2022

Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework - Background Quality Report

This background quality report contains information on how various dimensions of quality have been considered when producing the Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework.

Contents

Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework: Background Quality Report

Introduction

This background quality report contains information on how various dimensions of quality have been considered when producing the Northern Ireland Planning Monitoring Framework.

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 Monitoring Framework annual statistical report (the 'framework').

The first annual report was produced and published in 2019. 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, alongside a suite of other indicators that provide more information on other planning processes and activity.

The publication includes information on performance in relation to regionally significant, major and local applications, compliance and enforcement, planning committees, planning appeals and notifications made to the DfI. It presents a summary of the indicators for Northern Ireland, as well as relevant indicator data for each local planning authority.

The publication is produced annually, with the initial aim to publish in September each year.

To inform this publication, ASRB obtain data from a number of data sources:

- The primary data source is the Northern Ireland Planning Portal (NIPP) and the information produced for the NI Planning Statistics annual report is utilised to inform the relevant indicators in this report. Some additional analysis is produced to update indicators reporting processing times where withdrawn applications are excluded. These files also provide the link file in the production of indicators relating to delegated decisions and committee overturns.

- DfI, Applications Notified to the Department - Case Management system - this is an information database that contains details of all applications notified to the Department. This is maintained and updated by DfI Officials.

- DfI, Planning Applications to Committee database - this database records all decisions on planning applications taken by planning committees, sourced from published committee meeting minutes. This is maintained and updated by DfI Officials.

- DfI, Planning Records - Regionally Significant Applications - this is maintained and updated by ASRB with input from DfI Officials as required.

- Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) – summary data on appeals and claims for costs are provided directly by the PAC, from their own internal records.

After validating the data from the various data sources above, ASRB produce and aim to publish the report around 23 weeks after the business year end.

The annual report is published on the DfI website. Information about the background to the publication, the data sources used, the quality of the data, the definition behind each indicator and the methodology used are included in each edition of the publication.

Relevance

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

The planning system in NI has undergone a period of considerable change. Under the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, from 1 April 2015 the majority of planning functions were devolved from the former Department of the Environment[1] to 11 re-organised councils[2].

While there are currently three statutory planning indicators, it is considered that these do not fully reflect all the work carried out by planning authorities. The framework aims to address this by presenting data on additional planning-related activity.

The report presents a summary of the current agreed indicators for NI, as well as relevant indicator data for each local planning authority.

The framework has been developed by DfI in collaboration with local planning authorities, and has been informed by best practice in other jurisdictions. The agreed list of indicators under the new framework include the three existing statutory indicators and an existing departmental indicator.

The first annual report, for 2018/19, was produced and published in September 2019 and DfI, in conjunction with local planning authorities will review indicators and definitions based on lessons learnt, trends, priorities and aspirations. As such, it is envisaged that this framework will evolve over time.

Content and presentation will continue to be adapted over time to ensure the publication remains relevant and accessible, this may include the addition and removal of specific data and graphics.

The needs of users will be continuously monitored and, if appropriate and practical, acted upon. These actions will 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 departmental key users. Minutes of these meetings are published on the DfI website.

- ASRB carried out an informal user consultation on the NI Planning Statistics publication during summer 2019. The outcome of this consultation has been published alongside the publication series on the DfI website. A similar consultation will be carried out for the framework in the future.

- Each time the publication is released, the ASRB general customer satisfaction survey, which includes a question on whether ASRB publications meet their needs, is issued to users.

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 NI, as required in legislation. Local planning authorities use the information for policy briefing

---

[1] Note that from 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of the Environment to the newly-formed Department for Infrastructure (DfI) following departmental re-organisation.

[2] There are currently 12 planning authorities in Northern Ireland – DfI and the 11 councils (local planning authorities).

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.

The framework is published after the finalised annual NI Planning Statistics publication for the same reference period. Therefore data which is common to both is validated through the process followed for the NI Planning Statistics, which is a National Statistics publication.

For the NI Planning Statistics data is extracted from the NIPP 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 MS Excel 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 NIPP. The data are processed in broadly the same way as each quarterly and annual report for the NI Planning Statistics (although the process for those publications is more detailed and thorough). Planning authorities are provided with headline information for their specific area and data lists detailing planning applications and enforcements. This is provided to the planning authorities as management information. ASRB will also highlight anomalies in the data to planning authorities. In this way, the monthly process compliments the quarterly processing as it vastly reduces the number of queries at the end of each quarter.

Further validation is required for the framework in addition to that above, to fully quality assure the information that is not available from the NI Planning Statistics. Around July of each year ASRB utilise the finalised annual NI Planning Statistics database to update and feed into the calculations of various indicators in the framework report. ASRB lift final extracts from the DfI, Planning Applications to Committee database and the DfI, Applications Notified to the Department – Case Management system (these data sources will have been subject to quarterly validation checks and queries by ASRB through the year) to update specific indicators.

Data provided directly by the PAC are checked against comparable figures from the NIPP and published information on the PAC website, where applicable.

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

For all data reported, a number of checks are employed by ASRB 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, ASRB also analyse trends for any data that appears to lie outside expected norms.

If any revisions are required they will be conducted in line with ASRB's revisions policy which can be found in DfI's Code of Practice for Statistics supporting statements.

All the data sources used to update the indicators within the framework are administrative systems and outputs produced are considered point in time true figures.

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 figures presented in the NI Planning Monitoring Framework report relate to the period up to the end of the most recent full year at the 31 March.

The aforementioned monthly, quarterly and annual reporting of the NI Planning Statistics process compliments the processing required for this publication, as it vastly reduces the number of queries required due to the majority of the indicators being solely or partially based on the finalised NI Planning Statistics.

Taking into account the data extractions and validation processes, and the time it takes to produce the report, data tables and associated documents, the report is aimed to be published around mid-September each year – about 23 weeks after the business year end.

Advance notice of ASRB publication dates is available in the upcoming statistical releases calendar on the DfI website. Publication dates are also pre-announced on gov.uk. On release of each publication an announcement is made through the DfI website, DfI and NISRA Twitter feeds, a DfI statistical press release, NISRA Facebook and a DfI circulation email to users of the publication.

Publication of the 2019/20 framework was delayed until December 2020 due to quality concerns relating to external data used in the framework. This was clearly communicated on the DfI website and gov.uk, with a new release date announced once the issues were resolved.

Publication of both the 2020/21 and 2021/22 frameworks were delayed until December 2021 and 2022 respectively due to resource pressures. A full suite of data tables was published with the report to follow as resource allows.

It is the intention to return to a September publication date when resources allow.

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 from 2018-19 to 2019-20 is available to download free of charge in PDF format on the DfI website.

The statistical tables from 2018-19 to 2021-22 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 website. If requested, ASRB will provide hard copies or other suitable media.

The publication is also accessible through 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.

A Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) report was produced in relation to the NIPP and the use of data from it in the production of the NI Planning Statistics. This report is

applicable to the use of NIPP data in the production of the framework report. A QAAD reviewing all the administrative data sources used within the production of the framework will be completed when resource allows.

All statistics produced by ASRB are designated as 'official statistics' and a subset of these are designated as 'National Statistics'. As such, they are produced in line with the three pillars and associated principles and practices set out in the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics. As well as complying with the Code of Practice, ASRB further demonstrates its commitment to the Code by publishing statements of compliance with the pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value in DfI's Code of Practice for Statistics supporting statements.

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 MS Excel tables to quality assure. This aims to ensure consistent recording, coverage, accuracy and timeframes with previous figures.

This report was first published in September 2019 (reporting information for 2018/19). Although this is the first year of the publication, indicators 1, 2, and 3 can be directly compared with information published in the NI Planning Statistics. Comparisons can be made over time and data are published back to 2015/16.

For indicator 4 which reports the percentage of applications determined under delegated powers, it should be borne in mind that each council has an individual scheme of delegation which determines the types of applications that are delegated to planning officers for decision and this may differ across councils.

As the indicators are bespoke to Northern Ireland, no suitable comparisons are available to Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland.

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.

The framework has been developed by DfI in collaboration with local planning authorities, and has been informed by best practice in other jurisdictions. The agreed list of indicators under the new framework include the three existing statutory indicators and an existing departmental indicator.

Given the link to required, statutory indicators, and the process through which the framework was developed, the content of the report is mainly fixed. DfI, in conjunction with local

planning authorities, will review the indicators and definitions and it is envisaged that the framework will evolve over time. Future framework reports will reflect any changes. User engagement will inform this process, as well as informing any changes on how the content is presented in the framework report. ASRB carried out an informal key user survey during Summer 2019 to seek the feedback of both internal and external users of the NI Planning Statistics publication. A similar consultation will be carried out for the framework in the future.

ASRB maintain a live mailing list of users of planning publications who are notified each time a publication is issued. This list was refreshed prior to the 2017-18 edition of the NI Planning Statistics being published to ensure it was up-to-date, that the people on it still wish to receive notification and that GDPR obligations had been satisfied. The list is updated on a quarterly basis following the issue of quarterly planning statistics publications.

There is an ongoing ASRB customer satisfaction survey which includes a question on whether ASRB publications (including the framework) meet customers' needs. The link to the customer satisfaction 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.

Statisticians from across central government and the devolved administrations are also working together to improve the public value of official statistics related to the planning process. As part of this work the GSS are looking for feedback to help ensure that our planning statistics are valuable in informing policy and important questions for the public. You can complete the user survey here which is open until 12 January 2023. This survey is being conducted by the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Housing coherence team and responses may be shared with devolved administrations and central government departments. Your responses will shape the work of statisticians to improve the quality and value of these statistics. Survey responses will be used and stored securely as outlined in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Privacy Policy.

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.

This publication is pre-released 24 hours in advance of publication. A list maintaining details of those granted pre-release access is published online and updated ahead of each publication being released.

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 a number of sources:

- An existing administrative platform, the NIPP, which is used by all planning authorities - this facility removes the need for separate data returns from these authorities.

- The finalised NIPP extracts developed for the production of the annual NI Planning Statistics are used by statisticians to directly update a number of indicators in this publication (indicators 1, 2, 3, and 8). The direct updates require no further validation checks. For indicators that have not been previously reported ASRB validate and update these prior to QA by planning authorities.

- Planning Applications to Committee database – this is a DfI database and holds records of all decisions on planning applications taken by planning committees, sourced from published committee meeting minutes. This removes the need for planning authorities to provide this information directly to the Department. ASRB validate the data prior to QA by planning authorities.

- Applications Notified to the Department – Case Management system. This is an internal DfI database. Data for this indicator are sourced from internal Departmental records. The data are then validated by ASRB prior to analysis. Staff within the Department are provided with the indicator data, as part of the QA process.

- Planning Records - Regionally Significant Applications. This detail is held by ASRB, DfI. ASRB liaise with planning colleagues within the Department to ascertain the dates when applications are processed to a ministerial recommendation.

- PAC internal records – summary data on appeals and claims for costs are provided directly by the PAC, from their own internal records.

Once all the data has been collated, validated and indicators updated, ASRB issue pre-defined MS Excel tables for ease of QA to the relevant planning authorities. There is ongoing communication with planning authorities to ensure timely QA of data.

Once data are verified, statisticians prepare for publication to meet a preannounced publication date.

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 MS Excel tables.

Personal information is not collected and statistical disclosure control methods do not need to be applied to the data. The majority of the raw data used in production of these statistics is already in the public domain through the public-facing NIPP, published Planning Authorities Planning Committee meeting minutes, or the PAC website.

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

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

Document last updated: December 2022

Next review due: December 2023