

Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects Evaluation Report 2013/14

Project title: Barnet Data Store

Lead organisation:

London Borough of Barnet

Other contributing organisation: Open Knowledge Foundation

Submission date:

22 August 2014

Type of project: Platform/tool development

Total grant:

£43,800

Summary of the project

The design of a data portal, structure to be developed in consultation with staff, according to users' needs and open data strategic priorities. Data sets are currently being identified through a cross council review, these will feed into a consultation on open data and transparency with residents and businesses later in the year. This will inform which data sets we prioritise for release on the open data portal. The deployment of data platform for publishing Barnet's open data sets.

Challenge/opportunity:

A need was identified to provide a suitable platform for council data that would suit the needs of both the council in uploading the data and external and internal users in downloading and accessing the data. We want to ensure our open data is located and formatted accessibly for residents and businesses, and in re-usable formats for developers' needs.

The existing barnet.gov.uk website was considered unsuitable for the release and hosting of datasets both in terms of technical accessibility and capacity. The value of data and information was not recognised. There was a potential for confusion, with data getting 'lost' – reflected by the relatively low page hits for pages containing published data. The portal, designed and themed appropriately, would be focused on data usability and value.

The new platform would need to ensure discoverability and usability for technological users. CKAN, via its powerful search and discovery capabilities; metadata options; language and linking options, and capacity for legacy information, was considered ideal for the council's needs, with the eventual

aim of helping Barnet on the way to achieving 5 star open data formatting standards. From the back-end perspective the portal would be designed for staff needs, ensuring officers have confidence with managing data. The technological training for ten staff will ensure confidence and skills are retained within the organisation.

Evaluation

The portal, now named “Open Barnet” has been designed, built and is now live and accessible since an official “soft launch” on 1 September. This will be followed by a more concerted communications campaign after full live testing and uploading.

A link to the open data portal is provided below:

<http://open.barnet.gov.uk/>

Associated workstreams

Whilst the Open Data Breakthrough Funding was earmarked solely for the procurement, design, build and maintenance of the portal, a number of associated workstreams have taken place to support the launch. These include:

- The publication of a [Declaration and Commitment Statement to Transparency](#). This was agreed by Members at the Policy and Resources Committee in June. This underlines and embeds the council’s efforts to be an exemplary local authority with regard to transparency and sets out what is expected from staff.
- Updates to both the Transparency and Data Quality policies to ensure officers are aware of their responsibilities.
- An intensive process of data discovery in order to identify and prioritise data held across Delivery Units.
- Appointing and embedding “Transparency Champions” in Delivery Units, to ensure knowledge and advocacy of the Transparency Agenda across all services.
- Including Transparency in all Delivery Unit business plans as a standard requirement, as well as embedding it into the induction process for new staff.
- A Transparency Consultation went live on 4 March 2014 in order to elicit the views and feedback of local residents and partners. This resulted in some very limited feedback, which has led us to look for other avenues to explore community engagement including building Transparency into the ongoing public consultation process.
- Initiating the appointment of Community Transparency Champions to give local residents, organisations and businesses a voice in what data we provide and how it’s provided.
- Connecting with businesses in the area by liaising with the North London Chamber of Commerce to promote the portal on their website.

- Participating in the Local Open Data Incentive Scheme. We aim to have all three schema-compliant datasets uploaded and provided in response to this scheme within days of the portal going live.

Data published

- We currently have 45 individual and grouped datasets uploaded, with more being checked and uploaded every week.
- An example of our currently published datasets:
 - Business Rates Register August 2014
 - Council Tax Bands & Charges
 - Population Projections - Barnet 2013
 - Tree Data file 2014
 - Events in Parks 2014-15
 - Planned procurements
 - Election results
 - Street Lighting Inventory
 - CCTV locations
 - Leisure locations
 - Members Allowances and expenses
 - Corporate Fraud data
 - Barnet Contracts Register
 - Expenditure over £500 2013/14
- In order to achieve the highest possible ODI data standards, datasets have thus far been provided in the proprietary csv format as standard, with only explanatory notes uploaded in other formats.
- A decision has been made not to publish geospatial data in relation to these datasets. This is due to the ongoing lack of clarity with regard to the licensing of Ordnance Survey and Ordnance Survey derived data. Our major concern surrounding this issue is that this makes much of the data of limited use and reduces the value of the data immensely. Whilst we are requesting exemptions from OS on some datasets, we suspect (with the experience of other authorities in) that this is not likely to be forthcoming. We therefore feel that a strong decision needs to be made at a central government level on this issue.

Approach to publishing data

Currently, data is published on the portal by the Information Management Team, but it is planned to devolve this function in the near future following the staff training sessions taking place in October.

Benefits and impact

- As the portal is due to go live in September, it is difficult to gauge the tangible benefits and impact at this stage with regard to public access and use of the data. We aim to evaluate this 6 months after the end of the project when the processes have bedded in and become business as usual.

- The internal impact of the project has been incredibly positive, however, as we have now reached a stage where Delivery Units are engaged in the Transparency process and are much more aware of their responsibilities and the possibilities transparency presents in communicating our data to the wider world.
- The initial data discovery process has also contributed to a better understanding of the data we hold within the council.
- The major benefit the project has produced is that Barnet now has a fully functioning data portal which will allow it to continue to uphold standards of Transparency whilst finding new ways of utilising our data.

Contact information:

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