

DATA QUALITY STRATEGY

November 2024



I. INTRODUCTION

The Council recognises the importance of good quality data; consistent, accurate, timely and comprehensive information is vital to facilitate the Council's decision-making process and to deliver better quality services to our customers.

This strategy seeks to achieve a coordinated approach and to ensure consistently high standards are achieved both within and across services with respect to data quality. The outcomes expected from the adoption of this strategy are that Council data will be accurate and verifiable and that all staff will know the part they play in this process. High-quality data leads to accurate performance information, which informs better decision-making, prioritisation, and planning.

This strategy is currently stand-alone but will form part of a larger Data to Intelligence Strategy which is under development.

I.1. DEFINITIONS

- **Data:** These are numbers, words, or images that haven't yet been organised or analysed to answer specific questions.
- **Information:** It results from processing, manipulating, and organising data to answer questions, adding to the receiver's knowledge.
- **Intelligence / Insight:** using information to predict something that may not be known, for example a trend over time. This might include predicting a person's future needs based on both what we know about them now, and what we know has happened to people like them previously.
- **Knowledge:** This refers to what people understand when interpreting information, adding relevance to clarify insights

2. IMPORTANCE OF DATA QUALITY

Data quality is the accuracy, completeness, and reliability of data throughout its lifecycle and is a critical aspect to the design, implementation and usage of any system which stores, processes, or retrieves data.

Good data quality is essential to ensuring that the Council and its partners can maximise its capacity, intelligence and performance. The impact and future delivery of services is based on information from many different sources and good data quality will support high quality intelligence to inform decision making.

Maintaining good data quality supports Performance Management and supports services to identify where they can and should improve (continuous improvement). It serves as the foundation for ongoing business improvement and helps us -

- Present an accurate picture of performance for informed decision-making and effective service planning.
- Measure the effectiveness and efficiency of our services.
- Compare costs and performance with our peers.

External assessors also use performance data for Audits, Peer Reviews, and Ofsted / CQC / LGO / ICO inspections to evaluate our organisational performance. This underscores the need to demonstrate reliable and high-quality underlying data.

Producing fit for purpose data is an integral part of our operational, performance management, and governance processes. Organisations that prioritise data quality in their performance management systems can swiftly turn it into reliable insight for decision-making.

High quality data also allows us to combine different data sets automatically with a high success rate.

3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR DATA QUALITY

Good quality data is essential for reliable performance and financial information and to enable the accurate representation of our activities in a timely manner.

Consistent high-quality data is reliant on embedding behaviour and culture within the organization in which all members of staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Every person working in the council has a duty to support good quality data in the following ways: -

- To record information as they receive it;
- To check that it is fully recorded without errors in the correct format; and
- To ensure that they are aware of all data procedures and standards relevant to their work.

Balancing the importance of information with the cost of collecting supporting data is crucial and highlights the importance of identifying information priorities and implementing appropriate systems to manage data.

Failing to address weaknesses in data quality or the underlying data collection and reporting arrangements risks misleading information, flawed decision-making, and wasted resources.

3.1. SPECIFIC ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

People Managers

- To ensure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities in respect of data quality and to ensure that policies and procedures are in place and followed rigorously.

Senior Leadership Team

- To communicate the high importance of data quality across the organisation.
- Supporting the corporate reporting process across their service area.

Heads of Service/Information Asset Owners

- To prioritise support for business-critical systems and data requiring quality assurance.
- To ensure that any identified data quality problems are resourced and solved. This should also be addressed where a commissioned service has access to Council data systems.

Data Administrators / Owners

- General information on key performance indicators, including ownership and deadlines.
- To understand the definition of the returns and measures for which they have responsibility.

- To collect data according to definitions and report it on time.
- To complete data quality self-assessments for all statutory returns and address areas of weakness.

Corporate Performance Team

- To support and challenge across the council in measuring, recording, reporting and interpreting performance data.
- To liaise with performance indicators owners and return co-ordinators in meeting requirements.
- Communicating, across the council, messages relating to data quality as it affects service performance and improvement.
- Identify and review “at risk” performance indicators.

Information Governance Team

- Responsible for information management policy and strategy and records managements – paper as well as data and systems information.
- To advise on data security, integrity and legality.
- To ensure that procurement of systems includes data quality standards.
- Ensure data is technically stored and organised as required.
- Responsible for all electronic data security.

Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)

- Responsible for the information risk profile of the organisation.
- Responsible for the identifying risks relating to data and information for the organisation.
- Responsible for appropriate mitigations so that the risks can be accepted.

Business Analyst Support

- To support the quality assurance of systems and data

4. MANAGING DATA QUALITY

4.1. GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Plymouth Plan serves as the primary strategic driver for the Council, outlining key priorities for the City and the approaches to achieve them. To measure progress, an outcome framework has been established, defining the desired outcomes and performance measures. This framework relies on data sources and appropriate benchmarking.

Additionally, the Performance Management Framework (PMF) provides governance and accountability guidelines for implementing the Corporate Plan and its associated deliverables. The PMF undergoes

regular reviews to ensure relevant performance measures and to develop new ones as needed. These reviews also verify the quality of data used in performance assessments.

4.2. DATA ACCURACY AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT GUIDELINES

To ensure accurate data recording, it is essential to adhere to prescribed definitions (many of which are nationally defined). These definitions will be incorporated into the design of performance indicators. For each measure, a specification will outline data sources and how they will be used to assess performance. The specification also considers the alignment of each measure with national and local policy contexts, available benchmarking, and appropriate performance tolerances throughout the year.

4.3. SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

The Council should seamlessly integrate data collection, recording, and reporting processes with its business planning and management. Council systems that store data should (wherever possible) apply restricted values to fields to ensure consistency (for example, pre prescribed answers ('Yes / No') or error if unexpected characters are included or format is not adhered to (postcode format for example). Whenever feasible, data should be collected and reported only once, adhering to the principle of "getting it right the first time," with minimal manual intervention. The goal is to eliminate inefficiencies such as duplicated recording, data cleansing, interfacing between different information systems, and consolidating data from multiple databases. By doing so, the Council aims to reduce administrative burden and ensure more accurate and timely data.

To enhance efficiency, the Council plans to leverage information technology for data collection, integration, and reporting. This includes utilising Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to access datasets and automating reporting through reporting tools.

Regular reviews of information systems and databases across the Council and its partners are necessary to ensure alignment with relevant policies and definitions.

4.4. PEOPLE AND SKILLS

All personnel responsible for data and performance management must be held accountable for data quality and adhere to established definitions and agreed-upon procedures. The performance management framework outlines transparent reporting lines and accountability throughout the process. It is essential to ensure that staff at all levels possess the necessary knowledge, competencies, and capacity related to data quality. Regular staff performance appraisals should identify any training or development needs.

4.5. DATA USE AND REPORTING

To demonstrate progress in fulfilling the commitments outlined in the Corporate Plan, the data collected will be utilised to bolster publicly available performance reports. These reports, in turn, will actively inform the decision-making process. When performance metrics rely on data from external Organisations, data sharing protocols will be established to ensure transparency, appropriate controls, and security.

4.6. SINGLE SOURCE OF TRUTH

The Council adheres to a 'single source of truth' approach, ensuring that all members of the organisation base business decisions on consistent data. By utilising digital reporting tools directly connected to key systems and datasets, the Council delivers accessible intelligence and data across the entire organisation.

5. CORPORATE DATA STANDARDS

To maintain consistent, high-quality data across the organisation, it is recommended that we establish Corporate Minimum Data Standards. Each Service Director will be responsible for ensuring compliance with these standards within their respective departments. This would set out information under the following categories.

5.1. DATA COLLECTION

- **Frequency of Data Collection** - When determining how often data should be collected, consider its sensitivity, variability, and volume.
- **Monitoring Reports** - For data used in Directorate Monitoring Reports, provide it promptly — within two weeks after the end of each indicator reporting period.
- **Data Collection System** - Design data collection systems with the principle of "collect once, use many times" in mind.
- **IT System Considerations** - When considering the acquisition of IT-based systems, work with DELT to evaluate compatibility with existing systems and consider whole-life costs.
- **Performance Data Review** - All performance data undergoes an annual review during Directorate Service Plan review to ensure its relevance and robustness.

5.2. DATA RECORDING

The following minimum standards must be applied in relation to the recording of data -

Staff Understanding and Accountability

- All staff members should fully understand the purpose of recording information within their responsibilities. Individual performance, following the "right first time" principle, is evaluated during the APR process.
- Those responsible for data recording must be clearly identified and receive appropriate training.
- For relevant data recorded in IT systems all relevant IT security policies should be adhered to.

Auditable Performance Data

- All performance data must have a clear and traceable evidence trail.
- Arrangements for data recording should undergo periodic risk-based reviews within each department.

Departmental Indicator Directory

- To enhance performance data robustness, include local performance indicators in a departmental indicator directory.
- Include within the directory available national indicators provided through LG Inform +
- Directory entries provide details about responsible officers, indicator definitions, calculation methods, collection frequency, and data sources.

5.3. DATA VALIDATION AND AUTHORISATION

The following minimum standards must be applied in relation to the validation and authorisation of data: -

Data Validity and Authorisation

- Each Service Director bears the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the validity and appropriate authorisation of all data within their department.
- Publicly reported performance data must receive authorisation from the relevant Service Director and Cabinet Member.

Responsible Officers

- All performance data must be associated with an identified Responsible Officer who acts as the validating officer.

Evidence Trail and Validation:

- Discourage the use of estimated data, but if practical, annotate such data with explanations of any limitations.
- Service Directors are responsible for ensuring data assurance from third parties and external agencies. Any concerns should be clearly communicated, along with limitations related to the data.

Quality Objectives –

- Whenever possible, specific quality objectives for data and validation arrangements should be explicitly included in Contracts / Service Level Agreements with third-party organisations delivering services on behalf of the Council.

5.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

The following minimum standards must be applied in relation to the analysis and reporting of data: -

Effective Data Use

- Departments use data routinely for service improvement.
- Data relevance is integral to annual departmental service plan reviews.

Performance Measurement

- Reflect Corporate Priorities through clear performance indicators, including local and national indicators, benchmarked where appropriate.

Quality Assurance

- Data for Directorate Performance Monitoring reports undergoes quality assurance by the Corporate Performance Team.

Transparency and Remediation

- Avoid data estimations or omissions where possible.
- Provide concise explanations in reports.
- Address deviations from planned progress with clear explanations and remedial actions.