
**Report To: Safe, Sustainable Communities
Committee**

Date: 10 March 2009

**Report By: Corporate Director, Environment and
Community Protection**

**Report No:
ECP/Plann/NMcL/09/013**

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**Subject: Report on the Scottish Building Standards Agency Verification Audit of
Inverclyde Council's Building Standards Service.**

1.0 PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the Scottish Building Standards Division Follow-up Verification Audit of the Council's Building Standards function.

2.0 SUMMARY

2.1 The Scottish Ministers have appointed councils as sole verifiers of building regulations, the purpose of which are to safeguard people in and around buildings, further the conservation of fuel and power and assist sustainable development. Verification is necessary to protect the public interest by providing an independent check of building warrant applications.

2.2 Verifiers have been appointed for the period to 30 April 2011, with a 'balanced scorecard' being the method of determining performance. Where a Council fails to achieve the necessary standard the Scottish Ministers may consider their continued role as verifier. Inverclyde Council was audited in January 2008 by the then Scottish Building Standards Agency (now the Building Standards Division).

2.3 The 'balanced scorecard' assessed five perspectives. The Council's performance, based on the 'balanced scorecard' submission dated May 2007 was:

- Public Interest – satisfactory
- Private customer – cause for concern
- Internal business – cause for concern
- Continuous improvement – cause for concern
- Finance – cause for concern

2.4 When an audit finds 'two or more areas give cause for concern within the five perspectives it would normally be expected that the verifier would take corrective action within 1 month. A follow-up audit would in normal circumstances be carried out within 3 months. However, in the case of Inverclyde the Audit Team considered that management restructuring and the consequent preparation of an Interim Business Plan 2008-11 to replace the May 2007 submission were 'positive moves'. As such, the follow-up audit was delayed to provide the Council with the opportunity to put in place an action plan for improvement and for improvements to begin to take effect.

2.5 The Audit re-visit occurred on 10 December 2008. The Building Standards Division are satisfied that Inverclyde Council's Building Standards Service scored well against their private customer, internal business, continuous improvement and finance perspectives which had previously given cause for concern. They were impressed with the turnaround in service in a relatively short period of time and commended the staff for their hard work

and dedication to service improvement. With this positive endorsement there are no plans for a further audit during the current verification period.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 That the Committee note the Follow-up Audit report findings.

Fraser Williamson
Head of Planning and Housing

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Scottish Ministers have appointed councils as sole verifiers of building regulations, the purpose of which are to safeguard people in and around buildings, further the conservation of fuel and power and assist sustainable development. Verification is necessary to protect the public interest by providing an independent check of building warrant applications.
- 4.2 Verifiers have been appointed for the period to 30 April 2011, with a 'balanced scorecard' being the method of determining performance. Where a Council fails to achieve the necessary standard the Scottish Ministers may consider their continued role as verifier. Inverclyde Council was audited in January 2008 by the Scottish Building Standards Agency (now the Building Standards Division).

5.0 AUDIT FINDINGS

- 5.1 The 'balanced scorecard' assessed five perspectives. The Council's performance, based on the 'balanced scorecard' submission dated May 2007 was:

- Public Interest – satisfactory
- Private customer – cause for concern
- Internal business – cause for concern
- Continuous improvement – cause for concern
- Finance – cause for concern

- 5.2 The Audit Report identified the following actions necessary to improve performance:

Public Interest.

- Formalise arrangements for holiday/sick leave caseload cover.
- Non-certified structural design checking when Team Leader on holiday.
- Staff engagement in review of Risk Management Protocols.
- Identification of circumstances when expert advice is required on fire engineering.
- Random sampling of applications to ensure consistency.
- Formalised protocol for allocation of warrants.
- Formalised completion certificate protocol required.

Private customer.

- Update customer charter and include details of fast tracking.
- Advise customers of duty rota.
- Performance targets low and not subject of public consultation.
- No robust method for assessing performance.
- Customer satisfaction questionnaires should be distributed with warrants.

Internal business.

- Staff contribution to Business Plan.
- Introduction of the CAPS system.

Continuous Improvement.

- Include more stakeholders in the Focus Group.
- Access local professional forums to develop partnership working.
- Explore additional benchmarking opportunities.
- Training needs should match business objectives.
- Individual needs/interests of staff prioritised through a training plan.
- Cascade training courses down to all staff.

Finance.

- Refine time recording to attribute costs to verification role.

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5.5 The Audit re-visit occurred on 10 December 2008. The Building Standards Division are satisfied that Inverclyde Council's Building Standards Service scored well against their private customer, internal business, continuous improvement and finance perspectives which had previously given cause for concern. They were impressed with the turnaround in service in a relatively short period of time and commended the staff for their hard work and dedication to service improvement. With this positive endorsement there are no plans for a further audit during the current verification period.

5.6 The Follow-up Audit made the following findings:

Private customer.

- The revised customer charter now allows customers to know clearly and concisely what they can expect from the service.
- Staff now report on 7 performance indicators, and information on performance is available at reception and on the Council's web site monthly.
- Positive initiatives have been introduced to gain customer views: questionnaires, an Open Door Customer evening and Focus Groups.
- Speed of service delivery has improved with greater workload monitoring and performance assessment.

Internal business.

- The Business Plan is a comprehensive document and is a significant improvement to previous versions.
- The recently introduced IT support system supports consistent service delivery and facilitates accurate management information on workload and workflow.

Continuous Improvement.

- The service now has a 3 year rolling strategy for continuous improvement.
- The Service now has a Training Plan.
- The Service provides strong commitment to the Clyde Valley Building Standards Benchmarking Group, which is being used as a driver for service improvement.

Finance.

- The service has developed a clear time recording system that is straightforward for all staff to use.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 **Legal:** There are no legal implications from this report.

6.2 **Finance:** There are no financial implications from this report.

6.3 **Personnel:** This report presents no personnel implications.

6.4 **Equalities:** When delivering services to our customers full cognisance is taken of equality and diversity processes and procedures.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 **Chief Financial Officer:** There are no current financial implications.

7.2 **Head of Legal and Administration:** There are no current legal implications.

7.3 **Head of Organisational Development and Human Resources:** There are no implications at this time.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 That the Committee note the Audit Report findings.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1
1. The Scottish Building Standards Agency Report on the Verification Audit of Inverclyde Council's Building Standards Service (29-30 January 2008).
 2. The Scottish Building Standards Agency Report on the Follow-up Verification Audit of Inverclyde Council's Building Standards Service (10 December 2008).