

Performance Summary Report

January 2008



# Data Quality

**Chorley Borough Council**

**Audit 2007/08**

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## Background

- 1 Public bodies are accountable for the public money they spend: they must manage competing claims on resources to meet the needs of the communities they serve, and plan for the future. The financial and performance information they use to account for their activities, both internally and externally, to their users, partners, commissioners, government departments and regulators, must be appropriate for these purposes, providing the level of accuracy, reliability and consistency required.
- 2 Considerable weight is attached to published performance indicators as the basis for reducing the burden of regulation and awarding freedoms and flexibilities. This has made reliable performance information, and the quality of the underlying data, significantly more important. Regulators and government departments need to be assured that reported information reflects actual performance. This will provide confidence that they are focusing on the key areas for improvement.
- 3 Auditors' work on data quality and performance information supports the Commission's reliance on performance indicators in its service assessments for comprehensive performance assessment (CPA). This delivers the commitment to reduce significantly the level of service inspection required.
- 4 Introducing the comprehensive area assessment (CAA) framework from 2009 will make reliable performance information more important. The CAA will place greater emphasis on assessments that are proportional to risk. Councils will also be required to use information to reshape services, and to account to the public for performance.
- 5 The responsibility for securing the quality of the data underpinning performance information can only rest with the bodies that collect and use the data. Producing data which is fit for purpose should not be an end in itself, but an integral part of a body's operational, performance management, and governance arrangements. Organisations that put data quality at the heart of their performance management systems are most likely to be actively managing data in their day-to-day business, and turning that data into reliable information.
- 6 This is the second year in which we have undertaken work on data quality in local government. Our work 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.
- 7 The expected impact of our 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 and objectives

- 8 The Audit Commission has developed a three-stage approach to the review of data quality comprising.

**Table 1**

<p><b>Stage 1</b></p>	<p><b>Management arrangements</b></p> <p>A review 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).</p>
<p><b>Stage 2</b></p>	<p><b>Analytical review</b></p> <p>An analytical review of 2006/07 BVPI and non-BVPI data, and selection of a sample for testing based on risk assessment.</p>
<p><b>Stage 3</b></p>	<p><b>Data quality spot checks</b></p> <p>In-depth review of a sample of 2006/07 performance indicators (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.</p>

- 9 All three stages of the review have been carried out at Chorley Borough Council.

## Conclusions

### Stage 1 – Management arrangements

- 10 The Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality have improved since our last review, most notably in terms of providing overall leadership and supporting officers in collating and compiling performance indicators. There is now scope to build on these improvements. In particular, there is a need to translate the data quality action plan into a formal strategy, to ensure that all responsible officers have received appropriate training and to ensure the integrity of data received from third parties.

### Stage 2 – Analytical review

- 11 Our analytical review work at stage 2 identified that all of the PI values reviewed fell within expected ranges or could be substantiated by evidence.

### Stage 3 – Data quality spot checks

- 12 For stage 3, we carried out:
  - detailed reviews of arrangements for BV199 (cleanliness of public places) and the Housing Investment Programme Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HIP HSSA) indicator (percentage of total private sector homes vacant for more than six months); and
  - a follow up of our work last year on BV183b (average time spent in temporary accommodation – hostels) as we found data quality issues in our 2005/06 audit.
- 13 Our detailed reviews of BV199 and HIP HSSA found that these PIs were fairly stated. There are now opportunities for the relevant service areas to strengthen their arrangements for compiling these indicators.
- 14 The Council is now using its IT system (Orchard) to compile data for calculating BV183b. This has improved efficiency but our follow up work identified that the system is not calculating length of stay strictly in accordance with the guidance issued to Audit Commission staff for the stage 3 tests. We do not consider the difference to be material, but the Council has submitted a revision to its data and the PI is fairly stated. In the meantime, we have raised the issue of the discrepancy between the guidance followed by the Council and that issued to Audit Commission staff through our internal co-ordination arrangements.
- 15 An action plan has been agreed with the Council (see Appendix 1) to address the issues arising from this review.

## Management arrangements (Stage 1)

- 16 The Council's overall management arrangements for ensuring data quality have improved since our last review, most notably in terms of providing overall leadership and supporting officers in collating and compiling performance indicators. There is now scope to build on these improvements. In particular, there is a need to translate the data quality action plan into a formal strategy, to ensure that all responsible officers have received appropriate training and to ensure the integrity of data received from third parties.

### Governance and leadership

- 17 Since our last review, the Council has put arrangements in place to promote a more strategic commitment to data quality, and to more clearly define responsibilities for this at both managerial and operational levels. Data quality is now included within the Council's Annual Report and corporate risk register, and a data quality strategy has been produced. This identifies the Director and Executive Member for Policy and Performance as having overall responsibility for data quality. It also sets out the roles and responsibilities expected of officers within services. Additionally, as part of an annual Directorate Assurance Statement, directors are now required to provide an assessment of data quality arrangements within their remit. This reinforces the message that data quality is of concern to the whole organisation.
- 18 There is scope to further embed data quality arrangements throughout the organisation. For example, staff changes in the last year left the Council's Strategic Housing function with no dedicated officer for the compilation of the HIP HSSA indicator although this has now been addressed through support to the Strategic Housing function.
- 19 Steps have been taken to raise elected members' awareness of data quality issues but this could be formalised. The Executive Member for Policy and Performance has been briefed on organisational arrangements for data quality and the Executive Member Portfolio leads are routinely advised of any issues as part of the programme of performance round table meetings. Briefing now needs to be provided for members of the Audit Committee to enable them to discharge their role in respect of data quality.
- 20 There is also scope for the Council to strengthen its strategic approach to planning and monitoring improvements in data quality. The Council's data quality strategy does not set out specific or measurable objectives, and there has been no formal reporting on the outcomes of internal monitoring activities. This would allow any issues which may require corporate attention to be considered and addressed in an appropriate forum whilst further promoting a sense of organisational ownership.

### **Recommendations**

*R1 Provide regular briefings for Members of the Audit Committee on data quality issues.*

Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further strengthen Member leadership and accountability for data quality. It is not anticipated that it will incur significant cost.

*R2 To strengthen arrangements for planning and monitoring improvements in data quality:*

- *develop the action plan component of the current data quality strategy as a separate and formal strategy which sets out objectives for improving data quality agreed in conjunction with service areas and supported by specific targets;*
- *ensure that an implementation plan is drawn up to achieve these objectives; and*
- *provide periodic reports on progress in implementing the strategy to the Audit Committee.*

Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further strengthen corporate ownership in delivering improvements in data quality. It is not anticipated that it will incur significant cost.

### **Policies**

- 21** In response to our recommendations from the 2005/06 review, the Council has established a basic policy framework for data quality and has taken steps to implement this. Its data quality strategy actually reads more like a policy in that it provides an outline of requirements in terms of data collection, recording and reporting. Complementing this, services have been required to update and document the procedures associated with compilation of all indicators within their remit. The data quality strategy is readily available to all staff as it is posted on the Council's intranet ('the loop'), and capacity within the Policy and Performance Directorate has been increased to provide ongoing support.
- 22** Further work is needed to ensure that this policy framework is well used throughout the organisation. The programme of quality reviews completed in June 2007 found instances where performance reporting checklists had not been completed in line with the requirements set out in the data quality strategy. Similarly, at the time of our spot check work for stage 3, a full set of procedures for the compilation of the HIP HSSA indicator had not yet been documented although action was being taken to address this.



- 23 Additionally, at the time of our fieldwork, the corporate policy framework did not make certain data quality requirements sufficiently explicit for service areas. For example, although the data quality strategy stressed the importance of ensuring that data provided by third parties is accurate, it did not set out what should be included in a contract or specification (eg timetables for submission, arrangements for verifying and validating returns). Similarly, the strategy did not detail what checks should be undertaken by Directors before signing off performance reporting checklists, or place any requirement on services to undertake periodic reviews of data quality. The Council has started taking action since our fieldwork to address these points.

### **Recommendation**

*R3 In revising the data quality strategy (R2), develop the policy component as a separate document to provide more detail for service areas on requirements for each stage of data collection, collation and reporting. This should include:*

- *greater clarity on the arrangements which need to be put in place for ensuring the quality of data provided by third parties; and*
- *the checks and reviews of data validity expected to be undertaken in service.*

Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further strengthen corporate ownership and assurance for data quality. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.

## **Systems and processes**

- 24 The Council has adequate arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of its systems and processes for compiling performance indicators, and these are being further developed. Internal audit has continued its programme of spot checks within service areas based on a sound assessment of risk. In future, these spot checks are to be undertaken on a quarterly basis, and the outcomes incorporated into training for relevant staff. This will provide an opportunity for good practice to be shared across the organisation.
- 25 The programme of reviews could also usefully support the Council's other governance/assurance arrangements for data quality but arrangements for reporting the outcomes of reviews could be strengthened. The outcomes of spot checks could be reported more formally to Directors than is currently the case.
- 26 The Council has controls in place to ensure the security of data but is not managing this risk as proactively as it could. For example, internal audit reports that it has not undertaken any work on the security of the Council's main performance management system (Performance Plus) for some time.

- 27 Similarly, there are opportunities for the Council to further reduce the risk of manual error in compiling all PIs. For example, to compile BV199 (cleanliness of public places), the outcomes of individual transects are manually inputted by the responsible officer within the Streetscene, Neighbourhood and Environment Directorate into its IT system (FLARE) and then separately into Performance Plus for the purposes of corporate performance monitoring as the two systems are not linked.
- 28 The Council now needs to develop robust arrangements for ensuring the quality of data from third parties. A systematic and comprehensive review of all instances of internal and external data sharing now needs to be undertaken and the data quality standards expected of other agencies clearly and consistently specified. For example, although the Council's contract with Chorley Community Housing requires the organisation to comply with the data quality strategy, the strategy now needs to be updated to include the level of detail necessary to provide proper assurance. Although this is now being addressed, the Council's Strategic Housing function does not yet have protocols with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) covering the provision of data. Delays in receiving information relating to the number of properties owned by RSLs contributed to the Council missing the deadline for the HIP HSSA return this year.

### **Recommendations**

#### *R4 Strengthen internal processes for ensuring data quality by:*

- *revising arrangements for reporting the outcomes of internal reviews so that these inform the end of year completion of the Directorate Assurance Statement;*
- *agreeing and implementing a programme of periodic reviews of the security of Performance Plus; and*
- *investigating the potential for integrating service-based systems with Performance Plus as part of the data quality strategy, and ensuring that any actions identified by this review are reflected in the implementation plan.*

Implementing this recommendation will provide the Council with greater assurance of the validity of its data. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.

#### *R5 Strengthen arrangements for ensuring the quality of data provided by third parties by:*

- *undertaking a systematic review to identify of all instances of data sharing; and*
- *ensuring that the arrangements as set out in the data quality policy (R3) are in place for all instances of data sharing.*

Implementing this recommendation will provide the Council with greater assurance of the validity of its data. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.

## People and skills

- 29 The Council has taken action to develop the capacity of staff for ensuring data quality. As referenced in an earlier section of this report, respective roles and responsibilities have been clarified. Corporate accountability has also been reinforced through a number of briefing sessions for relevant staff which were held in December 2006.
- 30 The Council acknowledges that it now needs to build on these initial steps.
- 31 In line with the data quality strategy, the Council intends to run annual workshops for relevant staff to cover issues raised by internal reviews. These will provide the opportunity for needs based training as well as sharing good practice. These workshops now need to be formally scheduled. Additionally, given the planned frequency of these workshops, supplementary provision needs to be made for new-starters to ensure that they receive timely briefings on data quality issues. For example, the designated responsible officer for the HIP HSSA indicator had not yet received any corporate training at the time of our review and was wholly reliant on national guidance in compiling the indicator.
- 32 At the same time, operational accountability for data quality could be further strengthened by setting objectives (which link to the targets defined in the data quality strategy) for staff with specific responsibilities for data quality as part of their personal development reviews.

### **Recommendations**

*R6 Put arrangements in place which:*

- *systematically identify all new starters with responsibility for data quality; and*
- *ensure that new starters with responsibility for data quality consistently receive appropriate training within an agreed period of their start date with the Council.*

Implementing this recommendation will enable the Council to provide proper support to all officers with a responsibility for data quality. It is not expected that this will incur significant cost.

*R7 As part of personal development reviews for staff with specific responsibilities for data quality, include:*

- *data quality objectives which link to the targets defined in the data quality strategy; and*
- *an assessment of progress/performance against these objectives in subsequent reviews.*

Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further promote corporate ownership of data quality and support the implementation of its data quality strategy. It is not expected that this will incur significant cost.

### **Data use and reporting**

- 33** The Council makes excellent use of performance data in managing and improving its services. Quarterly performance reports are made to a variety of decision-making committees, for example Executive Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These are now supplemented by quarterly round table meetings between the Executive Officer and Member for each portfolio and the Director of Policy and Performance and the Executive Member for Policy and Performance. Action plans to address areas of underperformance are produced and are included in the quarterly performance reports.

## Analytical review (Stage 2)

- 34 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**

<b>2006/07 Performance indicator</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Comment</b>
BV 184b Percentage change in the proportion of non decent homes	Variance from 2005/06 attributable to other issues.	The Council undertook a new stock condition survey in October 2005 as part of the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer (LSVT) of its housing stock. The calculation of 2005/06 outturn had been based on a 2002 survey.
BV 217 Pollution control improvements	Variance from 2005/06 attributable to real performance decline.	With restructuring of the directorate, none of the pollution control improvements identified have been delivered within the prescribed timescale.
BV 66b Rent Collection and Arrears Recovery – 7 weeks arrears	Variance from 2005/06 attributable to real performance improvement.	Preventative measures are included in the rent collection and arrears pursuance policy and have been delivered by the Council's tenancy support team and partnership working with the Citizens' Advice Bureau.
BV 78a Speed of processing new claim to HB/CTB	Variance from 2005/06 attributable to real performance improvement.	Improvements have been achieved through a combination of process re-engineering (including cross departmental working), staff training and ongoing monitoring and review of progress in processing individual claims.

## 14 Data Quality | Analytical review (Stage 2)

<b>2006/07 Performance indicator</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Comment</b>
BV 82ai	Variance from 2005/06 attributable to real performance improvement.	Improvements have been achieved through increased participation in the recycling scheme brought about by various initiatives by the Council.

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

## Data quality spot checks (Stage 3)

- 36 A number of PIs were reviewed using a series of detailed audit tests/follow up work. Our findings are shown below.

**Table 3**

<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>Environment</b> BV199 (cleanliness of public places)	Fairly stated (but see comments)	<p>Whilst performance was correctly reported to one decimal place in the Council's annual report, the Council rounded the figure down when submitting data to our electronic data capture system. However, as the error was less than 10 per cent, we did not deem this material.</p> <p>Management arrangements associated with this indicator are otherwise satisfactory but there is scope for the service to further strengthen the co-ordination of individual surveys. Within each survey period, individual transects are selected by the Neighbourhood Officers meaning that an even distribution across land use types is not always being achieved. Additionally, surveys are tending to be undertaken on particular days of the week and at weekends which is not strictly in accordance with the guidance.</p>

16 Data Quality | Data quality spot checks (Stage 3)

<b>Performance indicator</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p><b>Housing</b> HIP HSSA (percentage total private sector homes vacant for more than 6 months)</p>	<p>Fairly stated</p>	<p>Weaknesses in management arrangements (referenced under the stage 1 section of this report) have been compounded by key staffing changes within the Council's Strategic Housing function. As a result, the Council did not submit the data by the requisite date. However, we found no errors in the calculation, and are satisfied that an action plan is now in place to address the areas of weakness.</p>
<p><b>Housing</b> BV183b (average time in temporary accommodation – hostels)</p>	<p>Fairly stated (but see comments)</p>	<p>Since our last review, the Council has taken steps to strengthen data collection and collation processes and, as part of this, is now using its IT system (Orchard). However, the system has not been calculating length of stay in accordance with guidance issued to Audit Commission staff for the stage 3 tests but has been under-reporting by one day in each case. The Council therefore submitted a revision to its data but, as the error was less than 10 per cent, we did not consider this material. In the meantime, we have raised the issue of the discrepancy between the guidance followed by the Council and that issued to Audit Commission staff through our internal co-ordination arrangements. As referenced under the stage 1 section of this report), the contract between the Council and Chorley Community Housing does not yet make data quality requirements sufficiently explicit.</p>



Performance indicator	Assessment	Comment
		We have not made a separate recommendation, but expect the Council to address this weakness in the implementation of recommendations 3 and 5.

### ***Recommendation***

*R8 Improve the survey packs issued to Neighbourhood Officers at the start of each BV199 survey period by including:*

- guidance on the number of transects by land-use type they will need to review in their neighbourhoods within that survey period; and*
- a reminder of the need to ensure an even distribution of reviews throughout the week and to avoid weekends.*

Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to ensure full compliance with the guidance for this indicator. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.

## Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
<b>Governance and leadership</b>						
8	R1 Provide regular briefings for Members of the Audit Committee on data quality issues.	2	Sarah Dobson/ Gary Hall	Yes	Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further strengthen Member leadership and accountability for data quality. It is not anticipated that it will incur significant cost.  Council response/update:  A briefing has been arranged on the 17th January 2008.	Ongoing from the 17 January 2008
8	R2 To strengthen arrangements for planning and monitoring improvements in data quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop the action plan component of the current data quality strategy as a separate and formal strategy which sets out objectives for improving data quality agreed in conjunction with service areas and supported by specific targets;</li> <li>• ensure that an implementation plan is drawn up to achieve these objectives; and</li> <li>• provide periodic reports on progress in implementing the strategy to the Audit Committee.</li> </ul>	3	Sarah Dobson/ Gary Hall		Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further strengthen corporate ownership in delivering improvements in data quality. It is not anticipated that it will incur significant cost.  Council response/update:  Update paper to be prepared	17 January 2008 and ongoing

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
9	<p>R3 In revising the data quality strategy (R2), develop the policy component as a separate document to provide more detail for service areas on requirements for each stage of data collection, collation and reporting. This should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>greater clarity on the arrangements which need to be put in place for ensuring the quality of data provided by third parties; and</li> <li>the checks and reviews of data validity expected to be undertaken in service.</li> </ul>	3	Sarah Dobson	Yes	<p>Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further strengthen corporate ownership and assurance for data quality. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.</p> <p>Council response/update:</p> <p>Briefings have been given to strategy group and key officers on arrangements for third party reporting.</p> <p>Meetings have been held with directors to identify all instances of third party reporting.</p>	January 2008
10	<p>R4 Strengthen internal processes for ensuring data quality by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>revising arrangements for reporting the outcomes of internal reviews so that these inform the end of year completion of the Directorate Assurance Statement;</li> <li>agreeing and implementing a programme of periodic reviews of the security of Performance Plus; and</li> <li>investigating the potential for integrating service-based systems with Performance Plus as part of the data quality strategy, and ensuring that any actions identified by this review are reflected in the implementation plan.</li> </ul>	2	Sarah Dobson	Yes	<p>Implementing this recommendation will provide the Council with greater assurance of the validity of its data. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.</p>	January 2008

20 Data Quality | Appendix 1 – Action plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
10	<p>R5 Strengthen arrangements for ensuring the quality of data provided by third parties by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>undertaking a systematic review to identify of all instances of data sharing; and</li> <li>ensuring that the arrangements as set out in the data quality policy (R3) are in place for all instances of data sharing.</li> </ul>	3	Sarah Dobson/Directors	Yes	<p>Implementing this recommendation will provide the Council with greater assurance of the validity of its data. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.</p> <p>Council response/update All instances of data sharing have been mapped and protocols have been produced for the majority, with ongoing work to produce the remaining instances.</p>	January 2008
11	<p>R6 Put arrangements in place which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>systematically identify all new starters with responsibility for data quality; and</li> <li>ensure that new starters with responsibility for data quality consistently receive appropriate training within an agreed period of their start date with the Council.</li> </ul>	2	Sarah Dobson	Yes	<p>Implementing this recommendation will enable the Council to provide proper support to all officers with a responsibility for data quality. It is not expected that this will incur significant cost.</p> <p>Council response/update: A new dialogue has been developing which identifies new starters with data quality responsibilities. These are then flagged up to policy and performance who then identify training needs.</p>	January 2008
11	<p>R7 As part of personal development reviews for staff with specific responsibilities for data quality, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>data quality objectives which link to the targets defined in the data quality strategy; and</li> <li>an assessment of progress/performance against these objectives in subsequent reviews.</li> </ul>	3	Sarah Dobson/ Rik Sterken	Yes	<p>Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to further promote corporate ownership of data quality and support the implementation of its data quality strategy. It is not expected that this will incur significant cost.</p> <p>Council response/update:</p>	Ongoing

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
17	<p>R8 Improve the survey packs issued to Neighbourhood Officers at the start of each BV199 survey period by including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guidance on the number of transects by land-use type they will need to review in their neighbourhoods within that survey period; and</li> <li>• a reminder of the need to ensure an even distribution of reviews throughout the week and to avoid weekends.</li> </ul>	2	Chris Sinnott/Simon Clark	Yes	Implementing this recommendation will help the Council to ensure full compliance with the guidance for this indicator. It is not expected that it will incur significant cost.	January 2008