

# COMPLAINTS Annual Report



# 2024/25

# **FALKIRK COUNCIL values complaints and wants to learn from them.**

**This annual report provides information about how Falkirk Council handled complaints during 2024/25.**



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

**This report details Falkirk Council's performance against the SPSO performance indicators during 2024/25. It also provides information about the learnings the Council services have taken onboard from complaints.**



# Our Complaints Procedure



The Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) follows the model developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The model CHP applies to all local authorities and all local authority services. The Council's CHP is based on a two-stage process. The first stage is frontline resolution and the second is investigation.

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

Stage Two investigations are for issues that have not been resolved at the first stage or that are complex, serious or 'high risk'. This means a response is provided within 20 working days following an investigation of the points raised.

Following investigation, if customers are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with their complaint, they can ask the SPSO to look at it. The SPSO cannot normally look at a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure first. This report provides information on complaints handling within the Council during 2024/25. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO.

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

The Council's performance against the SPSO indicators for 2024/25 is set out with comparative information for 2023/24.

# SPSO

# indicators for

# 2024/25



## Indicator One: The total number of complaints received

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

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

Complaints received per 1000 population	2024/25	2023/24
Population	158,620	158,450
Total complaints received	4679	5458
Complaints received per 1000 population	30	34

## Indicator Two: Closed complaints

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

"Please note: There is a variance of “20” between complaints received and complaints closed. This is due to 20 complaints being withdrawn by customers."

Closed complaints	2024/25	% against total closed	2023/24	% against total closed
Total closed	4,659		5,458	
Total closed at stage 1	4,110	88%	4,795	88%
Total closed at stage 2	62	1%	60	1%
Total closed at stage 2 after escalation	487	11%	603	11%

## Indicator Three: Complaint outcomes

There are four outcome categories:

**Upheld** - a complaint where we investigated and found that something went wrong.

**Partially upheld** – a complaint where we investigated and found some parts of the process had gone wrong.

**Not upheld** – when there is no evidence to support any aspects of the complaint.

**Resolved** - when both Falkirk Council and the customer agree on what action (if any) will be taken to provide a full and final resolution for the customer, without making a decision about whether the complaint is upheld or not upheld.

The tables below show the outcomes for each stage.



### Stage 1 outcomes

Stage 1 complaints	2024/25	% against total closed	2023/24	% against total closed
Total complaints closed at stage 1	4110	88%	4795	88%
Upheld	369	9%	463	10%
Partially upheld	561	14%	680	14%
Not upheld	1810	44%	2226	46%
Resolved	1370	33%	1426	30%

## Stage 2 outcomes

Stage 2 complaints	2024/25	% against total closed	2023/24	% against total closed
Total complaints closed at stage 2	62	1%	60	1%
Upheld	4	7%	5	8%
Partially upheld	12	19%	16	27%
Not upheld	33	53%	37	62%
Resolved	13	21%	2	3%

## Stage 2 (escalated) outcomes

Escalated complaints	2024/25	% against total closed	2023/24	% against total closed
Total complaints closed after escalation	487	11%	603	11%
Upheld	56	11%	149	25%
Partially upheld	120	25%	153	25%
Not upheld	212	44%	188	31%
Resolved	99	20%	113	19%

# Indicator Four: Average response times

The table shows our average response times for 2024/25.

Average response time (working days)	Target	2024/25	2023/24
Stage 1	5	5	6
Stage 2	20	18	20
Escalated	20	17	18



## Indicator Five: Performance against timescales

The table below shows the total number and % of complaints closed at all stages within agreed timescales:

- **Stage one** - within 5 working days (or 10 working days where an extension has been authorised)
- **Stage two and Escalated** - within 20 working days (or within the agreed timescale where extension has been authorised)

Complaints received per 1000 population	2024/25	2023/24
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	4110	4795
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 within timescale	3567	3601
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 as a % of total stage 1 complaints	87%	75%
Stage Two	2024/25	2023/24
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	62	61
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within timescale	53	47
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 as a % of total stage 2 complaints	85%	77%
Escalated	2024/25	2023/24
Number of complaints closed after escalation	487	602
Number of complaints closed after escalation within timescale	403	430
Number of complaints closed after escalation as a % of total stage 2 complaints	83%	71%

## Indicator Six: Use of extensions

### Stage One

In exceptional cases (e.g. a key staff member is unavailable), we may need extra time to respond. Any extension must be approved by a manager. We'll inform the customer of the reason and when to expect a reply. The maximum extension is five working days, meaning a total of ten working days to respond.

### Stage Two & Escalated Complaints

Some complex complaints may take longer than the standard 20 working days. Any extension must be approved by a manager. We'll keep the customer and any staff involved updated, explain the delay, and give a new timeline. We'll provide updates at least every 20 working days.

The tables below show where extensions have been used:

Stage One	2024/25	2023/24
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	4110	4795
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised	57	44
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised as a % of total stage 1 complaints	1%	1%
Stage Two	2024/25	2023/24
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	62	61
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised	13	9
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised as a % of total stage 2 complaints	21%	15%
Escalated	2024/25	2023/24
Number of complaints closed after escalation	487	602
Number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised	23	15
Number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised as a % of all complaints escalated	5%	2%

# Learning from complaints



The SPSO is clear that councils should have processes in place to help them learn from complaints and review and change service delivery if required. This section outlines areas where service provision has been reviewed and improved in response to complaints. The Complaints Handling Working Group identifies complaint themes i.e. service failure, information failure, and staff conduct. This allows recurring issues to be addressed on a Council-wide basis with further guidance and training provided if required.

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



# Social Work Adult Services



1. Social Work Adult Services identified that communication with service users was a key factor in the complaints received. In response, improvements were made to the Mobile Emergency Care Service (MECS) referral process. This now includes a digital option, ensuring accessible and efficient support for some of the most vulnerable people in our community.
2. The MECS service has also introduced a SMS alert function as part of its new digital care alarms. Where service users request it, this feature sends an instant SMS notification to their chosen family member or representative when their alarm is activated, providing reassurance and improving communication at critical times.
3. Following complaints regarding property adaptation requests, a review of a sample of these requests was conducted. The review highlighted concerns about the quality of submissions made by staff on behalf of residents. In response, a panel of senior occupational therapists has been established to review all adaptation applications. This panel provides feedback to individual OT staff to support their learning and development, and to improve the overall quality of the decision-making process.



# Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services



1. Following the analysis of customer complaints, our Business Support teams have introduced updated customer care training, now available to all Council employees. This training promotes a consistent, professional approach in the delivery of all frontline services, helping to ensure a high-quality experience for every customer interaction.
2. Some customers expressed concerns about the tone of the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) letters they received. In response, we reviewed the feedback and made adjustments to improve the tone. We're also reviewing the overall process to make the letters shorter and more user-friendly. Additionally, some customers reported not receiving their Inspection for Water Ingress (IWIN) letters. To address this, we've updated the process so all IWIN letters are now sent via the Click and Drop Service, which allows us to track deliveries and confirm receipt. If a letter isn't picked up, it will be hand-delivered to the customer's home.
3. There were instances where rent direct debit instalments were not increased promptly following mid-year rent changes, such as when the Discretionary Housing Payment was removed from a tenant's rent account. To address this, we implemented new weekly reporting to ensure the team is promptly alerted when a net rent change occurs, allowing the direct debit instalments to be updated and tenants notified.
4. Incorrect advice was given to customers regarding refund timescales for overpayments. The Revenues team has since refreshed the information on current procedures to ensure accurate guidance is provided moving forward.
5. Incorrect email addresses were entered for two customers' Revenue accounts, causing email communications to fail. As a result, team members have been reminded of the importance of accurately entering email addresses into customer accounts and checking them against the communication received.



1. Complaints highlighted that there had been missed collections near bridges and in areas where flooding works were taking place. As a result, Waste services worked closely with the Roads team to improve how we share information about upcoming roadworks, especially when traffic management could affect access for our bin lorries. This means our Waste team will now be better informed and able to plan ahead, helping us avoid missed collections in the future.
2. Car park charges are typically reviewed and increased annually as part of the Council's budgeted fees and charges. In addition, car parks may be temporarily impacted by planned or reactive maintenance or permanently removed, as was the case with West Bridge Street at the former Municipal Buildings site. To keep the public informed, we've now made regular website updates a standard part of our procedures, ensuring accurate and timely information about car park availability and charges is always accessible.
3. Bus operators had raised concerns about not being informed of roadworks affecting their services, resulting in unexpected delays. In response, we've improved our communication around live roadworks and now hold quarterly meetings with the service providers to address ongoing issues and provide visibility on upcoming work programmes.
4. Building Maintenance Division (BMD) is rolling out a new initiative called Bolt-On Skills, aimed at enhancing the skills and expertise of its workforce. By equipping tradespeople with a broader range of capabilities, more repairs can be completed during a single visit. This approach not only improves efficiency but also boosts customer satisfaction by minimising the number of visits needed to complete a job.
5. Over the past year, BMD have also strengthened our approach to customer complaints management by introducing weekly reporting practices, helping to accelerate response times across all BMD sections. Looking ahead, we plan to deliver additional training to all managers and staff involved in complaint resolution, focusing on enhancing their knowledge, improving response efficiency, and ensuring the quality and clarity of information provided to our customers.



# Childrens Services



In May 2024, Children's Services received a high volume of correspondence from parents and elected Members following the publication of our proposal to make changes to the school learning week.

Feedback indicated that, for some families, the distinction between the two elements of the proposal - moving to an asymmetric week and changing the number of learning hours - was not immediately clear.

In response, we made adjustments to the online consultation and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), issued updated communications via group call and social media, and wrote to complainants to acknowledge concerns and clarify key points.

The aim throughout was to ensure all stakeholders had access to accurate and accessible information to support their engagement in the consultation process.

We are building in additional steps to strengthen how we develop and communicate proposals. These include earlier engagement with our newly re-established forum for Chairs of Parent Councils to gather feedback and test clarity; improved Equalities and Poverty Impact Assessments (EPIAs) to ensure implications are fully understood and addressed; and a more structured approach to consultation design and messaging, including accessible FAQs and targeted communications.

## Complaints raised to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO)

47 complaints were raised to the SPSO in 24/25. These are detailed by Service area in the table below.

Complaints raised to SPSO	2024/25	2023/24
Place Services	12	10
TC&CS	24	30
Children's Services	11	4
Social Work Adult Services	0	0
Total	47	44

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

SPSO case outcomes	2024/25	2023/24
Not Upheld	1	1
Upheld	1	0
Remain open (still being considered)	5	0
Not taken forward	40	43
Total	47	44

In 2024/25 one case was upheld by the SPSO. This complaint was about repairs carried out which also involved a homeowner.

The SPSO provided the Council with the following recommendations:

- Send an apology to the homeowner; and
- Review processes for multi tenure repairs.

In March 2025, these recommendations were confirmed and evidenced via correspondence to the customer and SPSO.

## Future Actions

We're transforming how customers can contact us. In collaboration with all Council services, we're launching an innovative, customer-friendly digital platform that makes it faster, easier, and more intuitive for you to share your complaints, general enquiries, compliments, comments or ideas. All feedback will flow directly to the right teams, giving the Council a smarter, real-time understanding of what matters most to you.

As of 1st April 2025, Social Work Children and Families and Criminal Justice have left Children's Services and moved to integrate with the Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership. Support will continue from Education Services in the short term to allow the transition to go smoothly and keep the improvements made around complaints ongoing. Both services will continue to work closely together, particularly due to the crossover of service users.

Education Services is in the process of drafting new staff guidance to incorporate the SPSO's child-friendly complaint handling principles alongside the existing Model Complaints Handling Procedure.



