Q and A on the single data list – March 2012

What is the single data list?

The single data list is a catalogue of all the datasets that local government must submit to central government. The Secretary of State committed that local authorities would not be obliged to provide any data which is not on the list without extra funding.

What is covered by the single data list?

The single data list is a list of all data required of local government by central government and public bodies. Most returns are those completed directly by the local authority but it also includes returns where the authority has some other significant involvement, such as Schools Census. The list does not contain data returns which local authorities complete voluntarily, are asked to complete in the course of an application for specific funding or returns not directly to do with their role as local authorities (such as the public service vehicle operators survey, as it applies to all public service vehicle operators not just local authorities).

What is the point of the list?

The list facilitates transparency, bringing clarity for local authorities and the public as to what data central government collects and what should be available to them. It also allows us to eliminate duplication and unnecessary collections.

What's the difference between this 'single data list' and the old National Indicator Set?

The National Indicator Set was set up to aid the performance management of local authorities by central government and consisted of processed indicators rather than pure data. The single data list is simply a catalogue of all Government's data requirements from local government. It has been assembled to aid transparency rather than to manage performance of local councils and facilitates the control of the volume of data central government asks of local government.

Will this actually reduce the burden on local government?

The Government has announced the end of 56 data collections since summer 2010 and has significantly reduced the scale of a further 19. A list with examples of stopped collections is posted alongside the single data list for reference. We will continue to challenge all remaining data requirements in order to minimise the burden. In addition the number of collections on the list has reduced from 193 in July 2011 to 156 in March 2012.

How will you ensure that collections are still necessary?

Although the bulk of the reductions have now been achieved, we agree that there is still some more we can do, particularly in simplifying some of the more complex collections. We are working closely with analysts across Government to ensure that data burden reductions are focussed on unnecessary data collections and that Government retains data streams that are central to its core business. In addition the new gateway process will review and challenge on-going collections on a periodic basis.

How will you to prevent the build-up of new data requirements?

To prevent this we have developed a 'gateway' system to govern the process of adding new collections. This will comprise a gateway group, jointly chaired by DCLG and the Local Government Association, which will:

a) Apply a set of principles against which each proposed new data requirement should be assessed

b) Confirm that all new data requirements are fully funded through the New Burdens procedures.

c) Ensure that any proposed new data requirement place the minimum possible burden on local government.