



Falkirk Council



National Planning Improvement

NATIONAL PLANNING IMPROVEMENT FRAMEWORK

Improvement Action Progress Update 2025 Falkirk Council



Falkirk NPIF Annual Report (Year Two - 2025)

Foreword

This report provides an update on early progress with Falkirk Council planning service's NPIF Improvement Plan, which was submitted in May 2025. The Improvement Plan was developed following a performance assessment which involved internal review, a peer review workshop involving key external stakeholders, and discussions with our peer review partner, Aberdeen City Council.

Although just six months have elapsed since the Improvement Plan was published, substantive progress has been made on a number of our commitments, overseen by a newly formed internal Planning Improvement Monitoring Group. A number of the actions documented in the Improvement Plan involve projects that had already been instigated by the Council, so some momentum for change had already been built up and we were not starting from scratch.

Some rationalisation of the original 29 improvement actions has taken place. Of the revised list of 22 actions, 5 have been completed and 14 are in progress. Particular areas where positive steps have been made include member training, the review of our scheme of delegation, increased resources in planning enforcement and biodiversity advice, and the procurement of a new GIS system. Work to improve the efficiency and transparency of how we deal with planning obligations and developer contributions is being progressed by its own corporate working group. Perhaps most importantly, a start has been made on the development of a new workforce plan which will be fundamental to the delivery of an effective and resilient planning service in the years to come.

Introduction

The National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF) was piloted incrementally in three separate cohorts throughout the 2024/25 financial year. This was to test a new approach to measuring the performance of planning authorities. The pilot aimed to test the new framework, to explore what works and what doesn't. This resulted in each planning authority producing an improvement action plan and performance assessment.

Each improvement action plan sets out:

- What the planning authority has agreed as its priority activities
- Whether these have short-, medium- or long-term timescales
- The owner of the actions
- The resources needed

[Link to action plan for 2023/24.](#)

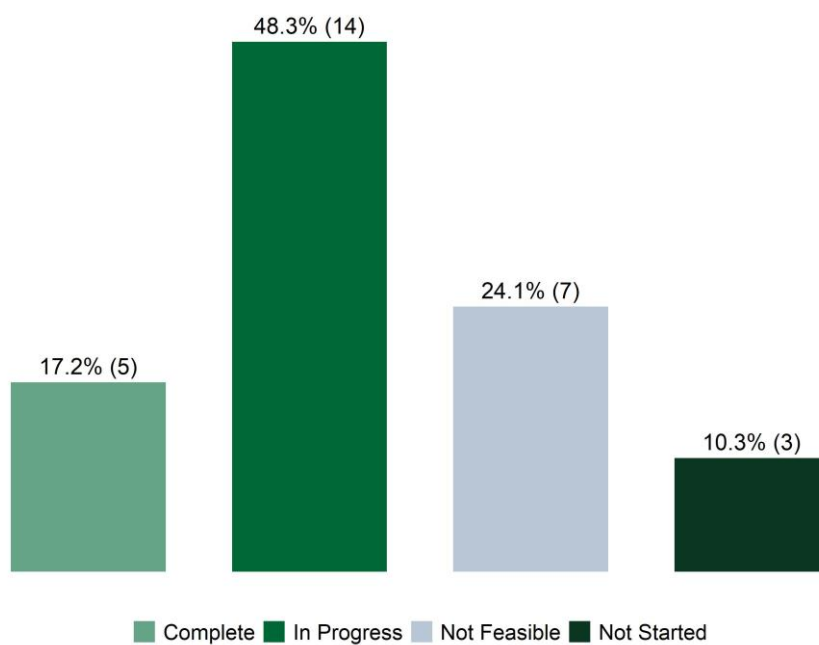


In year two of the NPIF the planning authorities are to update on their progress with the improvement actions. This report sets out the progress Falkirk has made, detailing any updates to actions, any further actions and plans for further collaboration with peer partners.

Planning Improvement Actions Progress Update

This section details each of the improvement actions and the progress the planning authority has made.

Falkirk has 22 improvement actions. The status of the actions is shown below:



Action 1: Prepare a Workforce Planning Strategy including consideration of future service delivery needs, available and potential resources including increased fee income, team resilience, technical support functions, staff progression and recruitment, and succession planning. Appropriately staffed and structured teams capable of delivering a quality planning service

Outcome: Appropriately staffed and structured teams capable of delivering a quality planning service

In Progress

Progress against this action: Discussions have taken place to define the current workforce issues and needs of the planning service. An initial workforce plan with a proposed target structure is being formulated.

The following next steps are proposed: Consultation will take place with Head of Service, HR and Finance prior to completion of draft strategy, following which consultation with staff, unions etc will be undertaken.

Action 2: Undertake a Training Needs Analysis and develop a Service Training Plan, including consideration of emerging types of development, new policy agendas, and the potential of digital technologies

Outcome: Staff are equipped to deal with changing professional demands and are able to make full and effective use of technology and digital tools

In Progress

Progress against this action: Preliminary discussions have taken place with the Planning Hub and Scottish Government regarding priority areas where they can offer support. In the meantime, the launch of our new GIS platform has been accompanied by training of staff in ArcGIS Online and Pro. Staff continue to access training opportunities available both internally and externally, mainly through the Improvement Service Skills Programme

The following next steps are proposed: Commence a formal training needs analysis involving consultation with staff.



Action 3: Review specialist support needs both internally and externally across a range of relevant topics and with particular reference to the challenges of industrial decarbonisation in Grangemouth

Outcome: Staff have timeous access to appropriate specialist advice needed to support quality decision making

In Progress

Progress against this action: Following discussions, an outline of specialist support needs is being prepared in discussion with the Scottish Government Planning Hub. Meanwhile, a full time biodiversity officer has been appointed in the Culture & Greenspace Unit, and discussions are taking place on the level of planning support which they will offer. The Council has also recently procured archaeological support from Stirling Council under a service level agreement.

The following next steps are proposed: Develop and confirm our 'ask' of the Planning Hub.

Action 4: Review Health and Safety risk assessments for all staff ensuring that risks associated with new ways of working are properly accounted for

Outcome: All risks are identified, understood, and appropriately mitigated

In Progress

Progress against this action: Risk assessments for all staff have been completed.

The following next steps are proposed: Actions arising out of the risk assessments can now be progressed, specifically production of guidance notes on key risks.

Action 5: Hold meetings/workshops with internal and external consultees to agree protocols around when consultations are issued

Outcome: Consultation is proportionate and delays associated with consultation are minimised

In Progress

Progress against this action: Meetings have been held with SEPA regarding consultation processes and procedures.



The following next steps are proposed: Discussions with other consultees will be assessed in terms of priority and progressed accordingly.

Action 6: Progress fuller implementation of the Uniform system with particular reference to the Consultee Access functionality

Outcome: Greater efficiency in the management of planning application consultations

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed: Other

The following next steps are proposed: Action is awaiting renewal of the Council's IDOX contract and general progress on national level digital planning work.

Action 7: Establish a Planning Improvement Monitoring Group to oversee implementation of the NPIF Improvement Actions

Outcome: NPIF actions are effectively progressed and monitored by an appropriate team

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The group has been established, an initial meeting held and a forward programme of monthly meetings set up. This gives the service a mechanism for monitoring progress on all the improvement plan actions.



Action 8: Undertake a review of the Scheme of Delegation including consultation with Elected Members/legal officers and secure Council approval for any recommended changes

Outcome: Delegation arrangements for different applications and consents are appropriate and proportionate, leading to more efficient processing and improved performance

In Progress

Progress against this action: A review of arrangements in other planning authorities has been undertaken to understand current practice. Extensive consultation has taken place with elected members.

The following next steps are proposed: Agree a draft revised scheme of delegation and seek approval by full Council (report to Council in December), and thereafter Scottish Ministers.

Action 9: Deliver a programme of non-mandatory training for all Elected Members on specific planning topics

Outcome: Members are better equipped to make informed decisions related to planning

In Progress

Progress against this action: A programme of training events has been delivered. A list of additional topics to be covered has been agreed.

The following next steps are proposed: Deliver further training opportunities according to demand and availability, including hydrogen and emerging technologies and affordable housing.

Action 10: Review Planning Committee report format, design, layout and content

Outcome: Reports convey information in a format that is more accessible for Elected Members and the public

In Progress

Progress against this action: A review of report structures and styles in other planning authorities has been undertaken.



The following next steps are proposed: Consider review work and draw up a list of potential changes for consideration, in the context of the wider corporate review of committee report formats which is imminent.

Action 11: Procure new corporate GIS system with new system/data administration procedures and staff training

Outcome: Staff have wider access to a more cost-efficient GIS service

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

ArcGIS Online has been procured, and training for relevant staff in planning and across the Council has been undertaken. As a result, wider corporate access to GIS mapping and functionality has been achieved.

Action 12: Integrate GIS planning datasets fully with Uniform

Outcome: Staff have access to reliable spatial constraint mapping through the Uniform system

In Progress

Progress against this action: The task has been scoped out, but implementation is awaiting the issue of UniMap Web 2.0 from IDOX.

The following next steps are proposed: UniMap Web 2.0 will be installed, enabling integration with ArcGIS Online.

Action 13: Increase enforcement capacity by recruiting full-time enforcement officer

Outcome: Better resourcing of the enforcement function

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

Full-time enforcement officer was recruited in July 2025 (increase from 0.6FTE to 1.0FTE), providing enhanced enforcement resource.



Action 14: Review systems for registration, validation, and allocation of applications

Outcome: Quicker and more efficient processing of planning applications

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- The action was set as a low or medium priority.
- We have not had the time given the quick turnaround for cohort two and three.

The following next steps are proposed: Mapping and analysis of current application registration, validation and allocation processes and staff roles.

Action 15: Review pre-application enquiry arrangements including charging, handling, and response timescales

Outcome: An improved and more transparent service offered to applicants

In Progress

Progress against this action: A review of existing practice has been commenced by graduate and planning officer.

The following next steps are proposed: Complete review, assess key issues which have emerged, and identify any relevant actions.

Action 16: Restart an annual or biannual Developers forum

Outcome: Improved communication between the planning service and its customers

In Progress

Progress against this action: Initial internal discussions held on format, presentation topics, invitees and venue.

The following next steps are proposed: Confirm date and arrangements for restart of Developers Forum for early 2026.



Action 17: Review customer satisfaction/feedback survey and processes

Outcome: Improved communication between the planning service and its customers

Not Started

Reason(s) action has not been progressed:

- We have not had the time given other priorities.
- The action was set as a low or medium priority.

The following next steps are proposed: The intention is to await the NPIF customer care review due in November before embarking on review of local practice.

Action 18: Produce project plan for LDP3 Proposed Plan Strategy and Site Choices consultation

Outcome: Consultation at this stage of plan preparation is effective

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

The project plan has steered the approach and content of our 'How Should Our Places Grow?'. The consultation has now been concluded, yielding over 300 responses to the survey and insightful conversations with the public at live drop-in events across the Council area, which will assist in the development of the LDP3 Proposed Plan.

Action 19: Update and expand LPP support resources

Outcome: Improved LPP guidance and resources available to community bodies

Complete

What was the outcome of completing this action?

What was the outcome of completing this action: Community bodies have access to up to date guidance, links to all relevant documents and a range of useful templates, all in a single location. Engagement with several community bodies who are preparing LPPs has demonstrated the usefulness of these resources.



Action 20: Develop a package of planning and regulatory information to assist potential business start-ups in Falkirk Town Centre

Outcome: Better quality development in the Town Centre and minimising delays to investors

In Progress

Progress against this action: Initial discussions have taken place with Economic Development officers to confirm the usefulness of such resources.

The following next steps are proposed: Initiate discussions with 'Falkirk Delivers' (BID) to understand the scope of information needed. Identify a resource to design and deliver the new resources.

Action 21: Improve the processes around the handling of developer contributions, including process mapping, consideration of software tools, risk identification, recording and reporting of contributions

Outcome: An efficient and publicly transparent developer contributions regime

In Progress

Progress against this action: The cross-service Planning Obligation Monitoring Group has been revived, and is co-ordinating and allocating responsibility for the various improvement elements, as well as monitoring spending of contributions. A process map has been completed, highlighting the complexity of the application journey and the interaction between stakeholders. A draft template has been prepared for recording the information required by Section 36(5) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1997 as amended.

The following next steps are proposed: The process map will be used to develop a spreadsheet connecting planning, legal and finance processes to assist tracking of triggers and transactions. If this tool is not fit for purpose, bespoke software packages will be explored. A risk register will be developed based on the process map. The draft information register to meet statutory requirements will be finalised once the relevant legislative provisions have been commenced. A dedicated web page and an interactive map and dashboard will be developed once other actions are completed.



Action 22: Review the process and format of the Housing Land Audit (HLA) in the light of the revised Scottish Government HLA Guidance

Outcome: Compliance of the HLA with the Scottish Government's Guidance

In Progress

Progress against this action: Some changes recommended by the HLA guidance have been made to 2024/25 HLA (e.g. change in audit period to March).

The following next steps are proposed: Identify and implement further changes through the forthcoming 2025/26 HLA.

Peer Collaborative Review Follow Up

As part of the pilot, each planning authority held a peer collaborative review workshop. This brought together key stakeholders and customers to discuss and provide constructive feedback on the improvement action plan.

Status of the peer review follow-up meeting: We are planning to send an email to update on progress.

Additional information: Our peer review workshop was held as recently as April 2025, so we consider that an email update would be most appropriate at the present time.

