



Your Ref -
Our Ref -
Date 27 October 2011

When calling please ask for

Dial Direct

Email address

Dear Sirs

OPEN DATA CONSULTATION

With regard to the Open Data Consultation please find below the joint response from Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council:

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

The terms do go far enough however the point regarding confidentiality and data covered by the Data Protection Act should be clearly qualified and stated within the definitions. Furthermore, with the rollout and delivery of localism and the Big Society public services should more clearly include voluntary sector, community groups and social enterprises who are equally funded through public funding.

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

The tests should be whether the data satisfy or contravene the Data Protection Act and is the data in the public interest in terms of monitoring performance and holding the public service to account. Some of these datasets are already published on the councils' websites and through publication of minutes of Full Council, Cabinet, Audit and Risk Committee, Overview and Scrutiny where performance reports, audits are openly reported and minuted.

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 service data, and under what circumstances?

That considering the financial cuts and reductions to public services and the council's consequential capital in capacity it is appropriate to charge for the public services data where its release is not judged to represent value for money. The charging mechanism is already applied in certain Freedom of Information requests.

There exists already through the Freedom of Information legislation a provision for communities and citizens to request additional datasets and information where it is deemed to be appropriate and in the public interests and to support transparency and value for money to do so.

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?

Any public service should apply where the majority or all of their funding is through the "public purse". This may include as referred to in '1' above voluntary sector, community and social enterprise organisations who are primarily funded through public sector budgets.

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

Inclusion within the Annual Audits and qualified through the Annual Audit letter as to whether annual audit services have gone far enough in terms of the transparency agenda. However, as with the response to question '4' the recent 'light-touch' audit approach reflects the public sectors reduce in capacity and it would be a backward step to return to the 'over auditing' period when public sector organisations were complying with CAA, Use of Resources, and LAA statutory requirements.