

# Data Quality Strategy

Eastbourne Borough  
Council

January 2008

**Data Quality** - The state of completeness, validity, consistency, timeliness and accuracy that makes data appropriate for a specific use in operations, decision making and planning.

## **Background**

1. Eastbourne Borough Council is committed to continuous improvement and effective planning. This requires making decisions based on reliable, timely and robust data.
2. The Council recognises the importance of ensuring the highest level of data quality that can be reasonably achieved and maintained.
3. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that the Council maintain a consistent approach to improving and maintaining a high standard of data quality across all of its service areas.

## **Scope**

4. Effective Data Quality management needs to consider the following elements:
  - 4.1. **Awareness:** everyone needs to recognise the need for good data quality and the role they play in delivering this across the Council.
    - 4.1.1. Data quality is the responsibility of every member of staff entering, extracting or analysing data from any of the Council's information systems. New staff are made aware of this as part of their corporate induction and detailed responsibilities should be covered in their initial training period.
    - 4.1.2. Commitment to effective data quality needs to be communicated clearly throughout the Council to enforce this message. Regular monitoring of data quality issues at a corporate level will help to reinforce this approach.
  - 4.2. **Calculation/Input:** there need to be adequate controls in place to ensure that all data calculated, reported and used is correct to the best of our abilities and at all times.
    - 4.2.1. Figures produced by any system are only as good as the data entered into them in the first place. We should aim for 100% accuracy 100% of the time with regards to inputting data and ensure that all inputting officers have adequate training, resources and support to enable this.
    - 4.2.2. Wherever possible, data should be entered into systems on an ongoing basis rather than stored up and input in large blocks. This will minimise the risk of errors being made and simplify verification.

- 4.2.3. Regular monitoring should be in place for all systems to ensure data is not double entered/counted. Safeguards can be built into the systems themselves where appropriate or take the form of checks prior to the data entry itself. There should be regular spot checks to ensure these are working correctly.
- 4.2.4. Where possible, evidence of data calculations and other relevant supporting information should be saved alongside the data itself. This constitutes a vital part of the audit process and will simplify the annual external audit procedures as well as our own internal reassurances.
- 4.3. **Guidance:** We need to ensure that when calculating and reporting performance information, we are following the most up-to-date and complete version of any guidance at all times.
  - 4.3.1. Definitions and requirements for performance data are subject to clarifications and updates. It is important that all officers responsible for collecting data make regular checks to ensure they are using the latest and most complete definitions.
  - 4.3.2. The Policy and Performance Officer will be responsible for circulating updates to definitions as and when they are made available as well as periodical data quality/performance management newsletters and updates on the Council's intranet pages.
- 4.4. **Verification:** We need to ensure that there are adequate checking and sign-off procedures in place to avoid inaccurate data being used or reported.
  - 4.4.1. Data requirements should be designed along the principle of getting it right first time in order to avoid wasting limited time and resources identifying and correcting errors later on.
  - 4.4.2. However, even when there are robust controls in place, it is still possible for errors to be made. Therefore, all areas where data is calculated and reported should be subject to stratified quality checking and sign off starting as close to the point of entry as possible.
  - 4.4.3. These checks should encompass double checking calculations against source data, comparisons to historical returns and targeted figures and audit spot checks on a wider scale.
  - 4.4.4. When using data supplied by a third party or partner organisation, we need to ensure that they operate to as high a data quality standard as we do ourselves. These organisations should either have their own data quality strategies/assurance in place or adhere to our set of standards set out in this document.

- 4.4.5. Although, responsibility for data verification lies within departments with overall responsibility held by the relevant CMT lead, assistance and further checking will be provided by the Policy & Performance Officer on a regular basis and Internal Audit checks will also be scheduled to investigate data collection procedures and identify any areas of potential risk.
- 4.5. **Systems:** It is important that the systems used by the authority are able to produce accurate and relevant data and that the officers using them are able to do so correctly and fully.
- 4.5.1. At this time, the Council operates a number of specialised systems within departments which are used for storing, calculating and reporting data.
- 4.5.2. Staff using these systems should be trained fully in their use including regular refresher training where appropriate so that they can minimise the risk of user error and utilise the systems to their full for the benefit of the Council and its customers.
- 4.5.3. There should be a named officer responsible for any data quality issues regarding each system. This includes monitoring the accuracy of data produced and ensuring the system's output meets the needs of the department and Council's performance requirements.
- 4.5.4. Regular checks on system information are a vital part of the audit process, these need to be scheduled and carried out in a timely manner in order to verify data used by the Council in its performance management processes. Failure to do so, could lead to data being qualified and may have financial implications as well as impacting on decision making.
- 4.5.5. As well as training, staff should also have permanent access to guidance documents for using appropriate systems especially with regards to calculating performance information accurately.
- 4.6. **Communication:** It is not enough to ensure data is calculated and used correctly, it important that relevant information is also communicated to those who need it in a clear and timely manner
- 4.6.1. Reporting accurate information regularly enables good decision making and ultimately improved performance.
- 4.6.2. It is becoming more important and beneficial for the Council to share performance information with a wider audience including partner organisations and the general public. By ensuring data accuracy throughout the collection and reporting processes rather than relying on backward looking audits, we are able to confidently communicate information in a more timely manner.

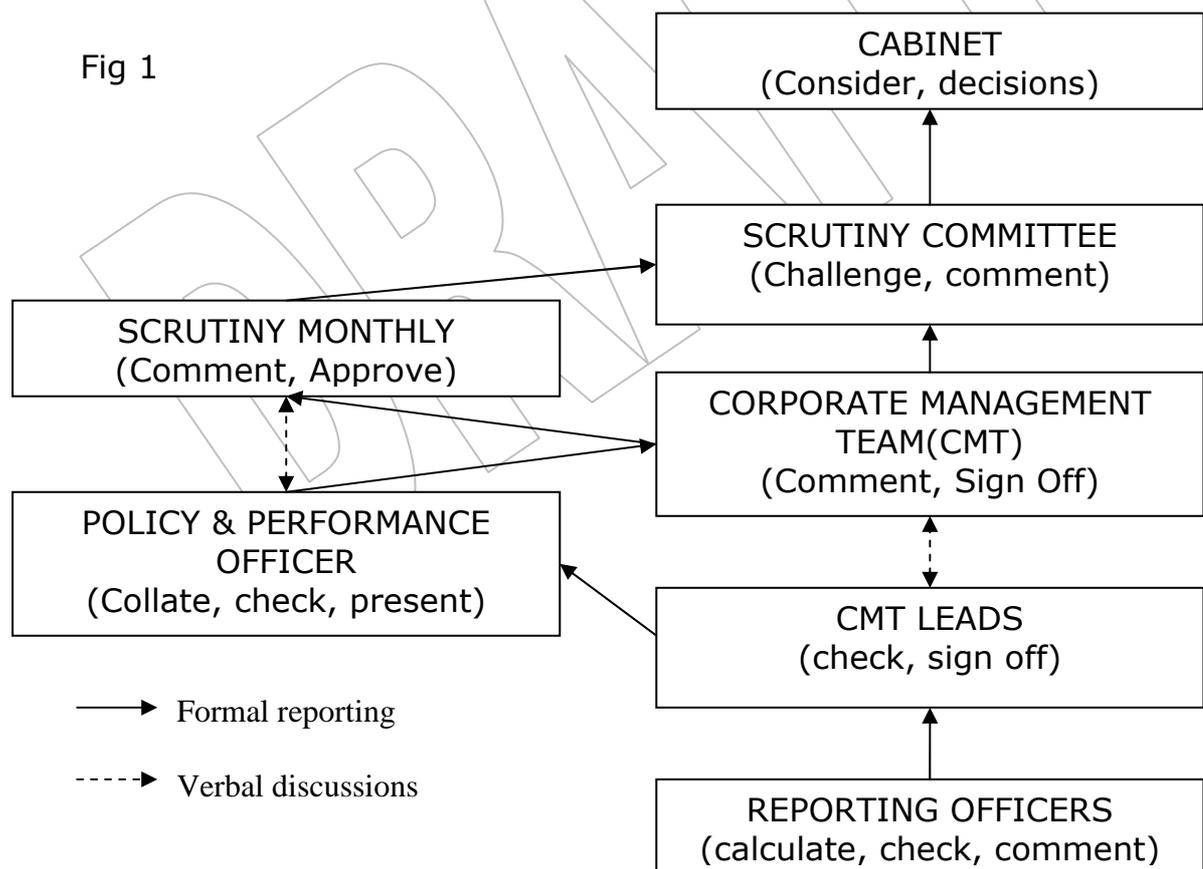
- 4.6.3. Data should be communicated in a clearly understood manner that minimises the opportunities for ambiguity or misinterpretation. Where possible and appropriate, this should include straightforward figures, a visual chart and some form of written commentary to provide any further explanation that is thought beneficial, thereby making the information more accessible to a wider audience.
- 4.6.4. The new format for reporting Performance Indicators will have charts and meaningful commentary boxes built into it and CMT leads will be responsible for the full completion of these.
5. Although the purpose of this strategy is targeted at performance information and BVPIs in particular, the scope should incorporate **all information created, used and communicated by the Council.**

### **Roles & Responsibilities**

6. The Leader of the Council is the lead member for performance management which includes data quality.
7. The Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring of performance and related data on behalf of the Council.
8. The Assistant Director Strategy and Democracy is the lead officer for ensuring data quality.
9. The Corporate Management Team (CMT) supports the lead officer in ensuring that the objectives of this strategy are applied within their departments.
10. CMT members are responsible for the complete, timely and accurate reporting of performance data in their area of activity including relevant national and local performance indicators (PIs). They are also responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of their responsibilities in this area and are provided with an appropriate level of training and guidance.
11. Each individual within the Council is responsible for taking all reasonable measures to ensure that any data they use or provide is accurate. This is of particular importance when calculating, entering, copying or quoting information or at any time where potential errors can be made.
12. The Policy and Performance Officer is responsible for co-ordinating day-to-day data quality issues, offering ongoing support to managers and officers responsible for working with data, communicating information relevant to data quality issues and leading the reporting/monitoring of data quality work to CMT and Members.

### **National Performance Indicators**

13. The current system for collecting and reporting national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) is based around a quarterly and annual reporting timetable.
14. Performance of selected BVPIs (those deemed appropriate in nature and frequency of change) are reported against local targets to Corporate Management Team and Scrutiny Committee every quarter.
15. The performance reports are compiled by the Policy and Performance Officer using information returns provided by the relevant CMT leads. As stated in 3.5, it is the CMT leads responsibility to ensure that data provided for these reports is as accurate as possible.
16. This system is expected to remain the same following the changeover to the new National Performance Indicator set and whatever local priority performance measures are adopted.
17. Fig 1 is a diagrammatic representation of the performance data reporting flow.



18. Local indicators are reported and used within departments/divisions as appropriate and will be subject to the requirements of this strategy.

**Non BVPI Data**

19. Ensuring accuracy of data that does not form part of the National Performance Indicator set is just as important.
20. Much of this information will be managed at a divisional/departmental level and there is an underlying risk linked to it not forming part of the overarching monitoring and auditing that the corporate performance indicators are subject to.
21. In order to minimise this risk, it is recommended that performance data that is collected and used within departments is monitored and reviewed at management meetings at regular intervals (minimum quarterly) where the accuracy of the data will be subject to discussion alongside the impact and implications of the information.

### **Risk**

22. Data Quality must be embedded within the Council's ongoing Risk Management system through the Service & Financial Plans and the Corporate Risk Register where appropriate.
23. Monitoring and audit of data quality issues will be scheduled on a risk basis.
24. The data quality risks include any potential barriers to collecting/calculating data accurately as well as the implications of using inaccurate data in decision making and target setting.

### **Monitoring and Review**

25. The Data Quality Strategy will be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. This is especially important in light of the upcoming changes to the National Performance Indicators.
26. Progress against the action plan included within this strategy will be reviewed regularly by CMT and at Audit Task Group.

### **Further information**

27. If you have any questions regarding this strategy please contact:

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## Actions

28. The following action plan has been drawn up to reflect suggestions made following the Data Quality Audit held in 2007 and the Council's drive towards continuous improvement.

### Data Quality Action Plan

Ref	Action	Owner	Date	Monitoring	Comment
1	Full Data Quality Strategy	Assistant Director Strategy and Democracy Policy & Performance Officer	CMT 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2008 Scrutiny Committee February 2008 Cabinet March 2008	Annual review	Incorporating but not limited to scope, responsibilities, full action plan and review schedule
2	Data Quality BVPI Audit/Register	Policy & Performance Officer	January 2008	CMT Leads	Full listing of all those responsible for collecting and signing off current BVPIs as well as systems used for calculation
3	Mapping of new National Indicators	Policy & Performance Officer	January 2008	CMT Policy & Performance Officer	Listing the new indicators that are the responsibility of EBC, indicating who collects and signs off the data and the systems used

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>4</b>	Systematic review of Divisional Data Quality processes	Scrutiny Committee	Monthly review starting from March 2008	Scrutiny Monthly meetings Audit Task Group	Chair and deputy-chair of scrutiny to assess divisions on a rotational basis (order based on priority and risk) and report findings back to the Scrutiny Committee
<b>5</b>	Assess and update training needs	All Assistant Directors and Human Resources	By 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2008	SADI and internal monitoring/audit	Need to ensure that adequate training and support is available for all staff to use their current systems fully to ensure robust data quality and the ability to provide evidence. Job descriptions to be updated to include Data Quality responsibilities
<b>6</b>	Implement evidence based reporting using new returns templates	CMT Policy & Performance Officer	From Quarter 3 reporting onwards	Quarterly returns	All BVPI returns will need to include the numerator/denominator information and printed evidence of the calculations & process will need to be retained and seen prior to signing off

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>7</b>	Internal Audit of Data Quality processes	Internal Audit	Schedule into the 2008/9 Audit plan	Internal Audit reports Scrutiny Committee	Specific audits into the data quality processes for calculating and collecting data for the new National Performance Indicator set – Prioritised by risk
<b>8</b>	Data Quality Newsletters	Policy & Performance Officer	February and August 2008	Circulated to all staff and managers involved with data collection/performance reporting	Publication of 2 newsletters per year dedicated to updates on data quality issues such as revised guidance, benchmarking, advice and general Data Quality and Performance Management information
<b>9</b>	Development and management of Data Quality/Performance Management intranet pages	Policy & Performance Officer	April 2008	Quarterly review and update of information on an ad-hoc basis	Establish a permanent online resource for officers and managers to access performance related information and updated data quality guidance as well as FAQs and links to Government guidance and resources

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Monitoring</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>10</b>	Corporate Review of Data Quality processes and Action Plan	CMT	11 <sup>th</sup> March 3 <sup>rd</sup> June 9 <sup>th</sup> September 2 <sup>nd</sup> December	Review progress against action plan and checklists at CMT meetings	Assistant directors to feedback on Data Quality processes, issues and improvements made within their divisions

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