

CHRIS TAGGART RESPONSE (VIA E-MAIL)

I have been dealing at the sharp end of open data for a couple of years now, co-founding [OpenCorporates](#) and founding [OpenlyLocal](#), both of which have massively increased the availability of [company and UK local data respectively](#). and, I hope, in some tiny way have helped give the UK its worldwide reputation of leading the way in open data.

Through sitting on the Local Public Data Panel and countless other government programmes and meetings, I've also encountered local and central government bureaucracy in the raw. I've seen in detail how too often the bureaucracy subverts complex rules drawn up with the best of intentions to stifle innovation, exclude the most important 'stakeholders' of all (the people), and reward those behind big, multimillion-pound projects with promotion and further contracts.

All this experience has, I think, led me to a fairly comprehensive understanding of the issues, the blockages, the hype and the potential of open data. And it is with this understanding that I am responding to the consultation.

The truth is, like it or not, we now live in a 'Big Data' world, where our lives are not just governed by data but are data, from bank accounts to loyalty cards, smart phones to smart meters, televisions to travel cards. Even those who have never been on the internet are producing bucketfuls of data as they shop, watch, or catch the bus using free travel cards for the elderly and disabled.

Yet their access to data, both the data they produce and that is produced on their behalf by government and the public sector, is fundamentally restricted. Not only do they have no access to many of the datasets that affects their lives, those who are innovating to help them make sense of it are fatally hobbled by open access to the core public datasets which underly our modern world – for example, geographic data, company data, health data, and democratic & electoral data.

Public sector data is still being treated as an asset to be sold, rather than an underlying infrastructure of a modern democratic society, and with this approach people and the innovators who seek to empower them are marginalised and disenfranchised.

That is why the risk here is not of making changes, but of making no changes, and why what is needed is not a set of rules to be gamed and worked around by the existing 'stakeholders' (who after all have a stake in preserving their existing, out-of-date business models), but a core set of principles.

Open data is no silver bullet, and won't on its own solve these problems, but it is an essential requirement for a '[more open, more fair and more prosperous](#)' society.

Fortunately the ~~consultation provides such a set in~~ [Annex 2](#) of the consultation (The Public Sector Data Principles). These should be issued to every ~~government~~ department, quango, health authority and public sector body ([including the PDC](#)), with the order to follow them in letter and spirit. Backing these up, we also need an [independent body](#) needs to be appointed with the power and resources to enforce them. With these two things – good public principles, and an effective enforcer – we have a chance to achieve the innovation and fairer society we need.

Chris Taggart

CEO & Co-Founder OpenCorporates
Founder OpenlyLocal
Member of Local Public Data Panel
Member of Mayor of London's Digital Advisor