

Customer Feedback Annual Report Shropshire Council 2019/20

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



1. Introduction

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

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

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

Complaint

We aim to make it as easy as possible to make a complaint. A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about a service provided. Family members and advocates may also make a complaint on behalf of one of our customers.

We will ask for consent to ensure that the complaint is not being made against the customer's wishes.

Compliment

Many people get in touch with a compliment when the information or support they have received has exceeded their expectations. It is really helpful to learn when a service has been provided well or when a member of staff has done a great job. We like to recognise compliments alongside any complaints. It is good for us to say 'thank you' to our teams and staff members too.

Comment

Feedback about a service could be:

- a suggestion to improve it.
- a question as to whether something could be done differently.
- an idea for delivering a service differently.



2. The Complaints Process

Shropshire Council encourages users of our services, their family members and carers to give feedback and highlight any concerns so that they may be addressed as quickly as possible. If problems cannot be resolved and the customer wishes to make a complaint, staff members can offer advice on how to make a complaint. Support is also available from complaints officers based within Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

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



Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days of being received and we let the complainant know how their complaint will be handled.

STAGE 1

An appropriate Investigating Officer will be allocated to the case and asked to investigate the complaint. This is usually a manager within the service area the complaint relates to. The complainant will be provided with a written response within approximately 6 weeks (12 weeks is the timescale for stage 1 and stage 2 responses and 6 weeks is usually allocated to each). In some complex cases it may take longer than 6 weeks at stage 1 but we let the customer know if this extra time is needed and why. The Investigating Officer will write to explain the outcome of their investigation, any learning or actions and information outlining how to progress the complaint if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome.



STAGE 2 - Review

The complaint will be reviewed by a more senior manager, commissioner, or in most cases, the Complaints Monitoring Officer. They will review the Stage 1 complaint and decide if there is more the service can do to address the concerns raised. If the reviewing officer believes the service has done all they can reasonably do, the customer will be written to and advised of this. They will also be given information about the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.



Ombudsman

If a complaint cannot be resolved locally it can be investigated by the Ombudsman. The Council has a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO). Responses are often complex, lengthy and require a large volume of appendices to be collated, catalogued and returned to the LGO. Complainants can request to go to the Ombudsman without a review if they choose to.

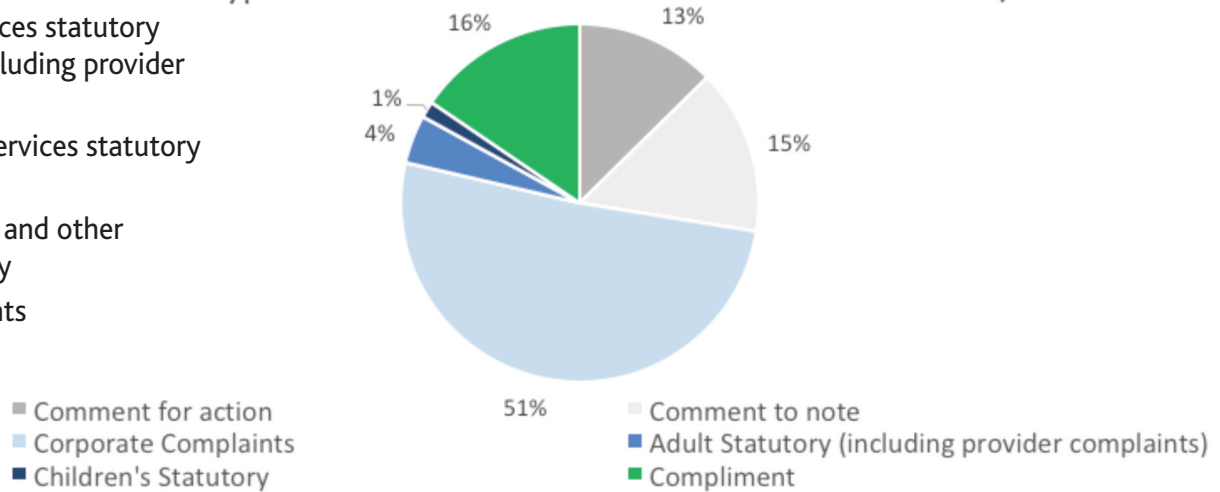
We cannot promise to get the result complainants want, but we do make sure that complaints are dealt with as quickly and as thoroughly as possible and we work to keep customers informed of what is happening and the progress being made.

3. Customer Feedback 2019/20

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

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

Types of Customer Feedback Cases Received 2019/20



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

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

Customer Feedback by Month 2019/20

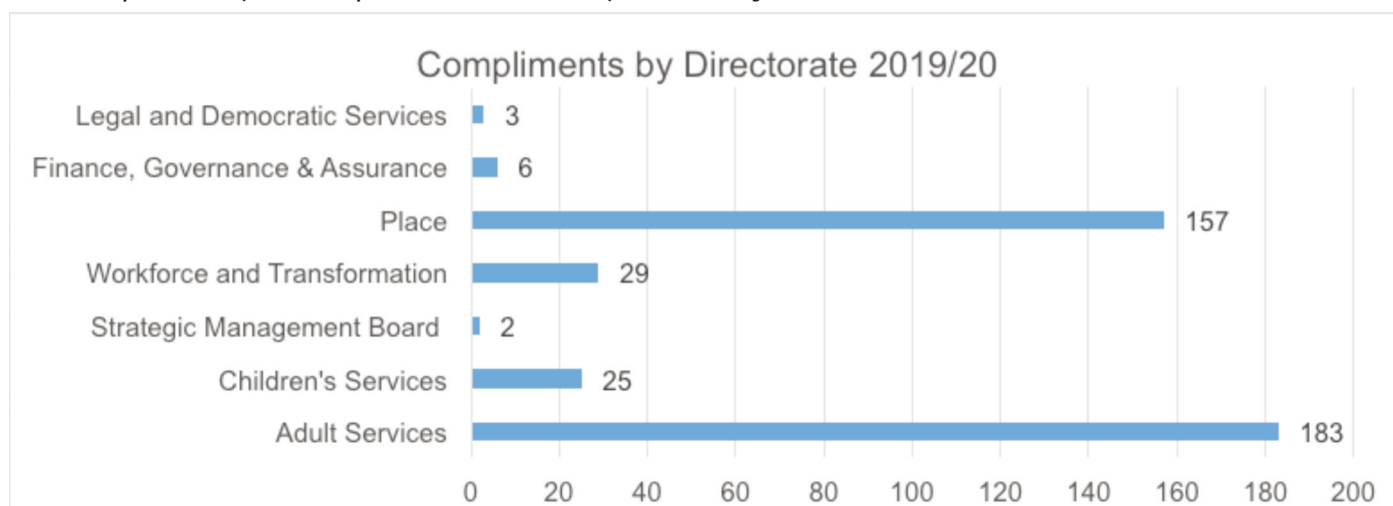


Over the year, the monthly average was 218 customer feedback cases (compared to 193 the year before). January and February 2020 saw the greatest number of cases at 279 and 257, followed by July 2019 with 252 cases. April and December 2019 had the lowest numbers of feedback. The data shows a noticeable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

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

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

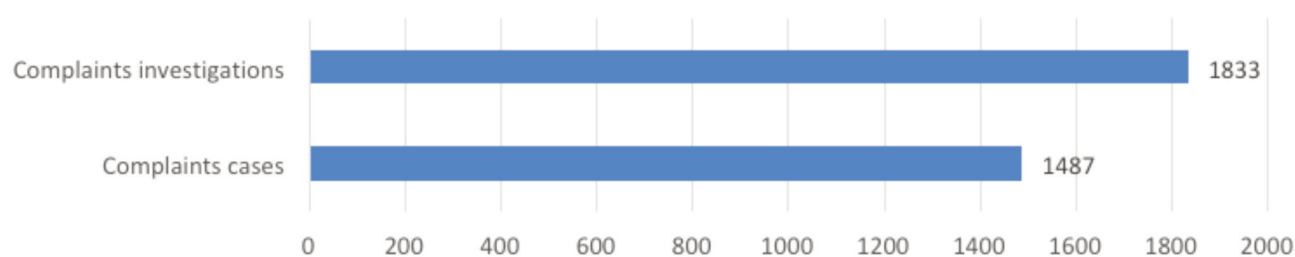
A closer look at compliments shows that Adult Services received the largest number of compliments (183 compliments in 2019/20) followed by the Place directorate.



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

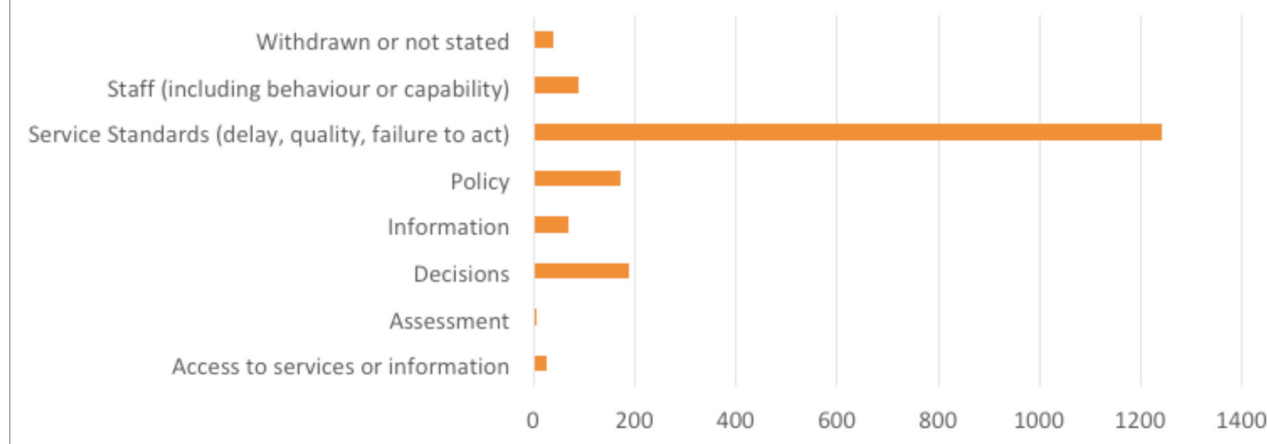
Complaints investigations do not always result in a complete investigation and outcome. Once a complaints case is explored in more detail, it is possible that a different course of action is required (e.g. an insurance claim or appeals process), or once the complaint is more fully understood it may be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

Complaints cases and numbers of investigations 2019/20



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

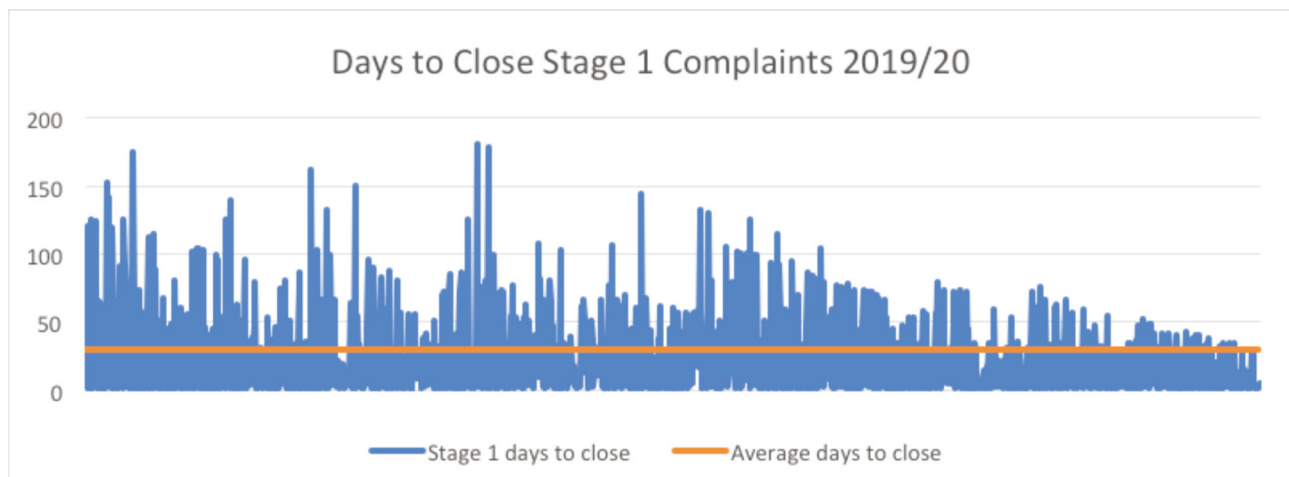
Category of Complaints Investigations 2019/20



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

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

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

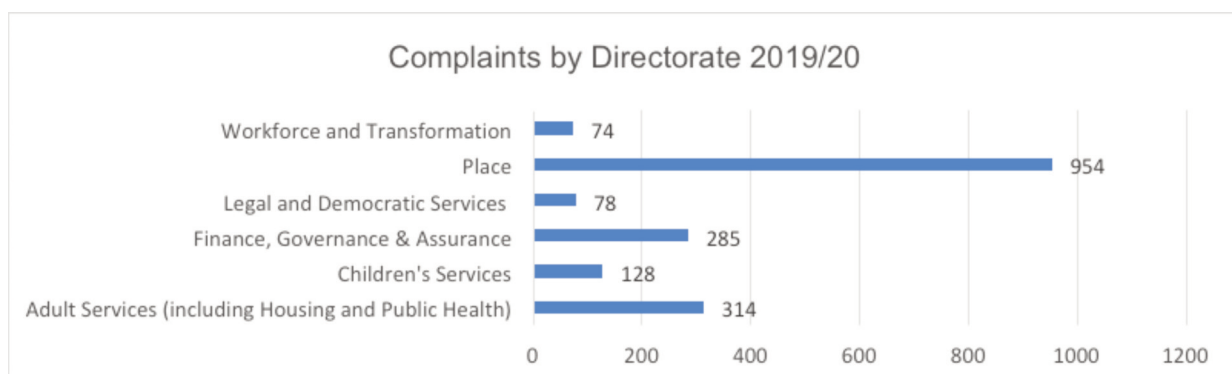


Some types of service are more likely to result in complaints than others and the chart below highlights complaints by directorate. Shropshire Council's Place Directorate handles the largest proportion of complaints compared to other directorates within Shropshire Council (52% of all complaints) followed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

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

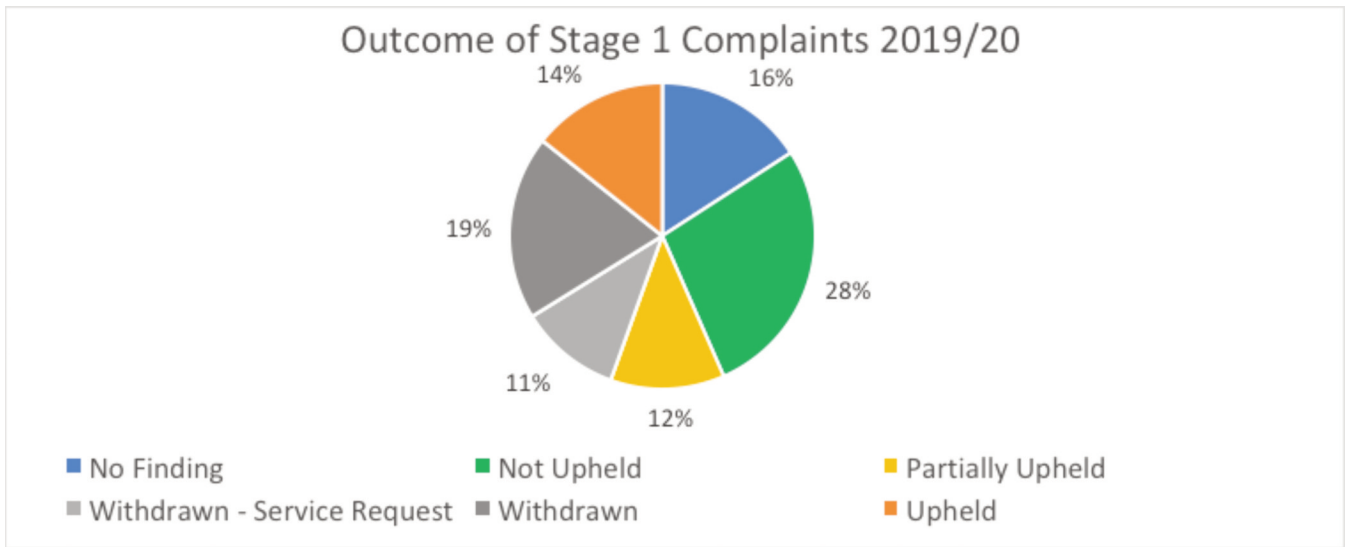
Complaints relating to Adult Services form 17% of all complaints and complaints relating to Children's Services form 7% of all complaints. The number of Adult Services complaints is very similar to the previous year but there were fewer Children's Services complaints in 2019/20 (forming 7% of complaints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

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



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

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



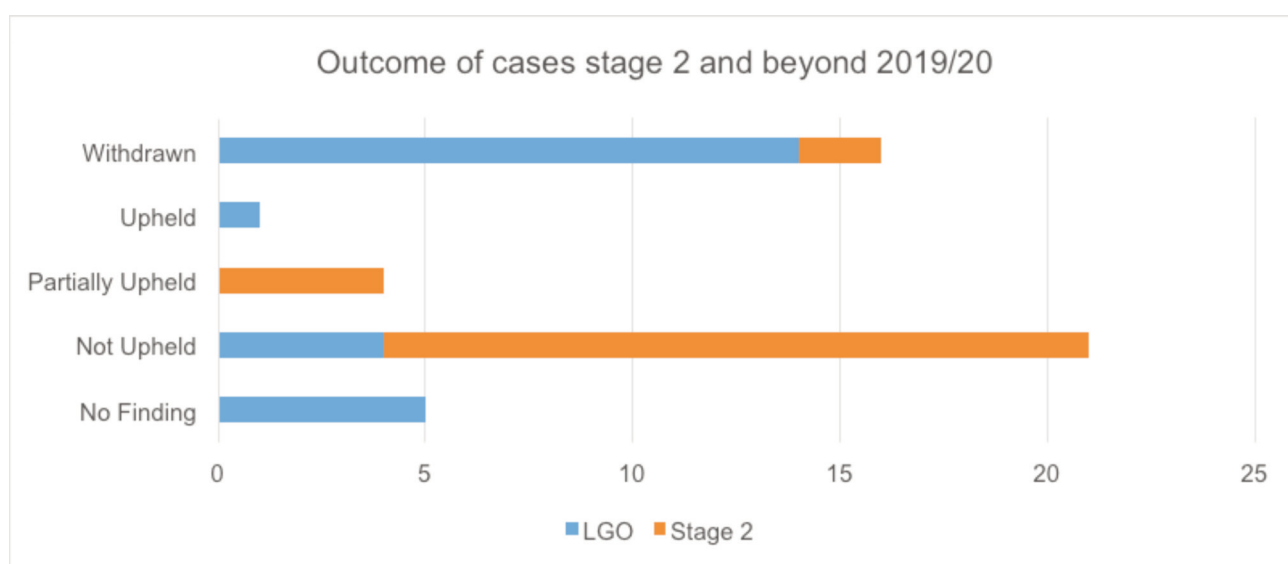
There is a concern that 16% of complaints investigations resulted in no finding. In some circumstances, there is a genuine reason for recording a 'no finding' outcome. A complaints investigator may find that not enough evidence or information is available to draw a conclusion, or they may be unable to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

4. Progression of Complaints

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

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

Stage 2	LGO	Total investigations beyond stage 1
23	24	47



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

Complaints and Enquiries Received

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

Decisions Made

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

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

5. Annual Comparison 2018/19 and 2019/20

Number of compliments – decreased

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



Number of complaints - increased

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



Nature of complaints - problems remain similar

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



Days to close – Average days to close increased

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

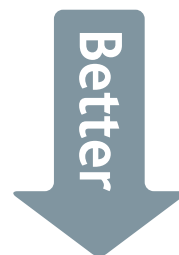


Outcome of complaints – Fewer complaints upheld

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

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

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



Complaints progressing beyond Stage 1 – similar proportion

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



6. Example Compliments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



7. Example Complaints

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

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

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

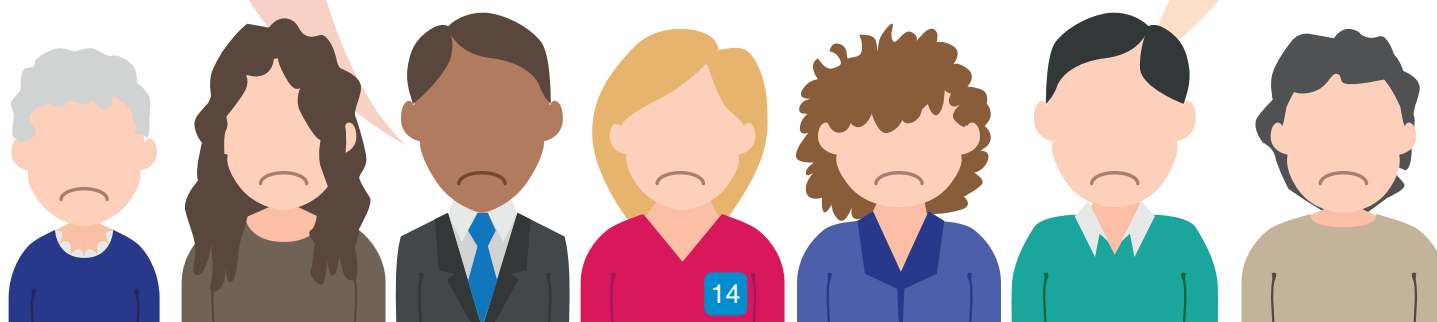
Complaint for ICT Services: "Pothole reporting and your website is very clunky. It took me about 30 minutes just to enter 3 reports. Maps are inadequate to identify the correct position for the reports that's why I try to send GPS positions."

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

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

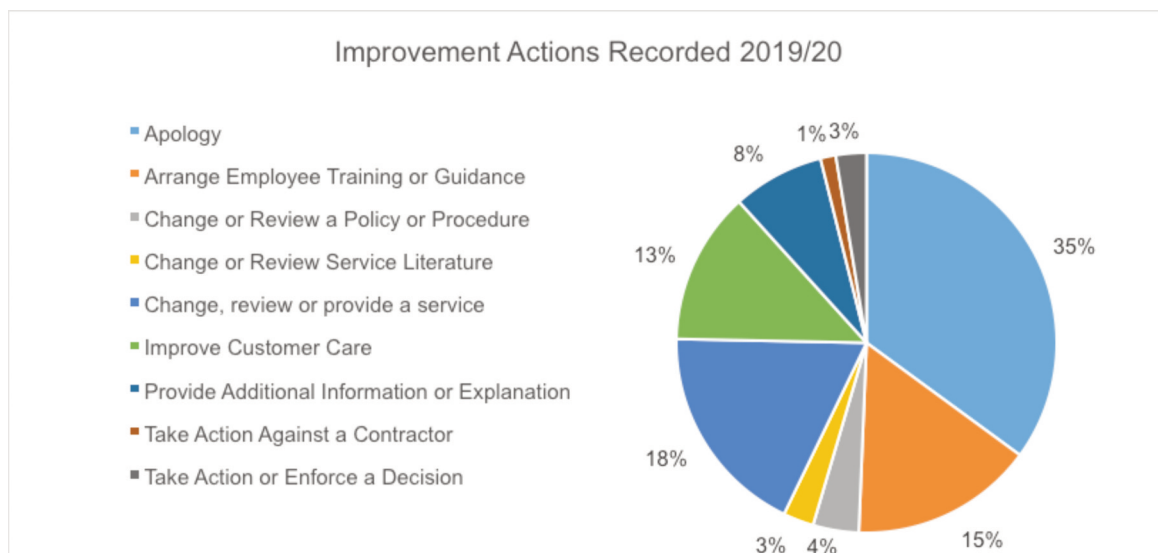
Complaint for Highways: Complaint regarding the state and condition of the Shropshire Roads in general: potholes, road signs, road gullies and road sweeping. Customer would welcome a discussion about these and especially the A489, a road the customer travels each day; stating "it's basically rotten and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

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



8. Learning and Actions

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



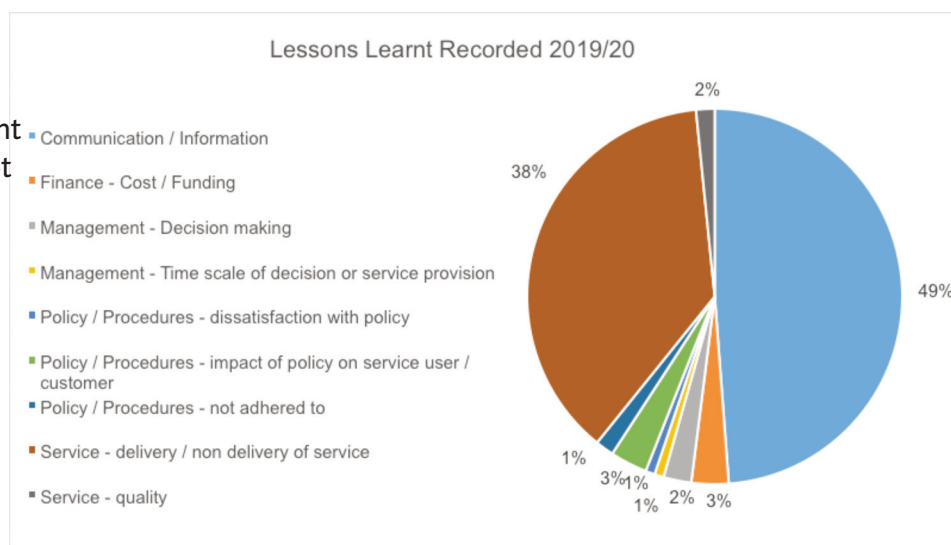
Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2019/20:

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

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

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

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



9. Example Learning and Actions

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

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

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

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

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

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

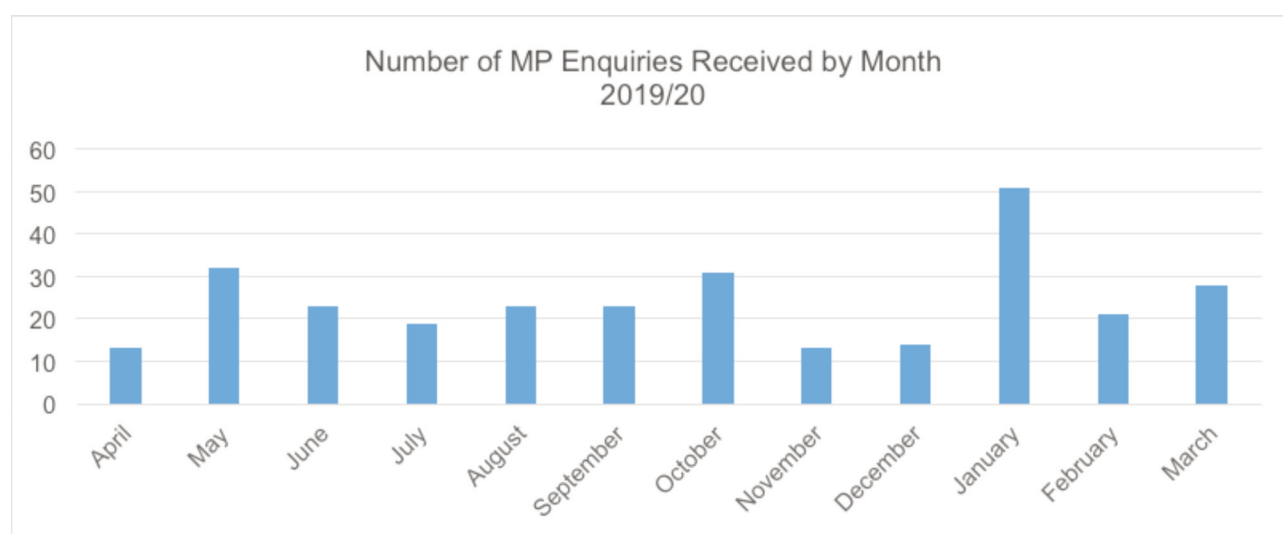
The complaint arose due to staff mistakes including missing appointments, and inaccurate paperwork. Concerns were also raised about the hours of support available. The investigation highlighted some of the causes of the problems raised but concluded that the impact of this was not significant. The actions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

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

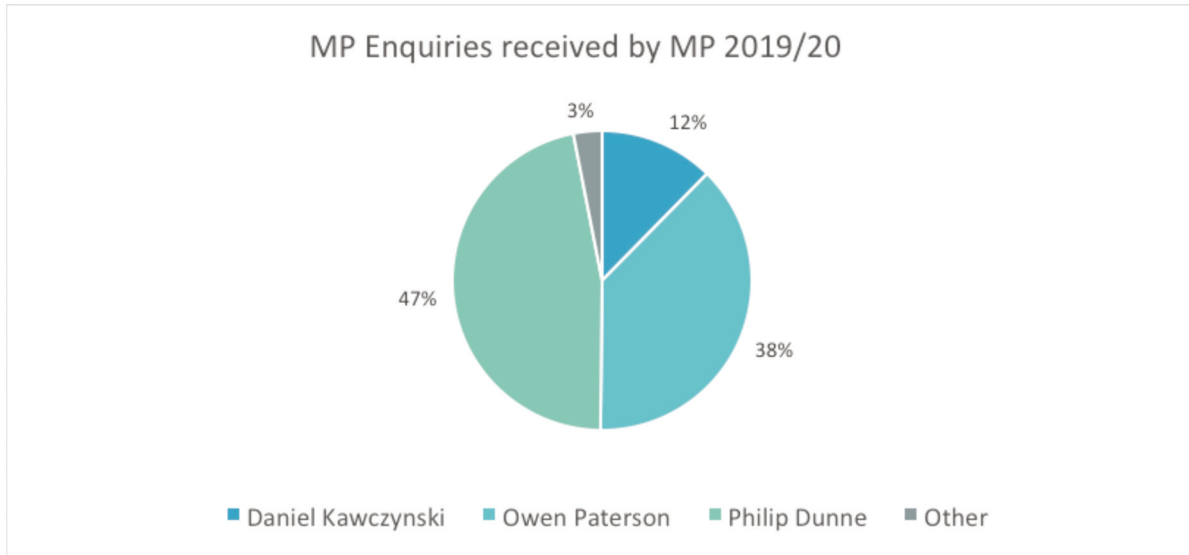
10. MP Enquiries

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

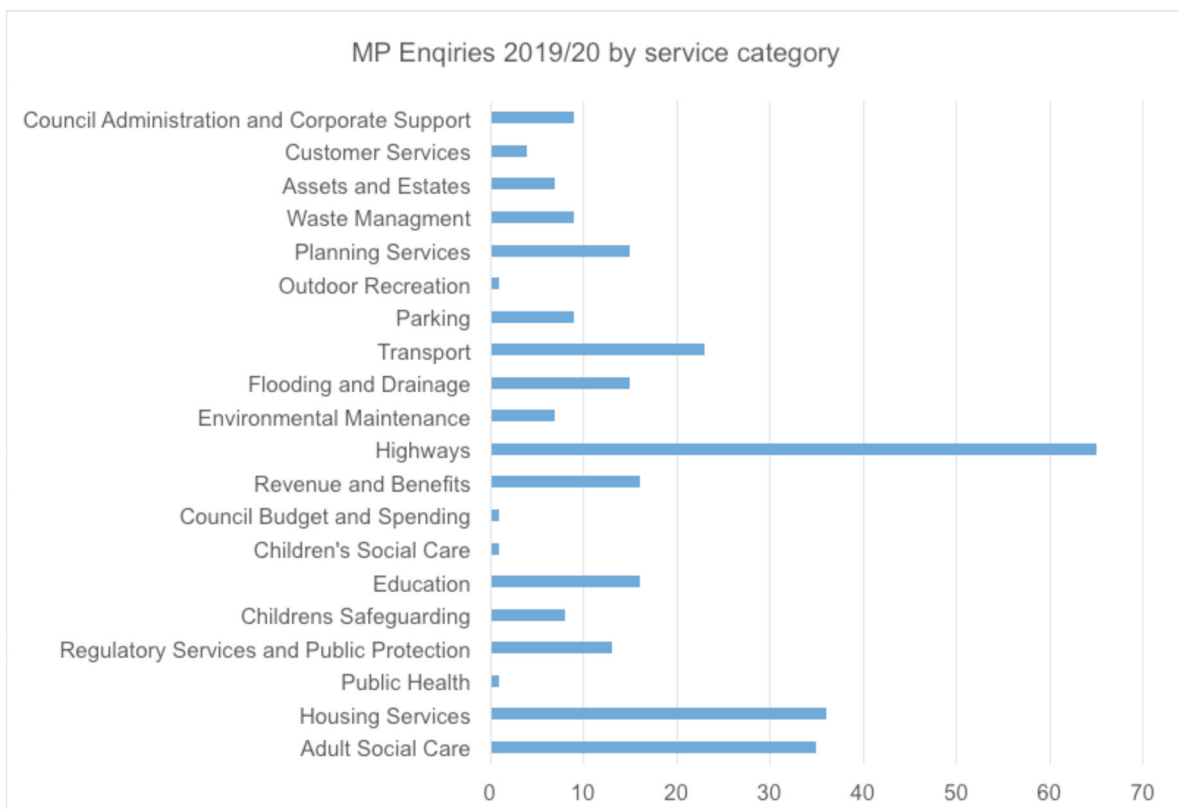
During 2019/20 there were 291 MP enquiries recorded by Shropshire Council (compared to 322 the previous year). The overall pattern of MP enquiries remains similar over time with little variance over the last 2 years and averages around 24 enquiries received a month. In the same way as complaints, there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



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



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



11. Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

12. Progress Update

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

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

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

13. Recommendations

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

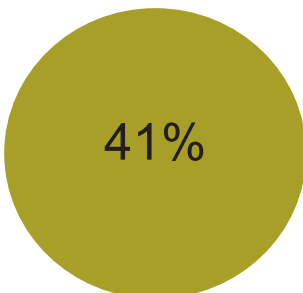
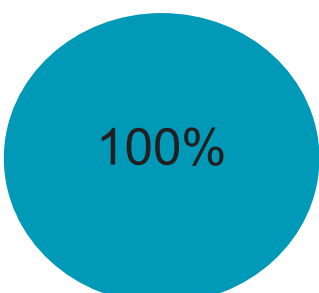
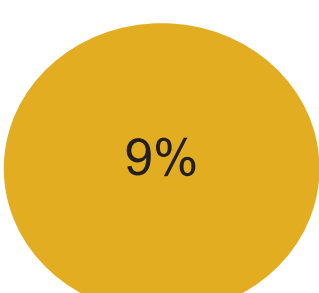
1. Overall there are growing numbers of customer feedback cases and a significant increase in the number of complaints investigations being undertaken. In many service areas, a review of complaints suggests there are few opportunities to address this growing volume of cases. Many service areas do not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

Recommendations continued...

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

Appendix 1 Ombudsman Cases 2019/20

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

Complaints upheld		
	<p>41% of complaints we investigated were upheld.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 56% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>11 upheld decisions</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 27 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020</p>
Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations		
	<p>In 100% of cases we were satisfied the authority had successfully implemented our recommendations.</p> <p>This compares to an average of 99% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>Statistics are based on a total of 12 compliance outcomes for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure to comply with our recommendations is rare. An authority with a compliance rate below 100% should scrutinise those complaints where it failed to comply and identify any learning. 		
Satisfactory remedies provided by the authority		
	<p>In 9% 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 11% in similar authorities.</p>	<p>1 satisfactory remedy decision</p> <p>Statistics are based on a total of 27 detailed investigations for the period between 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020</p>

Appendix 2

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

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

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

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

Customer Feedback Annual Report Shropshire Council 2019/20

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

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

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

