Local transparency guidance – publishing data

A practitioner's guide to publishing information in accordance with the local government transparency code 2015

13 November 2020

Version 1.4

Contents

Version history

Version/Date	Page/section	Comment
v1.1/22/12/2014	p.5 organisation covered by the Code	Added: The mandated publication of data as specified in part 2 of the Code does not apply to parish council whose gross annual income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) is £6.5 million or less.
	p.15, Schemas	Change of reference to http://transparency.opendata.esd.org.uk/
v1.2 and v1.3 05/06/2015	p.3 Introduction	Added reference to new social housing asset value guidance
v1.4 13/11/2020	Various pages	Fixed broken links

Introduction

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published a revised Transparency Code in February 2015, which specifies what open data local authorities must publish. The Code also recommends that local authorities go further than its requirements and publish additional datasets and provide more detail on these.

The Local Authorities (Data Transparency) Code 2015 is published, alongside a frequently asked questions document, on https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2015. [1]

To support local authorities in understanding and implementing the Code and to help them publish the data in a meaningful and consistent way, the Local Government Association (LGA) has produced this set of revised guidance. The guidance provides more detail on both the mandatory and recommended elements of the Code. It should be read in conjunction with the Code and the associated frequently asked questions document.

The guidance offers practical help and advice, both to meet the immediate targets of publishing data, and to adopt consistent approaches that will add most value for local people and public services over the longer term. This approach will enable authorities to be able to compile and compare data from different authorities and departments.

This document provides an introduction to publishing the data and and it applies to all datasets required by the revised Code. It describes

- how to prepare data for publication
- what to consider when publishing the data such as data access and protection, fraud prevention, licensing, metadata and other matters
- how to make better use of the data following open data standards through progression along the 'five star scale' and use of 'linked data'.
- how and when to publish the data

This guidance accompanies three further documents which inform about the requirements of the Code related to specific datasets. The various dataset requirements have been grouped into the following themes:

Publishing spending and procurement information

- expenditure exceeding £500
- Government Procurement Card transactions
- procurement information (tenders and contracts)
- grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations
- waste contracts.

Publishing organisation information

- organisation chart

---

[1] Please, note, that some of the FAQs referring to the Transparency Code 2014 are still published on https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-transparency-code-2014.

- senior salaries
- the pay multiple
- trade union facility time
- fraud
- constitution

Publishing land asset and parking information

- local authority land and social housing assets
- social housing asset value
- parking accounts and parking spaces

To help authorities to publish the datasets in an efficient and consistent way we are also developing schemas for the datasets. These schemas would provide voluntary standards against which local authorities can publish data – enabling easy access, reuse and comparison between different areas. These schemas will initially be based on the templates found in the annexes of each of the guidance documents.

This guidance document has been produced by the LGA in consultation with DCLG, the Local e-Government Standards Body (LeGSB) and local authorities.

We may amend the guidance in the future to take account of evolving good practice, technical developments and changes to the Code.

Overview

This guidance provides general information about publishing data online that is common to all elements of the Code. The guidance will cover the following topics in detail

- organisations covered by the Code
- compliance with the Code
- preparing data for publication
  - data access and reuse regulations
  - fraud prevention
  - licensing
  - converting data to open data standards
  - information management including metadata, registration and retention
- publishing the data

Organisations covered by the Code

The Code applies to any local authority in England[2], as follows:

- a county council in England
- a district council
- a parish council which has gross annual income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) exceeding £200,000
- a London borough council
- the Common Council of the City of London in its capacity as a local authority
- the Council of the Isles of Scilly
- a National Park authority for a National Park in England
- the Broads Authority
- the Greater London Authority so far as it exercises its functions through the Mayor
- the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
- Transport for London
- a fire and rescue authority
- a joint authority established by Part IV of the Local Government Act 1985
- a joint waste authority
- an economic prosperity board established under section 88 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
- a combined authority established under section 103 of that Act
- a waste disposal authority
- an integrated transport authority for an integrated transport area in England.

The duties of district and county councils cover unitary authorities. The mandated publication of data as specified in part 2 of the Code does not apply to parish council whose gross annual income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) is £6.5 million or less. Generally, local authorities only have to provide the information if it falls within their statutory duty. For example, an authority that does not have any waste collection responsibility does not have to publish a waste collection contract.

Schools themselves are excluded from the Code but where the local authority provides services or incur

---

[2] Statutory Instrument 2014: No 2680: The Local Government (Transparency Requirements) (England) Regulations 2014 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/2680/regulation/2/made

expenditure on schools information about these would be included.

The inclusion of Arm's Length management organisations, trusts and shared services in the Code will depend on the specifics of each individual organisation. The Code seeks to ensure that key information is published about services which the local authority is responsible for delivering or commissioning. Authorities must ensure that the information they publish gives local taxpayers a clear and accurate picture of how public money is spent. The Code is not prescriptive about which organisations should be included in the reporting requirements and it is for each authority to decide locally whether to include expenditure on such organisations and ventures. However, where such organisations can be considered to be directly delivering services on behalf of the local authority then we would encourage the authority to actively consider including them within the data it publishes.

Compliance with the Code

Compliance with the Code is mandated under section 2 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. The code came into effect on 31 October 2014.

The timing of data publication differs between different elements of the Code's requirements and recommendations. The Code mandates for some data to be published quarterly such as expenditure data while other information is to be published annually. This guide will make clear the mandatory minimum requirements of the Code, and provide information about publishing more information more frequently.

The first mandatory requirement to publish each dataset will be within the frequency set out in the Code. For data to be published quarterly it should be first published no later than 31 December 2014 and for annual data not later than 2 February 2015, thereafter not less than annually and not later than one month after the year to which the data and information is applicable.

We recommend that the data is published at least as frequently as required in the Code for the particular item, on a single web page that links to the individual files.

While local authorities must publish the data in accordance with the Code, the government is not planning to monitor compliance with the Code. However, it will react to complaints from the public under existing frameworks – the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 7. Local authorities are advised to following FOIA compliance and complaints procedures.

Further information about complaints procedures is available under Question 23 of the frequently asked questions which accompany the Code.
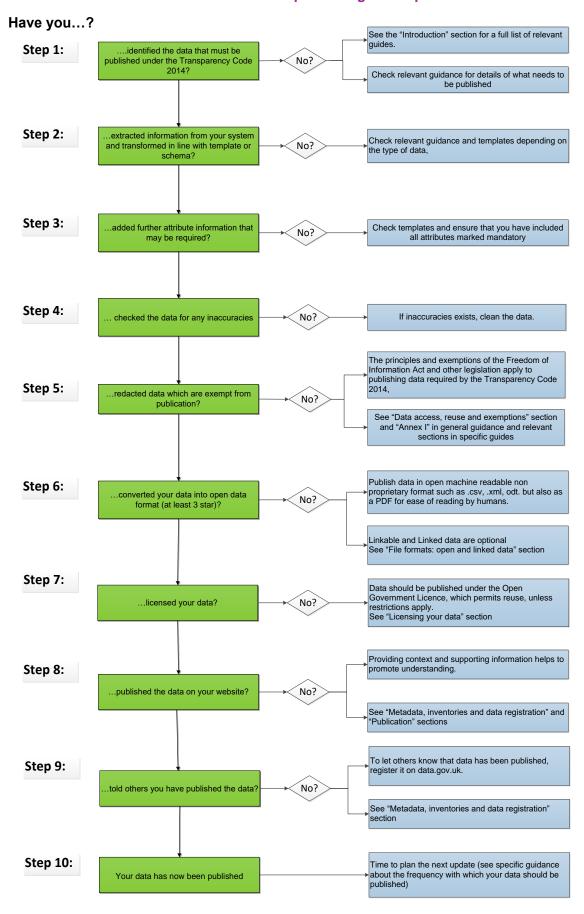
Preparing data for publication

The publication of much of the data requires a set of processing steps (see flowchart). These are:

- identify the data that must be published under the Code
- extract the data from the internal system
- transform the data to standard templates or schemas if they exist (i.e. see specific templates in the guidance documents)
- add further attribute information that may be required
- clean and check the data for, and get rid of, any inconsistencies
- redact any data that is exempt from publication under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) so that it is not published and anonymise any personal data
- check if the data is licenced to be published under Open Government Licence

- convert the data into a machine-readable format or another open data format following the five star journey recommended in the Code (see the converting data to open standards section for more details)
- publish the data on your website – with supporting information and commentaries for citizens and users
- record metadata about your data and register your data so that it can be found

The flowchart below illustrates the process for publishing data.

Process flowchart for publishing local open data

Have you…?

Step 1: ….identified the data that must be published under the Transparency Code 2014?

No?
- See the "Introduction" section for a full list of relevant guides.
- Check relevant guidance for details of what needs to be published

Step 2: …extracted information from your system and transformed in line with template or schema?

No?
- Check relevant guidance and templates depending on the type of data,

Step 3: …added further attribute information that may be required?

No?
- Check templates and ensure that you have included all attributes marked mandatory

Step 4: … checked the data for any inaccuracies

No?
- If inaccuracies exists, clean the data.

Step 5: …redacted data which are exempt from publication?

No?
- The principles and exemptions of the Freedom of Information Act and other legislation apply to publishing data required by the Transparency Code 2014,
- See "Data access, reuse and exemptions" section and "Annex I" in general guidance and relevant sections in specific guides

Step 6: …converted your data into open data format (at least 3 star)?

No?
- Publish data in open machine readable non proprietary format such as .csv, .xml, odt. but also as a PDF for ease of reading by humans.
- Linkable and Linked data are optional See "File formats: open and linked data" section

Step 7: …licensed your data?

No?
- Data should be published under the Open Government Licence, which permits reuse, unless restrictions apply. See "Licensing your data" section

Step 8: …published the data on your website?

No?
- Providing context and supporting information helps to promote understanding.
- See "Metadata, inventories and data registration" and "Publication" sections

Step 9: …told others you have published the data?

No?
- To let others know that data has been published, register it on data.gov.uk.
- See "Metadata, inventories and data registration" section

Step 10: Your data has now been published

- Time to plan the next update (see specific guidance about the frequency with which your data should be published)

Data access, reuse and exemptions

For all datasets published as open data it is important to consider any legislation that controls if and how certain information is made public. In most cases only data that are non-personal can be published in line with the following data access legislation and regulations:

- FOIA 2000 (as amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012),
- Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998
- the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004,
- the Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations (RPSI) 2005 and
- Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community Regulations (INSPIRE) 2009.
- sections 100A, 100B or 100F of the Local Government Act 1972.

The FOIA and its amendments require public sector authorities to provide access and permit the reuse of datasets. Certain information is exempt from publication such as personal or national security information. The Ministry of Justice website provides more detailed information on FOIA exemptions[3].

The Transparency Code is specific in paragraphs 13 to 17 when exemptions may or may not apply. Personal information is generally exempt not to contravene the DPA 1998. There are cases where the publishing of personal information is necessary to meet a legitimate public interest, for example, to enable the scrutiny of councillors and senior local authority officials. Others would include:

- sole traders, as the individual is trading under his or her name for business purposes with public organisations and not as in the capacity of their private life[4]
- individuals in the public domain as part of their public facing role to enable the scrutiny of councillors and senior local authority employees.

Relevant Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) information on publication of personal data about public authority employees is provided in specific guidance[5]. In general, organisation information related to senior employees as defined under the Account and Audit Regulation 2011[6] can be released. Sole traders can be named as long as their business is in the public domain. In all other circumstances, it is best to inform individuals up-front, within the terms and conditions of their contract that their name may be disclosed. This will serve as a means of getting consent for publication. If individuals have not been informed before, they should be contacted to explain that information will be published. This will allow them to object should the disclosure cause unwarranted damage to their interests or distress.

Commercially sensitive information falls under qualified exemptions. It may or may not be released

---

[3]Exemption guidance - [ARCHIVED CONTENT] Exemption guidance for freedom of information (FOI) (nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[4] Information Commissioner Office FOIA Decision notice on publicly naming sole traders: https://ico.org.uk/media/action-weve-taken/decision-notices/2013/802230/fs_50450700.pdf

[5] ICO guidance on Request for Personal data about employees: https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1187/section_40_requests_for_personal_data_about_employees.pdf

[6] Account and Audit Regulation 2011: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2011/817/part/3/made

depending on whether it is in the public interest to publish the data. In most instances, it is now expected that information in public sector contracts will be made available unless it falls under the DPA. Most contracts should include a clause to the effect that contractual information will be published unless the information is exempt through confidentiality clauses. For example, an exception to this would be when publication of the information could harm an organisation's intellectual property. The Information Commissioner Office has published further guidance about the release of information under public sector contracts[7]. Further information about publishing contracts is also provided in the Transparency Code guidance about publishing spending and procurement information.

Any data that is exempt from publication needs to be redacted or anonymised. The Information Commissioner's Office has published guidance on anonymisation of datasets, enabling publication of data which can yield insights to support public service improvement, whilst safeguarding individuals' privacy[8],[9].

We advise you to use the FOIA as a frame of reference when making judgments on redaction. FOI guidance should be applied consistently across the organisation. This will ensure that the credibility of transparency reporting is not undermined if information is subsequently published under FOI.

Fraud prevention

When publishing data under the Code, local authorities should ensure that they have effective fraud control measures in place so that the information cannot be used in fraudulent claims.

The Transparency Code in Annex B suggests a range of sources for supporting to tackling fraud:

Fighting Fraud Locally, The Local Government Fraud Strategy (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118508/strategy-document.pdf), was drafted by the National Fraud Authority and CIPFA (the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy). The document calls for the adoption of a tougher approach to tackle fraud against local authorities. The strategy is part of a wider collaboration on counter fraud and is the local authority contribution to the national fraud strategy – *Fighting Fraud Together* (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nfa-fighting-fraud-together) which encompasses both the public and private sectors response to fraud in the UK.

Local authorities should use a risk management approach with strong internal control arrangements to reduce the risk of any payment fraud as a result of publishing public data. Local authorities should refer to the *CIPFA Red Book 2 – Managing the Risk of Fraud – Actions to Counter Fraud and Corruption* (http://www.cipfa.org/-/media/files/topics/fraud/cipfa_corporate_antifraud_briefing.pdf). The document sets out a step by step toolkit to tackling fraud: identifying and understanding your fraud risks and potential exposure to fraud loss; assessing current resilience to fraud; evaluating the organisation's ability to respond to potential or identified fraud; and developing a strategy. Developing an anti-fraud culture is an important part of improving resilience; the benefits of improving resilience to fraud include reduced exposure to fraud and an organisation that is better able to identify attempted frauds or vulnerabilities.

---

[7] Information Commissioner Office guidance on public sector contracts - public-contract-regulations-foi-eir.pdf (ico.org.uk)

[8] https://ico.org.uk/media/1061/anonymisation-code.pdf

[9] http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/redaction_toolkit.pdf

The National Fraud Authority have produced a guide on procurement fraud, *Procurement Fraud in the Public Sector*: (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118460/procurement-fraud-public-sector.pdf) which deals with the whole process, from bidding during the pre-contract award phase through to false invoicing in the post-contract award phase.

Licensing your data

Data should be published under the Open Government Licence which permits open onward reuse. For further information please visit: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/ http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/re-using-public-sector-information/re-use-and-licensing/what-ogl-covers/There is guidance for information providers on the National Archives website: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/re-using-public-sector-information/re-use-and-licensing/

Authorities must ensure that the data they publish has no third party ownership which may restrict the publishing and onward use of the data under the Open Government Licence. For example, many of the geographic data collated by local authorities are derived from third party data most notably Ordnance Survey (OS) address and map data. The Public Sector Mapping Agreement (PSMA) licenses OS data to local authorities and other public sector bodies. The PSMA allows the publication of datasets which contain OS derived data under the terms of the PSMA licence. For example, if data is not licensed under Ordnance Survey Open Data or is exempt from OS licensing restrictions, the data can only be released under an enduser licence and not an Open Government Licence. Further information about the PSMA licence is available on http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/help-and-support/public-sector/guidance/index.html.

Converting data to open standards

The Code recommends for data to be published in open machine readable formats and refers to the Sir Tim Berners-Lee suggested five star journey to publishing open data. Open public-sector data becomes significantly more useful and productive if it can be published in human- and computer-readable form, consistently across the sector, capable of being linked or connected widely with other open data and uses open data standards so that the data becomes comparable between different organisations.

Sir Tim Berners-Lee suggested a five star journey to publishing open data, which DCLG has adapted and endorsed as part of the Code.

★	Available on the web (in any format), but with an open licence
★★	The same as for one star, plus available as machine-readable structured data
★★★	The same as two stars, but with a non-proprietary format (for example CSV and XML, rather than Excel)
★★★★	All of the above, plus use of open standards from the World Wide Web Consortium (such as RDF and SPARQL21
★★★★★	All of the above, plus the data is linked to other data to provide context

Note that the LeGSB guidance to 5* data, contains a table giving the pros and cons of each step – see:
http://legsb.i-network.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/LeGSB-PublishingLocal5StarData-Rev4.pdf

Machine-readable and non-proprietary formats

The open data initiative is promoting the use of machine-readable formats in contrast to just human readable formats such as pdf files so that data can be automatically linked to other information on the internet without human intervention. The Code recommends that, where appropriate, local authorities publish data in three star formats within six months of the Code being issued. This means that data should be published in machine readable, non-proprietary formats such as CSV[10] or XML[11] files. Excel (XLS or XLSX) is a software proprietary format and cannot be uniformly read by any software, whereas CSV and XML are widely accessible. CSV is similar to the format used in Excel, however, and can be created using the 'save as' function in Excel by selecting 'CSV' as the file type.

Care should be taken to ensure CSV files are as usable as possible, with little or no manipulation needed by users of the data. For example, there should be no comment lines, no 'total' lines and no blank lines. This helps users of the data avoid any double counting or other errors when conducting analyses. For CSV files produced from a text file, values should be separated by a comma character, with a new line between separate records, and text values that contain a comma must have double quotes (") at the start and end of the value. Note that pound signs and other symbols can also cause problems when saving files in CSV format using Microsoft Excel and for that reason should not be included in the file.

The Open Data Institute has developed a validator for CSV files called csvlint so that they follow common rules. The validator is available on: http://theodi.org/blog/introducing-csvlint.

In addition to publishing data in machine-readable formats (for easier reuse and analysis), we also advise authorities to use portable document formats (PDF) for users who simply want to read the data easily.

Linked data

Publishing data in a simple CSV file meets the three star recommendations, but users may get more value from data when it can be confidently compared to data from other sources, and when more detail can be found about the "things" it refers to.

Linked data is a specific form of open data that enables information to be joined up with other related information. In this way it can create new views and services. It is at the heart of the semantic web (please see this Wikipedia article for a description: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantic_Web).

Further information about linked data is available in the technical companion to the code of recommended practice published by LeGSB: http://legsb.i-network.org.uk/resources/technical-companions-to-the-department-for-communities-and-local-governments-code-of-recommended-practice-for-local-authorities-on-data-transparency/.

To be classed as linked data, the "meaning" of each field is included by a "link" to definitive sources of definitions and classifications, which are published on the web. Where the data refers to things that might also be referred to in other data-sets using the same definitions, these items can be identified via

---

[10] Comma-separated value files

[11] Extensible mark-up language files

an address on the web that can be read and acted upon by humans and Apps or other corporate systems. These links to definitions are referred to as uniform resource identifiers (URI). The value of linked data increases as the potential for more links is included. We encourage local authorities to include links to other key data sets in their published data using URIs wherever possible. Local linked data that includes a URI from these lists can be joined up with data from other councils who use the same URI.

Sources of Uniform Resource Identifier (URI)

Using a URIs will help data consumers to link data sets for novel and innovative uses and put the data into context.

For example, local authorities may spend different amounts on winter maintenance depending on the area and length of roads to be gritted. The amount of spending is also dependent on the weather during the winter months. The cost of waste management contracts will depend on the number of households within a local authority. A review of crime data or hospital admissions is given more context when linked to ONS population data or other demographic data sets for an area. The use of URIs will make it easier to link to additional information and analyse the data.

Sources of URI that will have relevance to the Transparency Code include some of the following:

- The DCLG supported Open Data Communities website maintains a unique identifier list for local authorities to link directly to local authority data. This way each authority can be uniquely identified. For Example: http://opendatacommunities.org/data/local-authorities. (please, note that the list currently does not include all authority types that fall under the Code).
- The Office for National Statistics' (ONS) maintains a list of statistical areas as defined in the Government Statistics Services (GSS) Coding and Naming for Statistical Geographies. (http://tinyurl.com/onsgeog)
- The esd programme through LG Inform maintains Local Government Functions List (LGFL - http://id.esd.org.uk/list/functions) and the Local Government Service List (LGSL - http://id.esd.org.uk/list/services) which gives a URI to each type of function at the high level or each service at the lower level that local authorities provide.
- The SeRCOP objective category headings published by the CIPFA – used in publishing expenditure and procurement data - are available as URIs they are mapped to the Local Government Service List, which enables data consumers to discover what authorities of a similar type are spending on services. This form of comparison has been successfully used in performance assessment, and can be applied to the analysis of expenditure, contracts and other data as well as via linked data.

The LG Inform Plus programme provides a search tool to help locate sources of URI for centres of definition or meaning. This tool can be found at http://uris.opendata.esd.org.uk/. Currently the tool provides URIs for a limited number of URI types, though there are plans to add more to the portfolio in forthcoming months.

To accommodate both human and machine readable formats the templates in the guidance will include human readable labels to describe an organisation, function or service alongside the machine readable URIs.

Schemas

Standardisation of open data helps to make the data comparable between different departments and authorities. If the same template and schema is used for publishing spending data, local authorities can more easily compare and combine data for example about spending for certain services and functions.

The Transparency Code provides some basic specification for publishing data in a more consistent way for many categories. This guidance provides some templates to further specify data and link them to consistent classifications and registers. In addition, the LGA, together with LeGSB and local authorities, has developed and assembled schemas that can be used to underpin consistent open data as required by the Transparency Code. The schemas define data in tabular format for use in spreadsheets.

The Local Government Association is helping councils to adopt common schemas in order to improve consistency between councils' datasets. Improved consistency means that datasets can be aggregated and compared more easily across areas. Schemas are normally optional. They just represent suggestions as to how data can be structured and functional or legal requirements met. Inevitably local decisions will result in variances between the formats most suitable in specific circumstances.

Online schemas define precise fields (representing columns in tabular datasets) that meet the mandated and recommended requirements of the Code. Optional fields have been added based on suggestions from local authorities and users of the data to make the data more usable. An online schema validation tool is available to validate datasets that comply with each requirement of the Code. The tool lets you choose which optional fields you want before validating a dataset.

The schemas, online schema validator and guidance are available under http://transparency.opendata.esd.org.uk/.

Use of open standards in local government

Information about local government open data is made available for example through the LG Inform standards programme which encourages the publishing of data to common standards so that the data can be more easily compared and combined. Common schemas are now available for some data topics and are published on: opendata.esd.org.uk. It also includes definitive lists which have been developed by the sector through the esd (effective service delivery) programme over the past decade. Whenever possible, local linked data should make use of these definitions and suggested URIs to allow the reuse of the data for regional and national coverage.

Various web services and tools can make better use of data once they are produced to common standards and are linkable through common URIs. We encourage the use of unique identifiers and common standards throughout the guidance to enable the better linking and use of data.

Examples of tools and services

- LG Inform is a data, benchmarking and reporting tool which compares services and how they perform between different local authorities: http://lginform.local.gov.uk/.
- LG Inform Plus Programme supports local government authorities on many aspects of information analysis and governance. Tools, services and guidance is available in the Open Data section at http://opendata.esd.org.uk/.
- LGInform Plus small area reporting tool provides a range of display and analysis features for discovering the performance and make-up of local data: http://www.reports.esd.org.uk
- DCLG's Open Data Community website makes use of standardised data for providing visualisations for services between local authorities: http://opendatacommunities.org/.
- Local authorities themselves increasingly make use of linkable standardised data to compare and analyse their service data: Hampshire Hub: www.hampshirehub.net, Leeds Data Mill: http://www.leedsdatamill.org/, Redbridge Datashare http://data.redbridge.gov.uk/
- A whole range of apps and tools to analyse spend data is available: Openly Local: http://openlylocal.com/councils/spending

Naming files

Files should be named in a consistent manner with the date included in the file name. Each file name should be unique. The name should avoid spaces and characters other than A to Z, 0 to 9, underline (_) and hyphen (-).

If you discover errors, or have to change the files for other reasons, you should publish a revised but differently named version with the original files. For example, an original file for February 2011 may include the characters 02_2011_v1 in the file name. In this case 'v1' stands for 'version 1'. The second version, when it is revised, will include the characters 02_2011_v2. It is good practice to publish previous versions of a dataset and if datasets are archived to indicate how they can be accessed.

Information Management

The management and publication of data under the Code should follow good information and record management practice on the basis of the FOI Act Section 46 Code of Practice [12]. Datasets published should be included in the publication schema as defined by the Information Commissioner [13]. Further information about how to use an inventory schema developed to publish the data in compliance with the publication scheme is provided below.

Metadata, inventories and data registration

Good information management practice recommends creating metadata about the open data and recording it in a data inventory. Metadata is 'data about data', which provides information about the dataset as a whole. Metadata contains information about the type of data, how often it will be updated, the services the data is linked too, the quality of the data, etc.

The LGA together with local authorities have developed an inventory schema to publish metadata about local authority data. An inventory lists datasets and related information. Once published, it lets other people know what data you hold and where they can find them. It encourages consistent referencing of datasets across and between councils to make it easier to find datasets on the same topic or in the same format. Further information is available on: http://inventories.opendata.esd.org.uk/

Apart from publishing the data on the local authority websites, local authorities may want to make it more widely known that the data is available. We recommend that all data is published on: data.gov.uk which is the national portal for open data in England. Data.gov.uk has built a harvester to automatically import inventories and so maintain up-to-date entries for a council, in its index of UK open data

Data retention

There is no requirement to retain information indefinitely online. An authority should follow its own records management policy. The Effective Service Delivery Toolkit (sponsored by the Local Government Association) has carried out a project with Kent County Council to identify records retention periods for all services in the standard Effective Service Delivery list of local authority services at http://retention.esd.org.uk/.

In summary according to Question 24 of the FAQ accompanying the Code, the requirements for keeping

---

[12] Ministry of Justice FOI section 46 Code of Practice http://www.justice.gov.uk/information-access-rights/foi-guidance-for-practitioners/code-of-practice

[13] Information Commisioners Office Definition document for principal local Authorities http://ico.org.uk/for_organisations/freedom_of_information/~/media/documents/library/Freedom_of_Information/Detailed_specialist_guides/definition_document_local_authorities.pdf

information online are:

- Any information about decision-making and records of decisions should be made available for the current financial year, plus the previous three financial years
- Any information about financial records (e.g. from parking income, to salary information) should be made available for the current financial year, plus the previous two financial years
- Any other substantive information (e.g. constitution) should be up to date.

Publication

Open data should be searchable from your own website in order to help members of the public find what they are looking for easily. You may wish to create a dedicated open data page or section on the authority's website, for example www.yourauthority.gov.uk/opendata to publish your information.

Local authorities publish their data in numerous ways. Many good practice examples now exist showing how data can be published. Various software is also now available for free and as open source to help with publishing the data. Please see further examples from the Local Open Data Breakthrough Programme: http://www.local.gov.uk/local-transparency/-/journal_content/56/10180/3926733/ARTICLE.

Wherever you publish the data, you should give further information and contact details to help those with enquiries. This will improve relationships with those using the data and prevent them having to go down more formal routes, such as issuing FOI requests.

It may be useful to place the information into context on the scale of the local authority in terms of at least the following factors, and publish the information alongside the other information on the authority's website.

- Employment

The headcount and Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) of all the council's directly employed staff. This data is already provided to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as part of the Quarterly Public Sector Employment Survey (QPSES) which councils are required to complete. The Local Government Association accesses this data from ONS and publishes it on their website at https://www.local.gov.uk/ons-quarterly-public-sector-employment-survey.

- Expenditure

The total Gross Expenditure of the council for the previous financial year. This data corresponds to the expenditure information provided to the Department for Communities and Local Government in the Revenue Outturn. This data is not currently published at local authority level but national data is available on the CLG website here: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-revenue-expenditure-and-financing-england-2014-to-2015-budget.

- Service Responsibilities

Details of the services provided by your council. This can take the form of a list of the main services provided, although you may like to build upon this by providing further information. For example, instead of just listing Social Care, Education, etc. You may like to provide additional information, like the number of schools, residential care homes, etc within your area.

It is also helpful to provide some context such as local authorities' policies or strategies that relate to the data. For example the list of grants may be linked to the policy about voluntary and community services, invitation for grant applications, etc.

The more you explain your data, the fewer related FOI requests you are likely to get: for example, if you explain unusual or high-spend items, you will reduce criticism, suspicion and FOI requests. We would also advise authorities to explain why certain information has been redacted based on your redaction policy. Authorities should make their communities and local bodies aware of this.

Metadata should be published alongside the datasets. Using spending data as an example, this could include:

- the identifier or URI of your authority
- the name of the accounts system – including software on which the accounts and related systems run, procedures and associated programmes used
- the purchase categorisation used – that is, CIPFA, Proclass or internal etc.

This could be published as an accompanying plain text file or on the web page linking to the data (For example, Sedgemoor has published some additional information on "what we have spent" to explain the data: http://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=7206).

For more information please contact

Research and information

Local Government Association

Local Government House

Smith Square

London SW1P 3HZ

Email: transparency@local.gov.uk