

Transparency Consultation

Consultation Findings

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Consultation
Consultation & Communications

Transparency Consultation

1. INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the detailed findings from the Transparency Consultation.

2. METHODOLOGY

- The consultation was open for six weeks, from the 4th March to 13th April 2014.
- The consultation consisted of an online survey. Paper copies were made available on request.
- The consultation was published on the council's engage space. <http://engage.barnet.gov.uk/>.
- The survey was widely promoted through a press release and it was emailed to 900 individual residents. The consultation was also Tweeted to the council's 7,000+ followers.
- Despite the repeated promotion of this consultation there was a low response rate. However, this number of respondents is consistent with other consultations that do not appear to affect residents directly.

3. RESPONDENTS

- The survey received a total response of 28 responses (not all respondents completed all questions). Due to the small sample size the overall findings should be treated with caution.
- All of the respondents were Barnet residents. There were no responses from the voluntary sector or other public sector stakeholders.
- All respondents were over 35 years of age. Residents over 45 years of age accounted for 88 per cent of the sample.

4. CALCULATING AND REPORTING ON RESULTS

- The results are based on "valid responses" only, i.e. all those providing an answer (this may or may not be the same as the total sample) unless otherwise specified. The base size may therefore vary from question to question depending on the extent of non-response.

5. RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

5.1 Types of data the council could publish

Respondents were asked what other information they would like the council to publish that would demonstrate that the council is being accountable?

- Of the 28 respondents, 15 (54 per cent) provided suggestions for data that could be published.

The two most requested types of data related to the accountability of councillors and staff and transparency with regard to spending. Whilst much of the information related to these issues is published, this suggests that people would be interested in being provided with further data on these subjects. It should be noted that this feedback tallies with the January 2012 Citizens' Panel Consultation, in which issues such as expenses, allowances, salaries and parking revenue were all raised, as they are here. The 2012 consultation also noted that much of this data was already published. Any gap analysis going forward should analyse how much more of this data we hold and can make available.

- Ten respondents (36 per cent) suggested information that was already published on the council website.

This suggests that there is a level of disconnect between what we publish and what we are perceived to publish. It can be assumed that the current Barnet website is at least in part the cause of this, as its limited search function makes it hard to track down information. Data on the website is also corralled in specific business areas spread around the site, which means one has to look in a number of places to identify council data. This may also be a result of the format in which we publish data (e.g. PDF and Word), which makes it hard to identify and analysed specific datasets.

The two most salient factors here, then, are the accessibility of the data that we hold and the communication of that data.

With regard to the first of these points, the introduction of the CKAN portal will provide a one-stop shop for Barnet data, and provide a tool by which to upload and analyse datasets. With regard to the second issue, the feedback would suggest that the data portal must be adequately signposted and promoted to the wider public.

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- Individual respondents also expressed interest in data on the following areas. Whilst much of this data is already published, we would need to consider its accessibility and if we hold any more that can be published:
 - Planning
 - Licensing
 - Parking revenue
 - Open tenders
 - Road works
 - Street trees
 - Littering and vandalism

5.2 Data to support business development

Respondents were asked if there was any information they felt the council could publish to support economic and business development in the borough.

- The response to this section was limited, with only seven (25 per cent) individuals providing relevant feedback. However, four (14 per cent) of the respondents suggested data with regard to parking space availability would be particularly useful, especially with regard to the retail sector.
- Of the remaining respondents, interest was shown in the publication of information with regard to what the council is doing to help business and details of new businesses opening in the area. Whilst the former is more about providing council advice, the latter could be an issue to be explored.
- The limited number of respondents that provided feedback for this section concentrated almost exclusively on the retail industry, with little comment on any other sectors.

5.3. Data held by other public bodies

Respondents were asked if there was any other information held by the council, or other public bodies, which they would like published and that would be helpful in their day to day life.

- There were eight (29 per cent) relevant responses in this section. These are set out below. There appears to be no unifying theme to analyse here, but each could be considered for publication:

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- (i) Crime figures – whilst the council does not produce this data, local and national recorded crime and the British Crime Survey could be linked to from CKAN
 - (ii) An expanded list of contact numbers in one place
 - (iii) Expenditure and council activity broken down by ward
 - (iv) National and local Planning regulations and policies
 - (v) Information on the recycling process
 - (vi) Statistics on how many individuals use services (e.g. libraries)
- One respondent also expressed concerns with regard to the data quality of previously published data, especially with regard to metadata such as creation date, etc. These issues should be addressed by the CKAN publishing schedule.

5.4 Format of data the council could use

Respondents were asked what other formats they would you like the council to use to publish its data.

- As is probably to be expected, respondents exhibited a limited knowledge of open data and the most useful data formats that contribute to the user-friendly manipulation of the data. The primary concern of the nine (32 per cent) respondents that provided relevant feedback here was with regard to how readable and accessible documents were, rather than data. Mention was made of PDF and Word formats that are already in use on the website and are not the best means of delivering open and transparent data for effective reuse.
- Responses from older residents stressed the importance of information being available in paper formats. Whilst this is understandable with regard to most documents, it would be essentially impossible to implement this with datasets.
- Some useful points were raised as to the inaccessibility of the current Capita contracts. These are currently on the website but in a PDF format that does not allow for easy searching and extraction of information. In addition a further concern was raised with regard to the accessibility and usefulness of the current website. With regard to the Capita contracts, as these constitute thousands of pages of documents, there is likely to be a resourcing issue in transferring these to a more user-friendly format. If a less labour-intensive means of doing this can be identified, it should be considered. However, it is clear from this feedback that all future contract publications should be in a more accessible format.
- The response to this section is generally limited by the assumption it makes that individual respondents have the necessary technological expertise to have a preference for an open data format. This could be seen as a flaw in the

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methodology of the questions, as the formatting question should really be targeted at a more specialist audience.

6. Conclusion

The limited response shows that there were clearly some issues with regard to the consultation methodology. The broad brush approach, together with the self-selecting sample, meant that we were not necessarily able to reach those with most interest and knowledge with regard to Transparency.

Whilst the response to the consultation was exceptionally limited, the lack of response provides some very useful insight:

- Knowledge of the information already published on the council's website is very limited.
- There is apparently very little public knowledge of the wider issues with regard to transparency.
- Any work going forward on transparency should take this into account and ensure that all efforts are made to inform the public and the wider community as to what we are doing and why.