

Customer Feedback Annual Report

Shropshire Council

2024/25

Feedback and Insight Team, Shropshire Council
June 2025



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1. Introduction

Shropshire Council's annual customer feedback report presents an overview of the formal feedback received, and responded to, by Shropshire Council between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. The report includes performance data for complaints, compliments and comments. The annual customer feedback report is made available to members of the public, councillors and council staff. The report complements the quarterly reporting and regular service-based monitoring reporting that takes place during the year. This more regular reporting is used to gain an understanding of customer experiences and the identification of any patterns in feedback. It supports the work that takes place to identify learning and actions designed to prevent further complaints and generate improvement.

This report also covers additional reporting requirements set out by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman within the Complaints Handling Code published in 2024. The Complaint Handling Code ('the Code'), sets out guidance for a process for organisations that will allow them to respond to complaints effectively and fairly. The purpose of the Code is to enable organisations to resolve complaints raised by individuals promptly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. The Ombudsman also hopes the Code will help to create a positive complaint handling culture amongst staff and individuals. The Code does not replace any existing statutory complaint processes such as The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 or Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009. The Ombudsman has issued the Code as "advice and guidance" for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. Local compliance will be assessed in Ombudsman findings from April 2026.

Complaints containing an element of social care fall under the statutory guidelines. These are classed as statutory complaints for either adult or children's services and are handled in line with the national statutory complaint procedures. The remainder of complaints are corporate complaints. Corporate complaints relate to administration or other types of services that do not provide social care. These are handled under the Council's corporate complaints procedure, set locally. You can find out more on Shropshire Council's website.

This report provides a council-wide view of formal customer feedback. Annual reports are also prepared for Adult Services and Children's Services allowing for a more detailed consideration of feedback for those service areas. Those reports are also published on Shropshire Council's website and are used to support key performance and inspection processes.

Definitions

Complaint: A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual or group of individuals. Family members and advocates may 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.

Service request: A request that the organisation provides or improves a service, fixes a problem or reconsiders a decision.

Compliment: Many people get in touch with a compliment when the information or support they have received has exceeded their expectations. It is helpful to learn when a service has been provided well or when a member of staff has done a great job. We record unsolicited compliments (we don't formally record positive feedback generated through feedback forms or between staff).

2. The Corporate Complaints Process

Feedback Received

Shropshire Council encourages users of our services, their family members and carers to highlight any concerns so that they may be addressed. If problems cannot be resolved and the customer wishes to make a complaint, staff members can offer advice on how to make a complaint. Support is also available from complaints officers based within Shropshire Council's Feedback and Insight Team.

Telephone: 0345 678 9000

Email: customer.feedback@shropshire.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/feedback/>

Online: Log into the My Shropshire portal



Acknowledgment

Complaints will be acknowledged within 5 working days of being received and we let the complainant know how their complaint will be handled.



STAGE 1

An appropriate Investigating Officer will be allocated to the case and asked to investigate the complaint. This is usually a manager within the service area the complaint relates to. The complainant will be provided with a written response within approximately 30 working days. (The timescale under the new Complaint Handling Code is 10 working days). In some complex cases it may take longer but we let the customer know if this extra time is needed and why (extensions must be agreed). 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

The complaint will be reviewed by a more senior manager, commissioner, or in most cases, the Complaints Monitoring Officer. They will review the Stage 1 complaint and 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 can reasonably do, the customer will be written to and advised of this. They will also be given information about the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.



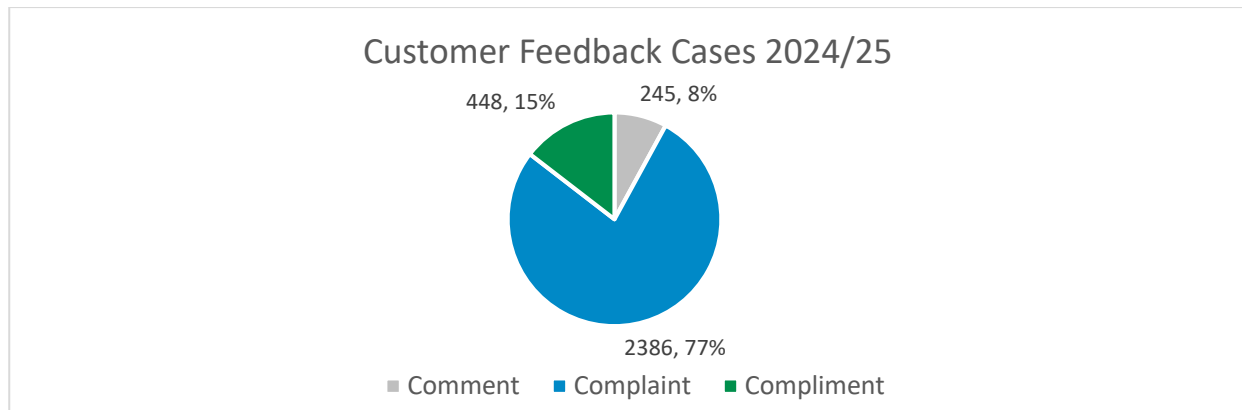
Ombudsman If a complaint cannot be resolved locally it can be investigated by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO). Responses are often complex, lengthy and require a large volume of appendices to be collated, catalogued and returned to the LGO. Complainants can request to go to the Ombudsman without a review if they choose to although they may be referred back to complete the local complaint process.

The Feedback and Insight Team coordinates the complaints process, recording and allocating complaints for investigation, monitoring response dates and overseeing performance. We cannot promise to get the result complainants want, but we do work to ensure that complaints are dealt with in line with the complaints procedures. We aim to keep customers informed of what is happening and the progress being made.

3. Customer Feedback 2024/25

Within the year 2024/25 Shropshire Council received and recorded 3,079 cases of formal feedback. There were:

- 2,386 initial complaint cases
- 245 comments
- 448 compliments

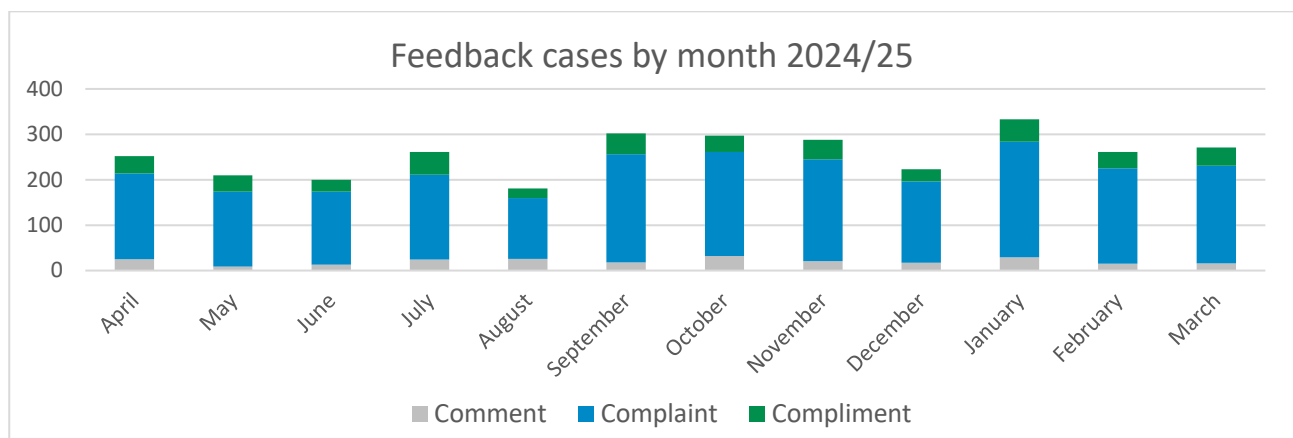


Comments and other enquiries formed 8.0% of all feedback cases and 14.6% of all customer feedback cases were compliments. The 2,386 complaint cases formed 77.5% of all formal feedback and resulted in 952 complaint investigations. Not all complaints cases will result in an investigation. There are a wide range of reasons a complaint may be closed before investigation such as it was a service request, anonymous, outside of the Council's jurisdiction, redirected to another process such as an appeal or claim, withdrawn or early resolved.

The 952 complaint investigations were handled under the different statutory and corporate complaints processes. There were:

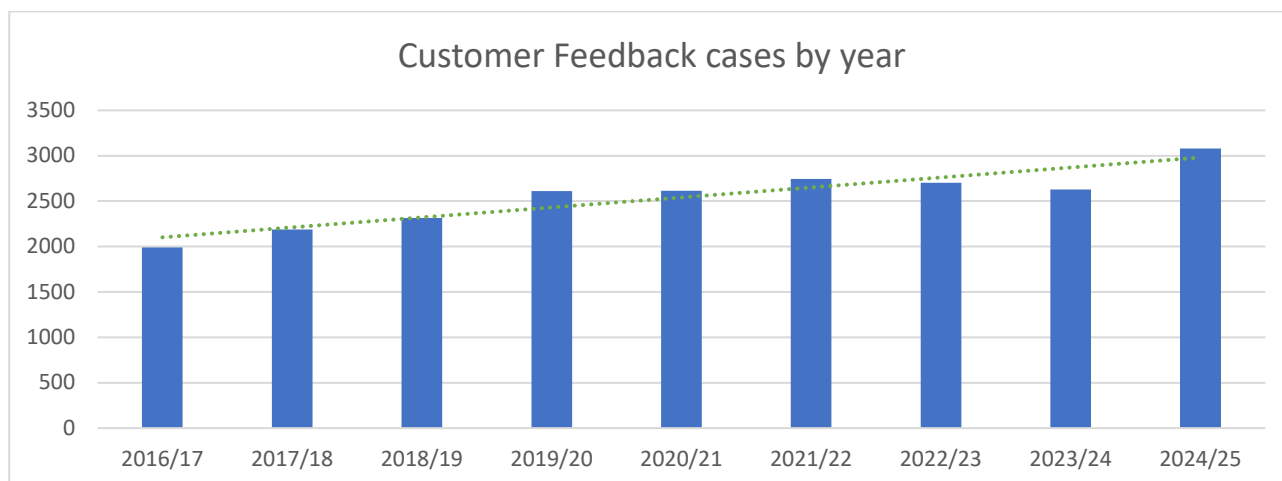
- 749 Corporate complaints
- 162 Adult Services statutory complaints (including provider complaints and multi-agency complaints)
- 41 Children's Services statutory complaints

Feedback levels can vary over the year with slight fluctuations influenced by changes in weather conditions (e.g. heavy rain causing flooding, snow and ice impacting highways) or other factors. Overall, unlike some past years, 2024/25 didn't see any dramatic increases or fluctuations due to severe weather conditions. There were some peaks in complaints as a result of public consultation and service changes made as part of Shropshire Council's response to budget pressures.



Over the year, the monthly average was 257 customer feedback cases (more than the previous year at 219). Customer feedback cases were relatively steady across the year with slight decreases in June and August. January (333), September (302) and October (297) saw the greatest number of feedback cases, marking very different patterns to the previous year. Looking across the years, September is often a busy month. There were 223 customer feedback cases in December, and this is commonly the month with the fewest cases, although in 2024/25 August saw the least feedback.

Performance data is considered by quarter. In 2024/25 quarter 1 (April to the end of June) saw the smallest quarter total with a steady increase through the year to 865 in quarter 4. The pattern is very different to the previous year making forecasting difficult. It suggests a steady upward trend unless there is change in 2025/26. Overall customer feedback case volumes have increased over recent years. The 2023/24 financial year suggested a plateauing with numbers relatively stable for the previous 3 years but 2024/25 has again seen another increase. There has been a 55% increase in customer feedback from 2016/17 and the chart below shows the upward trend line for customer feedback. There has been a 17% increase in all cases from 2023/24 to 2024/25. Due to budget pressures the resources allocated to manage customer feedback have not increased in line with growing demand. Research with 8 other similar local authorities highlights that team sizes were generally much larger. Shropshire Council's complaints officers have average caseloads of 282 complaints compared to an average of 118 among those surveyed.

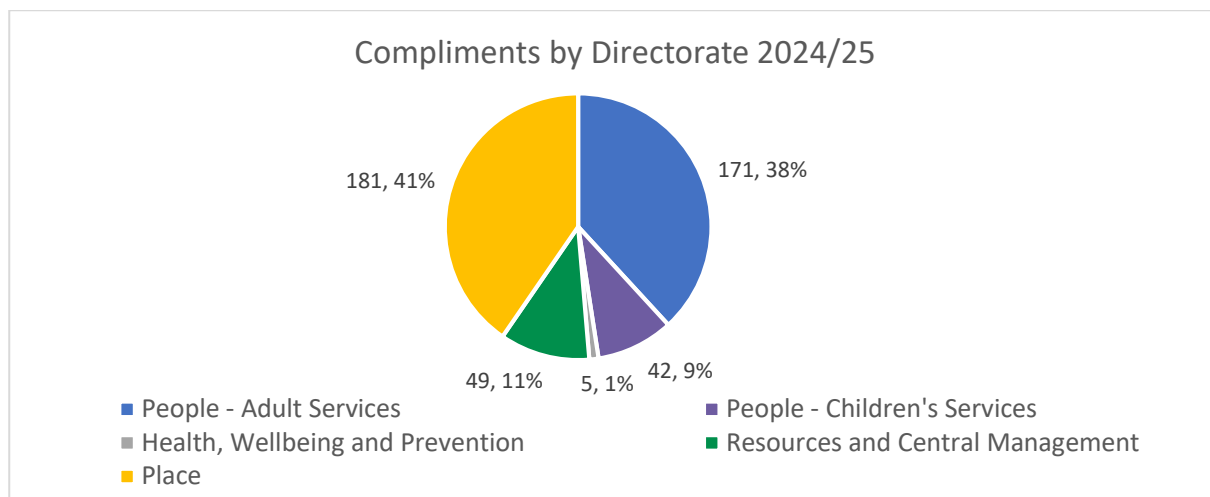


Work takes place to monitor the proportion of complaints within annual customer feedback totals. Over previous years there had not been any dramatic change and the proportion fluctuated slightly between 40% and 44%. However, this last year has seen dramatic change. In 2024/25 77% of all customer feedback cases raised were complaints.

Towards the end of the financial year the council implemented a significant restructure. Due to the timing of that restructure the data in this report is more reflective of previous structures. Efforts will be made in 2025 to bring reporting in line with new structures (see recommendations).

A closer look at compliments shows that the Place directorate (now split across Infrastructure, Strategy, Legal and Governance, and Communities & Customer) received the largest number of compliments (181 compliments, 40.4%) followed by People Adult Services (171, 38.2%). Due to the restructure this is the last year that change over time can be reported at a directorate or unit level.

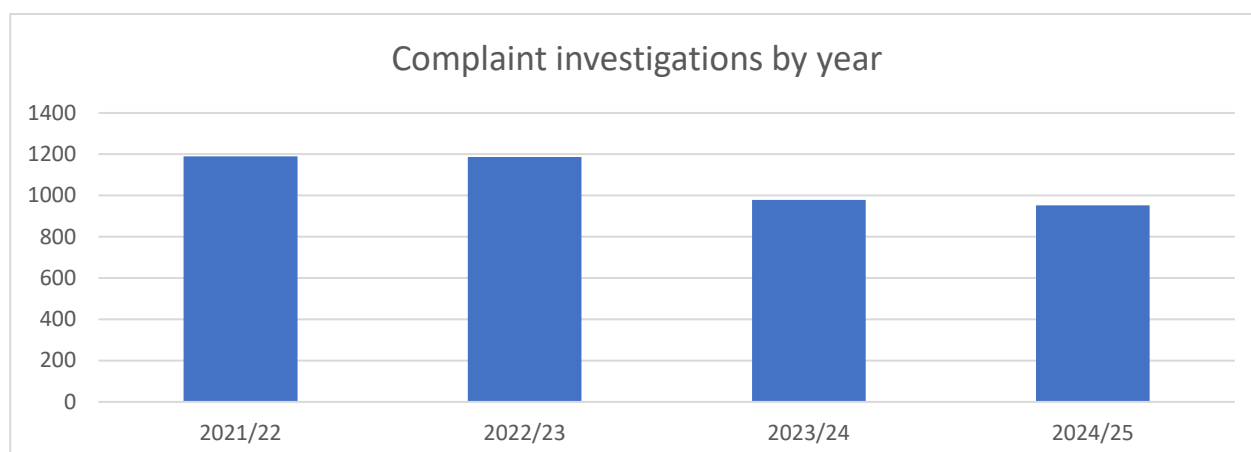
Adult Services and Children's Services data is presented separately rather than as the People Directorate (as was in 2024/25) due to the different complaint procedures for statutory cases and national reporting requirements.



Complaints (and some comments) are explored at greater depth than other types of feedback and may result in investigations. There may be multiple investigations for each complaint case, or a complaint case may be closed before it reaches investigation stage (for example it may be outside of the council's jurisdiction, or the complainant may decide to withdraw their complaint because they have received a response/service). A complaint may refer to the services provided by more than one council department, in which case there will be more than one investigation. Investigations are led by officers (usually team or service managers) with a detailed knowledge of the service area. In 2024/25 there were 2,386 complaints cases and 952 complaint investigations.

Complaint investigations do not always result in a complete investigation and outcome. Once a complaint case is explored in more detail, it is possible that a different course of action is required (e.g. an insurance claim or appeals process), or once the complaint is more fully understood it may be concluded that the complainant is merely asking for a simple remedial action to resolve a concern rather than wishing to proceed through a formal complaint investigation (a request for a service). Of the 2,386 complaints cases, many had an early closure reason allocated to indicate that the complaint did not result in a full investigation. Reasons for early closure may be that the complainant did not want to provide contact details or details to allow an investigation to proceed, the issue may not have been concerning a council or a commissioned service, or a more appropriate process may have been available (such as an appeal). Of the early closures, 397 cases (55%) had to be early closed because the complainant chose not to provide contact details (anonymous complaints cannot be investigated). 13% were outside of the council's jurisdiction and 8% were insurance claims. Complaint outcomes are explored in more detail later in the report and this is picked up within the report recommendations.

The following paragraphs are based on complaints investigations against which more detailed information is captured. The performance measures Shropshire Council uses to monitor complaints are largely based on complaints investigations.



Within the last few years considerable effort has been made to assess and 'triage' feedback prior to implementing the complaints process (where the process of incoming feedback makes that possible e.g. it is not possible through the portal online customer recording). This has avoided certain issues becoming complaints when they are a request for a service or can be remedied quickly, such as a request to cut back foliage or replace a streetlight. The Ombudsman uses guidance to emphasise that local authorities should provide a clear distinction between service requests and formal complaints (see definitions on page 3).

Complaints should be made when there are concerns about the quality of service or other action taken by the council and not before services have had the opportunity to respond, particularly if they have not previously been aware of an issue. An effective complaints process requires support across the organisation to manage incoming issues and enquiries effectively.

Action is required to improve this work within Shropshire Council due to the high volumes of enquiries being raised as complaints when they do not meet the definition of a complaint. There will always be a need to early close some complaints at case level but in 2024/25 42% of complaints raised at case level should have been considered as service requests and not directed to the complaint processes.

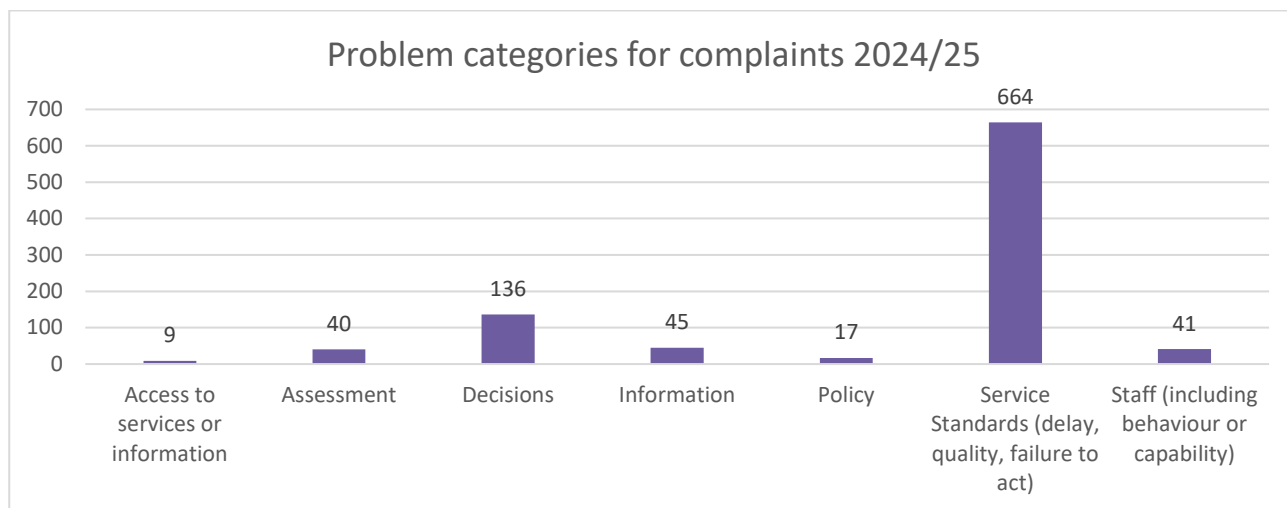
There is a requirement by the Ombudsman that annual reports should include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept. The table below provides a summary.

Cases not accepted as formal complaints for investigation

Early Closure Reason	Count	%
Immediate Resolution	66	9.1
No Further Action Required	10	1.4
Anonymous Case/ insufficient detail to investigate	398	54.9
Call Abandoned	2	0.3
Customer withdrew complaint/ Customer didn't respond	22	3.0
Failed to Provide Consent	10	1.4
Outside Jurisdiction	94	13.0
Other Organisation to respond	2	0.3
Logged In Error	3	0.4
Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures	10	1.4
Housing Benefit Appeal	1	0.1
Insurance Claim	59	8.1
Licensing Decision Appeal	3	0.4
Penalty Charge Notice	4	0.6
Planning Enforcement Appeal	1	0.1
Planning Permission Appeal	4	0.6
Special Educational Needs (SEN) Tribunals	1	0.1
Police Investigation - Criminal	1	0.1
Outside Timeframe/Old (12 months)	9	1.2
Service request/ premature/ created in error	25	3.4
Total	725	100

The complaint investigation data collected highlights the reasons for complaints. 'Service standards' was the main category under which complaints were made in 2024/25 (70%). Within 'service standards' there are a number of sub-categories and analysis highlights that 'service standards – failure to provide a service/take action', 'service standards – inappropriate/incorrect

action' and 'service standards – poor quality of work/service' were the dominant sub-categories. 'Decisions' was the second main category under which complaints were recorded (14%). Complaints under the category decisions are usually made because someone is dissatisfied with a decision made (only 5 complaints related to a decision not taken). Complaints related to decisions seem to have been growing over the last few years, across multiple departments and this could be linked to public sector budget challenges.



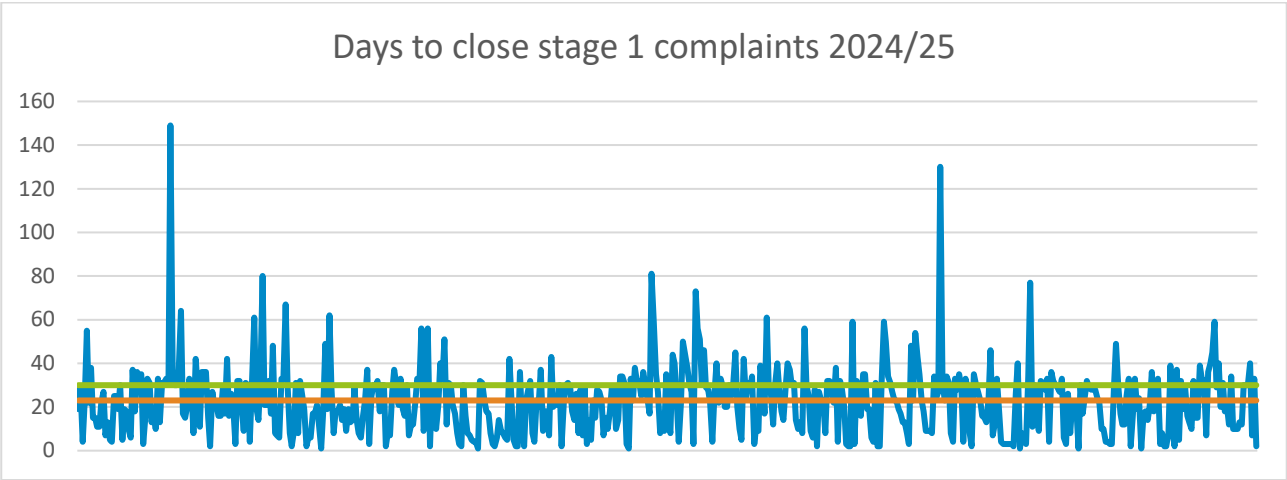
During 2024/25 Shropshire Council took an average of 23 working days to respond to stage 1 complaints (against the 30 working day timescale). This has been the dominant performance issue over the last 2 years. Although the average has reduced, suggesting some improvement, this is due to very short response times within some service areas, there are still too many cases exceeding the timescales. Quarterly performance reporting has been focusing on the average time taken to respond to stage 1 complaints. The trend has been for longer response times over the last few years, but continued focus has shown a stabilising of average performance. The Council currently has 60 working days in total to respond to corporate complaints, 30 working days for each stage (stage 1 and stage 2). Additional analysis shows that of the 565 stage 1 corporate closed complaints, 156 were late and 409 (72%) were on time. Days to close will remain a key measure within ongoing performance monitoring.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has implemented a new complaint handling code for corporate complaints (excluding adult and children's social care statutory complaints). The Ombudsman has issued the Code as "advice and guidance" for all local councils in England under section 23(12A) of the Local Government Act 1974. The Code is currently being piloted and there is an expectation that local authorities will adopt the Code by March 2026. The Ombudsman intends to start considering the Code as part of processes (including case findings and reporting) from April 2026.

Under the Code, stage 1 complaint investigations must be completed and a response provided within 10 working days. An additional 10 working days may be applied as an extension if there are robust and recorded reasons why more time is required and this is communicated to the complainant. Feedback and Insight Team officers report increasing complexity within complaints cases. Unfortunately, complexity is not something that can be easily measured or reported on with currently available data.

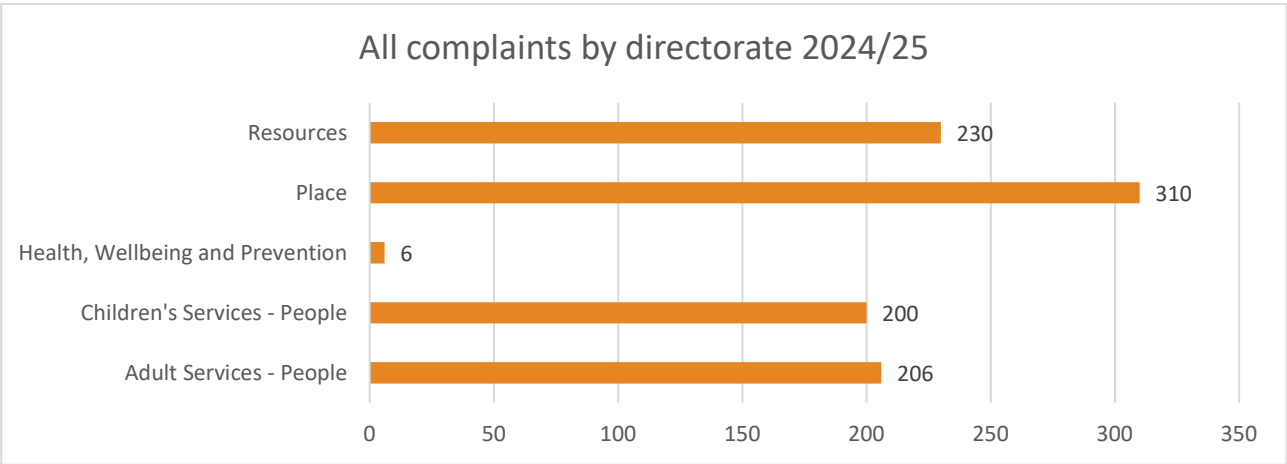
One indicator of complexity that can be reported is the number of investigations raised for each complainant during the year (complaints may be added to over time or additional new complaints made as a complaint is responded to). The data shows that, in 2024/25 there were 156 customers with 2 or 3 complaint investigations within the year (22% of customers). 18 customers made 4 or more complaints within the year (2.6%). There has also been a significant increase in use of the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customers' Register. In 2023/24 9 customers were

contacted under the procedure and in 2024/25 that increased to 26, often as a result of abusive, threatening and unreasonable contact with members of staff.



Green line = days to close timescale, Orange line = average days to close performance

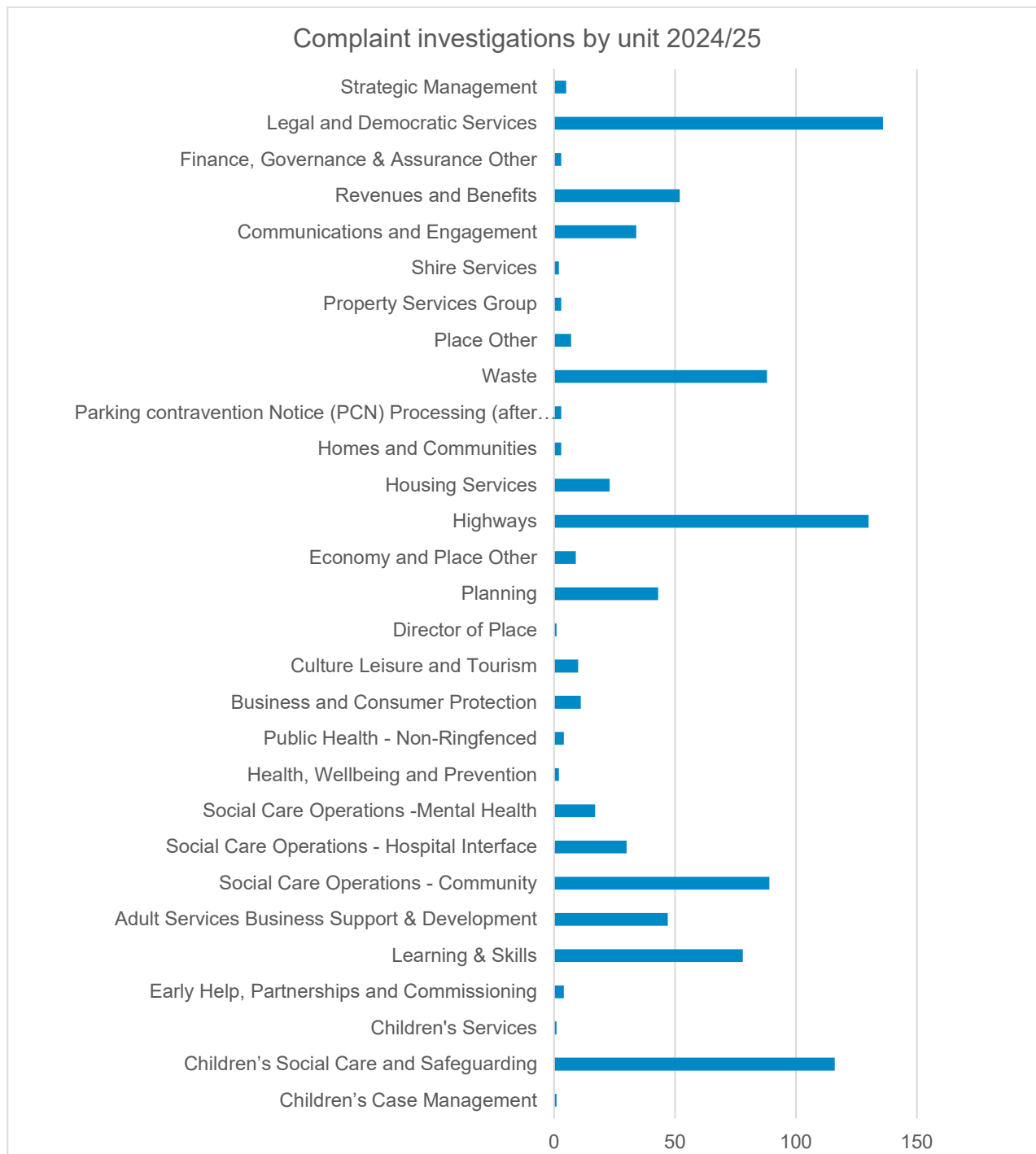
Some types of service are more likely to result in complaints than others and the chart below highlights complaints by directorate. Shropshire Council's Place Directorate (as was in 2024/25) handled the largest proportion of complaints compared to other directorates within Shropshire Council (33% of all complaints) followed by Resources and the Office of the Chief Executive combined (24%) and Adult Services (22%). Children's Services shows an increase and now has 21% of complaints. Health, Wellbeing and Prevention reported only 6 complaints for the year. Data for Adult Services and Children's services is explored in more detail throughout the year and within the annual reports for these services.



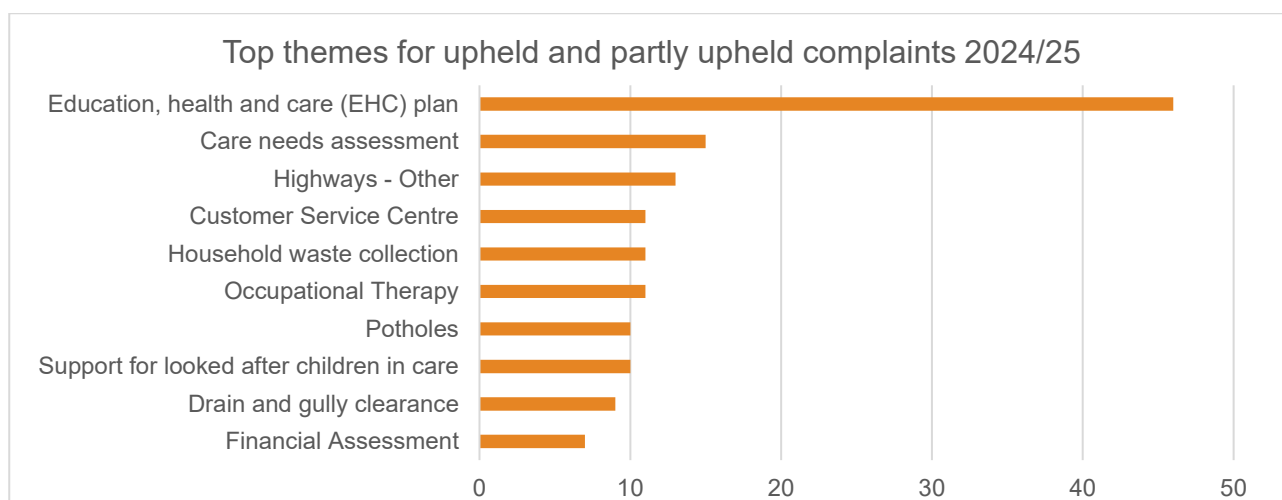
Highways and Transport complaints traditionally form a large proportion of all complaints and in 2024/25 formed 14% of all Shropshire Council's complaints (an increase from 12% in 2023/24 but an improvement on the 19% in 2022/23 and 27% in 2021/22). Waste services complaints have also fluctuated slightly from 14% in 2022/23 to 6% in 2023/24 and 9% in 2024/25. These are services used by all residents. Revenues and Benefits received a significant proportion of complaints at 5% similar to the last year. Planning Services complaints formed 5% (the same proportion as the previous year).

The Resources directorate, as was, included a smaller number of customer-facing services (many providing services to other council departments). A significant proportion of the complaints allocated to Resources are not related to its own services but to those of other departments. Legal and governance services was allocated 136 complaints, 14% of all complaints but this is due to the fact that stage 2 corporate complaints have increased in volume (the complaints are not complaints about the services delivered by Legal Services).

Considering detailed data by service it is worth noting that some service areas with slightly higher volumes of complaints reflect the national picture across other local authorities. Children's social work case management, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and adult social care complaints are among areas of service nationally where there are growing demands and pressures leading to complaints. Some of the reasons for this are linked to national economic and social changes and cost of living pressures. The chart below displays numbers of complaints by unit (services are grouped into these areas for ease of reporting). Comparison will not be possible in 2025/26 due to the significant council restructure.

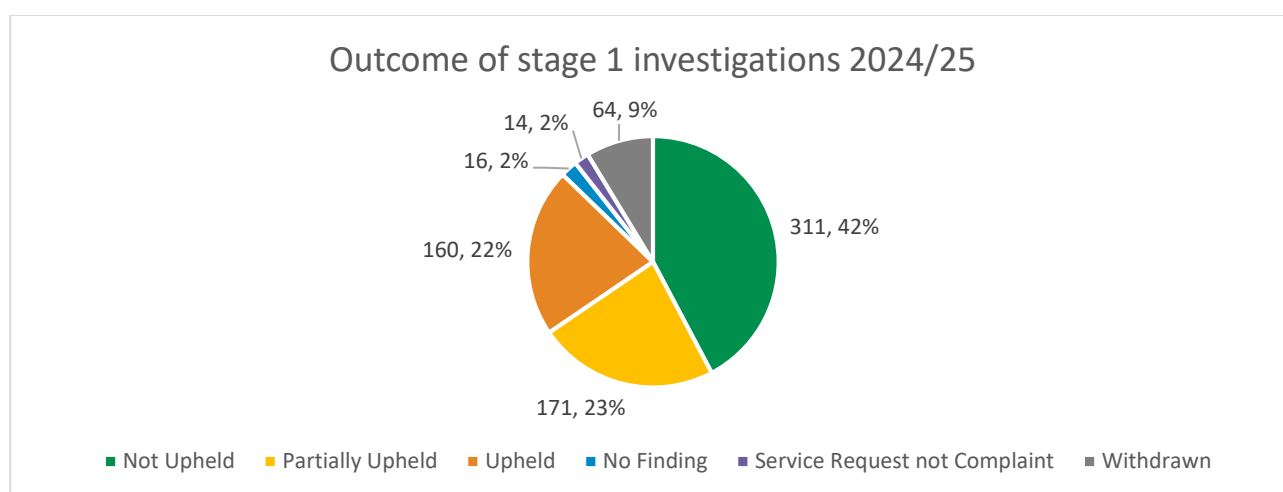


The top themes for upheld and partly upheld complaints are shown in the following chart and show that complaints relating to Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans, care needs assessment, highways and customer services are more frequently leading to findings of some fault.



When considering complaints performance, the outcome is very important. The data for 2024/25 shows that:

- At the end of the 12-months 2024/25, 736 were complaints opened and closed at stage 1.
- Of the closed stage 1 complaints 22% were upheld (160 complaints), 23% were partially upheld and 42% were not upheld.
- Considering the complaints that were upheld (all stages closed within the year), 21% were with Highways and Transport (a significant improvement compared to 2021/22 at 32% but more than the 17% in 2023/24). 18% were for Special Educational Needs and Disability within Learning and Skills, 14% Adult Social Care Operations - Community and 9% were with Waste Management.
- Although in smaller numbers, there were also a higher proportion of upheld cases for Adult Services Business Support (linked to charges for care (7%) and Customer Services (5%)).
- The three dominant problem categories within upheld complaints are 'Service standards – failure to provide a service/take action', 'Service standards – delays', and 'Service standards – inappropriate/incorrect action'. Work by the Feedback and Insight Team is undertaken to keep complainants informed of any delays and progress, but often concerns cannot be addressed without more detailed and specialist knowledge from service areas.
- 2% of stage 1 complaints investigations resulted in no finding. A complaints investigator may find that not enough evidence or information is available to draw a conclusion, or they may be unable to obtain enough information from the complainant to fully complete the investigation. Occasionally it may be a sign of failure to investigate. The proportion of 'no finding' outcomes was previously a problem, but this has now been addressed and performance has improved and been consistent for the last two years.



The next section of the report considers the progression of complaints beyond stage 1.

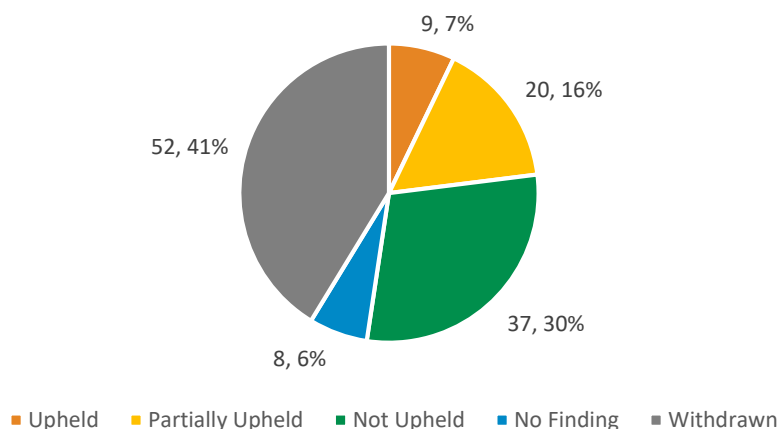
4. Progression of Complaints

Effective stage 1 complaint handling can reduce the number of stage 2 complaints. It is important to understand how many complaints progress beyond stage 1 and this is a measure included within regular performance reporting. During 2021/22 only a small proportion of all the complaints Shropshire Council received progressed beyond stage 1. Since then the number of cases progressing beyond stage 1 has increased. In 2021/22 99 cases progressed beyond stage 1; in 2022/23 the number was similar at 95 but in 2023/24 129 cases progressed and in 2024/25 this rose again to 143.

Occasionally some complaints may progress prematurely to the Ombudsman without a stage 2 investigation and these will be referred back where appropriate. The table below shows the number of complaints investigations beyond stage 1 and the chart below highlights the outcome of those complaints (18 of the cases remain open so do not yet have a finding). Numbers will differ from the Ombudsman data later in the report due to the difference in the dates reported to each organisation. For the first time in 2024/25 it is now also possible that insufficient staffing and excessive caseloads have impacted reporting. Some cases may not have been up to date at the time of the annual data extract.

Stage 2	Stage 3 (children's statutory)	Ombudsman	Total investigations beyond stage 1
82	1	61	144

Outcome of stage 2 and Ombudsman investigations 2024/25



The Shropshire annual report from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman highlighted that 79 complaints were received by the Ombudsman for Shropshire Council in 2024/25 and 31 cases were considered/decided (15 of those with an outcome). This total will include complaints received by Shropshire Council in previous financial years, so the data is not comparable with local data covered in this report (looking at cases received within the financial year).

Of the 15 cases investigated with outcomes, 9 were upheld, 6 were not upheld. Many of the total 79 considered resulted in other actions such as referring back for local resolution, offering advice, or closure after initial enquiries. The Ombudsman reports Shropshire Council's upheld rate at 60%. The LGO upheld rate for similar local authorities is reported as 80%. Available data from the

Ombudsman is used within a separate, performance report to track annual performance over the years and for benchmarking with the local authority family group.

Ombudsman Complaints – Received and Upheld

Category	Number received	Number upheld
Adult Care Services	16	3
Benefits & Tax	6	0
Corporate & Other Services	4	0
Education & Children's Services	16	4
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	8	0
Highways & Transport	7	1
Housing	5	0
Planning & Development	16	1
Other	1	0
Grand Total	79	9

Outcome of Decisions Made

				Investigation Outcomes			Grand Total
Advice given	Closed after initial enquiries	Incomplete/Invalid	Referred back for local resolution	Not Upheld	Upheld	Upheld rate (%)	
2	31	3	28	6	9	60	79

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations was 100% in 2024/25. The rate of complaints per 100,000 population is 2.7% for Shropshire Council in 2024/25 against an average of 5.3% for all authorities.

Ombudsman is currently considering the introduction of a new standard set of performance measures for local authorities to enable improved information and benchmarking beyond the Ombudsman level data available currently. These measures have been suggested within recent Ombudsman training on the new Complaint Handling Code (see recommendations).

Appendix 1 displays the current Ombudsman performance measures. Appendix 2 highlights findings and recommendations made by the Ombudsman for upheld cases. All recommendations are monitored and actioned by the Shropshire Council service area responsible for the complaint, and in many cases overseen by the service area's Service Director.

5. Annual Comparisons

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of compliments – average The number of compliments in 2024/25 has fallen very slightly since the previous year but remains in line with average figures.	436	475	448
	Performance is in line with expected numbers with.		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Complaints investigations – lower than expected The number of complaint investigations recorded by Shropshire Council totalled 952 in 2024/25, 978 in 2023/24, 1,187 in 2022/23 and 1,190 in 2021/22. Overall, the reduction is against the upward trend of complaints at case level. Work has been taking place to triage cases and ensure service requests are not taken forward as complaints prematurely, but the Ombudsman warns that a fall in complaint numbers can be a sign of poor performance. The lack of resources to raise and manage investigations should be considered a possible factor with caseloads significantly exceeding other local authority averages.	1,187	978	952
	Complaint investigations have reduced in number, but this is not necessarily a sign of improved performance and should be considered alongside other data.		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Days to close – Average days to close reduced The average number of working days taken to respond to a stage 1 complaint was 32 working days in 2023/24 but performance has since improved with the 2024/25 average standing at 23 working days. Despite this average improvement too many complaints investigations are exceeding the 30 working days total for stage 1 corporate complaints (28% were overdue). Complaints investigators increasingly report concerns about their ability to meet complaint timescales as a result of workload and other pressures.	26 working days	31 working days	23 working days
	Average performance has improved but there are still too many complaints investigations exceeding timescales.		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Outcome at stage 1 – Reduction in proportion upheld When considering the proportion of complaints upheld, performance overall was relatively steady until the last few years when a trend towards more upheld complaints began. It would be a concern if performance monitoring highlighted too few cases being upheld (it is important that Shropshire Council accepts where things have gone wrong and strives for improvement). As highlighted earlier in the report, there are some services experiencing pressure and seeing increased findings of fault.	16%	27%	22%
	Some improvement since 2023/24.		
	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Complaints progressing beyond Stage 1 – Increased In 2019/20 2.7% of cases progressed to stage 2 or the Local Government Ombudsman (47) and this has increased considerably over recent years with 19.6% cases escalating beyond stage 1 in 2024/25. That doesn't include cases where an additional stage 1 response is required. The Ombudsman upheld rate was 80% in 2022/23 and remained stable in 2023/24 at 79%. There has been an improvement in 2024/25 to 60%.	8.7%	15.0%	19.6%
	Complaints cases have become increasingly complex and time consuming and the data for escalated cases helps illustrate this increase.		

6. Example Compliments

Shropshire Council received 448 compliments during 2024/25. Examples are included below. Receiving a compliment can make a big difference to a member of staff working hard to provide support for others or deliver services as effectively as possible. Although compliments are not given the same attention as complaints, they are used within the Council to understand where things are working well and to recognise the additional efforts made by individual members of staff.

Compliment for Revenues and Benefits Officer: "[name removed] at Sales Ledger is fantastic, very polite and cheery. I rang to ask if a direct debit had been set up and she was very patient with me she explained in lots of detail what was happening and even liaised with Debt Recovery (he's great too) for me about another issue I have. She was fantastic, everyone needs a [Name removed] at their council! Thank you."

Compliment for Housing Options and Homelessness: "I wanted to say thank you for the help you have given me. I know it won't be easy but with your, and your colleagues, support I know I can do what's the best for me and my children. I am incredibly grateful. Thank you once again."

Compliment for Rights of Way, Outdoor Partnerships: "Thank you for all your help with this footpath diversion. It has been a pleasure and I wish all local authorities were as proactive, communicative and helpful as you have been. I am sure our paths will cross again soon."

Compliment for Planning Officer: "I just thought I'd let you know that we have secured funding from Veolia to go forward with our new clubhouse. I wanted to thank you for your help it. I don't suppose you get too many thanks, so I thought I'd let you know that your support was crucial and much appreciated."

Compliment for Public Protection Officer, Blue Badge Scheme: "I have just tried to call you to give a more personal thank you for looking at my case and making the application process so clear and easy but I think you may be 'mega busy' and so the switchboard couldn't get through. It's bitter-sweet in some ways - not wanting to have a disablement but at the same time so very grateful for the extra support you have been able to offer. I really do appreciate you...Keep doing what you do; you have certainly made my day. Thanks again."

Compliment for Waste Client Team: "I just want to say thank you to the refuse collectors who come to Bucknell each week. They always seem to go above and beyond. I'm really thankful. I left a huge box out today, and I did not expect it to be taken; but it has been. They grab my garden waste bin if I decide not to put it out or forget. I just hope they see this message as I imagine it's quite a thankless job at times. I'm very grateful and feel lucky to have such a service."

Compliment for Occupational Health and Housing Options: "The major Adaptations to our property have now been completed and we are so very grateful for the massive difference that this has made to our lives. The specialist toilet is so helpful in managing our condition and the walk-in level access shower is also a huge blessing. We appreciate everyone who has been involved with it all from start to finish."

"Compliment for a Compass Help and Support Team: "...I don't have enough words to thank him enough for his kindness and his positive support that he brings to every visit. My kids are always so comfortable and open when he is around. I would like to compliment his support and hard work for my family."



7. Example Complaints

Shropshire Council received 2,386 complaints during the year 2024/25 and carried out 952 investigations. Some example complaints have been included below to highlight the type of feedback Shropshire Council receives. These examples were not all upheld. Some complaints arise from a lack of understanding of the service Shropshire Council can provide. Where necessary wording within the examples has been removed within to ensure anonymity. The next section of this report looks more closely at learning and the actions taken following complaint investigations.

Complaint relating to Customer Services: *"I wish to raise a formal complaint regarding your telephone line 03456789000. It is hopeless trying to call option 9, one JUST cannot get through, sometimes I have been holding the line for over one hour 10mins the 10 mins will be add to my telephone bill at a PREMIUM RATE, which I am most annoyed about. I have been trying to get through since the 3rd September, to no avail. This is appalling service. The Council is quick to take money from people but are reluctant to provide services that meets the needs of is town and if they do it is always at a high price. Shropshire Council's administration/executives are no longer servants of, and for, the people but rather a self-serving despot corporation acting under the guise of a Council. This cannot continue without some redress."*

Complaint relating to Children's Case Management North West: *"...there has been a lack of contact with her regarding her children's welfare since they were removed from her care earlier in the year. She also states that she has been trying to arrange contact with them, but no one is updating her or arranging it."*

Complaint relating to Revenues and Benefits. *"I'm trying to challenge incorrect business rates. I call day after day and no one answers the phone. I send an email which bounces back informing it is no longer monitored. I try to upload detail on your website and it will not allow me to do it. How do I talk with someone?"*

Complaint relating to Building Control: *"The customer's complaint is with regard to a lack of both communication and action ..The customer has concerns with his neighbour's car port. The customer has had communication with the team and an inspection conducted. However, he feels that communication has been difficult, and his initial requests not acted upon. The customer is waiting for a report from Building Control to enable his solicitor to progress the matter."*

Complaint relating to Community Social Work Team South: *"A meeting was held to seek additional hours for care to be provided to my son...We were told that we could expect a decision within 6-8 weeks, it is now 13 weeks and no decision."*

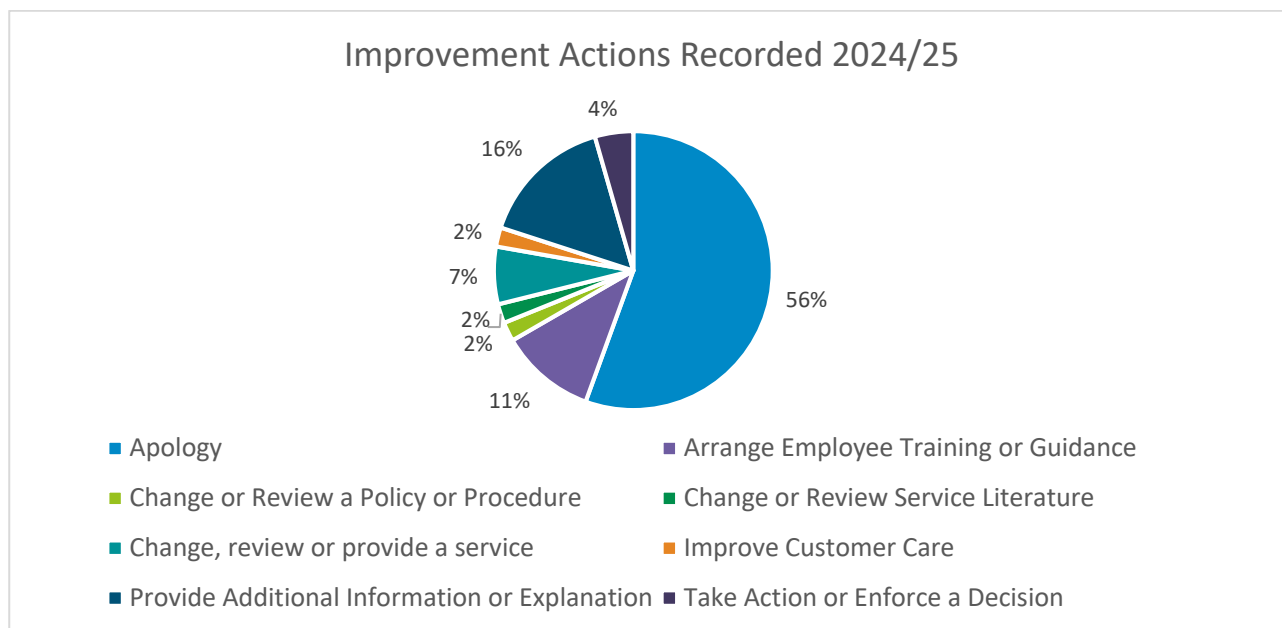
Complaint relating to Housing: *"The complainant states that she cannot access email without support and so has missed the emails meaning her application has been terminated. The complainant states she made the Council aware she could not respond to emails without support and that she requires communication in the post. The complainant feels that reasonable adjustments should have been so that she can access the service. As a consequence of this, she is now going through the application process again from the beginning and has lost the initial date of her application as the backdated date."*

Complaint relating to Waste Management: *"The customer ordered a bulky Collection for 2 items to be collected and paid £48. Phoned in to cancel as she had given the items to some children for a den. I advised unfortunately would not be able to have a refund due to terms and conditions. Customer feels this is not fair as she tried to contact just after 5.00pm on Friday but we were closed then it was weekend then a Bank Holiday feels she is being punished as she can't have a refund. She would like to complain about this and have it looked into."*

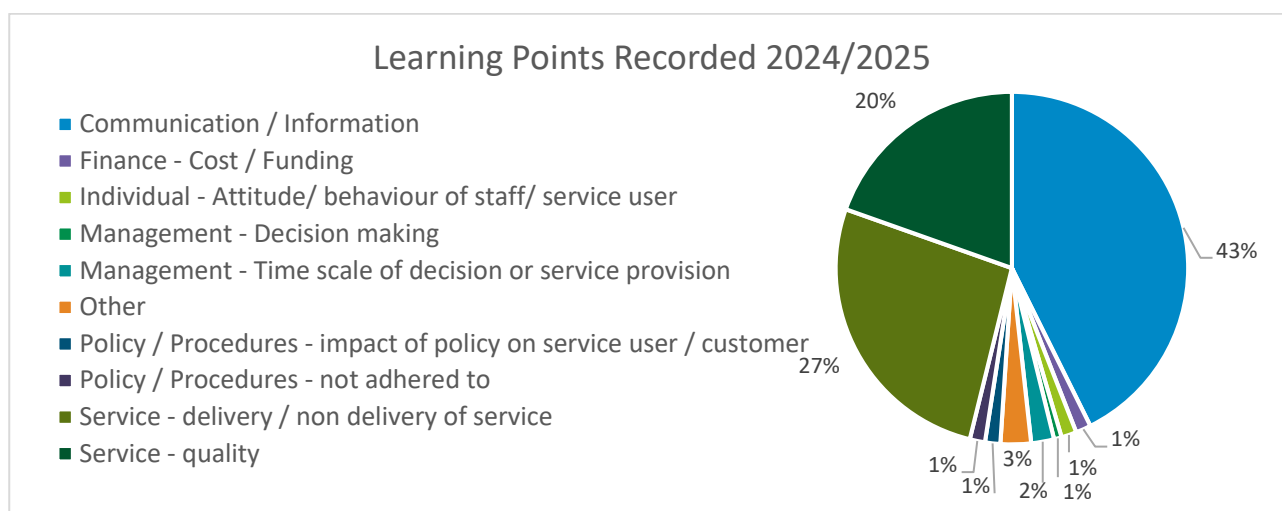


8. Learning and Actions

Shropshire Council recorded learning, action or outcome notes against 705 complaints in 2024/25 (and 138 of those included detailed actions or lessons). Actions and lessons are usually made when complaints are upheld or partly upheld. If only a small proportion of complaint investigations result in a finding of fault there will be fewer remedial actions or learning. However, this recording of learning and actions should be an area for ongoing improvement (currently around 40% of all partly upheld or upheld closed cases have learning recorded). This is referred to in the recommendations. The charts below highlight the primary action and learning point recorded.



Of the actions that were recorded against complaints closed in 2024/25 56% were to provide an apology. 16% of actions included the provision of additional information or explanation and 11% were actions linked to arranging employee training or guidance.



43% of learning related to communication or provision of information. Communication is consistently a dominant theme within complaints. Complainants often highlight disappointment that they were not contacted, were not communicated with enough, or information was not shared effectively. More effective communication at an earlier stage can lead to a better understanding of the issues or the processes council staff work to and prevent the development of a formal complaint. Non-delivery of a service and service quality were also main categories in 2024/25.

9. Example Learning and Actions

The recording of learning is strongly encouraged following the completion of a complaint investigation. Acknowledging and acting on learning from complaints can avoid any mistakes from being repeated and lead to ongoing improvement. Examples are shown below to highlight the type of learning and actions recorded. This is one element of wider work undertaken to focus on quality, and ensure customers receive a good standard of service. Wording within the examples has been altered slightly for simplicity and to ensure confidentiality.

Following a complaint relating to the lack of suitable alternative education for child: *"[The Council will] issue a reminder to staff that the statutory duty to provide suitable alternative educational provision under Section 19 remains with the Council."*

Complaint about repeated reports on FixMyStreet over two years being ignored: *"I have spoken to the Technician about the apparent lack of activity and communication with you, as the Council's customer, for which I apologise. I have reminded them that they are responsible for maintaining a line of communication with customers about issues that have been raised. There may not always be a consensus, but efforts should be made to keep residents updated and in a timely manner."*

Complaint following a mess left after Waste Collection: *"The supervisor of the depot has reminded the crews of the importance of tidying up any waste they drop on the floor. Whilst sometimes a small amount of mess is unavoidable due to a sack being overfilled, we do request that our collection crews report the larger messes to the depot so that they can send a colleague to tidy the area up."*

Complaint relating to an invoice which is being challenged as the customer does not recognise the amounts: *"All Financial Assessment Officers have been reminded that it is their responsibility to explain the contents of invoices. Further training will be provided to ensure officers are able to answer such queries when required."*

Complaint relating to the responsibility for Housing: *"There was confusion among officers regarding Shropshire Council's duty to support and provide accommodation and some lack of clarity in working with the ICB. This is now recognised and officers made aware of Shropshire Council's duty."*

Complaint relating to the delay in responding to an application for an uplift in care home fees: *"We now have a structured process, with scrutiny and oversight, in place to consider provider uplift queries and applications. This will ensure that current and future uplift requests are responded to in a timely manner and that there is clear communication regarding outcome of application and justification."*

Following a complaint relating to ineffective communication within Children's Social Care: *"There was an element of complaint upheld relating to communication. The social worker had said they would make contact at the end of the week but was then absent from work, so the communication did not happen. There is learning linked to the need to manage communications and expectations."*

Following a complaint relating to the conduct of a Children's social worker: *"A new social worker has been put in place but lessons have been learnt from the practice of the previous social worker and the need for management and oversight. Communication improvements and clarity of information were taken as learning points."*

Complaint relating to non-repayment of care home fees: *"I appreciate that the communication was unclear, and discussions have been held with staff around clear and transparent communication. I apologise for the upset and distress that has been caused. Please accept my sincere apologies that your recent experiences of the Council were not of the high standard that one should expect to receive."*

10. Conclusions

The customer feedback data for 2024/25 highlights a number of challenges for the year ahead, particularly in relation to the significant performance improvements that will be required under the Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code. Over the year, the monthly average was 257 customer feedback cases (more than the previous year at 219). This is also reflected in quarterly totals and in 2024/25 each quarter saw an increase in the number of customer feedback cases being raised. There has been a 55% increase in customer feedback from 2016/17 whilst the level of resources available to manage the complaints process has remained the same.

Analysis suggests that too many complaints are being raised prematurely rather than remedial action being taken to resolve concerns informally at service request stage. In 2024/25 42% of complaints raised at case level should have been considered as service requests and not directed to the complaint processes. Despite this, through use of triage processes complaints investigation numbers have reduced compared to the previous year. This should not necessarily be considered a sign of improvement and may reflect the Council's ability to adequately resource the complaints processes and the increase in inappropriate referrals to the complaints process.

The complexity of complaints has increased (although difficult to demonstrate through the performance measures) and more complaints are progressing beyond stage 1 to stage 2 (for corporate and children's statutory complaints) and to the Ombudsman. There are also more customers making multiple complaints in a year and the council has seen an increase in use of restrictions under the unreasonably persistent and vexatious customers register. Where complaints are upheld this is commonly as a result of failure to provide a service, incorrect action, poor quality of service and delays. The pattern for more complaints relating to decisions has been maintained in 2024/25 (only evident in the last 2-3 years). Generally, complainants are more likely to challenge the decisions taken by Shropshire Council. This is not restricted to some services but can be seen across the local authority.

Complaints for Adult Services and Children's Services have continued to form a larger overall proportion of complaints compared to previous years. Place Directorate complaints have decreased since 2022/23 and over the last 2 years have varied from 31% in 2023/24 to 33% in 2024/25). Adult Services complaints now form 22% of complaint investigations (from 16% in 2022/23) and Children's Services complaints have increased to 21% this year. There are clear areas of more pressure (many reflected nationally) such as in Special Educational Needs and Disability, Revenues and Benefits and finance related complaints. Waste services saw a peak in complaints linked to service changes designed to reduce expenditure, but numbers have since stabilised.

The average number of working days taken to respond to stage 1 complaints has improved but remains a concern due to the number of overdue complaints (averages mean good performance in some areas masks problems in others). However, it is encouraging to see that the average number of working days to respond to stage 1 corporate complaints has reduced from 31 working days in 2023/24 to 23 working days in 2024/25. Late responses can be linked to increases in the proportion of complaints progressing beyond stage 1. Additional analysis shows that of the 565 stage 1 corporate closed complaints in year, 28% were late. This is a concern due to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's new complaints handling code for corporate complaints which includes a 10 working day stage 1 timescale. In 2024/25 only 27% of complaints were responded to within 10 working days at stage 1.

Overall, the Ombudsman investigated 15 complaints relating to Shropshire Council in 2024/25 (with 79 raised and 31 assessed). 9 complaints were upheld with an uphold rate of 60%. Due to the relatively small numbers of cases the upheld rate can fluctuate significantly each year and comparison is difficult, however, performance is better than the average upheld rate for similar local authorities (80%).

11. Progress Update

Key actions and achievements over the last 12 months are summarised against a brief description of the recommendations made last year. Some of the recommendations require ongoing organisational action across services and are beyond the direct influence of the Feedback and Insight Team.

	Action Last Year	Progress Made
1	Improve customer experience: Use the Digital Delivery Unit transformation programme as a means of improving the ease of raising customer feedback reporting and the updates provided to reassure customers that the appropriate action is underway.	A new IT system for complaints is in the process of being developed. The system has not yet lead to any recommendations designed to improve customer experience; and since its use is limited to a few services it is not expected to improve the experience of making service requests in a way that will lead to a reduction in complaint numbers.
2	Focus on service request responses: Adopt a focus on resolving requests for services promptly as a way of reducing the number of complaints received by the organisation.	Work to triage cases has resulted in mixed success. In some areas, services have been able to provide a service and resolve an issue to prevent the need for formal investigation. In others there have been additional complaints about delays and poor customer service.
3	Feedback Culture: Foster a positive complaint handling culture among staff and individuals, as envisioned by the Ombudsman's Code, to encourage constructive feedback and learning from complaints.	The Feedback and Insight Team work to promote the value of learning from complaints where possible but there is a need for further action to deliver an organisation-wide change in how complaints are viewed, and learning identified and used for service improvement.
4	Review the potential impact of the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code: Undertake further analysis of the impact of the new Ombudsman's Complaints Handling Code and present a report to Cabinet during 2025/26.	The self-assessment included within this report highlights where work is required to move towards delivery of the Ombudsman's Code. An internal report will be presented to the Leadership Board and will set out the resources required to deliver the Code.
5	Clarify exclusions: Ensure customers and members of staff understand the most appropriate way of responding to enquiries and complaint process exclusions. Using the correct processes and clarifying when a complaint cannot be taken.	The Feedback and Insight Team has been identifying the exclusions that will be recommended within the updated Shropshire Council corporate complaints procedure – this is subject to agreement to implement the code and sign off of a new procedure.
6	Improve Response Times: Continue efforts to reduce the average response time for stage 1 complaints, aiming to meet the 30-working day timescale.	This has been a significant focus in the last year and the data highlights improvement with average timescales reducing. It will remain an important priority to reduce numbers of overdue complaints.
7	Service Area Focus: Pay special attention to service areas there are higher upheld rates.	More focused work takes place with some service areas such as more regular reporting of complaints due/overdue and regular caseload meetings.

	Action Last Year	Progress Made
8	Upheld Rates: A greater proportion of complaints are being upheld. This suggests service failure and growing pressures. It may be a difficult issue to address with local authority budgets under pressure.	There has been some improvement in the last 12 months and upheld rates have reduced. There is further work to do and this report highlights those areas in need of attention for the next 12 months.
9	Complaint Progression: A focus should be on trying to reverse the annual increases in the proportion of complaints escalating beyond stage 1.	Numbers of cases progressing have continued to increase. This is featured as a key recommendation for 2025/26.
10	Focus on Response Quality: Without significant change the Feedback and Insight Team is not large enough to quality check all complaints. Work is recommended to find ways of improving quality, perhaps through training, IT system record keeping etc.	The Feedback and Insight Team have been promoting stage 1 complaint quality as a way of reducing follow up requests and progression to stage 2. This work has not yet impacted, and data highlights the increase in stage 2 requests. Work will need to continue with senior management support (see recommendations).
11	Remedies: Shropshire Council will need to respond to the Ombudsman's Code with a new approach to remedies. This may need policy consideration and could also include increased reporting and reporting of actions and integration into performance reporting.	The decision to delay decision making concerning the implementation of the Ombudsman's Code has meant a lack of progress in this area. Additional resources are required to deliver this action (see recommendations).
12	Equalities and Reasonable Adjustments: The Complaint Handling Code sets out new requirements for the way local authorities should consider and record customer needs within the complaints process.	This has been considered within casework, but new council guidance will be required to accompany a new complaints procedure if the agreement to implement the Code is made (following see sections of the report).
13	Changing Customer Behaviours: Abuse towards staff is becoming more common and must be addressed. Work will continue to assist officers in applying the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customers Procedure and other support to assist where possible.	There has been a significant increase in use of the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customers Procedure. This has resulted in some successful outcomes but there are some limitations in cases where customers have greater levels of need or complexity. The overall result has been mixed with some positive impact.
14	Third Party Complaints: Consideration of the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code on local arrangements with third party providers.	Additional resources are required to deliver this action (see recommendations).
15	Engagement and Surveys: The Ombudsman has included a request within the Code for local authorities to report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizens' panels, staff and relevant committees. It also asks that service feedback surveys provide details of how individuals can complain.	Additional resources are required to deliver this action (see recommendations).

12. Ombudsman Code

In August 2023, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman published proposals for a standardisation of complaints processes for public bodies that are within its remit, including council complaints processes. It should be noted that the proposals do not cover statutory complaints processes for social care (children's statutory complaints process and adult statutory complaints process). The aim of the planned changes will be to create a consistent approach to complaints across councils and housing providers to give the public greater clarity of what to expect when making a complaint. Shropshire Council responded to the consultation along with other bodies, including the Local Government Association.

This has resulted in some revisions to the Code published by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has asked councils to start applying the Code as soon as possible but will not use the Code within its assessment of complaints and recommendations until April 2026.

The table below sets out the Code timescales compared with the current council procedure.

Process	Shropshire Council's current corporate complaints timescales	Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code timescales
Stage 1 investigation acknowledgement	5 working days	5 working days
Stage 1 investigation response	30 working days	10 working days
Stage 1 investigation extension	Not applicable – as soon as possible	10 working days
Stage 2 review acknowledgement	5 working days	5 working days
Stage 2 review response	30 working days	20 working days
Stage 2 review extension	Not applicable – as soon as possible	20 working days

Main requirements:

- An annual report (to include a list of content including the annual letter from the Ombudsman).
- Completion of an annual self-assessment against the Code. This should set out how well the organisation is performing against the Code (e.g. timescales), information of improvements implemented, records of quality checks, exclusions and feedback from staff. If the failure to meet an expectation only relates to one service area or department this should be made clear.
- Changes to corporate complaints procedure to use the definitions of complaints and service requests set out within the Code. Clear exclusions must also be explained (where other processes should be used rather than a corporate complaint).
- Communication about the complaints process and choice of channels to make a complaint (e.g. online form, telephone, letter).
- Demonstration of reasonable adjustments and complaint remedies action.
- An appropriately resourced complaints process with central responsibility and senior officer leadership and governance. All relevant staff should be suitable trained in the importance of complaint handling.
- A culture of learning from complaints with access to all levels to allow resolution of disputes promptly and fairly.
- An Elected Member with responsibility for complaints with reporting to Scrutiny.
- Robust performance reporting.

The Ombudsman has published a series of guidance documents to support the implementation of the Code, available here: [Complaint Handling Code - LGSCO](#)

13. Code Self-Assessment

Shropshire Council has not yet implemented the new Complaints Handling Code outlined in section 13. A decision was taken by the previous administration to delay decision making until 2025 due to organisational pressures and other priorities. The new administration (Cabinet) will consider the requirement to implement the Code alongside this report. A step towards implementation includes the publication of an annual self-assessment to demonstrate compliance. This self-assessment acts as a baseline, pre-implementation with progress expected to be reported in 12 months' time.

Code section	Compliance?	Comments
1. Definition of a service request and complaint		
1.1 Adopt a shared understanding of what constitutes a service request and what constitutes a complaint. (1.2 to 1.4 set out definitions). This should be set out within the complaints policy.	Not yet	The complaints procedure will need to be updated.
1.5 A complaint that is submitted via a third party or representative should still be handled in line with the organisation's complaints policy.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
1.6 Organisations should recognise the difference between a service request and a complaint. This should be set out in their complaints policy.	Partly	Differences included but wording to be updated with Ombudsman's new definitions.
1.7 Organisations should have the opportunity to deal with a service request before a complaint is made. A complaint may be raised when the individual expresses dissatisfaction with the response to their service request, even if the handling of the service request remains ongoing.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
1.8 Service requests should be recorded, monitored and reviewed regularly.	No	This is an organisational issue beyond complaints processes.
2. Exclusions		
2.1 and 2.4 If the organisation decides not to accept a complaint, it should be able to evidence its reasoning and communicate to the complainant. Each complaint should be considered on its own merits.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
2.2 Organisations should accept complaints referred to them within 12 months of the issue occurring, or the individual becoming aware of the issue. Discretion may be applied in some circumstances.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
2.3 Exclusions should be set out within the complaints policy/procedure.	Partly	Some changes are required as the procedure is updated.
2.4 and 2.5 If an organisation decides not to accept a complaint, an explanation should be provided to the individual. Organisations should not take a blanket approach to excluding complaints; they should consider the individual circumstances of each complaint.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
3. Accessibility and awareness		
3.1A Organisations should make it easy for individuals to complain by providing different channels through which they can make a complaint.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
3.1B Organisations must consider their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and anticipate the needs and reasonable adjustments of individuals who may need to access the complaints process.	Partly	This appears to be in line with current practice although clear guidance would be helpful.

Code section	Compliance?	Comments
3.2 Individuals should be able to raise their complaints in any way and with any member of staff. All staff should be aware of the complaints process and be able to pass details of the complaint to the appropriate person within the organisation.	Partly	This is in line with current practice, but staff members may need reminders.
3.3 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.	Yes	This is communicated in current performance reporting.
3.4 Organisations should make their complaint policy available in a clear and accessible format.	Yes	This is in line with current practice although an update is required.
3.5 The policy should include details about the Ombudsman and the Code.	Yes	This is in the current procedure and when updated will remain.
3.6 Organisations should give individuals the opportunity to have a suitable representative deal with their complaint on their behalf, and to be represented or accompanied at any meeting with the organisation.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
3.7 Organisations should provide individuals with information on their right to access the Ombudsman service.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
3.8 Where an organisation asks for feedback about its services through a survey, it should provide details of how individuals can complain.	No	This is a significant additional requirement and may generate complaints.
4. Complaint handling resources		
4.1 Organisations should have designated, sufficient resource assigned to take responsibility for complaint handling, including liaison with the relevant Ombudsman and ensuring complaints are reported to the governing body (or equivalent).	Unclear	Clarification of the Ombudsman's expectation of 'sufficient' would be helpful.
4.2 Anyone responding to a complaint should have access to staff at all levels to facilitate the prompt resolution of complaints. They should also have the authority and autonomy to act to resolve disputes promptly and fairly.	Yes	Staff at all levels are engaged in the complaint process.
4.3 Organisations are expected to prioritise complaint handling and a culture of learning from complaints. All relevant staff should be suitably trained in the importance of complaint handling. It is important that complaints are seen as a core service and resourced accordingly	No	A training programme will need to be implemented.
5. The complaint handling process		
5.1 Organisations should have a single policy for dealing with complaints covered by the Code.	Yes	This is current practice although the existing policy will need updating.
5.2 Organisations should not have extra named stages (such as 'stage 0' or 'informal complaint') as this causes unnecessary confusion.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
5.3 When an individual expresses dissatisfaction that could meet the criteria for a complaint as set out in section 1 of the Code, they should be given the opportunity to make a complaint.	Yes	This is in line with current practice, but a review is recommended in line with IT system changes.
5.4 The person responding to the complaint should: clarify with the individual any aspects of the complaint they are unclear about;	Yes	This is in line with current good practice but will need to be included in staff training.

Code section	Compliance?	Comments
- deal with complaints on their merits, act independently, and have an open mind; - give the individual a fair chance to set out their position; - take measures to address any actual or perceived conflict of interest; and - consider all relevant information and evidence carefully.		
5.5 Where a response to a complaint will fall outside the timescales set out in this Code the organisation should inform the individual of when the response will be provided and the reason(s) for the delay.	Yes	This is in line with current practice, but a review is recommended due to limited staff capacity.
5.6 Organisations should keep a record of any reasonable adjustments agreed. Any agreed reasonable adjustments should be kept under active review.	No	The current IT system does not allow this recording. This is a new requirement.
5.7 Organisations should not refuse to escalate a complaint through all stages of the complaints procedure unless there are valid reasons to do so. Organisations should clearly set out these reasons, and they should align with the approach to exclusions set out in section 2 of the Code.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
5.8 A full record should be kept of the complaint, and the outcomes at each stage. This should include the original complaint and the date received, all correspondence with the individual, correspondence with other parties, and any relevant supporting documentation such as reports. This should be retained in line with the organisation's data retention policies.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
5.9 and 6.10 Organisations should have systems in place to ensure that a complaint can be remedied at any stage of its complaints process. Individuals should not have to escalate a complaint in order to get an appropriate remedy.	Partly	Recommended for review.
5.10 and 5.11 Organisations should have policies and procedures in place for managing unacceptable behaviour from individuals and/or their representatives. Organisations should be able to evidence reasons for putting any restrictions in place and should keep an individual's restrictions under regular review. Restrictions should be proportionate and have regard for the Equalities Act 2010.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
6. Complaints stages		
6.1 Organisations should have processes in place to consider which complaints can be responded to as early as possible, and which require further consideration. Organisations should consider factors such as the complexity of the complaint and whether the individual is vulnerable or at risk. Most stage 1 complaints can be resolved promptly, and an explanation, apology or resolution provided to the individual.	Partly	The challenge is achieving any resolution or prioritisation consistently across service areas.
6.2 Complaints should be acknowledged and logged at stage 1 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the complaint being received.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.

Code section	Compliance?	Comments
6.3 Organisations should provide a full response to stage 1 complaints within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	No	This is a new requirement and significant timescale change.
6.4 and 6.5 Any extension should be no more than 10 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual. When an organisation informs an individual about an extension to these timescales, they should be provided with the details of the relevant Ombudsman.	No	This is a new requirement.
6.6 A complaint response should be provided to the individual when the answer to the complaint is known, not when the outstanding actions required to address the issue are completed. Outstanding actions should still be tracked and actioned promptly, with appropriate updates provided to the individual.	Partly	Responses are provided when the answer is known but the central team do not have the level of resources required track and report all actions.
6.7 Organisations should address all points raised in the complaint and provide clear reasons for any decisions, referencing the relevant policy, law and good practice where appropriate. Organisations should be clear which aspects of the complaint they are, and are not, responsible for and clarify any areas where this is not clear.	Partly	Complaint investigators do not always reference relevant policies within responses and do not always make responsibilities clear.
6.8 At the conclusion of stage 1 organisations should provide details of how to escalate the matter to stage 2 if the individual is not satisfied with the response.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
6.9 Where individuals raise additional complaints during stage 1, these should be incorporated into the stage 1 response if they are related, and the stage 1 response has not been provided. Where the stage 1 response has been provided, the new issues are unrelated to the issues already being considered, or it would unreasonably delay the response, the new issues should be logged as a new complaint.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
6.11 If all or part of the complaint is not resolved to the individual's satisfaction at stage 1, it should be progressed to stage 2 of the organisation's procedure. Stage 2 is the organisation's final response.	Yes	The current way of working is largely in line with this but this could lead to increases in stage 2 requests.
6.12 Requests for stage 2 should be acknowledged and logged at stage 2 of the complaints procedure within five working days of the escalation request being received.	Yes	This is in line with current practice although demand is currently exceeding staff capacity and delays are occurring as a result.
6.13 Individuals should not be required to explain their reasons for requesting a stage 2 consideration. Organisations should make reasonable efforts to understand why an individual remains unhappy as part of its stage 2 response.	No	This is a new requirement.
6.14 The person considering the complaint at stage 2 should not be the same person that considered the complaint at stage 1.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
6.15 Organisations should issue a final response to the stage 2 within 20 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.	No	This is a new requirement.

Code section	Compliance?	Comments
6.16 Any extension should be no more than 20 working days without good reason, and the reason(s) should be clearly explained to the individual.	No	This is a new requirement although stage 2 responses would not usually exceed 40 days.
6.18 and 6.19 Organisations should confirm the following in writing to the individual at the completion of stage 2 in clear, plain language: - the complaint stage; - the organisation's understanding of the complaint; - the decision on the complaint; - the reasons for any decisions made; - details of any remedy offered to put things right; - details of any outstanding actions; and - details of how to escalate the matter to the Ombudsman if the individual remains dissatisfied. Stage 2 should be the organisation's final response and should involve all suitable staff members needed to issue such a response.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
6.21 Where an organisation's complaint response is handled by a third party (e.g. a contractor) or independent adjudicator at any stage, it should form part of the two stage complaints process set out in this Code. Individuals should not be expected to go through two complaints processes.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
6.22 Organisations are responsible for ensuring that any third parties handle complaints in line with the Code.	No	Activity will be required to communicate new expectations and monitor compliance.
7. Putting things right		
7.1 Where something has gone wrong an organisation should acknowledge this and set out the actions it has already taken, or intends to take, to put things right.	Yes	This is in line with current practice.
7.2 and 7.3 Any remedy offered should reflect the impact on the individual as a result of any fault identified. The remedy offer should clearly set out what will happen and by when and be followed through to completion.	No	This is a new requirement and require significant change including IT system changes.
7.4 and 7.5 If a proposed remedy cannot be delivered the individual should be informed of the reasons for this, provided with details of any alternative remedy and reminded of their right to complain to the Ombudsman. Organisations should take account of the good practice guides when deciding on appropriate remedies.	No	Shropshire Council will need to undertake work to develop a local policy/procedure in relation to remedies and develop resources to assist complaints investigators in identifying remedies.
8. Performance reporting and self-assessment		
8.1 Organisations should produce an annual complaints performance and service improvement report for scrutiny.	Yes	Changes to the annual report have been incorporated.
an annual self-assessment against this Code to ensure its complaint handling policy remains in line with its requirements.	Yes	This self-assessment
a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the organisation's complaint handling performance. This should also include a summary of the types of complaints the organisation has refused to accept;	Yes	Included within this report
any findings of non-compliance with this Code;	Partly	

Code section	Compliance?	Comments
the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints;	No	Limited examples only.
the annual letter about the organisation's performance from the Ombudsman;	Yes	Included as Appendix 1
any other relevant reports or publications produced by the Ombudsman in relation to the work of the organisation.	Yes	Not applicable – no reports from the Ombudsman.
8.2 The annual complaints performance and service improvement report should be reported through the organisation's governance arrangements and published on the section of its website relating to complaints. The response to the report from the relevant governance arrangement should be published alongside this.	Yes	This is in line with current practice other than publishing the response to the report within the report on the complaints webpages.
8.3 Organisations should also carry out a self-assessment following a significant restructure, merger and/or change in procedures.	Partly	The self-assessment is produced but significant work is required.
9. Scrutiny & oversight: continuous learning and improvement		
9.1 Organisations should look beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint and consider whether service improvements can be made as a result of any learning from the complaint.	Mixed	This is hard to assess for the whole organisation and varies service to service.
9.2 A positive complaint handling culture is important to the effectiveness with which organisations resolve disputes. Organisations should use complaints as a source of intelligence to identify issues and introduce positive changes in service delivery.	No	The complaints handling culture is not positive at present and requires improvement.
9.3 Organisations should report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizens' panels, staff and relevant committees.	No	Complaints reports were previously shared with the Making it Real Board but there are no current arrangements.
9.4 The organisation should appoint a suitably senior person to oversee its complaint handling performance. This person should assess any themes or trends to identify potential systemic issues, serious risks, or policies and procedures that require revision.	Yes	The Complaints Monitoring Officer is a senior role. The Complaints Manager role may need review following organisational changes.
9.5, 9.6 and 9.7 The 'Member responsible for complaints' should receive regular information on complaints performance (including the annual report) and have access to staff. As a minimum, the Member should receive: - regular updates on the volume, categories, and outcomes of complaints, alongside complaint handling performance - regular reviews of issues and trends arising from complaint handling; and - the annual complaints performance and service improvement report.	Yes	Reporting to the lead member is in place and quarterly reports have been/will be provided.
9.8 Organisations should have a standard objective in relation to complaint handling for all relevant employees or third parties (includes taking responsibility, collaboration across departments and acting within professional standards).	Partly	Complaint handling is referred to within job description templates for managers referred to within model contracts for third party providers.

14. Recommendations

The following recommendations for the year ahead are designed to allow for ongoing improvement in the application of Shropshire Council's complaints procedures and in the work of Shropshire Council to obtain and respond to customer feedback. The recommendations also cover work towards implementation of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's complaint handling code although a more detailed implementation plan will be required should Cabinet decide to meet all recommendations for April 2026. It should be noted that recommendations will require resourcing and cannot be delivered within the existing level of resources allocated to complaints handling.

1. **Provide a more detailed report covering the LGSCO Complaint Handling Code:** Due to the resource implications of the new Code, a more detailed report and action plan may need to be presented to Shropshire Council's Leadership Board (delivery dependent on a Cabinet decision in July 2025). This should include information on the current pressures and challenges facing the Feedback and Insight Team.
2. **Review Shropshire Council's corporate complaints procedure:** Regardless of the Ombudsman Code decision there is a need to review Shropshire Council's corporate complaints procedure to strengthen the sections on exclusions, remedies and reasonable adjustments.
3. **Develop guidance on remedies:** There is a growing expectation by the Local Government and Social care Ombudsman that more complaints should be remedied at the local level and that all local authorities should have a local remedies policy in line with the national document provided by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
4. **Develop guidance on reasonable adjustments:** Complaints work in 2024/25 has highlighted that there is a need to remind all staff of their responsibilities to offer reasonable adjustments. Recording and reporting of the reasonable adjustments offered as part of the complaints process will also be required.
5. **Third Party Complaints:** As part of Shropshire Council's response to the Ombudsman's Code, consideration will need to be given concerning complaint handling arrangements with third party providers and how additional training and actions could be resourced. 'Managing complaints in contracted and commissioned services: a good practice guide' has been produced by the Ombudsman for local implementation.
6. **Staff Training and Feedback Culture:** Foster a positive complaint handling culture among staff and individuals, as envisioned by the Ombudsman's Code, to encourage constructive feedback and learning from complaints. Implement staff training and remind staff to also report formal feedback centrally so that Shropshire Council has a view of both positive feedback and complaints.
7. **Engagement and Surveys:** The Ombudsman has included a request within the Code for local authorities to report back on wider learning and improvements from complaints to stakeholders, such as citizens' panels, staff and relevant committees. It also asks that service feedback surveys provide details of how individuals can complain. Shropshire Council will need to consider how these new requirements may be resourced and implemented.
8. **Focus on service request responses:** Too many cases are being raised as complaints rather than addressed as service requests. Shropshire Council needs to adopt a focus on resolving requests for services promptly as a way of reducing the number of complaints received by the organisation. It should also be noted that the Ombudsman's Code recommends new reporting of service request data. Input of Customer Services will be required.

9. **Focus on Response Quality:** Without significant change the Feedback and Insight Team is not large enough to quality check all complaints and checks should not be required if all complaints investigators are committed to producing good quality stage 1 responses. Work is recommended to find ways of improving quality. Investigators will need to be reminded of the importance of referring to policies, law, good practice and ensuring clear communication relating to responsibilities.
10. **Continue to Focus on Response Times:** Continue efforts to reduce the average response time for stage 1 complaints and significantly reduce the number of complaints being responded to out of timescale (this will be more challenging if a decision is made to implement the shorter timescales set out within the Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code).
11. **Complaint Progression:** A focus should be on trying to reverse the annual increases in the proportion of complaints escalating beyond stage 1. Stage 2 complaints have increased significantly in the last year. This focus will link to quality and remedies.
12. **Complaint Prioritisation:** Currently there is little evidence that complaints are prioritised against other cases or against each other depending on complexity, urgency and impact. All service areas are asked to consider the suggestion by the Ombudsman that prioritisation is necessary and design a system appropriate to the service (a blanket council-wide approach would be exceptionally challenging due to the significant differences in requirements, statutory functions, pressures and levels of resources across the organisation).
13. **Learning and actions:** The evidencing of learning and actions within complaint responses has reduced. This is only in part due to a reduction in upheld complaints in the last 12 months and as a whole it remains a concern, particularly because it leads to a lack of data to demonstrate how learning from complaints is used to deliver improvement and prevent repeated customer dissatisfaction. From 2026 annual reports should clearly identify the service improvements made as a result of the learning from complaints.
14. **Implementation of new national performance measures:** Regardless of the decision taken concerning the implementation of the Complaint Handling Code it is recommended that the Ombudsman's proposed complaint performance measures should be implemented. This does not require significant additional resource allocation and will allow improved benchmarking with other local authorities (previously only possible for the Ombudsman stage of the complaints process).
15. **New structures:** Shropshire Council's complaints system does not currently allow reporting against new council structures. Significant work is required to ensure quarterly data and 2025/26 annual data is aligned to new structures and enables appropriate team and service area reporting.
16. **Changing Customer Behaviours:** Although use of the Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Customers Procedure has increased, this in itself, does not resolve the growing trend of customer harassment and abuse towards members of staff and its impact. A more strategic cross-council approach is recommended to review and respond to this growing issue.

Appendix 1 Ombudsman Letter 2024/25

21 May 2025

By email

Mr Begley
Chief Executive
Shropshire Council

Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN

Dear Mr Begley

Annual Review letter 2024-25

I write to you with your annual summary of complaint statistics from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman for the year ending 31 March 2025. The information offers valuable insight about your organisation's approach to complaints, and I know you will consider it as part of your corporate governance processes. We have listened to your feedback, and I am pleased to be able to share your annual statistics earlier in the year to better fit with local reporting cycles. I hope this proves helpful to you.

[Your annual statistics are available here.](#)

In addition, you can find the detail of the decisions we have made about your Council, read the public reports we have issued, and view the service improvements your Council has agreed to make as a result of our investigations, as well as previous annual review letters.

In a change to our approach, we will write to organisations in July where there is exceptional practice or where we have concerns about an organisation's complaint handling. Not all organisations will get a letter. If you do receive a letter it will be sent in advance of its publication on our website on 16 July 2025, alongside our annual Review of Local Government Complaints.

Supporting complaint and service improvement

In February we published [good practice guides](#) to support councils to adopt our [Complaint Handling Code](#). The guides were developed in consultation with councils that have been piloting the Code and are based on the real-life, front-line experience of people handling complaints day-to-day, including their experience of reporting to senior leaders and elected members. The guides were issued alongside free [training resources](#) organisations can use to make sure front-line staff understand what to do when someone raises a complaint. We will be applying the Code in our casework from April 2026 and we know a large number of councils have already adopted it into their local policies with positive results.

This year we relaunched our popular [complaint handling training](#) programme. The training is now more interactive than ever, providing delegates with an opportunity to consider a complaint from receipt to resolution. Early feedback has been extremely positive with delegates reporting an increase in confidence in handling complaints after completing the training. To find out more contact training@lgo.org.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Amerdeep Somal
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
Chair, Commission for Local Administration in England

Complaint overview

2024 / 2025

Between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, we dealt with 79 complaints. Of these, 33 were not for us or not ready for us to investigate. We assessed and closed 31 complaints. We investigated 15 complaints.

[More about this data](#)



Complaints dealt with



Not for us

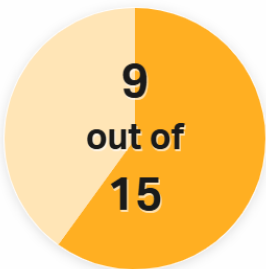


Assessed and closed



Investigated

Complaints upheld



We investigated 15 complaints and upheld 9.

60% of complaints we investigated were upheld.

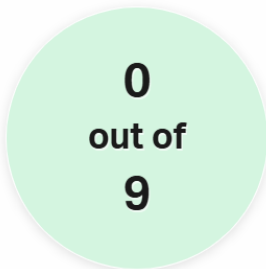
This compares to an average of 80% in similar authorities.

Adjusted for Shropshire Council's population, this is 2.7% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

The average for authorities of this type is 5.3% upheld decisions per 100,000 residents.

[View upheld decisions](#)

Satisfactory remedies provided by the Council



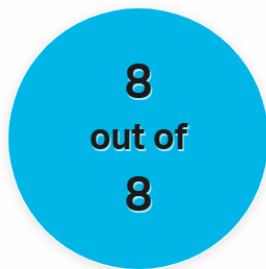
In 0 out of 9 upheld cases we found the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman.

0% satisfactory remedy rate.

This compares to an average of 10% in similar authorities.

[View satisfactory remedy decisions](#)

Compliance with Ombudsman recommendations



We recorded compliance outcomes in 8 cases. In 8 cases we were satisfied with the actions taken.

100% compliance rate with recommendations.

This compares to an average of 100% in similar authorities.

Appendix 2 Ombudsman Recommendations 2024/25

This table covers complaints that were **upheld** by the Ombudsman during 2024/25.

Category	Decided date	Ombudsman recommendation	Agreed action	Completed date
Education & Children's Services	06/08/2024	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service	An apology was provided for the delay in completing the EHCP annual review and a failure to provide suitable education and speech and language therapy. A payment was made with the apology and the council also agreed to backdate the child's personal budget to cover the cost of lost speech and language therapy support.	15/10/2024
Adult Care Services	21/06/2024	Apology	An apology was provided as a result of fault in the information provided in relation to the provision of personal care. Action had already been taken to remedy the injustice in advance of the Ombudsman concluding its investigation.	27/06/2024
Planning & Development	07/11/2024	Apology	The Ombudsman found that there was fault in council process and that a complaint should have been progressed rather than an ongoing planning enforcement case. An apology was issued.	19/11/2024
Education & Children's Services	15/08/2024	Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Financial redress: Loss of service, Provide training and/or guidance	Actions included an apology with payment for time and trouble, a payment for the loss of education provision and the issuing of a reminder to staff that the statutory duty to provide suitable alternative educational provision under Section 19 remains with the council regardless of arrangements with third parties.	03/10/2024
Highways & Transport	19/07/2024	Apology	The Ombudsman found that Shropshire Council had already remedied the delay in responding to a request for local parking restrictions through an apology. No further action was required.	19/07/2024
Education & Children's Services	17/12/2024	Apology, New appeal/review or reconsidered decision	An apology and payment were issued due to delays in arranging respite care and use of the wrong complaint procedure. A review of support was put in place and the complaint remedied.	02/04/2025
Adult Care Services	27/03/2025	Apology	There were failings in the domiciliary care provided, which the care agency acknowledged and dealt with through an apology. The Ombudsman was satisfied that an apology had been made and no further action was required.	27/03/2025
Adult Care Services	10/01/2025	Apology, Financial Redress: Quantifiable Loss	A mistake was made in the financial calculations. The Ombudsman found this had not led to any significant personal injustice. An apology was made with a small payment adjustment to correct the error.	16/01/2025
Education & Children's Services	20/02/2025	Apology, Financial redress: Avoidable distress/time and trouble, Provide services to person affected	An apology was made for the delay in the council's response to an independent stage 2 statutory children's complaint. A payment was made for time and trouble.	27/03/2025