

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link if relevant)

Benefit cap - number of households capped across phased area Local Authorities (LA), data to May 2013:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/benefit-cap-number-of-households-capped-across-phased-area-local-authorities-data-to-may-2013>

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice 8 - ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access before publication.

Date of occurrence

2 July 2013

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

The day before publication, an official from HM Treasury (HMT) contacted DWP Press Office with a question intimating that they had a broad view of what the statistics would say. On receipt of the enquiry from HMT, DWP Press Officers alerted DWP statisticians who in turn alerted the HoP in DWP.

As HMT had not been awarded pre-release access to the publication, this indicated that a breach of Protocol could have occurred as they had been given an indication about the nature of the data. There was no public release of this information prior to publication.

Reasons for breach

DWP have agreements in place across Government, to share management information for operational purposes with other Government departments. These arrangements are made in consultation with the National Statistician. DWP shares information on the Benefit Cap with HMT, the Cabinet Office and local authorities.

DWP has spoken to officials in HMT and Cabinet Office about the discussions they held and the information that they were based on. HMT advised us that the official involved had not seen the DWP statistics on numbers affected by the benefit cap. However, they had seen other management information as part of operational delivery discussion around liaison with local authorities in preparation for LAs to enact the cap. The statement made by the Cabinet Office to officials based in HMT was based on this source. No details or specific numbers were communicated.

Number 10 Office had been granted pre-release access to this particular official statistics publication as its release coincided with Prime Minister's Questions. This is recorded on the DWP pre-release access list, which is publicly available on its statistics web pages. However, the Cabinet Office official referred to above did not have sight of them.

3 Reactions and Impact

There was no early release of these statistics to the public. Nor was there any impact on the release of the official statistics or any public statements made by the department on them. Therefore, there was no media coverage of the incident.

4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

DWP has investigated the source of the information behind HMT's enquiry and concluded that it was management information, shared to enable administration of the benefit cap, not the official statistics, and were passed on without authorisation.

DWP already has procedures in place with the Cabinet Office for handling pre-release access to official statistics; and access to Management Information that covers similar ground.

This case is around management information that has a link to official statistics, but is not the same information. The Head of Profession's office in DWP has discussed this incident with Cabinet Office officials and we have agreed some stricter procedures with analysts there to ensure that the conditions of access to any information that DWP share with them are clearly spelt out, specifically to ensure that only personnel with an operational need can see this information, and that authorised recipients do not discuss, or share it, with others.