

# Data Quality Strategy 2006 to 2008

## *Getting it right first time policy*

**Produced By: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council  
October 2006**

**To be reviewed in October 2007**

---

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

Sara Childs  
Service Improvement Manager  
Service Improvement Unit  
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council  
Town Hall  
The Parade  
Epsom  
Surrey KT18 5BY

Tel: 01372 732182

Email: [schilds@epsom-ewell.gov.uk](mailto:schilds@epsom-ewell.gov.uk)

## Contents

---

<b>CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. EPSOM &amp; EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL’S DATA QUALITY STRATEGY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 WHAT IS DATA QUALITY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?.....	3
1.2 EEBC’S DATA QUALITY STRATEGY.....	3
1.2.1 Objectives of the Data Quality Strategy .....	3
1.2.2 Scope of the Data Quality Strategy.....	4
1.2.3 Principles of the Data Quality Strategy .....	4
1.2.4 Standards and Procedures .....	5
1.2.5 Risk Assessment.....	6
1.2.6 Roles and Responsibilities.....	6
1.2.7 Contracts.....	7
1.2.8 Partners.....	7
1.2.9 Output and Reporting.....	8
1.2.10 Monitoring and Review.....	8
<b>2. THE WAY FORWARD: DATA QUALITY ACTION PLAN .....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 ACTION PLAN.....	9
2.2 ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES .....	9
2.3 ACTION PLAN MONITORING .....	9
2.3 ACTION PLAN.....	10
<b>APPENDIX ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON DATA QUALITY.....</b>	<b>14</b>
INFORMATION AND DATA .....	14
DATA REQUIREMENTS FOR EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL .....	14
<b>APPENDIX TWO: DEVELOPING THE DATA QUALITY STRATEGY .....</b>	<b>16</b>
DIAGNOSTIC – IDENTIFYING WHERE WE ARE NOW AND WHERE WE WANT TO BE .....	16
<i>Identifying where we are now.....</i>	16
<i>Identifying where we want to be.....</i>	17
<i>Drivers of Change .....</i>	17

# **1. Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Data Quality Strategy**

---

## **1.1 What is Data Quality and Why is it Important?**

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.

Inspection bodies such as the Audit Commission require assurance that performance information is accurate. This is increasing the emphasis on data quality, and the external audit approach of checking calculation and systems reports is developing into the more challenging scrutiny of systems controls. This is likely to entail an examination of the systems and processes for the collection of data, the skills required and the use of information. The quality of our data is crucial for assessments of council effectiveness. Policies and strategies for ensuring data quality as well as governance and leadership for ensuring accurate and reliable data is essential.

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 scores.

Additional background information on data quality can be found in Appendix One.

## **1.2 EEBC's Data Quality Strategy**

Background information on how this Data Quality Strategy was developed can be found in Appendix Two. This includes identifying where we are with data quality and information on the recent Data Quality Inspection undertaken by the Audit Commission in which we were classified as Level 3; information on where we would like to be incorporating the recommendations made by the Audit Commission following this Inspection; as well as the key internal and external drivers for change.

### **1.2.1 Objectives of 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.

In order to achieve this, Epsom & Ewell Borough Council will:

- Ensure that performance information in use is of high quality, consistent, timely, and comprehensive and held securely and confidentially.
- 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.
- Ensure that we have the right controls to ensure that the Council meets what is expected of us.

The purpose of the data quality reporting process is to ensure that the Council supports a learning culture so that future mistakes can be avoided. All members of staff are encouraged to report on any data quality issues.

### 1.2.2 Scope of the Data Quality Strategy

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.

The Council believes that continued initiatives in relation to data quality should be proportionate to risk.

Please note that issues relating to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act are excluded, as these are covered in the Council's Information Strategy; and issues relating to Information Technology and the security and control of IT systems are covered in the Council's IT Strategy.

### 1.2.3 Principles of the Data Quality Strategy

There are a number of principles that underpin good data quality. It is important to consider these sequentially because if any of the principles are not adhered to, inaccuracies are likely to creep in, and adherence to subsequent principles will not be able to rectify the position.

- **Awareness:** everyone recognises the need for good data quality and how they can contribute.
- **Definitions:** everyone knows which PIs are produced from the information they input and 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 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.
  - 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.
  - Every PI should have a named officer who is responsible for collecting and reporting the information. This ensures that there is consistency in the application of definitions and use of systems for providing the data. Each named officer should be kept up-to-date of any changes in definition that may occur from time to time.
- **Input:** there are controls over input; especially that information is input on an ongoing basis; rather than stored up to input later.
  - The aim should be 100% accuracy 100% of the time.

- 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.
- A key requirement is that data should be entered on an ongoing basis, not saved up to be entered in a block at the end of a period. This reduces the error rate and the need for complex verification procedures.
- Controls should also be in place to avoid double-counting. These should be designed according to the nature of the system, in particular where more than one person inputs data. A likely control will be an absolutely clear division of responsibility setting out who is responsible for what data entry.
- The systems must also record all relevant information.
- **Verification:** there are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible.
  - Data requirements should be designed along the principle of 'getting it right first time' in order to avoid waste in the form of time and money spent on cleansing data, interfacing between different information systems, matching and consolidating data from multiple databases and maintaining outdated systems.
  - Nevertheless, in complex systems, even where there are strong controls over input, errors can creep in. Where it is needed, a verification procedure should exist close to the point of data input. The frequency of verification checks will need to be aligned with the frequency of data reporting.
- **Responsibility:** Each performance indicator, whether national or local, 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 updates on a regular basis.
  - Officers with responsibility should work closely with IT in procuring the systems and the general management of the systems to ensure a robust control environment.
  - These procedures should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.
  - Officers should ensure that they have 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 that an Auditor would be happy with.
- **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.

#### 1.2.4 Standards and Procedures

Epsom & Ewell Borough Council is committed to collecting and processing data according to national and locally defined standards. Standards and procedures are necessary to ensure that:

- Data collection is consistent throughout the organisation and in accordance with national definitions as laid down in the statutory performance indicator guidance where appropriate.
- Information can be meaningfully compared / collated both across the organisation and nationally.

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. This will be done as

and when the requirement arises and initial work to ensure organisation-wide standards and procedures are in place for all key data collection processes.

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.

### 1.2.5 Risk Assessment

Data quality is embedded in the Council's Risk Registers, through the Corporate Risk Register, Operational Risk Register as well as the Service Improvement Unit Division 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.

### 1.2.6 Roles and Responsibilities

#### Officers

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.

- The **Service Improvement Manager** 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 Service Improvement Manager will report to the Directors Management Team on data quality and any data quality issues that arise.
- The **Service Improvement Unit** will be the Data Quality co-ordinators with responsibilities for promoting the importance of data quality throughout the organisation. In addition, the Service Improvement Unit 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 national 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.
- **Directors** have the responsibility 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.

- The **Service Improvement Unit and Directors** are responsible for formulating improvement measures in the Action Plan supporting this strategy, as well as monitoring to ensure that progress against the plan is systematically monitored and any corrective action taken, if required.
- **Team Leaders, Service Managers and Division Heads** 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.
- Data champions (or data managers) are those Officers who are **BVPI Originators**. Data champions will take particular responsibility for data quality and drive improvements in their service areas.
- It is the responsibility of **all staff that input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data** to ensure that it is of the highest quality.
- Everyone in the organisation will be responsible for complying with this Data Quality Strategy.
- All staff are responsible for following policies and procedures, and all line managers for ensuring that this is the case in their respective service teams.

Commitment to data quality will be clearly stated in job descriptions for all relevant roles within the Council, ensuring that Directors, managers, administrative staff and others recognise their responsibilities as an integral part of their role and profession.

### 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.

### **1.2.7 Contracts**

Epsom & Ewell Borough 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 will 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<sup>st</sup> January 2007. 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.

### **1.2.8 Partners**

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

Responsibility for data verification lies within the department receiving the information. Internal Audit and the Service Improvement Unit can provide advice and guidance if needed.

### **1.2.9 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.

Performance updates are reported to Financial Policy Panel as part of the Council's performance management framework, with any issues escalated to the relevant policy committee. Scrutiny Committee also plays a role through the monitoring and review of the Best Value Review process and their resultant Improvement Plans.

Reporting accurate information leads to good decision-making and improved performance. For many indicators that 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 national performance indicators (Best Value Performance Indicators).

### **1.2.10 Monitoring and Review**

The policy and the council's overall approach to data quality will be monitored by Directors and the Service Improvement Unit. Internal Audit will provide internal assurance controls. A formal reporting structure for this will be developed.

The monitoring and review process will involve:

- Regular meetings with PI originators and Division 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 they have come across 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. We will take this into account in developing our approach to monitoring and review. It will be necessary to focus resources on data that the council regards as critical to its 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.

## **2. The Way Forward: Data Quality Action Plan**

---

### **2.1 Action Plan**

Implementation of the Data Quality Strategy is through the actions listed in the Action Plan. None of these actions have any cost implications, although Officer time is needed to implement them.

A detailed Action Plan can be found in Section 2.3.

### **2.2 Anticipated Outcomes**

The main anticipated outcomes of delivering the Data Quality Action Plan are:

- Improved accountability for data quality issues.
- An increased awareness of data quality and its importance.
- An increased commitment to data quality by the Council.
- A strengthened performance management framework.

### **2.3 Action Plan Monitoring**

The delivery of this Data Quality Action Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Service Improvement Unit, and reported to Directors. An annual report will also be produced and presented to the Directors Management Team.

## 2.3 Action Plan

	Actions	Target Date	Resource Implications			EEBC Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Time	Cost	Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
<b>Council Documents</b>								
1	To include a reference to data quality in the Council's key corporate documents.	From End June 2006	W	W	Ongoing	Sara Childs, Service Improvement Manager	This includes the statutory Best Value Performance Plan and the new Corporate Plan 2007 to 2011.	Increased commitment to data quality.
2	To update the Council's Performance Management Guide to incorporate data quality.	End March 2007	W	W	One-off	Sarah Hogg, Research & Performance Officer	Data quality is implicit in the current Guide, rather than explicit as the Audit Commission would like.	Increased commitment to data quality.
<b>Council Processes</b>								
3	<u>Internal Audit</u> To develop a process whereby Internal Audit incorporates data quality into their annual review programme.	From 1 April 2007 and annual	W	W	Ongoing	Sara Childs, Service Improvement Manager	This is already underway. The review programme for 2007/08 will be approved by Scrutiny Committee in early 2007.	Improved data quality testing. Centralised recording and monitoring of data quality issues by SIU.
4	<u>Risk Register</u> To have reference to data quality in the Council's Corporate Risk Register, and review on a regular basis.	From 1 October 2006	W	W	Ongoing	Doug Earle, Head of Financial Services	Data quality is currently implicit in the Corporate Risk Register, which makes reference to the annual Best Value Performance Plan process.	Increased commitment to data quality.
5	<u>Register of Performance Info</u> To establish a register of performance information returns that are collected and reported by the Council to various agencies, and update on a regular basis.	End March 2007	W	W	One-off and ongoing	Sara Childs, Service Improvement Manager	This will include high level details of any statistic returns to central government or any other statutory bodies.	Centralised record of what is reported when, and who is responsible.

	Actions	Target Date	Resource Implications			EEBC Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Time	Cost	Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
6	<u>Process Documentation</u> To ensure that data obtained (action 5) has supporting processes in place to ensure data quality, and that regular meetings take place between departments and SIU.	From 1 April 2007	W	W	One-off and ongoing	Sara Childs, Service Improvement Manager and Division Heads	This will enable the SIU to work with relevant Division Heads to ensure data quality is embedded through procedures documentation and processes, as well as allowing for any areas of concern to be raised and resolved.	Data quality embedded into all performance management reporting.
7	<u>Standing Agenda Item</u> To have a standing agenda item on data quality in: - Presentation to Directors on monthly and quarterly PIs. - Directors' DMT meetings (performance review and data quality standing agenda item).	From 1 Jan 2007	W	W	Ongoing	Directors	Any issues raised will be documented and resolved.	Increased awareness of data quality. Reporting of data quality issues in a timely manner to enable timely issue resolution.
8	<u>Benchmarking</u> To develop a centralised database of benchmarking activity undertaken by departments within the Council.	End March 2007	W	W	One-off and ongoing	Jo Cole, Research & Performance Officer	Much benchmarking activity already takes place, but no central recording facility exists to record what benchmarking has happened and what has happened as a result. This will assist the Use of Resources statement process.	Shared knowledge of learning from benchmarking activity. Improved recording of activity.
9	<u>Annual Review on Data Quality</u> To undertake an annual review of data quality assurance and report to Directors.	October 2007 (annual)	W	W	Ongoing	Sara Childs	A review of the Data Quality Strategy will be incorporated into this, along with an identification of what further steps need to be taken to ensure data quality in any information from which decisions are made.	Strengthened data quality arrangements.

	Actions	Target Date	Resource Implications			EEBC Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Time	Cost	Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
<b>Staff</b>								
10	<u>Role Profiles</u> To review role profiles and job descriptions for relevant staff to incorporate data quality issues.	From 1 Jan 2007	W	W	Ongoing	Irene Clare, Director of HR & Communication	SIU will work with HR to identify relevant Officer posts.	Improved accountability for data quality issues.
11	<u>Awareness</u> To undertake a review of staff awareness and understanding of data quality.	End June 2007	W	W	One-off	Sarah Hogg, Research & Performance Officer	This has links with the Best Value Performance Plan process.	Identification of knowledge gaps. Increased awareness of data quality issues.
<b>Third Party Data</b>								
12	<u>Contracts</u> To develop a standard clause re data quality and implement it to appropriate public-facing contracts tendered.	From 1 Jan 2007	W	W	Ongoing	Andrew Forzani, Head of Procurement & Projects	This will be implemented as and when new contracts materialise.	Improved arrangements for data quality with contractors.
13	<u>Partnership Data</u> To establish a register of data we share with partners. To establish a register of data that partners share with EEBC. To identify what data governance procedures, if any, partners have to validate data prior to EEBC receiving it. To identify any areas of risk. To establish a corporate data sharing protocol and processes for validating data from third parties.	End Feb 2007	W	W	One-off	Andrew Eperson, Head of Policy & Partnerships	This will enable us to understand what data we receive from where, how it is used, and what processes third parties have in place to verify this data before passing it across.  This will form part of EEBC's Partnership Register.	Increased awareness of data quality. Improved accountability for data quality in partnerships.
		End Feb 2007	W	W	One-off			
		End April 2007	W	W	One-off			
		End May 2007	W	W	One-off			
		End July 2007	W	W	Ongoing			

	Actions	Target Date	Resource Implications			EEBC Responsible Officer	Comments	Required Outcomes
			Time	Cost	Resource (one-off /ongoing)			
<b>Miscellaneous</b>								
14	To produce an IT Systems Stakeholder & Information Document, this includes a reference to data quality; and review annually.	End March 2007	W	W	One-off and ongoing	Mark Lumley, Head of IT	These will be produced for those IT systems that generate performance information e.g. Uniform.	Improved accountability for data quality in IT systems.
15	To monitor the delivery of this Action Plan on a quarterly basis.	From 1 January 2007	W	W	Ongoing	Sara Childs, Service Improvement Manager		Improved accountability for data quality.

W = Within budget / within current resources

## **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.

Much time and money is spent on the activities and systems involved in collecting and analysing the data that underlies performance information, and the Audit Commission says that despite this, there remains a prevailing lack of confidence in much of this data. *Please note that this is a general comment relating to all local authorities and the NHS, not to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council.* As increasing reliance is placed on this information in performance management and assessment regimes, the need for reliable data has become more critical.

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

- Best Value Performance indicators.
- Statutory returns / data sets (e.g. to the Department for Works & Pensions; Department for Communities & Local Government).
- Quarterly monitoring returns e.g. Government Office for the South East (GOSE) reports.
- 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 Best Value Improvement Plans.
- Progress against Actions Plans (e.g. Communications Action Plan to support the Communications Strategy).

### Information Governance

Good quality, reliable data enables the sharing and use of information with partner agencies.

## Appendix Two: Developing the Data Quality Strategy

---

The Council recognises that accurate performance data is a crucial element of a robust and proactive performance management system. Accurate data is essential for both internal management and external scrutiny of the Council's activities. It is important for the efficient and effective running of the Council's services to have accurate information both about the volume and quality of services that we are providing, which is fit for purpose and represents an accurate and timely manner for the Council's activities..

### Diagnostic – Identifying where we are now and where we want to be

#### Identifying where we are now

In July 2006 the Audit Commission undertook an unexpected inspection on our data quality systems, in place of the usual annual Best Value Performance Indicator audit. Stage 1 of this new approach involved looking at our management arrangements for data quality. The objective of this stage was to determine whether proper corporate management arrangements for data quality are in place, and whether these are being applied in practice. The findings contribute to the auditor's conclusion under the Code of Audit Practice on the audited body's arrangements to secure value for money (VFM Conclusion).

We were assessed to be consistently above minimum requirements for data quality, at **Level 3**, against the descriptions in the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry for Data Quality. *Please note that the possible ratings were Level 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest. It is understood that the majority of local authorities have been awarded a Level 2.*

Areas of strength with regards to EEBC's data quality management arrangements, documented by the Audit Commission, include:

- High level commitment to good data quality.
- Providing good support to staff involved in preparing and presenting performance information.
- Having robust information collection and reporting systems, which are well supported by Service Improvement Unit staff and underpinned by local systems.
- These systems leading to improved data quality – new processes implemented in the past couple of years have addressed identified data quality shortfalls and improved the quality of information and reporting. This has resulted in the number of qualifications (where the Audit Commission validates the data as "disqualified" due to inaccuracies and having no supporting evidence) falling progressively and no qualifications being made in 2004/05.
- The changes to the overall performance management framework in the past couple of years, in response to issues identified by the Audit Commission.

As a result of the Data Quality Inspection, and the gaps identified in the Key Lines of Enquiry for Data Quality, the Audit Commission has identified areas where we could further improve our approach to data quality. These areas include:

- Not having a formal Data Quality Strategy – the Commission felt we are missing an opportunity to consider data quality across the organisation and establish a clear framework for consolidation and improvement.
- Not routinely reporting on data quality, resulting in us not regularly assessing areas of data quality weakness or risk. (The Commission has noted that this is not affecting the quality of performance information).
- Needing to refine existing processes to meet the tests included in the Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry for Data Quality.

## Identifying where we want to be

Several recommendations were made by the Audit Commission, which are listed below. These reflect the main variances in our practice from the Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry on management arrangements for data quality:

- R1 Consider the Council's existing management arrangements for data quality and prepare a corporate data strategy which anticipates future data quality requirements, sets data quality objectives and incorporates a delivery plan with clearly defined actions, responsibilities and timescales to support improvement.
- R2 Review job profiles and personal targets to ensure consistent specification of data quality responsibilities across services.
- R3 Analyse results of the Service Improvement Unit's review of performance information and report on data quality and risks to data quality as part of performance reporting.
- R4 Maintain a corporate overview of local systems to provide high level assurance that procedures are in place to ensure data quality within local systems. Undertake periodic reviews of controls by tracking a sample of returns back to source data.
- R5 Carry out a corporate assessment of information sharing with partners and contractors to establish the extent of information exchange and the implications in terms of legality, confidentiality and data quality.

The Council strives to seek continuous improvement in everything that it does, and as such, wishes to progress with the recommendations made by the Audit Commission. We also wish to maintain the status of Level 3, and pursue some of the areas cited as needing to be in place to achieve Level 4. However, we need to develop an action plan which is proportionate to risk, and further promote and embed awareness of data quality issues across the Council.

## Drivers of Change

There are several areas of activity that will have an impact on delivering the future possibility and way forward. Identifying these drivers for change will take us from current reality to future possibility. These are the key areas we can take action and that create real leverage in shifting us from current reality to the future possibility.

Internal Drivers	External Drivers
Recognising the importance of reliable information for the delivery and management of excellent services.	The Audit Commission's 'Data Quality' agenda through the new Key Lines of Enquiry.
Needing to respond to the recommendations made by the Audit Commission following the Data Quality Inspection in line with the change in auditing approach for performance indicators.	The Comprehensive Performance Assessment framework, by which all local authorities are assessed and judged on performance.
Needing to formalise the current arrangements for performance management to explicitly include reference to data quality.	