FALKIRK COUNCIL

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NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Cohort 3

May 2025

1. Please use this document as a template for the self-assessment. If you can please state which planning authority you are and your lead officer below.

Planning Authority:	Falkirk Council
Lead officer:	Richard Broadley
Email:	richard.broadley@falkirk.gov.uk
Phone number:	01324 506070

2. Please provide an introduction page, setting out a bit of background to your planning authority and the purpose of the self-assessment and improvement action plan.

3. Please use the below matrix when determining what score you are giving each attribute. We ask that if you score a 1 or 2 that you provide a good practice example, a separate template for this will be provided.

PRIORITISE	REVIEW	DEVELOP	BUILD UPON	CONSOLIDATE
No progress	Making limited progress	Making fair progress	Making good progress	Making excellent progress
5	4	3	2	1
Prioritise fundamental review and revisit approach taken. Engage with NPI Learn from others	Review ambition Review approach taken Inform NPI Learn from others	Increase ambition in targets Review and improve implementation	Increase ambition in targets Share learning with others	Share learning with others

Introduction

Falkirk Council embarked on the NPIF process for 2023/24 in December 2024. Early meetings were held with our peer review partner, Aberdeen City Council, to share basic information about our respective authorities and our understanding of the NPIF process. A draft performance assessment and improvement plan was prepared in March 2025, led by a steering group comprising the manager and co-ordinators in the Planning and Building Standards Unit, and informed by discussions with staff. Our peer review workshop took place on 8th April 2025 in the Falkirk Stadium, facilitated by Nick Wright. The draft performance assessment was issued to participants in advance. The list of attendees is as follows:

Attendee	Organisation	Type
Sandy Wilson	Arka	Local Architects/Agent
Ryan Marshall	RMAR Architecture	Local Architects/Agent
Stuart Salter	Geddes Consulting	Planning Consultant
Lesley McGrath	LarnerMcGrath	Planning Consultant
Bryan Wallace	Wallace Planning Limited	Planning Consultant
Elaine Grant	Falkirk BID	Representative Organisation
Silvia Cagnoni	SEPA	Key Agency
James Turner	HES	Key Agency
Sarah Hannon-Bland	HES	Key Agency
Michael Stuart	Polmont CC	Community Council
Daniel Lewis	Aberdeen City Council	Peer Review Partner Authority
David Dunne	Aberdeen City Council	Peer Review Partner Authority
Cllr Paul Garner	Falkirk Council	Elected Member
Richard Broadley	Falkirk Council	Planning Authority
Donald Campbell	Falkirk Council	Planning Authority
Alistair Shaw	Falkirk Council	Planning Authority
Nick Wright	Nick Wright Planning	Facilitator
Craig McLaren	Improvement Service	Improvement Service
Susan Rintoul	Improvement Service	Improvement Service

The workshop provided valuable input to the process, with participants offering insights into their experience of dealing with Falkirk as a planning authority, and indeed of navigating the complexities of the planning system in Scotland. We would like to thank them for their time and feedback. The discussion centred around resources, processes, information, and engagement. Following the workshop, Nick Wright prepared a list of potential amendments to the draft performance assessment, which the Council has considered in finalising the documents. We would like to thank colleagues in Aberdeen for their support throughout the process.

Falkirk Council has undertaken the process as part of Cohort 3, a consequence of which is that the performance assessment has taken place a year late in relation to the official monitoring year of 2023/24. We have nonetheless taken the opportunity to report on changes over the past year where appropriate, not least the major restructuring of the service which became effective from June 2024.

Context Statement

The Falkirk Council area is located at the heart of the Central Belt of Scotland. Although a compact area of some 297 sq.km., it has a diverse landscape character and contains a wide range of natural and cultural assets which the planning service is charged with protecting and enhancing. It has a growing population (currently 158,450 according to the 2022 census), living in a network of distinctive towns and villages. Managing sustainable housing growth and delivering the requisite infrastructure has been an ongoing challenge. The area retains a strong manufacturing base, with Grangemouth hosting the largest chemical and petrochemical complex in Scotland as well as the busiest container port. Grangemouth faces major challenges as it seeks to make a just transition to a net zero future and is the focus of the area's Growth Deal, as well as being part of the recently designated Forth Green Freeport. Our town and village centres have continuing regeneration needs as they repurpose and adjust to social change.

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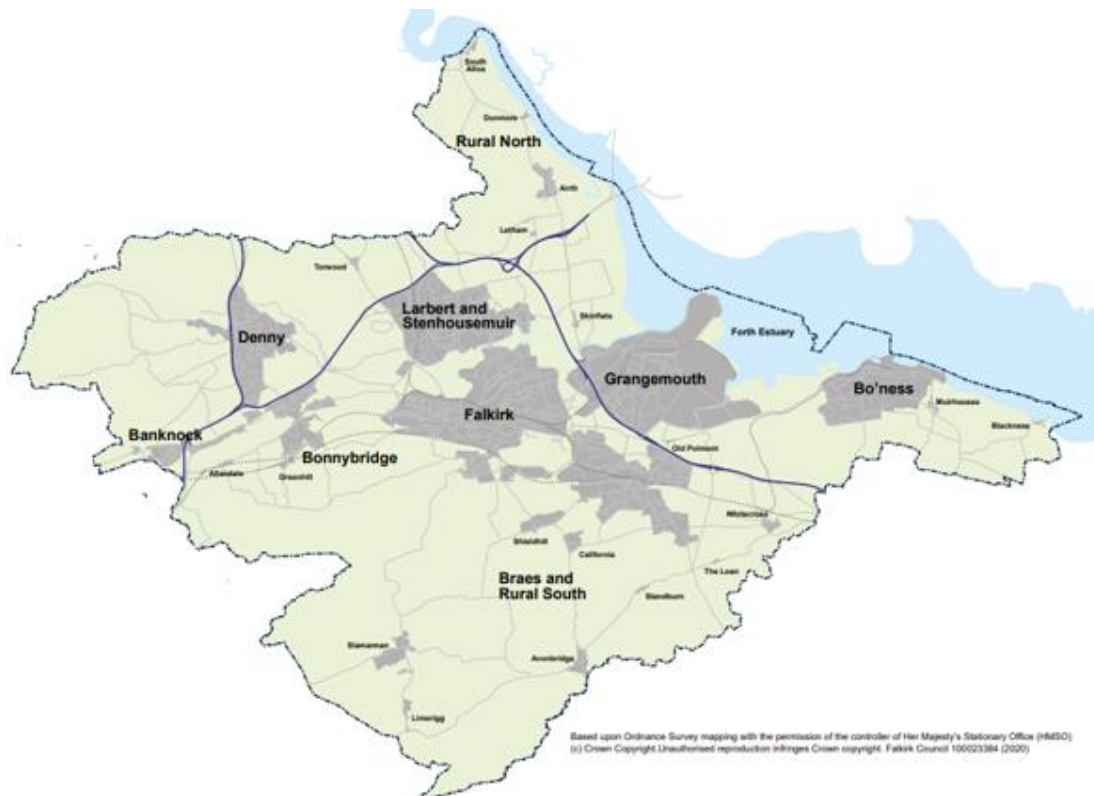
Following restructuring in 2024, the planning service is delivered by the Planning and Building Standards Unit, headed up by a Senior Planning Manager who performs the statutory role of Chief Planning Officer. There are three teams: Development Management, responsible for processing planning applications and related consents; Development Planning, responsible for preparing the local development plan and dealing with related planning policy matters; and Building Standards. A small number of specialist staff (urban design and conservation, landscape and trees, outdoor access, and biodiversity) sit within the separate Culture and Greenspace Unit and provide support to the core planning teams.

In the wider Council structure, Planning and Building Standards is located within the Growth, Planning, Sport and Culture Division, which in turn is part of Place Services. The structure and staff numbers are illustrated below.

Planning Service Structure Diagram
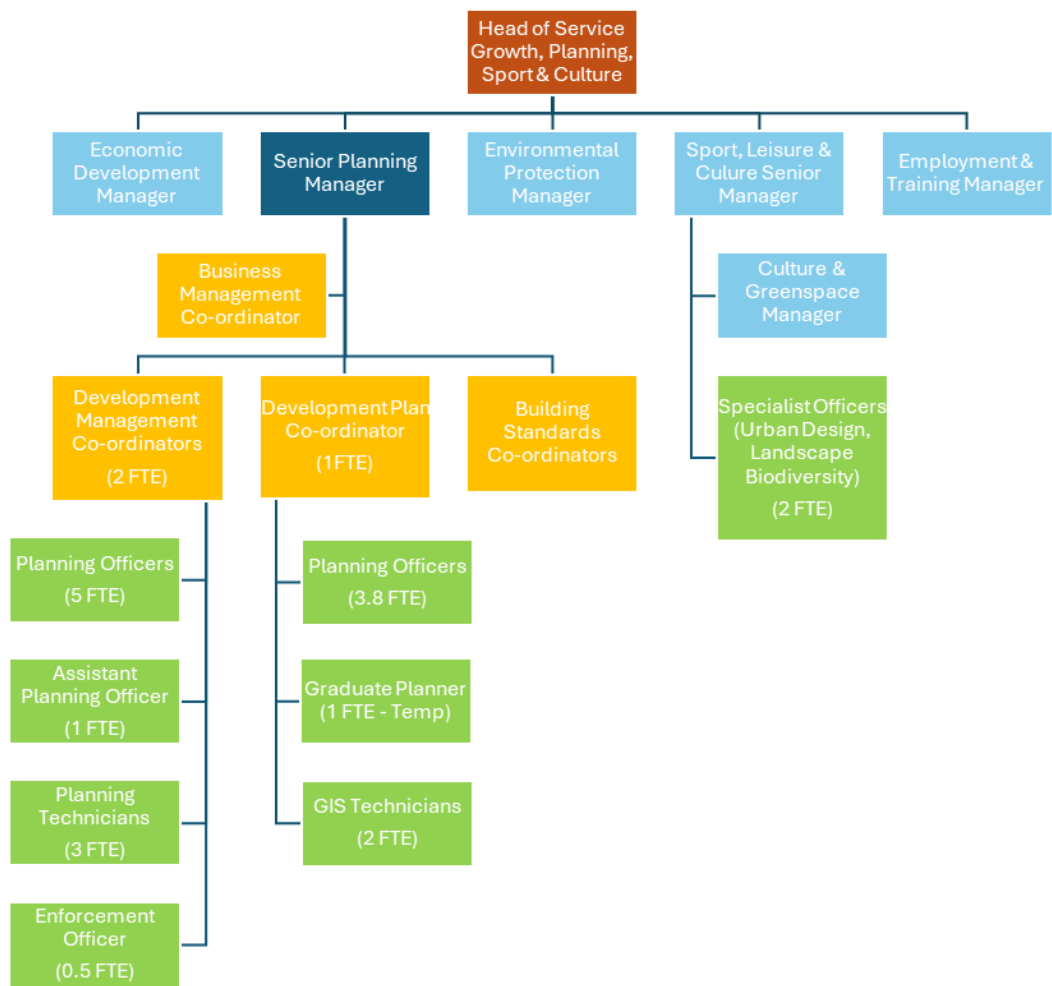
Planning Service Staff Numbers (post restructuring June 2024)

Function	Role	FTE Permanent Posts	FTE Temporary Posts	Total FTE Posts	FTE MRTPI Posts
Senior Planning Manager		1.0		1.0	1.0
Development Planning	Co-ordinator	1.0		1.0	1.0
	Planning Officers	3.8		3.8	3.8
	Technicians	2.0		2.0	
	Graduates		1.0	1.0	
Development Management	Co-ordinators	2.0		2.0	2.0
	Planning Officers	5.8		5.8	5.8
	Asst. Planning Officer	1.0		1.0	
	Technicians	2.4		2.4	
	Enforcement	0.6		0.6	
Specialists (Culture & Greenspace Unit)	Planning Officers	1.0		1.0	0.5
Total		**20.6**	**1.0**	**21.6**	**14.1**

Key Development Management Performance Indicators

Development Management:	2023-24	2022-23
Project Planning		
Percentage and number of applications subject to pre-application advice	60 10.75	120 23.2%
Percentage and number of major applications subject to processing agreement	2 50.00%	3 60.00%
Decision Making		
Application approval rate	95.7	94.5%
Delegation rate	93.9	94.7%
Validation	41.7%	44.9%
Decision-making Timescales		
Major developments	25.4 weeks	143.8 weeks
Local developments (non-householder)	12.3 weeks	15.2 weeks
Householder developments	8.3 weeks	8.2 weeks
Legacy Cases		
Number cleared during reporting period	2	6
Number remaining	18	6

Enforcement activity	2023-24	2022-23
Time since enforcement charter published / reviewed	9 months	16 months
Complaints lodged and investigated	129	46
Breaches identified – no further action taken	47	8
Cases closed	119	54
Notices served	7	0
Direct Action	0	0
Reports to Procurator Fiscal	0	0

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Enforcement activity	2023-24	2022-23
Prosecutions	0	0

Scottish Government Official Statistics

Decision-making timescales (based on 'all applications' timescales)

Timescales	2023-24	2023-24	2022-23
Overall			
Major developments	3	25.4 weeks	143.8 weeks
Local developments (non-householder)	159	12.3 weeks	15.2 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	82	6.4 weeks	
• Local: more than 2 months	77	18.7 weeks	
Householder developments	191	8.3 weeks	8.2 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	147	62 weeks	
• Local: more than 2 months	44	15.4 weeks	
Housing Developments			
Major	1	32.4 weeks	111.71 weeks
Local housing developments	43	13.9 weeks	22.2 weeks
• Local: less than 2 months	19	6.4 weeks	
• Local: more than 2 months	24	19.9 weeks	
Business/Industry			
Major	0	0	0
Local business and industry developments	0	0	0

Timescales	2023-24	2023-24	2022-23
• Local: less than 2 months • Local: more than 2 months			
EIA Developments	0	0	0
Other Consents • *As listed in the guidance*	115	11.7 weeks	8.1 weeks
Planning/legal agreements	7	0	3
• Major: average time	1	N/A Subject to Processing Agreement	237.1 weeks
• Local: average time	6	14.6 weeks	74.2 weeks

Decision-making: local reviews and appeals

		Original decision upheld			
	Total number of decisions				
	2023-24			**2022-23**	
Type	No.	No.	%	No.	%
Local reviews	2	1	50%	1	50%
Appeals to Scottish Ministers	1	1	100%	3	60.0%

A high performing planning authority needs to have the right number of people to do the work expected of it with the rights skills set. It also needs to have a strategy to ensure that it retains and recruits the right staff in the future. It supports staff to upskill and to be prepared for changes in policy, legislation, and new circumstances.

ATTRIBUTE 1: THIS PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS SUFFICIENT RESOURCES AND SKILLS TO MAXIMISE PRODUCTIVITY

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the sufficient level of staff to carry out all activities within the required timeframes?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current budget?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to carry out all activities within the required timeframes with its current income?
- Does the planning authority received responses from consultees within the prescribed timescale when assessing planning applications?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to access the appropriate advice, expertise, evidence and data it requires?

Overall Staffing and Budget (June 2024)

Staffing levels in the planning service at the point at which the new service structure was created are shown in the Context Statement above. In 2023/24, the combined annual revenue budget for the Development Planning and Development Management functions was £1.43 million, of which staffing costs were £1.24 million (87%).

Development Planning Team

The Development Planning team has reduced by about a quarter over the past 10 years in terms of permanent planning staff (now 4.3 FTE). However, an increased technician resource (2 FTE) has been highly beneficial in responding to increased GIS/digital/graphics requirements,

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although this is increasingly servicing corporate GIS needs. Notwithstanding the reduced level of staff, the team is a stable and experienced one and LDP2 (adopted in 2020) and the subsequent programme of SG preparation was completed broadly to targeted timescales.

The additional duties arising from the new Planning Act have introduced new resource challenges and complexities. A good start has been made with LDP3 under the new procedures but progress has been slower than anticipated. It will be a challenge to reach adoption by the programmed date of May 2028 (also the Scottish Government back stop timescale for new style plans) given that a further expected reduction of 1 FTE in the team over the next two years is built into the service savings plan.

Access to specialist support for LDP3 is likely to present difficulties. The lack of a corporate research and information team has already impacted on evidence report preparation. The expectation of development briefs and masterplans within LDP3 may be difficult to achieve given the lack of specialist urban design support within the unit. Resource pressures experienced by both internal and external consultees may impact on progress.

In terms of other elements of the new planning system, the team (in conjunction with colleagues in Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils) has not had the resources to advance the preparation of the Forth Valley RSS. Support for the LPP process has been manageable given the relatively low number of LPP being prepared by communities.

Development Management Team

The Development Management team has also reduced over the last 10 years driven by the need to make savings and removal of vacant posts and now stands at 11.8 FTE. Main grade MRTPI qualified development management posts (excluding co-ordinators, assistant planner and technical posts) amount to 5.8 FTE. It is considered this is now at an absolute minimum for development management service provision.

The processing of applications is supported by a team of 2.4 FTE technicians with the further input of the Systems Development Officer who is responsible for maintaining the Uniform casework management system and Corporate Address Gazetteer. There is an additional 1 FTE Graduate role who administers the Street Naming & Numbering service. Ongoing software difficulties and single points of failure continue to give concerns. Greater resilience within technical areas, emerging AI technology for verification and technical capacity are likely to be a focus for improvement in any workforce plan review.

Historically, the enforcement function has been better resourced than at present (now at 0.6FTE). Enforcement capacity is therefore also likely to be considered as part of any workforce plan.

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Graduate Scheme

A positive element over the last 6 years has been the participation of the planning service in the Council's graduate recruitment programme. Graduates have been taken on for a two-year period, and have worked across both Development Planning, Development Management and technical roles providing a valuable additional resource. Most have been able to move into permanent posts, with benefits for the age profile of teams and succession planning.

Specialist Support

Legal services support is available internally. Council solicitors also clerk both Planning Committee and Planning Review Committee. In addition, external legal support is available when required through a framework at additional cost.

Internal technical advice and support is available across a range of Council functions including contaminated land, environmental health, roads, transport planning, housing, flooding and children's services. All engage fully with the statutory planning system as required, and consultation responses are provided in respect of both the development management and development planning functions. Landscape/specialist tree advice (0.5 FTE) and urban design/historic environment support (0.5 FTE) is available from the Culture & Greenspace Unit. However, lack of internal biodiversity/ecological advice is currently an issue, especially given the increasing emphasis placed on the nature crisis and biodiversity enhancement in NPF4. Options are being considered as to how such advice can be provided. Recently, a gap in terms of archaeological advice has been filled (2024) through procurement of this service from our neighbouring local authority, Stirling Council.

The current increased policy focus on energy, new and emerging technologies including Hydrogen and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) as well as the policy focus on biodiversity will require consideration of additional training, and additional internal and external specialist capacity.   This is especially important given Grangemouth's National Development status and the policy imperative to decarbonise the industrial cluster. Provision of additional technical or specialist advice is underway through the nascent Planning Hub and Improvement Service with discussions on how best to service these additional capacity needs ongoing.

As and when required, external specialist advice is also available through the Council's framework agreement with WSP. This includes a range of specialisms and is an additional cost to the service.

Key external agencies are engaged with the planning service. Response rates and determination timescales are linked to response capacity and timescales of key agency responses. Liaison groups have been established with SEPA, Scottish Water and NHS Forth Valley which has assisted in addressing issues around consultation processes.

It is important that both internal and external consultation on planning applications is proportionate. Agencies such as SEPA have clearly outlined the circumstances in which they expect to be consulted, and when the use of standing advice is more appropriate. There is potential for extension of this principle to other consultees.

There are some technical elements to external consultation that give opportunities for improvement. Despite having the facility within our Uniform back-office system, we have yet to implement Consultee Access. This would facilitate a quicker and less task intensive procedure and obviate the need for additional documents to be sent by email; this is currently the case with applications for Hazardous Substances Consent which we do not make available on our public access system, or with documents considered sensitive such as protected species surveys and financial or personal information.

The software has been successfully implemented by other Scottish planning authorities and would improve communication with internal as well as external consultees. We are aware of a project by NatureScot which will require planning authorities to input data into their back-office system and upload documents. Others may well follow this lead, creating an additional burden on planning authority staff.

ATTRIBUTE 2: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS A VALUED AND SUPPORTED WORKFORCE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a workforce planning strategy in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to support staff development and upskilling and send staff on relevant courses?
- Does the planning authority have a deliverable commitment to support staff health and wellbeing?

Employee Engagement

The Council undertakes a bi-annual programme of engagement with all employees on a range of themes including Health, Safety & Wellbeing and Reward & Recognition. The data is used to inform and develop service-level workforce improvement plans.

Workforce Strategy

The planning service has been working towards a workforce planning strategy, but the process has been delayed by the restructuring process. The need for the strategy has been driven by budget pressures and the requirement to make savings, the changing demands of delivering the service, skills development, the age profile of the workforce, the need for succession planning, particularly in certain functional areas, and recruitment challenges. Some progress has been made (positive elements of which include the continuing graduate programme referred to previously, and the establishment of a second GIS technician post) and a number of key decisions have already been made on the basis of best information. However, these need to be put in the context of a wider strategy.

Staff Development

Training needs are discussed in formal 1-1 sessions and more informally with staff generally. Staff are able to access a number of opportunities, through the wide availability of free online webinars on a variety of subjects, as well as some paid events supported by a small training budget. We subscribe to the Improvement Service's Planning Skills programme which is well used by staff and are active participants in HOPS which offers a range of other learning and knowledge sharing activities. Staff have full access to the Council's online learning courses and have had some limited opportunity to access ILM (Institute of Leadership and Management) management courses. Place Services has also run a Future Leaders programme which two of our planners have participated in. Our graduates are offered a mentoring service, which some

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of our senior staff are involved in providing. One of our graduates is also enrolling in the new UWE undergraduate planning course. Notwithstanding the above, there remains a need to take a more co-ordinated, service-wide approach to training needs, given the rapidly changing environment of policy and practice that staff dealing with.

Health and Wellbeing

Annual 1-1s are held with staff to discuss workload issues, staff aspirations and future development. A wide range of flexible working opportunities are available corporately. A flexible approach is taken to hybrid working, with staff largely free to choose a pattern which suits their personal circumstances. Both formal and informal team meetings take place in person to support staff wellbeing. A full review of risk assessments is underway for the planning function and is managed on the corporate SHE Assure system. Health and safety is a standing item on team meeting agendas.

Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
1. The planning authority has sufficient resources and skills to maximise productivity	3
2. The planning authority has a valued and supported workforce	3

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Action: Prepare a Workforce Planning Strategy including consideration of future service delivery needs, available and potential resources including increased fee income, team resilience, technical support functions, staff progression and	Senior Planning Manager & Team Coordinators	High	Short term – 1 year	All Planning Staff Human Resources Organisational Development

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recruitment, and succession planning. **Outcome:** Appropriately staffed and structured teams capable of delivering a quality planning service.				
Action: Undertake a Training Needs Analysis and develop a Service Training Plan, including consideration of emerging types of development, new policy agendas, and the potential of digital technologies. **Outcome:** Staff are equipped to deal with changing professional demands and are able to make full and effective use of technology and digital tools.	Senior Planning Manager & Team Coordinators	Medium	Short term – 1 year	All Planning Staff Human Resources Organisational Development
Action: Review specialist support needs both internally and externally across a range of relevant topics and with	Senior Planning Manager & Team Coordinators	Medium	Short term – 1 year	All Planning Staff Improvement Service Heads of Planning Scotland

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particular reference to the challenges of industrial decarbonisation in Grangemouth. **Outcome:** Staff have timeous access to appropriate specialist advice needed to support quality decision making.				
Action: Review Health & Safety risk assessments for all staff ensuring that risks associated with new ways of working are properly accounted for. **Outcome:** All risks are identified, understood and appropriately mitigated.	Senior Planning Manager & Team Coordinators	Low	Long term – 3+ years	Team Coordinators Health & Safety
Action: Hold meetings/workshops with internal and external consultees to agree protocols around when consultations are issued.	Senior Planning Manager & Team Coordinators	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Team Co-ordinators Internal Consultees External Consultees

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Outcome: Consultation is proportionate and delays associated with consultation are minimised.				
Action: Progress fuller implementation of the Uniform system with particular reference to the 'Consultee Access' functionality. **Outcome:** Greater efficiency in the management of planning application consultations.	Development Management Co-ordinators	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Systems Development Officer Development Management Staff

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A high performing planning authority has a positive culture through ensuring it has sound governance, effective leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement. The authority has an identified chief planner, who is supported by a strong leadership group to advise on decision-making, policy and operational management.

ATTRIBUTE 3: THIS PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EMBEDDED CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority undertaken an annual assessment of its performance and acted upon areas previously identified as in need of improvement?
- Has the planning authority achieved recognition at relevant awards or through performance accreditation frameworks?
- Has the planning authority engaged in peer review, good practice exchange or improvement activities?
- Has the planning authority addressed any complaints upheld by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman and have evidence of this and that it has learned from valid cases?

Performance Assessment

The Council has produced an annual Planning Performance Framework (PPF) since 2013, which has provided a mechanism for performance reporting and reflection, as well as peer review. Through the PPF, service improvements were identified and progress monitored. Scottish Government feedback was provided on key performance markers in the form of a RAG rating. In the last year of PPF reporting, the Council achieved 13 green ratings, 2 amber ratings and no red ratings.

A Service Improvement Liaison Group (SILG) was established several years ago in association with the 'Cost of Planning' exercise but has not met for some time. This group now needs to be revived to provide a more structured and collaborative approach to service improvement, and to monitor and drive forward the improvement actions identified through the NPIF process.

Recent examples of service improvements include:

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- The introduction of a system of discretionary charging system for pre-application advice.
- The establishment of a cross-service Planning Obligations Monitoring Group to improve the way developer contributions are managed and handled within the Council.
- The development of a 20-minute neighbourhood tool to assist with assessment of the extent to which places facilitate local living.
- The development of place profiles in story map format to support the LDP3 evidence process and preparation of local place plans by communities.
- The development of an open data portal to share GIS datasets with the public for browsing and downloading.

Peer Review/Good Practice Exchange

The Council is actively involved in the HOPS Development Plan, Development Management, and Performance & Practice Sub-Groups, which facilitate good practice exchange. This has been particularly beneficial in relation to the early stages of LDP3. Regular meetings with our Forth Valley Regional Spatial Strategy partners, Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils, are used to share experience, ideas, and good practice on development planning matters. We have also engaged with our nominated peer review partners as part of the annual PPF process.

Internally, the Development Management and Development Planning teams meet monthly to discuss current issues and to share views and ensure consistency in interpretation and approach to NPF4 policy. These meetings are also used to exchange information and updates with internal Council planning consultees (e.g. Roads, Education, Housing, Flooding, Open Space).

We have regular communication and information exchange with SEPA, Scottish Water and NHS Forth Valley through established liaison groups.

Awards/Recognition

Prior to the restructuring of the planning service, the Planning & Greenspace Unit was the recipient of a number of national awards, mainly for greenspace and heritage projects. These included:

- Planning & Children's Services worked with A Place in Childhood (APIC), winner of The Research Award at the Thornton Education Trust "Inspire Future Generation Awards 2024 for Co-creating Local Neighbourhood Plans with Children and Young People: A 'How To' Guide".
- Zetland Park Regeneration – RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence Overall Winner 2023
- Rediscovering the Antonine Wall – shortlisted for RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence in 2023

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- Falkirk Sustainable Grass Management Project – COSLA Excellence Awards Runner Up 2023
- Carron Dams Local Nature Reserve: A Dam Fine Place – Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning Overall Winner 2019

Complaints

The service received 4 complaints which were referred to the SPSO during 2023/24. However none of these were upheld and no recommendations were made.

ATTRIBUTE 4: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS SOUND GOVERNANCE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an effective scheme of delegation in place?
- Have all councillors who exercise a planning function undergone statutory training and is there evidence of ongoing training for members?
- Have more than x % of officer recommendations have been overturned by councillors at committee or Local Review Body.

Scheme of Delegation

For the key stages of the Local Development Plan, decisions are reserved to full Council. Otherwise, development plan or planning policy matters are generally reported to the Council's Executive. Information may also be formally brought to the attention of councillors through information bulletins which are attached to the full Council agenda, but do not require consideration unless a specific question is asked.

The planning service has an effective scheme of delegation for planning and related regulatory consents. Between March 2023 and April 2024, 93.6% of applications were determined under delegated powers. Our Scheme of Delegation allows determinations of local and major applications that are in accordance with the development plan to be made by officers unless called in by any councillor for consideration by the Planning Committee following publication of the weekly list of delegated recommendations.

When an application is called in, the councillor must state their valid planning reasons for calling the matter in and give an explanation of any interest in the application. The applicant/agent is informed of the call in, and the reason given. Councillors are encouraged to discuss applications with officers before making a call-in request. Apart from elected member call-in, the Planning Committee will also consider applications in circumstances where:

1. The application has been made by a member of the Council or an officer involved in the statutory planning process;
2. As reflected above, determining the application (whether by grant or refusal) would result in a contravention of the development plan or Council policies;
3. It is proposed to approve the application and there is a formal objection from a statutory consultee that would trigger referral to Scottish Ministers or;
4. The Director of Place Services considers it inappropriate to consider the application under delegated powers. The scheme of delegation ensures that the number of applications considered by the Planning Committee is generally small in relation to the

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total number of applications received by the Council and mainly limited to more controversial applications where a greater degree of public scrutiny is justified.

Planning Review Committee

Our Planning Review Committee sits separately from the Planning Committee. Meetings are arranged by the Council's Democratic Services as and when required to consider requests for review. Membership is the Convener and Depute Convener of Planning Committee, ex officio, along with three other members of the Planning Committee on a rota basis. The Planning Review Committee is supported by a Council Solicitor, as legal adviser, and a Planning Officer, as an advisor on planning matters. The Planning Officer is required to be an officer with no previous involvement in the review case.

Councillor Training

All councillors are required to attend mandatory planning and governance training sessions before taking up membership on the Planning Committee. These sessions are led by the Council's Chief Planning Officer and Legal Services Manager. Updates and training on matters of interest, such as NPF4, are provided on a more ad hoc basis.

Committee Report Format

Planning application committee reports are produced in a standard format with recommendations at the end. Reports can be lengthy and contain little graphical information other than a site plan. It is recognised that there is scope to improve the format so that they present information in a more effective and accessible way.

Overturned Recommendations

Of 56 planning applications considered by the Planning Committee over the 2-year period from April 2022 to March 2024, 23% of decisions went against officer recommendation. Of the 6 Local Review Board decisions made over the 3-year period from April 2021 to March 2024, 50% were granted.

April 2025 Update

At the time of writing this report, work had started on a review of our Scheme of Delegation. Workshop sessions are being arranged with councillors to review the existing scheme and to consider potential changes and efficiency improvements.

A programme of non-mandatory planning training is currently being provided for all councillors to enhance elected members' appreciation of current key topics such as green belt, planning obligations, flooding, and the housing emergency. Future monthly sessions are planned for 2025/2026 on a range of topics.

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ATTRIBUTE 5: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an identified Chief Planning Officer in place?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise on corporate decision making and policy within the broader organisation?
- Is the planning authority's Chief Planning Officer a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute?
- Does the Chief Planning Officer advise and support external bodies through engagement in organisations' committees, advisory groups or working groups?
- Does the planning authority have a strong leadership team that supports a culture of continuous improvement?

Leadership

Falkirk Council has a Chief Planning Officer in place. The post "Senior Planning Manager - Chief Planner" sits within Place Services, within the Growth, Planning, Sport & Culture Division. The post oversees a number of teams including: Development Planning, Development Management, Building Standards and some wider essential systems support services including GIS. The postholder is a full Member of the Royal Town Planning (MRTPI) Institute and a full Member of the Institute of Leadership & Management (MInstLM).

The postholder has been in post since June 2024, following a restructure where a number of key changes took place within the Growth, Planning, Sport & Culture division. Notably the functions of two planning manager posts were amalgamated into a single post. This was done both to assist savings targets and to bring both policy and development management under one Unit. As part of those changes some key elements were removed from the two previous planning manager posts into other units including: some environmental specialists involved in the planning service who are now within the Culture & Greenspace Unit, and the Council's Climate function which now sits within Investment, Assets and Climate team.

The role of the Chief Planning Officer is evolving and varies across Scotland. The role within Falkirk is also evolving. In the main the post, in a small/medium sized authority, is rightly focused on business-critical elements of the Local Development Plan and Development Management. Wider corporate engagement is focused on "Future Falkirk" and a range of strategic projects.

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There are several high-level corporate groups notably "Future Falkirk" which is a relatively new Corporate internal group that is helping shape the future development of the Council area. The Senior Planning Manager and key planning officers service and attend the Future Falkirk Board which comprises of the Chief Executive, Directors and corporate Chief Officers across the Council. This new high-level access to chief officers complements long-standing cross-service officer engagement at an operational level. However, the Chief Planning Officer is not a 'chief officer' within the Council's hierarchy; the Head of Service for Growth, Planning, Sport and Culture is the chief officer in this hierarchy.

The Senior Planning Manager and key planning officers advise and support internal and external bodies through engagement with committees, advisory groups and working groups. There are a wide range of Council, partnership and external strategic priority project groups which are attended either by Planning Officers, Planning Co-ordinators and/or the Senior Planning Manager. Examples include Future Falkirk, Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme (GFPS), Green Freeports (GFP), Strategic Property Review (SPR), Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS – various groups), Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), and the Planning Obligations Monitoring Group (POMG).

Place Services has a strong Leadership Team in place with robust governance. A range of governance structures are in place covering a wide thematic focus at different management levels. These include:

- Corporate Management Team meetings and reporting
- Service Management Team meetings and reporting
- Head of Service and Manager meetings
- Head of Service / Manager and Co-ordinator tracking meetings,
- Place Services Board focusing on Revenue
- Strategic Asset Management Board focusing on capital budgets,
- Future Falkirk Board and sub-groups on long term strategic development direction
- Strategic Property Review
- Planning Obligation Monitoring Group

In addition to this, wider Leadership sessions with the extended management team are also in place. Core business is guided at a Team and Unit level through regular team meetings which take place on both a formal and informal basis, and in 1:1 sessions with line managers and team members.

There is clear scope for future sharing experience and good practice in the role of Chief Planning Officers across Scotland, which could be facilitated through HOPS.

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Improvement Action Plan (Culture theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
3. This Planning Authority has embedded continuous improvement	2
4. This Planning Authority has sound governance	2
5. This Planning Authority has effective leadership	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Action: Establish a Planning Improvement Monitoring Group to oversee implementation of the NPIF improvement actions. **Outcome:** NPIF actions are effectively progressed and monitored by an appropriate team.	Senior Planning Manager	High	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Team Co-ordinators Planning Delegates Planning & Performance Colleagues

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Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Action: Undertake a review of the Scheme of Delegation including consultation with Elected Members/legal officers and secure Council approval for any recommended changes. **Outcome:** Delegation arrangements for different applications and consents are appropriate and proportionate leading to more efficient processing and improved performance.	Development Management Coordinators	High	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Team Co-ordinators Planning Delegates Governance Colleagues Legal Colleagues Elected Members
Action: Deliver a programme of non-mandatory training for all Elected Members on specific planning topics.	Lead Planning Officers	Medium	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Team Co-ordinators Planning Delegates Governance Colleagues Elected Members

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Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Outcome: Members are better equipped to make informed decisions related to planning.				
Action: Review Planning Committee report format, design, layout and content. **Outcome:** Reports convey information in a format that is more accessible for Elected Members and the public.	Senior Planning Manager	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Senior Planning Manager Team Co-ordinators Planning Delegates Governance Colleagues Elected Members
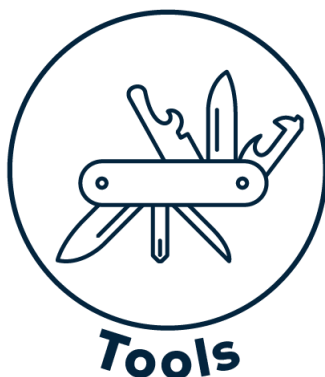
A high performing planning authority needs to have an effective local development plan and other strategies in place to provide a vision for the future of the area. It needs to be able to set and deliver on policy ambitions and priorities by clearly informing decision making and providing certainty and predictability for communities, developers and investment. The authority's development management systems need to be effective in making the right decisions about development and be efficient as possible in doing this. The planning authority makes best use of digital technology and how it manages and uses data.

ATTRIBUTE 6: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS A ROBUST POLICY AND EVIDENCE BASE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Local Development Plan in place and/ or is on track to adoption?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Regional Spatial Strategy in place/ or on track to adoption?
- Has the planning authority's Local Development Plan Evidence Report been approved by the Department of Planning and Environmental Appeals and/ or on track for approval?
- Has the application of the Local Development Plan's policies been found to be deficient at appeal or judicial review?

Local Development Plan

The current Falkirk Local Development Plan 2 was adopted in August 2020 and was 3.6 years old as of March 2024. Though it pre-dates NPF4, it is still considered up-to-date, with progress on its wide range of proposals still ongoing. The accompanying suite of 14 Supplementary Guidance documents was completed in December 2023. An Action Programme update was undertaken in November 2022, with a further update (and conversion to Delivery Programme due in March 2025).

Work formally commenced on LDP3 in February 2023, which was later than planned due to the timing of the commencement of the relevant parts of the new Act and the issue of LDP Regulations and Guidance. Nonetheless, the Council has been one of the early cohort of authorities progressing new style plans. The period to March 2024 was focused on early

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engagement, evidence gathering and the preparation of topic papers which formed a provisional view of the evidence and were issued for consultation in batches through spring 2024. The current projected date for adoption of LDP3 (as per the Development Plan Scheme of February 2025) is May 2028, which will meet the recommended timescale for adoption of new style LDPs set out by the Scottish Government. Whilst robust project planning is in place to meet this target, the potential for slippage is significant, given the need to deliver a different style of plan (rather than rely on the current template), and the diminishing staff resource.

Regional Spatial Strategy

The Council has been working with Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils to develop a Forth Valley Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). An indicative RSS was developed in 2020/21 to provide input to the development of NPF4 and proved to be a useful scoping exercise, identifying thematic areas where a regional approach to planning could add value. The three authorities have since formally agreed to work as an RSS partnership, continue to meet regularly, and have prepared a draft project plan. However, little substantive progress on the development of the RSS has yet been made due to a lack of resource across all three authorities, and the fact that the relevant legislative provisions have yet to be commenced and are not prioritised in the Scottish Government's current business plan.

LDP2 has generally been found to be robust at appeal.

April 2025 update

At the time of writing of this report, further progress has been made on LDP3. The Evidence Report has been completed, was approved by the Council and submitted to the DPEA for its Gate Check review in October 2024. In January 2025, the DPEA notified the Council that the Evidence Report was deemed sufficient. The Council has now issued a Call for Sites and Ideas, with the deadline for submissions in May 2025.

ATTRIBUTE 7: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY MAKES BEST USE OF DATA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Does the planning authority have a data governance strategy in place for the management of planning data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use interactive web-mapping, GIS and spatial data?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to use digital approaches to engagement, including website, social media and other platforms?

Planning Applications

During the reporting period, 96.08% of all planning applications were submitted online via the ePlanning portal. While this represents a welcome and significant shift away from paper-based systems, it does have its own issues. We have seen a continued decline in the number of applications submitted which are valid at the time of submission, despite the many and varied guidance notes available on both the Council and Scottish Government websites.

We encourage applicants to engage with us before submitting an application and the Development Management pages of the Council website contain a substantial amount of information answering many of the questions associated with making an application.

Data Governance Strategy

The Council has an Information Management Strategy in place, which establishes a strategic framework for information. "Information" includes structured data stored in systems, drives or databases within the Council. The Council's Information Management Working Group is responsible for overseeing delivery of the strategy, with two key actions for the initial phase. The first is the delivery of a good information management culture, which will involve developing our information asset register, and ensuring we have an information risk management policy in place, setting out roles and responsibilities. The second is to ensure good governance of M365 SharePoint, with a pathfinder project underway to find the best way to move information from shared network drives to a structured SharePoint environment. Alongside the Strategy, the Council has completed a Data Maturity Assessment and is working on a Data Transformation Plan to address its findings.

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Digital Capability

The Council has for some time procured corporate GIS services from IDOX (ThinkWhere). This is QGIS based and provides browsing and basic map preparation capabilities via the Location Centre platform. In addition, a number of more intensive users of spatial data within Place Services have ArcGIS licences and this is the product that is primarily used within planning. Two GIS technicians are based within the development planning team and provide support for other GIS users across the Council.

The Development Planning team uses interactive web mapping extensively, for example within the interactive version of LDP2, the topic papers which have formed the basis of the LDP3 Evidence Report, and our 20-minute neighbourhood tool. Over the last year, a Spatial Data Hub has been established which provides access for the public to web mapping covering a wide range of features as well as the ability to download GIS layers. This has made responding to requests for spatial data in GIS format easier to manage. We make extensive use of Story Maps, for example in our Place Profiles and Guide to Local Place Plans. Data collected on a wide range of topics (e.g. retail floorspace, open space, vacant and derelict land) is recorded digitally on IPads in the field using Survey 123 and stored within ArcGIS.

Development Management staff utilise a variety of spatial tools, from interactive constraint checking within the Uniform system to our own web-based Location Centre software.

Notwithstanding the above, there are several issues with the management and use of GIS within planning:

- The current combination of IDOX (thinkWhere) services with individual ESRI ArcGIS licences is not efficient or cost effective
- Management, ownership and updating of the numerous spatial datasets currently stored within Location Centre could be more rigorous.
- Integration of GIS with the Uniform case management system (constraints mapping) needs to be improved.

With the GIS contract with IDOX coming to an end in 2025, the Council, with planning as the lead, is looking at the procurement of a new GIS platform. Preliminary investigations indicate that a move to the ESRI Enterprise package could provide a better and more integrated service, with wider access to high quality GIS for a range of users across the Council, as well as financial savings. This will be a significant improvement project.

In terms of engagement with customers, the Council procured a new digital engagement platform in 2023 which is branded Participate +, and this is being used by the Development

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Planning team, for example for the Play Sufficient Assessment survey. Communication via social media is carried out via the LDP Facebook page and the Council's wider social media outlets, with some external partners such as CVS Falkirk providing additional channels. Our regular mailings are electronic via Mailchimp. The planning sections of the Council's web site are comprehensive and regularly updated. A corporate redesign of the web site is planned.

ATTRIBUTE 8: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority planning have the ability to make decisions on planning applications within the required timeframes?
- Are less than x% of planning decisions overturned at appeal or judicial review?
- Does the planning authority have an up-to-date Enforcement Charter in place?
- Does the planning authority have the ability to resolve enforcement cases?

Planning Decision-Making

The Council approves 95.7% of all planning applications, and 93.9% of all decisions are delegated to the Director of Place Services. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, the average processing time for major planning applications has fallen from 144 weeks to 25, and the average determination time for local non-householder applications from 15 weeks to 10. Average householder application determination time has remained static at just over 8 weeks.

No Council planning decisions have been the subject of judicial review during the last 10 years. During the year 2023-24, the Council's Planning Review Committee considered two local reviews, upholding the original decision on one of the two reviews. The single appeal determined by the DPEA was dismissed.

Planning Enforcement

The Council actively fulfilled its enforcement role within the reporting period, investigating 129 complaints lodged. Some 47 cases were closed with no further action appropriate, although a breach was found. A further 72 cases were closed with no breach found, and 7 enforcement notices were served. No direct action was taken, and no cases were reported to the Procurator Fiscal.

The Council's Enforcement Charter was updated in August 2023 and has been further updated in March 2025 to reflect the launch of the Council's new website.

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Improvement Action Plan (Tools theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
6. The planning authority has a robust policy and evidence base	2
7. The planning authority makes best use of data and digital technology	2
8. The planning authority has effective and efficient decision-making processes	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Action: Procure new corporate GIS system with new system/data administration procedures and staff training. **Outcome:**	Senior Planning Manager	High	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Business Management Co-ordinator Planning Technicians

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Staff have wider access to a more cost-efficient GIS service.				
Action: Integrate GIS planning datasets fully with Uniform **Outcome:** Staff have access to reliable spatial constraint mapping through the Uniform system.	Business Management Co-ordinator	Medium	Short term – 1 year	Systems Development Officer Planning Technicians
Action: Undertake a review of the Scheme of Delegation including consultation with Elected Members/legal officers and secure Council approval for any recommended changes. **Outcome:** Delegation arrangements for different applications and consents are appropriate and proportionate leading to more efficient processing and improved performance.	Development Management Coordinators	High	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Team Coordinators Planning Delegates Governance Colleagues Legal Colleagues Elected Members

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Action: Increase enforcement capacity by recruiting full time enforcement officer. Outcome: Better resourcing of the enforcement function.	Development Management Coordinators	High	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Development Management Co-ordinators
Action: Deliver a programme of non-mandatory training for all Elected Members on specific planning topics. Outcome: Members are better equipped to make informed decisions related to planning.	Lead Planning Officers	Medium	Short term – 1 year	Senior Planning Manager Team Co-ordinators Planning Delegates Governance Colleagues Elected Members
Action: Review systems for registration, validation and allocation of applications. Outcome: Qucker and more efficient processing of planning applications.	Development Management Coordinators	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Development Management Co-ordinators Graduate Planner

A high performing planning authority should ensure a wide range of people are involved in shaping their future places. Engagement should be fair and inclusive, early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate and should include difficult to reach groups. The authority should engage with a wide range of partners at a national, regional and local level to ensure a joined-up approach and that links are made across policies and programmes. The planning authority should demonstrate good customer care, transparency and effective communication.

ATTRIBUTE 9: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS GOOD CUSTOMER CARE

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have the ability to offer pre-application advice where it is requested?
- Has the planning authority held regular engagement events with developers and communities?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that customers are satisfied with the service offered by the planning authority?

Pre-Application Advice

We offer a pre-application service which allows applicants and agents to seek planning advice and guidance prior to the submission of an application. Use of the service is recommended because it helps to improve the quality of application submissions and streamline the process of determining applications. The service is publicised on our webpages with details of how to submit an enquiry, what information should be submitted, the standard of service to expect and the fees for this service. Enquiries can be submitted using our online forms. These forms allow supporting documents to be uploaded, the enquiry payment to be made and provide a case reference and acknowledgement of receipt.

Discussion at the peer review workshop highlighted issues around the quality of pre-application advice and timescales for responses. There was also wider comment about how the introduction of the pre-application service, combined with the ending of the duty officer service and changes in working patterns post-Covid, have reduced the accessibility of officers and made the service more remote.

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Developers' Forum

Historically, the planning service ran an annual Developers' Forum which provided an opportunity to update developers, consultants and agents on initiatives taking place in the service and explain processes, as well as providing an opportunity for customers to raise and discuss any issues they had with the service. The forums were a success, and provided valuable feedback. However, they have not been run for several years, and consideration need to be given reviving them on an annual or biannual basis.

Engagement activity through the development planning process is summarised under Attribute 10.

ATTRIBUTE 10: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY HAS EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND COMMUNITIES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Does the planning authority have a community engagement strategy and infrastructure in place to ensure engagement is early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate?
- Has the planning authority undertaken community engagement, for example consistent and effective use of the Place Standard Tool, to inform decision-making processes? Has the planning authority encouraged and promoted planning applications to be submitted through the e-development portal?
- Has the planning authority engaged with a good representation of the community including young people, gypsies and travelers, people with protected characteristics, including disability, race, age, sex and sexual orientation, and including people from a range of socio-economic backgrounds?
- Has the planning authority supported the production of Local Place Plans when requested?
- Do the results from the customer and stakeholder survey show that stakeholders are satisfied with their collaboration with the planning authority?

Stakeholder/Community Engagement

The Council has a corporate Strategy for Community Engagement which guides the way services, including planning, should engage with local communities. This sets the context for the LDP3 participation statement, which is a part of the Development Plan Scheme, and sets out when, how and with whom the Council will engage in the preparation of the plan.

The evidence gathering stage of LDP3 has seen a comprehensive engagement exercise carried out with the public and stakeholders. This comprised:

- A 'Tell Us About Your Place' campaign which involved an online Place Standard survey with a tailored approach to adults, young people and children.
- A Business and Organisations Survey inviting parties to submit any evidence they considered relevant to LDP3
- A Topic Paper consultation asking parties for their views on the provisional evidence and to identify any gaps
- Meetings/correspondence with key stakeholders to discuss the LDP3 process and relevant evidence.

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- A presentation and subsequent training session with community councils.

In line with statutory requirements, we have attempted through the LDP3 consultation to reach out to young people, the disabled and gypsy/travellers. We have some information on the extent to which we are reaching those with protected characteristics with our LDP3 surveys. Whilst we consider that we have met our statutory obligations, and there is some good practice with regard to children and young people (Place Standard events and a children's 20 minute neighbourhood plan for Langlees/Bainsford, facilitated by APiC), lack of resources is a constraint to the extent to which we can engage meaningfully and comprehensively with these groups. As we move forward into the preparation of the Proposed Plan, we will be looking at ways in which we can involve communities effectively in the key choices around the spatial strategy.

Ongoing engagement with particularly critical stakeholders, both internal and external, is facilitated through bespoke liaison groups. Examples of external groups include our tripartite group with SEPA and Scottish Water, a bipartite group with NHS Forth Valley, and a Strategic Housing Group involving Housing Services, Registered Social Landlords and Homes for Scotland. Planning also continues to be represented on the Locality and Place Planning Group, which is the officer working group associated with the Falkirk Community Planning Partnership. Internal liaison groups exist with Housing and Children's Services.

Local Place Plans

In terms of supporting Local Place Plans (LPPs), the Council issued an invitation to prepare LPPs in February 2023. A package of information and assistance has been assembled, including a brief guide to LPPs in Story Map format, Place Profiles with local data, training for community councils and other potential community bodies, assistance with mapping, and an offer of general advice. Interest in LPPs has been relatively limited, but we have provided advice to, and supported, two community bodies to date. Updating of the brief guide is needed. We also intend to add an LPP template to the package of assistance.

Customer Surveys

Historically, Development Management has operated a customer satisfaction survey which is accessible by a link on staff emails. However, the level of response has been increasingly low, and there is a need to review how we seek feedback from customers, including better engagement with any future nationals planning customer surveys.

The Development Planning team tends to carry out customer satisfaction surveys at the beginning of each LDP cycle, to gauge people's experience of the last plan as a basis for improving engagement. The last such exercise was in 2022. People's experience of plan making as expressed though the survey is inevitably a mixed one, and we have attempted to address perceived failures with engagement on LDP2 in our participation statement for LDP3.

Business Engagement

Improving the quality of planning information available to small businesses, particularly in Falkirk Town Centre, was highlighted as an opportunity during the peer review workshop. New business start-ups typically have to negotiate a complex landscape of consents, which can result in delays and unauthorised works, with adverse consequences for the quality of the Town Centre and for much needed investment. Whilst the Town Centre has a dedicated planning officer who works closely with Falkirk Delivers and applicants to secure good outcomes, there is potential to develop a package of information and support which can be issued to businesses wishing to invest in the centre.

Improvement Action Plan (Engage theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
9. This planning authority has good customer care	3
10. The planning authority has effective engagement and collaboration with stakeholders and communities.	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Action: Review pre-application enquiry arrangements including charging, handling, and response timescales **Outcome:** An improved and more transparent service offered to applicants.	Development Management Co-ordinators	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Senior Planning Manager Development Management Co-ordinators

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National Planning Improvement Framework | Falkirk Council

| Action: Restart an annual or biannual Developers' Forum.

Outcome: Improved communication between the planning service and its customers.	Senior Planning Manager	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Senior Planning Manager Team Co-ordinators
Action: Review customer satisfaction/feedback survey and processes.

Outcome: Improved communication between the planning service and its customers. | Development Management Co-ordinators | Medium | Short term – 1 year | Development Management Co-ordinators |
| Action: Produce a project plan for LDP3 Proposed Plan Strategy and Site Choices consultation.

Outcome: Consultation at this stage of plan preparation is effective. | Development Planning Co-ordinator | High | Short term – 1 year | Development Planning Co-ordinator |
| Action: Update and expand LPP support resources. | Development Planning Co-ordinator | High | Short term – 1 year | Planning Officer |

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Outcome: Improved LPP guidance and resources available to community bodies.				
Action: Develop a package of planning and regulatory information to assist potential business start-ups in Falkirk Town Centre. **Outcome:** Better quality development in the Town Centre and minimising of delays to investors.	Economic Development Manager	Medium	Medium term – 3 years	Economic Development and Business Gateway staff Falkirk Delivers (BID) Planning Officer

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A high performing planning authority should demonstrate place leadership by taking a collaborative place-based approach in line with the Place Principle. It should use the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes in decision-making processes, to achieve the three spatial principles outlined in NPF4: Sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; Liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and Productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy. The planning authority should seek to ensure that there are no impediments to delivering agreed development.

ATTRIBUTE 11: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF SUSTAINABLE, LIVEABLE AND PRODUCTIVE PLACES

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Is the planning authority aware of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes, the evidence that sits behind them and is it using them in decision-making processes?
- Has the planning authority identified tools and approaches to delivering sustainable, livable and productive places and is implementing them?

Place and Wellbeing Outcomes

The Council is aware of the Place and Wellbeing Outcomes and seeks to promote an understanding of the connection between place and wellbeing, and the importance of planning in achieving such outcomes, across the Council. Accordingly, there is a growing appreciation of place in corporate strategies and the role that planning can play in achieving wider wellbeing outcomes. The Place and Wellbeing Outcomes are based on the Place Standard, the use of which planning has pioneered within the Council and is promoting in other services.

Tools and Approaches

In terms of delivering sustainable, livable and productive places, we work through our core legislative tools of development management and development planning to promote positive change. Our suite of detailed Supplementary Guidance notes is used to good effect to influence the quality of development and deliver developer contributions for investment in infrastructure and greenspace. We have a limited in-house capacity to prepare development frameworks,

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masterplans and site briefs, and over the past year this has been focused on important sites which the Council is disposing of as a result of its Strategic Property Review. Additionally, regeneration funding is facilitating external procurement of development frameworks/ masterplans for key priority areas. A Vision and Development Framework for Falkirk Town Centre was approved in August 2023, and similar work is planned for Grangemouth, Falkirk West and Bo'ness. These will inform future investment and feed into LDP3.

Planning is also providing ongoing support and input to the Council's strategic investment programmes including the various Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal projects, the Forth Green Freeport and the Grangemouth Flood Protection Scheme.

Given the growing importance of NPF4 outcomes around subjects such as health, the nature crisis and biodiversity enhancement, climate mitigation and adaptation, and the hydrogen economy, these topics feature prominently in our monthly Development Management/ Development Planning joint meetings and are a priority in terms of training needs.

ATTRIBUTE 12: THE PLANNING AUTHORITY SUPPORTS THE DELIVERY OF CONSENTED DEVELOPMENT

Please consider the following when thinking about this attribute and how you have performed over the last year:

- Has the planning authority provided clear and proportionate expectations of Section 75 agreements and set these out in the LDP and pre-application discussions and are they concluded within 6 months of resolution to grant?
- Does the planning authority take a proportionate approach to imposing conditions?
- Does the planning authority have an ambitious local housing land requirement that exceeds the Minimum All Tenure Housing land requirements in NPF4 and is it on track to support delivery?
- Are the number of processing agreements the planning authority has agreed with applicants increasing?
- Does the planning authority have an effective delivery programme in place that supports the delivery of development on the ground?

Section 75 Agreements

Advice and guidance are provided in development plan policy and supplementary guidance setting out the circumstances in which legal agreements will be required. Where financial contributions may be sought, the reasoning and amounts are explained in the supplementary guidance. This information is published on our website and referenced in pre-application discussions.

We generally seek completion of S75s within 6 months of a minded to grant decision. This timescale is typically set out in our decision recommendations and is recorded in reports to the Planning Committee and in delegated reports on handling. Our recommendations also include details of the heads of terms of the S75. Completion of a S75 is however reliant on the co-operation of applicants. Delays in the submission of title information to the Council, negotiating the terms of an agreement, and in returning signed documents to the Council can impact on the conclusion of a S75. As appropriate, on a case-by-case basis, minded to grant recommendations are reassessed if a S75 is not concluded within 6 months.

A cross-service Developer Contributions Monitoring Group has been re-established within the last year to improve procedures for the management of contributions, including public transparency and reporting, and to monitor the application of contributions to projects. The group has identified a number of improvement actions.

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Planning Conditions

Planning conditions are only imposed where it is reasonable and proportionate to do so. Where practical the terms of planning conditions are discussed with applicants/agents prior to recommendation. The reasons for conditions are set out in Planning Committee reports and reports on handling.

Processing Agreements

The take-up of processing agreements remains consistently very low. A template is available on our website and agreements are promoted by officers at the pre-application stage or early in the assessment of applications. However, customers appear to be generally satisfied that we have procedures in place to ensure applications are progressed to a reasonable timescale. We are very open with applicants and agents and are available by phone or email to talk matters through.

Minimum All-Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR)

As at March 2024, the Council had set out its draft approach to setting the indicative Local Housing Land Requirement (LHLR) in its Housing Topic Report, with an uplift of 850 on the MAHLR (6,000 compared to 5,250), demonstrating an ambitious attitude to growth.

Delivery Programme and Housing land Audit

The Council updated its Action Programme for LDP2 in November 2022. There was a requirement for a further update and the conversion of the document to a Delivery Programme (incorporating the deliverable housing delivery pipeline) by the end of March 2025.

The Council produces an annual Housing Land Audit (HLA) which records information on the status and programming for sites in the housing land supply. New HLA Guidance was issued by the Scottish Government in January 2025, and the Council will have to review the format of its HLA in the light of the guidance.

April 2025 update

The indicative LHLR has since been approved by the Council as part of the Evidence Report and the derivation of the figure deemed appropriate through the Gate Check.

The 2024/25 HLA was published in April 2025. It has taken on board some aspects of the new HLA Guidance, notably the change in the reporting period, but full consideration of the Guidance will be undertaken in next year's audit.

The Delivery Programme was completed in March 2025.

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Improvement Action Plan (People theme)

Attribute	Score (1=Making excellent progress, 5= No progress)
11. The planning authority supports the delivery of sustainable, liveable and productive places	2
12. This planning authority supports the delivery of appropriate development	2

Based on the grading above, outline any areas of improvement that are required and by whom and their level of importance (High/ Medium/ Low) and by when (short/ medium/ long term).

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
Action: Consult and finalise process mapping of the stages and tasks involved with planning obligations and identify areas for further improvement. **Outcome:** A clearer understanding of the planning obligations process	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	High	Short term - 1 year	Input required from relevant POMG officers.

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Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
and journey as a basis for improvements.				
Action: Prepare a risk register to identify significant risks from planning obligations monitoring facing the Council and control measures to address these. **Outcome:** Risks associated with the planning obligations process will be appropriately mitigated.	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	High	Short term - 1 year	Input required from relevant POMG officers.
Action: Identify cost benefits for software automation to support and improve planning obligations enforcement, monitoring and reporting. **Outcome:**	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	Medium	Short term - 1 year	Engage with potential software providers, and early adopters of software (Aberdeenshire and West Lothian Councils) Build a business case to secure budget for software licence.

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
A clear business case for investment in new systems to manage the process.				
Action: Record information on planning obligations as required by Section 36(5)) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1997 as amended and develop a template for reporting this information in advance of the commencement of the Section 36(5) duty. **Outcome:** Legislative requirements are met and public transparency on developer contributions is improved.	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	High	Short term - 1 year	Engage with Heads of Planning Scotland and Scottish Government, both of which may be looking to develop a national template. Input required from Legal Services.
Action: Create a dedicated Council webpage for planning	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	Medium	Medium term - 3 year	Review good practice from other Councils.

Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
obligations which includes information on developer contributions secured, spent and unspent. **Outcome:** Public transparency on developer contributions is improved.				
Action: Pilot the use of an interactive map and dashboard to report and improve internal and external communication around spending of contributions. **Outcome:** Information on developer obligations is more accessible.	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	Low	Medium term - 3 years	Engage with GIS Technicians and review emerging good practice from other Councils.
Action: Review the process and format of the Housing Land Audit	Planning Obligations Monitoring Group	Medium	Short term – 1 year	Planning Officer

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Improvement Action What action will you take? What will the outcome be?	Owner	Importance High Medium Low	Timescale Short term – 1 year Medium term – 3 years Long term – 3+ years	Resources
(HLA) in the light of the revised Scottish Government HLA Guidance. **Outcome:** Compliance of the HLA with the Scottish Government's Guidance.				

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