

# **BUILDING STANDARDS CUSTOMER ANALYSIS**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010**



**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 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 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 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 period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 the building industry within East Ayrshire slowed down significantly further due to the local and national economic impact to a development value of £55.4 Million compared to £66.3 Million in the previous yearly period which was attributed to:-

- 1088 Building Warrant applications; and
- 1320 surveys for Completion Certificates.

The table below details the performance target response and actual figures for the period 1st April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 along with the comparison of performance from previous years.

<b>Customer Charter Target</b>	<b>01/04/09-31/03/10</b>	<b>2008/2009</b>	<b>2007 / 2008</b>	<b>2006 / 2007</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>No of Building Warrant Applications received</b>	1088	1174	1483	1622	The number of applications submitted has fallen by 86 compared with the period during 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2008 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2009.
<b>No of Building Warrant responded to within 20 WD's</b>	97%	80%	72%	68%	A 17% increase in performance was achieved during this period
<b>No of Decisions reached</b>	1061	1264	1568	1562	The number of decisions reached has fallen by 203 applications compared with the period during 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2008 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2009.
<b>% of Decisions reached within 6 Days</b>	96%	91%	85%	83%	A 5% increase in performance was achieved during this period
<b>No of Completion Certificates applied for</b>	1320	1903	1883	1650	583 fewer completion surveys were carried out during this period compared with the period during 1 <sup>st</sup>

					April 2008 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2009.
<b>Average time taken to respond to a request for a Completion Certificates</b>	2 days	3 days	5 days	8 days	An average reduction of 1 day was achieved over the period
<b>No of Completion Certificates Determined within 3 days</b>	85 %	75%	67%	65%	A 10% increase in performance was achieved during this period

### Summary of Customer Feedback Results

The customer feedback questionnaires returned during 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 provided 136 Building Warrant questionnaires and 187 Completion Certificate questionnaires which equated to a 13% and 14% return with the specific results noted as follows:-

#### Feedback on Building Warrants

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-  
 70% of responses from Applicant  
 29% of responses from Agents  
 1% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had visited an office:-  
 33% visited an office  
 67% did not visit an office

Customers were asked which office they had visited:-  
 31% attended the Lugar Office, Cumnock  
 69% attended the Croft Street Office, Kilmarnock

Customers were asked whether there were adequate reception facilities encountered when attending the office:-  
 49% Strongly agreed  
 29% Agreed  
 21% No opinion  
 1% Disagreed  
 0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had received a letter following their Building warrant submission:-  
 31% did not receive a letter  
 69% did receive a letter

From the correspondence received customers were asked whether they understood the letter contents:-  
 57% Strongly agreed  
 21% Agreed  
 15% No opinion  
 6% Disagreed  
 1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-  
 68% Strongly agreed  
 30% Agreed  
 1% No opinion

1% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-  
58% Strongly agreed  
34% Agreed  
6% No opinion  
0% Disagreed  
2% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-  
62% Strongly agreed  
33% Agreed  
4% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

### **Feedback on Completion Certificates**

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-  
73% of responses from Applicant  
18% of responses from Agents  
9% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-  
64% Strongly agreed  
34% Agreed  
1% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and on site advice:-  
53% Strongly agreed  
37% agreed  
8% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-  
55% Strongly agreed  
40% Agreed  
4% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had considered that there had been sufficient site visits.  
50% Strongly agreed  
37% Agreed  
11% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there had been appropriate responses to site visit requests.  
57% Strongly agreed  
31% Agreed  
10% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
1% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked how they rated Building Standards during the entire Building Standard Process	54% Excellent
	37% Very Good
	6% Good
	2% Adequate
	1% Poor

Comparison of the 2008/09 figures against 2009/10 demonstrated that the service delivered a similar high standard of service to 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 full report for East Ayrshire Council can be reviewed at:- <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/Building/Building-standards/publications/publa/verauditea>. Additionally the Service was developed to attain ISO 9001 Accreditation from BM Trada in relation to the provision of a quality Management System.

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 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 resulting from both written and verbal customer feedback and management analysis for this period are detailed as follows:

- Maintain roll out of Customer Service Professional training course for front line staff;
- Continue to reduce timescale in processing building warrants and completion certificates and increase service efficiency;
- Monitor new local performance indicator relating to the average response time to deal with a Building Warrant;
- Maintain performance in Fast Tracking of designated applications to retain high standards.

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

- “Professional advice given by Building Surveyor during process”.
- “Your performance was over and above my expectations. I felt the Building Inspector was working on my behalf as well as yours for me to get the best possible job with as little hassle as possible. He certainly kept the contractor in line and did not permit ‘cutting corners’ and has my sincere thanks for that”
- “Generally very helpful and informative. This allowed us to complete the project with little fuss and additional expenditure whilst meeting standards”.
- “The Building Standards team have been excellent throughout the process. They have been pro-active and willing to provide good advice at all stages. It has been a pleasure to work with EAC Building Standards on this project”.
- “I appreciated the help and advice I received from personnel on site and at the office. I also found information on the Council website helpful”.
- “Over recent weeks needed advice re completion certificate, late building warrants etc. Everyone I spoke to either on the phone or when I called into the office was exceedingly helpful and got the home visit and certificates very quickly”.

### **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](mailto:david.mcdowall@east-ayrshire.gov.uk)**

**David McDowall BSc (Hons) MRICS  
Building Standards Manager**