

## **Data Quality Policy – Progress Report**

### **Summary**

1. The following report outlines the progress made towards implementing and embedding a data quality policy across the council and gives feedback from the Audit Commission on City of York Council's Data Quality Arrangements under Use of Resources Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) 2.2 as part of the Organisational Assessment.

### **Background**

2. Over the past few years there has been increasing emphasis placed on councils to have robust, clear and effective data quality (DQ) policies in place to ensure data quality is considered when key decisions are made and to help drive performance improvement.
3. York's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality were assessed by the Audit Commission as 'performing adequately' under the new Use of Resources inspection in 2008-09. Actions have taken place and are planned in order to move York up to a 'performing well' score.
4. The Audit Commission view data quality as crucial, given that much of what we decide to improve, and how well we say we are performing, is dependent on the foundations of accurate data and information. This affects all aspects of performance management including the Comprehensive Area Assessment, achieving the corporate priorities, the Local Area Agreement, etc.

### **Audit Commission Inspection 2008-09 – Feedback**

5. The following summarised feedback was given to the council as part of the 2008-09 Audit Commission Inspection (including spot checks) of data quality under the 2.2 KLOE:
  - There is a robust corporate framework to oversee data quality (DQ). The profile of DQ issues has been raised through the nomination of a Chief Officer as DQ champion and the inclusion of DQ as a key project within the council's Improvement Plan. A policy has been adopted which sets out standards for accuracy, validity, timeliness and accessibility of data.
  - The policy provides guidance and toolkits to support improvements in data collection and is translated into action through a council-wide Performance Officer Group (POG), which champions DQ within services and provides an ongoing challenge to the accuracy of data.

- The council has a good track record of producing and using relevant and reliable data. Work is progressing to address weaknesses in some partnership data, as well as dealing with issues in respect of some of the new National Indicator set.
- The Performance Officer Group provides a mechanism for gathering feedback from decision makers to ensure reports remain relevant. Data management systems are effectively managed and controlled to minimise the risk of data loss or corruption.
- The range of indicators used to manage performance has been reviewed to ensure alignment with the Local Area Agreement and the corporate priorities of the council. There are clear links between the performance management process and business planning and the council has a track record of using performance information to target under-performance, improve value for money and identify actions to improve.

#### Audit Commission Spot Check Conclusion

- In 2008/09 spot-checks were made to national indicators: NI 130 (Social care clients receiving self directed support), NI 135 (Carers needs assessed and reviewed), and one local (LAA) indicator LAA 8.10 (GCSE results in deprived areas). The systems were found to be sound, and there are no improvements that need to be made to the systems of collection.

#### **Internal Audit Inspection**

- 6 As well as the Audit Commission Inspection, our data quality arrangements were also reviewed by Internal Audit (Veritau). All indicators were risk assessed to provide a short list of 24 indicators to be inspected. They found all of these indicators to have at least moderate assurance except 1 indicator, Improved Local Biodiversity (NI 197), which was given limited assurance. Actions have been put in place to improve the system of collection for this indicator, which involve better procedures for recording site visits.

#### **Progress made with implementing the Data Quality Policy**

- 7 The data quality policy has been expanded this year to build on the feedback given by the Audit Commission and Internal Audit. One of the areas has been to review all national indicators against a self assessment matrix to give an indication of data quality issues across the council and partners. We have now assessed nearly 167 (90%) of the national indicator set, which builds on the 50 indicators assessed in the last Data Quality Audit and Governance Report.
- 8 Average Initial Data Quality Scores for Local Area Agreement (LAA) indicators and National Indicators (5 being good).

	Accuracy	Validity	Timeliness	Accessibility
LAA Indicators Average	<b>4.0</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>3.6</b>
National Indicator Average	<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>4.0</b>
LAA Scoring 4-5 (of 50)	<b>37 (74%)</b>	<b>42 (84%)</b>	<b>21 (42%)</b>	<b>32 (64%)</b>
National Indicators Scoring 4-5 (of 167)	<b>129 (77%)</b>	<b>152 (91%)</b>	<b>117 (70%)</b>	<b>116 (69%)</b>

9 Reliance on External Data or Local Partner.

Reliance on:	External Data	Local Partner
LAA Indicators (of 35)	<b>33 (66%)</b>	<b>17 (34%)</b>
National Indicator (of 167)	<b>69 (41%)</b>	<b>40 (24%)</b>

- 10 LAA indicators have more of a reliance on local partners due to the nature of the agreement and this can impact on the timeliness of the data available. Partners naturally have to wait to release an indicator until it has been verified or has been released by the national agencies. We have made good progress this year with partners with regular data transfers being set up with the PCT, the Health Observatory and the Safer York Partnership. However there is still more work to be done to achieve a level of constancy in data quality.
- 11 We have also aligned the process of reporting information to the With Out Walls Executive Delivery Board picking up commentary on indicators to report progress where indicator information is not available.
- 12 Below is a summary of some of the key DQ issues raised in the self assessments:

Accuracy:

- Some survey data is voluntary therefore low participation can distort figures.
- Data sharing happens between partners but can be limited due to national constraints.
- Data has to be “cleaned up” due to complicated collection arrangements and counting rules.
- Assumptions or human judgement that rely on different people cause fluctuation.
- Seasonal variation can cause the indicator to change throughout the year, such as school term dates or winter weather.

Validity

- Counting rules not being released or being too complicated.
- Limited knowledge within service about indicators and how they are calculated.

Timeliness

- Information that relates to surveys or those only supplied on an annual basis.
- Many figures are not released until finalised and verified which can cause delays to directorate and corporate performance reporting.
- Data can be up to 2 years out of date due to the way indicators are calculated.
- Limited trend data due to new indicators or limited supply from external source.

Accessibility:

- External data supplied by partners or government agencies either does not come with enough detail or is difficult to obtain.
- Information which is available on request limits access or causes delay.
- Licences on software products either not provided or too expensive.
- Websites with limited access or with regional data rather than York.

External and Local partners:

- A high proportion of indicators rely on external information.
- Over a third of information comes through partners and the relationship with partners is to be continuously improved.
- Problems with the national data hub cause delays with the availability of data.

### Place Survey Indicators

- Although the place survey results are seen as accurate, they suffer from having a small sample size and therefore analysis of ward level data can not be done as its not statistically viable.
- Other authorities have invested resources to increase the sample size and have improved customer insight data as a result.

### **Actions Summary**

- 13 There have been many indicators scoring 1-3 on the self assessment forms especially under the timeliness (30%) and accessibility (31%) criteria (see para 8). To target future improvements there have been a number of actions identified within the assessments. Below is an example of some of the actions raised:
- More manual and spot checks.
  - Better designed reports within systems to gather the relevant information.
  - Increasing sample sizes or asking similar questions within other surveys.
  - Improved training and limit the use of manual calculation.
  - Improve relationship with partners.
  - Use more estimated data throughout the year.

### **Next Steps**

- 14 Many areas of the council's data quality work were assessed as improving well and an action plan has been developed to move York's overall score from 'performing adequately' to 'performing well'. Many areas of the council's data quality work were assessed as performing well already and we only just missed out on the next level. We have now reviewed all of national indicators, aligned our corporate strategy to the Sustainable Community Strategy and are continuously improving our links with partners. We have also developed a council wide performance management framework which is being aligned to the partnership including setting out a shared data quality standard with the 2 main partners (Police and PCT).
- 15 In our drive to further embed the data quality policy within the council, the appointment of a 'data quality champion' at Elected Member level would strengthen our current arrangements. This has also been recognised as best practice in other authorities and is likely therefore to be commended by the Audit Commission. Therefore the committee may wish to request that the Executive Member for Resources takes on this role in line with his portfolio responsibilities.
- 16 Over the past 18 months we have used benchmarking data through the PWC benchmarking club. We will continue to build on this work as it is an excellent source of information helping the council to quickly see where an indicator may have been calculated incorrectly or where we are not performing as we should.

### **Corporate Priorities**

- 17 Since the achievement of all corporate priorities are assessed through key performance indicators then in order to produce reliable, accurate, timely and accessible data, it is vital the Data Quality Policy is followed fully. Data Quality is critical to an effective performance management framework and therefore contributes to an Effective Organisation.

## Implications

18 Below are the implications of this report:

- (a) **Financial** – there may be some financial implications due to actions required to solve data quality problems identified through use of toolkits.
- (b) **Human Resources (HR)** – there are no implications
- (c) **Equalities** – there are no implications
- (d) **Legal** – there are no implications
- (e) **Crime and Disorder** – there are no implications
- (f) **Information Technology (IT)** – there may be some IT implications depending on the results of systems integrity checks.
- (g) **Property** – there are no property implications.
- (h) **Other** – none.

## Risk Management

19 The Audit Commission has identified that the risk of not addressing weaknesses in data quality is that:

- information could be misleading
- decisions may be flawed
- resources may be wasted
- poor services may not be improved
- and policy may be ill-founded.

20 Comprehensive Area Assessment is a key strategic risk for the authority which is being monitored by the Audit & Governance Committee. As a key part of the council's Use of Resources assessment, poor data quality could impact on achieving an overall score of 3.

### Recommendations

21 Audit & Governance Members are asked to:

- (a) consider and comment on the progress made to date on improving data quality, including positive audit results which show the improvements having an impact.
- (b) consider a request to the Executive Member for Resources takes on the role of Member Champion in line with his portfolio.

### Reason:

*To ensure continual improvement is made to the council's data quality arrangements, which will also help to improve the reported results in the Use of Resources Assessment as part of the Organisational Assessment in CAA.*

**Contact Details**

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**Annexes**

None