

Improving local government transparency

As Chair of the Local Public Data Panel I am responding to the above consultation. We are pleased to see that the Department is seeking to improve and enhance the published code.

The Panel has been operating since January 2010 and the key objectives have been:

- encouraging the release of local public data to put power in to people's hands, support business re-use of the data and help improve the provision of local services.
- championing those local public bodies innovating and using open data to improve their accountability to users and to improve the services they provide.

I note that a number of organisation's have submitted responses to the consultation and that many of our panel members have been involved in these responses. These contributions will reflect different perspectives and in this case I am not seeking to provide a univocal view representing all panel members. The observations below are therefore views of the panel Chair.

Question 1: What amendments or additions could be made to paragraphs 10 and 11 of the Code to aid compliance?

Inventories of data are essential if effective open data policies are to prosper. There is a clear trade-off between the effort to construct and maintain inventories and their utility – but basic parameters should be established – I would refer to the response of the ODI as being a good basis for progress.

<http://theodi.org/consultation-response/improving-local-government-transparency>

The discovery of data on the Web is also an important consideration. The use of metadata to support automatic search and discovery of public open data sets needs to be addressed. Examples at

<https://dvcs.w3.org/hg/gld/raw-file/default/dcat/index.html>

and

<http://schema.org>

Question 2: What data streams could be added to the Code to aid transparency where services are contracted-out; and help greater access to contract information?

We have argued before within our Panel that Local authorities should ensure that when services are contracted out, they are granted the rights to all the data that is created as a result of providing the service.

Question 3: Are there other data sets which would be useful to the public which could be added to paragraph 12 of the Code?

- bye laws
- Issued licences issued (and those refused) for local services
- changes to roads, street names, footpaths, boundaries other local reference geography.
- accessibility features associated with transport access points and other local services
- lists of empty buildings

Question 4: Is the description of minimum standards and proposed timing to achieve them correct?

We need to address the sustainable publication of data as well as the format. Two star data is the minimum acceptable for structured data resources. Encouraging the adoption of URIs for reference data would render much data linkable and reusable. Five-star publication of data confers particular benefits for reference data that serves to link other data sets and we note some of the excellent work carried out in this area

<http://theodi.org/blog/guest-blog-%E2%80%9Cgreat-prize%E2%80%9D-offer-embracing-open-data>

Question 5: Is the process of what will happen if the Code is to be enforced clear?

There are different views in the panel as to whether the Code should be mandatory. In any event the resourcing of compliance needs to be considered. In the event of dispute a process of mediation needs to be in place.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Nigel Shadbolt'.

Professor Nigel Shadbolt FREng

Government Transparency and Open Data Advisor

Chair Local Public Data Panel