

# Health

**Life expectancy:** Life expectancy at birth in the Falkirk area for 2008-2010 was similar to the Scottish average at 76.4 years for men (slightly higher than the Scottish figure) and 80.3 years for women. However, at age 65, life expectancy was below the Scottish figures at 16.6 years for men (compared to 16.8 years in Scotland as a whole) and 18.8 years for women (19.3 years is the Scottish average).

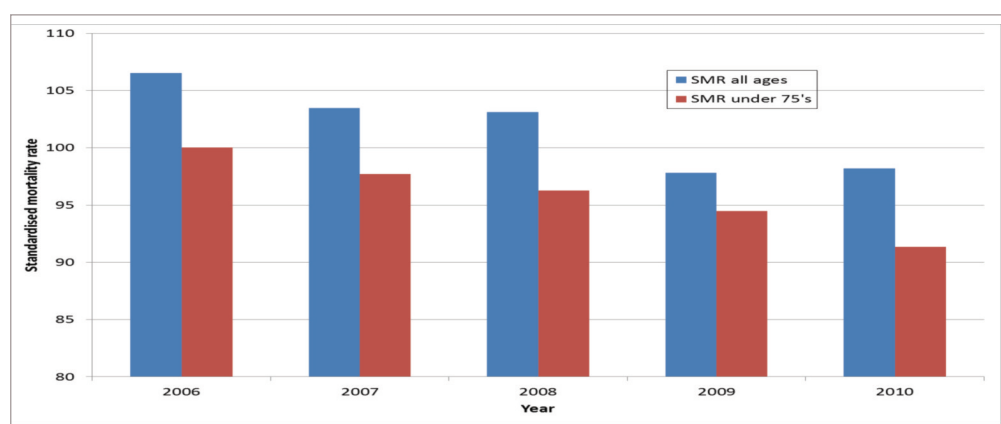
Life expectancy has increased over the last ten years, from 73.3 years for men in 1998-2000 and from 78.4 years for women. Also, the Falkirk ranking has improved slightly compared to other local authority areas. In 1998-2000, Falkirk ranked 18th for men and 22nd for women out of the 32 councils in Scotland, but by 2008-10, this had risen to 17th for men and 21st for women.

While improving life expectancy is a good thing, it is healthy life expectancy (HLE) which has greater implications for service provision. Figures for the years 1999-2003 (the latest available at a local authority level) show an HLE for males of 66.4 years and 69.5 years for females in Falkirk giving some seven years during which health would be impaired when compared with life expectancy at that time.

More up to date HLE figures are available for Scotland. However, a major change was made to the methodology for calculating HLE in 2009 which resulted in estimates of HLE at birth from 2009 onwards being over 8 years lower for each sex. The figures for 2010 for Scotland give an HLE of only 59.5 for men and 61.9 for women. When the figures for Falkirk become available they are likely to show a similar decrease. These figures once again show that an aging population which will put pressure on our services.

**Mortality:** Mortality rates from all the major causes of death have been decreasing for some time, and this trend is expected to continue. Standardised mortality rates which measure mortality compared to the Scottish average (Scotland = 100) for Falkirk have shown signs of improvement over the last five years, particularly for those aged under 75, as can be seen in Figure 12.

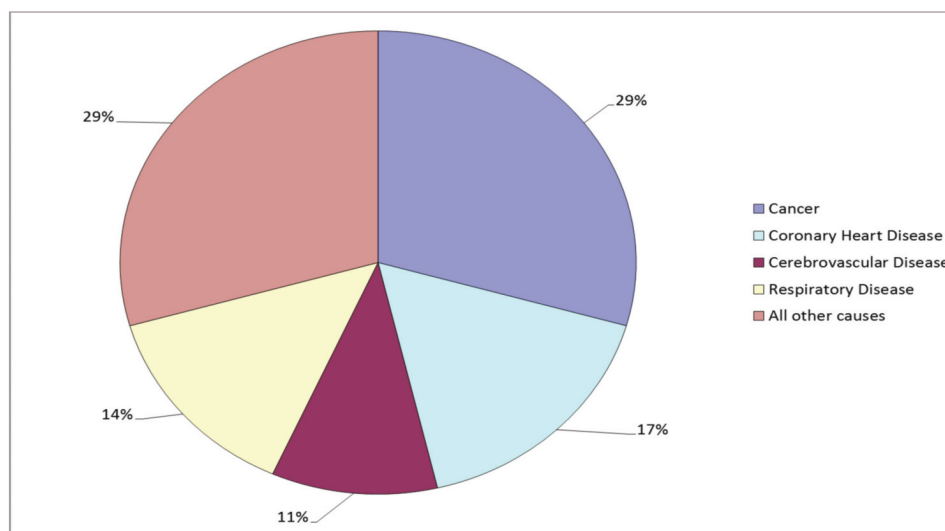
Figure 12: Standardised mortality 2006-2010



Source: National Records for Scotland and Falkirk Council Research & Information Team

There have been considerable improvements in death rates from major diseases such as coronary heart disease in recent years and also in treatments for cancer. However, with the aging population and cancer being predominantly a disease of older people, cancer is now the biggest cause of death in the Falkirk area as can be seen in Figure 13. Other major causes of death include stroke (cerebrovascular disease) and respiratory diseases.

Figure 13: Deaths by cause 2010



Source: National Records for Scotland

Lifestyle changes such as eating healthier food, taking more exercise or stopping smoking could reduce further the prevalence of the major killer diseases in the Falkirk area. As well as this, there is a clear link between health and life circumstances with people living in most disadvantaged circumstances experiencing poorer health than those who are better off. Improving health and well-being is a complex process which requires individuals to make the correct choices.

Falkirk has recently accepted the challenge from the British Heart Foundation to become a "Heart Town", one of three in Scotland. Heart Towns is an initiative that brings communities together through local fundraising and volunteering as well as raising awareness of heart disease and offering residents support services including initiatives for schools, workplace health and lifestyle information resources.

**Health Inequalities:** The Council and its partners put significant emphasis on reducing health inequalities across our area, inequalities which lead to earlier death and poorer health. The Council's Health Inequalities profiles highlight some of the stark contrasts between our areas. Camelon East has male life expectancy of only 68.9 years and rates of coronary heart disease, respiratory disease and cancer well above the Falkirk average. On the other hand in the Lochgreen area of Falkirk male life expectancy is 79.8, almost 11 years longer than in Camelon, while all disease rates are well below the Falkirk average.

**Risk factors:** The Scottish Household Survey showed that in 2009/10 28% of our population smoked. This is higher than the Scottish figure of 24.2%.

Recent statistics released by Drugs Misuse Scotland show the progress we are making in reducing drug misuse across our area. The number of clients reporting to drug related treatment services between 2006 and 2010 fell by 19%, with heroin users requiring treatment services falling by 12%. Reported heroin use within the Falkirk Council area is 25% below the Scottish average.

Alcohol related deaths (where alcohol is a main contributory cause of death) in our area have increased significantly since the 1980's and have averaged in the low 30's since the late 1990's. Alcohol related hospital admissions, i.e. where there was an alcohol related diagnosis, have shown a considerable increase over the last few years from 347 per 100,000 population in 2005/06 to 467 in 2009/10, an increase of 35%, although some of this increase may be due to changes in recording practice. This was however, the seventh lowest rate among all council areas in Scotland and well below the Scottish average of 709 in 2009/10.

Being overweight is another risk factor in relation to many medical conditions. This is defined as a person having a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25 or more, with a BMI of 30 or over being obese. There are no readily available statistics at a local level for adults, but information is published annually on children entering primary school. This showed that in 2010/11 21% of P1 children in Falkirk were overweight - the same as the Scottish figure - and 8.8% were obese compared to a Scottish figure of 9.6%.

There is a limited amount of information on the general health of the population, but the Scottish Household Survey 2009/10 showed that 72% of the population think that their health is very good, with 21% saying it was fair and the remaining 7% saying that they were in bad or very bad health.

In 2011 the new Forth Valley Royal Hospital became fully operational at Larbert serving the whole of the Forth Valley area. A Community Hospital was opened on the site of the former Falkirk Royal Infirmary in 2010 and complements the Community Hospital at Bo'ness. The future of the Bonnybridge Hospital site is under discussion. Bellsdyke will continue to provide care for those with severe mental health problems. These changes represent a significant realignment of health services in our area but should bring benefits in terms of improved care for patients.

#### **Challenges:**

- improve health across the area particularly from main killer diseases
- provide health services which meet the highest modern standards
- help our citizens to make healthy lifestyle choices
- reduce health inequalities across our area.
- reduce risk factors among the population

# Poverty and Deprivation

**Areas of deprivation:** While not suffering from the same concentrations of deprivation as experienced in the cities and some other local authorities, there are still pockets of deprivation in most of the towns in our area. Six areas have been shown to have persistent concentrations of deprivation across a number of versions of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD). These are:

- Bainsford/Langlees;
- Camelon;
- Grangemouth (area around Avonbank Avenue, Kingseat/Craigleith, Torwood Avenue);
- Denny (area around Bridge Crescent, Church Walk);
- Maddiston; and
- Westquarter.

Additionally, there are a number of areas which are not consistently identified as areas of multiple deprivation but are included in some SIMD in the worst 15% of areas, but fall just outside the worst 15% in other years. These are:

- Callendar Park Flats, Falkirk;
- Hallglen;
- Stenhousemuir (The Valley);
- Bo' ness (Deanfield); and
- Falkirk (area around Thornhill Road, Westfield).

Each of these areas has its own characteristics and vary in size from a population of just 600 to almost 3,000. In the SIMD 2009 - the latest version - around 11,850 people lived in an area ranked in the worst 15% in Scotland - 7.7% of the total.

**Benefits claimants:** There are a significant number of people in our area living on working age benefits because they are not in employment. 4,370 people were claiming Job Seekers Allowance in August 2011, 4,380 people of working age (aged 16-64) were on Income Support, 6,300 on Incapacity Benefit and 2,090 on Employment Support Allowance - the replacement for Incapacity Benefit, while 8,890 people received Disability Living Allowance.

7,380 people of pensionable age were claiming Pension Credit in August 2011 representing 25.3% of all those in receipt of a state pension. This is a slightly lower percentage than across Scotland as a whole where the figure was 26.4%. In addition, 2,950 pensioners received Disability Living Allowance.

The UK government passed a Welfare Reform Act in March 2012 which will introduce a single Universal Credit by 2017 when all new and existing benefits claims will have transferred to the new benefit. New claims will transfer to the new benefit from October 2013. Child Tax Credits and Working Tax Credits will be integrated into the new Universal Credit. In addition, a Personal Independence Payment will replace Disability Living Allowance from 2013 for those of working age. From a Council point of view, the biggest direct effect will be the abolition of Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit, both of which are administered by the Council. Our Housing Benefit responsibility will end in 2017.

The Government's aim is to simplify the benefits system, improve incentives to work and reduce poverty but many organisations working in this area do not believe that this will be effective and that many people living in poverty will be worse off. It remains to be seen what the effect will be, but the Council and its partners will continue to monitor the changes as they are introduced to see what the effect will be on people living in our area.

The current state of the economy, with increased costs of fuel, energy etc. has had an impact on people within our communities and in particular people in our poorer communities. We are monitoring the situation to ensure we have the right balance of services when people most need them. This is particularly important when people require advice for debt and money problems.

In 2010/11 our Community Advice Service achieved welfare benefit gains for people in the Falkirk Council area of £5.4 million. In the same period, the team lodged a total of 496 appeals against unfavourable decisions by benefits agencies and achieved a success rate of 82% decisions overturned. The service also provided advice or negotiated debts for 977 local people on debts amounting to £21.9 million.

In 2011 the Council published its Poverty Strategy "Towards a Fairer Falkirk," a 10 year programme to tackle poverty and inequality across our area. It incorporates a corporate approach to charging and concessions, the Living Wage and also a process to ensure that we understand and can measure the impact of our actions on the poorest in our communities. £1.7m has been set aside from the funding which came to the Council with the ending of the Fairer Scotland Fund to support initiatives in this area.

In support of our poverty strategy, and in parallel to our health inequalities profiles, in 2010 we published Poverty and Inequalities profiles covering 41 areas within the Council. This showed some of the disparities which exist within our area. For example, 40.5% of households in the Bainsford and Langlees area had incomes of less than £15,000 compared to only 12.2% in Polmont. 35.8% of people in the Bainsford and Langlees area were in receipt of working aged benefits while only 4.3% of people in the Lochgreen area of Falkirk were receiving such benefits, while 33.5% of primary school children in Bainsford and Langlees received free school meals compared to 3.9% in Antonshill in Stenhousemuir.

**Challenges:**

- deal with the causes of poverty rather as well as reducing its impact
- monitor the impact of the Welfare Reform Act on benefits claimants
- implement the Council's Poverty Strategy
- reduce inequalities across our area.

# Equalities

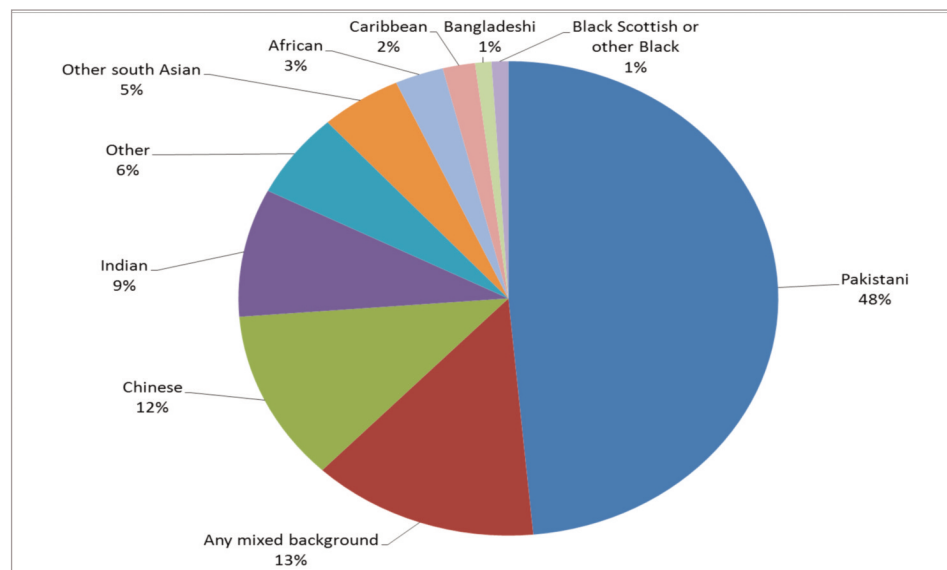
**Gender:** The 2010 Mid Year Estimates of the population show that there is a gender split of 51.5% females to 48.5% males across the population as a whole. The percentage of working aged residents (aged 16-64) by gender is 50.8% female and 49.2% male. On the other hand, the area's workforce has a slight excess of males (50.7%) to females (49.3%).

However, because of higher mortality rates among males at all ages, there is a considerable imbalance by gender among the elderly population with 65% of the over 80's being female.

**Ethnicity:** The 2001 Census showed that only 1% of the population of Falkirk was from an ethnic minority, just under 1,500 people. This however, represents a significant increase from less than 1,000 (0.6%) in 1991. Although no current figures are available, it seems likely that the numbers will have increased further in the last eleven years.

About half of the Council's ethnic minority population in 2001 were of Pakistani origin with the next largest groups being the Chinese and Indian populations as can be seen in Figure 14.

**Figure 14: Ethnic minority population 2001 Census**



Source: National Records of Scotland 2001 Census - Crown Copyright

**Religion:** The 2001 Census asked questions about religion and religion of upbringing. This showed that almost half of our population said they were Church of Scotland with 12% being Roman Catholic. 5% belonged to other Christian denominations such as Methodists or Baptists and only 1% belonged to other religions. Of these, the largest group were Muslims, accounting for half the total. On the other hand, 29% of the population claimed no religion.

The question on religion of upbringing allowed a comparison to be made with current religion. Table 3 shows the differences between the religions which people said they currently belonged to and those in which they were brought up. This shows a decrease in all three Christian groups but a large increase in those now claiming to belong to no religion.

Table 3: Current religion and religion of upbringing

Religion	Current		Of upbringing		Difference	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Church of Scotland	70,042	48.2%	77,470	53.4%	-7,428	-9.6%
Roman Catholic	17,549	12.1%	18,741	12.9%	-1,192	-6.4%
Other Christian	7,134	4.9%	8,054	5.5%	-920	-11.4%
Other	1,586	1.1%	1,199	0.8%	+387	+32.3%
None	41,751	28.8%	28,422	19.6%	+13,329	+46.9%
Not answered	7,129	4.9%	11,305	7.8%	n/a	n/a
Total	145,191	100%	145,191	100%	n/a	n/a

Source; National Records of Scotland 2001 Census – Crown Copyright

Disability: Data on disability is difficult to come by and information on those claiming disability benefits does not reflect the actual numbers of people with disabilities. The 2001 Census asked a question on limiting long term illness which showed that 21.2% of the population had a limiting long term illness which limited their daily activities or the work they could do. This also showed that prevalence of limiting long term illness increased with age. While only 17.1% of people of working age had a limiting long term illness, this increased to 55.9% for those over retirement age.

The Scottish Household Survey showed that in 2009/10 31 % of households contained someone who had a long standing limiting illness, health problem or disability.

#### Challenges:

- ensure that those in the equalities groups are not disadvantaged in the provision of services

# Environment

86% of residents rated their neighbourhood as a good place to live in 2010. This has increased each time the Council has conducted its biannual Council tax survey.

The area is home to ten nationally and internationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest, two Special Protection Areas for birds, a Special Area of Conservation for flora and fauna at Black Loch Moss and the Firth of Forth RAMSAR site, the wintering ground for many bird species. There are also very many locally important ecological areas requiring protection from development so that they can continue to be enjoyed by Falkirk residents.

However, the last 100 years have seen considerable declines in the numbers and health of many of our wild plants, animals and habitats as human activities place ever-increasing demands on our natural resources. The Council has recently published an updated Biodiversity Action Plan aimed at safeguarding the local variety of life, conserving our rare and threatened plants, animals and habitats.

According to the SEPA flood map, significant parts of the Council area could be subject to flooding along the Forth estuary and along some of our river valleys. This may limit development in some areas.

The amount of vacant and derelict land in our area has been decreasing - from 282ha in 2002 to only 140ha in 2011, as land has been regenerated and put to new uses. However, this figure has remained constant for several years and a significant proportion of this land has been in this condition for a considerable period of time.

Our record on waste recycling is good. In 2010/11 49.3% of waste was recycled or composted - the second highest rate among local authorities in Scotland. This was up from 36% in 2007/08 and only 19% in 2004/05. The Scottish Household Survey for 2009/10 showed that 96% of the population said that they had recycled items in the previous month - up from 54% in 2003/04 and above the Scottish average of 88%. We must work to maintain and improve these figures.

Climate change remains an issue which is already affecting our environment and biodiversity.

## **Challenges:**

- protect our environment while still allowing development
- ensuring that development is sustainable
- continuing to meet the challenges of recycling
- dealing with the impact of climate change

# Heritage and Tourism

The iconic Falkirk Wheel, which was built as part of the Millennium project to reopen the Forth and Clyde and Union canals, now attracts over 500,000 visitors each year.

In a partnership project with British Waterways and the Central Scotland Forest Trust, the Council has secured £25m of Big Lottery funding towards the Helix project which is working to transform the area between Falkirk and Grangemouth, creating a new landscape of 300ha with iconic public art works, a new canal link and boat moorings, contemporary park, community allotments and improved path networks connecting communities. The initial part of the project is due for completion in 2013 and the contract for the new canal extension has just been announced.

These modern attractions add to the historic attractions of the area. The Antonine Wall achieved World Heritage status in 2008 and continues to require to be protected and promoted. Other heritage attractions such as Callendar House, Blackness Castle, the Pineapple, the Hippodrome and many others of local rather than national significance, remain in need of heritage protection and promotion as tourist attractions.

The grade A listed Hippodrome in Bo'ness, Scotland's oldest purpose built cinema opened originally in 1912, received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund as part of a wider Townscape Heritage Initiative and reopened as a new cultural facility in April 2009.

Our location at the heart of Scotland makes our position ideal for attracting day visitors and this has been the focus of tourism promotion to date. However, the area also has a significant and growing hotel capacity for both business and leisure markets. There are currently over 750 bedrooms in medium/large hotels (20+ rooms) and numbers have increased in recent years.

## **Challenges:**

- continue to promote our heritage to local people and the wider community

# Culture and Leisure

Taking part in cultural and leisure activities helps to promote good health, both physical and mental. In July 2011 the Council set up Falkirk Community Trust which took responsibility for the Council's sport, recreation, arts, heritage and library services. The Trust now provides a wide variety of facilities including the national athletics stadium at Grangemouth with both indoor and outdoor facilities which hosts national and international events.

The 'Let's Make Falkirk More Active' is a campaign to develop healthy, physically active and vibrant communities across the Falkirk Council area. This will help to improve health, educational attainment and social inclusion in the area. The national target, which Falkirk has adopted, is for 50% of the adult population and for 80% of children to be reasonably active by 2022. This means that everyone should try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five times a week. At present, only around 30% of the population is reasonably active, so the campaign has a challenge on its hands.

There was a 35% increase during 2010/11 in admissions to the Council's Community Schools for out of hours leisure use. This included a welcome increase in the proportion of adults using these facilities.

A new Community Sports Centre opened in December 2010 to serve the communities of Banknock, Hags and Longcroft.

The Council works in partnership with health providers to encourage people to be more active more often and offers supported exercise programmes as part of a GP referral scheme through the Community Trust.

The Trust runs eight libraries which loan books, music and DVDs. Increasingly, use is being made of online access to information held in the libraries and free wireless internet access is available in all libraries. Special services are provided for children to encourage them to read. The mobile service reaches communities which are not close to a library and a housebound service is also available for those unable to get out.

The Hippodrome cinema recently ran a successful Festival of Silent Cinema attracting 1,500 people over three days. Falkirk Town Hall provides a venue for cinema, theatre and arts productions and is used by local amateur groups for their shows.

The Park Gallery, our contemporary visual arts space was relocated to Callendar House with a consequent increase in gallery visits. A new temporary exhibition space also opened in early 2011.

The Council, through its small grants scheme, provides support funding for a variety of sport and leisure groups who provide activities for local communities and interest groups.

## **Challenges:**

- involve more people in physical activity
- provide cultural and leisure facilities which meet the needs of our communities

# Community Safety

Our area has a lower crime rate than other parts of Scotland with only 543 crimes recorded per 10,000 population in 2010/11 compared to a Scottish figure of 619 although the rate rose slightly by 3% compared to the previous year. All types of crime are below the Scotland average, for example, the rate of domestic housebreaking was 24 per 10,000 households compared to 34 per 10,000 households in Scotland as a whole. The clear up rate for crimes is well above the Scottish average, with 59% of all crimes being cleared up, compared to only 49% of all Scottish crimes solved.

Vandalism was one of the most frequently reported crimes but numbers are falling, from 3,118 incidents in 2006/07 to only 2,043 in 2010/11. According to the Scottish Household Survey, in 2009/10 only 9.4% of the population thought that vandalism was prevalent in their neighbourhood - down from 19.3% in 2001/02 and lower than the Scottish figure of 12.7%

Fear of crime is often higher than actual crime. While this can sometimes be a reflection of national issues rather than local problems, we understand the impact it has on individuals and communities. In 2010, 84% of residents in the Falkirk area said that they feel very or fairly safe in their local area during the day but this dropped to 53% at night.

Along with the rest of Great Britain, road accident and casualty numbers have been decreasing since the latter peaked in 1966. In the Falkirk Council area, an average of 105 road users were seriously injured or killed per year in the period 1994-1998. By the period 2006-2010, however, the average had fallen by over 40% to 61 per year.

The rate of accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 population in our area is consistently below the Scottish average. In 2010/11 the rate in our area was 7.37 compared to over 10 in Scotland as a whole. In addition the rate of wilful fires and hoax 999 calls are at or around the Scottish average.

The integrated Community Safety Team was established in April 2010, enabling the service to be expanded both geographically and in terms of operating hours. In line with the public's wish for a zero tolerance approach to littering and dog fouling, the number of fixed penalty notices issued for such offences increased from 325 in 2009/10 to 840 in 2010/11.

## Challenges:

- maintain our area's reputation as a safe place to live
- maintain a focus on public protection

# Regeneration

Falkirk town is the main administrative and retailing centre for the area. It has a vibrant town centre which has been popular with shoppers for its mix of the usual high street retailers and specialist shops. Like all town centres, it has suffered during the economic downturn due to the closure of major chains such as Woolworths, and vacancy rates have increased. However, it retains its position as a major shopping centre within the Scottish retail hierarchy.

Throughout our area, some 10,700 people are employed in the wholesale and retail sectors. In spite of recent closures of retail premises due to economic downturn, employment in these sectors has held up well with a decrease of only 550 between 2008 and 2009 followed by an increase of 350 between 2009 and 2010. Some businesses continue to show faith in our area and a new Tesco store opened in Camelon in early 2012.

There is some competition from neighbouring centres such as Livingston and Stirling and new out of town centres in Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Council commissioned a retail survey as part of the Local Development Plan currently being prepared which has provided up to date information on local shopping patterns which were shown to have remained similar to those in the previous survey ten years before – in spite of the rise of internet shopping.

In 2010, Falkirk Council attracted regeneration funding through its successful bid to the Scottish Government's Town Centres Regeneration Fund to make a number of architectural and environmental improvements around Falkirk town centre and Falkirk Old and St Modan's Parish Church. A further bid for Heritage Lottery Funding to upgrade frontages within the conservation area is currently being progressed.

Work has been completed on the regeneration of the two of area's district centres – Bo'ness and Stenhousemuir. The regeneration of Stenhousemuir town centre included the opening of a new library, park facilities and retail provision, including a new Asda store. The Bo'ness Townscape Heritage initiative has also been completed but the regeneration projection for the harbour and foreshore has been put on hold.

A masterplan for Denny town centre was unveiled in early 2012 including a library, shops, a car park and a town square and the planning process has commenced. Demolition has already taken place of some of the old blocks which had to be swept away to allow the new development to take place.

Initial plans for the regeneration of Grangemouth town centre have not progressed as hoped but the Council has recommenced the process of seeking a development partner.

The Falkirk Gateway project, an ambitious project of business, office, retail and leisure uses on the east side of Falkirk with good access to the M9, has also been put on hold because of the economic situation.

Falkirk Council and our partners are keen to act on behalf of local businesses, people and communities, leading the response of partners locally to minimise the impact of the economic downturn and maintain the momentum of regeneration. Our area's economic strengths will aid our response, the actions underway currently to bolster the area's economy, and the key actions we will be required to take to ensure our area's continued development.

## Challenges:

- maintain Falkirk town centre's status in the retail hierarchy
- complete the regeneration of our other town centres to bring them up to modern standards

# Political context

The next big challenge will be the referendum on Scottish Independence which the Scottish Government proposes to hold in the autumn of 2014. Both the Scottish and UK governments have recently held consultations on the matter. Until the outcome of the referendum is settled, the longer term future of local government and the public sector in Scotland will remain somewhat uncertain. It is expected however that the Council will be called upon to administer the running of the referendum vote in the Falkirk Council area.

Whatever the outcome of the referendum, it would appear that local government faces a period of uncertainty. In the meantime additional powers are already coming to the Scottish Government through the Scotland Bill.

Public sector reform: In order to ensure that the public sector is providing services efficiently and effectively, the Scottish Government established a Commission, chaired by Campbell Christie, to look at the future of public sector services. This Commission reported in June 2011. Its findings, while not recommending structural changes to local government, will require careful consideration.

The Commission suggested that a new collaborative framework across public services will be required in order to deliver the required services at a time when budgets are being squeezed. They also said that, in their view, inequalities were one of the main reasons for increased demands on public services and suggested that a redesign of services would be needed to deal with the long standing, deep seated, problems of deprivation.

We anticipate that the Government will look to address reform through collaboration and cooperation rather than by structural change. However, it is understood that if change is not delivered locally then it may be imposed upon us. It is therefore critical that our partnership arrangements are robust and delivering efficient and effective services for our local communities so that we can demonstrate how we are working towards greater collaboration in service delivery.

The most immediate change which will affect the Council and its partners is the establishment of a single Police Force and single Fire Service covering the whole of Scotland. Both forces will become operation in April 2013. This change will obviously impact on the relationship which the Council and its partners have with the Police - Central Scotland Police currently being headquartered relatively locally in Stirling and Central Scotland Fire Service who have their headquarters currently at Maddiston within the Falkirk Council area.

It is not clear at this stage how the new Scottish Police Force and Fire and Rescue Service will operate at a local level and to what extent this will affect the relationship between the Council and the Police and Fire services. However the plans are that there will be designated local senior officers who will be responsible for building new relationships with councils and will have a statutory duty to provide local police and fire services. Local authorities will approve plans for their area and, according to the Scottish Government, many more councillors will have a say than under the current arrangements. The services will be independent, with no operational control by Ministers, but subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, while currently they are run by Joint Boards consisting of elected councillors.

In December 2011 the Scottish Government set out plans to integrate adult health and social care services. This will lead to Community Health Partnerships being replaced by Health and Social Care Partnerships which will be the joint responsibility of councils and the NHS with integrated budgets. We already work closely with our NHS Forth Valley colleagues but this will present an additional challenge, particularly at a time of tight budgets but increasing numbers of older people. In developing proposals for these changes we must design our services to older people to ensure that they can live as independently within their own homes as is safe and appropriate for as long as possible.

The coming years are therefore likely to see a change in the way in which public services are both organised and delivered. We will need to secure services, which cost less, maintain service quality and have the ability to cope with both rising and diverse demands. Implicit in this is being clear about what services are needed and valued by both citizens and communities. In redesigning the way in which we deliver our services we must continue to ensure that we give continuing priority to support our most vulnerable and those with the greatest level of need.

All these changes will have to be faced at a time when there are reducing resources for the public sector and these will have to be managed while continuing to provide essential services to our communities.

We have a new Strategic Community Plan, our third, which was based on consultation with both our partners and our communities. The Strategic Community Plan 2010–2015 sets out a challenging agenda for change, for Community Planning Partners, as well as our citizens and communities. Central to the new Plan, is a commitment to build and further both individual and community contributions to our vision and local outcomes. The Plan also sets out how we will address the key challenges and priorities facing the Falkirk Council area into the future.

The Government will publish new guidance for Community Planning and Single Outcome Agreements in the autumn. It is anticipated that this will formalise the requirement for all public authorities to achieve local outcomes and may formalise the responsibilities of Community Planning partnerships themselves. This will put community planning partnerships on a more formal footing that has been the case to date and with potentially a more explicit role in performance management and the achievement of outcomes.

We continue to develop our approach on community engagement and in 2011 approved our Community Participation Strategy. This strategy sets out our commitment to ensuring our engagement with our communities is effective and adds value to our planning and decision making. We have our Citizen's Panel which the Council and our partners have used on five occasions to consult on a variety of issues. The Panel membership is now over 1,500. We are also seeking to engage with individuals, as well as groups of communities in new and innovative ways. We led the Council's biggest ever budget consultation, with over 1,300 responses and 7,000 comments submitted. These will inform the difficult budget decisions which the Council will have to make over the next few years.

The Council has a statutory duty to seek best value in all that it does. We may potentially face the challenge of our next Best Value Audit in a year's time. Audit Scotland state that "Local authorities that place best value at the centre of all that they do are well placed to deal with the challenges of 2012 and beyond. "

There is a continued focus on self assessment driving improvements and efficiencies. It is critical that the Council and all our services have a clear programme for self assessment and that in addition there is clarity about the improvements such self assessments have achieved. The Improvement Service and SOLACE are also about to publish the first benchmarking for all services. This has the potential to lead to focus being put on services that are not performing well in relation to other authorities though without clarity about the context within which those services are delivered. This will prove a challenge for the Council and all our services.

The drive to do more with less, extends across all aspects of the Council's work. We must make best use of our existing resources – financial, workforce and physical assets such as buildings. This brings with it risks as well as efficiencies and savings. These risks need to be managed so that the Council does not leave itself open to accusations of reductions in service standards.

Funding reductions: All public sector organisations face a challenge due to the economic situation and the reductions in funding which is being provided by government. There are pressures on finances from reducing budgets and growing demands for services. The Scottish Government budget shows a real reduction of over 12% by 2014/15, and local government funding will be reduced by 6%.

The last four years have seen a freeze on Council Tax across all Councils in Scotland. While this has been of benefit to our citizens who have not had to face increased tax bills, it has reduced the flexibility which the Council has to raise funds.

#### **Challenges:**

- meet the challenge of the single Scottish Police and Fire and Rescue Services
- prepare for the result of the independence referendum
- meet the challenges of reconfiguring services in the light of the Christie Commission
- meet the challenge of integrated health and social care
- meet the challenges of service delivery in difficult financial circumstances.



**Falkirk Council**

Corporate Plan Appendix: Context Statement