

RYEBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 1 April 2008
title: Ribblesdale Borough Council's Data Quality Policy
submitted by: Chief Executive
principal author: Michelle Haworth - Corporate Policy Officer

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Regular performance monitoring is essential to ensure that the Council is delivering services effectively to meet the needs of the community. It is therefore important that reliable, accurate and timely information is available to facilitate decision-making.
- 1.2 The Council has produced a Data Quality Policy to ensure all data produced is timely and accurate.
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to approve the Council's Data Quality Policy. The report puts forward a final version of the policy with the recommendation that it is now adopted by the Council.

2 RELEVANCE TO THE COUNCIL'S AMBITIONS AND PRIORITIES:

- Council Ambitions: Measuring and monitoring our performance allows us to
- Community Objectives: ensure that we meet the Council's ambitions and objectives,
- Corporate Priorities: which together formulate the corporate priorities. The
- Other Considerations: importance of getting it right first time - the Council needs reliable, accurate and timely information with which to manage services, inform users and account for our performance.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 2006/07, the Audit Commission developed a new three-stage approach to reviewing data quality at local authorities, representing a significant shift in the level of work carried out by auditors in this area. The Data Quality assessment forms part of the mandatory work for the audit year, and it also has a direct impact on the Use of Resources conclusion.
- 3.2 The purpose of a Data Quality assessment is to:
 - present auditors detailed findings in relation to one of the 12 Use of Resources criteria, (criterion 4: "The body has put in place arrangements to monitor the quality of its published performance information and to report the results to Members");
 - report the findings of detailed work performed in relation to the Council's BVPIs; and
 - agree an action plan with the Council to address relevant identified weaknesses.
- 3.3 Our auditors' conclusion in January 2007 was that the Council demonstrated that its Data Quality arrangements were adequate and met the overall minimum Data Quality performance standards in 2005/06. However, they also stated that the Council should seek to continue to improve its performance and position in 2006/07 by successfully implementing the agreed actions contained within the Action Plan section of their report, in which they set out the immediate areas that the Council needed to address to improve its future Data Quality score and internal control arrangements.
- 3.4 We developed a Data Quality Strategy and an associated delivery plan to ensure improvements were made in this important area. This was approved by Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Resources) in March 2007, at which time members also assigned responsibility for Data Quality. It was approved that overall responsibility should reside with the Corporate Services Manager, Jeff Fenton, and the chair of Overview and Scrutiny (Resources) Committee, Cllr. Stan Taylor, to take the member lead.

nt improvements to our Data Quality arrangements, have
gy and most of the associated actions, we retained a judgement
were inadequate in 2006/07. The main reason for this is that the
Data Quality Policy and we cannot improve our judgement until

4 THE IMPORTANCE OF DATA QUALITY

- 4.1 Accurate and timely information is crucial to effective performance management. Traditionally government monitoring has relied on audited data from the last full financial year, which often takes place months after the year-end. This can mean audited performance information is out of date, does not reflect the current local position and can cause delays in responding to under-performance.
- 4.2 The new performance framework, which was outlined in the White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, provides a clear set of national outcomes and a single set of national indicators by which to measure progress and aims to enable Government and inspectorates to base their activity on more up-to-date data. The new national indicators will be the only indicators against which local authorities performance, alone or in partnership, will be reported to Central Government. They will therefore be the only measures against which Government can agree targets with a local authority or partnership, through Local Area Agreements (LAAs).
- 4.3 It is clear from Government guidance on the new framework that this will mean that, while post-hoc checking of data quality through audit may still be needed, on a proportionate basis, it will not be sufficient.

'The quality of data needs to be improved at the point of collection and reporting, to ensure it is fit for purpose.'

- 4.4 Local authorities and their partners are responsible for having in place effective arrangements for managing data quality. The Data Quality Policy seeks to put in place systems, policies and procedures to ensure the highest possible data quality, particularly where information is shared with partners.
- 4.5 Data Quality arrangements will continue to be considered as part of the annual audit and any concerns reflected in the Audit Commission's Use of Resources judgement as part of Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The Audit Commission is publishing advice on improving the quality of data on which it will base its audit judgements.

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1

- Resources: None
- Technical, Environmental and Legal: None
- Political: None
- Reputation: It is important that correct and timely information is available to facilitate decision-making.

6 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 It is recommended that committee approve the Data Quality Policy.

Michelle Haworth
Corporate Policy Officer

For further information please ask for Michelle Haworth, extension 4421