



Data Quality Strategy 2010 to 2015

If you have any comments on the Data Quality Strategy, please contact:

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1. The Data Quality Strategy

1.1 Purpose

The quality of our data is crucial for decision making and for assessing council effectiveness. Decisions must be made on correct data and therefore policies and strategies for ensuring data quality as well as governance and leadership are essential.

Inspection bodies such as the Audit Commission require assurance that performance information is accurate. The higher the number of amendments and reservations that we receive regarding our data following external inspection / scrutiny, the lower the confidence that inspectors, government and interested parties will have in the performance information we provide. This results in increased and more detailed inspection and the likelihood of lower performance ratings.

Data will be of high quality if it is:

- Accurate (in terms of correctness)
- Comprehensive (in terms of all data being captured)
- Valid (in an agreed format which conforms to recognised council and national standards)
- Available when needed
- Stored securely and confidentially.

1.2 The Data Quality Strategy

The Council recognises the importance of data quality as we need reliable, accurate and timely performance information with which to manage services, inform users and account for our performance. We are committed to ensuring that we maintain the highest standards of data quality and as a result get our performance information “right first time.” This will enable us to have the right information at the right time at the right cost.

1.3 Aims of the Data Quality Strategy

The aims of the data quality reporting process are to:

- Ensure that performance information in use is of high quality, consistent, timely, and comprehensive and held securely and confidentially
- Ensure that we have the right controls in place
- Ensure that the Council supports a learning culture so that future mistakes can be avoided and all members of staff are encouraged to report on any data quality issues
- Improve accountability for data quality issues
- Increase awareness of data quality and its importance
- Increase commitment to data quality across the Council
- Strengthen the performance management framework.

Another important aim is to ensure that the principles of quality data collection and reporting are promoted and followed by all staff. These principles are:

- **Awareness:** everyone recognises the need for good data quality and how they contribute to achieving this
- **Definitions:** everyone knows which performance indicators (PIs) are produced from the information they input and how they are defined
 - Statutory performance indicators 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
 - Where we are setting local PIs, we must establish a clear definition and ensure systems are available to collect and report the data in an agreed format

- In some cases, there are a number of similar indicators (some national and some local) measuring the same thing in slightly different ways. It is important to ensure that separate figures are calculated and reported systematically for each definition
- **Input:** there must be controls over input; especially that information is entered on an ongoing basis; rather than stored up to input later.
 - The aim should be 100% accuracy 100% of the time
 - There should be clear guidelines and procedures for using systems and adequate training to ensure that information is being entered consistently and correctly
 - Controls should also be in place to avoid double-counting, in particular where more than one person inputs data.
 - The systems must also record all relevant information
- **Verification:** there are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible. The frequency of verification checks will need to be aligned with the frequency of data reporting
- **Responsibility:** Each PI has an assigned officer who takes responsibility of the systems to support this PI as well as reporting this information to the required standards
 - Officers with responsibility should document the procedures that need to be undertaken to produce this information to the required standard in the form of a procedures document, which is reviewed and updated on a regular basis
 - Officers with responsibility should work closely with ICT in procuring the systems and the general management of the systems to ensure a robust control environment
 - Officers should ensure that they have someone assigned possibly a deputy to produce this information in their absence
- **Output:** performance indicators are extracted regularly and efficiently and communicated quickly
 - Any output produced should have an auditable trail i.e. evidence to support the data output
- **Presentation:** annual performance indicators are presented, with conclusive evidence, in such a way as to give an easily understood and accurate picture of our performance to external inspectorates and the public.

1.4 How does the Data Quality Strategy fit in?

All Council systems and processes that produce performance information are in the scope of this strategy in order to ensure that accurate and dependable information is available for all Council functions. However it is important and the Council belief that continued initiatives in relation to data quality should be proportionate to risk.

Issues relating to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act are excluded from this policy as these are covered in the Council's Information Strategy. Issues relating to Information Technology and the security and control of IT systems are covered in the Council's ICT Strategy.

Some important information is provided by partner organisations and other external agencies e.g. Primary Care Trust, Surrey Police and Surrey County Council. We will work with these organisations to provide assurance of the data quality. Any doubts about data quality will be addressed with the organisation.

The Council recognises that data quality is an important part of any contract that is outsourced to a third party to manage. This is of particular importance to public-facing service contracts where large amounts of performance data are requested by the Council from which to judge a contractor's performance.

We will ensure that all appropriate contracts where data collection and data quality are instrumental to the delivery of the service have a standard clause inserted into the contract which defines data quality and how it should be embedded into the contractor's processes. This will apply to contracts tendered after 1 January 2010. This clause will lay out our requirement for the

contractor to provide timely and accurate information and that responsibilities for data quality and checking information are clearly set out. Responsibility for the verification of data lies within the department managing the contract.

The Data Quality Strategy has links with many of the Council's strategies and policies including:

- ICT Strategy
- Information Strategy.

Supporting documents include:

- Performance Management Guide.

2 How will we do it?

To make sure we meet our aims we will:

- Put in place arrangements at senior level to secure the quality of data that we use to manage our service and demonstrate our performance
- Make clear what is expected from officers and contractors in terms of the standards of data quality
- Put in place systems, policies and procedures to enable the highest possible data quality, particularly where information is shared with partners
- Ensure that we put in place the right resources, and in particular, have the right people with the right skills, to ensure we have timely and accurate performance information.

3 How will we know we have done it?

3.1 Evaluation

The strategy and the council's overall approach to data quality will be monitored by Corporate Board and the Consultation & Communication Team. Internal Audit will provide internal assurance controls and external assessments will include the Single Data List process.

The monitoring and review process will involve:

- Regular meetings with Consultation & Communication Team, PI originators and Service Heads, to ensure that the correct systems and procedures are in place
- Routine checks
- Spot checks
- Follow up of any data quality queries from members of staff
- Liaising with Internal Audit and External Audit regarding any data quality issues found as part of their review / inspection programme.

The Council recognises the need to achieve a balance between the resources required to set and meet data quality standards and the relative benefits that flow. It will be necessary to focus resources on data that is regarded as critical to overall business objectives. Equally, the right balance must be achieved and justified between the dimensions of data quality, for example, a balance needs to be struck between accuracy and timeliness.

3.1.1 Standards and Procedures

The Council is committed to collecting and processing data according to national and locally defined standards. Standards and procedures are necessary to ensure that the data is:

- **Complete** by including all elements of the definition and takes into account any exceptions
- **Accurate** by measuring what it is meant to be measured. It is free of error
- **Timely** by being collected when it is meant to be collected and covers the correct reporting period

- **Relevant** by being important to the service and its future development. It is meaningful and useful to service heads who will use it to deliver and improve their areas
- **Verifiable** by ensuring there is enough evidence to support the final results. The data is collected and calculated in a way that can be checked and recalculated to ensure accuracy
- **Unique** by avoiding duplication in the collection, manipulation or analysis of information
- **Consistent** by providing information which can be compared over time and across services and with other councils

Where there is no national standard to guide procedures for data collection, processing or reporting, the Council will generate its own local standards and procedures. Where problems are identified, corrective action and any recommendations for change will be identified. This stage may be complex, especially where more than one information system is involved. The 'master' source of the data must be identified and the impact on recipient systems evaluated. Where at all possible data must be corrected at source and this is the responsibility of the service managers to ensure that this happens. Should areas where issues of incorrect data are not being put right are identified; the matter will be referred to the relevant Director.

3.1.2 Output and Reporting

Performance data required by external government departments and inspection bodies normally has a timetable for publication. All performance information should be available in time for management assessment and action prior to publication. It is important that performance information is subject to scrutiny and challenge before final reporting. This can be achieved through verification of output reports, departmental and directorate review.

Policy Committees receive quarterly reports on exception, suggest recommendations and ensure officers take action to meet or improve performance for key service priorities. Scrutiny Committee also plays a role by monitoring the progress on Corporate Plan and ensures Policy Committees oversee actions required. Reporting accurate information leads to good decision-making and improved performance. For many indicators performance will only be recognised publicly if it can be substantiated by external bodies.

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council receives external validation through an audit process. During these audits the officer responsible for data collection should be available to provide all supporting information. If that officer is not available, there should be at least one other officer who is able to provide advice and information on the PI. This is important to ensure that audit work proceeds smoothly. The audit will require working papers to confirm the definition has been followed, the calculations are correct and that the indicator is supported by a full audit trail. A comprehensive process is already in place for the collection, verification and reporting of the statutory single data list indicators.

3.2 Monitoring the delivery of the Action Plan

The delivery of this Data Quality Action Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Consultation & Communication Team, and reported to Corporate Board and S&R Committee on exception.

3.3 Risk Management

Data quality is embedded in the Council's Risk Registers, through the Corporate Risk Register and Operational Risk Register. Areas that can be classified as 'high risk' conditions include:

- A high volume of data transactions
- Technically complex performance information definition / guidance
- Problems identified in previous years
- Inexperienced staff involved in data processing / performance information production
- A system being used to produce new performance information

- Known gaps in the control environment.

4 Who are our stakeholders?

Set out below are various key stakeholders for this strategy.

The Stakeholders	Key Messages / responsible for
All stakeholders	
Staff (including data originators)	<p>Users are adequately trained, where appropriate, by having a formal training programme which is periodically evaluated and adapted to respond to changing needs</p> <p>There is security of access/amendment and periodic tests of the integrity of data are undertaken</p> <p>Information management and support is available to all data originators users</p> <p>System upgrades are made where necessary (including to accommodate amendments to performance information definitions)</p> <p>Feedback from users is acted upon</p> <p>The system can produce adequate audit trails (e.g. from the information reported back to the source of information)</p> <p>Actions recommended by system reviews (eg by internal and external auditors) are implemented</p> <p>A set of written procedures (user guide) exists for the purpose of extracting performance information</p> <p>Ensure the system is covered by business continuity plans.</p> <p>Benchmark performance against others</p>
Councillors / All Committees	<p>Decision making, monitoring strategic objectives, targets and use of resources, ensuring accountability and challenging data quality</p> <p>Identifying population needs and determining priorities and services for meeting it</p>
Strategy & Resources Committee	<p>Scrutinise data quality</p> <p>Ensure relevant actions in place to address data quality issues</p> <p>Ensure recommendations are adapted</p>
Scrutiny Committee	<p>Monitoring implementation of recommendations from internal and external auditors</p>
Partners	
Local Strategic Partnerships/ Surrey Policy Officers Group / Other Surrey LAs/Statutory Agencies and Voluntary Groups	<p>Monitoring the achievement of partnership targets and the use of resources</p> <p>Ensuring data quality measure are in place and embedded in the partnership framework</p> <p>Ensuring accountability and tackling data quality issues</p>

Central Government

Audit Commission

Developing policy
Monitoring progress of new initiatives and the achievements of national targets
Publishing local performance information at national level
Identifying poor performing organisations and rewarding good performance with autonomy and resources

External Auditors

Monitoring performance and the use of resources of local bodies
Publishing comparative performance information and national studies
Planning work programmes proportionate to risk
Identifying areas to be assessed

5 Roles and Responsibilities

Councillors

The **Chairman of Strategy & Resources Committee** has responsibility for data quality as part of its responsibility for corporate governance and risk management, and is the Member Data Quality Champion.

Corporate Management Board

The Corporate Management Board are responsible for ensuring that accurate and complete records are maintained and that performance, appraisal and disciplinary processes are in place to maintain and enhance data and information quality for their directorate

Consultation & Communication Team

The **Research, Consultation & Information Analyst** has senior responsibility for data quality with regards to performance information and is the Officer Data Champion (with delegated authority from the Chief Executive). The Research, Consultation & Information Analyst will report to the Corporate Management Team on data quality and any data quality issues that arise.

The **Consultation & Communication Team** are the Data Quality co-ordinators with responsibility for promoting the importance of data quality throughout the organisation and will formulate improvement measures in the Action Plan supporting this strategy, as well as monitor progress. In addition, the **Consultation & Communication Team** will:

- Advise departments and Internal Audit of new and amended performance indicators so that data quality processes can be set up / amended
- Check and chase up data returns and ensure that appropriate explanations are provided for performance exceptions
- Maintain links to single data list performance indicator guidance so that it is readily available to data collectors, authorisers and Internal Audit
- Develop the performance management framework and supporting systems to incorporate data quality processes at the point of collection based on recommendations from External and Internal Audit.

Managers

Service Heads, Managers and Team Leaders are responsible for ensuring that adequate, safe systems holding an acceptable standard of information are developed and maintained and that performance information they provide is accurate, timely and meets the relevant guidance. They are also responsible for ensuring the implementation of corporate policy and procedures and the development of service based policies and procedures for performance information.

Staff

Data champions (or data managers) are those officers who are responsible for **Single Data List Indicators (SDLIs)**. Data champions will take particular responsibility for data quality and drive improvements in their service areas.

Data quality is the responsibility of every employee who enters, extracts or analyses data from any of the Council's information systems and records. Every employee should be aware of his or her responsibilities for quality of data. Commitment to data quality is clearly stated in job descriptions for all relevant roles within the Council, ensuring that Corporate Board, managers, administrative staff and others recognise their responsibilities as an integral part of their role and profession.

6 Data Quality Action Plan

Actions	Resource Implications High Medium Low	Target Date	EEBC Officer	Comments	Update as at Sept 2011
1. Ensure all documents comply with Data Quality Strategy eg Performance Reports, Single Data Indicator submission papers and all other key documents	M	30/12/11 (Ongoing)	Research, Consultation & Information Analyst and all data originators	Check C&C documents and move onto corporate and all staff	<p>This action is ongoing, given the new Single Data List Indicator set that was announced in April 2011 for 2011/12.</p> <p>Data Quality will be strengthened by randomly selecting a few indicators on a half-yearly and annual basis to carryout spot checks on them. This will improve accuracy, consistency and adherence to the Data Quality Strategy. As a result, Data Originators (DOs) will have to apply the same DQ principles on all indicators collected whether reported locally or externally.</p> <p>Each indicator reported will also have someone who inputs the data, a verifier and a Service Head or Director signing it off to stipulate that the guidelines on the Data Quality Strategy were adhered to.</p> <p>The new Corporate Plan 2012 to 2016 is under development, and reference will be made to data quality to stress its importance in the role of corporate governance.</p>

Actions	Resource Implications High Medium Low	Target Date	EEBC Officer	Comments	Update as at Sept 2011
2. Process Documentation - Regular meetings between C&C and Data Originators, identify training needs, ensure data submitted internally and externally are consistent	H	Quarterly and ongoing	Research, Consultation & Information Analyst and Information & Consultation Officer	Set up regular meeting to DOs to ensure levels of consistency are maintained.	This will take place through the process used to produce the monthly and quarterly performance management reports. This process is ongoing and the regular meetings will give both C&C and DOs the change to ensure high level of accuracy is maintained, issues regarding DQ are addressed and best practice used internally and externally are shared.
3. Staff awareness campaign- Review Dos understanding of Data Quality, getting it right the first time	H	Quarterly and then ongoing	Research, Consultation & Information Analyst and Information & Consultation Officer	Create a series of internal awareness initiatives to keep DQ in the minds of staff through emails, Iris, One 2 Ones, half yearly Surgeries and annual workshops	Awareness levels re data quality is sustained through the regular communications between the C&C team and the data originators. This includes verifying and challenging performance information collected to ensure data quality is integral. Work will continue and the regular meeting schedule with data originators (see above action) will facilitate this.
4. C&C to meet with Chairman of S&R Committee to discuss performance management	L	Jan 2012	Research, Consultation & Information Analyst and Information & Consultation Officer	Discuss process as it stands and what Members might like to see improved	Meeting to be scheduled to discuss progressed made, action plan and implement changes suggested by S&R Committee
5. Conduct an annual check of data quality	H	Mar 2011 Ongoing	Information & Consultation Officer	Work with data originators during the year to ensure no surprises	A formal programme of spot checks will be developed as part of Year 2 of the Action Plan. By year end, all indicators collected will undergo a spot check.

Actions	Resource Implications High Medium Low	Target Date	EEBC Officer	Comments	Update as at Sept 2011
6. Internal Audit (IA) – work with IA to incorporate data quality into their annual review programme, act on identified good practice & areas for improvement	M	March 2011	Research, Consultation & Information Analyst and Information & Consultation Officer	Add suggestions and actions into quarterly reports for formal monitoring as required	An Internal Audit inspection of data quality has been scheduled for 2012/13. Data quality is also covered as part of the Annual Audit and Inspection process by External Audit (at the moment External Audit is not carried out – however, good practises which were proposed as a result will continue to be implemented). As and when any recommendations are made, action will be incorporated into the data quality action plan.
7. Formalise regular spot checks of indicators to strengthen data quality and ensure information reported is consistent across the board. Ensure an audit trail of evidence.	H	Monthly (Ongoing)	Information & Consultation Officer	Set up a regular review of spot checks with audit trail. Implement through the year.	There is overlap between this action and action number 5. A verification form has been created and revised to reflect good DQ practice. Spot checks have taken place, with a good response from staff and will be an ongoing process. A formal programme of spot checks will be developed to ensure those indicators with any historic issues are captured, along with any other indicators should any issues arise.
8. Update Data Quality Strategy, incorporating new action plan	M	Nov 2011 (Ongoing – the Action Plan Section)	Research, Consultation & Information Analyst	Update the Strategy to reflect new actions to be taken and changes made by Central Government	This will be done by the end of Quarter three. Actions in the Strategy will also be revised annually to ensure Data Quality is maintained and that best practice is continually added as part of our performance management framework. DOs will also be given the opportunity to take part in devising new action plans.

Appendix One: Background Information on Data Quality

Information and Data

Public services need reliable, accurate and timely information with which to manage services, inform users and account for performance. Service providers make many, often complex, decisions about their priorities and the use of resources. Service users, and members of the public more widely, need accessible information to make informed decisions. Regulators and government departments need information to satisfy their responsibilities for making judgements about performance and governance.

Good quality data is the essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information to support decision making. The data used to report on performance must be fit for purpose, represent the Council's activity in an accurate and timely manner. At the same time there must be a balance between the use and importance of the information, and the cost of collecting the required data to the necessary level of accuracy.

Data Requirements for Epsom & Ewell Borough Council

All information in the Council is built up from a variety of sources. These 'data' form the basis of whatever information is used in the Council. The information is used locally, but also nationally, to inform planning, performance management and to contribute to national statistics. To ensure consistency and comparability at a national level there are numerous rules and protocols about how, when and why certain data should be collected. If these rules are not followed closely or if the data are missing or unreliable then the information itself will be more likely to be flawed (resulting in low quality data). Conversely, the higher the quality of the underlying data, the more likely it is that the resulting information is accurate and consistent between organisations.

In practice, most data in the Council is gathered as part of the everyday activity of many frontline and support staff working in a huge variety of settings. This means that unless we have very well-managed systems and processes operated by appropriately supervised staff, errors can creep in and the quality of data can decline.

From an external monitoring perspective, the Council requires accurate information to manage service agreements with partners, along with data needed to meet national reporting requirements listed below:

National Requirements

- Single Data List Performance Indicators
- Statutory returns / data sets (e.g. to the Department for Works & Pensions, Defra, ARM, Department for Communities & Local Government)
- Quarterly monitoring returns
- External inspections e.g. Audit Commission, Benefit Fraud Inspectorate.

Audit Requirements

The Council is regularly audited to ensure that:

- There is compliance with applicable legislation
- Best practice derived from British and International standards are implemented
- Suitable processes are used, and control put in place, to ensure the completeness, relevance, correctness and security of data.

Local Requirements

- Progress against the Council's Key Priorities and Key Service Priorities
- Monthly performance indicators
- Quarterly performance indicators
- Progress against Single Data List Indicators.