

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

Date: 22nd June 2015

Our Ref: AIF/GT

Dear John,

As we approach the July 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.

We are pleased to report that Liberata have made significant improvements in the performance of the Benefits Service. Due to a number of factors, 2014/15 had proved to be an extremely challenging year. During the last six months, Liberata have introduced new processes and initiatives which have had a significant impact on the benefits service. This can be seen in the final outturn performance for the last financial year.

This summary covers performance for the period 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2015.

1. Current Status of the Benefits Service

The Benefits caseload, which measures all households receiving Housing and/or Council Tax Support, was 22,180 at the end of March 2015. This has reduced from the end of March 2014 when the caseload was 23,195.

In terms of our current position for the nationally recognised Right Time Indicator, our average performance as at 31st March 2015 was 13.85 days against a target of 13 days. Our average performance as at 31st March 2014 was 13.59 days.

For the final quarter of 2014/15 we put in place new processes to improve our processing times for new claims and change in circumstances. This performance will continue throughout 2015/2016 and onwards.

As at 31st March 2015, the total amount of outstanding work was 5,885 items which includes 2,074 items pended awaiting information from the claimant and/or third-party. This is a significant improvement over the same period last year when we had a total of 7,255 documents outstanding.

All Benefit Cap cases are ring fenced for assessment by our most experienced Assessors. This is to ensure consistent and accurate entitlements as these assessments require manual calculation and procedural knowledge. This is one of the areas we are looking to automate.

The social rent restrictions which were introduced in 2013 continue to increase the number of Discretionary Housing Payments being requested by customers.

1.1 Temporary Accommodation

The numbers of Temporary Accommodation claims continue to increase reflecting the changes implemented through welfare reform and the shortage of affordable privately rented accommodation.

We acknowledge the need to process temporary accommodation applications in a timely manner and have undertaken a complete review of the processes in place for the assessment of these claims. This area of work is now robustly managed and regular liaison meetings have been set up with the appropriate teams within the Council, as well as the stakeholders. We have introduced automated reporting which will advise of the progress of claims once received by the benefits service.

I am happy to report that we are now seeing significant improvements in the assessment of these claims which is reflected in our processing times.

1.2 ATLAS

As advised in the main report the outstanding items include the increased number of DWP ATLAS files. These are changes which affect entitlement and would not necessarily have been advised by the customer. We are now in phase 3 of ATLAS implementation and are currently testing further automation of DWP benefits which will ultimately provide a better service to our customers and reduce any potential overpayments.

1.3 Real Time Information

Based on the success of the 'Real Time Information' pilot, the HMRC initiative to reduce fraud and error, the DWP have decided to continue with this initiative. Since the launch, the London Borough of Bromley has created overpayments in excess of £800k.

We are investigating the use of automation with the RTI matches we receive which could result in further benefit to the Council and the customer.

1.4 Quality

We have made a significant improvement with the quality of assessments. The average error rate for 2014/15 was 4.99% compared to 7.27% for 2013/14.

We continue to build on the improvements which have been made in this area. The 'Buddy' system we introduced earlier in the year has proven successful so we have widened the scope of this initiative. In addition, pre and post determination checks are carried out on high risk cases.

The 'careless error' workshops which we run have proven to be invaluable and will continue as part of our process.

1.5 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.

The recovery rate for 2014/15 was 75.12%. The final outturn was negatively impacted due to the creation of overpayments as a result of the RTI initiative. Most of this debt was raised in the last four months of the financial year; this reduced the opportunity to recover the overpayment. 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. The use of 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.

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

1.6 Universal Credit

We have been advised by the DWP that Bromley will form part of the 4th tranche of Universal Credit implementation due for the period December 2015 – March 2016. This will only include single working aged claimants.

Based on our experience on other contracts which have already gone live, we are expecting to see relatively low volumes of cases being transferred to the DWP. This is as because most of the Universal Credit claimants are not currently receiving Housing Benefit.

There are a number of issues which are being raised and escalated to the DWP such as duplicate requests for information being received, information going to the incorrect Local Authorities and customers not receiving Universal Credit award letters.

2. Call Centre & Customer Services

The number of customers seen in Customer Services for the period April 2014 to March 2015 totalled 46,518. During this period 85% of customers were seen within 15 minutes, against a target of 85%.

During the same period the Contact Centre (Help Line) received 231,744 calls with 87% answered.

Throughout the year the team became more customer centric with a focus on first time resolution and trying to ensure customers do not make repeat calls. This practice was helped by us introducing the Resolution Capture Tool which allows our advisers to record the reason for a customer's call. We also carried-out more refresher training and brought-in a new process of coaching and mentoring to supplement the established 360^o quality monitoring and feedback process.

During the period we have seen the teams promote the forms and information on offer on LBB's website and the My Bromley portal as we work with the Council on the important channel shift agenda.

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
- Academy 'Decisions and Appeals' - Academy software has now been purchased to assist with report running to ensure compliance and minimise delays with processing times.
- We have up-skilled 6 assessors to Level 2. They have received training from a local Bromley Team Leader and their training program is continuing in order to ensure quality of performance.
- The DMS system is now being used for Blue Badges and Freedom Passes.
- The use of an independent solicitor's firm to aid our recovery of overpayments including CCJ's as an option for our high value debts
- Increased our experienced permanent resource to strengthen our local assessment team
- Introduction of a Complaints & Members Liaison Lead Officer
- Introduction of front line Benefit Assessors

Further Developments for 2015/16:

- E-Bens; we are exploring the possibility of E-forms to be integrated with the Bromley Portal
- Further ATLAS automation is being tested which will assist in minimising errors and provide an overall good customer service
- Currently testing NDL automation for Pension Credits which will enable the automation of Pension Credit changes through the NDL software.

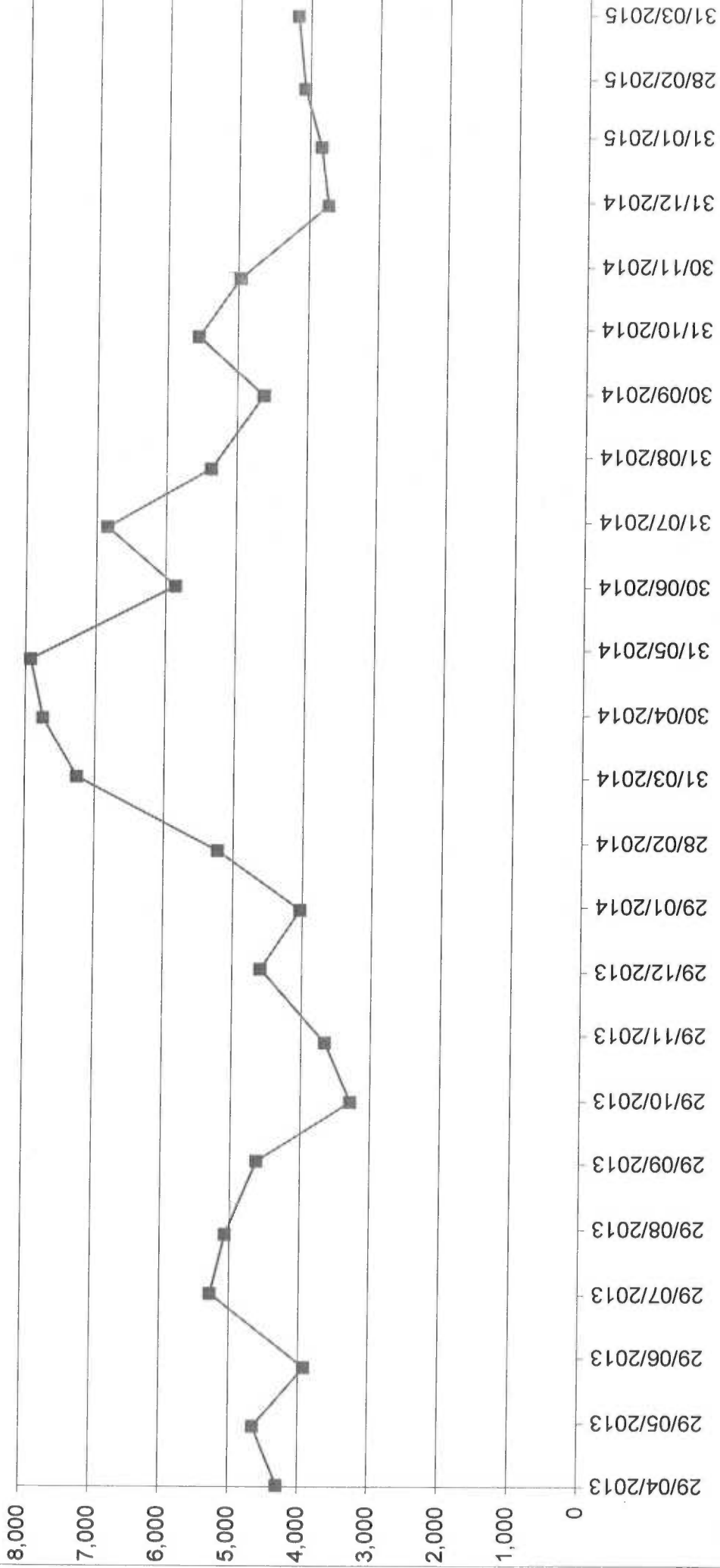
- Introduction of a Pilot Fast Track system which will cover Change in Circumstances.
- Introduction of a Pilot for up-skilling Customer Service/Call Centre staff to carry out basic changes on the Benefits system.
- Introduction of the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERRIS) which allows us to upload our Single Housing Benefits Extract (SHBE) to a secure online portal, where the data is analysed by applying a series of pre-defined rules and run campaigns to reduce incorrect benefit entitlements for target groups. This is an effective way to identify, target and detect customer error and fraud within the caseload. Liberata has successfully secured funding to assist the Authority to maximise this opportunity.
- The Council Tax Reduction Review Service (CTRRS) is a fully managed review service that helps the Authority to identify cases where the claimant's entitlement to Council Tax Reduction (also known as Council Tax Support) is incorrect. Liberata formed a consortium with 12 Local Authorities and submitted a successful bid to DCLG for funding a project to find fraud and error within those 12 client's caseloads.

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

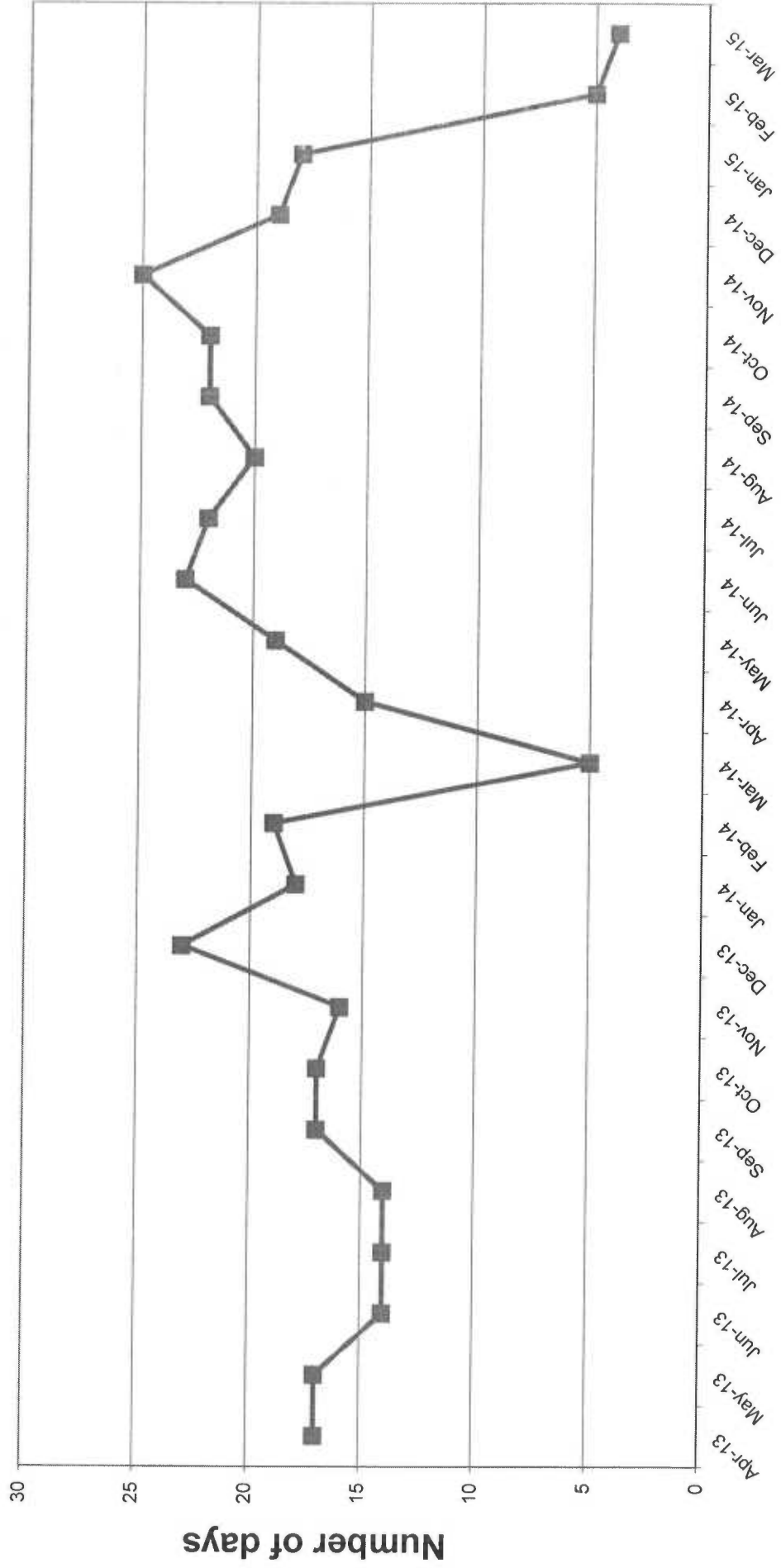
Yours sincerely,

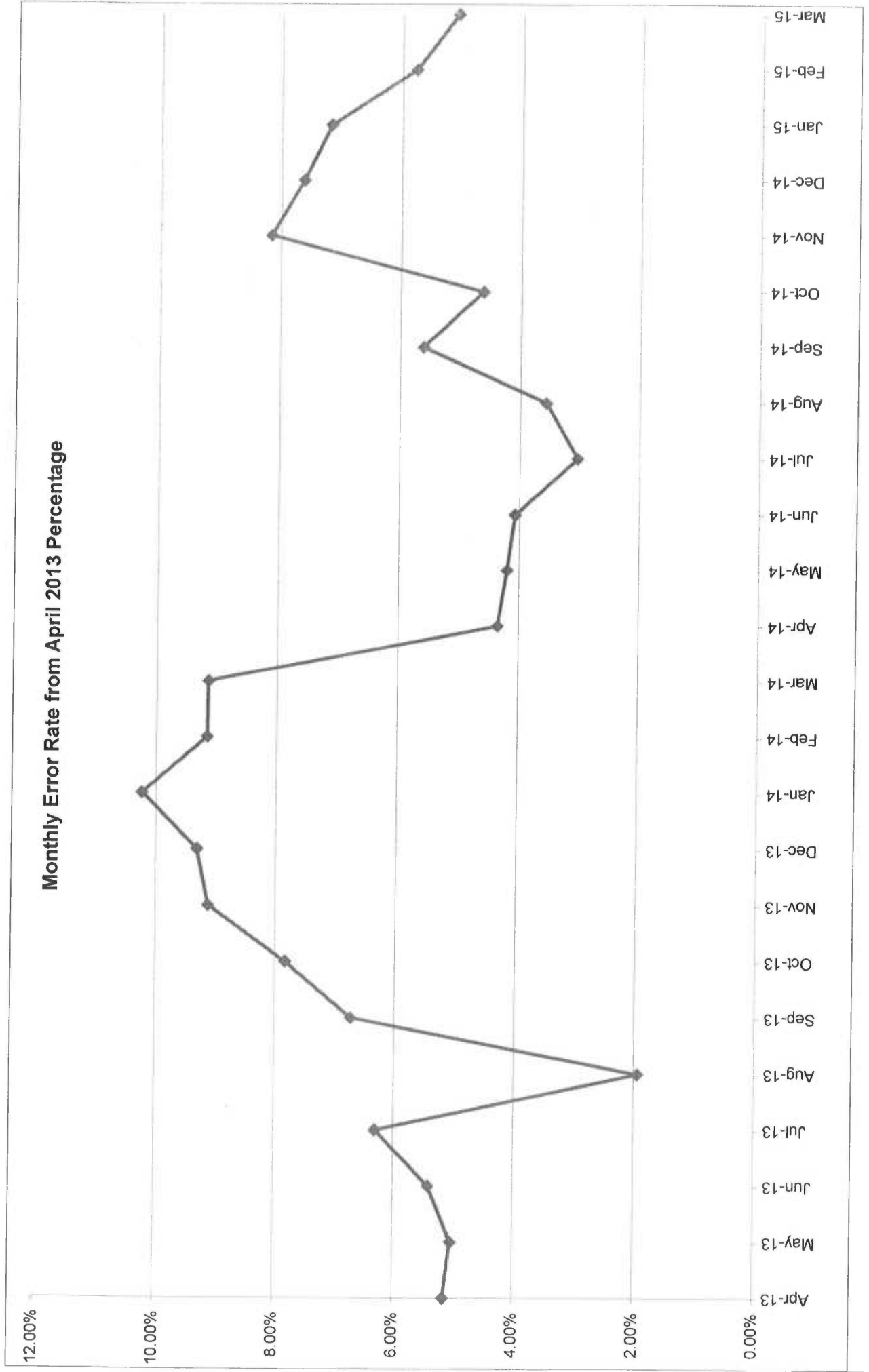
Amanda Inwood-Field
Contract Director

**Total Pending & Outstanding Work
April 2013 to March 2015**

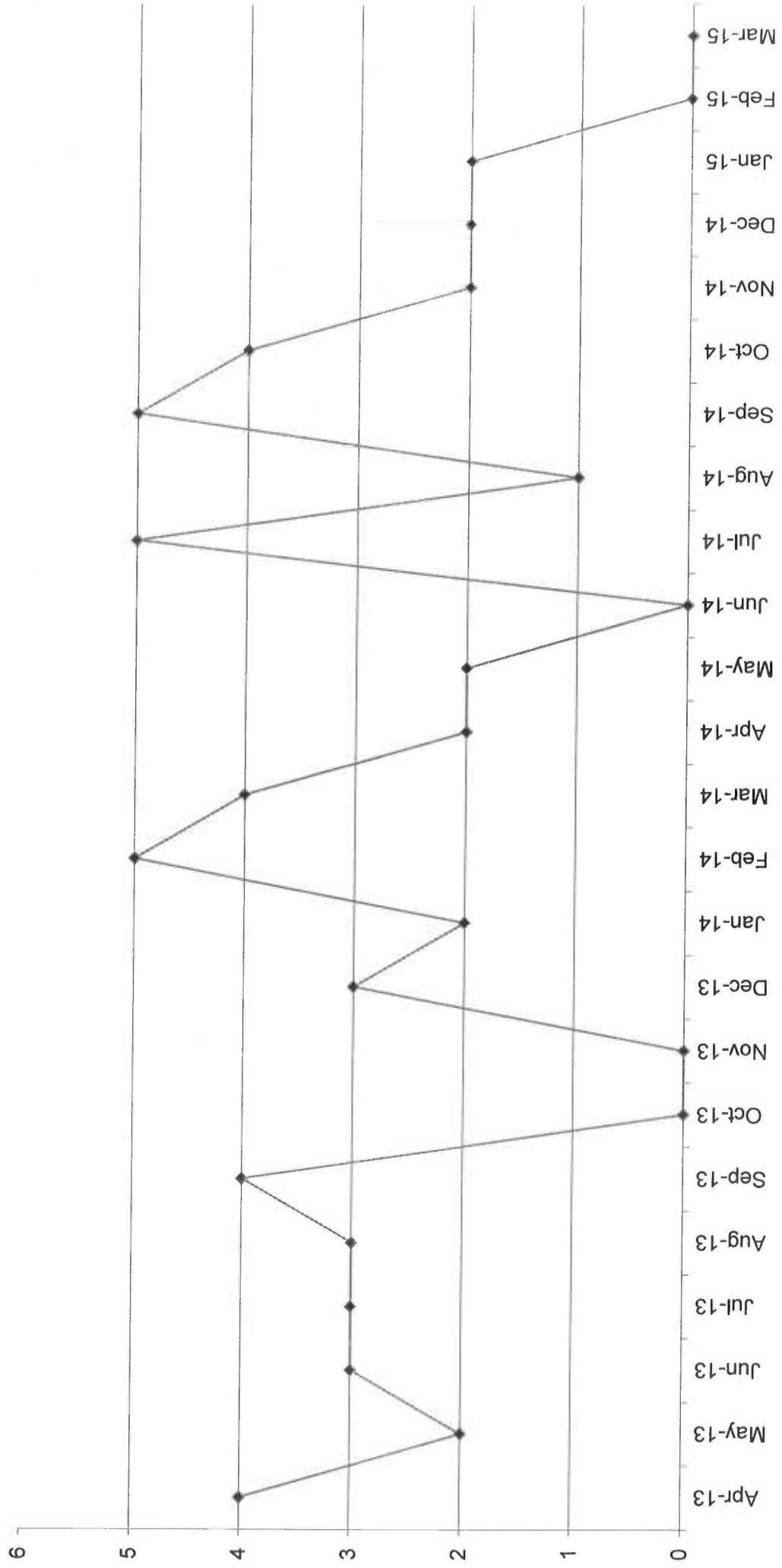


Right Time Indicator April 2013 - March 2015

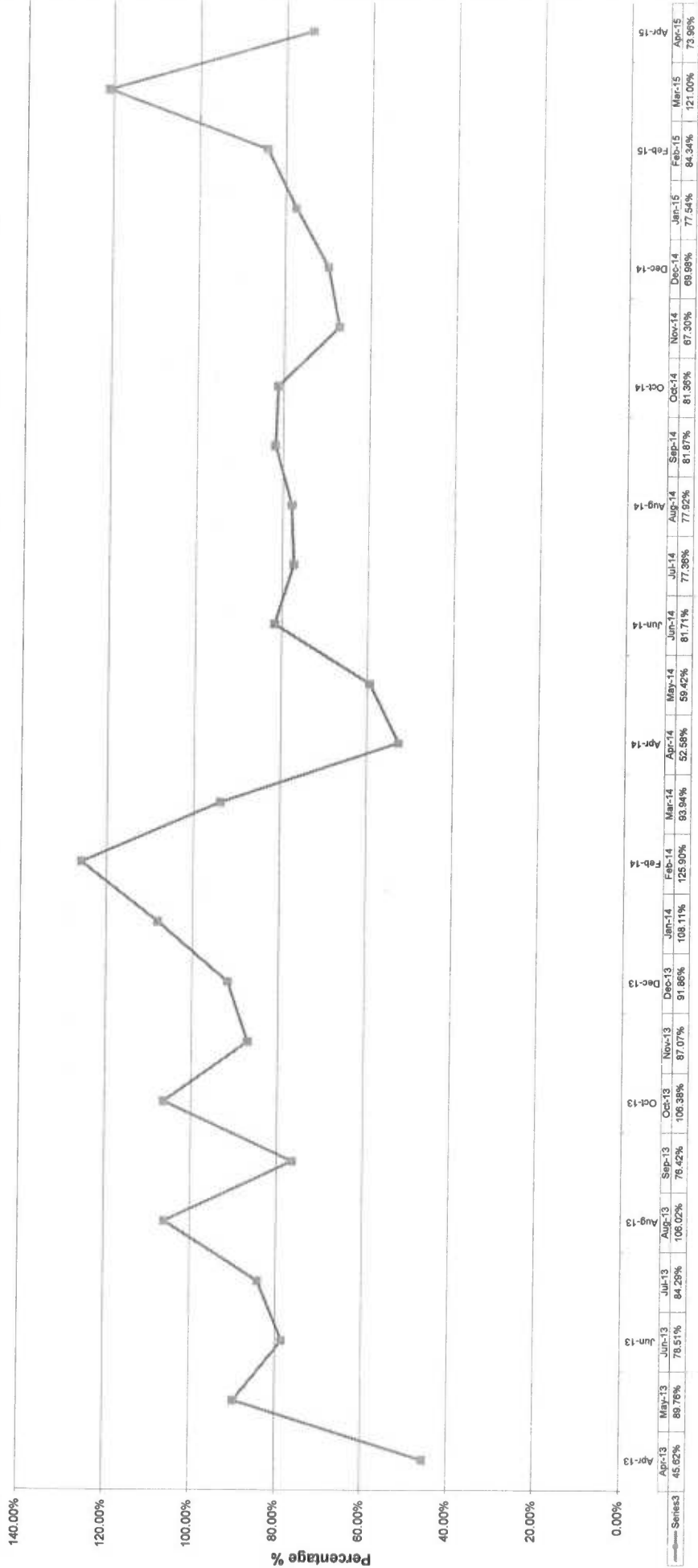




Housing and Council Tax Benefit Stage 2 Complaints from April 2013



Monthly Overpayment % recovered against that created From April 2013 every 2 months



Calls Received and Abandoned by Month from April 2014

