

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Sustainability and the Environment in Wales

(produced by the Welsh Government)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the following sets of National Statistics produced by the Welsh Government:

- *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release*⁴;
- *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales*⁵;
- *State of the Environment*⁶; and
- *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales*⁷.

1.1.2 The Act also allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request in relation to

- *Municipal Waste Management*⁸; and
- *Fly-tipping in Wales*⁹.

1.1.3 *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release*, *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* and *State of the Environment* are compendium publications. Assessments of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

1.1.4 This Assessment report is one of a series on environmental statistics. The assessment of Statistics on the Environment in Scotland, produced by the Scottish Government has been published in report number 165. An assessment is also underway of Statistics on the Environment in England and the UK, produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Environmental statistics in Northern Ireland are not currently designated as National Statistics. It is proposed that they be assessed in due course.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/sustaindev/110830/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/sustain11/?lang=en>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/environment2011/110721/?lang=en>

⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/environment2010/101116/?lang=en>

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/environment2011/110628/?lang=en>

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/environment2011/110726/?lang=en>

- 1.1.5 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality¹⁰. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.
- 1.1.6 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in the products listed in 1.1.1 can be designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics published in the products listed in paragraph 1.1.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to Welsh Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by April 2012.
- 1.2.2 As reported in Assessment report 151, senior staff in the Assessment team and Welsh Government’s statistical directorate have agreed an approach in which the Head of Profession for Statistics may confirm that certain steps, which would otherwise have been formal recommendations, will be taken; these are noted in the body of this report:
- i. announce future changes to the sustainable development and environment indicators in advance of their publication;
 - ii. where they are available, provide links to methodological documents relating to the statistics underpinning the sustainable development and environment indicators; and
 - iii. improve the published information about the quality of municipal waste and fly-tipping statistics, including identifying the main sources of bias and other error, and the strengths and weaknesses in relation to use

The specification of improvements expressed in this manner does not diminish the responsibility of the Welsh Government to ensure that it continues to produce this set of statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*. We will review progress with these improvements at a later stage.

- 1.2.3 Welsh Government has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

¹⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 Welsh Government has a good understanding of how the statistics are used within central and local government, but could usefully explore the needs of a wider range of users.
- 1.3.2 Welsh Government makes good use of administrative data and statistics already published, although the provision of information about quality and methods is variable.
- 1.3.3 The commentary in the publications provides useful contextual information alongside the statistics but could be improved to identify the main messages. Some of the language used in *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* could be interpreted as supporting particular policies.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that Welsh Government could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the sustainability and environment statistics, publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.1).
Requirement 2	Ensure that <i>Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales</i> presents the statistics impartially and objectively (para 3.2).
Requirement 3	Investigate the potential for statistical analysis to inform the allocation of traffic light statuses to sustainable development indicators, and publish the outcome of these investigations (para 3.5).
Requirement 4	Improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.8).
Requirement 5	Change the title of future Fly-tipping publications – for example, to “Local Authority recorded Fly-tipping in Wales” (para 3.9).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release* presents a summary table of the ‘traffic light status’¹¹ allocated to various sets of statistics about topics such as health, housing, crime and the environment. It is used by the Welsh Government to monitor the progress of its sustainable development policy *One Wales: One Planet*¹². Local authorities (LAs) also use these statistics for comparisons with other LAs. Non-governmental organisations with an interest in the environment and sustainability also use the indicators to hold the government to account. The *First Release* is published alongside the *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* booklet. The booklet provides graphs, tables and additional commentary about the trends shown in the underlying statistics. Further information is also provided on the StatsWales¹³ website. The indicators were originally developed in 2000 but the current set of indicators was first published in 2008. These were developed with the support of the Sustainable Development Indicators Working Group¹⁴, which includes representatives from the voluntary sector, local government and business.
- 2.2 *State of the Environment* is produced annually; it presents a summary table of the ‘traffic light status’ allocated to various sets of statistics about different aspects of the environment. These are used by the Welsh Government to monitor the progress of its environment strategy, as well as by LAs, Environment Agency Wales¹⁵ and the Countryside Council for Wales¹⁶ to inform their work. The data used to produce the indicators, along with further analysis and other metadata, are published on the StatsWales website as a series of online reports. *State of the Environment* was first published in 2008, and replaced *Key Environment Statistics*¹⁷. The indicators were developed by the Environment Strategy Indicators Sub-group, which included Welsh Government statisticians, scientists, policy officials and representatives of non-governmental users.
- 2.3 *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales* is produced annually. It presents statistics for the latest financial year on the amount of waste collected by LAs, including how much is recycled and composted, as well as some statistics on residual waste for individuals and households. The annual statistics have been published since 1997. Data were originally collected through the Municipal Waste Management Survey in Wales but since 2004, they have been collected through a central administrative system called WasteDataFlow¹⁸, managed by the Environment Agency¹⁹. *Municipal Waste Management* presents these statistics on a quarterly basis. We were told that

¹¹ The traffic lights indicate whether the trends in the statistics indicate a clear improvement, a clear decline, or are stable (or do not indicate a clear trend).

¹² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/publications/onewalesoneplanet/?lang=en>

¹³ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

¹⁴ <http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20070129124147/http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/susdnews/susdevnews/sdindicators?lang=en>

¹⁵ <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/aboutus/organisation/35675.aspx>

¹⁶ <http://www.ccw.gov.uk/?lang=en>

¹⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/env2008/hdw200702272/?lang=en>

¹⁸ <http://www.wastedataflow.org/>

¹⁹ <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/>

the quarterly statistics are not National Statistics as they were originally produced by the Welsh Government's Department for the Environment and Countryside. The Welsh Government's Statistical Directorate took over responsibility for the quarterly releases in 2009. The statistics are used by the Welsh Government to monitor progress towards the national and local targets. In particular, *Towards Zero Waste*²⁰ sets a target that all sectors (for example, households) should recycle 70 per cent of waste by 2025. The statistics are also used to monitor progress against the requirements of the EU Landfill Directive²¹, which has set targets for the amount of biodegradable waste sent to landfill. Municipal waste statistics are used as indicators for both *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* and *State of the Environment*.

- 2.4 *Fly-tipping* presents annual statistics on fly-tipping incidents in Wales, as recorded by LAs. It includes statistics on the number of incidents, the location type, the type of waste involved, and the size of the incident. Data on fly-tipping are collected from LAs by the Environment Agency using a web-based system called Flycapture²². *Fly-tipping* was first published in 2008. The statistics are used by Welsh Government, LAs and the Environment Agency to develop and monitor policy initiatives such as Fly-tipping Action Wales²³.
- 2.5 The total annual cost for producing the sustainability and environment statistics releases is £15,600.

²⁰ http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/epq/waste_recycling/publication/towardszero/?lang=en

²¹ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31999L0031:EN:NOT>

²² <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/research/library/data/41333.aspx>

²³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/epq/cleanneighbour/flytipping/ftaw/?lang=en>

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 In December 2010, Welsh Government published an article²⁴ on proposed new methods to allocate traffic light statuses to the environment indicators published in *State of the Environment*, and invited users to comment. The results of this consultation have not been published, although the new method has been adopted. More recently, known users were sent a questionnaire²⁵ asking for views on the sustainability and environment statistics outputs and how they could be improved; the statistics team told us that it plans to publish a summary of the responses to this consultation shortly. Although the questionnaire is available on the Welsh Statistics Liaison Committee's web page, it was not publicised more generally to a wider range of users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the sustainability and environment statistics, publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics²⁶ (Requirement 1). In meeting this requirement we suggest that Welsh Government publish the responses to the consultation on the new methods used for the environment indicators.
- 3.2 The introduction to *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* refers to the 'indicators that we will use to measure our progress' and 'our Sustainable Development Scheme'. This language is not neutral and could be interpreted as an endorsement of current government policies. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should present the statistics impartially in *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales*²⁷ (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 Welsh Government told us that it consults users about potential changes to methods and announces forthcoming changes to the statistics when possible. On occasion, Welsh Government is not informed of changes to the statistics used for indicators until the statistics are provided by the supplier. Changes have been made to the sustainable development indicators published in *Sustainable Development indicators for Wales* which, although discussed at the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee²⁸, were not announced to other users prior to their implementation. For example, for the indicator of mobility, the "distance travelled per person, per year, by broad trip purpose" was replaced by "main mode of travel to work" in 2010. In addition, there is no explanation of why the underlying statistics were replaced or how the decision to adopt a new indicator was made. During the course of this assessment, the Head of Profession for statistics confirmed that future changes to the sustainable development and environment indicators will be announced in advance of their publication. Users will be informed of any planned changes through announcements on the web theme pages and direct emails. We suggest that Welsh Government provide systematic documentation about the decisions surrounding changes to indicators.
- 3.4 The source of the underlying statistics for each indicator is provided in *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* and *State of the Environment*. The source is identified as being National Statistics or not; however, these are

²⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/articles/soeindicatoranalysis/?lang=en>

²⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/meetings/110609/?lang=en>

²⁶ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁷ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/meetings/100610/?lang=en>

not always correct – for example, river water quality statistics are incorrectly identified²⁹ as National Statistics in the environment indicators metadata on StatsWales. Additional data tables, graphs and metadata are provided on StatsWales, which is itself clearly linked from the relevant statistics web pages and within the reports. The metadata for some (but not all) indicators outlines the methods used to produce the underlying statistics. Additional links to websites where the methodology has already been published would be useful. During the course of this assessment, the Head of Profession for statistics confirmed that where they are available, links to methodological documents relating to the statistics underpinning the sustainable development and environment indicators will be provided in the publications as they are published in 2012.. We suggest that Welsh Government review the status of the source data to ensure that they are correctly identified as National Statistics or otherwise.

- 3.5 Welsh Government recently changed the method used to allocate the traffic light status to the environment indicators. The method provides a statistical analysis of the trends to determine whether or not they might have occurred by chance. The allocation of traffic light status to sustainable development indicators is not based on such a statistical analysis. Instead, the current year is compared with the base year and if there is a difference of 3 per cent or more, a ‘clear trend’ indicator is allocated. Welsh Government told us that it uses this method so that the sustainable development indicators are comparable with the UK indicators produced by Defra³⁰. Furthermore, Welsh Government told us that the methods used to allocate the traffic light status of environmental indicators would not work for some sustainable development indicators as too few data points are available for this. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should investigate the potential of statistical analysis for allocating traffic light statuses to sustainable development indicators and publish the outcome³¹ (Requirement 3). In meeting this requirement we suggest that Welsh Government work with Defra to maintain comparability with UK indicators.
- 3.6 Welsh Government publishes little information about the quality of the data provided through the administrative sources (WasteDataFlow and FlyCapture) for the municipal waste and fly-tipping statistics. Welsh Government told us that the Environment Agency manages the administrative systems and validates the data provided by LAs. However, there is scope for Welsh Government to publish more information about the quality of the data, including potential sources of bias; in particular, the way in which local authorities’ identification and classification of fly-tipping could impact on the statistics and how they are used. During the course of this assessment, the Head of Profession for statistics confirmed that the published information about the quality of municipal waste and fly-tipping statistics will be improved, including identifying the main sources of bias and other error, and the strengths and weaknesses in relation to use. This information will be provided in the releases as they are published in 2012.

²⁹ <http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=5877>

³⁰ <http://sd.defra.gov.uk/progress/>

³¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 5 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

- 3.7 Comparable statistics from other UK countries are provided or linked to in all releases. The summary table presented in *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release* includes the traffic light status allocated to the UK sustainable development indicators produced by Defra, where available. *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* also provides further information about the statistics used for the UK indicators where they differ from those used for Wales; for example the Welsh indicator for economic output is Gross Value Added, whereas the UK indicator is Gross Domestic Product. Links are also provided to sustainable development information published by the other UK countries, as well as by the United Nations and Eurostat. We regard this as an example of good practice. Comparisons are not provided in *State of the Environment*; some (but not all) are provided on StatsWales – for example the Trends in Seabird Population Index is sourced from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee³² which also produces data for England and Scotland - but these comparable statistics are not referenced. Welsh Government told us that making comparisons across the UK countries can be difficult. We suggest that Welsh Government engage with statisticians in Defra, Scottish Government and the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, under the auspices of the Inter-Administration Committee of the Government Statistical Service, to develop a framework for the presentation of statistics on the environment.
- 3.8 The sustainability and environment statistics releases provide helpful information about the policy and operational context. *State of the Environment* and *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release* contain very little commentary about the indicators; each presents only a summary of how many indicators have improved or deteriorated compared with the base year. Further commentary on individual sustainable development indicators is provided in *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* but *State of the Environment* is not accompanied by such a supplementary release, as all other information is provided on StatsWales. The July 2011 publication of *Fly-tipping* provides some good commentary that will aid users' interpretation of the statistics; however most of the commentary in all of the releases is limited to descriptions of increases and decreases. The June 2011 publication of *Municipal Waste Management* briefly discusses how the weather may have affected the statistics in January; however, there is little further analysis to aid users' interpretation. During the course of this assessment, Welsh Government published *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales 2010-11* which has significantly improved commentary, providing contextual information and explanations of developments which may have impacted upon the statistics. The Authority welcomes this improvement. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics³³ (Requirement 4). We suggest that in meeting this requirement Welsh Government consider the points detailed in annex 2. We further suggest that Welsh Government improve the commentary provided on StatsWales for the environment indicators in line with the improvements being made to the statistical releases.

³² <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4467>

³³ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

- 3.9 *Fly-tipping* does not specify that the statistics relate only to fly-tipping incidents dealt with by LAs, although this is explained in the opening paragraph. Published estimates should be described as clearly as possible. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government change the title of future Fly-tipping publications – for example, to “Local Authority recorded Fly-tipping in Wales”³⁴ (Requirement 5).

³⁴ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to Welsh Government's Sustainability and Environment Statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Publish the responses to the consultation on the new methods used for the environment indicators (para 3.1). |
| Suggestion 2 | Provide systematic documentation about the decisions surrounding changes to indicators (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 3 | Review the status of the source data to ensure that they are correctly identified as National Statistics or otherwise (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 4 | Work with Defra to investigate statistical analysis of sustainable development indicators to maintain comparability with UK indicators (para 3.5). |
| Suggestion 5 | Engage with statisticians in Defra, Welsh Government and the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, under the auspices of the Inter-Administration Committee of the Government Statistical Service, to develop a framework for the presentation of statistics on the environment.(para 3.7). |
| Suggestion 6 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.8). |
| Suggestion 7 | improve the commentary provided on StatsWales for the environment indicators in line with the improvements being made to the other releases (para 3.8). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*³⁵. Whilst this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with sustainability and environment statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 Only two releases clearly identify that the statistics are for Wales. *Fly-tipping* does not specify that the statistics relate only to fly-tipping dealt with by LAs although this is explained in the opening paragraph.
- A2.4 The releases give an indication of their frequency of publication. Not all the statistics for the sustainable development and environment indicators are updated each year. The summary table in *State of the Environment* provides the date that the statistics for each indicator were updated; this information is not shown in *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* or *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release*.
- A2.5 All releases use standard headings, formatting and logos. The name and contact details of the responsible statisticians are in each report. Additional contact details for the Waste Strategy Branch, with an Environment Agency email address, are provided in *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales*.
- A2.6 The sustainable development and environment indicators releases provide an indication of what is presented in each release; *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* provides a full contents page. The municipal waste and fly-tipping releases do not provide an indication of the breakdowns, tables and graphs included in each release.
- A2.7 Revised estimates in the municipal waste and fly-tipping releases are clearly indicated and the latest estimates are identified as provisional.

Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English

- A2.8 *State of the Environment* and *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release* provide summaries of the progress shown by the indicators. *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* also provides the summary table published in the First Release. The municipal waste and fly-tipping releases provide key bullet points on the front page, but these are not always about the most noteworthy developments; for example, the rise in rural fly-tipping is not

³⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

highlighted in *Fly-tipping*, whilst the decline in the number of abandoned vehicles being recycled is not highlighted in *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales 2009-10*. During the course of this assessment, Welsh Government published *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales 2010-11* which has significantly improved commentary, providing contextual information and explanations of developments which may have impacted on the statistics.

- A2.9 The language used in all the releases is non-technical, although there is scope for some additional definitions to be provided, for example 'dry recycling.'
- A2.10 Most of the commentary within the releases is restricted to describing increases or decreases; comparisons made across LAs simply describe those that have highest or lowest rates of recycling or fly-tipping. In the July publication of *Fly-tipping* an explanation of the continued decrease in fly-tipping incidents is provided, as well as the impact that a targeted exercise in Cardiff has had on the number of enforcements. This provides good context to aid users' interpretation. The key results in the June publication of *Municipal Waste Management* mention that the weather may have affected the statistics for the January to March period. The Key Quality Information section also provides other potential narrative, for example, inter-seasonal differences and new services introduced by LAs. *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales* could usefully provide more analysis of the year-on-year changes in recycling rates for LAs. *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* supplements the first release by providing brief commentary for each indicator. *State of the Environment* is not supplemented by a similar release, although commentary is provided on StatsWales.

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

- A2.11 *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release* and *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* refer to "our sustainable development scheme." Furthermore, *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* states, "To highlight whether things are moving in the right or wrong direction...." These phrases give the impression of endorsing government policy. The text in *State of the Environment*, *Fly-tipping* and the municipal waste releases is impartial.
- A2.12 In *Fly-tipping*, most descriptions are of percentages and proportions. However, the graphs within the release only illustrate counts. There are no tables within the release. Similarly, in *Municipal Waste Management Report for Wales*, Table 3 presents the amount of waste analysed by how it is processed, but the commentary discusses percentages.
- A2.13 Descriptions of proportions and trends appear to be generally professionally sound although, without data tables in *Fly-tipping*, this is difficult to verify. The municipal waste releases contain no discussions of potential errors or bias caused by incorrect or differing classifications used by LAs; *Fly-tipping* acknowledges there may be differences but does not discuss the implications of these. The sustainable development indicators releases and *State of the Environment* are compendium publications, so it is not appropriate for them to

include in-depth discussion of sampling and non-sampling errors for all the statistics used as indicators. However, it would be appropriate to provide links to this information where it is available.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.14 All releases provide good information about the policy and operational context. However, there is no discussion about the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to potential uses. The sustainable development and environment indicators releases do not discuss the strengths and limitations of the statistics being used as indicators, although *State of the Environment* does explain that the quality and suitability of data sources is decided by statisticians and scientists. More information could be provided in the municipal waste and fly-tipping releases, in particular about potential differences in classifications used by LAs. *Fly-tipping* notes that the cost of fly-tipping incidents is “set in the system based on national averages calculated when the system went live in April 2004.” More information about the implications of this would be useful.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.15 Brief information about methods is provided for the municipal waste and fly-tipping statistics. *Sustainable Development Indicators – First Release* provides a brief overview of the methods used for allocating traffic light statuses to the indicators; these are comparable with those used by Defra for the UK indicators. Links are provided to StatsWales and *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales*, which also includes a brief overview of the methods for allocating statuses. *State of the Environment* provides a link to StatsWales where further commentary and metadata are published. The release also contains a brief outline of the methods used to allocate the traffic light statuses and a link to a detailed methodology paper.

A2.16 All releases except *Fly-tipping* provide links to comparable statistics for other parts of the UK, though there is little analysis of these. *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* is the most comprehensive, providing the closest UK (though sometimes GB, or England & Wales) level indicator traffic light, as well as links to Eurostat and the United Nations indicators.

A2.17 The ‘Indicator Development’ section in *Sustainable Development Indicators for Wales* provides a brief outline of changes to the source statistics. However, where the source has been changed (e.g. mobility) there is no explanation why. *State of the Environment* provides information about the new methods used for allocating traffic light statuses, including how one indicator has changed from ‘stable’ to ‘clear deterioration’ as a result of the new methods.

A2.18 The provisional date of the next publication is provided in all releases. Where statistics are provisional, they are clearly identified as such.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from June to November 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Rachel Beardsmore and Catherine Barham – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of Welsh Government in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 13th July 2011. The Assessment team subsequently met Welsh Government during September to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 4 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Welsh Government	2
Other government department	1
Academic	1

A3.5 All the users who responded were happy with the sustainability and environment statistical releases, although there was recognition that there are limitations – for example, the frequency and lack of lower geographical level data. The users who responded reported good relationships with the producer team in Welsh Government.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

