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**Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead**

Alastair McAlpine  
Interim Chief Statistician  
Scottish Government  
(by email)

7 October 2022

Dear Alastair

**Planning Performance Statistics for Scotland**

We recently completed our compliance check of your [Planning Performance Statistics](#) against our [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). These are important Official Statistics providing insights into the performance of local authorities (LAs) in making planning decisions across Scotland. In addition to our findings, this letter also provides feedback for you and your team to consider alongside the planned developments for these statistics.

Our review found a range of positive features that demonstrate the trustworthiness, quality, and value of the statistics:

- The outputs have been streamlined to meet accessibility requirements, allowing more users with different needs to access them. We heard from your team that feedback from planning policy colleagues and LAs to ensure their continued relevance helped guide the changes.
- Insight has been added through the addition to the statistical release of a section providing context to the Scottish Government's planning policy, to help users understand the need for reporting on planning performance. Further clarity has also been added to the statistical release around the statutory time targets for determining local and national development applications where a processing agreement is not in place.
- In line with our expectations around trustworthiness, the team is proactive in reviewing its pre-release access list, keeping it relevant to only those who need early access to the statistics, recently reducing the list from 25 recipients to 20.
- Following our previous compliance check of your Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey (SVDLS) statistics, we welcome that the team has reviewed and refreshed the previously outdated information on users and uses of the statistics, for both the [SVDLS](#) and the [Planning Performance Statistics](#).

Your team told us of its plans for the further development of the statistical outputs to enhance their value and insight, including:

- Further refining the statistical bulletin over the forthcoming publications, informed by user need, to ensure it focuses on key topics and messages, avoids any unnecessary repetition, presents information in formats that are helpful to users and further enhances accessibility.

- Proposed engagement with users of planning statistics later this year to better understand the audience these statistics have. Using a sub-set of harmonised user engagement questions which were developed through collaboration between the [GSS Coherence team](#) and colleagues in the [GSS-cross government planning statistics sub-group](#), should enable some cross-UK analysis of user views and allow a degree of comparability when looking at key user issues for each country, and should go some way to provide coherence across the planning statistics landscape.
- Aims to introduce Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAP) into the statistical production process to make it more efficient, in line with what is happening across other Scottish Government statistics teams. We have published a [review into the use of RAP principles and overcoming barriers](#) which may be useful to your team as you consider a more automated approach
- Adding further insight through working with LAs who supply planning performance data, to understand the range of circumstances where LAs apply the '[stop the clock](#)' procedure and therefore explain within the statistical release differences in where 'stop the clock' is used. The team has agreed to also include more explanation of the planning of [National Developments](#), which do not form part of these statistics, to enable users to access this information more easily.
- The team told us that it is feeding into some of the [Digital Planning in Scotland](#) developments to oversee that any proposals meet the needs, or enhance the collection, of the PPS data. We recommend that the team communicate any forthcoming changes to users at the earliest opportunity and set out its views on its level of assurance around data quality, potential impacts on data quality or methods related to the changes, and how these will be mitigated. The [planning activity statistics](#) produced by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in Northern Ireland have recently gone through a similar process and we suggest contacting them to learn from their experiences.
- Plans to further enhance the value of the recently published [quality assurance information](#) by using our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data ([QAAD](#)) framework – for example, by setting out the quality assurance that the team undertakes, reviewing its assurance processes for the source data supplied, and communicating its assurances around data quality. This will demonstrate transparency and enable users' appropriate interpretation of statistical quality.

To maximise the benefits from these developments we recommend sharing your plans with users including the key findings from your planned user engagement events and explaining how these will shape the development of the statistics.

I would like to thank your team for their positive engagement on this review. My team will continue to engage with them as the developments set out above are implemented. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further. I am copying this letter to Adam Krawczyk, Head of Housing, Homelessness and Regeneration Analysis at Scottish Government, and Charles Brown and Karren Friel, the responsible statisticians.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont  
Assessment Programme Lead