

Open Data Consultation: Pendle Response

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

A key term that appears to have been omitted from the glossary is 'quality'. It is referenced throughout the consultation paper in terms of the quality of 'open data' but at no point is it defined or explained. Does quality refer to how new and up-to-date the data is? Does it apply to how easy to understand it is? How detailed it is and how local it goes? Quality will mean different things to different stakeholders. As a local authority 'quality data' provided by government would be up-to-date regular data at least at a district authority level. However, residents may well class quality data as information that is easy to find and easy to understand.

Regarding what 'open' can mean, if local authorities are to make data available to all in a format that can be manipulated then there is a risk that the data could be misinterpreted.

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

Whether the data is useful to anyone should be a major factor. It would be counterproductive to make everything open and available as a 'needle in a haystack' effect could ensue with useful data being lost in a mound of inconsequential data. To test the need for a dataset to be open, how much the dataset has been used, requested, etc could be looked at.

To make a dataset open also depends on where it is published and where it can be accessed from. With the LG Inform tool still being developed (and available to public sector bodies only), there is a real need for a central place for people to access data.

The term 'open' is open to interpretation as any dataset requiring a subscription or fee isn't exactly open. The formerly ABI, now BRES, business data requires a hefty subscription – yet information on business and the economy is vital "to stimulate enterprise". With the ABI people are often after a specific dataset yet they have to pay for complete access. A pay-as-you-go style service may be more suitable – ie. £25 to access a dataset, rather than £250 to access the whole database.

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?

The issue here is that by charging for 'open data' it is then not truly open. With budgets being cut to reduce the deficit, individuals, organisations and authorities can not necessarily justify paying to access information and data. The data we would have to pay for is certainly useful to us, but there is a difference between being useful and essential. The risk, by continuing to charge for data, is that the majority of users will not be accessing the 'open data' due to their financial situation. The impact here is that communities needing to access funding opportunities may not have the evidence to support a bid, or that they may not be able to access data to identify the priorities in their area.

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?

It needs to be considered what impact the burden of providing accessible 'open data' will have on service delivery for some. A possible scenario is that more 'open data' is available but

frontline services are being detrimentally affected. It should also be considered how useful low quality data is from providers such as those related to health. In the raw format this data can be difficult to understand and so the usefulness of it probably doesn't reflect the time it would take to make such data 'open'. So for health services it may be beneficial to release less data but that the data that is released must reach certain quality standards.

Another issue to consider is the manpower at an organisation. A county or metropolitan council will have more time and employees at their disposal to meet any 'open data' requirements. But to have the same expectations of smaller district councils would be unrealistic, given that the challenge currently is to ensure the deficit is reduced with as little impact as possible on the services our residents receive. Hence, a criterion to consider when looking at 'open data' proposals is the capacity at particular organisations and the difficulty in resourcing certain data in order to satisfy residents.

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

The mechanisms have to go deeper than simply ensuring that data is published. Data needs to be easy to track down and a standardised format would help in the interpretation of data (e.g. some data is presented using actual figures whereas others use standardised ratios – this makes it difficult to compare and understand).