



Consultation Response

Making Open Data Real: A Public Consultation

October 2011

Preface

This paper forms Socitm's response to the proposals outlined in *Making Open Data Real: A Public Consultation*.

Socitm is the association for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and related professionals in the United Kingdom public and third sectors, and suppliers to these sectors. It offers networking and peer support, professional development, and access to research and consultancy on a wide range of policy and technology issues to its over 1500 members.

Socitm works with the Local Government Group (Local Government Association and Local Government Improvement & Development) and the Local e-Government Standards Body (LeGSB) in areas such as data quality, interoperability standards, transparency and open data; with Central Government, including Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, the Department of Communities and Local government, the Department of Work and Pensions, Centre for the Protection of National Infrastructure and CESG (National technical authority for advice and services to protect Government voice and data networks); and with other professional associations and groups, such as the SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers), CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy), ADASS (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services) and IRRV (Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation). The Local Chief Information Officer (CIO) Council is made up of Socitm members and supplies representatives to the CIO and Chief Technology Officer (CTO) Councils. Socitm also has strong links to its partner associations in Europe and around the world, and is a signatory to the recent *Citadel Statement* (<http://egovstatement.wordpress.com>) that identifies a number of barriers to effective use of IT at the local level throughout Europe.

Socitm's response

Socitm is an advocate of transparency and the democratisation of public data, as evidenced by:

- Representation on the Open Public Data Panel
- Significant role in authoring the Local Government Data Handling Guidelines
- Active role in the team that produced guidance on the publication of Local Government spending data over £500, contracts and salaries.
- *Planting the Flag: a strategy for ICT-enabled local public services reform* which advocates greater transparency and opening up data to allow collaborative approaches to service design, delivery and accountability.

Socitm believes that open data issues need to be treated within a broader approach to information management and evidence-based decision-making. Modern technology gives us the tools to capture data that is potentially highly useful for making better decisions. However, low priority is still given to the process of managing data and ensuring useful data is properly captured and readily available in a timely fashion to decision-makers. This is a key part of local authorities and other public services being able to manage their business instead of simply reacting to what comes through the door. Unfortunately, these opportunities are not widely understood by the current cohort of top public services managers.

Linked to this, there is over-emphasis on in government statements on open data primarily serving armchair auditors and developers. Socitm sees open data primarily benefitting management of public services, as managers are able to access/share more and better information produced by their own organisation and other public services.

This would be aided by gradual adoption of common data standards across local authorities and other public services, allowing reuse of analysis programmes and master data like the National Land and Property Gazetteer and other commonly used codes.

Developers have a role in this, but more in working with public and private sector clients to manipulate data to improve the efficiency of their organisations, rather than creating and selling services to the public, because of difficulties in finding sustainable business models.

Local authorities struggle with the business case for publishing open data. There is an oft-made argument around savings on handling Freedom of Information requests, but Socitm has yet to see any real evidence of this.

Attachments

Planting the Flag: a strategy for ICT enabled local public services reform – Executive Summary

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