



GOVERNMENT

Data Quality Review 2008

Wiltshire County Council
December 2008

AUDIT

Content

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Executive Summary

The Audit Commission has developed a three-stage approach for assessing data quality, the first stage being a review of management arrangements for data quality. This review determines whether the Council has in place proper corporate management arrangements for data quality, and whether they are being applied in practice. This is the first year that we have undertaken work on data quality, with the Audit Commission having done this previously.

The findings support our conclusion on your arrangements to secure value for money in relation to the specific criterion on data quality which we issued in September 2008. This requires the Council to have *'a track record of using high quality information on costs to actively manage performance, improve value for money and target resources'*.

Stage One – Management arrangements

The work on management arrangements focuses on corporate data quality arrangements for your performance information. Our work will help drive improvement in the quality of performance information, leading to greater confidence in the supporting data on which performance assessments are based. The review is structured around five themes:

- Governance and leadership;
- Policies and procedures;
- Systems and processes;
- People and skills; and
- Data use and reporting.

These themes break down into thirteen Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs). We have assessed your arrangements against each KLOE and have scored you against each theme as defined below:

Level	Description
Inadequate	Below minimum requirements - inadequate performance
Adequate	Only at minimum requirements - adequate performance
Performing well	Consistently above minimum requirements - performing well
Performing strongly	Well above minimum requirements - performing strongly

We have assessed your overall performance as **performing well**. You have performed *well* in respect of your arrangements over governance and leadership, people and skills and data use and reporting and *strongly* in respect of policies and procedures. Your arrangements over systems and processes have been assessed as adequate.

We have provided our key findings in Section One and have raised 8 recommendations, summarised in Appendix 1.

Stage Two – Analytical review

During Stage Two of the process we followed up issues arising from the analytical review of 2007/08 BVPI and non-BVPI data, used in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment carried out by the Audit Commission. This analytical review informed our selection of a sample for testing at Stage Three.

Executive Summary

Stage Three – Spot check testing

When deciding how many and which PIs to review at Stage Three, in addition to those identified for review by the Audit Commission, we used the results from stage one and our cumulative audit knowledge and experience to determine the total number of PIs for review. As a result of this, we have identified 3 BVPIs and non-BVPIs to review. The following were reviewed:

- C13 – Cost per library visit;
- BV82a – Recycling performance; and
- BV165 – Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people.

The results of these spot check reviews indicate that the data quality underpinning your PIs is largely adequate. However, a significant error was noted in the data originally submitted for BV165 and a minor amendment was required in respect of BV82a. These both required amendments to be made to the data submitted on EDC (the Audit Commission's Electronic Data Collection portal).

The results of our data quality spot checks are summarised in Section Two.

The identification of errors at Stage 3 does not require testing of additional PIs (in accordance with Audit Commission guidance). However, consideration is given to the impact such errors may have on forming our opinion over the management arrangements in place at the Council (Stage 1 assessment), although we concluded that our initial assessment did not need to be revised.

Best Value Performance Plan Report

In prior years, the Audit Commission audited your Best Value Performance Plan in accordance with the Local Government Act 1999 and the Audit Commission's Code of Audit Practice. From this year there is no requirement for this to be audited.

Section one

Management Arrangements

We have assessed your **overall level of performance** as **performing well**. You have performed well in respect of your arrangements over governance and leadership, people and skills and data use and reporting and strongly in respect of policies and procedures. Your arrangements over systems and processes have been assessed as adequate.

The table sets out key drivers behind each theme, and details areas where you are currently meeting requirements and areas where further development is required.

Theme	Performance	Key issues
Governance & Leadership	Consistently above minimum requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Data quality is fully integrated into the Council's planning, monitoring and reporting processes ✓ A formal strategy for data quality is in place and has been approved at top management level. The strategy covers all departments and functions ✓ Accountability for data quality throughout the Council is clearly and formally defined for relevant staff and is considered as part of the corporate performance appraisal process for those staff • There is no explicit responsibility for data quality at Member level • Corporate objectives for data quality linked to business objectives are not formally defined. These should be agreed and adopted at top management level • The Council has not yet begun to consider data quality as part of its corporate risk management arrangements. Data quality should be embedded in corporate risk management arrangements, with regular assessments of the risks associated with unreliable and inaccurate information
Policies & Procedures	Well above minimum requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A comprehensive data quality policy has been defined and approved by senior management. This covers data collection, recording, analysis and reporting, applies to all business areas and defines local practices and monitoring arrangements. The policy also covers data quality requirements on partnership working ✓ Data quality procedures and guidance notes are reviewed and updated annually, with relevant staff from the Council and partnerships involved in this process ✓ Performance leads in each department fulfil the role of data quality "champions", promoting existing data quality policies and procedures and regularly reviewing and reporting on compliance
Systems & Processes	At minimum requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Council consults effectively with staff when developing or implementing new information systems • The Council should implement systematic arrangements for ensuring that key data supplied by third parties is fit for purpose, for example through data quality assessments carried out by internal audit • All instances of internal and external data sharing should be formally identified with formal protocols and standards developed • Systems and processes should operate according to the principle of "right first time" avoiding extensive data cleansing or manipulation

Management Arrangements (continued)

Theme	Performance	Key issues
People & Skills	Consistently above minimum requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Information staff (i.e. performance leads) work closely with service level staff to address data recording problems and other data issues ✓ Performance leads strengthen the feedback loops by identifying potential data quality issues, for example through error reports, and see that they are addressed through front-line staff training or briefing. This is also the case with key partnerships ✓ There is a formal programme of training (including updates when necessary) on data quality issues tailored to the varying needs of all relevant staff. Corporate arrangements are in place to ensure that this training is periodically evaluated and adapted to changing needs ✓ Roles and responsibilities of management and operational staff, in relation to data quality, are clearly defined and documented, for example, these may be incorporated into job descriptions • Data quality targets and standards should be set for relevant staff who are then assessed against these
Data Use	Consistently above minimum requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Senior management routinely and actively use data supporting performance information to plan services and allocate resources ✓ There is evidence that management action is taken to address service delivery issues identified by data returns and performance information reports. Members have available to them high-level information with which they can assess delivery of services against agreed milestones ✓ Data returns to government departments, their agencies and regulators are supported by a clear and complete audit trail ✓ All data is subject to senior management approval before external reporting to regulators and government departments • Data underpinning the information which is used for external reporting should be subject to departmental verification checks in order to reduce scope for errors (for example in BVPI calculations)

Section two

Data Quality Spot Checks

Our Stage Two analytical review work identified that all of the PI values reviewed fell within expected ranges or were substantiated by evidence. We carried out spot checks on three of your PIs. As a result of our audit work two PIs were amended as summarised in the table below.

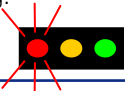


PI	Description	Value stated	Conclusion
C13	Cost per library visit	2.51	Fairly stated
BV82a(i)	Recycling performance – percentage	23.13%	PI was amended to 23.30% in order to agree with the Council's own records. Difference arose due to issues on aggregation of five Councils' data on the Waste Data Flow system
BV82a(ii)	Recycling performance – tonnage	52,430.20	PI was amended to 52,477.40 in order to agree with the Council's own records. As above, difference arose due to issues on aggregation of five Councils' data on the Waste Data Flow system
BV165	Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people	96.6%	PI was amended to 32.2% after our initial sample testing identified a large number of errors in the source data provided by external contractor. All crossings were subsequently re-assessed by the Council and our further sample testing of the revised data was concluded satisfactorily

The identification of errors at Stage 3 does not require testing of additional PIs (in accordance with Audit Commission guidance). However, consideration is given to the impact such errors may have on forming our opinion over the Management Arrangements in place at the Council (Stage 1 assessment), although we concluded that our initial assessment did not need to be revised.

Recommendations

This appendix summarises the recommendations we have identified relating to your data quality management arrangements. We have given each a risk rating (as explained below) and agreed with management what action you will need to take.

We will follow up these recommendations as part of our 2008-09 audit.

Priority rating for recommendations		
<p>Priority one: Addressing these issues is essential to assist in moving you towards an improved rating.</p> 	<p>Priority two: Addressing these issues is desirable to assist in moving you towards an improved rating.</p> 	<p>Priority three: Addressing these issues will assist in moving you towards an improved rating.</p> 

No.	Priority	Recommendation	Management response	Officer and due date
1	● (one)	<p>Systems and processes</p> <p>Implement systematic arrangements for ensuring that key data supplied by third parties is fit for purpose, for example through data quality assessments carried out by internal audit</p> <p>For example, significant errors were noted with source data provided by an external contractor for BV 165 which led to a reduction in reported PI from 96.6% to 32.2%. This may have been avoided if the source data had been reviewed by appropriately trained staff to ensure that it meets the same quality standards as internally generated data</p>	We agree with the principle of this recommendation and will consider how best this may be achieved.	Steve Memmott March 2009
2	● (two)	<p>Data Use</p> <p>Data underpinning the information which is used for external reporting should be subject to departmental verification checks in order to reduce scope for errors (for example in BVPI calculations)</p>	We agree with this. Most data for external reporting already goes through verification within departments. We will consider how best to formalise this for each department.	Lynda Cox, Linda Coleman, Helen Knight, Helen Karn/Karen Scott, Sandra Schofield, Jacqui White March 2009
3	● (two)	<p>Governance and leadership</p> <p>Corporate objectives for data quality linked to business objectives are not formally defined. These should be agreed and adopted at top management level</p>	We agree with the principle of this recommendation and will consider how best this may be achieved.	Tim Gregory March 2009
4	● (two)	<p>Governance and leadership</p> <p>The Council has not yet begun to consider data quality as part of its corporate risk management arrangements. Data quality should be embedded in corporate risk management arrangements, with regular assessments of the risks associated with unreliable and inaccurate information</p>	We agree with the principle of this recommendation and will consider how best this may be achieved.	Tim Gregory & Jan Collins March 2009
5	● (two)	<p>Systems and processes</p> <p>All instances of internal and external data sharing should be formally identified with formal protocols and standards developed</p>		
6	● (three)	<p>Systems and processes</p> <p>Systems and processes should operate according to the principle of "right first time" avoiding extensive data cleansing or manipulation</p>	We agree with the principle of these recommendations and recognise that action will be required both corporately at within services. We will consider how best this may be achieved.	Tim Gregory March 2009
7	● (three)	<p>People and skills</p> <p>Data quality targets and standards should be set for relevant staff who are then assessed against these</p>		
8	● (three)	<p>Governance and leadership</p> <p>Responsibility for data quality should be defined explicitly at Member level</p>		