The Building Standards system in Scotland fundamentally changed in 2005 with the introduction of the Building (Scotland) Act 2003. The Building Standards system permitted the appointment of verifiers, a balanced scorecard approach to performance management, auditing of verifiers. All of these have resulted in verifiers becoming more customer focussed and engaging in the continuous improvement agenda. This is demonstrated by a significant number of verifiers holding the UK Government’s Customer Service Excellence Standard (CSE). Indeed the Building Standards team in Angus is class leading in CSE terms, not solely across Building Standards but sector wide.

In addition national and local customer charters have been introduced across Scotland to highlight to customers the service they should expect and be given. Local authority verifiers have engaged in greater consortium working to try and gain greater consistency in service delivery. Consistency has also been improved with the promotion of greater use of LABSS (Local Authority Building Standards in Scotland) type approvals.

The continuous improvement agenda noted above is demonstrated by how verifiers have engaged in the introduction of the eDevelopment.scot portal. The introduction in the online submission of building warrant applications has been dealt with positively by local authorities with many of them making significant investment in enabling building warrant applications being dealt with digitally, end to end. Angus Council has recently invested additional monies, approximately £30,000, in the purchase of hybrid tablets/laptops to permit the complete removal of drawings and paper from the building warrant / completion certificate process. These actions demonstrate that authorities are engaged in an agenda which benefits all users and
helps the country deliver on its ambition to become world class in the digital delivery of services.

The above indicates that local authority verifiers have been carrying out the role of verifier in a professional and competent manner and demonstrate that the argument to permit private sector verifiers has not been made. It would potentially lead to a postcode lottery of service delivery by organisations who are not accountable and lack local knowledge on matters such as ground conditions and infrastructure provision. Being delivered locally permits close working with planning colleagues.

Having said all of the above there is no doubt that there is always room for improvement around areas such as the built product, succession planning and further improvements to the customer experience. These could be dealt with on appointment using the balanced scorecard approach to performance management.

In 2011, following work carried out by the Building Standards Division and LABSS (Local Authority Building Standards in Scotland), guidance was formulated to assist local authorities, exercise “reasonable enquiry” when accepting Completion Certificates. This guidance introduced Construction Compliance Notification Plans (CCNP’s) to the Building Warrant process. Each Building Warrant is issued with a CCNP which is formulated on a risk assessment basis. The introduction of CCNP’s in our opinion has increased the level of inspection by local authority verifiers. This increase in the number of inspections has undoubtedly increased compliance of the built product. For the next step to be taken in the compliance agenda it is the view of Angus Council that the inspections within the CCNP should become legally mandatory. It is also our view that penalties for proceeding with work, whereby no notification was given to verifiers that a building was ready for an interim inspection, should be introduced. These changes will enhance the quality of the built product and help achieve the Government’s aims in respect of the built product.

The call for evidence requests comments in respect of whether a statutory system to provide redress for new home buyers whose properties are subsequently found not to meet building standards requirements. There is merit in the suggestion however we have major concerns and it is our view that such a system should not be introduced without further work being carried out.

- Work should be carried out to determine whether house buyer’s issues relate to building regulations or workmanship.
- Insurance issues for local authority verifiers would have to be ascertained.
- Such a system could not be introduced without a more robust and mandatory regime being introduced in respect of site inspections.
Building warrant fees have not been increased since 2005. Given the additional duties required of and carried out by local authorities during the building warrant process it is our view that an increase in fees is long overdue.

The Scottish Government are currently consulting on amending the fee structure and our response to this consultation has been submitted.

However, it should be stressed that the fees payable should be amended in the following manner:-

- fees in respect of lower cost works should be significantly increased to reflect the amount of work necessary to process them;
- fees for Amendment to Warrants and Demolition Warrants should be significantly increased to reflect the amount of work necessary to process them;
- fees for late Building Warrants and Completion Certificates should be significantly increased to reflect the significant and additional work necessary to process them and to act as a deterrent to start work without approval;
- the fee payable to extend a Building Warrant where the Building Warrant has lapsed should be increased.

By increasing Building Warrant fees any additional income should permit verifiers to invest further in e-Building Standards and inspection regimes to ensure buildings the subject of a Building Warrant are built in accordance with approved plans and the building regulations.

**Given the significant changes and improvements made by verifiers since 2005 it is the view of Angus Council that local authorities should be re-appointed as verifiers in May 2017. The period of appointment should be for the longest period possible:-**

- to reflect the significant steps taken by local authority verifiers in customer care and the continuous improvement agenda;
- to reflect the significant investment local authorities have made in the necessary technology and staff training to deliver the digital delivery of services.

**An extended period of appointment will also permit authorities to deliver other Government priorities such as an improvement in the built product.**