



Committee and Date

**Performance Management
Scrutiny 9 September 2021**

Item

Public

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

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1. Synopsis

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

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This report gives an overview of formal customer feedback to the Council in 2020/21, covering complaints, compliments and comments as well as MP enquiries. In total, the council received 2,615 cases of formal feedback, including 1,200 complaints, 801 comments and 614 compliments.
- 2.2. While complaints are 14.8% down on the previous year, the longer-term trend is up, with complaints doubling since 2015. Last year, 30% of Stage 1 complaints received were upheld or partially upheld, while the numbers of cases with no finding has fallen from 16% to 10%.
- 2.3. The time to complete Stage 1 complaint investigations has risen slightly to a 23 working day average, up from 14 in 2018/19. This is well within the Council's target of 30 working days, however there is mixed performance and continued effort is important to minimise the number of overdue complaint responses.
- 2.4. Complaints formed 57% of all cases of customer feedback during 2019/20, followed by comments and other enquiries at 28% and compliments at 16%. Customer feedback provides the Council with the opportunity to improve services following concerns and recognise where customers have had a good or bad experience. The learning and actions that are identified through the complaint investigations are used to improve service provision.
- 2.5. The number of compliments the Council received increased year on year by 51%. Many the complements received reflected the Council's work in responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

3. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 3.1. Consider the findings of the report and its recommendations and make any changes or additions to these prior to the report's consideration at Cabinet.
- 3.2. Approve the Annual Customer Feedback Report 2020/21 (Appendix 1) for publication on the Council's website.

REPORT

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

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

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. This report presents information to support decision making and does not itself carry any direct financial implications. However, systems that will help prevent complaints escalating, particularly to Stage 2 complaints, will result in less staff time taken to deal with complaints. Accountable officers and senior managers may use the information to inform actions or interventions for improving service performance and the prioritisation and use of resources.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

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

7. Background

- 7.1. The Customer Feedback Annual Report for Shropshire Council covers the formal feedback Shropshire Council received in 2020/21. The report also covers MP enquiries, although these are included in the feedback data as they commonly duplicate other complaints. Quarterly monitoring also takes place and, where necessary, issues are addressed within the year. This report covers all service areas and the handling of complaints under different complaints procedures. The report lists the Council's own Corporate Complaints procedure. The processes for Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care complaints are statutory and set nationally.

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

- 8.1. Shropshire Council received 2,615 cases of formal feedback during 2020/21, up by 4 cases on the previous year. Complaint cases fell 19% year on year to 1,200 representing 46% of feedback. Comments accounted 31% of cases and compliments 23%. Compliments increased by 51%, with many relating to the Council's response to the pandemic.
- 8.2. Of the 1,200 complaint cases received, 1,091 were investigated under the Council's corporate complaints procedure, a reduction of 18% on the previous year, however the

longer-term trend is a sustained rise in complaints. Of these cases requiring investigation, 88% were corporate complaints, 12% were statutory complaints with an element of social care, so handled under the nationally-set adult or children's complaints procedures.

- 8.3. Effective Stage 1 complaints handling reduces the number of complaints escalating to Stage 2. Most complaints continued to be addressed and closed at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure. However, in 2020/21 82 cases progressed beyond Stage 1, either to Stage Two or going the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO), up 74% from 47 the previous year. There has however been no linked increase in cases upheld by the LGO with this falling between rates recorded in the two previous years, although a slowdown in LGO complaint handling during the pandemic may have played a part in this and this will need close monitoring as LGO capacity returns.
- 8.4. Considering complaints by service area, the Place Directorate, which contains most of the Council's public facing services (such as Highways and Transport, Waste and Leisure), received 49% of the Council's complaints followed by Adult Services (including Housing and Public Health) at 17% and Children's Services received 7%. Resources received the remaining 27%, although many of these will be on behalf of other services outside of the directorate. The two most complained about services are those with the high public visibility Highways and Transport and Waste, which accounted for 30% and 8% of all complaints respectively, with both figures slightly down on the previous year.
- 8.5. It took an average of 23 working days to respond to a complaint - one day more than the previous year, and up from 14 days in 2018/19. This remains well within the LGO timescales of 60 days for Stage 1 and Stage 2 investigations to be completed. (The Council works to 30 days for each stage). Although average performance is good, there are significant numbers of complex and long running cases exceeding timescales, which can be due to reduced officer capacity within a service or the result of highly complex cases that are difficult to resolve or require significant time to resolve.
- 8.6. In 2020/21 at the end of Stage 1, 33% of complaints were not upheld, 12% were upheld, 18% were partly upheld (often where a complaint might have multiple points within it) and 27% were withdrawn or were a service request rather than a complaint. 10% of complaints had no finding. These rates vary compared to the previous year.
- 8.7. Understanding the causes of complaints and common themes informs learning and improvements to address the underlying causes of a complaint. As with previous years, communication and information provision continues to be the most common theme within learning and includes responding to correspondence and comments in a timely manner, keeping people up to date as cases progress and improving how information is shared. Service delivery/non-delivery of a service was another common learning point.
- 8.8. The number of compliments received by the Council were at their highest level for a number of years, reversing a recent downward trend. In 2021/20 compliments increased

by 33% on the previous year. This was largely attributed to recognition from the public of the Council's work in responding to the pandemic in many ways.

- 8.9. The Annual Report highlights recommendations made by the LGO in 2020/21. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint.

9. Conclusions

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

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

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

2015/16 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report
2016/17 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report
2017/18 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report
2018/19 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report
2019/20 Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Cllr Gwilym Butler, Cabinet member resources

Local Member

n/a

Appendices

Annual Corporate Customer Feedback Report 2020/21