

DATA QUALITY STRATEGY

2013/14

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Kevin Wright Corporate Performance Officer
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APPROVED BY	Sarah Ashmead Service Director, Policy, Performance & Communications
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1. Introduction

1.1 Data Quality is a vital tool in supporting good decision making and budget setting. It is an important part of informing policy and setting targets for the future, thereby leading to an improved service for customers and stakeholders. High quality data needs to be accurate, comprehensive, accessible and valid.

1.2 The purpose of this strategy is to outline the corporate approach to maintaining and improving the quality of data across the Council.

1.3 This strategy is the Council's overarching corporate approach to ensuring high quality data. Individual service areas may also wish to have their own data quality strategy or policies which use this corporate strategy as their initial reference but which take into account individual service needs in relation to their own data.

1.4 Our aim is to make sure that that Council uses high quality data as part of its operational, performance management and governance arrangements in order to drive service improvement and inform policy and good decision making.

2. What is 'Data Quality' and why is it important?

2.1 Data can be defined as "facts and or numbers collected together for reference or information."¹ Data can be quantitative e.g. numbers or frequencies, or qualitative e.g. focussing on experience, comments or behaviour.

2.2 The Audit Commission has said that there are six key characteristics to good quality data as shown below.

¹ Oxford English Dictionary [online]

Characteristic	Description
Accuracy	Data should be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes, captured once only, although used multiple times, and is likely to be more accurate if it is recorded as close to the point of activity as possible. Limitations of the data must be made clear to users.
Validity	Data should be recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements, including the correct application of any rules or definitions. There are many audiences for data collected by public services, so there is clear need for data to be consistent over time.
Reliability	Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time, whether using manual or computer-based systems.
Timeliness	Data must be available quickly and frequently enough to support information needs and to influence the appropriate level of service or management decisions.
Relevancy	Data captured should be relevant to the purposes for which it is used. This entails periodic review of requirements to reflect changing needs.
Completeness	Data requirements should be clearly specified based on the information needs of the organisation. Monitoring missing, incomplete, or invalid records can provide an indication of data quality.

Adapted from: Audit Commission (2007) Improving information to support decision making: standards for better data quality.

2.3 These characteristics need to be balanced with the importance of the uses of the data and the costs and/or effort of collection. Where compromises are made, for example on accuracy where timeliness is more important, then this should be made clear to users of the data.

2.4 Providing high quality data on time will:-

- allow accurate information to be pulled together to allow the Council to make well informed decisions, taking account of potential risks
- create a “no surprise” performance culture
- add value to the organisation; allowing the Council to report its achievements using data that officers, members, customers and stakeholders trust.

2.5 The risk of not identifying weaknesses in data quality or the arrangements that underpin data collection and reporting activities is that resulting information may be misleading, decision making may be flawed, resources may be wasted, poor services may not be improved and policy may be ill-founded. There is also a danger that good performance may not be recognised.

2.6 The Government's focus on decentralising power to councils, communities and local people is linked to its transparency agenda. This requires local councils to make data more readily available to the citizen to allow them to hold service providers to account and allow the voluntary sector and small business to pitch for contracts and bring new ideas to how services can be run. All of this will mean that the quality of data that the council hold and publish will be important not just internally but also, potentially, to a wide range of people and organisations outside of the Council.

2.7 Our vision, as outlined in the Data and Information Management Strategy, is *to make the Council's data and information available to our customers, partner organisations, officers and elected members in the right format, at the right location, and with the right security to deliver the best possible services directed by information management decisions.*

3. Data Quality and Information Governance

3.1 As well as the characteristics previously outlined, there are a further four elements to ensuring good data quality and these relate to information governance. It is essential that data are:

- Held securely
- Collected fairly
- Used ethically
- Shared appropriately and lawfully

3.2 Information governance covers a wide range of issues including data protection, freedom of information and privacy rights and therefore this data quality strategy must be read in conjunction with the council's Data and Information Management Strategy 2011-2015. The Data and Information Management Strategy shows how the data quality strategy links not only to information governance but to other information strategies across the council.

4. Scope of the Data Quality strategy

4.1 This scope of this strategy applies to:

- All council employees and Members (Councillors) who need to provide, use or access data.
- All information that is entered and stored either on a manual or computerised system within the Council whether centrally or locally maintained.
- All partners and contractors providing services to or working in partnership with the Council.

5. Outcomes and Objectives

5.1 This strategy aims to achieve the following outcomes.

Data Quality Outcomes	
1	Policies and decisions are made based on accurate and reliable data
2	All Members (Councillors) and Officers recognise the need for good quality data
3	There is clear accountability for good quality data
4	Staff have the knowledge and competencies to produce, interpret and analyse good quality data and are clear about the purpose of the data collected and its use

5.2 In order to achieve these outcomes, we have set a number of objectives as outlined in appendix 1. The objectives will be reviewed and updated regularly as part of the annual audit process.

6. The corporate performance framework and performance management software

6.1 The Council has a refreshed corporate performance framework in place from April 2012. This data quality strategy forms part of the corporate performance framework. Further details of the corporate performance framework are available on the intranet [here](#) on the Performance Hub pages.

6.2 The performance management system used to manage corporate performance data is 'InPhase'.

6.3 Responsibility for the maintenance of the system and the development of its use remains with the Corporate Performance team and there are separate protocols that support this, however licence holders have a responsibility to ensure that corporate priorities are not undermined and that data quality principles are maintained.

6.4 For further information on the guides and policies for the use of 'InPhase' please contact: Corporate performance performance@buckscc.gov.uk

7. Partnership and Commissioning arrangements

7.1 When working in partnership or commissioning services from third party organisations the Council will ensure that data quality arrangements are robust. The Council will aim to (as set out in the Contract Management Framework);

- Draw up detailed agreements that outline data quality expectations as necessary between both parties and ensure partners are compliant with data legislation (e.g. data protection, freedom of information) and any professional standards.
- Ensure that processes are in place to verify data.
- Identify the governance arrangements that the third party has in place to validate data before it is received and that audit trails are available.
- Ensure there is a key contact person both within the Council and third party organisation to resolve data quality or governance issues or escalate them to senior managers as appropriate.

8. Management Process and Monitoring

WHO	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITY
MEMBERS	Monitoring & Review	<p>Cabinet members & Deputy Cabinet Members are expected to be aware of the processes in place, within their Portfolio, to secure data quality and challenge directorate leads when lapses occur or gaps are identified.</p> <p>Select Committees: Scrutinise financial and performance data, and progress on implementing Portfolio Plans for the services within their remit, and help identify data quality issues.</p> <p>Regulatory and Audit Committee: Monitoring the internal control arrangements and data governance of the Council.</p>
CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM (COMT)	Management & Assurance	Overall responsibility for ensuring that arrangements are in place to assure the quality of data and that action for improvements are taken where necessary. Encourage open debate and constructive challenge to

		ensure the data governance arrangements meet the needs of the organisation.
SERVICE DIRECTORS AND SERVICE MANAGERS	Management & Assurance	<p>Ensuring that the BCC Data Quality Strategy and any service specific data quality action plans are communicated, understood and implemented.</p> <p>Ensuring that staff have the necessary skills required to deliver high quality data and that their responsibility for data quality is reflected in role profiles and is monitored and supported through the delivering successful performance (DSP) process.</p> <p>Ensuring that appropriate systems and processes are in place to deliver high quality data, and contingency arrangements and appropriate controls are in place to give assurance about quality.</p> <p>Reviewing data quality and agreeing actions for improvement where required.</p>
CORPORATE PERFORMANCE TEAM	Monitoring & Review	<p>Providing frameworks and guidance to support delivery of high quality data – from defining requirements to monitoring service progress against data quality action plans, to the use of information to drive improvement.</p> <p>Maintaining an overview of performance information to satisfy internal and external corporate reporting requirements, and ensuring systems and processes are in place to collect and report this corporately.</p> <p>Maintaining an overview of data quality issues for performance data, using wider intelligence to adopt a risk based approach to internal quality assurance, facilitating internal and external audits.</p> <p>Monitoring progress against any data quality/methodology compliance issues identified, offering challenge and ‘critical friend’ support, and including issues and progress updates in corporate reports and audit responses where appropriate.</p> <p>Producing, refreshing and getting approval for the data quality strategy in line with good practice guidance and feedback from inside and outside the council and ensuring delivery of the corporate data quality action plan.</p>

<p>PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT OFFICERS & DATA QUALITY CHAMPIONS</p>	<p>Monitoring & Review</p>	<p>Keeping knowledge of relevant performance measures, requirements and issues up to date and cascading appropriate information to any other staff involved in producing this information.</p> <p>Ensuring high quality information is regularly provided within the timescales agreed, highlighting any changes, caveats or potential issues relating to the information provided (e.g. changes to systems, sources and definitions) so that sound judgements can be made about how this information should be used and interpreted. This should also include regular appraisal of data quality, highlighting areas of concern, responding to issues/taking action and providing updates on progress as appropriate.</p> <p>Ensuring that the information provided is supported by underlying working papers/records and that these are retained as appropriate.</p> <p>Sharing learning relating to data quality from inside and outside of the organisation, applying good practice and collectively tackling data quality issues.</p>
<p>INTERNAL AUDIT TEAM</p>	<p>Monitoring & Review</p>	<p>Annual Audit programme to include review of underlying systems used to produce performance information where data quality issues have been identified.</p> <p>Providing a robust risk framework to enable all services to adopt a risk based approach to data quality assurance.</p>
<p>ALL STAFF</p>	<p>Support</p>	<p>Aware of their individual responsibilities relating to data quality and how their day to day work can impact on data quality.</p>

Appendix 1
Schedule of improvements 2012 - 2014

ACTIONS	DUE DATE	RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	COMMENTS	EXPECTED OUTCOME
POLICIES & FRAMEWORKS				
Ensure that there is a reference to data quality in the Council's key corporate documents	Ongoing	Kevin Wright	Key links need to be maintained to Performance Management Framework	Increased awareness of and commitment to data quality
Contribute to the review and refresh of the Information Sharing Protocol	Ongoing	Kevin Wright	Support the Policy team in refreshing the Protocol for 2013/14	Strengthened partnership data quality arrangements
Refresh Performance Management Framework & Data Quality Strategy in accordance with integrated reporting project outcomes	March 2014	Kevin Wright & Andrew Capjon		Ensuring the relevant frameworks and strategies are fit for purpose and add value to the work of the County Council
SYSTEMS & PROCESSES				
Develop a council wide integrated reporting solution	March 2014	Andrew Capjon	The InPhase contract ends in March 2014 and a replacement performance software solution needs to be identified and implemented	Improve the decision making processes based on these reports
Identify data quality champions across all service areas	June 2013	Kevin Wright	An up to date list of Data Quality Champions across all service areas will be kept on the Intranet with relevant contact details.	Strengthening data quality arrangements
Ensure DQ champion roles are clearly articulated and that DQ Champion's roles and	June 2013	Kevin Wright	Develop a role profile for Data Quality Champions and ensure that DSP objectives & measures are developed and sent to all	Strengthening data quality arrangements

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responsibilities are included within personal objectives set in their DSP			champions.	
Support services in their development and monitoring of Data Quality Action Plans and support data quality champions in implementing the plans	Ongoing	Kevin Wright	Templates and guidance can be issues via intranet pages	Strengthening data quality arrangements
Annual Audit programme to include review of underlying systems used to produce performance information where data quality issues have been identified	Ongoing	Internal Audit Team		Improved data quality testing. Centralised recording and monitoring of data quality issues
USE OF DATA/ REPORTING				
Identify owners for all key performance indicators and that complete definition sheets are held for each indicator	Ongoing	Kevin Wright	Key performance indicators include those used within the 8 Portfolio Plans	Improved timeliness of data collection and reporting. Strengthened links between corporate performance and service based performance
All locally determined performance indicators to have clear definitions	Ongoing	Service Performance Officers	Previous challenges about the data we gather and report has led to a reduction in performance indicators, the original objective was to focus resources on the 'critical few' that support service	Improved understanding of indicators used to report performance Confidence that the processes used to gather data for these

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			delivery	indicators are in line with what the definition requires
Clear links are made between performance objectives and risks (within InPhase) to help identify potential data quality issues	September 2013?	Andrew Capjon	This activity forms part of the integrated performance project to improve business intelligence	Strengthened data quality arrangements and improved decision making
SKILLS, TRAINING AND AWARENESS				
Send out reminder communications of data quality and indicator owner responsibilities as part of the annual DSP process	April 2013	Kevin Wright & Emma Denley	Using signed off Portfolio Plans to pull together a full list of indicator owners for DSP objectives and also have a suggested 'pick list' of DSP objectives and measures as part of the DSP toolkit	Coordinated approach to planning and ensuring that data quality roles and responsibilities are well understood and embedded
Plan and deliver awareness sessions for the new Members on the use of InPhase and on Data Quality issues	June 2013	Emma Denley & Andrew Capjon	Training being delivered as part of the Member Induction Programme following 2013 elections	Members feel confident to access and challenge performance data reported by officers
Deliver relevant training sessions on InPhase as required across all services	Ongoing	Kevin Wright & Andrew Capjon	Training to be delivered on an ad-hoc basis as required	Officers feel confident to input data and access relevant reports in a timely manner.