Local Government Open Data Incentive Scheme Survey

Final Report

May 2015

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Contents

Introduction

The Local Government Open Data Incentive Scheme ran between June 2014 and March 2015 as a practical exercise to see if local government could work together to develop a way of publishing selected datasets so they could be aggregated, shared and re-used. Now that the scheme has closed the LGA is to review the exercise, to learn lessons and help refine any future activities.

The incentive scheme required participating authorities to prepare and publish up to three chosen data themes in an open, easily accessible form to a common schema. The data is registered on data.gov.uk and certified by the Open Data Institute. The three data themes were: planning applications, premises licences and public conveniences (toilets). Each successful data set publication was awarded a modest financial incentive of £2000 or £7000 if all three data sets were completed. The scheme was funded by the Open Data User Group (ODUG) and the Cabinet Office as part of the Release of Open data funding scheme; more information about the scheme can be found at http://incentive.opendata.esd.org.uk/.

Annex 1 contains information on the number of authorities that participated in the scheme and the number of schemas that were successfully published. A summary Lessons Learned Report is also available.

Methodology

An online survey was sent to participants of the open data incentive scheme in the 111 authorities in England who had registered for the scheme. The survey comprised of two sections, the first half was an overarching summary for authorities who had successfully published data as part of the scheme. The second half was a more detailed evaluation of the scheme, for the purpose of helping the LGA shape its approach to open data schemes in the future, this was for both respondents who had published as well as those who had withdrawn or only registered.

The survey was in the field between 7th May 2015 and 29th May 2015, and reminders were sent to non-responding councils during the data collection process.

The survey was completed by 68 councils, a response rate of 61 per cent. Sixty three of these respondents had published at least one of the three data sets and answered either one or both sections of the survey, five respondents had withdrawn from schema publication and answered only the second section. Tables and figures report the base, the description refers to the group of people who were asked the question. The number provided refers to the number of respondents who answered the question. Because the survey was split into two sections bases vary throughout the survey.

Throughout the report, percentages may not add up to exactly 100 per cent due to rounding. Where the response base is less than 50, care should be taken when interpreting percentages, as small difference can seem magnified.

Table 1 shows the response rate by authority type, based on the number of participating authorities per region, rather than the total number of authorities within that region. Table 2 shows the response rate by region.

Table 1: Response rate by authority type			
	Respondents	Participating Authorities	Response Rate
	Count	Count	%
District	39	62	63
English Unitary	12	19	63
Metropolitan District	13	19	68
London Borough	4	10	40
County	0	1	0
Total	68	111	61

Table 2: Response rate by region			
	Respondents	Participating Authorities	Response Rate
	Count	Count	%
East Midlands	5	9	56
East of England	9	18	50
London	4	10	40
North East	4	4	100
North West	10	14	71
South East	18	27	67
South West	7	9	78
West Midlands	4	6	67
Yorkshire and the Humber	7	14	50
Total	68	111	61

There were three sets of data that councils could register to publish. The table below shows the number of authorities who registered and/or published as part of the scheme who also responded to the survey; as some councils registered for more than one data set figures do not add up to 111. Survey respondents represent 151 published data sets from a total of 209.

Table 3: Survey respondents by data set	Planning applications	Licensing applications	Public Toilets
	Count	Count	Count
Withdrawn	11	21	5
Published	50	39	62
Total	61	60	67

Part One: Review of Experiences

This section provides detailed aggregated results for each question contained within the first half of the survey.

Publication of data and impacts

Participants who had published at least one data set were asked, if there had been no incentive scheme do you think your authority would have published the data? Nearly half (48 per cent) of publishing authorities said that without the incentive scheme their authority would not have published the data (Table 4 and Figure 1).

Table 4: If there had been no incentive scheme do you think your authority would have published the data?								
	Planning applications		Licensing applications		Public Toilets		All respondents who published a dataset	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Yes	23	46	11	29	20	32	54	36
No	18	36	21	55	33	53	72	48
Don't know	9	18	7	18	9	15	25	17

Q1
Base: all respondents who had published at least one data set (base varies depending on schema, 50 planning applications, 39 licensing applications, 62 public toilets

Figure 1: If there had been no incentive scheme do you think your authority would have published the data?
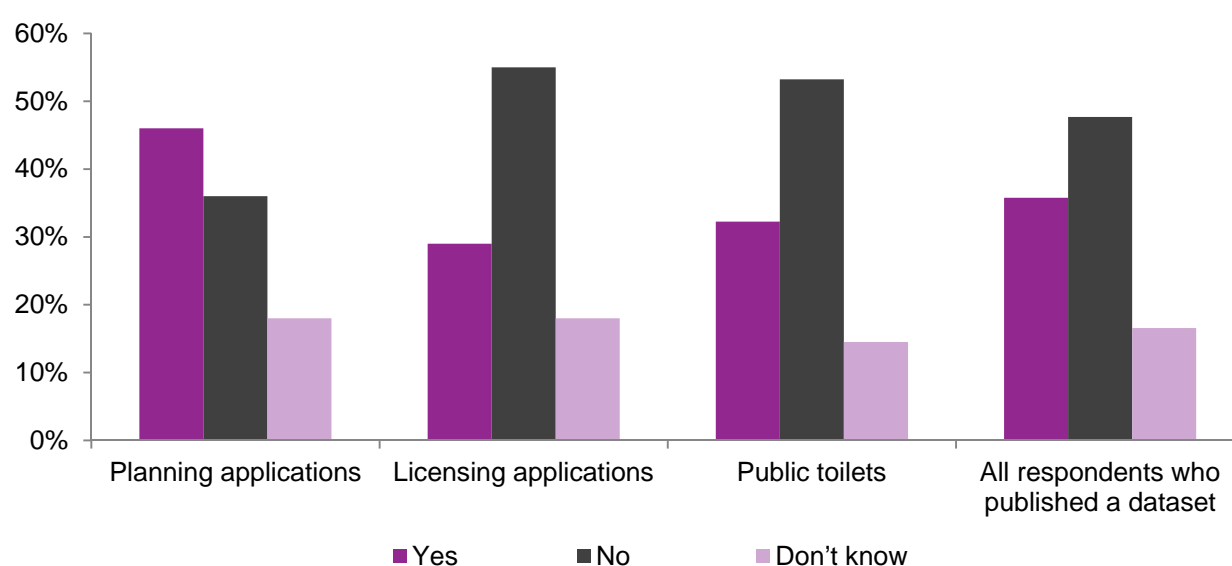
Participants were asked, whether they had any feedback from data customers. Only eight per cent had received feedback (count of 5). Those five respondents were asked if the feedback had been positive or negative about the publication of data, two respondents said that feedback had been fairly positive, the remaining three said that it was neither positive nor negative.

Benefit of publishing data

Participants were asked, whether they have seen a reduction in Freedom of Information (FOI) requests (Table 5). Five per cent had seen a reduction, whilst for one in five it was still too early to say (43 per cent).

Table 5: Have you seen a reduction in Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, for the services covered by the datasets you published, since participating in the scheme?		
	Count	**%**
Yes	3	5
No	16	25
Too early to say	27	43
Don't know	17	27

Q4

Base: all respondents who had published at least one data set (63)

Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statement: "In general, the exercise of publishing data is of benefit to our organisation." Eighty three per cent strongly or tend to agree that the exercise of publishing data is of benefit to their organisation. Only three per cent did not agree (tend to disagree) (Table 6 and Figure 2).

Table 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In general, the exercise of publishing data is of benefit to our organisation."		
	Count	**%**
Strongly agree	27	43
Tend to agree	25	40
Neither agree nor disagree	8	13
Tend to disagree	2	3
Strongly disagree	0	0
Don't know	1	2

Q5

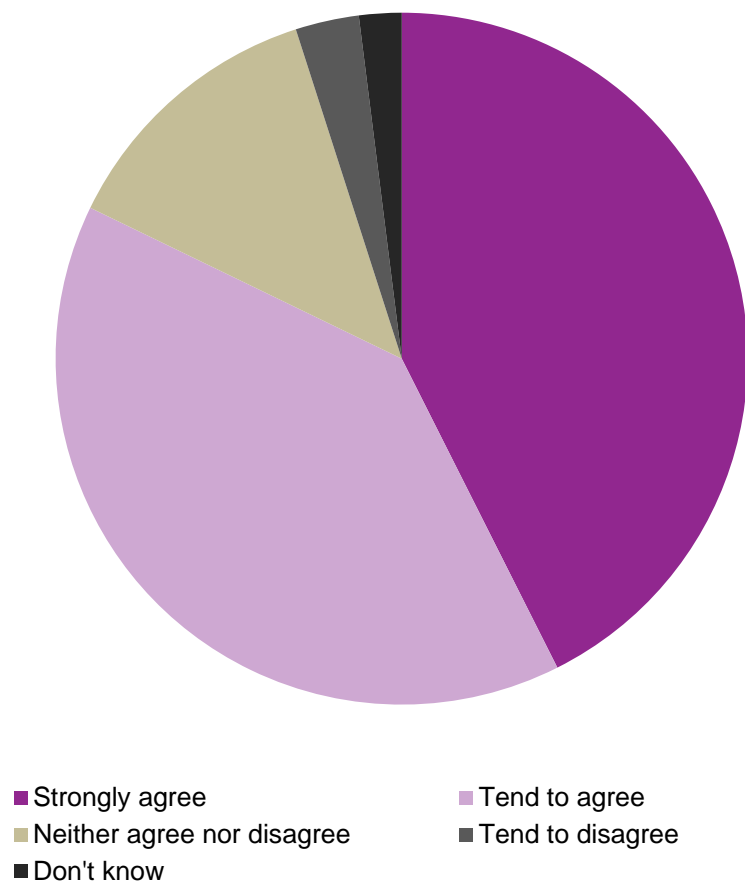Base: all respondents who had published at least one data set (63)

Figure 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In general, the exercise of publishing data is of benefit to our organisation."

■ Strongly agree   ■ Tend to agree
■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Tend to disagree
■ Don't know

Extension of incentive scheme

Participants were asked whether they thought that the incentive scheme should be extended. The majority of respondents thought that the scheme should be extended (Table 7), however one in ten did not know whether it should be.

Table 7: Do you think the incentive scheme should be extended?		
	Count	**%**
Yes	52	83
No	3	5
Don't know	8	13

Q6

Base: all respondents who had published at least one data set (63)

Future participation

Participants were asked how likely it was that they would participate again in an open data scheme (Table 8). Ninety per cent said that if asked, and in hindsight they would participate in an open data incentive scheme again. Less than one in nine respondents said that they would not participate again (eight per cent).

Table 8: If asked, and in hindsight, would you participate in an open data incentive scheme again?		
	Count	%
Very likely	40	63
Fairly likely	17	27
Not very likely	5	8
Not at all likely	0	0
Don't know	1	2

Q7
Base: all respondents who had published at least one data set (63)

Part Two: Scheme evaluation

Respondents who had published data were given the option to continue with the survey, 92 per cent of respondents said that they would like to continue (count of 58), in addition five authorities who had not published data took the opportunity to provide valuable feedback on the scheme.

Publicity

Participants were asked how they heard about the Open Data Incentive scheme. Thirty one per cent had heard about it at a project launch event, a further 45 per cent via promotion emails sent by ODUG (23 per cent) and the project team (22 per cent). ODUG were responsible for the publicity of the scheme to potential users.

Table 9: How did you hear of the Open Data Incentive scheme?		
	Count	**%**
A project launch event in July (London, Bristol or Leeds)	20	31
ODUG (Open Data User Group) emails promoting the scheme	15	23
Emails sent by the project team	14	22
Other emails from interested organisations	4	6
Newsletters / Bulletins	3	5
Twitter	1	2
Knowledge Hub	6	9
Other social media	0	0
Word of mouth	16	25
Other	6	9
Can't remember	4	6

Q1
Base: all respondents (63)
Others included signposting from colleagues and groups, as well as LG Inform training.

Data withdrawals

Respondents who withdrawn from a schema were asked what the reasons were for any data theme withdrawals or failures to complete (Table 10). Over half cited the inability of the corporate system to extract the information required (52 per cent) and just under half (48 per cent) reported staffing constraints. This was followed by time constraints (38 per cent).

Only ten per cent (2 respondents) said that they had withdrawn or failed to complete due to technical skills or political/senior direction from the council.

Respondents were then asked, of these, which was the most significant reason (Table 11 and Figure 3). The most significant reasons echo the most cited in Table 10: an inability of the corporate system to extract the information required (29 per cent), time and staffing constraints (both at 19 per cent).

Table 10: What are the reasons for any data theme withdrawals or failures to complete?		
	Count	%
Inability of the corporate system to extract the information required	11	52
Staffing constraints	10	48
Time constraints	8	38
Inadequate internal data processes	5	24
Conflict between the schemes' data specs and those you use to already publish open data	5	24
Data quality problems	4	19
Political/senior direction from the council	2	10
Ordnance Survey licensing restrictions	2	10
Technical skills	2	10
Data governance issues	1	5
Other	4	19
Don't know	0	0

Q2

Base: all respondents who withdrew or failed to complete for a data theme that they registered for (21)

Others included: lack of sync with a corporate system, focus on data rather than metadata, cost of commissioning report and duplication of what was already published.

Table 11: Of these, which was the most significant reason?		
	Count	%
Inability of the corporate system to extract the information required	6	29
Time constraints	4	19
Staffing constraints	4	19
Conflict between the schemes' data specs and those you use to already publish open data	3	14
Data quality problems	2	10
Inadequate internal data processes	1	5
Other	2	10

Q3

Base: all respondents who withdrew or failed to complete for a data theme that they registered for (21)

Others included: cost of commissioning report and duplication of what was already published.

Figure 3: Main reasons for any data theme withdrawals or failures to complete
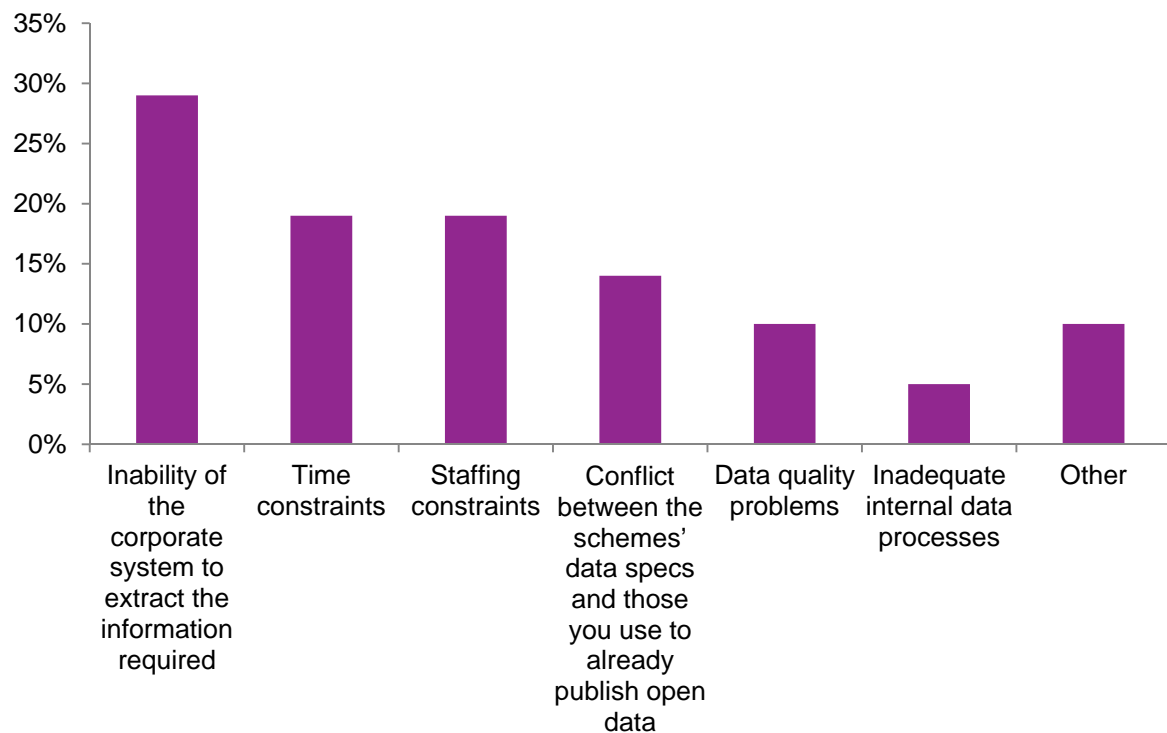
Support and guidance

Participants were asked how useful the support materials available on the Open Data pages on LG Inform Plus and Knowledge Hub were. Most respondents (93 per cent) thought that the support materials were very or fairly useful (Table 12 and Figure 4).

Table 12: How useful were the support materials available on the Open Data pages on LG Inform Plus and Knowledge Hub?		
	Count	**%**
Very useful	19	30
Fairly useful	39	62
Not very useful	2	3
Not at all useful	1	2
Don't know	2	3

Q4

Base: all respondents (63)

Participants were then asked how useful they found the communication that was made at each stage to guide them through the process. Ninety per cent thought that the communication was very or fairly useful, however nearly one in ten (eight per cent) thought that the communication was not very useful (Table 13 and Figure 4).

Table 13: Communication was made at each stage to guide you through the process. In general how helpful or not did you find these communications?		
	Count	**%**
Very useful	19	30
Fairly useful	38	60
Not very useful	5	8
Not at all useful	0	0
Don't know	1	2
Total	63	100

Q5
Base: all respondents (63)

When asked how helpful the review and help information provided at the technical review stage was, over half (50 per cent) said that it was very useful; an additional 37 per cent said it was fairly useful. Ten per cent said that the review and help information at the technical review stage was not very useful (and Figure 4).

Table 14: Was the review and help information provided at the technical review stage helpful?		
	Count	**%**
Very useful	32	51
Fairly useful	23	37
Not very useful	6	10
Not at all useful	0	0
Don't know	2	3
Total	63	100

Q6
Base: all respondents (63)

Figure 4: How useful were the different elements of support and guidance?

- Support materials available on the Open Data pages on LG Inform Plus and Knowledge Hub
- Communication at each stage to guide you through the process
- Review and help information provided at the technical review stage
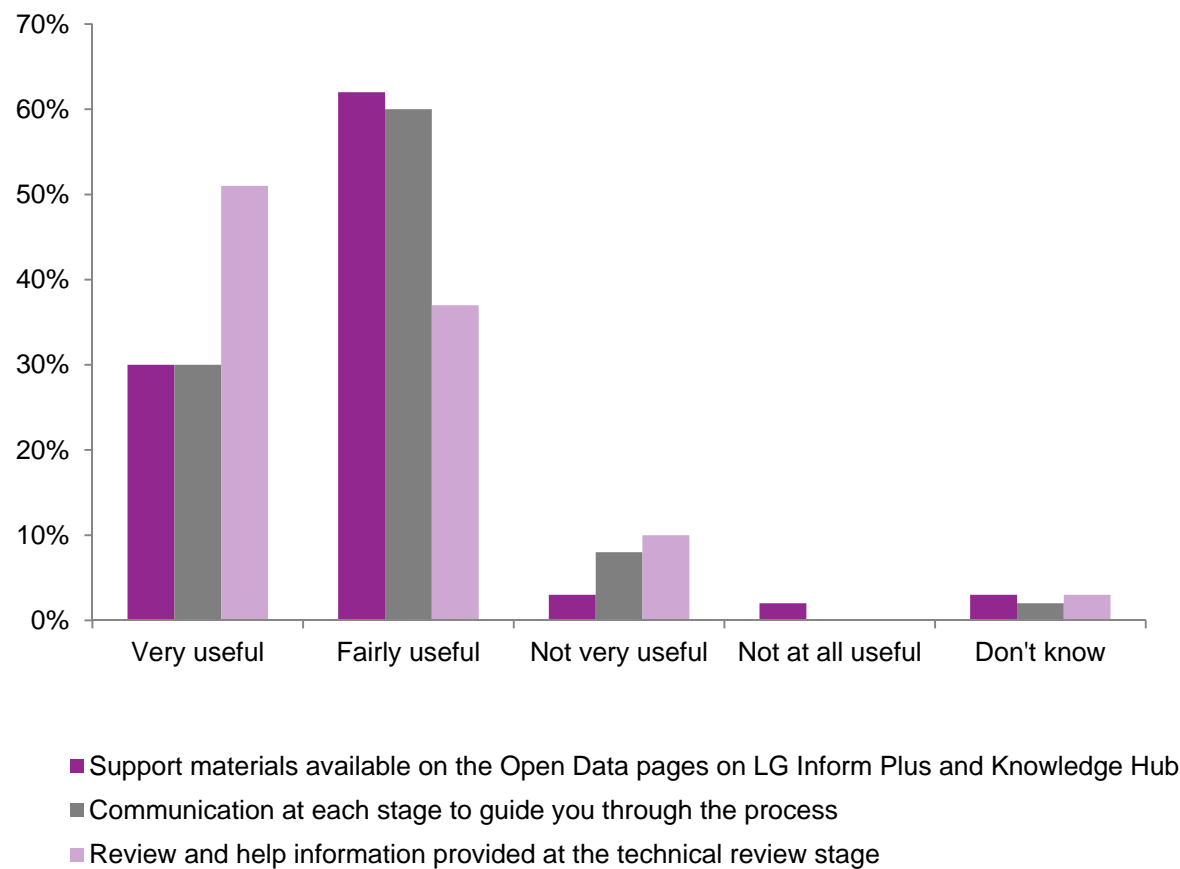
Straightforwardness of the process

Participants were asked how straight forward they found the different elements of the process (Table 15). The most straightforward element was the online project administration system (90 per cent found it to be straightforward), followed by the financial process at 86 per cent.

The least straightforward element was the Open Data Institute (ODI) certification process, 57 per cent found this to be straightforward; over a third (36 per cent) found it to be not straightforward.

Table 15: Please tell us, how straightforward or not, were the following elements of the process:										
	The online project administration system		The Open Data Institute (ODI) certification process		The data registering process on data.gov.uk		The technical review stage		The financial processes	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Straight forward	57	90	36	57	41	65	41	65	54	86
Not straightforward	4	7	23	36	16	26	17	27	2	3
Don't know	2	3	4	6	6	10	5	8	7	11
Total	63	100	63	100	63	100	63	100	63	100

Q7

Base: all respondents (63)

Schema specifications

Participants were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the definitions provided in the schema specifications. Nearly two thirds (65 per cent) strongly or tended to agree with the definitions. Only eight per cent tended, to or strongly disagreed, with the provided definitions (Table 16).

Table 16: To what extent did you agree or disagree with the definitions provided in the schema specifications?		
	Count	%
Strongly agree	3	5
Tend to agree	38	60
Neither agree nor disagree	13	21
Tend to disagree	4	6
Strongly disagree	1	2
Don't know	4	6
Total	63	100

Q8

Base: all respondents (63)

Respondents were then given the opportunity to say per data set how easy or difficult they found it to conform to the schema fields. Participants found the easiest schema fields to conform to were for public toilets, with 82 per cent of participants that had registered for or published public toilet information finding the schemas very or fairly easy to conform to.

Only a quarter (25 per cent) of participants that had registered for or published data for licensing applications found the schema fields very or fairly easy to conform to, compared to 44 per cent who found them fairly, or very difficult. Similarly, for those who had registered or

published data for planning applications, 46 per cent found the schema fields very or fairly difficult to conform to.

Table 17: In relation to the following data sets how easy or difficult did you find it to conform to the schema fields?						
	Planning applications		Licensing applications		Public Toilets	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Very easy	4	7	0	0	29	47
Fairly easy	17	30	14	25	22	35
Neither easy nor difficult	4	7	4	7	3	5
Fairly difficult	17	30	18	33	3	5
Very difficult	9	16	6	11	1	2
Don't know	5	9	13	24	4	6
Total	56	100	55	100	62	100

Q8
Base: all respondents, base varies depending on schema (planning applications, 56; licensing applications, 55; public toilets, 62)

Support, data governance and skills

Participants of the scheme were asked, for each data scheme that they had worked on, to what extent they agreed with a number of statements about the support they received, data governance and the available skills.

Table 18 shows the responses relating to planning applications. Generally responses were positive, 62 per cent said that they strongly or tended to agree that senior management was supportive of the council participating in the scheme. Over half (58 per cent) said that they strongly or tended to agree that staff were in place to help them, although nearly a quarter (22 per cent) said that they strongly or tended to disagree with this statement. Sixty nine per cent of respondents strongly or tended to agree that the skills were available to prepare the data for publication.

Table 18: In relation to the planning applications data, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?										
	Senior management was supportive of the council participating in the scheme		The councillors were supportive of the council participating in the scheme		Staff were in place to help you		The data governance arrangements meant that it was easy for the council to participate in the scheme		Skills were available to prepare the data for publication	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Strongly agree	17	31	5	9	11	20	10	18	17	31
Tend to agree	17	31	5	9	21	38	20	36	21	38
Neither agree nor disagree	10	18	9	16	9	16	10	18	9	16
Tend to disagree	1	2	1	2	7	13	6	11	6	11
Strongly disagree	1	2	0	0	5	9	4	7	0	0
Don't know	9	16	35	64	2	4	5	9	2	4
Total	55	100	55	100	55	100	55	100	55	100

Q9

Base: all respondents who participated in the planning applications schema (55)

Table 19 shows the responses for licensing applications. Nearly half of all respondents (48 per cent) strongly or tended to agree that senior management was supportive of the council participating in the scheme. Over half (54 per cent) said that they strongly or tended to agree that staff were in place to help them, although nearly one fifth (19 per cent) said that they strongly or tended to disagree with this statement. Forty six per cent also said that they strongly or tended to agree that the data governance meant that it was easy for the council to participate in the scheme.

Table 19: In relation to the premise licensing data, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Senior management was supportive of the council participating in the scheme		The councillors were supportive of the council participating in the scheme		Staff were in place to help you		The data governance arrangements meant that it was easy for the council to participate in the scheme		Skills were available to prepare the data for publication	
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Strongly agree	14	26	4	7	8	15	7	13	14	26
Tend to agree	12	22	5	9	21	39	18	33	17	31
Neither agree nor disagree	9	17	7	13	6	11	7	13	5	9
Tend to disagree	2	4	1	2	8	15	6	11	4	7
Strongly disagree	1	2	0	0	2	4	4	7	4	7
Don't know	16	30	37	69	9	17	12	22	10	19
Total	54	100	54	100	54	100	54	100	54	100

Q9

Base: all respondents who participated in the premise licensing schema (54)

Table 20 shows the responses for those that participated in the public toilets data scheme. Opinions were also generally positive, 58 per cent said that they strongly or tended to agree that senior management was supportive of the council participating in the scheme. Two thirds (66 per cent) said that they agreed that staff were in place to help them (strongly and tended to agree), with 16 per cent disagreeing (strongly and tend to disagree).

	Senior management was supportive of the council participating in the scheme		The councillors were supportive of the council participating in the scheme		Staff were in place to help you		The data governance arrangements meant that it was easy for the council to participate in the scheme		Skills were available to prepare the data for publication	
Table 20: In relation to the public toilets data, to what extent do you agree with the following statements?										
	Count	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**	**Count**	**%**
Strongly agree	20	33	5	8	16	26	15	25	25	41
Tend to agree	15	25	5	8	24	39	17	28	19	31
Neither agree nor disagree	10	16	9	15	8	13	15	25	7	11
Tend to disagree	1	2	1	2	5	8	5	8	6	10
Strongly disagree	1	2	1	2	5	8	4	7	1	2
Don't know	14	23	40	66	3	5	5	8	3	5
Total	61	100	61	100	61	100	61	100	61	100

Q9

Base: all respondents who participated in the public toilets schema (61)

Learning

Participants were asked what they had learnt from participating in the scheme. Four in five respondents (81 per cent) identified that they had learnt the stages of work needed to prepare and publish data openly. The following most frequently identified lessons from participating in the scheme were the problems in the quality of their own/council's data (56 per cent); the role of ODI certification (55 per cent); the importance of national specifications (56 per cent); and how difficult the process is (both at 55 per cent) (Table 21).

Table 21: What have you learnt from participating in this scheme?	Count	%
The stages of work needed to prepare and publish data openly	50	81
Problems in the quality of your own/council's data	35	56
The role of ODI certification	34	55
The importance of national specifications	30	48
How difficult it is	30	48
The extent of silo working in your organisation	26	42
Gaps in the features of your corporate systems	24	39
Greater networking within the organisation and with other officers doing similar work	22	35
Inadequacies in your council's processes	22	35
National data standards you never knew existed	18	29
The interest in internal local government data	17	27
The impact of external licences	16	26
The financial cost of moving to an open publication age	13	21
Availability of tools and guidance in the sector	13	21
How easy it is	11	18
Other	7	11
Don't know	0	0
Total	62	100

Q10

Base: all respondents (62)

Others included:

From non-publishing authorities: nothing; that the schemes needed to work together; the lack of knowledge and understanding from those who governed the project regarding European requirements.

From publishing authorities: duplication and limitation of the open data; skills required; extent of manual processing and the need for a purpose of the data.

Table 22 shows which areas of learning were the most important for the participants. Over a third (35 per cent) identified the stages of work needed to prepare and publish data openly. Around ten per cent identified the problems in the quality of their own/council's data (11 per cent), greater networking within the organisation and with other officers doing similar work (eight per cent), and the importance of national specifications (eight per cent).

Table 22: Of these, which was the most important lesson for you?	Count	%
The stages of work needed to prepare and publish data openly	22	35
Problems in the quality of your own/council's data	7	11
Greater networking within the organisation and with other officers doing similar work	6	10
How difficult it is	5	8
The importance of national specifications	5	8
The financial cost of moving to an open publication age	3	5
Inadequacies in your council's processes	3	5
The role of ODI certification	2	3
The extent of silo working in your organisation	1	2
How easy it is	1	2
Gaps in the features of your corporate systems	1	2
The impact of external licences	1	2
The interest in internal local government data	1	2
Other	4	6
Total	62	100

Q11

Base: all respondents (62)

Improvements to the Open Data Incentive Scheme

Participating authorities were asked whether they thought that the scheme could be improved. Thirty nine respondents took the opportunity to provide feedback. The majority of suggested improvements were around guidance, these included a clearer start to finish guide, schema templates containing example data and the use of plain English.

Other suggested improvements were: having a stimulus for data use within the scheme so as to advance the case of releasing open data; staggered financial incentives to ensure continued management of the open data; matching schemas to business systems; and a wider range of datasets to be included within the scheme.

Additional comments

Participants were given the opportunity to tell us anything else about the scheme that was not covered by the questionnaire. A number of respondents took the opportunity to thank the support team and praise the scheme:

> "I generally think it was a great idea, and would love for there to be future similar endeavours. I think it really served to highlight the councils who are enthusiastic towards open data, as well as shining a light on those councils with woefully inadequate data management/manipulation skills that they really should have in the modern local government environment."

<div align="right">District, South East</div>

A few authorities commented on the lack of resources:

> "Overall it was a good introduction into open data and the processes, there is an appetite to do more but in a time of shrinking resources getting managers to buy into it is hard work"

<div align="right">London borough, Greater London</div>

There were also further comments relating to how you might link data management systems to national schemas:

> "Ideally we need a set of national data schemas (for each service) that IT suppliers need to conform to so that data extraction from different systems still provides the same meta data without the need for editing. Would also make switching suppliers at end of contracts a lot more simple and less costly in terms of data migration."

<div align="right">District, Midlands</div>

Annex 1

Table 23: Scheme participation by authority type			
	Authorities who participated in the scheme	**Authorities who successfully published data**	**Rate of successful completion**
	Count	**Count**	**%**
District	62	53	85
English Unitary	19	16	84
Metropolitan District	19	17	89
London Borough	10	6	60
County	1	1	100
Total	111	93	84

Table 24: Scheme participation by region			
	Authorities who participated in the scheme	**Authorities who successfully published data**	**Rate of successful completion**
	Count	**Count**	**%**
East Midlands	9	7	78
East of England	18	14	78
London	10	6	60
North East	4	3	75
North West	14	12	86
South East	27	25	93
South West	9	9	100
West Midlands	6	6	100
Yorkshire and the Humber	14	11	79
Total	111	93	84

Table 25: Scheme participation by data set	Planning applications	Licensing applications	Public Toilets
	Count	Count	Count
Withdrawn	24	43	15
Published	70	52	87
Total	94	95	102