

# Local Government Data Unit – Wales (Data Unit) Release Practices

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to set out the principles and standards the Data Unit will follow in respect of release practices.

## 2. Background

The [National Statistics Code of Practice](#) sets out the key principles and standards which official statisticians, including those in the National Assembly for Wales, are expected to follow and uphold. The Code is supported by twelve protocols that describe how those principles and standards are to be implemented in practice. The [Release Practices Protocol](#), sets out how the Chief Statistician and, with his or her authority, other members of the Government Statistical Service in the Assembly will carry out their responsibilities in respect of release practices. The Data Unit will follow and promote best practice in respect of release practices.

## 3. Data Unit Principles and Standards

### 3.1 National Statistics

When releasing statistics on behalf of the Assembly the Data Unit will follow the principles and standards set out in the Assembly's Release Practices Protocol.

#### The principles

The *National Statistics Code of Practice Statement of Principles* states that:

1. National Statistics will promote equality of access.
2. Release arrangements will be open and pre-announced. Timing will not be influenced by the content of the release or set in such a way to create a presumed advantage to any particular group or individual.
3. Final responsibility for the content, format or timing of release of National Statistics will rest, in devolved administrations, with the Chief Statistician.
4. National Statistics will be released separately from statements by Ministers about the figures. Ministerial statements must not be released before the statistics.
5. National Statistics will be released in an orderly fashion, as early as possible after compilation.
6. Where privileged early access has been determined by Ministers, it will be documented.
7. As much detail as is reliable and practicable will be made available, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints.

Ahead of releasing such data the Assembly and Data Unit will agree their respective responsibilities under the protocol.

## **3.2 Other Statistics and Data**

In seeking to follow good practice, the Data Unit will release other statistics and data in accordance with the principles set out in the Assembly's Release Practices Protocol. The way in which we will do this is set out below and reflects the nature of our outputs and the local government perspective of our work.

### **3.2.1 Equal opportunity of access**

The Data Unit will make new statistical data available to all at the same time.

New statistical outputs will be published on the Data Unit's website at 9:30am on the pre-announced day of publication.

Statistical releases will normally be available free of charge via the Data Unit's website. Similarly, where data are not published in hard copy, a printed version will be made available free of charge upon request. The Data Unit may put a cover charge on selected publications such as compendia or specific pieces of commissioned research. The exact format of each release will take into account the need of users of the information.

### **3.2.2 Pre-announcement of statistical releases**

The Data Unit will seek to provide maximum notice of forthcoming statistical releases. The timing of releases will not be influenced by the content of the release or set in such a way as to create a presumed advantage to any particular group or individual.

The Unit will maintain a forward programme of releases on its website. This programme will set out the anticipated month of release. For regular publications we will give a minimum six months notice. The exact date of the release will be provided at least two weeks ahead of the publication date. Any alteration to publication dates will be announced on the Data Unit's website along with the reasons for the change.

Appropriate Data Unit staff will be available at the time of release to provide advice on the data.

### **3.2.3 Political Integrity**

Data Unit statistical releases will be published separately from statements by central or local government politicians.

As an exception, statistical publications may contain forewords from politicians if appropriate. These will exclude statements that include presentation or advocacy of any related policies.

Where it will help users understand the data a factual statement of the policy context may be included. However, this will do no more than state a policy objective and will not contain anything that could be interpreted as a political comment.

### **3.2.4 Prompt orderly release**

Subject to the standards contained within this document, the Data Unit will release statistical data as early as possible after compilation. However, there may be occasions where it is appropriate to 'bundle' releases where these are referring to the same or very closely related issues.

Unplanned or selective release of parts of research or data collection activities will be avoided. If there is clear proof of wrongful or accidental early release, the Director of the Data Unit may judge it appropriate to arrange for the immediate release of the data/publication, via the Data Unit's website.

### 3.2.5 Pre-release access arrangements

There will be occasions when it is appropriate to make data/research available ahead of its formal release. Details of early access will be documented by the Data Unit. Individuals given early access will not seek to change the timing, content or format of the release. Documentation accompanying material supplied ahead of release will clearly identify the restrictions on the data.

*Quality assurance of work in progress* – Early access to unreleased data may be given to persons who might provide useful comments, ideas or criticism on the content, quality or presentation of information. The Unit will often seek the advice of statistical and policy colleagues from the Assembly and local authorities. Those receiving such material will be advised of their responsibility with respect to maintaining confidentiality.

*Management Information* - where statistics are derived from sources primarily used to manage and inform government services or processes, a number of individuals will have access to the data sources in the course of their normal work. For practical purposes, this amounts to a form of early access and needs to be recognised as such and managed accordingly. In terms of release practices, the following two points should be noted:

- (i) To provide confidence that wide access within government to this information before its public release does not affect the form or context around which release of the resulting statistics occurs, release dates will be scheduled well in advance (see Section 3.2.2 above) and publication formats will be rigidly adhered to.
- (ii) Those who have access to these data should avoid any public comment that would damage the integrity of that statistical release.

*Privileged early access for politicians and officers* - Appropriate Ministers and local government politicians and their officials may be given early access to releases for the purpose of preparing briefings and responding completely to questions at time of publications. In normal circumstances, this will be no more than 5 working days before publication.

*Release under embargo* – Where appropriate, the Data Unit may wish to provide accredited journalists with pre-release access. This will occur where there is likely to be public interest in the information and where a period of time is required to assimilate and comprehend the information being released. The Director of the Data Unit will determine when embargo access is appropriate.

*Managing data release* – Within the Data Unit, access to pre-release information will be restricted on a ‘need to know’ basis. In addition to internal support staff, agents of the Data Unit (translators, designers, printers etc) will also require pre-release access. In all cases, those having such access will be advised of their responsibilities with respect to confidentiality.

### **3.2.6 Release of as much data as reliable and practicable**

The Data Unit will seek to release the maximum amount of data to inform policy making and public debate. Initial release of data may be limited to key data items. This may be followed by a further release or releases of more detailed information. The Data Unit will limit the information it releases to that which it judges as suitably reliable and where such information does not impinge on confidentiality constraints.

### **3.2.7 Review of release arrangement**

The Data Unit will regularly review these release arrangements.

<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1	November 2005	
2	September 2006	Arrangements reviewed and section 3.2.5 expanded.

**September 2006**