

DATA QUALITY POLICY

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE, CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

10 APRIL 2008

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To approve the data quality policy.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendations

THAT Cabinet

- (a) note the actions being taken by the Chief Executive to improve data quality; and**
- (b) approve those elements of the data quality policy at Appendix 1 that relate to its own role and those of the Leader, lead Cabinet Member and all Members.**

Reasons

The high quality of the data the Council receives, creates, uses and reports to others is too often taken for granted. It is a matter of public and regulatory concern nationally that procedures exist to demonstrate and improve data quality. The Audit Commission assesses each Authority annually and, like all regulators, increasingly emphasise appropriate systems and processes rather than individual indicators or returns. The Council's 2007/08 audit highlighted the lack of a formal policy which has now been produced for adoption.

Considerations

1. Nationally, all the regulatory bodies, including the Audit Commission, are paying an increased amount of attention to data quality. It will be a fundamental part of the CAA from 2009, with a major influence on the Use of Resources assessments of the Council, the PCT and other partners. CAA will not be a 'lighter touch' unless external regulators share a considerable confidence in locally generated and assured data. If collectively they view data quality as a risk, it could lead to further, more detailed inspections in future.
2. As part of the preparations for CAA, a set of voluntary data quality standards has been issued by the Commission in conjunction with other national audit bodies, CIPFA and with the full support of the national audit office. These standards are virtually identical to the key lines of enquiry already used by the Commission for their audits.
3. It is important to recognise that the emphasis of the national regulatory regime has fundamentally changed. The new approach is more systemic. Regulators will examine the existence and use of policies, procedures and practices as well as the responsibilities of officers and elected members. Their approach mirrors that being taken to the wider risk and the use of resources assessments proposed for the CAA. Individual performance indicators will still be examined but this will be primarily to confirm that the overall governance arrangements of organisations like the Council, the PCT and their partners are in place and working effectively.
4. The results of the 2007 data quality audit are now known and, although the Audit Commission do not formally 'score' these, it is clear that the Council is at level 2 out of a possible 4 as anticipated. This overall ranking will combine elements from across the entire audit ranging from 1 to 3. A score of 1 is 'below the required standard'.
5. A draft data quality policy has been produced, considered by the Information Policy Group and the Joint Management Board. This is attached at **Appendix 1**. It is a short, focussed document that conforms to the voluntary standards referred to earlier. It includes the role of Cabinet, the Leader, the lead Cabinet member and elected members generally along with the arrangements for monitoring and review. The policy is underpinned by a more detailed action plan based on the key lines of enquiry used in last years audit and the feedback that followed. This has been reported to the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee as part of the formal response to the 2007 audit.
6. Finally; while the drive to improve data quality is currently coming from performance management; the requirement clearly applies more widely to all data used by officers for planning, commissioning and the operational management of services as well as by elected members in their strategic, community leadership and scrutiny roles.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications

Risk Management

The risks of not adopting a policy and vigorous action to improve data quality are increased inspection and intervention and a decline in the Authority's reputation amongst the public and partners.

Alternative Options

There are no Alternative Options.

Consultees

Joint management team
Information policy group
Performance improvement network

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft data quality policy.

Background Papers

Improving information to support decision-making: standards for better quality data. Audit Commission. March 2007

APPENDIX 1

Herefordshire Council Data Quality Policy

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out the Council's intentions as regards assuring data quality, so as to secure reliable and timely information and intelligence to account for its performance and to drive continuous improvements in services and outcomes for citizens and customers.
- 1.2 This is one of the underpinning elements of the Council's Performance Improvement Framework.
- 1.3 This policy is given effect through the Council's *Data Quality Action Plan* and associated procedures and protocols.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Council, its Cabinet and Corporate Management Board recognise the importance of ensuring data quality of the highest standard to maintain effective corporate governance and raise performance.
- 2.2 Across the Council, data are collected, analysed and used to monitor service delivery and outcomes, report performance, and aid decision-making, including the allocation of resources.
- 2.3 Good quality data are essential for sound planning, commissioning, routine service and performance management. Data must therefore be accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete as well as well presented. Above all data must be fit for purpose and the Council recognises the need to balance the importance of the information requirement and the cost of collecting the supporting data.
- 2.4 The Council has a statutory duty to publish information about its performance and to assure that the data are accurate. The Council is judged on the adequacy of its arrangements to do this. This requires that robust arrangements are in place across the organisation for the collection, recording, collation, analysis and reporting of performance data.

3. Responsibility and accountability

- 3.1 Overall responsibility and accountability for data quality rests with the Chief Executive on behalf of the Corporate Management Board. It is the role of the Leader and Cabinet to ensure this system is properly held to account, on behalf of the Council.
- 3.2 Strategic responsibility and accountability is vested in the Director of Corporate and Customer Services. Data quality is included in the Cabinet portfolio for Corporate and Customer Services and Human Resources.
- 3.3 Operational responsibility and accountability is vested corporately in the Head of Policy and Performance and, for their respective services, the heads of services. They are supported in the discharge of these duties by the individual

designated performance improvement managers. Each performance improvement manager has a personal responsibility, in respect of which they account to the Head of Policy and Performance, for ensuring in their respective areas that data quality protocols, procedures and systems are in place and operating efficiently and effectively.

- 3.4 All managers and staff have a personal responsibility and accountability for the accuracy and sound presentation of data, and for observing associated protocols, procedures and systems that apply to their designated areas of work.
- 3.5 As such every member of staff has a responsibility for ensuring that the highest possible standards relating to data quality are adhered to.

4. Principles governing data quality

- 4.1 Data quality is an integral part of all Council business and performance management
- 4.2 Data used to inform plans and decision-making, including resource allocation, must be right first time and fit for purpose
- 4.3 Data quality is the responsibility of all who contribute to it, directly or indirectly, whether they are producers of data or users of it

5. Key requirements for assuring data quality

- 5.1 All staff must be aware of the importance of data quality and take responsibility for securing it.
- 5.2 Up-to-date arrangements and control procedures must be documented and in operation for the ownership, security, collection, recording, collation, analysis and reporting of data
- 5.3 Staff must be equipped with the knowledge, understanding, skills and tools necessary to maximise the quality of data and their effective use
- 5.4 Clear performance management arrangements must be in place across the organisation to ensure that data are used appropriately to inform decision-making, including resource allocation
- 5.5 Data quality must be assured through routine reporting of errors and performance reviews
- 5.6 All out-turn data and collection processes must be subject to periodic audit and review
- 5.7 Business continuity and security arrangements must be in place for all data and information systems
- 5.8 In furtherance of the Council's commitment to working with partners to deliver the *Herefordshire Sustainable Community Strategy*, protocols agreed with partners and any relevant third parties must be in place to ensure that fit-for purpose data can be shared in compliance with legal and confidentiality standards

- 5.9 A documented validation process must be in operation for all data provided by partners or third parties

6. Securing a data quality culture

- 6.1 The Council is determined to embed a culture of data quality across the organisation. Elected members, managers and staff alike must act at all times with an awareness of the importance of data quality and of accuracy and integrity in the use of data.
- 6.2 It is therefore imperative that all receive the training or development appropriate for their particular roles, responsibilities and accountabilities; and that this is reviewed and refreshed over time to meet changing requirements, needs and circumstances.
- 6.3 As a basis for this training and development the Council will develop a set of data quality standards and guidelines to establish a common understanding of what good quality data entails.

7. Monitoring and review

- 7.1 Progress in giving effect to this policy, through the associated operational arrangements and the Data Quality Action Plan, will be monitored continuously. The Head of Policy and Performance will report on it quarterly to the lead Cabinet member and Corporate Management Board, and six-monthly to Cabinet and the Audit and Governance Committee.
- 7.2 The Chief Internal Auditor will present an annual data quality audit report to the lead Cabinet member and director. This will also be reported to the Audit and Governance Committee and the Corporate Management Board. It will form the basis for continuous improvements in data quality.
- 7.3 This policy and its associated operational arrangements and Action Plan will therefore be reviewed and reported alongside the annual data quality audit report.

Draft for approval by Cabinet April 2008