

REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting:	19 March 2013
Subject:	Data Quality Assurance
Responsible Officer:	Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive, Alex Dewsnap, Divisional Director Strategic Commissioning
Scrutiny Lead	All
Member area:	
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Data Quality Policy

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

- 1.1. There are many examples of good work across the authority to improve and maintain high standards of data quality. Work to check accuracy and completeness of databases through exception reporting, reconciliations and trend analysis leads to a high level of data quality on many local systems. However, Harrow's approach to data quality has not been consistent across the authority, and recent problems have highlighted the need for a more robust approach to data quality assurance.
- 1.2. Current work on information management, security and governance provides aims to bring rigour and consistency to data quality across the authority. New Data Quality Procedures are being introduced and will be supported by compliance software to provide online training including compulsory test questions.
- 1.3. Additional assurance on data quality within Children's and Adults Social Care is being obtained via the work on the Information Governance Tool Kit which is being completed in preparation for the 'N3 connection' with NHS systems.
- 1.4. Data quality is being considered for inclusion in the Internal Audit plan for 2013-14.

1.5. The work above will inform the annual governance review and Annual Governance Statement, which is overseen by the Corporate Governance Group and GARM.

Recommendations:

1.6. Scrutiny Members are asked to note the work taking place across the authority to improve data quality.

1.7. Scrutiny Members may wish to indicate support for coverage of data quality in the 2013-14 internal audit plan.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

- 2.1. At the meeting of 14 November, Scrutiny Members asked that a report be submitted to the next meeting by the Assistant Chief Executive and Divisional Director of Strategic Commissioning on the issues raised in relation to performance data and data quality in Children's Services.
- 2.2. Following the meeting, the specific instances referred to above were discussed further in a meeting with the Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny - the Chair was invited but could not attend - and it was agreed that a report would be widened to consider data quality in relation to performance information across the local authority. This report provides details of the specific issues in children's services and further details of the work done across directorates to check and improve data quality for information that is used in monitoring performance internally and for submission to central government and regulators.

Background

- 2.3. High quality data is vital to the local authority to manage services, inform service users and regulators, to aid decision making and account for performance. Poor data quality can be the result of a lack of training or individual error, but can also point towards inadequate systems or checks within the data cycle. There is always a risk that individuals will make errors in entering data, and it is crucial to have adequate levels of support, systems and controls to minimise the risk that inaccurate data will be used within the authority or submitted to central government.
- 2.4. There are examples of good practice on data quality from across the authority which are detailed in the remainder of this report. However, the approach is not consistent, and recent issues around data quality, most notably in the Youth Offending Team, suggest that more

attention is needed. Work has already begun at a corporate level to provide more consistency and rigour to data quality across the authority.

- 2.5. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) of the Council, which refers to the importance of the 'reliability, integrity, timeliness and usefulness of information is reviewed annually by GARM. In its work on the AGS during 2012-13, Internal Audit noted that although Harrow has a Data Quality Policy in place (See appendix A) it is not up to date nor consistently applied. As a result, the Information Manager has agreed to review the policy as part of the work on improving compliance around information security. This is due to be completed by March 2013.
- 2.6. As part of the cross-council work on Information Management, policy compliance software is being introduced to improve understanding and ownership of data, and all managers will be required to complete an online training module. This module will require managers to demonstrate knowledge of the new data quality policy through a compulsory test.
- 2.7. Risks around information management are also considered as part of the work on Management Assurance that take place annually across the authority. The Information Management Team is introducing stronger systems and controls around information security, including annual risk assessments and establishment of information owners and controllers, making responsibility for action clear. 'Information Asset Registers' have been established and are maintained for each Directorate.
- 2.8. The Information Asset Register provides the foundation for work on data quality as it identifies all of the important databases held within the authority, including those which provide information for key decisions, for planning and commissioning, for monitoring performance and for providing information to central government and regulators. Data quality is being considered for inclusion in the 2013-14 internal audit plan, which is currently under development. The plan is risk based, and although the data issues in the YOT will feed into the risk assessment, it is not expected that data quality would have a particularly high risk rating corporately, as there have been no other major problems reported in the last year.

Data quality in Children's Services

Youth Offending Team

- 2.9. The YOT was inspected in September 2011 by HM Inspectorate of Probation and received an unsatisfactory result. In addition to a number of weaknesses in the work of the YOT, poor recording on the case management system and data quality were identified as areas for urgent attention.

- 2.10. The improvement plan which was developed following the inspection identified that major work was needed to ensure that YOT workers were recording assessments of and interventions for, young offenders in an accurate and timely way. There had been no regular, consistent management information produced on completeness and timeliness of records, nor of management oversight of the work. Significant changes have been made to staff and management in the YOT and there is now regular reporting of these issues.
- 2.11. Managers are now informed of missing, incomplete and inconsistent records on a monthly basis and have been able to take action to significantly improve data quality. Ongoing support is being provided by a dedicated analyst to enable staff to record activity accurately and completely. Steady improvement is now being reported to the Youth Offending Executive Board.

Children's Social Care

- 2.12. Children's social care is heavily scrutinised by central government and inspectors. Data is submitted to DfE each year covering a broad range of activity around child protection, children looked after, fostering, adoptions and more. A detailed record of social care interventions for every Child in Need is submitted to DfE annually from which a number of performance indicators are calculated. The Children's performance team carries out a wide range of checks on every data return before submission including reconciliations with local records, internal consistency checks and comparison with previous periods. DfE have given Harrow's social care returns the highest available data quality rating of 'good' for each of the 4 years since this measure was introduced.
- 2.13. In addition to quality assuring statutory returns, work takes place to improve the quality of social care records held on Harrow's database. Monthly data quality reports are produced which identify missing and inconsistent data and these are provided to social workers and managers for action. The Children and Families Management Team holds each social work team to account on the completeness and accuracy of its records. This work is supported through regular 'Data Days' across the services where teams take a day out of normal activity to bring records up to date. Maintaining a high quality electronic social care record in line with statutory requirements is an ongoing challenge in every local authority, and continues to be a priority for Harrow.
- 2.14. The issue referred to at O&S in November related to an increase in referrals to social care that resulted in no further action ('NFA'). It was an example where poor practice showed up through monitoring of data over time. Senior management became aware that the rate of referrals resulting in NFA was increasing to unexpected levels. Initially, it wasn't obvious why the rate would be increasing, but further data analysis and checking of case files showed that cases were being closed and reopened to improve the chances of meeting assessment timescales. Appropriate management action was taken as a result.

Further examples of work on data quality across Children and Families

- 2.15. Education data submitted to DfE each year includes pupil level data around attendance and achievement. Some of this is submitted directly by the schools with the local authority carrying out a support and quality assurance function. Other data returns are collected and submitted directly by the local authority education team and are subject to a series of internal checks before data is sent to DfE.
- 2.16. The data quality requirements of the DfE are high and both the schools and the authority also expect a very high level of accuracy in pupil records. Checking is done to ensure that records are brought up to date in the schools before termly census data is submitted. In addition, dedicated staff in the local authority work to ensure consistency and a high level of accuracy in the central pupil database which is populated by weekly uploads from the 60 individual schools' databases. Any data quality issues, for example, an unexpected change in a child's details, are checked with the school each week. It is vital that this database is kept accurate as it is used in school place planning, admissions and for a wide range of monitoring.
- 2.17. Data about families using, and services provided at, our Children's Centres is held on the eStart database. The data input at each Children's Centre is checked monthly by the Early Years Analyst, who runs reports on completeness and consistency of data. A priority for Children's Centres is to ensure that they are accessible to the most vulnerable families in the community and it is therefore crucial that information such as ethnicity, disability and worklessness are captured. The Early Years Analyst has provided training and carried out data quality assurance that has meant that the recording of such characteristics has improved year on year. Trend analysis is also an important part of this work as the service aims to increase its 'reach' to Harrow's changing community each year. Progress on improving local knowledge of communities and service users was recognised by Ofsted at the last Children's Centre inspection

Data quality work in other directorates

Adults Social Care

- 2.18. Monthly Data Quality reports are produced which both provide a 'health check' of the indicators being monitored locally and a series of more general data quality indicators, highlighting missing and inaccurate data. Monthly case audits are completed giving a more detailed analysis of randomly selected files. Issues which are identified are passed on to the relevant service managers and highlighted at Data quality meetings chaired by the Head of Commissioning (who also acts as the Caldicott Guardian for the authority).
- 2.19. Recent work by the Data Quality Analyst identified that support plans were missing from some service user records, and Adults Social Care have made it a priority to ensure that these plans are complete and

held on the appropriate case file. A control is being introduced so that a budget cannot be allocated until a support plan is fully in place.

- 2.20. Adults Social Care sees consistently high performance in satisfaction for reablement and has used data quality checks as a means to verify this. Through cross referencing the number of complaints received against those that report their satisfaction it was possible to confirm that satisfaction with the support from the in-house reablement team continues to be more than 95%.

Public Health

- 2.21. In preparation for the transfer of Public Health to the local authority from April 2013, a standard NHS Information Governance checklist is being completed, which covers a wide range of issues including data quality. This is required to be completed by March 2013 to enable Harrow to access Public Health IT systems. The work focuses in particular on Children's and Adults Social Care data and the work is providing additional assurance in these areas.

- 2.22. Achievement of the required standards of governance will enable an 'N3 connection' to be established giving access to national applications including NHS 'Spine' Services, Choose and Book and NHSmail.

Housing

- 2.23. In housing, data returns to government are validated at point of entry onto system. The checks do not allow for data which is outside of tolerance margins. While collating the data, housing staff carry out a detailed review to identify any items which will fall outside these margins. Where there are significant variations or inconsistencies, work is carried out with managers to understand and make corrections where necessary.

Enterprise and Environment

- 2.24. The main database in E&E is MVM which records public realm activity. Data is analysed and a quarterly assessment is given by the Service Manager, and further work is carried out on any significant or unexpected changes in data. Trend data is analysed and any inconsistencies are investigated, with an explanation being sought from the data owner.
- 2.25. Performance data around waste undergoes a number of statistical reviews, and it must pass through checks to ensure accuracy. Once the data for a quarter has been entered it must be 'rolled up' by the inputter to allow sign off to the next level. A separate authorisation is carried out by a manager, who has a separate password and access rights to the website. Data is then released to the National Level for validation. The latter stages of this data validation are carried out by organisations external to the local authority.

- 2.26. Historically, quality checks identified lack of separation of duties – e.g. the officer calculating the indicator was also the officer reviewing the indicator. Clear roles and responsibilities were established, and the system is now more robust, with a separation of data production and authorisation.
- 2.27. For performance on street cleanliness, data is produced and recorded by an independent consultancy. Areas are graded according to their cleanliness (litter, graffiti, detritus etc), and a photograph is also taken, and stored on a database, so the grading can be traced back to source. The process is transparent, and there is a clear audit trail from source to submission to central government.
- 2.28. Data on Planning and Building Regulations applications is also held on the MVM database. The details are input by Technical Support Officers (TSOs) and random sampling is carried out monthly to ensure information is reconciled with the original.
- 2.29. Data regarding Planning applications (decisions, application type and time taken) is provided to Department of Communities and Local Government on a quarterly basis as a statutory requirement. This data is manually checked for accuracy on a random basis. Returns for new house commencements also go to DCLG on a quarterly basis. The information is extracted from the database via validated Crystal Report writing software and reviewed for accuracy.
- 2.30. To improve data quality specific training is given to TSOs to ensure that correct fields are completed on the system. An increasing level of errors was identified by sample checking around one year ago and management action was taken. Additional training has been provided and the error rate has reduced significantly.

Financial Implications

- 2.31. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Performance Issues

- 2.32. Good data quality is necessary to produce meaningful performance information and underpins all performance indicators used in the authority. Examples of the work that is completed to ensure that performance indicators are accurate is included in the detail above. Harrow Council receives strong indications from central government that data submitted in statutory returns is of good quality.

Environmental Impact

- 2.33. There is no environmental impact associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications

2.34. There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

Equalities implications

2.35. No equalities impact assessment has been undertaken in relation to this report as no changes to service delivery are proposed. However, data quality helps the Council to analyse equalities implications, and therefore allows members to pay due regard to their decisions.

Corporate Priorities

2.36. Good data quality supports all of the Council's Corporate Priorities

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Emma Stabler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 6 th March 2013		
Name: Sarah Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 5 th March 2013		

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact:

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Background Papers:

Data Quality Policy