

Impact Assessment of INSPIRE

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

1. The European INSPIRE directive regulates the access and sharing of location information to support European member states in implementing environmental policy. Information covered by INSPIRE includes transport networks, addresses, land use, environmentally protected areas, risk and management zones. The purpose of INSPIRE is to allow such data to be comparable across Europe to give decision makers reliable evidence about the environment. The regulation came into force in 2009.
2. The implementation of the INSPIRE regulation across the UK is led by the UK Location Programme within the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The Local Government Association is working closely with the UK Location Programme team to implement INSPIRE in local government.
3. Local authorities will benefit from being able to use such location data, mainly in planning and transport but also in other service areas. But councils are also responsible for meeting the requirements of the regulation themselves, as local authorities create location information as part of their regulatory function.
4. Publishing environmental location data in accordance with INSPIRE has costs, because it requires organisations to provide information to a high technical specification (for example, using web mapping tools to present the data). Defra commissioned the LGA to carry out an impact assessment of implementing INSPIRE in local authorities. The initial assessment estimates the costs to be up to £9 million over eight years depending on whether datasets are published nationally or locally. On the other hand, there also potential costs associated with not meeting INSPIRE requirements which are likely to be passed down to authorities.
5. This report presents the draft findings of the impact assessment and outlines the next steps in relation to INSPIRE. We welcome members' views on the plans.

Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the report on INSPIRE and the work that has been conducted to date, and to comment on or make recommendations about plans for its future direction.

Action

The Research and Information Team will continue to engage with the UK Location Programme in line with any recommendations made by the Board.

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Impact Assessment of INSPIRE

What is INSPIRE?

1. The European INSPIRE directive regulates the access and sharing of location information to support European countries in environmental policy. Information covered by INSPIRE includes transport networks, addresses, land use, environmentally protected areas, risk and management zones. The purpose of INSPIRE is to allow such data to be comparable across Europe to give decision makers reliable evidence about the environment. The regulation came into force in 2009.
2. The implementation of the INSPIRE regulation across the UK is led by the UK Location Programme within Defra. The Local Government Association is working closely with the UK Location Programme team to implement INSPIRE in local government.
3. Local authorities will benefit from being able to use such location data, mainly in planning and transport but also in other service areas. But councils are also responsible for meeting the requirements of the INSPIRE regulation themselves, as they create location information as part of their regulatory function. In total, the LGA has identified over 40 datasets that fall under INSPIRE, including:
 - 3.1 address information as part of street naming and numbering;
 - 3.2 street data as part of their highway function, environmental protected areas;
 - 3.3 land use, regulation and area management zones to protect and regulate land use and guide development as part of the planning process; and
 - 3.4 more recently, information required through various flood regulation.
4. Publishing such environmental location data in accordance with INSPIRE has costs, because it requires organisations to provide information to a high technical specification including:
 - 4.1 the signposting of data on data.gov.uk to given metadata standards;
 - 4.2 the publishing of information through specific web services to be able to view and download the data;
 - 4.3 the availability of data according to given data standards; and
 - 4.4 the sharing of data with EU bodies.

5. Defra have commissioned the LGA to carry out an impact assessment of implementing INSPIRE in local authorities. The first assessment (Annex I) took place in 2009/10, and the next section in this report outlines the draft findings from the impact assessment of the second phase (known as Annex III). The implementation is phased over 10 years, with full completion required by 2020.

Implications of meeting INSPIRE obligations

6. Local authorities will benefit from INSPIRE as it will improve data management within councils and provide easier access to more consistent information for environmental impact assessments, development control, planning, flood risk assessments and other service areas. As one officer pointed out: “INSPIRE should be seen as an opportunity (for better data management), not an EU burden.”
7. However, there is a cost of meeting the requirements as few local authorities have currently the technical capabilities to meet the INSPIRE requirements. A recent LGA survey revealed that only 3 per cent of local authorities are ready to meet the requirements. Barrow Borough Council is the only council that is fully INSPIRE compliant and links their data and services directly to data.gov.uk. Most authorities do not even meet half of the technical requirements and stated a lack of resource, understanding and senior management engagement as barriers to implementing INSPIRE. Authorities with an existing good data management will find it easier to implement INSPIRE whereas authorities that are lagging behind in modernising the way they manage their data will face a larger burden.
8. There is certainly a cost to local authorities for implementing the INSPIRE standards framework. The INSPIRE impact assessment estimated implementation costs to UK local government of around £9 million. The LGA has worked closely with Defra to find cost effective solutions to meet some of the requirements: we found national portal providers who could publish the data to the required technical standards on councils’ behalf (such as GeoPlace for addressing and streets, Natural England for local nature reserves and English Heritage for conservation areas). There was no additional cost to local authorities meeting INSPIRE compliance in this way, other than submitting the datasets to the national providers where they were collated and published.
9. Overall Defra and the UK Location Programme have been supportive of the cost burden faced by local authorities and have been working closely with the LGA to find solutions to reduce the burden.

10. The LGA is currently evaluating a range of possible options for meeting the technical requirements and the associated costs of making the remaining INSPIRE datasets compliant. The individual costs to local authorities ranging from £23,000 to £44,000. Local publishing solutions are likely to be more costly overall, as the required infrastructure investment would be multiplied 362 times (for each local authority and national parks). A national portal solution is favoured by two thirds of local authorities but would require central commissioning, coordination and ownership at national level. The costs are based on meeting full compliance at the current technical level and include external costs through commercial providers and internal staff resources in local authorities over the next eight years.

Next steps

11. Defra is currently reviewing the costs estimated by the LGA. More cost effective solutions may be found by utilising newly emerging portals; and technological advances in five years time may not require expensive data conversions which make up two thirds of the above costs.

12. Under the burdens assessment, we are trying to compare costs with the potential savings from the use of the location infrastructure. Currently, benefits are difficult to quantify as the infrastructure is new and comparable usage assessments are not available. However, as the technology matures and organisations start to use the infrastructure we hope that the benefits can be better quantified. We propose to evaluate future savings from INSPIRE as part of a wider value study of the local benefits of open data.

13. We are working with UK Location Programme to:

- 13.1 review and agree the likely extent of burdens on local authorities;
- 13.2 minimise those burdens by finding the best possible solutions for implementing INSPIRE in local authorities. Options range from local publishing services, publishing through a regional/partnership, or publishing using central services. A hybrid approach between local, regional and national solutions may be the most likely option to take account of localism and local ownership; and
- 13.3 support local authorities and help them understand INSPIRE. The UK Location Programme together with the LGA will revise guidance to meet local authority needs, and run four regional workshops in spring/summer to inform about INSPIRE and take local authority views. The LGA has also established an expert group from local authorities to consult on proposals and solutions.