



Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects 2014/15 Evaluation Report

Project title: Releasing Suffolk Data for All

Lead organisation:	Mid Suffolk District Council and Babergh District Council
Other contributing organisations:	Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council, Ipswich Borough Council
Date report is submitted:	31 st August 2015
Type of project:	Data release, platform and data usability
Total grant:	£198,667

SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT: The Suffolk wide open data project is a large collaborative programme with seven local authorities, to coordinate the publishing of comparative open data enabling self-service and analysis of information by communities and businesses in a rural area.

Challenge and an opportunity

The countywide project, led by Mid Suffolk and Babergh District Councils is a collaborative programme with all of the Districts and Boroughs within Suffolk. As a cross boundary project team we developed a process to identify release and extract datasets that would be useful and informative for businesses and communities, beyond the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 requirements. Together we also compiled joint internal and external communications, integrated our training arrangements and considered ways to change behaviours internally so that data is used as a strong evidence base for a range of purposes. Our plan, which received buy-in at the highest levels within the individual councils, was to ultimately make as much data open, transparent and usable as possible, by identifying, grouping and publishing data sets on a single data platform (the Suffolk Observatory).

The innovative collaborative working across the partnership involved all authorities agreeing to release the same data/information with the aspiration that, through our partner organisations, our communities, businesses and organisations, a wealth of knowledge would be created which in turn would support economic and social growth countywide. Since the release of the first tranche of 25 datasets other partner organisations (incl. Public Health and Suffolk County Council) have been in contact with a view to working with us to release further datasets.

Many opportunities were identified when the project was first scoped. As an example, these included:

- Data to support businesses to locate into the area or grow,
- Data to support communities to understand their neighbourhoods and potentially produce neighbourhood plans,
- Internal data enabling our organisations to become more intelligence led in their decision making,
- Information where our Councillors might self-serve in support of their community and strategic roles,
- The need to reduce FOI requests including repeat requests.

Early on in the project, it was identified that data mining and visualisation software would be a longer term solution for the project. Using grant money that was secured through the LGA we



purchased software and consultancy support that was used to simplify the ongoing publication of datasets including regularly updating and comparing data across the County. This resulted in the partnership initially identifying and releasing 25 datasets on the Suffolk Observatory with a view and commitment to continue to release up to 100 datasets as a longer term ambition.

Approach to publishing data

A range of technologies have been used to enable the publication of the data. The diagram within Appendix A shows the core of the solution which utilised a data mining software which moves, transforms and translates data; and a visual analytic platform to visualise and publish the data.

One of the primary reasons for choosing the toolset and visual analytic platform was their scalability, robustness and ability to grow and develop. The toolset is widely used within other authorities allowing us to share and work with them in the future to create further work streams, building on the existing collaboration in Suffolk. The toolset has provided an integration platform back into core council systems and databases. This ensures that all the datasets released are realised on the same schema, format and are comparable. The visual analytic gives us visual options and as an analysis tool provides users with the ability to interrogate the data by providing different and novel ways to view, to drill into the data further and contextualise information. Better visualisation was considered a key element, as the feedback received from communities and businesses identified the requirement to more easily understand the data that was available.

Data requirements were determined through communication with a variety of users with the following key points raised:

External data requirements – main points	Internal data requirements – main points
<i>Data needs to be in an easy format to understand</i>	<i>Access to data was problematic</i>
<i>Data must be up to date and easily available</i>	<i>Regular updated data was not available</i>
<i>Data needs to be fit for purpose to meet needs</i>	<i>Inconsistent formats and granulation of data</i>
<i>Data must be downloadable in a non-propriety format</i>	<i>Lack of knowledge of what data was available and the location of the data</i>

We developed a process considering the main points that internal and external data users were experiencing. Purchasing the toolset helped to resolve these points including: being able to provide the data in several accessible formats, automating data updates and providing data in multi locations i.e. Suffolk Observatory and data.gov.uk. The visual analytic platform has provided a way for data to be published in a format that is easy to understand and to allow the user to interact with the data, as well as providing the data to download in a non-proprietary format i.e. CSV/XML.

In addition, the ability to combine the new data with existing data on the Suffolk Observatory such as Census data provides users with a full picture. Friendly tutorials have been developed for downloading or combining datasets to assist users. Furthermore, we provided users with all the information about the data information and published the metadata on data.gov.uk.

The project team produced joint internal and external communications to promote the publication of the data. Internal communications were published in internal newsletters, briefings were provided across the organisations, articles were published on Council websites, the Suffolk Observatory promotes the data, and a press release was sent out w/c 27/7 requesting communities and businesses to notify us of suggested open datasets.



In addition, a specific email address has been set up for the project to receive feedback and suggestions; the main piece of external feedback to date has been interest in being kept informed of updates to the datasets released. Internally there has been much interest and excitement with an increased awareness of available information that can support the Councils' activities.

Data published and uses

To ensure the datasets would be useful across the authorities we consulted with a range of potential users: internal teams within the authorities, Councillors from a range of authorities (County, District and Parish) and businesses who provided feedback through internal teams. We also held engagement events, attended events and reviewed FOI requests. A number of systems were interrogated with regard to collating information on the proposed 1st release of datasets, which identified 25 to be published during the project period, (Appendix B).

As the data has only been released in the last month it is hard to give accurate information around use of the datasets. Activity on [Data.gov.uk](https://data.gov.uk) has been limited as the datasets have only been uploaded for a short amount of time (see Appendix C). The Suffolk Observatory records the number of views (where we have had over 370) but does not record the number of dataset downloads, however the Suffolk Observatory Manager is looking to develop this feature. Both sites have a place for users to feedback on what further datasets would be useful.

Benefits and impact

There are several impacts of publishing data and the benefits of creating this knowledge are starting to materialise:

- It has been proven that Open Data supports social and economic growth and the transparency of releasing data helps to improve the confidence and trust with communities and businesses particularly with helping them to better understand their neighbourhoods.
- Our business engagement identified the need for data to support future business development or to attract new businesses in the area. We have released a number of datasets to support this with further identified sets to follow.
- Communities identified benefits in having robust data and evidence that could inform their neighbourhood plans, particularly around business and residential growth in rural areas.
- In support of the Localism Agenda, the release of these datasets engages citizens and communities, and empowers them to hold us to account.
- Internally, this project is one of the steps in making us all intelligence-led organisations and provides a mechanism to innovate through better use of data.
- Each Council has signed up to a Charter to make as much data transparent as possible (with another 75 datasets identified) and with the software solutions making a number of datasets automatic and real time, there are potentially significant staff resource savings.
- Release of datasets based upon repeat FOI requests will also reduce staff resource and refine future requests.
- Data will support our Councillors both in their community and strategic role.
- A self-serve ethos by accessing useable data on the Suffolk Observatory will enable communities to do more for themselves.

As this is the 1st tranche of data that has been released, benefits will continue to increase over time as more datasets are released, building on the current data available. This information will lead to better informed decision making based upon robust evidence. There were and will continue to be



several major benefits of working with all the districts and boroughs within the County on this project:

- It provided a wide knowledge base to be used with views beyond our own authorities.
- Work was shared across the authorities with best use made of skills and resources across the partners.
- The same data was made available across a wider geographic area as users do not always know where one authority stops and another starts.
- Authorities can benchmark against data that was not previously available.
- Knowledge gained with the purchase of the software solutions, opens up additional opportunities across Suffolk such as a shared performance approach.
- It builds on existing collaborative working between the authorities through identifying similarities, issues and where we may look to deliver activities together or learn and take best practice from each other.
- Working across seven district councils has not been 'easy sailing', however much has been learnt and there is an appetite to build on this collaborative working across Suffolk for the benefit of our communities and businesses.

Lessons learned

Public services in Suffolk have an excellent track record of partnership working and the open data project was seen as another opportunity to grow, show this and reap the benefits. Aligning the release of open data so that it is usable and comparable across Suffolk was an important factor and this would contribute to future projects and the ease of data access for communities and businesses in Suffolk.

As with any project, lessons have been learnt and these have been included in Appendix D. In summary however releasing data can be complex for one authority working on its own; when there are seven authorities that complexity multiplies and impacts on the time taken. One dataset and schema might work for one or several authorities but it may not for others due to software limitations, location of the data etc. In future a detailed spreadsheet will be used for assessing datasets and breaking the schema down into identifiable sections, so that all authorities are comfortable with releasing the data before extraction begins. In addition, releasing data is time consuming due to extraction and ensuring a useable format for release. Time must be allowed to do this including working out what is a suitable frequency for updates.

All authorities have a data protection officer/team but data management is more crucial as the data needs to be managed and not just protected. Having appropriate policies, agreements and a charter in place is significant as well as embedding a culture to manage data.

Open Data is so important for so many reasons, but there is no point in releasing data if no one knows about it. A strong communication with both internal and external users is fundamental. Advertise through several channels, websites, e-mails, newsletters etc. Communication needs to be ongoing throughout the project and beyond.

Further information:

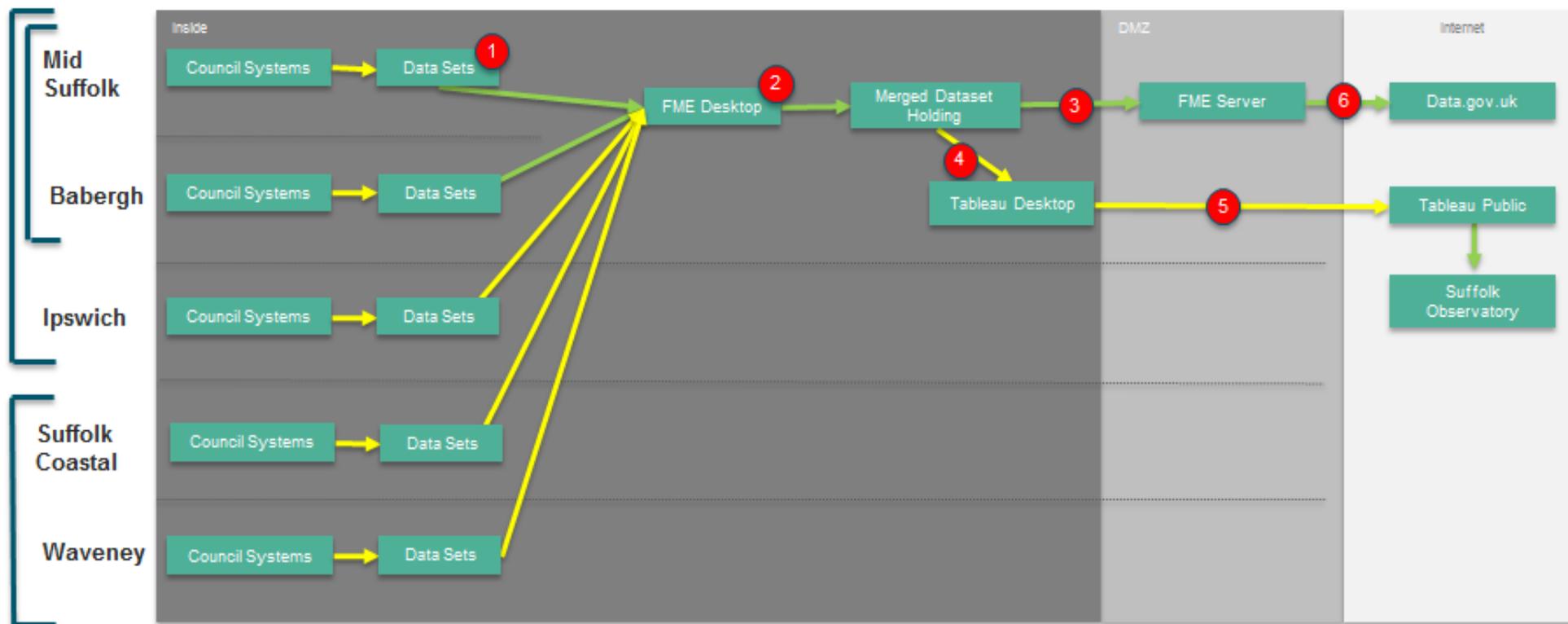
Contact details: Karen Coll – Business Improvement Manager and Kate Parnum – Project and Research Officer

E-mail address: – opendata@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

Website: <http://public.tableau.com/profile/releasing.suffolk.data.for.all#!/> and www.data.gov.uk



Appendix A – This diagram explains the process on how the data is extracted from the source to upload of the data



1. Council staff will be responsible for sourcing the data from council systems and storing these on a suitable internal network location.
2. FME Workspaces are authored to translate the Data Sets into required Schemas and into the Merged Holding of 25 datasets
3. FME Server when required will automatically retrieve data from the Merged Dataset Holding.

4. Dashboards will be authored in Tableau Desktop using Merged data files produced from FME Desktop.
5. Tableau Desktop will publish to Tableau Public.
6. When a user requests a download from Data.Gov.UK, this will be retrieved via FME Server.



Appendix B - List of all the 25 datasets released

Number	Area within the authority	Dataset title
1	Elections	Electors by Ward
2	Elections	Election results
3	Food and Safety	Pet shops
4	Food and Safety	Mobile food vendors/Street traders
5	Governance	Member allowances
6	Governance	Members Attendances - Annual Returns
7	Housing	Summary of Homelessness Decisions By Month
8	HR	Headcount & Turnover
9	HR	Average salary
10	HR	Absence - Days Lost Per FTE
11	Revenues and Benefits	Business rates live accounts
12	Revenues and Benefits	Business rates accounts in credit
13	Revenues and Benefits	Business rates relief awarded
14	Revenues and Benefits	New business rate accounts created within the last month
15	Revenues and Benefits	Discretionary housing payments
16	Revenues and Benefits	Business rate properties
17	Finance	Insurance claims
18	Revenues and Benefits	Summary of Housing Benefit in Year
19	Heritage	Conservation Areas and details about them
20	Planning	Planning Applications Received
21	Revenues and Benefits	NNDR small business relief
22	Public Realm	Excess charge notices issued
23	Public Realm	Payments made for enforcement charge notices
24	Public Realm	Penalty charge notices issue
25	Public Realm	Payments made for penalty charge notices



Appendix C – View and downloads of the datasets within the first month from data.gov.uk

Authorities	Views	Downloads
Babergh DC	39	10
Forest Heath DC	54	3
Ipswich BC	3	2
Mid Suffolk DC	3	1
St Edmundsbury BC	40	5
Suffolk Coastal DC	5	1
Waveney DC	10	1
Average	22	3



Appendix D – Lessons learnt

Release of data

Issue	Lesson learnt
Ensure all Local Authorities hold and are able to release the data.	Don't underestimate the time needed to define this list. It's essential that data owners are communicated with at an early stage of the project to ensure they think the release of the data is appropriate.
Schemas	Involve data owners and IT leads in the production of open data schemas. This will ensure early agreement across all Suffolk district/borough councils. These will be uploaded to the opendata.esd.org.uk/schemas
Usability of the data once released	Don't underestimate the time or resource needed to extract the data and put it into a usable format for release.
Data output – format for publishing the data not determined until late in the project.	Agree a format for publishing the data, for example hot spot maps, graphs etc. This should be agreed at an early stage.
More effort and time was required just to identify data than expected – even that which seemed quite simple!! Electronic data collection and storage is not obvious.	Data needs to be managed – rather than just protected.

Data quality

Issue	Lesson learnt
Datasets must be checked for completeness and this must be consistent across all local authorities.	Create a checking procedure for IT and data owners to use when extracting and publishing data. This should include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify data gaps • Identify any data protection or sensitive data issues • Ensure the data is in an open and reusable format

User support and communication

Issue	Lesson learnt
Communication format for officer feedback on data interaction, errors and user feedback required	Create process for monitoring and managing feedback.
Value of data not clearly defined	Plan appropriate campaign to engage the public sector, businesses and communities in the release of open data to ensure it is valuable to the customer.
Feedback from customers not currently facilitated	Implement a contact form and consider creating a user forum for future development of open data (phase 2)