

BUILDING STANDARDS CUSTOMER ANALYSIS

1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020



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 if not suitably planned.

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 Building Standards and Development Management Operations Manager 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 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 2019/20 there has been a 10% decrease in new building warrant applications with the income generated from these applications decreasing by 4.9%.

The table below details the performance target response and actual figures for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 along with the comparison of performance from previous years.

Customer Charter Target	2019/2020	2018/2019	2017/2018	2016/2017	Comments
Number of Building Warrant Applications received	1028	1142	1004	928	The number of applications submitted has decreases by 114 compared with the previous year's figures.
Number of Building Warrants responded to within 20 Working Days	97%	99%	96%	89.2%	There has been a 2% decrease 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. In conclusion the Service overall has maintained a strong performance over the last year.
Number of Decisions reached	965	1100	978	841	965 building warrants were determined during the period which is a reduction of 12% when compared to the previous year.
% of Decisions reached within 6 Days	59.8%	80.5%	65%	65%	There has been a significant decrease in performance compared to last year. This can be explained by a reduction in workforce, of both a surveyor and administrative staff, experienced during this period. The Service has also moved to a new premise and is still adapting to the new office and the electronic systems.
Number of Completion Certificates applied for	1708	1277	2003	1370	431 more completion certificates were applied for during this period compared with the period during 1 st April 2018 to 31 st March 2019.

Average time taken to respond to a request for a Completion Certificate	2.1 days	2.1 days	2.3 days	1.5 days	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.
Number of Completion Certificates Determined within 3 days	39.9%	71.4%	65.3%	69.3%	Performance decreased by 31.5% compared with the period during 1 st April 2018 to 31 st March 2019 due to the 25% increase in Completion Certificates and reduced resource. In conclusion the Service overall has performed to a good standard during a disruptive period.

Summary of Customer Feedback Results

The customer feedback questionnaires returned during 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 provided 2 Building Warrant questionnaires and 11 Completion Certificate questionnaires which equated to a 0.2% and 0.6% return. It is noted that since the move to an electronic customer feedback process and the introduction of the Scottish Government's National Satisfaction Survey that response number have reduced from previous years figures. The specific results noted are as follows: -

Feedback on Building Warrants

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process: -

- 50% of responses from Agents
- 50% of responses from Contractors
- 0% of responses from Applicants

Customers were asked whether they had visited an office: -

- 0% visited an office
- 100% did not visit an office

Customers were asked whether there were adequate reception facilities encountered when attending the office: -

- 50% Strongly agreed
- 0% Agreed
- 50% No opinion
- 0% Disagreed
- 0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had received a letter following their Building warrant submission: -

- 50% did not receive a letter
- 50% did receive a letter

From the correspondence received customers were asked whether they understood the letter contents: -

- 50% Strongly agreed
- 0% Agreed
- 50% No opinion
- 0% Disagreed
- 0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff: -

50% Strongly agreed
0% Agreed
50% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice: -

50% Strongly agreed
0% Agreed
50% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff: -

50% Strongly agreed
0% Agreed
50% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked if they had received mail within 2-3 working days.

100% Said they did.
0% said they did not.

Feedback on Completion Certificates

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process: -

91% of responses from Applicant
9% of responses from Agents
0% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff: -

91% Strongly agreed
9% Agreed
0% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice: -

73% Strongly agreed
27% agreed
0% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff: -

91% Strongly agreed
9% Agreed
0% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had considered that there had been sufficient site visits.	55% Strongly agreed 18% Agreed 18% No opinion 0% Disagreed 9% Strongly disagreed
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Customers were asked whether there had been appropriate responses to site visit requests.	64% Strongly agreed 0% Agreed 36% No opinion 0% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
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Customers were asked how they rated Building Standards during the entire Building Standard Process	63% Excellent 28% Very Good 7% Good 2% Adequate 0% Poor
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Customers were asked if they had received mail within 2-3 working days.	75% Said they did. 25% said they did not.
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Comparison of the 2018/19 figures against 2019/20 results demonstrated that although performance has not matched that of the previous year, the service has delivered a high standard of service. 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.

Since 2009 BM TRADA have carried out an annual surveillance audit of the Building Standards Service. The 2019 audit established the continued conformity with the departments ISO 9001:2015 management system which was found to be satisfactory with no non-conformities raised. As a result, of the Audit, BM TRADA continued the accreditation until the next proposed audit date in June 2020.

During the last year there has been extensive works undertaken in relation to developing our works procedures in relation to electronic working whilst making provision for reporting in relation to the building standards performance and operating frameworks. 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 an appointment period of six years from 1st May 2017 until 30th April 2023. All 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-year 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. On 5th February 2020 the Scottish Government undertook a surveillance visit to review the performance of the Building Standards Service. From this visit and the monitoring of quarterly performance information, the Scottish Government concluded that the service consistently delivered a strong performing service, which met customer expectations.

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.

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

- Very helpful and approachable, suggesting solutions to any problems we encountered.
- The staff were helpful and courteous, giving advice whenever I contacted them.
- All personnel involved – building standards surveyors and admin staff were extremely helpful, efficient, and professional.

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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