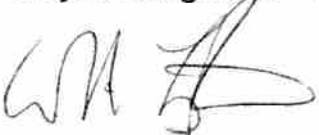




**Haringey** Council

Agenda item:

Audit Committee		25 March 2010
Report Title: Data Quality Update		
Report of: Wayne Longshaw – Asst Chief Exec. PPP&C		
Signed : 		
Contact Officer : Eve Pelekanos – Head of Policy and Performance Telephone 020 8489 2508		
Wards(s) affected: All	Report for: Information	
<b>1. Purpose of the report</b> 1.1.To provide an update on work being done to improve data quality across the council in particular in the Children's and Benefits and Local Taxation service.		
<b>2. State links with Council Plan Priorities and actions and /or other Strategies:</b> 2.1.The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) considers how the council is delivering its priorities for local people and how well we are delivering outcomes with partners for the area. Data Quality is assessed as part of the Use of Resources and part of the managing performance judgement under the Organisational Assessment. It feeds into the Council priority <i>Driving Change Improving Quality</i> .		
<b>3. Recommendations</b> 3.1.To note the report, findings in relation to recent audits and the progress being made in respect of data quality.		

#### **4. Summary**

4.1. The OFSTED review of Children's Services in December 2008 highlighted data quality weakness linked to operational practice within the service. These weaknesses were subsequently reflected in the Comprehensive Area Assessment 2009. In addition the data quality audit undertaken by Grant Thornton last summer identified further data quality issues in Benefits and Local Taxation.

4.2. Since then a number of steps have been taken to improve data quality in these two areas:

##### **Children and Families service**

- Auditing of referrals, initial and core assessment indicators with a sample 300 cases reviewed. This audit identified improvement in the quality of recording and completion of assessment records over time.
- Off-line social work audits found improvements in the quality of assessments with appropriate outcomes.

##### **Benefits and Local Taxation**

Series of actions taken to improve accuracy and data quality including:

- New quality and performance software implemented – ensures that identified errors are feedback and corrected
- Compliance team established to carry out data quality checks of assessments
- Workshops held with staff and team leaders to understand accuracy issues and identify solutions
- Ongoing testing of identified risk areas i.e. new claim start dates, single persons discount and earned income calculations
- Focused ongoing training and development activity for benefits staff

4.3. Work continues in other areas across the council to ensure data is robust with an ongoing programme of audits (Appendix 2)

#### **5. Chief Financial Officer Comments**

5.1. The Chief Financial Officer notes the positive improvements that have been made to the data quality particularly in the two key areas of Children's and Benefits and Local Taxation service.

5.2. Accurate and reliable data is crucial to support a real understanding of how the business operates and what is driving costs; this in turn will enable informed decisions on where to focus and direct resources to ensure the best outcomes for clients.

5.3. Costs associated with data quality will be contained within existing budget resources.

## **6. Head of Legal Services Comments**

6.1 It is in the interests of the Council to present an accurate and robust picture of its work and to monitor improvements specifically in areas identified for improvement. Improvements in data quality will assist in protecting the Council from adverse criticism and from possible legal challenges.

## **7. Equalities & Community Cohesion Comments**

7.1. Equalities are a central thread throughout the Council's performance framework and many of the performance indicators have equalities implications. Ensuring data is robust and accurate is in the interest of all groups as is producing reliable information, fit for purpose and used to support decision making.

## **8. Consultation**

8.1. Data quality is everyone's responsibility but specific roles and responsibilities have been set out and communicated to staff in our Data Quality Strategy and Performance Management Framework. Staff and Team Leader workshops have been held in the Benefits service to engage staff and address data quality issues and improvements in Children's services have been supported by a programme of training and development both on the IT system but also social work practice based training.

## **9. Use of appendices /Tables and photographs**

- 9.1. **Appendix 1:** Summary findings from the 300 case sample audited in Children's Services
- 9.2. **Appendix 2:** Performance Information Audit Schedule for 2010/11
- 9.3. The Data Quality Strategy and related papers are published on Harinet and can be accessed at:

[http://www.haringey.gov.uk/data\\_quality](http://www.haringey.gov.uk/data_quality)

## **10. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

- 10.1. Inspection of progress made in the provision of safeguarding services in Haringey- Ofsted report January 2010
- 10.2. Grant Thornton Use of Resources Report 2009
- 10.3. Data Quality Strategy

### 13. Background

- 13.1 The Use of Resources Report 2009 assessed the council as performing adequately in all areas of the “governing the business” theme, with the exception of a score of 1 (inadequate) for “use of data”. This reflects the findings of the joint area review, the Ofsted review of safeguarding children and mixed results from the auditors spot-checking work.
- 13.2 The report identified weaknesses in data quality management and reporting in relation to child protection, in particular reducing the need for manual checking and manipulation in performance reporting. It also made recommendations around developing data quality checking mechanisms to minimise the high level of errors associated with housing and council tax benefit claims, both of these areas were classed as high priority actions.
- 13.3 This report details an update on the work in respect of data quality in the Children and Families and the Benefit and Local Taxation Services and highlights findings from recent audits undertaken.
- 13.4 The Council’s Policy and Performance team routinely carry out performance information audits. The programme and schedule for 2010/11 can be found on the Data Quality page on Harinet along with the Data Quality Strategy, Action Plan and other related papers.

### 14. Audit update in Children’s Service

- 14.1 In October to December ’09 the corporate performance team undertook an audit of 3 children’s social care indicators covering data for the period April 2009 to September/October 2009:
- NI 68 Percentage of referrals to children’s social care going on to initial assessment. – measured as number of initial assessments as a percentage of number of referrals.
  - NI 59 Percentage of initial assessments for children’s social care carried out within 7 working days of referral.
  - NI 60 Percentage of core assessments for children’s social care carried out within 35 working days
- 14.2 The audit focussed on compliance with the indicator definitions and the records available to support the figures reported for the given months.
- 14.3 300 cases were sampled over the period and detailed findings have been fed back to the service. The scale of the errors found was not material and therefore the numbers reported for the indicators were found to be substantially accurate. Appendix 1 summarises the findings and highlights some areas of concern along with the service response.
- 14.4 Although the audit found some discrepancies and raised some areas of concern, notable improvements were evidenced in the quality of the recording and completion of the assessment records as the audit progressed to later months. For example in the period April to July, there were backlogs and

emphasis was clearly on improving the quality. The timeliness of assessments and performance on these indicators is now improving.

14.5 In addition to the corporate data quality audits of the indicators, the service commissioned some off line management audits to assess the quality of practice. Of the 165 audits undertaken since November '09 and conducted by senior managers, there has been an improvement in the quality of assessments with appropriate outcomes and recommendations.

14.6 The service have a performance management strategy which sets out the contribution of practice standards; team performance plans; team evidence files; case file audits; the Members Safeguarding Panel; and the work of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board Quality Assurance Sub-group to improve performance management. There is a refreshed and re-focused monthly performance management group bringing together Heads of Service and their deputies, all Child Protection advisors, the performance team and other key players with weekly performance information presented to the Chief Executive and used by operational managers in the service.

14.7 The recent inspection of progress made in the provision of safeguarding services confirmed the good progress in improving the effectiveness of arrangements for referral, assessment, protection and planning for children in need. It stated that the council has made satisfactory progress in strengthening the support, supervision and performance management arrangements in front line social care services.

14.8 The report also found that performance management is now increasingly well established across the Partnership and that good progress has been made on recording decisions on case files and supervision files. It found that although the majority of case files have evidence of management decisions, there is variability in quality of recording and actions taken and anticipated outcomes are not always clear. This is consistent with the findings of the corporate performance information audit.

## 15. Data quality work undertaken in Benefits and Local Taxation Service.

15.1 There has been much focused work around improving data quality in the BLT service over the last few months. Some of the tasks undertaken include:

- **Implemented new Quality and Performance monitoring software** – Since June 2009 the service have been using a software tool that records and monitors work processes that have been completed. The system records cases where quality checks have been undertaken and provides the feedback loop to ensure that identified errors are fed back and corrected by officers.
- **A Compliance Team established** of four experienced assessment officers to carry out data quality checks of assessments. They are checking 4% of all assessments made each month, in line with best practice; and reviewing assessments on a risk based approach carried out last year for the three main errors types; new claim start dates, single person discounts and earned income calculations.

- **Staff workshops** held with benefits staff to focus on data quality discussions of issues and suggested solutions. The workshops were well attended and were well received by staff. Service managers are reviewing the suggestions and will feed back to staff about their implementation.
- **Team Leader workshops** held to discuss the error rate, and agree how best to improve it. The team leaders highlighted what they see as the three key areas for improvement (performance monitoring, managing capability, and being a point of reference for staff). A follow-up workshop will identify specific actions to address these issues. Changes have also been made to Team Leader in-trays removing 90% of the work that was previously routed that way. This will enable them to focus and deal exclusively on managing their staff both in terms of quality and productivity.
- **Testing on key risk areas** has recently been introduced and the service is now targeting training to address quality issues. One of the big areas highlighted in the 2008/09 audit was around Housing Benefit start dates. A recent start date test exercise proved highly effective and enabled the service to identify poor performers as well as recognise staff that had high degrees of accuracy. From May '09 to date there were 107 start dates errors identified in the quality assurance samples but following testing and training the number of errors has reduced dramatically from a monthly average of 11.5 start date errors to 3.
- **Data Quality Champions** have been identified as those scoring high in the start date test and these have been appointed to give guidance to colleagues and sign off the work of poor performers.
- **Training and Development** has been enhanced across the board with the following now in place:
  - New starters revised training strategy with extended 6 week training period for new staff (previously 3 weeks)
  - New training needs strategy with needs assessment underway to deliver on-going training on evidence based need rather than officer self assessment.
  - A new Recruitment strategy to ensure that the service have the right people with the right skills in the right jobs. The service is introducing testing in numeracy and literacy as part of the initial recruitment process for all new starters.
  - Quick guide laminated desk aids given to staff in key areas of assessment and hyperlinks to Benefits policy and procedures have been added to the new IWorld software application (V6) which can assist staff when assessing claims.
  - Regular feedback and updates on data quality once a month from the Head of Service and feedback from the Team Leaders to the Training

Team recording how many work items have been checked, the most frequent type of errors and which staff have the most errors.

- **Data Quality Board** has been established as the team to oversee the implementation of the improvement plan. Led by Head of BLT the team includes members of the BLT performance team, the Head of Policy and Performance and two members of the Service Improvement Team.

## 16. Other Developments on Data Quality

16.1 Work continues in other areas across the council to ensure that data is robust and fit for purpose with many services implementing quality assurance frameworks.

16.2 The corporate performance team has agreed a new schedule of performance information audits for 2010/11. This is a risk based programme and will include re-auditing areas of high risk to ensure progress is being made with any recommendations being implemented. Appendix 2 details the programme of audits for 2010/11.

16.3 The team have recently finished sample checking records for three worklessness indicators that are included in our Local Area Agreement and have a substantial financial reward grant attached to them.

16.4 The corporate team are also working with Internal audit to facilitate an assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the system of internal controls on the National performance indicators. These audits assess the financial and non-financial risks and in addition provide assurance that these controls will assist in the effective achievement of the Council's objectives.

16.5 Internal audit have recently completed three audits on National Indicators;

- NI 117 Young people not in education, employment or training and
- NI 140 Effective Treatment for Drug Users
- NI 131 Delayed Transfers of Care

16.6 These are cross-cutting indicators where the council is not the lead agency or the body who return the figures but they can help in providing assurance that our organisation is working with reliable data and working with partners to ensure the quality of partnership data.

16.7 Finally changes have been made on Framework I to make it simpler to use and address the key concerns of primary system users in a structured and programmed manner. There has been an extensive programme of improvements which has included the re-engineering of the finance module and simplifying the finance workflow for social workers; changes to the recording of child protection assessments as well as changes to how legal documents are recorded and saved making sure they are easier to locate.