

## Data Quality Policy

### Purpose of Report

#### The HSP Board is requested to:

1. Adopt the Data Quality Policy principals and Audit Commission standards for the Partnership

### 1. Overview

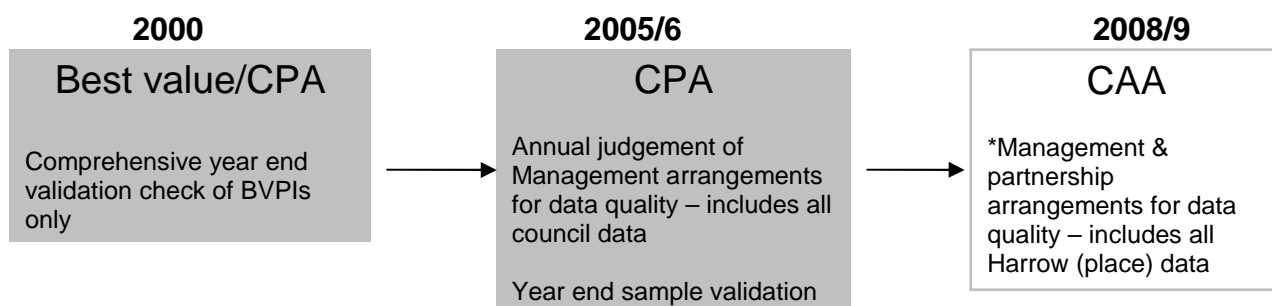
- 1.1 It is important that decisions are based on high quality performance information. The risks associated in not identifying poor quality data are:
  - information may be misleading;
  - decisions may be flawed;
  - resources may be wasted;
  - poor services may not be improved and;
  - policy may be ill founded.
- 1.2 The council has developed a data quality policy which is intended to address the quality of data used for making decisions and ensure it is fit for purpose.
- 1.3 The policy will help the partnership to achieve the following outcomes:

1. To improve how we collect and use information in order to deliver better services across the council and the Harrow Strategic Partnership.

2. To respond to the increasing importance placed upon Data Quality by the Audit Commission as part of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

### 2. Background

In 2005/6 the Audit Commission changed its approach to the annual review of performance indicators to a more risk-based approach and also included a review of the management arrangements for data quality. The changed approach has largely been driven by the notion that good quality data is an essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information to support sound decision-making.



The new approach enabled the Audit Commission to form a judgement on the adequacy of the arrangements the council has in place to monitor the quality of its data. This

judgement formed one of the criteria on which the 'Value for Money' conclusion was based.

In 2008/9 this judgement will be extended to include partnership arrangements for data quality and the management arrangements of partnership bodies - \* further details are yet to be published by the Audit Commission in late summer through the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The Audit Commission will be looking for the following standards in regard to partnerships:

- Leader members and officers on partnership arrangements are fully aware of the need for data quality when sharing information through partnerships
- Data quality objectives are reflected in partnership arrangements
- Where partnership arrangements exist, there is an agreed framework for monitoring and review of the quality of data shared between partners
- The data quality policy covers data quality requirements on partnership working, where relevant
- Non-compliance of data quality policies and procedures within partnerships are pursued and rectified
- The council consults with partners when developing or implementing new information and systems
- The council keeps partners informed of identified issues and how these are being addressed
- The Council has robust assurance from partners that processes, which supply information to the Council through partnership arrangements, are secure.
- There is formal data sharing protocols, which specifies the responsibilities of partners to provide data which is 'fit for purpose'
- If the council contracts out services the service level agreement should state how performance is to be reported and that the data is of the required quality
- Third party suppliers of data are able to demonstrate to the Council that key data is fit for purpose in accordance with the data sharing protocol
- Data and information staff work closely with partners to address data sharing problems
- Data quality champions or information staff strengthen the feedback loops with partners by identifying and sharing information on potential data quality issues

2.2 A Data Quality Policy (*Appendix 1*) was developed by the Council to provide a reference tool for all staff detailing what the authority expects in terms of Data Quality.

### **3. Data Quality Policy**

3.1 The Data Quality Policy outlines the characteristics of good quality data and formalises the council's commitment to achieving them.

3.2 Harrow Council needs complete, valid, reliable, relevant, accurate and timely information to manage services and account for performance. This information is increasingly being provided by or shared with our partners. The council needs to be confident that data that is reported is robust and fit for purpose and vice versa.

3.4 The policy will be kept under review by the Councils Corporate Performance Improvement Team and will be amended as necessary to reflect any changes in national

standards or requirements, as well as redefining local practices and monitoring arrangements where applicable.

# 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 are 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 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 enable an effective decision-making process supported by quality data*
- *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)

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

<b>Accuracy</b>	<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><b>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.</b></p>
<b>Validity</b>	<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.</p> <p>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>
<b>Reliability</b>	<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 progress toward performance targets reflects real changes rather than variations in data collection approaches or methods.</p>
<b>Timeliness</b>	<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>
<b>Relevance</b>	<p>Data captured should be relevant to the purposes for which it is used. This entails periodic review of requirements to reflect changing needs. It may be necessary to capture data at the point of activity which is relevant only for other purposes, rather for the current intervention. Quality assurance and feedback processes are needed to ensure the quality of such data.</p>
<b>Completeness</b>	<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
- To 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
- Information meets with 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 has 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

#### **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.