
Data Quality Policy

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Table of Amendments

Issue	Date	Section	Description Of Amendment
1.	14 Jul		Draft version for consultation
2.	20 Jul	Action plan and inclusion in main policy	Updated by L Poyser including action plan update and additional section on performance measures.
3.	21 Jul	Action Plan and main text	Minor amendments to main text & I. McHugh added to action plan.
4.	25 Jul	DQ10 inserted & 2 Appendices	Added appendices on data sharing and reporting/monitoring and final data quality requirement no. 10.
5.	13 Feb		Updated version for consultation.
6.	22/9/09	Complete	Complete refresh of the Policy in line with the needs of CAA – R Fernandez.
7.	28/3/11	Complete Review	Review Policy inline with review programme, removed reference to CAA as no-longer applies.
8.	5/4/12	Complete Review	Review Policy, amended formatting issues, inserted tables for key points amendments made to the introduction.
9.	21/4/15	Complete Review	Review Policy. Minor amends in line with Council restructure 2014.

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1. Introduction

Erewash Borough Council is committed to using good quality information as an integral element of sound governance and effective performance management. This policy helps us realise that commitment by ensuring a consistent approach to data collection, recording and management. In particular it:

- Formalises what the council expects of those who work with data and performance information
- Establishes the objectives which guide our data quality work
- Contributes to a culture in which performance information and data are seen as valuable assets

The quality of the information we use will affect our capability to make effective decisions about the way services are planned, managed and undertaken. Poor quality information leads to poor decision making. As Performance indicators are used as a way of judging operational performance, weakness in information quality cannot be accepted as a reason for low achievement.

Improving information and data quality requires an approach that addresses the whole range of activities from basic data collection through to the application of information and analysis and knowledge.

The principles set out in this policy are applicable to any system used or managed by the Authority, whether they use paper, computer or other media. It applies to the information that is produced in reports, but it also applies to the background data; the records, evidence, calculations and processes that are used to produce those reports.

2. What Makes Good Quality Data?

In summary the six key characteristics of good quality data are:

• Accuracy	Sufficiently accurate for its intended purpose, representing clearly and in enough detail the interaction provided at the point of activity.
• Validity	Recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements, including the correct application of any rules or definitions.
• Reliability	Reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time, whether using manual or computer based systems, or a combination.
• Timeliness	Be captured as quickly as possible as the event or activity and must be available for the intended use within a reasonable time period.
• Relevance	Relevant to the purpose for which they are used.
• Completeness	Requirements should be clearly specified based on the information needs of the body and data collection processes matched to these requirements.

Assurances for Data Quality include:

- The correct numerator and denominator has been used and the calculation is correct and consistent with agreed methodologies
- Figures agree to systems reports or compilation documents
- The correct data has been included or excluded and it is accurate, complete and up to date
- Data is collected, recorded and reported consistently for the correct time period, using the same methods across the period and across collection points

3. Why is Data Quality Important?

Public services need information that is fit for purpose with which to manage services and account for performance. For example, service providers need good information to make judgments about efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of their services.

This places greater reliance on data quality, to provide robust data for local performance management and to inform performance assessments. It also emphasises the need for local public services to use information to reshape services and account to local people for performance.

Elected Members and Chief Officers require assurance that performance information is accurate. This is increasing the emphasis on data quality. This requires an examination of the systems and processes for the collection of data, the skills required and the use of information. The quality of our data is crucial for assessments of council effectiveness. Policies and strategies for ensuring data quality as well as governance and leadership for ensuring accurate and reliable data are essential.

The higher the number of amendments and reservations that we receive regarding our data following scrutiny, the lower the confidence interested parties will have in the performance information we provide. This can result in increased and more detailed audit and inspection which uses staff time and other scarce resources.

4. Aims of the Data Quality Policy

We will maintain standardised practices for data collection to ensure that data is accurate, reliable, complete, relevant and timely to ensure everyone who accesses it can have confidence in its use.

We will ensure that data is captured and recorded promptly and correctly first time and is fit for purpose. Where we can we will work to the principles of COUNT collect data once and use numerous times.

We will use Plain English when reporting data and outcomes of performance to make it understandable to our audience(s).

5. Data Quality Objectives

The Council recognises the importance of data quality, as we need reliable, accurate and timely performance information with which to manage and develop services, inform users and demonstrate our performance. We are committed to ensuring that we maintain the highest standards of data quality and as a result get our performance information 'right first time'. This will enable us to have the right information at the right time at the right cost.

In order to achieve this we will:

- Ensure that performance information is high quality, consistent, timely, comprehensive and held securely and confidentially, by putting in place arrangements to secure the quality of data that we use to manage our services and demonstrate our performance.
- Make it clear what is expected from officers, partners and contractors in terms of the standards of data quality.
- Put in place systems, policies and procedures to enable the highest possible data quality, particularly where information is shared with partners.
- Ensure that we put in place the right resources, and in particular, having the right people with the right skills, to ensure we have timely and accurate performance information.
- Ensure that we have the right controls in place in order that we meet the expectations of inspection bodies, Government, partners, residents and any other interested parties in the performance information we provide.

The core of this policy is the Data Quality Objectives. These objectives will drive the council's processes regarding the collection, processing, analysis and reporting of data.

DQO1: ACCOUNTABILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The Council will appoint a lead member to be responsible and accountable for data quality within the organisation.✓ The Council will allocate responsibility for overseeing Data Quality within the organisation to the relevant Chief Officer.✓ The Council will identify all officers responsible for the collection, processing, analysis and reporting of data.
DQO2: PROBITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ The Council will maintain a regime by which Data Quality may be scrutinised and challenged. This regime will ensure that the council's data is at all times within the legal parameters of current UK and EU legislation, relevant policies, procedures and Government guidance.
DQO3: ACCURACY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ All responsible officers will ensure that they maintain systems which ensure that data provided is accurate (within the parameters that are acceptable for that data). They will also ensure the correctness of the data in terms of description, numerators and denominators.
DQO4: TIMELY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ All responsible officers will ensure that data is provided in accordance with the Council's reporting framework.

DQ05: TRUSTWORTHY	✓ All responsible officers will ascertain, to the best of their ability, the accuracy of data, particularly when collected from external sources. The potential accuracy or otherwise will be transmitted to the recipients of that data so they may know with what confidence the data may be treated. Clear audit trails must be available for all data transmitted by the council.
DQ06: EASE OF USE	✓ All responsible officers must endeavour to present data in a manner that is easy to understand and clearly highlights the performance issues being addressed. Officers will be mindful of equality and diversity issues when providing data. Externally produced information will adhere to the councils approach regarding Plain English, recognising the audience for which the information is intended.
DQ07: GET IT RIGHT FIRST TIME	✓ All responsible officers will adhere to the principle of “Get it right first time”. Emphasis will be on maintaining systems that preserve the accuracy and integrity of data without having resource intensive sampling or data cleansing regimes.
DQ08: ASSESSMENT OF RISK	✓ The Council will assess the level of risk associated with the data it produces and will commit its resources appropriately to minimise that risk. All responsible officers will assess the risk inherent in their data processes and will put in such safeguards as appropriate to minimise that risk.
DQ09: SUPPORT	✓ The Council will support all members and staff with appropriate training in order that the council can meet its data quality objectives.
DQ010: SHARING	✓ Responsible Officers will work within the protocols established in Appendix E “Data Sharing Protocols”. They will establish the data quality requirements of all partners and external bodies and ensure that data provided is of the quality required by them. In turn Responsible Officers will ensure that all data received by them from another source outside of their control is subject to the same rigor and controls demanded by the council (including data received from other internal sources).

6. Scope of the Data Quality Policy

All Council systems and processes that produce performance information are in the scope of this policy to ensure that accurate and dependable information is available for all Council functions.

The Council believes that continued initiatives in relation to data quality should be proportionate to risk.

Please note that issues relating to the Data Protection Act, Freedom of information Act and Information Communication Technology and the security and control of ICT systems are all excluded, as these are covered in the relevant Policies.

7. The Principles of Good Data Quality Management

There are a number of principles that underpin good data quality. It is important to consider these sequentially because if any of these principles are not adhered to, inaccuracies are likely to creep in, and adherence to subsequent principles will not be able to rectify the position, a detailed explanation for each principle can be found at Appendix A:

Awareness	Everyone recognises the need for good data quality and how they can contribute.
Definitions	Everyone knows which PIs are produced from the information they input and how they are defined.
Input	There are controls over input, i.e. that information is input on an ongoing basis rather than stored up to be input later.
Verification	There are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible.
Systems	Are fit for purpose and all staff having the expertise to get the best out of them.
Output	Performance indicators are extracted regularly and efficiently and communicated quickly.
Presentation	Annual performance indicators are presented, with conclusive evidence, in such a way as to give an easily understood and accurate picture of our performance.

8. Standards and Procedures

The Council is committed to collecting and processing data according to national and locally defined standards. Standards and procedures are necessary to ensure that:

- Data collection is consistent, and in accordance with the single data set definitions as laid down in the statutory performance indicator guidance where appropriate.
- Information can be meaningful compared/collated both across the organisation and nationally.

Where there is no national standard to guide procedures for data collection, processing or reporting the council will generate its own local standards and procedures. This will be done as and when required, and when initial work to ensure organisation-wide standards and procedures are in place for all key data collection processes.

Where problems are identified, corrective action and any recommendations for change will be identified. This stage may be complex, especially where more than one information system is involved. The master source of the data must be identified and the impact on recipient systems evaluated. Where at all possible, data must be corrected at source and this is the responsibility of the appropriate service managers. Should areas where issues of incorrect data are not being put right are identified; the matter will be referred to the relevant Chief Officer.

9. Risk Assessment

Where areas of poor data quality are identified these will be recorded in the Operational Risk Registers and escalated to the Strategic Risk Register as appropriate inline with the Risk Management Policy. Areas considered a high risk could include:

- A high volume of data transactions
- Technically complex performance information definition/guidance
- Problems identified in previous years
- Inexperienced staff involved in data processing/performance information production
- A system being used to produce new performance information
- Errors in calculation
- Known gaps in the control environment

10. Roles and Responsibilities

To ensure that data quality is managed effectively we have allocated specific responsibilities as outlined below:

The Council's Lead Member & Officer on Data Quality	The Council Executive has appointed a Lead Member who is responsible for overseeing the Council's approach to Data Quality and who acts as a champion in all matters relating to Data Quality. Responsibility for the strategic management of data quality lies with the Chief Executive and the appointed member.
Directors	Are responsible for ensuring their directorates follow the Data Quality Policy and must assure that resources are deployed so that these may be carried out effectively.
Heads of Service	Responsibility for the operational management of data quality lies with senior officers. They will ensure that their services have suitable trained responsible officers and/or Data Quality champions. They will be responsible for ensuring that data produced by their services adheres to the principles described below.
Responsible Officers	Have been appointed by their Head of Service with responsibility for the collection, input, analysis and reporting of performance data. They are also responsible for the maintenance of the systems involved and the resulting accuracy and timeliness of the data.
Data Champion	Chief Officers have appointed at least one Data Champion per

directorate, who may or may not be the responsible officer. The data champion is responsible for ensuring that systems are suitably tested and for ensuring best practice is adhered to.

All staff

Have a responsibility to ensure that data is handled in a responsible way and that all reasonable efforts are made to ensure the quality, accuracy, trustworthiness and timeliness of data. Staff must never knowingly report data which is inaccurate or incomplete and must endeavour to communicate any known risks or known variables.

11. Partners

Important Information is often provided by partner organisations and other external agencies, e.g. the Local Strategic Partnership, Derbyshire Police and Derbyshire County Council. We will work constructively with these organisations to provide assurance of the data quality. Any doubts about data quality should be addressed with the relevant partner(s).

Responsibility for data verification lies within the service receiving the information, Internal Audit and the Corporate Planning Team can provide advice and guidance if needed.

12. Contracts

The Council recognises that data quality is an important part of any contract that is outsourced to a third party. This is of particular importance to front line service contracts where large amounts of performance data are requested by the Council to judge a contractors performance.

Responsibility for the verification of data lies within the service managing the contract.

13. Output and reporting

Performance data required by external government departments, inspection and auditing bodies normally has a timetable for publication. All performance information should be available in time for management assessment and action prior to publication. It is important that performance information is subject to scrutiny and challenge before final reporting. This can be achieved through verification of output reports, service and directorate review.

Reporting accurate information leads to good decision-making and improved performance. Data quality is assessed through internal audit, during this process the officer responsible for data collection should be available to provide all supporting information. The audit undertaken by internal audit will require working papers to confirm the definition has been followed, the calculations are correct and that the indicator is supported by a full audit trail.

A comprehensive process is already in place for the collection, verification and reporting of local performance indicators and the Single Data Set.

14. Monitoring and Review

Chief Officers and the Performance and Community team will monitor the policy and the Council's overall approach to data quality. Internal Audit will provide internal assurance controls. A formal reporting structure for this will be developed.

The monitoring and review process will involve:

- Regular meetings with PI originators and Heads of Service, to ensure that the correct systems and procedures are in place, including providing support to data collectors
- Routine and spot checks
- Following up any data quality queries from members of staff; and
- Liaising with Internal Audit regarding any data quality issues they have come across as part of their review/inspection programme

The Council recognises the need to achieve a balance between the resources required to set and meet data quality standards and the relative benefits that flow. We will take this into account in developing our approach to monitoring and review. It will be necessary to focus resources on data that the Council regards as critical to its overall business objectives. Equally, the right balance must be achieved and justified between the dimensions of data quality; for example a balance needs to be struck between accuracy and timeliness.

The Council will judge its success in meeting its data quality policy through a number of key measures:

- ✓ The assessment provided by Internal Audit against the collection and reporting of its Performance Indicators.
- ✓ The Auditors opinion on its annual accounts and Value for Money.
- ✓ The % of monthly performance reports completed accurately and on time.
- ✓ The % of Performance Indicators collected and reported in line with their associated definitions, when reviewed by the Performance and Information Security Officer

15. Data Quality Action Plan

The implementation of the Data Quality Policy is through the actions listed in the Action Plan.

Anticipated Outcomes

The Main anticipated outcomes in delivering the Action Plan are:

- Improved accountability for data quality issues
- Increased awareness of data quality and its importance
- Increased commitment to data quality by the Council
- A strengthened performance management framework
- Informed decision making to improve service delivery

Action Plan Monitoring

The delivery of the Data Quality Action Plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis and will be reported at 6 month intervals into the Corporate Management Team (CMT). An annual progress report will also be produced and presented to the Corporate Management Team unless data quality concerns are identified sooner which will be escalated into the CMT for their information and actions as required.

Appendix A: Principles of Good Data Quality Management

Awareness: everyone recognises the need for good data quality and how they can contribute:

- Data quality is the responsibility of every member of staff entering, extracting or analysing data from any of the Council's information systems. Every responsible and/or relevant officer should be aware of his or her responsibilities with regard to data quality. The commitment to data quality will be communicated clearly throughout the Council to reinforce this message.
- Some responsible officers will have overall responsibility for data quality on a system but this does not exempt others from the responsibility to ensure that data is accurate and up-to date.
- There is collective responsibility for data quality, but it is necessary to be clear about what actions and responsibilities are allocated to specific individuals and teams in order to implement this policy.

Definitions: everyone knows which PIs are produced from the information they input and how they are defined:

- Statutory PI's have nationally set definitions. It is important that every detail of the definition is applied. This ensures that data is recorded consistently, allowing for comparison over time and national benchmarking.
- When setting local PI's, there is a need to ensure that a clear definition of the PI has been established and that there are systems available to collect and report the data in an agreed format.
- In some cases there are a number of similar indicators (some national and some local) measuring the same thing in slightly different ways. It is important to ensure that separate figures are calculated and reported systematically for each definition.
- Every PI should have a named officer who is responsible for collecting and reporting the information. This ensures that there is consistency in the application of definitions and use of systems for providing the data. Each named officer should be kept up to date of any changes in definition that may occur from time to time.

Input: there are controls over input, i.e. that information is input on an ongoing basis rather than stored up to be input later:

- The aim should be 100% accuracy, all of the time.
- It is important that officers have clear guidelines and procedures for using systems and are adequately trained to ensure that information is being entered consistently and correctly.
- Controls should also be in place to avoid double-counting. These should be designed according to the nature of the system, in particular where more than one person inputs data. A likely control will be an absolutely clear division of responsibility by setting out who is responsible for what data and who will be inputting the data.
- Data should be entered on a consistent basis; this reduces the error rate and the need for complex verification procedures.

- The system must also record all relevant information and be kept up to date.

Verification: there are verification procedures in place as close to the point of input as possible:

- Data requirements should be designed along the principle of 'getting it right first time' in order to avoid waste in the form of time and money spent on cleansing data, transferring data between different systems, matching and consolidating data from multiple databases and maintaining outdated systems.
- Nevertheless, in complex systems, even where there are strong controls over input, errors can creep in. Where it is needed, a verification procedure should exist close to the point of data input. The frequency of verification checks will need to be aligned with the frequency of data reporting.

The simplest verification system might be a review of recent data against expectations or a reconciliation of systems-produced data with manual input records. Depending on the complexity of the system it might be necessary to undertake more thorough verification tasks, such as:

- data cleansing - removing duplicate records or filling in missing information;
- sample checks to eliminate reoccurrence of a specific error - e.g. checking one field of data that is pivotal to a PI against documentation, for a sample of cases;
- test run reports to check the integrity of the query being used to extract data; and
- spot checks, e.g. on external contractor information.

Particular attention needs to be paid to data provided by external sources. A number of PIs are calculated using information provided by contractors and the Council's intention must be to work alongside contractors to ensure that such data is accurate.

When entering into contracts with service providers it is essential that wherever relevant, there is a requirement to provide timely and accurate performance information, and that we are clear with the contractor about their responsibilities for data quality and how we will be checking the information they provide.

It might not always be possible to alter existing contracts so that contractors are fully committed to providing an agreed quantity of performance data. In this case the data must be treated as high-risk and thought must be given to establishing a system of checks and measures to ensure that we are confident about the accuracy of this data. When carrying out checks on such information it is important that this is documented and signed off by the relevant officer.

Some important performance information - for example crime statistics - is provided directly to the Council by external agencies. The initial priority of this strategy is to address shortcomings in performance information provided directly by and to us, but where concerns exist about the integrity of externally-provided information, the Council's intention is to work with other agencies constructively wherever possible to provide assurance and rectify any problems identified.

Responsibility for data verification will lie within Departments but Internal

Audit and/or the Corporate Planning team can offer advice and guidance about verification procedures. In some cases it might become apparent that existing procedures are not sufficient to maintain a robust control environment. The next section describes how this can be rectified.

Systems: are fit for purpose and all staff have the expertise to get the best out of them.

Responsibility for maintaining a robust control environment for information systems lies within Departments, but there are some corporate resources for supporting improvement in this area. It is important to have a central record of systems to monitor the progress of the data quality policy.

Each system should have a named officer responsible for data quality issues. The responsible officer would be required to ensure that:

- users are adequately trained. Where appropriate there should be a formal training programme which is periodically evaluated and adapted to respond to changing needs;
- there is security of access/amendment;
- periodic tests of the integrity of data are undertaken;
- information management and support is available to users;
- system upgrades are made where necessary (where Performance Indicator definitions are amended for example);
- the system meets managers' information needs;
- feedback from users is acted upon;
- the system can produce adequate audit trails;
- actions recommended by system reviews (e.g. by internal/external auditors) are implemented;
- a set of written procedures (user guides) exist for the purpose of extracting performance information; and
- a business continuity plan for the system exists in order to protect vital records and data.
- a risk assessment has been undertaken
- a process map exists

There should also be a named substitute officer who can deputise in the data quality lead's absence by (at least) maintaining the day-to-day functionality of the system. Given the increasingly demanding timescale for performance reporting the Council cannot afford to have systems lying dormant during unplanned absences. It is, therefore also essential that written procedures are designed so that another officer can carry out the procedures essential to providing performance information if the officer who normally performs these duties is absent.

The earlier paragraphs detail the approach that will ensure systems data quality is maintained, but there will be systems where work has to be undertaken to rectify gaps in the control environment. To identify these systems there needs to be a co-ordinated evaluation of every information system used in the Council to produce performance information. The Corporate Planning team will be responsible for maintaining a database of all systems, including:

- the identity of the data quality lead (and deputy);
- a summary of data quality and verification actions undertaken; and
- risk assessment undertaken.

There are a number of conditions that might lead to a system being considered high-risk and every system needs to be assessed against these factors. The risk-assessment will be updated annually by the Corporate Planning team in consultation with Departments. 'High risk' conditions will include:

- a high volume of data/transactions;
- technically complex PI definition/guidance;
- problems identified in previous years;
- inexperienced staff involved in data processing/PI production;
- systems being used to produce new PIs
- known gaps in the control environment.

The purpose of undertaking a risk assessment is to target limited resources at the areas that require most attention. A co-ordinated programme of improvement will be put together focusing on high-risk systems. This will be compiled by the Corporate Planning team in consultation with Departments and Internal Audit.

Responsibility for delivering the Plan will lie within Departments, but support will be available from the Performance Officer and Internal Audit. Where high-risk systems have been identified for attention, the following steps will need to be taken:

- analysis of the control environment;
- identification of gaps;
- design of additional controls and procedures to address gaps;
- preparation of an action plan; and
- monitoring the implementation of the action plan.

There are a number of tools that might be used to analyse the control environment, and these are detailed below. Guidance on how to design and use these tools is available from Internal Audit:

- Maps of key controls show the progress of information from the input to output stages, and can be used to document the people, processes and tools that exist to ensure that expectations are met at every stage. These already exist for many high-risk systems.
- Another method of assessing the control environment is to write a verification checklist. This would be in the form of a series of 'yes'/'no' answers, and could be used by anyone to determine whether information flows accurately through the system.
- In some cases, externally designed tools exist to evaluate the control environment.

These tools all exist to identify any weaknesses in controls (or to confirm that the control environment is robust). Once this has been undertaken systematically, gaps in the control environment will be evident and new systems and procedures can be designed, addressing any part of the PI production process where controls are weak. This might involve a new verification procedure, new input controls, or improved training and communication.

It is important that the necessary improvement measures are formulated in an action plan, and that progress against the plan is systematically monitored. Officers carrying out the analysis work described above will be required to communicate the resulting action plan to the Corporate Planning team who will be responsible for liaising with departments to periodically update the action plan to check that proposed measures have been implemented. Progress on data quality action plans will be reported regularly to CMT.

Output: performance indicators are extracted regularly and efficiently and communicated quickly:

- Best use can be made of performance data if it is produced and communicated on a timetable that allows for management action. Performance data must be reported monthly to the Corporate Management Team/Senior Management Team. The Council's performance reporting timetable can be found on ERNIE.
- It is important that performance information is subject to scrutiny and challenge before being passed up the line for management action. This can be undertaken at several stages in the process. The most likely instances will be either a verification check on output reports or a Departmental review meeting of performance data (e.g. at a DMT). There will also be close internal scrutiny of external audit submissions by Internal Audit and the Corporate Management Team (see section 6).

Presentation: annual performance indicators are presented, with conclusive evidence, in such a way as to give an easily understood and accurate picture of our performance to external inspectorates and the public.

Reporting accurate information regularly leads to good decision-making and improved performance. For a large number of PIs, that performance will only be recognised publicly if it can be substantiated by external bodies. There are a number of controls that need to be in place in order for this to happen. If the preceding steps are in place, stakeholders will have confidence in the information we present, but there are principles of presenting evidence that are necessary to avoid problems in the audit process.

During external audits, there should be at least one other officer who is able to provide advice and information on the PI in the absence of the lead officer. This is an important control to ensure that audit work proceeds smoothly.

When information is presented for external audit, another officer must review working papers to confirm that the definition has been followed, the calculations are correct and that the indicator is supported by a full audit trail. This must be reviewed by the Corporate Planning team and then signed off by the Director.

A self-assessment form, accompanied by a full audit trail, must be compiled for any PI presented for external audit. This needs to include:

- a calculation, cross-referenced both backwards (to the self- assessment form) and forwards (to supporting information);
- system notes;
- explanation of any variance from the previous year;

- documentation supporting any estimates, sampling or any apportionments made; and supporting information (e.g. spreadsheet, database, screen dumps), or at least a full description of where the supporting information is kept.

Guidance has already been issued to departments on procedures necessary to ensure that high quality audit submissions are made. These will be further consolidated in a series of workshops on the subject, to be repeated as necessary to ensure that the Council continually improves data quality standards.

Some of these procedures are limited to indicators subject to external audit, such as the Single Data Set. However there are locally set definitions for some Service Plan targets and it is equally as necessary to ensure consistency of reporting for these. Additionally there are other performance indicators (such as local indicators) that are not subject to audit but are used in performance assessments, so it is also essential that these are reported fairly.

Appendix B: Background Information on Data Quality

Information and Data

Public services need reliable, accurate and timely information with which to manage (develop) services, inform users and account for performance. Service providers make many, often complex, decisions about their priorities and the use of resources. Service users and members of the public more widely, need accessible information to make informed decisions. Regulators and government departments need information to satisfy their responsibilities for making judgments about performance and governance.

A lot of time and money is spent by local authorities and public bodies on activities and systems that are involved in collecting and analysing data that underlies performance information. Despite this 'there remains a prevailing lack of confidence in much of this data'. Therefore, an increasing reliance is placed on this information in performance management and assessment regimes, and the need for reliable data has become more critical.

Good quality data is the essential ingredient for reliable performance and financial information to support decision making. The data used to report on performance must be 'fit for purpose', represent the Council's activity in an accurate and timely manner. At the same time, there must be a balance between the use and importance of the information, and the cost of collecting the required data to the necessary level of accuracy.

Data Requirements for the Council

All information in the Council is built up from a variety of sources. These data sets form the basis of whatever information is used in the Council. The information is used locally, but also nationally, to inform planning, performance management and to contribute to national statistics. To ensure consistency and comparability at a national level there are numerous rules and protocols about how, when and why certain data should be collected. If these rules are not followed closely or if the data are missing or unreliable then the information itself will be more likely to be flawed (resulting in low quality data). Conversely, the higher the quality of the underlying data, the more likely it is that the resulting information is accurate and consistent between organisations.

In practice, most data in the Council is gathered as part of the everyday activity in a huge variety of settings. This means that unless we have well managed systems and processes operated by appropriately supervised staff, errors can creep in and the quality of data can decline.

From an external monitoring perspective, the Council requires accurate information to manage service agreements with partners, along with data needed to meet for example, the reporting requirements listed below:

National Requirements

- Single Data Set
- Statutory returns/data sets (e.g. Department for Works and Pensions and Communities and Local Government)

- Quarterly monitoring returns
- External inspections

Audit requirements

The Council is regularly audited to ensure that:

- There is compliance with applicable legislation
- Best practice derived from British and International Standards are implemented
- Suitable processes are used, and control put into place, to ensure the completeness, relevance, correctness and security of data

Local Requirements

- Progress against the Council's Key Priorities and Key Service Priorities
- All performance indicators
- Progress against improvement and service plans

Appendix C: Managers Data Quality Guidance

Ensure that Responsible Officers have robust data collection systems in place

Managers should ensure that the collectors have systems in place that are documented and can be audited. This includes contingency arrangements to cover the absence of the usual collector.

Ensure that Responsible Officers have adequate training

Managers should ensure that collectors and their nominated deputy receive adequate training in the use of systems.

Clear guidelines and definitions should be available to all appropriate staff.

Checklist

- Is the process for the collection of data documented? Are reporting timescales agreed including third party providers?
- Is there a clear audit trail in place?
- Is there a nominated collector and back-up collector for data?
- Is there a nominated liaison officer for third party data providers?
- Have nominated officers received the appropriate training?
- Are regular or random checks made on the integrity of information

Appendix D: Responsible Officers Data Quality Guidance

Ensure that you have documented the process of Data Collection

This can be a written document or a flow process chart. Further guidance and assistance can be provided by the Performance Officer.

Ensure that there is an audit trail for information produced

You should be able to trace the data back to where it first originated – tracking entries on a computer system back to hard copy data entry forms for example.

Ensure that someone in your team understands the process you go through to collate information

It is important that the Council can continue to provide quality data in the absence of individuals. Therefore, at least one other person should be capable of collecting data in your absence.

Ensure that all working files are stored on a shared computer drive

All information and working files should be stored in shared computer drives in order to be accessible if the usual collector is unavailable and automatically backed up on a daily basis. Security access restrictions should be in place to ensure that these files can only be accessed by appropriate staff.

Ensure that submitted data is clear and unambiguous

Clearly label data and avoid use of acronyms and abbreviations as these can cause confusion

Responsible Officers should be able to demonstrate that:

- The most up to date guidance and definitions have been used
- The process of collecting data is documented
- Support evidence is available
- There is a clear audit trail between source and end data

Appendix E: Data Sharing Protocols

Protocol	Action	By	When
1. Terms of Reference	Always establish: the data requirements of any partners, the use for which the data is intended, the accuracy/ confidence requirements and the audience to whom it will be reported. Ensure that a memorandum of understanding is drawn up and signed off by all partners.	The Council's representative in the partnership.	Prior to the partnership being formalised
2. Confidence	All data communicated externally must include this disclaimer. "This data is provided by Erewash Borough Council and has been rated as (High/Medium/ Low) risk; supporting documentation is available on request (subject to Data Protection). No consent is given for republication."	All officers	With all data transmissions
3. External Data	All officers receiving data from other sources must establish the risk rating of that data prior to use.	All officers	Prior to reuse of data/ publication.
4. Descriptions/ Criteria	Responsible Officers must ensure that for all data either received or transmitted, both parties understand the full description/criteria and context of the data supplied so that it cannot be misinterpreted or misapplied.	All officers	Prior to receipt/ transmission.