

WasteDataFlow (WDF) User Group for England – minutes of meeting on 19th October 2021

1 Introductions

As was done in October 2020, the User Group meeting was hosted online.

The introduction outlined the planned schedule for the day, including a brief outline on how attendees can contribute to the meeting through providing feedback and general comments.

2 Actions points from last meeting (October 2020)

Action point / owner	Progress
Action 1 Defra to seek feedback on LAs' use of data via Newsletter.	Done.
Action 2 Defra to seek assistance from a few user group members to learn about data gathering and QA process at LA level.	This was shelved due to the continuing Covid-19 epidemic and lack of Defra resource. This was an Office for Statistics Regulations (OSR) recommendation so will need to be revisited in 2022.
Action 3 Waste data management system survey – updated list of questions to be agreed with Defra and circulated via WDF newsletter.	A draft survey has been prepared but this initiative has not been progressed due to uncertainties around future LA waste data management obligations following the launch of the Waste Tracking Service (WTS). Agreed that WTS team would consider whether to take this forward as part of LA consultation process.
Action 4 Facilities shown in Q100 – Defra to check on procedures for updates.	Requests for updates to add facilities has been improved by Environment Agency. Some development work about to be started to greatly simplify process of local authorities using selection lists in WDF.

3 Update from Defra Waste Statistics Team

3.1 Waste Tracking Service (WTS)

Defra provided an update on the WTS. There are provisions to mandate the service through the Environment Bill and a consultation is expected to be published soon. The WTS will perform the following duties:

- Track waste and resource flows through the economy.
- Tackle waste crime – such as waste being misclassified, taken to illegal waste sites and waste being shipped abroad illegally.
- Identify actions to support a shift to the circular economy – supporting secondary material markets and boosting productivity.

Defra went on to say that the implementation of the WTS has been split into 4 products:

- Product 1 – Where is waste going [alpha assessment passed in July 2021].
- Product 2 – Who is handling the waste [mobilisation October 2021].
- Product 3 – What happens to the waste [defining scope/high-level requirements].
- Product 4 – Tracking waste from source to final destination [defining scope/high-level requirements].

Individuals are encouraged to actively engage with the development of the WTS and can do so through the following:

- Blog published last week.
- User Panel: Help shape waste tracking by taking part in user research and usability testing of software.
- Regular Newsletter.

More information on the above points can be accessed here:

<https://defradigital.blog.gov.uk/2021/10/13/user-panel-is-key-to-success-for-the-waste-tracking-service/>

Those in attendance were then offered the opportunity to raise any questions. One attendee asked what the proposed timescale for the implementation of the WTS was, which Defra confirmed as currently being late 2023 and early 2024.

A further question was raised on whether WTS would ultimately replace WDF, and whether it would include EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) and DRS (Deposit Return Scheme). Defra confirmed that the intention is for WTS to replace WDF. The information collected through the WTS could also fulfil some of the needs for EPR and DRS so there is a level of collaboration across the projects.

3.2 Policy update and topical issues

Defra provided an update on the Environment Bill, which sets out ambitions on green governance and for protecting the environment, including resource and waste management. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent in 2021.

Defra then highlighted that the Environment Bill specifically includes sections on EPR, DRS and collection consistency – all of which were part of the 2021 consultations; the results of the consultation are currently being analysed.

The Bill also includes a provision for a plastics packaging tax which will take effect from April 2022, with the tax being applied to packaging with less than 30% recycled content. These policies are in support of the UK Government's commitment to recycle 65% of municipal waste by 2035.

The next steps in relation to the Environment Bill are as follows:

- The Government will publish their responses to the EPR, DRS and consistency consultation, which will be done in due course.
- Government will draft secondary legislation for the policies in 2022.
- Government will consult further on statutory guidance for consistency in 2022.

It is recognised that the proposals will mean new duties for local government. The additional burden presented by these will be appraised in line with New Burdens Doctrine and net costs of new duties will be covered

3.3 Highlights from 2019/20 statistics and Q1 2020/21

Defra summarised the national statistics for 2019/20. These had been delayed due to reporting difficulties experienced by some local authorities during the Covid-19 epidemic. The following key measures were highlighted:

- "Waste from Households" (WfH) recycling rate for 2019 45.5% (+0.9 PP on 2018).
- The rolling 12-month WfH recycling rate to end March 2020 was also 45.5% (+0.4 PP on 2018/19).
- Total LA managed waste in 2019/20 was unchanged from 2018/19 at 25.6 million tonnes, with the following changes being highlighted: -
 - a. Landfill was down 21.3% to 2.2 million tonnes.
 - b. Incineration was up by 3.8% to 11.6 million tonnes.

Defra also provided an update on the official statistics release for Quarter 1 2020/21. A one-off ad hoc publication covering the first national lockdown during the Covid-19 epidemic. Key measures highlighted were as follows:

- WfH recycling rate was 45.0% (-3.4 PP on 2019).
- Waste from Households was 5.7 million tonnes, a decrease of 3.3%. Within that total:
 - a. Recycling was 2.6 million tonnes down 10.1%.
 - b. Residual waste was 3.1 million tonnes up 2.8%.
- Total LA managed waste in Q1 was down 0.5 to 6.3 million tonnes – a decrease of 7.4%. The following changes being highlighted: -
 - a. Landfill was down 34.0% to 0.4 million tonnes.
 - b. Incineration was up by 7.5% to 3.0 million tonnes.

Defra went on to state that there was great variability in the impact of Covid-19 on local authorities. Time at home had increased tonnages of residual waste in particular. Cancelled or reduced dry recycling and organics collections had also increased residual waste tonnages. Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) closures also impacted upon waste arisings due

to their closures and restrictions once re-opened. Many local authorities with commercial and industrial (C&I) waste streams had seen significant reductions in those tonnages.

Defra also provided an update on the fly-tipping statistics for 2019/20, summarising the following key points:

- For the 2019/20 year, local authorities in England dealt with just under 1 million (976,000) fly-tipping incidents.
- The most common place for fly-tipping to occur was on highways (pavements and roads).
- The most common size category for fly-tipping incidents in 2019/20 was equivalent to a 'small van load'.
- Local authorities carried out 474,000 enforcement actions in 2019/20.
- The number of court fines issued increased from 2,056 (30%) to 2,671 in 2019/20.

Defra thanked local authorities for continuing to provide high-quality data during such a challenging time, adding that data validation, quality assurance and production of statistics releases was now back to a more normal timetable.

4 2020/21 statistics publication schedule

Defra said that publication of official statistics for fly-tipping for 2020/21 and the national statistics on local authority waste arisings had been provisionally set as November and December.

Post-meeting update: Publication dates have now been announced as 8th December for the fly-tipping statistics and 15th December for the local authority waste and recycling statistics.

5 WDF reporting – feedback and discussion

5.1 Defra – Validation during 2020/21

Both Defra and the WDF team provided feedback on the validation of data during 2020/21. The validation thresholds were revised in early 2020/21 owing to the impact of Covid-19 – with the thresholds being increased in order to reduce the number of queries raised, hopefully easing burdens on LA reporting. It was confirmed that pre-Covid-19 validation thresholds had now been reinstated for reporting of 2021/22 data.

Defra went on to encourage local authorities to provide detailed comments wherever possible, both as comments in their return and in response to the automated queries during the roll-up process. Such comments are useful for preparing the national statistics and allow for a greater understanding of the data.

5.2 Jacobs – general feedback or any points to raise

Prior to the User Group meeting, all WDF users were contacted and given the opportunity to provide feedback. Following this request, the below feedback was received from four users:

Feedback	Response
The number of validation queries being raised by the Validation team are increasing each quarter, with these often relating to	There have been changes to the validation thresholds, but only changes that would reduce the number of queries raised.

<p>changes that seem very trivial – such as changing ‘compost-like output’ to ‘composting’. These changes take a significant amount of time to resolve and require input from senior officers.</p>	<p>Covid-19 has impacted upon waste arisings and, understandably, this would result in additional queries being raised despite the threshold change.</p> <p>Although some queries may appear trivial, these likely have an impact upon the wider statistics and how a material is categorised. For example, ‘compost-like output’ describes organics derived from a residual waste stream, whereas ‘composting’ is used to describe source-segregated organics; the waste type therefore described the quality and source of the material.</p>
<p>As the information requested from each local authority is the same, please can we have a template which can be provided to each contractor / DSO.</p>	<p>Local authorities can download an XML upload spreadsheet from the WDF website which contains a full list of questions. This spreadsheet could be provided to contractors / DSO to provide an insight into the type of information required.</p>
<p>Is there an intention to add a report to WDF which measures carbon emissions relating to waste arisings?</p>	<p>Defra have started work to produce a carbon metrics statistical release – this will be at national level. Defra aim to do this in Spring 2022.</p> <p>There isn’t a plan to develop carbon metric reports at local authority level in WDF, as more data would need to be entered into WDF, for example on vehicles etc. Most likely solution for LAs would be to use some kind of spreadsheet template.</p>
<p>Please can the provision and availability of training sessions be increased so that new users can be introduced to the system sooner rather than later?</p>	<p>Training sessions are provided in advance of upcoming submission deadlines, as the knowledge and understanding gained can then be applied shortly thereafter. This does however mean that there is a gap of around 3 months between each session.</p> <p>The training slides, and guidance, are available on the WDF website, and the helpdesk can be used to provide assistance.</p>

Those in attendance were asked whether they would like to comment on the feedback. Several attendees provided comments in relation to carbon metrics, generally stating that there is an increased interest in this area and that a consistent reporting mechanism across local authorities would be of interest. EA commented that a “lifecycle assessment tool” (LCA) had some time ago had been produced by Defra and further developed by EA, and that the tool may still exist.

Post-meeting note: An update on the LCA tool, which is called WRATE, is now hosted by Golders and is still being maintained and marketed. It is believed that the licences were recently reduced in price, more [here](#).

Action: Newsletter to signpost the WRATE tool. When published the Defra carbon metrics for England due in 2022 will be signposted in the Newsletter.

Users also commented on training sessions, with one user stating that their 'New User' training session focused on why WDF reporting occurred rather than providing instructions.

5.3 Common data-recording queries or misreporting errors

The WDF team stated that there were few data-recording queries or misreporting errors to raise during the meeting.

The only data-recording issue to raise related to the reporting of wood, as it's been found that some wood that was sent for biomass / incineration was being recorded as being sent for recycling.

Local authorities are encouraged to review how their wood waste is reported in WDF and ensure that this corresponds with how the material is treated. Local authorities are also encouraged to make enquiries with their contractors and / or permitted facilities to identify how their material is treated if there is any uncertainty around this.

EA commented that there are RPS (regulatory position statement) rules around wood - what can be accepted at HWRCs and how it can be disposed of. These RPSs have recently been reviewed and updated. It is up to LAs to satisfy themselves that disposal of wood is being reported correctly by their waste contractors.

The Wood Waste RPSs are:

Receiving hazardous waste wood at household waste recycling centres: [RPS 249](#) published 23/07/2021.

Hazardous waste wood from demolition and refurbishment activities: [RPS 250](#) published 23/07/2021.

The reporting methodology for wood which is sent for incineration, or where the tonnage split – with some being recycling and the remainder incinerated – is covered in both the [FAQs](#) and '[Question 100 Data Entry \(pdf\)](#)' guidance documents.

Action; Guidance around Wood reporting will be reviewed and a Newsletter update reminder will be issued.

6 Freedom of Information requests

The WDF team stated that they are seeing an increasing number of FOI requests via the helpdesk, where the response provided by the receiving local authority was to direct the individual to the WDF website, with no other guidance provided beyond this.

It is acknowledged that FOI requests can take some time to resolve and that there is increased pressure on officers' time at present, but we would encourage local authorities to provide as much information as possible in their response. Through providing a more

detailed response, it is hoped that the public can access information more quickly and have a better understanding of the data.

Where required, the WDF helpdesk can be contacted by LAs for guidance on which reports would be best to recommend to enquirers, based on the information that is being requested.

7 Any other business

Defra flagged up a recent trend for some local authorities to collect commercial waste from outside of their own geographic area. They asked if anyone had any views on whether this would potentially cause reporting problems for local authority data into WasteDataFlow. No problems were identified.

8 Timing of next meeting and agenda items

The timing of the next meeting is currently anticipated to be Summer / Autumn 2022.

Ideas for agenda items are welcome and should be sent for consideration via the WDF helpdesk.

Thanks to all those who attended.

Attendees:

Name	Organisation
Adele Storr	Defra
Aimee Ruane	Cheshire West and Chester
Alex Clothier	Defra
Amanda Hulse-Berry	Barnsley MBC
Andy Mayes	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Chris Dove	Cumbria County Council
Claire Collard	Canterbury City Council
George Watson	Defra
Iain Stevens	Devon County Council
Ian Lancaster	Lancaster City Council
James Alderson	Shropshire
Janine Bobbett	Hampshire County Council
Jessica Loring	Defra
Julian Fox	Jacobs
Katherine Merrett	Defra
Laura Hemingway	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Liz Glynn	Jacobs
Michael Richards	Cambridgeshire county council
Michelle Yates	Wigan MBC
Mike Tregent	Environment Agency
Naomi Fitzgibbons	Defra
Rachel Porter	South Staffordshire Council
Raegan Hargreaves	Hyndburn Borough Council

Rebecca Piper	Suffolk County Council
Richard Booth	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Rob Morris	Telford and Wrekin Council
Robert Andrew	Jacobs
Sarah Innes	Reading Borough Council
Steven Lewington	Oxfordshire County Council
Stuart Brown	Leicestershire County Council
William Ingleton	Bassetlaw District Council