

By: Nick Chard, Cabinet Member, Environment, Highways & Waste

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview Committee - 16 July 2009

Subject: Data Quality Audit 2007 / 08

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This item provides an opportunity for members to consider and discuss data quality issues following the publication of the 2007 / 2008 Data Quality Audit.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Data quality is an area where there has been an increasing national focus in the recent past. This reflects the recognition that having accurate, up-to date data, together with a good appreciation of what the data does, and does not, tell us is vitally important in the provision of public services. As recently as March 2009 the Audit Commission published a report saying 'recent work has shown that the quality of data in the NHS is often not what it needs to be to meet the demands now being placed upon it' (*Figures you can trust, A briefing on data quality in the NHS, Audit Commission, March 2009*), and while this report referred specifically to the NHS data quality is an issue that is relevant to all public services.
- 1.2 The Audit Commission recently undertook an audit of data quality in KCC and this was reported to Governance and Audit Committee on 4 March 2009. A copy of the report is attached as an appendix.

2 Discussion

- 2.1 Data quality is an important issue for any piece of information or intelligence that is used to steer or manage the business. Current business plans include key performance and activity data that covers not just national performance indicators but also Towards 2010 targets, directorate-wide targets and service level indicators. In producing these plans there has been a specific focus on developing measures that are robust and meaningful in terms of the business and the people working in it. We have sought to be clear about what is being measured, why, and on how it is to be measured. Examples of this can be seen in the performance indicator definition sheets that are used within KHS. Performance information is reviewed by individual teams and heads of service as part of the data quality process.
- 2.2 The overall finding of the audit report was that the council's arrangements were consistently above minimum standards. The report made five recommendations, a number of which related to enhancing the role of councillors with respect to data quality. This report is an initial step in that direction and seeks to enable the committee to consider data quality issues and their involvement in them.

- 2.3 Members will note that the analytical review and spot checks undertaken as part of the audit looked at two BVPIs relevant to the Directorate – recycling and composting performance (BV82) and pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people (BV165). BV165 is an interesting example in that whilst we believed we were measuring it correctly up until 2006/07 an audit in that year showed that our interpretation of the methodology and standards were incorrect. The 2007/08 measurement used the clarified measurement standards and performance as measured by the BVPI thus dropped significantly compared to the years prior to 2006/07. The actual conditions (e.g. kerb heights) experienced by users of the pedestrian crossings are very unlikely to have changed much over a period of a couple of years, but the measure reported by the BVPI changed significantly. This demonstrates the both importance of data quality, and the need, in certain situations, to use other performance measures (e.g. complaints) to gain a fuller understanding of the circumstances.
- 2.4 Members will be aware that the new national set of performance indicators is significantly reduced compared to the BVPIs. Nationally based performance frameworks may well change further – for example, the recently published final report of the Operational Efficiency Programme (April 2009) says that ‘CLG should lead on reforming, and where possible reducing, the National Indicator Set (NIS) ahead of the next round of LAAs to support effective local prioritisation’ (*Operational Efficiency Programme, final report, HM Treasury, April 2009*).
- 2.5 Irrespective of the number of measures or indicators in place, be they national or local, the need for them to be both relevant and meet high data quality standards is likely to increase. This may be particularly so in a situation where resources are likely to be tight and decisions need to be based on the best, most accurate, and representative information available.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members of the POC are asked to:
- a) note the recommendations made in the Data Quality Action Plan
 - b) identify any areas where they have particular concerns about data quality or require more information;
 - c) and identify any training needs they feel they have.

Background Documents: Data Quality Audit Report 2007/08 (appendix)

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