

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 provide feedback via an online form relating to the service provided at each decision stage 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 2023/2024 there has been a 9% decrease in new building warrant applications with the income generated from these applications also decreasing by 16.5%. *Please clarify*

The table below details the performance target response and actual figures for the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 along with the comparison of performance from previous years.

Customer Charter Target	2023/2024	2022/2023	2021/2022	2020/2021	Comments
No of Building Warrant Applications received	754	825	998	952	The number of applications submitted has decreased by 71 compared with the previous year's figures.
No of Building Warrants responded to within 20 WD's	99.7%	100%	100%	100%	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.
No of Decisions reached	701	737	933	877	701 building warrants were determined during the period which is decrease of 5% when compared to the previous year.
% of Decisions reached within 6 Days	93.8%	93%	91.9%	83.6%	There has been an increase in performance compared to last year. The service has continues to perform efficiently.
No of Completion Certificates applied for	1280	1174	1522	1054	106 more completion certificates were applied for during this period compared with the period

					during 1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023
Average time taken to respond to a request for a Completion Certificates	2 days	1.5 days	1.6 days	1.7 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.
No of Completion Certificates Determined within 3 days	91.5%	92.1%	89%	71.3%	Performance decreased by 0.6% compared with the period during 1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023. In conclusion the Service overall has performed to a high standard during an uncertain economic time.

Summary of Customer Feedback Results

The customer feedback questionnaires returned during 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024 provided 9 Building Warrant questionnaires and 18 Completion Certificate questionnaires which equated to a 1.2% and 1.4% 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:-
 25% of responses from Agents
 0% of responses from Contractors
 75% 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:-
 Not applicable.

Customers were asked whether they had received a letter following their Building warrant submission:-
 38% did not receive a letter
 62% did receive a letter

From the correspondence received customers were asked whether they understood the letter contents:-
 60% Strongly agreed
 20% Agreed
 20% No opinion
 0% Disagreed
 0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-
 86% Strongly agreed
 0% Agreed
 0% No opinion

	14% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-	57% Strongly agreed 29% Agreed 0% No opinion 14% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-	72% Strongly agreed 2% Agreed 0% No opinion 14% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked if they had received mail within 2-3 working days.	80% Said they did. 20% said they did not.

Feedback on Completion Certificates

Customers were asked to identify their involvement in process:-	78% of responses from Applicant 11% of responses from Agents 11% of responses from Contractors
Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by courteous staff:-	76% Strongly agreed 24% Agreed 0% No opinion 0% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether there was sufficient guidance and site advice:-	78% Strongly agreed 22% agreed 0% No opinion 0% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether they had been dealt with by knowledgeable staff:-	94% Strongly agreed 6% Agreed 0% No opinion 0% Disagreed 0% Strongly disagreed
Customers were asked whether they had considered that there had been sufficient site visits.	82% Strongly agreed 12% Agreed 6% No opinion

0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

Customers were asked whether there had been appropriate responses to site visit requests. 81% Strongly agreed
6% Agreed
13% No opinion
0% Disagreed
0% Strongly disagreed

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

Customers were asked if they had received mail within 2-3 working days. 100% Said they did.
0% said they did not.

Comparison of the 2023/2024 figures against 2022/2023 results demonstrated a strong performance during a highly disruptive period, and continued delivery of 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 2023 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 on the 4th July 2024.

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 service has successfully been re-appointed by Scottish Government to undertake the verification function for a period of six years until 30th April 2029. As part of the re-appointment, the service will have to continue to show it can meet the Operating and Performance Frameworks and be resourced to retain staff with appropriate building standards related qualifications and experience. Out with the verification function the service has to resource an enforcement function to administer building regulations compliance, continuing requirement enforcement, building warrant enforcement, defective or dangerous buildings.

The Scottish Government, Building Standards Division published, via the National Customer Survey Dashboard, the results of the most recent National

Customer Satisfaction Survey. The report and research undertaken concluded that service provided by East Ayrshire Council Building Standards was above the national average in relation to the Overall Customer Satisfaction, Meeting Customer Expectations, Quality and Accessibility of Service and Communications. The Service has consistently and continues to deliver a strong performing service above the national average, which met customer expectations.

The Service was also awarded the Building Standards Performance Excellence award by the Scottish Minister, Patrick Harvie MSP at the LABSS Conference in September 2023. The service continues to deliver a high quality service to all customers and has consistently maintained excellent performance across all KP0's reported quarterly to Scottish government over the last period of appointment.

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:-

- "Calls from the building control officer to discuss the application were useful and helpful."
- "Friendly staff on the telephone, Blair our surveyor was available to answer any of our queries and guide me with what was required to support my application."

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 Pamela.Clifford@East-Ayrshire.gov.uk

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