

Borough Council of  
**King's Lynn &  
West Norfolk**



# Data Quality Policy Statement and Strategy

February 2017

## Introduction

*I have overall portfolio responsibility for the Council's performance management and data quality arrangements. Data of good quality ensures a solid foundation for decision making processes and as an authority, we place great emphasis on our data quality arrangements.*

*This document contains a policy statement, which outlines the Council's position on the matter. Information produced by the authority is used extensively, both for decision making internally and by Central Government, for example, by DEFRA, the Food Standards Agency and the Department for Communities and Local Government.*

*Good quality decision making will help us achieve the actions and work towards the outcomes outlined in the 2015/16 – 2019/20 Corporate Business Plan adopted by Council in February 2016.*

**Cllr Nick Daubney**

**Portfolio Holder, Systems and Economic Development**

## Background

The Council has had a Data Quality Strategy in place since.

Local Government is required to provide data and information to various agencies through the 'Single Data List'<sup>1</sup>.

This Data Quality Policy Statement and Strategy document outlines the approach adopted by the Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk to maintain and improve data quality arrangements.

We aim to ensure that all the data the Council provides and uses is 'right first time'. All staff involved in the collection, collation and reporting of any data, including data relating to performance, have a responsibility to ensure that it can be relied upon and Service Managers should ensure they have sound procedures in place and adequate training and guidance is provided for staff.

Data Quality is a cross cutting issue across the organisation. The strategy within this document sets out the corporate framework for the management and accountability of data quality and aims to ensure a consistently high standard of data production and use across the Council's Directorates.

**Debbie Gates**

**Executive Director, Central & Community Services**

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<sup>1</sup> A catalogue of all the datasets that local government must submit to central government in a given year: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/single-data-list>  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/tacklingburdens/singledatalist/>

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## 1. Data Quality Policy Statement

1.1 The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk understands the importance of data quality and is committed to being consistent in its management of data quality within the organisation and in partnership with others.

1.2 The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk is committed to ensuring that the data it produces adheres to the 7 principles of data quality:

Accurate: All data should be accurate for its intended purpose, represented clearly and in enough detail to enable informed decision making

Valid: All data should be recorded and used in accordance with relevant requirements, rules and definitions to ensure consistency across the board

Reliable: All data should reflect stable and consistent collection methods

Timely: All data must be available for its intended use within a reasonable time period, it must be available quickly and frequently enough to support information needs

Relevant: All data should be relevant to the purpose for which it is used

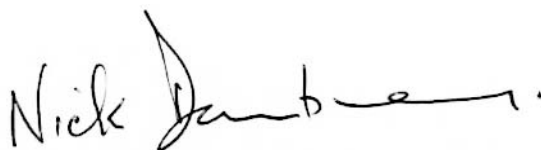
Complete: All relevant data should be recorded in its entirety, avoiding gaps in data and duplication of data

Secure: All data should be stored securely and confidentially where appropriate

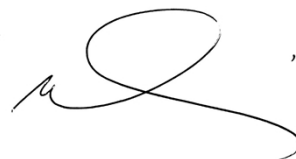
1.3 It is the responsibility of all staff that input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data to ensure that it is of the highest quality and to comply with the above principles.

1.4 The Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk will comply with all legislation affecting the creation and processing of data. This includes but is not limited to:

- The Data Protection Act 1998
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Computer Misuse Act 1990
- The Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003



Cllr Nick Daubney  
Portfolio Holder, Systems and



Ray Harding  
Chief Executive

Economic Development

28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

28<sup>th</sup> February 2017

## 2. Data Quality Strategy

- 2.1 This strategy sets out standards for ensuring that we improve the accuracy, validity, reliability, timeliness, relevance, completeness and security of information we use to manage our services. It outlines the approach adopted by the Council in order to maintain and improve its data quality arrangements.
- 2.2 Good quality data is essential to support decision making and improved service outcomes. Data that is accurate, timely and readily available allows managers and Councillors to make informed decisions. Our data must be fit for purpose and accurate; however we must strike a balance between the value of good quality, timely information and the cost of collection.
- 2.3 Arrangements for data quality form part of corporate performance management and governance arrangements which focus upon achieving the Council's aims and objectives.
- 2.4 This strategy sets out the importance of the quality of the data that we use and our approach to improving it across the Council, in order to help with working towards the outcomes detailed in the Corporate Business Plan<sup>2</sup> and across all our services. It also provides guidance on management arrangements for ensuring we collect quality data.

## 3. Scope

- 3.1 This strategy is intended to cover all data that is entered onto computerised systems within the Council as well as any paper-based records. It covers data relating to service users, the delivery of services, financial management, service management, performance management, corporate governance and communications. In this regard, it should be noted that this policy is not restricted to just performance indicators.
- 3.2 Service user data is held on a number of information systems owned by the Council or accessed under Service Level Agreements with partner organisations. The Council also operates a range of information systems that support its business processes. This strategy applies to all staff who use, or supply data that is input to, those systems. It outlines good practice and identifies the roles and responsibilities of both the Authority and its staff in terms of data quality.
- 3.3 As a local authority, we aim to provide services at appropriate levels of quality for residents and service users, whilst reducing costs. The priorities we want to work towards during the period 2015/16 to 2019/20, detailed in our Corporate Business Plan, are
  - Provide important local services within our available resources
  - Drive local economic and housing growth
  - Work with our communities to ensure they remain clean and safe
  - Celebrate our local heritage and culture

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<sup>2</sup> See the Corporate Business Plan at [https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20163/corporate\\_performance\\_and\\_transparency/450/corporate\\_business\\_plan](https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20163/corporate_performance_and_transparency/450/corporate_business_plan)

- Stand up for local interests within our region
- Work with our partners on important services for the Borough

The Data Quality Strategy supports achievement of the Corporate Business Plan and is a cross cutting issue across the authority.

## 4. Responsibilities

- 4.1 The **Portfolio Holder for Systems and Economic Development** has overall responsibility for the strategic management of data quality in the organisation.
- 4.2 The **Executive Director, Central & Community Services** has overall responsibility for the operational management of data quality.
- 4.3 The **Chief Executive and Executive Directors** (individually and/or collectively) have responsibility for ensuring that their Directorate has effective data processes in place for dealing with service user data, monitoring information on performance and for ensuring that operational responsibilities for data quality have been delegated to individuals.
- 4.4 **Service Managers** are responsible for contributing to the integration of performance management into their area and for ensuring the quality of all data collected and reported within their areas of responsibility.
- 4.5 The **Performance & Efficiency Team** supports performance management and data quality overall within the Council. Support is also provided to Directorates in the creation of data processes that support monitoring, including advice and guidance regarding the collection and calculation of data for performance indicators.
- 4.6 **Internal Audit** provides an independent review of the corporate approach to data quality arrangements. If data quality issues are identified through the course of an audit, whether linked to performance indicator data or not, this will be raised in reports produced.
- 4.7 **Managers / Supervisors / Team Leaders** ensure that their staff have access to and are familiar with corporate requirements and departmental procedures on data quality. General responsibilities relating to data quality, where appropriate to the role, are outlined in individual Job Descriptions.
- 4.8 The **Corporate Induction** process, which is completed by employees at the commencement of their employment, ensures that new staff are made aware of data protection and freedom of information requirements, both of which underpin the quality, use and accuracy of data.
- 4.9 **All staff** have a responsibility to ensure that all data collection and input processes should have an audit trail. Any training and development issues identified in the course of data entry, reporting or during an audit (whether internal or external) should be addressed promptly.
- 4.10 All staff will be made aware of the authority's Whistleblowing policy<sup>3</sup>. This will allow individuals who may have concerns about the quality of

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<sup>3</sup> [http://insite.west-norfolk.gov.uk/corporate\\_documents/Council%20Policies/Whistleblowing%20Policy%20-%20May%202014.pdf](http://insite.west-norfolk.gov.uk/corporate_documents/Council%20Policies/Whistleblowing%20Policy%20-%20May%202014.pdf)

data and experience difficulties in resolving them in the normal way, the opportunity to relay them to an appropriate senior member of staff.

## 5. Standards

- 5.1 There are a number of standards that underpin good data quality. Failure to work to these standards introduces the possibility of inaccuracies and therefore poor data quality. These standards are outlined below.

- 5.2 **Awareness and responsibilities:** Ultimate responsibility for data quality lies with the Executive Director, Central & Community Services and the Portfolio Holder for Systems and Economic Development . However, data quality is the responsibility of every member of staff entering, extracting or analysing data from any of the Council's information systems. Every relevant officer should be aware of their responsibilities with regard to data quality. The commitment to data quality will be communicated clearly throughout the Council to reinforce this message.

Some officers will have overall responsibility for the quality of data on a particular system but this does not exempt others from the responsibility to ensure that data is accurate and up to date.

Responsibility for data quality should be reflected in job descriptions and the Performance Management appraisal process. Managers are encouraged to ensure that suitable appraisal targets are set and paragraphs relating to Data Quality are included in job descriptions as appropriate.

- 5.3 **Validity:** Data validity is the correctness and reasonableness of data. All data held on the Council's data systems must be valid. Wherever possible, computer systems will be programmed to only accept valid entries. Examples of this may include data where the number must fall within a specific range of numbers, or a date format, and controls can be put in place where only the correct format of information is accepted.

Data should be relevant and appropriate to the purpose for which it is required. It should be capable of answering the right question.

- 5.4 **Completeness:** All mandatory data should be completed and up to date. Use of default data and codes will only be used where appropriate and not as a substitute for real data. Missing data should be reported back to the relevant Manager for immediate follow up.

- 5.5 **Consistency:** Data use should be consistent and there must be adequate controls over the input of data. This should include formats (such as names) as well as the data itself. Systems-produced figures or information is only as good as the data input into that system in the first place. It is important that clear guidelines and procedures for using systems exist and that staff are adequately trained to ensure that information is being entered consistently and correctly. Where appropriate, and to maintain consistency, data is reused where it is known to be accurate rather than duplicating processes which increases the chances of inconsistency.

- 5.6 **Coverage:** Data is used across all Council operations. Managers are responsible for ensuring that internal checks are undertaken regularly to identify missing or incomplete data. These data quality standards will



apply to all data and systems within the Council.

- 5.7 **Accuracy:** Data requirements should be designed along the principle of 'getting it right first time', or 100% accuracy 100% of the time, in order to avoid waste in the form of time and money spent on cleansing data, interfacing between different information systems, matching and consolidating data from multiple databases, and maintaining outdated systems.

Even where there are controls over input of data, to minimise errors a verification procedure should exist close to the point of data input. The frequency of checks should be consistent with the complexity of the data and frequency of data reporting.

The simplest verification system might be a review of recent data against expectations, or a reconciliation of systems-produced data with manual input records. Depending on the complexity of the system, it might be necessary to undertake more thorough verification tasks, such as:

- data cleansing, for example, to remove duplicate records, to fill in missing information or to ensure a consistent format;
- sample checks to eliminate reoccurrence of a specific error, for example, checking one field of data that is pivotal to a Performance Indicator against documentation, for a sample of cases;
- a test run of a report output, to check the integrity of the query being used to extract data; and
- spot checks.

- 5.8 **Timeliness:** A key requirement is that data should be entered on an ongoing basis and not stored up to be entered in a block at the end of a period. This reduces the error rate and the need for complex verification procedures.

All data should be recorded and input in a timely manner, which will enable that data to be collected and reported in line with internal and external deadlines.

- 5.9 **Reliability:** Data should reflect stable and consistent collection processes across collection points, whether using manual or computer-based systems, or a combination.

Managers should be confident that progress against performance targets reflects real variations rather than changes in data collection approaches or methods.

## 6. Performance data

- 6.1 At a corporate level, the Council monitors a suite of performance indicators, as well as achievement across the organisation against the priorities outlined in the authority's Corporate Business Plan. The information is reported to Councillors and staff through the Council's Intranet, Insite, and also to the Corporate Performance panel on a regular basis. The data for these performance reports are provided by departments to the central Performance & Efficiency team.

- 6.2 Data for the Performance Indicator report is keyed by data collectors in individual departments into a database internally devised during 2011, which is held on the Insite system. The Performance & Efficiency team provide guidance for the data collectors and controls are in place between data collectors and the Performance & Efficiency team to ensure the data is robust.

## 7. Monitoring, assurance and review

- 7.1 Data quality will be subject to internal control, monitoring and review in the following ways:
- Data will be checked within departments prior to being reported.
  - Internal audits will be conducted where areas of high risk to internal controls have been identified. Recommendations will be produced, implemented and reported in line with agreed audit arrangements.
  - The Corporate Risk Register details major corporate risks which include items related to data, for example, risks such as loss of data, access to data during large scale change, etc. The register is reviewed by Management Team on a half-yearly basis and changes reported to the Audit Committee.
  - The Council will act on enquiries made by service users in relation to the quality of data reported and will undertake remedial action suggested by external inspectors where appropriate.
  - In addition to regular 'reasonableness' checks made each quarter on receipt of performance data, the Performance & Efficiency team will undertake
    - spot checks (made through a risk based approach) on data provided for the purposes of performance reporting;;
    - an annual verification check on the base data used, where Service Managers will be asked to confirm that the data submitted is accurate.
  - Any issues identified relating to data quality will be integrated with reports on performance and considered by the relevant Executive Director, who will put in place actions regarding the improvement of data quality.

This policy statement and strategy will be reviewed every four years in the year following a new Corporate Strategy / Business Plan or sooner if deemed appropriate.