Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects Evaluation Report

North Somerset Council

PROJECT TITLE:	Customer information portal and dashboards supported by a corporate metadata repository
LEAD ORGANISATION:	North Somerset Council
SUBMISSION DATE:	28/08/2014
TYPE OF PROJECT:	Collection of data/metadata, data publishing/release, standards, platform/tool development, data presentation
TOTAL GRANT:	£26,750

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

To implement a suite of tools that use existing 'best of breed' Open Data applications and standard driven information management tools. The suite of tools will enable engagement with a broad range of customers and maximise corporate awareness of the need for good quality, standardised information.

The core project components are:

1) Implement an Open Data repository/portal and supporting technical infrastructure (Redbridge DataStore).

2) Develop a standard corporate metadata catalogue for all corporate data.

3) Implement online graphical dashboards that enable view and download access to Open Data at local levels.

CHALLENGE/OPPORTUNITY

1) To generally improve the availability of, and access to, more relevant and timely information to external customers

2) Development of a corporate metadata hub to increase corporate awareness and raise understanding of the importance of proper information management. This will identify Open Data datasets than can be published, as well as issues with data quality, security and sensitivity. The metadata will in turn will support the effective rollout of the wider Portal project, promote external customer/partner buy in and enable more effective service delivery.

3) Easy to use portals and dashboards will ensure improvements in data quality and standardisation, leading to more informed data mashups and migration to fully linked data as part of the semantic web.

DATA PUBLISHED AND USES

At the time of writing, approximately 30 datasets have been released. It was intended that more datasets would have been published by the end of August 2014, but ongoing ICT delays with the technical implementation of the DataShare portal meant this was unfortunately not possible.

However, a significant amount of work has taken place to identify, collate and collect further datasets ready for publishing, with another 20-30 datasets planned for publication in September/October 2014.

As a result of the increased awareness of open data at North Somerset Council, additional dedicated resources have been secured and tasked with the collection and publication of both pending and additional datasets until the end of 2014. The additional resources will also continue to develop the automated publishing of datasets to the DataShare tool. This will use software tools and tasks to automate extraction and movement of information from back office systems and data sources for publication as open data.

The list of datasets has been prioritised based on known demand from a combination of local projects, service/FOI requests and to support the transparency agenda. The list and schema of datasets can be downloaded from the DataShare portal at www.data.n-somerset.gov.uk.

Due to ongoing ICT delays that have pushed back the project, the monitoring of take up and usage is yet to provide any quantifiable information. In light of this lack of evidence at this point, North Somerset Council will monitor future usage/take up and will provide this evidence to LGA/BIS whenever requested. Evidence will also be used for reporting back to internal senior managers and councillors who are actively engaged with the project and emerging value of open data.

APPROACH TO PUBLISHING DATA

- *What approach is used to publish data?*

    Data publication is currently a mixture of manual processing and automated extraction/formatting depending on the data source.

    Where processes have been automated, data extract scripts have been written and scheduled to format and moving files from internal locations through to a default location ready for publication onto the public facing tools. Development of automation tasks is being expanded where it is cost effective to do some (in some

instances it is quicker to manipulate raw data or use a standard system report). It is hoped that more datasets will be able to be uploaded automatically following definition of schemas.

- *How data users assess the availability and use of data:*
  - *How have users found out about the service?*
  - *How has the authority promoted the publication of the data?*
  - *Have users found it easy to download datasets and use the datasets?*

  The public facing DataShare tool was only made available at the end of August 2014 and as such it is impossible to provide a qualitative response at this time.

  Internally, communications have been undertaken at all levels via senior management meetings (leadership development teams and directorate leadership teams as well as the council's internal communications. Significant investment in time has been made in securing the senior sponsorship of Cllr Ashton, Leader of the Council and CEO Mike Jackson.

  This senior support is assisting in the promotion of open data both internally, with partners and externally (as demonstrated by Mike Jackson's presentation at the LGA conference in July 2014). The senior support has also prompted the application for 2014/15 breakthrough funding to enhance the use of open data offer and use the tools established in this project as a solid basis and springboard for more innovation.

  Links are being added throughout the NSC website where data has now been published via DataShare. There is a plan to include articles in the Council's internal and external communications publications (The Knowledge/Life magazine) once the pending datasets have been loaded, tested and configured. Comments will be sought from the user community as to how the data has been used/explored and what further information should/could be made available.

  DataShare was selected as the open data public interface as it offers a tried and tested tool that has been custom built for the management and publication of open data. The tool is also supported by Cipfa which reduces local dependencies on ICT.

- *Is the contextual information such as metadata provided with the data of use? Whether data systems are sufficiently robust and sustainable. Are there any plans for further monitoring, developing and improving the system?*

  A link to the DataShare site has been made available on data.gov.uk.

  Additional datasets will have metadata provided where it is considered valuable to the wider community.

  North Somerset is moving ICT to a cloud based infrastructure later in 2014 so detailed statistics for service availability/reliability should be available as part of the

overall service monitoring. The systems, particularly dashboards, will continue to evolve over time based on customer feedback and corporate priorities. North Somerset will look to continue to work closely with open data and transparency groups, and provide constructive input based on findings from this project.

BENEFITS AND IMPACT

- *What is the impact of publishing the data or providing a service to your organisation and to the data users?*

    Access to timely, relevant information will provide invaluable support for internal and external users.

    The portal/dashboard tools will seek to empower local groups to make informed decisions through an improved visibility and understanding of the council and its partner's activities (e.g. service provision/priorities, spending, demographics, infrastructure/planning, etc).

    Information will be collected from local and national sources meaning professionals, volunteers and community groups are better able to use current information to enable clearer communication and faster, more effective decision making.

    Corporate understanding and buy in to the importance of Open Data has been key to this project. The development of the Corporate Information Catalogue ensures a detailed knowledge of the information managed by different service areas, helping to identify potential datasets for publishing, as well as identifying duplication, errors and opportunities for closer data sharing with partners.

- *Provide evidence/case studies of social, economic or environmental benefits to data providers, direct data users, communities or resellers.*

    Case studies will be compiled following wider roll out. This is seen as essential to ensure future engagement and buy in from partners and customers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The North Somerset DataShare platform is available at http://data.n-somerset.gov.uk. Links to information can be found at www.n-somerset.gov.uk.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Dave Burdge, Corporate Information Manager at North Somerset Council (david.burdge@n-somerset.gov.uk)