

## **Correction to Scottish Diligence Statistics 2016-17 and historic diligence data**

### **Core information**

Statistical output: Scottish Diligence Statistics 2016-17 (experimental statistics: data being developed) and historic diligence data

Link to statistical output: [www.aib.gov.uk/about-aib/statistics-data/diligence](http://www.aib.gov.uk/about-aib/statistics-data/diligence)

Name of producer organisation: Accountant in Bankruptcy (AiB)

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Date of correction statement: 28/11/2018

### **Introduction**

1. This short note explains the correction to the Scottish Diligence Statistics 2016-17 and historic diligence data. Information on the statistical outputs affected, as well as more details on the error and the overall impact are provided in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, specifically Practice Quality 3.4: *"...unscheduled corrections that result from errors, should be explained alongside the statistics, being clear on the scale, nature, cause and impact."*
2. Accompanying this correction note are the corrected diligence statistics for 2016-17 and previous years.
3. AiB apologise to our users for any problems or inconvenience caused by this error. If you have any questions please email [samuel.dickinson@gov.scot](mailto:samuel.dickinson@gov.scot).

### **The error**

4. AiB compiles and publishes annual diligence statistics based on information submitted by officers of court – data suppliers for the diligence statistics.
5. On Friday 14 September 2018, AiB were notified by a data supplier of an error in their diligence data previously submitted to AiB. The error affected the current, experimental Scottish Diligence Statistics 2016-17 and historic diligence data.
6. As a consequence of the potential scale of the error, AiB withdrew from its website all diligence statistics publications and accompanying data tables for 2016-17 and previous years on Monday 17 September.
7. A notice was also posted on AiB's website to notify users of the error including an indication of the scale of the error and expected time to release the corrected data. This prompt notification alerting users to the error and subsequent action to withdraw was in line with the [Scottish Government](#)

[Statistician Group Revisions Policy](#), which follows the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

8. The cause of the error was an incorrect data script used by the data supplier to extract the diligence data from their systems before submitting to AiB. This incorrect data was then submitted to AiB.
9. The overall effect of the error was to over report the number of diligences and Charge for Payments in Scotland.
10. The size of the over reporting was significant due to the relative size of the data supplier and the nature of the mistake in the data script. The incorrect data script, assumed to be correct by the data supplier, had been the basis for the data submitted to AiB and previously the Scottish Government's Justice Analytical Services division for several years, which added to the significance of the error.

### **Outputs affected**

11. The error affected both the experimental Scottish Diligence Statistics 2016-17 statistical release and accompanying data tables. Specifically, for the data tables, all tables were affected by the error apart from table 11, which is not based on data from officers of courts.
12. The error affected all tables showing different warrant procedures, diligence processes and data by sheriffdom for all years since 2011-12, when AiB started publishing diligence information.
13. **Data before 2011-12:** Following an agreement in September 2009, responsibility for the collation of diligence statistics was transferred from the Scottish Government's Justice Analytical Services division to AiB. Diligence statistics are available for before 2011-12, although not published by AiB. There is a high likelihood that data before 2011-12 is also affected by the error. At this stage owing to the length of time that has passed and the transfer of responsibility for diligence statistics, it has not been possible to correct diligence data before 2011-12. Users should use data before 2011-12 with caution and when presenting data include a break in the time series between 2010-11 and 2011-12. Comparisons with data before 2011-12 are not advised.

### **Impact**

14. The diligence statistics have been corrected using corrected data from the data supplier. The overall effect of the error has been to over report the number of diligences executed and Charge for Payments served in Scotland since 2011-12. The size of the correction is large: between 2011-12 and 2016-17 the corrected data shows that in total there are 45% fewer diligences executed and 37% fewer Charge for Payments.
15. The corrected data shows a large downward shift in the number of diligence executed and Charge for Payments when compared with the uncorrected data.

In terms of overall trends the uncorrected data was previously showing an increase in diligences executed and Charge for Payments between 2011-12 and 2016-17.

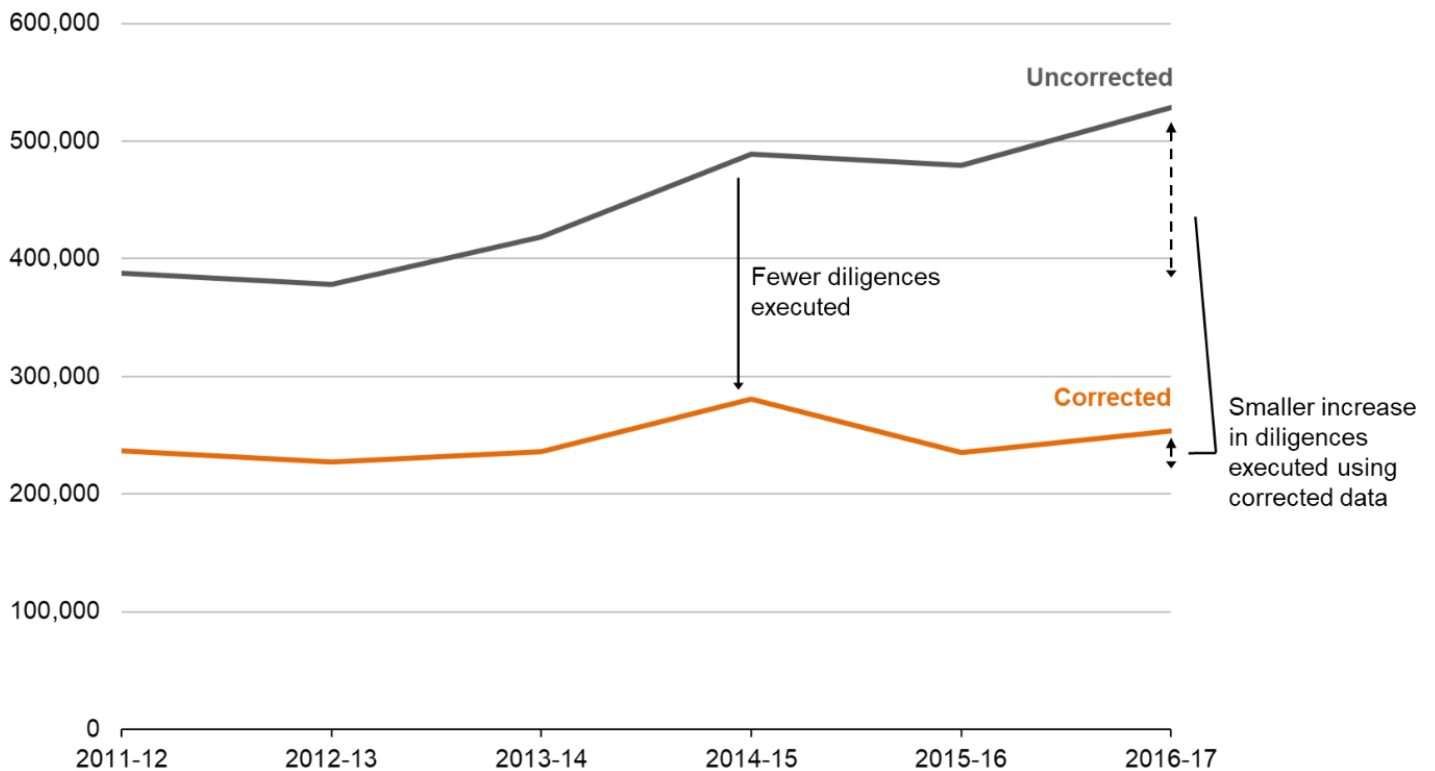
16. Using the corrected data shows a similar trend is present for diligences executed but the size of the increase across the period is smaller. For Charge for Payments the corrected data is now showing a small decrease.
17. When looking at specific warrant procedures, diligence processes and by sheriffdom a similar impact (downward shift in absolute numbers and lower rate of change) is observed in the majority of cases but not all.
18. The following comparisons focus on the correction to the summary tables for diligences executed and Charge for Payments (table 6 and table 1 in the accompanying data tables). Users are advised to refer to the corrected data tables for full details on the corrected data by diligence process and sheriffdom.

*Diligences executed by warrant procedure (all diligence processes) (table 6)*

19. Chart 1 shows a comparison between the uncorrected and corrected data for total diligences executed (all warrant procedures, all diligence processes). Two features, as outlined above, have been highlighted.

**Chart 1: Total diligences executed before and after correction**

Total diligences executed (all warrant procedures, all diligence processes)



20. First, the corrected data shows fewer diligences executed. In 2016-17, total diligences executed using the uncorrected data was 528,755 and have now been corrected to 253,358 (a downward correction of 52% or 275,397 fewer diligences).
21. Second, the corrected data shows a smaller increase in diligences executed across the period. Previously the uncorrected data was showing a 36% increase in diligences executed between 2011-12 and 2016-17. The corrected data shows a smaller increase of 7.1%.
22. Table 1 shows the changes that the correction causes by warrant procedure for each year since 2011-12.

**Table 1: Change between corrected and uncorrected data for diligences executed by warrant procedure**

Warrant procedure	Change between corrected and uncorrected data					
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Summary Warrant (Council Tax and Community Charge)	-149,722	-149,902	-181,390	-207,404	-243,007	-248,904
Other Summary Warrant	-1,734	-755	-989	-839	-1,301	-1,544
Non-Summary Warrant	0	0	0	0	0	-24,949
<b>Total diligences executed</b>	<b>-151,456</b>	<b>-150,657</b>	<b>-182,379</b>	<b>-208,243</b>	<b>-244,308</b>	<b>-275,397</b>

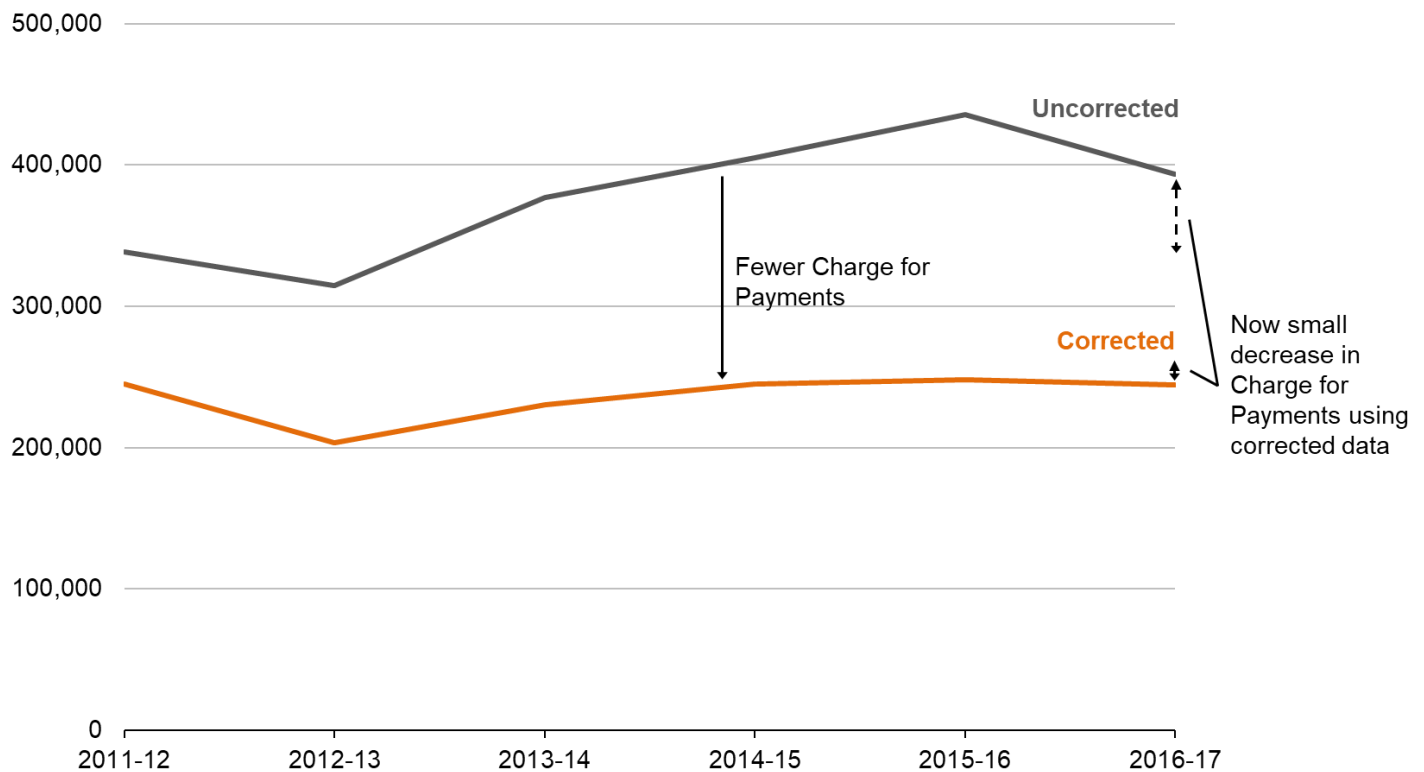
Change = corrected data minus uncorrected data.

*Charge for Payments served by warrant procedure (table 6)*

23. Chart 2 shows a comparison between the uncorrected and corrected data for Charge for Payments. As with total diligences executed, the corrected data shows fewer Charge for Payments but the previous upward trend has been corrected to a small decrease.

**Chart 2: Total Charge for Payments served before and after correction**

Total Charge for Payment Served (all warrant procedures)



24. The corrected data shows fewer Charge for Payments served. In 2016-17, total Charge for Payments served using the uncorrected data was 393,400 and have now been corrected to 244,305 (a downward correction of 38% or 149,095 fewer Charge for Payments).

25. The corrected data is now showing a small decrease in Charge for Payments served across the period. Previously the uncorrected data was showing a 16% increase in Charge for Payments between 2011-12 and 2016-17. The corrected data shows a small decrease of 0.3%.

26. Table 2 shows the changes that the correction causes by warrant procedure for each year.

**Table 2: Change between corrected and uncorrected data for Charge for Payments served by warrant procedure**

Warrant procedure	Change between corrected and uncorrected data					
	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Summary Warrant (Council Tax and Community Charge)	-92,828	-93,837	-130,445	-144,805	-169,778	-136,758
Other Summary Warrant	-830	-1,326	-1,195	-1,727	-2,215	-2,956
Non-Summary Warrant	0	-16,323	-15,027	-13,628	-15,370	-9,381
<b>Total Charge for Payment served</b>	<b>-93,658</b>	<b>-111,486</b>	<b>-146,667</b>	<b>-160,160</b>	<b>-187,363</b>	<b>-149,095</b>

Change = corrected data minus uncorrected data.

## **Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence**

27. The error in the data supplier's data script to extract the diligence data was missed by their internal processes. However, once the data was submitted to AiB, the error should have been picked up because of the size of the over reporting.
28. The length of time that the error was present in the data certainly played a part in not spotting the error sooner. Quality assurance procedures at AiB may not have picked up on the error earlier because of the length of time that the error has been present in the data submitted to AiB.
29. In a scenario where an error of this type was newly introduced into an established time series then the quality assurance procedures that AiB has in place would have flagged the scale of the increase and questions might have been asked. However, due to the error being present for a number of years the checks looking solely at the trend in diligences did not pick up the error. The transfer of responsibility for the diligence statistics may have also been a factor in the acceptance of the incorrect statistics.
30. It is only when stepping back and looking at the absolute number of diligences previously reported in the uncorrected data that a common sense check could have raised questions over their plausibility and identified the error sooner. Diligence statistics are presented at sheriffdom level and not available by local authority – usually key users that could have aided this type of sense check and other forms of data validation.
31. An improved awareness of the background intelligence surrounding the diligence statistics should help in spotting errors and designing further quality assurance procedures to prevent, reduce and limit errors.
32. Communication with our data suppliers will also be improved to increase our understanding of how diligence returns are extracted, completed and submitted.
33. The Scottish Diligence Statistics are currently labelled as 'experimental statistics: data being developed' and were published under this label for the first time in December 2017. Experimental statistics are a type of official statistic that are undergoing development. Outlined in the 2016-17 report was a work programme to evaluate and improve this statistical output. The actions outlined above will be added to this work programme.

## **Future publications**

34. The next update to the Scottish Diligence Statistics with 2017-18 data will be published on Wednesday 19 December where a full statistical release and accompanying data tables is planned.