



Statistical Press Release

Large Reduction in Planning Decisions Issued

The Northern Ireland Planning Statistics – 2015/16 First Quarterly Bulletin is published today.

~ Thursday, 19th November 2015

The first quarterly provisional figures to be released since the transfer of planning powers to councils show that, for the period Apr – Jun 2015, the total number of decisions issued was down by over one-quarter to 2,013 compared to the same time last year. This represents a 10 year low in the series which had previously shown signs of levelling out and followed a longer term downward trend, in parallel with falling applications, apparent since the onset of the recession in 2006/07. The number of applications received also reduced between equivalent quarters, this year and last, but were down by a much less significant 5% to 3,188.

Whilst, overall, the average processing time for Local Development decisions has shown only a small increase, from 18.6 weeks across Northern Ireland in the quarter immediately preceding the transfer of planning powers, to 19.0 weeks across all councils in this first quarter of 2015/16, it was almost six weeks longer when compared to the same time last year. This masks a wide variation between councils ranging from 13.1 weeks, on average, in Fermanagh & Omagh to 28.4 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down. Nine of the eleven councils were not meeting the 15 week statutory processing target during this first quarter. It is important to be aware, however, that many of the applications that had a decision issued during this period will have previously been processed to some extent within the Department before being transferred to councils for completion.

The key points to note in the bulletin are:

- The number of planning applications received in Northern Ireland in the period April to June 2015 was 3,188, a decrease of 5% compared to the same period in 2014/15, and comprised 3,091 Local Development, 94 Major Development and 3 Regionally Significant Development applications.
- The number of planning applications decided was 2,013, the lowest in this ten year series and a marked decrease of over one-quarter (27%) compared to the same period in 2014/15. This was the sharpest quarterly decline in decisions in the series but was not driven by a similar fall in applications received. No Regionally Significant Development applications were decided during the first quarter.
- The average processing time to decide Major Development applications was 37.6 weeks across all councils. This was nine weeks longer than the Northern Ireland processing time for the same quarter last year; however, it is an improvement of almost six weeks from the final quarter of 2014/15.
- The average processing time to decide Local Development applications was 19.0 weeks across all councils, up slightly on the 18.6 weeks recorded in the final quarter of 2014/15 for Northern Ireland, but almost six weeks longer when compared to Q1 last year. This ranged from 13.1 weeks in Fermanagh and Omagh to 28.4 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The time taken to process 70% of enforcement cases to target conclusion across all councils was 33.6 weeks, over five weeks better than the 39 week target and an improvement of just over three weeks on the 36.8^(r) weeks achieved in the equivalent quarter last year for Northern Ireland. At council level, the shortest time taken to conclude 70% of cases was 14.3 weeks in Antrim and Newtownabbey whilst the longest was 55.9 weeks in Newry, Mourne and Down.
- The overall approval rate for all planning applications dropped by just under one percentage point to just over 94% compared to the equivalent quarter last year.
- At a Northern Ireland level, the number of live applications greater than one year old at the end of June 2015 was 1,128. This continues the five year downward

trend in the proportion of older applications with now 1 in 7 applications taking over one year to process compared with 1 in 3 at the end of June 2010.

Notes for Editors

1. This is the latest in a regular series of quarterly statistical bulletins related to Development Management (Planning) functions in Northern Ireland. The Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 sets out the legislative framework for development management in Northern Ireland and provides that, from 1 April 2015, councils now largely have responsibility for this planning function. This is the first statistical bulletin to report on activity and performance since the transfer of planning functions occurred. This first year will provide the base year for the reporting of performance-related data at council level, with comparative trend data then building from that point onwards.

2. A new classification hierarchy for planning applications came into effect on 1st April 2014 in advance of the transfer of planning functions to local government from 1st April 2015. The new development categories are – Major and Local development applications, processed by councils, and Regionally Significant Development applications processed within the Department. Note that the new ‘Major Development’ category is based on a completely different definition to the previous ‘Major’ category so figures should not be compared with those from earlier bulletins (i.e. pre-2014/15).

3. There are three new legislative performance targets covered in the report related to the processing of Local Development decisions within an average of 15 weeks; Major Development decisions within an average of 30 weeks; and processing 70% of enforcement cases to target conclusion within 39 weeks.

4. The records of all applications from 1st April to 30th June 2015 were transferred in Oct 2015 from a live database and inspected for consistency in coding before figures were prepared for publication. These quarterly figures are regarded as ‘Provisional’ and will be superseded by the release of the annual bulletin in June each year.

5. Quarterly data are provided in more detailed accompanying Excel tables together with comparable data from the previous financial year, where possible. Electronic copies of the ‘Planning Service Development Management Statistical Bulletin’ and associated Excel Tables are available free of charge from:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/asb/statistics/planning_statistics.htm

6. All media enquiries related to headline NI results should be directed to the DOE Press Office 028 9025 6058 or for out of office hours, contact the EIS Duty Press Officer on pager: 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned. However, any queries related to individual council performance should be directed to the relevant council.