Northern Ireland

New Dwelling Statistics

Quality Assurance of Administrative Data

24 August 2016

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1. Background

Land & Property Services (LPS) publishes the number of new dwelling starts and completions in NI each quarter. The information is presented by development type (private/speculative and social housing), property type (apartments and houses) and local government district.

Publication timetable

Quarter	Publication month
January-March	May
April-June	August
July-September	November
October-December	February

Data source

Data on new dwelling starts and completions are provided by Building Control within each council in Northern Ireland (NI).

Level of risk of data quality concerns

There is low risk of data quality concerns. There is an agreement between LPS and Councils about what data will be provided, how it will be provided and the timing of data provision. LPS Statistics Branch have a good understanding of the building control and data collection process and are content that the quality standards being applied meet the statistical needs.

Public interest profile of the statistics

The new dwelling statistics are of low public interest. The statistics are not generally used in isolation but may be combined with other economic and housing statistics by users. There is limited media interest.

Level of assurance

As the new dwelling statistics have a low risk of data quality concerns and a low public interest profile, basic assurance of the quality of the administrative data is appropriate.

2. Operational context & administrative data collection

Data are collected by District Council Building Control surveyors under the Building Regulations (NI) Order 1979 (amended 2012). It is their responsibility to enforce the parliamentary standards on health, structural stability, fire safety and energy conservation. Information is collected through application forms and on-site inspections.

Each Council collects the same data on building regulations applications. Once the application has been checked to ensure the correct fee and documentation has been submitted, the application details are entered into the building control IT system.

It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all necessary inspections are carried out and to request inspections at each stage. The surveyor records details of each site visit on the IT system.

Each application is coded to identify the type of work to be undertaken using a coding framework agreed by all NI Building Control offices.
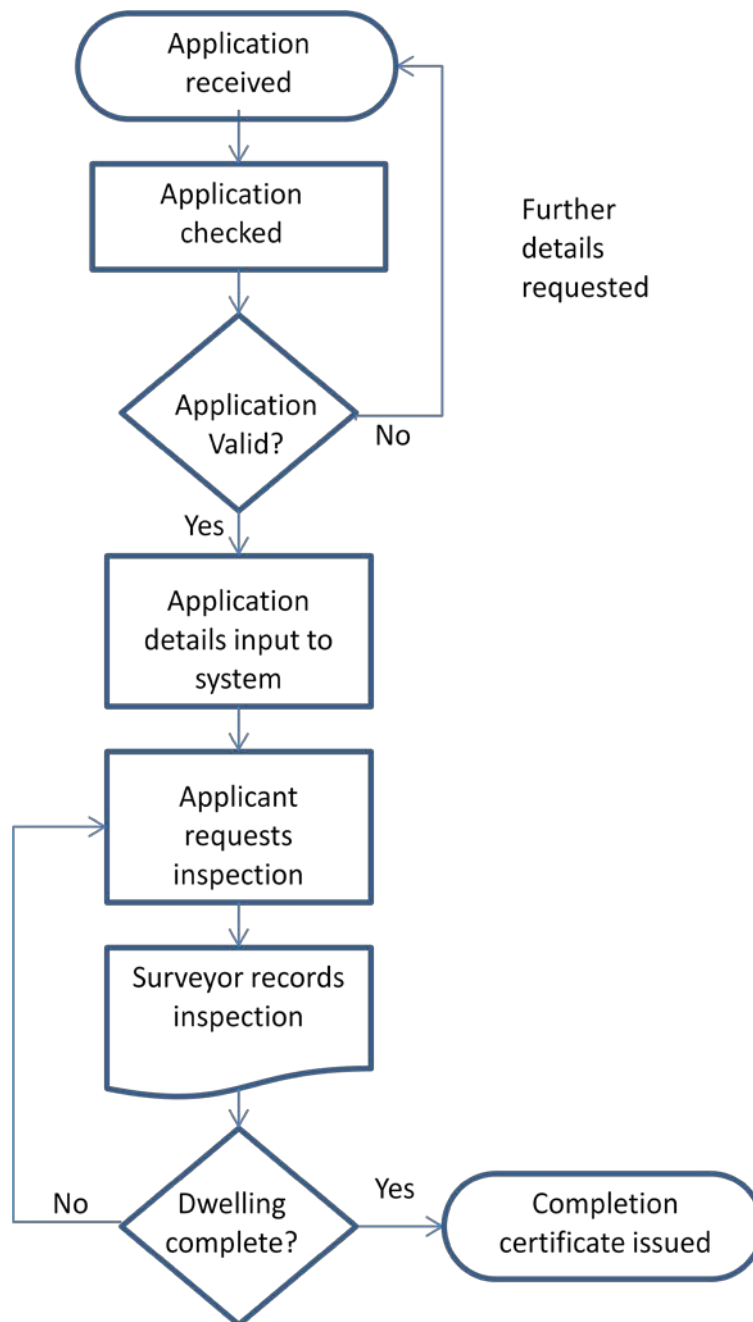
A new dwelling start is identified by the date on which the first building control inspection takes place (commencement and foundations).

A new dwelling completion is identified by the date on which the completion inspection takes place.

Applications are validated on receipt and fees are calculated based on the work required. Standards are enforced by impartial professionals with a thorough knowledge of the building regulations who visit each site repeatedly during the building process. Repeated viewing of application details by surveyors when recording each inspection helps to minimise the risks to the quality of the data.

A process map providing an overview of the application process is shown in figure 1. More detailed process maps are used by the councils at each stage of the process but are not included in this document.

Fig 1: Process map for data collection

Application received

Application checked

Application Valid? — No → Further details requested

Yes

Application details input to system

Applicant requests inspection

Surveyor records inspection

Dwelling complete? — No / Yes → Completion certificate issued

3. Communication with data supply partners

Building Control data is provided to LPS to assist in the maintenance of the NI Valuation List in addition to statistical purposes.

The format and content of the data provided to LPS was agreed with software providers in 2007/08 when LPS took over responsibility for collection of commencements and completions data. The information collected mirrored the original returns which had been previously collected by DRD.

A Memorandum of Understanding between LPS and each council outlines the data requirements from both parties. Building Control data is supplied to LPS monthly. The software system used by the majority of councils was designed to ensure LPS could access the data in a user friendly and timely manner. Councils using a different software system have put mechanisms in place to supply regular data updates.

All data is held on secure servers and is transferred securely. Access to data within LPS Statistics Branch is restricted to branch members. Information is only released at aggregate level and individual properties/applications cannot be identified.

LPS Statistics Branch are represented on the Property Services Liaison Group, a group which meets quarterly to provide a forum for developing, managing and maintaining the working relationships, processes and data sharing across LPS and the councils. During 2015/16, LPS Statistics Branch met with representatives from each council building control office, gaining a better understanding of the building control process and building relationships with the data suppliers.

The quarterly statistics are published on the Department of Finance website and feedback from users is welcomed.

4. QA principles, standards and checks applied by data suppliers

As shown in figure 1, applications are checked on receipt. If incomplete, further information is requested. Monthly reports are checked before submitting to LPS. Audits of building control are carried out in a number of Councils.

LPS were involved in the initial design of the main software system and provided guidance on input validation techniques.

Data can often be used as part of the legal process which helps ensure accurate recording and checking.

5. Producer's QA investigations and documentation

On receipt of data, LPS validate the data using a number of checks for accuracy, coverage and completeness of returns. The data is checked to ensure that there are cases for each council and no cases are duplicated. The purpose group code is checked against the applicant name and description of work to ensure the development type, property type and type of work has been correctly coded. Any anomalies are checked with the relevant council and amended as necessary.

6. Strengths and weaknesses of the administrative data

Strengths

- The data collected by all councils is consistent and collected to meet Building Regulations.
- The data provided to LPS is in a consistent format which can be easily combined.
- A consistent coding framework is used to identify the type of works.
- There is full coverage of all works recorded by Building Control in NI.
- There is full geographical coverage for NI.
- A consistent time series is available.
- The data is available at council level.
- Statistical producers and data providers are in regular contact, aiding the understanding of the process and facilitating the resolution of any issues impacting on data quality.

Limitations

- Raw data relating to pre 2005 is not held by LPS. It is not possible to QA the NI data published by DCLG relating to 1978-2004.