

Update on Transparency

Background

1. This report gives an update on data transparency and policy developments since the Improvement and Innovation Board meeting in July 2013, and outlines key work undertaken by the Research and Information Team over the last six months. This report seeks members' views on the plan of work for the local transparency programme and asks members to approve the LGA response to the transparency code for local government.
2. The report covers:
 - 2.1 recent government announcements on open data and transparency
 - 2.2 the Local Authorities Data Transparency Code published by DCLG
 - 2.3 an update on the open data Breakthrough Fund and other funding programmes.

Government announcements on open data and transparency

3. During the last six months, government has announced a range of legislation and policies about transparency and open data that impacts on local authorities:
 - 2.4 Amendments to the Freedom of Information Act
 - 2.5 Open Government Partnership UK National Action Plan 2013 to 2015
 - 2.6 National Information Infrastructure
 - 2.7 Data Capability Strategy
 - 2.8 Local Authorities Data Transparency Code.

Amendments to the Freedom of Information Act

4. On 1 September 2013, the Ministry of Justice released the dataset code of practice, which outlines amendments to the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act¹. The amendments to the FOI Act – as defined in the Protection of Freedoms Act – extend the right to request information, from access to reuse. In practice, this means that for any FOI data request, local authorities must publish the data and any future updates openly unless any exemptions apply. The Information Commissioner Office (ICO) has issued further practical guidance.

The UK National Action Plan 2013 to 2015 and National Infrastructure

5. The [Open Government Partnership](#) is a worldwide movement for transparency and open data from governments which was, until recently, chaired by the UK government. The UK National Action Plan² was published in October 2013 and outlines the government's commitment to the Open Government Partnership for:

¹ FOI Dataset Code of Practice: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/information-access-rights/foi/code-of-practice-datasets.pdf>

- 5.1 open data: radically opening up government data for greater accountability, public service improvement and economic growth
 - 5.2 government integrity: fighting corruption and strengthening democracy through transparent government
 - 5.3 fiscal transparency: helping citizens to follow the money
 - 5.4 powering citizens: transforming the relationship between citizens and governments
 - 5.5 natural resource transparency: ensuring natural resources and extractive revenues are used for public benefit.
6. In the Action Plan, the UK government sets out its commitment to the National Information Infrastructure (NII). The government will continue to develop and list an inventory of all the datasets it owns, whether published or unpublished, in order to identify the NII. The datasets that are likely to have the broadest and most significant economic and social impact if made available will form the NII.
 7. The creation of the NII applies in the first instance to open data held and owned by central government departments. However, the government recognises that there is a rich source of data available in local authorities, which will also have significant potential for social and economic growth. The Cabinet Office has committed to work with the LGA, the Local Public Data Panel and DCLG to:
 - 7.1 determine by April 2014 how best to consider local authority datasets in future iterations of the NII
 - 7.2 integrate local authorities more fully into the UK's open data structures and provide one accessible website location (the Cabinet Office promised to develop a local section of data.gov.uk providing a forum to help local authorities share data more widely and work with developers and citizens to build best practice)
 - 7.3 engage with users to get a better understanding of the impact, benefits and uses of these government data sets.
 8. The LGA has set-up a local open data group to seek input from local authorities, DCLG, the Local e-Government Standards Body (LeGSB) and the Cabinet Office on a local information infrastructure.
 9. Cllr Tim Cheetham is currently representing local government on the Local Public Data Panel, which reports to Baroness Stowell (DCLG). Gesche Schmid is a member of the Open Data User Group. Both groups report directly to the Public Sector Transparency Board chaired by Frances Maude MP.

Data capability strategy

² Open Government Partnership: UK National Information Infrastructure:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/open-government-partnership-uk-national-action-plan-2013>

10. The Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) published the data capability strategy in October³. Government recognises that Big Data is one of the eight great technology sectors in the UK. Analysing large data volumes will increase the social and economic benefits, transforming lives and impacting on business. The data capability strategy emphasises the requirements for a strong skills base, an agile, resilient data infrastructure and tools to be able to analyse the data, and data itself as an enabler and asset for greater data capability. The government will promote the smart use of information technology and data in UK business, in particular supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and ensure that citizens benefit from the digital age and are able to use digital service confidently.

Local Authorities Data Transparency Code

11. In December 2013, DCLG issued a revised Local Authorities Data Transparency Code, requiring local authorities to publish key information and data to increase local accountability and transparency⁴. The Code will make it mandatory for local authorities with an income or expenditure of over £6.5 million to publish a range of information under section 2 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980.

12. Information to be published quarterly includes expenditure exceeding £500, government procurement card transactions and procurement information with a value that exceeds £5,000. In addition, councils must publish the following information annually:

- 12.1 details about the land and assets they own
- 12.2 details of all grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations
- 12.3 their organisation chart
- 12.4 time and resources spent on trade union tasks and functions
- 12.5 parking revenues and number of controlled parking spaces
- 12.6 details of officer salaries over £50,000
- 12.7 their constitution
- 12.8 the pay multiple (the ratio between the highest paid salary and the median salary of the whole workforce).

13. The data should be published in a way that it can be easily accessed and used by local people and other interested persons. Local authorities already publish most of the data as part of being transparent and accountable to their citizens. Indeed, the LGA has worked closely with the sector to release data in a meaningful way, for example through the open data Breakthrough Fund programme.

14. Mandating authorities to publish some of the data to the detail specified in the Code will add a burden. However, DCLG has listened to the LGA's representations and the

³ UK data capability strategy: seizing the data opportunity – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-data-capability-strategy>

⁴ Local Authority Data Transparency Code <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-authorities-data-transparency-code>

sector's concerns and reduced the regulation of datasets from the original consultation; and will make funding available to meet some of the burden following the enactment of any regulations. For example, performance data is no longer mandatory as DCLG has recognised that LG Inform - the LGA data service - makes data about the performance of local services available to enable citizens to compare their authority with others (<http://lginform.local.gov.uk>).

15. DCLG plans to deliver this policy by:

- 15.1 seeking responses to the revised Code by 17 January, and engaging in a dialogue with councils across the country, e.g. roadshows;
- 15.2 issuing the revised Local Authorities Data Transparency Code (Winter 2014);
- 15.3 bringing into force regulations making it a legal requirement for local authorities to publish data in accordance with the Code by 1 April 2014 under section 2 of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980. There will be a 3 to 12 months lead in time depending if data needs to be published quarterly or annually;
- 15.4 working with sector led organisations such as the LGA, LeGSB, the Local Public Data Panel and the Information Commissioner's Office to develop and disseminate guidance, good practice examples and case studies.

16. The LGA are currently collating responses from local authorities and will submit a response to the Improvement and Innovation Board for approval before submitting it to DCLG.

Open Data Breakthrough Funding

17. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) granted the LGA over £1 million to manage the local government Breakthrough grants and fund local authority projects over the financial year 2013/14⁵. The fund is to enable open data release and ease of access to open data supporting growth and innovation, contributing to local engagement with citizens, communities and business. The fund is to also help councils overcome particular technical barriers in opening up data so that the data can be more easily used in onward applications, tools and services.

18. The LGA works with local authorities to issue funding, and set-up the projects. 94 per cent of the total funding of £1.087 million will be issued to local authorities directly, 6 per cent will be retained within the LGA for managing the programme and to bring councils together to share their experiences and learn from each other.

⁵ Local Open Data Breakthrough Programme: http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/local-transparency/-/journal_content/56/10180/3926733/ARTICLE

19. A local government review panel has been set up, chaired by Cllr Tim Cheetham. The panel has met five times since April and has approved 21 successful projects from a total of 46 applications. Two authorities, Sheffield and Solihull, later declined the funding due to lack of internal resources. Some of the applications covered consortia of local authorities. The 19 successful projects are listed in **Appendix 1**. In reviewing the proposals, the panel put particular emphasis on funding projects that could be shared across groups of authorities or benefit the wider sector such as the development of common standards or infrastructures.
20. The LGA organised a learning day for participating councils to share their projects, ideas and common issues. Participants took the opportunity to network with other project leaders and learn about other initiatives that may be of interest for developing further the release of data. Challenges are arising from agreeing and/or adopting common standards locally and from identifying local demand for and uses of data externally. However, there is a growing interest internally for making efficiency savings from data transparency.
21. BIS has now extended the programme into 2014/15 and offered a further £1 million in grant funding for 2014/15. The panel will be evaluating the programme in February/March and will issue some new guidelines with an emphasis on the usability of data to foster improvement and innovation within authorities, and engagement with business and community groups to fuel social and economic growth.
22. BIS has set-up a national evaluation to review the outcome of the programme. The experience and learning from the programme is likely to be made available and promoted to all authorities. The LGA is planning some transparency road shows across the country in spring to promote existing projects and good practice, and encourage take up of funding. A presentation of one or two of the successful projects may be of interest to members of the Improvement and Innovation Board.
23. The Cabinet Office, through the public sector Transparency Board, has approved £700K of funding to local authorities for publishing data to certain standards. This funding is to meet the demands from the open data user community through the open data user group, to provide more consistent, reusable data from local government. Local authorities will receive a voucher if they publish their data to given standards. The programme will be managed through the LG Inform Plus (formerly esd toolkit) programme.

INSPIRE Funding

24. Defra has approved £2.7 million in new burdens funding to local authorities to meet the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community Regulations 2009 (INSPIRE) obligations to publish geospatial data about the environment. The funding is based on evidence and sustained lobbying by the LGA. The LGA will be working with Defra to support local authorities in meeting the requirements. The funding will be issued directly to local authorities who will be able to use it to implement their own local publishing solution, meeting European standards. Suppliers are now providing ready-made technical solutions through the government procurement service and g-cloud services.

25. The successful implementation of INSPIRE publishing services will mean that data about environment policies, planning, transport, etc, with a location reference can be seamlessly used in web mapping services and geographic information systems, thereby reducing the burden to collate, store, convert or transform data in the future. This would allow data from public sector organisations to be more easily combined when planning and responding for example to recent flood or other emergency events.

Future direction

26. The open government and open data policies have matured over the last year. There is a realisation that more emphasis needs to be placed on the usability and meaningfulness of open data to link it to policies and outputs rather than the actual release of data. Government needs to provide the economic case for open data locally. However, anecdotal evidence from councils is starting to suggest that there are internal and external benefits from transparency by breaking down data silos between departments, sharing data with partners and engaging with local communities and citizens. This requires comparable and consistent data, which LG Inform, LG Inform Plus and Breakthrough Fund programmes are promoting. Local government can also benefit from the release of central government data, for example, to gain insight into how services meet needs and demands. LG Inform is a good example of this, bringing together individual authority data from a range of government departments - allowing authorities to compare their performance on key services.

Next steps

27. Over the next six to twelve months, the LGA proposes to work with government and local authorities to:
- 27.1 participate in the transparency code of practice road shows to seek views from local authorities on issues, guidance and support needed to meet the requirements, and seek clarification on the Code on behalf of the sector where needed. We will prepare a response to the Improvement and Innovation Board for approval before submitting it to DCLG
 - 27.2 update and develop guidance to support local authorities in publishing data for the transparency code of practice, working together with DCLG, Information Commissioners Office, LeGSB and local authorities
 - 27.3 work with the Cabinet Office, the local public data panel, DCLG, local authorities and LeGSB to consider local authority information in the National Information Infrastructure and to develop a local domain on data.gov.uk
 - 27.4 continue to work with local authorities to successfully manage the open data Breakthrough programme and local government data voucher scheme, fostering a collaborative approach and ensuring that the outputs and lessons from the projects are useful to the sector as a whole

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- 27.5 support local authorities to understand and implement INSPIRE publishing services
 - 27.6 promote LG Inform and LG Inform Plus as a data service for local government and support the sector with guidance and development of data standards
 - 27.7 continue its lobbying for ways to cover costs for collating, maintaining and publishing data to given standards where the publishing of comparable data adds further value
 - 27.8 identify good practice in publishing and using the data in services and business applications and encouraging uses in the community
 - 27.9 hold workshops across the country to promote a greater understanding and responsibility for the opening up of data within local authorities
 - 27.10 organise an LGA event to seek views from members and senior officers for a strategic approach to the value of open government and data within local authorities.
- 28 Members of the Improvement and Innovation Board are invited to give views on these proposed activities and plan of work. In particular, they are asked to approve an increase in focus on supporting local authorities to meet the needs and demands of open government and open data policies to foster accountability and transparency, innovate and transform local public services and empower citizen, business and community groups. Members are also asked to consider whether a more strategic approach of making data more open and meaningful - demonstrated and promoted to councils through guidance and case studies - would also be appropriate.

Financial Impact

- 29 Some of the programmes, such as open data Breakthrough fund, voucher scheme and INSPIRE are grant funded (and this money has been agreed). Funding of other key staff resources to review guidance, support and promote transparency and to coordinate activities is pending approval of the LGA budget for 2014/15.

Appendix 1: List of awards to local authorities under the Breakthrough funding

Lead organisation	Name of project	Description	Proposed Funding
Cambridgeshire County Council ¹	Cambridgeshire Insight Open Data: Stimulating Economic Growth and Encouraging Innovation	Building on the Cambridgeshire Insight project by developing a new, open methodology that will unlock unpublished datasets to enable local companies, community groups and individuals to plan and then respond to the challenges created by rapid growth.	£65,000 ¹
Cheshire East Council ¹	URIs for Natural Neighbourhoods	A public interface for defining geographical areas at neighbourhood level, other than formally supported administrative or census output areas.	£56,000 ¹
City of York Council ¹	York Open Data – Empowering Communities to Access Services	An up-to-date machine readable feed of the service directory made available for free under the Open Government License. Tools that will allow communities and community groups to reuse and combine the data in different ways without a high level of technical knowledge.	£70,000 ¹
Devon County Council ²	Local Government Community Data – Opportunities for Localities and Businesses	Working with communities, businesses and IT experts to find what data are most required and how best to make them useful to communities and business.	£33,000 ²
Hampshire County Council ¹	Linked Open Data Planning Register	Development of a schema and open source tool to enable collating and publishing of linkable planning data.	£60,000 ¹
Kent County Council ¹	Local Government Legal and Business Guidance as Open Data	Publish legal powers and duties as open data under which each English local government service is delivered.	£47,500 ¹
Lancashire County Council ¹	Lancashire Local Information Service (Lis) Project.	To publish reportable, statistical and other information from the authority and partners through a local information system. Release initially datasets which are of relevance to communities and business.	£34,000 ¹
Leeds City	Continued Provision and	Continued provision and development of the West Yorkshire	£21,500 ²

Lead organisation	Name of project	Description	Proposed Funding
Council ²	Development of the West Yorkshire Observatory and Sponsored Hackathon	Observatory to publish spatial data for five local authorities to a wide range of users.	
Leicester City Council ¹	The Automation of the Publishing of Open Data and Internal MI Data in a Standard, Machine Readable, Linked Format	To provide an infrastructure to enable Leicester to automate the production and provision of open data. The project builds on existing technology and partnership that was established for sharing data.	£38,600 ¹
London Borough of Barnet ²	Barnet Data Store	Design of open source data portal around users and according to open data strategic priorities; deployment of data platform for publishing Barnet's open data sets and technical training.	£43,800 ²
London Borough of Harrow ²	Hot Harrow	An investigation using geographic information system (GIS) technology into the thermal properties of the London Borough of Harrow. Outputs thermal and height imagery as well as building footprints. Data to be openly reusable. To aid service delivery, environmental projects, open data and detection of unsafe dwellings.	£56,000 ²
London Borough of Hounslow ^{2*}	Customer Data Gateway	Extension of cloud based technology to provide an online platform for all FOI datasets in accessible formats. Joint bid with West London alliance (Ealing, Harrow and Brent).	£38,000 ^{2*}
London Borough of Lambeth ²	Cooperative Council Community Data Project	A freely shared open source platform that can be installed on any suitable web site. It will embed data and tools "where the conversations are taking place" on more citizen facing sites giving the local community and third party organisations better access to information and enable them to work with the council on designing and delivering improved services across the borough.	£38,000 ²
London Councils ²	Intelligent London: Skills	Skills Match will bring skills data and labour market data together and	£55,750 ²

Lead organisation	Name of project	Description	Proposed Funding
	Match	analyse it to enable policy-makers, practitioners and employers to take an intelligence-led, geographically specific approach to addressing youth unemployment in London.	
North Somerset Council ²	Customer Information Portal and Dashboards	To implement a suite of tools that use existing 'best of breed' Open Data applications and standard driven information management tools using Datashare as the core.	£26,750 ²
Peterborough City Council ¹	Index of Open Data Sets to Aid Comparison Across Councils.	To create index schemas and tool for metadata inventory and core datasets to enable comparisons and combination of indexed datasets from different councils and enable a direct link to data.gov.uk.	£97,000 ¹
Redbridge Council ¹	DataShare	The project seeks funding to distribute the data publishing software Datashare to approximately 100 authorities.	£170,000 ¹
Sunderland City Council ²	Sunderland Software City Data Brokerage (SoftDB)	Development of an open data web feature service for publishing and linking transport, utility and weather data. Part of the innovation challenge programme to create open data for use by SMEs.	£45,750 ²
Surrey Heath Borough Council ²	Countywide Planning Open Data: Part of the Surrey Digital Services (SDS) Programme	A PanSurrey data feed of live planning information, harvested from every district council. The aggregator tool and interface will feed planning applications using open source code published on GitHub.	£25,000 ²
		Total grant funding for projects	£1,021,650
		LGA programme management and review	£ 65,200
		Total grant funding	£ 1,086,850

¹ First cohort of projects approved up to end of June 2013

² Second cohort of projects approved since September 2013

* London Borough of Hounslow: £ 38,000 funding approved 2013/14 and £ 24,000 2014/15