

COMPLAINTS **ANNUAL REPORT**

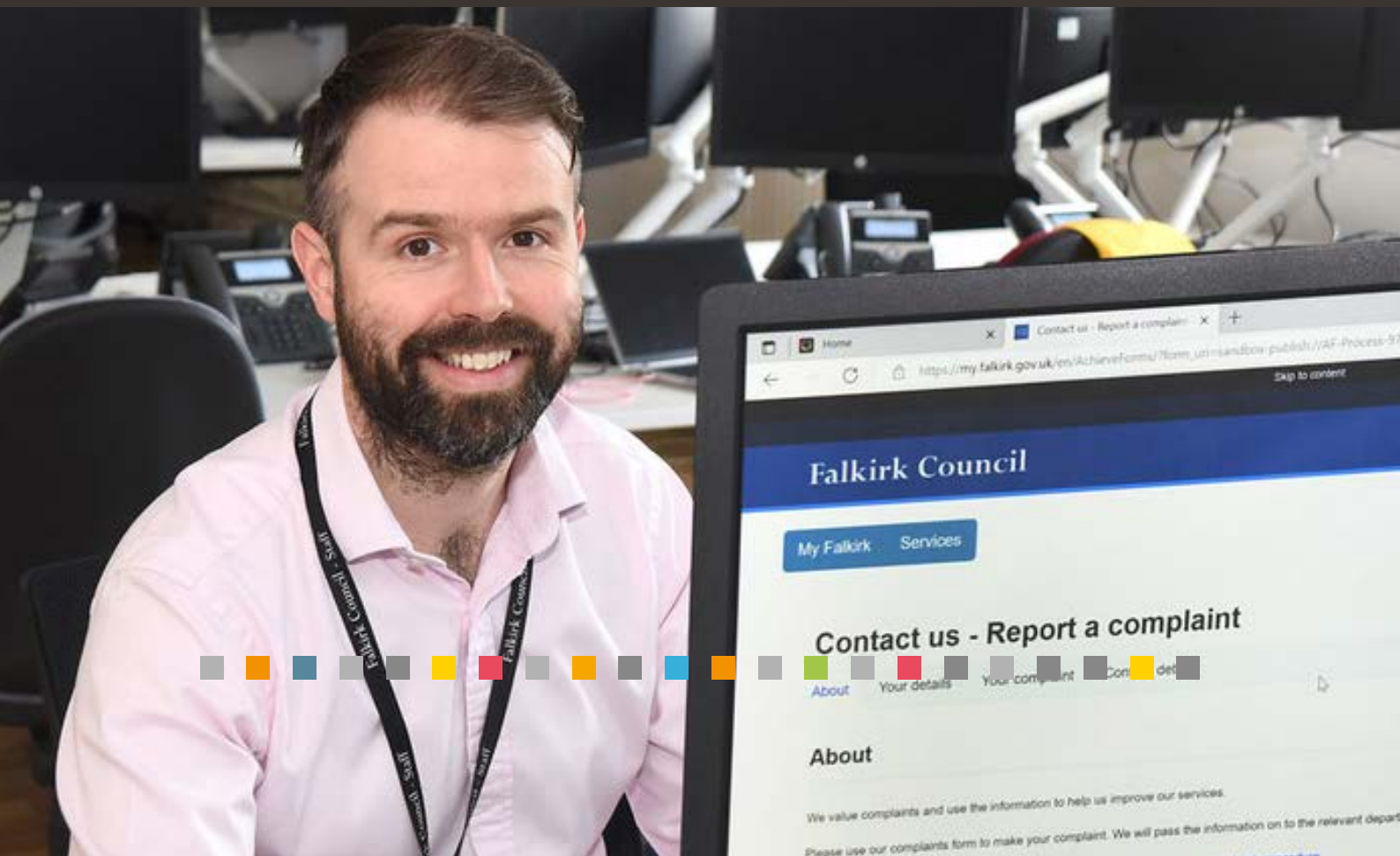
2023 | 24

**Falkirk Council values complaints and wants to learn from them. This annual report provides information about how Falkirk Council handled complaints during 2023/24.**



**The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) sets out performance indicators for all Councils to report on annually.**

**This report details Falkirk Council's performance against the SPSO performance indicators during 2023/24. It also provides information about the learnings the Council services have taken onboard 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. The Council's CHP is based on a two-stage process. The first stage is frontline resolution and the second is investigation.

- Frontline resolution, Stage One complaints, is for 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.
- Stage Two investigations are for 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 handling within the Council during 2023/24. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO.

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





# SPSO Performance Indicators



The SPSO has set four indicators for complaints performance:

- Indicator One: the total number of complaints received.
- Indicator Two: the number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of 5 and 20 working days.
- Indicator Three: the average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.
- Indicator Four: the outcome of complaints at each stage.

The Council's performance against these indicators for 2023/24 is set out with comparative information for 2022/23.

## Indicator One

# The total number of complaints received.

This indicator records the total number of complaints received at Stage 1, escalated complaints and Stage 2.

\* Escalated complaints are those that have been considered at Stage 1 and then have either moved to Stage 2 at the customer's request (because the customer was unhappy with the response at Stage 1) or because they have exceeded the maximum of ten working days at Stage 1 (includes approved extension time), therefore have automatically been moved to Stage 2.

Complaints received per 1000 population	2023/24	2022/23
Population	158450	160890
Total complaints received	5458	4675
Complaints received per 1000 population	34	29



## Indicator Two

The number and percentage of complaints at each stage that were closed in full within the set timescales of five and 20 working days.

The table shows volumes and percentage against the total of complaints closed.

Closed complaints	2023/24	% against total closed	2022/23	% against total closed
Total closed	5458		5126	
Total closed at stage 1	4795	88%	4162	81%
Total closed at stage 2	60	1%	504	10%
Total closed at stage 2 after escalation	603	11%	460	9%

The table shows volumes and percentage of complaints closed within timescale.

Performance against timescales	2023/24	% against total complaints closed at each stage	2022/23	% against total complaints closed at each stage
Total closed within timescale	4079		4235	
Stage 1 closed within 5 working day target	3601	75%	3696	89%
Stage 2 closed within 20 working day target	48	80%	280	56%
Escalated closed within 20 working day target	430	71%	259	56%

## Indicator Three

The average time in working days for a full response to complaints at each stage.

The table shows our average response times for 2024/23.

Average response time (in days)	Target	2023/24	2022/23
Stage 1	5	6	8
Stage 2	20	20	32
Escalated	20	18	23

## Indicator Four

### The outcome of complaints at each stage.

There are four outcome categories:

- Upheld - a complaint where we investigated and found that something went wrong.
- Partially upheld - a complaint where we investigated and found some parts of the process had gone wrong.
- Not upheld - when there is no evidence to support any aspects of the complaint.
- Resolved - when both Falkirk Council and the customer agree what action (if any) will be taken to provide full and final resolution for the customer, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

If a customer complains about two or more completely distinct topics, these are treated as two or more complaints.

The tables below show the outcomes for each stage.

## Stage 1 Outcomes

Stage 1 Complaints	2023/24	% against total complaints closed at S1	2022/23	% against total complaints closed at S1
Total complaints closed at stage 1	4795		4162	
Upheld	463	10%	437	10%
Partially upheld	680	14%	888	21%
Not upheld	2226	46%	1870	45%
Resolved	1426	30%	967	23%

## Stage 2 Outcomes

Stage 2 Complaints	2023/24	% against total complaints closed at S2	2022/23	% against total complaints closed at S2
Total complaints closed at stage 2	60		44	
Upheld	5	8%	2	5%
Partially upheld	16	27%	20	45%
Not upheld	37	62%	20	45%
Resolved	2	3%	2	5%

## Stage 2 (escalated) Outcomes

Escalated Complaints	2023/24	% against total complaints closed at escalated	2022/23	% against total complaints closed at escalated
Total complaints closed after escalation	603		460	
Upheld	149	25%	55	12%
Partially upheld	153	25%	146	32%
Not upheld	188	31%	166	36%
Resolved	113	19%	93	20%





# Learning from Complaints



The SPSO is clear that councils should have processes in place to help them learn from 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. The Complaints Handling Working Group identifies complaint themes i.e. service failure, information failure, and staff conduct. This allows recurring issues to be addressed on a Council-wide basis with further guidance and training provided if required.

Each Service has provided detail around just some of the learnings we have taken from customer feedback this year.

# Social Work Adult Services



Over the past year SWAS have focused on improving 'response within timescales' rates, providing better quality of information on complaints received for Integration Joint Board scrutiny and seeking to improve the way we learn from complaints.

Progress on responses within timescale has been evident with a 5% improvement and, in terms of qualitative information, we now provide a breakdown of complaints by team as well as complaint 'type'. Within the service we are introducing complaints learning as an agenda item for management meetings, so that learning from complaints can be shared across the service, where appropriate. For example, we have reviewed our response times for callouts and are adjusting our staffing levels accordingly.

For the year ahead SWAS aim to maintain and improve the responses within timescales rate, embed learning from complaints in our management activity and continue working with the IJB on the format and content of quarterly complaints reporting.



# Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services



Over this past year, the Contact Centre have focussed on improving how we handle our customer enquiries and complaints. There has been a recruitment drive and a transformation in our training delivery, to ensure we are giving our staff the best start in their career with us. This also means they are fully equipped to provide the right information at first point of contact.

In collaboration with our Services, we undertook a review which enabled us to streamline some of our processes resulting in a significant improvement in our call wait times, reducing the time our customers have to wait to speak to us from 21 mins to an average of 3-4 mins.

We have improved average response times for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints across Housing and Communities. To achieve this, we implemented new procedures such as weekly and quarterly reporting.

We have also learned the importance of good communication. Early responses to enquiries and complaints can prevent further escalation and will ensure tenants and residents are satisfied with the service we provide. In addition to this, we have reviewed our

web content to ensure that information such as tenancy procedures are easily accessible. We have also reviewed our printed correspondence to ensure the wording is clear and accurate.

After receiving several similar FOI requests relating to housing waiting lists and available housing stock, we began working on projects to publish some of this information online, such as our FOI disclosure log which will be available later this year.

Next year, we aim to create and distribute training materials to all Housing and Communities staff, which will increase their knowledge and improve response times.



# Place Services



## Building Maintenance Division

We have reviewed the way we manage complaints and have implemented several processes to improve our performance in this area. Some examples of actions that have been taken are highlighted below.

On one occasion, a customer made a complaint that they had not been informed that an external repair which they had reported had been completed. To ensure clarity when external repairs are completed and the tenant is not present, trades people now leave a confirmation card at the property. This card includes the job number, a brief description of the completed repair, and our contact information for any further inquiries the customer may have.

On another occasion, a customer residing in a block of flats complained that as an owner, he had been billed for repairs to the communal close lighting however, one of the lamps was still faulty. He therefore wanted a full breakdown of each item repaired and its location. This information could only be partially provided as although records confirmed that 5 bulbs and a starter had been replaced, it could not be confirmed where in the building these were situated. It was highlighted to the trades staff by means of a toolbox talk, the need to record full details of components that have been repaired or replaced, and their location. This ensures that a comprehensive list can be provided to owners billed for their share of repair costs and assists staff in identifying which specific

component have been repaired and/or replaced - e.g. replaced x 2 bulbs ground floor, 1 x starter external back door light, 3 x bulbs on 1st floor.

We aim to provide the highest possible quality service to our customers, but we do recognise that sometimes things can go wrong, and we fail to meet expectations. As part of our complaints process, after the completion of any repairs which are part of a stage one or two complaint, a BMD management team member conducts a thorough quality check of the works. Additionally, we request customers to fill out a satisfaction survey. This helps us to monitor performance, and review and identify where we can do things better.

## **Estates Services**

Estates learned from a complaint logged by a community group related to Street Cleansing relocating bins within a park that the group have active participation in. We learned that consulting with community groups prior to implementing change fosters transparency and trust and ensures that decisions are informed by different viewpoints, thereby enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of our endeavours. By actively involving the group in any proposed change within the park, we will honour their expertise and amplify their voices which will solidify partnerships and show appreciation for the good work they do.

## **Waste Services**

As part of identifying improvement from the complaints we receive, the service took onboard feedback from the public and took the decision to modify our traffic management with respect to Household Waste Recycling Centre booking permits. Residents were arriving early prior to opening times, causing a pinch point at the start of shift. The service therefore modified traffic plans to accommodate throughput and also had staff start early to facilitate a meet and greet service to help residents understand the new process and answer any questions which enhanced our dedication to customer service.



Check to fulfil

### Blue Bin Recycling

**YES PLEASE**

- ✓ Plastic bottles
- ✓ Tins & trays
- ✓ Drink & food cans
- ✓ Containers



**NO THANKS**

- ✗ Plastic bags or film
- ✗ Food waste
- ✗ Landfill waste  
e.g. nappies

[www.falkirk.gov.uk/recycling](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/recycling)

  
Falkirk Council



# Children's Services



In July 2023, Children's Services Social Work received a large number of complaints from parents and elected members in relation to the timing of communication regarding spaces for the Children with Disabilities summer activity scheme. Decisions were sent out on the last day of summer term, with many families expecting that their child would receive a space when this wasn't the case.

We should have told families the number of places that were available at an earlier point to manage their expectations. We received less opportunity to access additional funds, and there was also a delay in receiving outcomes from funding applications that had been submitted. An apology letter was sent to all families effected acknowledging the inconvenience that was caused.

Ahead of next year's scheme, we have conducted a review and sought families' views on how this may look in the future. Parents indicated that they felt there was a lack of transparency around how places were allocated. In response to this a new referral form was developed, explicitly stating the purpose of the scheme and criteria for attendance. A process was developed for communicating the outcome of applications to parents in a timely manner, and additional funding was secured on a permanent basis to effectively deliver the Activity Scheme to those who meet the criteria.

Children's Services have worked with SPSO since 2022 to provide Complaints and Stage 2 investigation training for central officers and senior leaders. Continued engagement is focusing on Scotland's

local authority complaint handling network (LACHN) to implement the SPSO's child friendly complaint handling principles.

When the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 becomes law on 16th July 2024, we will be required to follow these principles to ensure that we handle and investigate complaints from/involving children in a way that respects their rights under the act.



# Complaints Raised to the SPSO



Complaints that have been considered by the SPSO during 2023/24.

44 new cases were notified to the Council by the SPSO. These are detailed by Service area in the table below.

The Council's SPSO Liaison Officer works closely with the SPSO Investigating Officer and the relevant Service(s) to provide guidance, complaint information and work towards a satisfactory resolution.

Complaints raised to SPSO	2023/24	2022/23
Place Services	10	6
TC&CS	30	21
Children's Services	4	4
Social Work Adult Services	0	3

The SPSO provided the Council with some recommendations for consideration, which have been addressed:

- Adherence to the agreed complaints procedures
- Sharing and communicating information clearly

- Increasing the sharing of knowledge across Services

Last year we embarked on a refresh and re-education of our complaints handling procedures. We updated our policies and knowledge hub including new letter templates. We also created a working group with representation from all the Services to share learnings, best practice and improvements across the Council.

# FALKIRK COUNCIL



# Future Actions



We aim to increase the knowledge and skill of all employees on allocating, handling and where required, escalating enquiries and complaints This will ensure we can provide solutions to our customers quickly and efficiently.

Training is being developed to provide knowledge and skill to employees on Customer Service and Complaints Handling, providing guidance and support on the complete customer journey.

FALKIRK COUNCIL

