

Report by the Chief Executive

Adur District Council – Data Quality Strategy 2007-2009

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Following a recent Audit Commission inspection into data quality, it has been recommended that this Council produce and adopt a Data Quality Strategy to raise awareness and to highlight the importance of good quality data and which clearly assigns data quality responsibilities. Attached to this report is a draft Data Quality Strategy for Members consideration.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 That Members approve and adopt this Data Quality Strategy 2007 - 2009.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Public services need reliable, accurate and timely information with which to manage services, inform users and account for performance. Service providers make many, often complex, decisions about their priorities and the use of resources. Service users, and members of the public more widely, need accessible information to make informed decisions. Regulators and government departments need information to satisfy their responsibilities for making judgements about performance and governance.
- 3.2 Much time and money is spent on the activities and systems involved in collecting and analysing the data that underlies performance information, and the Audit Commission says that despite this, there remains a prevailing lack of confidence in much of this data. Please note that this is a general comment relating to all local authorities, not just to Adur District Council. As increasing reliance is placed on this information in performance management and assessment regimes, the need for reliable data has become more critical.
- 3.3 Good quality data is the essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information to support decision making. The data used to report on performance must be fit for purpose, represent the Council's activity in an accurate and timely manner. At the same time there must be a balance between the use and importance of the information, and the cost of collecting the required data to the necessary level of accuracy.

4.0 Data Requirements For Adur District Council

- 4.1 All information in the Council is built up from a variety of sources. The information is used locally, but also nationally, to inform planning, performance management and to contribute to national statistics. To ensure consistency and comparability at a national level there are numerous rules and protocols about how, when and why certain data should be collected. If these rules are not followed closely or if the data is missing or unreliable, then the information itself will be more likely to be flawed (resulting in low quality data).
- 4.2 In practice, most data in the Council is gathered as part of the everyday activity of many frontline and support staff working in a huge variety of settings. This means that unless we have very well-managed systems and processes operated by appropriately supervised staff, errors can occur and the quality of data can decline.
- 4.3 From an external monitoring perspective, the Council requires accurate information to manage services provided by and with our partners, along with data needed to meet national reporting requirements such as :
- Best Value Performance indicators.
 - Statutory returns / data sets (e.g. to the Department for Works & Pensions; Department for Communities & Local Government).
 - Quarterly monitoring returns e.g. Government Office for the South East (GOSE) reports.
 - External inspections e.g. Audit Commission, Benefit Fraud Inspectorate to ensure that there is compliance with applicable legislation and that suitable processes are used and controls put in place to ensure the completeness, correctness and security of data.
- 4.4 Such information is important within the Council to:
- Check progress against the Council's priorities and service priorities mainly in the form of quarterly performance indicators.
 - Allow re-allocation of resources if necessary
 - Check progress against Best Value Improvement Plans.
 - Check progress against various Action Plans
- 4.5 This Strategy will put in place the mechanism to formally assign responsibility and clarify the importance of high quality data.

Background Documents:

Audit Commission Draft Data Quality Audit report 2006/07

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Appendix

1.0 Council Priority

1.1 This Strategy will provide the framework to allow the Council to monitor its progress against each of the five Council priorities.

2.0 Specific Targets

2.1 To provide a performance management framework tracing linkages to external factors, the Best Value Performance Plan, Corporate Plan etc.

3.0 Sustainability Issues

3.1 Matters considered and no separate issues identified

4.0 Equality Issues

4.1 Matters considered and no separate issues identified.

5.0 Community Safety issues (Section 17)

5.1 Matters considered and no separate issues identified.

6.0 Human Rights Issues

6.1 Matters considered and no separate issues identified.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct costs associated with the adoption and implementation of this Strategy other than the cost of delivery of the services and actions which will be dealt with through the normal Capital and Revenue processes.

8.0 Legal Implications

8.1 The Council has a duty to plan for the best possible services to the people of Adur and for those services to be delivered in an efficient, effective and economical manner. This Strategy will provide the means to collect and report high quality data so as to allow Members to make informed decisions on future service delivery.

9.0 Consultations

9.1 A copy of the draft Strategy has been circulated to all Divisional Managers. No comments have been received to date.

10.0 Risk assessment

10.1 If the Council were not to approve this Strategy, it would be open to criticism by external auditors for not having a corporate Data Quality Strategy in place that allows informed decisions to be taken on the future allocation of resources.

11.0 Health & Safety Issues

11.1 Matters considered and no separate issues identified.

12.0 Procurement Strategy

12.1 The collection of high quality data will allow informed decisions to be made on all matters including future service delivery including procurement matters.

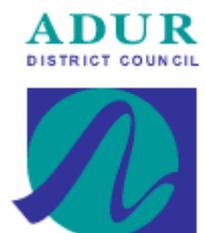
13.0 Partnership working

13.1 High quality data will allow informed decisions to be made, including the possible joining of any future partnership arrangements and the subsequent sharing of reliable data once in that partnership.

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Data Quality Strategy 2007 to 2009

Adur District Council



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1. Adur District Council's Data Quality Strategy

1.1 What is Data Quality and Why is it Important?

Data will be of high quality if it is:

- Accurate (in terms of correctness).
- Comprehensive (in terms of all data being captured).
- Valid (in an agreed format which conforms to recognised council and national standards).
- Available when needed.
- Stored securely and confidentially.

Inspection bodies such as the Audit Commission require assurance that performance information is accurate. This is increasing the emphasis on data quality, and the external audit approach of checking calculation and systems reports is developing into the more challenging scrutiny of systems controls. This is likely to entail an examination of the systems and processes for the collection of data and the use of information. The quality of our data is crucial for assessments of council effectiveness. Policies and strategies for ensuring data quality as well as governance and leadership for ensuring accurate and reliable data is essential.

The higher the number of amendments and reservations that we receive regarding our data following external inspection / scrutiny, the lower the confidence that inspectors, government and interested parties will have in the performance information we provide. This results in increased and more detailed inspection and the likelihood of lower performance scores.

1.2 Objectives of the Data Quality Strategy

The Council recognises the importance of data quality as we need reliable, accurate and timely performance information with which to manage services, inform users and account for our performance. We are committed to ensuring that we maintain the highest standards of data quality.

In order to achieve this Adur District Council will:

- Ensure that performance information in use is of high quality, consistent, timely, and comprehensive and held securely and confidentially.
- Put in place arrangements at senior level to secure the quality of data that we use to manage our service and demonstrate our performance.
- Make clear what is expected from officers and contractors in terms of the standards of data quality.
- Put in place systems, policies and procedures to enable the highest possible data quality, particularly where information is shared with partners.
- Ensure that we put in place the right resources to ensure we have timely and accurate performance information.
- Ensure that we have the right controls to ensure that the Council meets what is expected of us.

The purpose of the data quality reporting process is to ensure that the Council supports a learning culture. All members of staff are encouraged to report on any data quality issues.

1.3 Scope of the Data Quality Strategy

All Council systems and processes that produce performance information are in the scope of this strategy in order to ensure that accurate and dependable information is available for all Council functions.

The Council believes that continued initiatives in relation to data quality should be proportionate to risk.

1.4 Principles of the Data Quality Strategy

There are a number of principles that underpin good data quality. It is important to consider these sequentially because if any of the principles are not adhered to, inaccuracies are likely to occur, and adherence to subsequent principles will not be able to rectify the position.

- **Awareness:** everyone recognises the need for good data quality and how they can contribute.
- **Definitions:** everyone knows which PIs are produced from the information they input and they are defined.
 - Statutory performance indicators have nationally set definitions. It is important that every detail of the definition is applied. This ensures that data is recorded consistently, allowing for comparison over time, and national benchmarking.
 - Where we are setting local PIs, we need to ensure that we have established a clear definition and that there are systems available to collect and report the data in an agreed format.
 - In some cases, there are a number of similar indicators (some national and some local) measuring the same thing in slightly different ways. It is important to ensure that separate figures are calculated and reported systematically for each definition.
 - Every PI should have a named officer who is responsible for collecting and reporting the information. This ensures that there is consistency in the application of definitions and use of systems for providing the data. Each named officer should be kept up-to-date of any changes in definition that may occur from time to time.
- **Input:** there are controls over input.
 - The aim should be 100% accuracy 100% of the time.
 - It is important that officers have clear guidelines and procedures for using systems and are adequately trained to ensure that information is being entered consistently and correctly.
 - A key requirement is that data should be entered on a quarterly basis.
 - The systems must also record all relevant information.
- **Verification:** there are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible.
 - Data requirements should be designed along the principle of 'getting it right first time' in order to avoid waste in the form of time and money spent on

- cleansing data, interfacing between different information systems, matching and consolidating data from multiple databases and maintaining outdated systems.
 - Nevertheless, in complex systems, even where there are strong controls over input, errors can occur. Where it is needed, a verification procedure should exist close to the point of data input. The frequency of verification checks to be undertaken by the Executive Office Manager in association with the relevant Divisional Manager will need to be aligned with the frequency of data reporting.
- **Responsibility:** Each performance indicator, whether national or local, has an assigned officer who takes responsibility of the systems to support this PI as well as reporting this information to the required standards.
 - Officers with responsibility should document the procedures that need to be undertaken to produce this information to the required standard on the annual Audit Commission PI calculation form.
 - Officers with responsibility should work closely with ICT when procuring new systems to ensure that performance data can be provided by and extracted from the system and ensure a robust control environment.
 - These procedures should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
 - Officers should ensure that they have a deputy to produce this information in their absence.
- **Output:** performance indicators are extracted regularly and efficiently and communicated quickly.
 - Any output produced should have an auditable trail i.e. evidence to support the data output that an auditor would be happy with.
- **Presentation:** annual performance indicators are presented, with conclusive evidence, in such a way as to give an easily understood and accurate picture of our performance to external inspectorates and the public.

1.5 Standards and Procedures

Adur District Council is committed to collecting and processing data according to national and locally defined standards. Standards and procedures are necessary to ensure that:

- Data collection is consistent throughout the organisation and in accordance with national definitions as laid down in the statutory performance indicator guidance where appropriate.
- Information can be meaningfully compared / collated both across the organisation and nationally.

Where there is no national standard to guide procedures for data collection, processing or reporting, the Council will generate its own local standards and procedures. This will be done as and when the requirement arises.

Where problems are identified, corrective action and any recommendations for change will be identified. This stage may be complex, especially where more than one information system is involved. The 'master' source of the data must be identified and the impact on recipient systems evaluated. Where at all possible, data must be corrected at source and this is the responsibility of the Divisional Managers to ensure that this happens. Should there be areas where there are on-going issues of incorrect data, the matter will be referred to the relevant Director and then on to the Council's Corporate Performance Team.

1.6 Risk Assessment

Data quality needs to be embedded in the Council's Risk Register.

Areas classified as 'high risk' conditions include:

- A high volume of data transactions.
- Technically complex performance information definition / guidance.
- Problems identified in previous years.
- Inexperienced staff involved in data processing / performance information production.
- A system being used to produce new performance information.
- Known gaps in the control environment.

1.7 Roles and Responsibilities

Officers

Data quality is the responsibility of every employee who enters, extracts or analyses data from any of the Council's information systems and records. Every employee should be aware of his or her responsibilities for quality of data.

- The **Executive Office Manager** has senior responsibility for data quality with regards to performance information and is the Officer Data Champion (with delegated authority from the Chief Executive). The Executive Office Manager will report to the Corporate Performance Team on data quality and any data quality issues that arise.
- The **Executive Office** will be the Data Quality co-ordinators with responsibilities for promoting the importance of data quality throughout the organisation. In addition it will:
 - Advise relevant Divisional Managers of new and amended performance indicators so that data quality processes can be set up / amended.
 - Check and chase up data returns and ensure that appropriate explanations are provided for performance exceptions.
 - Maintain links to national performance indicator guidance so that it is readily available to data collectors, authorisers and auditors.
 - Develop the performance management framework and supporting systems to incorporate data quality processes at the point of collection based on recommendations from the Council's auditors.
- **The Corporate Performance Team** have the responsibility for ensuring that accurate and complete records are maintained and that performance, appraisal and disciplinary processes are in place to maintain and enhance data and information quality for the Council.
- The **Corporate Performance Team and the Executive Office Manager** are responsible for formulating improvement measures in the Action Plan supporting this strategy, as well as monitoring to ensure that progress against the plan is systematically monitored and that any corrective action is taken, if required.
- **Divisional Managers, Service Managers and Team Leaders** are responsible for ensuring that adequate, safe systems holding an acceptable standard of information are developed and maintained and that the performance information they provide is

accurate, timely and meets the relevant guidance. They are also responsible for ensuring the implementation of corporate policy and procedures and the development of service based policies and procedures for performance information.

- It is the responsibility of **all staff** who input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data to ensure that it is of the highest quality.
- Everyone in the organisation will be responsible for complying with this Data Quality Strategy.
- All staff are responsible for following policies and procedures, and all Divisional Managers for ensuring that this is the case in their respective service teams.

Commitment to data quality will be clearly stated in job descriptions for all relevant roles within the Council, ensuring that Directors, managers, administrative staff and others recognise their responsibilities as an integral part of their role and profession.

The **Policy and Strategy Committee** has responsibility for data quality as part of its responsibility for corporate governance, performance management and risk management.

1.8 Contracts

Adur District Council recognises that data quality is an important part of any contract that is outsourced to a third party to manage. This is of particular importance to public-facing service contracts where large amounts of performance data are requested by the Council from which to judge a contractor's performance.

We will ensure that where data collection and data quality are instrumental to the delivery of the service all appropriate contracts will have a standard clause inserted into the contract which defines data quality and how it should be embedded into the contractor's processes. This clause will lay out our requirement for the contractor to provide timely and accurate information and that responsibilities for data quality and checking information are clearly set out.

Responsibility for the verification of data lies within the division managing the contract.

1.9 Partners

Some important information is provided by partner organisations and other external agencies e.g. Sussex Police and West Sussex County Council. It is the intention to work constructively with these organisations to provide assurance of the data quality. Any doubts about data quality should be addressed with the organisation.

Responsibility for data verification lies within the division receiving the information. The Executive Office Manager can provide advice and guidance if needed.

1.10 Output and Reporting

Performance data required by external government departments and inspection bodies normally has a timetable for publication. All performance information should be available in time for management assessment and action prior to publication. It is important that performance information is subject to scrutiny and challenge before final reporting.

Performance updates are reported to the Corporate Performance Team as part of the Council's performance management framework prior to being reported to the relevant executive and Scrutiny committees.

Reporting accurate information leads to good decision-making and improved performance. For many indicators that performance will only be recognised publicly if it can be substantiated by external bodies.

Adur District Council receives external validation through an audit process. During these audits the officer responsible for data collection should be available to provide all supporting information. If that officer is not available, there should be at least one other officer who is able to provide advice and information on the PI. This is important to ensure that audit work proceeds smoothly. The audit will require working papers to confirm the definition has been followed, the calculations are correct and that the indicator is supported by a full audit trail. A comprehensive process is already in place for the collection, verification and reporting of the statutory national performance indicators (Best Value Performance Indicators).

1.11 Monitoring and Review

This Strategy and the Council's overall approach to data quality will be monitored by the Corporate Performance Team and the Executive Office Manager. Deloitte, the Council's auditors will provide internal assurance controls for the statutory Best Value Performance indicators.

The monitoring and review process will involve:

- Annual meetings with PI originators and Division Heads, to ensure that the correct systems and procedures are in place.
- Quarterly monitoring and review of BVPI's by the Corporate Performance Team.
- Follow up of any data quality queries from members of staff.
- Liaising with Internal Audit and External Audit regarding any data quality issues they have come across as part of their review / Inspection programme.

The Council recognises the need to achieve a balance between the resources required to set and meet data quality standards and the relative benefits that flow. We will take this into account in developing our approach to monitoring and review. It will be necessary to focus resources on data that the council regards as critical to its overall business objectives. Equally, the right balance must be achieved and justified between the dimensions of data quality, for example, a balance needs to be struck between accuracy and timeliness.

2. The Way Forward: Data Quality Action Plan

2.1 Action Plan

Implementation of the Data Quality Strategy is through the actions listed in the attached action plan. None of these actions have any cost implications, although officer time is needed to implement them.

2.2 Anticipated Outcomes

The main anticipated outcomes of delivering the Data Quality Action Plan are:

- Improved accountability for data quality issues.
- An increased awareness of data quality and its importance.
- An increased commitment to data quality by the Council.
- A strengthened performance management framework.

2.3 Action Plan Monitoring

The delivery of this Data Quality Action Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Executive Office Manager and the Corporate Performance Team. An annual report will also be produced and presented to the Corporate Performance Team and Members in the form of the Council's annual Best Value Performance Plan.

3. Contact

3.1 If you have any queries or comments on the Data Quality Strategy please contact:

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2.3 Action Plan

	Actions	Target Date		Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
1	To include a reference to data quality in the Council's key corporate documents.	From 2007	Ongoing	ALL	This includes the statutory Best Value Performance Plan and the new Corporate Plan 2007 to 2011.	Increased commitment to data quality.
2	To update the Council's guidance notes on the collection and presentation of performance indicators to incorporate data quality and refer to it in the Council's Performance Management system - Covalent.	2007	Refresh annually	Executive Office Manager	To make data quality explicit as the Audit Commission would like.	Increased commitment to data quality.
3	<u>Internal Audit</u> To develop a process whereby Internal Audit incorporates data quality into their annual review programme.	From 1 April 2007 and annual	Ongoing	Executive Office Manager	This is already underway.	Improved data quality testing.
4	<u>Risk Register</u> To have reference to data quality in the Council's Corporate Risk Register and review on a regular basis.	2007/08	Ongoing	Executive Office	To make data quality explicit as the Audit Commission would like.	Increased commitment to data quality.
5	<u>Register of Performance Info</u> Consider implications and resources to establish a register of performance information returns that are collected and reported by the Council to various agencies, and update on a regular basis.	2007/08	One-off and ongoing	Executive Office	This will include high level details of any statistic returns to central government or any other statutory bodies.	Centralised record of what is reported when, and who is responsible.

	Actions	Target Date		Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
6	<u>Process Documentation</u> To ensure that data collected has supporting processes in place to ensure data quality, and that annual meetings take place between divisions and the Executive Office.	From 1 April 2007	One-off and ongoing	Divisional Managers/ Executive Office Manager	This will enable the Executive Office Manager to work with relevant Division Heads to ensure data quality is embedded through procedures, documentation and processes, as well as allowing for any areas of concern to be raised and resolved.	Data quality embedded into all performance management reporting.
7	<u>Corporate Performance Team</u> - To ensure consideration is given to data quality on a quarterly basis whilst monitoring BVPI's and that Directors follow up any anomalies and queries in their areas of responsibility and report back at the next available opportunity	Already in place	Ongoing	CPT/ Executive Office Manager	Any issues raised will be documented and resolved.	Increased awareness of data quality. Reporting of data quality issues in a timely manner to enable timely issue resolution.
8	<u>Annual Review on Data Quality</u> To undertake an annual review of data quality assurance and report to the Corporate Performance Team when considering annual outturn figures for the Best Value Performance Plan.	June 2007 (annual)	Ongoing	CPT/ Executive Office Manager	A review of the Data Quality Strategy will be incorporated into this, along with an identification of what further steps need to be taken to ensure data quality in any information from which decisions are made.	Strengthened data quality arrangements.
9	<u>Role Profiles</u> To review role profiles and job descriptions for relevant staff to incorporate data quality issues.	End March 2007	Ongoing	Executive Office Manager/HR	Executive Office Manager will work with HR to identify relevant officer posts.	Improved accountability for data quality issues.

	Actions	Target Date		Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
10	<u>Awareness</u> To undertake a review of staff awareness and understanding of data quality.	During 2007	On-going	Executive Office Manager	This has links with the Best Value Performance Plan process.	Identification of knowledge gaps. Increased awareness of data quality issues.
11	<u>Contracts</u> To develop a standard clause re data quality and implement it to appropriate public-facing contracts tendered.	2007/08	Ongoing	Executive Office Manager/ Head of Corporate and Legal Services	This will be implemented as and when new contracts materialise.	Improved arrangements for data quality with contractors.
12	<u>Partnership Data</u> To identify what arrangements need to be put in place to validate data from third parties. To identify any areas of risk.	End March 2007 End March 2007	One-off One-off	Executive Office Manager/ relevant managers	This will enable us to understand what data we receive from where, how it is used, and what processes third parties have in place to verify this data before passing it across.	Increased awareness of data quality. Improved accountability for data quality in partnerships.
13	To monitor the delivery of this Action Plan on a quarterly basis.	From 1 April 2007 onwards	Ongoing	CPT/ Executive Office Manager	This will form part of the quarterly reporting process to CPT	Improved accountability for data quality.