

BUILDING STANDARDS PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24

1.0 HEADLINES

- 1.1 This paper updates members of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing (PPSL) Committee on the progress which has been made to deliver the Building Standards Balanced Scorecard 2023/25, highlighting achievements and performance in 2023-24, and identifying additional priorities for the forthcoming year. The [Building Standards Balanced Scorecard 2023-25](#) was approved by PPSL Committee on the 21st June 2023.
- 1.2 Building Standards is a statutory service with its duties and powers detailed in the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 and relevant legislation. The purpose of the Building Standards service is primarily to secure the health, safety, welfare and convenience of persons in or about buildings and of others who may be affected by buildings or matters connected with buildings; further the conservation of fuel and power; and further the achievement of sustainable development. We also ensure that the service operates in a customer focused manner which facilitates development and assists the local economy.
- 1.3 Building Standards have made positive progress in delivering the service plan priorities and exceeding the targets for 2023/24.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that members of the Planning, Protective Services and Licensing Committee consider and note the positive performance by Building Standards in 2023/24.

3.0 BUILDING STANDARDS BALANCED SCORECARD

- 3.1 The Building (Scotland) Act 2003 and associated regulations, sets out the essential standards required to be met for works to existing buildings or to new construction. Building Standards assess detailed applications for proposals to ensure that building work meets these standards; and inspections of works on site, although these are limited to a minimal necessary to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and the approved building warrant consent. The control of work on site is a matter for contracts and arrangements in place between a builder and client. Argyll and Bute Council are the duly appointed

verifier for the Argyll and Bute Council area. We are one of 32 local authority verifiers as appointed by Scottish Ministers and thus are responsible for the verification process within Argyll and Bute.

3.2 Building Standards have responsibilities, in addition to their verifier’s functions, which account for approximately 19% of surveyor workload averaged over the authority area and is increasing. These include responding to dangerous buildings and structures, unauthorised works, document searches, maintaining the Building Standards register and working with partners across a range of issues including licensing, events and the built environment.

3.3 Good progress has been made in delivering the priorities outlined in the [Building Standards Balanced Scorecard 2023-25](#) and targets for the key national performance measures have been exceeded. **Appendix 1** of this report provides a progress report on each of the key priorities but key achievements to highlight are as follows:

- i. The Councils Building Standards service was awarded with a verification licence by the Scottish Government for a six year period. This is the maximum duration of licence and allows for the verification of building warrants for developments within Argyll and Bute and for other commercial work on behalf of other local authorities.
- ii. Met and exceeded all targets for key performance measures in 2023-24.

Key National Performance measure	2023/24 Target	2023/24 Actual
The percentage of requests for a building warrant responded to within 20 days	95%	97.2%
The average time taken to respond to a requests for completion certificate	3 days	2 days
The percentage of building warrants issues (or otherwise determined) within ten days	90%	99.2%
The percentage of completion certificates issued/accepted (or otherwise determined) within 3 days	90%	100%
The percentage of applicants providing feedback either satisfied or very satisfied with our service	90%	100%

- iii. The cost of living crisis and increased building costs is resulting in a reduction in building warrant applications across Scotland. This is evident in Argyll and Bute, with an 8% reduction in warrants from 22/23 with a total of 1690 warrants received and determined, including 335 applications from other local authorities. Building warrant income for 23/24 was **£1,108,751 and £7,667 above the projected 23/24 budget.**
- iv. Processed a total of 1690 warrants which were received, compared with 1844 in 2022/23. Argyll and Bute generated warrants actually increased from 1262 to 1355 in 2023/24.
- v. The service was reaccredited with the Customer Services Excellence (CSE) Award on the 23rd April 2024, increasing the number of

compliance-plus criteria to 26, the highest across all Council services. This reflects the excellent “customer-focus” across the team and the auditor concluded that:-

“you clearly remain at the forefront of excellence and the recommendation for retention of the CSE Standard is well deserved”.

- vi. Presentations were given to stakeholders and contractors in regards to the new updates to the Domestic and Non-Domestic Technical Handbooks. These were well received by our customers.
- vii. Completed the actions outlined in the Building Standards Internal Audit Improvement Plan 2023 increasing our resilience to report from systems.
- viii. Our workforce strategy focusing on “growing our own” continues to be successful. In 2023/24, two Assistant Building Standards Surveyors achieved professional membership and met the criteria to be promoted to Building Standards Surveyors. At the same time we appointed another Assistant Building Standards Surveyor, taking the staff complement back to two Assistants.
- ix. There have been 104 dangerous/defective building cases raised and responded to by Building Standards in 2023/24 at various properties across Argyll and Bute, including the former White Hart Hotel, Campbeltown.

3.4 **Challenges and issues** facing Building Standards service for 2024/25 are:

- i. Our reliance on commercial income from other local authorities is unsustainable as there has been a downturn in building warrant numbers across Scotland. This creates an additional budget pressure and need for action going forward.
- ii. Buildings in disrepair. There is an ever increasing workload associated with action being required by Building Standards in relation to non-maintained buildings in disrepair to assess whether they pose an imminent risk to public safety. This work is being progressed through the Councils Housing Emergency Action Plan.
- iii. Changing landscape for Building Standards. A number of changes are being introduced to the Building Standards system through the work of the Building Standards Futures Board Programme. This follows the recommendations made by the expert review panels on Compliance & Enforcement and Fire Safety, in the aftermath of failings in Edinburgh School buildings and the Grenfell Tower fire, to strengthen the Building Standards system in Scotland. The changes to strengthen the system will require additional verification compliance capacity and financial resources for local authority verifiers over the coming years. The increase in the building warrant fees is part of a planned 3-year model to increase fees annually, dependent on the outcome from monitoring, reporting, and auditing of the application of increased building warrant fee income at local authority level in support of increased verification service capacity. It is intended that the increase in fees will be used by local authorities to support and invest in their Building Standards

Teams as necessary to meet revised Verification Operating and Performance Frameworks being introduced from 1st of April 2024 and to meet future increased inspection and other compliance workload. An Action Plan will be developed over the coming months.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Council's Building Standards service continues to deliver its statutory duties with a continued focus on providing performance and customer focussed services. The team have worked hard in 2023/24 to deliver the Balanced Scorecard and reaccreditation of the Customer Services Excellent Award with 26 compliant plus criteria, is testament to the team.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – consistent with Council policies for built environment and public safety.
- 5.2 Financial – the Service is self-financed through income generated from building warrant verification activity.
- 5.3 Legal – statutory service under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 and associated legislation.
- 5.4 HR – none.
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty – the Fairer Scotland Duty, Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010, came into force in April 2018. The duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland, such as Argyll and Bute Council, to pay due regard to (actively consider) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome, caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions and how this has been implemented.
- 5.5.1 Equalities - all activities comply with all Equal Opportunities/Fairer Scotland Duty policies and obligations.
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty - all activities have complied with the council's socio-economic duty.
- 5.5.3 Islands – interventions have been delivered across the Argyll and Bute area, including island communities.
- 5.6 Climate Change – work of the Service supports climate change and net zero through the implementation and enforcement of building standards.
- 5.7 Risk – sustainability of securing commercial work from other local authorities together with increasing demand from dangerous buildings work and Scottish Governments drive for increased pre-completion inspections, reduces capacity and creates additional resilience issue.
- 5.8 Customer Service – the Service achieved Customer Standards Excellence.

5.9 Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – none.

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Appendix 1: Progress report against Building Standards Balanced Scorecard
2023/25

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	Priority	Progress report May 2024	Status
1.	Managing performance and workload against available resources and in the Councils finance outlook 2024-27.	This is ongoing and work is aligned to Councils Budget Strategy. Continuing to provide support on a commercial basis with one other Scottish local authority and securing additional income Professional resource reduced by 0.5FTE from May 2024 due to maternity leave	Ongoing
2.	Continue to provide a verification service to our customers and our statutory duties under the Building (Scotland) Act 2002	Ongoing and exceeding national performance standards and targets.	Ongoing
3.	Monitor the external environment and the impact of the Scottish Building Standards Hub and Scottish Governments Construction Compliance and Notification Plan (CCNP)	Ongoing at a local and national level through the Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) Actively participated in work associated with Argyll and Bute Councils Housing Emergency.	Ongoing
4.	Ensuring compliance with the new updates to the Technical Handbooks post February 2023 and further changes in June 2023.	Implemented new Technical Standards and completed training across the team Impact of changes discussed at Building Standards User Forum and through newsletters to agents and customers	Complete
5.	Tackle the pressures on Building Warrant fee income due to the economic downturn.	Budget income for building warrants in 2023/24 of £1,108,751, exceeding the target by £7,667 National downturn out with our control but continuing to source commercial income from another local authority and Babcock Revised RICS Building Cost Information Surveys (BCIS) of Tender prices were adopted and posted on our website. This information is used to calculate the appropriate Building Warrant fee payable in £/square metres for works of different character New Scottish Government fee structure implemented as of 1 April 2024	Ongoing
6.	Workforce planning and the replacement of experienced officers due to retire over the next 3-5 years	Workforce plan revised with HR Assistants promoted to Building Standards Surveyors Recruited new Assistants and currently have two undergoing training and development plans	Ongoing

7.	Continue to grow and develop our team in meeting the national building standards competency framework	Continued training and development to existing team Team Day in March 2024	Ongoing
8.	Maximising our use of digital technology and new ways of working including remote verification and improvements to software information management	Implemented “Near-me” platform which provides video/audio communications as an alternative to MS Teams and Skype. This is less data-driven and supports our Remote Verification Inspection work. Completed the actions outlined in the Building Standards Internal Audit Improvement Plan 2023 increasing our resilience to report from systems.	Ongoing
9.	Migration of Document Management System in line with e-Building Standards	This project has been delayed due to a variety of issues relating to ICT, the systems functionality and testing arrangements. Timescale revised to September 2024 and Project Board to review the direction of the project.	Delayed
10.	Make preparations for assessment of the Customer Services Excellence Award	This work is complete and Building Standards successful gained reaccreditation of the CSE award (following an audit on the 9 April 2024) with a further 2 compliance plus criteria, taking the total to 26. This is the highest across the Council.	Complete but will prepare for 2025
11.	Working and supporting our customers and stakeholders	This work continues	Ongoing
12.	Working with service partners as part of Argyll Property Action Group (APAG) in tackling non-maintained properties prior to any potential enforcement action	Work continues to support all Property Action Groups. Safety Advisory Groups and to respond to dangerous building reports	Ongoing