

BUILDING STANDARDS CUSTOMER ANALYSIS

1st April 2008 – 31st March 2009



East Ayrshire
COUNCIL

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 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 applicants' 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 feedback from customer 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 Manager following the issue of a Building Warrant and acceptance or issue of a Completion Certificate. All customers can, using the pre-paid envelope issued with the questionnaire at each decision stage, 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 customer's comments and observations; via the stakeholder's focus group meetings and through the Councils 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 period 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009 the building industry within East Ayrshire slowed down significantly due to the local and national economic impact to a development value of £66.3 Million compared to £163.5 Million in the previous yearly period which was attributed to:-

- 1174 Building Warrant applications; and
- 1903 surveys for Completion Certificates.

The table below details the performance target response and actual figures for the period 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009 along with the comparison of performance from previous years.

Customer Charter Target	01/04/08-31/03/09	2007/2008	2006 / 2007	2005 / 2006	Comments
No of Building Warrant Applications received	1174	1483	1622	1645	The number of applications submitted has fallen by 309 compared with the period during 1 st April 2007 to 31 st March 2008.
No of Building Warrant responded to within 20 WD's	80%	72%	68%	46%	An 8% increase in performance was achieved during this period
No of Decisions reached	1264	1568	1562	1685	The number of decisions reached has fallen by 304 applications compared with the period during 1 st April 2007 to 31 st March 2008.
% of Decisions reached within 6 Days	91%	85%	83%	81%	A 6% increase in performance was achieved during this period
No of Completion Certificates applied for	1903	1883	1650	1422	20 additional completion surveys were carried out during this period compared with the period during 1 st

					April 2007 to 31 st March 2008.
Average time taken to respond to a request for a Completion Certificates	3 days	5 days	8 days	5 days	An average reduction of 2 days was achieved over the period
No of Completion Certificates Determined within 3 days	75%	67%	65%	67%	An 8% increase in performance was achieved during this period

Summary of Customer Feedback Results

The customer feedback questionnaires returned during 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009 provided 130 Building Warrant questionnaires and 162 Completion Certificate questionnaires which equated to a 11% and 8.5% return with the specific results noted as follows:-

Feedback on Building Warrants

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-

- 74% of responses from Applicant
- 20% of responses from Agents
- 6% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had visited an office:-

- 57% visited an office
- 43% did not visit an office

Customers were asked which office they had visited:-

- 23% attended the Lugar Office, Cumnock
- 77% attended the Croft Street Office, Kilmarnock

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

- 54% Strongly agreed
- 29% Agreed
- 16% No opinion
- 1% Disagreed
- 0% Strongly disagreed

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

- 32% did not receive a letter
- 68% did receive a letter

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

- 68% Strongly agreed
- 18% Agreed
- 9% No opinion
- 3% Disagreed
- 2% Strongly disagreed

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

- 71% Strongly agreed
- 26% Agreed
- 5% No opinion

0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-
64% Strongly agreed
28% Agreed
2% No opinion
2% Disagreed
2% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-
66% Strongly agreed
26% Agreed
6% No opinion
2% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Feedback on Completion Certificates

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-
87% of responses from Applicant
10% of responses from Agents
3% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-
65% Strongly agreed
32% Agreed
2% No opinion
1% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and on site advice:-
54% Strongly agreed
37% agreed
8% No opinion
1% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-
56% Strongly agreed
34% Agreed
5% No opinion
1% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had considered that there had been sufficient site visits.
46% Strongly agreed
37% Agreed
13% No opinion
3% Disagreed
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there had been appropriate responses to site visit requests.
57% Strongly agreed
26% Agreed
15% No opinion
1% Disagreed
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked how they rated Building Standards during the entire Building Standard Process	59% Excellent 30% Very Good 7% Good 3% Adequate 1% Poor
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Comparison of the 2007/08 figures against the 2008/09 demonstrated that the service delivered a similar high standard of service to that of the previous year. Furthermore, 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 criterion comprising Public Interest, Internal Business, Continuous Improvement and Finance with an overall rating of Good for the Private Customer .The full report for East Ayrshire Council can be reviewed at:-

<http://www.sbsa.gov.uk/verifiers/VerificationAuditReports.htm>

Customer feedback provides a range of responses focusing on where the customer considered the service could be improved to the feedback congratulating the service and case Surveyor(s) on the service delivered. On receipt of negative customer feedback the Building Standards Manager shall review the comments along with the relevant application, consult the Surveyor, then contact the customer to hear first hand 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 Building Standards 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.

A summary of the service enhancements for the period between the 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2009 resulting from both written and verbal customer feedback and management analysis for this period are detailed as follows:

- Roll out of Customer Service Professional training course for front line staff;
- Maintain progress to reduce timescale in processing building warrants and completion certificates;
- Introduce a new local performance indicator relating to the average response time to deal with a Building Warrant;

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

- “Friendly helpful staff who answered my questions with a good attitude and manner.”
- “10/10 for all staff involved in this application including reception staff”
- “The staff who dealt with my application were very courteous and helpful and their advice and assistance undoubtedly saved me both time and money. When a layman enters the world of building standards without knowledge or previous experience it is good to know that your staff can be relied upon for good help and guidance. Thanks.”
- “This is the first time I've done anything like this and on the couple of occasions I telephoned your office for advice your staff surpassed my expectations.”
- “Very helpful staff throughout the process. Very knowledgeable staff who provided guidance and advice. Prompt responses from staff by phone/e-mail etc.”
- “Timescale for processing applications still one out of the best of all local authorities I deal with throughout Scotland.”

The Focus Group meeting held during March 2008 Architects highlighted the need for a design guide to provide comprehensive information on accessible issues. This guide has now been published and can be viewed at:-

<http://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/devser/planandbuild/bcguidance.asp>

On the 28th January 2009, a Stakeholder Focus Group meeting was held at the County Buildings, Ayr between representatives from the three Ayrshire Authorities and Architects, Engineers and Agents who use the service. The focus of the event related to:-

- The review of the AYRSHARE Customer Charter;
- Update Stakeholders on the new Regulations implemented on the 4th January 2009 relating to Fees, Forms and Energy Performance Certificates;
- Service Delivery and Performance
- E-Newsletter
- E-Building Standards
- Interpretation of Technical Standards

As a result of this meeting a joint working group has been set up with six Architects and the three Building Standards Managers to progress service delivery issues.

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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