

Transparency Policy

London Borough of Barnet

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Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Purpose	1
3	Benefits	1
4	Scope	1
5	Definitions.....	2
6	What to publish.....	2
7	Publishing guidelines.....	5
8	Associated documentation	6
9	Contact Information/Further Guidance	6

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1 Introduction

The transparency policy sets out the council wide approach to publishing public information and data sets. It provides guidance on opening up access to the council's information, thereby enabling greater value to be generated from the council's data assets, and increasing opportunities for residents to hold the council to account

2 Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to outline the council wide approach to transparency; to outline the minimum statutory requirements as well as Barnet's 'open council' proactive approach to publishing. The policy sets out key definitions, guidelines for what to publish, and how to publish information. It also explains the expected approach from internal and external delivery units.

3 Benefits

Our residents should be able to hold us to account about the services we provide, how we make decisions, and how money is spent, in order to judge value for money and efficiency. Greater transparency makes this easier. It can highlight inadequacies, poor performance, and enforce improvements in service delivery.

In addition there are huge benefits to making information available in a transparent fashion for use by the public and other organisations:

- Public data can be used for comparative purposes and to drive up performance;
- Information about existing services' functions and performance will ensure more focussed bids from potential providers, and increase competition;
- Data sets and information may be useful to businesses, third sector organisations, and residents, which leads to wider social, economic, and environmental benefits;
- Data sets may be used for development by third parties, for apps for example.

The commissioning council could see great benefits from publishing more information to shape the market, to drive up competition amongst potential providers, and ensure the council receives the best offer from bidders.

4 Scope

This policy applies to all internal delivery units. Particular requirements for particular service areas are specified below. With regard to external delivery units and partners the policy applies where that organisation is processing

council data. In addition the council expects partners to publish copies of contracts and tenders to businesses and to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector and encourages them to use the policy for their internal workings. Where possible transparency and open data agreements should be built into contracts, and delivery units should work with providers to ensure data is formatted consistently, to high standards, and in a transparent fashion

5 Definitions

Public data is information which is collected or generated in the course of public service delivery. It is the objective, factual data, on which policy decisions are based and on which public services are assessed.

The public have a right of access to public data and, where possible, it should be available by default or on request. Data will not be disclosed if it contains personal information or is of a commercially sensitive nature. However it may still be possible to publish it by anonymising or aggregating it up. Barnet council's approach to publishing is guided by the [Public Data Principles](#).

Data sets are generated when you store information. Data might be listed in a simple spreadsheet with few or multiple columns, or in a data base. The Freedom of Information Act defines a data set as a collection of factual information in electronic form to do with the services and functions of the authority which is neither the product of analysis or interpretation, nor an official statistic and has not been materially altered.

Transparency means honest and accountable communication of the council's information. This means releasing information and data which is not subject to distortion or selection, which is representative if not complete, and which is not misleading. Transparent information is provided in forms that can be easily accessed, understood and analysed.

Open data or information is information provided in a format which enables ease of re-use and open data is data anyone is able to access, use, reuse and redistribute it – subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and share-alike. Barnet Council will publish data in open formats with specified licences, and where possible [open licences](#), so that people will be able to understand how to use and reuse the data for different purposes.

6 What to publish

The starting point for all decisions to publish should be the principles of the [Freedom of Information Act 2000](#). The council recognises that it has a responsibility to provide a right of access to the information that it holds. It also recognises that it has a duty of care towards the public, clients and staff where it holds information on them, including [its duties](#) contained within the [Data Protection Act](#). In deciding whether to publish information the council will

take into consideration whether it is lawful to release that information and whether the public interest in publishing that information outweighs the public interest in withholding it. Public data will generally not include personal information or commercially sensitive information. Public data can only include personal information if disclosure would not contravene the Data Protection Act, and disclosure of personal information should be necessary to meet a legitimate public interest.

Barnet already publishes a range of information and data on its publication scheme, based on the [Code of Recommended Practice for local authorities on data transparency](#). The table below sets out our minimum transparency criteria, but the council will take a proactive approach to publishing data sets, and work on improving transparency and open data formatting of these sets.

Data category	Items	Guidelines	Frequency of release	Service and data owner
Finance data	Expenditure over £500;	Include costs, supplier and transaction information. Any sole trader or body acting in a business capacity in receipt of payments of at least £500 of public money should expect such payments to be transparent. Publish according to LGA spending data guidelines.	Monthly in arrears	Finance
	Statements of accounts;		Annually	Finance
	Grants to the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector;	Grants to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector should be clearly itemised and listed.	Annually	All service areas as applicable
HR data	Senior employee salaries;	Names (with the option for individuals to refuse to consent for their name to be published), job descriptions, responsibilities, budgets and numbers of staff. Publish according to LGA spending data guidelines.	Annually, as close to the end of the financial year as possible	HR
	An organisational chart of staff structure;	Including salary bands and details of currently vacant posts.		
	The pay multiple;	The ratio between the highest paid salary and the median		

		average salary of the whole of the authority's workforce.		
Democratic data	Information on democratic running of council; Councillor allowances and expenses;	Constitution, election results, committee minutes, decision-making.	As produced and according to statutory guidelines; Annually	Governance , Assurance
Procurement data	Copies of contracts and tenders;	To businesses, social enterprises, and the voluntary and community sector; Publish according to LGA spending data guidelines.		Procurement, CSG
Corporate data	Policies; Performance;	Key policies, performance monitors and reports, and key indicators on the authorities' fiscal and financial position.	As often as reported	Commissioning Group, and all Delivery Units as applicable
Assurance data	External audits; Key inspections;			Assurance
Assets data	Public land; Building assets.	Locations data and key attribute information.	Annually	Estates and Facilities, CSG

In terms of minimum requirements the following describes what we would expect partners to make available to the public:

- Performance; Policies, performance, external audits and key inspections and key indicators on the authorities' fiscal and financial position
- HR Data; Organisational charts; annually
- Procurement and contracts; copies of contracts and tenders to businesses and to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector; at least quarterly, with a view to increasing this to monthly. We would expect a list of businesses the Partner contracts with to be transparent so that we would could ensure conflicts of interest are minimised for Members and Senior Officers.

Prioritising by demand

Publishing of data sets should be demand led. Delivery Units should use the following themes to prioritise what data to share and how to make it available:

- Consultation with service users, residents, external organisations and businesses, and gather feedback to improve the data offer
- Staff input on what may be most useful for service provision and residents
- Strategic priorities and business plan
- FOI and complaints themes for service area
- Website intelligence.

Commissioning

The council should provide information about contracts, partnerships, and data on funding for partnership arrangements.

Commissioners should also focus on the benefits of publishing data in conjunction with Market Positioning Statements and pushing out data to shape the market, for example performance data sets, measures of commissioner satisfaction, information about current service provision, and needs in the borough.

7 Publishing guidelines

Information and data should be **accurate** and of **good quality**, it should be **timely** (i.e. published as soon as possible following production), and it should be published in an **open format**.

The publication scheme

The council uses its website as the method of publication, where it maintains a [publication scheme](#) that outlines the information it routinely publishes (see minimum requirements above). This acts as an inventory for our data holdings, and aids people wishing to make use of data and information by categorising it.

Open format

The council will aim to publish information in an open format that can be retrieved, downloaded, indexed and searched by commonly used Web search applications. In addition, it may also publish the information in easily readable and printable versions, or provide key pieces of information or a high level explanation alongside data sets.

Where the council owns all the information to be published it will specify a licence for re-use. This will usually be the [Open Government Licence](#) for public sector information, unless council copyright applies in which case it will

use an appropriate licence from the [UK Government Licensing Framework](#). Where third party data or other licensing restrictions apply the council will aim to provide a named attribution.

Publication should be in open and machine-readable formats. Barnet's minimum standard for publishing will be:

- available on the web with a specified licence;
- available as machine-readable structured data; (e.g. Excel instead of image scan of a table);
- in a non-proprietary format (e.g. CSV and XML).

Providing appropriate metadata

A transparent data set should be provided with clear background information alongside it so users understand it. This should explain what a data set contains, and further information to put the information into context and aid understanding. You could also provide metadata with a data set, containing a description, temporal coverage, update process, data maintainer, source, and any third party or licensing conditions.

Standardising

The council will also work towards adhering to common formatting standards and standardising data so that our data sets can be reliably compared and linked to other public sector organisations. Standardising means:

- using consistent definitions of the meaning of the values in the data;
- using common reference schemes to refer to common items.

The LGA provides [local practitioners guides](#) on publishing local spending data, salaries information, and new contracts and tenders information. LG Inform provide a [service list](#) which acts as a definitive classification list for local authority services.

8 Associated documentation

Data Protection Policy
Data Protection Act Compliance Toolkit
Data Quality Policy
DPA Data Transfer Policy
DPA Staff Guidance
FOI Policy
FOI Staff Guidance
Information Management Strategy

9 Contact Information/Further Guidance

Further advice and guidance on Transparency is available from the Information Management team.

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