
Siobhan Tuohy-Smith, Assessment Programme Lead

Stephanie Howarth
Chief Statistician
Welsh Government
(by email)

16 January 2025

Dear Stephanie

Statistics on Council Tax in Wales

We recently completed a compliance check of council tax statistics produced by the Welsh Government against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We completed this review as part of a series of compliance checks on council tax statistics produced in Great Britain (GB). The scope of this review included the annual [dwellings](#), [levels](#) and [collection rates](#) outputs. These statistics are valuable to users who are trying to understand how council tax affects them. Furthermore, these statistics help the public hold the Welsh Government to account by keeping a public record of the current condition of the Welsh council tax system. The statistics also have considerable potential value in helping to inform public debate around planned [changes to Welsh council tax policy, property revaluation and bandings](#).

Our review found a mixture of positive practices and areas where the statistics could be improved. From our engagement with your statisticians, we are assured of the quality of the statistics. They are largely based on financial information from audited local government accounts and there is a comprehensive approach to quality assuring the incoming data. Your team has also committed to improve the presentation and value of the statistics as part of its plans to improve their accessibility by publishing each bulletin in HTML format in the first half of 2025. We have therefore concluded that the statistics should retain their [accredited official statistics](#) status.

We found helpful information about the high 100% response rate from local authorities in each publication, and the comprehensive list of quality assurance checks performed on the incoming data helps to reassure users about your approach to quality management and understand the quality of the statistics. It is also good that if quality issues are identified during data validation, these are communicated to the data provider and the issues can be rectified. Furthermore, using automatic data validation and feedback mechanisms helps to ensure data quality and improves the efficiency of the production process. We also commend the use of RAP principles and encourage the team to be transparent about this to demonstrate the quality of the statistics.

We welcome your team's commitment to improve the presentation and value of the statistics. The statistics are published as PDF summaries and contain a variety of breakdowns and supporting commentary. The statistics are also available via [StatsWales](#) which allows users to view a variety of customisable tables. The PDF summaries provide useful background information around how Welsh council tax works and charts are used

effectively to demonstrate trends. We discussed with the team where including additional charts and commentary on key trends and the policy context in Wales, could further highlight the relevance and value of these statistics for a broader range of users – for example, on the Welsh Government’s previous and planned changes to council tax policy. Including links between the summaries to other relevant content, such as the [summary quality report](#), published Pre-release access lists and data on StatsWales, would also make it easier for users to access this information from the statistics and further support their appropriate interpretation. We look forward to seeing these improvements for each publication, as part of your team’s plans to publish the statistics in HTML format, starting with the dwellings statistics in January 2025.

The following paragraphs highlight other improvements that we consider would further enhance the trustworthiness, quality, and value of the statistics.

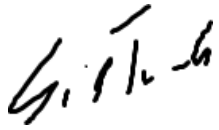
Helpful comparisons of council tax statistics between local authorities are included, but there should be more information on the extent of comparability of council tax statistics between GB nations. A comparison to council tax in England is made in the levels publication, though this should be reviewed before the next publication due to divergences between Wales and England council tax policy, including property revaluation in Wales in 2003, which was not replicated in England. This comparison will also become less viable should the Welsh council tax system change again in the next few years. We highlighted to the statistics team some recently published [guidance](#) by Scottish Government statisticians on the comparability of council tax statistics between GB nations. We encourage your team to engage with its counterparts in England and Scotland, to achieve a consistent guidance to support users of council tax statistics across GB in making appropriate comparisons.

While we understand there is no sampling error due to the 100% return from councils, uncertainty can arise in other ways. We recommend that the team investigates where potential sources of error and uncertainty in the administrative source data may exist and uses this information to improve the communication of uncertainty in the statistics. The team may find our [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\) toolkit](#) and [Approaches to presenting uncertainty in the statistical system](#) insight report useful to identify where potential uncertainty or bias may need to be communicated. In addition, the [summary quality report](#) covers multiple publications and appears outdated. In its current format, the information is quite general, which makes it hard for users to find more-specific quality information relating to individual publications. It should be reviewed to ensure users have current information on quality, to support an appropriate interpretation of the statistics.

Finally, while the statistics include an email address for users to provide feedback, the team could more proactively seek to increase its understanding of users’ needs, so that the statistics remain relevant and useful. This will be especially important given planned changes to Welsh council tax policy and related developments to the statistics. We recommend the team explicitly sets out its approach to user engagement and proactively seeks feedback on the changes made to the statistics, following their publication in HTML.

I would like to thank your team for their positive engagement during this review. Our Housing, Planning and Local Services team has provided some detailed points of feedback to your statisticians on the presentation of statistics and will keep in touch with them as they take these recommendations forward. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter or if we can be of further assistance. I am copying this letter to Anthony Newby, the responsible statistician.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siobhan' followed by a stylized flourish.

Siobhan Tuohy-Smith
Assessment Programme Lead