

An **Electronic Town Meeting** on

“Making Open Data Real”



CabinetOffice

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The Electronic Town Meeting (eTM)

Introduction

The Cabinet Office’s Open Data consultation paper sets out a proposed approach for Transparency and Open Data Strategy, which is aimed at establishing a culture of openness and transparency in public services. They have requested input from everyone – citizens, businesses, public services themselves, and other interest groups – on how they can best embed a culture of openness and transparency in public services.

The proposed approach is fundamentally about creating a “pull” (an enhanced right to data) and a “push” (a presumption of publication). The consultation seeks the public’s views on:

- how to enhance a ‘right to data’, establishing stronger rights for individuals, businesses and other actors to obtain data from public service providers
- how to set transparency standards that enforce this right to data
- how public service providers might be held to account for delivering open data
- how to ensure collection and publication of the most useful data
- how to make the internal workings of government and the public sector more open
- how far there is a role for government to stimulate enterprise and market making in the use of open data.

The deadline for responses is 27th October 2011.

In order to support the consultation process, the University of Ulster, in association with the Parterre Project, is organizing an Electronic Town Meeting (eTM) on Friday 23rd August 2011. The aim of the event is to let a wide range of stakeholders from various sectors discuss and vote on the issues at stake and to make related recommendations to policy makers. The results of the event will be submitted to the Cabinet Office as part of the consultation process.

The Town Meeting event aims to achieve the following goals:

- to enable a range of stakeholders from academia, government and business to debate on the issues surrounding Open Data;
- to ensure that a voice is given to stakeholders in Northern Ireland and that they are given an opportunity to influence UK government policy on Open Data;
- to trial innovative technologies in the context of discussion in small groups, and to verify the potential for e-participation in Northern Ireland.

What is a Town Meeting?

A Town Meeting is a form of participation in local government practiced in the U.S. region of New England since colonial times, when an entire community was invited by government officials to gather in a public place to formulate suggestions or provide feedback on policy actions.

In its modern version the electronic Town Meeting (e-TM) the most fundamental features are that information on the discussion topic is provided thanks to electronic means, and citizens can participate in debates and express themselves individually on that issue.

This Electronic Town Meeting on “Making Open Data Real” will be held on the Jordanstown Campus on Friday 23rd September, from 10am until 3pm.

The main features

The method combines the live aspect of small-scale discussion with electronics: on one hand it allows rapid transmission of work-group results to a plenary assembly; while on the other it permits surveys of individual participants’ opinions through a polling system.

The e-TM consists of four different work steps, all aimed at facilitating the participants’ discussion of the themes at issue:

- information and in-depth investigation, allowing the participants to gain confidence with the topics of discussion;
- discussion in small groups, allowing reciprocal listening and the confrontation between different perspectives;
- reflection, during which the results of group work are summarised and sent back to the whole assembly;
- polling step, in which participants are asked to individually answer questions generated during discussion.

How it works

The overall organisation of the event is entrusted to a Central Facilitator, who guides the participants through the various steps and prompts guests to intervene.

Participants debate in small groups at round tables, each with a Facilitator whose task is to moderate the discussion.

Every table is connected through a computer and an Internet network to a central server so that the participants' comments and the individual preferences of the polling sessions may be recorded after each discussion.

Staff will work on integration of collective outputs so as to give feedback to participants during the course of the event. At the end of the day, an instant report with the main results of the work performed will be produced and distributed to all participants.

Issues to discuss

The discussion will be based on the UK Cabinet Office consultation document "Making Open Data Real". Six key areas for discussion are identified within the document:

1. **An enhanced right to data:** how do we establish stronger rights for individuals, businesses and other actors to obtain, use and re-use data from public service providers?
2. **Setting transparency standards:** what would standards that support an enhanced right to data among public service providers look like?
3. **Corporate and personal responsibility:** how would public service providers be held to account for delivering Open Data through a clear governance and leadership framework at political, organisational and individual level?
4. **Meaningful Open Data:** how should we ensure collection and publication of the most useful data, through an approach that enables public service providers to understand the value of the data they hold and helps the public at large know what data is collected?
5. **Government sets the example:** in what ways could we make the internal workings of government
6. **Innovation with Open Data:** and the public sector as open as possible? to what extent is there a role for government to stimulate enterprise and market making in the use of Open Data?

The event will consist of two discussion sessions, with each session focusing on three themes from the list above.

What is your role?

Participants are asked to contribute to the success of the event by exercising their creativity and ability to listen.

For this reason it is fundamental that they commit themselves to participating actively in the discussions:

- with an open and democratic attitude, and a willingness to listen with respect to the opinions of others;
- with arguments preferably relevant to collective interests and not only individual interests;
- with a simple and concise language, keeping comments brief and precise.

It should be recalled that the aim of the discussion is not to seek agreement at all costs, but to elicit different interests and interpretations, allowing comparison among a richer and broader range of opinions.

What you have to do before the event

It is very important to read this guide carefully.

One of the fundamental aims of the eTM is to assure the participants a high level of information on the central discussion topics allowing an “informed” debate at least along general lines.

The following section outlines the main topics for discussion with the aim of preparing participants for the event.

Contents of the eTM

Introduction – “Making Open Data Real”

Information is power and by sharing it, we can deliver modern, personalised and sustainable public services. Transparency of data in the UK has already transformed our interaction with the private sector, particularly via the internet. From financial services and online banking, to travel booking and retailing, access to data has become a means to change the relationship we have with service providers and retailers: we have access to our personal data, we compare providers, we exercise choice and we share our feedback. Online banking was first launched thirteen years ago and now has more than 22m users in the UK. This is the kind of meaningful Information Revolution that we now seek in our public services.

For the public sector, Transparency and Open Data are about helping people find the right doctor for their needs, or the best teacher for their child, or helping a victim of crime track whether justice is done. It is about helping frontline professionals compare outcomes and improve them. It is about giving people access to their individual medical records so that they can manage their health better and make more informed decisions with their clinician. It is about giving people the data on local authority spending and delivery that they need to challenge the value of a service provided. Above all, it is about providing the data people need to make choices and to help improve public services.

Open Data may be the most powerful lever of 21st century public policy: it can make accountability real for citizens; it can improve outcomes and productivity in key services through informed comparison; it can transform social relationships – empowering individuals and communities; and it can drive dynamic economic growth. A recent McKinsey report forecast that the benefit of public data assets to the European economy, if used effectively to drive innovation and enterprise, could be up to 250bn Euros.

Open Data enables accountability; it improves outcomes and productivity in key services through informed comparison; it transforms social relationships – empowering individuals and communities; and it drives dynamic economic growth. Delivering Open Public Services, as described in the Open Public Services White Paper – and Open Data is key to that – is also about reducing the administrative burden on these services. Better data actually means less but higher quality data, and more openness means fewer Freedom of Information Act requests for this data and less red-tape.

The “Making Open Data Real” consultation document sets out proposals for embedding a culture of openness and transparency in public services. It sets out how one might create the “pull” (a right to data) and the “push” (a presumption of publication) that will underpin the further development of Open Government in the UK. Broadly speaking, Transparency is considered to be the goal and Open Data to be the tool.

The proposals are designed to promote a collaborative and wide-ranging discussion with partners in government, the wider public sector, and the broader user community. Following the consultation period and the conclusion of a full impact assessment, the Cabinet Office will revise proposals and publish a White Paper in the autumn bringing together input from the consultation and other initiatives outlined above and setting out the way forward.

Policy Challenge 1 - An Enhanced Right to Data

"The point of open information is not merely to expose the world but to change it...These days democratic openness means more than that citizens can vote at regular intervals in free and fair elections. They also expect to have access to government data."

- The Economist

1. How would we establish a stronger presumption in favour of publication than that which currently exists?
2. Is providing an independent body, such as the Information Commissioner, with enhanced powers and scope the most effective option for safeguarding a right to access and a right to data?
3. Are existing safeguards to protect personal data and privacy measures adequate to regulate the Open Data agenda?
4. **What might the resource implications of an enhanced right to data be for those bodies within its scope? How do we ensure that any additional burden is proportionate to this aim?**
5. How will we ensure that Open Data standards are embedded in new ICT contracts?

Policy Challenge 2 – Setting Open Data Standards

"Lack of common standards ...makes it excruciatingly time consuming to exploit the information."

- Literature review for EFMC 2011 (European Federation for Medicinal Chemistry): AstraZeneca, Royal Society of Chemistry, Pfizer UK and others

1. What is the best way to achieve compliance on high and common standards to allow usability and interoperability?
2. Is there a role for government to establish consistent standards for collecting user experience across public services?
3. Should we consider a scheme for accreditation of information intermediaries, and if so how might that best work?

Policy Challenge 3 – Corporate and Personal Responsibility

"Without strong leadership, transparency of decision making and effective and intelligent accountability, trust can [sic] be abused and confidence damaged."

- Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life

1. How would we ensure that public service providers in their day to day decision-making honour a commitment to Open Data, while respecting privacy and security considerations?
2. What could personal responsibility at Board-level do to ensure the right to data is being met include? Should the same person be responsible for ensuring that personal data is properly protected and that privacy issues are met?
3. Would we need to have a sanctions framework to enforce a right to data?
4. What other sectors would benefit from having a dedicated Sector Transparency Board?

Policy Challenge 4 – Meaningful Open Data

"Once medical researchers start publishing their data, and depositing it in data archives, they will discover not only that it is painless, but that it affords huge advantages to medical science, and to patients present and future."

- Medical Research Scientist, New York (BMJ editorial)

1. How should public services make use of data inventories? What is the optimal way to develop and operate this?
2. How should data be prioritised for inclusion in an inventory? How is value to be established?
3. In what areas would you expect government to collect and publish data routinely?
4. What data is collected "unnecessarily"? How should these datasets be identified? Should collection be stopped?
5. Should the data that government releases always be of high quality? How do we define quality? To what extent should public service providers "polish" the data they publish, if at all?

Policy Challenge 5 – Government Sets the Example

"Three basic principles govern my work. First, data is a public good and therefore should be out there. Second that if it is available by Freedom of Information then citizens or residents shouldn't have to go through any bureaucratic nightmares to get it, and [third] that we should have a presumption of openness – extremely important in restoring public confidence in public institutions..."

- Director of Digital Projects, Greater London Authority

1. How should government approach the release of existing data for policy and research purposes: should this be held in a central portal or held on departmental portals?
2. What factors should inform prioritisation of datasets for publication, at national, local or sector level?
3. Which is more important: for government to prioritise publishing a broader set of data, or existing data at a more detailed level?

Policy Challenge 6 – Innovation with Open Data

“If people put data on the web – government data, scientific data, community data, whatever it is – it will be used by other people to do wonderful things in ways they would never have imagined. The cry of ‘raw data now’ has spread around the world.”

- Sir Tim Berners-Lee OM, KBE, FRS, FREng, FRSA

1. Is there a role for government to stimulate innovation in the use of Open Data? If so, what is the best way to achieve this?

Format of the eTM

The issues and themes described above will form the core topics for discussion on the day. The overall structure of the event is outlined below:

Time	Section
09:30	Registration
10:00	Introduction
10:30	Discussion Session 1
11:30	Tea/Coffee
11:45	Discussion Session 2
12:45	Lunch
13:45	Feedback from Discussion Sessions
14:15	Voting Session
14:45	Distribution of Instant Report
15:00	Close

More Information

- The consultation document can be downloaded here:
<https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/open-data-consultation.pdf>
- The consultation document can be viewed online here:
<http://data.gov.uk/opendataconsultation>