

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

Date: 22nd October 2018

Our Ref: AIF/GT

Dear John,

As we approach the November 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.

Since the formation of the Single Financial Assessment Unit (SFAU), Liberata are committed to regularly reviewing and improving services. This includes creating resilience between service lines within the SFAU to ensure that outcomes for customers are not delayed during peak periods within the year. Adopting a Tell Us Once approach through data sharing has enabled Liberata to reduce the processing times of transactions within the SFAU services and improve the overall customer experience.

This summary covers performance for the period 1st April 2018 to 30th September 2018.

1. Current Status of the Benefits Service

The Benefits caseload, which measures all households receiving Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, was 19,434 as at the end of September 2018. The caseload at the same time last year was 19,989.

In terms of our current position for the nationally recognised Right Time Indicator, our average performance was 10.11 days compared to the 10.31 days achieved for the same period in the previous year. This is against an annual contractual target of 13 days. For this reporting period the average processing times for New Claims was 21.84 days and Change in Circumstances was 9.05 days.

As at 30th September 2018, the total amount of outstanding work was 4,995 items. This includes 1,843 items pended which are awaiting information from the claimant and/or third-party. This is a reduction since the same period in 2017 when the outstanding work was 5,869 and pended items were 1,892.

1.1 Temporary Accommodation

We continue to maintain close working relationships with the LBB Housing teams, Orchard and Shipman and Mears group. Our monthly meetings enable us to discuss benefit issues and focus on specific assessment queries with a view to minimising any potential delays in the processing of claims.

The reporting we provide assists the team(s) with an accurate real time 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 Real Time Information (RTI) & Validate Earnings and Pensions (VEP) Alerts Service

Since April 2018, Authorities stopped receiving 'Mandatory' RTI data matches from the DWP. One file is now received called the 'Optional' RTI file. Eventually this file will completely diminish and be replaced solely by VEP alerts only.

The DWP has recently introduced the VEP Alerts Service. This service sends alerts to nominated benefit assessors which enables them to download VEP files directly from the DWP database. The files contain information of changes to a customer's earnings and pension which is used to update the Authority's Benefit system. By processing the changes, the potential for overpayments are reduced as the customer may not have advised LBB of the changes to their household income.

1.3 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 remains accurate. The automation of these files eliminates the potential for error through the manual handling by assessment staff. This also ensures that any potential overpayments are significantly reduced and provides an enhanced customer experience.

1.4 Quality

We continue to be firmly focused on quality and we drive to eradicate any financial error within the assessments carried out. The average financial error rate for the period April 2018 to September 2018 was 2%.

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.

1.5 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 30th September 2018 was 93.77% compared to 89.96% for the same period for the previous year which represent an additional £229k of revenue. Liberata continues to effectively recover debts by using a variety of techniques including Blameless Tenant recovery, Direct Earnings Attachment and Debt Collection Agencies.

1.6 Universal Credit

Since 25 July 2018, Universal Credit "Full Service" went live for Bromley. This means 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 when there is a change in their circumstances.

To date there has been limited reduction to the benefits caseload as a result of Universal Credit. However, this is expected to accelerate over the coming months. In the last few months we have seen an increase in enquiries from the DWP in regard to housing cost. Liberata have a dedicated Single Point of Contact (SPOC) that liaises directly with the DWP to ensure that any requests are dealt within the DWP service level of 5 days.

2. Corporate Visiting Team (CVT)

The Corporate Visiting Team (CVT) has undergone a programme of cross-training which has enabled Liberata to use additional visiting officers to verify requested benefit information and to provide advice to customers in their homes. This has created resilience within the team and has ensured customer information is obtained quickly to reduce time taken to process a benefit claim.

3. Call Centre & Customer Services

The number of Revenues & Benefits customers seen in Customer Services for the period 1st April 2018 to 30th September 2018 totalled 18,209. During this period 86% of customers were seen within 15 minutes. This is an improvement on the same reporting period last year when 84% were seen in 15 minutes. Footfall has remained fairly constant between the two periods.

During the same period, the Contact Centre (Help Line) received 70,344 calls with 95% answered. Call volumes have fallen by 8% 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 call volumes.

4. 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;

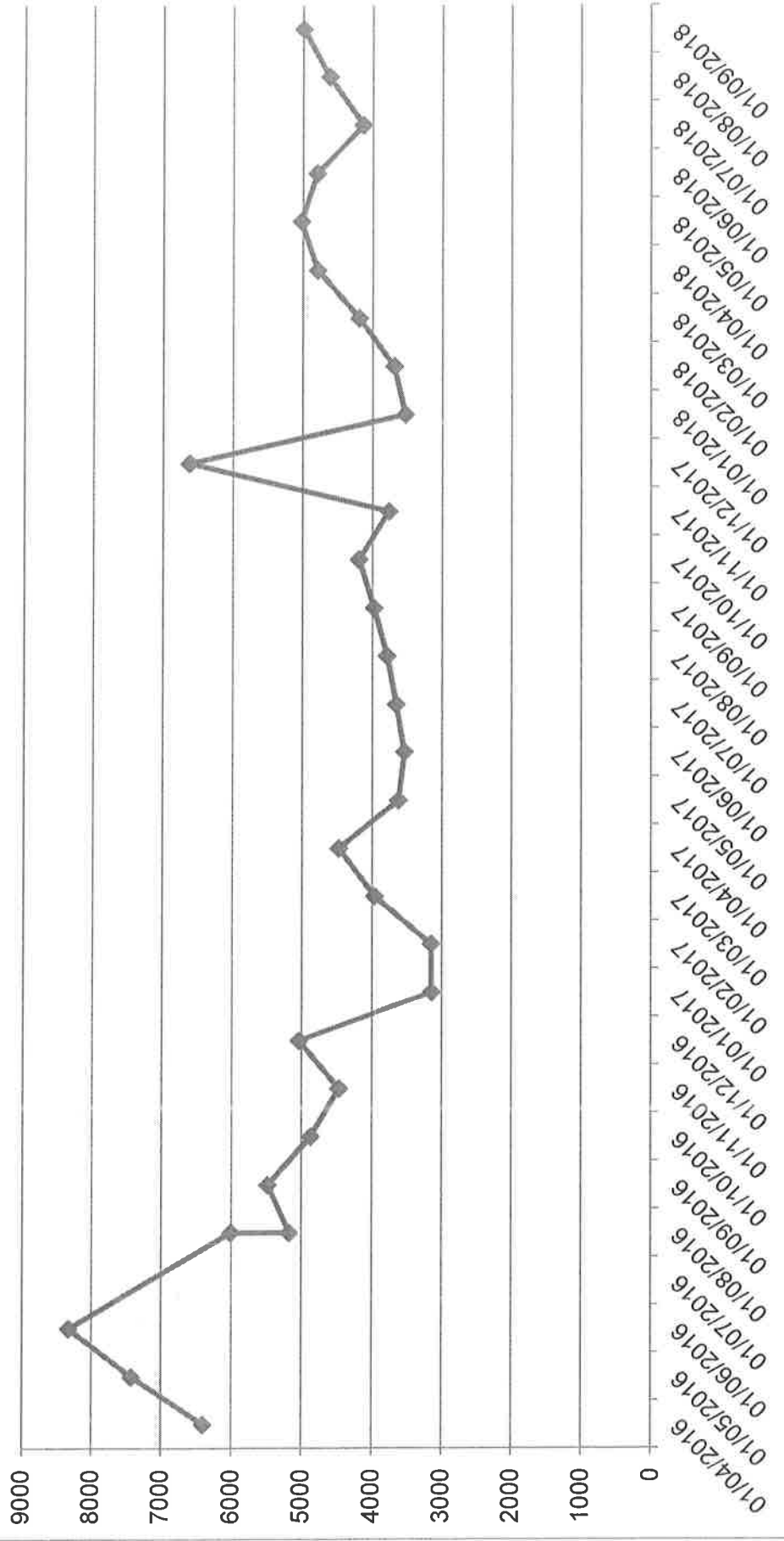
- Proposal to undertake a Self Employed review. This is a DWP initiative which Bromley have opted to undertake. This will involve reviewing approximately 400 Self Employed cases where no change of income has been declared for the last 12 months.
- Implementation of Verify Earnings & Pensions (VEP) Alert Service files. This is a DWP service which provides Real-Time identification of changes in income and will replace the RTI files which we currently receive.
- 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.
- Providing assistance go the Job Centre Plus for Universal Credit Digital Support for claimants. Revenues and Benefits Customer Service staff attend the Bromley Job Centre; 4 half days each week to provide practical support in claiming Universal Credit.
- Successful implementation of the DWP EAS Service to an online portal. This enables administrators to make changes to user access in real time to prevent delays in information being accessed.

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

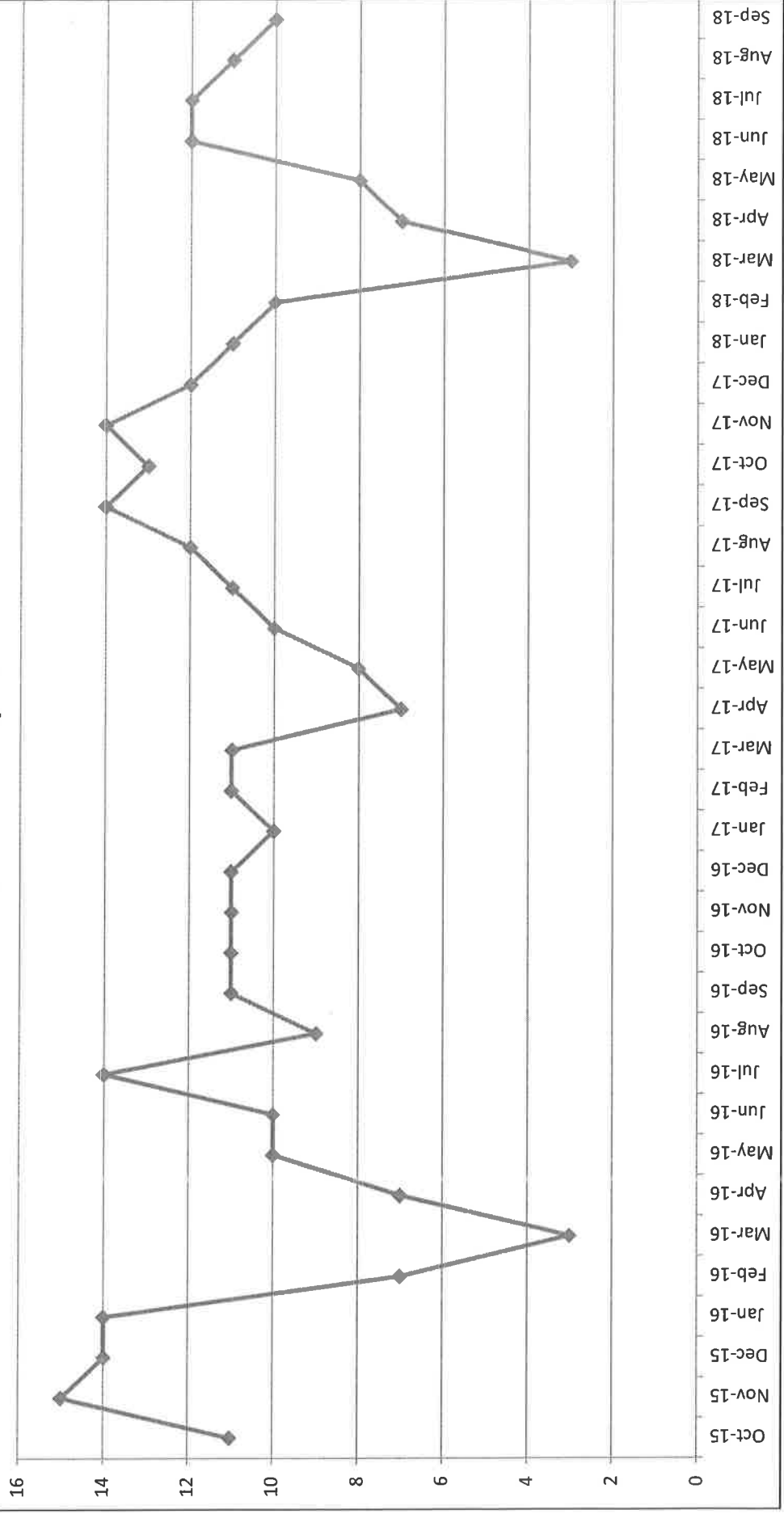
Yours sincerely,

Amanda Inwood-Field
London Regional Contract Director

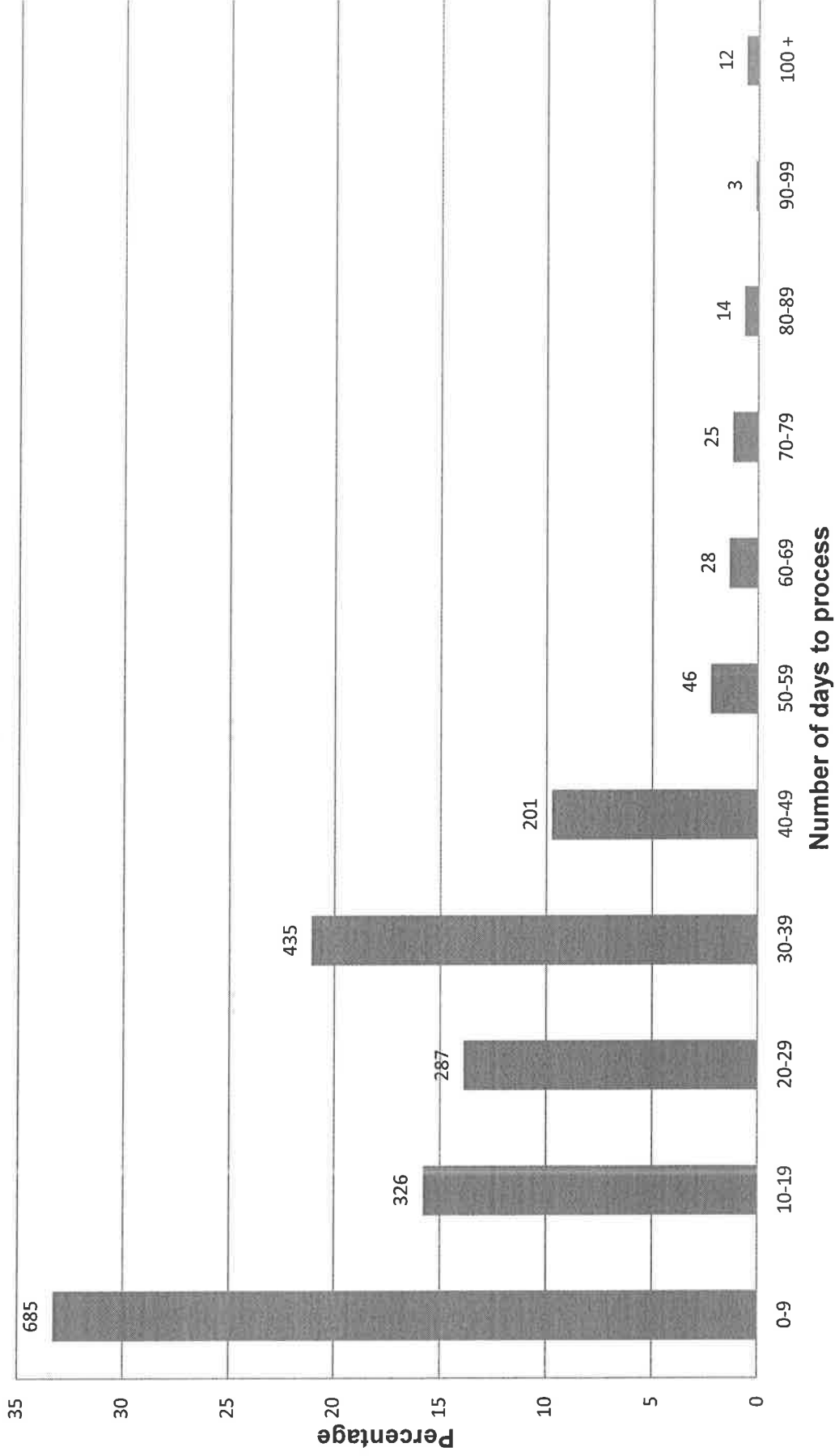
Total Pending and Outstanding Work April 2016 to September 2018



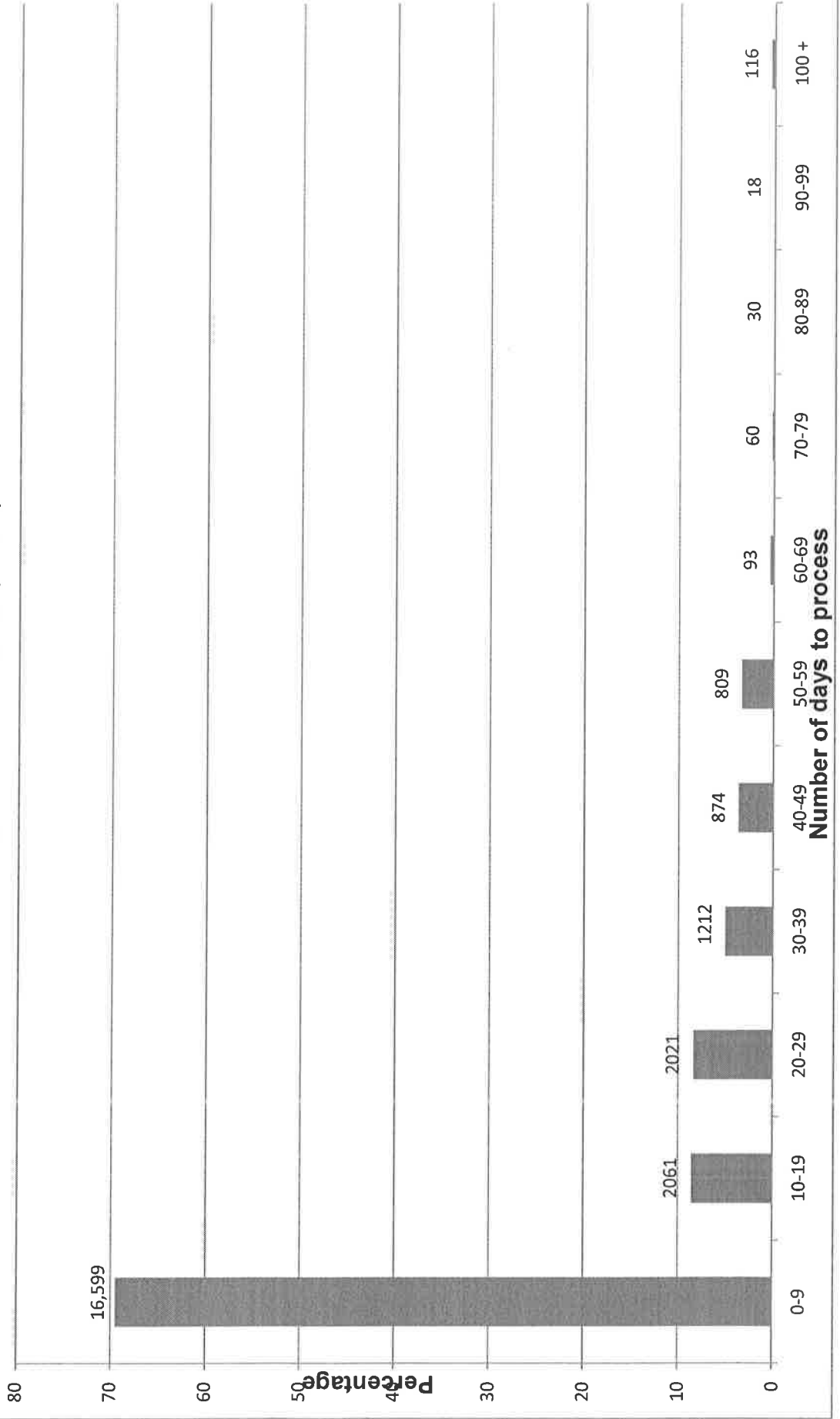
Right Time Indicator October 2015 to September 2018



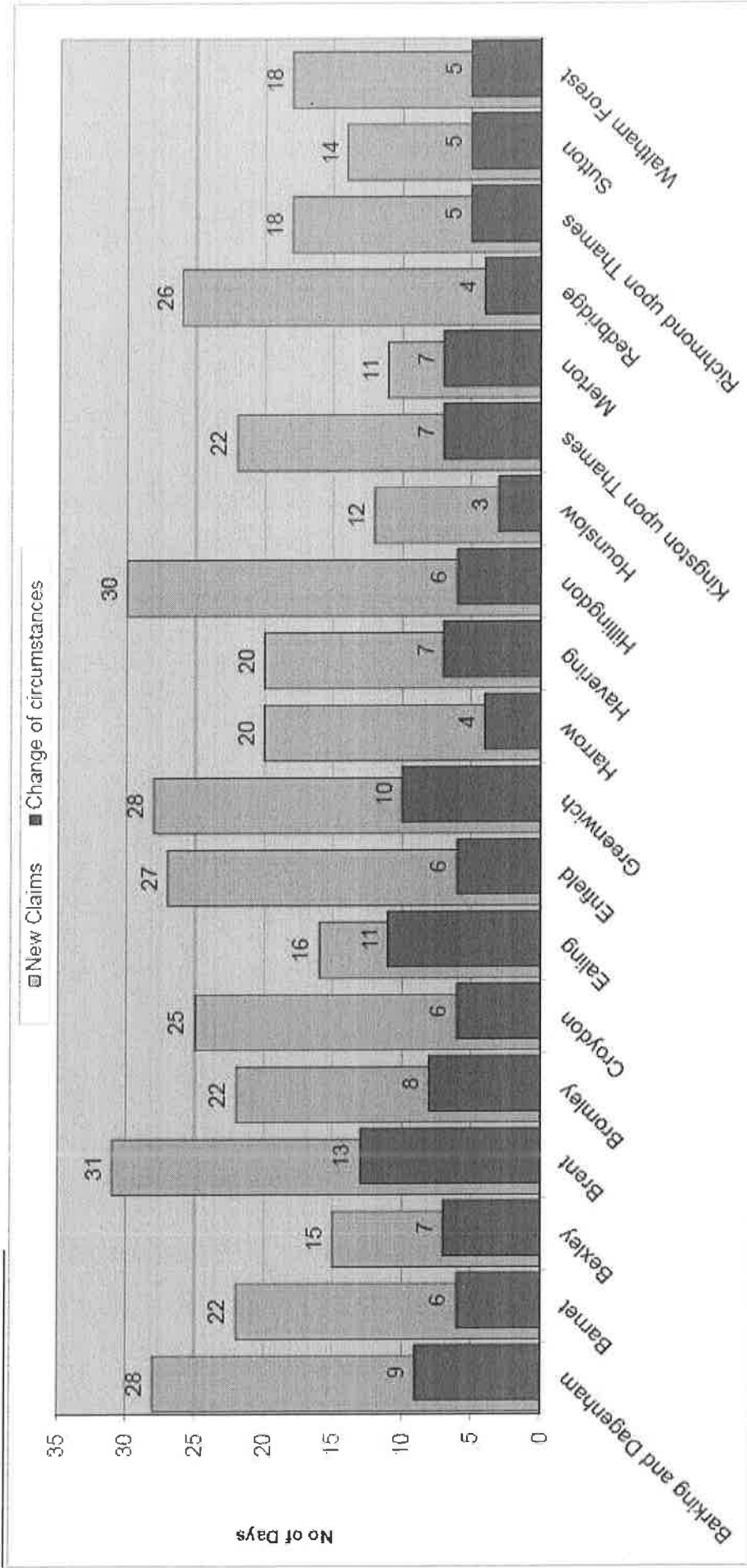
Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown April to September 2018 New Claims (2062 cases)

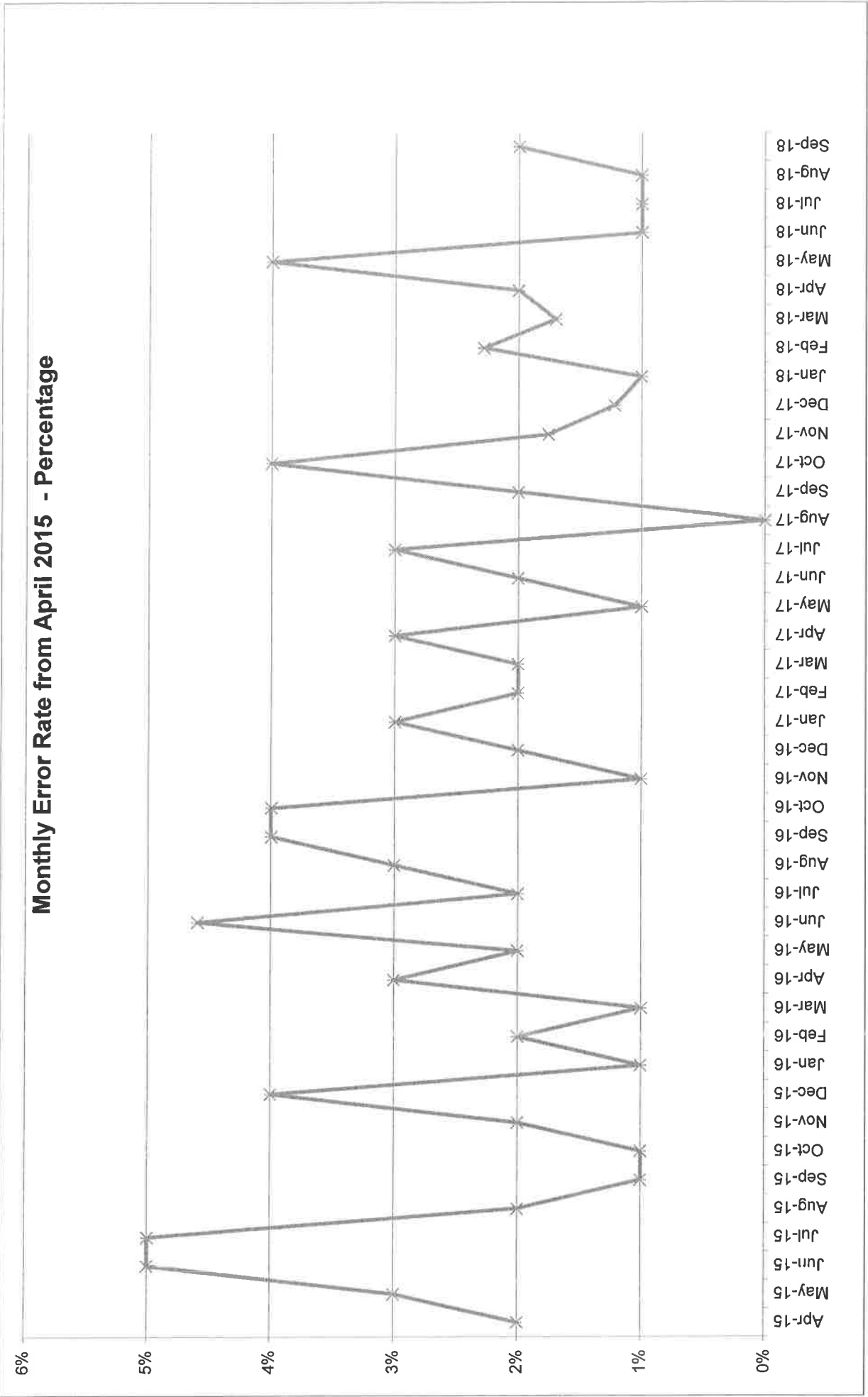


Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown - April to September 2018 Change in Circumstances (23,893)

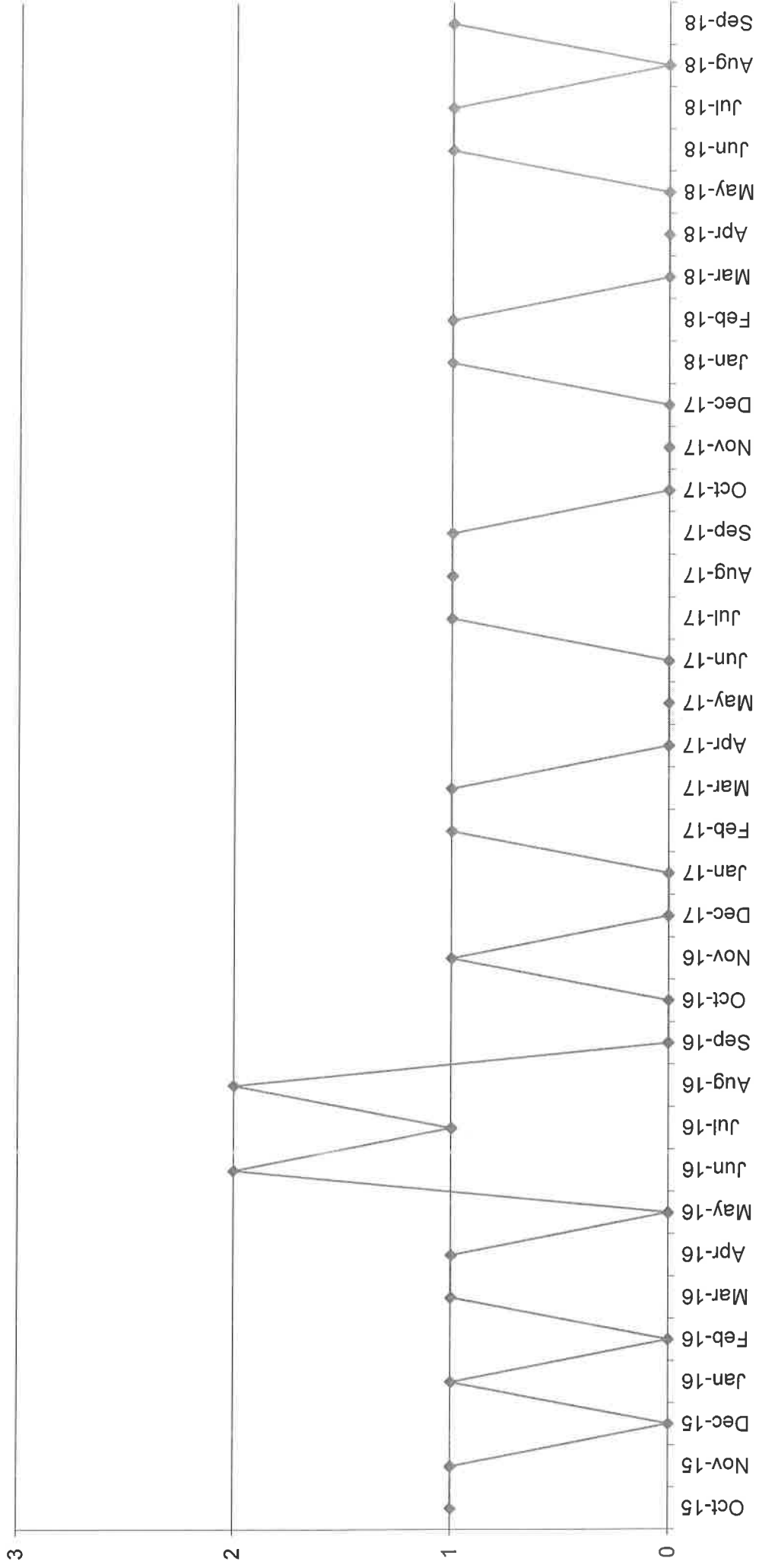


Speed of Processing by Outer London Authorities for April 2018 to June 2018 (Quarter 1, 2018/19)

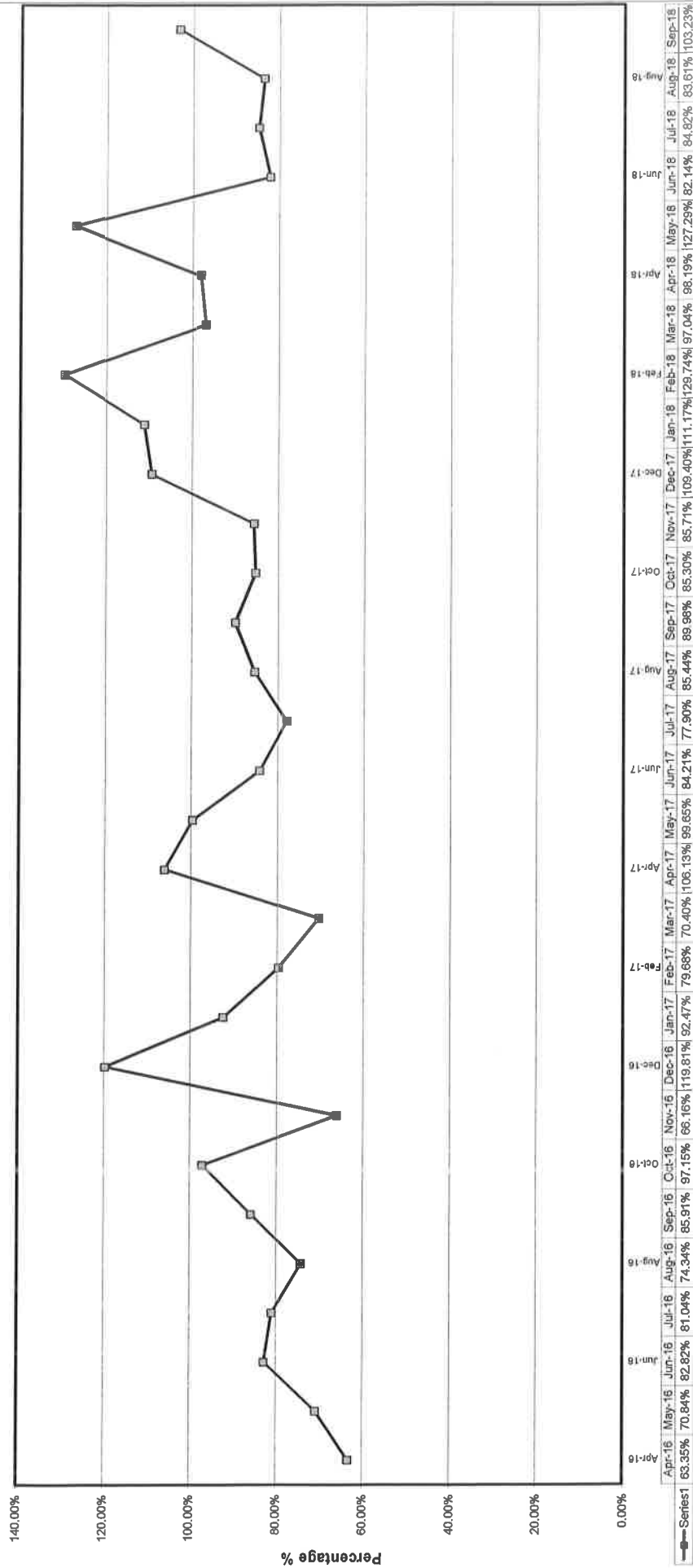




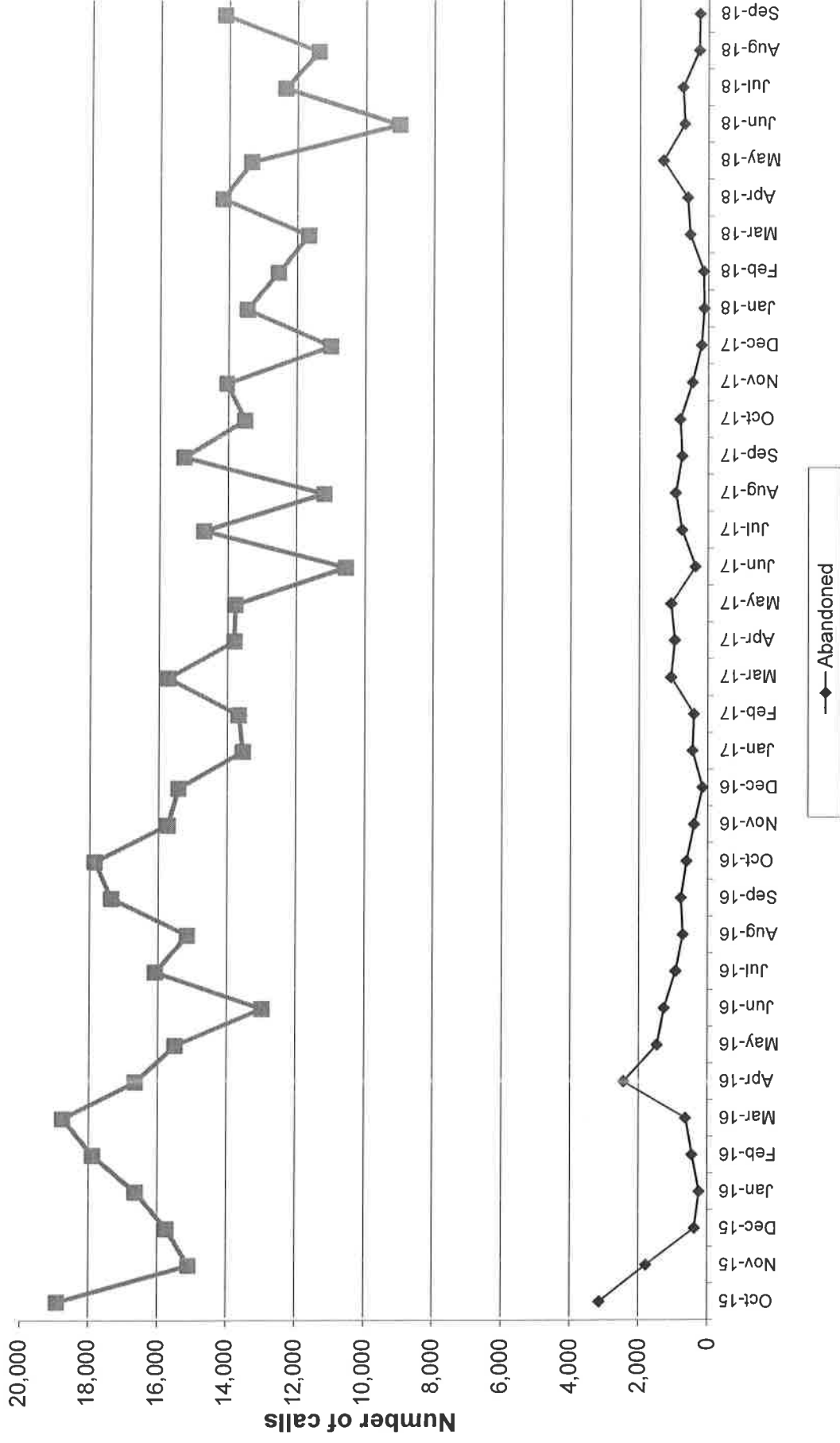
Housing and Council Tax Support - Stage 2 Complaints from October 2015



Monthly Overpayment % recovered against that created from April 2016



Calls Received and Abandoned by monthly from October 2015



Caseload from October 2015 - every 2 months

