

# Customer Feedback Annual Report Adult Services 2016/17

Feedback and Insight Team, Commissioning Support  
June 2017





# 1. Introduction

The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 require local authorities with Social Services responsibilities to produce an Annual Report on the operation of their Complaints Procedure. The annual complaints report (Shropshire's annual customer feedback reports) 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 Adult Services received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017.

In addition to the annual report, Shropshire Council prepares quarterly customer feedback reports. These are designed for internal use in order to develop a clear understanding of customer experience and support us in our work to address concerns and implement service improvement. Regulations provide a framework for those handling a complaint relating to a local authority's social care functions - this includes directly provided services and independent services provided through commissioning. The actions, omissions or decisions of the local authority in respect of a social care function are covered; the regulations do not, however, apply more generally to independent providers. People who are paying for their own social care (self-funders) may complain to the local authority, for example about assessment, or failure to assess. Services people have arranged or purchased themselves are not covered but the local authority could be challenged if they commission those services. For example, on why they have commissioned a sub-standard service, or whether they are performance managing contracted services sufficiently.

Complaints containing an element of social care fall under the statutory guidelines. Some complaints we receive for adult 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 annual report describes the compliments, comments and complaints Adult Services received in 2016/17.

## Complaint

We aim to make it as easy as possible to make a complaint. A complaint is a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction about the service provided by the council. Family members and advocates may also make a complaint on behalf of one of our customers. We will ask for consent to ensure that the complaint is not being made against the customer's wishes.

## Compliment

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

## Comment

Feedback about a service could be: a suggestion to improve it; a question as to whether something could be done differently; an idea for delivering a service differently.



## 2. The Complaints Process

Shropshire Council encourages users of adult services, their family members and carers to give feedback and highlight any concerns so that they may be addressed as quickly as possible. If problems cannot be resolved and the customer wishes to make a complaint, staff members offer advice on how to make a complaint.

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

See: <https://new.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/adult-social-care-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 Investigating Officer and ask them to investigate the complaint. The complainant will be provided with a written response within a maximum of 65 working days (for statutory complaints). In some complex cases it may take longer but we let the customer know if this extra time is needed and why. The Investigating Officer will write to explain the outcome of their investigation, any learning or actions and information outlining how to progress the complaint if the customer is not satisfied with the outcome.



### STAGE 2 - Review

An Investigating Officer, who is not part of the service the complaint is about, will investigate the complaint in more detail. They will decide if there is more the service can do to address the concerns raised. If the reviewing officer believes the service has done all they reasonably can do, the customer will be written to and advised of this. They will also be given information about the Local Government Ombudsman.



### Ombudsman

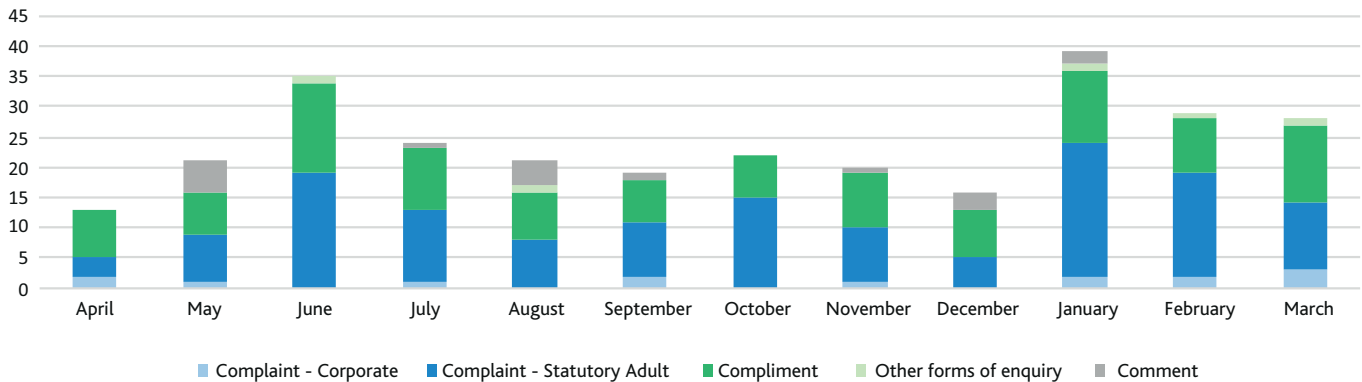
If a complaint cannot be resolved locally it can be investigated by the Ombudsman. The Council has a timescale of 28 calendar days to provide a response to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). Complaint responses are often complex and it can be necessary to collate, catalogue and provide a large volume of information for the LGO's consideration. Complainants can request to go to the Ombudsman without a review if they choose to.

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

### 3. Customer Feedback 2016/17

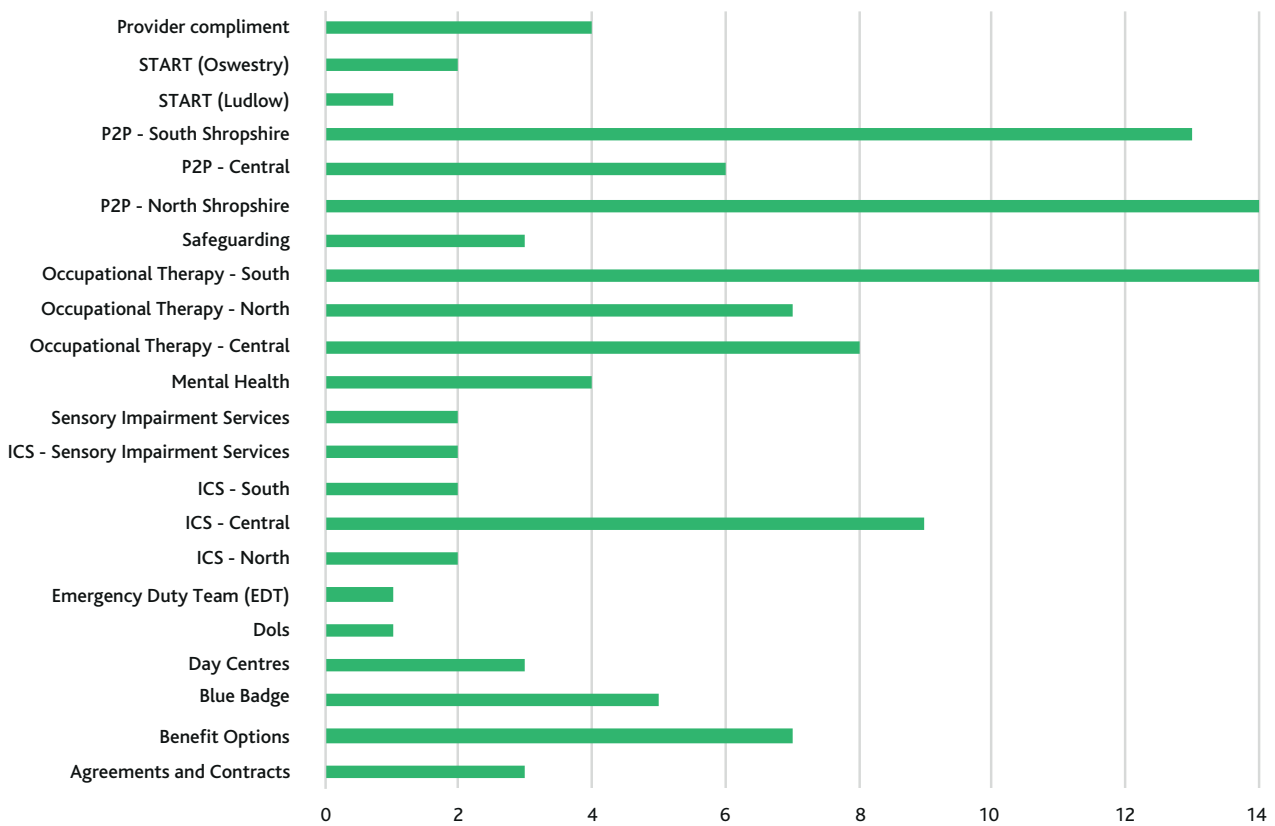
- In 2016/17 there were 287 cases of customer feedback recorded for Adult Services. There were:
  - o 17 comments and 5 other forms of enquiry
  - o 113 compliments
  - o 138 statutory complaints
  - o 14 corporate complaints

Customer Feedback by Month 2016-17



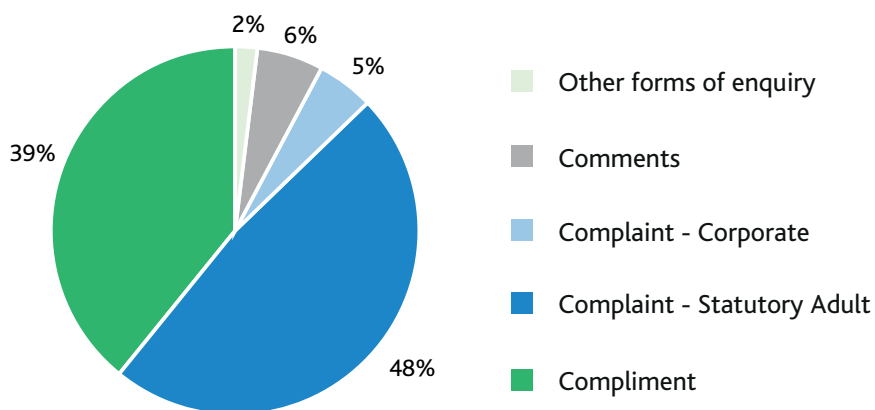
- The average number of customer feedback cases recorded per month during 2016/17 was 23.9. January and June were the busiest months with April seeing fewer cases. Quarter 4 (January to March 2017) saw an increase in customer feedback with 96 cases compared to an average for the other three quarters of 64 cases (numbers were similar across quarters 1,2 and 3).
- Complaints account for 53% of the customer feedback received and compliments form 39% of all cases. This is, in part, due to recording practice with staff members much more likely to report a complaint than record a compliment.
- Compliments are spread across teams and services with more compliments for the social care (People 2 People) and occupational therapy teams than for other types of service delivery.

### Compliments by Team or provider 2016/17



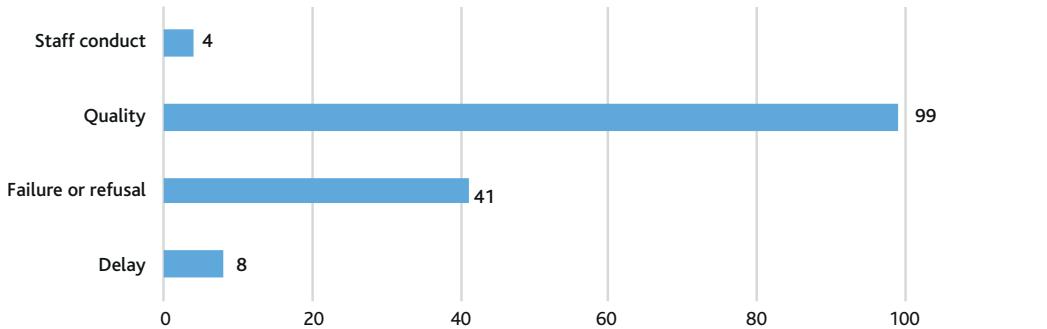
- Of the 152 complaints received by adult services in 2016/17, 138 were statutory complaints (relating to social care and handled in line with the Adult Statutory Complaints Procedure) and 14 were corporate complaints handled under the Council’s Corporate Complaints Procedure.

### Type of feedback 2016/17



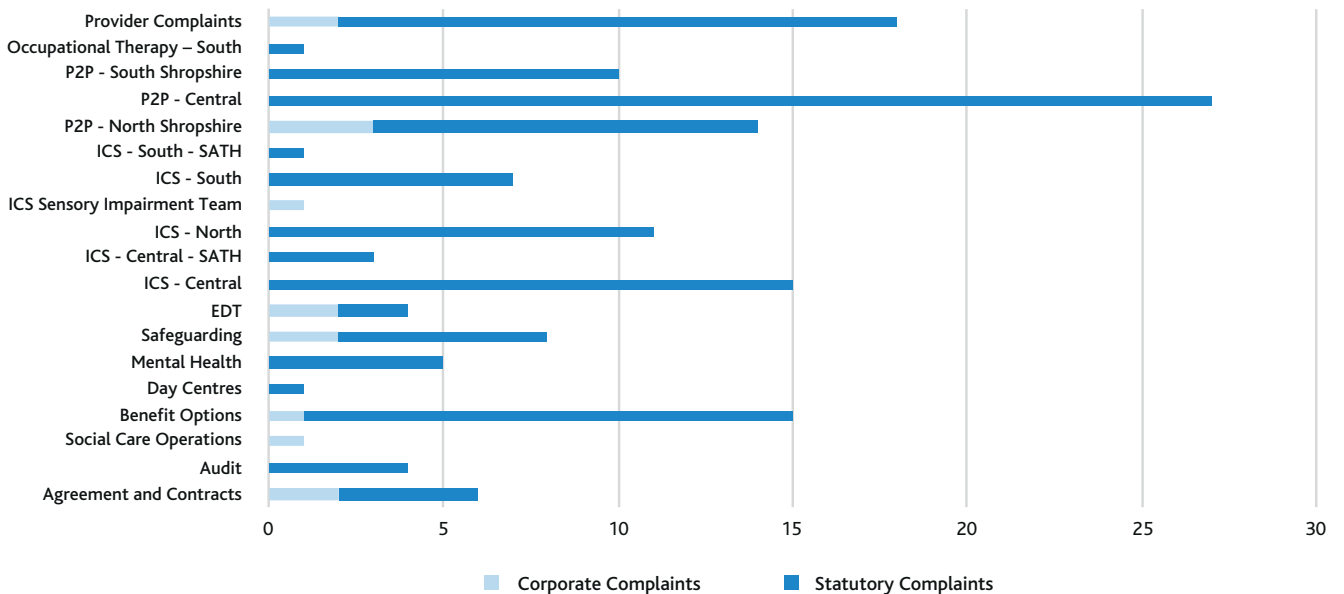
- Quality was the main category under which complaints were made within the year (99 cases, 65% of all complaints). Dominant sub categories within quality were quality of service provided, 'quality – unreasonable decision' and 'quality – incorrect decision'. Other significant sub categories under the second most dominant theme 'Failure or refusal' were 'failure or refusal to provide information' and 'failure or refusal to deliver a service'. In total 27% of complaints were recorded under the 'Failure or refusal' theme. Although many complaints contain multiple concerns and issues, the complaints system only records the dominant theme for analysis purposes.

### Category of Complaints received 2016/17



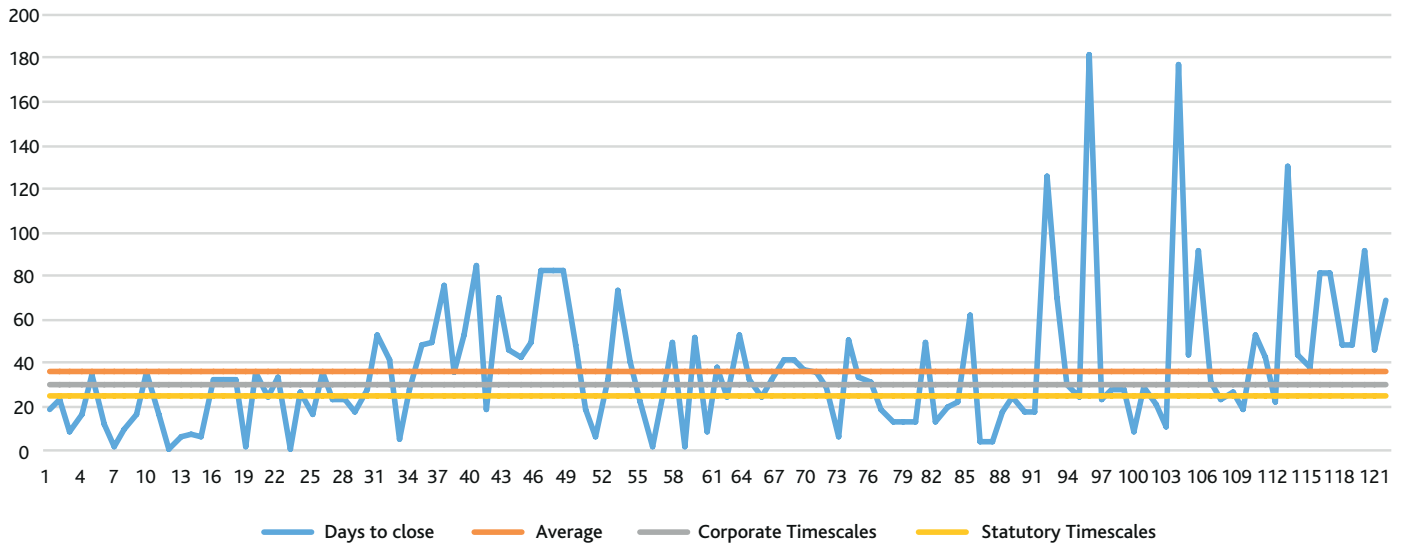
- An analysis of complaints by team highlights that 34% of complaints in 2016/17 were for People 2 People, 25% were for ICS (Integrated Community Services) and 12% were provider complaints (Shropshire Council is responsible for complaints made against the services it commissions and records these in the same way as complaints for its own services (although complaint handling follows a slightly different process)).

### Complaints by Team 2016/17



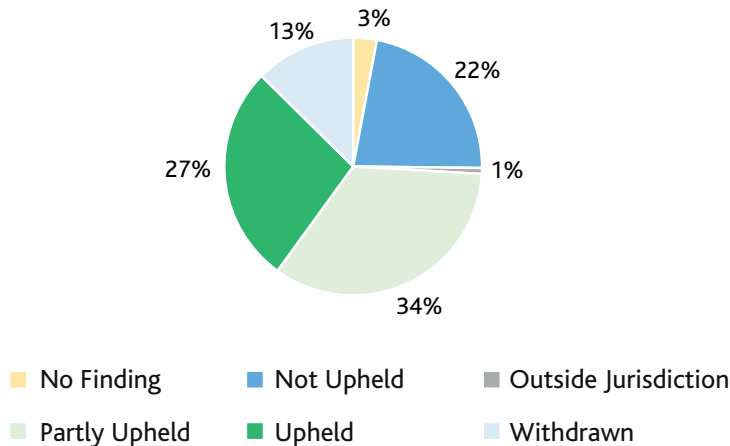
- During 2016/17 Adult Services took an average of 36.2 days to close stage 1 complaints (65 days are available so this is well within the maximum timeframe). The initial target for statutory complaints is 25 days but where detailed investigation is required customers are often contacted and a new timescale agreed. During the year statutory complaints took an average of 38.6 days to close at stage 1. Corporate complaints took an average of 17.9 days to close with 30 days set as a rough target. (12 weeks is the corporate timescale for stage 1 and stage 2 complaints – allocating approximately 30 days for each).

### Days to Close - Stage 1 Complaints 2016/17



- 135 of the 152 complaints received within the year have an outcome recorded at stage 1 (some recently received complaints remain open). 27% of stage 1 complaints were upheld, 34% were partly upheld and 22% were not upheld (the remainder were withdrawn, considered outside of the Council’s jurisdiction (and signposted to the appropriate organisation) or there was no finding (commonly with a ‘no finding’ action is agreed without the need for a formal finding for example more focused contract management is put in place).

### Outcome of Stage 1 Complaints 2016/17





- Considering the outcome of complaints by team highlights that the Central Team within People 2 People had the greatest volume of complaints during the year and upheld the largest proportion (26 complaints, 9 upheld and 11 partly upheld). Benefit Options had the second greatest number of complaints (15, of which 7 were upheld and 5 partly upheld).
  - At the end of the year 17 complaint cases remained open with the remainder closed or completed.
  - During 2016/17 very few complaints progressed beyond stage 1, suggesting effective stage 1 complaint handling. Shropshire Council's Adult Services saw 11 complaints progress beyond stage 1 (2 to stage 2 and 9 to the LGO) during 2016/17.
  - Stage 1 complaint responses include information to ensure complainants understand how they can raise concerns if they do not feel their complaints has been adequately addressed and options for progressing their complaint to the next stage. It is best practice to review complaints under Shropshire Council's Adult Services Complaint's Procedure before LGO investigations are carried out but complainants can request to go to the LGO after the initial response.
  - The data below highlights the outcomes at all stages (review and LGO). It should be noted that those outcomes may relate to the same complaints at different stages of investigation. During 2016/17 there were closed investigations for (including those opened within the year and cases opened in previous year and closed in the year):
    - 2 reviews
    - 9 Local Government Ombudsman investigations
- Of the complaints above:
- 2 were upheld
  - 1 was partly upheld
  - 5 were not upheld
  - The LGO decided not to investigate 3 complaints
- Overall Adult Services have performed well during 2016/17 but performance figures show an increase in complaints during the last quarter of the year. This could be a result of improvements in the way provider complaints are being considered but further attention is required to ensure that this increase does not become an ongoing pattern.

## 4. Annual Comparison

Number of compliments – increased

- In 2015/16 there were 71 compliments recorded for Adult Services and this has increased to 113 in 2016/17.
- Compliments averaged at just over 9 a month.
- It should be noted that although Shropshire Council is responsible for provider complaints, the same does not apply for provider compliments; so although a few of these may be reported and recorded they are few in number.



Number of complaints – increased slightly

- Complaint numbers have increased slightly, with 152 complaints recorded for 2016/17 and 146 complaints in 2015/16 (there were 126 in 2014/15). Improvements in the recording of provider complaints could be partially responsible for this slight increase.



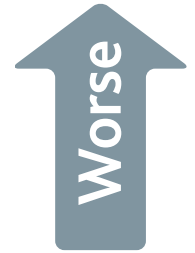
Nature of complaints – remains similar

- Comparing the types of complaint recorded in 2015/16 and in 2016/17 highlights the following key points:
  - Quality remains the main category of complaints with 99 complaints in 2016/17 compared to 81 in 2015/16. Unlike 2015/16 where 'incorrect decision' was the dominant sub category within 'Quality', in 2016/17 the dominant sub category was 'Quality of service provided' (incorrect decision was the second dominant sub category).
  - In 2015/16 'Failure or refusal' was the second main category of complaint (31 complaints). The same pattern is highlighted in 2016/17 (41 complaints).
  - Complaints relating to 'Delay' have reduced from 12 in 2015/16 to 8 in 2016/17.
  - Staff conduct complaints have also reduced in number with 11 in 2015/16 to 4 in 2016/17.



## Days to close – increased

- The average time taken to close Stage 1 complaints has increased in 2016/17. The average for the year was 36.2 days compared to 30.4 days in 2015/16. This increase is likely to be a result of the complexity of some of the cases received and an increase in complaint numbers overall. It should be noted that, due to the relatively low number of complaints Adult Services receive overall, a small number of long running cases has a significant impact on average timescales. (See recommendations for further information).



## Outcome of complaints – increased slightly

- The proportion of upheld complaints has increased since 2015/16 but consideration of partly upheld complaints and the 2014/15 data suggests very similar performance overall.
- In 2014/15 29% of complaints were upheld and 35% were partly upheld. In 2015/16 20% were upheld and 38% partly upheld. In 2016/17 27% were upheld and 34% partly upheld (very similar to 2014/15 data).



## Complaints progressing beyond Stage 1 – Decreased slightly

- Shropshire Council's Adult Services saw 14 complaints progress beyond stage 1 during 2015/16 (only 9% of all the complaints received within the year). In 2016/17 there were 11 cases beyond stage 1 (6% of all the complaints received).



## 5. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council's Adult Services received 113 compliments in 2016/17. The compliments predominantly related to the work of individual members of staff and the compliments were sent in by customers who felt those members of staff had gone 'above and beyond' to support them and provide a high standard of care and support. Compliments are a great source of customer feedback and should not be forgotten in an effort to focus on more formal complaint handling.

"What a gentleman, he listened to all I had to say... What an asset he is to the Council. When you are old the last thing you want is for someone who is on the end of a phone, to talk to you as if you have no brain, it is so rude. [Name of member of staff] treated me so nicely, I have so much admiration for him". Compliment for Benefit Options.

The customer said that the service that he received in relation to his wife was "excellent, sensitive and efficient". Compliment for Occupational Therapy.

"The 'gadgets' I didn't know existed have made daily life much safer, less painful and daily living much more accessible. I can barely believe the difference they have made. .... Somehow you combine warmth with understanding, expertise and efficiency, making your visits an enjoyable experience". Compliment for Occupational Therapy

The customer would like to compliment and thank the team of carers who looked after her husband. "They have all been amazing patient and kind. They have cared for him and treated him with respect from day one". The customer said they have, even in the short time, shown her friendship and support when she needed it the most. Compliment for People 2 People, South

"Thank you for your help, kindness and patience in dealing with any of my queries over the telephone. At times I have felt as if I've "pestered" you but you have always shown understanding before trying to help....Your team has given whatever help it can, whenever we needed it. It has been very much appreciated". Compliment for ICS (South)

"Everyone was so caring and kind, punctual. It was like having a friend". Compliment for ICS (Central)

"They must be congratulated and praised for their excellent professionalism, their kindness, their cheerfulness, their thoughtfulness and the great support they also gave. We miss them all. Thanks to the whole team. They are indeed 'magic fairies"'. Compliment for ICS (North)

The customer commented on "knowledge, efficiency and friendly manner" and wanted to say how impressed they were with "the excellent service received in searching for a solution to a specific hearing problem". The customer commented that "not only did he explain clearly the various technical devices available, but was highly competent in demonstrating their uses practically". The "expert advice" has given the customer hope and confidence that their hearing problem can and will be improved. Compliment for Social Care Efficiency & Improvement, Sensory Impairment.

"It was a very distressing time. [Name of staff member] was extremely supportive, clear headed and empathetic. She made the whole process much easier to deal with. Nothing was too much trouble ... Thanks and admiration for such professional support and care". Compliment for Safeguarding



## 6. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council's Adult Services received 152 complaints during 2016/17. The analysis earlier in this report highlights the types of complaints received and how they were handled. More information is included later in the report to highlight the learning these complaints allowed and the recommendations that may help maintain good performance and prevent any increase in complaints. Example complaints can help to highlight the issues customers raise with Adult Services. The examples below have been reworded slightly to maintain confidentiality and anonymity and steps have been taken to ensure the meaning is not altered. It should be noted that only small numbers of complaints go on to stage 2 so in most cases Adult Services was able to resolve the complaints illustrated below through the provision of information, an explanation or a service.

The customer is unhappy with the attitude of the social worker. They do not feel that the social worker has listened to their wishes and describe the attitude as "very dismissive", "with no consideration" of what the customer wanted. Complaint for ICS (North)

The customer feels that communication from ICS has been very poor. They said her mother would only be at [care home name] for a week and this is the start of the third week and she is still there. Customer states that she has had no update as to when her mother will return home. Complaint for ICS (Central)

Complaint regarding discharge from hospital. The complaint is that an assessment was not carried out in hospital prior to discharge. The complainant comments on a "Lack of/ unclear communication between NHS and ICS". Complaint for ICS (Central)

The complainant does not believe that he has been "properly informed regarding what his father is entitled to", and that the "processes or steps that should have been taken" have not been undertaken. Complaint for ICS (Central)

The complainant is unhappy about the lateness of invoices received relating to a care package. The customer comments they didn't know how much they had to pay and kept asking for information but only received it after a delay. Complaint for ICS (South)

Customer states that when her mother went into emergency placement due to dementia that she was not advised that her mother would need to pay a contribution. Complaint for ICS (South)

"There appears to be no clear evidence of a thorough Care and Support Assessment to take into account all [name of customer removed] needs relating to the choice of accommodation". Complaint for People 2 People (Central)

The complainant stated that they "have never received a copy of the assessment and do not know the reason why [customer name] was moved". Complaint for People 2 People (Central)

"Unhappy with the lack of action taken by Adults regarding the transition from Children's Services....The allocated worker had been absent due to sickness and the case has not progressed in a timely way". Complaint for People 2 People (Central)



## 7. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council's Adult Services recorded learning and/or actions against 57% of complaints cases during 2016/17. Limitations in the system used to record complaints mean that currently it is not easy to record detailed learning and multiple action points and therefore only primary action and primary learning point are included within the analysis below.

- Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2016/17:
  - 44% related to the need to change or review a policy or procedure.
  - 17% were to make an apology.
  - 13% were to change, review of provide a service.

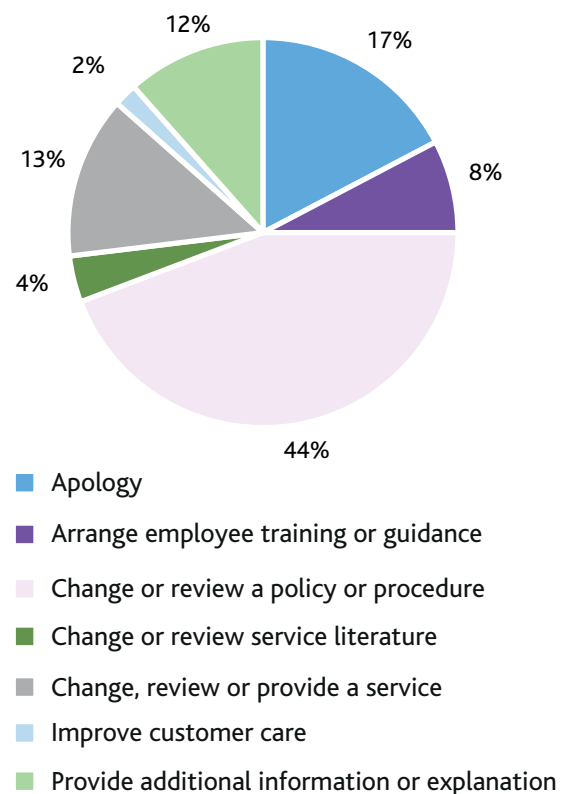
These improvement actions follow a similar pattern to the actions recorded in 2015/16.

- Learning points recorded during 2016/17 highlight the following:
  - 69% of learning was around communication and information (although not a dominant complaint category, communication is an underlying theme in a large proportion of complaints, so this learning is reflective of the more detailed complaints information available).
  - 17% of learning points are around service delivery or lack of delivery of a service.
  - 14% of learning falls under the category of service quality.

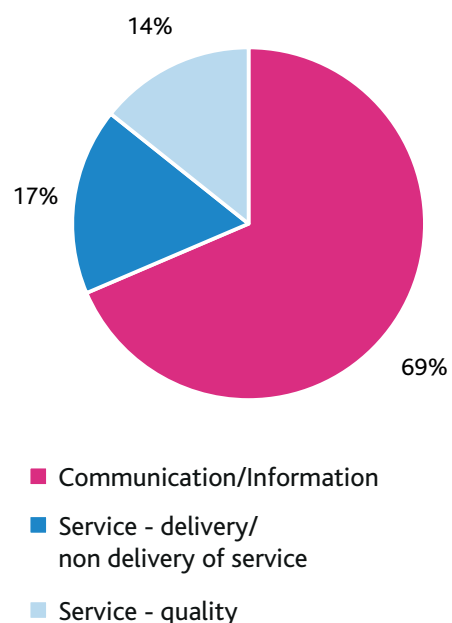
In 2015/16 learning points were spread over a larger number of categories so it is interesting to see that learning is more focused on three key areas in 2016/17.

Examples of learning are included on the following page.

### Improvement Actions Recorded 2016/17



### Learning Points Recorded 2016/17



## 8. Example Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council's Adult Services has worked throughout 2016/17 to take learning from complaints and record actions to be taken where they are necessary. Learning and actions are recorded on any case where they can lead to an improvement and they are not necessarily related to upheld or partly upheld cases (although the majority will be where some fault has been identified). The examples shown below are re-worded for simplicity as learning and actions are often included in more detailed descriptions of the outcome of a case. Steps have been taken to anonymise examples and maintain confidentiality.

The complainant should have been given clear information about the contribution to care at a much earlier stage. Shropshire Council has made changes to the documentation used to ensure that this now happens. There were delays in the processing of the different steps necessary to notify the Financial Assessment Team of the need for an assessment so changes have been made to trigger these steps earlier.

It is acknowledged that the current telephone systems are not adequate and at times do not allow callers to leave messages. This is currently being looked into with IT colleagues to work towards an improved system.

As a result of the complaint a process of issuing feedback forms on a weekly basis has been put in place. This should pick up any concerns and ensure they are dealt with promptly.

Due to a worker's absence there was a lapse in the communication regarding the commencement and costs of the support. Apology for this and for any inconvenience caused. A full explanation of the actions taken was also provided.

There was a lack of financial information shared in the process of transitioning from Children's Service to Adult Social Care. The learning is that there is a need to ensure people are informed of the contribution charges and improvements made to the transitioning process.

Apology that a review of an assessment was not carried out due to staff changes so arrangements put in place for a further assessment to be completed by Senior Practitioner.

Apology that there was a mistake within the letter that was sent. The case was mistakenly allocated to a member of staff in another team. This meant that it did not show up on the records until an exceptions report was run. Additional training has been provided to ensure this doesn't happen again.

There was a delay in communicating contact arrangements to the customer and there could have been more clarity regarding who to contact in the social worker's absence.

Apology delay in responding and an explanation that this was due to seeking specialist advice on particular concerns regarding consent and data protection.

An apology that there was a delay in invoicing due to human error, a mistake in the records was made. This is an unusual and very rare occurrence. In addition it is acknowledged that the process by which Finance raised the invoice was flawed. In order to avoid similar problems a weekly checking regime has been put in place to detect any cases where action is required.

The complainant was not sufficiently informed that the move would incur a change in costs. The social worker has been made aware of the consequences of this and asked to ensure learning is taken from the complaint and the same situation does not occur with other customers.

## 10. Recommendations

Performance is good overall: there has been little change in performance over the last 12 months (good performance has been maintained against most measures). Despite this, there are some actions that could be taken throughout 2017/18 in order to prevent any downturn in performance, and hopefully make further improvement.

1. The main area of performance in need of attention is the length of time taken to investigate and close complaints. It is taking longer to close stage 1 complaints. This average time could be a result of a few long running cases or the result of an increase in complexity of cases but it is important to retain a focus on this measure and ensure that the customer experience of the complaints procedure is not negatively impacted as a result of any delays.
2. A closer look at the detail within complaints highlights a number of common themes. The current complaints recording system does not have the sophistication to highlight underlying themes (only primary category of complaint is recorded) but a manual check highlights the following themes. These issues may not be raised in large numbers but nevertheless require attention to ensure a good customer experience for all:
  - Failure to provide information (mainly in relation to cost of care, choice of care home).
  - Unclear information provided (commonly about funding, care costs, respite).
  - Communication (commonly difficulty in making contact, lack of return calls, no response to emails).
  - Quality of service (for example the way hospital discharge has been handled, delay in delivering a service, lack of action, failure to deliver a service, breach of confidentiality).
  - Staff attitude or behaviour (usually concerns are feeling a lack of support from a social worker, arriving late for meetings/appointments).
  - Decision (for example about a care home or care package, lack of action regarding a decision).
3. Adult Services have been working to make improvements in order to reduce the number of complaints resulting from a lack of communication about charges for care and assessment of finances. This focus should continue over 2017/18 to ensure all staff are aware of their responsibilities for effectively communicating when there are financial implications for customers/family carers.
4. Stage 1 complaints handling remains effective and few complaints progress beyond stage 1. This good performance minimises any cost to Shropshire Council (for example by reducing staff time spent on complaints handling). It is recommended that this remain an area for attention within performance reporting and that immediate action is taken if good performance appears to be at risk. An increase in complaint numbers during quarter 4 is a cause for concern because any increase in complaint volumes could impact on the quality of stage 1 investigations unless staff capacity is in place to respond. Monitoring will continue throughout the year to mitigate against this risk.





## Recommendations continued...

5. The recording of learning and actions is important and was a key recommendation in 2015/16. Recording of learning and actions seems to have improved in 2016/17 but should nevertheless remain a recommendation due to the importance of learning in generating improvement.
6. Good recording practice is important to inform complaints investigations and it is recommended that this is an ongoing message for communication to all Adult Services Staff.
7. Some complaints can be complex and communication can be ongoing for some time. If communication does not appear to be resulting in progress towards a resolution it is recommended that face to face communication is organised. Meetings can allow people to communicate their concerns more clearly and offer more instant progress towards a conclusion.
8. Over 2016/17 work has taken place to respond to LGO guidance on third party provider complaints. Although progress has been achieved, further work is required in order to further develop and embed a new approach to the handling and recording of provider complaints. It is therefore recommended that this remains an area of focus in 2017/18.
9. Shropshire Council supports a Joint Complaints Group for Shropshire and Telford in order to bring health and social care Complaints Managers and Officers together to share learning from joint complaints, implement good practice and keep up to date with regional and national developments. It is recommended that this work continues into 2017/18 in order to overcome some of the challenges associated with joint complaints and cement robust working relationships across organisations.
10. Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team have been working on new staff guidance for Shropshire Council's staff intranet and hope to develop training on the Council's new 'Leap into Learning' system. It is recommended that this work continue and that Adult Services Staff are encouraged to access support and resources once available.
11. It is recommended that a focus on recording all feedback is maintained over the next 12 months. The information obtained from compliments and comments is very important and, when combined with more formal complaints cases, provides a more comprehensive understanding of customer experiences.
12. Shropshire Council's IT transformation is likely to have a significant impact on customer feedback handling and reporting during 2017/18. This change will also impact upon complaints performance reporting. It is recommended that good joint working is maintained between Adult Services and the Council's Feedback and Insight Team within Commissioning Support to manage this significant change and minimise any impact whilst maximising opportunities where they exist.



# Customer Feedback Annual Report

## Adult Services

### 2016/17

For more information concerning Shropshire Council's  
Customer Feedback reporting contact:

Feedback and Insight Team,  
Commissioning Support, Shropshire Council  
Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY2 6ND

Email: [customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk)  
[www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)

