Hastings Borough Council

Draft

Data Quality Policy

September 2007

Draft HBC Data Quality Policy

1.   Introduction

Hasting Borough Council (HBC) recognises the importance of using reliable data for decision-making purposes. Councillors, managers and partner organisations need to know that they can rely on information produced to make sound decisions on spending, service planning or performance improvement. Local people also need to have trust and faith in the quality of decisions made.

We have a duty to ensure that data is 'fit for purpose' and that we aim for data to be produced on a 'right first time' basis. We do this through providing clear guidance and training to relevant staff and putting in place appropriate controls and other mechanisms aimed at checking and validating the data that is produced for decision making.

Implementation of this Data Quality Policy will support this Council's priorities and goals by ensuring that accurate and trustworthy data is used in decision making and planning processes.

2.   Background

External reviews of Council performance are becoming less dependent on formal inspection and are more about measuring successful outcomes, which in turn rely on accurate reporting.

The Audit Commission has developed an approach to the review of management arrangements for data quality. The new approach (from 2006) will enable them to form a judgement on the adequacy of arrangements in place to monitor the quality of performance information. This judgement forms one of the criteria on which the Council's Use of Resources judgement is based.

This policy has been produced to set out clear and precise objectives for maintaining and improving data quality within Hastings Borough Council. It is guided by The Audit Commissions approach to Data Quality (DQ) and based upon their standards for better quality data published in September 2007[1].

It was agreed and approved by the Council's Audit Committee on 25 September 2007.

3.   Policy Aims
This policy supports the underlying principles of:
- Delivering effective local government, based on excellent customer care, which is open and responsive to residents' wishes.
- and
- Delivering value for money services, through the avoidance of duplication and error and aiming to provide best value at all levels of activity.

- This policy:
- will ensure Hastings Borough Council will be amongst the leading authorities in the collection and reporting of accurate and reliable performance information in order to assist the decision making/ planning process
- will provide a framework to ensure action is taken to meet the data quality objectives which have been set

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[1] Improving information to support decision making: Standards for Better Data Quality: A Framework to support improvement in data quality in the public section available form www.audit-commission.gov.uk

- will meet internal and external audit requirements.

4 Objectives

The Council's Data Quality objectives are:

- To ensure that the Council's data is relevant, accurate, timely and complete;
- To ensure that data is held and released lawfully;
- To ensure that data is held securely and systems for producing data are robust;
- To ensure that where data is exchanged with other organisations appropriate protocols are in place;
- To ensure that the quality of data is regularly monitored and checked;
- To ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place for ensuring staff are aware of the Council's data quality requirements and provided with suitable training.

5 The importance of Data Quality

The Council's political and managerial leaders need to know how effective the Council is, not just in terms of individual service delivery but whether the services provided are making a positive impact on the people of Hastings. This knowledge is only achieved if management information is up to date and accurate.

Good quality management information is important for sound decision-making and it is vital that the information used to inform, manage and plan is accurate, therefore adequate data quality arrangements must be in place across the Council.

Poor quality data means that comparisons and benchmarking will fail and areas for improvement cannot be easily identified. Unreliable data could also result in performance indicator qualification, have a negative impact on external assessments and our organisational reputation or partnership working.

It is not possible to apply a standard process across all areas of the Council as different methods are used to measure performance. However, a standard approach to accurate data collection can be applied in order to ensure confidence in the quality of data used.

6 Organisation and arrangements

Members: The Deputy Leader is the Lead Member with overall strategic responsibility for performance management and data quality.

The Council's Use of Resources performance is reported to the Audit Committee, who, in turn include data quality issues in their annual report to Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committees play a key role in monitoring the Council's performance and will require and seek assurances about the quality of the data underpinning quarterly performance reports.

Officers: The Deputy Chief Executive (DCE) has overall strategic responsibility for performance management and data quality. This responsibility is cascaded as follows:

Operational responsibility for data quality rests with individual Heads of Service (HoS) and the HoS Operational Board is responsible for delivering continued improvement.

The Head of the Policy and Performance is responsible for co-ordinating the Council's performance management and data quality processes and through the work of the Policy and Performance team takes steps to assure the Council that performance information and data presented in the Corporate Plan, quarterly monitoring reports etc. is accurate, timely, proportionate and used to inform decisions. The Policy & Performance team and individual service managers work closely to help improve data quality, where required.

The Council's Performance Indicator Group (P.I.G.) is made up of staff employed throughout the organisation that have responsibility for data and performance recording, reporting or management. PIG members are also the 'Performance Champions' who embed a culture of performance management and ensure accurate performance information is supplied to the Policy and Performance Team.

A number of individual officers have direct data quality responsibility in key Council areas, these include Personnel, Revenues and Benefits, Waste and Recycling and Community Safety.

This policy is also a key corporate policy that applies to all employees of HBC since all have a responsibility for ensuring good data quality in their day to day work.

7   Data Quality Priorities

Prior to development of this Policy, regular and on-going attempts have already been made to assure ourselves of data quality. These include external inspections and processes e.g. Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, external audits of PIs undertaken by the Audit Commission, internal audits done by our in-house Audit Service as well as the rolling programme of work undertaken by Policy and Performance with managers and Performance Indicator Group (PIG) colleagues.

The key message from the Audit Commission is that as public services, we need reliable accurate and timely information to manage services and account for performance. That said, as a sector we spend a great deal of time and money on collecting and analysing the data that underlies performance information. The Commission do also recognise that although good quality data is essential for reliable performance and financial information, a balance must be struck between the importance of the information and the cost of collecting the supporting data with the necessary accuracy, detail and timeliness.

Therefore, to achieve this balance, as a public body we need to identify our information priorities and ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to secure the quality of their data.

Our data quality priorities mirror those of our performance priorities, i.e. although we strive to achieve our targeted performance against all our Performance Indicators, we also recognise that with limited resources, we sometimes have to focus on meeting the higher priority ones. This proportionate approach means our priorities for Key PI's/data quality can be categorised as Gold Silver and Bronze.

Gold Standard –   PIs and data used to support the BVPIs, LAA targets and Community Strategy Targets, i.e. those that must be externally reported, are high impact, and high public profile and can relate to partnership working.

Silver Standard -   Local Performance Indicators – high impact for service users, and service delivery decisions and resource allocation

Bronze Standard - Management Indicators - where information in only used by service managers.

Even within the standards set out above, there needs to be some sub-categorisation, as the resources available to both ourselves and external bodies to regularly review data quality needs to be proportional. Priorities for data quality within the standards above are areas/activities that are high risk, high cost, underperforming either against our targets or in comparison to others or over time, hothouse PIs, and those that have poor satisfaction ratings.

8.   Data Quality Assurance

In order to assure ourselves and the public about the quality of our data, the Council needs to ensure it has identified and applied standards, assessed performance and provided guidelines in order to enable improvement. We do this in the following ways:

- All staff involved in the data gathering process are given clear guidance on what quality data is from their manager, additional support and advice is also available corporately.

- The Policy and Performance Team work with the PIG members and individuals to communicate any external performance indicator amendments/updates to ensure appropriate officers are made aware of such changes and work with them to understand any impact these changes may have on reporting mechanisms.

- A number of performance indicators are identified every year by the Audit Commission as high risk indicators. These indicators are scrutinised on data quality and recommendations made where appropriate. The Policy and Performance Team works with the affected services and co-ordinates responses back to the Audit Commission.

- The Council also has in place a formal risk management process, used to identify, monitor and review risks at all levels within the organisation. It is the responsibility of identified lead officers to ensure that any potential risks which may arise relating to reliability and accuracy of data are recorded and managed in line with the corporate process.

- Development of information/guidance for the Council's data collection systems is the responsibility of the individual system administrator, who will consult all interested parties, including Policy and Performance on any system developments.

- The Policy and Performance Team undertake a rolling programme of Data Quality Assurance (DQA) reviews, prioritising Gold Standard PIs. (see below for details)

- Any recommendations made following Audit Commission or internal audit inspections or reviews are addressed through the relevant service area.

9. Data Quality Reviews

The DQA process, managed by the Policy and Performance Team will review and document sources of data, systems and processes used to record data, responsibilities and reporting lines, staff training, learning, risks, reporting audiences/duplication issues, and undertake a 'walk-through' of data capture, data quality checks on systems producing information.

The conclusions of the DQA review will be reported to service managers and/or Head of Service. The HoS will be responsible for signing–off the review to state they are satisfied with the arrangements underpinning the collection and reporting of the data they are responsible for.

Data Quality is a standard item on all quarterly Performance Review meeting agendas and the findings of DQA's will be reported to the relevant Directorate performance review meeting, as well as to the Corporate Resources Performance Review meeting, which will receive a regular update on the rolling programme of DQA's undertaken by P & P and others to assess data quality, to enable the Deputy Chief Executive and Lead Member to maintain a strategic overview.

This work will address the Gold Standard PIs and document why we are satisfied with the data supporting them.

10. Data Quality Culture & Awareness

Monitoring and review of data quality is part of the performance management framework and effective leadership is essential to further develop a quality culture in Hastings Borough Council.

The commitment to data quality will be one of the management "Must Do's" and communicated to staff at all levels by service managers.

Every member of staff entering, extracting or analysing data from any of the Council's information systems will have a responsibility to ensure it is accurate, up-to date, relevant and consistent.

11. Systems & Processes

In order to support sound business management the Council needs robust and effective systems in place:

- Heads of Service and Managers are responsible for ensuring that both manual and computerised systems are fit for purpose. Systems should be reviewed regularly and weaknesses addressed.

- Data collection and production systems should operate on a "right first time" principle and should not require extensive data manipulation or cleansing processes.

- Adequate training and support must be provided for staff using the Council's systems, with up to date user guides readily available.

- Regular reviews should be undertaken to ensure continuous improvement and will include consultation with stakeholders and regular system testing.

- Where possible information systems will include built in controls to minimise human error.

12   Security Arrangements

The Council will ensure that information systems are secure; including access controls, procedure notes and manuals.

IT severs are located in a locked secure room which uses an un-interruptible power supply and discs to protect against component failure.

Disaster recovery processes have been tested during trial and recent real situations. The results of these are reported to Heads of Service and Directors as appropriate and practices have been shared with IT managers across East Sussex.

A business continuity plan is in place, which identifies systems vital to the continued and effective functioning of the organisation.

13   Data Sharing

The Council ensures that all necessary legal, compliance and confidentiality standards are maintained in the sharing of data internally and externally.

Formal data sharing protocols have been established in the case of long-term external/third party arrangements such as the Sussex CADDIE (Crime And Disorder Data Information Exchange) scheme, to facilitate crime information exchange across Sussex.

Data provided through contracts with third parties will be validated where possible and if necessary the source identified in any formal management reports. When new contracts are issued, third party data will be validated to ensure that security and quality standards are maintained, through a DQA review undertaken by the P&P team and reported to the Performance Review meetings.

Hastings Borough Council is committed to open access to information under Freedom of Information. Our aims are:

- to publicise the information that is already available through the council's publication scheme.

- to ensure access to the publication scheme is made as easy as possible

- to uphold rights of access to information under Freedom of Information

- to presume that information is available, unless a Cabinet member, committee or officer can demonstrate a legitimate reason for withholding it

More information on this and Data Protection of personal information. can be found on the Council's website www.hastings.gov.uk

14 Further work

The Policy and Performance Team will lead on progressing actions to further embed and improve our Data Quality processes throughout the organisation, and progress will be reported annually to the Audit Committee.

Following the Audit Commission's annual assessment of Data Quality, if required, an action plan will be devised to respond to any recommendations made.

Jane Hartnell

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