

Government and Public Sector

November 2008

# Ribble Valley Borough Council Data Quality Review

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18<sup>th</sup> November 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Data Quality Reviews**

We are pleased to present the summary results of our assessment of the Authority's data quality arrangements, which has been completed in accordance with the methodology and guidance issued by the Audit Commission. We discussed the results and issues arising with officers on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2008. Please contact Sally Parkinson or Peter Chambers if there are matters that you would like to discuss further.

Yours sincerely

*PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP*

PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP

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**Code of Audit Practice and Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies**

*In March 2005 the Audit Commission issued a revised version of the ‘Statement of responsibilities of auditors and of audited bodies’. It is available from the Chief Executive of each audited body. The purpose of the statement is to assist auditors and audited bodies by explaining where the responsibilities of auditors begin and end, and what is to be expected of the audited body in certain areas. Our reports and management letters are prepared in the context of this Statement.*

*Reports and letters prepared by appointed auditors and addressed to members or officers are prepared for the sole use of the audited body, and no responsibility is taken by auditors to any Member or officer in their individual capacity, or to any third party.*

# Introduction and summary

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings from our work on Data Quality (DQ) for 2007/08. Auditors' work on DQ and performance information supports the Audit Commission's reliance on performance indicators (PI) in its service assessments for comprehensive performance assessment (CPA).

Our work on DQ is informed 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 DQ. The expected impact of the Audit Commission's work on DQ 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.

We followed the Audit Commission's three-stage approach to the review of DQ as set out below, together with a summary of our findings.

## Stage 1: Management arrangements

A review using key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to determine whether proper corporate management arrangements for DQ 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).

We concluded that the Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring DQ are consistently above minimum requirements satisfying the criteria for a level 3 assessment.

## Stage 2: Analytical review

This stage constituted an analytical review of 2007/08 BVPI and non-BVPI, and the accuracy of the PI confirmed through review of the calculation and supporting documentation. Our work identified that the PI values reviewed were substantiated by evidence. The review identified that the Council had incorrectly input BV199a in the EDC system. This was amended by the Council and resubmitted. We concluded that for all other PIs we reviewed, changes in data reflected genuine changes in performance of the Council.

## Stage 3: Data quality spot checks

This stage constituted an in-depth review of a sample of 2007/08 PIs all of which come from a list of specified BVPIs used in comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), to determine whether arrangements to secure DQ are delivering accurate, timely and accessible information in practice. For 2007/08, the Audit Commission specified that it is compulsory to review two housing benefits PIs at all single tier and district councils as a minimum. Our review and spot checks of PIs identified that the PIs submitted by the Council were fairly stated. Substantive testing confirmed that the PIs were accurate, with no significant issues arising.

# Summary of Key Findings and Areas for Improvement

## Management arrangements (Stage 1)

We concluded that the Council's DQ arrangements justified a score of level 3. The conclusion was derived from our assessment of the Council's performance against each DQ KLoE prescribed by the Audit Commission. This shows an improvement in DQ arrangements within the year.

### Governance and leadership

Has the body put in place arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of data used to manage and report on performance?

#### Overview

- The Council has a 'Data Quality Strategy' in place that details the arrangements and responsibilities of DQ throughout the Council. Overview and Scrutiny Committee has member input into DQ arrangements with the Central Management Team reviewing DQ performance on a regular basis. Responsibility for DQ is cascaded to officers through performance appraisals, where challenging objectives are set and performance against these objectives are monitored.

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The Council were unable to evidence that DQ is fully integrated into the Council's planning, monitoring and reporting procedures whilst also considering partnership arrangements and ensuring that these partnerships are fully aware of the need for DQ regimes. The Council should consider how it can ensure that best practice is shared across the Council and to third parties to improve DQ throughout.

## Policies and procedures

### Has the organisation defined its expectations and requirements in relation to data quality?

#### Overview

- The Council has a comprehensive DQ policy in place that covers data collection, recording, analysis and reporting across all business areas. Comprehensive procedures and guidance notes exist that meet users' needs. All relevant staff are able to access the policies and support is offered by the Corporate Services Manager. Training updates are given on an annual basis to ensure that officers are informed of changes to policies and procedures on a timely basis. Revised policies are uploaded on the Council's intranet to ensure that the latest policies are accessible.

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The Council should identify DQ champions in each department who review and report on compliance of the department on a regular basis. The DQ policy should include DQ arrangements with partners and procedures to follow should partners not comply with the Council's procedures.

## Systems and processes

### Are there effective systems and processes in place to secure the quality of data?

#### Overview

- The Council have appropriate systems in place to secure the quality of data. The Council use the "Covalent" system to record DQ arrangements and PI performance. Training has been provided by the Council to adopt a 'right first time' principle. Approval of data submissions by management ensure that data entered is reviewed before submission to assist in the accuracy of the data produced. Internal Audit review DQ arrangements and PI outputs as part of their annual plan to ensure that data is accurate. System administrators and the Information Technology General Controls review performed by external audit provide assurance over the security and quality of data.

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The Council should actively include officers and partners when developing or implementing new information systems and ensure that it is actively strengthening performance information systems. Robust assurances should be gained from information received from partners to ensure that the Council receives accurate and secure data. The Council should develop formal protocols or standards for the sharing of information with entities that the Council transact with.

## People and skills

### Does the organisation have the resources in place to secure data quality?

#### Overview

- The Council has ensured responsibility for DQ is set at the top level and has included its commitments to DQ through the Corporate Plan. Job descriptions reflect roles and responsibilities of management and operational staff. DQ targets and standards have been set, with performance appraisals including DQ performance. The Corporate Services Manager is the Council's DQ champion and has responsibility for DQ improvement throughout the Council.

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The Council needs to consider the implications and impact of future developments on DQ staff skills and capacity, and actively manage these developments. Potential DQ issues should be identified and reported to the responsible DQ officer to improve feedback and accuracy of data.

## Data use

### Are there effective arrangements for the use of data for performance management and service improvement?

#### Overview

- The Council produces performance information relevant to targets to enable monitoring of service delivery, forecast year end achievement and identified areas for improvement. Data reported is supported by an adequate audit trail that is validated by internal checks and testing performed by Internal Audit. PI reporting requires manager approval to ensure accuracy of the information reported. Internal Audit review PI outturns on a risk basis to ensure that significant performance changes are accurate. Findings from the review performed by Internal Audit are reported to the Central Management Team.

#### Areas for Improvement and Recommendations

- The Council needs to consider routinely using data supporting performance to plan services and allocate resources to aid future planning. Evidence to support this consideration should be retained and decisions made reported to Members.

## Analytical review (Stage 2)

An analytical review of the following BVPIs was carried out. The findings are shown below.

2007/08 Performance Indicator	Assessment	Comment
BVPI 82a	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance improvement.	The Council have introduced the three stream waste collection within the Borough and this has enabled to Council to improve recycling and composting performance.
BVPI 82b	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance improvement.	
BVPI 199a	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance decline.	The Council has low levels of problems with cleanliness of public spaces; performance in this area has declined from the prior year due to a small increase in the level of litter and detritus, graffiti and fly-posting.
BVPI 199b	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance decline.	
BVPI 199c	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance decline.	
BVPI 184a	Variance from 2006/07 and the value are within Audit Commission parameters.	Performance is within the Audit Commission parameters.
BVPI 212	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance improvement.	Average re-let times have reduced within the 2007/08 financial year. The Council has improved timelines of repairs to enable re-lets to be quicker.
BVPI 183b	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance improvement.	As a result of improved re-let times the Council has been able to reduce the average time in temporary accommodation.
BVPI 78a	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance decline.	Substantive testing performed in the Stage 3 assessment to provide assurance over the accuracy of the PI.
BVPI 78b	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance decline.	

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

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

Performance Indicator	Assessment	Comment
<b>Housing benefits</b> BVPI 78a	Fairly stated.	Testing performed identified one error (case number 10018555). The Council incorrectly treated a change in circumstances as a new claim. There was no impact on the PI outturn as a result of this error.
<b>Housing benefits</b> BVPI 78b	Fairly stated.	One error was identified as a result of the testing performed. The Council incurred an overpayment to a claimant (case number 10015303). Evidence to validate the value of the overpayment could not be found.  There was no impact on the PI outturn as a result of this error.
<p><b>Recommendations</b>                      The Council ensure that changes in circumstances are correctly treated and appropriate documentation is retained to support benefit claims.</p>		

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