**Code of conduct for local authorities in England, running WDF reports for local authorities in England**

When data is reported in WDF it undergoes various stages of validation. There are different access levels associated with these stages, which also depend on the type of user. There are three user types with varying levels of access to data:-

1. Public users. Can access reports of published data and view guidance material.
2. Local authority users. Data entry, validation and submission, data and performance indicator (PI) reports.
3. National users. Data validation and all reports.
   - WasteDataFlow helpdesk & validation team (Jacobs)
   - Environment Agency
   - Defra.

A summary of the various validation levels for the WDF data and associated data access permissions is in the table below.

| Data progression within local authority | |
|---|---|
| Level 0 | Data entry. |
| Level 10 | Data rolled up for checking. *Only your local authority can run reports on the data at this level.* |
| Level 20 | Data ready for review by administrator. *Other local authorities can run reports on the data at this level.* |
| Level 30 | Data has been confirmed by administrator and is out of local authority control. |
| **Data progression after local authority** | |
| Level 35 | Data validation by WasteDataFlow (Jacobs) is complete. |
| Level 40 | Data validation by Defra is complete. |
| Level 50 | Data validation by Defra is complete (pre-2006 data only). |

Registered users within a local authority can run any of the reports available through the WDF portal when their data reaches level 10.  Between level 10 and level 30 the data produced in these reports will not have gone through a validation process outside the local authority.  It is not until the data is rolled up to level 35 where data has started to go through the external validation process.

Public users have to register with WDF to be able to run reports. Public users can only run reports when the local authority data has reached level 40 (validated and published by Defra).  Reports available to public users are listed in Annex 1.

The WasteDataFlow system allows local authority users to run reports for their own local authority and all other local authorities in England once their data has reached level 20 and prior to level 40 when it is published officially by Defra through its regular schedule of statistical releases.  Before reaching level 40 the

data is still very much subject to change and so should be treated as provisional.

**Benchmarking and the Annual Statistics on Local Authority Collected Waste in England**

We realise that WasteDataFlow is used as a benchmarking tool for local authorities to see how their neighbouring or similar authorities are treating their waste management.  We recognise the importance of this benchmarking facility but there is a potential tension with the publication of the official Defra statistics published on an annual basis.

The Defra waste and recycling publications are Accredited Official Statistics (formerly known as 'National Statistics').  This is the national standard for official statistics.  This means that the statistics have been produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.  The Code of Practice requires the statistics to be produced, managed and disseminated in accordance with a number of key principles such as integrity, impartiality, sound methods and assured quality.

A key provision of the Code of Practice is that official statistics should be made equally available to all, subject to statutory provisions for pre-release access for preparation of the statistics and releases.

Pre-release access is very strictly enforced. Any breaches involving disclosure of information before publication have to be reported to the Defra Head of Profession for Statistics and to the National Statistician.   A breach statement would be published on both the Defra website and the National Statistics Publication Hub which would give details around the circumstance of the breach.

There is an obvious tension between providing timely access to local authorities for management and benchmarking processes and the publication of the annual statistics which is not helped by the time delay between receipt of data and publication, allowing for data quality assurance.

We would therefore appreciate the co-operation of local authorities in respecting the Code of Practice for Statistics in relation to these statistics and request that local authorities do not divulge their own data or those of other local authorities to third parties in advance of publication of the official statistics. This applies to the Accredited Official Statistics which are published annually towards the end of the year. Publication dates, which are finalised at least one month prior to publication, are available at https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics.