



National Audit Office

**Cross-government review**

# Implementing Transparency

Detailed methodology

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**APRIL 2012**

# Detailed methodology

## Introduction

**1** This document accompanies the Comptroller and Auditor General's report *Implementing Transparency*, published in April 2012. It adds further detail to the description of the methodology in Appendix One of the main report.

## Study scope

**2** The report reviews early implementation of the transparency initiatives announced by the Coalition Government and considers the arrangements in place to judge value for money to establish key lessons that Government should address. It covers:

- the background to the transparency agenda and its governance arrangements;
- the progress of implementation to date;
- how transparency aligns with choice and accountability; and
- the economic growth potential of transparency.

## Methodology

**3** We undertook our fieldwork from October to December 2011. Our methodology consisted of seven elements:

- survey of 16 ministerial departments in central government and four local authorities, including follow-up interviews;
- interviews with key government stakeholders, including the Cabinet Office Transparency Team;
- review of documents held by the ministerial departments, the Cabinet Office and the Shareholder Executive;
- case studies of the provision of information in the schools, adult social care, police and local government sector;
- interviews with developers and media;
- literature review of recent studies on the economic growth potential of public sector information; and
- review of central and local government data releases.

## Survey of ministerial departments and local authorities

4 We asked 16 ministerial departments and four local authorities to complete a questionnaire on their governance and administrative arrangements for implementing transparency, their understanding of costs and benefits associated with the transparency initiatives, and the demand generated by their data releases. Responses were used to inform interviews with key transparency officials in all of the 16 departments and four local authorities. This allowed us to determine:

- the arrangements in place to release data and manage the risks associated with data releases;
- the use of data inventories;
- the extent to which departments and local authorities monitored benefits and public demand for the released data, including their engagement with key users of public data; and
- departmental estimates of the costs of releasing the standard data sets specified in the Prime Minister's letters on transparency.

## Interviews with key government stakeholders

5 We carried out semi-structured interviews with officials in the Cabinet Office Transparency Team, the National Archives, and the Information Commissioner's Office. This allowed us to understand:

- the current Government's objectives for the transparency agenda;
- the role and responsibilities of the Cabinet Office and other stakeholders in implementing the transparency agenda;
- the implementation of the Open Government Licence; and
- the progress in implementing a new public 'right to data'.

## **Review of documents held by ministerial departments, the Cabinet Office and the Shareholder Executive**

**6** We reviewed business cases and impact assessments where they had been developed for sector-specific data releases, strategic and operational plans relating to transparency initiatives, relevant risk assessments, and tools monitoring the progress on implementing the government's transparency commitments. This allowed us to identify:

- departmental estimates of the costs and benefits of sector-specific data releases;
- the latest government plans for [www.data.gov.uk](http://www.data.gov.uk) and the Open Data Institute;
- the development of draft public data principles as good practice;
- privacy impact assessments that have been undertaken with respect to the release of individual-based data sets; and
- the Cabinet Office's monitoring arrangements to track and report progress on the transparency agenda, including the use of [www.data.gov.uk](http://www.data.gov.uk).

## **Case studies of the provision of information in the schools, adult social care, police and local government sector**

**7** We assessed the provision of information in four sectors to understand the extent to which it supports user choice and local accountability, against the criteria set out in Part Three of the Comptroller and Auditor General's report. This involved review of documentation and websites, and interviews with departments and relevant stakeholders, and allowed us to exemplify the extent of current information provision, and the nature of gaps in provision, in the following areas:

- school choice;
- adult community-based care services;
- crime reporting; and
- performance information for local government services.

## **Interviews with developers and the media**

**8** We conducted a focus group with developers of web and smartphone applications and held three interviews with data journalists. This allowed us to understand their views on the overall progress of the transparency agenda as well as their experiences of using public data to produce applications, visualisations and other tools and services.

## Literature review of recent studies on the economic growth potential of public sector information

9 We reviewed recent research that has attempted to estimate the economic value of public sector information. This allowed us to identify:

- the main approaches used in estimating the economic benefit of public sector information, and their strengths and weaknesses; and
- the scale of the various estimates of benefits.

## Review of recent central government and local government data releases

10 We assessed the compliance of a sample of monthly itemised spending data releases of all departments against Treasury guidance. We also reviewed the compliance of a representative sample of local government data releases against the *Code of Recommended Practice for Local authorities on Data Transparency*.