

# **BUILDING STANDARDS CUSTOMER ANALYSIS**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013**



## **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 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 the building industry within East Ayrshire expanded slightly, due to the local and national economic impact, to a development value of £41.5 Million compared to £37 Million in the previous yearly period which was attributed to:-

- 971 Building Warrant applications; and
- 1311 surveys for Completion Certificates.

The table below details the performance target response and actual figures for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 along with the comparison of performance from previous years.

<b>Customer Charter Target</b>	<b>01/04/12-31/03/13</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>2010/2011</b>	<b>2009/2010</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>No of Building Warrant Applications received</b>	971	1043	1064	1088	The number of applications submitted has fallen by 72 compared with the period during 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2012.
<b>No of Building Warrants responded to within 20 WD's</b>	98%	100%	99%	97%	Performance fell by 2% compared with the previous year.
<b>No of Decisions reached</b>	1014	880	1047	1061	The number of decisions reached has risen by 134 applications compared with the period during 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2012.
<b>% of Decisions reached within 6 Days</b>	95%	97%	96%	96%	Performance fell by 2% compared with the previous year.
<b>No of Completion Certificates applied for</b>	1311	1118	1650	1320	193 more completion surveys were carried out during this period compared with the period during 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2012.
<b>Average time taken to respond to a request for a Completion Certificates</b>	1 day	1.3 days	2 days	2 days	The performance of the previous year was improved further during this period.
<b>No of Completion Certificates Determined within 3 days</b>	92%	92%	91%	85 %	The previous year's high level of performance was maintained during this period

## Summary of Customer Feedback Results

The customer feedback questionnaires returned during 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 provided 110 Building Warrant questionnaires and 151 Completion Certificate questionnaires which equated to a 11.3% and 11.5% return with the specific results noted as follows:-

### Feedback on Building Warrants

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-

59% of responses from Applicant
38% of responses from Agents
3% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had visited an office:-

31% visited an office
69% did not visit an office

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

53% Strongly agreed
20% Agreed
27% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

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

34% did not receive a letter
66% did receive a letter

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

72% Strongly agreed
21% Agreed
7% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

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

78% Strongly agreed
17% Agreed
5% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

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

67% Strongly agreed
31% Agreed
2% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

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

71% Strongly agreed
23% Agreed
5% No opinion
1% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

## Feedback on Completion Certificates

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-  
79% of responses from Applicant  
16% of responses from Agents  
5% of responses from Contractors

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-  
76% Strongly agreed  
23% Agreed  
1% No opinion  
0% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-  
66% Strongly agreed  
29% agreed  
5% No opinion  
0% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-  
72% Strongly agreed  
24% Agreed  
4% No opinion  
0% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had considered that there had been sufficient site visits.  
60% Strongly agreed  
32% Agreed  
8% No opinion  
0% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there had been appropriate responses to site visit requests.  
63% Strongly agreed  
30% Agreed  
6% No opinion  
1% Disagreed  
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked how they rated Building Standards during the entire Building Standard Process  
70% Excellent  
23% Very Good  
5% Good  
1% Adequate  
1% Poor

Comparison of the 2011/12 figures against 2012/13 demonstrated that the service delivered almost as high a 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>

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 Operations Manager - Building Standards and Development Management 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 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 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;
- Utilise a 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:-

- I found the Building Standards Department to be very amenable and knowledgeable. They did everything within their power to make the application and approval procedures as simple as possible and were always on hand for advice.
- On my visits to Kilmarnock Building Standards office to clarify/request further information I was treated mannerly and professionally by staff who had wealth of knowledge and spoke in laymen terms which made my application and works so much
- Prompt response to queries, pro-active approach, helpful advice.
- Being able to communicate by e-mail meant not having to drive to your office, saving a little on the carbon footprint and resolving any issues before a final paper copy of the altered drawings were sent.
- When I first met Building Standards the whole process was dealt with at super-efficient speed.

- Member of staff I dealt with was extremely helpful and made the process very easy for myself.
- Very professional attitude. Extremely helpful comments. Knowledgeable staff.
- Application was dealt with timeously and I felt it was beneficial to come into the offices and deal with the queries face to face. This helped speed up the approval process.
- All aspects of dealing with Building Control was made easier due to the nature of how we were dealt with, if our main case worker was not available information was still given, all in all excellent service.
- All advice was good and helpful and appropriate to our needs, excellent help.
- Despite expecting the process to be difficult, all contact with the department was very helpful and handled extremely professionally.
- Unfortunately the builder/agent working on my behalf did not notify EAC of the intent to start building. It was only when I applied for an ABW that I discovered this. EAC undertook the checks retrospectively and I cannot fault EAC in any way. The service was professional, courteous and all visits were carried out when planned. I am extremely pleased with the excellent service provided by EAC.
- Prompt attendance at site when requested. All visits to site were helpful/good advice given/at agreed time i.e. punctual.

### **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)**

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