



Department for Communities & Local
Government Open Data Strategy
April 2012 – April 2014

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Executive Summary

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has embraced the government's ambition to create a new era of accountability and openness. The department has made an impressive start. It has gone beyond the commitments for government departments set out in the Prime Minister's letter of 31 May 2010¹, in particular by publishing details of corporate spending on items over £500 and all spend on our Government Procurement Cards. DCLG is the second largest contributor of data to the government's data.gov.uk service after the Department of Health. It also has a strong record of publishing datasets, on house building, homelessness, planning applications, local authority expenditure and Indices of Deprivation to name but a few.

As set out in this strategy, DCLG is at the forefront of work in government to routinely release data in more open and useful forms. Although at an early stage, it has achieved notable successes with:

- Testing and demonstrating new methods for robust, reliable open data publication to deliver DCLG outputs that can be re-used alongside other related third party sources;
- Building demonstration applications which illustrate benefits of open data for the department itself, and our broad community of data users;
- Forging partnerships with local authorities to build best practice and standards for sharing and re-using data within this key sector.

DCLG's future work will be based on outputs and learning from these activities, and promoting examples of good practice from around the department.

In order to ensure that data outputs from across DCLG are actively used alongside other external data sources by a broad and diverse audience, objectives for the medium term are:

- To adopt systems, tools and processes which ensure that data is released in a reliable, trusted, efficient and cost-effective manner;
- To routinely publish data that is easy to find, understand and re-use; and
- To maintain strong and effective partnerships across central and local government, ensuring that solutions and standards for DCLG are re-used as widely as possible.

¹ See: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/letter-to-government-departments-on-opening-up-data/>

Introduction

1. The Government wants to create a new era of accountability and openness.
2. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has embraced this ambition. Open data is an essential ingredient of DCLG's overarching purpose – driving effective localism and creating the conditions for success. Better government, through empowering communities and enabling decisions to be taken at the lowest practicable level, makes for better places to live.
3. This Open Data Strategy attempts to identify how DCLG can drive reform and service improvement through transparency and greater participation from citizens, communities, partner groups and small businesses. It describes the benefits that releasing specific datasets could bring in terms of:
 - Accountability
 - Choice
 - Public service productivity
 - Public service quality (outcomes)
 - Social growth
 - Economic growth
4. It also demonstrates how we are developing new approaches across the three main groups of the department:
 - 'Localism' - responsible for the transfer of power and funding from Whitehall to individuals and communities and building the Big Society
 - 'Neighbourhoods' - responsible for creating the conditions which re-energise and empower individuals, communities and business to build successful cities, towns and neighbourhoods; and
 - 'Finance and Corporate Services' - responsible for all support services. This group is expected to deliver significant efficiency savings both through internal consolidation and by setting up shared services arrangements with other departments.
5. The Strategy will apply equally to our Arms Length Bodies such as the Homes and Communities Agency which are responsible for delivering many of our key programmes. Our work in partnership with the Local Government Association is also important. We need to foster and highlight good practice in local authorities and encourage them to publish accessible, re-usable open data at the local level that is helpful and easy to understand.

Governance of the Open Data Strategy

6. Collectively, the examples that have informed this strategy offer a broad view of where DCLG is with respect to open data and how we anticipate progressing as a department over the next two years.
7. DCLG has a Board-level Transparency Champion - Sue Higgins, Director General for the Finance and Corporate Services Group - responsible for overseeing the department's response to the government's transparency agenda and for chairing DCLG's **Public Data and Transparency Board**².
8. The Board owns this strategy. It will be a task and finish group, existing until at least the end of 2012, to position DCLG as an exemplar department in Whitehall. Under the Board's direction, this strategy will be promoted across DCLG to embed a culture of change that is grounded in examples of good practice; examples that are subject to continuing improvements.
9. The Board will develop strong relationships with staff across the department and link to the Cabinet Office, which leads on transparency for government, and the Local Public Data Panel which advises DCLG on the release and use of public data³.
10. The department's Digital Advisory Group and corporate IT team also play an important role in ensuring that our strategy remains aligned with government initiatives in the digital and technology arenas.
11. The ★ symbol indicates where DCLG intends to develop work in the future. A list of all such actions can be seen at Annex D. Our 'quick-win' activities (see Chapter 1) are particularly important. They will capture and help us to articulate the benefits of open data within the organisation, amongst our partners, and to citizens and communities. The quick wins will also provide the basis for the Board to determine a realistic, affordable work programme beyond May 2012.

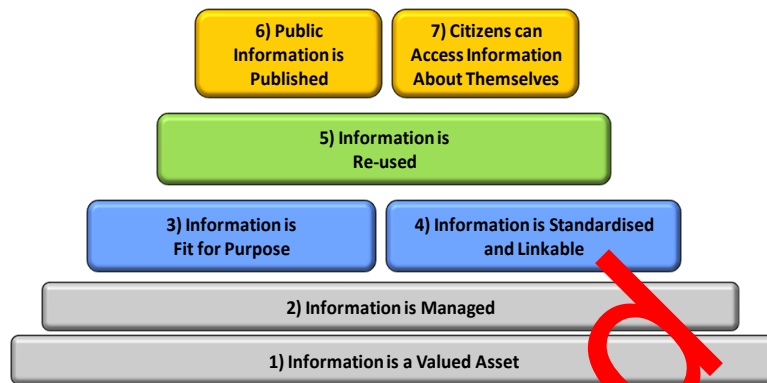
DCLG will adopt the Information Principles for the UK Public Sector

12. Underpinning all this work is the recognition that information is needed to inform policy development, as well as to ensure accountability to parliament and the public. At an operational level, information can be used

² DCLG's Public Data and Transparency Board has initiated, and is tracking, a programme of transparency-related projects. It aims to embed transparency within the department.

³ The Local Public Data Panel was set up by DCLG in January 2010, and was the first sector transparency panel. Its membership brings together different interests from the developer, activist, local authority and government communities. Amongst its accomplishments, the Panel played a key role in bringing about the release of local authority £500 expenditure and contracts/tender data and provided guidance for local authorities to support the development of technical standards. Details of Panel outputs can be seen at <https://www.data.gov.uk/users/local-data-panel/track>

to drive efficiency and service improvement whilst at the same time reducing waste and improving value for money. The government's drive towards using information to transform public services through transparency and openness is also enabling innovation and empowering individuals to choose and influence services. In support of this DCLG will align its approach to open data with the Information Principles for the UK Public Sector⁴. These principles build into a hierarchy, as depicted in the diagram below, and are an integral part of this Open Data Strategy.



13. This Open Data Strategy as a whole is informed by two key principles: i) that information is valued as an asset; and ii) that information is managed. But this Strategy also outlines how future data-related work will help to improve quality, by moving progressively to employing open, re-useable formats and standards in all data outputs. DCLG is therefore aligning with all other elements of the hierarchy.

DCLG Organisational Change

14. DCLG is undergoing significant organisational change and restructuring. The department and its arms length bodies will respond proactively and develop a transparent, cost-effective approach to data publication. This will involve revisiting and, where required, changing arrangements governing open data, ensuring they remain aligned to the new organisational structure, roles and responsibilities.

15. Alongside organisational change, the department is undertaking a re-let of corporate information and communication technology (ICT) services and considering opportunities to adopt new technologies arising from government strategy⁵ such as the Government Cloud and app-store, and single domain website. DCLG will use these initiatives to revisit tools, processes, technologies and resources for managing information and data across its estate. The department will adopt open, standard techniques where this is appropriate and cost-effective, and seek out opportunities to

⁴ http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Information_Principles_UK_Public_Sector_final.pdf

⁵ <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/government-ict-strategy>

consolidate and rationalise systems and data assets on shared, reusable platforms.

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Chapter 1: Going Forward with Open Data in DCLG: Strategic Priorities and Opportunities

16. DCLG is working to build on its successes to date and embed transparency and open data across everyday activities. In order to ensure that data outputs from across the department are used alongside other external data sources by a broad and diverse audience, objectives for the medium term are:

- To adopt systems, tools and processes which ensure that data is released in a reliable, trusted, efficient and cost-effective manner;
- To routinely publish data that is easy to find, understand and re-use; and
- To maintain strong and effective partnerships across central and local government, ensuring that solutions and standards for DCLG are re-used as widely as possible.

17. DCLG recognises that open data solutions will provide the means for citizens to engage in public policy and service design and delivery, with improved mechanisms to challenge and hold the department and its partners to account and for them in turn to exploit opportunities for efficiencies and savings.

DCLG Open Data Quick Wins

18. In order to make progress, DCLG is currently focused on delivering a package of open data “quick-win activities” (see Annex A), which:

- a) Consolidate achievements to date;
- b) Ensure DCLG remains on track to meet specific Business Plan actions;
- c) Enable DCLG to make meaningful, visible progress; and
- d) Ensure that activity and outputs are grounded in clear evidence of the advantages, likely costs and risks of moving to the next stage.

19. ★ Through the DCLG Public Data and Transparency Board, plans for the short-term are to create the following main outputs:

- A new **“proof-of-concept” open data store**, containing a broad range of statistical datasets on housing, planning and local government finance. DCLG is also exploring incorporating other types of data for example on its budgets and spending transactions over £500. The store will be available from end-March 2012, with

data accessible via open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) conforming to Government and Open Linked Data standards⁶.

20. Members of the Board and other key data holders from across the department will form a short-term Open Data Steering Group to ensure the development of the open data store can be progressed consistently irrespective of individual datasets.

- Modest applications that “**show and tell**” users and software developers how to access and re-use data in the store. DCLG is working with the Government Digital Service to determine opportunities for wider re-use in government, aiming to make the first applications available this summer.
- Additional demonstration applications which show **DCLG data being used in third party sites**. We are currently working with various external developers on opportunities for re-use in applications for monitoring homelessness, tracking and planning housing delivery, and undertaking area profiling in local authorities. The first applications should be on-line in early summer 2012.
- A prototype demonstrating practical uses and benefits of **more comparable data on local spending**. Our plan is make this available in May 2012, with supporting guidance on best-practice and standards for councils to apply to their own local sources.

21. Crucially, the “proof of concept” involves testing and developing new standards which enable DCLG’s data to be reliably linked to and used alongside other related third-party sources. One of the key outputs will be standard terms and definitions (or ontologies) for concepts including:

- Types of dwellings
- Types of planning application
- Categories of local government spending and budgets
- Administrative and other geographies

22. DCLG is therefore putting in place the foundations for blending and combining different sources relating to these concepts. It will be working with others operating in this arena, confirming whether similar standards already exist, and will promote and encourage re-use, particularly within the local sector.

23. The “proof of concept” will, for the first time, involve linking statistical datasets with their associated guidance, terms and definitions. This should provide a potentially significant model for publishing official statistics in a high-quality, re-usable manner. DCLG will work with the Government

⁶ Standard web-based data format that allows data of various kinds to be analyzed

Statistics Service to share learning and exploit opportunities for employing this approach.

24. Through the quick-wins work, DCLG will make good progress against its medium-term objectives, preparing the ground for additional improvements in the 2012-2014 timeframe.

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Chapter 2: Big Data

25. Big Data is the term applied to that data which is routinely collected and held by DCLG teams and its arms length bodies either as part of their everyday activities or through specific initiatives.
26. Examples of Big Data include our records of incidents attended by Fire and Rescue Services throughout Great Britain. Much has been done during 2011-12 toward developing and testing sensitivities, and Data Protection Act disclosure risks, of national level Fire and Rescue Service Incident Recording System data bases for use by: i) Fire and Rescue Services, and ii) anyone else. This is delivering against both the transparency agenda and a DCLG commitment set out in the sector-led Fire Futures review.
27. In its *Business Plan 2011-15*⁷, DCLG lists a range of datasets used for key policy decisions. They show a mix of statistics such as details of the level of council tax set by local authorities in England, area of designated green belt land in local authorities in England, and housing stock estimates.
28. A challenge for DCLG is to make all these datasets more accessible and useable to residents and partners. Chapter 11 illustrated how the department aims to test new approaches before introducing them department-wide.

Big Data: Corporate Spend Transparency

29. This new agenda illustrates how DCLG is already driving reform and service improvement through 'big' data. In line with local government, DCLG became the first department to publish details on its website⁸ of all spend data at the 1000 or £500 threshold (compared with £25,000 for some other departments). It has committed to publishing details of any new tenders for contracts, and new contracts over £10,000. Since May 2011, it has been routinely publishing full details of monthly Government Procurement Card spend on items of over £500. In response to a series of Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of information requests it has actually published a full breakdown of all Government Procurement Card spending from April 2004 to October 2011. DCLG has also published historic data on grants, as well as wider procurement spend, for 2008/9 and 2009/10.
30. A comprehensive range of information is provided to support the open data agenda and to maximise its usability. For each transaction, details published include the amount, supplier details, both 'procurement' and 'financial' spend categorisation, payment date and description. In addition, DCLG has led on the inclusion of supplier postcode details in spend data

⁷ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/businessplan2011>

⁸ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/transparencyingovernment/>

to assist with geographical analysis. With effect from September 2011, suppliers postcodes are now published as part of the standard monthly spend data.

31. ★ DCLG will be seeking opportunities to be even more open with its corporate spending data over the next two years. For example:
- Extending its monthly transparency publication to include details of transactions of over £500 paid to non civil servants who carry out work on behalf of the department and which were previously anonymised.
 - Exploring how it can make the corporate spend pages of the department's website more convenient for users, perhaps incorporating spend data in the proof-of-concept data filing cabinet (see Chapter 1). This data is used by some external organisations (e.g. <http://opencorporates.com/companies/gb/04077975>) and the department will endeavour to make it more user friendly over the coming months.
 - In order to make DCLG's spend data easier to access, understand and re-use, over the coming months the department will explore improved reporting technologies which can create interactive dashboards and reports. This will initially be used internally, providing slices of the data which can simply be viewed and challenged by business data owners, creating greater awareness and accountability. If this proof of concept is successful the interactive data will be made available on the DCLG website, possibly in the open data store, and will support data enquiries by the general public including trend analysis of spend by type or supplier.

32. To help embed corporate spend transparency within the department, it has:

- Developed a dedicated "transparency page" on the DCLG intranet to inform staff of issues;
- Produced a departmental Redaction Protocol to help staff determine which expenses should be redacted and which should not (the protocol can be seen at Annex B).
- Begun to examine ways of promoting awareness and making more accessible transparency datasets via a SAP Portal.

Big Data: DCLG's Demonstrator Map of Public Sector Assets

33. A critical success factor for DCLG will be our (and our partners') ability to publish high-quality data that is actively re-used by a broad audience. This could be citizens and local communities understanding and challenging specific policy issues in their particular locality. DCLG's Demonstrator Map of Public Sector Assets is perhaps an illustrative example.

34. Data on public sector assets⁹ is fragmented; there is no single source which covers all public sector assets. This makes it difficult to undertake strategic asset management and to generate benchmarks around the number and size of assets. To increase access to information on this matter, DCLG published the demonstrator map of public sector assets on 5 August 2010. It received a positive response from partners and widespread media coverage. Although the map was not able to identify *all* public sector assets, the publication of the map generated a lot of interest at the time – over 32,000 unique visits to its web page. It gave citizens access to public sector asset information, enabling them to challenge the public sector to make better use of its buildings and land.
35. DCLG Ministers are clear there is no need for central government to pull this published information together into a continually updated map. DCLG will though continue to encourage all organisations to publish their data.
36. ★ To avoid creating a burden on local government, DCLG will encourage local authorities to publish their asset data by including the publication of assets in the *Code of Recommended Practice on Transparency* (see below). The central government estate is now published on data.gov.uk and DCLG will continue to encourage departments to improve the information they provide.

Big Data: Details of Local Authority Spending

37. Although DCLG does not collect this information from local authorities, it has encouraged them to publish details of all items of expenditure over £500. It is one example of how we are driving reform through open data.
38. In June 2010 the Communities and Local Government Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, wrote to all principal local authorities in England requesting they provide financial transparency by publishing all expenditure over £500 online by January 2011. At the same time he challenged authorities to forge ahead and publish a wealth of information and data beyond spend in order to establish a culture of openness and transparency within local government.
39. To date, all but one principal authority (Nottingham City Council) has published its spend data. Details of local authorities' spend data can be found by using the [Local Directgov council expenditure over £500 search](#).
40. To support authorities in publishing data, DCLG has produced a *Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency*¹⁰. The department consulted on the draft Code in February 2011 and published the final version in September 2011. It should be made clear that DCLG

⁹ Public sector assets are defined as buildings and land that are owned (or used) by public sector organisations.

¹⁰ See <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/transparencycode>

itself follows all the requirements that we demand of local authorities in the Code.

41. Officials are currently considering the strategy for the next phase of local government transparency. It will focus on increasing our understanding of: the local authority data that citizens want, and when and how; and the benefits that open data can bring for local government and local public services.

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Chapter 3: My Data

42. My Data is the term applied to data about individuals (and held by organisations) that is released for access only by the individual. At a basic level this might include details of names and addresses. At a higher level it might capture details of transactions between citizen and supplier.
43. DCLG captures relatively little of this data. Where we do, we take steps to ensure that it is adequately protected while it is in our care, and that we respond to all requests for copies of an individual's personal data within the statutory timeframe. This ensures compliance with the Data Protection Act.
44. Examples of how the department is already driving reform and service improvement through 'my' data and greater citizen participation include: **DCLG's Planning Portal** which puts users at the heart of the service.
45. The Planning Portal is government's one-stop-shop for planning and building regulations. It hosts the national standard planning application form, along with a range of tools and interactive guidance on planning and building control policy. In a typical month it receives around 800,000 visits, processes 25,000 planning applications to local authorities and enables 130,000 downloads of Approved Documents. Its users are primarily planning agents, 'interested' citizens and local authorities across England and Wales.
46. A significant redesign in 2010 saw the Planning Portal move to a platform where users are presented with 'portlets' (windows of content) which best match their user type. They then have the choice to add and remove content easily to ensure that they get the most from the service.
47. ★ Ongoing enhancements to the application service expected in 2012 will further improve the service and improve the efficiency for users by streamlining the pull-through of personal data into application forms and providing additional customisation tools. In addition, DCLG is considering if/how we should make data regarding online planning applications available.

Chapter 4: Satisfaction and Experience Data

48. Satisfaction and Experience Data is data that provides customer insight about levels of satisfaction of public services. It provides an evidence base for the department and its arms length bodies to analyse and address the concerns of their users, customers or partner agencies.
49. An illustrative example of how it is used to drive service improvement can be seen through the **'Info4local' web portal and email alert service**, managed by DCLG. It provides one place for local authorities, the wider local public sector, the voluntary and community sector and others to get information from nearly 60 departments, agencies and public bodies. Its daily email has 46,500 subscribers.
50. It has consistently consulted customers throughout its 12-year life to develop the service. Its latest user survey shows that 95.9% of users are very satisfied or satisfied with the info4local service.
51. ★ Future plans are that the new single government domain will provide email alert services. Info4local aims to work with the Government Digital Service to ensure that lessons learned from info4local are taken on and that the new service provides the 'added value' features users appreciate.

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Chapter 5: Creation of Dynamic Information Markets

52. This chapter offers examples of DCLG's proposals for engagement with data users and how it will draw on such groups or individuals to improve datasets. This work aligns with the *Information Principles for Public Sector Information*:

- Principle 4 - Information is Standardised and Linkable;
- Principle 5 – Information is Re-used; and
- Principle 6 - Public Information is Published

53. DCLG sees potential to stimulate the information market in three main areas:

- Re-use of data by the public sector itself
- Re-use of data within the commercial analytics market
- New tools for citizens and communities

Re-use of data by the public sector itself

54. Within the local public sector, there are already many examples of re-using data from multiple sources. Through the DCLG-sponsored 'data4nr' service, we have catalogued around 100 Local Information Systems (LISs)¹¹, each comprising a variety of central government and local datasets.

55. Research in 2007¹² demonstrates that Local Information Systems have played an important role in supporting local partnerships to monitor and target delivery of shared regeneration policy outcomes. They have also served a broader purpose, for example by supporting early intervention in policy areas outside of the regeneration domain, and by providing publicly accessible tools to residents and communities, thereby strengthening local accountability.

56. The research identified that developing standards to ensure data can be coded or tagged in a consistent way to ensure it can be exchanged between organisations could offer considerable time and cost savings.

57. The Government's drive for transparency and open, re-usable data provides the impetus for securing these benefits across the network of local systems and sources. DCLG is aware of initiatives in the local sector that could be a focal point for change and improvement such as the Local

¹¹ <http://www.data4nr.net/local-information-systems/local/>

¹² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/localinformationsystems>

Government Association's (LGA) *Knowledge Hub*¹³ and *LG-Inform*¹⁴ programmes.

58. ★ DCLG is working closely with the Local Government Association on these initiatives. Through our open data quick-wins programme (see Chapter 1), we are exploring direct data feeds of DCLG sources into them. DCLG is encouraging the Local Government Association to offer the shared, underlying datasets in open, re-usable forms, so they can then be consumed directly by individual Local Information Systems. The aim is to open up new competition and economic opportunity amongst Local Information Systems suppliers by reducing costs and complexity of sourcing. This could lead to Local Information Systems vendors offering data from their own solutions in more open, re-usable formats. The prize is an environment where local and national sources can be easily combined, shared, and re-used, with potential for significant new applications for the public sector, local residents and communities.
59. Furthermore, DCLG will continue to work closely with the Local Chief Information Officer Council¹⁵ and the Local Government Delivery Council¹⁶ on how the open data strategy can help contribute to the development of locally delivered digital public services that maximise the benefits of localism.
60. More generally, DCLG promotes the creation of dynamic information markets through encouraging open local authority data, increasing transparency in order to make data more available to the citizen, local communities, and businesses, and allowing them to hold local service providers to account.
61. Not only will transparency allow people to see where their money goes and what it delivers, it will open up new markets and improve access for small and local businesses, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship. Greater transparency will put the voluntary sector and small business in a stronger position to pitch for contracts and bring new ideas and solutions to the table.

¹³ LGA's Knowledge Hub is a new online platform for building professional networks in the local government sector. Go to: <http://www.local.gov.uk/knowledgehub>

¹⁴ A prototype online service that allows local authorities to access, compare and analyse data. See <http://www.local.gov.uk/about-lginform>

¹⁵ The Local CIO Council meets three times a year to review where local government can support the broader Government CIO agenda and to discuss other issues and priorities relevant to local public services transformation

¹⁶ The Local Government Delivery Council (LGDC) drives forward local service transformation. It is part of local government's commitment to delivering services that meet the needs and expectations of citizens and businesses. The LGDC provides a forum where activity related to transformation can be brought together, monitored and developed

Re-use of data within the commercial analytics market

62. Many of DCLG's statistical outputs are widely re-used amongst suppliers of commercial analytical products and tools. Two examples are: (a) use of household projections and other data for retail planning; and (b) use of housing, planning and the Indices of Deprivation for local area profiling.
63. Our 'Live' Tables are an important resource. Published on the DCLG website¹⁷, they provide extensive and detailed statistics, drawn from official sources, and organised around policy topics such as housing stock, house building and repossession. The tables are updated frequently, as soon as new or revised data become available.
64. ★ DCLG will stimulate greater use of Live Tables and other data:
- Through the 'proof of concept' (described in Chapter 1) DCLG is already working with two leading suppliers of commercial information services. The aim is to test and prove standards which enable these suppliers to consume data directly from source, over the internet, and present/display results within their analytical tools and products.
 - Through the 'comparable local spending' project described in Chapter 6, DCLG has engaged leading suppliers of local authority financial systems software. Again, the objective is to determine how open standards can be employed in these commercial products to simplify and automate the process of acquiring and re-using public datasets.
 - DCLG will promote learning and outputs from this work via established channels such as the Demographic User Group. The aim is to stimulate take-up of open, standards-based approaches across the commercial sector in a range of scenarios.

New tools for citizens and communities

65. Alongside building a proof-of-concept data cabinet (see Chapter 1), DCLG has taken the first steps towards offering data to citizens in a more accessible, intuitive manner. Current solutions typically involve spreadsheets with embedded tools and functionality to help users navigate and understand complex statistical information. Two examples are:
- Local authority level data on revenue expenditure and financing¹⁸; and
 - A New Homes Bonus Calculator¹⁹

¹⁷ E.g. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingstatistics/livetables/>

¹⁸ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/xls/2031592.xls>

¹⁹ Government provides additional funding or a 'bonus' for new homes by match funding the additional council tax raised for new homes and empty properties brought back into use, with an additional amount for affordable homes, for the following six years. For details and the Calculator see:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/newhomesbonus/>

66. Feedback from users indicates that the tools have been well received. The New Homes Bonus Calculator and associated guidance has helped to provide a thorough in-depth understanding of the scheme. There was consensus that the calculator should be maintained as a permanent tool.
67. DCLG is also beginning to see new, innovative applications which use its datasets. The website 'Localism agenda' has used our New Homes Bonus Calculator to develop an i-Phone app²⁰.
68. ★ DCLG will engage with developers to encourage innovative uses of its outputs for citizens and local communities. Work will initially be undertaken with the 'proof of concept' data cabinet project thereby ensuring data re-use is based on open sources and standards. This should provide useful intelligence on how and when to migrate spreadsheet-based tools to web-based equivalents with the underlying data available for open re-use.
69. The activities set out in parts 2 and 3 of this chapter help ensure DCLG meets its obligations under the 'Reuse of public sector information regulations'. These regulations remove obstacles that stand in the way of the re-use of our information, and are intended to stimulate the development of innovative new information products and services²¹.

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²⁰ <http://www.localism-agenda.com/new-homes-bonus-calculator/> and <http://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/nhb-calc/id463740545?mt=8&ign-mpt=uo%3D4#>

²¹ See <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/legislation/directive-and-regulations.htm> for more information

Chapter 6: Continuously Improving the Quality of Data Published

70. In line with Principle 3 of the *Information Principles for Public Sector Information*, DCLG maintains data quality by ensuring it is fit for the purpose for which it is collected, used or published.
71. Quality standards vary across different datasets in DCLG. Those for official statistics are very different to those for administrative sources. However, elements of quality control that are common across *all* datasets include:
- Ensuring the release of accurate data in a timely manner;
 - Helping users to understand and match our datasets to their requirements by providing appropriate metadata including contextual information to minimise the risk of quality being compromised;
 - Enabling straightforward data re-use by publication in open formats under an Open Government Licence or appropriate equivalent;
 - Compliance with protocols and guidelines issued by bodies such as the UK Statistics Authority and the Open Standards Board; and
 - Maximising opportunities for our data to be reliably compared and combined with other relevant datasets. This includes using standard controlled vocabularies and code lists to aid data linking and integration.
72. DCLG's data outputs are already produced to very high quality standards (see Annex C). In addition, and in line with Principle 2 of the *Principles for Public Sector Information - Information is Managed* - it has various methods of ensuring data quality throughout the information life-cycle. These include:
- Security accreditation of the IT systems holding our datasets – this captures evidence to ensure that data is actively managed and protected according to legal requirements, and to mitigate business risk; and
 - Business Continuity Plans which identify information assets and systems for priority recovery in the event of serious disruption to our business.

Driving up data quality in DCLG

73. ★ DCLG will enhance its data quality through a process of continuous improvement, driven through various means:

- DCLG already publishes its Quarterly Data Summary: a snapshot of its budgets, spending, workforce, and results it has achieved. With the Government Digital Service, we are **developing plans for new on-line tools which present Quarterly Data Summary data for the public to scrutinise**. This should enable additional challenge, and engage the public to help us enhance the quality of the underlying data. It should also support improvements in DCLG operations and help identify cost savings. DCLG will work with other departments to share best practice on using the Quarterly Data Summary as a tool for achieving greater transparency and accountability.
- Building on successes to date, **DCLG will improve the timeliness and accuracy of data on our spending, budgets, workforce, and organisational structures**. With the Government Digital Service, we will explore opportunities for tools to enable these separate sources to be combined and visualised in new, innovative ways. Again, this should lead to greater scrutiny and challenge and shape further quality improvements.
- DCLG is aiming to **enhance the current staff organogram available on our website**. The existing version uses a standard, cross-Whitehall template but DCLG plans to add more details such as the names and photos of Senior Civil Servants, their personal work email address (rather than the generic "Contact Us" offered on the existing organogram) and a few key areas of work that s/he leads. This new organogram will feel more 'open' and usable to members of the public and partners.
- Using established governance structures DCLG will work across different groups of experts - statisticians, economists, geographers, data architects, and IT professionals - to **develop a more integrated, consistent approach to improving data quality**.
- **Strengthening its usage of the data.gov.uk catalogue** by testing opportunities to present entries directly on the DCLG website in new ways. Benefits should include improving the public's understanding of the purpose and nature of the datasets we produce – e.g. by presenting them in context of policy activities; and stimulating innovative uses of our data – e.g. by highlighting what is available for specific policy initiatives.
- Enabling **more extensive and effective comparison of DCLG data**. Our first step is to better coordinate and synchronise corporate data releases. This will help users combine and compare different sources drawn from a diverse set including Government Procurement Card spending and details of Ministerial meetings with external

organisations. By May 2012 we aim to produce, and will then maintain, a 'timeline grid' of relevant data releases.

Improving data quality through adopting open standards

74. ★ DCLG sees open standards as key to achieving significant improvements to data quality. Work here will align with the *Principles for Public Sector Information* Principles 4: Information is Standardised and Linkable; and 5: Information is Re-used. Through adopting open standards, we will:

- Release high-quality data that is actively re-used by a broad audience;
- Enable users to discover and understand our outputs by, for example,
- clearly describing the provenance of DCLG sources; and
- Enable DCLG's data to be reliably used alongside related third party sources in a range of scenarios, in new, innovative ways.

75. Benefits should include:

- Enabling users to quickly and reliably combine DCLG and related third party datasets, thereby generating new debate and insights; and
- Supporting new economic opportunities (by removing the barriers to and costs of re-using data in new applications).

76. DCLG also sees good potential to apply open, standards-based data across its policy agenda, in particular to support the drive for localism, decentralisation and public service reform.

77. DCLG is starting from a relatively strong position. Most of its published data complies with Level 3 of Sir Tim Berners-Lee's 5-star Linked Open Data Scheme. Data is available on the web in non-proprietary formats. It is working to go beyond this level and utilise Uniform Resource Indicator (URI) sets linked data formats to promote interoperability, provide context and add value. To date, DCLG has:

- Launched a trial site providing the high-profile Indices of Deprivation in 5-star formats²². This data is highly accessible - through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) - incorporating the latest Linked Data standards and best practice developed under the data.gov.uk agenda;
- Developed an application²³ to demonstrate how third parties can use this Linked Data source alongside other third party datasets, to create innovative new analysis and insights;
- Developed a demonstration application for DCLG's locality management function²⁴. **This brings together various local**

²² Trial site available at <http://opendatacommunities.org/>.

²³ LinkedData demonstration application available at http://dclgexamples.mywebcommunity.org/imd_demo_v7.htm

authority-level datasets from a mix of DCLG and external sources.

External data is retrieved directly from source, in real time, over the internet, illustrating potential for savings by avoiding the costs of holding and maintaining copies locally.

78. Building on these achievements, DCLG is now developing the proof-of-concept data cabinet described in Chapter 1. The key purpose is to determine the costs and benefits of moving up the 5 star rating in an efficient manner.
79. ★ DCLG is also **collaborating with external partners, particularly local authorities, to promote and encourage adoption of standards-based open data.** It has partnered the Local e-Government Standards Body²⁵ to test and prove open, standards-based approaches in specific, “real-world” local contexts. Currently, we are:
- Demonstrating how open data, founded on open standards, can improve engagement between local authorities and their residents, communities, and local businesses. With Devon County Council we are exploring the potential for open data to bring together disparate sources on strategic priorities, services and policy outcomes for different areas in the County;
 - Exploring how open data and standards can help to deliver more useful and comparable data on local spending. We are working with various councils to determine if and how open standards could be used to integrate information on budgets, spending, and contracts, with the results made available to councils and residents in order to improve understanding of funding priorities and enable appropriate challenge;
 - Working with the Local Government Association and encouraging local authorities to publish more accessible and comparable performance data, and to broaden accessibility to interactive performance data comparison websites. This will help citizens make informed judgements on the value for money provided by their local service providers.
80. The *Effective Services Delivery (esd) toolkit*²⁶ - facilitated by the Local Government Association - and *LG-Inform* will support local authorities to create and publish data to given metrics and standards. The Effective Services Delivery toolkit is already publishing a range of well established local standards linked to the local government business model.

²⁴ DCLG's Senior Civil Servants have responsibility to engage with localities. They have a role to visit local areas and understand the views and experiences of citizens, communities, businesses and local government, and feed that back to improve policy-making and good government. The Locality Management demonstration application is available at http://dclgexamples.mywebcommunity.org/localities/locality_manager_demo_v2.htm

²⁵ Local e-Government Standards Body's (LeGSB's) mission is to promote eStandards that support efficiency, transformation, and transparency of local services See:

<http://www.legsb.gov.uk/>

²⁶ See: <http://www.esd.org.uk/esdtoolkit/default.aspx>

Chapter 7 – any new data sets to be released for first time during period 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2014

81. DCLG is not presently aware of any new datasets to be released for the first time during the period 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2014. New programmes of work may of course entail new sets of data to be collected. The Single Datalist Gateway Group, co-chaired by DCLG and the Local Government Association will identify any new proposed data requirements from local authorities.
82. ★ The Department for Communities and Local Government will, through the course of 2012/13, strategically review the data it holds. Data that is currently held but not published will be considered for publication. As a result of this, datasets will obviously either be released into the public domain or remain unreleased. For any datasets falling into the latter category, a register of them will be made public, accompanied with details justifying this stance.

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Annex A: DCLG's Transparency and Open Data "Quick Win" Programme

83. Quick-win activity is focussed on delivering three main objectives, by end-April 2012:

84. **OBJECTIVE 1:** To develop and promote demonstrators of how, through adopting new publishing tools, techniques and standards, the Department can stimulate innovative uses and applications of its open data outputs.

85. **This is about DCLG's community of data publishers and data users working together to determine demand and explore new uses. The aim is also to enhance on-line services (such as the DCLG website) to showcase our data and stimulate external interest in building new tools and insights.**

86. For example, our proposals could provide simple and intuitive tools on the DCLG website for users to explore and understand data in context – for instance, by offering interactive charts and maps of key housing statistics within the website's housing section. We could also go further, to provide tools which help users blending the related sources – e.g. to use our data on payments, budgets and the Organogram to understand accountability for planned and actual expenditure, and constructively challenge DCLG about its spending decisions.

87. **OBJECTIVE 2:** To confirm how DCLG will move to release its full portfolio of datasets by default in more open, accessible forms – whilst also achieving cost-savings and efficiencies.

88. **This is about continuing progressively to test, prove and embed more cost-effective and reliable tools, systems and standards for releasing data to a trusted, open repository – akin to a data "filing cabinet". The aim is for this "filing cabinet" to be a single source of maintained, authoritative data for external users and DCLG staff. This will help to drive out opportunities for system rationalisation and consolidation, and therefore achieve cost savings and efficiencies.**

89. For example, our proposals will deliver a data "filing cabinet" containing datasets that DCLG produces or uses for two selected quick-win business areas. Our proposals will test tools for DCLG's data publishers to manage and control the release of their datasets to the "filing cabinet". This will determine whether this approach could be extended to accommodate the Department's full range of datasets, and estimate associated costs.

90. **OBJECTIVE 3-** To maintain strong and effective partnerships with key open data standards decision-making bodies such as Cabinet Office, the Chief Information Officers Council, and the Local Government Group.
91. **This is about DCLG collaborating with others and - where required - leading from the front, to develop and embed standards and best practice for effective and efficient data sharing and re-use. A key aim is to ensure that data from national and local public sector organisational silos is openly available to be blended, compared and visualised around common topics, or specific localities.**
92. For example, our proposals will cement the Department's partnership with the Local e-Government Standards Body (LeGSB). This relationship has already delivered proven and effective mechanisms for DCLG to work collaboratively with local authorities and solve real-world challenges around data sharing and re-use. The Local e-Government Standards Body partnership also improves the credibility of DCLG's own open data "offer" within the local sector, and helps the Department to build trust and so influence change and improvement amongst local authorities and their local partners.

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Annex B – Protocol for Redacting DCLG Transactions from Monthly Corporate Transparency Spend Data Reports

Issue

93. Until December 2011, DCLG had no official policy on which transactions should be disclosed in its monthly corporate transparency spend data reports and which should not. While some requests for redaction (i.e. blocking out, deleting or anonymising so as not to be disclosed publicly) are obvious - e.g. they concern national security – justification for redacting others can be far less clear.

Recommendation

94. It is therefore sensible for DCLG, its executive agencies and its arms length bodies (ALBs) to have a protocol that establishes consistency over which transactions are fully disclosed and which are partially or fully redacted. DCLG staff in the Finance Shared Services Division tasked with completing the monthly reports will use this protocol to determine whether they should accept or decline redaction requests. Certain standard categories of expenditure – for example civil servants expenses claims and salary payments for non-senior staff - are currently anonymised and consolidated by Finance Shared Services Division as a matter of course. All staff are reminded that this protocol applies only to those items of spend over £500²⁷

Consideration

95. Treasury guidance²⁸ sets out categories of transactions which should not be published. It does, though, set out an expectation that most information will be published, so that redactions are expected to be the exception rather than the rule. For instance, items will not be redacted merely because they cause embarrassment. Where uncertainty exists, a department should judge for itself whether items of spend are to be redacted but “the Freedom of Information Act should be used as the frame of reference when making these judgements” – that is, if details of a transaction would be disclosed in response to a Freedom of Information (FoI) request, then the expectation is that they would be disclosed in corporate transparency spend data reports.

²⁷ At the Local Government Association conference in July 2010, the Secretary of State committed the Department and its arms length bodies to publish details of spending over £500.

²⁸ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/government_spend280211.pdf

Proposed 'protocol'

96. DCLG (and its arms length bodies') staff should therefore consider the following simple protocol where departmental transactions are concerned:

97. Where a redaction is sought, the question to ask is: would the details of the expenditure be published in response to a valid, specific Freedom of Information Act enquiry?

98. If the answer to this is clearly "yes", there should be no redaction. In line with Treasury advice, and from December 2011, redactions will not normally be considered for non civil servant or contractors' travel and subsistence claims, or rent claims, that total over £500 (including VAT). The threshold of £500 applies to a total claim value, so any items of less than £500 within a claim for over £500 will be included. Civil servants' claims will be redacted inasmuch as they will be anonymised and consolidated²⁹.

99. For the answer to the question to be "no" the information must be.....:

- personal information to the extent that it is protected by the Data Protection Act 1998. Under this protocol, DCLG will presume data on sole traders should be released (as they are not acting in a "personal" capacity) and will follow Information Commissioner's Office's guidance that there should be a greater degree of scrutiny of payments made to senior officials³⁰.
- prejudicial to national security
- commercially confidential information. As per Information Commissioner's Office guidance³¹, the disclosure needs to harm or prejudice the contractor's or the department's commercial interests to warrant redaction. This protocol notes that all contracts over £500 need to be pro-actively published. This reduces the scope for arguing that payments made under schedules to these contracts should be confidential.
- exempt under Freedom of Information to protect the identities of companies and individuals providing services to HM Government in e.g. 'fragile' countries
- other types of information for which there is an exemption under Freedom of Information (e.g. payments to Royal households) or

²⁹ The exceptions to this are expenses claimed by the DCLG Permanent Secretary, Directors General and non-executive Directors. These, and also details of hospitality they receive, should be published in Cabinet Office's Expenses & Hospitality Registers for Permanent Secretaries and Directors General.

³⁰ http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/practical_application/salaries_v1.pdf

³¹ http://www.ico.gov.uk/upload/documents/library/freedom_of_information/detailed_specialist_guides/awareness_guidance_5_-_commercial_interests.pdf

- outside the definition of expenditure for the purpose of corporate transparency spend reports (e.g. provisions or promises to pay not yet realised)

100. Even if the transaction falls into one of the above categories it is still necessary to consider whether there is overriding public interest in disclosure of the transaction; if so the transaction should be disclosed unredacted. Otherwise, it may be redacted.

101. **Those seeking redactions must indicate which of the above categories the information falls under to justify its exemption from DCLG's monthly corporate transparency spend reports³². If uncertainty remains, the request for redaction is to be forwarded to DCLG's Accountability and Transparency Division who will consult with DCLG's Legal Officers and the Freedom of Information Team to determine the correct response.**

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³² In November 2011, DCLG contacted non civil servants and sole traders advising them of our transparency publication commitments and providing an opportunity to challenge (and retain anonymity after December 2011) if transactions fell under, for example, the 'commercially confidential' category.

Annex C: DCLG Adherence to Data Quality Standards

102. DCLG manages all of its national and official statistics in accordance with the governance arrangements set out in the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, and in conformance with the *UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.
103. The latter incorporates the additional statutory requirements set out in the *UK Government's Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*. The department also complies with the wider data management requirements set out in legislation such as the *Data Protection Act 1998* and the *Freedom of Information Act 2000*.
104. In the case of its 'National Statistics', the department has a statutory duty to comply with the Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This sets out both the general principles and the specific rules that must govern the management of official statistics. The Code embraces such matters as quality assurance; data security; classification; standardisation; presentation; publication; and preservation.
105. The Department also follows the National Statistician's published 'best practice' guidance on how to implement the Code. This equates with more general data management guidance issued by the government covering such matters as metadata and data archiving.

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Annex D: Commitments set out in the DCLG Open Data Strategy

106. The ★ symbol in the strategy indicates where DCLG intends to develop work in the future. A full list of such actions can be seen below.

Chapter 1

107. ★ Through the DCLG Public Data and Transparency Board, plans for the short-term are to create the following main outputs:

- A new **“proof-of-concept” open data store**, containing a broad range of statistical datasets on housing, planning and local government finance. DCLG is also exploring incorporating other types of data for example on its budgets and spending transactions over £500. The store will be available from end-March 2012, with data accessible via open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) conforming to Government and Open Linked Data standards³³;
- Modest applications that **“show and tell”** users and software developers how to access and re-use data in the store. DCLG is working with the Government Digital Service to determine opportunities for wider re-use in government, aiming to make the first applications available this summer.
- Additional demonstration applications which show **DCLG data being used in third party sites**. We are currently working with various external developers on opportunities for re-use in applications for monitoring homelessness, tracking and planning housing delivery, and undertaking area profiling of local authorities. The first applications should be on-line in early summer 2012.
- A prototype demonstrating practical uses and benefits of **more comparable data on local spending**. Our plan is make this available in May 2012, with supporting guidance on best-practice and standards for councils to apply to their own local sources.

Chapter 2

★ DCLG will be seeking opportunities to be even more open with its corporate spending data over the next two years. For example:

- Extending its monthly transparency publication to include details of transactions of over £500 paid to non civil servants who carry out work on behalf of the department and which were previously anonymised.

³³ Standard web-based data format that allows data of various kinds to be analyzed

- Exploring how it can make the corporate spend pages of the department's website more convenient for users, perhaps incorporating spend data in the proof-of-concept data filing cabinet (see Chapter 1). This data is used by some external organisations (e.g. <http://opencorporates.com/companies/gb/04077975>) and the department will endeavour to make it more user-friendly over the coming months.
 - In order to make DCLG's spend data easier to access, understand and re-use, over the coming months the department will explore improved reporting technologies which can create interactive dashboards and reports. This will initially be used internally, providing slices of the data which can simply be viewed and challenged by business data owners, creating greater awareness and accountability. If this proof of concept is successful the interactive data will be made available on the DCLG website, possibly in the open data store, and will support data enquiries by the general public including trend analysis of spend by type or supplier.
108. ★ To avoid creating a burden on local government, DCLG will encourage local authorities to publish their asset data by including the publication of assets in the *Code of Recommended Practice on Transparency* (see below). The central government estate is now published on data.gov.uk and DCLG will continue to encourage departments to improve the information they provide.

Chapter 3

109. ★ Ongoing enhancements to the application service (of the Planning Portal) expected in 2012 will further improve the service and improve the efficiency for users by streamlining the pull-through of personal data into application forms and providing additional customisation tools. In addition, DCLG is considering if/how we should make data regarding online planning applications available.

Chapter 4

110. ★ Future plans are that the new single government domain will provide email alert services. Info4local aims to work with the Government Digital Service to ensure that lessons learned from info4local are taken on and that the new service provides the 'added value' features users appreciate.

Chapter 5

111. ★ DCLG is working closely with Local Government Association (LGA) on these initiatives (*LG Inform* and the *Knowledge Hub*). Through our open data quick-wins programme (see Chapter 1), we are exploring direct data feeds of DCLG sources into them. DCLG is encouraging Local Government Association to offer the shared, underlying datasets in open, re-usable forms, so they can then be consumed directly by individual Local Information Systems (LISs). The aim is to open up new competition and economic opportunity amongst Local Information Systems suppliers by reducing costs and complexity of sourcing. This could lead to Local Information Systems vendors offering data from their own solutions in more open, re-usable formats. The prize is an environment where local and national sources can be easily combined, shared, and re-used, with potential for significant new applications for the public sector, local residents and communities.
112. ★ DCLG will stimulate greater use of Live Tables and other data:
- Through the 'proof of concept' (described in Chapter 1), DCLG is already working with two leading suppliers of commercial information services. The aim is to test and prove standards which enable these suppliers to consume data directly from source, over the internet, and present/display results within their analytical tools and products.
 - Through the 'comparable local spending' project described in Chapter 6, DCLG has engaged leading suppliers of local authority financial systems software. Again, the objective is to determine how open standards can be employed in these commercial products to simplify and automate the process of acquiring and re-using public datasets.
 - DCLG will promote learning and outputs from this work via established channels such as the Demographic User Group. The aim is to stimulate take-up of open, standards-based approaches across the commercial sector in a range of scenarios.
113. ★ DCLG will engage with developers to encourage innovative uses of its outputs for citizens and local communities. Work will initially be undertaken with the 'proof of concept' data cabinet project thereby ensuring data re-use is based on open sources and standards. This should provide useful intelligence on how and when to migrate spreadsheet-based tools to web-based equivalents with the underlying data available for open re-use.

Chapter 6

114. ★ DCLG will enhance its data quality through a process of continuous improvement, driven through various means:

- DCLG already publishes its Quarterly Data Summary (QDS): a snapshot of its budgets, spending, workforce, and results it has achieved. With the Government Digital Service, we are **developing plans for new on-line tools which present Quarterly Data Summary data for the public to scrutinise**. This should enable additional challenge, and engage the public to help us enhance the quality of the underlying data. It should also support improvements in DCLG operations and help identify cost savings. DCLG will work with other departments to share best practice on using the Quarterly Data Summary as a tool for achieving greater transparency and accountability.
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 - Working with the Local Government Association and encouraging local authorities to publish more accessible and comparable performance data, and to broaden accessibility to interactive performance data comparison websites. This will help citizens make informed judgements on the value for money provided by their local service providers.

Chapter 7

117. ★ DCLG will, through the course of 2012/13, strategically review the data it holds. Data that is currently held but not published will be considered for publication. As a result of this, datasets will obviously either be released into the public domain or remain unreleased. For any datasets falling into the latter category, a register of them will be made public, accompanied with details justifying this stance.

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