

# Data Quality Policy

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## Introduction

The Council recognises the importance of having good quality data. The overarching objective of this policy is therefore to improve the quality of all data used by the Council.

This document sits alongside the Information Protection Policy and Records Management Policy. The purpose of this policy is to manage the quality of the data collected and used by the Council in relation to performance management and decision making. This policy document sets out the Council's approach to ensure that:

- information is fit for purpose, with appropriate balance between the characteristics of good quality data which are relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, coherence and comparability,
- awareness of data quality is fully embedded across all services and is a key factor considered by all staff dealing with data, whether from a collection or a decision making point of view.

Good data is essential for the Council's operational business and performance management. To be effective it is important that the data, which underlies performance information, is robust and reliable. We use data to:

- Understand the Kent population and our customers.
- Inform good decision making and effective service planning.
- Help measure the effectiveness and efficiency of our services to the public.
- Identify and resolve issues rapidly and manage our risks.
- Benchmark cost and performance with other authorities.
- Set targets to improve performance, reduce cost and improve customer satisfaction.

Performance data and information is used by external bodies such as Ofsted to inform their inspections of specific services. This trend places a bigger emphasis on the need to demonstrate the underlying data is reliable and of good quality.

In working to improve data quality we are aware of the need to balance the cost of collecting and collating data into useable information and the benefits derived from using the information.

The risk of not addressing data quality is inaccurate or misleading information, or information which is too late to be of use. The consequence of this is flawed decision making, wasted resources and potentially non-compliance with statutory legislation or regulatory pressures.

Service specific policies and procedures will flow from this corporate policy, where relevant and necessary, thereby ensuring that all the corporate standards outlined in this policy are maintained across the council.

To show how importantly the council treats data quality this document will be available to all stakeholders and published on the web site.

## Characteristics of good data quality

There is common agreement across International Statistical Agencies (eg Eurostat) and other commentators that Data Quality is defined as “fitness for purpose” in terms of user needs. It is generally recognised that Data Quality is best viewed as a multi-faceted concept with a number of important dimensions, which need to be balanced appropriately in collecting and presenting data.

When designing and reviewing data collection processes, the following characteristics of data quality should be considered, and an appropriate balance made between the different characteristics to ensure the needs of the users of the data are met to best effect.

- **Relevant** - Data should be defined, selected, collected, recorded and analysed with the intended use and audience in mind.
- **Accurate** - Data should provide a true account of what it is intended to represent to enable informed decisions to be made.
- **Timely** - Data should be available frequently and promptly enough for it to be valuable for managing service delivery and decision making, providing the opportunity to take corrective action where needed.
- **Accessible** - Data should be easily available to those who need access to it. This also refers to the format used to present the data and accompanying notes of explanation to ease interpretation.
- **Coherent** - Refers to data being consistent with other available information, either from other sources or with different frequency.
- **Comparable** - Data should be comparable across time, which requires consistency of method in preparation of the information. Where changes in methodology have occurred, this should be clearly stated in a commentary alongside the data.

The dimensions or characteristics of good data quality outlined above align closely to those used by organisations such as the Office of National Statistics, Eurostat and OECD.

## **KCC Data Quality Standards**

The Council's standards for data quality are defined below and all staff with accountability for data quality should work to ensure that:

1. All data collected and stored by the council is clearly defined and understood, with clear documentation in place to support this.
2. All performance indicators reported within KCC performance dashboards will have a Performance Indicator Definition form completed and reviewed annually.
3. Information is collected accurately at source and initial input into any computer system is tightly controlled so that our performance information is right first time.
4. The management of data within the organisation is delivered with a connected and robust framework of systems, policies and procedures for data handling within each service area.
5. There are appropriate internal controls in place to check the quality of data reported, and that any issues or concerns about data quality are included within any reporting of that data.
6. High standards of data quality is received from partners on the information they share with us and which we make use of in decision making or assessing performance.
7. The information we process and use is regularly reviewed against the characteristics of good quality data, to ensure it is fit for purpose.
8. Services have in place the right resources, and in particular the right people with the right skills, to ensure we have timely and accurate performance information.
9. Provide effective training for staff who are required to collect and input data, so that the data quality expectations in terms of this policy are understood.
10. Data is stored, used and shared in accordance with the Data Protection Policy and Records Management Policy.

## Roles & Responsibilities

The specific responsibility for data quality for any individual in the organisation will be dependent on their role. The different roles in the organisation and their responsibilities for data quality are shown below.

Role	Areas of responsibility
Elected Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of this Data Quality policy.</li> <li>• Monitor and challenge that services have sufficiently robust systems in place to ensure good data quality for key management information.</li> <li>• Consider the quality of data before them when making decisions.</li> </ul>
Corporate Directors & Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overall responsibility for assuring the quality of data (in particular that which is business critical).</li> <li>• Ensure improvement action is taken where necessary.</li> <li>• Verify and sign off performance reports.</li> </ul>
Heads of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate the Data Quality Policy ensuring it is understood and implemented by all staff.</li> <li>• Review data quality and agree actions for improvement where required.</li> <li>• Advise elected Members of any data quality issues.</li> <li>• Ensure data quality training is available and sufficient.</li> </ul>
All other Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand and implement the Data Quality Policy.</li> <li>• Responsible for ensuring that staff have the necessary skills required to deliver high quality data. This is reflected in job descriptions, monitored and supported through the staff appraisal process.</li> <li>• Ensure 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.</li> </ul>
All Staff Members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware of this Data Quality Policy.</li> <li>• Aware 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.</li> </ul>
Management Information Units	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have knowledge of relevant performance measures, requirements and performance issues.</li> <li>• Ensure high quality information is regularly provided within the timescales agreed, highlighting any changes, caveats or potential issues relating to the information provided (e.g. changes to systems, sources and definitions) so that sound judgements can be made about how this information should be used and interpreted.</li> <li>• Ensuring that the information provided is supported by underlying working papers/records and that these are retained as appropriate.</li> <li>• To support all managers in ensuring they understand and deliver on the requirements of the KCC Data Quality Policy.</li> </ul>
Internal audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual audit programme to review underlying systems used to produce performance information using a risk based approach.</li> </ul>

## **Additional Guidance**

Additional guidance to support the Data Quality Standards is provided below.

### Systems & Processes

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 indicators are agreed.

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 and include lead officer 'sign off' to assure the quality of data.

Contingency arrangements should be established to ensure data can 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.

Relevant supporting information should be held for all performance data, including a Performance Indicator Definition form.

Systems and processes should be regularly tested to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Data quality should be regularly reviewed in-year using appropriate tools and techniques to enable necessary actions to be taken where issues are identified.

Staff involved in the production or use of data should be provided with appropriate training and support to ensure data is produced and used in a way that adds value for the organisation and is of high quality.

### Partnership working and contracts

Where data is provided by a third party or shared externally the following should be agreed and documented in Service Level Agreements (SLA) or contracts:

- Clear definitions of data requirements and terminology.
- Statement of expected levels of data quality and data validation.
- Outline of quality assurance processes to ensure data quality standards are met.
- Process to ensure notification of any changes to methods of data collection that may impact upon the data provided.
- Ensure that Data Quality is not compromised by data adjustment, e.g. it should be clear where estimates or sampling are being used.
- Clear process to address any issues or questions over data quality.

## Data use and reporting

To provide most value, data should be focused upon supporting the organisational priorities and be defined in a way that will support decision making and help the organisation take appropriate action.

Data should be presented in a format that is meaningful and accessible to the users of that data. User feedback should be sought to ensure outputs continue to be valuable.

Where the preferred performance data is not available as expected, the creation of proxies/alternative data sources should be considered, where these will support decision making. In these instances, care needs to be given to ensure that data shows what it is intended to and limitations of such proxies are communicated and taken into account by users.

To get most value from data, supporting commentary and contextual information needs to be maintained and kept relevant and up to date, with any caveats or data quality issues clearly outlined.

Data should be at an appropriate level of detail to influence management decisions e.g. broken down to underlying activity, district or service level where meaningful.

Comparison to earlier periods and/or other organisations or groups should be considered to help with interpretation of data and identifying potential areas of good practice.

Where there is significant variation in performance against target and/or over time, underlying information and causes should be considered to identify whether this is a performance issue or data quality issue. Monitoring and reporting should include a review of latest progress on such issues and any management action being taken to address these.

Where data quality issues are raised internally through self-assessment or externally, e.g., through matters arising from audit, this should be taken into account in any interpretation and analysis.

All reporting should be compliant with data protection legislation. This includes suppression of figures which are less than 5 if publication could result in the identification of individuals.