



The Planning Inspectorate Yr Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

Official Statistics 17 December 2020

Introduction

This statistical release provides summary information on appeals, which represent the highest volume (in terms of number of cases) of the work of the Planning Inspectorate.

This release also provides a general overview of the impact of the Covid pandemic on the work of the Planning Inspectorate to enable everyone to see the effect of the restrictions on performance.

These statistics will be produced each month to allow anyone to see how the Inspectorate is performing. The focus is on timeliness as that is an area in which stakeholders have an interest. Information on the decisions that we have made is also included; and on the number of Inspectors available to make those decisions.

These statistics have been published to ensure everyone has equal access to the information and to support the Planning Inspectorate's commitment to release information where possible.

This statistical bulletin provides¹;

- An overview of the impact of Covid on the work of the Inspectorate
- Appeals decisions from December 2019 to November 2020
- The time taken to reach those decisions
- Number of open cases
- Number of Inspectors
- Number of virtual events.

The data in this release is only applicable to England.

The Planning Inspectorate

The Planning Inspectorate's job is to make decisions and provide recommendations and advice on a range of land use planning-related issues across England and Wales. We do this in a fair, open and timely way.

The Planning Inspectorate deals with planning appeals, national infrastructure planning applications, examinations of local plans and other planning-related and specialist casework in England and Wales.

The Planning Inspectorate is an executive agency, sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and the Welsh Government.

¹ See Annex A for breakdown of what has been included in recent releases.

Summary

The impact of COVID can be seen in the Planning Inspectorate data in three ways:

1. The Inspectorate suspended all events during the Spring lockdown, but have since resumed activities, including holding events virtually. The number of events held in September 20 were the highest recorded in the last 12 months at 2,109. The numbers in October and November are lower and about the same as pre-pandemic levels.
2. In deciding cases that were impacted by the Spring lockdown, and after-effects of the lockdown, the timeliness measure is starting to increase as the Inspectorate work through the backlog that was created. The median timeliness from April 20 onwards is consistently above 22 weeks and is increasing; contrasting with the months of December 19 to March 20 where it is never above 21.3 weeks, and generally around 20 weeks.
3. The number of open cases (cases received but not yet closed) increased to a high of around 11,000 in August 20. It is now decreasing, as the Inspectorate are now closing more cases than are received on a monthly basis; but is still above pre-pandemic levels.

The Planning Inspectorate has made 17,643 appeal decisions² in the last 12 months, an average of almost 1,500 per month. The 1,729 decisions in November are fewer than October and broadly in line with pre-pandemic levels.

Written representations decisions have recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In contrast there remain fewer decisions from hearings and inquiries. Both planning and enforcement decisions have recovered to pre-pandemic levels; but there remain fewer specialist decisions.

The mean average time to make a decision, across all cases in the last 12 months (Dec 19 to Nov 20), was 27 weeks. The median time is 23 weeks.

The median timeliness from April 20 onwards is consistently above 22 weeks, contrasting with the months of December 19 to March 20 where it is never above 21.3 weeks, and usually around 20 weeks. The median timeliness is gradually increasing since Jun 2020. Hearings and inquiries take longer than written representations – with Inquiries taking more than twice as long as written representations.

The median time for written representations over the 12 months to November 20 is 22 weeks. The median time for inquiries over the 12 months to October 20 is over a year - 61 weeks. The median time for hearings is slightly less at 41 weeks.

The median time to decision for planning cases is lower than for other casework categories, apart from in May 2020. Across the whole year, the median time to decision for planning cases is 21 weeks. Enforcement decisions made in the last 12 months had a median decision time of 34 weeks. The median time to decision for specialist decisions is broadly the same as for enforcement decisions, and longer than the median for planning decisions.

² The appeal types are the same as last month. They include planning & related appeals, Enforcement and Specialist casework (covering a range of casework types). Please note that some previous releases covered only Rights of Way orders within Specialist casework. Annex A details the scope of previous releases, Annex D the scope of this release and Background Notes has further information.

The median time for Inquiries under the Rosewell Process over the 12 months to November 20 is 26 weeks. Since the COIVD outbreak there have been fewer such decisions and generally longer durations – noting that these inquiries began many weeks before the pandemic had its impact.

At the end of October, the Planning Inspectorate had ten thousand five hundred cases open. This is a reduction of about 170 from the previous month.

There were 345 Planning Inspectors employed by the Inspectorate in November 2020 – with a full-time equivalent of 308.

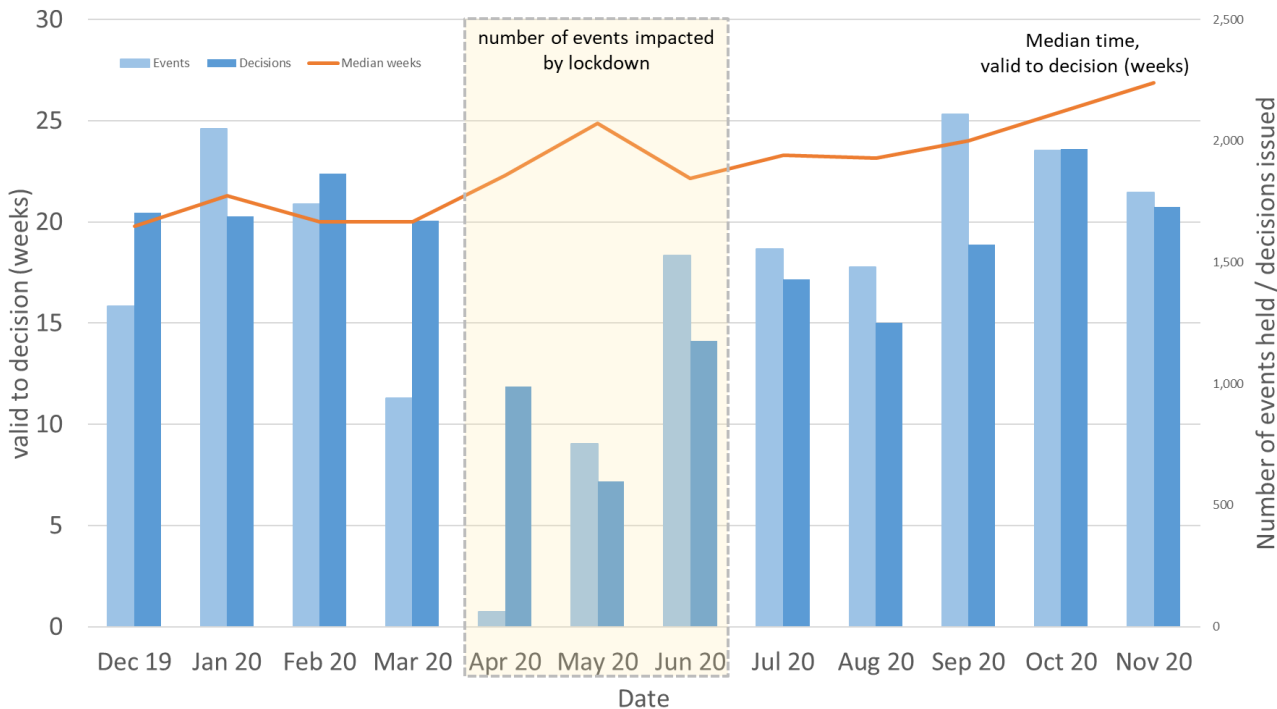
The Inspectorate are continuing to increase the number of events carried out 'virtually'. There were 102 Virtual Events during November 2020, with 83 estimated for December.

Impact of Covid

The impact of COVID can be seen in the Planning Inspectorate data in three ways:

1. The Inspectorate suspended events during the Spring lockdown, but have since resumed activities, including holding events virtually. The number of events held in September 20 were the highest recorded in the last 12 months at 2,109. The numbers in October and November are lower and about the same as pre-pandemic levels.
2. In deciding cases that were impacted by the Spring lockdown, and after-effects of the lockdown, the timeliness measure is starting to increase as the Inspectorate work through the backlog that was created. The median timeliness from April 20 onwards is consistently above 22 weeks, and is increasing; contrasting with the months of December 19 to March 20 where it is never above 21.3 weeks, and generally around 20 weeks.
3. The number of open cases (cases received but not yet closed) increased to a high of around 11,000 in August 20. It is now decreasing, as the Inspectorate are now closing more cases than are received on a monthly basis; but is still above pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 1: Number of events held, decisions issued and median time between valid date & decision date, Dec-19 to Nov-20



Source: Horizon, Picaso, Inspector Scheduling System

Table 1: Number of events³ held, decisions issued and median time between valid date & decision date, Dec-19 to Nov-20

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Events Held	1,321	2,049	1,740	942	61	753	1,529	1,556	1,480	2,109	1,960r	1,787	17,287
Decisions	1,704	1,688	1,865	1,671	989	597	1,178	1,431	1,251	1,573	1,967	1,729	17,643
Median	19.8	21.3	20.0	20.0	22.3	24.9	22.1	23.3	23.1	24.0	25.4	26.9	22.7

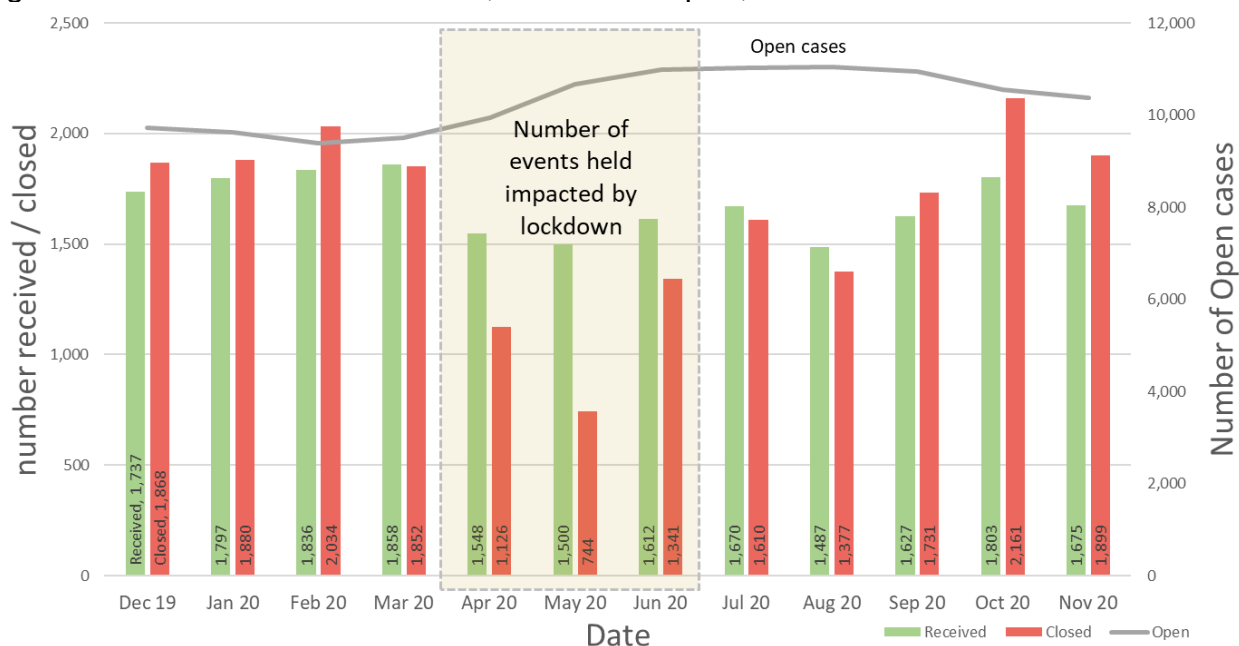
Source: Horizon, Picaso, Inspector Scheduling System. r denotes revision – a change of more than 5 cases since last month (see Background Quality Report for more information)

The Planning Inspectorate were able to continue deciding cases where the site visit, hearing or inquiry had already occurred. However, the impact of pandemic meant that the Inspectorate did not carry out site visits, hearings and inquiries events during the lockdown period in Spring 2020.

The Inspectorate needed to adapt to new ways of working and re-arrange those events that were cancelled during the lockdown period and this also impacted on customers who appealed before (from as early as Dec 19), during and after lockdown.

The impact of Covid is starting to appear in the timeliness data, as cases delayed during and after the Spring 2020 lockdown are now being decided. Times for decisions are expected to lengthen further in the short term, as the Inspectorate make decisions on cases held up in a backlog, before reducing again leading up to Spring 2021.

Figure 2: Number of cases received, closed and open, Dec-19 to Nov-20



Source: Horizon and Picaso

The number of open cases increased, peaking at an increase of 1,650 more cases than February (an 18% increase from the fewest cases open). In the last three months the number of cases being closed has exceeded the number received (September - November 2020, once schools re-opened and full capacity returned), and the overall number of open cases is starting to reduce as a result of this.

³ Data collection and quality assurance will be examined to determine why events are being shown during months when the Inspectorate did not carry out any site visits, hearings or inquiry events.

Table 2: Number of cases received, closed⁴ and open, Dec-19 to Nov-20

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Received	1,737	1,797	1,836	1,858	1,548	1,500	1,612	1,670	1,487	1,627	1,803	1,675	20,150
Closed	1,868	1,880	2,034	1,852	1,126	744	1,341	1,610	1,377	1,731	2,161	1,899	19,623
Open	9,732	9,627	9,397	9,512	9,933	10,665	10,987	11,023	11,049	10,952	10,543	10,376	N/A

Source: Horizon and Picaso

Number of Decisions

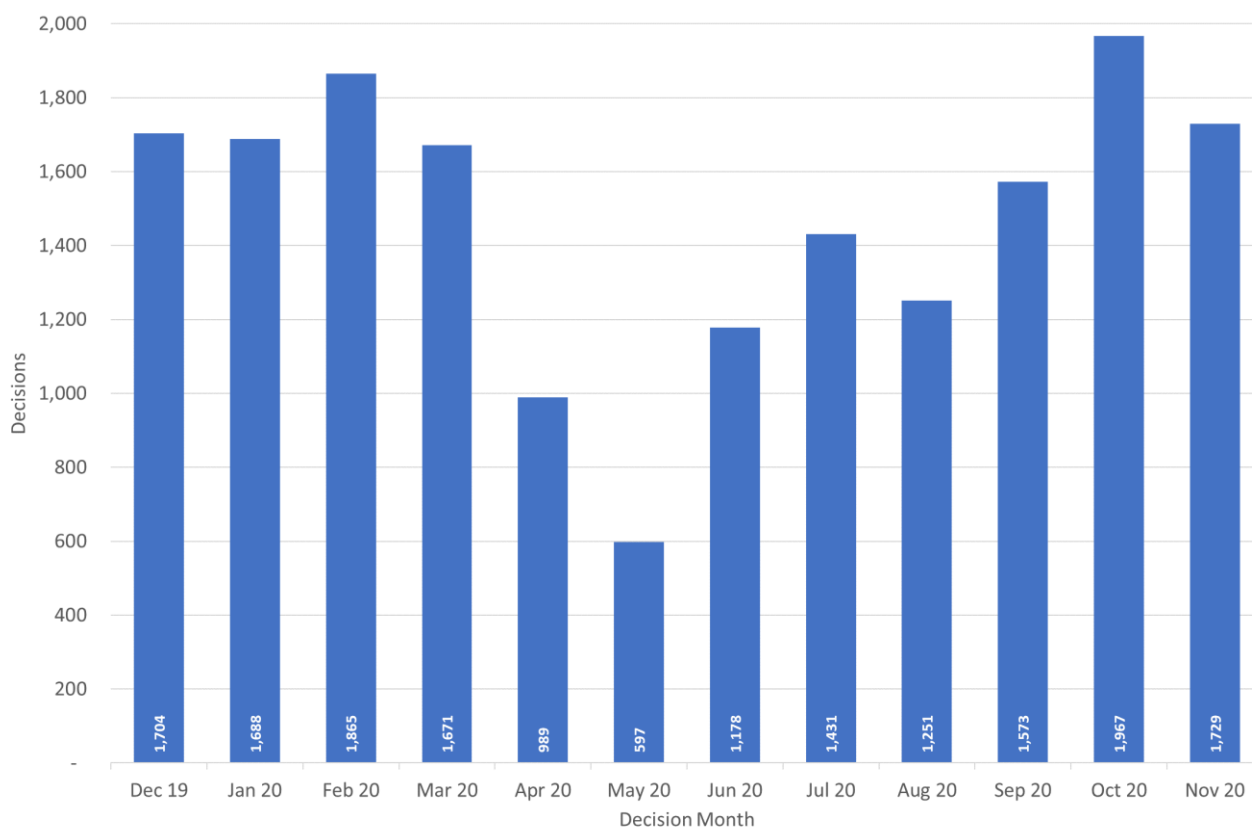
The Planning Inspectorate has made 17,643 appeal decisions⁵ in the last 12 months, an average of almost 1,500 per month. Table 3 below shows the monthly breakdown with fewer decisions from April to August 2020 than would have been expected, due to the impact of COVID-19. The same information is represented in Figure 3.

Table 3: Appeal Decisions, Dec-19 to Nov-20

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Decisions	1,704	1,688	1,865	1,671	989	597	1,178	1,431	1,251	1,573	1,967	1,729	17,643

Source: Horizon and Picaso

Figure 3 – Appeal Decisions, Dec-19 to Nov-20



Source: Horizon and Picaso

⁴ The number of cases closed is considerably higher than the number of decisions, as it includes cases where an appeal is withdrawn, notice is withdrawn, or the appeal is turned away.

⁵ The appeal types are the same as last month. They include planning & related appeals, Enforcement and Specialist casework (covering a range of casework types). Please note that some previous releases covered only Rights of Way orders within Specialist casework. Annex A details the scope of previous releases, Annex D the scope of this release and Background Notes has further information.

As can be seen from the table, the fewest decisions were made in May 2020 – just under six hundred decisions. Since then the number of decisions each month is showing a generally upward trend (with a slight dip in August linked to annual leave). The 1729 decisions in November are fewer than October and broadly in line with pre-pandemic levels.

Planning Inspectors work on a broader range of work than the appeals featured in this Release. For example, they also work on examining Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project applications, Local Plans, Compulsory Purchase Order applications and many other specialist licencing/application types.

Table 4 below gives the numbers of appeal decisions made broken down by whether the case was dealt with by written representations, hearings, or inquiries.

The large majority of decisions (16,845) were made on written representations. This is about ninety five percent of all appeal decisions made. There were 499 decisions made on hearings; and 299 on inquiries. These totals are shown in Figure 2 below.

The large majority of cases were planning (14,263). This is about eighty-one per cent of all appeal decisions made. There were 2,757 enforcement decisions and 623 specialist decisions. These totals are also shown in Figure 4 below.

Table 4: Appeal Decisions by procedure and casework category, Dec-19 to Nov-20

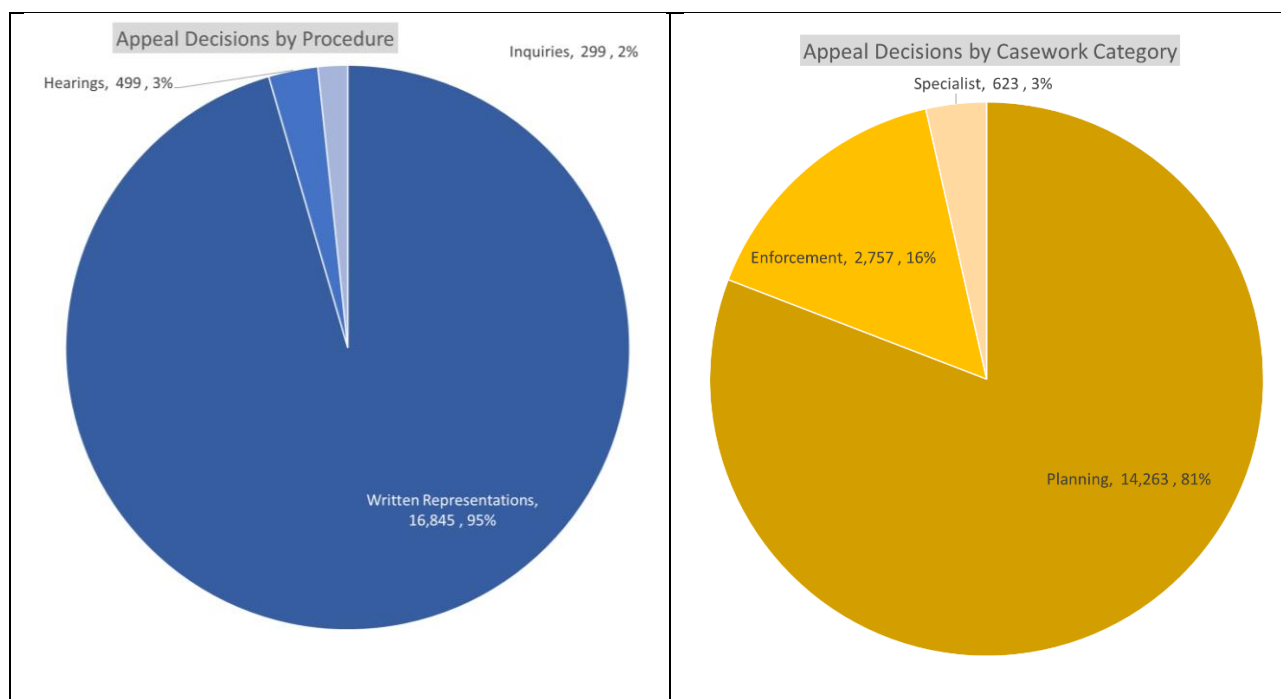
Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Written Representations	1,555	1,556	1,737	1,566	931	575	1,155	1,410	1,227	1,545	1,914	1,674	16,845
Hearings	61	90	80	71	41	17	13	16	14	21	40	35	499
Inquiries	88	42	48	34	17	5	10	5	10	7	13	20	299
Total	1,704	1,688	1,865	1,671	989	597	1,178	1,431	1,251	1,573	1,967	1,729	17,643

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Planning	1,420	1,268	1,474	1,343	753	439	971	1,150	991	1,326	1,639	1,489	14,263
Enforcement	247	322	287	272	144	146	178	239	227	215	283	197	2,757
Specialist	37	98	104	56	92	12	29	42	33	32	45	43	623
Total	1,704	1,688	1,865	1,671	989	597	1,178	1,431	1,251	1,573	1,967	1,729	17,643

Source: Horizon and Picaso

Table 4 shows that written representations decisions have recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In contrast there remain fewer decisions from hearings and inquiries; but for both procedures more decisions are being made than were over the summer. It also shows that both planning and enforcement decisions had recovered to pre-pandemic levels (though there were fewer enforcement decisions in November than October); but that there remain fewer specialist decisions.

Figure 4 – Appeal Decisions by Procedure and Casework Category, Dec-19 to Nov-20



Source: Horizon and Picaso

Decision timeliness

It is important for people to know how long an appeal is going to take, so that they can make plans and decisions based on this information. This section covers the timeliness of decisions (i.e. how long it takes to make a decision) across our appeal casework. In addition to an overall measure, timeliness is analysed by procedure type and casework category, as timeliness varies a great deal depending on these characteristics.

Table 5 below shows that the mean average time to make a decision⁶, across all cases in the last 12 months (Dec 19 to Nov 20), was 27 weeks.⁷ The table also shows the median time⁸ is 23 weeks. Each month the median is less than the mean; this is due to the larger impact on the mean of very long cases.

Table 5: Mean, Median and Standard Deviation of Time to Decision, Dec-19 to Nov-20

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Valid to Decision (mean weeks)	26.7	27.7	25.5	24.2	28.1	29.1	26.0	25.9	25.8	26.1	28.3	28.5	26.7
Valid to Decision (median weeks)	19.8	21.3	20.0	20.0	22.3	24.9	22.1	23.3	23.1	24.0	25.4	26.9	22.7
Standard Deviation (weeks)	17.9	17.2	16.2	14.1	17.4	15.9	13.9	14.4	14.0	12.5	14.8	12.9	15.2

Source: Horizon and Picaso

⁶ The time to make a decision is measured from the time we judge we have enough information for the case to proceed (i.e. it is deemed 'valid') to the time a decision letter is issued. 50% of cases are deemed 'valid' in a week or less – see 'Open Cases' below for more information.

⁷ The decisions made in a given month will include those that started many months before, and thus do not give an accurate indication of how decisions submitted, or deemed 'valid' in that month, will take.

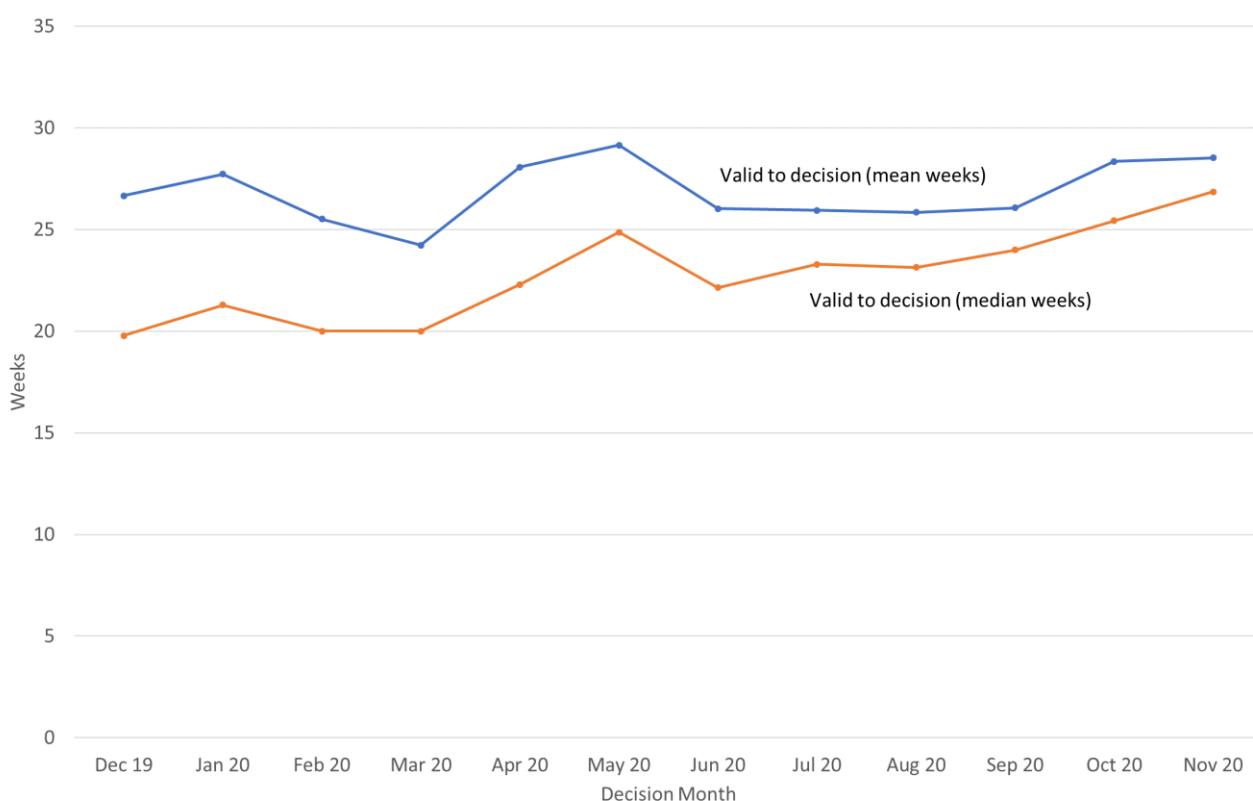
⁸ Note that the median case is the 'middle', so half the cases take this long or less; and half take this long or more.

The mean and the median are two different representations of the centre of a data set, more detailed explanation can be found in the Background Notes section.

Also included in the table is the *standard deviation* of decision timeliness. A lower standard deviation would demonstrate greater consistency in the Planning Inspectorates decision timeliness. The data shows that the variability is getting less towards the end of the year – the standard deviation values are around 16 to 18 for much of December 19 to May 20; but 14.8 or lower for June to November.

The median timeliness from April 20 onwards is consistently above 22 weeks, contrasting with the months of December 19 to March 20 where it is never above 21.3 weeks, and usually around 20 weeks. The median timeliness is gradually increasing since Jun 2020.

Figure 5: Mean and Median time to decision, Dec-19 to Nov-20



Source: Horizon and Picaso

The mean time to decide, shows a less clear pattern. The mean is often around 25 or 26 weeks, dropping below this only in March 20 (to 24.2 weeks). The mean for November, 28.5 weeks, is the highest since May (when it was 29.1 weeks).

Procedure Type

Table 6 below shows decision timeliness broken down by the procedure type. Hearings and inquires take longer than written representations – with Inquiries taking more than twice as long as written representations. Because 19 of every 20 cases are by written representation, the timeliness measures for written representations is similar to the measure across all cases.

Where a small number of cases has been decided, the average timeliness (whether mean or median) is less meaningful as a measure than where there are many cases. Those areas shaded in the table below should be treated with caution as there are fewer than 20 cases decided.

The median time for written representations over the 12 months to November 20 is 22 weeks.

The median time for inquiries over the 12 months to November 20 is over a year - 61 weeks. The median time for hearings is slightly less at 41 weeks. For each of these procedure types, the mean is higher as it is more affected by the longest cases.

Table 6: Mean and Median Time to Decision, with standard deviation, by procedure; Dec-19 to Nov-20

Measure	Procedure	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Valid to Decision (mean weeks)	Written Representations	23.8	26.0	23.6	22.7	26.4	28.1	25.2	25.5	25.4	25.6	27.8	28.0	25.6
	Hearings	36.9	40.1	48.3	45.5	47.2	50.4	63.8	56.0	44.5	50.5	49.8	37.6	45.0
	Inquiries	69.2r	64.5r	55.9r	48.5r	73.4	77.4r	71.4	42.3	55.1	63.2	43.8	59.1	61.7
	All Cases	26.7	27.7	25.5	24.2	28.1	29.1	26.0	25.9	25.8	26.1	28.3	28.5	26.7
Valid to Decision (median weeks)	Written Representations	19.0	20.4	19.3	19.4	22.1	24.1	22.0	23.1	23.0	23.9	25.1	26.6	22.1
	Hearings	33.0	38.9	41.7	44.0	42.3	47.1	52.6	39.6	47.6	40.3	40.1	37.3	41.0
	Inquiries	76.2r	54.1r	59.5r	43.9r	96.9	88.1r	67.7	24.0	44.4	65.0	37.3	55.0	61.3
	All Cases	19.8	21.3	20.0	20.0	22.3	24.9	22.1	23.3	23.1	24.0	25.4	26.9	22.7
Standard Deviation (weeks)	Written Representations	14.0	15.0	13.3	12.2	15.1	14.5	12.2	13.6	13.4	11.7	14.1	12.3	13.5
	Hearings	15.1	17.0	27.1	19.2	20.2	20.3	30.7	31.8	11.4	20.4	25.5	15.0	21.9
	Inquiries	23.7r	32.1	26.5	24.3r	32.8	18.5r	13.2	24.0	34.0	18.5	17.4	14.3	26.9
	All Cases	17.9	17.2	16.2	14.1	17.4	15.9	13.9	14.4	14.0	12.5	14.8	12.9	15.2

Source: Horizon and Picaso

Cells shaded grey had fewer than 20 decisions. r denotes revision – a change of more than 0.5 weeks since last month.

The standard deviation information indicates that for all three procedures, there is considerable variation, meaning times are widely spread about the mean. For each type, the amount of variation is fairly stable through the year.

Annex B gives information on mean and median time to decision, with standard deviation, for these procedure types, split by planning, enforcement and specialist casework categories (see next section).

Casework Category

The nature of the cases the Planning Inspectorate deal with varies widely and a number of factors play a part in determining how long it takes to make a decision. One such factor is the casework type. Table 7 below shows the time taken to make a decision, in planning cases, in enforcement cases, and in specialist⁹ cases; as does Figure 6.

The median time to decision for planning cases (there are many more of these decisions than in the other categories) is lower than for other casework categories, apart from in May

⁹ Specialist cases comprise Common Land, Rights of Way orders, Tree Preservation Orders, High Hedges appeals and Hedgerow appeals

2020. Table 7 and Figure 6 show an increase in median time for planning cases – they are consistently below 19 weeks up to March 2020; from April 2020 onwards they are above 20 weeks and in November 2020 rose to 25.6 weeks, higher than at any time in the last 12 months. Across the whole year, the median time to decision is 21 weeks.

Table 7: Decisions, Mean, Median and Standard Deviation of Time to Decision – Planning, Enforcement, Specialist Cases; Dec-19 to Nov-20

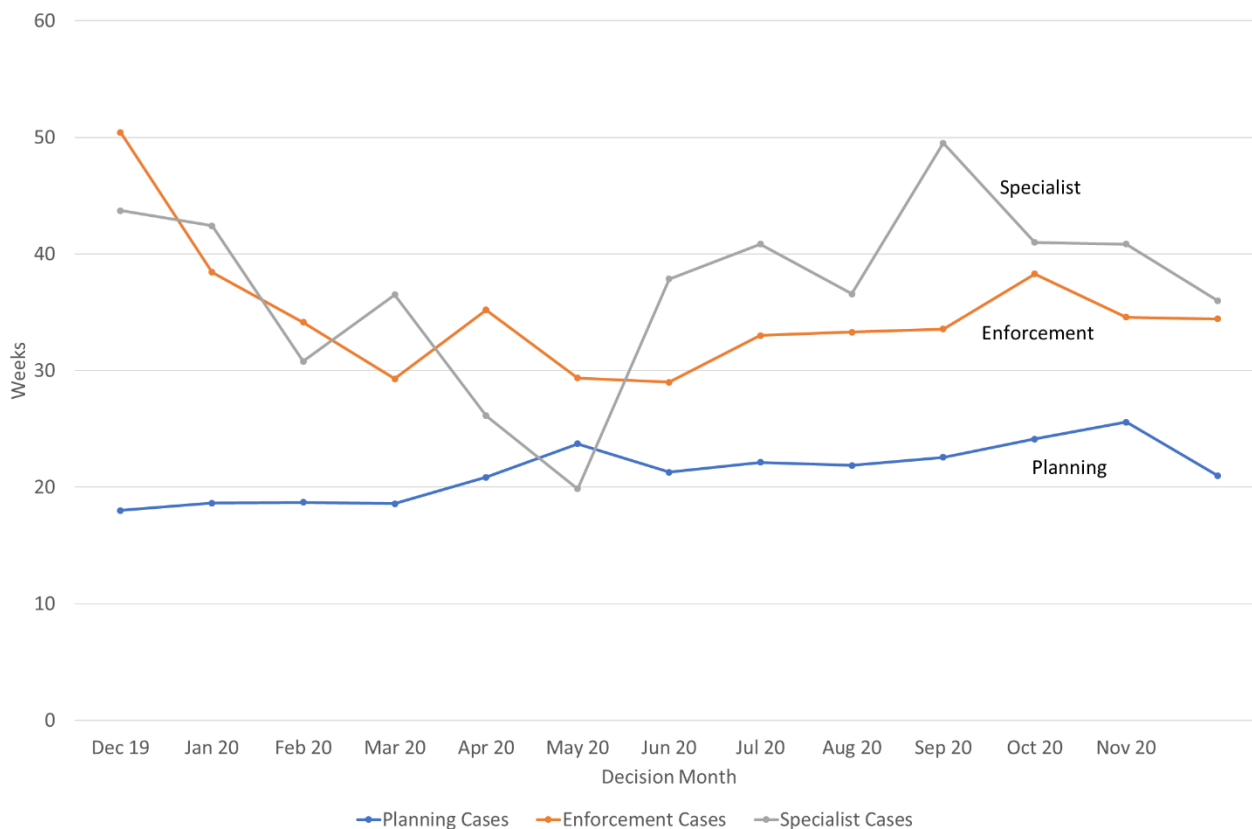
Casework Category	Measure	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Planning Cases	Valid to Decision (mean wks)	22.0	23.2	22.1	21.6	25.2	27.1	23.5	22.9	23.0	23.7	25.6	27.0	23.7
	Valid to Decision (median wks)	18.0	18.6	18.7	18.6	20.9	23.7	21.3	22.1	21.9	22.6	24.1	25.6	21.0
	St. dev. of decision (weeks)	12.2	13.6	12.3	11.6	15.0	14.4	10.0	9.6	11.4	9.8	11.3	11.3	11.9
Enforcement Cases	Valid to Decision (mean wks)	51.3	41.1	39.7	34.1	39.6	34.9	37.5	38.0	36.8	37.5	42.7	37.6	39.5
	Valid to Decision (median wks)	50.4	38.4	34.1	29.3	35.2	29.4	29.0	33.0	33.3	33.6	38.3	34.6	34.4
	St. dev. of decision (weeks)	23.0	19.5	21.4	17.4	20.4	18.2	21.3	22.6	17.3	15.5	20.5	16.8	20.2
Specialist Cases	Valid to Decision (mean wks)	42.0r	42.6	34.4	39.9r	33.7	32.3r	40.1	41.7	37.0	47.0r	38.0	39.6	38.6
	Valid to Decision (median wks)	43.7r	42.4	30.8	36.5r	26.1	19.9r	37.9	40.9	36.6	49.5r	41.0	40.9	36.0
	St. dev. of decision (weeks)	17.7r	20.6r	22.6	19.8r	21.9	18.5	23.7r	16.6	18.0	24.7r	26.4	19.0	21.6

Source: Horizon and Picaso

Cells shaded grey had fewer than 20 decisions

r denotes revision – a change of more than 0.5 weeks since last month. This is due to a processing error in the November release.

Figure 6 – Median time to decision by casework area, Dec-19 to Nov-20



Source: Horizon and Picaso

The 2,757 enforcement decisions made in the last 12 months had a median decision time of 34 weeks. The median decision time showed an improvement at the start of the 12-month

period; then it increased to October and fell to 35 weeks for November. This, together with the drop in number of decisions, could be due to working through a backlog of older decisions. The median time for enforcement decisions is longer than the median decision time for planning cases.

There are considerably fewer specialist cases (623 for the year) which means results are more liable to be distorted by extreme values. Looking at the annual totals, the median and mean time to decision for specialist decisions are broadly the same as for enforcement decisions, and longer than the median for planning decisions. The median time for decisions in specialist cases since June 2020 has been longer than for other case work areas.

Note that the Inspectorate publishes each month, information on the mean and median times from valid to decision, for selected appeal types – data for November 20 are published at the same time as this Release, and are given at Annex C. The information published also breaks down the time for each stage of the process, see “Open Cases” below.

Planning Inquiry Decisions

For planning appeals decided by the inquiry process, The Planning Inspectorate has been implementing recommendations from the Rosewell review.

The median time for inquiries over the 12 months to November 20 is 26 weeks, with the mean being higher at 33 weeks.

Table 8: Decisions, Mean and Median Time to Decision, Planning Inquiry cases under Rosewell process; Dec-19 to Nov-20

Measure	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Decisions	10	5	17	16	4	1	0	3	5	2	7	7	77
Mean (weeks)	25.3	24.2	28.9	30.4	35.2	47.0	-	22.7	42.5	41.1	45.7	45.7	33.0
Median (weeks)	24.2	26.0	26.0	23.7	34.4	47.0	-	23.4	45.6	41.1	32.6	50.9	26.0
St. Dev. (weeks)	4.9	2.4	10.5	12.7	7.7	-	-	1.4	16.0	1.1	22.1	9.1	13.9

Source: Horizon

Most inquiry decisions now being issued are under the revised ‘Rosewell’ process, but we are still deciding those under the previous process.

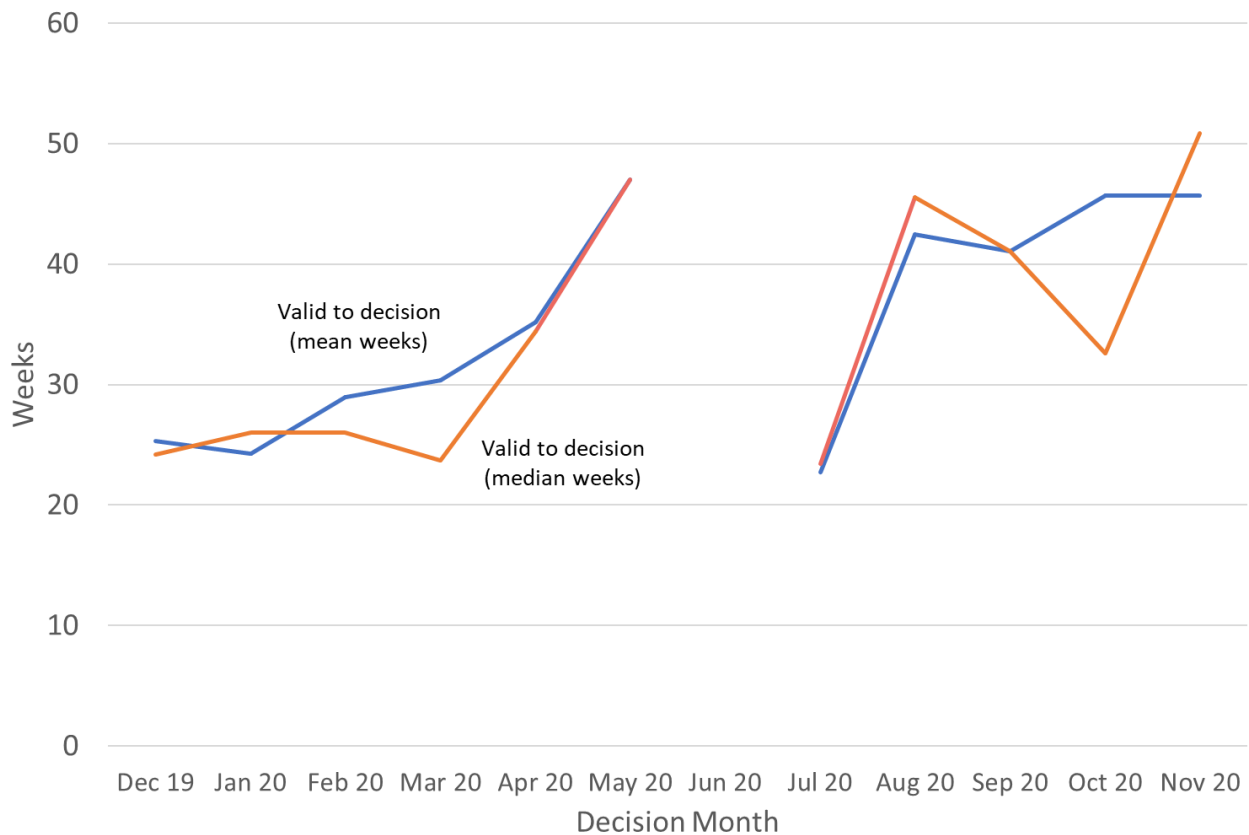
Table 9: Decisions, Planning Inquiry cases under non-Rosewell process; Dec-19 to Nov-20

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Decisions	8	11	11	6	2	1	2	-	1	-	1	5	48

Source: Horizon

Figure 7 below shows the mean and median time to decision for planning inquiry cases under the Rosewell process. Since the COVID outbreak there have been fewer decisions (see table 8) and generally longer durations – noting that these inquiries began many weeks before the pandemic had its impact.

Figure 7: Mean, Median Time to Decision, Rosewell Inquiry Process, Dec 19 – Nov 20



Source: Horizon

Note – no decisions were made during June 2020

At the end of November, the Planning Inspectorate had ten thousand four hundred cases open¹⁰ (10,376). This is a drop of about 170 from the 10,543 at the end of October. The open cases comprised 8,658 cases being handled through written representations; 1,042 through hearings; and 676 through inquiries. This is not the number of 'live' hearings and inquiries since it includes cases where the event (hearing or inquiry) has yet to start, as well as those where the event has finished but the decision has yet to be issued.

For each procedure type, there are more cases with an event scheduled but not yet started, than at any other stage in the process.

This information provides a 'snapshot' in time. As subsequent 'snapshots' are issued, more insight will be possible – including such issues as how the numbers and proportions change over time. Event refers to either a site visit, hearing or inquiry.

Table 10: Open cases by procedure and stage, as of end of November 2020¹¹

Procedure	Case received but yet to be deemed valid	Case deemed valid, event date yet to be set / in the future	Event complete but decision not yet issued	Total
Written Representations	870	5890	1,898	8,658
Hearings	65	889	88	1,042
Inquiries	6	600	70	676
Total	941	7,379	2,056	10,376

Source: Horizon and Picaso

Inspectors

Table 11 below shows the number of inspectors in the Planning Inspectorate in each month from December 2019 to November 2020¹². This includes headcount (i.e. the number of different individuals) and full-time equivalents (FTE) where those working part time are counted in proportion with their contracted hours. There were 345 Planning Inspectors employed by the Inspectorate in November 2020 – with a full-time equivalent of 308.

By both measures (headcount and FTE) the maximum Inspector resource was in February 2020; and by both, the number at the end of the 12-month period was somewhat lower than the number at the end.

¹⁰ Open cases are any that have been received but on which a decision has not yet been made/ issued. Cases included comprise Planning, Enforcement, and the following Specialist cases: Common Land, Environment, Purchase Notice and Rights of Way. Tree Preservation Orders, Hedgerows and High Hedges cases are excluded.

¹¹ Note that, as of September 2020, the average time of cases to be deemed valid was 1.3 weeks. The median was 0 weeks. The time prior to validation is excluded from the timeliness figures above.

¹² Data as at the last day of the month.

Table 11: Planning Inspectors – Headcount and FTE, Dec-19 to Nov-20 (at end of month)

Month	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20
Headcount	357	356	364	361	357	356	356	355	352	352	347	345
FTE	319.5	317.7	326.3	323.6	320.8	319.1	319.0	318.2	316.0	316.4	310.0	308.1

Source: SAP HR

As above, Planning Inspectors work on a broader range of work than the appeals featured in this Release. They also work on applications and examinations. Please note that data on Planning Inspectors is only applicable to salaried employees (it does not include fixed term contract Inspectors or non-salaried Inspectors).

Virtual Events¹³

The Planning Inspectorate has continued moving casework forward during the pandemic by adapting the ways of working so that examinations, hearings and inquiries (which would previously have been held face-to-face) could take place virtually.

The Inspectorate are continuing to increase the number of events carried out ‘virtually’. The table and graph below the number of virtual events that have occurred each month. Data for December 2020 is an estimate.

There were 102 Virtual Events during November 2020, with 83 estimated for December.

There are concerns about the quality and accuracy of the data collection methods for virtual events data. For National Infrastructure, the number given in the table is the number of projects that have held virtual events. The number in brackets is the number of individual events but this is potentially misleading as multiple sessions on the same day (e.g. morning and afternoon sessions) have been counted as separate events.

Table 12: Virtual Events, Jun-19 to Dec-20^P

	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec 20
s78 Hearings	8	11	18	36	41	43	35
s78 Inquiries	4	6	4	11	11	17	16
Enforcement	0	1	3	9	15	18	20
Local Plans	1	2	2	7	9	5	0
National Infrastructure	3 (3)	1 (3)	1 (2)	2 (3)	10 (30)	3 (9)	6 (18)
Other	0	1	0	0	4	16	6
Total	16 (16)	22 (24)	28 (29)	65 (66)	90 (110)	102 (108)	83 (95)

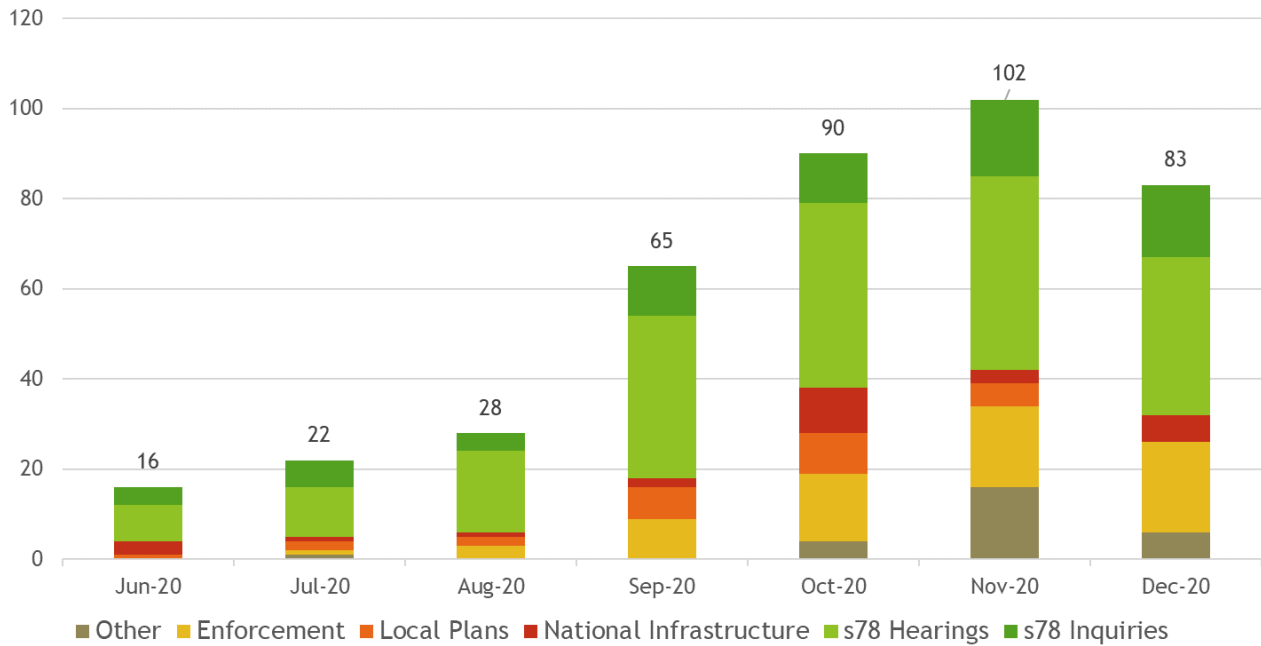
Source: Virtual Events Project Dashboard, data as at 14/12/2020

Numbers in brackets show count of events but note concerns above over counting sessions on same day.

P – These numbers should be treated as provisional due to concerns about quality and accuracy.

¹³ Virtual Events data includes casework types not covered elsewhere in this release, including Local Plans and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

Figure 8: Virtual Events, Jun-19 to Dec-20



Source: Virtual Events Project Dashboard, data as at 23/11/2020

P – These numbers should be treated as provisional.

Note – some cases can have multiple ‘events’ – for example an inquiry may sit over four to eight days but would only be counted as one ‘event’. On the other hand, casework like National Infrastructure may have multiple events for the same project.

Annex A – Content of ad-hoc Statistical Releases, 2020

Note: The Table below covers ad-hoc statistical releases. From November onwards, the content is fixed, so is the same as this publication.

Date	March 2020	April 2020	July 2020	September 2020	October 2020
Content	<p>Appeals receipts and decisions in the last 12 and 24 months (1st March 2018 – 29th February 2020)</p> <p>Number of section 78 Planning Appeals received / decided / within target that used the written representation method in the last 12 months (1st March 2019 – 29th February 2020)</p> <p>Number of dwellings decided and number of dwellings allowed by appeal decisions between 1st January 2017 and 31st December 2019.</p> <p>Number of Planning Inspectors employed by the Planning Inspectorate at the end of each quarter between 31st March 2017 and 31st December 2019.</p>	<p>Appeals receipts and decisions between 17th March 2020 and 22nd April 2020</p> <p>Live appeals in the system as at 23rd April 2020</p> <p>Number of appeals involving housing within the system as at 23rd April 2020</p> <p>Virtual site visits</p>	<p>Appeals decisions between 17th March 2020 and 22nd June 2020</p> <p>Number of open cases</p> <p>Number of virtual events</p> <p>Number of appeals involving housing within the system as at 12th June 2020</p>	<p>Appeals decisions between 17th March 2020 and 21st September 2020</p> <p>Number of open cases</p> <p>Number of virtual events</p>	<p>Appeals decisions from October 2019 to September 2020</p> <p>Number of open cases</p> <p>Number of virtual events</p>
Scope	<p>England only</p> <p>Planning cases, Enforcement cases and Rights of Way orders</p>	<p>England only</p> <p>Planning cases, Enforcement cases and Rights of Way orders</p>	<p>England only</p> <p>Planning cases, Enforcement cases and Rights of Way orders</p>	<p>England only</p> <p>Planning cases, Enforcement cases and Rights of Way orders</p>	<p>England only</p> <p>Planning cases, Enforcement cases, Specialist cases: Common Land, Rights of Way orders, Tree Preservation Orders, High Hedges appeals and Hedgerow appeals</p>

Annex B – Mean and median time to decision, with standard deviation, for planning, enforcement and specialist casework

Planning

Measure	Procedure	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Valid to decision (mean weeks)	Written Representations	21.2	22.0	20.9	20.3	24.3	26.5	23.2	22.6	22.5	23.3	25.2	26.6	23.1
	Hearings	35.2	36.5	40.4	42.0	39.9	42.9	50.0	46.7	42.2	51.3	39.7	35.4	39.9
	Inquiries	38.2	57.6	46.3	40.3	56.2	69.4	62.0	22.7	60.0	41.1	44.6	54.9	47.3
	All Cases	22.0	23.2	22.1	21.6	25.2	27.1	23.5	22.9	23.0	23.7	25.6	27.0	23.7
Valid to decision (median weeks)	Written Representations	17.6	18.0	18.1	18.0	20.3	23.3	21.3	22.0	21.7	22.3	23.9	25.4	20.7
	Hearings	31.7	33.6	32.4	42.9	35.3	42.0	42.4	34.4	45.1	43.1	34.0	36.1	36.6
	Inquiries	32.9	45.9	29.1	30.3	42.4	69.4	62.0	23.4	49.2	41.1	34.8	53.9	42.1
	All Cases	18.0	18.6	18.7	18.6	20.9	23.7	21.3	22.1	21.9	22.6	24.1	25.6	21.0
Standard Deviation (weeks)	Written Representations	11.6	11.6	10.3	9.7	14.1	13.7	9.2	8.8	10.4	8.8	10.7	10.9	10.8
	Hearings	14.7	15.3	18.5	16.9	15.6	14.7	24.9	27.9	9.7	20.5	18.5	13.9	17.6
	Inquiries	18.0	38.8	24.8	21.0	30.4	22.4	1.6	1.4	41.8	1.1	20.8	13.1	26.7
	All Cases	12.2	13.6	12.3	11.6	15.0	14.4	10.0	9.6	11.4	9.8	11.3	11.3	11.9

Please note that in the November release, covering Nov 19 – Oct 20, an error occurred: the median times given for planning cases was wrong; it only included Section 78 cases rather than all planning cases. The table above corrects most of these values – the correct median values for Nov 19, not included in the table, are as follows:

Procedure	Nov 19
Written Representations	17.1 weeks
Hearings	43.3 weeks
Inquiries	33.0 weeks
All Cases	18.1 weeks

Enforcement

Measure	Procedure	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Valid to decision (mean weeks)	Written Representations	41.1	37.9	35.4	31.7	34.1	33.0	35.0	37.2	36.8	37.1	41.3	36.6	36.6
	Hearings	52.2	62.6	73.3	67.9	69.7	74.8	94.8	96.5	34.4	34.3	84.4	54.4	70.5
	Inquiries	82.1	73.8	77.5	72.7	88.5	91.6	85.6	-	-	84.6	43.9	62.5	78.4
	All Cases	51.3	41.1	39.7	34.1	39.6	34.9	37.5	38.0	36.8	37.5	42.7	37.6	39.5
Valid to decision (median weeks)	Written Representations	38.9	34.6	31.7	27.9	32.1	28.5	28.9	32.6	33.3	33.6	36.7	33.9	32.8
	Hearings	50.4	61.4	63.9	72.0	70.4	76.5	93.4	100.1	34.4	34.3	89.0	56.0	69.4
	Inquiries	84.4	76.9	69.0	85.9	101.1	91.6	87.0	-	-	84.6	42.6	56.1	83.9
	All Cases	50.4	38.4	34.1	29.3	35.2	29.4	29.0	33.0	33.3	33.6	38.3	34.6	34.4
Standard Deviation (weeks)	Written Representations	15.6	16.3	15.6	14.2	12.6	15.6	18.2	21.8	17.3	14.9	19.3	16.3	17.1
	Hearings	7.6	14.6	34.8	19.0	16.0	16.4	16.6	5.2	0.0	0.0	12.8	12.3	24.3
	Inquiries	13.0	24.2	17.5	22.3	25.8	3.5	7.6	-	-	0.0	10.1	10.1	19.1
	All Cases	23.0	19.5	21.4	17.4	20.4	18.2	21.3	22.6	17.3	15.5	20.5	16.8	20.2

Specialist

Measure	Procedure	Dec 19	Jan 20	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	Jun 20	Jul 20	Aug 20	Sep 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Total
Valid to decision (mean weeks)	Written Representations	40.8	42.1	32.5	39.1	32.5	29.4	36.3	40.2	33.6	45.2	38.0	37.3	37.1
	Hearings	28.9	47.7	63.4	58.7	-	-	-	-	62.1	-	-	-	50.8
	Inquiries	47.7r	40.6r	50.0r	45.0r	67.7	65.0r	62.0	71.6	47.9	63.7	37.3	70.7	53.6
	All Cases	42.0r	42.6r	34.4r	39.9r	33.7r	32.3r	40.1r	41.7r	37.0r	47.0r	38.0r	39.6	38.6
Valid to decision (median weeks)	Written Representations	39.0	40.6r	29.9	34.0r	26.0	18.6	31.9r	39.8	35.6	48.7	42.9	39.0	34.9
	Hearings	28.9	51.4	44.9	58.7	-	-	-	-	62.1	-	-	-	51.4
	Inquiries	50.0r	39.6r	47.7r	41.5r	45.4	65.0r	63.5	71.6	43.1	65.0	37.3	72.4	51.4
	All Cases	43.7r	42.4	30.8	36.5r	26.1	19.9r	37.9	40.9	36.6	49.5r	41.0	40.9	36.0
Standard Deviation (weeks)	Written Representations	19.2	21.3r	21.4	20.4r	20.2r	16.3	23.1r	15.6	17.1	24.9r	26.7	17.0	21.2
	Hearings	14.9r	10.6r	28.9r	0.0r	-	-	-	-	0.0r	-	-	-	18.9
	Inquiries	11.4r	17.2	21.7	6.6r	35.5	0.0r	6.5	0.6	13.4	12.7	0.0	16.8	18.9
	All Cases	17.7r	20.6r	22.6	19.8r	21.9	18.5	23.7r	16.6	18.0	24.7r	26.4	19.0	21.6

r denotes revision – a change of more than 0.5 weeks since last month.

Annex C – Detailed Information on timeliness (November)

The information below is published today on the number and length of decisions made in November:

Casework Type	Procedure Type	Mean (weeks)	Median (weeks)	Decisions
s78 planning appeals	Written	27.5	26.3	891
	Representations	35.2	35.9	30
	Hearings	*54.9	*53.9	*12
	Inquiries			
Householder appeals	Written	24.8	24.6	459
	Representations			
Enforcement appeals	Written	36.6	33.9	188
	Representations	*54.4	*56.0	*4
	Hearings	*62.5	*56.1	*5
	Inquiries			

The smaller the number of decisions, the less helpful the mean and median are as measures for summarising performance. Particular care should be taken when there are fewer than twenty decisions. These are represented with an asterisk (*) in the table but have been provided for completeness and transparency.

The information published below shows the time taken for different stages of the appeals process:

	s78 planning appeals			Householder appeals
	Written Representations	Hearings	Inquiries	
Weeks between valid date & start date				
Mean (average)	7.4	22.5	7.0	8.0
Median (average)	7.0	21.3	2.9	7.7
Cases that started in Nov-20	887	36	23	445
Weeks between start date & event date				
Mean (average)	14.6	27.2	*24.6	10.7
Median (average)	10.6	22.9	*22.7	6.9
Cases where an event occurred during Nov-20	894	45	*19	482
Weeks between event date & decision date				
Mean (average)	4.8	5.2	*8.5	3.5
Median (average)	4.0	4.0	*9.0	2.8
Cases that have been decided in Nov-20	888	29	*12	456

Valid date – the date a case is deemed to have been validly received

Start date – date when a case has started its documentation phase (requesting statements and additional information) and an Inspector resource has usually been identified to carry out the case

Event date – the date of either a site visit, hearing or inquiry

Decision date – the date the decision was issued by The Planning Inspectorate

Annex D – Casework types included in this release

Planning covers s78 planning appeals, Householder appeals, Commercial appeals, s20 Listed Building appeals, Advertisement appeals, s106 Planning Obligation appeals and Called In Planning Applications.

Enforcement covers s174 Enforcement appeals, s39 Enforcement Listed Building appeals and Lawful Development Certificate appeals.

Specialist casework includes Common Land, Rights of Way orders, Purchase orders, Tree Preservation Orders, High Hedges appeals and Hedgerow appeals.

Note that the data on Open Cases excludes Tree Preservation Orders and High Hedges and Hedgerow appeals.

Background notes

Data sources

Horizon / Picaso – The main casework management systems used for processing appeals casework.

SAP HR – The Human Resources system database used to store all information regarding members of staff.

Measure	Definition
Mean	The total time taken divided by the number of cases. Also referred to as the 'average'. A measure of how long each case would take, if the total time taken was spread evenly across all cases.
Median	This is the time taken by the 'middle' case if all cases were sorted from quickest to longest
Standard deviation	This is a measure of variability or spread. It is calculated by examining how much each value differs from the mean. A higher standard deviation means the individual decision times vary more widely around the mean.

Compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

These statistics have been published in accordance with the Code of Practice for Statistics, which cover trustworthiness, quality and value. They have been pre-announced, and publication is overseen by the Head of Profession.

Technical Notes

A Background Quality Report is published alongside this Statistical Release. It provides more detail on the quality of statistics in this publication.

Data quality	Data on cases is taken from a live casework system, and details of cases can change for a number of reasons even after a decision has been made. We are seeking to get a better understanding of the nature and volume of these changes and will provide further information as it is available. We carry out regular checks on the quality of our data and may undertake ad hoc data cleansing exercises. Therefore, all the data for the last 12 rolling months is published in provisional form.
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	We have indicated in this publication any data where a number of cases has changed by more than five cases in a month; or where a measure (mean, median or standard deviation) has changed by more than 0.5 weeks.
Virtual Events	Data is currently being sourced from an operational MS Excel workbook. It is therefore being constantly updated and refined and may result in data may changing between monthly publications. There are concerns about the quality and accuracy of the data collection methods. Definitions of what constitutes an event are being refined, as this differs according to the type of casework. Whilst this work is in progress these numbers should be treated as provisional.
Measuring weeks	Data are measured in days and then converted to weeks. Note that not all decimal values are possible where converting days to weeks. 1 day is 1/7 of a week, or 0.14 weeks (to two decimal places). 2 days = 0.29; 3 days = 0.43; 4 days = 0.57; 5 days = 0.71; 6 days = 0.86. When these are used to calculate averages, or displayed to one decimal place, the result will not equate to a full day which can be misleading: it may appear that we are measuring part days (e.g. 19.8 weeks) but we only measure in whole days.

Glossary

Term	Explanation
Appeals	The right to appeal a planning decision made by a local authority is a key feature of the planning system, as is appealing when an authority is taking too long.
Appeals decided	Number of appeals by the date the appeal was decided by The Planning Inspectorate.
Appeals received	Number of appeals by the date the appeal was received by The Planning Inspectorate.
Applications	Planning Inspectorate manage the application process for proposed Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) within England and Wales in line with the 2008 Planning Act.
Closed	The total number of appeals decided, withdrawn or turned away.
Decision	The outcome of the case e.g. appeal allowed or rejected. The date of the decision is taken as the date a decision letter is sent to the appellant.
Event	A site visit, hearing or inquiry (may be virtual)
Event Type	The different options of how an Inspector visits a site for a written representations appeal.
Examinations	The process of examining local plans is dealt with by the Planning Inspectorate. Every Local Planning Authority is required to have a local plan. This includes a vision for the future and plan to address housing needs in the area. When a Local Planning Authority has finished preparing and consulting on a local plan it must be submitted to the Secretary of State who appoints an Inspector to carry out an independent examination.

FTE	Full Time Equivalent – a count of employees where those working part time are counted in proportion with their contracted hours.
Headcount	Total number of staff employed regardless of how many hours they work (i.e. the number of different individuals).
Hearings	<p>A hearing involves the submission of written evidence by the main parties and a hearing once all the written submissions have been received.</p> <p>This takes the form of a round-the-table discussion (in person or virtually) that will be led by the planning inspector. It allows for all parties to respond to any questions that the inspector might have, and to let everyone make their case known.</p> <p>Source: Planning Portal</p>
Inquiries	<p>An inquiry is usually used for complex cases where legal issues may need to be considered. The main parties will usually have legal representatives to present their case and to cross-examine any witnesses. Prior to the inquiry date, the Planning Inspectorate will expect to have received various documents from all parties that will be taking part in the appeal. These may include statements of case and proofs of evidence from expert witnesses. Third parties may also take part. The inquiry will be led by the inspector and will follow a formal procedure.</p> <p>At some point during or on conclusion of the inquiry the inspector and the main parties will undertake a site visit.</p> <p>Source: Planning Portal</p>
Live appeals	Number of live appeals in that have an appeal valid date but no end date (either decision date or a closed date, e.g. for appeals that have been withdrawn).
Open Cases	Number of cases that have been received but on which a decision has not yet been made/ issued. Will differ from Live Appeals as it includes those received but not yet verified.
Procedure Type	The method by which The Planning Inspectorate processes and decides appeals.
Written Representations	Most planning appeals are decided by the written representations' procedure. With this procedure the Inspector considers written evidence from the appellant, the LPA and anyone else who has an interest in the appeal. The site is also likely to be visited.

Contact Us

The Planning Inspectorate welcome feedback on our statistical products. If you have any comments or questions about this publication or about our statistics in general, you can contact us as follows:

Media enquiries 0303 444 5004
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Public enquiries email statistics@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Please note we are currently reviewing our statistics with a view to making them as clear and helpful as possible for users. We would be delighted if you could contact us via the

address below with any views on this approach; particularly on what content would be most useful and why.

email statistics@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

If you require information which is not available within this or other available publications, you may wish to submit a Request for Information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to the Planning Inspectorate. For more information, see: <https://www.gov.uk/make-a-freedom-of-information-request/the-freedom-of-information-act>