



The Scottish Building Standards Agency  
**REPORT ON THE VERIFICATION AUDIT**

of

**CLACKMANNANSHIRE COUNCIL'S BUILDING  
STANDARDS SERVICE**

**16 – 17 January 2007**



## INTRODUCTION

1. This audit report covers the operation of Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service in carrying out its verification function.
2. A new Scottish building standards system came into force on 1 May 2005 and the 32 Scottish local authorities have been appointed as sole verifiers for their respective geographical areas for a period of 6 years. The Scottish Building Standards Agency (SBSA) has been appointed to audit the Scottish verifiers approved under Section 7(1) of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003.
3. The Scottish verifiers have agreed with the SBSA a 'Balanced Scorecard' of five perspectives. These are: public interest, private customer, internal business, continuous improvement and finance. For each perspective the Scottish verifiers will individually identify their own actions and supporting information.
4. The audit process consisted of:
  - a. Clackmannanshire's submission of a balanced scorecard incorporating five perspectives,
  - b. Clackmannanshire's submission of evidence to support the balanced scorecard,
  - c. SBSA review of the balanced scorecard and supporting evidence,
  - d. SBSA on-site assessment including interviews with key staff, inspection of administration systems and random sampling.
5. The on-site assessment took place at Clackmannanshire's Council's Building Standards Service Headquarters on 16 and 17 January 2007.
6. Standardised commentary and marking will be applied to each section of the balanced scorecard. The SBSA assesses the Verifier's Balanced Scorecard against the evidence provided. The appropriateness or otherwise of the actions and supporting information have not been assessed.
7. The markings will be:

<b>Excellent</b>	-	<b>Major Strengths</b>
<b>Good</b>	-	<b>Strengths outweigh weakness</b>
<b>Satisfactory</b>	-	<b>Strengths balance weakness</b>
<b>Cause for concern</b>	-	<b>Weaknesses outweigh strengths</b>
<b>Serious cause for concern</b>	-	<b>Major weakness</b>

8. Any discrepancies or areas of disagreement on matters of fact will be agreed with the verifier and further explanation provided as required. The timing of any follow up audit inspections or action points will also be agreed with the verifier at this stage.

9. The audit report will detail the findings of the investigation. If any of the five areas is graded 'serious cause for concern' or two or more gives 'cause for concern' a follow-up audit will be undertaken within three months. The follow-up audit may possibly be conducted by a different team depending on availability. However, it is expected that immediate corrective action is taken on any area graded 'serious cause for concern'. If one area gives 'cause for concern' a follow-up audit will be undertaken within six months.

	<b>Action by verifier</b>	<b>Follow-up audit</b>
Any of the five areas is graded 'serious cause for concern'	Immediate	Within 3 months
Two or more areas give 'cause for concern'	Within 1 month	Within 3 months
One area gives 'cause for concern'	Within 3 months	Within 6 months

10. The following information was provided by Clackmannanshire's Building Standards Service in their Balanced Scorecard.

*"Clackmannanshire is Scotland in miniature, magnificent scenery, a rich history and proud, enterprising people. Set in the very heart of Scotland with the stunning Ochil Hills as it's backdrop Clackmannanshire is bounded by the River Forth to the south, Stirlingshire to the west with Fife to the east and Perth and Kinross Council to the north.*

*The Building Standards team forms part of Development and Environmental Services and is located at Kilncraigs, Greenside Street, Alloa along with other services of the Council dealing with Planning, Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Roads and Transportation, Land Services and Waste and Property Services.*

*The Building Standards Team has, in recent years, been restructured to provide a more efficient and cost effective service to better meet the needs of it's customers. The Team is composed of a Team Leader with 2 Principal Building Standards Surveyors each responsible for all operations within a geographical area. The Principal Building Standards Surveyors are assisted in their duties by 2 Building Standards Surveyors and a Building Standards Technician.*

*Clackmannanshire covers a geographical area of 15,864 hectares and has a population of over 48,000. Clackmannanshire Council is currently undergoing a major regeneration programme including the creation of a link to the national railway network, connection to the national motorway system, replacement of all 3*

*secondary schools and establishment of a new hospital and outpatient facilities. During 2004/05 there was an increase of 636 new households created within the County with a further projected increase of 532 new dwellings in 2006/07.*

*Clackmannanshire Council is committed to providing efficient, quality, customer focused services. To this end the Building Standards Team regularly carries out customer surveys, attend local business initiative group meetings, and has created it's own customer focus group. This commitment lead to the Team, as part of Development Services, gaining Charter Mark Standard for Customer Service Excellence in 2005.*

*In addition to the statutory services required under the Building (Scotland) Act the Building Standards Team has a direct input into submissions to Council for licensing applications, and site visits and Safety at Sports Ground legislation. The Building Standards Team is also responsible for Street Naming within the County and for administering several of the provisions of the Civil Government (Scotland) Act.*

*The Building Standards Team has also developed a raft of non statutory services designed to meet the diverse needs of it's customers including copy documents, property enquiries, confirmation of exemption and compliance etc*

*During the period '05-06' Clackmannanshire Council Building Standards Team handled 642 applications for Building Warrant approval, 92% received a full technical response within 15 days of submission and the average time for first response was 10 days."*

## **PERSPECTIVE 1 – Public Interest**

**Verifiers will have in place risk management protocols which will determine the management of work on building warrants and completion certificates.**

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### ***Actions intended to be taken by verifier:***

- 1. Develop a risk management protocol for Building Warrant applications by 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2006*
  - 2. Develop a risk management protocol for site inspections by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006*
  - 3. Establish appropriate staffing levels*
  - 4. Communicate protocols to staff and stakeholder April 2006*
  - 5. Review protocols*
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### **Balanced Scorecard Review Findings**

1.1 Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service have developed risk management protocols which determine the management of work on building warrant applications and completion certificates. These protocols were developed and implemented in November 2006 following consultation with staff and presentation to customers at the Building Standards Customer Forum Group.

1.2 A flexible risk matrix has been produced which allows the Building Standards Manager or Principal Building Standards Surveyors to allocate applications to staff based on their work experience and training and development needs. The principles of the risk management tool for both warrant applications and completion certificate submissions are similar. A new risk protocol was being developed for multi-plot housing developments to reduce repetitive testing. A sample of building warrant applications and completion certificate submissions were reviewed and tested. Protocols appear to be followed effectively however risk levels have only recently been recorded on files. The risk management protocols will be reviewed in February 2007 with a view to ensuring that they are robust and fit for purpose.

1.3 The Best Value Review [BVR], September 2004, recommended appropriate staffing levels which are now in place. The Building Standards Service have recently created a new technician trainee post which is well supported. They also have a good mix of experience and expertise within the team.

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- Risk management protocols are in place for the management of work on building warrants and completion certificates.
  - Revised staffing structure now in place.
  - Staff and customers are aware of the protocols.
  - Protocols will be reviewed in February 2007.

**OVERALL MARKING – GOOD**

## PERSPECTIVE 2 – Private Customer

Verifiers will have in place by 30 September 2006 the principles of a customer charter which encompasses areas such as:

- guidance to stakeholders,
- accessibility of service,
- measurable performance targets,
- customer views.

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### ***Actions intended to be taken by verifier:***

1. *Develop a customer charter (focus groups) NPIs, LPI's, guidance documents etc) by 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2006*
  2. *Review customer charter and feedback processes*
  3. *Review and publish L.P.I. etc*
  4. *Review availability of information/guidance available*
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### **Balanced Scorecard Review Findings**

2.1 Clackmannanshire Council's Development Services have obtained Charter Mark for Customer Service Excellence [see Continuous Improvement].

2.2 The current Customer Charter provides information to customers on building warrant processes and how they can access the Building Standards Service including telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and website information. A new customer charter is in final draft form and was issued to customers for comment in December 2006. It is intended that the new Customer Charter will be implemented shortly.

2.3 The Building Standards team have recently moved premises and some work is due to be carried out at the reception area. This will enable Building Standards literature to be displayed. Clackmannanshire Council are currently considering the use of computer terminals within the reception area to allow customers to access information, guidance on-line. At present, information is passed to customers by the receptionist and through the warrant approval package.

2.4 A postal survey card scheme was introduced in January 2003 to monitor user satisfaction on an ongoing basis. The Building Standards Service are about to embark on a further review of this process with a view to providing more meaningful results and usable data. The Building Standards Service have taken various steps since the BVR in 2004 to improve engagement with customers. A Building Standards customer satisfaction survey was carried out in January 2005 and a Customer Forum Group established in November 2006. Actions have been implemented to improve the service including streamlining of business processes and random sampling of building warrant applications to monitor consistency. The service has carried out

several presentations to stakeholders on the new Building Standards legislation, technical guidance and the role of building standards. The Building Standards team are committed to customer engagement to improve services. For example, a partnership approach is being encouraged to improve the quality of building warrant submissions which will help speed up building warrant processes.

2.5 Challenging Local Performance Indicators [LPI's] are published on the Clackmannanshire Council's website. These are Building Warrant applications responded to within 15 days, Building Warrants issued within 6 days of satisfactory drawings, average time taken to respond to a Completion Certificate and Completion Certificates issued within 3 days. Consideration should be given to publishing the remaining service indicators and performance against those targets once bedded in. The Building Standard's Manager continually reviews performance and produces monthly reports for discussion with Head of Service at the Service Managers meeting.

2.6 A corporate customer complaints procedure is in place which encourages both positive and negative responses.

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- Customer charter to be produced in final format and published.
  - There are various mechanisms in place for customers to feedback on the service.
  - Challenging Local Performance Indicators are published but could be extended to include all LPI's.
  - Information and guidance is available to customers.

**OVERALL MARKING – GOOD**

## **PERSPECTIVE 3 – Internal Business**

Verifiers will have prepared a formal plan for the internal business perspective for the financial year 2006-2007 by 30 September 2005.

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### ***Actions intended to be taken by verifier:***

- 1. Map new processes to meet legislative and customer needs – March 2006*
- 2. Recruit, retain and train correct level and competency of staff*
- 3. Enhance/improve use of I.T.-March 2006*
- 4. Review cross-service processes for major developments*

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### **Balanced Scorecard Review Findings**

3.1 Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service have an internal Business Plan in place which explains their core business and how it relates to the strategic framework. An opportunity exists to incorporate the balanced scorecard more into the service plan.

3.2 The Building Standards Service are supported by the Head of Development Services and an experienced and dedicated administrative support team who have helped the efficient implementation of the new building standards regime whilst maintaining the old regime. Team meetings have become more regular and administrative staff are asked to contribute as necessary.

3.3 Process maps for building warrant and completion certificate procedures have been produced. The peer reviews which are in place should continue to be carried out early in the warrant process. The process maps should be updated to reflect current practice i.e. streamlined processes and random sampling as recommended in the BVR [September 2004].

3.4 The Building Standard's Manager monitors staffing levels against demands on resources. A new staffing career progression system is being considered to assist in the recruitment and retention of staff.

3.5 Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service currently utilise IT to accept some electronic information on building warrant and completion certificate processes. The costs and benefits of expanding the use of electronic systems to submit building warrant applications, record site inspections and drain tests is currently being investigated.

3.6 Recent experience of cross-service working for a major project is being further investigated. Consideration is being given to expanding this process for other strategic developments which will improve the efficiency of all services involved. This provides the Building Standards service an excellent opportunity to give informed advice earlier in the process and thus avoid abortive work.

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- An internal business plan has been produced.
- Consideration being given to incorporating the balanced scorecard fully into the departmental service plan.
- Process maps are in place but need to be updated to reflect current practice.
- Career development progression is under consideration.
- Use of IT currently being developed to improve service delivery.
- Development of cross-service working for other major projects is being considered

**OVERALL MARKING – GOOD**

## **PERSPECTIVE 4 – Continuous improvement**

Verifiers will have prepared a three-year strategy for 2006-2009 for continuous improvement by 30 September 2005.

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### **Actions intended to be taken by verifier – 2006-2009**

1. *Review structured staff training requirements*
  2. *Achieve nationally recognised service level accreditations*
  3. *Develop and enhance IT packages to serve B.S Team and customer requirements*
  4. *Develop and enhance IT package to produce performance data*
  5. *Development of IT systems to receive/transmit electronic information*
  6. *Join and contribute to Benchmarking Group(s)*
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### **Balanced Scorecard Review Findings**

4.1 A 3-year continuous improvement strategy has been developed and implemented.

4.2 Development Services have obtained Charter Mark for Customer Service Excellence in April 2005 for 3 years. A successful review was carried out in 2006 involving discussions with customers. Charter Mark was content with progress on continuous improvement and no further assessments were deemed necessary.

4.3 Clackmannanshire Council has agreed to pilot the Public Service Improvement Framework (PSIF). The PSIF is a self-assessment tool which encourages organisations to conduct a systematic and comprehensive review of their own activities and results to drive service improvements over a specified period of time. For this reason Investor in People [IiP] has been put on hold.

4.4 Several team training sessions and meetings have taken place to inform staff and encourage participation in the development of the balanced scorecard. This practice should continue as the balanced scorecard evolves.

4.5 A new Corporate Performance Review and Development Plan has been implemented and completed by individual team members and the Building Standards Manager. For this process to be fully effective the business objectives set for staff should be more specific, measurable and interim reviews carried out. Training and development needs are identified and incorporated into the Corporate Training Plan. It is the intention to develop a separate training plan for the Building Standards Service. A strong culture of continued professional development is evident and staff are encouraged to obtain professional qualifications.

4.6 Clackmannanshire's Building Standards Register has been introduced successfully and is now available on-line. This enables the general public and other stakeholders to access information on buildings and to check progress on applications. The register is updated automatically and has received a significant number of 'hits'.

4.7 A good suite of electronic performance management information is recorded and continuously monitored and evaluated by the Building Standards Manager. This enables the re-allocation of resources, if necessary, to meet business demands.

4.8 A system for electronic building warrant submissions including drawings is under development which should streamline the process.

4.9 Clackmannanshire Building Standards Service are currently a member of a benchmarking group exchanging ideas, information and networking. There is no proper benchmarking of LPI's yet developed.

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- An action plan for continual improvement has been developed.
  - The Service has obtained Charter Mark accreditation and have been successfully reviewed.
  - Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service are committed to exploring the use of IT systems to improve processes and accessibility of service.
  - A new process for identifying staff training and development needs has been recently introduced.
  - Currently a member of a benchmarking group.

**OVERALL MARKING – GOOD**

## PERSPECTIVE 5 – Finance

Verifiers shall have systems in place to record costs and the management of costs against income streams for the verification process by March 2007.

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### **Actions intended to be taken by verifier:**

1. *Implement activity costing (Sept 06) verification/non verification*
  2. *Maintain a robust financial monitoring system (January 2007)*
  3. *Initiate benchmarking of accounting practices*
  4. *Implement 3 year budget*
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### **Balanced Scorecard Review Findings**

5.1 Clackmannanshire Council Building Standards Service have an electronic time recording system in place which details time spent by officers on verification, enforcement and other related work. Verification costs can be clearly identified.

5.2 They have good budget setting and monitoring procedures in place. This includes monthly monitoring of budgets by the Building Standard's manager and dealing with any discrepancies.

5.3 The Building Standard's Manager is in the process of looking at finance practices across Scotland via the benchmarking group.

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- A time recording system is in place.
  - Budget setting was established.
  - Procedures are in place to record and monitor budget.

**OVERALL MARKING – GOOD**

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The SBSA reviewed the verifier's Balanced Scorecard against evidence submitted by Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service for each perspective: Public Interest; Private Customer; Internal Business; Continuous Improvement and Finance. A number of core questions were issued to Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service prior to an on-site visit. The SBSA undertook the audit on 16 and 17 January 2007 and SBSA reviewed the processes and procedures against the information provided on the Balanced Scorecard along with the evidence submitted. The audit team produced a final report using standardised commentary and markings throughout.
2. After reviewing the Balanced Scorecard evidence and conducting the two-day audit (including testing how the processes worked in practice), the SBSA were content that Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service scored well against their Balanced Scorecard submission.
3. Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standard's Manager is very committed to driving forward improvement to service delivery. The audit team noted that a positive team spirit was evident and the quality of the building standards and support services was very good overall. The Building Standards Service are currently meeting targets against challenging local performance indicators. Consideration should be given to publishing all results and improving benchmarking data.
4. The SBSA found a positive approach to the use of IT within the service. The building standards register is now on-line and the performance management systems are robust and well established. The service are currently exploring other IT initiatives to help improve processes and accessibility.
5. Clackmannanshire Council's Development Services have obtained the Charter Mark Standard for Customer Service Excellence. The SBSA found a culture committed at all levels to improve services. A second BVR is expected to commence in 2007-08.
6. As each Clackmannanshire Council's Building Standards Service Balanced Scorecard perspectives were assessed as "good" the SBSA conclude that there will be no need to undertake any further audits within the current verification appointment period.

## CONTACT DETAILS

Further information about the verification process can be found on the SBSA web site at [www.sbsa.gov.uk](http://www.sbsa.gov.uk). The site contains information about the work of the Agency and includes a list of contacts covering key areas of work.

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