

BUILDING STANDARDS CUSTOMER ANALYSIS

1st April 2017 – 31st March 2018



Introduction

The Building Standards Service has a wide range of customers using the Building Warrant process. These customers extend from members of the public using the service for the first time, undertaking work to their house, to the developer constructing a new domestic or non-domestic building. Irrespective of the type of customer using the system, the common theme from all parties is to secure an approved Building Warrant and Acceptance of Completion Certificate as soon as possible to ensure that the proposed works can be implemented and the building occupied.

In projects requiring planning permission, the application for Building Warrant is often submitted by the applicant's appointed agent after the planning decision has been finalised. This process is common in most projects, irrespective of size and complexity, or whether the application is for domestic or non-domestic applications. Consequently, the time from commissioning the original design to the granting of the planning approval and then finally the Building Warrant approval can be several months. In larger projects this time can be considerably longer, all of which can be frustrating to the applicant irrespective of the size or complexity of the project.

Often the delay in determining a Building Warrant application is attributed to the quality of the submission, including architectural and engineering information and the intermittent submission of revised information to allow Building Standards to determine the application. The process can also impact on the local building industry and will affect the local economy. It is therefore important that the service delivery targets are detailed within the customer charter, reviewed with stakeholders, and service improvements introduced to enhance the overall service delivery.

Application Process

On receipt of a valid application both the applicant and agent will receive an acknowledgement letter detailing the expected deadline for assessing the application. During periods of high volume of work this deadline will be amended to reflect the high workloads received. Similarly, target deadlines will be reduced as necessary, taking cognisance of the resources applicable at the time of the submission. During each stage of the verification process both the applicant and agent will receive correspondence on the progress of the application.

Consequently, it is important that the Building Warrant process has been streamlined to deliver an efficient and effective service delivery which is quality assured and that utilises customer feedback to progress the service response to all types of projects. Continuous feedback from customers provides invaluable information on areas where the system is either achieving or not achieving its aim, and establishes specific customer needs, therefore enabling improvements to be introduced to improve overall service delivery.

As part of Building Standards commitment to continuous improvement in the overall Building Warrant process, customers are actively encouraged to provide feedback to the Operations Manager - Building Standards and Development Management following the issue of a Building Warrant and acceptance or issue of a Completion Certificate or online at any time. All customers can, using the pre-paid envelope issued with the questionnaire (or electronic customer feedback form) at each decision stage, to provide feedback relating to the service provided along with the ability to provide comments where the service did or did not meet their expectations. In addition, feedback is also integrated into the service review process directly from customers' comments and observations; via the stakeholders' focus group meetings and through the Council's complaints procedure.

The Building Standards customer charter details the prescribed standards to be delivered and performance targets for assessing and determining Building Warrants and Completion Certificates. During the financial year 2017/18 there has been an 8.2% increase in new building warrant applications with the income generated from these applications has also increasing by 63.7%.

The table below details the performance target response and actual figures for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 along with the comparison of performance from previous years.

Customer Charter Target	2017/2018	2016/2017	2015/2016	2014/2015	Comments
No of Building Warrant Applications received	1004	928	972	997	The number of applications submitted has increased by 76 compared with the period during 1 st April 2016 to 31 st March 2017.
No of Building Warrants responded to within 20 WD's	96%	89.2%	99.9%	99%	There has been an increase in performance during the last year. The service continues to perform well at a national level which was acknowledged as part of the re-appointment process. It is thought that the provisions made have minimised the potential disruption and lessened the effect on the customer. In conclusion the Service overall has maintained a strong performance over the last year.
No of Decisions reached	978	841	956	1028	978 building warrants were determined during the period which is an increase of 16% when compared to the previous year, this is a reflection on the increase of workload generally.
% of Decisions reached within 6 Days	65%	65%	93.9%	95.8%	Performance has been maintained at the same level as last year although this is a decrease by compared to historic performance. Again, this can be put down to the extensive development works in relation to the re-appointment process, introduction of ebuilding standards and some internal resourcing factors. The service continues to perform well at a national level which was acknowledged as part of the re-

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No of Completion Certificates applied for	2003	1370	1359	1488	633 more completion certificates were applied for during this period compared with the period during 1 st April 2016 to 31 st March 2017.
Average time taken to respond to a request for a Completion Certificates	2.3 day	1.5 day	1.2 day	1.6 day	The service has maintained a strong performance over the last year in relation to average time taken to respond to a request for a completion inspection. This figure is fractionally down on previous performance although impacted on the increased volume of applications.
No of Completion Certificates Determined within 3 days	65.3%	69.3%	85.9%	84%	Performance decreased by 4% compared with the period during 1 st April 2016 to 31 st March 2017. This is a reflection on the increase of workload generally. In conclusion the Service overall has maintained a strong performance over the last year.

Summary of Customer Feedback Results

The customer feedback questionnaires returned during 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 provided 10 Building Warrant questionnaires and 117 Completion Certificate questionnaires which equated to a 1% and 6% return with the specific results noted as follows:-

Feedback on Building Warrants

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-
69% of responses from Applicant
28% of responses from Agents
3% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had visited an office:-
34% visited an office
66% did not visit an office

Customers were asked whether there were adequate reception facilities encountered when attending the office:-
47% Strongly agreed
27% Agreed
25% No opinion
1% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had received a letter following their Building warrant submission:-
30% did not receive a letter
70% did receive a letter

From the correspondence received customers were asked whether they understood the letter contents:-
64% Strongly agreed
20% Agreed
11% No opinion
4% Disagreed
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-
67% Strongly agreed
22% Agreed
11% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-
60% Strongly agreed
30% Agreed
10% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-
67% Strongly agreed
22% Agreed
11% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked if they had received mail within 2-3 working days.
71% Said they did.
29% said they did not.

Feedback on Completion Certificates

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-
71% of responses from Applicant
26% of responses from Agents
3% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-
78% Strongly agreed
17% Agreed
3% No opinion
1% Disagreed
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-
69% Strongly agreed
25% agreed
3% No opinion
3% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-
72% Strongly agreed
21% Agreed
5% No opinion

	0% Disagreed 2% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether they had considered that there had been sufficient site visits.	61% Strongly agreed 21% Agreed 16% No opinion 0% Disagreed 2% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether there had been appropriate responses to site visit requests.	66% Strongly agreed 15% Agreed 17% No opinion 0% Disagreed 2% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked how they rated Building Standards during the entire Building Standard Process	76% Excellent 18% Very Good 6% Good 0% Adequate 0% Poor
Customers were asked if they had received mail within 2-3 working days.	86% Said they did. 14% said they did not.

Comparison of the 2016/17 figures against 2017/18 demonstrated that the service delivered as high a standard of service as that of the previous year. In 2009 the service was subject to independent audit by the Building Standards Division of Scottish Government and achieved a rating of Excellent for the following 4 criteria, comprising Public Interest, Internal Business, Continuous Improvement and Finance with an overall rating of Good for the Private Customer. The current service delivery maintains this standard.

Since 2009 BM TRADA carried out annual surveillance audits of the Building Standards Service with the latest audit on the 2nd May 2017 to establish whether the ISO 9001: 2008 Accreditation standard Quality Management System (QMS) was being maintained. As a result of the Audit, BM TRADA continued the Accreditation until the next proposed audit date in June 2018.

During the last year there has been extensive works undertaken in relation to the re-appointment process. The Minister for Local Government and Housing, Kevin Stewart MSP confirmed his intention to re-appoint East Ayrshire Council as a Building Standards Verifier for the next appointment period from 1st May 2017. In a departure from the position since 2005, local authorities were appointed for different periods based on their performance. Local authorities consistently showing a strong performance were appointed for six years. Those authorities with good performance but with aspects of their service that would benefit from improvement were appointed for a three years period and those authorities with poor performance were appointed for one year.

In all cases the appointment is dependent on the verifier meeting the verification Operating Framework 2017 and the verification Performance Framework 2017. This includes satisfying the Scottish Ministers that the authority is meeting, and continues to meet, these revised performance measures.

East Ayrshire Council was appointed to carry out the functions of a verifier for their own geographical area under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003. The appointment is for a period of six years from the 1st May 2017 until 30th April 2023.

Customer feedback provides a range of responses, focusing on where the customer considered the service could be improved, to feedback congratulating the service and case Surveyor(s) on the service delivered. On receipt of negative customer feedback the Operations Manager shall review the comments along with the relevant application, consult the Surveyor, then contact the customer to hear of the issues raised prior to identifying any service enhancements applicable. All service enhancements shall be considered in the decision making process by the Building Standards Management Team who shall identify how and when to progress the improvements. In cases when positive feedback is provided relating to an area of service or to a member or members of staff the Operations Manager shall discuss the comments with the appropriate Surveyor(s) and acknowledge the good service delivered. Service improvements can relate to the strategy, internal processes and development of staff.

During the last year, in instances where feedback was provided by the applicant or agent on areas where they felt that the service could be improved the comments along with the relevant applications were reviewed and conclusions fed back, where applicable. In the instances where reviews were undertaken no service improvements were thought necessary other than those implemented through the continuous improvement framework.

A sample of the positive feedback received from customers over this period is noted below:-

- Efficient and approachable.
- I found the officer for the project was very helpful in both phoning me personally to provide additional advice and the speed of the application being approved.
- Whilst I've dealt with many local authorities this was the first time I have applications in East Ayrshire. My first impression was how quickly the officer processed the application. From submission via the portal to 1st response in less than 7 days is the fastest turnaround we have ever experienced. Furthermore, following a quick discussion on the points raised and the drawings being re-submitted, it only took a few days to get approval, again a record turnaround from submission to closure.

Overall the service from your team and the professional dealings I had was outstanding. My client is delighted that they can begin the build process and I look forward to further dealings with your team in the future.

- The surveyor was extremely helpful, professional and courteous throughout the process – thank you. Well done the surveyor and East Ayrshire Council.

Conclusion

In the development of any service it is essential to understand the needs of the customer and to develop the service to meet those needs. Therefore, customer feedback is essential in the continuous improvement of the business processes and development of staff to deliver the service. As a result of customer feedback the balanced scorecard service plan has been developed to take cognisance of the issues raised and challenges Building Standards to meet these goals.

Should you wish to provide comment on this analysis or provide feedback on the Building Standards Service please contact david.mcdowall@east-ayrshire.gov.uk

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