

## **Accenture response to Making Open Data Real: a consultation**

Accenture<sup>1</sup> welcomes this opportunity to respond to Making Open Data Real. In responding to this consultation we have drawn on our experience working across the public sector in the UK and internationally, including in countries generally acknowledged to be at the leading edge, e.g. the US. We have focused on areas where we have experience of using public data (in public accountability, performance management, user feedback and personal ownership); there are other uses of open data where we are not well-qualified to contribute.

### **Overarching Perspective: Framing our Response**

We welcome the Government's general approach to open data, particularly where it underpins public service reform through enhanced accountability and user feedback, facilitates comparisons which will drive improvements in service and helps individuals make well-informed choices.

We consider open data to be part of a broader trend towards "open government" where open data combines with social media, mobile technology and other feedback mechanisms to transform the relationship governments have with citizens, delivering better, more relevant public services (which we could broadly term "citizen-centric" open data). Open data also has the power to improve individuals' lives through private or third sector innovation on the back of publically-available data sets, resulting in valuable services and economic growth (which we could term "consumer-centric" open data).<sup>2</sup> We explore examples of each throughout our response.

Our analysis of these global trends and our experience of working with governments on their transparency agendas (particularly in relation to "citizen-centric" approaches), including the New York City, has underlined that the UK government is right to think of transparency and open data as an evolutionary process that should adapt flexibly to changing priorities. Since the launch of New York's Citywide Performance Reporting website over three years ago, both public sector managers and citizens have changed the way they use the available information:

- Citizen-user feedback on website has diminished over time, but there is increasing external interest in more specialised data sets.
- Performance dashboards provided public servants with a good start to allow better management and comparison between agencies, and they now have appetite for more detailed analytic capabilities to conduct sophisticated analysis and drive change at agencies.<sup>3</sup>

We discuss how government can take an evolutionary and adaptive approach in more detail in our answer to question 2 under "glossary".

Where the publication of raw data sets has been useful for specialist developers, in our experience it has not always reached its full potential. Experience so far shows that data is most useful when it is released in a consumable fashion, and usability (for both the specialist developer audience as well as the non-specialist citizen audience) should be a key consideration in Making Open Data Real. Under-exploitation of the data already in the public domain may be for two reasons: the data is not always in a standardised format, and the market for the information may be underdeveloped. Rather, information should be easily accessible, well-organised, intuitive to use and understand and data sets should be complete.<sup>4</sup> In order to realise the full potential of open data – for both citizens and entrepreneurs (and to minimise the burden on public services), we think it is important to:

- ***Compromise for short-term publication, but focus on rigorous data hygiene standards for data currently being collected:*** The data is only as good as its quality. Inaccurate datasets can be at best misleading and at

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<sup>1</sup> Accenture is a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, with around 236,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. The company generated net revenues of US \$21.6 billion for the fiscal year ended 31 August 2010. We employ c.9,100 people in the UK.

<sup>2</sup> Although the distinction between these two categories may be blurred, particularly where open data is used to support citizen choice.

<sup>3</sup> We discuss this example in more detail in our answer to question 3 under "meaningful open data".

<sup>4</sup> National Performance Management Advisory Commission, *A Performance Management Framework for State and Local Government: From Measurement and Reporting to Management and Improving* (2011)

worst, harmful. Data quality is central to the open data agenda – but we agree that the cost of completely “clean” data may be prohibitive, and therefore a compromise needs to be found between quality, cost and timeliness. We agree with the consultation that “better data means less data”.

- **Reduce, reuse, recycle:** the burden on public service providers can be minimised by prioritising the publication of data sets that are already being collected – for example management information about service quality and outcomes rather than collecting new data sets. Provision of context will also be important for the publication of service performance data so they can fully understand this information and to avoid any misinterpretation of this data by the public.
- **Make it valuable for citizens:** Open data has been most empowering and successful both in the UK and internationally when it has been real for citizens, i.e. where individuals can relate to the information provided and can affect real change. Successive examples show that open data that is provided at a local (e.g. city), neighbourhood and even street level can be most effective.
- **Standardise for easy comparability and interoperability:** standardised datasets in consistent formats will enable citizens / users / developers to compare and analyse the information easily – this is particularly important for organisations like police or local authorities where citizens may want to benchmark organisations against their peers.
- **Turn data into intelligence:** Many public sector organisations, for example the NHS, are data-rich, but marshalling the different data sets to create usable, analytical intelligence to provide insights (either for managers, commissioners or the public) can be more challenging. Widespread adoption of analytic and predictive modelling techniques that analyse and visualise information would provide more easily consumable insights for those inside and outside organisations.
- **Make targeted investment to turn “data” into a “service”:** the Government should make limited and targeted investments to transform a few crucial datasets into “services” by making them easily consumable – good examples are mash-ups like the crime maps. This is particularly important for the citizen-centric open data agenda and will help establish a market and stimulate demand for further publication of datasets.

## Response to the consultation questions

### Glossary

#### 1. Do the definitions of the key terms go far enough or too far?

The definitions capture the main issues.

#### 2. Where a decision is being taken about whether to make a dataset open, what tests should be applied?

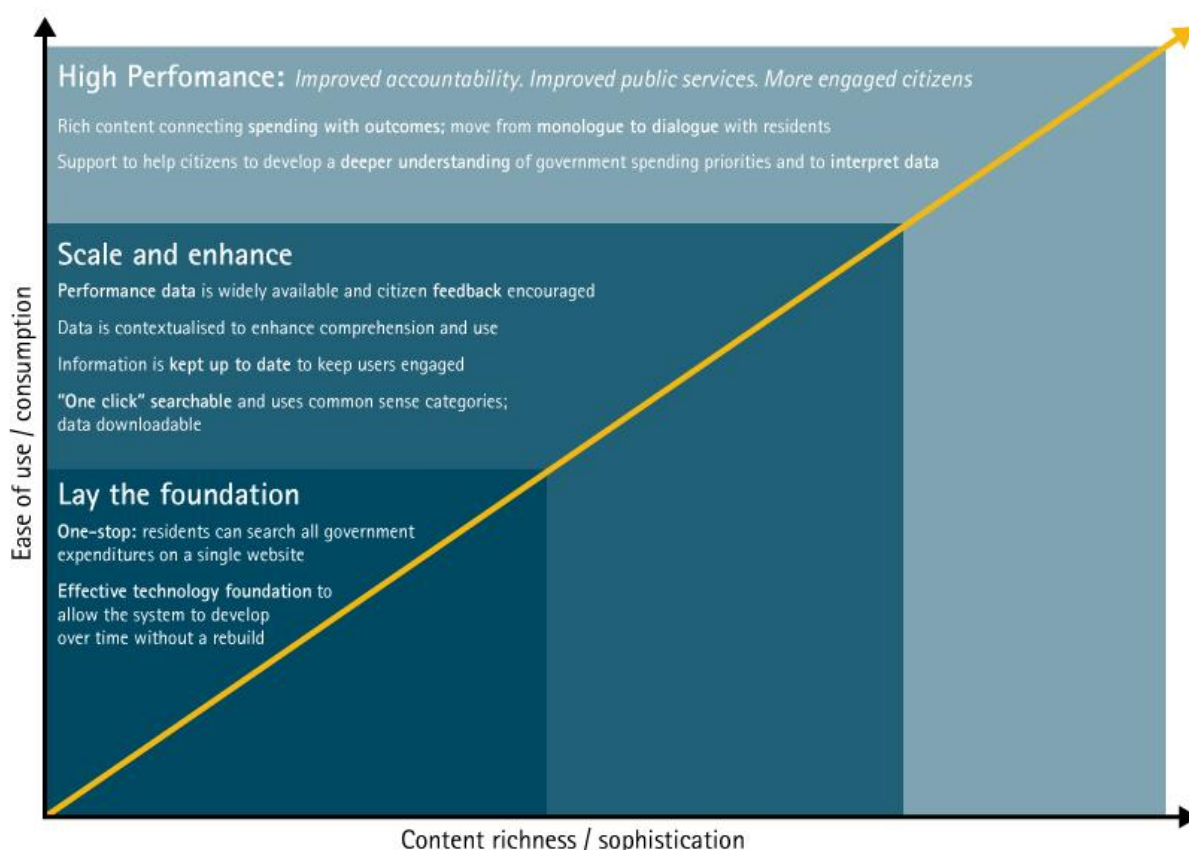
We acknowledge the ambition of the “presumption of openness” but given the government’s limited resources we suggest a framework to determine the prioritisation of publication that asks simple questions:

Criteria	Questions
<b>Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What problem are you trying to solve by publishing this data?</li><li>• Does it achieve one or more of the 6 opportunities for open data; Accountability, choice, Productivity, Quality, Social Growth and Economic Growth?</li><li>• How much does it take forward ambitions in each of these areas?</li></ul>
<b>Quality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the data of good quality?</li><li>• Is it current? Is it timely? Is it accurate?</li></ul>
<b>Presentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can the data be presented easily in a consumable format?</li><li>• Can it be standardised to allow comparability?</li></ul>
<b>Value</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is the data in a format which allows use?</li><li>• Is there a case for limited investment to transform data into intelligence or even into a service?</li></ul>
<b>Demand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is there demand / a discernable market?</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is it likely that the information, once published, will be used – either by the public, by other public sector organisations or for commercial purposes?</li> <li>• Can ongoing usage of the data be monitored?</li> </ul>
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As part of the prioritisation process and as discussed in our overarching perspective, we think the government is right to think about transparency and open data as an evolutionary process that responds to changing needs (from users, developers and public services) over time. Based on our experience of working with governments on their transparency agendas, we have developed a framework for approaching open data in this way and adapting to user needs as they become more sophisticated (see figure 1) – and which could be useful in developing an organisation's open data strategy and identifying the steps that should be prioritised.

**Figure 1: "Citizen-centric" Open Data Evolution**



**3. If the costs to publish or release data are not judged to represent value for money, to what extent should the requestor be required to pay for public services data, and under what circumstances?**

In some circumstances it may be prohibitively expensive to gather and process a raw dataset – so it may be worth assessing the viability of encouraging the private sector to pay and commercialise the data. Under such circumstances Government should consider making it an obligation for the purchaser to publish the dataset in its raw format.

If the Government is able to make targeted investments to turn the data into a service, there may be scope to sell these services to the public and to create a revenue stream.

Although beyond the scope of the consultation, the Government may wish to consider charging for access to anonymised datasets if direct commercial gain may result – for example pharmaceutical firms and health data.

**4. How do we get the right balance in relation to the range of organisations (providers of public services) our policy proposals apply to? What threshold would be appropriate to determine the range of public services in scope and what key criteria should inform this?**

The proposals should also apply to non-public sector providers of frontline public services such as charities or private sector businesses for the transparency agenda to be meaningful and accountability to be real. It would also help build the case for mixed provision of public services. We would urge the government to implement measures to ensure consistency of data collected and its presentation to allow comparison across providers.

**5. What would be appropriate mechanisms to encourage or ensure publication of data by public service providers?**

One approach may be to include data publication as an assessment criterion in tenders to incentivise providers. As a further step, the Government may want to consider the feasibility of making data collection and consistent presentation a contractual obligation. If this were pursued, it is worth considering transition arrangements for current contracts until the contract is recompeted.

**Policy**

**1. How would we establish a stronger presumption in favour of publication than that which currently exists?**

We agree broadly with the proposals outlined in chapter 8, in particular the proposal in 8.6 of “a new requirement that all public bodies and providers of public service proactively publish data about the services they deliver” and the comment in paragraph 8.9 that some form of “obligation to consider and, if appropriate, act on user feedback”. These inter-related proposals have the power to create a real culture shift in citizens’ interaction with government.

We agree with your ambition for an ‘open by default’ culture and have seen it to be effective when Public Services make data publication “opt-out” rather than “opt-in”: by clarifying which data sets would not be published, the expectation would be created that all others would be published.

**2. Is providing an independent body, such as the Information Commissioner, with enhanced powers and scope the most effective option for safeguarding a right to access and a right to data?**

Yes. Experience from other countries has suggested that an independent governance board can be an effective way not just of safeguarding a right to access, but also of ensuring that data is shared in a consistent, standardised form that makes it easy to access and reuse. In our view, the UK Information Commissioner’s Office is an experienced and long-standing body which would be well-placed to safeguard the Open Data right to access and right to data rather than an additional body.

**3. Are existing safeguards to protect personal data and privacy measures adequate to regulate the Open Data agenda?**

In our view although the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and associated guidance provide safeguards to protect personal data and privacy but the DPA principles are dependent on context and open to interpretation by different organisations. Therefore, although the legal and regulatory framework exists, as noted in the consultation document, it will be important to give further consideration to guidelines and standards to protect personal data under the Open Data agenda. These should include clear guidance on what constitutes personal data in this context (for example taking into account the many decision notices under the Freedom of Information Act) and standards for anonymisation and pseudonymisation (which have great potential in the context of health data). Individuals should be protected on a level playing field and consideration given to how data sets could potentially be merged or reconstituted across government so standards should be consistent and robust.

**4. What might the resource implications of an enhanced right to data be for those bodies within its scope? How do we ensure that any additional burden is proportionate to this aim?**

To improve accountability and public service performance, the publication of existing management information should be prioritised – which should not place an additional burden on organisations as they will be collecting and reporting this information as a matter of course.

We do, however, recognize that different levels of management information are currently collected; from operational data, through to service performance measures, and then output and outcome information. We recommend prioritising publication of outcome, output and service performance measures. Most operational data is unlikely to be meaningful to the public and will need contextualising to ensure it is not misinterpreted.

## **5. How will we ensure that Open Data standards are embedded in new ICT contracts?**

An effective way to ensure Open Data standards are embedded would be to make them a contractual obligation.

In addition, we agree with the government's aim to ensure the public sector is an intelligent, demanding customer. As part of this, it would be helpful to create focus groups that allow ICT suppliers and other stakeholders to contribute to open data standards in a productive way (for example the encouragement of models similar to Skunkworks).

### **Setting standards**

#### **1. What is the best way to achieve compliance on high and common standards to allow usability and interoperability?**

We agree with the proposals as outlined in paragraph 8.10, particularly around the importance of consistent meta-data as an important first step.

At a high level, individuals (by which we mean in particular the specialist developer group) will comply if the standards are sensible, cost of compliance is low, and compliance itself does not cause further interoperability problems. A useful step would be to encourage consistent schemas for particular data sets (for example bus timetables) and to ensure they are interoperable with other, related sets (for example train timetables). We recommend clear lists of the schemas with links to their definition should be published on the same website as the catalogue. In addition, consistent master data across all relevant Government datasets (for example around the naming of hospitals or stations) would be helpful as it will aid navigability, usability and interoperability. Another step to increase usability would be to ensure that key data sets are available (and made easy to interrogate in a programmatic fashion) on government servers as well as for download. This makes the building of mobile phone applications, for example, much easier when the information is regularly updated and means that individual users do not have to download the entire data set. It is appreciated that the cost of supporting such a service may require restrictions on the quantity of queries that can be made by an individual service; this might be addressed by the use of a private API key for each service user, in a similar fashion to Google Maps or National Rail Enquiries.

In addition we would suggest that the government adopts and communicates to employees clear information governance measures<sup>5</sup> in order to achieve compliance and to ensure usability and interoperability. Based on our experience of working with public and private organisations service across the globe on over 4,000 Information Management engagements, we have developed information governance frameworks that can be applied to UK public services and the open data agenda.<sup>6</sup> The information governance framework examines measures to maintain the privacy, confidentiality, security, quality and integrity of data. Two of these areas are of particular relevance to achieving usability and interoperability:

***Rigorous data hygiene standards should be adopted to improve data quality:*** ensuring data quality is a major challenge—particularly in complex, environments with multiple IT systems not all of which share common technical,

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<sup>5</sup> Accenture defines information governance as the processes, functions, standards and technologies that help enable high-quality information to be created, stored, communicated, valued and used effectively and securely

<sup>6</sup> Sector specific Information Governance Framework - Accenture Information Governance: *The Foundation for Effective eHealth*, 2010 available at <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/pages/insight-information-governance-effective-ehealth-summary.aspx>

data, communication or terminology standards. The key to ensuring data quality in these environments is to develop standardised interfaces and models that allow IT subsystems to share information effectively. Effective system architectures should include for key components:

- Manual and automatic processes that detect and correct errors in information efficiently and effectively. Emphasis should be placed on incentivising and motivating public service professionals to understand the implications of poor data quality (which we discuss further in our answer to question 5 under “meaningful open data) and to change behaviours to enhance data quality over time.
- Validation rules that verify that data conforms to a set of specifications regarding format, quality, integrity, accuracy and structure.
- Roles, processes and solutions that verify that systems and interfaces conform to specifications defined by regulators / standards development organisations.
- Use open standards for the recording and coding of data to promote a high level of data quality through similar data processing across multiple component systems.

***Quality data must preserve its integrity<sup>7</sup> when stored, transferred or retrieved:*** unauthorised modification of data, poor-quality source code and non-interoperable subsystems all undermine data integrity and thus the open data agenda. Effective information governance architectures to maintain data integrity should include:

- Processes to test source code to eliminate bugs (that may result in data loss or data corruption);
- Processes that identify and mitigate security risks;
- A governance function that works across silos to develop and enforce common standards, protocols and processes to enable syntactic, semantic and/or process interoperability;
- A standards-driven system architecture conforms to open or common messaging, infrastructure, communication, application, data and clinical terminology standards.

## **2. Is there a role for government to establish consistent standards for collecting user experience across public services?**

Yes. Standards should be established to ensure that the data gathered is consistent and easily comparable between agencies, public service providers and departments. It would also be worth considering the feasibility of synchronising the dates when the data is refreshed to ensure consistency for further comparisons.

## **3. Should we consider a scheme for accreditation of information intermediaries, and if so how might that best work?**

No comment.

### **Corporate and personal responsibility**

#### **1. How would we ensure that public service providers in their day to day decision-making honour a commitment to Open Data, while respecting privacy and security considerations?**

Given the current Freedom of Information requirements, public service providers already balance a commitment to openness with a need to respect privacy and security. We believe many of the same principles can be followed to ensure a commitment to Open Data.

#### **2. What could personal responsibility at Board-level do to ensure the right to data is being met include? Should the same person be responsible for ensuring that personal data is properly protected and that privacy issues are met?**

No comment.

#### **3. Would we need to have a sanctions framework to enforce a right to data?**

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<sup>7</sup> By which we mean both quality and characteristics such as format, meaning, rules, relationships and latency.

No comment.

#### 4. What other sectors would benefit from having a dedicated Sector Transparency Board?

The sectors where there are multiple, comparable organisations (such as in health, education, local government and police) may benefit from sector transparency boards. Different sectors may require different approaches.<sup>8</sup>

#### Meaningful open data

##### 1. How should public services make use of data inventories? What is the optimal way to develop and operate this?

We agree with the statement that “a right to data is meaningless without knowledge of what is available” and with the proposals (as outlined in paragraph 8.15) to create a central, user-friendly catalogue or inventory of all the information available. We think that this should:

- Include information of what is available not only in central government datasets but also in those of more fragmented organisations such as the NHS, local authorities or the police to allow comparisons (e.g. the Australian government open data website has a catalogue of catalogues<sup>9</sup>).
- Be easily searchable with common sense terms (e.g. the New Zealand government open data website<sup>10</sup>).
- Include notes on the freshness of the data and how regularly users can expect it to be updated (i.e. is it one-off, published quarterly – including the next publication date)
- Include links to other, related, data sets if it is part of a historical data series (or with other breakdowns such as regions or relevant agencies)
- Be presented in a user-friendly format as well as in raw format, where possible – including star rating of accessibility<sup>11</sup>.
- Allow user feedback, ranking interest/value of datasets and opportunities to post relevant applications based on the data (the Australian government’s open data website allows users to suggest data sets for publication, nominate their apps and share datasets through email and social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>12</sup>). Using such approaches can help make the data inventories self-regulating and cut down on the effort required to manage and maintain them.

The Government may also wish to highlight, signpost or even implement visualisation tools in order to encourage less-experienced users to access and manipulate the information.

##### 2. How should data be prioritised for inclusion in an inventory? How is value to be established?

No comment.

##### 3. In what areas would you expect government to collect and publish data routinely?

There are three main areas where we would expect government to collect and publish data on a routine basis – in particular where the publication:

- Improves **outcomes** and increases the **productivity** of public service providers through informed comparison;
- Supports the **choice** agenda – by informing citizens of different providers and alternative services thus underpinning market (this is particularly important in healthcare with the “any willing provider” policy; and in other public services as the government moves towards a “payment by results” model);
- Makes **accountability** real for citizens and encourages greater **engagement** with public services and government.

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<sup>8</sup> Transparency & Accountability Initiative, *Opening government: A guide to best practice in transparency, accountability and civic engagement across the public sector* (2010)

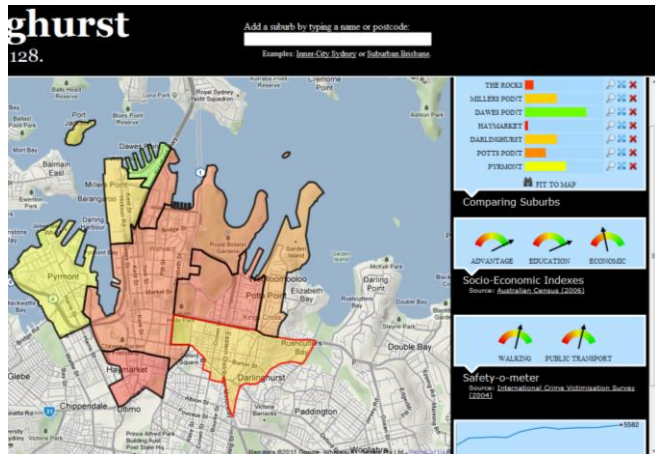
<sup>9</sup> <http://data.gov.au/catalogues/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.data.govt.nz/catalog/>

<sup>11</sup> A private citizen has catalogued and given a star rating for open data quality to Sweden’s datasets <http://www.opengov.se/data/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://data.gov.au/apps/>

Our experience of working across the globe with governments and agencies aiming to be more transparent has highlighted some excellent examples of innovative approaches. We have drawn on this experience and also research undertaken by the Accenture Institute for Health and Public Service Value<sup>13</sup> to provide some examples of meaningful open data. Much of the leading practice in this area is in the United States where there has been a significant focus on different agencies' spending (e.g. recovery.gov). Another practice that has been globally popular is the publication of data sets to allow citizens to compare the area in which they live with other regions (e.g. Australian suburb maps).



### Suburb comparison in Australia

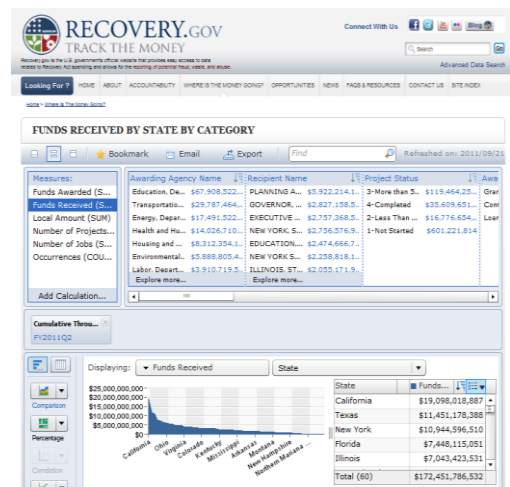
A non-government website uses publically available data sets to visualise information comparing suburbs across Australia on measures such as socio-economic status, crime and the perceived safety of public transport and walking.

<http://www.suburbantrends.com.au/>

### Tracking stimulus funding in the United States

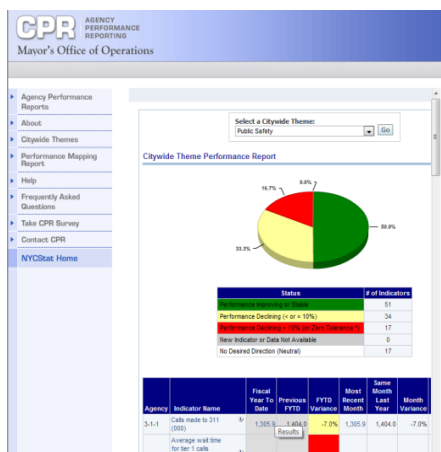
The Recovery.gov website, designed to provide taxpayers with user-friendly tools to visualise how the money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009) is spent. Detailed breakdowns of funding types are available for each state, congressional district and county. Data can be visualised in a variety of ways using maps, charts, graphs and word clouds to allow easy comparison between the different states. Charts and webpages can be emailed for sharing, bookmarked for later use or the data exported.

[www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov)



Publishing data relating to public service performance (e.g. New York citywide performance reporting) is a useful step. If this approach were combined in the UK with “payment by results” and public service provider data, it would help move reporting on outputs to outcomes and could help strengthen public service reform.

<sup>13</sup> Accenture Institute for Health and Public Service Value, *From eGovernment to eGovernance*, available <http://nstore.accenture.com/egovernance/x/From%20e-Government%20to%20e-Governance.pdf>



### Performance reporting in New York

The Mayor of New York's citywide performance reporting, where individuals can monitor the performance of government agencies against a series of indicators in a standardised, easily accessible format. Citizens can also access information on "citywide themes" such as community services, infrastructure or public services which take the relevant measures from different departments and pull them together.

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/cpr/html/home/home.shtml>

It is worth noting that much of the focus of data publication so far in the UK has been on spending data. Where this is valuable from a transparency/accountability perspective, the Government may wish to focus on the publication of data that has a more tangible impact on citizens' daily lives – for example real-time information, the live-running of transport, or useful facilities information (a good example is the Amsterdam Public Toilet finder<sup>14</sup>). Citizens do not live in a purely private sector or purely public service world – their lives bring them into daily contact with both – and some of the best examples of the potential of open data blend both the public and commercial spheres. An interesting example is that of the former Chief Technology Officer of the District of Columbia, Vivek Kundra, who launched 'Apps for Democracy'—an open competition costing approximately \$50,000 to run, but saving the state government \$2 million in internal operations and contractual costs through generating innovative ideas. One of the award-winning applications is iLive.at, which mines a number of different data sources for Washington DC. The user can type in any Washington DC postcode, and will access a comprehensive overview of the neighbourhood, including crime statistics, schools, shopping centres and post offices.<sup>15</sup>

Open data can also drive commercial innovation and economic growth as we explore in our recent report *Driving Public Entrepreneurship* which gives examples of consumer-centric open data.<sup>16</sup>

### Driving economic growth in Denmark

The Danish government's open data agenda strategy has resulted in some success. Although still in its early stages of development and use, some entrepreneurs are already making use of publicly available data to drive business growth. Often, the insights from public data are used to inform business planning and strategies. For example, many Danish retailers are using data from the Danish Meteorological Institute and demographic data to plan the sale of ice cream, beer and skiing equipment. Some firms go further – the growth of the Danish company Geomatic (a specialist geomarketing, company intelligence and consultancy firm) is attributable to publicly available geographic and demographic data which it combines in new ways that allow them to help businesses better understand their customers and the market.

<http://www.geomatic.dk/english>

## 4. What data is collected "unnecessarily"? How should these datasets be identified? Should collection be stopped?

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.wcvinder.nl/>

<sup>15</sup> Accenture, *Driving Public Entrepreneurship* (2011) available at [http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture\\_2011\\_GoTFC\\_Research-Driving\\_Public\\_Entrepreneurship.pdf](http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture_2011_GoTFC_Research-Driving_Public_Entrepreneurship.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Available at [http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture\\_2011\\_GoTFC\\_Research-Driving\\_Public\\_Entrepreneurship.pdf](http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture_2011_GoTFC_Research-Driving_Public_Entrepreneurship.pdf)

The collection of data that clearly duplicates other datasets should be stopped – a central inventory will be helpful in identifying these. It is also worth tracking the use of the data (through downloads) so refreshing the most popular data sets can be prioritised.

**5. Should the data that government releases always be of high quality? How do we define quality? To what extent should public service providers “polish” the data they publish, if at all?**

To be most effective, we believe that:

- ***Compromise is necessary for short-term publication, but there should be focus on rigorous data hygiene standards for data currently being collected:*** Inaccurate datasets can be at best misleading and at worst, harmful (we have highlighted an example from our experience in the NHS below) but we acknowledge that the cost of achieving an entirely “clean” dataset may be prohibitive and the task may be impossible. In the interests of resources and time, we propose that a compromise must be made and suggest the Government might consider a duty for public service organisations to publish data that is “as clean as possible” with standardised attendant notes that explain the origin of the data and any potential quality issues of which other users should be aware.

**An example based on our experience of working in the NHS has highlighted to us that data quality should be central to the open data agenda:** in EMR systems where alphabetically-sorted pick-lists are used in data entry screens there often appears to be a disproportionately high number of records created starting with the letter ‘A’ (they are nearer the top of the list and quicker for the operator to pick when completing mandatory fields on a form or screen). While the field in question may not be of high importance to the care professional populating the form, the inaccurate data entry causes issues for ‘down-stream’ processes. This could result in skewed management reports, contribute to inaccurate clinical coding and incorrect invoicing with trusts losing out on revenue.

Looking to the future we think it is important to create a the right culture, discipline and supporting infrastructure to ensure high quality data is captured, analysed and shared – as the quality of the insights that can be gleaned from the data depends on the quality of the data itself. Emphasis should be placed on incentivising and motivating public service professionals to change behaviours to enhance data quality over time.

- ***Polished data can be more consumable and meaningful:*** The state of Virginia’s reporting website is a good example of the publication of “polished” data that can be very meaningful to citizens: there is a “map it” tool that allows users to select from a variety of data sets to compare them on a map of the state.<sup>17</sup> The data sets cover various measures such as unemployment rates, educational attainment, traffic fatalities and teenage pregnancies – and the information is broken down by region and locality. Other examples are explored in our answer to question 3 in “Meaningful Open Data”.

**Government sets the example**

**1. How should government approach the release of existing data for policy and research purposes: should this be held in a central portal or held on departmental portals?**

The location of the data is less important than the development of a central inventory that can signpost individuals to the data’s location.

**2. What factors should inform prioritisation of datasets for publication, at national, local or sector level?**

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Performs can be found at <http://www.vaperforms.virginia.gov/> and the “Map It” tool at <http://vaperformsmapping.virginia.gov/>

Data that relates to a particular region or locality (the UK Crime Maps or the Australian suburb maps<sup>18</sup> are good examples) can have great resonance for citizens and should be prioritised as a way of stimulating the market.

**3. Which is more important: for government to prioritise publishing a broader set of data, or existing data at a more detailed level?**

No comment.

**Innovation with open data**

**1. Is there a role for government to stimulate innovation in the use of Open Data? If so, what is the best way to achieve this?**

We think the most important thing government can do to stimulate the market for open data is to make the data itself more consumable and accessible. Data is most useful to the citizen when it tells a story and is meaningful. By investing limited resources to transform from “data” into “intelligence” the Government can lead by example and show the potential of data sets. It will also help inspire entrepreneurs to explore potential uses of public data for commercial benefit, thus driving economic growth.

It may also be worth going a step further and transforming a few crucial datasets into data-mashed “services” by making them very easily consumable – a good example is the crime maps in the UK. This will help establish a market and stimulate demand for further publication of datasets.

We support the Government’s efforts to raise the profile of the open data agenda by holding competitions to develop innovative uses of highlighted datasets – we suggest this approach is expanded and given higher profile if possible as it will be important in any attempt to achieve widespread usage of data sets (successful examples have been New Zealand’s Mix & Mash event now in its second year<sup>19</sup> and District of Columbia’s ‘Apps for Democracy’ as discussed in our answer to question 3 in “Meaningful Open Data”).

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.suburbantrends.com.au/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.mixandmash.org.nz/>