

DATA QUALITY – SIX MONTH UPDATE

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

20 NOVEMBER 2008

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To update Cabinet on progress against the data quality action plan as required by the Council's data quality policy.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

Recommendation(s)

- THAT (a) progress against the data quality action plan be noted; and**
(b) the plan be fully completed by the time of the annual review.

Reasons

Demonstrable progress has been made with the action plan. The results of the 2008 external audit, due soon, are expected to reflect these improvements in the Council's approach to data quality. However, as Appendix 1 indicates there are a number of tasks behind the original timescale or where there is no / limited progress currently. These should be completed by next April when the plan is reviewed and rolled forward.

Considerations

1. The Council's policy requires reports on progress against the data quality action plan to the lead Cabinet members, JMT, Cabinet and the Audit & Corporate Governance Committee. This is the first of those six monthly reports. It includes progress against the recommendations of the Audit Commission in its 2007/08 audit of the Council's data quality arrangements and statutory performance indicators.
2. There are 52 actions to be completed in the current action plan. There are currently 22 green (completed), 20 Amber (behind the original timescale) and 10 red (no / limited progress currently). More detail is given in paragraphs six to twelve that follow.
3. Cabinet is reminded that the data quality action plan only addresses those parts of the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry (KLOE's) where the Council was

thought to be at its weakest in the 2007/08 audit. When it is rolled forward next spring, the action plan will need to address the remaining KLOE's together with any recommendations from the 2008 audit which was conducted in July and on which a report is awaited.

4. There have been a number of successes. In particular:
 - The Council's data quality policy was agreed by Cabinet and communicated to staff in a variety of ways. There have been a number of follow up questions generated by team talk etc. Key documents are now available on the intranet in the info-library.
 - Key plans; corporate, directorate and service now refer to data quality and the actions being taken to improve this.
 - Standard data quality clauses have been agreed with the Assistant Chief Executive (legal and democratic services) for use in relevant contracts and SLA's.
 - Standard data quality requirements have been agreed with the Assistant Chief Executive (HR) for inclusion in job descriptions.
 - Business cases for new or upgraded ICT must now include consideration of data quality issues.
 - Data quality has been included as part of the staff training for the new social care system.
 - A Herefordshire Public Services information management group has been established. Although the group did not exist when the action plan was created, the activities of the group - data sharing protocols, data flow mapping and training – have all contributed to the action plans achievements.

5. However, the original timescales were over-optimistic. More attention needs to be given to the following areas in order to complete the action plan within 12 months.
 - Finalising the library of data sharing protocols and a definitive list of data sharing partners. (paragraph 6 refers)
 - Consolidating corporate policies and procedures that relate to data quality. (paragraph 7 refers)
 - Consolidating directorate and service policies and procedures that relate to data quality. (paragraph 8 refers)
 - Developing the contracts register so that it highlights contracts where data quality is a significant feature (paragraph 9 refers)
 - The final identification of posts with data quality responsibilities. (paragraph 10 refers)
 - The development and delivery of data quality training where most needed. (paragraph 11 refers)

- The development and delivery of a rolling programme of data quality assessments to supplement internal audit work. (paragraph 12refers)
6. Directorates need to confirm what data sharing protocols already exist and identify all significant routine or periodic sharing of data whether they are currently covered by protocols or not. Partners would then be asked to consider the Council's data quality policy and confirm that they worked to the same or higher standards.
 7. More time needs to be given over the next six months to identifying those corporate policies and procedures that are of relevance to data quality and then reviewing these as part of their established cycle. The Deputy Chief Executive's Office will begin this but the review stage will require the involvement of more directorates.
 8. Equally more time is required to produce consolidated lists of directorate or service specific procedures, guidelines and operational practices that demonstrate how we ensure data quality on the ground and to which employees can turn for guidance. This is a task for all sections of the Council that handle data.
 9. The information currently held centrally on contracts does not make it easy to identify those that involve the transfer of data and thus might require additional clauses relating to data quality in future. The available information on contracts needs supplementing for data quality purposes, it should be updated routinely and appropriate clauses inserted when contracts are re-tendered. Managers responsible for these contracts need to be able to demonstrate that they are monitoring the quality of any data supplied under such contracts in an appropriate fashion.
 10. Identifying posts with responsibility for data quality will enable job descriptions to be amended where necessary and appropriate training to be provided to current employees. The six-month interim staff review and development (SRD) meetings underway at present are being used to complete the process of identifying all relevant employees. All supervisors are expected to complete reviews and return the necessary data.
 11. Once there is a clearer picture of the numbers of employees involved, appropriate training and awareness sessions can be delivered. Material for these sessions has already been developed for the Frameworki roll out and central induction. A more co-ordinated approach to employee responsibilities in relation to all information matters, including data quality, will be developed by HPS information management group referred to in paragraph 4 above.
 12. Data quality assessments depend, in part on progress with some of the previous points. The more that responsibility for data quality is accepted by employees as being part of their job, the fewer specific assessments will be required by internal audit or other performance staff. One of the aims of the training referred to in paragraph 11 above is to equip a wider range of staff with the skills to complete assessments for themselves.
 13. There has still not been any formal notification of the results or recommendation from this July's data quality audit. The Audit Commission's deadline to complete the work was October, so feedback is expected imminently. However all the individual performance indicators that were checked during the latter stages of

the audit are understood to have been correct. If this is confirmed it indicates that the Council's increased focus on data quality is beginning to have a positive impact. This will need to continue in future.

Financial considerations

14. There are no financial considerations. Work on data quality will be carried out within existing budgets

Legal considerations

15. To ensure that there is a consistent approach in procurement process and there should be outlined in the Tender measures and scoring for future contracts the requirements of Data Quality in all future contracts.

Risk Management

Failure to take adequate action to ensure high quality data can result in a damaged reputation; adversely affect longer-term CAA success and produce poor audit reports. On this basis the risk of poor data quality continuing in the long term has been entered into the corporate risk register. The Audit Commission regards this as appropriate. The most effective mitigating actions are contained in the data quality action plan at Appendix 1

Alternative Options

There are no Alternative Options to continuing with the action plan at Appendix 1 and updating it as necessary.

Consultees

Joint Management Team.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – DATA QUALITY ACTION PLAN –2008 – November update.

Background Papers

None identified.