

Sevenoaks District Council

Data Quality Statement



Data Quality

Data quality can be defined simply as ‘fitness for use’. It ensures a solid foundation for our decision making process, which in turn helps us achieve the aims and objectives outlined in our Council Plan, Community Plan and Corporate Strategies.

Information produced by the authority is used extensively for decision making by officers and elected Members. Our data is also used by Central Government, external audit and our local community in assessing the Councils use of public funds. This requires us to ensure that as an authority we place great emphasis on the quality of the data we produce.

This statement outlines the approach adopted by Sevenoaks District Council to continually improve its data quality arrangements. A co-ordinated approach to ensure the highest level of data quality across the authority continues to be pursued in order to meet our data quality objective – ‘Right First Time’.

We are always interested in ways to improve our Data Quality Statement and welcome your suggestions

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Publication details

**Purpose of the
Data Quality Statement**

To help us ensure the data the authority produces is of the highest quality to support the decision making processes of the council and external audiences.

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Why is Data Quality important?

There are a number of reasons why ensuring good data quality is important, including:

- Keeping service users and partners informed and thereby promoting accountability;
- To assist with operational management and strategic planning;
- To ensure accurate performance outturns are submitted to partners and government departments;
- To ensure the accuracy of transparency information published for use by the public and other interested parties; and
- To ensure compliance with relevant legislation.

In addition to the factors outlined above there are also a number of hidden costs and risks which can be overcome by maintaining good data quality, these include:

- Increased costs through wasted resources;
- Customer dissatisfaction;
- Reduced employee morale; and
- Poor information to assist with decision making processes.

The Principles of Data Quality

The authority has adopted the following principles of good quality data.

- **Relevant.** Data captured should be relevant to the purposes for which it is used. This entails periodic review of requirements to reflect changing needs. Assessing this relevance is subjective and dependant upon the varying needs of users.
- **Accurate.** Data should be sufficiently accurate for its intended purposes, representing clearly and in sufficient detail the activity the indicator was designed to measure. Reported information that is based on accurate data enables informed decision making at all levels.
- **Timely.** Timeliness refers to the delay between the data period being measured and the point after this date that this information is published. There is commonly a trade off between timeliness and accuracy. The timeliness will also have an impact on the relevance of the data.
- **Valid.** Data should be recorded and used in accordance with requirements, including the correct application of rules and definitions. This will ensure consistency between periods and across similar organisations making direct comparisons possible.

- **Reliable.** Data should reflect stable and consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time. Progress toward targets should reflect real changes in performance rather than variations in data collection methods.
- **Comprehensive.** Data requirements should be clearly specified based on the information needs of the authority, ensuring data is captured for a comprehensive range of indicators covering all elements of service delivery. Comprehensive also reflects the availability of the supplementary information which may be necessary for interpretation of results.
- **Accessible.** Refers to how easy it is to obtain data or how easy it is to ascertain whether or not the information exists. The way in which information is accessed is also important, particularly when data is published.

Links to Other Policies

The Council's Data Quality Statement does not stand alone in ensuring the quality of the authority's data. The following documents are also relevant:

- **Officer Code of Conduct** outlines the duties of officers in the Disclosure of Information;
- **IT Security Policy** outlines the responsibilities of officers and Members in the use of IT equipment and the controls in place to protect the authority's information;
- **Risk Management Strategy** sets out the processes for undertaking risk assessments across the council which consider data quality issues where appropriate; and
- **Data Protection** and records retention guidance set out best practices in managing data.

2. Data Quality for Performance Indicators

Roles and Responsibilities

Ensuring good quality data requires commitment from a number of officers across the organisation. This commitment is led by the Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation.

Operationally the Assistant Chief Executive holds responsibility for data quality, supported by Service Managers who act as Data Quality Champions responsible for the monitoring and reporting of information and ensuring all data conforms to the data quality principles.

Those responsible for data quality are supported by the Policy and Performance team. The Policy and Performance team provide a corporate support function and hold responsibility for the ongoing review and development of the authority's data quality arrangements. A critical role for the Policy and Performance team includes the management of the authority's performance management system and the reporting of council performance. Additional responsibilities include co-ordinating regular local performance indicator reviews, reporting to Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee and Strategic Management Team on data quality issues and taking a lead role in communication and training activities designed to improve data quality.

Officers across the authority routinely produce information that is used for a range of purposes. All officers are required to produce information in accordance with the authority's Data Quality Principles.

In Year Performance Monitoring

Performance indicator information is collected throughout the year to monitor the workload, performance and productivity of Council services.

A majority of the performance information is collected and reported on a monthly basis. To support these process the following roles have been developed:

- **PI Lead Officer.** The person allocated responsibility for the data for each indicator. These officers are within the service area to which the indicator relates.
- **Data Inputers.** An officer within each service area with responsibility for inputting data in to access controlled spreadsheets for import in to the council's performance management system.
- **Data Checkers.** Officers in each service area responsible for checking the accuracy of figures input in to the access controlled spreadsheets prior to electronic import into the council's performance management system. All data is targeted to be available to officers and Members within the performance management system by the 15th of each following month.

2. Data Quality for Performance Indicators

The Policy and Performance team are responsible for ad-hoc accuracy checks of data and for the electronic import of data in to the performance management system. On a monthly or quarterly basis reports are produced for Strategic Management Team, Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. Service Managers as measure owners are required to provide commentary at least quarterly for any indicators not meeting target, this is recorded in the performance management system and reported to Strategic Management Team and Members.

Statutory Performance Reporting

Local authorities are no longer required to provide annual performance returns against a list of statutory indicators.

However, Government departments continue to receive data returns from local government across of a range of financial and service information.

These data returns are managed by responsible officers within each council department. It is a requirement that the data returns adhere to the standards set out in this statement.

Data Transparency

The Government believes that greater transparency is at the heart of enabling the public to hold politicians and public bodies to account.

As such they set out a Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency in September 2011.

The Council agrees that where a public interest exists in seeing how public money is spent or how efficiency and value for money is achieved data should published on its website.

All data published is done so in accordance with the standards set out in this statement and includes, but is not limited to:

- Expenditure over £500;
- Information on senior employee salaries;
- Councillor allowances and expenses;
- Grants to the voluntary sector; and
- Performance information.

Wherever possible data will be published in an open format and be made available for re-use.

3. Data Quality in Partnerships

Data Quality Standards

The authority has a strong history of working in partnership and is keen to provide and develop support for partnership working. The authority works constructively with all partners to provide assurance over the quality of data passed within them.

The principle of ensuring data quality extends to all data shared or provided by third parties.

The authority has adopted a set of Data Quality Standards that each partner is requested to sign up to. Based on best practice standards seek to ensure partner organisations implement robust processes to ensure the quality of data shared between partners.

The Data Quality Standards are set out at Appendix 1 to this statement.



Data Quality Standards

These standards have been developed for adoption by partners of Sevenoaks District Council to further improve governance arrangements.

They define a framework of management arrangements that the Council adheres to and expects its partners to have in place to ensure the quality of data they use to manage and report on their activities and those of the partnership.

1. Governance and Leadership

(Insert Name of Partner organisation) has in place a framework for the management and accountability of data quality, with a commitment to secure a culture of data quality throughout the organisation.

2. Policies

(Insert Name of Partner organisation) has in place appropriate policies and procedures to secure the quality of the data it records and uses for reporting.

3. Systems and Processes

(Insert Name of Partner organisation) has in place systems and processes which secure the quality of data as part of the normal business activity of the organisation.

4. People and Skills

(Insert Name of Partner organisation) has in place arrangements to ensure that staff have the appropriate knowledge, skills and capacity for their roles in relation to data quality.

5. Data use and reporting

(Insert Name of Partner organisation) has in place arrangements that are focused on ensuring that data supporting reported information is actively used in the decision-making process, and is subject to a system of internal control and validation.

Signed by:

Date:

Title:

Sevenoaks District Council

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The Data Quality Statement is available, along with the Council's other key plans and strategies, on the intranet.

Other formats:

This publication is available in large print.

For a copy, call 01732 227414.

If you need help communicating with us or understanding this document, we can arrange for an interpreter to help you. Please contact us on 01732 227414 stating your language and telephone number.

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