

Report to: **Audit Committee**
Date: **12th July 2007**
Report of: **Principal Corporate Development Officer**
Subject: **Data Quality Arrangements**
Ward: **All**

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform Members of the recommendations of the inspection of the Council's Data Quality arrangements, the work undertaken by the Council last year to improve and to present an updated action plan to address areas for further improvement.

2.0 Consultation

- 2.1 In preparing this report I have consulted with Management Team, the Executive Member for Improvement and the Audit Manager.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Members may recall that the Audit Commission carried out a review of Authorities' Data Quality Arrangements between July and December last year. This Inspection was introduced last year and took place across all Councils. The results of the review were not scored, but resulted in a judgement being made as to the level of risk the authority was currently operating at, in relation to its data quality.
- 3.2 The Audit Commission's move towards more Strategic Regulation, will ultimately mean less emphasis on auditing a large number of specific performance indicators each year, and focussing on the Council's own arrangements for ensuring that the data it submits and acts upon is robust and reliable, and that the Council's reporting and performance management mechanisms are operating effectively.

4.0 The Review of the Council's Data Quality Arrangements

- 4.1 There were 3 stages to the review process:
Stage 1 – this involved the Council submitting a self assessment and a 2 day site inspection involving interviews with key Officers and Members. This part of the review considered the Council's arrangements in relation to

- Governance and leadership
- Policies and procedures
- Systems and processes
- People and skills
- Data use

The findings from this part of the review concluded that the council's overall arrangements for data quality were adequate, however there were some areas which needed strengthening. The main areas for improvement were in relation to a lack of an overall policy on data quality, and some areas of operation and partnership working did not have a shared protocol for sharing information. Other areas for development include the roles and responsibilities of those involved with submitting data and further detail to be included in the proposed action plan audit programme for checking data. Overall, the Council was

assessed as representing a Medium Risk in terms of its overall data quality arrangements.

- 4.2 Stage 2 of the review involved the Audit Commission carrying out a completeness test against all the indicator information reported by the Authority in the end of year submission of all PI data. This exercise assesses the variations between current and previous results to ascertain whether changes in actual performance are reasonable. The conclusions drawn from this stage of the review confirmed that changes in performance were either within expectations or could be explained.
- 4.3 Stage 3 of the review involved the selection of 3 PI's to be audited by the Audit Commission.
 - **BVPI 82a** (Recycling of household waste) and **BVPI 82b** (Recycling in relation to composting) – Following checks, these indicators did not require amendment
 - **BVPI 184a** (proportion of non decent Council Homes)– this indicator was reserved due to the inaccuracies contained within the system used to calculate this return. Improvements have subsequently been made to the information contained within the systems at East Durham Homes to ensure a more accurate return.
- 4.4 A copy of the full report detailing the findings and recommendations of the Audit Commission in relation to the Data Quality review is attached as Appendix “1” to this report.
- 4.5 Following the work of the review, we have strengthened the arrangements in place for monitoring and reporting data quality in a number of ways. In accordance with the agreed action plan previously reported to this Committee, the guidance and documentation in place for the collation and recording of data has been reviewed to ensure that Officers have more clarity when carrying out their role in gathering the required data, and the mechanism for “signing off” data returns has also been tightened. Discussions have also taken place with Heads of Service on specific issues around data collation and reporting to improve the systems within Service Areas. Any new guidance from the CLG or Audit Commission in relation to changes in reporting or calculation of Indicators are discussed with the Officers responsible for those areas, to ensure they are implemented. Work on improving target setting has also taken place to ensure that targets are realistically set through analysis, information and future work plans. Targets are also now set on a quarterly basis to enable closer monitoring and so that interventions can be made earlier where performance is slipping.
- 4.6 Work on procuring a performance management system was delayed due to Officers being asked to provide support to East Durham Homes during last year. This will be picked up later this year, following news on the proposed Local Government review.
- 4.7 We have also carried out training with Officers responsible for data collection, and are now carrying out a data quality “induction” with new Officers. This includes outlining the guidance, system and proformas for collating the data, as well as considering the specific indicators, which fall under the remit of that Officer to ensure a full understanding of the calculation direction and any performance issues previously highlighted.
- 4.8 A Performance Management Workshop was also held in March this year with Members of Management Team, the Executive, Audit and Scrutiny to clarify the roles and responsibilities of members in performance management, highlight work carried out by the Audit Commission and the Idea on

“performance breakthroughs” and discuss key issues relating to performance at Easington. We received very positive feedback from the workshop.

- 4.9 As outlined in the existing action plan around data quality, Officers in my unit have completed the agreed programme of audits over the course of the last year, on selected indicators across the Council. These findings have resulted in some changes within certain areas and improvement recommendations being made to Service Managers. A summary of these findings is attached as Appendix "3" to this report.

5.0 Revised Action Plan to further improve our data quality arrangements

- 5.1 In order to ensure that we further develop the work started on improving the Council's Data Quality Arrangements, we have reviewed our action plan to be incorporated into the work programme for my unit. Appendix "2" to this report shows the updated action plan and timescales. Recent guidance has become available from the Audit Commission, which will be used as a framework to determine key areas for improvement. The majority of the work will be carried out during the summer and will involve all Officers and Members associated with data collection. Work will also take place with other Authorities to discuss best practise in this area. The Data Quality Policy and recommendations for improving the current systems will be subject to further reports to Council.
- 5.2 This work also involves Internal Audit, therefore we are working with the Audit Manager to develop the areas identified.

6.0 Implications

6.1 Financial Implications

This report has no financial implications

6.2 Legal Implications

This report has no direct legal implications

6.3 Policy Implications

This report has no direct policy implications

6.4 Risk Implications

A risk assessment has been carried out.

6.5 Communications

This report has no direct communications implications

6.6 Corporate Implications

6.7 Corporate Plan and Priorities

This report relates to the Corporate and Best Value Performance Plan as the indicator data is recorded within those documents.

6.8 Equality and Diversity

There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications.

6.9 E Government

There are no e government implications

7.0 Procurement

There are no specific procurement issues.

8.0 Recommendations

8.1 Members are asked to

- (1) Note the report of the Audit Commission in relation to the audit of the Council's Data Quality Arrangements
- (2) Agree the Action plan for improvements to our data quality arrangements

Background Papers

Auditor's report on the 2006/7 Audit of Data Quality Arrangements December 2006