MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

DATA QUALITY POLICY

2017 - 2019

"Getting it right first time"

Produced By: People, Performance and Policy
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MALDON DISTRICT
COUNCIL

Document Control Sheet

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MALDON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Maldon District Council's Data Quality Policy

1. Maldon District Council's Objective:

To ensure the collection and use of high quality data which is available at the right time, at the right costs and can be relied upon for informed decision making and all aspects of financial and performance management and service delivery.

2. Scope

2.1 The policy relates to all information which can be held as electronic data or physical records.

2.2 It covers the:
- Collection
- Use
- Sharing
- Storage
- Presentation

of information by Maldon District Council.

2.3 The policy applies to all staff, councillors and contractors accessing Maldon District Council information systems.

2.4 The policy does not cover the following, which are addressed through other policy or frameworks:

- Information security
- Information/data sharing
- Records management.

3. The following definitions are used for the purpose of this policy:

Data	Unstructured pure and simple facts – numbers, words or images that have yet to be organised or analysed
Information	Structured data with additional meaning, put in context and with significance
Knowledge	Ability to use information strategically to achieve one's objective
Wisdom	Capacity to choose objectives consistent with one's value within a larger social context

4. What is data quality and why is it important?

4.1 The availability of complete, accurate, relevant, accessible and timely data is important in supporting decision-making, planning, resource allocation, accountability, and the delivery of service outcomes and priorities; for example:

Strategic planning	High quality data and information is used to plan the Council's vision and goals and informs the decisions that underpin everything the organisation does.
Financial planning	Financial data must be reliable to enable the Council to set budgets and forecasts to support service planning.
Service planning	Accurate data about the volume and type of services delivered and activities undertaken is essential to ensure appropriate allocation of resources and future service delivery.
Performance management	Accurate data enables the identification and resolution of any shortfalls against standards and targets.
Service improvement	Accurate data enables the analysis of service provision against user needs and overall efficiency and effectiveness.
Customer Support	Accurate data enables the delivery of relevant and timely services and ensures that the customer and other parties involved can be kept informed where appropriate.
Efficient administration	Data needs to be provided to an appropriate standard and in such a way that the full range of stakeholders, partners and agencies can access the information they need easily and quickly.
Adherence to audit processes	Data needs to be available for timely, reliable and accurate reporting to support the Council's internal and external audit regimes.
Accountability, transparency and open data	Good quality data is essential in delivering the Council's transparency and open data agenda.

4.2 Data quality is particularly important in partnership working and integrated service delivery, an increasingly important aspect of the Council's work. We need to be clear that the quality of the data from the organisations who are working together is consistent in order to ensure an accurate and shared understanding of the task in hand.

4.3 The key risks associated with poor data quality include:
- decisions are based on inaccurate or out of date information;
- customers are not given the service for which they are eligible;
- at risk individuals are not identified;
- opportunities for integration and partnership working cannot be taken;
- poor performance is not identified and addressed;
- published information is misleading;
- inaccuracies in base data result in financial error and loss;
- inaccuracies in externally reported data result in funding discrepancies;
- good performance is not recognised and rewarded;
- poor use of resources;
- policies are ill-founded and impacts are not properly assessed; and
- improvement opportunities are not identified and monitored.

4.4 Poor data quality can have a significant impact on the Council's political, legal, reputational, professional and financial position.

5. What is good quality data?

It is generally accepted that the six characteristics of good quality data are:

Accuracy	Data should be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes and captured once only, as close to the point of activity as possible. Sometimes, accuracy must be weighed against timeliness, cost and effort of collection. Where compromises are made on accuracy, limitations must be clear to users.
Validity	Data should be recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements, including the correct application of any rules or definitions. This will ensure consistency between periods and with similar organisations, measuring what is intended to be measured. Where estimated data is used to compensate for an absence of actual data, services must consider how well this data is able to satisfy the intended purpose.
Reliability	Data should be consistently calculated, recorded, analysed and reported over time in a way that provides a meaningful reflection of the situation. It is essential that definitions and guidance are followed each time performance data is produced to enable assessments to be made consistently over time.
Timeliness	Data should be available frequently and promptly enough (as near to 'real-time' as possible) for it to be valuable for managing service delivery and decision making, providing the opportunity to take corrective action where needed.
Relevance	Data should be defined/selected, collected, recorded and analysed with the intended use and audience in mind so that it is fit for purpose and adds value to the decision making process.
Completeness	Data should be complete and comprehensive to ensure it provides a full picture of the current situation, e.g. for performance data enabling assessment of how we are doing against our targets and/or others. Where it is incomplete and/or could be misleading this should be stated to enable appropriate judgements about its use to be made.

In seeking to achieve good quality data, it is recognised that a balance may be required between some of the elements. It is also important that the resources used to achieve these characteristics should be proportionate to the perceived value it provides to the organisation and therefore consideration must be given to its purpose/use.

6. Checklist for applying the principles of good data quality in practice:

Timeframe	- Is the timeframe covered by the data clear? - Has there been a change in policy since the data was collected or are the circumstances the same? - When comparing datasets – are they for the same year?
Scope	- Is the scope of the dataset known and stated? - For example, when looking at demand for a service in Essex, is data only taken from Essex sources?
Collection methodology	- Is it clear how the data was obtained? - In a survey, for example, were respondents able to tick more than one box, or just one? - When comparing datasets, were the two methodologies the same (e.g. self-reported issues vs collected by an agent?)
Source	- Is the source of the data known and clearly stated? - Is it a reliable and ethical source, with no bias? - When comparing datasets, is the source the same?
Metadata	- Are metadata available and clearly communicated? - Do they give access to the raw data so that further analysis can be done?
Limitations	Are the limitations of the data clearly presented when used in a report?
Validation	Has data been validated through cross-checks with, for example previous/historical data, other staff members or other sources where available?

7. Roles and responsibilities

7.1 Overall responsibility for maintaining accurate and complete data and information lies with the Senior Information Risk Owner (the Director of Resources).

7.2 In general, data quality is the shared responsibility of all:
- Information providers are the source of the data and so are the starting point for creating good data
- Information recipients have responsibility to maintain accurate data within their systems and ensure its integrity in their processes

7.3 Whilst all staff have a collective responsibility for quality, there are also some specific responsibilities that individuals and teams should be aware of. See table below:

Role	Areas of responsibility
Corporate Leadership Team	- Overall responsibility for ensuring that arrangements are in place to assure the quality of data (in particular that which is business critical) and that improvement action is taken where necessary
Directors	- Responsibility for ensuring that accurate and complete records are maintained and that performance, performance reviews and disciplinary processes are in place to maintain and enhance data and information quality for their Directorate. - To support corporate data quality and take forward appropriate actions assigned to them.

Role	Areas of responsibility
Managers and Team Leaders	- Responsible for ensuring the implementation of corporate procedures with regard to data quality. - Ensuring that appropriate systems and processes are in place to deliver high quality data, and contingency arrangements and appropriate controls are in place to give assurance about quality - Ensuring staff have the necessary skills required to deliver high quality data and that their responsibility for data quality is reflected in job descriptions and monitored and supported through the performance management process. - Reviewing data quality and agreeing action required
Performance and Risk Officer	- Maintaining an overview of performance information to satisfy internal and external corporate reporting requirements, ensuring systems and processes are in place to collect and report this corporately - Keeping knowledge of relevant performance measures, requirements and issues up to date and cascading appropriate information to any other staff involved in producing this information - Sharing learning relating to data quality from inside and outside of the organisation, applying good practice and collectively tackling data quality issues - Maintaining an overview of data quality issues for performance data, using wider intelligence to adopt a risk based approach to internal quality assurance, facilitating internal and external audits - Producing and refreshing the Data Quality Policy (every two years) in line with good practice guidance and feedback from inside and outside of the organisation - Monitoring/assessing the levels of data quality and reporting any issues identified to Corporate Leadership Team - Monitoring progress against any data quality/compliance issues identified, offering challenge and 'critical friend' support, and including issues and progress updates in corporate reports and audit responses where appropriate
All Staff	- Awareness of their individual responsibilities relating to data quality and how their day to day work can impact upon the quality of data and add value for the organisation. - It is the responsibility of all Officers that input, store, retrieve or otherwise manage data to ensure that it is of the highest quality and is administered in accordance with approved systems. - Every officer in the Council will be responsible for complying with this Data Quality Policy.
Members	- The **Audit Committee** is responsible for providing assurance to the Council on the adequacy of internal controls, corporate governance and risk management processes. Data quality is a significant factor in the effectiveness of these processes. - Any concerns re data quality issues are included in the quarterly performance reports submitted to the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**. - All Members will be responsible for adhering to this Data Quality Policy.

8.   Systems and processes

8.1   Arrangements for collecting, recording, analysing and reporting data (including frequency and quality standards required) should be considered as part of the business planning process, for example when new local indicators or standards are agreed

Responsible officers should ensure that systems and processes are in place to provide data in line with the characteristics of good quality data (see page 5).

8.2   Systems and processes should be designed, and staff trained, in line with good practice guidance. These systems and processes should be set up in a way that maximises our ability to achieve high quality data first time, avoiding the need to divert resources and cause delays due to excessive checks, controls and 're-works'.

The level of checks and controls should be proportionate to the value of the data and risk of poor quality. These should be appropriate to the systems and processes being used.

8.3   The interface between systems and processes should be streamlined as far as possible. Ineffective/inefficient overlaps in data storage and reporting systems should be avoided where possible to minimise duplication of effort and reduce opportunities for errors and inconsistencies.

8.4   Accountability for data quality must be clearly defined. For example, in the case of performance data, each indicator will have a designated collector with overall responsibility for collating the information and entering it into the Council's performance management system. The designated owner will have overall accountability for performance and responsibility for the quality of the data.

8.5   Procedure notes/manuals must be in place for the production of all information to ensure that the necessary data can still be extracted/provided when required even in the absence of the designated collector. These procedure notes should be reviewed regularly and updated as appropriate.

8.6   Contingency arrangements should be established to ensure data can still be delivered when circumstances change. This should include, as a minimum, producing back-ups of data, creation/retention of audit trails and ensuring that there is a deputy in place who would also have some knowledge of the relevant data and processes and/or systems used to produce it.

8.7   Where data is provided by a third party or shared externally, quality standards and frequency of exchange should be agreed and documented. (See Partnerships on page 9).

8.8   Data collection systems and processes should be regularly tested to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Any data quality issues will be reported to the Corporate Leadership Team and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to

enable necessary actions to be taken.

9   Contracts

9.1   Maldon District Council recognises that data quality is an important part of any contract that is outsourced to a third party to manage. This is of particular importance for public-facing service contracts where information is requested by the Council, from which to judge a contractor's performance.

9.2   All appropriate contracts where data collection and data quality are instrumental to the delivery of the service have a standard clause inserted into the contract which defines data quality and how it should be embedded into the contractors' processes. This clause lays out our requirements for the contractor to provide timely and accurate information and that responsibilities for data quality and checking information are clearly set out.

9.3   Responsibility for the verification of data lies within the service managing the contract.

10.   Partnerships

10.1   Maldon DC is increasingly undertaking more partnership working which involves the need to share data or rely on data from other providers. To be confident of the quality of the data, MDC is a partner of the Whole Essex Information Sharing Framework (Whole Essex Information Sharing Framework) which is an agreement in principle for partners in any County wide group to share information. The framework is supported by specific sharing protocols.

10.2   There is a need to ensure sufficient data quality and information sharing protocols are in place when data is to be shared between, or provided by, partners. Any service establishing a new partnership or a new information sharing arrangement should follow the guidance contained within "Managing Partnerships Effectively" (available on the Intranet) and meet the Council's requirements in this respect.

11.   Monitoring and Review

11.1   Performance and risk updates are reported to the Corporate Leadership Team, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit Committee on a quarterly basis. Any data quality issues identified during this process are highlighted in the reports and any necessary action required agreed with the Director.

11.2   Data quality is monitored as part of the annual governance process.   A review is undertaken of the Council's internal controls, risk management and governance arrangements and an Annual Governance Statement is produced in liaison with the Corporate Leadership Team.

Further information on the Council's commitment to data quality is available and accessible by all on the Intranet.