

WasteDataFlow (WDF) User Group for England – minutes of meeting on 18 September 2017

1. **Introductions** – Karen Bradley announced that would be her last User group meeting as she was moving on from Waste Statistics, and that Alex Clothier would be taking on her role.
2. **Action points** from the last meeting were reviewed.
3. **Jacobs overview** – main points:-
 - Attendance at training webinars – there remained a high drop-out rate for a number of courses. The reasons were not clear e.g. technical issues joining or competing work demands or other factors.

ACTION : Jacobs would welcome feedback on reasons for this with any practical solutions along with prior notification if any LA needed to pull out of training they had registered for.

- Reports run from WDF – Decline in number of reports being run – perhaps due to authorities viewing Indicators as less important compared to other matters they had to deal with or possibly the reduction in available reports.
- Validation – High-level commentary checks to be introduced for total recycling and incineration and landfill to give opportunity for authorities to comment on collection or disposal changes that may affect their figures. Jacobs and Defra explained that the commentary checks would be a 'For response' check; WDF would not check the detail of responses just that it addresses the question. Information such as changes to collection arrangements, including charging or switches in treatment is all really helpful contextual information that assists in data interpretation and removes the need for further enquiries. When the high-level checks are rolled out, Defra said they would be under review. The aims of the high-level checks are to assist Jacobs and Defra in QA of data. These will be introduced for Q2 2017/18 data.

Data reporting

- An inconsistency with the way different local authorities were reporting treatment to the same facility within WDF had been identified. In this example 58 separate local authorities reported waste to a facility, some reporting it as a MRF facility and reporting rejections from it, whilst others were reporting it as a final destination (final reprocessor). WDF established that the facility is a secondary MRF and that rejections should be reported. The particular local authorities using this facility had been contacted with advice but local authorities were reminded more generally of the need for complete and accurate reporting.
- User-defined splits for household (HH) and non-household (non-HH) waste: these are optional but users are reminded to report splits accurately if these are completed and to take care that figures are entered in the correct box. The figures in the user-defined split boxes are treated as a ratio even if only one of the figures is completed; so if only

one of the figures is completed the split is 100% on that side, even if the actual tonnage entered is not equivalent to 100% of the tonnage for that node. If, for example, a user wants to assign a user-defined split of 80% non-household, the tonnage equivalent to 80% non-household must be entered in the non-HH box and the remaining tonnage (20%) entered in the household box. If the figure is entered just in the non-HH box, this will assign 100% of the tonnage as non-household.

- The same applies with the optional user-defined splits for “waste from households” and “waste not from households”. Sometimes transcription errors have occurred with tonnages entered in household and non-waste from household rather than household and waste from household boxes.
- Section 2.6.7 Reporting of rejected recyclate – Jacobs drew attention to refined guidance for items such as wood and carpet to cover situations where the waste had been separately collected for recycling but subsequently incinerated possibly because of market conditions or lack of treatment facilities. This updated document is available to download on the [guidance section](#) of the WasteDataFlow website.
- “Other/exempt” facilities. Jacobs said that the usage of ‘other/exempt’ should only be used for facilities which are genuinely licence-exempt (“exempt”) or otherwise not on the WDF selection list (“other”). For example, all incinerators except very small incinerators ought to be listed as properly licensed facilities. The expectation is that for the majority of situations ‘other/exempt’ should not be used. The Environment Agency maintain the national list of all permitted facilities (WDF selection list) and if local authorities need a facility adding to the list they should get in touch with the EA; guidance on how to update the selection list is available on the [guidance section](#) of the WasteDataFlow website. Where the facilities are genuinely exempt, the name and address of the facility should still be provided by the WDF user.

ACTION : Jacobs to include these pointers/reminders in the next Newsletter.

Developments

Julian Fox gave an overview of work to make data from Question 100 more usable. The data “Raw data plus” is presented in a spreadsheet with one row of data for each node, making it much easier to trace waste destinations. A second report covering recycling was also being developed and would hopefully address a question raised by one LA for extra detail to make it easier to unpick data feeding into the recycling indicator. These will initially only be available for LAs, and depending on usefulness and feedback will be made publicly available later.

It was queried by the Environment Agency whether A-codes are included in the “raw data plus” or recycling reports outputs. They are not, but there is a column for these in WDF data (sourced from the Environment Agency) although it may not be fully populated in data received from the EA.

Internet browsers

Julian Fox presented a chart of browsers used to access WDF. He pointed out that access to WDF using internet Explorer 7 was now very low at about 1%, with most using IE 11 or Chrome. Further WDF development would not be tested on IE7 (though the existing WDF site would still work OK) so users would need to be mindful of the need to upgrade browsers.

ACTION : LAs on older versions of IE (pre-IE 9 especially) were encouraged to upgrade to newer version, with support from their IT departments as appropriate.

4. Defra Update

Timeliness and quality of reporting data

Lindsay Holmes (Defra) – said that reporting and timeliness had gradually improved following the introduction of question 100. However she reminded the meeting that just one late return can hold up the data clearing process, and this year one authority had held up Q4 data with the net result Defra had lost 3 weeks' processing time, consequently we have yet to announce a publication date. Defra thanked local authorities for their continued support in providing data.

ACTION : Catrin Smith (Jacobs) – asked that if LAs were anticipating problems getting returns in on time it would be helpful for them to let Jacobs know.

A local authority referred back to Jacobs' charts showing the timeliness of WDF returns and asked how some authorities managed to make their returns so early – was it just that some authorities had much easier reporting, for example unitary authorities perhaps? Julian Fox thought that these were mainly unitary authorities. Robert Andrew pointed out that there were 10 or 12 authority returns in each quarter which were rolled up prematurely in error, so this makes the position look better than it actually is.

EU Circular Economy Proposals – Lindsay Holmes gave an overview of current ambitious EU proposals with the European Parliament proposing a 70% recycling target for municipal waste and a 5% target to reduce landfill, 80% target for the reuse or recycling of packaging waste.

EU Council position is ambitious but more achievable e.g. 60% recycling target. The Council, Parliament and the Commission will negotiate a final compromise package and it was expected that this would conclude and be voted on by the end of 2017. However as the transposition deadline will come into force after the UK has left the EU it was not clear how far the UK will need to implement any measures.

SurveyMonkey feedback exercise

Karen Bradley (Defra) introduced the results of the SurveyMonkey feedback exercise. Before going into the breakout session exercises there was some general comment on current arrangements. It was commented how useful it is to keep a record of historical

queries. Jacobs commented that they are currently looking at signposting of guidance and a restructure of the WDF website to help navigation.

5. Breakout session

The aim of these breakout sessions was to identify actions which can practically be taken forward based on the issues raised in the recent WDF User SurveyMonkey exercise.

Key points:

Salford – Validation

- Comments from the SurveyMonkey feedback came after the new validation process started, which saw the introduction of validation checks being raised with the LA during the roll-up process.
- Easier to go back after new validation process installed.
- Sometimes LAs not getting notified of data being rolled down to level 30.
- LAs like to have a consistent member of WDF staff who validates their returns each quarter. Helpful to have the same validator for WCA and WDA.
- Validation spreadsheet – LAs like orange highlighting which highlights potential discrepancies within the data, but reviewing data for outstanding discrepancy not easily identifiable so can they be made more clear.
- Helpdesk staff – there are some cases where inconsistent advice was received, for example how to count the number of HH that receive a garden waste collection when the service is subscription only.
- XML upload – although the XML uploader does save time in the long term, it was stated that it is quite difficult to set up so needs to be made easier.

London – Validation and data entry

- Useful to be able to more readily see the mass balance on Q100 data entry on screen.
- Screen scrolling functionality.
- Useful to keep FAQs live.
- Question by question guidance viewed as very useful.

London – Reporting

- LAs interested in being able to compare to other local LAs – particularly on recycling including material comparisons.

- Mainly used summaries of the indicators, not such need for detailed raw data although did want to be able to see more detail on materials recycled.

London – Guidance

- Useful to have the same validator each quarter.
- On-screen highlighting to identify any data entry discrepancies as entering data would be useful.
- XML upload was difficult to set up but once done was beneficial.

6. LA feedback

- Process rejections from a recycling reprocessor – a local authority requested that the guidance notes be updated to advise how to deal with this. It was suggested (as discussed earlier in the meeting) that section 2.6.7 of the main WDF guidance covered this. This updated document is available to download on the [guidance section](#) of the WasteDataFlow website.
- Fridges and Freezers – a question was asked about the use of the data at Question 26 of the WDF – the number of fridges and freezers. The Environment Agency confirmed that the question was introduced originally from when there were disposal issues related to the fridges and freezers and that this number can be seen to increase when the value of scrap falls, increasing fly-tipping, so it is still used. The data is sometimes used for answering FOIs. A local authority commented that they apply a standard conversion factor of 45kg to work out numbers from tonnages recorded elsewhere in WDF.
- Stockpiling of waste – A local authority queried whether it would be useful to be able to log the % of waste sent for processing but held back for processing later, so that a subsequent quarter's data can be adjusted. Julian Fox said that the imbalance will show up in the validation and this could be noted in comments. This scenario was normal in the data and not felt to be a major issue.
- Back allocation – training. A local authority raised that the back-allocation process (for two-tier authorities) causes some confusion and that a step-by-step guide would perhaps be helpful. Julian Fox said that section 4.2 of the WDF guidance has an example of this – if this didn't meet needs it could be looked at.
- Waste systems data – A local authority asked if there was any scope for a system providing a unified data platform across LAs. Defra were not aware of any current commercial system that would provide this functionality. Defra had secured funding to undertake some discovery work to look at user needs and systems for waste data so it could be possible to pick this up as part of this work. Detailed breakdown of National Indicator (comparator) reports – one attendee had provided spreadsheet examples of how he would like to see more detailed breakdowns of data feeding into the

comparator reports for old National Indicators. There was some agreement that this would be useful.

ACTION : Jacobs and Defra to look into the feasibility and costs of adding Cvars reports to WDF.

- Level 25 roll-up. This would affect two-tier authorities. *{Where WCA data would be rolled up to level 25 for checking by WDA before data is then rolled up to level 30}*. It was pointed out that level 20-30 checking process is standard across all regions – so any change to this process would need to be agreed with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Jacobs commented that the following approach with existing functionality would help to meet this requirement:
 - Level 0 – data entry. Person entering data reviews and rolls to Level 10 when happy with the data.
 - Level 10 – WCA data admin reviews and approves to Level 20 when happy with the data.
 - Level 20 – WDA user reviews WCA data at this level and either approves to Level 30, or informs WCA administrator that it is now OK to approve to Level 30.
- A query was raised about a fly-tipping report still showing street litter control notices even though this is outdated legislation. On investigation this is thought to relate to a FlyCapture report so is outside the control of WasteDataFlow (and pre-dates the addition of the Fly-tipping Module to WDF).

7. Any other business

- Private waste collections – Mike Tregent raised the issue of private operators offering pay to collect services and how this might affect the reporting waste figures given that the material collected is municipal waste. This is becoming more common with a couple in London and one in Sheffield and another operator in Northampton.
- Recycling sites – Julian Fox asked what LAs were doing with regard to recycling sites – as there seemed to be an increased tendency for this role to be taken on by supermarkets. A local authority agreed that this was becoming more prevalent and that they had closed their recycling sites.

8. Date of next meeting.

The lower than unusual attendance at this meeting was noted and thought to be a product of higher post-holiday workloads and timing relating to the last survey period. It was suggested that a return to end Jan/Feb & July meetings were generally better times for LAs to attend.

LAs are welcome to suggest agenda items and items to present on that are of interest to the group.

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Cameron Curran	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Charlie Stearn	Aylesbury Vale District Council
Alex Clothier	Defra
Karen Bradley	Defra
Lindsay Holmes	Defra
Steve Sanderson	EA seconded to Defra
Iain Stevens	Devon County Council
Andy Mayes	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Mike Tregent	Environment Agency
Richard Booth	Greater Manchester Waste Disposal Authority
Janine Stevens-Hoare	Hampshire County Council
Dayer Abdullah	Haringey LB
Pauline Peddie	Haringey LB
Suzanne Phillips	Hertfordshire County Council
Catrin Smith	Jacobs
Julian Fox	Jacobs
Robert Andrew	Jacobs
Debbie Fillingham	Lancashire County Council
James Gazzard	Leicestershire County Council
Gary Fisher	Middlesbrough Borough Council
Chris Harbottle	Milton Keynes Council
Carole Taylor	Pendle Borough Council
Rebecca Piper	Suffolk County Council
Nav Rai	Warwickshire County Council
Vicky Pudner	WRAP