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

Date: 23 August 2019

Our Ref: AIF/GT

Dear John,

As we approach the September 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 it's citizens.

This summary covers performance for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

1.   Current Status of the Benefits Service

The Benefits caseload, which measures all households receiving Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, was 18,718 as at the end of March 2019. The caseload at the same time last year was 19,653.

In terms of our current position for the nationally recognised Right Time Indicator, our average performance was 9.40 days. This is against an annual contractual target of 13 days. For the 2018/19 reporting period, the average processing times for New Claims was 20 days and Change in Circumstances was 9 days.

As at 31 March 2019, the total amount of outstanding work was 3,168 items. This includes 1,274 items pended which are awaiting information from the claimant and/or third-party. This is a reduction since the same period in 2018 when the outstanding work was 4,550 and pended items were 1,435.

1.1   Temporary Accommodation

We continue to maintain close working relationships with the LBB Housing teams, Orchard and Shipman and Mears Group. We meet on a monthly basis to deal with any specific assessment queries and fast track cases to ensure that any delays are minimised. This enables housing staff to enage with tenants early on to robustly manage potential rent arrears.

1.2 Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) Alerts Service

The DWP has now commenced issuing VEP alerts for Authorities to process, which have replaced the former Real Time Information (RTI) files. The VEP alerts provide earnings and pension information in 'real time' which is used to update the Authority's Benefits system. By processing the changes received via VEP alerts, we are significantly reducing the potential for overpayments which the customer may have incurred if they had not notified us of any changes in their household income. The VEP alerts draw information held by different organisations and is a very useful tool in Benefits administration.

1.3 ATLAS

ATLAS is a process of transferring data from the DWP systems to the Local Authority systems including state benefit changes which may not have been notified to us by the customer. We continue to process ATLAS files as these ensure that the data we hold on the Authority's Benefits system is accurate and up to date. We have successfully automated a significant number of ATLAS files which eliminates the potential for inputting error through the alternative manual handling by assessment officers. Similarly to VEP alerts, potential overpayments are significantly reduced and thus 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 March 2019 was 2%. Compared to a contractual target of 5% or a soft target of 4%.

Our accuracy level demonstrates that the robust quality management framework is highly effective. We undertake a regular 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. New members of staff undergo an intense training program with significant post monitoring to ensure accuracy levels remain to high standard. Refresher training is undertaken regularly with all our staff to ensure that their understanding is consistent with our policies and procedures and changes in legislation.

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 31 March 2019 was 97.74% compared to 94.25% for the same period for the previous year. Liberata continues to effectively recover debts by using a variety of techniques including Blameless Tenant recovery, Direct Earnings Attachment and Debt Collection Agencies. These recovery techniques remain highly effective tools in securing the repayment of these debts.

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 help 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 a change in their circumstances.

We are seeing a month on month reduction of the Benefits caseload as customers transfer to Universal Credit. However, we continue processing the Council Tax Support claims, where applicable, for these customers. We continue to receive enquiries from the DWP in regards to housing costs and process the Universal Credit notifications on a daily basis. We are looking into how we can automate these notifications into the Authority's Benefits system.

Liberata has a dedicated Single Point of Contact (SPOC) that liaises directly with the DWP to ensure that any requests are dealt with within the DWP service level of 5 days. We have received positive feedback from the DWP in respect of the level of quality of the information provided by the SPOC.

2. Corporate Visiting Team (CVT)

The CVT Visiting Officers have all undergone a programme of cross training so that they can verify requested benefit information and provide advice to customers in their homes on benefit related matters. This has created resilience within the team and has ensured customer information is obtained quickly to reduce the 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 31st March 2019 totalled 33,979. During this period 88% of customers were seen within 15 minutes. This is an improvement on the same reporting period last year when 86% were seen in 15 minutes. Footfall has fallen by 8% compared to the same period in 2017/2018.

During this reporting period, the Contact Centre (Help Line) received 132,433 calls with 95.2% answered. Call volumes have fallen by 12% compared to the same period in 2017/2018. This is as a result of implementing One Digital self serve modules for direct debit, payment arrangements, change of address and the ability to view revenues and benefits correspondence.

4. Service Developments

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

Examples of current year new and ongoing initiatives;

- On-going annual reviews of Self Employed cases to ensure that the Benefits database remains accurate and Benefit entitlements are correct.
- Continual processing of Verify Earnings & Pensions (VEP) Alerts. This service provides real-time information of income and pensions which enables the Benefits database to be correctly updated to minimise potential overpayments.
- On-going implementation of the 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.

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

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Inwood-Field
London Regional Contract Director

Outstanding Work
October 2016 to March 2019
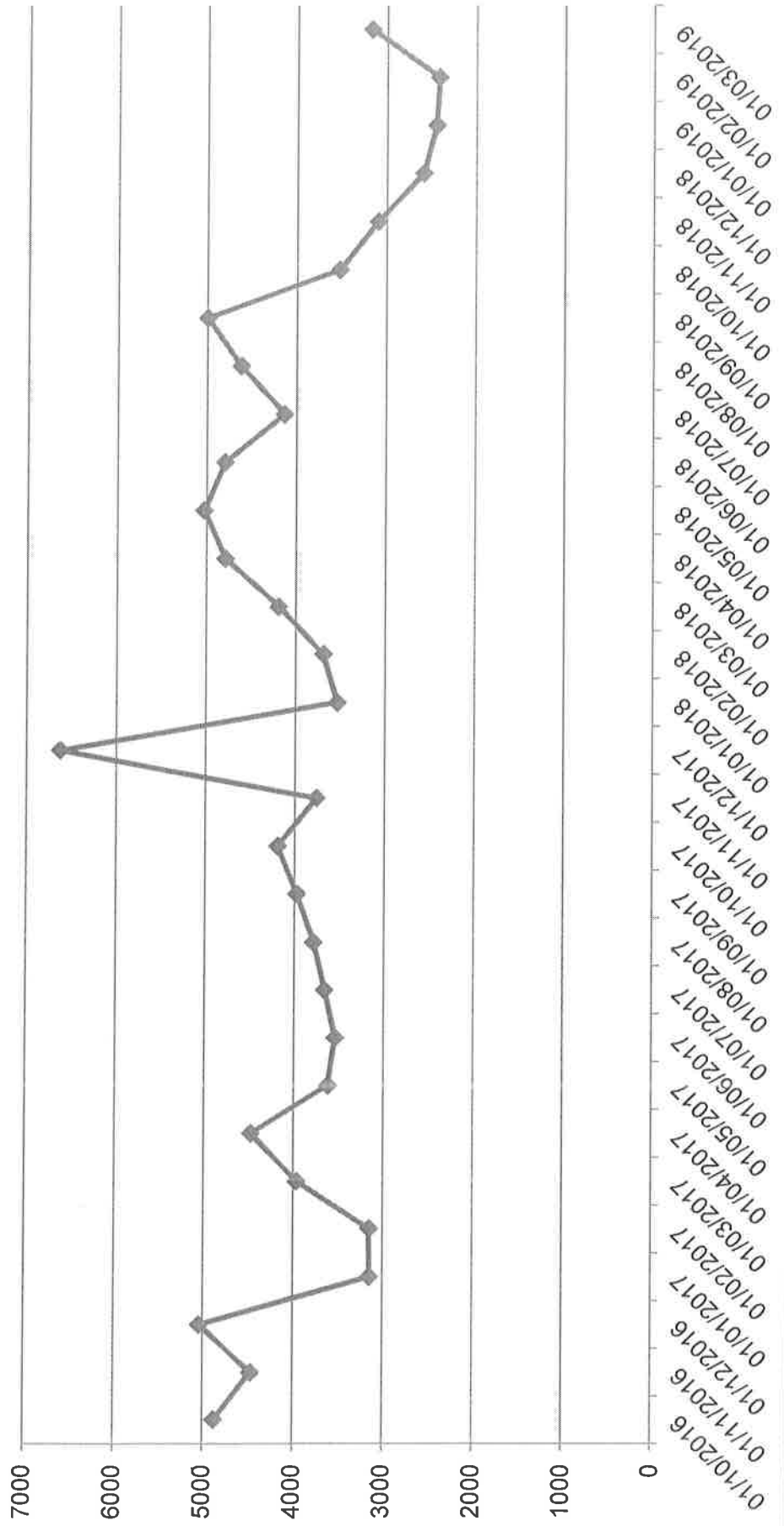
Right Time Indicator
April 2016 to March 2019
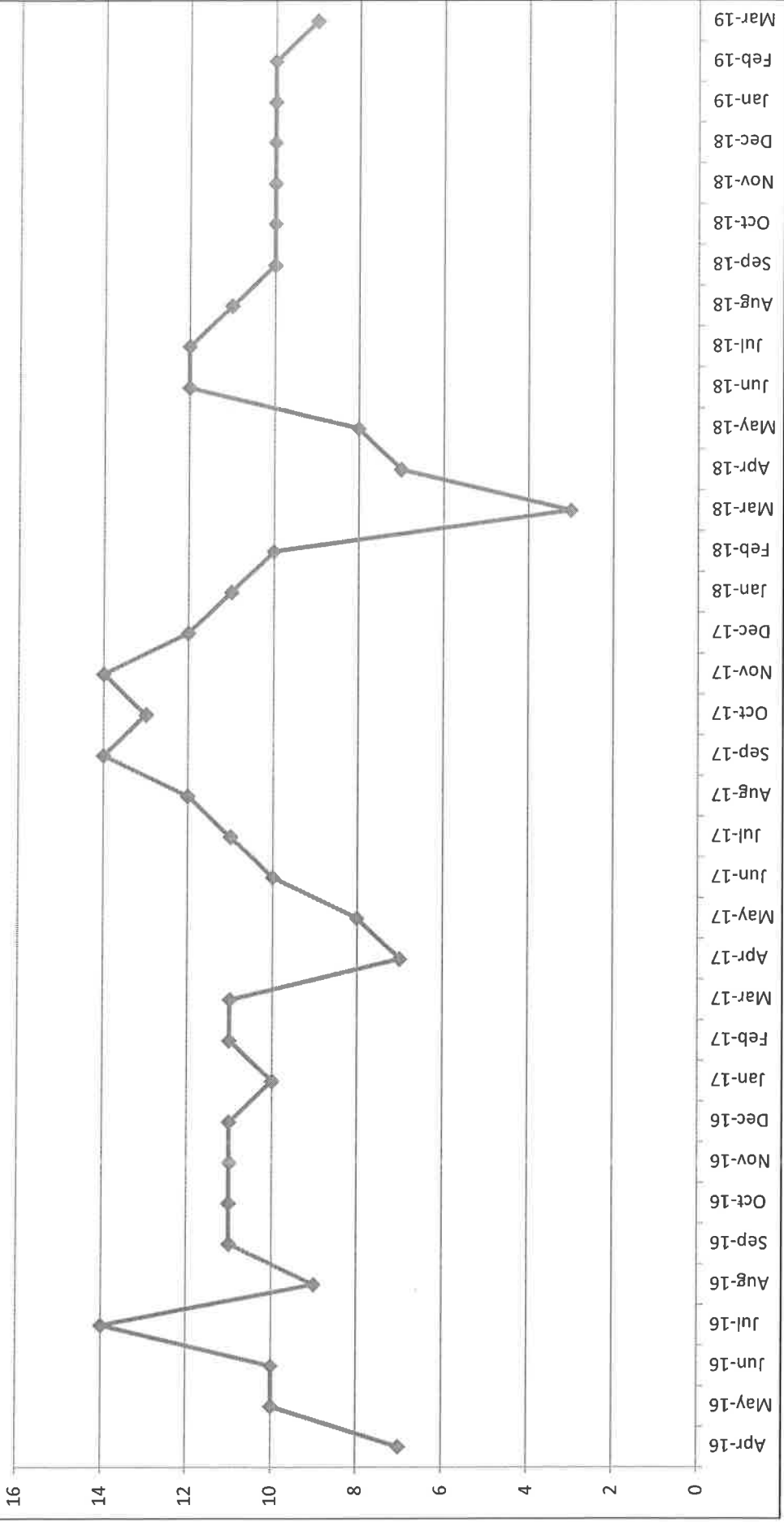
**Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown October 2018 to March 2019
New Claims (1486 cases)**

Number of days to process	Percentage
0-9	692
10-19	239
20-29	157
30-39	315
40-49	74
50-59	2
60-69	3
70-79	1
80-89	0
90-99	0
100 +	3
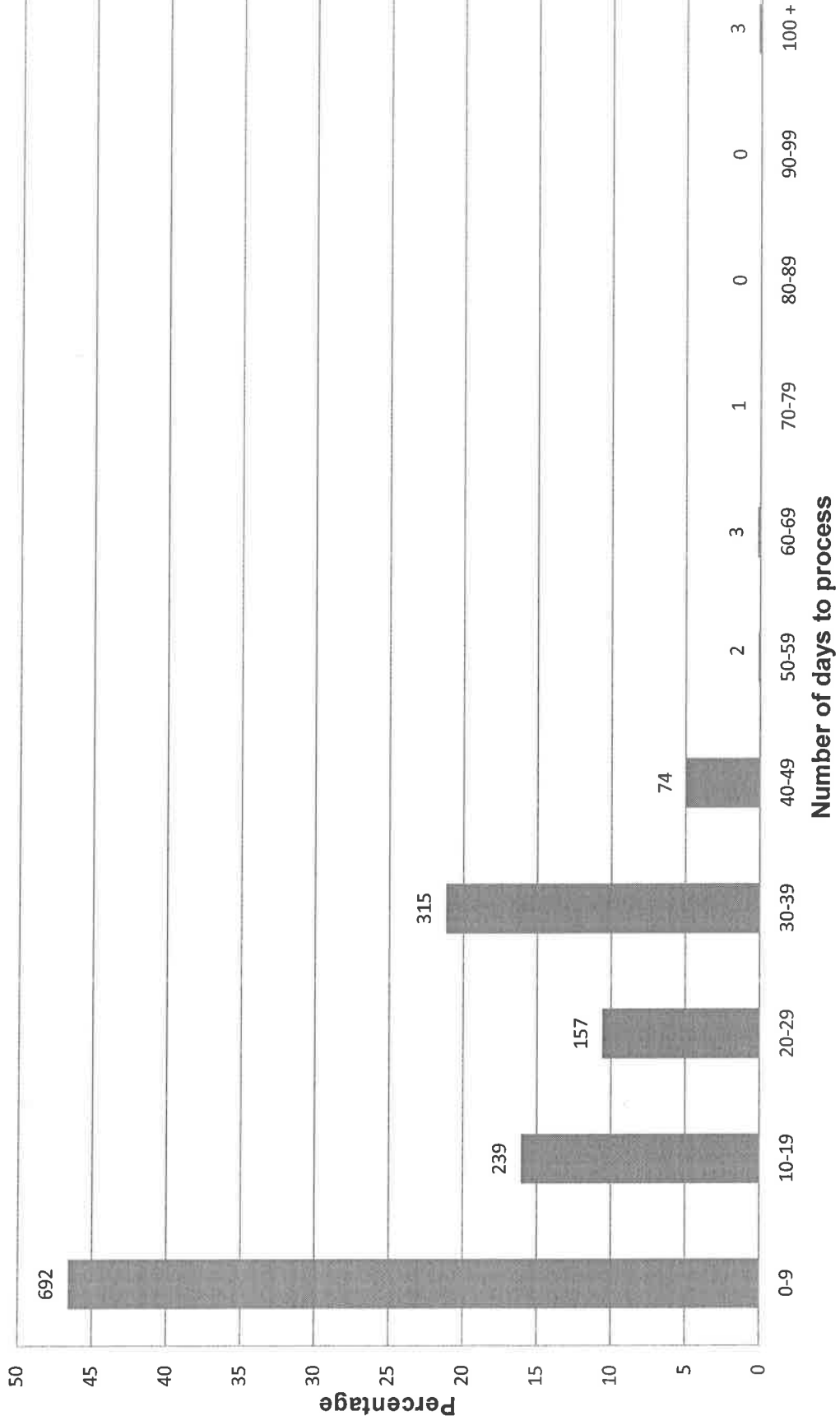
Housing Benefit - processing time breakdown - October 2018 to March 2019 Change in Circumstances (47,209)

Number of days to process	Value
0-9	40049
10-19	1831
20-29	1080
30-39	3044
40-49	758
50-59	277
60-69	55
70-79	48
80-89	25
90-99	10
100 +	32

Percentage

Number of days to process
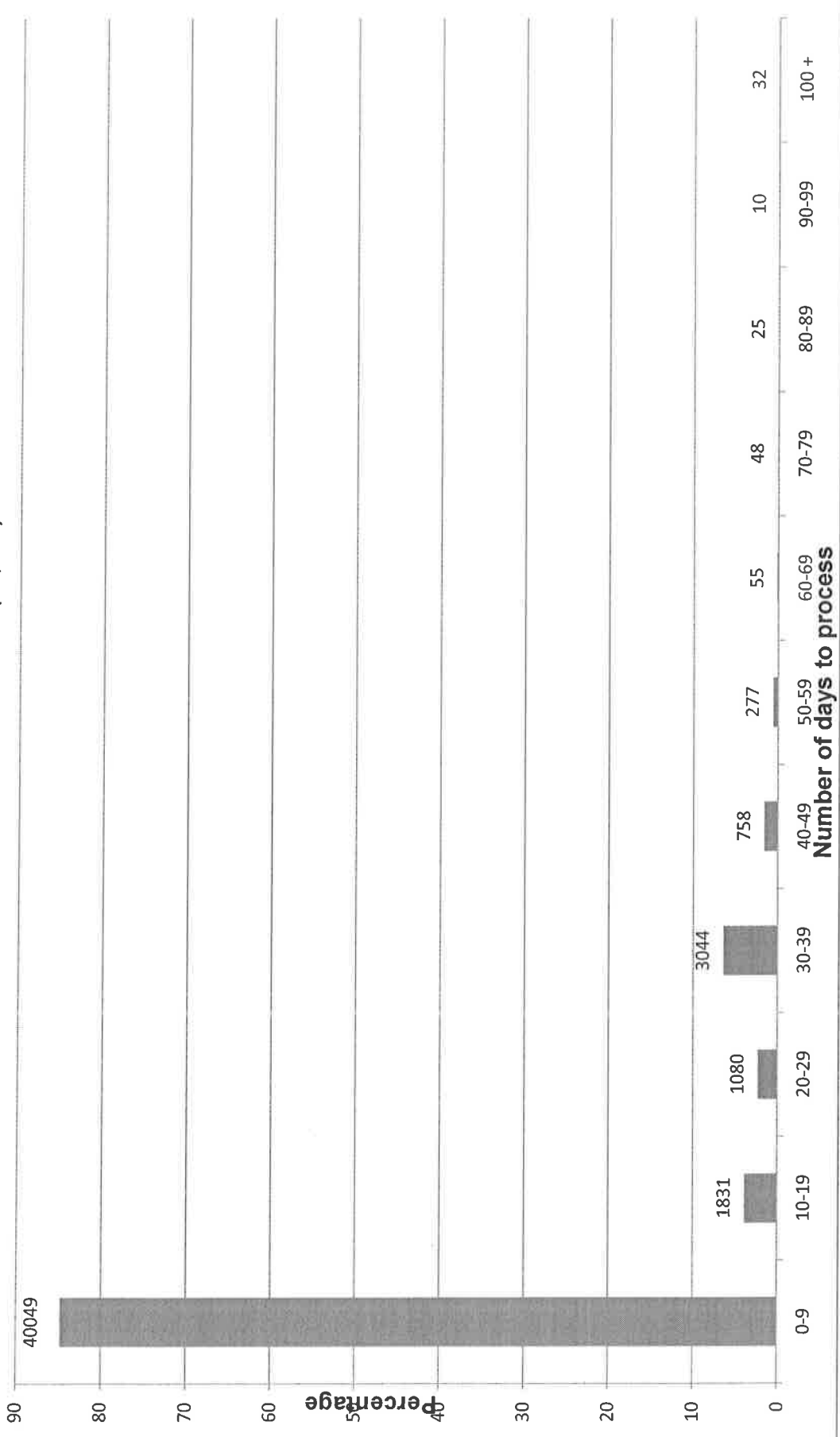
Average Inner & Outer London New Claims & Changes Performance – April 2018 – March 2019 (DWP Published data)

Legend:
- New Claims
- Changes

Boroughs (top to bottom):
- Westminster
- Wandsworth
- Tower Hamlets
- Southwark
- Newham
- Lewisham
- Lambeth
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Islington
- Hounslow
- Haringey
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Hackney
- City of London
- Camden
- Waltham Forest
- Sutton
- Richmond upon Thames
- Redbridge
- Merton
- Kingston upon Thames
- Hounslow
- Hillingdon
- Havering
- Harrow
- Greenwich
- Enfield
- Ealing
- Croydon
- Bromley
- Brent
- Bexley
- Barnet
- Barking and Dagenham

Axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35

Monthly Error Rate from April 2016 - Percentage
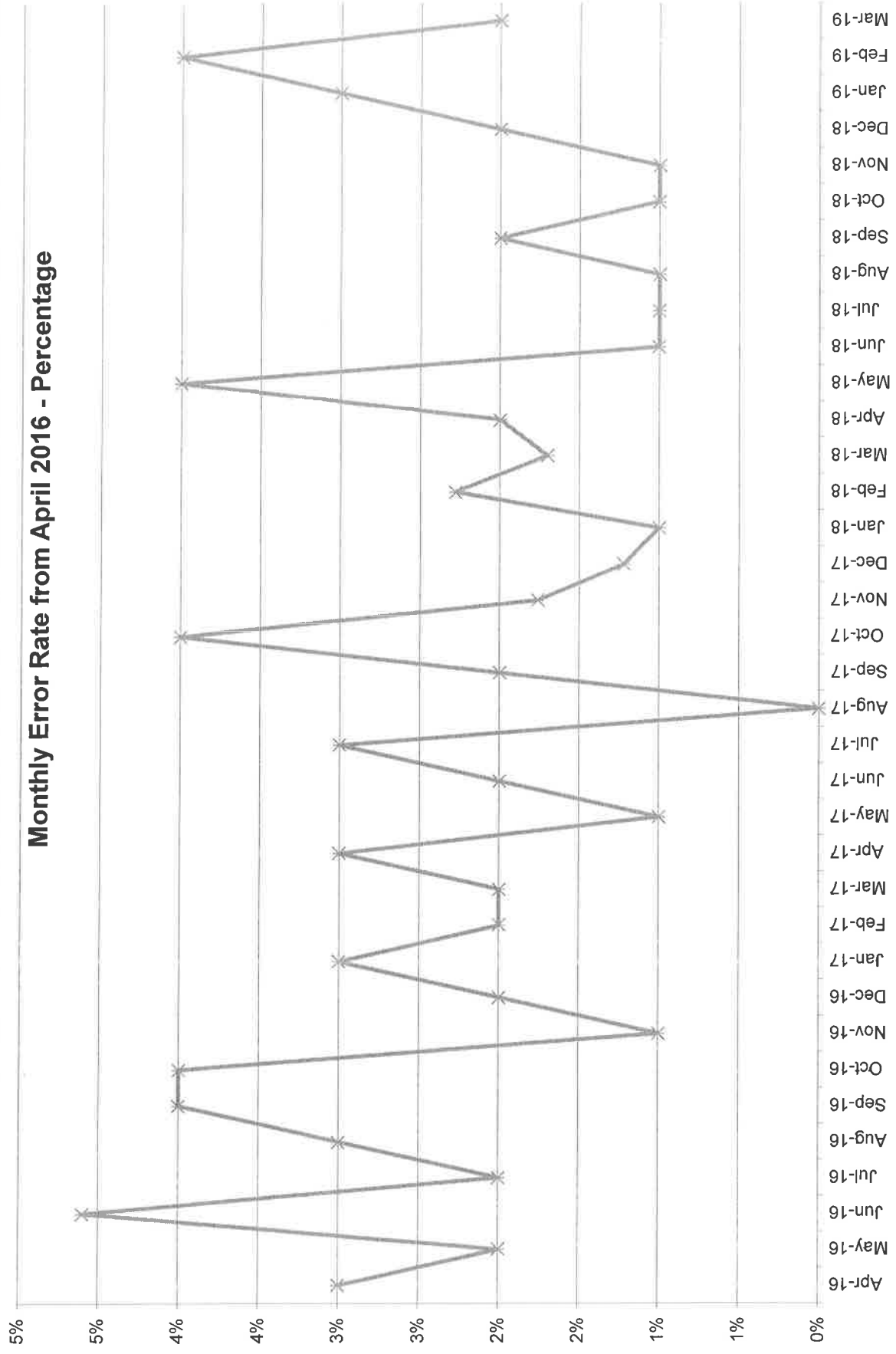
Monthly Overpayment % recovered against that created from April 2017

	Apr-17	May-17	Jun-17	Jul-17	Aug-17	Sep-17	Oct-17	Nov-17	Dec-17	Jan-18	Feb-18	Mar-18	Apr-18	May-18	Jun-18	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19
Series3	106.13%	99.65%	84.21%	77.90%	85.44%	89.98%	85.30%	85.71%	109.40%	111.17%	129.74%	97.04%	98.19%	127.29%	82.14%	84.82%	83.61%	103.23%	94.28%	98.30%	103.56%	101.06%	119.24%	101.07%
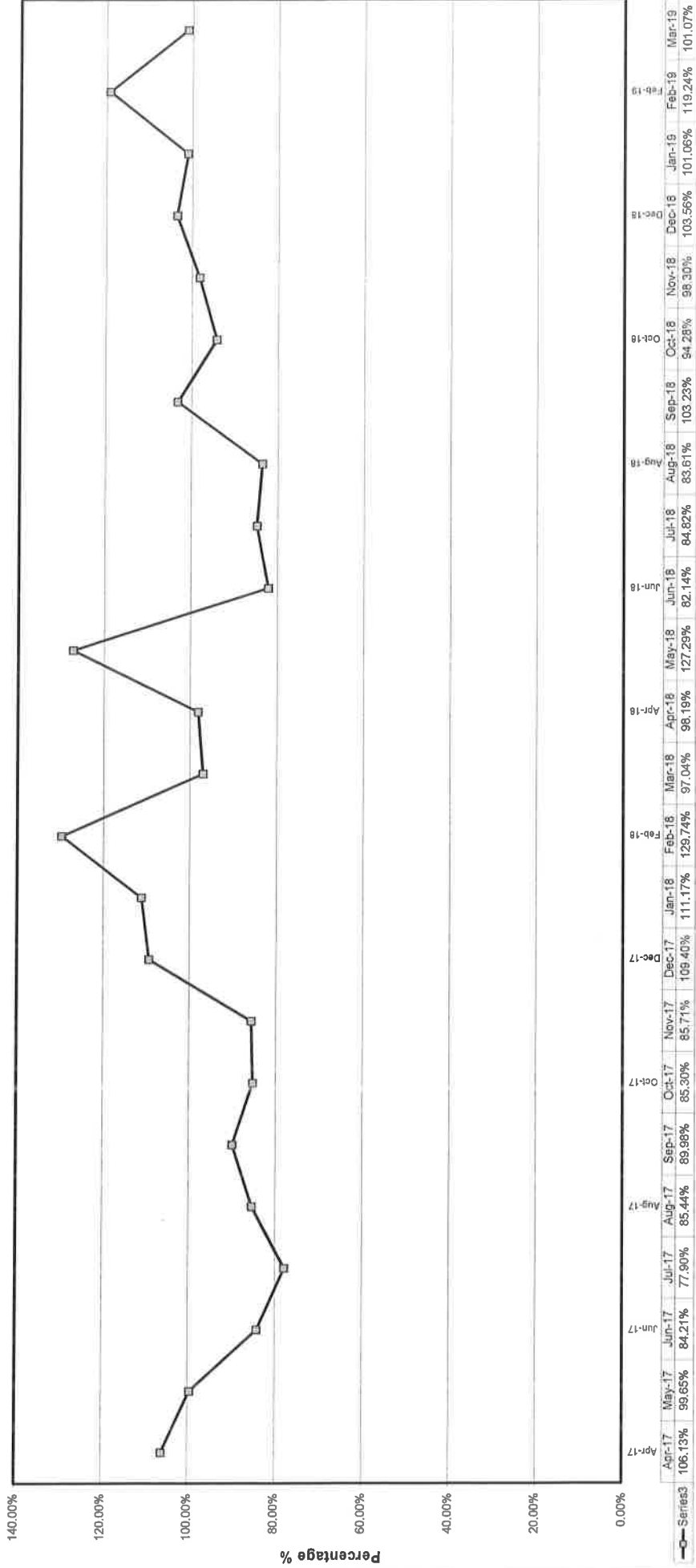
Calls Received and Abandoned monthly from April 2016

Number of calls

20000 · 18000 · 16000 · 14000 · 12000 · 10000 · 8000 · 6000 · 4000 · 2000 · 0

Apr-16, May-16, Jun-16, Jul-16, Aug-16, Sep-16, Oct-16, Nov-16, Dec-16, Jan-17, Feb-17, Mar-17, Apr-17, May-17, Jun-17, Jul-17, Aug-17, Sep-17, Oct-17, Nov-17, Dec-17, Jan-18, Feb-18, Mar-18, Apr-18, May-18, Jun-18, Jul-18, Aug-18, Sep-18, Oct-18, Nov-18, Dec-18, Jan-19, Feb-19, Mar-19
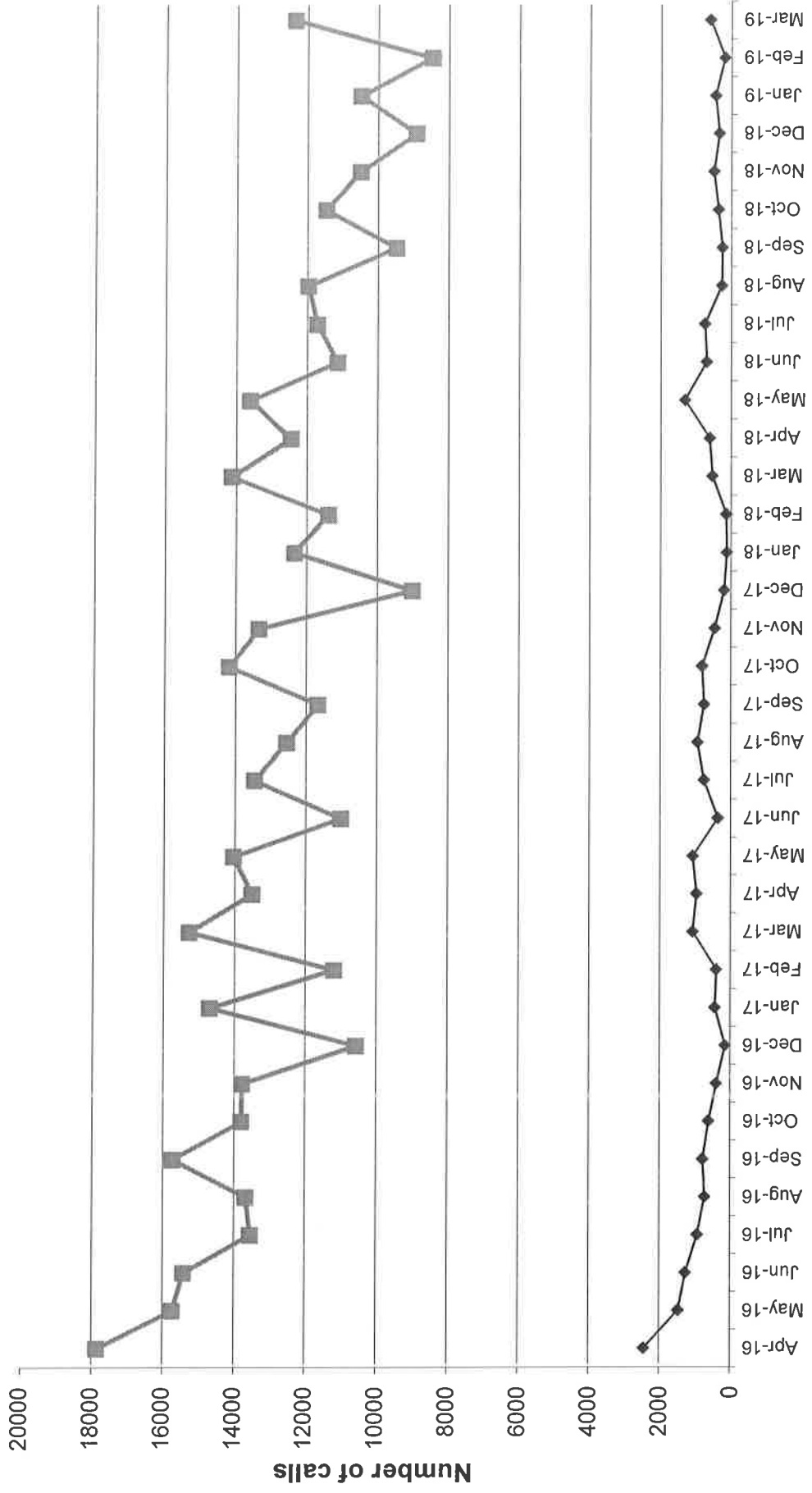
◆ Abandoned

Caseload from April 2016 - every 2 months