

NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

2017/18 FIRST QUARTER STATISTICAL BULLETIN

(April – June 2017: Provisional figures)



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Key Points

- There were 3,337 planning applications received in Northern Ireland (NI) during April to June 2017 (Q1), similar to the previous quarter (3,346) but down by 3% on the same period a year earlier. This comprised 3,297 local, 39 major and 1 regionally significant development application.
- During the first quarter of 2017/18, 3,301 planning applications were decided, an increase of nearly 2% over the quarter but a decrease of almost 6% when compared to the same period a year earlier.
- The average processing time for major applications during Q1 was 56 weeks across all councils; an improvement of nearly 10 weeks from the 65 weeks reported for the first quarter last year. This is over 25 weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks, although it is still a relatively early stage in the year.
- The number of local planning applications received was 3,297, similar to the number received in the previous quarter but down by over 3% on the same period a year earlier. Across councils, Belfast City (445), Newry, Mourne and Down (400) and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (387) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q1.
- Across councils it took, on average, just over 15 weeks to process local applications to decision or withdrawal, an improvement of nearly 2 weeks on the same period last year. Five of the eleven councils were within the 15 week target during the first 3 months of 2017/18. The shortest average processing time for local applications across councils was just below 10 weeks in Mid and East Antrim, whilst the longest was nearly 24 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh.
- The number of enforcement cases opened in NI was 840, a decrease of 11% on the same period last year. Apart from the 943 cases recorded in Q1 last year, this is still the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any first quarter since 2010/11 when 1,028 cases were opened. Across the councils, Belfast City (127) and Ards and North Down (110) opened the largest number of cases in Q1.
- Across NI, over three quarters (77%) of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks, nearly 7 percentage points above the statutory target but just over 4 percentage points lower than the equivalent period last year. Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with performance ranging from a high of 96% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey to 57% in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The NI approval rate for all planning applications for the quarter was 94%, similar to the rates for the previous quarter and a year earlier. First quarter approval rates varied across councils from 89% to 98%.
- The 13 renewable energy applications received was by far the lowest first quarter figure in thirteen years (since 2004/05). Less than one quarter (23%) of these were for single wind turbines, compared with nearly half (48%) a year earlier. The average processing time for renewable energy applications was almost 96 weeks in Q1, over 42 weeks longer than the same period last year.

Introduction

This statistical bulletin presents a summary of Northern Ireland (NI) planning volumes and processing performance for the new district councils, and the Department of Infrastructure, during the first quarter of 2017/18. Note that from the 8th May 2016, Ministerial responsibility for planning transferred from the former Department of Environment to the new Department of Infrastructure (the 'Department') following departmental reorganisation.

Whilst the bulletin and accompanying tables report data for first quarter of 2017/18, the detailed tables also include comparable data from previous years. Commentary will be mainly focussed on changes over the year and changes over the last quarter. Please note that these quarterly figures for 2017/18 are provisional and will be subject to scheduled revisions ahead of finalised annual figures being published in June 2018.

Background

The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the '2011 Act') sets out the legislative framework for development management in NI and provides that, from 1 April 2015, councils now largely have responsibility for this planning function. Planning applications for development categorised as being either major development or local development are determined by the councils. Responsibility for planning applications for regionally significant development rests with the Department. In addition, the Department retains responsibility for legacy 'Article 31' applications (i.e. Article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991).

Furthermore, the Department has the power to 'call in' both major and local development applications from councils, where it so directs, and determine them (see 'User Guidance' for a fuller description of the different planning application types). Responsibility for planning legislation, and for formulating and co-ordinating policy for securing the

orderly and consistent development of land, remains with the Department. Consequently, the responsibility for development management is shared between the 11 new councils and the Department.

The Department will continue to have responsibility for the provision and publication of Official Statistics relating to the overall development management function, including enforcement. The quarterly and annual reports provide the NI headline results split by district council (and the Department where relevant). These data will also provide councils with information on their performance in order to meet their own reporting obligations under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Note that whilst pre-transfer activity volumes can be mapped historically to the new organisational areas from which the demands arise, it would not be valid to do the same with performance data as the newly established district councils did not exist, nor do they neatly overlap with the old area planning office jurisdictions.

The first year of data under the new organisational areas was 2015/16, therefore, 2015/16 is regarded as the base year for reporting of performance-related data at council level with comparative trend data building from that point onwards. Whilst historic comparisons of performance at NI level can still be made, it is important to be aware that there have been a number of significant recent changes to the Planning system which will have had an impact. Where relevant these have been highlighted throughout the report.

Statistics included in this report

This bulletin provides an overall view of planning activity across NI. It provides summary statistical information on council progress across the 3 statutory targets for major development applications, local development applications and enforcement cases as laid out in the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015. It

also provides information relating to Departmental performance against quantitative Corporate Business Plan targets.

All of the information underlying the charts and graphs featured in this bulletin are included in accompanying Excel tables (see Appendix 1 for additional 'Definitions' used in these tables). This summary bulletin provides an overview and high level commentary with more details and further analyses available in the Excel tables. Where relevant, some of the more detailed findings may be referred to in the commentary.

Revisions and changes since Quarter 1 2015/16

(i) Major versus local classification - following the publication of the first quarter provisional bulletin in November 2015, a number of planning application classification issues were identified which required further investigation. This led to a number of revisions to the first quarter 2015/16 provisional figures which are reflected in later quarterly bulletins. The validation exercise additionally highlighted some inconsistencies in major and local development classification between the 2015/16 and 2014/15 when the new classification hierarchy was first administratively implemented. It was decided, therefore, that 2015/16, when the classification hierarchy was given full legal effect, would be the base year for future comparisons of major and local development activity. As such, back-comparisons at council level for these application types are not possible.

(ii) 'Discharge of conditions' - whilst forming part of a council's workload, these are not planning applications per se and hence should be excluded from the assessment of target processing performance. This led to some further revisions from the previously released first quarter 2015/16 results. However, whilst there were some small changes to activity volumes, their exclusion did not materially affect average processing times across the vast majority of councils. See 'User Guidance' for further detail on excluded planning activity. Table 9.1, in the accompanying bulletin tables, provides

volumes and processing times for all such 'non-application' workload.

(iii) Legacy versus new council activity – in order to provide additional context around council performance, two additional analyses have been included in the companion tables. Table 8.1 shows the volume of legacy work which each council inherited on 1st April 2015 and to what extent it has since been reducing, while Table 8.2 splits out processing performance for major and local development into legacy versus new council applications. These tables will be retained until the legacy applications become a negligible part of overall council workload.

Future Releases

The next quarterly release is due in December 2017. This will contain planning data up to 30th September 2017 (i.e. for Q2 2017/18).

The next annual report covering 2017/18 is planned for release in late June 2018.

See [Gov.UK Release Calendar](#) for release dates of future publications.

1. Overall NI Planning Activity

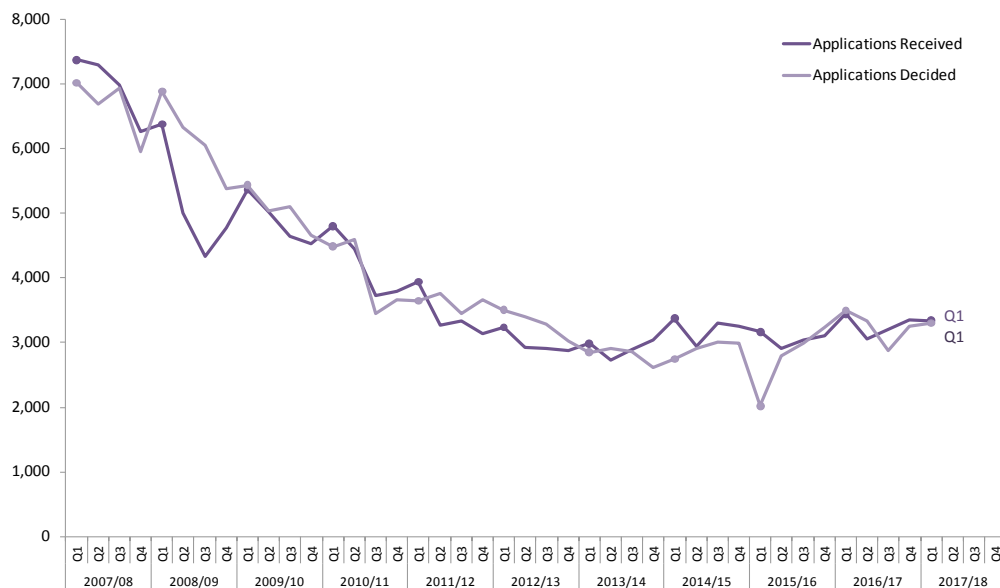
Applications Received

The number of planning applications **received** in Northern Ireland (NI) by councils and the Department in the period April to June 2017 (Q1), was **3,337**, similar to the previous quarter (3,346) but down by 3.1% on the same period a year earlier (3,442).

The number of planning applications received had generally been on the decline from its peak in 2004/05 up until 2013/14 when it reached its lowest level of the series. The series shows that the number of applications received has been fairly stable for the last six years with small changes quarter on quarter.

Of the 3,337 applications received in Q1 just over three quarters were for full planning permission (75.9%), similar to the position last year (76.5%).

Fig 1.1 NI planning applications, quarterly from Apr 2007 Jun 2017

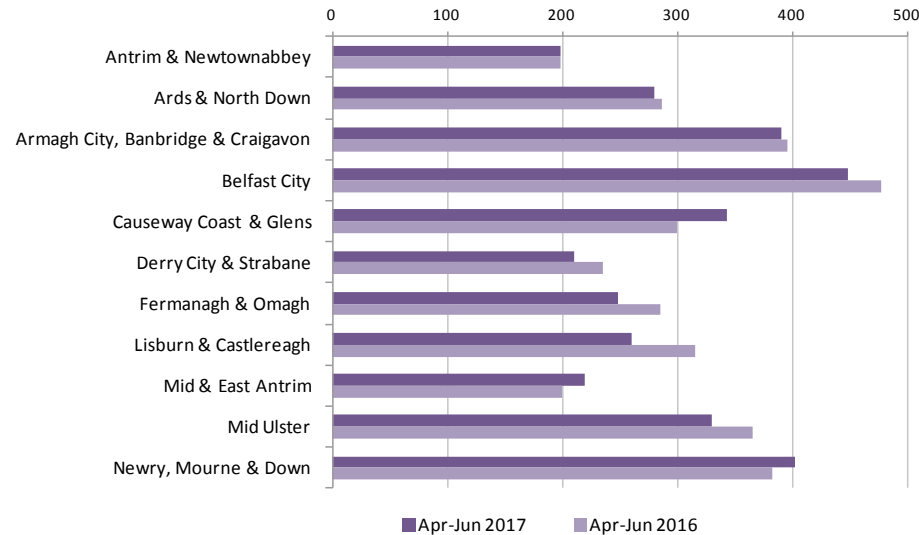


Across NI in Q1, there were 17.9 planning applications received per 10,000 population. This is a stark decline when compared to the 63.7 applications received per 10,000 population in the same quarter of 2005/06, the highest ever received in a quarter.

In Q1, Belfast City council received the most (448) planning applications, followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (402) and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (390); between them accounting for nearly two fifths (37.2%) of all applications received across NI, which was the similar to the position a year earlier. The councils receiving the lowest number of applications were Antrim and Newtownabbey (199), Derry City and Strabane (210) and Mid and East Antrim (220), the same councils as the previous year.

The volume of planning applications received in Q1 decreased in seven of the eleven councils when compared with the same quarter a year earlier. The greatest decreases in percentage terms occurred in Lisburn and Castlereagh (-17.5%), Fermanagh and Omagh (-12.6%) and Derry City and Strabane (-10.6%). Three of the eleven councils recorded increases, these were Causeway Coast and Glens (14.3%), Mid and East Antrim (10.0%) and Newry, Mourne and Down (5.2%). There was no change recorded in Antrim and Newtownabbey.

Fig 1.2 Applications received by council, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18



At council level, Causeway Coast and Glens (23.9), Mid Ulster (22.7) and Newry Mourne and Down (22.6) received the most planning applications per 10,000 population, whilst Belfast City (13.2), Derry City and Strabane (14.0) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (14.1) received the least. The supporting Excel table provides activity per head of population for each district council.

[Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

Applications Decided

The number of planning decisions issued during April to June 2017 was **3,301** representing a small increase of 1.7% over the quarter but a decrease of 5.6% when compared to the same period a year earlier (3,498).

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning authority out to councils, the level of decisions issued dropped

sharply. However, they quickly recovered in subsequent quarters and since then have closely tracked applications received.

Just over three quarters of planning decisions in Q1 (75.9%) were for full planning permission, the same as the proportion of applications received.

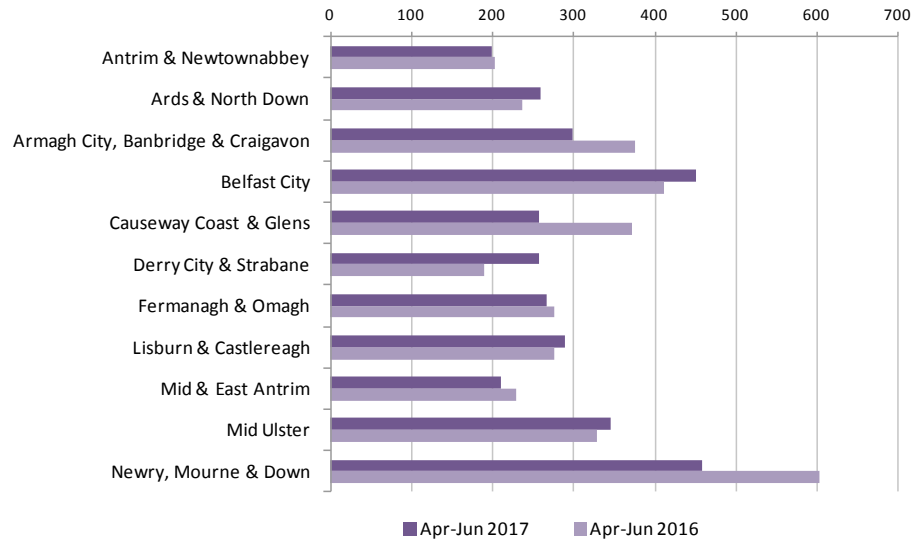
In Q1 2017/18, **158** applications were **withdrawn**, over one tenth more (10.5%) when compared to the same period the previous year (143). Applications can be withdrawn at any stage prior to a decision being made.

Applications Decided by Council

Across councils in Q1, the highest number of decisions were issued from Newry, Mourne and Down (459), Belfast City (451) and Mid Ulster (345). Antrim and Newtownabbey (199) and Mid and East Antrim (211) issued the least.

The number of planning decisions issued across councils in Q1 2017/18 varied when compared to the same period a year earlier. Six of the eleven councils reported decreases over the year. Of these six, there were significant decreases recorded in Newry, Mourne and Down (459), down 23.8% and Causeway Coast and Glens (257), down 30.7%. The remaining five councils reported increases over the same period with Derry City and Strabane reporting the greatest increase (36.5%).

Fig 1.3 Applications decided by council, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18



Six of the eleven councils issued more decisions than they received during Q1 2017/18, the greatest of these in percentage terms were Derry City and Strabane (+22.9%), Newry, Mourne and Down (+14.2%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (+11.2%). [Refer to Tables 1.1, 1.2](#)

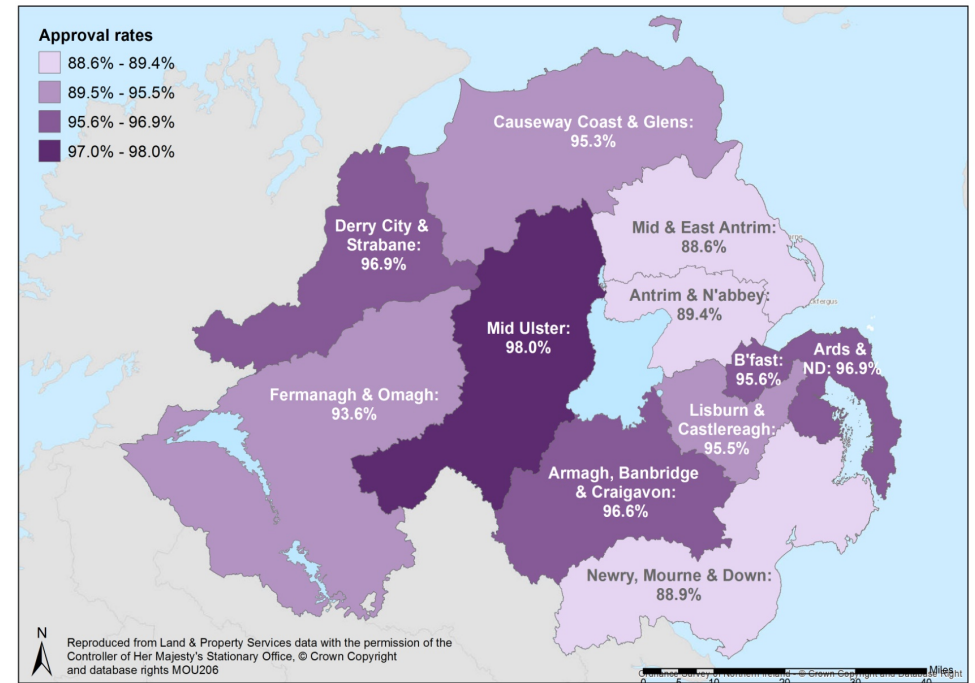
In addition to processing applications, councils deal with a range of other planning related work. For example, during Q1 2017/18, they processed to decision or withdrawal 156 discharge of conditions, 139 non material changes and 113 certificates of lawfulness. When compared to the same quarter a year earlier the numbers processed in all of these areas increased. A further breakdown of these figures is provided in [Table 9.1](#).

Approval Rates

The **overall Northern Ireland approval rate** for all planning applications for Q1 2017/18 was **94.2%**, which was similar to the rates for the previous quarter (94.0%) and the same quarter a year earlier (94.5%). Four out of

the eleven councils had an approval rate which was lower than the overall NI approval rate in Q1 2017/18.

Fig 1.4 Approval rates by council, Q1 2017/18



Planning approval rates varied across councils during Q1 2017/18 from highs of 98.0% in Mid Ulster and 96.9% in both Ards and North Down and Derry City and Strabane to lows of 88.6% in Mid and East Antrim and 88.9% in Newry, Mourne and Down.

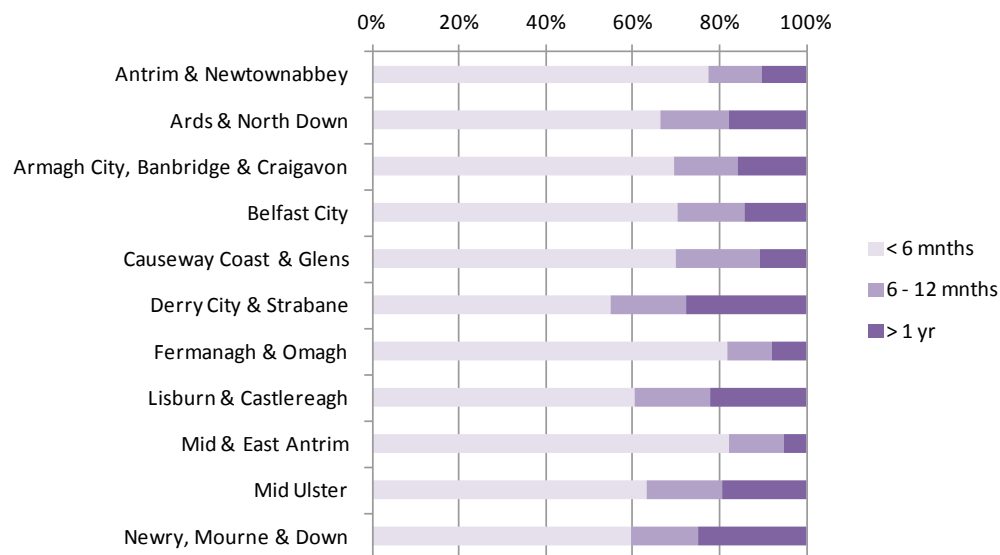
Seven councils reported a decreased approval rate when compared to the same quarter a year earlier. The most notable declines were in Newry, Mourne and Down (dropped by 4.5 percentage points) and Mid and East Antrim (down by 4.4 percentage points). [Refer to Tables 1.2](#)

Live applications

At the end of June 2017, there were **6,577** live applications in the planning system across NI, a decrease of 8.2% over the year from 7,163 at the end of June 2016. Nearly 1 out of every 5 live applications in the planning system at the end of June 2017 was over one year old (1,154: 17.5%); this was down 3 percentage points when compared to the end of June 2016 (1,474: 20.6%). [Refer to Table 1.3](#)

Over the last year, eight of the eleven councils reduced the proportion of live cases that are in the system for over a year, with the greatest change in Newry, Mourne and Down (7.7pp). The proportion of applications over a year increased in three councils, with the greatest of these increases in Mid Ulster (+5.7pp). [Refer to Table 1.4](#)

Fig 1.5 Live applications by council at end of Jun 2017

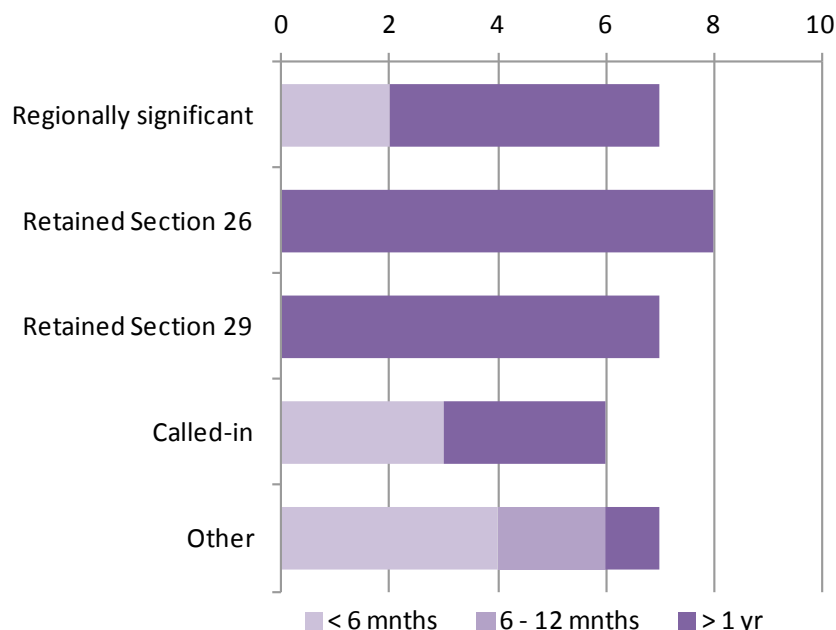


The proportion of live applications over one year old at the end of June 2017 varies across councils as shown in Figure 1.5. Mid and East Antrim had the lowest proportion of cases over one year old (5.1%), followed by Fermanagh and Omagh (8.1%) and Antrim and Newtownabbey (10.3%). Derry City and Strabane had the largest proportion of applications in the system for over a year (27.9%) followed by Newry, Mourne and Down (24.9%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (22.1%).

2. Departmental Activity

At the end of June 2017, there were **7** ongoing **regionally significant development (RSD)** applications, **6 called-in**, **15 retained applications** and **7 other applications**¹. Over two-thirds of these applications (24 of 35) were in the system over a year.

Fig 2.1 Live Departmental applications by development type at end Jun 17



RSD applications are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include

¹ 'Other' applications include Conservation Area Consents, Variation of Conditions and Reserved Matters.

developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan.

During Q1 2017/18, the Department received **7** new applications; **1** regionally significant, **2** were called-in and **4** other applications. This is 5 more than the same period a year earlier (2).

[Refer to Table 2.2](#)

It is a target for the Department to contribute to sustainable economic growth by processing 50% of Regionally Significant Planning Applications to a Ministerial Recommendation within 30 weeks, subject to pre-application discussions having taken place and meeting the requirements of relevant Environmental Legislation.

At the 30 June 2017, of the **7** RSD applications that were live in the planning system, four were not subject to Pre-Application Discussions and therefore will not fall under the remit of the target. Of the remaining three applications, one was received towards the end of the previous financial year and is still being processed while the other two, due to the requirement for further environmental information (FEI), have had target dates in 2016/17 extended to 2017/18. These will be assessed in future reports once they have been decided or withdrawn, alongside any new applications which may come into scope.

The Department reached **decisions** on **8** applications during the first quarter of 2017/18, 6 more than a year earlier (2). Three decisions were on **called-in** applications, 2 were on **Retained Section 29** (former Non-Article 31) applications, 2 on **other** applications and one **regionally significant** application. Although the regionally significant application had a decision issued during Q1 2017/18, it was processed to Ministerial Recommendation during the previous quarter, within a period of 19 weeks.

There were no applications withdrawn during Q1 2017/18.

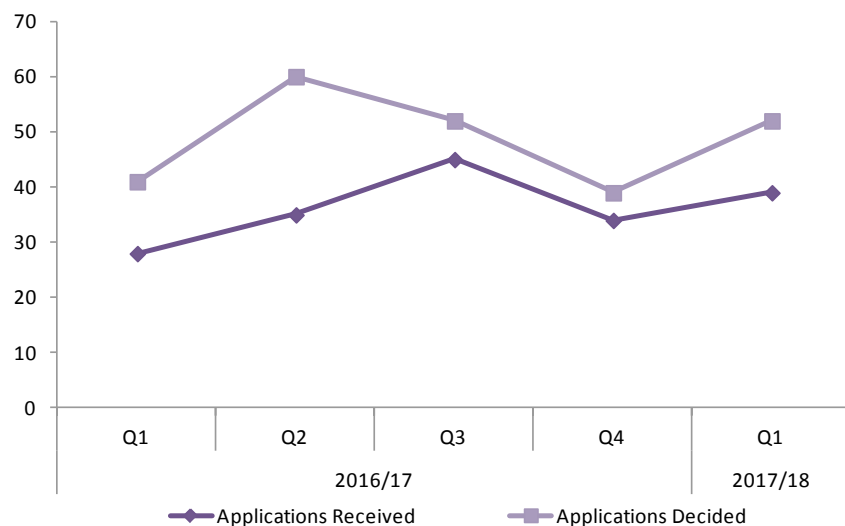
The average processing times during the first three months of the year for the different application types which were processed by the Department to a decision or withdrawal are reported in [Table 2.1](#). Processing times are not highlighted in this commentary due to the very small numbers of applications on which the times are based.

NOTE: In Section 2, processing times for 'Called-In' applications are calculated from the date the application was called in by the Department. This method is only used in Section 2 of the report in order to show Departmental processing performance. All other processing times reported in the publication are based on the date the application is made valid.

3. 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. The number of **major** planning applications **received** in NI during Q1 2017/18 was **39**.

Fig 3.1 Major Development applications, quarterly Apr 2016 – Jun 2017



From 1st July 2015, pre-application community consultation became a pre-requisite to a major application. All major applications now go through a minimum 12 week consultation process before being accepted. The impact of this requirement should be borne in mind when considering the longer term trend in major applications received.

Q2 2015/16 had the lowest number of major applications received across the whole series but this can be attributed to the new community consultation requirement. From Q2 2015/16, the number of major

applications received steadily increased quarter on quarter with Q3 2016/17 reporting 45 across Northern Ireland, the highest number since Q1 2015/16. It is likely applications were submitted ahead of the introduction of the community consultation requirement, resulting in an atypically high volume for the series. The number of major applications received in the latest two quarters may now be a sign of these levelling out with 34 applications received in Q4 2016/17 and 39 in Q1 2017/18.

Of the 39 major applications received in Q1, Fermanagh and Omagh (5), Ards and North Down (4), Lisburn and Castlereagh (4) and Mid and East Antrim (4) received the most.

Over the quarter, **52 major** planning applications were **decided** and **6 withdrawn**. At council level, Belfast City (11), Derry City and Strabane (9) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (7) issued most decisions on major applications.

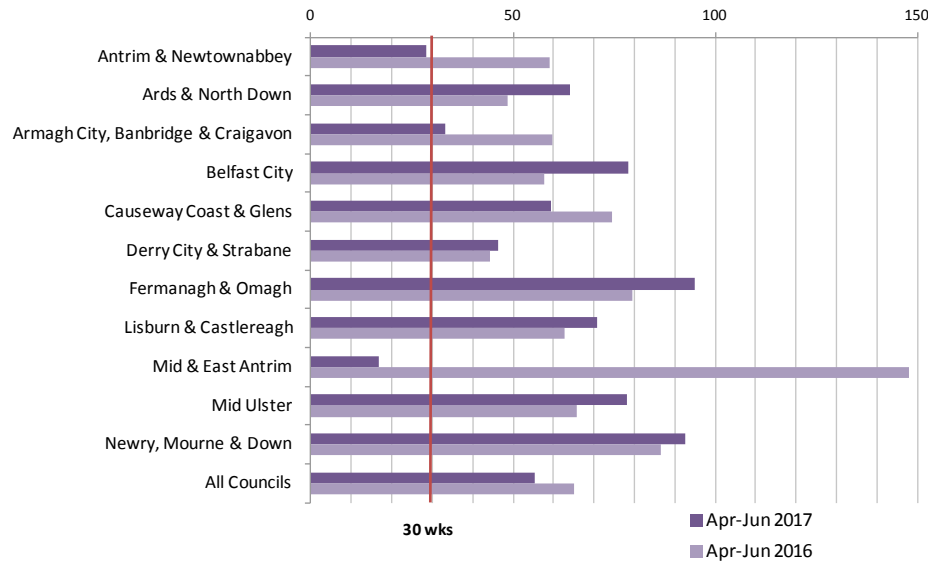
[Refer to Table 3.1](#)

Since Q2 2015/16, the number of planning decisions issued for major applications have exceeded the numbers being received.

It is a statutory target for each council that their 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 provides year to date processing times for major applications. During Q1, the **average processing time** to process **major** applications to a decision or withdrawal was **55.5 weeks** across all councils, an improvement of nearly 10 weeks from the 65.2 weeks reported for the same quarter last year. This is still, however, over twenty- five weeks longer than the statutory processing time target of 30 weeks.

Fig 3.2 Major processing times by council, Apr-June 2016 & 2017



Whilst Fig 3.2 has been provided for completeness, none of the councils had processed a sufficient number of major applications during the first quarter of both the current and previous year to allow any meaningful assessment of their individual performance. Comparison against the target and across councils will become more robust as we get further into the financial year with more applications being processed. With that in mind, it is still worth noting that during the first three months of the year, two of the councils are processing major applications within the 30 week target time while another is very close to it.

[Refer to Table 3.2](#)

A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

It is interesting to note that the year to date (Apr-Jun 2017) average processing time for major applications which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is more than 3 times shorter (40.4 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (133.0 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland in Q1 2017/18, 96.2% of major planning applications decided upon were approved. This is the highest approval rate in any quarter following the transfer of powers in April 2015. Ten councils issued decisions on major applications during the first quarter of the year. In eight out of the ten, 100% of major applications decided upon were approved.

4. Local Development Planning Applications

Local Development planning applications are mostly residential and minor commercial applications received and determined by a council. The number of **local** planning applications **received** in NI during Q1 2017/18 was **3,297**, similar to the number received the previous quarter but down by 3.4% on the same period a year earlier.

Across councils, Belfast City (445), Newry, Mourne and Down (400) and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (387) received the highest number of local planning applications during Q1. These councils also received the highest number of applications in the previous year.

In eight of the eleven councils, the number of local applications received in Q1 2017/18 was lower than during the same period a year earlier. The decrease over the year is largely attributable to the decreases in Lisburn and Castlereagh (-56 applications), Fermanagh and Omagh (-39) and Mid Ulster (-36) alongside other smaller decreases. The overall decrease over the year was slightly offset by an increase in Causeway Coast and Glens (+43).

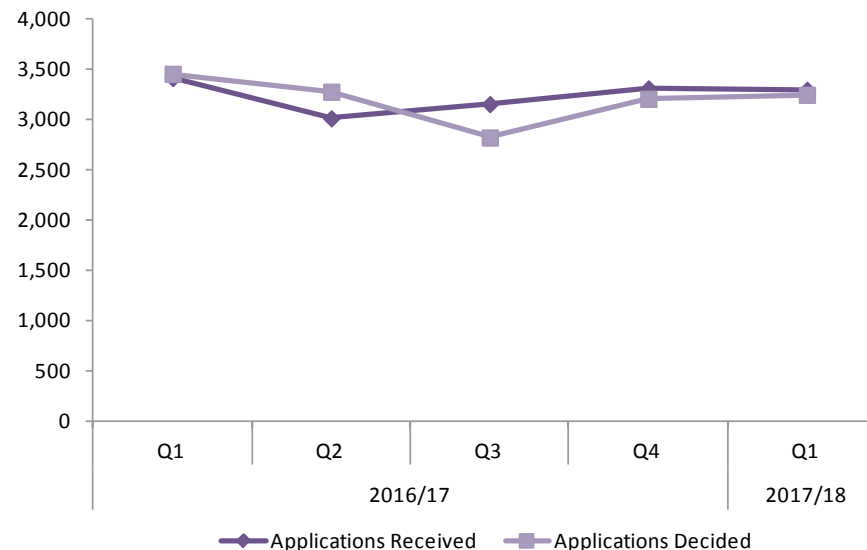
The number of **local** applications **decided** in Q1 2017/18 was **3,248**, an increase of 1.2% over the quarter but down by 6.0% when compared to the same period a year earlier.

In the first quarter of 2015/16, immediately following the transition of planning functions to councils, the number of decisions reached on local planning applications was considerably lower than the number of applications being received. Moving through 2015/16, the number of applications decided each year increased considerably narrowing the gap significantly between the numbers received and the numbers decided.

In Q4 2015/16, the number of applications decided exceeded the number received for the first time in the series and this continued to be the

situation in the first two quarters of 2016/17. From the end of 2016/17, the numbers of local applications received each quarter has been slightly higher than the number decided. See Fig 4.1.

Fig 4.1 Local applications, quarterly Apr 2016 – Jun 2017



During Q1 2017/18, Newry, Mourne and Down (454), Belfast City (440) and Mid Ulster (345) issued the most local decisions across councils, partly reflecting the high volumes of such applications received.

Six of the eleven councils issued fewer decisions on local applications during Q1 than they did during the same period a year earlier. Of these six, Causeway Coast and Glens decreased by 31.1% (from 367 to 253 decisions), Newry, Mourne and Down decreased by 23.4% (from 593 to 454 decisions) and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon fell by 20.8% (from 370 to 293 decisions).

Over the quarter, there were 152 local applications withdrawn across NI, this ranged from 20 applications withdrawn in both Derry City and Strabane and Newry Mourne and Down to 6 in Mid and East Antrim.

[Refer to Table 4.1](#)

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

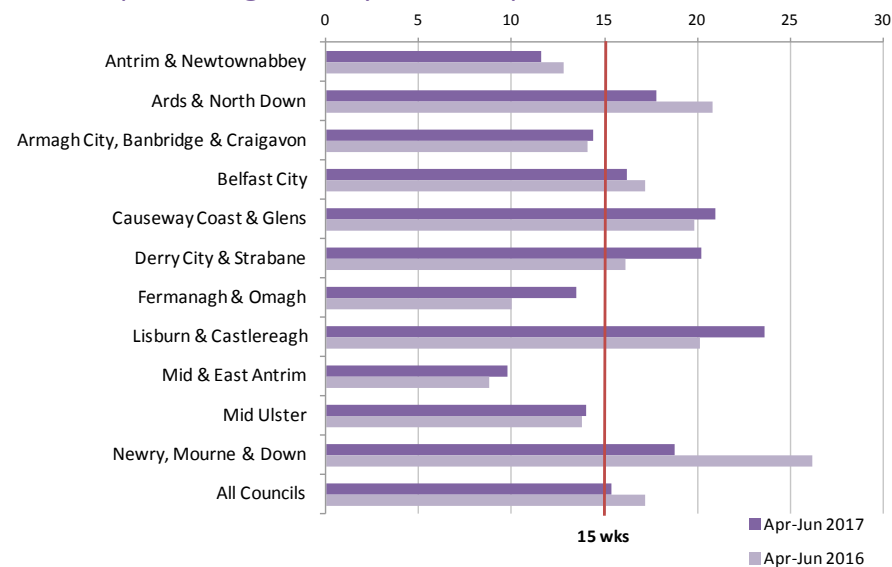
During Q1 2017/18, the **average processing time** to bring local applications to decision or withdrawal was **15.4 weeks** across all councils, an improvement of nearly 2 weeks on the average time taken in the same period last year (17.2 weeks).

The shortest average processing time for local applications during the first three months of 2017 was 9.8 weeks in Mid and East Antrim (based on 209 local applications decided and 6 withdrawn) whilst the longest was 23.6 weeks in Lisburn and Castlereagh (based on 282 local applications decided and 18 withdrawn). Five of the 11 councils, namely Mid and East Antrim (9.8), Antrim and Newtownabbey (11.6), Fermanagh and Omagh (13.5), Mid Ulster (14.0) and Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (14.4) were within the 15 week target at the end of June 2017.

Processing times in seven of the eleven councils increased during Q1 2017/18 when compared to the same period a year earlier. The greatest of these increases was in Derry City and Strabane, taking just over 4 weeks longer to process local applications in Q1 2017/18, and in Fermanagh and Omagh and Lisburn and Castlereagh where the average processing time increased by 3.5 weeks. Over the last year, the most notable change in local processing times was achieved in Newry Mourne and Down which improved its performance by more than 7 weeks from 26.2 weeks in Q1 2016/17 to 18.8 weeks in Q1 2017/18.

[Refer to Table 4.2](#)

Fig 4.2 Local processing times by council, Apr-Jun 2016 & 2017



A further breakdown of these figures by legacy cases (those applications received prior to transition of planning powers) and council received cases is provided in [Table 8.2](#).

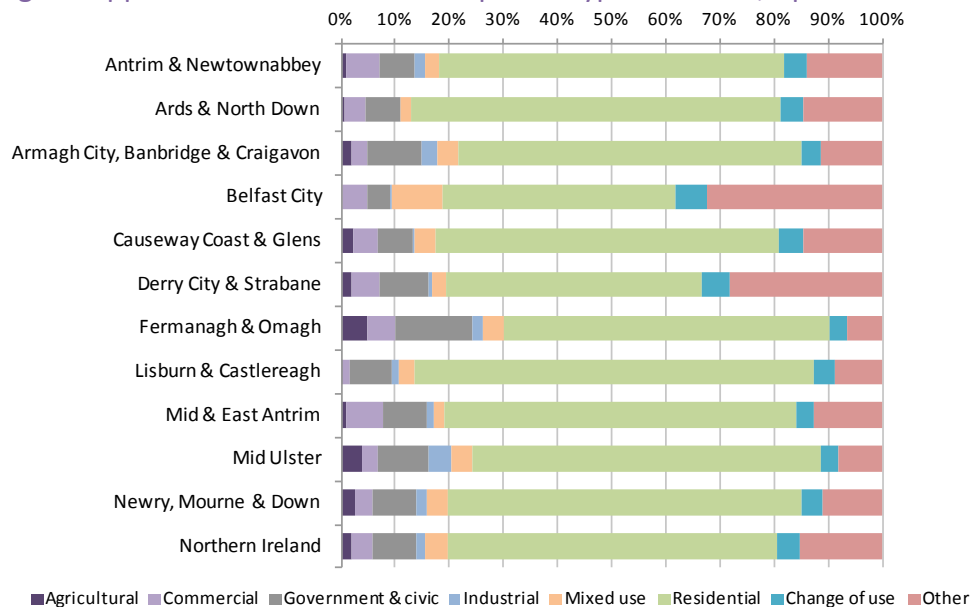
It is worth noting that the processing time for local applications in Q1 2017/18 which were processed entirely by councils (i.e. received post-April 2015) is nearly 9 times shorter (15.2 weeks) than for those which had already been partially processed by the Department (133.8 weeks).

Across Northern Ireland, 94.2% of local planning applications decided upon were approved in Q1, similar to the rate for the same period last year (94.5%).

5. Development Type

Generally the majority of planning applications received are for residential development. During Q1 2017/18, **residential** applications made up **60.9%** of all Northern Ireland planning applications received, down by 1.6pp from the same period last year (62.6%). Fig. 5.1 illustrates the profile of development happening across councils and at the regional level.

Fig 5.1 Applications received - development type & council, Apr-Jun 2017



During Q1 2017/18, in Lisburn and Castlereagh more than seven out of every ten applications received (73.8%) were for residential development, compared to just over four in every ten in Belfast City (42.9%).

Belfast City (32.6%) and Derry City and Strabane (28.1%) receive a much higher proportion of applications in the 'Other' category. See Appendix 1 – 'Definitions' for a description of the types of applications included in these categories.

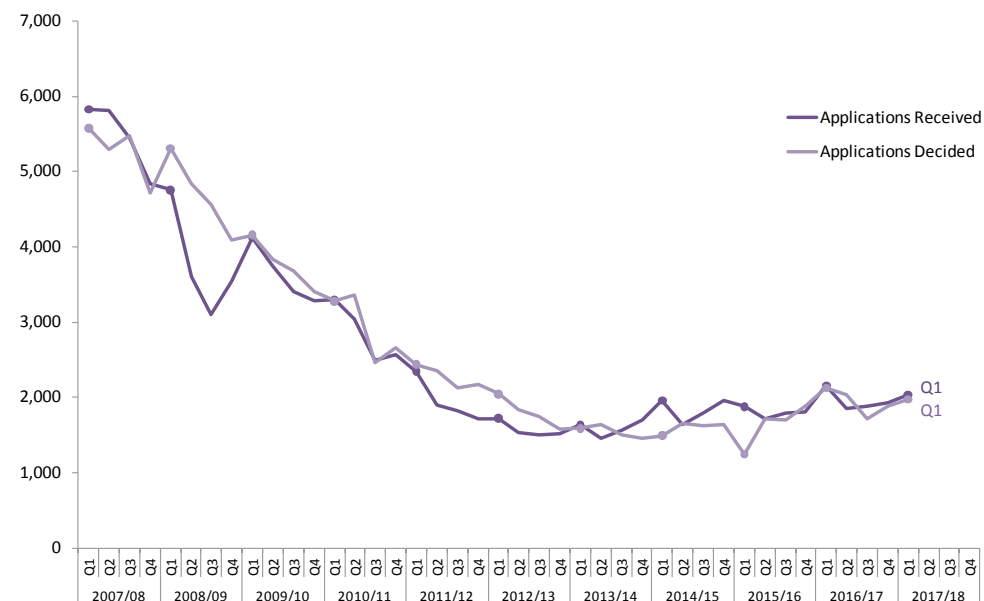
At NI level, the overall number of planning applications decreased by 3.1% in Q1 when compared to the same period a year earlier. This decrease was driven by a decrease of 5.6% in the number of 'Residential' applications received (down from 2,153 to 2,033).

[Refer to Table 5.1, 5.2](#)

Residential applications

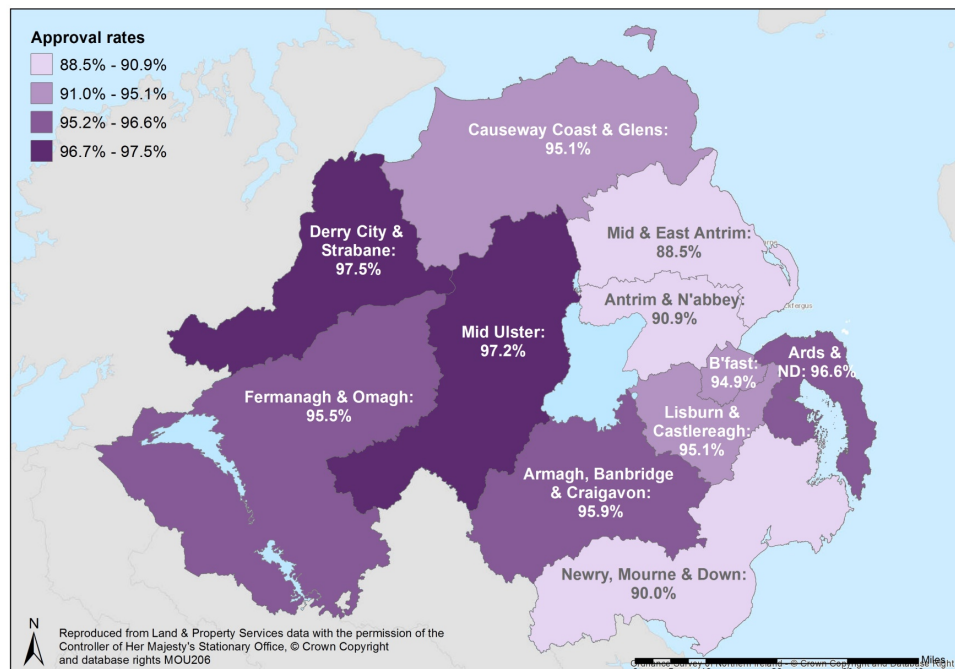
The overall number of **residential** planning applications **received** in total for Northern Ireland in Q1 2017/18 was **2,033**, an increase over the quarter of 5.8% but a decline of 5.6% on the same period a year earlier.

Fig 5.2 NI Residential applications, quarterly from April 2007 to Jun 2017



[Refer to Table 5.3](#)

Fig 5.3 Residential approval rates by council Apr-Jun 2017



The Northern Ireland approval rate for residential planning applications in Q1 2017/18 was **94.3%**, lower than the rate for the previous quarter (95.8%) but similar to the same period in the previous year (94.7%).

Approval rates for residential planning applications varied across councils in Q1 with highs of 97.5% in Derry City and Strabane and 97.2% in Mid Ulster, to 88.5% in Mid and East Antrim.

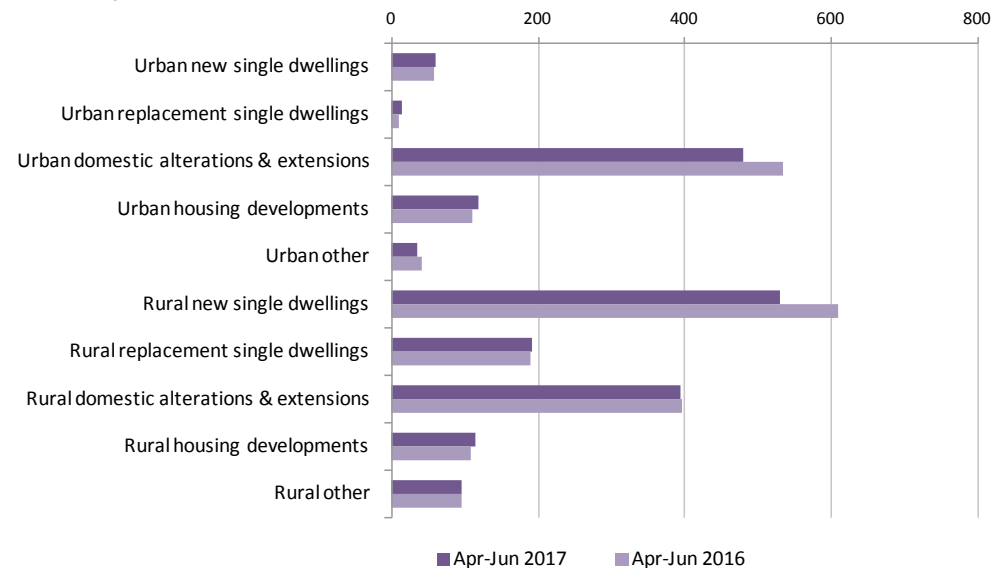
Approval rates for residential planning applications declined in six of the eleven councils over the year with Mid and East Antrim approval rates dropping by 5.6pp over the year (from 94.0% to 88.5%).

During Q1, there were 83 residential applications withdrawn, similar to the numbers withdrawn in the previous quarter (84) but ten fewer than the same period a year earlier (73). [Refer to Table 5.4](#)

Across urban areas (*in settlements greater than 5,000 population*), the number of residential applications received in Q1 increased by 8.3% over the latest quarter but decreased by 6.5% when compared to the same period a year earlier. In rural areas within settlements of less than 5,000 population, there was also increase over the quarter (4.9%) and a fall over the year (3.8%). It was similar in the open countryside, where residential applications increased over the quarter (4.4%) but declined over the year (5.4%).

Fig 5.4 shows a breakdown of the type of residential applications received. Urban is based on areas with settlements greater than 5,000 population while rural is a combination of settlements below 5,000 population and open countryside.

Fig 5.4 NI Residential applications received by urban/rural, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18

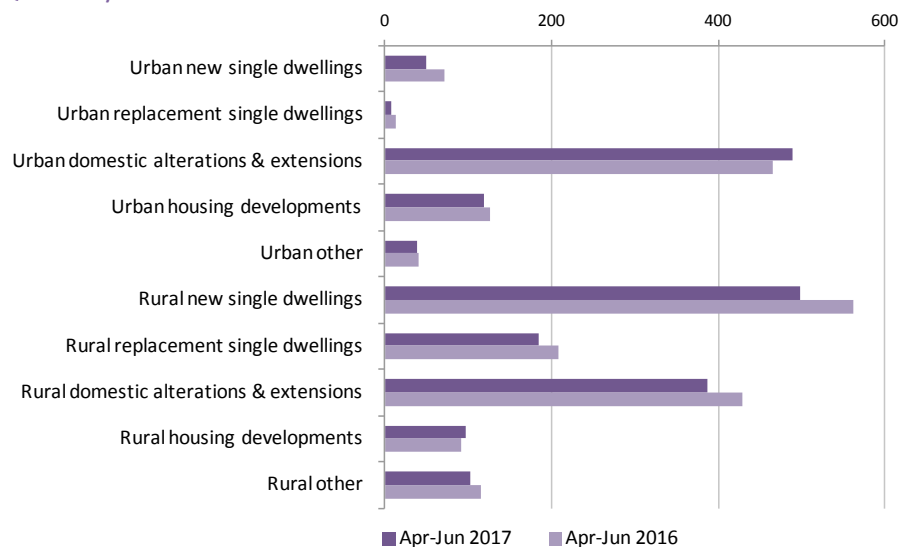


New single dwellings in rural areas (531) and alterations/extensions in urban areas (479) continue to dominate, together making up nearly half of (49.7%) of all residential applications received during Q1.

The decrease over the year in the number of residential applications received (5.1%) was driven by the decreases in the number of **new single dwellings**, down 11.4% from 667 to 591 applications and **domestic alterations and extensions**, down 6.1% from 931 to 874 applications.

Decisions on residential applications decreased over the year by 7.1% (from 2,125 to 1,974), with the largest decrease (64 applications) recorded in the number of applications decided for **rural new single dwellings** which is in line with the volume of such applications received.

Fig 5.5 NI Residential applications decided by urban/rural, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18



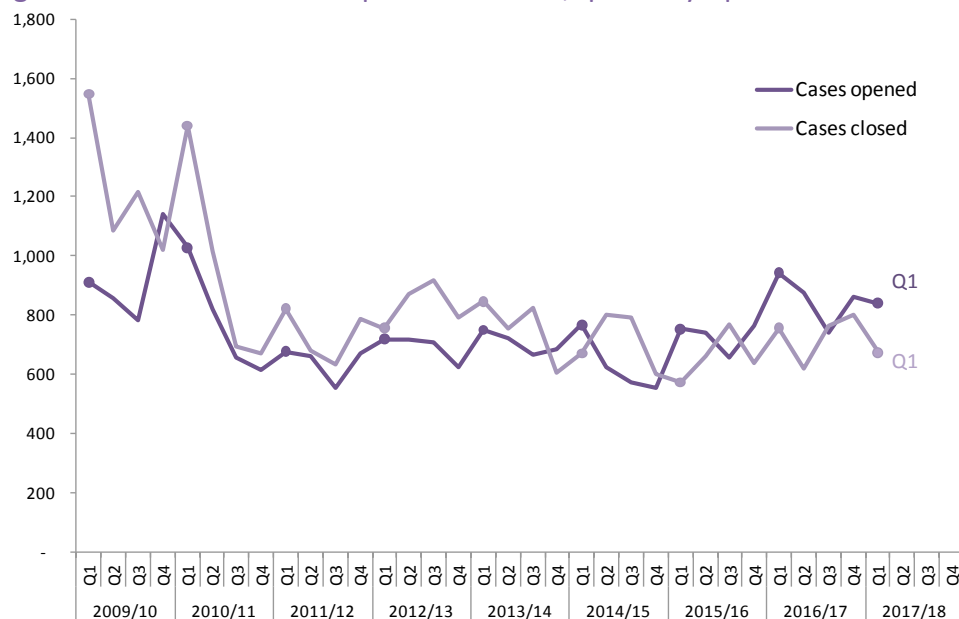
[Refer to Table 5.5](#)

6. Compliance and Enforcement Activity

The number of **enforcement cases opened** in Northern Ireland during Q1 of 2017/18 was **840**, a decrease of 10.9% compared to the same period a year earlier. Apart from the 943 cases opened in Q1 last year, this is still the highest number of enforcement cases opened in any first quarter since 2010/11 when 1,028 cases were opened.

Across the councils, Belfast City (127) and Ards and North Down (110) opened the largest number of cases in Q1, whilst Derry and Strabane (49) and Mid and East Antrim (50) opened the least amount of cases.

Fig. 6.1 Enforcement cases opened & closed, quarterly Apr 2009-Jun 2017



The number of **enforcement cases closed** during Q1 2017/18 was **674**, a 10.8% decrease on the number of cases closed in the same quarter of the previous year.

Belfast City (105) and Causeway Coast and Glens (89) closed the highest number of cases in the first quarter of 2017/18 whilst Mid and East Antrim (33) and Derry City and Strabane (39) and closed the least.

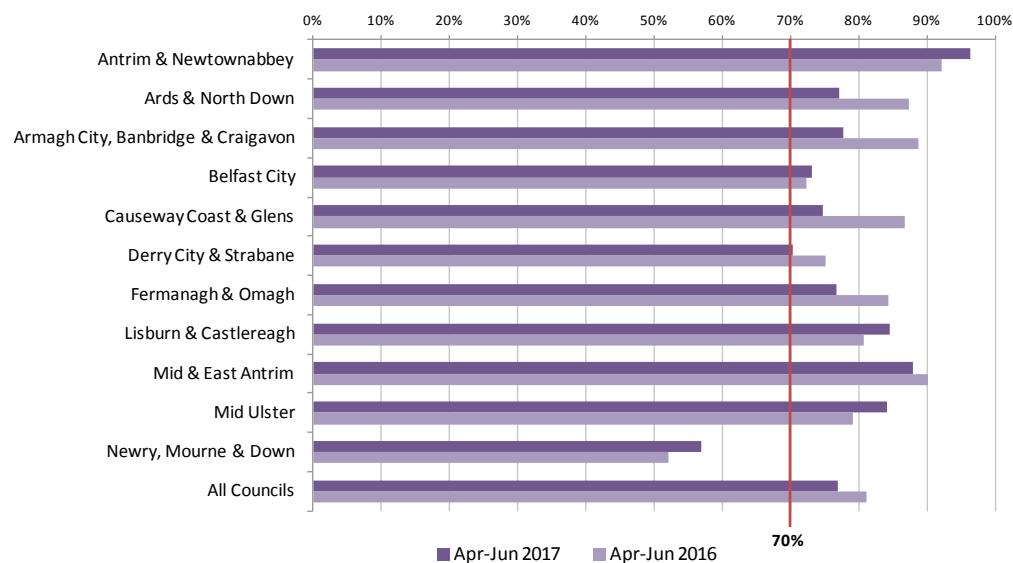
Of the **674** enforcement cases closed in Q1 2017/18, the two main reasons accounting for almost two thirds of cases were that no breach had actually occurred (31.9%) and that cases had been remedied or resolved (31.0%).

[Refer to Table 6.1](#)

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.

Across Northern Ireland, **over three quarters (76.9%)** of enforcement cases were concluded within 39 weeks. This was nearly 7 percentage points above the statutory target but 4.2 percentage points lower than for the equivalent quarter last year.

Fig. 6.2 Percentage of cases concluded within 39 weeks by council, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18



Ten of the eleven councils are on track to meet the target with highs of 96.3% concluded within 39 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey followed by Mid and East Antrim (87.9%) and Lisburn and Castlereagh (84.4%). Only Newry, Mourne and Down (57.0%) are currently below the target level, although this percentage is an improvement of nearly 5 percentage points on Q1 last year.

[Refer to Table 6.2](#)

During Q1 2017/18, there were **12 prosecutions** initiated, similar to the number initiated in the equivalent quarter of the previous year (14). Whilst this figure is markedly lower than the Q1 series peak of 54 prosecutions in 2010/11, it is three times higher than the Q1 series low of 4 prosecutions in 2015/16.

Between April and June, three of the eleven councils initiated prosecutions, with Fermanagh and Omagh and Mid Ulster both initiating 5. These two councils accounted for more than four out of five (83.3%) of prosecutions initiated during the quarter. There was only one conviction during the same period, recorded in Mid Ulster.

[Refer to Table 6.3](#)

The number of **live enforcement cases** at the end of June 2017 was **3,488**, 15.2% more than at the same time last year. The number of **cases over two years old** stood at **887**, accounting for just over a quarter (25.4%) of all live cases. The proportion of live enforcement cases in the planning system for more than two years, which although remaining relatively static since 2014/15, does show a very slight downward trend.

[Refer to Table 6.4](#)

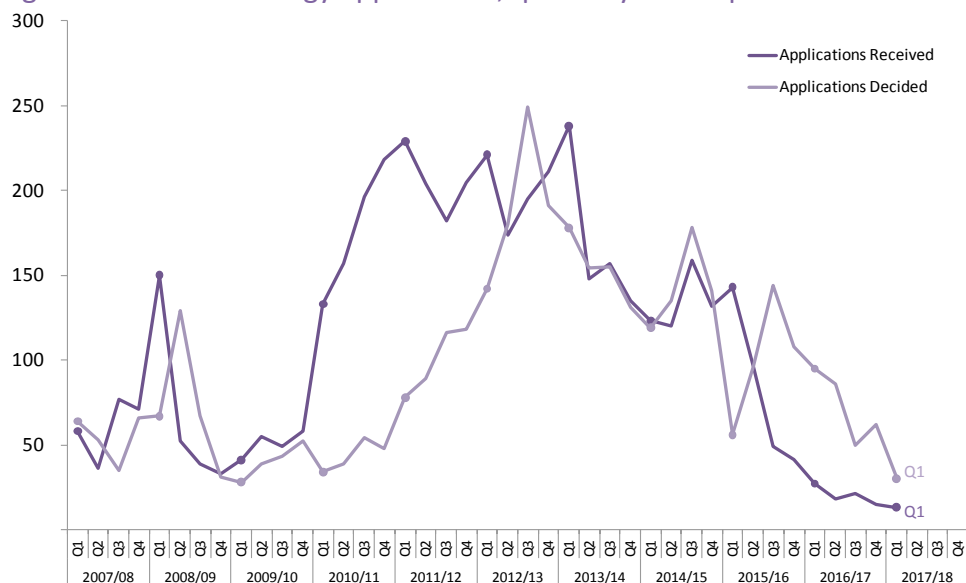
Across the councils, Newry, Mourne and Down had the largest number of live cases at the end of June 2017 (768) and the highest proportion in the system for over 2 years (41.7%). Mid and East Antrim had the smallest number of cases (138) with 8.0% of them being in the system for over 2 years. The number of live enforcement cases increased over the year in nine of the eleven councils, with the greatest percentage increases in Ards and North Down (32.8%) and Newry, Mourne and Down (27.2%).

[Refer to Table 6.5](#)

7. Renewable Energy (RE) Activity

The overall number of **renewable energy** applications **received** in Q1 2017/18 was **13**, the lowest first quarter figure since 2004/05 (also 13), and this represented a **51.9%** decrease in received applications from the same period a year earlier (27). The number of applications received during April to June peaked in 2013/14 with 238 applications. It is likely that the high levels at this time were driven by the NI Executive's targets for electricity consumption from renewable sources, with a target of 20% to be achieved by 2015, and 40% by 2020. This continuing sharp decline in recent years (a **94.5%** decrease from Q1 peak of 238 to 13 applications in Q1 2017/18) may be partly due to a reduction in government funding available, as well as a lack of capacity on the power grid to allow for new connections.

Fig 7.1 Renewable Energy applications, quarterly from Apr 2007 – Jun 2017



The number of applications **decided** between April and June 2017 was **30**, a decrease of 68.4% when compared to the previous year (95) and down

by over four fifths (83.1%) when compared to the series first quarter peak of 178 applications decided in Q1 of 2013/14. During the first quarter of 2017/18, the average processing time for these applications was 95.7 weeks across NI, nearly 43 weeks longer than the equivalent quarter last year (53.1 weeks).

Up until last year, single wind turbines had dominated renewable energy applications. However in Q1 of 2017/18, less than one quarter (23.1%) of renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (3 of 13) with a much more even spread now evident across the various renewable application types. This contrasts with the same period last year when nearly half of all renewable energy applications were for single wind turbines (13 of 27). [Refer to Table 7.1, 7.2](#)

Fig 7.2 RE applications received by authority, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18

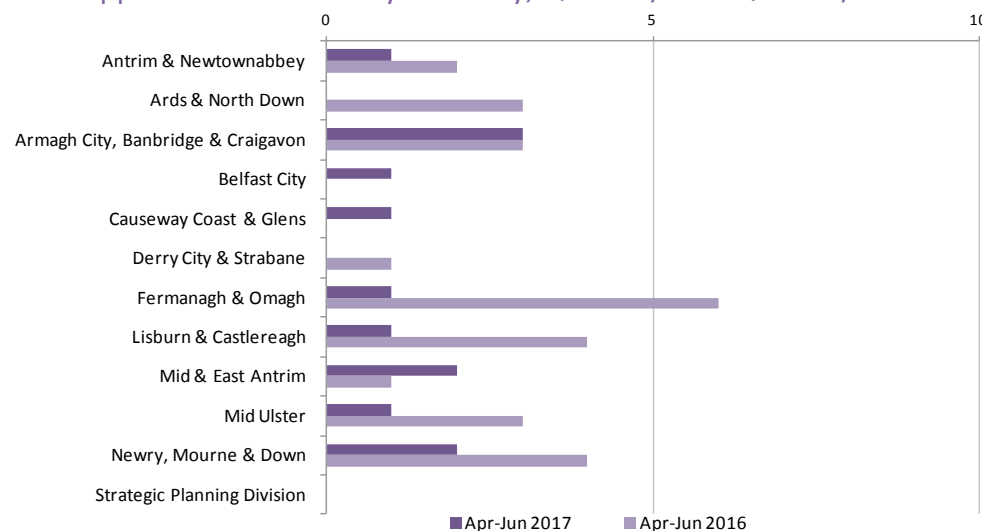
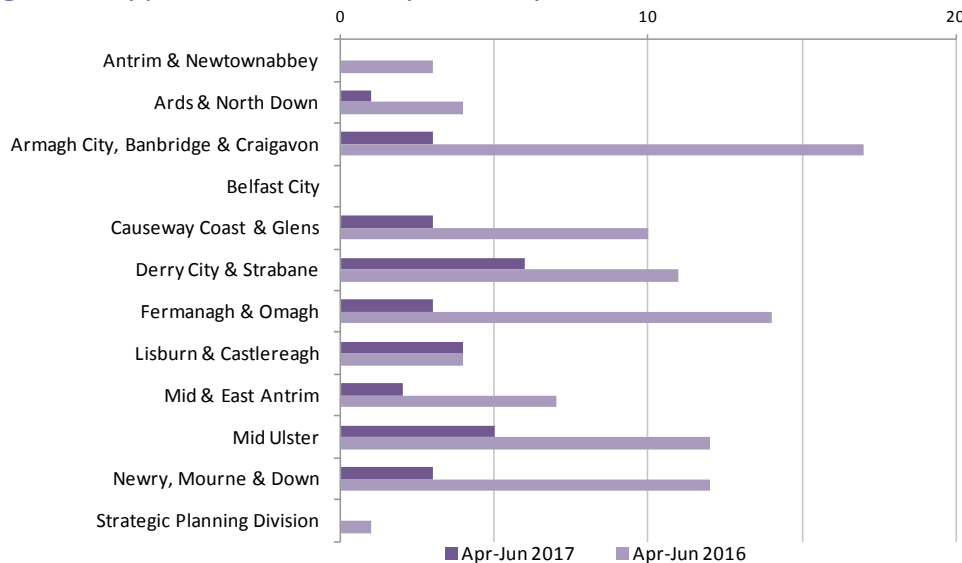


Figure 7.2 shows the spread across councils with Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon receiving the most renewable applications (3) closely followed by Mid and East Antrim and Newry, Mourne and Down (both 2).

Of the 30 decisions issued in the first quarter of 2017/18, almost three fifths (17) were for single wind turbines. Derry City and Strabane issued the most renewable energy decisions (6), followed by Mid Ulster (5). This is a marked decrease from the 95 decisions issued in the same period a year earlier – see Figure 7.3 for the full breakdown.

Fig 7.3 RE applications decided by authority, Q1 2016/17 & Q1 2017/18

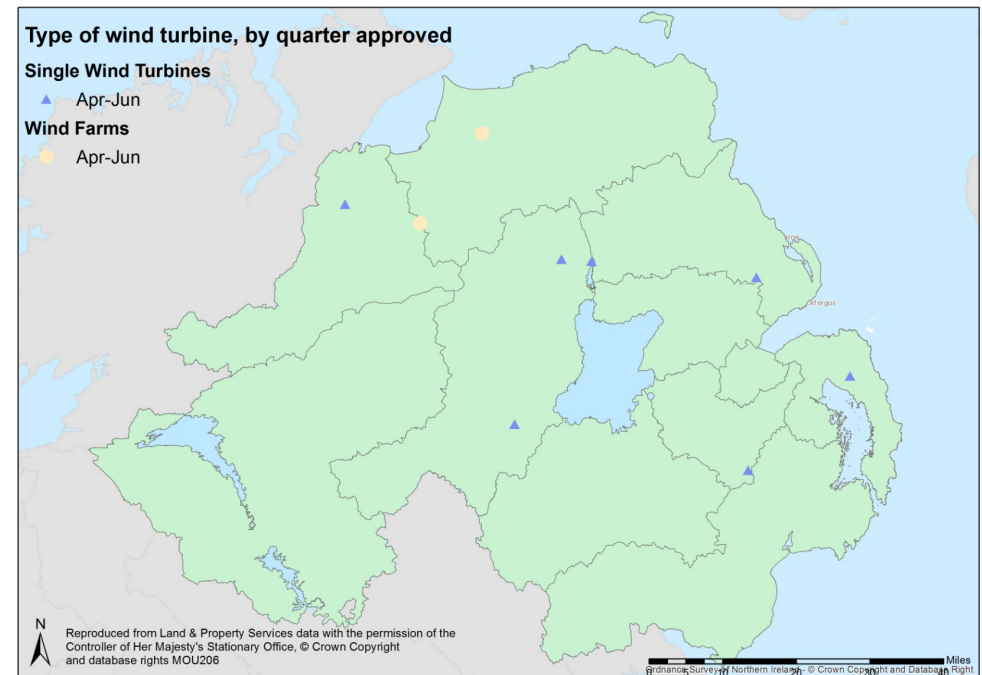


Twelve renewable energy applications were withdrawn during Q1, 13 fewer than the same period last year, with Newry, Mourne and Down (4) recording the most across councils.

At the end of June 2017, there were **115 live renewable energy applications**, with over seven out of ten of these (72.2%) being in the planning system for over a year. These largely comprised of 58 single wind turbines, 18 wind farms, 15 biomass/anaerobic digesters, and 12 for hydroelectricity. The number of live renewable energy applications was down by almost a fifth (18.4%) when compared with end of March 2017, while the proportion of applications in the system for over a year has decreased by just over 2 percentage points over the same period.

The overall **NI approval rate** for renewable energy was **60.0%** in **Q1 of 2016/17**, the lowest first quarter approval rate of the series. This figure is down by over 12.6 percentage points from the 72.6% recorded at the same point a year earlier.

Fig 7.4 Location of approved wind energy applications by council, Q1 2017/18



[Refer to Table 7.3, 7.4](#)

Interactive maps have been developed for renewable energy planning applications by the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Sharing (NINIS) team. These maps are held on the [\(NINIS\) website](#) and direct links can be found below:

- [Single Wind Turbines](#)
- [Wind Farms](#)
- [Solar Farms](#)

User Guidance

Notes on Data Source and Quality

The records of all planning applications from 1st April 2017 to 30th June 2017 were transferred in July 2017 from a live database. This included all live planning applications in the Planning Portal. The data were validated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) which involved quality checks and inspection of coding of classifications in the Planning Portal. Local councils were provided with their own headline planning statistics before the release of this publication as part of the quality assurance process. On completion of ASRB and council validation, a final extract was taken at the end of August 2017. Quarterly data for 2017/18 are regarded as provisional and will remain this status until the annual report for 2017/18 is published in June 2018.

Users should be aware that quite a number of structural changes have been made to the Planning Portal and associated processes, in order to comply with new planning legislation and it will inevitably take time for these to become properly embedded.

Regionally Significant / Major / Local Development Applications after 1st April 2014

Note that a new classification hierarchy of development for planning application came into effect on 1st April 2014, on an administrative basis, with the introduction of the following new categories – regionally significant, major and local development. The hierarchy was subsequently placed on a statutory basis in line with the transfer of planning functions to the new district councils on 1st April 2015. It should be noted that there are some differences between the initial administrative hierarchy classifications in place from 1st April 2014 and the final classifications set out in the Planning (Development Management) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 (S.R.2015 No.71).

Regionally significant developments (RSD) are similar to former Article 31 applications in that they will be determined by the Department. These developments have a critical contribution to make to the economic and social success of Northern Ireland as a whole, or a substantial part of the region. They also include developments which have significant effects beyond Northern Ireland or involve a substantial departure from a local development plan. Applications for these development proposals will be submitted to and determined by the Department. However, the thresholds for RSD may mean that applications which may have previously been dealt with by the Department will now be classified as major development and thus determined by the relevant council. Like major applications, RSD proposals will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Major developments have important economic, social and environmental implications for a council area. The majority of applications for major developments will be dealt with by councils under the new planning system and will be subject to pre-application consultation with the community.

Local developments will comprise of all other developments (other than permitted development) that do not fall within the classes described for major or for regionally significant developments. They comprise of the vast majority of residential and minor commercial applications to be received and determined by a council.

Departmental activity

Retained Section 26 (former Article 31) applications are Major applications being processed by the Department as Article 31 (under the Planning (NI) Order 1991) and, where a decision had not issued before 1 April 2015, which will now be determined under Section 26 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011.

Retained Section 29 (former non Article 31) applications are those being dealt with by the Department's Strategic Planning Division which were close to determination at 1 April 2015 and which were retained for determination as if the Department had called them in under Section 29 of the Planning Act (NI) 2015.

Called-in applications are those initially made to councils where the Minister/Department directs that these should fall to the Department for determination.

It should be noted that in Section 2 of this report, processing times for 'Called-In' applications are calculated from the date the application was called in by the Department. This method is only used in Section 2 of the report in order to show Departmental processing performance. All other processing times reported in the publication are based on the date the application is made valid.

Appeals

All applicants of a planning application have the right to appeal a decision or the conditions attached to a decision. The statistics reflected in this publication only reflect the original decision and not any subsequent decision on appeal.

Enforcement Activity

Compliance and enforcement are important functions of the planning system. The summary data presented in this report and accompanying Excel tables covers enforcement cases opened, enforcement cases closed, court action taken and the live caseload as at the end of the quarter. Cases may be closed for a variety of reasons:

- case has been remedied or resolved (the breach may have been removed or amended accordingly);
- planning permission has been granted (so no breach has occurred); it would not be expedient to take further action;
- no breach has actually occurred; the breach may be immune from enforcement action (it may be outside the time limit in which to initiate action);
- Or an application has been allowed on appeal or indeed the notice has been quashed.

The time taken to conclude an enforcement case is calculated from the date the complaint is received to the earliest date of the following:

- a notice is issued;
- legal proceedings commence;
- a planning application is received;
- the case is closed.

Please note that the number of cases closed is not a sub-set of the number of cases concluded in that period - cases that are concluded in any given period may not be closed until subsequent periods, and cases that are closed in any given period may have been concluded in previous quarters.

The value at 70% is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point at the 70th percentile of the sequence.

Processing Times

The time taken to process a decision/withdrawal is calculated from the date on which an application is deemed valid to the date on which the decision is issued or the application is withdrawn. The average processing time is the median. The median is determined by sorting data from its lowest to highest values and then taking the data point in the middle of the sequence. The median is used because some planning applications can take several years to reach a decision. As a consequence, these extreme cases (outliers) inflate the mean and the result is that the mean may not be considered as 'typical'. Therefore the median may be taken to better represent the 'average' or 'typical' processing time.

Geographical Classification

The method of classifying the urban and rural marker has been updated to reflect the latest NISRA guidance using the 2015 Settlement limits:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/geography/settlement15-guidance.pdf>

This method is preferred to the previous method as it more accurately considers which of the 8 Settlement bands fall into mainly urban or rural areas. The limitation of the previous method was that all settlement bands were classified as urban. Under the new method it is recognised that smaller settlements are more rural than urban in character and should be distinguished as such. Presently the mid-point of the application polygon is used to assign urban and rural bandings.

From Q2 2016/17, an additional split has been provided reporting separately rural settlements with populations of less than 5,000 people. In addition to that 'housing developments' and 'other' residential applications have been included within the urban and rural breakdowns.

If users want to compare this information with information published before 2015/16 the 'housing developments' and 'other' residential applications should be excluded first; the next step to obtain a

comparative figure would be to add 'Urban settlements' (>=5,000 people) and 'Rural settlements' (<5,000 people) together.

From 2015/16 the Urban/Rural data reported in this bulletin is based on the recommended NISRA definition. To obtain rural figures in line with the NISRA definition users should add 'Rural Settlements' and 'Countryside' together.

The method of classifying the Parliamentary Constituencies is based on the x and y co-ordinates as recorded on the planning application in conjunction with Westminster Parliamentary Constituency boundaries (2008).

Note on Exclusions:

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs)

Certificates of Lawful Use or Development (CLUDs), either proposed or existing, have not been included in the Official Statistics bulletin since 2012/13. These are not actually applications for planning permission. A council will issue a CLUD if it is satisfied that a particular development is lawful within the provisions of planning legislation. Examples include proposed extensions, which fall within the provisions of the Planning (General Permitted Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 for permitted development and do not require planning permission, or uses that have become lawful due to the length of time they have been in existence.

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)

While applications for planning permission and other consents were included in the operational statistics produced prior to transfer, Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) were excluded. In the interests of consistency TPOs will also be excluded from the new operational statistics.

Non Material Changes (NMCs)

Applications for a Non Material Change (NMCs) to an existing planning permission are provided for under the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. There is no requirement to advertise or consult on NMCs.

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs) are not provided for in planning legislation and councils may adopt different approaches in relation to these, as may the Department.

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs)

Proposal of Application Notices (PANs) are provided for under Section 27 of the 2011 Act, but they are not planning applications. They are essentially advance notices of major/RSD planning applications and detail how a developer proposes to engage with the community. A major/RSD development planning application cannot be submitted without a PAN having been issued, community consultation undertaken and a report prepared and submitted with the application by a developer.

Discharge of Conditions (DCs)

It will be necessary to seek to discharge a condition where planning approval has been granted and a condition has been attached to the decision which requires the further consent, agreement or approval of the council (or the Department).

Further Information

Information and statistics for the other devolved administrations and Republic of Ireland can be found at the following links.

England:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics>

Scotland:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning>

Wales:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/planningstats/development-management-quarterly-survey/?lang=en>

Republic of Ireland:

<http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/construction/>

Building Control (LPS Starts and completions):

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/new-dwelling-statistics>

Housing bulletin DSD:

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing-statistics>

Appendix 1 – Definitions

The Statistical Categories referred to in Section 5 and Excel Table 5.1 are defined below.

Agricultural

These include agricultural buildings or structures for the storage of slurry and/or manure, agricultural glasshouses, stables and livery yards and infilling of land for agricultural purposes.

Commercial

These include food supermarkets and superstores, non food retailing, major retail developments exceeding 1000 sq m, alterations, extensions and improvements to buildings used for retailing, retail warehouses, clubs, post offices, factory outlets, petrol stations, offices, purpose built office developments, restaurants, car parking, and motor vehicle display, hire, repair or sale.

Government and Civic

These include police stations, coastguard stations, civic amenity sites, recycling centres, schools and colleges, hospitals, clinics, other medical establishments including surgeries and dental practices, 'Hard infrastructure' facilities such as roads, water mains, water treatment works, trunk sewers, waste water treatment works and natural gas pipelines. Also includes recreational facilities, including indoor and outdoor sports facilities, and swimming pools and renewable energy applications, including wind turbines, wind farms, solar panels, biomass burners, hydroelectric schemes etc. Note that this category also includes non public sector applications related to the above topics.

Industrial and Manufacturing

These include factories, warehousing, light and general industrial floor space, quarries, sand and gravel extraction and fuel depots.

Mixed Development

These include applications for mixed development incorporating a number of development types such as residential, retailing, offices, community and leisure.

Residential

These include housing developments (incorporating a mixture of house types and apartments), purpose built apartment developments, sheltered housing schemes, single dwellings including dwellings on farms, holiday chalets, caravans and mobile homes, alteration, extension or improvement of existing dwellings, residential homes or nursing homes, hotels or motels.

Change of Use

These include applications for a change in the use of land or buildings including changes to residential, retailing, offices, community or leisure uses.

Other types of application

All other types of applications not mentioned above are put into the 'Other' category but mainly comprise 'Works to Facilitate Persons Who Are Disabled', 'Advertisements', and 'Listed Buildings'.

The application types referred to in Excel Table 5.6 are defined below.

Outline permission

An application for outline planning permission can be used to ascertain whether a proposed development is acceptable in principle. This usually means that detailed drawings are not needed. However, the council or, as the case may be, the Department, may, in certain circumstances, require the submission of additional information or insist that an application for full planning permission be submitted.

Full permission

An application for full planning permission requires the submission of all details of the proposal. This type of application would be appropriate, for example, if the erection of new buildings is proposed and / or if a change of use of land or buildings is proposed.

Approval of Reserved Matters

If outline planning permission is granted, then a subsequent application and approval relating to the siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping details, known as 'reserved matters', will be required before building work can commence. The reserved matters application must be consistent with the outline planning permission and take into account any conditions that have been attached to it. If the development proposal changes, then it may be necessary to submit a new planning application.

Consent to Display an Advertisement

Advertisement consent is normally required to display an advertisement, particularly large signs and illuminated adverts.

Listed Building Consent

Works that would affect the character of a listed building need listed building consent. This includes work to the internal or external fabric of the building or any demolition. It should be noted that the requirement for Listed Building Consent is in addition to any requirement for planning permission for works to a listed building.

Conservation Area Consent

Works that would entail the full or partial demolition of a non-listed building in a conservation area need conservation area consent. It should be noted that the requirement for Conservation Area Consent may be in addition to any requirement for planning permission.

Hazardous Substances Consent

The Planning (Hazardous Substances) (No2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 are concerned with the storage and use of hazardous substances which could, in quantities at or above specified limits, present a risk. Hazardous Substances Consent ensures that hazardous substances can be kept or used in significant amounts only after the council or, as the case may be, the Department has had the opportunity to assess the degree of risk arising to persons in the surrounding area and to the environment.

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