

Building Standards Verification Service

Annual Performance Report 2023-2024



Falkirk Council

Version Record

Version	Description	Date
3.1	Performance information updated for Quarter 1 and general updates	July 2023
3.2	Performance information updated for Quarter 2 and general updates	October 2023
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1.0 Introduction

The verification performance report is a strategic planning and management tool that provides information about the local authority building standards service, communicates the vision and strategy, and sets out performance against strategic goals and targets.

Building standards verifiers in Scotland are required to utilise the performance report to manage, monitor, review and develop strategies for their business, and should focus on the performance framework's core perspectives and cross-cutting themes.

1.1 Falkirk Council

The Falkirk Council area lies at the heart of the central belt of Scotland (Figure 1) and covers some 114 square miles. It is home to an increasing population that currently stands at just over 160,890 and is an area that contains a wide and varied landscape, including areas of considerable quality with a shoreline on the Forth estuary. The area also has significant historical and commercial relevance and includes the historical impact of coal mining, iron foundries, contaminated land and flooding. Falkirk Council has, within its boundaries, the 5th largest sea port in the UK, the largest in Scotland, and the petro-chemical site at Grangemouth, which is of strategic significance to the economic prosperity of Scotland.

The town of Falkirk is at the junction of the Forth and Clyde and Union canals, a location which proved key to its growth as a centre of heavy industry during the Industrial Revolution. Within the last fifty years, heavy industry has almost disappeared and the economy relies increasingly on retail and tourism with both The Falkirk Wheel and The Kelpies becoming major tourist attractions in recent years.

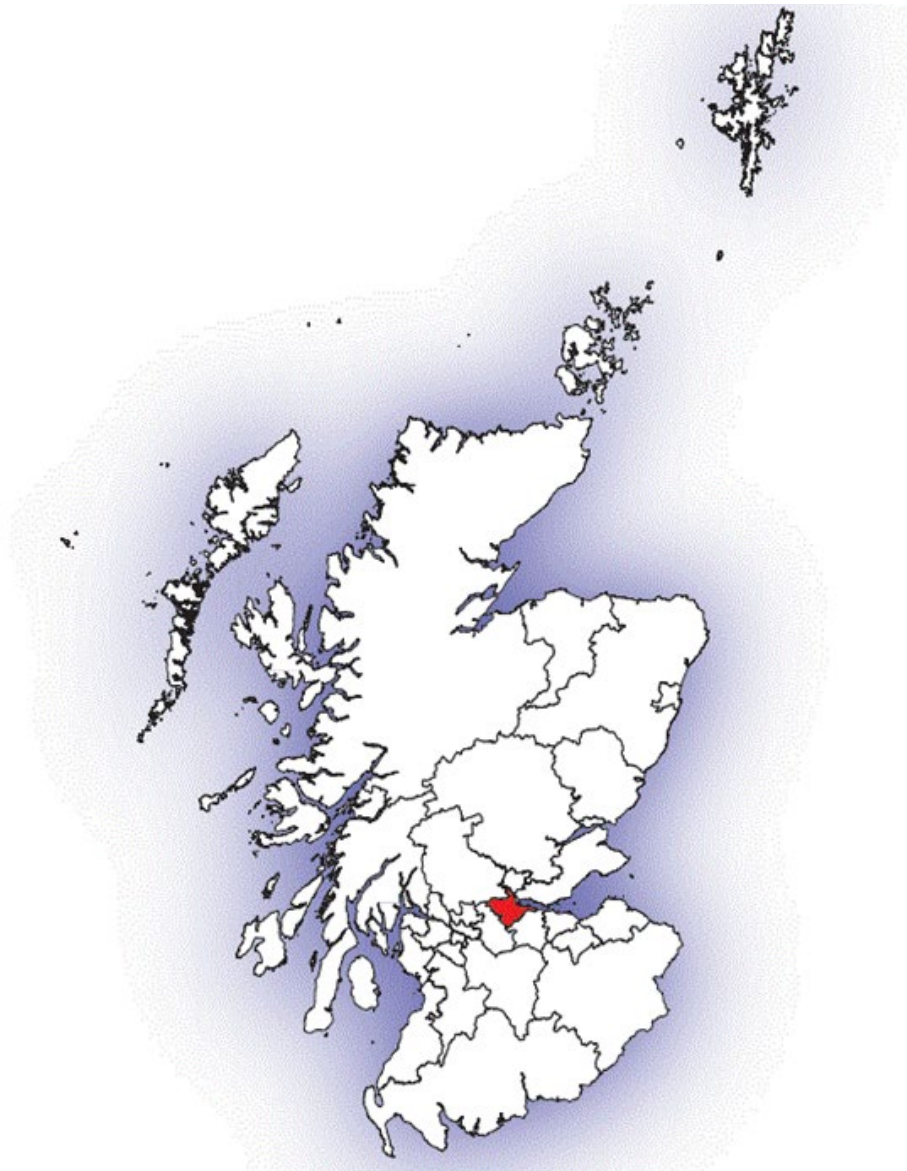


Figure 1: Location of Falkirk Council within Scotland

The Falkirk Council area is a mix of urban and rural communities and within this mix there are complex town centre developments, a general hospital and a newly completed schools programme. There are also new office developments, public buildings, commercial and retail parks, domestic housing both (private and public) delivered by specialist and major developers.

The area extends from Banknock in the West to Blackness in the East and from South Alloa in the North as far as Limerigg in the South (Figure 2).

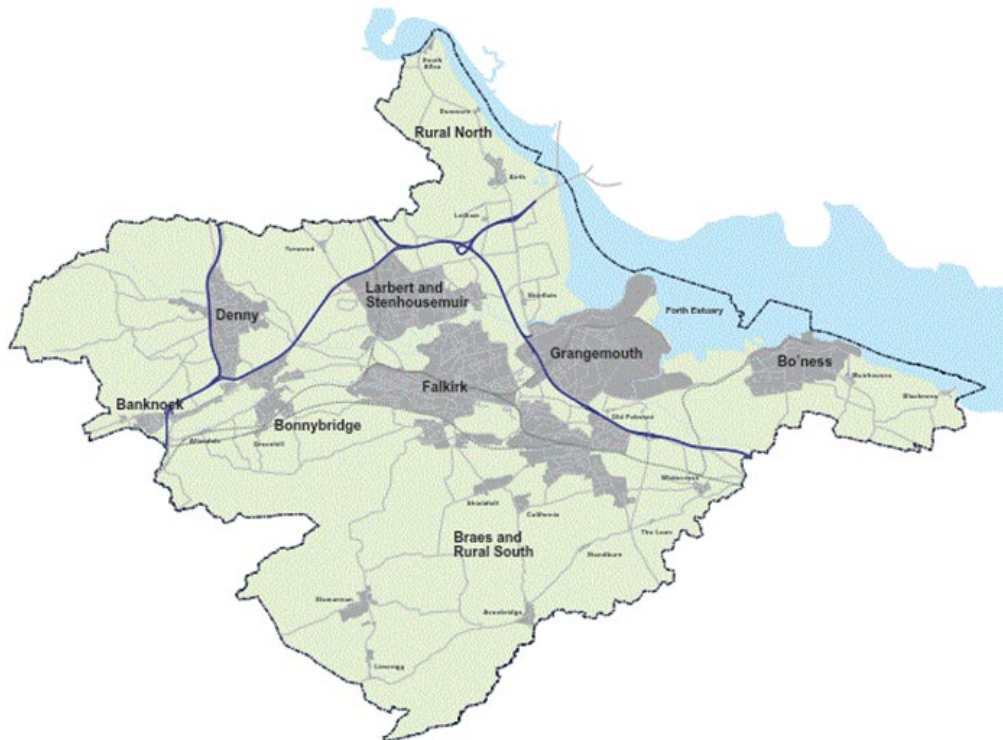


Figure 2: Map of Falkirk Council

1.2 Responsibilities

The principal role of the Building Standards Service under the Building (Scotland) Act 2003 is that of a Verifier. Verifiers, as appointed by Scottish Ministers are responsible for the independent assessment and approval of applications for building warrant to construct, alter, convert or demolish buildings, to provide services, fittings or equipment in buildings and to ensure as far as reasonably practicable that all such authorisations are compliant with the relevant Regulations and standards in place.

The Building Standards Service is also responsible for several additional roles and functions including enforcement of matters in respect of dangerous buildings, investigation and inspection of unauthorised works and the provision of a 24 hour emergency call-out service. In addition it also operates in partnership with other Council Services in relation to provisions relating to Energy Performance Certificates, Licensed Premises, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's), Safety at Sports Grounds, Temporary Raised Structure approvals and inspections, Regularisation Inspections and statutory approval and document confirmation aligned to property history and profile with regard to the sale and transfer of land and property as part of the Scottish conveyancing process.

1.3 Organisational Chart

The schematic diagram (Figure 3) indicates the current structure of the Council with Place Services highlighted. This provides an overview of the three Divisions and link to Building Standards within the Growth, Planning and Climate Division of Place Services.

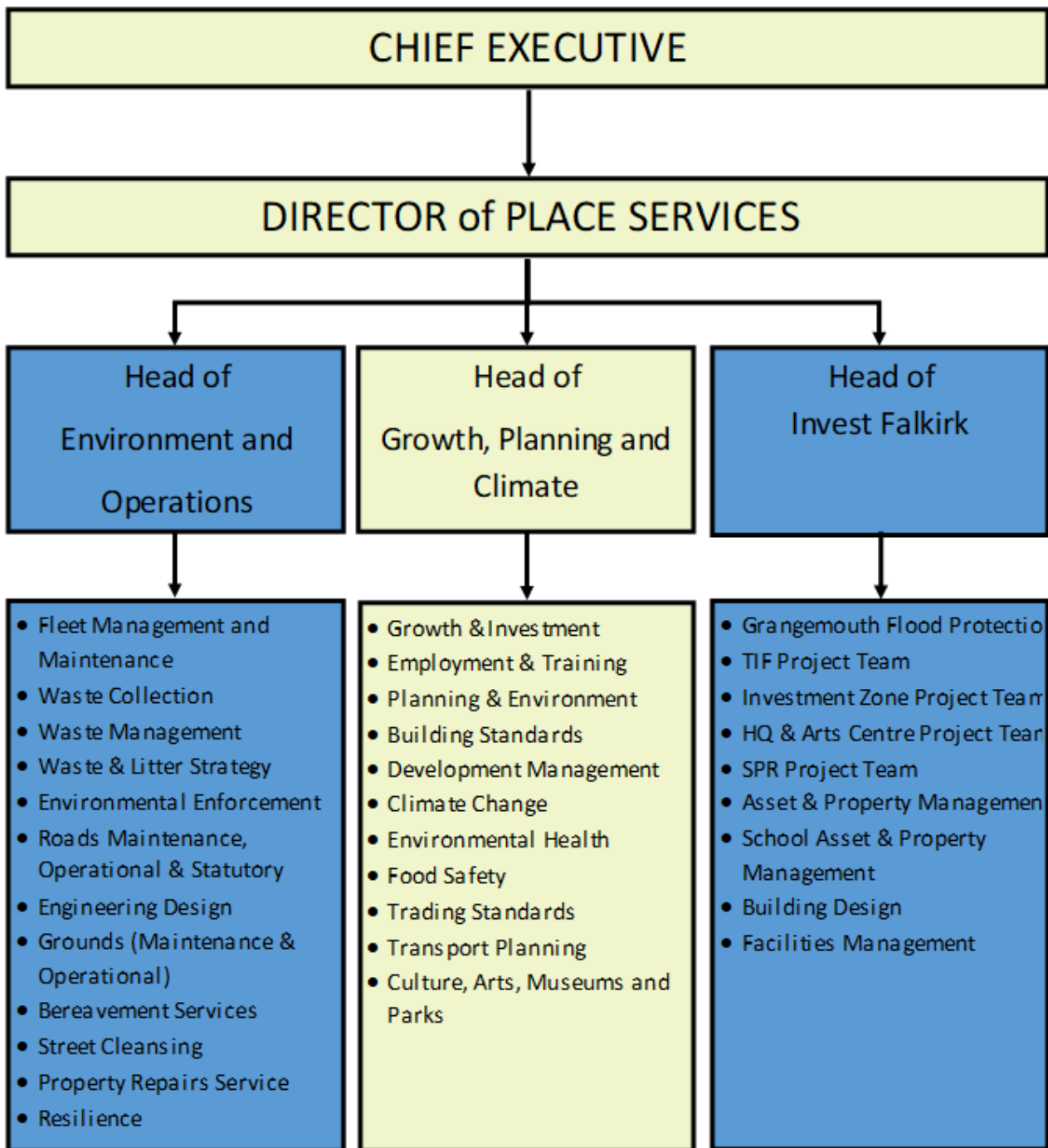


Figure 3: Current structure of Place Services

The Building Standards Service provides a range of functions with the Development, Building Standards and Climate Change Manager having responsibility for three core areas of business (Figure 4). These are the Development Management, Building Standards and Climate Change Units.

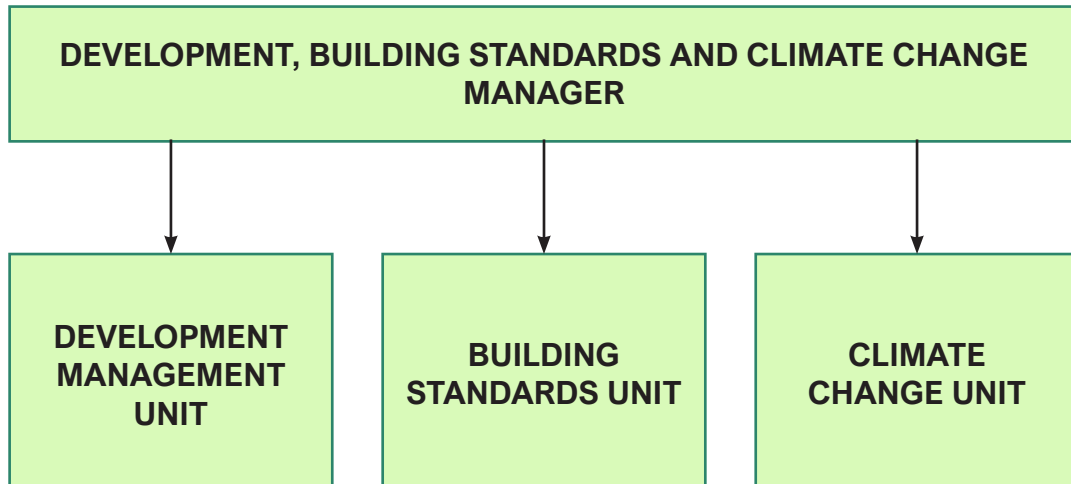


Figure 4: Development, Building Standards and Climate Change core areas of business

2.0 Building Standards Verification Service Information

2.1 Location

The Building Standards Unit is positioned within the Development, Building Standards and Climate Change Units under the Growth, Planning and Climate division of Place Services and is operated and administered from our offices at Suite 1b, Falkirk Stadium, 4 Stadium Way, Falkirk, FK2 9EE.

2.2 Verification Services

Scottish Ministers have appointed Falkirk Council as sole verifier of building works in its geographical area. The council are responsible for the independent assessment and processing of applications for building warrant and completion certificate submissions.

The verification services and functions carried out include:

- Assessment and processing of applications for building warrant, including amendment to warrant applications, staged applications and extension to warrant applications;
- Pre-application advice and consultation service free of charge;
- Inspection of approved building operations during construction and on completion;
- Assessment and processing of Completion Certificate submissions and applications;
- A regularisation service in relation to works undertaken without statutory consent or the necessary Completion Certificate;
- An advisory service to the Council's Licensing Section for Houses in Multiple Occupation, Temporary Raised Structures and Premises requiring a Liquor Licence;
- A 24 hour emergency call out service to investigate reported Dangerous Buildings;
- Search and copying of Building Warrant documents (subject to conditions);
- Maintain a building standards register containing information on building warrants / amendment to warrants, application decisions, completion certificate submissions and decision details;

2.3 Public Interest Statement

The purpose of the building standards system is to protect the public interest. The system sets out the essential standards that are required to be met when building work or conversion of a building takes place in order to meet building regulations.

The building standards system checks that proposed building work or conversion of a building meets standards; inspections are limited to a minimal necessary to ensure that legislation is not avoided. The control of work on site is not down to the system but is a matter for contracts and arrangements in place between a builder and client.

Verifiers, appointed by Scottish Ministers are responsible for the independent checking of applications for building warrants to construct or demolish buildings, to provide services, fittings or equipment in buildings, or for conversions.

2.4 Organisational Information

The Building Standards Unit has a total of 14 staff (FTE13.5).

The current structure of the Building Standards Unit (Figure 5) consists of a Development, Building Standards and Climate Change Manager, 2 No. Area Teams (split geographically into the North and South areas of the Authority within the same office), with each team, based on FTE posts, consisting of:

- Building Standards Area Co-ordinators;
- Building Standards Surveyors;
- Assistant Building Standards Surveyor and;
- Building Standards Technician.

The Building Standards Surveyors have a wide range of experience and qualification, ranging from MRICS, CABE, to ARICS and from BSc (Hons) to HND/HNC level, with the Building Standards Technician providing technical administration to the Unit.

The administrative support for the Unit comprises 5 (FTE) clerical staff which is shared jointly with the Development Management Unit.

The administrative support staff are responsible for the generation of all relevant documentation, correspondence and scanning to our Idox document management system and general filing with regard to all aspects of the Building Standards and Development Management services.

Building Standards Contact Details

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BUILDING STANDARDS CO-ORDINATOR

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BUILDING STANDARDS SURVEYORS

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BUILDING STANDARDS TECHNICIAN

Shona Kerr

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Figure 5 below indicates the staffing position as at April 2024.

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4
Head of Building Standards Verification Service				1

Note : Tier 1 = Chief Executive; Tier 2 = Director; Tier 3 = Heads of Service; Tier 4 = Managers

Roles		Building Standards Verification Service	Other
Managers	No. of posts	2	
	Vacant	0	
Building Standards Surveyor	No. of posts	8.5	
	Vacant	0	
Assistant Building Standards Surveyor	No. of posts	1	
	Vacant	0	
Technician	No. of posts	1	
	Vacant	0	
Office support/ clerical	No. of posts	5 (FTE shared)	
	Vacant	0	
Total		18.5 (including Admin support)	

Note: Managers are those staff responsible for the operational management of a team/division. They are not necessarily line managers.

Staff age profile	Number
61 and over	3
56-60	5
50-55	4
40-49	1
30-39	5
25-29	1
16-24	0

Figure 5: Staffing position

3.0 Strategic Objectives

3.1 Falkirk Council : The Corporate Plan

Falkirk Councils Corporate Plan sets out the vision for the area and balances the things the Council must address and deliver.

The purpose of the plan is to set out what the Council and our services will seek to achieve for our area and communities over the coming years.

The Council's Corporate Plan priorities are:

Council Plan Vision:

- Strong communities where inequalities are reduced and lives are improved.

Council Plan Priorities:

- Supporting stronger and healthier communities
- Promoting opportunities and educational attainment and reducing inequalities
- Supporting a thriving economy and green transition

Council Plan Values:

- Responsive
- Innovative
- Trusted
- Ambitious

Council Plan Enablers:

- Financial Sustainability
- Transformation & Improvement
- Valued Sustainable Workforce

3.2 Departmental Issues

Place Service's purpose is to contribute to safeguarding, developing and promoting our communities, the local economy and our environment. We aim to ensure that we meet the priorities and outcomes in our community partnership's Strategic Outcomes Local Delivery Plan and the council's Corporate Plan.

Departmental issues to be addressed within the coming year include:

- Implementation of 'Frame' solution to further develop mobile and flexible working;
- Upgrading of Idox software;
- Review of 'back office' processes;
- Review the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

3.3 Key Strategic Objectives

The key strategic objectives for Falkirk Council Building Standards Unit in the coming year are as follows:

- Implement delivery of National Performance Framework;
- Maintain and improve on current levels of performance;
- Continued partnership working with LABSS; and
- Engagement and partnership working with Central Authorities Consortium.

The national verification performance framework is based on three core perspectives:

- Professional Expertise and Technical Processes;
- Quality Customer Experience; and
- Operational and Financial Efficiency.

There are also three cross-cutting themes, comprising:

- Public Interest;
- Continuous Improvement; and
- Partnership Working.

4.0 Key Performance Outcomes and Targets

4.1 Summary of Key Performance Outcomes (KPOs)

Professional Expertise and Technical Processes

KPO1 Minimise time taken to issue a first report or issue a building warrant or amendment to building warrant.

KPO2 Increase quality of compliance assessment during the construction processes

Quality Customer Experience

KPO3 Commit to the building standards customer charter

KPO4 Understand and respond to the customer experience

Operational and Financial Efficiency

KPO5 Maintain financial governance

KPO6 Commit to eBuilding Standards

KPO7 Commit to objectives outlined in the annual performance report

4.2 Summary of Key Performance Targets

KPO1 Targets

- 1.1 95% of first reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).
- 1.2 90% of building warrants and amendments issued within 10 days from receipt of all satisfactory information – all building warrants and amendments (not including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).

KPO2 Targets

- 2.1 Targets to be developed as part of future review of KPO2.

KPO3 Targets

- 3.1 National customer charter is published prominently on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least quarterly).
- 3.2 95% of BSD requests for information on a BSD 'Verifier Performance Reporting Service for Customers' case responded to by verifier within 5 days.

KPO4 Targets

- 4.1 Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10.

KPO5 Targets

- 5.1 Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).

KPO6 Targets

- 6.1 Details of eBuilding Standards to be published prominently on the verifier's website.
- 6.2 75% of each key building warrant related process being done electronically
 - Plan checking
 - Building warrant or amendments (and plans) being issued
 - Verification during construction
 - Completion certificates being accepted

KPO7 Targets

- 7.1 Annual performance report published prominently on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).
- 7.2 Annual performance report to include performance data in line with KPOs and associated targets (annually covering previous year e.g. April 2020 – March 2021).

5.0 Performance Data

5.1 Summary of Performance against all KPO's and Targets

KPO Targets	1.1	1.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	5.1	6.1	6.2	7.1	7.2
	95% of first Reports (for building warrants and amendments) issued within 20 days – all first reports (including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	90% of building warrants and amendments issued within 10 days from receipt of all satisfactory information – all building warrants and amendments (not including BWs and amendments issued without a first report).	National customer charter is published prominently on the website and incorporates version control detailing reviews (reviewed at least quarterly).	95% of BSD requests for information on a BSD 'Verifier Performance Reporting Service for Customers' case responded to by verifier within 5 days.	Minimum overall average satisfaction rating of 7.5 out of 10	Building standards verification fee income to cover indicative verification service costs (staff costs plus 30%).	Details of e-Building Standards to be published prominently on the verifier's website.	75% of each key building warrant related processes being done electronically (plan checking; BW's and amendments (incl. plans) issued; Verification during construction; CC acceptance)	Annual performance report published prominently on website with version control (reviewed at least quarterly).	Annual performance report to include performance data in line with KPOs and associated targets (annually covering previous year eg. April 2019 – March 2020).
Q4 2022-2023	95.77%	92.15%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	9.4	109.54%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Q1 2023-2024	99.08%	96.32%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	9.4	78.09%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Q2 2023-2024	97.91%	95.19%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	9.4	86.72%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Q3 2023-2024	99.55%	91.30%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	9.2	72.63%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data
Q4 2023-2024	96.97%	91.35%	Published prominently (with review)	No cases referred to BSD 'Reporting Service'	9.3	138.66%	Published prominently	4 of 4 done	Published prominently (with review)	Includes all performance data

5.2 Professional Expertise and Technical Processes

Protocols for dealing with work

Falkirk Council Building Standards manage, monitor and operate agreed risk management procedures and protocols for the allocation and progression of building warrant applications, site inspection requests and completion certificate submissions, from receipt to determination and closure based on a risk assessment matrix aligning complexity of project with our Surveyors' skills, qualifications and experience.

Performance Management Systems

The current performance management reporting mechanisms will be augmented to monitor, review and satisfy the Performance Improvement Framework agreement and enable management/audit scrutiny of the verification systems and deliver the Key Performance Outcome requirements both in terms of reporting returns to BSD and in meeting agreed targets. This will be achieved through the systems and processes currently in use and will be upgraded as required to assist in meeting the agreed targets.

Samples of the current systems that are utilised are:

- Uni-form Building Standards System;
- Idox Electronic Document Management System;
- Enterprise System - Electronic Case Management performance software;
- Profess Time Recording and Management Data Systems.

Training and Development/CPD

Falkirk Council will develop and support staff training initiatives and professional development of individuals that will sustain the delivery of key service requirements, ensure best value and provide a smooth transition to new practices, procedures and legislation changes with minimal impact on our customers.

We will encourage responsibility and ownership of decision making by individuals and/or groups by providing the necessary training and support to encourage officers to realise their full potential in relation to technical knowledge, awareness skills, decision making, budgets, customer interaction and career development potential.

This is delivered through a variety of measures some of these being:

- Professional Competency Framework (PCF) and Competency Assessment System (CAS) for agreeing individual training programmes and needs on an annual review basis;
- Consortia joint training programme and National initiatives for all staff encouraging discussion and awareness of common interests and concerns;
- Staff engagement and interaction with Consortia Technical Working Group on advice and guidance;
- Specific targeted and focused training to align with the Performance framework Agreement and associated protocols;
- Specialist seminars and conferences;
- Private sector company presentations and workshops.

Benchmarking/Shared Services

We will continue to support and engage with our Verifier/Consortia partners, the BSD and LABSS to deliver and share our knowledge, skills and experiences to the benefit of our customers. This will be achieved by sound management analysis, continual assessment, monitoring and modification of our systems, operations and processes that will continue to improve and deliver a service that is open, transparent, and accessible to all, with quality, consistency and value for money at its core.

This will be delivered by engagement with our partners, communities and individual end users, via a number of strategic and operational initiatives such as:

- National and Local Forums and Survey Questionnaires;
- Representation and Attendance at Consortia/LABSS/BSD meetings;
- Sharing skills and resources with Verifiers where possible;
- Delivering customer focused joined up working and improvement strategy.

Succession Planning

The Competency Assessment System (CAS) and associated interview assessment processes is aligned to training needs assessments, with the focus on assessment of an individual's needs and skill sets and aligning them to the future development and forward planning requirements of the Unit.

This is to ensure an individual's and teams growth, leadership and succession planning preparedness and is achieved by enriching existing skills, knowledge and experiences to those required to deliver the service in the future allowing for smooth transitions and seamless progression of career aspirations, retain professional and experienced staff and to deliver on forward planning objectives without loss of direction or leadership.

5.3 Quality Customer Experience

Customer communications strategies

Falkirk Council Building Standards will continue to upgrade, monitor and review existing customer communication strategies ensuring all available methods for interaction with our customers and partners are analysed and adopted where feasible. This includes the provision of our Customer First complaints system.

We will maximise our usage of electronic communication systems, such as the Council Web site, e-mail and notification / alerts to applications change in status on our web based public access system for Building Standards, which also provides access to public records and data on line and access to our information on a 24 hour / 365 day, basis. We will continue to provide a free pre-warrant application discussion service.

We will share performance information with our customers through our best value reporting mechanisms. These include publishing performance outcomes on our web site, based on statistical analysis of our performance across a range of deliverable targets. We will also provide data to the BSD with regard to the Performance Improvement Framework agreement for National publication and we will participate, support and encourage responses to both Local and National customer engagement forums, workshops, surveys and questionnaires.

Customer Charter

Falkirk Council Building Standards customer charter provides information about the standards of service to be expected. The charter will be reviewed on a regular basis, updated as necessary and published on the Councils website.

The customer charter details both national and local data, aims and objectives and service delivery information for the benefit of individuals, communities and businesses that live and operate in the Falkirk Council area and beyond.

Customer Feedback

Falkirk Council Building Standards service is involved in national surveys and committed to local surveys with customer feedback received via electronic and postal data collection systems surveys, in order that we have a greater understanding of our customer needs and their views on our level of service delivery.

We will amend and augment the content, style and method of collection to take account of any additional requirements that will better reflect the collection and analysis of wider national concerns, issues and needs of our customers.

The collection of information and the subsequent actions delivered, as a result of the various communication strategies, will willingly be offered to all participants, benchmarking partners, BSD and the wider public through our website.

Accessibility of service

Falkirk Council Building Standards are committed to providing an open, transparent and accessible service to our customers, communities and partners. Our communication strategy and systems are designed to deliver those requirements. The drive to increase accessibility and flexibility of service is assessed and designed through effective customer engagement protocols, such as questionnaires, surveys, and forums etc. with both our customers and partners.

We currently deliver and are committed to:

- Provide, monitor and expand access via electronic means to information on our service and specific applications, 24 hours a day;
- Provide access to a Building Standards Surveyor, on a daily basis for advice and guidance; (Please note however that all staff are currently working remotely from home and can be contacted via telephone or e-mail.);
- Provide an appointment service for informal or formal discussions with Surveyors, Supervisors and Manager free of charge;
- Maintaining and monitoring a 24 hour “round the clock” access to information service with regard to application status, via the Councils’ Building Standards web site;
- A 24 hour/day e-building standards electronic submission and payment system.

Pre-application advice

Pre-application requests for advice are welcomed and provided as a free of charge service to applicants or agents requiring assistance on procedural or technical matters prior to submitting building warrant applications.

Customer agreements

Customer agreements are available on request however the service is focused on meeting the performance targets contained within the Performance Framework.

Customer dissatisfaction

Falkirk Council operate a corporate formal complaints procedure for customers who may be dissatisfied with any action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided.

Customer dissatisfaction can also be referred for resolution through LABSS Dispute Resolution Process and the Scottish Government Verifier Performance Reporting Service.

5.4 Operational and Financial Efficiency

Team structures

The Building Standards unit is split geographically into 2 no. teams covering the north and south areas of the Authority. Each team consists of a Building Standards Co-ordinator and five Building Standards Surveyors. The teams are sub-divided with a minimum of two surveyors per allocated area to allow for better management control of operations, site inspections and cover.

Boundaries within teams are also flexible depending on workload.

Time recording system

Building Standards utilise the 'Profess' time management and recording system to provide robust and accurate time analysis data for the various aspects of activity based codes for verification and non-verification activities. We will introduce where appropriate specific activity code references to satisfy key performance outcome data collection for periodic returns to Scottish Government as set by the Building Standards Division.

Financial monitoring/governance

Building Standards will monitor and operate a system of sound financial and budget management in partnership with our financial accountants to maximise and target available resources.

This will be achieved through the use of monthly and quarterly fee income reports, monthly full budgetary position statements and meetings with service accountants to monitor budgets.

Verification income and verification costs for the building standards service are reported to the Building Standards Division on a quarterly basis.

IT systems

Falkirk Council Building Standards operate the integrated case management system provided by Idox.

The Uniform system holds electronic records of all application types, financial information, Notices and site inspections with access to correspondence, reports and plans via the Document Management System.

The Uniform system also provides information to our public access system which is available on the Councils website and accessed through the Building Standards Register.

Idox's performance management module (Enterprise) is also utilised which visually enables rapid assessment of workloads and other performance criteria.

Digital services

With the introduction of e-Building Standards all building warrant applications are now submitted to Falkirk Council via the national web based portal.

All building warrant applications received through the portal are assessed electronically and all correspondence issued via e-mail.

Surveyors are provided with laptops, tablets and smart phones to assist with digital mobile/flexible working when out of office or attending site visits.

Finance systems

Expenditure against budget is closely monitored through the Council's Financial Management System 'Integra' which is accessible to the Development and Building Standards Manager and area team Co-ordinators.

Variances to the budget are regularly reported in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations.

Internal communication strategies

Regular Building Standards team meetings are held to keep staff fully updated with corporate, departmental and unit matters. The opportunity exists at meetings to raise and discuss any procedural or technical issues.

Informal discussions on technical matters are encouraged and undertaken on a daily basis within the office environment.

Communications by e-mail also form an important role in providing information and updates to all staff.

Corporate Information is also available for all employees through the Council's 'Intranet' system.

6.0 Service Improvements and Partnership Working

This section provides a summary of service improvements and examples of partnership working performance against all KPOs and performance targets.

In the previous 12 months (2023-2024) we did –

Number	Continuous improvement action	Status
1	Developed and introduced a remote Building Standards Verification Service	Complete
2	Submitted all KPO reporting information as set out in Performance Framework	Complete
3	Annual Performance Report published on website with quarterly updates	Complete
4	Published and maintained Customer Charter on website	Complete

In the next 12 months (2024-2025) we will –

Number	Continuous improvement action	Status
1	Aim to maintain current levels of performance and identify areas for improvement	On-going
2	Develop additional enterprise tasks to improve workflow	On-going
3	Review and update back office processes as necessary	On-going
4	Provide CPD and training to Building Standards staff	On-going

In the previous 12 months (2023-2024) we worked with –

- South Lanarkshire Council, North Lanarkshire Council, Stirling Council and Clackmannanshire Council via the Central Authorities Consortium group;
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service;
- Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS).

In the next 12 months (2024-2025) we will –

- Engage with other local authorities and groups, e.g. Local Authority Building Standards Scotland (LABSS);
- Engage with external stakeholder organisations and groups;
- Provide support for local training and development/CPD;
- Commit to working together on technical related issues with LABSS and Building Standards Division.

7.0 Building Standards - Additional Data

Verifiers provide returns to Scottish Government on their verification performance and workload. The performance data relates to the building standards verification performance framework and the workload data relates to the numbers of building warrant applications; completion certificates; fees; costs; certificates (certification, energy performance; sustainability); enforcement cases.

The following table provides information relating to the previous 12 months (2023/2024).

Building warrants and amendments to building warrant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 968 Applications • 920 Decisions
Completion certificates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 979 Submissions • 909 Decisions
Certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 439 Certificates of design submitted • 177 Certificates of construction submitted
Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 191 Copy certificates received (domestic) • 0 Copy certificates received (non-domestic)
Statements of Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 301 Copy certificates received (domestic) • 4 Copy certificates received (non-domestic)
Enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 Notices served under sections 25 to 30 • 0 Cases referred to procurator fiscal • 1 Case where LA has undertaken work