



Peabody's response to Making Open Data Real: A Public Consultation

Peabody was established in 1862 by the American banker and philanthropist, George Peabody. Peabody is one of London's oldest and largest charitable housing associations. It has its own Act of Parliament stipulating Peabody's objectives to work solely within London for the relief of poverty. We own and manage approximately 20,000 homes across 25 London boroughs, providing affordable housing for more than 50,000 people. We work with the government and a whole range of voluntary, private and public sector partners to bring services to our residents and others in communities where we work. The majority of our homes are on estates with open, communal green spaces. Our aims have always extended beyond housing and our 21st Century mission is 'to make London a city of opportunity for all by ensuring that as many people as possible have a good home, a real sense of purpose, and a strong feeling of belonging'.

Peabody has four key areas of activity, benefiting directly and indirectly both its residents and the wider London population:

- The provision of rented housing for people who are unable to afford to rent or buy in the open market;
- The provision of supported housing and care for those who need additional support;
- The provision of low cost home ownership, particularly shared ownership; and
- The delivery of community regeneration activities.

Peabody welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's consultation on Making Open Data Real. We are committed to the philosophy and practice of transparency both as a means to improve accountability to our residents and customers and to enrich resident participation in shaping their neighbourhoods and services. We therefore commend the Government for seeking to increase the availability and quality of Open Data and we are broadly in agreement with the benefits that would follow.

However, we have some significant concerns about the scope of the proposals as they relate to both Peabody and the housing association sector as a whole.

We note there is no mention of private registered housing providers in the consultation document and request that the Government clarifies whether it intends to include them within the scope of its Open Data policy framework. We firmly hold the view that such a move would be unnecessary, overly-prescriptive and with no discernible public benefit, in light of the considerable array of information already published. The ambiguity in the scope of these proposals, coupled with the Housing

Minister's suggestion that the housing associations should be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, gives us concerns that the sector is at risk of reclassification from its independent status to that of public sector bodies. There is, in turn, the risk of the eventual reclassification of the sector's debt as public.

We have explained the nature of our work in some detail above to highlight that while we clearly provide a great public benefit, the majority of our business cannot be construed as the discharge of a public function. The sector is made up of strong, independent organisations, with a demonstrable track record and commitment to openness and accountability. We also ask the Government to note that where we do have access to public funds for the development and provision of affordable housing, we are contractually committed to provide details of spending over £500 under the transparency provisions of the Framework Delivery Agreement with the Homes and Communities Agency. These details will be accessible by the general public.

In addition, the Tenant Services Authority collates key data from social housing providers about the homes we own and manage, the lettings and sales we undertake, and our key expenditure. Most information is sourced from the following publicly available datasets:

- CORE (Continuous Recording of lettings and sales in social housing in England)
- RSR (Regulatory and Statistical Return)
- NROSH (National Register of Social Housing)
- Performance Indicators

The sector is open in its approach to benchmarking and the comparison of performance across organisations.

Both our Annual Report to residents and our Annual Report and Financial Statements contain comprehensive financial and performance data and are publicly available on our website.

Furthermore, we are of course already subject to and fully comply with requests for personal information requested under the Data Protection Act. More individual, tailored information regarding rent, repairs and service requests is increasingly being made available to residents online.

Peabody has regular contact with key local stakeholders through face-to-face meetings, participation in local groups and forums, events and local newsletters. Data and performance information is routinely shared through these channels. We are in regular dialogue with national, local and trade media and open in our communication. We regularly respond to requests for comment and information from journalists – and took a leading role in highlighting the sector's role and response around the disturbances across London earlier this year.

While we again emphasise our commitment to accountability, given the existing channels of data provision, we believe that enhancing individual rights to data is not necessary and would create additional bureaucracy.

In summary, Peabody believes it is preferable to allow the housing association sector to decide how to meet transparency requirements in consultation with local

government, developers and local communities rather than being mandated to comply with stringent guidelines from central government.

Contact Details

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