

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

Date: Tuesday, 12 October 2021

**Committee:  
Cabinet**

**Date: Wednesday, 20 October 2021**

**Time: 10.00 am**

**Venue: Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND**

You are requested to attend the above meeting. The Agenda is attached

*Members of the public will be able to access the live stream of the meeting by clicking on the link below and a recording will be made available afterwards*

<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/cabinet20october2021/>

**There will be some access to the meeting room for members of the press and public but this will be limited for health and safety reasons.**

**If you wish to attend the meeting please e-mail [democracy@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@shropshire.gov.uk) to check that a seat will be available for you.**

Tim Collard  
Interim Assistant Director – Legal and Democratic Services

**Members of Cabinet**

Lezley Picton (Leader)  
Gwilym Butler  
Dean Carroll  
Rob Gittins  
Kirstie Hurst-Knight  
Simon Jones  
Cecilia Motley  
Ian Nellins  
Ed Potter

Your Committee Officer is:

**Amanda Holyoak**

Tel: 01743 257714

Email: [amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk)

# AGENDA

## 1 **Apologies for Absence**

## 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** (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2021

## 4 **Public Question Time**

To receive any questions from members of the public, notice of which has been in accordance with Procedure Rule 14. Deadline for notification is not later than 10.00am on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

## 5 **Members Question Time**

To receive any questions from members of the council. Deadline for notification is not later than 5.00pm on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

## 6 **Scrutiny Items**

## 7 **Annual Customer Feedback (complaints) Report** (Pages 5 - 34)

Lead Member – Councillor Rob Gittins – Portfolio Holder for Digital/Technology/Data and Insight

Report of James Walton, Executive Director Resources attached

Tel: 01743 258915

## 8 **Business Rate Relief and Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy Review** (Pages 35 - 74)

Lead Member - Councillor Gwilym Butler – Portfolio Holder for Resources

Report of James Walton, Executive Director Resources, attached

Tel: 01743 258915

**9 Discretionary Housing Payment Policy Review (Pages 75 - 90)**

Lead Member – Councillor Gwilym Butler - Portfolio Holder for Resources

Report of James Walton, Executive Director Resources, attached

Tel: 01743 258915

**10 Annual Health & Safety Performance - 2020/2021 (Pages 91 - 96)**

Lead Member – Councillor Gwilym Butler - Portfolio Holder for Resources

Report of James Walton, Executive Director Resources, attached

Tel: 01743 258915

**11 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme (Pages 97 - 156)**

Lead Member – Councillor Kirstie Hurst Knight – Portfolio Holder for Children & Education

Report of Tanya Miles, Executive Director of People, attached

Tel: 01743 254201

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## Committee and Date

Cabinet

20 October 2021

## **CABINET**

### **Minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2021**

**In the Shrewsbury/Oswestry Room, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate,  
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND**

**10.00 - 10.38 am**

**Responsible Officer:** Amanda Holyoak

Email: amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk      Tel: 01743 257714

### **Present**

Councillor Lezley Picton (Chairman)

Councillors Dean Carroll, Rob Gittins, Kirstie Hurst-Knight, Cecilia Motley,  
Ian Nellins and Ed Potter

### **26 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gwilym Butler.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Steve Charmley (he was able to join the meeting remotely and did not vote)

### **27 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests**

None were declared.

### **28 Minutes**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 21 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### **29 Public Question Time**

No questions had been received from members of the public.

### **30 Members Questions Time**

Member questions were received as follows:

Councillor Julian Dean – regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking children being accommodated in the Council's area and the Council's future

commitments in this regard. Councillor Dean wished also to place on record thanks and praise for the tireless efforts of Shropshire Supports Refugees.

Councillor David Vasmer – regarding the current funding levels for the North West Relief Road, any request submitted to Government for additional funding and publication and availability of the full Business Case for this project.

Councillor Tracey Huffer – regarding the ongoing restricted use of Ludlow Youth Centre under Covid regulations, the capital value of the building and its retention by the Council during the current Administration.

The full questions and answers are provided on the webpage for the meeting: <http://shropshire.gov.uk/committee-services/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=130&MIId=4230&Ver=4>

### **31 Scrutiny Items**

There were no scrutiny items for consideration.

### **32 Annual Treasury Report 2020/21**

The Leader presented the report outlining the Council's treasury activities for 2020/21, including the investment performance of the internal treasury team to 31 March 2021.

She drew attention to the performance of the internal treasury team being 0.40% per annum above benchmark during the last three years. It was also noted that the team had delivered an under spend of £3.21 million mainly due to Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) savings following the Council's review of the policy and interest payable savings.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the position detailed in the Annual Treasury Report 2020/21 be accepted.

### **33 Treasury Management Update Quarter 1 2021/22**

The Leader presented a report outlining the treasury management activities of the Council during the first quarter of 2021/22. She stated that the treasury management team dealt with £170M of the Council's investment and £304M of borrowing. During the first quarter of 2021/22 the team delivered a return of 0.17% that equated to over £100,000 income to the Council and exceeded the benchmark by 0.25%.

**RESOLVED:**

That the position detailed in the Treasury Management Update Quarter 1 2021/22, be accepted.

**34 Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2021/22**

The Leader presented the first quarterly Financial Monitoring Report for 2021/22 covering the period April 2021 to 30th June 2021. The report outlined the main variances from the original General Fund budget and mitigating plans to bring expenditure in budget by year end. It was noted that this entire period was delivered within the context of continued Covid-19 restrictions and implications from national lockdowns dating back to 23 March 2020.

The Leader commented that projected revenue figures were difficult to estimate and the overspend was anticipated between £2.5M (this figure assumes more Government funding for Covid expenditure and the loss of income) and £9.7M (this figure assumes suppressed demand as a result of Covid 19 and no further Government funding). She added that £3.1M, 24%, of savings had been delivered or were being delivered on an ongoing basis, 6.7% of the Council's budget had been delivered in the first Quarter and £7.6M ringfenced grant had been received.

In response to questions from Councillor Vasmer, the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, Public Health and Assets made the following points:

- The current position of the Adult Social Care and Childrens' Social Care budgets was an underspend of £315,000. The position for the following year may result in a £10M deficit but it was hoped that this would be partially met by one off Government funding.
- The Council's capital programme was delayed by both affects of the pandemic and by the huge global shortage in construction materials and the skills needed to work on site but full delivery of the programme was nevertheless anticipated.
- Cost increases would lead to higher costs but contingency plans were built into every project and would be considered on a project to project basis to meet any such delays and/or costs.

The Executive Director of Resources committed to provide a response to Councillor Vasmer and to Cabinet members regarding ways of achieving the one off savings of £16.147M.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) That it be noted that at the end of Quarter 1 (30th June 2021), the full year revenue forecast is a potential overspend of between £2.591m and £9.731m, with early estimates projected at £7.331m;
- ii) That the impact of this on the Council’s General Fund balance be considered; and
- iii) That a budget virement of £0.932m from Highways to Environment and Transport be approved, as set out in Appendix 7 to the report.

**35 Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2021/22**

The Leader presented the Quarter 1 performance report showing progress against outcomes within the Corporate Plan: A Healthy Environment, A Good Place to do Business, Sustainable Places and Communities, More People with a Suitable Home, Embrace our Rurality, Care for those in Need at any Age and Your Council.

She explained that the compilation of the new Corporate Plan, ‘The Shropshire Plan’ would provide a new focus to performance monitoring reports throughout the year.

Responding to Councillor Vasmer, she confirmed that The Shropshire Plan would be considered by scrutiny before being considered by Council. Finally, responding to comments made by Councillor Buckley, the Leader agreed that more information on climate change implications was needed in future Council reports and that, as this report related to performance, implications resulting from a reduction in recycling rates and road maintenance issues would be dealt with elsewhere.

**RESOLVED:**

- i) That the emerging features detailed in the Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2021/22 be considered;
- ii) That both the appendix and performance portal be reviewed to identify any performance areas that Cabinet may wish to consider in greater detail or refer to the Performance Management Scrutiny Committee.

Signed ..... (Chairman)

Date: .....





<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet 20 October 2021

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

## Annual Customer Feedback (Complaints, Comments and Compliments) Report 2020/21

**Responsible Officer**

Nigel Newman, Head of Communications & Engagement

e-mail: [Nigel.newman@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:Nigel.newman@shropshire.gov.uk)

Tel: 01743 253976

### 1. Synopsis

In 2020/21 the Council received 2,615 cases of formal customer feedback. 57% were complaints, down by 15% on last year. Enquiries, including those from MPs, make up 28% of feedback and compliments at 16%, up by 51% with many reflecting the Council's pandemic response.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report gives an overview of formal customer feedback to the Council in 2020/21, covering complaints, compliments and comments as well as MP enquiries and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigations. In total, the council received 2,615 cases of formal feedback, including 1,200 complaints, 801 comments and 614 compliments.
- 2.2. While complaints are 14.8% down on the previous year, the longer-term trend is up, with complaints doubling since 2015. Last year, 30% of Stage 1 complaints received were upheld or partially upheld, while the numbers of cases with no finding has fallen from 16% to 10%.
- 2.3. The time to complete Stage 1 complaint investigations has risen slightly to a 23 working day average, up from 14 in 2018/19. This is well within the Council's target of 30 working days, however there is mixed performance and continued effort is important to minimise the number of overdue complaint responses.
- 2.4. 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 or bad experience. The learning and actions that are identified through the complaint investigations are used to improve service provision.

- 2.5. The number of compliments the Council received increased year on year by 51%. Many the complements received reflected the Council's work in responding to the coronavirus pandemic.
- 2.6. The report was presented to Performance Management Scrutiny in September 2021 which noted the report. Committee members noted an increase in complaints relating to Looked After Children (LAC), together with associated data on trends, and asked this be further investigated by the People Overview Committee.

### **3. Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- 3.1. Consider the recommendations and actions in the Annual Customer Feedback Report to deliver robust customer feedback performance.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

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

### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1. This report presents information to support decision making and does not itself carry any direct financial implications. However, systems that will help prevent complaints escalating, particularly to Stage 2 complaints, will result in less staff time taken to deal with complaints. 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.

### **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

- 6.1. This report does not have any direct impact on the Council's climate change agenda.

## **7. Background**

- 7.1 The Customer Feedback Annual Report for Shropshire Council covers the formal feedback Shropshire Council received in 2020/21. The report also covers MP enquiries, although these are not included in the feedback data as they commonly duplicate other complaints. Quarterly monitoring also takes place and, where necessary, issues are addressed within the year. This report covers all service areas and the handling of complaints under different complaints procedures. The report lists the Council's own Corporate Complaints procedure. The processes for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care complaints are statutory and set nationally. It also includes reference to investigations by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

## **8. Additional Information** **Customer Feedback 2020/21 (focus on complaints)**

- 8.1 Shropshire Council received 2,615 cases of formal feedback during 2020/21, up by 4 cases on the previous year. Complaint cases fell 19% year on year to 1,200 representing 46% of feedback. Comments accounted 31% of cases and compliments 23%. Compliments increased by 51%, with many relating to the Council's response to the pandemic.
- 8.2 Of the 1,200 complaint cases received, 1,091 were investigated under the Council's corporate complaints procedure, a reduction of 18% on the previous year, however the longer-term trend is a sustained rise in complaints. Of these cases requiring investigation, 88% were corporate complaints, 12% were statutory complaints with an element of social care, so handled under the nationally-set adult or children's complaints procedures.
- 8.3 Effective Stage 1 complaints handling reduces the number of complaints escalating to Stage 2. Most complaints continued to be addressed and closed at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure. However, in 2020/21 82 cases progressed beyond Stage 1, either to Stage Two or going the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), up 74% from 47 the previous year. There has however been no linked increase in cases upheld by the LGSCO with this falling between rates recorded in the two previous years, although a slowdown in LGSCO complaint handling during the pandemic may have played a part in this and this will need close monitoring as LGSCO capacity returns.
- 8.4 Considering complaints by service area, the Place Directorate, which contains most of the Council's public facing services (such as

Highways and Transport, Waste and Leisure), received 49% of the Council's complaints followed by Adult Services (including Housing and Public Health) at 17% and Children's Services received 7%. Resources received the remaining 27%, although many of these will be on behalf of other services outside of the directorate. The two most complained about services are those with the high public visibility Highways and Transport and Waste, which accounted for 30% and 8% of all complaints respectively, with both figures slightly down on the previous year.

- 8.5 It took an average of 23 working days to respond to a complaint - one day more than the previous year, and up from 14 days in 2018/19. This remains well within the LGSCO timescales of 60 days for Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations to be completed. (The Council works to 30 days for each stage). Although average performance is good, there are significant numbers of complex and long running cases exceeding timescales, which can be due to reduced officer capacity within a service or the result of highly complex cases that are difficult to resolve or require significant time to resolve.
- 8.6 In 2020/21 at the end of Stage 1, 33% of complaints were not upheld, 12% were upheld, 18% were partly upheld (often where a complaint might have multiple points within it) and 27% were withdrawn or were a service request rather than a complaint. 10% of complaints had no finding. These rates vary compared to the previous year.
- 8.7 Understanding the causes of complaints and common themes informs learning and improvements to address the underlying causes of a complaint. 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.
- 8.8 The number of compliments received by the Council were at their highest level for a number of years, reversing a recent downward trend. In 2021/20 compliments increased by 51% on the previous year. This was largely attributed to recognition from the public of the Council's work in responding to the pandemic in many ways.
- 8.9 The Annual Report highlights recommendations made by the LGSCO in 2020/21. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint.

## 9. Conclusions

9.1 The recommendations in the Annual Report highlight areas of development designed to improve customer feedback handling. Key areas of focus arising from the 2020/21 annual report include:

- Continuing work with services to help better triage customer feedback and ensure that issues that are service request (for example a one-off missed bin collection) is treated as this rather than a corporate complaint. Repeated missed bin collections would however be a corporate complaint.
- Preventing complaints escalating beyond Stage One by focusing on work with services to reduce no finding outcomes and case exceeding time limits.
- Reviewing the Council's approach to handling persistent and vexatious complainants by looking at best practice elsewhere. Given the long-term upward trend in complaints, improving ways to handle such customers who can take up a disproportionately large amount of staff time, will help the Council to more effectively manage other complaints.
- Improving methods to ensure compliments the Council receives are more effectively captured.

**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  
2019/20 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Cllr Gwilym Butler, Cabinet member, Resources

Cllr Rob Gittins, Cabinet member, Digital, Data and Insight

**Local Member**

n/a

**Appendices**

Draft Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report 2020/21

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# Customer Feedback Annual Report

## Shropshire Council

### 2020/21

Feedback and Insight Team, Shropshire Council  
July 2021



# 1. Introduction

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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 2020 and 31 March 2021.

The report includes key performance data for complaints, compliments and comments. 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 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 complaint 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 all 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 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

### Feedback Received

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.

**Telephone:** 0345 678 9000

**Email:** [customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk)

**Website:** <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/>

**Online:** Log into the My Shropshire portal

### Acknowledgment

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.

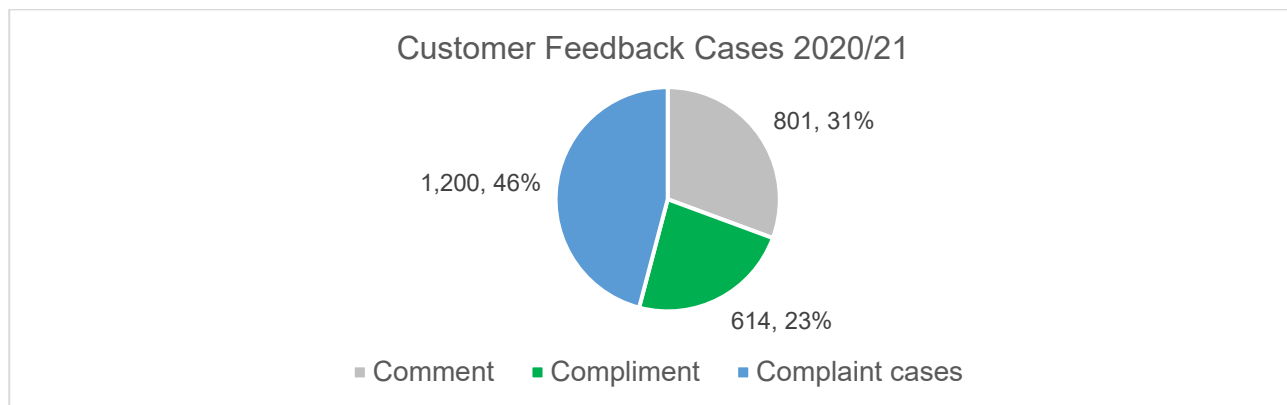
We cannot promise to get the result complainants want, but we do make sure that complaints are dealt with as quickly and as thoroughly as possible and we work to keep customers informed of what is happening and the progress being made.

## 2. Customer Feedback 2020/21

In 2020/21 Shropshire Council received and recorded 2,615 cases of formal feedback. There were:

- 1,200 complaint cases
- 801 comments
- 614 compliments

In addition, there were also 398 MP enquiries recorded between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021. 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.

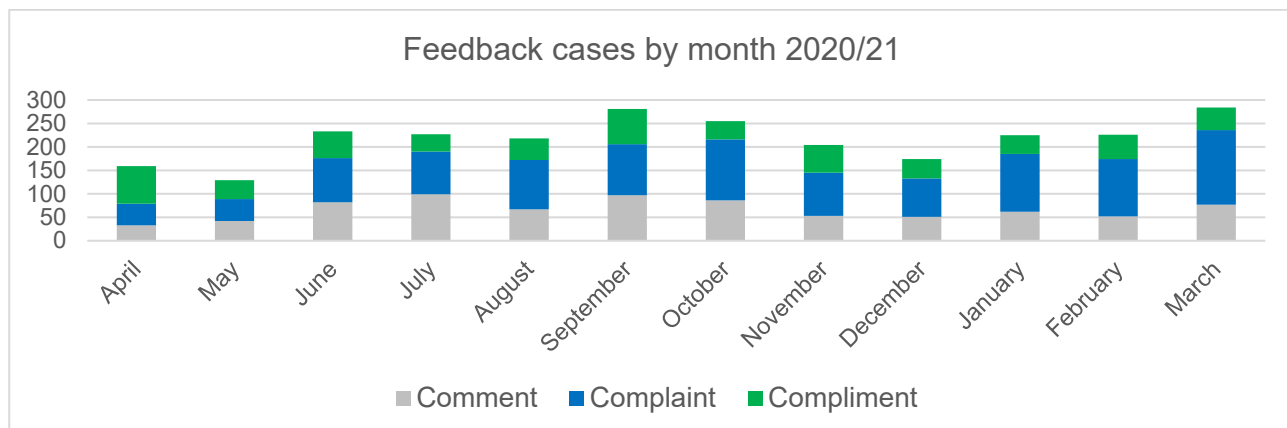


Comments and other enquiries formed 31% of all feedback cases and 23% of all customer feedback cases were compliments. The 1,200 complaint cases formed 46% of all formal feedback and resulted in 1,091 complaint investigations.

The 1,091 complaint investigations were handled under the different statutory and corporate complaints processes. There were:

- 959 Corporate complaints
- 72 Adult Services statutory complaints (including provider complaints and multi-agency complaints)
- 60 Children’s Services statutory complaints

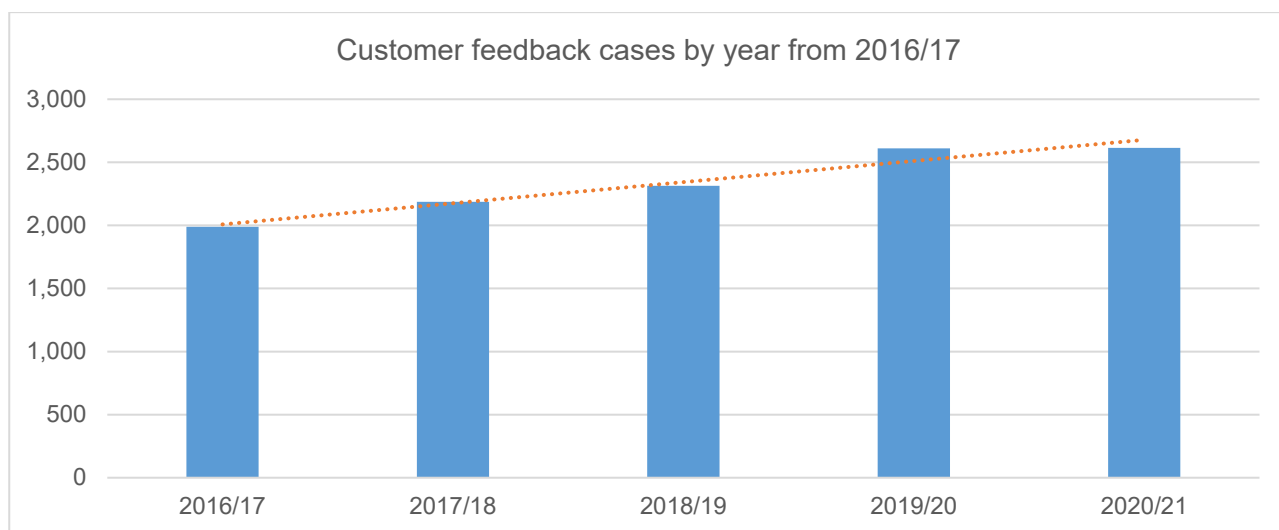
Feedback levels can vary over the year with slight fluctuations influenced by changes in weather conditions (e.g. heavy rain or snow and ice can lead to place-based complaints) or other factors. The pandemic generated some changes in feedback with an influx of compliments in the early months of the pandemic, but overall feedback returned to usual levels fairly quickly as people adjusted to new methods of service delivery and social restrictions. The chart below displays feedback by month.



Over the year, the monthly average was 218 customer feedback cases (the same as the previous year). September (281) and March (284) saw the greatest number of feedback cases, a very different pattern to the previous year where January and February 2020 saw the greatest number of cases. May and December had the lowest numbers of feedback and this appears to be a pattern in the data coinciding in slight reductions in feedback over Winter/Christmas and Spring/Easter holiday periods.

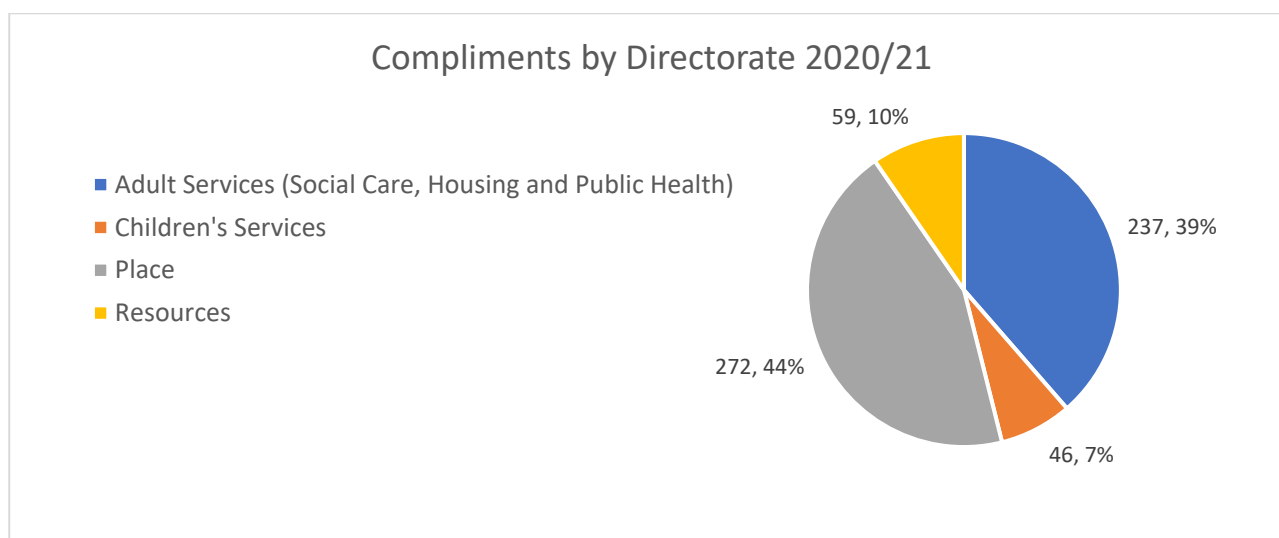
Performance data is considered by quarter and quarter 2 (July to September) and quarter 4 (January to March) both saw increases with over 725 cases in these quarters compared to 521 in quarter 1 (April to June) and 633 in quarter 3 (October to December).

Overall customer feedback case volumes have increased over recent years. There has been a 31.5% increase in customer feedback since 2016/17 and the number of cases has more than doubled since 2014/15.



Work takes place to monitor the proportion of complaints within annual customer feedback totals. There is some fluctuation each year but overall, the total has remained steady and in 2020/21 the proportion of feedback cases that were complaints was in line with the average.

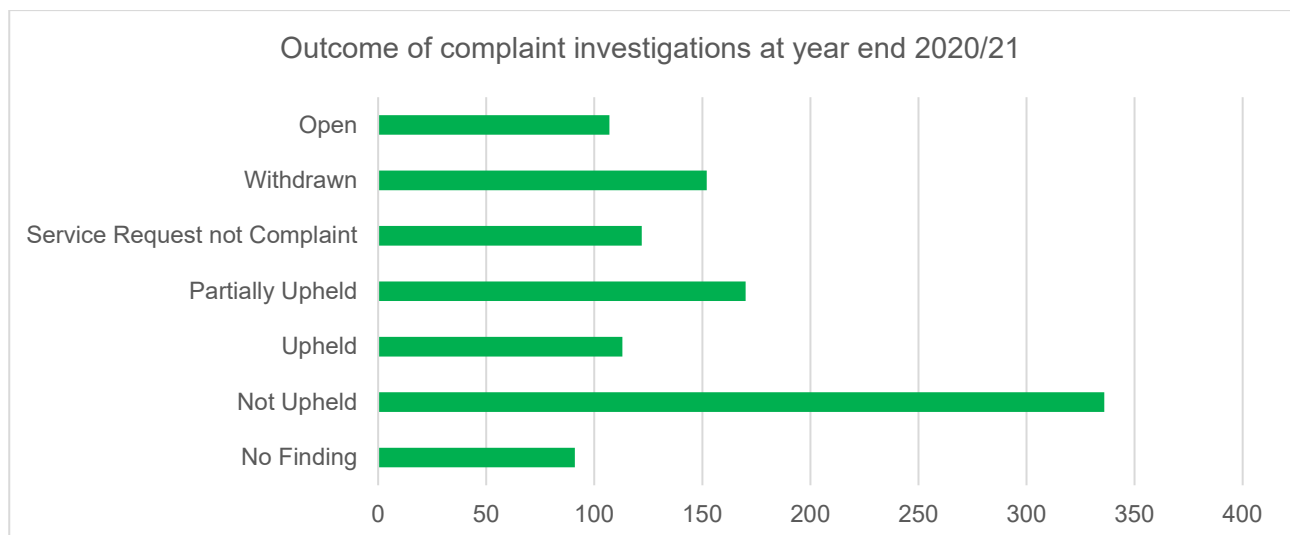
A closer look at compliments shows that the Place directorate received the largest number of compliments (272 compliments in 2020/21) followed by Adult Services (237).



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, or a complaint case may be closed before it reaches investigation stage (for example it may be outside of the council’s jurisdiction or the complainant may decide to withdraw their complaint). 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 (usually team or service managers) with a detailed knowledge of the service area. In 2020/21 there were 1,200 complaints cases and 1,091 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 (a request for a service). Of the 1,200 complaints, 152 were withdrawn and 122 were closed and a service request was initiated as an alternative course of action. 91 investigations resulted in a finding or no finding. This is explored in more detail at the end of this section.

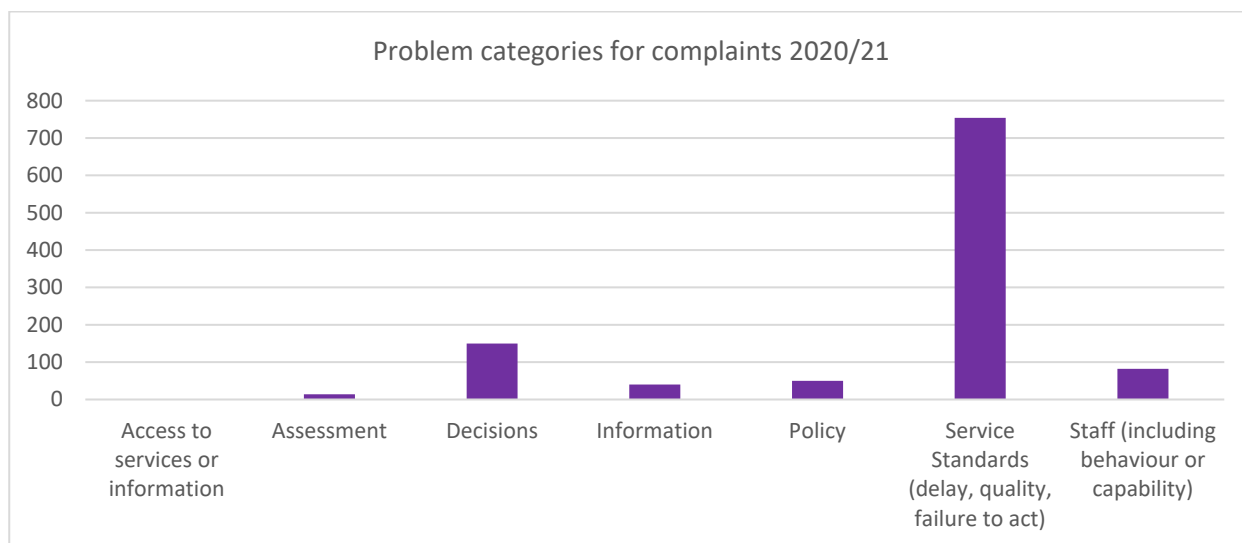
The following paragraphs are based on complaints investigations against which more detailed information is captured. The performance measures Shropshire Council uses to monitor complaints are largely based on complaints investigations.



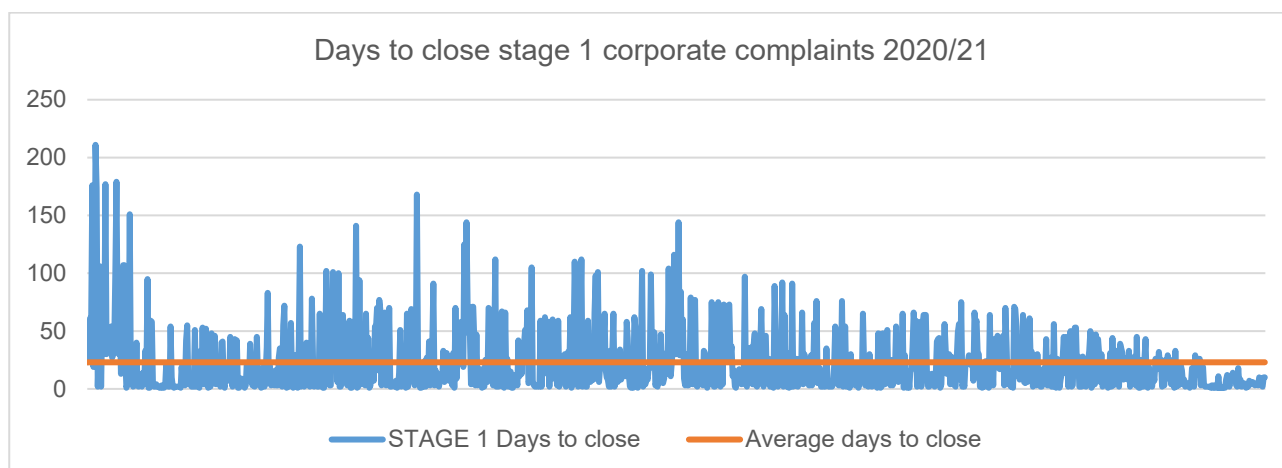
Over previous years there have been steady increase in numbers of complaints investigations (with an increase in previous years between 14% and 16% each year). Within the last year considerable effort has been made to fully assess and ‘triage’ feedback (where the process of incoming feedback makes that possible) prior to implementing the complaints process. This has avoided certain issues becoming complaints when they are a request for a service or can be remedied quickly, such as a missed bin collection or a request to cut back foliage. Complaints should be made when there are concerns about the quality of service or other action taken by the council and not before services have had the opportunity to respond. This additional assessment should help to reduce increases in complaint numbers but there are other factors to consider so it will be important to measure change during the year and at year end.

‘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’, ‘service standards – poor customer care’ and ‘service standards – communication (failure/poor)’ were the dominant sub-categories. ‘Decisions’ was the

second main category under which complaints were recorded. Complaints under the category decisions are usually made because someone is dissatisfied with a decision made.



During 2020/21 Shropshire Council took an average of 23 working days to respond to stage 1 corporate complaints (an increase on the 14 working days average in 2018/19). The average is within the 30 day timescale Shropshire Council works to for its corporate complaints process. 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. Feedback and Insight Team officers report increasing complexity within complaints cases and this, alongside service pressures, is considered to be a contributing factor to longer-running cases.

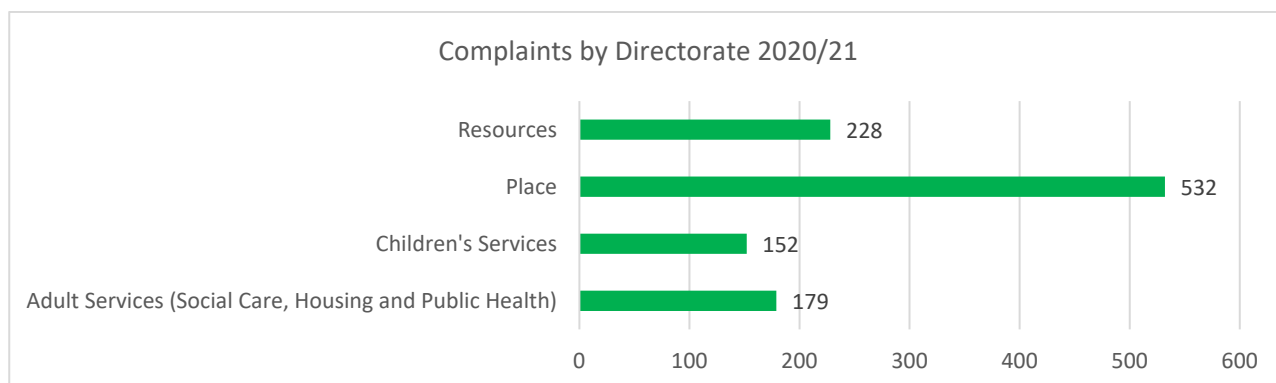


Some types of service are more likely to result in complaints than others and the chart below highlights complaints by directorate. Shropshire Council's Place Directorate handles the largest proportion of complaints compared to other directorates within Shropshire Council (49% of all complaints) followed by Resources (21%) and Adult Services (17%).

Taking a closer look at the breakdown of complaints by service highlights that, within the Place Directorate, Highways and Transport received 30% of all Shropshire Council's complaints in 2020/21 (a slight reduction on the previous year). Waste services accounted for 8% of all the complaints in 2019/20 (another slight reduction).

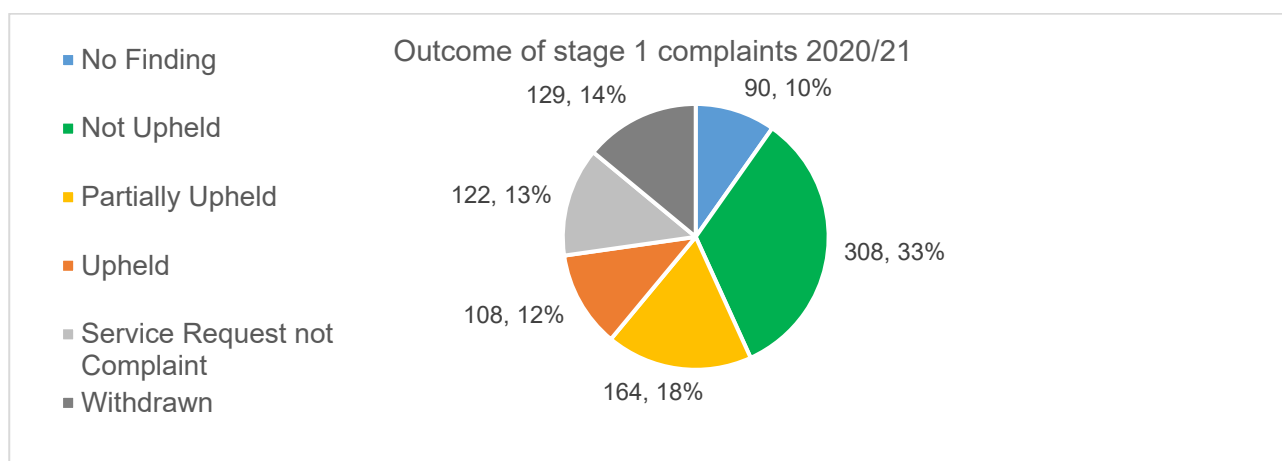
Complaints relating to Adult Services form 17% of all complaints and complaints relating to Children’s Services form 7% of all complaints. The number of Adult Services complaints is very similar to the previous year but there were fewer Children’s Services complaints in 2019/20 (forming 7% of complaints compared to 12% in 2018/19). Data for Adult Services and Children’s services is explored in more detail throughout the year.

The Resources directorate includes a smaller number of customer-facing services (many providing services to other council departments). For this reason, a significant proportion of the complaints allocated to Resources are not related to its own services but to those of other departments. An example of this is that the finance department may deal with a complaint relating to the financial arrangements in a different service or, for example a complaint may be made in order to highlight intention to progress an insurance claim.



When considering complaints performance, it is very important to understand the outcome of the complaints that are made against Shropshire Council. The data for 2020/21 shows that:

- At the end of the 12-month period 2020/21, there were 921 closed stage 1 complaints.
- Of the closed stage 1 complaints 12% were upheld (108 complaints), 18% were partially upheld and 33% were not upheld.
- Considering the complaints that were upheld, 33% were with Highways and Transport and 13% were with Waste Management.



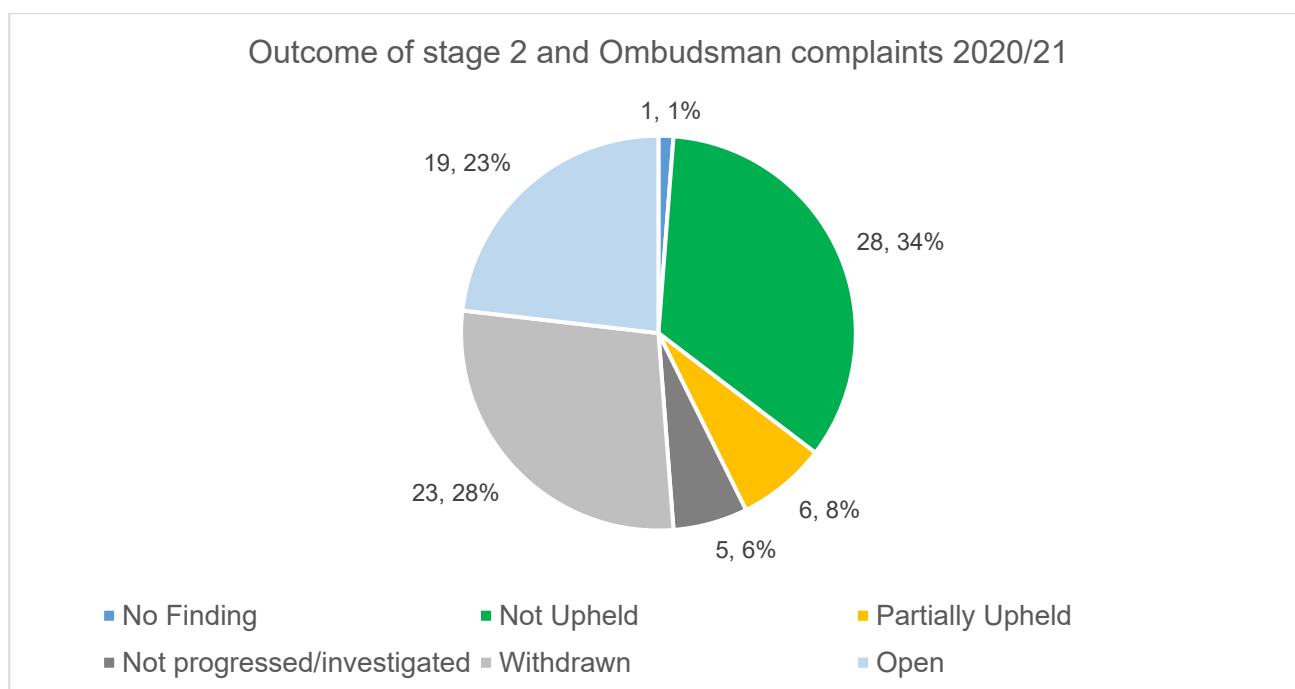
In 2019/20 there was a concern that 16% of complaints investigations resulted in no finding. In some circumstances, there is a genuine reason for recording a ‘no finding’ outcome. A complaints investigator may find that not enough evidence or information is available to draw a conclusion, or they may 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 appeared to be largely a result of a failure to investigate allocated complaints. Performance has improved in 2020/21 and the proportion has reduced to 10% but this remains an area of concern and will continue to be closely monitored.

### 3. 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 2020/21 only a small proportion of all the complaints Shropshire Council received progressed beyond stage 1 but despite numbers remaining low, the number of cases progressing beyond stage 1 has increased compared to previous years (47 in 2019/20 increasing to 82 in 2020/21).

In total, 82 complaints received within the year progressed to a stage 2 complaint case or to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Occasionally some complaints may progress prematurely to the Ombudsman 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	Ombudsman	Total investigations beyond stage 1
38	44	82



The Shropshire annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) highlighted that 46 complaints were received by the Ombudsman for Shropshire Council in 2020/21 and 50 cases were considered/decided. This total will include 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 50 cases, 8 were not upheld, 8 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 50%. The LGO upheld rate for similar local authorities is reported as 63%.

## Ombudsman Complaints and Enquiries Decided

Category	Number received
Adult Care Services	7
Benefits & Tax	2
Corporate & Other Services	7
Education & Children's Services	8
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	3
Highways & Transport	10
Housing	2
Planning & Development	10
Other	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>50</b>

## Outcome of Decisions Made

Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete/ Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Detailed Investigations			Grand Total
				Not Upheld	Upheld	Upheld rate (%)	
0	15	3	16	8	8	50	50

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on complaints numbers to some degree but within Shropshire Council (and all local authorities) there was a requirement to continue to deliver a complaints service through the pandemic so the impact was not significant overall (after initial impact feedback levels returned to average levels). The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman made a decision to pause casework and did not accept new complaints for three months between March and June 2020. This has meant that the 2020/21 year should not be considered a 'full year' and the reduction in overall numbers for Shropshire Council does not indicate improved performance. It is possible that there could be an increase in 2021/22 data. However, some of our findings, such as the increase in the uphold rate, are not out of keeping with trends from previous years.

The Ombudsman has described that the impact and response by councils to the pandemic is only beginning to play out in the Ombudsman casework. The Ombudsman has also expressed concerns at the national level about the pressures on complaint handling functions in councils expressing concerns "about the general erosion to the visibility, capacity, and status of complaint functions within councils" and commented "These concerns are not new and cannot be wholly attributed to the trials of the pandemic".

Appendix 2 highlights findings and recommendations made by the Ombudsman within 2020/21. 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.



## 4. Annual Comparisons 2018/19 to 2020/21

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
<p><b>Number of compliments – increased</b></p> <p>In the last financial year (2020/1) Shropshire Council received 614 compliments. This marks a significant increase on previous years and many compliments were directly linked to the actions taken by Shropshire Council to respond to the pandemic. In previous years, the data suggested a steady decline in the number of compliments received, so it has been encouraging to see that trend reversed. Compliments average at 51 a month.</p>	460	405	614
	Performance has improved against this measure in 2020/21.		
<p><b>Number of complaints investigations – reduced</b></p> <p>The number of complaint investigations instigated by Shropshire Council totalled 1,091 in 2020/21, this is a reduction on the previous year. The reduction has been influenced by multiple factors and may not be continued again in the next financial year (there is a clear upward trend shown in the last 5 years of data). The pandemic has had some impact (but not significantly) and work has been taking place to triage cases and ensure service requests are not taken forward as complaints prematurely.</p>	1,281	1,883	1,091
	Performance has improved and there were fewer complaints investigations in 2020/21. However, it should be noted that over the longer-term complaint numbers show an upward trend.		
<p><b>Days to close – Average days to close increased</b></p> <p>The average number of working days taken to respond to a stage 1 complaint during 2019/20 was 22 working days. That average increased in 2020/21 to 23 working days and the data suggests that too many complaints investigations are exceeding the 30 working days total for stage 1 corporate complaints. Complaints investigators increasingly report concerns about their ability to meet complaint timescales as a result of workload and other pressures/ priorities.</p>	14 working days	22 working days	23 working days
	Days to close is the performance indicator of most concern due to increases. Too many complaints investigators are exceeding timescales.		
<p><b>Outcome of complaints – Fewer complaints upheld</b></p> <p>Fewer stage 1 complaints were upheld in 2020/21 (12%) compared to previous years (14% of complaints were upheld in 2019/20 and 19% the year before). In 2020/21 18% of complaints were partially upheld (compared to 12% last year). This performance overall is relatively steady and suggests that standards are being maintained. It would be a concern if performance monitoring highlighted too few cases being upheld. It is important that Shropshire Council accepts where things have gone wrong and strives for improvement.</p>	19%	14%	12%
	Performance has improved slightly. Considering the proportion of partially upheld complaints then performance is similar to the previous year.		
<p><b>Complaints progressing beyond Stage 1 – increased</b></p> <p>In 2018/19 3.9% (50) of all cases progressed beyond stage 1. In 2019/20 2.7% of cases progressed to stage 2 or the Local Government Ombudsman (47). In the last year (2020/21) 82 cases progressed beyond stage 1. This is a slight concern but needs monitoring over time against other indicators since the upheld rate locally has not increased and the upheld rate with the Ombudsman is 50% (compared to 41% in 2019/20 and 61% in 2018/19).</p>	3.9%	2.7%	7.5%
	More complaints are progressing beyond stage 1. Although this is a concern, (increasing time/resources required for complaints) the numbers upheld have not increased so a longer-term view is needed.		

## 5. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council received 614 compliments during 2020/21. 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 Highways South West Division: “The customer would like to pass on their thanks to all Shropshire Council and WSP for their continued work repairing the roads in the Bridgnorth area and throughout Shropshire during these unprecedented times. When out for their 'essentials shop' they saw the much deserved thank you to the NHS rainbow road marking. A very meaningful and thoughtful message.”

“I would like to thank the Benefits Team for their superb service. Thank you for taking an empathetic and caring approach. Understanding one’s situation, being professional and knowledgeable and assisting and answering my questions. I just wanted to say thank you. Much appreciated. Stay safe and healthy.”

“Customers would like to pass on their heartfelt thanks to the registrars at their wedding on Saturday. The couple were not sure what to expect with all the current rules and were a bit nervous that it might all feel a bit clinical. They made sure all rules were adhered to, but they were also warm and kind and really put us at ease. Thank you both for helping to make our ceremony such a joyful occasion.”

Compliment for Planning Services: “I just wanted to drop you a quick note to express our gratitude for the speed and diligence in which you have managed the above application, it is very much appreciated.”

Housing options and Homelessness Team, “Customer would like to compliment the Handyperson Service, for installing the grab rail it’s absolutely perfect as usual. Thank you for your kindness, really do appreciate it.”

“Just like to bring to your attention of the brilliant job your refuse collectors do. The guys came Friday morning to collect the recycling bags and boxes. A terrible rainy and very windy day, I noticed that the guys were doing their job and also putting the residents boxes, bags that they had emptied behind the dust bins so they didn’t blow down the road plus picking up plastic that had blown out of residents containers. I just had to inform you what a brilliant job they do....”

Compliment for the Shropshire Council Rough Sleeper Team – “A member of the public rang to say she wished to thank the team for the work done for the homeless in Shropshire ... she has herself worked tirelessly with homeless people following a very long time ago being homeless herself ... she said that Housing, the Ark and the Prince Rupert have worked diligently together and she wanted to ring and say thank you.”

For Street Scene Central Division, “Thank you to SC for dealing with the overgrown footpath along The Mount that I reported in September”

“It is really wonderful to have Church Stretton swimming pool open again.... I feel very safe swimming there and the staff are always responsive and supportive. This is a much-valued local resource and I welcome its re-opening.”



## 6. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council received 1,200 complaints during the year 2020/21 and carried out 1,091 investigations. Some example complaints have been included below to highlight the type of feedback Shropshire Council receives. These examples were not all upheld. 27% of closed cases (at all stages of complaints processes) 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.

"I am sorry to be making a complaint at a time like this; but as an owner of a small business affected by the current pandemic, I need the council's help and I have been unable to receive it so far.... On 6/4/20 I filled in the online application for Retail Rates Relief and the Covid-19 business grant.... On the 22nd I called the Business Rates team again....I have called twice since.... a month seems like a long time to process these applications..."

"I contacted highways in early February in regards to a road closure that would cause financial hardship to my business. I did not receive a reply. My business was severely impacted for 2 weeks I then sent emails to four members of the council requesting compensation and an explanation why road signs were placed in surrounding villages saying that business are open up to the road closure which obviously means the businesses after that point are closed; I have a photo of this sign to prove it. I never received one reply to my email from four different email addresses...."

Customer stated that over the last 2 years he has... "reported approx. 12 times issues with potholes, surface issues and the general terrible state of the road where he lives. Still nothing has been done regarding proper repairs. The occasional pothole has been temporary filled, but most remain. Customer stated the road would be resurfaced 12 months ago and this has still not happened."

"I have just been to (business name removed) and I was disgusted and shocked at the lack of social distancing controls...You need to look into this as a matter of urgency."

"Ms Z says that she wishes to make a formal complaint and requests an investigation into the lack of care delivered by (name of third party provide removed) during two incidents."

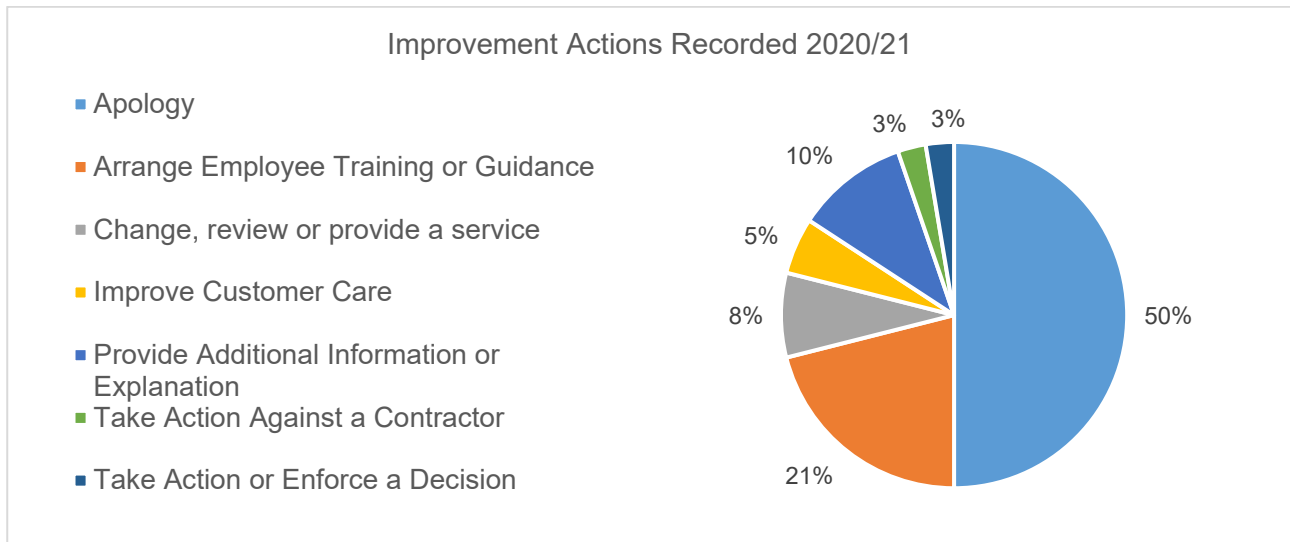
"..As people are now back outside enjoying the park, saddened to see the return of plastic bottles, food litter etc. returning too. Why is it, the council can facilitate an extensive poster campaign with Government guidelines printed all around the Quarry for the last 3 months, complete with taped benches etc. yet nothing is done to ask people to throw rubbish in the bin or take it home? Why are there no plastic bottle / paper recycling bins in the Quarry? The council needs to do something - a poster campaign, local news, fines, look after Shrewsbury, etc. But why do nothing?"

Customer is reporting their green bin was not emptied. It was full of gardening waste. The customer "had to struggle to get it down their path and then struggle to get it back up their path with their bad back, only to find it had not been emptied at all." The customer is not happy at all, and asks "What am I paying council tax for if I am not getting the service I have paid for."

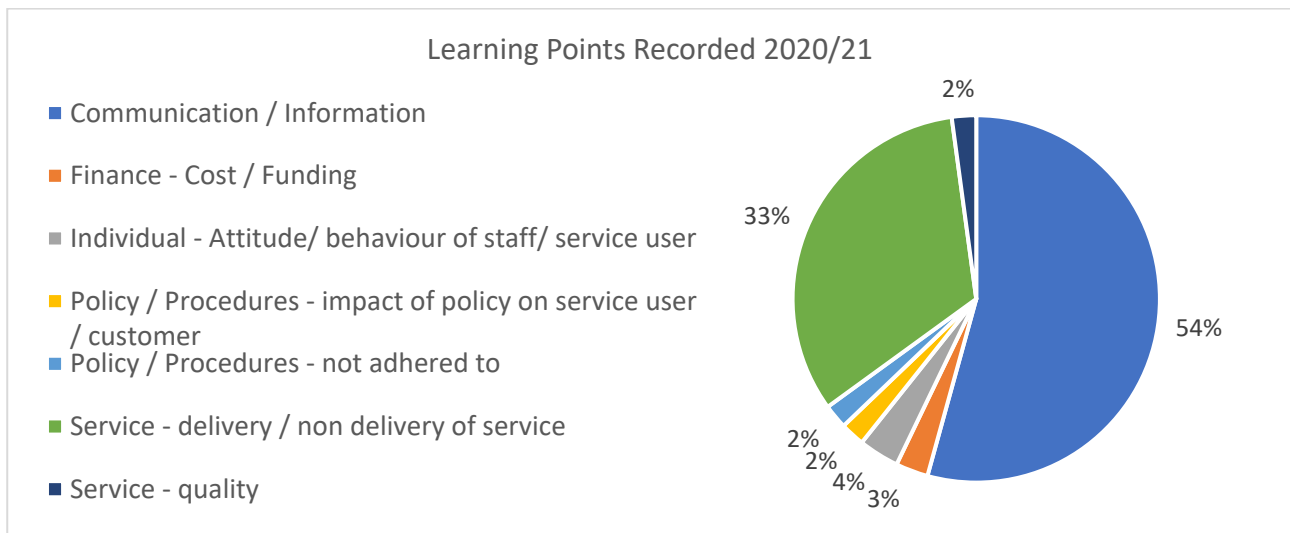


## 7. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council recorded learning and/or actions against 152 complaints investigations in 2020/21. 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. However, this recording of learning and actions is a reduction from previous years and out of line with the proportion of upheld and partially upheld cases (11% at all stages of the complaints procedures, 283 investigations). This is referred to in the recommendations in section 12. The charts below highlight the primary action and learning point recorded.



Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2020/21 19% were to provide an apology and 21% to arrange employee training or guidance. Very few resulted in the need to take more formal action to enforce a decision or take action against a contractor.



54% of learning related to communication or provision of information. Communication is consistently a common and dominant theme within complaints. Complainants often highlight their disappointment that they were not contacted efficiently, 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.

## 8. 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.

“As a result of the complaint (regarding the way in which the customer was spoken to and interrupted on the telephone call) follow up action has included arranging employee training and guidance.”

“The reason for only half the pool being accessible was explained to the customer and an apology that there should have been posters put up the week before notifying customers of the change. In the future the website will also be kept updated. Apologies were provided.”

“In response to the customers complaint, regarding late collections of recycling, they were informed Waste services are currently experiencing more and more recycling being presented by residents thus causing delays to some collections which can take place between 7am and 5pm. Extra vehicles are being used and there is the possibility of re-rounding to ensure these collections are done efficiently. Introduction of wheelie bins was put to Elected Members as an option. Extra boxes can be provided free of charge to avoid overfilling.”

“The customer was given an apology. The cause was the advisor was unable to find a case and this was human error. The initial call was sent to the wrong team, the second advisor spoken to didn't realise this, so it looked as if the call hadn't been logged. A learning log has now been completed with both advisors that details the learning points and areas for improvement. We apologised that our service fell below the level expected.”

“The teams are taking steps to ensure that they communicate in a more effective manner and social workers caseloads are monitored during periods of long term or unexpected absences. An apology was provided.”

“Following the customer's complaint regarding Shropshire Council's online reporting system, the Transformation Team are working closely with colleagues within the council and reviewing the functionality of the MyShropshire portal to identify where improvements can be made. The option to incorporate photographs has been captured and will be included in our discussions.”

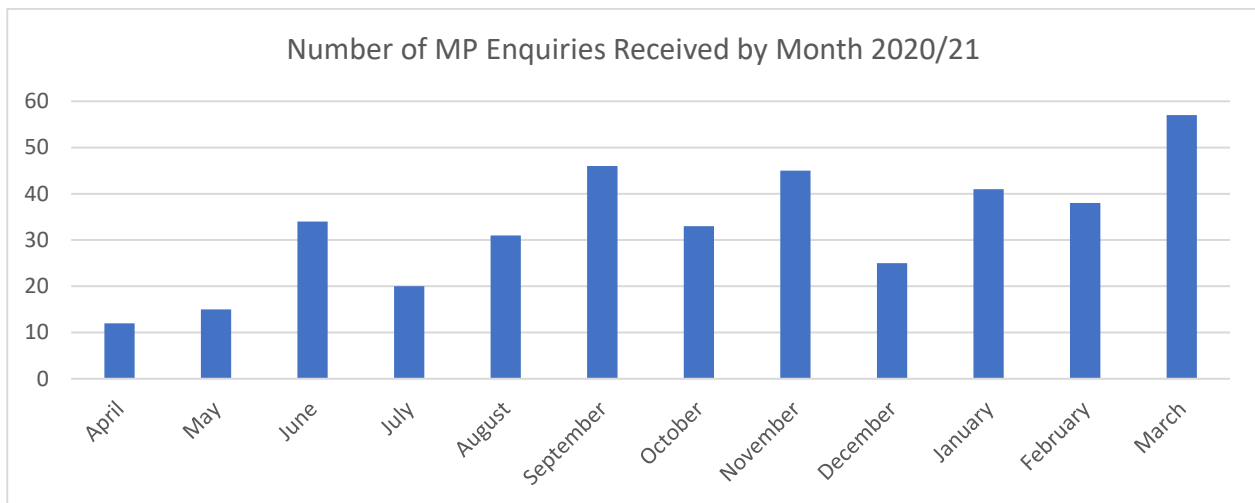
“Apology provided. The customer was informed they were correct the PCN was incorrectly served and that it ought to have been cancelled on receipt of the challenge. I have arranged for the PCN to be cancelled with immediate effect and have discussed this matter with the officers concerned. I am satisfied that they are now fully aware that their actions were incorrect and that there will not be a repetition of this incident.”

“We will clear the area and will speak with the crew to ensure that they clear any spillages when they are there in future. Action will be taken to ensure that the streets are left with no spillages.”

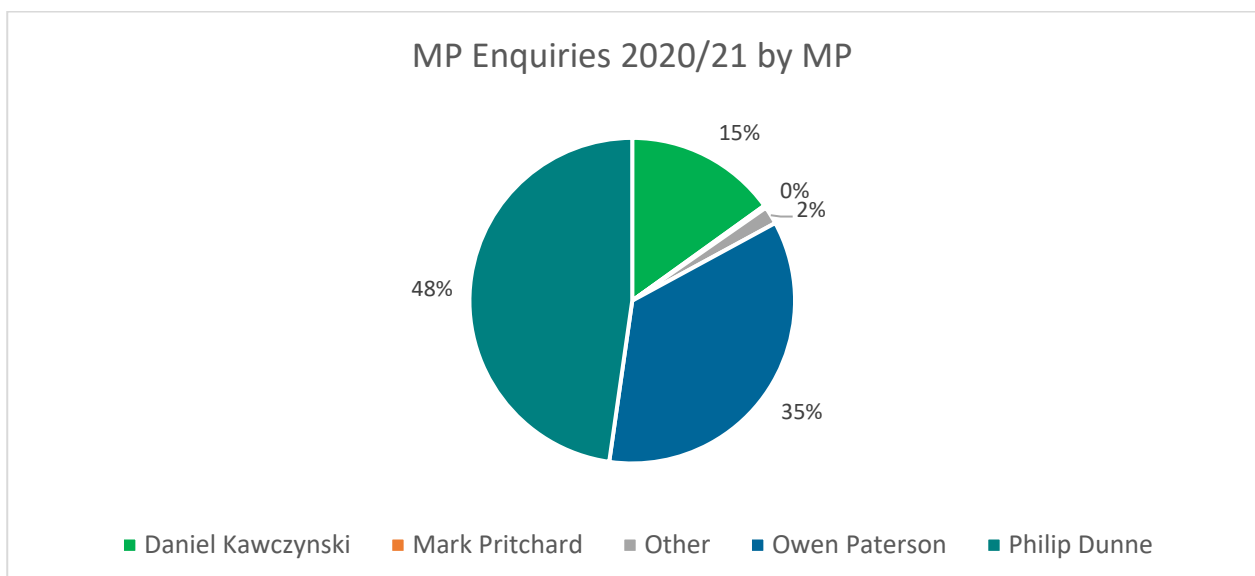
## 9. MP Enquiries

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’ support staff and complaint investigators/service managers to coordinate complaint and MP enquiry responses to minimise duplication.

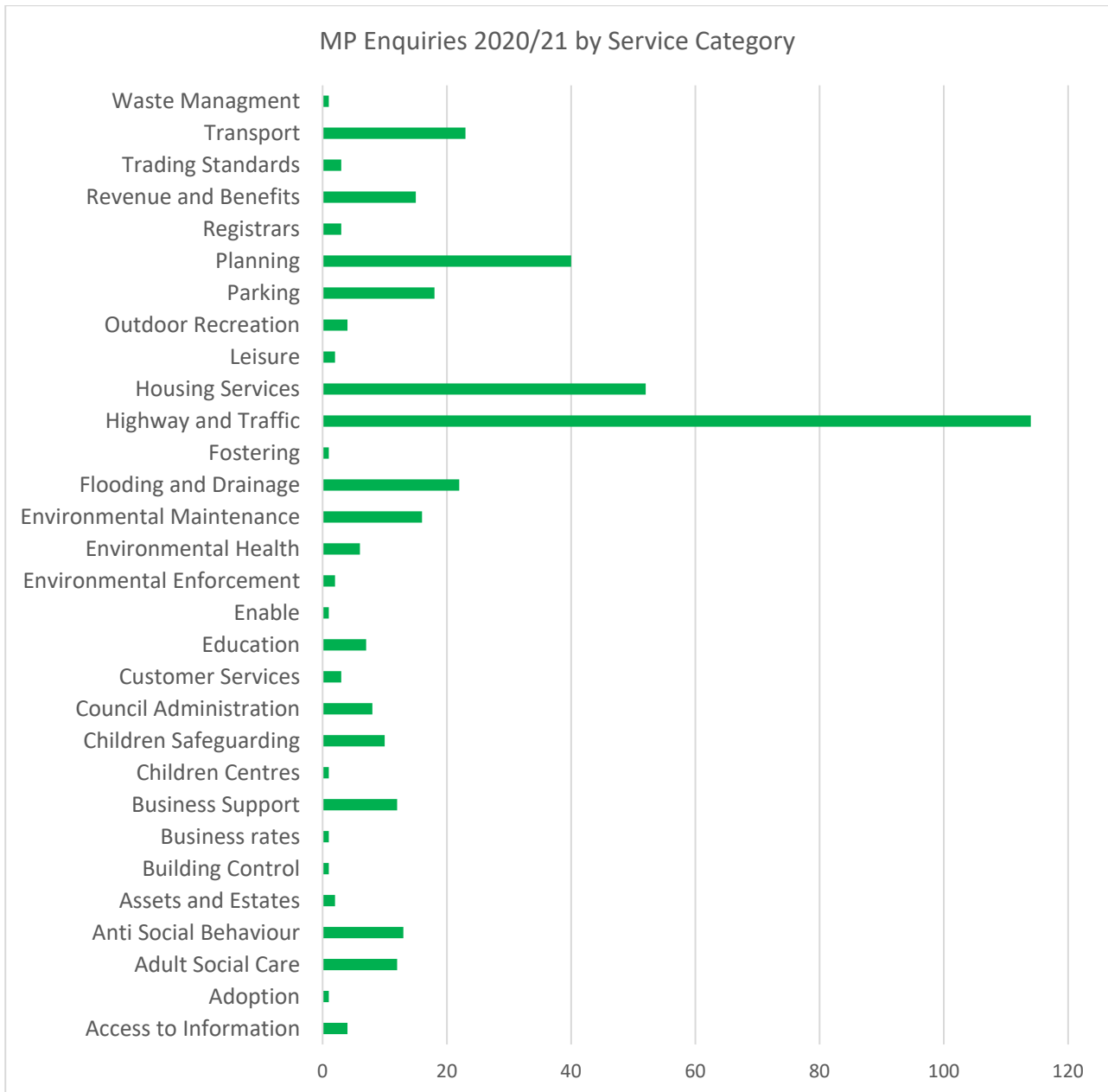
During 2020/21 397 MP Enquiries were received compared to 291 in 2019/20 and 322 the previous year. The overall pattern suggests an increase in MP enquiries. In 2020/21 an average of 33 enquiries were received a month compared to an average of 24 a month the year before. In the same way as complaints, 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 in 2020/21 March saw the greatest number of enquiries.



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 48% 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. 29% of all MP enquiries cover Highways services, 13% relate to housing issues and 10% relate to Planning issues.



The average number of days taken to respond to MP enquiries during 2020/21 was 16 days. Although this response performance is shorter than the average for stage 1 corporate complaints, it remains longer than the target timescale of 10 working days. 71% of MP Enquiries were responded to within timescale. Many managers report challenges responding to the number of formal enquiries received and the time involved in thoroughly investigating an issue before compiling a response.

## 10. Conclusions

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The 2019/20 customer feedback data highlighted a continued growth in the volumes of formal customer feedback received by Shropshire Council, but that trend has not continued into 2020/21. This is due to a number of factors including an unusual year with some fluctuations caused by the impact of the pandemic, and a focused effort to ensure feedback is triaged as much as possible and progressed in the correct way (for example service requests not progressing to complaints prematurely). The number of complaints investigations has reduced slightly, and the number of compliments has increased.

The nature of complaints remains similar with the allocation of cases across service areas showing similar patterns to previous years. Although a small proportion of complaints progress to Stage 2 the number of cases progressing beyond stage 1 has increased. This may be partly due to the number of cases exceeding timescale and overdue cases are more likely to result in complainants keen to progress to the next stage of the process.

Despite a lack of timely response in some cases, it should also be noted that only a relatively small proportion of complaints are upheld at stage 1 (12%) or partially upheld (18%). 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. Feedback from complaints investigators suggests that pressures exist due to public sector budget pressures and limited staff resources within service areas.

A close analysis of complaints by service area 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 continues to receive a significantly larger number of complaints than any other area of service (30%). However, this has reduced from 34% the previous year and officers have been focused on making improvements in process and response (the results of this were clearer in the later part of the year). Complaints refer to a lack of response/communication, lack of action or delays, complaints about condition of highways such as potholes, road closures/road works and flooding/drainage.
- Waste & Recycling – 8% of complaints relate to Waste Management services (compared to 9% the previous year). These complaints are 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. The service is responsive to feedback and seeks to apply remedies as efficiently as possible.
- Planning Services – 6% of complaints relate to Planning Services. These cases are usually complex in nature and are not easily remedied. Planning complaints feature significantly in the cases progressing to stage 2 and the Ombudsman. The coordination of complaints cases is working well but responses rely on manager time/capacity.

Overall, the LGO made 50 decisions relating to Shropshire Council in 2020/21 compared to 85 enquiries from Shropshire in 2019/20 and 91 in 2018/19. 2020/21 was not a usual year for the Ombudsman and the impact of the pandemic lead casework to be suspended for three months. It is likely that the impact of this will be seen in the data for 2021/22. The LGO annual data includes upheld rates as key measures of performance. Due to the relatively small numbers of cases the upheld rate can fluctuate. In 2018/19 the upheld rate was 61%, in 2019/20 41% and in the last year (2020/21) 50%. Performance is slightly better than the average upheld rate for similar local authorities (63%).



# 11. Progress Update

Key actions and achievements over the last 12 months are summarised against the summary recommendations made in 2019/20 below. Some of the recommendations require continued ongoing action and longer-term focus.

	Action 2019/20	Progress Made
1	Seek to address the significant increase in numbers of complaints investigations, with specific emphasis on Highways complaints.	A working group has been in place throughout 2020/21 to focus on a range of factors that have contributed to a downturn in highways complaints performance over the last few years. Highways managers have been actively working with the Feedback and Insight Team to better understand both themes in customer feedback and the barriers to processes that were preventing complaints from being handled most effectively. Issues have included inefficiencies in IT systems and challenges in process, as well as lack of budget to put remedial action in place to address complaints. Complaints performance has been improving over the latter part of the year. System changes and new ways of working should see this improvement continue in 2021/22.
2	Monitor the proportion of complaints outcomes recorded as 'no finding' and seek to reduce the proportion over the year.	Close monitoring has been taking place over the course of the year. The overall proportion of cases recorded as 'no finding' has reduced and further improvement is anticipated in 2021/22. Although progress has been achieved this will continue to be a consideration. An ambitious target is to reduce the proportion of 'no finding' outcomes to less than 4%.
3	Undertake more detailed review of complaint timescales and 'days to close' performance by service area.	More detailed information on 'days to close' performance has been built into quarterly customer feedback performance reporting. Where issues have arisen within the year these have been highlighted to managers. Despite a commitment to improve, progress has fluctuated due to the pressures of the pandemic. Children's statutory complaint 'days to close performance' has been the most challenging due to the much shorter timeframes in place. Additional support has been provided by the Feedback and Insight Team and close working and monitoring will continue into 2021/22.
4	Seek to address a reduction in the overall quality of complaints responses and compliance with the standards and expectations set out by the Feedback and Insight Team.	Quality varies significantly between complaint investigators and as a result some service areas can see significant variations in quality. Additional staff information and guidance has been produced. Quarterly performance reports have included reminders to ensure staff know what is expected of them and how to seek support if it is needed. It is a difficult issue to address but senior managers are encouraged to promote a focus on ensuring complaint investigators understand that responses must be formal and written to a high standard since they may be subject to external consideration by the Ombudsman.
5	Increase the recording of learning and actions against upheld and partially upheld complaints.	Performance has remained relatively stable despite a reduction in staff capacity for the recording of complaints for a significant part of the year. That gap has now been filled and continued effort will be made through 2021/22. Maintaining performance with a reduction in staff time is considered an achievement.

	Action 2019/20	Progress Made
6	In 2019/20The Ombudsman requested Shropshire Council look at its performance in relation to delays (time taken to respond and to implement recommendations).	The feedback in 2019/20 was not reflective of any team performance, delivering recommendations requires responsiveness from across the organisation. In 2020/21 the Ombudsman highlighted concern nationally that complaints systems are not being well resourced but there is no repeat of concerns over timely responses from Shropshire Council. Available data suggests recommendations have been responded to.
7	Deliver staff training on complaints.	Face to face and MS Teams training continues to be delivered. In 2020/21 training workshops have been held/planned for Children's Services and Adult Services staff due to the demands of statutory processes. Plans to develop online training have had to be put on hold due to staff vacancies and pressures faced by the Feedback and Insight Team. It is an ongoing ambition to implement online complaints training for staff and it remains part of the recommendations below.
8	Use the Unusually Persistent and Vexatious Customers Procedure to manage the significant numbers of people making repeat complaints and submitting feedback to Shropshire Council using multiple processes (e.g. MP enquiry, Information Governance requests etc.)	The Unusually Persistent and Vexatious Customers Procedure has been better promoted through complaints reporting and through discussions with investigating officers. However, awareness and application of the procedure has not delivered the anticipated results. In part, this was due to an increase in persistent complainants contacting the council during the pandemic, but also a recognition that the procedure is not effective in all circumstances. It provides a short-term solution to long-term challenges. This has been discussed with the Chief Executive and Director of Place and additional research suggested to identify whether there are other approaches being taken and learning from other local authorities.
9	Increase use of quarterly performance reports.	There has been some improvement in the use of performance reports. Adult Services Managers have been accessing the Adult Services quarterly report over recent quarters and this has coincided with a noticeable reduction in Adult Services complaints and improved performance against key performance measures. Children's Service managers have been using a monthly report containing the details of cases and due dates. Use of the council-wide quarterly report has improved slightly but the extension of its use would be beneficial across a wider range of departments.

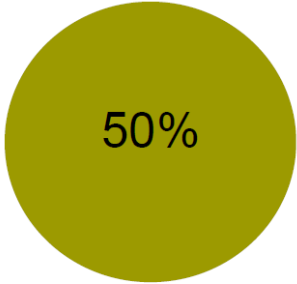
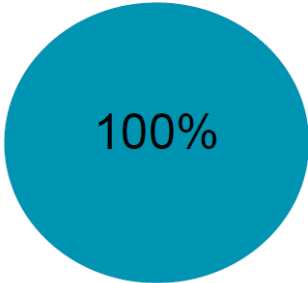
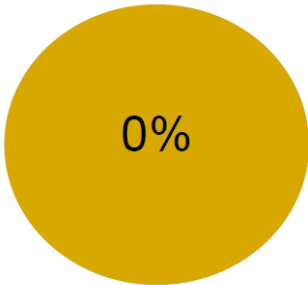
## 12. Recommendations

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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. The number of compliments received by Shropshire Council increased in 2020/21. It was encouraging to see recognition of the services and support delivered across a wide range of service areas during the pandemic. However, not all services appear to consistently report compliments. It is recommended that all teams are reminded of the importance of reporting compliments for central recording as well as complaints.
2. Complaint numbers didn't increase in 2020/21. This was partly influenced by the pandemic but also by a focus on triage of feedback. Despite improvements, the data suggests too many cases are developing into complaints when they should be resolved earlier, at the stage of service request. Joint working will be required across service areas to address customer feedback processing. It is also recommended that the focused project work undertaken with Highways Services continues due to the positive impact it had during the latter part of 2020/21
3. It is recommended that 'days to close' and 'no finding' performance remain a focus in 2021/22. Too many cases are exceeding timescales (with some complaints not adequately responded to resulting in 'no finding') and the impact of this often means complainants remain dissatisfied and cases are more likely to escalate.
4. It is recommended that communication work is undertaken within the year to try to increase the identification of 'lessons learnt' outcomes (follow up actions and recommendations) for upheld and partially upheld complaints investigations. Complaints investigators will be encouraged to report these to the Feedback and Insight Team's complaint officers for recording.
5. It is anticipated that the longer term trend of rising complaint numbers and increased escalations is likely to continue (customers seem much more aware of their rights to complain and to use other processes such as Information Governance requests to draw attention to the issues they wish to raise). The Ombudsman has identified concern at the national level that local authority complaint handling functions are not well resourced to respond to increases in demand. These concerns are reflected locally, and it is recommended that options are considered for how resources may be best allocated to respond to longer-term challenges.
6. It is recommended that research takes place into techniques used by local authorities to manage repeat and unusually persistent and vexatious customers. The current approaches do not feel effective over a longer term. The widespread impact and cost generated by small numbers of customers is significant.
7. Staff vacancies and pressures within the Feedback and Insight Team have meant that ambitions for delivering new online complaints training have not yet been achieved. It is recommended that this remain an area of focus, and that if possible, this development is pursued alongside the more traditional training provided. It is also recommended that internal communications are delivered in 2021/22 to support complaints investigators understand the expected standards and quality Shropshire Council aims to deliver.
8. It is recommended that more senior managers are encouraged to ensure the responsibilities for complaints investigations are included within all manager job descriptions. This is a core role required across the organisation and it should be considered an intrinsic part of management responsibilities. It is recommended that the way to progress this is to share information with HR Business Partners, well placed to provide advice and recommend this action when job descriptions are being reviewed and new posts created.

# Appendix 1 Ombudsman Cases 2020/21

Complaints upheld		
	<p><b>50%</b> of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>63%</b> in similar authorities.</p>	<p><b>8</b> upheld decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 16 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	<p>In <b>100%</b> of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>99%</b> in similar authorities.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of 9 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>		
Satisfactory remedy provided by the authority		
	<p>In <b>0%</b> of upheld cases we found the authority had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.</p> <p>This compares to an average of <b>10%</b> in similar authorities.</p>	<p><b>0</b> satisfactory remedy decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 16 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021</p>

## Appendix 2 Ombudsman Recommendations 2020/21

This table covers complaints that were **upheld** by the Ombudsman during 2020/21

Category	Decided date	Remedy	Ombudsman recommendation	Recommendation achieved date
Adult Care Services	24 Aug 2020	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Provide training and/or guidance	The Council will send a memo to the officers involved in carrying out Care Act assessments in this case to remind them of the need to involve the service user and any family members in the assessment, share the completed assessment with the service user and any family members and ensure the service user is involved in drawing up a support plan.	22 September 2020
Education & Children's Services	09 Sep 2020	Apology, New appeal/review or reconsidered decision, Procedure or policy change/review	The Council will also review its school transport appeal procedure to ensure it meets the requirements of statutory guidance including provision for parents to attend the hearing and make verbal representations.	20 October 2020
Adult Care Services	23 Nov 2020	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	Apology and payment made.	18 December 2020
Education & Children's Services	07 Dec 2020	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Procedure or policy change/review, Provide information/advice	The Council has already changed its annual review template to avoid similar issues occurring in future. Should the Council decide not to include in the template reference to the legal sections of the regulations and guidance about ceasing an EHCP for those who are over 18 the Council should produce some guidance for officers instead.	15 February 2021
Highways & Transport	06 Jan 2021	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	Apology and payment made.	Initial action completed with ongoing action due to complexity of case.
Planning & Development	04 Feb 2021	Apology, New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	Apology provided.	12 March 2021
Adult Care Services	03 Feb 2021	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble	Apology and payment made.	22 February 2021
Education & Children's Services	22 Feb 2021	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service	Payment made.	17 March 2021

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<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet 20 <sup>th</sup> October 2021

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

## **REVIEW OF NON-DOMESTIC RATES DISCRETIONARY RELIEF AND COUNCIL TAX DISCRETIONARY DISCOUNTS**

**Responsible Officer**     **James Walton**

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### **1. Synopsis**

The current Business Rate Relief and Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy was approved by Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018 with a view to review the policy every three years. However, due to the uncertainty surrounding the implication of Covid19, it is proposed to continue with the existing policy in 2022-23 with a full review to take place in 2022.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 The Authority has responsibility for the collection and administration of Business Rates and Council Tax revenues. There is complex legislation detailing how the amount due from Business Rates and Council Tax is calculated. Within the legislation and government guidelines, the Local Authority has certain discretions to award reliefs and discounts in certain circumstances. The current Business Rate Relief and Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy was last considered by Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018. At this time there was a commitment to review the policy every three years.
- 2.2 The global pandemic (Covid19) has led to much economic uncertainty, and the pandemic continues to impact on businesses. The Government have prescribed additional rate relief for a lot of businesses in 2020-21 and 2021-22 due to Covid19 and it is unclear whether this will continue in 2022-23. It is therefore proposed to continue with the existing discretionary rate relief policy for 2022-23 with a commitment for a review of the policy in 2022.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. Continue with the existing Business Rate Relief and Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy for 2022-23 with a review of the policy in 2022.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

- 4.1. The current policy is understood by ratepayers and council taxpayers, meaning a continuation of this policy for a further year is of low risk.

### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1. The authority has a statutory duty to bill and collect business rates. Under the current rate retention scheme the authority bears the cost of 49% of any business rate relief awarded.
- 5.2. The cost to the Council of awarding discretionary rate relief in 2020-21 was £0.730m, with a cost to Shropshire Council at 49% £0.358m.
- 5.3. The financial implications of continuing the current policy for a further year should be broadly similar.

### **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

- 6.1. There are no direct climate change impacts arising from this report.

### **7. Background**

- 7.1. The Rate Relief Policy for Shropshire Council was agreed by Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010. The aim was to bring together the most common award elements from the policies that had been in operation from the previous five districts.



- 7.2 The policy was amended by cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2011 to award 100% discretionary rate relief to Social Enterprises under certain conditions, and 20% discretionary top-up relief to Charity Shops that evidence that 90% of their gross profit is invested in the local community.
- 7.3 The policy was reviewed by Council on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015. No further amendments were made to the policy at that time.
- 7.4 The policy was last reviewed by Council on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2018. At that review the Council agreed to award discretionary top up relief to charities that provided a benefit to the local community but removed the 20% top up to Housing Associations. Discretionary Rate Relief to Sports Clubs not registered as Community Amateur Sports Clubs was removed. Qualifying criteria for Social Enterprises and Community Interest Companies was restricted to organisations where there was no provision to remunerate their directors.
- 7.5 The full policy is attached at Appendix A. A summary of the current award criteria is on page 11 of the policy.

## **8 Additional Information**

- 8.1 None

## **9 Conclusions**

- 9.1 Continuation of the existing rate relief policy for a further twelve months will provide certainty to businesses and enable a full review to take place in 2022 when the impact of the pandemic may be better understood.

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

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder for Resources

**Local Member**

N/A

**Appendices**

2018 Business Rate Relief and Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy

# Business Rate Relief and Council Tax Discretionary Discount Policy



PHIL WEIR – REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICE MANAGER

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## **Introduction**

The authority has discretion to award business rates relief and rural rate relief to certain qualifying businesses and a Business Rate and Council Tax discount in certain circumstances that it sees fit. This report recommends the circumstances in which these reductions are awarded and the process to be followed.

## **Background Information**

1. The Local Government Finance Act (LGFA) 1988 provides that Local Authorities can award a discretionary relief to ratepayers in various circumstances. The Local Government Act 2003 extended the Council discretion to allow discretionary Council Tax discount to be awarded where the Council sees fit and the Localism Act 2011 extended the Council's power to award business rate discounts. The areas for discretionary consideration are listed below.

Discretionary Charitable Top-Up Relief (Section 47 LGFA 1988)  
Discretionary Charitable Rate Relief (Section 47 LGFA 1988)  
Rural Discretionary Relief (Section 47 LGFA 1988)  
Hardship Relief (Section 49 LGFA 1988)  
Local Business Rate Discounts (Section 47 LGFA 1988)  
Part Occupied Relief (Section 44A LGFA 1988)  
Section 31 Grants/Autumn Statement Relief (Section 47 LGFA 1988)  
Council Tax Discretionary Discounts (Section 13A Local Government Finance Act 1992)

2. Up until 1 April 2013 business rate relief was funded in the following manner.

Mandatory Relief – fully funded by Central Government  
Discretionary Top-Up Relief – 25% Government and 75% Shropshire Council  
Discretionary Relief – 75% Government and 25% Shropshire Council  
Rural Mandatory Relief – fully funded by Central Government  
Rural Discretionary Relief – 75% Government and 25% Shropshire Council  
Hardship Relief (Section 49) – 75% Government and 25% Shropshire Council  
Part Occupied relief (Section 44A) – fully funded by Central Government  
Local Discounts – Fully funded by Shropshire Council

3. Under the current system of rates retention (post 1 April 2013) Shropshire Council bears the cost of 49% of any relief awarded, with the government bearing the cost of 50% and the Fire Authority 1%
4. Shropshire Council's discretionary relief policy was first approved by Cabinet on 21 July 2010. Two amendments to the policy were approved by Cabinet on 14 December 2011. The policy was last considered by Council on 14 May 2015.

## **Discretionary Charitable Top-Up Relief**

### **Guidance**

5. On receipt of an application for charitable relief, billing authorities should first consider whether the institution or organisation is eligible for mandatory relief.
6. To qualify for mandatory relief the property must be wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes and the institution or organisation must be established for charitable purposes. Registration under the charities Act 1993 is conclusive evidence of charitable status.
7. Mandatory Relief of 80% of the full rate liability for charities and other organisations is provided for in sections 43 and 45 of the 1988 act.
8. Under section 47 of the 1988 Act Shropshire Council has the discretion to top-up this relief to 100%.

### **Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCS)**

9. Registered CASCS are entitled to mandatory relief at the same level as charities. This provision came into force with effect from 1 April 2004.
10. CASCS are defined by Schedule 18 Finance Act 1988 and registration forms are available from the Inland Revenue Website.
11. As with charities, billing authorities are also allowed to top-up the remaining 20%.

### **Charity Shops**

12. Charity Shops are entitled to 80% mandatory relief providing that they are registered charities and they are used wholly or mainly for the sale of donated goods and the proceeds of the sale of goods are applied for the purposes of the charity.

### **Financial Implications**

13. With effect from 1 April 2013 and the introduction of the rate retention scheme the cost of all reliefs is split between the government (50%), the billing authority (49%) and the Fire Authority (1%).

### **Approved Relief in Shropshire**

14. To award 20% top-up to those local or national charities that provide a benefit to the local community that are classed as:
  - Community Centres, Village Halls, Meeting Rooms
  - Scouts, guides, cadets and youth clubs
  - Museums

- Drop in/advice centres
  - Nursery/pre schools
  - Sports/community centres providing sporting leisure facilities to the general public with no membership requirement
  - Provision of care and support to vulnerable people
  - Animal Welfare
  - Advancement of religion or the arts
15. Award 20% top-up to sports clubs that can demonstrate that:
- They are registered CASCS
  - Their membership is mainly composed of active membership rather than social membership
  - The club is accessible to all.
  - The club has achieved the CLUBMARK accreditation standard
  - (CLUBMARK and associated individual sports equivalents is the only national cross sports quality accreditation scheme for clubs with junior sections. It is built around a set of core criteria which ensure that accredited clubs operate to a set of consistent, accepted and adopted minimum operation standards).
16. Award charity shops with the 20% top up if they evidence that 90% of their gross profit is invested in the local community
17. To delegate the determination of applications for discretionary top up relief outside this policy to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel.

### **Discretionary Relief for Charities**

#### **Guidance**

18. Where the property does not qualify for mandatory relief authorities can still consider the award of a discretionary rate relief under section 47 of LGFA 1988. Authorities have discretion to award up to 100% to certain non-profit making bodies.
19. To be eligible for consideration the ratepayer:
- Must be a charity or trustees of a charity and the property must be wholly or mainly used for charitable purposes; or
  - The property is not an excepted property and all or part of it is occupied for the purposes of one or more institutions none of which is established or

conducted for profit and each of whose objects are charitable or otherwise philanthropic or religious or concerned with education, social welfare, science, literature or the fine arts: or

- The property is not an excepted property and is wholly or mainly used for the purposes of recreation, and all or part is occupied for the purposes of a club, society or other organisation not established or conducted for profit.

20. Discretionary relief may not be granted where the hereditament is an excepted property, such as a billing authority or a precepting authority.

### **Financial Implications**

21. With effect from 1 April 2013, under the arrangements for local business rate retention, the cost of all reliefs is split between the Government (50%), Shropshire Council (49%), and the Fire Authority (1%).

### **Approved Relief in Shropshire**

22. To award Village Halls and Community Centres 100% discretionary rate.
23. To award other similar voluntary organisations (e.g. Senior Citizens Clubs, Scouts/Guide Huts) whose emphasis is on recreational activity rather than social activity 100% discretionary rate relief.

### **Social Enterprises**

24. To award 100% discretionary relief to social enterprises that that provide benefit to the local community and are:-
- Community Interest Companies that are limited by guarantee providing that they:-
    - Are registered as a Community Interest Company. Reference can be made to Gov.Uk website on Community Interest Companies and to Companies House
    - <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-of-the-regulator-of-community-interest-companies>
    - <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/>
    - Also the Company's Articles of Association or Memorandum should clearly state that any surplus of income over expenditure will be applied in a particular manner to ensure that no profit is actually made
    - Not conducted for profit
    - Do not remunerate the Directors of the Company
  - Industrial and Provident Societies and Companies Limited by Guarantee providing that they:-
    - Are a not for profit company.



- Provide benefit for the local community.
  - Not for profit companies are normally limited by guarantee (as opposed to shares)
  - Reference should be made to Companies House website above
  - Also the Company's Articles of Association or Memorandum should clearly state that any surplus of income over expenditure will be applied in a particular manner to ensure that no profit is actually made.
  - Do not remunerate the Directors of the Company
25. To delegate the determination of applications for discretionary relief outside this policy to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel.

### **Rural Discretionary Relief**

#### **Guidance**

26. The Local Government Finance and Rating Act 1997 introduced a scheme of 50% mandatory rate relief for certain kinds of property with effect from 1 April 1998. To qualify businesses must be within a rural settlement with a population of not more than 3,000.
27. The Rural Settlement List for Shropshire is at Appendix B.
28. Mandatory rate relief applies to a qualifying property which is within a settlement identified in an authority's rural settlement list for the chargeable financial year where its rateable value is not, at the beginning of the year in question more than a relevant prescribed amount. The rateable value limits are as follows:
- For qualifying sole shop, general store or post office £8,500.
  - For qualifying sole petrol filling station or pub £12,500.
29. In addition discretionary rate relief may be allowed if:
- The property is in a rural settlement
  - The rateable value of the property is £16,500 or less.
  - The property is used for purposes which are of benefit to the local community:  
and
  - It is reasonable for the Council to grant relief taking into account the interests of its council taxpayers

#### **Financial Implications**

30. With effect from 1 April 2013, under the arrangements for local business rate retention, the cost of all reliefs is split between the Government (50%), Shropshire Council (49%), and the Fire Authority (1%).
- 31.

### **Approved Relief in Shropshire**

32. To award 25% rate relief to qualifying post offices and general stores and to delegate the determination of applications for rural rate relief outside this policy to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel.
33. In 2016 the Government announced their intention to legislate to award mandatory rural rate relief of 100% to qualifying rural business. As yet the legislation to allow this has not been passed. Instead, the Government have required billing authorities to award 100% relief to qualifying rural businesses using discretionary powers and this is fully funded by the Government via payment of Section 31 grant.

### **Hardship Relief**

34. Section 49 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 provides that the Council may reduce or remit any amount that a person is liable to pay in respect of Non-Domestic Rates. The Council cannot act under this section unless it is satisfied that:
  - The ratepayer would sustain hardship if the authority did not do so, and
  - It is reasonable for the authority to do so, having regard to the interest of its council tax payers.
35. Any amount up to 100% of the rates liability can be remitted.
36. Government guidance on the award of hardship relief is that each case must be treated on its merits and a 'blanket policy' must not be adopted.

### **Financial Implications**

37. With effect from 1 April 2013, under the arrangements for local business rate retention, the cost of all reliefs is split between the Government (50%), Shropshire Council (49%), and the Fire Authority (1%).

### **Options**

38. The recommendation is to delegate the determination of non-domestic rate hardship relief to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel.

### **Local Discounts**

39. The Localism Act 2011 removed the previous restriction that discretionary relief could only apply to charities and other organisations of prescribed type. However discretionary relief may not be granted where the hereditament is an excepted hereditament such as a billing authority or a precepting authority.

### **Financial Implications**

40. With effect from 1 April 2013, under the arrangements for local business rate retention, the cost of all reliefs is split between the Government (50%), Shropshire Council (49%), and the Fire Authority (1%).

### **Options**

41. The recommendation is to delegate the determination of non-domestic rates local discounts to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel.

### **Part Occupied Relief**

41. This can be awarded where business premises are partly occupied or not fully occupied providing that the situation exists for a short time. When awarding the relief Shropshire Council ask the Valuation Office to provide amended rateable values based on the occupied and unoccupied areas.

### **Financial Implications**

42. With effect from 1 April 2013, under the arrangements for local business rate retention, the cost of all reliefs is split between the Government (50%), Shropshire Council (49%), and the Fire Authority (1%).

### **Options**

43. The recommendation is to delegate the determination of non-domestic rate part-occupied relief to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel.

### **Section 31 Grant Relief (Autumn Statement)**

44. Since 2012 the Government has required Billing Authorities to grant relief to businesses in various circumstances. These reliefs are awarded under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (discretionary powers) but the Council are fully compensated for the cost of these reliefs through payment of grant under Section 31 of Local Government Act 2003.

### **Financial Implications**

45. The full cost of awarding these reliefs are covered by the Government through a Section 31 grant payment.

### **Options**

46. The authority should delegate authority to award any reliefs that are awarded under Section 47 Local Government Finance Act 1988 but fully compensated via Section 31 grant payment, to the Council's Section 151 Officer.

## **Council Tax Discretionary Discount**

47. The Local Government Act 2003 introduced a new power as Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, whereby a billing authority may reduce the liability of a council tax payer to such extent as it sees fit.
48. The power can be exercised in relation to particular cases or by determining a class of case in which liability is to be reduced.

### **Financial Implications**

49. Any cost associated with such a reduction is borne by the billing authority.

### **Options**

50. The authority should have a due process for consideration of applications for discretionary council tax discount.

### **Process to consider applications to the authority to exercise its discretion**

51. Requests for Section 13A discount may come from a variety of people for a variety of reasons.
52. Where applicants for discretionary discount are applying due to financial hardship consideration will be given to:
  - The applicants personal circumstances
  - The applicants income and expenditure and budget management
  - Any savings or assets available to the applicant
  - Any discount, relief, exemption, benefit, or any other financial assistance the applicant may be entitled to
  - Any other factors the authority deems to be relevant
53. In order to properly understand the claimants circumstances the applicant will be asked to provide reasonable evidence in support of their application. This may include:
  - Income and Expenditure statement
  - Documentary evidence to verify information provided on Income and Expenditure statements
  - Evidence that all other benefit eligibility has been explored thoroughly and maximised
  - Evidence of any applications made to other organisations for financial assistance
  - Any special circumstances that the Council is aware of

- Any other relevant documentation
54. Government guidelines state that an authority may delegate the decision making process on applications for discretionary relief either to individual officers or committees.
  55. The authority should have a mechanism that allows applicants to appeal against a decision by an authority to revoke, reject or restrict the award of discretionary relief. The same officials that made the original decision should not consider appeals. Guidelines suggest that it may be appropriate to refer any appeal to a panel of council members, especially where an officer of the council made the original decision under delegated powers.
  56. The timescales for appealing against a decision of a billing authority in relation to council tax liability are set out in Section 16 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. This allows a person to appeal directly to the Valuation Tribunal if they have received no notification from the billing authority within two months of appealing against a decision.

### **Recommendation**

57. The recommendation is to delegate the determination of council tax discretionary discount awards to the Council's Section 151 Officer with any appeal against that decision to be heard by the General Appeals Panel. Where an appeal against a decision of Section 151 Officer is received the General Appeal Panel of Members will hear the appeal within two months of the appeal being received.
58. The council tax payer may appeal directly to the Valuation Tribunal if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of the appeal, or if they have received no notification from the billing authority within two months of appealing against a decision of Section 151 Officer.
59. The flowchart at Appendix C details the process for considering requests for Section 13A discount.

## Appendix A – Shropshire Council Discretionary Relief Policy

Relief Type	Relief Description	Award %
Top up	<p><b>Local or national charities</b> that provide a benefit to the local community that are classed as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- community centres, village halls, meeting rooms</li> <li>- scouts, guides, cadets and youth clubs</li> <li>- museums</li> <li>- drop in/advice centres</li> <li>- nursery/pre schools</li> <li>- provision of care and support to vulnerable people</li> <li>- animal welfare</li> <li>- advancement of religion or the arts</li> <li>- sports/community centres providing sporting leisure facilities to the general public with no membership requirement</li> </ul> <p><b>Charity shops</b> that commit 90% of gross profit to the local community</p> <p><b>Sports clubs</b> that are registered as Community Amateur Sports Clubs that can demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Their membership is mainly composed of active membership rather than social membership</li> <li>- (Reference can be made as to whether the club has a bar or not)</li> <li>- The club is accessible to all</li> <li>- The club has achieved the CLUB MARK accreditation standard</li> </ul>	20%
non profit making	<p><b>Village hall and community centres</b></p> <p>Similar voluntary organisations whose emphasis is on recreational activity rather than social e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Senior Citizen’s Clubs</li> <li>- Scout and guide huts</li> <li>- Youth clubs</li> </ul> <p>Social Enterprises that provide a benefit to the local community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Registered Community Interest Companies</li> <li>- Industrial and Provident Societies</li> <li>- Companies Limited by Guarantee</li> <li>- Where articles of association or memorandum clearly state not conducted for profit and surplus is applied for benefit for community</li> <li>- directors receive no remuneration</li> </ul>	100%
Rural Rate Relief	25% to rural post offices and village shops that qualify for mandatory relief	25%
Hardship Relief	Applications to be considered by Section 151 Officer and any appeal to the General Appeals Panel	N/A
Local Business Rate Discounts	Applications to be considered by Section 151 Officer and any appeal to the General Appeals Panel	N/A
Part Occupied Relief	Applications to be considered by Section 151 Officer and any appeal to the General Appeals Panel	N/A
Section 31 Grant Relief	Applications to be considered by Section 151 Officer and any appeal to the General Appeals Panel	N/A
Council Tax discretionary discounts	Applications to be considered by Section 151 Officer and any appeal to the General Appeals Panel	N/A



Shropshire  
Council

**National Non Domestic  
Rates**

**RURAL SETTLEMENT  
LIST**

**2015**

# 1. Background

## 1.1 Legislation

With effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1998, the Local Government Finance and Rating Act 1997 introduced a scheme of mandatory rate relief for certain kinds of hereditament situated in 'rural settlements'. A 'rural settlement' is defined as a settlement that has a population of not more than 3,000 on 31<sup>st</sup> December immediately before the chargeable year in question.

The Non-Domestic Rating (Rural Settlements) (England) (Amendment) Order 2009 (S.I. 2009/3176) prescribes the following hereditaments as being eligible with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010:-

- Sole food shop within a rural settlement and has a RV of less than £8,500;
- Sole general store within a rural settlement and has a RV of less than £8,500;
- Sole post office within a rural settlement and has a RV of less than £8,500;
- Sole public house within a rural settlement and has a RV of less than £12,500;
- Sole petrol filling station within a rural settlement and has a RV of less than £12,500;

Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 provides that a billing authority may grant discretionary relief for hereditaments to which mandatory relief applies, and additionally to any hereditament within a rural settlement which is used for purposes which are of benefit to the local community.

## 1.2 Current Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Currently, Shropshire Council's discretionary rate relief policy, as agreed by Council on 14 May 2015, allows the following awards to be made:-

- 25% to the sole post office within the rural settlement that qualify for mandatory relief;
- 25% to the sole village shop within the rural settlement that qualify for mandatory relief.

## 1.3 Source of Information

The population figures are currently based upon the 2011 Census, the relevant details of which are contained in Section 2.



The following tables in Section 3 details such rural settlements within Shropshire Council's area of responsibility.

## 2. Census 2011 Population Figures

Census Settlement	Population Estimate (unrounded)	Population Estimate (rounded)	Census Settlement	Population Estimate (unrounded)	Population Estimate (rounded)
Abdon	15	20	Bedstone	60	60
Ackleton	287	300	Bentlawnt	83	80
Acton Burnell	216	200	Berrington	57	60
Acton Round	29	30	Berwick	49	50
Acton Scott	27	30	Besom Woods/Wheathill	46	50
Adderley	206	200	Bettws-Y-Crwyn	4	5
Alberbury	109	110	Bicton	494	500
Albrighton (1)	4462	4500	Billingsley	129	13
Albrighton (2)	35	40	Bings Heath	57	60
Aldon	16	20	Binweston	12	10
All Stretton	288	300	Bishops Castle	1735	1700
Allfordgreen	37	40	Bitterley	104	100
Alveley	1566	1600	Bletchley	45	40
Angel Bank/Farden	227	250	Bomere Heath	1256	1300
Annscroft	228	250	Boningale	47	50
Arscott	72	70	Boraston	38	40
Ash Magna/Ash Parva	247	250	Boulton	33	30
Ashford Bowdler	45	50	Bourton	76	80
Ashford Carbonell	326	350	Bourton Westwood	17	20
Asterley	112	110	Brandhill	24	20
Asterton	22	20	Breadon Heath	37	40
Astley	114	110	Bridgnorth	12312	12300
Astley Abbots	79	80	Broad Oak/Six Ashes	46	50
Aston	70	70	Brockton	46	50
Aston Botterell	33	30	Brockton (1)	70	70
Aston Eyre	43	40	Brockton (2)	57	60
Aston Munslow	114	110	Bromfield	81	80
Aston Pigott	33	30	Bromlow	57	60
Aston Rogers	50	50	Brompton	21	20
Aston-On-Clun	221	200	Bronygarth/Castle Mill	103	100
Atcham	127	130	Broome	98	100
Babbinswood	175	180	Broseley	4752	4800
Badger	107	110	Broughall	55	50
Bagley	74	70	Brown Heath	26	30
Barkers Green	47	50	Bryn	11	10

Barrow	17	20	Bucknell	405	400
Baschurch/Newtown/ Prescot	1602	1600	Buildwas	143	140
Bayston Hill	4837	4800	Burford	1216	1200
Beambridge/Aston Mill	32	30	Burlton	114	110
Beckbury	221	200	Burwarton	108	110
Bedlam	76	80	Button Bridge	58	60
Bushmoor/Leamoor Common	82	80	Condover	526	550
Button Oak	81	80	Coppice Gate	50	50
Callaughton	41	40	Coreley	31	30
Calverhall	156	160	Corfton/Corfton Bache	68	70
Cardeston	38	40	Cosford/Donnington	954	950
Cardington/Gretton	124	120	Cound/Upper Cound	179	180
Castle Pulverbatch	120	120	Coundmoor/Evenwo od Common	96	100
Catherton Common	124	120	Crackley Bank	34	30
Caynham	149	150	Craven Arms	2370	2400
Cefn Blodwel	18	20	Cressage	632	650
Cefn Einion	23	20	Crickheath	63	60
Chapel Lawn	32	30	Croesaubach	28	30
Chavel	41	40	Cross Houses	744	750
Chelmarsh	244	250	Cross Lane Head	56	60
Cheney Longville	39	40	Crowsnest	42	40
Chesterton	62	60	Cruckmeole	50	50
Cheswardine	625	650	Cruckton	90	90
Chetton	66	70	Culmington	131	130
Childs Ercall	492	500	Darliston	38	40
Chipnall	101	100	Deuxhill	9	10
Chirbury	220	200	Dhustone	91	90
Chirk Bank/Gledrid	622	600	Diddlebury	182	180
Chorley	121	120	Ditton Priors	408	400
Church Preen	41	40	Dobsons Bridge/Roving Bridge	65	60
Church Pulverbatch	35	40	Doddongton	269	250
Church Stretton	3676	3700	Donnington/Charlto n Hill	31	30
Claverley	672	650	Dorrington	606	600
Clee Hill/The Knowle	854	850	Dovaston/Knockin Heath	264	250
Clee St Margaret	84	80	Draycott	51	50
Cleeton St Mary	51	50	Dudleston	28	30
Cleobury Mortimer	2750	2700	Dudleston Heath/Gadlas	861	850
Cleobury North	30	30	Eardington	332	350

Clive	423	400	Eardiston	33	30
Clun	760	750	East wall	44	40
Clunbury	95	90	Easthope	59	60
Clungunford	200	200	Eaton Constantine	137	140
Clunton	120	120	Eaton Upon Tern	100	100
Cockshutford	29	30	Edge	20	20
Cockshutt	611	600	Edgebolton/Moreton Mill	176	180
Coed-Y-Go	63	60	Edgerley	52	50
Colebatch	68	70	Edgton/Basford	66	70
Colemere	71	70	Edstaston	43	40
Colemore Green	40	40	Ellesmere	3726	3700
Elson	63	60	High Hatton	48	50
Enchmarsh	20	20	Highley/Netherton	3158	3200
English Frankton	26	30	Hilton	179	180
Ensdon	22	20	Hindford	34	30
Exfords Green	27	30	Hinstock/Wood Lane	768	750
Eyton	21	20	Hinton	30	30
Eyton On Severn	16	20	Hints	148	150
Farley	23	20	Hodnet/Hodnet Heath	639	650
Farlow	15	20	Holdgate	22	20
Faulsgreen	108	110	Hollinwood	121	120
Felhampton	26	30	Homer	247	250
Felton Butler	24	20	Hookagate	114	110
Fenn Green	55	60	Hope	42	40
Fitz	31	30	Hope Bagot	30	30
Ford	595	600	Hope Bowdler	139	140
Ford Heath	52	50	Hopesay	65	70
Forton Heath/Mytton	118	120	Hopton Bank	77	80
Frodesley	126	130	Hopton Cangeford	11	10
Garmston	69	70	Hopton Castle	53	50
Glazeley	32	30	Hopton Heath	36	40
Gleedon Hill	16	20	Hopton Wafers	94	90
Glynmorlas/Rhyn	65	60	Hopton/Valeswood	100	100
Gobowen/Rhewl	2747	2700	Hordley	28	30
Grafton	106	110	Horsebridge	32	30
Great Ness	73	70	Hughley	43	40
Great Sutton	24	20	Hungerford/Broadst one	66	70
Great Wytheford	33	30	Ightfield	199	200
Greete	33	30	Jackfield	112	110
Grimpo	51	50	Kemberton	194	190
Grindle	30	30	Kempton	61	60
Grindley Brook	118	120	Kenley	44	40

Grinshill	153	150	Kinlet	65	70
Habberley	68	70	Kinnerley	297	300
Hadnall	568	550	Kinton	83	80
Halfway House	142	140	Knockin	182	180
Halston/Plealey Road	60	60	Knowbury	344	350
Hampton Loade	150	150	Lea	13	10
Hanwood	603	600	Lea Cross	65	60
Hanwood Bank	371	350	Leaton	24	20
Harley	139	140	Lee	43	40
Harmer Hill	318	300	Lee Brockhurst	122	120
Hatton	17	20	Leebotwood	113	110
Haughton	36	40	Leighton	132	130
Haytons Bent/Up Lo Hayton	107	110	Lilyhurst	25	20
Heath	13	10	Little Brampton	15	10
Heath Hill	65	60	Little Ness	108	110
Heathton	60	60	Little Stretton	238	250
Llanfair Waterdine	36	40	Montford	40	40
Llanyblodwel	69	70	Montford Bridge	320	300
Llanymynech	418	400	Morda	1553	1600
Llynclys	281	300	More	20	20
Lockleywood	78	80	Moreton Corbet	40	40
Long Meadow End	50	50	Moreton Say	40	40
Longden	247	250	Morton/Morton Common	89	90
Longden Common	109	110	Morville	81	80
Longford	60	60	Much Wenlock	2242	2200
Longnor	284	300	Muckley	13	10
Longslow	27	30	Muckley Cross	18	20
Longville In The Dale	66	70	Munslow	99	100
Longwood	38	40	Myddle	450	450
Loppington	220	200	Nantmawr	56	60
Loughton	16	20	Nash	33	30
Lower Frankton	61	60	Neen Savage	3	5
Lower Hordley/Bagley Marsh	102	100	Neen Sollars	76	80
Ludlow	10174	10200	Neenton	88	90
Lydbury North	234	250	Nesscliffe	221	200
Lydham	92	90	Netchwood Common	39	40
Lyneal	179	180	New Marton	17	20
Lyth Bank/Lyth Hill	218	200	Newcastle	152	150
Maesbrook/Maesbroo k Green	160	160	Newtown	101	100
Maesbury	240	250	Noneley/Commonw ood/Ruewood	78	80
Maesbury Marsh	252	250	Norbury	53	50

Mainstone	11	10	Nordley	38	40
Marchamley	196	200	Nordley Common	67	70
Market Drayton	11794	11800	Northwood	109	110
Marshbrook	39	40	Norton	151	150
Marton	118	120	Norton In Hales	296	300
Meadowtown	19	20	Nox	17	20
Melverley	31	30	Obley	21	20
Melverley Green	87	90	Oldbury	204	200
Merrington	33	30	Ollerton	46	50
Middle/Lower Hengoed	140	140	Onibury	112	110
Middlehope	13	10	Oreton	150	150
Middleton	95	90	Oswestry	17260	17300
Middleton Priors	48	50	Overton	65	70
Middleton Scriven	43	40	Pant Glas	57	60
Middleton/Aston Square	58	60	Pant/Pen-y-Coed	1199	1200
Mill Green	30	30	Park Hall	525	550
Milson	53	50	Peaton	24	20
Minsterley	1408	1400	Peatonstrand	29	30
Minton	30	30	Pennerley/The Bog	90	90
Monkhopton	90	90	Pentre	52	50
Peplow	29	30	Rushton	31	30
Petton	76	80	Ruyton XI Towns	940	950
Picklescott	38	40	Ryton	239	250
Pipegate	177	180	Sansaw Heath	59	60
Pitchford	129	130	Shawbury	1573	1600
Plash	45	50	Sheinton	40	40
Platt Lane	53	50	Shelderton	16	20
Plealey	130	130	Shelve	19	20
Ploxgreen	99	100	Shepherds Lane/Calcott	133	130
Pont Faen	42	40	Sheriffhales	261	250
Pontesbury	1665	1700	Shifnal	6179	6200
Pontesbury Hill	203	200	Shiple	22	20
Pontesford	90	90	Shipton	43	40
Porthywaen	137	140	Shorthill	42	40
Posenhall	37	40	Shrawardine	134	130
Prees / Prees Wood	1037	1000	Shrewsbury	71460	71500
Prees Green	84	80	Sibdon Carwood	9	10
Prees Heath	130	130	Sidbury	28	30
Prees Higher Heath	1013	1000	Siefton	53	50
Prees Lower Heath	69	70	Siefton Bache	26	30
Preston	23	20	Silvington	25	30
Preston Brockhurst	73	70	Snailbeach	234	250

Preston Gubbals	38	40	Snitton	16	20
Preston Montford	3	5	Soudley	39	40
Priest Weston	69	70	Soudley (Great)	130	130
Priors Halton	4	5	Spurtree/Hammerhill	59	60
Purslow	15	10	St Martin Moor	60	60
Quatford	266	250	St Martins/Ifton Heath	120	120
Quatt	70	70	Stableford	64	60
Queens Head	92	90	Stanley Green	106	110
Quina Brook	77	80	Stanmore Camp	169	170
Ratlinghope	13	10	Stanton Lacy	35	40
Rednal	32	30	Stanton Long	43	40
Rhoswiel	181	180	Stanton Upon Hine Heath	233	250
Rhyd-y-Croesau	9	10	Stanwardine In The Fields	55	60
Richards Castle/Batchcott	43	40	Stapleton	117	120
Romsley	58	60	Stapleton Common	68	70
Rorrington	38	40	Stiperstones/Perkins Beach	146	150
Rosehill	68	70	Stockton	14	10
Roughton	50	50	Stoke Heath	288	300
Rowton	23	20	Stoke St Milborough	67	70
Ruckley/Langley	52	50	Stoke Upon Tern	120	120
Rudge	36	40	Stokesay	28	30
Rudge Heath	7	5	Stoney Stretton	50	50
Rushbury/Roman Bank	44	40	Stottesdon	176	180
Stowe	23	20	Wattlesborough Heath	142	140
Street Dinas	46	50	Weirbrook	39	40
Strefford	48	50	Welsh Frankton/Perthy	196	200
Stretford Bridge	41	40	Welshampton	204	200
Stretton Westwood	30	30	Welsh End	31	30
Sutton	36	40	Wem	5813	5800
Sutton Maddock	89	90	Wentnor	66	70
Sweeney Mountain/Nant-Y-Caws	142	140	Wern Ddu	9	10
Ternhill	67	70	West Felton	1032	1000
Tetchill	293	300	Westbury	519	500
The Down	23	20	Westhope	48	50
The Hobbins	354	350	Westley	22	20
The Hope	31	30	Weston	46	50
The Sheet	214	200	Weston and Wixhill	161	160
The Smithies	20	20	Weston Heath	73	70

The Wern	76	80	Weston Lullingfields	102	100
Ticklerton	49	50	Weston Rhyn/Preesgweene	1512	1500
Tilley	60	60	Weston Wharf/Weston Common	142	140
Tilstock	401	400	Whitchurch	9297	9300
Tong	105	100	Whitcot	15	20
Tong Norton	118	120	Whitcot Keysett	53	50
Treflach	180	180	Whittingslow	17	20
Trefonen	746	750	Whittington	1509	1500
Tuckhill	29	30	Whitton	65	70
Tugford	26	30	Whittytrees/Duxmoor	43	40
Twitchen	43	40	Whixall	72	770
Uffington	125	130	Wilcott	169	170
Upper Affcot	17	20	Wistanstow	147	150
Upper Astley	84	80	Wistanswick/Crickmerry	308	300
Upper Hengoed	49	50	Withington	152	150
Uppington	56	60	Wollaston	24	20
Upton Cressett	13	10	Wollerton	201	200
Upton Magna	148	150	Woodseaves	180	180
Vennington	39	40	Woofferton	68	70
Vernolds Common	48	50	Woolstaston	27	30
Vron Gate	17	20	Woolston	97	100
Walford Heath/Oldwood	125	120	Woore/Irelands Cross	696	700
Walkmill	11	10	Wooton	27	30
Wall Under Heywood	105	110	Worfield	215	200
Wallbank	41	40	Worthern/Brockton	634	650
Walton	12	10	Wotherton	52	50
Waterloo	24	20	Wrentnall	33	30
Wroxeter	65	70			
Wyken	67	70			
Wykey	44	40			
Yeaton	52	50			
Yockleton	222	200			
Yorton	35	40			

### 3. Rural Settlements

#### i) Bridgnorth Parishes

Code	Parish & Designated Rural Settlement	Census Settlement	Census Settlement Population	Parish Population
NBN001	Acton Round	Acton Round	29	60
		Muckley	13	
		Muckley Cross	18	
NBN002	Albrighton	NOT RURAL	4462	4462
NBN003	Alveley	Alveley	1566	1650
		Fenn Green	55	
		Tuckhill	29	
NBN004	Astley Abbots	Astley Abbots	79	280
		Colemore Green	40	
		Cross Lane Head	56	
		Nordley	38	
		Nordley Common	67	
NBN005	Aston Botterell	Aston Botterell	33	33
NBN006	Aston Eyre	Aston Eyre	43	43
NBN007	Badger	Badger	107	107
NBN008	Barrow	Barrow	27	84
		Posenhall	37	
		The Smithies	20	
NBN009	Beckbury	Beckbury	221	221
NBN010	Billingsley	Billingsley	129	129
NBN011	Boningale	Boningale	47	47
NBN012	Boscobel	Boscobel	0	0
NBN013	Bridgnorth	NOT RURAL	12079	12549
		Oldbury	204	
		Quatford	266	
NBN014	Broseley	NOT RURAL	4929	5041
		Jackfield	112	
NBN015	Burwarton	Burwarton	108	108
NBN016	Chelmarsh	Chelmarsh	244	430
		Hampton Loade	150	
		Sutton	36	
NBN017	Chetton	Chetton	66	89
		The Down	23	
NBN018	Claverley	Broad Oak/Six Ashes	46	
		Claverley	672	



		Draycott	51	836
		Heathton	60	
		Rudge Heath	7	
<b>NBN019</b>	Cleobury North	Cleobury North	30	30
<b>NBN020</b>	Deuxhill	Deuxhill	9	9
<b>NBN021</b>	Ditton Priors	Ditton Priors	408	495
		Middleton Priors	48	
		Netchwood Common	39	
<b>NBN022</b>	Donington	Cosford/Donington	954	954
<b>NBN023</b>	Eardington	Eardington	332	332
<b>NBN024</b>	Easthope	Easthope	59	59
<b>NBN025</b>	Farlow	Farlow	15	165
		Oreton	150	
<b>NBN026</b>	Glazeley	Glazeley	32	32
<b>NBN027</b>	Highley	NOT RURAL	3158	3158
<b>NBN028</b>	Kemberton	Kemberton	194	194
<b>NBN029</b>	Kinlet	Button Bridge	58	254
		Button Oak	81	
		Coppice Gate	50	
		Kinlet	65	
<b>NBN030</b>	Middleton Scriven	Middleton Scriven	43	43
<b>NBN031</b>	Monkhopton	Monkhopton	90	90
<b>NBN032</b>	Morville	Morville	81	81
<b>NBN033</b>	Much Wenlock	Bourton	76	2669
		Bourton Westwood	17	
		Callaughton	41	
		Gleedon Hill	16	
		Homer	247	
		Much Wenlock	2242	
		Stretton Westwood	30	
<b>NBN034</b>	Neen Savage	Neen Savage	3	3
<b>NBN035</b>	Neenton	Neenton	88	88
<b>NBN036</b>	Quatt	Quatt	70	70
<b>NBN037</b>	Romsley	Romsley	58	58
<b>NBN038</b>	Rudge	Rudge	36	58
		Shipley	22	
<b>NBN039</b>	Ryton	Grindle	30	269
		Ryton	239	
<b>NBN040</b>	Sheriffhales	Crackley Bank	34	385
		Heath Hill	65	
		Lilyhurst	25	
		Sheriffhales	261	
<b>NBN041</b>	Shifnal	NOT RURAL	6179	6179
<b>NBN042</b>	Shipton	Shipton	43	43
<b>NBN043</b>	Sidbury	Sidbury	28	28
<b>NBN044</b>	Stanton Long	Brockton	70	113

		Stanton Long	43	
<b>NBN045</b>	Stockton	Norton	151	165
		Stockton	14	
<b>NBN046</b>	Stottesdon	Chorley	121	297
		Stottesdon	176	
<b>NBN047</b>	Sutton Maddock	Sutton Maddock	89	89
<b>NBN048</b>	Tasley	Tasley	0	0
<b>NBN049</b>	Tong	Tong	105	223
		Tong Norton	118	
<b>NBN050</b>	Upton Crescent	Upton Crescent	13	13
<b>NBN051</b>	Worfield	Ackleton	287	1447
		Chesterton	62	
		Hilton	179	
		Roughton	50	
		Stableford	64	
		Stanmore Camp	169	
		The Hobbins	354	
		Worfield	215	
Wyken	67			

## ii) North Shropshire Parishes

Code	Parish & Designated Rural Settlement	Census Settlement	Census Settlement Population	Parish Population
<b>NNS001</b>	Adderley	Adderley	206	206
<b>NNS002</b>	Baschurch	Baschurch/Newtown/Prescott	1602	1953
		Stanwardine In The Fields	55	
		Weston Lullingfields	102	
		Weston Wharf/Weston Common	142	
		Yeaton	52	
<b>NNS004</b>	Cheswardine	Cheswardine	625	895
		Chipnall	101	
		Soudley	39	
		Soudley (Great)	130	
<b>NNS005</b>	Childs Ercall	Childs Ercall	492	492
<b>NNS006</b>	Clive	Clive	423	423
<b>NNS007</b>	Cockshutt	Cockshutt	611	637
		English Frankton	26	
<b>NNS008</b>	Ellesmere Rural	Dudleston	28	1547
		Dudleston Heath/Gadlas	861	
		Elson	63	
		Lee	43	

		New Marton	17	
		Street Dinas	46	
		Tetchill	293	
		Welsh Frankton/Perthy	196	
<b>NNS009</b>	Ellesmere Urban	NOT RURAL	3726	3726
<b>NNS010</b>	Grinshill	Grinshill	153	212
		Sansaw Heath	59	
<b>NNS011</b>	Hadnall	Hadnall	568	568
<b>NNS012</b>	Hinstock	Hinstock/Wood Lane	768	676
		Lockleywood	78	
		Mill Green	30	
<b>NNS013</b>	Hodnet	Hodnet/Hodnet Heath	639	1065
		Marchamley	196	
		Peplow	201	
		Wollerton	29	
<b>NNS014</b>	Hordley	Bagley	74	204
		Hordley	28	
		Lower Hordley/ Bagley Marsh	102	
<b>NNS015</b>	Ightfield	Calverhall	156	355
		Ightfield	199	
<b>NNS017</b>	Loppington	Brown Heath	26	438
		Burlton	114	
		Loppington	220	
		Noneley/Commonwood/ Ruewood	78	
<b>NNS018</b>	Market Drayton	NOT RURAL	11794	11794
<b>NNS019</b>	Moreton Corbet	Lee Brockhurst	122	235
		Moreton Corbet	40	
		Preston Brockhurst	73	
<b>NNS020</b>	Moreton Say	Bletchley	45	239
		Longford	60	
		Longslow	27	
		Moreton Say	40	
		Tern Hill	67	
<b>NNS021</b>	Myddle	Harmer Hill	318	921
		Marton	118	
		Myddle	450	
		Yorton	35	
<b>NNS022</b>	Norton In Hales	Norton In Hales	296	296
<b>NNS024</b>	Petton	Petton	76	76
<b>NNS025</b>	Prees	Darliston	38	2349
		Fauls Green	108	
		Prees Green	84	
		Prees Higher Heath	1013	
		Prees Lower Heath	69	
		Prees/Prees Wood	1037	

<b>NNS027</b>	Shawbury	Edgebolton/Moreton Mill	176	1782
		Great Wytheford	33	
		Shawbury	1573	
<b>NNS028</b>	Stanton Upon Hine Heath	High Hatton	48	281
		Stanton Upon Hine Heath	233	
<b>NNS029</b>	Stoke on Tern	Eaton Upon Tern	100	862
		Ollerton	46	
		Stoke Heath	288	
		Stoke on Tern	120	
		Wistanswick/Crickmerry	308	
<b>NNS030</b>	Sutton on Tern	Rosehill	68	284
		Sutton	36	
		Woodseaves	180	
<b>NNS031</b>	Welshampton	Breaden Heath	37	491
		Colemere	71	
		Lyneal	179	
		Welshampton	204	
<b>NNS032</b>	Wem Rural	Aston	70	507
		Barkers Green	47	
		Edstaston	43	
		Newtown	101	
		Northwood	109	
		Quina Brook	77	
		Tilley	60	
<b>NNS033</b>	Wem Urban	NOT RURAL	5813	5813
<b>NNS034</b>	Weston Under Redcastle	Weston	46	280
		Weston & Wixhill	161	
		Weston Heath	73	
<b>NNS035</b>	Whitchurch Rural	Ash Magna/Ash Parva	247	833
		Broughall	55	
		Prees Heath	130	
		Tilstock	401	
<b>NNS039</b>	Whitchurch Urban	NOT RURAL	9297	9415
		Grindley Brook	118	
<b>NNS041</b>	Whixall	Dobsons Bridge/ Roving Bridge	65	472
		Hollinwood	121	
		Platt Lane	53	
		Stanley Green	106	
		Waterloo	24	
		Welsh End	31	
		Whixall	72	
<b>NNS042</b>	Woore	Pipe Gate	177	873
		Woore/Irelands Cross	696	

### iii) Oswestry Parishes

Code	Parish & Designated Rural Settlement	Census Settlement	Census Settlement Population	Parish Population
NOW001	Kinnerley	Dovaston/Knockin Heath	264	825
		Edgerley	52	
		Kinnerley	297	
		Maesbrook/Maesbrook Green	160	
		Pentre	52	
NOW002	Knockin	Knockin	182	182
NOW003	Llanyblodwel	Cefn Boldwel	69	275
		Llanyblodwel	69	
		Porthywaen	137	
NOW004	Llanymynech & Pant	Llanymynech	418	1898
		Llynclys	281	
		Pant/Pen-y-Coed	1199	
NOW005	Meverley	Meverley	31	118
		Meverley Green	87	
NOW006	Oswestry Rural	Coed-y-Go	63	2497
		Crickheath	63	
		Croesaubach	28	
		Maesbury	240	
		Maesbury Marsh	252	
		Middleton/Aston Square	58	
		Morda	1553	
		Morton/Morton Common	89	
		Rhyd-y-Croesau	9	
		Sweeney Mountain/Nant-Y-Caws	142	
NOW007	Trefonen	Nantmawr	56	991
		Treflach	180	
		Trefonen	746	
		Wern Ddu	9	
NOW008	Ruyton XI Towns	Eardiston	33	1017
		Ruyton XI Towns	940	
		Wykey	44	
NOW009	Selattyn Gobowen	Gobewen/Rhewl	2747	3058
NOW010		Middle/Lower Hengoed	140	
		Pant Glas	57	
		Upper Hengoed	49	
		Glynmorlas/Rhyn	65	
NOW011	St. Martins	St. Martins/Ifton Heath	12	123
		St. Martins Moor	60	
		Grimpo	51	
NOW012	West Felton	Haughton	36	
		Queens Head	92	

		Rednall	32	1231
		Weirbrook	39	
		West Felton	1032	
<b>NOW013</b>	Weston Rhyn	Bronygarth/Castle Mill	103	2536
		Chirk Bank/Gledrid	622	
		Pont Faen	42	
		Rhoswel	181	
		The Wern	76	
		WestonRhyn/Preesgweene	1512	
<b>NOW014</b>	Whittington	Babbinswood	175	2304
		Hindford	34	
		Lower Frankton	61	
		Park Hall	525	
		Whittington	1509	
<b>NOW015</b>	Oswestry Town	NOT RURAL	17260	17260

#### iv) Shrewsbury & Atcham Parishes

Code	Parish & Designated Rural Settlement	Census Settlement	Census Settlement Population	Parish Population
<b>NSA101</b>	Acton B, Frod, Pitch, Ruck, Lang	Acton Burnell	216	523
		Frodesley	126	
		Pitchford	129	
		Ruckley/Langley	52	
<b>NSA102</b>	Alberbury and Cardeston	Alberbury	109	454
		Cardeston	38	
		Halfway House	142	
		Rowton	23	
		Wattlesborough Heath	142	
<b>NSA103</b>	All Stretton, Smethcote & Woolstan	All Stretton	288	353
		Picklescote	38	
		Woolstaston	27	
<b>NSA104</b>	Astley	Astley	114	255
		Bings Heath	57	
		Upper Astley	84	
<b>NSA105</b>	Atcham	Atcham	127	176
		Berwick	49	
<b>NSA106</b>	Bayston Hill	Not Rural	4837	4837
<b>NSA107</b>	Berrington	Berrington	57	822
		Brompton	21	
		Cross Houses	744	
<b>NSA108</b>	Bicton	Bicton	494	630
		Preston Montford	3	
		Shepherds Lane/Calcott	133	

<b>NSA109</b>	Bomere Heath & District	Albrighton	35	1767
		Bomere Heath	1256	
		Fitz	31	
		Forton Heath/Mytton	118	
		Grafton	106	
		Leaton	24	
		Merrington	33	
		Preston Gubbals	39	
		Walford Heath/Oldford	125	
<b>NSA110</b>	Buildwas	Buildwas	143	143
<b>NSA111</b>	Cardington	Cardington/Gretton	124	189
		Enchmarsh	20	
		Plaish	45	
<b>NSA112</b>	Church Preen, Hughley & Kenley	Church Preen	41	128
		Hughley	43	
		Kenley	44	
<b>NSA113</b>	Church Pulverbatch	Castle Pulverbatch	120	188
		Church Pulverbatch	35	
		Wrenthall	33	
<b>NSA114</b>	Condover	Condover	526	1249
		Dorrington	606	
		Stapleton	117	
<b>NSA115</b>	Cound	Cound/Upper Cound	179	275
		Coundmoor/Evenwood Common	96	
<b>NSA116</b>	Cressage, Harley & Sheinton	Cressage	632	811
		Harley	139	
		Sheinton	40	
<b>NSA117</b>	Ford	Chavel	41	636
		Ford	595	
<b>NSA118</b>	Great Hanwood	Hanwood	603	974
		Hanwood Bank	371	
<b>NSA119</b>	Great Ness & Little Ness	Felton Butler	24	778
		Great Ness	73	
		Hopton/Valeswood	100	
		Kinton	83	
		Little Ness	108	
		Nesscliffe	221	
		Wilcott	169	
<b>NSA120</b>	Leebotwood & Longnor	Leebotwood	113	397
		Longnor	284	
<b>NSA121</b>	Leighton & Easton Constantine	Eaton Constantine	137	376
		Garmston	69	
		Leighton	132	
		Longwood	38	
<b>NSA122</b>	Longden	Annscroft	228	

		Exfords Green	27	1011
		Hook a Gate	114	
		Longden	247	
		Longden Common	109	
		Lyth Bank/Lyth Hill	218	
		Stapleton Common	68	
<b>NSA123</b>	Minsterley	Horsebridge	32	1558
		Meadowtown	19	
		Minsterley	1408	
		Ploxgreen	99	
<b>NSA124</b>	Montford	Ensdon	22	516
		Montford	40	
		Montford Bridge	320	
		Shrawardine	134	
<b>NSA125</b>	Pontesbury	Arcscott	72	2663
		Asterley	112	
		Cruckmeole	50	
		Cruckton	90	
		Edge	20	
		Farley	23	
		Habberley	68	
		Halston/Plealey Road	60	
		Hinton	30	
		Lea	13	
		Lea Cross	65	
		Plealey	130	
		Pontesbury	1665	
		Pontesbury Hill	203	
Pontesford	20			
Shorthill	42			
<b>NSA126</b>	Uffington	Uffington	125	125
<b>NSA127</b>	Upton Magna	Preston	23	171
		Upton Magna	148	
<b>NSA128</b>	Westbury	Ford Heath	52	938
		Nox	17	
		Stoney Stretton	50	
		Vennington	39	
		Vron gate	17	
		Westbury	519	
		Westley	22	
		Yockleton	222	
<b>NSA129</b>	Withington	Withington	152	152
<b>NSA130</b>	Wollaston	Wollaston	24	24
<b>NSA131</b>	Wroxeter & Uppington	Donnington/Charlton Hill	31	199
		Eyton on Severn	16	
		Rushton	31	



		Uppington	56	
		Wroxeter	65	
<b>NSA132</b>	Shrewsbury Town	NOT RURAL	71460	71460

## v) South Shropshire Parishes

Code	Parish & Designated Rural Settlement	Census Settlement	Census Settlement Population	Parish Population
<b>NSS01</b>	Abdon	Abdon	15	63
		Holdgate	22	
		Tugford	26	
<b>NSS02</b>	Acton Scott	Acton Scott	27	27
<b>NSS03</b>	Ashford Bowdler	Ashford Bowdler	45	45
<b>NSS04</b>	Ashford Carbonel	Ashford Carbonel	326	326
<b>NSS05</b>	Bitterley	Angelbank/farden	227	660
		Bedlam	76	
		Bitterley	104	
		Cleeton St Mary	51	
		Dhustone	91	
		Middleton	95	
		Snitton	16	
<b>NSS06</b>	Boraston	Boraston	38	97
		Spurtree/Hammermill Hill	59	
<b>NSS07</b>	Bromfield	Bromfield	81	85
		Priors Halton	4	
<b>NSS08</b>	Burford	Burford	1216	1216
<b>NSS09</b>	Caynham	Caynham	149	1347
		Clee Hill/The Knowle	854	
		Knowbury	344	
<b>NSS10</b>	Church Stretton & Little Stretton	Church Stretton	3676	3983
		Little Stretton	238	
		Marshbrook	30	
		Minton	39	
<b>NSS13</b>	Clee St. Margaret	Clee St Margaret	84	113
		Cockshutford	29	
<b>NSS14</b>	Cleobury Mortimer	Cleobury Mortimer	2750	2750
<b>NSS15</b>	Coreley	Coreley	31	179
		Hints	148	
<b>NSS16</b>	Culmington	Culmington	131	258
		Seifton	53	
		Seifton Bache	26	
		Vernolds Common	48	
<b>NSS17</b>	Diddlebury	Corfton/Corfton Bache	68	
		Diddlebury	182	

		Great Sutton	24	388
		Middlehope	13	
		Peaton	24	
		Peatonstrand	29	
		Westhope	48	
<b>NSS18</b>	Eaton Under Heywood	Hatton	17	66
		Ticklerton	49	
<b>NSS20</b>	Greete	Greete	33	33
<b>NSS22</b>	Heath	Heath	13	13
<b>NSS23</b>	Hope Bagot	Hope Bagot	30	30
<b>NSS24</b>	Hope Bowdler	Hope Bowdler	139	139
<b>NSS26</b>	Hopton Cangeford	Hopton Cangeford	11	11
<b>NSS27</b>	Hopton Wafers	Catherton Common	124	564
		Doddington	269	
		Hopton Bank	77	
		Hopton Wafers	94	
<b>NSS29</b>	Ludford	The Sheet	214	214
<b>NSS30</b>	Ludlow	NOT RURAL	10174	10174
<b>NSS34</b>	Milson	Milson	53	53
<b>NSS35</b>	Munslow	Aston Munslow	114	279
		Hungerford/Broadstone	66	
		Munslow	99	
<b>NSS36</b>	Nash	Nash	33	33
<b>NSS37</b>	Neen Sollars	Neen Sollars	76	76
<b>NSS38</b>	Onibury	Onibury	112	194
		Walton	12	
		Whittytree/Duxmoor	43	
		Wooton	27	
<b>NSS39</b>	Richards Castle	Overton	65	176
		Richards Castle/Batchcott	43	
		Woofferton	68	
<b>NSS40</b>	Rushbury	East Wall	44	300
		Longville In The Dale	66	
		Rushbury/Roman bank	44	
		Wallbank	41	
		Wall Under Heywood	105	
<b>NSS41</b>	Sibdon Carwood	Sibdon Carwood	9	9
<b>NSS43</b>	Stanton Lacy	Haytons Bent/Upper & Lower Hayton	107	184
		Hopton Cangeford	11	
		Stanton Lacy	35	
		The Hope	31	
<b>NSS44</b>	Craven Arms	Aldon	16	2471
		Bouldon	33	
		Brandhill	24	
		Craven Arms	2370	

		Stokesay	28	
<b>NSS45</b>	Stoke St. Milborough	Stoke St. Milborough	67	67
<b>NSS47</b>	Wheathill	Besom Woods/Wheathill	46	87
		Loughton	16	
		Silvington	25	
<b>NSS48</b>	Whitton	Whitton	65	92
		Wooton	27	
<b>NSS49</b>	Wistanstow	Bushmoor/Leamoor Common	82	473
		Cheney Longville	39	
		Felhampton	26	
		Strefford	48	
		Upper Affcot	17	
		Whittingslow	17	
		Wistanstow	147	
		Woolston	97	
<b>NSS51</b>	Bedstone	Bedstone	60	60
<b>NSS52</b>	Bettws-y-Crwyn	Bettws-y-Crwyn	4	4
<b>NSS53</b>	Bishops Castle	Bishops Castle	1735	1735
<b>NSS55</b>	Bucknell	Bucknell	405	405
<b>NSS56</b>	Chirbury with Brompton	Chirbury	220	379
		Priest Weston	69	
		Rorrington	38	
		Wotherton	52	
<b>NSS57</b>	Clun & Chapel Lawn	Bryn	11	856
		Chapel Lawn	32	
		Clun	760	
		Whitcott Keysett	53	
<b>NSS58</b>	Newcastle	Newcastle	152	152
<b>NSS59</b>	Clunbury	Clunbury	95	370
		Clunton	120	
		Kempton	61	
		Little Brampton	15	
		Obley	21	
		Purslow	15	
		Twitchen	43	
<b>NSS60</b>	Clungunford	Clungunford	200	252
		Hopton Heath	36	
		Shelderton	16	
<b>NSS61</b>	Colebatch	Colebatch	68	68
<b>NSS62</b>	Edgton	Edgton/Basford	66	66
<b>NSS63</b>	Hopesay	Aston-On-Clun	221	466
		Beambridge/Aston Mill	32	
		Broome	98	
		Hopesay	65	
		Long Meadow End	50	

<b>NSS64</b>	Hopton Castle	Hopton Castle	53	53
<b>NSS65</b>	Llanfair Waterdine	Llanfair Waterdine	36	36
<b>NSS66</b>	Lydbury North	Brockton	27	261
		Lydbury North	234	
<b>NSS67</b>	Lydham	Lydham	92	92
<b>NSS68</b>	Mainstone	Cefn Einion	23	34
		Mainstone	11	
<b>NSS69</b>	More	More	20	20
<b>NSS70</b>	Myndtown	Asterton	22	22
<b>NSS71</b>	Norbury	Norbury	53	79
		Walkmill	11	
		Whitcot	15	
<b>NSS72</b>	Ratlinghope	Ratlinghope	13	13
<b>NSS74</b>	Stowe	Stowe	23	23
<b>NSS75</b>	Wentnor	Wentnor	66	66
<b>NSS76</b>	Worthen with Shelve	Aston Pigott	33	1442
		Aston Rogers	50	
		Bentlawnt	83	
		Binweston	12	
		Bromlow	57	
		Crows Nest	42	
		Hope	42	
		Pennerley/The Bog	90	
		Shelve	19	
		Snailbeach	234	
		Stiperstones/Perkins Beach	146	
		Worthen/Brockton	634	

Council Tax Payer requests Section 13A discount in writing. Request acknowledged by Revenues Team



Liaison between applicant and Revenues staff to understand and verify application



Report prepared for Section 151 Officer detailing the claimants reasons for the request and circumstances



Section 151 Officer reviews application and makes a **decision**



Discount awarded – claimant notified in writing



Discount refused- claimant notified in writing



Appeal received from council tax payer against decision



General Appeal Panel of Members convened within two months of appeal being received to hear appeal



Appeal successful and discount awarded – claimant notified in writing



Appeal unsuccessful - claimant is notified in writing. Claimant can appeal to Valuation Tribunal

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<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet 20 <sup>th</sup> October 2021

<u>Item</u>
Public

## DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

**Responsible Officer**     James Walton

e-mail:    james.walton@shropshire.gov.uk    Tel: 01743 258915

### 1. Synopsis

The Council administers an annual Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Grant from central Government. The grant provides financial support where there is a shortfall between a claimants Housing Benefit, or Housing Cost in Universal Credit, and their rent. It can also be used for rent in advance, deposits, removal costs and other housing costs. The Council policy was last reviewed in 2015. It is good practise for the policy to be reviewed periodically.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. The Council has responsibility to support housing benefit and universal credit claimants where there is a shortfall in their housing benefit, or housing cost, and rent via DHP payments.
- 2.2. The DHP grant for every local authority is set by central Government each year. In recent years the level of the grant that each Local Authority receives is dependent on the amount of grant that the Local Authority has spent in previous years.
- 2.3. The Council must have a policy against which grant applications can be assessed, and awards made. The Council policy broadly follows Department of Work and Pensions guidance and was last reviewed in 2015 and informs the application and verification process.
- 2.4. In 2017-18 Shropshire Council spent only 44% of its DHP grant. During 2019, full responsibility for administering the Councils DHP grant was moved to the Councils Revenues and Benefits Service. This has seen a marked improvement in the amount of DHP grant

spent, with 93% of the total DHP grant being spent in 2018-19 and 99% of the total DHP grant being spent in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. Approve the DHP policy with a commitment to review the policy to be undertaken every three years.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

- 4.1. Shropshire Council could be challenged on its decision making in relation to applications for DHP if it does not have an up to date DHP policy in place. It is good practise for the policy to be reviewed periodically.
- 4.2. The DHP policy and administration of the grant must enable maximisation of DHP awards against total grant to ensure Shropshire Council maximises its grant allocation from the Government each year.
- 4.3. Failure to administer a policy to maximise DHP awards will have a negative impact on financial vulnerable residents and on the overall economy of Shropshire.

### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1. The Council is allowed to spend up to 2.5 times the grant allocated each year by central Government, but any such overspend must be met by the Council. It is therefore important that the budget is managed carefully each year, to maximise expenditure within the grant, without committing to overspend.
- 5.2. Ensuring maximum expenditure against DHP grant allocation has become important to ensure maximum grant allocations in future years.
- 5.3. For 2021-22 grant allocation to those Local Authorities that had spent less than 85% of their 2020-21 grant will see their midyear allocation for 2021-22 reduced by either 20% if their spend was between 70% and 85%, or 40% if their spend was less than 70%.
- 5.4. The balance is redistributed to Local Authorities that had spent more than 95% of their grant for 2020-21. Shropshire Council spent 99% of the DHP grant for 2021-22 meaning that careful management of DHP fund in line with our DHP policy has resulted in Shropshire Council seeing an overall increase in its midyear allocation of an



estimated £14,000. This is additional money that can be used to support vulnerable residents in Shropshire.

## 6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. While there are no direct climate change impacts arising from this report the Revenues and Benefits Service is currently introducing an online application form for DHP applicants, meaning a reduction in paper and printing costs.

## 7. Background

- 7.1. Every Local Authority receives an annual fund from central Government to provide financial assistance to residents with housing costs to rented properties that cannot be met by Universal Credit or Housing Benefit. The grant award is amended to reflect any Welfare Reforms introduced by the Government.
- 7.2. The aim of the Council DHP policy is to provide consistency in decision making, maximise the annual DHP grant to provide support to the most vulnerable residents in Shropshire, and meet the aims of the DHP scheme set by central Government.
- 7.3. In the past two years, Shropshire Council has spent 99% of the DHP grant made available by Central Government.

## 8. Additional Information

- 8.1. Shropshire Council DHP grant allocation and expenditure over the past four financial years is detailed below.

Financial Year	DHP grant £	Shropshire Expenditure £	% expenditure of grant
2017-18	531,974	234,855	44.1%
2018-19	483,003	451,799	93.5%
2019-20	413,601	412,739	99.8%
2020-21	546,034	544,493	99.7%

## 9. Conclusions

- 9.1. Shropshire Council should continue to maximise expenditure of annual DHP grant in order to provide support to vulnerable residents as detailed in the attached policy.

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

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**  
Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder for Resources

**Local Member**  
N/A

**Appendices**  
2021 Discretionary Housing Payments Policy



Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme Policy  
September 2021

The discretionary housing payment scheme is administered in line with the *Discretionary Finance Assistance Regulations 2001 and The Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual including Local Authority Good Practice Guide August 2019*

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Intentions of the Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme**

Each Local Authority receives an annual fund from Central Government in order to have finance available to assist residents, who meet set criteria, with housing costs relating to rented properties that cannot be met by Universal Credit (UC) housing costs or Housing Benefit (HB)

Each year the allocation is calculated based on the welfare reforms that have been introduced by Central Government in order for the Local Authorities to help tenants who are unable to sustain their tenancies following these changes.

Any grant that remains unspent each year is returned to central Government.

This policy is intended to provide clarification on how Shropshire Council will administer the funds to ensure:

- Consistency in decision making
- It meets the aims of the scheme set by Central Government
- It monitors the fund to allow it to be used equitably throughout the fund year
- Maximise expenditure of the grant within the limit set by central Government

### **1.2 Aims of the policy**

Whilst Central Government have set the intended aims of the scheme, we have our own aims designed to best support Shropshire Council's most vulnerable residents, these include

- Prevention of homelessness
- Reduction of homelessness subsidy
- Assisting in the process of resettlement following homelessness
- Alleviating poverty
- Tenancy sustainment
- Safeguarding residents in their own home
- Providing temporary support during a period of crisis or transition
- Keeping families together
- Keeping residents within their area of support networks
- Supporting vulnerable people and/or victims of violence to move to a safer environment
- Assist people to move to housing appropriate to their needs
- Providing stability for children
- Supporting young people establishing independence
- Helping disabled people remain in suitably adapted properties

## **2. What can Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) be used for?**

### **2.1 Shortfall awards**

Where there is a difference between the maximum eligible HB or UC housing costs and the rental liability, DHP can be used to assist the customer in making up the shortfall in full or part. This shortfall can be due to a number of things, for example:

- Reduction due to non-dependant deductions
- The benefit cap
- Reduction due to the size criteria
- Local Housing allowance restrictions
- In terms of UC, if the payments are not going direct to the landlord, where the overall payment has been reduced and it is not clear which element the deductions may have been taken from.
- If the UC is being paid directly to the landlord, then it is only the shortfall in relation to the housing costs that can be considered.

However, there are also circumstances under which DHP cannot be used. These include where the shortfall has been caused by:

- Recovery of HB overpayments
- Ineligible service charges
- Increased rent due to rent arrears
- Certain sanctions and reductions in benefits

### **2.2 Shortfall arrears**

In order to either prevent eviction or facilitate a move to a more sustainable accommodation.

Where a claimant has accrued arrears of rent a payment of DHP can be considered to help clear the arrears in either part or full for any period where HB and/or UC housing costs have been in payment and the arrears have accrued in due to the shortfall criteria outlined in section 2.1 above.

### **2.3 Rent in advance and deposits**

Where a person is looking to move into a new property, they can often be faced with having to initially pay large sums to cover rent in advance and/or a deposit in order to secure a tenancy.

Since the introduction of UC this has become more commonplace for Landlords to require a payment upfront to secure a tenancy, this includes properties from the social housing sector.

DHP's can assist by paying part or all of this lump sum payment to help secure the new tenancy.

These moves can include either move into or out of the Shropshire area so long as there is genuine reason for the move and the new property is affordable.

In order for an award of DHP to be made there has to be an appropriate reason for the move, for example, moving to a more affordable property or moving closer to a support network.

A tenant wishing to move for reasons not pursuant to the aims of the scheme, will not be given access to the fund, for instance where a move is motivated out of personal preference alone.

Likewise in order for an application to be successful the applicant must demonstrate that the move has some urgency and that they would not be able to budget for the move themselves given time, for instance an applicant wishing to move out of the familiar home and become independent, would need to demonstrate why they were not able to remain in their current home and put money aside for rent in advance and/or a deposit.

In order for an application to be successful the proposed tenancy must be appropriate to the customer's needs and must be financially sustainable without further recourse to the DHP fund.

#### **2.4 Removal costs**

As with rent in advance and deposits, removal costs can be a considerable sum of money. This is again something that the DHP fund can help with. The move has to be taking place due to an appropriate reason in line with the overall DHP policy. This move could, again, be either into or out of the County of Shropshire.

#### **2.5 Two homes**

A DHP can be awarded in respect of two homes if a customer is temporarily unable to stay in their main home, for instance those who have fled their main home because they are a victim of domestic abuse.

In such cases of temporary absence - if the claimant is liable for rent on both properties, it is possible to award a DHP in respect of one or both properties

If the claimant is only treated as liable for HB or UC on one home, but is having to pay rent on two, a DHP could be made to cover the costs of the second home.

In either case the amount of the award is limited to the weekly or monthly eligible rent of the customer's main home, for example if the eligible rent on the customer's main home is £100 per week, this is the maximum combined HB or UC HC and DHP they can be paid in respect of each property.

## **2.6 Other housing costs**

As there is no actual definition of housing costs within the regulations, this allows for Local Authorities to utilise the DHP fund to assist with other housing costs they may deem eligible.

However, the DHP fund is limited so only costs deemed adherent to the principles of the scheme could be awarded.

## **3. How can an application be made?**

Although the regulations state that an application must be made for an award for DHP they allow local authorities to decide what format this can be in.

Often the reason for a DHP application is time sensitive, in the best interests of the customer we aim to make it as quick and easy as possible to apply, therefore we will accept an application via the following methods:

- Written form (available for download on our website)
- Over the telephone
- Via email
- Online application (when available)
- Where we already hold information relating to income and expenditure via a section 13A request or an overpayment recovery request and we identify a possible DHP we can obtain verbal or written authority from the customer to treat this as an application for DHP

Where an application for an extension of an award or a reapplication is made within 3 months of the termination of an earlier award, the decision maker may at their discretion not require the customer to complete a full application.

## **4. Qualifying conditions**

In order to qualify for an award from the DHP fund the claimant (or partner in the case of joint claims), throughout the currency of any award must be in receipt of either:

- Housing Benefit
- Universal Credit Housing Costs

It is not necessary for entitlement to exist at the time of application.

In the case of a Universal Credit award where payment is reduced to nil, where there are deductions other than income, entitlement can still be established if payment would be due but for said deductions.

Provisional Awards



In the case of a claim for costs to facilitate a change of address there must be an expectation that the customer and/or their partner will be entitled to a qualifying benefit at the new property.

In cases where there is no qualifying benefit entitlement prior to the change of address a provisional award can be made, this requires the potential Landlord to accept a promise of payment to be made once the qualifying benefit is awarded.

In cases where subsequent to the change of address a qualifying benefit is not awarded, the DHP is not paid and the matter of any sum owed to the Landlord becomes a matter of dispute between the Landlord and tenant.

## **5. Length of award**

There is no limit to the length of an award of DHP however:

- An award may not be backdated to include a period prior to 02 July 2001
- An award which spans 2 or more fund years will be split into periods corresponding to the fund year.

The expectation is that most DHP awards will be for short periods structured to enable customers to change their circumstances in order to be able to meet their housing costs without further support from the fund, however an award may be extended under repeat application if deemed appropriate.

Where it is accepted that a customer is in a property appropriate to their needs, and is not able to pursue a change to their circumstances an award maybe be granted for a longer period.

## **6. Capital, Income and Expenditure**

An award from the DHP fund should only be made if all other reasonable sources of help have been exhausted.

Evidence of Capital, Income and/or Expenditure may be requested as reasonable.

Where evidence is requested a deadline of 1 month from the date of request for the provision of the evidence must be notified to the customer and must state that failure to provide the required evidence within time limits will result in their claim being refused.

Where evidence is not provided within 1 month of the request (or longer where reasonable) the claim will be refused.

### Capital

Any capital that the customer and/or partner can reasonably access should be exhausted before an award of DHP is considered.

In regard of applications for assistance with moving property an appropriate amount of capital may be ignored to facilitate the move and associated costs of resettlement.

### Income

Income belonging to the customer and/or partner will be accounted for in full when assessing financial capacity to meet their expenditure, except in the case of:

- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payments

Income belonging to other household members for example non-dependants may be taken into account in so much that a financial contribution to the household may be assumed and/or expenditure attributable to the non-dependant may be disregarded.

### Expenditure

Where expenditure appears excessive the decision maker may at their discretion assume a figure they deem to be more reasonable, or may ask the customer to provide evidence of said expenditure before the application can proceed.

If a reduced expenditure figure is assumed, the notification of the decision must contain a statement explaining why a reduced figure has been assumed and invite the customer to provide evidence of the expenditure within 1 month should they disagree.

Where expenditure appears to be non-essential the decision maker may at their discretion exclude said expenditure from the assessment.

If expenditure is excluded from the assessment, the notification of the decision must contain a statement explaining why it has been excluded.

Where expenditure appears too low the decision maker may at their discretion assume a figure they deem to be more reasonable, for instance an application listing food as £10 per week because more cannot be afforded can be increased to allow a more reasonable amount for the purposes of assessment.

Where an expenditure has been omitted from an application and the decision maker either knows or can reasonably assume that the expenditure should exist, a reasonable figure may be assumed for said expenditure.

In the case where an application for an extension of an award is made, or in the case where a further application is made within 3 months of the end date of an earlier award, the expenditure figures previously provided may be used where they have been deemed reasonable and where a condition has not been based on the award to take steps to reduce expenditure and/or engage with budgeting support.

## **7. Conditions on award**

The decision maker at their discretion may place conditions on the award which require that the customer undertake specific actions in order to enable the customer to be able to meet their housing costs without recourse to the DHP scheme.

These conditions may include but are not limited to:

- Actively seek more affordable appropriate accommodation
- That payments of HB/UC HC are paid direct to the Landlord
- Approach their Landlord to request that the rent is reduced
- Reduce excessive and/or non-essential expenditure
- Engage with budgeting support
- Obtain more affordable deals for out of contract items for instance mobile phones
- Increase their income through employment

In the case where an application for an extension of an award is made, or in the case where a further application is made following a cessation of an award, the customer is required to provide evidence that they have complied with the conditions placed on the earlier award.

Where the customer has not complied with the conditions of an award or fails to provide evidence to show they have complied with the conditions of an award, the application for extension or reapplication may be refused.

The decision maker should have regard to any factors which may have prevented the customer from complying with the conditions placed on them.

## **8. Notification of an award**

Notification of a decision must be made in writing to the customer (or their appointed representative).

An extension to an award may be notified verbally providing that there are no alterations to, or further conditions placed on the award.

## **9. Payments**

Payments will be made to whomever the decision maker deems appropriate in a given case.

The default position for payments are:

- Rent in advance and/or deposits – payments will be made directly to the prospective Landlord. These payments will be released after the claimant has moved into the property.
- Removal costs – Payments will be made directly to the customer or representative. These payments will be released after the claimant has moved into the property.
- Shortfall - Payments will be made to the same party as the payments of HB or UC HC

However, the decision maker may decide to pay a different party if it is in the best interest of safeguarding the tenancy.

## **10. Revisions**

Where the qualifying benefit is reassessed or where of any other change of circumstances occurs during the currency of an award of DHP, the DHP must be reassessed and the customer must be notified of any changes made to the award.

During the currency of an award the customer may request that award be revised, in this case a reassessment must be undertaken, the decision maker may at this point request any further evidence and/or information they require to make the reassessment and may suspend payment of the award pending the completion of the reassessment.

## **11. Recovery of overpayments**

In the case of a payment of rent in advance, deposit or removal costs which have been made, where it occurs that the move did not (and will not take place), the

amount of the payment is recoverable from the person to whom the payment was made.

In the case of a payment of a shortfall where it occurs that a payment was made in error, either by fault of the local authority, or the DWP, recovery will not ordinarily be sought.

In the case of a payment of a shortfall where it occurs that a payment was made in error, as a consequence of misrepresentation by or failure to disclose relevant information by the customer or representative recovery may be sought at the discretion of the decision maker from the person to whom the payment was made.

Where there is an overpayment which occurs during the currency of an award, or where an overpayment of an earlier award has occurred, the overpayment should not be recovered from ongoing payments, this would be contrary to the purpose of making the award, (if there was capacity to cope with a reduced level of DHP award, there would be no justification to award the DHP at that level other than to recover the overpayment).

## **12. Reconsiderations**

A customer or their appointed representative may request a review of a decision at any time following the decision or at any point during the currency of an award.

Requests for review where the customer disagrees with our decision are to be undertaken by a decision maker other than the originating decision maker.

Where a further review is requested or in complex or contentious cases a senior member of staff will undertake a review of the case.

There is no recourse to review of a DHP decision by an independent body.

## **13. Monitoring**

The Local Authority will actively record the outcomes of DHP applications throughout the fund year in order to ensure that the budget is managed correctly and to identify the issues facing the vulnerable residents of Shropshire.

We also commit within this policy to maximise expenditure of the DHP grant and spend at least 90% of the DHP grant annually (and minimise any grant repaid to central government).

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<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet – 20 <sup>th</sup> October 2021

<u>Item</u>
Public

## **ANNUAL REPORT ON HEALTH AND SAFETY PERFORMANCE FOR 2020/2021**

**Responsible Officer** Carol Fox,  
Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Manager  
e-mail: carol.fox@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: (01743) 252814

### **1. Synopsis**

This report reviews the health and safety performance for 2020/21, detailing the key health and safety challenges for the Council, progress on last year's Annual Report and identifies key priorities for 2021/22.

This whole year was dominated by the Covid 19 pandemic. Flooding again also caused major disruption in January 2021 but not on the scale of the February 2020 floods

- Covid 19

The team were involved with the council's steering group around strategy towards this virus and attended Business Continuity Groups around the issue.

- Floods

The Health & Safety Team were involved with various aspects of the January floods, including advice, support and PPE advice.

### **2. Executive Summary**

#### **Progress with Action Plan for 2020/2021**

**2.1** Whilst heavily impacted by the Covid Pandemic positive progress has been made with the completion of the actions for Shropshire Council arising from the Action Plan for 2020/2021. Some of the key actions where progress has been made are:

- Some auditing/inspections and Covid security arrangement inspections took place, both face to face and via Teams. As a priority the Health and Safety Team were heavily involved in reviewing Covid risk assessments for both schools and non-school premises. Many reviews were carried out for schools in

June 2020 and additionally, to support the wider opening of schools in September 2020.

- To implement new and revised Health & Safety guidance and arrangements into Service Areas to ensure it is communicated to all employees.
- To engage and retain services across the Council and externally with associated Service Level Agreements in place

Please see **appendix 1** for detailed information on progress with the 2020/2021 plan.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### **3.1 Note the contents of the report are accepted;** particularly noting:

- Good progress has been made during 2020/2021 on managing health and safety across the Council.
- Reportable employee accidents to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) have decreased and minor accidents have also decreased compared to last year's figures.
- Service Areas and the Health & Safety Team work well together.
- The Council continues to maintain a good relationship with the HSE.

#### **3.2 The Key Actions for 2021/2022 are agreed**

The key actions for Shropshire Council are:

- The Health & Safety Team to continue with the ongoing work involved with the Covid recovery
- Key actions from 2020/2021 have therefore been extended into 2021/2022 to include:
  - The Health and Safety Team to work with Service Areas to produce and implement Health & Safety management systems including policies, procedures and arrangements
  - Continual development of external contracts with associated Service Level Agreements (SLA) in place.
  - To fulfil contractual monitoring and support to Academies and customers under Service Level Agreements
  - To engage with Service Areas to ensure that health and safety compliance is in place and to review Self-Monitoring Checklist to ensure roll out to Premise and Team Managers.
  - Raise awareness of workstation assessments in particular agile working brought about by Covid and which will form part of the Council's working practices going forward.
  - Rollout of new workstation Healthy Working system.



- To continue to implement the Wellbeing Plan and facilitate the three themes of Be Active, Be Minded and Be Informed by continuing staff wellbeing events throughout the year.
- Support 'Leap into Learning' development for e-learning health and safety awareness courses across service areas.
- Revised and simplified auditing plan for schools to enable more schools to be visited annually going forward.

## **REPORT**

### **4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal**

#### **Health and Safety Performance Information**

##### **Reactive Safety Performance**

- 4.1. Detailed in **appendix 2** is performance information regarding reactive monitoring, where incidents have occurred and proactive monitoring to show what is being done to ensure that the Council has robust systems in place to prevent injury and ill-health. Council Health & Safety Officers continue to work closely and regularly with the HSE in respect of reactive and proactive work.
- 4.2. The Health and Safety Executive encourage employers to include reporting on health and safety performance in their annual reports as part of the drive to manage and reduce work-related injury and ill-health.

##### **Health and Safety Investigations**

- 4.3. The Health and Safety Team continue to investigate and follow up accidents. The majority of these investigations were related to accidents, which were reportable under legislative requirements and were either a full investigation with recommendations or a follow up after an accident to ensure that corrective action had been put into place. The nature of the investigations included: Please see **Appendix 3**

##### **Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Involvement and Enforcement Activities**

- 4.4. During 2020/2021, the Health & Safety Team had no HSE involvement or enforcement activities. For HSE contact with schools please see **appendix 4**.

##### **Work-related Absences**

- 4.5. For details on work related stress and musculoskeletal disorders please see **appendix 5**

## **Proactive Safety Monitoring**

### **Health and Safety Team - Advice and Guidance**

4.6 Please see **appendix 6** for details on advice and guidance given by the Health and Safety Team and Crime Prevention Officer

### **Health and Safety Audits**

4.7 For details about audits please see **appendix 7**

### **Health and Safety Monitoring**

4.8 For details about Health and Safety monitoring undertaken please see **appendix 8**

### **Fire Safety**

4.9 For details about Fire Safety including support and liaison with the Fire Service please see **appendix 9**

### **Health and Safety Training**

4.10 For details about Health and safety training courses delivered by the Health and Safety team please see **appendix 10**

### **Health, Safety and Welfare Group**

4.11 For details about the Health, Safety and Welfare Group please see **appendix 11**

### **Occupational Health - Workplace Wellbeing**

4.12 For details of the work undertaken by Occupational Health please see **appendix 12**

## **5. Financial Implications**

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report. There may be future financial implications in respect of the Actions for 2021/2022 although these will be approved by Senior Managers before they are progressed.

## **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

6.1 The report has no effect on climate change outcome

## **7. Background**

7.1. N/A

## 8. Additional Information

8.1. None

## 9. Conclusions

9.1 This report indicates that the health and safety performance of Shropshire Council has been managed well over the last twelve months.

The next twelve months will continue to see new challenges in light of the Covid 19 implications and the resultant financial climate. It is important to maintain focus on sensible risk management so that risks can be managed sensibly, appropriately and proportionately.

### **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)**

Gwilym Butler Portfolio Holder Resources

Jeff Anderson, Deputy Portfolio Holder Health & Safety

### **Local Member**

N/A

### **Appendices**

APPENDIX 1

Progress with Action Plan for 2020/2021

APPENDIX 2

Reactive Safety Performance

APPENDIX 3

Health and Safety Investigations

APPENDIX 4

Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Involvement and Enforcement Activities

APPENDIX 5

Work-related Absences

APPENDIX 6

Health and Safety Team - Advice and Guidance

APPENDIX 7

Health and Safety Audits

APPENDIX 8

Health and Safety Monitoring

APPENDIX 9

Fire Safety

APPENDIX 10

Health and Safety Training

APPENDIX 11

Health, Safety and Welfare Group

APPENDIX 12

Occupational Health - Workplace Wellbeing

This report demonstrates five of our organisational principles in action





<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet
20 October 2021

<u>Item</u>
Public

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children National Transfer Scheme

**Responsible Officer**                      Tanya Miles  
 e-mail: Tanya.miles@shropshire.gov.uk      Tel:    Fax

### 1. Synopsis

This report provides an overview of the duties of Shropshire Council towards unaccompanied asylum-seeking children; how children and young people become the responsibility of Shropshire Council; how they are supported and how this is funded. This report is for information and no decisions are required.

### 2. Executive Summary

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers.

Every local authority has a duty to 'look after' any unaccompanied asylum-seeking child who is found in their area and to support them through to adulthood.

Local authorities have specific statutory duties to care for and meet the needs of all looked after children and to be a good corporate parent.

The Government initially introduced a model whereby it was deemed reasonable for 0.07% of a Local Authority looked after children population to be asylum-seeking children.

Local Authorities who did not have 0.07% were requested to support Local Authorities who looked after more than this %. Nationally, the majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have arrived on the south coast or in certain local authorities on key transport routes and those local authorities have carried a disproportionate duty of care.

To address the national inequality, in March 2021 the Government backed a revised National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for all Local Authorities to share this duty more fairly. At this stage it is not mandatory, however the indication has been that it will become so if Local Authorities do not participate.

Under The National Transfer Scheme a model has been worked out to calculate a fair distribution for each Local Authority. This is set out in more detail in this report.

Government funding is provided to support the Local Authority in fulfilling its duties to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people. This covers the costs of their placements and statutory education and some staffing costs. There is additional funding for young people accepted under the National Transfer Scheme.

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 Cabinet is requested to consider the information in this report and support the work of the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Service in fulfilling the Council's statutory duties and the requirements of the National Transfer Scheme.

3.2 Cabinet is requested to consider what other services or functions of the Council and partner agencies could contribute or assist in settling unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Shropshire, for example offering a secure base to be cared for, participation in activities, integration into local communities and with other young people and opportunities as care leavers for employment or training and suitable housing.

## REPORT

### 4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

#### 4.1 Risk Management

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people are all subject to an initial age-assessment and initial Home Office assessment on arrival and also a self-isolation period in respect of Covid.

Their story of their reasons for seeking asylum and of their journey is assessed by the Home Office in determining their status and whether they are granted temporary 'leave to remain', the legal status given to those who can legally stay in the UK. This is permanently decided once they are 18 years old. Children and young people come to the UK from a range of countries, fleeing a range of political regimes, risks to their life or by being trafficked.

A Social Work Assessment is completed, a qualified Social Worker is allocated and regular Looked After Children Reviews take place to oversee their Care Plan. Their assessment includes a risk assessment in respect of risk of trafficking, exploitation or modern slavery. A referral is made to the police National Referral Mechanism if this is suspected.

There are potentially risks arising from the young people feeling alienated, or from other members of the community where they live not understanding their circumstances. Supporting the children and young people to settle, integrate and access education and community opportunities is essential.

#### 4.2 Human Rights

All unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people are entitled to the same human rights as everyone else in this country. Their human rights are considered as part of their Care Plan and their status as a looked after child or care leaver.

Asylum-seeking children and young people have a right to be safe and to feel safe. Assessments ensure that any risks in terms of their trauma history, personal safety and their environment are taken into account.

Most young people are separated from their parents and siblings. All efforts are made through the Red Cross to reunite them if possible, or to put them in touch with family members who are often in other countries or refugee camps across the globe. This can take months, or longer and waiting is a worrying and lonely time for the children and young people.

### 4.3 Equalities

Most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people have particular needs in respect of language, culture and religion. Interpreters and translators are made available, key documents are translated.

Their health assessment and access to educational support are important elements of their care to identify any additional health or educational needs or disability. Many have experienced trauma, either in their country of origin or on the journey to flee their home country.

It can be particularly hard for a child from a different culture to share issues relating to their gender or sexuality. Opportunities for support will be available through the child's care planning processes.

### 4.4 Community

Most unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people have a wish to become integrated into the community in which they settle. They are given access to language classes and opportunities to undertake activities and social events with other looked after young people and care leavers.

We have a UASC Champion, who was a previously looked after child in Shropshire, who is able to be a peer mentor and is able to welcome them and to aid their understanding of the culture, norms and behaviours expected and how to access advice, guidance and support.

Unaccompanied young people are cared for in foster homes, or if no places available residential homes if they are under 16. If over 16 we enable them to live with Supported Board & Lodgings (SBL) carers or Supported Housing. Carers and support staff enable them to understand and utilise their local community-based resources. Young people are supported to sign on with a GP, register with a school or college and apply for their ID card.

### 4.5 Consultation

The Government consulted widely with all stakeholders in devising the National Transfer Scheme.

Young people are always consulted in making their care plans and pathway plans as care leavers.



## **5. Financial Implications**

Government funding is provided to local authorities for each unaccompanied asylum-seeking child and young person who is looked after.

The funding is intended to cover the costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This includes the cost of care and education up to statutory school leaving age. In some cases this may not cover the full costs of supporting the child including the cost of staffing to fulfil the statutory duties to a looked after child, eg social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, Team Manager.

As we accept more Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) as a result of increasing numbers, there is an increased likelihood that Shropshire Council will have a UASC in need of a residential placement. This is due to national placement sufficiency issues. We know that while a UASC is placed in a fostering or semi-independent placement the weekly funding rate of £798 (£114 per night) is just about sufficient to cover the costs of supporting that child, whereas if a UASC does require a residential placement the Home Office funding falls significantly short of meeting our costs. We are working with supported living providers to try and ensure this is not required. However, if it is then it will be at significant cost to the Local Authority.

Where responsibility for a UASC is transferred between local authorities through the National Transfer Scheme, funding eligibility passes from the entry Local Authority to the receiving Local Authority from the day the UASC transfers into the care of the receiving authority.

The funding reduces post-18 as the majority of young people are granted 'leave to remain' and so can earn money, access education and training grants or claim benefits to contribute to their care and support. There are occasions where there is a lengthy wait in relation to this.

The Leaving Care Team ensure young people are supported to process their claim so that decisions are made as swiftly as possible. There have been Home Office delays in processing claims, although more recently this has improved.

## **6. Climate Change Appraisal**

Not applicable

## **7. Background**

### 7.1 Who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers.

Many have fled their home country alone after their family has gathered funds or paid traffickers to enable their child to escape from persecution, war or other threat to their life.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people share the same needs as any other child or young person. They wish to be integrated into their new adopted country and many grow to adulthood wishing to 'give something back' to the country that welcomed them.

Most are never able to be physically reconciled back with their birth physically and they live with loss and trauma due to their experiences in their home country and on their journey.

This Government has pledged to continue to support and offer a home to all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive in the UK and to work in cooperation with our European neighbours post-Brexit.

Children who arrive with their parents are supported as an asylum-seeking family via the Refugee Council and do not need to be 'looked after' as are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

### 7.2 Statutory duties of the Local Authority to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Local Authorities have specific statutory duties to care for and meet the needs of all looked after children and to be a good corporate parent.

Every local authority has a duty to 'look after' any unaccompanied asylum-seeking child who is found in their area and to support them through to adulthood.

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure they have suitable, secure and safe housing, and access to education, training and employment opportunities and healthcare. They are entitled to an equal right of access to services and support and their individual needs are taken into account in respect of any disability, religion, language, culture, gender or sexuality.

While their asylum claim is processed, any unaccompanied asylum-seeking child is cared for by a local authority as a 'looked after child' up to the age of 18.

Post-18 the responsible local authority continues to have a duty to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who have previously been 'looked after' up to the age of 25 if they are granted 'leave to remain' by the Home Office, or they are still waiting for this claim to be processed. This is part of the Leaving Care duties and Responsibilities for a Local Authority.

### 7.3 National Context

Nationally, the majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have arrived on the south coast or in certain Local Authorities on key transport routes and those local authorities have carried a disproportionate duty of care.

The Government initially introduced a model whereby it was deemed reasonable for 0.07% of a Local Authority looked after children population to be asylum-seeking children.

Local Authorities who did not have 0.07% were requested to support Local Authorities who looked after more than this %.

However, over the last 12 months it has been apparent that this transfer scheme has not addressed the challenge of ensuring a safe home for all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the areas where they are initially found.

The Government has calculated that there may be a need to transfer up to 1,400 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children currently being looked after in Kent, Portsmouth and London Boroughs across to other local authorities.

In respect of the current situation in Afghanistan, it is highly likely that the majority of children arriving in need of asylum in the UK from Afghanistan will be accompanied by a parent and will not be looked after as an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. However, it is likely there will become more children from Afghanistan in the weeks and months ahead.

### 7.4 The National Transfer Scheme

To address the national inequality, in March 2021 the Government backed a revised National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for all Councils to share this duty more fairly. The West Midlands region supports this scheme.

The National Transfer Scheme and regional Local Authorities have worked on a model for fair distribution for each Local Authority.

The model of distribution which has now been agreed gives greater weighting to factors relating to children's services while ensuring a

significant recognition is also given to pressures from the supported asylum population. The final weightings applied are:

- Child population 25%
- Looked After Children per 10k 22%
- UASC per 10k 10%
- Former UASC care leavers per 10k 10%
- Supported asylum population per 10k 33%

A national rota, divided into 8 cycles, is in place to enable local authorities to adjust and plan for their 'turn' on the rota. Cycle 3 is in progress.

## **8. Additional Information**

### Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children & Young People in Shropshire

Children's Social Care and Safeguarding has worked proactively with other Local Authorities in the West Midlands Region to ensure that we offer safe homes for all children who arrive unaccompanied.

We have done so consistently over recent years and responded to children and young people as they have either arrived in Shropshire, or where they have needed to be transferred from their arrival point and we have a resource to offer.

Currently we have 20 unaccompanied asylum-seekers under the age of 18 who are looked after. This number changes week by week and will continue to do so as new children arrive and some reach 18.

Currently in Shropshire we also have 37 unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers ages 18-25.

In Shropshire, based on our current number of looked after children, if we were to care for 0.07% as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, this would be up to 40 children under 18.

Since April 2021 we have taken 15 unaccompanied children/young people, of which 13 have come to us through the National Transfer Scheme and 2 directly from the port.

Due to the low numbers, it is not possible to be specific about their age or country of origin in this report as young people may be identifiable. However, our unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people are mainly, but not exclusively, male, ages 16+ and from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Albania, Sudan and Vietnam.

There are particular skills and knowledge that social workers have to acquire to support these children and young people, we support dedicated social workers and personal advisors to undertake this work, the

legislation is complex and they require a broad knowledge and understanding of culture, religion, trauma as well as working with interpreters, legal advisors and a range of other professionals. They also have to be alert to a specific range of risks to these young people, as they are vulnerable and at risk of going missing, being trafficked or pulled into modern slavery. We are one of only a few Local Authorities that has employed a UASC Champion to support our young people.

## 9. Conclusions

9.1. No decision is required from Cabinet but it is requested that the information is noted

<b>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</b>
N/A
<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</b> Kirstie Hurst-Knight
<b>Local Member</b> All members
<b>Appendices</b>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The National Transfer Scheme</li><li>2. Councillors' Induction to Corporate Parenting</li></ol>

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## Note sent from Home Office to Strategic Migration Partnerships on 7 July 2021

### New NTS rota

We wanted to share now, ahead of the regional implementation calls, the updated rota modelling and the change plan we have developed to support implementation of the voluntary rota.

We are grateful for your engagement throughout and the new rota modelling reflects your feedback.

Just to remind you of the underpinning principles for the new rota. The aim has been to secure a fairer distribution of UASC which continues to prioritise their best interests and reflects the challenges faced by local authorities.

The model which has now been agreed gives greater weighting to factors relating to children's services while ensuring a significant recognition is also given to pressures from the supported asylum population. The final weightings applied are:

Child population	25%
LAC per 10k	22%
UASC per 10k	10%
Former UASC care leavers per 10k	10%
Supported asylum population per 10k	33%

We recognise that, to achieve the objective of a more equitable distribution, the rota requires significant change for some regions/nations and therefore we have developed a change plan to support regions/nations implement this. This is a concern that many of you raised directly with us over recent weeks. We have sought to set out an incremental approach that will allow for a phased transition, at the end of which regions will be fully delivering on the rota allocations. We believe this will provide a clear path to implementing the rota while ensuring that regions that see the most change, are able to manage their capacity in a structured way so that they are able to ensure that they can meet the needs of transferring UASC.

Developing the change plan has given us opportunity to refresh the core rota modelling. The underpinning data for each factor is now the most recent verified data as of 1 July<sup>1</sup>. We have also sought to ensure the modelling is as realistic as

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<sup>1</sup> The data sources are:

Child population:

Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-2020 population estimates published June 2021

Supported asylum, UASC and former UASC care leaver populations:

Home Office management information, collated for the RASI place based report March 2020

Looked after children rate:

England - "Children looked after in England including adoption: Reporting year 2020"

## Note sent from Home Office to Strategic Migration Partnerships on 7 July 2021

possible by increasing the number of expected referrals to 650 in a year. This reflects our operational learning over the past twelve months. Adjusting this figure does not impact on the proportion of UASC referrals to be allocated to a region/nation under the rota but will ensure the **illustrative number** is as reliable as possible. Of course, this is a difficult number to predict and we will continue to monitor and refine the estimate for future revisions of the modelling.

### The change plan

We will be discussing the change plan at the upcoming implementation meetings, and national launch event, but we felt it would be useful to explain the document a little.

The change plan sets out a staged approach for regions/nations to build capacity to meet the allocation of UASC placements set out by the rota. To do this we have broken the expected 650 annual transfers into four cycles which allows us to apply incremental adjustments to each region/nation's allocation at each cycle and avoid a sudden change.

Subject to the rate of referrals received and children placed, alongside our estimate of 650 referrals in a year, our expectation is that this change plan will be in place for around two years. At the end of this period, regions/nations will have developed processes and capacity to implement the rota allocations in full.

The columns on the left show the starting point based on maintaining the current distribution of UASC across the UK.

The columns on the right show the endpoint for NTS placements as guided by the rota weightings.

The blue columns in the centre set out the number of placements to be allocated to each region/nation at each cycle. These allocations will either increase or decrease in a linear manner as we progress through the cycles toward the endpoint.

The change plan remains **illustrative** at this stage as we work with devolved nations to finalise their participation in the scheme and commitment under the rota. We are grateful for those ongoing conversations which have so far demonstrated significant ambition to support vulnerable children.



# 2021 Elected Member Induction Programme

Councillors as Corporate Parents

**Lead Officer, Siobhan Williams, Service Manager  
Children Looked After & Care Leavers**

**Lead Officer, Lisa Preston  
Fostering, Adoption & Residential Services.**

# Corporate Parenting Priorities

- **The whole council has a role in ensuring that we safeguard children. Corporate parenting is not something that can be left to a single Directorate or Team but is something that can only deliver effective outcomes if it is managed in a collaborative way.**
- **It takes a community to raise a child and we should focus on the outcomes we need those communities to deliver.**



# Did you know now you are a councillor you have become a parent to 700 children and young people?

- By law, every professional who works with children and young people looked after and care leavers has a responsibility as a corporate parent.
- This can be a social worker, **councillor** or other professionals who work in police, health, housing, probation and education.

# The Role of a Councillor as a Corporate Parent

***“The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care leavers”***

(Children and Social Work Act 2017)

Being a corporate parent means providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the council.

# Councillors' responsibilities

Under the Children and Social Work Act 2017 **all Councils must have regard** to enact 7 Corporate Parenting Principles when exercising their functions in relation to children and young people looked after and care leavers:

- To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people;
- To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners;
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.



# Shropshire Council's Corporate Parenting Vision

We intend to be ***the best parent that we can be*** to every child and young person we look after.

We ask ourselves ....

Would our care be good enough for our own child?
















What do our children and young people want most from you?

**MOST OF ALL THEY NEED YOU TO  
UNDERSTAND THEIR NEEDS,  
LISTEN TO THEM AND CARE  
ABOUT THEM** 

# 2021 Elected Member Induction Programme

## Corporate Parenting

## Home-Finding for our looked after children and young people

# Home-Finding

- Most children thrive best living within their birth family- parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles.
- For some children this is not possible and so we seek the best foster carers or adopters to match the needs of a child
- We try to keep brothers and sisters together
- We try to maintain and grow family ties where this is safe and leads to a secure and stable home life
- We try to build lifelong links to take a child through adulthood















# 2021 Elected Member Induction Programme

## Being Corporate Parents to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children and Young People

# Who are Unaccompanied Asylum -Seeking Children?

- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) are children and young people who are seeking asylum in the UK but who have been separated from their parents or carers.
- While their claim is processed, they are cared for by a local authority.
- They have often faced danger, including persecution and death threats, in the country they left behind and have undertaken arduous journeys alone to arrive in the UK.
- Many remain permanently separated from their birth family.
- Their families are desperate to enable their child to be in a safer country and pay a lot of family money or owe a large debt to traffickers.
- As a consequence the children are at high risk of exploitation and modern slavery.



# Who are Unaccompanied Asylum -Seeking Children?

- This Government has pledged to continue to support and offer a home to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive in the UK and to work in cooperation with our European neighbours post-Brexit.
- The majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arrive on the south coast and those local authorities have carried a disproportionate duty of care.
- Therefore, there is now a government backed National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for all councils to share this duty more fairly.
- Under the NTS Shropshire may be responsible for between 20-30 additional children over the next year.

# Who are Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (known as UASC)?

- Shropshire currently looks after 11 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and we have 22 care leavers who came as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- Their home countries are mainly Vietnam, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.
- Some have really liked the rural location and our Vietnamese young people have settled well in the Shrewsbury area.
- We have some care leavers living with Supported Board & Lodgings providers in Shropshire and are able to travel to Telford or Wolverhampton for worship/cultural links.
- However, many who are of the Muslim faith live in the Wolverhampton and Birmingham areas as we have few facilities to offer them in Shropshire to meet their religious and cultural needs.



# 2021 Elected Member Induction Programme

## Corporate Parenting Celebrating Our Care Leavers

























**Mike's Story** - Mike has a placement at very prestigious company in the tech world. He has helped to create our Care Leavers' Local Offer. Mike is living independently and is studying for his degree at University

**Amy's Story** - Amy moved into her new place did an amazing job at cleaning it up. She is upcycling her own furniture. Amy is looking after her own mental health. She is good at baking. Amy is a member of our Care Leavers' Forum

**Brittany's Story** - Brittany had her baby during lockdown! She and her baby live independently and her baby is thriving. Brittany wants to train as a nursery nurse

**Liam's Story** - Liam is very proactive in Forum. He is looking at career options. Liam is a great friend to others and he is good at keeping in touch. Liam lives independently. He has thousands of likes on tiktok – he creates dance and comedy content!

**Dan's Story**-Dan lives independently and works full time in computer engineering. He is a dog parent! Dan is an active forum member and he is really passionate about creating opportunities for our care leavers and under privileged young people

**Charley's Story**-Charley has been at university this year, and has coped so well with the restrictions! She has been incredibly positive through out lockdowns. Charley knits & is an active forum member







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# CORPORATE GRANDPARENTS!













