



Northern Ireland  
Statistics and Research Agency  
Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann  
um Staitisticí agus Taighde



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# NORTHERN IRELAND PLANNING STATISTICS

## User Survey 2025 - Report



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## Key points

The Northern Ireland (NI) Planning Statistics User Survey was setup on [NI Direct](#) and circulated by Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) with the Department of Infrastructure (DfI) to those listed on the readership list for the statistical product. Alongside this the [survey](#) was placed on the [DfI's website](#) and X (formally Twitter), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) social media channels.

In total, twenty-two responses were received. These responses are summarised in this report, with the key findings presented below.

- NI local and central government and the private sector are key users of NI Planning Statistics.
- NI Planning Statistics are primarily used in planning services, research, modelling and forecasting and responding to information requests.
- The majority of respondents access NI Planning Statistics through the DfI website link and the email circulated to the readership list.
- The top products fully or mostly meeting users' needs are the data tables and statistical bulletin.
- Over two-thirds of respondents stated that they would like to see planning statistics made available in a dashboard format.

## Introduction

ASRB within DfI is responsible for producing and disseminating a range of official and accredited official statistics relating to the Department's travel, transport and planning functions.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) requires all producers of official statistics to ensure that they deliver statistical services that serve the public good. The framework for this Code is based on three pillars (each containing several principles and detailed practices):

- Trustworthiness
- Quality; and
- Value.

'Value' means that the statistics and data are useful, accessible, relevant, and support understanding of important issues. Under this pillar, the 'Relevance to users' principle states that 'Users of statistics and data should be at the centre of statistical production; their needs should be understood, their views sought and acted upon, and their use of statistics supported.' Further details of how ASRB work to meet the requirements of the Code can be found in their published [User Engagement Strategy](#).

This report presents the results from the Northern Ireland (NI) Planning Statistics user survey which was conducted over the summer 2025.

## Background to planning statistics

The [NI Planning Statistics bulletin](#) is an accredited official statistics publication produced by ASRB on a quarterly and annual basis. The publication presents a summary of NI planning volumes and processing information for councils and the Department for Infrastructure. The report provides an overall view of planning and enforcement activity across NI with some data series dating back to 2002/03; it also includes summary statistics on council progress since transfer of powers in 2015 and reports against the three statutory targets set out in the [Local Government \(Performance Indicators and Standards\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#).

Provisional quarterly bulletins are published for the first three quarters of each financial year, with a final annual bulletin produced during June/July, immediately following the respective financial year.

## User survey - 2025

ASRB undertook a user survey to invite feedback on the NI Planning Statistics annual and quarterly official statistics publication; this was carried out from 25 July to 31 August 2025. The survey included questions on:

- Types of users.
- User needs, are needs being met?
- Accessibility of results / publication.
- Resources utilised by users.
- Additional formats.

The survey was designed to gather information that would provide a greater understanding of who the users of the published data are; to find out what the information is primarily used for; to collect users views on the range of data published; to gauge satisfaction with the content of the publication and to identify possible future products.

The results from the survey will be used to review the content of the current publication and other related products and help identify areas where there is scope for improvement.

## Methodology

ASRB maintain a readership list for planning statistics; each quarter this is used to circulate details of new publications. The readership list contains email addresses for approximately 160 users from various sectors including central government, local government, academia, business, media, voluntary sector and others. This list was used to issue a link for the user survey which was carried out through NI Direct Citizen Space.

It is important to note that this list does not contain details of all users of planning statistics; it only holds details of users who have opted to be included on the mailing list. Therefore, users that access information independently on the website would not be known to ASRB and have not been directly surveyed. To manage this DfI announced the survey on the DfI

website, alongside placing it on X and posting reminders. NISRA also placed the survey on its social media channels.

The results of this survey are the collective views of those who responded and should not be considered as representative of all users.

The user consultation opened on the 25 July 2025 and closed on the 31 August 2025.

In total, twenty-two responses were received. This report provides a summary of the responses received.

## Summary of responses

### Users

The twenty-two respondents recorded the capacity in which they primarily use the statistics. Half (50%) of respondents came from NI local government and over a quarter (27%) from the private sector. See Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents reported they primarily use the planning statistics as a member of:

Answer Option	Total	Percent
NI local government	11	50%
Private sector	6	27%
NI central government	2	9%
Community / voluntary sector	1	5%
Academia/research	1	5%
Other (please specify)	1	5%
Media	0	0%
General public	0	0%
Not Answered	0	0%

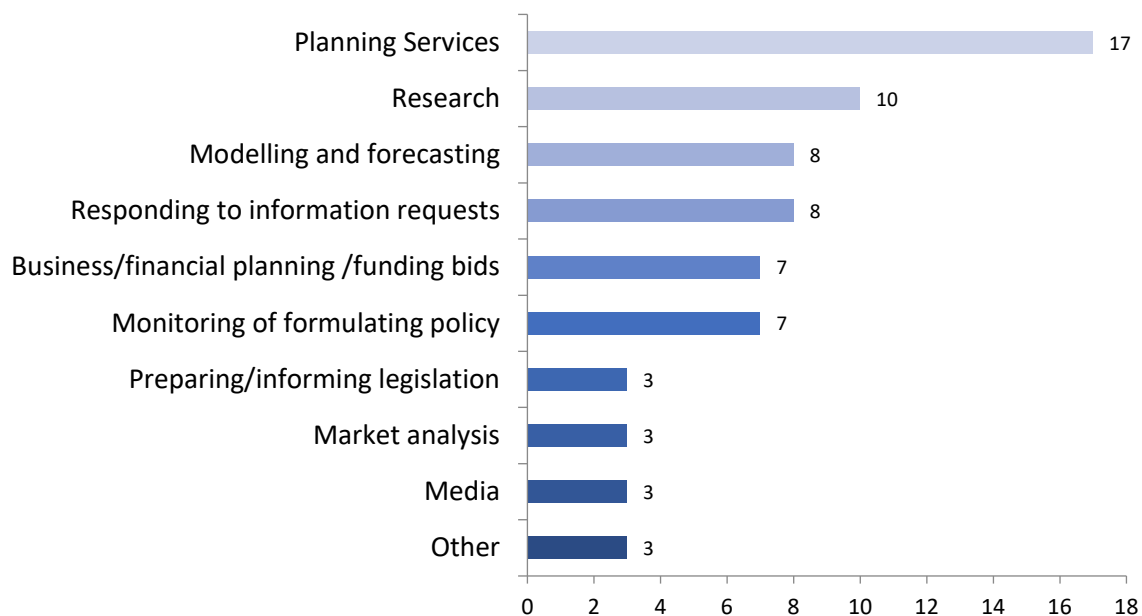
### Uses of planning statistics

The top two uses of planning statistics were reported to be 'Planning Services' (17; 77%) and 'Research' (10; 45%). Over a third of respondents (8; 36%) use the planning statistics to 'model and forecast' and to 'respond to information requests'.

Two of the three respondents who selected 'Other' mentioned that they used the statistics to monitor performance. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Respondents reported that they use planning statistics for:**

*Note: Respondents could select more than one option.*

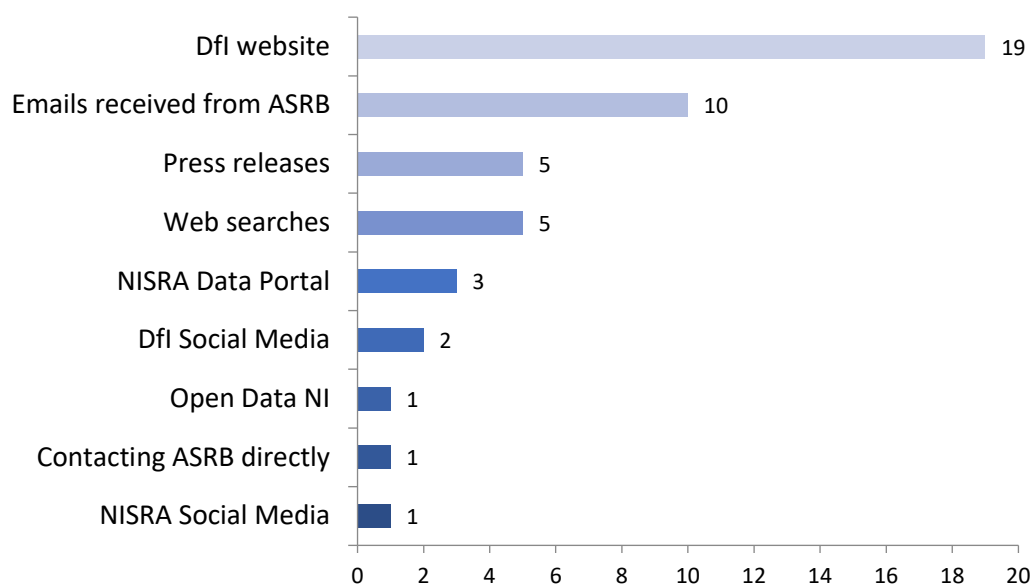


### Accessing planning statistics

Most respondents stated that they accessed the statistics directly through the DfI website (19; 86%), while 45% (10) reported that they accessed through 'Emails received from ASRB'. Among the other reported means of access were 'web searches' (5; 23%), 'press releases' (5; 23%), NISRA Data Portal (3; 14%) and 'DfI social media' (2; 9%). See Figure 2.

**Figure 2: How do you access NI Planning Statistics information?**

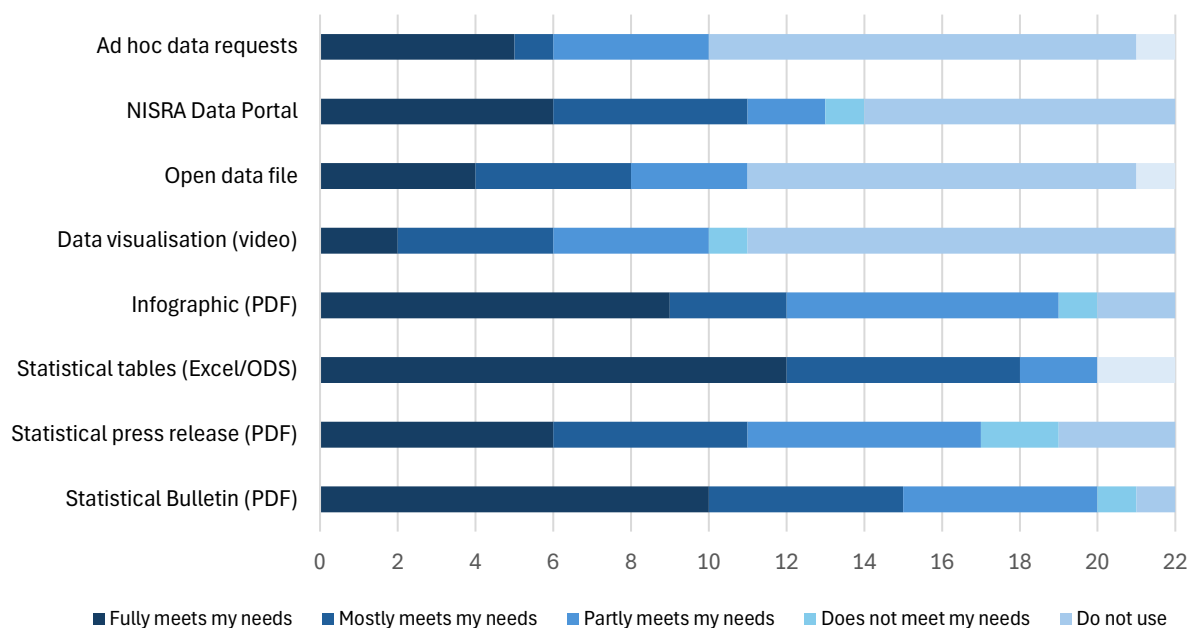
*Note: Respondents could select more than one option.*



## Products

Planning statistics are made available through several different products including the statistical bulletin, press release, excel tables, infographic, video, open data file and ad hoc data requests. Users were asked, where applicable, how each of these resources met their needs. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Statistical products – meeting user needs



Five respondents provided comments about the statistical products. The comments are listed below with a response from Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch where relevant.

- *“The reports mainly used are the statistical tables to see comparisons of performance with other local authorities and if our performance continues to reflect previous years or the differences. These are used to present reports to the Planning Committee. Press release data is useful to see the quick headlines of performance.”*
- *“Statistical tables provide ability to interrogate data at an individual council level. It would be beneficial to see a breakdown across councils of the local application category - how many householder applications, how many advertisements etc.”*

**Response:** In the statistical tables, Table 5.2 provides details of planning applications received by development type and reported by council. Table 5.4 provides a fuller breakdown of residential applications received and processed at council level.

To assist users in producing more in-depth analysis an [open dataset](#) for planning applications received, decided, withdrawn and live has been published annually since 2016/17.

- *"The statistics only partly meet our council's needs:  
There is no breakdown of performance for ""unmeasured"" (i.e. not Major or Local) applications.  
There is no monthly reporting to council's on the approval / refusal / withdrawal rate (%).  
Statutory consultee performance is not officially reported by council / district area.  
Statutory consultee performance should also include the average number of dates per substantive response by consultee type by council / district area."*

**Response:** In the statistical tables, Table 9.1 provides details of “unmeasured” applications. In this table data is provided separately for discharge of conditions, certificates of lawfulness (proposed and existing), pre-application discussions, proposals of application notices, non-material changes and tree preservation orders.

Each month the Department, as part of the production cycle to produce the accredited planning statistics, provides management information to councils for validation.

There are no official statistics for statutory consultation. ASRB produce management information to support the work of the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum. A suite of data tables has been developed that now accompany the quarterly/annual reports. This includes information at council area level. DfI publish management information on statutory consultation in the '[Oversight and Performance Monitoring](#)' section of the website.

**ASRB will share the comments received referring to statutory consultees with the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum for consideration.**

- *"The tables are very comprehensive, however, it would be useful to have them in a format that's easier to read into software like R/python. For example, having just one table per sheet, with consistent spacing and formatting across all files (this includes past files). In addition, it would be useful to have pre-2015 data in the post-2015 council boundaries (and vice versa, though I recognise there's limited need and probably demand for that)."*

**Response:** ASRB will consider how the format of tables could be improved to read into other software and seek to keep spacing and formatting across files consistent moving forward.

To assist users in producing more in-depth analysis an [open dataset](#) for planning applications received, decided, withdrawn and live has been published annually since 2016/17. These datasets contain co-ordinates that would enable additional geographies to be added.

- *“Statistics is one measure of performance. It is important that this is portrayed correctly.”*

**Response: ASRB will continue to engage with customers and seek feedback to ensure that the statistics and data produced are relevant and meeting user need.**

## Other formats

Fifteen of the 22 respondents (68%) stated that they would like to see planning statistics made available in a dashboard format. Five (23%) expressed interest in more detail being made available on the NISRA Data Portal. Two respondents selected ‘Other’, with their comments indicating that they were content with the current products.

Comments received have been detailed below.

- “Anyway that makes them more accessible to people.”
- “Generally the currently available info meets my needs.”
- "need for more information in relation to:  
Measurement and performance of non-Local and Major applications.  
Statutory consultee performance - by council / district area; and average number of days per substantive consultee response by type of consultee and by council / district area."

**Response: In the statistical tables, Table 9.1 provides details of “unmeasured” applications. In this table data is provided separately for discharge of conditions, certificates of lawfulness (proposed and existing), pre-application discussions, proposals of application notices, non-material changes and tree preservation orders.**

**Each month the Department, as part of the production cycle to produce the accredited planning statistics, provides management information to councils for validation.**

**There are no official statistics for statutory consultation. ASRB produce management information to support the work of the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum. A suite of data tables has been developed that now accompany the quarterly/annual reports. This includes information at council area level. DfI**

publish management information on statutory consultation in the '[Oversight and Performance Monitoring](#)' section of the website.

ASRB will share the comments received referring to statutory consultees with the Planning Statutory Consultee Forum for consideration and appropriate response/action.

- "Detail on other reason for delays i.e. statutory consultation response rates - include NIEAs response rate."

**Response:** The data used in the production of the planning statistics does not have this level of detail available. DfI publish management information on statutory consultation in the '[Oversight and Performance Monitoring](#)' section of the website.

- "An online dashboard where you could retrieve and visualise data, then download it would be useful."

**Response:** ASRB will consider developing / implementing a dashboard to report planning statistics as resource permits.

Eight comments were received in relation to how planning statistics could be improved. These are detailed below.

- "DFI should learn from work practices in better performing councils and use this to make changes in councils that do not perform as well."

**Response:** This falls outside the scope of reporting planning statistics.

- "COUNCILS IMPROVE THEIR SCHEME OF DELEGATIONS AND ADOPT THEIR PLANS."

**Response:** This falls outside the scope of reporting planning statistics.

- "further breakdown of local category of development to householder applications, advertisements, LBC applications etc."

**Response:** In the statistical tables, Table 5.2 provides details of planning applications received by development type and reported by council. Table 5.4 provides a fuller breakdown of residential applications received and processed at council level.

To assist users in producing more in-depth analysis an [open dataset](#) for planning applications received, decided, withdrawn and live has been published annually since 2016/17.

- There is a comprehensive amount of data contained within the data tables in the publication. If there was any way of summarising these via infographic (maybe not possible) but we have found that people interact with graphics more so than data tables. It is however important that we also retain the raw data tables.”

**Response: A summary infographic and data visualisation are produced alongside each release of planning statistics. At present there is no plan to increase the production of infographic information.**

- “A definition or interpretation of terms used would be useful. For example, timeframes for the processing of a planning application - is this taken from date of submission or date of validation?”

**Response: This information is available in the published bulletin, footnotes in published tables and the [Planning Statistics User Guidance](#).**

- “Statistics should emphasise quality of decisions and alignment with policy from across government, not just emphasise speed of planning decision making.”

**Response: The official planning statistics provide consistent and timely reporting of the number of applications received, decided, withdrawn, approval rates and processing times at regional and planning authority level. Reporting on the quality of decisions and alignment with policy falls outside the scope of these statistics.**

- "As mentioned, changing the formatting of files (both past and present) would be welcome, as it would make it easier to read in multiple years worth of data at once. Having a master file containing all the planning data from when they were first collected in a file that's updated with each quarterly release would also make loading of files and analysis of planning data contained in them easier.

**Response: To assist users in producing more in-depth analysis an [open dataset](#) for planning applications received, decided, withdrawn and live has been published annually since 2016/17.**

And, though not entirely planning related, it'd be great to have easily accessible council spending data for Northern Ireland - both on planning, and other council spending areas. Transparency around individual council spending on services is important for accountability and this is made much easier if there's an easily found central webpage holding that data for all councils, in enough detail, and in an accessible format."

**Response: This falls outside the scope of reporting planning statistics.**

- “How many applications sit awaiting to be validated! This backlog or complacency skews the figures.”

**Response: To assist users in producing more in-depth analysis an [open dataset](#) for planning applications received, decided, withdrawn and live has been published annually since 2016/17. Time taken to validate planning applications can be derived from this dataset.**

## Contact with ASRB planning statistics team

Six respondents (27%) stated that they had directly contacted the ASRB Planning Statistics Team. All respondents stated that they felt were helped by the team and that they were treated well.

One respondent commented:

*“I received a prompt, informed and courteous response when I contacted the ASRB Planning Statistics Team.”*

## Future actions based on User Survey results

ASRB is committed to continuous engagement with customers and users to ensure that the statistics and analyses produced meet their needs; and to enable our customers and users to inform future priorities, plans and outputs. ASRB extend thanks to all who took the time to complete the user survey and provide valuable feedback. The actions informed by this survey that ASRB plan to take forward are listed below.

- ASRB will share this report with the DfI Planning Statutory Consultee Forum by Autumn/Winter 2025.
- ASRB will consider how the format of tables could be improved to read into other software and seek to keep spacing and formatting across files consistent moving forward by end December 2025.
- Continue to engage with users, being mindful of their needs. Consider/implement where possible/viable improvements to statistical reporting.
- ASRB will consider developing / implement as resource permits a dashboard to report planning statistics. To be considered for scheduling into work programme.
- Carry out a user survey again in Summer/Autumn 2027.
- Develop the planning statistics bulletin to report in html format as resource permits.

# Appendix 1 – User engagement survey

## Overview

Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) publish the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics which provide an overview of planning activity in Northern Ireland, as well as a summary of individual council performance.

Provisional quarterly bulletins are published for the first three quarters of each financial year, with a final annual bulletin produced during June, immediately following the respective financial year.

ASRB are seeking feedback from users of these Accredited Official Statistics, in relation to the published reports and the service we provide customers.

Published planning statistics can be found [here](#).

## Why your views matter

Your views are very important to us and will help us in providing a high-quality service which meets users' needs.

We thank you in advance for taking part in this survey. It should only take five minutes to complete.

If you have any queries please contact us at: [ASRB@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:ASRB@nisra.gov.uk)

## User information

1. Please complete the following statement: I primarily use the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics as a member of: (please select one only)

(Required)

- NI central government
- NI local government
- Other public sector
- The community / voluntary sector
- Academia/research
- The media
- Private sector
- The general public
- Other (please specify)

Please specify:

2. What do you use the Planning Statistics for? (please select all that apply)

(Required)

- Responding to information requests
- Monitoring or formulating policy
- Research
- Planning Services
- Modelling and forecasting
- Business/ financial planning / funding bids
- Media
- Market analysis
- Preparing / informing legislation
- Other (please specify)

Please specify:

3. How do you access Planning Statistics information? (please select all that apply)

(Required)

- Web searches
- DfI website
- Emails received from ASRB
- DfI Social Media
- NISRA Social Media
- Press releases
- Hard copy printed documents
- Contacting ASRB directly
- Open Data NI
- NISRA Data Portal
- Other (please specify)

Please specify:

### Meeting user needs

4. There are a number of different sources of Planning Statistics information, these are listed below. Where applicable, to what extent does each source meet your needs?

	Fully meets my needs	Mostly meets my needs	Partly meets my needs	Does not meet my needs	Do not use
Statistical bulletin (PDF)					
Statistical press release (PDF)					
Infographic (PDF)					
Data visualisation (video)					
Statistical tables (Excel/ODS)					
Open data file (available on Open Data NI)					
NISRA Data Portal (Planning Applications, Decisions and Enforcements)					
Ad hoc data requests					

5. Please provide any further comments you have in relation to your answer(s) above.

### Contact with ASRB Planning Statistics Team

6. Have you previously contacted ASRB Planning Statistics Team for any reason?

(Required)

- Yes
- No

7. When contacting ASRB Planning Statistics Team, do you feel you were treated well? (That is, did we respond promptly, courteously, competently and informatively, even if we could not provide the specific answer or response that you needed)

- Yes
- No

If no, please let us know why

8. When contacting ASRB Planning Statistics Team, do you feel we helped you? (That is, did we answer your query, signpost you to someone who could answer and/or explain why we could not provide an answer)

- Yes
- No

If no, please let us know why

9. As we move forward would you like to see Planning Statistics made available in any of the following ways?

- An online Dashboard
- Publish in HTML format as opposed to Pdf
- More data available on NISRA Data Portal
- Other (please specify)
- N/A

Please provide detail:

10. Is there anything else you could add which you feel might help to improve the Planning Statistics?

Please provide any further comments

Thank you for your response.

## Appendix 2 – Dfl social media post

**Department for Infrastructure** @deptinfra · 28 Aug  
Have your say on our planning statistics before our consultation closes on 31 August!

See more here [👉](#)

**Department for Infrastructure** @deptinfra · 25 Jul  
Our planning statistics provide an overview of planning activity in Northern Ireland, as well as a summary of individual council performance.

We want to know what you think of these stats....

**Give us your views on our planning statistics**

Department for Infrastructure | An Roinn Bonneagair | Department for Infrastructure

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