ABERDEEN

Building Standards Verification

Annual Performance Report

2023 - 2024

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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.
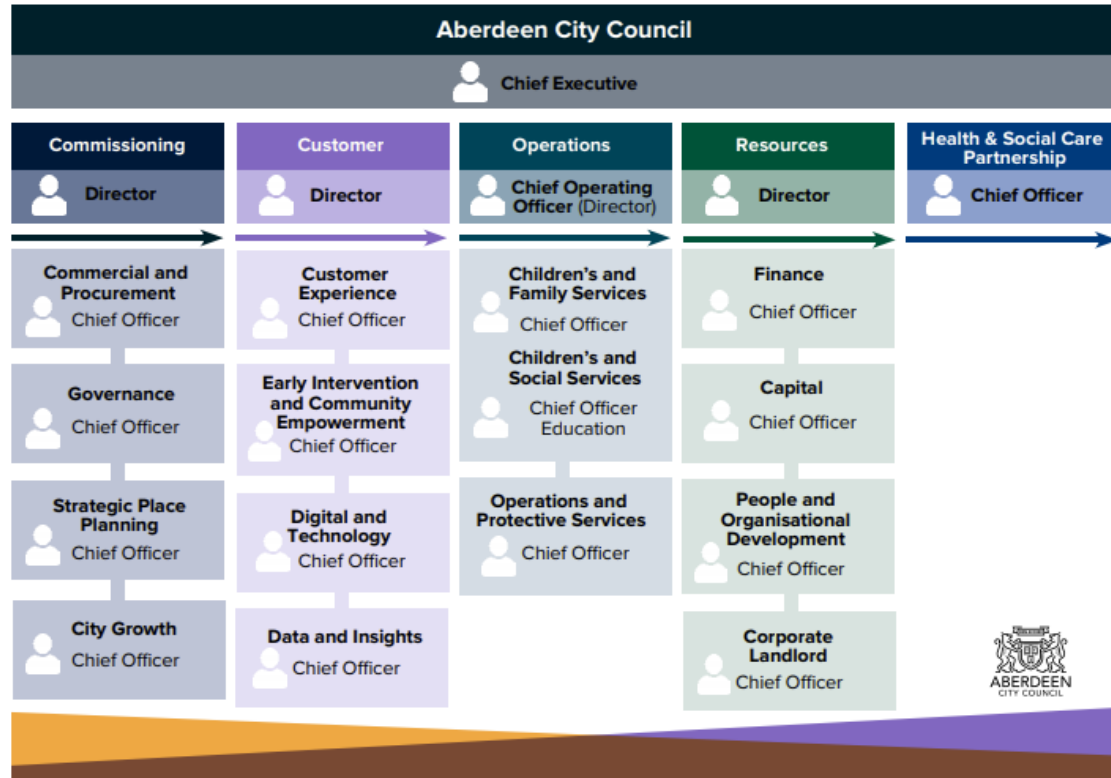
<u>Aberdeen City</u>

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.

The population of Aberdeen City is 227,430 (reference Scottish Government Census 2021) and covers a geographical area of 186 sq.km and is a mixture of rural and urban areas. It has the 8th 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 and COVID 19. 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.

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 Director of Commissioning. The Building Standards team sit below the Chief Officer within Strategic Place Planning as part of the Commissioning Function alongside Planning Development & Applications, Strategic Planning functions, Local Development Plan and Major Infrastructure Planning.

The Building Standards team is responsible for and delivers a verification service for building warrant applications, compliance during construction including determining completion certificates. Enforcement, including unauthorised works and protecting the safety of the public with regard to potentially dangerous and defective building In addition, to the statutory duties of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003, the team are also responsible for the Safety at Sports Grounds, Street Naming and Numbering, Section 89 Permits, Property Clearance Certificates and Licensing Inspections.

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 Building Standards team are currently trialling a hybrid approach to work which involves working from home or their chosen remote location.

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 Technical Team, (Administration), 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:
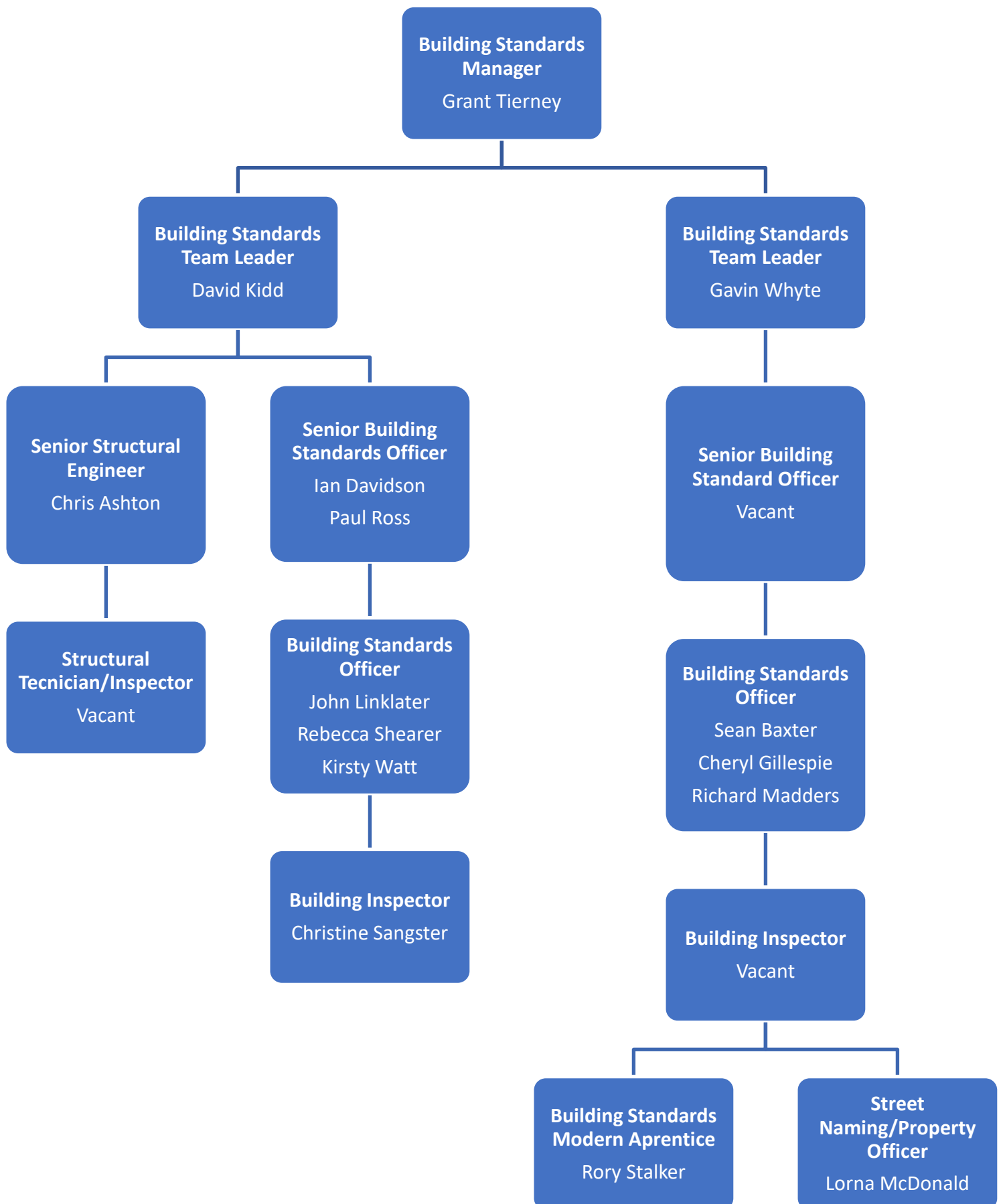
Building Standards

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

Head of Building Standards Verification Service	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
	Angela Scott – Chief Executive	**Gale Beattie** – Director	**David Dunne** – Chief Officer

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

Building Standards Manager

Grant Tierney

Building Standards Team Leader

David Kidd

Building Standards Team Leader

Gavin Whyte

Senior Structural Engineer

Chris Ashton

Senior Building Standards Officer

Ian Davidson

Paul Ross

Senior Building Standard Officer

Vacant

Structural Tecnician/Inspector

Vacant

Building Standards Officer

John Linklater

Rebecca Shearer

Kirsty Watt

Building Standards Officer

Sean Baxter

Cheryl Gillespie

Richard Madders

Building Inspector

Christine Sangster

Building Inspector

Vacant

Building Standards Modern Aprentice

Rory Stalker

Street Naming/Property Officer

Lorna McDonald

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

		Building Standards Verification Service
Managers	No. posts	**3 posts (Manager & Team Leaders)**
	Vacant	
Verification officers	No. posts	**9 (SBSO, SSE & BSO)**
	Vacant	**1 SBSO**
Technician	No. posts	**1 Inspector**
	Vacant	**2 Inspector/Structural Inspector**
Modern Apprentice	No. Post	**1 MA**
	Vacant	**0**
Property Officer/Street Naming	No. Post	**1 Property Officer**
	Vacant	**0**
Office support/ clerical	No. posts	**5**
	Vacant	**1**
TOTAL		**23**

Verification Staff age profile	**Number**
Under 30	**6**
30-39	**11**
40-49	**4**
50 and over	**3**

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. Strategic Place Planning 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 since the Balanced Scorecard system was 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:

Professional Expertise & Technical Processes	
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
Quality Customer Experience	
KPO3	Commit to the building standards customer charter
KPO4	Understand and respond to the customer experience
Operational & Financial Efficiency	
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:

KPO1 Targets	
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)
KOP2 Targets	
	Targets to be development as part of future review of KPO2.
KPO3 Targets	
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.
KPO4 Targets	
4.1	Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10.
KPO5 Targets	
5.1	Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).
KPO6 Targets	
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 • Plan checking • Building Warrant or amendments (and plans) being issued • Verification during construction • Completion certificates being accepted
KPO7 Targets	
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 2022 – March 2023).

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 Continuous 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 are currently working towards professional membership. Further education for career development is encouraged with 1 member of the team currently undertaking BSc Degree at Robert Gordon University on day release. A modern Apprentice was employed in cohort 1 of the National initiative linked the Scottish Governments, Futures Board, Workforce Strategy. Furthermore, in-house training sessions are provided, joint training within the Grampian Consortium and staff are supported to other additional CPD events e.g. NICEIC/SELECT training.

Competency Assessment

Every member completed the Building Standards Competency Assessment System, CAS, in 2022. The results were returned and accepted by the Scottish Government. CAS was developed by LABSS in partnership with the BSD, this being the first time every building standards professional has been assessed against the same criteria

Nationally.

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 the 3rd 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 3rd year Building Surveying students when resources are available given the service demands 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. National Customer Satisfaction survey provided an overall satisfaction rating of 81% 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 97%. 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.

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 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 110% which indicates that the service just covers the cost of delivery.
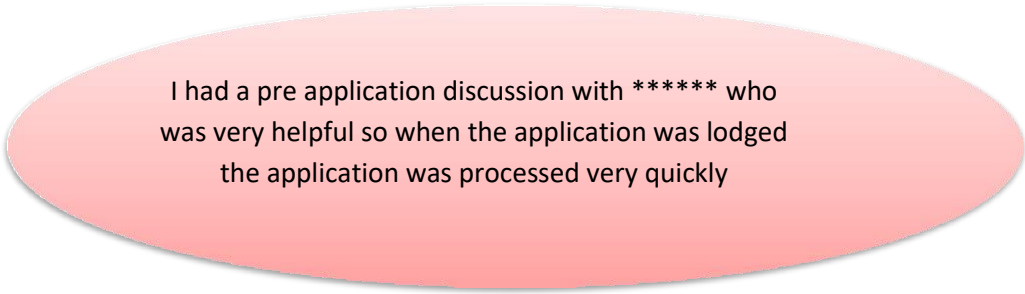
However, this follows a poor financial year 2021/22 where the impact of Covid-19 was significant on application fees received and the Local Authority had to part finance the running of the Building Standards Service. For this reason, it is unlikely that a business case for additional resources will be successful until an upturn in the economy resultant fee income is evidenced over a sustained period.

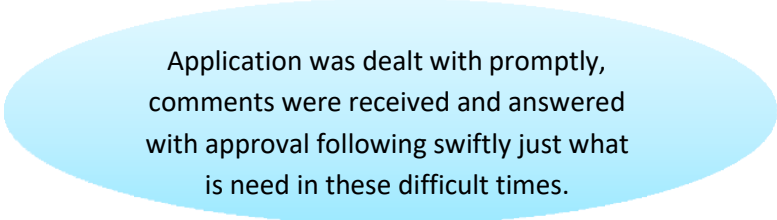The actual performance against the KPOs can be seen in the table on the next page.

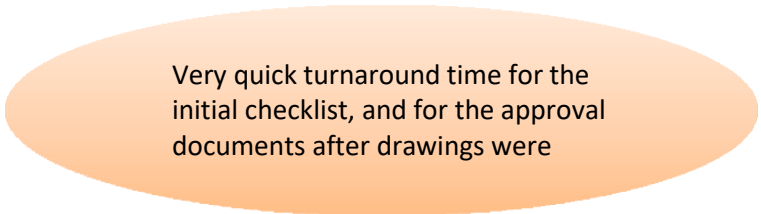| KPO	Aberdeen City	2022/23 - Q3	2022/23- Q4	2023/24 - Q1	2023/24 - Q2	Average
KPO	95% of first reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	96.32%	98.50%	96.50%	97.06%	97.10%
KPO	90% of building 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).	82.67%	84.94%	80.41%	85.34%	83.34%
KPO	National customer charter is published prominently on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least quarterly).	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)
KPO	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'	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'
KPO	Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10	8.1	7.8	7.8	7.9	7.9
KPO	Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).	85.92%	158.73%	87.71%	107.04%	109.85%
KPO	Details of eBuilding Standards are published prominently on the verifier's website.	Published prominently	Published prominently	Published prominently	Published prominently	Published prominently
KPO	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	4 of 4 done	4 of 4 done	4 of 4 done	4 of 4 done
KPO	Annual performance report published prominently on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)	Published prominently (with review)
KPO	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	Includes all performance data	Includes all performance data	Includes all performance data	Published with performance data

Quality Customer Experience

We continue to be accredited for Customer Service Excellence this year. The most recent assessment was carried out virtually for the first time and we were able to showcase the public realm transformation of Schoolhill and reopening of Aberdeen Art Gallery as the case study. A small number of customers joined the auditor on Microsoft Teams to give their feedback on the service received. Although a virtual assessment brought new challenges, the assessment took place after six months of lockdown and we were in a position to reflect how we had dealt with the changes the pandemic had brought to working life. Examples of compliment received in the last year can be found below
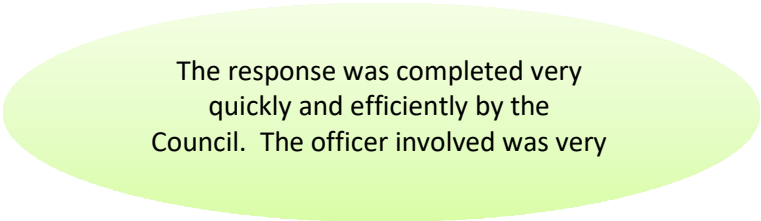
I had a pre application discussion with ****** who was very helpful so when the application was lodged the application was processed very quickly

Application was dealt with promptly, comments were received and answered with approval following swiftly just what is need in these difficult times.

Very quick turnaround time for the initial checklist, and for the approval documents after drawings were

The response was completed very quickly and efficiently by the Council. The officer involved was very

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. The current contract for these service was extended until October 2025.

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 100% 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 Improvement and Partnership Working

In the previous 12 months (2021/22) we did:

Number	Continuous Improvement Action	Status
1	Continuously review end to end electronic processing	Complete
2	Retain Customer Service Excellence	Complete
3	Every professional member of the team completed CAS	Complete
4	Report to Public Protection Committee	Complete
5	Establish weekly 1-2-1 video calls with every team member	Complete
6	Develop quality assurance for warrant approvals and completion acceptances	Complete

In the next 12 months (2023/24) we will:

Number	Continuous Improvement Action	Status
1	Extend re-appointment period	Continuous
2	Competency Assessment for verifiers	Continuous
3	Complete Service Review - Inspections	8 months
4	Virtual Worker – Automated plan stamping and warrant approval	8 months
5	Review quality assurance for warrant approvals and completion acceptances	8 months
6	Develop Knowledge & Training Hub	12 months
7	Raised Structure Permits, (Section 89), electronic application process	12 months

In the previous 12 months (2020/21) 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
- Grampian Joint Assessors

In the next 12 months (2021/22) 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 2022/23: *Corporate data reporting under development, data currently not available.

Building warrant and amendments to building warrants	Applications	1308
	Decisions	909
Completion certificates	Submissions	*
	Decisions	806
Certification	Certificates of design	*
	Certificates of construction	*
Energy performance certificates – EPC's	Certificates received – domestic	Not recorded
	Certificates received – Non domestic	Not recorded
Statement of sustainability	Certificates received – domestic	*
	Certificates received – Non domestic	*
Enforcement	Notices served under sections 25-30	8
	Cases referred to procurator fiscal	0
	Cases where the LA undertook work	0

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. Hybrid working pattern in trial, office meetings by appointment only.

Where we are:

Building Standards Team
Ground Floor North Marischal
College
Broad Street
Aberdeen
AB10 1AB

Contact details:

Telephone: 03000 200 292 – option 4

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Building Standards Manager: Grant Tierney

Chief Officer: David Dunne