

John Nightingale
Head of Revenues and Benefits
London Borough of Bromley
Civic Centre
Stockwell Close
Bromley
BR1 3UH

Date: 15 January 2015

Our Ref: CB/AIF

Dear John,

As we approach the February Executive & Resources PDS meeting where we consider and review the performance of the Benefits service, we take this opportunity to write to you with Liberata's assessment of the performance of this critical high profile service that we provide to London Borough of Bromley (LBB) and its citizens.

This financial year 2014/15 has proved to be an extremely challenging one, due to a numbers of factors which are explained in this letter. We apologise that the service has not been to the standard expected by both our organisations. For the previous five years we had sustained year on year improvements with performance and customer experience and therefore absolutely understand what's required to deliver both. Liberata have undertaken all that was necessary to recover our position and will continue to deliver the high quality performance both our organisations and customers expect.

This summary covers performance for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st December 2014.

1. Current Status of the Benefits Service

The Benefits caseload, which measures all households receiving Housing and/or Council Tax Support was 22,303 at the end of December 2014. This has reduced from the end of December 2013 when the caseload was 23,436. There continues to be an increase in the volume of incoming documents and associated claims. This is mainly due to ATLAS files and 'Real Time Information' matches.

We continue to see an increase in the number of Discretionary Housing Payments being requested by customers due to the Social Rent Restriction. The number of Temporary Accommodation claims also continue to increase reflecting the changes implemented through the reform and the shortage of affordable privately rented accommodation.

1.1 Claims and Work Outstanding

As at the 29th December 2014, the total amount of outstanding work was 3,730 items which includes 1,798 items pending awaiting information from the claimant and/or third-party.

As advised in the main report the outstanding items are higher due to the increased number of DWP ATLAS files which inflate the workload. These are changes which affect entitlement which we would not necessarily have been made aware of by the customer. We also became a pilot site for ATLAS phase 3 in September to enable us to be at the fore front of further automation and ultimately providing a better service to our customers and reduce any potential overpayments.

Since October we have started receiving 'Real Time Information' HMRC matches have added further documents to our outstanding workload. These are data matches of our benefits system against the HMRC data base. Any inconsistent data in regards to earnings or occupational pensions are matched and sent to us to further update our system. This ultimately results in overpayments being created. As at the end of December, 94% of overpayments created through 'Real Time Information' matches were classified as claimant error.

1.2 Right Time Indicator

In terms of our current position for the nationally recognised Right Time Indicator, our average performance as at 31st December 2014 was 20.23 days against the profiled target of 16.5 days. Our average performance as at 31st December 2013 was 16.66 days.

Quality during 2013/14 had fallen below the contractual threshold. This was due to a combination of factors which included a high number of new recruits being deployed onto the Bromley account as well as agency temps whose quality levels did not meet the standard for Bromley.

In addition, a significant change in the way some assessments are now carried out impacted the checks the client team undertake. This is no a longer an issue as we now ensure that all work irrespective of how it's processed is captured and included for monitoring purposes.

In order to address this a plan was put in place to focus on improving quality. This entailed implementing a new and revised set of standards including bringing in additional resource.

Recruiting appropriately qualified assessment officers proved a challenge due to the high level of competency required on the Bromley contract. This caused a build-up of work that negatively impacted the processing times.

The clearance of this work inflated the processing times to that contained in the report. The built up work was ring-fenced and cleared by dedicated officers, ensuring claims received during the "clearance period" were not delayed.

A plan has been devised and processes are now in place to ensure that we improve and sustain our processing times for the final quarter of 2014/15 and onwards

1.3 Quality

We have made significant improvements with our levels of quality. The average error rate for the period April to November was 4.91% which is within contractual tolerance.

We continue to remain firmly focused on achieving high levels of accuracy. An additional quality resource and targeted high risk checking is being utilised to ensure we drive down errors. A higher number of checks are carried out on each assessment officer that works on the Bromley contract.

We continue to run 'careless error' workshops and have increased our training resource to support our new and upskilled members of staff.

1.4 Overpayment Strategy

The creation of overpayments is a natural bi-product of the administration of Housing & Council Tax Support, with recovery needing to be sought from some of the most vulnerable members of the community. This is compounded by the HMRC initiative to reduce fraud and error, through 'Real Time Information' data matches which identify changes to income previously undeclared. The total value of overpayments created in the past 12 weeks through receipt of 'Real Time Information' is £399k.

The recovery rate as at the end of December was 70.48%. We continue to use proactive measures to assist in our recovery technique. This includes the use of visiting officers to make contact with debtors at home. We also use a solicitors firm to send out letters which are followed up by phone calls. They are also used to assist in obtaining County Court Judgements on some of our highest debts. This continues to be a highly effective debt recovery process.

Blameless tenant recovery continues to be an effective tool in recovering debts from landlords that receive benefit for multiple tenants.

2. Call Centre & Customer Services

The number of customers seen in customer services for the period April 2014 to December 2014 totalled 33,693. During this period 86% of customers were seen within 15 minutes, against a target of 85%.

During the same period the Call Centre (Help Line) received 173,569 calls with 86% of calls answered. Callers have had an average queue time of 165 seconds before being answered by an officer. Improvements to performance are being made in this area. In December our average queue time was 44 seconds.

It is important to note that we no longer use 'call snatching' as an option to reduce the volume of calls. The increase in call handling times reflects a much improved customer experience.

We drive to achieve service excellence within Customer Services teams and ensure that our staff is adequately trained.

3. Service Developments

Liberata's goal is to continue to improve and enhance the services provided to LBB and its citizens through the introduction of innovative and effective solutions.

Examples of current year new and ongoing initiatives;

- Call recording has been introduced onto the Bromley Call Centre (Help Line)
- Introduction of a Fast Track system to speed up the assessment of new claims
 - Claims forms received at our Customer Services reception with all the required information are processed within 24 hours by assessment staff
 - Claim forms submitted by post are reviewed by staff and if all required information has been submitted the case is scanned into our 'fast track' tray within our system and processed within 24 hours
 - We actively call customers that have submitted claims and have not responded to our information requests after 5 working days
- The use of an independent solicitor's firm to aid our recovery of overpayments including CCI's as an option for our high value debts
- Increasing our experienced permanent resource to strengthen our local assessment team

- Introduction of front line Benefit Assessors
- Further ATLAS automation is being piloted which will assist in minimising errors and provide an overall good customer service

We have made a number of changes to our operating model and processes to ensure that we maintain high accuracy levels whilst processing claims in a timely manner. We are already seeing improvements from the changes that have been made and are confident that we will see a higher performing fourth quarter.

4. Investment in the community

Liberata is keen to play an active and constructive part in the Bromley community. We have been working in collaboration with the London Borough of Bromley on events.

We have donated to a number of local charities through our dress down and cake sale days. We also provided the United Reform church in Bromley with 100 gifts for people who would normally be alone at Christmas. The gifts donated are given out during the Christmas day lunch which is provided by the church.

We recognise it will be disappointing to have had a deterioration in service in some areas during the first half of this year however, we are confident that with all the actions taken sustainable improvements are now in place.

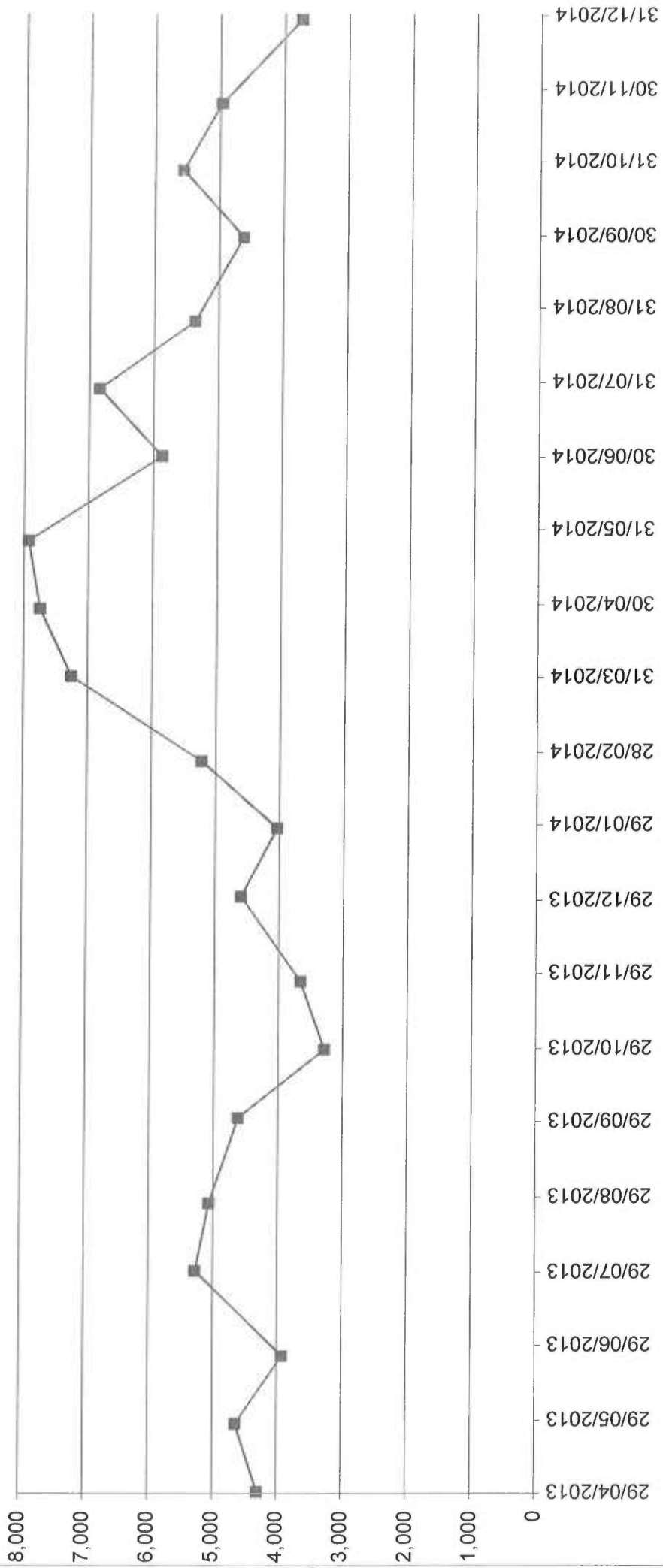
Liberata remains firmly committed to delivering an outstanding service to the London Borough of Bromley and its citizens.

Yours sincerely,

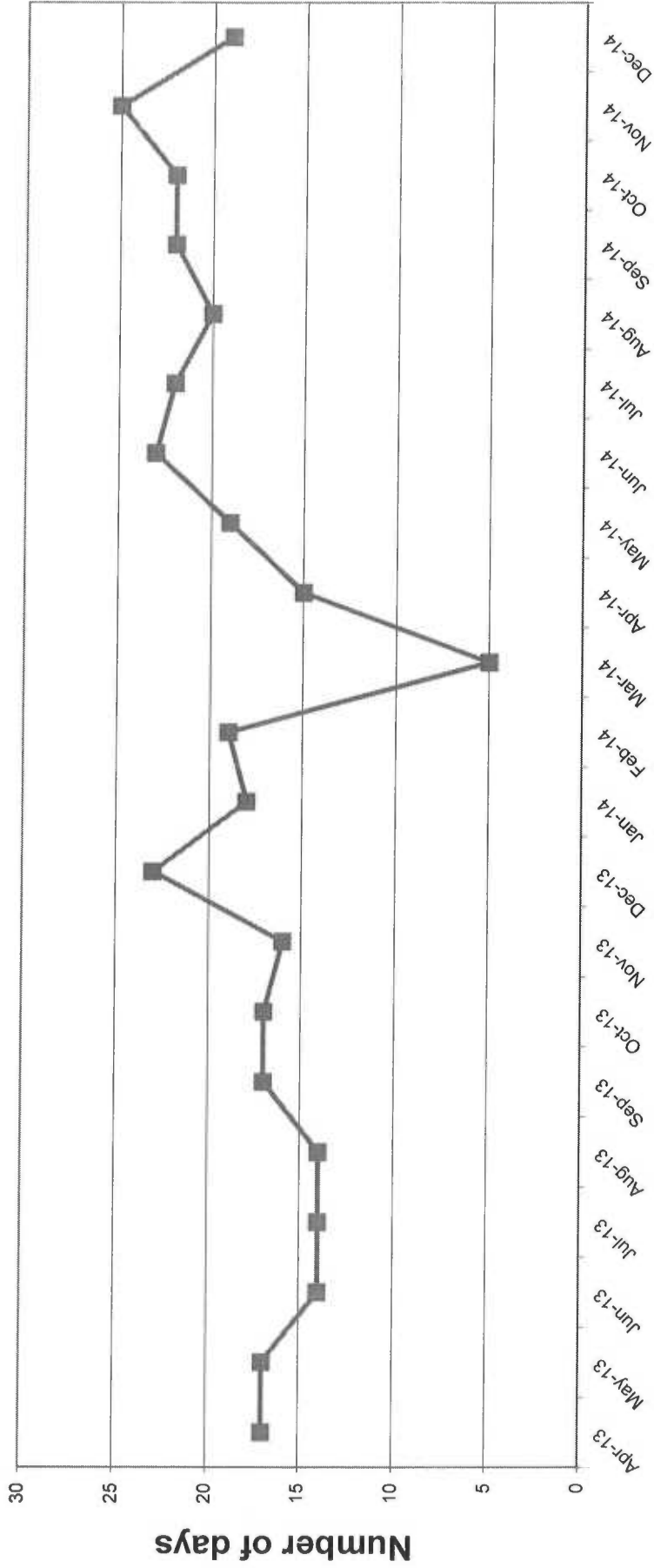


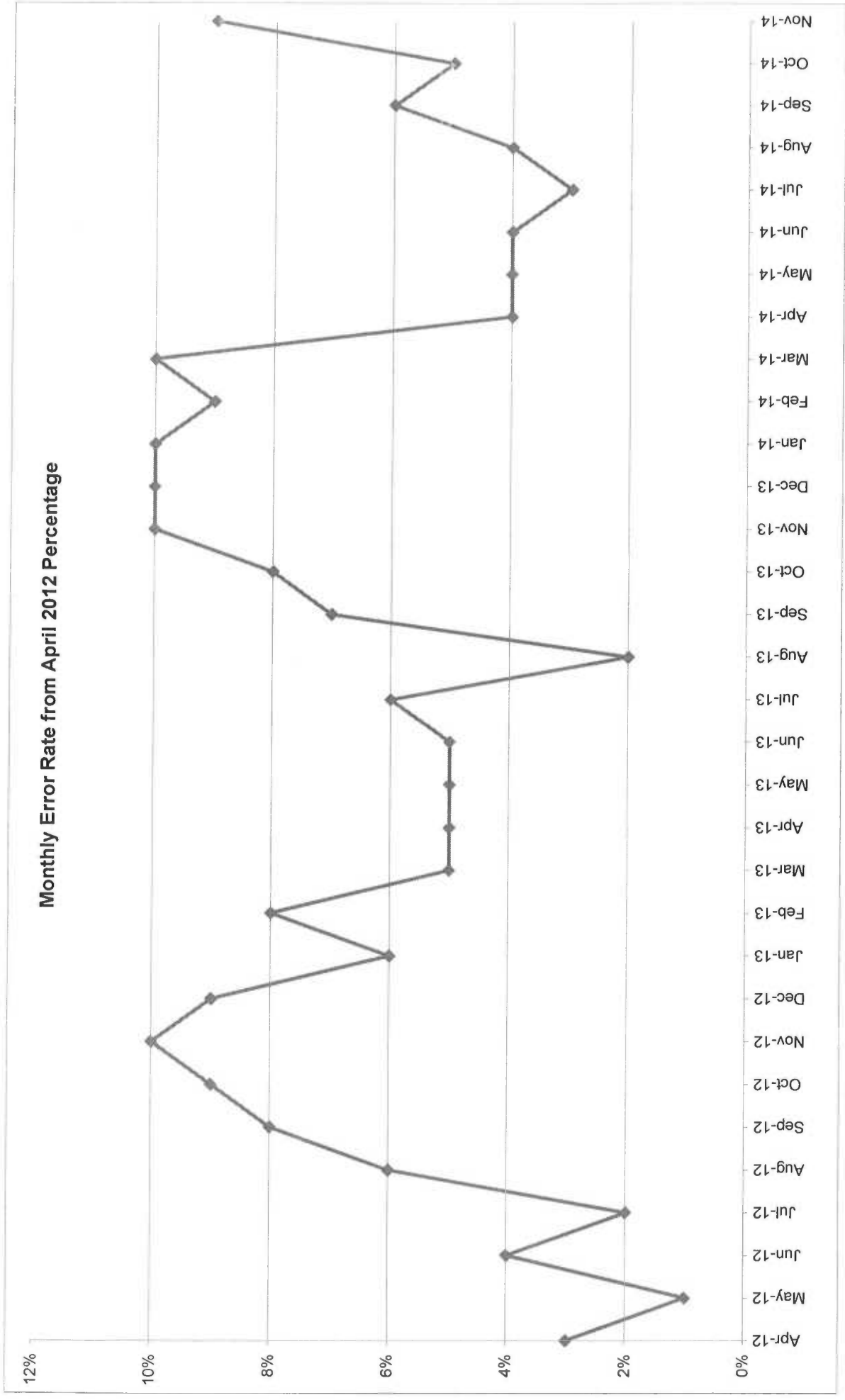
Charlie Bruin
Executive Director, BPO Services

Total Pending & Outstanding Work
April 2013 to December 2014

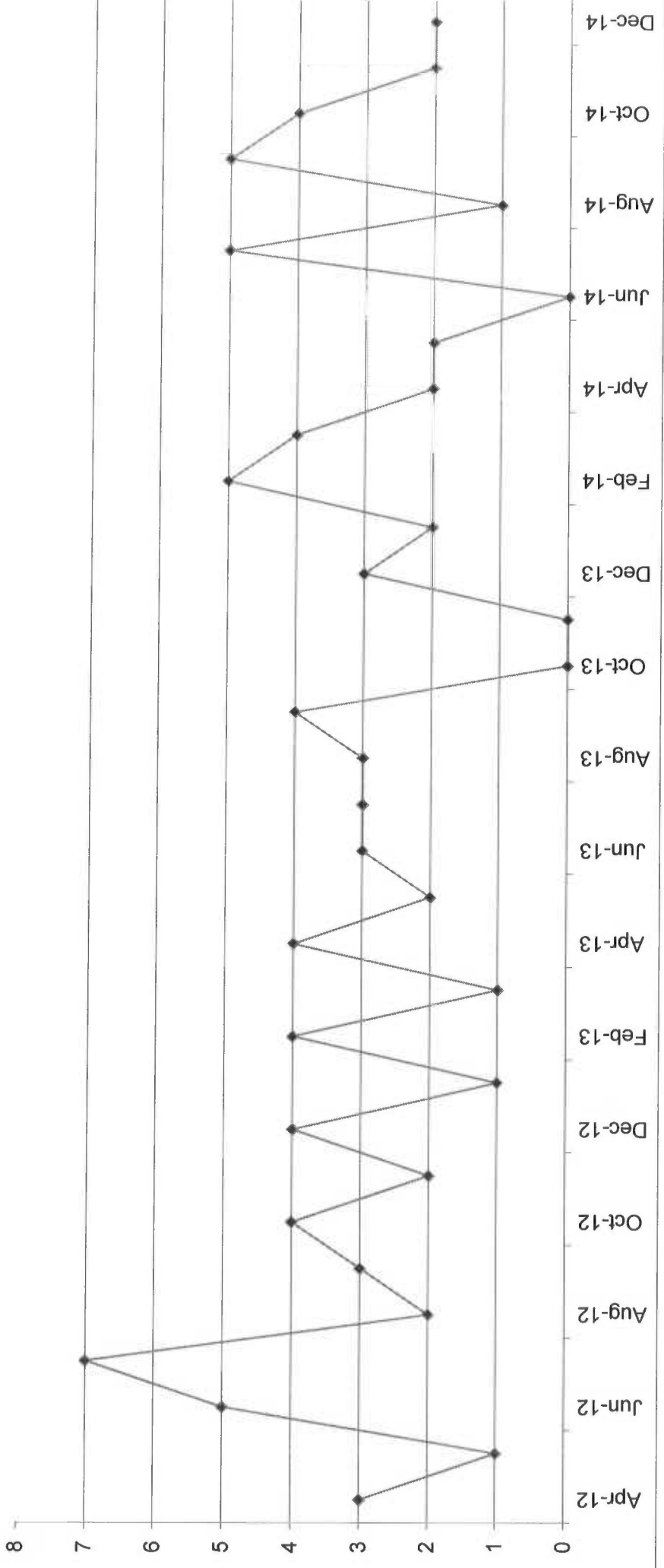


Right Time Indicator April 2013 - December 2014

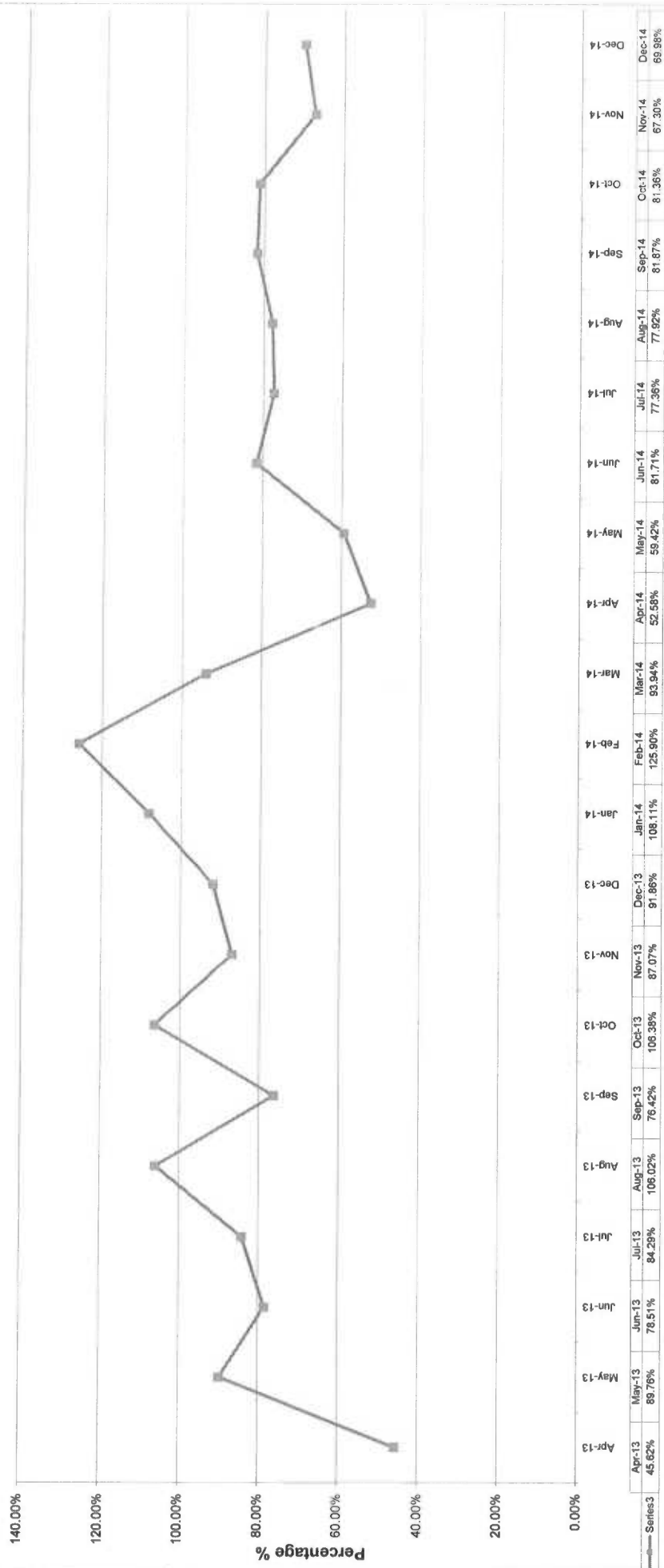




Housing and Council Tax Benefit Stage 2 Complaints from April 2012



Monthly Overpayment % recovered against that created From April 2013



Calls Received and Abandoned by Month from April 2014

