

# Background notes for Interview with Sally Kerr, Edinburgh City Council Digital Services Manager

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27-4-2015

**1. Could you describe briefly your role at the City Council.**

I am the Digital Services Manager. My portfolio includes management of digital services, with a focus on strategy, standards and policies, the front end and customer experience, running from the Council's main website and Intranet through to the digital estate as a whole, and including app development and management. I am also the lead for open data in the Council, delivering programme of work and encouraging innovation through the use of our data.

**2. What are the aims of the council in running an open data programme (project, etc), or why is open data in the Council strategy?**

We have a wider ICT and Digital Strategy, with the vision for an:

*Empowered Edinburgh, where Edinburgh is a city empowered through its use of ICT and Digital Services.*

This strategy is aligned to the Council's core priorities. The open data strategy sits within this vision, with a goal to become the leading contributor of open data for Edinburgh and its wider region..

**3. How does the council hope to benefit, and how does it fit within the overall goals of the council?**

We are encouraging open data in order to increase accountability, efficiency, responsibility and encourage economic growth in government

**4. What examples from elsewhere in the world were used to inform the decision, and are there some that you recognise as good practice**

We have looked to a range of cities across the world who are using open data to change their cities. Helsinki and Amsterdam are good examples, using open data to inform decision making and in Helsinki's case a massive programme of data release for transparency and innovation.

**5. Can you describe the main elements of the (Strategy programme)?**

- Putting in place Governance
- Identifying Data Sources and processes required to assure data for release
- Building an open data portal
- Identifying city partners to create a city portal
- Identifying opportunities for innovation using our data
- Encouraging and promoting our programme

**6. Can you give some examples of some of the more successful?**

- Creating our alpha open data portal
- Working with Nesta on two programmes... (one earlier) Make It Local Scotland, Open Data Scotland and creating new open products

- Developing the EdinburghApps programme
- Working with partners at their events, such as the SEPA hack coming up at the end of May, sharing data sets
- Investigating how to change working practices for our publishing formats

## **7. Can you give some examples of key activities needed to move to open data?**

Identifying key stakeholders who will be early adopters and support the release of data

Putting in place a platform that supports release of data, and engagement with key stakeholder groups such as universities, students, researchers, developers and other organisations  
Identifying or putting in place opportunities to innovate with our data, improving the city – through working with partners such as Nesta, but also the Universities, and creating our own opportunities, through EdinburghApps.

## **8. What are the partnerships and skills that have been necessary to develop the programme - how have they need developed?**

This is a continuing development. We recognise the need for data science skills in house to provide data in the best format we can. Other more established open data portals are publishing in basic formats such as pdfs. We would like to publish to at least level 3 on Berners-Lee 5 star deployment scheme. We are exploring working with the Universities in the city, and with our own Business Intelligence unit in the Council. We are also looking at how to automate the assurance and publishing process by developing a Data Hub that will be the receiving point for data sets, and can then process them for release onto CKAN, our open data store.

Because we want to open up data for the city in a sustainable way, we need to look at our existing partners and partnerships to achieve this. We are carrying out a programme of engagement to find early adopters and encourage others to begin to think about open data. Demonstrating benefits can help to change thinking e.g. transparency, supporting the economy, potential savings, improving data by sharing.

We also want to work with wider, European partners, and look for opportunities through EU funding opportunities.

## **9. What are the main challenges facing the development of open data and how have you tried to tackle them?**

The Strategy was only agreed less than a year ago. In that time we have created our portal, released around 60 data sets and created a number of case studies to support sharing and opening up data.

At the moment open data is not a recognised and adopted approach in Scottish local government. Whilst the Scottish Government has recently published its own strategy and some authorities have their own portals, there needs to be more effort put into explaining the concept of open data and promoting its benefits and making opportunities to empower the public sector to move forward with open data. It is possible that EU funding opportunities may help with this work plus associated legislation.

Publishing is another challenge: the Council, like many other large organisations, has a publishing process that is in place for internal use rather than external sharing. Our formats are mostly not machine readable and staff do not want to spend time converting files unless there is a sound business benefit for doing so.

By offering opportunities such as our EdinburghApps civic challenge programme, partner events or projects, we have encouraged some areas of the Council to work with us to improve their data and

make it available. At the same time we have political support to expand the data sets we release, (see the newest Committee report) and this helps us produce more open data sets.

We are exploring how we might, in the future, change default publishing formats so that we publish data by default in machine readable formats, which would make it much easier to share.

Open Data is a journey and each year we make progress.

## **10. How is the open data strategy or projects evaluated?**

We report through Council Committee. Most recent report was agreed in March 2015. This had a number of recommendations:

- 1.1 Endorse the data and delivery principles and principles for data publishing across the Council.
- 1.2 Instruct all services to identify data sets for early release using the types of data identified in Appendix 2, and clear protocols for the release of data by officers be produced
- 1.3 Agree to the Council delivering 100 new data sets at level three of the agreed Open Data format hierarchy<sup>1</sup> by Sept 2015, and identifying and cataloguing the opportunities for re-use.
- 1.4 Endorse the EdinburghApps programme as a delivery model supporting departments priorities and connecting with and promoting local businesses.
- 1.5 Endorse the need for resources to support the programme as noted at point 3.17.

## **11. What recommendations would you give to a public, NGO or private organisations looking at the potential of opening their data or using data opened by others?**

- Identify a champion – a senior officer who has the power to support and make decisions
- Use examples of good practice to demonstrate the benefits
- Produce and seek agreement for a strategy to share data
- Review publishing processes to improve these for open data
- Put in place a programme of activities which will provide case studies to demonstrate the benefits

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the Open Data full strategy p16 ([http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20218/council-wide\\_plans\\_and\\_strategies/1031/open\\_data\\_strategy](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20218/council-wide_plans_and_strategies/1031/open_data_strategy))