

# Executive

## Management Information Strategy

16 March 2009

### Report of Head of Improvement

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report presents a Management Information Strategy and action plan for Cherwell District Council which will deliver continuous improvement in its information management arrangements, helping to improve service delivery and respond effectively to the new CAA assessment regime.

This report is public
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#### Recommendations

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The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To identify any additional actions or initiatives to be included in the strategy and action plan
- (2) To agree the management information strategy and action plan
- (3) To require officers to report back on progress with the implementation of the strategy and action plan in March 2010

#### Executive Summary

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##### Introduction

- 1.1 The quality and cost of public services depends on the decisions that many people make. Poor quality information can lead to poor decisions or inappropriate conclusions that can affect our services and so impact on the lives of Cherwell residents.
- 1.2 There have been significant improvements in the council's arrangements for information management over the last year. These include better governance arrangements, improved staff awareness, a better performance monitoring framework, external expertise used to test our arrangements, an improved service and financial planning process and progress made in data sharing arrangements with partners. Although this has left the council in a better

position it needs to improve further still in order to respond to recent inspection feedback, new assessment frameworks around CAA and the need to plan and deliver services more in partnership.

- 1.3 This strategy sets out a broad framework of how the council intends to develop its management arrangements for the production, sharing, analysis and interpretation of management information. It will be use as the basis for a medium term action plan to guide improvement activity during the period 2009/10 to 2011/12.

### **Proposals**

- 1.4 The Management Information Strategy will set a clear direction for future improvements in how the council produces, shares, receives and acts on its management information. Its action plan set out how this will be achieved under the five key objectives set out in section 6 of the Strategy. A set of management information principles is also proposed (see section 12).
- 1.5 The action plan will deliver improvements under the following areas;
  - ensuring the council has all the relevant information it needs to help it and its partners make effective decisions;
  - ensuring that the information it uses, produces, shares or accepts from others is of a suitable quality for the purpose it is used for;
  - producing and presenting information in the most appropriate way to satisfy the needs of those who use it, and ensure they understand it;
  - ensuring that people have the skills, knowledge and tools needed to collect, analyse, present and interpret management information;
  - safeguarding the security of our management information.
- 1.6 Progress against the action plan is to be reported back to members on an annual basis.

### **Conclusion**

- 1.7 By agreeing this management information strategy and delivering its action plan the council will;
  - better understand its community and its needs, and so plan to meet them;
  - monitor and manage its performance more effectively;
  - ensure it can deliver better services and outcomes for its residents;
  - ensure it performs well against external assessment frameworks

## Background Information

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### 2.1 The need for high quality management information

The quality and cost of council services depends on the decisions that many people make, staff and members. Poor quality information can lead to poor decisions or inappropriate conclusions that can affect our services and so impact on the lives of Cherwell residents. The key risks arising from relying on information which is not fit-for-purpose are significant, and can include;

- Published information which is misleading
- Poor use of council resources
- Failure to improve services
- Poor policy decisions
- Not recognising and rewarding good performance
- Not identifying and monitoring improvement opportunities

### 2.2 Inspection feedback during 2008

The Audit Commission plays an important role in setting standards for and auditing our information management arrangements. Until recently it has relied on a high degree of costly inspections for BVPIs only, restricting the scope of its audit to a narrow range of management information.

The principle now in use by the Commission is to ensure that overall management arrangements for ensuring good quality data are in place for all aspects of work by means of an annual assessment. The council's first data Quality assessment was carried out for 2006/7 (report received January 2008) which identified the need for;

- Strengthening responsibility and commitment to data quality
- Improving quality of plans, policies, procedures and guidance.
- Introducing a more robust approach to monitoring and reviewing data quality.
- Ensuring systems and controls are fit for purpose.
- Continuing to develop business continuity arrangements.
- Developing arrangements for sharing and validation of data.
- Improving understanding of data quality skills needs across the Council and more effectively targeting training programmes.
- Better demonstrating how performance monitoring is improving delivery of services.
- Ensuring that validation of data is consistent across the organisation.

### 2.3 Improvements made to date

As a result of the feedback it received the council has been working to improve its management arrangements through a Data Quality Improvement Project managed by the Improvement Team. Since early 2008 a range of initiatives has been introduced to improve our management information arrangements. We have;

- appointed Cllr Pickford, Portfolio Holder for Organisational Development and Improvement, as the 'Member Champion' for data quality;

- developed a draft Data Quality policy during 2008 (this became outdated before it was presented to Executive for approval);
- commissioned KPMG to undertake a detailed data quality audit of Best Value Performance Indicators and hold a series of management team workshops to feed back the results;
- written data quality responsibilities into the job descriptions for key posts;
- created an intranet portal and used internal staff briefings to raise awareness about data quality;
- highlighted data quality issues to Executive through the use of a data quality implications paragraph for relevant reports;
- introduced Performance Indicator Definition Records (PIDRs) to record data quality arrangements for all National Indicators and corporate plan targets for 2008/09;
- commissioned KPMG to assist in ensuring consistency and quality in our PIDRs for new National Indicators;
- commissioned from our internal audit team a data quality audit ahead of our 2007/08 BVPI returns to test our arrangements, resulting in no reservations found on detailed testing by the Audit Commission;
- refreshed our corporate information on the district and its population to ensure managers use up-to-date and shared data for policy development and service planning;
- improved the quality of information used to guide the annual service and financial planning process with greater input on our priorities from hard to reach groups whilst maintaining input from the general public, the business community, the voluntary sector and from members themselves;
- revised our corporate scorecard and improved the clarity of our performance monitoring reports;
- implemented all performance monitoring through our Performance Plus software system;
- worked with our partners towards establishing the joint data sharing and data quality agreements.

#### 2.4 The need for further improvement

Despite this excellent progress further improvements are still needed. The Audit Commission's most recent evaluation of the council's arrangements is made in its Data Quality Assessment for 2007/08 (received February 2009), which concludes that the council is still only meeting minimum requirements.

Although acknowledging the progress that was made during 2007/08 the report highlights that;

- objectives for improving data quality have been process focused, reactive and short term in nature;
- there is more work to do to ensure that procedures and guidance effectively support our objectives;
- arrangements for validation of some high risk performance information are not robust

These observations are likely to be updated through the publication of the council's Corporate Assessment report in March 2009 (currently embargoed

for publication until 17 March 2009). Feedback from the Commission has confirmed that the council is seen as making good use of community information to guide its priorities, and has a highly effective approach to customer consultation and needs assessment.

New expectations on how the council performs in this area have been introduced as a result of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and its supporting assessment framework (see 3.2 and 3.3 below). These emphasise the need for effective partnership arrangements for sharing and using strategic information to identify and address the needs of the community.

## 2.5 Outcomes of the Strategy

The outcomes that can be expected from the successful implementation of this Strategy are;

- improved overall management information arrangements which match the council overall improvement objectives;
- high quality strategic information to guide policy and practice (e.g. demographic and ethnicity data) which remains accurate and up to date;
- better documented procedures and guidance that set out the council's requirements and arrangements for good management information to help staff understand how they are expected to perform and leading to raised awareness of what constitutes good quality information;
- robust arrangements for ensuring security of our information in line with national expectations;
- clear arrangements for how we obtain and share information from our partners to ensure we comply with legislation and work together better;
- better assurance for external inspectors on how the council manages its information which will assist in ensuring positive assessments for the council under the Use of Resources and Comprehensive Area Assessment frameworks

These in turn should lead to the council;

- better understanding its community and its needs, and so plan effectively to meet them;
- monitoring and managing its performance more effectively;
- ensuring it can deliver better services and outcomes for its residents;
- ensuring it performs well against external assessment frameworks

## **Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision**

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3.1 The two important drivers which have contributed to the drafting of this strategy are the new guidelines on how its annual Use of Resources Assessment will be undertaken from 2008/09 and the new Comprehensive Area Assessment framework announced in February 2009.

### 3.2 Use of Resources Assessment 2008/09

Until 2008/09, assessing data quality arrangements had been a subset of the council's value for money assessment, and as such constituted only a small

element of the overall Use of Resources assessment. New guidance for 2008/09 introduces dedicated Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) for assessing management information arrangements.

The new KLOE set out to assess if councils produce relevant and reliable data and information to support decision making and managing performance, specifically if they;

- produce relevant and reliable data and work with partners to secure data quality;
- provide information which supports the decision making process;
- ensure data security and compliance with statutory requirements;
- monitor performance against priorities.

Emphasis in this new assessment has shifted from simply looking at the processes in place to wider areas of information management, particularly regarding partners and information sharing, and showing how use of information leads to improved outcomes for residents.

### 3.3 Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)

The Audit Commission have already indicated that management information will play an important role in this assessment with the CAA Lead looking to place reliance on the quality of a council's data and use of information to support both the area assessment and the managing performance theme. In forming their judgement about the Area the Commission will use a range of evidence including;

- the National Indicator Set and other nationally available data;
- local performance management information used to monitor local priorities including any self evaluations and evidence from scrutiny; and
- the views of people who use services including residents, third sector organisations and local businesses in the area.

The Commission will consider how effectively this information has been used alongside other evidence to identify priorities and to assess performance and where improvement is most needed.

#### **Consultations**

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**Internal** All Heads of Service have been invited to contribute to the draft Strategy

#### **Implications**

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**Financial:** There are no direct financial implications arising from the adoption of this strategy. The action plan either brings together existing planned activity or introduces new activities that can be undertaken from within existing budgets.

Comments checked by Karen Curtin, Chief Accountant

01295 221551

**Legal:**

Arrangements to comply with existing legislation will be unaffected by the strategy, but will place these within an overall framework for management information. Better data sharing arrangements will ensure that such compliance extends to data shared with partners.

Comments checked by Liz Howlett, Head of Legal and Democratic Services 01295 221686

**Risk Management:**

By failing to plan for improvements in its management information arrangements the council may receive an adverse evaluation under the Use of Resources and CAA assessment frameworks.

Comments checked by Rosemary Watts, Risk Management and Insurance Officer 01295 221566

**Data Quality**

The proposed strategy sets clear information management objectives and a forward looking action plan that will contribute to improved arrangements for data quality within the council.

Comments checked by Neil Lawrence, Project Manager, Improvement 01295 221801

**Wards Affected**

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All

**Corporate Plan Themes**

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Strategic priority 4 – Cherwell: an accessible, value for money council.

**Executive Portfolio**

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**Councillor Mrs D Pickford**  
**Portfolio Holder for Organisational Development and Improvement**

**Document Information**

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<b>Appendix No</b>	<b>Title</b>
Appendix 1	Draft Management Information Strategy
<b>Background Papers</b>	
None	
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