SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

DATA AND INFORMATION STRATEGY - 2025-2030

'OUR VISION'

Quality data and information facilitating data-driven decision making, which leads to positive outcomes for our communities, accountability, and trust in Scottish Borders Council as an organisation.

Scottish Borders COUNCIL

*Quality Data and Information > Quality Decision Making >
Quality Outcomes*

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What is Data and Information, and why is it important?

Although the terms 'data' and 'information' are often used interchangeably, there is a difference between them.

Data is usually a set of values that describes the facts, details or qualities of something. For example, data on students' scores of correct answers from a class test with 44 questions might look like:

20, 11, 32, 43, 10, 6, 36, 15, 22, 11, 8, 17, 41, 15, 3, 16, 32, 32, 12, 44, 19, 29, 36, 40, 23, 25

Through processing, organising or structuring data, information can be generated. Using the example above, from the data given the information derived could be:

26 students took the class test

1 student got every question correct

13 students scored 50% or higher, and **13** students scored less than 50%

34.6% of students scored over 70%

Information can then be used to document service activity, understand how a service is performing, and inform decision-making.

The Benefits of a Data and Information Strategy

The availability of high quality data and information and the way we use it within the organisation is critical if accurate judgements are to be made on service activity and performance, and good decisions are to be made to deliver high quality services. Accurate data and information records are also key for us to meet legal obligations regarding data and information storage, and demonstrate accountability. Diagram 1 summarises the key outputs and benefits we seek to achieve through good use of data and information within the organisation.

The Data and Information Strategy will:

- Provide a clear statement of direction
- Document the commitment and intent of the organisation to achieving its vision
- Identify the recommended approach to move the organisation towards its vision
- Provide a structure around which the multiple services and functions can co-ordinate their contributions effectively
- Maximise the likelihood of achieving high quality data and information, and realising the organisation's vision

Diagram 1. The key outputs and benefits deriving from good use of data and information

Delivering this high quality data and information and using it wisely depends on a network of services and functions interacting holistically throughout the organisation. This interdependence is show in more detail in Diagrams 2 and 3.

Diagram 2. A simplified representation of the dependence between the different functions, and how each level rests on the success of the other, is show in the diagram below.
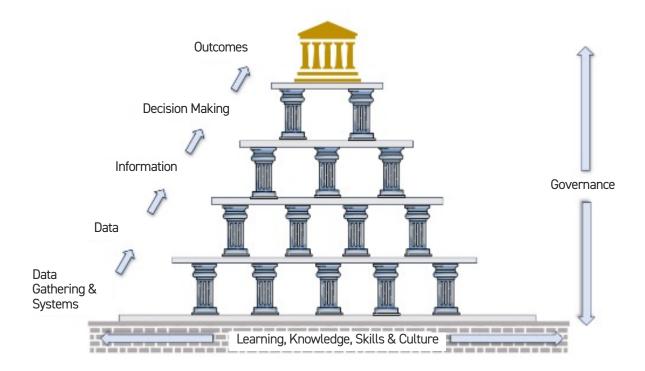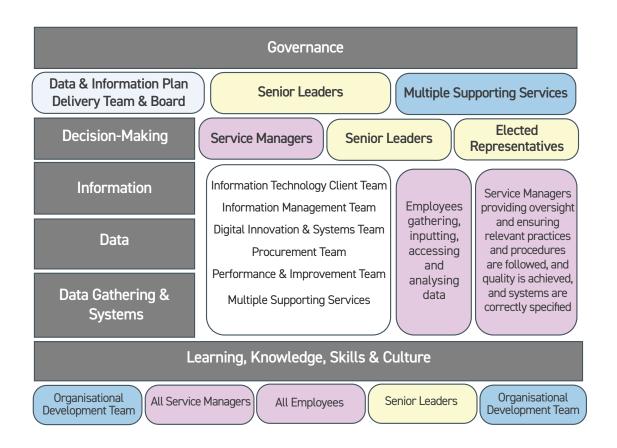

Diagram 3. Delivering all the elements of the interdependent levels shown in the diagram 2 depends on multiple services working closely together, supported by all services and employees within the organisation.

Our Starting Position

In order to establish what our current position is we engaged with stakeholders to explore where we want to be, where we feel we currently are, and what our challenges are.

Where We Want To Be

A number of stakeholder sessions explored where we want to be with our data and information. Nearly 500 points were raised and these are grouped by theme in the diagram below with the most common suggestions being bigger.

The top ten themes that emerged were:

- Easy access to data
- Good Security
- Data collected is relevant
- Effective training
- High quality data
- Clear policies, procedures and standards
- Data driven decision making
- Interconnected data
- Systems are well designed
- Data and information is valued

Where We Currently Are

We carried out a data maturity assessment, provided by Data Orchard through the Scottish Government's Data Maturity programme, which used an employee questionnaire to evaluate the organisation against 7 themes in relation to data.

For each theme the organisation was evaluated against a 5 point scale from the low to high levels of maturity.

92 employees completed the questionnaire. The organisation showed a wide range of perceptions across the organisation as to how data was being managed.

Strengths

Strengths were identified where around 50% or more of the responses were in the most positive category. Areas of strength were identified as:

- Collecting data with good reason
- Managing access to sensitive and personal data
- Receiving training on data protection and security
- Sharing data internally with others in the organisation
- Recording activity/work with clients

Weaknesses

Weaknesses were identified through a combination of results that had around 20% or less responses in the most positive category, and/or a notable number of negative responses.

Weaknesses were evident in:

- The quality of our data
- How well we analyse and present data
- How easily we can locate and access our data
- How good our tools are for collecting, storing and analysing our data

Our Challenges

At stakeholder sessions the key challenges facing us progressing our data and information goals were explored. The key challenges identified were:

- A need for greater knowledge and skills
- A need to enhance our ability to get data out of systems
- Allocating sufficient resource within teams to adequately manage data
- A need to move away from paper-based records
- A need to reduce the time taken to produce reports
- A need to modernise some of our applications
- Competing needs for funding from a limited financial resource
- How to minimise cost and maximise returns when delivering data and information solutions

Our Opportunities

As a large organisation Scottish Borders Council has a large number of examples of good data and information practices and systems, opportunities to learn from other authorities, and access to numerous tools and systems that can support good data and information management.

Throughout the stakeholder sessions, workshops and subsequent discussions with Service Leads it was clear that there is an abundance of interest and skill in how the organisation handles its data and information. There is enthusiasm for improvement, knowledge on what can be done to deliver positive change, and interest in engaging with the Data and Information Strategy outcomes.

Harnessing this access to resources, interest, enthusiasm and skill through the Strategy will enable the organisation to grow and improve on the outcomes it currently delivers.

Vision Statement

Our vision was developed following engagement with over 100 colleagues, analysis of the information gathered from them, and a subsequent workshop that explored the themes identified and their links to the key outcomes we wish to achieve.

Our vision for Data and Information is:

Quality data and information facilitating data-driven decision making, which leads to positive outcomes for our communities, accountability, and trust in Scottish Borders Council as an organisation.

It can be summarised as:

Quality Data and Information > Quality Decision Making > Quality Outcomes

Recommended Actions

Following the assessment of our Vision, where we are, where we want to be, our strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities, consideration was given to the actions that will move us closer to our vision and how we can optimally achieve these.

A total of 51 actions have been initially identified, with these grouped across 9 workstreams:

- Gathering Good Quality Data
- Business Intelligence
- Interconnected Data
- Central Knowledge Hub
- Governance, Standards and Procedures
- Service Data & Information Plans
- Objective Data Driven Decision Making
- Well Designed Software Applications
- Learning, Knowledge, Skills and Culture

A summary of each workstream can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. A Summary of the 9 Workstreams of the Data and Information Plan 2025-2030

Workstream	Summary
Gathering Good Quality Data	Develop guidelines on how to gather good quality data, including recommendations for questionnaire development, and gathering data from public forums
Business Intelligence	Develop a business intelligence strategy for the organisation.
Interconnected Data	Explore options for interconnecting data in the context of Scottish Borders Council, along with use cases for different options, to maximise the ability for different systems' data to be connected and of high quality, and to move data towards 'the golden record'
Central Knowledge Hub	Build a location which can be accessed by everyone in SBC which can be used for accessing and displaying useful data and information. This will link in with developing a data directory to start building knowledge of key datasets available.
Governance, Standards and Procedures	Look at what we already have in terms of governance, and what we need in addition. Look at filing structures and naming conventions, and create data standards, as well as documenting a standard data language for use across the organisation. Establish an approach for measuring progress.
Service Data & Information Plans	Each service to have a data and information plan which will cover where the service is aiming to be with its data and information, and what steps they need to take to get there, considering a short (1 to 3 years), medium (4 to 6 years) and long term (7 to 10 years) time period. This will then tie in with planning for digital resource and investment.
Objective Data Driven Decision Making	Create a framework for what data-driven decision-making looks like within the organisation.
Well Designed Software Applications	Develop a framework to succeed in designing good systems, and how procurement, training and change management all fit into this approach. Create use cases for SharePoint and other apps which different services could use productively.
Learning, Knowledge, Skills and Culture	Building a framework of the training, knowledge and skills we need to excel in data & information, along with a plan for achieving it. Looking at communicating the organisation's data and information needs and knowledge, and further developing a positive data and information culture.

Our Strategy

Quality data and information facilitating data-driven decision making, which leads to positive outcomes for our communities, accountability, and trust in Scottish Borders Council as an organisation.

High quality data and information will facilitate efficient, cost-effective, resilient and high-quality services, and ensure we are accurate, lawful and legal. This will ensure the organisation is accountable and trusted, and delivers positive outcomes for our communities.

Following the conclusions drawn from where we are; where we want to be; our strengths, weaknesses and challenges, and our desire to achieve our vision, a number of strategy actions have been agreed.

Conclusion 1: A comprehensive set actions have been recommended, structured as 9 workstreams.

Strategy Action 1: The recommended actions will be taken forward as the Data & Information Plan 2025-2030.

Strategy Action 2: The Data & Information Plan 2025-2030 will be governed under the following framework:

- The Function Manager – Performance and Improvement will lead the Plan. The Plan will be sponsored by the Director of Corporate Governance.
- A Project Team will be set up to assist delivering the Plan.
- The Corporate Management Team will be the Board for the Plan, ensuring oversight at a senior level within the organisation.
- The Data & Information Plan 2025-2030 will be considered as part of the current Operating Model Programme.

Conclusion 2: In order to succeed, given the complex network of services and functions that influence data and information, the actions of the Plan will need input from multiple services, and close collaboration between different services across different directorates.

Strategy Action 3: All Directors will commit to contributing resource from their Services to the delivery of the Plan, and support the Strategy's approach.

Strategy Action 4: The creation and review of other strategies and Plans that have an impact on Data and Information will be co-ordinated and reviewed alongside the Data and Information Strategy and Data and Information Plan 2025-2030 to ensure that they will work together in a complimentary way to achieve their co-dependent outcomes. This will include the Digital Strategy, Systems Strategy and Operating Model Workstreams.

Strategy Action 5: The leads of each Plan action will support different Services working together to find solutions that meet as many Service needs as possible.

Conclusion 3: To ensure that progress made is relevant and appropriate, those for whom data and information are a large part of their roles must be included in the Plan delivery, and contribute towards delivery of the agreed actions.

Strategy Action 6: A data and information group will be identified, consisting of those for whom data and information is a large part of their roles. This group will support the Plan actions through engaging with consultation exercises and, where appropriate, provision of time resource to deliver specific actions.

Strategy Action 7: The leads of each Plan action will ensure that they consult with relevant stakeholders to inform their decisions and actions.

Conclusion 4: Resource levels within the organisation are challenging, and it's important that the Plan is led by those in the Services who know best what their needs are. The majority of the identified actions in the Plan depend upon time resource rather than financial resource, and allocation of this resource should be seen as an investment that will deliver a robust platform upon which the organisation can deliver future efficiency and performance gains.

Strategy Action 8: A slow and steady approach to delivering the actions will be taken. Identified actions will be prioritised, and there will be an understanding that it will take several years to work through them all.

Strategy Action 3 [repeated from above]: All Directors will commit to contributing resource from their Services to the delivery of the Plan, and support the Strategy's approach

Conclusion 5: Learning, Knowledge, Skills and Culture underpins all layers of the data and information journey, and there is a need to upskill in areas of data and information.

Strategy Action 9: The Council Management Team will encourage their respective staff groups to take responsibility for developing their own data and information skills.

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