

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

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1. Summary

- 1.1 This report presents Cabinet with an overview of the formal customer feedback the Council received during 2019/20. Formal customer feedback includes complaints, compliments, comments and other types of enquiry. MP enquiries are monitored and reported separately because they can often duplicate complaints.
- 1.2 Although overall performance remains good in terms of complaints handling, there continues to be a steady increase in complaint numbers. There were 1,833 complaints received in 2019/20 (1,281 in 2018/19, 1,119 in 2017/18 and 922 in 2016/17). Complaints increased by 43% between 2018/19 and 2019/20. The time taken to complete stage 1 complaint investigations has risen to an average of 22 days compared to 14 working days in 2018/19. However, it should be noted that this is well within the Council's target of 30 working days. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) has investigated a similar number of enquiries about Shropshire Council during each of the past four years. The upheld rate for the Council for 2019/20 was 41%, showing a decrease from 61% in 2018/19, and compares to the average upheld rate for other similar local authorities of 56%.
- 1.3 Complaints formed 57% of all cases of customer feedback during 2019/20, followed by comments and other enquiries at 28% and compliments at 16%. Customer feedback provides the Council with the opportunity to improve services following concerns and recognise where customers have had a good experience. The learning and actions that are identified through the complaint investigations are used to improve service provision.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- A. Approve the Annual Customer Feedback Report 2019/20 (Appendix 1) for publication on the council's website.
- B. Agree the recommendations included within the Annual Report, highlighting key issues and areas for improvement.

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

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

4. Financial Implications

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

REPORT

5. Introduction

- 5.1 The Customer Feedback Annual Report for Shropshire Council covers the formal feedback Shropshire Council received during 2019/20 (excluding MP enquiries; these commonly duplicate complaints). The Annual Report covers all service areas and, as a result, the handling of complaints under all three complaints procedures (the statutory and nationally set processes for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care, and the Council's locally defined Corporate Complaints procedure). More detailed reports have been produced for Adult Social Care and Children's Services.
- 5.2 The Annual Report details the performance of Shropshire Council during 2019/20. In addition, quarterly monitoring takes place and where necessary issues are addressed within the year.

6. Customer Feedback 2018/19 (focus on complaints)

- 6.1 Shropshire Council received 2,611 cases of formal feedback during 2019/20, up by 297 from 2,314 in 2018/19. There were 1,487 complaints (57%), 719 comments and other enquiries (27%) and 405 compliments (15%).
- 6.2 Of the 1,487 complaints received, 1,334 were complaints handled under the Council's corporate complaints procedure, an increase of 250 compared to 2018/19. 153 were statutory complaints (with an element of social care so handled under the nationally set adult or children's complaints procedures), a reduction of 43 compared to 2018/19, with Adult Social Care statutory complaints reducing by 36 and Children's Social Care complaints reducing by 6 complaints.
- 6.3 Effective stage 1 complaints handling can reduce the number of stage 2 complaints. Most complaints are addressed and closed at the first stage of the complaints procedures. In 2019/20 47 cases progressed beyond stage 1 compared to 50 in 2018/19, 26 in 2017/18, 46 in 2016/17 and 38 in 2015/16.

- 6.4 Considering complaints by service highlights that Highways and Transport received 34% of all Shropshire Council's complaints during 2019/20 followed by Adult Services (including Housing and Public Health) at 17%. Finance Governance and Assurance were allocated 16% of complaints, Waste Management and Planning each received 9% of complaints, and Children's Services received 7%.
- 6.5 On average it took an average of 22 working days to respond to a complaint in 2019/20 compared to 14 working days in 2018/19 and 20 working days in 2017/18. This remains well within the LGO timescales of 60 days for Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations to be completed. (The Council works to 30 days for each stage). However, although average performance is good, there are significant numbers of complex and long running cases exceeding timescales, this is sometimes due to reduced officer capacity within a service but can often be the result of highly complex cases that are difficult to resolve or require significant time to resolve.
- 6.6 In 2018/19 at the end of stage 1, 14% of complaints were upheld, 12% were partly upheld (often where a complaint might have multiple points within it), and 28% were not upheld. The remainder were withdrawn or had no finding. These rates vary slightly compared to the previous year.
- 6.7 The learning and actions resulting from complaints are an important element of customer feedback reporting and improving services. Understanding the causes of complaints and common themes informs learning and the identification of actions to address the underlying causes of the complaint being made. Learning from complaints during 2019/20 covered a range of issues. As with previous years communication and information provision continues to be the most common theme within learning and includes responding to correspondence and comments in a timely manner, keeping people up to date as cases progress and improving how information is shared. Service delivery/non-delivery of a service was another common learning point. It should be noted that cases not upheld will usually not have any learning.
- 6.8 Appendix 1 of the Annual Report includes Shropshire Council's annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO publish data on the investigations that they have carried out, including whether they upheld the complaints they looked into. Table 1 below sets out the number of enquiries that the LGO received, the number investigated, the number upheld and the uphold rate as a percentage of the cases investigated.

Table 1	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Number of enquiries to the LGO	83	90	84	91	85
Number investigated by the LGO	30	23	25	33	27
Number upheld by the LGO	15	11	8	20	11
LGO upheld rate for Shropshire Council	50%	48%	32%	61%	41%
LGO national average upheld rate	50%	54%	57%	58%	56%*

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

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

- 6.9 Appendix 2 of the Annual Report highlights recommendations made by the LGO in 2018/19. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint. The LGO now produce publicly available compliance reports in which they list whether local authorities have completed actions within the timescales set by the Ombudsman.

7. Customer Feedback Development

- 7.1 The recommendations included within the Annual Report highlight areas of development designed to improve customer feedback handling. Key areas of focus arising from the 2019/20 annual report include:

- There has been an increase in complaints for the Highways department which now form a significant proportion (34%) of the Council's overall complaints. Additionally, 56% of 'no-finding' outcomes in 2019/20 were recorded for Highway and Transport, which can indicate the investigation and reporting back may not have been completed. There appears to be some opportunity to make improvements in complaints handling in Highways and Transport and it is recommended that this is a priority for 2020/21.
- Carry out one-off detailed reviews into long running and overdue complaints cases on a service by service basis, working with senior managers to provide detailed information at the investigator level. This will allow managers to fully understand where there are ongoing obstacles and performance issues.
- Increase the accessibility and use of staff information and guidance on the standards and expectations of complaints investigators and the quality of their responses, including the identification and recording of learning and actions from corporate complaints and how to seek advice and support if it is needed.
- The LGO has requested Shropshire Council look at its performance in relation to delays (time taken to respond and to implement recommendations). It is recommended it forms an area for attention in 2019/20. It will require a response from across the organisation and should be addressed through the delivery of the recommendations in the Annual Report.
- Increase the identification of opportunities to improve people's experiences of Council services during the year across the Council through greater use of the quarterly complaint reports which made available to all service areas via Directors and key contacts within council departments.

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p> <p>2015/16 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report</p> <p>2016/17 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report</p> <p>2017/18 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report</p> <p>2018/19 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report</p>
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)</p> <p>Cllr Lee Chapman - Portfolio Holder Organisational Transformation and Digital Infrastructure</p>
<p>Local Member</p> <p>All</p>
<p>Appendices</p> <p>Appendix 1 – Customer Feedback Annual Report 2019/20</p>