

Report to: **Audit Committee**
Date: **11th December 2008**
Report of: **Senior Corporate Development Officer**
Subject: **Data Quality Audit Programme 2008/09**
Ward: **All**

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To present the outcomes from the programme of data quality audits carried out on a selection of National Indicators and the corporate local PI's for the period April to October 2008

2.0 Consultation

2.1 The audits are undertaken in conjunction with Officers responsible for the collation and reporting of the New Indicator set and corporate local PI's

3.0 Background

3.1 The new National Indicator set was introduced from 1st April 2008 to replace the previous Best Value Performance Indicators. The Council continues to regard data quality as a key factor in its performance management arrangements. With the introduction of a new Indicator set, including a large number of indicators which are brand new, the data quality audits are considered to play a significant role in the quality assurance process. In addition, as there is no comparative data for many of the new indicators, hence making this the baseline year for these indicators, there has been a need to check that the guidance & definition for each indicator is understood and followed

3.2 Key to managing and improving performance through informed decision making is knowing that all data is accurate and timely. We need to be assured that all partners and the council have in place robust arrangements for maintaining and improving data quality. The following six characteristics as determined by the Audit Commission form this assurance framework:

- Accuracy
- Validity
- Reliability
- Timeliness
- Relevance
- Completeness

3.3 This Council has continued to strengthen its Data Quality arrangements enabling less reliance on the annual programme of detailed audits on performance indicators carried out by specialist inspectors from the Audit Commission. The Council's arrangements for ensuring data quality are annually tested and assessed as part of the "Use of Resources" Judgement.

4.0 Methodology

- 4.1 The process of auditing the data quality of National indicators involves the following checks:
- To ensure that the data audited is valid, it is checked against the National Indicator definition.
 - Sample testing of data is carried out so that checks for accuracy and consistency can be made.
 - The process of data entry and updating is reviewed for relevancy and timeliness
 - The calculation of the Indicator is reviewed and checked to ensure that the most up to date definition is being applied and that all relevant data sources are included within the return.
 - The identification of responsibility for data collection and collation is reviewed to ensure staff are clear about their role within the data collection and reporting process
 - The system for validating and checking data for error is robust
- 4.2 Where any non-compliances or errors in calculation are identified an agreement is reached on addressing the issues raised and targets are set for this. This is followed up by a further audit to ensure that corrective action has been taken.
- 4.4 In some areas manual systems are still being used for the collection of data. Where appropriate, consideration of computerised Information systems has been made.

5.0 Audit Summary

- 5.1 The Majority of audits carried out so far, of which there have been 12, were found to be compliant with the definition of each National indicator being followed as stipulated by the guidance. There have also been audits carried out on some key corporate local indicators, which were also found to be compliant with the applicable guidance. All the systems checks have shown satisfactory data quality.
- 5.2 **Issues identified as a result of the Audits**
The Audits did identify some errors but also highlighted some points of good practice with the following indicators:
- 5.3 **NI 181 - Time taken to process Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit new claims and change events** – This is an amalgamation of 2 previous BVPI's. The data is now combined as one figure on the system but can still be reported separately.
A new software system has been installed in the Benefits section. Unlike the old system the new one identifies any errors, e.g. if data has been input incorrectly. The Manager sets the parameters on the system and a report is run every other night where any errors are highlighted and flagged up. Previously errors identified in the old system had to be checked manually &

therefore proved to be very time consuming. The new system rectifies errors immediately.

- 5.4 **NI 195 - Improved street & environmental cleanliness (levels of litter, detritus, graffiti & fly posting)** – The guidance has changed slightly since it was the Cleanliness Performance Indicator BV199. Litter & detritus are now surveyed as 2 separate elements rather than combined. Labels for land classification have changed to make them more easily understood. Once surveys have been carried out to collect the data, the processes for reporting data have been streamlined and the data is uploaded onto a spreadsheet on the DEFRA website.

Surveys are carried out to collect the data for this indicator. Extra work, which is not a requirement, is also being carried out to enhance the surveys undertaken. Once the survey is complete, the data is loaded onto the GIS system and colour coded depending on its grade. This enables the service to map the data to a district-wide level, enabling analysis across zones to identify levels of poor and good performance. This information supports performance improvement activity.

- 5.5 **NI 182 – Satisfaction of business with local authority regulation services**
The data collected for this indicator relies on questionnaires being filled in. As this covers three separate services it is spread across three service areas & two directorates. This has made the collation of this information difficult. However steps are being taken to integrate systems and share information. A combination of both manual & computerised systems is used to pull the information together. This is to be reviewed at the end of January when systems should be integrated to enable the data to be more accurate and more accessible for the purposes of this indicator.

- 5.6 **NI 184 – Food establishments in the area that are broadly compliant with food hygiene law** – All our food premises each have a unique premises file. This database contains all the information on actions relating to each food business including inspections and risk rating, sampling, complaints and enforcement. At the end of the financial year a report is run which creates an XML file, this contains all the information including compliance data, the Food Standards Agency require to calculate the indicator and provide the information to the data interchange hub.

- 6.0 **Pro formas for the New National Indicator Set** – A new pro forma has been set up for officers to fill in (see appendix 1). A separate pro forma is filled in for each of the indicators, which captures the essential data quality information. This also provides additional knowledge in relation to description, rationale, good performance and all the past data required which we will need as we move towards the new council.

7.0 Conclusion

The audits completed so far this year have highlighted some minor areas for improvement; all actions with times & targets have been agreed.

8.0 Implications

8.1 Financial Implications

This report has no direct financial implications

8.2 Legal Implications

This report has no direct legal implications

8.3 Policy Implications

Data Quality is a key component of the Audit Commission's annual Use of Resources judgement.

8.4 Risk Implications

A risk assessment has been carried out

8.5 Communications

Communication between the various services is vital when audits are timetabled. Times and dates are agreed with the relevant officers across the Council to enable the audits/sample checks to be carried out.

9.0 Corporate Implications

9.1 Corporate Plan and Priorities

BVPI's and performance form a major part of the Corporate Plan and it's priorities

9.2 Service Plans

National Indicators are included in Service Plans across the Authority and targets for these are set on a quarterly and year end basis.

9.3 Performance Management and Scrutiny

This report presents information from audits carried out and completed from an annual audit schedule. It also highlights any discrepancies/non compliances found during the audits and actions are agreed and followed up to resolve this. Good data quality is a key component of Performance reporting and management.

9.4 Sustainability

There are no sustainability implications

9.5 Expenditure related to 'well-being' powers

There are no direct well being implications

9.6 Human Resource Implications

There are no HR implications

9.7 Information Technology

There are no I.T. implications

9.8 Equality and Diversity

There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications

9.9 Crime and Disorder

There are no direct crime and disorder implications

10.0 Human Rights

There are no human rights implications

10.1 Social Inclusion

There are no direct social inclusion implications

10.2 Procurement

There are no specific procurement issues

11.0 Local Government Review

The Policy and Partnerships workstream has responsibility for progressing the arrangements for data quality for the new Council. This work has included considering the different systems and mechanisms within each of the Councils for the collection of data for the National Indicators and Corporate Local Indicators and aligning them as we move towards a central system of data collection.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note and comment upon the report for the data quality audits completed to date, for the year 2008/09.

Background Papers

National Indicators for Local Authorities – Handbook of definitions
Audit reports 2008/09
Internal Audit Schedule