

Audit Summary Report

December 2006



Data Quality

Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

Audit 2006/2007

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Introduction

- 1 This report covers the audit of the 2005/06 performance indicators. It highlights any areas that need attention to improve the performance of the Council.

Background

- 2 It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that their best value performance plan (BVPP) and performance indicators (PI) are accurately reported. The Council need to ensure that the data quality assurance processes are in place so that they can assure themselves that the data produced is accurate and reliable. As this data is now being used for performance management, internal quality assurance processes are increasingly important.
- 3 Various factors were used to assess the 'medium' risk rating attached to the audited bodies' arrangements for data quality:
 - responsibility for data quality should be clearly defined;
 - the body should have clear data quality objectives;
 - the body should have effective arrangements for monitoring and review of data quality;
 - a policy for data quality should be in place, supported by a current set of operational procedures and guidance;
 - policies and procedures should be followed by staff and applied consistently throughout the organisation;
 - there should be appropriate systems in place for the collection, recording, analysis and reporting of the data used to monitor performance, and staff should be supported in their use of these systems;
 - the body should have appropriate controls in place to ensure that information systems secure the quality of data used to report on performance;
 - security arrangements for performance information systems should be robust, and business continuity plans should be in place;
 - an effective management framework for data sharing should be in place;
 - the body should communicate clearly the responsibilities of staff, where applicable, for achieving data quality;
 - the organisation should provide training to ensure that staff have the necessary skills and knowledge in relation to data quality;
 - the body should have put in place arrangements that are focused on ensuring that data supporting performance information is also used to manage and improve the delivery of the service; and
 - the body should have effective controls in place for data reporting.

- 4 The risk rating is used to determine how many of the high risk indicators, as determined by the AC (see 5 below), need to be the subject of detailed testing.
- 5 For 2005/06 the Audit Commission selected a new set of automatic high risk indicators, which were deemed high risk from a national perspective. These were as follows:
 - assessment of users 16 and over of their library service (PLSS7);
 - stock turn - users per 1,000 population/books per 1,000 population (IPF);
 - stock level per 1,000 population (IPF);
 - cost per library visit (IPF);
 - planning speed (BV109);
 - speed in fixing street lights (BV215);
 - percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people (BV165);
 - bus patronage (BV102);
 - recycling performance (BV82a);
 - composting performance (BV82b);
 - average time in temporary accommodation: time in B&B (BV183a);
 - average time in temporary accommodation: hostels (BV183b);
 - service users who have moved on in a planned way from temporary living arrangements (KP12);
 - percentage of private sector homes vacant for more than six months (HIP HSSA);
 - repeat homelessness; and
 - private sector unfit properties made fit (HIP HSSA).
- 6 The Electronic Data Collection (EDC) system has been used to record the outturns of performance indicators in 2005/06 and an assessment by the Audit Commission of whether each of the indicators was considered to be fairly stated.
- 7 The deadline for the Council to submit their BVPP to audit was 30 June 2006, the Council met this deadline. The audit deadline for the indicators was 16 October 2006, this deadline was also met.

Audit approach

- 8 The 2005/06 audit was carried out in three stages:
 - Stage 1 - A review of management arrangements to secure data quality was undertaken in respect of governance and leadership, policies, systems and processes, people and skills and data use. The work was completed using the results of document reviews, interviews and cumulative audit knowledge. A report on this aspect of our work was produced earlier in the year and reported to the Audit Committee in September 2006.

- Stage 2 - Completeness checks were undertaken and explanations obtained for all significant changes in the outturn results between 2004/05 and 2005/06 in respect of the high risk PI's (see 5 above).
- Stage 3 - The results of the work undertaken at stages 1 and 2 were used to determine which of the high risk indicators (see 5 above) should be subject of an in depth review. The following 10 indicators were selected for detailed testing: 1) Assessment of users 16 and over of their library service. 2) Libraries stock turn. 3) Planning speed. 4) Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people. 5) Recycling performance. 6) Composting performance. 7) Time in B&B. 8) Time in hostels. 9) Private sector homes vacant for more than six months. 10) Private sector unfit properties made fit.

Main conclusions

- 9 The Council's arrangements for managing data quality were assessed as medium risk and a separate report and action plan is already in place.
- 10 The Council's Performance Plan is a supplement to the Corporate Plan and has been appropriately and accurately prepared. It details all the required information and includes details both of performance and targets.
- 11 Assessment of users 16 and over of their library service.
 - We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commissions criteria.
 - The indicator was calculated by IPF after the completed forms had been issued and collected at the individual libraries
 - The results were published by IPF in their report Walsall MBC Public Library Users Survey Combined Weighted Authority & Service Point Report November 2003 PF K10.7
 - This shows that 3,465 survey forms were completed and 54.3 per cent of respondents rated the library service as very good and 37.8 per cent rated the service as good.
- 12 Stock turn - users per 1,000 population/books per 1,000 population.
 - It was not possible for us to conclude whether the PI is fairly stated because there was an insufficient audit trail for us to conduct all the required testing.
 - Our testing required us to test individual books but the manual stock count only identified the number of books in each category.
- 13 planning speed (BV109)
 - We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.

- There has been a significant improvement in performance since 2004-05 and the explanations provided are that 1) there has been increased delegation to officers and 2) overall improved performance due to the implementation of a restructure, including the establishment of a development control committee.
- There are no formal procedures in place which staff could consistently follow, and which could ensure consistency and continuity of the business of the department in the absence the more experienced staff. There is the risk that the process of reviewing planning applications is inconsistently applied.

Recommendation

R1 The department should put in place formal policies and procedures that incorporate the processing of planning applications (from receipt of an application to the dispatch of the final decision). The use of a 'validation checklist' should also be defined.

- 14 Percentage of pedestrian crossings with facilities for disabled people (BV165)
- We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.
 - Pedestrian crossings are named differently by Traffic Engineering and Urban Traffic Control departments, and their records are often incomplete. There is a risk that non compliant pedestrian crossings may go unidentified since information maintained by Traffic Engineering cannot be independently verified or verified to an independent source.

Recommendation

R2 The Traffic Engineering department should ensure that pedestrian crossings are given the same names as in the UTC database. This would facilitate cross referencing between the two databases.

- Where audible beepers have been turned off, no reasons are indicated in the Traffic Engineering database. In its present form, the data base doesn't give a comprehensive picture of the extent to which each pedestrian crossing is compliant with the specified definition.

Recommendation

R3 The Traffic Engineering database should be modified to include a column indicating if pedestrian crossings have audible beepers, and where such beepers have been turned off, the reasons for turning them off. This would enhance understanding of the information contained therein.

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- The 'Assessment of Controlled Pedestrian Crossing' forms are not properly completed. There is a risk that information contained in the database is not supported by a monitoring visit to each pedestrian crossing.

Recommendation

R4 The 'Assessment of Controlled Pedestrian Crossings' form used by the Traffic Engineering Department should be amended to include the date each pedestrian crossing was commissioned. This would facilitate the distinction between pedestrian crossings commissioned before 01/04/2002 and those commissioned after that date, as well as their various compliance requirements.

15 Recycling performance (BV82a)

- We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.
- There has been a significant improvement in performance since 2004-05 and the explanation provided is that the roll out of kerbside recycling across the borough has had the desired impact. The participation and door knocking exercises have helped improve the outturn throughout the year.

16 Composting performance (BV82b)

- We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.

17 Average time in temporary accommodation: time in B&B (BV183a)

- We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.
- There has been a significant improvement in performance since 2004-05 and the explanation provided is that robust management/reporting arrangements and controls have been implemented to minimise B&B usage and to ensure the speedy move on of families. There have also been new measures to prevent homelessness/reduce demands on temporary accommodation.

18 Average time in temporary accommodation: hostels (BV183b)

- We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.
- The Council does not have any accommodation classified as a hostel and where facilities are shared.

19 Percentage of private sector homes vacant for more than six months (HIP HSSA)

- We have concluded that the PI is fairly stated in accordance with the Audit Commission criteria.

- From a sample of 20 properties selected for testing there were two where the Council has been unable to provide any documentary evidence that the property is unoccupied.

Recommendation

R5 In all cases evidence should be retained and available for inspection to support the categorisation of properties as empty.

- The numerator for this indicator was incorrect. A whole category of 177 properties termed 'exempt' had been incorrectly omitted but their inclusion did not alter the outturn figure.

Recommendations

R6 The calculation of outturn results should be independently reviewed prior to submission.

20 Private sector unfit properties made fit (HIP HSSA)

- We have concluded that the PI should not have been calculated using the 'snapshot' method. The average method should have been used. The outturn result has been amended from 7.67 per cent to 5.05 per cent.
- There were cases of duplication in which certain properties were reported twice in 2005/06 and certain properties reported as having been made fit in 2005/06 even though they had been reported in 2004/05. These duplications resulted from the fact that properties were counted as having been made fit following the completion of only part of the required work.

Recommendation

R7 Properties should only be included as having been made fit after the final repairs/maintenance work has been satisfactorily concluded and not when a batch of work is completed.

- Final Completion Inspection forms are not signed and included in the files. This makes it difficult to conclude that the properties have been satisfactorily brought to fitness.

Recommendation

R8 Final Completion Inspection forms should be completed, signed and included in the file for each property that has been made fit.

- For private sector dwellings that have been made fit by the third party - HESTIA - there are no supporting documents to back up invoices and computer printouts from this service provider. There is the risk that HESTIA may not be working in the best interest of the council and that Value for Money (VFM) is not being achieved. Furthermore, with no SLA, there are no parameters against which the services of HESTIA (or any other service provider) could be monitored and measured.

Recommendation

R9 The Council should establish a formal contract with HESTIA or any other service provider. The contractual documents should include a Service Level Agreement to which the service provider would render services to customers and be monitored against.

- In 2005/06 payments to the value of £665,287 were made by the Council to HESTIA but the services provided were not monitored (including figures reported as well as supporting documents). HESTIA submits only invoices and computer printouts of addresses in which services have been provided and names of owner-occupiers. There is the risk that inadequacies may not be identified and the quality of data may not be assured. Fraud/attempted fraud could also go undetected. It should be noted that HESTIA processes and approves applications from occupants/owners, and then carries out the required maintenance/repairs and then bills the Council. This increases the risk of fraud/irregularity.

Recommendation

R10 The Council should establish a formal monitoring process for services and data provided by third party service providers. Monitoring reports should be produced and should be reviewed by management so that any inadequacies could be identified, investigated in a timely manner.

Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
7	R1 The department should put in place formal policies and procedures that incorporate the processing of planning applications (from receipt of an application to the dispatch of the final decision). The use of a 'validation checklist' should also be defined.	3	Janet Read – Regeneration Directorate Business Manager.	Yes	The Planning Service is undertaking a project to put in place formal policies and procedures for all its processes. The first process scheduled in this project is planning applications.	January 2007
7	R2 The Traffic Engineering department should ensure that pedestrian crossings are given the same names as in the UTC database. This would facilitate cross referencing between the two databases.	3	Glyn Oliver – Traffic and Transport Service Manager.	Yes	It has been agreed by the Head of Service in Transportation that the responsibility for the monitoring and reporting of BV165 should now sit within the UTC section. This will ensure that the only database for BV165 source data will be in UTC and that one unique referencing system will be used for crossings.	Completed.

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Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
7	R3 The Traffic Engineering database should be modified to include a column indicating if pedestrian crossings have audible beepers, and where such beepers have been turned off, the reasons for turning them off. This would enhance understanding of the information contained therein.	3	John Wood – UTC Manager	Yes	This action now passes to UTC – see R1 above.	December 2006
8	R4 The 'Assessment of Controlled Pedestrian Crossings' form used by the Traffic Engineering Department should be amended to include the date each pedestrian crossing was commissioned. This would facilitate the distinction between pedestrian crossings commissioned before 1 April 2002 and those commissioned after that date, as well as their various compliance requirements.	3	Paul Leighton – Group Leader Traffic Management/ UTC/Car Parks	Yes	The 'Assessment of Controlled Pedestrian Crossings' form previously used by the Traffic Engineering Department, is not in use in the UTC section which is now responsible for BV165 (See R1). This transfer of responsibility to UTC means that all data relevant to crossings will be held on the UTC source database, including commissioning dates.	Completed.

Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
9	R5 In all cases evidence should be retained and available for inspection to support the categorisation of properties as empty.	2	Housing Strategy & Partnerships Manager	Yes	All supporting information provided by a third party will be kept as soft and hard copy for document clarification and inspection.	March 2007
9	R6 The calculation of outturn results should be independently reviewed prior to submission.	3	Housing Strategy & Partnerships Manager	Yes	HSSA submission to be checked by Internal Audit and signed off prior to final submission as per the Audit Commission recommendation.	August 2007
9	R7 Properties should only be included as having been made fit after the final repairs/maintenance work has been satisfactorily concluded and not when a batch of work is completed.	2	Mark Wade	Yes	Properties may receive more than 1 grant in any financial year. Staff to be briefed to check for additional grants to check fitness details. If any queries officer to be instructed to check with supervisor to ensure properties are not counted twice.	Quarterly and at year end.
9	R8 Final Completion Inspection forms should be completed, signed and included in the file for each property that has been made fit.	2	Mark Wade	Yes	Officers to be briefed at 1 2 1 to ensure completion forms are signed and included on the grant file. Housing Improvement Managers to conduct on a quarterly basis a sample file checking system to ensure this task is completed.	March 2007

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Page no.	Recommendation	Priority 1 = Low 2 = Med 3 = High	Responsibility	Agreed	Comments	Date
10	R9 The Council should establish a formal contract with HESTIA or any other service provider. The contractual documents should include a Service Level Agreement to which the service provider would render services to customers and be monitored against.	3	Mark Wade/ Stephen Rowley	Yes	Walsall Heating Installation Programme (WHIP) formerly run by HESTIA is to be tendered out for 2007/08 financial year. This process will incorporate the Audit Commission recommendations.	March 2007
10	R10 The Council should establish a formal monitoring process for services and data provided by third party service providers. Monitoring reports should be produced and should be reviewed by management so that any inadequacies could be identified, investigated in a timely manner.	3	Mark Wade/ Stephen Rowley	Yes	Tender process will incorporate monitoring process as highlighted in the Audit Commission recommendations.	March 2007