



Place Overview Committee

12 July 2018

Item

8

Public

Managing Highways Customer Services and Complaints

Responsible Officer

Chris Edwards, Head of Infrastructure and Communities

chris.edwards@shropshire.gov.uk

01743 258912

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of how Shropshire Council manages customer service requests and complaints relating to highways. It also provides an overview of the council's new customer relationship management systems, and how these will transform how the council manages its highways customer services and complaints.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Appraise the strengths and weaknesses of the current and proposed systems for customer services requests and complaints.
- 2.1 Make recommendations to support the ongoing development of the new customer relationship management system.

3.0 Opportunities and risks

- 3.1 Transforming Shropshire Council's customer services and complaints systems could deliver the improvements listed from paragraph 7.3 of this report.
- 3.2 Effective customer service and complaints resolution mean that people who call us receive the information or service they require in a timely manner. Getting things right, or putting them right quickly, also saves time and money, as well as enhancing the council's reputation.
- 3.3 Implementing any new system risks disrupting the ability of the council to respond effectively to service requests. Any new system also risks either cost overruns or a failure to deliver agreed savings. Scrutiny should satisfy itself that the council has adequate project management and risk mitigation in place.
- 3.4 If the programme of works should, for any reason, cease to be funded, the deliverables set out in section 7 of this report and other related works will be difficult to see through.

4.0 Financial assessment

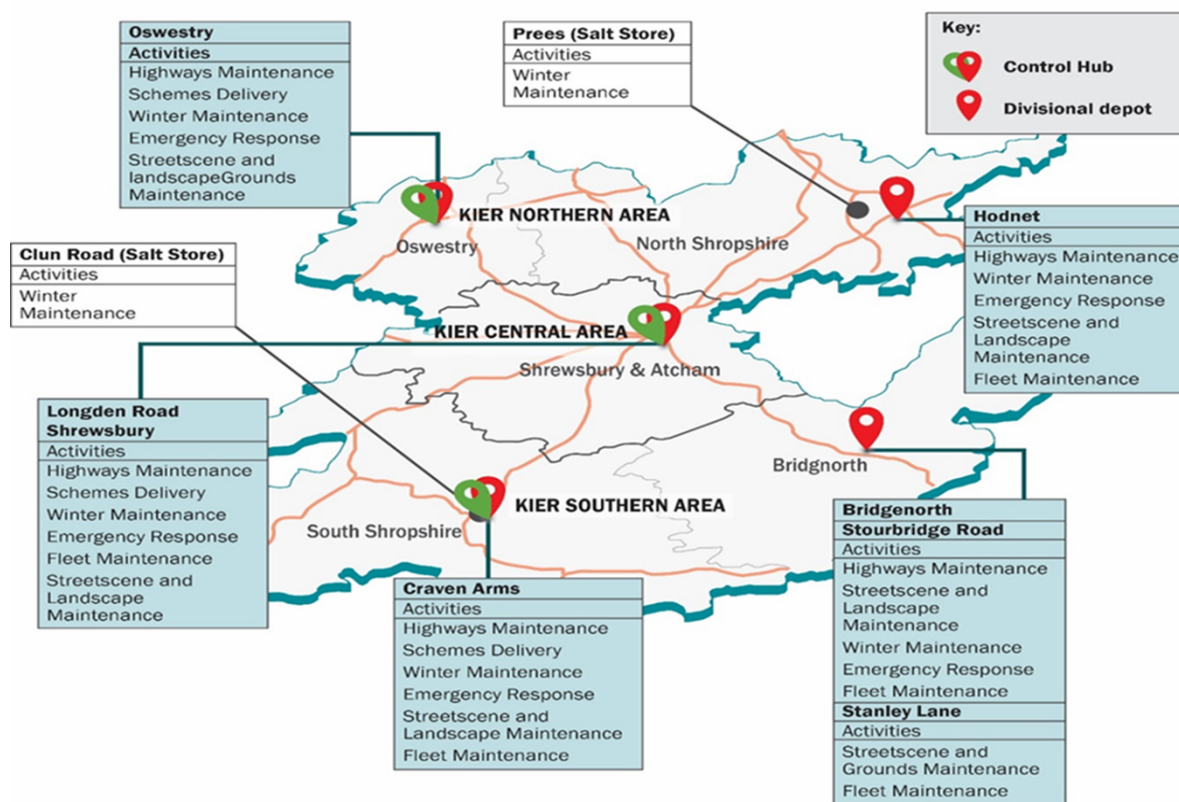
- 4.1 This report is primarily for information, and requires no decision that would entail a financial assessment. However, any recommendations the committee make could have a financial implication that would need to be assessed.

5.0 Highways customer service

- 5.1 Highways and Transport is a service that delivers its responsibilities seven days per week, 24 hours per day and 365 days per year. Highways and Transport receive on average 2,500 contacts per month.

The service currently is a Level 3 Highways Authority (highest rank is 3) and submits an annual self-assessment against 22 national recommendations, which include service satisfaction and quality.

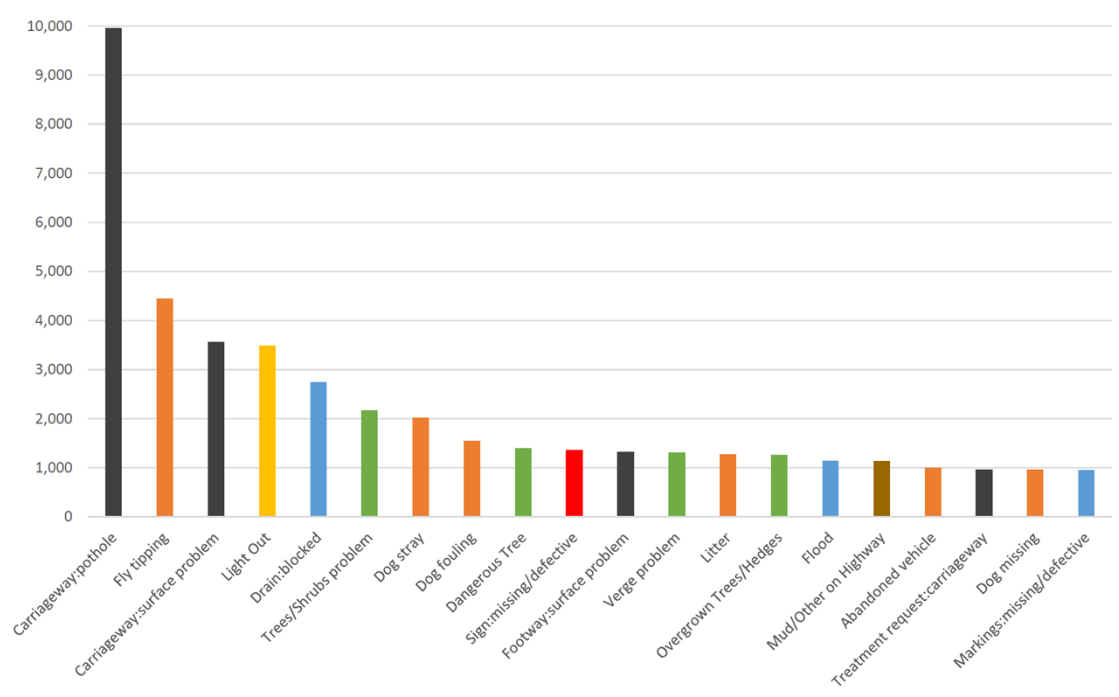
- 5.2 The service is predominantly delivered via five operational depots:



- 5.3 All depots provide ability, via Shropshire Highways (Shropshire Council, Kier and WSP) to provide responses and services *within the resource allocations and responsibilities assigned*. Operational decisions are required in a dynamic service environment, and often these are 'risk based' decisions, as demand for services and responses always outweighs supply
- 5.4 The customer's route into the service is preferably via the Customer Service Centre (CSC). The request or concern is placed onto the Confirm Information Management System for Highways and Transport, and the customer service

request is sent through to the appropriate responsible technician. As part of their responsible duties, the technician will investigate the issues and respond to the request, either by updating the text on the system, or contacting the customer directly if a request for contact has been made. Once a resolution is made, the case is closed down.

- 5.5 The chart below (extrapolated from Confirm) demonstrates the most common enquiries received for highways from June 2015 until May 2018.



- 5.6 Thus, every month a dashboard of key indicators is placed upon the Highways and Transport web pages of which are publically accessible. The latest dashboard indicator is demonstrated below.

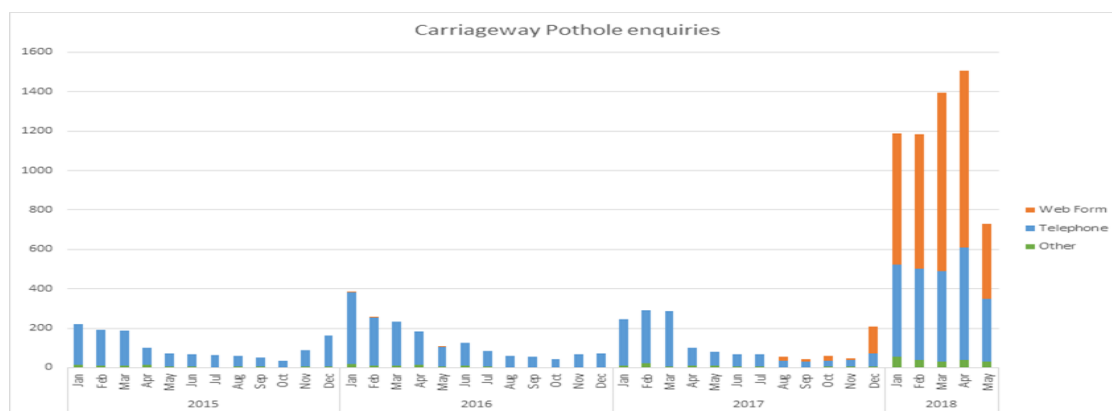
5.7

Highway Asset Management Internal Performance Dashboard

Our asset management mission					
To provide a highway network that enables Shropshire to flourish by investing to give great value now and in the future and giving our customer's confidence in the decisions we make.					
		Performance	Alm	Level of service	
				Currently we are	Aspiring to be at least
Delivering the asset management mission					
Giving our customers confidence in the decisions we make		84%	100%	Good	Excellent
Investing to give great value now and in the future		93%	100%	Good	Excellent
Confidence	What we are doing				
	Responding to customers promptly	91%	95%	Good	Excellent
	What we are achieving				
	Customer satisfaction with the condition of highways	40%	45%	Good	Excellent
	Customer satisfaction with highways maintenance	53%	57%	Good	Excellent
Great Value	Informing customers about actions taken to repair roads	21%	28%	Good	Excellent
	What we are doing				
	Prioritising funding using an asset management led approach	65%	67%	Good	Excellent
	What we are achieving				
	Percentage of A class roads which should be considered for maintenance	4%	6%	Excellent	Good
	Percentage of B & C class roads which should be considered for maintenance	9%	12%	Good	Good
	Percentage of unclassified roads which should be considered for maintenance	16%	22%	Good	Fair
	Percentage of footways which should be considered for maintenance	16%	20%	Good	Good
	BCI rating of our bridge stock (100% – best, 0% – worst)	82%	80%	Good	Good
	Street lighting that is exceeding its design life	28%	10%	Fair	Good
	Percentage of nights in which sufficient street lighting is working	12%	100%	Poor	Excellent
	Mitigating high risk flood locations by schemes within three years	57%	99%	Fair	Excellent

5.8

Information is available to the public through the service web-page, as are satisfaction levels and other service data. This capture of data onto the Confirm system, allows users to extrapolate, integrate, store and retrieve service data, and allows numerous reports to be produced, from a number of search filters, typically the number of pot hole enquiries, as demonstrated below, and also demonstrates the methods, web based, telephone, and other that are used to contact us.



5.9

There is a human element, in that the local technician needs to make a judgement on the information available and whether the request is valid, for example if requested repairs are on an adopted road. If the work requires action a works order is raised, the priority will depend on the severity, risk and nature of the work.

- 5.10 If a customer raises a complaint, this will be actioned through the complaints team, and the responsible officer will investigate the issue and respond within the allocated timeframe. Complaints can range from simple issues to more complicated concerns that may not be service issues, but arise because of corporate decisions or legislation. This area of information is identified and as part of the service data.

It is important to differentiate between a service request (for example can a tree be pruned) and a complaint (for example the service has not done something it is reasonably expected to do). This distinction is not clear and can be blurred. For example, the Highways and Transport contract has to be reduced to a maximum of £21.2 million per annum to meet budgetary constraints as the tender received during the procurement process was higher. Approval from Cabinet to reduce the costs by contract mechanisms was provided.

Also, as the current budgetary factors that have required a change of approach for the current and following financial year especially for capital budgets. The revenue budget allocated for road and bridge maintenance, street lighting, footway repair and cyclical maintenance activities declined and is only now above the level of 2015/16.

- 5.11 To provide an example of this the annual highways programme of circa. £20 million is derived from data or service intelligence such as accidents and complaints.



Thus, highways utilises this data facility along with intelligence to programme work, this also allows performance data to be publically available.

5.12 In addition to the formal contact detailed above, service requests and requests for information from:

- Members
- Town and Parish Councils
- Residents
- Businesses
- Interest groups
- Associations
- MPs

5.13 Highways and Transport is also governed and operates within the parameters of the following key documents. The National Code of Practice for Highways Authorities is designed to promote integrated asset management for highway infrastructure based on a risk-based approach to local service levels. The review of existing guidance has provided an opportunity not only to update advice to reflect the latest developments in the maintenance sector but also to bring a fundamental change in the way highway infrastructure is managed in the United Kingdom, through the adoption of a risk-based approach.

The document states that 'a risk-based approach should be adopted for all aspects of highway infrastructure maintenance, including setting levels of

service, inspections, responses, resilience, priorities and programmed.

- 5.14 Authorities are encouraged to develop appropriate records and make a detailed inventory of highways assets and keep the quality, currency, appropriateness and completeness of all data supporting asset management under regular review. A network hierarchy, or a series of related hierarchies, should be defined which include all elements of the highway network, including carriageways, footways, cycle routes, structures, lighting and rights of way. The hierarchy should take into account current and expected use, resilience, and local economic and social factors such as industry, schools, hospitals and similar.

- 5.15 Further our key contracts such as:

- Kier: £21.2 million annually
- WSP £2.5 million annually
- Dyniqa £500,000 annually

are managed via national agreed and established contract procedures known as NEC 3.

- 5.16 The New Engineering Contract (NEC), or NEC Engineering and Construction Contract, is a formalised system created by the Institution of Civil Engineers that guides the drafting of documents on civil engineering and construction projects for the purpose of obtaining tenders, awarding and administering contracts. As such they legally define the responsibilities and duties of Employers (who commission work) and Contractors (who carry out work) in the Works Information. The contract consists of two key parts the Contract Data part one (Data provided by the Employer) and Contract Data part two (Data provided by the Contractor). Several approaches are included making it a family of options. It is used in the UK and internationally in countries including New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong and South Africa.

6.0 Highways complaints

- 6.1 A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided by the council, whether that service is provided directly by the council, a Contractor or Commissioned service. Complaints can provide valuable learning points which helps to improve service delivery.

- 6.2 A complaint is not a request for a service. It is expected that customers will have given the Council the opportunity to address initial enquiries and provide a service before a complaint can be made. It can be difficult to determine whether a case is a complaint or a service issue and sometimes re-categorisation is necessary once initial investigations have begun.

6.3 Complaints Process

Shropshire Council encourages users of its services and their representatives 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. Support is also available from complaints officers based with Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

- Telephone us: 0345 678 9000
- Email us at: customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk
- Write to: Feedback and Insight Team, Shropshire Council, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND.
- Fill in the customer feedback form on the council's website. Use the 'make a complaint' button at:
<https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/corporate-complaints/>

- 6.4 Shropshire Council, in common with many local authorities, manages complaints using a three-stage process. It acknowledges complaints within a maximum of five working days of being received, letting the complainant know how their complaint will be handled.

STAGE 1

An appropriate Investigating Officer will be allocated to the case and asked to investigate the complaint. This is usually a manager within the service area the complaint relates to. The complainant will be provided with a written response within approximately 6 weeks (12 weeks is the timescale for stage 1 and stage 2 responses and 6 weeks is usually allocated to each). In some complex cases it may take longer than 6 weeks at Stage 1 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 will investigate the complaint in more detail. The investigating officer is often the Complaints Monitoring Officer but it may also be a more senior manager, or commissioner. 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 and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO). Responses are often complex, lengthy and require a large volume of appendices to be collated, catalogued and returned to the LGO. Complainants can request to go to the Ombudsman without a review if they choose to.

6.5 **Highways Complaints and Customer Feedback**

(NB – the 2017/18 data has been based on the quarterly reporting. There may be some variation between this data and the data used in the annual report due to case records being finalised after the Q4 reporting period).

The following tables and charts contain data for two financial years between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018.

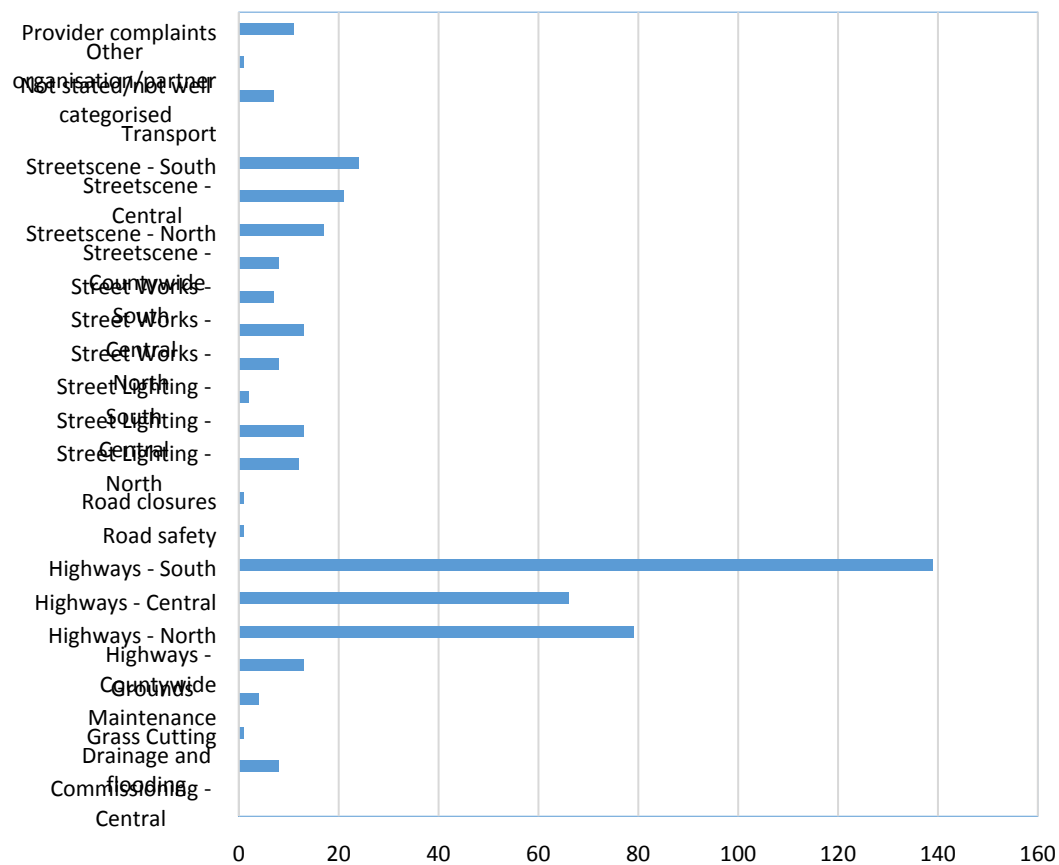
- Over the 2 years there were 457 complaints: 183 in 2016/17, and 274 in 2017/18.
- Numbers of compliments remained similar over the 2 years (78 in 2016/17 and 79 in 2017/18). More complaints are received for Highways and Streetscene than for any other service area.
- Highways and Streetscene complaints formed 20% of all the Council's complaints during the financial year 2016/17.
- The pattern has remained similar throughout the quarterly reporting in 2017/18 and it is anticipated that the 2017/18 Annual Report will highlight a very similar overall percentage for the service area.

6.6 The table below illustrates the types of customer feedback received by Highways and Streetscene for the two financial years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

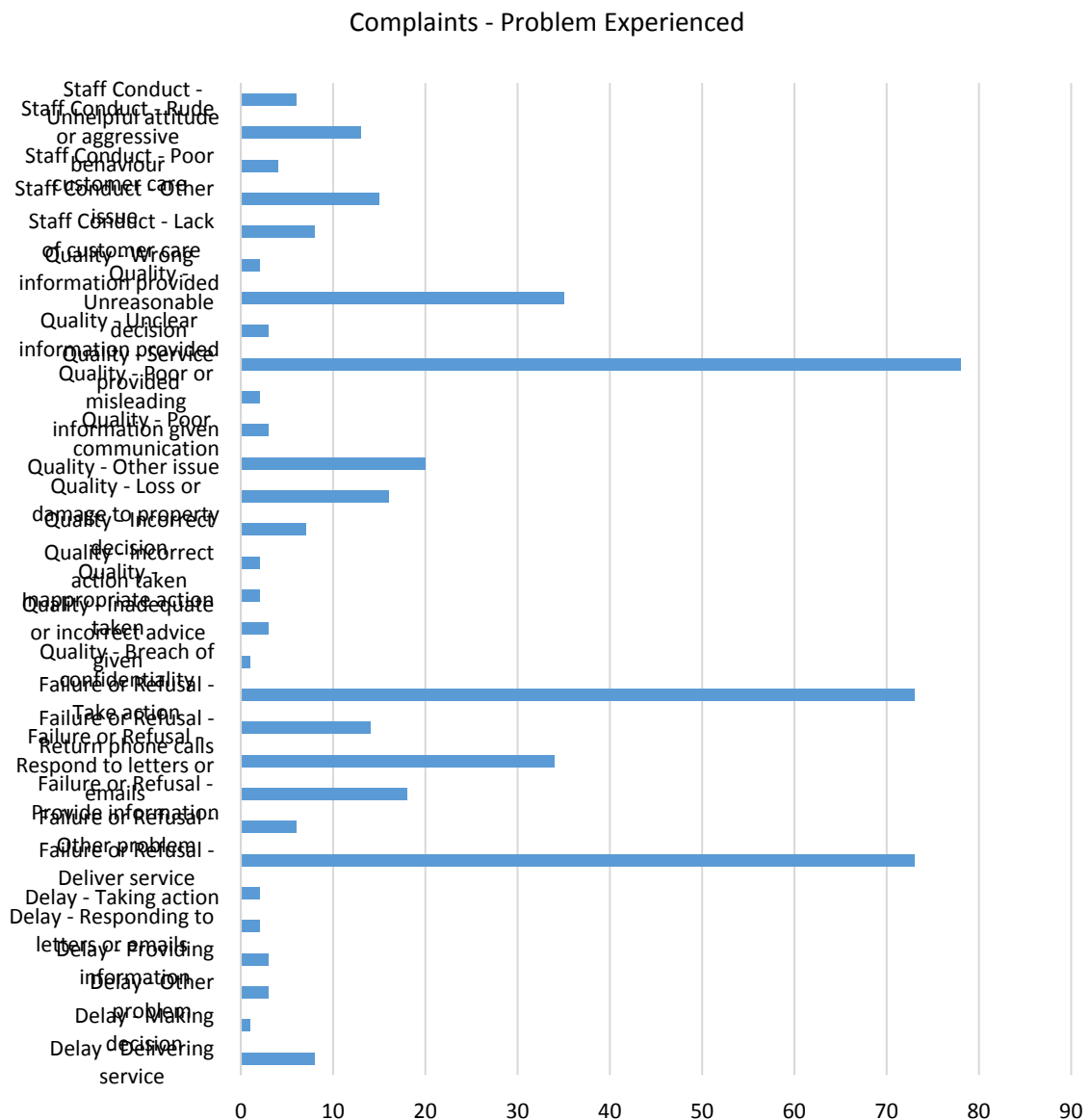
Type	2016/17	%	2017/18	%
Comment	69	20	169	31
Complaint - Corporate	183	54	274	50
Compliment	78	23	79	14
Councillor Enquiry	1	0	1	0
General Enquiry	6	2	23	4
Premature	2	1	2	0
Total	339	100	548	100

6.7 The chart below illustrates the numbers of complaints by area of service or team, but it should be noted that the current complaints system does not allow the accurate allocation of complaints to teams (there is no process for updating teams when they change e.g. as a result of restructures or checking which team the investigating officer sits within). For this reason recording errors are likely and the data should be seen as an approximate categorisation only.

Complaints by Area of Service/Team (2016/17 and 2017/18)



6.8 The chart below highlights the main problem experienced as reported by complainants. Highways and Streetscene complaints tend to relate to the quality of the service provided, a perceived refusal or failure to take action or the failure or refusal to deliver a service.



6.9 The chart below highlights that 16% of the complaints (73) relate to customers unhappy with a lack of response to their initial enquiries or an overall lack of communication. 14% of complaints (64) are as a result of customers complaining that there has been no action to address concerns or considerable delays in taking action. Other key themes are damage or accidents caused by the condition of roads or pavements, traffic lights/works/obstructions, quality of services/works and condition of roads/pavements.

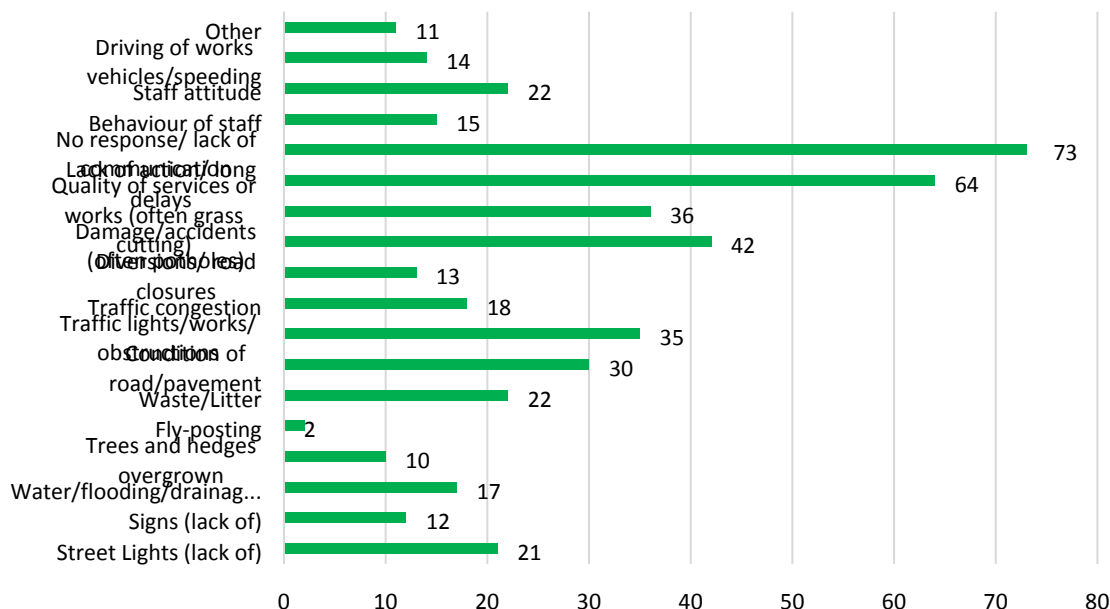
The current complaints system does not allow for any further categorisation so all 457 complaints received in 2016/17 and 2017/18 have been read and coded into key themes shown in the chart. Some complaints can fall into multiple themes so only the dominant theme has been chosen.

The categorisation into themes does appear to suggest that some complaints are avoidable. As well as the complaints relating to lack of response or lack of communication, 22 complaints relate to staff attitude, 15 complaints were about the behaviour of staff, and 14 complaints related to how works vehicles were

being driven. Many complainants mentioned bad language or unprofessional responses to public concerns or interactions by people at work in the community.

It is also clear from reading all the complaints that a great number of complainants are frustrated by a lack of communication from Shropshire Council and many report making multiple enquiries without a response.

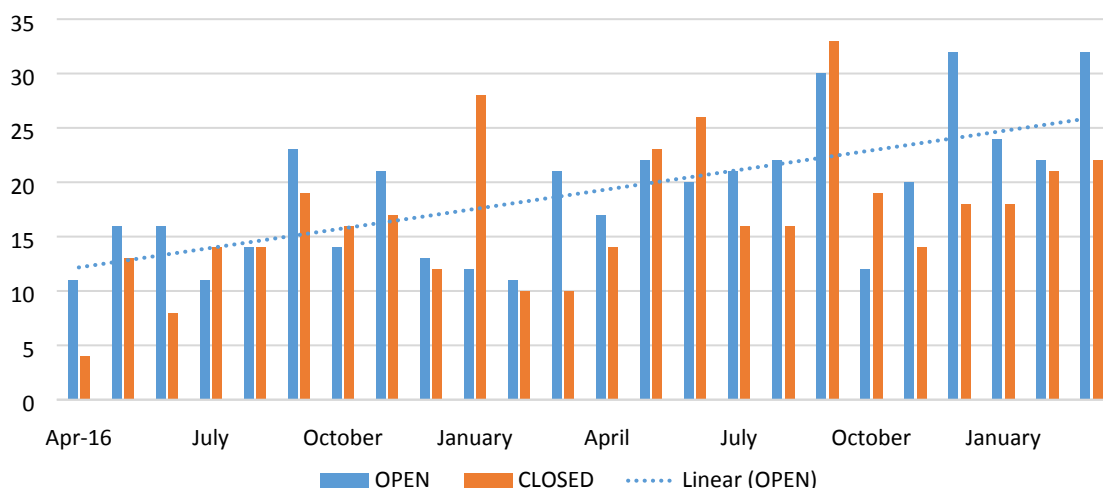
Categorisation of complaints by theme



- 6.10 The chart below provides a view of when complaints are opened and closed. Some of the complaints are seasonal in nature and relate to grass cutting, gritting (lack of) and potholes.

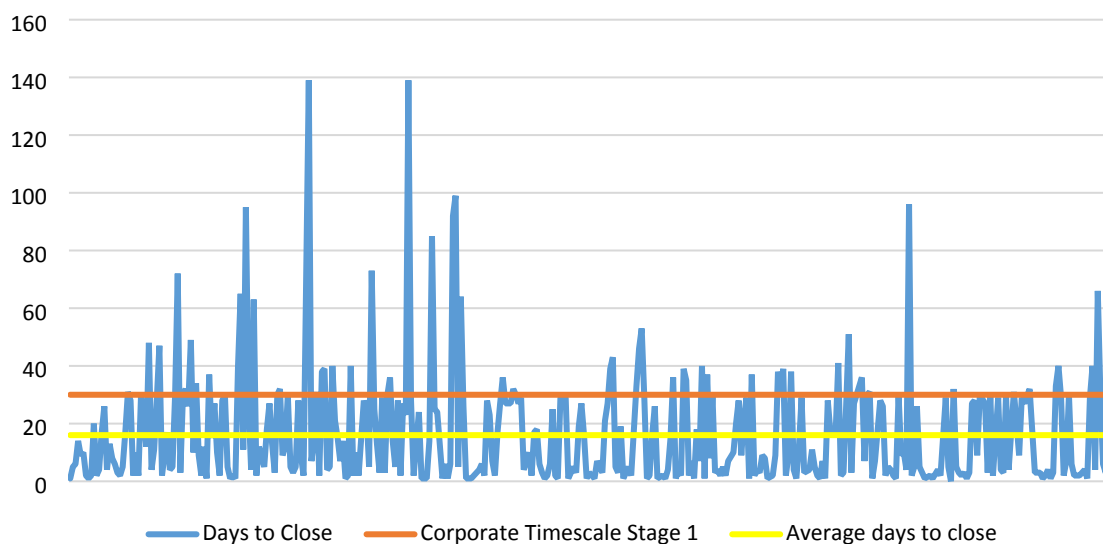
This chart also displays the overall increase in the number of complaints over time. The blue dotted trend line is for cases opened per month and suggests that numbers will continue to increase unless action can be taken to reverse the trend, possibly starting by tackling the avoidable complaints.

Stage 1 complaints by month



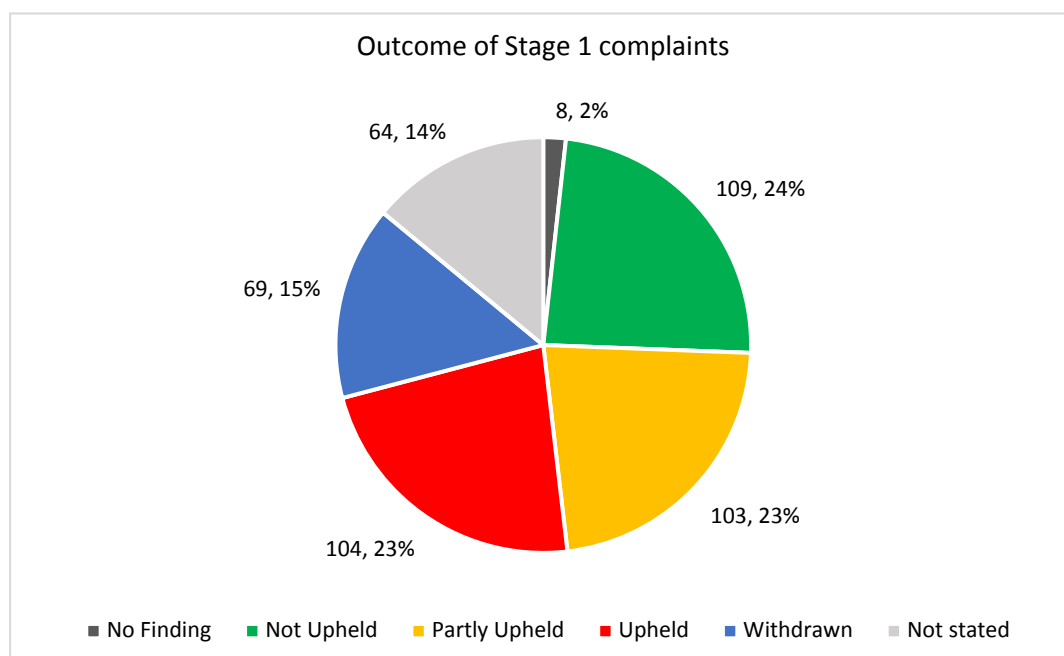
- 6.11 The chart below displays how long complaints cases remain open for. It shows that, on average, stage 1 complaints are closed within 16 working days. This is well within the corporate timescales for stage 1 complaints (30 working days). Highways performance for days to close complaints is good but timescales could increase if the numbers of complaints received increase.

Average Time to Close Stage 1 Complaints



- 6.12 The chart below highlights the outcome of stage 1 complaints. It shows that 23% of complaints are upheld, 22% are partly upheld and 24% are not upheld. This balance is expected and does not highlight any cause for concern. However, a proportion of Highways complaint outcomes are missing (14%). Missing outcomes suggest that there is a lack of reporting back to the Feedback and Insight Team for recording on the Council's complaints system. This needs to be addressed. The Council is required to collect and report its complaints data for all services.

Very few Highways complaints progress beyond stage 1 to stage 2. This suggests that when complaints are identified they are handled effectively at stage 1. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) reported being contacted on 7 occasions for Highways and Transport in 2016/17. These were all enquiries with the LGO and not all may have been investigated. The Council's data suggests that this was the case since there are only 3 LGO cases recorded by Shropshire Council and of those 1 was not being investigated. Please note that there is a time delay in complaints progressing to the LGO so it is not possible to compare data sets for each year.



6.13 It should be noted that no IT system will make any significant change to the way formal customer feedback is handled because processes are based on national requirements and agreed local policy and procedures. However, there are 2 key areas of work designed to deliver Council-wide improvement in the management of formal customer feedback:

- Digital improvements through the development of a new Complaints System within the CRM as part of digital transformation. This will provide a system which will better enable the Council's recording and reporting of customer feedback
- Culture change through wider transformation work to improve customer service and the quality of responses and communication. This is not limited to Highways and is a cross-Council approach.

7.0 Transforming highways customer service and complaints processes

7.1 Shropshire Council is currently developing a new customer relationship management (CRM) system. The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool being deployed is Microsoft Dynamics. Shropshire Council are working with implementation partner Hitachi, who have many years' experience in software implementation, specifically CRM and data driven pieces.

- 7.2 The first “phase” includes a complete overhaul of our “Waste” and “Highways” customer engagement, amongst many others. This work is due for completion by the end of the year, with the bulk of deliverables in place for October. This work can be divided into two distinct parts:
- Our management of the process – using CRM
 - The customers experience of the process, which is managed by CRM but surfaced using a range of communications tools.
- 7.3 The improvements planned for our management of the process are thorough, with many opportunities to improve the way we manage interactions between staff and systems. The CRM works to what are called “Workflows”, which are simply a series of steps making various things happen. This may be as simple as, “If X person emails, respond with Y template email and copy Z person in” but they can be incredibly complex, with built in variables and stages of any given magnitude.
- 7.4 The “workflows” are our opportunity to improve the customer experience as we can build in stages for a response to be sent to the customer. For instance, if we were looking at the example of a pot hole, the customer could be alerted to each stage of the process in whatever format they choose to be kept up-to-date:
- We have received your pot hole query
 - The team are looking at your query
 - We have instructed a member of the team to look at the pot hole
 - The team are going to look at the pot hole on X date
 - The team have looked at the pot hole and deemed it necessary to carry out the work
 - The work is scheduled for X
 - The work has been carried out
 - Are you happy with the work
 - Is there anything we could do to improve our service?

Obviously, all written in plain English and perhaps not as exhaustive as this list but the point is valid, we keep the customer completely up-to-date. The same logic can be applied to all services and we use feedback to keep improving the service, either through complaints or requested feedback during and after an interaction.

- 7.5 The other side of this to consider is the “surfacing” of the information, as in – how do we get the information to the customer? For this we are looking at maintaining most of the existing channels, such as the Customer Service Centre (CSC) but considerably expanding our online function using a new portal, currently being called “MyShropshire”. This portal will be intuitive, with different information depending on the user – for instance, if a person does not receive Social Care they will not be presented with Social Care options. The

MyShropshire portal will also have other benefits to drive people to use the tool, such as offers from the Council, news and information a resident will find useful – such as alerts to roadworks in their area.

- 7.6 Using the MyShropshire tool, we will also be able to provide information to residents before they might ask for it or in a pre-emptive way. For instance, if we have already been alerted to the fact a road has lots of potholes and it is due for resurfacing, we will be able to target communications at that road to tell them the work is scheduled. We will also be able to use “Push” notifications of some sort, the exact method is still to be defined, to give quick snippets of information if relevant.

Background Papers
None
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)
The Portfolio Holder for Transport and Highways
Local Member
All
Appendices
None