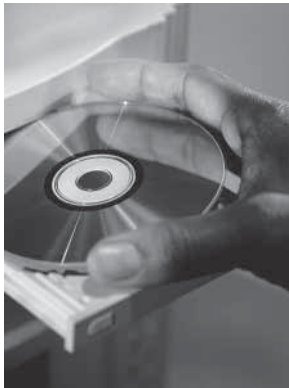




Data Quality Standard

Ratified November 2007

Next review date November 2008



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reliable information is a fundamental requirement for the Council to conduct its business efficiently and effectively. This applies in all areas of activity including the service delivery, performance management, corporate governance, internal and external accountability and communication. Data quality is a crucial pre-requisite to information that is accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant, and complete.

1.2 Rationale

1.2.1 Ever-increasing use of computerised systems provides greater opportunities to store and access many types and large volumes of data but also increases the risk of misinformation if the data from which information is derived is not of good quality. This risk applies both to the Authority's internal use of information and to information conveyed in the form of statutory returns to central Government and its various agencies. In addition, the Authority provides data to the many partnerships to which it belongs.

1.2.2 For that information to have value, it is essential that the data that underlies it is consistent and complies with national standards.

Authorities are assessed and judged on the quality of the data they produce. This is especially important in terms of Best Value Performance

Indicators, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment and emerging Comprehensive Area Assessment, which depends on good quality data for their accuracy and supporting evidence.



1.2.3 It is for these reasons that the authority requires a data quality Standard.

1.3 Scope

1.3.1 This Standard is intended to cover all data that is entered onto computerised systems within the Council and paper-based records. It covers primarily 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.

1.3.2 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. The Standard 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.

2. DATA QUALITY STANDARD

2.1 Core Principles

- ❑ Overall responsibility for the strategic management of data quality in the Authority will lie with the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Finance. Overall responsibility for the operational management of data quality will lie with the Corporate Services Director. Individual responsibilities are to be stated in Job Descriptions
- ❑ Heads of Service are responsible for, and will champion, data quality issues within their service areas. Responsibilities are to be explicitly stated in Job Descriptions.
- ❑ Swale Borough Council will seek to achieve the Data Quality - Comprehensive Performance Assessment Level 2 by 31 March 2008.
- ❑ The Data Protection Act (1998) requires, amongst other things that information held is accurate and up to date

2.1.1 Below Head of Service level, accountabilities for individuals with responsibility for data quality are to be clearly and formally defined as part of the performance appraisal process.

2.1.2 The importance of achieving good data quality will be addressed with all staff as part of the Corporate Induction process at commencement of their employment. This clear message will be reinforced periodically as and when required using an appropriate method of delivery.



2.1.3 The working environment will be conducive to achieving data quality. Supervision of staff using computer systems will encourage appropriate working practices, including:

- ❑ Lighting, heating, ventilation and equipment which comply with health and safety legislation
- ❑ Adequate breaks
- ❑ Refresher training
- ❑ Reasonable workload

2.1.4 All data collection and input processes will have an audit trail that operates continuously. Any training and development issues

identified in the course of auditing will be addressed promptly. All users will be made aware of the Authority's Protected Disclosure Policy ('whistle-blowing'). This will allow individuals, who may have concerns about the quality of data and are experiencing difficulties in resolving them in the normal way, the opportunity to relay them to an appropriate senior member of staff.



2.2 The Standards

Accuracy: Our Data shall be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes, representing clearly and in sufficient detail the interaction provided at the point of activity. Data will be captured once only, although it may have multiple uses. Accuracy is most likely to be secured if data is captured as close to the point of activity as possible. Reported information that is based on accurate data provides a fair picture of performance and should enable the Council to make informed decision at all levels. The need for accuracy must be balanced with the importance of the uses for the data, and the costs and effort of collection. Where compromises have to be made on accuracy, the resulting limitations of the data should be clear to users.

Validity: Data will be recorded and used in compliance with relevant requirements, including the correct application of any rules and definitions. This will ensure consistency between periods and with similar organisations. Data items held on Authority computer and other record systems must be valid and contextually logical. Where possible free-text fields will be avoided and standard codes or options used which comply

with national standards or map to national values. Wherever possible, computer systems will be programmed to only accept valid entries. In particular, steps will be taken to ensure that service user details are validated for changes and accuracy throughout the duration of service provided by the Authority.

Reliability: Our data will reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time, whether using manual or computer based systems or a combination. Members, Managers and stakeholders should be confident that progress towards performance targets reflects real changes rather than variations in data collection methods.

Timeliness: Data will be captured as quickly as possible after the event and will be available for the intended use within a reasonable time period. Data must therefore be available quickly and frequently enough to support information needs and to influence both operational and strategic decisions. To that end, key staff, need to be aware of relevant deadlines.

Relevance: Data captured will be relevant for the purposes for which it is to be used. This will entail periodic review of requirements to reflect changing needs.

Completeness: Data requirements will be clearly specified based on the information needs of the Council and data collection processes matched to these requirements. An assurance review may be instigated should monitoring identify missing, incomplete or invalid records. In this respect the assurance and feedback processes (see Section 2.3) will be adhered to, ensuring quality of data.

Documented Procedures: In order to minimise errors and achieve good quality data, appropriate procedures and guidance must exist so that staff can be trained and supported in their work. Details of these procedures, training and processes will be in the relevant System Administration manuals and available to all trained staff.

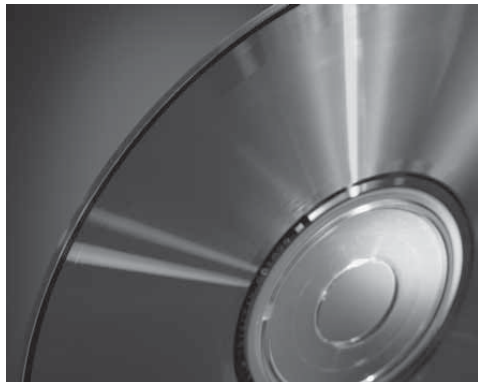
2.3 Assurance Framework

2.3.1 Data quality will be subject to internal control (including risk) processes within the Authority and to external scrutiny in the following ways:

- ❑ All information systems and processes will have routines developed and designed to systematically identify errors and other aspects of poor data quality

- ❑ Data will be checked and verified, then validated (by Head of Service; Director and Portfolio Holder) prior to being reported (both internally and externally)

- ❑ Data quality issues will be integrated with regular performance reports and considered by the appropriate monitoring body, which will make recommendations regarding the improvement of data quality



- ❑ Data quality reports will be routinely fed back to operational managers with advice as to corrective action to be taken such as improving processes and systems and staff training and development

- ❑ Audit of performance indicators and data quality by external auditors

2.3.2 The Council will aim to be significantly above average in all indicators and will strive for 100% accuracy. An assurance programme has been developed as part of the assurance framework. The Council will act on all enquiries made by service users and undertake remedial action suggested by external inspectors.

2.4 Issue of Indicator Guidance

The Policy and Performance Officer responsible for Data Quality will, every two weeks (as a minimum), visit the Audit Commission website to ascertain whether updated indicator guidance has been issued.

Should the Audit Commission issue new guidance this will be formally circulated to Heads of Service as soon as practicable.

Heads of Service will be accountable for ensuring that their “Responsible Officers” read the amended guidance and take, where appropriate, the necessary action to change systems and processes (including documented procedures).

As part of the departmental, Data Quality management arrangements, Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring changes to systems/processes are subject to validation checks

In addition, should amended guidance require changes to systems/processes these indicators will be assessed proportionate to risk and where appropriate subject to Internal Audit review as part of the Data Quality Assurance Programme.

3. IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLIANCE

3.1 Responsibilities of Heads of Service and all Staff

- 3.1.1 In respect of data quality, it is the responsibility of all those accountable to assist the Council in achieving a positive direction of travel. All Staff are therefore obliged to adhere to this Standard. Managers at all levels are responsible for ensuring that the staff for whom they are responsible are aware of and adhere to this Standard. They are also responsible for ensuring staff are updated in regard to any changes in this Standard. Managers will require staff to sign a statement to say that they have access to and have read this Standard.

3.2 Corporate Oversight

- 3.2.1 The Corporate Services Director, on behalf of the Chief Executive, will take steps to ensure that Heads of Service and all staff adhere to this Standard.

3.3 Training

- 3.3.1 In addition to the Corporate Induction Process, the Corporate Services Director will work with the Head of Organisational Development to ensure that training in data quality is available to Heads of Service and all staff who require it.

3.4 Equalities and Diversity

- 3.4.1 In accordance with Swale Borough Council's duty to promote equality: access, storage, handling and use of data/information will be in a manner consistent with fairness and accessibility for all.

4. REVIEW

- 4.1 This Standard will be reviewed annually in conjunction with the emerging Corporate Plan.

Contacting Swale Borough Council

The **Customer Service Centre** deals with all enquiries across the Council; it should be your first stop when contacting us.

Copies of this Swale Borough Council booklet are available on the Council website www.swale.gov.uk If you would like further hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. **large print**, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact the Council at:

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