

Performance update – May 2021

The [latest official statistics](#) detail our performance from May 2020 to April 2021 for cases in England.

In summary:

- we made 16,980 appeal decisions in the last 12 months, an average of just over 1,400 per month
- at the end of April 2021, we had 11,184 open cases. This is an increase of 470 (4%), from the previous month, and the highest number of open cases in the last 12 months
- one in four S78 appeals decided (25%) were allowed in 2020/21, the same proportion as in 2019/20

A year has passed since the Planning Inspectorate held its first virtual hearing in May 2020. By April 2021, we had delivered over 700 cases via virtual hearings and inquiries. Whilst virtual events have allowed us to keep casework progressing as much as possible during the Covid-19 pandemic, the lockdown restrictions have had an impact on our overall productivity.

We are continuing to follow Government advice in line with the [roadmap out of lockdown](#). We are not currently holding physical-only hearings and inquiries. Instead, we are running hearings and inquiries virtually with some blended events (including physical elements) being arranged.

Now that the easing of restrictions has been confirmed in line with Step 3 of the government's roadmap, inspectors are now able to undertake some accompanied site visits. However, our top priority is to ensure that the safety of our staff and customers is not compromised.

See the [latest guidance on our current casework arrangements](#).

How long appeals take

Our [latest average timescales](#) for planning, enforcement and householder appeals have recently been updated.

In summary:

- a householder appeal proceeding by written representations will take 18 weeks to decide on (mean) average
- planning appeals progressing by hearing have increased from the previous month to a (mean) average decision time of 56 weeks. For inquiries, the (mean) average is 54 weeks
- for enforcement appeals, (mean) average decision times are 34 weeks for written representations, 78 for hearings and 74 for inquiries

We realise that some appellants have had to wait longer than usual for a decision. We are working hard to meet the demand on our services during an

unprecedented period, whilst providing the same quality and rigor in our determination of cases.

The continuing Covid-19 restrictions in place over the past months has meant our ability to visit sites and capacity to run hearings and inquiries has been reduced. This has resulted in an increased number of cases that are waiting to start, and consequently longer decision times.

The run [up to local elections](#) also had a short-term impact on our ability to issue decisions. And, like other organisations, many of our staff took leave over Easter resulting in reduced capacity during this time.

We continue to explore how we can further increase the number of appeal hearings without having an adverse impact on our work in other areas.

Local plan examinations

The past 12 months has seen a slowdown in the number of plans submitted for examination. In the financial year 2020/21, we issued a total of 32 reports for plans of all types compared to 59 in 2019/20. Strategic plans represented the largest number of reports issued at 21.

See the [blog post from Professional Lead for Local Plans, Jerry Youle](#), where he explains the role of local plans and celebrates a key milestone – the 1000th local plan submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

National Infrastructure examinations

Nine applications were submitted in 2020/21, compared to 14 in 2019/20. Ten reports were issued to the relevant Secretary of State in 2020/21, compared to 20 in 2019/20

See the [register of applications](#) on the National Infrastructure Planning website for a list of live and decided applications.

Medium to longer term arrangements

Looking further ahead to Step 4 (not before 21 June) when it is hoped that all social contact restrictions will be lifted, we will carefully consider, when and how in-person events can take place. Much of our work has significant lead times where councils need to arrange these events and notify parties of the arrangements several weeks or in some cases months in advance.

So that events can proceed under all possible scenarios, and we are able to keep casework moving, we need to plan events with certainty. This means planning ahead of when there are likely to be announcements confirming changes in restrictions.

We rely mainly on councils to provide accommodation for our events and any transition to include face-to-face events needs careful planning when the availability of accommodation becomes clearer. For this reason, we expect

that the majority of cases will be heard through virtual events for now, with some blended events (including physical elements) being arranged.

For the longer term we will be engaging and consulting with staff, stakeholders and customers about how we should work in the future. We expect both blended (which include in-person elements) and virtual events to be part of our future operating model. One of the key questions we will need to decide on, following research and engagement, is what the balance should be between physical and virtual within and across different case types.

We will of course keep customers informed as arrangements change. Follow us for updates: