

Future model to evaluate the customer experience as part of the building standards verification service

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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 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/policies/building-standards/>

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BSD, Directorate for Local Government and Communities, Denholm House,
Almondvale Business Park, Livingston, EH54 6GA

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1. Introduction

Building standards in Scotland

- 1.1 The Building Standards system in Scotland was established as a result of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003. Its remit 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.
- 1.2 The principal objective of the verification system in Scotland is to protect the public interest by ensuring compliance with the Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004. Verifiers are appointed by Scottish Ministers and the Act provides for a variety of verifiers should this be required. At present the only appointed verifiers are the 32 Scottish local authorities, each covering their own geographical area.
- 1.3 Building standards verifiers work in accordance with the Terms of Appointment; Operating Framework; and Monitoring and Auditing Requirements.
- 1.4 The Operating Framework (2021) comprises three strands:
 - Integrity and Operational Resilience;
 - Administration of Building Warrant Applications and Completion Certificate Submissions; and
 - Maintenance of Records to facilitate effective business operation and periodic audit by the Scottish Government.
- 1.5 Under the auspices of the Operating Framework, verifiers are expected to meet the requirements of the Building Standards Verification Performance Framework. This was first introduced in May 2012 and updated in 2017 and more recently in 2021 to ensure consistency and quality of outputs and overall service, along with a greater focus on peer review, benchmarking and best practice sharing.
- 1.6 The Performance Framework (2021) covers three perspectives:
 - Professional Expertise and Technical Processes;
 - Quality Customer Experience; and
 - Operational and Financial Efficiency.
- 1.7 There are three cross-cutting themes of:
 - Public Interest;
 - Continuous Improvement; and
 - Partnership Working.

- 1.8 To enable performance to be measured, the framework comprises nine Key Performance Outcomes (KPOs). Verifiers are re-appointed on the condition they continue to meet these requirements.

Developments in measuring the performance of verifiers

- 1.9 In 2015, the Scottish Government commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to evaluate the performance of local authorities in their role as verifiers, 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.
- 1.10 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, and those re-appointed for a shorter period were subsequently re-appointed for a further period from 1st May 2020. The new 'Building Standards Performance Framework for Verifiers' was also implemented from May 2017, and updated in April 2021. A full review of appointment periods is planned to be undertaken before 1st May 2023.
- 1.11 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. This followed notable failings found in the construction of Edinburgh School buildings and following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London. The Board's programme of work aims to improve the performance, expertise, resilience and sustainability of the Scottish building standards system.
- 1.12 One such workstream 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.

Measuring customer satisfaction - a timeline

- 1.13 Prior to the development of Scotland's first national customer satisfaction survey for building standards in 2013-14, there was no single standard approach. A wide range of methods used by local authorities included continuous or ad hoc paper based surveys; online surveys and/or customer focus groups. This made it virtually impossible for the quality of service to be consistently measured through the use of like-for-like questions and precluded the possibility of longitudinal analysis.
- 1.14 In 2013, the Scottish Government commissioned Pye Tait Consulting to develop the first national customer satisfaction survey, based on the need to obtain nationally consistent data on customer perceptions of their local authority building standards service. This survey was developed in late 2013/early 2014 and was live in Spring 2014, and successfully obtained baseline data to feed into the customer experience indicators of the verification performance framework and permit future trend analysis.

- 1.15 Every year since then, the survey has measured and reported on performance at national, consortium and local authority levels, incorporating trend analysis to visually show how performance has moved over the preceding three years. This has been undertaken independently by Pye Tait Consulting.
- 1.16 Under the model used to date, local authority verifiers have collated and shared contact details of customers from the previous twelve months with Pye Tait. An email (and reminder messages) are then sent by Pye Tait with a link to the survey. Results are subsequently independently analysed and reports produced at national, local, and consortia levels.
- 1.17 The national survey aligns with KPO 4 of the performance framework – titled ‘Understand and respond to the customer experience’. The purpose of this KPO is for verifiers to monitor customer satisfaction with the building standards service and ensure it meets or exceeds customer expectations.
- 1.18 In recent years there have been several minor changes to the data collection process, questionnaire content, and how performance is benchmarked. For example, in 2015 Pye Tait Consulting was commissioned to review the existing question set and ensure it was fit-for-purpose. More recently, the introduction of GDPR in 2018 determined that customers could reasonably expect to be surveyed by a third party acting as an arms-length extension to the Scottish Government, meaning higher volumes of customer email addresses could be made available without any prior opt-outs or opt-ins being required. That led to an uplift in response volumes although the response rate has generally remained around 15%.
- 1.19 In 2020, Acorn Learning was commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake a review of the national customer satisfaction survey, with the overall aims of establishing the most effective approach to measuring customer satisfaction across Scotland and ensuring the survey is fit for the future to support the Performance Framework for Verifiers. A summary of their findings is provided below.

Strengths and limitations of the current approach

- 1.20 Data from the annual survey have been invaluable for achieving national consistency; enabling performance monitoring and benchmarking; feeding into Ministerial decision-making regarding the length of future appointment of verifiers; as well as contributing towards continuous improvement and best practice sharing at a local level. Acorn Learning’s 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 performance year-on-year is important. The research did, however, note that there is scope for continuous improvement in the way satisfaction is measured.
- 1.21 One of the limitations of the current approach to measuring customer satisfaction, for example, can be seen in the 2020 survey findings which indicate that some customers might be basing feedback on their most recent experience rather than thinking about the application which occurred in the designated timeframe. There is also the risk that agents (working on behalf of an applicant or submitter) who interact with multiple local authorities do not always differentiate between local authorities.

- 1.22 Furthermore, there is concern that the response rate (15% in the 2020 customer survey) is low and could be improved. Acorn Learning's report notes that efforts should be made to improve the range, number, and percentage of response rates from customers, and the question set shortened where possible (while retaining the ability to monitor longitudinal trends).
- 1.23 Additionally, Acorn Learning's research to date for the BSD identified the issue of lack of real-time data gathering and suggests making best use of modern technologies including 4G and 5G and mobile devices to potentially overcome this. To illustrate this, the overall customer satisfaction rating from the December 2020 national survey report will feed into quarterly performance returns from January 2021 until December 2021. This highlights a significant time lag between data collection and reporting by local authorities which does not allow the impact or effectiveness of improvements to customer engagement strategies to be assessed in a timely manner.

Research aim and objectives

- 1.24 The aim of this research is 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. This future model should retain a standardised approach to measuring the customer experience across all 32 local authority verifiers to meet the requirements of KPO 4 of the national performance framework – 'Understand and respond to the customer experience'. Key outputs will include a revised question set and a plan for how the survey should be deployed and managed.
- 1.25 Specific objectives of the research are to:
1. optimise the survey questions so customers are more likely to engage;
 2. review and agree on any necessary changes to the core measures and metrics to capture and benchmark the customer experience as part of KPO 4;
 3. consider a mechanism for more regular data collection (either scheduled or using a more dynamic on-going data collection and real-time reporting tool) to minimise the current time lag;
 4. minimise the survey burden for verifiers and customers given that some local authorities still use their own mechanisms to obtain customer feedback;
 5. ensure the future survey is accessible and easy to use for customers wishing to provide feedback anywhere and from different types of devices;
 6. confirm who will have ownership and control of the survey in future years;
 7. continue to make use of secure and robust data collection methods that comply with relevant data protection legislation and market and social research standards;
 8. through the above actions, set the conditions for increasing survey response rates so that verifiers can rely better on the survey findings.

Methodology

- 1.26 This research was split into two distinct phases. The first phase focused on gathering evidence to determine what future options are available and feasible to measure customer satisfaction (via the current or alternative models).
- 1.27 Evidence to inform the first phase was gathered through a workshop with the BSD Review Group of local authority verifiers, and through six telephone interviews with wider stakeholders. Desk research was also undertaken to supplement this primary research to feed into and inform the development of the three options for a future model presented later in this report, and to identify best practice that can be gathered from elsewhere. This desk research sought to understand:
- what local authority verifiers in Scotland are currently doing to measure customer satisfaction locally, including good practice and limitations.
 - other approaches for measuring and reporting on the customer experience in other organisations in public, private and voluntary sectors, to look for innovative examples that give fast and effective customer data.
 - the range of survey software and data presentation options (including strengths, limitations, and costs) relating to who might run it, how often, mechanisms for reaching customers, device accessibility, and analysis and reporting and presentation considerations.
- 1.28 Following the development of the three potential future models, the second phase of the research presented these options in turn to local authority verifiers at a second BSD Review Group workshop, to discuss the relative (non-financial) merits and drawbacks of each option, before discussing what a preferred future model might best look like. High-level views from wider stakeholders were also sought on the three options, and opinions and potential solutions were gathered to address limitations of the preferred model identified by the Review Group's workshop.

This report brings together all findings from both phases to set out a preferred future model to evaluate the customer experience.

Report structure

- 1.29 Chapter 2 outlines the issues and considerations which prompted this review and incorporates the findings from the initial phase of the research, i.e. the first workshop with the BSD Review Group and first set of stakeholders interviews, and interweaves the findings from the desk research (including Acorn Learning's review, where relevant / applicable).
- 1.30 Chapter 3 provides an outline of how each option would work in practice, along with their respective merits and drawbacks, as noted by workshop attendees and stakeholders, and a conclusion is drawn on the preferred option. Indicative ballpark costing for each option is also provided.
- 1.31 Chapter 4 outlines key considerations highlighted in pursuing the preferred option, and potential solutions that may help to mitigate these issues to an extent. It then sets out the next steps which are required to implement this

option, and outlines key decisions and actions which need to be taken, as well as core considerations to bear in mind when fleshing out this preferred option.

2. Considerations for a future model

2.1 To inform potential options to evaluate the customer experience, there are various factors that need to be taken into account:

1. issues which prompted this review,
2. the importance of the customer evaluation exercise remaining relevant to the needs of the BSD and local authority verifiers, and
3. Ensuring the customer evaluation exercise continues to be fit for purpose.

Issues and considerations which prompted this review, and Research findings addressing these

Frequency, point of survey, and time-lag

The Issue

Historically, the national customer satisfaction survey has been issued annually in the autumn, and respondents in scope are those customers who had contact with a local authority building standards service between 1st April and 31st March of the previous financial year. Therefore, there has always been a time lag between customers' interaction with building standards and the point at which they have been asked to provide feedback via a national survey, ranging from eighteen months as one extreme (April through to October the following year) to six months at best.

In addition, the overall satisfaction rating emerging from each annual report feeds into quarterly performance returns from January to December of the following year. This results in data collection and reporting by local authorities which does not allow the impact or effectiveness of improvements to customer engagement strategies to be assessed timeously. A worst-case scenario is that customer interaction could take place in April one year and be fed into performance returns almost two years later.

The future model should aim to reduce and minimise the time lag so that results can be presented as close to "real time" as possible. Stakeholders and the BSD Review Group agree it is important to reduce this time lag as far as possible.

Customer feedback is currently gathered annually, and customers who have had dealings with a local authority at multiple points over 12 months are only provided the opportunity to provide feedback 'once' per local authority in each year.

2.2 In contrast to the national survey occurring annually, at a local level, customers of most local authority verifiers are able to provide feedback at multiple points throughout the year, at any point in their customer journey.

- 2.3 A benefit of these local approaches being ongoing is that they provide the opportunity to capture views immediately after an interaction, or at different points in the process, however, drawbacks are that results could be skewed to an extent by one individual responding multiple times, or that individuals not in scope might respond.
- 2.4 The idea of a 'live' survey (i.e. one running continuously) provides the ability to monitor results as close to "real time" as possible.
- 2.5 Questioned on the frequency of the survey, stakeholders are split between whether customer satisfaction data should be gathered annually, or continuously. Those supporting an annual approach state that individuals can feel overburdened and increasing the frequency with which feedback is requested may lead to survey fatigue. Alternatively, stakeholders commented that the quality of responses may be diminished, leading to some respondents providing comments of less substance. Stakeholders also note that an annual exercise may provide a greater basis for individuals to reflect on and provide an overall response with potentially more interaction from which to cast an overall judgement, rather than respond in what might be a knee-jerk reaction to a one-off experience.
- 2.6 Stakeholders supportive of a continuous/real-time approach commonly note that existing technology should be able to support faster feedback, and that feedback provided will be more targeted and focused on the specifics on an interaction, both positive and negative aspects.
- 2.7 With regard to the point of survey, stakeholders agree that customers should be asked for feedback only after the process is complete, noting that otherwise individuals may feel that, by providing comment before then, their application may be jeopardised in some way. In general, stakeholders agree that there are two potential points at which to ask for feedback – once on approval of the building warrant, and once at completion certificate stage – which can be far apart in time, and involve liaising with different building standards staff. With agents often handling multiple applications simultaneously, there is the danger that offering a survey more frequently than this would be less well-received.

Data quality and robustness

Consideration

There is a need to control the quality of information being gathered from customers to ensure that the data provide useful, reliable outputs. For example, the current national survey uses a number of controls to ensure that respondents answer questions only about local authority verifiers they have interacted with (which, in the case of agents acting on behalf of an applicant, could be several).

- 2.8 The BSD Review Group, as well as Acorn Learning in their report, have both highlighted the benefits and drawbacks that increasing the frequency of the current annual exercise might have in relation to data quality. On the one hand, agents and applicants would be able to provide feedback about every process (e.g. each warrant application) for which they have had interaction, while on the other, agents handling multiple applications per local authority verifier per year

would be given the chance to provide feedback on multiple occasions, thus increasing the size of their “voice” compared to a customer with a single interaction in a year.

- 2.9 In addition, it is noted in Acorn Learning’s report, and again by local authority verifiers for this research, that national level data obtained by the current method are very robust and reliable. However, there were concerns raised – and this directly links to a slight fall in response rates (see below) – that data at a local authority verifier level can sometimes be insufficiently robust due the small number of responses obtained and – as such – could make it difficult to draw firm conclusions based on response levels.
- 2.10 Research findings from Acorn Learning’s report broadly indicate that a national survey run by an independent agency is perceived to provide impartiality to data gathering and reporting, and adds weight to the findings. This viewpoint is further supported by feedback from local authority verifiers.
- 2.11 Wider stakeholders also broadly support the view that an independent third party should administer and report on the survey in any future model, on the condition that this body works very closely with the BSD and LABSS to ensure that the aims and objectives are met and understood. Stakeholders disagree that local authority verifiers themselves should administer the survey, raising concerns about the perceived validity of self-reporting. Stakeholders are ambivalent regarding LABSS overseeing the exercise, noting that an overarching body is required to ensure consistency, however, several note that a third party would ensure there are no vested interests in the process.

Consistency and comparability

Consideration

The existing customer satisfaction model and core question set has been largely consistent over the past seven years. This has provided a high degree of consistency in the way in which results can be interpreted and compared, both across local authority verifiers, and year-on-year.

- 2.12 A clear finding from Acorn Learning’s report is that stakeholders highly value the current national customer satisfaction survey. The reason is that it provides consistency in measuring service quality at national and local levels. Furthermore, retention of the core question set provides the ability to compare performance all the way back to 2013, as well as enabling benchmarking against key indicators within the national performance framework. Stakeholders agree that retention of core questions enabling year-on-year benchmarking and comparison across local authority verifiers is critical in any future question set.
- 2.13 The BSD Review Group workshop indicated a reasonably high degree of satisfaction with the current approach and question set to evaluate the customer experience at a national level. That said, the Review Group’s discussion predominantly focused on the current question set, and most questions currently in use are viewed as important to keep either to provide year-on-year comparisons, or to enable local authority verifiers to improve continuously. The

Review Group's views on possible alternative models and associated question sets were discussed in the workshop in the second phase of this research.

Response rate

The Issue

The response rate to the national customer satisfaction has sat at around 15% in recent years. Response rates to the survey have decreased slightly in recent years, reflecting either a lack of engagement by customers, and/or a burden on respondents to participate, or just general survey fatigue experienced by the population where surveys are taking place on a regular basis.

- 2.14 Falling response rates to surveys and research are a current trend being seen across all UK industries, reflective of a society over-burdened by research, and therefore it is imperative that organisations are proactive, agile, and seek innovative ways in which to continue to engage with their customers.
- 2.15 Response rates can be linked to survey fatigue but can also be linked to factors such as the length of a survey (Acorn Learning's report suggests a shorter question set in this regard), the readability or intuitiveness of questions and anticipated answers, the "look and feel" of a survey for participants, and whether a respondent "trusts" a survey link, and how their data will be used.
- 2.16 Social media has been used in recent years to promote the survey to customers, and although difficult to quantify its impact, can have had no adverse impact. Stakeholders interviewed for this research suggested they could assist in wider promotion of the research to their members if required, and Acorn Learning note that any and all promotion would help to boost responses.

Local approaches to seeking feedback

The Issue

In addition to the national survey, most local authority verifiers also gather and monitor customer satisfaction data at a local level. Local authority verifiers have ownership of this approach, and set-up and monitor responses in-house on an ongoing basis. The extent to which this is undertaken varies by verifier, depending upon resource constraints and competing priorities.

- 2.17 Local authority verifiers' surveys can typically be accessed by clicking a link in the building standards' staff email signature, or through the verifier's website. Feedback can be provided by anyone at any time, meaning that there is less control over responses compared to the current national approach, but that feedback can be provided more timeously.
- 2.18 These local approaches are typically short and sharp, ranging between six and 15 "Likert" style questions, with a final open-ended text box to capture wider comments and feedback. There is no "joined up" approach between local

authority verifiers, and questions asked differ between verifiers, in some cases duplicating, and in some cases adding to, the national survey questions, but broadly covering similar themes such as timeliness of response, ease of understanding of the process, overall satisfaction with customer service, etc.

- 2.19 Reporting and response rates are both variable among local authority verifiers. Some publish overall feedback on a regular basis (quarterly) while others do not make findings publicly available. Some local authority verifiers' published results are based on very small sample sizes, as low as a dozen, meaning results need interpreting with caution and that monitoring changes over time should be done so with great care.
- 2.20 Asked for their thoughts on these local approaches, wider stakeholders could see the benefits that these might add, including the ability to gather richer, more focused data on a quicker timescale. However, most stakeholders raise concerns about these local approaches, stating that such approaches might not be complementary, either to each other, or to the national survey, and that these may in fact detract from the importance of, and confuse customers about, the national survey. Furthermore, there is concern about respondent fatigue for individuals to complete multiple surveys containing similar questions.

Reporting outputs

The Issue

The current national customer satisfaction survey provides a total of 40 reports: one main national report, 32 local authority verifier reports, and seven consortium reports. These are all supplied in Word format and contain charts, but it is worthwhile reviewing whether this format and extent of reporting continues to meet the needs to readers. In addition, full data tables are supplied to the BSD to accompany the main report, and spreadsheets of the customer responses to open-ended questions are provided at a local level.

- 2.21 Participants at the BSD Review Group workshop suggested that consortium level reports are seldom used or referred to, and therefore it is suggested that these are of little value to continue producing in the future. Wider stakeholders – while broadly familiar with the national report output – were unable to comment on the usefulness of local level outputs and noted that this would be best judged by local authority verifiers and consortia themselves.
- 2.22 Both the Review Group and stakeholders highlight that two key items of information are of most value when reporting at a local level. Firstly, the core quantitative metrics which enable benchmarking against the performance framework metrics and through which a year-on-year comparisons are made in the reporting outputs. Secondly, there is great value placed on the qualitative data that can be/is provided as an additional, separate output from the national customer satisfaction survey, as this provides a more detailed understanding of customers' behaviours and attitudes.
- 2.23 Wider stakeholders support these points, noting that it is important to retain key questions for benchmarking purposes, and that free text comment boxes are

often the most interesting and useful components of surveys to provide context and enable improvement. Stakeholders further comment that any future reporting outputs should be clear, easy to read, and accessible, and suggest a mix of (short) explanatory text and graphics to engage the reader.

Data sharing

Consideration

In the current model, local authority verifiers supply customers' names and email addresses to an independent agency (for all annual surveys to date this has been Pye Tait Consulting), which then contacts customers to gather feedback on the service they received. Data are supplied in such a way that all parties comply with the requirements of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Any future model would have to ensure this process is maintained to be compliant with GDPR requirements and with the Data Protection Act 2018 and other relevant legislation.

Scope of survey respondents

Consideration

The scope of the existing model is to gather and report on feedback from agents, direct applicants, and 'others' who have been customers of building standards services. The BSD Review Group workshop participants indicated that local authority verifiers struggle to obtain feedback from a wider range of individuals who interact with building standards, predominantly contractors and tradespeople who have a critical role in ensuring high quality construction and safe buildings, and noted that they do not collect (or are unable to collect easily) the contact details of such individuals and organisations.

Wider building standards landscape

Consideration

This research is taking place against a backdrop of considerable change in the building standards landscape in Scotland, with the wider work of the Futures Board ongoing. Such change – although as yet to be fully determined – could have wide-reaching implications for the way in which local authority verifiers will operate in terms of their priorities and goals. That work takes a considerably longer-term view (three years hence, and beyond), while the scope of this research and options review is more focused on the short- to medium-term (one to three years).

Technology

The Issue

Email has been a reliable way in which to contact customers in recent years, however, the increased shift to online has resulted in more emails either being ignored or filtered

(deliberately or not), particularly as individuals seek to cut down on the volume of communication received, or have an increased awareness of potential 'phishing' messages. There is a need to explore whether evaluation of the customer experience can be administered in a smarter or more automated fashion to increase efficiencies and meet customer expectations.

- 2.24 The advent of smarter technology – for instance, social media, smart phones, or the eBuildingStandards portal (eBS for short) – represent opportunities for a national survey to be promoted and/or deployed by additional or alternative means. Smarter technologies and smart devices could potentially offer the opportunity to optimise and automate processes, as suggested in Acorn Learning's report, but would involve a large amount of initial set-up.
- 2.25 While the eBS might in theory offer an obvious "quick win" in this regard, it is understood that future digital solutions are in development by the Scottish Government. In addition, there is concern that customers using the portal might provide feedback which is, perhaps unintentionally, focused on their portal experience, rather than on their interaction with building standards services.
- 2.26 Stakeholders broadly agree that using an online approach is the most suitable means to reach customers to obtain feedback, stating that it is a quick and efficient method of engagement. One stakeholder notes that using alternative methods such as paper-based surveys or telephone calls may broaden the reach of the survey, however, another notes that any survey methodology should be kept as simple as possible.

Data presentation software

- 2.27 Beyond the technology which is currently used to evaluate customer satisfaction at a national level, there is a wide range of survey software and data presentation options in the market currently. It is therefore important to consider what options are available which might offer solutions to providing a "smarter" survey that increase levels of automation. Many of these software options can appear very similar at first glance, while many are more focused on marketing and increasing customer engagement and customer numbers.
- 2.28 Presented below in tabular form (in no particular order) is an overview of a selection of potential software options that could potentially be used when gathering and reporting on customer satisfaction with building standards services in Scotland. Please note that the views and assessment presented within the table are those of the author.

Data presentation software Options

| Software | Overview | Cost |
|--------------|---|--|
| Displayr | A data analysis and presentation tool. Data are collected through using other survey software and are then uploaded into Displayr which can be used to create cross-tabulation analysis, text analysis, professional reporting interactive dashboard, and infographics which are visually appealing. Multiple data sources can be blended and analysed and outputs can be published as a webpage or to Office products. | Professional package is £1,899 per year for one professional user. |
| SurveyMonkey | A widely known and used survey platform, SurveyMonkey is currently used by several local authority verifiers to gather local-level feedback. It has the capability to host personalised surveys via different devices. It can run analysis and create reports at regular intervals, although analytical capabilities are slightly less broad than may be required for rigorous research analysis. Feedback can be integrated into other webpages and customised, visually appealing dashboards can be created. | Offers three pricing plans ranging from £25 per month (for three users) to an “Enterprise” package whose cost is calculated based on the needs stipulated by the organisation. |
| HappyOrNot | A “customer experience improvement solution”, most commonly recognised as a series of faces ranging from sad to happy and often seen in airport terminals or shopping malls/supermarkets. This is a very light-touch method to obtain quick, high-level feedback from time-poor respondents, and could be employed at various stages in a customer journey to understand levels of satisfaction with different aspects of the overall experience. This enables feedback to be captured in the moment, and email reports can be generated regularly, while in addition results can be presented online. In terms of analysis, smiley faces do not provide depth of detail of response obtainable by other methods. | Prices are not freely available, but anecdotal evidence suggests one “terminal” can cost up to \$100 a month in the USA. |
| Qualtrics | Qualtrics enables organisations to survey customers across different channels and provides the ability to view data in real-time on a single platform. Surveys can be created and hosted, and feedback can be collected online, via SMS, offline apps, or even via chatbots. Alternatively, data can be imported from other sources for analysis. Customised reporting dashboards are available to present findings. | The basic Qualtrics plan starts at around \$1,500 per year in the USA. |

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|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| SurveySparrow | SurveySparrow offers different solutions to a classic or traditional survey, in the form of chat surveys, or pop-up surveys asking for feedback. A survey can also be distributed by email, and data collected offline using the app if respondents lack internet access. While data can be presented similarly to other software via infographics etc, it lacks the visual appeal offered elsewhere. | A variety of packages are available ranging from the basic, free version up to a business package costing \$149 per month in the USA. |
| Infogram | A content creation tool used by government departments and public organisations, for instance, Angus Council uses this tool to gather and present building standards customer feedback. It is a presentation tool only, and data collected by other means is imported, from which reports, dashboards, and other reporting options can be created. Content is customisable and visually appealing, and viewing is optimised for different devices. Each time data are uploaded, specific processing would be required, thereby meaning processes could not necessarily be automated at each reporting milestone in the context of evaluating building standards customers' experience. | The Pro packages costs \$19 per month in the USA. |
| Microsoft (inc. Forms and Power BI) | Forms is a survey tool included as part of the Office package, featuring a range of survey questions and designs for different devices, and is currently used by some local authority verifiers. It is integrable with Excel for data outputs, but analytical capabilities are slightly less broad than may be required for rigorous research analysis. Power BI allows easy visualisation of data in dashboard forms, and integrates with Excel and other data sources. | Forms included free as part of the Office Business package. Power BI Pro package \$10/month. |
| Snap Surveys | The survey software package used for previous editions of the customer satisfaction survey. Surveys can be set up and run for multiple devices, and disseminated via a smart emailing capability. It has adjustable design and comprehensive analytical capabilities. Directly exported reporting outputs are possible but are less visually appealing than competitors; data can be exported to other software easily. | Basic package for one user licence and 1000 responses is £835 per year. Add-ons/extensions available. |

Approaches used elsewhere to gathering customer satisfaction data

2.29 When considering what potential models to be used to evaluate the customer experience in the future, it is useful to look to other sectors to understand approaches and to explore whether any lessons can be learned and applied to building standards.

2.30 The supermarket sector has notoriously fierce competition, and customer satisfaction surveys, hosted predominantly online, are key for organisations to

understand the customer experience to make improvements. While a small handful are free for anyone to access (whether they have been a customer or not), most of these feedback portals have a point of entry control point, whereby customers enter digits from their receipt to gain access to the survey itself. This enables supermarkets to link up feedback to specific customers. Findings are not made publicly available (understandably) so it is difficult to assess data presentation options.

- 2.31 Such a concept could potentially be extended to the building standards system to control entry to the feedback portal, for instance by entering a building warrant or completion certificate number to gain entry, however, a major drawback would be that individuals may feel that their anonymity would be compromised if responses could be linked back to applications.
- 2.32 Relatively new companies such as Uber and Airbnb have taken a mutual feedback approach, whereby both customers and “hosts” provide feedback on each other. Respective reviews are hidden and cannot be viewed by the other party until both have submitted their feedback. This ensures that feedback is honest and not compromised by the other party’s views. Feedback can be provided about specific aspects (e.g. tidiness, cleanliness, communications, meeting expectations etc.) and about specific people.
- 2.33 While it is not expected that the building standards system will be providing feedback to customers about the experience, approaches to measuring satisfaction using short, sharp surveys are a learning point from these other organisations, as described above. A handful of rating-style questions are provided, as well as an open-text box for freeform comment. These ratings are available for any prospective customer to read, and comments are available to view too. Customers are prompted to provide feedback very shortly after their experience, so that it is fresh in mind.
- 2.34 Which? is viewed as a reliable, trusted independent third-party organisation for the public to gauge levels of satisfaction across different products. Every year, Which? conducts its own independent online survey asking customers about their satisfaction with their energy suppliers. Questions are again short and sharp, asking individuals to rate out of five stars their overall satisfaction with their provider, and additional aspects such as customer service, value for money, complaints handling, and bill clarity. Results are published online for all to view and compare providers’ service (a minimum of 40 responses per energy provider must be obtained) and a star rating against each aspect is visible, and Which? also calculates an overall score. Survey participants must be registered with Which? already to provide feedback.

3. Options for a future model

- 3.1 Taking into account the considerations detailed in the previous chapter and the findings from the first phase of the research, three potential future models for measuring the customer experience were developed for onward discussion and refinement. This included the possibility of mixing and matching elements from these possible models to form an alternative variant, and these outline future models were intended to be viewed as preliminary and very much open to refinement throughout the course of second phase of the research. The three models identified can be summarised as:
1. Continuing with a similar approach to previous years with minor adjustments
 2. Quarterly monitoring with automated data analysis and reporting
 3. Rolling survey (open year-round) with star ratings

Option 1: Continuing with a similar approach to previous years with minor adjustments

| Overview of approach |
|---|
| <p>Proposal</p> <p>This option is to continue with the national customer satisfaction survey in a similar way to previous years, but with some minor alterations to address the concerns and issues raised. The suggested changes for future editions are noted herein (see Appendix).</p> |
| <p>Frequency</p> <p>Annually, but in order to reduce the time lag of previous years, it is suggested that evaluation of the customer experience begins as soon as possible after 31st March. This is the cut-off point for customers to be in scope of the survey.</p> |
| <p>Question set</p> <p>The proposed national survey questionnaire has been shortened from previous years and will allow historic benchmarking and comparisons. Questions perceived as no longer relevant have been tentatively removed and options around virtual inspections and meetings have been inserted.</p> |
| <p>Contacting customers</p> <p>Local authority verifiers would collate customer contact details for the financial year in scope, as before. The survey link would be issued by email (with reminders) and the exercise promoted widely on social media and through other appropriate channels.</p> |
| <p>Reporting and presentation</p> <p>The main, national report would retain its core structure and layout with all key findings as before. At a local level, 32 local authority verifier reports would be produced, and these would be significantly streamlined to a shorter (2-3 page) document providing “at-a-glance” results of key findings and metrics only. Open-ended comments would still be provided in Excel format. Consortium reports would be discontinued.</p> |
| <p>Administration</p> <p>It is proposed that this option is administered overall by an independent third party, working closely with the Building Standards Division.</p> |
| <p>Timelines</p> <p>The research start date should be brought forward to earlier in the year and ideally run from April to August rather than August to December as before (cf. 'Frequency' above). The period for which the survey is open to responses can remain at one month.</p> |

Views from the BSD Review Group and stakeholders

Strengths of Option 1

This option largely maintains the status quo of how the survey has been undertaken in previous years, and stakeholders note this is a “tried and tested process”. Furthermore, local authority verifiers foresee no major work being required to implement this option as all systems are already set up and all those involved are familiar with the processes.

Participants note that retaining the same data collection method and most of the same core questions means that year-on-year comparisons of findings can continue.

Shifting the timings of the survey research to four months earlier (compared to previous waves of the survey) reduces the time lag between customers’ interactions and their chance to provide feedback, thus making it more relevant to customers. Further, participants recognise that moving the survey four months earlier will mean that their rating will also be less out of date compared to previous survey waves.

A slightly shorter question set compared to previous years could boost survey engagement, thus potentially improving response volumes and the response rate (%).

By continuing to undertake the customer satisfaction survey on annual basis, there can be a focused promotional push to raise awareness of the survey to potential customers, for instance a dedicated drive on social media.

The removal of consortium reports (compared to previous survey waves) will reduce the time and resource required at analysis and reporting stage.

Customers will continue to be reassured that the survey is run by an independent third party and that their responses will be treated impartially.

Limitations of Option 1

Whilst the time lag would be reduced compared to previous waves (as noted above) there is still no chance for customers to provide immediate feedback – indeed, some customers might have interacted with their verifier up to 12 months previously in this option – resulting in gathering data that are potentially out of date, vague and/or inaccurate.

There is concern that this option (and the other options presented) continues to potentially duplicate existing local approaches to measuring the customer experience. That could mean that two sets of questions in two separate surveys may confuse or over-burden customers, which could adversely affect response rates.

As an annual exercise, local authority verifiers would have to use the rating arising from this survey for 12 months and would not be able to update their performance any more regularly.

Stakeholders highlighted that the question set is still reasonably long which may be off-putting for potential respondents to complete.

Estimated cost implications of option 1

- 3.2 It is envisaged that the level of resource required to undertake this option would be approximately similar to previous years, that is, around £15,000 per annum (exc. VAT). Improvements to survey questions and design, look and feel and to accessibility (e.g. so suitable for mobile devices) would cost approximately £2,000, for the first year only.

Option 2: Quarterly monitoring with automated data analysis and reporting

| Overview of approach |
|--|
| <p>Proposal</p> <p>The national customer satisfaction survey is proposed to operate in a similar way to previous years through set-up and fieldwork phases. Major changes in this approach are that the exercise is undertaken quarterly, and that data analysis and reporting are automated.</p> |
| <p>Frequency</p> <p>Quarterly (every three months).</p> |
| <p>Question set</p> <p>The proposed national survey questionnaire is identical to that proposed in option 1, i.e. a very slightly shortened question set that retains the core structure from previous years that will allow historic benchmarking and comparisons (see Appendix).</p> |
| <p>Contacting customers</p> <p>Local authority verifiers collate customer contact details every three months. The survey link is issued by email (with reminders).</p> |
| <p>Reporting and presentation</p> <p>Reports in Word format would no longer be produced. Instead, results would be presented visually on a dedicated webpage in graphical format. The website would have dedicated pages for the national level findings, and each local authority. Charts would demonstrate quarter-on-quarter trends. Excel workbooks with open-ended comments would be provided by the third party administering (see below) to each local authority verifier.</p> |
| <p>Administration</p> <p>It is proposed that this option is administered overall by an independent third party, working closely with the BSD.</p> |
| <p>Timelines</p> <p>Collating contact details and set up would take a month, the survey would run for two to three weeks, and analysis and reporting would take two weeks at most, meaning outputs could be provided just over two months after each quarter ends.</p> |

Views from the BSD Review Group and stakeholders

Strengths of Option 2

The Review Group and stakeholders embraced the type of reporting output in this option, supporting the shift in the presentation of findings from a Word output (as in previous years) to a much more visual output using an online dashboard. In addition, local authority verifiers commented that they also support the retention from the 2020 model of the Excel workbooks as an output, as the open-ended comments in these workbooks allow verifiers to build a fuller picture of their service.

Moving from an annual to a quarterly exercise means that local authority verifiers could update their rating more regularly. It would also enable them to act faster and on the basis of more up-to-date information.

Retaining the same data collection method and the same core question set to previous years means that year-on-year (and, going forward, quarter-on-quarter) comparisons of findings can continue.

Customers can continue to be reassured that the survey is run by an independent third party and that their responses will be treated impartially.

Limitations of Option 2

There was concern raised that undertaking this exercise on a quarterly basis may quickly result in survey fatigue, particularly if the question set used is extensive (the proposed option is 24 questions long) and that this would have an adverse impact on overall response rates in the mid to long term.

Local authority verifiers raised concerns that this option would create more work for verifiers as they would be asked to collate contact details of their customers four times a year, which would be an additional administrative burden for them.

Local authority verifiers also raised concerns around the time and resource which might be required on their part to review fully the data arising from a longer survey each quarter and to read and fully digest the analysis and feed this into their performance reports.

Estimated cost implications of option 2

- 3.3 Costs for the initial phase each quarter, i.e. gathering contact details and undertaking the fieldwork, will be similar to those associated with the current survey in previous years. Multiplied by four, this works out at around £16,000 per annum. There will also be increased resource implications for local authority verifiers to be obliged to provide contact details each quarter.
- 3.4 Analysis and reporting stages may involve a significant amount of set-up and testing, likely involving an experienced IT consultant with specialist knowledge to set-up “behind the scenes” processes so that survey findings can be instantly transformed into reporting outputs. Specific conversations are required to determine the precise amount, but an approximate cost for set-up and testing might be £25,000.
- 3.5 Once set-up, a small amount of time would be required each quarter to run analysis and reporting, and checking that automated processes are running as intended. The approximate annual cost to undertake this exercise four times per year is £5,000. An annual subscription fee of approximately £2,500 would be required to present reporting outputs visually via an interface such as Displayr (although less costly examples are available as noted in Chapter 2).
- 3.6 Therefore, this option would incur a cost of £48,500 in year 1, and £23,500 in years thereafter, not adjusting for inflation. Note: all costs included here exclude VAT.

Option 3: Rolling survey (open year-round) with star ratings

| Overview of approach |
|---|
| <p>Proposal</p> <p>A short, sharp survey for customers to complete at one of two stages: at approval of building warrant, or acceptance of the completion certificate.</p> |
| <p>Frequency</p> <p>Rolling/ongoing survey (open all the time) with quarterly reporting outputs.</p> |
| <p>Question set</p> <p>A short question set (format and questions to be agreed) of potentially six to ten Likert style questions followed by a final open text box for wider comments.</p> |
| <p>Contacting customers</p> <p>Customers would have the chance to provide feedback either following building warrant approval, or acceptance of the completion certificate. The link to the feedback survey would be contained in the confirmation email to customers.</p> |
| <p>Reporting and presentation</p> <p>Reports in Word format would no longer be produced. Instead, results would be presented visually on a dedicated webpage in graphical format. The website would have dedicated pages for the national level findings, and each local authority. Charts would demonstrate quarter-on-quarter trends. Consortium analysis and reporting would be discontinued. Excel workbooks with open-ended comments would be provided by the third party administering (see below) to each local authority verifier.</p> |
| <p>Administration</p> <p>It is proposed that this option is administered by an independent third party to have ownership of the survey questions and oversee the data analysis and reporting, working closely with the Building Standards Division. As noted, customers would receive the feedback link on building warrant approval or on acceptance of the completion certificate automatically through the building standards systems.</p> |
| <p>Timelines</p> <p>Responses would be gathered on a 'rolling' basis, meaning data from one quarter could be analysed immediately at quarter end. With automated processes, analysis and reporting would take two weeks at most, meaning outputs could be provided around a fortnight after each quarter ends.</p> |

Views from the BSD Review Group and stakeholders

Strengths of Option 3

Workshop participants broadly believe this option to be “workable” and that it would be reasonably straightforward to tie processes into existing systems and processes.

Workshop attendees and stakeholders largely agree that a much shorter question set would make the survey more attractive to respondents – especially repeat respondents such as agents – which could minimise survey fatigue and potentially mitigate against any adverse impact on the response rate arising through gathering feedback more regularly.

Sending out the survey link in the email accompanying the building warrant approval or acceptance of the completion certificate provides customers the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience immediately after a part of the process, so that their thoughts are still fresh in their mind when responding, meaning the feedback is highly relevant. Providing two points of feedback (BW and CC) will also mean that analysis of the process is more granular.

The Review Group and stakeholders embraced the type of reporting output in this option, supporting the shift in the presentation of the findings from a Word output (as in previous years) to a much more visual output on an online dashboard. Stakeholders comment that a contemporary dashboard/visual output is now expected by readers in preference to a Word report for this type of exercise, and note that, if respondents can see how their local authority verifier is performing year-on-year/compared to other verifiers, this easy view of results will enhance their buy-in/motivation to participate.

In addition, local authority verifiers commented that they also support the retention from the 2020 model of the Excel workbooks as an output, as the open-ended comments in these workbooks allow verifiers to build a picture of their service.

Moving from an annual to a quarterly exercise means that local authority verifiers can update their rating more regularly. It will also enable them to act faster and on the basis of more up-to-date information.

Workshop attendees commented that, sending out the survey link to customers within the same email of building warrant approval or acceptance of the completion certificate would mean that the survey link can be tied into existing processes. Further, they note that this would reduce the existing administrative burden for local authority verifiers to collate and share customer contact details, as they have been obliged to do so in previous years.

Participants discussed that this option allows customers to provide feedback on each individual experience/interaction, rather than at a single occurrence each year, potentially allowing verifiers to unpick experiences in greater detail.

Customers can continue to be reassured that the survey is run by an independent third party and that their responses will be treated impartially.

Limitations of Option 3

Workshop participants raised concerns about the suggestion in this option to gather feedback at two stages and were unsure whether it was indeed necessary to survey customers at both approval of building warrant and acceptance of completion certificate. These participants noted that customers can have less interaction with building standards at completion certificate stage, and that customers may believe they are providing feedback related to planning, rather than building standards, potentially leading to irrelevant survey data. (Note: this is a risk within all options presented, and an existing risk within the current model, with terms used interchangeably by some customers.) Other participants noted that gathering feedback at two stages may actually bring benefits as the customer is not necessarily the same at the two points.

Changing the question set would result in some loss of comparability to previous years' performance data gathered through earlier waves of the customer satisfaction survey. However, while this historic comparability may be lost, local authority verifiers would still be able to benchmark themselves against one another using any new question set.

Participants discussed the survey response rate at length. Several verifiers noted that they currently use an "exit" survey approach to gather feedback (i.e. including a link in an email at, say, building warrant approval stage) but that the response rates are typically low (below 10%). There was concern that, if a survey link is to be provided as a standard part of the warrant approval email, that the email may be lost, or that agents dealing with multiple applications per year may ignore the email and not respond at all, thus adversely affecting response rates. Furthermore, local authority verifiers raised concern that a small number of responses per verifier per quarter may result in their performance rating for that quarter being based on a very small number of responses.

The annual approach which has been used in previous years to gather customer feedback provides a single focus point in the year where the exercise can be promoted. Moving to gathering feedback on an ongoing basis may make it more difficult to undertake promotion to raise awareness.

Estimated cost implications of option 3

- 3.7 An initial set-up cost will be required to develop the new question set, and to input this into survey software and test, at a cost of approximately £2,500. This question set could be reviewed and, if necessary, altered on a regular basis at a small additional cost.
- 3.8 Analysis and reporting stages may involve a significant amount of set-up and testing, likely involving an experienced IT consultant with specialist knowledge to set-up "behind the scenes" processes so that survey findings can be instantly transformed into reporting outputs. Specific conversations are required to determine the precise amount, but an approximate cost for set-up and testing is £25,000.

- 3.9 Once set-up, a small amount of time would be required each quarter to run analysis and reporting, and checking that automated processes are running as intended. The approximate annual cost to undertake this exercise four times per year is £5,000. An annual subscription fee of approximately £2,500 would be required to present reporting outputs visually via an interface such as Display (although less costly examples are available as noted in Chapter 2).
- 3.10 Therefore, this option would incur a cost of £35,000 in year 1, and £7,500 in years thereafter, not adjusting for inflation. Note: all costs included here exclude VAT.

Wider considerations when selecting a preferred option – views from the BSD Review Group

- 3.11 Workshop participants discussed the frequency of the exercise (for example, customer satisfaction is evaluated annually in option 1), noting that gathering feedback more regularly could be overly burdensome for customers. In this regard, there was discussion around whether differing approaches could be taken to gather feedback from agents and from direct applicants, with a suggestion that applicants' thoughts could be gathered immediately after their BW approval/CC acceptance, and that agents could also be contacted directly after each these points, but that (say) an annual push/promotion could be undertaken, directly targeted at agents, to gather feedback from this cohort. Such a change to (say) the preliminary option 3 model would have financial and resourcing implications to the tentative costing set out above, and may also potentially disadvantage any agents who wished to provide feedback immediately.
- 3.12 There was discussion around which part of the customer experience should be evaluated. Some workshop participants noted that they saw the "core" of the interaction occurring up to the point of building warrant approval, rather than the following period between warrant approval up to acceptance of the completion certificate, despite site inspections being a key function.
- 3.13 Some workshop participants noted that the presented options might continue to duplicate existing local survey activity and that, if customers received two sets of questions in two separate surveys, this could add to their burden and reduce response rates.
- 3.14 The annual approach which has been used in previous years to gather customer feedback provides a single focus point in the year where the exercise can be promoted. Moving to gathering feedback each quarter could reduce the positive impact that any awareness-raising campaign might have on the response rate. Workshop participants also noted that promoting the survey on a quarterly basis might result in overlap and/or duplication with other strands of verifiers' communications strategies, potentially leading to customer confusion.
- 3.15 Regarding questionnaire design, and while noting that a shorter question set in option 3 would increase its attractiveness to customers providing feedback, the Review Group commented that including an open-ended response question is extremely helpful to gather wider comments for them to aid continuous improvement of their services. Furthermore, one participant noted that any rating scale questions should be designed as "forced" Likert-style questions with no middle ground option.

Towards a future model

- 3.16 Having discussed the relative strengths, limitations, and considerations of each option in turn, the Review Group and stakeholders were asked for their thoughts on which of the three options would be the most appropriate to take forward as a future model. **There was unanimous agreement among respondents that option 3, on the basis of the respective merits and drawbacks of each option, would be the best of the three options.**

4. Implementation plan

Considerations and decisions required around option 3

- 4.1 In supporting option 3 as the preferred model, the Review Group put forward several caveats/considerations, where key decisions will need to be made.
- 4.2 With the potential overlap/duplication this option might have with existing local approaches (noted in paragraph 3.13), local authority verifiers suggested that local level approaches could be discontinued if the national-level question set used in option 3 could be specifically designed to meet the requirements of Customer Service Excellence (CSE) elements.
- 4.3 There were broad discussions around the response rate that option 3 might generate. While the Review Group noted that similar approaches for their local feedback surveys typically produced a low response (under 10%), participants agreed it would be difficult to estimate the response rate of this option until fully implemented nationwide. Participants did note that raising awareness through personal approaches to individuals, such as prompting customers while on site, or via telephone calls, could be one option to consider to raise awareness and response levels. In addition, the Group noted that, even if responses were to fall, the quality and usefulness of responses may be higher given customers would be providing feedback directly after their experience. In the final point linked to response rate, verifiers raised concerns that a small number of responses per verifier per quarter may result in their performance rating for that quarter being based on a very small number of responses, a trade-off that would need to be made.
- 4.4 The Review Group raised concerns that the survey link, if included in an automated email with (say) Building Warrant approval, may be easily overlooked. To increase the visibility of the customer survey link, it was suggested that, rather than being included and potentially lost within the text of the email notification of building warrant approval (or acceptance of completion certificate) that the opportunity to provide feedback could instead be circulated in a separate, dedicated and auto-generated (that would require initial set-up) message shortly afterwards.

Potential mitigations for option 3 considerations – views from stakeholders

- 4.5 Asked about how the response rate might be uplifted and maintained, stakeholders noted that email was the most appropriate means to gather feedback, and that SMS would have little positive impact. Three stakeholders independently suggested that the request for feedback could be implemented as part of application process, for instance, applicants/agents could be informed that their warrant/certificate was ready and could be accessed upon completing a short feedback form. These stakeholders suggested this embedded survey is simple and quick, and that the benefits of completing the feedback are clearly stated for respondents, for example by noting that it will only take 2-3 minutes to complete, that feedback will feed into verifiers' continuous improvement, and that results are viewable on a dashboard webpage. However, two stakeholders believed that making a feedback request mandatory was unacceptable.

Separately, another stakeholder suggested that potential respondents could be incentivised to provide feedback via entry into a free prize draw.

- 4.6 A second consideration raised by the BSD Review Group was that, moving from an annual exercise to an ongoing one would reduce the potential for focused promotional activities. Stakeholders commented that, were the survey to be embedded as part of the process (as outlined in the previous paragraph), then this would be a moot point. One stakeholder noted that, since the Covid-19 pandemic, they have significantly boosted their social media activity and use two-minute animations to get across key messages to followers on an ongoing basis, and that such a model might be applied in this instance. Another stakeholder commented that any promotion would be best placed coming either from verifiers themselves, or from LABSS, and could link to the latest results dashboard to drive interest and uptake in participating.
- 4.7 The third main consideration raised by the Review Group centred on whether differing approaches would be required for agents and applicants. Broadly, stakeholders believed that a similar approach should be used to obtain feedback from both cohorts, otherwise there is a danger that a two-tier system results, with data that may not enable consistency or comparability between the two groups. While agents, with the suggested approach outlined in option 3, will be asked for feedback at multiple points in each year, stakeholders believe that agents will not become fatigued if the survey is easy and quick to complete.
- 4.8 As outlined in paragraph 3.13, Review Group verifiers believe option 3 might duplicate existing local approaches used to gather feedback. One stakeholder suggested that, to avoid such duplication, to simplify processes, and to minimise any potential customer confusion, local approaches should be discontinued, and that the national survey is deployed, as outlined, to enable consistent comparison and benchmarking.

Next steps and considerations

- 4.9 **A new question set will need to be agreed upon between local authority verifiers and the BSD.** This would potentially need the input of a specialist research company. This question set should be designed to be quick and easy for respondents to understand and complete, and cover the key question topics, as well as retaining core questions needed for benchmarking purposes, i.e. year-on-year comparison and measurement against performance framework criteria. There is broad agreement between the BSD Review Group and stakeholders that questions should be designed to be closed (rating, or Likert-type question) with one open-ended question for additional comment.
- 4.10 **Decide on whether existing local-level approaches being used to gather customer feedback and satisfaction should be retained or discontinued.** If discontinued, any potential customer confusion will be avoided, as will any duplication in effort. However, as some of these local approaches feed into CSE, any new question set would need to cover the key areas and question topics that will still enable these local authorities to meet their CSE requirements. Discontinuing local-level approaches would require a unanimous and collective buy-in from all verifiers.
- 4.11 **The approach to distributing the survey itself, i.e. if it needs to be integrated as a mandatory step.** As noted above, local-level approaches which

include a link in their BW approval/CC acceptance email typically have low response rates. Therefore, it is recommended that the process is changed to integrate the short feedback questionnaire as an additional step (although completing the questions may not necessarily have to be made mandatory) and embed this as part of the BW/CC process. In practice, customers would be informed that their BW/CC is ready and that, to be able to obtain and download a copy, they will first need to navigate through a short feedback form to reach it. To implement this procedure, associated technical systems would first need to be revised to take this into account.

- 4.12 Alternatively, if the BSD does not wish to implement this particular recommendation of asking for feedback as an integrated, additional step, we recommend that the survey link is sent as a separate email to the BW/CC email, so that it is not lost among the other text and information. Furthermore, it is recommended that ongoing promotional activity and awareness raising is undertaken via social media, via regular posts and short video messages.
- 4.13 **A decision on the software to be used is to be agreed upon to meet all parties' needs.** Various potential reporting dashboards have been outlined in Chapter 2, each with relative strengths, limitations and cost considerations. A careful review will be required to understand precisely what additional technical expertise and capacity is required to turn the quarterly analysis output into a dataset that can be easily imported to the chosen data presentation software and updated with a quarter-on-quarter comparison, both at a national and a local level. Associated with this, once the question set is decided upon, the analysis template needs to be set up so that quarterly datasets can be easily imported and analyses run.
- 4.14 **Decisions need to be taken on how the various key stages of the process (question design, survey hosting, analysis, automated reporting) are set up, managed and audited on an ongoing basis.** There was broad support among the BSD Review Group and stakeholders for an independent third party/specialist research agency to run these aspects, working closely with the BSD, to ensure impartiality and underline the independence of the overall process. Thought will also need to be given as to how the cost of implementing this will be met in future years.
- 4.15 **Timelines:** All the above steps may take some time to implement, and it is uncertain, at this stage, precisely how long it will take to move from this point to taking this option forward to implement in day-today use. Therefore, depending on such decisions, it may be that the current evaluation model (i.e. that used in 2020 and previous years) is implemented for a final time in 2021 to ensure that customer satisfaction and associated performance framework measures can be assessed and reported on, before this new model is rolled out.

Appendix A: Proposed questions for use in options 1 and 2

Questions which have been removed from the 2020 edition have been included at the end of this Appendix for reference.

Note: as outlined in Chapter 4, the question set for option 3 will require developing.

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

XXXX 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 XXX under the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.

If you have any queries, please contact XXX at XXX, via XXX or by telephoning XXX

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 no longer presented with this drop-down list of 32 local authorities to manually select which to provide feedback about. Instead, this information is 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 |
| | Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar | | Orkney |
| | Dumfries and Galloway | | Perth and Kinross |
| | Dundee | | Renfrewshire |
| | East Ayrshire | | Scottish Borders |
| | East Dunbartonshire | | Shetland |
| | East Lothian | | South Ayrshire |
| | East Renfrewshire | | 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]

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Domestic new build – multiple plotted developments (houses/flats) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Domestic new build – other (e.g. one-off house build) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Domestic existing build - extension |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Domestic existing build - alteration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Non-domestic – residential (e.g. hostels, guest houses, hotels, hospitals) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Non-domestic – assembly (e.g. churches, schools, health centres, libraries, stadia) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Non-domestic – commercial (e.g. shops, restaurants and office buildings) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Non-domestic – Industrial (e.g. factory buildings, manufacturing units, refineries) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 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 | | | | | |
| Your 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]

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Email |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Telephone |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Letter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | On-site visit |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | At the Building Standards service offices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 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'

Q24. Finally, do you have any final comments about how you believe the local authority verifier Building Standards service could be improved in the future?

Questions removed from the 2020 survey

Did you use an agent to act on your behalf as part of the application process? (formerly Q3)

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know |

For which of the following reasons did you make contact with your local authority building standards service? Tick all that apply. (formerly Q4)

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | To discuss my proposal before applying for a building warrant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | To make an application for a building warrant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | During construction, including submission of a completion certificate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other reason/s |

If Other, please specify

Are you aware of the need to notify the building standards service before warrantable work commences? (formerly Q15)

| | |
|--------------------------|-----|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No |

Are you aware of the new Construction Compliance Notification Plan (CCNP) which is issued by the local authority at the same time as the building warrant is granted? (formerly Q16)

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes – aware but not familiar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Yes – aware and familiar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | No – not aware |

Did you have an inspection visit by building standards service staff?
(formerly Q17)

| | |
|--|------------|
| | Yes |
| | No |
| | Don't know |

Have you visited the building standards section of the local authority's website?
(formerly Q21)

| | |
|--|-----|
| | Yes |
| | No |

Did you visit the offices of the local authority building standards service?
(formerly Q28)

| | |
|--|-----|
| | Yes |
| | No |

How satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of the building standards service offices? Leave any statements blank if you don't know or if not applicable.
(formerly Q29)

| | Very satisfied | Fairly satisfied | Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | Fairly dissatisfied | Very dissatisfied |
|------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Reception service | | | | | |
| Waiting time | | | | | |
| Privacy for discussion | | | | | |



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