

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: CORPORATE SCRUTINY

19 April 2010

Date of Meeting:

Report of:

Head of Policy and Performance

Subject/Title:

Data Quality

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor David Brown

1.0 Report Summary

1.1 This report provides Corporate Scrutiny with an overview of the Council's Data Quality Strategy and proposes that Corporate Scrutiny initiate a review programme to monitor data quality arrangements. The Council's data Quality Strategy is attached at appendix 1.

2.0 Decision Requested

2.1 Corporate Scrutiny Committee IS requested to:

- 1) Note the Data Quality Strategy and the actions being carried out to evaluate performance against the actions and standards it sets.
- 2) Support data quality improvement through a programme of reviews and assessments.
- 3) Take responsibility for ongoing review of the Data Quality Strategy.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 To ensure that performance against the Council's Data Quality Strategy requirements is scrutinised and that the Council fulfils its responsibilities in respect of quality data.

4.0 Wards Affected

4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate change - Health

- 6.1 Good data quality supports the effective delivery of all Council policies including climate change and health.

7.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

- 7.1 None

8.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

- 8.1 Financial decision making relies on sound and accurate data. Poor or incomplete information may result in inefficient use of resources, non-achievement of value for money and failure to deliver the Council's objectives.

9.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

- 9.1 The legislation governing the handling/holding of data has remained the same for a few years now (data protection and freedom of information). However, interest in how data is held has increased and the regulator (the Information Commissioner) has become more active. This is a complex area and one where the local authorities can lose both reputationally and financially if they fail to take their obligations seriously. Breaches of legislation can involve not just civil actions, but also criminal sanctions.

The way that local authorities take decisions is being subjected to greater scrutiny and it is important that when taking such decisions they have the best information that can be obtained available to help inform their decision-making. The quality of the data held plays a critical part in decision-making and if a decision is made which relies upon data that is inaccurate/inadequate, it could lead to a decision being successfully challenged (whether by judicial review, or other means).

The delivery of services can be compromised if data quality is poor. For example, it could lead to services being delivered badly and/or to the waste of public funds. This might be highlighted in an audit, or worse still could cause a local authority to fail in its statutory duties. There are high profile instances of problems caused by poor data handling and sharing and poor quality data heightens the risks involved.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 Poor data quality is a risk for all services and is addressed by them in their risk assessments and risk management plans.

11.0 Background and Options

11.1 The Council's Data Quality Strategy has been put in place to ensure that the Council carries out its responsibilities on respect of producing and using quality data in an effective and co-ordinate manner. It plays a vital role in the management and improvement of Council services. The Strategy acknowledges that quality data are an integral part of the Council's operational, performance management and governance arrangements.

11.2 The Audit Commission have said that public bodies are accountable for the public money they spend and must manage competing claims on resources to meet the needs of communities they serve and plan for the future. The financial and performance information they use to account for their activities, both internally and externally, to their users, partners, commissioners, government departments and regulators, must be appropriate for these purposes, providing the level of accuracy, reliability and consistency required. They also highlight the importance of published performance indicators as the basis of external assurance and the need for confidence that information reflects actual performance.

Characteristics of Quality Data

11.3 The Cheshire east Data Quality Strategy defines the key characteristics of quality data:

- Accuracy – fit for purpose
- Validity – recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements
- Reliability – Reflecting stable and consistent data collection processes
- Timeliness – captured quickly and available when needed
- Relevance – Relevant to its purpose
- Completeness – reflect all the information needs

The Strategy then sets out the means by which data quality will be ensured.

Ensuring Data Quality

11.4 There are seven aspects to the delivery of quality data in the Council. These are:

- Awareness – everyone recognises the need for quality data, and their contribution
- Definitions – everyone knows which performance measures are produced from the performance information they provide and how those measures (including national Indicators) are defined
- Recording – information is recorded and entered on an ongoing, timely basis to ensure information can be collated effectively
- Verification – there are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible
- Systems – are fit for purpose and staff have the expertise to get the best out of them
- Output – Performance measures are extracted regularly and efficiently and communicated quickly.
- Presentation – Performance measures are presented in such a way as to give an easily understood and accurate picture of performance.

Roles and Responsibilities

11.5 A commitment to data quality across the organisation is vital and is reflected in the roles and responsibilities of management, staff and Councillors. The Data Quality Strategy identifies roles and responsibilities at a number of levels:

Officers

- Corporate Management Team: responsible for the strategic approach to data quality as set out, for example, in the Corporate Plan
- Heads of Service: have overall ownership and responsibility for data quality within their service areas
- Team managers: have day to day responsibility for ensuring data quality within their service delivery areas
- Performance team: Reviewing the Strategy and associated action plan
- Responsible Officers: take ownership of data collecting and reporting of specific National Indicators and assure standards
- Technical Officers: are responsible for producing information and applying data definitions
- All staff: who are responsible for in-putting or extracting data are responsible for quality in respect of this specific data.

Members

- Overall responsibility for data quality lies with the Portfolio holder for Performance and Capacity
- Responsibility for review of data quality with lies with Corporate Scrutiny Committee. They evaluate both ongoing data quality and the effectiveness of the Data Quality Strategy.

Partners

11.7 The Data Quality Strategy notes that important information is passed between the Council, partner organisations and other external agencies. It defines responsibilities for ensuring that partners are aware of the Council's requirements and for assuring data quality

National Indicator Audit

11.8 To help take forward the Data Quality Strategy and develop an action plan, an audit of National Indicators has been commissioned. This has reviewed the calculation of a sample of national Indicators, the data used to calculate the measures, including procedural guidance for collection of data and examination of key systems and interviews with staff. Findings from the audit are currently being analysed and will be reported to Corporate Scrutiny. The intention is to include any actions identified from the audit in a comprehensive action plan to take forward the Data Quality Strategy.

Next Steps

11.8 Data quality is of paramount importance to the Council. Corporate Scrutiny Committee is requested to agree to undertake a programme of work to challenge data quality across the Council. This is likely to include:

- An examination of roles and responsibilities for data quality and tests to determine whether role requirements are being met
- An evaluation of data quality assurance arrangements across key systems
- An assessment of officers' awareness of data requirements in their areas
- An examination of the presentation of information to identify best practice in the Council
- An assessment of the risk associated with poor data quality and actions across the Council to identify and address the risks.

12.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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