Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects 2014/15 Evaluation Report

Project title: Norfolk County Council Enhanced Spend Data

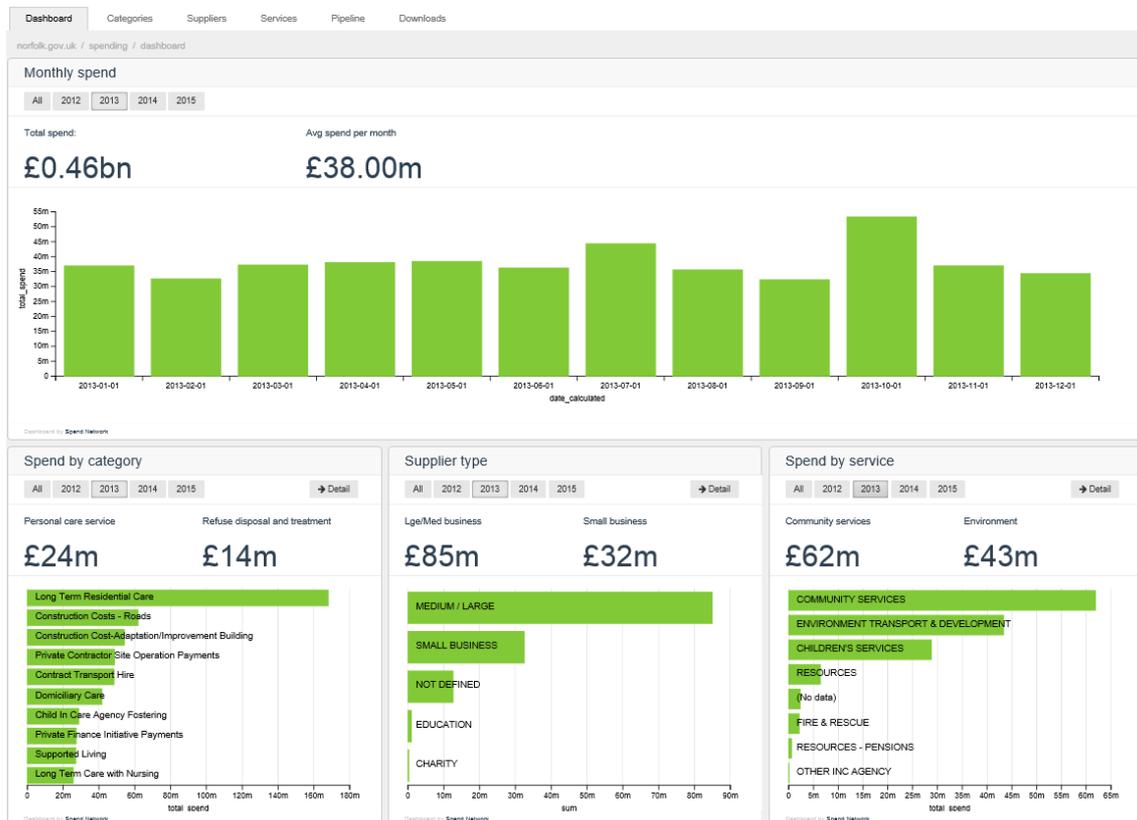|	
Lead organisation:	**Norfolk County Council** with Spend Network
Date report is submitted:	30 June 2015
Type of project:	Data usability
Total grant:	£39,600

Summary of the project

The objective of the project was to redesign how Norfolk County Council (NCC) publishes procurement data to create new insights into the council's spending, procurement and contracting including the amount spent with SMEs, how much trade is with vulnerable suppliers, which suppliers are heavily dependent on the council, the environmental impact of spending, as well as the performance of social care suppliers and the amount of spend with Social Enterprises.

NCC has also redesigned the visual presentation of the council's spend data and contract register, together with the linked data described, as an accessible dashboard format with click through and filter functionality, making the data more easily understandable by a wider audience.

A snapshot of the dashboard, designed to be visually accessible and deliver an immediate overview of the council's spending is shown below.
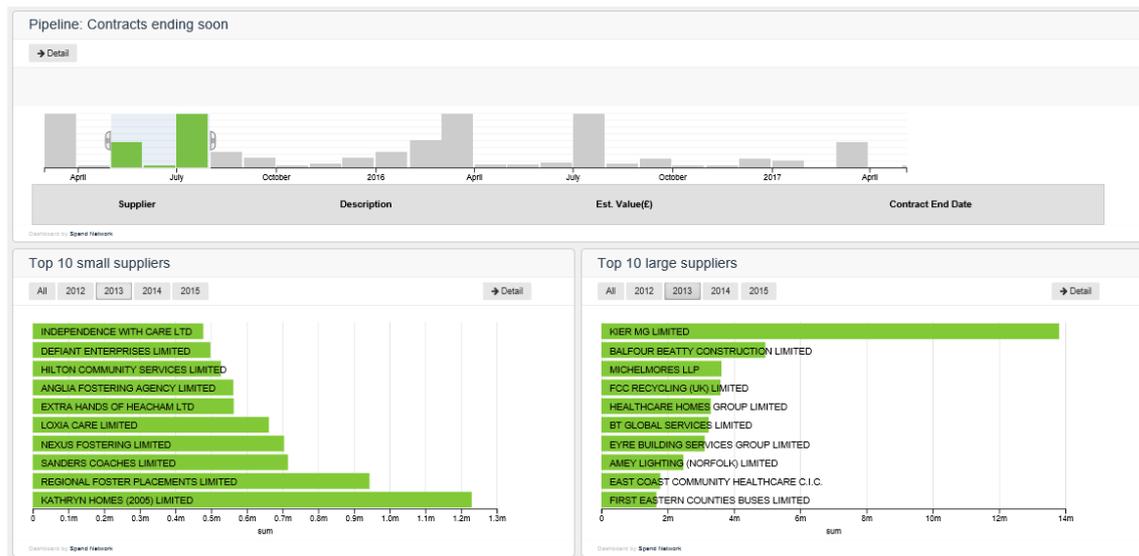
Challenge/opportunity:
Norfolk County Council (NCC) wanted to create new insights for the public and businesses; giving them greater understanding of the council's spending, procurement and contracting. New analysis and redesigned publication will build on our award as one of ten "Best councils to do business with" from Lord Young, the Prime Minister's adviser on Enterprise, in 2013.

Data published and uses:
As part of the project, NCC developed a spending dashboard with
- o Spending profiled by purchasing category
- o Spending profiled by supplier type
- o Spending profiled by service
- o Pipeline of expiring contracts

Despite not being publicized, NCC had 60 unique downloads of the data. And 235 users between 4 and 29 June. The most popular page and downloads has been the pipeline page (33% of all visits).

Approach to publishing data

- As required by the Local Authorities (Data Transparency) Code 2015 the council publishes its contract register along with spend data on its website. This data is available to anyone, including the public and supplier organisations, and goes some way towards making the ways in which the council spends public money more transparent

- The data is published in the format recommended in the LGA's guidance, meaning that it is consistent with similar publications by other local authorities. The council has added the company registration number and CQC location id against the spend information, and this is published in additional to the recommended minimum structure

- In addition, NCC has linked the procurement data to council budget data, company records (opencorporates.com), Care Quality Commission (CQC)

data, environmental data (amee.com), charity data (opencharities.com) and where available to Social Enterprise data (SE UK) to enable greater insights.

- The format of the data is tabular providing a rich data source for people and organisations familiar with using data, but can be difficult for others to navigate and to cross reference

- The council worked with Spend Network to develop a more accessible format for publishing the data

- Spend Network harvests the spending data and contract information directly from the NCC website, imports it into their own database for linking as per the data model diagram at appendix A, before publication on their website in dashboard format as presented in the image above

- Development of the dashboards use of the data uncovered some data quality issues. NCC has resolved these, but is awaiting a refresh of the dashboards in September as part of a website launch. At the same time, NCC will also provide a link from the Opendata and procurement webpages to the published dashboard.

- Work is underway to further link the data between the contract and spend to monitor over-spend or underspend on a contract

- has published various codes on GitHub to ensure availability to others. This will include:
  - Report on business process review re supplier set up
  - Source code for building the dashboards
  - Data model (as shown above)

Benefits and impact

The major benefit of publishing the data on the Spend Network site in dashboard format is that it is more visually accessible, and therefore more useful to people less familiar with manipulating the raw data tables. Data tables are held alongside the dashboards for those users with more sophisticated requirements than can be provided via the functionality of the dashboards.

Enhancements identified during the project produced additional benefits not originally anticipated. The augmentation of the spend data with additional pieces of data such as CQC location reference id, company registration number where available, council's contract reference id and council's procurement category enables cross referencing to sources of information relating to those entities. Previously opaque links between the council's spend information and CQC inspection ratings or Companies House filing dates are facilitated by including this additional information.

Linking the data in this way and ironing out some of the data issues which existed in the council's systems have assisted in the council's own internal ability to scrutinize its activity and make decisions based on analysis of the previously opaque data. For example, it is now easy to identify which suppliers are heavily reliant on the council for their turnover and to act accordingly, or to target savings activity on the departments with highest spend on a particular category of goods or services.

Publishing the expiring contracts pipeline means that suppliers can easily identify which contracts are due to expire in the coming months in the particular category they are interested in, and can make the appropriate preparations to be able to bid for the work or to get involved at the right stage of the contract life-cycle.

In addition the council has engaged with and influenced the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS), the new worldwide standard for publication of contracting data and influenced the LGA guidance on spend transparency so that it aligns with the OCDS and so that it has provision for the crucial additional references which enable links to be made between spending data and the other data sources described.

Further information:
Further information:
- project manager: al.collier@norfolk.gov.uk
- project contact: ian@spendnetwork.com
- link to published dashboards: http://Norfolk.spendnetwork.com
- The code of the dashboard is published on https://github.com/spendnetwork/norfolk_spend_dashboard

APPENDIX – DATA MODEL

This diagram demonstrates how the linkages are made between the various pieces of data from the council's published open data. Linking in this way enables users to interrogate the data in various ways via the interactive dashboards.