Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects Evaluation Report

Project title: York Open Service Directory

Lead organisation: City of York Council

Submission date: 30/06/2014

Type of project: This project has released the data held about services by York Family Information Service and provided a web service and widget platform to allow technical and non-technical reuse of the data.

Total grant: £70,000

Summary of the project

City of York Council has developed an extensive directory of services in York. Initially these services focussed on childcare and services for parents and carers but has now expanded to include any service in York. It is a very powerful resource that is currently accessible through council contact points such as our websites and customer centre.

The data is currently being reused on eight different websites across York and North Yorkshire. However, each time the information is needed for a new channel the council needs to provide a level of technical expertise and resource. The aim of the York Open Data Directory project was to:
- Publish this service directory data under an open government license (via a webservice)
- Develop widgets to allow for the non-technical reuse of this data.

Challenge/opportunity:

Many areas of local government, health, police, voluntary and community sector have requirements or a desire to publish information about services to communities. This ranges from childcare through to sheltered housing options for older people.

This leads to multiple directories without comprehensive coverage of variable data quality, limited impact and significantly higher costs in terms of overall production. This fractured approach to collating and disseminating service information means that data sets about different types of services are not linkable and presented in a closed way to end users not allowing for reuse.

By publishing the York Open Directory in a machine readable format alongside tools to allow non-technical reuse the power of this directory can be unleashed by local communities.

Data published and uses:
There are a number of different audiences that have been engaged in this project.
- It has been led by City of York Council and meetings have been help with partners to help establish the approach. Partners include Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York Metrics and York Council for Voluntary Service.
- There are 1,750 services listed within the service directory who have had their terms and conditions updated to reflect the new approach of publishing their information under and open government license.

The York Open Service Directory is a single data set covering over 1,750 groups and services. These can be broken down into the following headline categories:

- Activities (Things To Do, Places To Go)
- Addictions (Drugs, Alcohol And Gambling)
- Advice And Support
- Armed Forces
- Business And Industry
- Charities
- Childcare
- Children's Centres
- Community
- Disability And Additional Needs
- Education And Learning
- Emergency Services
- Environment
- Family Groups And Parenting
- Food And Drink
- Government Politics And Public Administration
- Health
- Housing And Homelessness
- International Affairs
- Jobs And Money
- Law
- Life Events
- Media And The Press
- North Yorkshire Children's Centres
- Parks And Open Spaces
- Sport
- Staying Safe And Crime
- Tourism
- Transport

At this point in the evaluation the widget tool has been used by one school as part of the pilot and others have expressed interest following the launch. However it is too soon following the launch (23/06/2014) to see a significant uptake of usage.

The York Open Service Directory has a wide range of potential groups wanting to make use of it. These would mainly be community focussed groups and services wanting to support people to understand what is available locally.

- Schools
- Children's centres
- Libraries
- Community groups

Approach to publishing data

Data is published via a web service and a widget tool. This allows developers and non-technical reuse of information held within the York Open Service Directory.

- York Open Service Directory Widget - This simple widget allows you to pre-define some simple search terms, categories and areas. The widget then builds you some nice and simple code that you can paste into the source code of a page on your website.

- York Open Service Directory Application webservice - This webservice allows you to pass defined parameters to the service directory which will then return XML for your website to consume.

The York Open Service Directory was launched on the 23rd of June. A number of promotional activities have been undertaken.

- The launch of the York Open Service Directory website www.yosd.org.uk
- All schools, colleges, children's centres and services the council are aware of have been emailed details about the service directory (http://www.yor-ok.org.uk/2014%20YorOK%20Website/newsletters/york-open-service-directory-launch.htm)
- A mail out to all schools will specifically highlight services in their local area and encourage them to engage.
- A council press release (http://www.york.gov.uk/news/article/650/york_open_service_directory_makes_family_information_even_more_accessible)
- Advertising and publicity in local media (e.g. http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/11298666.New_council_directory_aimed_at_families/)
- The council is part of a national Community Childcare Hubs pilot being led by 4Children. The dataset has been made available as part of this pilot work to improve families access to childcare information.
- The council is in the process of establishing a wider data mill and this dataset will be publicised as part of that wider work.
- Other engagement work such as the 2014 No Wrong Door conference in York will highlight the dataset. (www.yor-ok.org.uk/nowrongdoor)

Active users are using the widget tool currently and have found this easy to use. As usage of the dataset increases we will monitor its usage and evaluate the ease with which users have been able to make use of the dataset.

Work was undertaken with partners when establishing the dataset and tools to ensure contextual information such as metadata was of use. Key metadata includes the categorisation of services, geographical wards etc.

As part of this project and the council's wider work to publish data through an open data mill a more formalised open data community is being established. This will be used to inform the ongoing development and availability of this dataset.

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

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

By creating and publishing a dataset of services in this way the council has reduced the number of database and web systems it needs for each of its directory solutions. A separate directory solution is not required for:
- The childcare directory
- The Family Service Directory
- The Local Offer (Special Educational Needs)
- The Youth Offer (details of services available for young people)

- Adult services (services available to adults and older people with a focus on social groups, care provision etc)
- A sports directory
- A database of community artists

The council now has a single solution for storing and sharing information in these service directories. This means the council has made a saving on the procurement and maintenance of multiple databases and proprietary web end search interfaces. Putting an exact figure for the potential saving is very challenging as this will be influenced by a range of factors from the exact specification and procurement process. However based on previous procurement experience it could be reasonable to place a range of £5k-£10k per year for each database and web interface required. Despite the York Open Service Directory having only recently launched it could be estimated to have already saved the need for £25k-£50k per year to be spent on multiple database and web systems.

This dataset of services or a variation of it has been available through council operated search websites for a number of years. Impact studies looking at the work of York Family Information Services have highlighted the value of this information.
- "I found a childminder which enabled me to find a job. Finding a nursery enabled me to continue employment and through activities I have done with my son found new things he enjoys doing and strengthened our relationship." – A York parent
- "Feel more connected to local community. Son has joined activities, and information is power - so find it empowering." – A York Parent
- Without this information ... "I would be in the house feeling isolated and lonely as I have no family in York and don't know many people." – A York Parent
- Without this information... "As a support worker I would have spent a lot of extra time researching services for my families - time which I do not have." – A York social worker

The aim of the York Open Service Directory is to open this information up to a wider audience and free developers to make creative use of the data in combination with other datasets.

During the pilot phase of developing the York Open Service Directory Robert Wilkinson Academy used the widget tool to simply add details of childcare providers in the local area to their website (www.rwprimary.ik.org/p_Child_Care_Hub.ikml). This means that anytime anyone goes to that webpage it references back to the York Open Service Directory pull through the latest and most relevant childcare information.

The work with Robert Wilkinson Academy is being supported and evaluated by the national charity 4Children. Tamar Shaw of 4 Children who is supporting the pilot commented on the use of the York Open Service Directory.

"The learning from the Community Childcare and Early Learning Hub programme run by 4 Children shows that it is helpful when authorities explore how they could open up their childcare data in this way. This can bring important information closer to families and empower them to understand their childcare options."

Further information: For more information about the York Open Service Directory please visit www.yosd.org.uk or contact York Family Information Service on 01904 554444.