

Shropshire Council
Legal and Democratic Services
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
SY2 6ND

Tuesday, 12 January 2021

Committee: Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

Date: Wednesday, 20 January 2021

Time: 2.00 pm

Venue: THIS IS A VIRTUAL MEETING - PLEASE USE THE LINK ON THE AGENDA TO LISTEN TO THE MEETING

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<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/performance-managementscrutinycommittee20january2021/>

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- Use the link at 2.00pm on the day of the meeting and click on 'Join as Guest'
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You are requested to attend the above meeting. The Agenda is attached

Claire Porter
Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Members of Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

Claire Wild (Chair)

Joyce Barrow

Karen Calder

Roger Evans

Hannah Fraser

Alan Mosley

Cecilia Motley

Peggy Mullock

Dave Tremellen

Leslie Winwood

Your Committee Officer is:

Julie Fildes Committee Officer

Tel: 01743 257723

Email: julie.fildes@shropshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

2 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

Members are reminded that they must not participate in the discussion or voting on any matter in which they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest and should leave the room prior to the commencement of the debate.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2020

To consider the Minutes of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 15th December 2020. [Minutes to follow.]

4 Public Question Time

To receive any questions or petitions from the public of which members of the public have given notice. Deadline for notification of questions for this meeting is 10am on Monday 18th January 2021.

A petition bearing over 400 signatures has been received from Nick Saxby requesting a debate under the Council's Petition Scheme.

This petition urges Shropshire Council to:

- Commit to making Whitchurch Swimming Centre useable.
- Work with contractors and partners to develop solutions for adapting the centre for social distancing.
- Engage with the community on the obstacles to opening the pool.

The petitioner will be allowed 5 minutes to outline their case through written submission, after which there may be a debate of up to a maximum of 15 minutes.

A petition bearing over 400 signatures has been received from Bernie Bentick requesting a debate under the Council's Petition Scheme.

The petition requests Shropshire Council to commission an in-depth review of the traffic, cycling and pedestrian problems in The Meole area and to publish and implement comprehensive and practical solutions.

The petitioner will be allowed 5 minutes to outline their case through written submission, after which there may be a debate of up to a maximum of 15

minutes

5 Member Question Time

To receive any questions of which members of the Council have given notice.
Deadline for notification for this meeting is 4.30pm on Friday 15th January 2020.

6 Shropshire's Economic Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Framework (Pages 1 - 14)

To receive an update on the work of the Economic Recovery Group

Contact Hayley Owen Tel. 01743 257883

7 Civic Centre Options Appraisals Update

To consider an evaluation of potential civic centre locations in Shrewsbury town centre. Report to follow

Contact Tim Smith 01743 258998

8 Complaints, Comments and Compliments Annual Report (Pages 15 - 48)

To gain an oversight of the nature of complaints, comments and compliments and to identify any issues or trends that merit further consideration.

Contact Sarah Dodds Tel 01743 258519

9 Financial Strategy and Budget Monitoring Task and Finish Group (Pages 49 - 60)

To agree a schedule of work for scrutiny of Shropshire Council's 2020/2021 – 2025/2026 financial strategy and 2022/2023 budget

Contact Danial Webb Tel. 01743 258509

10 Future Work Programme (Pages 61 - 68)

To consider the future work programme of the Committee.

Contact Danial Webb Tel 01743 258509

11 Date/Time of next meeting of the Committee

The Committee is scheduled to next meet at 2.00pm on 17th March 2021.



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Performance Management Scrutiny Committee
20 January 2021

<u>Item</u>
<u>Public</u>

Shropshire's economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework

Responsible Officer

Mark Barrow

Tel: 01743 258919

Executive Director of Place

Mark.barrow@shropshire.gov.uk

Hayley Owen

Tel: 01743 257883

Interim Head of Economic Growth

Hayley.owen@shropshire.gov.uk

1.0 Summary

- 1.1. This report provides members with an overview of plans to develop an economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework for Shropshire, as a key part of the Council's response to the Covid-19 crisis. The framework will set out a clear and detailed narrative on how Shropshire is well-placed to support and grow its natural assets and businesses, in order to refocus economic growth over the next few years. The framework will essentially support the development of a new economic growth plan to be directed at government, businesses and investors with the aim of setting out Shropshire's growth opportunities and how to maximise these to create new jobs, employment opportunities to benefit residents and businesses of Shropshire.
- 1.2. This report details some of the key/headline emerging issues affecting Shropshire's economy as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated national lockdown and restrictions.
- 1.3. This report provides a snapshot of the current economic profile for Shropshire and the data, intelligence and evidence informing and driving key strategic decision making whilst creating offers and asks for Shropshire.
- 1.4. This report summarises the key practical measures and immediate responses and interventions Shropshire Council put in place to restart the economy and support the economic challenges facing businesses, high streets and communities. It then goes on to detail some of the more planned medium to longer-term strategic interventions needed to revitalise and grow the economy of Shropshire.

- 1.5. This report highlights the work being undertaken through the Economic Task Force for Shropshire with the business community, key partners and stakeholders to address the priorities and issues facing Shropshire's economy.
- 1.6. This report underpins the key themes for building the framework for Shropshire's future economy and growth plan - with resilience, recovery and growth being key.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1. That the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee supports the principles of setting out an economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework and that the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Assets, Economic Growth and Regeneration develops the framework. This will inform a new economic growth plan and strategy refresh for Shropshire Council, which will be brought to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee for consideration in 2021.

REPORT

3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1. We have ensured that Government guidance has always been followed and adhered to in the administration of local guidance and signposting with the primary objective being to support public health.
- 3.2. We have been working with many partners to effectively address the socio-economic Covid-19 risk and impacts i.e. public and mental health, unemployment, redundancies, business closures, home working, self-isolation, staff redeployment. The majority of this report is focused on managing the risks associated with Covid-19 impacts to our business and economic community.
- 3.3. As part of the development of the framework a high level Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) has been undertaken.

4.0 Financial Implications

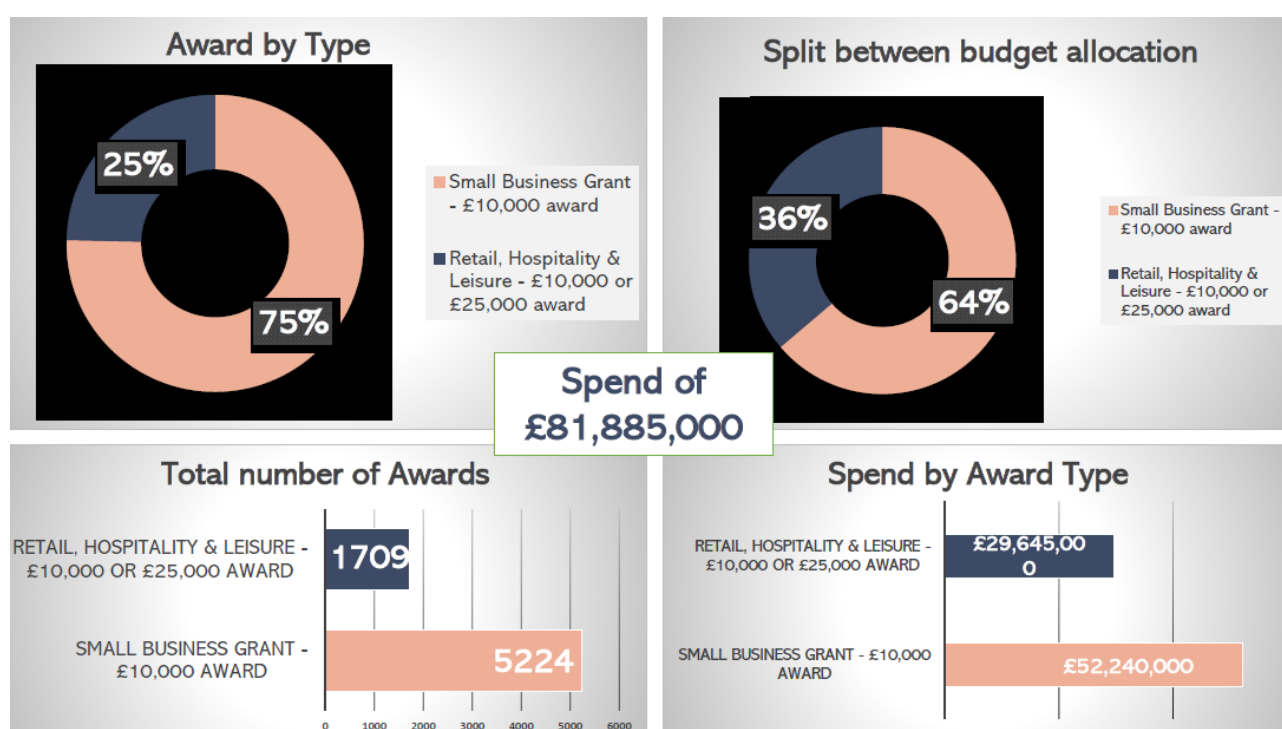
- 4.1 Covid-19 would have had a significant impact on the Council's finances in 20/21 had it not been for the support given by Central Government to the Authority. Shropshire has also benefited from grant support for businesses (which have been provided through the Council and is set out in this report) and the job support (furlough) scheme. Though there are no direct financial implications as a result of this report, the unknown further impacts of the pandemic, and the speed of the economic recovery are likely to have on-going implications for the Council, which though they are yet unquantifiable should be taken into account when considering this report.
- 4.2 Central Government provided all Local Authorities with grant funding to support businesses during the national mandated lockdown. The financial packages available were provided from central sources rather than sources at the

discretion of the Council and without such the Council would have been unable to support local businesses at the scale that has been required.

- 4.3. Central Government grant support to businesses included **Small Business Grants (SBG)** and **Retail and Hospitality Grants (RHL)**. The SBG provided up to £10,000¹ as a one-off grant to help small business owners manage their operating costs throughout the lockdown period. The RHL provided a one-off cash grant up to £25,000² to support those eligible businesses in the retail and, hospitality and leisure sector with their business costs during coronavirus.

Below gives a summary of the funding awarded between March – June 2020.

- 7,835 total number of grants awarded
- £91,670,000 overall budget – Central Govt funded
- 89.3% amount of funding paid out by Shropshire Council
- £9,785,000 amount of funding to be returned to Central Govt



Extended (Discretionary) Grant – also referred to as the top up grant which was aimed at small and micro businesses who were not eligible and unable to access the SBG and RHL grant funding. In total through this grant we supported:

¹ Based on receipt of small business rate relief (SBRR)

² Based on rateable value and Eligibility for the Expanded Retail Discount

- 883 businesses and 17 town areas = 900 total number of grants awarded
- £5,320,500 overall budget – Central Govt funded allocated 5% top up + LEP allocation
- 99.6% amount of funding paid out via B&I team
- £21,500 amount of funding to be returned to Central Govt

The Small Business Grant Fund, the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants and Local Authority Extended Discretionary Grants which ran through the initial lockdown period have now closed.

4.4. The Marches LEP **Marches Investment Fund (MIF) Scheme**

Discretionary Scheme which ran alongside the main Government grants to support the business enabling sector (financial services, creative industries, consultants) who were not eligible for the Extended Discretionary Grant. This scheme provided £737,000 of funding (business case co-written with Shropshire Business Board) of which £570,000 was used to support shops and businesses directly.

In summary:

- 94 Shropshire businesses supported: 74 businesses received £5,000 and 20 businesses received £10,000

Market Town Place Marketing Scheme provided the remaining £167,000³ to support help Shropshire's market towns impacted by both flooding and coronavirus to attract and encourage visitors back into the towns particularly as the initial lockdown restrictions were eased.

In summary:

- 16 towns were supported across the County these were, Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Oswestry, Market Drayton, Whitchurch, Shifnal, Ellesmere, Church Stretton, Much Wenlock, Wem, Cleobury Mortimer, Broseley, Bishops Castle, Clun and Craven Arms.

- 4.5. The Marches LEP has been allocated £630,000 of **Marches Small Business Recovery Grant**. This was a scheme to help small businesses across the Marches which have suffered as a result of coronavirus. Grants between £1,000 and £3,000 were available for businesses with up to 10 FTE employees who were able to demonstrate a negative impact due to the crisis. This was a scheme managed through the Marches Growth Hub.

³ £137,000 initial budget increased by £30K in response to demand = £167,000 overall budget

Area	Wider Sectors	Visitor Economy Sector	Total
Herefordshire	£120,000	£62,500	£182,500
Shropshire	£157,500	£82,500	£240,000
Telford & Wrekin	£137,500	£70,000	£207,500
Total	£415,000	£215,000	£630,000

4.6. A priority during the second national lockdown was to again support those businesses hit by the second round of coronavirus lockdown restrictions through the application, processing and payment of the new round of national grant funding schemes, namely:

- **Local Restriction Support Grant (LRSG)** which supports businesses forced to close by government during the period of 5th November to 2nd December. The Council was awarded £6,752,250
- **Additional Restrictions Grant** which is a single allocation of funding based on £20 per head of population for each local authority. The Council was awarded £6,462,720 which was based on ONS 2019 population data of 323,136. The grant is a one-off payment for Local Authorities in financial year 20/21 and is to be used in 20/21 and 21/22 and will not be renewed. A proportion of the Additional Restrictions Grant has been used to formulate discretionary grant schemes to support closed businesses that do not have a rateable value and businesses that are severely impacted rather than closed. Funds can be used to run a series of business support programmes at the discretion of the Local Authority. The details of this are being developed for implementation in the New Year.

4.7. At the time of writing this report the Government has announced a third national lockdown. The Government has made available a further £4.6bn in business grant support for businesses who are mandated to close as part of the new lockdown restrictions. Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors will receive up to £9,000 in the form of a one-off grant based rateable values:

- £4,000 for businesses with a rateable value of £15,000 or under
- £6,000 for businesses with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000
- £9,000 for businesses with a rateable value of over £51,000

4.8. Furthermore, an additional £594 million is being made available, as part of the third national lockdown restrictions, to support business not eligible for the grant detailed in 4.6.

5.0 Background

Covid-19 Unprecedented challenges

5.1 Coronavirus (Covid-19) was declared a Public Health Emergency by the World Health Organisation in January 2020, and then recognised as a worldwide pandemic in March 2020. From 23rd March 2020, the UK Government

introduced a nationwide lockdown to protect UK residents and consequently all non-essential organisations were mandated to close.

5.2 These have been unprecedented times across the Country and the pandemic resulted in significant disruption to the economy and this has been incredibly challenging for businesses across Shropshire.

5.3 Some of the key headline issues shaping the current economic profile are as follows:

- **Unemployment and Redundancies - universal credit claimants⁴**, reported in November 2020, Shropshire has a notably lower claimant count than the national average (4.8% compared with 6.5%)

Overall universal credit claimants in Shropshire in October: 20,580

Ludlow*: 5,006

North Shropshire*: 7,271

Shrewsbury & Atcham*: 7,409

Increase of 10,331 in Shropshire since March (+101%)

Note: Includes those on very low incomes as well as those claiming benefits due to unemployment

Unemployment claimant count in Shropshire in October: 8,565

Ludlow*: 2,245

North Shropshire*: 2,875

Shrewsbury & Atcham*: 3,025

Increase of 4,555 in Shropshire since March (+114%)

Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) otherwise known as the furlough scheme. Current data suggests total Shropshire employees registered on CJRS peaked in July at 42,800 and there was a fall of more than two-thirds in August to 13,000.

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme following the following grant allocation in Shropshire:

Round 1, 14,300 grants totalling £42.6 million (July 2020)

Round 2, 11,500 grants totalling £29.4 million (Oct 2020)

- **Apprenticeships** 25% down from 800 last year to 600 this year
- **Sector impacts**, almost all sectors of the economy have been impacted by the pandemic. However, there are notable impacts which have been felt particularly in;
 - Retail, hospitality and leisure industries
 - Tourism and visitor economy
 - Healthcare
 - Transport

⁴ The claimant count is a measure of those who are not in work and who are claiming out of work benefits, including universal credit and job seekers allowance

- Supply chains

5.4 Shropshire Council set about assessing some of the key emerging issues, associated risk and proactively managed a collective response with a series of practical short-term **immediate** interventions to help **restart** and support the economy across all sectors. These included:

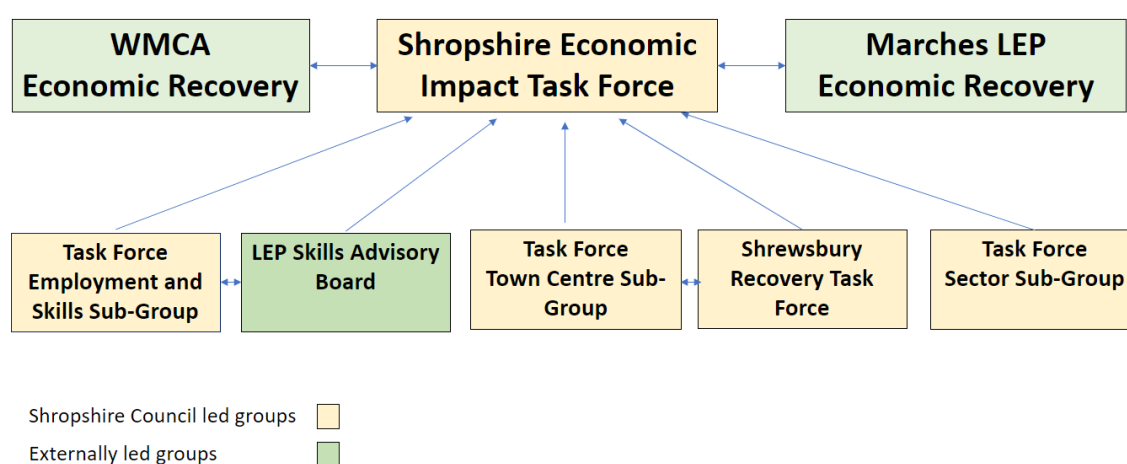
- Producing a *Reopening your Business in Shropshire* – online business guide/toolkit.
- Providing effective business support and signposting - to access finance initiatives e.g. **Bounce Back Loan (BBLs)** and ‘top up’ schemes; and financial support/funding streams.
- Provision of business support packages - resource a programme of support packages, events and webinars which were developed to support businesses through the pandemic
- Resourced the application, processing and payment of business support grants i.e. **SBG, RHL, Extended (Discretionary) Grants** and more recently the **LRSB** and **Additional Restriction Grant**.
- Supporting and signposting small and voluntary organisations to access much needed funding e.g. **ESF Community Grants** offering grants of £5,000 – £20,000 for local initiatives that will move unemployed people towards employment, training or education.
- Working in partnership with the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce to proactively support the **Kickstart** scheme designed to help those aged 16-24 who are claiming Universal Credit and at risk of long-term unemployment
- Supporting **town centres** and businesses:
 - Implementing **social distancing** measures to comply with public health regulations and to safely manage the reopening of the high streets and town centres
 - Installing **temporary TROs** interventions to additionally help with social distancing requirements
 - Processing **temporary pavement licencing** applications to support Autumn and Winter trading. As at 30th September = 28 licences – 1 Ellesmere, 2 Ludlow, 1 Market Drayton, 2 Oswestry and 22 Shrewsbury (source Shropshire Council Trading Standards and Licensing Operations)
 - Offering **free car parking** to encourage visitor and durations extensions
 - Maintaining and managing accessible public open space/public realm to support business, residents and mental health initiatives
 - Roll out Shropshire Council’s **shop local campaign**
 - Support local marketing campaigns e.g. Oswestry and Shrewsbury BID’s - *Shrewsbury’s Open* and *Shrewsbury Open Online*, *Oswestry back open for business* and similar for the other market towns to encourage shop local campaigns.

5.5 The Council has been working extremely closely with the business community, Business Improvement Districts, the Marches LEP, Government departments, partners and stakeholders to understand the immediate requirements to

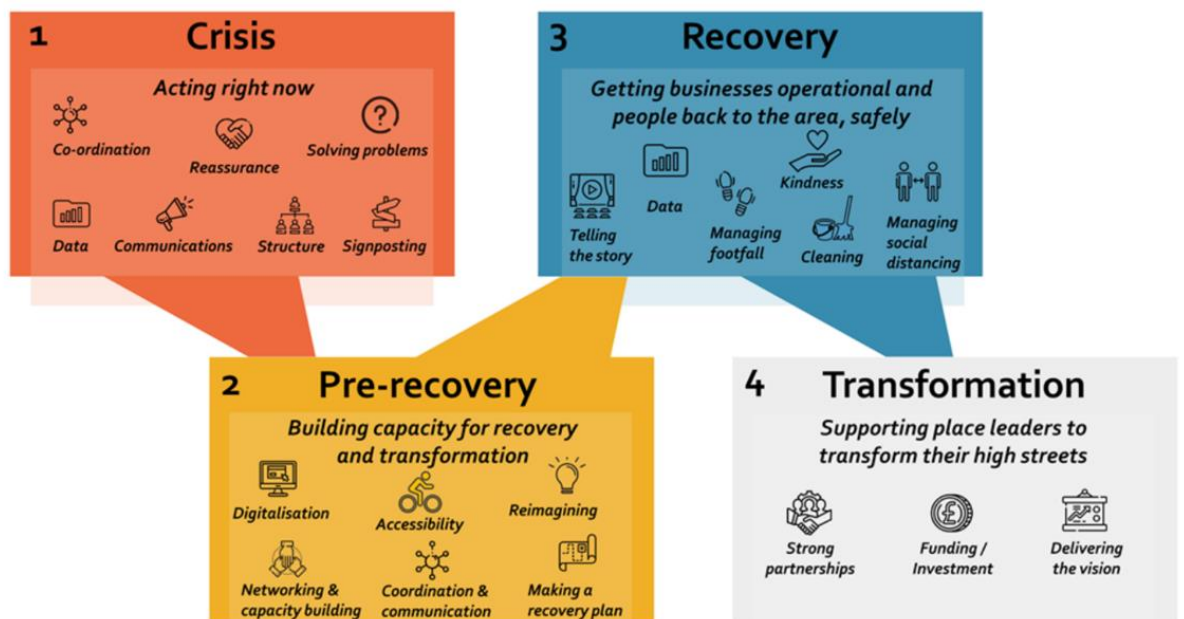
support businesses, respond to immediate requirements and provide as much support as we can to help businesses and residents across Shropshire.

- 5.6 Shropshire Council established an Economic Task Force to bring together key partners, stakeholders and organisations from across the County and the business community. A number of subgroups have been established to support key strands of focus and work, this includes:
- Employment and Skills
 - Town Centre recovery
 - Sector focus

5.7

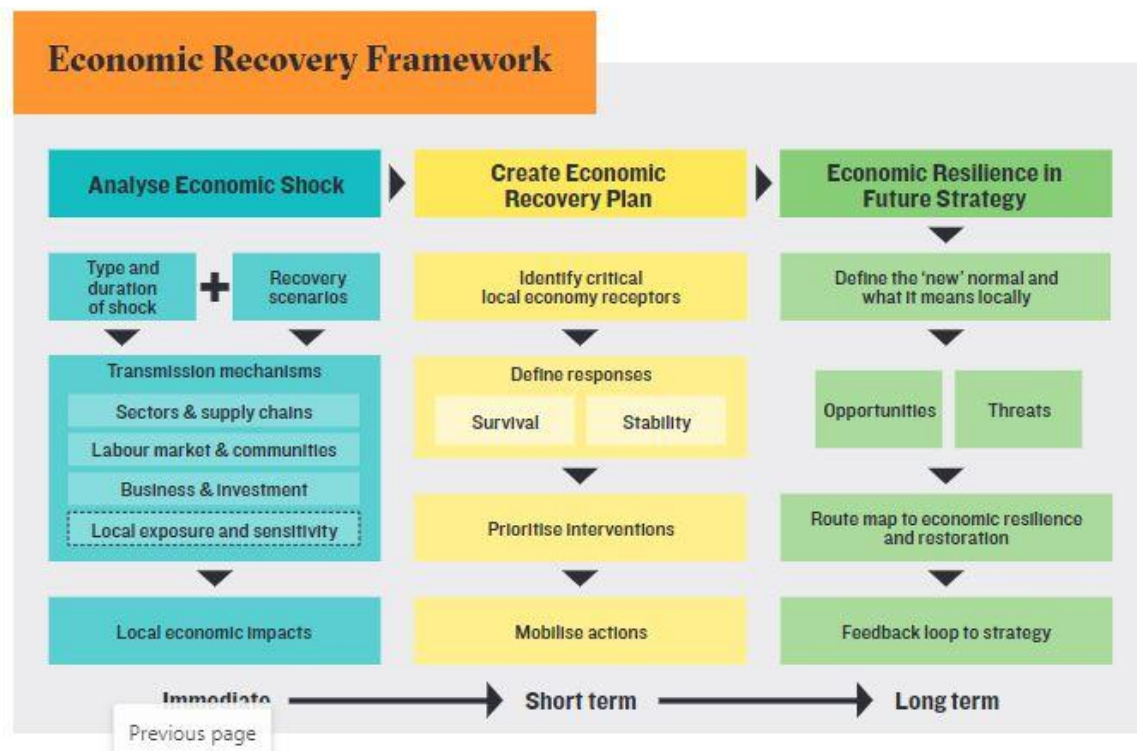


- 5.8 The Economic Task Force has established a tracker to manage and monitor key trends, emerging issues, establish areas of need and highlight responses/interventions.
- 5.9 The Task Force Subgroups (partnerships supported by external key stakeholders) adopted an action led proactive response with three key areas of focus:
- To identify and report on the main issues
 - To identify practical, immediate (**restart**) short term (**revitalise**) measures and intervention that will support the economy
 - Set out future medium to long term (**growth**) interventions and recommendations for further work to build Shropshire's transformation and resilience framework
- 5.10 Shropshire Council has used examples and followed nationally recognised best practice task forces e.g. The High Street Task Force, to help shape localised intervention measures for high streets and town centres through a 4-stage process.



6.0 Economic Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Framework and Economic Growth Plan

- 6.1 Shropshire is well placed geographically and strategically to grow and build on its natural assets and both core established and new emerging businesses to redefine, develop and transform its economy for the residents and businesses of Shropshire.
- 6.2 Building on best practice, the economic recovery framework will aim to deliver an economic growth plan to ensure Shropshire's recovering economy is aligned to national and regional priorities, positioning Shropshire as a magnet to attract investment opportunities, provide jobs and offer sustainable growth across key sectors.



<https://lichfields.uk/media/5869/covid-19-economic-recovery-framework.pdf>

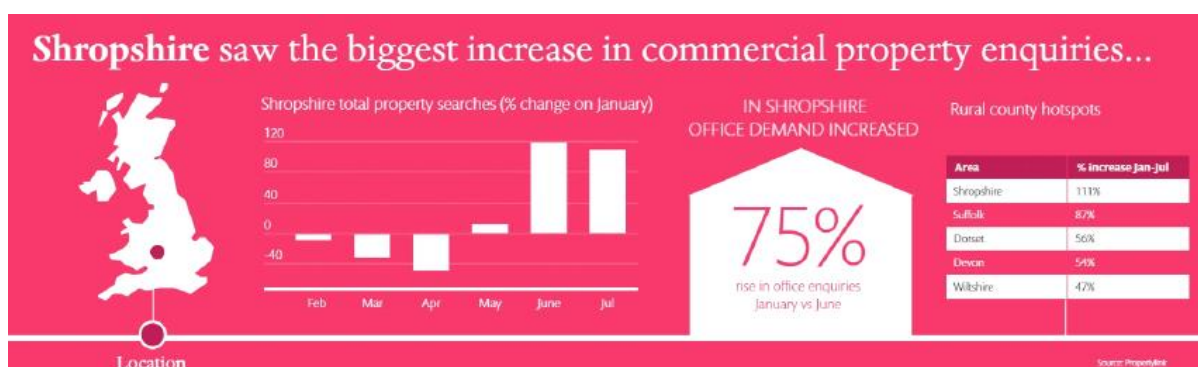
6.3 The development of Shropshire's Economic Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Framework and Economic Growth Plan will involve:

- Use of a dynamic project tracker as a means of identifying and reporting emerging issues with the evidence base to support and bring forward opportunities and interventions to build the short, medium and long term asks, offers and deliverables.
- Working collaboratively and continuing to engage and consult with key stakeholders, partners and through wider public consultation platforms to collectively map and explore the strategic priorities to address the emerging "local" economic issues and challenges coming out across Shropshire and region.
- Identifying and establishing restart, revitalise and regrow opportunities for Shropshire's economy which will shape and refresh Shropshire's Economic Growth Strategy addressing Covid-19, Brexit, digital and environmental challenges with resilience and transformation at the very heart of the Shropshire's future economy.

6.4 The framework will look at planned **short, medium and long term interventions** to **grow** Shropshire's economy.

The framework will be structured and focusing on some key themes:

- GVA and business growth/survival and investment for the local economy
- Employment growth – particularly innovative, digital and environmental management i.e. potential growth sectors
- Cross sector transferable skills to reduce the digital skills gap
- Initiatives to support economically active young (16-24)
- Digital/Smarter Infrastructure Strategy to support future ecommerce growth and the need for a digitally active and agile workforce
- Sustainable and green recovery
- Visitor economy and staycation opportunities
- Sustainable and active modes of transport/movement
- Support local health and wellbeing
- Local - buy in to local initiatives
- Commercial property - throughout the Covid-19 pandemic there has been an increase in the number of commercial property enquiries.



Source: Estates Gazette Property Link – Occupier Sentiment Report October 20202

7.0 Other Considerations

- 7.1 The Economic Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Framework and Economic Growth Plan will clearly have to consider the wider economic context including national trends and agendas and of course regional influences. Shropshire Council will build on important relationships in order to maximise opportunities to help meet our growth aspirations.

Brexit

- 7.2 The UK has left the EU and new rules for businesses with the EU start in January 2021. The transition period expired on the 31 December 2020. With Brexit uncertainty suggesting a weaker outlook for investment, trade and productivity coupled with Covid-19, this has resulted in a downturn of GDP and challenging economic conditions.
- 7.3 Therefore, Shropshire Council is working along with the Growth Hub collaboratively with other partners e.g. Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Shropshire Business Board, The Marches LEP to offer practical advice, support and signposting to Shropshire businesses. This support provision has been made available across all sectors to help business prepare and operate

successfully under these new rules, particularly with regards to export planning, supply chain resilience and services and travel to the EU from 2020 onwards.

- 7.4 The Economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework will recognise the importance of continuing to work with companies to support their growth aspirations and ongoing success.

Digital

- 7.5 Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, residents and businesses have adapted to new restrictions put in place, with the digital agenda playing a significant role in supporting the ability of communities to remain socially and economically active and engaged. Whilst there have been examples where employees, or those seeking employment, have been unable to work from home due to limited connectivity, many have benefited as a direct result of the broadband interventions that have implemented by the Connecting Shropshire Programme. Since 2014 'superfast' broadband coverage (defined as 30 megabits per second) has increased in Shropshire from only 24% to over 94% in 2020, highlighting the impact that the pandemic could have had in our business communities had digital infrastructure not been upgraded earlier.
- 7.6 In addition to supplier contract interventions, which will continue to build 'gigabit' (1000 megabits per second) networks into 2021, Connecting Shropshire has a number of complimentary interventions that have, and continue to support businesses that need immediate improved connectivity where none is planned. The Marches and Gloucestershire Broadband Grant (MGBG) scheme was first introduced in 2017 and enables eligible European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) SME's to access up to £25k of capital funding for improved connectivity without a need to contribute capital. Where any business fails to qualify for an MGBG grant, a new 'top up' gigabit voucher now exists that can enable qualifying 'home based' businesses and 'agile' workers to get connection as part of a wider community scheme.
- 7.7 Whilst the above interventions have been successful in providing 'demand' focused projects we recognise the importance of achieving the aspirations of ubiquitous and equitable broadband across the whole Council area. As a result, we are now working with Government on the new Government 'gigabit' programme planning announced in the Autumn Spending Review. £1.2bn has been committed to deliver 85% 'gigabit' coverage in the UK by 2025. Our focus will be to ensure this funding is focused on building improved broadband to the remaining 'superfast' broadband gaps in Shropshire as a priority, at the same time as supporting the government's commitment to deliver more 'gigabit' capable networks.
- 7.8 Although broadband remains a key focus of activity, we understand businesses and home workers also expect, and demand reliable mobile coverage. Whilst Shropshire Council has no direct influence upon the wholly commercial Mobile Network Operator (MNO) market, we are conscious of the need to improve coverage in Shropshire. We will continue to work with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS), the Mobile Network Operators and

Ofcom to seek improvements to current 4G coverage. In 2020 we expect more information to become available on the Shared Rural Network (SRN) which is a Government and Industry initiative to improve 4G connectivity specifically to 'not spot /partial not spot' areas.

- 7.9 Whilst in its commercial infancy 5G networks have started to offer opportunities to test capabilities beyond the conventional handset market. As part of the national DCMS 5G 'Test and Trials' programme Shropshire Council is working with partners on evaluating how 5G networks can be built and operated in rural areas as well as assessing new service delivery opportunities for health and social care provision. We will additionally look at other collaborative opportunities with other partners where opportunities present themselves.
- 7.10 The Economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework will look to explore a new proposition for Shropshire around wider digital / smarter solutions and interventions to align with the new economic growth plan opportunities and aspirations

Green agenda

- 7.11 Throughout the pandemic, the national picture reported reduced carbon consumption as a result of industries temporarily closing and restrictions on travel, there has been a notable reduction in pollution and carbon emissions. Lockdown saw a 7% reduction in global emissions, equivalent to the level of reduction needed per annum to deliver net carbon zero ambition – indicating not only the scale of behaviour change needed, but also how this will need to be sustained year on year. Improving environmental and carbon performance can also significantly reduce revenue costs and help local companies to remain competitive in the context of economic challenges from both Covid-19 and Brexit, especially where energy forms a significant overhead (e.g. Bridgnorth Aluminium).
- 7.12 We are working collaboratively with partners to maximise the acceleration we have seen in environmental business growth, by narrowing the emerging skills gap to tap into future employment opportunities (potential 5,000⁵ new direct jobs) in sectors such as:
- renewable energy development;
 - energy efficiency retrofit measures for existing buildings (both domestic and non-domestic);
 - low carbon vehicle fuels;
 - Waste, materials and resource management.
 - Land management, carbon capture & storage.
- 7.13 The Economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework will support the challenge of clean growth through increased investment in low carbon

⁵ https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/estimated-total-number-of-direct-jobs-in-low-carbon-and-renewable-energy-sector?mod-area=E92000001&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup

innovation and industries with a focus on sectors that support the environment and local green job growth.

8.0 Next steps

- 8.1 Through the Economic Task Force and working with partners, we will continue to develop, underpin and take forward the economic recovery, transformation and resilience framework set out in this report. We will develop and consult on the key areas of focus, prioritise the opportunities, streamline the offers and asks to Government to enable us to effectively and efficiently plan, support and deliver the national economic recovery. Alongside this we will developing a refreshed economic growth strategy for Shropshire covering the period 2021-2026.

List of Background Papers
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Cllr Steve Charmley
Local Members All
Appendices



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Performance Management Scrutiny Committee	<u>Public</u>
20 January 2021	

Annual Customer Feedback (Complaints, Comments and Compliments) Report 2019/20

Responsible: Sarah Dodds, Feedback and Insight Team Leader

e-mail: sarah.dodds@shropshire.gov.uk tel: 01743 258519

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Annual Customer Feedback Report presents an overview of the formal customer feedback received by Shropshire Council during 2019/20. 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 Complaints formed 57% of all cases of customer feedback during 2019/20, followed by comments and other enquiries at 28% and compliments at 16%. 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.
- 1.3 Although overall performance remains good in terms of complaints handling, there continues to be a steady increase in complaint numbers. There were 1,833 complaints received in 2019/20 (1,281 in 2018/19, 1,119 in 2017/18 and 922 in 2016/17). Complaints increased by 43% between 2018/19 and 2019/20. The time taken to complete stage 1 complaint investigations has risen to an average of 22 working days compared to 14 working days in 2018/19. This remains well within the Council's target of 30 working days. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) has investigated a similar number of enquiries about Shropshire Council during each of the past four years (85 in 2019/20 (see section 6.8 for details). The upheld rate for the Council for 2019/20 was 41%, showing a decrease from 61% in 2018/19, and over time compares to the average upheld rate for other similar local authorities of 56%.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- A. Recommend that internal communication is issued to Shropshire Council staff to remind them of good practice in complaint handling and the need to meet complaints timescales (allocated response dates).

- B. Understand that while average performance is good and within timescales, some cases exceed timescales and 16% of complaints are relating in a 'no finding' that can sometimes be due to lack of investigation. Performance monitoring is regular and ongoing (with issues raised with service areas as they arise).
- C. Request that progress with actions that are being taken to address performance with complaint management is presented to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee at 6 months to ensure progress is being made. The service areas in question are asked to attend the meeting.
- D. Recommend that training for all councillors on the Council's complaints handling policies and the role of Members as they work with their constituents wishing to make a complaint should be part of the Member Induction programme following the local election.

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 2019/20 (MP enquiries are summarised within the report, but it should be noted that these commonly duplicate complaints). The Annual Report covers all service areas and, as a result, the handling of complaints under all three complaints procedures:

- Adult Social Care (statutory complaints)
Website: [Adult social care complaints | Shropshire Council](#)
- Children's statutory complaints
Website: [Children and young people's complaints | Shropshire Council](#)
- Corporate complaints (complaints that do not have an element of social care).
Website: [Corporate complaints | Shropshire Council](#)

- 5.2 The Annual Report details the performance of Shropshire Council during 2019/20. In addition, quarterly monitoring takes place. Frequently monthly reports are also produced (particularly for social care services) in order to ensure performance issues are closely monitored and responded to as they arise.

6. Customer Feedback 2019/20 (focus on complaints)

- 6.1 Shropshire Council received 2,611 cases of formal feedback during 2019/20, up by 297 from 2,314 in 2018/19. There were 1,487 complaints (57%), 719 comments and other enquiries (27%) and 405 compliments (15%).
- 6.2 Of the 1,487 complaints received, 1,334 were complaints handled under the Council's corporate complaints procedure, an increase of 250 compared to 2018/19. 153 were statutory complaints (with an element of social care so handled under the nationally set adult or children's complaints procedures), a reduction of 43 compared to 2018/19, with Adult Social Care statutory complaints reducing by 36 and Children's Social Care complaints reducing by 6 complaints.
- 6.3 Effective stage 1 complaints handling can reduce the number of stage 2 complaints. Most complaints are addressed and closed at the first stage of the complaints procedures. In 2019/20 47 cases progressed beyond stage 1 compared to 50 in 218/19, 26 in 2017/18, 46 in 2016/17 and 38 in 2015/16.
- 6.4 Considering complaints by service area, this shows that Highways and Transport received 34% of all Shropshire Council's complaints during 2019/20 followed by Adult Services (including Housing and Public Health) at 17%. Finance Governance and Assurance were allocated 16% of complaints (not due performance but due to the service's role in addressing complaints, insurance cases and other enquiries). Waste Management and Planning each received 9% of complaints, and Children's Services received 7%.
- 6.5 On average it took 22 working days to respond to a complaint in 2019/20 compared to 14 working days in 2018/19 and 20 working days in 2017/18. This average remains well within the Council's timescales of 60 days for Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations to be completed. (The Council works to 30 days for each stage). However, although average performance is good, there are significant numbers of complex and long running cases exceeding timescales, this is sometimes due to reduced officer capacity within a service but can often be the result of highly complex cases that are difficult to resolve or require significant time to resolve.
- 6.6 In 2019/20 at the end of stage 1, 46% were withdrawn or had no finding, 28% were not upheld, 14% of complaints were upheld and 12% were partly upheld (often where a complaint might have multiple points within it),
- 6.7 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. Learning from complaints during 2019/20 covered a range of issues. As with previous years, communication and information provision continues to be the most common theme within learning and includes responding to correspondence and comments in a timely manner, keeping people up to date as cases progress and improving how information is shared. Service delivery/non-delivery of a service was another common learning point. It should be noted that cases not upheld will usually not have any learning.

- 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	2018/19	2019/20
Number of enquiries to the LGO	83	90	84	91	85
Number investigated by the LGO	30	23	25	33	27
Number upheld by the LGO	15	11	8	20	11
LGO upheld rate for Shropshire Council	50%	48%	32%	61%	41%
LGO national average upheld rate	50%	54%	57%	58%	56%*

*In a change to previous years, for 2019/20 the LGO provided the average for similar authorities.

Despite the decrease in the upheld rate (and above average performance in the upheld rate compared to similar local authorities) the LGO has requested Shropshire Council look at its performance in relation to delays (time taken to respond and to implement recommendations). Shropshire Council will need to continue in its efforts to ensure complaints are robustly responded to and its procedures adhered to at the local level.

- 6.9 Appendix 2 of the Annual Report highlights recommendations made by the LGO. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint. The LGO now produce publicly available compliance reports in which they list whether local authorities have completed actions within the timescales set by the Ombudsman.

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 2019/20 annual report include:

- There has been an increase in complaints for the Highways department which now form a significant proportion (34%) of the Council's overall complaints. Additionally, 56% of 'no-finding' outcomes in 2019/20 were recorded for Highways and Transport, which can indicate the investigation and reporting back may not have been completed. There appears to be some opportunity to make improvements in complaints handling in Highways and Transport and it is recommended that this is a priority for 2020/21.
- Carry out one-off detailed reviews into long running and overdue complaints cases on a service by service basis, working with senior managers to provide detailed information at the investigator level. This will allow managers to fully understand where there are ongoing obstacles and performance issues.

- Increase the accessibility and use of staff information and guidance on the standards and expectations of complaints investigators and the quality of their responses, including the identification and recording of learning and actions from corporate complaints and how to seek advice and support if it is needed.
- The LGO has requested Shropshire Council look at its performance in relation to delays (time taken to respond and to implement recommendations). It is recommended it forms an area for attention in 2019/20. It will require a response from across the organisation and should be addressed through the delivery of the recommendations in the Annual Report.
- Increase the identification of opportunities to improve people's experiences of Council services during the year across the Council through greater use of the quarterly complaint reports which made available to all service areas via Directors and key contacts within council departments.

8. Elected Members and Scrutiny

- 8.1 Elected members have an important part to play in the effectiveness of a local authority's complaints system. There are two main areas of responsibility described by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman:
- a) Performance Management, and Overview and Scrutiny – driving improvement and ensuring complaints are used as learning. Described by the Ombudsman as *"holding the local authority to account, improving services and optimising health and wellbeing outcomes for residents"*.
 - b) Signposting and providing representation - supporting members of the public to use the complaints process if they are dissatisfied with a service they have received. Leaflets and information are available on the Council's website here: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/complaints-comments-and-compliments/>

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 2017/18 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report 2018/19 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Cllr Lee Chapman - Portfolio Holder Organisational Transformation and Digital Infrastructure
Local Member All
Appendices Appendix 1 – Customer Feedback Annual Report 2019/20

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Customer Feedback Annual Report Shropshire Council 2019/20

Feedback and Insight Team, Information, Intelligence and Insight
July 2020



1. Introduction

Shropshire Council's annual customer feedback report presents an annual overview of the formal feedback received and responded to by Shropshire Council between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The report includes key performance data for complaints, compliments and comments (including other types of formal feedback received by Shropshire Council). The annual customer feedback report is made available to members of the public, councillors and council staff. The report complements the quarterly reporting and regular monitoring reporting that takes place within the Council during the course of the year. This more regular reporting is used to gain an understanding of customer experiences and the identification of any patterns in feedback. It supports the work that takes place to identify learning and actions designed to prevent further complaints and generate improvement.

Complaints containing an element of social care fall under the statutory guidelines. These are classed as statutory complaints for either adult or children's services and are handled in line with the statutory complaints procedures. The remainder of complaints are corporate complaints. Corporate complaints relate to a support service or services that do not provide social care and these are handled under the Council's corporate complaints procedure. You can find out more on Shropshire Council's website.

This report covers both statutory complaints and corporate complaints, providing a whole council view of formal customer feedback. Annual reports are also prepared for Adult Services and Children's Services allowing for a more detailed consideration of feedback for those service areas.

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 a service provided. 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 can offer advice on how to make a complaint. Support is also available from complaints officers based within Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

- Speak to a member of staff
- Telephone us: 0345 678 9000
- Email us at: customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk
- Visit the website: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/>
- Feedback can now also be submitted through the MyShropshire portal.



Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 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

The complaint will be reviewed by a more senior manager, commissioner, or in most cases, the Complaints Monitoring Officer. They will review the Stage 1 complaint and 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 can reasonably do, the customer will be written to and advised of this. They will also be given information about the Local Government and Social Care 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.

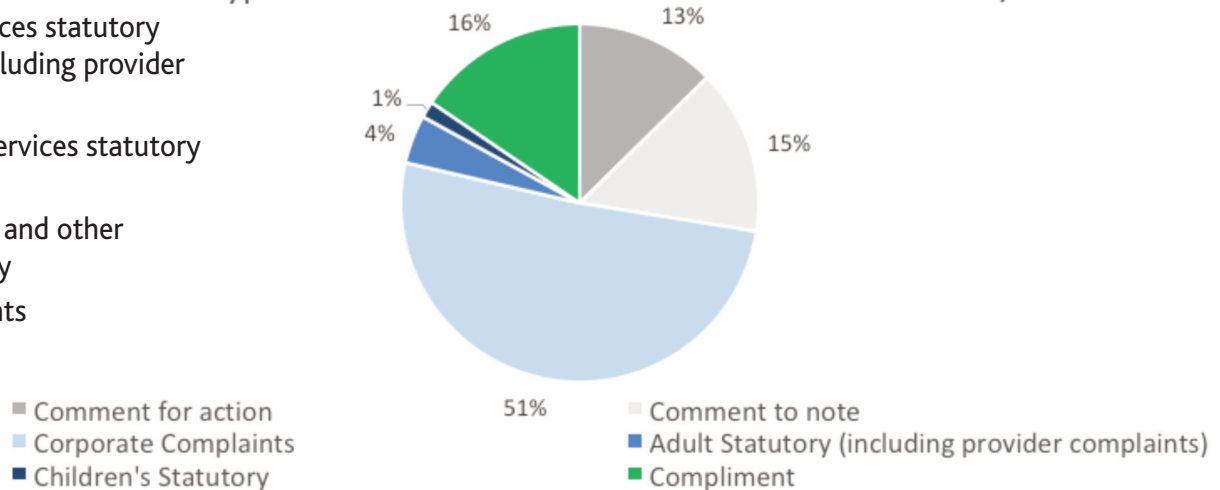
We cannot promise to get the result complainants want, but we do make sure that complaints are dealt with as quickly and as thoroughly as possible and we work to keep customers informed of what is happening and the progress being made.

3. Customer Feedback 2019/20

In 2019/20 there were 2,611 cases of formal feedback recorded by Shropshire Council. There were:

- 1,334 Corporate complaints
- 114 Adult Services statutory complaints (including provider complaints)
- 39 Children's Services statutory complaints
- 719 comments and other types of enquiry
- 405 compliments

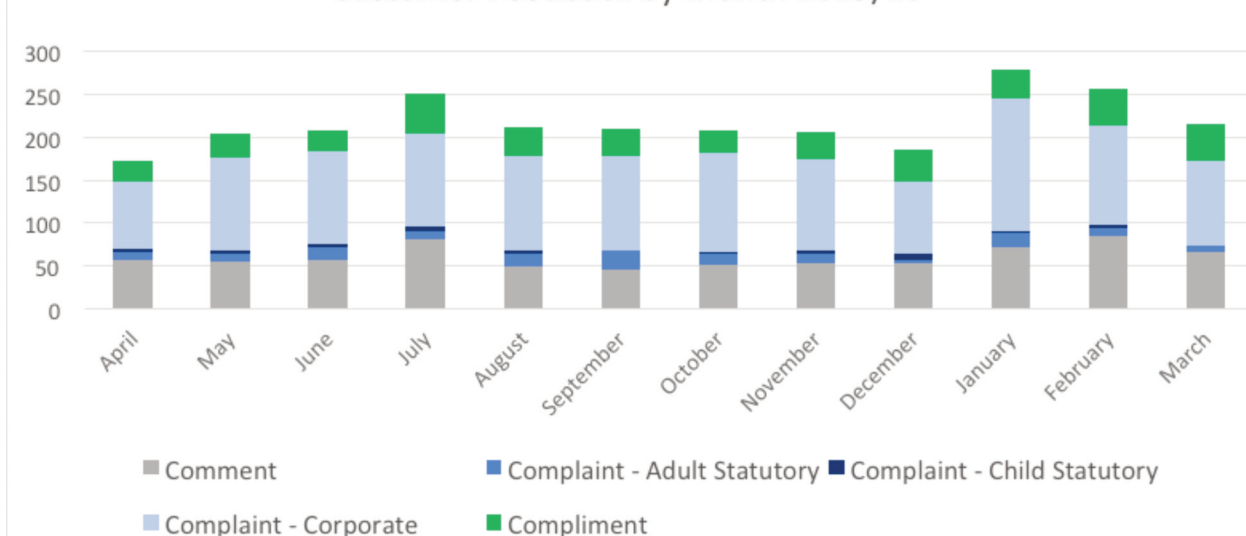
Types of Customer Feedback Cases Received 2019/20



During the year there were 1,487 complaints, forming 57% of all cases. Comments and other enquiries formed 28% of all cases and 16% of all customer feedback cases were compliments.

MP enquiries are covered separately later in the report since MP enquiries often relate to complaints and inclusion in the figures for feedback would result in double counting and the over reporting of cases.

Customer Feedback by Month 2019/20

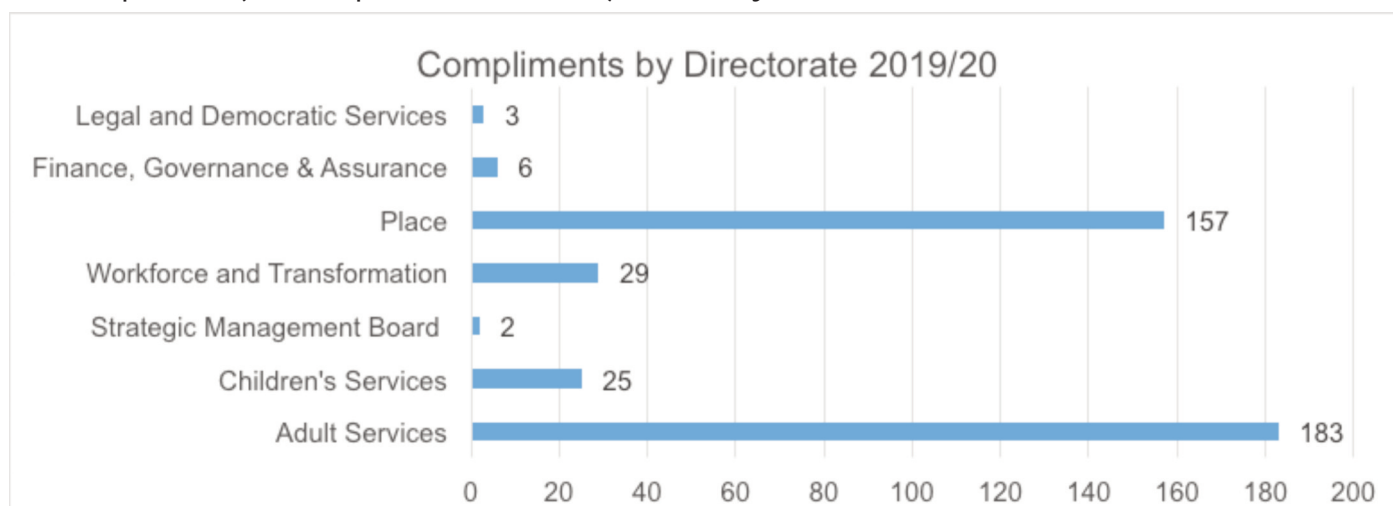


Over the year, the monthly average was 218 customer feedback cases (compared to 193 the year before). January and February 2020 saw the greatest number of cases at 279 and 257, followed by July 2019 with 252 cases. April and December 2019 had the lowest numbers of feedback. The data shows a noticeable increase in feedback for the last quarter (January to the end of March 2020) with 751 cases for the quarter compared to an average of 620 for the other 3 quarters of the year. Overall case volumes increased over the course of the last 4 years. On average 124 complaints were made to Shropshire Council each month compared to an average of 107 complaints each month in 2018/ 19 (93 in 2017/18 and 77 in 2016/17).

The volumes of customer feedback cases received do fluctuate slightly during the year. Longer term patterns show steady increases but the data for this year highlights that more feedback was received in the last quarter followed by the period July to September 2019.

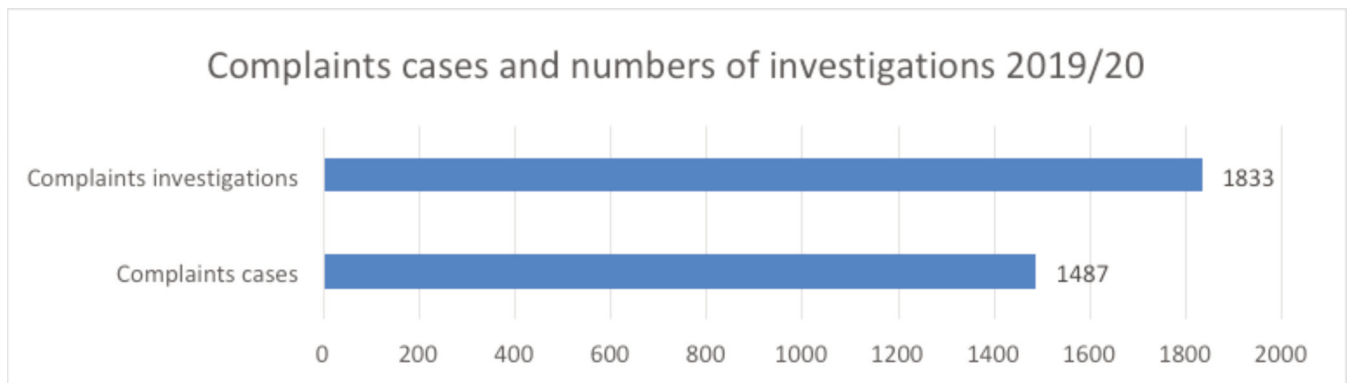
- Quarter 1 (April to June 2019) = 22% of all customer feedback
- Quarter 2 (July to September 2019) = 26% of all customer feedback
- Quarter 3 (October to December 2019) = 23% of all customer feedback
- Quarter 4 (January to March 2020) = 29% of all customer feedback

A closer look at compliments shows that Adult Services received the largest number of compliments (183 compliments in 2019/20) followed by the Place directorate.

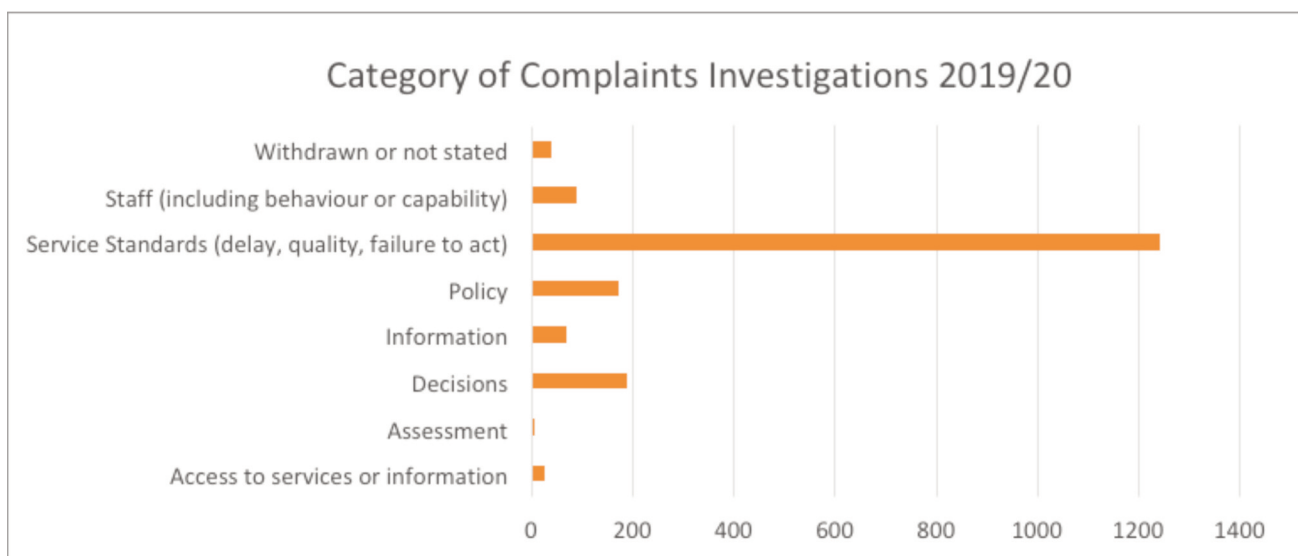


It is important to look at complaints cases in more detail to gain an understanding of customer feedback and any areas of dissatisfaction. Complaints (and some comments) are explored at greater depth than other types of feedback and result in investigations. There may be multiple investigations for each complaints case. For example, a complaint may refer to the services provided by more than one council department, in which case there will be more than one investigation. Investigations are led by officers with a detailed knowledge of the service area, usually a service manager. In 2019/20 there were 1,487 complaints cases and 1,833 complaints investigations.

Complaints investigations do not always result in a complete investigation and outcome. Once a complaints case is explored in more detail, it is possible that a different course of action is required (e.g. an insurance claim or appeals process), or once the complaint is more fully understood it may be concluded that the complainant is merely asking for a simple remedial action to resolve a concern rather than wishing to proceed through a formal complaint investigation. Of the 1,833 complaints investigations, 19% were withdrawn and 10% were closed and a service request was initiated as an alternative course of action. 1,295 investigations resulted in a finding or no finding. This is explored in more detail at the end of this section.



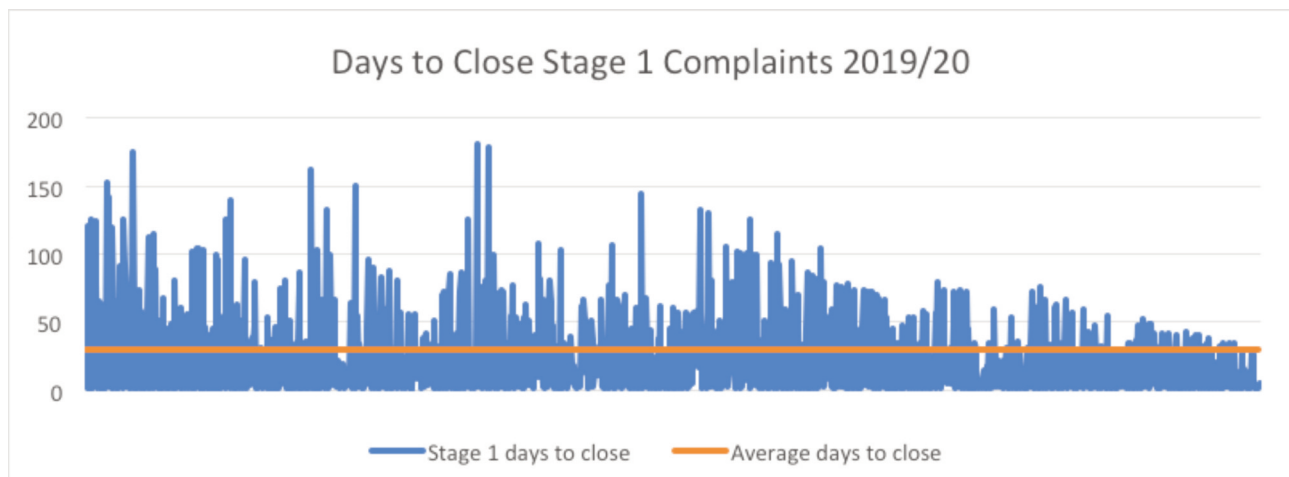
The following paragraphs are based on complaints investigations against which more detailed information is captured. The performance measures Shropshire Council uses to monitor complaints are largely based on complaints investigations. This allows a better understanding of complaints in relation to the services complaints relate to.



During the last financial year (2019/20) there were 1,833 complaints investigations, a 43% increase from 2018/19. This increase is much more significant than increases seen over previous years. Of the 1,833 investigations, 2% were withdrawn before completion. This is sometimes at the request of a complainant, but more often because the case is better handled under a different process (for example an appeals process).

'Service standards' was the main category under which complaints were made. Within 'service standards' there are a number of sub-categories and analysis highlights that 'service standards – failure to provide a service/take action' and 'service standards – poor customer care' were the dominant sub-categories. 'Decisions' was the second main category under which complaints were recorded in 2019/20 followed by 'Policy'. Complaints under the category decisions are usually made because someone is dissatisfied with a decision made, and policy complaints often reflect the fact that someone is dissatisfied with council policy (examples in 2019/20 include dissatisfaction with changes to Shropshire Council's recycling and parking policies).

During 2019/20 Shropshire Council took an average of 22 working days to respond to stage 1 complaints (an increase on the 14 working days average in 2018/19). The average is within the 30 day timescale Shropshire Council works to. However, it should be noted that there is significant variation around the average and some cases, particularly complex complaints, can take longer than the 30 days allocated to respond. The Council has 60 working days in total to respond to corporate complaints, 30 working days for each stage (stage 1 and stage 2). Days to close is a key measure within ongoing performance monitoring.

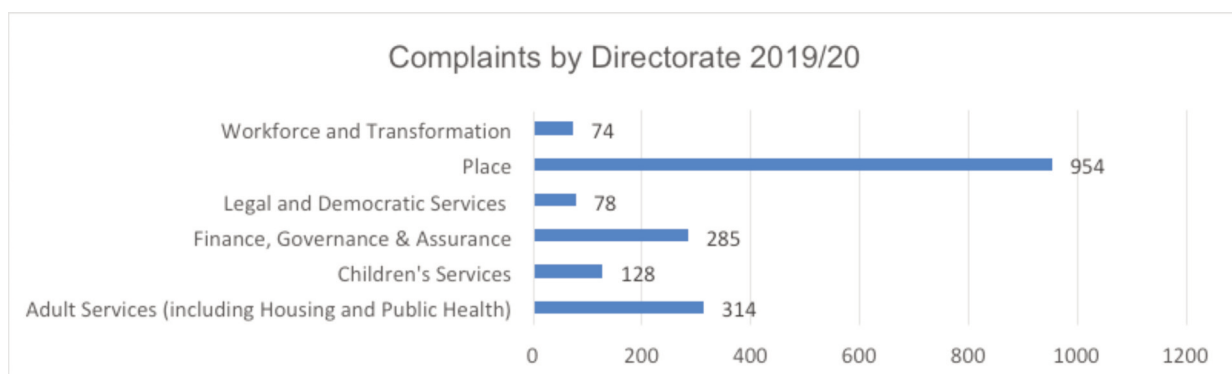


Some types of service are more likely to result in complaints than others and the chart below highlights complaints by directorate. Shropshire Council's Place Directorate handles the largest proportion of complaints compared to other directorates within Shropshire Council (52% of all complaints) followed by Adult Services (17%).

Taking a closer look at the breakdown of complaints by service highlights that, within the Place Directorate, Highways and Transport received 34% of all Shropshire Council's complaints in 2019/20 (compared to 30% of all complaints during 2018/19). Waste services accounted for 9% of all the complaints in 2019/20.

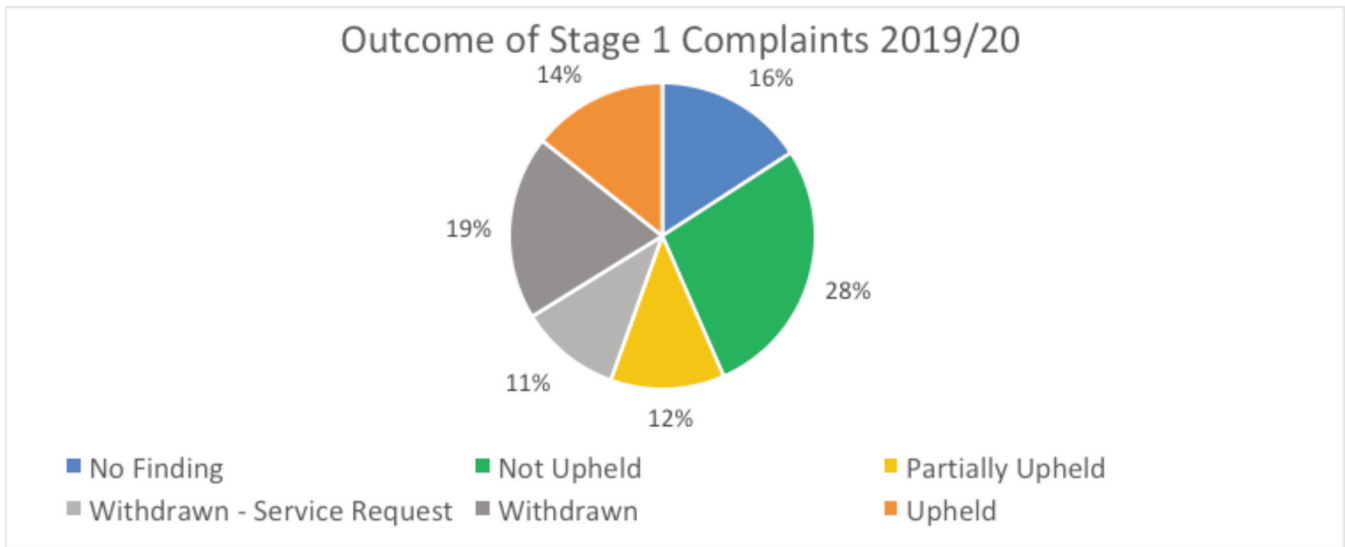
Complaints relating to Adult Services form 17% of all complaints and complaints relating to Children's Services form 7% of all complaints. The number of Adult Services complaints is very similar to the previous year but there were fewer Children's Services complaints in 2019/20 (forming 7% of complaints compared to 12% in 2018/19). Separate reports on Adult Services and Children's services explore the complaints and customer feedback received by these service areas in more detail.

Finance, Governance and Assurance were allocated 16% of all complaints in 2019/20. It is important to note that a large proportion of these were due to the fact that this Directorate handles revenues and benefits cases and insurance cases. Unlike other areas of service, the complaints are not likely to be about the service provided (for example a complaint may be made in order to highlight intention to progress an insurance claim).



Considering the outcome of complaints made within the year highlights that:

- At the end of 2019/20 1,725 stage 1 complaints were completed or closed. 108 stage 1 complaints remained open.
- Of the closed stage 1 complaints 14% were upheld (247 complaints), 12% were partly upheld and 28% were not upheld.
- Considering the complaints that were upheld, 30% were with Highways and Transport and 17% were with Waste Management. Following this, 6% of all upheld cases were for Revenues and Benefits.



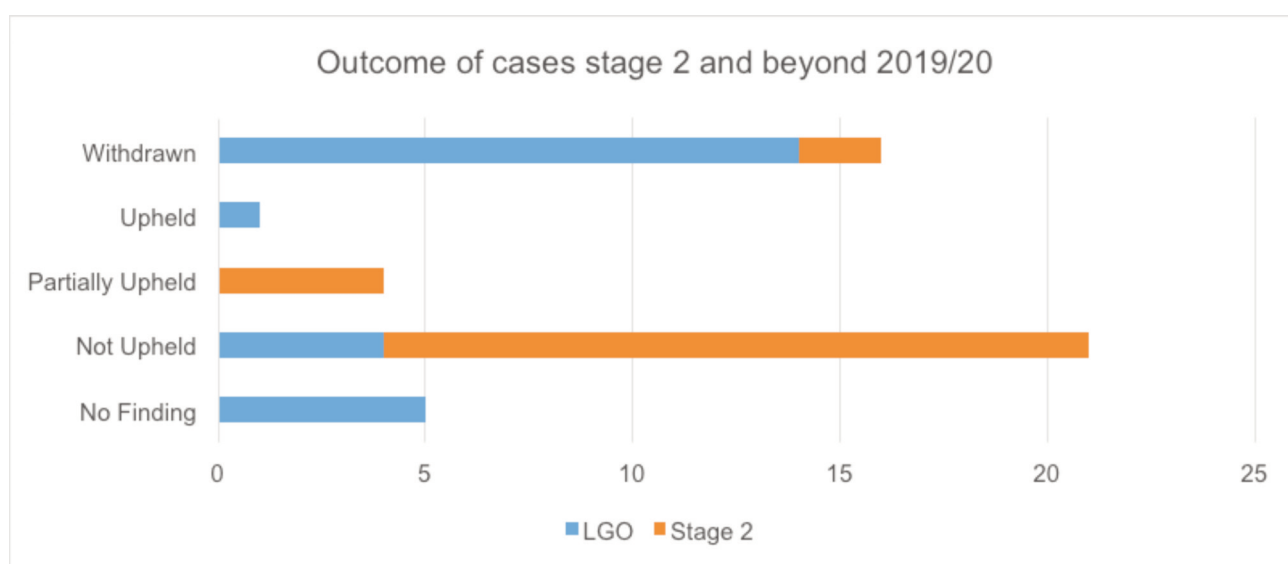
There is a concern that 16% of complaints investigations resulted in no finding. In some circumstances, there is a genuine reason for recording a 'no finding' outcome. A complaints investigator may find that not enough evidence or information is available to draw a conclusion, or they may be unable to obtain enough information from the complainant to fully complete the investigation. However, the large number of 'no finding' outcomes in 2019/20 (254) appear to be largely a result of a failure to investigate allocated complaints. 56% of 'no finding' outcomes are recorded for Shropshire Council's Highways and Transport department with very small numbers spread across other services. This is highlighted within the recommendations.

4. Progression of Complaints

Effective stage 1 complaint handling can reduce the number of stage 2 complaints. It is important to understand how many complaints progress beyond stage 1 and this is a measure included within regular performance reporting. During 2019/20 only a small proportion of all the complaints Shropshire Council received progressed beyond stage 1.

In total, 47 complaints received within the year progressed to a stage 2 complaint case or to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). This number was similar in 2018/19 (50 cases). Occasionally some complaints may progress prematurely to the LGO without a stage 2 investigation. The table below shows the number of complaints within the year that progressed beyond stage 1 and the chart below highlights the outcome of those complaints

Stage 2	LGO	Total investigations beyond stage 1
23	24	47



The Shropshire annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) highlighted that 85 complaints and enquiries were made to the LGO from Shropshire during the year. This total includes complaints received by Shropshire Council in previous financial years' so the data is not comparable with local data covered in this report (looking at cases received within the financial year). Of the 85 cases, 16 were not upheld, 11 were upheld and the remainder resulted in other actions such as referring back for local resolution, offering advice, or closure after initial enquiries. The LGO reports Shropshire Council's upheld rate at 41%. The LGO upheld rate for similar local authorities is reported as 56%.

Complaints and Enquiries Received

Category	Number received
Adult Care Services	19
Benefits & Tax	9
Corporate & Other Services	4
Education & Children's Services	12
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	7
Highways & Transport	12
Housing	1
Planning & Development	20
Grand Total	84

Decisions Made

				Detailed Investigations			Grand Total
Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete / Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Not Upheld	Upheld	Upheld rate (%)	
1	29	5	23	16	11	41	85

Appendix 2 highlights findings and recommendations made by the LGO within 2019/20. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint, and in most cases overseen by the service area's Director.

5. Annual Comparison 2018/19 and 2019/20

Number of compliments – decreased

In the last financial year (2019/20) Shropshire Council received 405 compliments. There has been a steady decline in the number of compliments received. In 2016/17 646 compliments were recorded for Shropshire Council in 2017/18 the Council received 541 compliments, and in 2018/19 460 compliments. Compliments average at 34 a month with fewer compliments recorded in April and June than in any other months of the year. More compliments were received in July than in any other month. Adult Services received 45% of all compliments followed by Place (39%).



Number of complaints - increased

The number of complaint investigations instigated by Shropshire Council totalled 1,833 in 2019/20 compared to 1,281 in 2018/19 (1,119 in 2017/18 and 922 in 2016/17). There were 1,487 complaint cases (some cases require more than one investigation). Complaints have increased by 43% since the previous financial year (there was a 14% increase between 2017/18 and 2018/19). A positive consideration is that people feel able to complain but the significant increase does suggest that the consequences of local authority budget reductions may be impacting on customer experience.



Nature of complaints - problems remain similar

The problems raised within complaints remain very similar to the patterns seen over previous years. Although Shropshire Council has changed the way it categorises complaints in order to improve in year reporting, reading the complaints and considering sub-categories, shows patterns remain stable. There has been an increase in the number of complaints relating to Council policy and reading these in more detail suggests this was, in part, due to policy changes for waste (recycling) and parking. Under the overall category of service standards (under which the majority of complaints fall) complaints commonly refer to failure to take action (sometimes expectations are beyond services the Council can deliver), and poor quality of service/ customer care. Lack of communication is also a common concern expressed by complainants.



Days to close – Average days to close increased

The average number of working days taken to respond to a stage 1 complaint during 2019/20 was 22 working days. In 2016/17 and 2017/18 it took Shropshire Council an average of 20 working days to close stage 1 complaints. In 2018/19 there was some improvement with the average being 14 working days so performance is not as good as the previous year. All averages are within the 30 working day corporate timescale for stage 1 complaints. Despite the good average performance, a significant number of stage 1 complaints are not responded to within the 30 working days timescale. The efficient handling of complaints by some departments is keeping the average response below the target. Quarterly performance reporting is used to identify where there is a need for improvement.

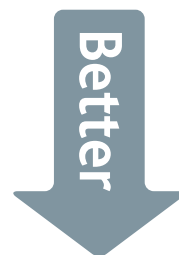


Outcome of complaints – Fewer complaints upheld

14% of complaints were upheld in the last financial year (2019/20). This is a reduction compared to the previous year. 12% were partly upheld, 28% were not upheld and the remainder were withdrawn or had no finding. This performance could be encouraging and suggests that although numbers of complaints have increased, this is not necessarily due to any significant changes in service standards or quality. It will be important to keep reviewing the complaints with the outcome 'no finding' to ensure this is not a result of failure to respond effectively.

In 2018/19 19% of cases were upheld, 16% were partly upheld and 34% were not upheld (the remainder were withdrawn, had no finding or were resolved in other ways). In 2017/18 24% of cases were upheld, 22% were partly upheld and 35% were not upheld, (other cases may have been withdrawn, resolved on the spot or resulted in a 'no finding').

It should be noted that, it would be a concern if performance monitoring didn't show some cases being upheld. It is important that Shropshire Council accept where things have gone wrong and are not in line with standards. Recognising where mistakes have been made is essential in any commitment to constant improvement. Quality checking of complaint responses by the Feedback and Insight Team's complaints and customer feedback officers remains in place and enables a more independent overview to achieve a balanced approach.



Complaints progressing beyond Stage 1 – similar proportion

In 2017/18 2.4% of all cases progressed beyond stage 1 and in 2018/19 the proportion was 3.9% (50 cases). In 2019/20 2.7% of cases progressed to stage 2 or the Local Government Ombudsman. This suggests little change in performance and performance remains good, with most cases being resolved at stage 1 of the complaint procedures. 85 cases were considered by the Ombudsman during 2019/20 (a very slight reduction on the previous year, at 91). The upheld rate in 2019/20 was 41% (an improvement on the 2018/19 upheld rate of 61%). However, the LGO raised performance concerns within their letter to the Chief Executive so this improvement in the main performance measure must be considered alongside other supporting information.



6. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council received 405 compliments during 2019/20. Example compliments are included below to illustrate the range of compliments received by different services. Receiving a compliment can make a big difference to a member of staff working hard to provide support for others and deliver services as effectively as possible. Although compliments are not given the same attention as complaints, they are used within the Council to understand where things are working well and to recognise the additional efforts made by individual members of staff.

Compliment for multiple teams: "On behalf of the Partners, staff and myself we cannot thank you and your teams enough for the speedy response and actions to our very distressing situation caused by the floods. We appreciate how busy the council have been with dealing with the flood situation for Shropshire, in particular Shrewsbury. Special thanks to the following people must be mentioned. X [name removed] who helped quickly organise with Ian the engineers, cleaning teams etc. X and X [names removed] for their very helpful meetings and updates and progressing everything with the insurance and procurement in an exceptional timely manner...."

Compliment for Street Scene and Highways North East: "Mrs. X [name removed] phoned to say what an excellent job we did to give them peace of mind with the flooding. We have cleared the nearby weir out twice of rubbish and debris and as they are at the lowest point in the area, they would flood if we hadn't done that. We cleared it last on Tuesday. She and her husband want to say thank you for such a good job."

Compliment for Property Services Group: "I would just like to thank PSG for the speedy service you gave us with the emergency we had getting a padlock out of the ground last week. It was much appreciated and got us out of a panic!"

Compliment for Environmental Maintenance: "X [name removed] would like to pass on her thanks to the team who came out last Sunday after the storm to cut up the fallen trees, and for coming to see her to make sure that she was alright. She said that they were "absolutely excellent" and did a very good job."

Compliment for Planning Policy: The Customer stated they wanted to thank so much, the officers concerned for the speedy reply to his enquiry which appears really helpful; also to say they have "received an excellent service from all the departments in Shropshire Council they have approached recently and that this has been a lesson in not taking at face value some of the poor press which is so freely bandied about these days. Many thanks again".

Compliment for Elections Team: Compliment from a Councillor present at a town council by-election; "may I congratulate your election staff, that were at the [by-election] last night. They were excellent and conducted themselves in a very efficient and professional manner. They were really good ambassadors for the council."

Compliment for Planning Services: "I have received confirmation today that planning consent has been granted for X at X [details removed]. I would like to thank you for your prompt attention to this matter and your help with it. Your efforts are much appreciated. Thank you."

Compliment for Registrars: "Customer wanted to thank everyone in the Registrars Team for all their help to arrange a last minute wedding for their friend who had terminal cancer. All their efforts were greatly appreciated...."



7. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council received 1,487 complaints during the year (2019/20). Some example complaints have been included below to highlight the type of feedback Shropshire Council receives. These examples were not all upheld (26% of closed cases were upheld or partly upheld). Some complaints arise from a lack of understanding of the service Shropshire Council is able to provide. Where necessary wording within complaints has been removed within the examples to ensure anonymity. The next section of this report looks more closely at learning and the actions taken following complaint investigations.

Complaint for Waste Management, Place: "Each and every time the recycling day arrives the binmen leave behind individual items that are effectively litter. This blows down the street into a local water course. The binmen make no attempt to pick up dropped or blown items on street despite being present. They seem to ignore it wilfully...."

Complaint for Commercial Services, Place: "Further to my visit to the Pride Hill Centre on Saturday 14th March, I am contacting you to make a complaint about the public toilets in this shopping centre. I visited the ladies toilets just before 5pm on the date above and was both shocked and angered to find in this time of immense concern over the coronavirus outbreak, that there was not a single drop of hand soap in either of the 2 dispensers at the time of my visit that day. This would be poor management at any time, however, at a time when hand-washing is of the upmost importance as one of the main preventative measures to help stop the spread of this potentially fatal virus, it is completely unacceptable and totally irresponsible."

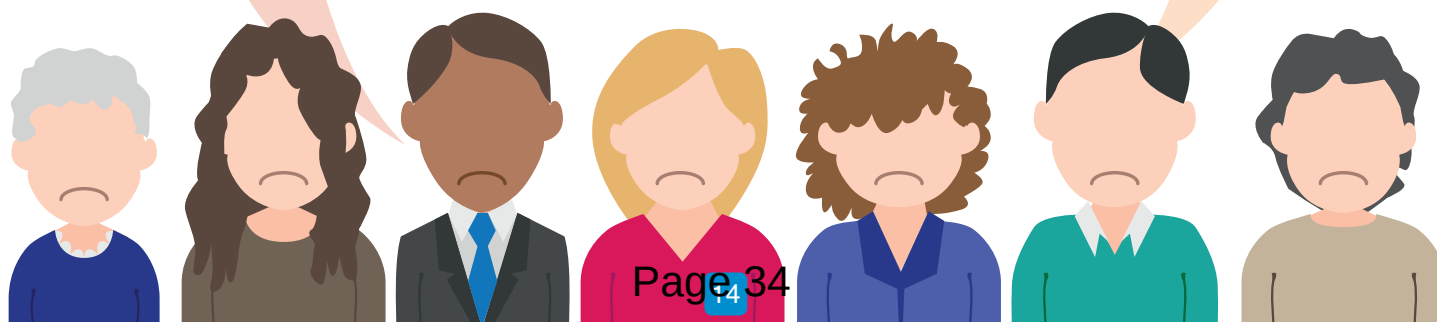
Complaint for ICT Services: "Pothole reporting and your website is very clunky. It took me about 30 minutes just to enter 3 reports. Maps are inadequate to identify the correct position for the reports that's why I try to send GPS positions."

Complaint for Waste Management: The customer would like to complain about the process for disputing a crew following a waste collection. Customers property was marked by the crew as recycling containers not being presented. Customer disputed this and was not happy with the process of raising a dispute. He felt that Customer Services should have been able to send a crew to collect the missed waste.

Complaint for ICT Services and Highways, Place: "Please consider this as a second official complaint - we have had to make one prior complaint to the Highways team who seem under-staffed and unable to keep up with demand. There is an issue with your website that prevents people from giving feedback."

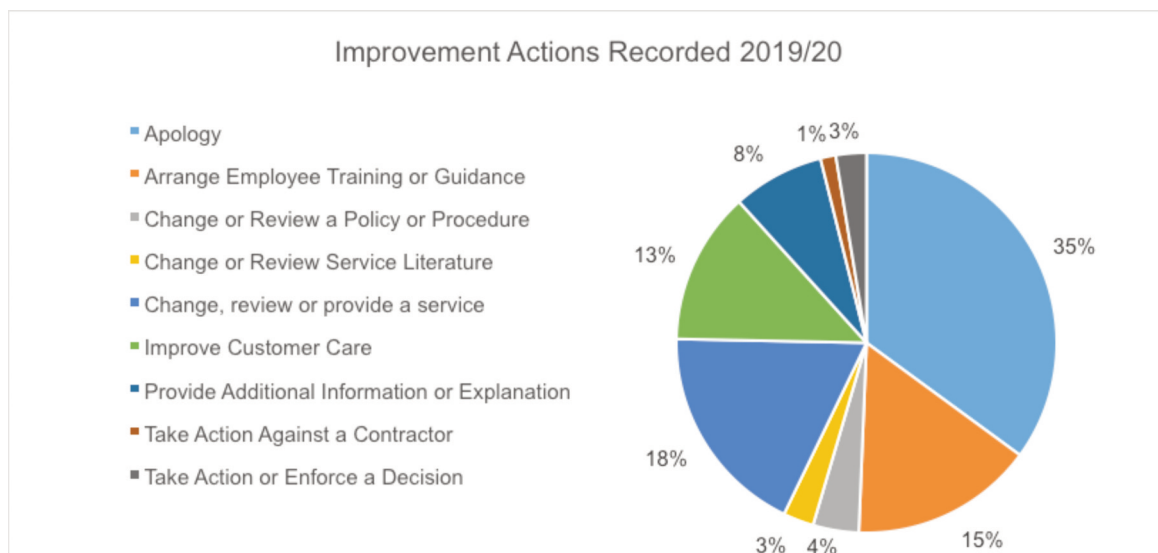
Complaint for Highways: Complaint regarding the state and condition of the Shropshire Roads in general: potholes, road signs, road gullies and road sweeping. Customer would welcome a discussion about these and especially the A489, a road the customer travels each day; stating "it's basically rotten and a joke how people are meant to travel to work and leisure each day, it is so dangerous".

Complaint for ICT Services and Highways, Place: The customer requested that the nearby salt box be filled via the 'My Shropshire' web site. "After being away last week and receiving a message saying that the work was carried out and the request closed. As of today, the bin remains empty. It was never filled. Not good enough."



8. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council recorded learning and/or actions against 11% of closed complaints (this is a reduction from 2018/19 at 17%). The charts below highlight the primary action and learning point recorded. It should be noted that actions and lessons are usually made when complaints are upheld or partly upheld. If small proportions of complaint investigations find fault there will be fewer remedial actions or learning.



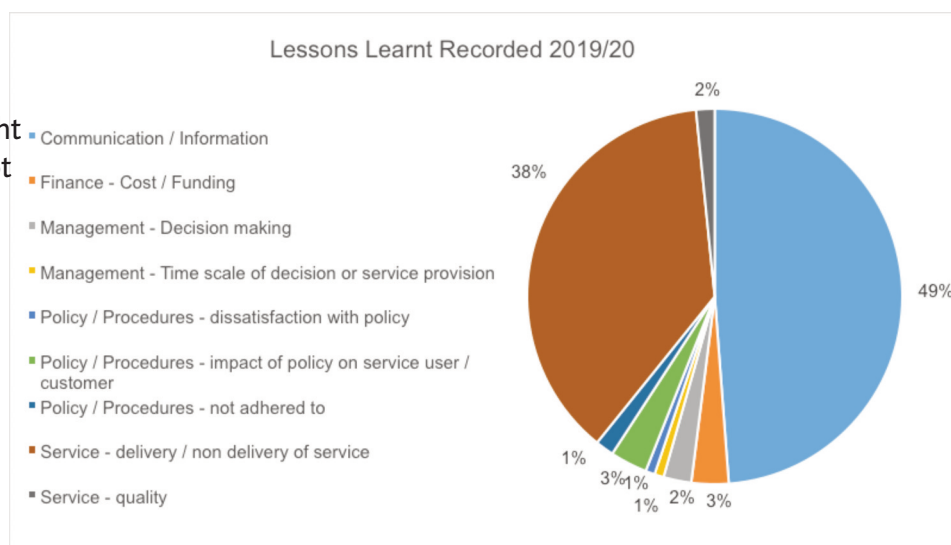
Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2019/20:

- 35% were to make an apology
- 18% were to change, review or provide a service
- 15% were to arrange employee training or guidance.
- 13% were to improve customer care
- 8% were to provide additional information or explanation

Consideration of the learning points recorded during 2019/20 highlights:

- 49% of learning points related to communication/information
- 38% of learning points fell into the category of delivery or non-delivery of a service
- Other types of learning points were not seen in any significant numbers.

Communication is consistently a common and dominant theme within complaints. Complainants often highlight their disappointment that they were not communicated with enough, or information was not shared effectively. Some complaints cases emphasise that more effective communication at an earlier stage could have led to a better understanding of the issues or the processes council staff work to and prevented the development of a formal complaint. Similarly, a lack of communication and response is commonly the cause of escalation within the complaints process.



9. Example Learning and Actions

The recording of learning is strongly encouraged following the completion of a complaint investigation. Acknowledging, and acting on, learning from complaints can avoid any mistakes from being repeated and lead to ongoing improvement. Examples are shown below to highlight the type of learning and action recorded. This is one element of wider work undertaken to focus on quality, and ensure customers receive a good standard of service. Wording within the examples has been altered slightly for simplicity and to ensure confidentiality.

The Commissioning Team and the Contract Monitoring Team will be following up on the issues that have been experienced with the care provider, to ensure the provider puts measures in place to provide support at agreed times and to effectively manage situations where there are last minute issues with allocated staff.

Concerns were raised that members of staff discussed some more personal matters in front of other service users, without recognising the impact that their comments could have on individuals or members of the group. To address this, actions included additional presence and support from service managers, discussion within supervision and encouraging staff to report any poor practice. It was also decided that further targeted refresher training for staff about Positive Behaviour Support should be arranged.

Concerns were raised within the complaint about delays in issuing minutes for child protection case. The delays were recognised, and apologies provided. It was highlighted that delays were caused by a backlog of work and staff shortages. Action was taken to recruit new staff to support the process and to prevent further delays from occurring.

The complaint arose because a member of the public was given the wrong advice by Shropshire Council's customer services department concerning completion of paperwork in relation to arranging to vote in an election. It was recognised that the member of staff intended to help the customer but unintentionally provided the wrong information. Actions included issuing information to Customer Service Advisors to remind them of the key information and process and to highlight the importance of obtaining all relevant details before providing information or advice to electors.

The complaint arose due to the length of time a customer waited for an Occupational Therapy report. To prevent similar concerns, a waiting list meeting was established to allow teams to discuss people on the waiting list, especially people moving to a priority status. This will enable the Team to get a better understanding of the people waiting and their potential needs and help monitor the number of telephone calls they receive regarding the support being given. People will then be seen in a more timely manner. This will be an ongoing meeting held monthly.

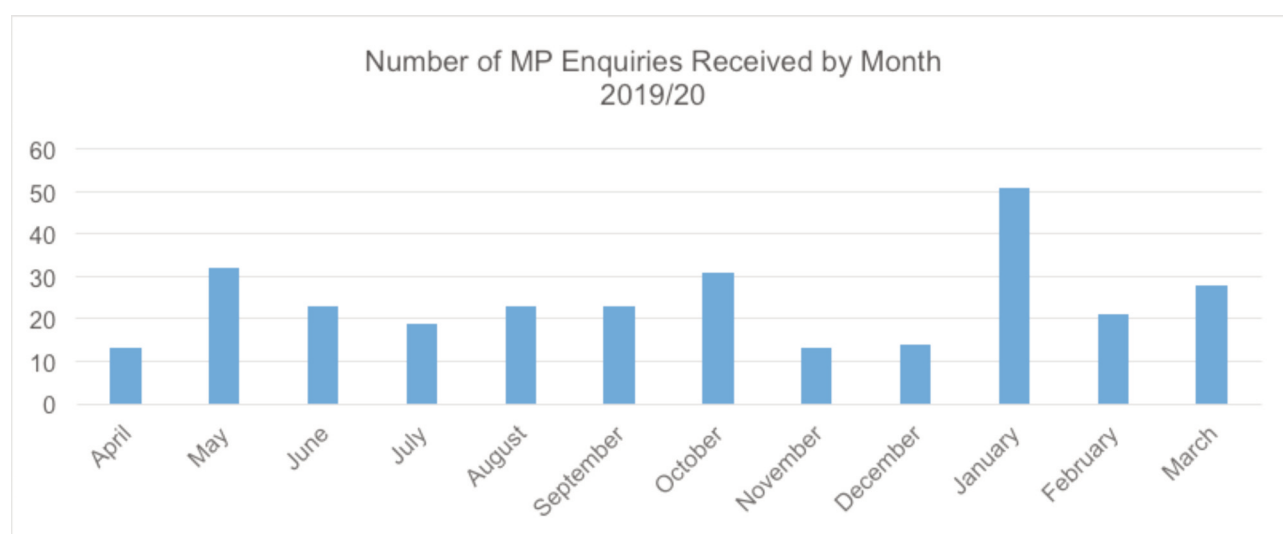
The complaint arose due to staff mistakes including missing appointments, and inaccurate paperwork. Concerns were also raised about the hours of support available. The investigation highlighted some of the causes of the problems raised but concluded that the impact of this was not significant. The actions included checking staff have adequate rest breaks, days off and annual leave in line with Working Time Regulations.

The complaint arose because some information provided within a telephone call was missed. This led to some paperwork being issued with an incorrect detail. The investigation into the complaint highlighted where the information had been missed and suggested action was to make use of recorded telephone calls (where they occur) and to listen back to the information again to double check accuracy.

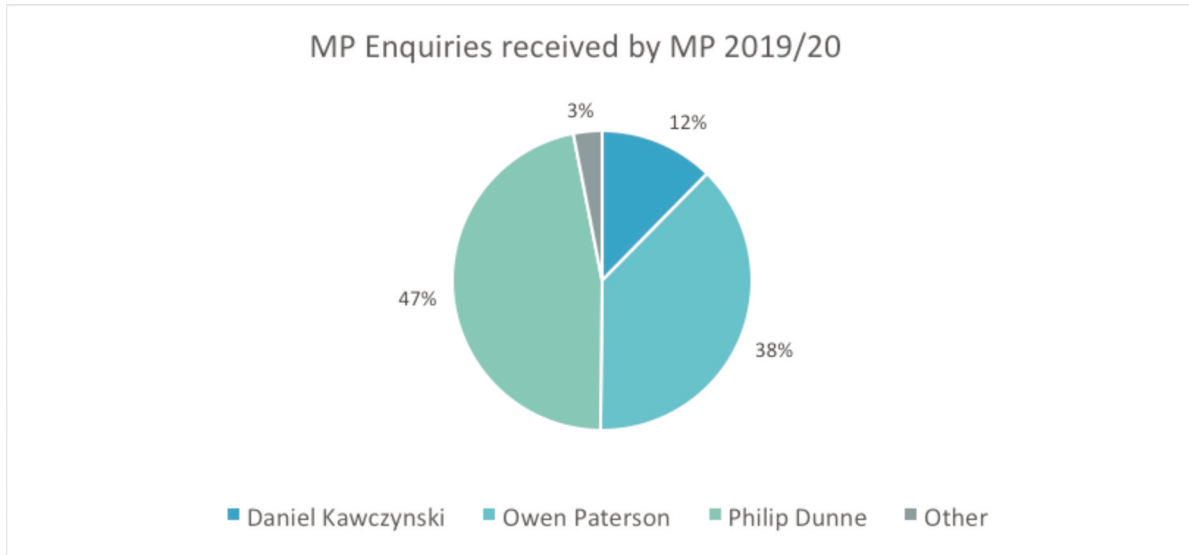
10. MP Enquiries

MP enquiries can commonly duplicate complaints received by Shropshire Council. Often a complainant will choose to make their local Elected Member, MP, Shropshire Council and sometimes the Local Government Ombudsman aware of a complaint at an early stage. For this reason, data concerning MP enquiries is considered and reported separately. Wherever possible Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team will work closely with the Directors' PAs and complaint investigators/service managers to coordinate complaint and MP enquiry responses.

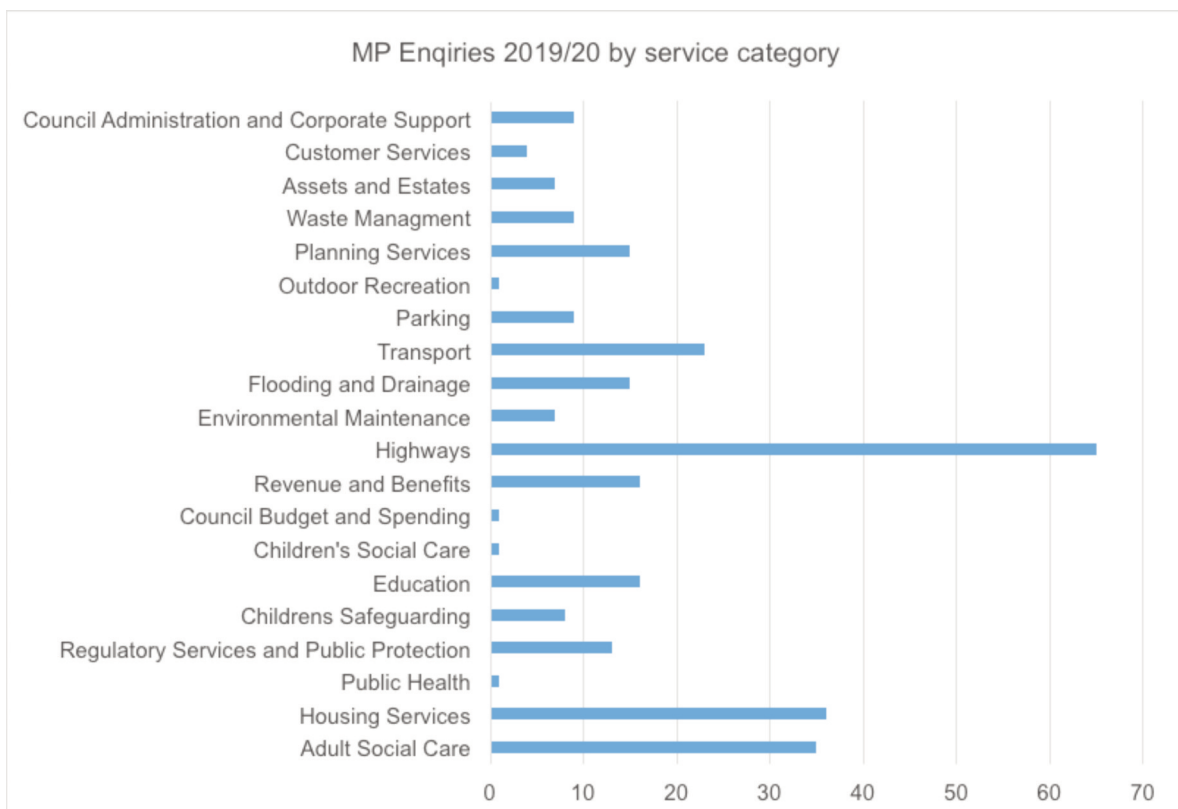
During 2019/20 there were 291 MP enquiries recorded by Shropshire Council (compared to 322 the previous year). The overall pattern of MP enquiries remains similar over time with little variance over the last 2 years and averages around 24 enquiries received a month. In the same way as complaints, there can be seasonal fluctuations caused by seasonal issues such as the impact of winter conditions on the roads or waste collections. January is often a busy month for MP enquiries but this in part may also be influenced by holiday periods. There were 51 enquiries in January 2019, followed by 32 in May and 31 in October.



MP enquiries are received from Shropshire's three MPs, Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham), Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) and Philip Dunne (Ludlow constituency, South Shropshire). The chart below highlights that 47% of all MP enquiries received by Shropshire Council relate to the south of the county.



A consideration of MP enquiries by service category suggests that there are 2 big clusters of topics. 38% of all MP enquiries cover the services Highways, Environmental Maintenance, Flooding/drainage and Transport (infrastructure services). 24% relate to Adult Social Care and Housing (adult support services).



11. Conclusions

The 2019/20 customer feedback data highlights a continued growth in the volumes of formal customer feedback received by Shropshire Council (a 13% increase in cases since last year). The data also highlights a significant increase in complaints investigations with a 43% increase in investigations since the last year. Overall complaints have increased steadily year on year with the number of complaints now more than double the volume 5 years ago (2015/16). This growth is slightly out of line with overall case numbers for two main reasons: a) complaints have increased as the proportion of all cases (there are fewer compliments, comments and other types of formal feedback); and b) increasingly there are likely to be multiple investigations for each complaint supporting anecdotal evidence that complaints cases are becoming more complex in nature.

The nature of complaints remains similar with the allocation of cases across service areas showing similar patterns to previous years. Stage 1 complaints handling remains effective with a small proportion of complaints progressing to Stage 2. It should also be noted that only a relatively small proportion of complaints are upheld (14%) or partly upheld (12%). Reading complaints case summaries highlights that complaints are often generated due to a lack of clear communication, provision of information and delays rather than any fault in following process or service quality when provided. It is possible that that this is the result of the impact of austerity on resource levels within service areas.

A close analysis of complaints by service area (separate and more detailed reports are provided for Children's Services and Adults Services) highlights the main themes for services receiving the greatest number of corporate complaints. Please note that these are reported issues and not necessarily upheld complaints:

- **Highways & Transport** – Highways and Transport received a significantly larger number of complaints than any other area of service (34% of all complaints). Complaints refer to a lack of response/communication, lack of action or delays, complaints about condition of highways such as potholes, parking, road closures/road works and flooding/drainage.
- **Waste & Recycling** – 9% of complaints relate to Waste Management services but it should be highlighted that despite the volumes these complaints are generally handled efficiently by the department. Themes include repeated missed collections, mess caused by rubbish not contained by bins, not returning bins or recycling containers to properties after emptying, attitude and behaviour of individuals collecting waste.
- Risk and Insurance cases feature significantly within the analysis by services, but it should be noted that these cases are not in relation to the services provided by Risk and Insurance Department. They are cases where members of the public express dissatisfaction about issues that are usually withdrawn as complaints and handled as insurance cases.
- Although Planning Services remain within the top 4 services for complaints, and there are some concerns around lack of communication and delay, it should be noted that there has been a significant reduction in case numbers and an improvement in complaint handling over the last year.

Overall the LGO received 85 enquiries from Shropshire in 2019/20, 91 in 2018/19, 84 in 2017/18 and 90 in 2016/17. Overall performance in terms of numbers of cases referred remains similar. The LGO annual data includes upheld rates as key measures of performance. In 2016/17 Shropshire Council's upheld rate was 48%, in 2017/18 it was 32%, in 2018/19 61% and in 2019/20 the upheld rate was 41%. The small numbers mean percentages fluctuate significantly. Performance is slightly better than the average upheld rate for similar local authorities (56%). However, the LGO has asked Shropshire Council, through its annual letter to the Chief Executive to consider its response timescales (the LGO highlight that high proportions of cases are being responded to late).

12. Progress Update

There have been a number of developments over the last 12 months as recommendations set out within the Annual Report 2018/19 have been implemented. Key actions and achievements over the last 12 months are summarised below. It has been highlighted where ongoing action is required:

	Action 2017/18	Progress Made
1	Address increases in complaints through focused preventative work (e.g. increased communications and effective case management).	Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team have implemented a range of actions to try to increase the support available to complaints investigators across the organisation. Careful assessment has taken place to identify cases that may be resolved more rapidly and less formally through comments and service request actions. Where appropriate, suggestions have been made about the actions that may be taken to avoid similar complaints (e.g. by making changes to public information). In addition, regular updates and reminders have been implemented to ensure investigators are aware of any imminent deadlines or outstanding cases to limit escalation of cases. This work has not impacted on complaint volumes and numbers of complaints continue to grow.
2	Undertake closer working with those services within the Place directorate experiencing higher levels of complaints.	Progress has been mixed. There have been some clear successes within this work, most noticeably within Planning Services where numbers of cases have reduced significantly and there is now effective complaint monitoring and regular attention to any outstanding cases. Increased reporting of complaints and joint working with the Place Directorate has been implemented with detailed monthly and/or ad hoc reports supplementing quarterly reporting. The data highlights that this has not yet produced results within the Highways department, in part, due to considerable changes in this service area. It is hoped that a more stable work environment could generate improvement in 2020/21 and this will feature in the recommendations below.
3	Anticipate groups of complaints generated through significant changes in service or policy (highlighted within public consultations).	Over the last 2 years changes in service provision (for example recycling bring banks and parking policy) have led to clusters of complaints on a topic. It has been important in the last 12 months to anticipate where multiple complaints could be likely. A range of actions can then be put in place where needed. This work can include maximising the feedback opportunities within surveys or consultations before a new policy is implemented, anticipating concerns and providing public information to address them, developing core information that may be used within complaints responses (although each complaint is considered separately where there are themes the availability of core information can reduce response times). This proactive work, taking a more holistic approach to feedback, is necessary over the long term.
4	Address the numbers of long running cases exceeding the timescales set.	Although efforts have been undertaken to highlight long running and overdue cases (increasing reporting and reminders) the data highlights that efforts to generate improvement have not been successful overall. This could be the result of staff capacity within services and may, as a result, be difficult to influence without additional resources. This issue remains a concern and is featured again within the recommendations.
5	Improve the recording of learning and actions.	The data for 2019/20 highlights that this remains a concern. The recording of learning and actions for statutory complaints remains effective (complaints investigators respond formally and frequently include feedback concerning learning and actions within response letters). However, despite some good practice within some service areas responding to corporate complaints, there has been a noticeable decline in quality in some areas. Increasingly investigators are responding to complaints in an informal way and not at a standard that would be expected within a formal process subject to external scrutiny.

	Action 2017/18	Progress Made
6	Address the increase in complaints being made across multiple processes.	A noticeable trend over the last 2 years has been for complainants to use multiple processes to raise their complaint. Increasingly complainants may send their concerns to Shropshire Council as a complaint, as an MP enquiry, as a councillor enquiry and if available an enforcement case or other type of case. Over the last 12 months discussions have taken place with key leads in different departments to try to determine how this can be addressed and a more coordinated response designed. Some progress has been achieved in that Customer Services led records can be viewed and read only access has been granted for the Highways IT system. However, without integration between IT systems it is not possible to have the view of all open cases for a customer and this issue remains a challenge.
7	Consider the 2018/19 increase in the LGO upheld rate.	There is a recognition that the relatively small numbers of cases progressing to the LGO can lead to variations in the upheld rate (measured as a percentage), nevertheless the upheld rate was a concern in 2018/19. The 2019/20 data shows a significant improvement in the upheld rate but LGO responses must remain a focus (see recommendations).
8	Take action to increase knowledge of, and further develop processes for, third party provider complaints.	The coordination of third-party provider complaints has been a successful area of work over the last 12 months. Processes and ways of working have become well embedded and joint work across the teams supporting this process (including contracts and Adult Social Care's Commissioning and Business Support Unit) has been very effective. Knowledge of ways of working is increasing gradually within the provider market and although work will be required over the long term, this no longer appears to be an area in need of special attention.
9	Provide staff training for complaint handling and good practice.	Over the last 12 months complaint training has been delivered on request, with a particular focus on statutory complaint handling within Adult and Children's Social Care. New complaint training resources have been developed by the Feedback and Insight Team for face to face training. Due to the significant increase in case numbers there has not been the capacity to develop online complaints training, but this remains an ambition.
10	Integrate Councillor Enquiries and MP Enquiries into the new IT system for customer feedback.	When the new IT system for customer feedback was developed it was designed as a phased implementation with complaints, compliments and comments forming the first phase of development. It was planned that a second phase of development would allow the recording of MP Enquiries, Councillor Enquiries and Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious procedure cases. Therefore, this development was included as a recommendation for focus in the last annual report. There is not currently any corporate commitment to progress the outstanding system development and for that reason no progress can be achieved. The recommendation will be carried forward into 2020/21 with the hope that this can be built into ICT transformation planning.
11	Further develop and improve reporting from the new customer feedback IT system.	This recommendation has been achieved. Reporting is now well established and filterable Power BI reports are available for use by all service areas and teams. These are made widely available by email across the organisation. Ad hoc reports are produced on request and monthly reporting is also in place for some service areas. This increased access to information has not positively impacted on performance.

13. Recommendations

The following recommendations for 2020/21 are designed to allow for ongoing improvement in the application of Shropshire Council's complaints procedures and in the work undertaken to obtain and respond to customer feedback.

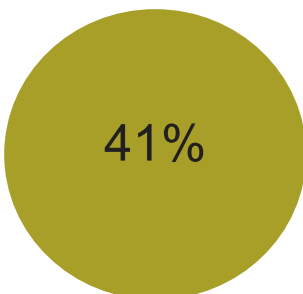
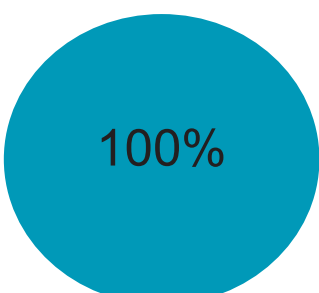
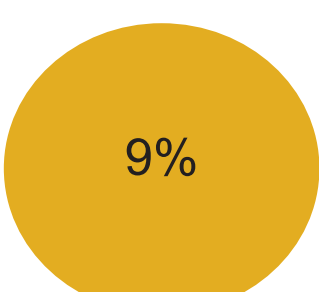
1. Overall there are growing numbers of customer feedback cases and a significant increase in the number of complaints investigations being undertaken. In many service areas, a review of complaints suggests there are few opportunities to address this growing volume of cases. Many service areas do not receive clusters of complaints on one topic, nor are large numbers of complaints upheld, both of which would suggest a need for improvement. However, there is one exception in the Highways department where numbers of complaints have increased and now form a significant proportion of the Council's overall complaints (34%). There seems to be some opportunity to make improvements in complaints handling this area and it is recommended that this is a priority for 2020/21.
2. The 2019/20 data highlights that over the year, there were a large number of 'no finding' outcomes recorded. This suggests that in many cases there has been a failure to investigate and report back on allocated complaints. 56% of 'no finding' outcomes are recorded for Shropshire Council's Highways and Transport department with very small numbers spread across other services. This links to the recommendation above, but it is recommended that work takes place with service managers and all investigators within the Highways department to highlight the importance of responding to allocated complaints and completing investigations in line with the corporate procedure.
3. Although average response times are within target, concerns remain about the large number of long running and overdue complaint cases. Performance reporting over the last 12 months has not impacted positively on long running and overdue complaints. For this reason, it is recommended that a one-off detailed review is undertaken on a service by service basis, working with senior managers to provide detailed information at the investigator level. This will allow managers to fully understand where there are ongoing obstacles and performance issues.
4. There is a concern about a drop in the overall quality of complaints responses and the compliance of complaints investigators with the standards and expectations set out by the Feedback and Insight Team. However, there is recognition that guidance and support is perhaps not as easily available as it could be for members of staff who are either new to complaints investigator role or receive complaints only very infrequently. To address this staff information and guidance will be made more accessible and reminders issued to ensure staff know what is expected and how to seek support if it is needed.
5. An ongoing recommendation is needed to address the lack of identification of learning and actions from corporate complaints. This recommendation is linked to the guidance for staff above, but it is important to focus on understanding learning and actions so that ongoing improvement can be generated (this ongoing learning and improvement is an important part of working to address the overall increases in complaints).

Recommendations continued...

6. LGO performance remains similar for the number of cases considered by the Ombudsman, and the upheld rate has improved in 2019/20. Despite the overall improvement in performance (and above average performance in the upheld rate compared to similar local authorities) the LGO has requested Shropshire Council look at its performance in relation to delays (time taken to respond and to implement recommendations). This should not be considered reflective of any team performance, it requires responsiveness from across the organisation and it is recommended it forms an area for attention in 2020/21.
7. The delivery of staff training is another ongoing recommendation from 2019/20. Face to face training continues to be delivered but plans to develop online training have had to be put on hold due to the increase in case volumes. It is an ongoing ambition to implement online complaints training for staff and it is recommended that this work is part of the Feedback and Insight Team's plan for 2020/21.
8. The data highlights that there are significant numbers of people making repeat complaints and submitting high volumes of other feedback to Shropshire Council. Where this is reasonable, cases can be handled effectively, and responses made. However, in some cases the level or nature of contact becomes unreasonable and starts to require significant time, negatively impacting on the ability of Shropshire Council staff members to carry out their services. It is recommended that the Unusually Persistent and Vexatious Customers Procedure is supported by the provision of additional staff information so that managers are better aware of the process they can follow where needed to respond to the most challenging cases (note these cases are not necessarily related to complaints).
9. Quarterly complaints reports are made available to all service areas via Directors and key contacts within council departments. Reports identify who has opened and viewed them. This information has highlighted that complaints performance reports are not being widely used. It is recommended that this is explored over the next 12 months to understand the reason for this and see if there are any actions that can be taken to increase use.

Appendix 1 Ombudsman Cases 2019/20

Shropshire Council
For the period ending: 31/03/20

Complaints upheld		
	41% of complaints we investigated were upheld. This compares to an average of 56% in similar authorities.	11 upheld decisions Statistics are based on a total of 27 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	In 100% of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations. This compares to an average of 99% in similar authorities.	Statistics are based on a total of 12 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020
Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning.		
Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority		
	In 9% of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of 11% in similar authorities.	1 satisfactory remedy decision Statistics are based on a total of 27 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020

Appendix 2

Recommendations to the Council made by the LGO during 2019/20

This table covers complaints that were upheld by the LGO during 2019/20:

LGO Category	Date decision made	Remedy	LGO's Recommendation	Recommendation actioned
Planning & Development	11/06/2019	Apology	Apology	Complete
Adult Care Services	08/05/2019	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	Apology and financial redress.	Complete
Education & Children's Services	23/04/2019	Apology, Training and guidance	Within one month of my decision the Council should: send a memo to officers dealing with education, health and care plans reminding them of the need to complete the process within 14 weeks unless there are exceptional circumstances. That memo should particularly remind officers to follow up with the school when Council officers are unable to attend the review meeting to ensure there is no delay providing the review paperwork; and send a memo to those dealing with complaints to remind them of the need to follow the Council's complaints procedure.	Complete
Planning & Development	23/07/2019	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	The Council will ensure measurements taken in respect of enforcement investigations are kept on record.	Complete
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	07/02/2020	New appeal/review or reconsidered decision, Procedure or policy change/review	The Council has agreed to properly consider whether there is any further action it could take to address the fly-tipping problem in the area. It will provide details of the options it has considered, any action it intends to take and its reasons for not taking any action which is within its power. The Council has agreed to take action to ensure the fly-tipping problem in the area is reviewed periodically. The Council has agreed to review the way it deals with residents' telephone calls and emails to ensure it responds to them in a timely manner.	Complete

LGO Category	Date decision made	Remedy	LGO's Recommendation	Recommendation actioned
Planning & Development	22/01/2020	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Provide information/advice	Financial redress and information provision.	Complete
Planning & Development	12/11/2019	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Provide training and/or guidance	The Council will send a memo to planning officers to remind them of the need to visit development sites and ensure, when doing so, they identify any properties with a boundary with the development site that should have been informed of the proposal.	Part complete. Payment made with ongoing action required.
Planning & Development	24/01/2020	Financial Redress: Quantifiable Loss	Financial redress.	Complete
Education & Children's Services	02/09/2019	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	Apology, review and financial redress.	Complete
Adult Care Services	05/12/2019	No further action, already remedied.		Complete
Adult Care Services	10/02/2020	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	Apology and financial redress.	Complete

Customer Feedback Annual Report Shropshire Council 2019/20

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

Feedback and Insight Team, Information,
Intelligence and Insight, Shropshire Council
Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 6ND

Email: customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk
www.shropshire.gov.uk



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**Committee and Date**

**Performance Management
Scrutiny Committee**

20 January 2021

Item

Public

Financial strategy and budget monitoring task and finish group**Responsible Officer**

Danial Webb, overview and scrutiny officer
danial.webb@shropshire.gov.uk
01743 258509

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a proposal for a task and finish group to scrutinise the council's financial strategy and budget setting. This group would complement the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee's regular scrutiny of the council's in-year performance against budget.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 This report makes the following recommendations
- That the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee approves the proposal and draft terms of reference for a financial strategy and budget monitoring task and finish group.
 - That the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee makes any amends to the proposal and draft terms of reference
 - That the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee requests that the task and finish group reports back after each meeting to the next scheduled meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee.

3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 Scrutiny of the draft budget is an essential part of the council's governance structure. Separate from audit processes, it provides for a democratically accountable body to scrutinise budget setting against council priorities in a public forum.
- 3.2 A failure to engage in budget scrutiny risks undermining public trust in the council's transparency.
- 3.3 A failure to properly support budget scrutiny risks committee and group members making weak or inappropriate recommendations. This too could undermine public confidence in the council's capacity for good governance.

4.0 Financial implications

- 4.1 Financial scrutiny is an integral and necessary part of the council's overview and scrutiny function. This work would form part of the function's regular work. There is therefore no additional cost to Shropshire Council in carrying out this work.

5.0 Climate change appraisal

- 5.1 There is not direct impact on the council's objectives to mitigate climate change. However, it is a fundamental part of financial scrutiny that considers the impact of the council's financial strategy and budget setting on its ability to meet climate change objectives.

6.0 Report

- 6.1 Scrutiny is a critical part of the overall governance framework. Effective financial scrutiny can help the council assure themselves that their budget is robust and sustainable, and that it properly considers the needs of residents.

Scrutiny can also provide an independent perspective, drawing directly on the insights of local people, and can challenge assumptions and preconceptions. It can also provide a mechanism to ensure buy-in – or at least understanding – of the tough choices that Shropshire Council regularly has to make.

- 6.2 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability's (CIPFA) *financial scrutiny practice guide* suggests the following four purposes of financial scrutiny.

- **Reviewing how resources are allocated, monitoring how they are used, and examining their impact.** This is about following through from budget development and planning to the delivery of a budget, and oversight over that budget in-year. It links to the way that scrutiny selects and prioritises its work.
- **Reviewing the integration between financial and service planning.** What is the level of integration between corporate and service planning and performance and financial management?
- **Testing out and making explicit whether the council is directing its resources effectively** to meet its priorities and demonstrating whether it is achieving value for money, equity and social value.
- **Providing, through scrutiny in a public forum, challenge to the executive's management of the council's finances, and a different perspective on challenges.** This is about scrutiny having a clearly defined role and bringing something unique to the table in how it goes about its work.

- 6.3 These four purposes suggest a dual role for scrutiny. Firstly, it has a strategic role that looks at how the council aligns its corporate objectives with its financial

strategy. It also has a tactical role, ensuring not only that the council meets its budget planning, but that its spending also achieves its purposes effectively. Both roles require an ongoing commitment to financial scrutiny throughout the year.

- 6.4 Shropshire Council conducts its financial scrutiny through its Performance Management Scrutiny Committee. This committee meets only six times a year, meaning that rigorous scrutiny of financial strategy and budget setting as outlined in the work programme in **appendix 1** would result in the committee having little time for other matters. This report therefore recommends that this work is carried out in a discrete task and finish group of no more than seven elected members. In order to maintain public accountability and transparency of governance, after each meeting the task and finish should table a brief report on its work to the next meeting of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee. In addition, regular quarterly monitoring of financial outturns would still take place at meetings of the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.5 In addition to this work, the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee should also continue its regular budget monitoring as part of its remit to review Council performance.
- 6.6 A proposed term of reference and work programme is attached at **appendix 1**. These terms and programme of work are based on CIPFA's *financial scrutiny practice guide* and include questions posed by CIPFA to guide member scrutiny.
- 6.7 Although the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee is invited to agree to the creation of a financial strategy and budget setting task and finish group, the terms of reference and work programme should be decided by the task and finish group and be referred back to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee for final approval.

List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability: *financial scrutiny practice guide*

Local Government Association: *A councillor's workbook on scrutiny of finance*

Centre for Public Scrutiny: *Treasure your assets*

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Support

Local Member

All

Appendices

Financial strategy and budget monitoring task and finish group draft terms of reference

Financial strategy and budget monitoring task and finish group proposed work programme

Appendix 1: Financial strategy and budget monitoring task and finish group draft terms of reference

Introduction

The Local Government Act 2000 states that it is the responsibility of the Full Council, on the recommendation of the executive, to approve the budget and related council tax demand. The Act makes it clear that the role of scrutiny in the financial process is to hold the executive to account and to ensure that its decisions are in the best interests of the community. Some scrutiny of budget setting and other financial planning processes is therefore essential.

The Local Government Act 2003 provides the central legislation surrounding a council's financial planning and budgeting arrangements. Sections 28 and 29 of the Act require members to be involved in budget monitoring throughout the year. Although it is not specified whether this is primarily an executive or scrutiny function, scrutiny provides the ideal vehicle for such involvement.

Terms of reference

The purpose of the proposed task and finish group will therefore be to:

- Track, scrutinise and contribute to the ongoing development of the medium term financial strategy and budget setting process as outlined in the committee's work programme, in particular:
 - How the financial strategy aligns with and supports corporate strategy priorities.
 - The risks in the council's strategic approach, and how the council mitigates those risks.
 - The particular risk that strategy may have on the ability to deliver a balanced budget.
 - The impact of budget setting on future service delivery.
- To report back after each group meeting to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee on its work.
- To escalate any areas of concern it may have regarding financial strategy to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee for formal, scrutiny in public.

Information required

- Financial strategy 2020/2021 – 2025/2026
- Current and developing service plans
- Financial planning from partner authorities, where available or needed.
- Ad-hoc financial information as requested during the group's work
- Learning, benchmarking and good practice from other local authorities
- Shropshire Council's Strategic risk register

Timescale

The committee will meet monthly after the elections in May 2021, from June 2021 until January 2022.

Appendix 2: Financial strategy and budget monitoring task and finish group proposed work programme

May 2021	Review and reflection on the 2020/2021 budget cycle • What did the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) say that this year's budget needs to achieve – How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect those aims? • To what extent was the draft budget refined over the course the previous year? • On what basis were these refinements made? End of 2020/2021 performance • How did performance match with expectations; how do expectations match with what we understand about local people's needs? • How has our overall performance aligned with that of our partners, ie Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group, West Mercia Police? How have partners' performance influenced our own performance? • How does overall performance at the end of the year match up with what we have spent? • How, if at all, have we been able to mitigate the risks that we anticipated at the beginning of the year? 2020/2021 – 2025/2026 MTFS • What is our overall outlook and how is it expressed in the MTFS? • What are our priorities? • What are our principal challenges and risks? • How are we mitigating those risks: who does what?
June 2021	2022/2023 budget headlines • How are the principal headlines in the budget influenced by what we know, and what we can assume about next year – as expressed in our overall priorities and in the MTFS? • What will our priorities be next year? Do we know enough about demand and user needs across all the areas for which we hold responsibility to have confidence here? • To what extent have we involved our partners in formulating this headline information? • What are the principal corporate risks that we face in delivering a balanced budget? • What are the principal corporate risks that we face in providing the services that local people need

	and expect?
July 2021	<i>NB – formal scrutiny of quarterly financial monitoring to happen at Performance Management Scrutiny Committee</i> End of quarter 1: reflection against plans in 2021/2022 budget • Did expenditure meet (or help to meet) the performance objectives set by members? Is it possible to make assessments on this to support a view of whether the service(s) in question were value for money? • Have new risks emerged which might affect deliverability of plans in the next quarter? • Are officers aware of the reasons for any under or overspends; how is cabinet overseeing this, where have issues been escalated to the s151 officer and what action is being taken? • What impact do under/overspends have on the achievement of the council's plans and policies? • Has this impact been taken into account for next year's budget and future budget?
September 2021	Building the 2022/2023 budget • Who holds responsible for developing and testing different elements of the budget? • Where does accountability lie for quality assurance and accuracy? • How are we testing assumptions – what is our level of optimism with the budget overall, and we will we continue to evaluate this as the process develops? • How will concerns be escalated as they emerge? Have any concerns emerged yet, and how are they being dealt with? Testing service plans • Do the proposed spending plans fit with the council's overall aims, objectives and priorities? • Is it clear how outcomes/outputs will be measured? • What opportunities might there be to make this service/our management of this issue more sustainable through alternative means of funding/income generation? • What targets have been established, and how will they be monitored (and amended, where necessary)? • How do plans link with expected service demand?

October 2021	<i>NB – formal scrutiny of quarterly financial monitoring to happen at Performance Management Scrutiny Committee</i> End of quarter 2: reflection against plans in 2021/2022 budget • Did expenditure meet (or help to meet) the performance objectives set by members? Is it possible to make assessments on this to support a view of whether the service(s) in question were value for money? • Have new risks emerged which might affect deliverability of plans in the next quarter? • Are officers aware of the reasons for any under or overspends; how is cabinet overseeing this, where have issues been escalated to the s151 officer and what action is being taken? • What impact do under/overspends have on the achievement of the council's plans and policies? • Has this impact been taken into account for next year's budget and future budget?
November 2021	Budget refinement • How will the budget reflect investments that are aimed at achieving longer-term savings? • What consideration has been given to maximising income and wider revenue opportunities? • How is the workforce planned and managed to ensure that market considerations are taken into account when determining pay scales? • What is the anticipated impact of current and planned efficiency /savings targets on the budget and how is the council planning ahead to deal with the cumulative effects of efficiency targets? • What is the anticipated impact of budget pressures on: ○ services ○ performance ○ clients/service users ○ partnerships and joint working ○ staffing levels ○ job evaluation? • How are borrowing and trading opportunities taken into account in our plans? • How does the budget engage with the need to stabilise and increase our income sustainably?

	• How can the council have the assurance that the draft budget continues to conform with the principles and expectations of the MTFS? • How will the MTFS alongside this draft budget be used to make detailed decisions on resource allocation? • What are the overall interfaces between the draft budget as it currently stands and our wider treasury management strategy? Savings and growth proposals • What are the general principles that underpin when, and how, proposals for savings and for growth will be made? • Were the proposals being made as part of the budget envisaged as the budget began to be formulate; are they reflected in the MTFS and in the council's broader strategy documents? If not, why not? • Do we expect that these proposals may change as further research is done; are they immutable now? • How can we have confidence in our assessment about the impact that savings and growth will have on local people? Definition of outcomes • To what extent do the outcomes we have set for this expenditure reflect the needs of local people? • How have local people been involved in this assessment? • How will we evaluate a) whether these were in fact the right outcomes and b) whether these outcomes were met? • Do we have confidence that we will be measuring the right things in the right way in assessing whether outcomes have been delivered? • To what extent are outcomes contingent on the activity of our partners?
December 2021	Implications of Government settlement • Is there a variance between our expectation of the settlement and the final figure agreed? • What does the level of the settlement mean for our expectations around the setting of council tax (and any associated precepts, if applicable)?

	• How does the notification of the settlement impact on the level of risk, and our expectations of being able to deliver a balanced budget? • Does the settlement, and the mix of other funding sources, provoke us to shift our assumptions about what our priorities will be in the coming year? • Does the settlement provoke us to rethink the MTFS?
January 2021	<i>NB – formal scrutiny of quarterly financial monitoring to happen at Performance Management Scrutiny Committee</i> End of quarter 3: reflection against plans in 2021/2022 budget Formal budget scrutiny – final report of the task and finish group to Performance Management Scrutiny Committee (where formal budget scrutiny will take place)

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**Performance Management
Scrutiny Committee**

Item

20 January 2021

Public

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

Responsible officer

Danial Webb, overview and scrutiny officer

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1.0 Summary

1.1 This paper presents the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee's proposed work programme until May 2021.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Committee members to:

- agree the proposed committee work programme attached as **appendix 1**
- note the current task and finish groups attached as **appendix 2**
- suggest changes to the committee work programme and
- recommend other topics to consider.

3.0 Background

3.1 As there will a be an election of all elected members to Shropshire Council in May 2021, this draft work programme mostly only includes items planned to be considered by the committee before the elections take place.

3.2 A refreshed draft overview and scrutiny work programme for this committee is attached as **appendix 1**. A refreshed list of current task and finish groups is attached as **appendix 2**.

4.0 Next steps

4.1 Overview and scrutiny updates this report on an ongoing basis and presents it at each committee meeting. This will allow members the opportunity to contribute to its development at each committee meeting.

List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

None

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

All

Local Member

All

Appendices

Overview and scrutiny work programme

Overview and scrutiny task and finish groups

Appendix 1

Overview and Scrutiny work programme 2020-2021

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

Topic	Intended outcomes	Required	Participants	Objectives	Date
Economic Recovery Group	To receive an update on the work of the Economic Recovery Group	Verbal update	Director of Place	Members are briefed on the work of the Economic Recovery Group	20 Jan 2021
Complaints, comments and compliments annual report	- Gain oversight of the nature of complaints, comments and compliments that are presented to scrutiny. - Identify any issues or trends that merit focussed scrutiny by a thematic committee.	Written report	Feedback and Insight Team Leader	Shropshire Council manages its complaints effectively Shropshire Council analyses its complaints in order to improve services.	20 Jan 2021
Financial scrutiny	To agree a schedule of work for scrutiny of Shropshire Council's 2020/2021 – 2025/2026 financial strategy and 2022/2023 budget	Overview report	Overview and scrutiny officer	Performance Management Scrutiny Committee carries out thorough and effective financial scrutiny.	20 Jan 2021

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

Topic	Intended outcomes	Required	Participants	Objectives	Date
Q3 Finance Monitoring Report	- Review projected revenue expenditure for the whole of 2020/21 as at Quarter 3, and for capital expenditure up to the end of Quarter 3. - To scrutinise the impact of budgeting on council performance.	Written report	Head of Finance Governance and Assurance	Shropshire Council expenditure meets statutory requirements and reflects its strategic objectives.	17 March 2021
Q3 Performance Report	- Consider any underlying or emerging performance issues. - Identify any performance areas that they would like to consider in greater detail or refer to the appropriate overview and scrutiny committee.	Written report	Commissioning Data Analysis Intelligence Manager	Committee develops its insight into council performance, and focuses its work on relevant performance issues.	17 March 2021

Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

Topic	Intended outcomes	Required	Participants	Objectives	Date
Dog welfare	- Understand how Shropshire Council: - tackles nuisance caused by dogs, such as dog fouling and attacks by dogs - works with West Mercia Police to tackle more serious issues of dog attacks - licences and monitors dog breeders in Shropshire and - manages stray dogs.	Written report		Shropshire Council is effective in: - responding to complaints of persistent dog fouling - tackles nuisance caused by dog attacks - licencing and monitoring dog breeders and - manages the stray dogs that it collects.	June 2021

Appendix 2

Current and proposed task and finish groups

Title	Objectives	Reporting to
Road casualty reduction	• Understand the nature of road traffic collisions in Shropshire. • Understand feelings of road safety, and the effect of feeling unsafe when travelling. • Understand the factors that contribute to safer travel • Scrutinise how Shropshire Council and its partners work together to make travel safer. • Explore how Shropshire Council responds to new models of Government transport funding.	Place Overview Committee
Brexit	• To consider the information brought together to develop a view for Shropshire of the possible implications of Brexit for the Shropshire economy and the achievement of the Economic Growth Strategy. • To identify, with the relevant officers, the key evidence and related requirements of what Shropshire would require from a future UK funding approach. • To make evidence based recommendations to Cabinet.	Performance Management Scrutiny Committee

Title	Objectives	Reporting to
Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy	• To understand how Shropshire Council currently uses Section 106, CIL and NHB and the impact that this has had • To understand how Section 106, CIL and NHB could be used in Shropshire to enable or encourage projects or initiatives for economic growth and prosperity • To learn from other places how they have used Section 106, CIL and NHB to enable or encourage projects or initiatives for economic growth and prosperity • To make evidence based recommendations on how Section 106, CIL and NHB could be used in Shropshire to enable or encourage projects or initiatives for economic growth and prosperity	Performance Management Scrutiny
Climate change	• To review Shropshire Council's existing work to reduce its CO2e output. • To scrutinise existing council policy and practice and recommend policy changes that would support further carbon reduction. • To identify and evaluate opportunities to reduce spending and generate income by adopting low-carbon technology and practices.	Place Overview Committee

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