2023 Falkirk Council Climate Change Survey

Results and analysis

# Background

This consultation ran over March and April 2023 to inform the Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment for the Council’s Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in development.

81 responses were received. This provides a useful level of data for indicating overall sentiment but insufficient data to make reasonable judgements as to how sentiment varies across demographics or to apportion weightings to reflect the demographics of the Falkirk Council area. However, some comparison was made between answers from different demographic groups as a ‘sense check’; this consistently showed similar answers across different groups.

# Results

## Concern about climate change.

### Question

“How worried are you about the impacts of climate change in the Falkirk Council area?”

### Result

The majority of respondents said that they were either very worried or a bit worried:

## Ranking of level of responsibility different groups and organisations should take

### Question

Please rank how much responsibility you think each of the following should have for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the Falkirk Council area and making sure the Falkirk Council area is resilient to the impacts of climate change (1= most responsibility, 5= least responsibility):

The Scottish Government, The UK Government, Falkirk Council, Businesses, Individuals and Communities

### Result

Answers varied greatly; the most discernible trend was that ‘individuals and communities’ were most frequently selected as being ought to have the least responsibility of all of those listed.

## Impacts of Climate Change Action

### Questions

Participants were given the following short summaries of the Council’s planned approach to tackling climate change across various sectors:

* **Buildings and Energy**: We are working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the construction, maintenance, and use of buildings. We are also working to help to ensure that buildings are resilient to changing weather patterns and flood risk.
* **Transport**: We are working to help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles, and from building and maintaining transport infrastructure. We are working to help to ensure that transport networks are resilient to changing weather patterns and flood risk.
* **Waste Management**: We are working to help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from waste management. We are also working to help to ensure that the way we manage waste is resilient to the impacts of climate change.
* **Procurement**: We are working to help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from things that we buy. This means thinking about emissions produced when things are made, transported, used, repaired and maintained and what happens with them when we have finished using them. We are also working to help to ensure that the things we buy are future-proof in terms of the changing weather patterns that we can expect.
* **Business and Industry**: We are working to support businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and be more resilient to the changing climate.
* **Removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere (known as “carbon sequestration”):** We are working to increase the number of trees in the Falkirk Council area to help to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. We are also working to increase the amount of carbon dioxide that is removed from the atmosphere in other ways such as technological solutions being developed at the Grangemouth industrial site.

Participants were asked how they felt each of these would affect:

* The cost of living
* Their physical health
* Their mental health and wellbeing
* The local natural environment in the Falkirk Council area (e.g. plants and animals, water quality, air quality)

Participants were also invited to provide comments.

### Results

#### The Cost of Living

##### Multiple choice answers

Across each sector participants most frequently said that they felt actions to tackle climate change would “neither help nor make things worse”. Overall, the second most frequent answer was that “they will make things a bit worse, and third most frequent choice was that “they will make things much worse”, with “they will help a bit” and “they will help a lot” respectively in fourth and fifth place, followed lastly with a smaller number of “don’t knows”.

The exception to this was in actions relating to buildings and energy, where “they will help a bit” was the second most frequently given answer after “they will neither be a help nor make things worse”.

##### Comments

20 comments were received in relation to cost of living (note: participants could leave up to 7 comments each).

Most comments received pertaining to the cost of living can be summarised as expressions of concern that:

* public spending relating to climate change will result in financial costs to individuals via changes to Council services,
* fossil fuel costs and other costs related to fuel prices will increase,
* individuals will incur increased costs in improving the energy efficiency of their homes and installing low and zero carbon energy technologies,
* the cost of travel is increasing as a result of high bus fares and lack of bus routes available necessitating car travel,
* EV charging is too expensive,
* Waste disposal is too expensive for individuals (particularly in terms of cost of brown bins and travel costs to recycling centres due to lack of local provision)

One comment expressed optimism in the scope for Community Wealth Building through actions which help to tackle climate change.

#### Physical Health and Mental Health and Wellbeing

##### Multiple choice answers

Both Physical Health and Mental Health and Wellbeing showed the following:

Across each sector participants most frequently said that they felt actions to tackle climate change would “neither help nor make things worse”, followed by “they will help a bit”. Some way behind these in third place was “they will help a lot”. A small number said “they will make things much worse” or “don’t know” with fewer still saying “they will make things a bit worse”.

The exception to this trend in both cases was in the area of sequestration, where “they will help a lot” was the most common answer followed closely by “they will help a bit”, with other answers trailing far behind.

In the area of physical health, there were three other exceptions to the trend, with slightly more people saying that action relating to buildings and energy, transport, and waste would “help a bit” than “neither be a help nor make things worse”.

##### Comments:

###### Physical Health

4 comments were received in relation to physical health (note: participants could leave up to 7 comments each). These can be summarised as follows:

* Poorly implemented changes to buildings could adversely affect physical health.
* tree planting may have negative implications for women’s safety
* busses on streets pose a safety risk (suggesting a bus station would be preferable to on-street busses in Falkirk town centre)
* natural environments are important to physical health

###### Mental Health and wellbeing

6 comments were received in relation to mental health and wellbeing (note: participants could leave up to 7 comments each). These can be summarised as follows:

* Poorly implemented changes to buildings could adversely affect mental health and wellbeing,
* Tree planting may result in environments not feeling welcoming to women,
* Low emissions zones may adversely affect quality of life for those who rely on ICE vehicles,
* The quality of the local environment is currently poor, and this is detrimental to mental health,
* Action on climate change should not be brought forward in a way that is detrimental to people’s standard of living,
* Natural environments are important to people’s mental health and wellbeing

#### Natural Environment

##### Multiple choice answers

Across all areas respondents frequently said that they thought actions would “help a lot” or “help a bit”, with actions relating to sequestration mostly being said to “help a lot” by some margin, followed by actions relating to buildings and energy, with the most frequent answer for other areas being “they will help a bit”. A far smaller number said “they will neither help nor make things worse” or “they will make things much worse”, and an even smaller number said “they will make things a bit worse” or “don’t know”.

##### Comments

37 comments were received in relation to the natural environment (note: participants could leave up to 7 comments each). These can be summarised as follows:

16 comments referenced waste. These can be summarised as follows:

* Cuts to waste services and increased charges will increase waste and reduce recycling
* Highlighting the negative impacts of littering in terms of flood risk and impact on plants and animals
* Complaints about fly tipping
* Arguing that more focus should be placed on reducing and refusing so there is less waste to be dealt with
* Concern over the waste that will be generated as building fabric and infrastructure is upgraded to reduce emissions.

8 comments related to the value to the natural environment aside from climate change. These can be summarised as follows:

* Benefits of natural world to physical and mental health
* Arguing that more focus should be given to nature as a distinct priority in addition to climate change
  + there may be conflicts between these (impact of low carbon infrastructure on the natural world, tree planting takes a different form when the focus is more strongly on one or the other)
  + “rewild Falkirk back to have rich wildlife and a sanctuary for birds”
* The role of the natural world in providing eco-system services: sustainable urban drainage
* A suggestion that priority is given to making transport routes more effective as nature corridors
* Need for all stakeholders to be involved with improving land management

9 comments were supportive of tree planting and/or critical of tree removal. These included advocating tree planting and preservation over of housebuilding, and criticism of tree removal at the Helix park and area around Calendar Park.

Other themes in comments were:

* Concern over flooding resulting from impermeable surfaces, litter and fallen leaves
* Criticism of plastic grass
* Criticism of Falkirk Council’s overall approach to protecting and improving the natural environment
* Criticism of flaring at Grangemouth
* Noting that tree planting will have limited impact in terms of sequestration

### Comments not specifically linked to cost of living, physical health, mental health and wellbeing, or the natural environment

#### Criticisms, concerns, and suggestions to improve climate outcomes

###### Buildings and Energy

7 comments included criticisms and/or suggestions pertaining to Buildings and Energy.

* Historic buildings may be neglected or demolished as they are not easily improved in terms of energy efficiency
* Householders should not have to pay for heat pumps
* Operational council buildings should have lights which automatically switch off on a timer
* Householders cannot afford to make improvements to their homes to reduce energy consumption
* More solar panels should be installed

###### Transport

23 comments included criticisms and/or suggestions pertaining to Transport

* Decarbonising transport should be prioritised
* The transport network should be better maintained
* School bus reduction is a step in the wrong direction
* The SPR proposals will necessitate increased vehicle miles
* Public transport should be more reliable, affordable, and services expanded
* Inchyra Road should be a low emission zone to reduce impact of heavy vehicles
* More focus should be given to walking and cycling
* Full lifecycle of EVs should be considered, not just direct emissions
* Transport infrastructure design should incorporate more nature/support for nature (inc. ensuring routes serve as effective pollinator corridors)
* A bus station in the town centre would be better than busses in busy area by shops
* Fees for EV charging should be competitive with neighbouring LAs
* More EV charging

###### Waste

23 comments included criticisms and/or suggestions pertaining to Waste.

* More bins needed
* Flytipping should be tacked
* Fees for waste collection should be reduced/removed (brown bin fees highlighted)
* Fines should be introduced for households who routinely fail to recycle properly
* Reducing service will lead to more landfilling (glass collection being removed highlighted)
* Reducing material which needs to be disposed of in the first place should be a priority

###### Procurement

23 comments included criticisms and/or suggestions pertaining to Procurement

* More information to be provided on the climate impact of Council procurement
* More focus should be given to climate impact with less on cost
* Falkirk Council could be more efficient in reducing un-necessary procurement and in recycling items when they are no longer needed
* Ground materials should be water permeable

###### Buildings and Industry

8 comments included criticisms and/or suggestions pertaining to Business and Industry

* Falkirk Council is too dependant on the petro-chemical industry
* Less should be done for business and more for households
* More should be done for industry
* The petro-chemical industry needs to be brought in line

###### Sequestration

12 comments included criticisms and/or suggestions pertaining to Sequestration

* More sequestration in the form of tree planting would be good
* More transparency needed over the fact that there is limited scope for capturing much CO2 through tree planting

###### Other

9 other comments included criticisms and/or suggestions in terms of Falkirk Council improving on climate action

* Effective staff required to meet the challenge
* More transparency needed over specific plans/projected impact of those
* Services which help to address climate change should not be getting cut/reduced/fees introduced for
* More needs to be done to ensure changes do not adversely affect particular groups
* Broader approach referring to SDGs would be good
* More funding is needed from the UK and Scottish Governments to support climate action
* Communication must be strong to keep people on board
* Holistic approach needed- especially ensuring that council targets result in real term emission reductions rather than real term increase (e.g. asset hand-over)
* Highlighting issues with flooding and suggesting more should be done

#### Suggestions that Falkirk Council should do less to tackle climate change

35 comments included suggestions that Falkirk Council should do less to tackle climate change

* Some effort is needed, but action on climate change is detrimental to other outcomes so balance is needed
* Refuting the international scientific consensus around climate change
* The contribution that Falkirk Council/ the local area can make in terms of driving climate change is small compared to other areas and big companies, as is the scope to make a difference locally so we shouldn’t be making significant efforts
* It is too expensive
* It will damage the local economy

#### Criticism of the survey

18 comments criticised the survey:

* Wording of a question
* Lack of specific CC actions planned by the Council to inform answers
* Implying that actions will have EPIA impacts is an overstatement and inviting overstatement in responses

Questions:

* More info requ’d on procurement
* Are you giving businesss financial support?