



Accountants &
business advisers

Lewes District Council

Data Quality

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1 Work undertaken and summary of findings

- 1.1 Local authorities need reliable, accurate and timely information with which to manage services, inform users and account for performance. Good quality data is the essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information. The data used to report on performance must, therefore, be fit for purpose, representing an organisation's activity in an accurate and timely manner.
- 1.2 External auditors are required to prepare a conclusion on Councils' arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources (VFM conclusion). The VFM conclusion is based on 12 criteria, one of which applies to the "arrangements for monitoring and reviewing performance, including arrangements to ensure data quality". To support our VFM conclusion, and to undertake work mandated by the Audit Commission, we have completed a review of data quality, this having been a three stage process:
- Stage 1: Management arrangements review.
 - Stage 2: Analytical review
 - Stage 3: Data quality spot check
- 1.3 We have reviewed the management arrangements established by Lewes District Council ('the Council') for ensuring data quality in accordance with the Audit Commission's methodologies. We also looked at the detailed evidence to support the performance reported for two performance indicators specified by the Audit Commission for the annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of the Council. Our key findings are summarised below:

	Conclusion
Stage 1	Arrangements for securing the quality of data are performing well and the external auditor's 2006/07 VFM conclusion was unqualified.
Stage 2	There were no significant variances beyond plausible or permissible values.
Stage 3	The two sampled indicators were "fairly stated" (unqualified). One Performance Indicator (PI) required amending but post amendment was fairly stated.

Focus for improvement

- 1.4 Key findings are summarised in Section 2. Areas of improvement that the Council may wish to consider include:
- Continued development and monitoring of the Data Quality Strategy and seeking to achieve best practice,
 - Development of a formal data sharing protocol for all partnerships, ensuring new and current partnerships adhere to its principles,
 - Continued review of the business continuity plan,
 - Ensuring automation of processes for calculation of new PIs wherever possible.

2 Findings from our work

- 2.1 Although our work concluded the Council has robust data quality arrangements we identified some areas where the Council could improve its arrangements. These are set out below:

Data Quality Strategy

- 2.2 The Council adopted a Data Quality Strategy in June 2006 which details the Council's commitment to data quality and contains an action plan to improve data quality arrangements within the Council. The action plan had first action timescales of around June and July 2007 - one of these actions had not been achieved at the time of our audit. It is important that the Council should monitor progress and consider if any remedial action is required if targets do not look as if they will be met. The Council should also continue to look to new developments in data quality to ensure its targets are stretching and reflect best practice.
- 2.3 The Council should also consider the implications of not achieving the data quality actions and feed them into the risk register as appropriate.

Partnership working

- 2.4 One of the Strategy's objectives is to develop guidance on "data sharing in relation to partnership working". We examined three partnerships and they all had arrangements covering data quality. However, there does not appear to be any formalised standard arrangements to guide partnership management processes. The Council should develop guidance to a standard approach. Formal data sharing protocols should specify the responsibilities of partners to provide data which is 'fit for purpose' and should be agreed and shared with partner organisations.

Continuity planning

- 2.5 The Council has a business continuity plan in place and has recently adopted an action plan to improve it and ensure it is line with best practice. The Council should continue to review its business continuity plan, including back up processes for protecting data, and carry out risk assessments on future potential developments. Any business continuity plan should be tested on a periodic basis.

Performance indicator systems

- 2.6 Currently most PI data is derived from different systems and the Council still has to manually calculate certain PI's. The Council should try to use an automated process wherever possible to lower the risk of incorrect PI calculations. When developing new systems the Council should ensure they can automatically report PI's in line with guidance.

Errors in PI calculations

- 2.7 Our work shows that for one of the indicators, BV 199a, the Council had calculated the PI incorrectly but upon recalculation we were satisfied the PI was correctly stated. Before commencing the detailed spot check the Council had themselves recognised this error and corrected it. The error meant the reported outturn moved from the original outturn of 2.1% to 9.2%.
- 2.8 As part of our spot check on BV 199a and 184 we found some issues with the parameters set for calculating the PI's. They do not affect the reported outturn but we believe they could be used to strengthen the PI calculations and ensure 100% compliance with the guidance.

Action plan

- 2.9 An action plan to secure improvements to data quality management arrangements (Stage 1), addressing the key focus areas above is set out in the Appendix.

Acknowledgement

- 2.10 We would like to thank the Council for the co-operation and assistance provided in advance of and during the course of the review.

Appendix 1 Action Plan

Recommendations	Priority	Management response	Responsibility	Timing
<p>The Council should monitor the data quality action plan and consider if any remedial action is required if targets do not look like they will be met.</p> <p>As part of the action plan the Council should also continue to look to new developments in data quality to ensure its targets are stretching and reflect best practice.</p>	High	<p>The Data Quality Action Plan is being monitored by CMT each quarter as part of normal arrangements to monitor Council Plan milestones. There were two milestones missed in the original 06/07 plan one of which has now been met. The other is part of a wider review of partnership working arrangements and is expected to be addressed by the end of March 2008.</p> <p>The action plan is reviewed against the KLOE each year to take account of new developments and best practice.</p>	Corporate Performance Officer	<p>Quarterly</p> <p>Annually as part of Council Plan process</p>
<p>The Council should consider the implications of not meeting the data quality targets and feed them into the risk register where applicable.</p>	Medium	<p>We have recognised the links between data quality and risk management. We have introduced PI DQ risk assessment form and will be rolling this out as part of arrangements for a new performance framework for the Council from April 2008. In addition we are in the process of broadening risk assessment for service delivery plans which also include data quality risks. These risks will be identified and incorporated in the Risk Register for 2008/09.</p>	Head of Audit & Performance	Ongoing as part of risk management process
<p>The Council should develop guidance to ensure the robustness of data quality when working with partners. This should be circulated to all relevant service managers to ensure partner organisations use the same robust arrangements for data quality as the Council's.</p>	High	<p>This is part of a wider piece of work in relation to governance of partnerships. We intend to develop a high level 'good practice' statement in relation to data quality but need to recognise the relative and important differences between the various partnerships with which the Council engages. A targeted and risk based approach is being discussed and is likely to take shape in the New Year.</p>	Head of Audit & Performance	By end March 2008

Recommendations	Priority	Management response	Responsibility	Timing
<p>The Council should ensure it continues to review its business continuity plan and carry out risk assessments on future potential developments. Any business continuity plan should be tested on a periodic basis.</p>	Medium	<p>The BCP is kept under review by the Director of Planning and Environmental Services and was initially tested in February 2006. Since then high risk issues eg electricity supply, have been tested separately. The annual audit plan for 2007/08 includes an internal audit of BCP which will be completed in December 2007. Further review and testing will be scheduled on the basis of this audit. The BCP is a standing item on the agenda for the Council's Resilience Planning Group.</p>	Director of Planning and Environmental Services	Ongoing
<p>The Council should try to use automated processes direct from systems wherever possible to lower the risk of incorrect PI calculations.</p> <p>As part of new system development the Council should ensure systems can produce PIs in line with relevant guidance.</p>	Medium	<p>We will assess this as part of our PI data quality risk assessment programme which will be carried out as part of the service planning arrangements for 2008/09.</p> <p>We are also considering the business cases for moving towards an automated and integrated software solution to support future performance management and risk management within the Council. This would strengthen our arrangements for data quality.</p>	Corporate Performance Officer	March 2008
BVPI Spot Check				
<p>199a</p> <p>As part of the planning of the survey the Council should use an increasing IMD score, not decreasing as is currently used.</p>	Medium	Agreed. We will do that as of the final survey period.	Head of Waste and Recycling Services	Commencing December 2007

Recommendations	Priority	Management response	Responsibility	Timing
<p>The Council currently conducts surveys in line with CLG guidance but it was not possible to assess if all surveys had been conducted on days when cleansing and refuse collection had not occurred due to the Council's incomplete records in these areas.</p> <p>The Council should ensure that inspections occur on days when cleansing and refuse collection have not occurred.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>We have asked the Supervisor to do the transects on days when there is no refuse collection or street sweeping and he is cognisant of the guidance. I believe that we can check that for any given period but it would not necessarily be a simple task. If we need to have an easy demonstrable audit trail, we can go back to the software company and ask them to include a box to tick on the PDA to say that this is either true or not. We are happy to progress that within the same time-frame.</p>	<p>Head of Waste and Recycling Services</p>	<p>Commencing December 2007</p>

Recommendations	Priority	Management response	Responsibility	Timing
<p>184 The Council uses a sample based survey to ensure its decent homes standard is met which is acceptable per the CLG guidance. This means that it currently has only assessed 50% of its current housing stock. It should consider carrying out full surveys by 2010 to ensure it has a complete survey of all of its housing stock.</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>The 2000/01 survey of 15% of our housing stock has been updated with all improvement works on an annual basis. It was also independently verified for an options appraisal in 2003. Our latest survey of an additional 15% took place in 2006. This included all of our "1 off" type properties and additional properties from streets of estate housing. We believe that this limits our risk to any unforeseen costs.</p> <p>These combined surveys provide an estimated 50% actual data and 50% pro-rata data. Improvements noted against each property is helping to update information about <u>all</u> of our properties.</p> <p>We are planning additional surveys by our Housing staff to update information (independent of stock surveys) and estimate that by 2010 approximately 80 to 85% of data held on our properties will be from surveyed or improved properties.</p> <p>Another 15% update survey is due 2011 or 2012, but this may take place earlier if a further housing Options Appraisal is required.</p> <p>In any new survey, we will ensure that different properties are surveyed but in the meantime we have every confidence that our reports and planning are robust. We believe this stepped approach to be sustainable in the longer term, and the best value for our tenants.</p>	<p>Head of Housing Services</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>