

Openness, Transparency and improving performance

Delivering a fair, open and timely planning appeal and examination service that meets the needs of our customers can be challenging, particularly when unexpected events occur.

During the pandemic we set ourselves three priorities:

- To continue to keep our staff and customers safe and well.
- To continue to progress and decide casework robustly as quickly as possible.
- To keep our staff, customers and other key stakeholders informed and engaged.

Despite the challenges we face by not being able to undertake traditional physical hearings and inquiries to help stop the spread of COVID-19, we are determined to provide good customer service and recover our performance.

In August, following a short break due to impact of COVID-19, we again published the average appeal handling times which are being updated each month. We have today published a [Statistical Release](#) which provides even more information on planning appeals. These represent the highest volume of our work.

Our work involving the examination of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects, such as major roads, power stations and airports, has continued and the statutory deadlines for events have been met on all occasions (needing only 3 extensions to examination deadlines). Our work on supporting Local Authorities to develop a sound Local Development Plan is also continuing.

These statistics will be produced each month to allow anyone to see how we are performing. The focus is on timeliness as we understand this to be a key area of interest from what customers and stakeholders have told us. We also include some information on the decisions that we have made; and on the number of Inspectors available to make those decisions. They have been published to ensure the public has equal access to the information and it supports the Planning Inspectorate's commitment to transparency and openness by releasing information where possible.

The times for delivering decisions that we publish are the average times from cases that have reached that stage in the previous month, measured from the time we have received all the information we need from a customer to begin the appeal process ('valid') to the time a decision is issued. This is in line with local authorities receiving planning applications. The appeal will 'start' later when an inspector is allocated, but all our performance information explains the total time we take, including the period before an inspector is allocated. Our future online appeals casework portal system will

help customers by using a screening tool to only accept valid applications at the point they are submitted to us.

Whilst we may not meet all our ministerial targets this year [2020/21], with the continuing high number of cases being received and the challenges of running hearings and inquiries so that they comply with Covid-19 regulations, the appeals process is “back on track” by holding virtual hearings since the lockdown. This statistical bulletin provides:

- Appeals decisions from October 2019 to September 2020
- The time taken to reach those decisions
- Number of open cases (cases being processed but not yet decided)
- Number of Inspectors working for The Planning Inspectorate.

The data in this Statistical Release applies only to England.