporting problems, graffiti, work order management, management reporting;
- property services: asset management, property purchases, neighbour notification, shared office space;
- environmental services: preventing illegal tipping, commercial premises licensing;
- customer services: identifying location, analysis of calls, improving customer relationship management, service interruption notices, opinion surveys;
- waste management: refuse collection, recycling, minimising landfill, garden and trade waste;
- public safety: contingency planning, evacuation plans;
- education: student registration, school place allocation, school transport, catchment areas;
- electoral management: electoral roll management, polling district demarcation, polling station consolidation;
- public health: joint strategic needs assessment, drug and alcohol services, NHS liaison.

Building on the data

GeoPlace and Ordnance Survey are taking Hancock?s challenge to 'transform public services' seriously. We work with councils to encourage address linkages across all databases, and seek wider adoption of AddressBase in the public and commercial sectors to 'improve the lives of the citizens we serve'.

Addresses are also vital in connecting people to the digital world. As Hancock said:

> 'To verify your identity, register to vote, get a driving licence, buy broadband ? the uses of addresses are countless, from our emergency services, welfare provision, social care, council tax charging, and fraud prevention. The address is the point of reference that anchors people throughout these services and across geographical boundaries.'

These services can be linked across systems to provide a common view of a place or property through the Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN), which Hancock described as:

> 'The jewel at the heart of the addressing system. It links address data across a diverse range of systems and services.
>
> The UPRN facilitates greater accuracy and immediate data sharing and matching ? delivering better services and better outcomes for citizens.'

Through the PSMA, we have the mechanism to enable this data sharing across the public sector. Our next challenge is to demonstrate how government can use the data to provide public services efficiently and wisely.

Gayle Gander is Head of Marketing at GeoPlace LLP

Further information

- Matthew Hancock?s speech to the GeoPlace conference
- ConsultingWhere?s report , Cost Benefit Analysis of Address and Street Data for Local Authorities and Emergency Services in England and Wales
- Related competencies include GIS , Planning , Property records and information systems
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Land journal* (October/November 2016)