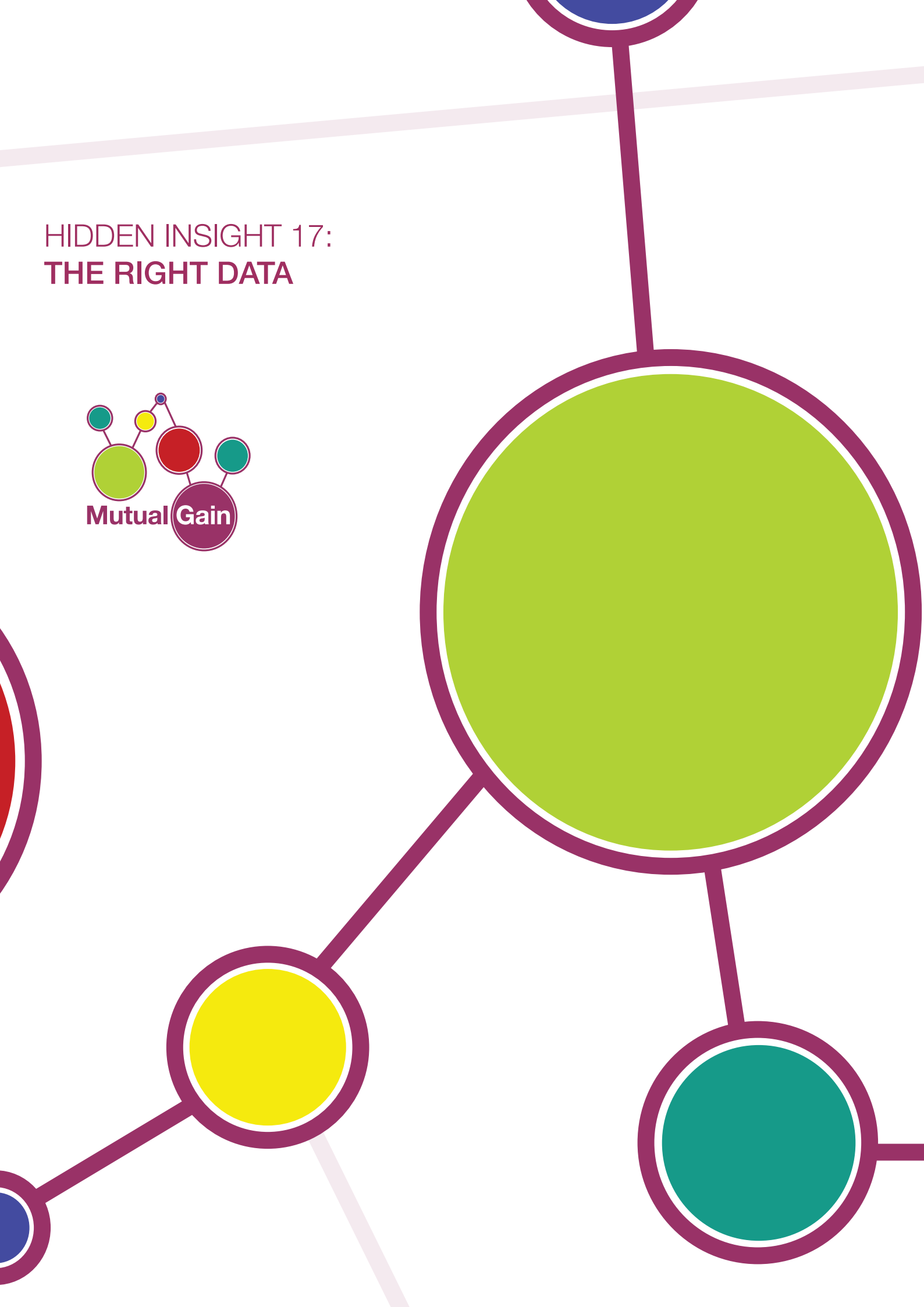# HIDDEN INSIGHT 17:
THE RIGHT DATA

Mutual **Gain**

This insight considers the benefits and approaches used to capture meaningful data from engaging with local communities and the importance of ensuring this data is captured from a representative and diverse section of the community. It considers the most effective ways of capturing community data and how the data can then be utilised to inform future activity that enhances the building of social capitol.

#Capturing community data #Building social capitol #Neighbourhood surveys
#Community engagement #Community consultation

Community engagement sounds simple doesn't it? On a typical day that's what beat bobbies and PCSOs do. Neighbourhood teams speak to people and 'do that engagement stuff'; walking the streets in 'hi vis' jackets so people can feel safe. Law abiding people understand that the police are there to protect the public, or to help them out if they have a problem. We engage to make them feel safe and secure.

Engaging communities and speaking to people is a key role of Neighbourhood Teams (NPTs). They are the face of the police - the ones who, every day, have the most direct contact with people. The picture of the friendly bobby or PCSO is the vision that most people conjure up when they think of the police. So when a neighbourhood officer appears on the doorstep to ask whether the person is willing to answer questions as part of a survey, many people will agree and invite the officer in. The point of the survey is to allow the police to gain a better understanding of the public and respond to their needs and expectations.

Surveys provide an opportunity to access peoples' lives and open up the possibilities of learning about how people live and work. In the course of getting survey data people will often share stories that contribute to an effective problem solving approach – their priority may be the removal of empty beer bottles from a nicely pruned hedge, or the fact that that lots of young people seem to spend a long time in a 'phone box when they all have mobiles etc. This data has value outside of the individuals' circumstances.

Alternative approaches

Despite many hours of walking the streets and door knocking, officers often wonder about the value of the data from surveys when informing a localised policing response. They challenge the survey process, arguing that it doesn't enable them to speak to those who they really need to speak to (new communities, young people, the disengaged). Officers say that the information which is useful to them is provided outside of the survey questioning process. They say that there must be a better way of gathering the real data and insights of the community they serve.

So are surveys the best way of gathering data about how people feel about the police? They have their place and they provide a snapshot perspective on satisfaction and confidence, but they don't get into the day to day lived experiences of residents. They can also be expensive and time consuming (resource deployment, printing and analysis). How do we access those people who do not want to allow the police into their homes, or who do not feel comfortable speaking to the police in open spaces, but do want to have a relationship with them? Is there a better way of gathering data that is less expensive and time consuming?

Communities are complex, and engaging communities is not as simple as it might seem – we have learned that from the numbers that turn up for PACT meetings or gala events – maybe 20 if you are lucky? People are selective and the fact that "Britain's Got Talent' is on TV, and its cold and damp outside may just encourage people to stay indoors, "after all, someone will turn up to speak to the police, won't they?" Sometimes visibility does not always equate to trust and can act as a barrier, especially in areas where communities are under stress or feel that no one cares. In these instances the police need to think about different ways of engaging communities, new ways of gathering data, new ways of building relationships and gaining the trust of people. New ways of engaging means new possibilities to speak to those people who either do not trust the police or are uncomfortable speaking to them on their doorstep, or in public places.

Communities need something to get them started – they need to see a strong 'reason why' they should engage. They need to have a good experience, see the police in an alternative light and see the value of going to meet with the police on a cold damp evening (and record 'Britain's Got Talent' on Sky Plus!).

MutualGain have discovered working with police forces it is possible to encourage communities to come and speak to the police, and there are better ways to listen to residents' stories. It is possible to attract those who do not normally speak to the police.

Despite a healthy cynicism at the start, officers have volunteered to learn about new ways of engaging communities, building relationships, building trust and seeing whether they could get more data from the people who live in the area in which they worked, with a view to being able to deliver an improved service.

Following the training teams have applied their learning by organising engagement events that were attended by large numbers of people. The data gathered, coded and analysed provided a clear insight into communities and their priorities.

The coding of qualitative data was a new skill learned. Often at Gala events the views of those in attendance is not captured in any systematic way, so if a 'minor' point was raised and dismissed by an officer in one area, and then again by an officer in another area, there was no way of spotting emerging issues. By coding and analysing the data and producing reports with original contributions, the police and partners can start to problem solve in a different way, and identify emerging trends across areas.

Each 'Post It' note and table cloth comment was input into a spreadsheet and grouped according to themes – a time consuming, but rewarding process. The teams produced reports which were made available to those in attendance and uploaded on to the neighbourhood reporting tool. Imagine a time when all these data lines can be analysed force wide, and the data used to influence partnerships?

The shared initiatives across agencies can also be better utilised, and the community more effectively mobilised, as a result of better data gathered in a face to face way. For example, one local authority have a Community Guardians scheme which is a volunteer database. Despite lots of communication about the scheme and support to raise awareness, residents still hadn't heard about it (neither had the police!). When litter was raised as an issue partners were able to signpost them to the Guardian scheme, new local residents are now actively using the scheme to improve their area. This is a good example of the police acting as a catalyst for shared conversations, but where the police themselves don't need to provide the response.

Listening rather than telling became the key focus and officers were struck by the diversity of those who attended, including residents who have recently arrived in the UK (from Iraq and Afghanistan), young and old, and people with disabilities. All had a story to tell and in they all had an opportunity to make their voices heard and build relationships with their local NPT. The data is openly available for all to see. The police listened intently. A new listening relationship will in time provide strong information and intelligence to help protect the public and make them feel safer.

A new approach opens new opportunities for new relationships that might lead to renewed legitimacy. So when we think about data we can consider new ways of capturing those conversations that officers often hear outside of formal consultation and engagement (surveys, gala events). It's an opportunity to hear the stories of communities and bring them into the systems and processes that lead to the deployment of resources.

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