

Annex A: Online Survey Questionnaire

Online Survey of Local Authorities

Introduction

Optimal Economics has been appointed by the Building Standards Division (BSD) of the Scottish Government to undertake a review of building standards fee income and the level of reinvestment in service delivery. The broad objectives of the research are to review building warrant fee income in Scotland and to consider how fees are used to support the delivery of the verification service and how verifiers invest in their service to meet the requirements of the Operating Framework and Performance Frameworks. The research must also determine how the future requirements for building standards verification can be delivered through increases to the fee structure.

The purpose of this survey is to seek information and views on how building standards departments used any additional income arising from the 2017 fees increase and to consider a number of factors relating to the potential changes to building standards procedures from the work of the Futures Board.

As the research must also model future fee levels, the survey concludes with some points of clarification regarding the number and type of building warrants and the component of fees and cost data in the annual return made to BSD.

If you have any questions regarding the research, please contact Edith McDowall by either email or phone (edith.mcdowall@optimaleconomics.co.uk or 07974 392693).

Background

1. Name:
2. Local Authority:

Current Fee, GAE and Other Income

3. Overall, and by type of work, do you think that current fees are sufficient to support the delivery of verification services?

	Yes/No
Overall	
Domestic	
Non-domestic	

4. Please explain your answer to Q3 above.

Overall	
Domestic	

Non-domestic	
--------------	--

5. Overall, and by type of work, do you think that current fees are sufficient to meet the operational performance framework?

	Yes/No
Overall	
Domestic	
Non-domestic	

6. Please explain your answer to Q5 above.

Overall	
Domestic	
Non-domestic	

7. As part of the finance settlement from the Scottish Government, all local authorities receive part of the £3.8 million Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) allocation for building standards. This is not a budget or target and local authorities can spend the allocation as they feel appropriate. Does your building standards service receive any income from your authority for the provision of other (non-verification) building standards services? Yes/No (£)

8. If yes, can you provide details of the amount received in 2021/22? (£)

--

9. What services did this income support and to what extent did it cover the cost of providing the service?

	Did income cover cost? Yes/no	Drop down menu with choices: - only part of staff costs; staff costs; staff costs plus costs related to the activity (e.g. travel); staff costs plus all overheads
Enforcement (excluding Dangerous Buildings)		
Enforcement – Dangerous Buildings		

Building Standards Register		
Licensing		
Safety at Sports Grounds		
Other (please specify)		

10. If no to Q7, are you expected to fund these services from your verification fee income?

	Yes/No/Not applicable
Enforcement (excluding Dangerous Buildings)	
Enforcement – Dangerous Buildings	
Building Standards Register	
Licensing	
Safety at Sports Grounds	
Other (please specify)	

11. Are there any other comments you would like to make on GAE allocations of funding to building standards?
12. When the building standards fees increased in 2017, £1.5 million was taken from the GAE allocation to local authorities. Does the finance department in your authority expect to receive a contribution from your verification fee income to cover this reduced GAE allocation? Yes/No
13. If yes, can you provide details of the amount paid to the finance department in 2021/22?

£	
---	--

14. Do you receive any other income for services provided?

Income Source	Yes/No
Licensing	
Safety at Sports Grounds	

Other (e.g. copy plans, letters of comfort)	
---	--

15. If Yes, how much would you receive for these services in a typical year? (£)

Licensing	
Safety at Sports Grounds	
Other (copy plans, letters of comfort)	

Re-Investment of Fee Income

Analysis of the BSD annual return data allows the change in fee income to be analysed over time. The email which provided the link to this survey compares 2016/17 (pre fee increase) fee income with 2018/19 (first full year post increase) fee income and sets out our estimates of the changes to your income which have arisen as a result of a change in the volume of applications and the change as a result of the fee increase.

16. Where your income increased as a result of the fee increase between 2016/17 and 2018/19, was this additional income available to invest in your building standards services or has it been used to fund other council services?

	Yes/No
Building Standards – Verification Services	
Building Standards – Enforcement Work	
Building Standards – other non-verification services	
Other Council Services	
Other (please specify)	

17. Where your income has increased as a result of the fee increase between 2016/17 and 2018/19, can you describe how this additional fee income has been re-invested? (Please provide the level of investment (£) and a brief description of the investment)

	£	Description
Additional Staff (no., grade)		
Training		

Technology		
Other (please describe)		

18. Have you been able to maintain the investment since 2018/19?

	Yes, maintained investment; No, not maintained investment; Increase Investment
Additional Staff	
Training	
Technology	
Other (please describe)	

19. Please comment on your answer to Q18.

Additional Staff (no., grade)	
Training	
Technology	
Other (please describe)	

20. Can you describe the effect this investment has had on the building standards service? (e.g. contribute to specific KPOs)

Additional Staff	
Training	
Technology	
Other (please describe)	

Expenditure on Verification and Building Standards

21. In the 2021/22 annual return under KPO 5 you provided details of your verification staff costs, non-staff costs for verification and other verification related investment. These costs were provided in the email which contained the link to this survey. Are you able to clarify what is included in the non-staff verification costs and other verification related investment?

	Non-Staff Verification Yes/No/Don't Know options	Other Verification Related Investment Yes/No/Don't/Know options
Travel & subsistence		
Training		
Accommodation		
Office Costs		
IT		
Personal Protection Equipment		
Recharged Council Services		
Outsourced Specialist Services		
Other (please specify)		

22. Can you provide an estimate of the total expenditure of your building standards department in 2021/22?
23. Does this expenditure include overheads (e.g. office costs, HR etc)?
24. To what extent is your building standards team involved in the following activities?

	Dropdown menu with options: Complete responsibility for activity Mainly responsible but there can be input from other teams Some input but the main responsibility of other teams No responsibility or input
Enforcement	
Licensing	
Other (please specify)	

Certification

25. For each certification scheme, does the value of the discount forgone cover the verification cost of checking the work, if a certificate is not provided?

	Dropdown box with: Always; Usually; Sometimes; Never
Design – Structures	
Design –Energy	
Design – Non-Domestic Energy	
Construction – Drainage, Heating, Plumbing	
Construction - Electrical	

26. Do you think the discounts are sufficient to encourage use? Yes/No
27. Please explain your answer to Q26.
28. What do you think could be done to encourage the use of certification and can you provide any examples where there has been an incentive to use certification?

Future Changes to the Verification Delivery Model

The planned future delivery model for verification services is expected to impact on the resources of the building standards teams. This will include the requirements from the Cole Report which, with respect to high risk buildings, includes a site inspection when a staged building warrant is submitted to check if work without approval was underway. There will also be a need to establish if notification of start of site, compliance plan inspection/checks and completion certificate submissions are being notified in line with the details recorded in the compliance plan.

29. Can you describe what you believe the following changes will have on the workload of delivering your building standards service?

	Dropdown box with choices: Increase; no significant change; decrease
Central hub	
Compliance plan manager role	
Increased compliance workload through more CCNP notices and stricter compliance procedures	

A more pro-active approach towards enforcement	
Pre-application discussions	
Monitoring high risk buildings to check work has not started without a warrant or there is no unauthorised occupation	
Other (please specify)	

30. Are there any comments you would like to make regarding fees and the potential future changes to the verification delivery model?

Central Hub	
Compliance Plan manager role	
Increased compliance workload through more CCNP notices and stricter compliance procedures	
A more proactive approach towards enforcement	
Pre-application discussions	
Monitoring high risk buildings to check work has not started without a warrant or there is no authorised occupants	
Other (please specify)	

31. Do you think there should be separate fees for specific services?

	Yes/No
Plan Checking	
Inspection/Reasonable Inquiry	
Pre-application discussions	
Monitoring high risk buildings	
Enforcement (excluding Dangerous Buildings)	
Enforcement – Dangerous Buildings	

Other (please specify)	
------------------------	--

32. Please comment on your answer to Q31.

Plan Checking	
Inspection/Reasonable Inquiry	
Pre-application discussions	
Monitoring high risk buildings	
Enforcement (excluding Dangerous Buildings)	
Enforcement – Dangerous Buildings	
Other (please specify)	

33. Do you think local authorities should be able to set their own fees to ensure full cost recovery rather than having to use the fee structure set by the Scottish Government? Yes/No

34. Please explain your answer to Q33.

35. Do you think the building warrant fee should have a component to cover the statutory local authority functions (e.g. enforcement, maintain the building standards register)? Yes/No

36. Please explain your answer to Q35.

37. Would you prefer to receive all your building warrant income up-front or in stages?

38. Please explain your answer to Q37.

39. In principle, how do you think the overall cost of delivering a future building standards central hub should be funded?

	Yes/No
Increased fees with a reduction in the GAE allocation	
Subscription by LAs – based no. building warrants	
Subscription by LAs – based on population	
Pay as you go use of services	

Combination of approaches (please specify)	
Other (please specify)	

40. Please comment on your answer to Q39.

Increased fees with a reduction in the GAE allocation	
Subscription by LAs – based no. building warrants	
Subscription by LAs – based on population	
Pay as you go use of services	
Combination of approaches (please specify)	
Other (please specify)	

Points of Clarification: Number of Warrants

BSD has supplied the number of building warrants for the five value of work bands set out in the performance framework and our fee modelling will be based on these value of work bands. Income will be modelled using mid-points from each range, but it would be helpful to know the number applications which are zero, fixed fee and in the over £1million value of work band.

41. Can you provide the number of applications which were zero fee applications in 2021/22?

<£10,000	
£10,001 to £50,000	
£50,001 to £250,000	
£250,001 to £1million	
>£1million	

42. Can you indicate if this number of zero fee applications is typical of the number of this type of applications in a year?

Value of Work Band	Dropdown menu of:
---------------------------	--------------------------

	Yes; No – usually less; No – usually more
<£10,000	
£10,001 to £50,000	
£50,001 to £250,000	
£250,001 to £1million	
>£1million	

43. Can you provide the number of fixed fee applications received in 2021/22 in the following categories?

Type of Application	No. of Applications
Conversion only (£150)	
Demolition only (£150)	
Extension of warrant (£100)	

44. Can you indicate if this number of fixed fee applications is typical of the number of this type of application in a year?

Type of Application	Dropdown menu of: Yes; No – usually less; No – usually more
Conversion only (£150)	
Demolition only (£150)	
Extension of warrant (£100)	

45. Can you provide a breakdown of the number of applications received in 2021/22 which were for work with a value of over £1million?

Value of Work	No. of Applications
£1 to £5 million	
£5 to £10	
£10 to £25 million	

£25 to £50 million	
>£50 million	

46. Can you indicate if this is typical of the number of projects per annum in these value of work bands?

Value of Work	Dropdown menu of: Yes; No – usually less; No – usually more
£1 to £5 million	
£5 to £10	
£10 to £25 million	
£25 to £50 million	
>£50 million	

47. Can you provide the number and total fee income from late applications which incur the 200% and 300% fees in 2021/22?

Type of Application	
Completion Certificates where no building warrant (300% fee) – no. of applications	
Completion Certificates where no building warrants (300% fee) – Total fee received, £	
Late applications where work has started (200% fee) – No. of applications	
Late applications where work has started (200% fee) – Total fee received, £	

48. Can you indicate if this is typical of the number of these applications in a year?

Type of Application	Dropdown menu of: Yes; No – usually less;

	No – usually more
Completion Certificates where no building warrant (300% fee) – no. of applications	
Completion Certificates where no building warrants (300% fee) – Total fee received, £	
Late applications where work has started (200% fee) – No. of applications	
Late applications where work has started (200% fee) – Total fee received, £	

49. Do you have any other comments you would like to make on building standards fees?

Thank you for your help with the research.