

Falkirk
Council
Complaints
Annual
Report
2017/18

Falkirk Council
takes complaints
seriously and wants
to learn from them.

This report provides
information
about how the
Council dealt with
complaints from
the public during
2017/18.



Performance indicators are set by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) and Councils have to report on their performance annually.

This report sets out the Council's performance against the indicators set by the SPSO during 2017/18. It also provides information about how Council services are learning from complaints.





Our Complaints Procedure

The Council's Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP) follows the model developed by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). The model CHP applies to all local authorities and all local authority services, including Social Work which implemented the CHP on 1 April 2017.

The Council's CHP is based on a two-stage process. The first stage is frontline resolution and the second is investigation.

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

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

Following investigation, if customers are still dissatisfied with our decision or the way we dealt with their complaint, they can ask the SPSO to look at it. The SPSO cannot normally look at a complaint that has not completed our complaints procedure first.

This report provides information on complaints handling within the Council during 2017/18. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO and includes benchmarking information, drawn from past exercises carried out by the Improvement Service and Audit Scotland.

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

Complaints Indicators

The SPSO has set eight indicators for complaints performance. These cover:

- Complaints received per 1,000 population
- Number of complaints closed
- Complaints upheld, partially upheld and not upheld
- Average response times
- Performance against timescales
- Number of cases where an extension is authorised
- Customer satisfaction
- Learning from complaints

The Council's performance against these indicators for 2017/18 is set out with comparative information for 2016/17.

The Local Authority Complaints Handlers Network is currently collating all performance information across the 32 local authorities. This benchmarking information will be included in next year's report.

Indicator One

Complaints Received Per 1,000 Population

The population of the Council area is 160,130.

2017/18	2016/17
Complaints received - 2832	Complaints received - 2462
Complaints per 1000 - 17.7	Complaints per 1000 - 15.4

Indicator Two

Closed Complaints

	2017/18	%	2016/17	%
Total complaints closed	2817	100%	2425	100
Total complaints closed at stage 1	2600	92.3%	2236	92.2%
Total complaints closed at stage 2	35	1.24%	24	1%
Total complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation	182	6.46%	165	6.8%

Indicator Three

Complaints Upheld, Partially Upheld & Not Upheld

Stage One Complaints

	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	2600	2236
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1	782	726
Number of complaints upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	30%	32.50%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 1	368	344
Number of complaints partially upheld as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	14%	15.40%
% of complaints upheld or partially upheld at stage 1	44%	47.90%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1	1450	1166
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 1 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 1	56%	52.10%

Stage Two Complaints

	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	35	24
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2	3	6
Number of complaints upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	9%	25.00%
Number of complaints partially upheld at stage 2	12	5
Number of complaints partially upheld as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	34%	20.80%
% of complaints upheld or partially upheld at stage 2	43%	45.80%
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2	20	13
Number of complaints not upheld at stage 2 as a % of all complaints closed in full at stage 2	57%	54.20%

Escalated Complaints

	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed after escalation	182	165
Number of complaints upheld after escalation	37	28
Number of escalated complaints upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	20%	17%
Number of complaints partially upheld after escalation	43	38
The number of escalated complaints partially upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	24%	23%
Number of complaints not upheld after escalation	102	99
The number of escalated complaints not upheld at stage 2 as a % of all escalated complaints closed in full at stage 2	56%	60%

Indicator Four

Average Response Times

Stage 1	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	2600	2236
Average time in working days for a full response at stage 1	6 (target 5)	6.3 (target 5)
Stage 2		
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	35	24
Average time in working days for a full response at stage 2	24 (target = 20)	15.9 (target = 20)
Escalated		
Number of complaints closed after escalation	182	165
Average time in working days for a full response after escalation	16 (target = 20)	19.6 (target = 20)

Indicator Five

Performance Against Timescales

Stage 1	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	2600	2236
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 within 5 working days	2317	1969
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 within 5 working days as a % of total stage 1 complaints	89%	88.1%
Stage 2		
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	35	24
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days	24	19
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 within 20 working days as a % of total stage 2 complaints	69%	79.2%
Escalated		
Number of complaints closed after escalation	182	165
Number of complaints closed after escalation within 20 working days	152	134
Number of complaints closed after escalation within 20 working days as a % of total escalated complaints	84%	81.2%

Indicator Six

Use of Extensions

Stage One	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed at stage 1	2600	2236
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised	186	258
Number of complaints closed at stage 1 where an extension was authorised as a % of total stage 1 complaints	7%	11.5%

Stage Two	2017/18	2016/17
Number of complaints closed at stage 2	35	24
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised	8	11
Number of complaints closed at stage 2 where an extension was authorised as a % of total stage 2 complaints	23%	45.8%
Escalated		
Number of complaints closed after escalation	182	165
Number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised	17	13
Number of complaints closed after escalation where an extension was authorised as a % of all complaints escalated	9.3%	7.9%

Indicator Seven

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction with contact with the Council is captured regularly using a variety of channels.

We ran a survey, between 6th April and the 31st May 2018, to ask our Citizens Panel how satisfied they are with how the Council deals with complaints. The survey received 102 responses. This sample size is not big enough to be considered statistically significant, therefore these results should be considered a snapshot of public opinion and not an accurate account of customer satisfaction.

50% of people who took the survey had never made a complaint against Falkirk Council. 61% of those people stated they did not know how to make a complaint. When asked where they think a complaint can be made: 82% said in writing or online; 70% said in person at their local One Stop Shop or Advice and Support Hub; and 66% said by telephone.

50% of people who took the survey have made a complaint against Falkirk Council. 52% of complaints were made in the last year, 36% two to four years ago and 12% five or more years ago. Their complaints were largely concerning maintenance of Council owned land, roads and properties, bin collections and poor customer service. 49% had made their complaint online, 41% by telephone, 22% through a Councillor, 19% in writing and 11% in person.

40% agreed or strongly agreed that information about the Council's complaints procedure was easily accessible. 65% agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to make their complaint. This rises to 76% when the complaint was made online and drops to 17% when made in person.

59% agreed or strongly agreed that they were given the opportunity to fully explain their complaint. 45% agreed or strongly agreed that staff understood their complaint. 34% agreed or strongly agreed that staff asked them what they wanted to happen as a result of their complaint. 60% agreed or strongly agreed that they were given the opportunity to fully explain their complaint. This drops to 33% when complaint is made in person and 38% when complaint was made by telephone.

40% agreed or strongly agreed that they received a response to their complaint within the set timescales. 23% agreed or strongly agreed that they were kept informed by any delays to resolving their complaint.

Due to the small sample size further consultation is needed. The complaint officers' working group is looking at options which include surveying all customers at the end of the complaints process for their views. This means an annual evaluation could be carried out and improvements made where needed.

Indicator Eight

Learning from Complaints

The SPSO is clear that Councils should have processes in place to help them learn from complaints and review and change service delivery if required. This section outlines areas where service provision has been reviewed and improved in response to complaints. To help identify cross-cutting issues, the complaints working group is identifying themes against which complaints will be recorded eg service failure, information failure, and attitude of staff. This will allow recurring issues to be address on a Council-wide basis with further guidance and training provided if required.

The areas of service which generated the highest volume of complaints over the year were household waste collection, repairs, staff conduct and Council Tax.



Revenues & Benefits

We are continuing to use text messages and emails in advance of Final Notices being sent for Rent and Council Tax arrears. This is improving the level of engagement from customers seeking help, advice and support in managing their debts and reducing complaints in this area.

In response to previous complaints about us not providing material digitally, we have continued to develop and improve our suite of digital forms helping customers to claim a variety of benefits, discounts and exemptions online as well as make payments to their Rent, Council Tax, Sundry Accounts and Non-Domestic Rates. Our most recent addition is a new form to claim Education Maintenance Allowance.

We are also making better use of the reports from the Customer First complaints system and a weekly summary is issued to all managers and team leaders detailing the complaints that remain outstanding providing us with essential information to make sure that we maintain and improve our performance in this area.

Children's Services

During 2017/18 training sessions covering complaint handling and the Customer First recording system continued for school-based staff. This means almost all staff within our schools now have a greater awareness of how to identify complaints and respond effectively.

We have introduced a filtering process which helps us determine what stage the complaint has reached and whether or not a school based response is appropriate. It is proving useful in filtering out issues which have not reached Stage I and are considered to be service requests.

Our service circular on complaints which details the complaints process and information on Olle e-learning training is being updated and will be available for all staff at the start of the new school session in August.

Social Work (Children & Families and Criminal Justice)

We are actively using learning from complaints to improve our services. One example of this is following a complaint in 2017 our attention was drawn to new Scottish Government Guidance. This in turn resulted in:

- An event being held in June 2017 with delegates from Scottish Consortium Learning Disabilities, Scottish Government, Central Advocacy, Falkirk Council Social Work and a parent.
- A further event with this group and 6 other parents in early December.
- The report, highlighting the learning from both events, has been shared widely within our Service and has influenced changes to our reports proformas. It is influencing change to how we include families in conferences and reviews.
- This report has been shared locally in training events and management groups and nationally via CareKnowledge.
- Central advocacy, a parent and social worker presented a workshop at 4 Child Protection Practitioner Forums on 'Is it resistance or a learning need' which was well evaluated.
- The Scottish Office Guidance is now embedded into Children & Families Staff Induction Handbook and referenced in Falkirk Councils' Parenting Assessment Framework.



Corporate & Housing Services

Information Team

Recognising the value of customer complaints and how this information can be used to shape and improve future service delivery, a team has been set up within the Contact Centre.

The team have extensive knowledge and experience of the Council's Services. They allocate and make sure that responses are made within the set timescales for enquiries, complaints and Freedom of Information requests made to the Council. They also make sure that all feedback, whether a complaint or positive comment, is recorded consistently which aids reporting.

Specific training on the complaints process has been rolled out to all complaints handlers and associated staff in all Services. The training covers topics such as the difference between a complaint and a request for service, the importance of recording complaints and how to give a good apology.

Next Generation Contact Centre

The Council has made significant investment to upgrade the Contact Centre's telephony systems.

Not only has this new telephony streamlined access to the Council through a single contact number, it offers direct access to services using intelligent call routing options.

Access to services quickly, faster responses to online enquiries and requests for services, information on any service disruption in real time and customers never receiving an engaged tone are just a few of the benefits.

Housing Services

The roll-out of mobile technology to around 50 trade staff within our Building Maintenance Division has allowed real-time processing of jobs, streamlining of processes and a reduction in time spent on completing paperwork. These changes have seen improved communication with tenants, jobs being completed first time and quicker response times which have resulted in an increase in tenant satisfaction rates.



Development Services

Bereavement Services

Following a complaint about a funeral service which overran, the Service has implemented a range of measures to both minimise the likelihood of this happening in the future, and the potential impact should it do so. These measures include communicating with funeral directors and celebrants about expectations regarding timeous running of services and the potential consequences if a service overruns. To support this a light which is visible to officiants but not to mourners, has been installed in the service chapel. This is used to make officiants aware of the time left for the service to be completed. The Service also has processes in place to advise an appropriate point of contact amongst funeral directors/members of the public immediately when a delay to a funeral service looks likely. Additional seating outside the crematorium was also installed, as part of refurbishment work, in direct response to suggestions made by a complainant.

Development Management

A complaint was received about a decision made in relation to permitted development. This was a complex case involving concerns over the proper description of permitted development categories in legislation and as a result the Service has produced new guidance for planning officers and for the flood prevention team. It has undertaken appropriate training and has alerted Scottish Government of the need for improvement in the wording of legislation.

Social Work Adult Services

It is the nature of Social Work Adult Services that the people we support are sometimes at risk of harm as a result of being ill, frail or having a disability. The Council has a duty to make inquiries into any concerns raised that may indicate a person needs support or protection. Inquiries can lead to an investigation that can at times be difficult and involve partner agencies such as Police Scotland. Last year a complaint was made to Social Work Adult Services about their investigation of an adult support and protection case. This included the steps taken and the communication around the case. Following on from this guidance has been provided to all appropriate staff in the form of a learning review and briefings to make sure that the investigation procedure is understood, followed and is carried out in a timely fashion. The issues raised by this complaint have also informed the routine auditing already in place, of such cases.



Complaints Considered by the SPSO

During 2017/18 49 new complaints were notified to the Council by the SPSO. These are broken down by Service area in the table opposite.

Corporate & Housing Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2017/18	2016/17	Difference
23	13	+10

Development Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2017/18	2016/17	Difference
14	6	+8

Children's Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2017/18	2016/17	Difference
12	1	+11

Social Work Adult Services		
Number of new complaints received		
2017/18	2016/17	Difference
0	0	0

Total		
Number of new complaints received		
2017/18	2016/17	Difference
49	20	+29