

Annual Customer Feedback (Complaints, Comments and Compliments) Report 2017/18

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report presents Cabinet with an overview of the formal customer feedback the Council received during 2017/18. Formal customer feedback includes complaints, compliments, comments and other types of enquiry. MP enquiries are monitored and reported separately because they can often duplicate complaints.
- 1.2 2017/18 saw a continued increase in the amount of feedback from customers to the Council compared to 2016/17 (including an increase in the number of complaints). The proportion of complaints that were upheld, partially upheld and not upheld remained broadly the same for each year. Over the same period the time taken to complete stage 1 complaint investigations has been maintained at 20 working days. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) has investigated a similar number of enquiries about Shropshire Council during each of the past three years, but the upheld rate for the Council has got steadily lower, whilst the national average upheld rate has steadily increased.
- 1.3 Complaints formed 51% of all cases of customer feedback during 2017/18, followed by compliments at 25%. 20% of all customer feedback were comments. Customer feedback provides the Council with the opportunity to improve services following concerns and recognise where customers have had a good experience. The learning and actions that are identified through the complaint investigations are used to improve service provision.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- A. Approve the Annual Customer Feedback Report 2017/18 (Appendix 1) for publication on the Council's website.
- B. Agree the recommendations included within the Annual Report [pages 18 and 19] highlighting key issues and areas for improvement.

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 Effective monitoring and follow-up provides the opportunity to manage risks and identify any trends and common issues being raised through customer feedback.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 This report presents information to support decision making and does not itself carry any direct financial implications. Accountable officers and senior managers may use the information to inform actions or interventions for improving service performance and the prioritisation and use of resources.

REPORT

5. Introduction

- 5.1 The Customer Feedback Annual Report for Shropshire Council covers the formal feedback Shropshire Council received during 2017/18 (excluding MP enquiries; these commonly duplicate complaints). The Annual Report covers all service areas and, as a result, the handling of complaints under all three complaints procedures (the statutory and nationally set processes for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, and the Council's locally defined Corporate Complaints procedure). More detailed reports have been produced for Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- 5.2 The Annual Report details the performance of Shropshire Council during 2017/18. In addition, quarterly monitoring takes place and where necessary issues are addressed within the year.

6. Customer Feedback 2017/18 (focus on complaints)

- 6.1 Shropshire Council received 2,187 cases of formal feedback during 2017/18, up by 198 from 1,989 in 2016/17. There were 1,119 complaints (51%), 448 comments (20%) and 541 compliments (25%). The number of complaints rose by 197 (21%) compared to 2016/17, returning to the same proportion of overall customer feedback received by the Council in 2015/16.
- 6.2 Of the 1,119 complaints received, 874 were complaints handled under the Council's corporate complaints procedure, an increase of 143 compared to 2016/17. 245 were statutory complaints (with an element of social care so handled under the nationally set Adult or Children's complaints procedures), up 54 compared to 2016/17, with Adult Social Care rising by 32 complaints and Children's Social Care rising by 22 complaints. Effective stage 1 complaints handling can reduce the number of stage 2 complaints. Almost all of these were addressed and closed at the first stage of the complaints procedures with only 26 (2.3%) progressing beyond this stage in 2017/18, which is lower than the 46 in 2016/17 and the 38 in 2015/16.
- 6.3 More than two thirds of the complaints received relate to four main service areas; Highways and Streetscene, Waste/Recycling, Adult Social Care, and Children's Services. This is consistent with patterns for previous years and reflects the size of

budget and number of staff, the nature of the services provided, and the number of people and/or organisations which come into contact with, or receive, these services. Complaints for most service areas relate to quality of services and failure to deliver a service or take action.

- 6.4 On average it took almost the same length of time to respond to stage 1 complaints in 2017/18 as it did in 2016/17. This remains well within the LGO timescales of 60 days for Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations to be completed. (The Council work to 30 days for each stage). Complex and long running cases can impact on this, and it is recognised that reduced officer capacity may also have an impact on the ability to respond to all comments and contacts in a timely manner. This is equally likely to be true for the time taken to respond to Freedom of Information and Data Protection requests. In light of the 21% increase over the past 12 months, sustaining the timeliness of responses to stage 1 complaints at the same level as 2016/17 should be considered as positive performance by those investigating the complaints and those coordinating the complaints procedure.
- 6.5 In 2017/18 at the end of stage 1, 24% of complaints were upheld, 22% were partly upheld (often where a complaint might have multiple points within it), and 35% were not upheld. The remainder were withdrawn or had no finding. These rates are broadly the same as for 2016/17 which is to be expected.
- 6.6 The learning and actions resulting from complaints are an important element of customer feedback reporting and improving services. Understanding the causes of complaints and common themes informs learning and the identification of actions to address the underlying causes of the complaint being made.
- 6.7 Learning from complaints during 2017/18 covered a range of issues. Communication and information provision continue to be the most common themes and range from responding to correspondence and comments in a timely manner and keeping people up to date, through to clear communication about the level and reach of services that were provided. Service quality provided another key area of learning and included issues such as access to services, the quality of work done, and the attitude and behaviour of those providing services.
- 6.8 Appendix 1 of the Annual Report includes Shropshire Council's annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO publish data on the investigations that they have carried out, including whether they upheld the complaints they looked into. Table 1 below sets out the number of enquiries that the LGO received, the number investigated, the number upheld and the uphold rate as a percentage of the cases investigated.

Table 1	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Number of enquiries to the LGO	83	90	84
Number investigated by the LGO	30	23	25
Number upheld by the LGO	15	11	8
LGO upheld rate for Shropshire Council	50%	48%	32%
LGO national average upheld rate	50%	54%	57%

Shropshire Council has demonstrated consistency over the past three years. In addition the upheld rate for the Council is reducing against a rise in the national average.

- 6.9 Appendix 2 of the Annual Report highlights recommendations made by the LGO within 2017/18 on upheld cases. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint.

7. Customer Feedback Development

- 7.1 The recommendations included within the Annual Report highlight areas of development designed to improve customer feedback handling. Key areas of focus arising from the 2017/18 annual report include:
- The importance of recording all formal customer feedback.
 - Where additional complaints are generated as a result of policy or service changes, they should be reported to senior managers for consideration.
 - If the number of complaints continues to increase there is a danger that Shropshire Council will see average timescales for responding to complaints increasing.
 - All staff should be supported through the complaints process. The more pressure staff are under the more likely that some otherwise avoidable mistakes could be made.
 - Making the best use of learning from customer feedback to inform service improvement.
 - Implementing the new complaints system as part of the Customer Relationship Management System (CRM) through the Digital Transformation Programme. Further design work will continue through 2018/19 as more customer feedback processes including councillor enquiries will be added to the system.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
2015/16 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report 2016/17 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Cllr Steve Charmley - Portfolio Holder for Corporate Support
Local Member All
Appendices Appendix 1 – Customer Feedback Annual Report 2017/18