

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

Date: 14th June 2018

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.

Liberata is firmly committed to delivering continuous improvement and driving down the processing days of new claims and changes where possible. Since the formation of the Single Financial Assessment Unit (SFAU) we have reconciled a number of services which are means tested or have a common assessment criteria, this has enabled us to effectively share data within the teams. This new process has identified a number of discrepancies with either financial or household data and as result we now have more consistent data held across the various systems used to assess claims.

The newly formed Corporate Visiting Team (CVT) has enabled us to use additional visiting officers to verify requested benefit information and to provide advice to customers in their homes. This has positively assisted in ensuring information is obtained quickly to reduce time taken to process a benefit claim.

The automated compliance process which has been introduced through the use of the 'Insight' software which is part of the Capita processing system has proven to be effective in ensuring a positive effect on the claim processing times.

This summary covers performance for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018.

1. Current Status of the Benefits Service

The Benefits caseload, which measures all households receiving Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, was 19,653 as at the end of March 2018. The caseload at the same time last year was 20,287.

In terms of our current position for the nationally recognised Right Time Indicator, our average performance was 9 days compared to the 10 days we achieved in the previous 12 months. This is against an annual contractual target of 13 days. For this reporting period the average processing times for New Claims was 20 days and Change in Circumstances was 10 days.

As at 2nd April 2018, the total amount of outstanding work was 4,550 items. This includes 1,435 items pending which are awaiting information from the claimant and/or third-party.

1.1 Temporary Accommodation

We continue to work closely with the LBB Housing teams, Orchard and Shipman and Mears and have formed good working relationships. Our monthly meetings enable us to discuss benefit issues and specific assessment queries with a view to minimising any potential delays in the processing of claims.

The reporting we provide assist the team(s) with an accurate position of a customer's benefit claim. This enables housing staff at the earliest opportunity to proactively engage with tenants to manage any rent arrear issues..

1.2 ATLAS

ATLAS is a process of transferring data from the DWP systems to the Local Authority systems. The data advises of changes which may not have been reported by the customer. The ATLAS files which we receive are imperative to accurately update our back office processing system and ensure the level of benefit in payment is accurate. The automation of these files eliminates the potential of error through the manual handling by assessment staff. This also ensures that any potential overpayments are significantly reduced and provides an enhanced customer experience.

1.3 Quality

We continue to remain firmly focused on quality and drive to eradicate any financial error within the assessments carried out. The average financial error rate for the period April 2017 to March 2018 was 1.8% compared to 2.6% for the same period last year.

Our accuracy level demonstrates that the robust quality management framework is highly effective. We regularly review our quality procedures and remain committed to ensuring that claims are processed accurately and to a high standard, minimising the potential for error and the requirement for reworking.

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 Housing Benefit recovery rate as at 31st March 2018 was 97.04%. This is a significant improvement for the same period last year when it was 79.48%. Liberata continues to effectively recover debts by using a variety of techniques including Blameless Tenant recovery, Direct Earnings Attachment and Debt Collection Agencies.

We continue to receive Real Time Information (RTI) data matches from the DWP. These include both 'Mandatory' RTI files and 'Optional' RTI files. However the RTI files will become obsolete and be replaced by 'Verify Earnings and Pensions' (VEP) files. These files will include alerts which provide real time notifications of changes to a customers financial information and place greater responsibility on customers to advise the Benefits Service of changes to their circumstances.

Liberata now access the 'Wider Use of Real Time Information' (WURTI) system. This is a DWP system enables assessment staff to view a customer's working income in real time. The use of this system has a positive effect on claim processing times as this information can be obtained without the need for further information requested from the customer. The use of WURTI enables accurate assessments and also minimises the creation of potential overpayments.

1.5 Universal Credit

The DWP have advised that Universal Credit "Full Service" will commence on the 25 July 2018 in Bromley. This means from that date the majority of working-age claimants commencing a claim for assistance with their rent will receive Universal Credit rather than Housing Benefit. Existing working-age Housing Benefit recipients will transfer over to Universal Credit on a change in their circumstances.

To date there has been a slight reduction to the benefits caseload resultant from Universal Credit. However, this is expected to accelerate on introduction of the "Full Service". In the same way, the section is expecting an increase in enquiries from the DWP in regards to housing costs. We have a dedicated Single Point of Contact (SPOC) that liaises directly with the DWP by email and telephone to ensure that any requests from them are dealt within 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 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018 totalled 37,634. During this period 84% of customers were seen within 15 minutes. This is an improvement on the same reporting period last year when 74% were seen in 15 minutes. It is also worth noting that during the period ending March 2018 footfall reduced by 14%.

During the same period, the Contact Centre (Help Line) received 150,547 calls with 95% answered. Call volumes have fallen by 17% compared to the same previous period.

We have previously reported that the team have been encouraging customers to use the on-line services available to them to self-serve, and we believe this has been and continues to be successful as evidenced by the reduction in footfall and call volumes. As at the end of March 2017, less than 1% of households had signed-up to use the online service MyBromley, this figure has since increased significantly with over 13% registered as at the end of May 2018.

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;

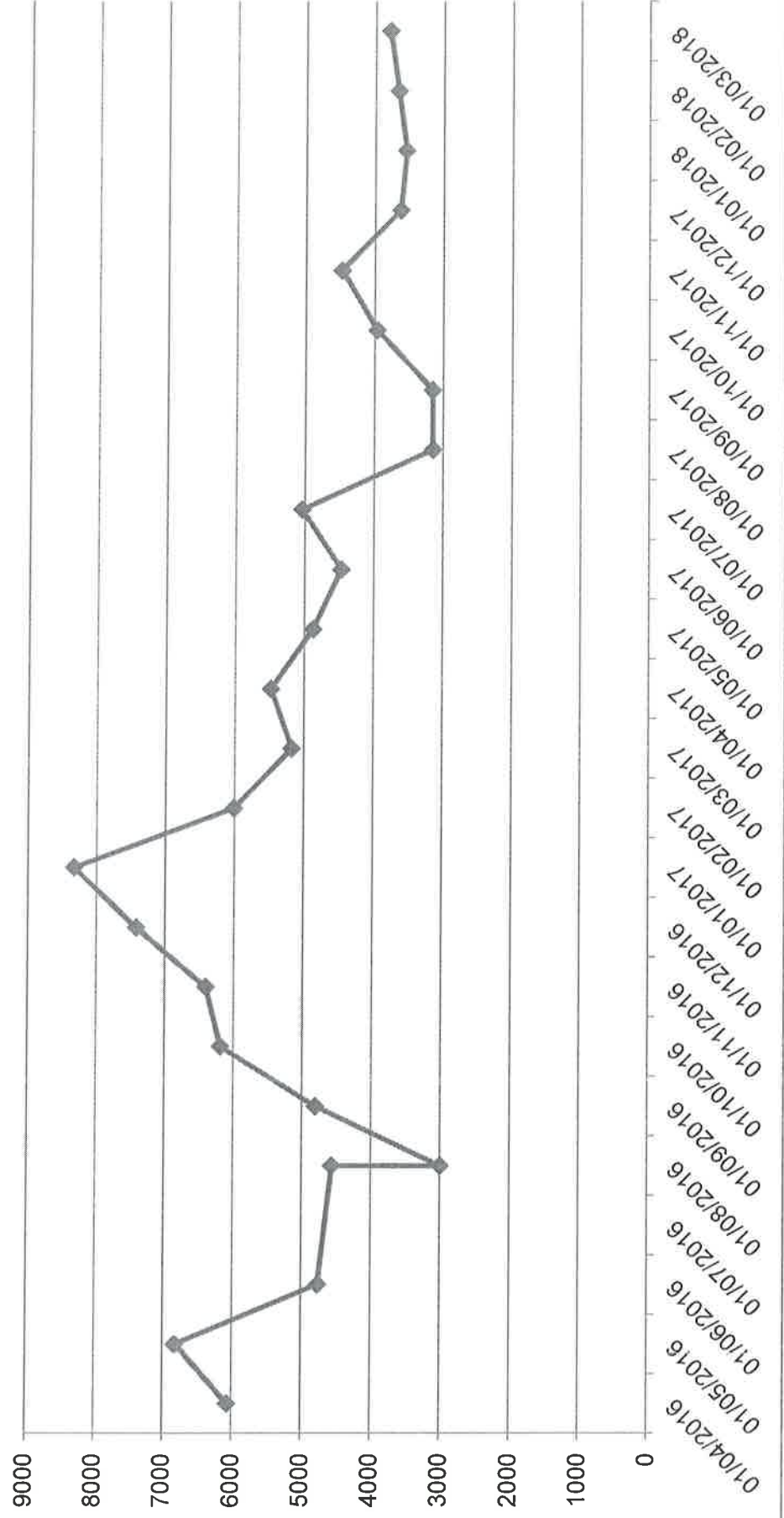
- Implementation of Verify Earnings & Pensions (VEP) files. This is a DWP service which provides real time identification of changes in income and replaces the RTI files
- On-going implementation of Capita Advantage Digital product. This will enable customers to use online forms to make a new claim or report changes to an existing claim. The information on the forms will be integrated with the back office processing system
- Implementation of improved reporting capability within 'Insight' which specifically uses SHBE data
- Proposal on how the Corporate Visiting Team (CVT) can assist other departments within LBB and Liberata

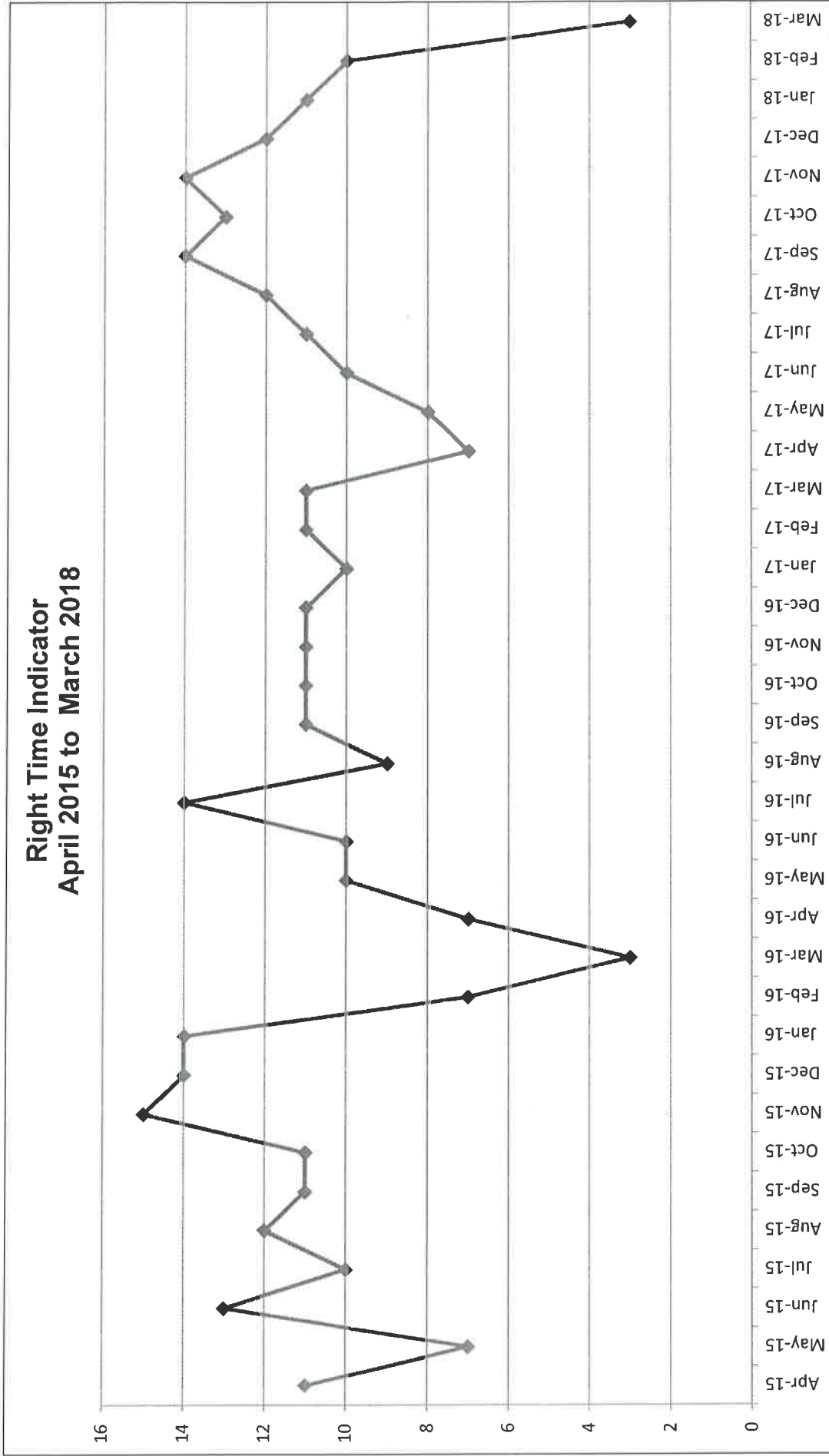
Liberata remains firmly committed to delivering an outstanding service to the London Borough of Bromley and its citizens.

Yours sincerely,

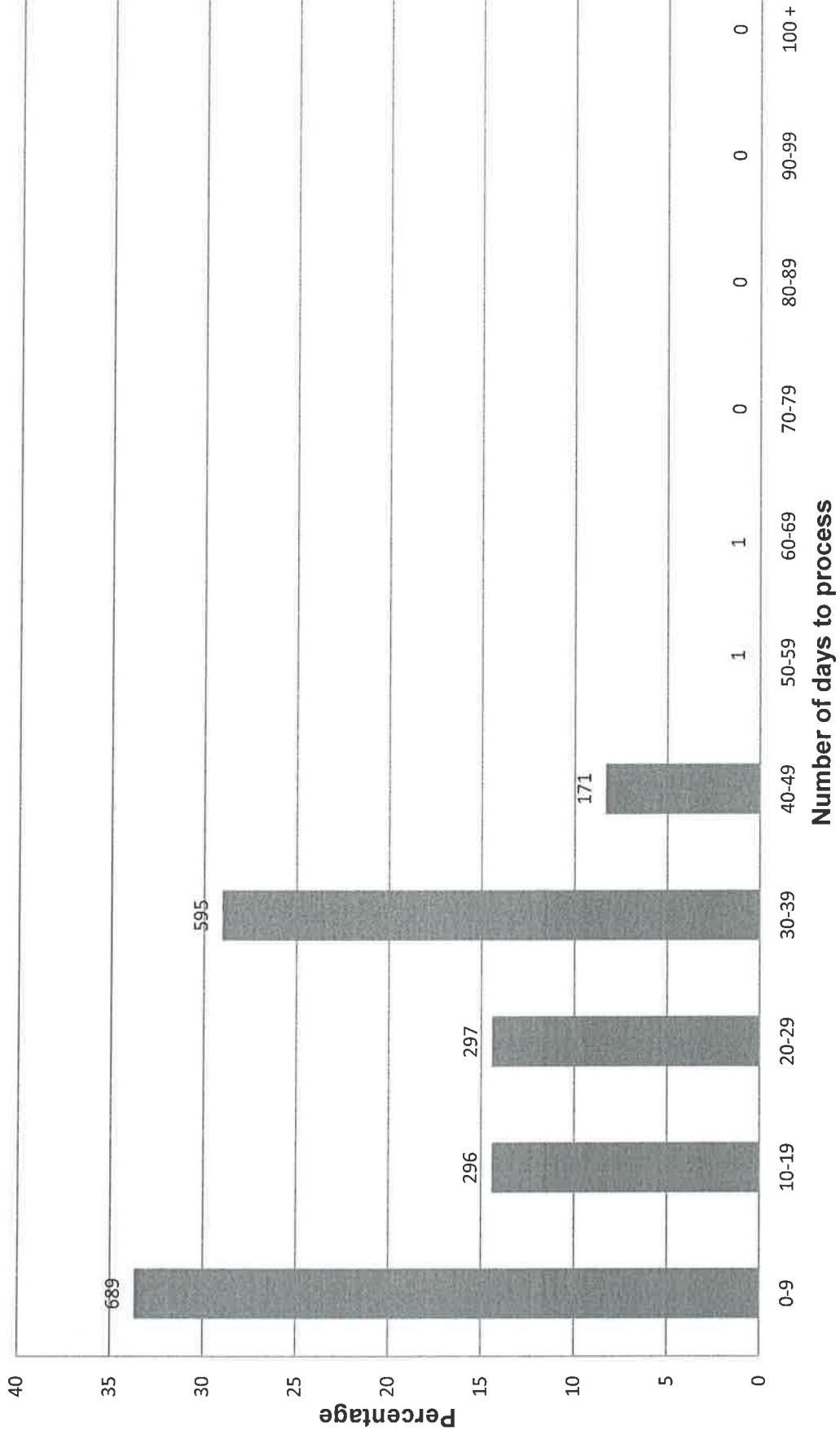
Amanda Inwood-Field
London Regional Contract Director

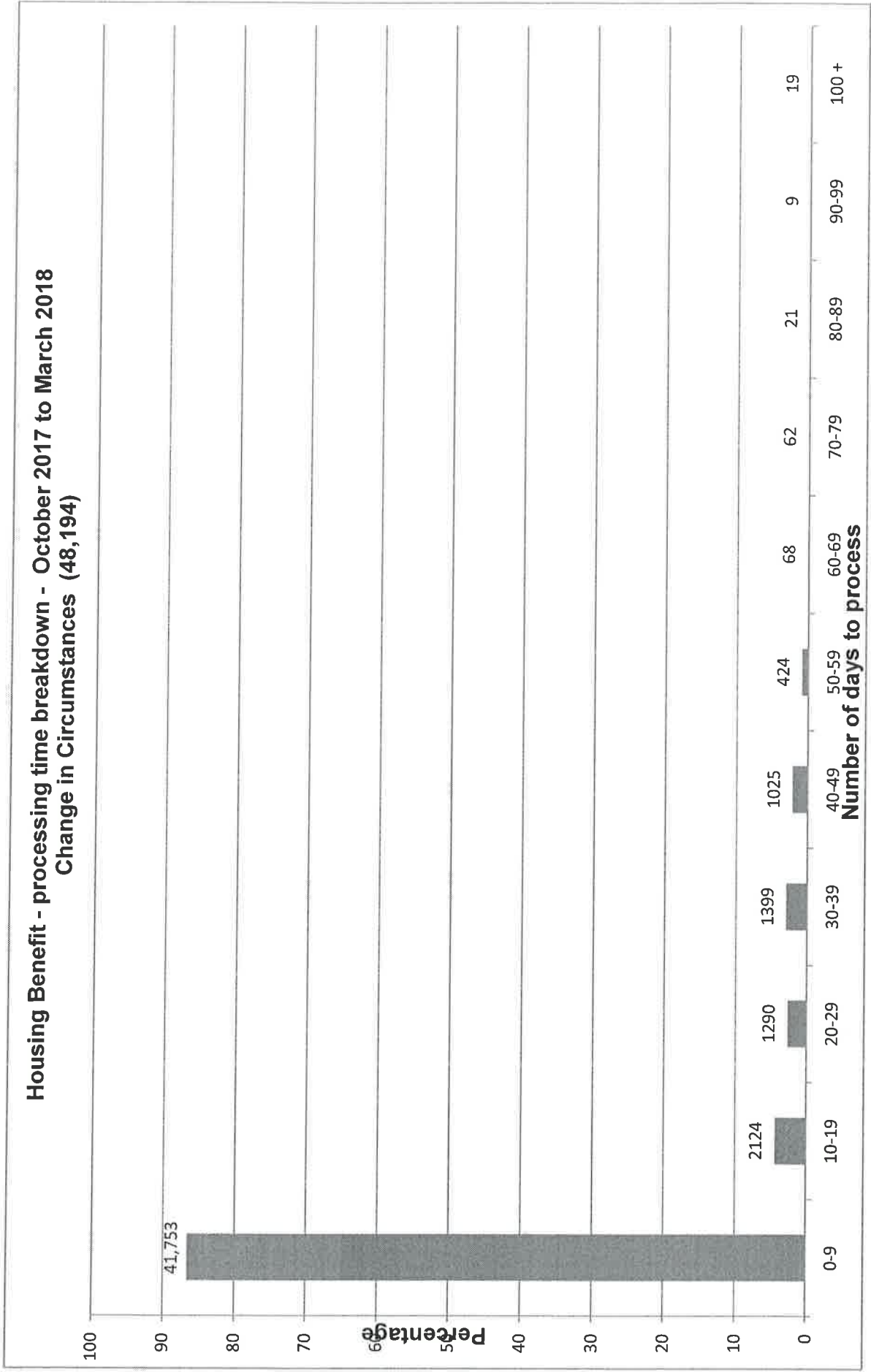
Total Pending and Outstanding Work April 2016 to March 2018

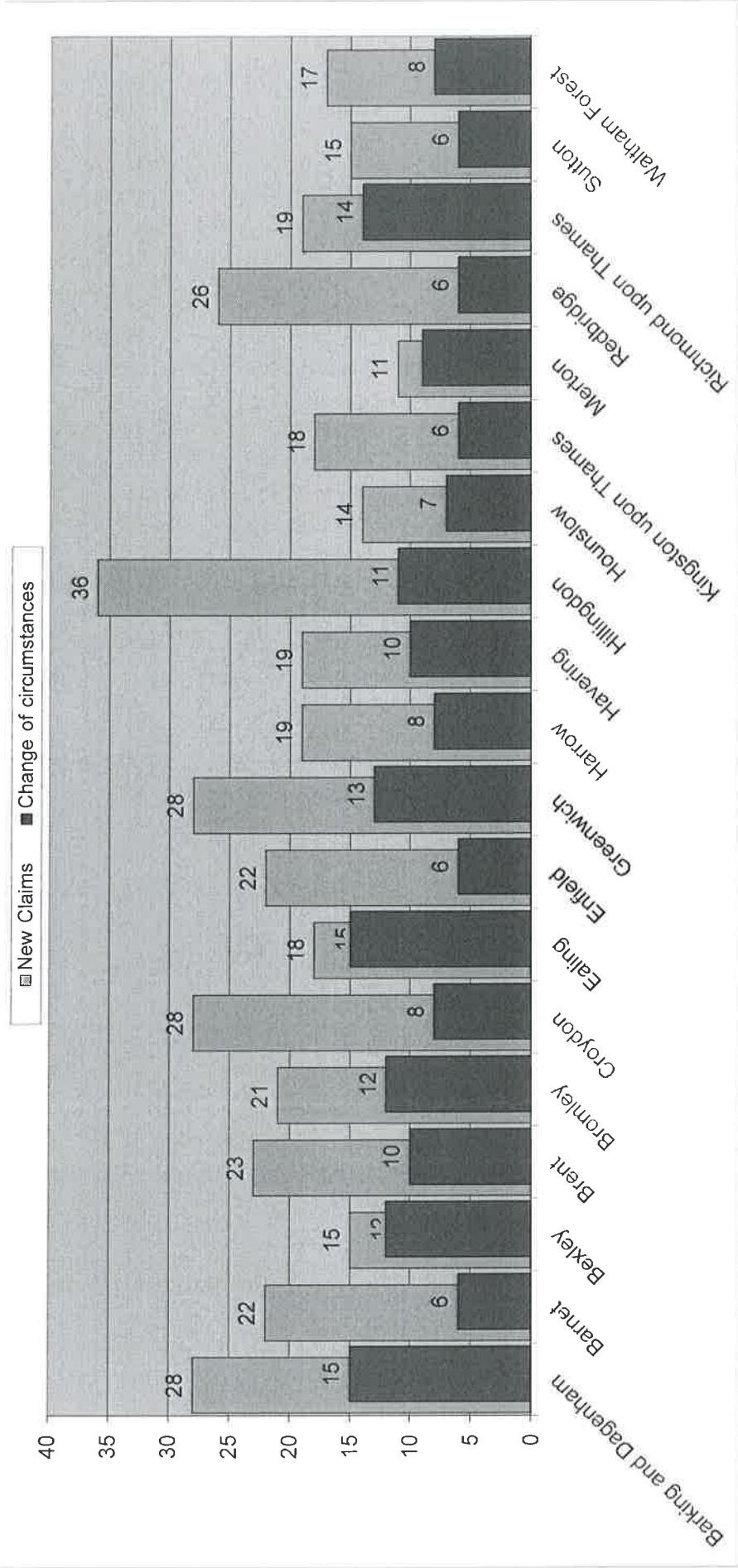


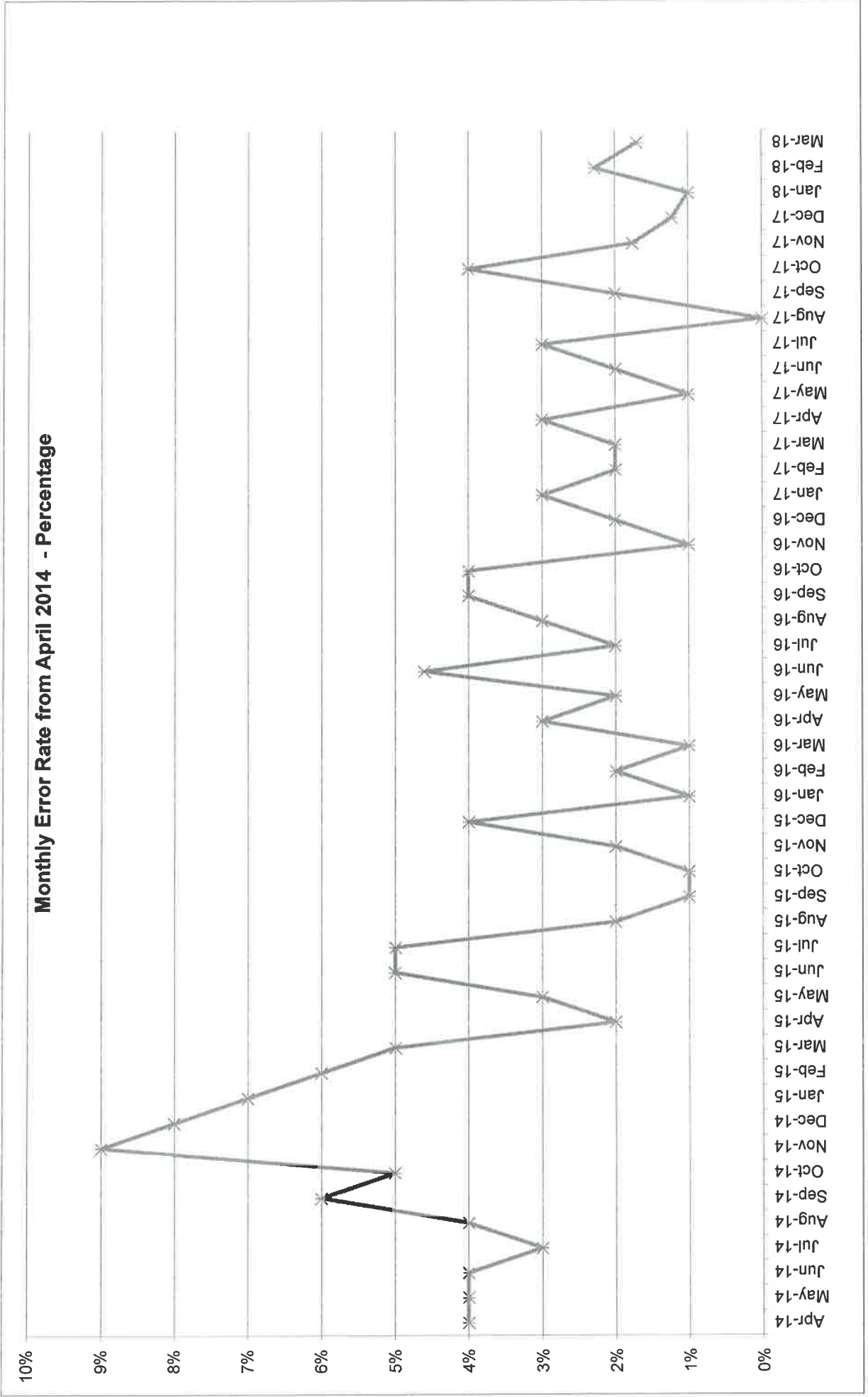


**Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown October 2017 to March 2018
New Claims (2050 cases)**

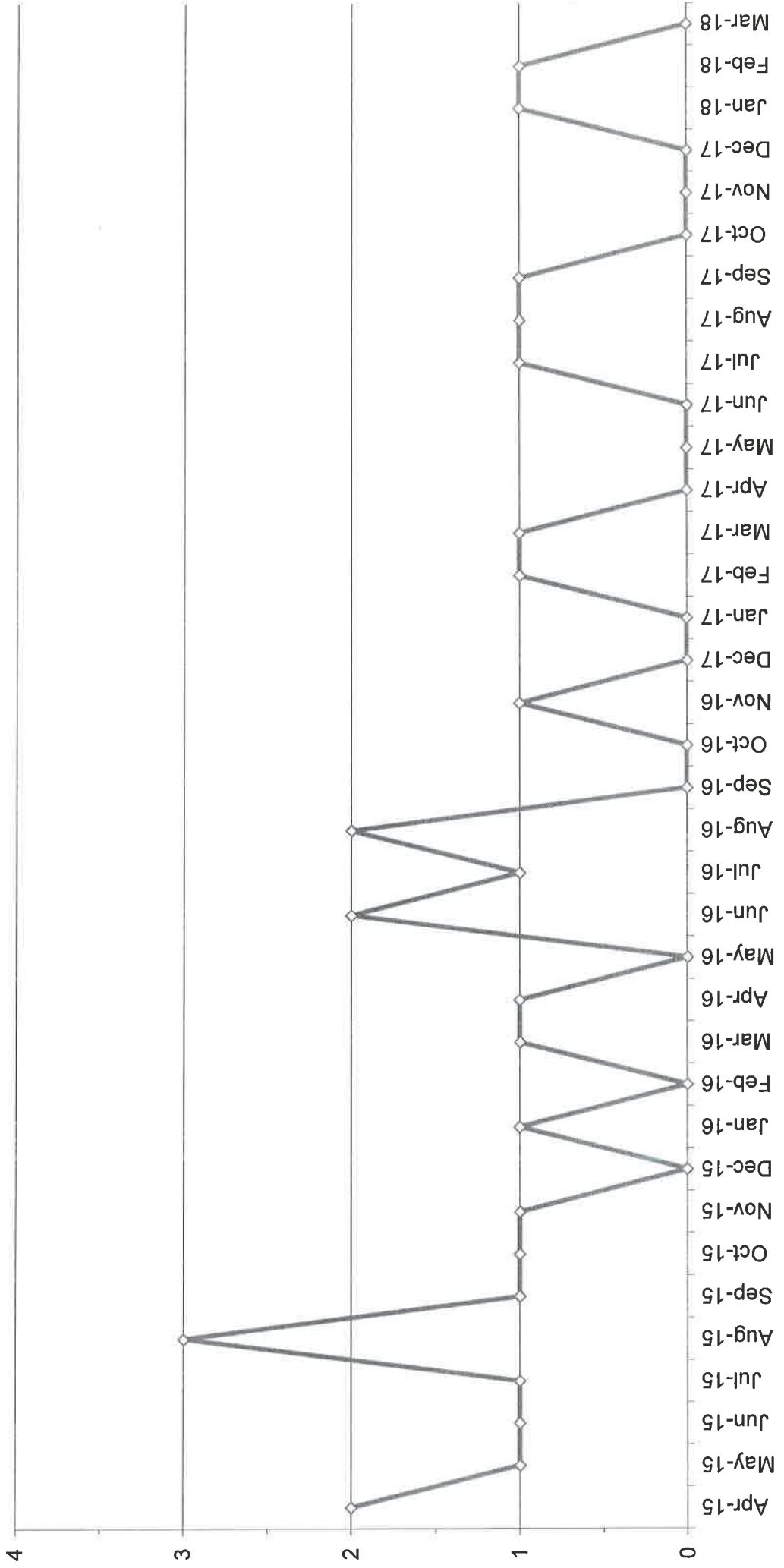




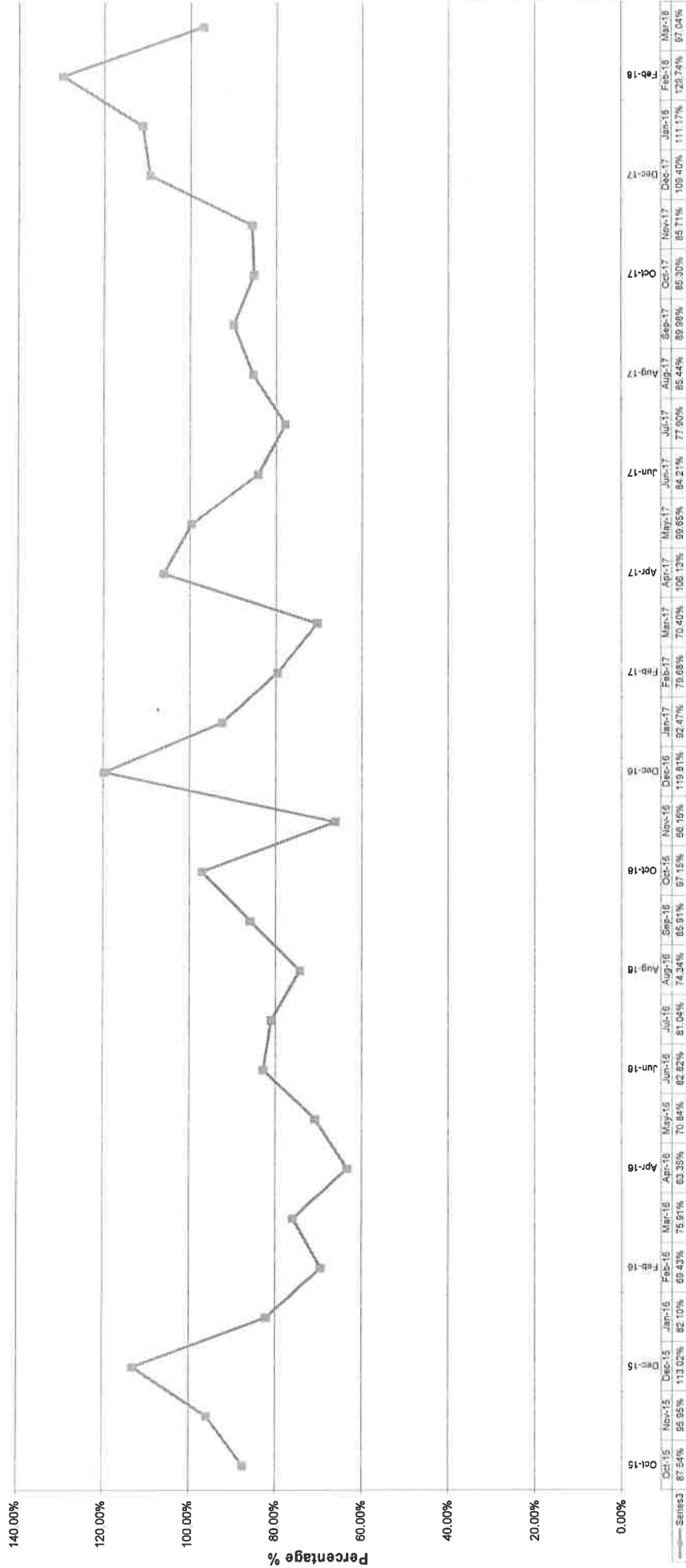


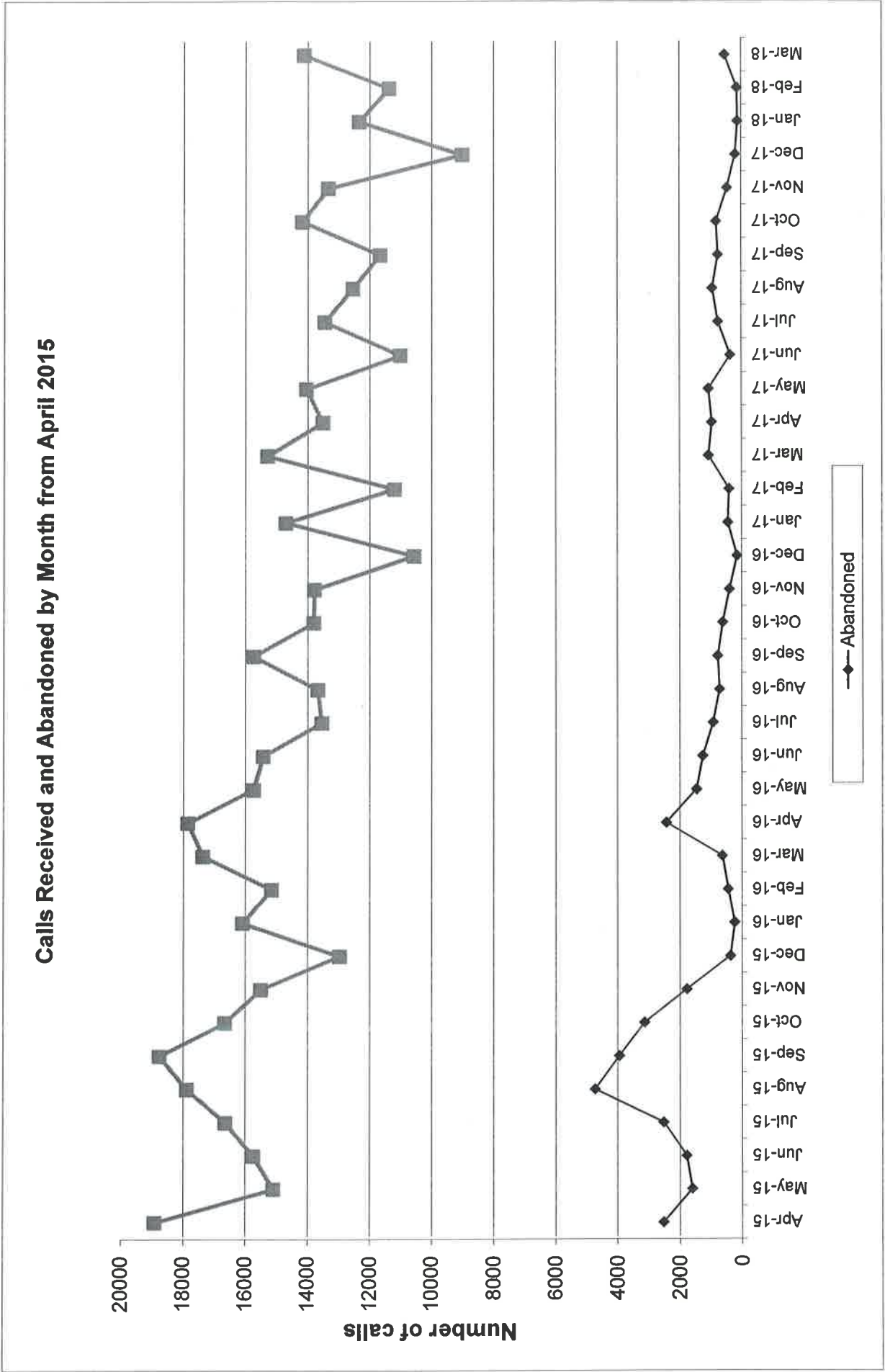


Housing and Council Tax Support - Stage 2 Complaints from April 2015



Monthly Overpayment % recovered against that created from October 2015 - every 2 months





Caseload from April 2015 - every 2 months

