

HARROW COUNCIL'S DATA QUALITY POLICY

1. Background

The Council recognises the importance of basing decisions upon high quality information. The risks in not identifying poor data quality is that information may be misleading, decisions may be flawed, resources may be wasted, poor services may not be improved and policy may be ill founded.¹

Data forms the basis of the work that the council undertakes by itself or in partnership. Data supports our planning process, helps us to identify what we need to do and how to deliver high quality services. It underpins our performance management framework, which helps us to assess when things are working well and when we need to take action to make improvements. We also use data to help us focus services around our customers and ensure that we are making the best use of resources and delivering value for money.

This policy is intended to address the quality of information/data used for decision making and ensure it is fit for purpose. This document sets out the expectations for data quality across the organisation and provides specific policy guidelines for performance data.

The aims of this policy document are:

- *To support the delivery of the Council's objectives and priorities*
- *To develop and embed a data quality culture which can assure the quality of data produced*
- *To become a leading authority on data quality*
- *To provide high quality data to support effective decision making*
- *Meet external audit requirements*

The policy also provides employees and partners with a standard framework to guide what actions are required to meet data quality objectives which will help us to achieve audit standards and requirements.

2. Characteristics of good quality data

'Quality Data' – data will be regarded as high quality if it is:

- Accurate (represents a fair picture of performance)
- Valid (in an agreed format which conforms to recognised Council and national standards or definitions)
- Reliable (data reflects stable and consistent high quality data collection)
- Timely (available when needed and within a reasonable time period)
- Relevant (only relevant data of value is collected, analysed and used)
- Complete (all relevant data is recorded)

¹ Improving information to support decision making: Standards for better quality data (The Audit Commission) March 2007

Accuracy	<p>Data should be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes. Where possible data should be captured once only, although it may have multiple uses. Accuracy is most likely to be secured if data is captured as close to the point of activity as possible. There must be evidence that data has been checked and validated for accuracy. Checking all data is impractical and sample sizes should be based on risk.</p> <p>The need for accuracy should be balanced against the use, cost and effort of collection. Where compromises have to be made on accuracy, the resulting limitations of the data should be clear to its users.</p>
Validity	<p>Data should be recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements, including the correct application of any rules or definitions. This will ensure consistency between periods and with similar organisations. Where proxy data is used to compensate for an absence of actual data, organisations must consider how well this data is able to satisfy the intended purpose.</p>
Reliability	<p>Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time, whether using manual or computer-based systems, or a combination. Managers and stakeholders should be confident that changes in performance targets reflect real changes rather than variations in data collection approaches or methods.</p>
Timeliness	<p>Data should be captured as quickly as possible after the event or activity and must be available for the intended use within a reasonable time period. Data must be available quickly and frequently enough to support information needs and to influence the appropriate level of service or management decisions.</p>
Relevance	<p>Data should be defined/selected, collected, recorded and analysed with the intended use and audience in mind.</p>
Completeness	<p>Data requirements should be clearly specified based on the information needs of the organisation and data collection processes matched to these requirements. Monitoring missing, incomplete, or invalid records can provide an indication of data quality and can also point to problems in the recording of certain data items.</p>

3. Policy Statement

The Council needs reliable, accurate and timely information with which to manage services, inform uses and to account for our performance. Many decisions, often complex, are made about our priorities and how resources are used based on the data available. Service users and more widely members of the public also need accessible information to make informed decisions. As increasing reliance is placed on information gathered there is an increased need for reliable data. Good quality data is the essential ingredient for supporting decision making and the Council needs to put in place arrangements to secure the quality of data.

The council is committed to:

- Communicating roles and responsibilities necessary to achieve high quality data
- Having robust systems and procedures to manage data quality
- Ensuring decisions are proportionate to the level of data quality
- Investing in our people so that they have the right skills for delivering high quality data
- Recognising the integral role of data in managing and improving the delivery of our services.

- Working to exceed the data quality standards set by the Audit Commission.

4. Desirable Outcomes

Governance

- Data quality is fully integrated into the council's planning, monitoring and reporting processes
- Responsibility and accountabilities for data quality is clearly defined for the council and its partners
- Information meets the defined characteristics of data quality
- Lead members, officers and partners understand the importance of data quality

Policies and procedures

- All significant information systems which provide strategic information have accessible guideline documentation
- Have in place information sharing protocols

Systems and Processes

- Arrangements for collecting, recording, analysing and reporting data is part of the business planning process
- The interface between systems and processes are streamlined
- The level of checks is proportionate to the value of the data and risk of poor quality
- Contingency arrangements are in place to ensure data can be delivered when circumstances change
- Quality standards and frequency of exchange are agreed when data is provided by third parties or shared externally
- Systems and processes are fit for purpose

People and Skills

- Staff have the knowledge, competencies and capacity to provide quality data
- Council officers work closely with partners to minimise data quality issues

Data use and reporting

- Data is focused upon directing and supporting organisational priorities and support decision making
- Data is accessible and meaningful to the user
- Data quality issues are taken into account in any interpretation and analysis
- Data provided by our partners is fit for purpose

5 Non-compliance

- Commitment to data quality principles is essential in ensuring that the aims of this policy are achieved.
- Any non-compliance, including partners signed up to this policy, will be reviewed and rectified.
- Appropriate action will be taken to rectify non-compliance, including an open review of management arrangements for data quality for owners of non complaint data.