

Report to the Cabinet



Report Reference: C/050/2006-07.
Date of Meeting: 4 September 2006.

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services.

Subject: Data Quality and Value For Money - Audit and Strategy.

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Recommendations:

- (1) That, in respect of the 'Data Quality' assessment to be undertaken by the Audit Commission, the Council's self-assessment submission be endorsed;**
- (2) That, subject to consideration of the views of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, the draft Data Quality and Value For Money Strategies be adopted; and**
- (3) That, in respect of the annual 'Value For Money' assessment to be undertaken by the Audit Commission, the Council's self-assessment submission be considered and agreed by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee.**

Data Quality:

1. As the first stage of the audit of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for 2005/06, the Audit Commission has recently undertaken an assessment of the overall management arrangements of all local authorities to secure data quality. Although part of this assessment related to the quality of performance information, the audit looked in detail at corporate data quality arrangements, and was therefore a much wider issue than the BVPI audit.
2. The audit was based on a self-assessment exercise and through on-site validation by the Commission. The audit will result in a scored judgement, as a result of a review of the following five themes and areas of audit focus:

Review theme	Audit focus
Governance and leadership	Is there a corporate framework of management and accountability for data quality, with a commitment to securing a culture of data quality throughout the organisation?
Policies and procedures	Are there appropriate policies and procedures in place to secure the quality of data recorded and reported by the organisation?
Systems and processes	Has the organisation put in place systems and processes that secure the quality of data as part of the normal business activity of the organisation?

Review theme	Audit focus
People and skills	Has the organisation put in place arrangements to ensure that all staff have the appropriate knowledge, competencies and capacity for their roles in relation to data quality?
Data use	Has the body put in place arrangements that are focused on ensuring that data supporting performance information is also used to manage and improve the delivery of services?

3. For each theme area, the Commission specified a number of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) as a basis for councils to undertake a voluntary self-assessment of their current position with regard to data quality. Although the completion of a self-assessment was not a mandatory requirement for the purposes of the audit, the Commission considered that this exercise would be helpful for both the audit and for the Council to understand its current position. Management Board therefore determined that the Council should complete the voluntary self-assessment in relation to the Data Quality audit, and agreed arrangements for undertaking the self-assessment process through a special meeting of all Heads of Service. If the Council had chosen not to participate in the self-assessment exercise, it is likely that the Audit Commission would have assessed the authority's management arrangements for data quality on the basis of previous audit work undertaken and existing perceptions of the authority.
4. The draft self-assessment for the Data Quality audit is attached as Appendix 1 to this report, and also sets out the audit KLOEs in detail. The timescale for the submission of the self-assessment element of this work was tight, and the completed self-assessment was required to be submitted to the Audit Commission by mid August 2006. As a result, the self-assessment was considered and agreed by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 15 August 2006, and the Cabinet is therefore now requested to endorse the content of the self-assessment submission. The results of the Data Quality audit will feed into the Council's next Value for Money assessment, and also inform the second round of district council Comprehensive Performance Assessment. The results of the audit will also have a bearing on the BVPI audit, in that the sample of performance indicators to be subject of in-depth review will be determined partly by the risks elicited from the Data Quality audit.
5. As a result of the audit, it was considered important for the Council to formalise its management arrangements in this area. The completion of the self-assessment provided an opportunity to set out an overall corporate approach to ensuring data quality, through the development of a Data Quality Strategy, a draft version of which is attached as Appendix 2 to this report. As performance information is increasingly being used for the external assessment of the authority's performance, the strategy sets out a commitment to ensuring that arrangements for securing the quality of key data meet the highest standards, as consistent, accurate, timely and comprehensive information is vital to support effective decision-making and enhanced service provision. The draft Data Quality Strategy was also considered and agreed by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 15 August 2006.

Value For Money:

6. In preparation for the forthcoming Value for Money assessment referred to in paragraph 4 of this report, a need has been identified to bring together the various elements of the Council's current approach to providing value for money services into a single comprehensive document. This has been achieved through the development

of a corporate Value for Money Strategy, a draft version of which is attached as Appendix 3 to this report for consideration by the Scrutiny Panel. The draft Strategy sets out the authority's overall approach to achieving value for money and allocates appropriate responsibilities at both member and officer level. The draft Value for Money Strategy was also considered and agreed by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 15 August 2006.

7. The Value for Money exercise will also comprise a self-assessment element, which must be submitted to the Audit Commission by 30 September 2006. In view of this timescale, it is proposed that the self-assessment be considered by the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee at its meeting on 25 September 2006, as the assessment could not be completed in time for this Cabinet meeting and there is no other scheduled meeting of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel before the submission deadline.
8. The Cabinet is requested to agree that the draft Data Quality and Value For Money Strategies be adopted. The results of the Data Quality assessment will be reported to a future meeting of the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

9. To ensure that the Council has put in place appropriate management arrangements to secure data quality and value for money.

Other Options for Action:

10. To decline to participate in the self-assessment processes, as a result of which the Audit Commission would have assessed the authority's management arrangements for Data Quality and Value For Money on the basis of previous audit work undertaken and existing perceptions of the authority.

Consultation undertaken:

11. Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel, Management Board and Senior Management Team.

Resource implications:

Budget: None.

Personnel: None.

Land: None.

Council Plan/Best Value Performance Plan Reference: Section 8 – 'How we Measure Our Achievements'.

Relevant statutory powers: None.

Background papers: None.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None.

Key Decision reference: (if required) None.