

Transparency Board Minutes
21.03.13

TRANSPARENCY BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on the 21st March 2013 at The Cabinet Office

Transparency Board Members:	Officials:
Nick Hurd, Minister for Civil Society	Paul Maltby (Cabinet Office Transparency Team)
Nigel Shadbolt	Glenn Preston (Ministry of Justice)
Andrew Stott	Vanessa Howlinson (DECC)
Rufus Pollock	Catherine Harding (DECC)
Heather Savory	Ian Knowles (DECC)
Matthew Hancock	Stephan Shakespeare (Data Strategy Board)
Sir Tim Berners-Lee (teleconferencing)	

Apologies:	
Francis Maude, Minister for Cabinet Office	
Dame Fiona Caldicott	

1. Welcome and Introductions

Nick Hurd, Minister for Civil Society, welcomed all attendees and sent apologies from the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

2. Transparency Team Update, Paul Maltby

Paul updated the Transparency Board on the busy schedule of work currently underway. The team was working on the following:

- a. Transparency and Open Data Written Ministerial Statement (WMS). It was noted that DCMS failed to submit a return for this quarter's WMS.
- b. Following discussions with departments, an online consultation was ongoing for the FOIA Code of Practice.
- c. Preparations were ongoing for the G8 3Ts event and a team was being put in place to negotiate the agreements with G8 members.

3. Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) progress on Open Data, Vanessa Howlinson

Vanessa updated the Board on DECC's current Open Data Initiatives.

- a. DECC was making very good progress against Open Data Initiatives and had scored well in the recent Written Ministerial Statement exercise.
- b. They had set up internal data assurance processes and proactively started to engage with the Open Data Institute.
- c. DECC collects and publishes a range of performance management data in order to monitor and evaluate the impact of their policies and programmes, and to strengthen future policy design, for example the installed capacity of renewable electricity production, number of energy efficiency measures installed under the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) and Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP) schemes, as well as energy prices data.

4. ODUG case for opening up the VAT register, Heather Savory

Heather Savory, Chair of the Open Data User Group, discussed the case for opening up the VAT register:

- a. BIPA (Business Information Providers Association) have estimated that publication of the VAT register could benefit the UK economy by around £50 billion based on an increase in credit requests and associated credit approvals powered by the positive data from the VAT Register.
- b. Opening up the register would improve access to business funding for 750,000 businesses, reduce the instances of commercial fraud (250,000 cases in 2011), enable the creation of new services such as 'trusted business' apps with the VAT Register acting as the unique data identifier and create internal government efficiencies through better data sharing and tax gathering.
- c. Requirements and barriers to release include the assumption that the VAT Register data would contain no personal or sensitive information. HMRC would also need to make the data available on a regular basis (weekly or more regular is recommended). HMRC would need to make the data available as a download or API. An 'Opt Out' scheme for unincorporated business owners could prevent any negative perception of the data.
- d. As long as the appropriate limits are put in place, it was argued that the case for opening up the register was compelling.

5. Update on the Shakespeare Review, Stephan Shakespeare

Stephan updated the board on progress and some of the themes that would be covered in the review. This was due to be published in June 2013.

- a. He will argue in the review that the UK has made great gains in making government more transparent and in promoting social and economic growth through open data.
- b. He will recommend that the government creates a unified 'National Data Strategy'
- c. He will recommend that it is ensured that the perfect is not the enemy of the good. Departments should publish their data in a timely fashion even if it is imperfect. However, there should remain a commitment to a high quality core of data.

- d. He will recommend that there is unified, clear leadership of the agenda. Rather than there being multiple boards and leadership structures there should be a clear line of governance.
- e. He will recommend concerted but intelligent pressure to be put on the trading funds.
- f. He will recommend that a clear, pragmatic policy towards privacy and confidentiality is adhered to in all future data releases.

6. Any Other Business

The Chair closed the meeting, and announced that the next meeting would be held in June 2013.