

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**POLICY & RESOURCES
CABINET MEMBER**

OPEN DATA: UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To introduce the main provisions of the Open Data white paper 'Unleashing the Potential' and to outline a proposed action plan for managing the provisions.
- 1.2 To seek cabinet member approval of the initial action plan and to determine a timeline for the next steps.
- 1.3 The key points are:
 - The Open Data white paper makes it clear that all public data, including local government data, should be open and externally available where possible.
 - The presumption is that datasets should be published unless there is a reason not to
 - Datasets should be made available in machine-readable formats that will allow re-use where possible

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 On 28 June 2012 the Cabinet Office published the Open Data white paper, 'unleashing the potential'. This followed a consultation which closed in October 2011. The white paper forms part of the government's wider transparency agenda as outlined in the '*Open Public Services White Paper*'.
- 2.2 The aim of this agenda is to:
 - Increase access to public sector data at no cost
 - Enable more transparent decision making by scrutiny and the public
 - Stimulate economic growth through information and data
 - Allow re-use of the data through use of open data licences
- 2.3 In response to the transparency agenda we have already published the following on our website:- :
 - Payments over £500,
 - Senior Salaries
 - Procurement awards over £10,000
 - Performance Information

- 2.4 The proposals outline how we will make it easier for the public and businesses to access public data and easier for data publishers to release data in standardised, machine-readable open formats; and engraining a 'presumption to publish' unless specific reasons (such as privacy) can be clearly articulated.
- 2.5 Currently datasets are not routinely published by local authorities and the main mechanism for accessing local authority held data is the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and Environmental Information Act (EIR). The provisions of this act have been widened to include the responsibility for local authorities to provide datasets, where requested, in formats so that the data can be re-used.
- 2.6 Local authority progress on Open Data is varied. This is an evolving area but research has shown that to comply with the basic requirements of the provisions local authorities have re-published data that is already available on their website but in formats that can be re-used. For example, our website currently lists Polling Stations as text on a page. Providing this as open Data would require us to supply the data in a machine-readable format so that anyone could analyse or re-use the data on another website under the terms of an Open License.
- 2.7 Whilst the White Paper only recommends that making data available in usable formats is good practice the Government recently consulted local authorities on making regulations to require local authorities to publish data falling within certain descriptions of information specified in the Code of Recommended Practice for Local authorities on Data Transparency, The code is concerned with making data generated by authorities available and accessible to the public.
- 2.8 The council benefits from accessing open data. The Ordnance Survey, Natural England and others make selected datasets available for us to use for whatever purpose we see fit, without the need to have a specific data sharing agreement with that organisation.
- 2.9 The implications of the provisions are:-
- The presumption is that all council datasets are published unless there is a reason not to
 - Data should be made available under an appropriate licence. The National Archives have defined an Open Government License for general use whilst specific examples exist, such as Ordnance Survey, for more specialist data.
 - Any dataset containing copyright material (where the council holds the copyright) must be made available under a specified licence
 - Datasets that are published should be signposted on the data.gov.uk website
 - Re-use of the datasets will be permitted under the licence
 - Best practice is to conduct an information audit to determine the information held by the organisation and identify suitable datasets to release
- 2.10 In order to meet the current provisions of the Open Data white paper we are already taking a number of steps (stage 1), to be completed by the end of March:-
1. Obtain an example of the Open government licence (this will stipulate how people or companies can re-use the data)
 2. Construct a separate web page within the North Lincolnshire council website to bring together links to currently available data via the website

3. Increase the data available via this web page by identifying geographic data that is already held on the council's website or the observatory but can be made available in a re-usable format
- 2.11 However, the steps in 2.8 will not fully meet the rationale behind the government's white paper and therefore once we have completed this first stage we should consider wider Open Data provisions (Stage 2). This could include:
- An audit of all available datasets that the council holds
 - A commitment to place all available datasets on the council's website in a re-usable format subject to restrictions, e.g. confidentiality
 - Utilising the Data Observatory as one of the vehicles for making data available

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 **Option 1:** Do nothing.
- 3.2 **Option 2:** To undertake the actions detailed in 2.8 by the end of March and then report back to Cabinet member on the actions required to deliver stage 2.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 **Option 1:** This will not allow us to comply with the provisions and will give us a negative rating on the SOCITM Better Connected survey.
- 4.2 **Option 2:** Stage 1 will allow us to comply with the current provisions of the white paper by the end of October, to get a positive rating on the SOCITM Better Connected survey and will bring us into line with the current position of other local authorities. Stage 2 will allow us to more fully comply with the provisions and the rationale behind the White Paper. This will also allow us to ensure that the quality of our data across the council is robust.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 There will be no direct financial cost to the procuring of an Open Data licence.
- 5.2 There will be some initial staffing resource required in digital services to produce an initial web page (1-2 days) and to transfer the current available data into usable formats (3-4 days).
- 5.3 There will be a minor resource required in Business Support to deliver stage 1, to maintain the web page and to identify new datasets as they appear on the council website. There will be more significant resource required to implement stage 2, however, this work would be subsumed into the work programme of the re-structured Information Governance unit and would be of benefit to the authority. As the potential number of datasets could be significant, we will add additional datasets in batches of 6-10 at a time.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

- 6.1 Option 2 will allow us to meet the current provisions of the Open Data white paper by the end of February and to develop a programme to more fully meet the provisions over the next few years.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

- 7.1 Consultation has taken place with the Information Management and Information Technology divisions of the Business Support unit and the Planning & Regeneration division of the Places directorate.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Cabinet member considers the implications of the Open Data White Paper and approves the initial stage 1 actions to meet the current provisions (Option 2).
- 8.2 An update on the programme of actions required to deliver stage 2 is submitted to cabinet member in April.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Open Data White Paper, 'Unleashing the Potential' – June 2012
Open Public Service White Paper – March 2012
Making Open Data Real – Public Consultation – August 2011