



Committee

Cabinet

Date and Time

9 September 2026
10:30 am

Public

Annual Customer Feedback Report 2025/26

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Alex Wagner Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Transformation and Economic Growth	
Lead Director:	Paul Clarke, Service Director, Strategy and Change	
Service Area:	Strategy and Change	
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Electoral Divisions Affected	All	
Key Decision?	Not Key Decision	
Cabinet Forward Plan	Not applicable	
Report considered by	Cabinet – 9 September 2026	

1. Purpose of Report

To present the Council's **Annual Customer Feedback Report 2025/26 (Appendix A)**, which provides an overview of formal customer feedback received and recorded by Shropshire Council in 2025/26, covering complaints, compliments and comments. The annual report data from the Local Government Ombudsman's is also included alongside information on compliance with the Complaint Handling Code. Producing an annual report is a requirement within statutory complaints guidance and under the Ombudsman's Code.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is asked to:

- 2.1. Consider and agree the recommendations and actions in the Annual Customer Feedback Report (pages 34 and 35), **Appendix A**, to support and improve customer feedback performance within Shropshire Council.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Customer Feedback Annual Report is prepared by the Council's Feedback and Insight Team. Complaints officers within the team handle the corporate and statutory processes for recording and responding to formal comments, compliments and complaints. Processes for adult and children's social care complaints are statutory and are set nationally. These processes are not impacted by the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- 3.2. The Annual Report 2025/26 covers the performance in the financial year April 2025 - March 2026. Since April 2026 the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code ('the Code') has been used to guide our complaints handling, which includes different timescales and standards, and the new requirements for annual reports have been adhered to within the 2025/26 report attached, and there is now a focus on ensuring improving performance during 2026/27.
- 3.3. The new annual reporting requirements under the Code are:
- Self-Assessment: An annual review checking compliance against the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code.
 - Data Analysis: Quantitative and qualitative breakdown of complaints handled, accepted, or refused.
 - Ombudsman Input: Integration of the annual performance letter and relevant findings issued by the LGSCO.
 - Publication: Must be reported through governance structures and published on the organization's website.
- 3.4. Shropshire Council's Annual Customer Feedback Report 2025/26 (**Appendix A**) covers complaints, compliments, comments, complaint investigations, Ombudsman activity, learning from complaints, progress against previous recommendations, and the Council's self-assessment against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.
- 3.5. Customer feedback remains an important source of insight into residents' experiences of Council services. It highlights areas of good practice, identifies where residents experience dissatisfaction, and provides evidence to support service improvement, performance monitoring and organisational learning. The Ombudsman highlights that *"High volumes of complaints should not be seen as a negative, as they can be indicative of a well-publicised and accessible complaints process. Low complaint volumes are potentially a sign that individuals are unable to complain."*

4. Annual Performance

- 4.1. The report summarises the annual customer feedback for 2025/26. In 2025/26, 3,377 cases of feedback (comments, compliments and complaints) were received. There were 435 compliments, 198 comments and 2,744 initial complaint cases. 1,083 complaints progressed to investigation. Challenges remain linked to

increasing complexity, growing customer demand and new expectations and requirements set out under the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code.

- 4.2. Complaints accounted for 81% of all formal feedback, continuing the recent trend of complaints forming an increasing proportion of customer feedback. Overall feedback volumes have risen over recent years, with a 9.7% increase in all feedback cases from 2024/25 to 2025/26 and a 70% increase since 2016/17. Trend data and horizon scanning suggests that this upward trend will continue and could escalate further.
- 4.3. The average monthly number of feedback cases was 281, compared with 257 in 2024/25 and 219 the year before. Quarter 4 saw the highest level of feedback, with a significant increase between quarters 3 and 4. This reflects both the accessibility of the complaints process and wider pressures across Council services.
- 4.4. The number of complaints progressing beyond Stage 1 through either the council's own processes or to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has also increased. The number of cases progressing to stage 2 or beyond has increased by 28% in a year since 2024/25 (a 43% increase since 2023/24). The full report highlights where performance is positive, needs improvements and makes recommendations for organisational activity in 2026/27 to improve complaint handling performance.
- 4.5. The report (**Appendix A**) suggests that resources and capacity remain a risk to the Council's ability to manage complaints effectively, meet new timescales, maintain quality, and ensure learning and improvement are consistently recorded and acted upon.
- 4.6. A key observation of the 2025/26 performance was the number of complaint cases that did not progress to full investigation. 883 complaint cases were closed early or excluded from the formal complaint investigation process. This represented 32% of complaint cases. Many issues are being directed through the complaints process when they could more appropriately be handled as service requests. This places additional pressure on the complaints system and suggests that further organisational work is required to help residents access the right route at the earliest opportunity.
- 4.7. The dominant complaint category in 2025/26 was service standards, which accounted for 69% of complaint investigations. The most common sub-themes were:
 - Failure to provide a service or take action
 - Delays
 - Incorrect or inappropriate actionThe second largest category was decisions, accounting for 14% of complaints. Complaints about decisions appear to have increased over recent years across several service areas, reflecting wider financial and service pressures affecting local authorities.
- 4.8. By service type, complaints were most commonly associated with:
 - Place-based services, including highways, transport and waste
 - Children's Services

- Adult Services
- Council business and support services

Children's Services have seen significant increases over the last two years and now account for a larger proportion of complaints. The report notes that areas such as SEND, children's social care, adult social care and other high-demand services reflect national trends and wider pressures across the public sector.

5. Complaint Outcomes and Timeliness

- 5.1 Complaint outcomes continue to provide important evidence about service performance. In 2025/26 20% of closed stage 1 complaints were upheld and 22% were partially upheld. The proportion of stage 1 complaints upheld has reduced compared with previous years, suggesting some improvement. However, it remains important for the Council to recognise where things have gone wrong and to use complaint findings to drive improvement.
- 5.2 The main themes in upheld and partly upheld complaints were linked to:
- Education, Health and Care Plans
 - Household waste collection
 - Arrangements for care at home
 - Child Protection Plans
 - Financial contributions
- The most common fault categories in upheld complaints were service failure, delays, and incorrect or inappropriate action.
- 5.3 Timeliness remains one of the main performance challenges. During 2025/26, Shropshire Council took an average of 25 working days to respond to stage 1 complaints. Excluding Adult Statutory complaints, which are subject to different national timescales, stage 1 complaints took an average of 24 working days to complete. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code introduced a 10 working day response timescale for stage 1 corporate complaints, with an extension period where required. Against this new expectation:
- 31% of relevant stage 1 complaints were completed within 10 working days
 - 69% exceeded the new 10 working day timescale
 - 45% of corporate stage 1 complaints were completed within the national 15 working day timescale KPI
- 5.4 Performance is expected to improve during 2026/27 as the new timescales become embedded. However, there is the need for sustained focus on timeliness, case progression and service ownership of complaint responses.

6. Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment

- 6.1. In line with new requirements, the annual report includes a self-assessment against the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Code sets clearer expectations for local authorities, including complaint definitions, exclusions, accessibility, response times, remedies, complaint handling resources, performance reporting and learning from complaints.
- 6.2. Shropshire Council has made progress in implementing the Code, including:
- Updating the corporate complaints procedure

- Strengthening definitions of complaints and service requests
 - Incorporating exclusion criteria
 - Producing guidance on remedies
 - Introducing revised timescales
 - Developing performance reporting in line with Code expectations
- 6.3 The report highlights continued pressures linked to increasing complaint volumes, staff absences, organisational change and limited resources.
- 6.4 A “best endeavours” approach has been adopted due to budget pressures, and a temporary 12-month post is expected to add some temporary capacity.

7. Progress and Recommendations

- 7.1. The annual report (**Appendix A**) shows that progress has been made against recommendations from 2024/25. Completed actions include the Cabinet report on the Complaint Handling Code, the review of the corporate complaints procedure, and the development of remedies guidance.
- 7.2. Some areas have seen partial progress, including reasonable adjustments guidance, staff training, survey wording and engagement activity. Other areas, such as third-party complaint handling, have been delayed due to wider organisational changes. The progress update demonstrates that improvements are being made, but also that several actions require continued leadership, ownership and support across service areas.
- 7.3. 14 recommendations are set out within the annual report for 2025/26 (**Appendix A**). These are included on pages 34 and 35. To briefly summarise complaint handling should remain a corporate priority, with stronger focus on timeliness, consistent practice and compliance with the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. The recommendations highlight the need to better distinguish service requests from complaints, improve tracking of remedies, learning and actions, and strengthen reasonable adjustments and third-party complaint handling. Improved communication with residents is a cross-cutting theme within the recommendations made.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1. The 2025/26 report (**Appendix A**) shows that Shropshire Council has an accessible complaints process and continues to use feedback to understand resident experience, service pressures and areas for improvement. There are positive findings, including continued recognition through compliments, reduced proportions of upheld stage 1 complaints, good performance for the Ombudsman’s upheld rate, and progress against several previous recommendations.
- 8.2. However, the report also identifies significant and growing pressure on the complaints system. Complaint volumes and investigations are increasing, response times remain a key challenge, more complaints are progressing beyond stage 1, and implementation of the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code requires continued work.

- 8.3. The Annual Report findings indicate that complaint handling should remain a corporate priority within the Council's performance, governance and improvement arrangements. Continued focus is needed on timeliness, quality of responses, service request handling, learning from complaints, remedy tracking, staff training and organisational ownership. Strengthening these areas will help improve residents' experience, reduce avoidable escalation, support compliance with the Ombudsman's expectations and ensure customer feedback continues to drive meaningful service improvement.

9. Alternative Options

- 9.1. None: Annual Customer Feedback Reporting is a requirement within children's and adult social care statutory complaints (as set out within national legislation and guidance) and is required as part of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Code. The Code is issued as 'advice and guidance' for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974.

10. Key risks and Opportunities

- 10.1. Effective monitoring and follow-up of complaints provides the opportunity to minimise risks through the identification of themes, areas of concern and opportunities for remedial actions, learning and improvements.
- 10.2. The complaints process plays an important part in capturing residents' opinion of Shropshire Council's services, where there may be shortcomings and how these can be rectified. Having an effective and open comment, complaint and feedback process is commonly referred to within external assessment and inspection processes including Ofsted, CQC, Corporate Peer Reviews and the Best Value Guidance.
- 10.3. The Annual Customer Feedback report is a public document and it can sometimes result in negative press coverage. Despite this risk transparency in reporting and identifying areas of underperformance is strongly encouraged as a means to prompt improvement and demonstrate Shropshire Council's commitment to listening to the views of local residents and taking action in response.

Risk	Mitigation	Link to Strategic Risk
Should the Ombudsman highlight concerns or issue public reports against Shropshire Council this could negatively impact national Government views of the organisation.	Organisation-wide action to respond promptly to Ombudsman requests and remedy and resolve complaints at earlier stages of the complaints processes.	Governance, Performance and financial weaknesses
Negative media coverage linked to complaints, either individual cases or performance generally influencing public opinion and organisational reputation.	A focus on remedying complaints. Regular internal reporting to address issues as they arise and prevent complaints from escalating and remaining unresolved.	Governance, Performance and financial weaknesses

Failure to comply with the Code will result in non-compliance reported within individual case findings, public reports and annual letters.	Shropshire Council must be able to demonstrate implementation of the Code and the annual report is a key method of demonstrating compliance and action to address concerns.	Governance, Performance and financial weaknesses
The Ombudsman requests use of new key performance indicators (KPIs) will increase national reporting and benchmarking.	Shropshire Council will need to make use of new data available from other local authorities to monitor changes and seek to make use of any good practice available.	Governance, Performance and financial weaknesses
Failure to meet new timescales for complaint handling.	Performance reporting and regular service reports highlight overdue cases. Senior manager involvement can promote compliance and address failure to respond.	Governance, Performance and financial weaknesses

11. Council Priorities

- 11.1. Customer Feedback aligns with the priority within the Corporate Plan that reads ‘A Council that is financially sustainable, with clear priorities and purpose, and a workforce that is supported to excel’. This priority references corporate governance.
- 11.2. This work also fits under the ‘Our Future Council Principles’ principle of Resident and Customer Focus.

12. Financial Implications

- 12.1. This report presents information to support decision making and does not itself carry any direct financial implications. However, future investment may be required to enable the Council to implement and comply with the Ombudsman’s Complaint Handling Code. The self-assessment identifies some of the main actions required but detailed guidance produced by the Ombudsman highlights further suggested action. The significant increases in customer feedback and complaint volumes and growing complexity mean future investment considerations are now needed to ensure Code compliance and compliance with statutory complaints processes in the years to come. This is an issue that can be highlighted within the budget setting process for Autumn/Winter 2026.

13. Legal and HR implications

- 13.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. It should be noted however, that under the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, there are some complaints involving Children’s Social Care matters which must follow the procedure contained within the Regulations. Similarly, complaints about Adult Social Care are governed by The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 and the guidance, “Listening, responding, improving; a guide to better customer care”.

- 13.2. The Council's policies ensure that the Council processes customer feedback in line with legislation and the requirements of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman Service. Legal and HR advice is, at times, required in relation to individual complaint cases.

14. Electoral Division Implications

- 14.1. This report applies countywide and there aren't any implications for particular divisions.

15. Health, Social (including "Child Friendly Shropshire") and Economic Implications

- 15.1. Health implications of complaints include:
- Unresolved service complaints or delayed support increase stress and anxiety for families and vulnerable individuals.
 - Overlooking complaints and their value as early warning signs in health, wellbeing and social care services can lead to more acute problems which could compromise the safety and protection of vulnerable residents.
- 15.2. Social implications of complaints include:
- Poor complaint handling may lead to an erosion of trust and organisational reputation. Failures that spark complaints damage the trust between local residents and local authorities. In particular, complaints work recognises the importance of the child's voice within children's social care.
 - There is a risk that service failures can disproportionately impact those who are more vulnerable, disadvantaged or digitally excluded.
- 15.3. Economic implications of complaints include:
- Investigating and resolving formal complaints absorbs valuable officer time and council resources. Ongoing increases in complaint volumes may have economic consequences.
 - Upholding complaints may require financial remedies or other action that has both direct and indirect costs.
 - Investment in complaints and associated activity can reduce the availability of funds for investment in broader service transformation and long-term sustainability.

16. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 16.1 Complaints work is designed in a way that is non-discriminatory and accessible to all. The Complaint Handling Code includes actions around reasonable adjustments to ensure those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 understand that they can request reasonable adjustments to assist participation within complaints processes.

17. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

17.1. There are no direct effects on the council's climate change agenda or environmental implications.

18. Background Papers

Shropshire Council Customer Feedback Annual Reports 2020/21, 2021/22, 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25.

Shropshire Council's Corporate Complaints and Representations Procedure (updated 2026).

19. Appendices

Appendix A - Shropshire Council's Customer Feedback Annual Report 2025/26