

# Customer Feedback Annual Report Shropshire Council

## 2015/16

Feedback and Insight Team, Commissioning Support  
October 2016





# 1. Introduction

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 require local authorities with social services responsibilities to produce an annual report on the operation of their complaints procedure.

The annual complaints report (Shropshire's annual customer feedback reports) must be made available to members of the public, council staff and councillors in order to fulfil the requirements. This report considers the customer feedback Shropshire Council received between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016. More detailed annual reports have been prepared for adult services and children's services.

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.

Complaints containing an element of social care fall under the statutory guidelines. The majority of complaints we receive for adult services and children's services relate to social care services, and these are handled as statutory complaints under the children's and adults complaints procedures. A smaller proportion of complaints for adult services and children's services are corporate complaints (for example they relate to a support service rather than a social care service). Complaints for all other service areas are corporate complaints. Corporate complaints are handled under the corporate complaints procedure available here:

<https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/corporate-complaints/>

## 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 our 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. Support is also available from complaints officers based with Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

- Speak to a member of staff and fill in one of our complaints leaflets.
- Telephone us: 0345 678 9000
- Email us at: [customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk)
- 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/>

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

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 a more senior manager, commissioner or the Complaints Monitoring Officer. 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). 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.

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.

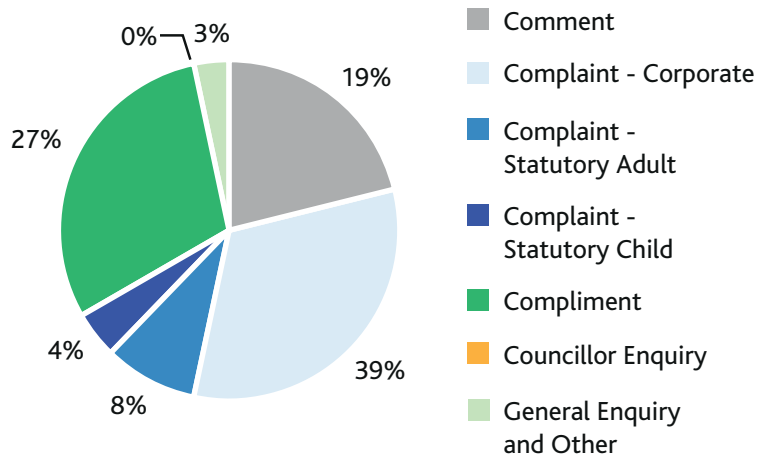
### 3. Customer Feedback 2015/16

In 2015/16 there were 1,719 cases of formal feedback recorded by Shropshire Council.

There were:

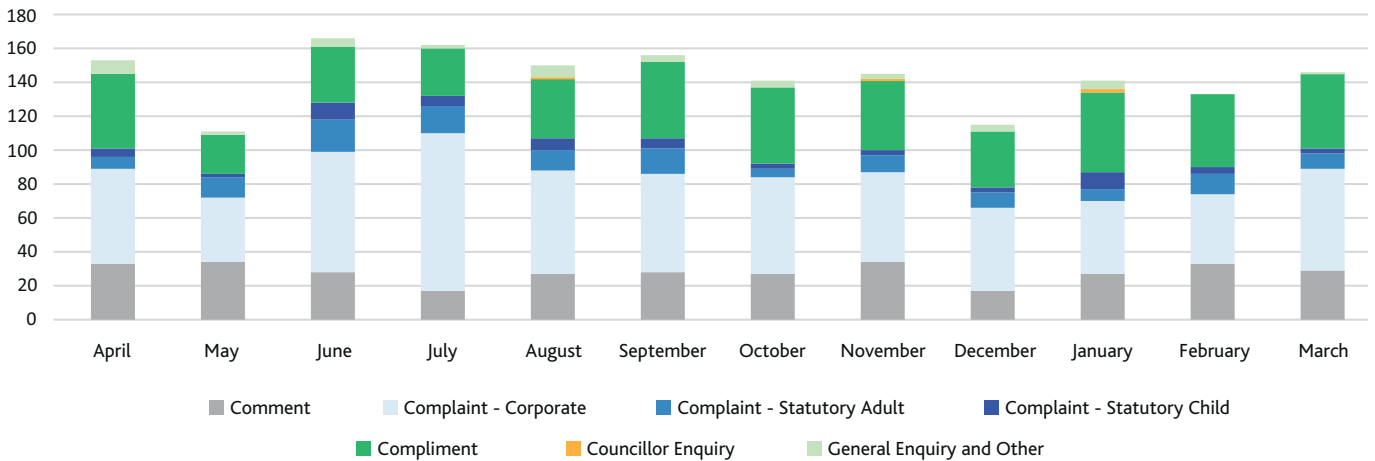
- 679 corporate complaints
- 133 adult services statutory complaints
- 62 children’s services statutory complaints
- 4 councillor enquiries
- 45 general enquiries and other types of feedback, including premature enquiries
- 334 comments
- 462 compliments

**Types of Customer Feedback Received 2015/16**



A separate report is prepared detailing MP enquiries. MP enquiries are often related to complaints received directly by the council and can result in over reporting when considered together.

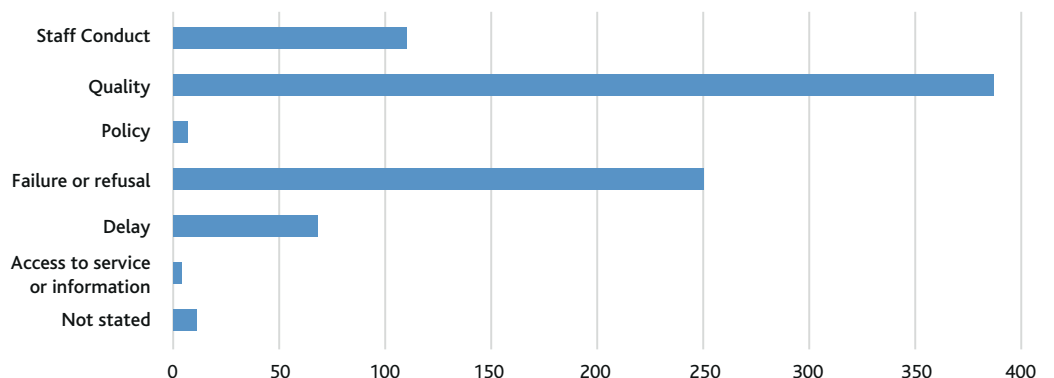
**Customer Feedback by Month 2015-16**



The average number of customer feedback responses recorded per month was 143. June and July 2015 saw the greatest total number of comments, compliments and complaints recorded (166 then 162). May 2015 saw the fewest (111).

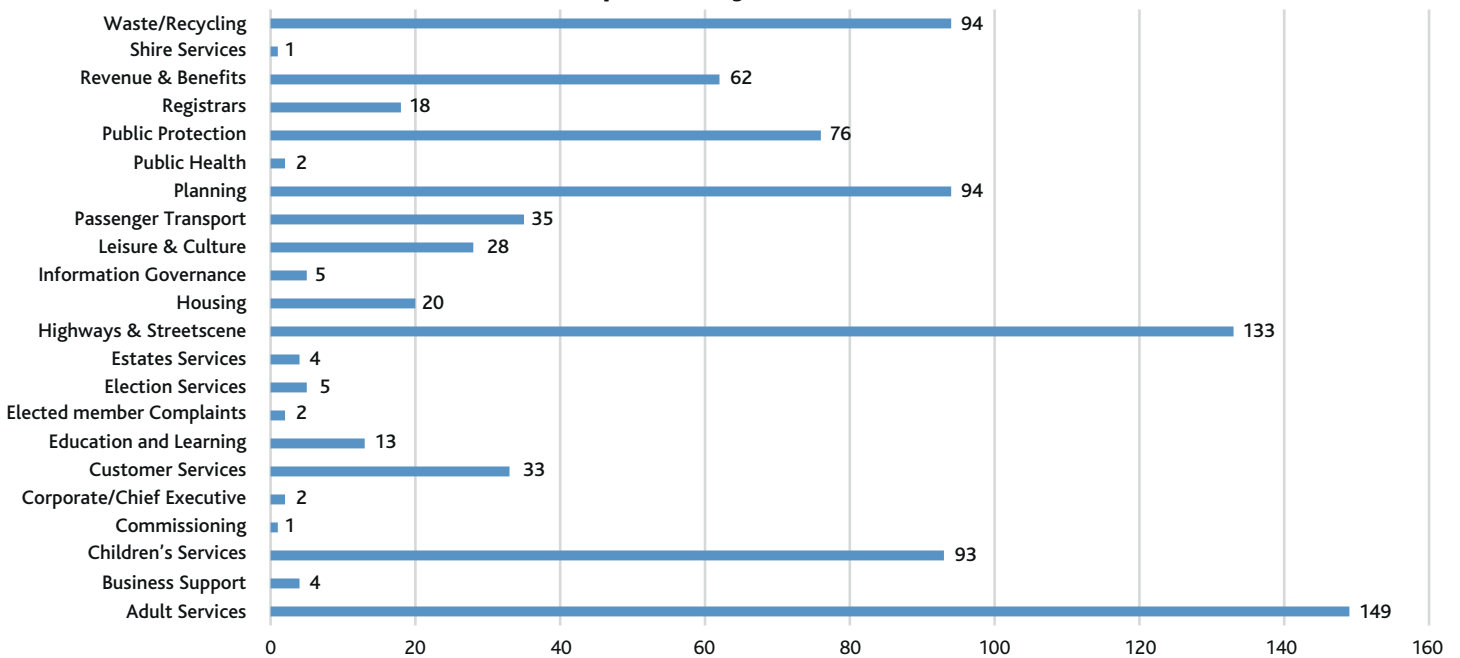
- Quarter 3 saw the lowest levels of feedback received in the year and Quarter 2 the greatest.
- Compliments formed 27% of all feedback and complaints 51%.
- Of the 874 complaints received, 679 were corporate complaints and 195 were statutory complaints.

**Category of Complaints Received 2015/16**



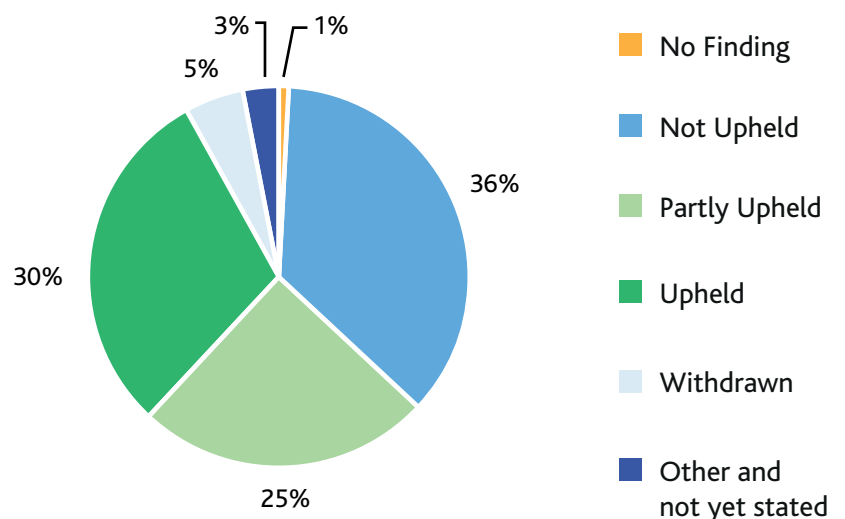
- 'Quality' was the main category under which complaints were made within the year (46%). Quality sub categories suggest a large proportion related to quality of the service provided and incorrect or unreasonable decisions. Only the dominant issue within a complaint is highlighted but complaints can include multiple concerns.
- During 2015/16 Shropshire Council took an average of 17.4 days to close stage 1 complaints. This average is well within the corporate timescales. However there is significant variation around the average, with more complex cases taking much longer to investigate and close. This issue is highlighted within the report recommendations.
- Some types of service are more likely to result in complaints than others, and the chart below highlights which of Shropshire Council's service areas receive the most complaints. Adult services receive 17% of all the council's complaints, the greatest proportion of all service areas. 15% of the council's complaints are for highways and streetscene, and 11% each for children's services social care, planning and waste/recycling.

**Complaints by Service Area 2015/16**



- During 2015/16, 785 complaints were closed at the end of stage 1 (78 remained open and some complaints had progressed beyond stage 1). Of the closed Stage 1 complaints 36% were not upheld, 35% were partly upheld and 30% (232 complaints) were upheld.
- Of the complaints that are upheld, 21% are within highways and streetscene, 17% within waste/recycling and 11% within adult services.

**Outcome of Stage 1 Complaints 2015/16**



## 4. Progression of complaints

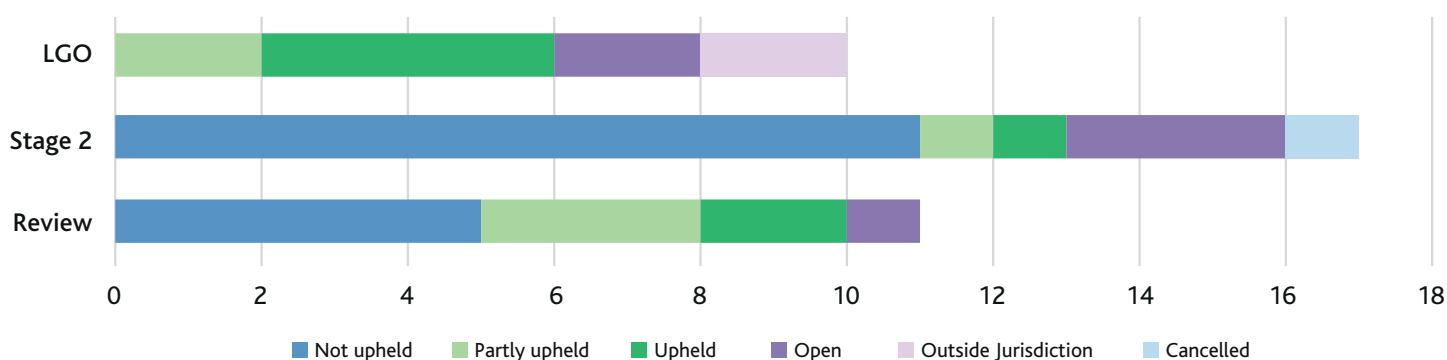
In addition to understanding the outcome of stage 1 complaints it is necessary to consider how many complaints progress beyond stage 1. During 2015/16 only a small proportion of stage 1 cases were not resolved at the end of stage 1 and resulted in a request to progress a complaint to review. It is also possible that a proportion of the stage 1 complaints remaining open at the end of the year could progress to stage 2 during 2016/17.

26 complainants requested a progression beyond stage 1 during 2015/16 (some of those complaints progressed through multiple stages and additional reviews were used to assist in the most complex cases). Of the 875 complaints investigations carried out during 2015/16, only 38 investigations were carried out beyond stage 1 (more than one investigation can relate to a complaint). This means that only 4% of investigations took place after stage 1.

The table below summarises the number of closed complaints made within the year that progressed beyond stage 1 by service area and the chart below highlights the outcome of those complaints. Other complaints remain open into 2016/17 at other stages including a further 6 LGO complaints (3 planning, 2 adult services and 1 for highways & streetscene).

	LGO	Review	Stage 2	Total investigations
Adult Services	4	9	1	14
Children's Services	1	1	4	6
Education and Learning			1	1
Highways & Street scene			2	2
Housing	2			2
Leisure & Culture			1	1
Passenger Transport			1	1
Planning	1		4	5
Public Protection	1	1	2	4
Revenue & Benefits	1		1	2
<b>Total investigations</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>38</b>

Outcome of complaints beyond stage 1



The Shropshire annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman highlighted that 83 enquiries were made to the LGO (see Appendix 1). Of those, 30 led to detailed investigations and 15 were upheld. Some of the investigations handled by the LGO within the year related to complaints received by Shropshire Council before the start of the financial year and are therefore not covered by this report. Overall Shropshire Council has performed well, effectively dealing with stage 1 complaints and minimising the number of complaints progressing beyond stage 1. However, there is still a recognition that the learning from complaints may help to reduce the number of complaints made in the future. Learning is explored in more detail on pages 11 and 12.

## 5. 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 462 compliments (only 32 were recorded in 2014/15).
- Compliments tend to be fewer in number over the summer months but average at 38 a month.



### Number of complaints - increased slightly

- The number of complaints received by Shropshire Council has remained fairly stable between 2014/15 and 2015/16. There has been a slight increase this year with 874 complaints received in 2015/16 compared to 857 in 2014/15.



### 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. (It should be noted that due to changes in recording practice only 6 months data was available for the category of complaint for 2014/15 October to the end of March 2015).

Category	2014/15	2015/16
Quality	40%	46%
Failure or refusal	34%	30%
Staff conduct	17%	13%
Delays	7%	8%
Other	2%	3%



- In 2015/16 dominant sub categories for 'Quality' were 'quality of the service provided', 'quality—incorrect decision' and 'quality—unreasonable decision'.
- 2015/16 dominant sub categories for 'Failure or refusal' were 'failure or refusal to deliver a service', 'Failure or refusal to respond to letters or emails' and 'Failure or refusal to take action'.

### Days to close - a little longer to resolve complaints

- In 2014/15 it took an average of 13.4 days to close complaints. In 2015/16 it took an average of 17.4 days to close complaints. It should be noted that a small number of more complex and long running cases can significantly impact on the average.



### Outcome of complaints - Slightly fewer complaints are upheld

- In 2014/15 33% of complaints were upheld and 22% were partly upheld. In 2015/16 the percentage of upheld complaints reduced to 30%, and 25% of complaints were partly upheld. In 2014/15 39% were not upheld and in 2015/16 the proportion was 36%.



### Complaints Progressing Beyond Stage 1 - has decreased

- On the 31 March 2015, 13 cases were open at stage 2 or beyond. On 31 March 2016 there were 7 cases open at stage 2 or beyond. Within the year 31 cases had progressed beyond stage 1 and been closed (some had been withdrawn). During 2014/15 the number of closed cases at stage 2 and beyond was 35.





## 6. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council received 462 compliments during 2015/16. Many related to compliments for staff members who had provided customers and their families with a high standard of care and support.

"We would like to thank [named officer] for her hard work in rehousing service users at the project. She worked over and above for one client who wanted to be rehoused in Wales. We did not think it was possible to do it - but she managed it."

"The school children were doing their bit for Children In Need and were told to dress up as their Hero for assembly. The young girl stood up in Assembly and said that she was dressed up as her social worker."

"We would just like to thank you all for a lovely ceremony for our wedding last week. The two ladies who took our service were so lovely. I really felt at ease with them and it helped my nerves a great deal. Please pass on my thanks."

"Your manner in dealing with us has been exemplary and thank you for explaining the things we asked about. You have given us hope."

A customer called today to say she is very impressed with the street cleaning in the area she lives. Cones were put out a week before. She wanted to thank the team.

"..[We] 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 just wanted to point out that the staff at the refuse centre in Oswestry are the most helpful, hardworking people I have met. Nothing is too much trouble and they are always there before you open your car to help. In this day and age it is a refreshing change to find the customer service that is offered, and in all weather too."

The customer was very impressed with Customer Services, they tried three different departments to get him an answer, "service like this does not happen very often".



## 7. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council received 874 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.

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.

The complainant commented on "the poor liaison and communication surrounding the temporary road closure on the A488 through Hanwood". "The whole project has been badly mishandled and I trust this dissatisfaction will be passed on to those responsible".

The customer explained that she recently took all her bags to the recycling centre, where she was told that they no longer accept/recycle plastic bags and that they should be placed in general waste. The customer was advised that if she wanted to recycle them she could try a supermarket, but many supermarkets no longer provide this service either. The customer would like to know how to dispose of the bags responsibly. The customer was also concerned that supermarket cardboard recycling is often full and Shropshire Council does not offer that service.

The complaint concerns lack of communication from the Planning Department. Two letters were sent. The second requested a response to the first letter before a scheduled meeting. To date, a response has still not been received. "This is an unsatisfactory service".

X has not received any correspondence from Children's Services and he has made numerous phone calls without reply. He does not feel that his concerns are being "taken seriously".

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

The customer said that they were "made to feel they had no rights and that their wishes were ignored".

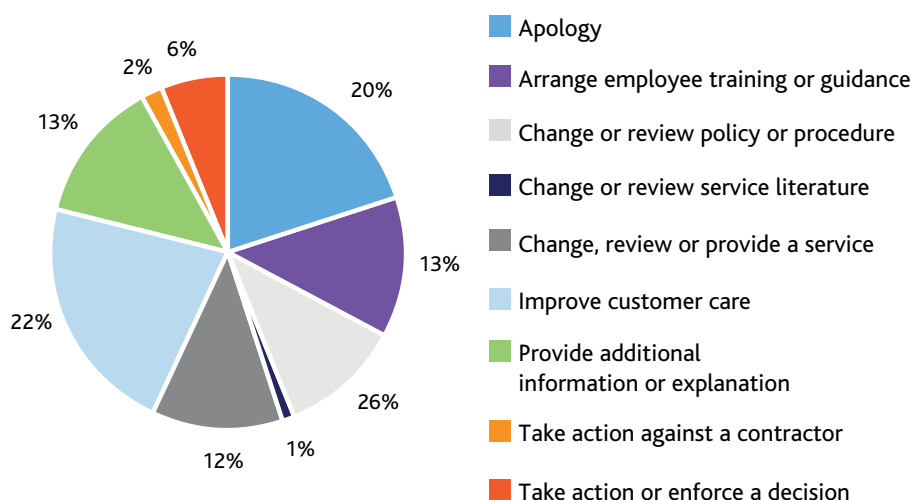
"The Revenue & Benefits online page has the incorrect phone times, namely 0845h to 1700h Monday etc. The automated message refutes this. How can you describe yourselves as a public service, when getting in touch is treated with such disdain?"



## 8. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council recorded learning and/or actions against 50% of complaints in 2015/16. 13% of complaints had a learning point recorded and 37% of complaints had one or more actions recorded. 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



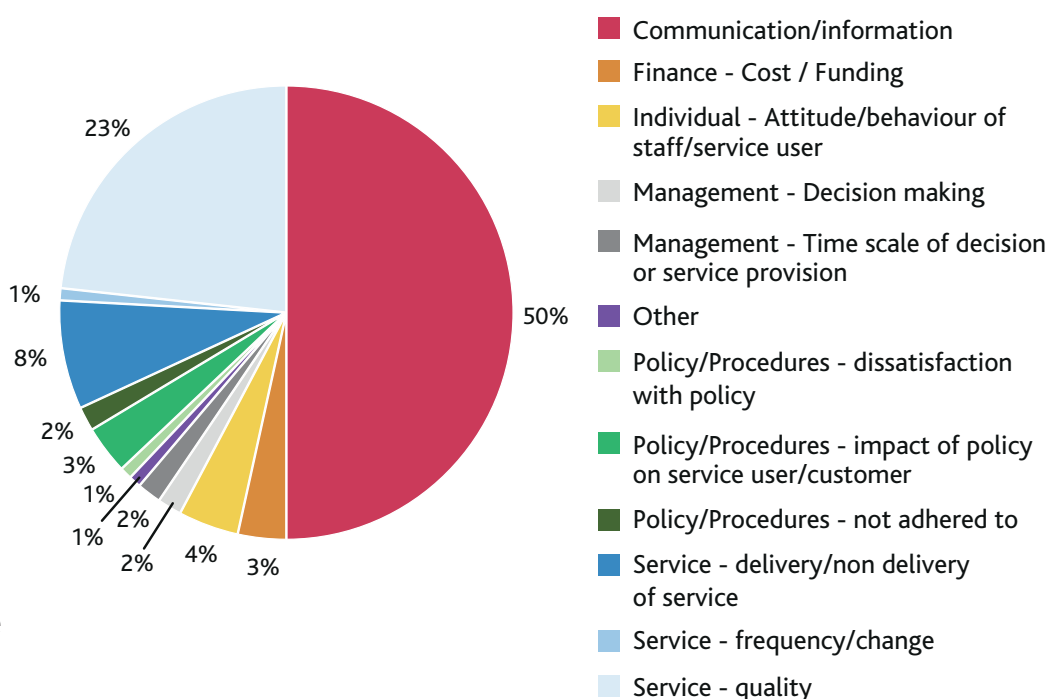
- Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2015/16:
  - 22% were to improve customer care.
  - 20% were to make an apology.
  - The categories 'arrange employee training or guidance' and 'provide additional information' both saw 13% of the total actions recorded, followed by 'change, review or provide a service' at 12%.

- Learning points recorded during the year included:

- 50% of learning points concerning the communication and information that had been provided.
- 23% were related to learning around service quality
- The other types of action points all related to fewer than 10 complaints for each category.

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

### Learning Points Recorded 2015/16



## 9. Example Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council 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 of the learning and actions resulting from complaints are shown below (wording has been changed slightly for confidentiality/ brevity).

The council can take the lessons learnt from this particular case to improve practices to ensure that the administrative issues that have arisen in this case are not repeated.

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

The staff issue within the complaint has been dealt with using the council's internal disciplinary process.

Officers should have made it clear that the customer's involvement was greater than it needed to be, and that payment for this time would not necessarily be made. There wasn't any agreement to pay any costs in this matter. This could have been made clearer at the outset

The customer was provided with an apology that information had not previously been received. Information has now been forwarded to the customer and includes signage and a map.

The phone system is currently being changed, so this should help customers to contact staff directly.

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 areas where performance may still be improved with the aim of reducing the number of complaints received. Recommendations of attention during 2016/17 are included below.

1. It is recommended that all staff are reminded of the need to record comments, compliments and complaints. 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 inform learning and improvement.
2. Customer feedback is received fairly steadily through the year but within most service areas June and July are busier months. It is recommended that teams consider any reasons for the generation of additional customer feedback (eg issuing of information at the new financial year), and prepare to manage those increases so that customers receive timely responses.
3. The analysis has shown that complaints predominantly relate to quality of serviced provided and decisions made. The quarterly reporting process is important to maintain an updated understanding of the reasons for complaints. Analysis for adult and children's social care services is included in more detail within individual annual reports (including more specific recommendations). Other service areas with higher numbers of complaints include:
  - Highways and street scene – complaints relate to quality of service and failure to deliver a service or take action.
  - Planning – the greatest proportion of complaints relate to a failure to respond to letters or emails.
  - Waste and recycling – most complaints fall under the categories 'failure or refusal to deliver a service' and 'quality of service'.

It is recommended that these three service areas in particular try to identify whether or not any action may be undertaken to reduce the number of complaints being made.

4. The analysis has shown that there is significant variation in the number of days taken to resolve/close a complaint. On average, performance is within corporate timescales but all service areas should work to reduce the number of complaints exceeding timescales (it is recognised that for some, very complex complaints, that may not be possible).
5. It is recommended that work takes place to maintain good practice in the handling of stage 1 complaints. Thorough investigations and comprehensive responses mean only a small proportion of complaints progress beyond stage 1.
6. The current pressures being experienced by local authorities and the subsequent changes to services are likely to have an impact on the numbers of complaints received. 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.



## Recommendations continued...

7. 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 an ongoing recommendation.
8. Only half of the complaints have learning and/or actions recorded against them. It may be that some complaints do not generate any action or learning but, as far as possible complaints should be used to help staff make improvement. Work should now take place to encourage all investigating officers to clearly include any learning and action points within response letters.
9. Very few councillor enquiries are captured, although councillors do work with staff members to report and resolve concerns. It is important that this information gap is explored further with councillors and that work takes place to determine how this issue may be resolved.
10. 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, teams are asked to ensure they report all provider complaints to the Feedback and Insight Team (email: [customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk)).
11. It is recommended that checks are made to ensure robust complaint procedures and complaints reporting is clearly specified as a requirement in all new contract arrangements and service agreements. This can provide important insights within the commissioning cycle.
12. Over the coming months the council's Feedback and Insight Team, within commissioning support, will explore whether there may be benefits in bringing together wider, less formal customer feedback alongside complaints, comments and compliments data.
13. It is recommended that team leaders check that their staff know how to promote the complaints process. Customer Services staff manage telephone complaints; web forms and other documents allow customers to access the information they need on the council's website, but face to face contact and direct telephone conversations mean all staff should know how to direct customers to make a complaint.
14. It is recommended that, over the next year, work will take place to support the inclusion of complaints handling within staff training and induction. The customer Feedback and Insight Team will work with human resources officers and other teams to improve the information available to staff and councillors.
15. The current complaints system has its limitations and presents a range of challenges for its users. Problems include duplicate data entry, inadequate case tracking and limited reporting capability. It is recommended that this is addressed through the council's IT review.





# Appendix 1

Local Authority Report: Shropshire Council  
For the Period Ending: 31/03/2016

For further information on how to interpret our statistics, please visit our website:  
<http://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/interpreting-local-authority-statistics>

## Complaints and enquiries received

Adult Care Services	Benefits and Tax	Corporate and Other Services	Education and Children's Services	Environment Services	Highways and Transport	Housing	Planning and Development	Other	Total
22	7	4	8	8	4	3	26	1	83

## Decisions made

Incomplete or Invalid	Advice Given	Referred back for Local Resolution	Closed After Initial Enquiries	Detailed Investigations		Total
				Not Upheld	Upheld	
5	3	29	18	15	50%	85

### Notes

Our uphold rate is calculated in relation to the total number of detailed investigations. The number of remedied complaints may not equal the number of upheld complaints. This is because, while we may uphold a complaint because we find fault, we may not always find grounds to say that fault caused injustice that ought to be remedied. The compliance rate is the proportion of remedied complaints where our recommendations are believed to have been implemented.

### Complaints Remedied

by LGO	Satisfactorily by Authority before LGO Involvement	Compliance Rate
10	0	100%

# Customer Feedback Annual Report Shropshire Council 2015/16

For more information concerning Shropshire Council's  
customer feedback reporting contact:

Feedback and Insight Team,  
Commissioning Support, Shropshire Council  
Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 6ND

Email: [customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk)  
[www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

