

100901

Armchair auditors – call to arms

Background

Local authorities are being encouraged to put their spending online as part of government drive to encourage transparency. This process should aid local democracy and give the public a greater insight into what their local authorities are doing and spending.

In order to generate public interest in the issue of transparency and make it more relevant to the widest audience possible we will develop media activity based around the concept of an 'army of armchair auditors' to engage the public and get media attention. The event would create an experiential stunt that illustrates to members of the public the use of transparent data and would likely take place in partnership with a council with something to say about their data.

Communication objectives

- Highlight the poor levels of data available and encourage a wider response from local authorities.
- Engage the public in debate about information they want to know from their local authorities.
- Stimulate competition between local authorities over provision of information and data to local communities.

Messages

We're calling on the public to become Local Government's "Armchair Auditors" and take it upon themselves to ensure that they are getting the best value from their councils.

The public should be able to see where their money goes and what it delivers, which is why we're encouraging councils to throw open their files and publish details of all spending over £500 in full and online by next year.

From car hire to consultancy fees and from storage to software costs, the public should be able to see and scrutinise the details to bring about a revolution in town hall accountability, and in the coming months, many more councils will be putting their data online.

We want to see local people checking this data out, exercising their democratic right to hold politicians and public bodies to account over the spending and decisions made on their behalf. They can only do that effectively if they have the information they need at their fingertips.

And councils should be keen to ensure they're providing the best information possible, to pass on the benefits to their area with greater accountability and efficiency, and improving access for small and local business and the voluntary sector.

Audiences

- Local interest engaged citizen
- Pro-democracy and transparency groups
- Media and bloggers

Call to arms Event

The event will be a call to arms for an ‘army of armchair auditors’ and will take place in partnership with a council an open-data story to tell, for example either being noted for their prompt publication or set to publish.

A stall with armchairs and internet-enabled laptops would be set out in a public place with high footfall within the council area. Ministers, Council leaders and open-data experts would be invited to take a seat and share their views, and the event would be filmed by our internal Digital Communications team for our YouTube channel to use as further illustrative resource.

Passing members of the public would also be invited to find out what data their council has available, shown what they and asked what else they would like to see provided, such as information on potholes, cycle routes, etc.

Public Engagement

We would also suggest to councils set to launch their own data that they should continue the armchair theme locally. This would give us an opportunity to build up a catalogue of vox-pops on open data from across the country.

Timings

	WHO	DATE
Build contacts with key stakeholders, venues, etc		
Recces		
Finalise date (or dates)		
Book venue		
Arrange refreshments (possible sponsorship?)		
Check availability of video/digital team	HM	
Submission for minister incl. speaking notes		
Invite key attendees, stakeholders		
Develop press contacts with press office	HM	
Prepare Q+A and press notice	HM	
Clearance for media handling and press notice	SoS	

Target media

Local

Local radio and newspaper involvement will be vital to engage people in the data available in their area. We would hope that an event that engages the public would ignite similar debate on local radio and spark campaigns for more open local data in print news.

National

Guardian datablog has written about the potential of our open-data policy in the past and could write about our push to engage local people in the data.

BBC online would also be likely to cover the video product. In addition we could discuss the possibility of a feature on the subject of open data in their magazine section

Specialist

Bloggers and tweeters will be vital to spread use of the DirectGov tool and increase viewership of the video of the launch by sharing links and voicing their own opinions on the subject.

Specialist commentators which already cover Government open data issues include Information Age, Computing and eWeek, while publications like House magazine, public servant, third sector magazine, and epolitix.com could reach those who would wish to use open data for campaigning purposes.

Ongoing

Stories on the provision of sector-specific data such as education, health, or construction figures could create a lead-in to more specialist audiences.

Morning programmes or discussion shows like the One Show could find an interest – for example instances of excessive council spending could be a topic for debate.

Resources needed

- Armchair – sourced from council or CLG Comms Directorate
- Banner stand with relevant branding (i.e. CLG, Open Data)
- Two laptops with wifi capabilities
- Location with free wifi available or CLG communications directorate dongles
- Is there a way we can Bluetooth/zap the open data site to their mobile?
Do any of our developer partners have such technical capabilities?

Risks

Some risks attached to this strategy include:

- Perception that CLG staff are wasting time on stunts and marketing
- Will people get the link between 'armchair', and the government campaign?
- Theft, loss or damage of technology used in a public place
- Bad weather
- Will local people have access to the stunt?
- Potential costs to use the space

Evaluation

Media coverage generated (especially amongst bloggers)

Numbers of people who use online “armchair” facility on DirectGov

100902

Questions Framework for LA Visits
(August-September 2010)

Introduction (x minutes)

Xxxx Insert appropriate text xxxxx

1. Drivers (x minutes)

- What enabled you to be in the Vanguard?
- What drove the transparency agenda in the GLA was it led by key individuals?

2. Support received (x minutes)

- Which politicians take an interest and why? To please residents? To please ministers?
- Do you have a data transparency champion? Who was the driving force?
- Who helped you the most?
- What if anything do you need from central government?
- Do you need any special training?
- What support are you getting from LGA?
- What support do you want from whom?

3. Publishing data (x minutes)

- What data do you publish?
- What other data mentioned in the SOS letter are you making available?
- How are councils prioritising which kinds of data to make public?

4. Obstacles (x minutes)

- What difficulties did you face?
- What are the key barriers to being more transparent?
- What are the problems in publishing?
- What was the worst hurdle?
- We've been told about problems e.g. costing too much, not having the skills in-house, having to outsource this in a fixed contract, expensive to change etc. Is this true?
- How do you ensure barriers are unblocked at each level: technical, policy, political?
- To what extent is this an additional burden in terms of cost, capacity, generating FOI requests etc?
- What costs are there?
- Are these one off costs or ongoing?
- Do you work with other councils: district/county/parish?
- Do you currently work with LSRs?

5. Practical issues

- How many people were involved in getting this data published?
- What length of time does it take to publish this data?
- Would either the number of people or the length of time change depending on the kind of data to be published?
- Are you linking in your data from data.gov.uk?
- Is data [QA'd] in before publishing or are you following SOS and just putting it out there?

- Do you have open data landing page?

6. Audience and feedback

- How do you make data more accessible?
- What level of interest has there been from the public?
- How are you publishing your open data?
- How are you publishing data that's become available?
- Who is the audience? Developers? [councillors?] Residents? Voluntary sector?
- Are areas using customers insight and talking to developers?
- Have you have any responses from developers?
- Has there been any kind of feedback from public? Good or bad?

7. Outcomes

- What do you see as the benefits of transparency?
- Have there been any positive outcomes so far?
- Are there any useful or unusual applications coming out of this publication?

8. Future publication

- Do you have plans to publish other data sets?
- What is the timetable?
- How ambitious are the SOS targets?
- You've done £500 ... what next? Contracts of £500, salaries, performance info, service information – minutes?
- What kinds of data will be difficult or problematic for you to be transparent about?
- How would you like to develop this further?
- Will you take account of the guidance in [September?]

9. Closing points

- What are your three key messages for us to take back to CLG?

**BRIEFING FOR LOCAL DATA PANEL
10-12.30, 9 SEPTEMBER 2010
SPACE FOR PLACE**

LINES TO TAKE

- I am keen that CLG be at the leading edge of this work and this Panel is a fantastic resource. Grateful for your time and expertise and huge energy in pinning down issues and solving problems.

Policy context

- Transparency is key to our ambitions on Big Society and decentralisation. It will drive the move from bureaucratic accountability to democratic accountability. From that perspective local people, rather than central government departments, should be the primary mechanism for shaping local services and holding local government and other services providers to account.
- Wherever possible local authorities and frontline services should create their own measures to ensure comparability across geographic areas.
- It is councils own interests to publish comparable data wherever possible – to have an informed dialogue with their residents; to inform spending decisions and drive efficiencies; to allow residents informed choice in services; to open up markets and opportunities for community groups and business to provide services.

CLG role and actions

- It is vital that government send a strong signal to councils about culture change and expectation, by meeting its own targets and timetable on transparency. We are determined to walk the walk and demonstrate to councils what is possible, before we ask them to publish data.
- There has been relatively good response from councils publishing their **£500 spend**, and I hope that publication of the draft guidance later this month will help more councils make the leap. Thank you for all your contributions to that guidance to ensure it is a Panel document.
- However, whilst pinning down the detail on the £500 it is important not to lose sight of the wider picture, and I am really pleased you have set aside today to focus on your **strategy and priorities** going forward, and what priorities you think us Ministers should also set ourselves.

Close

- Since your last meeting, we have set up a dedicated Transparency Division, officials have a DG-chaired Programme Board to keep it on track. I personally meet the DG once a fortnight and get regular updates. Please do not underestimate how seriously I take the commitment to transparency and open data.

100913 Transparency advice

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is using Local Directgov to capture the data relating to publication of expenditure and contract details on council websites. This information is used to populate the page on the Communities site that gives details of councils providing details of their expenditure over £500:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/>

The communities page additionally uses the search service :

<http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=1465&LGIL=8>

The search facility will bring back the contacts page of non compliant LAs.

Local Directgov holds local authority (LA) supplied URLs for a number of services. These stored links allow Directgov to link out to service related web pages on Council web sites.

The service and interaction type are defined by the Local Government Service List (LGSL) and Local Government Interaction List (LGIL) that are maintained by the esd toolkit.

Following discussion with esd toolkit, it was decided that the existing LGSL 828: "Council – procurement- contract management" could be used for the contract detail over £500 and a new LGSL 1465 was set up to cover the publication of expenditure detail (over £500).

Web teams in LAs are actively updating the Local Directgov Administration Interface (LDGAdmin) on a daily basis. They can submit the new data in spreadsheet format or online via screen input, remembering to mark the service as supported.

Below is the format required for batch update which should be submitted in .csv format:

ServiceNumber	LGILInteractionNo	ServiceName	LGChLChannelNo	ChannelAddress
1465	8	Find out about details of council expenditure over £500	1	URL
828	8	Find out about council contracts and tenders over £500	1	URL

Columns 1-4 contain static information. Councils are expected to enter the appropriate URL in the Channel Address Column

When the majority of LAs have published this information on their website, the links will be used in articles in Directgov to support routine service enquiries. The service links will also be available to web developers via the Local Directgov widget - <http://innovate-apps.direct.gov.uk/widgets/localservices/> and the full services list on data.gov.uk - <http://data.gov.uk/dataset/local-directgov-url-instructions>

SRP action 5.3

Highlight Report

Action Owner: Hulya Mustafa
Action SRO: Jane Todorovic

Highlight report number: 5.3

Covering the period : 08/09/10 –
22/09/10

Overall project status this period –**Green**

Green

Programme Aims:

5.3 Prepare Local Authorities for publication, in an open and standardised format, of items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500.

Draft guidance, produced jointly by LGA, CLG and developers published online in open format.

Progress and next steps against plan (max 255 characters)

Draft guidance to be publicised at end Sept, in tandem with DCLG spend. Events being planned around that date. Around 60 councils currently publishing.

Currently negotiating a joint statement with LGA. LGA have a programme of support and help in place for councils, including more detailed practitioner guidance.

Need to now work on making it a 'requirement' – possibly through right to data.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

Lack of data literacy/ IT skills in sector to push this through.

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Data protection remains a concern for councils.

Contracts and tenders work is progressing at a slower pace – focus has been on the spend.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Work of Dept Bus Plans and other data burdens on local authorities

Transparency workstream of the LG productivity programme, led by George Garlick (Durham)

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Good with LG sector, after some intensive work. Developers more unsure of commitment of councils.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Straightforward for us, complex for councils

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Already councils' spending has been a target of media interest.

100921 Draft launch script

Communities Minister Eric Pickles has sent out a rallying cry to people across the country, asking them to get online and check out what their council is spending their tax pounds on.

This comes as The Prime Minister today sent letters praising the 60 councils who have made the effort to publish their spending details well ahead of their January deadline.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles said that there were now just three months for the remaining 300(check) councils to get their house in order and get their spending data online for residents to scrutinise.

The public should be able to see where their money goes and what it delivers, and councils are being asked to open their files and publish details of all spending over £500 in full and online by next year.

To help them achieve this Communities and Local Government have worked with X Y and Z to create a draft guidance document detailing best practice in getting the information online, out for consultation from today. The guidance stresses the importance of making the data clear and comprehensible, and of making local people aware of its availability.

Mr Pickles was clear however that he wants to see councils putting the numbers to meaningful use instead box-ticking by doing the bare minimum required in the guidance.

Mr Pickles said:

“The public have a right to be able to see where their tax money goes and what it delivers, ensuring that they’re getting the best value from their councils. That’s why we want a new era where all Councils publish their spending over £500 online.

“60 councils have already delivered and 300 more have just three months to follow suit. I want to I’m calling on the public to become Local Government’s “Armchair Auditors” and take it upon themselves to look up their council, and if the information isn’t there, find out why.

“This isn’t just about box-ticking, I want to see this data being put to real use. The potential’s there - from simply informing people about the real decisions their councils every day to creating untold new business opportunities. I want to see councils and their residents getting creative with this information, finding new and useful ways to make it relevant to local life.”

Some councils have already found innovative ways of using their spending data. Redbridge Council’s YouChoose budgeting tool for example lets people have their say on where every public penny goes in their area, and has been

so successful that the LGA have been made it available for any council in the country. (another example here – Maidenhead's visualisation?)

100924 Transparency Campaign Script

SIXTY COUNCILS OPEN BOOKS TO ARMCHAIR AUDITORS

Local authorities who are not putting their spending detail online are denying the public the right to hold their council to account, Secretary of State for Local Government Eric Pickles said today.

All councils are expected to publish details of all spending over £500 in full online by the end of the year. With just [64] working days for councils to open their files so the public can see where their money is being spent, the clock is ticking.

In the clearest signal of Government support for council transparency yet the Prime Minister has today taken the unprecedented step to write a letter of praise to the 60 councils that have already made the effort to publish their spending details.

To help meet this target Mr Pickles has today published new advice documents detailing best practice for putting spending and salary information online. They stress the importance of making the data clear and comprehensible, and of making local people aware of its availability.

Mr Pickles' own department continues to lead the way. This week it published all its spending data online for 2008-09 and for the first quarter of 2011-12.

Mr Pickles said:

“I've called for a new era of transparency where all councils publish their spending over £500 online. 60 councils have been brave enough to face public scrutiny and I commend them for doing so, there are only 60 odd working days for those lagging behind to catch up.

“This isn't another central government box-ticking exercise. The public have a right to see how their council tax is being spent so they know they are getting value for money and the best possible frontline services.

“I want to see any army of 'Armchair Auditors' able to pour over the information and hold their council to account if things are not done right. That means the data also has to be easily accessible and today I've published advice that will help councils yet to go online - so there is no where left to hide.

“There are hundreds of computer wizzes that can find creative new ways to make that raw data relevant to local life or turn it into a new business enterprise.”

Getting data out in the open is just the first step for Government. The data can be put to real use from simply informing people about the real decisions their councils take every day to creating untold new business opportunities.

Mr Pickles was clear that he wants councils making sure that all information is in an accessible format so that IT experts can 'mash up' the raw data and put it to other uses. The real potential for open government lies with greater transparency by unlocking innovation and analysis and scrutiny.

Financial data is just one aspect of data transparency. Individuals and community groups are using a wide range of information to highlight issues or to find solutions and ideas using the information in new ways.

Transparency is at the heart of this Government. Data.gov.uk is home to national and local data for free re-use. Just this week the CLG has published more datasets on the website. With thousands and thousands of lines of data coming online, websites like OpenlyLocal are making accessing data easier and enabling proper interrogation and comparison of the published information.

Some councils have also found innovative ways of using their spending data. For example, Redbridge Council has created a truly innovative budgeting tool called 'You Choose' which lets the public try to balance the council's budget themselves. This gives them a say on where every public penny goes in their area. It has been so successful that the Local Government Association is making it available for any council in the country.

Professor Nigel Shadbolt of Southampton University and chair of the Local Data Panel said:

"The publication of all spends by Local Authorities over £500 is hugely important. Authorities spend millions and millions of pounds in our name, so why shouldn't we know how that money is spent?"

"It will be useful in a whole range of ways. We are going to be able to see what the pattern of spend is, what particular contractors are used and whether it represents value for money. Once it's published councils can have a discourse with the citizen to find out how they want their money to be spent and where they would want to save."

Chris Taggart, creator of openlylocal.co.uk added:

"This is about a conversation with the people. Publishing information, which belongs to the public after all, allows them to look at local spending and say - wait a minute, you could be saving money there."

"There are all sorts of benefits to be gained from understanding the data and using the skills of the community to understand it. Councils themselves can benchmark their data and spending against other

councils. People can build applications which will allow everyone to ask questions and join the conversation."

Notes to Editor

1. You can find out which councils that have already published their financial information over £500 online at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/>
2. xxxx on £500 online guidance
3. In line with the transparency agenda requirements on the pay of senior public servants, councils should have their salary information published by 31st January 2011 providing a snapshot from 31st October 2010. Data to be published for each individual includes; Organisation Name, Body (organisational identifier), Individual's Name (subject to consent), Job title, Service Area, Full-Time Equivalent, FTE Pay band for disclosure – this will be shown in £5,000 bands (for instance, £80,000-£84,999). Councils are also asked to publish data on the scale of their authority in terms of; employment, expenditure and service responsibilities. The guidance, *Transparency - publication of senior salary information Reporting Guidance*, is intended to assist local authorities in the preparation and publication of senior salary information. Full details can be found at: xxxx
4. Openly Local is a place to access data about the workings of your Local Council, without having to poke around through dense, difficult-to-navigate websites. It can be found at: <http://openlylocal.com/councils/spending>
6. Redbridge Council's new "You Choose" public engagement tool shows residents how the council currently spends their money and asks them to feed back and suggest how they can make savings. Redbridge council successfully trialled the tool last year and it has now been expanded to other councils across the country with the help of YouGov and the Local Government Association. Redbridge's YouChoose tool can be found at: <http://youchoose.yougov.com/redbridge>
5. Communities Secretary Eric Pickles talks more about Council transparency in a short online clip at xxxxx [link to YouTube video]

100929

**DRAFT LETTER FOR PM TO SEND TO COUNCILS PUBLISHING £500
SPEND**

[Dear Leader]

Greater transparency across Government is at the heart of our shared commitment to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Getting more information out in the open will also help reduce the deficit and deliver better value for money in public spending; and to realise significant economic benefits by enabling businesses and non-profit organisations to build innovative applications and websites using public data. As part of that we have asked local government to publish all spending over £500 on a council-by-council basis from January 2011.

Today I would like to congratulate you for being one of the first [sixty] councils to have put their data up online.

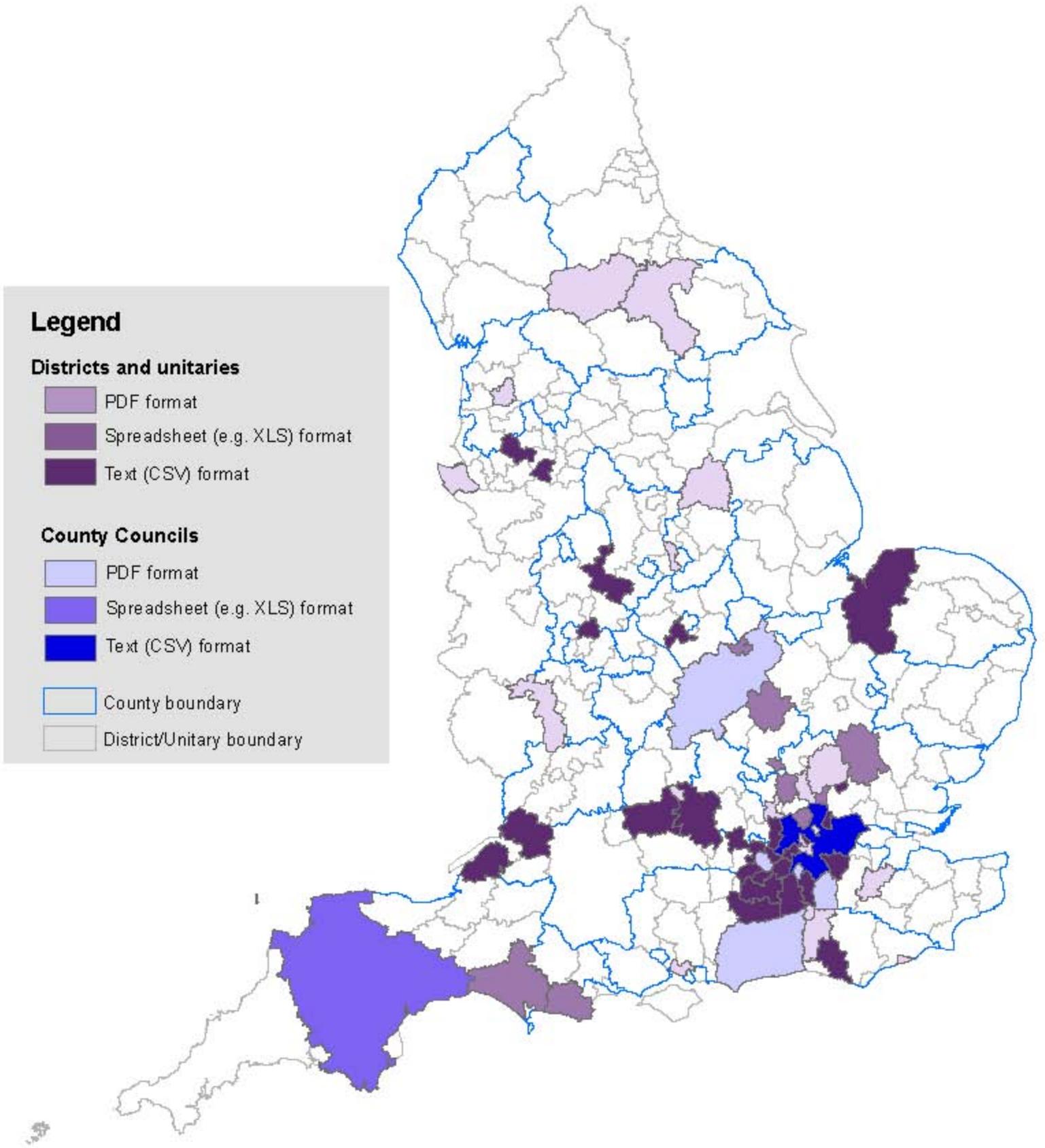
And going forward, I am looking to you to continue to forge ahead in freeing up more of your local data, and in putting information online in open formats using an open license to maximise its usefulness to your residents and to those people who want to use the data in innovative ways to help inform debate and decision-making.

This is a challenge and an opportunity for us all.

Extract from Team Work Packages: Town Hall Transparency: 10-09-29
Team Lead:

Work Package	Current Lead	Current Position	Contributions
£500 spend – guidance - what happens with reluctant Councils? - salaries and contracts guidance - new burdens	DP/PJ	Draft guidance published by Local Public Data Panel	

Councils publishing spend data - as at 30 September 2010



Produced by Geographical and Statistics Evidence Division,
Analytical Services,
Communities and Local Government

Sept 2010

SRP action 5.3

Highlight Report

Action Owner: Hulya Mustafa
Action SRO: Jane Todorovic

Highlight report number: 5.3

Covering the period : 22/09/10 –
06/10/10

Overall project status this period –Green

Green

Programme Aims:

5.3 Prepare Local Authorities for publication, in an open and standardised format, of items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500.

Draft guidance, produced jointly by LGA, CLG and developers published online in open format.

Progress and next steps against plan (max 255 characters)

LGA practitioners' guide published 1 October on spend and LGA/ LGE practitioners' salaries. Contracts and tender guide being worked on.

65 publishing spend so far.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

Lack of data literacy/ IT skills in sector to push this through.

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Data protection remains a concern for councils.

Contracts and tenders work is progressing at a slower pace – but being addressed.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Work of Dept Bus Plans and other data burdens on local authorities

Transparency workstream of the LG productivity programme, led by George Garlick (Durham)

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Good with LG sector, after some intensive work. Developers more unsure of commitment of councils.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Straightforward for us, complex for councils

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Already councils' spending has been a target of media interest.

Extract from readout of Data Publishers Conference on November 18 in Brighton:

They didn't know about organograms, interested in tracking spend on contracts through the over £500 and need to think about how we can do this, also going to set up a google doc and start getting local authority contacts on transparency completed.

101020

Extract from Transparency: Lines for general correspondence

£500 spend:

This Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen to allow them to hold politicians and public bodies to account. The Secretary of State has called upon councils to increase transparency and openness about how they do their business by publishing information on senior salaries, councillor allowances and all spending over £500. Greater transparency will help root out overspending and waste in local government.

A number of public bodies have already wholeheartedly embraced the transparency agenda and over 60 councils are already publishing their spend data. Spend of £500 and above is the first step but other types of data include: council minutes and papers; expenses; organograms; service information; performance data; food hygiene reports; licensing applications.

This Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen to allow them to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will help root out overspending and waste in local government.

A key part of the change will be getting information in the public domain in an accessible and standardised format. Such measures will enable local residents to know exactly where their money is going and you should continue to raise and direct any concerns you might have to your local council.

Parish Councils:

The Secretary of State for Communities wrote to all council leaders on 4 June, urging them to publish this and other information by January 2011 at the latest. At the moment this is not a legal requirement, however the need for legislation will be reviewed later this year depending on progress. We are working with the LGA, Socitm, LeGSB and CIPFA on guidance for Local Authorities, the first draft of which will be published in September, and we will attempt to make it as easy as possible for authorities to comply.

The general principle of transparency is that all public data should be published by default, unless there are very specific reasons for exclusion, therefore I would expect town and parish councils to also publish their data. I do however recognize that this may in some cases be very difficult and we will need to consider this issue further as we develop guidance. Regarding whether the £500 refers to a single item or an invoice, my understanding at this time is that it should refer to the invoice, however this again an issue that will be considered further in the guidance. As you may be aware a number of authorities are already publishing this information.

Local Public Data Panel's Local Spending Guidance and LGA's Practitioners' Guide:

Draft guidance produced by the Local Public Data Panel is available for comment on the data.gov.uk blog here: data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance. The Local Public Data Panel is an independent panel that exists to promote and facilitate the release of public data. The Panel has played a key role in providing advice on the publication of fine grained and timely local authority spend data. More information about the Local Public Data Panel is available on the data.gov.uk website, here: <http://data.gov.uk/blog/local-public-data-panel>.

In addition to the Panel's guidance, on Friday 1st October, the Local Government Association has published a draft practitioners' guide, which offers concrete advice to councils on how they should follow the Local Public Data Panel's guidance in publishing their spending and salaries data. You can read and comment on it here - <http://lqtransparency.readandcomment.com/> .

Existing Draft Panel Guidelines/Practitioners' guides and Government plans:

Apologies for any confusion caused by CLG website content. Draft guidance have been produced by the Local Public Data Panel and Local Government Group on the publication of spend data and senior salaries / organisational structure and are available for comment on these links: data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance and <http://lqtransparency.readandcomment.com/>

The Local Public Data Panel is an independent panel that exists to promote and facilitate the release of public data. The Panel has played a key role in providing advice on the publication of fine grained and timely local authority spend data. More information about the Local Public Data Panel is available on the data.gov.uk website, here: <http://data.gov.uk/blog/local-public-data-panel>.

The Local Government Association's draft practitioners' guide, offers concrete advice to councils on how they should follow the Local Public Data Panel's guidance in publishing their spending and salaries data.

These provide helpful advice from practitioners on how to rise to the challenge of transparency and meet Minister's expectations that local authorities respond quickly. These documents are not Govt guidance. Such guidance will seek to preserve the established principle of transparency rather than detailed information needed to support implementation. At this early stage, we would also wish to be able to respond to local authority experiences in rising to the challenge.

Publication of Schools' expenditure by local authorities:

The accountability of schools (including maintained schools, academies and free schools) and the role of local authorities might have in school accountability is being considered as part of the spending review. As soon as an approach has been agreed we will let interested parties know."

SRP action 5.3

Highlight Report

Action Owner: Hulya Mustafa
Action SRO: Jane Todorovic

Highlight report number: 5.3

Covering the period : 20/10/11 –
03/11/10

Overall project status this period –**Green**

Green

Programme Aims:

5.3 Prepare Local Authorities for publication, in an open and standardised format, of items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500.

Draft guidance, produced jointly by LGA, CLG and developers published online in open format.

Progress and next steps against plan (max 255 characters)

On 1 October LG Group published practitioners' guide on spend and LGA/LGE practitioners' salaries. The consultation period on these guides ended on 19 October and the LG Transparency programme is now considering comments and will be feeding back shortly. HO contributed comments to the consultation.

Contracts and tender guide being worked on.

80 councils are publishing spend so far.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

Lack of motivation in some LAs – they will not do this until they have to

Lack of data literacy/ IT skills in sector to push this through.

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Data protection remains a concern for councils.

Contracts and tenders work is progressing at a slower pace – but being addressed.

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Work of Dept Bus Plans and other data burdens on local authorities

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Good with LG sector, after some intensive work. Developers more unsure of commitment of councils.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Straightforward for us, potentially complex for councils

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Already councils' spending has been a target of media interest.

101102

Transparency – Q&A

Q: What steps do you plan to take in respect of local authorities that have not started to publish online details of their expenditure over £500?

A: All local authorities should be publishing this information from January 2011. I am pleased with the response from local government, with nearly 80 Councils now publishing information and welcome the support from the LGA in driving this agenda forward. Given the importance for citizens and communities I will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure they do.

Q: Do local authorities know what is expected from them?

A: I have asked every local authority in England to crack on as soon as possible regardless of instructions from Whitehall. There are nearly 80 authorities already publishing information online, authorities who have not released information as of yet should talk to them, work together and learn from their experiences. The LGA and the Local Data Panel have produced draft guidance which will assist authorities when publishing data. This will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Q: How does transparency fit with localism?

A: This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits. Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allowing local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; increasing accountability of councils to their residents.

Getting council business out in the open will revolutionise local government and enable the Big Society. Transparency is the foundation of accountability. Local people should be able to hold politicians and public bodies to account over how their council tax is being spent, and decisions made on their behalf. It is also a powerful means of promoting efficiency, without requiring the heavy-handed intervention of an unaccountable bureaucracy.

Q: What will happen if councils don't do it?

A: The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data. The driver for this is the benefit to the people. We want a society of active and engaged citizens who can easily see what decisions have been made and where their money has been spent locally. We want a society where small businesses and social enterprises can easily find out about local authority projects and know how to tender for that business.

Q: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

A: Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas. Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

Q: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities surely central government should be doing the same?

A: Central government should be leading the way to encourage authorities to do the same and my department is at the forefront of this. My department was the first to publish its 2009/10 spend of £500 and over in August. In September my department released its first quarter spend report for 2010/11 and will be publishing its second quarter shortly. My department will continue to lead the way and show what can be achieved through transparency.

Q: What are you doing to ensure that people can compare performance across local authorities?

A: It is very important that people have access to the information they need to judge the performance of their local service providers, and hold them to account. National government will still have a role to play in aggregating some data of critical national importance, or to guarantee Parliamentary accountability for public funds, but the onus must be on local authorities to provide local residents with the data they need. We are also committed to creating a new 'right to data' to empower citizens to request access to government-held datasets if they feel they need more information. We fully support the work being done by the LGA to develop effective benchmarking tools to allow citizens to compare their local council's performance against others.

Draft speech for Baroness Hanham

8 November 2010

Background

Centre for Public Scrutiny have set out the themes of the conference as follows:

- A summary of the government's plans for accountability at national and local level, and how the localism, transparency and decentralisation agenda will affect this;
- The potential offered by direct election of police decision-makers and reforms to health commissioning;
- What the abolition of CAA and the Audit Commission and the rolling-back of other inspection regimes will mean for local accountability;
- How and when some of the planned changes might occur;
- How local practitioners might work together to meet the challenge.

Suggested speech

Thank you X for your introduction. For those of you that were expecting Eric Pickles, apologies. As Minister with special responsibility for local transparency I'm delighted to be here this morning.

We all know the rhetoric that getting council business out in the open will revolutionise local government and enable the Big Society. I want to talk to you this morning about how everyone can be a part of this revolution, and how transparency is the foundation for our ambitions.

Context of decentralisation

There are three main drivers for transparency: decentralization; accountability; and the need to reduce the deficit – but they are all interwoven. It is this relationship between them that I want to touch on this morning.

Through decentralisation and the Big Society, councils and local people will have more power to build the communities and services they want. Open data and

transparency are key tools in achieving that. This Government is committed to achieving a fundamental shift in the way this country is governed. Our success will be measured by the degree to which transparency helps shift the focus from bureaucratic to democratic accountability.

This shift is already happening: Councils are being freed from top-down bureaucratic control and centralist performance management and freed from the burdens of centrally enforced targets and inspection. We have marked the end of the old, top-down local performance framework and have made a fresh start underpinned by genuine localism, with councils becoming more directly accountable to local people for the services they provide and the money they spend.

The Government is clear that deficit reduction, and securing economic recovery, is the most pressing issue facing Britain today. Councils are responsible for their own finances, and any unjustified spending should be rooted out, in the first instance, by senior financial officers and elected members. But pressure from local residents for councils to justify overspending and waste can help reinforce this scrutiny.

But they can only do this if they have the information they need at their fingertips.

That is why this Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen and allow them to hold service providers to account.

Transparency

So the aim of every one of us should be to: firstly – publish all data you hold unless it is illegal to do so; secondly – keep safe the personal data you hold; and thirdly – be absolutely clear about what data it is you hold.

But what does transparency mean and where to start?

The Secretary of State has called upon councils to increase transparency and openness about how they do their business by publishing information on senior salaries, councillor allowances and all spending over £500 as a first step.

Other types of data including council minutes, decisions and papers, expenses, organograms, service information, performance data, food hygiene reports and licensing applications should also be freely and openly available. All contain invaluable information to help not only citizens hold councils to account, but also assist officers and councillors question the way they conduct their business.

Simply making this data available is a good first step, but to make it truly useful it is imperative that we all – Government and local government – work towards providing data that complies with the public data principles, that are being developed by the Public Sector Transparency Board. I won't repeat them all here, but there are a few that deserve a particular mention in the context of revolutionising local democracy.

Firstly, public data policy and practice will be clearly driven by the public and businesses who want and use the data, including what data is released when and in what form. We are moving away from the days when central government demanded data from you, but instead councils will need to respond to data requests from the public.

Secondly, public data will be released under the same open licence which enables free reuse, including commercial reuse. There is a value to data – not just to your citizens, but to the wider economy. To realise that value, you must publish data with an open hand, and let others analyse, interrogate and present it back to you, your residents and others. Not only should you allow it, you should

encourage it – partly by having up to date data asset registers, but also making the data timely and appropriately formatted.

I am clear that, despite needing some effort at the outset, it is in councils' own interests to make data open, accessible, comparable and timely. But it is for the sector – not government – to set its own standards as to how this is done. The list of councils that are already publishing this data is growing daily. For those of you that have not, and think there are practical and technical obstacles stopping you, then speak to those that are already publishing the data – they may well have tackled these issues already.

Guidance has also been produced by the Local Public Data Panel on £500 spend, and the Local Government Group have developed guides, in partnership with central government and sector experts, setting out how councils can publish financial data on salaries, spending, contracts and tenders over £500 to meet the January 2011 deadline. The 'Spending practitioners guide' and 'Salaries disclosure guide' will be revised on an ongoing basis to reflect councils' experience and feedback.

What will good look like?

But let's remember that we are not publishing data for the sake of it – there must be some real world benefit. Setting data free will give the public greater insight into what their local authorities are doing, what is happening in their local area, and most importantly where their money is going.

We are living in challenging times. Where cuts to services are proposed, citizens must be able to see how decisions are being made and their opportunities for influencing them.

Citizens need information to suggest new ways of doing things and to get involved.

There are different ways of getting this data to them.

There will be some armchair auditors who will pore through data and challenge their council on some aspect or other.

And alongside this, releasing the data in its rawest state will enable businesses and non-profit organisations to build innovative applications and websites which will make the data easier to understand.

We are already seeing good examples of this on websites such as Openly Local, Where Does My Money Go, Armchair Auditor and Spotlight on Spend and through tools such as You Choose.

On the other hand, pages of figures on endless excel spreadsheets will mean nothing to many ordinary citizens. Councils will, rightly, want to present their data in such a way as to make it more meaningful to individuals and community groups. This is why transparency is integral to the Big Society.

For some groups – communities of interest, or brought together in a locality – there will be lobby groups who will interpret data for their benefit to help them push for change. It will also, in some cases, be the media who will use your data.

But what does this mean for you as scrutiny councillors? The challenge is how do you help people to use this wealth of information to press for their cause and hold their local leaders to account? What can Scrutiny Committees and Councils do to strengthen local scrutiny, both through existing formal routes and the wider web of accountability? What more can Government do? How can we get developers interested in these local datasets?

Last week I participated in the Local by Social online conference. This was an exciting and innovative way to bring together a range of experts to discuss how the internet can be used to deliver services, influence how localities are governed and, crucially, strengthen local accountability. I was very interested in the conversations that followed the presentations given by Swansea and Coventry on what they have done with social media, and the conversation that took place with Councillors on social media surgeries.

To me, the critical word here is conversation – how can social media and transparent open data be brought together to enable Councils to have a conversation with their residents? How can local open data be used in innovative ways to rebuild the accountability relationship? What can I do as Minister with special responsibility for local Transparency to help you drive localism and facilitate those conversations that I know you are having already, but want to be having with more people in your communities? How do we use open data, social media, and other tools to bring people into the decision-making process, as well as to raise an army of armchair auditors?

I am sure that many of you are at the forefront of this agenda, either as part of 'Tweetyhall', or through other social media activities. As I'm sure you know, Eric Pickles, is a keen tweeter, though I, I have to admit, am catching up with this agenda.

These are exciting, as well as challenging, times, and I see no limit to the opportunities that we can give people through greater transparency and democratic accountability. This government is doing what it can. You all have a pivotal role in supporting your councils to make your data available, and your residents to make the best use of it.

Extract from Background Briefing
Centre for Public Scrutiny Speech: 10 November 2010

TOP LINES TO TAKE

- Local people should be able to hold local authorities to account over how their council tax is spent, and the decisions made on their behalf.
- Transparency is the foundation of accountability. If we want people to play a bigger role in our society and be able to hold central and local government to account we need to give them the tools and information to do so.
- Whitehall must lead by example. The Department for Communities and Local Government has already published information on spend over £500 for 2009/10.
- The Department for Communities and Local Government will continue to be at the forefront of transparency. In September my department published its first quarter expenditure over £500 for 2010/11 and at the same time published further historical spend data for 2008/09 and 2009/10.
- As of 3rd November 2010 there are 87 local authorities publishing data online.
- The Local Government Group have developed guides, in partnership with central government and sector experts, setting out how councils can publish financial data on salaries, spending, contracts and tenders over £500 to meet the January 2011 deadline. The 'Spending practitioners guide' and 'Salaries disclosure guide' will be revised on an ongoing basis to reflect councils' experience and feedback.
- Guidance has also been produced by the Local Public Data Panel on £500 spend

TRANSPARENCY

Q: How does transparency fit with localism?

This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits. Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allowing local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; increasing accountability of councils to their residents.

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over how their council tax is being spent, and decisions made on their behalf. It is also a powerful means of promoting efficiency, without requiring the heavy-handed intervention of an unaccountable bureaucracy.

Q: What steps do you plan to take in respect of local authorities that have not started to publish online details of their expenditure over £500?

All local authorities should be publishing this information from January 2011. I am pleased with the response from local government, with nearly 90 Councils now publishing information and welcome the support from the LGA in driving this agenda forward. Given the importance for citizens and communities I will take whatever steps are necessary to ensure they do.

Q: Do local authorities know what is expected from them?

I have asked every local authority in England to crack on as soon as possible regardless of instructions from Whitehall. There are nearly 90 authorities already publishing information online, authorities who have not released information as of yet should talk to them, work together and learn from their experiences. The LGA and the Local Data Panel have produced draft guidance which will assist authorities when publishing data. This will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Q: What will happen if councils don't do it?

The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data. The driver for this is the benefit to the people. We want a society of active and engaged citizens who can easily see what decisions have been made and where their money has been spent locally. We want a society where small businesses and social enterprises can easily find out about local authority projects and know how to tender for that business.

Q: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas. Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

Local authorities that are already publishing items of expenditure of £500 and above suggest there is no additional cost. Rather than creating a new financial burden additional transparency should help reduce wasteful expenditure, which is why local authorities have been asked to publish such information. Any formal requirement to publish this information will be accompanied by an impact assessment.

Q: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities surely central government should be doing the same?

Central government should be leading the way to encourage authorities to do the same and my department is at the forefront of this. My department was the first to publish its 2009/10 spend of £500 and over in August. In September my department released its first quarter spend report for 2010/11

and will be publishing its second quarter shortly. My department will continue to lead the way and show what can be achieved through transparency.

SRP action 3.3i

Highlight Report

(Date)

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board: Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting: 25 November 2010

Highlight report number: 1

Covering the period: 8/11/2010 -
30/11/2010

Overall project status this period – **Red- Amber/Red -Amber-
Amber/Green-Green**

<p>RAG rating: Amber/Green</p> <p>Agreed with OGD: Yes</p>	<p><u>Programme Aims:</u></p> <p>3.3 Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers</p> <p>i. Work with local authorities to support publication</p> <p>Milestone D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format</p> <p>(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone.)</p> <p>102 councils are now publishing their spend. Draft Code of Recommended Practice about to go to Ministers for clearance. LGA about to publish their guide on contracts..</p>
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<p>Progress (max 255 characters)</p>
<p>Continuing progress in the numbers of councils publishing. The LGA has taken a good lead with the 'how to guide' and Baroness Hanham has spoken at two events in the last month, and there have been two press notices on DCLG website.</p>
<p>Next steps (max 255 characters)</p>
<p>. Check where councils are on publishing senior salaries.</p>
<p>Top Risks (max 255 characters)</p>

That the majority of councils do not publish £500 spend - due to capacity or political issues

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Contract guidance is not yet issued, despite January deadline for compliance - focus has been on £500 spend. Not clear how far senior salaries are being published.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of practice - 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Mixed - some councils believe in this and are even going further, others disagree fundamentally with the approach, preferring to talk to their residents in their own way - not through open data.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Big challenge to get compliance with the existing levers.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Data from councils is key to proper accountability.

**COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS**

Thursday 25 November 2010

CLG Ref: XXXX 10/11

Question: 6 & 11

Question 6: Penny Mordaunt (CON – Portsmouth North): What requirements local authorities have to report their expenditure to his Department? (PQ 1820)

Question 11: Brandon Lewis (CON – Great Yarmouth): What steps he has taken to increase transparency and accountability in local government spending? (PQ 1825)

Mr Eric Pickles

We are replacing bureaucratic accountability to central Government with democratic accountability.

Local people should be able to hold their council to account over how their tax is spent.

More and more local authorities are now publishing items of spend over £500 on line.

Next month I will be consulting on a Code of Recommended Practice for local authorities, which will address issues such as scope, formatting and timings for publishing data.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Top Lines to Take:

- Local people should be able to hold local authorities to account over how their council tax is spent, and the decisions made on their behalf.
- Transparency is the foundation of accountability. If we want people to play a bigger role in our society and be able to hold central and local government to account we need to give them the tools and information to do so.
- Given the importance of transparency to citizens and communities, I will continue to challenge and support those authorities yet to publish their data.
- Whitehall must lead by example. The Department for Communities and Local Government has already published information on spend over £500 for 2009/10 and its first and second quarter spend for 2010/11.

Key facts & figures:

- As of 18th November 2010 there are 102 local authorities publishing data online.
- Guidance produced by the LGA on £500 spend and salaries was released for consultation on 1st October 2010 and closed on 19th October 2010, a revised version will be released shortly. They will be producing draft guidance on contracts shortly.
- Guidance produced by the Local Public Data Panel on £500 spend was released for consultation on 1st October 2010. This guidance is still open for consultation.

Additional Lines to Take:

Possible elephant traps

Q: Do local authorities know what is expected from them?

A: I wrote to all local authorities in England in June requesting they publish information on spend of £500 and over and information on contract and tenders of £500 and over. There are 102 authorities already publishing information online, authorities who have not released information as of yet should talk to them, work together and learn from their experiences.

The LGA and the Local Data Panel have produced draft guidance which will assist authorities when publishing data. This will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Q: How does this fit with localism?

A: This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits.

Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allowing local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; increasing accountability of councils to their residents.

Q: What will happen if councils don't do it?

A: The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data.

The driver for this is the benefit to the people. We want a society of active and engaged citizens who can easily see what decisions have been made and where their money has been spent locally. We want a society where small businesses and social enterprises can easily find out about local authority projects and know how to tender for that business.

Q: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

A: Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas.

Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

Q: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities surely central government should be doing the same?

A: Central government should be leading the way to encourage authorities to do the same and the Department for Communities and Local Government is at the forefront of this.

The department was the first to publish its 2009/10 spend of £500 and over in August. In September the department released its first quarter spend report for 2010/11 and has just released its second quarter spend report.

The Department of Communities and Local Government will continue to lead the way and show what can be achieved through transparency.

Q: Why is the threshold £500 for local government but £25,000 for central government?

At the LGA conference in July I committed my department and its arms length bodies in publishing spend of £500 and over.

The department was the first to publish its 2009/10 spend of £500 and over in August. In September the department released its first quarter spend report for 2010/11 and has just released its second quarter spend report.

Q: But what about other departments?

A: This is for individual departments but I couldn't look local government in the face if my department didn't take up the challenge.

Information about MP/Constituency:

Penny Mordaunt entered Parliament on 6th May 2010. There are no previous questions or interventions on Local Government transparency and no specific constituency issues relevant to the MP in relation to transparency.

Brandon Lewis entered Parliament on 6th May 2010. There are no previous questions or interventions on Local Government transparency and no specific constituency issues relevant to the MP in relation to transparency.

BACKGROUND NOTE

Not for public disclosure

- Since your letter of 4th June 2010 requesting local authorities publish data we have been considering the options to underpin the transparency agenda.
- It has been agreed not to proceed with provisions in the Localism Bill. Instead, we are currently working on a Code of Recommended Practice and to ensure provisions in the Freedom Bill underpin the local transparency agenda.
- Currently there is a power to require local authorities to publish information through the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. This enables you to issue a Code of Recommended Practice as to the publication of information by local authorities concerning the discharge of their function and other matters which he considers to be related.

101123

Local Government Transparency

Lines to take

- Local people should be able to hold local authorities to account over how their council tax is spent, and the decisions made on their behalf.
- Transparency is the foundation of accountability. If we want people to play a bigger role in our society and be able to hold central and local government to account we need to give them the tools and information to do so.
- All local authorities are expected to publish data on items of spend over £500 on line – whether they are invitations to tender, contracts or the actual payments – from January 2011, as requested by the Secretary of State in June.
- In the spirit of localism the Secretary of State has challenged local authorities to get going under their own steam and forge ahead and release a wealth of further information online – including salaries, expenses, service information, performance data, licensing applications, hygiene reports for food outlets and transport information.
- There are over 100 local authorities' publishing data online.
- Whitehall must lead by example. The Department for Communities and Local Government has already published information on spend over £500 for 2009/10 and its first and second quarter spend for 2010/11.
- Guidance produced by the LGA on £500 spend and salaries was released for consultation on 1st October 2010 and closed on 19th October 2010, a revised version will be released shortly. They will be producing draft guidance on contracts shortly.
- Guidance produced by the Local Public Data Panel on £500 spend was released for consultation on 1st October 2010. This guidance is still open for consultation.
- Next month the Department intends to issue for consultation a Code of Recommended Practice, under section 2 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. This will address issues such as the scope, formatting and timing of the duty to publish the data.

Questions & Answers

1. Q: How does this fit with localism?

A: - This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits.

Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allowing local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; increasing accountability of councils to their residents.

2. Q: Aren't you just telling Councils what to do?

A: - This Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen and allow them to hold service providers to account.

The Local Government Group has published a practitioners' guide, which offers concrete advice to councils on how they should publish spending and salaries data.

3. Q: What will happen if councils don't do it?

A: - Councils are expected to be publishing their expenditure information from January, and the clock is ticking. The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data. The driver for this is the benefit to citizens. We want a society of active and engaged citizens who can easily see what decisions have been made and where their money has been spent locally. We want a society where small businesses and social enterprises can easily find out about local authority projects and know how to tender for that business.

I am encouraged with the response from local government with over 100 council's now publishing information and welcome the support from the LGA in driving this agenda forward. Given the importance for citizens and communities we will continue to challenge and support those authorities yet to do so.

Next month the Department intends to issue for consultation a Code of Recommended Practice, under section 2 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. This will address issues such as the scope, formatting and timing of the duty to publish the data.

4. Q: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

A: - Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas.

More transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

5. Q: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities surely central government should be doing the same?

A: - Central government should be leading the way to encourage authorities to do the same and the Department for Communities and Local Government is at the forefront of this.

This department was the first to publish its 2009/10 spend of £500 and over in August. In September this department released a report on expenditure of £500 and over for the first quarter of 2010/11 and the second quarter has just been released. This department will continue to lead the way and show what can be achieved through transparency.

6. Q: Why is the threshold £500 for local government but £25,000 for central government?

A: - I agree this is unfair, that's why at the LGA conference in July the Secretary of State committed the department and its arms length bodies in publishing details of spend over £500.

We published our 2009/10 details of spend on the department's website in August 2010. In September 2010 we published details of our first quarter spend of £500 and over for the 2010/11 financial year. The second quarter has just been released. From late November 2010, the Department and our Arms Length Bodies will start publishing spend data on a monthly basis.

Extract from 101124 Transparency: Lines for general correspondence

£500 spend:

This Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen to allow them to hold politicians and public bodies to account. The Secretary of State has called upon councils to increase transparency and openness about how they do their business by publishing information on senior salaries, councillor allowances and all spending over £500. Greater transparency will help root out overspending and waste in local government.

Eric Pickles wrote to English Local Authorities Leaders to urge them to publish details of all spending over £500 (invitations to tender, contracts or payments) in full and online as part of wider action to bring about a revolution in town hall openness and accountability. Attention has been also drawn to other information that people would find useful if they had access to it online: such as salaries, expenses, service information, performance data, licensing applications, hygiene reports for food outlets and transport information. Guidelines on how to proceed have been produced by the Local Government Group and Local Public Data Panel and are available here: <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>
<http://data.gov.uk/blog/publishing-itemised-local-authority-expenditure-advice-comment>

This Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen to allow them to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will help root out overspending and waste in local government.

A key part of the change will be getting information in the public domain in an accessible and standardised format. Such measures will enable local residents to know exactly where their money is going and you should continue to raise and direct any concerns you might have to your local council.

Parish Councils:

The Secretary of State for Communities wrote to all council leaders on 4 June, urging them to publish this and other information by January 2011 at the latest. At the moment this is not a legal requirement, however the need for legislation will be reviewed later this year depending on progress. We are working with the LGA, Socitm, LeGSB and CIPFA on guidance for Local Authorities, the first draft of which will be published in September, and we will attempt to make it as easy as possible for authorities to comply.

The general principle of transparency is that all public data should be published by default, unless there are very specific reasons for exclusion, therefore I would expect town and parish councils to also publish their data. I do however recognize that this may in some cases be very difficult and we will need to consider this issue further as we develop guidance. Regarding whether the £500 refers to a single item or an

invoice, my understanding at this time is that it should refer to the invoice, however this again an issue that will be considered further in the guidance. As you may be aware a number of authorities are already publishing this information.

Local Public Data Panel's Local Spending Guidance and LGA's Practitioners' Guide:

Draft guidance produced by the Local Public Data Panel is available for comment on the data.gov.uk blog here: data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance. The Local Public Data Panel is an independent panel that exists to promote and facilitate the release of public data. The Panel has played a key role in providing advice on the publication of fine grained and timely local authority spend data. More information about the Local Public Data Panel is available on the data.gov.uk website, here: <http://data.gov.uk/blog/local-public-data-panel>.

In addition to the Panel's guidance, on Friday 1st October, the Local Government Association has published a draft practitioners' guide, which offers concrete advice to councils on how they should follow the Local Public Data Panel's guidance in publishing their spending and salaries data. You can read and comment on it here - <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/> .

Existing Draft Panel Guidelines/Practitioners' guides and Government plans:

Apologies for any confusion caused by CLG website content. Draft guidance have been produced by the Local Public Data Panel and Local Government Group on the publication of spend data and senior salaries / organisational structure and are available for comment on these links: data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance and <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>

The Local Public Data Panel is an independent panel that exists to promote and facilitate the release of public data. The Panel has played a key role in providing advice on the publication of fine grained and timely local authority spend data. More information about the Local Public Data Panel is available on the data.gov.uk website, here: <http://data.gov.uk/blog/local-public-data-panel>.

The Local Government Association's draft practitioners' guide, offers concrete advice to councils on how they should follow the Local Public Data Panel's guidance in publishing their spending and salaries data.

These provide helpful advice from practitioners on how to rise to the challenge of transparency and meet Minister's expectations that local authorities respond quickly. These documents are not Govt guidance. Such guidance will seek to preserve the established principle of transparency rather than detailed information needed to support implementation. At this early stage, we would also wish to be able to respond to local authority experiences in rising to the challenge.

Publication of Schools' expenditure by local authorities:

[24/11/2010: To let you know that we've agreed an expanded set of lines to deal with the more detailed queries we're now getting on this.](#)

Schools

From January 2011 local authorities will be required to publish details of all their expenditure over £500. We do not currently expect this requirement to extend to maintained schools and academies. The Government is committed to minimising bureaucratic burdens on schools. Maintained schools already provide expenditure information to the DfE through the Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) framework. From January 2011, the DfE will publish information annually about each maintained school's expenditure using this CFR data. This approach will provide greater transparency on schools' spending whilst minimising burdens on schools. The YPLA are reviewing academies' financial reporting and monitoring arrangements, and their review is taking account of the wider transparency agenda.

LAs

From January 2011 local authorities will be required to publish details of all their expenditure over £500. We do not currently expect this requirement to extend to maintained schools. Local authorities' expenditure on goods/services which are used by schools should count as local authority expenditure for this requirement. This should include local authorities' spending of the proportion of the DSG that they retain centrally. Individual schools' delegated budgets are paid to them through their local authority, but this should not count as local authority expenditure even where schools use their local authorities' accounting system for their own accounts.

As you can see, they leave room for policy to change, but they should answer more queries until a definite approach has been agreed.

NAME REDACTED

Efficiency and Value for Money, 3-19 Funding Policy and Efficiency Team

Dept for Education

Tel: NUMBER REDACTED

Email: NAME REDACTED@education.gsi.gov.uk

101125

Schools

From January 2011 local authorities will be required to publish details of all their expenditure over £500. Maintained schools currently provide expenditure information to the DfE through the Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) framework. From January 2011, the DfE will publish information annually about each maintained school's expenditure using this CFR data.

Whilst the Coalition Government is committed to minimising bureaucratic burdens on schools, it is also keen to strengthen democratic accountability, particularly enabled by transparency, to allow the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account and to help deliver better value for money. This should include a commitment that all schools receiving public funding must make information available in open and re-usable formats, in line with the Transparency Board's Public Data Principles to enable the public to assess and compare their performance. To ensure compatibility with local authority transparency, this should include information on head teacher salaries, organograms showing numbers and pay ranges of teaching and non-teaching staff; all income received, all spend over £500, contracts and tenders awarded and the amount of reserves held.

The YPLA are reviewing academies' financial reporting and monitoring arrangements, and their review is taking account of the wider transparency agenda.

LAs

From January 2011 local authorities will be required to publish details of all their expenditure over £500. Local authorities' expenditure on goods/services which are used by schools should count as local authority expenditure for this requirement. This should include local authorities' spending of the proportion of the DSG that they retain centrally. Individual schools' delegated budgets are paid to them through their local authority, but this should not count as local authority expenditure even where schools use their local authorities' accounting system for their own accounts.

Contribution to FRS Finance Network meeting 27 November

Transparency is integral to the success of key government objectives:

This is a fast moving and evolving agenda. The approach has been to get data out quickly.

- The Secretary of State wrote to all local authorities in England in June 2010 expressing his expectations that they publish items of spend over £500, as well as publishing invitations to tender and final contracts on projects over £500 from January 2011. He also challenged local authorities to go beyond this and release a wealth of data/information such as meeting minutes, local service and performance data.
- On 2 August, Bob Neil wrote out to the leaders of Fire and Rescue Authorities outlining the governments' commitment to increasing transparency across central and local government and asking FRA's to follow suit.

Code of Recommended Practice

- The SoS now wishes to strengthen this expectation and embed the transparency agenda. The intention is to introduce a Code of Recommended Practice. Currently there is already a power to require local authorities to publish information through the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. This enables the SoS to issue a Code of Recommended Practice as to the publication of information by local authorities concerning the discharge of their function and other matters which he considers to be related.
- The Code is a broad high level document which avoids the prescriptive top down route.

Time table

- We have produced a draft Code which is now with OGDs for initial comments.
- We will need to consult (over Xmas) and get Home Affairs Committee clearance.
- The intention is to have the Code in place as soon as feasibly possible.

Next Steps

- Intend to submit the draft Code to the SoS next week.

Existing Draft Panel Guidelines/Practitioners' guides and Government plans:

Draft guidance have been produced by the Local Public Data Panel and Local Government Group on the publication of spend data and senior salaries / organisational structure and are available on these links: data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance and <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>

The Local Public Data Panel is an independent panel that exists to promote and facilitate the release of public data. The Panel has played a key role in providing advice on the publication of fine grained and timely local authority spend data. More information about the Local Public Data Panel is available on the data.gov.uk website, here: <http://data.gov.uk/blog/local-public-data-panel>.

These provide helpful advice from practitioners on how to rise to the challenge of transparency and meet Minister's expectations that local authorities respond quickly. These documents are not Govt guidance. *Such guidance will seek to preserve the established principle of transparency rather than detailed information needed to support implementation.*

Moving forward

- Currently there are 10 fire authorities publishing spend data on their websites and a number of authorities publishing spend via their local council's website.
- Further details can be found at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/transparencyingovernment/fireserviceexpenditure>

To: Secretary of State

From: **Hülya Mustafa**
Digital Delivery and
Transparency
Location: 3/J4 EH
Tel: 0303 444 2133
Date: 1st December 2010
Copies: PS/All Ministers
PS/Permanent Secretary
PS/Advisers
David Prout
Andrew Campbell
NAMES REDACTED

MISSED SRP DEADLINE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT DATA TRANSPARENCY

Summary

1. This submission is to seek your clearance of the reason why we have missed the SRP deadline to 'complete' the publication of the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency in November.

Timing

2. Urgent - our progress report is due to be published on Friday.

Recommendation

3. That you approve the following line on why we have missed the deadline:
 - Require publication by a Code of Practice on council transparency, through the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 or other legislation
 - Work on the Code of Practice was slipped slightly to allow it to be informed by other developments on data transparency and the public sector. A draft is now due to be published in mid-December, and this slippage will not affect the final requirement to be in place in January.

Background

4. We have been working on the Code of Practice with Cabinet Office, Ministry of Justice and the Local Government Group to ensure it fits in well with other policy developments around transparency. For example, we need to ensure that our work on costs and definitions fits with the 'right to data' work CO and MoJ are doing. Missing the November deadline for publishing the Code does not affect our overall milestone of having a final Code in place in January. Nor has it slowed the work we are doing with LG Group on guidance and communications on the requirement for transparency of spend on £500.

Hülya Mustafa

SRP action 3.3i

Highlight Report

(Date)

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board: Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting: 20 December 2010

Highlight report number: 1

Covering the period: 30/11/2010 -
30/12/2010

Overall project status this period – **Red- Amber/Red -Amber-
Amber/Green-Green**

<p>RAG rating: Amber/Green</p> <p>Agreed with OGD: Yes</p>	<p><u>Programme Aims:</u></p> <p>3.3 Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers</p> <p>i. Work with local authorities to support publication</p> <p>Milestone D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format</p> <p>(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone.)</p> <p>102 councils are now publishing their spend. Draft Code of Recommended Practice has gone to Ministers for clearance. LGA about to publish their guide on contracts..</p>
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Progress (max 255 characters)

Continuing progress in the numbers of councils publishing. The LGA has taken a good lead with the 'how to guide' and Baroness Hanham has spoken at two events in the last month, and there have been two press notices on DCLG website.

Next steps (max 255 characters)

. Check where councils are on publishing senior salaries.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That the majority of councils do not publish £500 spend - due to capacity or political issues

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Contract guidance is not yet issued, despite January deadline for compliance - focus has been on £500 spend. Not clear how far senior salaries are being published.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of practice - 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Mixed - some councils believe in this and are even going further, others disagree fundamentally with the approach, preferring to talk to their residents in their own way - not through open data.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Big challenge to get compliance with the existing levers.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Data from councils is key to proper accountability.

SRP action 3.3i

Highlight Report

(Date)

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board: Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting: 20 December 2010

Highlight report number: 1

Covering the period: 30/12/2010 - 06/01/2011

Overall project status this period – **Red- Amber/Red -Amber- Amber/Green-Green**

<p>RAG rating: Amber/Amber</p> <p>Agreed with OGD: Yes</p>	<p><u>Programme Aims:</u></p> <p>3.3 Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers</p> <p>i. Work with local authorities to support publication</p> <p>Milestone D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format</p> <p>(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone.)</p> <p>Have notification of 114 councils publishing their spend via directgov. Draft Code of Recommended Practice awaiting clearance. LG Group have published their draft guide on contracts and revised versions of the other Practitioners Guides for consultation.</p>
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Progress (max 255 characters)

Continuing progress in the numbers of councils publishing.

Next steps (max 255 characters)

Working with the LG Group to ensure we have comprehensive list of councils who are publishing, including those who do not link to data.gov. Focus now moving to understanding which councils are publishing contracts and salaries.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That the majority of councils do not publish £500 spend - due to capacity or political issues

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

The majority of Councils are yet to publish their expenditure information, and it is not yet clear whether councils will start publishing contracts and salaries information in January.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of practice - 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Mixed - some councils believe in this and are even going further, others disagree with the approach, preferring to talk to their residents in their own way - not through open data.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Big challenge to get compliance with the existing levers. Publishing contracts is more complex than publishing simple expenditure information, and goes further than local authorities have gone before.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Data from councils is key to proper accountability.

110107

What will happen to LAs who do not publish details of their £500 expenditure before the end of January 2011?

1. The Secretary of State wrote to all English local authorities in June asking them to publish items of spend over £500 – whether they are invitations to tender, contracts or the actual payments – online by the end of January 2011. Legally speaking, this was simply an ‘ask’ of local government by central government – there is no way to enforce this particular request. There is also a milestone in the DCLG Structural Reform Plan.
2. The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 allows the Secretary of State to issue a Code of Recommended Practice as to the publication of information by local authorities about the discharge of their functions. A draft Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency is currently undergoing HA clearance and we are expecting a five week consultation to commence during week commencing 17 January. Once the draft Code has issued for consultation there is a clear expectation that local authorities should comply with it, but it is not clear that there is a legal obligation for them to do so.
3. The Code specifies the data that should be released as a minimum:
 - expenditure over £500 (including costs, supplier and transaction information);
 - senior salaries, names, job descriptions, responsibilities, budgets and numbers of staff;
 - an organogram of the staff structure of the local authority;
 - Councillor allowances and expenses;
 - contracts and tenders;
 - policies, performance, audits and service information; and
 - data of democratic running of the local authority including the constitution, election results, decision - making processes and records of decisions.
4. The Act upon which the Code is based does provide the power, should it be deemed necessary at a later date, to require publication of information specified in the Code by way of regulations, thereby making publication a legislative requirement. A legislative requirement would mean that failure by a local authority to comply would be unlawful. Before we can make publication of the specified information a legislative requirement, we first need a set of Regulations which would permit the Secretary of State to require publication of information more often than once a year. These Regulations would be subject to the affirmative procedure and require approval of both Houses of Parliament. Also, before making these Regulations, consultation on the Regulations would be required.
5. Once those Regulations are in place, then a second set of Regulations (subject to the negative procedure) can be made requiring publication of specific information contained in the Code. These Regulations would also have to be subject to consultation before they are made. It will take several months to put in place both sets of Regulations, although the work and the consultations could largely be undertaken concurrently, particularly because the two sets of Regulations are clearly linked. However the affirmative Regulations would have to come into force before the negative Regulations could be made (because the negative Regulations are dependent upon the affirmative Regulations).
6. The Code includes a commitment for review within 18 months to account for progress with broader transparency policy. If there were Regulations in place

requiring the publication of information specified in the Code, they would need to be amended to refer to the up to date version of the Code, if additional information were required to be published.

7. We are working closely with the Communications teams to praise those local authorities who have published and draw attention to those local authorities who have not published their items of spend over £500 – this will be through Ministerial interviews (including the Secretary of State) and using the timeline on the DCLG website together with a countdown on the news pages. We will be naming and shaming those who have not published, and asking what it is they are trying to hide. We will be supporting this with analysis of those who have not published. We will also be working with media partners such as the Guardian, Telegraph and the MJ.
8. If a significant number of local authorities do not publish items of spend over £500, and pressure from this Department, their citizens, the media, other local authorities and other bodies (such as the Local Government Group and the Centre for Public Scrutiny) is not enough to make them comply with the Code of Recommended Practice, then the Secretary of State will need to decide whether to make it a legislative requirement through the two sets of Regulations referred to above.
9. If the publication of information specified in the Code becomes a legislative requirement, then local authorities must publish the information specified. If a citizen considers that their local authority has not published what is required, then in theory they would be able to take action through the Courts to enforce compliance. However, members of the public are unlikely to wish to take such action, because of the expense, although representative groups, such as the Taxpayers Alliance, may wish to do so. Alternatively, central Government could take court action against local authorities; however this would be politically contentious and potentially expensive.
10. There are many legal obligations on local authorities which do not have a specific route for enforcement – however, local authorities generally comply with the law.
11. The Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice are separately planning to legislate to require the whole of the public sector to proactively publish information, and we understand that the Information Commissioner is keen to include spend over £500 within the Publications Schemes required under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Both of these offer additional ways to hold local authorities to account for their funding decisions. We understand that Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice are looking to introduce legislation this month, and we are working with them.

110112 Briefing for OPQs List of authorities

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty; CON)

- Harrogate – no
- Selby – yes
- North Yorkshire - no

Heidi Alexander (Lewisham East; LAB)

- Lewisham - no

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire; CON)

- Malvern Hills – yes
- Wychavon – yes
- Worcestershire - yes

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central; CON)

- Croydon - yes

Clive Betts (Sheffield South East; LAB)

- Sheffield - no

Hazel Blears (Salford and Eccles; LAB)

- Salford - no

David Blunkett (Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough; LAB)

- Sheffield – no

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire; CON)

- North West Leicestershire – no
- Leicestershire – yes

Mary Creagh (Wakefield; LAB)

- Wakefield – yes

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale; LAB)

- Rochdale – yes

Jack Dromey

- Birmingham – yes

Charlie Elphicke (Dover; CON)

- Dover – yes
- Kent – yes

David Evennett (Bexley Heath and Crayford; CON)

Bexley – yes

Caroline Flint (Don Valley; LAB)

Doncaster – no

Richard Graham (Gloucester; CON)

Gloucester – no

Gloucestershire – no

Andrew Griffiths (Burton; CON)

East Staffordshire – yes

Staffordshire – yes

Duncan Hames (Chippenham; CON)

Wiltshire – yes

Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow; LAB)

Gateshead – no

South Tyneside – no

Philip Hollobone (Kettering; CON)

Kettering – no

Northamptonshire – yes

Margot James (Stourbridge; CON)

Dudley – yes

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough; CON)

Harrogate – no

North Yorkshire – no

Barbara Keeley

Salford – no

Jessica Lee (Erewash; CON)

Erewash – yes

Derbyshire – no

Ivan Lewis (Bury South; LAB)

Bury – no

Tony Lloyd (Manchester Central; LAB)

Manchester – no

John Mann (Bassetlaw; LAB)

Bassetlaw – yes

Nottinghamshire – yes

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley; CON)

Kirklees – no

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale; CON)

Lancaster – yes

Lancashire – no

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall; CON)

Cornwall – no

Chinyelu Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central; LAB)

Newcastle upon Tyne – yes

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South; CON)

Croydon – yes

Priti Patel (Witham; CON)

Braintree – yes

Colchester – yes

Maldon – no

Essex – yes

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South; LAB)

Sunderland – yes

Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton; CON)

Elmbridge – yes

Surrey – yes

Nick Raynsford (Greenwich and Woolwich; LAB)

Greenwich – no

Linda Riordan (Halifax; LAB)

Calderdale – yes

Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury; CON)

Cheltenham – yes

Gloucester – no

Tewkesbury – no

Gloucestershire – yes

Bob Russell (Colchester; LD)

Colchester – yes

Essex – yes

Julian Sturdy (York Outer; CON)

York – no

Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk; CON)

Breckland – yes

King's Lynn and West Norfolk – yes

Norfolk – no

Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight; CON)

Isle of Wight – no

Alison Seabeck

Plymouth – no

Chris Williamson

Derby - no

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

Monday 17 January 2011

CLG Ref: 2334 10/11

Question Number: 22

Mr Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton)

How many local authorities have published online details of their spending over £500 to date. **[33566]**

Mr Eric Pickles

Draft answer

Our latest assessment is that at least 193 local authorities are publishing their spending data online.

Please provide advice for the above ORAL PQ as follows:

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Top Lines to take:

- Local people should be able to hold local authorities to account over how their council tax is spent, and the decisions made on their behalf.
- Transparency is the foundation of accountability. If we want people to play a bigger role in our society and be able to hold central and local government to account we need to give them the tools and information to do so.
- I am delighted that nearly 200 local authorities are now publishing their spend data online. We are being notified regularly of additional councils that are publishing.
- I am prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that all local authorities are publishing their data.
- Support and practical advice on how to prepare spend data for publication has been produced by both the LGA and the Local Public Data Panel.

Key facts and figures:

- As of 12 January there are 193 local authorities publishing their spend data online.
- The LGA have produced guidance on £500 spend and senior salaries. Draft guidance on the publication of contracts and tenders is open for consultation until 21st January.
- The Local Public Data Panel have also produced guidance on the £500 spend.
- A Draft Code of Recommended Practice on council transparency will be published shortly.

Additional Lines to take:

Q: Do local authorities know what is expected of them?

A: Last June I asked every local authority in England to crack on as soon as possible regardless of instructions from Whitehall. 193 authorities have advised that they are now publishing their spend data online. In addition, there are 10 more that have holding pages on their web site in preparation for the data.

Authorities who have not released information as of yet should talk to them, work together and learn from their experiences.

The LGA and the Local Public Data Panel have produced guidance which will assist authorities when publishing data. This will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Q: What action will you take against local authorities that have not published their spend data by the end of January?

A: The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data.

A Draft Code of Recommended Practice on council transparency will be published shortly. I am prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure local authorities publish their data.

Q: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

A: Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas.

Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

Q: How does this fit with Localism?

A: This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits.

Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allow local institutions to compete,

innovate and diversify; and increase accountability of councils to their residents.

Q: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities. Surely central government should be doing the same?

A: Central government should be leading the way to encourage authorities to do the same and my department is at the forefront of this.

My department was the first to publish its 2009/10 spend of £500 and over in August. In September my department released its first quarter spend report for 2010/11. Data for the 2nd quarter was published in November, and DCLG also began publishing monthly spend data from October.

Q: But what about other departments?

A: There is an expectation that Whitehall should lead by example, but it is for individual departments to determine whether their financial systems are capable of publishing spend data over £500. There are seven departments publishing spend of £500 and over (BIS, DCLG, DCMS, DECC, DEFRA, DfT, and GEO).

Information about MP/Constituency:

- **Dominic Raab (Esher and Walton)** entered Parliament on 6th May 2010. There are no previous question or interventions on Local Government transparency and no specific constituency issues relevant to the MP in relation to transparency.

BACKGROUND NOTE

Not for public disclosure

- The Secretary of State wrote to all Local Authorities on 4 June 2010 requesting that they publish data on: spend of £500 and above; council minutes and papers; senior salaries and expenses; organograms; service information; performance data; food hygiene reports; licensing applications.
- The letter asked for this data to be published by the end of January 2011.
- To date, 193 Local Authorities have advised DCLG that they are publishing their spend data. A further 10 Local Authorities have holding pages on their web site in preparation for the data.
- Other Local Authorities may have published their spend data but not notified DCLG that they are doing so.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

ORAL PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION

Monday 17 January 2011

CLG Ref: 2314 10/11

Question Number: 2, 4, 9, 14

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South) – 2314 10/11

How many local authorities have published details of their spending on line to date. [33546]

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) – 2316 10/11

How many local authorities have published online details of their spending over £500 to date. [33548]

Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk) – 2321 10/11

How many local authorities have published online details of their spending over £500 to date. [33553]

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) – 2326 10/11

How many local authorities have published online details of their spending over £500 to date. [33558]

Mr Eric Pickles

Draft answer

Our latest assessment is that at least 193 local authorities are publishing their spending data online.

Please provide advice for the above ORAL PQ as follows:

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Top Lines to take:

- Local people should be able to hold local authorities to account over how their council tax is spent, and the decisions made on their behalf.
- Transparency is the foundation of accountability. If we want people to play a bigger role in our society and be able to hold central and local government to account we need to give them the tools and information to do so.
- I am delighted that nearly 200 local authorities are now publishing their spend data online. We are being notified regularly of additional councils that are publishing.
- I've made clear that all Local Authorities should publish this information by the end of January. I am prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that all local authorities are publishing their data.
- Support and practical advice on how to prepare spend data for publication has been produced by both the LGA and the Local Public Data Panel.

Key facts and figures:

- As of 12 January there are 193 local authorities publishing their spend data online.
- The LGA have produced guidance on £500 spend and senior salaries. Draft guidance on the publication of contracts and tenders is open for consultation until 21st January.
- The Local Public Data Panel have also produced guidance on the £500 spend.
- A draft Code of Recommended Practice on council transparency will be published shortly.

Additional Lines to take:

Q: Do local authorities know what is expected of them?

A: Last June I asked every local authority in England to crack on as soon as possible regardless of instructions from Whitehall. 193 authorities have advised that they are now publishing their spend data online. In addition, there are 10 more that have holding pages on their web site in preparation for the data.

Authorities who have not released information as of yet should talk to them, work together and learn from their experiences.

The LGA and the Local Public Data Panel have produced guidance which will assist authorities when publishing data. This will be updated on an ongoing basis.

Q: What action will you take against local authorities that have not published their spend data by the end of January?

A: The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data.

A Draft Code of Recommended Practice on council transparency will be published shortly. I am prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure local authorities publish their data.

Q: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

A: Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas.

Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

Q: How does this fit with Localism?

A: This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits.

Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allow local institutions to compete,

innovate and diversify; and increase accountability of councils to their residents.

Q: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities. Surely central government should be doing the same?

A: Central government should be leading the way to encourage authorities to do the same and my department is at the forefront of this.

In September my department released its first quarter spend report for 2010/11. Data for the 2nd quarter was published in November, and DCLG also began publishing monthly spend data from October.

Q: But what about other departments?

A: There is an expectation that Whitehall should lead by example, but it is for individual departments to determine whether their financial systems are capable of publishing spend data over £500. There are seven departments publishing spend of £500 and over (BIS, DCLG, DCMS, DECC, DEFRA, DfT, and GEO).

Information about MPs/Constituencies:

Richard Ottaway (Croydon South): MP for Notts North 83 – 87, returned to Parliament in 1992 as MP for Croydon South. Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. Chairman of the All Party Parliamentary London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Group, and a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health. Has been a conservative spokesman for London and Local Government.

Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall): entered Parliament on 6 May 2010. No previous questions on transparency / local government.

Elizabeth Truss (South West Norfolk): elected at the General Election on 6th May 2010. She is a Member of the Justice Select Committee. No previous questions on transparency.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton): elected at the 2010 General Election. He has asked a further 8 questions relating to central and local government transparency:

Written answers and statements, 18 October 2010

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department (a) entered into and (b) renewed contracts for pot plant (i) maintenance and (ii) leasing in (A) 2008-09 and (B) 2009-10. **Bob Neill** - I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 14 September 2010, Hansard, columns 1027-28W. The departmental pot plant contract, initiated by the former Office of the <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/glossary/?gl=91> Deputy Prime Minister, has now been cancelled.

Written answers and statements, 11 October 2010

Andrew Griffiths To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to his Department's press release of 5 August 2010, if he will place in the Library a copy of the contract and project brief for work undertaken for the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation by Connect Public Affairs; and how much was spent on the contract. **Bob Neill** holding answer 13 September 2010

A copy of the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation's contract with Connect Public Affairs has been placed in the Library of the House. In the last 12 months the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation has paid £8,002.56 to Connect Public Affairs as a contribution to the secretariat services provided by them to the All Party Thames Gateway Parliamentary Group. This contract has now been cancelled.

Written answers and statements, 15 September 2010

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department spent on cleaning in (a) 2006-07, (b) 2007-08, (c) 2008-09 and (d) 2009-10. **Bob Neill** - Communities and Local Government have spent the following on cleaning in its headquarters buildings in London during: (a) 2006-07, (b) 2007-08, (c) 2008-09 and (d) 2009-10.

	Cost (£)
2006-07	594,155
2007-08	655,534
2008-09	370,386
2009-10	423,553

In July 2004, the Office of the <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/glossary/?gl=91> Deputy Prime Minister signed a contract with Mitie for contract cleaning services in Ashdown House and Eland House, London Victoria. In May 2010, the Department gave due notice to reduce the level of contract cleaning in its remaining headquarters building, Eland House, achieving ongoing savings of circa £150,000 per year.

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what declarations of (a) interests, (b) gifts and (c) hospitality were made by special advisers in his Department in (i) 2007-08, (ii) 2008-09 and (iii) 2009-10. **Bob Neill** - In the periods 2007-08 and 2008-09 no declarations of interests, gifts or hospitality were made by special advisers in Communities and Local Government and in 2009-10 there was one declaration of a gift made by special adviser.

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much was spent on fruit supplied to Ministerial offices in his Department in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. **Bob Neill** – None.

PQs between Friday 17 September and Monday 4 October 2010

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department spent on newspapers for Ministers and special advisers in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [15043] **Robert Neill:** For information on the cost of newspapers and periodicals for ministerial offices in 2008-09, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond) on 7 July 2009, Official Report, columns 702-04W. The total cost of newspapers and periodicals for ministerial offices in 2009-10 was £24,608.43. These costs were in addition to two media monitoring contracts with Durrants and Precise. The new Government consider this expenditure wasteful, and as outlined in my Department's press release, of 11 September, we have consolidated seven sets of papers and periodicals for Ministers and special advisers down to one set.

Andrew Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to his Department's press release of 5 August 2010, if he will place in the Library a copy of the contract and project brief for the work carried out for Ordnance Survey by Mandate Public Affairs; and how much was spent on the contract. [15026]

Robert Neill [holding answer 13 September 2010]: Mandate Communications were contracted by Ordnance Survey to provide consultancy and advice on Corporate Communications and Public Affairs.

For the financial year 2009-10 the value of the contract was £35,757. Notice on this contract was served in May 2010.

A copy of the contract, with commercially confidential information redacted, and which includes the Project Brief at Appendix 1 which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Written answers and statements, 14 September 2010

Andrew Griffiths To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much was spent on pot plants by his Department in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. **Bob Neill** The following table identifies how much Communities and Local Government spent on the maintenance of existing pot plants since 2004, including details of the (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10 spend:

Contract year	Cost (£)
July 2004 to June 2005	5,555.88
July 2005 to June 2006	5,555.88
July 2006 to June 2007	6,634.32
July 2007 to June 2008	6,634.32
July 2008 to June 2009	6,634.32
July 2009 to June 2010	6,454.58
July 2010 to September 2010	1,388.97

Total 38,858.27

In July 2004, the Office of the

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/glossary/?gl=91> Deputy Prime Minister signed a contract with Mitie for maintenance of internal plants in Eland House. In July 2010, the Department gave due notice that this contract will be terminated; the contract will formally end in September 2010.

The pot plants are owned by the Department, rather than leased. When the contract ends, as suggested by staff in feedback on departmental cost savings, the plants will be looked after by departmental staff on a voluntary basis. No new pot plants have been procured since May 2010. A copy of the relevant section of the 2004 contract on internal planting has been placed in the Library of the House.

BACKGROUND NOTE

Not for public disclosure

- The Secretary of State wrote to all Local Authorities on 4 June 2010 requesting that they publish data on: spend of £500 and above; council minutes and papers; senior salaries and expenses; organograms; service information; performance data; food hygiene reports; licensing applications.
- The letter asked for this data to be published by the end of January 2011.
- To date, 193 Local Authorities have advised DCLG that they are publishing their spend data. A further 10 Local Authorities have holding pages on their web site in preparation for the data.

- Other Local Authorities may have published their spend data but not notified DCLG that they are doing so.

110112 DRAFT PN

FINAL COUNTDOWN BEGINS TO FULL COUNCIL TRANSPARENCY

Councils have been put on two weeks' notice to get their books open for public scrutiny, Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles said today.

Last June, Mr Pickles set a deadline for councils to become more transparent by publishing all of their spending data over £500 online in accessible formats, at the end of January.

Today the Local Government Secretary is starting the final countdown for councils to show their residents that they are ready to be open and transparent about how they spend taxpayers' money.

Over [193] councils across the country – just over half - have put some information online, but this leaves over 150 still to act. A timeline on the department's website shows who has put their data online while making it crystal clear which councils are leaving it to the eleventh hour.

A draft code of practice will be published shortly to help 'slowcoach councils' get on the right track.

Councils are expected to put details of senior pay, councillor expenses, tenders and contracts, meetings, and frontline service data into the open so that 'armchair auditors' can clearly see the decisions being made on their behalf by the council in due course.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has already set the precedent for councils to follow, regularly publishing all spend data over £500.

Communities Secretary Eric Pickles said:

"I've called for every council to become more open and accountable about every aspect of their work, starting with getting all expenditure over £500 online by the end of this month. Transparency can help save money in tough times protecting frontline services, by cutting waste and unnecessary costs.

"The final countdown for councils has begun. In the last six months more than half of all councils have got their house in order. Today I'm putting those councils still to open up on two weeks' notice.

"The public have a right to know how their tax pounds are spent, and those yet deliver are running out of excuses and time before they have to face their electorate – I hope every council chooses to do so openly, transparently and democratically. "

Note to Editors

1. The list of council that have already told DCLG they have put their spending data online is at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/>

2. The timeline of when councils went online is at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/timeline/>

3. The Department for Communities is leading the way across Whitehall and Local Government by publishing all its expenditure over £500 online too. This can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/transparencyingovernment/spenddata/>

4. Experian research suggests councils could be overpaying by as much as £150m a year:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/newsstories/corporate/1738897>

Supplementary Briefing Box Note- One Pager

Policy lead: NAMES REDACTED

Landline/ Mobile number: NUMBERS REDACTED

ISSUE: There is nothing about Transparency in the Localism Bill

KEY LINES TO TAKE:

- This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Transparency is the foundation of accountability.
- If we want people to play a bigger role in our society and be able to hold central and local government to account we need to give them the tools and information to do so. We do not need the Localism Bill to provide these tools and information.
- Last June I asked every local authority in England to crack on as soon as possible regardless of instructions from Whitehall. 193 authorities have advised that they are now publishing their spend data online
- I am delighted that nearly 200 local authorities are now publishing their spend data online. We are being notified regularly of additional councils that are publishing.
- A Draft Code of Recommended Practice on council transparency will be published shortly. I am prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure local authorities publish their data.

FACTS AND ANECDOTES:

- As of 14 January there are 194 local authorities publishing their spend data online.
- The LGA have produced guidance on £500 spend and senior salaries. Draft guidance on the publication of contracts and tenders is open for consultation until 21st January.
- The Local Public Data Panel have also produced guidance on the £500 spend.

BACKGROUND:

When the Localism Bill was first introduced, it was thought we could need clauses on transparency. However, We are introducing the Code of Practice on council transparency using The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. In addition, the Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice are separately planning to legislate to require the whole of the public sector to proactively publish information, and we understand that the Information Commissioner is keen to include spend over £500 within the Publications Schemes. Both of these offer additional ways to hold local authorities to account for their funding decisions.

SRP action 3.3i

Highlight Report

(Date)

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board: Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting: 20 December 2010

Highlight report number: 1

Covering the period: 06/01/2011 -
20/01/2011

Overall project status this period – **Red- Amber/Red -Amber-
Amber/Green-Green**

<p>RAG rating: Amber/Amber</p> <p>Agreed with OGD: Yes</p>	<p><u>Programme Aims:</u></p> <p>3.3 Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers</p> <p>i. Work with local authorities to support publication</p> <p>Milestone D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format</p> <p>(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone.)</p> <p>Now have notification of 194 councils publishing their spend via directgov. All guidances available.</p>
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Progress (max 255 characters)

Continuing progress in the numbers of councils publishing.

Next steps (max 255 characters)

Focus now moving to understanding which councils are publishing contracts and salaries.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That councils do not publish £500 spend - due to capacity or political issues

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Contracts and tenders guidance has only recently been published. We are not yet requesting information on whether salaries have been published. There are around 150 LAs yet to publish £500.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of practice - 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Mixed - some councils believe in this and are even going further, others disagree with the approach, preferring to talk to their residents in their own way - not through open data.

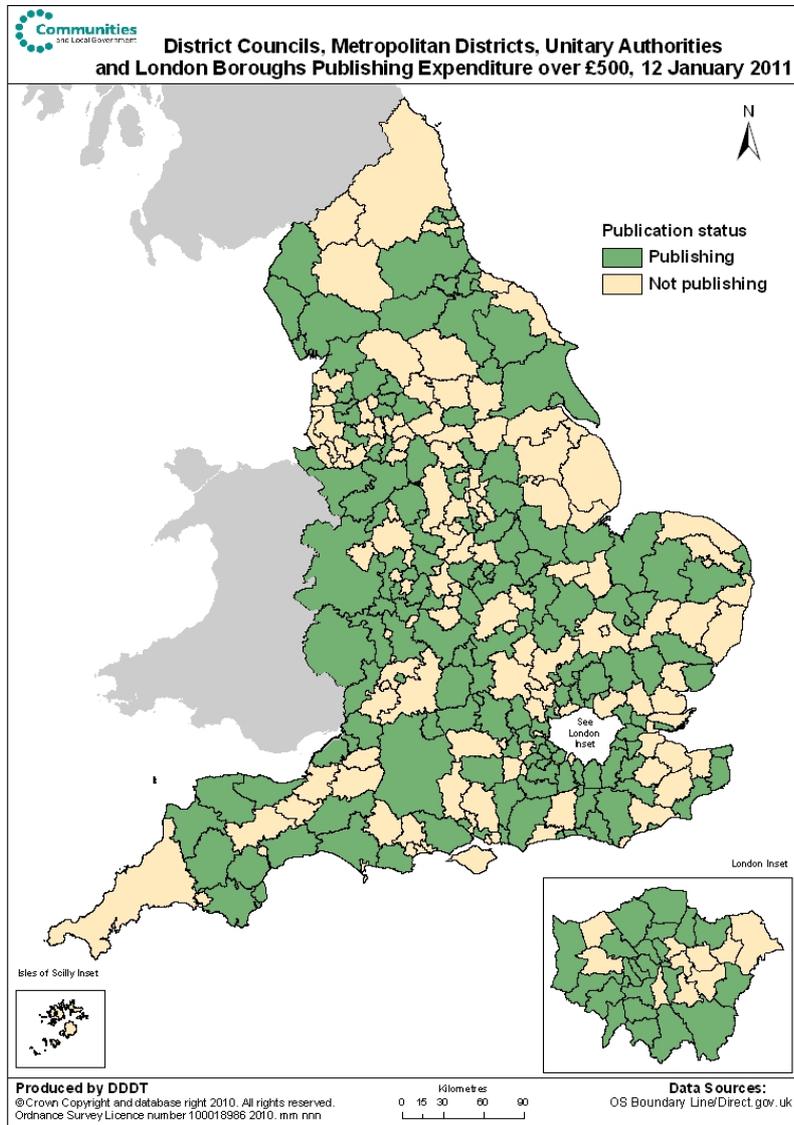
Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Big challenge to get compliance with the existing levers. Publishing contracts is more complex than publishing simple expenditure information, and goes further than local authorities have gone before.

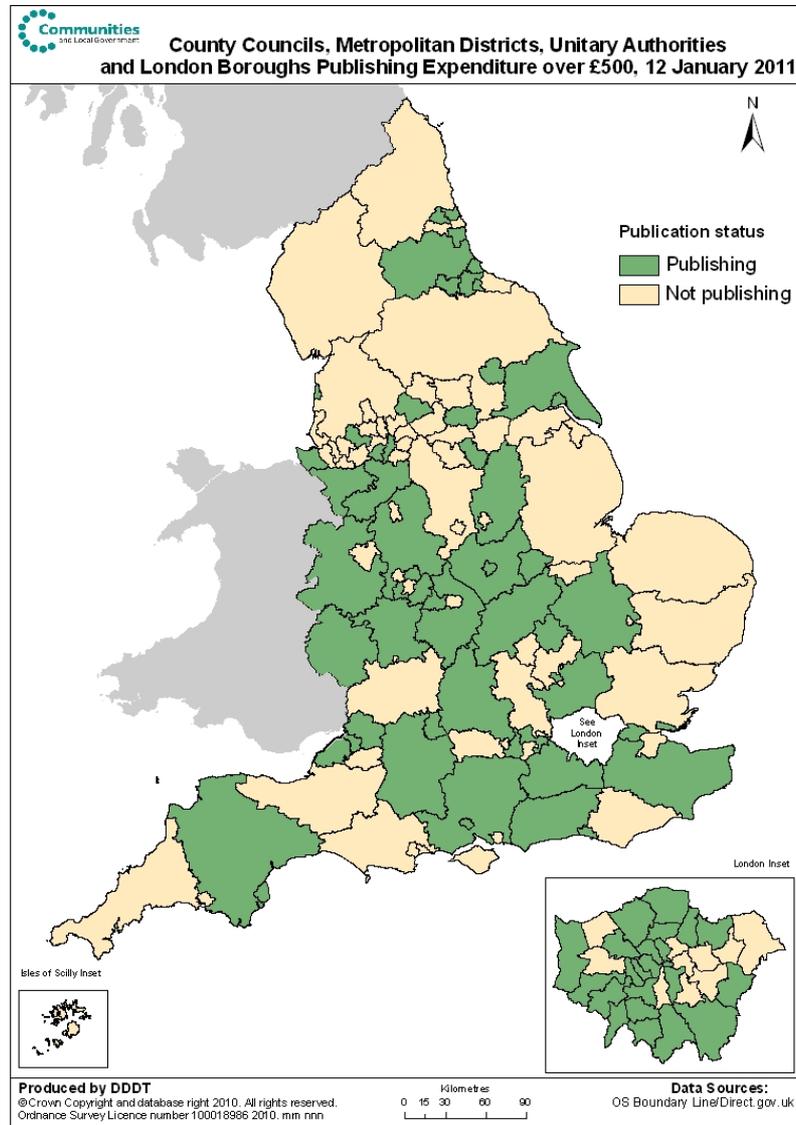
Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Data from councils is key to proper accountability.

Lower Tier



Upper Tier



EXTRACT FROM MJ INTERVIEW BRIEFING 110124

MJ INTERVIEW BRIEFING

Transparency

- Transparency and openness should be the underlying principal behind everything councils do.
- It can help save money in tough times and protect frontline services by exposing waste and unnecessary costs.
- Six months ago I called on councils to put their all spending over £500 online. Today more than half of all councils (238) are publishing, and more are coming on line all the time.
- This week I put those councils that are yet to open up on a weeks' notice.
- The end of the month is the deadline. The public have a right to know how their tax pounds are spent. Practical support on how to publish their data has been published by the local government sector. Not knowing how to do this is no longer an excuse.
- I'll be publishing A Draft Code of Practice - a council transparency code - shortly to help 'slowcoach councils' get on the right track.
- I want to see every aspect of council business opened up to public scrutiny - from details of senior pay and councillor expenses to contracts, tenders and frontline service data.
- If they publish these details front and centre, not buried in the depths of website archives, the 'armchair auditors' in their area and the people they serve will be able to clearly see where the their tax pounds are going and what decisions are being made on their behalf.
- My Department is leading the way across Whitehall and Local Government and is already regularly publishing all its expenditure over £500 online.

KEY FACTS

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- **354 councils in England including Shire districts 201; Unitary 56; Metropolitan 36; London boroughs 33; Shire counties 27.** (433 including fire, waste and police)
- **net current expenditure £121.9 billion 2010-11: 25% council tax; 27% formula grant; 48% specific grants**
- **Non school Reserves: £10.5 billion (March 31 2011)**
- **Sales, fees and charges £11.9 billion**
- **Formula grant £29.4 billion for 2011-12 (2010-11 £32.7 billion, adjusted)**
- **Council Tax collected in 2009-10 £21.4 billion (97.1%)**
- **Business rates collected in 2009-10 £19.6 billion (97.8%)**
- **Cut number of specific grants from 127 in 2010-11 to 23 in 2011-12**

Source: DCLG

WORKFORCE

- **Local Government Headcount: 2,078,100.**
- **Full-Time Equivalent (FTE): 1,456,000**

Source: Q2, 2010, ONS Quarterly Public Sector Employment Survey / LGA <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/15139412>

- **129 Chief Executives are paid more than £150,000.**

Source: GMB 29 September 2010: <http://www.gmb.org.uk/default.aspx?page=1344> total 151 councils but 2 did not reply.

- **Average local government pay £22,732, £15,292 part time (£25,900 national ave)**
- **Care Worker £15,948**
- **Bin man £17,059**
- **School Crossing Assistant (lollypop lady) £12,242**

Source: LGA survey 08/09. (not teachers, chief officers). 212 out of 410 LAs (52%) <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/7419508>

- **Average pension paid in the LGPS is £4,235 per annum**

Source: Superannuation Form 3 (SF3) data covering the period 1 April 2009 - 31 March 2010)

- **Average redundancy payment £4,000**

Source: Local Government Association estimate (December 2010).

- **Statutory weekly redundancy pay is £380, goes up to £400 on 1 February 2011.**

Source: Local Government Employers (LGE) Employment Bulletin December 2010

- **Public sector headcount will fall by 330,000 by 2014/15 plus 80,000 in 2015/16. (160,000 less than June forecast, GMB estimate 100,000 in local government)**

Source: Office for Budget Responsibility, 29-11-10: <http://budgetresponsibility.independent.gov.uk/econ-fiscal-outlook.html>

Q&A

Why did you let your department post loan shark ads on its website?

- As I understand it last October, when we launched the 'transparency timeline' to help the public see what their council spends, the free third party site used had no pop-up advertising.
- It subsequently changed the form and extent of their advertising. When MJ brought to our attention that visitors clicking on the timeline also saw pop-ups, we put a stop the ads appearing.
- We've also made it explicit on the timeline that neither the Department nor any local authorities endorse or control any advertising on the external website.

Why are you making councils pay £1bn Eurofines when you are dramatically cutting their budgets too?

Political response:

- These figures are pure fantasy. Thanks to Gordon Brown signing up to the Lisbon Treaty, fast-track fines could be imposed on the United Kingdom by the European Court of Justice for breaches of EU rules.
- Where these fines are solely due to the fault of a local authority, the burden should fall on the responsible authority not the general taxpayer. Localism cuts both ways - more powers but more responsibility.
- The new Government equally will be stopping the gold-plating of EU regulations which imposes so much extra cost on councils and local firms.

Policy:

- Where the UK is liable for fines as a result of other public bodies failure to comply with obligations it is right that the bodies responsible should in turn be held liable.
- The Bill will create a generic power to recover funds from local authorities and other public bodies in England in order to pay all, or part of, a European Court of Justice (ECJ) financial sanction imposed as a result of an authority's or body's breach of EU law. Ministers would be able to exercise discretion when apportioning fines to ensure that they are fair and proportionate.
- The aim of the power would be to provide a strong incentive for Local Authorities and other public bodies to comply with their European obligations. The expectation is that the risk of fines being allocated to the UK (and therefore the risk to local authorities and other public bodies) would be significantly reduced.

What about councils like Westminster, who you put up on a pedestal for sharing services, but are cutting programmes like Supporting People?

- While we recognise the challenges councils are facing we do expect to see them match our commitment to help the most vulnerable people in society
- We've entirely protected homelessness funding at £400million in the spending review, and took deliberate steps to protect this central funding as much as possible so the impact of the cuts do not fall on those most in need
- Supporting People was relatively shielded from public sector spending reductions necessary to tackle the nation's deficit when compared to nearly all other publicly funded programmes - so nationally for every pound Supporting People funding provided last year 99 pence will be provided this year
- The ring-fence on Supporting People was removed in April 2009 - almost two years ago.
- There is no excuse for councils to be targeting any disproportionate spending reductions on programmes that support the most vulnerable people in their communities - local authorities on average will only receive a reduction in their overall spending power of 4.4 per cent this year and we have taken steps to cap the maximum reduction for any individual council at 8.9 per cent to protect those which are very dependent on Government grants.

What action will you take against local authorities that have not published their spend data by the end of January?

- The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data.
- I'll be publishing A Draft Code of Practice on council transparency shortly to help.
- The taxpayer has a right to see what decisions are being made on their behalf and where their money is being spent 'slowcoach councils' get on the right track.

Do local authorities know what is expected of them?

- Last June I asked every local authority in England to crack on as soon as possible regardless of instructions from Whitehall. [238](#), now say they are publishing their spend data online – [22 of them earlier this week](#). [And more are publishing daily](#).
- In addition, I know more are readying their web site in preparation for data publication. But that still leaves over [100](#) not online.
- The LGA and the Local Public Data Panel have produced guidance to assist authorities.

Deleted: 193 authorities

Deleted: 10

Deleted: 50

Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

- Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas.
- Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

How does this fit with Localism?

- This Government is committed to throwing open the doors of public bodies, to enable the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits.
- Being transparent about how much is spent will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allow local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; and increase accountability of councils to their residents.

What about Whitehall departments?

- Yes, Whitehall should, and is, leading by example - all are putting information online. But it is for individual departments to determine whether they can manage spend data over £500.
- Seven departments are publishing spend of £500 and over (BIS, DCLG, DCMS, DECC, DEFRA, DfT, and GEO).

LOCAL AUTHORITY TRANSPARENCY – PROGRESS NOTE

- Two commitments in PM letter:
 - New items of local government spending over £500 to be published on a council by council basis from January 2011
 - New local government contracts and tender documents for expenditure over £500 to be published in full from Jan 2011.
- c238 LAs of 354 now publishing £500 expenditure data. = c67%. (This figure is based on those Councils who have informed us they are publishing data.). The glass is two thirds full than empty. Number of LAs that are publishing is going up on a daily basis (30 more registered today). Compliance through exhortation has been good.
- The picture is mixed for those that are not yet publishing. LGA is fully supportive. Some LAs are biding their time; others are taking a while to come to terms with the new world. This is a journey with 350 separate bodies so believe progress is good. No LAs have indicated that they won't do it.
- There is clear practical guidance produced by Prof. Nigel Shadbolt and the rest of the Local Public Data Panel on how to get the data out there; guidelines are also there on publication of senior salaries and contracts / tenders. Not knowing how to do it is no longer an excuse: we are promoting the guides at every opportunity.
- Media campaign: increasing pressure on those LAs not yet publishing, moving into a 'naming and shaming' phase of the campaign - "Slow coach councils" coverage at New Year with further press activity today ("One week till your deadline").

Next steps

- Upcoming consultation from SoS on a transparency code (of recommended practice) to strengthen current exhortation. This would extend transparency requirements and include other bodies (police authorities).
- As a minimum, the Code recommends that data to be released should include:
 - expenditure over £500, (including costs, supplier and transaction information);
 - senior salaries, names (with the option for individuals to refuse to consent for their name to be published) job descriptions, responsibilities, budgets and numbers of staff. "Senior salaries" is defined as being above £58,200, which is the Senior Civil Service minimum pay band.
 - an organogram of the staff structure of the local authority;
 - Councillor allowances and expenses;
 - contracts and tenders;
 - policies, performance, audits and service information;
 - data of democratic running of the local authority including the constitution, election results, decision - making processes and records of decisions.
- Ministers seeking LAs to forge ahead beyond original requirement. Ministers want to push local transparency to all areas of LA activity and for this to become business as usual. Further emphasis that the agenda is here to stay.

- If Councils fail to comply, then the Secretary of State will consider making it a legislative requirement. A legislative requirement would mean that failure by a local authority to comply would be unlawful.

SRP action 3.3i

Highlight Report

(Date)

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board: Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting: 20 December 2010

Highlight report number: 1

Covering the period: 20/01/2011 - 03/02/2011

Overall project status this period – **Red- Amber/Red -Amber- Amber/Green-Green**

RAG rating: Amber/Amber	Programme Aims:
Agreed with OGD: Yes	3.3 Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers
	i. Work with local authorities to support publication
	Milestone D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format
	(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone.)
	Now have notification of 254 councils publishing their spend via directgov. All guidances available.

Progress (max 255 characters)

Continuing progress in the numbers of councils publishing.

Next steps (max 255 characters)

Focus now moving to understanding which councils are publishing contracts and salaries.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That councils do not publish £500 spend - due to capacity or political issues

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Contracts and tenders guidance has only recently been published. We are not yet requesting information on whether salaries have been published. There are around 100 LAs yet to publish £500.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of practice - 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 Characters)

Mixed - some councils believe in this and are even going further, others disagree with the approach, preferring to talk to their residents in their own way - not through open data.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Big challenge to get compliance with the existing levers. Publishing contracts is more complex than publishing simple expenditure information, and goes further than local authorities have gone before.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Data from councils is key to proper accountability.

RESTRICTED

Extract from 110202 LG Burdens and Cutting Red Tape Exercise

No	Theme/suggestion	Contact	Summary of progress to date	Please select:
42	<p>Transparency Requirement to publish all spending over £500. Many responses suggest this will be very burdensome and resource intensive to administer, particularly in large unitary authorities</p>	Hulya Mustafa	<p>Blue – text provided in September 2010</p> <p>Red – updated at end of January 2011 (as featured in CRT Top 10)</p> <p>At this point this is not a legal requirement, however in a letter to Council leaders on 4th June, the SoS called on all councils to publish details of spend over £500 by January 2010. Local people should be able to hold politicians and public bodies to account over how their money is being spent and decisions made on their behalf. They can only do that effectively if they have the information they need at their fingertips. Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability will help reduce wasteful expenditure and allow councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas</p>	<p>1. Action taken & no further work required eg revoked legislation</p> <p>2. Work in progress (give timescale)</p> <p>3. After consideration – no further action proposed</p> <p>4. For further consideration by officials</p> <p>5. For further consideration by Ministers</p>

110202 Draft

Finding out how your council spends your money

Most local councils now show information on their websites on how they spend your money. Find out how to get details on what your council spends on items and services over £500, new contracts and tenders, as well as councillor allowances and senior salaries.

How your council is funded [h3]

Your council is funded by a combination of grants from central government, Council Tax and business rates. You can read 'Local government powers and finance' to find out more about where money for your council comes from.

Local government powers and finance

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/Localgovernment/DG_073311]

Seeing what your council spends [h3]

Councils are encouraged to share details on spending with an aim to be more open with residents and to save money. Many councils now provide information on their website to show residents how they spend their budget.

Get details on council payments and contracts more than £500 [h4]

You can access council spending reports on your council website which lets you see payments ('expenditure') for goods and services over £500.

You can also see the details of contracts and tenders worth more than £500. This will put community organisations and small businesses in a better position to pitch for contracts, helping them bring new ideas for how services should be delivered to the table.

Link: [Get monthly spending reports from your council](#)

Link: [Get details on contracts and tenders from your council](#)

Get details on senior salaries and councillor expenses [h4]

You may be able to get details of councillor allowances and expenses on your council website. You can also find out who holds

senior positions in your council and what their salaries and job descriptions are.

Link: [Get senior salary details from your council](#)

Link: [Get details on councillor allowances and expenses](#)

Personal details that have been removed from spending information [h4]

You may see that certain personal information has been 'redacted' from spending reports. This means that specific details have been removed, for example, to protect personal information such as names and addresses.

Link: [Get more information on protecting your personal information \[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Yourrightsandresponsibilities/DG_10031451\]](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/Yourrightsandresponsibilities/DG_10031451)

If your council doesn't publish spending information [h3]

If your council website doesn't have spending information available, you can contact your council to request that they put this type of information on their website.

Link: [Contact your local council](#)

Government transparency – what it is [h3]

Government transparency aims to increase openness by sharing more government information with citizens. Central Government departments and their agencies are increasingly publishing the information they have.

You will be able to see things like how your money is spent by Government Departments and its agencies, which companies have contracts with the government, and how public services perform.

You can also get data sets (information presented in tables) from the data.gov.uk website.

Link: [Transparency at No. 10 \[http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/#\]](http://transparency.number10.gov.uk/#)

Link: [Get spending details for your council](#)

Link: [Data.gov.uk website](http://data.gov.uk)

More useful links

Link: [Local government powers and finance](#)

Also in this section

Link: [Council tax – who pays and how much](#)

Link: [How your local council works](#)

110208
£500 ONLINE

Councils who have not yet published

- Lincolnshire - intend to do so shortly
- Eastbourne - intend to do so shortly.
- Bradford - we expected them to publish today
- Epsom & Ewell
- Nottingham City
- Peterborough

This list is changing by the day – we will let you know if there is any change to this list before the debate.

Extract from draft Permanent Secretary note to Local Authority Chief Executives 8 February 2011

Transparency

I'd like to thank all of you who have met the Secretary of State's request to publish items of expenditure exceeding £500. As of Monday 31 Jan there were only 15 councils not publishing this data, although I understand 2 have made clear they plan to very shortly. You can see your local authority in the list of councils publishing this data at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/> . We will also publish the list of councils yet to do so, and are now consulting on a new Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency.

Extract from final Permanent Secretary note to Local Authority Chief Executives 8 February 2011

Transparency

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/>

I'd like to thank all of you who have met the Secretary of State's request to publish items of expenditure exceeding £500. We will shortly consult on a new Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency.

SRP action 3.3i & Milestone D

Highlight Report

(Date) 9 February 2011

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board (if applicable): Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting:

Highlight report number: 6

Covering the period: 03/03/2011 -
17/02/2011

Programme Aims:

[Enter SRP action number, description and end dates here. Link related milestones]

3.3.Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers
i3.3i: Work with local authorities to support publication

MILESTONE D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format.

(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone)
(max 255 characters)

Deadline for publication was 31 Jan. To date, 349 (out of 354) councils are publishing their spend data. All proposed guidance notes are available and draft Code of Recommended Practice published for consultation.

SRP RAG Rating Green

Agreed with OGD:Yes

IPR RAG Rating Not applicable

Please provide an explanation for any difference in the rating (if applicable)

This is not a programme of work included in the IPR

Progress (max 255 characters)

To date, 349 (out of 354) councils are publishing their spend data. All proposed guidance notes are available and draft Code of Recommended Practice published. Lincolnshire and Eastbourne to publish mid-Feb

Are you on track to start/end action due in next three months Yes

If not, provide short explanation below

(max 255 characters)

Next steps (max 255 characters)

Focus now moving to understanding which councils are publishing contracts and salaries.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That publication of other data is a lower priority for council. Draft Code of Recommended Practice out to consultation (see SRP 3.3.ii) which sets out minimum expectations and considerations should mitigate this.

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

We are not requesting information on whether salaries and contracts have been published. By their nature, these data-sets are harder to monitor.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of Recommended Practice – 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 characters)

Excellent on spend – all but a handful of councils have now published. Only Nottingham City has publicly stated its resistance to publish, but through the local media than directly to DCLG.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Publishing of contracts is significantly more challenging to monitor than publishing of information on spend, and goes further than councils have had to go before.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Availability of data from councils is key to proper accountability.

Do you require support from the SRP Team on this action?

e.g.

No

If so, describe below (max 255 characters)

Town Hall Transparency Q & A – 14 February 2011

Key Messages/Lines to take:

- Transparency is the foundation of accountability. The taxpayer has a right to see how their money is being spent. In this tight fiscal climate cutting waste is extremely important and every penny needs to be accounted for.
- Councils have had six months to start publishing and encouraging that almost all local authorities are now publishing their spend data online. It is easy to do and those councils that haven't started to publish really have no excuses.
- Opening up councils finances to scrutiny is only the start – there is a wealth of information currently locked up and it needs to be brought into the open. Why shouldn't people have information on the decisions being taken by councils, performance data, licensing applications, transport information, hygiene reports for food outlets and so on.
- To support this agenda, the Government has produced a Draft Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency for consultation to enshrine the principles of transparency and set out the requirement to publish data at the minimum expectations and considerations. The Code is currently out for consultation for a period of 5 weeks and due to close on 14th March 2011.
- As part of building the 'right to data', the Freedom of Information Act is being amended to ensure that public authorities proactively release datasets and do so in a re-useable and machine readable format. This will help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by enabling businesses, not-for-profit organisations and others to exploit government datasets for social and commercial purposes.

Key facts and figures:

- The majority of councils (351 of 354 as at 11th February) are now publishing their spend data online. The list of Councils that have told DCLG they have put their spending data online is at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/>
- The timeline of when councils went online or were added to the DCLG list is at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/timeline/>
- The Local Government Association and other experts have produced the following guidance:
 - Publishing £500 spend data: <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>
 - Publishing new contracts and tenders: <http://lgnewcontracts.readandcomment.com/>
 - Publishing senior salary information: <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>

- Local Spending guidance produced by the Local Public Data Panel is available at this link: <http://data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance>
- The Department for Communities is leading the way across Whitehall and Local Government by publishing all its expenditure over £500 online too. This department was the first to publish its 2009/10 expenditure over £500, followed by the first and second quarter spend report for 2010/11. DCLG also began publishing monthly spend data from October at this link: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/transparencyingovernment/spenddata/>

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Draft Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency

Q1: What is expected to be published?

A1: Information should be made easily accessible to the public. For most local authorities it will mean publishing data online and where possible there should be a single access page for data being published. As a minimum, the Code recommends that data to be released should include:

- expenditure over £500, (including costs, supplier and transaction information);
- senior salaries, names (with the option for individuals to refuse to consent for their name to be published) job descriptions, responsibilities, budgets and numbers of staff. "Senior salaries" is defined as being above £58,200, which is the Senior Civil Service minimum pay band.
- an organogram of the staff structure of the local authority;
- Councillor allowances and expenses;
- contracts and tenders;
- policies, performance, audits and service information;
- data of democratic running of the local authority including the constitution, election results, decision - making processes and records of decisions.]

Q2: Does this apply to Parishes?

A2: Yes, it applies to a parish council and a parish meeting of a parish which does not have a separate parish council. The Code specifically applies to:

- a county council;
- a district council;
- a parish council;
- a parish meeting of a parish which does not have a separate parish council;
- a London borough council;
- the Common Council of the City of London;
- 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;

- the London Development Agency;
- a fire and rescue authority (constituted by a scheme under section 2 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 or a scheme to which section 4 of that Act applies, and a metropolitan county fire and rescue authority);
- a police authority, meaning
- (a) a police authority established under section 3 of the Police Act 1996;
- (b) the Metropolitan Police Authority;
- a joint authority established by Part IV of the Local Government Act 1985 (fire and rescue services and transport);
- joint waste authorities, i.e. an authority established for an area in England by an order under section 207 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007;
- 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;
- waste disposal authorities, i.e. an authority established under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1985;
- an Integrated Transport Authority for an integrated transport area in England.

Q3: What is the position regarding local authorities and schools?

A3: We are committed to increasing transparency and information for the public about school funding and expenditure. From January 2011, the DfE will publish information annually about each maintained school's expenditure that is currently provided to the DfE through the Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) framework. The Department for Communities and Local Government has not made a distinction in the Code of Recommended Practice for school salaries but accept that there will be a lot of variation across the country. Whether there is eventual disclosure will need to depend on each authority / teacher's employment relationship and consideration of relevant data protection / privacy issues. DfE are examining other ways to increase availability of information about school spending, contracts and salary costs, in line with other parts of the public sector. We intend to consult those affected by the proposals and take account of the experience of local authorities to ensure this approach is proportionate, tailored and in line with the Government's objective of strengthening the accountability of public services to local people. The Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) are reviewing academies' financial reporting and monitoring arrangements, and their review is taking account of this wider transparency agenda.

Q4: Councils are doing this already, why produce a Code of Recommended Practice?

A4: The Code of Recommended Practice is intended to cover Local Councils as well as other bodies, it is a short, high-level document, intended to set out principles that should underpin local authority data transparency. It also includes some minimum standards, setting out specific data that should be published (£500 expenditure, senior salaries over £58K.etc). It is not a detailed 'how to' piece of guidance.

Q5: What is the legal position of the Code?

A5: The Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 allows the Secretary of State to issue a Code of Recommended Practice as to the publication of information by local

authorities about the discharge of their functions. As the draft Code has been issued for consultation there is a clear expectation that local authorities should comply with it. The Act upon which the Code is based does provide the power, should it be deemed necessary at a later date, to require publication of information specified in the Code by way of regulations, thereby making publication a legislative requirement.

Q6: This is unenforceable, so why are we doing it/what does the Code mean?

A6: The proposed Code is concerned with enshrining the principles of transparency and sets out the requirement to publish data and the minimum expectations and considerations. Opening up Government to public scrutiny is one of the six key actions of decentralisation, and in keeping with decentralisation the Government is issuing a draft Code rather than legislative requirements. However, if Councils fail to comply with this Code once it is in force, then the Secretary of State will consider making it a legislative requirement.

Q7: Aren't you just telling Councils what to do?

A7: The tax payer has a right to see where their money is being spent, to point out waste and decide local priorities. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits. The Code sets high level and minimum expectations but it is not prescriptive and it is for local authorities to determine how they publish data.

Q8: How does this fit with Localism?

A8: This Government is committed to increasing transparency across Whitehall and local authorities in order to make data more readily available to the citizen and allow them to hold service providers to account. Greater transparency will also drive better value for money and bring significant economic and social benefits. Being transparent about how much is spent will work in tandem with decentralisation and foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allow local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; and increase accountability of councils to their residents.

Q9: Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

A9: Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure by allowing councils to become more aware of best practice in other areas. Experian research suggests that local authorities could be over paying by as much as £150m a year: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/newsstories/corporate/1738897>. Greater transparency can also help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic benefits by stimulating innovation around applications and websites.

Q10: Why are local authorities being asked to publish salaries of £58.2K and above when Central Government is not?

A10: This is intended to increase accountability and ensure management salaries in local government are consistent with levels of responsibility. The Government believes that a specific salary threshold will provide clarity for local people. However, this is a consultation, and we are clearly seeking views on whether a different approach - such as a function test - would be a better way for achieving the same standards of transparency for tax payers. The consultation asks whether this or whether disclosure of salary based on role / responsibility is appropriate.

Q11: Does the Code mean I will be able to see what cuts the Council is making to the VCSE?

A11: The Code recommends that grants and payments under contract to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector should be clearly itemised and listed.

Q12: Who are we consulting?

A12: Comments are being sought from any organisations affected by this Code. Discussions are being held with the Local Government Group, National Association of Local Councils, Association of Chief Police Officers and the Local Public Data Panel. This document is available on the Department for Communities and Local Government website: www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/publications/consultations/ and we will be drawing it to the attention of all principal councils in England. It is open to all to make representations on the proposed code, which will be considered carefully.

Q13: Have government done an impact assessment before issuing the Code?

A13: Yes

Q14: How long will the consultation period be for the code?

A14: The consultation will run for 5 weeks from **Monday 7th February 2011** and will close on **Monday 14th March 2011**.

Q15: Why are you only consulting for 5 weeks?

A15: There has been a clear policy direction for many months. Many local authorities are already publishing data and the proposed Code is concerned with enshrining the principles of transparency and set out the requirement to publish data and the minimum expectations and considerations.

Q16: Where do I send responses?

A16: Electronic responses to the consultation have to be in by Wednesday Monday 14th March 2011 sent to: transparencycode@communities.gsi.gov.uk. Hard copies can be sent by post to: Stuart Macleod, Zone 3/J4, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU

All information in responses, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure under freedom of information legislation. If a correspondent requests confidentiality, this cannot be guaranteed and will only be possible if considered appropriate under the legislation. Any such request should explain why confidentiality is necessary. Any automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not be considered as such a request unless you specifically include a request, with an explanation, in the main text of your response

Data – context, standards, comparability

Q17: Data is on its own is meaningless. Where is the context?

A17: Publishing raw data in an accessible format is a first step. Transparency is not about the Government taking data and presenting it in the way it wants to. This Government is committed to real transparency which means publishing all data in full in its most basic

format. This will not make sense to most people but it will make sense to an army of armchair auditors out there and developers, who can understand the data and build innovative programmes to help it become more transparent and accessible to the general public.

Q18: Why are standard formats not being prescribed? As a developer, I need this.

A18: Publishing raw data in an accessible format within the means of the authority is a first step. The Code states that local authority information should be where possible published in open and machine-readable formats. The recommended 5 step journey to a fully open format is:

- * Publish the available data on the web in whatever format;
- ** Make it available as structured data, for example in a spreadsheet rather than a .pdf document;
- *** Publish it in non-proprietary format such as comma separated values (CSV);
- **** User Uniform Resource Identifiers (URIs) to define and describe your data, thereby helping users discover and explore it, and understand its meaning and context, and;
- ***** Using URIs, incorporate links in your data to related external sources.

Q19: Is a Licence required to allow re-use of data?

A19: Information should be published under a licence that allows open reuse, including commercial and research activities, in order to maximise value to the public. The Open Government Licence published by the National Archive is the recommended standard [<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>]. Where any copyright concerns exist with information, these should be made clear.

Q20: Why do it? What are the benefits of publishing data?

A20: Greater transparency of public bodies is at the heart of enabling the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. Where public money is involved there is a fundamental public interest in being able to see how it is being spent. "Public data" means the objective, factual, non-personal data on which policy decisions are based and on which public services are assessed, or which is collected or generated in the course of public service delivery. This data should be the basis for publication of information on the discharge of local authority functions.

Q21: How do I get more data?

A21: All local authorities are encouraged to provide a link to their data pages to data.gov.uk, the repository for this information and being added to all the time. The local authority [opendata/transparency](#) page should also include a point of contact for data enquiries.

Q22: What does the Code say about comparability?

A22: The Code states that LAs should release data in a way that allows the public, developers or the media to present it in new ways and make its meaning more apparent. It specifies minimum data to be published (i.e. £500 organograms, etc). It doesn't specify data headings e.g. date of payment, service codes, transaction numbers, etc, which have been covered separately in practitioner guides. Instead we recommend use of open and standardised formats to support a market-led solution for presenting data.

Q23: What guidance is available?

A23: The Local Government Group has published a set of guides to offer practical help to meet both immediate targets of publishing spending and salaries data, and to adopt approaches that will add most value for local people and public services over the longer term. The LG spending guide [<http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>] was produced in collaboration with the Local Public Data Panel and their spending guidance [data.gov.uk/blog/local-spending-data-guidance].

The Local Government Group also published draft guidance to:

- publishing new contracts and tenders data: <http://lgnewcontracts.readandcomment.com>
- publishing senior salary information: <http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>

Q24: What action will you take against local authorities that have not published their spend data by the end of January?

A24: Councils are expected to be publishing their expenditure information from January, and the clock is ticking. How can they look their residents in the face if they don't? The public have a right to see where money is being spent, what have they got to hide? The public must be able to hold local authorities to account through more transparent data. The driver for this is the benefit to citizens. We want a society of active and engaged citizens who can easily see what decisions have been made and where their money has been spent locally. We want a society where small businesses and social enterprises can easily find out about local authority projects and know how to tender for that business. The Secretary of State is prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure local authorities publish their data.

Q25: How many local authorities are publishing?

A25: The majority of councils (351 of 354 as at 11th February) are publishing expenditure over £500. Given the importance for citizens and communities we will continue to challenge and support those authorities yet to do so.

Q26: Are there plans to maintain a record of local authorities compliant with transparency requirements?

A26: The Department is compiling a list of Local Authorities that are publishing information on spend over £500 to assist local accountability:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/transparency/localgovernmentexpenditure/>

Q27: Will this lead to an increase in requests under the Freedom of Information Act?

A27: We do not think this will be the case and consider there is a case for a reduction in FOI cases as a direct result of local authorities opening up their books and publishing data for citizens to look at.

Q28: How will the FOI Amendment Act and the 'right to data' affect this agenda?

A28: Greater transparency is at the heart of our commitment to open up government to greater scrutiny and allow the public to hold us to account. As part of building the 'right to data', the Freedom of Information Act is being amended to ensure that public authorities proactively release datasets and do so in a re-useable and machine readable format. This will help to deliver better value for money in public spending and bring significant economic

benefits by enabling businesses, not-for-profit organisations and others to exploit government datasets for social and commercial purposes.

Q29: Will this lead to new contracts?

A29: We expect authorities to work within local standing orders when issuing tenders and contracts, and so would only expect contracts and tenders to be published when they would have been issued under local standing orders - we are not expecting the requirement to publish to mean that new tenders and contracts have to be set up for work that previously would have been raised under a purchase order for example. The rationale is that all expenditure over £500 should be transparent, whether it is contained within a contract or as an actual payment. This issue is looked at in more detail in the Practitioners Guide produced by the Local Government Group:

<http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/>
<http://lgnewcontracts.readandcomment.com/>

Q30: Have any councils indicated they will not publish £500 spend details?

A30: No, not to the Department.

DCLG Corporate Transparency

Q31: You are putting all this pressure on local authorities to publish at £500 surely central government should be doing the same?

A31: At the LGA conference in July the Secretary of State committed the department and its arms length bodies in publishing details of spend over £500.

This department was the first to publish its 2009/10 expenditure over £500, followed by the first and second quarter spend report for 2010/11. DCLG also began publishing monthly spend data from October.

DCLG will continue to lead the way and show what can be achieved through transparency. Seven other departments are publishing spend of £500 and over (BIS, DCLG, DCMS, DECC, DEFRA, DfT, and GEO).

Q32: What are you doing about the data sets you hold?

A32: We are compiling a list of all the data the Department and its arms length bodies hold, with the intention of releasing it in an open and standardised format. We have already published a wealth of information on spend along with organograms and Ministerial data:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/transparencyingovernment/>.
The Department will continue to keep the doors open and publish data.

TRANSPARENCY

Key messages:

- The taxpayer has a right to see how their money is being spent.
- I congratulate the overwhelming majority of councils for seizing the initiative and publishing their expenditure. This has been an exceptional response by the sector. Only Nottingham City Council has not seen sense and opened up the books.
- Opening up councils finances is only the start – there is a wealth of information currently locked up and it needs to be brought into the open. Why shouldn't people have information on councillor allowances, senior salaries, responsibilities, performance data and so on.
- Transparency shines a spotlight on waste, establishes greater accountability and efficiency. It will also help open up new markets and improve access for small and local businesses and the voluntary sector.
- If people are to play a bigger role in society, they need to have the tools and information to enable them to do so.

Key facts:

- Local authorities are now publishing expenditure over £500 and new contract / tender documents

Relevant recent policy commitments/announcements:

- **Secretary of State wrote to English local authorities in June 2010 asking them to publish details of £500 expenditure.**
- The Department consulting until 14 March on a Code of Recommended Practice, under the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, to address issues such as the scope, formatting and timing of the duty to publish data.
- The Code proposes the following minimum data sets as standard publication by councils:
 - Expenditure over £500, (including costs, supplier and transaction information).
 - Grants and payments under contract to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector should be clearly itemised and listed.
 - Senior salaries, names (with the option for individuals to refuse to consent for their name to be published) job descriptions, responsibilities, budgets and numbers of staff. "Senior salaries" defined as above £58,200 (irrespective of post) - the Senior Civil Service minimum pay band.
 - An organisational chart of the staff structure of the local authority.
 - Councillor allowances and expenses.

- Copies of contracts and tenders to businesses and to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector.
- Policies, performance, audits and key indicators on the authorities' fiscal and financial position.
- Data of democratic running of the local authority including the constitution, election results, committee minutes, decision - making processes and records of decisions.

Defensive Q & A:

How is this localist?

Transparency allows the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account. It will foster a new spirit of local enterprise; allowing local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify; increasing accountability of councils to their residents.

Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency can help reduce wasteful expenditure and ensure better value for money in public spending. It is easy to do and should not require additional expenditure – it is simply about publishing the information that already exists in councils.

SRP action 3.3i & Milestone D

Highlight Report

(Date) 9 February 2011

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board (if applicable): Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting:

Highlight report number: 6

Covering the period: 17/02/2011 -
03/03/2011

Programme Aims:

[Enter SRP action number, description and end dates here. Link related milestones]

3.3.Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers
i3.3i: Work with local authorities to support publication

MILESTONE D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format.

(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone)
(max 255 characters)

Deadline for publication was 31 Jan. To date, 351 (out of 354) councils are publishing their spend data, and only one has said that they will not. All guidance notes are available and draft Code of Recommended Practice published for consultation.

SRP RAG Rating Amber

Agreed with OGD:Yes

IPR RAG Rating Not applicable

Please provide an explanation for any difference in the rating (if applicable)

This is not a programme of work included in the IPR

Progress (max 255 characters)

To date, 351 (out of 354) councils are publishing their spend data. All proposed guidance notes are available and draft Code of Recommended Practice published. Lincolnshire and Eastbourne to publish mid-Feb.

Are you on track to start/end action due in next three months Yes

If not, provide short explanation below

(max 255 characters)

Next steps (max 255 characters)

Focus now moving to understanding which councils are publishing contracts and salaries.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That publication of other data is a lower priority for council. Draft Code of Recommended Practice out to consultation (see SRP 3.3.ii) which sets out minimum expectations and considerations should mitigate this.

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Monitoring compliance with publishing contracts data is more challenging. LG Group consider that publishing the detail of contracts is tricky and want to negotiate a change in the expectations.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of Recommended Practice – 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 characters)

Excellent on spend – all but a handful of councils have now published. Only Nottingham City has publicly stated its resistance to publish, but through the local media than directly to DCLG.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Publishing of contracts is significantly more challenging to monitor than publishing of information on spend, and goes further than councils have had to go before. LG Group are concerned by the additional challenge and the potential burden.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Availability of data from councils is key to proper accountability.

Do you require support from the SRP Team on this action?

e.g.

No

If so, describe below (max 255 characters)

110303 Draft contribution to submission

Background

1. No. 10 and Oliver Letwin have suggested making available a template for local authorities to use when publishing details of funding to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations. The template is intended to make it easier for local authorities to publish the information and ensure uniformity / comparability of data across areas. You agreed to explore the possibility of producing a guidance note with LG Group on this.

Consideration

2. Producing the exact data as specified in the No. 10 template would represent a new data collection burden on local authorities. Given current requirements to reduce central data collections we do not recommend using this template or these specific data headings. However, there is a considerable overlap with existing collections through the Local Government Finance Revenue Outturn forms, with annual data currently available and quarterly returns to start from the new financial year.

Table 1: Comparison between No 10 template and Revenue Outturn data

No. 10 suggested data list	Revenue Outturn
Council staff and expenses	[what is this data heading?]
Administration	Central services / Running Costs
Contracts with charities and voluntary sector	No specific collection
Contracts with private sector	No specific collection
Council-run services	Service breakdown

3. The significant gap in available data is the ability to distinguish the value of contracts entered into with charities and voluntary sector and the private sector. Existing data is published on the basis of services received rather than the type of supplier. Chris Taggart from Openly Local is already mashing £500 expenditure information together with Registered Charity Numbers, using names as unique identifiers. However, there are no equivalent codes used to identify, for example, grass roots community groups or to distinguish social enterprise from other types of businesses. The guidance that the LG Group have produced on publishing £500 does recommend that Councils themselves publish Charity Numbers as an additional field, but it is not clear this information is routinely held within a local authorities financial system, so it could take time for them to add. Local authorities are expected to now disclose full documentation for any new contracts that they sign. However, this is new and complex area of work, and it will take time for a full picture of contracts to emerge as they may run for a number of years.
4. The current consultation on the Code of Recommended Practice on Data Transparency proposes that grants and payments under contract to the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations should be clearly itemised and listed. We are also asking whether there are other existing data sets that could be specified to increase transparency in this area. The information will exist in the round, as local authority expenditure and contract information continues to come on stream, but there is currently no automatic way for VCSE data in its totality to be extracted. Similarly, the template oversimplifies the work needed to calculate percentage changes in funding. No such benchmarking data exists and, as Chris Taggart's analysis has identified 195,000 individual supplier relationships with 40% of local authorities, to accurately work this out is likely to represent a significant extra burden.

5. We recommend engaging with local authorities to determine whether and how this data could be extracted through future annual and quarterly collections. This work can be done through our local government consultative group and influence future Revenue Outturn collections. [DN: SoS likes Qs in bold so that he can tick/cross them]
6. A criticism levelled at the £500 expenditure information published to date by local authorities is that, without adaptation or visualisations, data in machine readable formats is not accessible to the general public. The proposed template is one potential response but simple representation of the existing data is needed to make it more accessible. Work is already in hand by individual developers and armchair auditors, and the LG Group are also developing an application utilising the £500 data to demonstrate the capabilities of their Knowledge Hub.
7. While we can not currently produce the VCSE data No 10. has suggested we could offer to target the other sets in Revenue Outturn forms data to better visualise trends on a consistent basis across local authorities. [DQ: Can we include this in any forthcoming hack day or similar activity or commit to working it up in-house?].

SRP action 3.3i & Milestone D

Highlight Report

(Date) 10 March 2011

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board (if applicable): Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting:

Highlight report number:

Covering the period: 03/03/2011 -
17/03/2011

Programme Aims:

[Enter SRP action number, description and end dates here. Link related milestones]

3.3.Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers

3.3i: Work with local authorities to support publication

MILESTONE D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format.

(Add a short headline description of overall status of action and milestone)
(max 255 characters)

Deadline for publication was 31 Jan. To date, 353 (out of 354) councils are publishing their spend data, and only one has said that they will not. All guidance notes are available and draft Code of Recommended Practice published for consultation.

SRP RAG Rating Amber

Agreed with OGD:Not relevant

IPR RAG Rating Not applicable

Please provide an explanation for any difference in the rating (if applicable)

This is not a programme of work included in the IPR

Progress (max 255 characters)

353 (out of 354) councils are publishing their spend data. All proposed guidance notes are available and draft Code of Recommended Practice published for consultation.

Are you on track to start/end action due in next three months No

If not, provide short explanation below
(max 255 characters)

All LAs except one have published spend. We are not able to monitor publication of the other types of data. It is highly unlikely that all LAs will publish full contract information in the immediate future. Working with LG Group on a pragmatic approach.

Next steps (max 255 characters)

Understanding which councils are publishing contracts and salaries and working with LG Group on revised guidance.

Top Risks (max 255 characters)

That publication of other data is a lower priority for council. Draft Code of Recommended Practice out to consultation (see SRP 3.3.ii) which sets out minimum expectations and considerations should mitigate this.

Top Issues (max 255 characters)

Monitoring compliance with publishing contracts data is more challenging. LG Group consider that publishing the detail of contracts is tricky and in revised guidance taking a pragmatic approach.

Interdependencies (max 255 characters)

Code of Recommended Practice – 3.3.ii

Buy – In (max 255 characters)

Excellent on spend. Only Nottingham City has publicly stated its resistance to publish, but through the local media than directly to DCLG. Starting to analyse who is publishing contracts data.

Challenge and Complexity (max 255 characters)

Publishing of contracts is significantly more challenging to monitor than publishing of information on spend, and goes further than councils have had to go before. LG Group are concerned by the additional challenge and are suggesting a pragmatic approach.

Benefits (max 255 characters)

Localism and decentralisation must be underpinned by citizen action based on understanding of what is happening in a local area. Availability of data from councils is key to proper accountability.

Do you require support from the SRP Team on this action?

e.g.

No

If so, describe below (max 255 characters)

SRP action 3.3i & Milestone D

Highlight Report

(Date) 10 March 2011

Action Owner: NAMES REDACTED

Action SRO: David Prout

Programme Board (if applicable): Transparency Programme Board

Date of next Programme Board meeting:

Highlight report number:

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17/03/2011

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Do you require support from the SRP Team on this action?

e.g.

No

If so, describe below (max 255 characters)

**Briefing for BBC Interview on Council Transparency
(23rd March 2011 – 10.30am)**

Examples of Spending:

Bolton:

- £857 on Heineken beer – which the council says was sold on to the public
- £84,000 on taxis – which the council says was for vulnerable children and adults
- £2,978 on tea, coffee and biscuits for meetings
- £40,067 on a food supply company called “The Potato Man”

Bury:

- Over £1,000 for individually wrapped, single portion cakes and flapjacks
- £500 on a new media guru
- £2995 on interior decorators
- £1914 at the world’s oldest jeweller, Garrard
- £689 on public sector branding

Leeds:

- £0.9m on furniture – which they say is for IT and infrastructure for schools
- £467,674 on taxis – which they say is for vulnerable children and adults
- £331,234 on food and drink – which they say is mainly for schoolchildren, social care facilities and meals on wheels

Key messages:

- Openness and transparency has the potential to transform government. It can strengthen people’s trust, shine a spotlight on waste and open up markets to local business and the voluntary sector.
- The taxpayer has a right to see how their money is being spent, go through the books and hold councils to account.
- Very grateful for the positive response to publishing £500 expenditure. A really good example of councils just getting on with it. The one remaining council (Nottingham City Council) that hasn’t started publishing really has no excuses.
- I also commend those local authorities who are forging ahead in becoming truly open by allowing open and free use of their data such as Northamptonshire County Council, Trafford Borough Council or North Yorkshire.
- There is a wealth of other information currently locked up and it needs to be brought into the open: the decisions taken, councillor expenses, licensing applications, transport information, hygiene reports and so on. Opening up the books to scrutiny is just the start.
- I’ve consulted on a Code of Practice to enshrine the progress made to date and set out the core principles of data transparency. The Code will help give local communities and taxpayers the necessary tools and information they need to hold their councils and democratically elected councillors properly to account.

Key facts:

- Nottingham has stated they will publish the information only when regulations are in place.
- The Department is leading the way across Whitehall and local government:
 - In August 2010 the Department published its 2009/10 spend.
 - In September 2010 we published the first quarter spend for 2010/11, followed by the second quarter spend in October. Since then we have been publishing spend data on a monthly basis.
 - In September 2010 the Department also released historical spend data concerning 2008/09 and 2009/10.
 - All data was released in an open and standardised format.

Relevant recent policy commitments/announcements:

- You wrote to all leaders of English local authorities on 4th June 2010 requesting they publish:
 - New items of local government spending over £500 to be published on a council-by-council basis from January 2011.
 - New local government contracts and tender documents for expenditure over £500 to be published in full from January 2011.
- You committed the Department and its arms length bodies to match the local government challenge by also publishing details of spend over £500 at the Local Government Association conference in July 2010.
- Protection of Freedoms Bill introduced to Parliament on 11 February by Theresa May. Includes proposals to amend the Freedom of Information Act and provide for publication of datasets for re-use and in a reusable format

Defensive Q & A:

Q1 - Councils are doing this already, why produce a Code of Recommended Practice?

- The Code is intended to cover councils as well as other public bodies, it is a short, high-level document, intended to set out principles and next steps to greater transparency. It provides a push to ensure all councils reach standards being set by the best.
- The consultation closed on Monday 14th March 2011. Around 250 responses have been received, which we are now considering.

Q2 - What is the legal position of the Code? This is unenforceable, so why are we doing it/what does the Code mean?

- The Code gives cover for local authorities to publish more information for use and reuse. It enshrines transparency principles and sets clear minimum standards recommended to local authorities.

Q3 - We have Freedom of Information already. Why is this necessary?

- This is about changing the relationship between citizen and state. Taxpayers should not have to search high and low for information: it should be easily accessible when they want it.
- Our actions complement broader changes to FOI proposed by the Government. We want to extend FOI to a range of additional bodies, such as the LGA and the Protection of Freedoms Bill, introduced to Parliament, proposes the need for proactive publication of datasets for reuse and reusable formats.

Q4 - Aren't you just telling Councils what to do?

- Local people have see a right to see what is going on behind closed doors and this Government is committed to throwing open those doors. The public should be able to hold politicians and public bodies to account about how their money is spent and the decisions made on their behalf.

Q5 - Isn't this just an extra burden at a time when you're imposing cuts?

- Rather than creating a new financial burden greater transparency and accountability can help reduce wasteful expenditure and deliver better value for money in public spending. Any capital costs are risible relative to benefits.

Q6 - Why are local authorities being asked to publish salaries of £58.2K and above when Central Government is not?

- The proposed threshold is in line with the pay of the lowest rung of the Senior Civil Service (SCS). We believe that this is the right level for increasing accountability and ensuring that management salaries in local government are consistent with levels of responsibility.

- However, we asked for views on whether a different approach - such as a function test - would be a better way for achieving the same standards of transparency for tax payers.

Q7 - None of this information is useful – you’re just encouraging councils to dump meaningless data into the public domain.

- Agree that we should not simply dump data out there but this is the sort of information taxpayers consistently want to have.
- We want councils to reveal the information that they hold and release it when people want it. We should not expect the public to know what is useful in advance nor should public bodies try to decide for them.

Q8 – If you expect councils to act in this way, shouldn’t it apply equally to central government?

- Central Government spends billions of tax pounds every year and transparency is just as important.
- I don’t believe in one rule for councils and one for my Department, which also publishes expenditure information above £500 in line with local authorities. BIS, DCMS and the Government Equalities Office are doing the same.

Q9 The proposals present a cost to the taxpayer for financial gain by private companies

- The information has been paid for by taxpayers. It is an underused resource that could realise significant economic benefits by enabling businesses and non-profit organisations to build innovative applications and websites using public data

Transparency countdown to January deadline

Press office will work with the transparency team, DirectGov and the e-news team to co-ordinate the final month of the transparency campaign. We will need to keep the transparency pages, timeline and data regularly updated, which will mean regular maintenance of the DirectGov database. They are already working with the LG group to update our database of active councils

Communications plan summary

This note covers communications work over the final campaign push up to the deadline for councils to put spending over £500 online (31 January).

Our transparency agenda and messages need to steadily ratchet up to a crescendo at deadline. As part of that we propose to have 3-4 key announcements in January.

The CLG list currently sits at 115 councils – less than half of all councils. DirectGov are working on next update. Ideally we would be able to announce a 150 council milestone for start of January. Worth noting that halfway point is 177.

31 Dec – New years' resolution

Announce only one month to go. Ministers to say with time running out councils should make a resolution to get online ASAP. Move transparency timeline to front of newsroom.

We are currently updating the CLG list, in co-ordination with the LG group, there is a possibility we could hit 150 by the New Year.

16 Jan - Sky interview/Sunday papers briefed

The Secretary of State is due to be interviewed by Sky on 16 January, with the intention to focus on transparency – with just over two weeks to go it is a good opportunity to talk about the wider implications of transparency policy, update on numbers and set out the code of practice rules to let bloggers or you-tube journalists film public council meetings.

We will also need fresh data for this interview and some analysis around trends in geography, format, council type.

One week to go

This should be the beginning of a week-long countdown to put the pressure on councils that are yet to act by naming and shaming - Who will be the last council to get online? We could also take a deeper look at the breakdown of councils who have published so far – are there any regions with a particularly poor publishing rate, how many councils are publishing truly transparent data, has there been a peak in the number of councils publishing, what are the biggest spends?

31 Jan Final Deadline

On reaching the deadline we propose to name and shame those councils that have not complied in time. We would also have to announce how the SoS intends to deal with the offending councils. In addition we would have a daily Final week countdown

Other possible hooks

23 December - BBC FOI request for £500 correspondence with councils

20 Jan - SoS visit to Birmingham possible transparency visit (to note)

Tbc - 177 is another key milestone. This is the halfway mark (354 councils), and depending on timing, could give an opportunity to either praise or criticise councils' progress.

Ramp up DCLG online presence

At the start of January the transparency news pages/timeline window should be moved to a permanent feature slot on the front page of newsroom with a headline - transparency deadline 31 Jan.

In co-ordination with the DirectGov team the timeline should be regularly updated - with the deadline added to it - weekly till w/c 17th, then twice a week till deadline (daily if possible in final week). This will help create a sense of momentum

In the final week daily twitter updates highlighting new online councils to be made linking to our multimedia tools and to the list of transparent councils.

Digi/e-comms should also explore what other online tools could be used alongside our timeline – based on analysis of the DirectGov data– such as maps, countdown, thermometer, graphs, charts etc.

Other activity

- Final guidance on publication
Action: transparency team to give press details
- Poss. Transparency app competition
Action: This is with the SoS – he will have comments shortly.
- When will we hit 150 councils?
Action: transparency team to give details
- Policy around code of practice – bloggers etc
Action: transparency team/Sheridan to give details
- Analysis of list – geography, district/county, etc
Action: transparency team to give details
- Daily Final week countdown
Action: press / digi to set up daily twitters and timeline updates.
- Name and shame councils still to deliver - power to require information
Action: transparency team to start preparing details
- Media Partners
Action: Matt to work with MJ on options;
Action: press to contact Guardian and Tele data correspondents to set out Jan's plan

Extract of Note of SRP action 3.2i, ii, 3.3i iii, 3.4ii assurance meeting 20 December 2010

Attended by: Hulya Mustafa, NAME REDACTED, NAME REDACTED
Selvin Brown and NAME REDACTED

Amber	<p><u>Programme Aims:</u></p> <p>3.3 Help local authorities publish, in an open and standardised format, (a) items of spending, contracts and tenders above £500 and (b) job titles and salaries for senior council officers</p> <p>i. Work with local authorities to support publication</p> <p>Milestone D. Local authority spending, contracts and tenders above £500, and job titles and salaries for senior council officers, published in an open and standardised format</p>
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1. SB explained the purpose of the meeting.
 - Revised SRP published as part of business plan on November 8th.
 - We meet No 10 officials fortnightly to report progress on all SRP actions and to discuss major policy issues. We also report progress fortnightly to the DCLG Executive Team.
 - We report publicly each month on actions due to start and finish that month. The reports are published on our website and the No 10 tracker. For any actions missed a line to take must be agreed with the Secretary of State, prior to publication to explain why.
 - The Secretary of State has quarterly progress meetings with the Minister for Government Policy and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to update on progress with SRP actions.
 - In order to report progress at these meetings we have devised a one page highlight report, which is completed by each action and is fed into a central database.

2. Governance - Which Board do you report to?
 - A programme board is in place and risks are being actively managed on all transparency actions (section 3)

3. How are things progressing with your actions?
 - Milestone D – SB reported that No.10 expect 100% before the action will be considered as complete. Hulya explained that 100% compliance is unlikely as publication is not compulsory.
 - Action: Ruth Miller to prepare a note by 5 January 2011 for No.10.

Extract from 110202 January actions with lines to take

SRP Actions due to end by end of January 2011 and associated milestones

Ref	Action	Progress to date
3.3i	Work with local authorities to support publication	<p>Complete</p> <p>We have supported local authorities - the Secretary of State wrote to all councils in June (http://www.communities.gov.uk/newsstories/newsroom/1672156) and the Local Government Group has published guidance on local transparency (http://lgtransparency.readandcomment.com/)</p> <p>Contact: NAME REDACTED</p> <p>[Note: As at 3 Feb there are nine local authorities who are not publishing, to be confirmed on 4 Feb. Media activity is planned for Monday.]</p>

Status of missed SRP Actions from previous reports

Ref	Action	Progress to date
3.3ii	Require publication by a Code of Practice on council transparency, through the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 or other legislation	<p>Still not complete</p> <p>The Code of Practice will published on 7 February. This follows a review to strengthen the code after the deadline of 31st January for councils to publish data online.</p> <p>Policy contact: NAME REDACTED</p>

Extract of notes from September visits to local authorities

Council 1

The Council published spend data of +£1,000 before the General Election and will publish spend data +£500 from early October. See this as an important tool in driving down costs. No specific examples yet, but see the availability of data as an opportunity for competitors to scrutinise, as well as helping officers to consider costs before services/goods are procured ie 'what is my line going to be' someone asks about this spend is a good question to ask.

Originally published data as pdf, but added excel after request from public. Have only provided raw data and let others do the work – local developer has picked this up, and the press has run a story on his work. Have not had any requests from developers/public for release of additional data-sets, conversations have only been around format. Want to respond to customer need than prescribe additional data sources, so waiting for requests to come before go further. Now looking into feasibility of publicising income data, but this is more difficult.

Local developer has picked up spend data and produced 3 press enquiries into financial data. Approx 5 enquiries per month into financial data received by finance team. Performance team report significant increase in requests for information, but not necessarily from new enquirers.

Haven't had an excessive number of requests for further information. There have been a number of enquiries from the press that have, rather, not resulted in stories in the press as the Council has been able to explain the spend. Expecting more questions to be raised after party conferences and in the run up to elections next year.

See logic in moving towards publishing everything but using financial data in a different way – too much data becomes meaningless to the public and requires processing by an intermediary to become useful. Need to think about different audiences and thresholds above which spend data made available: ie for a district council there probably won't be many invoices over £500, but for a large unitary there could be 10 times the volume.

Council 2

Engagement/stakeholder management exercises with the local press, Tax Payers Alliance etc. have been crucial to opening up the debate and generating largely positive coverage in the local press.

Internal comms exercise has also been important to success - e.g. asking budget managers to frame spend descriptors accurately.

Transparency work has been linked to their 'You Choose' campaign on the deficit challenge - road shows and media campaign - possibly helping to deflect some negative coverage.

£500 spend information is being rolled out by service area rather than all at once.

Spend data has been published in pdf to date - not in open and linked formats. Concerned about keeping control and contextualising the data.

Publication of spend data has been a relatively simple exercise - Oracle system means it is easy to run reports. What about authorities which don't have Oracle or

similar reporting systems in place?

Time and care is required for vetting/redacting/taking account of the data protection act etc. and there is considerable uncertainty around these issues.

Would welcome some degree of prescription/guidance on what should and shouldn't be published and how it should be published.

Have not had any support from LGA or IDeA - think they should be more proactive in supporting local authorities.

Council 3

The transparency work began with the initiative to publish data on invoices over £500 two years ago. Impetus was new management team with a desire to be more customer focussed and willingness to be challenged. Leader of the Council sees it as part of supporting small businesses – important to show when contracts are to be available and what the council is spending on existing contracts

At present all information is in PDF but the council will be moving to open formats in line with the S of S's letter. The resource implications have been minimal (about one person) and is made easier by the central arrangements for procurement that the council have introduced as part of their procurement transformation strategy (involves having a central team with one person posted in each service directorate to deal with raising all purchase orders and inputting the data). Using COA solutions as their finance system – used by about 50% of District councils.

Not 'courted' the local media and there has been very little press coverage; the CEx had been interviewed a couple of times but no negative coverage. Had expected some difficulties over the items relating to restaurant supplies but these had not been picked up by the press.

Extract from Structural Reform Plan Update

**DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
EXECUTIVE TEAM**

DCLG – EX(11)04

From: Andrew Campbell/Selvin Brown

Meeting Date: 17 January 2011

Structural Reform Plan Update

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to update the Executive Team on the Structural Reform Plan (SRP) implementation performance to date, key risks and next steps.

Key Forward Risks – January 2011

7. We have also been made aware by Action Owners (Deputy Directors) that this month (January 2011) we are likely to miss the following four actions and one milestone:

- i. **Local Authorities publishing all spend** over £500, salaries and job titles (action 3.3i and milestone D). We have notification that as at mid-January 194 Councils are publishing out of some 350. We expect this number to increase, but despite good work by DCLG on transparency we do not think all local authorities will be publishing by the end of January;

Extracts from Transparency Progress Reports from Deputy Director responsible for transparency (Hülya Mustafa) to Baroness Hanham

TRANSPARENCY – PROGRESS REPORT 14th OCTOBER

Local authority transparency

We published a list of councils publishing their £500 spend on 1 October (around 65). At the same time, the LGA published a draft 'how to' guidance on £500 and salaries and workforce organisations. There was a short period for comments which is due to end this week.

The publicity campaign around the £500 is going well, with the MJ publishing a series of case studies, and hosting a roundtable discussion. There are also several conferences and opportunities to speak. I spoke at a Digital Innovation conference last week, to an audience of mainly service providers. SoS is speaking at an event for Scrutiny Councillors on 10th November, and you have been invited to contribute to an LGA online conference at the beginning of November on 'open data for accountability and improvement.' Advice will come to you shortly about what you may wish to contribute (eg a video, a statement etc).

We are currently working up a Code of Practice to add weight to practitioner guidance on £500, salaries and contracts / tenders. Engagement with the LGA and other Government Departments with an interest (Home Office, DfT and Defra) is underway. The Code will need to support the January deadline for action by local authorities and also account for other work going on around the 'right to data'.

TRANSPARENCY – PROGRESS REPORT 1 December

Local authority transparency

Around 125 councils are now publishing their £500 spend.

We continue to maintain the profile of spending transparency. Since the last update you have addressed a couple of events, and Irene Lucas is speaking at a conference on 7 December.

TRANSPARENCY – PROGRESS REPORT 2 March

Local authority transparency

All but one council is now publishing their £500 spend (Nottingham City Council).

Extracts from briefing to Andrew Campbell for Structural Reform Plan meetings with Number 10

Extract from briefing dated 6 September 2010

**Structural Reform Plan – Meeting with No.10 Implementation Unit
4.30 - 5.30pm, 08 September
DG Meeting Rooms 1&2, Eland House**

1. Actions from the last meeting
 - Monthly update on transparency progress by specific local authorities (Jane Todorovic)

Transparency: Further examples of early action on publication of data by local authorities

Line to take:

- The handout provides some more details.
 - We have published, on the CLG website, a list of councils that have already put their information on line.
 - A function on direct gov also allows the general public to enter their postcode and find out if their council has data on the above £500 spend, or contracts and invitations to tender, online.
 - Jane may wish to provide more details.
2. SRP actions at risk
 - Publication of local authority spend over £500

Prepare local authorities for publication of spend, tenders and contracts over £500 (action 5.3)

- We have made progress - SoS wrote to Council Leaders on 4 June. CLG has published its own spend over £500.
- We have published, on the CLG website, a list of councils that have already put their information on line.
- A function on direct gov also allows the general public to enter their postcode and find out if their council has data on the above £500 spend, or contracts and invitations to tender, online.
- There is a risk that not all local authorities will publish data - our mitigation is we will set up a monitoring system through direct.gov to track progress.

Extract from briefing dated 22 September 2010

**Structural Reform Plan – Meeting with No.10 Implementation Unit
4.30 - 5.30pm, 22 September
DG Meeting Rooms 1&2, Eland House**

1. Actions from the last meeting

Ivan Collister has not prepared a note from the last meeting but he had three actions:

- to find out whether a Prime Ministerial letter can be sent to those authorities who have published transparency data (Ivan - No.10 has told us that he hasn't had time to do this). The letter should say this is all very important (and Hulya told me that you would use an extract from the letter in the letter that the SofS will send on Friday 1 Oct to those LAs which have not yet published).

Extract from briefing dated 6 December 2010

**Structural Reform Plan – Meeting with No.10 Implementation Unit
14.00 to 15.00, 09 December 2010
DG Meeting Room 4 and 5, 6th Floor, Eland House**

3. Update on major programmes
 - Transparency
 - 102 councils are now publishing their spend. Draft Code of Recommended Practice about to go to Ministers for clearance. LGA about to publish their guide on contracts.
 - Two Ministerial speeches recently, and two press notices on local govt spending, on back of central govt spend publicity.

Extract from briefing dated 30 December 2010

**Structural Reform Plan – Meeting with No.10 Implementation Unit
14.00 to 15.00, 06 January 2011
DG Meeting Room 1 and 2, 6th Floor, Eland House**

1. Actions from the last meeting

NAME REDACTED to consider the comms strategy for transparency, in terms of opportunities to encourage publication by local authorities (following general discussion on transparency and challenges around whether all local authorities will publish information on contacts over £500 and salaries above SCS PB1)

On track. Paper commissioned and due to be ready for 20 January.

3. Update on major programmes
 - Transparency
 - Have notification of 114 councils publishing their spend via directgov. Draft Code of Recommended Practice awaiting clearance. LG Group have published their draft guide on contracts and revised versions of the other Practitioners Guides for consultation.

Extract from briefing dated 17 January 2011

Structural Reform Plan – Meeting with No.10 Implementation Unit
14.00 to 15.00, 20 January 2011
DG Meeting Room 5 and 6, 6th Floor, Eland House

1. Actions from the last meeting

Outstanding DCLG actions from the meetings on 9 December and 6 January are:

- NAME REDACTED to consider the comms strategy for transparency, in terms of opportunities to encourage publication by local authorities (following general discussion on transparency and challenges around whether all local authorities will publish information on contacts over £500 and salaries above SCS PB1)

5. Forward look

- January progress report due to be published Friday 4 February 2011 (actions 1.1iv, 2.3ii, 2.11i and ii, 3.2i, 3.2ii, 3.3i, 3.5iii, 4.1iii, 4.2i and ii, 4.5iv, 4.6iii, 4.7iii)
 - We provided Number 10 with an indication of the actions we will miss this month. We are likely to miss four actions:
 - Action 3.3i Work with local authorities to support publication (of items of spending, contracts and tenders over £500 and job titles and salaries for senior council officers.

Extract from briefing dated 1 February 2011

Structural Reform Plan – Meeting with No.10 Implementation Unit
14.00 to 15.00, 3 February 2011
DG Meeting Room 1 and 2, 6th Floor, Eland House

5. Forward look

The Code of Practice will be published on 7 February. This follows a review to strengthen the code after the deadline of 31 Jan for councils to publish data online.

Extract from briefing dated 15 February 2011

4. Update on major programmes

- Transparency
 - Every Council, with the sole exception of Nottingham, is signed up to publish details of their spending.

LGEG - LGF WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 13 – 2 September 2010

Transparency

General (Hülya Mustafa):

- Around 40 councils now publishing £500 spend. Further push expected around 20th September with a publicity event. Draft guidance due out that day.

LGR GROUP WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 15 – 16 September 2010

Transparency

General (Hülya Mustafa):

- The £500 guidance was agreed by the Panel and put up on their blog for comments. In the new world this possible constitutes the beginning of 'consultation', but we are checking with lawyers.

LGR GROUP WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 16 – 23 September 2010

Transparency

General (Hülya Mustafa):

- Preparing advice for the SoS on options for a 'Code of Practice' for the £500 guidance in light of plans for a broader 'Right to Data' from Cabinet Office.

LGR GROUP WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 24: 18 November 2010

Transparency

- We are hoping to get some coverage of councils' £500 spend - we are up to 100 councils now.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 01: 6 January 2011

Transparency

- Month of intensive action to encourage remaining LAs to publish details of their £500 expenditure has commenced (around 150 have now published).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 05: 04 February 2011

Transparency (NAME REDACTED/Hulya Mustafa)

- Only 10 councils have missed the deadline for publishing spend over £500. We are writing to them this week to confirm planned publication dates and making this information public.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 06: 11 February 2011

Accountability & Transparency (Hulya Mustafa)

- Only 6 councils have yet to publish spend over £500 with Nottingham, the only council to say it will not be publishing until there is a legal requirement. The BBC has run a story on this (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-12414268>).

LOCALISM GROUP WEEKLY UPDATE NOTE

Issue 09: 4 March 2011

Accountability & Transparency (Hülya Mustafa):

- Nottingham City Council non-publication of £500 spend was noted in PMQs by the PM, and the Leader of the Opposition was invited to comment: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110302/debtext/110302-0001.htm#11030269000013> (Column 294).