



## Remote Verification Inspection (RVI) Case Study



This is a series of case studies, written by verifiers, for verifiers, identifying good practice and opportunities for remote verification to contribute to the safe and reasonable inquiry into the compliance of buildings with building standards. This is a partnership between LABSS and Building Standards Division of the Scottish Government.

### **RVI – Responding Practically to the Covid-19 Pandemic**

*In this case study, Stirling Council's Building Standards Team explain how they transformed, through necessity, their inspection processes as a result of the restrictions introduced to combat COVID-19.*

Remote Verification Inspection? This is the prominent question that triggers the most discussion within our building standards team. In recent months our team determined that Remote Verification Inspection (RVI) would be a real time virtual inspection arranged and determined by the case officer, using our existing technology with the ability to invite various parties, record proceedings and share the approved plans on screen. It was the best option to determine reasonable enquiry in the circumstances and ensure the customer was informed efficiently.

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, local authority building standards teams have had to rethink our traditional site inspection methods and embrace virtual digital technologies. At Stirling Council, we have developed a system aimed at carrying out the Construction Compliance and Notification Plan (CCNP) and Completion submissions solely online.

#### **Development**

At the outset we encouraged initial discussions with the building standards team to be creative and truly take on board what an RVI at Stirling could be. Linking these discussions, as a group we have embraced, modernised and aligned with the working groups for digital initiatives. We were inspired by our colleagues in Highland Council at the Digital Workshop back in February, which has opened a new and positive engagement in what a long-term digital strategy means for us.

Did Microsoft 365 lend itself to the process? We were confident with the knowledge our team had using Microsoft 365. This provided a starting point to move RVI forward. With hours of extensive research, using countless media platforms along with discussion forums, we thought outside the box.

Familiarity with Microsoft Teams was invaluable in our preparation to deliver on RVI. This modern digital era enables the customer to use smart phones for internet

access over Wi-Fi or 4G platforms. However, we still had to overcome the limited storage capacity within our existing data management system. MS Stream allows us to save the RVI as evidence using cloud-based storage which can be transferred to our data management system later.

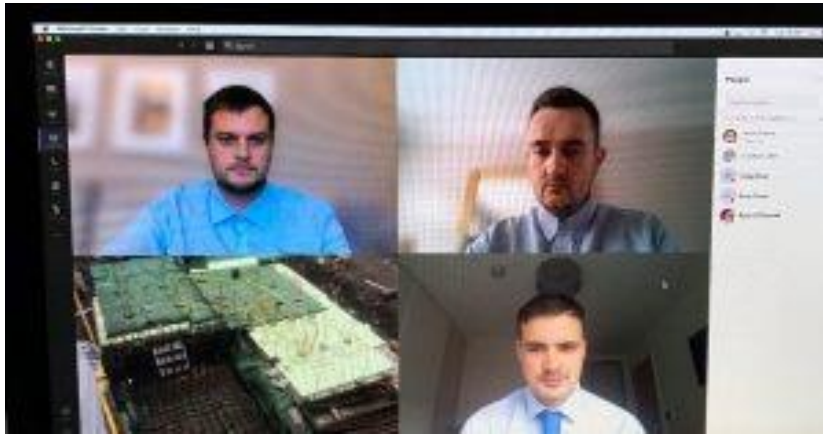
Critical factors in developing the RVI process were the dynamics and support of the whole team. This involved many tasks ranging from the team compiling a list of the inspections they felt couldn't be carried out through RVI, brainstorming the process from customer request until RVI, contributing to and reviewing the various staff user guides, customer guides, revised BSI 9001 process maps for sending invites, chairing RVI meetings and saving recordings. Allowing flexibility to adapt and alter quickly where required, benefited not only our team, but improved our customer focus. It was essential that the process was approached from a customer perspective as this is integral to our Customer Service Excellence (CSE) mind-set. Clear customer guidance provides clear details of how to join the RVI, what will happen during site inspections and any equipment needed.

Developmental time constraints, evaluating the performance of the RVI process for training the team and delivering to our customers was a major challenge. Without the push of the COVID-19 crisis, what took a few weeks to develop, would have taken a year of meetings and workshops.

### **Testing and Launch**

After setting up the RVI, we contacted a wide spectrum of our local customers to trial it. After an initial two-week trial period, some minor revisions for improvements, we went live with our system on 18 June 2020.

RVI in practice is quite surreal. It is hugely different to the normal interaction we enjoy and use on site, connecting in the field with projects with a broad spectrum of personalities and builders. Physical site inspections allow a 'hands-on' experience in numerous areas which enhances the inspection scope whereas RVI requires an enhanced level of concentration during the site visit process, directing the relevant person with a 'remote walk-through' of key areas you wish to view referring to the approved drawings. Having our senior team on hand peer reviewing the team's work in the first phase of RVI brought added reassurance and review measures on larger applications such as the Stirling University Mac Roberts Centre extensions. A bespoke RVI team was set up which took into account the specific skill sets of our team, the Contractor and the Design team. Due to the scale and complexity of the project a larger building standards team resource was required to focus on specific areas in order to ensure success throughout the RVI.



*RVI in action, many thanks to Robertson Construction at Stirling University extension project. Top left – Craig Peat- Building Standards Inspector, Ross Davies- Graduate Building Standards Surveyor and Ryan O'Donnell – Graduate Building Standards Surveyor*

Our team had to rethink how we survey. It takes time to develop and evolve these new surveying skills. It is worth noting that our RVI process will be simplified through constant review as the system beds-in.

### **Review**

RVI holds limitations and recognising these early is key. Physical drain tests can't be undertaken. Also, in towns which have restricted network coverage, or where the team consider it necessary, a follow up physical site inspection process may still be required. However, earlier intervention through the CCNP discussions allow us to look at promoting the Certifiers of Construction scheme for the relevant sections creating an efficient process. RVI has advantages in reduced travel times, improving accessibility for our customers, a simpler peer review process for the CCNP and reduced build times due to faster inspections and completion processes to name a few.

It is necessary and important to acknowledge that although this is a short-term initiative during the COVID-19 crisis, there is a longer-term benefit from RVI to assist verification. The development of RVI shows the construction industry is adapting to new, improved technology that puts ownership of the process back in the hands of the customer.

We should recognise this as a real opportunity to progress and refresh, creating a new norm for the construction industry. Developing RVI long after the COVID-19 crisis is another step in the journey towards achieving reasonable enquiry, assisting in a safe and secure built environment.

Digital technology is blighted by the myth that it impacts budgets, it is "not what we do" and that it will fail. Instead, we should be focused on what digital resources are available, challenging ourselves and our teams to adapt them to satisfy our needs and not just 'dip the toe' into the digital era. Getting behind digital technologies enables us to create verification processes that attract new staff and provide a 'best in class' future for building standards professionals in our industry.