

# Customer Feedback Annual Report Children's Services 2015/16

Feedback and Insight Team, Commissioning Support  
September 2016





## Summary

This report covers the customer feedback obtained by Shropshire Council's Children's Services over the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016. The report covers comments, compliments and complaints formally recorded on the council's customer feedback system. The report is split into two key sections:

- Section 1 covers children's social care services (pages 5 to 18)
- Section 2 covers learning and skills services (pages 19 to 23)

The majority of children's social care complaints fall under the category of a statutory complaint. These are complaints that include an element relating to social care services and they are handled under the children's complaints procedure. Some complaints may relate to support services or other activities and these are dealt with as corporate complaints under the council's corporate complaints procedure.

All learning and skills complaints are corporate complaints. Learning and skills services receive small numbers of complaints. To find out more about the way Shropshire Council collects customer feedback, and to obtain copies of the children's complaints procedure and corporate complaints procedure, use the link below:

Children's customer feedback:

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

Corporate customer feedback

<https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/corporate-complaints/>

**"Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning"**

Quote from Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft

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

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



## Key findings

- During 2015/16 Children's Services received:
  - 10 comments
  - 108 complaints (62 were statutory complaints and 46 were corporate)
  - 38 compliments
- Complaints comprise 69% of all customer feedback received by Children's Services. This is largely as a result of recording practice: greater emphasis is placed upon the recording of complaints, due to the need to respond and resolve them.
- There isn't a particular pattern across the year for customer feedback but June, July, December and January do seem to be slightly busier months for customer feedback. On average, Children's Services receives 13.3 cases of customer feedback (complaints, comments and compliments) per month.
- The nature of complaints varied across the directorate, but a common theme related to customers being dissatisfied with communication. Common issues included feedback concerning a lack of adequate information, delays in providing information or a service, and the way in which staff members spoke to customers.
- The analysis suggests that the majority of complaints are handled efficiently and resolved within the timescales set. However, the analysis highlights that some complaints, particularly complex complaints, take long periods of time to resolve and work may be required to consider how staff can be supported to progress these more complex complaints more quickly. Corporate complaints, in particular, should not be exceeding the 12 weeks allocated for stage 1 and 2.
- The outcome of complaints suggests that investigating officers are not finding many problems when they investigate. In total, only 14 complaints received by Children's Services were upheld during 2015/16.
- Very few complaints progress beyond stage 1. Only 12 complaints progressed beyond stage 1 for the whole of Children's Services in 2015/16. This suggests effective handling of stage 1 complaints. If complaints are not well handled at stage 1, then customers will comment that the issues they raised were not adequately addressed and request that the complaint is progressed to stage 2 or review (corporate and statutory complaints are handled differently at stage 2).
- Overall complaints performance remains very similar in 2015/16 to 2014/15. In most areas performance has improved or remains the same. Two areas of performance have been highlighted as areas in need of attention during 2016/17:
  - the time taken to respond to complaints (a small number of long-running complaints can negatively impact on overall performance); and
  - the number of complaints being upheld or partly upheld (this increased from 2014/15).
- Quarterly reporting of customer feedback is used to highlight any concerns and implement remedial action. Alongside this reporting we will also monitor progress to implement the recommendations included in this annual customer feedback report.

## Children's Social Care Customer Feedback 2015/16

### 1. Introduction

The Children 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 for people dealing with social care services. Getting the Best from Complaints provides guidance for local authorities on implementing the Children Act 1989. The regulations require three internal stages to the complaints procedure:

- Stage 1 - Local Resolution
- Stage 2 - Investigation
- Stage 3 - Review Panel.

The requirements also include the production of an annual report on complaints. This annual report must be made available to members of the public, council staff and elected councillors. In order to fulfil the requirements, this report considers the customer feedback Shropshire Council's Children's Services received between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

In addition to the annual report, Shropshire Council prepares quarterly customer feedback reports. These are designed to develop a clear understanding of customer experience and support us in our work to address concerns and implement actions in order to achieve service improvement.

Complaints containing an element of social care fall under the statutory children's social care guidelines. Some complaints we receive for Children's Services do not relate to social care services and these are handled as corporate complaints. Those complaints are included in this report in order to provide a comprehensive overview of all complaints.

This section of the annual report describes the compliments, comments and complaints Children's Services social care teams and services received in 2015/16.

#### 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 with Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

For a copy of the leaflets we use see:

<https://new.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.

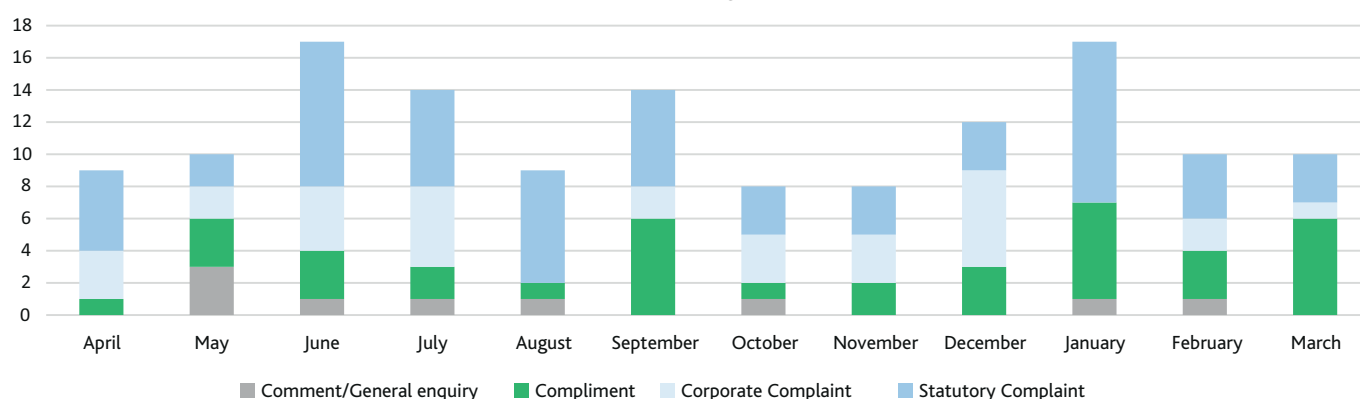
**Ombudsman** - If a complaint cannot be resolved locally it can be investigated by the Ombudsman. The council has a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Complaint responses are often complex and it can be necessary to collate, catalogue and provide 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.

### 3. Customer Feedback 2015/16

- In 2015/16 there were 138 cases of feedback recorded for Children's Services social care teams:
  - 36 compliments
  - 9 comments
  - 31 corporate complaints
  - 62 statutory complaints

Customer Feedback by Month 2015-16



- The average number of customer feedback responses recorded per month during 2015/16 was 11.5.

- June 2015 and January 2016 saw the greatest total number of comments, compliments and complaints recorded (17).

- October and November 2015 saw the fewest total number of comments, compliments and complaints recorded (8 in each month).

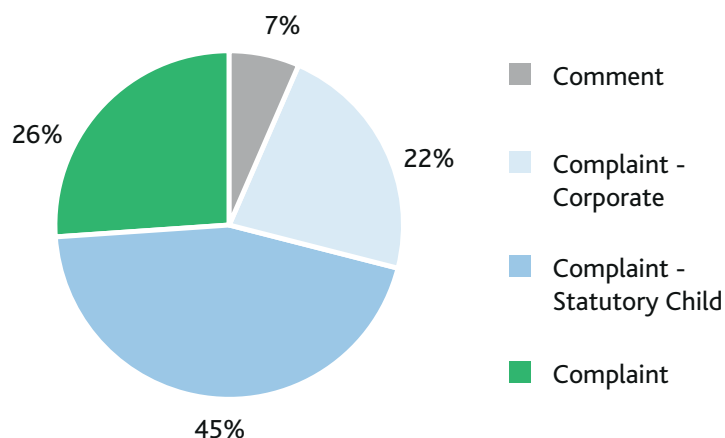
- Quarter 3 saw the lowest levels of customer feedback received in the year. Numbers were fairly consistent across quarters 1, 2 and 4.

- The majority of customer feedback recorded is formed of complaints rather than comments or compliments (this is due to recording practice, and something that is picked up within the recommendations towards the end of this report).

- Of all the customer feedback received in the year, complaints comprised 67%.

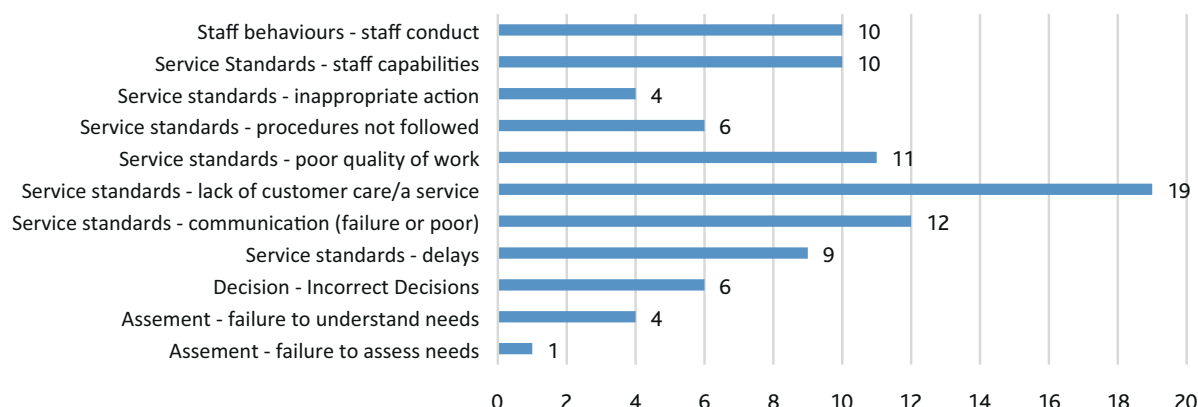
- Of the 93 complaints received within the year, 31 were corporate complaints and 62 were statutory children's services complaints. The process on page 6 highlights the statutory complaints timescales and deadlines for children's services. Corporate complaints tend to be less complex and are therefore easier to close within a shorter timeframe, although work takes place to resolve stage 1 corporate complaints within 6 weeks (a 12 week total is given for stages 1 and 2).

Types of Customer Feedback Received 2015-16



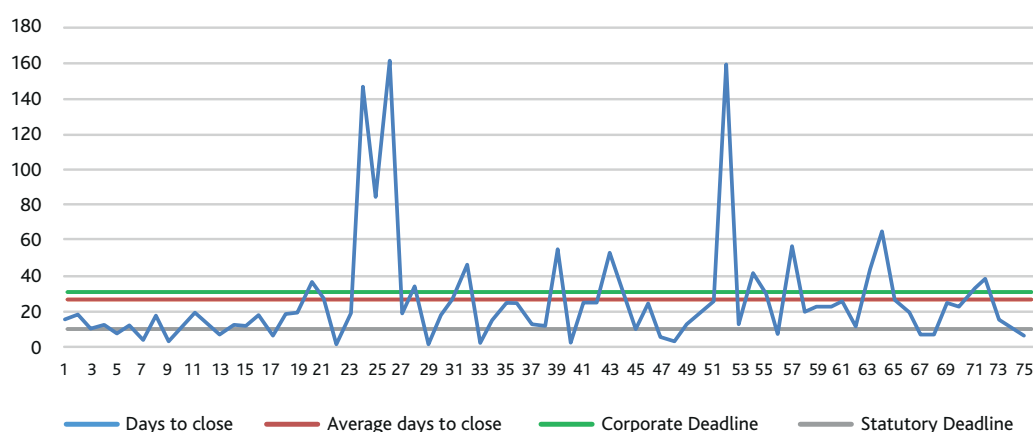
- The reasons for making complaints during 2015/16 were varied, suggesting there is no strong pattern within the data. The category used the most often, for 19 of the 92 complaints was 'Service Standards- lack of customer care/a service'.
- Service standards is the main category under which complaints were made within the year.
- Quality of service, delays in providing a service and inadequate communication appear to be some of the more common themes within the complaints recorded. This is explored in more detail later in the report.

### Main reason for complaint 2015/16



- During 2015/16 Children's Social Care Services took an average of 26.5 days to close stage 1 complaints. On average corporate complaints were closed within the corporate timescales, taking an average of 18.8 days (up to 6 weeks or 30 days is allowed). Statutory complaints tended to take longer (an average of 31.7 days) suggesting that the complexity of those complaints required correspondence with complainants to extend the 10-day timescale.

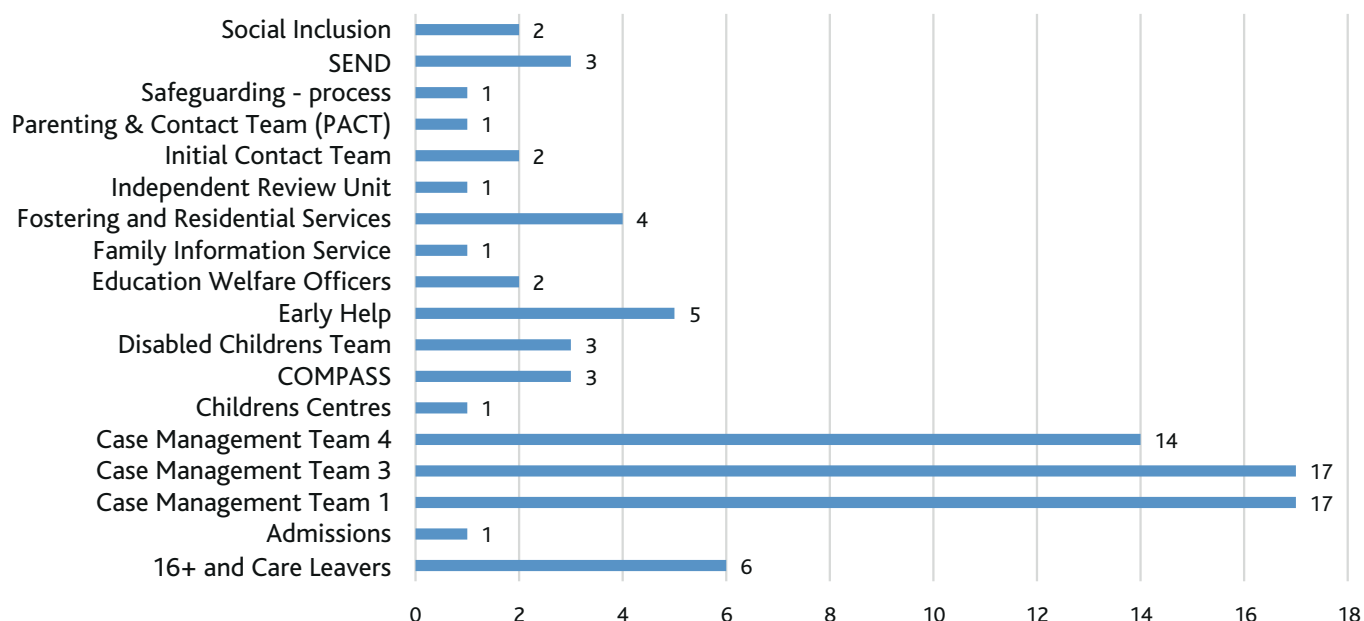
### Days to close - Stage 1 Complaints 2015/16



- Quarterly reporting includes consideration of the outcome of complaints by teams or a service area, in order to understand whether or not some teams require additional support to identify how complaints may be reduced in number. The outcome of that analysis highlights that the majority of complaints sit with case management teams, with low numbers spread across other teams. More detail is shown in the chart on the following page.

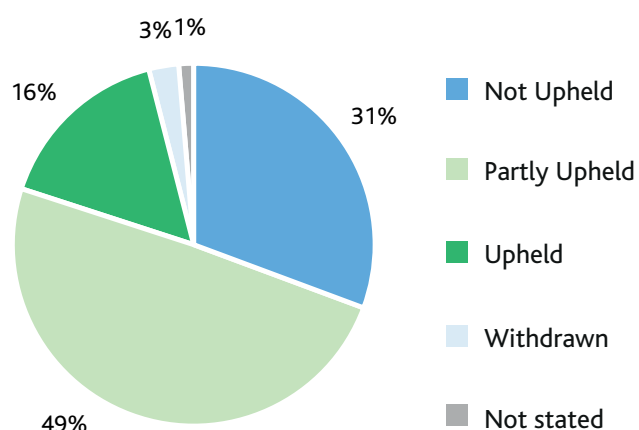


### Children's Services Complaints by Team 2015/16



- During 2015/16, 75 Children's Services social care teams complaints were closed at the end of stage 1. Of those, 31% were not upheld, 49% were partly upheld and 16% (12 complaints) were upheld.

### Outcome of Stage 1 Complaints 2015-16



- In addition to understanding the outcome of stage 1 complaints it is necessary to consider how many complaints progress beyond stage 1. During 2015/16 very few requests were made to progress a complaint beyond stage 1. This suggests that the vast majority of complaints were resolved at stage 1. It is possible that a proportion of the stage 1 complaints remaining open at the end of the year (10 complaints) could progress to stage 2 over the coming months. During 2015/16 there were 5 stage 2 complaints. Of the 5, 1 was withdrawn, 1 was partly upheld and 3 are ongoing.
- Although the complaints system does not allow for clear identification of complaints made by children, a check of cases has highlighted that, during the year, 3 complaints were made by children through two advocates and a solicitor.
- Overall Children's Services social care teams have performed well through 2015/16 with small numbers of complaints per service/team. Most complaints sit with the case management teams and this would be expected due to the nature of the service. There is the recognition that the learning from complaints may help to reduce the number of complaints made in future and this is explored in more detail on pages 14 to 16.

## 4. Annual Comparison 2014/15 and 2015/16

### Number of compliments - increased

- The number of compliments recorded in 2015/16 increased from 17 compliments in 2014/15 to 36 in 2015/16. This is likely to be the result of improved recording but nevertheless it is a positive development and should be considered an improvement.
- Compliments have been made at steady rates over the months with an average of 3 compliments a month in 2015/16.



Better

### Number of complaints - remains similar

- The number of complaints received by Children's Services social care teams in 2015/16 was very similar to 2014/15 levels. 92 complaints were received in 2015/16 compared to 97 in 2014/15.



The Same

### Nature of complaints - problems identified in 2014/15 have reduced

- When comparing the main complaints categories for 2014/15 with the last year, it is possible to see that 'staff behaviours - staff conduct' remains unchanged but that the other top categories for 2014/15 have reduced in scale including:
  - In 2014/15 there were 32 complaints recorded as 'Service Standards-communication (failure or poor)' and that reduced to 12 in 2015/16.
  - In 2014/15 there were 22 complaints in the category 'Service Standards - procedures not followed'. This reduced to 6 in 2015/16.
  - In 2014/15 there were 18 complaints relating to assessment and that reduced to 6 in 2015/16.



Better

### Days to close - it is taking longer to close complaints

- In 2014/15 it took an average of 20 days to close complaints to Children's Services social care teams. In 2015/16 it took an average of 26.5 days to close complaints. However, although average timescales have increased, it should be noted that a small number of long-running cases can significantly impact on the annual average.



Worse

### Outcome of complaints - More complaints are partly upheld

- In 2014/15 17% of complaints were upheld and 25% were partly upheld. In 2015/16 the percentage of upheld complaints remained similar at 16% but significantly more complaints were partly upheld (49%). This highlights that the proportion of complaints not upheld has fallen significantly from 56% in 2014/15 to 31% in 2015/16.



Worse

### Complaints Progressing Beyond Stage 1 - remains similar

- During 2014/15 there were 8 requests to progress to stage 2, 4 complaints were externally investigated at Stage 2 and 4 were withdrawn. There were no requests to move to Stage 3.
- In 2015/16 there were 5 stage 2 investigations and a review. 4 contacts were made with the LGO but 1 was premature, 1 was not investigated (due to a court decision), 1 case resulted in a 'no finding' and for 1 case fault was found but with no injustice. There were no stage 3 requests. This suggests there is no real change in the progression of complaints since 2014/15.



The Same

## 5. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council Children's Services social care teams received 36 compliments during 2015/16. Many compliments related to compliments for staff members who had provided children and their families with a high standard of care and support.

She spoke about the times when she said she was horrible towards you; when she used to say nasty things about her Mum and when you would offer her advice and speak about your own Mother; and she would again just be nasty and didn't want to listen. But she said she was listening really and your words and advice have stayed with her and she believes have led her to the positive place where she is today.

"Your manner in dealing with us has been exemplary and thank you for explaining the things we asked about. You have given us hope."

"I always find your team so organised and your responses so quick. It is greatly appreciated."

The school children were doing their bit for Children In Need and were told to dress up as their Hero for assembly. The young girl stood up in Assembly and said that she was dressed up as her social worker.

" Since being involved with our case X has done an exceptional job and has gone above and beyond the call of duty to help me and my family through very difficult time including going out of her way to sort an incident out. We are really happy and comfortable working with X and highly recommend her to anyone. So thank you very much, you are awesome and a credit to the service".

"We are going to miss the senior social worker who has been our rock and support for the past 4 years. She has always been there and has helped enormously. Always professional but approachable and wonderful she is an asset to the department."

" X [social worker] has made my life worthwhile again."



## 6. Example Comments

Shropshire Council Children's Services social care teams received only 6 comments during 2015/16. These comments differed from the more informal comments services receive on a regular basis. The day to day comments staff receive will be handled directly and used to inform service improvement. Children's Services also seeks comment through a range of customer feedback and engagement methods such as consultations on service proposals, feedback surveys and face to face meetings and events.

The comments recorded formally during the year predominantly related to comments linked to complaints or comments that could have been complaints had the customer agreed to make the comment a complaint (customers can sometimes clearly state that they are not making a complaint but wish to comment).

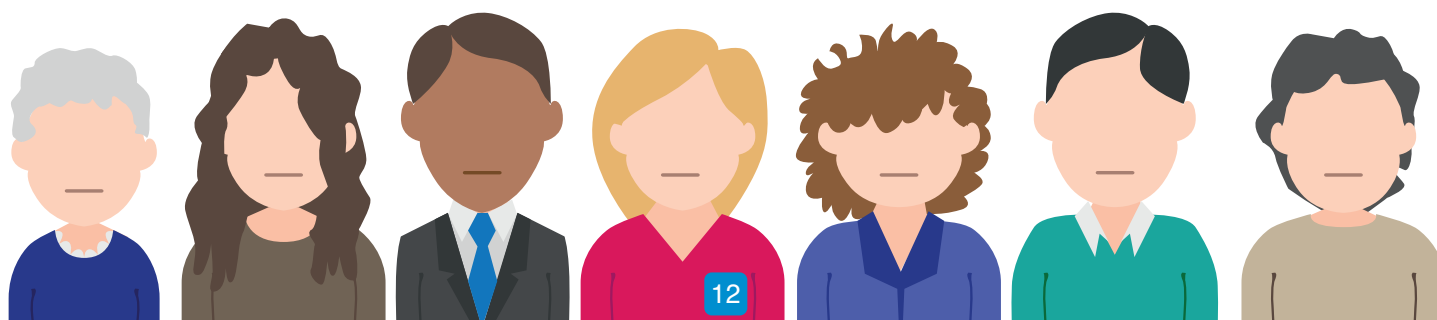
A few comments have been included below to highlight the type of comments that were recorded within the year. The wording has been changed to highlight the basic nature of the point being made but whilst ensuring complete confidentiality.

We have some concerns about the suitability of a placement. We need to know that the staff there have the appropriate knowledge, are able to communicate effectively and manage risk to ensure safety.

I have concerns about a process but I don't want to make a formal complaint or get anyone into trouble.

I would like further information on how to challenge a report... I would also like to make a comment about the approach made by the social worker.

I need to let the council know that an allegation being made is completely untrue. I would like my comments recorded and considered as part of the investigation that is being carried out.



## 7. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council Children's Services social care teams received 93 complaints during 2015/16. The analysis on pages 7 and 9 provides an overview of complaints and how they were handled. More information is provided on pages 14 to 16 in order to identify the areas in need of attention and the work that can take place to make further improvements. Some example complaints have been included below in order to illustrate the type of complaint being received. In most cases the wording is not true to the original complaint and has been changed in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The basic nature of the complaint and message it contained has been retained as far as possible within the examples below.

X has not received any correspondence from Children's Services and he has made numerous phone calls without reply. He does not feel that his concerns are being "taken seriously".

"The Council's safeguarding investigation... was poorly conducted".

X wants to complain about the Social Worker who is in charge of the care of her children. "The Social Worker never gets back to me despite numerous messages and phone calls left for her on mobile and at the office."

The way in which X has spoken to Y is "not acceptable professional conduct when meeting with someone who needs meetings/talks to be conducted in a calm and measured way".

X does not feel that she has been included in discussions about her son. She feels that she has also been "discriminated against".

"she was firing a lot of intrusive and personal questions" ...

X was left feeling very upset after the visit and said she "felt intimidated."

The customer said that they were "made to feel they had no rights and that their wishes were ignored".



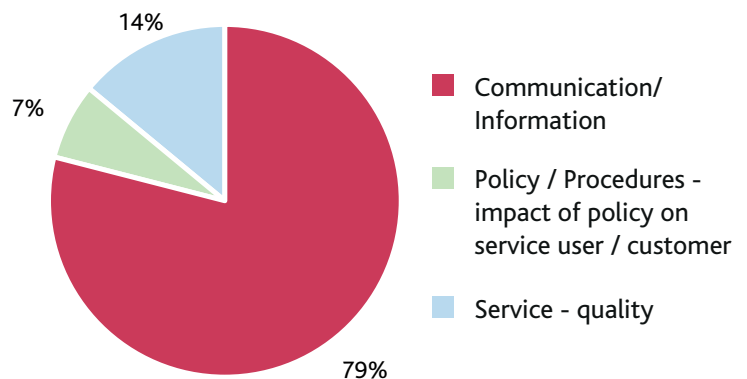
## 8. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council Children's Services social care teams recorded learning and/or actions against 49% of complaints in 2015/16. 15% of complaints had a learning point recorded and 41% of complaints had an action recorded. Limitations in the system used to record complaints mean that the ability to easily record and report multiple learning and action points is not currently in place but has been identified as a future requirement. For that reason only the primary action and learning point is included below.

Only a small proportion of learning points were recorded against complaints during 2015/16 but of those that were recorded:

- 79% were learning points concerning the communication and information that had been provided.
- 14% were related to learning around service quality.
- 7% of complaints led to learning about the impact of a policy or procedure.

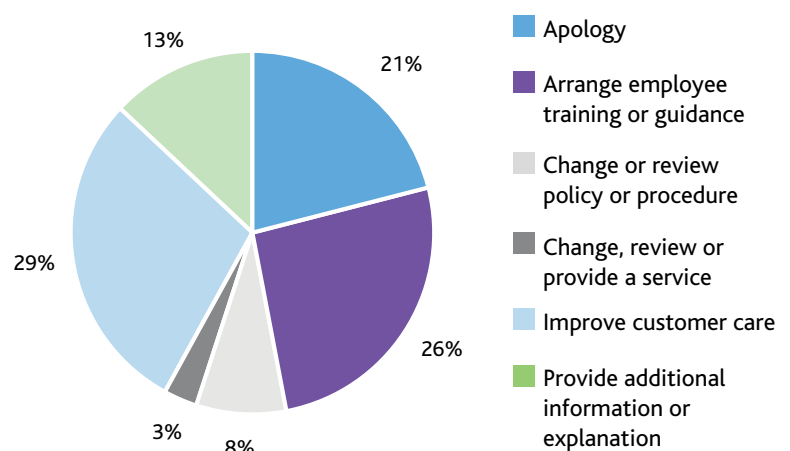
**Learning Points Recorded 2015/16**



Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2015/16:

- 29% were related to actions to improve customer care
- 26% of actions were to arrange training or guidance for council staff members
- 21% of actions were to apologise to the customer
- 13% of actions involved the provision of additional information or explanation
- 8% of the actions taken led to the change or review of a policy or procedure
- 3% of actions taken were to the change or review a service, or the provision of a service.

**Improvement Actions Recorded 2015/16**



In working to understand complaints we consider the main problem experienced, but this does not do justice to the complexity of issues that can be raised within a complaint. Reading complaints in detail highlights that, although a complaint may relate to an assessment, a decision made or a delay in receiving a service (and be recorded as such); the complaint may also include information about the way the complainant felt after their contact with a service. These feelings are frequently as a result of staff behaviour such as the language a member of staff used or the perception of their attitude. Although not a specific action covered within the recommendations on pages 17 and 18, work will take place through 2016/17 to develop the resources staff members need to assist them in developing a better understanding of how their behaviour can be perceived by customers and good practice in complaints handling (through the development of training and staff guidance). An insight into the learning from complaints (and the actions put in place) is included on the next page.



## 9. Example Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council Children's Services has worked throughout 2015/16 to understand learning from complaints and take action to minimise the number of complaints that will be received in 2016/17. Staff capacity was a significant concern within social care services. A restructure and recruitment of team managers has worked to resolve problems and the management of complaints has improved.

Ensure that where parents have joint custody both parents are kept fully informed of developments, irrespective of which parent applied for their children's placement and whoever appears to be making most contact with the team for updates.

Develop practice through the implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) reforms and the development of education, health and care planning. As a result of this case we will also review all relevant cases regarding the legal status of children who are in full time care away from family.

The social worker was asked to prioritise work, maintain consistency with the service user and responding to messages received as quickly as possible (or to suggest contact with the duty worker when unavailable). Autism training was also provided.

Learning led to social workers being asked to ensure parents are fully aware of the reasons for their visit and ensure this is fully explained.

A recognition that it can be confusing when a number of professionals from different organisations are involved in supporting a family. Aim for Shropshire Council to communicate with all parents and carers to clearly explain roles and the extent to which we support will be provided.

Initiated a review of the process for managing contacts and referrals and how decisions are made with regards to requests for children with disabilities.

Reviewed the process for decision-making concerning joint-funded placements.

The importance of keeping both the carer and user fully informed of what is happening within their specific case is now recognised.

### Identified learning:

- 1) Sharing all reports/ assessments with parents in a timely way.
- 2) Proof read all written reports.
- 3) Ensure all parents and carers are spoken to as part of any investigation/ assessment to ensure their views are obtained and considered.

Take actions to improve transition of support from children's to adult services. To include an annual list of all children moving into transition shared with the relevant community team managers and allocation dates are set accordingly.



## EXAMPLE STAGE 2 COMPLAINT Outcomes, Learning and Actions

This stage 2 complaint highlights how complaints become more complex, but also how they influence understanding of customer experience and the steps that can be taken to improve delivery.

- The initial complaint made was partly upheld and it was agreed that customer involvement in the assessment process had not been in line with policy. However the council had been right to exclude the complainant from discussions while estranged from the family.
- The second complaint by the complainant was not upheld. Learning included the need to clearly record management decisions and state the rationale for the decision.
- A third stage of the complaint was upheld. It is agreed that the complainant's views should have been sought as part of the assessment process and they should have had the opportunity to challenge statements made. Learning was to ensure that there is consistency in practice, seeking views of all parents even when there have been instances of domestic violence.

Actions included a) review the processes for managing contacts and referrals and making decisions with regard to an assessment for children with disabilities b) review the decision making process for joint funded placements; and c) develop practice through the implementation of the SEND reforms and the development of education, health and care planning.



## 10. Recommendations

Shropshire Council Children's Services receives low levels of complaints overall but the annual report helps to highlight a few areas where performance may still be improved with the aim of reducing the number of complaints even further. Recommendations for areas of attention during 2016/17 for social care teams are included below.

- 1 Overall there are no significant patterns within the complaints being recorded (ie customers are not making the same complaints about a particular process or service). However, it is recommended that the most common categories of complaint are explored in more detail in order to identify actions that may help to reduce the incidence of complaints in 2016/17. Currently the most common category is 'service standards - lack of customer care'.
- 2 Although particular services or processes are not highlighted within complaints reporting, there is a common theme within most complaints relating to the way staff members are communicating with customers. Many complaints related to a lack of effective communication or the way customers felt after communication.
- 3 Response timescales have increased since 2014/15. Feedback suggests this is a result of an increase in the complexity of complaints and increasing work loads for investigating officers. It is recommended that this is a priority area of focus for improvement.
- 4 More complaints were upheld in 2015/16 than in 2014/15. This may be the result of many different factors, but it is recommended that this is considered within quarterly monitoring to ensure that the reasons for complaints being upheld and partly upheld are understood and addressed where possible.
- 5 It is recommended that work takes place to maintain current good practice in the handling of stage 1 complaints. Thorough investigations and comprehensive responses mean that only a very small proportion of complaints progress beyond stage 1.
- 6 The current and increasing financial pressures being experienced by local authorities are likely to have an impact on staff members. Although Children's Services have a skilled and experienced workforce, it is recommended that all teams are encouraged to identify when they are under pressure and work with others to find ways of ensuring that the customer experience is not negatively impacted upon.
- 7 Shropshire Council works to maintain a culture of open and honest communication without blame. Things can, and do, go wrong from time to time despite best efforts to maintain high standards of service provision. Maintaining a culture of support for staff members so that complaints are turned into a more positive experience through learning and team support is essential. This should form a long term, ongoing recommendation.



## Recommendations continued...

- 8 The analysis undertaken suggests that work should now take place to encourage all investigating officers to clearly include any learning and action points within response letters so that these may be recorded and collated. This will assist Children's Services in its work to implement service improvement and share learning across teams.
- 9 It is recommended that all Children's Services teams are encouraged to improve the recording of comments and compliments. Currently comments are generally only recorded when they are directly linked to a complaint but, if more comments could be recorded (particularly those related to suggestions for service improvement) this could be helpful in further developing customer feedback processes. (There is a recognition that a balance is needed to avoid an increase in administration).
- 10 A range of work already takes place to encourage children and their parents and carers to communicate with council staff and highlight any comments or concerns they may have. We must continue this emphasis on feedback and engagement, recognising that most people are reluctant to make a complaint. Progressing a concern as a formal complaint is often seen as a last resort when a customer feels they are not being listened to. It is recommended that Children's Services continue to promote the range of ways in which their customers can share their experiences and work to support the service to make changes or co-design new processes and services.
- 11 Work across different service areas should now take place, to ensure all new staff members receive information on good practice complaints handling as part of the induction process.
- 12 Over the coming months it may be helpful for Children's Services to work with the Council's Feedback and Insight Team within Commissioning Support to explore whether there may be benefits in bringing together wider, less formal customer feedback alongside complaints, comments and compliments data. This could assist with learning and service improvement.
- 13 It is recommended that close working with the Council's Statutory Complaints Officer is maintained in order to share and implement best practice at a local and national level.
- 14 It is recommended that Shropshire Council widely promotes national best practice messages, including the recognition that an apology is not an admission that something was wrong with the service provided or actions taken. An apology can be made that a customer felt it necessary to make a formal complaint and did not have a good customer experience.



## Learning and Skills Customer Feedback 2015/16

### 1. Introduction

All Learning and Skills complaints are dealt with under Shropshire Council's corporate complaints procedure. Work takes place to handle stage 1 and stage 2 complaints within a 12 week period. On receipt of feedback, work takes place to acknowledge the feedback, clarify the details of a complaint if needed and ensure it is appropriately recorded and allocated. Customers are advised who will be dealing with their complaint and when they can expect a response. The response to a complaint also ensures customers know how to progress their concerns if they are not satisfied with the outcome.

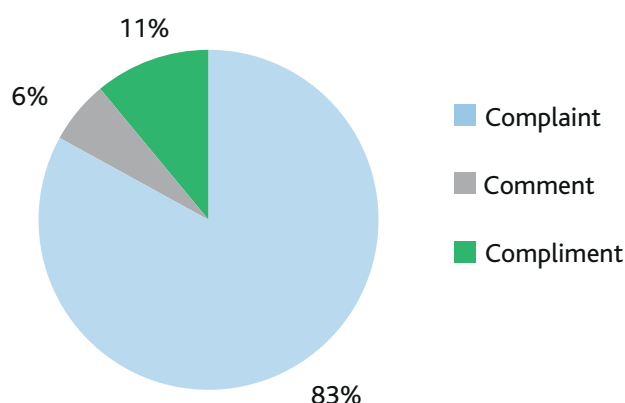
### 2. Customer Feedback 2015/16

During the year 2015/16 Learning and Skills received and recorded:

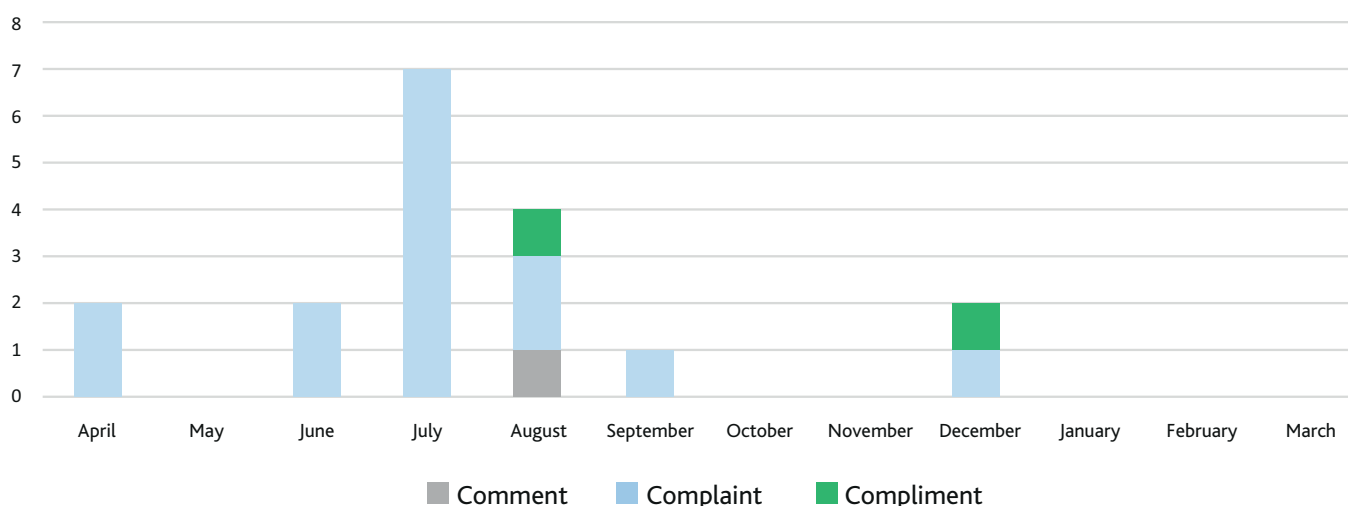
- 2 compliments
- 1 comment
- 15 complaints

These are small numbers and as a result it is difficult to determine any patterns within the data. However, analysis has been undertaken in a similar way to the analysis for the rest of Children's Services to allow for some comparison.

Learning and Skills Customer Feedback 2015/16



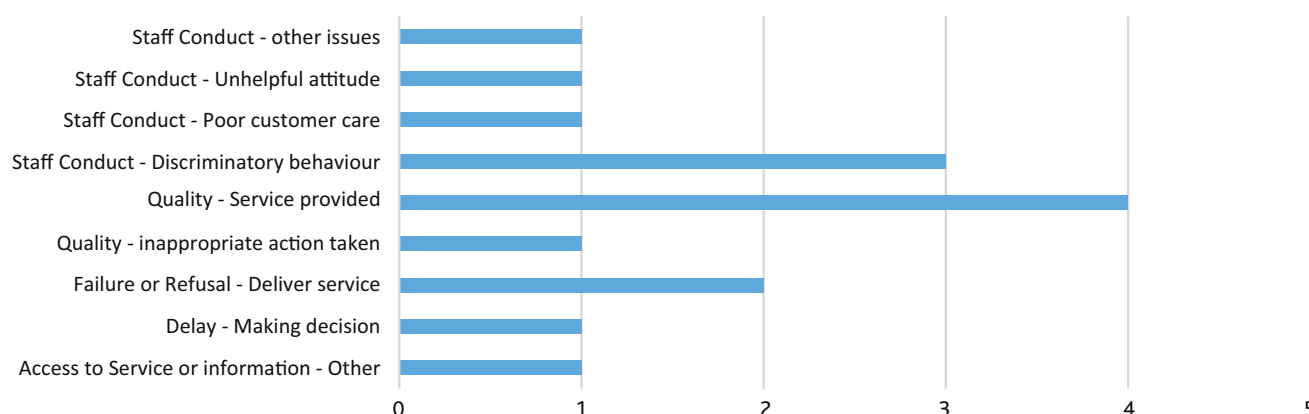
Learning and Skills Customer Feedback by Month 2015/16



- The customer feedback Learning and Skills received was not spread evenly over the year but clustered in particular months. July saw a greater than average number of complaints. On closer inspection it is clear that these complaints were made about very different issues and are not related to any one service or change in service provision.

- Staff conduct was a main cause of complaints within Learning and Skills services in 2015/16, followed by quality of service provided.

### Main reason for complaint 2015/16



- The majority of the 15 complaints received within the year were handled and responded to within an average of 16.9 working days. Only 3 complaints took longer than 25 working days to close.
- There were no patterns in the data when service area and team were considered. The complaints were spread across Learning and Skills with only 1 or 2 complaints per team.

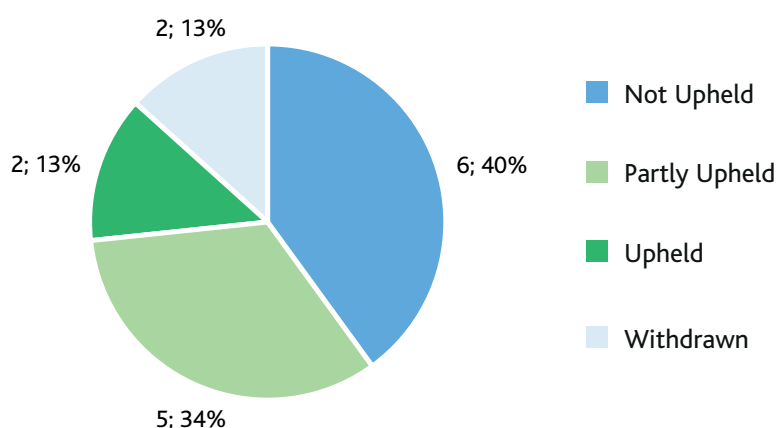
- Of the 15 complaints closed at stage 1:

- 6 were not upheld
- 5 were partly upheld
- 2 were upheld
- 2 were withdrawn

- Sometimes complaints are recorded for information and later withdrawn. It is not always clear whether the council or another body should respond to a complaint and further investigation is sometimes needed to determine the most appropriate way forward.

- Only 1 complaint progressed beyond stage 1 and the complaint was not upheld at stage 2.

### Outcome of Complaints at Stage 1 - Learning and Skills 2015-16



### 3. Annual Comparison 2014/15 and 2015/16

- **Number of compliments - None recorded for 2014/15**

No compliments were recorded in 2014/15 and only 2 were recorded for 2015/16.

The same

- **Number of complaints - Remains the same**

18 records of customer feedback were reported for Learning and Skills in 2014/15. Of those, 15 were complaints, 1 was a comment and 2 were MP enquiries. Reporting now takes place separately for MP enquiries because they can duplicate existing complaints and lead to over reporting.

The same

- **Nature of complaints - Different concerns reported in 2015/16**

The nature of complaints has changed in 2015/16 to those reported in 2014/15. In 2014/15 the majority related to 'Failure or Refusal' to respond or take action, followed by complaints falling under the category of 'Quality' of service or information provided. In 2015/16 more complaints concerned staff behaviour with quality of service remaining the second most common category.

Changed

- **Days to close - Improved**

In 2014/15 it took an average 21 days to close complaints. In 2015/16 it took an average of 16.9 days to close complaints.

Better

- **Outcome of complaints - Fewer complaints upheld**

In 2014/15 7 complaints were not upheld, 7 were upheld and 1 was partly upheld: a similar picture to 2015/16 but only 2 complaints were upheld in 2015/16.

Better

- **Progression of complaints - Remains the same**

There were no stage 2 complaints in 2014/15 and only 1 complaint progressed to stage 2 in 2015/16.

The same



## 4. Example Feedback

Example feedback received by Learning and Skills in 2015/16 is included below. Where necessary feedback has been altered slightly to retain anonymity but as far as possible the nature/ main message of the original comment/compliment/complaint has been retained.

The customer commented that she is "disgusted with the way that her daughter and herself have been treated over the years surrounding the lack of attendance at school".

The customer is very concerned that the issues they have raised are not being addressed. They comment that they have "made various phone calls to get this situation rectified but no one appears to be taking responsibility: Powys appear to blame Shropshire and Shropshire blame Powys."

The customer described that a "call into the Customer Service Centre was handled professionally and politely", but upon transfer to the school admissions team she was "dealt with by a rude, flippant lady".

The customer described problems at the Gateway Centre (IT issues). These problems prevented her from sitting an exam. The complaint includes the comment: "After one and a half hours of waiting to take my exam, I finally gave up."

"I always find your team so organised and your responses so quick. It is greatly appreciated."

"I would like a full investigation carried out as soon as possible and a full written response as to why the information I provided concerning my circumstances was not taken into consideration!"

Poor communication — the customer does not wish to make a complaint but is unhappy that they have had to chase for information.



## 5. Learning and Actions

The teams within Learning and Skills are not currently benefitting from the learning that can be gained from more formal customer feedback. Complaints and comments are a valuable source of information, providing an insight into the customer experience and often helping to identify areas for improvement. During 2015/16 only 2 learning or action points were recorded and they were related to action to improve customer care and provide additional information or explanation.

## 6. Recommendations

The Learning and Skills teams and services within Children's Services receive very small numbers of complaints but this report helps to highlight a few areas where performance may be further investigated or improved. Recommendations for areas of attention during 2016/17 are included below and it is recommended that these are viewed alongside recommendations for the social care teams.

- 1 It is recommended that Learning and Skills staff are asked to double check that all comments, complaints and compliments are being reported on the council's customer feedback system. The low numbers of complaints, comments and feedback recorded could be accurate or the result of under reporting.
- 2 Many members of staff recognise the value of complaints and compliments but comments are often not reported. It is recommended that all members of staff are asked to make use of the facility to record a comment, particularly information relating to customer experience or suggestions for improvement that could contribute within service review processes.
- 3 Although it is hard to determine patterns within the data when only small numbers of complaints are received, a number of complaints for Learning and Skills did relate to staff behaviour, with customers feeling that members of staff did not communicate with them in the right way. Work is currently taking place to build more resources/ training information concerning complaints and customer care and it is recommended that staff are encouraged to participate when available.
- 4 It is recommended that when complaints are closed, all actions and learning are clearly recorded. Staff should also be reminded that it is good practice to inform the customer of any learning or action that has resulted from the complaint within the response letter. This reinforces the message that the council values customer feedback and uses it to inform service improvement.
- 5 Managers within Learning and Skills are asked to note the effective handling of the complaints that were received within the year. The vast majority of complaints were responded to within timescales (only 2 complaints extended beyond the corporate timescales).
- 6 It is recommended that staff within Learning and Skills review their work to promote the complaints process. It is recommended that regular checks are undertaken to ensure public information is available to allow members of the public to easily provide feedback (examples of promotional mechanisms include webpages, leaflets, verbal promotion from staff members).
- 7 It is recommended that those officers handling complaints within Learning and Skills, and responsible for implementing these recommendations, make use of the support and advice available from the council's feedback and insight team.

# Customer Feedback Annual Report Children's Services 2015/16

For more information concerning Shropshire Council's  
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