

Corporate Learning from Complaints 2014/15

1. Executive Summary

The council adopted the Welsh Government's 2 stage Model Concerns and Complaints Policy on 01 July 2013. This is the first annual report on Corporate Complaints under this policy.

This report details all formal complaints recorded on the Oracle CRM system for the council and that were handled through the corporate complaints policy during the financial year 2014/15. Complaints handled through alternative, statutory, processes are excluded from this report.

Social Service representations and complaints are dealt with under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. A separate annual report was submitted to the Social Services Scrutiny Committee in July 2015 with a detailed analysis of the 55 complaints received during the period.

The information presented reflects the organisation structure prior to recent changes.

During the year the council recorded 303 formal complaints, 280 being handled at Stage 1 of the Corporate Concerns and Complaints policy and 23 at Stage 2.

Analysis indicates that complaints are investigated well by the council with **92% of complaints being resolved at Stage 1**. Only 35 (11%) complaints were referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, below the Welsh average (adjusted for population) of 39. In only 1 of the cases referred to the Ombudsman was the council found guilty of maladministration and this case related to an investigation initiated in 2013/14.

71% of complaint investigations were completed **within target** time scales. This is an area where improvement can be made. The Customer Complaint Officer now actively monitors complaint time scales via the CRM system and escalates any that are nearing their target completion date. This should lead to an increased percentage of complaints being resolved within target

Of the **total of 303 complaints** recorded, **48%** were received by **Visible and Housing** directorate. Waste Management generated 87 complaints during the period representing 60% of the directorate total and 29% of the council total. This reflects the high volume of customer interaction and high public profile of these services.

A total of **4** complaints were received regarding the use of **Welsh** language. One of these related to the Penarth Pier Pavilion sign which is run by a third party organisation and does not fall under the councils remit. Two complaints related to poor translation or lack of Welsh on road signs and road markings. In each of these occasions errors have been corrected or bilingual signage has been installed. The fourth complaint referred to a general lack of Welsh services in the council.

27% of corporate complaints were generated by **Development Services**, however of the 83 complaints received 69 individual complaints related to the proposed installation of the Twinkling Weather Station, commissioned by Penarth Heights developers Crest Nicholson. While all of these complaints were “not upheld” they produced a significant peak in the monthly trend for corporate complaints in September 2014. Excluding this one off event complaints during the year averaged circa **20 per month**.

Learning and Skills received the fewest number of complaints, totalling 6 or 2% of the total.

Only **34%** of complaints were fully **upheld**, while almost **half** were **not upheld**

45% of complaints were generated by 2 main performance areas; Policy or Process not being followed (23%) and Staff Behaviour (22%). Incorrect Information being provided accounted for 20% of the total.

No learning action was recorded against 16% of complaints and a further 23% were marked as “Not Applicable”. The main learning point categories recorded reflect the **causes of complaint** with 29% reporting Review and Revise Information / Communication and 23% requiring Staff Training & Development.

Complaint handling within the council is generally good with the majority being resolved at stage 1 and a small proportion being escalated to the Ombudsman.

Focus for improvement for 2015/16 will be on improving response times and recording of specific service improvements that have been derived from complaint handling.

2. Public Service Ombudsman for Wales

During 2014/15 the Ombudsman received 35 (compares to 21 in 2013/14) complaints against this Council (31 of which were closed).

Whilst there has been an increase in the number of complaints received in 2014/15, compared to 2013/14, this figure remains below the average figure for local authorities in Wales. The average figure, adjusted for population in 2014/15 was 39 – this Council's figure was 35. (This compares to the average figure of 36 in 2013/14 – when this Council's figure was 21.)

In 2014/15 the Council was found guilty of maladministration in respect of 1 complaint and a Section 21 report was issued. (The complaint had been taken in to investigation during 2013/14.) The complaint related to School Exclusion and the role of the Local Education Authority and it was upheld. The complainant was paid £250 and a number of recommendations were put forward by the Ombudsman and the Council complied with them in accordance with the timescales set by the Ombudsman.

No complaints were taken in to investigation by the Ombudsman's Office during 2014/15.

In addition the Ombudsman decided to close 12 complaints after initial consideration (compares to 10 in 2013/14); 9 were determined as Premature (compares to 7 in 2013/14); 3 were Quick Fix/Voluntary settlement (compares to 2 in 2013/14) - in 1 such case £850 was paid and 6 were out of Out of Jurisdiction (compares to 3 in 2013/14)

The largest number of complaints received by the Ombudsman in 2014/15 in respect of this Council related to Planning and Building Control - 13 (compares to 5 in 2013/14) and Housing* – 10 (compares to 6 in 2013/14). (The category of "Housing" used by the Ombudsman also includes services such as Building Services, WHQS and Housing.)

The Ombudsman has received a 7% increase in the number of public body complaints received in 2014/15 compared to 2013/14. Over the past 5 years there has been a 10% increase in the number of complaints submitted to him regarding Local authority sectors.

3. Performance Commentary

With the exception of September 2014, the monthly trend during the year is flat with on average 23 complaints being received per month. Septembers figure was inflated by 69 complaints being received regarding the Twinkling Weather Station at Penarth Heights, although, even without these total for September would have been above the average at 37.

Corporate and Customer Services resolved 100% of the 31 complaints received at Stage 1. Learning and Skills resolved the lowest number of complaints at Stage 1 at 67%, however this was on the basis of only 6 recorded complaints.

Directorate	Percentage Resolved at Stage 1
Corporate & Customer Services	100
Development Services	95
Learning & Skills	67
Resources	90
Visible Services & Housing	90
<i>Council</i>	<i>92</i>

Corporate and Customer Services and Visible Services and Housing had the highest percentage of “Upheld” complaints at 52%, while Development Services had the highest percentage of complaints that were “Not Upheld” at 89%.

Directorate	Not Upheld (%)	Upheld (%)	Part Upheld (%)
Corporate & Customer Services	32	52	16
Development Services	89	1	10
Learning & Skills	50	17	33
Resources	66	24	11
Visible Services & Housing	34	52	10
<i>Council</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>15</i>

The percentage of complaints resolved with target time scales for the council stands at 71%. While this may indicate an area for improvement, a proportion of those complaints where the target was not met will be as a result of a slow response from complainants in providing information. In addition, some complaints have been resolved within target time scales but have been recorded as being outside of target due to delayed administration of the CRM system.

During 2015/16 further work will be undertaken to provide a better understanding of the council's performance in this area and improve reporting accuracy. This will include work to show by how far targets are missed.

Directorate	Resolved within target (%)
Corporate & Customer Services	55
Development Services	95
Learning & Skills	67
Resources	73
Visible Services & Housing	61
<i>Council</i>	<i>71</i>

There is a wide variation of performance across directorates in this performance area. Development Services achieved the highest percentage of complaints resolved within target at 95%. This includes 69 complaints received in bulk in September 2014. Resources directorates achieved a result above the corporate average of 71%.

4. What was learnt from the complaints?

In total, the cause of complaint was recorded in just of 27% of cases. While this is a statistically significant sample and provides valuable information for analysis, it represents an area for improvement going forward. More information of this type being recorded will provide a greater insight into what customers want from us and how we might be able to improve our services to reduce the number of complaints being received in the future.

Similarly, a total of 39% of complaints had no learning point recorded, either because the investigating officer thought that it was “Not Applicable” (23%) or because it was “Not Recorded” (16%). Again, while there is sufficient data on which to analyse the corporate response to complaints, more information would provide for a higher level of confidence in drawing conclusions from this data.

Reasons for the generation of complaints are categorised as:

- Incorrect Information provided
- Other
- Policy / Procedure Not Followed
- Service Standards Not Met
- Staff Behaviour

Reasons recorded for the cause of complaints are fairly evenly spread when viewed at a council level. The most frequent cause of complaint “Failure to Follow Policy or Procedure” accounting for 23% of the total, while the least frequent, “Service Standards Not Met” accounted for 17%.

There is greater variation between directorates however. The most frequent cause of complaint with Visible Services and Housing was “Incorrect Information Provided” at 40% of the directorate total, while Development Services had no complaints generated by this issue. Conversely, Development Services most frequent cause of complaint was “Staff Behaviour” accounting for 50% of the directorate total compared to just 15% in Visible Services and Housing.

Directorate	Incorrect Info provided (%)	Other (%)	Policy / Procedure not Followed (%)	Service Standards not met (%)	Staff Behaviour (%)
Corporate & Customer Services	6	0	28	33	33
Development Services	0	17	25	8	50
Learning & Skills	0	0	100*	0	0
Resources	17	41	18	18	6
Visible Services & Housing	40	18	12	12	15
<i>Council</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>22</i>

*Based on 3 responses

Actions taken as a result of complaints broadly reflect the causes. Key Learning Points are categorised as:

- Review & Amend Systems
- Review & Revise Information / Communication
- Review & Revise Policies / Procedures
- Review Service Standards
- Staff Training & Development
- Not Applicable

At a council level responses to complaints fell into three main areas; “Not Applicable”, “Review & Revise Information / Communication” and “Staff Training & Development” accounting for 23%, 29% and 23% respectively.

“Not Applicable” responses are mostly associated with complaints that were not upheld.

The provision of Staff Training and Development as a result of complaints was highest in Visible Services and Housing at 42% and Corporate and Customers Services at 29%.

The review of information and communication accounted for 86% of responses to complaints in Development Services, significantly above the council average of 29%.

In only 1% of cases recorded were service standards reviewed as a result of a complaint investigation and these were all in Visible Service and Housing.

Directorate	Not Applicable (%)	Not Reported (%)	Review Systems (%)	Review Information (%)	Review procedures (%)	Review Service Standards (%)	Staff Training (%)
Corporate & Customer Services	13	42	6	0	10	0	29
Development Services	10	2	1	86	0	0	1
Learning & Skills	16	50	0	17	0	0	17
Resources	37	52	3	5	0	0	3
Visible Services & Housing	29	8	9	10	1	1	42
<i>Council</i>	23	16	6	29	2	1	23

5. Conclusion

The council has established a mechanism for capturing, monitoring and reporting on its performance in handling complaints. There is an ability to identify the areas of the council that is driving complaints, identifying their cause and the steps taken by services to reduce reoccurrence. This represents a significant step forward for the council and provides a foundation for the better management of complaints in the future.

The statistics for 2014/15 indicate that complaints are generally being handled well although there is room for improvement in some performance areas.

Only 8% of complainants requested that their complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy indicating a high level of customer satisfaction with Stage 1 investigations.

Information from the Public Sector Ombudsman for Wales seems to verify this conclusion, with referred cases being below the Welsh average and no cases referred during the reporting period being investigated.

6. Areas for future work

Performance against target

- Establish cause of missed targets e.g. administration, customer delays
- Establish extent to which target dates are missed

Cause of Complaints

- Improve data capture

Key learning points

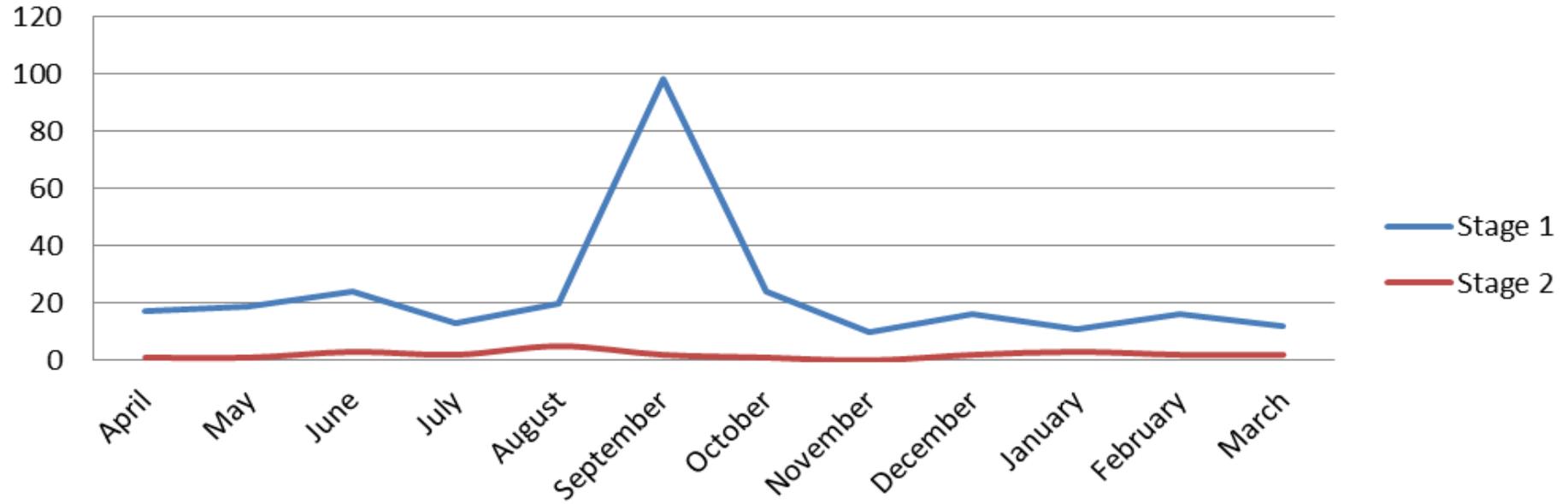
- Improve data capture
- Improve reporting on specific service improvements

General Reporting

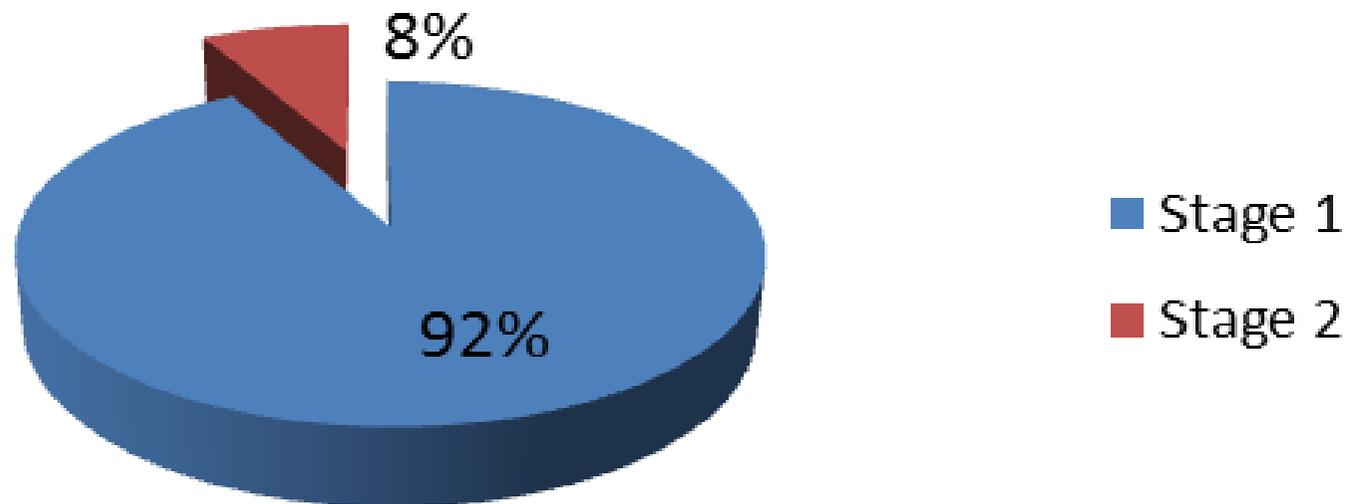
- Change data capture to allow for reporting against existing organisational structure

Appendix 1 Complaints Received Monthly Trend

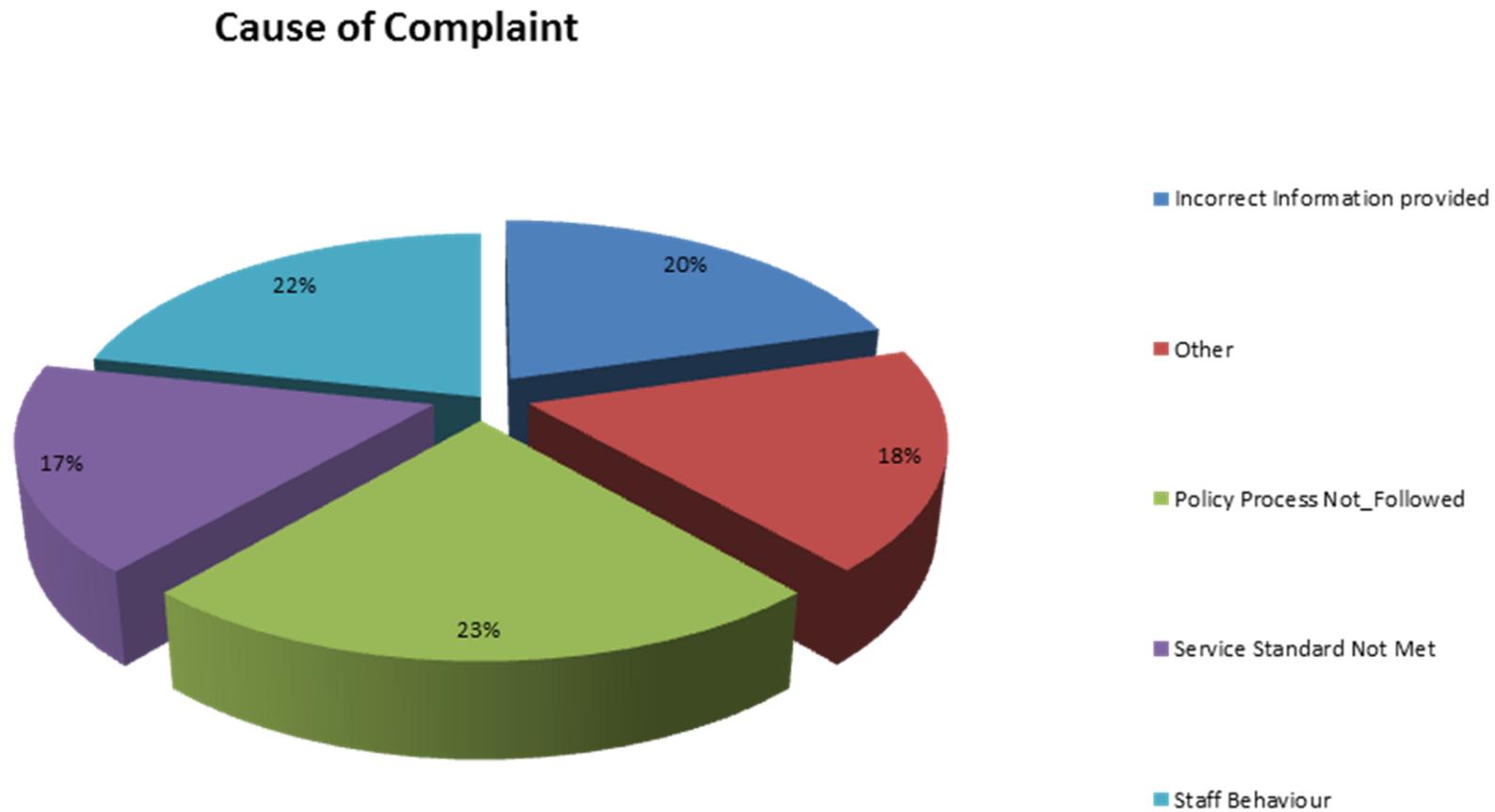
Monthly Complaints



Complaint Resolution Stage

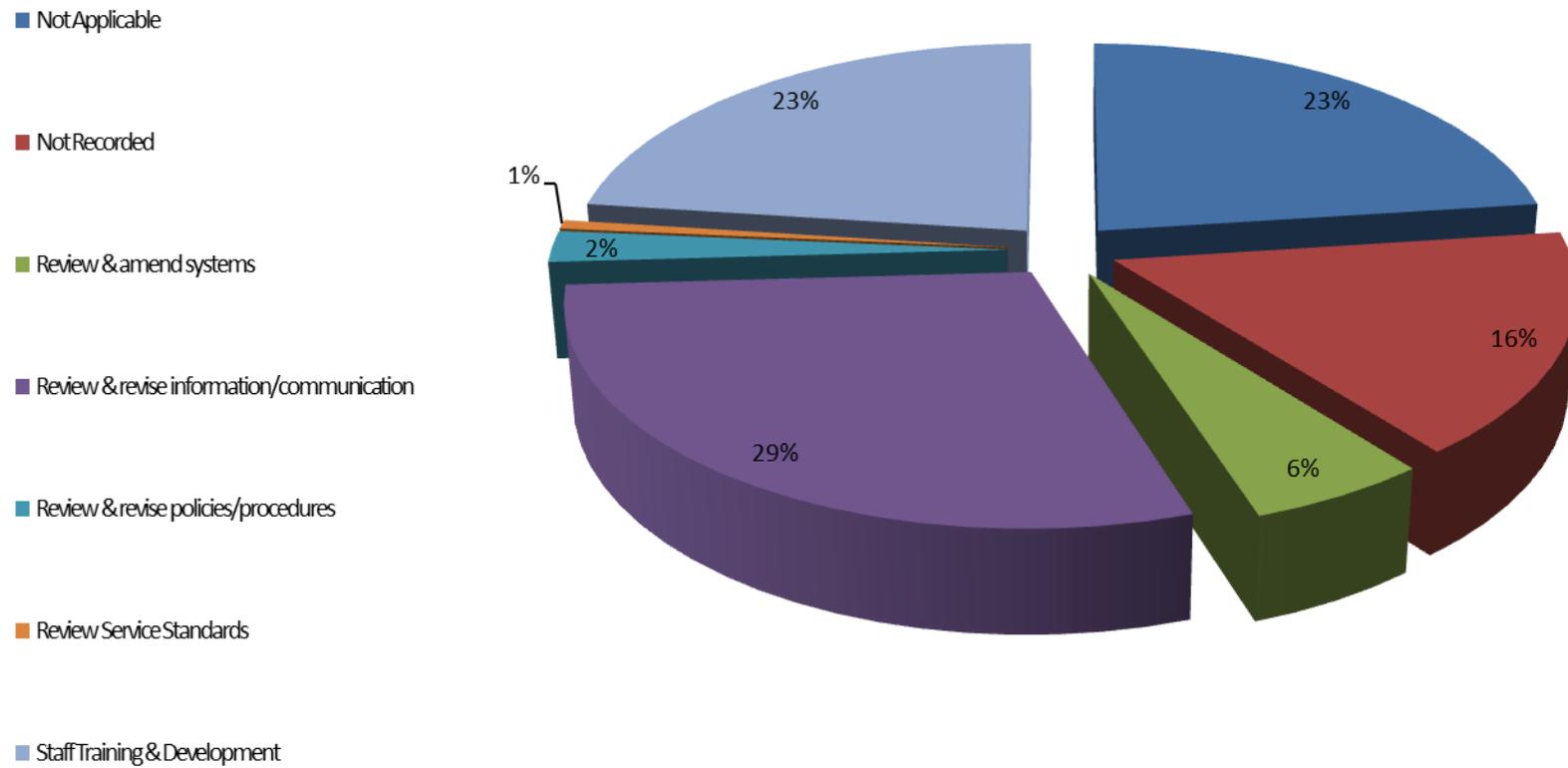


Appendix 3 Cause of Complaint



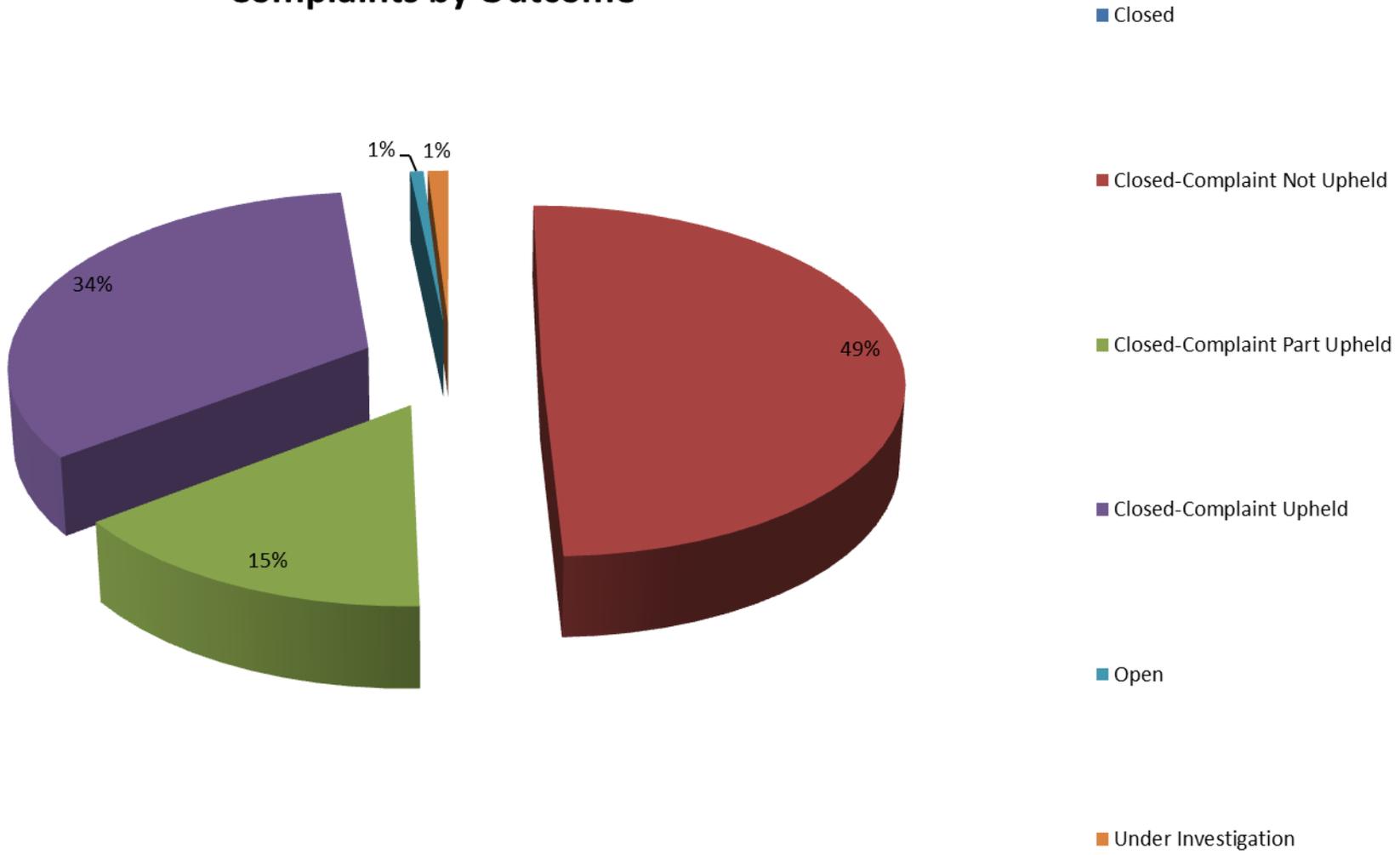
Appendix 4 What Was Learned from Complaints

Key Learning Points



Appendix 5 Complaint Outcomes

Complaints by Outcome



Appendix 6 Complaints Investigations Completed Within Time Scale

On Target

