Data Quality Policy

September 2007

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Introduction

Aim of the Policy

1. The aim of this Policy is to set out a clear framework for maintaining and improving high levels of data quality within Wyre Forest District Council.

Background

2. The Council recognises that high quality data* is essential for:
    - ensuring the delivery of services against agreed plans
    - Meeting legislative and regulatory requirements
    - Supporting policy formation and managerial decision-making
    - Providing protection and support in litigation, including management of risks
    - Providing evidence of business activity (e.g. for CPA / CAA)
    - Improving efficiency, performance and accountability, and
    - Supporting business continuity in the event of a disaster

3. The Council has developed this Policy to ensure that the data it produces and uses is of high quality, and to provide a framework for maintaining and improving data quality within the Council.

Scope

4. This Policy applies to all Council Members and employees, and to all information systems owned, used or managed by the Council in paper or electronic media. An Action plan is attached as Appendix 1 to this Policy and Guidance Notes for employees are attached as Appendix 2.

Data Quality

Definitions

5. For the purposes of this Policy, 'data' is defined as 'factual verbal or numerical information which is held by the Council, may be used to assist decision-making and which can be stored and processed by any medium'.

6. * Data is regarded as being of high quality if it is:
    - Accurate (in terms of correctness)
    - Comprehensive (in terms of all relevant data being captured)
    - Valid (in an agreed format which conforms to any recognised national standards)
    - Timely (available when required)
    - Stored securely and (when required) confidentially

Roles & Responsibilities

7. The Cabinet Member for Corporate and Customer Services is the lead Member for data quality issues.

8.   The Head of the Chief Executive's Office has overall strategic responsibility for promoting and co-ordinating this Data Quality Policy and associated procedures, guidance and training. These duties include:

*   raising awareness of data quality within the Council
*   ensuring security and back-up of the Covalent Performance Management System
*   follow up of any issues arising from data quality checks
*   checking and monitoring performance information produced by the Council, and
*   ensuring that training and awareness programmes are used to ensure that all employees and Members are aware of the importance of maintaining a high quality of data.

9.   Each Head of Service is responsible for ensuring that data generated, used and supplied by their Division is of a high quality. They will ensure that individual responsibilities and accountabilities for ensuring data quality have been assigned and are regularly reviewed and assessed, including via Employee Development Reviews.

10. Where Members or employees become aware of data quality issues which cannot be immediately rectified and which affect information on which the Council or other organisations are relying, the relevant Head of Service or the Head of the Chief Executive's Office will be notified accordingly in order that remedial action can be taken as required.

11. Nominated officers are assigned responsibility for collecting and reporting data on the Covalent Performance Management System and in other performance reports.

12. Employees are made aware of any performance indicators and other measures to which they contribute data and must adhere to agreed procedures for producing, checking and reporting such data.

13. All employees are responsible for ensuring that data which they create, receive or act upon is of a high quality.

14. All Members and employees have access to this Policy and associated guidance, which are available on the Council's Intranet.

Data Quality Monitoring

15. Data quality is monitored by each Head of Service in accordance with agreed corporate procedures. These include:

*   Regular reports
*   Routine checks
*   Sample checks
*   Follow up with remedial action as required and reported to Members

16. The Council ensures that partners and contractors are clear about their obligation to provide high quality data and will routinely check the information provided or held by its partners / contractors in order to ensure compliance.

17. Procedures for data capture, processing and storage are reviewed and updated annually. These include specific arrangements for ensuring data quality at the point of data capture, during the processing of that data and appropriate data quality checks before data / information is released.

18. Systems operate on a 'right first time' principle in order to avoid the need for routine data cleansing or manipulation to produce the information required.

Internal Control & Validation

19. All systems and procedures have built-in controls to minimise the scope for human error, manipulation or other factor affecting data accuracy (e.g. the use of system validation on key data entries or drop down menus / pick-lists).

20. When data is produced or loaded onto electronic systems the accuracy is to be checked and the data 'signed-off' by an authorised officer other that the data in-putter, e.g. line manager / data manager.

21. Wherever possible, data should be stored centrally and not duplicated in multiple locations in order to reduce officer time and risk of errors.

Reporting Arrangements

22. These include, but are not limited to:

   - The Council
   - Cabinet
   - Scrutiny Committees
   - Corporate Management Team
   - Divisional Management Teams
   - Performance Management Group

23. An annual self-assessment is carried out using the Audit Commission's Key Lines of Enquiry and the results are reported in the Annual Audit & Inspection Letter.

24. Data quality reports are prepared on an exception basis so that areas where action is needed are clearly identified. Reports include an assessment of the risks associated with unreliable and inaccurate data and are included as appropriate in the Risk Register.

Security & Confidentiality

25. The Council is committed to keeping data secure and, where required, confidential in accordance with its Data Protection Policy and other supporting statements and policies, which are available on the Council's intranet and website.

26. Each Division ensures that appropriate measures are taken to ensure the security of its business-critical data systems. Such measures are documented and regularly tested and reviewed. Any areas of concern or weakness are documented and rectified.

27. A business continuity plan is in place to protect records and data which are vital to the effective functioning of the Council. When sharing data with third parties, e.g. partner organisations, protocols are agreed to ensure the quality of data shared. This will include as a minimum:

- Formal Information Sharing Protocols to ensure that information can be shared lawfully and within the framework of relevant legislation.
- An agreed set of standards for the quality of all data shared and the creation of processes to validate the quality of data obtained from third parties.

DATA QUALITY ACTION PLAN

Objective	Action / Milestone	Responsible Officer(s)	Date
1. Agree clear responsibility for data quality	▪ Identify relevant officers and incorporate data quality responsibilities in JDs & EDRs	▪ CMT / Line Managers	▪ Mar 2008
2. All relevant employees / Members to have an understanding of PI definitions and the importance of data quality	▪ Current PI definitions supplied to relevant officers / Members ▪ Training sessions for employees / Members ▪ Data quality Policy and guidance published on intranet	▪ CEO	▪ Sep 2007 ▪ Ongoing ▪ Oct 2007
3. Robust data validation to support accurate performance reporting	▪ Guidance for data validation implemented	▪ CEO & Responsible Officers	▪ From Oct 2007
4. Data quality to be a required competence for responsible officers	▪ Consider introducing Data Quality as a specific competence as part of the Generic and Manager Competency Frameworks	▪ CEO & HR	▪ Apr 2008
5. Continue implementation of the Covalent performance management system to eliminate duplication of data collection and storage, and ensure data controls are robust	▪ Include clear definitions for all local PIs on Covalent system	▪ CEO & Divisions	▪ Apr 2008
6. Action to achieve level 3 Data Quality	▪ Full review of Level 2 KLOE criteria ▪ Achieve Level 3	▪ CEO	▪ Dec 2008 ▪ Sep 2009
7. Updated Action Plan	▪ Review and update DQ Action Plan	▪ CEO	▪ Sep 2008