



ARTICLE NO:

**CORPORATE & ENVIRONMENTAL
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

MEMBERS UPDATE

Issue: 3

Article of: Corporate Director of Transformation, Housing and Resources

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor R Molloy

**Contact for further information: Helen Morrison (Extn. 5091)
(E-mail: helen.morrison@westlancs.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: CUSTOMER FEEDBACK (2022-2023)

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF ARTICLE

- 1.1 To present data in relation to the volumes of Complaints received by the Council under the former complaints process from April 2022 to the end of September 2022.
- 1.2 To present data in relation to Comments, Compliments and Complaints received by the Council, under the Customer Feedback Policy from October 2022 to March 2023.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Following an extensive review of the former three stage complaints procedure, a new Customer Feedback Policy and process was launched in October 2022 (see appendix 1). The policy sets out the Council's approach to dealing with comments, compliments and complaints, whilst adhering to the principles of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.
- 2.2 Both the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman and the Housing Ombudsman recommend two stages for complaints policies. This best practice was adopted within the new policy, reducing the complaints process from three stages (one informal and two formal) to two formal stages, with each stage being investigated independently. This streamlined the process and makes it easier for customers to make a complaint.

- 2.3 Prior to the introduction of the new policy, complaints were managed within individual service areas. As stage one was an informal stage, only stage two and three were recorded. Complaints were monitored and recorded independently by service area, which limited the ability to understand organisational themes to drive service improvement.
- 2.4 As part of the introduction of the new feedback policy, a new process was developed to enable all feedback to be recorded in one central digital platform and triaged by a centralised team within the Customer Experience Service. The centralised team assess and assign feedback to the relevant service areas for investigation. This approach ensures that all feedback is captured, recorded and monitored effectively against each service area.
- 2.5 The Ombudsmen encourage the use of complaints to identify issues and introduce positive changes to service delivery. The new approach actively encourages feedback, which supports the creation of a positive complaints culture. This enables the Council to effectively resolve issues for customers, use feedback to develop and improve services and demonstrate that it listens and learns from feedback.
- 2.6 If a complainant wishes to pursue an issue further after the Council has fully investigated their complaint and issued their final response, they can raise this with either the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman or the Housing Ombudsman, depending on the nature of the complaint. Council tenants are also able to seek independent advice from the Housing Ombudsman before they submit a complaint and whilst the Council conducts their investigation.
- 2.7 The Council defines a complaint as 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 resident or group of residents.
- 2.8 A comment is a verbal or written remark expressing an opinion. The Council recognises that customers may want to express views on the standard of service provided, without making a complaint. Comments are investigated to ensure that appropriate action is taken to resolve.
- 2.9 A compliment is an expression of satisfaction about the standard of service provided.

3.0 ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK

- 3.1 As the new policy launched in October 2022, the performance data contained within this article, will be reported on in two parts. For the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022, the data will focus solely on complaints recorded under the former three stage process. For the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023, the data will cover Comments, Compliments and Complaints as they form part of the Customer Feedback policy.

1 APRIL 2022 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2022

- 3.2 The tables below detail the volumes and response times in relation to formal complaints (recorded at the formal stage two and three) under the former three-stage process, from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022. The timescales set for investigating and responding to both stages two and three complaints was ten working days.

Complaints – 01.04.22 – 30.09.22	
Stage 2	
Number of complaints recorded	11
Number of complaints responded to within 10 working days	3 (27%)
Number not responded to within 10 working days	8 (73%)

Stage 3	
Number of complaints escalated from stage 2 to stage 3 % Escalated from stage 2 to stage 3	9 (82%)
Number responded to within 10 working days	7 (78%)
Number not responded to within 10 working days	2 (22%)

- 3.3 The table below details the number of complaints **recorded/escalated** for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022 by service area.

Complaints per service – 01.04.22 – 30.09.22	Stage 2	Escalated to stage 3
Corporate & Customer Services	0	0
Environmental Services	0	0
Finance, Procurement & Commercial Services	0	0
Housing Services	3	3 (100%)
Legal and Democratic Services	0	0
Planning and Regulatory Services	8	6 (75%)
Wellbeing & Place	0	0
Total	11	9 (82%)

- 3.4 The table below details the performance in relation to response times at stages two and three for the service areas that received complaints.

01.04.22 – 30.09.22 Service	Stage 2			Stage 3		
	No. due	In time	Out of time	No. due	In time	Out of time
		No. (%)	No. (%)		No. (%)	No. (%)
Housing Services	3	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	3	2 (67%)	1 (33%)
Planning & Regulatory	8	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	6	5 (83%)	1 (17%)
Total responses	11	3 (27%)	8 (73%)	9	7 (78%)	2 (22%)

1 OCTOBER 2022 TO 31 MARCH 2023

- 3.5 The table below details the total number of feedback cases submitted under the new Feedback Policy during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 by category.

Category	1.10.22 - 31.3.23
Comments	42
Compliments	53
Complaints - stage 1 (escalated to stage 2)	235 (23)
Complaint received at stage 2	1*
Service Requests	18
Total	349

- 3.6 Comments and stage 1 complaints should be responded to within ten working days and stage 2 complaints should be responded to within 20 working days. We recognise that given the nature of some complaints, they may take longer to investigate and respond to. To ensure that complaints can be investigated in full, officers are permitted to request to extend response times if the reason meets one of the three areas defined within the policy. The request is considered by the Head of Service. Response timescales for complaints with extensions should not normally exceed a further ten working days.
- 3.7 When extension requests are approved, customers are provided with a holding letter, which notifies them of the reason for the extension in line with the Policy and the revised response date.
- 3.8 The tables below provide an overall annual summary of performance in relation to the handling of comments and complaints.

Comments received between 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023	
Number received	42
Number responded to within timescales	40
Percentage responded to within timescales	95.2%
Percentage not responded to within timescales	4.8%

Complaints received between 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023	
Stage 1	
Number of complaints received	235
Number of complaints to be responded to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> within 10 working days within 20 working days (extension granted) 	229 6
Number responded to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> within 10 working days within 20 working days (extension granted) 	189 5
Percentage responded to within timescales: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> within 10 working days within 20 working days (extension granted) 	82.5% 83.3%
Number not responded to within 10 working days	40 (17.5%)
Number not responded to within 20 working days	1 (16.7%)

Stage 2	
Number of complaints received at stage 2*	1*
Number of complaints escalated from stage 1 to stage 2	23
% Escalated from stage 1 to stage 2	(9.8%)
Number of complaints requiring response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> within 20 working days within 30 working days (extension granted) 	24 0
Number responded to within 20 working days	18 (75%)
Number not responded to within 20 working days	6 (25%)

**This was a new complaint, triaged at Stage 2 rather than Stage 1, given previous interactions/complaints with this customer. Under normal circumstances all stage 2 complaints are escalated from stage 1.*

4.0 SERVICE AREA PERFORMANCE

4.1 The table below details the number of **comments** submitted during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 by service area.

Service Area - comments	1.10.2022 to 31.3.2023
Corporate & Customer Services	5
Environmental Services	18
Finance, Procurement & Commercial Services	0
Housing Services	9
Legal and Democratic Services	0
Planning and Regulatory Services	4
Wellbeing & Place	6
Total	42

- 4.2 The table below details the performance for each service area in relation to response times for **comments**, during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Comments - 1.10.2022 to 31.3.2023				
Service Area	Number responded to within timescales	Number responded to outside of timescales	% Responded to within timescales	% Responded to outside of timescales
Corporate & Customer Services	5	0	100%	n/a
Environmental Services	18	0	100%	n/a
Housing Services	9	0	100%	n/a
Planning and Regulatory Services	3	1	75%	25%
Wellbeing & Place	5	1	83%	17%
Total	40	2	95%	5%

- 4.3 The table below details the number of compliments submitted during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023, by service area.

Service Area - compliments	1.10.2022 to 31.3.2023
Corporate & Customer Services	14
Environmental Services	23
Finance, Procurement & Commercial Services	0
Housing Services	10
Legal and Democratic Services	0
Planning and Regulatory Services	6
Wellbeing & Place	0
Total	53

- 4.4 The table below details the number of stage 1 complaints submitted during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and those that were subsequently escalated.

Service Area - complaints	1.10.2022 to 31.3.2023	
	stage 1	stage 2
Corporate & Customer Services	34	2
Environmental Services	33	4
Finance, Procurement & Commercial Services	1	0
Housing Services	131	12
Legal and Democratic Services	1	0
Planning and Regulatory Services	25	5
Wellbeing & Place	10	1
Total	235	24

- 4.5 The table below details the performance in relation to response times for stage 1 complaints submitted during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023, including those that were subsequently escalated to stage 2.

Complaints - 1.10.2022 to 31.3.2023						
Service	Stage 1			Stage 2		
	No. due	In time	Out of time	No. due	In time	Out of time
		No. (%)	No. (%)		No. (%)	No. (%)
Corporate & Customer Services	34	34 (100%)	0	2	2 (100%)	0
Environmental Services	33	31 (94%)	2 (6%)	4	4 (100%)	0
Finance, Procurement & Commercial Services	1	1 (100%)	0	0	0	0
Housing Services	131	101 (77%)	30 (23%)	12	6 (50%)	6 (50%)
Legal and Democratic Services	1	1 (100%)	0	0	0	0
Planning & Regulatory	25	18 (72%)	7 (28%)	5	5 (100%)	0
Wellbeing & Place	10	10 (100%)	0	1	1 (100%)	0
Total responses	235	196 (83%)	39 (17%)	24	18 (75%)	6 (25%)

- 4.6 Whilst performance in relation to response times has improved significantly since October 2022, there is a recognition that this needs to improve further. There is a clear commitment by officers to improve further in this area, with systems in place to monitor performance and ensure improvements are made.

5.0 COMPLAINT OUTCOMES

- 5.1 The tables below detail the number of complaints upheld, partially upheld or not upheld as a result of the Council's investigations, for each period.

Stage 2 complaints – 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022			
Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Housing Services	1	0	2
Planning & Regulatory	0	0	8
TOTAL	1	0	10

Stage 3 complaints – 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022			
Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Housing Services	0	3	0
Planning & Regulatory	0	0	6
TOTAL	0	3	6

Stage 1 complaints – 1 October 2022 – 31 March 2023			
Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Corporate & Customer Services (34)	2	10	22
Environmental Services (33)	16	6	11
Finance, Procurement & Commercial Services (1)	0	0	1
Housing Services (131)	79	30	22
Legal and Democratic Services (1)	0	0	1
Planning & Regulatory (25)	6	5	14
Wellbeing & Place (10)	2	2	6
Total (235)	105 (45%)	53 (22%)	77 (33%)

Complaints subsequently escalated to stage 2			
Service Area	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld
Corporate & Customer Services (2)	0	1	1
Environmental Services (4)	2	2	0
Housing Services (12)	5	2	5
Planning & Regulatory (5)	0	2	3
Wellbeing & Place (1)	0	0	1
Total (24)	7 (29%)	7 (29%)	10 (42%)

6.0 HIGH LEVEL THEMES

6.1 High level themes have been introduced for complaints received from 1 October 2022, to enable service areas to categorise the complaints received, undertake further analysis of the root cause of the issues and develop action plans to resolve issues.

6.2 The table below provides the definitions of the high-level themes.

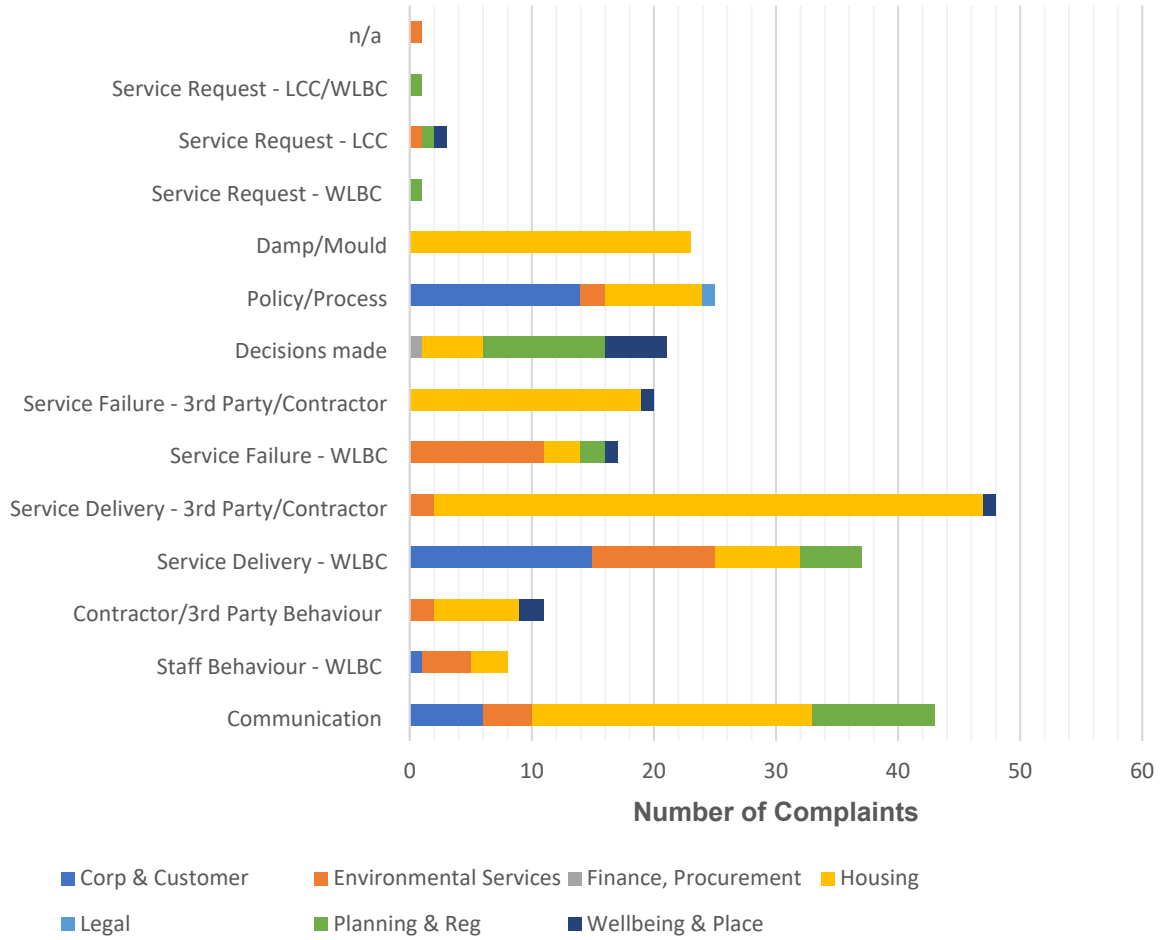
Theme	Definition
Staff Behaviour	The actions or behaviours of an officer of the Council or a third party/contactor acting on behalf of the Council.
Communication	Failing to keep customers informed or where communication is not clear.

Decisions	Customer is unhappy with a decision made by an officer of the Council. This does not include decisions made where there is a formal right to an appeal, as these are not investigated under the Customer Feedback policy (see appendix 1 for further details).
Service Delivery	The standard or quality of service provided by the Council or a third party/contractor acting on behalf of the Council.
Service Failure (WLBC or third party/contractor)	Failing to provide a service. Either the Council or a third party/contractor acting on behalf of the Council.
Policy or Process	Dissatisfaction with a policy/process.
Damp/Mould	Complaints from Council tenants regarding damp and mould issues in their home.

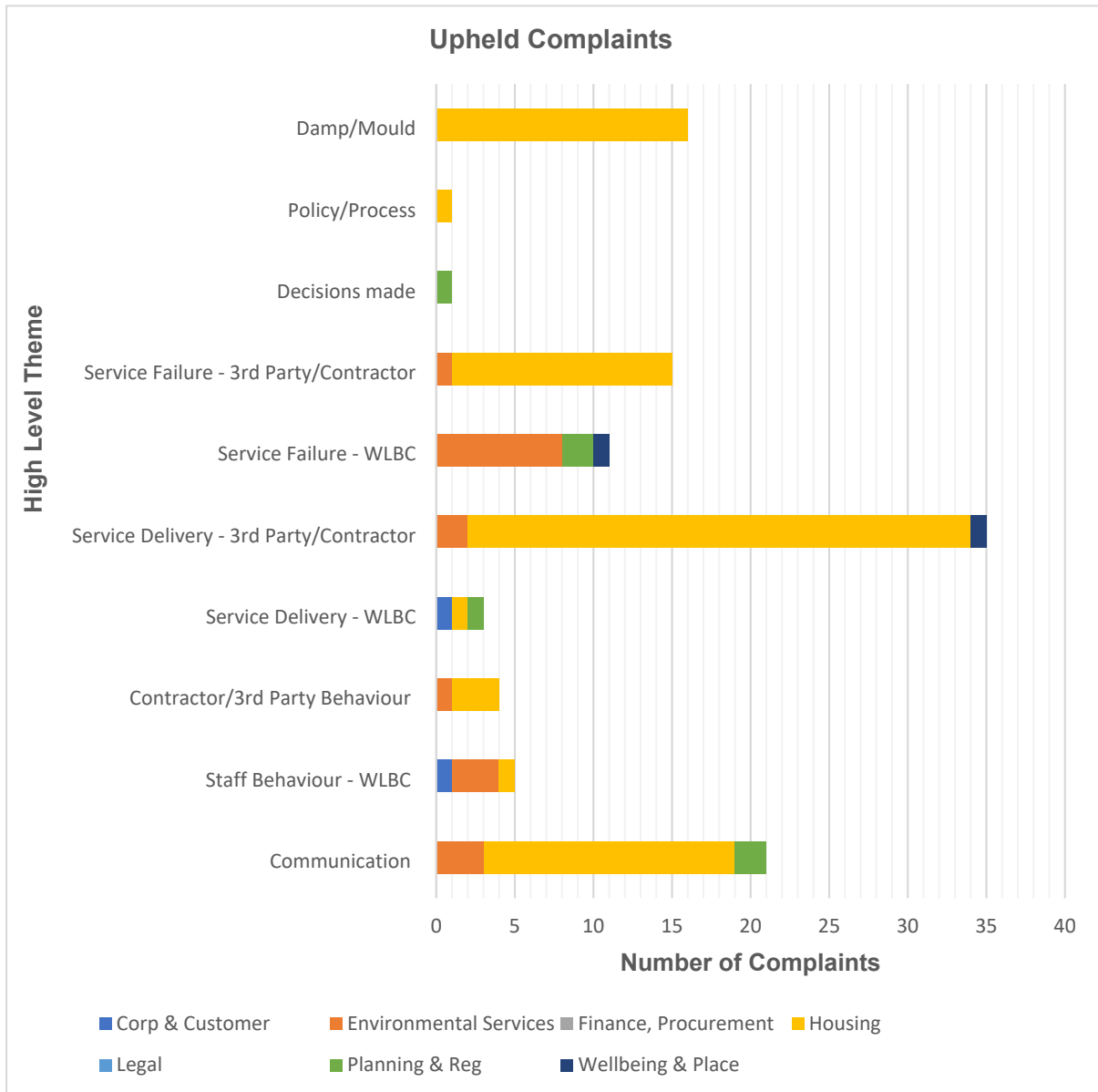
- 6.3 The graph below demonstrates the total number of complaints received since 1 October 2022, categorised by theme and service area. Where "n/a" and "Service Requests" are identified, analysis has shown that these were originally triaged as complaints, but upon investigation they were identified as not falling within the Council's remit or being service requests for either the Council or Lancashire County Council (LCC). All of these complaints were responded to and the service requests were actioned accordingly.

All Complaints

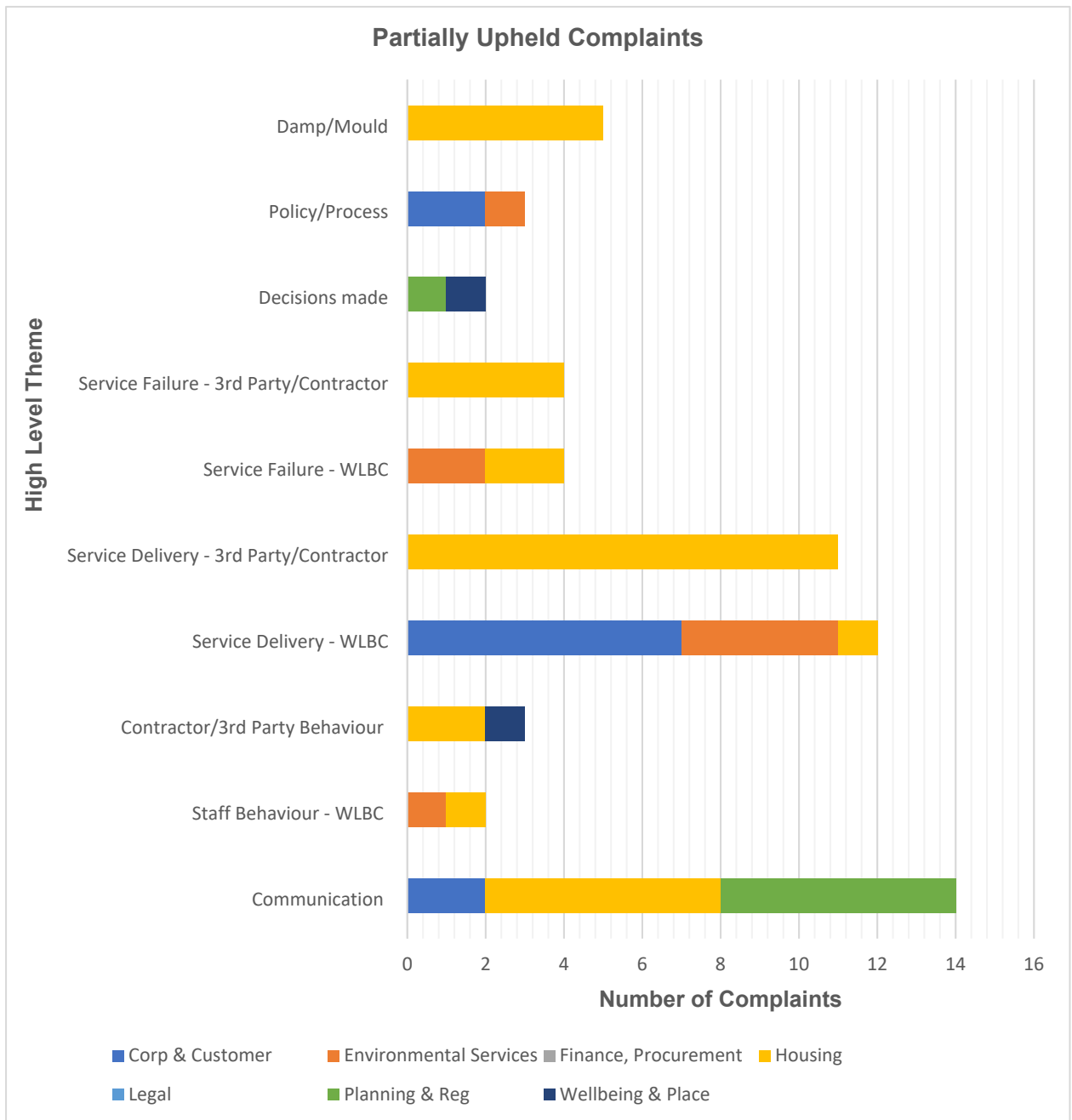
High Level Theme



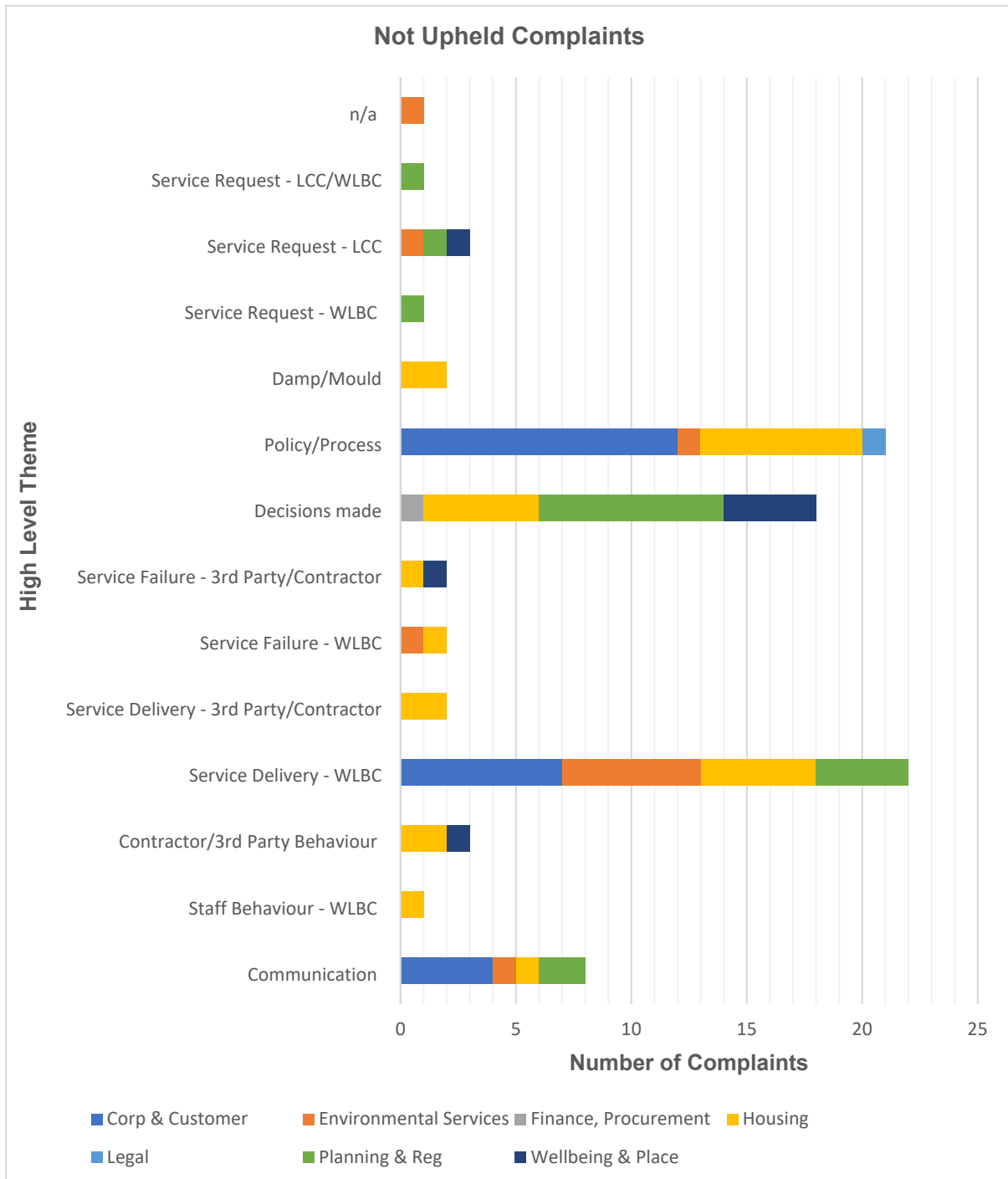
6.4 The graph below demonstrates the number of complaints that were determined as upheld, by theme and service area.



6.5 The graph below demonstrates the number of complaints that were determined as partially upheld, by theme and service area.



6.6 The graph below demonstrates the number of complaints that were determined as not upheld, by theme and service area.



7.0 OMBUDSMAN REFERRALS

7.1 The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman provides an annual report to each Council on the number of complaints referred to them, along with the outcome of their investigations and the decisions made. This information was previously presented to Members via a Members Update in August 2023 (appendix 2).

7.2 There have been no complaints investigated by the Housing Ombudsman.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Complaints provide valuable customer feedback and the principal purpose of investigating, monitoring and responding to complaints is always to improve service delivery. On the occasions where the Council acknowledged that the service was not up to the required standard, the focus is on putting the matter right and preventing any re-occurrence. By taking complaints seriously, the Council is ensuring that all genuine grievances are recognised and action taken to address the issue.
- 8.2 Complaints are written expressions of dissatisfaction and not always substantiated. This is demonstrated at section 6 which details the number of complaints that were not upheld.
- 8.3 Following the introduction of the new Customer Feedback policy and process, there has been an increase in the number of feedback cases recorded. This should be viewed as a positive change as feedback enables the Council to understand customer views, improve services and prevent any re-occurrence.
- 8.4 9.8% of stage 1 complaints within the new process (01/10/22 – 31/03/23) were escalated to Stage 2, in comparison to 82% being escalated to the next stage under the previous process. This is a positive change and demonstrates that in most cases, officers are understanding, acknowledging and listening to customers concerns and responding appropriately at stage 1.
- 8.5 Analysis of complaint handling times during the two periods shows a significant improvement during 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. This is as a result of the introduction of the Customer Feedback Policy, the revised process and the centralised team as detailed at section 2.4. Whilst performance in this area has increased, there is a continued drive to further improve in this area.
- 8.6 Whilst complaints have increased, it should also be recognised that the level of compliments from customers expressing satisfaction with services has increased. Through effective analysis of feedback, it has been identified that two customers who made a complaint, subsequently submitted compliments, in relation to how their complaint was handled and investigated, which is a positive change.
- 8.7 The level of complaints in relation to each service area during the year must also be put into perspective, in comparison to the number of services delivered:
- For Housing Services, 109 complaints relating to the repairs service were received. This equates to 0.4% of the 29,315 repairs completed.
 - For Planning and Regulatory, 23 complaints relating to the planning service were received. This equates to 1.8% of the 1254 planning applications received.
 - For Environmental Services, 15 complaints relating to refuse and recycling collections were received. This equates to 0.0005% of the 3,279,187 refuse and recycling collections, that the Council undertakes on an annual basis.
- 8.8 Feedback is not fully resolved until the actions identified as part of the investigation are completed. Appendix 3 provides a summary of the high-level themes and

actions taken/planned as a result. These actions and progress are consistently monitored by individual service areas.

9.0 PROMOTION OF CUSTOMER FEEDBACK DATA

9.1 The Housing Ombudsman requires landlords to publish complaint handling data in relation to Housing Services and any actions/lessons learnt as a result. For openness and transparency, data for all services, along with comments and compliments, will be published on the Council's website.

10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this article and in particular no significant impact on crime and disorder.

11.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no significant financial or resource implications arising from this article.

12.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

12.1 This Article is for information only and makes no recommendations. It therefore does not require a formal risk assessment, risk registers remain unchanged.

13.0 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

13.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this article.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Article.

Equality Impact Assessment

This article is for information only and does not have any direct impact on members of the public, employees, elected members and/ or stakeholders. There is no Equality Impact Assessment required.

Appendices

1. Customer Feedback Policy
2. Members Update – Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman statistics 2022/23
3. High level themes and actions