



# Building Standards Verification

## Annual Performance Report

2019 - 2020

Review Date – July 2020

[www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/buildingstandards](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/buildingstandards)

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## 1. Introduction to the Verifier

The verification performance report is a strategic planning and management tool that provides information about the local authority building standards service, communicates the vision and strategy and sets out the performance against strategic goals and targets.

Building standards verifiers in Scotland are required to utilise the performance report to manage, monitor, review and develop strategies for their business and should focus on the performance framework's core perspectives and cross-cutting themes.

### Aberdeen City

Aberdeen City is the capital of north-east Scotland. It is known throughout the world as the 'Granite City'. It is the centre of commercial activity for the oil industry and has been named as the 'Energy Capital of Europe'. Indeed, the oil industry along with the construction industry is one of the main employers in the area.



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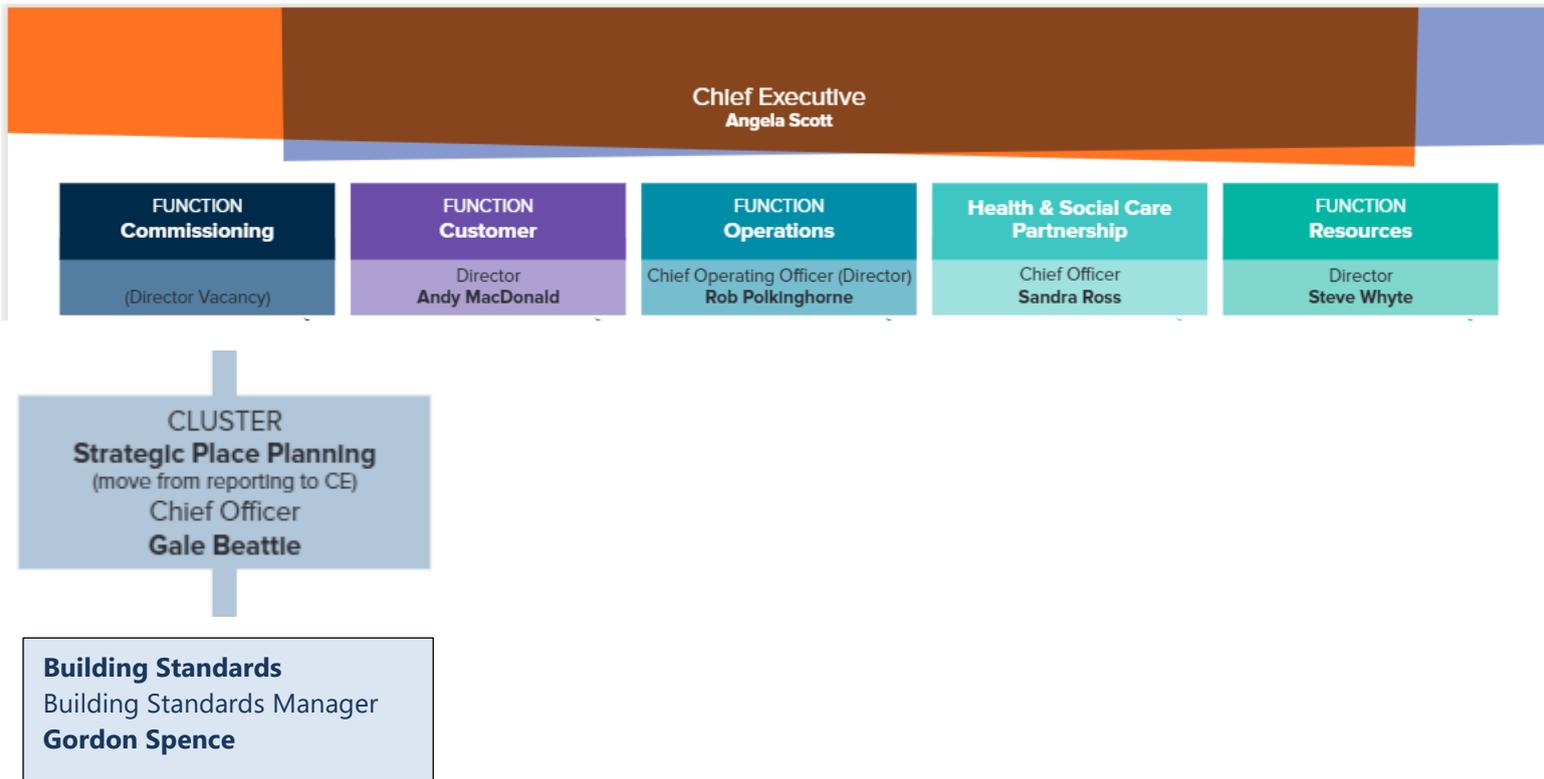
The population of Aberdeen City is 227,130 (reference 'Behind the Granite – 2015' and covers a geographical area of 186 sq.km and is a mixture of rural and urban areas. It has the 8<sup>th</sup> highest population of Scotland's local authorities. Aberdeen City is mainly an urban area with a mix of high density populations and commercial premises within the core of the city. Less dense residential areas spread from the

city centre with large pockets of industrial areas supporting the oil industry. The city also supports two separate universities, a large hospital complex, 3 large shopping malls and a busy airport/heliport.

Despite continued uncertainty, green shoots are appearing in the City's oil and gas industry since the economic downturn at the end of 2015. This factor, coupled with considerable public-private investment and action to improve infrastructure & diversity and broaden the City's economic base has meant continued activity in the housing market and a recent return of activity in the commercial world.

The City became the first Council in Scotland and one of the first in the UK to secure a bond issue on the London Stock Exchange, the sum of £370M being the largest ever achieved by any local authority. The City Region Deal heralded a further £250M of investment from the UK and Scottish Governments. The Regional Economic Strategy and the Oil & Gas Technology Centre will help anchor Aberdeen as a global energy hub whilst investment through the Strategic Infrastructure Plan into projects such as the Aberdeen Western Peripheral route, the Berryden Corridor improvement and Third Don Crossing are set to result in significant enhancement to connectivity and infrastructure. The new Aberdeen Exhibition & Conference Centre and the Aberdeen Harbour development are further examples of projects underway that will help kick-start transformational change and adaption.

Aberdeen City Council is currently undergoing a Transformation Programme representing a complete change in how we manage and deliver services to the people and place of Aberdeen. This is known as the Target Operating Model (TOM) and is a move away from the traditional Directorate structure to a functional model:



Strategic Place Planning is led by a Chief Officer reporting directly to the Chief Executive due to the current Commissioning Director vacancy. The Building Standards team sit within Strategic Place Planning as part of the Commissioning Function alongside Planning Development & Applications, Strategic Planning functions and Major Infrastructure Planning.

## 2. Building Standards Verification Service Information

Aberdeen City Council main office is located at Marischal College, Broad Street, Aberdeen and it is from within this single site that the Building Standards Service is located.

The purpose of the buildings standards system is to protect the public interest. The system sets out the essential standards that are required to be met when building work or conversion of a building takes place in order to meet building regulations.

The building standards system checks that proposed building work or conversion of a building meets standards; inspections are limited to a minimal necessary to ensure that legislation is not avoided. The control of work on site is not down to the system but is a matter for contracts and arrangements in place between a builder and client.

Verifiers, appointed by Scottish Ministers are responsible for the independent checking of application for building warrants to construct or demolish buildings, to provide services, fittings or equipment in buildings, or for conversions.

In addition to verification duties, the Building Standards team also deal with dangerous and defective buildings, inspect all premises subject to a Theatre, Entertainment and Liquor Licences and provide advice to the appropriate Licensing Committee and Licensing Board. Building Standards are also represented on the Safety at Sports Ground Working Group for Pittodrie Football Stadium. The Building Standards Manager also has responsibility for managing Roads Projects, the Public Transportation Unit, Property Clearance Certificates and Street Naming & Numbering.

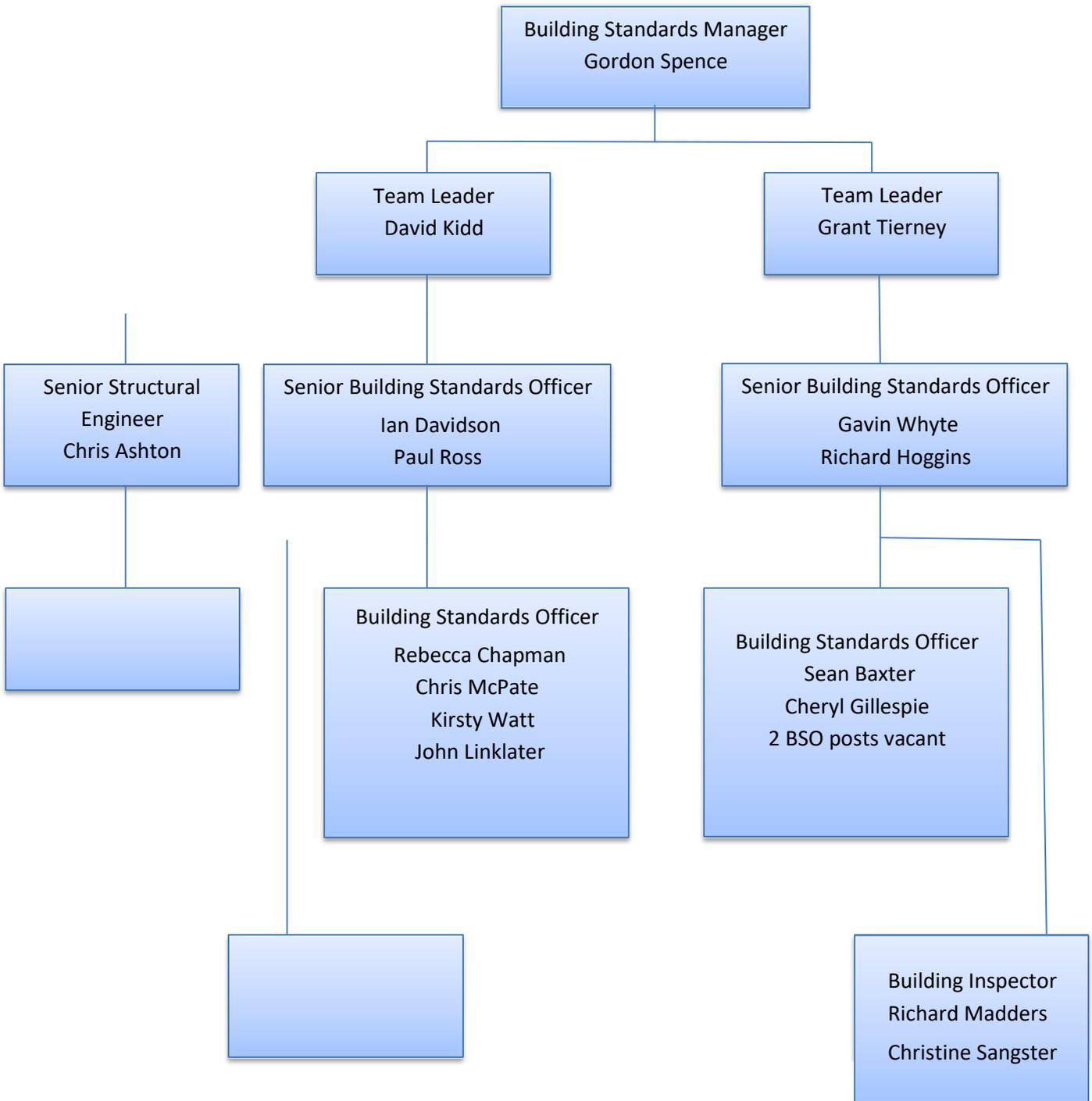
As part of the Council re-structure a Service Review was completed by an independent assessment body called the Planning Advisory Service. The review focussed on the service functions of Building Standards, Development Management, Transport, Policy & Environment and the wider Corporate Vision & Leadership. The service review covered interviews with key staff, customers and a peer challenge process. The outcome from the service review for Building Standards resulted in 3 recommendations. An excerpt is below:

**Building Standards**

1. Building Standards is an exemplar service and our recommendations reflect the need to maintain this excellence over the longer term.

B1	Carry out a succession-planning exercise to increase resilience
B2	Lead a review of on-site visits, to ensure that there is maximum corporate value from the various times different officers inspect or survey buildings
B3	Contribute the experience and views of the building standards team to the other parts of P&SD to help share a positive “can do” operating culture

The staffing structure for the Building Standards team can be found overleaf:



A breakdown of verification and applications support staff can be found below followed by the age profile of staff:

		<b>Building Standards Verification Service</b>
<b>Managers</b>	No. posts	3 posts (Manager & Team Leaders)
	Vacant	
<b>Verification officers</b>	No. posts	11 (SBSO & BSO)
	Vacant	2 BSO
<b>Technician</b>	No. posts	2 Inspectors
	Vacant	1 Structural Inspector
<b>Office support/ clerical</b>	No. posts	6
	Vacant	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		21

<b>Verification Staff age profile</b>	<b>Number</b>
Under 30	4
30-39	3
40-49	2
50 and over	5

### **3. Strategic Objectives**

Our vision is to deliver on the aims and objectives of the Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan

- Improving the quality of our natural and built environment
- Instilling the people of Aberdeen with pride in their City
- Growing the prosperity and economic security of our Citizens

For Strategic Place Planning, this means making a visible difference to the quality of the city's urban and natural environment by promoting high quality development and providing an effective infrastructure to make us a world class strategic location.

To do this we must think strategically, facilitate development, engage positively with communities and the business sector and be open and transparent in our decision making. We also have a key role in delivering the vision for the City and Shire as

expressed through regional plans and strategies. Planning and Sustainable Development is tasked with seeing that Aberdeen stays at the forefront of planning for the future and the Building Standards service contributes to this goal as part of the development pipeline.

Within Building Standards the aim is to provide a service which is timeous and responsive to the differing needs of developers, contractors and individuals while at the same time providing information which is accurate and up to date.

Building Standards key objectives in the coming year are to implement the Key Performance Outcomes and commitments borne from the Verifiers national submission to Ministers.

Broadly, developments in the following areas will be a priority:

- Maintain and extend the Verification appointment period
- Engaging with Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) to deliver a consistent customer experience nationally and further enhance Local Authority Verification
- Participate in the Grampian Consortium
- Implement Performance Framework and Operating Framework and report to Scottish Government on same
- Continue to develop improvements in performance and the customer experience
- Maintain the Customer Service Excellence award

## 4. Key Performance Outcomes and Targets

Continuous improvement is recognised as key in raising the bar for quality, compliance, consistency and predictability of the verification service. This cannot be achieved without benchmarking, setting targets and measuring performance. This has been at the core of the Building Standards Balanced Scorecard system since its introduction in 2005.

More recently, Key Performance Outcomes (KPOs) have been reviewed by Scottish Government working with Local Authority Building Standards Scotland and the result is a new Performance Framework which better measures Verifier's performance in relation to the needs of customers.

The framework is based on 3 core perspectives:

- Professional Expertise and Technical Processes
- Quality of Customer Experience; and
- Operations and Financial Efficiency

These are coupled with cross cutting themes of:

- Public Interest
- Continuous Improvement; and
- Partnership Working
- 

From April 2017, the KPOs are as follows:

<b>Professional Expertise &amp; Technical Processes</b>	
KPO1	Minimise time taken to issue a first report or issue a building warrant or amendment to building warrant.
KPO2	Increase quality of compliance assessment during the construction processes
<b>Quality Customer Experience</b>	
KPO3	Commit to the building standards customer charter
KPO4	Understand and respond to the customer experience
<b>Operational &amp; Financial Efficiency</b>	
KPO5	Maintain financial governance
KPO6	Commit to eBuilding Standards
KPO7	Commit to objectives outlined in the annual performance report

The targets set against the above outcomes are as detailed below:

<b>KPO1 Targets</b>	
1.1	95% of first reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports. (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report)
1.2	90% of building warrants and amendments issued within 10 days from receipt of all satisfactory information – all building warrants and amendments. (not including BWs and amendments issued without a first report)
<b>KOP2 Targets</b>	
	Targets to be development as part of future review of KPO2.
<b>KPO3 Targets</b>	
3.1	National customer charter is published clearly on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least annually).
3.2	95 % of BSD requests for information on a BSD 'Verifier Performance Reporting Service for Customers' case responded to by verifier within 5 days.
<b>KPO4 Targets</b>	
4.1	Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10.
<b>KPO5 Targets</b>	
5.1	Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).
<b>KPO6 Targets</b>	
6.1	Details of eBuilding Standards to be published clearly on the verifier's website.
6.2	75% of each key building warrant related process being done electronically <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan checking</li> <li>• Building Warrant or amendments (and plans) being issued</li> <li>• Verification during construction</li> <li>• Completion certificates being accepted</li> </ul>
<b>KPO7 Targets</b>	
7.1	Annual performance report published clearly on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).
7.2	Annual performance report to include performance data in line with KPOs and associated targets (annually covering previous year e.g. April 2016 – March 2017).

## **5. Performance Data**

### **Professional Expertise & Technical Processes**

#### **Protocols**

A suite of Corporate and Building Standards specific policies and procedures are in place to deal with every aspect of the verification process and especially to address the requirements identified within Appendix B of the Operating Framework. A complete operating manual for our back office system (Uniform) is accessible on-line for any member of staff.

#### **Performance Managements Systems**

The Uniform system includes the Enterprise task module which acts as a performance management system at Officer, Team Leader and Manager levels. The system identifies tasks to be completed and operates a traffic light system for those tasks which contribute to KPOs. Work is easily re-allocated when circumstances dictate and applicants and agents are kept informed of the progress of their application.

#### **Training & Development**

The Council operate a corporate Performance, Review & Development appraisal system for all staff which is linked to performance related advancement through the pay scale. From the appraisal, specific training needs are identified and requests for training funding are submitted to the senior management team. Staff are encouraged and supported to pursue Chartered status – 2 members of staff gained this in the past year. Furthermore, in-housing training sessions are provided, joint training within the Grampian Consortium and staff are supported to other additional CPD events e.g. NICEIC/SELECT training.

#### **Benchmarking/shared service**

Aberdeen Council in conjunction with Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils form the Grampian Consortium Group of LABSS – the Fire Service are also represented. This group meet on a regular basis and its main purpose is to establish a consistent approach to interpretation of policies and technical guidance, performance benchmarking, share best practice and facilitate training. Aberdeen staff and the Grampian Consortium are actively involved with national policy and working groups via LABSS.

Aberdeen is also a member of the Building Standards Customer Service Excellence Benchmarking Group which includes all other Building Standards holders of Customer Service Excellence and private sector holders including Lovells Construction and the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector charity Crossreach. The group meet twice a year to share customer service best practice.

### **Succession Planning**

Succession planning is supported through the support provided to staff to advance their qualifications and experience. In addition, links have been made with Robert Gordon's University to provide work place experience for 3<sup>rd</sup> year Building Surveying students and updates to the Building Standards system are provided to final year Architecture students.

Staff within the team support LABSS at Executive and Management levels and the team vet applications for the Scottish Type Approval Scheme.

Staff are also provided with a clear progression route through verification competency levels supported by more experienced members of staff.

### **Performance against KPOs**

Performance measurement should be a blend of quantitative figures and qualitative measures such as customer satisfaction. The National Customer Satisfaction survey provided an overall satisfaction rating of 80% for Aberdeen City Building Standards. Our own surveying via Customer Service Excellence covers a larger return of surveys than the national survey and the results indicated an overall satisfaction level of 90%. Another indicator of good performance is that the Building Standards team have not had a single complaint recorded through the Council complaints process nor reported directly to the Building Standards Division.

During the period Jan to Dec 2017, Aberdeen City supported the City of Edinburgh Council by checking building warrant applications. Edinburgh is experiencing a boom in the economy and was finding difficulty in resourcing the service. This offer was partly to explore and confirm the ability to transfer and process applications remotely through the E-Building Standards portal. A process was set up, a legal contract developed and the system worked successfully. As a result, the performance with Aberdeen did suffer as can be seen from the Q2 & Q3 figures. Since ending the support to Edinburgh, our own performance has been affected by a reduction of checking officers within Aberdeen.

Coupled with performance is the available fee income to cover the costs of verification. The actual income versus expenditure shows that the fee income is not

covering the costs of resourcing verification. The measure is staff costs + 30% (130%) indicates a well-resourced verification service. As can be seen, the average across last year is 102% which indicates that the service is appropriately funded. For this reason, it is unlikely that a business case for additional resources will be successful until an upturn in the economy resultant fee income is evidenced.

The actual performance against the KPOs can be seen in the table on the next page.

KPO	Aberdeen City	2019/20 - Q1	2019/20 - Q2	2019/20 - Q3	2019/20 - Q4	Average
1.1	95% of first reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	98.18%	97.22%	100.00%	99.30%	98.68%
1.2	90% of building warrants and amendments issued within 10 days from receipt of all satisfactory information – all building warrants and amendments (not including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	82.97%	88.38%	91.36%	85.97%	87.17%
3.1	National customer charter is published prominently on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least quarterly).	Published prominently (with review)				
3.2	95% of BSD requests for information on a BSD 'Verifier Performance Reporting Service for Customers' case responded to by verifier within 5 days.	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'				
4.1	Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10	8.5	8.5	8.5	8.1	8.1 (most recent survey)
5.1	Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).	196.77%	145.88%	134.00%	133.84%	152.62%
6.1	Details of eBuilding Standards are published prominently on the verifier's website.	Published prominently				
6.2	75% of each key building warrant related processes being done electronically (Plan checking; BWs and amendments (and plans) issue; Verification during construction; CC acceptance)	4 of 4 done				
7.1	Annual performance report published prominently on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).	Published prominently (with review)				
7.2	Annual performance report to include performance data in line with KPOs and associated targets (annually covering previous year e.g. April 2016 – March 2017).	Includes all performance data	Published with performance data			

## Quality Customer Experience

Building Standards were recredited in Oct 2018 for Customer Service Excellence. The report highlighted nineteen areas of good practice and four areas were awarded the highest grading of “compliance plus”. For example, a compliance plus was awarded for the Service’s customer journey maps. Subsequently, the service has assisted other organisations in both private and public sectors in customer journey mapping. Customer interaction is a key element and the service works hard to gain feedback which can be developed into service improvements. Many compliments are received - some examples can be found on the next page:

The Building Inspector was very helpful and gave very good advice which helped us through some difficult problems. He showed a genuine concern for our work and demonstrated a willingness to help solve problems in an efficient cost effective manner.

Full support was given on all aspects.  
Clear timescales for responses were set out and all were met.

The overall service was very good from the first phone call to ask advice, to submitting an application, to receiving approval was all very straight forward.

Discussed what our client brief was and the process of obtaining building warrant followed on very easily.

All the aims within the Performance Framework related to customer are secured by holding Customer Service Excellence accreditation. Customer Service Excellence is designed to operate on three distinct levels:

1. As a driver of continuous improvement. By allowing us to self-assess our capability, in relation to customer focussed service delivery, identifying areas and methods for improvement.
2. As a skills development tool. By allowing individuals and the team to explore and acquire new skills in the area of customer focus and customer engagement, thus building capacity for delivering improved services.
3. As an independent validation of achievement. By allowing us to seek formal accreditation to the CSE standard, demonstrate competence, identify key areas for improvement and celebrate their success.

The Customer Service Excellence covers competency, systems and improvement plans in all the following areas:

- Customer communication strategies – web site, newsletters, training events
- Customer Charter – published on our web-site
- Customer feedback (national/local)/analysing and changes to systems. – feedback questionnaires, improvement plans, etc
- Accessibility of service – all available channels
- Pre-application advice – encouraged at all levels of development
- Customer agreements – offered especially for large developments
- Customer dissatisfaction (procedural or technical) – full complaints process available

More importantly, holding CSE changes the culture and focus of customer service and puts it front of house when providing our service.

## **Operational & Financial Efficiency**

### **Team**

As can be seen from the team structure and age profiles, there is a healthy range of senior and younger staff. Aberdeen City have retained structural resources within the team which enhances the speed and competency of the service in relation to non-certified work.

## **Time Recording**

Time recording of verification services from application to approval and site start to completion is sampled for 3 months every year. This is compared with the time spent on non-verification services.

## **Financial monitoring/governance**

Aberdeen City ensures strong financial governance by setting an annual budget and a tight monitoring system. Monthly meetings are held between the Building Standard Manager and a financial representative at which income & expenditure trends are covered.

## **IT systems**

Building Standards along with our Development Management colleagues operate an integrated paperless case management system hosted by iDox and a suite of products. The system went live in July 2016 after heavy investment in monies and resources with the ultimate aim being to provide end to end electronic processing. This aim was achieved and all applications are processed through to completion acceptance without the need for paper.

## **Digital services**

Whilst paper submissions are not excluded, all aspects of the verification process are offered digitally to customers. The success of the system is evidenced by the fact that 81% of new applications are submitted via the National portal.

## **Finance systems**

The Council utilise the financial system offered by SAP Business Objects with complete monitoring and reporting capabilities.

## **Internal communication strategies**

A team wide meeting is held every month with a set agenda. Individual staff member meetings on a 1-2-1 basis are often superseded by the close working relationships within the team. Staff training and supervised training further contribute to internal communication.

## **Engagement**

As mentioned previously, Aberdeen City is part of the Grampian Consortium and wider LABSS network with the aim of providing consistency and improving the quality of service delivery at regional and national levels.

Through CSE engagement, regular meetings with our agent's focus group are held and specific training needs for our agents can be identified and implemented.

The Strategic Place Planning wider service also holds regular "Townhall meetings" where a better understanding of other services service provision is discussed leading to improved delivery of the development pipeline.

## 6. Service Improvements and Partnership Working

In the previous 12 months (2018/19) we did:

Number	Continuous Improvement Action	Status
1	Continuously review end to end electronic processing	Complete
2	Retain Customer Service Excellence	Complete
3	Capture Sustainability Labelling data	Complete
4	Report to Public Protection Committee	Complete
5	Review and improve plan sharing	Complete
6	Develop quality assurance for warrant approvals and completion acceptances	Complete

In the next 12 months (2019/20) we will:

Number	Continuous Improvement Action	Status
1	Extend re-appointment period	3 months
2	Competency Assessment for verifiers	3 months
3	Extend focus group to housebuilders	6 months
4	Capture CCNP data	6 months
5	Implement quality assurance for warrant approvals and completion acceptances	6 months
6	Investigate extending focus group to small/medium contractors	12 months
7	Continuously review end to end electronic processing	12 months

**In the previous 12 months (2018/19) we worked with:**

- Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils via the Grampian Consortium Group
- Other Local Authorities via LABSS
- Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
- Oakleaf Fire Engineer
- CSE National Benchmarking Group

- Planning Advisory Service
- Grampian Joint Assessors

**In the next 12 months (2019/20) we will work with:**

- Aberdeenshire and Moray Councils via the Grampian Consortium Group
- Other Local Authorities via LABSS
- Scottish Fire & Rescue Service
- Oakleaf Fire Engineer
- CSE National Benchmarking Group
- Housebuilders
- Grampian Joint Assessors

**7. Building Standards – Additional Data**

The performance data relates to the building standards verification performance framework and workload data relates to the numbers of building warrant applications; completion certificates; certificates (design, construction, energy and sustainability); enforcement cases:

Data for 2018/19:

Building warrants and amendments to building warrants	Applications	1417
	Decisions	1395
Completion Certificates	Submissions	2084
	Decisions	2032
Certification	Certificates of Design submitted	737
	Certificates of Construction submitted	416
Energy Performance Certificates - EPCs	Copy certificates received (domestic)	Not recorded
	Copy certificates received (non domestic)	Not recorded
Statement of Sustainability	Copy certificates received (domestic)	712
	Copy certificates received (non domestic)	1
Enforcement	Notices served under sections 25 to 30	18
	Cases referred to procurator fiscal	0
	Cases where LA has undertaken work	2

## **Contact Details**

The Building Standards Service is one of the functions sitting within the Strategic Place Directorate of Aberdeen City Council.

### **Opening Hours:**

Monday - Friday 8.30am - 5.00pm except for public holidays

### **Where we are:**

Building Standards Team  
Ground Floor North  
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