

Report to: **Audit Committee**
Date: **12 March 2009**
Report of: **Senior Corporate Development Officer**
Subject: **2008/09 NI Data Quality Audit Programme**
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 during 2008/09.

2.0 Consultation

2.1 The audits are undertaken in conjunction with Officers throughout the Council, who are 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 this year, 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 Ex BV12 – Working days lost due to sickness absence

This indicator is an old BVPI which was kept as a local corporate indicator. All information for this indicator is taken from the flexi system and work is in place to continually monitor sickness. Service Heads and Managers monitor sickness levels within their own department and are encouraged to carry out back to work welfare interviews. The council also has a stress counselling service in place, which is available to all employees. With these initiatives in place it was found that the sickness figures have been kept to a minimum. Systems in place are robust, the data is accurate and the source is always consistent.

5.4 NI 182 – Satisfaction of business with local authority regulation services

As mentioned in the previous report of the second quarter 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. A combination of both manual & computerised systems is used to pull the information together. Steps have now been taken to ensure that all information is integrated across all three service areas. This will ensure that the data is more accurate and more accessible for the purposes of this indicator and that the information is available for the year end figures to be submitted.

5.5 NI 187 – Tackling Fuel Poverty - % of people receiving income based benefits living in homes with low energy efficiency rating

This is a new indicator and there is no baseline information available.

However we are the only authority in the country who have a whole stock database where a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) has been carried out on every property in the district.

There is an energy database, which contains information for a subset of properties where people are claiming income related benefits. There is a dataset for all properties who fall into this category, which is more robust as it hits everyone it applies to. The database is updated on a regular basis and is continually monitored. The systems in place provide the most accurate and valid up to date information, which shows good practice for improving data quality.

6.0 Conclusion

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

The new National Indicator set includes some brand new indicators, which were introduced in April 2008. In some areas where information has previously not been required, there is no baseline data, however, in other areas e.g. Planning, although the information has not been required for data quality purposes, baseline information is available as it has been requested by other departments. This means that systems for monitoring and producing timely, reliable and accurate information are in place and can be built on for data quality purposes.

7.0 Implications

7.1 Financial Implications

This report has no direct financial implications

7.2 Legal Implications

This report has no direct legal implications

7.3 Policy Implications

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

7.4 Risk Implications

A risk assessment has been carried out

7.5 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.

8.0 Corporate Implications

8.1 Corporate Plan and Priorities

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

8.2 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.

8.3 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.

8.4 Sustainability

There are no sustainability implications

8.5 Expenditure related to 'well-being' powers

There are no direct well being implications

8.6 Human Resource Implications

There are no HR implications

8.7 Information Technology

There are no I.T. implications

8.8 Equality and Diversity

There are no direct Equality and Diversity implications

8.9 Crime and Disorder

There are no direct crime and disorder implications

90.0 Human Rights

There are no human rights implications

9.1 Social Inclusion

There are no direct social inclusion implications

9.2 Procurement

There are no specific procurement issues

10.0 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 for the year 2008/09.

Background Papers

National Indicators for Local Authorities – Handbook of definitions

Internal Audit review of Data Quality Arrangements 2007/08

Audit reports 2008/09

Internal Audit Schedule