

Distribution Sub-Group (2020) Paper 12 – Treatment of datasets within the 2021-22 settlement and beyond

This discussion paper has been written by officials of the Welsh Government. Ministers have not had an opportunity to comment on the contents. Exemplifications of changes are provided simply to inform discussion by DSG members. They are not Welsh Government proposals or statements of Government policy for or against changes.

Treatment of datasets within the 2021-22 settlement and beyond

Summary

1. This paper looks at arising issues surrounding the datasets used in the calculation of the local government settlement and groups these into three categories: those which are currently frozen; those which could be directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and those for which the COVID-19 pandemic may have an impact on their collection.

Views sought

2. This paper is largely for information at this point in time, but views are welcomed by the group on potential ways forward regarding future use of these indicators.

Recent related papers

- *DSG (2019) Paper 21: Homelessness Indicator*
- *DSG (2019) Paper 20: The impact of universal credit on Housing Benefits Recipients data*
- *DSG (2019) Paper 19: Options paper to remove or reduce the impact of universal credit on the eligible for free school meals distribution indicator*
- *DSG (2019) Paper 18: Assessing the impact of universal credit on the Dependent Children in Out of Work Families data*
- *DSG (2019) Paper 16: Assessing the impact of universal credit on the PLASC FSM data*

Background

3. Either as a result of changes to data collections or the impact of the staggered rollout of Universal Credit, there are a number of datasets within the settlement calculations that are currently frozen. For those datasets that have been frozen due to the impact of the staggered rollout of universal credit, there is no clear exit strategy from the current position.
4. There are a number of datasets used in the settlement for which the collection of data that is due to be used in the 2021-22 settlement will, or could, be impacted by the current situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. In addition to this, there are a number of datasets where the data itself will be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. This paper attempts to set out the issues impacting certain indicators.

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Analysis

7. There are a number of indicators that have been frozen for a number of years, such as the settlement and dispersion indicators and the census-based deprivation indicators, which were not intended to be updated each year; these are not considered in this paper. Table 1, below, lists the indicators that have been frozen as a result of data quality/availability issues:

Table 1: Frozen datasets in the local government settlement

Dataset	Settlement year of frozen data	Reason for freezing	Exit strategy
Pupils eligible for Free School Meals	2019-20	Impact of UC	None
Dependent children in out of work families	2019-20	Impact of UC	None
Housing benefit recipients	2019-20	Impact of UC	None
Total homelessness decisions	2016-17	Data no longer available	Assess new data and review formula

8. Members are asked to begin to consider how and when we may look to unfreeze the above datasets.
9. Table 2, below, lists the datasets where officials are aware that the collection of this data may be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic for the 2021-22 settlement and beyond:

Table 2: Datasets where the collection may be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

Dataset	Nature of impact
Pupil Level Annual School Census	PLASC returns all in and duplicates removed, but validation summaries not carried out. Issue with validation is that schools are not open to provide amended data. Big practical issues in collecting any updated data in summer term
Those Education Other Than At School	Only half of returns received and no validation carried out
Tourism	Some LAs had not collected their 2019 data from local businesses before lockdown. Likely to result in delays for some LAs in a dataset that is ordinarily late
Road lengths	Delay and possibly stop
Street lighting units	LGFWP officials have not yet started this collection exercise and need a sense from members if this is worth pursuing
Local Government Finance collections	Propose to keep schedules where possible, but there may be some delays
Non-PLWB debt	DSG are asked to consider whether it is reasonable for LGFWP colleagues to ask authorities to provide this data and whether an alternative approach to the Pool Rate calculation should be considered

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10. Members are asked to consider whether officials should proceed with the street lighting unit and non-PWLB debt profile data collections.
11. There are a number of datasets where the data itself will be/could be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. While more consideration will need to be given to these in turn, members are asked to provide any specific comment at this point on any specific issues they envisage and/or potential omissions from the following list:
 - CTRS (caseload and income foregone)
 - Free school meals
 - Dependent children in out of work families
 - Benefit claimants
 - Tourism
 - Traffic flow
 - Homelessness
 - Number of deaths
 - Ships arriving at ports
 - Food and trading premises
 - Planning applications received

Conclusion

12. This paper will likely be the first in a series of papers looking at both the exit strategies for currently frozen datasets and the impacts of COVID-19 on the existing settlement datasets. Members are asked to provide comments on how this work might potentially be taken forward.

**Local Government Finance and Workforce Partnerships
Welsh Government**