

# Data Quality

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Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council

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Audit 2007/08

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March 2009

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## **Status of our reports**

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# Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings from our work on Data Quality (DQ) for 2007/08.
- 2 Auditors' work on data quality and performance information supports the Commission's reliance on performance indicators (PI) in its service assessments for comprehensive performance assessment (CPA).
- 3 Our work on data quality is complemented by the Audit Commission's paper, 'Improving information to support decision making: standards for better quality data'. This paper sets out standards, for adoption on a voluntary basis, to support improvement in data quality. The expected impact of the Audit Commission's work on data quality is that it will drive improvement in the quality of local government performance information, leading to greater confidence in the supporting data on which performance assessments are based.

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## Scope of our work

- 4 We have followed the Audit Commission's three-stage approach to the review of data quality as set out in Table 1.

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**Table 1 Data quality approach**

<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>Management arrangements</b> A review using key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to determine whether proper corporate management arrangements for data quality are in place, and whether these are being applied in practice. The findings contribute to the auditor's conclusion under the Code of Audit Practice on the Council's arrangements to secure value for money (the VFM conclusion).
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>Analytical review</b> An analytical review of 2007/08 BVPI and non-BVPI data and selection of a sample for testing based on risk assessment.
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Data quality spot checks</b> In-depth review of a sample of 2007/08 PIs all of which come from a list of specified BVPIs and non-BVPIs used in CPA, to determine whether arrangements to secure data quality are delivering accurate, timely and accessible information in practice. For 2007/08 PI spot checks, the Audit Commission specified that it is compulsory to review two housing benefits PIs at all single tier and district councils as a minimum.

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## Summary conclusions

### Stage 1 – Management arrangements

- 5 We concluded that the Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality are performing consistently above minimum requirements. The Council has effective arrangements for the governance, review and recording of performance data.

### Stage 2 – Analytical review

- 6 Our analytical review work identified three indicators where values fell outside the expected ranges. However, these included two indicators for recycling where the increase was consistent with the full year effect of the final rollout of the borough-wide recycling plan. The variance on the remaining indicator (BVPI 199b: Street cleanliness - graffiti) was selected for detailed review at Stage 3.

### Stage 3 – Data quality spot checks

- 7 For 2007/08 the Audit Commission has specified mandatory spot check testing on two performance indicators relating to housing and council tax benefit (BVPI 78a: Speed of processing for new claims and BVPI 78b: Speed of processing for changes of circumstances). In addition we performed detailed testing on BVPI 199b.
- 8 No errors were identified from our audit testing in respect of BVPI78a and BVPI199b. We concluded that these indicators were fairly stated.
- 9 Our initial work on BVPI78b identified four fails out of 24 cases tested. The main reason for errors appeared to be multiple date stamps on documents with the wrong date being input to the housing benefit system. Testing was therefore carried out on a further 40 cases. The overall error rate combining both samples indicated that the number of days reported by the Council for processing changes of circumstances was understated by 4.6 per cent. However, this variation was within the tolerance limit of 10 per cent specified by the Audit Commission. We therefore concluded that this indicator was fairly stated.

# Detailed findings

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## Management arrangements (stage 1)

- 10 Overall, the Council's corporate arrangements for data quality are performing consistently above minimum requirements.

### Governance and leadership

- 11 The overall strategic responsibility for DQ matters within Tonbridge and Malling is clearly defined. The Council operates a 'get it right first time' policy towards data matters and the corporate commitment to data quality is clearly stated in the Council's DQ Policy. This document is available to all officers who have responsibility for service performance data and more widely available to all staff via the Council's internal website. Performance information is reported on a monthly basis to the corporate Management Team at the Performance Management meeting which is chaired by the Chief Executive. Compliance with data quality also features in the annual staff survey.
- 12 The Council has clear data quality objectives and these are well documented. The strategic approach to data quality is set out in the corporate Data Quality Policy which was approved by Cabinet on 16 January 2008, and covers all departments and service areas within the Council. The Council seeks to improve data quality on a continuous basis and demonstrates its commitment to achieving data quality through monthly performance meetings held by the corporate Management Team, quarterly reports to Cabinet and annual comprehensive reviews. The Council consciously sets challenging targets aimed to stretch performance achievements. Whilst acknowledging the risk that such a policy means that not all services will be able to fulfil the targets, the process is designed to raise performance and challenge service delivery levels to provide continuous improvement.
- 13 The Council has effective arrangements in place to monitor and review the quality of its data. Monitoring is done on a monthly basis by the corporate Management Team and Chief Executive. Cabinet Members review performance quarterly so that longer term issues can receive strategic direction. An annual comprehensive review is carried out towards the end of the financial year as a 'look back and plan forward' exercise to review performance and set targets for the next reporting period. However, although there is a clear reporting and monitoring framework in place, each service area and BVPI is assumed to be unique so that there is no common forum for sharing best practice amongst officers with data responsibilities.

### Policies

- 14 The Council's data quality policy was formulated in July 2007 and adopted by the Cabinet in January 2008. The Policy is supplemented by a range of procedure notes particular to the service areas and BVPIs. The Data Quality Policy provides guidance on the information which needs to be reported to external bodies.

- 15 The Council can demonstrate that it has a well articulated framework of policies and procedures for recording and monitoring its BVPIs. The DQ Policy and BVPI procedure notes are available to all staff via the Council's intranet site and the Council is generally confident that these are being followed consistently throughout the organisation. Each BVPI is assigned a lead officer who acts as the data 'champion' and provides day-to-day guidance.

### Systems and processes

- 16 The Council has a well developed system for the collection, recording, analysis and reporting of performance data. The data is reported to the corporate Management Team and Cabinet using a 'traffic light' colour coded system to highlight performance levels. The Council has taken the conscious decision not to implement an automatic feed from the service systems into the performance management system. The manual re-entry of data provides the opportunity for a data check-point but it can increase the potential for human error. Performance data is measured and analysed in relation to current targets, peer group performance and previous performance. The data is reviewed every month so that the corporate Management Team are kept aware of operational issues.
- 17 The Council reviewed its critical business systems in 2007 as part of its preparation process for creating a Business Continuity Plan (BCP). The Business Impact Analyses helped the Council to understand how its critical businesses functioned and resulted in Service Level Business Continuity Plans being formulated for each critical service. The BCP aims to minimise any disruption to these services in the event of an emergency. As the BCP was only adopted by the Council in Jan 2008, the Business Continuity Management process is not yet fully embedded within the Council. Training for the implementation of the BCP was still underway at the time of the Stage 1 DQ audit and testing was not due to not take place until after the training process is completed.
- 18 The Council has specified standards for the sharing of data with third parties. The Council's partners are encouraged to either have their own DQ policies in place or to adopt the Council's own DQ Policy and procedures. It is the responsibility of the lead officer for any partnerships within the Council, to ensure that any data generated by a third party is validated.

### People and skills

- 19 The Council is clearly communicating data quality responsibilities to its staff. Data quality is being promoted through departmental meetings and the internal staff magazine. There are well developed policies for ensuring that performance data is collected and recorded in an accurate and timely manner. The Council has an effective network of named officers who are responsible for the reporting of performance data in their respective service areas. The Performance Management team also assist with the production of procedure notes which are tailored to the needs of the individual service areas and BVPIs. However, it is unclear if data quality is articulated as a target in the appraisal process for individual staff.

## Detailed findings

- 20 The Council has provided the training to ensure that staff have the data quality necessary skills and knowledge but there is no formal DQ training programme across the Council. Each BVPI is viewed as having unique requirements and training is carried out on an ad hoc one-to-one basis, although the Improvement and Development Unit will carry out bespoke training across a team or a section if required.

### Data use and reporting

- 21 The Council has good arrangements in place to ensure that the data generated by operational activities is also reported for performance monitoring. Performance data is monitored by and compared against targets, direction of travel and peer group performance.
- 22 Some data checking occurs when information is re-entered onto the performance management system, and there is also reliance on automated data analyses via Excel programmes to eliminate errors. However, the Council should consider implementing a programme of spot-check verification to provide additional assurance.

### Recommendations

**R1** The Council should introduce a formalised DQ training programme.

**R2** The Council should set up a formal system of sharing good practice amongst data users as a means of creating a best practice dialogue across the organisation.

**R3** The Council should introduce a review system to provide independent assurance of data quality.

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### Analytical review (stage 2)

- 23 We carried out an analytical review of the following BVPIs.
- Recycling performance: BV82a (i) (percentage) and BV82a (ii) (tonnage).
  - Composting performance: BV82b (i) (percentage) and BV82b (ii) (tonnage).
  - Average time in temporary accommodation: hostels: BV183b.
  - Cleanliness of public places: BV199a (Litter and detritus) BV199b (Graffiti) and BV199c (Fly-posting).
- 24 All PIs reviewed were found to be complete and within plausible and permissible values other than those identified at Table 2.

**Table 2 Analytical review findings**

2007/08 Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
BVPI 82a (1) Household waste management (recycling): Percentage	Variance with previous year outside of Audit Commission parameters but increases consistent with the full year effect of the final rollout of the borough-wide recycling plan.	No further action.
BVPI 82a (1) Household waste management (composting): Percentage	Variance with previous year outside of Audit Commission parameters but increases consistent with the full year effect of the final rollout of the borough-wide recycling plan.	No further action.
BVPI 199b: Local Street and Environmental cleanliness: Graffiti	Variance with previous year outside of Audit Commission parameters	Selected for testing at stage 3

**Data quality spot checks (stage 3)**

- 25 For 2007/08 the Commission specified detailed spot check work on two mandatory benefits performance indicators (BVPIs 78a and 78b). In addition detailed testing was performed on BVPI 199b.
- 26 The findings from our detailed spot check work are shown at Table 3.

**Table 3 Spot check findings**

Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
Housing Benefits BVPI 78a: Speed of processing new claim to housing benefit/council tax benefit.	Fairly stated.	Management arrangements are considered adequate to report data that is both complete and accurate within the allowed tolerance levels.  No errors were identified from audit testing of 24 cases.
Housing Benefits BVPI 78b: Speed of processing changes of circumstances to housing benefit/council tax benefit.	Fairly stated.	Management arrangements are considered adequate to report data that is both complete and accurate within the allowed tolerance levels.



## Detailed findings

Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
		<p>Our initial testing identified 4 fails from a sample of 24 cases. Under Audit Commission methodology additional testing of a further 40 cases was carried out by the Council and spot checked by auditors.</p> <p>The overall error rate combining both samples indicated that the number of days reported by the Council for processing changes of circumstances was understated by 4.6 per cent. However, as this was within the tolerance limit of 10 per cent specified by the Audit Commission we concluded that the indicator was fairly stated.</p>
<p>Environment</p> <p>BVPI 199b: Local Street and Environmental cleanliness: Graffiti</p>	<p>Fairly stated.</p>	<p>Management arrangements are considered adequate to report data that is both complete and accurate within the allowed tolerance levels.</p> <p>No errors were identified from audit testing.</p>

# Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
7	R1 The Council should introduce a formalised DQ training programme.	2	Central Services Director	Yes		2009/10
7	R2 The Council should set up a formal system of sharing good practice amongst data users as a means of creating a best practice dialogue across the organisation.	2	Central Services Director	Yes		2009/10
7	R3 The Council should introduce a review system to provide independent assurance of data quality.	1	Chief Internal Auditor	Yes	Internal Audit (IA) has traditionally reviewed data quality, including PI data quality, as a fundamental part of its review programme. Formal procedures aimed at producing accurate/complete results for the new national performance indicators are being completed by service managers who have lead responsibility for the NPIs. In addition to its traditional approach, IA is reviewing the quality and application of these procedures. IA will also be sample checking the data quality of the NPI results themselves in due course.	Ongoing

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For further information on the work of the Commission please contact:

Audit Commission, 1st Floor, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4HQ

Tel: 0844 798 1212 Fax: 0844 798 2945 Textphone (minicom): 0844 798 2946

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

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