North Wiltshire District Council

Data Quality Strategy

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Data Quality Strategy

Introduction

Good quality data is essential for reliable performance information, which is used to manage services, inform decision-making, set priorities and assign resources.

The aim of this document is to set out a clear framework for securing a high standard of data quality within North Wiltshire District Council, thus ensuring all information is accurate, timely and reliable.

Objectives

The overall vision for data quality is that we get things right first time and ensure that all performance information we use and provide is accurate, timely and reliable. To achieve this, our data quality objectives are:

1. To make clear what we expect from staff and partners in terms of data quality.
2. To ensure that relevant staff have the skills and resources to provide the required standards of data quality.
3. To provide a robust framework in which high standards of data quality are delivered.

Scope

This strategy relates to all performance information and underlying data that is important to the Council and its stakeholders. This includes:

• Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs)
• Local Performance Indicators (LPIs)
• Government department returns
• Management information

Standards

The required standard of data quality will be proportionate to the use and importance of the information and the cost of collecting it to the necessary level of accuracy. Management information, for example, which needs to be immediate and easy to obtain, does not have the same data quality requirements as a BVPI that is used to inform Members and CPA judgements. All performance information should, however, be robust and substantiated and use the best available data.

CPA indicators and BVPIs have nationally set definitions. It is important that every detail of the definition is applied. This ensures that data is recorded consistently, allowing for comparison over time, and national benchmarking. It also ensures that no reservations are placed on the Council's BVPIs, which would have a negative impact on the annual VFM judgement.

Where we are setting LPIs we need to ensure that we have established a clear definition and that there are systems available to collect and report the data in an agreed format.

This Strategy and the Council's arrangements for data quality have been developed in line with the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for Data Quality. If the Council fails to achieve an overall level of 2 out of 4 against the KLOE, this may lead to a qualified opinion in relation to the adequacy of arrangements in place to monitor and publish performance information. This would impact upon the VFM judgement.

While the priority is to ensure that level 2 is met to avoid qualification, the action plan, on page 6, aims to ensure level 3 is achieved, which would ensure the data quality standard is achieved.

Responsibilities

- *The portfolio holder for Democracy and Governance* has senior Member responsibility for data quality
- *The Strategic Manager responsible for Performance Management* has senior management responsibility for data quality and is responsible for implementing this strategy via the Information Management and Data Security Group
- *Members of the Information Management and Data Security Group* will own the Data Quality Strategy and ensure required standards of data quality are delivered across business areas.
- *The Performance Management Officer* is responsible for implementing systems and processes for ensuring that data quality requirements are met.
- *Team Leaders and Service Managers* are responsible for providing performance information that is accurate, timely and meets relevant guidance and standards. They should implement appropriate controls to ensure all performance information produced for their service or area meets data quality standards. This includes information provided by Team Members and partners. They are also responsible for ensuring the implementation of corporate policy and procedures.
- *All staff who input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data* have to ensure that it is accurate, timely and meets relevant guidance and standards.
- *Partners* that provide performance information should have robust data quality arrangements in place and ensure that all information that they provide meets the required data quality standards.
- *Internal Audit* review the Council's overall data quality arrangements and carry out ad hoc work as required.

Data Input

Performance information is produced from a wide variety of systems in all the Council's service areas. The systems will range from the complex, such as the housing benefits system, to simple manual arrangements.

There must be adequate controls over the input of data. Systems-produced figures are only as good as the data input into that system in the first place. It is important that officers have clear guidelines and procedures for using systems and are adequately trained to ensure that information is being entered consistently and correctly.

Verification

A verification procedure should exist to ensure data is accurate and reliable.

The simplest way of verifying data might be a review of recent data against expectations, or a reconciliation of systems-produced data with manual input records. Depending on the complexity of the system, it might be necessary to undertake more thorough verification tasks, such as:
− data cleansing, eg to remove duplicate records or to fill in missing information;
− sample checks to eliminate recurrence of a specific error
− test run of report output, to check the integrity of the query being used to extract data; and
− spot checks, eg on external contractor information.

Particular attention needs to be paid to data provided by external sources. A number of PIs are calculated using information provided by contractors or partner organisations and the Council's intention must be to work alongside these organisations to ensure that such data is accurate. When entering into contracts with service providers it is essential that, wherever relevant, there is a requirement to provide timely and accurate performance information, and that we are clear with the contractor about their responsibilities for data quality and how we will be checking the information they provide.

For all PIs, responsible officers are required to complete a year-end verification sign-off sheet (Appendix 1). This ensures the information has been collected in accordance with the Audit Commission's guidance (for BVPIs) or local procedure notes (for local PIs), that arithmetic has been checked and that an explanation for the year's performance has been provided. It also confirms that Strategic Managers and, where appropriate, Portfolio Holders, have reviewed the performance commentary and approved any targets.

Guidance notes for officers that produce and use performance information (Appendix 2) are provided on the bulletin board. This includes guidance on using the PI database, retaining audit evidence and the reporting timetable.

Reporting

Information on the PI database, which is available to all staff and members, is fed into quarterly performance reports that are reviewed by CMB, Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These reports are made available to officers and Members on the bulletin board.

All performance reports have a comments box for contextual information. This is especially useful to explain reasons for under-performance or issues affecting outcomes and provides stakeholders with a better understanding. It is important that officers provide explanations for performance in the "comments" section of the PI database when submitting PI information.

To ensure effective reporting and performance management, all PI information should be submitted on the PI database as soon as possible. Whether the PIs are reported monthly, quarterly or annually, it is the officer's responsibility to ensure PI data is submitted as soon as possible. Failure to do so will be reported to CMB and any gaps in PI information will be apparent in reports to members.

Monitoring and Audit

There are a number of arrangements in place to provide assurance that performance information is robust and accurate.

All responsible officers are made aware of data quality requirements and performance information is checked via programmed 1 to 1 visits from the Performance Management section. All performance information and supporting evidence provided on the PI database is then reviewed by the performance management section to ensure it is reasonable and meets appropriate standards and guidance.

An analytical review is performed on all draft BVPIs where explanations are provided for all significant variances. Any reasons for differences in performance from previous years should be included in the "comments" section of the PI database when submitting PI information. This will reduce the amount of questions from external and internal audit

High risk PIs are then audited by Internal Audit prior to BVPP publication. Internal Audit reports are disseminated to relevant Business Area Strategic Managers and Team Leaders, and Corporate Services Strategic Manager The Internal Audit Plan includes 20 days per year for BVPIs and data collection.

High risk PIs can be:
− PIs that have been qualified or raised audit recommendations
− Where there have been changes in personnel and/or systems
− New or amended PIs
− Where there are significant movements in performance not explained in the analytical review

The Audit Commission carries out an annual Data Quality and BVPP audit, where data quality arrangements are reviewed against their Key lines of Enquiry and an opinion is given on the BVPP's compliance with legislation. The Final Accounts and Audit Committee review all External and Internal Audit reports and associated action plans.

Any breaches of data quality standards or issues of non-compliance and areas of concern will be raised at the Information Management and Data Security Group on a quarterly basis. Significant points will then be reported to CMB.

Review

In line with Audit Commission guidance, this Strategy and data quality arrangements should be reviewed by the Information Management and Data Security Group and approved by the Final Accounts and Audit Committee on annual basis.

Data Quality Action Plan

The overall vision for data quality is that we get things right first time and ensure that all performance information we use and provide is accurate, timely and reliable. To achieve this, our data quality objectives are:

1. To make clear what we expect from staff and partners in terms of data quality.
2. To ensure that relevant staff have the skills and resources to provide the required standards of data quality.
3. To provide a robust framework in which high standards of data quality are delivered.

Ref.	Action	Who	When
1. To make clear what we expect from staff and partners in terms of data quality.			
1.1	Officer approval of Data Quality Strategy	IMDS Group	Jan 2007
1.2	Include Data Quality Strategy within Information Management and Data Security Strategy and amend Group's TOR.	IMDS Group	Jan 2007
1.3	Lead Member for Democracy and Governance briefed on data quality role and responsibilities	Strategic Manager for Corporate Services	Jan 2007
1.4	Member approval of Data Quality Strategy	Final Accounts and Audit Committee	Feb 2007
1.5	Data quality to be included in new job descriptions for all staff	Performance Mgt Officer and HR Team Leader	Jul 07
1.6	Specific responsibility for ensuring data quality standards are met to be assigned to Performance management officer	Performance Mgt Officer and HR Team Leader	Jul 07
1.7	Communications plan developed to communicate commitment to data quality at all levels.	IMDS Group	Feb 2007
1.8	Identify all instances of data sharing with third parties	IMDS Group	Feb 2007

Ref.	Action	Who	When
2. To ensure that relevant staff have the skills and resources to provide the required standards of data quality.			
2.1	Programmed one-to-one meetings for all responsible officers, outlining data quality standards and responsibilities.	Performance Management Team	Jan 2006 Apr 2006 Then 6-monthly
2.2	Help desk for provided for all data quality queries.	Performance Management Team	Current
2.3	Guidance notes and data quality strategy on bulletin available for all staff.	Performance Management Team	Current / Feb 2007

| 2.4 | Data quality strategy communicated to staff under Information Management and Data Security Strategy. | IMDS Group | TBC |

3. To provide a robust framework in which high standards of data quality are delivered.

Ref.	Action	Who	When
3.1	Internal audit of data quality arrangements and individual PIs.	Internal Audit	20 days in audit plan
3.2	External audit of data quality arrangements, individual PIs and BVPP.	Audit Commission	Sep 2006
3.3	Breaches of data quality standards or issues of non-compliance and areas of concern raised at the Information Management and Data Security Group.	Performance Management Officer	Quarterly
3.4	Significant data quality issues reported to CMB	Strategic Manager for Corporate Services	As required
3.5	Review and approval of audit reports pertaining to data quality.	Final Accounts and Audit Committee	As required
3.6	Annual review and approval of data quality strategy	Final Accounts and Audit Committee	Annually