

Falkirk
Council
Complaints
Annual Report
2022/23

Falkirk Council
values complaints
and wants to learn
from them.

This annual report
provides
information about
how Falkirk
Council handled
complaints during
2022/23.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) sets out performance indicators for all councils to report on annually

This reports details Falkirk Council's performance against the SPSO performance indicators during 2022/23. It also provides information about the learnings the Council services have taken onboard 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. 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 2022/23. It sets out our performance against the indicators set by the SPSO.

Each Service has a nominated lead officer for complaints and a Complaint Handling 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.

SPSO performance 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 2022/23 is set out with comparative information for 2021/22.



Indicator One: Complaints received per 1000 population

Complaints Received per 1000 Population	2022/23	2021/22
Population	160890	160700
Total Complaints Received	4675	3418
Complaints Received per 1000 Population	29	21

Indicator Two: Number of Complaints Closed

Closed Complaints	2022/23	% against total	2021/22	% against total
Total complaints closed	5126		3754	
Total complaints closed at stage 1	4162	81%	3016	80%
Total complaints closed at stage 2	504	10%	402	11%
Total complaints closed at stage 2 after escalation*	460	9%	336	9%

* Escalated complaints are those that have been considered at Stage 1 and then have either moved to Stage 2 at the customer's request (because the customer was unhappy with the response at Stage 1) or because they have exceeded the maximum of ten working days at Stage 1 (includes approved extension time), therefore have automatically been moved to Stage 2 .

Indicator Three: Complaints upheld, partially upheld, not upheld or resolved

Stage 1	2022/23	% against total	2021/22	% against total
Total complaints closed at stage 1	4162		3016	
Stage 1 upheld	437	10%	293	10%
Stage 1 partially upheld	888	21%	477	16%
Stage 1 not upheld	1870	45%	1857	62%
Stage 1 resolved	967	23%	389	13%

Stage 2	2022/23	% against total	2021/22	% against total
Total complaints closed at stage 2	504		402	
Stage 2 upheld	57	11%	54	13%
Stage 2 partially upheld	166	33%	97	24%
Stage 2 not upheld	186	37%	187	47%
Stage 2 resolved	95	19%	64	16%

Escalated Complaints	2022/23	% against total	2021/22	% against total
Total complaints after escalation	460		336	
Upheld	55	12%	50	15%
Partially upheld	146	32%	70	21%
Not upheld	166	36%	156	46%
Resolved	93	20%	60	18%

Indicator Four: **Average response times**

Average response times (in days)	Target	2022/23	2021/22
Stage 1	5	7	6
Stage 2	20	32	29
Escalated	20	23	24

Indicator Five: **Performance against timescales**

Performance against timescales	2022/23	% against total	2021/22	% against total
Stage 1 closed within 5 working day target	3696	89%	1528	51%
Stage 2 closed within 20 working day target	280	56%	150	54%
Escalated closed within 20 working day target	259	56%	128	57%

Indicator Six: **Extensions**

Extension Usage	2022/23	% against total	2021/22	% against total
Stage 1	39	1%	45	1%
Stage 2	3	1%	7	2%
Escalated	15	2%	11	2%

Indicator Seven: **Customer Satisfaction**

Consultation with our customers helps to continue building strong relationships with the community and supports improvements to our processes. The Complaints Handling Working Group looks to bring all services together to share best practice and build refreshed training and coaching to the Council.

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. The Complaints Handling Working Group identifies complaint themes i.e. service failure, information failure, and staff conduct. This allows recurring issues to be addressed on a Council-wide basis with further guidance and training provided if required.



Social Work Adult Services

Monitoring and managing complaints is an important aspect of governance and quality management with Adult Social Work. It also helps ensure that any necessary improvement actions arising from complaints are followed up and implemented. Complaint compliance now forms part of the standing agenda, for 4 weekly, Team Manager meetings. Complaints analysis is provided to the Clinical and Care Governance Committee of the Integrated Joint Board on a quarterly basis as well as an annual review. Weekly reports of complaints outstanding are provided to the Heads of Service and Locality Managers.

Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services

Housing & Communities continue to prioritise our complaints, with a dedicated Customer Service Team Leader and Customer Service Team Officer employed to coordinate and push for resolutions. Following a turnover in each of these roles in December 2022 and January 2023 respectively, the team have been reviewing previous practice and implementing changes in-line with our desire for continuous improvement.

Our average response times had increased during the financial year of 2022 to 2023, attributable to staffing challenges and the implementation of a new housing management system. Longer term this system will provide greater transparency and should allow for quicker resolutions being achieved. Whilst these times had increased, the number of complaints being responded to in full had increased, ensuring that each customer received a full response to their concerns.

Changes that we have implemented:

- New weekly reports were launched at the beginning of January 2023, providing a clear view of the complaints and enquiries assigned to each area of the service. This has driven down our average response times with the increased accountability through into the current financial year.
- Quarterly reporting revised for Senior Management, highlighting key themes and patterns that have emerged during the months prior. This has assisted with data-driven decision making to target areas for improvements.
- Continuing to nurture the culture of empowerment that enables officers to resolve issues frontline, reducing the requirement for Stage 2 responses to be issued.
- This is reflected in our SPSO complaints figures showing that from the 19 complaints raised in 2022/23, zero were upheld.
- Introduction of YouTube content with subtitles to support with online journeys relating to Housing Online giving a walkthrough of process.

Housing Online designed to show live placement for Allocations, bringing transparency for the process and reducing complaints related to placement.



Place Services

Our senior managers continue to monitor complaints weekly to ensure that any issues are identified and responded to promptly. Where a complaint is upheld, our service management teams make sure that suitable lessons are learnt and that steps are taken to improve service delivery to better meet the needs of our customers. We have engaged with and supported all corporate workstreams to simplify how we interact with our customers when handling complaints and are committed to supporting the latest workstreams that will consider further areas for improvement and the sharing of best practice approaches in line with our corporate complaints handling policy.

Children's Services

Children's Services updated their complaints guidance for educational establishments in January 2021 in response to the new SPSO Model Complaints Handling Guidance published on 1st April 2020. As part of this review, SPSO stage 2 complaints training was arranged and completed by education officers and other Children's Services staff who would be carrying out stage 2 complaint investigations.

In January 2023, to help improve our response times, Children's Services appointed a Customer Response Officer whose role is to log, acknowledge and issue officers complaint response for both Education and Social Work. The Customer Response Officer is our liaison with our customers and is tracking and monitoring the progress of complaints.



Complaints raised to the SPSO

Complaints that have been considered by the SPSO during 2022/23, 34 new cases were notified to the Council by the SPSO which is a reduction on the previous year. These are detailed by Service area in the table below.

The Council's SPSO Liaison Officer works closely with the SPSO Investigating Officer and the relevant Service(s) to provide guidance, complaint information and work towards a satisfactory resolution.

Ambitions for the Future

The re-invigoration of our Complaints reporting has seen a more streamlined and efficient reporting programme, where each Service can analyse and engage with learnings and improvements. Reporting that adds value and works towards us becoming the Council of the Future. Alongside this programme, we are redesigning our complaints training approach; from a range of E-learning modules to facilitated workshops, supporting us in having open and honest discussions about complaints and building the knowledge base of the Council.

Complaints raised to SPSO	2022/23	2021/22
Place Services	6	10
Transformation, Communities & Corporate Services	21	22
Children's Services	4	12
Social Work Adult Services	3	1