

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

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Our Ref: AIF/GT

Dear John,

As we approach the January 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 summary covers performance for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

### **1. Current Status of the Benefits Service**

The Benefits caseload, which measures all households receiving Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, was 20,714 as at the end of September 2016. The caseload at the same time last year was 21,564.

In terms of our current position for the nationally recognised Right Time Indicator, our average performance was 10.02 days compared to 11.14 days for the same period last year. This is against an annual contractual target of 13 days. The processing performance of New Claims was 20.03 days and Changes was 9.21 days.

Liberata are committed to continuous improvement and driving down the processing days of new claims and changes where possible. We regularly review our established processes to identify whether there are any further enhancements which could be introduced to improve the service to our customers.

As at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016, the total amount of outstanding work was 5,575 items which includes 2,582 items pending awaiting information from the claimant and/or third-party.

### **1.1 Temporary Accommodation**

The number of clients accessing the Temporary Accommodation channel continues to increase and reflects the shortage of affordable privately rented accommodation within the Borough. Customers that previously had their benefit restricted but continued paying their rent are now increasingly unable to afford these properties. This is likely to continue as the reduced Benefit Cap effective from November 2016 will affect more customers.

The strong relationship which has been formed through joint working between Liberata's dedicated Temporary Accommodation resource and the Housing teams continues to be highly effective. For Mears, a new stakeholder, we have put in place the same robust processes and procedures which ensures that benefit claims and queries are dealt with promptly.

The successful implementation of our automated reports has significantly driven down the number of queries from our stakeholders and customers. These reports outline the current position of a customer's benefit claim as well as their assessed entitlement once the claim has been calculated. It also advises as to when a claim has been suspended which enables the housing officer to engage with the customer to reduce potential arrears.

We continue to provide verification training. We encourage our stakeholders to take advantage of the training as this allows their staff to verify original documents to the DWP's standards. It also allows for prompt submission of claims to the Council offices as claims have already been verified by authorised staff. In addition it enables claims to be processed promptly, as requests for further information are minimised.

The close partnership working with both the Housing and Leaving Care Team has continued to grow with strong liaison between all parties. This has resulted in claims being processed quickly and queries being resolved in a timely manner with the focus being to pay benefit claims promptly.

### **1.2 ATLAS**

ATLAS is a process of transferring data from the DWP systems to the Local Authority systems. The data reports on changes which may not have been reported by the customer. These changes enable us to ensure the entitlement of customers is correct and consistent with the information held by the DWP. Throughout May we encountered DWP technical issues with the ATLAS files. This meant that we loaded a significantly high volume of ATLAS files throughout June which inflated our outstanding workload items during this time.

### **1.3 Quality**

We have continued making significant improvements in the quality of the assessments which we carry out. The average error rate for the period was 2.7% compared to 3.3% for the same period in 2015/16.

We are very pleased with the level of quality and continue to focus on reducing errors. The robust quality management framework which we have in place ensures that claims are processed to a high standard which minimises the potential to create errors.

### **1.4 Overpayment Strategy**

The creation of overpayments is a natural bi-product of the administration of Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support, with recovery needing to be sought from some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

The recovery rate as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 was 76.83%. Liberata continue to recover debts by using a variety of recovery techniques including Blameless Tenant.

Based on the success of the Real Time Information (RTI) pilot, the HMRC initiative to reduce fraud and error, the DWP decided to continue with this initiative for 2016/17. We have created a total of £270k worth of overpayments as a direct result of RTI data matched for the period April 2016 to September 2016.

Earlier this year the DWP advised that Authorities can opt to receive 'Optional' RTI files. Bromley opted to receive the files and the first one was processed in October 16. Liberata expect that these files will increase the Overpayments raised by in excess of £1m pa.

### **1.5 Universal Credit**

Bromley has now gone live with the first phase of migration to Universal Credit which only covers single working aged claimants. We have been advised by the DWP that Bromley will be fully live with Universal Credit for all claim types from May 2018. Our dedicated Single Point Of Contact (SPOC) liaises directly with the DWP by email and telephone and ensures any requests which we receive from them are dealt the DWP service level of 5 days.

## **2. Call Centre & Customer Services**

The number of Revenues & Benefits customers seen in Customer Services for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 totalled 22,404. During this period 83% of customers were seen within 15 minutes, against a target of 85%. During the same period last year the team saw 22,554 customers and delivered a service level of 73%. Though the footfall has remained static the level of service has improved, whilst at the same time focussing on first time resolution.

During the same period, the Contact Centre (Help Line) received 91,965 calls with 92% answered. During the same period last year, 104,751 calls were received with 84% answered. Together with the increase of customers signing up for a MyBromley account the reduction in calls demonstrates that the channel shift activities that started in February 16 have been successful.

### **3. Service Developments**

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

Examples of current year new and ongoing initiatives;

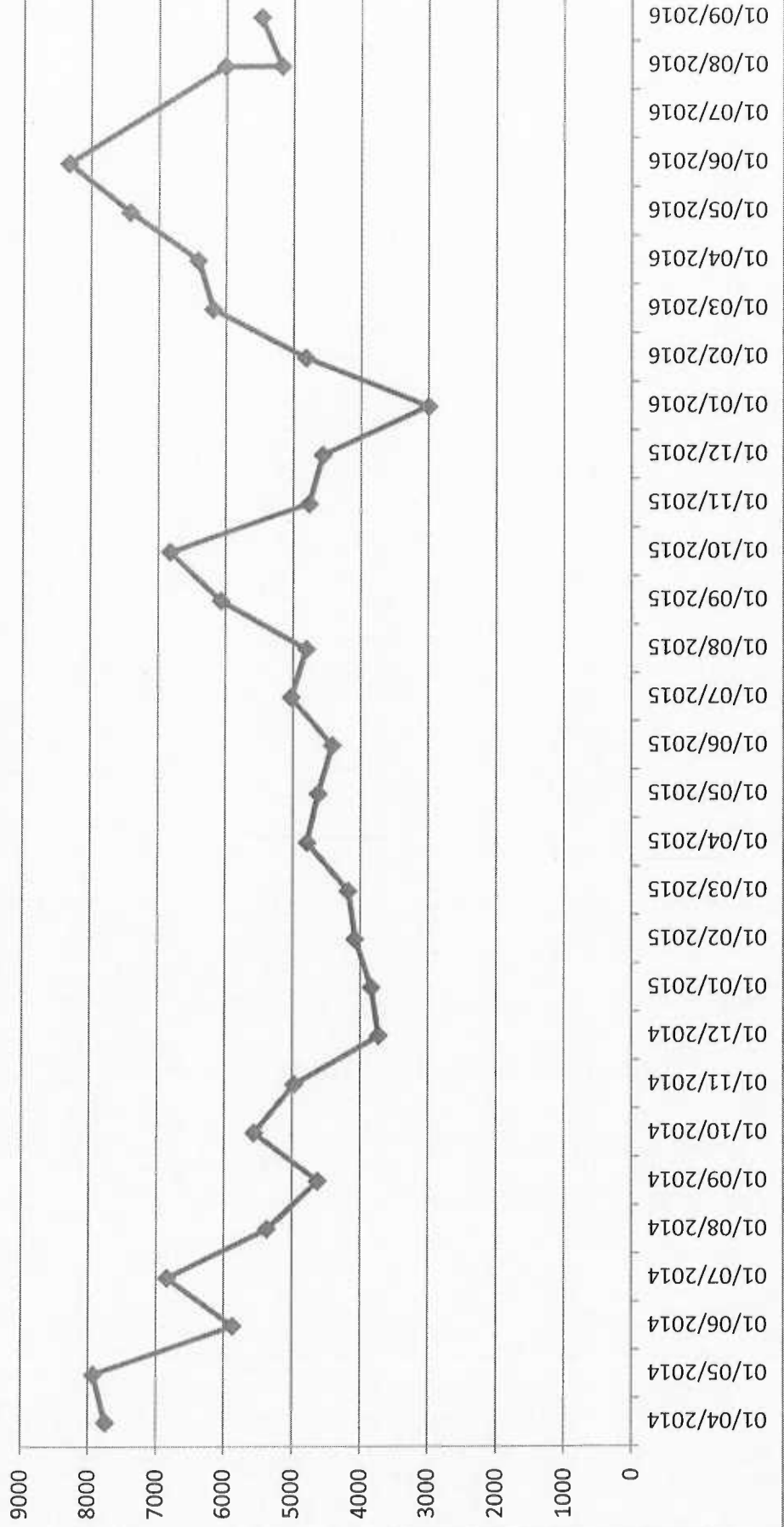
- Implementation of Capita Digital Advantage product. This will enable customers to use online forms to make a new claim or report changes to an existing claim. The information on the forms will be integrated with the back office processing system
- Implementation of Academy 'Insight' which will support process compliance and minimising delays with processing times
- Direct scanning of documents. This will enable customers to submit documents which will be scanned directly onto the system and immediately visible by the back office
- Automation of Real Time Information (RTI) HMRC data matches
- Piloting the cross working of call centre and back office staff. This enables Call Centre Advisors to assist with processing during quieter periods throughout the day and vice versa

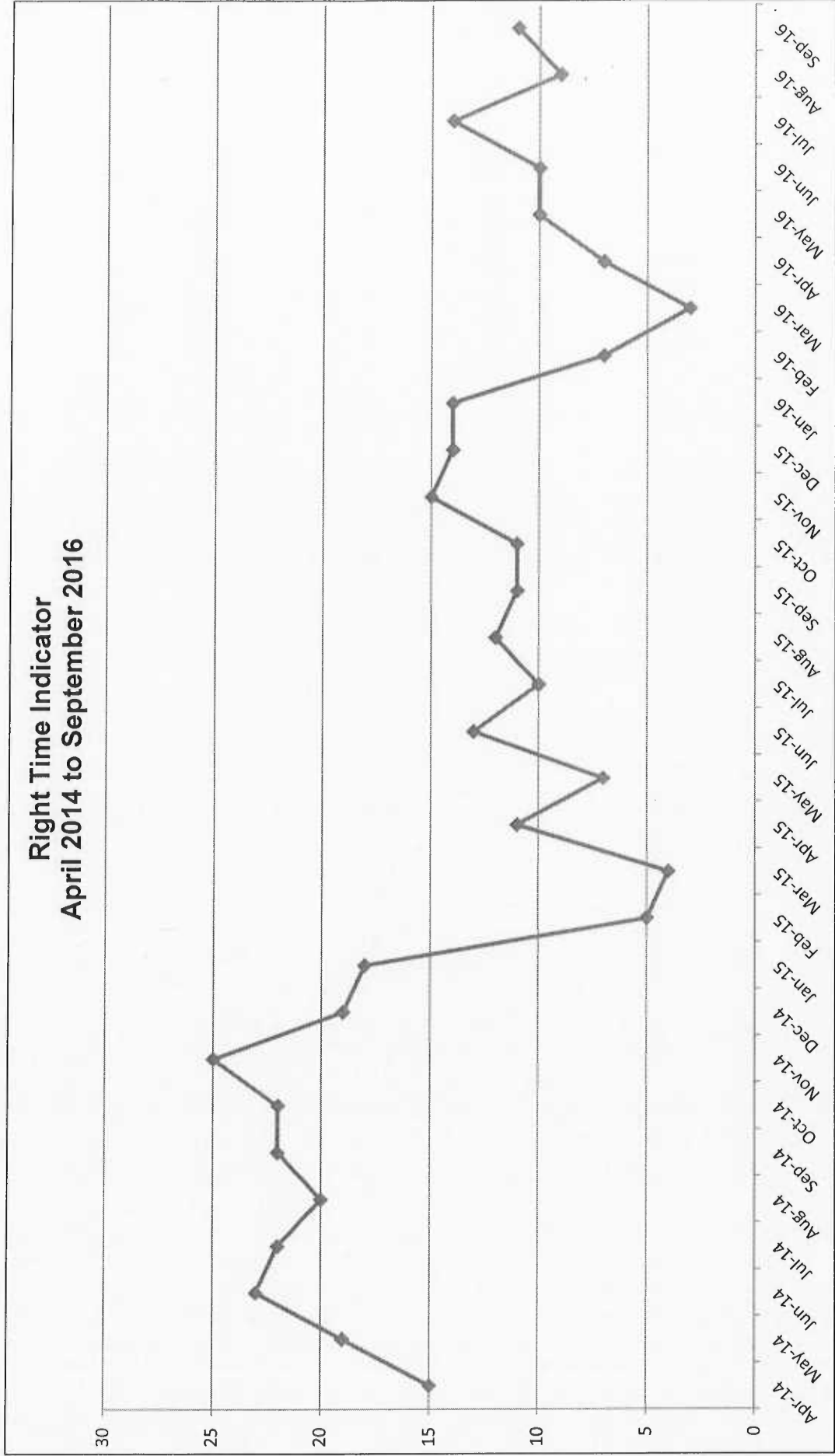
Liberata remains firmly committed to delivering an outstanding service to the London Borough of Bromley and its citizens.

Yours sincerely,

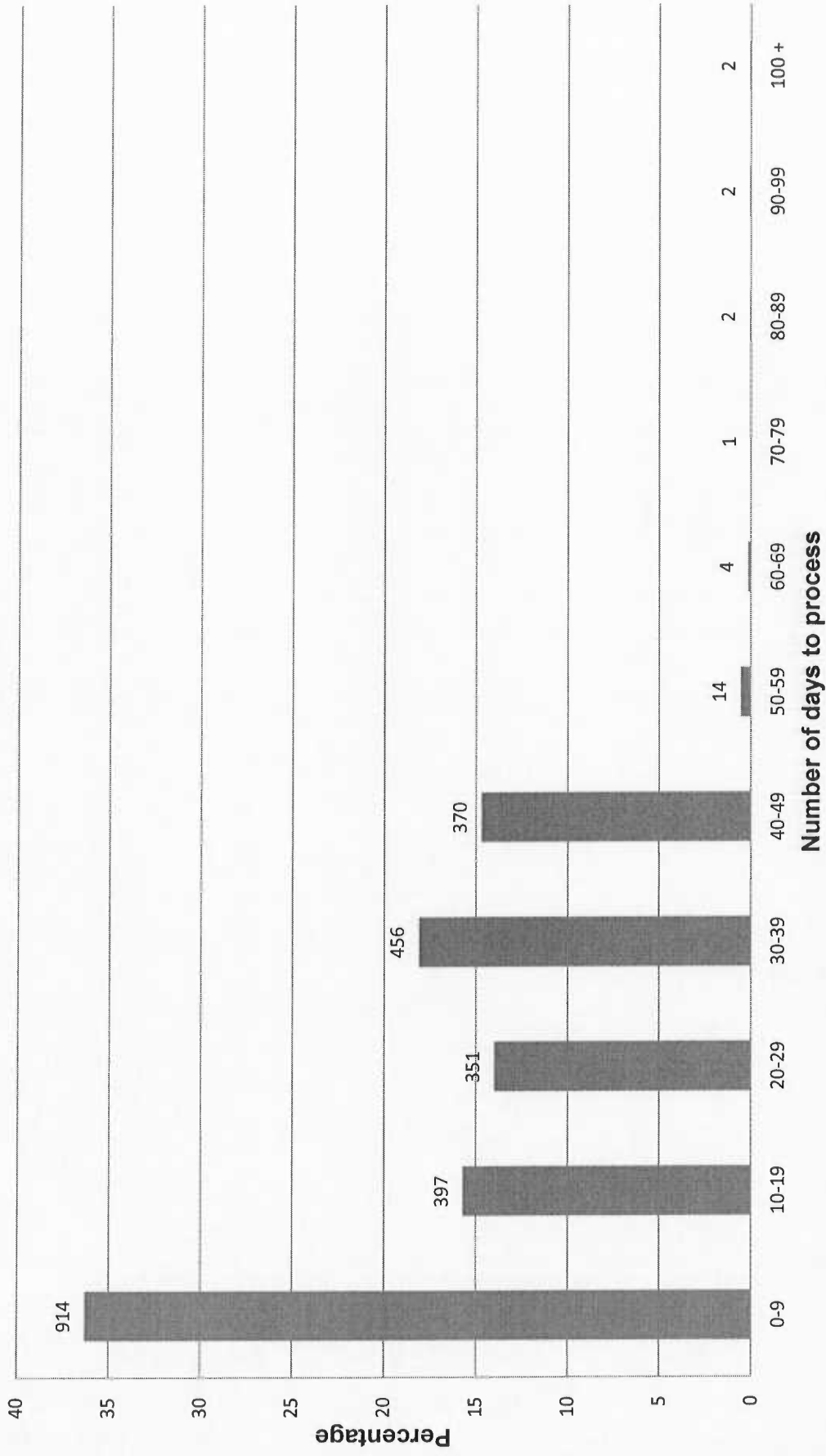
Amanda Inwood-Field  
Contract Director

**Total Pending and Outstanding Work  
April 2014 to September 2016**

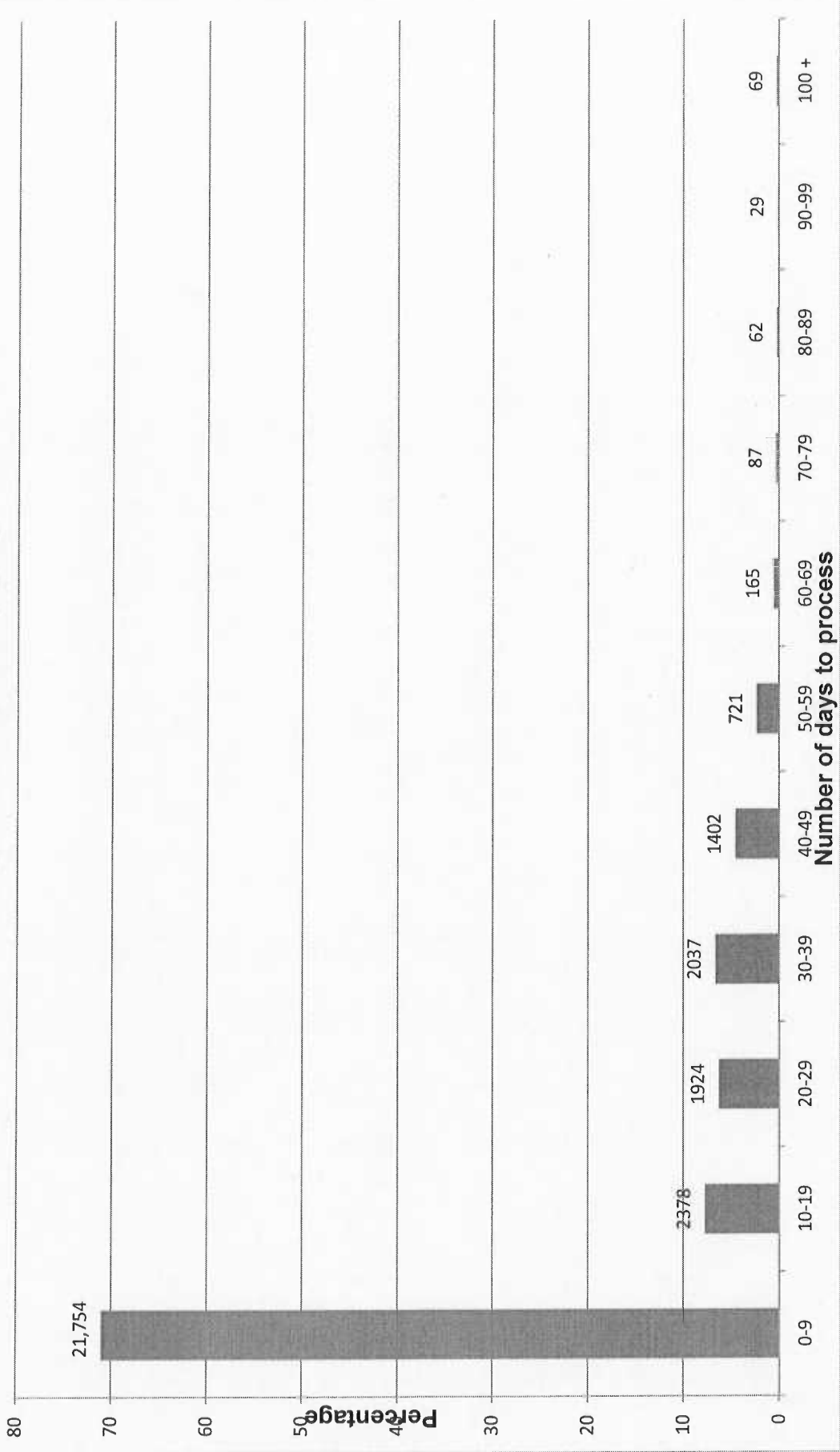




**Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown April to September 2016  
New Claims (2513 cases)**

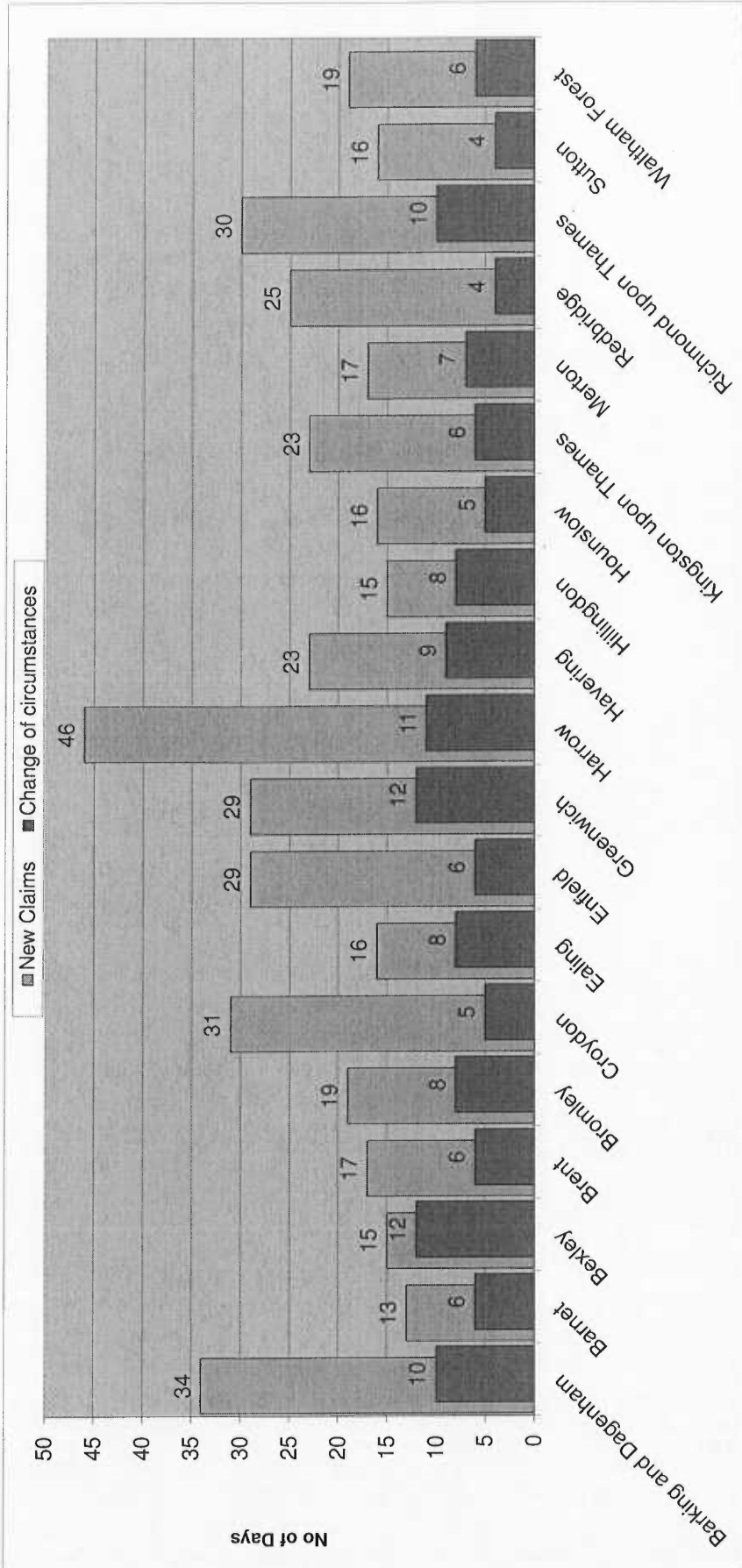


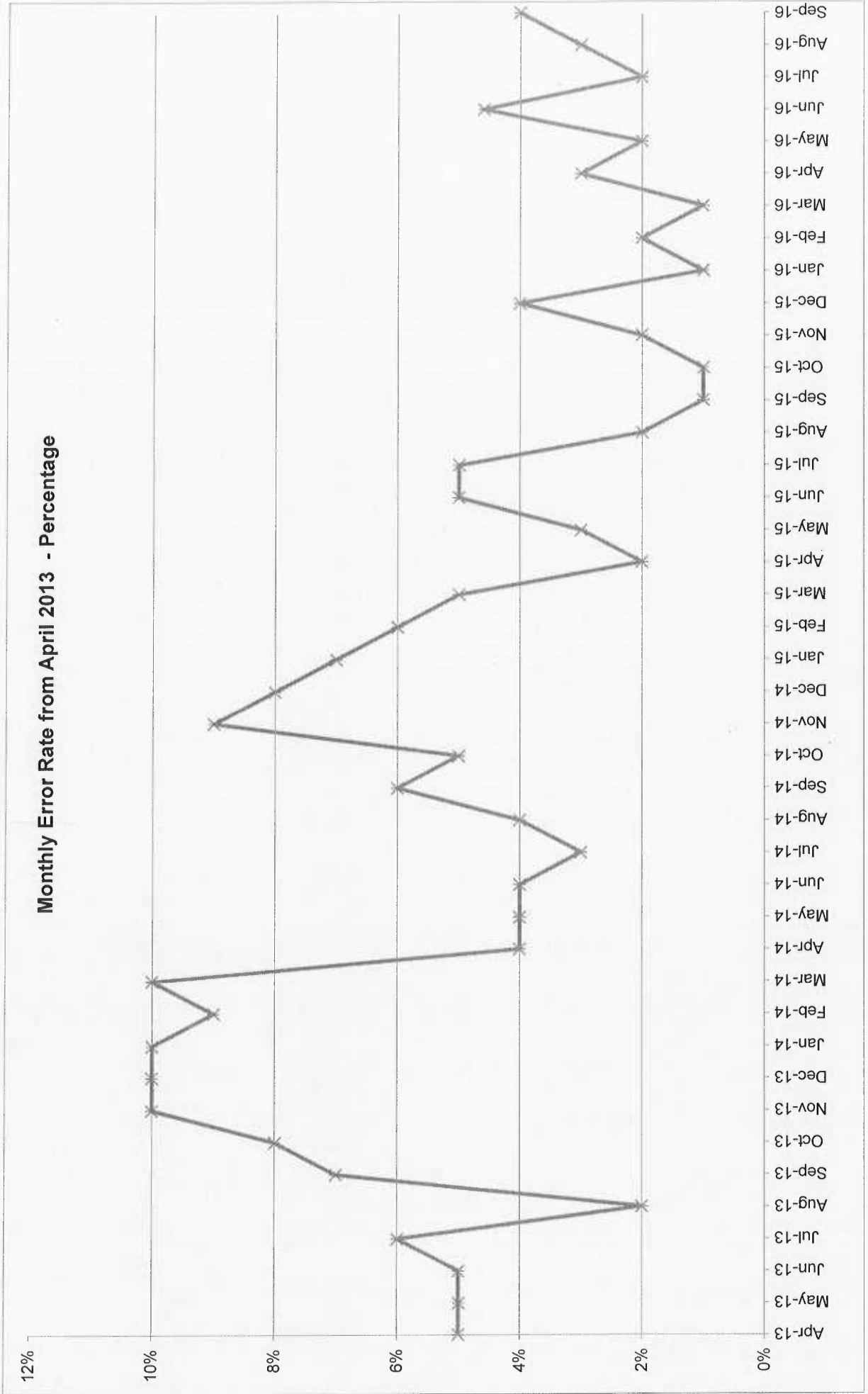
### Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown April to September 2016 Change in Circumstances (30,628)



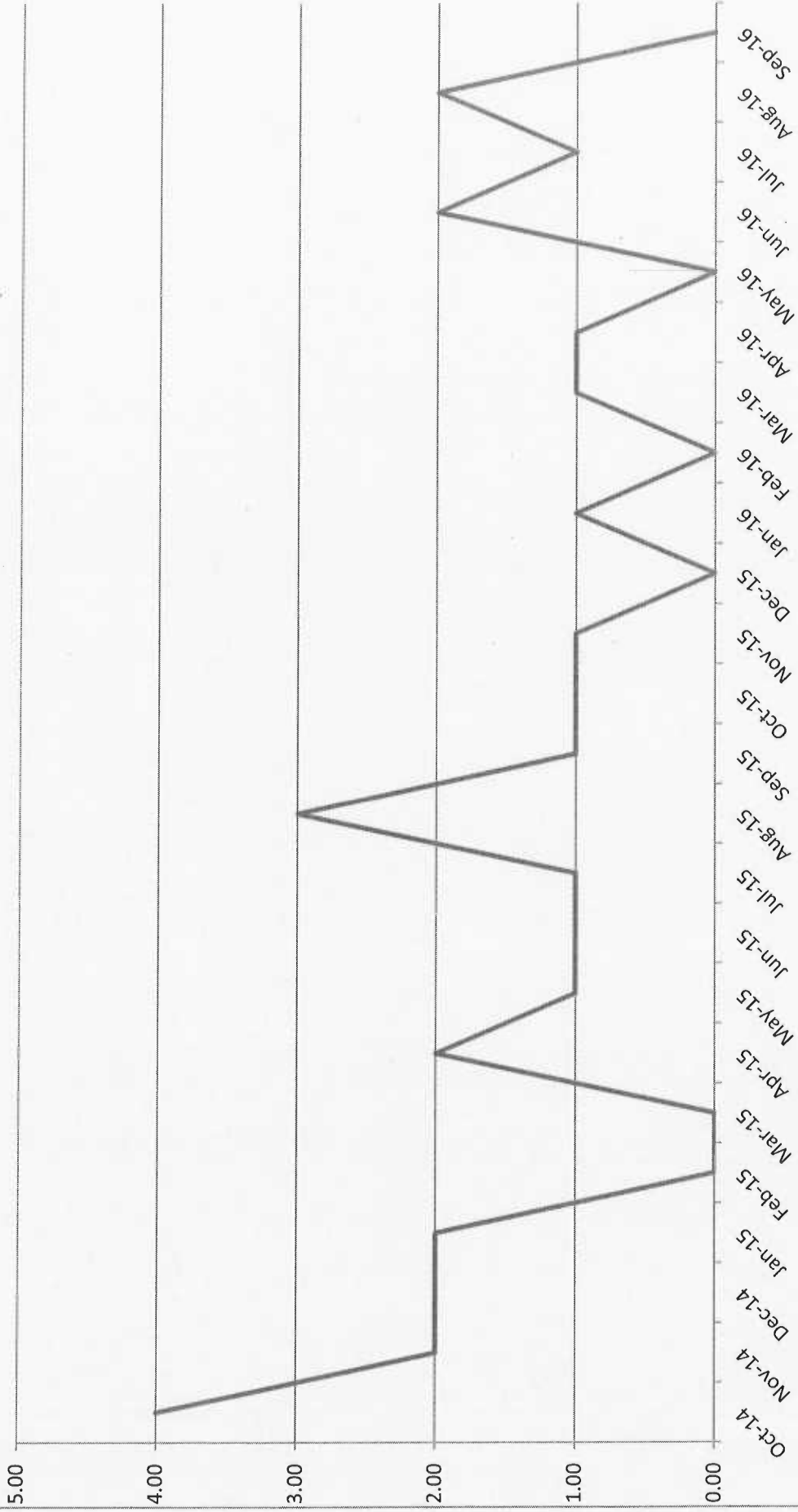


Speed of Processing by Outer London Authorities for April 2016 to June 2016 (Quarter 1, 2016/17)

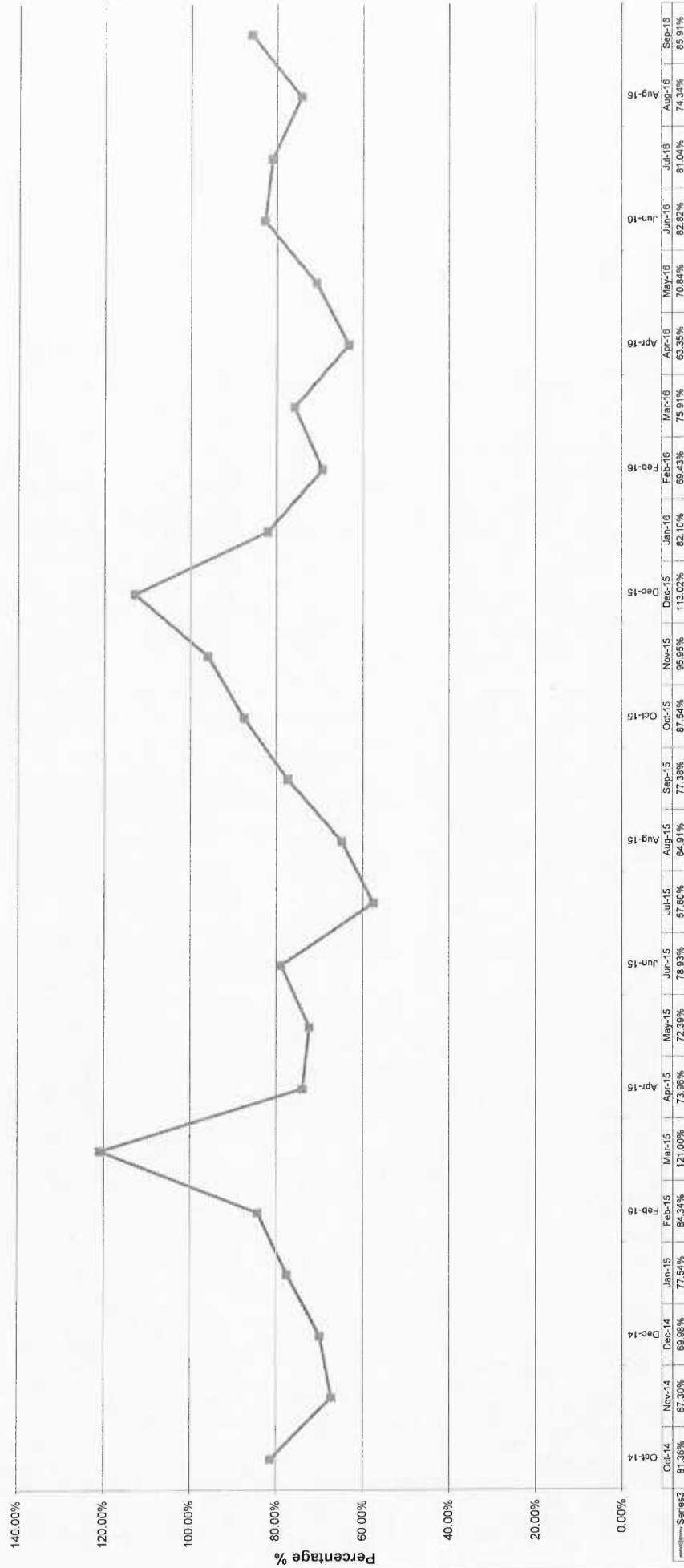




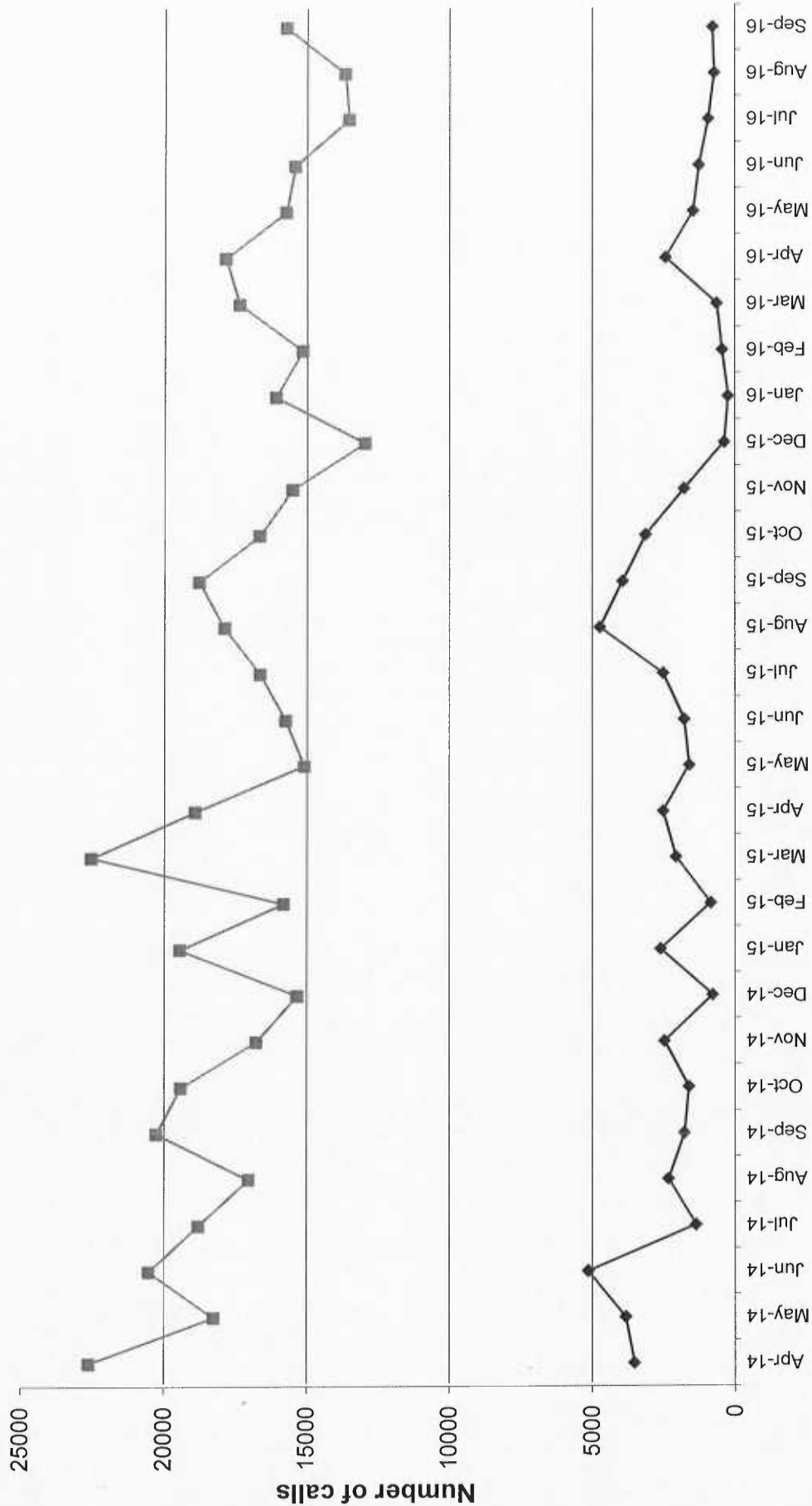
### Housing and Council Tax Support - Stage 2 Complaints from October 2014



Monthly Overpayment % recovered against that created From October 2014 every 2 months



Calls Received and Abandoned by Month from April 2014



◆ Abandoned ■ Received

Caseload from October 2014 every 2 months

