

# Argyll and Bute Council

Comhairle Earra-Ghàidheal agus Bhòid



## Building Standards Customer Engagement Strategy



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**Building Standards**  
Planning, Housing and Regulatory Services

# Customer Engagement Strategy

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CUSTOMER  
SERVICE  
EXCELLENCE



## Document History

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## 1.0 - Introduction

The Building Standards service is a frontline service with a diverse range of customers. The demand for our services has put pressure on our resources and we need to find ways of streamlining our delivery of these services whilst still ensuring we provide good customer service. We want to change the way we deliver our service and this Customer Engagement Strategy sets out how we intend to do this.

## 2.0 – Who are our customers?

As a frontline public service, Building Standards has a wide range of customers. Some have direct contact with the service in terms of applying and engaging in a variety of Building Standard processes. Others experience the outcomes of these processes without formal contact. In other words, the buildings and spaces we help to create affect everyone.

Although we refer to those who come in contact with the service as ‘customers’, this has a broad meaning and is used to describe the various individuals, groups and organisations who interact with the service.

Our customers can also be split into those with whom we have:

### Direct customer contact:

- Applicants / agents / developers /landowners applying for a variety of building warrant related permissions
- Residents or agents requesting pre-application advice
- Anyone concerned that the works are unauthorised
- Complainants about any aspect of our service
- Other professionals and consultants
- Other Council services
- Partners such as Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, SEPA, etc.
- Other Councils and Government agencies
- Solicitors

### Indirect customer contact:

- Neighbours
- Community councils and amenity groups

- Councillors and their assistants
- Those who live, work and visit the buildings and spaces created through the Building warrant process
- Investors and employers from the outcomes of the Building Warrant process
- Future generations and new residents/businesses, all of whom benefit from decisions – schools, new housing, conservation of historic buildings/areas, etc.

### *KEY MESSAGE -*

#### *OUR CUSTOMER CONTACT CHANNELS NEED TO CONTINUE TO EVOLVE*

We have a wide range of customers, often with competing demands, who put pressure on our resources. We need to prioritise our service delivery in line with the Council's Transformational Change programme. This will mean focussing our services to those most needing our advice and directing others to online services.

### 3.0 – What is engagement?

This document recognises that different approaches are appropriate in different situations. In all cases the communication of information is essential to inform our customers of any proposed change or issue. The provision of information is a valuable end in itself and may be the only suitable action in certain circumstances, for example communicating factual information on the Building Warrant application process.

In many cases effective engagement will also include consultation. This involves providing a specific opportunity for our customers to express an opinion on a proposed area of our work to inform and enhance that work. It is generally a time limited exercise and is followed with further communication on the engagement outcome.

**Communication = Engagement**

**Communication + Consultation + Communication = Engagement**

As part of our Customer Engagement Strategy, we want to improve how we engage with our customers so that they feel they have had a proper say even if they do not agree with the final outcomes.

### 4.0 – Consulting with our customers

Public participation is at the heart of good customer engagement and it is important that we have robust and clear systems in place to ensure effective consultation on a range of subjects. However it must be noted that there is no provision whilst processing Building Warrant applications for public consultation.

A key aspect of effective consultation is getting the communication right at the beginning of the process to help raise awareness of the opportunity to comment and to respond to feedback.

#### **Guidance**

Building Standards guidance, whether statutory or non-statutory, requires effective consultation to ensure acceptance of the basic principles of the guidance and adds weight to our decisions. The Building Standards pages of the Council's website is the central point for all our guidance and documentation. Anyone can access this information via the website. Customers can respond via the website. We will make use of our webpages in publicising training events to ensure participation is as wide as possible.

### 5.0 – Communicating with our customers

Argyll and Bute Building Standards has always been a forward thinking service in terms of innovation in information and communication technology. We were one of the first Councils to introduce an eBuilding Warrants system, allowing new ways of submitting applications and considerably greater access to information for the wider community. We are starting to investigate the use of social media. However, emails, phone calls and face-to-face remain the main ways our customers contact us. The volumes of contact have increased over the years, and, in the context of a Council seeking transformational change in service provision, has introduced the Customer Service Centre and Customer Service Points.

Currently we provide a number of ways where customers can communicate with us. Through the increasing use of digital technology such as mobile phones and computers, we are seeing significant changes to how people consume and interact with information. Whilst we already make good use of this change in the information we offer, there are greater opportunities to expand the use of digital communications, increasing participation and improving accessibility. Taking existing customers from more traditional communication means to new online means – channel shift.

### Current means of communication

- Printed material such as guidance notes
- Public meetings / forums / workshops
- Letters
- Telephone calls
- Requests from councillors and MSPs
- Emails
- Newsletters
- Reception counter
- Statutory notices and notifications
- Face to face meetings with customers
- Council website

In effect, the customer has a wide range of means to get advice on various aspects of the Building Standards process. Managing these different channels can be resource intensive and the demand for direct contact is encouraged by the availability of this service even when much of the information is already online. Promoting a self-serve culture will encourage Channel Shift in line with the Council's transformational change programme. Moving customers to find the information online will allow Building Standards staff to concentrate on their core business.

However, this has to be balanced with the customers' needs and our role in managing the sustainable economic growth of Argyll and Bute. Giving a full advice service on major developments is still a top priority and there will still be complex Building Warrant and listed buildings cases where advice and guidance at face to face level is required. Advice on more straightforward cases will be dealt with on a case by case basis but the aim will be to direct the enquirer to the Council website for the information. This includes householder enquiries and particularly where professional agents want us to confirm whether a proposal needs a Building Warrant; in many cases, they can make the assessment themselves and make the appropriate applications.

Such as system means that we need to continue and monitor the information we hold on our website and make it fully accessible on digital devices.

### *KEY MESSAGE -*

#### *OUR CUSTOMER CONTACT CHANNELS NEED TO CHANGE*

Communication channels will change so that our customers are able to self-serve to find the information they need. Information will be improved and online forms will be available if the customer has been unable to find the information and still needs advice from us. A full pre-application advice service will still be provided for applications and other complex cases. We will make more use of digital technology to enhance the customer experience.

#### **Future means of communication – possible new ways**

- An interactive, fully online Building Standard application process – no printing and posting of large documents
- Use of social media to inform customers about current Building Standards issues
- An online form for enquiries and pre-application requests
- An improved website with interactive links to help the customer find the information
- An enhanced efficient telephone service provided by the Council's Customer Contact Centre directing callers to information based on an annual Service Level Agreement
- Produce easy read 'quick guides' for a variety of common enquiries
- Help for those who cannot find the information they want online - this may be an email response or a call back.

### **6.0 – Building Standards information and records**

The service retains a large number of historic records which are regularly requested by customers for a variety of purposes such as buying and selling properties. Building Standards records from the late 1990s onwards and forming Part 1 of the Building Standards Register are available online. Otherwise, searches must be done of the historical paper Building Standards registers for information. There is a charge for Building Warrants searches and for copies of documents. Note only relevant parties are permitted to obtain copies of information, plans, etc. retained under Part 2 of the Building Standards register. However, anyone can view the information held on a case at a mutual agreed time.

The information we hold will be in line with legislative requirements, our retention schedules and records management policy. We will publish information online in accordance with this and the Scottish Government's guidance on Publishing Information Online.

Other information not online can be subject to Information requests which are co-ordinated by the Council's FOI team. The Council gathers and processes information about citizens so that services can be delivered effectively and efficiently. The Council's 'Privacy Notice' sets out what to expect when we collect information in line with the Data Protection Act, 1998 and other legislation and how we handle personal information.

### 7.0 – Customer journey of the future

Currently the customer has a number of ways they can contact the service to receive information and advice. Building Standards is actively developing the way we engage with our customers to reflect the digital age.

This would mean:

- The Building Standards telephone, email and face-to-face service will be given to those who need this contact, mainly for live Building Warrant applications, enforcement cases, and dangerous building occurrences
- Other services will be largely based on online transactions and information with customers self-serving to find what they need.
- Telephone calls will be handled by the Customer Contact Centre
- The use of social media will be developed
- Customers being directed to where to find the information and making applications based on their own assessment.
- Improved website information.

We will set out what our customer can expect in our Customer Service Charter.

### 8.0 – A timetable for action

The strategy will evolve over time. While the success of it depends on a cultural shift by all parties involved Building Standards believe that the focus has to be on the improvement of our own and national online information systems to ensure that our customers can continue to find what they need.



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