



# COVID-19 Mobility Report

## An Assessment of Social Distancing in Northern Ireland

COVID-19 Community Mobility: Changes up to Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 2021.

## Introduction

This report is the latest in a series of publications which show movement trends in Northern Ireland (NI), across different categories of places. The data used to produce this report is sourced from [COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports](#) which are publicly available and updated sporadically (typically at least once a week). Analysis is also presented for the UK overall and NI council areas / Local Government Districts (LGDs). These insights are calculated by Google based on data from users who have opted in to Location History for their Google Account, so that the data represents a sample of users. As with all samples, this may or may not represent the exact behaviour of a wider population.

Figures shown relate to mobility for that date compared with a baseline day, and reported as a positive or negative percentage. A baseline day represents a *normal* value for that day of the week. The baseline day is the median value from the 5-week period Jan 3 – Feb 6, 2020.

Google release data at LGD level. An average of the figures for each of the LGDs presented is used as a representation of NI as a whole within the report.

## Categories of places

**Retail & recreation:** change in total visitors for places like restaurants, cafes, shopping centers, theme parks, museums, libraries, and movie theaters.

**Supermarket & pharmacy:** change in total visitors for places like grocery markets, food warehouses, farmers markets, specialty food shops, drug stores, and pharmacies.

**Parks:** change in total visitors for places like national parks, public beaches, marinas, dog parks, plazas, and public gardens.

**Public transport:** change in total visitors for places like public transport hubs such as subway, bus, and train stations.

**Workplaces:** change in total number of people visiting places of work.

**Residential:** change in duration of time spent at home.

# Mobility changes for Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2021

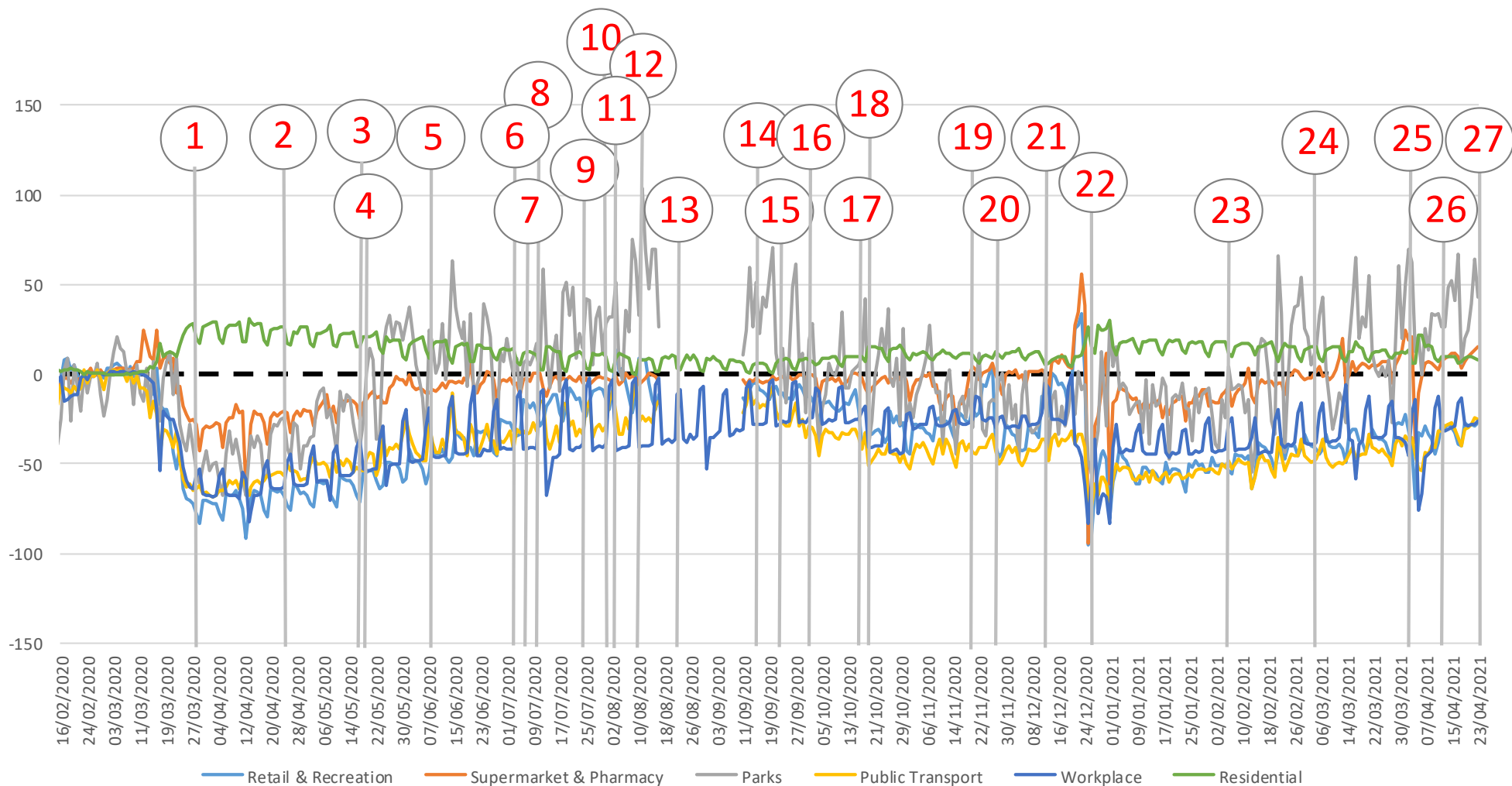
The data shows how visitors to (or time spent in) categorised places change compared to baseline days. A baseline day represents a *normal* value for that day of the week. The baseline day is the median value from the 5-week period Jan 3 – Feb 6, 2020. These insights are calculated by Google based on data from users who have opted in to Location History for their Google Account, so that the data represents a sample of users. As with all samples, this may or may not represent the exact behaviour of a wider population.

**Table 1. Mobility changes for NI Council average and UK for Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2021, when compared with baseline period**

	NI Council average	UK
Retail & Recreation	-27%	-30%
Public Transport	-25%	-37%
Parks	43%	69%
Workplace	-26%	-31%
Supermarket & Pharmacy	15%	5%
Residential	8%	9%

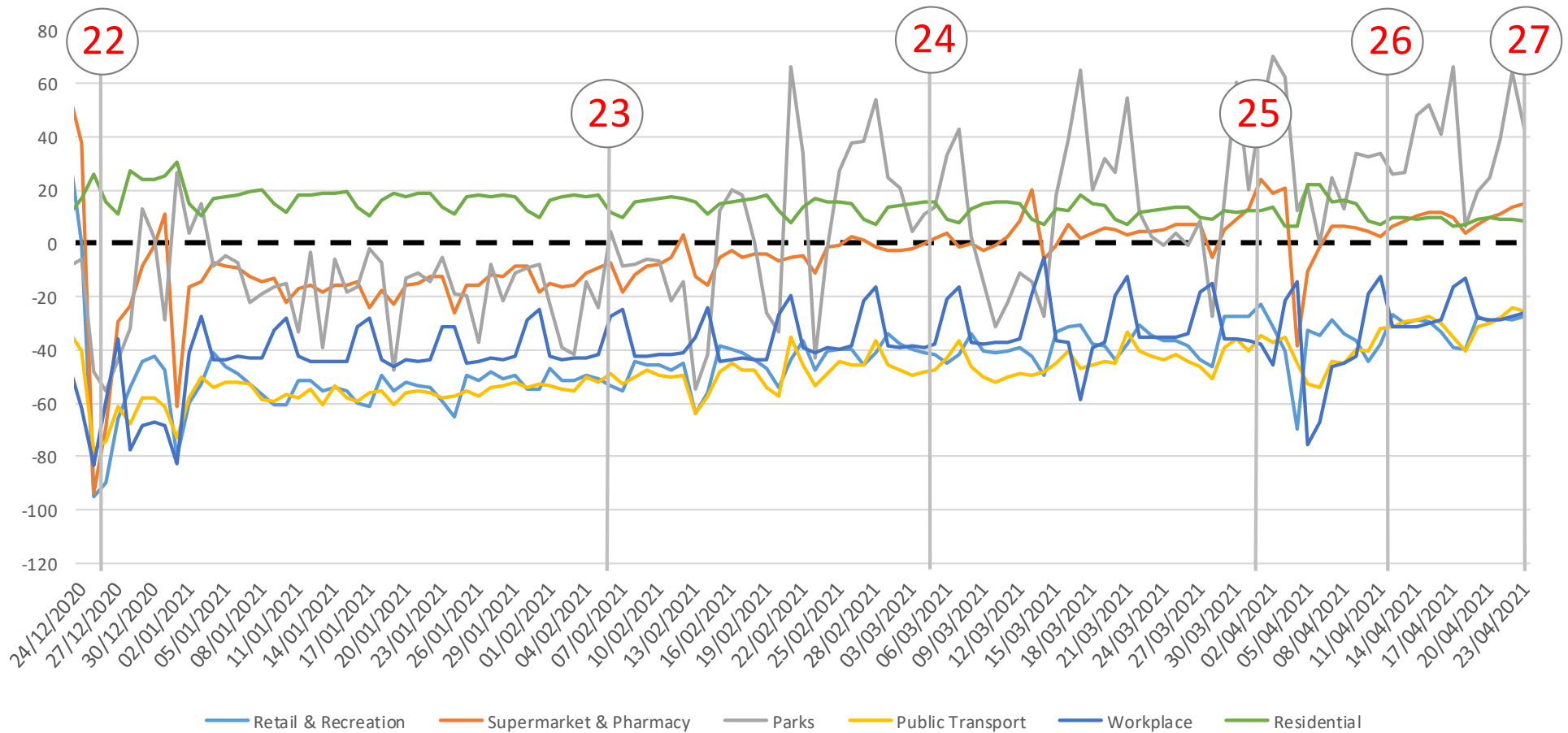
For Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, similar to the UK overall, activity in Northern Ireland was above normal levels for visits to parks (43% above normal levels) time spent at home (residential) where activity was 8% above normal levels and supermarkets (15% above normal levels). Notable decreases in activity were seen in Northern Ireland for public transport, retail & recreation and workplace where activity was 25%, 27% and 26%, respectively, below normal levels.

## Mobility changes in NI since initial lockdown in March 2020



Information for Retail & recreation, Supermarket & pharmacy, Parks and Public transport is not presented between 17th Aug – 10th Sep due to insufficient data. An average of the figures for each of the LGDs is used as a representation of NI as a whole.

## Mobility changes in NI over the last four months



Information for Retail & recreation, Supermarket & pharmacy, Parks and Public transport is not presented between 17th Aug – 10th Sep due to insufficient data.

# Timeline of Covid-19 restrictions in NI

- 1 28 March 2020:** Coronavirus, Restrictions came into operation in NI.
- 2 24 April 2020:** Opening of cemeteries on a restricted basis.
- 3 18 May 2020:** Allowance to travel to garden & recycling centres; Marriage ceremonies allowed for terminally ill.
- 4 19 May 2020:** Allowance to travel to places of worship for individual prayer; attend drive-in cinemas, church services, live music or theatre performances; take part in certain outdoor activities, such as tennis, golf and angling; meet in groups of up to six people outdoors.
- 5 8 June 2020:** People shielding able to spend time outside with people from their own household; attend to welfare of animals; marriage/civil partnership ceremonies can take place outdoors, (limited to 10 people); opening of outdoor sports facilities, outdoor non-food retailers, car retailers; retailers of light motor vehicles, lorries/trailers; retailers of caravans/motorhomes, and retailers of agricultural or other large machinery; opening of non-food retail outlets with lower frequency customer visits and/or with a greater propensity for larger store areas will be permitted.
- 6 3 July 2020:** Hotels, bars and restaurants have been allowed to reopen, subject to conditions & restrictions. Tourist attractions and museums were also allowed to reopen.
- 7 6 July 2020:** Hairdressers spas, tattoo parlours, holistic therapies, massage and reflexology providers allowed to reopen. Visits to hospitals and care homes were allowed to continue
- 8 10 July 2020:** indoor fitness studios and gyms; bingo halls and amusement arcades; outdoor playgrounds, courts and gyms; and cinemas are able to reopen.
- 9 24 July 2020:** The maximum number of people allowed to gather in a residential setting increased from six to 10 if they come from no more than 4 different households, overnight stays in a different household are allowed, community centres and halls are able to reopen, spectators are able to attend outdoor competitive games, swimming pools in leisure centres, hotels and private facilities are able to open, bowling alleys are able to reopen and indoor and outdoor funfairs are able to reopen.

- 10 1 August 2020:** Those shielding in Northern Ireland are now able to leave their homes.
- 11 3 August 2020:** Eat Out to Help Out scheme was implemented
- 12 10 August 2020:** It is now compulsory to wear a mask in shops and other enclosed public spaces.
- 13 21 August 2020:** The number of people able to meet outdoors is now limited to 15 and group meetings indoors are limited to six people from two households.
- 14 14 September 2020:** Local restrictions put in place in Belfast, Ballymena and parts of Glenavy, Lisburn and Crumlin. People in these areas can no longer visit others in their homes.
- 15 22 September 2020:** Local restrictions broadened to include all postcodes in Northern Ireland. People in all areas are no longer able to visit others in their homes.
- 16 1 October 2020:** Bars and restaurants in Northern Ireland told to close from 11pm from midnight 30<sup>th</sup> September.
- 17 16 October 2020:** Closure of the hospitality sector, apart from deliveries and takeaways. No indoor sport or organised contact sport involving mixing of households, other than at elite level, no mass events involving more than 15 people, close-contact services such as hairdressers to close.
- 18 19 October 2020:** Schools to close for 2 weeks across NI.
- 19 20 November 2020:** Close contact services and unlicensed premises such as cafes and coffee shops able to open with restricted opening hours to 8pm for 1 week before closing again on the 27<sup>th</sup> November.
- 20 27 November 2020:** The restrictions on hospitality have been extended for another 2 weeks. Close-contact services and cafes are to close again. Non-essential retail also to shut for the 2 weeks. Places of worship to close.
- 21 11 December 2020:** Restaurants, gyms, close contact services, non-essential retail and places of worship able to reopen. Wet-pubs still unable to open.



# Timeline of Covid-19 restrictions in NI

22

**26 December 2020:** Lockdown restrictions put back in place for 6 weeks. Non-essential shops and close-contact services to close, hospitality allowed to offer takeaway and delivery only and leisure and entertainment services to close. For the first week of restrictions, gatherings (indoor & outdoor) are not permitted between 8pm and 6am each day, outdoor exercise is permitted only with members of your own household and no sporting activity allowed, with elite sport resuming from 2<sup>nd</sup> January.

23

**6 February 2021:** Lockdown restrictions put in place on 26<sup>th</sup> December, have been extended until 5<sup>th</sup> March.

24

**5 March 2021:** Lockdown restrictions have been extended until 1<sup>st</sup> April.

25

**1 April 2021:** Easing of lockdown restrictions introduced, allowing up to six people from two households to meet in a private garden and up to 10 people from two households are able to participate in outdoor sporting activities. Click-and-collect services are allowed from garden centres and plant nurseries and phased return to school has begun for children in pre-school, nursery and primary school pupils in examination years 12 to 14.

26

**12 April 2021:** Stay-at-home order has been replaced with 'stay local'. Ten people from two households can meet in private gardens & non-essential shops can resume click-and-collect. Sports training can resume, with a limit of 15 people.

27

**23 April 2021:** Close contact services such as hairdressers and beauty salons reopen. Outdoor visitor attractions reopen and driving lessons can resume. Outdoor competitive sport is allowed with numbers not exceeding 100 and no spectators are allowed.

## What patterns are we seeing in mobility changes in NI (based on council average)?

As can be seen, from mid to late March 2020 when the initial coronavirus restrictions came into place in NI there have been notable decreases across all activities with the exception of mobility for places of residence (time spent at home) where as a result, activity has been higher than normal levels.

Since the turn of the year activity around parks had generally been below normal levels, albeit with daily fluctuation. During the last two months however there have been some large increases for visits to parks, most likely due to the better weather and longer daylight hours. On Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, park visits were 43% above the baseline level. It is important to note that visits to parks are heavily influenced by the weather therefore you can expect more dramatic changes.

While there was a sizeable increase in supermarket and pharmacy activity before UK school closures were announced on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020, activity then fell; as of the 12<sup>th</sup> April 2020, activity was 63% below baseline levels. Activity has since gradually increased and has generally remained around normal levels since early June 2020, with a recent increase in activity. As of the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021 activity was 15% above normal levels.

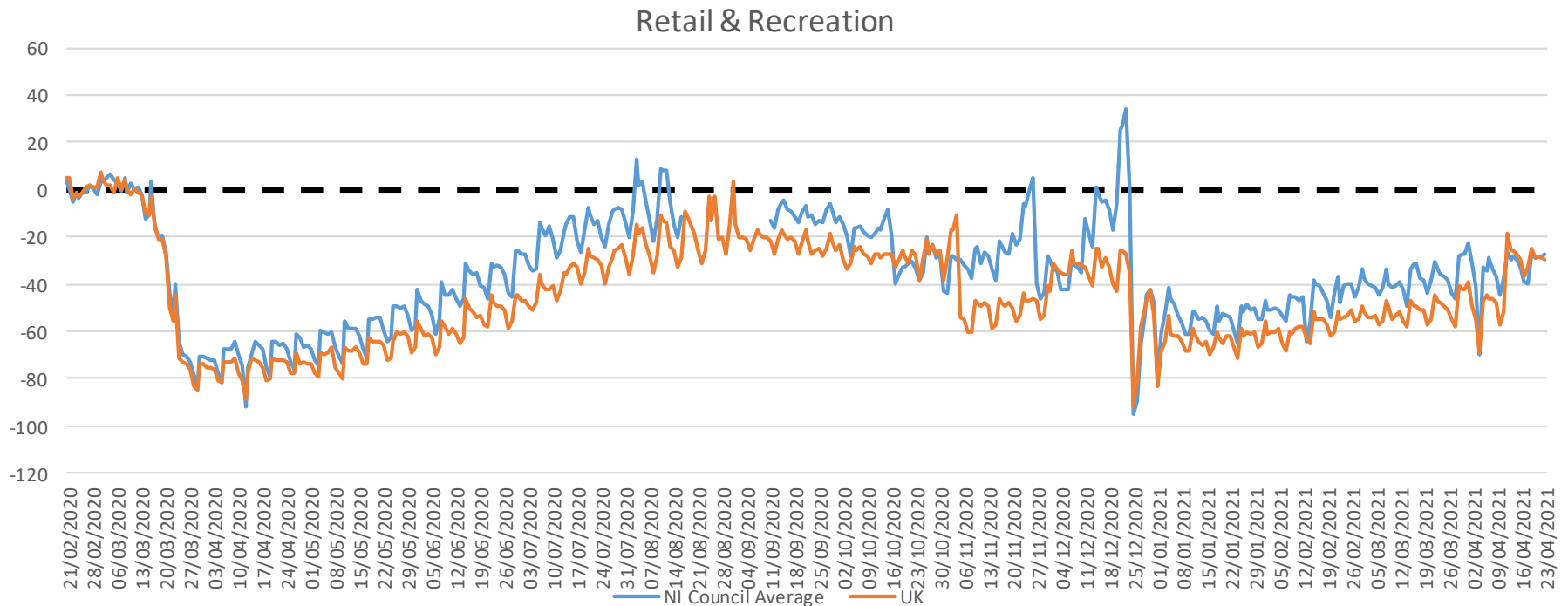
Activity for retail and recreation, workplace and public transport have shown similar trends since the initial lockdown in March 2020, the correlation between the activities would be expected to some degree however due to the partial interconnectivity of the three categories, with retail representing a large proportion of the NI workforce. While activity for these categories fell steadily for a few weeks when UK guidance on working from home was announced on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, activity then gradually increased (while generally remaining below normal levels) from mid-May through August 2020 as restrictions eased. The Eat Out To Help Out scheme which applied to restaurants on Mondays to Wednesdays during August 2020 had led to increases in activity above baseline levels on days when the scheme was in place however since the scheme ended, activity levels have remained lower.

As expected, the introduction of stricter restrictions on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 led to decreased activity in most mobility categories. As of the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, activity for retail and recreation was 27% below normal levels, with activity for public transport and workplace 25% and 26% below normal levels respectively.



# How do the patterns we are seeing in mobility changes in NI compare with the UK overall?

Similar to the UK overall, visits and time spent at places like restaurants, cafes, shopping centres, theme parks, museums, libraries, and movie theatres fell sharply for a few weeks in NI council areas from the 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Since mid-April 2020 however, there had been a gradual increase in the trend in retail and recreation activity. In August 2020, for the first time since the 16<sup>th</sup> March, figures had went above the baseline level, likely due to the implementation of the Eat Out to Help Out scheme. Levels had begun to lower again since the scheme ended, although showing a gradual increase in activity since mid-November 2020, with figures going above the baseline level again on the 26<sup>th</sup> November. Despite a drop in activity from the 27<sup>th</sup> November, activity increased in the weeks leading up to Christmas, as expected, with a sharp drop on Christmas Day. Activity has gradually been increasing since the start of the year and as of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, activity for NI was 27% below the baseline, coinciding with the current restrictions.



Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

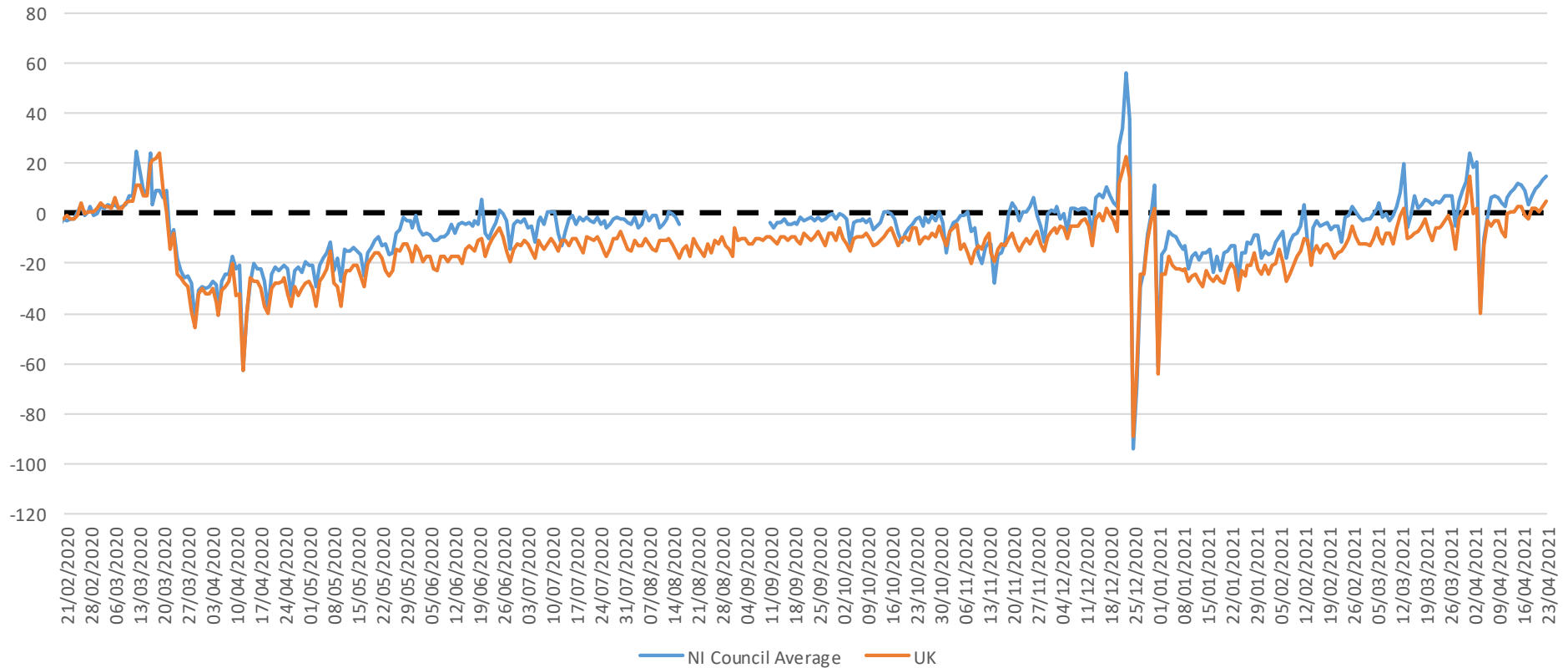
Data for Retail & Recreation from the 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 has been revised and updated by Google to ensure consistent data reporting across categories.

Data is not presented between 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 at NI level due to insufficient data.

Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>

The NI council average has also seen fairly similar trends to the UK overall for visits to places like supermarkets, food warehouses, farmers markets, specialty food shops, chemists, and pharmacies. However, on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2020 there was an increase above the baseline (6% above normal levels) for the first time in NI since lockdown restrictions were introduced, and since then, levels in NI have generally remained close to normal, with sharp drops on Christmas Day and New Year's Day as expected. As of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, activity stood at 15% above usual levels for NI, while for the UK overall, activity was 5% above the usual level.

### Supermarket & Pharmacy



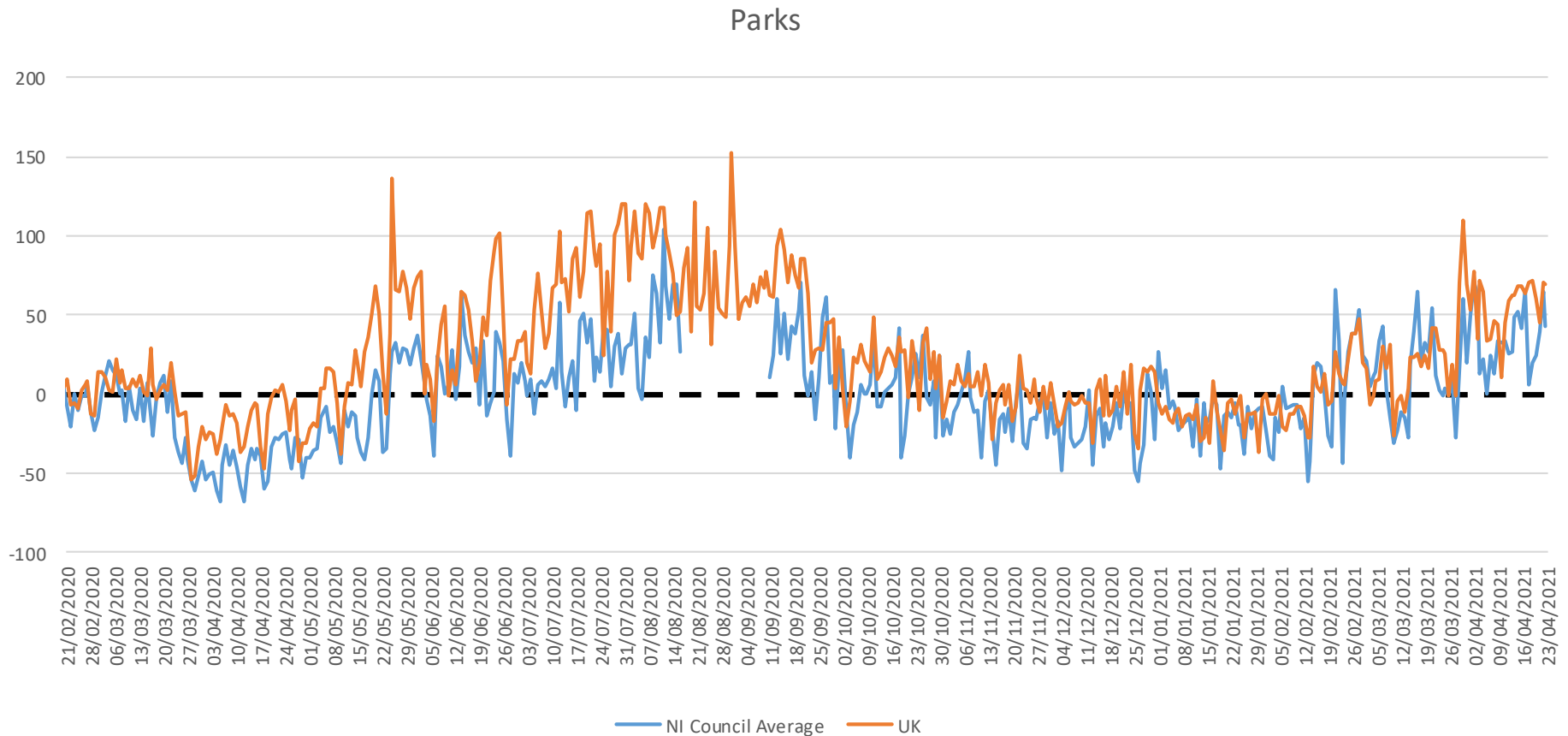
Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

Data for Supermarket & Pharmacy from the 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 has been revised and updated by Google to ensure consistent data reporting across categories.

Data is not presented between 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 at NI level due to insufficient data.

Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>

Data on parks typically refers to official national parks and not the general outdoors found in rural areas. It is important to note however that visitors to parks are heavily influenced by the weather therefore you can expect more dramatic changes. While initially visits to parks had fallen markedly below baseline levels in NI and the UK as a whole, there were notable increases in activity observed from May through September 2020, most likely due to the partial relaxation of social distancing guidelines and good weather. In the past two months there have been some large increases for visits to parks, most likely due to the better weather and longer daylight hours. As of the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, activity at parks stood at 43% above usual levels for NI and 69% above normal levels for the UK overall.



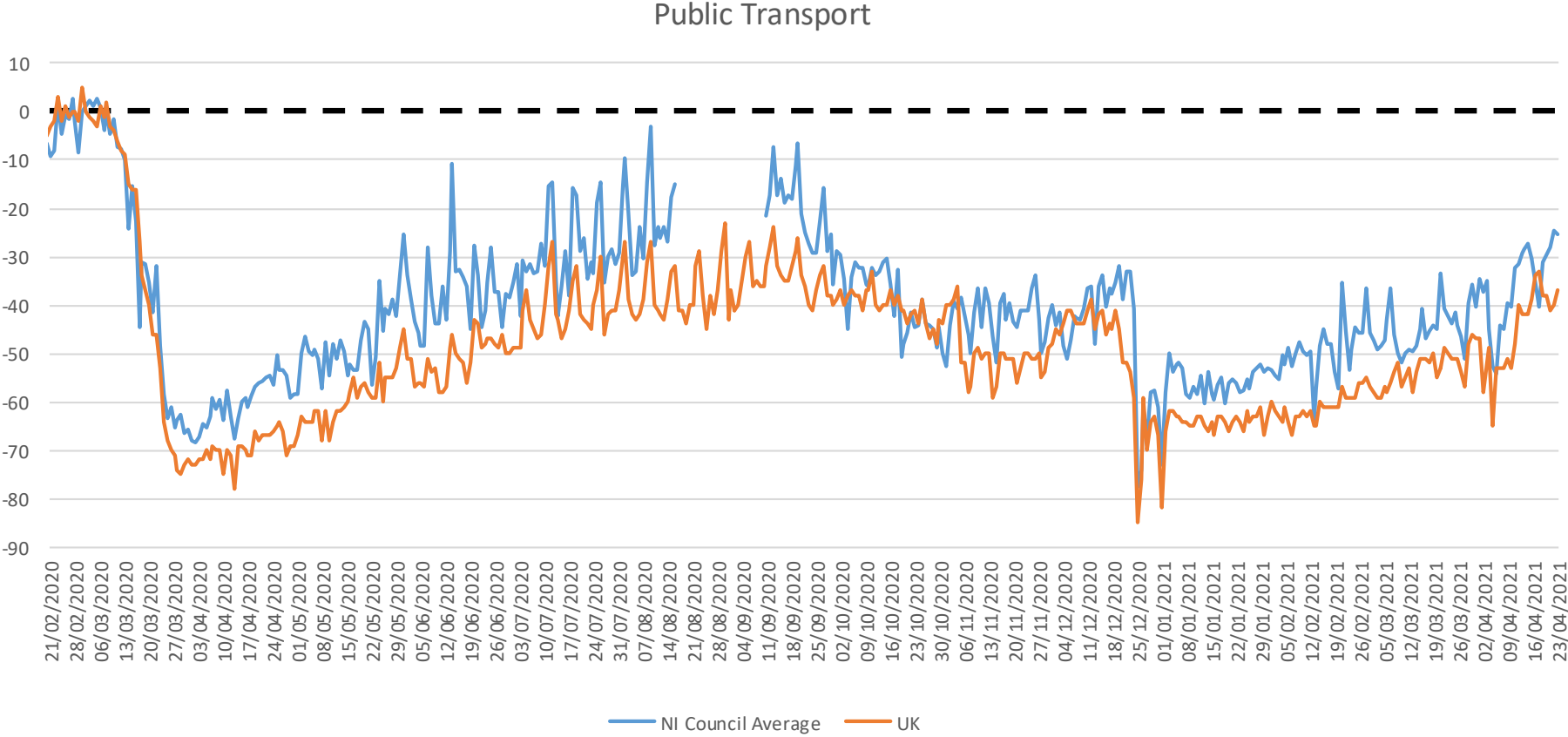
Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

Data for Parks from the 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 has been revised and updated by Google to ensure consistent data reporting across categories.

There was no reported mobility data for park activity in NI during the period 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020.

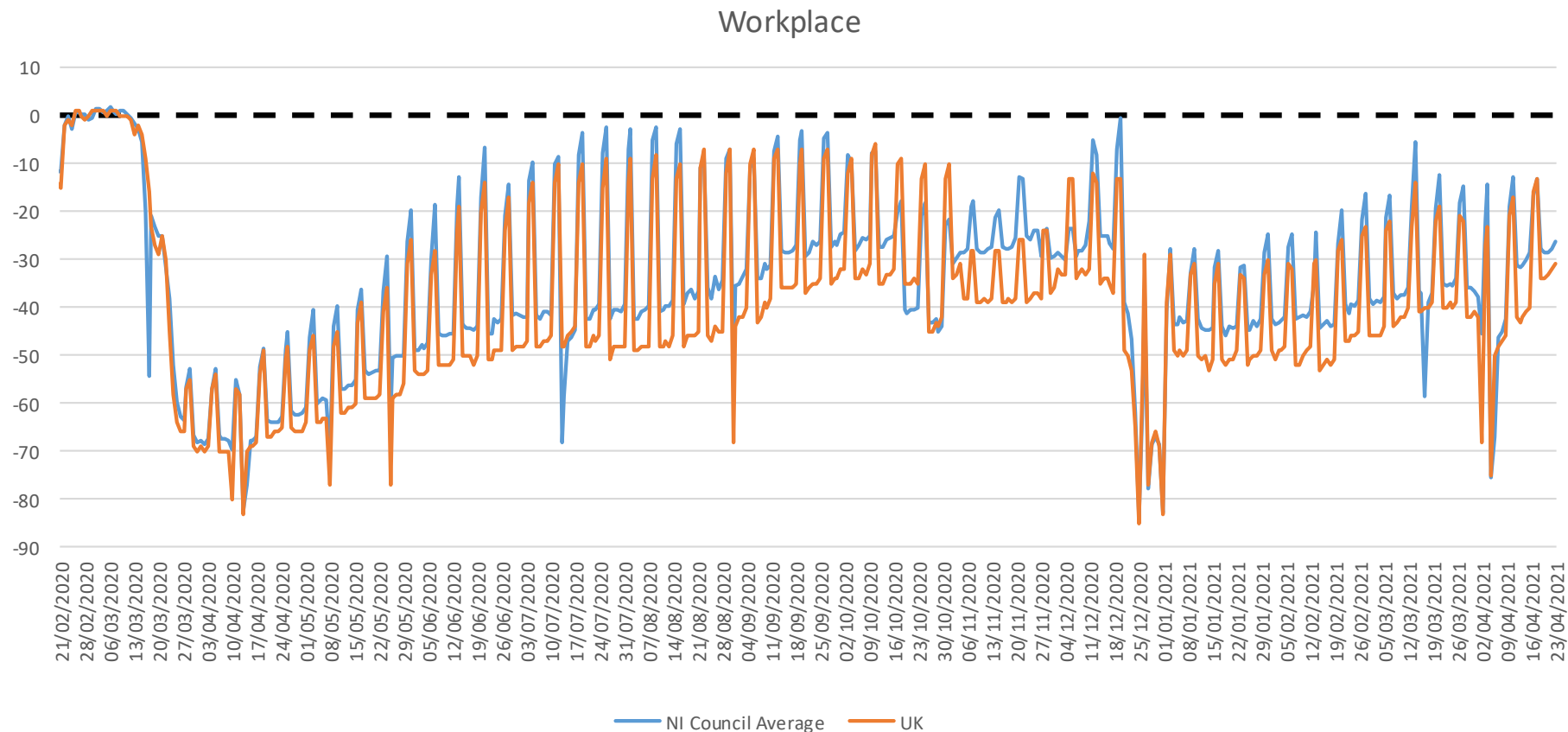
Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>

Similar to the UK overall, visits and time spent at places like public transport hubs such as bus and train stations had been falling sharply in NI since the start of March 2020, followed by a gradual increase in activity from mid-April 2020, albeit remaining markedly below normal levels. From mid-September however there has been a notable drop in activity, with the largest drop as expected on Christmas Day. As of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, use of public transport in NI was 25% below baseline levels, while activity for the UK overall was 37% below normal levels.



Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.  
 Data for Public Transport from the 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 has been revised and updated by Google to ensure consistent data reporting across categories.  
 Data is not presented between 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 at NI level due to insufficient data.  
 Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>

The reduction in travel to workplaces in NI is largely comparable with the UK overall. Increases in activity observed between May and July 2020 were most likely due to the easing of restrictions on some workplaces and the opening of additional retail outlets such as garden and recycling centres, hotels, bars and restaurants. The large drops in activity seen sporadically throughout the chart coincide with bank holidays being observed in some or all of the UK constituent countries. Weekday decreases in workplace activity have generally been less pronounced in NI when compared with the UK overall. As of Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, levels of travel to the workplace in NI and UK stood at 26% and 31% below baseline levels, respectively, reflecting the current restrictions and home working advice in place.

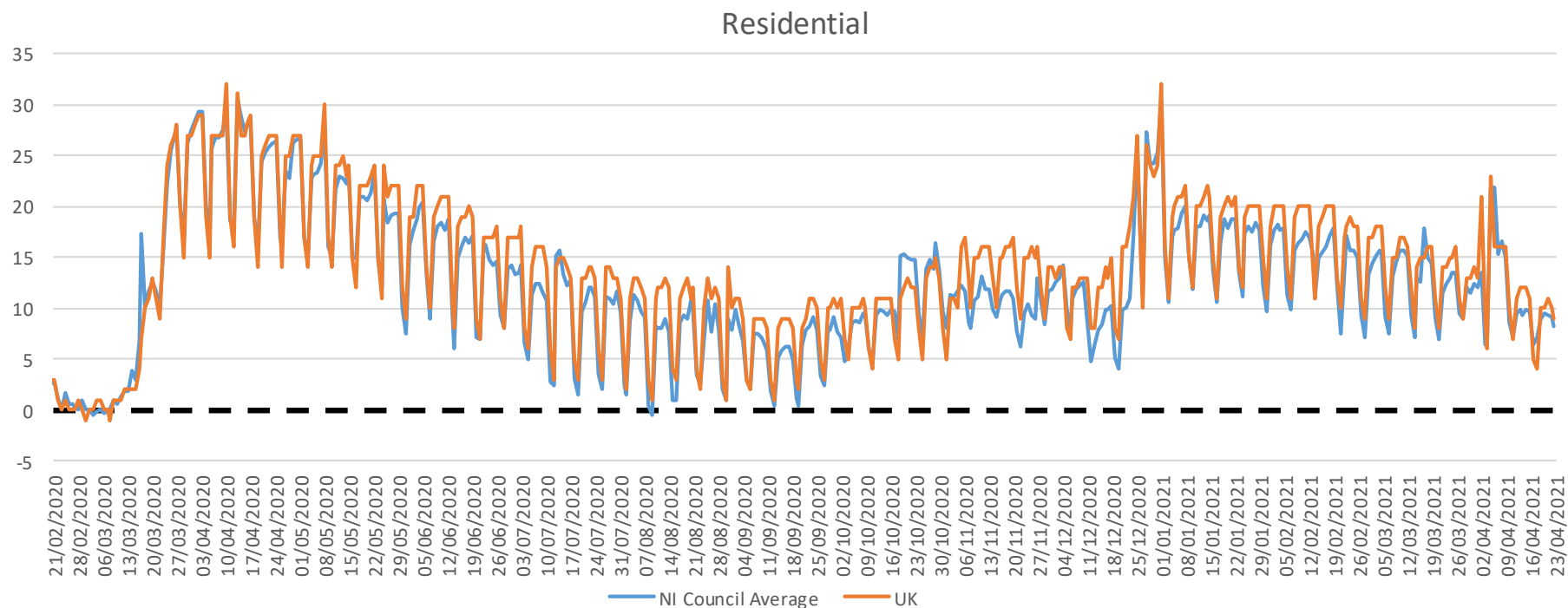


Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

Data for Workplace from the 17<sup>th</sup> Aug – 8<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020 has been revised and updated by Google to ensure consistent data reporting across categories.

Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>

The Residential category shows a change in **time spent** at home—the other mobility categories presented measure a change in **total visitors**. Because people already spend much of the day at home (even on workdays), the capacity for change isn't so large. Since the introduction of social distancing measures, the NI council average and the UK average have seen increases in mobility for places of residence. This increase is notably lower at weekends when many people would spend more time at home under normal conditions. Overall, NI and the UK had seen increases of around 15-30% in residential activity compared with baseline levels. Activity had been lowering gradually since mid-May 2020 as a result of increased activity to non-residential locations. However, since mid-September activity for places of residence has slowly began to rise likely due to local, followed by regional, restrictions being put in place across NI. While the restrictions put in place on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2020 have led to an increase in time spent at home, there has been a slight but gradual decrease in residential activity of late, likely due to the recent easing of these restrictions in addition to improved weather.



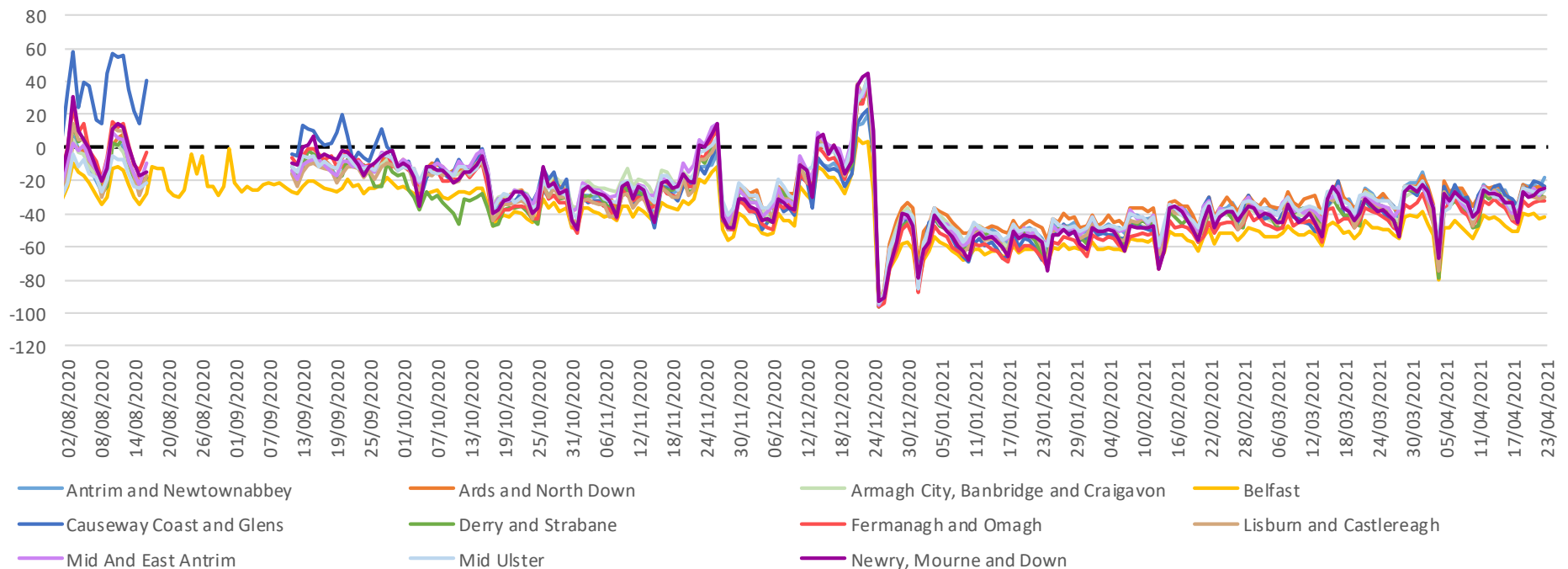
Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>

## How do the patterns we are seeing in mobility changes compare across Councils / Local Government Districts (LGDs) in NI?

An increase in activity in retail and recreation in August for a number of LGDs, most notably Causeway Coast & Glens, coincided with the implementation of the Eat Out to Help Out Scheme. Activity notably decreased in all LGDs after the scheme had ended. There had been notable decrease in activity for the majority of LGDs from Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2020 when the restrictions on the hospitality and recreation sectors were implemented, with activity slowly rising again to above normal levels. As would be expected, activity increased in the weeks leading up to Christmas followed by a sharp drop on Christmas Day for all areas. As of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, activity was markedly below normal levels across all council areas, coinciding with the latest restrictions.

Retail & Recreation



Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

Data for Retail & Recreation was not reported for all LGDs between 17<sup>th</sup> Aug - 10<sup>th</sup> Sep.

Analysis for Parks category has not been included at LGD level, due to a lack of comprehensive data.

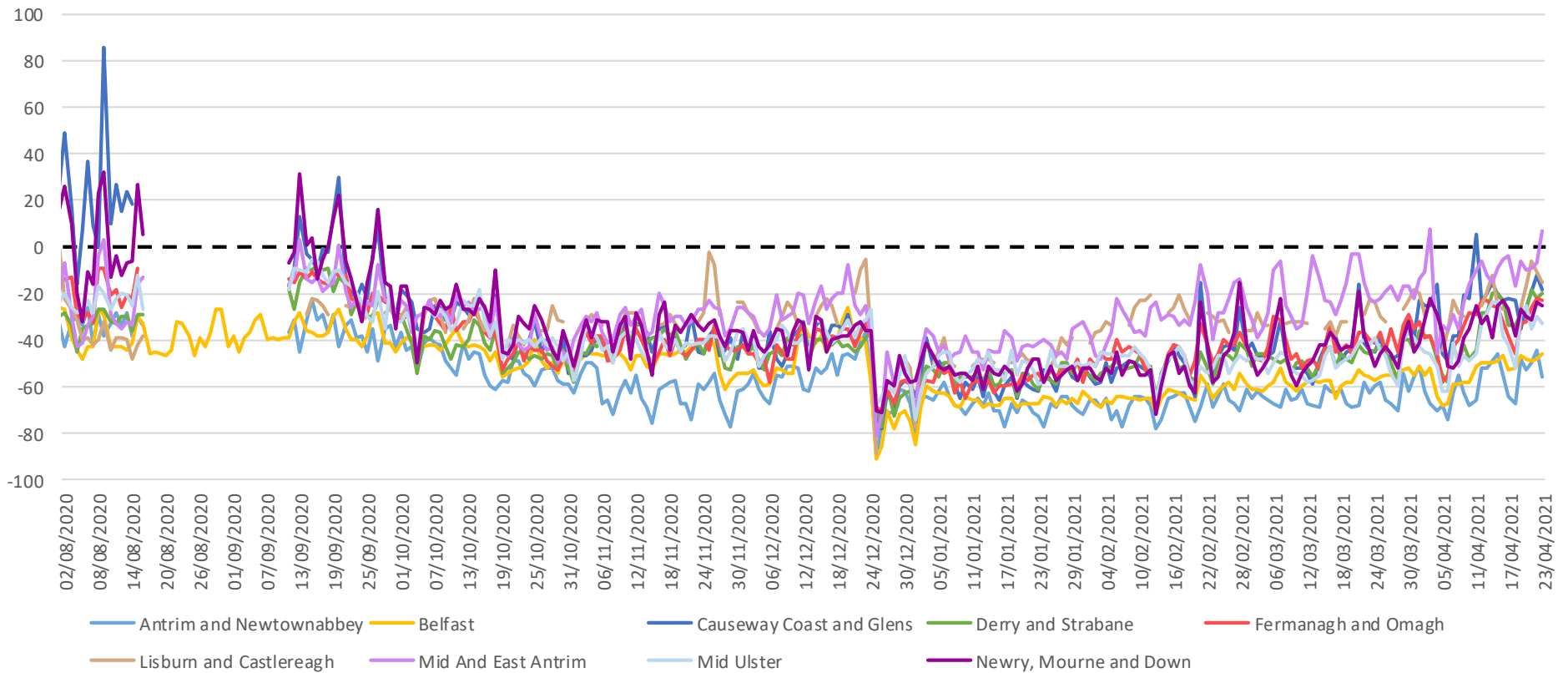
Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>





Visits and time spent at places like public transport hubs such as bus and train stations had been gradually falling across all LGDs since mid-September 2020, however activity then increased slightly in most council areas in the week leading up to Christmas. As of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, public transport across all LGDs was below usual levels, with the exception of Mid & East Antrim where activity was 7% above usual levels. The largest deviation was found in Antrim & Newtownabbey where activity was 56% below baseline levels.

### Public Transport



Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

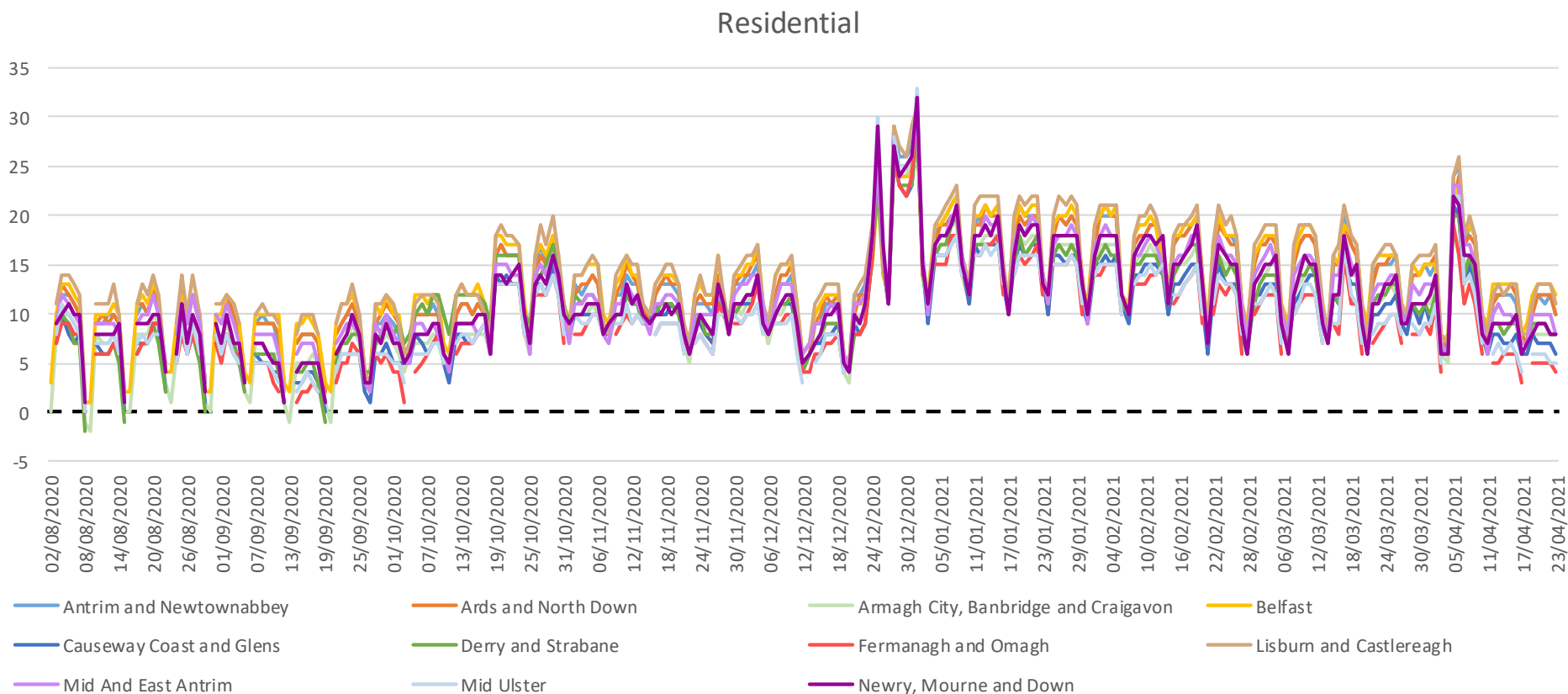
Data for Public Transport was not reported for all LGDs between 17<sup>th</sup> Aug - 10<sup>th</sup> Sep.

Sufficient data for Public Transport activity was not available from Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon, and Ards & North Down.

Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>



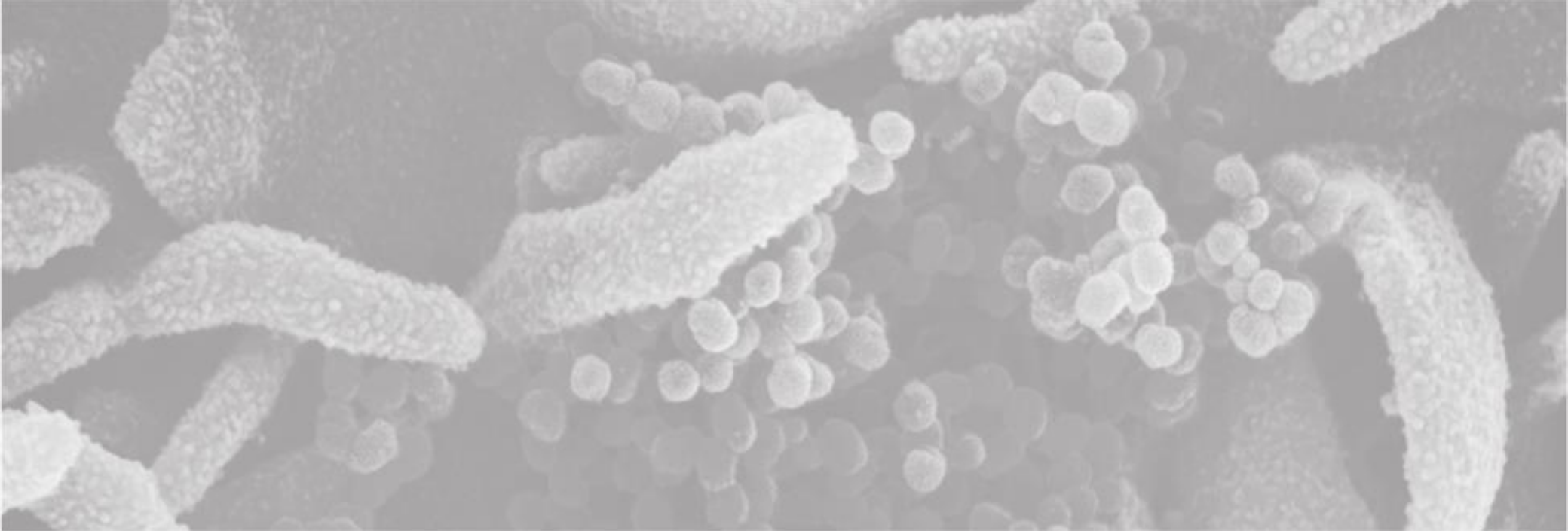
The Residential category shows a change in **time spent** at home—the other mobility categories presented measure a change in **total visitors**. Because people already spend much of the day at home (even on workdays), the capacity for change isn't so large. Since the start of August 2020, residential activity across all LGDs had remained at around 5-15% above normal levels, except for weekends when time spent at home is only slightly higher than normal for most LGDs. Since mid-October activity for places of residence has been slightly higher, likely due to local, followed by regional, restrictions being put in place across NI. However, as of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021 although activity was higher than usual levels in all council areas, there has been a recent drop in activity most likely due to the easing of some restrictions.



Note: Figures for NI are based on an average of council-level figures.

Data for Sundays was not available for most areas with the exception of Belfast and Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon until 20<sup>th</sup> Sep 2020.

Link to Google Mobility Report: <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/index.html?hl=en>



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