<u>Public Data Group views on the National Information Infrastructure prototype</u>

The following comments represent initial views from the Public Data Group on the National Information Infrastructure prototype document and do not represent the formal view of the Department Businesses, Innovation and Skills. This note sets out comments on the three key strands of the Cabinet Office's paper.

We very much welcome the continuing evolution of the National Information Infrastructure (NII). We were pleased that many PDG data sets were included in the original version but agree that further development for the framework and approach is needed. The following comments respond to each of the sections in the prototype document.

On why we need the NII

Data is of an ever growing importance, driving both economic and social gains. Across the public sector there is a vast range of data that can be used to support innovation. Whilst not agreeing with all of the points made by The Open Data User Group (ODUG) in their response to the NII prototype we absolutely do agree that greater use of data can deliver a wide range of benefits including:

- the operation of public sector bodies,
- how organisations and citizens interact with the public sector,
- and private sector innovations.

Similarly we also agree with the ODUG proposition; that the Internet of Things and Smart Cities agenda are two great examples of developments that would benefit from greater access to and usage of public sector data.

Our experience tells us that the use, uptake and appetite for data is hard to predict. Data published by PDG members already underpins a variety of key functions within the state, used extensively across the public sector through both the Public Sector Mapping Agreement and the Public Weather Service. In addition, this data also supports a host of other activities such as:

- increasing the precision of insurance calculations
- driving efficiency in the aviation industry
- bringing increased transparency in the housing market
- supporting fraud management activities
- coordinating the management of the national critical physical infrastructure assets including road, rail and energy distribution networks

We do acknowledge, and are aware of, some of the challenges that encouraging greater data use can bring. The whole of PDG continue to work to promote its uptake and increased usage across both the public and private sectors. The development of the NII is a powerful step on the way to overcoming some of those challenges and will ensure greater data access and utility across all sectors.

On the components of the NII

We are supportive of the suggested components and agree that at its heart the NII should be a list of the "most strategically important national data". Awareness and understanding of data is key to its usage and a focus on clarifying and exposing the availability of key reference data will support this.

We're pleased to see that the existing range of standards, dictionaries and code lists is acknowledged and that these will be incorporated rather than a new system developed. Clarity over licencing is also vital to increase awareness of the level of open data that is already available and to aid understanding where data is not available under an OGL.

We welcome the focus on transparency of quality commitments and service levels. Setting specific requirements in the NII itself could lead to considerable costs and pressures on data providers but equally users do need some form of reassurance over what they can expect. We have long experience of providing data services as contracts and would be happy to further feed in our expertise.

On the governance of the NII

Given the challenges of co-ordinating activities across the whole of public sector we can see that there is a need for central leadership. The proposal to create an NII working group will be a useful way to ensure that the unique complexities and issues individual bodies face also feeds into that central point. PDG members would welcome direct involvement in such a group.

On the principles of the NII

We welcome the commitment to a flexible approach. Our experience is that the data landscape is changing rapidly and the NII will need to be flexible to work with this. We also agree with the importance of reliable and well maintained data – a point also stressed in the ODUG report.

It should be noted however that there are costs associated with this and that the tension between finding value for money for the tax payer and financial sustainability, and user appetite will need to be carefully managed. An approach that allows the development of a freemium model, where some data remains paid for, but much is available free at the point of use, could be beneficial to explore.

We also whole heartedly support the emphasis on the importance of data interoperability. Through both Companies House company URIs and the adoption of Local Authority originated UPRNs in AddressBase (Addressing products created by Geoplace a Joint Venture between LGA and Ordnance Survey) we have two of the key common threads to link public sector data. The NII is an excellent opportunity to increase usage and we are ready to fully support this initiative.

The NII also offers the scope to address some of the other challenges around increasing the usage of data. The NII could also act as the locus for the development of an evidence base to better understand how data is used. PDG members consider this as vital in order to support future requests for funding and also to help evolve the data and services offered through the NII over time.

In order to deliver the full impact from the NII there has to be the right skills across Government which will ensure that its own data is being used effectively to the greatest benefit to the nation.

Because of this we think that it would be helpful to consider the creation of a plan to support development, and access to, appropriate data skills.

We look forward to seeing the NII develop further and engaging with the NII working group to share our experience and expertise.