

[The Planning Inspectorate publishes its 2021/22 Annual Report and Accounts](#)

The report demonstrates progress in many key areas over the last year despite the continued challenge of keeping casework moving during the pandemic.

Some of the key achievements from 2021/22 include:

- publishing the new three-year [Strategic Plan](#)
- recruiting more than 50 new inspectors and apprentices
- adopting our first Environmental Policy
- developing our Customer Strategy to become more customer-focused
- formalising the way that we assure the quality of our decisions and reports
- designing and developing our Digital Public Services
- improving data protection
- improving equality, diversity, and inclusion
- establishing health and safety working groups

The Inspectorate decided more than 17,400 appeals, issued 34 reports on Local Plans, and continued to hold hearings and inquiries using a blend of virtual and face-to-face events.

Planning appeals are our largest area of work and we decided 8,971. New planning appeals being submitted increased, back to pre-pandemic levels, and were 4% higher than 2020/21. The number of new planning appeal cases submitted needing to be heard by inquiry rose by 38%.

Continuing to plan for the country's infrastructure needs has been a focus for us, to aid economic recovery and to provide certainty for communities. We made recommendations to a Secretary of State on 12 national infrastructure applications on time and provided advice on 70 potential infrastructure projects.

Despite still working with a reduced capacity caused by COVID-19, we received 21,300 appeals in 2021/22, 6% more than in 2020/21, and close to the pre-pandemic level. As restrictions reduced, we increased the number of decisions we made and decided more cases in 2021/22 than 2020/21. This involved running virtual hearings and inquiries (which took longer than face-to-face equivalents), on top of lockdown measures impacting both employees and customers.

While some decisions were faster than previous years, on average decisions took longer last year. However, a focus was placed on casework with the most community interest and those key to supporting the nation's economic recovery, such as national infrastructure applications, local plan examinations and appeals needing a hearing or inquiry. We are working hard to decide more appeals so our decisions can become consistently faster.

In October 2021 we published our rolling Strategic Plan outlining the objectives we will be delivering to achieve our vision to:

‘Provide our customers with high quality, timely and efficient services that support the nation’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic by engaging, empowering, and equipping our workforce and by delivering ambitious policy changes’.

We also saw the successful establishment of the new Planning and Environmental Decisions Wales service after transferring our Wales-based team to the Welsh Government.

Sarah Richards, Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, said:

“Through our use of technology, planning effectively for the future, focused resource management and robust decision making we kept casework moving through the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the speed of decision making for our appeals service is now steady, and in some areas has improved. We have focused our efforts on the areas that are key to the economy.”

She also highlighted ongoing work to make the Inspectorate a more inclusive and diverse organisation.

Trudi Elliott, Chair of the Planning Inspectorate Board, said:

“The second year of the pandemic has required us to dig deep. I am proud of the way the Inspectorate’s people and Board have stepped up. I’m also grateful for the constructive collaboration of our partners and stakeholders and the support and interest of Ministers.”

“We remained focused on improving the speed with which we determine cases and have agreed new measures with Ministers, which better reflect our customers’ needs.”

Work to support planning reform over the last year has now been given more focus and momentum with the progress of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill currently making its way through parliament.

This work is woven within the priorities the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has recently set for the Planning Inspectorate, which include improving digital services and cutting timescales for some infrastructure projects.

[Read the full report](#)