

London Fire Brigade

A framework for better data quality

These standards define a framework of management arrangements that the London Fire Brigade will put in place to ensure the quality of the data it uses to manage and report on our activities. The standards distil the principles and practices identified as best practice by the Audit Commission.

The standards are intended to be used flexibly to promote better data quality, rather than as a rigid set of requirements.

Governance and leadership

The LFB has a corporate framework for management and accountability of data quality, with a commitment to secure a culture of data quality throughout the organisation.

Key components:

- The Deputy Commissioner has overall strategic responsibility for data quality, and this responsibility is not delegated.
- The Head of Strategy & Performance will have responsibility for data quality issues including the development and maintenance of a data quality strategy and policies and procedures.
- On a day-to-day basis, the Head of Information Management & Performance and staff in the Strategy & Performance Department will be responsible for implementing data quality policies and procedures across the Brigade, including maintaining definitions for all LFB local performance indicators and measures.
- Heads of Service are responsible for ensuring that accurate and complete records are maintained.
- All LFB local performance indicators and service measures will be allocated a lead Head of Service; they will need to be satisfied with arrangements for the use of data.
- It is the responsibility of all staff that handle data (i.e. input, retrieve or collect data) to make sure that data is recorded or input as accurately as possible.
- The officer-level Information Governance Group will be the cross-departmental forum to consider and discuss, amongst other things, information/data quality issues. ICG is chaired by the Head of Strategy & Performance as the LFB's Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO).
- The corporate objectives for data quality are clearly and formally defined (although this may not necessitate a discrete document for data quality). The objectives are linked to the Brigade's strategic objectives, cover all the organisation's activities, and have been agreed and adopted by the Corporate Management Board.
- The strategic approach for data quality will have an associated delivery plan, with clearly identified actions and timescales to support improvement and, where appropriate this will be reflected in the corporate plan (London Safety Plan).
- The commitment to data quality will be communicated clearly, reinforcing the message that all staff have a responsibility for data quality.
- Accountability for data quality will be clearly and formally defined in job descriptions and will be part of the performance review and development system (PRDS) where appropriate.
- Where there is joint working, there will be an agreed accountability framework for data quality with partners.
- Data quality is covered by corporate risk management arrangements, with regular assessments of the risks relating to the reliability and accuracy of the information produced and used by the Brigade.

- Data is subject to robust scrutiny by those charged with governance, and there is formal reporting of data quality issues.
- There will be a formal programme of data quality review, proportionate to risk and reported formally to those charged with governance. This includes periodic review of data quality arrangements, as well as reporting on the quality of data supporting key performance measures and published performance indicators.
- Where applicable, the Brigade will take action to address the results of previous internal and external reviews of data quality.

Policies

The LFB has appropriate policies and procedures to secure the quality of the data it records and uses for reporting.

Key components:

- There will be a comprehensive and current data quality statement, policy, or set of policies, in place. This covers data collection, recording, analysis and reporting, and has been implemented in all business areas.
- The policy will be supported by a current set of operational procedures and guidance for staff.
- Policies and procedures meet the requirements of any relevant national standards, rules, definitions or guidance, as well as defining local practices and monitoring arrangements.
- Policies and procedures are reviewed periodically and updated when needed.
- All staff are able to access the policies, procedures and guidance. Where possible, this is supported by information systems.
- The organisation can demonstrate that it is proactive in informing staff of any policy or procedure updates on a timely basis.
- Policies, procedures and guidelines are applied consistently and comprehensively. Mechanisms are in place to monitor compliance in practice, and the results are subject to formal reporting to top management. Corrective action is taken where necessary.

Systems and processes

The LFB has systems and processes in place which secure the quality of data as part of the normal business activity of the organisation.

Key components:

- There are systems and processes in place for the collection, recording, analysis and reporting of data which are focused on securing data that is accurate, valid, reliable, timely, relevant and complete.
- Systems and processes operate according to the principle of 'right first time', rather than employing data cleansing or manipulation processes to produce the information required.
- Arrangements for collecting, recording, compiling and reporting data are integrated into the Brigade's wider business planning and management processes of the organisation, and support staff in their day-to-day work.
- Adequate support is provided for all staff using the organisation's systems and processes for all aspects of the collection, recording, analysis, and reporting of data (for example, user and quick reference guides, online help and helpdesk services are available where appropriate).

- Business systems have in-built controls (e.g. validation rules, 'pick' lists) to minimise the scope for human error or manipulation and prevent erroneous data entry, missing data, or unauthorised data changes.
- Internal controls are reviewed at least annually to ensure they are working effectively. Results are reported to the Corporate Management Board and/or an appropriate Committee of the Authority.
- Security arrangements for all information systems are in place.
- The organisation regularly tests its information systems to ensure that processes are secure. Results are reported to the Corporate Management Board and/or an appropriate Committee of the Authority.
- A formal set of quality requirements is applied to all data used by the organisation that is shared externally, or that is provided to the Brigade by a third party.
- There are processes in place to validate data from third parties.

People and skills

The LFB has arrangements to ensure that staff have the appropriate knowledge, competencies and capacity for their roles in relation to data quality.

Key components:

- Roles and responsibilities in relation to data quality are clearly defined and documented, and incorporated into job descriptions. Roles and responsibilities are applied consistently.
- Data quality standards are set, and staff are assessed against these.
- The organisation has recruited and trained the necessary staff, ensuring they have the capacity and skills for the effective collection, recording, analysis and reporting of data.
- There is a formal and on-going programme of training on data quality, including regular update training to ensure that changes in data quality procedures are disseminated and acted on.
- There are corporate arrangements in place to ensure that training provision is periodically evaluated and adapted to respond to changing needs.
- Weaknesses identified in internal or external reviews of data quality are addressed, where appropriate, through the training programme or briefing sessions.

Data use and reporting

The LFB has arrangements that are focused on ensuring that data supporting reported information is actively used in the decision-making process, and is subject to a system of internal control and validation.

Key components:

- The suite of financial and performance data required for reporting on performance, internally and externally, has been critically assessed. The data is reviewed regularly to ensure it remains relevant to needs.
- Data used for reporting to those charged with governance is also used for day-to-day management of the organisation's business. As a minimum, reported data is fed back to those who generate it to reinforce understanding of the way it is used.
- Reports include an element of prediction when appropriate, as well as being a record of historical events.
- Data is used not only to measure the volume of activity delivered, but also to assess the quality of service provided.

- There is evidence that management action is taken to address service delivery issues identified by data returns and performance information reports.
- Information which is used for external reporting is subject to rigorous verification, especially where errors may lead to loss of income.
- Data returns are supported by a clear and complete audit trail.
- Data returns are prepared and submitted on a timely basis.
- All data is subject to senior management approval prior to external reporting.

[With acknowledgement to the Audit Commission Improving Information to Support Decision Making: Standards for Better Quality Data,2007]

Originally produced: April 2009 (PMC 57)

Revised: November 2013 (FEP 2177)

Information Management and Performance
Strategy and Performance Department
London Fire Brigade
Brigade Headquarters
169 Union Street
London
SE1 0LL

020 8555 1200