

## WasteDataFlow (WDF) User Group for England – minutes of meeting on 11 March 2019

### 1. Introductions

### 2. Action points from the last meeting were reviewed:

Action point / owner	Progress
<p>Action 1 - Defra/Environment Agency (EA) to add the key points from the discussion on expectations on end destination reporting to WDF reporting documentation, including whether it is acceptable to report the broker as the end processor or to use unknown/multiple sites. Start work to compile a list of accredited reprocessors.</p>	<p>The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been updated.</p> <p>Defra confirmed that there isn't a universal list of accredited reprocessors as they are generally not permitted facilities. They discussed work which has been conducted to match up a number of facilities and sites through a comparison of accredited reprocessors from the National Packaging database and WDF, but this would not cover all possible reprocessors. Local authorities (LAs) were encouraged to report on the final reprocessor; where this is not at all possible and they could only report the broker, they were asked to add a comment in the appropriate comments box.</p>
<p>Action 2 - Validation - Include a note in the next newsletter on the use of comments supplied through the data QA trigger checks.</p>	<p>Completed. Defra noted that they find it highly useful if notes are added when validation checks are triggered. This is especially true when LAs are aware of changes which may have affected recycling rates, i.e. new treatment plants, new contractors, and other changes impacting waste collection and disposal systems.</p>
<p>Action 3 - "Waste from Households" figures in the "Raw Data Plus" and recycling reports have been QA'd. Defra and Jacobs to agree desk instructions and timetable for release of these reports for LAs.</p>	<p>Recycling report released for LA use. Defra confirmed that the recycling report has now been extensively checked and will be released to LAs shortly (Jacobs later gave a walkthrough of this report). The Raw Data Plus figures have also been QA'd. These haven't yet been released because Defra expects that extra guidance will need to be issued. Defra requested and received volunteers to QA and assess the usefulness of the Raw Data Plus download.</p>
<p>Action 4 - Fly-Tipping Module (FTM) time-out issue affecting some users.</p>	<p>Jacobs have monitored situation; not aware of this causing ongoing problems. Should the issue arise in future, a review on whether a time-out warning message ought to be added can be conducted.</p>

Action 5 - Fly-tipping average weights of loads.	Defra contacted LAs. Following discussions with LAs, Defra have decided not to publish these figures given concerns about their robustness. LAs queried whether the standard weights in the WDF guidance will be updated. Defra responded that this may be difficult without more data being provided by LAs on their own experience. A recent request for information on average fly-tipping weights received useful responses from LAs, but the amount of information was not viewed as sufficient for updating the figures.
Action 6 - Civic amenity sites – can data for multiple CA sites (Q14) be entered as a single block rather than site by site?	Defra have been reviewing this and have received feedback on the usefulness of site-level civic amenity site data; it is considered that this information is useful and will be helpful in future modelling around waste arisings at borough level.
Action 7 - Q100 input screen layout changes.	Completed.

LAs queried what the reporting requirements were under the new Circular Economy Package (CEP) proposals in relation to reprocessors. Defra responded that under the new CEP, recycling targets will apply to municipal waste more broadly, i.e. not just LA waste, but the wider Commercial and Industrial (C&I) sector also. The proposal was for recycled waste to be counted when entering its final recycling process. Draft EU guidance on the calculation points for the key materials was under consideration and could mean counting recycling later in the process rather than currently at the point of acceptance at the gate of the reprocessor.

LAs raised concerns about releasing the Waste from Household (WfH) recycling figures at LA level to a wider audience. Defra clarified they would not rush to release the Recycling report publicly and that they would welcome feedback from LAs. With regard to the Raw Data Plus download initially, either an extract, or the complete Raw Data Plus file would be released to LAs only. Longer-term, Defra confirmed that the intention would be for both the recycling report, and Raw Data Plus download to be released to the general public.

LAs commented that consistent and up-to-date weight conversion figures would be useful for calculating fly-tipping tonnages from household sources and adding this to non-household on a consistent basis across LAs. One LA found the difference between the fly-tipping weight estimates calculated using the WDF guidance and on the basis of their own analysis to be quite considerable.

**ACTION 8** – Defra to review the standard weight information supplied by LAs and look at options to update these standard weights. If any other LAs were able to contribute information this would be appreciated. Defra will also investigate whether data on edoc (a voluntary record of waste transfers) or held by WRAP could usefully inform this analysis.

### **3. Update from Defra:**

#### **3i. Highlights from the National statistics (WDF and FTM 2017/18)**

Defra updated the LAs with highlights from the recently published “Statistics on waste managed by LAs in England in 2017/18” (published 11<sup>th</sup> December 2018) and “Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2017/18” (published 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018). Key points included

#### **Statistics on waste managed by LAs in England in 2017/18:**

- WfH recycling rate for 2017 45.2% (+0.3 PP on 2016).
- WfH recycling rate includes metal recovered from incinerator bottom ash. This increases the overall rate for 2017 by 0.8 percentage points.
- The rolling 12-month WfH recycling rate to end March 2018 was 44.8 % – down 0.3 percentage points.
- Total LA managed waste in 2017/18 was down by 2.6% to 25.6 million tonnes:
  - Landfill down 22.3% to 3.2 million tonnes.
  - Incineration up by 6.5% to 10.8 million tonnes.

#### **Fly-tipping statistics for England, 2017/18:**

- 1 million fly-tipping incidents in England (-1% from 2016/17).
- Two thirds (66%) of fly-tips involved household waste.
- 47% of incidents were on highways.
- LAs carried out 494,000 enforcement actions, an increase of 4% from 2016/17.
- 33% of incidents were of the size category “small van load”.
- 4% of incidents were of the size category “tipper lorry load” or larger. The cost of clearance for these £12.2 million.
- The number of fixed penalty notices issued increased by 20% to 69,000.

During the presentation, Defra noted that their QA process had been more extensive this year and emphasised the usefulness of LA notes to this process. Defra requested that LAs make use of the “high-level summary” in the validation workbook, as this has similarities to the kinds of issues which are often flagged during the Defra QA process.

LAs queried whether the fly-tipping costs of waste figures are going to be renewed. Defra confirmed that this is desirable, but that they hadn’t received enough information from LAs on the updated cost of clearance for fly-tipped waste. Deriving costs is complex and would take significant resource so was unlikely to be prioritised at this time.

#### **3ii. Policy Update and topical issues including 25 Year Environment Plan, Resources and Waste Strategy, EU Circular Economy Proposals**

Defra updated the LAs on consultations covering collection consistency, packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), a tax on plastic packaging, and the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers.

During the presentation, Defra gave an overview of its intention to improve consistency through a core set of materials to be collected for recycling from all households, including flats. LAs queried whether there’s a market for this specific core set of materials. Defra responded that they

recognise challenges on the demand side for some recyclable materials, but emphasised that producers paying more through EPR and more consistent collection schemes should help to drive up demand from end markets.

During the presentation, Defra summarized plans to make the guidance on collection scheme consistency statutory. The EA queried whether it would be possible to easily transpose this guidance into standard contract paragraphs for arrangements with waste contractors. Defra confirmed that this is a possibility and something that they'd be very interested to hear views on, but that the proposals have not yet reached this stage of development.

Following a comment from LAs, Defra confirmed that the impacts of adjusting collection frequencies on recycling rates and service quality are within the scope of the consultation. They confirmed that there is potential to alter the statutory guidance on this depending on the views received.

Some LAs described experiences of collection approaches outside of those discussed as being more effective. Defra agreed that evidence showing multi-stream collection processes to be more effective overall did not mean that this would be the case for all LAs. Defra agreed to circulate a link to the impact assessment on this topic to LAs with the minutes.

During the presentation, Defra summarized two of the competing DRS schemes under consideration for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland have already conducted their own consultation). These are 'All-in' and 'On-the-go'. The 'All-in' option specifies no restriction on the size of drinks containers which are within the scope of the scheme, while the 'on-the-go' option specifies a maximum volume of 750ml and excludes multipacks. LAs queried whether packaging retailers would simply produce, and consumers purchase, larger bottles to avoid the requirements of the 'on-the-go' option. Defra responded that they don't expect the incentives towards these actions to be strong, given that all producers of waste would be subject to EPR principles, and would therefore bear the costs of waste reprocessing regardless of whether they are within the scope of the DRS.

Defra provided links to the consultations and specified the closing dates:

- 12 May (23:59) for HMT Plastic Packaging Tax:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/plastic-packaging-tax>
- 13 May (23:59) for Defra consultations:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/waste-and-recycling-making-recycling-collections-consistent-in-england>  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/packaging-waste-changing-the-uk-producer-responsibility-system-for-packaging-waste>  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/introducing-a-deposit-return-scheme-drs-for-drinks-containers-bottles-and-cans>
- Please respond via the Citizen Space questionnaire.

Subject to consultation, Defra expect the plastic packaging tax to be introduced in 2022. Subject to consultation, Defra expect the roll-out of a DRS, proposals for mandatory separate food waste collections, and EPR for packaging to come into force in 2023.

On the subject of mandatory food waste collections, Defra recognised the need for flexibility given that existing contracts are often long-term and difficult to amend. Defra stated that new burdens arising from the proposed changes would be assessed and net costs funded. This would be both upfront and ongoing costs.

### **3iii. Defra – waste tracking service – overview of work so far and position**

Defra gave an overview of work so far on the waste tracking project. At the end of March, Defra will receive the end of phase 1 reports, along with show and tells from the 5 suppliers on the initial discovery work. If the project progresses into phase 2 to develop a prototype, up to 2 of the 5 projects may be selected with funding of up to £500,000 each. Further information on the challenges and the five suppliers is available from the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/smart-tracking-of-waste-across-the-uk-govtech-catalyst-competition-winners-announced>

Defra noted that a big driver for the waste tracking project is to help address waste crime. An effective system would reduce coverage gaps, provide more detailed information on the production of secondary materials, and allow users to clearer identify waste carriers, producers and receivers. It's important to establish exactly where responsibilities for reporting lie so that waste can be tracked throughout the system.

### **3iv. Update on WDF contract**

Defra provided an update on WDF. The current contract would run to January 2020 so Defra were looking at options for continued data reporting provision. If progressed and successful, WasteTracking may provide the long-term solution but would take some time to fully implement.

## **4. Jacobs demonstration of new Q100 screen layout and features.**

Jacobs walked LAs through the new Q100 screen layout and updated features.

LAs queried whether there was a way to print Q100 branches to review offline. Jacobs responded that although this wasn't an option, it is now possible to expand and contract the tree window, allowing authorities to customise the layout according to preference and the device being used. It's also possible to view data for past years for year-on-year comparisons.

LAs noted that the repetition involved in entering data at the final destination node could be burdensome. Jacobs drew attention to the autocomplete feature for final destination nodes, which has been refreshed.

Jacobs went on to demonstrate the new recycling report, which will shortly be made available to LAs and higher access users, but not the general public.

## 5. LA feedback, sharing advice and experience, best practice, suggestions for improvements

An LA queried that the land type categories used within the Fly-Tipping Module (FTM) – highways, council land, private residence etc. – are very broad and this limits the potential to interrogate the data in order to distinguish rural and urban crime rates. Would it be possible to break down the definition of highways to ‘highways – urban’ and ‘highways –rural’?

Defra responded that while it was possible to add extra categories within WDF, producing a clear definition of what constitutes an urban or rural location could be difficult, and that this would be likely to mean different things to different LAs. Some LAs agreed that having to define areas as urban/rural would add additional burden on contractors for the fly-tipping statistics. Other LAs added that they were considering mapping their fly-tipping hotspots to a Geographical Information Mapping System (GIS), which could be overlaid with the urban/rural definition by coordinate.

An LA noted that in their case, FTM submissions require input from numerous different departments which makes collating and interpreting the data a time-consuming exercise. They asked what measures other LAs had taken to resolve this.

One local authority gave a brief overview of how fly-tipping is dealt with and recorded in their authority, using a tablet system to record fly-tipping locations and sizes remotely from incident sites. In their experience, this enabled a more straightforward compiling of data for the FTM. They were content for the Jacobs to contact them directly for more information. Defra added that while fly-tipping on private land was outside the scope of WDF, other initiatives, including a fly-tipping app, were being developed and may fill in this gap.

**Action 9** – Jacobs agreed to share the contact details between these two authorities for further discussion.

An LA raised a query relating to the use of software to check, store and upload data into WDF. In most known examples, unitary authorities use Excel spreadsheets while disposal authorities use either off-the-shelf or designed software. Spreadsheets have limitations, especially when considering the increasing range of materials being covered and the frequency of destination changes, so has anybody found a reliable and flexible system at a cost that a unitary authority could afford?

LAs discussed the software solutions currently employed for aggregating and submitting data to WDF. The approaches used were varied and generally bespoke to specific LAs. Some LAs mentioned that off-the-shelf systems were often expensive, while others were cautious that contractors would increase costs at the point of renewal once systems were embedded. Several authorities suggested that a joined-up approach among LAs, through a consortium, would mean that less effort would need to be repeated, more expertise could be shared, and that LAs would have more leverage in negotiations with contractors. It was agreed that while Defra has a role to play in facilitating these discussions, LAs who volunteer would be responsible for coordinating this consortium as a group.

**Action 10** – Defra to consider how to support this consortium for alternative means of collecting and entering WDF/FTM data, including distributing the contact details for the LAs who offered to lead on setting this up.

Defra confirmed that on waste tracking, a key requirement is to have a system that can process data on waste outputs from LAs robustly, whether through an API, data entry tool, or other approach, so that the waste tracking system can be integrated with the data production processes LAs have in place. This project is at an early stage of development and a decision on whether to proceed to phase 2 had not been taken. If it does however proceed, this type of information and user engagement would be a strong feature of further work to ensure that user needs are met.

An LA requested clarification on how far down the waste chain authorities should report. With specific examples including whether there is a need to report secondary and tertiary off-takers for MBT and secondary sort facilities. This query also referred to an article published by Let'sRecycle on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018 entitled 'Agency warns of 'major problems' if quality levels not met' which discussed this point.

Defra said that under new CEP proposals, they expect more attention on how waste statistics are reported, with more detail and greater transparency to be needed, particularly further down the waste chain. The intention is for WasteTracking to make reporting easier and provide this transparency in future. At present, LAs need to continue efforts to provide as much detail as possible. This would help reduce the risk of discrepancies being observed in the recycling reported by reprocessors under WDF and the values produced under waste tracking.

Following an LA query, Defra confirmed that there is no formal guidance on how frequently LAs should update any compositional analyses which inform the optional household/non-household waste recycled ratios. It was expected that any splits would be representative and relevant. If LAs chose not to enter this split, a default is calculated based on the ratio of household/non-household waste collected for each waste stream.

LAs asked whether carbon metrics could be produced automatically by the WDF system. They added that this was a requirement for LAs in London and that time could be saved if a report were in place, rather than LAs having to re-enter WDF data into another system. Defra noted that carbon metrics calculations were more complex and would require composition data, but such metrics were part of some wider thinking under the Resource and Waste Strategy. Defra appreciated the general point so agreed to keep this in mind for the future once this became clearer but did not think it would be realistic to prioritise this through WDF during 2019 as a development to the current contract.

The EA added that the 25-year plan metrics would be the focus moving forward over the next few years. They agreed that money could be saved if carbon metrics were an extra report on the WDF system.

**Action 11** – Defra to keep in mind possible demand for carbon metrics reporting for future prioritisation.

## **6. Update from Jacobs on highlights or new issues relating to:**

- **Updated validation process and checks**
- **Common data-recording queries or misreporting errors**

Jacobs noted that they'd recently raised more queries on Refuse-Derived Fuel (RDF) to LAs. They noted that sometimes the outputs from RDF plants are shown as process loss, whereas in almost all cases, it should instead be noted as incineration. Jacobs noted that in quite rare cases RDF might also be landfilled or sent elsewhere.

Jacobs commented on the updated flags for changes in the amounts of materials sent to recycling/incineration/landfill and asked LAs whether they found the thresholds for these checks to have been set appropriately. LAs with experience of them agreed that they were, and confirmed that they'd been useful for flagging changes requiring further comment or investigation. Defra added that for these flags in particular they'd expect to see comments. They're extremely useful when looking to explain or summarise changes to policy and for publication.

An LA asked whether a further check could be added for changes in total household waste tonnages arising.

<b>Action 12</b> – Defra to consider adding a fourth check to WDF to flag changes in total household waste arising.
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## **7. A.O.B.**

On waste exports, the EA updated that India is introducing tighter restrictions on the import of waste plastics. At the moment, some plastic is being diverted to Turkey. They emphasised the importance of checking the validity of reprocessor details given the changes taking place and the likelihood that there will be some new destinations.

## **8. Date of next meeting and any requests for agenda items for the next meeting**

Date of next meeting was tabled but likely to be scheduled for September 2019.

LAs who volunteered to establish a consortium for standardising LA waste data processing for WDF offered to provide an update at the next UG meeting. It was noted that this would be a good opportunity for new members to become involved.