

2016 Action Plan – Building Standards

Strengths in meeting expectations – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

“The Officer was kind and thoughtful, he went out of his way to help and provide support in what was my first application. His knowledge and understanding of the laws and regulations was outstanding.”

Direct applicant

“There was an excellent response to queries. Officers were friendly and professional”.

Agent

“As a novice I found the staff extremely helpful in providing informed advice throughout the process.”

Direct applicant

“I am always provided with an excellent service from all Building Standards staff. They are very helpful and approachable, always available for consultation when required.”

Agent

Possible weaknesses in meeting expectations – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

“I find that different area offices do not seem to apply the standards criteria in a consistent manner. Specifications and the amount of information required often vary to quite an extent.”

Agent

D&G Response.

Once an inconsistency has been highlighted, it is discussed by the ABSM's and clarification given to all staff. We also address consistency during our scheduled staff training events and during team meetings.. Consistency is a regular item on our Local Forum agendas and we encourage them to raise the issue at the Forum meetings when they are together. We have a comprehensive raft of in depth policies and procedures which are available to our staff via SharePoint which allows a uniformed approach to how we deal with all areas of our business. We have appointed dedicated offices that deal with Schools, NHS and Care and repair applications which has been received positively.

“Staff are not always the most helpful. They either did not attend the property when stated they would, or not at all. I had to chase them constantly for paperwork especially for the completion certificate.”

Direct applicant

D&G Response.

A document tracking system has been introduced for applications for completion and supporting documentations, together with a task list that is monitored by the Area Building Standards Manager. In order to test the effectiveness of this system a question with regards to the above will be added to our next customer satisfaction survey. We have furtherer introduced dedicated inspectors who will be solely responsible for carrying out completion inspections and associated paperwork; this will aid consistency and avoid delay.

“The service has become very slow and staffs are hard to contact.”

Agent

D&G Response

There is a duty officer system in place, if you make a call and are not able to speak directly to a member of the Building Standards Team, our reception staffs are trained to take a messages and pass it on to the appropriate person. The strengths recorded against this question above contradict this comment but we will monitor this area of business in our next customer survey.

Possible weaknesses in keeping customers informed – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

“There was no information provided as to how the application was progressing. When asking what was meant by some comments on the report we were told that there was a discrepancy somewhere, but they could not recall where.”

Direct applicant

D&G Response

On receipt of an application the applicant is sent a letter detailing the timescales involved in the building warrant process. There is also an online building standards register that can be used to track building warrants progress. A review of the guide to building warrant applications has been carried out and we will add a section to this with a web link to further highlight this facility. The acknowledge receipt letter has been reviewed and an additional section has been added that directs our customers to the Building Standards Register.

“When telephoning for an update on the application received a response much later and by email. Out of courtesy one would expect a response in the same form.”

D&G Response

On receipt of an application the applicant is sent a letter detailing the timescales involved in the building warrant process. There is also an online building standards register that can be used to track building warrants progress. A review of the guide to building warrant applications has been carried out and we will add a section to this with a web link to further highlight this facility. The acknowledge receipt letter has been reviewed and an additional section has been added that directs our customers to the Building Standards Register.

“There were delays caused in issuing consent due to the Officers not interpreting plans correctly, and it was very difficult to contact an Officer to arrange site visits.”

Direct applicant

There is a duty officer system in place, if a call is received and the person is not able to speak directly to a member of the Building Standards Team, our reception staffs are trained to take a message and pass it on to the appropriate person. The Construction Compliance Plan already provides clear contact details via a direct telephone number and e-mail address which can be used to book inspections, No further action proposed.

Strengths in quality of service – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

“All of the employees responded appropriately and timely; issuing advice where necessary and conducting themselves professionally.”

Direct applicant

“When I have been uncertain with regards to an item within the Technical Handbook staff have always been able to clarify the matter for me, and give me a greater understanding of the Building Standards.”

Agent

“The whole department is consistently extremely helpful and efficient and my application was quite complicated. The Officer suggested a way which a complicated matter could be resolved rather than simply saying it couldn't be done. I have made several applications over the last eleven years. I could not fault the department of building control with respect to any projects.”

Direct applicant

"The staff treat you as a person, you are not just someone at the end of a phone. They do not give you the impression that you are a bother to them, even if you are."

Agent

Possible weaknesses in quality of service – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

"The staff were not helpful in facilitating the application process, and it took much longer than first anticipated."

Direct applicant

"There was a lack of information supplied to us. Some of the staff were unhelpful and were slow to respond to our communications."

Direct applicant

D&G Response

The strengths listed above contradict the comments left under weaknesses. The recent telephone survey did not find that this was a cross cutting theme. This area of business will continue to be tested in future customer satisfaction surveys. No Action at this time.

Possible weaknesses associated with electronic communications – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

"The website is not very helpful, it is rather confusing."

Direct applicant

"The Building Standards system is hidden behind the planning system on the website. It should have a separate building control section on the front page."

Agent

"The website functions often don't work, so you have to go back later to check the progress of a warrant on the Online Building Standards Register."

Agent

D&G Response

We have found that statements like this are often made by people who are not comfortable with the use of technology. Unfortunately we have to conform to the corporate format of our web page. We have been in communication with the web team regarding this and other issues. 'Building' has now been added after Planning to the main page.

Suggestions for improving communications – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

“Customers may be non-technical, therefore use plain English whenever possible.”

Direct applicant

D&G Response

All staff have been enrolled on a plain English training course, which will be rolled out in 2016.

“To have more telephone contact when minor issues occur rather than letter or email would be very useful.”

Agent

D&G Response

Due to the significant reduction in staff numbers over the last few years, it is no longer possible to offer the one to one assistance we have done in the past. However, to enable us to answer as many queries as possible, we have found that making greater use of e-mails enables us to answer larger quantity in a shorter time frame. Telephone calls are time consuming especially if the customer cannot be contacted in the first instance and often lead into other areas of business being discussed.

“Give access to FAQs or simple example case studies available online.”

Direct applicant

D&G Response

A frequently asked question section is on our web site and is one of the headings displayed on our home page.

“More consistency from all Officers would be beneficial to communications.”

Agent

D&G Response

All staff has been enrolled on a plain English training course which will be rolled out in 2016.

Accessibility – What customers of Dumfries and Galloway said:

“The staff have always responded to me promptly, logically and reasonably, even when I have turned up without an appointment.”

Direct applicant

"It is difficult to meet with Officers in person. Most of the time when contact is made by phone you can't get to speak to the appropriate person straight away and you have to wait for a call-back."

Agent

"There are very limited numbers of staff in Dumfries and Galloway so the assigned Officer wasn't always in when trying to call. The best communication was via email, this received the quickest answer most of the time."

Direct applicant

"Email is by far the most effective way of getting an answer. With a central office you do not have the consistency of attendance you used to get at the local offices."

Agent

Due to the significant reduction in staff numbers over the last few years, it is no longer possible to offer the one to one assistance we have done in the past. By making greater use of e-mails, we are able to answer more query's than would be achieved via telephone. Telephone calls are time consuming especially if the customer cannot be contacted in the first instance.