

Annual Customer Voice Report

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1. Executive Summary

What this report shows

This is the Council's first refreshed Customer Voice report. It moves beyond traditional complaints reports and tells a more ambitious story about how Sheffield is listening, learning and acting on what residents tell us. It brings together complaints, compliments, suggestions, learning and improvement actions, and shows how Customer Voice is becoming a practical driver for better services, stronger accountability and improved trust.

Sheffield's picture reflects a national shift

Complaint volumes increased by 21% to 9,548. This should be understood within a wider national context: the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman reported a 33% increase in complaints about English authorities in 2025/26, with housing one of the largest and fastest-growing areas of demand. The Housing Ombudsman has also reported rising social housing complaint activity, with repairs and property condition continuing to dominate. Sheffield is not experiencing these pressures in isolation, but the local data is clear that Neighbourhoods and Repairs and Maintenance are the biggest drivers of demand and customer impact.

There is progress to build on, but the system needs stabilising

Stage 2 performance has improved significantly: 76% of responses met the 20-working-day benchmark, up from 46% last year, and 87% met the 40-working-day benchmark, up from 63%. This shows that stronger coordination and governance are having an impact. Stage 1 is now the central pressure point, with performance falling to 69% within 10 working days. Stabilising this first response is critical because it is where most residents expect quick resolution, reassurance and ownership.

Customer Voice is creating a stronger improvement platform

The Council is capturing more learning from complaints, with 1,588 lessons learned logged. Compliments and suggestions have also increased, with 651 compliments and 398 suggestions recorded. This gives a richer evidence base: not just where services fall short, but what good looks like when staff communicate well, solve problems, show empathy and act quickly. The next challenge is to make the link between feedback, service change and resident impact more visible.

Priorities for 2026/27

The focus for 2026/27 is to turn this insight into visible change. Priorities are to stabilise Stage 1, improve the Repairs and Maintenance customer journey, strengthen equality and reasonable-adjustment practice, improve complaint response quality, reduce avoidable delay and embed the new Customer Standards. These actions will be delivered through the Customer Voice consolidation project and the wider Customer Experience Strategy, with a clear aim: to help Sheffield become a more consistent, responsive and listening organisation at a time when national demand and expectations are rising.

2. Benchmarking And Ombudsman Comparison Data

The rise in Sheffield's complaint volumes should be viewed alongside the wider national picture reported by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Nationally, the LGSCO reported a 33% increase in complaints made to the Ombudsman about English authorities in 2025/26, with 27,625 complaints received. This is materially higher than the 16% increase reported in the previous year and indicates that rising complaint demand is not unique to Sheffield, but part of a wider pattern of increasing pressure across local public services.

The LGSCO report is clear that this increase is visible across every service area, with the fastest national growth in benefits and tax complaints, followed by housing and children's services. Housing complaints were the most common issue brought to the Ombudsman, making up almost 20% of complaints received, with homelessness and social housing allocations the most common issues raised. This aligns with Sheffield's own data, where Neighbourhoods and Repairs and Maintenance are the main drivers of demand, and reinforces the need to prioritise high-volume, high-impact housing and repairs customer journeys.

The national LGSCO commentary also describes the complaint increase as a signal of a growing gap between what residents expect and what they receive from local authorities. This is consistent with the themes in this report: rising internal complaint volumes, Stage 1 timeliness pressures, recurring issues around delay and communication, and increased financial remedies linked to avoidable delay. It strengthens the case for the Council's 2026/27 improvement actions, particularly stabilising Stage 1, improving the repairs journey, strengthening early resolution, and using Customer Voice insight to redesign services around residents' needs.

3. Overall Performance Report

a. 2025/26 Key Performance Issues Identified

The 2025/26 picture shows a complaints system under increasing pressure, shaped by rising demand, operational complexity and customer expectations. Complaint volumes have increased significantly, with 9,548 complaints received year-to-date, a 21% increase on the previous year. This growth is concentrated in high-contact services where residents experience the impact most directly, particularly Neighbourhoods and Repairs and Maintenance. As these services account for the largest share of complaint demand, performance in these areas has a disproportionate effect on the Council's overall customer experience.

This mirrors the wider public-sector trend highlighted by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, where local authorities are seeing increasing complaint demand and recurring themes of delay, communication and service complexity. Sheffield's position should therefore be understood within a national context of rising expectations and increasing pressure, while still reinforcing the need to act locally on the areas we can influence most directly. The national data is set out in more detail in section 2.

This rising demand has placed pressure on Stage 1 responses. Performance against the 10-working-day target fell to 69%, compared with 80% last year, while 82% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days, down from 89%. This means more residents are waiting longer for an initial response, increasing the risk of repeat contact, dissatisfaction and escalation. Reported delays linked to the Q3 CRM upgrade data transition further affected visibility and workflow, adding to existing capacity pressures.

The data also points to persistent service-quality issues. The upheld rate is 20% overall, indicating that a significant proportion of complaints identify fault or service failure. Financial remedies have also increased, with £101,823.97 paid in compensation year-to-date. Delay remains the largest cost driver. However, the increase in compensation should also be understood in the context of improved and more consistent application of the Council's compensation policies, aligned to Ombudsman expectations. As services become more confident in applying these policies fairly and consistently, remedy levels may increase before longer-term service improvements begin to reduce avoidable cost.

There are also important equality and accessibility considerations. A total of 252 equality-related complaints were logged, with 63% relating to race or disability. This may indicate greater recognition and recording of equality concerns, but it also highlights the need for more consistent reasonable-adjustment practice. The Customer Voice Team and Equalities Team continue to dip sample and quality assure complaints, including speaking directly to customers, to better understand the issues being raised and ensure learning is acted on.

Quality assurance results reinforce the case for stronger support and guidance across services. Overall QA performance was 81% against an 85% target, with underperformance in Neighbourhoods, Housing and Repairs, Strategic Support Services, Children's Education and Skills, and City Futures. This will be addressed through clearer toolkits, more visible guidance and targeted support so that

complaint responses are more consistent, customer-focused and focused on learning.

Taken together, these issues point to a clear improvement focus for 2026/27: stabilising Stage 1 performance, reducing avoidable escalation, improving insight into themes and root causes, strengthening vulnerability and reasonable-adjustment practice, tracking service improvement actions through to completion, and building staff capability and confidence in complaint handling.

b. New Complaints Received

A total of 9,548 new complaints were received in 2025/26. This represents a 21% increase on the previous year and shows continued growth in demand across the complaints system. The increase is most visible in high-volume, high-impact operational services, particularly Neighbourhood Services and Repairs and Maintenance, where service delays and repeat contact are more likely to affect residents directly.

The increase in new complaints means that more cases are entering the system than services are able to close at the same pace. This creates pressure on response times, particularly at Stage 1, and increases the risk of backlog, repeat contact and escalation. Understanding where new complaints are coming from will be essential to targeting improvement activity in 2026/27.

c. New Compliments Received

A total of 651 compliments and 398 suggestions were recorded in 2025/26, representing a 68% increase on the previous year. This compares with 387 compliments and 19 suggestions recorded in 2024/25. The increase reflects the continued work to strengthen how the Council captures Customer Voice, ensuring that positive feedback, suggestions and learning are recorded more consistently alongside complaints.

This matters because compliments provide a valuable evidence base for understanding what good customer experience looks like in practice. They highlight where staff are communicating clearly, resolving issues, showing care and providing practical support. The Customer Voice Team is improving how the Council records, shares and learns from these examples, so that positive practice can be recognised and used to support wider service improvement.

The table below provides a service-by-service breakdown of where compliments were recorded and the main themes emerging from that feedback. Service-level figures can be added once the final reporting extract is available.

Service area	Examples / themes
Housing and Repairs	Repairs craft and skill, housing officer support, clear communication and practical help.
Highways and street scene	Positive feedback about completed repairs, visible fixes and responsive operational work.
Children's services / SEND	Support described as thorough, caring and focused on helping children and families.

Adult social care and support services	Care, emotional support, reassurance and practical help during difficult circumstances.
Total recorded compliments	Service-level figures to be completed once the final extract is available.

d. Customer Compliment Examples

The compliments below show the positive difference staff and services have made for customers during 2025/26. They highlight the importance of clear communication, empathy, practical problem-solving, professional skill and care in delivering a good customer experience.

Highways and potholes "A nicely executed repair recently done."	Housing support "The officer went above and beyond to help me resolve every single one of these matters. Her professionalism, dedication, and clear communication made a world of difference."
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Housing officer support "She is a credit to your team — kind, understanding, friendly and most of all patient. She helped me tremendously with my home and much more."	SEND support "She is very thorough, easy to get on with and her passion to help the student is very apparent. A lovely breath of fresh air."
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Repairs craft and skill "I'm always genuinely amazed at the competency of the repair staff of Sheffield City Council. The door has now been fixed and we're all good again."	Care and emotional support "You're the best support I've ever had. You supported me and looked after me... I am ever so thankful."
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Together, these compliments show what good customer experience looks like in practice: skilled services that resolve issues, staff who communicate clearly, and officers who show empathy, patience and care when customers are experiencing stress or uncertainty. These behaviours will be embedded through the new Customer Standards – ensuring a more consistent customer experience.

4. Complaint Responses (excluding statutory complaints):

A total of 7,907 complaints were responded to, excluding those rejected (1,354) and withdrawn (146). This shows how many cases reached a formal response, and it is the base for the timeliness and quality measures below.

This represents a marginal increase (215; 3%) on the previous year response total of 7,692. However, new complaint volumes have risen more sharply, so when we receive more complaints than we can respond to, delays increase and backlogs build, particularly at Stage 1.

76% were responded to at Stage 1 and 9% at Stage 2 compared with the previous year of 93% at Stage 1 and 5% at Stage 2. This means a higher share of cases moved to escalation, which may reflect more complex cases, higher customer impact, and/or weaker early resolution at Stage 1.

15% were rejected or withdrawn. Rejected cases are usually those that do not fall within the corporate complaints process (for example duplicates or issues better handled through another route). Withdrawals can reflect issues being resolved informally or the customer choosing not to continue.

Neighbourhood Services (4,005 - 48%) and specifically Repairs and Maintenance (2011 - 24%) account for the largest share of all responses, including strategic partners. This means improvements in these areas will have the biggest impact on overall timeliness, quality and resident experience.

Strategic Partners: Amey - 17% - 1,472 and Veolia, 13% - 1,072. This shows the volume of responses issued for partner-delivered services and reinforces the need for consistent standards across SCC and partner teams.

a. Stage 1 Responses - Target is 10 working days

Stage 1 is the main pressure point because this is where the highest volume of complaints should be resolved quickly. Timeliness has also been affected by delays in moving data over after the CRM upgrade, which reduced visibility and slowed progress through the workflow.

Average Stage 1 response time: 17 days (Q1: 14 to Q4: 17), showing response times got worse over the year as demand and capacity pressures increased.

Performance against the 10-day benchmark: 69% met the standard. This compares with the previous year of 80% - a declining trend. In practice, this means more residents wait longer for an initial response, which can increase repeat contact, dissatisfaction and escalation.

Performance against the 20-day benchmark: 82% met the standard. This compares with the previous year of 89% - a declining trend. While most cases are still responded to within 20 working days, the drop shows the process is under strain and less able to absorb peaks in demand.

Housing and Repairs results: 10-day benchmark: 58%, 20-day benchmark: 72% compares with the previous year of 74% and 86%. Because Housing and Repairs is a high-volume area, this has a large effect on overall Stage 1 performance and on the common themes seen in this report (delay, repeat contact and communication). This is being addressed through the service's separate Improvement Plan, which is monitored regularly through Housing Leadership Team.

Overall, timeliness worsened quarter by quarter, in line with rising complaint volumes and capacity pressures. As demand grows, more cases compete for the same investigation time, and delays in the underlying service (for example repairs scheduling) can also slow complaint responses.

High-volume services such as Repairs and Maintenance have driven much of this decline, both because demand is high and because cases are often more complex (multiple visits, contractor coordination and vulnerability considerations). This increases the risk of delay and escalation if issues are not resolved early.

b. Stage 2 Responses - Target is 20 working days

Despite pressures at Stage 1, Stage 2 performance remains strong and meets the 20-day response target. This suggests escalation handling is more consistent and more resilient than Stage 1, supported by clearer governance and joint working across services. For customers, this gives more confidence that escalation will lead to a timely, robust final response.

Average Stage 2 response time: 18 days (Q1: 3 to Q4: 18) within target. The average rose across the year as volumes and complexity increased, but it has stayed within the 20-working-day standard.

Performance against the 20-day benchmark: 76% met the standard. This compares with the previous year of 46% - an improving trend. This suggests better coordination at Stage 2 and reduces the risk of residents escalating externally because of delay.

Performance against the 40-day benchmark: 87% met the standard. This compares with the previous year of 63% - an improving trend. This gives a more reliable experience for the most complex cases and supports clearer expectations for customers.

Housing and Repairs results: 20-day benchmark: 75%, 40-day benchmark: 87% compares with the previous year of 53% and 80% - an improving trend. Given the volume and impact of Housing and Repairs cases, this Stage 2 performance helps ensure escalated complaints are closed on time while Stage 1 stabilisation work continues.

c. Average Response Times

Overall, early-stage response times worsened quarter by quarter, mainly because volumes increased and teams had limited capacity.

- Stage 1: above the ten-day target (17 days)

- Stage 2: within the 20-day target (18 days)

Overall, as workload rose, response times slowed.

5. Upheld Rate

The upheld rate (partially upheld and fully upheld) including strategic partners was 20% which is a 3.4% increase on the previous year. Upheld findings indicate persistent underlying service issues, particularly in high-volume operational areas.

Repairs and Maintenance is the portfolio with the strongest link between high complaint volume and upheld outcomes, reinforcing the need for targeted intervention. Work is underway including a review of this customer journey in partnership with Digital to improve the end-to-end experience.

6. Remedies

a. Non-financial

The total remedy actions recorded (YTD) was 1,365. The Council's highest reason category recorded was, 'Delay' (321) 23.5%, followed by 'Quality' (296) 21.7% and 'Staff Conduct' (277) 20.3%. This compares with the previous years of: 'Delay' (40%), followed by 'Policy' (32%) and 'Failure' (10%).

The most common remedy actions are 'Apology' – 614 and 'Provide additional information/explanation' – 237

b. Financial

The total number of complaint outcome that resulted in a compensation payment – 223. The financial impact of delays is significant. £101,823.97 (223 cases) was paid in compensation compared with £28,577 in the previous year. The three main reasons are Delay - £55,817.25 (54.8%); Failure/Refusal - £16,193.89 (15.9); Policy & legislation - £15,083.27 (14.8%).

Analysis shows avoidable “cost of delay” is a major driver of compensation spend. Earlier workflow intervention and improved scheduling would materially reduce financial exposure. However, it should be noted that we expect to see an increase in financial remedies as more consistent application of the Compensation Policy means potentially higher payment amounts – aligned to Ombudsman best practice.

7. Equalities Issues

In total, 252 complaints were recorded as involving an equality issue:

- SCC only: 209; Amey: 39; Veolia: 4.
- 65/252 (26%) of these complaints were upheld.
- 158/232 (63%) were recorded by the complainant as involving a race or disability concern. Of these 158, 6 (4%) were upheld.

Equality-related complaints increase significantly in Q3 and Q4, particularly around disability and race, indicating service pressure and inconsistent application of equalities duties.

Most issues relate to disability, accessibility barriers, and communication or process failures affecting residents - highlighting a need for stronger reasonable-adjustments practice and more consistent application of equalities duties.

Despite that, the table indicates very few upheld findings specifically within Race and Disability (6 of 158 - 4%)

Delays and missed appointments are frequently linked to higher risk/impact for tenants with mobility needs, caring responsibilities, or health conditions. A clear prompt for action is to strengthen scheduling reliability, introduce earlier escalation triggers where vulnerability is present, and ensure communication explains what will happen and when - so that service failures do not compound existing disadvantage.

There is a consistent pattern of tenants highlighting their disability when they are complaining about a service failure/delay. In some examples the disability is referred to in the body of the complaint as the tenant explains why they think it is relevant to their complaint, in some the disability is not referenced at all.

In the examples where disability is not referenced again, it raises questions about why the tenant selected discrimination. From speaking to tenants, they tend to feel that their disability has not been factored in when their complaint was handled. Two disabled tenants indicated their frustration with moving into a house on medical priority/disability terms only to find that their home was not fit for their needs, leading to the need for repairs, which in turn has led to complaints. This is being addressed through the Housing and Repairs customer journey improvement work, which will improve data capture about equalities information.

8. Lessons Learned - All Remedies/Service Improvements

The Council recorded 1,588 lessons learned in 2025/26, showing a strong upward trend across the year, from 115 in Q1 to 500 in Q4. This increase suggests that services are becoming more consistent in identifying and recording learning from complaints and remedies. SCC accounts for approximately 99.5% of all lessons logged, indicating that most of the recorded learning relates directly to Council-managed services.

The financial impact of service failure is also clearer. In total, £101,823.97 was paid in compensation across 223 cases, representing 14% of all lessons recorded. This spend is heavily concentrated in Housing and Repairs, which accounted for £73,528.16, or 72% of all payments. This reinforces the importance of the Housing and Repairs customer journey improvement work, as reducing avoidable delay and improving first-time resolution in this area would have the greatest impact on both customer experience and financial exposure.

The remedy data shows that delay remains the most significant driver of financial remedies, accounting for 54.8% of payments. This is followed by failure or refusal at 15.9% and policy and legislation issues at 14.8%. Secondary financial themes include quality at 11% and staff conduct at 2.9%. For non-financial remedies, the pattern is slightly broader, with delay accounting for 23.5%, quality 21.7% and staff conduct 20.3%. Secondary non-financial themes include failure or refusal at 15.8% and policy and legislation at 13.5%.

The overall message is that learning is being captured more consistently, but the Council now needs to show more clearly how that learning leads to visible service change. Apologies are becoming more common, which is positive and helps demonstrate empathy and accountability. However, service and policy changes are not yet recorded consistently enough. The focus for 2026/27 should therefore be to reduce avoidable delay, strengthen quality and first-time resolution, and evidence service change more systematically through the Customer Experience Strategy and the Council's wider ambition to become a listening and learning organisation.

a. Lessons Learned Examples

These examples show how complaints and feedback have helped services understand what customers were experiencing, identify the root cause, make practical changes and improve outcomes. Each case study is shown as a short visual card, using the case study template flow: what customers told us, what we learned, what changed, and the difference made.

Case study 1: My Account and improved digital journeys

Service area: Customer Experience, Digital and wider services

Complaint theme: Access, repeat contact, visibility of progress and ease of use

Who was affected: Residents needing to contact the Council, submit requests, receive updates and track progress

Customer voice: Residents told us that accessing services online could be complicated, requiring multiple contacts, repeated information and difficulty tracking progress. It wasn't always clear where to find the right service, and once a request had been submitted, residents had little visibility of what happened next. Residents were often forced to wait in long queues in our call centre to complete simple tasks.

Learning: The feedback showed that residents needed a simpler, more joined-up digital route that made it easier to find information, complete routine tasks and understand what would happen after a request was submitted.

What changed: The introduction of My Account provides a single place for residents to manage enquiries, receive updates and track requests. Alongside this, we redesigned our website to make it much simpler to access information, including through AI searches, and to complete tasks online. Over 300 customer processes have been reviewed and improved. Taxi licensing and council housing rents are two examples where a redesigned digital journey has made routine transactions significantly easier.

Impact: Residents can access information more easily, complete tasks online, and track progress without needing to repeatedly contact the Council. As more people use self-serve for simple transactions, it should free up customer contact staff to support more complex queries, vulnerable customers, and those who are not digitally enabled.

Impact so far includes:

- More than 11,000 My Account registrations since it was launched in March.
- 150 online forms integrated into My Account.
- We've seen a 10% increase in online submissions, and 83% of cases that are resolved through My Account are within agreed response time.
- In the example of taxi licensing, over the first 6 months web usage increased by 118%, telephone calls reduced by 7.6%, and there were no issues reported by drivers using the online form.
- In the example of council housing, there was a 25% increase in users accessing online information about Council Housing Rents, and a 10% reduction in telephony enquiries related to rents.
- As more people use self-serve for simple transactions, it should free up our customer contact staff to support more complex queries, customers who need more support, and those who are not yet digitally enabled.

Case study 2: Commercial waste pilot and cleaner city centre streets

Service area: Street Scene and Waste Services

Complaint theme: Commercial waste bins left on public highways, causing obstruction, clutter, litter, pest concerns and poor street scene appearance

Who was affected: Residents, businesses, visitors and local Councillors in affected city centre locations

Customer voice: Residents, businesses and local Councillors repeatedly raised concerns about commercial waste bins being left on public highways at locations including Convent Walk, Carver Lane and Backfields. Customers reported that bins were creating clutter, obstructing pavements, attracting litter and pests, and negatively affecting the appearance of the city centre. These concerns generated a high number of complaints and Councillor enquiries.

Learning: The repeated feedback showed that the issue could not be resolved through individual complaint responses alone. The Council needed a coordinated approach across services, clearer expectations for businesses, improved engagement, agreed collection arrangements and a stronger policy framework to address the root cause of commercial waste being stored on public highways.

What changed: Sheffield City Council developed and implemented a Commercial Waste Pilot in the affected city centre locations. The pilot introduced a coordinated approach across services, clearer expectations for businesses, improved communication and engagement, agreed collection arrangements, and a formal policy framework with enhanced enforcement powers. Officers also worked proactively with waste contractors and local businesses to improve compliance.

Impact: The pilot delivered visible improvements in some of the city centre's most problematic locations. Areas that had previously generated a high volume of complaints and Councillor enquiries saw significant improvements in waste management and street scene appearance. Following implementation of the policy and pilot approach, complaints relating to these locations ceased. The project has also helped create cleaner, safer and more accessible public spaces, while establishing a model for managing commercial waste issues in other parts of the city.

Case study 3: Motor Neurone Disease fast-track pathway

Service area: Adult care and multi-agency support

Complaint theme: Delay, coordination and access to timely support

Who was affected: People with Motor Neurone Disease and their families or carers

Customer voice: Customers and carers needed faster, more coordinated support where a person's condition could change quickly. Delays in assessment, equipment, adaptations or hand-offs between agencies could significantly affect independence, dignity and family wellbeing.

Learning: The usual pathway did not always respond quickly enough to the pace and complexity of Motor Neurone Disease. Services needed a clearer way to identify these cases early, prioritise action and coordinate across teams.

What changed: A fast-track pathway was developed so referrals are prioritised for allocation and assessment. Equipment and adaptation processes are accelerated, with

multi-agency coordination and escalation arrangements set out in a Standard Operating Procedure.

Impact: Future customers have a clearer route for timely, coordinated and anticipatory support, reducing avoidable delay across the support journey.

Case study 4: Fawcett Street access improvement

Service area: Housing and Neighbourhoods, Central Neighbourhood Team

Complaint theme: Physical access barrier

Who was affected: Tenants needing step-free access, including wheelchair users and residents with prams

Customer voice: Multiple tenants complained that cars were parking in a way that restricted access to the block. This affected residents who use wheelchairs and people with prams, creating a practical barrier to entering and leaving the building safely and easily.

Learning: The complaints identified a real access issue at the entrance to the block. The problem could not be resolved alone by responding to each complaint individually; it needed a physical change to prevent the same issue happening again.

What changed: A bollard was installed in June 2025 to stop vehicles blocking the access route.

Impact: The obstruction identified by tenants was addressed. Access to the block is now better protected for residents using wheelchairs and people with prams.

Case study 5: Clearer Blue Badge and Travel Pass processes

Service area: Blue Badge and Travel Pass

Complaint theme: Forms, guidance and customer understanding

Who was affected: Customers applying for Blue Badges and Travel Passes

Customer voice: Customers said the application processes were difficult to understand, hard to navigate and poorly explained. This could make it harder for people to access support linked to independence, mobility and everyday travel.

Learning: The feedback showed that unclear forms and guidance can create avoidable contact, delay and frustration. Customers needed plain English information and a simpler process that made it easier to understand what was needed and what would happen next.

What changed: The processes were reviewed, feedback was sought, and application forms were updated in plain English.

Impact: This led to reduced enquiries, reduced handling times and reduced waiting times for customers who applied. This shows that clearer communication can improve both customer experience and service efficiency.

Case study 6: Reasonable adjustments in repairs appointments

Service area: Housing Repairs and Maintenance

Complaint theme: Accessibility, reasonable adjustments and appointment planning

Who was affected: A disabled tenant and wheelchair user

Customer voice: A tenant had recently been rehomed to a ground-floor flat due to increased mobility needs. They reported unresolved leaks in their wet room and difficulty accessing the car park. They had also requested a dropped kerb, but the issue had been passed between Council services without clear ownership or resolution.

Learning: The complaint showed that risk and need had not been assessed strongly enough to prioritise the repair. Repeat visits had not been recognised effectively, and the wet room repair needed specialist expertise. The access issue also showed frustration and delay when ownership is unclear between services.

What changed: Repairs were progressed, H-markings were repainted to make parking restrictions more visible, and the dropped kerb was completed. The learning also highlighted the need for better monitoring, planning, risk assessment and communication between departments.

Impact: The actions improved access and helped address issues affecting the tenant's independence, safety and confidence in the service. The case also supports wider learning about reasonable adjustments, repeat repairs, vulnerability and cross-service ownership.

9. Quality Assurance

A Quality Assurance Framework is embedded within Sheffield City Council's Feedback and Complaint procedures to review the standards of complaint responses.

It places emphasis on customer focus (personal contact, empathy, positive tone, user friendly) and the complaint outcome (clear explanation of investigation findings, remedies and signposting).

Each quarter the Customer Voice Team analyse a sample of responses which are evaluated against the framework as follows:

- Identify areas of improvement and good practice
- Use the outcome of the evaluation to provide a platform for guidance and development on complaint handling.

The corporate target for Quality Assurance is 85%. Overall performance for 2025/26 was 81%, compared with 84% in 2024/25.

The following portfolio areas met or exceeded the 85% target:

- Adults Wellbeing and Care Service (86%)
- Children's – Children and Families (86%)
- Public Health and Integrated Commissioning (86%)

The following portfolio areas fell below the target:

- Neighbourhoods (80%)
- Housing and Repairs (81%)
- Strategic Support Services (79%)
- Children's – Education and Skills (79%)
- City Futures (66%)

10. Recommended Improvement Actions For 2026/27

Commented [TS1]: Customer Standards missing from this list?

Stabilise Stage 1 performance: improve first-response timeliness from the current baseline of 69% within 10 working days and 82% within 20 working days. The Q4 milestone is to reach 80% within 10 working days, 87% within 20 working days and reduce average response times towards 14 days. This will be supported through portfolio recovery plans, backlog management, earlier escalation before day 8 and oversight through Customer Voice governance.

Maintain Stage 2 performance: sustain and improve the current baseline of 76% within 20 working days and 87% within 40 working days. The Q4 milestone is to achieve at least 80% within 20 working days and 90% within 40 working days, supported by pre-Stage 2 checks, earlier resolution and review of Ombudsman escalation themes.

Improve Housing and Repairs complaints: focus on the highest-volume and highest-impact complaint areas, with a current baseline of 58% within 10 working days, 72% within 20 working days and 2,211 Repairs and Maintenance complaints. This will focus on improving Housing Repairs complaint handling and targeted customer journey improvements.

Strengthen equality and reasonable adjustments: improve consistency in how vulnerability, accessibility and reasonable adjustments are recorded and acted on. The baseline is 252 equality-related complaints, including 65 upheld complaints and 158 issues related to race or disability. By Q4, sampled cases should show consistent consideration of vulnerability and adjustments, with equality learning reported through the annual update.

Improve complaint response quality: increase corporate quality assurance performance from the current 81% baseline to the 85% corporate target. This will be supported by portfolio QA recovery plans, timely feedback where responses fall below standard, and targeted support for lower-performing portfolios.

Reduce avoidable delay: address avoidable delay as the largest driver of financial remedies. The Q4 milestone is to evidence a reduction in avoidable delay risk.

Increase visibility of learning and service change: make the link between complaints, lessons learned and service improvement clearer for services, customers and Members. The baseline is 1,588 lessons learned and 1,365 non-financial remedy actions recorded. By Q4, completed actions, impact evidence and remaining risks should be included in the annual report, supported by visible "You Said / We Changed" examples.

Deliver the Customer Voice consolidation and improvement project: create a more consistent Customer Voice offer across the end-to-end feedback and complaints journey. This includes improved digital systems, clearer online routes, better reporting, reduced manual hand-offs, improved customer updates and stronger insight across services. By Q4, benefits should be delivered, remaining risks confirmed and the next phase agreed.

Embed Customer Experience Standards: implement the new Customer Experience Standards so they are understood, adopted and evidenced through customer contact, complaint responses, quality assurance and service improvement activity. The Q4 milestone is for standards to be embedded in key customer-facing services, with measurable evidence from QA sampling, staff engagement, customer feedback and service improvement reporting.

11. Customer Experience Strategy: Listening and Acting on Customer Voice and Summary

Customer Voice

Complaints are a key part of Customer Voice, but the Council must do more to increase the range and impact of feedback channels. This ensures that we are able to listen, learn and adapt our services to the needs of our population. Currently, complaints are the most significant way our services receive feedback. Work is currently underway to introduce wider channels, including lived experience, customer satisfaction, customer journeys, social media and a residents survey.

In addition, the Customer Voice Consolidation Project will create a more cohesive complaint journey and customer voice offer. This will help address performance issues highlighted in this report by ensuring services have effective coordination support, particularly in high-volume areas.

Customer Journeys

Progress can be seen across initial high-priority end-to-end customer journey improvement in areas such as Taxi Licensing and Place Hub. Building on this learning, journey work is now being prioritised in higher-volume, higher-impact services, focusing on Housing Repairs and Revenues and Benefits so customers can find the right information first time, track progress more easily and receive clearer updates at key points.

Over the next year, work will continue to strengthen online customer journeys, including safer and more accessible in-person access points, a review of First Points, embedding the Brown Envelope Code, improving the website and digital offer, online forms, automation, My Account, AI chatbot options and a better telephone experience through the Core Customer Hub.

Customer Insight

Customer insight is essential because it helps the Council understand what residents are experiencing across the whole journey, not just when they make a complaint. Bringing together complaints, compliments, satisfaction feedback, contact reasons and lived experience insight will help identify root causes, reduce avoidable repeat contact and design clearer, simpler processes.

Key changes over the next 12 months include a new Customer and Digital performance dashboard, customer satisfaction measured across all channels, customer insight feeding back into services, and a strengthened knowledge hub for staff.

Customer Workforce

Focusing on the values, skills and impact of our customer workforce is important because the experience residents receive is shaped day-to-day by the people who answer calls, triage and investigate cases, deliver services on the ground and write responses. Priorities include bringing together Phase 1 of the Core Customer Hub, developing a workforce framework, implementing workforce management tools, delivering trauma-informed training, embedding Customer Experience Standards and engaging customers and staff to show where we have listened and learned.

12. Summary

This report shows that Sheffield City Council is listening more systematically to what residents are telling us through complaints, compliments, suggestions and wider Customer Voice activity. It also shows that demand, complexity and expectations are increasing, particularly in high-volume services such as Housing and Repairs, where delay, communication and consistency have the greatest impact on residents' day-to-day lives.

The findings underline the importance of moving beyond complaints as a process and using Customer Voice as a driver for service improvement. The priorities for 2026/27 are clear: stabilise Stage 1 performance, maintain stronger Stage 2 handling, improve the repairs customer journey, strengthen equality and reasonable-adjustment practice, improve response quality and make learning more visible through clear "You Said / We Changed" evidence.

The new Customer Standards provide the common thread for this work. They set out what good should feel like for residents: clear communication, timely responses, empathy, ownership, accessibility and learning from feedback. Embedding these standards across customer-facing services will help make the improvements in this report practical, measurable and consistent, so that residents receive a better experience whichever service they contact.

Overall, the report provides both the evidence for change and a clear route to delivery. By connecting Customer Voice insight, service improvement activity and the Customer Standards, the Council can strengthen trust, reduce avoidable contact, improve outcomes for residents and become a more consistent listening and learning organisation.