

**TOWARDS 2020
FALKIRK COUNCIL'S EUROPEAN
STRATEGY**

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Foreword

Over the past 10 years, the Falkirk Council area has seen significant changes. We have moved from an area of decline to an area of growth and with this we have experienced many opportunities and challenges. Working in partnership with our communities we have a clear vision for the area that is set out in “Moving Forward Together – The Falkirk Area Strategic Community Plan 2010 -2015”.

The coming years are likely to see a major change in the way in which public services are both organised and delivered. Foremost will be the need to secure services which cost less, maintain service quality and have the ability to cope with both rising and diverse demands. We also have to consider what services can be provided in different ways and by different means. Whilst this agenda may be challenging, the area has many strengths on which it can build and move forward.

It is important that these challenges are also considered within a wider European context particularly as more than half of all new legislation affecting local government has its origins in the European Union. Local authorities are also key partners in helping European money reach the people and places that need it most. Falkirk Council therefore wishes to play its part in realising this for the benefit of our local communities, citizens and businesses. We believe that working productively with our European partners, together with continue access to European funding is essential as other important funding sources come under increasing pressure.

Since its establishment in 1996 Falkirk Council has successfully engaged with the European agenda. European funding has been used to lever in additional monies to the area and helped to deliver a diverse range of initiatives, from large-scale tourism infrastructure projects, local business development and growth, to employment and training programmes that support the most disadvantaged people in our communities. Engagement with our EU partners has also helped to develop and promote town-twinning, provide additional learning and exchange opportunities for both young people and adult learners and enabled the exchange of best practice between teaching professionals. These are aspects we wish to continue and build upon.

The European Commission has now launched its revised economic strategy “Europe 2020”, which provides an ambitious vision for our continent by the end of this decade. It quite rightly recognises the need for economic growth which is smart, sustainable and inclusive to take Europe forward. Such an ambitious agenda will require significant investment and coordination between different spheres of government including the EU, Member States, regional and local authorities.

Falkirk Council believes that for Europe 2020 to be realised, public policies and funds also need to be delivered in a way which is smart, sustainable and inclusive. This document sets out how through aligning our local priorities with those of Europe 2020 we can make a real contribution to this vision and continue to be a key player in the delivery of the European agenda.

About the Falkirk Council Area

Falkirk Council is a unitary authority which provides all local government services for the Falkirk Council area. Covering 112 square miles, it has a growing population of over 153,000, which is expected to grow by a further 12% by 2033.

The area is situated right at the centre of Scotland and contains varied countryside, including areas of considerable landscape quality. Over 56,000 people work in the area and the main towns are Falkirk itself, Bo'ness, Denny, Larbert and Grangemouth - Scotland's premier port and home to its only major oil refinery.

It is one of the best connected areas in Scotland and lies midway between Glasgow and Edinburgh and their airports, is situated at the heart of the Scottish motorway network, with excellent rail connections and enjoys strong maritime trade links with Europe and beyond through the port of Grangemouth.

The area has a dynamic economy which is built on its locational strengths. Grangemouth is Scotland's largest container port and the Falkirk-Grangemouth area is a key node in much of Scotland's logistics industry. This sector has witnessed a 51% increase in productivity in the past 10 years.

It is also home to Ineos, one of the world's largest independent chemical companies, with its refinery and petrochemical facilities, and to Aurelius/Calachem which makes chemicals for the agrochemical and pharmaceutical industries. Other significant employers in the area include Forth Ports, Asda and Alexander Dennis, while other major sources of employment are the public sector, food and drink and timber processing industries.

Tourism has become an increasingly important strand in the economy, with a growing number of tourists visiting the area. The Falkirk Wheel is now one of the most popular Scottish tourist destinations, attracting over three million visitors between 2003 and 2009. This adds to the existing attractions of the Antonine Wall - part of a World Heritage site designated in 2008 - the unique Dunmore Pineapple, Callendar House, Blackness Castle, Bo'ness Steam Railway and the Scottish Railway Museum.

However, the recent economic downturn has affected the economy of the area. Employment has fallen by 6,000 since 2008 and unemployment has increased faster than in Scotland as a whole and is now above the Scottish average (4.5% compared to 4.1%). Before the recession it was below average. Addressing youth unemployment continues to be a priority as 30% of claimants in September 2011 were young people.

While in a Scottish context, deprivation in Falkirk is not particularly high – less than 8% of the population live in the worst 15% of areas in the 2009 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) – there are still places within the Council area which suffer from poverty and deprivation. “Towards A Fairer Falkirk” the Council's Poverty Strategy highlights these issues and sets out actions that can be taken forward to alleviate the negative impact of poverty in our local communities.

The Falkirk area has much to commend it as a location for business and as a place in which to live, work and visit. “My Future’s in Falkirk” is a transformational economic development programme for the Falkirk area. There is great potential for further development in conjunction with our neighbours in the EU by maximising our links to encourage exports, develop and disseminate good practice, connect our young people and access European programmes and funding. The growing population and vibrant economy makes the Falkirk Council area well placed to maximise on the benefits of EU membership.

Why do we need a European Strategy?

It is estimated that around half of all new regulation affecting local councils has its origins in the EU which means that decisions made in Brussels have a very real and direct impact on local government and the communities they serve.

In addition, the European Commission has launched its revised economic strategy “Europe 2020” which sets the framework of activity and priorities for the EU for the next 10 years. Future policy and funding opportunities will be closely aligned with the objectives of Europe 2020 and it is essential that Falkirk Council gives consideration to EU issues by integrating these into Council Services.

We also believe there is much to be learned from the diversity of Europe’s peoples and cultures that will add value to future development and progression of the Falkirk Council area and its communities. We want this area to be central in optimising the benefits which membership of the European Union provides, whilst taking the opportunity of tapping into learning from its member countries, people and culture. We also believe the area’s rich heritage and drive for progress can make a positive contribution to Europe’s growth agenda.

Since its establishment in 1996, Falkirk Council has been a key partner in helping to deliver the European agenda specifically through the European Structural Fund Programmes. A significant amount of additional funding from the EU has been levered into the area enabling the delivery of key initiatives of both local and regional significance.

As our experience with the EU demonstrates and given the role that European funding has played in levering in additional funding from other sources, we believe that it is essential for the future prosperity of the Falkirk Council area that we continue to work both successfully and productively with our European partners. Continued access to European funding is also essential as other important funding streams come under strain and pressure.

New EU funding programmes will run from 2014-2020 and whilst Falkirk Council acknowledges that funds will be directed towards more disadvantaged EU areas, it is important that our area is well placed to take advantage of future opportunities whilst acknowledging the challenges presented by the current economic climate. We are also well placed to help the growth of Europe, if funding is targeted at areas of opportunity as well as areas of disadvantage.

In preparation for the next programming period, Falkirk Council has developed an updated European Strategy which seeks to maximise the benefits of European integration and minimise potential problems from increased legislation by encouraging early engagement. It sets out a framework to maximise the benefits of EU engagement and its overall vision is to:

“Actively engage in the European Agenda in a positive, innovative and forward looking manner, to the benefit of our local communities, citizens and businesses in order to become a preferred area of choice for partnership working with other EU areas”.

Falkirk Council within the European Context

Over the years, Falkirk Council has successfully engaged with the European agenda in a number of ways, some examples of which are outlined below:

- Accessing over £6.5 million of European funding to deliver projects of both local and regional significance¹ enabling a further £7m of investment to be levered into the area;
- Promoting and developing town twinning arrangements that benefit citizens, local communities and support economic development;
- Leading on and sharing good practice with European partners in the fields of education, lifelong learning, youth mobility and the environment;
- Influencing European policy development through active membership of the East of Scotland European Consortium (ESEC) and COSLA.

European Funding

Falkirk Council has a successful track record in developing and delivering European funded projects that have provided real added value to the Council area. The Council has been the lead applicant in 46 projects during the programme from 2000 to the present day. During this time additional funding accessed through the European Social Fund (ESF) has assisted 580 unemployed people who are the most disadvantaged in the labour market to access employment and training support. A further 180 young people will be supported into employment through targeted interventions and gain a vocational qualification.

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support has been used to develop projects that leave a lasting legacy for the area. For example tourism infrastructure has been improved at the Falkirk Wheel through the provision of park and ride facilities and public realm has been enhanced within Bo'ness Town Centre as part of a major regeneration initiative. Local businesses have benefited from access to business master-classes and development support to promote start-up, growth and improve survival rates.

European funding has also been accessed through the Lifelong Learning Programme, for example Grundtvig, Comenius and Erasmus to support exchanges between local young people, adult learners and teaching professionals. Working in partnership with other areas of Europe promotes a greater understanding of different cultures and can lead to improvements in service delivery through a mutual exchange of best practice.

Falkirk Council acknowledges that future funding should be directed towards more disadvantaged EU areas, however the restrictive geographic targeting applied to the Lowlands and Uplands Scotland Programme 2007-13 resulted in the Council area having very limited access to additional ESF and ERDF funding. Whilst we understand the need to target more limited EU resources we do not consider the strict geographic approach to be the most effective way as it creates unnatural barriers to project development.

¹ Appendix Two lists all Falkirk Council projects supported through the European Structural Fund programmes 2000/06 and to present day through the 2007/13 Programme Period.

Future funding programmes should also be focused on areas of opportunity and support initiatives that deliver on outcomes and provide a tangible contribution to the objectives of the EU 2020 agenda.

Regional Selective Assistance (RSA)

RSA is a discretionary grant scheme to encourage businesses to undertake investment which will directly result in the creation or safeguarding of jobs. It is funded by Scottish Government and administered in lowland Scotland by Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International. As a regional development tool, RSA is available only in certain areas called Assisted Areas.

The amount of aid and the delineation of Assisted Areas are governed by Regional Aid Guidelines which are agreed by the European Commission and the member states. Parts of the Falkirk area currently fall within an Assisted Area and grants totalling some £10 million have been allocated to Falkirk area companies in the last 4 years.

Retaining Falkirk's assisted area status post 2013 is likely to be a challenge as regional aid is to be concentrated on Europe's weakest economies primarily located in eastern and southern Europe. Falkirk Council's case to retain assisted area status will be pursued through representations to Government and others during the negotiation period for the 2014 - 2021 Regional Aid Guidelines and Assisted Areas. We will be making a strong case that the selection criteria should take account of where there are real opportunities to attract and accommodate investment and that selection criteria should not be based solely on Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Town Twinning

Town twinning is a further means of promoting awareness of European matters. Twinning breaks down cultural and social barriers as well as encouraging trade opportunities and economic development. Such partnerships offer citizens practical opportunities to find out more about the European integration process, facilitating a sense of European awareness and identity. The European Union has sponsored town twinning since 1989 to link networks of citizens, especially groups in small municipalities or geographically disadvantaged areas.

The Falkirk Council area has 2 twinning partners: Creteil, a large cosmopolitan town south of Paris and the Odenwald, a rural region in South West Germany. The Falkirk District Twinning Association and The Odenwald Association promote twinning with these areas. Twinning activity helps to promote a greater understanding of cultures between different areas within the EU and helps support exchange of ideas and best practice that will have a positive impact for the Council area. Successful exchanges have taken place with our twinning partners and we would envisage this activity to continue in the future, particularly as future funding programmes are placing greater emphasis on partnership working.

European Networks

Falkirk Council participates in a number of networks in relation to European activity. This supports work undertaken in relation to accessing funding, influencing policy and legislation development and exchanging best practice.

- East of Scotland European Consortium (ESEC)**
 Established in 1991, ESEC is a non-statutory joint committee representing the European interests of its local authority members in Eastern and North Eastern Scotland. Members collaborate on a shared European agenda centred on knowledge and information on EU funding, developing joint EU funded projects, influencing EU policy change and ensuring policy engagement.
- Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)**
 COSLA is the representative voice of Scottish local government and also acts as the employers' association on behalf of all 32 Scottish Councils. With more than half of legislation coming directly from the EU, it is crucial that Scottish local government is represented in the heart of Europe. COSLA's European work aims to ensure that the interests and rights of Scottish local government are safeguarded and advanced by EU policy and legislation.
- Scotland Europa**
 Scotland Europa is a membership-based organisation that promotes Scotland's interests across the institutions of the EU and to the representatives of Europe's regions and Member States. Membership comprises a broad range of interests including business, education, local government, trade unions and voluntary sectors. Falkirk Council is a member of Scotland Europa through ESEC and this membership provides a direct link to Brussels based intelligence and conference facilities.
- Scottish Development International (SDI)**
 SDI is a joint venture between Scottish Government, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise. It is also a UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) partner organisation. SDI's role is to encourage inward investment in Scotland and to help Scottish-based companies develop international trade.

 SDI generates and handles investment enquiries from its offices around the world. It works with Scottish Enterprise and local authorities, including Falkirk Council, to help identify appropriate locations and ensure a supply of suitable sites. SDI also provides services to Scottish companies who are developing export markets – this forms part of the overall provision of business support available to companies in the Falkirk area.
- Scottish Council for Development & Industry (SCDI)**
 SCDI is a membership organisation, independent of government. Its members come from a wide spectrum of organisations, including businesses and the public sector. Falkirk Council is a member. SCDI's aim is to influence and inspire government and key stakeholders to create sustainable economic prosperity for Scotland.

SCDI has a number of activities which encourage international trade. In particular, it organises and leads a programme of Trade Visits to key and emerging markets overseas. Trade Visits provide companies with a ready-made way to investigate new markets and meet customers abroad.

- **Economic Development Association (Scotland) (EDAS)**

EDAS is an organisation for economic development practitioners in Scotland. It seeks to improve the effectiveness of economic development by raising knowledge and skills. It runs events and training courses, including a range of European and international topics, in which a number of Falkirk Council officers participate in.

- **Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group (SLAED)**

Falkirk Council is a member of SLAED, the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group, which comprises economic senior officials from economic development teams across all 32 Scottish local authorities. They are a joint local authority forum for discussing and sharing experience, expertise and best practice on a number of economic development issues relevant to Scotland's local authorities, and the Scottish economy. SLAED also proactively lobby on behalf of Scotland's local authorities at a regional, national and European level and have a specific thematic group on European and External Funding which Falkirk Council contributes to.

Scottish MEPs

- Elections to the European Parliament are held every 5 years, with the last election taking place in June 2009. The European Parliament Office in Edinburgh aims to help increase awareness of the Parliament and the impact of its activities in Scotland, as well as highlighting the work of the six Scottish Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). Officers and Elected Members from Falkirk Council have attended events organised by the representation. Liaison with Scottish MEPs also takes place through membership organisations such as ESEC and COSLA, ensuring that the priorities of our area are highlighted.

Scottish Parliament – European & External Relations Committee

The European and External Relations Committee was established on 1st June, 2011. The Committee's role is to consider and report on issues relating to the European Communities and the European Union, the Scottish Government's links with countries and territories outside Scotland and the international activities of the Scottish Government. Through its membership of ESEC, Falkirk Council has responded to consultations from the Committee on European issues affecting local government.

Looking to the future – Europe 2020

The EU's overarching economic strategy, "Europe 2020", aims to create a framework for a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. This document will guide all future EU activity, including funding programmes and sets targets for Member States on the key priorities. It has 3 key priorities that have been used to set a framework for this strategy.

Main priorities:

- **Smart growth:** developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- **Sustainable growth:** promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
- **Inclusive growth:** fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

The 3 main priorities are complemented by seven flagship priorities for growth:

- **Innovation Union** – to improve framework conditions and access to finance for research and innovation so as to ensure that innovative ideas can be turned into products and services that create growth and jobs.
- **Youth on the Move** – to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market
- **A Digital Agenda for Europe** – to speed up the roll out of high speed internet and reap the benefits of a digital single market for households and firms
- **Resource Efficient Europe** – to help economic growth from the use of resources, support the shift towards a low-carbon economy, increase the use of renewable energy sources, modernise our transport sector and promote energy efficiency
- **An Industrial Policy for the globalisation era** – to improve the business environment, notably for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and to support the development of a strong, sustainable industrial base able to compete globally.
- **An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs** – to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout the life cycle with a view to increase labour market participation and better match labour supply and demand, including through labour mobility
- **European Platform Against Poverty** – to ensure social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

Member States have drafted National Reform Programmes which set out how they plan to achieve these targets, and which was complemented by a Scottish National Reform Programme document, alongside the formal contribution by the UK. This new approach places a greater responsibility on local, regional and national actors in achieving these targets.

Appendix 2 of this report highlights the five EU 2020 headline targets. Baseline information for the Falkirk Council area (where available) against each of the Europe 2020 targets is also shown. This will allow progress in Falkirk to be monitored against the EU targets.

Moving Forward Together – Achieving Our Outcomes

“Moving Forward Together” – The Falkirk Area Strategic Community Plan sets out the things we need to do to ensure we meet our vision for the area. Over the last 10 years we have seen the area change significantly, with a growing population, becoming one of the safest areas in the Country, more visitors coming to the area and increasingly being seen as a place to do business.

Our aspirations for the area remain high with our vision remaining valid. The vision includes:

- the legacy of our past and the potential of our future are protected
- our area is at the centre of Scottish life
- our future is one of the most culturally diverse and distinct areas of Scotland
- Our has future has investment in jobs, learning homes and leisure for all
- Our area is the place to be in the Third Millennium

The following table highlights the strong alignment between the priorities set out in the EU 2020 strategy and our local themes and outcomes. There are clearly degrees of overlap between the EU 2020 Priorities and the Falkirk Strategic Community Plan Themes and this table is only illustrating the fit at local level. A more flexible approach would be adopted in relation to developing future projects that address more than one theme.

EU 2020 Strategy		Falkirk Strategic Community Plan 2010 – 2015	
<i>Main Priorities</i>	<i>Flagship Initiatives</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Local Outcomes</i>
Smart Growth	Innovation Union Youth on the Move A Digital Agenda for Europe	Young People Who are Confident & Successful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our area will be recognised as having a culture & ethos of aspiration & ambition • Our young people will achieve their potential through learning and creativity, developing skills and knowledge • Disadvantaged communities will benefit from better services
Sustainable Growth	Resource Efficient Europe An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era	Sustainable Falkirk Growing Businesses & Prosperous People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will be greener • We will improve the built environment • Our open spaces will be attractive, accessible & safe • The quality of our infrastructure will help promote the growth of the local economy • Our profile will reflect our area as a destination of choice

Inclusive Growth	An Agenda for New Skills & jobs	Fairer Falkirk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Workforce will be highly skilled • The wealth & prosperity of our area will increase • People will have equitable access to local health support & care • Our housing continues to meet the needs of people who live & may wish to live in our area • Our citizens continue to access critical services that meet their needs • Our citizens will be protected • Vulnerable children will be protected • Our citizens & communities will be encouraged to take responsibility for their own health & wellbeing • Our citizens will be supported to make positive health choices & lifestyles in order they can live longer
	European Platform Against Poverty	Safer Communities	
		Healthier People	

Moving Forward Together – Our Key Priorities for Action

The Falkirk Community Planning Partnership is very practically focused and has developed a consolidated set of priorities for action to deliver on local outcomes. These perpetuate the strong alignment with EU priorities and show at a local level the contribution we can make towards their attainment.

Information on the anticipated level of EU funding (within the relevant policy area) is highlighted within Appendix 3 of this report.

Smart Growth

Flagship Initiative: Youth on the Move

The high quality of education provision in European countries has historically been felt to be part of the continent's economic success story, though in recent years there is a growing concern about the performance of European universities in global rankings and the attainment of university degrees compared to Europe's main competitors (less than a third of Europeans aged 25-34 have a university degree compared to 40% in the US, and over 50% in Japan).

Likewise at school level it is felt that too many young people leave education without qualifications and a quarter of European school children have poor reading skills. Education remains a domestic issue for Member States and EU policy work is centred on an initiative called "Youth on the move" which focuses on cooperation and exchanges:

- helping students and trainees study abroad
- equipping young people better for the job market
- enhancing the performance/international attractiveness of Europe's universities improving all levels of education and training (academic excellence, equal opportunities)

EU Funding Opportunities

There are a range of EU Programmes which can help promote this area including:

- Education Europe Programme (education, training and youth)
- Education Europe (Sport) Programme
- Health for Growth Programme

Local Priority – Young People who are Confident and Successful

Our young people are our future and it is imperative that the actions we take today and tomorrow give our children and young people the best start in life as well as opportunities to realise a positive and fulfilling life. We agree the importance the EU attaches to investing in our young people so that they can emerge from school making a successful progression into employment.

Part of this entails ensuring that society regards young people in a positive way and respects the contribution they can make to their communities and the area's quality of life. We believe that it is our responsibility to create positive environments and opportunities which young people can benefit from. Integral to our approach is building an ethos of self responsibility and sustainability, whilst being conscientious citizens who are willing to help other and make a positive contribution to our society. We have set out to:

- ✓ Keep our children in a safe environment;
- ✓ Improve opportunities for looked after and accommodated children and young people;
- ✓ Improve educational attainment with a focus on literacy and numeracy and securing positive destinations for our young people;
- ✓ Give priority to supporting young people at risk of not entering employment, education and training; and
- ✓ Improve the knowledge and skills of young people in the digital age.

Local Project

Kinnaird Primary School is currently participating in a project with schools in Sweden and Norway, funded by the European Union's Comenius programme. Pupils have taken part in two joint curriculum projects with partner schools – a TV programme called "TV Europa", showcasing key features of each country's culture. The use of ICT has enabled the three schools to regularly share work. A core part of the Comenius programme is funding for visits to partner schools. Kinnaird's partnership involves three planning meetings, one held in each school, which gives all staff a chance to engage with staff from their partner schools.

Local Action Plan
To support the EU 2020 Flagship Initiative of "Youth on the Move" we have identified the following actions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support transitions project to help our most vulnerable young people with move from school to employment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to promote benefits of continuing professional development through school exchange projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed international education and global citizenship in curricular content, ensuring pupil participation through effective links.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to promote benefits of continuing professional development opportunities and joint curricular projects, securing funding from EU and Council of Europe education programmes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support and promote the Strategic Skills Pipeline approach in relation to the learner journey and progression to well paid sustainable employment.

Sustainable Growth

Flagship Initiative: Resource Efficient Europe

Climate Change and Energy are seen by the EU to be two of the greatest challenges of our time. On one hand there is a desire to mitigate the effects of climate change, become more resource efficient and reduce CO₂ emissions then on the other hand recognition that there is a need to capitalise in the economic opportunity from greening the economy. The EU is guided by its 20-20-20 targets and includes a desire to reduce CO₂ by 20% of 1990 levels, generate 20% of the continents energy usage from renewable energy sources and achieve a 20% increase in energy efficiency. These targets are complemented from an EU policy perspective by the Resource-efficient Europe flagship initiative.

European Funding Opportunities

Climate change and energy policy are addressed in EU programmes as cross-cutting themes. The EU has developed a Strategic Energy and Technology (SET) Plan which has identified €1 trillion of investment needed over the next decade for the EU to make its 20-20-20 targets through a mixture of private sector, national and EU spending.

Key projects will therefore be delivered through a wide range of programmes including:

- CAP market measures (support to farmers for environmental measures)
- CAP Rural Development (support to communities for low carbon activities as well as broader rural development including the LEADER Programme)
- Maritime Funding (environmental measures for seas and coastal communities)
- LIFE+ (bio-diversity measures)
- Eco-innovation (product innovation encouraging resource efficiency)
- Connecting Europe Programme (strategic transnational infrastructure investment for ICT, energy and transport corridors)
- Horizon 2020 (energy, innovation and RTD)

Local Priority – Sustainable Falkirk

We recognise the challenges we face in addressing climate change and the impacts and risks to our local area of not doing so. We are also very aware of the contribution we can make to local, national and European level improvement in reducing carbon emissions and our impact on the environment.

Locally we recognise the importance of acting in both balanced and creative ways in achieving sustainable economic growth. We are also very aware that a finite window of opportunity exists to achieve the necessary significant turn round and level of improvement required if we are to reduce the impact of our actions on local environments. Preserving the legacy of our future is one of the key aspects of our 20-year vision. In order that we realise this aspiration we have committed to:

- ✓ Managing and mitigating the impact of climate change and tackling its causes;

- ✓ Promoting our open spaces, paths and parks as attractive places to exercise and travel around our area;
- ✓ Promoting waste minimisation, recycling and other environmentally friendly forms of waste disposal;
- ✓ Reducing our carbon footprint; and
- ✓ Promoting and realising increased use of sustainable forms of transport.

Local Project

The Communities Along the Carron project was initially funded by LEADER in September 2009 with Falkirk Council being the lead applicant. The project engaged consultants in a unique fact-finding, awareness-raising and community engagement mission regarding the 16 Falkirk areas along the 19.8 mile length of the River Carron. The aim of the project was to provide a true picture of the status of the River Carron as a resource; to compile the wish list of it's people (from bins to bridges); and to encourage cooperative links along one big interdependent and thriving river community. Further LEADER funding has subsequently been secured to help make 'Aspirations into Actions'. A constituted group has been established by members of the community to take forward key projects identified which will help to regenerate the River Carron Corridor.

<i>Local Action Plan</i>
To support the EU 2020 Flagship Initiative of "Resource Efficient Europe" we have identified the following actions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will seek to diversify and support our rural areas through securing funding from the Leader programme and ensuring these issues are highlighted within future funding programmes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are collaborating with Community Planning Partners to reduce our collective emissions from our asset base. We would like to identify suitable European partners for learning purposes to help with progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grangemouth has significant potential to further develop renewable and low carbon industries. We would like to pursue the development of this with European partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector partners are collaborating with the Scottish Government to procure low carbon vehicles. We will seek to secure European support to develop our infrastructure to support these vehicles.

Sustainable Growth

Flagship Initiatives: An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era/Innovation Union

Europe's economic policies are very much informed by a desire to address the main societal challenges facing the continent by stimulating entrepreneurship and innovation. In order to prepare, adapt and deliver services in response to these societal challenges, European policies recognise the need to invest in key areas of infrastructure (transport, ICT and energy networks) and entrepreneurship.

Europe has had lower growth than its main competitors for a number of years which is largely put down to a productivity gap which the EU believes is caused in part by lower levels of investment in Research and Development (R&D) and innovation as well as a need to improve access to innovation to broader society. It has created a flagship initiative the 'Innovation Union' to help deliver these goals.

Increasing productivity through guaranteeing the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people across the EU and European Economic Area has been the ongoing desire behind the moves towards creating a seamless internal market. Half of the trade in goods within the EU is now covered by legislation harmonised by the EU. This important area includes competition policy and state aid rules which are about ensuring fair competition and preventing market distortion. Areas of Falkirk are eligible for Regional Selective Assistance (RSA) which allows limited amounts of state aid to be awarded to any one company in certain geographies through EU regional aid rules. The scheme is administered by Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International. It is an important tool in attracting investment to our most deprived communities. In relation to Small and Medium Sized Enterprise (SME) growth and development the EU Flagship Initiative is "An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era"

EU Funding Opportunities

The EU is currently developing a new generation of programmes for 2014-2020 to help deliver its policy aspirations and which will focus on areas of activity where "EU value-added" can be demonstrated. In other words, where either transnational collaboration is of benefit or where activity can be demonstrated to be genuinely additional to what could take place within regional programmes.

There are a range of EU Programmes which can help stimulate entrepreneurship and infrastructure investment:

- SME Programme (including financial instruments, SME programmes for tourism, implementing the Small Business Act, eco-innovation, Erasmus for Entrepreneurs exchange programme)
- Connecting Europe Facility (Energy, Transport, ICT)
- Regional Competitiveness Programme (too early to ascertain Scottish format)
- Territorial Cooperation Programmes (North Sea, North West Europe & inter-regional)

- Framework for research and innovation - Horizon 2020 (covers a wide range of thematic areas focused on the RTD)
- Regional Competitiveness Programme
- Territorial Cooperation Programmes (North Sea, North West Europe & inter-regional) are likely to make supporting regional innovation an eligible area of activity.
- Eco-Innovation Programme (part of the SME Programme and likely to focus on product innovation for resource efficiency)

Local Priority – Growing Businesses & Prosperous People

Underpinning the area's future prosperity is the need to secure sustainable economic growth and prosperity. Local businesses and employers are at the heart of this by creating wealth, employing local people and helping to improve standards of living. Being in employment goes to the heart of improving people's wellbeing and their sense of self fulfilment. Sustainable economic growth also underpins entrepreneurship, opportunity and the ability to secure a good quality of life. We are actively encouraging local businesses to take a more outward export derived focus in securing new business opportunities, harnessing new digitally based technologies where appropriate. We also recognise the need to continually develop skills and learning among our local workforce. Central to our ambitions on securing sustainable economic development and growth across the Falkirk Council area is the My Future's in Falkirk initiative. This seeks to:

- ✓ Grow business and employment – by developing business locations, providing business support and equip particularly young people with the skills needed for employment;
- ✓ Enhance business connections – by improving transport infrastructure and services;
- ✓ Transform places – through regenerating our town centres and other areas, as well as major investment in our area through the HELIX and growing the benefits from the area's tourism potential; and
- ✓ Engage young people – by promoting high aspirations for our young people and connecting them with the employment market.
- ✓ Improved learner journey and increased participation in work-based training and qualifications
- ✓ Increased collaborative activity with colleges and learner provider delivering innovative approaches to the senior phase
- ✓ Improved labour market and career information and advice

Local Project

East of Scotland Investment Fund (ESIF) – Falkirk Council is part of a consortium of ten local authorities in the East of Scotland who have joined together to create the ESIF. The project successfully attracted match funding from ERDF and offers loans of up to £50,000 to new and growing small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). The aim of ESIF is to ensure that good, commercially viable business proposals do not fail from a lack of access to finance.

<i>Local Action Plan</i>
To support the EU 2020 Flagship Initiatives of “An Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era and Innovation Union” we have identified the following actions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek European funding support for targeted infrastructure development which will improve the connectivity of local businesses to European markets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the skills base of local and young entrepreneurs through matched learning exchanges with European partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore opportunities with transnational partners that enhance the area’s tourism product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the provision of training and other mechanisms to enhance business leadership, management skills and knowledge that will help businesses grow and succeed in the Falkirk area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of European R&D opportunities across the Falkirk area to stimulate an increase in R&D spend

Inclusive Growth

Flagship Initiative: An Agenda for New Skills & Jobs/European Platform against Poverty

Jobs and Skills

The EU is facing up to a number of social and demographic challenges such as a falling workforce as a result of an aging population, youth unemployment as a fall out of the global economic downturn, and lower rates of productivity in comparison to the US and Japan.

There are a number of EU policies which support employment; job growth; skills development; and the internal market under the heading 'Agenda for New Skills and Jobs' one of the EU's flagship initiatives which runs to 2020. This flagship initiative will boost inclusive growth by raising the employment rate with more and better jobs, helping people of all ages anticipate and manage change by equipping them with the right skills and competences, modernising labour markets and welfare systems and ensuring the benefits of growth reach all parts of the EU. The target is to have 75% of the EU population in full employment. The skills agenda is complemented by other EU initiatives such as "Youth on the Move" and "the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015".

The European Social Fund (ESF) can support many of the actions proposed in this flagship, including the design of better policies such as active labour market measures and lifelong learning and support institutions such as public employment services. It can also support forecasting of skills needs and developing qualifications and competences. The Lifelong Programmes such as Leonardo da Vinci (vocational education and training), Comenius (schools) and Grundtvig (adult education) will also contribute to the objectives of the Agenda. The main responsibility in the area of employment policy lies with the Member States, however implementation will be based on mix of EU Policy instruments, including legislation, policy coordination, social dialogue, funding and strategic partnerships.

Within this agenda the EU is proposing measures to:

- Make labour markets function better through further reform
- Equip people with the right skills for employment
- Improving job quality and working conditions
- Creating jobs by easing the administrative burden for employers and proposing lower taxes on labour.

Poverty

Coupled with the above agenda is the stark issue that 80 million people in the EU (16% of the population) currently at risk of poverty (classed as living on an income below 60% of the median household income of their own country) there is still significant work needed on this agenda. As part of the Europe 2020 Strategy a specific flagship initiative has been created to help bolster work at all levels to help reach the agreed EU headline target of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty and exclusion by 2020. It is called the European Platform against Poverty and Social exclusion.

EU action has helped to create a consensus about the need to:

- raise the employment rate with more and better jobs
- help people of all ages anticipate and manage change by equipping them with the right skills and competences
- modernise labour markets and welfare systems
- eradicate child poverty by breaking the vicious circle of intergenerational inheritance
- promote the active inclusion in the society and the labour market of the most vulnerable groups
- ensure decent housing for everyone
- overcome discrimination and increase the integration of people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and immigrants and other vulnerable groups
- tackle financial exclusion and over indebtedness

EU Funding Opportunities

There are a range of EU Programmes which can help promote this area including:

- Regional European Social Fund (unemployment and training support)
- Education Europe Programme (education, training and youth)
- Education Europe (Sport) Programme
- Health for Growth Programme
- European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (redundancies)
- Progress Programme (employment, social inclusion and protection, working conditions, discrimination, and gender equality)

Local Priority – Fairer Falkirk

We share the EU's aspiration that the benefits of sustainable economic development and growth and any resultant increase in prosperity must be more evenly shared across society. We must also give continuing priority, especially during this prolonged period of financial austerity to supporting those in the greatest poverty and to the most vulnerable members of local communities. Key to this is ensuring access to employment opportunities for those with the lowest incomes. We also believe that local people can assure their place in society through access to employment, training or education opportunities. We support the right of everyone, no matter their background or belief, to have equal opportunity and access to services. We will provide continuing support to those who experience the greatest level of deprivation and those who are impacted most by the economic downturn. We will also support those who unintentionally become homeless and provide them with access to permanent accommodation. Some of the key priorities we have set in this are include:

- ✓ Continuing to improve the skills and employability of local people;
- ✓ Tackling poverty and its causes. Specific measures in this area include:
 - Supporting people to increase their household income;
 - Promoting financial inclusion; and
 - Supporting people back into work or into work for the first time

- ✓ Regenerating our communities;
- ✓ Taking positive action to support those not normally included in society through access to opportunity and helping them to realise a positive destination;
- ✓ Ensuring that no-one has a poorer standard of service or opportunity than anyone else;
- ✓ Tackling discrimination based on the grounds of ethnicity, disability, religious belief, sexual orientation, age, gender or social background;
- ✓ Preventing people from becoming homeless, making the best use of available accommodation whilst supporting the most vulnerable; and
- ✓ Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing.

Local Project

Backing Falkirk's Future – supported through the Lowlands Uplands Scotland Programme, ESF Priority 5, this project aims to assist 180 young disadvantaged people in the labour market without appropriate vocational qualifications. This innovative approach will focus on effectively matching local employer demand (opportunities) with local labour supply (needs of the most disadvantaged young people). 300 employers will also be supported to improve their engagement, development and retention of employees from disadvantage groups. The project also seeks to address one of the identified factors contributing to poverty through developing skills and ensuring qualifications and employment for those at greatest risk.

<i>Local Action Plan</i>
To support the EU 2020 Flagship Initiatives of “An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs and the European Platform against Poverty” we have identified the following actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged communities • Reducing re-offending through early intervention and targeted employability support • Targeting and enhancing support for care leavers through the Family Firm approach • Delivery of Falkirk Jobs Programme providing supported employment delivering community benefits in partnership with third sector • Development of social enterprises employing young and unemployed people • Support ethical and socially responsible alternatives to banking and stimulate financial inclusion

Conclusion

The European strategy sets out a framework on how the Council can maximise the benefits of EU engagement and has as its overall vision to:

“Actively engage in the European Agenda in a positive, innovative and forward looking manner, to the benefit of our local communities, citizens and businesses in order to become a preferred area of choice for partnership working with other EU areas”.

In order to achieve this vision we have identified a range of local actions set out at Appendix 5 that will help to support the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy. These actions are aligned with our local priorities as set out in The Falkirk Area Strategic Community Plan 2010 -2015.

In conclusion, Falkirk Council’s European Strategy “Towards 2020” has:

- Set out the Council’s continued commitment to engaging with our European partners
- Set out the context and rationale for the continuing importance of Europe in relation to the delivery of Council Services.
- Aligned the Council’s local priorities with those of Europe 2020 highlighting where we can make a tangible contribution
- Identified local actions to be taken forward in support of the Strategy