

**A GUIDE TO OPEN DATA**

**What is Open Data?**  
Open Data is all about publishing **non-personal** and **non-business sensitive** data. Where possible, the data is published as it has been collected, that is, without any manipulation or interpretation – this is regarded as raw data. The data can then be scrutinised and re-used by members of the public and businesses alike in a way in which they see fit including for commercial purposes.

Data should be published in an open format which allows everyone to access it regardless of what computer software or operating system they have purchased. It should also be in a format which can be interpreted by computers themselves without any human interaction – this is known as being machine readable. Fortunately, it is very simple to convert an Excel document into an open and machine-readable document (e.g. CSV – comma separated values).

**What are datasets?**

A number of pieces of raw data presented together can be regarded as a dataset. Remember, none of the published data is personal or business sensitive. For example, the business rates dataset could include; name of business, address of business, charge made, date charge paid etc.

Another dataset could show city centre footfall on specific days and at specific times. This can give an insight into which are the busiest days of the week – and what has contributed to peaks and troughs – e.g. has a concert at the Arena meant that an increased number of people were in the city centre between 7pm and 11pm on a normally quiet Tuesday evening? This not only helps the council and other public services in managing the city centre but also helps businesses – e.g. Should shops open later? How many staff should they employ? etc.

All Datasets are published under the National Archives’ Open Government Licence which outlines dos and don’ts for those wanting to re-use council data.

**Why publish data?**

Publishing increasing amount of data has a number of drivers which not only result in benefits for Local Authorities but also benefits the wider region:

* Improves openness and transparency;
* Data published by one organisation can be used to help service delivery in another – e.g. Public Health and Children’s data could help Sport and Active Lifestyles focus their sports provision in the most appropriate places;
* Improves partnership working and promotes civic enterprise;
* Can provide an economic stimulus to the local economy;
* Web developers can re-use council data to provide innovative apps and web services;
* Regularly published data can provide real insight and lead to the identification of historical trends;
* An increased focus on data quality as we will want to publish good quality data; and,
* A reduction in Freedom of Information requests for public services as data will already be available.

**legislation**  
The Freedom of Information Act was amended in September 2013 to make specific reference to datasets. If a request is now made specifically for a ‘dataset’, the council has an obligation to provide (and publish) the data in an open and re-usable format. The published data will then need to be maintained, that is, it will need to be regularly updated etc.

The EU Public Sector Information directive has also been amended recently to specifically incorporate datasets to encourage public sector authorities to adopt an ‘open by default’ stance.

**What’s next?**  
The council and partners are leading on the city’s open data platform, Data Mill North for the region. We are working with organisations and individuals across the city to unlock previously unpublished data to create a ‘one stop shop’ for data about the city, rather than simply City Council data.

Publishing data is just the start. To make it accessible it needs to be presented in an easy to digest format. The Data Mill Dashboard offers visualisations of published data, and soon will offer additional functionality to users to curate their own dashboards and create their own visualisations.

**More information and further reading**  
Council data is currently published at:

[www.leeds.gov.uk/opendata](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/opendata)

The UK Government white paper ‘Open Data: Releasing the Potential’:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78946/CM8353_acc.pdf>

Public sector Transparency Board - Public Sector Principles:

<http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Public%20Data%20Principles_For%20Data.Gov%20%281%29_10.pdf>

The Department of Communities and Local Government Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5967/1997468.pdf>

The National Archives’ Open Government Licence:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>



**For further details email open.data@leeds.gov.uk**