

Customer Feedback Annual Report Children's Services 2018/19

Feedback and Insight Team, Information, Intelligence and Insight
July 2019



Customer Feedback Annual Report

Children’s Services 2018/19

1. Introduction

The report covers Children’s Services formal feedback and representations for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. The report details the comments, compliments and complaints formally recorded by Shropshire Council. The annual report is designed as a public document, but regular internal reporting is carried out in order to assess performance and identify any patterns over time. This regular monitoring of formal feedback enables any issues to be addressed early and focuses attention on ongoing improvement.

The Children’s Act 1989 and NHS and the Community Care Act 1990 require all local authorities with social services responsibilities in England and Wales to have a complaints procedure. ‘Getting the Best from Complaints’ provides guidance for local authorities on implementing the Children’s Act. This report is produced in line with national guidance.

Statutory complaints relate to the provision of social care and are handled in line with the national regulations referred to above. These statutory complaints follow the Council’s Statutory Complaints Procedure for children’s services, the key stages of which are set out in section 2 of this report: stage 1 - local resolution; stage 2 – investigation; stage 3 - review panel and section 4 - referral to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Few complaints progress through all stages of the procedure, and Shropshire Council aims to provide thorough investigations and responses at stage 1.

The remainder of complaints for Children’s Services fall under the Council’s corporate complaints procedure, for example these may be complaints about educational improvement services, a support service or administrative process rather than social care. Corporate complaints are investigated at stage 1, reviewed at stage 2 and customers may choose to progress their complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman as a final stage. You can find out more in the Council’s Corporate Customer Feedback Report 2018/19.

How can I provide feedback on my experience of using a service provided by Shropshire Council’s children’s services?

You can give us your views in a number of ways; use the one that suits you best. If you are a child, you can make the complaint yourself, use an advocate or ask an adult you trust to make the complaint on your behalf. You can:

- Speak to a member of staff.
- Telephone us: 01743 256188
- Email us at: customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk

Fill in the customer feedback form on the council website. Use the “make a complaint” button at: <https://shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/children-and-young-peoples-complaints/>



Complaint

A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided by the council. Parents, carers and other trusted adults may complain about the service a child has received. A child may also complain themselves, or receive the support of a professional advocate. We aim to make it as easy as possible to make a complaint.

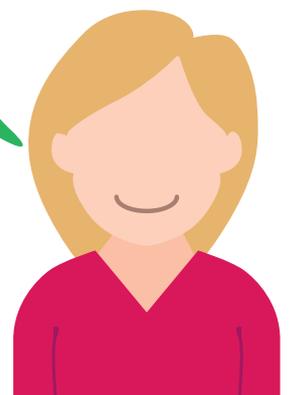
Compliment

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 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 Children’s Complaints Process

Shropshire Council encourages children, parents, carers and others to give feedback and suggests that any concerns are raised with social workers, other members of council staff, teachers or a trustworthy adult. We aim to address any concerns as quickly as possible and provide support if a child or adult wishes to make a more formal complaint.

Complaints, comments and compliments can be made by telephone, email, letter or by using our online form. Support is also available from complaints officers based within Shropshire Council’s Feedback and Insight Team.

For a copy of the leaflets we use see:

<https://shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/children-and-young-peoples-complaints/>

Complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days of being received and we let the complainant know how their complaint will be handled.

STAGE 1 - The Statutory Complaints Officer will contact the appropriate team manager for Children’s Services and ask them to investigate the complaint. The complainant will be provided with a written response within 10 working days (for statutory complaints). In some cases it may take up to 20 working days, but we let the customer know if this extra time is needed and why. If a customer is unhappy with the response at stage 1 they can request to go to Stage 2.

STAGE 2 - If a complaint is not resolved at Stage 1, and the complainant or their representative remains dissatisfied with the investigation or response, an external Independent Investigating Officer and an external Independent Person are commissioned by Children’s Services to further investigate the complaint. The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will aim to produce a report within 25 working days. However, if the case is complex, they can have a maximum of 65 days in which to produce their reports. Once the reports have been finalised they are sent to the adjudication officer (usually the head of the service) who will, after careful consideration of the reports, provide the complainant with a written response to the complaint.

STAGE 3 - If the complainant still remains dissatisfied with the decision/outcome following the independent investigation, they can ask to have their complaint reviewed by the Complaints Review Panel.

The Complaints Review Panel is made up of three external people who will review the complaint, but they will not reinvestigate or consider new complaints. The complainant can attend the panel meeting if they choose to and can bring a friend or someone they can trust.

Ombudsman - If a complaint cannot be resolved locally it can be investigated by the Ombudsman. The council has a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Complaint responses are often complex and it can be necessary to collate, catalogue and provide a large volume of information for the LGO’s consideration. Complainants can request to go to the Ombudsman after Stage 2 if they choose to.

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

The Shropshire Council Annual Customer Feedback Report includes a similar diagram to outline the corporate complaints process: stage 1 – investigation, stage 2 – review, final stage – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

3. Customer Feedback 2018/19

In 2018/19 there were 198 cases of feedback recorded for Children’s Services including Educational Improvement & Efficiency (commonly referred to as Learning & Skills). There were:

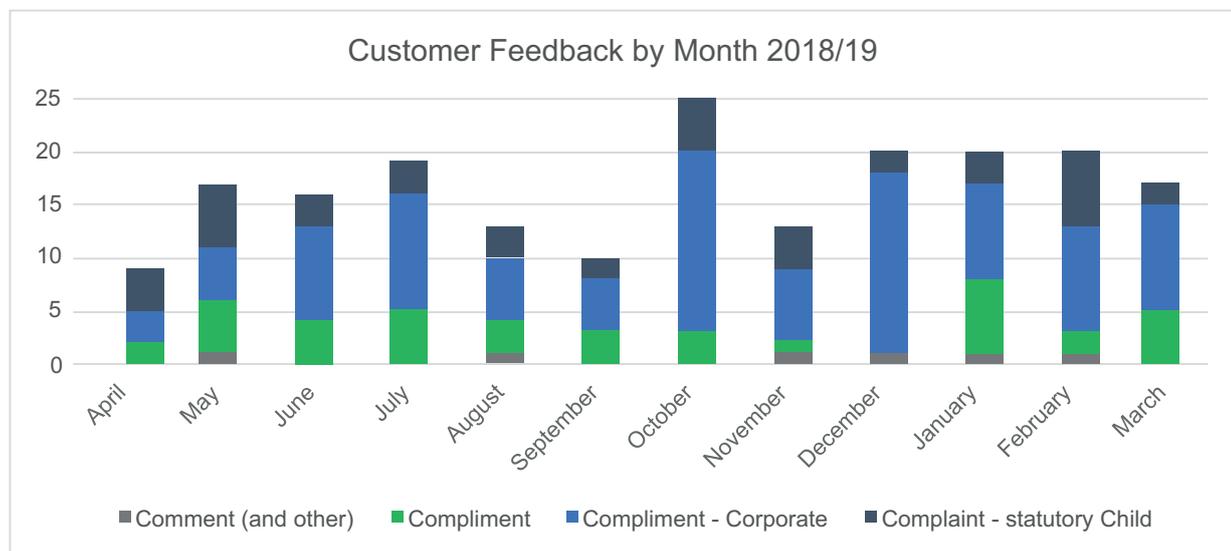
- 40 compliments
- 6 comments or other types of enquiry
- 106 corporate complaints
- 46 statutory complaints

159 of the cases were for Children’s Services excluding education (covering social care and support services).

Educational Improvement & Efficiency (Learning & Skills) receive very few cases of customer feedback. In 2018/19 there were 39 cases and 7 were related to schools. There were:

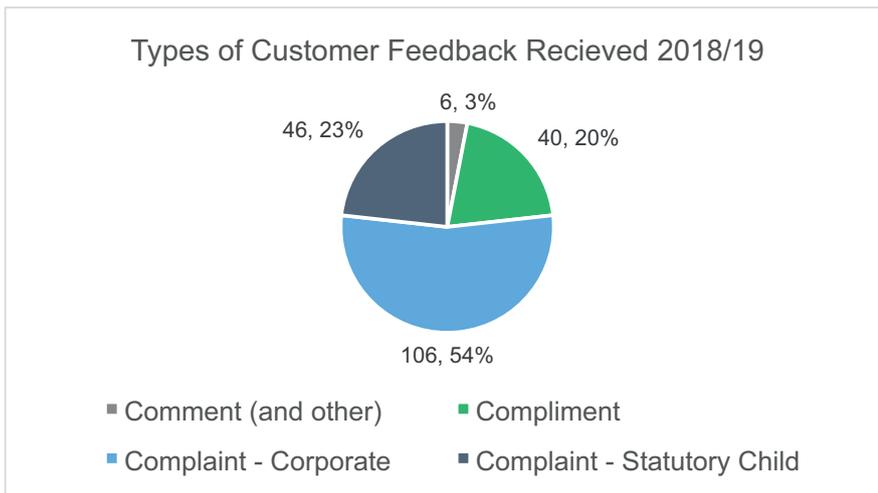
- 9 compliments
- 25 complaints
- 5 comments and other enquiries

The average number of customer feedback responses recorded per month during 2018/19 was 17. October was the month with the most feedback. April was the month with the least feedback during the year. Overall average monthly feedback volumes were greater in quarters 3 and 4.



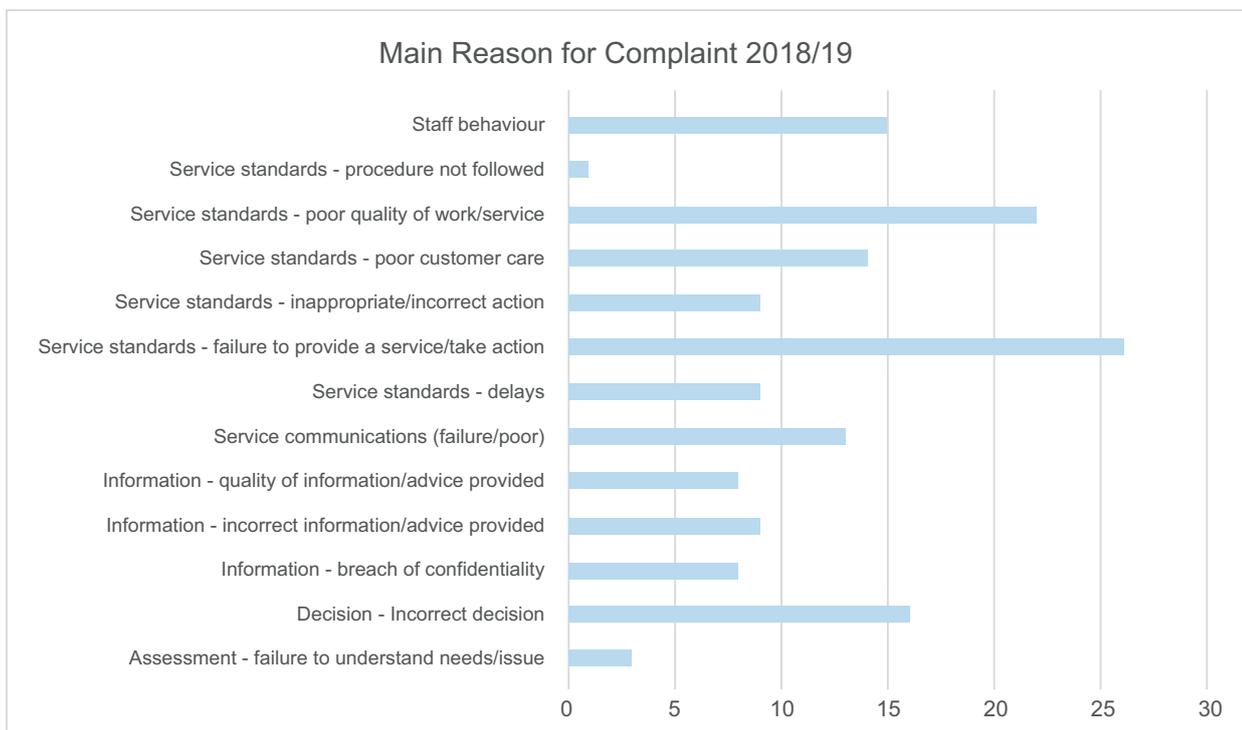
The majority of customer feedback recorded takes the form of complaints rather than comments or compliments (this may be due to recording practice, with staff members less likely to more formally report a compliment). Of all the customer feedback recorded, 76% of cases were complaints.

Of the 152 complaints received within the year, 106 were corporate cases (54% of all the formal feedback received, and 46 were statutory complaints (23% of all feedback). The process on page 6 highlights the statutory complaints process and timescales for children’s services. Corporate complaints tend to be less complex in nature.

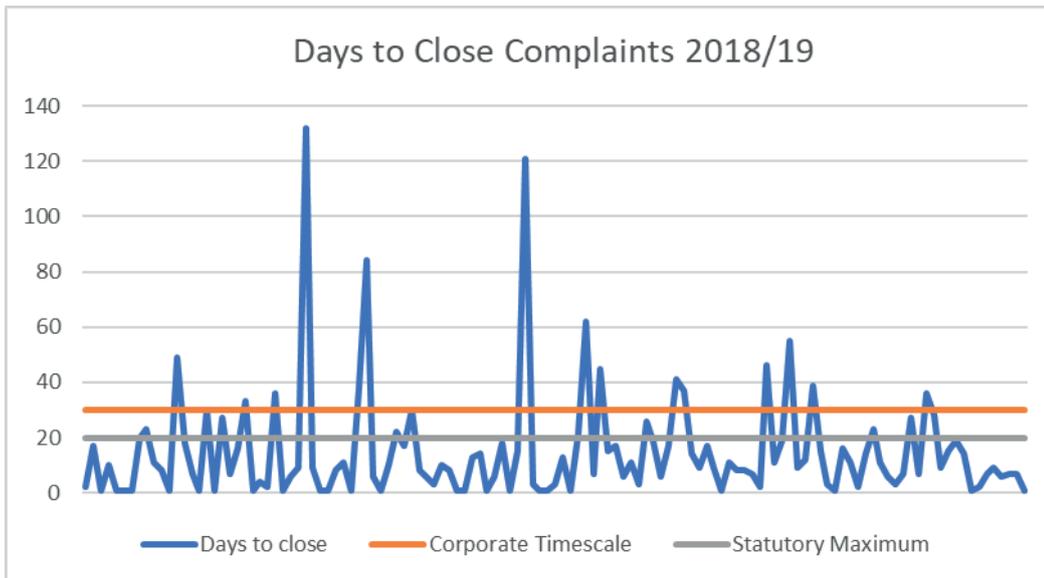


During 2018/19 complainants commonly referred to concerns relating to a failure to provide a service, or customers complained because they were concerned they had been provided with a poor quality of service. Complainants challenging a decision, poor customer care and lack of/poor communication and staff behaviour were the other dominant themes within the complaints made. However, despite complaints falling within these overarching categories, there were few patterns or common themes within the complaints made, making it difficult to find areas of performance in need of attention (complaints were spread across teams and processes).

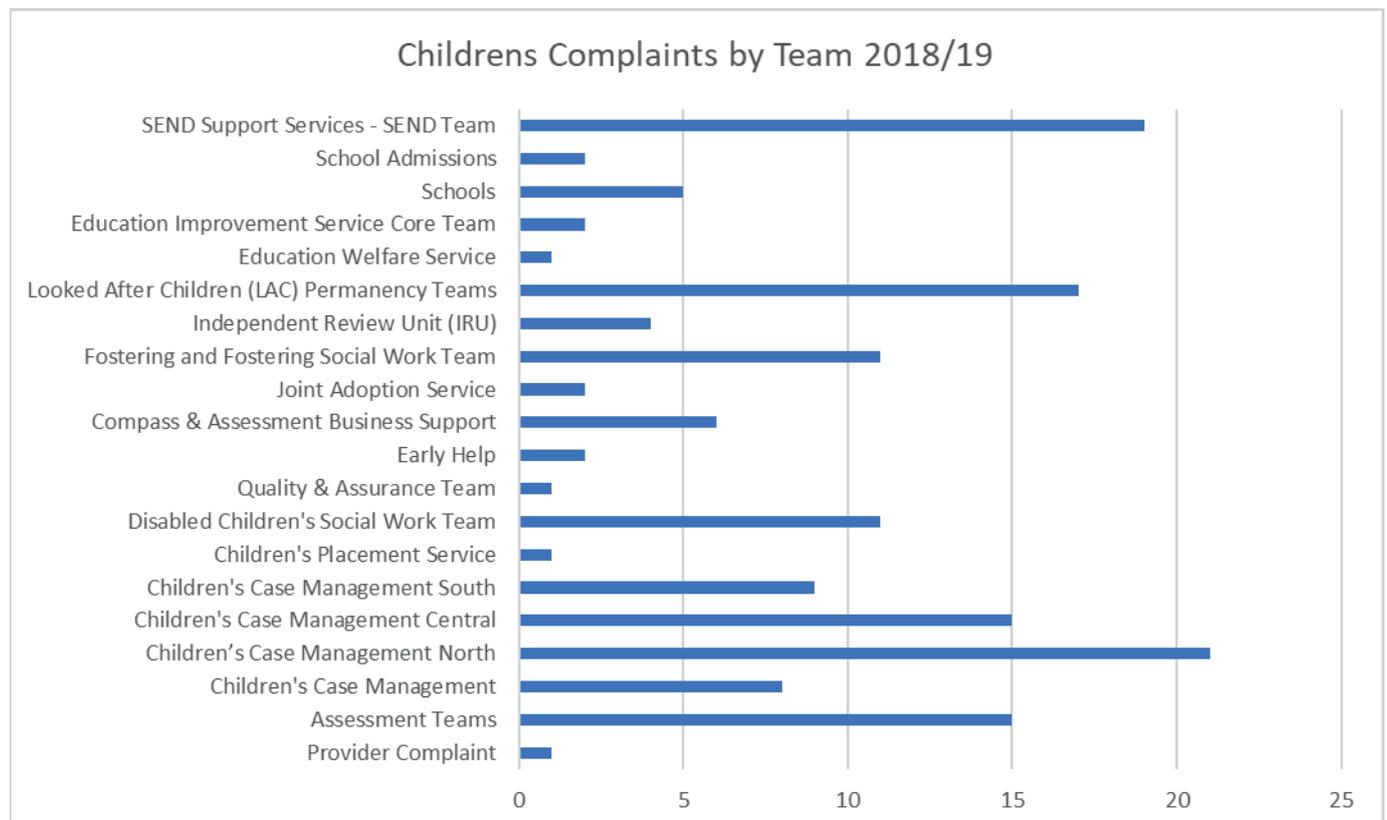
There were very few complaints related to not following procedures and failure to understand customers’ needs/issues. This suggests good performance in these areas.



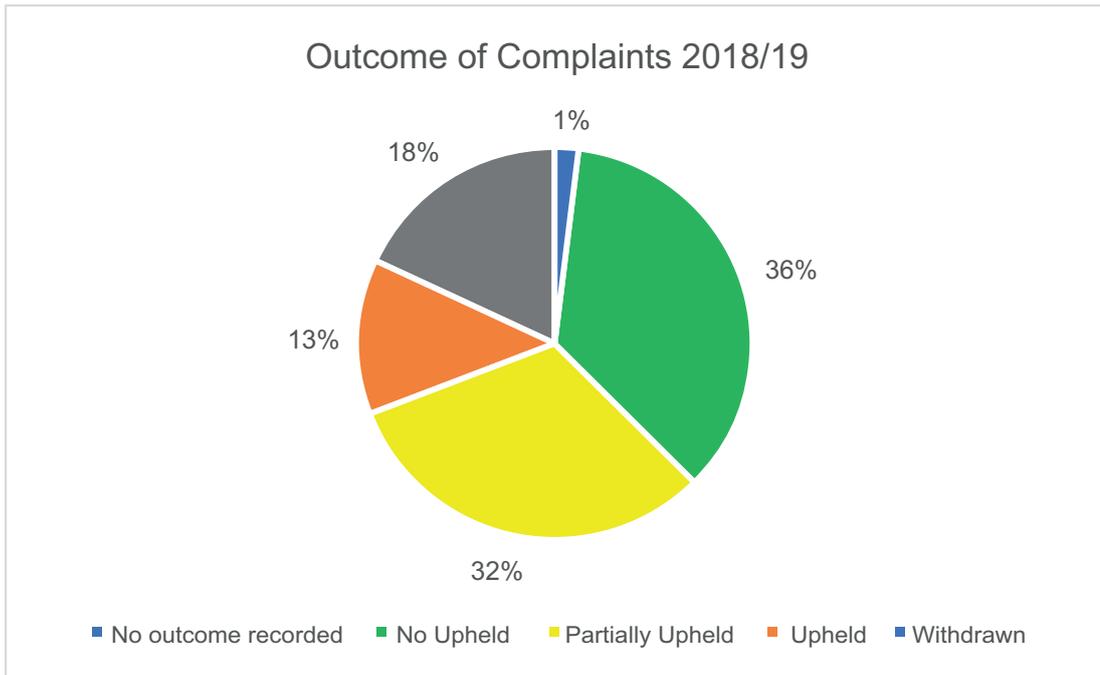
During 2018/19 Children’s Services took an average of 15 days to close stage 1 complaints. Corporate complaints took an average of 17 days to close (within the 30 working days timescale). Statutory complaints took an average of 11 days to close suggesting that, in some cases, the complexity of issues required correspondence with complainants to extend the initial 10 working days timescale in order to allow for more detailed investigation. Although average performance is within target it is always important to look at all cases and the chart highlights that it was not possible to resolve all cases within the targets set.



Quarterly reporting considers complaints by team in order to understand whether or not teams require any additional support to identify the reasons for complaints. The analysis highlights that complaints are spread across teams (as are compliments) rather than focused on particular areas of service, although some types of service are more likely to result in feedback than others. Overall in 2018/19 Case Management Teams received 35% of the total number of complaints (53 of the 153), SEND Support Services received 19 complaints and LAC Permanency Teams received 17 complaints.



At the end of 2018/19, 139 of the 152 complaints received were closed (some recent complaints remained open at the end of the financial year (14). Of those completed, 13% were upheld, 32% were partly upheld and 36% were not upheld. Other complaints were withdrawn or resulted in no recorded outcome.



In addition to understanding the outcome of stage 1 complaints it is important to consider how many complaints progress beyond stage 1. During 2018/19 few complaint cases progressed beyond stage 1. This suggests effective stage 1 handling. In total 3 cases (all of which were statutory) progressed beyond stage 1 within the year. 4 cases have been raised with the Local Government Ombudsman.

The Local Government Ombudsman’s report for 2018/19 considers complaints referred to the LGO within the year (so this will include complaints referred to Shropshire Council in 2017/18). Of the 91 complaints the LGO received for Shropshire Council during 2018/19, 13 were for Children’s Services (including education), 2 were considered and both were not upheld. 4 of the cases were referred back to Shropshire Council for local resolution.

Shropshire Council’s data shows that during 2018/19 there were 13 complaints relating to looked after children. During the year 5 complaints were made by children themselves.

Overall Children’s Services seem to have performed well through 2018/19 in relation to the handling of customer feedback but it is important to put performance into context with previous performance to compare change over time. The next section of the report considers performance in comparison to 2016/17 and 2017/18.

4. Annual Comparison

A comparison with 2016/17 and 2017/18 data highlights that the number of complaints has increased in 2018/19. Analysis of the complaints has identified the nature of complaints is also changing. This may be attributed to a new system for recording complaints and other customer feedback which was introduced in 2018. The new system enables teams to capture more detailed information which can then be used to analyse and improve the customer experience. The section of this report on recommendations will be used to highlight where further work may be required.

Number of compliments – very slight increase in compliments

- There were 40 compliments recorded in 2018/19, 37 recorded in 2017/18 and 36 in 2016/17 showing a slight increase in the number of compliments received.
- Compliments have been made at a relatively steady rate over the year (although there were 8 received in January, more than in any other month). On average 3 compliments are received per month.



Similar

Number of complaints – increase in complaint numbers

- The number of complaints received in 2018/19 was 153. In 2017/18 there were 123 complaints and in 2016/17 there were 102 complaints, showing an increase in complaints.
- There do not appear to be any patterns within the complaints highlighting a reason for the increase in complaint numbers. It could be that overall demand for services has increased and consequently led to a proportionate increase in complaints cases. It is difficult to determine with the data available but monitoring will continue over time to ensure this remains an area of focus.



Worse

Nature of complaints – different challenges to 2017/18

- When comparing the type of complaints made it is possible to see a change in the nature of complaint. Complaints relating to information occur strongly in 2018/19 but have not been recorded as a key theme previously. In 2018/19 there were 8 complaints relating to breach of confidentiality, 9 relating to incorrect information/advice provided and 8 relating to quality of information/advice provided. Public awareness of information and rights has increased following the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
- Complaints about communication have been consistent over the previous 3 years. (14 in 2016/17 and 14 in 2017/18 and 13 in 2018/19).
- In 2018/19 the most dominant theme within complaints was ‘failure to provide a service/take action’, featuring in 26 complaints. This was not recorded as a dominant theme in previous years.
- The number of complaints relating to staff conduct have increased from 10 in 2017/18 to 15 in 2018/19.
- The 2018/19 data suggests that ‘poor quality of work’ remains a concern with 22 complaints. However, fewer people are raising concerns over decisions with 16 complaints under the category ‘decision - incorrect decision’ compared to 21 in 2017/18.



Worse

Days to Close – decreased

- In 2016/17 it took an average of 25.8 working days to close Children’s Services complaints. In 2017/18 the average timescale to close complaints was 29.5 working days and in 2018/19 the average was 15 working days.
- This shows a significant reduction in the average days taken to close complaints and reflects the focus placed on performance. However, it should be noted that small numbers of cases are exceeding the timescales set and continued effort is needed to keep these to a minimum.



Outcome of complaints – remains similar overall

- In 2016/17 the percentage of complaints upheld was 23% but dropped significantly in 2017/18 to 8%. In 2018/19 the percentage of complaints upheld was 13%. With relatively small numbers of cases percentages can fluctuate significantly but upheld cases remain a small proportion of all cases investigated.
- The number of complaints that were partly upheld in 2018/19 has remained consistent with previous years. (32% of complaints were partly upheld in 2018/19, 33% in 2017/18 and 34% in 2016/17.)
- A greater proportion of complaints were not upheld in 2018/19. 36% were not upheld, compared to 30% and 31% in previous years. The remaining proportion of complaints were withdrawn, fell outside of Shropshire Council’s jurisdiction or did not result in a finding.



Complaints progressing beyond stage 1 – remains similar

- In 2018/19 there were 4 requests to progress to stage 2. During 2016/17 there were 6 requests to progress to stage 2 and in 2017/18 the total was 7. This highlights little change over the last 3 years in terms of complaint progression.



5. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council’s Children’s Services received 40 compliments in 2018/19. Examples of the compliments recorded are shown below.

Compliment for School Support Services: “Please can you pass on a compliment to [name removed] at [name removed] School. Within 24 hours of contacting the form tutor regarding the performance and general wellbeing of a student, he had contacted all appropriate teachers and gave in depth feedback and reassurance. As a result of his findings, he also pulled the student aside and commended him on his improvement over the last two months. As a result I have a very happy newly motivated teenager. [Name removed]’s overall email, actions, and response was outstanding and deserves recognition. Thank you.” (Parent).

Compliment for Joint Adoption Service: “I would like to compliment a Specialist LAC Teacher: “I personally would like to thank you for your dedication and input to see that [name removed] received everything she so desperately needs during her education journey. I felt the PEP was carried out exactly the way it was supposed to and that is down to you. Thank you, I’m just glad that [name removed] has someone dedicated to ensure she has what she deserves.....”

Compliment for an Enable worker: “[Name removed] embodies the ethos of Enable. He utterly respects the wishes of his clients but knows when to speak up if he feels he can provide some useful advice. He has supported me personally to grow and develop within the workplace at my own pace and it has been a pleasure working with him.”

Compliment for Enable: “Customer wanted to say a huge thank you to [name removed] and [name removed] for giving her son the confidence to get to college on the bus. This is going to be so helpful as he works towards independence. He is so proud that he passed the travel training – he was grinning from ear to ear yesterday and has told everybody.”

Compliment received for a Targeted Youth Support Worker, from a family receiving Early Help support: “[Name removed] has always had a very warm and friendly approach, always doing the best he could, giving great information and support in times when life was very difficult with my son. If we were in crisis he was always quick to respond to help us. A big ‘Thank You’ to [name removed] from us all, especially my son. We couldn’t have got through the last two and a half years without you.”

Compliment for the Educational Psychology Service regarding Head Teachers’ Peer Group Supervision: “It was brilliant this afternoon. Thank you for providing this service - most welcome - really clears the head and gives food for thought”. (Head Teacher of a Shropshire primary school).

Compliment for [name removed], Early Help Family Support Worker: “When any person, including myself, is in this situation and has never had any professional help or support in their life it’s very daunting. I was very lucky to have [name removed] on board. I strongly believe if it was not for her support I would not be here today. I still have a long way to go to get my son on the right tracks but slowly we are getting there. I can only highly praise [name removed] for the fantastic person she is; always a smile, nothing too much trouble, plus the professional help and support we have received, and are still receiving, from her is overwhelming.”



6. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council’s Children’s Services received 152 statutory children’s and corporate children’s complaints during 2018/19. Some example complaints have been included to illustrate the way complaints are received and the nature of the issues raised. All complaints have been anonymised and personal details removed. In some cases wording may have been changed very slightly to ensure anonymity (with steps taken not to alter the point being made within the complaint). Please note that many of these cases were not upheld. Sometimes complaints can arise from a misunderstanding or expectations beyond the level of service Shropshire Council is required to deliver.

The customer is not happy that Education Welfare Officer [name removed] turned up at his house yesterday, unannounced while he and his wife were out and spoke to his 12 year old daughter about school attendance. Customer said his daughter is having anxiety issues which the school are aware of and the school have put a plan in place to try and help his daughter. She just attends so many hours when she is able to. Education Welfare Officer phoned [name removed] (the parent) later yesterday and customer did not like the attitude of the officer who threatened court action and fines. The customer said this has knocked his daughter back again and he went home to find his wife and daughter in tears. The customer is asking why an appointment was not made with himself or his wife and is not happy that his daughter was spoken to without them being there.

The complainant is not happy with the assessment report and “feels the report is sloppy, hurried, at times unprofessional, flawed, with incomplete investigations and misrepresentations”.

The complainant wishes to complain about the timeline breach in waiting for the amendment to his son’s Education Health and Care plan, in relation to Code of Practice Section 9.17-9.19. The annual review took place in April, however, 4 months on and they are still awaiting confirmation of amendment and Plan, as well as associated level of funding.

The complainant does not feel that the social worker is listening to her. She says that 6 hours (direct payment) have been awarded but she does not feel that this is sufficient.

Customer is unhappy that social services did not explain the process correctly and that they were not invited to meetings. The case should never have been taken on by social services as it was later discovered that her daughter had a medical condition.

The complainant does not feel supported by his social worker and he does not feel that his wishes and feelings are being considered in his care plan. Due to the difficulties that [name removed] has had trying to communicate his views with his social worker about his living arrangements it is making him feel angry and depressed.

The complainant wishes to complain about a court report. She states that how an event is described in the court report is untrue and not what happened.

The complainant is not happy that a social worker had written things the complainant had said in an assessment when she wasn’t told that they would be included.



7. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council’s Children’s Services recorded learning and/or actions against 30 cases (20%) of complaints in 2018/19. Learning and actions are more likely to be recorded when a case is upheld or partly upheld and some fault can be found. For many cases not upheld there will not be any learning or actions to implement.

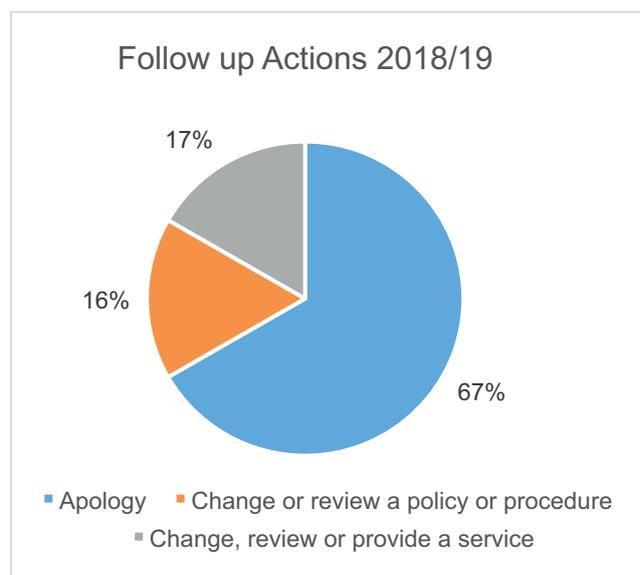
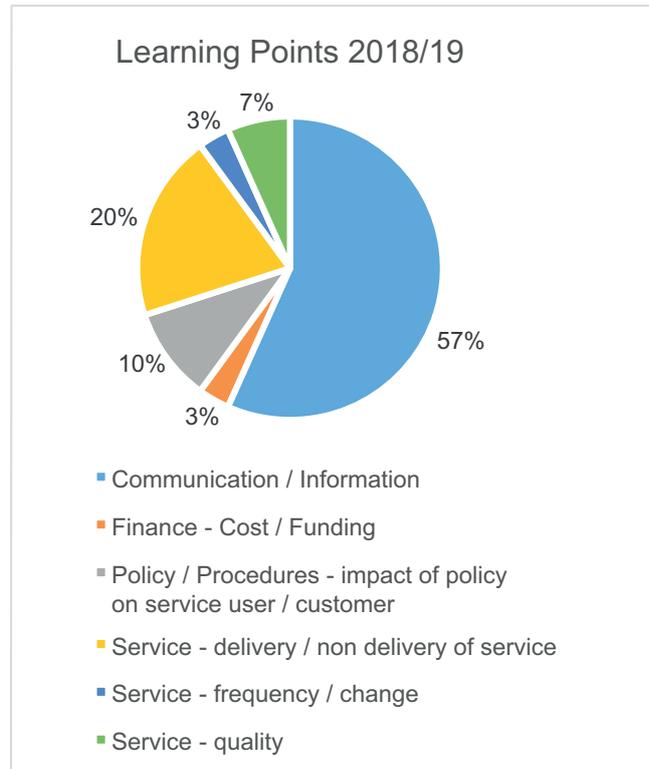
Of the learning points recorded in 2018/19:

- 57% related to the learning concerning communication and/or information provided.
- 20% of learning was associated with the delivery or non-delivery of a service.
- 10% of learning related to the impact a policy or procedure had on a complainant.
- 7% of learning points were in relation to service quality.

Of the actions that were recorded against the complaints closed in 2018/19:

- There were 6 complaints where follow up actions were implemented.
- 4 complainants were issued with a formal apology (there may have been other less formal apologies provided within complaint responses).
- Other actions undertaken included changing or reviewing a policy/procedure and changing or reviewing the provision of a service.

Complaints performance monitoring considers the main problem experienced, but this does not do justice to the complexity of issues that can be raised within a complaint and investigated. Reading complaints in detail highlights that although a complaint may relate to a specific service or concern about lack of a service, there may be other issues such as lack of communication, the way someone felt or perception of someone’s attitude towards them. The way staff consider and investigate complaints allows for more learning to take place and allows managers to influence the practice of staff members.



8. Example Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council's Children's Services maintains a focus on complaints reporting and each quarter takes the learning and actions from complaints and considers how the learning can be used to make improvements. There are some examples of learning below. These examples may appear out of context because they are not provided with the original complaint but they do highlight how the Council responds to complaints without sharing confidential information. These examples are mainly from upheld and partly upheld cases. Complaints that were not upheld may occasionally include some learning within notes on the case and often this can relate to misunderstandings of how the Council has delivered a service or what to expect from a service.

The Service Manager has arranged for additional telephone/reception training to be undertaken by all members of the Administration Team. Discussions were also held with the Social Work Team Managers regarding Social Workers responsibilities around management of incoming calls and the returning of calls in a timely manner.

The complainant was unhappy that the interpreter she had requested was not available when social services made an unannounced visit. All social workers will be reminded of the VISS Sign Language Interpreting Service available to support families.

Following the complaint Shropshire Council will ensure that discussions are held between the Social Worker and Service Manager. This will ensure that practice will be monitored to ensure that good practice is observed both in terms of timeliness and completion of reports.

[Name removed] spoke to the customer and they discussed the process with regards to the assessment. The customer was informed that the assessment would be completed by the end of October and she would ask a social worker to call the customer when she was back in the office to see how things are. The customer was happy with this and apologised with regards the comments she made and said she was at a low point at that time.

The complaint investigation has highlighted that copies of minutes from meetings had not been provided to the complainant. This was due to a change in the administration team, which caused some difficulties in relation to sending copies of minutes of meetings. There is now a system in place to address the issue and minutes from the meetings have now been posted.

[Name removed] has offered to join a meeting with Powys agencies so that they may look at which services are available to provide appropriate intervention and support, including what education provision will be the most appropriate to meet the young person's needs.

Shropshire Council apologised for the delay that occurred and the effect that it had on the family. There was a significant delay between when the panel awarded the Direct Payments and the process being commenced. There was a delayed transfer to the Disabled Children's Team and confusion over a closure letter sent February 2018, due to panel having not agreed the service provision at that time. Review of the child's needs should have happened before the closure.

The report has been re-opened so the factual inaccuracies (spelling of names, calling family members by the correct title and factual errors) can be amended. On completion, the updated version will be sent to the customer. There are elements that have not been changed due to the information being reported by different sources, as identified within the report, and a need for the information to be present.

Shropshire Council has apologised that the process was not clearly explained to the customer by the social worker, and that from her description of events, the social worker may not have verbally communicated effectively with her. Therefore, the quality of service may not have achieved the usual standards leading to the customer seeing the social worker as 'unprofessional'.



9. Progress Update

There have been a number of developments over the last 12 months as recommendations set out within the Annual Report 2017/18 have been implemented. Key achievements over the last 12 months are summarised below:

	Action 2017/18	Progress Made
1	There was an action to remind all teams to record compliments in addition to the recording of complaints.	The Children’s Services Service User Feedback meetings have maintained a focus on the collection of all feedback (formal and informal). The meetings have proven to be a regular reminder for service managers of the importance of the collection and recording of different types of feedback, including compliments. Many teams are recording solicited feedback separately (for example feedback gathered through evaluation sheets and user surveys).
2	The monitoring of complaint numbers and patterns was included within the recommendations for 2017/18.	Although regular performance monitoring has been in place before, new reporting has been introduced over the last 12 months to allow the tailoring of reports to team level and greater interrogation of the data by service managers. New reports allow users to drill down to specific time periods or themes to better understand the nature of complaints.
3	Communication was a fairly dominant theme within complaints during 2017/18 and improvements to communication were recommended.	Over the last 12 months improvements have been made to the information provided for members of the public so that they understand how to make a complaint. New leaflets and posters have been introduced and changes to websites have been made. Children’s services staff have been promoting this and have also been conscious of the need to effectively communicate to prevent complaints from arising. The focus on improved communication appears to have generated improvement with communication a less dominant theme within the 2018/19 complaints.
4	Frequent changes in social worker featured as a common concern (and subsequent recommendation for action) in 2017/18.	Children’s Services have been conscious of the need for a more stable workforce and have taken steps where possible to address this concern. This issue still features within complaints (perhaps less frequently) but it is recognised that it is an issue that will require attention over a longer time period because the issue is also driven by external political and socio-economic influences.
5	Working to reduce the number of days to close complaints featured as a recommendation in 2017/18.	Average number of days to close complaints is featured as a main performance measure within reporting and additional complaints reports are produced to highlight complaints nearing timescale or overdue. There has been an improvement in average days to close since 2017/18. Despite this improved performance there are cases exceeding timescales and as a result a similar recommendation is included for 2019/20.

	Action 2017/18	Progress Made
6	A key recommendation included using the complaints system replacement process to collect additional information to assist with complaint management and reporting.	The previous complaints system did not allow for all data needed to be recorded (for example complaints relating to Looked After children and complaints made by children), the system did not include forms for all of the statutory children’s complaint stages, and required manual checks, and the collection of additional information outside of the system. A new complaints system was introduced in October 2018. The system has been built to overcome previous gaps. In the short term it has been necessary to operate two systems and reporting has been more difficult as a result, but it is hoped that once the new system is fully functional new opportunities can be realised during 2019/20.
7	Ongoing training and the provision of information for staff was a key recommendation.	Over the last year the provision of information for staff and staff training has been an area for action and progress has been made. Sessions have taken place within team meetings and with team managers to ensure those responding to complaints have the information and support they need from the Council’s Feedback and Insight Team. Information has been fed into the staff induction process. The Council’s internal communication tool Yammer has also been used to share information. Further work is planned and will continue into 2019/20 and beyond.

10. Recommendations

Complaints performance for Shropshire Council’s Children’s Services is good overall but continued efforts are needed to ensure this is maintained. Recommendations for 2019/20 are:

1. There has been a 50% increase in complaint numbers over the last 3 years. This increase is expected to continue in line with demand for services. Any small increases in complaint numbers can have an impact due to the work involved in undertaking robust complaint investigations. It is recommended that Children’s Services staff continue their work to encourage informal feedback that may allow any concerns to be addressed early or preventative action taken, before issues lead to the creation of formal complaints.
2. Although every effort has been made to ensure the data contained in this report is as accurate as possible, the extraction of data from 2 different systems and some early implementation issues with the new system means that there is a risk of slight over reporting of cases. Complaints have increased generally across the whole council due to a variety of factors such as more accessible complaint reporting using a variety of methods, greater awareness of the right to complain, population/user increases etc. Nevertheless, a recommendation is that data quality should be a focus throughout 2019/20 to ensure early implementation issues with the new system are addressed.
3. Complaints are currently spread across teams, with more complaints for teams dealing with complex issues or higher volumes of customers. It is important to continue to monitor the services receiving complaints through regular performance reporting. Over 2018/19 Children’s Case Management Teams, SEND Services and Looked After Children Permanency Teams received more complaints than other services. It is recommended that work takes place with these teams to see if there is any action that can be taken to minimise future complaints.
4. All services can find that there are times of pressure, particularly when there is increased demand or staff absences. As an ongoing recommendation it is suggested that team managers maintain regular communication with senior managers if complaint handling at stage 1 becomes difficult. It is as a result of effective stage 1 complaints handling that stage 2 cases are kept to a minimum. In addition, Shropshire Council’s Feedback and Insight Team should publish additional information for staff to highlight good practice in complaint handling including complaint examples.
5. Information handling and information governance issues have featured in a greater number of complaints over the last 12 months. It is recommended that information governance continues to be an area of focus particularly concerning the accuracy and quality of records.



Recommendations continued...

6. Although not a very strong theme there have been some complaints made concerning perceived bias by social workers. It is recommended that social workers are reminded, that it is good practice to obtain evidence to support opinions, and that all interested parties should be spoken to, to gain a full picture of events. This links back to recording accurate information in recommendation 3 above. Similarly, within complaints investigations it is important to obtain evidence from a wide range of sources before drawing any conclusions.
7. Although overall performance in relation to timescales has improved, there are still some longer running complaints exceeding timescales. Investigators should be reminded of the importance of being responsive on allocation of complaints and preventing unnecessary delays. The Feedback and Insight Team work with Children’s Services to highlight where delays are taking place. It is recommended that reports focusing on outstanding cases are shared with senior managers.
8. Significant progress has been made over recent years in the way Shropshire Council handles provider complaints. Priority has been placed on Adult Social Care and large corporate contracts. Arrangements in Children’s Services appear to have been working well. However, it is now recommended that this is subject to a review to ensure provider complaints arrangements made by Children’s Services commissioners are working effectively and any development work, should it be required, can be identified and implemented.



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