

Data Quality

Carlisle City Council

Audit 2008-2009

January 2009



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Status of our reports

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- any director/member or officer in their individual capacity; or
 - 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.

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.

Table 1 Data quality approach

Stage 1	Management arrangements 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).
Stage 2	Analytical review An analytical review of 2007/08 BVPI and non-BVPI data and selection of a sample for testing based on risk assessment.
Stage 3	Data quality spot checks In-depth review of a sample of 2007/08 PIs [most/all of which] [amend as applicable] 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.

Summary conclusions

Stage 1 – Management arrangements

- 6 The Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality are consistently above minimum requirements.
- 7 There is strategic responsibility for data quality and members and senior officers are involved in scrutinising the quality of performance information. This scrutiny is supported by a quarterly programme of internal audit reviews of data quality.
- 8 The Council has a data quality policy and supporting guidance available to staff. Reminders are sent out to responsible officers to ensure that robust performance information is available in a timely manner.
- 9 During 2007/8 the Council used an interim performance management system as the review of local government reorganisation in Cumbria was taking place. Since the review, they have invested in Covalent and involved users and managers in designing the way it operates. Both systems are secure and all instances of third party data sharing have been identified and protocols and agreements on data quality are in place or under development.
- 10 The data quality policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of staff in relation to data quality. These are considered in appraisals where appropriate and guidance and bespoke support is available from the policy and performance team.
- 11 The Council is recognised by external bodies and the Audit Commission for its approach to mapping and analysing small area data to inform service improvement.

Stage 2 – Analytical review

- 12 Our analytical review work at Stage 2 identified that the PI values were substantiated by evidence for the variations. Two mandatory and one discretionary PIs were selected for review in detail at Stage 3.

Stage 3 – Data quality spot checks

- 13 Our review and spot checks of BVPIs Housing Benefits 78a and 78b and Environment 82a found that they were all fairly stated.
- 14 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)

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

Governance and leadership

- 16** There is overall strategic responsibility for data quality. The Deputy Chief Executive has lead responsibility and receives monthly reporting on issues relating to data quality. Members scrutinise data quality on a quarterly basis.
- 17** The roles and responsibilities of staff for data quality have been set out within the data quality strategy and comprehensive training has been undertaken. There is a management lead for each indicator and staff have received training and coaching where requested.
- 18** The Council have reviewed the PIs and organised them into groupings and assessed their relevance and usefulness. Within this process they also adjusted the timing of review of individual PIs.
- 19** The Council uses quarterly internal audit reviews to assess the effectiveness of controls on a number of PIs. The outcomes of these reviews are reported to members.

Policies

- 20** The Council has a data quality strategy that has been approved by senior management and is available to all staff. There was a range of supporting guidance available through the performance system which has been incorporated into Covalent for 2008/9. All the Audit Commission guidance documents and updates are emailed to PI Users and PI custodians and are available on the Council's Intranet site.
- 21** All staff can access the policy and supporting guidance and know that they can receive bespoke support from the policy and performance team. When performance information is requested, an email reminding PI users of deadlines is sent to each PI user. All PI users are made aware of the importance of the deadline being met and the importance of the integrity and accuracy of the information.

Systems and processes

- 22** There are systems and processes in place for collection, recording and analysis of performance data. During 2007/08 the Policy & Performance Team developed an interim performance management system that gave greater flexibility in the recording, collecting, analysing and reporting of performance information. This system checks the data for variances greater than 10 per cent and calculates performance indicators using standard equations agreed by PI users. The system also uses universal population and household data where appropriate.

- 23** The Council uses internal audit to review the effectiveness of controls on a selection of performance indicators for data quality on a quarterly basis. In addition work was commissioned by the authority to improve performance in the waste data collection process. The project involved evaluating performance of comparable councils and process mapping of current ways of working.
- 24** Security arrangements were in place for the performance system and a business continuity plan (BCP) is in place.
- 25** All instances of internal and external data sharing have been formally identified. There is a formal protocol in place for the Carlisle & Eden Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership who regularly exchange sensitive information between agencies. A Service Level Agreement is in place with minority groups with regards to Equality issues, which includes the handling of data and statistical information. Each PI user and their line manager complete a Data Quality Statement that contains questions about information received from third parties.

People and skills

- 26** The roles and responsibilities of staff for data quality have been set out within the data quality strategy and relevant staff have access to guidelines when inputting data. Key Performance staff and audit services staff have attended audit commission training on data quality and process mapping training throughout the year to ensure we are using the most up to date methods for ensuring robust data quality. PI users were trained and coached in the interim Performance Dashboard system. All PI users, Managers and Members are currently being trained in the new Covalent system. Regardless of the system being used, refresher coaching is given by Policy & Performance Officers on a regular basis throughout the year, as a matter of course.
- 27** The annual appraisal round, including objective setting, also covers information and data issues where appropriate.

Data use and reporting

- 28** Senior Management and committees review monthly and quarterly reports that contain predicted end of year information and target setting based on available evidence.
- 29** The authority has representation on a regular basis on several partnership groups that share performance and information to reduce duplication of information across the county and share best practice. These include:
 - Cumbria National Indicator Set project team
 - Cumbria Research and Analysis Group
 - Cumbria Intelligence Observatory Group
- 30** The Council has been recognised by the Audit Commission for good practice in the use of small area data to improve services.

Detailed findings

- 31** Each PI user completes a Data Quality Statement as part of the Self Assessment process. Each Head of Service has input into this process. Specific reviews are undertaken on data quality by Internal Audit on a quarterly basis and has process mapped waste collection to identify potential weaknesses in controls and introduce robust checking to address.

Analytical review (Stage 2)

- 32** An analytical review of the following 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 82a(i) - Household waste management (recycling) - percentage	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to real performance improvement	Increased investment
BVPI 170a - Visits To and Use Of Museums and Galleries: all visits	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to other reasons	High participation rates
BVPI 170b - Visits to and Use of Museums and Galleries: visits in person	Variance from 2006/07 attributable to other reasons	High participation rates

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

Data quality spot checks (Stage 3)

- 34** An analytical review of the following BVPIs and non-BVPIs was carried out. They were chosen because the variation between the data for 2006/07 and 2007/08 was deemed to be greater than would normally be expected for the indicator, and this degree of variation led to the review to identify whether it was due to changes in resourcing, process, variation in a very small number, or a reflection on data quality. The findings, subject to the validation of a sample of PIs in stage 3 spot checks, are shown below.

Table 3 Spot check findings

Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
Housing Benefits Housing Benefits BVPI 78a (Average time for processing new claims for housing and council tax benefits)	Fairly stated	No errors found in testing
Housing Benefits BVPI 78b (Speed of processing change in circumstances for housing and council tax benefit claims)	Fairly stated	No errors found in testing
Environment BVPI 82a (Household waste management - recycling)	Fairly stated	One minor error identified in calculation which the Council were aware of. Some process timing issues mean that county figures may not match district figures.

- 35** The Environment BVPI 82a was fairly stated, but there were some process timing issues which meant that the county figures may not match district figures. Our data quality audit work in Cumbria this year found that the arrangements for reconciling waste and recycling data, both between councils and with DEFRA could be improved.

Recommendation

- R1** Improve the arrangements for reconciling waste and recycling data, both between councils in Cumbria, and with DEFRA.

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
8	R1 Improve the arrangements for reconciling waste and recycling data, both between councils in Cumbria, and with DEFRA.	2				

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