

# Data Quality

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Gedling Borough Council

Audit 2007/08

November 2008



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## Status of our reports

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  - any third party.
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# Summary report

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## Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings from our work on data quality 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**

Stage 1	<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).
Stage 2	<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.
Stage 3	<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 Overall, the Council's corporate arrangements for data quality are consistently above minimum requirements. This is an improvement from last year, there are two areas where further improvement can be made:
- more formalised and systematic training of staff and members; and
  - more explicit arrangements with third parties regarding data quality issues, for example protocols covering the sharing of data, and the checking and validation that should precede such sharing.

### Stage 2 – Analytical review

- 6 Our analytical review work at stage 2 identified that the PI values reviewed either fell within expected ranges or were substantiated by evidence.

### Stage 3 – Data quality spot checks

- 7 Our review and spot checks of PIs 78a (average processing time taken for new housing and council tax benefit claims) and 78b (average processing time taken for changes in claimants circumstances) found they were fairly stated.

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## Management arrangements (Stage 1)

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

### Governance and leadership

- 9 Responsibility for performance management monitoring and reporting has been assigned to a corporate management team member. Departmental managers have responsibility for their department's performance and for signing off performance data prior to inputting for corporate monitoring and reporting.
- 10 The organisation has developed a strategy, which was adopted in July 2007, escalating the importance of data quality within the Council. All BVPIs are assigned to named responsible officers. In comparison to similar strategies from other Councils this strategy appears to have the relevant information to drive improvements in data quality.
- 11 Data quality management is clearly developing and can be evidenced in strategic documents such as the DQ strategy and draft policies for data quality. There is a DQ action plan which is being monitored and DQ working group which is looking at data quality improvements.
- 12 Data quality issues form part of the Council's risk management arrangements and risks are actively managed. They are reported through the risk register there is also some reporting of the accuracy of data to Senior Management Team (SMT). Examples of good practice are not yet evident, this should improve with the introduction of the new Covalent performance management system in 2008/09.

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- 13 There is a member lead for quality issues who took up this role from December 2007. The member has data quality management as part of this portfolio. Members have not yet received training on the importance of data quality.

### Recommendation

- R1** Provide training for members on the importance of data quality.

### Policies

- 14 In an improvement since last year, there is now an adopted strategy and action plan covering data quality. There is also a draft policy which should be approved by SMT before the end of 2008.
- 15 Heads of Service decide local procedure for the completion of data quality and they are all aware of their responsibilities. Other staff involved in gathering, monitoring and collating of data are aware of their responsibilities regarding data quality. As part of the implementation of Covalent there will be new procedure notes and training these have been bought as part of the package.
- 16 Annual checks against submitted data are undertaken prior to submission to the data recipients. These are supported by a clear trail recording how the data is collected and submitted. Data is validated manually by the service manager responsible for the initial submission and the central performance team responsible for the final submission. Performance is monitored on a quarterly basis by the SMT. Any clear variances in the data are investigated and challenged. In most cases the variance is accompanied by a clear explanation or action plan or both.
- 17 The Council has a set of operational policies which include the IT strategy, IT disaster recovery plan, Business continuity Plan and Anti Fraud strategy. These plans have the requisite and appropriate approval by Cabinet, SMT and departmental managers.
- 18 Procedures when sharing data externally have not been identified or developed. There are no clear data sharing policies or protocols in place with external partners who submit data. Data sharing partners have been identified but a data quality protocol, including confirmation of compliance procedures, is still to be developed.

### Recommendations

- R2** Operational procedures notes and training, purchased with Covalent, should be put in place to support the new approach this should help to ensure with compliance with legal requirements and good practice.
- R3** Develop procedures for sharing data with external bodies.

### Systems and processes

- 19 There are appropriate systems in place for the collection, recording, analysis, and reporting of the data used to monitor performance. Data is submitted by the relevant service managers. The data is considered to be right first time as it is signed off by the manager as correct. Data quality is assured through exception reporting and then checking where data looks to be out of line with expectations. The central team checks the data submission against variances and validation of the calculations. Errors are resolved directly with Managers.
- 20 Systems are not control mapped, however there is guidance for all departments on how to submit data through the data quality strategy. Spreadsheet cells are locked to prevent manipulation of data, although error trapping is not in place to capture errors at the time of input.
- 21 Controls are reviewed at least annually, for example through internal audit review, to ensure that they are working. Results from these reviews are reported to the SMT and entered on to the risk register where risks have been identified.
- 22 Security arrangements are in place for business critical systems such as procurement, cash management, HR and payroll. However, performance management systems do not have the same levels of security. Weaknesses have been identified in the action plan, and should be resolved with the implementation of Covalent.
- 23 The council does test its business critical systems. For example a test is being planned for October to simulate a data disaster situation, restoring systems from backup to test recovery procedures. The council is also checking systems against standard ISO 27001. A report from this testing raised no major concerns.
- 24 The council knows the third parties with whom it shares data, however there is no centralised list, the knowledge being held by individual departments. Contracts do not specify how or when the council will check or validate data from third parties however the outputs are checked for reality and trends, and outliers would prompt investigation.

#### Recommendation

- R4** Ensure all relevant contracts with third parties explicitly list data requirements including checking and validation procedures.

### People and skills

- 25 The Council has identified the staff who are responsible for data quality and champions have been nominated in the majority of departments/teams. The Head of Strategy and Performance is driving and championing DQ and personnel are in place to manage the delivery of the improvements. Staff have an understanding of their responsibilities through the terms of reference of the DQ working group and the leadership of the Head of Strategy and Performance. Support is clear and available from the central PI team.

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- 26 Some staff have specific data quality objectives or targets set for them, for example the Resource Services Manager, and DQ champions. There are also section targets in some areas, such as housing benefits, where managers are considering introducing personal targets too. However it is not clear whether all relevant staff have data quality objectives set for them.
- 27 There are examples of the effectiveness of data champions, however, effectiveness is not consistent across the authority. The planned implementation of the Covalent performance management system will enable a clear definition of roles and responsibilities for rectifying issues of non-compliance to be developed.
- 28 Ad hoc data quality training is given to all staff responsible for data quality through the central team, this training covers all aspects of data quality. An example is Housing Benefits where issues raised in internal audit reports would generate training.
- 29 There is currently no systematic Council wide formal training this should be addressed with the implementation of the new Covalent system.

### Recommendations

- R5 Ensure that all relevant staff have data quality objectives set for them.
- R6 Develop the effectiveness of data quality champions across the Council.
- R7 Undertake a training needs analysis for staff and members who are responsible for data quality. Then develop and implement training including regular refresher updates.

### Data use and reporting

- 30 The council has put in place arrangements to use data, that supports performance information, to drive improvements in services. Data collected is fed back to those who submit it, as well as scrutiny committees and SMT. These groups scrutinise and identify issues relating to this performance information. Performance information is used by SMT and members to drive improvements. Variances from targets and performance are highlighted through the system and the central Performance Management team. These are then presented to SMT with action plans for improvement.
- 31 Where issues relating to data are identified, action planning is developed to rectify any downturns in performance and reported to overview and scrutiny and the SMT. When the data quality policy is adopted these groups will also monitor improvement against it and action plans.
- 32 The council has effective validation procedures which ensure the accuracy of data used in reported performance indicators. An audit trail can be identified and evidenced (in paper format) for all data submitted to the central team responsible for collation. On annual submission a validation check is completed by this team to ensure all BVPI data items are within the ranges specified either by the PI or the Council.

## Analytical review (Stage 2)

- 33 An analytical review of the following BVPIs was carried out based on a risk assessment using year on year comparisons and nationally set plausible and permissible values. The findings are shown below.

**Table 2 Analytical review findings**

<b>2007/08 Performance indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
BV 127a	Violent crime per 1,000 population	Real performance improvement - overall crime reduction in the Borough during 2007/08.
BV 127b	Robberies per 1,000 population	Real performance improvement - overall crime reduction in the Borough during 2007/08.
BV 128	Vehicle crimes per 1,000 population	Real performance improvement - overall crime reduction in the Borough during 2007/08.
BV 156	Percentage of buildings accessible for disabled people	Real performance improvement - result of a successful five-year capital bid funding works to improve access.
BV 174	Racial incidents per 1,000 population	Real performance improvement – the number of incidents fluctuates significantly year on year.
BV 204	The % of appeals allowed against the authorities decision to refuse planning applications	Real performance improvement – volatile indicator which is dependent upon how Planning Inspectors interpret local and national policies.
BV 219b	Conservation areas – character appraisals	Real performance improvement – increase in the number of appraisals and consolidation of three conservation areas to one.
BV 225	Actions against domestic violence	Real performance improvement – outcome of significant partnership working.
BV 226c	Advice and guidance services: direct provision	The basis of calculation has changed. The advice service is now delivered through the ‘one stop shop’ whose costs have been included in the calculation.

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<b>2007/08 Performance indicator</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
BV 2a	The equality standard for local government in England	Real performance decline - following a Council commissioned independent consultant's review the self-assessment reduced from level 2 to 1.
BV 66B	Rent collection and arrears recovery - 7 weeks arrears	Real performance improvement - more proactive tenant management
BV 66c	Rent collection and arrears recovery - Notice seeking possessions served	Real performance improvement - more proactive tenant management.
BV 66d	Rent collection and arrears recovery - Evictions	Real performance improvement - more proactive tenant management.
BV 76b	Housing benefit security - number of investigations per 1,000 households.	Real performance decline - long term sickness of one investigator.
BV 76c	Housing benefit security - number of investigations per 1,000 households	Real performance decline - long term sickness of one investigator.
BV 79b(iii)	Percentage of recoverable overpayments recovered (HB)	Real performance - improvement - full implementation of the new IBS computer system and reprocessing of work stream.

34 All other PIs reviewed were found to be complete and within plausible and permissible values.

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

35 A number of PIs were reviewed using a series of detailed spot checks and audit tests. Our findings are shown below.

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**Table 3 Spot check findings**

<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Housing Benefits BVPI 78a (Processing time new housing and council tax claim)	Fairly stated	We reviewed the management arrangements specifically relating to benefits PIs, tested a sample of cases to the PI data trail and agreed the calculation.
Housing Benefits BVPI 78b (Processing time for change of circumstances)	Fairly stated	We reviewed the management arrangements specifically relating to benefits PIs, tested a sample of cases to the PI data and agreed the calculation.

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# Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
5	R1 Provide training for members on the importance of data quality.	2				
5	R2 Operational procedures notes and training, purchased with Covalent, should be put in place to support the new approach this should help to ensure with compliance with legal requirements and good practice.	2				
5	R3 Develop procedures for sharing data with external bodies.	2				
6	R4 Ensure all relevant contracts with third parties explicitly list data requirements including checking and validation procedures.	2				
7	R5 Ensure that all relevant staff have data quality objectives set for them.	2				
7	R6 Develop the effectiveness of data quality champions across the Council.	2				
7	R7 Undertake a training needs analysis for staff and members who are responsible for data quality. Then develop and implement training including regular refresher updates.	2				

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