

Falkirk Council Local Housing Strategy Summary 2023-2028



Foreword

Welcome to the Local Housing Strategy for the Falkirk Council area covering the period 2023 to 2028. This strategy builds upon the achievements of the previous Local Housing Strategy 2018-2022 and has been developed in consultation and collaboration with our tenants and partners, Elected Members, Registered Social Landlords, service providers and statutory bodies.

The seven priorities contained in the Strategy is are aligned to the Falkirk Plan themes and the Council Plan priorities. Account has also been taken of the Falkirk Integrated Strategic Plan and a range of partnership plans reflecting the importance of good quality housing across all aspects of life. Most importantly the Strategy reflects the views of residents on the key issues identified as important to them. These have been woven throughout the Strategy and action plan.

Recent years have been unprecedented and have highlighted the importance of our homes and places in improving our health and wellbeing. We face unparalleled challenges nationally and locally and the actions from this strategy will contribute significantly to ensuring that people live in good quality homes that meet their needs, while recognising the vital role that housing and related services play in Falkirk Council area's social and economic progression. The challenges are significant. However, we believe by creating synergy between public, private and third sectors we can combine our resources and efforts to maximise housing services achieving more together than separately.

As highlighted in the Falkirk Plan "our greatest asset... is our people".



Councillor Gary Bouse

Introduction

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires local authorities in Scotland to create a Local Housing Strategy (the Strategy) that outlines their plans and priorities for housing and related services. This strategy is to be renewed every five years and must be accompanied by an assessment of housing need. In Falkirk, our strategy for 2023-2028 builds upon our previous strategy and is a central part of our housing planning and partnership activities. Our focus is on improving outcomes for individuals and communities in the area.

Housing plays a crucial role in achieving various goals in Falkirk and Scotland, such as addressing homelessness, fighting poverty, tackling climate change, and promoting health and well-being. We believe that having an affordable, comfortable, and accessible home that meets people's needs throughout their lives is essential for their overall well-being and reaching their full potential. Our goal is to ensure that every person in Falkirk can have such a home by providing high-quality housing and support and creating vibrant and resilient communities.

To achieve this, we will make sure that our housing and support services can adapt and respond to the changing needs of our communities and residents. We will also tackle challenges like an aging population, climate change, and poverty. Our aim is to build a thriving Falkirk where housing plays a key role in driving positive transformation and prosperity for everyone.

Priorities

The Local Housing Strategy 2023-2028 focuses on seven key priorities, including affordable housing, addressing homelessness, promoting sustainable communities, enhancing housing quality and energy efficiency, promoting a sustainable private sector, and ensuring housing meets the needs of local people.

These priorities have been co-created through extensive consultation with local people, partners, stakeholders, and colleagues. Falkirk Council developed each of the priorities and created actions to monitor and measure progress of each priority.

“Housing plays a crucial role in achieving a range of goals in Falkirk and Scotland, including addressing homelessness, tackling poverty, responding to climate change, and promoting health and wellbeing. We believe that having an affordable, comfortable and accessible home that meets people's needs throughout their lives is fundamental to overall wellbeing and enabling people to reach their potential. Our aim is to improve access to high-quality housing and appropriate support for those who need it, while working with partners to create vibrant and resilient communities across Falkirk.”



Priority 1

Increasing housing supply

The evidence base for this strategy is the Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) which estimates the number of additional units needed to meet existing and future need. The main goal is to increase the number of available homes and make it easier for people to find and afford housing that meets their needs over time. This includes providing a wider range of housing options for people to choose from. We recognise the importance of having a shared understanding of place and the need to take a more collaborative approach to an area's services and assets to achieve better outcomes for people and communities.

In person consultation with local people also noted a high demand for affordable housing, many respondents called for an increase in the supply of affordable particularly social rented housing in their local area.

Achieving our goals

- One of our key actions is to ensure that enough land is available for housing development, with a target of building 2,600 properties by 2028. By securing an adequate housing land supply, we aim to meet the growing demand for housing and provide more homes for our community.
- We will work towards increasing the supply of newly built social rented properties. We aim to address the need for affordable housing options and ensure that individuals and families have access to safe and affordable places to live.
- Through our ex local authority Buy Back Scheme, we will deliver additional social rented housing. This involves purchasing existing suitable private properties and converting them into social rented homes, expanding the availability of affordable housing options within our community. Our Registered Social Rented partners offer a similar scheme to provide additional social rented housing.
- We will collaborate with partners to implement the Affordable Housing Policy. By working together with various stakeholders, we aim to effectively deliver affordable housing projects, ensuring that individuals with different income levels can access suitable housing options and contributing towards the Council's vision of 'strong communities where inequalities are reduced, and lives are improved'.
- We will explore the concept of Build to Rent in relation to the release of census information. This means we will investigate the potential of developing purpose-built rental properties in line with demographic data. This approach can offer more options for rental housing in our community.
- We are committed to regularly updating housing information. By reviewing and revising housing data on an annual basis, we can stay informed about the current housing situation and make informed decisions regarding housing policies and strategies.

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- When progressing projects under the Strategic Housing Investment Plan, we will consider Place principles. The Place principle will encourage better collaboration and community involvement and improve the impact of combined energy, resources, and investment. We will start by considering the surrounding areas and ensuring that essential services and amenities, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and transportation, are conveniently located for resident. We will encourage the use of the Place principle in the development of new housing and in housing regeneration.



Priority 2

Creating sustainable communities

The aim for Priority Two is to build sustainable communities that meet the needs of both present and future generations. This involves promoting environmental sustainability, social inclusion, economic opportunities, and overall well-being. The aim is to create long-lasting, thriving communities that can adapt to changes and provide a high quality of life for residents.

During the Strategy consultation, focus groups emphasised the importance of fostering a sense of pride among residents in their homes and neighbourhoods.

Achieving our goals

- One of our main actions is to collaborate with various partners to implement housing regeneration initiatives across the Falkirk Council area. This means we will work in partnership with different organisations and stakeholders to improve and revitalise housing in Falkirk which meet current and future needs.
- We will work in partnership with others to promote events locally that enhance well-being.
- We are committed to working collaboratively to address poverty. Through partnerships with relevant organisations and agencies, we will deliver strategies such as Falkirk's Child Poverty Action Plan and Towards a Fairer Falkirk to tackle poverty within the Falkirk Council area, aiming to uplift individuals and families facing economic challenges.
- We will support tenants and residents to maximise their income through identifying opportunities to promote benefits and in-kind support including free bus travel, swimming and period products to people who may benefit from these services.
- We will actively address the issue of private sector empty properties by bringing them into use. By working with private property owners and utilising resources effectively, we aim to repurpose these vacant properties, contributing to housing availability and reducing the number of unused buildings in Falkirk.
- As part of our collaboration efforts, we will explore town centre sites as potential locations for housing developments. By working closely with partners and stakeholders, we will assess suitable areas in town centres to create new housing opportunities, potentially energising these areas and promoting vibrant communities.
- We recognise the importance of digital technology and will actively promote its use. By advocating for the adoption and integration of digital technology in various aspects of housing and community development, we aim to enhance accessibility, efficiency, and connectivity for residents.

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- We will ensure transparency and progress by annually reporting on our achievements related to the Falkirk Tenant and Customer Participation Strategy. Additionally, we will strive to co-produce the Tenant and Customer Forum, engaging tenants and customers in decision-making processes and fostering meaningful collaboration to improve housing services and customer experiences across all age groups.



Priority 3

Access to housing: Preventing & Resolving Homelessness

The main goal of this priority is to stop people and families from becoming homeless in the first place. It aims to find effective ways to help people who are already homeless to get back on their feet and find a stable place to live. It also places importance on acting early, providing supportive housing options, and making sure people have access to the right support services.

The aim is to help those at risk of homelessness before it happens and provide the necessary help to those who are already homeless. By focusing on preventing and resolving homelessness, the goal is to create a community that is inclusive and supportive, where everyone can have a safe and stable home.

During public consultation participants also highlighted the need for a more comprehensive approach to tackling homelessness, including prevention measures, access to support services, and the provision of suitable accommodation. Maximising income and joint working with Department of Work and Pensions and the Health and Social Care Partnership being seen as essential.

Achieving our goals

- Our first action is to implement a clear strategy for providing homeless services. This means creating a well-defined plan that outlines how we will address the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness. By having a clear strategy in place, we can ensure that our efforts are focused, coordinated, and effective in helping those who are homeless.
- We will work closely with key stakeholders, such as other organisations, agencies, and community groups, to develop and implement prevention pathways. This involves establishing collaborative partnerships to create strategies and programs that aim to prevent homelessness from occurring in the first place. By working together, we can identify and address the root causes of homelessness and implement measures that will help individuals and families stay housed.
- We will ensure that individuals leaving institutions or care have suitable housing options to return to. We want to make sure that when someone transitions out of an institution or care setting, they have a safe and appropriate place to live. By focusing on this, we aim to prevent homelessness among this vulnerable population.
- We will relaunch a project around access to private rented accommodation properties. This involves providing support and assistance to individuals who are seeking housing in the private rental market. The service aims to help people find suitable and affordable private rental options which meets their needs.
- We will review the temporary accommodation action plan on an annual basis. This means regularly assessing and updating our plan for providing temporary accommodation to individuals experiencing homelessness. By reviewing the plan annually, we can make necessary adjustments and improvements to ensure that temporary housing options are effective and meet the needs of those who require them.
- We will work closely with Registered Social Landlords to ensure that homeless applicants can be re-housed as quickly as possible. By collaborating with Registered Social Landlords, we aim to speed up finding permanent housing solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness.

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- We will develop our approach to the Secure Housing on Release for Everyone (SHORE) standards. The SHORE standards are a set of guidelines for measuring and improving the quality of housing services for people leaving institutions. By developing our approach to these standards, we aim to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our housing services.
 - We will continue to provide the Housing First service for our most vulnerable clients. Housing First is an approach that prioritises providing individuals experiencing homelessness with stable housing as a first step, and then offering the necessary support services to address any underlying issues. By continuing to offer this service, we aim to support our most vulnerable clients in achieving stable housing and improving their overall well-being.
 - We will co-produce a domestic violence policy with victims/survivors of domestic abuse. This involves working closely with individuals who have experienced domestic abuse to develop a policy that addresses their specific needs and concerns. By involving the victims/survivors in the policy development process, we can ensure that their voices are heard, and that the policy effectively supports and protects them.
 - We will build upon the homeless prevention team. This team will be dedicated to proactively prevent homelessness by identifying individuals and families at risk and providing them with appropriate support and intervention to help them maintain their housing stability.
 - We will roll out the Housing Options Training Toolkit. This toolkit provides training and resources to housing professionals and staff, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively assist individuals and families in exploring different housing options and making informed decisions.
 - We will implement a Homeless Prevention action plan. This action plan will outline specific strategies and actions aimed at preventing homelessness within our community. By implementing this plan, we can proactively address the root causes of homelessness and provide targeted support to individuals and families at risk.
 - We will increase digital inclusion to help support the most vulnerable customers. This involves ensuring that individuals who may face barriers to digital access and technology have the necessary support and resources to effectively engage with housing services and access vital information.
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- We will work with partners to support those coming to the Falkirk area through the refugee resettlement schemes. By collaborating with various organisations and agencies, we aim to provide comprehensive support and assistance to individuals and families who are resettling in the Falkirk area as refugees.
 - We will undertake a comprehensive review of housing support. This involves conducting a thorough evaluation and assessment of the housing support services we provide. By reviewing these services, we can identify areas for improvement.
 - We will keep our Housing Allocation Policy under review.



Priority 4

Housing and support for vulnerable groups

This priority focuses on addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by vulnerable groups such as those with physical or mental health issues, older people, and families in need. The Strategy prioritises how we can provide safe and stable housing including identifying and implementing housing and support solutions that meet individual's specific needs. Our aim is to improve the overall well-being and quality of life for vulnerable individuals and families by providing a person-centred approach to meeting housing and support needs.

The consultation also highlighted the importance of the link between housing and health calling for more emphasis to be placed on the role of housing in promoting good health, this includes ensuring that homes are accessible and are designed to promote physical and mental wellbeing.

Supporting larger families, households with disabilities and ethnic minority families to access suitable affordable homes supports our Child Poverty Action Plan as these groups are more likely to experience poverty.

Achieving our goals

- We will increase the availability of wheelchair properties, including larger properties that can accommodate families with one or more members with a physical disability. This action aims to ensure that individuals who use wheelchairs have suitable and accessible housing options that meet their specific needs.
- We will collaborate with partners to provide accommodation and support for individuals with complex needs. By working together with relevant organisations and agencies, we can offer housing and support options services for individuals with complex needs, such as those with learning disabilities or mental health challenges who may be housed out with area, in hospital or in an unsuitable provision.
- We will increase the supply of larger social rented properties. This action focuses on increasing the availability of social rented housing options that are spacious and suitable for larger households, accommodating the needs of families or individuals requiring more space.
- We will work with partners and older people to create a user-friendly guide that explains specialist housing options for older individuals. This guide aims to provide clear and easily understandable information about specialised housing choices available for older people, helping them make informed decisions about their housing needs.
- We will collaborate with partners to develop a user-friendly guide on accessing mainstream housing. This guide will offer clear and easily understandable information to individuals seeking to access housing within the mainstream market.
- We will conduct an options appraisal to evaluate the role of the existing Falkirk Council travelling person's site. This appraisal will assess the current site's effectiveness and explore potential improvements or alternative approaches to better meet the needs of the travelling community.

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- We will review and strengthen relationships with military veterans' organisations, exploring the possibility of providing Armed Forces Mental Health First Aid training courses. This action aims to enhance support for military veterans, particularly in terms of mental health, by collaborating with relevant organisations and offering specialised training.
 - We will provide services that assist older and physically disabled individuals in maintaining their properties in good repair. This action acknowledges the importance of ensuring that older individuals and those with physical disabilities can live in homes that are safe, well-maintained, and suitable for their needs.
 - We will co-produce with individuals who have a physical disability, advice that is impartial regarding on adaptations. This means working together with individuals who have personal experience of physical disabilities to develop advice and information that is neutral and unbiased, providing guidance on housing adaptations and tenure options to individuals facing physical disabilities.



Priority 5

Sustainable Housing: Climate change, fuel poverty and energy efficiency

The purpose of Priority 5 is to address the environmental impact of housing, promote energy efficiency, and help achieve Net Zero. This priority focuses on developing strategies and actions that deliver sustainable housing options that are resilient to climate change and prioritise energy efficiency. It emphasises the need to reduce carbon emissions, conserve energy, and promote renewable energy sources within housing. It aims to identify ways to make homes more energy efficient.

Additionally, the priority aims to tackle fuel poverty, which is the inability to afford adequate heating and energy costs. It seeks to address this issue by implementing measures to improve energy efficiency, reduce energy bills, and increase access to affordable and sustainable energy sources.

Consultation highlighted that the impact of climate change on housing is becoming increasingly apparent, participants raised concerns about the need to reduce the carbon footprint of housing in Falkirk by reducing energy emissions from our homes and design and build homes that are energy efficient.

Achieving our goals

- We will develop a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Delivery Plan by December 2023 and keep it under review. This action involves creating a strategic plan that outlines the approach and actions for improving heat and energy efficiency within the local area. The plan will be regularly reviewed to ensure it remains effective and aligned with current needs and developments.
- We will work to meet statutory requirements and report annually. This action focuses on fulfilling legal obligations related to sustainable housing, climate change, and fuel poverty. It includes providing regular reports on progress, achievements, and compliance with relevant regulations and standards.
- We will continue to prioritise a fabric first approach. This means emphasising the improvement of the building fabric (such as insulation, windows, and doors) to enhance energy efficiency and reduce heat loss. By prioritising the fabric first, we aim to create more sustainable and energy efficient homes.
- We will develop a renewable package of heating solutions, including solar PV (photovoltaic) systems, battery storage, and increasing the number of properties connected to the Combined Heat and Power system. This action focuses on incorporating renewable energy technologies and expanding the use of sustainable heating methods. By implementing these solutions, we aim to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, decrease carbon emissions, and promote renewable energy generation.
- We will conduct energy efficiency training for front-line staff. This action involves providing training to staff members who interact directly with residents or are involved in housing management. The training aims to increase their knowledge and understanding of energy efficiency practices, enabling them to provide better guidance and support to residents in improving their energy usage and efficiency.
- We will explore a pilot project involving Internet of Things (IoT) sensors. This action involves testing and evaluating the use of IoT sensors in housing to gather data on energy usage, heating patterns, and other relevant factors. The pilot project aims to explore the potential of IoT technology in improving energy efficiency and informing future strategies and actions.

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- We will work to tackle fuel poverty. This action focuses on addressing the issue of fuel poverty, the aim is to implement measures that alleviate fuel poverty, such as improving energy efficiency, providing financial support, and promoting access to affordable and sustainable energy options. By tackling fuel poverty, we aim to ensure that all residents can affordably heat their homes and improve their overall well-being, supporting the Council priority to reduce inequalities.



Priority 6

Improving housing conditions

The purpose of Priority Six is to ensure that all residents have access to safe, secure, and high standard housing that meets their needs. This priority focuses on addressing issues related to the physical condition of housing, such as maintenance, repairs, and overall quality. The priority aims to develop strategies and actions that improve the overall condition of housing within the community. This includes identifying and addressing areas where housing conditions may be substandard or inadequate.

Supporting this aim, consultation with focus group members raised concerns about the quality and standards of affordable housing. Maintaining current stock and ensuring that good housing conditions were seen to be very important.

Achieving our goals

- We will strive to ensure that social rented housing meets regulatory standards. This action focuses on improving the quality and compliance of social rented properties with established regulations and standards. The aim is to ensure that residents living in social rented housing have homes that meet the required standards of safety, habitability, and overall quality.
- We will enhance the conditions of mixed tenure properties through the provision of advice and information. By providing advice and information, we aim to assist them in improving the conditions of their properties, addressing issues such as maintenance, repairs, and general upkeep.
- We will explore a pilot project on the Internet of Things (IoT) in 2024/2025 to explore the use of digital technology in assisting owners and tenants in improving property conditions. This action aims to test and evaluate the potential of IoT technology, which involves connecting devices and sensors to gather data and enable remote monitoring. By exploring different digital technology, we aim to identify ways it can be used to improve property conditions and provide innovative solutions for owners and tenants.
- We will conduct a review of the Scheme of Assistance in 2024/2025. This action involves evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of the Scheme of Assistance, which is a program that provides financial and practical support to homeowners for essential repairs, improvements, and adaptations. The review aims to ensure that the Scheme of Assistance remains relevant, efficient, and aligned with the needs of homeowners, promoting the maintenance and improvement of their properties.
- We will review the Below Tolerable Strategy in 2025/2026. This action focuses on evaluating and updating the Below Tolerable Strategy, which outlines the approach to addressing properties that do not meet the minimum tolerable standard for housing conditions. The review aims to assess the effectiveness of the strategy and identify any necessary adjustments or improvements to ensure that properties falling below tolerable standards are addressed appropriately, promoting safe and habitable housing for residents.

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- We will review the Housing Renewal Area policy in 2026/2027. Councils can declare a housing renewal area if it is concluded that a significant number of properties in the area are substandard. The council must then draw up an action plan to improve the area and can send notices requiring owners to bring their home up to standard or in some cases demolish them.
 - We will explore the possibility of selling single council properties within a block where owners hold up work to bring Council properties up to standard. This action aims to address situations where certain property owners consistently impede efforts to improve the condition of their homes. By exploring the option of selling these properties, the aim is to ensure that necessary repairs and upgrades can be carried out to maintain overall housing standards and the well-being of the community. Income generated from any sale would be invested in the Housing Investment Programme, possibly through purchasing other ex-local authority properties elsewhere to bring them into majority ownership where the council could legally progress improvement work.



Priority 7

Creating a sustainable private rented sector

The aim of Priority Seven is to promote a rental market that is sustainable, affordable, and meets the needs of tenants and landlords alike. This priority focuses on developing strategies and actions that support the long-term sustainability and quality of the private rented sector.

The goal is to ensure that tenants within the private sector live in safe and well maintained homes and that landlords are informed and supported to meet the requirements of their landlord registration. It emphasises the importance of compliance with legal requirements, such as meeting health and safety regulations, ensuring proper maintenance, and addressing any issues promptly.

Achieving our goals

- We will engage with private tenants and landlords on an annual basis. This action involves actively communicating and interacting with both tenants and landlords in the private rented sector. By engaging with them regularly, we aim to understand their needs, concerns, and perspectives to inform our policies and actions.
- We will increase opportunities for engagement with private rented tenants. This action focuses on creating more avenues for tenants in the private rented sector to provide feedback, voice their concerns, and participate in decision-making processes. By increasing engagement opportunities, we aim to ensure that tenant perspectives are considered and incorporated into the development of housing strategies.
- We will introduce a pilot tenant engagement survey for private tenants at the postcode level in 2023/2024. The survey aims to gather valuable insights about their experiences, satisfaction levels, and any issues they may face. The findings will help us identify areas for improvement and develop targeted solutions.
- We will review the private tenant engagement survey in 2024/2025, introduced in 2023/24. This action involves assessing the effectiveness and relevance of the tenant engagement survey implemented in the private rented sector. The review aims to ensure that the survey captures meaningful data and provides valuable insights to inform policies and actions that benefit private tenants.
- We will introduce a biennial private rented sector tenant survey. This action focuses on conducting a survey of private rented sector tenants every two years. The survey aims to measure tenant satisfaction, identify areas of concern, and gather feedback on their rental experiences. The findings will guide efforts to improve the quality and conditions of the private rented sector.
- We will monitor private rented sector complaints on a quarterly basis. This action involves regularly reviewing and tracking complaints received from tenants in the private rented sector. Monitoring complaints allows us to identify recurring issues, address them promptly, and improve the overall rental experience for tenants.

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- We will monitor the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation licenses and short-term let licenses annually. This action involves regularly tracking and reviewing the number of licenses issued and short-term lets within the private rented sector. Monitoring licenses helps ensure compliance with regulations and promotes the safety and well-being of tenants.
 - We will work to reduce the number of people who present as homeless from the private rented sector. This action focuses on implementing strategies and interventions to prevent homelessness and support individuals at risk of losing their homes in the private rented sector. By addressing the underlying causes and providing appropriate assistance, we aim to reduce homelessness instances within this sector.
 - We will continue to review and expand our private sector leasing scheme during 2023/2024 and beyond. This action involves regularly evaluating and improving the private sector leasing scheme, which facilitates the leasing of properties from private landlords to provide housing options for individuals in need. The review aims to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the scheme in meeting housing demands. By increasing the number of leased properties, we aim to meet the growing housing needs within the private rented sector.
 - We aim increase private tenant satisfaction biennially. This action involves regularly measuring and tracking private tenant satisfaction levels in the rental market every two years. By assessing tenant satisfaction, we can identify areas of improvement and implement measures to enhance the overall rental experience for tenants.
 - We will monitor and take enforcement action against private landlords who fail to meet statutory requirements. This action involves actively monitoring private landlords to ensure their compliance with legal obligations and standards. If landlords fail to meet these requirements, appropriate enforcement actions will be taken to protect the rights and well-being of tenants.
 - We will monitor the need for rent pressure zones. This action focuses on regularly assessing and monitoring the need for rent pressure zones, which are designated areas where rent increases are regulated. By monitoring the need for such zones, we can address affordability concerns and prevent excessive rent hikes that may impact tenants' ability to secure and maintain suitable housing.
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Local Housing Strategy Monitoring & Evaluation

The need for monitoring and evaluation of The Strategy is crucial to assess the effectiveness of the implemented actions, measure progress, and ensure that the desired outcomes are being achieved. As a result, progress will be reported annually to Falkirk Council Executive Committee and details will be published on Falkirk Council's website. Indicators are also reported in the Council Plan performance monitoring framework and progress reports are submitted to Scottish Government annually.

FALKIRK COUNCIL



If you would like this document in Braille, LARGE PRINT or another language, please contact the Community Engagement Team by email at tenant.participation@falkirk.gov.uk or by telephone on 01324 590796/590858