Chester-le-Street
District Council

Data Quality Policy
'Getting it Right First Time'

February 2008

About this document

This document has been developed to assist the council in improving the council's performance in data collection, handling, retrieval, use and communications. The document sets out the policy of Chester-le-Street District Council in terms of how it is to respond to the challenges of ensuring the highest quality of the data it uses to demonstrate its performance. A policy summary is included in Annexe 1.

The council's commitment

The council recognises the importance of reliable information to the delivery of excellent customer services. Data quality is crucial and the availability of complete, accurate and timely data is important in supporting customer care, corporate governance, management and service agreements for service planning and accountability.

Chester-le Street District Council aims to achieve quality excellence by constantly meeting the requirements of all customers, both external and internal. Quality excellence means identifying and understanding customer needs and requirements, and meeting both without errors on time every time. **The council is therefore committed to ensuring it maintains the highest standards of data quality and as a result gets its performance information right first time.** All council staff and Members are required to adhere to the Data Quality Policy. The Policy is fully authorised by the council's Corporate Management Team.

The importance of getting it right first time

The council needs accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete information with which to manage services, inform users and account for our performance. Data also needs to be held securely. We make many, often complex, decisions about our priorities and the use of our resources. Service users, and members of the public more widely, need accessible information to make informed decisions. Those organisations monitoring our progress require information to satisfy their responsibilities for making judgements about our performance and governance.

A great deal of time and money is spent on the activities and systems involved in collecting and analysing the data which underpins our performance information, yet there remains a prevailing lack of confidence in much of this data. As increasing reliance is placed on this information in performance management and assessment regimes, the need for reliable data has become even more critical.

Good quality data is the essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information to support decision making. The data must be sufficiently fit

for purpose, representing in an accurate and timely manner the council's activity. At the same time a balance needs to be struck between the importance of the purpose for which the information is intended and the cost of collecting the data to the necessary level of accuracy, detail and timeliness. The council needs to determine their information priorities and put in place appropriate arrangements to secure the quality of our data.

The council is accountable for the money we spend. We need to prove that we achieve value for money. The council must therefore manage competing claims on resources to meet the needs of the communities we serve, and plan for the future. The financial and performance information we use to account for our activities, both internally and externally, to our customers, partners, and those monitoring our progress, must be appropriate for these purposes, providing the level of accuracy, reliability and consistency required.

The weight attached to published performance indicators as the basis for reducing the burden of regulation and awarding freedoms and flexibilities has significantly increased the importance attached to performance information, and the quality of the underlying data. To be confident that we are focusing on the key areas for improvement, those monitoring our performance, and particularly the Audit Commission need to be assured that reported information reflects actual performance. The quality of our data will be crucial to future assessments in terms of our direction of travel and Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

The quality of financial information has generally been higher than for performance information, because the underlying data is collected according to professional accounting rules, and is subjected to strong internal controls and a formal audit regime. The quality of non-financial performance information tends to be more variable, because internal controls for the recording and preparation of the data are often less developed. There is often also less ownership of performance information by those charged with governance.

The council needs to be assured that the information it uses to demonstrate its performance is accurate and timely, otherwise it will not be able to properly plan and deliver the services we provide. Producing data which is fit for purpose should not be an end in itself, but an integral part of our operational, performance management, and governance arrangements. If we put data quality at the heart of our performance management systems we will be more likely to actively manage data in all aspects of our day-to-day business, in a way which is proportionate to the cost of collection, and turning that data into reliable information.

It is important that the council gets its data quality right first time. It is more cost effective to ensure this than to have to address failings later. Getting things wrong first time can seriously damage the council's health.

The council's approach to data quality improvement

The council understands the importance of data quality and is committed to improving its management within the organisation and in partnership with others. Above all it is committed to continuous improvement.

The council feels that it has made significant progress in developing data quality over the past few years. The Corporate Performance Team and Internal Audit have been working closely with service teams to improve data quality. As a result the council's Best Value Performance Plan was unqualified last year and there were no Best Value Performance Indicators with reservations. The improvements have resulted from targeted and risk assessed control activity and general awareness-raising of the importance of improvement. Improvements have been acknowledged by the Audit Commission.

The council accepts fully that there is a need to sustain the improvements made. The new approach to Data Quality management offers an opportunity for the council to make further incremental improvements to the quality of data it holds and its subsequent use. The council's approach to moving forward is as follows:

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        │   Implement and     │
        │ Monitor Data Quality│
        │      Policy         │
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  ┌───────────────────────────────┐
  │   Develop Data Quality        │
  │ Management Strategy and       │
  │ action plans based on self    │
  │ assessment, Audit             │
  │ Commission KLOE and local     │
  │ and National Standards        │
  └───────────────────────────────┘
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        ┌─────────────────────┐
        │ Implement Strategy  │
        │    Action Plan      │
        └─────────────────────┘
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        │ Achieve improved    │
        │ data quality and    │
        │ assessment levels   │
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Policy objectives

Our vision for data quality is that we get things right first time. This will enable us to have the right information at the right time at the right cost. In order to achieve this, our objectives in relation to data quality are as follows:

☑   To ensure that the information we use is of high quality, consistent, timely, comprehensive and held securely and confidentially

☑   To put in place arrangements at senior level to secure the quality of data we use to manage our service and demonstrate our performance

☑   To make clear what we expect from our staff and Members in terms of the standards of data quality

☑ To put in place systems, policies and procedures to ensure the highest possible data quality, particularly where information is shared with partners

☑ To ensure that we put in place the right resources, and in particular have the right people with the right skills, to ensure we have timely and accurate performance information

☑ To ensure that we have the right controls in place to ensure we meet what is expected of us

☑ To ensure that data is stored, used and shared in accordance with the law including the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act

Policy definitions

Definition of **'quality data'**

The key characteristics used to describe the quality of data are as follows:

☑ **Accurate** - Data should be sufficiently correct for its intended purposes
☑ **Valid** - Data should be recorded in an agreed format and used in compliance with recognised council and national standards
☑ **Reliable** - Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across the council
☑ **Timely** - Data should be available within a reasonable time period, quickly and frequently enough to support information needs
☑ **Relevant** - Data captured should be relevant to the purposes for which it is used
☑ **Complete** - All data should be captured based on information needs of the council
☑ **Secure** - Data should be stored securely and confidentially

Importance of **'quality data'**

Performance information is essential for:

☑ Customer care – delivering effective, relevant and timely care, and minimising risk
☑ Keeping stakeholders informed – through central data collection mechanisms
☑ Efficient administration and compliance with the law
☑ Operational Management and Strategic Planning to provide appropriate allocation of resources and future service delivery
☑ Corporate Governance - which depends on detailed, accurate performance data for the identification of areas where services can be improved

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Setting and Meeting of Standards

Chester-le-Street District Council is committed to collecting and processing data according to national and locally defined standards. Where national standards are not available or are not sufficient, local standards will be developed and implemented. Standards are essential to ensure that:

- ☑ data collection is accurate and consistent throughout the council;
- ☑ customer records are accurately completed and processed;
- ☑ data is kept securely and confidentially; and
- ☑ data outputs can be compared both internally and externally.

Standards will relate to key areas such accuracy, validity, reliability, timeliness, relevance, completeness, quality assurance, security and confidentiality.

Where problems are identified, corrective action and any recommendations for change will be identified. This stage may be complex, especially where more than one information system is involved. The 'master' source of the data must be identified and the impact on recipient systems evaluated. Where at all possible data must be corrected at source and it will be the responsibility of the service managers to ensure that this happens. If the corporate monitoring resource identifies areas where issues of incorrect data are not being put right the matter will be referred to the relevant Director.

A formal set of quality requirements will be applied to all data used by the organisation which is shared externally, or which is provided by a third-party organisation.

Roles and Responsibilities

Within the council roles and responsibility for Data Quality are as follows:

- ☑ The Director of Corporate Services has senior management responsibility for data quality and is officer Data Quality Champion (with delegated authority from the Chief Executive)
- ☑ The Portfolio holder for Communications and Performance has Senior Member responsibility for data quality and is Member Data Quality Champion
- ☑ The Senior Performance Officer in the Performance and Improvement team will be the Data Quality Co-ordinator with responsibilities for promoting the importance of data quality throughout the organisation
- ☑ Service Team Managers are responsible for ensuring that adequate, safe systems holding an acceptable standard of information are developed and maintained and that performance information they provide is accurate, timely and meets relevant guidance. They are also responsible for

ensuring the implementation of corporate policy and procedures and the development of service based policies and procedures

☑ Data 'champions' or data 'managers' will be established in all service areas to take particular responsibility for data quality and drive improvement within individual teams

☑ It is the responsibility of all staff who input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data to ensure that it is of the highest quality

☑ Everyone in the organisation will be responsible for complying with this Data Quality Policy

☑ All staff will be responsible for following policies and procedures, and all line managers for ensuring that this is the case in their respective service teams.

Commitment to data quality will be clearly stated in job descriptions for all relevant roles within the council, ensuring that directors, managers, administrative staff and others recognise their responsibilities as an integral part of their role and profession.

Data quality responsibilities will be documented and therefore become part of the council's appraisal process. Training needs will be identified through the appraisal process and built into personal development plans and corporate training plans.

Partnership Working

The council is committed to working with partners to achieve the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement and to deliver joined up public services. Information sharing is crucial to partnership working. In addition the council is now playing a crucial role in the development of a new unitary council in County Durham. This will necessitate significant data sharing. **The council will ensure that a formal framework for data sharing with partners is put in place**. A formal set of quality requirements will be applied to all data used by the organisation which is shared externally, or which is provided by a partner or third-party organisation. These quality requirements could be in the form of a data sharing protocol, contract or service level agreement. The council will ensure that a framework is put in place for identifying and complying with all relevant legal, compliance and confidentiality standards. A validation process will be established for all data provided by partners or other third parties.

Risk Management

The council will ensure that it adequately manages risk associated with data quality. In particular it will develop a Data Quality Strategy to enable the council to improve and protect it from data quality failures. The council will ensure that adequate Business Continuity Plans are developed and maintained.

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People Development and Communication

The council is committed to ensuring that it has the right people with the right skills and knowledge to deliver services. Training and Development of staff is key to the achievement of high levels of data quality. Staff also need to be supported in their responsibility towards capturing quality data. The following principles will be met to achieve this:

☑ All new staff who use Information Systems will receive training in the use of the respective systems. Only once training has been completed will passwords to these systems be issued.

☑ Policies, procedures and guidance will be developed and updated in association with relevant staff and copies provided to all staff engaged in data quality work. Documents will be made available on the intranet or on knowledge management systems.

☑ Staff will be supported through data 'champions' or data 'managers' established in service areas as well as from corporate support (Director of Corporate Services, Performance and Improvement Team or Internal Audit Team). An intranet support resource will also be made available with all current procedures and guidance documents.

☑ Policies and procedures will be communicated to all staff. Awareness workshops or briefings will be held with staff and Members to develop awareness in the council of the importance of Data Quality.

☑ An on-going and developmental awareness campaign will be undertaken, led by the Corporate Performance and Improvement Team, to ensure that all members of staff are aware of the importance of accurate and timely data collection and recording.

Monitoring and Review

This policy and the council's overall approach to data quality will be monitored by the council's Corporate Governance Group. The Director of Corporate Services will take the lead role on data quality issues. Internal Audit will provide internal assurance controls. A formal reporting structure will be developed as part of the Data Quality Strategy.

Data quality will be regularly monitored by the Performance and Improvement Team and Internal Audit. This will involve:

☑ quarterly reports;
☑ routine checks;

- ☑ spot checks;
- ☑ mystery shopping; and
- ☑ follow up of any data quality queries from members of staff

Procedures for data capture, processing and storage must be reviewed and updated regularly, normally annually. These procedures will include specific arrangements for ensuring data quality at the point of data capture, during the processing of that data, and appropriate data quality checks before data/information is released. Responsibility for this will rest with the nominated 'data manager' i.e. the departmental manager or champions responsible for the data capture or data processing system.

The council recognises the need to achieve a balance between the resources required to set and meet data quality standards and the relative benefits that follow. It will take this into account in developing its approach to monitoring and review. It will be necessary to focus resources on data that the council regards as critical to its overall business objectives. Equally, the right balance must be achieved and justified between the dimensions of data quality, for example a balance needs to be struck between accuracy and timeliness.

The purpose of the quality reporting process is to ensure that the council supports a learning culture so that future mistakes can be avoided. All members of staff are encouraged to report any data quality issues.

Data Quality Policy Summary
'Getting it Right First Time'

The council's commitment
☑ The council recognises the importance of reliable information to the delivery of excellent customer services.
☑ The council is therefore committed to ensuring it maintains the highest standards of data quality and as a result gets its performance information right first time**.**

The importance of getting it right first time
☑ The council needs accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete information with which to manage services, inform users and account for our performance. It also need to ensure that data is stored securely.

The council's approach to data quality improvement
☑ The council understands the importance of data quality and is committed to improving its management within the organisation and in partnership with others.

Policy objectives
Our objectives in relation to data quality are as follows:

☑ To ensure that the information we use is of high quality, consistent, timely, comprehensive and held securely and confidentially.
☑ To put in place arrangements at senior level to secure the quality of data we use to manage our service and demonstrate our performance.
☑ To make clear what we expect from our staff and Members in terms of the standards of data quality.
☑ To put in place systems, policies and procedures to ensure the highest possible data quality, particularly where information is shared with partners.
☑ To ensure that we put in place the right resources, and in particular have the right people with the right skills, to ensure we have timely and accurate performance information.
☑ To ensure that we have the right controls in place to ensure we meet what is expected of us.
☑ To ensure that data is stored, used and shared in accordance with the law

including the Data Protection Act and Freedom of Information Act.

Setting and Meeting of Standards

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Roles and Responsibilities

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☑ The Portfolio holder for Communications and Performance has senior Member responsibility for data quality and is Member Data quality Champion
☑ It is the responsibility of all staff who input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data to ensure that it is of the highest quality and comply with this policy.

Partnership Working

☑ The council is committed to working with partners to achieve the Sustainable Community Strategy, The council will ensure that a formal framework for data sharing with partners is put in place.

Risk Management

☑ The council will ensure that it adequately manages risk associated with data quality.

People Development and Communication

☑ The council is committed to ensuring that it has the right people with the right skills and knowledge to deliver services**.**
☑ An on-going and developmental awareness campaign will be undertaken to ensure that all members of staff are aware of the importance of accurate and timely data collection and recording.

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Ian Forster
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(Responsible Officer for data quality)

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