

Building Standards Pilot Hub – Background Paper

Building Standards Futures Board – Strengthening the Verification Delivery Model – Development of a Building Standards Pilot Hub

Background

The Expert Review Panel on Building Standards Compliance and Enforcement chaired by Professor John Cole highlighted that it is of vital importance that there is a properly functioning Building Standards system that is efficient in its operation as well as upholding standards that are fit for purpose. Recommendations by the Panel concluded that, whilst the core elements of the current building standards system should be maintained, some reshaping of the system is necessary to ensure that it addresses identified weaknesses. The verification delivery model is one area that has been identified as requiring strengthening. In addition to this both the Fire Safety and Compliance and Enforcement Expert Review Panels identified the potential for a 'national or central hub' that would provide expertise in specialist and safety critical areas of design of complex buildings.

In March 2021 a Working Group was set up to specifically consider options to strengthen the existing delivery model. This included identifying ways for verifiers to share expertise and staff resources in relation to complex and safety critical areas of buildings, such as fire safety issues, as well as identifying ways to strengthen the system. The Group agreed that the aims of any improvements to the existing system need to:

- Drive efficiencies
- Ensure investment in skills and new technology
- Improve compliance
- Increase capacity within the building standards service to deliver across all types of construction work
- Increase consistency
- Provide stronger resilience.

To support the Working Group, Building Standards Division (BSD) commissioned research looking at potential options for strengthening the verification delivery model and after consideration the Group recommended the provision of a central support hub with complimentary regional strengthening. The role of Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS) in the delivery of building standards in Scotland was also identified and noted by the Working Group. LABSS also submitted an Optional Appraisal for a Verification Delivery Model for Scotland that builds on their current role including an option for a central hub. The Working Group subsequently asked BSD and LABSS to work together to test the proposal.

The first step in this process is the establishment of a pilot hub and funding has been made available through the Futures Board for a period up to 18 months. This will allow two senior members from within local authority building standards to be appointed full-time to the hub with 0.5 FTE technical admin support, evidencing that improvements to the delivery model can be achieved by the introduction a centralised hub and the strengthening of regional partnerships whilst also scoping the delivery of a permanent Hub.

SOLACE met on the 29th October, where an update on the work of the Building Standards Futures Board was presented with subsequent agreement to note the ongoing work and provide

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support for the establishment of a local authority building standards pilot hub hosted by Fife Council. Wider discussions have also been ongoing with stakeholders including COSLA, the Improvement Service, Trading Standards Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service who have all been supportive of the proposal for a building standards hub. COSLA and others have indicated their preference that the pilot is provided within the local government family and in this respect the hub will be hosted by Fife Council, working in partnership with BSD and LABSS, providing the necessary HR arrangements, IT, administration support and office facilities.

The Building Standards Pilot Hub

The pilot hub (PH) will be a central administration and coordination resource, available to all local authority building standards teams in Scotland. The PH will also aim to strengthen and develop current LABSS building standards services and support the provision and sharing of specialist verification skills in areas such as fire and structural engineering. Other planned activities include the facilitation of workload sharing between local authorities to support customer service delivery during localised workload surges or temporary shortage of staff. The PH will also look to identify and support the development of other services required by local authority building standards teams and the work of related Futures Board work streams.

During this 18 month pilot, work will also be undertaken on mapping the services, support and wider arrangements required for any permanent hub, with proposals and findings presented to the Working Group and Futures Board for their consideration.

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Building Standards Pilot Hub – Strategy, Aims & Relationships

