

Data Quality

Teesdale District Council

Audit 2007/08

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Introduction

Background

- 1 Auditors' work on data quality and performance information supports the Commission's reliance on performance indicators in its service assessments for comprehensive performance assessment (CPA). This delivers the commitment to reduce significantly the level of service inspection required.
- 2 Introducing the comprehensive area assessment (CAA) framework from 2009 will make reliable performance information more important. The CAA will place greater emphasis on assessments that are proportional to risk. Councils will also be required to use information to reshape services, and to account to the public for performance.
- 3 The responsibility for securing the quality of the data underpinning performance information can only rest with the bodies that collect and use the data. Producing data which is fit for purpose should not be an end in itself, but an integral part of a body's operational, performance management, and governance arrangements. Organisations that put data quality at the heart of their performance management systems are most likely to be actively managing data in their day-to-day business, and turning that data into reliable information.
- 4 This is the second year in which we have undertaken work on data quality in local government. Our work is complemented by the Audit Commission's paper, 'Improving information to support decision making: standards for better quality data.' This paper sets out standards, for adoption on a voluntary basis, to support improvement in data quality.
- 5 The expected impact of our work on data quality is that it will drive improvement in the quality of local government performance information, leading to greater confidence in the supporting data on which performance assessments are based.

Scope and objectives

- 6 The Audit Commission has developed a three-stage approach to the review of data quality.

Table 1

Stage 1	<p>Management arrangements</p> <p>A review to determine whether proper corporate management arrangements for data quality are in place, and whether these are being applied in practice. The findings contribute to the auditor's conclusion under the Code of Audit Practice on the council's arrangements to secure value for money (the VFM conclusion).</p>
Stage 2	<p>Analytical review</p> <p>An analytical review of 2006/07 BVPI data and selection of a sample for testing based on risk assessment.</p>
Stage 3	<p>Data quality spot checks</p> <p>In-depth review of a sample of 2006/07 PIs all of which come from a list of specified BVPIs and/or non-BVPIs used in CPA, to determine whether arrangements to secure data quality are delivering accurate, timely and accessible information in practice.</p>

- 7 All three stages of the review have been carried out at Teesdale District Council.

Conclusions

Stage 1 – Management arrangements

- 8 The Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality demonstrate an adequate performance. The following provides a summary for each of the five areas covered by the KLOE.

Governance and leadership

- 9 The responsibility for data quality (DQ) is clearly defined in the Council's Data Quality Strategy. In addition to officer responsibility the lead member for governance has direct responsibility for performance management and championing the DQ process, but effectiveness of role is unclear.
- 10 The Council's commitment to data quality is outlined in the Corporate Plan; clear data quality actions are identified in the plan to ensure the accuracy of data. The Chief Executive's commitment to improving performance management and data quality is clearly demonstrated to staff and has increased focus on PIs by service managers and at DMT meetings in the last year. Issues related to data quality are considered by CMT on a monthly basis as a standing item on the agenda. Quarterly reporting to Departmental Management Teams includes issues of data quality on PIs.
- 11 Data quality is not incorporated into risk management arrangements. It is not prominent in the risk management strategy, policies or documentation. Internal audit is tasked to develop risk management to include data quality risks.

Policies and procedures

- 12 The Council continues to improve performance management and data quality guidance. A revised performance management framework document, approved in April 2007, brings together previously approved amendments.
- 13 Policies and procedures are however not being followed consistently by service departments. While all staff can access the policies via the Council's intranet the strategy and the importance of data quality throughout the Council needs to be reinforced.
- 14 Data quality policies in relation to partnerships are still to be developed. Officers have been tasked with agreeing with LSP partners a system of who collects what in terms of performance.

Systems and processes

- 15 There are appropriate systems in place for the collection, recording, analysis and reporting of performance data but the emphasis is on service performance rather than data quality. At the time of developing the DQ strategy a number of key risks relating to quality and timeliness of information were identified.
- 16 The Council is improving their arrangements for managing and communication information on performance. The introduction of the PI checklist/sign off to replace the 'service manager assurance statement' has improved sign off. We found that there is still an over reliance on corporate reviews to find errors which suggests that controls are not in place at service level to ensure accuracy of information.

People and skills

- 17 Roles and responsibilities for data quality are clearly defined within the Data Quality Strategy. The role for the lead member is developing and the monthly meeting with officers has increased awareness. This will help to raise the understanding of good data quality within the performance management process. There has been a range of staff development activities to improve performance management and particularly target setting but there is no specific training with respect to data quality.

Data use and reporting

- 18 Arrangements for using data to manage and improve the delivery of services have improved. Service planning is linked to financial planning and as a result Members and officers are more able to use performance data to plan services and allocate resources.
- 19 All performance information data is subject to corporate approval. A commentary form has been introduced for reporting monthly to management and quarterly to the Improvement and Performance Board. This is requested by the corporate performance team if there are concerns from their monthly reviews. The form is completed by the responsible officer to verify the accuracy of the data and contains calculations behind the data and additional evidence used. An internal audit annual review had no concerns with accuracy of data but found some weaknesses in audit trails and validation procedures.

Stage 2 – Analytical review

- 20 Our analytical review work at stage 2 identified that the PI values reviewed fell within expected ranges.

Stage 3 – Data quality spot checks

- 21 Our review and spot checks of PIs listed below found the following.
- Housing (BVPI 184a) - only issue was the reliance on manual input for changes which will be addressed by the new housing management system.
 - Street Cleanliness (BVPI 199) - no issues to raise.

Recommendation

R1 Based on the findings of the work on data quality we recommend that the Council should ensure that:

- *data quality risks are incorporated into the risk management strategy (paragraph 11);*
- *the importance of the data quality arrangements is reinforced throughout the Council (paragraph 13);*
- *data quality policies for partnerships are developed (paragraph 14);*
- *service departments undertake their own validation checks rather than reliance of corporate reviews (paragraph 16); and*
- *training on data quality is considered (paragraph 17).*

- 22 An agreed action plan to address the issues arising from this review is at Appendix 1.

Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
	R1 Based on the findings of the work on data quality we recommendations that the Council should ensure that:					
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> data quality risks are incorporated into the risk management strategy (paragraph 11); 	3	Audit Manager	Yes	Completed - DQ risks incorporated into risk management strategy.	-
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the importance of the data quality arrangements is reinforced throughout the Council (paragraph 13); 	3	Assistant Chief Executive	Yes	Incorporated into corporate performance management systems and to be reinforced by training.	Ongoing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> data policies in relation to partnerships are developed (paragraph 14); 	3	Assistant Chief Executive	Yes	The Council is in the process of reviewing the partnership strategy and this will be incorporated.	Ongoing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> service departments undertake their own validation checks rather than reliance of corporate reviews (paragraph 15); and 	3	Corporate Projects officer	Yes	Will be reinforced by training.	Ongoing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> training on data quality is considered (paragraph 16). 	3	Corporate Projects officer	Yes	This will be covered in the managers' forum.	April 2008