

Northern Ireland Planning Statistics

Assessment of Compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Investigating the feasibility of linking planning approvals to house building completions data

October 2020

Published by:

Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch,
Department for Infrastructure

Contact: Suzanne Napier

Telephone: 028 9054 0390

Email: ASRB@nisra.gov.uk

Internet address: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-activity-statistics>

Contents

1. Introduction	3
Key findings of investigation.....	5
2. Discussions with LPS Statisticians	5
3. Desk review of Housing Statistics produced by DfC	9
4. Review of Housing content in other jurisdictions Planning Statistics	10
5. Datasets available through Open Data NI	14
6. Admin Data Research.....	14
7. GSS Working Group – Cross-government Housing Statistics	15
8. Findings and Current position	16

1. Introduction

1.1 An assessment of the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics was conducted from November 2019 to March 2020.

1.2 The regulatory team from the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) – Oliver Fox-Tatum and Gemma Keane – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DfI in November 2019. Documentary evidence for the assessment was provided by the DfI statistics team in November 2019. The regulatory team discussed and met with the statistics team in February 2020 to review compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics, taking account of the evidence provided and research performed.

1.3 Evidence provided by the planning statistics branch included:

- NI planning statistics bulletins and data tables
- NI planning statistics – background quality report; and NI planning statistics – quality assurance of administrative data sources (QAAD)
- Statistics team organisational chart
- User group meeting agendas and minutes
- Example of data sharing agreement with councils
- NI planning statistics guidance note (desk instructions/training manual)

1.4 An additional key part of the assessment was talking to people who use the statistics, to help us to understand the current value of the statistics, and where there is the potential for this to increase. Interviews with users were conducted as part of the process, users interviewed generally worked within DfI, councils, corporations or charities concerned with planning. The OSR engagement with these users provided some insight into the extent to which the statistics meet different users' needs and to which users feel that ASRB as producers engage with them.

1.5 Following the primary assessment period, the OSR produced an [assessment report](#), approved by the Regulation Committee on behalf of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority, based on the advice of the Director General for Regulation.

1.6 This assessment report laid out key findings structured around the three pillars of the Code of Practice – Public Value, Quality and Trustworthiness. Alongside the key findings,

OSR also made a number of recommendations across four actions for Dfl statistics to address, prior to any designation of the Northern Ireland Planning Statistics as National Statistics.

1.7 These requirements have been taken considered across the period May to September 2020 in an effort to meet the required standards. This short report deals specifically with one requirement highlighted under the **Value** pillar - *Dfl should investigate the feasibility of linking planning approvals to house building completions data, perhaps exploring this in partnership with Admin Data Research Northern Ireland. Dfl should collaborate with other UK and NI statisticians as necessary to help answer key questions and enable a better understanding of the NI planning statistics in relation to the overall UK planning picture, and publish its findings.*

1.8 As per the requirement, over the past four months Dfl Statisticians have liaised with Land and Property Services statisticians, as producers of Housing data within NI, as well as liaising with Admin Data Research Northern Ireland to explore a potential partnership in this area. Discussion has also been commenced amongst the cross-government working group on housing statistics. Dfl Statisticians have also worked to achieve a better understanding of both Planning Statistics across the UK, including how they link to relevant Housing data, and other Housing Statistics produced within Northern Ireland (that is the Department for Communities) to explore any feasibility of linking data as suggested. Dfl have also continued to produce open data in a way that should support researchers to make their own explorations and investigations pending any further development within Dfl Statistics.

1.9 ASRB is currently under considerable resource pressures, with limited scope in the Planning section to accommodate existing key Departmental requests. This exercise has been no easy task considering the issues occurring over the recent period, notably ASRB resource has been reduced overall by 25% and COVID-19 introduced new challenges both on resource and working practices during the period. However, as an initial exploration, the learning gathered has been helpful in understanding the logistics and complexities of linking planning data to housing completions. This report highlights investigations to date and ASRB will further consider this concept in the future, keeping it on our forward work plan. However, the proportionate burden of a full exploration and development of this exercise on the limited ASRB resource also needs to be balanced in the context of customer concerns and demand, where there are many competing priorities on the current resource available.

Key findings of investigation

1.10 Any linkage between Housing and Planning data, if possible, would not be a short-term project. There exists a number of issues which would have to be overcome through further investigation and collaboration.

1.11 The conversations and explorations achieved over the past six months are detailed below. There are three systems currently gathering the required data (the NI Planning Portal and two building control systems). There is no robust common variable across the systems to allow linkage between records. Previous experience of similar linkage projects shows there are potential issues around use of data, data sharing and ensuring GDPR compliance. There are also competing Departmental priorities within Planning in DfI which ASRB must support as a priority, which limits the potential for exploration of this matter.

1.12 However, from a positive perspective, there has been recent early discussion on this concept on the GSS cross-governmental working group on housing statistics, so it is clear there is interest elsewhere. Given the resourcing difficulties, this may provide an economy of resource and this working group could support development on this across UK jurisdictions. Additionally, ASRB already publish an [Open Data planning dataset](#) annually and this provides for researchers a data source of all planning approvals made within the given financial year. This existing resource is an enabler to researchers who might be interested in taking forward further exploration in this area in the more immediate future.

2. Discussions with LPS Statisticians

2.1 In early summer, DfI Statisticians had discussions with professional colleagues in Land and Property Services in an attempt to understand, at the broadest level, how feasible it may be to link planning application data to house completion data.

2.2 The first point of interest that came out in discussion was that this concept is not a new one and it has been considered in the past. Given this previous investigation had occurred, it did suggest that there were reasons for the linkage of such data to not already be occurring. LPS colleagues recalled a piece of commissioned work they had taken forward for Planning Service Headquarters in the Department of the Environment that had been carried out a number of years ago (2009-2014). The piece of work had been first piloted in the Coleraine area before extending it wider. The project was called 'Planning

Service – Monitoring Housing completions and Housing Land Availability’. The project was to develop a geographic information based solution to monitor housing completions and housing availability across Northern Ireland. Up until the transfer of planning powers out to local councils the Department of the Environment produced an annual housing monitor report which was informed by this piece of work. The housing monitor ceased to be produced centrally following the transfer of planning functions. The last housing monitor that was produced by the Department can be found at the link below:

https://www.planningni.gov.uk/northern_ireland_housing_land_availability_summary_report_2013_revised_july_2014_.pdf

Housing monitor reports were produced by DOE annually up until transfer of planning powers in 2015. These were not continued following transfer, as the plan making function had moved to councils, as well as the personnel who carried this out. In the future councils will be required to report on housing when Local Development Plans (LDPs) are in place but we have been advised this will not be in place for some time. However, a number of councils now have now published housing land availability monitors for their respective areas. Examples can be found below:

Belfast:

- [Monitoring reports](#)
- [Housing Land Availability Monitor Viewer](#)

Mid and East Antrim:

- [Housing Land Availability Report Monitor 2019](#)
- [Housing Land Availability Map 2019](#)

Antrim and Newtownabbey:

- [Annual Housing Monitor 2019](#)

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council:

- [Annual Housing Monitor Report 2017-2018](#)

2.3 Data sources were also discussed and ASRB suggested that there may be benefit in approaching councils to acquire data. However, LPS colleagues advised that as full completions information comes through LPS from the councils as a requirement for the

maintenance of the Valuation List which is used for ratings purposes, councils are content for LPS to act as a central source for building completions data, following permission from Building Control NI for the release of the data. Therefore it was viewed that there would be no benefit to approaching the eleven councils separately. LPS colleagues also advised that, from first-hand experience during meetings related to building completions data, it was clear that there was not always linked contact between Planning and Building Control teams within councils. Additionally, building control teams work differently in each council so to ensure consistency, any data acquisition would be best serviced through LPS.

2.4 Data sharing was viewed as another significant reason for using LPS as a sole point of contact, if linkage was feasible, to ensure that data would be handled with appropriate care. ASRB were advised that a recent Information Commissioner's Office case on council data found that an address could be considered as sensitive data. The main reason for sharing Building Control data with LPS is to support the maintenance of the Valuation Lists. Statistical use is a secondary benefit and as such there would likely be GDPR issues to address. Were linkage feasible, this would mean any short-term addressing of this idea would be unlikely as there would be a need to consider such use of the data against GDPR principles and completion of a Data Protection Impact Assessment (this consideration also applies to any potential use of Admin Data Research and will also be noted below in that section).

2.5 Further discussion also considered the coverage of Building Control data, of which LPS statisticians mainly focus new domestic dwellings. As such coverage is not as wide as the Planning data and there would be considerations required around how to treat non-domestic and non-new dwellings (for example, Planning applications can involve the replacement of an existing property on the same land, which would not be adding to Housing stock numbers, or involve replacing one property with multiple units or mixed-use units) as these are not handled in a consistent way within the Building Control data. As coverage is not as wide, there would be gaps in linking applications through to completion and ensuring clarity about the effects of the completion of a Planning application in the context of what previously existed.

2.6 Another aspect that emerged was that linkage would not be a case of updating at each iteration. By the nature of planning applications and the variation in time between approvals, starts and completions (which can stretch across a number of years in some individual cases), there would be a need for linkage to be performed for the entire historic

dataset each time to pick up any completions that may have occurred on older applications that had not started/completed when any linkage exercise was previously performed. It is not as simple as running it and updating for the most recent quarter / year each time in the manner of the current Planning Statistics publication for instance.

2.7 In terms of the actual variables available to support any linkage, LPS advised that their system does not hold any reference to the planning application or planning reference number. LPS have the building control reference as an identifier on their datasets but this would not facilitate direct linkage to the planning data. While addresses may seem obvious often, and most obviously in the case of new builds, planning applications will not have an address. Another option may be to consider any geocoding associated across planning and housing data. Co-ordinates and polygons are available at the planning end and co-ordinates are also available in the housing data. However, these are entered by independent parties (the planning applicant/officer and building control) so exact matches are unlikely. The most likely method would involve buffering to some extent but for large developments or dense housing, this may prove troublesome in separating units as buffers will overlap. Therefore, such an exercise could prove quite intensive, with some manual matching and mixed methods across databases and GIS resources. Variables included across the two systems used to collect data are highlighted in the table below. LPS have also advised that Property IDs are the unique identifier used on the LPS valuation and rating system.

System A Variables	System B Variables
BUILDING_CONTROL_REFERENCE	Ref No.
PROPERTY_ID	Secondary Name
UPRN	Street Number
SITE_NUMBER	Street
BUILDINGNAME	Locality
SUBBUILDINGNAME	Town
BUILDINGNUMBER	County
STREET_NAME	Postcode
ALTERNATIVE_STREET_NAME	Applicant
LOCALITY_NAME	Description
TOWN_NAME	Purpose Group
POSTCODE	Eastings
X_COR	Northings
Y_COR	House Type
APPLICANT	Started Date
DESCRIPTION	Completed
PURPOSE_GROUP	Occupiable
HOUSE_TYPE	
STARTED_DATE	
COMPLETED_DATE	
OCCUPIABLE DATE	

3. Desk review of Housing Statistics produced by DfC

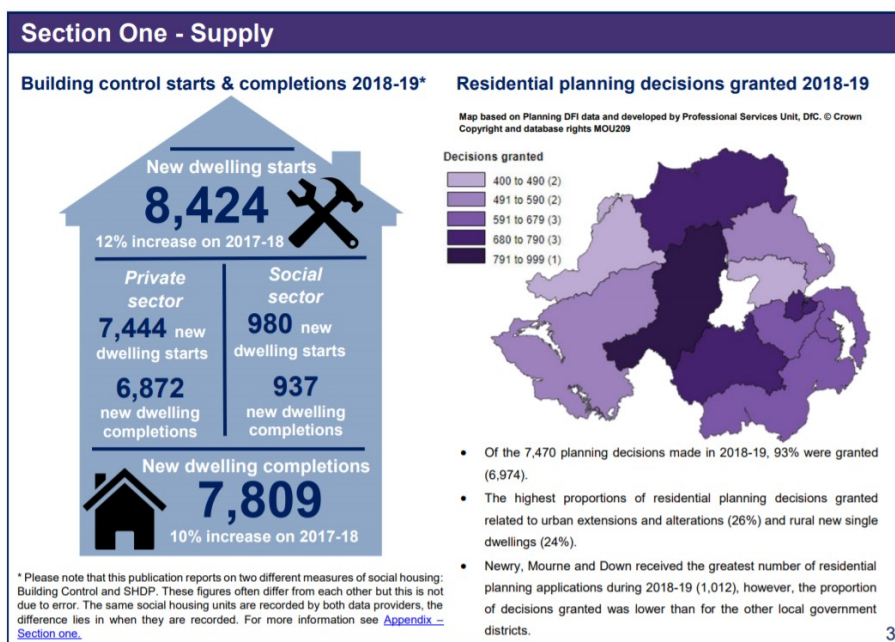
3.1 As well as LPS, the other key producer of Housing Statistics is the Department for Communities (DfC), which holds the remit to Housing policy in the NI Executive. As part of this investigation it was necessary to investigate any potential for using the statistics produced by statisticians in DfC.

3.2 DfC statisticians produce both an [annual housing report and quarterly housing bulletins](#).

3.3 The quarterly bulletins are produced two to three months after quarter end (although there has been some instance of a five month lag in the past couple of years). Section one of the bulletin relates to supply and covers two aspects of supply. Building Control starts and completions with data provided by LPS; and the Social Housing Development Programme starts and completions with data provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which manages the delivery of the Programme.

3.4 The annual report is produced, as far as the most recent edition, nine months after year end. This is an important point as the NI Planning Statistics annual report is published six months earlier. Therefore if there was any potential to link to DfC housing annual statistics, it would not be feasible within our current expected publication timescales and it would not be prudent to delay planning publications to allow for any such linkage. However, as with the DfC quarterly housing bulletin, data presented for completions is provided by LPS. As such, there is no alternative source of completions data that is available through DfC and the issues explored in Section 2 of this report would not be resolved by any collaboration with DfC.

3.5 The DfC Housing Annual report does make use of planning data and presents residential planning decisions granted within the Supply section of the report. This content is taken from the NI Planning Statistics annual report which, as mentioned in 3.4, is published some months in advance of the DfC Housing Annual. However, there is no suggestion of linking those decisions granted to starts or completions (see below).



3.6 Given the issues detailed above and the fact that DfC Housing statistics is a compendium publication using data sourced elsewhere, ASRB are of the view that any potential linkage between planning and completions data should be between NI Planning Portal and LPS Building Control data, if feasible. As such, no further exploration of the issue with DfC statisticians was taken forward.

4. Review of Housing content in other jurisdictions Planning Statistics

4.1 As part of ASRB efforts to understand how any such linkage might be achieved, a brief exploration of Planning Statistics published across other UK jurisdictions was carried out. ASRB looked into (i) any existing linkage between planning data and completions data, including signposting to Housing data within regional jurisdictions; and (ii) links within publications to other jurisdictions. There has been notable recent work in this area taken forward by the Cross-Government Housing and Planning Statistics Group, which was also helpful in taking this overview forward (see Section 7).

England

4.2 Planning statistics for local authorities in England are published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics#2020>. At the time of writing, statistics were available to December 2019 (published in March 2020) so there appears to a noticeable time lag at present, given that in NI statistics have been published to

March 2020 and are soon to be published for quarter ending June 2020. Statistics for the period January to March 2020 are noted as ‘cancelled’ on gov.uk and statistics for January to June 2020 are now scheduled for publications on 29 September 2020.

4.3 (i) in relation to any existing linkage between planning data and completions data in this jurisdiction, the most recent National Statistics release gives no indication of any linkage between planning and housing completion data. The data presented includes planning applications received, decided and granted; speed of decision-making; use of performance agreements and performance against time; housing units granted permission; residential/commercial units decided/granted; applications for prior approvals; with some detail on delegated decisions, enforcement and traveller pitches. None of the information in the publication is broken down into local authority level but is solely presented for England. More detailed local authority information is available through the tables which are found [at this link](#) but these tables do not provide any more coverage or linkage to Housing data than that provided in the publication.

4.4 While there are no direct linkages made from planning applications to housing completions, the publication does provide some signposting to Housing data. Page 23 – 26 provides a table of ‘Related Statistics’. This interestingly, in the context of this investigation, does not include any reference to house completion statistics. Instead it refers to planning inspectorate data, minerals survey, affordable housing granted planning permission land value estimates and land use statistics etc.

4.5 (ii) with regards to links within publications to other jurisdictions, page 36 provides web links to landing pages for Scotland, Wales and NI planning statistics and a high level description of the planning context in each but there is no linkage or comparisons to the other jurisdictions.

Scotland

4.6 Planning statistics for Scotland are published at <https://www.gov.scot/collections/planning-statistics/>. At the time of writing, statistics were available up to the annual publication for 2019/20, similar to current coverage in NI. There was no notification on gov.uk relating to the planned publication of the next quarterly statistics.

4.7 (i) in relation to any existing linkage between planning data and completions data in this jurisdiction, as with the discussion in the 'England' section above the most recent official statistics release gives no indication of any linkage between planning and housing completion data. The data presented includes approvals, decision times, use of processing agreements, applications by development type, delegations and enforcement activity. Certain elements of the information in the publication is broken down into local authority level in a specific section in the publication. More detailed local authority information is available through the associated tables but these tables do not provide any more coverage or linkage to Housing data than that provided in the publication.

4.8 There are no linkages or signpostings made from planning applications to housing completions (or housing data of any sort). Unlike the direction provided in the England publication highlighted above in paragraph 4.4, the publication does not provide links or direction to any 'Related Statistics'.

4.9 (ii) with regards to links within publications to other jurisdictions, page 43 (para 13.2, see image below) provides simple web links to landing pages for Scotland, Wales and NI planning statistics but no further detail. (The NI link actually sends the reader to a page on the Planning Portal website, which then directs through another link to the NI Planning Statistics page on the Department for Infrastructure website).

13.2. Statistics for other UK countries

Information and statistics on planning applications for the other UK countries can be accessed at the following links:

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

Wales: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/planningstats/?lang=en>

Northern Ireland: <http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/tools/about-statistics.htm>

Wales

4.10 Planning performance reports for Wales are published at <https://gov.wales/planning-services-performance-reports> and the latest report, published in January 2020, covers the year 2018/2019. This performance report details the current position against a number of indicators, which are also outlined at <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/planning-performance-framework-indicators-and-targets-in-detail.pdf>. Therefore the lag before publication in Wales is longer than any other jurisdiction. These reports also appear

to not be published as statistical reports and no planning publications were located on gov.wales.

4.11 (i) in relation to any existing linkage between planning data and completions data in this jurisdiction, the performance report mentioned in 4.10 does not contain any information which links planning performance/outcomes to housing data. The indicators outlined, by which performance is measured, are grouped under six headings and include detail on approvals, decision times, delegations and enforcement activity. Not all are statistical, some are yes/no process-based indicators. Each indicator in the most recent report is broken down into local authority level, see screenshot below. There is no coverage or linkage to housing completions data. Indicator SD3 within the Welsh Government's sustainable development indicators does make reference to housing provision but presents the number of dwellings granted planning permission during the year, it does not link through to actual completions. There is also no signposting or links to any housing data that may be available from other sources.

PLANNING PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK TABLE - OCTOBER 2018 TO SEPTEMBER 2019																														
		Version: 1													Date: 10/12/2019															
MEASURE	GOOD	FAIR	IMPROVE	VALUES AVERAGE/TOTAL	Belfast Council	Blackburn Council	Blackpool Council	Bolton Council	Brighton Council	Cardiff Council	Cardiff Bay Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff North Council	Cardiff South Council	Cardiff West Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council	Cardiff Metropolitan Council				
Plan making																														
Is there a current Development Plan in place that is within the plan period?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No				
LDP preparation deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<12	13-17	18+	78																						111				
Time taken to commence formal revision of an LDP following the triggering of Regulation 41, in months	<12	13-17	18+	17	23	10	10	62																						
Has an LDP Revision Delivery Agreement been submitted to and agreed with the Welsh Government?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No																							
LDP review deviation from the dates specified in the original Delivery Agreement, in months	<3.0	<3.0	1.1																											
Annual Monitoring Reports produced following LDP adoption	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				
The local planning authority's current housing land supply in years	<5	7	1.5	2.1	2.9	2.0	2.9	3.5	1.7	2.5	1.5	0.0	5.3	5.3	1.3	4.0	4.5	5.2	4.5	1.8	10.8	1.3	5.0	6.3	3.4	5.0	0.9			
Efficiency																														
Percentage of "major" applications determined within time periods required	80+	50-79.9	<50	70.3	100.0	100.0	31.8	31.3	89.1	38.2	68.8	78.6	73.7	85.6	50.0	53.3	90.0	78.6	90.0	71.4	18.2	72.7	89.5	53.3	0.0	88.4	91.7	83.3	88.8	
Average time taken to determine "major" applications in days				345 of 492	9 of 9	5 of 5	7 of 22	5 of 16	41 of 46	13 of 34	11 of 16	11 of 14	14 of 19	21 of 32	4 of 8	8 of 15	9 of 10	11 of 14	9 of 10	20 of 28	2 of 11	8 of 11	34 of 38	16 of 30	0 of 4	38 of 43	11 of 12	15 of 18	24 of 27	
Percentage of all applications determined within time periods required	80+	70-79.9	<70	85.8	98.2	99.6	61.8	64.4	87.7	69.6	86.6	91.0	92.6	89.1	85.8	82.2	96.4	91.8	97.3	85.1	83.8	91.9	90.2	90.6	70.5	98.5	89.4	92.1	92.1	
Average time taken to determine all applications in days	<67	67-111	112+	20451 of 23247	276 of 281	547 of 549	705 of 862	705 of 835	2311 of 2635	898 of 1291	533 of 801	824 of 905	788 of 851	918 of 1030	638 of 745	504 of 613	317 of 322	1025 of 1119	729 of 749	799 of 939	763 of 910	483 of 504	1149 of 1274	987 of 1089	291 of 412	1877 of 1905	500 of 559	1146 of 1244	758 of 823	
Percentage of Listed Building Consent applications determined within time periods required	80+	70-79.9	<70	75.2	100.0	100.0	68.4	42.9	83.3	71.7	55.3	92.5	76.2	37.5	60.7	69.2	100.0	98.4	100.0	83.3	33.3	100.0	84.1	100.0	0.0	77.8	90.9	66.7	93.5	
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2+	5	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Quality																														
Percentage of applications determined under delegated powers				94.4	92.2	95.8	96.4	92.5	97.6	93.4	93.8	97.6	94.7	96.9	94.0	91.4	93.5	93.7	98.0	92.2	95.5	92.3	94.3	87.7	95.1	96.3	96.4	96.9	81.4	
Percentage of Member made decisions against officer advice	<5	5-9	9+	9.0	19.2	8.7	0.0	6.3	0.0	7.1	66.0	18.2	4.4	25.1	13.3	5.7	9.5	2.9	6.7	9.6	9.0	7.7	4.2	5.2	0.0	2.9	5.0	7.7	11.6	
Percentage of appeals dismissed	65+	55-64.9	<55	117 of 1301	4 of 22	2 of 23	0 of 31	4 of 63	0 of 62	6 of 85	28 of 50	4 of 22	2 of 45	9 of 32	6 of 45	3 of 53	2 of 21	2 of 70	1 of 15	7 of 73	0 of 41	3 of 39	3 of 72	7 of 134	0 of 20	2 of 71	1 of 20	3 of 39	18 of 153	
Applications for costs at Section 78 appeal upheld in the reporting period	0	1	2+	336 of 474	5 of 7	2 of 3	14 of 18	10 of 17	37 of 47	15 of 20	7 of 9	3 of 6	5 of 6	10 of 18	15 of 26	9 of 15	8 of 10	7 of 11	4 of 7	17 of 30	8 of 12	4 of 5	6 of 10	24 of 29	5 of 5	77 of 98	10 of 12	20 of 22	14 of 31	
Engagement																														
Does the local planning authority allow members of the public to address the Planning Committee?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the local planning authority have an officer on duty to provide advice to members of the public?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Does the local planning authority's web site have an online register of planning applications, which members of the public can access, track their progress (and view their content)?	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Enforcement																														
Percentage of enforcement cases investigated (determined whether a breach of planning control has occurred and, if so, resolved whether or not enforcement action is expedient) within 84 days	80+	70-79.9	<70	75.6	98.3	76.0	83.9	87.3	96.7	49.3	100.0	90.7	68.0	60.9	80.2	33.2	76.6	64.8	96.9	80.0	52.6	88.5	85.6	74.3	65.8	70.3	88.6	91.2	70.1	
Average time taken to take positive enforcement action	<190	101-200	200+	150.0	219.3	251.0	30.8	232.3	32.8	No Data	485.6	194.5	135.8	126.7	105.7	161.0	52.3	156.8	174.3	194.8	216.8	184.0	146.5	46.8	198.0	35.3	46.3	79.8	88.5	

4.12 (ii) with regards to links to other jurisdictions, unlike all other UK jurisdictions there is no linkage or signposting to England, Scotland or Northern Ireland planning statistics within the published Wales performance report.

5. Datasets available through Open Data NI

5.1 There are a number of datasets relevant to this action that are made available through Open Data NI.

5.2 As producers of NI Planning Statistics, DfI Statisticians produce an annual dataset for upload to Open Data NI which includes finalised, validated information on received and decided planning applications during the reported year, as well as pending applications as at the end of the financial year.

5.3 In addition to the NI Planning Statistics dataset, LPS also make available [quarterly new dwelling completion](#) datasets and [quarterly new dwelling start](#) datasets.

5.4 While the NI Planning Statistics dataset available on Open Data NI provides detailed information, extracted from the NI Planning Portal, on each application received that year (including reference number, Council, classification, category, housing type, proposal description, address, co-ordinates and status), the LPS datasets are quarterly numeric counts of starts and completions within each Council area by a number of sub-categories. No information is provided in terms of unique identifiers of each individual start or completion.

6. Admin Data Research

6.1 Another potential avenue for data linkage support which was highlighted in the assessment report is the Admin Data Research (ADR) facility within NISRA. ADR NI supports the acquisition, linking and analysis of administrative datasets to improve knowledge, policymaking and public service delivery. ADR NI is one of several partners that make up the UK wide [Administrative Data Research UK](#) (ADR UK).

6.2 Prior to a discussion with ADR, experience gained within ASRB of a current ADR project, which involves sharing data from two parties who both are positioned under the

responsibility of the same Department, has shown that it has taken considerable but necessary time to ensure necessary legal documentation, GDPR requirements, legal gateways and understanding to get to a point where data sharing has in principal been agreed. As such any progress in linkage between housing and planning data using this avenue would not be a short-term exercise achievable within the current year.

6.3 ASRB met with ADR staff during September 2020 to discuss the requirement that had been raised in this assessment and to establish if ADR was a potential support for any such linkage. There were a number of discussion points raised that gave consensus to ADR not being a primary solution to any linkage between housing and planning – these included any ADR project needs a clear research question developed from an identified customer (and at present, specifically from the Planning side, there is no such request); the ADR tends to focus on individual level linkages which involve the need to process personal data in a secure environment (this proposal is land-based and not using individual-linked data so the legal gateway requirement was potentially not a requirement); and the most likely suitable matching variables, geocoded data, exist and do not specifically need ADR intervention to handle either data security or the matching process. All this was not to say ADR could not provide some support but given current work, and the prioritising of COVID-19 related research across the ADR workload, it would likely be towards the end of next year for any relevant input or support to be realistic. Any future work on planning/housing linkage can consider ADR as necessary and ASRB will engage as necessary to ensure any potential use of the ADR expertise is explored.

7. GSS Working Group – Cross-government Housing Statistics

7.1 Dfl statisticians are part of a collaborative cross-government working group, working to improve the trustworthiness, quality and value of housing and planning statistics across the UK. More information can be found [at this link](#). Dfl statisticians also sit on the Northern Ireland Producers Theme Group – this is a group of the key statistics producers of housing and planning statistics in Northern Ireland. The purpose of the group is to keep up to date with changes/developments, exchange relevant statistical information in relation to housing statistics and to consider any emerging data needs.

7.2 At the last meeting of the working group held on the 17 September 2020, how to measure the extent to which planning permissions then equate to houses being built on the ground was an agenda item. Each relevant member of the group provided a current position

for the regions across the UK, with all at varying positions in relation to this area. Across regions the general setup of planning and housings statistics is separate, with the areas sitting together in only one region. Members agreed to setup a sub-group to scope out areas of work in linking planning and housing data and to share ideas and experiences. The chair of the group agreed to lead on this action and the issuing of invites for new sub-group.

8. Findings and Current position

Given resource and constraints faced with COVID-19, investigations have been progressed as far as possible within the timeframe to date. There are clearly issues in attempting any join or linkage across the Planning Portal and LPS systems and these would need further exploration with relevant partners. This is not a task ASRB can progress in isolation. Any potential joining is likely to require effort in developing a process using the most likely method arising from these investigations, which is matching geo-spatially. Resource and current skillsets and expertise in ASRB do not support accommodating this in our 2020/21 work programme but it will be kept on as a project consideration for future years.

While ASRB Planning section must consider the needs of users of its statistics, it must also consider the needs of its primary customers given existing capacity. Those primary customers are DfI and Planners within local government. It was notable that where this idea was raised during assessment, it appears to have come from several researchers at the Housing end. The Open Data resource provides the required planning data to enable those of a research background to carry out investigations in the short term, ahead of any further work by ASRB. Housing researchers may also want to approach LPS and DfC to ascertain if similar open data could be made available for housing to allow exploration to be made by those researchers. Given the required resource to fully explore this and the perceived demand, it would not be a proportionate or reasonable use of resource to further explore at this stage given existing commitments but will be added to the ASRB work programme for consideration should priorities allow.

While ADR have suggested it is unlikely that any data protection issues around personal data might exist, ASRB would also want to be explicitly clear that no issues exist around GDPR and the use of personal data to make linkages. This would require investigation with relevant data holders and other partners to ensure adherence to any legal requirements both in sharing across organisations and in making use of the data for any new purpose.

ASRB had hoped that learning could be gathered from other jurisdictions. It appears that this is not an area that has been successfully explored in any other UK jurisdiction. Our review of other Planning Statistics shows no sign of direct linkage between planning data and housing data. However, with recent movement towards discussing this concept on the GSS cross-governmental working group on housing statistics, it is clear there is interest elsewhere. Given the resourcing difficulties, this may provide an economy of resource and this working group could support progress on this matter in Northern Ireland. The lack of previous success elsewhere might indicate that this is not a simple task achievable by one party but will need multiple partners. Given this working group's broader remit, with a wider interest in housing, it can provide a resource more specific to the customer requesting this, coming as it is from those with a more specifically housing background. Given the time, resource available and issues related to COVID-19, ASRB have not been able to explore with other jurisdictions as much as ASRB would have liked at this point however future investigation through the working group will now benefit that investigation.