

## 1.0 Introduction

Good quality data and information is critical as a basis for transparency, making sound decisions and in supporting the monitoring and improvement of service delivery. The Council aims to produce data that is fit for purpose – accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete data that is “right first time” for use by internal and external stakeholders.

### 1.1 Scope

For the purposes of this protocol, “data quality” is understood to mean the quality of the data or information on which the value of any analysis and interpretation depends.

All Council functions, systems and processes that produce data are covered by this protocol. Each service area is responsible for ensuring that staff with duties related to any information and data capture, use and management carry out their function in accordance with this protocol.

The protocol does not cover issues regarding management of personal data, data security, release of information under Freedom of Information or Data Protection, or information / records management. For guidance on these areas, please refer to the relevant policies listed at the end of this document.

The protocol applies to paper based, computerised or other media (film, tape etc.). All data and information used by the Council is subject to the statutory requirements of, for example, the Data Protection Act, the Freedom of Information Act, and those emerging from the developing public sector transparency and “Open Data” agenda, as well as any applicable service based legislation.

Specific data sets may be subject to different regulations (for example, CIPFA rules for financial data). However, as a minimum all data should meet the overarching data quality criteria outlined in *Data Quality Criteria* below. This includes any information regularly reported, either internally or externally, upon which decisions are made. For example:

- Data items submitted to central government/arms length bodies (eg. single data list)
- Data sets made public as specified in the *Code of recommended practice for local authorities on data transparency*
- All performance information stored within the electronic performance and risk management system.

## 2.0 Data Quality Criteria

The council aims to produce data that is fit for purpose – accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete data that is “right first time” for use by internal and external stakeholders. Data and information must therefore meet the following criteria:

The Audit Commission defines six key characteristics of quality data, which the council recognises as identifying good quality data and will apply when devising and reviewing data collection processes:

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Accuracy     | <p>Data should be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes, representing clearly and in sufficient detail the interaction provided at the point of activity. Data should be captured once only, although it may have multiple uses. Accuracy is most likely to be secured if data is captured as close to the point of activity as possible. Reported information that is based on accurate data provides a fair picture of performance and should enable informed decision making at all levels.</p> <p>The need for accuracy must be balanced with the importance of the uses for the data, and the costs and effort of collection. For example, it may be appropriate to accept some degree of inaccuracy where timeliness is important. Where compromises have to be made on accuracy, the resulting limitations of the data should be clear to its users.</p> |
| Validity     | <p>Data should be recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements, including the correct application of any rules or definitions. This will ensure consistency between periods and with similar organisations.</p> <p>Where proxy data is used to compensate for an absence of actual data, organisations must consider how well this data is able to satisfy the intended purpose.</p>  |
| Reliability  | <p>Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time, whether using manual or computer-based systems, or a combination. Managers and stakeholders should be confident that progress toward performance targets reflects real changes rather than variations in data collection approaches or methods.</p>  |
| Timeliness   | <p>Data should be captured as quickly as possible after the event or activity and must be available for the intended use within a reasonable time period. Data must be available quickly and frequently enough to support information needs and to influence the appropriate level of service or management decisions.</p>  |
| Relevance    | <p>Data captured should be relevant to the purposes for which it is used. This entails periodic review of requirements to reflect changing needs.</p> <p>It may be necessary to capture data at the point of activity which is relevant only for other purposes, rather than for the current intervention. Quality assurance and feedback processes are needed to ensure the quality of such data.</p>  |
| Completeness | <p>Data requirements should be clearly specified based on the information needs of the organisation and data collection processes matched to these requirements. Monitoring missing, incomplete, or invalid records can provide an indication of data quality and can also point to problems in the recording of certain data items.</p>  |

All staff must endeavour to ensure that any data or information they are responsible for meets the above criteria. Responsibility for maintaining data quality lies within the individual services.

## 2.1 Guidance

The following guidance underpins good quality data and provides the basis for how data quality is attained at the Council.

1. Awareness: relevant staff recognise the need for good data quality and how they can contribute.
2. Definitions: Where appropriate, relevant staff are made aware of the requirements of the data that is produced through job descriptions/appraisal process.
3. Input: there are controls over input - it must be clear within services who is responsible for entering and/or submitting data (or if more than one person, exactly how this works). Staff using the systems must have clear guidelines and procedures for using systems and be adequately trained. As a general rule data should be input onto one system only to decrease the chance of errors and entered on an ongoing basis, not saved up to be entered in a block at the end of a period.
4. Verification: there are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input/submission as possible, for example: a review of recent data against expectations; a reconciliation of systems-produced data with manual input records; data cleansing (eg to remove duplicate records or to fill in missing information); sample checks to eliminate reoccurrence of a specific error (eg checking one field of data that is pivotal to a Performance Indicator/data return against documentation); for a sample of cases, a test run of report output to check the integrity of the query being used to extract data; spot checks (eg on external contractor information).
5. Systems: are fit for purpose and staff have the expertise to get the best out of them. It is every services' responsibility to maintain a robust control environment for information systems.
6. Output: data is extracted regularly and efficiently and communicated quickly. Performance information should be subject to scrutiny and challenge before being passed 'up the line' for management action.
7. Presentation: data and information is presented in such a way as to give an easily understood and accurate picture to external bodies, inspectorates and/or the public. Managers are responsible for the accuracy of the data produced within their sections, they should always be confident that the data being reported from their area of activity is accurate. Checking that systems and processes are producing valid information must not be left until there is an external audit and/or query raised.

## 2.2 Roles & Responsibilities

Certain roles have more accountability for Data Quality within the organisation than others.

The **Cabinet Member** with the portfolio for **Resources & Transformation** (which encompasses risk) has senior member responsibility for data quality.

The **Transformation Manager** has overall strategic responsibility for data quality.

**Managers** (including Section Heads) must ensure that staff are aware of their requirement to maintain complete, accurate and timely records, and how important their role in maintaining data accuracy is. This should be achieved through the job description, induction, ongoing management and annual appraisal.

**Heads of Service** have the operational responsibility for ensuring that the systems under their control produce reliable data, endorsing PI information in the quarterly/annual reports and promoting data quality within the council.

**Internal Audit** review controls on data and report to management on data quality issues.

**Audit & Governance Committee** considers the Council's compliance with its own and other published standards and controls in so far as these contribute to the adequacy of its framework of internal control.

Those **officers** involved in inputting, extracting, analyzing, reporting on, submitting or otherwise managing data from any of the council's information systems (or external data) have a responsibility to ensure that processes and protocols are being followed.

There are obligations upon **all staff** to maintain accurate records, these are:

- Legal (Data Protection Act where involving personal information)
- Contractual (job descriptions).

### **3.0 Partnership Working and Third Party Data**

A standard clause relating to data quality assurance should be included in new contracts and to be raised at the start of any new partnership work, including the frequency and punctuality of data provision. For example, data sharing protocols already exist within the Community Safety Partnership.

Copies of partner data quality policies should be requested to ensure that the principles of partner organisations (with whom data is shared) are compatible with our own.

Where data sharing arrangements already exist, and contracts are not able to be amended to include data quality clauses, protocols should be discussed and agreed with existing partners as appropriate.

Our own data quality procedures should be shared with partners as appropriate.

### **4.0 Monitoring of Data Quality**

Data quality can be assured by directly testing the data itself. Carrying this out for all data produced is impractical and costly. The benefit of improving the level of data quality should not be outweighed by the resources necessary to achieve the improvement. The council therefore focuses on arrangements for collection and reporting data, rather than the data itself, as outlined above.

Service areas with a higher risk from data quality should carry out a risk assessment on the systems used and consider adding to their risk register if appropriate. Areas likely to have a higher risk for data quality are those areas that:

- have a high volume of data transactions
- have a financial impact associated with the data
- are technically complex, eg. in terms of performance information definition / guidance
- have had problems identified in previous years
- rely on inexperienced staff involved in data processing / production
- have introduced a new system
- have known gaps in the control environment.

In addition, the following safeguards are in operation:

- As well as providing assurance to management on the integrity of the Council's internal data systems, internal audit check selected externally reported information using a risk based approach.
- External audit provide an opinion on the Council's financial statements including whether they give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and its spending and income for the year in question; and whether they have been prepared properly, following the relevant accounting rules.

This Policy will not be reviewed to a timetable. It will be reviewed through the Audit and Governance Committee only should its content become out of date. Any significant issues relating to data quality that arise will be reported to Audit and Governance on an ad hoc basis as appropriate.

#### Related Policies

- Data Protection Policy
- Retention and Disposal Schedule
- ICT and Data Security Policy

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