

2013/14 National Statistics on Local Authority Collected Waste Management in England Defra Statistical Summary

Contents

Introduction.....	1
Timeliness	1
Data Quality.....	1
Revisions Policy	2
Seasonality and year-end effects.....	3
2013/14 provisional results	3
Dealing with unvalidated returns	3
Access to data	3
Feedback.....	4

Introduction

Estimates of local authority collected waste generation and management for England and its regions are published on a quarterly and annual (financial year) basis by Defra¹. Since 2004/5 data collection has been via an online web-based system called [WasteDataFlow](#) (WDF). National estimates were released on a quarterly basis for the first time in February 2008 as it took some time for the new system to become established. Since Quarter 2 of 2007/8 the quarterly data have been published as National Statistics, and the response rate for the survey has been 100% since 2008/9.

WasteDataFlow is a UK system, and is used by the other UK countries to produce similar statistics. The questionnaires differ slightly, but the core information collected is comparable. Details of the core dataset are available [here](#).

Timeliness

The deadline for data submission for each quarter is 3 months after the end of the quarter. After the validation process is complete (as described below) Defra receive the data around 6 months after the end of each quarter. There is additional work carried out by the Environment Agency on the annual data set, which can further delay annual data availability. Defra publishes the annual data set in the first week of November each year.

Data Quality

Generally, the data that is reported into WasteDataFlow comes from information supplied to authorities by their waste management contractor, and which is used by them in their own internal management information systems and for contract performance monitoring, etc. It is not possible to know for sure how accurate the reported data is, but authorities have an incentive to maintain accurate data for their internal purposes.

In WasteDataFlow, each local authority has at least one data entry user and an authoriser who has to check and approve the data before it can be submitted to the

¹ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/environment/waste/>

database. After submission the data pass through 3 validation stages – stage 1 conducted by Defra’s contractors (more details [here](#)), stage 2 by the Environment Agency, and finally by Defra at the national level.

Stage 1 validation covers the internal consistency of the return and comparison with previous returns. There is detailed [guidance](#) for local authorities on the WasteDataFlow website covering data entry. There are also a number of tools provided to authorities to help them ensure their returns are correct. There are validation spreadsheets available on WDF for users to run to check that the data they have entered balances. Once the local authority has submitted their quarterly dataset Defra’s contractors validate the data using a validation spreadsheet. There is a comments box accompanying each question where local authorities can enter extra information to help with the validation process. The data is checked against the equivalent quarter from the previous year and any unexpected changes between the two quarters are queried with the local authority and amended if necessary.

At stage 2, the Environment Agency (as the monitoring authority for the Landfill Allowances Trading Scheme) look at consistency between authorities, checking that the return for Waste Disposal Authorities reflects the waste reported for the Waste Collection Authorities they cover. As part of their role the Environment Agency also carry out periodic visits to authorities and treatment facilities to monitor data collection and quality assurance processes within authorities.

At the national level, Defra performs checks on the consistency of the national results, comparisons with previous estimates and general sense checking of the results. At this stage it is rare to uncover issues with local data which have not been picked up in the first two stages.

Revisions Policy

The general WDF policy is to minimise data revisions and encourage local authorities to accurately report quarterly data by deadlines. Where small revisions are requested, local authorities are advised to make balancing adjustments in subsequent quarters. For more substantive changes, local authorities request their data to be ‘rolled back’ to them after they have submitted. Where this change request is agreed by the Environment Agency and Defra, a quarterly return will be revised. These requests are relatively few during the year, but more requests are received towards the end of the year. In 2012/13, 32 returns from 22 local authorities were revised after validation.

No changes are permitted after validation of Quarter 4 data has been completed. Authorities are also required to provide evidence regarding changes in procedures they have put in place to minimise the need for future data revisions.

Provisional results for each quarter will be published within 4 months of the end of data submission date, i.e. within 5 weeks of Defra receiving the validated data. Each quarter will not be revised in each publication to minimise revisions and confusion for the user. Instead, a final set of results will be published in the annual dataset in November and this will include revised quarterly figures.

Seasonality and year-end effects

Waste production and management varies over the course of a year. This means that the trends observed in quarterly data (or a rolling year) will not necessarily marry up with that previously seen by users of the annual data. This means care needs to be taken in interpreting the long-term trends of an annual dataset with that of a quarterly release of data. The revisions that can happen to quarterly data and the 'balancing' of tonnages across quarters (particularly at year-end) could also mean that different trends are observed in the 'rolling year to date' and the 'final financial year'. The focus continues to be on the financial year trends.

2013/14 provisional results

The provisional cut of Quarter 1 2013/14 was downloaded from the WasteDataFlow database on 13th January 2014. This is a snapshot taken of the database. Changes may be made to the data after this snapshot has been taken and these will be reflected in the final 2013/14 publication in November 2014.

There was a 100% submission of returns in quarter 1 of 2013/14. Therefore the final data is based on all 352 authorities including the Dorset Waste Partnership, representing six Councils:

- Weymouth and Portland Borough Council
- West Dorset District Council
- Purbeck District Council
- North Dorset District Council
- East Dorset District Council
- Christchurch Borough Council.

Babergh District Council submits a joint return with Mid Suffolk District Council.

Dealing with unvalidated returns

There are two main choices for dealing with returns that have not completed validation. Either to use the validated return made for the same period of the previous year, or to use the unvalidated returns directly. All returns in Quarter 1 of 2013/14 were validated so this decision was not needed.

Access to data

WasteDataFlow data becomes public domain once that quarter's statistics release has been published. Users can access the results in a number of ways:

- From the Defra website, which contains the statistics releases and summary analyses
- WDF contains a reporting feature which allows custom reports to be produced. Access is available to anyone. An email address is required to register (no other personal information is collected). [Register here](#).
- The entire English raw data from WDF is also published, in annual extracts, on www.data.gov.uk. The data is in comma separated value format. These are large files with over 200,000 records in each dataset.

Feedback

We are always interested in feedback from users on any aspect of this release or waste statistics in general. In particular we would welcome hearing about what users do with the results and data which is available in WasteDataFlow. Comments may be sent to:

Waste and Recycling Statistics

Defra

2B Nobel House

17 Smith Square

London

SW1P 3JR

Tel: 08459 33 55 77

Email: wasteprogramme@defra.gsi.gov.uk