

Report to: **Audit Committee**  
Date: **12<sup>th</sup> March 2009**  
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 outcome of last year's Audit Commission inspection of the Council's Data Quality arrangements.

## **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 This assessment looks at how well the Council manages its data quality arrangements, to ensure that the data it uses to inform decisions on performance, and where it will focus its priorities, is based on information which is high quality, accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant, complete and held securely and confidentially. The findings of this assessment are then reflected in the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter, to be published in March 2009.
- 3.2 The Audit Commission carried out their annual review of Authorities' Data Quality arrangements between July and October last year. This Inspection takes place across all Councils. The results of the review were not scored, but resulted in a judgement being made as how well the Council has put arrangements in place to effectively manage its data quality
- 3.3 The Audit Commission's move towards more Strategic Regulation has ultimately meant 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 – Management Arrangements  
Stage 2 – Analytical Review  
Stage 3 – Data Quality spot checks
- 4.2 **Stage 1** – Management arrangements. This involved the Council submitting a self assessment and an audit Commission Inspector carrying out interviews with the Principal Corporate Development Officer and an Officer from Information Services. This part of the review, structured around the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry for Data Quality, considered the Council's arrangements in relation to
- Governance and leadership
  - Policies and procedures
  - Systems and processes

- People and skills
  - Data use
- 4.3 The findings from this part of the review concluded that the council's overall arrangements for data quality were adequate, operating at the minimum standards expected by the Audit Commission, however the report also highlighted some areas for development. These are areas, which the Council recognised as needing to be strengthened in the self-assessment. The two main areas for improvement were in relation to a lack of an overall policy on data quality, and also that in some areas of operation and partnership working, a shared protocol for sharing information was not formally in place.
- 4.4 **Stage 2 – Analytical Review.** This 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, for 2007/8. This exercise assesses the variations between current and previous results to ascertain whether changes in actual performance are reasonable. The Audit Commission highlighted a number of results for indicators, which were outside of their "tolerance" criteria. The Authority then had to supply the reason(s) for the "significant" increase/decrease in the performance of that indicator to justify the change in performance from the previous year. Having submitted the full range of explanations for each of the indicators highlighted by the Audit Commission, the conclusions subsequently drawn by Inspectors from this stage of the review confirmed that changes in performance were either within expectations or could be explained.
- 4.5 **Stage 3 – Data Quality Spot Checks.** This part of the review involved the selection of 2 PI's to be audited by the Audit Commission. All Councils were subject to the same audit for the identified indicators. For 2007/8, the Inspectors chose to audit:
- **BVPI 78a** (Average time taken to process new claims for Housing Benefit) – Following the audit process, these indicators did not require amendment and were confirmed as being fairly stated
  - **BVPI 78b** (Average time taken to process notification of changes of circumstances for Housing Benefit payments) Following the audit process, these indicators did not require amendment and were confirmed as being fairly stated
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 The report recognises that the Council has continued to implement improvements in its approach to its Data Quality arrangements, and describes the actions, which have been put in place by the Corporate Development Unit, since the last review was carried out a year ago. These actions are described under the relevant KLOE headings; Governance and Leadership, Policies, Systems and processes, People and skills and Data Use and reporting.
- 4.8 Whilst the Council has fully implemented the new National Indicator set, addressing the Data Quality issues around it, and has continued to carry out its programme of audits on the Corporate Indicator set, the main focus has been on maintaining the overall performance of the Council's services during the transitional year. As the Council approaches the implementation of the Unitary Council following Local Government reorganisation, much of the energy which would have been spent by this Council on strengthening its own data quality arrangements has gone into working collaboratively to develop the arrangements for the new Council from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009.

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. These findings are subject to a separate report to this Committee.

## **5.0 Implications**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

This report has no financial implications

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

This report has no direct legal implications

### **5.3 Policy Implications**

This report has no direct policy implications

### **5.4 Risk Implications**

A risk assessment has been carried out.

### **5.5 Communications**

This report has no direct communications implications

### **5.6 Corporate Implications**

### **5.7 Corporate Plan and Priorities**

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

### **5.8 Equality and Diversity**

There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications.

### **5.9 E Government**

There are no e government implications

## **6.0 Procurement**

There are no specific procurement issues.

### **6.1 Local Government Review**

The findings and areas for future improvement contained within the assessment will be carried forward to be included in the arrangements for data quality for the new Unitary Council

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 Members are asked to note the report of the Audit Commission in relation to the assessment of the Council's Data Quality Arrangements for 2007/8

## **Background Papers**

Auditor's report on the 2007/8 Audit of Data Quality Arrangements February 2009