

Customer Feedback Annual Report Adult Services 2015/16

Feedback and Insight Team, Commissioning Support
September 2016



1. Introduction

This report considers the customer feedback Shropshire Council's adult services received between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

In addition to the annual report, Shropshire Council prepares quarterly customer feedback reports. These are designed to develop a clear understanding of customer experience and support us in our work to address concerns and implement actions in order to achieve service improvement.

Regulations provide a framework for those handling a complaint relating to a local authority's social care functions - this includes directly provided services and independent services provided through commissioning. The actions, omissions or decisions of the local authority in respect of a social care function are covered; the regulations do not, however, apply more generally to independent providers. People who are paying for their own social care (self-funders) may complain to the local authority, for example about assessment, or failure to assess. Services people have arranged or purchased themselves are not covered but the local authority could be challenged if they commission those services. For example, on why they have commissioned a sub-standard service, or whether they are performance managing contracted services sufficiently.

Complaints containing an element of social care fall under the statutory guidelines. Some complaints we receive for adult services do not relate to social care services and these are handled as corporate complaints. Those complaints are included in this report in order to provide a comprehensive overview of all complaints.

This annual report describes the compliments, comments and complaints Adult Services received in 2015/16.

Complaint

We aim to make it as easy as possible to make a complaint. A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided by the council. Family members and advocates may also make a complaint on behalf of one of our customers. We will ask for consent to ensure that the complaint is not being made against the customer's wishes.

Compliment

Many people get in touch with a compliment when the information or support they have received has exceeded their expectations. It is really helpful to learn when a service has been provided well or when a member of staff has done a great job. We like to recognise compliments alongside any complaints. It is good for us to say 'thank you' to our teams and staff members too.

Comment

Feedback about a service could be:

- a suggestion to improve it.
- a question as to whether something could be done differently.
- an idea for delivering a service differently.



2. The Complaints Process

Shropshire Council encourages users of adult services, their family members and carers to give feedback and highlight any concerns so that they may be addressed as quickly as possible. If problems cannot be resolved and the customer wishes to make a complaint, staff members offer advice on how to make a complaint.

Complaints, comments and compliments can be made by telephone, email, letter or by using our website based form. Support is also available from complaints officers based with Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

See: <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/adult-social-care-complaints/>



Complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days of being received and we let the complainant know how their complaint will be handled.

STAGE 1

The Statutory Complaints Officer will contact the appropriate Investigating Officer and ask them to investigate the complaint. The complainant will be provided with a written response within a maximum of 65 working days (for statutory complaints). In some complex cases it may take longer but we let the customer know if this extra time is needed and why. The Investigating Officer will write to explain the outcome of their investigation, any learning or actions and information outlining how to progress the complaint if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome.



STAGE 2 - Review

An Investigating Officer who is not part of the service the complaint is about, will investigate the complaint in more detail. They will decide if there is more the service can do to address the concerns raised. If the reviewing officer believes the service has done all they reasonably can do, the customer will be written to and advised of this. They will also be given information about the Local Government Ombudsman.



Ombudsman

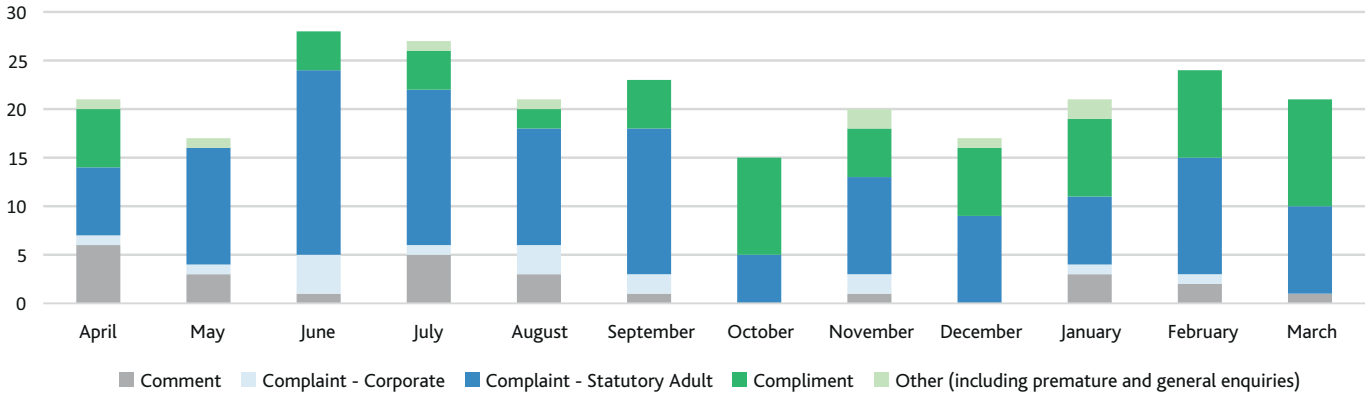
If a complaint cannot be resolved locally it can be investigated by the Ombudsman. The Council has a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Complaint responses are often complex and it can be necessary to collate, catalogue and provide a large volume of information for the LGO's consideration. Complainants can request to go to the Ombudsman without a review if they choose to.

We cannot promise to get the result complainants want, but we do make sure that complaints are dealt with as quickly and as thoroughly as possible and we work to keep customers informed of what is happening and the progress being made.

3. Customer Feedback 2015/16

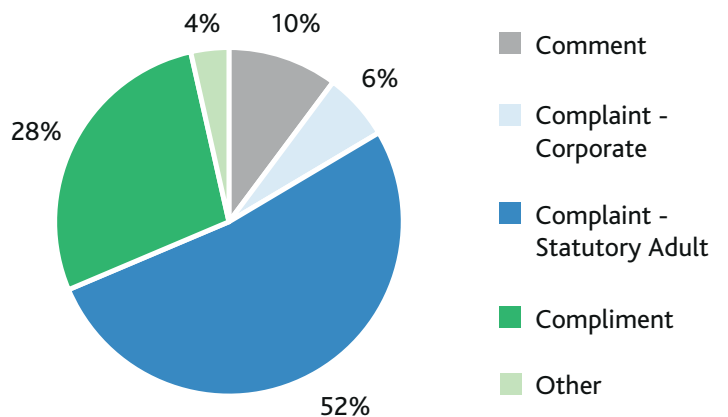
- In 2015/16 there were 255 cases of feedback recorded for Adult Services. There were:
 - 26 comments and 9 other types of feedback (including premature and general enquiries)
 - 71 compliments
 - 16 corporate complaints
 - 133 statutory complaints

Customer Feedback by Month 2015-16

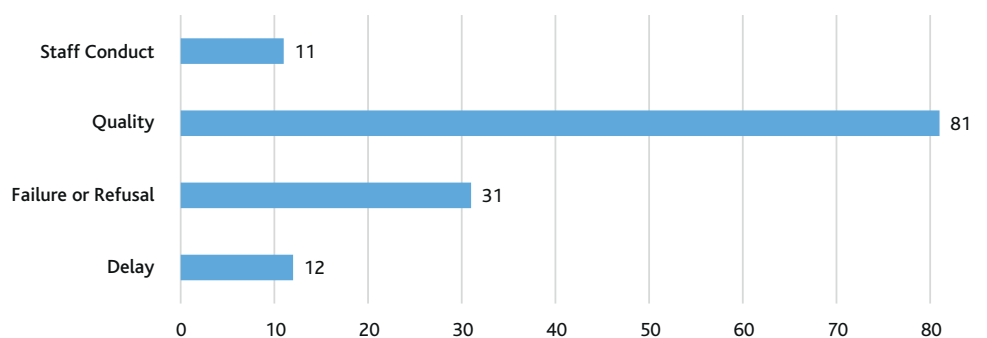


- The average number of customer feedback responses recorded per month during 2015/16 was 21.25.
- June and July 2015 saw the greatest total number of comments, compliments and complaints recorded (28 then 27).
- October 2015 saw the fewest total number of comments, compliments and complaints recorded (15).
- Quarter 3 saw the lowest levels of customer feedback received in the year. Numbers were fairly consistent across quarters 1 and 4 with an increase in quarter 2.
- The majority of customer feedback recorded is formed of complaints rather than comments or compliments (this is due to recording practice). Compliments formed 28% of all feedback. Of all the customer feedback received in the year, complaints comprised 58%.
- Of the 149 complaints received within the year, 16 were corporate complaints and 133 were statutory adult services complaints.

Types of Customer Feedback Received 2015-16

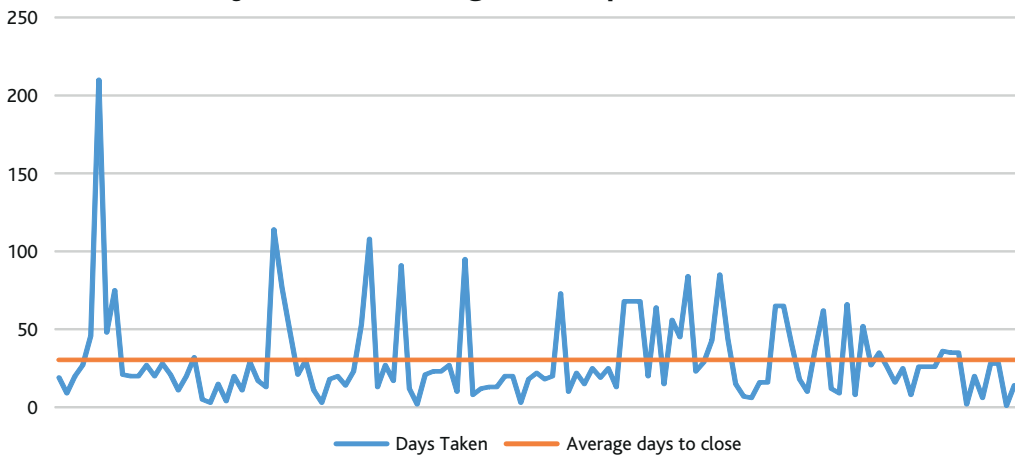


Category of Complaints Received 2015/16



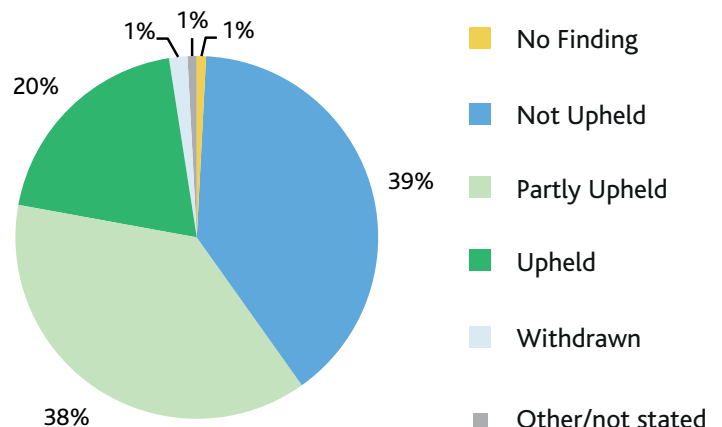
- 'Quality' was the main category under which complaints were made within the year (60%). Quality sub categories suggest a large proportion related to incorrect or unreasonable decisions, quality of the service provided and quality of the information provided. Another significant sub category (under the primary category 'failure or refusal') was 'failure or refusal to deliver a service'. Although many complaints contain multiple issues, it should be noted that due to IT system functionality only the dominant issue within a complaint can be recorded and analysed.
- During 2015/16 Adult Services took an average of 30.4 days to close stage 1 complaints. Corporate complaints were taken an average of 25.3 days to close (within the corporate timescales of 12 weeks for stages 1 and 2 (a maximum of 6 weeks for stage 1 is recommended). Statutory complaints tended to take longer (an average of 31.2 days) due to their complexity.
- During 2015/16, 122 Adult Services complaints were closed at the end of stage 1. Of those, 39% were not upheld, 38% were partly upheld and 20% (24 complaints) were upheld.

Days to close - Stage 1 Complaints 2015/16



- Quarterly reporting includes consideration of the outcome of complaints by team or service area in order to understand whether or not some teams require additional support to identify how complaints may be reduced in number. The outcome of that analysis highlights that complaints are predominantly received by the three social care teams (North, Central and South with slightly more by North) and ICS (Integrated Community Services).
- During 2015/16 very few requests were made to progress a complaint beyond stage 1. This suggests that the vast majority of complaints were resolved at stage 1. It is possible that a proportion of the stage 1 complaints remaining open at the end of the year could progress to stage 2. Page 10 takes a closer look at the complaints that were closed at the review and LGO stages during the year.
- Overall, Adult Services have performed well, effectively dealing with stage 1 complaints and keeping numbers of complaints progressing beyond stage 1 low. However, there is still a recognition that the learning from complaints may help to reduce the number of complaints made in future. Learning is explored in more detail on pages 12 and 13.

Outcome of Stage 1 Complaints 2015-16



4. Annual Comparison 2014/15 and 2015/16

Number of compliments - increased

- Compliments were not well reported in 2014/15 and the last year has seen significant improvement in the way compliments are recognised and recorded. In 2015/16 there were 71 compliments (only 6 were recorded in 2014/15).
- Compliments tend to be fewer in number over the summer months but average at 6.45 month.



Number of complaints - increased slightly

- The number of complaints received by Adult Services has remained fairly stable between 2014/15 and 2015/16. In 2014/15 126 complaints were received and in 2015/16 this increased to 146.



Nature of complaints - problems remain similar

- When comparing the main complaints categories for 2014/15 with the last year, it is possible to see that the spread of complaints across the main categories remains very similar.
 - Quality remains the main category of complaints with 81 in 2015/16 and 66 in 2014/15. 'Incorrect decision' remains the dominant sub category (28 complaints) followed by 22 complaints for 'quality of service provided'.
 - Delays (making a decision, providing information or a service) have reduced slightly in the last year.
 - Complaints relating to 'failure or refusal' remain at similar levels (2 more in 2015/16).
 - Complaints relating to staff conduct remain at similar levels (2 more in 2015/16).



Days to close - timescales remain similar

- In 2014/15 it took an average of 29.2 days to close complaints made to Adult Services. In 2015/16 it took an average of 30.4 days to close complaints. It should be noted that a small number of long-running cases can significantly impact on the annual average.



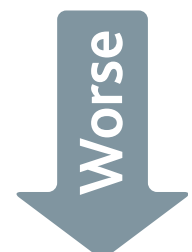
Outcome of complaints - Fewer complaints are upheld

- In 2014/15 29% of complaints were upheld and 35% were partly upheld. In 2015/16 the percentage of upheld complaints reduced to 20%, and 38% of complaints were partly upheld. In 2014/15 33% were not upheld and in 2015/16 the proportion was 39%.



Complaints Progressing Beyond Stage 1 - has increased

- During 2014/15 7 complaints progressed beyond stage 1 (3 were upheld, 2 were partly upheld and the remainder were withdrawn or remained open at the end of the year). In 2015/16 a total of 19 reviews and Local Government Ombudsman complaints were closed (but of those many were opened the previous year).



5. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council Adult Services received 71 compliments during 2015/16. Many compliments related to compliments for staff members who had provided customers and their families with a high standard of care and support.

"I wanted to put on record my thanks to you. I now have a Blue Badge, splendid access to my garden and a seat and toilets I can rise from with ease and in safety, not to mention a state of the art door key, so I no longer miss my callers. Added to this, I heard on Thursday that my claim for Attendance Allowance has been successful. I am so grateful for your recommendation to seek help from Age UK and for your letter of support."

"X was very professional in her approach whilst compassionate and understanding".

The customer has written in to compliment the way they have been cared for: "X was patient, considerate, and all needs were looked at, and dealt with admirably and speedily. Thank you very much".

"I was seeking advice on support for my wife's aunt... as her physical and mental conditioned worsened. Initially I found it difficult to identify a person who could assist but when a response was made I was most impressed with the competent and sympathetic way difficult topics were handled".

"..encountered nothing but the highest professionalism and care from everyone" and "made an almost unbearable situation for our family bearable".

"We would like to say how much we appreciate the adaptations to our property, it has enabled us to live as independently as possible and with much less worry".

"I would like to thank everyone concerned with organising my father's wet room. This is going to make his life so much easier and also help my mum who cares for my father. All the people I have spoken too have been so polite and helpful. Communication with myself and parents was excellent. Thank you."

"Thank you for all your hard work in coming up with a care package and the funding to assist my grandparents in caring for my mum. They are so much happier since the change and they are starting to enjoy their retirement again, which is thanks largely to your hard work ... I wish to express my gratitude ...and to hopefully get across to you what a significant improvement you have made."

"It is people like [P2P social worker] who bring happiness in lives of others."



6. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council Adult Services received 149 complaints during 2015/16. The analysis on pages 5 and 6 provides an overview of complaints and how they were handled. More information is provided on pages 11 to 14 in order to identify the areas in need of attention and the work that can take place to make further improvements. Some example complaints have been included below in order to illustrate the type of complaint being received. In most cases the wording has been changed slightly in order to reduce the number of words used and ensure anonymity and confidentiality. It should be noted that the complaints are the initial views held by the complainants, and in many cases the response provided by Shropshire Council will have helped to alleviate those concerns (few complaints progress following a response).

X has "received several unnecessary and distressing letters" since his mother's death. X comments on "weaknesses in operational processes" and suggests they could be reviewed and changed to prevent reoccurrence. X is unhappy about a delay in the response. Complaint – Upheld.

The customer has not received a response following the letter he received informing him that he would receive a response from the relevant officer. He has since received an invoice for his mother's residential care and wrote back to explain the circumstances. To date no response has been received. Complaint – Upheld.

Over the last 3 years the customer has had 8 reassessments all by different Social Workers and OTs. The customer feels that each person that re-assesses is not forward planning. His condition is progressive and when he identifies things that he will need they are not implemented soon enough. A request for evening support has been turned down so he cannot eat because there is a chance he may choke, he limits drinks because he cannot safely use the bathroom on his own. Complaint – Not Upheld.

X feels that social services "did not help her in her time of need when there was a safeguarding issue". X also feels that her social worker is "useless" and is not much help to her. Complaint – Not Upheld.

"Unclear information provided in respect of whether my mother was self funding her care or not. I have since been informed that my mother now owes £50,000." Complaint – Partly Upheld.

The concern is that an invoice was sent for care; during a time that no care was provided due to a stay in hospital. Complaint – Upheld.

X has recently been registered blind and the family have been advised that a rehabilitation officer is not available for 3 months. X's husband has been identified as her carer but was not offered a carers assessment. Complaint – Partly Upheld.

"My 84 year old mother has been in hospital for four weeks and for that time she has been medically fit to go home. In those 4 weeks Shropshire has failed to put in a care package that would facilitate her coming home." Complaint – Partly Upheld.



7. Complaints progressing beyond Stage 1

Shropshire Council's Adult Services saw 14 complaints progress beyond stage 1 during 2015/16. This forms only 9% of all the complaints received within the year. This suggests that complaints are being effectively handled at Stage 1, and that few complainants are left feeling that their complaint had not been resolved. Stage 1 complaint responses include information to ensure complainants understand how they can raise concerns if they do not feel their complaints has been adequately addressed and options for progressing their complaint to the next stage. Looking at the progression of complaints can be an important part of customer feedback analysis.

It is best practice to review complaints under Shropshire Council's Adult Services Complaint's Procedure before LGO investigations are carried out but complainants can request to go to the LGO after initial response. The data below highlights the outcomes at all stages (review and LGO). It should be noted that those outcomes may relate to the same complaints at different stages of investigation. During 2015/16 there were closed investigations for (including those opened within the year and cases opened in previous year and closed in the year):

- 7 reviews
- 12 Local Government Ombudsman investigations

Of the complaints above:

- 1 was upheld
- 10 were partly upheld
- 8 were not upheld

Examples are included below (some details have been removed and wording altered in order to anonymise the complaints):

Example 1 - Upheld

This was described as a complex case within the complaint record. The complaint related to delays in conducting a financial assessment following the customer's capital falling below the threshold. This meant that the customer continued to pay the full costs of care and did not receive a contribution from the Council. The council did not consider the availability of alternative suitable accommodation (less expensive accommodation) which meant the customer's family had to pay a top-up for the customer to remain in a nursing home. Following the complaint the Care Team put funding in place and paid back-dated care funding to the nursing home. However there were delays in the refund to the customer. The Ombudsman considered the complaint and it was upheld. The Ombudsman's finding was that the council delayed completing a financial assessment for care costs by almost a year, and that the council could have completed a provisional assessment sooner. The family have now received a refund.

Example 2 - Not Upheld

The complaint relates to a misunderstanding around payment for care. The complainant's father had been placed in respite care after his wife, his main carer, suffered a stroke. He did not settle in the respite placement and so the family decided to move him to a more expensive care home nearer to his home.

The social worker recommended that care could be provided at home with support from carers. However the family disagreed and felt this would put too much pressure on his wife, as the main carer. The family did not understand that the placement was temporary, they believed Shropshire Council was paying a contribution and a debt of £18,000 was built up.

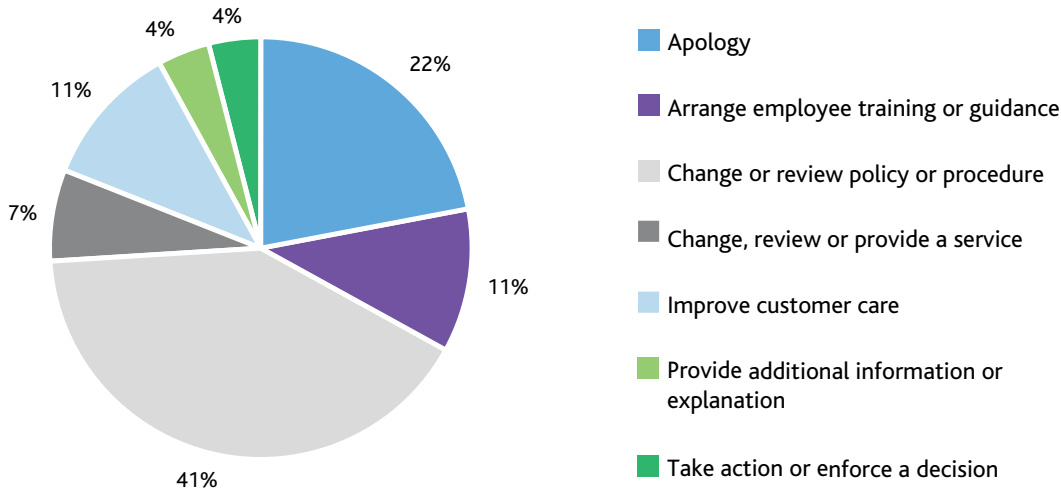
After the service user's care needs changed a reassessment was undertaken. It was agreed that the patient needed to be close to home and it was explained that if the family wished him to remain at the care home they would have to support 3rd party top up.

The complaint was not upheld. Reasons included that only respite care had been agreed. The family had agreed the move without the involvement from the Social Work Team. The assessment highlighted that the criteria for residential care was not met and that support could be provided to allow the complainant's father to remain living at home.

8. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council’s Adult Services recorded learning and/or actions against 54% of complaints in 2015/16. 21% of complaints had a learning point recorded and 31% of complaints had an action recorded (3% included a detailed comment but not a category for overall learning or action). Limitations in the system used to record complaints mean that the ability to easily record and report multiple learning and action points is not currently in place but has been identified as a future requirement. For that reason only the primary action and learning point is included below.

Improvement Actions Recorded 2015/16

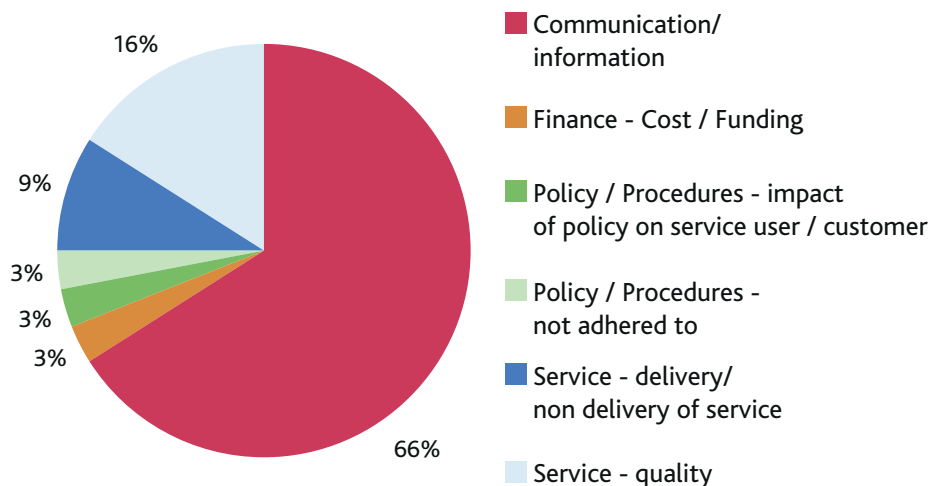


- Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2015/16:
 - 41% were related to actions to change or review a policy or procedure
 - 22% were to make an apology
 - The categories ‘improve customer care’ and ‘arrange employee training or guidance’ both saw 11% of the total actions recorded.
 - Fewer than 5 actions were recorded under the categories ‘change, review or provide a service’, ‘provide additional information or explanation’ and ‘take action or enforce a decision’.

- Learning points recorded during the year included:

- 66% of learning points concerning the communication and information that had been provided.
- 16% were related to learning around service quality.
- 9% of complaints led to learning about the delivery or non delivery of a service.

Learning Points Recorded 2015/16



More detail about the learning obtained from complaints is included on the following page.

9. Example Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council's Adult Services has worked throughout 2015/16 to understand learning from complaints and take action to minimise the number of complaints that will be received in 2016/17. Examples are shown below (wording has been changed slightly for confidentiality/ brevity).

The learning has been a recognition that X and X could have been communicated with in a more compassionate and supportive manner, as they were in a situation where they required support and guidance.

A more robust decision-making system is needed for future deprivation of capital decisions. We will be setting up an independent panel to review all decisions/appeals in order to eliminate the issues that have been encountered within the complaint.

There is a recognition that improvement needs to be made to ensure people raising safeguarding concerns are communicated with more effectively.

We have met with the agency manager and raised the issue of the missed calls and the standard of care provided. A number of agreed actions have been put in place with the provider and we have agreed to meet again to ensure these actions are carried out.

There is a recognition that if a number of people are visiting, then it may be feasible for another meeting to be arranged in order not to overwhelm the service user (this was the concern raised by the complainant).

The Financial Assessment Team has introduced a case management system. New cases are now monitored at fixed 4 and 8 week points. Exceptions reporting has been introduced to highlight and correct process failings.

There is a recognition that improvement is required in how Best Interest Meetings are conducted.

"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning"

Quote from Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft

I didn't really want to make a complaint.

I hoped that if I told the council about my experiences, lessons would be learnt, things would change and other people wouldn't experience the same situation again.



10. Recommendations

This annual report helps to highlight a few areas where performance may still be improved with the aim of reducing the number of complaints received by Adult Services. Recommendations for areas of attention during 2016/17 are included below.

- 1 There are patterns within the complaints being recorded (customers are making complaints about similar elements of service). The way in which complaints are categorised and recorded on the council's complaints system means that it can be difficult to recognise common issues but a review of all the complaints has shown that the common themes for 2015/16 were:
 - Complaints concerning charges for care and invoices received.
 - Lack of, or poor communication (many relate to lack of early information concerning invoices).
 - Reductions in level of care/support.
 - The time taken between requesting and receiving support (delays).
 - Lack of support when moving between services.
 - Quality of assessments.

It is recommended that these themes are explored to see if there are any additional actions that may help to reduce the incidence of complaints in 2016/17. Currently the most common category is 'Quality'. Sub categories suggest a large proportion related to incorrect or unreasonable decisions, quality of the service provided and quality of the information provided.

- 2 Response timescales have remained similar with only a very tiny increase since 2014/15. Although this is not currently a particular concern (averages remain within target) it should remain an area of focus within quarterly reporting and be monitored to prevent any more increases in the average time taken to respond to complaints.
- 3 It is recommended that work takes place to maintain current good practice in the handling of stage 1 complaints. Thorough investigations and comprehensive responses mean that only a small proportion of complaints progress beyond stage 1. Numbers of complaints progressing beyond stage 1 doubled from 2014/15 levels (7 to 14) but remain a small proportion of all complaints received by Adult Services.
- 4 The current and increasing financial pressures being experienced by local authorities are likely to have an impact on staff members. Although Adult Services have a skilled and experienced workforce, it is recommended that all teams are encouraged to identify when they are under pressure and work with others to find ways of ensuring that the customer experience is not negatively impacted upon.
- 5 Shropshire Council works to maintain a culture of honest communication without blame. Things can, and do, go wrong from time to time despite best efforts to maintain high standards of service provision. Maintaining a culture of support for staff members so that complaints are turned into a more positive experience through learning and team support is essential. This should form a long term, ongoing recommendation.



Recommendations continued...

- 6 Only just over half of complaints have learning and/or actions recorded against them. Work should now take place to encourage all investigating officers to clearly include any learning and action points within response letters so that these may be recorded and collated. This will assist Adult Services in its work to implement service improvement and share learning across teams. When more robust action is required it is recommended that action plans are used to record and communicate progress.
- 7 It is recommended that all Adult Services teams are encouraged to improve the recording of comments. Currently comments are generally only recorded when they are directly linked to a complaint but, if more comments could be captured (particularly those related to suggestions for service improvement), it would help in further understanding learning and improvement.
- 8 Recent guidance published by the Local Government Ombudsman has highlighted the need for local authorities to make improvements within the management of provider complaints. As a result, Adult Services teams are asked to ensure they report provider complaints to the feedback and insight team (email: customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk). (Other actions are also being undertaken as part of a more focused project).
- 9 It is recommended that checks are made to ensure robust complaints procedures and complaints reporting is clearly specified as a requirement in all new contract arrangements and service agreements. This can be an important insight within the commissioning cycle.
- 10 Over the coming months it may be helpful for Adult Services to work with the Council's feedback and insight team within commissioning support to explore whether there may be benefits in bringing together wider, less formal customer feedback alongside complaints, comments and compliments data. This could assist with learning and service improvement.
- 11 It is recommended that staff within Adult Services review their work to promote the complaints process. It is recommended that regular checks are undertaken to ensure public information is available to allow members of the public to easily provide feedback.
- 12 It is recommended that close working with the council's Statutory Complaints Officer is maintained in order to implement best practice.
- 13 It is recommended that Shropshire Council widely promotes best practice messages including the recognition that an apology is not an admission that something was wrong with the service provided or actions taken. An apology can be made that a customer felt it necessary to make a formal complaint and did not have a good customer experience. Over the next 12 months work will take place to support the inclusion of complaints handling within staff training and induction.



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