National Customer Satisfaction Survey to Support the Building Standards Verification Performance Framework

Report for: Argyll and Bute Council

December 2021

Report prepared by:

Pye Tait Consulting
Royal House 110 Station Parade Harrogate HG1 1EP
Tel: 01423-509433
Fax: 01423-509502

Email: info@pyetait.com

Web: www.pyetait.com

The opinions expressed in this report - other than the reported views of research subjects - are those of the author.

Report commissioned by:

Building Standards Division
Directorate for Local Government and Communities
Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Livingston
EH54 6GA

Tel: 0300 244 4000
e-mail: buildingstandards@gov.scot
web: https://www.gov.scot/bsd

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Building Standards Division, Directorate for Local Government and Communities, Denholm House, Almondvale Business Park, Livingston, EH54 6GA.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Survey

1. The building standards system in Scotland was established under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003. The Act gives powers to Scottish Ministers to make building regulations, procedure regulations, fees regulations and other supporting legislation as necessary to fulfil the purposes of the Act. The purposes include setting building standards and dealing with dangerous and defective buildings.

2. The remit of the building standards system is to protect the public interest by setting out the standards to be met when building or conversion work takes place, to the extent necessary to meet the building regulations.

3. The standards are intended 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.

4. The role of the building standards verifier is to protect the public interest by:

   - Providing an independent check of applications for building warrants to construct buildings, provide services, fittings or equipment in buildings, or to convert buildings;
   - Granting or refusing building warrants;
   - Carrying out an independent check of construction activities through the process of reasonable inquiry; and
   - Accepting or rejecting completion certificates.

5. Verifiers are appointed by Scottish Ministers and the Act provides for a variety of verifiers should they be required. At present, the only appointed verifiers are the 32 Scottish local authorities, each covering their own geographical area.

6. In 2011 Pye Tait Consulting, on behalf of the Scottish Government, developed a set of nine national Key Performance Outcomes (KPOs), which were implemented as part of the 'Building Standards Verification Performance Framework' and launched on 1st May 2012. The intention of these was, through more accurate and effective comparisons, to ensure consistency and quality in terms of outputs and overall service, along with a greater focus on peer review, benchmarking and sharing of best practice. Additionally, the KPOs underpinned a strong culture of continuous improvement.

7. In 2013/14 the Scottish Government commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to develop and run the first national customer satisfaction survey for building standards. This was based on the need to obtain nationally consistent data on customer perceptions of their local authority verifier building standards service.

The first survey provided baseline data for trend analysis in subsequent years and was repeated in 2015 and each year since then.[1]

1.2. Changes from May 2017

1. In 2015, the Scottish Government commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to evaluate the performance of local authorities in their role as verifiers,[2] with an aim to inform Scottish Ministers in the lead-up to the next appointment of verifiers from May 2017. The evaluation identified various considerations including the scope for a review and refresh of the performance framework.

2. In 2016, the Scottish Government completed this review in consultation with Local authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) and with independent input from Pye Tait Consulting. The 32 local authorities were re-appointed on 1st May 2017 for varying lengths of time based on their prior performance, some of which were subsequently re-appointed for a further period from 1st May 2020. A full review of appointment periods is planned to be undertaken before 1st May 2023.[3] The new 'Building Standards Performance Framework for Verifiers' was also implemented from May 2017.[4]

3. Two of the seven new KPOs, categorised under 'Quality Customer Experience', aim to ensure that verifiers adhere to the commitments in the building standards customer charter and meet or exceed customer expectations. The 2021 survey aligns with KPO4 – titled 'Understand and respond to the customer experience'. The purpose of this KPO is for local authority verifiers to monitor customer satisfaction with the building standards service and ensure it meets or exceeds customer expectations.

1.3. Proposed changes for future years

1. In early 2019, the Building Standards Futures Board was established to provide guidance and direction on developing and implementing recommendations made by the Review Panels on Compliance and Enforcement and Fire Safety. The Board's programme of work aims to improve the performance, expertise, resilience and sustainability of the Scottish building standards system.

2. In 2020, Acorn Learning was commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake a review of the national customer satisfaction survey. This research found that the current satisfaction survey is highly valued and plays a vital role in measuring service quality across Scotland, and the ability to compare

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[1] The Scottish Government (2014) National Customer Satisfaction Survey to Support the New Verification Performance Framework (Phase 2 report). Available at: www.gov.scot/Resource/0045/00456855.pdf

[2] The Scottish Government (2016) Evaluation of the performance of local authorities in their role as building standards verifiers. Available at: http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00495402.pdf

[3] Further details about the 2017 re-appointment of verifiers are available at: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Building/Building-standards/verification/

[4] The Scottish Government (2017) Building Standards Performance Framework for Verifiers. Available at: http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00516415.pdf

performance year-on-year is important. The research did, however, note that there is scope for continuous improvement in the way satisfaction is measured.

3. One of the Futures Board's workstreams was the 2021 review of the Operating and Performance Frameworks to assist verifiers in assessing their service against requirements. Reviewing and improving how customer feedback is collected and reported can help to ensure that a modernised, reliable and flexible solution can be found.

4. In 2021, the Scottish Government commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to identify and propose a preferred model which the Scottish Government (Building Standards Division) could use to deliver the national customer survey for building standards.[5] The future model that was proposed as the preferred option, and which has since been taken forward by the Scottish Government for testing and piloting, is a short, sharp survey for customers to complete at one of two stages: at approval of building warrant, or acceptance of the completion certificate. The survey will be rolling/ongoing and is expected to comprise a short set of six to ten questions with one open-text box for comments. This model is intended to be used to evaluate customer satisfaction from 2022 onwards.

1.4. Survey Methodology

1. The 2021 survey questionnaire (a copy is presented in Appendix I) was shortened compared to the 2020 version. The aims of this were twofold: to remove questions that were no longer fit-for-purpose and to improve the response rate. Questions removed include:

    - For which of the following reasons did you make contact with your local authority verifier Building Standards service?
    - Are you aware of the need to notify the Building Standards service before warrantable work commences?
    - Are you aware of the new Construction Compliance Notification Plan (CCNP) which is issued by the local authority verifier at the same time as the building warrant is granted?
    - Did you have an inspection visit by Building Standards service staff?
    - Have you visited the Building Standards section of the local authority verifier's website?
    - Did you visit the offices of the local authority verifier Building Standards service?
    - How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of the Building Standards service offices?

2. In addition, a number of small changes were made to existing survey questions to reflect the necessary shift to virtual working due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

    - A new sub-question was added to the current Q14 to ask for customers' satisfaction with the thoroughness of the virtual inspection; and

[5] The Scottish Government (2021) Building standards - verification service: customer experience evaluation - future model. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-model-evaluate-customer-experience-part-building-standards-verification-service/

- Two questions in Section 6: Accessibility were revised from “in person” to “in person / virtually”.

3. The scope of the survey was all building standards customers between 1st April 2020 and 31st March 2021, defined as:

   - Applicants for building warrants (including any agents);
   - Submitters of completion certificates (including any agents); and
   - Others that have interacted with the building standards service.

4. Local authorities supplied their customers’ contact details (name and email address only) to Pye Tait Consulting for the express purpose of being invited to participate in the survey. On advice from the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO) following GDPR coming into force in May 2018, the national customer satisfaction survey is in the legitimate interests of the buildings standards system and its customers. However, prior to GDPR, customers may have previously opted out of being contacted for the purpose of this survey, and local authorities double-checked with these customers if they still wished to opt out of their details being shared with Pye Tait.

5. The survey opened on 4th October 2021 and closed on 4th November 2021. It was hosted online and customers with email addresses were directly invited by Pye Tait Consulting to participate. Local authorities were also at liberty to promote the survey to their own customers (i.e. those within scope) as appropriate, with some promoting the survey via social media channels.

6. When completing the survey, customers were presented with a link relating to the specific local authority to which their response related. Customers of multiple local authorities were presented with links for each local authority of which they had been a customer and thus could complete the survey multiple times, once for each local authority.

1.5. Presentation of results

1. Customer satisfaction survey reports have been produced at a national (Scotland) level, for seven consortium groups and for all individual local authorities in Scotland.

2. This report presents the findings for customers of **Argyll and Bute Council.**

3. The findings are anonymous and based on the perceptions of customers responding to the survey. They indicate possible strengths and weaknesses in customer service although they do not explore the extent to which any particular issues may be within or outside of local authority control.

4. The results have not been subject to statistical tests to determine the significance of any apparent patterns and should therefore be treated with caution. Percentages shown in charts may not add up to precisely 100% due to the impact of rounding.

5. Certain charts in this report refer to a base number of ‘respondents’ (meaning total customers answering that particular survey question) and others refer to a

base number of ‘responses’ (total boxes ticked for survey questions where customers could choose more than one answer).

The following colour key applies to Tables 2.2.a, 2.3.a, and 2.4.a

Colour key	Numerical rating questions	Percentage questions
Green (G)	7.5 and higher	75% and higher
Amber (A)	Between 6.5 and 7.4	Between 65% and 74%
Red (R)	6.4 and below	64% and below

Note that the colour-coding metrics used reflect The Scottish Government’s updated performance measurement requirements.

2. Results

2.1. Total Survey Responses

1. Total survey responses for Argyll and Bute are shown in Table 2.1.a. This includes a comparison between the response rate for Argyll and Bute and the national (Scotland) response rate.

Table 2.1.a Achieved sample and response rate

A	Number of customer email addresses supplied to Pye Tait Consulting	702
B	Of these – number of customers unique to Argyll and Bute (i.e. not also customers of other local authorities):	515
C	Total survey responses attributed to Argyll and Bute:	97
	Response rate for Argyll and Bute (C as a percentage of A):	13.8%
	Response rate for Scotland (for reference):	14.5%
Notes	For comparison purposes, the national response rate in 2020 was 14.5%. However, higher volumes of customer email addresses were supplied by local authorities this year than in 2020, resulting in the highest number of responses to date since the survey was first run.	
Source	Pye Tait Consulting, 2021	

2.2. Overall Satisfaction

1. Customers were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the local authority Building Standards service on a scale from 1 ‘not at all satisfied’ to 10 ‘completely satisfied’ (Table 2.2.a).

Table 2.2.a Overall satisfaction with the building standards service

	All customers	Direct applicants/ submitters	Agents	Other
2021 average rating	8.0 (G)	7.9 (G)	8.3 (G)	-
2020 average rating	8.6 (G)	9.0 (G)	8.3 (G)	9.0 (G)
2019 average rating	8.5 (G)	8.4 (G)	8.8 (G)	-
2021 average rating for Scotland*	7.1 (A)	7.2 (A)	7.0 (A)	7.4 (A)
Note	*National average			
Source	Pye Tait Consulting, 2021			

2.3. Meeting expectations

1. Customers rated the extent to which they felt the local authority Building Standards service had met their expectations, on a scale from 1 ‘not at all’ to 10 ‘completely’ (Table 2.3.a).

Table 2.3.a Extent to which the service met expectations

	All customers	Direct applicants/ submitters	Agents	Other
2021 average rating	8.1 (G)	7.8 (G)	8.7 (G)	-
2020 average rating	8.4 (G)	8.5 (G)	8.4 (G)	8.0 (G)
2019 average rating	8.2 (G)	7.9 (G)	8.8 (G)	-
2021 average rating for Scotland*	7.2 (A)	7.3 (A)	7.2 (A)	7.2 (A)

Note *National average

Source Pye Tait Consulting, 2021

2.4. Main results and comparisons

1. Table 2.4.a presents the 2021 headline customer satisfaction results.
2. The colour coding shows the trend in the local authority’s results between the 2019 survey, 2020 survey, and the 2021 survey.
3. The 2021 Scotland-wide national results are also shown for information.

Table 2.4.a 2021 Headline Customer Satisfaction Results

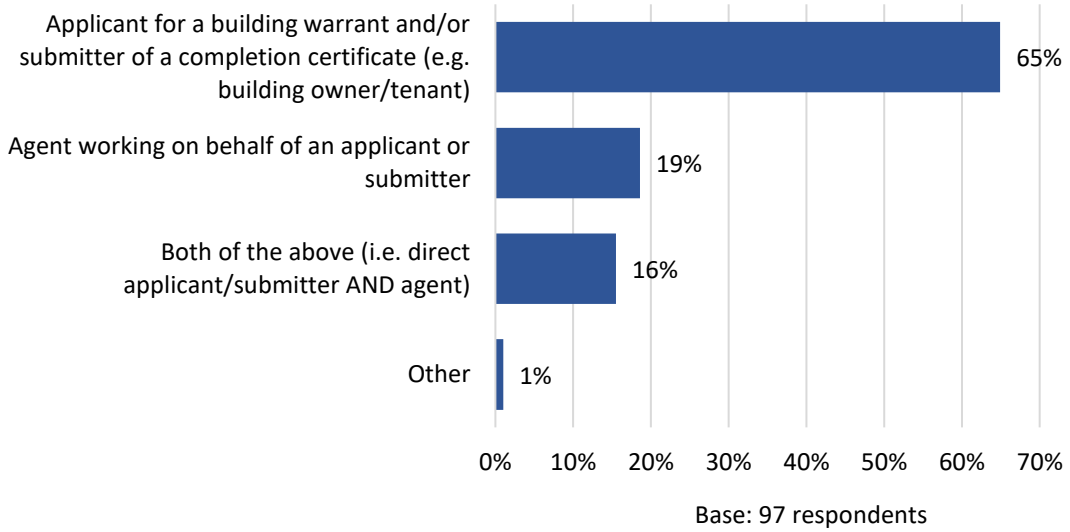
Measures	Argyll and Bute 2021	Argyll and Bute 2020	Argyll and Bute 2019	Scotland 2021
Overall Satisfaction				
Overall satisfaction with service (out of 10)	8.0 (G)	8.6 (G)	8.5 (G)	7.1 (A)
Extent to which the service met expectations (out of 10)	8.1 (G)	8.4 (G)	8.2 (G)	7.2 (A)
Very/fairly satisfied with the timeliness of various aspects of the service	66% (A)	72% (A)	74% (A)	54% (R)
Kept very/fairly well informed about the progress of an application or submission	74% (A)	76% (G)	73% (A)	59% (R)
Strongly agree/agree to some extent that sufficient advice and guidance was received to meet needs	79% (G)	82% (G)	73% (A)	63% (R)
Strongly agree/agree to some extent that Building Standards service staff were polite and courteous	87% (G)	97% (G)	86% (G)	80% (G)
Very/fairly satisfied with the quality of the advice and guidance received from inspection staff	57% (R)	89% (G)	85% (G)	60% (R)
Satisfied with the accuracy of written information (out of 10)	8.5 (G)	8.7 (G)	8.4 (G)	7.9 (G)
Satisfied with the quality of written information (out of 10)	8.4 (G)	8.6 (G)	8.3 (G)	7.8 (G)
Building Standards service staff are accessible if I want to meet them in person	63% (R)	71% (A)	65% (A)	48% (R)
Building Standards service staff are approachable	83% (G)	88% (G)	82% (G)	66% (A)
Source	Pye Tait Consulting, 2021			

3. Respondent profile

3.1. Respondent profile data and figures

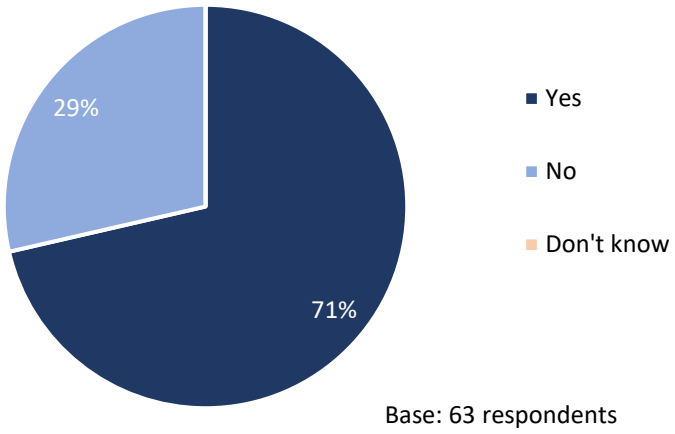
1. This section sets out the profile of survey respondents for Argyll and Bute based on specific criteria.

Figure 3.1.a Customer type



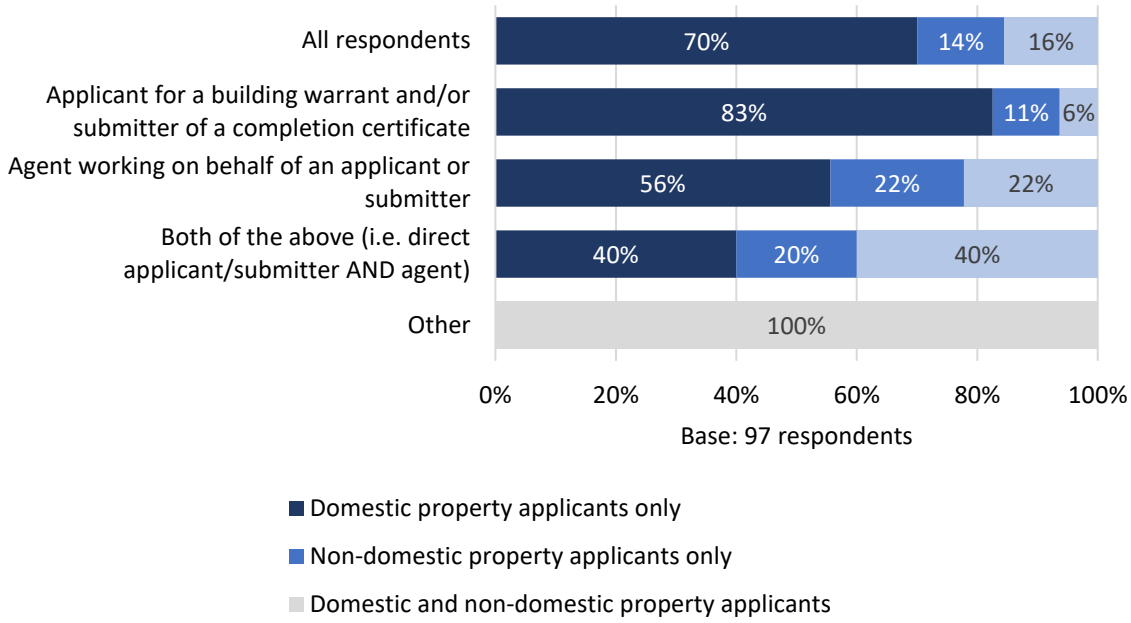
Source Pye Tait Consulting, 2021

Figure 3.1.b Use of an agent (direct applicants/submitters only)



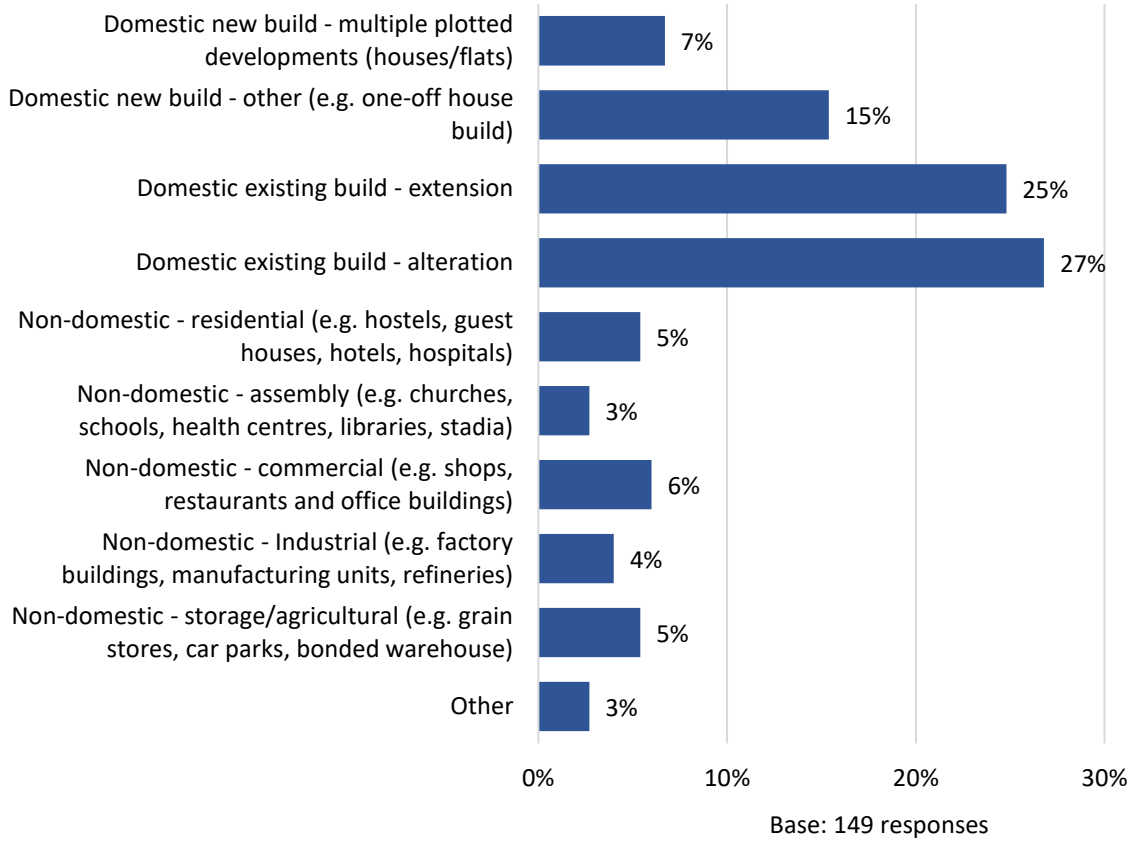
Source Pye Tait Consulting, 2021

Figure 3.1.c Customer type by category of application



Source Pye Tait Consulting, 2021

Figure 3.1.d Categories of building work



Source Pye Tait Consulting, 2021

I. Appendix: National survey questionnaire

2021 Customer Satisfaction Survey for Building Standards

Please tell us what you think

Introduction

The Scottish Government (Building Standards Division) would like to obtain your views and feedback about the local authority verifier Building Standards service in Scotland. This is a national survey that is being administered separately to customer feedback questionnaires issued by individual local authorities.

As a Building Standards customer since April 2020, we would like to hear about the quality of service you have received, for example when applying for a building warrant and/or submitting a completion certificate. We are interested in your views on the customer service you have experienced as opposed to the actual decision made in response to an application.

How to complete the survey

You will be asked to identify which local authority verifier your feedback relates to. If you have been a customer of more than one local authority verifier and would like to provide additional feedback, please complete a separate survey.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete (this may take a little longer depending on how much feedback you wish to give). Please note, the final question asks you for any additional comments or feedback not covered by the previous questions.

As you progress through the survey, you will only be presented with those questions that are relevant to you. If you are unable to answer any questions, or if you feel they are not applicable, please leave them blank.

Reassurance

Pye Tait Consulting is carrying out this survey independently on behalf of the Scottish Government and all 32 local authorities in Scotland. The findings from the survey will be treated confidentially and reported anonymously by Pye Tait Consulting under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.

If you have any queries, please contact Tom Wilson at Pye Tait Consulting, via t.wilson[at]pyetait.com or by telephoning 01423 509433

Thank you for taking the time to complete this online survey. To continue, please select a local authority verifier to provide your views and feedback. Please note that after you press 'submit' at the end of this survey, you will return to this page and your response for this local authority verifier will be marked as 'completed' (below).

PART 1: About you and your application: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q1. In order to minimise selection error, customers are not presented with this drop-down list of 32 local authorities to manually select which to provide feedback about. Instead, this information was either pre-filled (for customers of one local authority verifier) or a dynamically controlled reduced list was presented for customers of more than one local authority verifier (typically agents).
Which ONE of the following local authorities are you responding about in this survey? (Please tick the appropriate box and complete a separate survey for any other local authorities of which you have been a customer since April 2020).

	Aberdeen		Highland
	Aberdeenshire		Inverclyde
	Angus		Midlothian
	Argyll and Bute		Moray
	City of Edinburgh		North Ayrshire
	Clackmannanshire		North Lanarkshire
	Dumfries and Galloway		Orkney
	Dundee		Perth and Kinross
	East Ayrshire		Renfrewshire
	East Dunbartonshire		Scottish Borders
	East Lothian		Shetland
	East Renfrewshire		South Ayrshire
	Eilean Siar		South Lanarkshire
	Falkirk		Stirling
	Fife		West Dunbartonshire
	Glasgow		West Lothian

Q2. In what capacity have you been a customer of the Building Standards service? [Tick one only]

	Applicant for a building warrant and/or submitter of a completion certificate (e.g. building owner/tenant)
	Agent working on behalf of another applicant/submitter
	Both of the above, i.e. direct applicant/submitter AND agent
	Other

If 'Other' – please specify: _____

Q3.[Only asked if Option 1 selected to Q2] Did you use an agent to act on your behalf as part of the application process?

	Yes
	No
	Don't know

Q4. For which of the following categories of work have you submitted an application? [Tick all that apply]

	Domestic new build – multiple plotted developments (houses/flats)
	Domestic new build – other (e.g. one-off house build)
	Domestic existing build - extension
	Domestic existing build - alteration
	Non-domestic – residential (e.g. hostels, guest houses, hotels, hospitals)
	Non-domestic – assembly (e.g. churches, schools, health centres, libraries, stadia)
	Non-domestic – commercial (e.g. shops, restaurants and office buildings)
	Non-domestic – Industrial (e.g. factory buildings, manufacturing units, refineries)
	Non-domestic – storage/agricultural (e.g. grain stores, car parks, bonded warehouse)

If 'Other' – please specify: _____

PART 2: Meeting your expectations: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q5. Overall, to what extent did the service you received from the local authority verifier Building Standards service meet your expectations? Please rate on a scale from 1 'not at all' to 10 'completely'?

Q6. Please provide your reasons for this rating:

PART 3: Progressing your application: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q7. How satisfied were you with the time taken by the local authority verifier Building Standards service to undertake each of the following? [Leave any statements blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Respond to telephone enquiries					
Respond to written enquiries					
Issue the first report for a building warrant application (e.g. detailing non-compliance or further information requested)					
Process the application and grant a building warrant					
Respond to a request for a site visit					
Accept a completion certificate					

Q8. How satisfied are you with the way you were informed about the progress of your application? [Leave blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Very satisfied
	Fairly satisfied
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
	Fairly dissatisfied
	Very dissatisfied

Q9. [Only asked if 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' to Q8] What are your reasons?

PART 4: Quality of service: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the advice and guidance you received from local authority verifier Building Standards service staff? [Leave any statements blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Strongly agree	Agree to some extent	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree to some extent	Strongly disagree
I received sufficient advice and guidance to meet my needs					
The advice and guidance I received was consistent					
The advice and guidance I received was helpful					

Q11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about the quality of service received from Building Standards service staff? [Leave any statements blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Strongly agree	Agree to some extent	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree to some extent	Strongly disagree
Staff were polite and courteous					
Staff were helpful					
Staff were efficient					
Staff were knowledgeable					
I felt as though someone took ownership of my enquiry					
Any problems that arose were adequately resolved					
I felt valued as a customer					

Q12. [Only asked if 'Strongly Agree' to any components of Q10 or Q11] You have stated STRONGLY AGREE to at least one of the above statements with respect to the advice, guidance and quality of service you have received. Please can you explain what was particularly good?

Q13. [Only asked if 'Strongly Disagree' to any components of Q10 or Q11] You have stated STRONGLY DISAGREE to at least one of the above statements with respect to the advice, guidance and quality of service you have received. Please can you explain your reasons?

Q14. How satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the inspection visit? [Leave any statements blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Flexibility of dates and times to meet my needs					
Professionalism of the inspection staff					
Thoroughness of the virtual inspection					
Quality of the advice and guidance received from the inspection staff					
My understanding of the next steps following the inspection					

PART 5: Communications: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q15. In which of the following ways did you interact with the local authority verifier Building Standards service? [Tick all that apply]

	Email
	Telephone
	Letter
	On-site visit
	At the Building Standards service offices
	Other

If 'Other' – please specify: _____

Q16. On a scale from 1'very poor' to 10 'very good' - how would you rate each of the following aspects of the local authority verifier's written information and documentation:

	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
Accuracy	
Quality	
Helpfulness	
Layout and presentation	
Use of plain English	

Q17. How satisfied are you with each of the following forms of electronic communication made available by the local authority verifier Building Standards service? [Leave any statements blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Website					
Email					
SMS/text message					
e-newsletter					

Q18. [Only asked if 'fairly dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied' to any of Q17 A to D] You stated FAIRLY DISSATISFIED or VERY DISSATISFIED to at least one of the options in the last question about electronic communication. What are your reasons?

Q19. Generally, in what ways (if any) do you think the local authority verifier Building Standards service could improve its communications?

PART 6: Accessibility: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q20. How easy was it to make contact with the local authority verifier Building Standards service via each of the following methods? Please rate on a scale from 1 'very difficult' to 10 'very easy'

	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10
In general	
By phone	
By email	
In person/virtually	

Q21. Please provide reasons for your ratings:

Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to the local authority verifier Building Standards service? [Leave any statements blank if don't know or not applicable]

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Building Standards service staff are accessible if I want to meet with them (in person or virtually)					
Building Standards service staff are approachable					

PART 7: Overall satisfaction and final comments: [Local authority verifier selected]

Q23. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the Building Standards service? Please rate on a scale from 1 'not at all satisfied' to 10 'completely satisfied'

Finally, do you have any final comments about how you believe the local authority verifier Building Standards service could be improved in the future?

II. Appendix: Survey invitation email

Email subject: Building Standards in Scotland – Customer Feedback Questionnaire

Dear {Name}

We are writing to you as a customer of the local authority verifier Building Standards service in Scotland.

This means that since 1st April 2020 you may have submitted a building warrant application, completion certificate, used the services of your own agent, or made other enquiries through your local authority verifier Building Standards service. You may also have been an agent acting on behalf of an applicant.

The Scottish Government would like to obtain your views and feedback on the customer service you received. This will help identify which aspects are working well and any areas where improvements need to be made in the future.

We would be grateful if you would spare 5 or 10 minutes to complete the online survey.

If you have been a customer of more than one local authority verifier Building Standards, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the service provided by each.

PLEASE CLICK HERE TO START THE SURVEY

Your feedback is important to us, even if you are not able to answer all questions or have had limited contact with the local authority verifier Building Standards service.

Further information, including our contact details, can be found via the survey link (above).

Many thanks for your time and contribution.

Kind regards,

Pye Tait Consulting (on behalf of the Scottish Government, Building Standards Division)

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