St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee
27 July 2011

Data Quality Policy

SUMMARY

The council recognises the importance of reliable information for the delivery of excellent customer services. Data quality is crucial and the availability of complete, accurate and timely data is important in supporting customer care, corporate governance, management and service agreements for service planning and accountability.

The council's first Data Quality Policy was adopted in March 2008, in accordance with Audit Commission best practice. The policy has now been revised due to legislation being introduced as part of the Localism Bill and in light of the government's transparency agenda. The policy has been updated in partnership with Forest Heath District Council.

The policy will be reviewed again in 2013. However, it will be amended as necessary to reflect any changes in national guidelines and legislation.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out on the policy. The EqIA found that there are no negative impacts on the public. Indeed, all communities should benefit from the policy as it will ensure that decision-making and service delivery is undertaken based on sound and accurate information.

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Committee is asked to consider the revised Data Quality Policy and recommend adoption to Cabinet, subject to any amendments suggested at the meeting.

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Data Quality Policy 2011

Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Data Quality Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 Consistent, quality, timely and comprehensive information is vital to support good decision making, improve service outcomes for the security of sensitive information and compliance with the law. This policy outlines Forest Heath District Council's and St Edmundsbury Borough Council's approach to managing data quality across the organisations.

1.2 The Data Quality Policy relates to all data and information that the councils use and should be adhered to in conjunction with the following legislation:

The Data Protection Act 1998	Personal information must be handled and stored in a confidential manner.
The Human Rights Act 2000	Everyone has the right to respect for their private and family life, home and correspondence.
The Crime and Disorder Act 1998	As a public sector body the Council, where necessary, can disclose information for the purposes of preventing crime and disorder.
Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)	Councils can collect and use information from a covert or human intelligence source for the purposes of investigating crime which may be subject to disclosure.
Freedom of Information Act 2000	Public authorities, if requested, must disclose information that they hold.
The Children Act 1989,2004 Children's Trusts Guidance	Local Authorities and other key bodies must co-operate to improve the well-being of children in the local area.
Localism Bill	Highlights the importance of transparency and accountability of public bodies and raw data.

2.   Scope

2.1   This policy has been produced to set our clear objectives for maintaining data quality. All staff and councillors are required to adhere to this policy.

2.2   The policy relates to all information which can be held as electronic data or manual records, such as financial or personal data. It covers all data collection, storage, calculations and computer entry particularly with regard to the councils' key information systems.

2.3   This policy does not cover the following, however they are referenced in other documents where indicated:

- ICT (Information Communications Technology) security;
- Data security; and
- Records management.
  (Held in each councils' relevant ICT strategies)

- Information/Data sharing
  (Suffolk Strategic Partnership Information Sharing Protocol 2009/Forest Heath District Council's and St Edmundsbury Borough Council's Data Sharing Protocol)

3.   National context

3.1   Localism is the flagship policy of the government and forms part of the legislative programme. The stated aim is *'to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a Big Society that will take power away from politicians and give it to people'.*

3.2   One of the foundations of the Big Society and Localism is transparency and the importance of raw data. Ensuring that local people have access to the information they need will help enable them to play a bigger part in society. Transparency helps the review of spending by public bodies and so ensures that they are accountable and deliver value for money.

3.3   The two principles of transparency are:

(a)   councils are responsible for their own performance and for leading the delivery of improved outcomes for local people in their area; and

(b)   councils are accountable to their local communities. Stronger accountability through greater transparency helps local people drive further improvement.

3.4   This policy has been developed to support these principles.

4.   Definitions

4.1   The following definitions of data, information and knowledge are used for the purpose of this policy:

Data:	Numbers, words or images that have yet to be organised or analysed to answer a specific question.
Information:	Produced through processing, calculating and organising data to answer questions, adding to the knowledge of the receiver.
Knowledge:	What is known by a person or persons. Involves interpreting information received, adding relevance and context to clarify the insights the information contains.

4.2   There are six principles that should be followed to ensure high quality data:

Accuracy:	Data should be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes, representing clearly and in enough detail the interaction provided at the point of activity. 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. Reported information that is based on accurate data provides a fair picture of performance and should enable informed decision making. The need for accuracy must be balanced with the importance of the use for the data, and the costs and effort of collection. For example, it may be appropriate to accept some risk in the degree of accuracy where timeliness is important. Where compromises are made on accuracy, the resulting limitations of the data should be clear to users. This must be a judgement determined by local circumstances, and is unlikely to be appropriate in the case of data supporting published performance information.
Validity:	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, measuring what is intended to be measured. Where proxy data is used to compensate for an absence of actual data, bodies must consider how well this data is able to satisfy the intended purpose.
Reliability:	Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points over time, whether using manual or computer based systems or a combination. For example, managers and stakeholders should be confident that progress towards performance targets reflects real changes rather than variations in data collection approaches or methods.
Timeliness:	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 service or management decisions.
Relevance:	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 than for the current intervention. Quality assurance and feedback processes are needed to ensure the quality of such data.
Completeness:	Data requirements should be clearly specified based on the information needs of the body 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.

5.   Risk

5.1   The key risks associated with poor data quality can include:

- decisions based on inaccurate and out of date information;
- poor performance not identified and addressed;
- published information being misleading;
- inaccuracies in base data resulting in financial error and loss;
- inaccuracies in externally reported data resulting in funding discrepancies;
- good performance not recognised and rewarded;
- poor use of resources;
- policies being ill-founded; and
- improvement opportunities not identified and monitored.

5.2   In order to achieve high quality data each service area must have in place the appropriate procedures, checks and standards that govern how staff use data and information. It is important that quality checks are undertaken at each stage of data management.
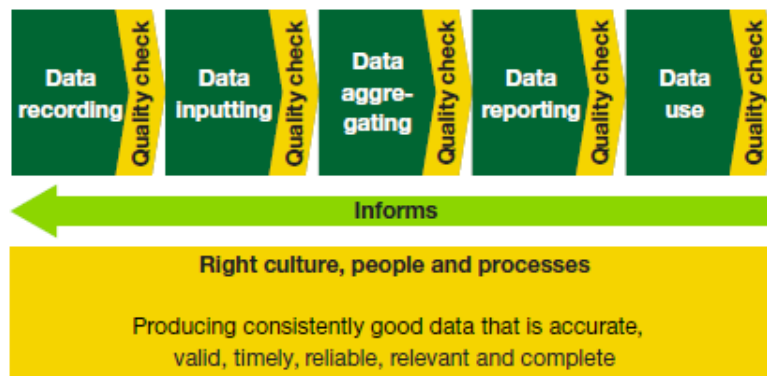
5.3   Poor data quality can have a significant impact on the councils' political, legal, reputation, professional and financial position. As a result the failure to ensure a high level of data quality is included in both councils' Risk Registers.

6. Why is data quality important?

6.1 Reliable information is vital to the success of an organisation. Within local government good service delivery is reliant on the availability of complete, accurate and up to date data. If data quality is poor, it is impossible to gain an accurate picture of financial situations, service standards and operational performance. Hence decision making can become more difficult.

6.2 In particular data quality is essential for:

Strategic/corporate planning:	High quality data and information is used to plan the councils' vision and goals and will inform the decisions that underpin everything the organisation does.
Financial planning:	Financial data must be reliable to enable the council to set budgets and forecasts to support service planning.
Service planning:	Accurate data about the volume and type of services delivered and activities undertaken is essential to ensure appropriate allocation of resources and future service delivery.
Performance management:	Accurate data enables the identification and resolution of any shortfalls against standards and targets.
Service improvement:	Accurate data will enable the analysis of service provision against user needs and overall efficiency and effectiveness.
Customer care:	Accurate data enables the delivery of relevant and timely services and ensures that the customer and other parties involved can be kept informed where appropriate.
Efficient administration:	Data needs to be provided to an appropriate standard and in such a way that the full range of stakeholders, partners and agencies can access the information they need easily and quickly.
Information security:	To provide assurance that the councils' information systems are able to maintain the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all data. The councils' ICT Security Policy has a key role in managing this element of data quality, and this will become more important as partnerships and shared services develop. There is an Information Sharing Protocol between the councils.
Adherence with audit processes:	Data needs to be available for timely, reliable and accurate reporting to support the councils' internal and external audit regimes.

7.   Vision and objectives

7.1   The councils' **vision** for data quality is:

> **"We are committed to the collection and use of high quality data which is available at the right time, at the right costs and can be relied upon for informed decision making and all aspects of financial and performance management."**

7.2   In order to achieve this vision we have developed a number of **objectives**:

Governance and leadership:	• To ensure that all staff and councillors are aware of their responsibilities relating to data quality through personal reviews and, where appropriate, job descriptions. • To ensure that the principles of data quality are embedded in the use of all of the councils' key information systems and frameworks.
Policies:	• To ensure that policies, systems and procedures are in place to ensure the data quality. • To ensure that data quality issues are reported to relevant staff and councillors.
Systems and processes:	• To ensure that all staff use the "right first time" principle for data capture and that all data is "fit for purpose". • To ensure data is stored, used and shared in accordance with the law including those for data protection and freedom of information (see section 1).
People and skills:	• To ensure arrangements are in place at a senior level and throughout the council to secure the high quality of data. • To ensure the right people with the right skills are producing accurate and timely performance information. • To ensure that all staff have data quality training as and when required and that those with particular data responsibilities have regular refreshers.
Data use and reporting:	• To ensure the information used by the councils is consistently presented, is timely and is of high quality. • To ensure that audit standards and requirements are met.

8.   Local arrangements for ensuring data quality

8.1   Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Councils have established data quality arrangements supported by a series of roles and responsibilities to ensure that their shared vision and objectives are met. These are set out in the following appendices which include a list of the councils' Key Information Systems.

9.   Working in partnership

9.1   We work in partnership with a number of organisations and often this involves sharing data. We will work constructively with these organisations to provide assurance of the data quality. The Partnership Strategy, shared by both councils, underpins this commitment.

Key Information Systems

The following table gives details of the key information systems used by each council, together with those used by both councils.

Data System	Forest Heath District Council	St Edmundsbury Borough Council	Used by both councils
All			
		Budget and general data monitoring spreadsheets	
Car Parks			
		Car Parks – Chipside system	
Corporate			
		Project Management Database – Sharepoint	Express Software – electoral services
		Risk Management Database	
		Corporate Complaints database	
		Refuse & Cleansing Database – Mayrise	
		Abandoned Vehicles – direct link to DVLA	
		Local Land Property Gazetteer (LLPG)	
		MapInfo	
Environmental Health			
		Northgate contaminated land module	Northgate M3 Public Protection
		Bruel and Kjaer noise analysis	Lalpac - licensing
Finance			
	Agresso Business World	QSP	BACS
	Financial Director	COMINO	Capita Academy
Housing			
			Home-Link Locata system for Choice Based Lettings

Data System	Forest Heath District Council	St Edmundsbury Borough Council	Used by both councils
Human Resources			
	BACSEES		TRENT
Legal			
		Tricostar time recording and case management system	
		Freedom of Information Act database for recording requests for information	
Leisure			
		Epitaph – cemetery database	Arbotrac - arboriculture database
		Spektrix – Apex Box Office system	
		Play Area Maintenance Regime	
Performance Indicator Recording			
		Planning information – APAS	Covalent – corporate performance management software
		Waste Data Flow System	
		Fly Capture database (flytipping)	
Planning			
	Northgate Planning	CAPS Uniform	
		Swift APAS – planning and building control	
		Swift Search – land charges	
		Locator GIS Mapping system	
Property Services			
		Vtas software - CCTV	
		OAKLEAF	
		Group 4 Multimax Access System	
		Excel Energy Management Database	
		Approved list of contractors	
Revenues and Benefits			
			Capita Academy
			Civica

Data System	Forest Heath District Council	St Edmundsbury Borough Council	Used by both councils
			Eiger
Waste Fleet			
		Vehicles – Fuel System Timeplan	
		Vehicle Movements – Black Box	
		Accelerator Fleet Management system	

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities for staff and councillors in helping to deliver the objectives are set out below:

Councillor lead	**Portfolio Holder for Resources and Efficiency and Performance and Organisational Development** (Councillor approval of the Data Quality Policy and annual updates)
Director lead	**Chief Executive** (Corporate responsibility for achieving the data quality objectives)
Service leads	**All Heads of Service** (Responsible for data quality within their service areas and liaising with the appropriate officers to rectify any non compliance)
All other staff	**All Staff** Personally responsible for the data quality of their work
Policy Unit	Report on a quarterly basis to members in relation to performance indicators. To report on the arrangements in place to meet the Data Quality Policy.
Internal Audit	To provide advice and guidance in relation to data quality. Monitoring the effectiveness of data quality through internal audits and reporting, by exception, any weakness identified in arrangements, as per existing reporting protocols. Taking a lead role in terms of the results of NFI (National Fraud Initiative) data review arrangements (which identify potential errors in recording as well as potential fraud). Reporting on the outcome of audit work to the Performance and Audit Scrutiny Committee.
External Audit	To discuss issues, share good practice and review approaches in relation to data quality. To assess and form a judgement on the authority's performance against data quality key lines of enquiry as part of the Value for Money conclusion.

It is the responsibility of each service to inform the Policy Unit of any changes to the key systems or staff in this table so that any potential data quality issues can be identified. Heads of Service must ensure that staff nominated for data system responsibilities are appropriately trained and that a record is kept of any training undertaken.