

# Data Quality

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Southampton City Council

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Audit 2008/09

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March 2009

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## Status of our reports

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  - any third party.
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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**

<b>Stage 1</b>	<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).
<b>Stage 2</b>	<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.
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>Data quality spot checks</b> In-depth review of a sample of 2007/08 PIs most 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.

- 5 As this is the third year of applying this approach to data quality, we tailored our work to focus on the key changes and actions taken to address previously identified weaknesses and recommendations.
- 6 In addition to the specified indicators at stage 3, we selected 3 performance indicators (BV165 Pedestrian crossings; BV184 (a) proportion of non-decent homes; and BV212 Average re-let times) to review that are on the list of specified indicators. This is because we identified a potential risk to the quality of the underlying data.
- 7 We also reviewed the 'cost per Library visit' indicator, which we reported on last year.

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### Summary conclusions

#### Stage 1 – Management arrangements

- 8 The Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality are consistently above minimum requirements. The Council has maintained good data quality arrangements in most areas but there are some weaknesses in its performance reporting to external bodies which need to be addressed.

#### Stage 2 – Analytical review

- 9 Our analytical review work at Stage 2 identified that the 'Specified' PI values reviewed fell within expected ranges. There were eight Non-specified PIs within our analytical review for which the variance fell outside expected ranges. Seven of these variances were substantiated by evidence. The eighth PI (BVPI 45 Absence from secondary school) was originally based on an estimate and has subsequently been amended by the Council to reflect final data. Therefore no specific variance analysis work was required and we based our selection of indicators on our knowledge and experience of the Council.

#### Stage 3 – Data quality spot checks

- 10 Our review and spot checks of PIs found that the performance indicators for both BV184 (a) proportion of non-decent homes; and BV212 Average re-let times; were fairly stated. Our testing of BV165 (Pedestrian crossings) indicated that there was a 64.9 per cent level of compliance with the height of the kerb standard. The Council therefore agreed that the performance indicator should be amended to 64.9 per cent.
- 11 Our testing of the two mandatory housing benefit performance indicators revealed an error rate of 23 per cent in relation to BVPI 78 (a) (Processing of new claims) and 43 per cent in relation to BVPI 78 (b) (Processing of change in circumstances). While the overall impact of the errors on both of these PIs is minimal, the wide range of causes of the errors in both cases leads to a level of uncertainty that requires us to qualify each of these two PIs.

## Introduction

- 12 Our follow up work from last year on the 'cost per library visit' indicator found that it has been correctly calculated and is therefore fairly stated this year.
- 13 An action plan has been agreed with the Council (see Appendix 1) to address the issues arising from this review.

# Detailed findings

## Management arrangements (stage 1)

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

### Governance and leadership

- 15 The Council demonstrates good leadership in ensuring the reliability and accuracy of its performance data and managers continue to take effective action where issues arise. The corporate data quality strategy and action plan are used to drive improvement, for example in performance management in the library service. The Council still needs to ensure that all councillors are made aware of the risks associated with poor data quality. The local area agreement (LAA) makes clear the importance of data quality and the Council is developing a partnership protocol which will include the data quality standards expected of its key partnerships but this is not yet complete.

### Recommendation

- R1** Set data quality standards for key partnerships in the partnership protocol.

### Policies

- 16 Officers receive good guidance on quality assuring performance information and this is followed in most cases. In 2007/08, the Council introduced its own quality checking of performance information provided by its LAA partners and set standards to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this information. Policy Coordinators continue to lead directorates on data quality compliance across the organisation, with support from performance officers. Generally there is good compliance with data quality procedures by officers but we identified a few weaknesses in 2007/08 in benefits (see 'data quality spot checks'), and in housing management relating to gas safety performance. The Council is taking action in response to the issues raised in relation to local housing performance indicators, including the need to quality check local performance indicators. The Council works with its LAA partners to ensure data quality, for example improved reporting by the PCT.

### Recommendation

- R2** Rectify weaknesses identified in the quality of housing benefit and housing management performance information.

## Detailed findings

### Systems and processes

- 17 The Council is improving its systems for collecting and reporting performance information. The new performance management system ('Corvu') introduced in 2007/08 enables timely on-line reporting by officers of the Council's corporate improvement plan commitments and targets and direct reporting by LAA partners of performance progress for the targets they are responsible for. The Council and its LAA partners receive good quality performance reports, produced by this new system, which clearly highlight where progress is off target and explain variances. Security controls for the Corvu system are regularly tested to prevent unauthorised access and there are appropriate controls in place for use of the system by the Council's LAA partners. The Council has agreed data sharing protocols with some of its key partners but there is no formal agreement with every LAA partner.

#### Recommendation

- R3** Agree appropriate data sharing arrangements with the Council's LAA partners.

### People and skills

- 18 The Council identifies and responds effectively to the data quality training needs of most staff. For example, training was provided for officers in the library service in 2007/08 in response to repeated issues identified with data quality and this has resulted in improvement. The Council continues to use its networks of performance officers to share learning and improve procedures but it had not completed its review of competencies by April 2008 and this may identify gaps in its data quality training.

### Data use and reporting

- 19 Senior managers continue to make effective use of performance information to improve performance. In 2007/08, performance improved in a number of underperforming areas including education attainment.
- 20 The Council has quality assurance procedures for externally reported performance information but this is not always being consistently applied. For example errors were found in the external reporting for housing management (HiP return) and housing benefit data. This presents risks to the Council, both financial and performance management.

#### Recommendation

- R4** Consistently apply existing quality checking of externally reported data more effectively, supported by refresher training for staff.

## Analytical review (stage 2)

- 21 An analytical review of the following BVPIs and non-BVPIs was carried out. The findings, subject to the validation of a sample of PIs in stage 3 spot checks, are shown below.

**Table 2 Analytical review findings**

2007/08 Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
BVPI 40 KS2 Mathematics	Variance from 2006/07 (improvement of 7 per cent to 76 per cent) attributable to real performance improvement	Specifically targeted initiatives have been implemented by the Council in this traditionally challenging area of performance during 2007/08.
BVPI 45 Absence in secondary schools	Initial PI value 10.30 per cent of half days missed was based on estimated rather than actual data. The actual value of 9.2 per cent has now been submitted.	The Council, through a number of initiatives, is continuing to address persistent absenteeism within the seven schools recognised as 'persistently absentee', and are receiving support to improve performance from the National Strategies Regional Advisor.
BVPI 127 (a) Violent crimes per 1,000 population	The reported performance indicator (42.3 crimes per 1,000 population) is attributable to actual levels of violent crimes.	A number of measures have been put in place to counter these offences including high visibility police patrols, taxi/bus marshals and identification of problem licensed premises. Further measures and projects will be put in place in the next 12 months in accordance with the published Southampton Safe City Partnership Plan.
BVPI 128 Vehicle crimes per 1,000 population	Variance from 2006/07 is attributable to a real performance improvement - ie a reduction of 28.3 per cent.	There has been a targeted focus to address vehicle crime across the city by the Chief Inspector lead for vehicle crime.



## Detailed findings

2007/08 Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
BVPI 174 Racial incidents per 100,000 population	Variance from 2006/07 (22.7 per cent increase) and the value of the PI (223.09) are both attributable to an increase in the level of awareness and reporting of racial incidents.	Officers have indicated that this reflects an expected increase resulting from a campaign raising the level of awareness and reporting of hate crimes.
BVPI 215 (a) Rectification of street light faults (Non-DNO)	Variance from 2006/07 (54 per cent decline) and the number of days taken to repair street lights (14.80) are both attributable to a real decline in performance.	Additional funding has been secured to address the backlog in repairs and an improvement is therefore expected during 2008/09.
BVPI 215 (b) Rectification of street light faults (DNO)	The number of days taken (99.12) is attributable to real performance levels.	Officers have commented that there have been a number of outstanding jobs and contractual difficulties that have contributed to this low level of performance.
BVPI 222 (a) Quality of Early Years and Childcare leadership - leaders.	The percentage of leaders with level 4 or above qualifications (64 per cent) is attributable to a real performance improvement.	The success in this area is attributed by officers to the availability of '2nd year Transformation Funding' to support level 4 training and continuing funding for level 5 (foundation degree) and above.

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

### Data quality spot checks (stage 3)

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

**Table 3 Spot check findings**

Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
Housing Benefits BVPI 78a	Unfairly stated.	Sample Testing of BV78a - Time taken to process New Benefit Claims (STAT 124) - indicated that although the effect on the reported figures were minimal the 23.08 per cent error rate in the sample tested meant that we could not conclude the PI Indicator is fairly stated at 26 Days Therefore, the indicator was qualified
Housing Benefits BVPI 78b	Unfairly stated.	Sample testing of BVI 78b - Time taken to process Change in Circumstances (STAT 124) - indicated that although the effect on the reported figures were to reduce the average days of the sample from 18 to 16 Days, the 41 per cent error rate in the sample tested meant that we could not conclude the PI Indicator is fairly stated at 16 Days - Therefore, the indicator was qualified
Culture Cost per Library visit	Fairly stated.	Our review of the 'Cost per Library visit' confirmed that management arrangements are satisfactory and that it has been correctly calculated.
Environment Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people (BV165)	Fairly stated now that it has been amended	The Council agreed to reduce the PI from 99.4 per cent to 64.9 per cent compliance in line with the results of the representative sample of crossings that we tested.
Housing Proportion of non-decent homes (BV184a)	Fairly stated	We concluded that based on our testing the management arrangements in relation to BV184 (a) are satisfactory and it has been correctly calculated.

## Detailed findings

Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
Housing Average Re-let Time (BV212)	Fairly stated	We concluded that based on our testing the management arrangements that are in place in relation to BV212 are satisfactory and it has been correctly calculated.

### Recommendations

**R5** Refresher Training required for Housing Benefit Assessors to ensure that claims are appropriately recorded for STAT124 purposes.

**R6** If the Council are to continue to operate the 'fit for purpose' criteria when assessing the state of disabled crossings, they should actively consult with disabled user groups and be able to demonstrate that they have obtained appropriate feedback that supports their assertion.

# Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
<b>Management arrangements</b>						
6	R1 Set data quality standards for key partnerships in the partnership protocol.	2	Mark Heath	Yes	Appropriate data quality considerations will be built into the new partnership protocol and other associated documents.	May 2009
6	R2 Rectify weaknesses identified in the quality of housing benefit and housing management performance information.	3	Nick Murphy & Carolyn Williamson	Yes	Action plans are in place to improve the quality of local housing management performance information with progress against these plans being monitored through intensive care meetings chaired by the Chief Executive. A full retraining exercise of housing benefit assessors was carried out in October 2008. The client team were also included in the retraining alongside the assessors. The client and the service quality and accuracy teams have jointly reviewed monitoring processes to include the checking of performance indicator data. This is ongoing and is discussed at regular meetings between the two teams. Following these meetings assessors are briefed of any findings that require additional care when updating the Academy benefit system. Monitoring forms have also been amended to clearly show the assessor, what is being checked and where corrections are needed.	Ongoing  November 2008  Ongoing  January 2009

## Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
7	R3 Agree appropriate data sharing arrangements with the Council's LAA partners.	2	Joy Wilmot-Palmer	Yes	Data Sharing arrangements are already in place to facilitate the operation of key partnerships that underpin the delivery of the LAA. Following on from the approval of the partnership protocol these arrangements will be reviewed for both existing and new partnerships to determine if they would be more appropriately applied at an individual partner rather than at a partnership level having due regard to all legal obligations as well as other information management requirements.	March 2010
7	R4 Consistently apply existing quality checking of externally reported data more effectively, supported by refresher training for staff.	2	Joy Wilmot-Palmer	Yes	The sign off arrangements for externally reported data, including HIP forms, will be reviewed. Updated guidance will be issued and the respective roles of Heads of Service and Policy Co-ordinators within the quality assurance process will be reinforced.	March 2010
<b>Spot checks</b>						
11	R5 Refresher Training required for Housing Benefit Assessors to ensure that claims are appropriately recorded for STAT124 purposes.	3	Carolyn Williamson	Yes	Refresher training has been carried out focussing on BVPI 78a+b. This has included staff working through practical exercises as well as the provision of additional guidance notes and charts to identify the correct dates to use in certain types of circumstances and scenarios. However, this is quite complex as a number of changes have been made since April 2008 by the DWP eg the non-suppression of intervention statistics.	December 2008

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
11	R6 If the Council are to continue to operate the 'fit for purpose' criteria when assessing the state of disabled crossings, they should actively consult with disabled user groups and be able to demonstrate that they have obtained appropriate feedback that supports their assertion.	2	Lorraine Brown	Yes	The Council will adapt its existing consultation processes to more clearly demonstrate the feedback obtained from disabled user groups to enable the 'fitness for purpose' criteria to continue to be adopted, as appropriate, for all new disabled crossing facilities installed from 2009/10 onwards.	Ongoing

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