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# Introduction

**Programme Background**

Future City Glasgow is a £24million initiative funded by Innovate UK. The programme demonstrates how technology can make life in the city smarter, safer and more sustainable. Glasgow has joined a network of future cities around the world who are investing in and unlocking the potential of open data and technology.

**Demonstrator Phase**

As part of the demonstrator phase of the Future City programme, the aim is to demonstrate the value of open data. To that end, data analytics approaches have been embedded in our activities to transform information into actionable insight across the council. The process of turning insight into value highlights the benefits of using open data to improve service and lower costs.

**Use Case Context**

Since the Freedom of Information Act 2000, local authorities and public organisations have been challenged to comply with an ever increasing number of requests, and how to fulfill them.

GCC fielded 2,888 requests in 2013/14. Using the most conservative surveyed estimate of time taken to fulfill a request at 11.6hrs, and using the statutorily specified £25/h - the minimum possible cost to the council at £837,520 per calendar year. Other research evidence suggests that this figure could be much higher with a range of hidden costs.

Through the Future City team’s ongoing data and innovation work, an opportunity was identified to alleviate the pressures of FOI by making the frequently requested datasets publicly available and accessible as part of an ongoing project to meet the demands of FOI requests. This project has been undertaken by the Future City Team in partnership with Corporate Services, the Customer Care Team and LES.

Three key questions were identified to guide the Future City Team’s activities in investigating how Open Data can be used to support the councils FOI activities.

1. Which datasets are most used in responding to FOI requests?
2. How can these datasets be published in a pro-active manner?
3. How can these published datasets be promoted to the general public, and reduce the requirement for FOI requests to the council?

In order to identify the activities the Future City team’s activities were set out to:

* Identify the most used datasets for LES and the Customer Care Team
* Prepare and publish these datasets
* Support the promotion of these datasets to the public.

**Benefit statement**

The benefit of the FOI transparency use case is to introduce a pro-active approach to publishing information that is of interest to the general public. By doing so, reducing the costs and effort associated with handling FOI requests and increasing transparency.

# Customers & Users

We take a user centered approach in order to better understand the scope of the project and needs of the stakeholders. Focussing on the end user reduces the risk of forgetting about the key aims of the project, and allows you to tailor the output to address the specific concerns of the people that are going to make use of the outputs of the project.

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| Components of user centered approaches, persona’s, user stories, needs analysis, cognitive walkthrough |

## Customers

* Corporate Services
* Customer Care Team
* LES

## Users

* Requester
* Domain expert
* FOI team member
* FOI officer
* Legal services
* Information commissioner

# Objectives

The following strategic objectives were set.

* Identify the most used datasets for LES and the Customer Care Team
* Prepare and publish these datasets
* Support the promotion of these datasets to the public.

# Methodology & Techniques

**Insert this section as a timeline of the whole process**

This section details the 4 step process the future city team underwent for the use case, discussing the methodology and techniques used, their outputs and what outcomes these activities produced.

Because data links together services within organisations, we take a holistic approach to understanding how data is used, and what is needed to integrate data driven decision making into the process. Specific data touchpoints within the organisation are mapped out and analysed in order to develop an understanding of the context data operates in, not just the data itself.

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| The different steps of the development method in a flow diagram |

## Understanding the problem

### Initial consultation and interviews

To kick off the project a number of consultations and interviews to discuss the context of the project, identify specific needs and existing workflows. These included meetings with the customer care team and senior stakeholders.

### Desk Research

**FOI legislation**

Investigated the **legislative background for FOI requests** and the obligations between local authorities and the public.

Key observations from the legislation:

* Guidelines of a model **‘seven layered’ publication scheme** that councils are expected to maintain
* The legal structure of an FOI request:
  + Time limitations on responding
  + Available avenues for denying requests
  + The process for arbitrating appeals.
* The type of **support and guidance** available to authorities from the information commissioner’s office

**Constitution unit report**

The constitution unit at Kings College London completed **a large scale survey** of English local authorities with regards to FOI processes, to understand how they varied, and discover common issues. The report received substantive responses from 110 FOI officers in local authorities out of a total of 388 responses.

Key observations from the report:

* Most local authorities receive **an overwhelming, and increasing number** of FOI requests per year.
* The **public are the largest proportion** of requesters (65%) followed by journalists (25%).
* An **average request is 11.5 hours**
* Key issues for authority FOI officers:
  + Problems with requesters or requests
  + Internal issues including support and training
  + Problems with the legislation and advice
* Officers frequently said that having to deal with FOI’s has also had a **positive impact on communication and processes** inside the organization.

### Sample FOI requests submitted to GCC

In order to understand the context of FOI requests sent to the council, the website “what do they know” (<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/>) , which catalogues FOI requests to local authorities throughout the UK, was reviewed.

Key observations from what do they know:

* Most of the requests **lack specific detail** of what the requester is looking for.
* A significant number of FOI requests are **spurious and antagonistic** in nature.
* Difficult FOI request are often handled by **legal services**.

**Existing FOI arrangements at GCC**

The information relating to FOI on the GCC website was reviewed, including the publication scheme and the process linked for members of the public to submit a request.

Key observations for FOI at GCC

* The publication scheme is contained in a word document, linking to specific pages of the GCC website
* The information and documentation regarding FOI is **difficult to follow**
* Attempts to divert requesters to existing information / data holdings is minimal

### FOI data service mapping

To help us understand the FOI process at the council, we mapped out how data and information for an FOI flowed through the council and in responding to the original requester. The information was collected through interviews with the customer care team.

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| Flow diagram |

## Defining the problem

The information and understanding developed during stage one was used to focus on some key issues relating to FOI requests at the council and potential interventions. These issues are compared with one another and used as a starting point for designing ideas that can alleviate them.

### Key issues identified:

1. Data used for FOI responses is **not accessible for re-use**
2. **Reactive approach** to handling requests
3. An **overwhelming amount of FOI requests** coming into the council
4. A significant amount of **manual effort** is undertaken to field requests
5. **Ad-hoc measures for tracking** FOI requests and responses.

### Directions for development:

1. **Identify frequently requested datasets**, council wide and for a single department
2. **Capturing, processing and publishing data** on the Open Data portal (data.glasgow.gov.uk), including content linked in the publications scheme
3. Develop a **pro-active approach** to publicizing open data on the data portal via the website, social media and other channels.
4. **Identify metrics** for tracking requests and responses performance

## Design, build and testing

### Scoping down

In recognition of the decentralised nature of handling FOI requests, it was decided to use a **case study approach** with LES to build out a process, test and evaluate, rather than attempting to work across the entire council. The idea is to build a process for opening FOI datasets and lessen the load in a way that can **scale up to new departments**.

Data analysis  
A list of **one years worth of FOI requests** has been compiled from Remedy and is in the process of being anonymised for use by Future Cities by the CCT. This is an invaluable asset to understand the detailed nature of the requests, uncover and analyse insights using our data analysis tools and processes. This analysis will be one of the key outputs from the case study, used to help **develop key metrics** to assess the **performance of open data**, in addition to the published data and a publicity strategy.

### Top Requests

To date we have been supplied with a list of **top ten request topics** sent to LES from the customer care team (CCT). From this list, we have observed that 3 of the 10 topics are already published on the open data portal, and a further 4 readily attainable. Those we already hold in some form are highlighted in green, with the readily attainable in blue.

Top Ten LES FOI requests:

1. Road Inspection/Reports
2. Parking Fines
3. PCN’s (Public consultation notices)
4. Accident Report/Incident’s
5. Baby Ashes
6. Bus Fees/Enforcements
7. Funerals
8. Catering Concessions
9. Traffic Light, Sequence/Faults
10. Noise Enforcement/Complaints

The fact that we already hold or have access to **70% of the top ten requests** is encouraging in itself. However we need to learn more from FOI officers and data holders at LES about how we can attain, process and publish the remaining datasets with **due care**, and select the best approach to publicise these datasets to the public, and ultimately **reduce the pressure** on council departments in fielding FOI requests.

### Top Ten Council Wide Datasets

1. Procurement requests – details of a variety of contracts listing the contractors and sub-contractors.
2. Land Sales – topical, latterly the sale of the Westthorn Grounds
3. Payments to Council employees – redundancy packages, re-employment, salaries (below Leadership level)
4. Council employee contracts – zero hours
5. IT set-up within the Council – structure, contracts, equipment and software
6. Council property (empty and operational) – numbers, location, ownership, cost, usage
7. Website pages browsed by Council employees.
8. Council events – costs (food and drinks), attendees, details of event.
9. Council employee absence – reasons, costs.
10. Council’s application of the RIPSA powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act – details of number of times applied, reasons and cost.

## Delivery

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### Identify frequently requested datasets.

The status of this section is complete. We have received the list of top ten datasets from the CCT and have moved on to collecting and publishing.

1. **Capturing, processing and publishing data**.

**Data capture: Top Ten Datasets**

**3 of the 10 top** LES datasets are already published on the data portal. 4 remaining datasets are accessible through existing contacts in LES. For the remaining three, we are working existing stakeholders in LES to identify the necessary datasets and process them before publishing them on the data portal.

**Data processing**

The data that we already have is formatted and ready for public consumption. **Datasets come on all different shapes and sizes**, and need to be processed before they area ready to publish. This process takes **1-3 days per individual dataset**, depending on what type of information needs to be compiled, if many datasets need to be aggregated or split up, or if they need to be converted from other formats.

**Data publishing**

Data has been **uploaded onto the GCC open data portal**, where it is accessible for **download and inspection** by the general public and interested parties. All data will be identified individually as FOI sets to allow users and requesters to easily access the sets and search for them.

1. **Identify metrics** for tracking requests and responses performance

From what we’ve learned, the assessment of the FOI process at GCC, its costs and relative value, are ad hoc and / or conjectural. In order to track the relative progress of the use case’s efforts in alleviating the pressure of FOI requests, we have **identified key metrics to benchmark current and future performance**.

An important source of insight will be taken from the data analysis on the years worth of individual FOI requests, including segmenting the requests, understanding the resources necessary to close them and estimating costs.

**A test framework** for understanding the success of the FOI project in the context of GCC’s daily business has been established and is being implemented.

1. Develop a **pro-active approach** to publicizing datasets.

We have to developed a publicity strategy, actively promoting the data portal and its FOI datasets across a series of channels. From the user analysis portion of the use case, we have identified a number of **user touchpoints**, including the website, email, social media and external locations where people find out or investigate FOI requests. The central aim would be to intervene in these places with information about the open data portal with the goal of **diverting the request to the data portal**, as opposed to sending it through the regular FOI channels.

In this initial testing stage the activities include:

* An **update of public facing** FOI pages on the GCC website.
* **An information sheet** for FOI officers on how to alert requesters of the availability of the data on the portal.
* Working with the PR team to send out **pro active messages on facebook and twitter** about our new FOI datasets.

We have generated a number of potential additional operational ideas that can be considered, which is discussed in the operationalizing section.

# Impact

The key impact for this use case is reducing the load of FOI by **pro-actively publishing frequently used FOI datasets** on the data portal. The goal is reducing the amount of time spent responding to requests, collecting the data from individual departments, processing the data and communicating with individual FOI requests.

The value of the reduced time and effort spent on this can be measured tangibly, but there are also a significant number of **intangible benefits**, including transparency, smarter operations, and smarter engagement with communities.

**Smarter Operations**

* Lower costs by reducing the load of FOI requests entering the council
* Enhancing existing communication channels between council departments
* Building on existing measurements for tracking the costs and benefits of handling FOI requests
* Consolidates data resources
* Encouraging a best practice framework

**Smarter Engagement**

* Improving public engagement with the council through open data
* Building trust with communities
* Increasing community engagement

**Transparency**

* Distributing information and analysis about council activities to the public
* Showcase reform activities
* Driving economic growth through information sharing
* Increase acceptance of policy decisions

# Operationalising

With regards to the specific deliverables for this project the activities undertaken here could be further embedded in daily activities, building on the value by taking the following approaches.

1. **Identifying datasets**
   * Start **cataloguing dataset**s that are created, compiled or accessed at the individual request level, when they are supplied, copy them to a central resources that can be accessed for new requests and published on the data portal
   * Create a **short questionnaire** for requesters to fill out to link requests to existing datasets
2. **Capturing, processing and publishing data**
   * Establish a **user journey** for FOI responders within the council, identifying key touchpoints.
   * **Automate this process** by integrating with the requester questionnaire
3. Develop a **pro-active approach** to publicizing open data on the data portal via the website, social media and other channels.
   * Establish a **user journey** for FOI requesters, identifying key touchpoints.
   * Review the existing web pages to **streamline the user journey** for learning about FOI
   * Develop a **microsite** dedicated to informing the public and interested parties about GCC’s FOI policy and available resources
4. **Identify metrics** for tracking requests and responses performance
   * Develop a **standardized workflow** for FOI officers to support their work
   * **Map FOI resources** throughout the council, and attribute cost / hour to each resource
5. **Knowledge Transfer**
   * Integrate processes

Additionally, as a result of the desk research, interviews and service mapping undertaken through this use case, a number of extended opportunities were identified. These ideas are designed support the aims and value of the use case to further take advantage of the opportunities of open data and transparency and lessen the workload of FOI officers.

1. **Identifying datasets**
   * Integrating with remedy to:
     + Generate a list of **frequent keywords used in request**s and map to their department
     + **Automatically map requests** to existing datasets using text analysis of the requests
     + **Model requests and predict volume** or flag difficult requests to legal services
   * Develop a **taxonomy for data holdings** and requests that can be used for automating the FOI response process
   * Data analysis on all past requests to **spot trends and build a predictive model** of upcoming request volumes and types
2. **Capturing, processing and publishing data**
   * Build a **shared service** with departmental databases and remedy in order to automatically process and upload data on the data portal so its constantly updated and ready for use by the public.
   * Generate a **map detailing data holdings** across the council to reduce the amount of time interacting cross department
3. Develop a **pro-active approach** to publicizing open data on the data portal via the website, social media and other channels.
   * Produce a **mini guide for internal FOI staff** with best practices, contact details and guidelines for handling FOI requests, and where to point them if we already have published the data.
   * Develop **autorespond emails** to FOI requests based on the requester questionnaire
   * Integrate **news tracking** into the work flow, to **anticipate upcoming FOI requests** based on council related news stories.
4. **Identify metrics** for tracking requests and responses performance
   * Develop **cost calculator** including post / extra effort needed for each FOI request so FOI responders can assess whether a request is possible or not based on the statutory limits.
   * **Estimate per hour costs** for FOI request and total time / year
   * **Segmentation of the most costly requests** and departments
   * Data analysis to **cluster and classify requests** automatically
   * Establish an **internal classification scheme** for FOI requests, describing attributes like level of effort needed or sensitivity.

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| Timeline graphic putting these ideas in the 4 categories above |

# Future Potential

The future potential of this use case is significant. In an environment where open data and sharing information is institutionalized and cost effective, benefits are captured across council activity. Beyond the immediate cost savings of reducing the amount of FOI requests the council has to respond to, the economic and operational impacts of transparency significantly increase the value and efficiency of the council overall.