

## 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 weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

Public Health Outcomes Framework February data update:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-health-outcomes-framework-february-2014-quarterly-data-update> and <http://www.phoutcomes.info>

Name of Producer Organisation

Public Health England (PHE)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

David Meechan  
Director for Knowledge & Intelligence (East Midlands)  
PHE Lead Official for Official Statistics  
[david.meechan@phe.gov.uk](mailto:david.meechan@phe.gov.uk)  
01623 812069  
13 February 2014

### 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2: Release Practices  
  
Practice 4: Issue statistical releases at a standard time of 09:30 on a weekday to maintain consistency and to permit time for users to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours.

Date of occurrence

4 February 2014

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

The publication due to go out on 4 February 2014 was made available on gov.uk at 09:30, but the associated website containing the statistical data was not made available until 10:40 on that date, a delay of 70 minutes. The breach was discovered by a member of the project team at 09:31 and the development team was informed immediately.

Reasons for breach

An error in the configuration files was causing the webserver to point to the wrong database. This problem was tracked down and corrected by 10:40 on the day of release.

### **3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)**

A small number of users tried to access the new and updated data and noticed they were not available. They contacted PHE via twitter and telephone to query this. Two tweets about the breach made on the morning of release:

<https://twitter.com/phoutcomes/status/430647190441062402>

<https://twitter.com/phoutcomes/status/430652886016471041>

A planned media release by PHE on the publication of new local authority adult excess weight data was delayed until 11:00 and has resulted in some reputational damage to PHE:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-release-local-authority-adult-obesity-data>

### **4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)**

An urgent review of our statistical publishing process was undertaken. This review resulted in recommended actions to improve the process and prevent reoccurrence.

The following improvements have subsequently been made:

- additional time allowed for testing along with improvements to the testing system and guidance provided, making the process more robust
- data uploaded to the system earlier and further quality measures now in place to ensure the data is ready for release on the appropriate date
- increased memory space added to the servers
- improved engagement and communication between teams
- contingency planning developed with a clear escalation route should future issues occur.

### **5. Links to published statements about this breach**

<http://www.phoutcomes.info/>