

Falkirk  
Council  
Complaints  
Annual  
Report  
2016/17



Falkirk Council takes complaints seriously and wants to learn from them. This report provides information about how the Council dealt with complaints from the public during 2016/17.

Performance indicators are set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and Councils have to report on their performance annually.

This report sets out the Council's performance against the indicators set by the SPSO during 2016/17. It includes benchmarking information so that our performance can be compared to that of other Councils. This information is drawn from the most recent exercise carried out by the Improvement Service. The report also provides information about how Council Services are learning from complaints.



## Our Complaints Procedure

The Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) follows the model developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The model CHP applies to all local authorities and all local authority services, including Social Work which implemented the CHP from 1st April 2017. The procedure also applies to arm's length organisations and has been adopted by Falkirk Community Trust.

The Council's CHP is based on a two-stage process. The first stage is frontline resolution and the second is investigation.

- Frontline resolution – issues that are straightforward and easily resolved, requiring little or no investigation. This means “on the spot” apology, explanation or other action to resolve the complaint within five working days or less. Complaints are addressed by staff or referred to the appropriate point for resolution. Complaint details, outcome and action taken are recorded and used for service improvement.

- Investigation – issues that have not been resolved at the first stage or that are complex, serious or “high risk”. This means a response is provided within 20 working days following an investigation of the points raised.

Following investigation, if customers are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with their complaint, they can ask the SPSO to look at it. The SPSO cannot normally look at a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure first.

This report provides information on complaints handing within the Council during 2016/17. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO and includes benchmarking information, drawn from recent exercises carried out by the Improvement Service and Audit Scotland.

Each Service has a nominated lead officer for complaints and a Complaints Officers' Working Group is in place. At a national level, a Local Authority Complaints Handlers network has been established in conjunction with the SPSO and a Knowledge Hub forum has been set up so that Councils can share good practice and common queries. Falkirk Council is part of this group which meets on a quarterly basis.

## Complaints Indicators

The SPSO has set eight indicators for complaints performance. These cover:

- Complaints received per 1,000 population
- Number of complaints closed
- Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
- Average response times
- Performance against timescales
- Number of cases where an extension is authorised
- Customer satisfaction
- Learning from complaints

The Council's performance against these indicators for 2016/17 is set out in this report, with comparative information from previous years.

For some indicators, national benchmarking information is also included. This is drawn from an exercise carried out in 2015 by the Improvement Service when all Councils were asked to submit performance information on a pro forma. There were some significant differences across the 32 local authorities, however the figures for Falkirk Council appear to be close to or better than the national average in terms of performance against timescales.

Note – In previous years we reported a total figure for all complaints reaching stage 2. We are now required to report separate figures for complaints that are ‘escalated’ from stage 1 to stage 2 and for those which are only handled at stage 2. The complaints procedure allows us to bypass stage 1 if a complaint is considered serious, high risk or requires complex investigation.

This means there may be notable variation between the figures for 2016/17 and those for previous years on some indicators due to this change.

## Indicator One

### Complaints Received Per 1,000 Population

The population of the Council area is 159,380.

2016/17	2015/16	All LAs 2014/15
Complaints received – 2,462	Complaints received – 2,476	Total 67,620
Complaints per 1,000 – 15.4	Complaints per 1,000 – 16	Per 1,000 – 12.9

## Indicator Two

### Closed Complaints

	2016/17	%	2015/16	%	All LAs 14/15
Total complaints closed	2,425	100	2,483	100	100
Total complaints closed at stage 1 (frontline resolution)	2,236	92.2%	2,289	92.2%	82%
Total complaints closed at stage 2 (investigation)	24	1%			
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation	165	6.8%	194	7.8%	18%

## Indicator Three

### Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld & Not Upheld

#### Stage One Complaints

	2016/17	2015/16	All LAs 2014/15
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 (frontline resolution)	2,236	2,289	
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1	726	884	
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	32.5%	38.6%	
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1	344	331	
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	15.4%	14.5%	
% of complaints upheld or partially upheld at stage 1	47.9%	53.1%	68.1%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1	1,166	1,074	
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	52.1%	46.9%	31.9%

#### Stage Two Complaints

	2016/17	2015/16	All LAs 2014/15
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 (investigation)	24	194	
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2	6	44	
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	25%	22.7%	
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2	5	52	
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	20.8%	26.8%	
% of all complaints upheld or partially upheld at stage 2	45.8%	49.5%	68.9%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2	13	98	
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	54.2%	50.5%	31.1%

## Escalated Complaints

	2016/17	2015/16
Number of complaints closed after escalation	165	149
Number of complaints upheld after escalation	28	38
The number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	17%	25.5%
The number of complaints partially upheld after escalation	38	40
The number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	23%	26.8%
Number of complaints not upheld after escalation	99	71
The number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	60%	47.7%

## Indicator Four

### Average Response Times

	2016/17	2015/16	All LAs 2014/15
Stage 1			
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 (frontline resolution)	2,236	2,289	
Average time in working days for a full response at stage 1	6.3 (target 5)	5.1 (target 5)	4.4
Stage 2			
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 (investigation)	24	194	
Average time in working days for a full response at stage 2	15.9 (target 20)	15.9 (target 20)	18.6
Escalated			
Number of complaints closed after escalation	165	149	
Average time in working days for a full response after escalation	19.6 (target 20)	15.8 (target 20)	

## Indicator Five Performance Against Timescales

Stage 1	2016/17	2015/16	All LAs 2014/15
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 (frontline resolution)	2,236	2,289	-
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 with 5 working days	1,969	1,958	-
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 within 5 working days as a % of total stage 1 complaints	88.1%	85.5%	80.8%
Stage 2			
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 (investigation)	24	194	-
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days	19	159	-
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a % of total stage 2 complaints	79.2%	82%	84.5%
Escalated			
Number of complaints closed after escalation	165	149	-
Number of complaints closed after escalation within 20 working days	134	119	-
Number of complaints closed after escalation within 20 working days as a % of total escalated complaints	81.2%	79.9%	-

## Indicator Six Use of Extensions

Stage 1	2016/17	2015/16	All LAs 2014/15
Total number of complaints closed at stage 1	2,236	2,289	
Total number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised	258	163	
Total number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised as a % of all complaints at stage 1	11.5%	7.1%	4%
Stage 2			All LAs
Total number of complaints closed at stage 2	24	194	-
Total number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised	11	18	-
Total number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised as a % of all complaints at stage 2	45.8%	9.3%	13.6%
Escalated			
Total number of complaints closed after escalation	165	149	-
Total number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised	13	13	-
Total number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised as a % of all complaints escalated	7.9%	8.7%	-

## Indicator Seven Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction with contact with the Council is captured regularly using a variety of channels. A Citizens Panel questionnaire issued in 2016 included a section on complaints, asking if panel members had made a complaint and what their experience of the process was. Areas covered included the following:

- Awareness of the complaints procedure
- Whether they had used it
- If the complaint was resolved to their satisfaction
- Satisfaction with the way it was handled
- Attitude of staff – sensitivity, time taken to deal with it, overall service
- The level of information they received
- How the process could be improved

The responses received show there is scope to improve the way that complaints are dealt with. Areas for improvement include dealing with problems promptly, level of information supplied and satisfaction with the final outcome. The findings will be reviewed by Service complaints leads and action taken where required.

## Complaints Considered by the SPSO

During 2016/17, 20 new complaints were notified to the Council by the SPSO. These are broken down by Service area in the table below. This is the same number reported to the SPSO in 2015/16.

## Indicator Eight Learning from Complaints

The SPSO is clear that Councils should have processes in place to help them learn lessons from the complaints and review and change service delivery if required. This section outlines areas where service provision has been reviewed and improved in response to complaints. To help identify cross-cutting issues, the complaints working group is identifying themes against which complaints will be recorded e.g. service failure, information failure, attitude of staff. This will allow recurring issues to be addressed on a Council-wide basis, with further guidance and training provided if required.

How the Council learns from complaints is an area that Members are particularly interested in and it was the subject of a Scrutiny Panel led by Members in early 2017. The panel involved Members hearing a range of evidence about the how the Council handles complaints, the procedures that are followed, how we learn from complaints and how our performance compares with that of other Councils.

Stage 1	2016/17	2015/16	Difference
Corporate & Housing Services	13	13	0
Development Services	6	4	+2
Children's Services	1	1	00
Social Work Adult Services	0	0	-2
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>

They also heard from John Stevenson and Alison Bradley from the Complaints Standards Authority who provided an overview of complaints from the perspective of the SPSO. A number of improvement actions were agreed as a result of the Scrutiny Panel and these are being implemented.

The areas of service which generated the highest volume of complaints over the year were household waste collection, repairs, staff conduct, Council Tax and rear door collection. In two of these areas, the volume of complaints has reduced considerably since the My Falkirk citizens account was implemented and the reasons for this are set out below.



## Revenue & Benefits

Following complaints about the wording of our Arrears communications, all our templates were reviewed. This is an ongoing process. We also introduced sending a text or email in advance of Final Notices which has had a favourable response from customers.

In response to complaints about not providing material digitally, we introduced a suite of online forms across Council Tax, Rents, Benefits, Sundry Accounts and Non-Domestic Rates. The uptake has already been significant and there are further developments underway to make sure that we continue to provide an immediate and more accessible service.

Earlier this year, all Revenues & Benefits staff attended further complaints awareness training. The training reinforces the need for early identification to make sure that responses are provided on time and to acknowledge that this feedback gives us the opportunity to review and improve our service delivery to meet customer's needs.

## Children's Services

Throughout the 2016/17 school year, there were some significant developments regarding the recording of complaints. It is hoped that these changes will provide us with greater insight into how we are responding to complaints as well as providing us with increased knowledge on where we are learning from complaints.

The development of the Schools' Portal and subsequent roll-out of Customer First and Complaints Handling training to school staff in the latter part of the 2016/17 school year has resulted in a change in how schools complaints are recorded. The training was targeted at anyone within a school who has a role in the Complaints Handling Procedure. As a result of the roll-out and training, schools are now responsible for recording Stage I complaints instead of staff at the centre. This will enable us to gauge the number of complaints schools are likely to receive and also how they are responded to (i.e. upheld, not upheld, partially upheld). Prior to the roll-out of Customer First, the process of having staff at the centre log and record Stage I complaints did not enable us to obtain a true reflection of the volume of complaints schools receive as it was only complaints that staff at the centre were aware of that were logged on the system. Now, as schools can log their own complaints, we will hold more accurate data for Stage I complaints.

It is hoped that, in the long term, this will prove beneficial with regards to learning from complaints. As there will be a more accurate reflection on Complaints Handling within Education, we will be able to evidence where we have learned from complaints more frequently both at Stage I (schools) and Stage 2 (centre). Throughout 2017/18, more training sessions will be arranged for any staff who were unable to attend and any new Headteachers/relevant members of staff. Over time, it is hoped that we will be able to gauge the true volume of complaints and any emerging patterns. From this, a greater insight into learning from complaints will be evidenced.

## Housing Services

We recognise that approximately half of our complaints in Housing Services relate to repairs, and to manage this, we ensure that these complaints are recorded and managed centrally so that key issues and improvements can be identified. Improvements include our current pilot in the Falkirk, Dawson and Camelon for void properties, where tenants who have been allocated a new home are provided with one point of contact for the process of repairs being carried out to the property while empty.

We are also in the process of extending the pilot of our Workflow Processing Team, which currently operates in the East and Central area to the whole Council area, to provide customers with appointments and better communication around when their repairs will take place. We will continue to monitor complaints received about this, to ensure our standard of service is improving.

Housing Services had seven cases referred us to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) in 2016/17, however, only one of these was fully investigated and the outcome was it was not upheld. We are hoping to continue to resolve complaints during the complaints procedure, and keep a similarly low number of referrals to the SPSO in future years. Complaints will continue to have a high profile within the Service and we will ensure that any lessons learned are identified and acted upon.

## Development Services

Learning opportunities and areas for improvement were highlighted following analysis of complaints made about services such as household waste collection, waste containers, road maintenance and household waste assisted collection.

More training for staff logging calls will enable the correct categorisation of the customer's enquiry and help expectations to be managed.

There was also a need for improved screening of complaints to ensure they are correctly assigned eg is the customer making a request for service rather than a complaint. Additionally, enhanced information recording what the complaint directly relates to allows for improved analysis and future planning.

The Assisted Collection Service is an area noted for improvement. Using 'In-Cab' technology on the waste collection vehicles is one way the service is working to improve.

Development Services also receives positive feedback from the public. These are most often about staff conduct and show the public's appreciation of when employees, operational staff in particular, go that extra mile even in unpleasant conditions.

## Social Work Adult Services

The new Social Work Complaint Procedure was introduced in April 2017, which brings the timescales for complaints in line with the rest of the Council. Staff awareness sessions were held in March 2017 to highlight the change to the Complaints Procedure. Training is planned for relevant staff members on the recording of complaints on our system and an on-line training module is also being developed.

As part of a planned restructure of administration services across the Council, a dedicated team will be created to manage, allocate and learn from complaints. The team will share and develop good practice across the Council to ensure complaints are recorded and managed effectively and are used to inform Service improvements. Adult Services will be one of the first Services to join this team.

## Social Work (Children & Families and Criminal Justice Services)

There was one distinct example of training being provided following a complaint around lack of parenting assessments for parents with learning disabilities, when the Scottish Government Guidance had not been followed.

As a result of this, all team managers and seniors were made aware of the guidance and the Scottish Government (SCLD) was invited to run a roadshow



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