

FALKIRK COUNCIL



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2025-2028

Connecting, Consulting and Collaborating

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1. FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce the new Falkirk Council Community Engagement Strategy 2025-2028.

This sets out the council's commitment to engage and consult with our citizens, communities and partners and to deliver our vision of having;

"Strong communities where inequalities are reduced, and lives are improved".

Our lives, communities and places are constantly changing along with people's needs, opinions and priorities. Therefore, it is essential that effective community engagement happens to enable everyone in the Falkirk Council area to have their say regarding the services and resources that they need and want.

I believe that effective community engagement is vital to creating trust, honesty and good conversations between Falkirk Council, our citizens, communities and partners. This will enable us to "co-define, co-design and co-deliver" and take a truly collaborative approach in delivering council services.

This strategy will ensure that community engagement remains at the forefront of all council business and that you, our citizens, communities and partners have a significant role in council decision-making, resource allocation and service design.

Cllr. Cecil Meiklejohn Leader, Falkirk Council



2. INTRODUCTION

The Community Engagement Strategy 2025-2028, from here on referred to as “The Strategy”, outlines Falkirk Council’s commitment to upholding the requirements of [The Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#), from here on referred to as “The Act”.

The Act outlines the responsibility of Local Authorities to inform, consult, engage and empower residents with decisions affecting their lives. The Strategy will ensure the voices and views of all groups and individuals are listened to, recognised, respected, valued, and acted upon.

- Community engagement is a way of developing a positive working relationship between public bodies, citizens, and community organisations.
- Good community engagement will mean that all participants in the engagement process can understand and act on the needs or issues of citizens and communities.
- Community engagement demonstrates respectful dialogue between everyone involved, aimed at improving understanding between communities and public bodies, helping them to take joint action to achieve positive change.
- Community engagement is supported by the key principles of fairness and equality, and a commitment to learning and continuous improvement.

Good quality community engagement is:

- **effective** – in meeting the needs and expectations of the people and organisations involved
- **efficient** – by being well informed and deliberately and properly planned
- **fair** – by giving people who may face additional barriers an equal opportunity to participate.

When done effectively, community engagement will provide the foundation for:

- **shared decision-making** – where communities influence planning, thinking and decision-making
- **shared action** – where communities contribute to and have ownership of actions taken because of the engagement process
- **support for community-led action** – where communities are best placed to take the lead in providing a response or solution to locally identified issues.



3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION

When developing this strategy, we engaged with a range of individuals, groups, and organisations in a range of ways during the Spring and Summer of 2024. Participants included:

- Protected characteristic groups
- Third sector groups
- Community Anchor Organisations
- Community Councils
- Community Planning Partners
- Partner Organisations
- Elected Members
- Residents and citizens

Feedback from participants in the Engagement highlighted:

- People welcomed the new approach to engagement and consultation
- There was a willingness to work together to make things better
- A need to build trust – people felt that their views were important and that decisions should be informed by their opinions
- A need to promote engagement opportunities to the correct audiences and participants.
- A need to provide timely and effective feedback – when engagement did take place, participants should receive feedback or information on the outcomes.
- A need to demonstrate the impact of engagement and consultation – people felt that when they engaged or offered opinions it should make a difference.
- A need to increase the number of opportunities – ensure enough opportunities are given to engage, consult and be involved. Also, the range of methods used (e.g. online, face to face, surveys etc.) should be appropriate.

The strategy will ensure that engagement and consultation is **effective, efficient, and fair**. We will implement changes to our engagement and consultation processes that lead to **shared decision-making, shared action, and community empowerment**. This will be supported by an internal Community Engagement Framework for council services to follow and ensure best practice.

- This will lead to service delivery within distinct communities that reflects local needs and aspirations.
- This will result in individuals and communities leading change and improvement.
- It will empower individuals and communities to transfer the skills, inspirational and aspirational approaches they have developed, in the delivery of local activities and services to and for future generations.
- The on-line engagement tool Participate + will continue to improve individuals' access to council information and enable them to comment and offer alternative solutions.



- Participatory budgeting will provide tangible evidence of the role local communities have in deciding best use of resources to meet local need.

4. WHO WE WILL ENGAGE WITH

We will identify and involve the people, groups and organisations that are affected most by the decisions we make. This will include, but not be exclusive to, children and young people, young people with experience of living in care, people from protected characteristic groups, communities of interest, local people, geographical communities, and service users.

We will also engage and create meaningful partnerships with community groups, third sector organisations and organisations that advocate for and represent the views of others.

We will do this in order that:

- The people and groups who are impacted by the focus of the engagement are involved at the earliest opportunity.
- People and groups are involved at the earliest opportunity, with their role in the engagement properly communicated, and expected outcomes clearly stated.
- We proactively involve people who are less likely to participate due to disadvantage by, where possible, going out into communities to meet them directly
- The Council works with partners to create constant, two-way communication with the people they work with or represent.
- A wide range of opinions, including minority and opposing views, are valued in the engagement process.

5. WAYS YOU CAN PARTICIPATE

You can participate and be involved in a range of ways as set out in the Community Empowerment Act.

These include.

- Community Councils - a group of individuals representing the interests of a particular council ward
- Community Asset Transfer - provides local people with an opportunity to turn public buildings and land into vibrant assets that cater to the needs of a specific community.
- The People's Panel - a group of people who have expressed an interest in commenting on council plans and decisions
- Freedom of Information Requests - gives individuals the right to ask any public sector organisation for information they hold.
- Petitions / Proposals - a petition / proposal enables groups and individuals to ask the council to take or not take a specific decision or action. A petition needs a least 50 signatures to be considered.
- Participation Requests - enables communities to request to participate in decisions and processes



- Participatory Budgeting - where individuals can vote on what projects and activities council funds should be spent on
- Local Plans - local communities work together with public and third sector organisations to create a plan that improves the areas they live in

The Falkirk Council website has more information on your Participation Rights - [People & communities | Falkirk Council](#)

6. HOW WE WILL ENGAGE

We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation. The most effective engagements use a range of methods to ensure equity and maximum participation. There is not one defined approach to engagement but there are accepted engagement techniques that have been successfully used for community engagement detailed below.

- **People's Panels** are a representative, consultative body of residents. They are typically used by statutory agencies, particularly local authorities, and their partners, to identify local priorities and to consult service users and non-users on specific issues
- **Community Councils** are voluntary organisations set up by the Local Authority and run by local residents to act on behalf of their area. As the most local tier of elected representation, Community Councils play an important role in local democracy.
- **Community Conversations** are an assembly of citizens, demographically representative of the larger population, brought together to learn and deliberate on a topic to inform public opinion and influence decision-making
- **Participatory Budgeting** is a method which enables people to directly vote on how local money should be spent. Community Choices is an example of this - [Community Choices | Falkirk Council](#)
- **Surveys** are a method that consists of a set of questions or other types of prompts that aims to collect information from a respondent. Often in the form of a questionnaire or poll, this is a predefined set of questions designed to collect specific data or opinions.
- **Focus Groups** are small-group discussions led by a skilled facilitator. They can be used to hear about opinions on a particular topic or range of topics, and to guide future actions.
- **Participate +** is the council's digital platform designed to empower communities across the Falkirk area. Participate + has a range of functions that go beyond simple surveys and provides a platform for timely, effective feedback - [Participate+](#)
- **Third Sector and Community Anchor Organisations** represent the views and needs of their participants and members in a number of formal and informal settings. These groups can be used to hear about opinions on a particular topic or range of topics, and to guide future actions.



We will ensure that:

- The methods used are appropriate for the purpose of the engagement.
- The methods used are acceptable and accessible to participants
- A variety of methods are used throughout the engagement to make sure that a wide range of voices is heard.
- Full use is made of creative methods which encourage maximum participation and effective dialogue.
- The methods used are evaluated and adapted, if necessary, in response to feedback from participants and partners
- Training and development opportunities are made available to communities, groups and partner organisations that build an effective engagement culture across the Falkirk Council area.

By having an inclusive and equitable approach to community engagement we will ensure that everyone has the right and opportunity to influence the decisions and actions that affect them and their communities.

7. HOW WE WILL COMMUNICATE

Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting is an essential part of all community engagement activities. Participants have the right to know what difference or impact their contributions have made

We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement. We will ensure that:

- Information on the community engagement process, and what has happened as a result, is clear and easy to access and understand.
- Information is made available in appropriate and inclusive formats.
- Participants have timely access to all information relevant to the engagement.
- We share the results of the consultation with the wider community where appropriate to do so.
- Feedback is a true and honest representation of the range of views expressed during the engagement process.
- Reporting includes information on the engagement process; the options which have been considered; the decisions and actions that have been agreed; and the reasons why.



8. OUR COMMITMENT

To work in partnership with individuals and organisations to consult and engage the community in activity and policy which impacts their lives. To ensure transparency in decision making and reporting.

We will:

INFORM

- Provide honest and accurate information that helps you understand how and why we make decisions that affect you.

CONSULT

- We will ask for your feedback and opinion on issues that affect you.

INVOLVE


- We will work with you to ensure your concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.

COLLABORATE

- We will look to you for advice and ideas and make decisions together.

DELEGATE

- We will support you to take control of local decision-making



	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	DELEGATE
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide

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We will continue to engage and consult with you to refine, develop, and co-produce our engagement strategy for future years. If you or a group you belong to would like to be involved, please contact the Community Partnership Team at CommunityPartnership@falkirk.gov.uk



9. REVIEW & PERFORMANCE

We will review our performance and measure the effectiveness of this engagement strategy through consultation, collaboration and engagement with stakeholders, groups and communities as an ongoing process.

Outcomes

- The number and diversity of people participating in council engagements will increase year on year
- Engagement responses will reflect the diversity of our communities, and we will monitor demographic information to ensure all voices, including marginalised groups, are represented
- We will increase the participation of underrepresented groups through targeted outreach and support, and measure how their contributions influence outcomes
- We will report on how community engagements have influenced specific council decisions, and provide transparent feedback to participants on how their input was used across all service areas
- We will demonstrate the short- and long-term impact of engagements by regularly evaluating the outcomes of decisions made through engagement, and reporting back on tangible changes experienced by our communities

We will achieve this using;

- An Engagement & Consultation Reference Group
- Community Satisfaction Surveys: feedback from participants on the quality of the engagement process and how well they feel their views were considered.
- Impact Case Studies: Develop case studies to highlight specific examples of how community engagement led to significant change.
- Engagement Outcome Reviews: conduct regular reviews of engagement processes to assess their effectiveness and adapt where needed.

We will formally review this strategy in partnership with our citizens, communities and partners after 18 months and provide a refreshed document based on the findings.

