

2022

Northern Ireland Planning Statistics - Background Quality Report

The background quality report contains information on how the various dimensions of quality have been considered when producing the Northern Ireland planning statistics reports.



Contents

Introduction	3
Relevance	3
Accuracy and Reliability	4
Timeliness and Punctuality.....	5
Accessibility and Clarity	5
Coherence and Comparability.....	6
Trade-offs between Output Quality Components.....	6
Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions	7
Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden.....	7
Confidentiality, Transparency and Security	8

Background Quality Report: Northern Ireland Planning Statistics

Introduction

Context for the quality report.

Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB), a Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) branch within the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is responsible for the compilation and publication of the Northern Ireland (NI) Planning Statistics report.

The first annual NI Planning Statistics publication was produced in 2003 and was first published in its current form in 2015 following the Review of Public Administration, the reduction of local councils from 26 to 11, and the majority of planning powers being transferred to these new councils. It presents, in one publication the statutorily required performance measures for each council, as laid out in the [Local Government \(Performance Indicators and Standards\) Order \(NI\) 2015 – Schedules 3 & 4](#).

It also presents further information on planning activity at regional and planning authority level. The publication includes information on performance in relation to major and local applications, development type, compliance and enforcement, and renewable energy.

The publication is produced four times each year – three provisional quarterly publications (in September, December and March) and a final annual publication each July. The annual publication presents finalised data for the business year just completed.

To inform this publication, ASRB obtain extracts from the Northern Ireland and Mid Ulster Planning Portals. After validating the data, ASRB produce and publish the report around ten weeks after the quarter / business year end.

A [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\) report](#) has also been produced.

[The quarterly and annual reports are published on the DfI website](#). Information about the background to the publication, the quality of the data contained in it and definitions of terms are included in each edition.

Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.

The content of the publication has changed over time and currently contains information that is most relevant to the legislative requirement as laid out in the [Local Government \(Performance Indicators and Standards\) Order \(NI\) 2015 – Schedules 3 & 4](#).

Content and presentation has continuously adapted over the years to ensure relevance, including the addition and removal of specific data and the introduction of new graphics to support accessibility. Examples of change include the production of data to accommodate two definitions of urban and rural (NISRA definition and planning definition) and the introduction of processing times throughout the report.

The needs of users are continuously monitored and, if appropriate and practical, acted upon. These actions help to shape the content of the publication. Examples of user engagement include:

- In line with the [ASRB User Engagement Strategy](#), statisticians hold regular meetings with key users. Minutes of these meetings are [published on the DfI website](#).

- ASRB carried out an informal user consultation during Summer 2019 to seek the views on the current publication. Twenty-three responses were received. The results of this consultation have been [published alongside the publication series on the DfI website](#). Further user consultation will be carried out to ensure developing user needs are understood.
- Additionally, we continuously seek user feedback. Each time the publication is released, the [ASRB customer satisfaction survey](#), which includes a question on whether our publications meet their needs, is issued to users to collect their feedback.

The publication is used by a wide variety of users for a range of purposes. For example, DfI uses the information to inform policy and monitor performance in relation to planning in Northern Ireland, as required in legislation. Local councils use the information for policy briefing and development, and to monitor performance. The publication may also be used by private companies and academics to study trends or for research purposes.

Accuracy and Reliability

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

Data is extracted from the NI and Mid Ulster Planning Portals using established processes and protocols.

This data is then validated internally by ASRB statisticians before being individually quality assured by each of the 12 planning authorities (DfI and 11 local councils). Each planning authority interrogates the relevant administrative data systems to validate pre-defined data table(s). They will also respond to any queries on the data raised by ASRB.

This validation process is further supported by ongoing monthly reporting which, while focusing on the three statutory targets, plays a key role in validating any discrepancies in a timely way. Each month extracts are taken from the NI and Mid Ulster Planning Portals. The data are processed in broadly the same way as each quarterly and annual report (although the process for the publications is more detailed and thorough). Councils are provided with headline information for their specific council and data lists detailing planning applications and enforcements. This is provided to the councils as management information and not statistics in their final form. ASRB will also highlight anomalies in the data to councils. In this way, the monthly process compliments the quarterly processing as it vastly reduces the number of queries at the end of each quarter.

For all data received, a number of checks are employed by statisticians as an integral part of the production process, with any issues between ASRB extracts and planning authority positions queried with the respective planning authority. As part of the quality assurance processes, statisticians also analyse trends for any data that appears to lie outside expected norms.

Previous data are revised if necessary and appropriate. All revisions are conducted in line with ASRB's revisions policy which can be found in DfI's [Code of Practice for Statistics supporting statements](#).

Data in the three quarterly publications are clearly marked as 'provisional' and data is only considered final when presented in the annual publication which is released each July following the completion of a full business year.

These processes and protocols will be developed and kept under review during the development of the new NI Planning Portal system.

The old NI planning portal system ceased operation on 18 November 2022 and a new system went live on 5 December 2022. The Department and 10 councils have been working

collaboratively on the configuration of the [new Regional Planning IT System](#) with an external provider. Relevant updates on the introduction of this new system and any potential impacts on statistical reporting will be included within future NI Planning Statistics publications. However, at this stage of the project it is still too early to include any further information on potential impacts to NI Planning Statistics. Updates about the project can be found in the [Planning Portal Newsletters](#).

ASRB have been involved in this process to date and will work closely with relevant suppliers to ensure that any new system continues to meet the existing requirements of the NI Planning Statistics. This will involve ASRB playing a role in data testing and transfer to any new system.

Alongside this, Mid Ulster council chose to move forward independently and develop an [independent planning system](#) which went live on 22 June 2022. Information reported for Mid Ulster for the first two quarters of 2022/23 was extracted from the new Mid Ulster planning portal. The transition to the new planning portal in Mid Ulster had no impact on the production of official quarterly planning statistics.

Timeliness and Punctuality

Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.

The majority of figures presented in the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics report relate to either the period up to the end of the most recent quarter or to the full year at 31 March.

The monthly reporting process compliments the quarterly processing as it vastly reduces the number of queries at the end of each quarter.

Taking into account the data extraction and validation processes, and the time it takes to produce the report, data tables and associated documents, the report is generally published around ten weeks after the end of the relevant quarter / business year.

Advance notice of ASRB publication dates is available in the [upcoming statistical releases](#) calendar on the DfI website. Publication dates are also pre-announced at least four weeks in advance on [gov.uk](#).

To date, all but one edition of the publication have been released on time (there was a delay in the publication of Quarter 2 2015 due to planning hierarchy classification issues). In the event of a change to a pre-announced release date, the delay would be announced and explained on both the DfI website and gov.uk, with the new publication date specified. If necessary, updates would be given regularly.

Accessibility and Clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

The publication series is available to download free of charge in PDF format on the [DfI website](#).

The statistical tables are also available to download in MS Excel format and ODS (Open Document Spreadsheet) format, from this webpage. An animated data visualisation, summarising the main findings from the most recent publication, is also available on the [DfI website](#). All published documents have appropriate metadata.

If requested, ASRB will provide hard copies or other suitable media.

The publication is also accessible through [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

User Guidance and Definitions sections are included in the publication to help users to understand and make the best possible use of the data. In addition, where necessary, explanatory footnotes are included within the tables.

The publication contains contact details of the responsible statistician.

Data is also made available annually on the [Open Data NI portal](#). These datasets accompany the Northern Ireland planning statistics annual reports. They contain finalised, validated information on received and decided planning applications during the year, as well as pending applications as at the end of the financial year. These datasets are unique planning application level data.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is committed to achieving AA standard under the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#). ASRB are reviewing web content and over the next number of months will be implementing relevant changes required to meet this standard.

ASRB are working to enhance the publication of planning statistics by adding to the suite of published information's interactive content. Due to resource pressures this work has been delayed. When resource allows this work area will be progressed with the plan to publish as soon as possible thereafter.

Coherence and Comparability

Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

ASRB supplies planning authorities with pre-defined data tables to quality assure. This aims to ensure consistent recording, coverage, accuracy and timeframes with previous figures.

Comparisons can be made over time and data are published back to 2002/03. However, it should be noted that some data tables have been added or discontinued over time so not all data are available for the complete period 2002/03 to most recent publications.

The latest data are always compared with previous years' data, where appropriate, and any notable changes are thoroughly checked and validated. Quarterly comparisons are also available.

Although published data is not directly comparable with any figures produced in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland, links to planning data for those regions are included within the report for user reference.

Dfl is part of a cross-government working group, working to improve the trustworthiness, quality and value of housing and planning statistics across the UK. ASRB's involvement in this group ensures continuous engagement with producers of similar and related statistics across the UK, ensuring opportunity for collaboration and improvement of this publication through understanding the wider UK picture. More information can be found on the Government Statistical Service website.

Trade-offs between Output Quality Components

Trade-offs are the extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.

None.

Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.

In line with the [ASRB User Engagement Strategy](#), the content of the publication is informed by an understanding of customers' information needs and ASRB's capacity to develop products to meet those needs.

Given the link to required, statutory indicators, content is mainly fixed. However, feedback and awareness of developments in other areas enables ASRB to ascertain if there is a need for any additional information to be included in the forthcoming publication to support the strategies or policies of DfI, or if any information included in the previous edition of the publication is no longer required. Given capacity, it may also be possible to consider bespoke research alongside the publication.

ASRB also carried out an [informal key user survey](#) during Summer 2019 to seek the feedback of both internal and external users and their needs. A further user engagement exercise is planned during either 2022 or 2023.

ASRB maintain a mailing list of users who are notified each time the publication is issued. This list was refreshed prior to the 2017-18 edition being published to ensure it is up-to-date, that the people on it still wish to receive notification and that GDPR obligations had been satisfied.

There is a continuous [ASRB customer satisfaction survey](#) which includes a question on whether ASRB publications (including NI Planning Statistics reports) meet customers' needs. The link to the survey is issued every time users are notified that a report has been published or an ad-hoc query is answered. Results are collated and analysed on a quarterly basis.

The data presented in the publication help to meet the needs of both internal and external users. User needs are prioritised, taking account of resources available and the feasibility of any additional needs identified.

Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.

In the production of this publication, ASRB endeavour to operate efficiently by placing the minimum load necessary on data providers and planning authorities. Data is sourced from an existing administrative platform, the NI Planning Portal, which is used by all planning authorities and this facility removes the need for separate data returns from these authorities.

On receipt of the Northern Ireland and Mid Ulster Planning Portal extracts, statisticians validate and perform checks on the data. ASRB issue pre-defined data tables for ease of QA for each series of statistics to the relevant planning authorities. All communication thereafter is exchanged via email. There is ongoing communication with planning authorities to ensure timely QA of data.

Once data are verified, statisticians prepare for publication within a short timeframe.

Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.

All of the information required for this publication is provided in pre-defined data tables.

Personal information is not collected and statistical disclosure control methods do not need to be applied to the data. All raw data used in production of these statistics is in the public domain through the public-facing Northern Ireland and Mid Ulster Planning Portals.

The data are held on a secure and accredited network drive that is only accessible to ASRB staff or within DfI's secure record management system (HPRM), also with restricted access.

ASRB has produced a statement on its confidentiality processes which can be found in DfI's [Code of Practice for Statistics supporting statements](#).

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