

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

Statistics on planning in Northern Ireland

(produced by the Department for Infrastructure)

Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the *Code of Practice for Statistics*. We ensure that producers of government statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the *Code*. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

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Executive Summary

Judgement on National Statistics Status

- ES.1 These statistics provide relevant and trusted information on planning activity in Northern Ireland (NI), with a good overview of the main trends. They enable users to better understand the planning activity performance of NI councils against statutory targets.
- ES.2 In requesting this assessment, the statistics team at the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) is demonstrating its commitment to produce planning statistics that meet the standards required of National Statistics and the Code of Practice for Statistics. We have identified four actions for DfI to address in order to enhance the public value, quality and trustworthiness of the NI planning statistics and to achieve National Statistics status. These are described in chapters one to three of this report.
- ES.3 Once the statistics team demonstrates that these steps have been undertaken OSR will recommend that the Statistics Authority designate the statistics as National Statistics.

Key Findings

Public Value

- ES.4 The NI planning statistics produced by DfI present an overall view of planning activity across NI. They are the only official source of information available for monitoring planning volumes and the processing performance of NI councils, and of DfI itself for regionally significant developments. Users are generally happy with the presentation, content, and quality of the statistics, and are positive about the level and forms of engagement provided by the statistics team. Some users highlight that the insights provided by the statistics could be enhanced by making use of more innovative forms of presentation, including interactive content and maps, to give an indication of the alignment between development plan priorities and actual location and type of planning approvals. The statistics team currently publishes limited information about its future planned developments for the statistics or details of various user meetings that it attends. Publishing more would help other users to feel better informed about forthcoming changes on which they could contribute their views.
- ES.5 Further public value and insight could be achieved by linking DfI's planning statistics with house building completions statistics produced by other NI departments. This would enable an understanding of the numbers and types of applications that result in actual new housing. We understand there may be challenges due to the data being held by different NI departments and suggest the team investigate the feasibility of overcoming these, making any findings public in the interest of transparency. NI planning statistics are also not comparable with those from the other UK countries and user feedback suggests a need to understand how NI planning statistics fit into the wider UK picture. The statistics team should take steps to address this through the cross-Government steering group on UK Housing and Planning statistics.

Quality

- ES.6 Users report that they have confidence in the quality of the planning statistics produced. We have not identified material concerns around the quality of the source planning data, or the methods used, and the available quality documentation is both accessible and informative. The impact of COVID-19 on planning data quality over the coming months is uncertain, but it is likely to impact on the capacity of planning offices to process planning applications. DfI told us that there may be a need to delay the publication of quarterly planning statistics, to allow councils more time to carry out their regular data quality assurance. DfI told us that it is keeping the situation under review, but will identify any changes in quality or statistical trends that may be related to COVID-19, and highlight these in the published statistics.

ES.7 The NI planning portal is due to be replaced in the next two years and the transition may bring increased risks to data quality. To demonstrate its continuous commitment to assured official statistics, DfI will need to demonstrate a higher level of assurance around data quality and any associated methods changes during the transition period. The team should also communicate the forthcoming changes to the planning portal to users at the earliest opportunity, setting out its views on its level of assurance and potential impacts on data quality or methods, and how these will be mitigated through the transition.

Trustworthiness

ES.8 The planning statistics are produced independently and presented impartially. The team draws effectively on the wider professional support and training opportunities provided by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). During the course of the assessment we heard positive examples of where the statistics team actively provides guidance to DfI policy and private office users to ensure their appropriate interpretation and use of the statistics.

Next Steps

ES.9 DfI should publish an action plan alongside the statistics on its website which sets out its proposals for addressing the assessment requirements. We expect the DfI statistics team to report back to us by October 2020 outlining the steps that it has taken to address the requirements. The UK Statistics Authority will take advice from OSR based on the evidence received and decide whether to award the National Statistics designation.

Chapter 1: Public Value

Introduction

- 1.1 Value means that the statistics and other numerical information are accessible, remain relevant and benefit society; helping the public to understand important issues and answer key questions.
- 1.2 Value is a product of the interface between the statistics or other numerical information and those who use them as a basis for forming judgements.

Findings

Background to the statistics

- 1.3 Councils in NI have a [legal obligation](#) to report their planning performance. The first annual NI Planning Statistics were produced in 2003, but these changed significantly from 2015 as the result of an earlier [Review of Public Administration in NI in 2002](#). This led to a reduction in the number of local councils from 26 to 11 from April 2015, after which the majority of planning powers transferred to the new councils from the former Department for Environment. Since then, planning applications for major or local developments have been largely determined by the councils, while responsibility for regionally significant development applications lies with DfI itself.
- 1.4 The [NI planning statistics](#) provide quarterly and annual reports split by council (and DfI itself where relevant) on councils' progress across three statutory targets, as laid out in the [Local Government \(Performance Indicators and Standards\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#). The targets are:
 - Major¹ applications processed to decision or withdrawal within an average of 30 weeks;
 - Local² applications processed to decision or withdrawal within an average of 15 weeks; and
 - 70% of all enforcement cases progressed to a target conclusion within 39 weeks of date of complaint.

The statistics also provide information relating to Departmental performance against quantitative Corporate Business Plan targets and other statistics such as the proportion of council caseload over one year old, renewable energy statistics, and legacy versus new system processing times. Additionally, the data provide councils with information on their performance in order to meet their own reporting obligations under the [Local Government Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2014](#).

- 1.5 The statistics are published back to 2002/03 and are comparable throughout for numbers of applications received and decided. All historical data back to 2002/03 are also held on the [NI planning portal](#) (see para 2.3). It is explained clearly throughout the statistical bulletin and within the data tables why 2015/16 is the base year for comparisons of major and local development activity.

¹ 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.

² Local developments comprise of all other developments with the vast majority being residential and minor commercial applications.

Insight, accessibility and reuse

- 1.6 The NI planning statistics are easily accessible, with users reporting that they access both the statistical report and the data tables. The statistics are easy to find from the DfI homepage, along with the related guidance and quality documentation and are also accessible directly from the planning portal. The bulletin and supporting materials are well presented and helpfully structured. The statistics are pre-announced on both the DfI release calendar and gov.uk statistical release calendar. Some users reported that they are emailed a direct link to the statistics when they are published, and we have seen that the releases are also promoted through DfI's Twitter account as well as the Facebook and Twitter accounts of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).
- 1.7 Users we spoke to were generally positive about the insight and commentary provided in the statistical report. Some users suggested that the use of interactive html presentation (such as that produced using Power BI for the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's [planning application statistics](#)) and maps to help display the precise location of planning applications, would allow visual mapping of decisions onto development plan areas. This would help give an indication of the alignment between development plan priorities and actual location and type of approvals.
- 1.8 Users were also interested in knowing more details about the progression of major applications through the planning system, when and where they were delayed, and having greater ability to understand the volume of local residential applications below the 50 developments threshold. However, DfI told us that understanding applications below the 50 developments threshold was not possible with the data collected through the current planning system. It also told us that statisticians would not be able to comment on potential reasons for delays to specific major applications, but users could approach relevant planning authorities for this information.
- 1.9 DfI provides ad hoc analyses to users on request and free of charge. However, it does not currently publish these analyses to enable their reuse by others. We are encouraged that DfI is considering the feasibility of introducing this across its entire range of statistics, not just those relating to planning activity. During the assessment, we became aware of a video summarising the NI planning statistics headline findings. The video had been particularly well received by policy users and at council events, with those who had seen it being very positive and complimentary about its value and benefits. However, it is currently only available to internal departmental users and has not been published.
- 1.10 To further enhance the accessibility of the statistics, the statistics team should explore options to improve links from the charts and tables in the statistical release to the relevant excel data tables, rather than to the statistics landing page. The statistical and quality reports would also benefit from the inclusion of hyperlinks to the referenced planning policies and legislation, for ease of use for readers. **DfI should enhance the impact and insight of the planning statistics for a wider range of users and facilitate their further reuse. DfI should do this by, for example: exploring the use of maps and new forms of interactive presentation; improving the accessibility of underlying data from the bulletin; and publishing the full range of available outputs, including the statistics key messages video and ad hoc analyses produced in response to users' requests.**

Relevance to users

- 1.11 The user community for statistics and data on planning is quite specialised; mainly local councils, NI government departments, academics, and planning consultancy companies. During this assessment, the uses identified by users included:
- Reviewing NI planning policy including to see if it is meeting current needs
 - Working with councils to help support them and monitor/improve their performance
 - Providing briefing and reports within local councils and within government departments




- Internal work within councils to report against the statutory performance indicators, to understand where they are in relation to other councils and their average processing times
 - Helping councils with planning to allocate land for housing
 - Responding to local government development plans and consultations in relation to individual councils, for example other government departments
 - Research and analysis purposes, for example by academic establishments
 - Providing information and help for those submitting planning applications, for example by planning consultancy companies
- 1.12 DfI has a published [statistics user engagement strategy](#) covering all regular publications from the Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch (ASRB) within DfI. There is also a specific area on the DfI website for [planning statistics user engagement](#) which currently provides details of the planning statistics user survey carried out during summer 2019, with the findings and next steps. The results showed that the bulletin and related statistical products generally met users' needs.
- 1.13 The statistics team communicates well with stakeholders and the users that we spoke to seemed happy with the level and quality of engagement that they receive. We heard that users find the DfI statisticians approachable and helpful and that they explain any queries satisfactorily. Engagement with stakeholders is further strengthened through the statistics team's attendance at council planning meetings and with a wide range of stakeholders through regular 'Planning Statistics Key User Meetings', the 'Northern Ireland Official Housing Statistics Producers' group, and the twice-yearly 'Planning Portal User Group'. However, no information about the topics discussed at these meetings is published.
- 1.14 The statistics team shared with us the wider ASRB work programme which covers the planning policy division. However, this is not published, and the statistics team currently publishes little information about its future planned developments for the statistics. The team informed us about the planned replacement of the planning portal which could lead to potential impacts or changes to the planning statistics. It is important that users are informed about such changes in advance so that they can prepare and have opportunities to contribute to their views on proposals. **To enhance transparency around the ongoing development of the planning statistics, DfI should set out its plans for the future development of the statistics in light of forthcoming changes to the planning portal, for example through a published work plan. It should also publish summary information from its key user meetings so that other users are kept informed and have opportunities to comment on proposals.**

Enhancing value through innovation and development

- 1.15 Statistics add value when they answer society's important questions. As well as planned developments to the planning portal, the DfI statistics team has recently expanded the range of planning statistics available through the development of a separate [Planning Monitoring Framework](#). This was first published in September 2019, to address the issue that the current NI planning statistics do not cover all the planning-related work that the councils undertake. The team informed us that the data for the monitoring framework come from a variety of data sources, not just the current planning portal, but that plans to develop a new planning portal may in future allow the collection of a broader range of data from councils at the same time. The team told us that some of the sources required for the monitoring framework only become available later in the year so incorporating it into the publication now would require a delay to the annual, year-end planning statistics. Although the planning monitoring framework is not in scope of this assessment, we advise the continued open communication between DfI, council planning staff and other interested users as it is developed to ensure that it meets their needs.

- 1.16 The NI planning statistics contain links to other UK countries' planning statistics. However, more information could be given on how comparable the statistics are with these sources. A lack of comparability between NI planning statistics and those produced for the rest of the UK was raised during our user engagement meetings and it is not currently clear how NI planning statistics fit into the overall UK planning statistics picture. We note that the harmonisation of planning statistics may be taken forward by the [cross-Government housing and planning steering group](#) which may help answer users' questions in this area.
- 1.17 Many questions cannot be answered without sharing and linking data. Some user feedback suggested a need to join up the planning statistics with house building statistics so that they can follow the whole process through from planning approvals through to build completions. This would add value in terms of being able to know the proportions of approvals where building had started, and where they had been completed. Users told us that it is difficult to get a handle on what happens to planned developments after they are approved, and it was not clear whether the approved developments led to completed projects or how successful the developments had been when compared to the original plans. The figure below illustrates the different data sources and departments involved in producing planning and housing statistics in NI.

Overview of NI planning, house building and housing stock data sources

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Planning statistics – <i>Department for Infrastructure</i></p> <p>https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-activity-statistics</p>  <p>Reports on the volume of planning applications received and decisions issued</p> | <p>Building control new dwelling starts and completions - <i>Department for Communities</i></p> <p>https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/housing-statistics</p>  <p>Number of recorded new dwellings (houses and apartments) started and completed using Building Control data</p> <p>New Dwelling statistics - <i>Department of Finance</i></p> <p>https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/new-dwelling-statistics</p> | <p>Housing stock statistics - <i>Department of Finance</i></p> <p>https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/housing-stock-statistics</p>  <p>Housing Stock includes both social sector and private sector dwellings</p> |
|---|---|--|

- 1.18 One user highlighted that as planning permission lapses after five years, some developers start building so that their planning permission does not lapse, but then wait for development sites to become more profitable (known as land banking) before developing to completion. However, there is little statistical evidence on this topic. The need to better understand the link between planning and house building was also a theme identified in OSR's 2017 [Systemic Review of the Public Value of Housing and Planning statistics in the UK](#). Users told us that it would be valuable to be able to track over time the extent to which planning permissions then equate to houses being built, and that no single source of data enables this insight. **To enhance the public value of the NI planning statistics, DfI should investigate the feasibility of linking planning approvals to house building completions data, perhaps exploring this in partnership with [Admin Data Research Northern Ireland](#). DfI 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.**

1.19 There is a lot of potential for the innovation and development of these statistics in future. It will be important for the team at Dfl to engage with a wide range of users throughout so that the value of any new developments is realised, and that any developments complement the existing statistics. We do though note the need for the statisticians to maintain the existing good relationships that they have built with the councils since 2015, as both data suppliers and users, and the need to balance the value of further developments with the potential for extra burden on councils in their role as data suppliers.

Table 1: Value – Findings and Requirements

| Findings | Examples | Requirement |
|---|---|--|
| <p>Users are generally happy with the current insight provided but suggested further enhancements could be made through more interactive html publications and the use of more maps so that users can see visually how planning applications align with development plans. While accessibility is generally good, some valuable statistical outputs and further analyses are produced but not published and some other small enhancements could improve the value of the statistical release.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insight is currently provided through the data tables and static maps in the statistical release. • Responses to ad hoc requests are not published. • A video summarising the NI planning statistics headline findings is available only to internal departmental users and has not been published. • If a user wanted to find more contextual information about the policies or legislation, they would have to go to another website to search for it. | <p>1 Dfl should enhance the impact and insight of the planning statistics for a wider range of users and facilitate their further reuse. Examples of ways that Dfl could do this are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) exploring the use of maps and new forms of interactive presentation; b) improving the accessibility of underlying data from the bulletin; and c) publishing the full range of available outputs, including the statistics key messages video and ad hoc analyses produced in response to users' requests. |
| <p>Dfl has several developments planned but does not have a transparent user engagement approach to ensure that all users are engaged throughout the development process and are informed about issues discussed at its regular user meetings.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an ASRB-wide work programme which includes the planning policy division however this is not published anywhere. • Dfl has not published material about its proposed developments that may impact the statistics. • Dfl has not published information from its regular meetings with planning statistics users. | <p>2 Dfl should set out its plans for the future development of the planning statistics in light of forthcoming changes to the planning portal, for example through a published work plan. It should also publish summary information from its key user meetings so that other users are kept informed and have opportunities to comment on proposals.</p> |

| Findings | Examples | Requirement |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Planning data, house building data, and housing stock data are all collected and produced by different departments within NI with no mechanisms in place to be able to statistically assess planning applications though to building completions. How NI planning statistics fit into the overall UK planning picture is also unclear.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User feedback suggests a need to be able to join up the planning statistics with house building statistics to answer important questions. • Little context is provided to explain the comparability of NI planning statistics with those from other nations. | <p>3 To enhance the public value of the NI planning statistics, DfI should investigate the feasibility of linking planning approvals to house building completions data, perhaps exploring this in partnership with Admin Data Research Northern Ireland. DfI 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.</p> |

Chapter 2: Quality

Introduction

- 2.1 Quality means that the statistics and numerical information represent the best available estimate of what they aim to measure at a particular point in time and are not materially misleading.
- 2.2 Quality is analytical in nature and is a product of the professional judgements made in the specification, collection, aggregation, processing, analysis, and dissemination of data.

Findings

Sound data sources and methods

- 2.3 The single data source for the planning activity statistics is the [planning portal](#) through which data are collected for statutory purposes against legislative definitions. Dfl told us that the data extracted from the portal are a full census of all planning applications within the planning portal at that time. As such, no estimation or imputation is carried out. Due to the data being collected for legislative purposes the data are on a consistent basis across the 11 councils in Northern Ireland. Paper applications are received by planning authorities and the information collected on the applications is keyed manually onto the portal by councils and planning officers. The statistics team told us that guidance and instructions for populating the planning portal are sent to councils from the policy team within Dfl.
- 2.4 The statistics team shared with us a copy of the data-sharing agreement that is in place with each of the councils. This lays out the purpose, legal basis for data sharing, the organisations involved, the data to be shared, how they will be extracted and processed, how any requests for information will be dealt with, the responsibilities of each party, security measures, retention and disposal of data, how security incidents and data breaches will be dealt with, and the review/termination of the data-sharing agreement, and indemnity. Data suppliers in the councils that we spoke to confirmed that there was minimal burden associated with producing the planning statistics as they supply data to the NI planning portal for legislative reporting. The team told us that the planning system is due to undergo an audit by the Northern Ireland Audit Office later in 2020, and will cover the planning activity undertaken by councils and the department.
- 2.5 Dfl told us that the planning portal is nearing the end of its lifespan and that it is very involved in the development of its replacement, due to be introduced in two years' time. The statistics team assured us that the new planning portal will cause no extra burden for councils or for Dfl, and may reduce quality assurance burden due to the potential for some automation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, we recommend that the team communicate the forthcoming planning portal changes to users and the impacts this may have to users at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.6 We have not identified any material concerns around the quality of the planning source data, nor with the methods used, given that they are a relatively straight-forward aggregation of cases from individual planning cases in the system. Users also told us they have confidence in the quality of the planning statistics. However, there is some uncertainty about potential impact of COVID-19 on the quality of the planning statistics over the coming months. Dfl told us that there was early evidence that some planning offices were only processing existing planning applications, and not accepting new ones. It was therefore possible that the volume of planning cases would reduce in the short-term, particularly for quarter 1, 2020/21, due for publication in September 2020. The team expected less of an impact on the quarter 4, 2019/20 statistics, due for publication in June/July 2020, but there was the potential for publication delays to allow councils more time to carry out their regular quality assurance. The team told us that it was keeping this under review and would take

appropriate steps to communicate its decisions, and to highlight in the statistics where any changes in statistical trends or quality may be related to COVID-19.

Assured quality

- 2.7 Extracts from the planning portal are run on a monthly basis by the statistics team and headline figures are sent to the individual councils for quality assurance allowing any queries to be dealt with in a timely manner. Extra individual quality assurance checks are introduced if a new issue emerges. The council representatives we spoke to told us this was an important and helpful process for ongoing quality control. The team explained to us that revisions can occur if a new application is put on the portal since the last extract or if extra information is added or an application could be marked invalid. Dfl publishes its revisions and errors policy on its website and each bulletin covers any revisions or changes since the start of quarter 1, 2015/16 with explanations of any changes. It clearly explains that the quarterly data are provisional and that the annual publication is the final data and that there may be small differences between provisional and final quarterly data.
- 2.8 The statistics team has published a [background quality report](#), which covers in detail how the European Statistical System quality dimensions have been considered when producing the planning statistics. In line with the expectations of OSR for producers using administrative data, Dfl has also published a [report describing the quality of the administrative data sources used \(QAAD\)](#). This report fully explains the team’s assessment for its level of risk of quality concerns for the data. The quality assurance carried out by both the data suppliers and the producers is thoroughly documented in the QAAD report with further insights in the background quality report, including when there are changes in the planning portal to reflect legislation/policy changes and information on the quality and validation checks undertaken both by Dfl and within councils to mitigate risks from human error. The QAAD report also covers the strengths and weaknesses of the data source. The team told us that it reviews the quality documentation as and when needed, but periodic reviews are included in the team workplan.
- 2.9 The current [level of assurance](#) given to the data source by Dfl is A1 Basic Assurance, though it may be appropriate for the team to consider enhancing its assurance level to A1/A2 or even A2 given potential risks to data quality during the transition to the new portal over the next two years. **To demonstrate its continuous commitment to assured official statistics Dfl should enhance the level of assurance that it seeks around planning data quality ahead of the transition to new planning portal. It should publish for users, details of its level of assurance, any potential impacts on data quality or methods, and how these impacts will be mitigated.**

Table 2: Quality – Findings and Requirements

| Findings | Examples | Requirement |
|--|---|---|
| The current planning portal used in the collection of the planning activity data is coming to the end of its lifespan. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dfl has published robust information about its assurance of risk and quality of the planning portal data. Changes to the portal present potential risks to data quality that need to be actively and transparently assessed, managed and communicated. | 4 To demonstrate its continuous commitment to assured official statistics Dfl should enhance the level of assurance that it seeks around planning data quality ahead of the transition to the new planning portal. It should publish for users, details of its level of assurance, any potential impacts on data quality or methods, and how these impacts will be mitigated. |

Chapter 3: Trustworthiness

Introduction

- 3.1 Trustworthiness means that the statistics and other numerical information are produced free from vested interest, based on the best professional judgement of statisticians and other analysts.
- 3.2 Trustworthiness is a product of the people, systems and processes within organisations that enable and support the production of statistics and other numerical information.

Findings

Independent and orderly statistics

- 3.3 The statistics are presented impartially and objectively. A press release is published separately at the same time as the bulletin, containing a clear link to the statistics. Dfl pre-announces all publications on its website and on the [gov.uk website](#). Dfl also has a clear corrections and revisions policy on its website, which is transparent about the procedures in place to deal with errors. Any revisions or corrections are also explained in each statistical bulletin.
- 3.4 Dfl has a dedicated webpage on [pre-release access information](#) which is kept up to date with the list of statistical releases to which pre-release access has been granted, including names and positions of those granted access, and Dfl's [statement of compliance](#) with the [Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2009](#). A [breach](#) of the Code of Practice for Statistics occurred in 2017 relating to pre-release access. The team assured us that lessons have been learnt and we welcome that since the re-instatement of the Northern Ireland Executive, the team has updated new staff in the Private Office on their obligations under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) and pre-release access legislation. Evidence from users we spoke to also indicates that the statistics team actively provides guidance to Dfl policy users to ensure their appropriate interpretation and use of the statistics.
- 3.5 The team told us that there are strong links between NISRA and Dfl, with arrangements in place for NISRA to supply and support statisticians in Dfl, where staff are recruited against the Civil Service competency framework. If necessary, the team also shares resources across the statistical teams within Dfl. The statistics Head of Profession at NISRA is available to the statistics team at Dfl to provide support and advice if needed. We are assured that there are relevant safeguards in place to ensure the team has sufficient resources to produce the planning statistics.

Data governance

- 3.6 All raw data used in the production of the statistics are in the public domain through the public-facing NI Planning Portal. This assessment process has not highlighted any concerns around the team's data governance practices, but we advise that these be borne in mind while the new planning portal is being developed.
- 3.7 In line with good practice from other National Statistical Institutes, the statistics team told us that it follows the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) to produce its statistical outputs. The team also told us that it has mandatory training and development in place including courses on GDPR and protecting information.

Table 3: Trustworthiness – Findings and Requirements

| Findings | Requirement |
|--|--|
| As noted above, the planning statistics are presented impartially and objectively, released in an orderly way and DfI statisticians proactively provide guidance to ensure the appropriate interpretation and use of the statistics. | We have no requirements relating to the trustworthiness of the statistics. |

Annex 1: The Assessment Process

- A1.1 This Assessment was conducted from November 2019 to March 2020.
- A1.2 This report was prepared by the Office for Statistics Regulation and 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.
- A1.3 The regulatory team – 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.
- A1.4 A 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 to increase this. We approached known and potential users of these statistics and conducted 12 interviews. These users worked within DfI, councils, corporations or charities concerned with planning; our engagement gave us some insight into the extent to which the statistics meet different users' needs and to which users feel that the statistics' producers engage with them.

Key Documents

- A1.5 Evidence provided by the planning statistics branch includes:
- 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)

