

Statistical Notice

Summary of responses received to the proposed changes to the Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics annual publication

Background

Between 30 June and 16 September 2016 Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) invited comments on proposed changes to the Northern Ireland Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste annual statistical report. Three formal responses were received which complemented information previously gathered at a variety of meetings and other correspondence with users related to their needs. This report describes those responses and provides Statistics and Analytical Services Branch's subsequent response. Key issues covered include the importance of energy recovery statistics, move to a theme based report with separate excel tables to mirror existing quarterly reports and changes to tables. The first publication using the new format is scheduled for release on 1 December 2016.

Whilst the changes are a necessary consequence of the re-organisation of Local Government, the opportunity was also taken to streamline the publication, increase its utility, and to make it more user-friendly. In summary, the proposals were:

1. **Harmonisation of the annual report with the recently updated quarterly reports -** Within this, we will update the annual report to reflect changes made to the quarterly report in 2015. These changes to the quarterly report were in response to its user consultation in summer 2015. They include:
 - a. the switch in reporting basis from 26 to 11 councils and from 3 to 2 waste management groups from April 2015,
 - b. a move from the current report's indicator-based sections, which includes covering LAC municipal and household versions of each indicator separately, to broader sections for:
 - overview
 - arisings
 - reuse, recycling & composting
 - energy recovery
 - landfill
 - biodegradable landfill
 - c. that each section will contain a time series chart and a chart comparing councils' data. The quarterly report does this, but the latest annual report does not.
 - d. that the focus of the recycling section will be the household recycling rate, but with all three recycling rates (household, local authority collected and waste from households) included in the tables. The excel tables will also be reorganised and renumbered into the broader sections listed at (b) above.
 - e. the move of data tables from the back of the pdf report to excel based appendices. Users who wish to print the tables will be able to do so from the spreadsheet, which will be print-friendly i.e. one page per table.
 - f. many presentational changes, including the metadata-based front cover, use of colour, and with user guidance, glossary and list of acronyms at the end of the document.
2. **Propose specific changes to the data tables -** for the quarterly reports consultation last year we had specifically set out to maintain all current data tables

produced in the publications. This time we propose the following changes to the tables of the annual report:

- a. Table 10 contains material types reporting as accepted / rejected for recycling and composting. However it only contains a waste management breakdown and stands out as the only non-council level table at the moment, and given that there will be no SWaMP figures for 2015/16 it will stand out even more. We propose adding council level data to this table alongside remaining waste management groups and NI level data.
- b. Table 9 breaks down local authority collected municipal waste sent to material recovery facilities by district council and waste management group. However, the council and group splits are potentially misleading as MRFs take inputs from multiple councils across groups. Further, the distinctions made between clean and dirty MRFs are not clear with clean MRF outputs contributing to dirty MRF inputs. In addition, we are not aware of any users of this table and so for these reasons we propose removing it.
- c. Other tables will remain but where they are reporting on a time series from 2005/06, no council breakdown will be available due to the change from 26 to 11 councils. For these tables, figures will only be shown at the Northern Ireland level.
- d. The above changes will bring the quarterly and annual reports broadly in line in terms of the data tables which they contain, although the annual report contains additional time series tables that are not produced in the quarterly report. Users can still recreate these tables on a quarterly basis from the time series dataset provided. We will however retain the time series tables in the annual for ease of use, as not all users will be comfortable working with the time series dataset.

An example of the proposed new format of the report was also provided. It was proposed that the report will be released as an Adobe pdf document with its referenced data tables being released as an Excel xlsx file. There will also be an associated time series dataset released in csv format. We were keen to hear from any users who were interested in the data being made available in alternative formats.

Between 1 July and 16 September 2016 SASB received three formal responses from the arc21 waste management group, the environmental policy division (in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) and the Green Party in Northern Ireland.

In addition to this formal user consultation, SASB have been involved in many discussions in recent months, internally within Statistics and Analytical Services Branch, across DAERA, with the NI Environment Agency and with other NISRA statisticians. All ad-hoc queries on waste statistics received by SASB have been used to inform the new reports and consideration will also be given to recent Office for National Statistics style guide advice and some presentational changes may be phased in as resources permit, all with a view to making the statistics more accessible and understandable.

Key Issues

Harmonisation of the annual report with the recently updated quarterly reports

Two of the responses mentioned the harmonisation of the annual report with the recently updated quarterly reports and both were in favour.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB will use the quarterly reports, the template provided at the time of consultation and these responses together to develop the annual report. We also hope to have a similar layout to the waste quarterly reports to aid read across between the quarterly and annual reports.

Energy Recovery

The importance of a section on energy recovery was emphasised given that this is a significant element of the current management options utilised to achieve NI Landfill Allowance Scheme targets.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB will include a section on energy recovery similar to the section included in the provisional quarterly report as outlined in the consultation draft report. Given that there is a clear user need for this, it will be made a priority for development.

Currently WasteDataFlow does not consistently capture whether quantities of material sent for energy recovery are exported as the system's primary focus is recycling / preparing for reuse and disposal. Export information comes from ad-hoc comments and it is not feasible to validate and report such figures. Exports are subject to a separate authorisation process through the NI Environment Agency and records for Refuse Derived Fuel shipped from NI are available here: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/export-records-rdf-shipped-northern-ireland>

Recycling

Respondents were apprehensive about including more than one recycling rate in the reuse, recycling and composting section of the report, as it is likely to cause confusion for readers.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB agree that the inclusion of more than one recycling rate is likely to cause confusion, especially given the importance of this section given the existence of recycling targets. There are three different recycling rates used for three different purposes at this point in time:

- i. The household waste recycling rate is used in the Waste Management Strategy 2006-2020 targets, the draft Programme for Government framework and in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (NI) 2015.*
- ii. the LAC municipal waste recycling rate is used by councils and the revised Waste Management Strategy - Delivering Resource Efficiency - proposed a municipal recycling rate target of 60% by 2020.*
- iii. the waste from households recycling rate allows comparison with England, Scotland and Wales and is consistent with the EU Waste Framework Directive target of 50% recycling rate by 2020.*

SASB would like to confirm that all three recycling rates will be included in the Excel tables but **only the household waste recycling rate in the report**, as it is the measure most directly related to current NI policy targets. The differences between the rates will be described in the user guidance. This may change in future should other recycling targets take prominence.

Specific changes to the data tables

Including council level data on Table 10

There was support for this change and acknowledgement that it will be useful given that there will be no figures for SWaMP.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

Table 10 will be updated to present councils, waste management groups and Northern Ireland level data for material types reported as accepted for recycling and composting.

Removal of Table 9

There was mixed responses on this table with some acknowledging that it was incorrect and supporting the removal of it and others of the opinion that it would be counter-productive as they use it in a number of ways.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

Given the number of limitations listed with this table and the fact that it is not accurate, it would be misleading to keep it in its current form. Furthermore, the inaccuracies will increase given the changes from 26 to 11 councils whereby one newly formed council may use more than one Material Recovery Facility (MRF). For these reasons, a couple of changes have been made to this table:

- the clean and dirty MRF terminology has been updated to LAC kerbside mixed dry recyclables sent for sorting and LAC residual waste sent for sorting respectively.*
- the table has been amended to account for tonnages that we know are sorted as residual waste rather than kerbside mixed dry recyclables*

By making these changes, the first two 'Notes' associated with the table, see the text numbered (1) and (2) below, will be removed:

- 1. Clean MRFs receive source segregated waste only, such as co-mingled recyclable materials from kerbside collections. Rejects from clean MRFs do not always go directly to landfill, e.g. they may go to dirty MRFs for further processing.*
- 2. Dirty MRFs accept a variety of residual wastes such as wastes from households, businesses and skips to try and recover recyclable materials.*

This makes it clearer for users of these tables to understand and presents a more accurate picture of the handling of this local authority collected municipal waste.

Tables in a separate document

Support was given to move the excel tables into a separate document.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB agree that this has worked well for the quarterly reports and provides a shorter and more useful report for users. In addition to this, the time series dataset will continue to be updated with provisional figures quarterly and finalised at the annual reporting stage.

Other Issues

Commentary

Caution against any commentary that could be construed as subjective.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB have always ensured that commentary is impartial and objective and will continue to do so in future. The UK Statistics Authority has designated the Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics publication as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics meet the eight principals and three protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, including that they are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest. Principle 3 (Integrity) specifically requires that at all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

Use commentary to ensure greater appreciation is given to the position that two situations are often scarcely comparable.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB endeavour to provide factual explanation in the report commentary for any differences which the figures may highlight. Other potential factors which may have influenced differences are cited as appropriate but unless there is evidence that the factor has played a part then this cannot be definitively stated. Moreover, the quarterly reports contain provisional data which are not finalised until the production of the annual report. For these reasons, very small increases or decreases in figures (<0.5%) are not highlighted in the commentary and should be interpreted with care. This policy will continue to apply to future reports.

Alternative formats

No specific requirements were provided. The removal of the tables from the report and into a separate Excel spreadsheet was supported.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

SASB will continue to produce the report as a pdf and all the data tables in Excel format. It seems that SASB are currently meeting user needs as per the Code of Practice for Official Statistics Principle 8 (Frankness and Accessibility) Practice 6: Ensure that official statistics are disseminated in forms that enable and encourage analysis and re-use. Release datasets and reference databases, supported by documentation, in formats that are convenient to users.

To further encourage analysis and re-use SASB will continue to follow guidance from the Open Data Strategy for Northern Ireland and publish data conforming to at least step three on the five star deployment scheme.

- <https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/open-data-strategy-for-northern-ireland-2015-2018.pdf>

- <http://5stardata.info/>

In practice this means providing non-proprietary formats in addition to the current Excel format e.g. csv spreadsheets.

Additional output: commercial and industrial waste arisings

There was a request for quantities of commercial and industrial waste to be measured in Northern Ireland.

Statistics and Analytical Services Branch (SASB) response:

The latest available information on commercial and industrial waste arisings in NI comes from the Northern Ireland Commercial & Industrial (C&I) Waste Estimates (November 2011).

http://www.wrapni.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Northern_Ireland_CI_waste_estimates_2009_v4_1.4bb45bd7.11553%5B1%5D.pdf

Some commercial and industrial waste is collected by councils and so will be included in the non-household waste arisings part of the Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics with which this report is concerned. However, this will account for only a small portion of total commercial and industrial waste arisings. To help quantify this, the C&I report above notes that in 2009 there were 92,600 tonnes of C&I waste collected by councils compared to an estimated 1.3 million tonnes of C&I waste in Northern Ireland in total, i.e., only around 7% of this waste is Council collected and hence recorded in the WasteDataFlow system on which our National Statistics reports are based. Note that the non-council collected results are estimates drawing heavily upon a survey undertaken in England and have a high associated level of uncertainty.

Total C&I waste data are not currently regularly collected centrally in Northern Ireland and therefore it would not be possible, at this time, for SASB to report commercial and industrial waste arisings in this publication.