

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Decision Made: 22 May 2009

Review of the Data Quality Policy

Issue for Decision

To consider the Council's position with regard to data quality and agree changes to the Data Quality Policy.

Decision Made

That the revised Data Quality Policy as set out at Appendix A to the Report of the Policy and Performance manager including:

- Reference to particular areas of risk;
- Reference to appropriate training for staff; and
- A change in wording in paragraph 6 regarding performance indicators

be agreed.

Reasons for Decision

All businesses need information that is fit for purpose to manage services and account for performance. Service providers also need accurate information to make judgements about the efficiency, effectiveness and the responsiveness of their services. Given the decisions that the council has to make, the time that is invested on these activities and the range of systems used to collect and analyse data, it is important that this information is reliable.

Successful bodies have recognised data quality as a corporate priority and have taken action to embed effective arrangements for managing the quality of the data they collect and use.

The Council has in recent years developed a Data Quality Policy and has, in the past few months, looked at further improvements to the content. There have also been a number of changes and improvements put in place to embed and improve data quality throughout the Council. Incorporated within the Corporate Improvement Plan is the data quality action plan, which includes recommendations made by the Audit Commission.

The Data Quality Policy was revised and strengthened in June 2007 and was approved by full Council. The policy sets out the Council's

commitment to data quality, the responsibilities of the staff here at the Council and points out the importance of ensuring that data received from partners and other third parties is in line with the authority's standards. Most recently, in February 2009, the Council achieved the top rating from the Audit Commission for data quality.

All authorities in Kent are subject to the same data quality inspection regime as Maidstone. However, they all approach this differently and the Council continues to learn best practice from other authorities.

Officers have considered several other models of delivery and have made recommendations to be incorporated into the updated Data Quality Policy (the policy including the recommended amendments can be found at Appendix A to the Report of the Policy and Performance Manager).

The revised policy highlights areas of potential significant risk that Heads of Service and Section Managers need to be aware of in order to efficiently be able to manage them. These are as follows:

- Where there is a high volume of data transactions;
- Technically complex performance information/definition guidance;
- Problems identified in previous years;
- Supporting inexperienced staff involved in data processing/performance information production;
- A system being used to produce new performance information; and
- Known gaps in the control environment.

Relevant training will continue to be provided to ensure officers are aware of how data quality relates to their work, how they fit into the overall council arrangements and what is expected of them.

Point 6 of the policy needed to be updated in relation to the new national indicators and retained BVPI's.

The revised Data Quality Policy will be published in the Best Value Performance Plan 2008/09, which details the Council's performance against target for the indicators set by central government and local indicators set by the Council.

Alternatives considered and why rejected

Not reviewing the Data Quality Policy is not recommended, as failing to take this seriously could mean the reliability that the Council can place on various information as part of the decision making process will be significantly reduced.

However, the Council needs to be mindful that the systems that are put in place are not overly bureaucratic, complicated or confusing for the officers who are involved.

Background Papers

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Scrutiny Manager by: 1 June 2009
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