

CILIP offers itself as Expert adviser to Government on Open Data

Peter Griffiths

A copy of Peter Griffith's recent blog at the CILIP website

This week guest blogger Peter Griffiths, former CILIP President 2009, writes about our [recent](#)



[response](#) to the Cabinet Office.

You wait ages for a government consultation paper on data and information management, and then four come along together... The Information & Advice Blog carried a story in July alerting members to [Making Open Data Real](#), which was seeking views on enhancing the right to data not just about government departments and agencies but about public service providers in general - meaning any organisation responsible for deliver-

ing a public service, including private companies (and in our own area of interest, presumably any contractor or group providing information and library services on behalf of a public sector body). The Government says it wants to “embed a culture of openness and transparency in our public services”.

CILIP has submitted a response - of which more in a moment - but has pointed out that the outcome of the open data consultation is inextricably linked to the proposal to create a [Public Data Corporation](#) which would be responsible for collecting, holding and managing public data. Open data is also one of the elements of the second phase of the Government's [Growth Review](#), and that is not due to make its first report until around the time of the Autumn Statement later in November - after the open data consultation has closed. Finally a [report](#) commissioned by the Cabinet Office from Dr Kieran O'Hara, a senior research fellow at the University of Southampton, makes important recommendations on the impact of transparency

on data privacy - though as yet we do not know whether or how the Government intends to implement them.

CILIP's response addresses many of the questions in [Making Open Data Real](#) - though to answer them all would have required us to publish a small book. It was put together by the informal task and finish group on information management that grew out of the Information Matters theme during my Presidential year, and is now supporting CILIP's policy priority on information management. In addition to responding to the key questions in the consultation paper, our response poses and answers several very relevant questions that weren't included, with concerns about privacy at the top of the list.

We've commented on the need to improve data quality (and the search function on government and public sector websites, which make it very difficult to find data even when it is available). We've argued that the selection of data to be released must be based on what users want to access, not what the public sector feels like releasing - and again, it shouldn't be acceptable to cite poor data quality as a reason for refusal to release it. We point to the need for consistency across the United Kingdom, to the resource pressures and possible conflicts of interest at the Information Commissioner's Office, and to the

need to raise awareness among the new "Big Society" public service providers, and we've warned that the technological issues to be tackled are considerable. In fact a model already exists to support public service providers in dealing with their responsibilities - following the approach of the Information Matters initiative, government could create a "Knowledge Council" for these providers.

CILIP has already suggested this in response to consultation about the [health sector](#), but government seems reluctant to re-use a winning formula. As you may know, information professionals have a key role in the original Knowledge Council, and CILIP's response not only emphasises the value that our professional skills will contribute to the initiative, but also offers to work with the Cabinet Office as an expert adviser as the consultation responses are turned into government policy.

In this blog I can only summarise the key points - the response is quite extensive in order to be thorough and to explain our professional concerns in places where government thinking doesn't yet seem to be clear. The members of the working group hope you'll read the whole response because this is an important issue that will affect every one of us in CILIP in one way or another as it develops.