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um Staitisticí agus Taighde



Department for  
**Infrastructure**

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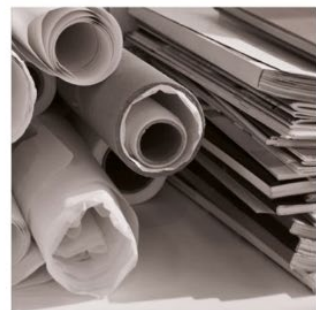
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# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

## First Quarter 2023/24 Statistical Bulletin

### April to June 2023: Provisional Figures



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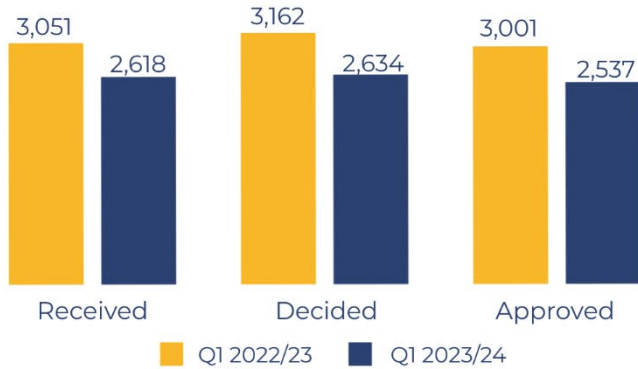
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## Key points

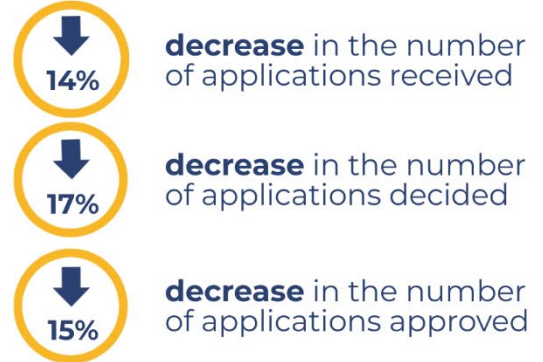
- There were 2,618 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during the first quarter of 2023/24; a decrease of almost eight percent on the previous quarter and down by over fourteen percent on the same period a year earlier. This comprised of 2,585 local and 33 major applications.
- In the first quarter of 2023/24, 2,634 planning applications were decided upon; up by over eight percent from the previous quarter but down by nearly seventeen percent from the same period a year earlier. Decisions were issued on 2,598 local and 36 major applications during the most recent quarter.
- The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first three months of 2023/24 was 18.9 weeks across all councils. This exceeds the 15 week target and represents an increase of 2.3 weeks from the same period a year earlier. Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first three months of 2023/24.
- The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first three months of 2023/24 was 59.6 weeks across all councils. This represents an increase of 8.2 weeks compared with the same period a year earlier and is almost double the 30 week target.
- The number of enforcement cases concluded and corresponding processing times are not presented in this report. This information will be published later and users will be notified when available.

## Overall planning applications

### Applications received, decided & approved



### Comparing Q1 2023/24 with Q1 2022/23:

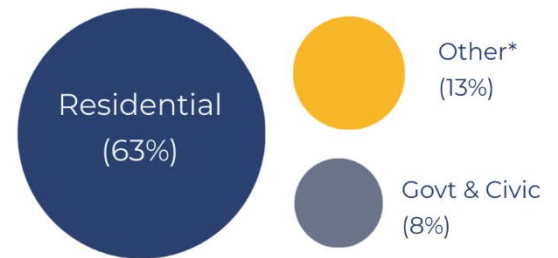


## Applications received

A total of 2,618 planning applications were received during Q1 2023/24:



### 3 largest development types



\*Other includes work to facilitate disabled persons, signs/advertisements & listed buildings

## Planning statutory targets

### Average processing times (weeks) - major



### Average processing times (weeks) - local



### Councils within major target



### Councils within local target



# Northern Ireland Planning Statistics: First Quarter 2023/24 Statistical Bulletin

## Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for councils and the Department for Infrastructure during the first quarter of 2023/24.

These quarterly figures are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures, to be published in July 2024. Enforcement figures for 2022/23 remain provisional and will be subject to a further revision once the full suite of enforcement data is available.

The records of all planning applications from 1 April to 30 June 2023 were transferred in August 2023 from live databases. This included all live planning applications in the Northern Ireland and Mid Ulster Planning Portals. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB). Local councils and the Department were provided with their own headline planning statistics as part of the quality assurance process. Once validations were complete, a final extract was taken in September 2023.

Detailed notes on the background of NI Planning Statistics and user guidance for this publication can be found [here](#).

## Future releases

The next quarterly bulletin containing provisional planning data up to 30 September 2023 is planned for release in December 2023. The next annual report covering 2023/24 is planned for release in July 2024. See [GOV.UK](#) Release Calendar and [upcoming statistical releases](#) on the Department's website for future publication dates.

## User engagement

ASRB carried out a user consultation exercise during the summer 2023. The outcome report on this consultation can be found [here](#).

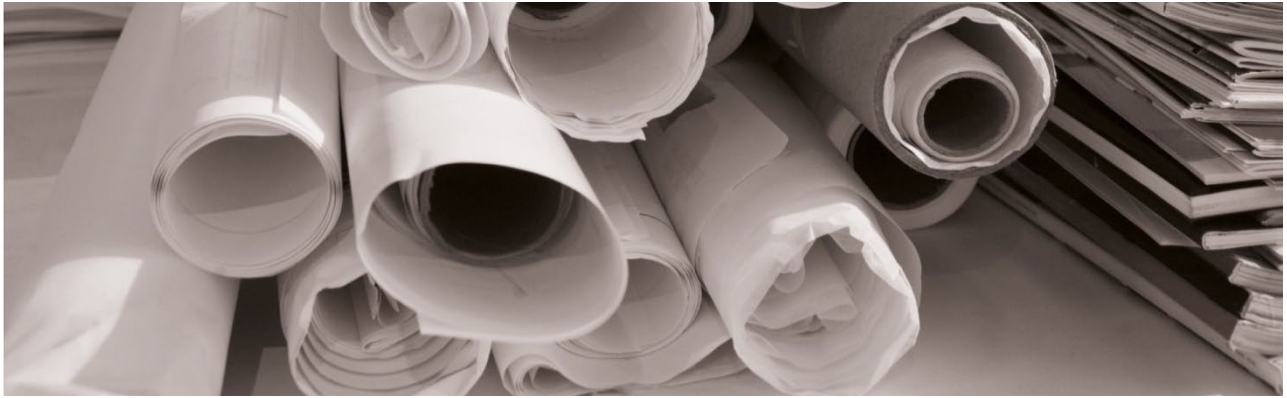
The content of this report has changed following the user consultation to make it more streamlined and focussed on the legislative targets and high-level planning activity. All data that would have been referred to in previous quarterly reports can still be found in the detailed data tables. Additionally, a separate '[User Guidance](#)' document has been created.

## Northern Ireland regional planning IT systems

In 2022, two new planning portals were introduced; the [Northern Ireland Planning Portal](#) for 10 councils and the Department for Infrastructure, and the [Mid Ulster planning portal](#). The transfer to the new planning portals will have impacted on planning activity and processing performance; this should be borne in mind and caution taken when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods. Data relating to the number of enforcements concluded and processing times for these is absent from this report. This will be published at a later date and users will be notified when available.

## Alternative formats

This document may be made available in alternative formats, please contact us to discuss your requirements. Contact details are available on the cover page of this report.



## Chapter 1: Overall Northern Ireland planning activity

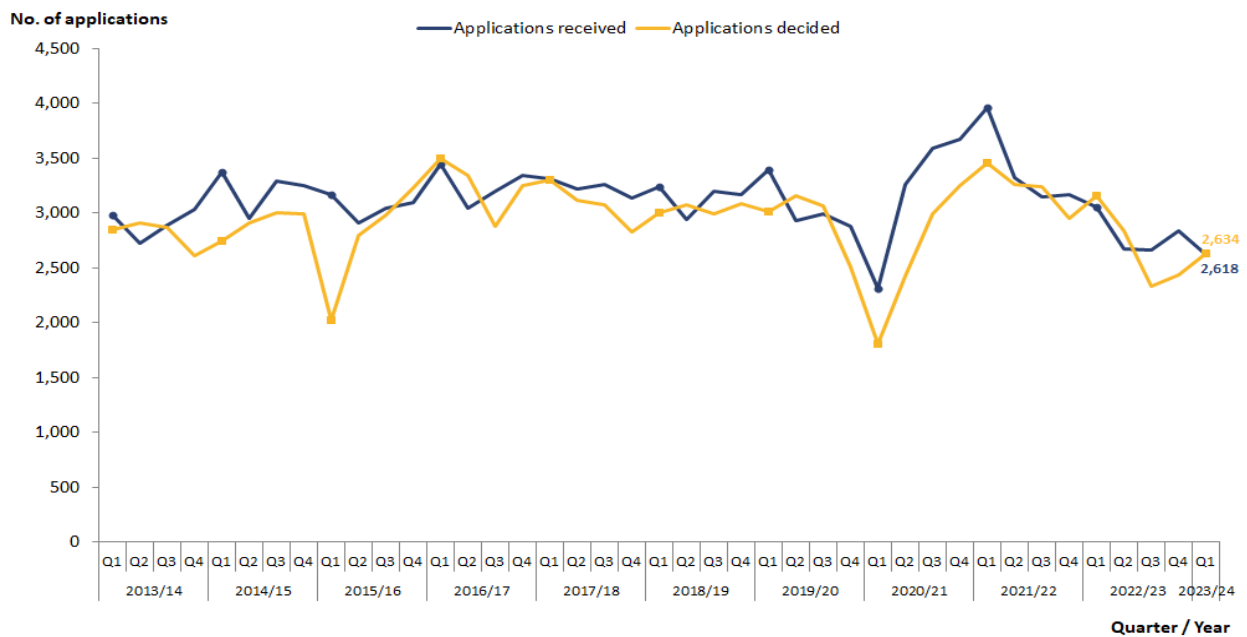
The volume of planning applications received in the first quarter of 2023/24 has decreased from the previous quarter and from the same period last year. For applications processed (i.e. decided or withdrawn) the volume processed has increased from the previous quarter but was lower than the levels recorded during the same period the previous year. The number of enforcement cases opened in the period April to June 2023 (Q1) increased from the previous quarter but was lower than the same period a year earlier; the number of cases closed was also higher than the previous quarter, but lower than in Q1 2022/23.

There have been some key events in recent years that will have impacted on planning activity and processing performance. These were the coronavirus pandemic with varying restrictions in place up until February 2022; the accessibility of the planning system for some users for a period during January and February 2022, and a significant change in IT planning systems with the development and implementation of two new planning systems in June and December 2022. All these factors should be borne in mind when interpreting these figures and when making comparisons with other time periods.

### **Applications received**

The number of planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in Q1 2023/24 was 2,618; decreases of 7.6% on the previous quarter (2,834) and 14.2% on the same period a year earlier (3,051) (Figure 1.1). [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.](#)

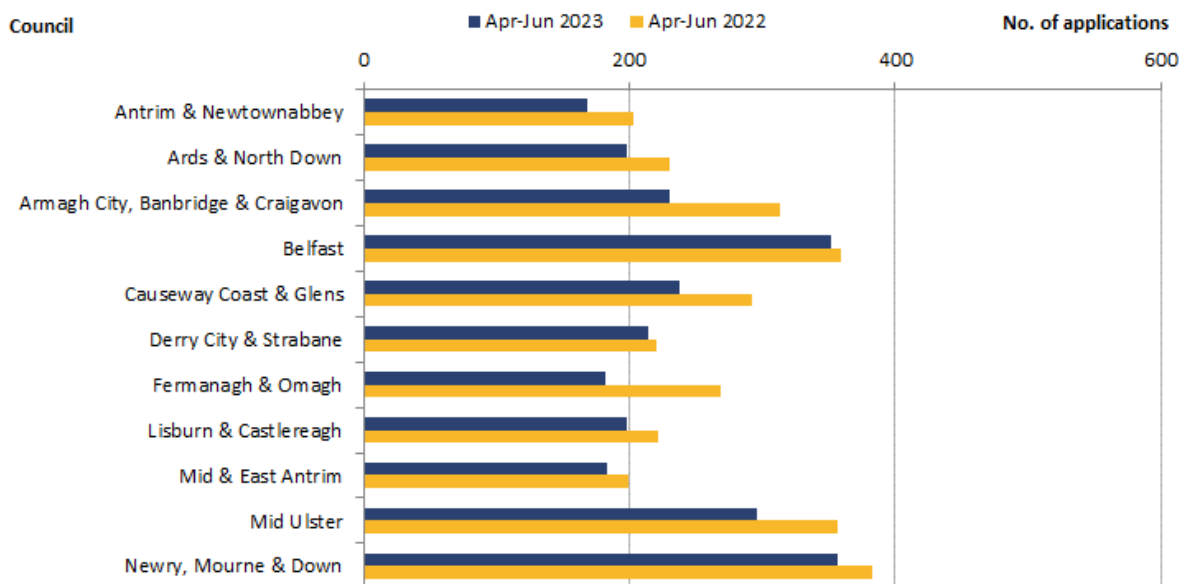
Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly, April 2013 to June 2023



Eight councils reported a decrease in the number of planning applications received in Q1 2023/24 compared with the previous quarter, with the decrease greatest in Causeway Coast and Glens (-19.6%). Two councils reported a small increase over the quarter with the increase greatest in Newry, Mourne and Down (2.3%); one council was unchanged.

Comparing Q1 in 2023/24 with the same period in 2022/23, all eleven councils reported a decrease in the number of applications received, with the greatest decrease reported by Fermanagh and Omagh (-32.3%). (Figure 1.2).

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, April to June 2022 & 2023



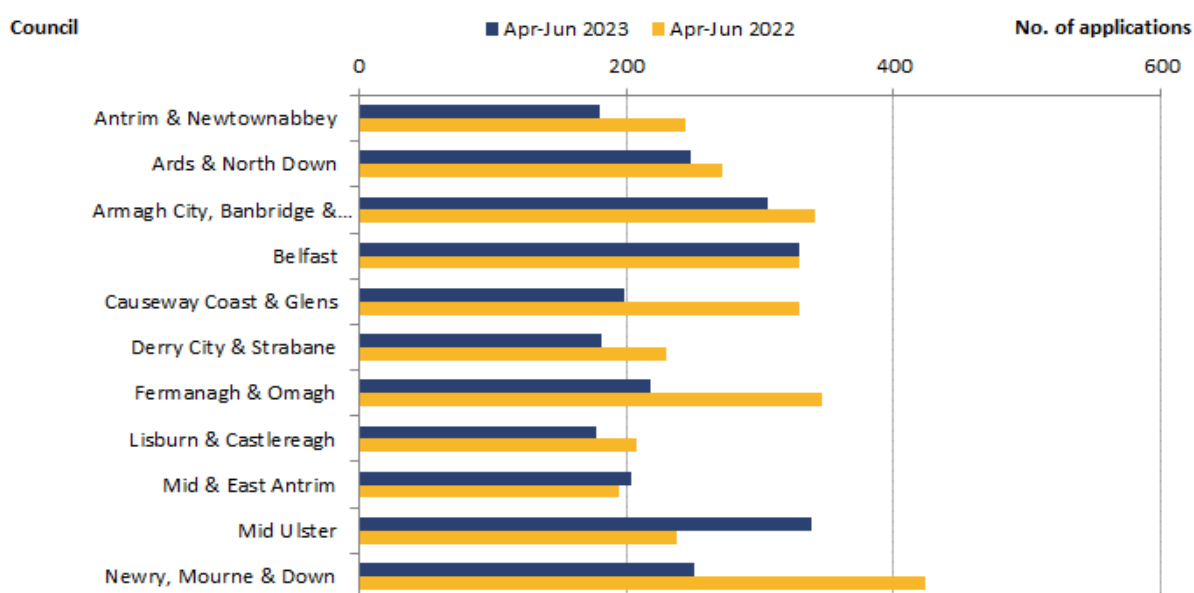


## Applications decided

The number of planning decisions issued during Q1 2023/24 was 2,634; up by 8.2% on Q4 2022/23 (2,435) but down by 16.7% when compared with the same period a year earlier (3,162). [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2.](#)

Comparing Q1 in 2023/24 with the same period in 2022/23, nine councils reported a decrease in the number of applications decided, with the largest decrease recorded in Newry, Mourne and Down (-40.8%). Two councils reported an increase over the same period with Mid Ulster reporting the greatest increase (42.4%) (Figure 1.3).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, April to June 2022 & 2023



In Q1 2023/24, 139 applications were withdrawn; an increase on the previous quarter (130) but down when compared with the same period a year earlier (148).

## Approval rates

The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for all planning applications was 96.3% in Q1 2023/24. This was higher than both the previous quarter (96.0%) and the same period a year earlier (94.9%). [Refer to Table 1.1.](#)

Approval rates varied across councils during Q1 2023/24, from 99.5% in Fermanagh and Omagh to 91.1% in Antrim and Newtownabbey. These rates are dependent on many factors and care should be taken in making any comparisons. [Refer to Table 1.2.](#)

## Live applications

There were 7,967 live applications in the planning system across NI at the end of June 2023, down from the end of March 2023 (8,092), and similar to the count at the end of the June 2022 (7,952).

Over one-quarter of live applications at the end of June 2023 were over one year old (26.9%); a slight increase from the proportion reported at the end of March 2023 (25.8%). [Refer to Table 1.3.](#)

## Departmental activity

There were no applications received by the Department in Q1 2023/24; this compares to one received during the previous quarter and one during the same period a year earlier. No applications were decided during the first quarter of 2023/24; this compares to five decisions during the previous quarter and four decisions during the same period a year earlier. There were no applications withdrawn during Q1 2023/24. At the end of June 2023 there were 18 live Departmental applications; 17 out of 18 were in the planning system for over a year.



**It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing regionally significant planning applications from date valid to a ministerial recommendation or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks.**

Of the four RSD applications live in the planning system at the end of June 2023, two have been progressed to ministerial recommendation but the 30 week period for recommendation / withdrawal has been exceeded. Of the remaining two awaiting ministerial recommendation, the 30 week period has been exceeded for one, and the other which was received during Q4 2022/23 will be progressed in future months.

## Development type

The majority of planning applications received and decided in NI are for residential development. Residential applications accounted for over three-fifths (1,653; 63.1%) of applications received in Q1 2023/24, followed by 'Other' (336; 12.8%) and 'Government and Civic' (202; 7.7%). The top three development types decided in Q1 2023/24 were 'Residential' (1,682), 'Other' (334) and 'Government and Civic' (202). [Refer to Tables 5.1, 5.2.](#)

## Renewable energy activity

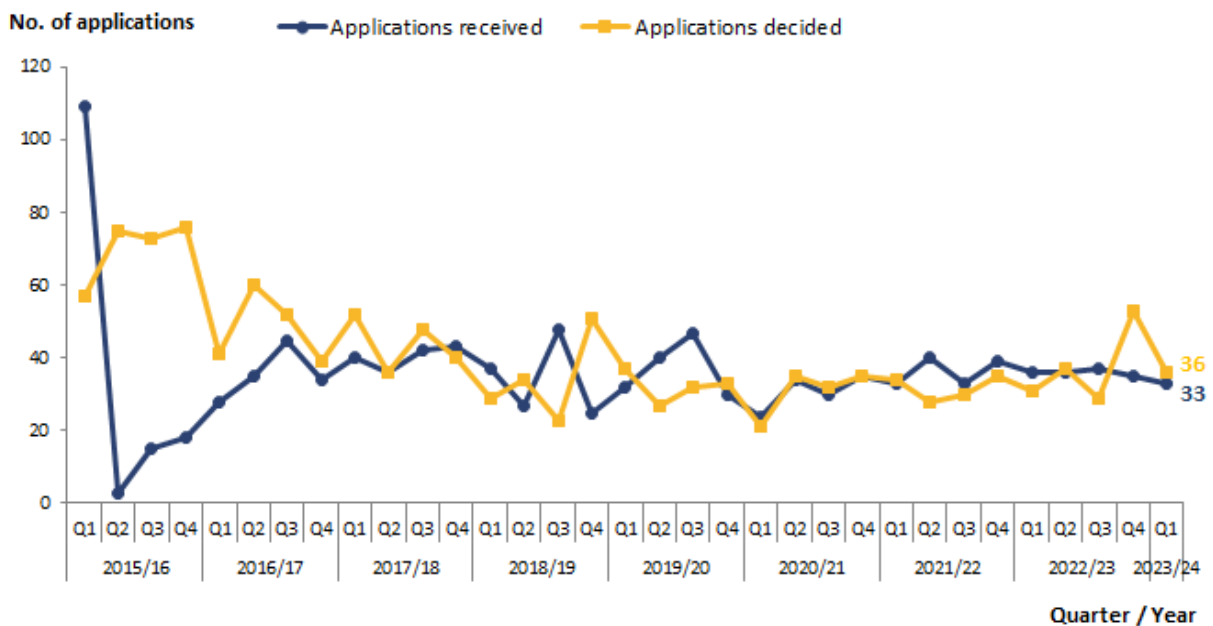
Twenty-four renewable energy applications were received in Q1 2023/24; down from the previous quarter (36) but similar to the same period the previous year (23). Nineteen renewable energy applications were decided during Q1 2023/24; this compares to 23 in the previous quarter and 19 in the same period last year.



## Chapter 2: Major development planning applications

Major Developments have important economic, social and environmental implications. The majority of major applications are multiple housing, commercial, and government and civic types of development. A total of 33 major planning applications were received in NI during Q1 2023/24; similar to the previous quarter (35) and the same period a year earlier (36). [Refer to Table 3.1.](#)

Fig 3.1 Major development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to June 2023



During Q1 2023/24, 36 major planning applications were decided; down from 53 decided in the previous quarter but up from 31 decided during the first quarter of 2022/23 (Figure 3.1).

The approval rate for major applications decided upon in NI during Q1 2023/24 was 97.2%. [Refer to Tables 3.1, 3.2.](#)

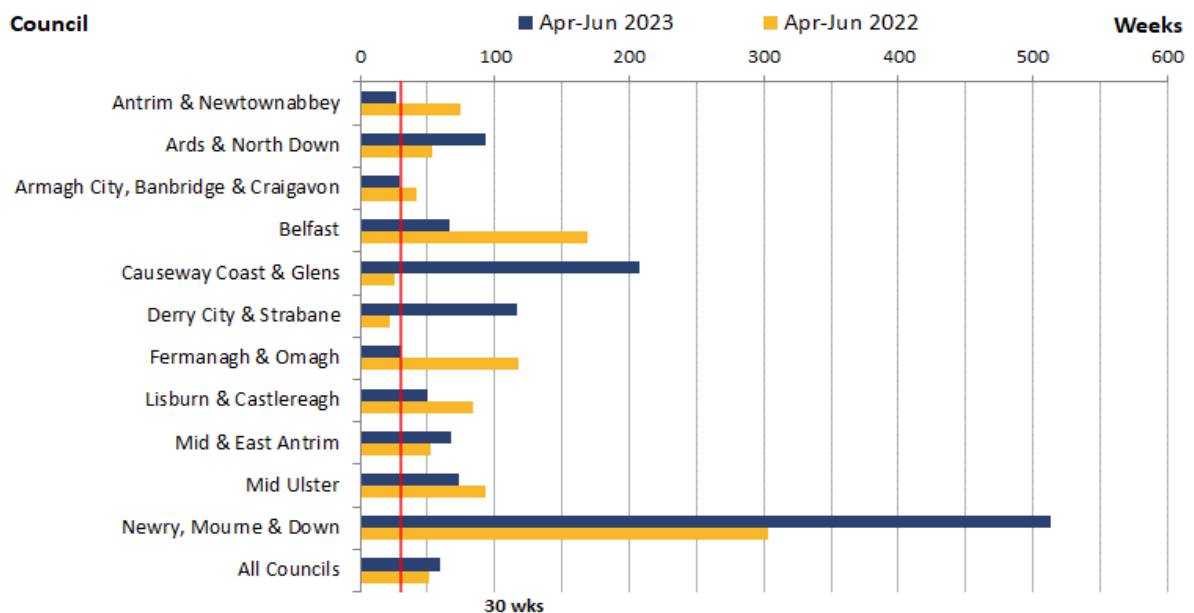
### Major planning applications statutory target



**It is a statutory target for each council that major development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 30 weeks.**

Figure 3.2 presents annual average processing times for major applications. The average processing time for major applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the first three months of 2023/24 was 59.6 weeks across all councils. This represents an increase of 8.2 weeks compared with the same period in 2022/23 (51.4 weeks) and is almost double the 30 week target.

Fig 3.2 Major development average processing times by council, April to June 2022 & 2023



Note: Whilst Figure 3.2 has been provided for completeness, across councils there may be an insufficient number of major applications processed during the period reported to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance.

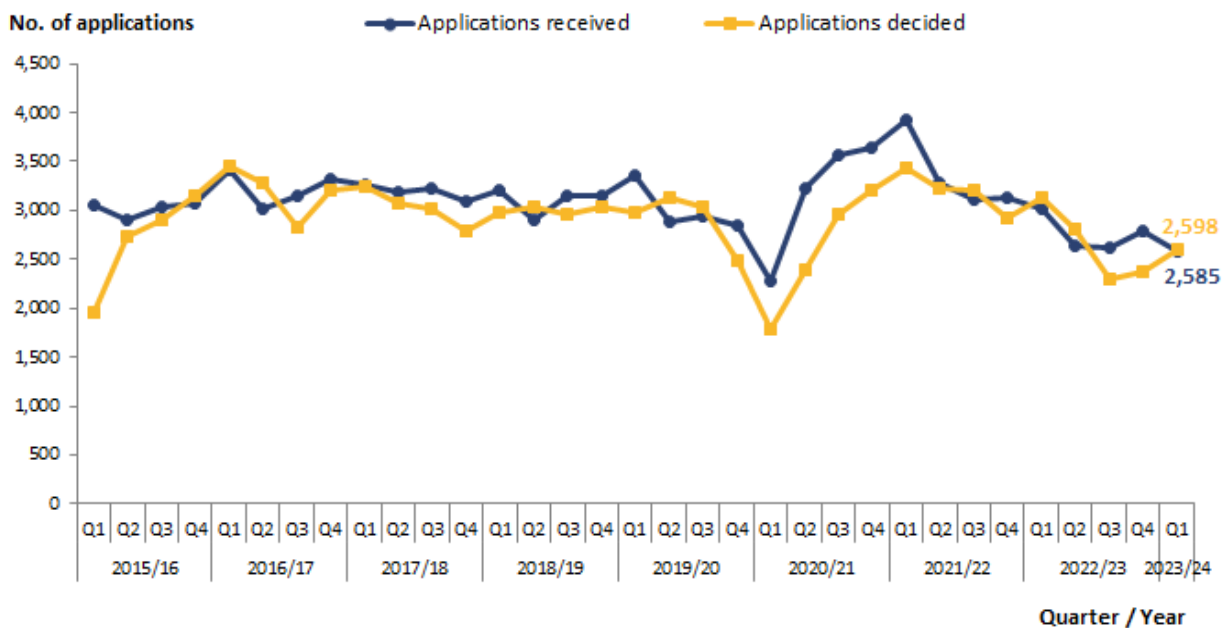
[Refer to Table 3.2 for further information.](#)



# Chapter 3: Local development planning applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications and are largely determined by the councils. The number of local applications received in NI during Q1 2023/24 was 2,585; a decrease of 7.6% on the previous quarter (2,798) and down by 14.3% on the same the same period a year earlier (3,015). [Refer to Table 4.1.](#)

Fig 4.1 Local development applications, quarterly, April 2015 to June 2023



The number of local applications decided in Q1 2023/24 was 2,598; up by 9.1% on Q4 2022/23 (2,382) but down by 17.0% compared with the same period a year earlier (3,131); [refer to Table 4.1.](#) The overall Northern Ireland approval rate for local applications was

96.3% in Q1 2023/24; up from the rates reported for the previous quarter (96.0%) and the same period a year earlier (94.9%).

### Local planning applications statutory target

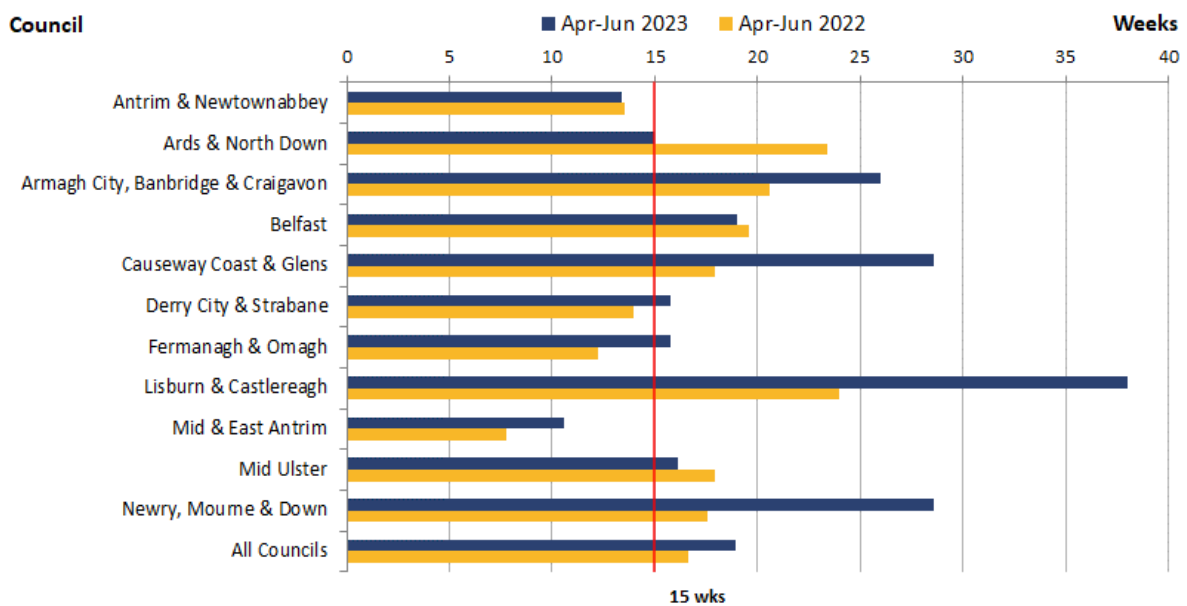


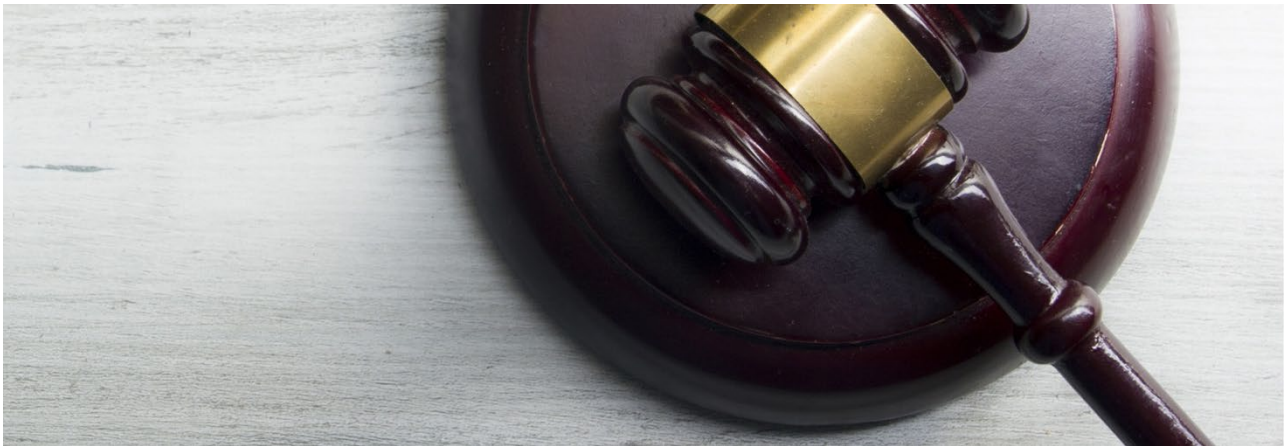
**It is a statutory target for each council that local development planning applications will be processed from the date valid to decision issued or withdrawal date within an average of 15 weeks.**

The average processing time for local applications brought to a decision or withdrawal during the most recent quarter (Q1 2023/24) was 18.9 weeks, exceeding the statutory target of 15 weeks. This is down over the quarter from 21.0 weeks, and up when compared to the same period the previous year (16.6 weeks).

Three of the 11 councils were within the 15 week target after the first three months of 2023/24: Mid and East Antrim (10.6 weeks), Antrim and Newtownabbey (13.4 weeks) and Ards and North Down (15.0 weeks) (Figure 4.1). [Refer to Table 4.2.](#)

Fig 4.2 Local development average processing times by council, April to June 2022 & 2023

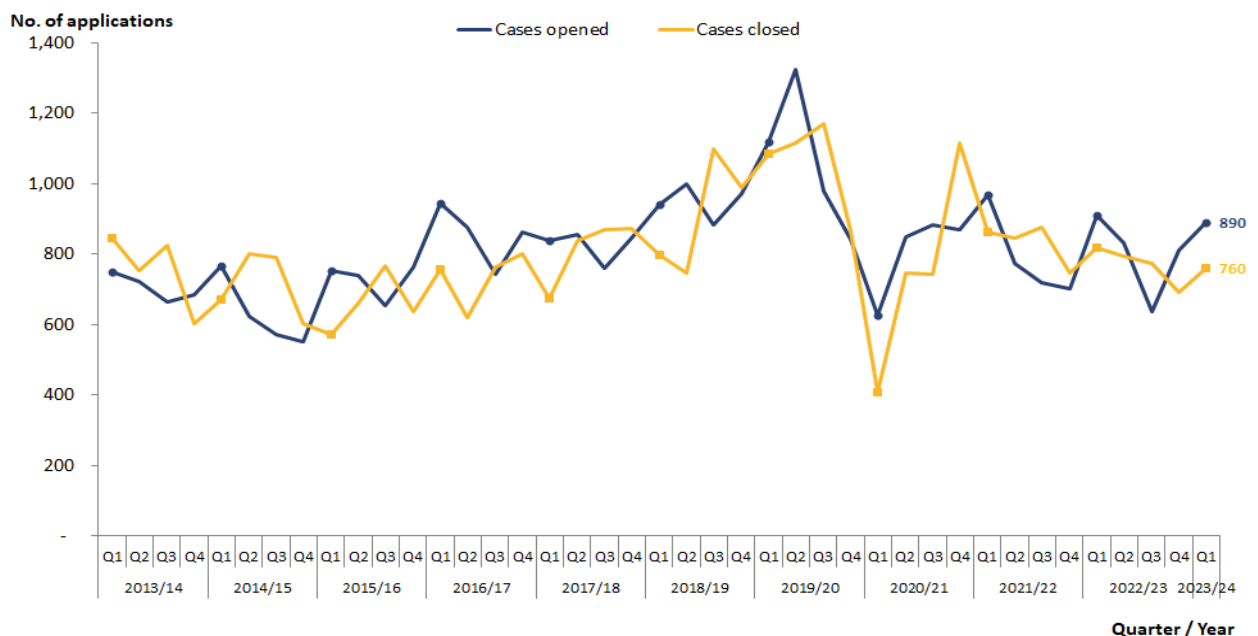




## Chapter 4: Enforcement activity

The number of enforcement cases opened in NI during the first quarter of 2023/24 was 890; up by 9.5% over the quarter (813) and down by 2.2% from the same period a year earlier (910). [Refer to Table 6.1.](#)

Fig 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly from April 2013 to June 2023



The number of enforcement cases closed during Q1 2023/24 was 760; up by 10.0% over the quarter (691) and down by 7.1% from the same period a year earlier (818) (Figure 6.1).

The number of enforcement cases over two years old stood at 1,403 at the end of June 2023, accounting for 36.0% of all live cases. This compared with 35.0% of live cases at the end of March 2023 and 31.2% at the end of June 2022.

[Refer to Tables and 6.1 and 6.4.](#)

### Enforcement cases statutory target



**It is a statutory target that 70% of all enforcement cases dealt with by councils are progressed to target conclusion within 39 weeks of receipt of complaint.**

The number of enforcement cases concluded and corresponding processing times (statutory target) is not presented in this report. This information will be published later and users will be notified when available.





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## National Statistics status

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics were accredited as National Statistics in December 2020, following an independent review by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). This means that the statistics comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled '[accredited official statistics](#)'<sup>1</sup>.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the OSR who sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk) or via the OSR website.

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<sup>1</sup> National Statistics are [accredited official statistics](#). In the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 [accredited official statistics](#) are called National Statistics.