Fit4 Change Programme
Post Implementation Review
Planning and Sustainability

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10 February 2020

What is local government?

*Local government is responsible for a range of vital services for people and businesses in defined areas. Among them are well known functions such as social care, schools, housing and **planning** and waste collection, but also lesser known ones such as licensing, business support, registrar services and pest control.*

*Local authorities receive funding from a range of sources, including Government grants, council tax and fees and charges. **Together, council tax and business rates make up local authorities' largest source of income**.*

https://www.local.gov.uk/about/what-local-government

What is the planning system?

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

*Planning ensures that the right development happens in the right place at the right time, **benefitting communities and the economy**. It plays a critical role in identifying what development is needed and where, what areas need to be **protected or enhanced** and in assessing whether proposed development is suitable.*

*Local planning authorities should work with applicants to secure developments that **improve the economic, social and environmental conditions** of their area.*

Plain English guide to the Planning System, DCLG, Jan 2015

WDC P&S statutory targets

Government target	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20 to date
Major - **60%**	42 (32) 76%	53 (46) 87%	40 (32) 80%	34 (29) **85%**
Minor - **65%**	444 (341) 77%	430 (300) 70%	411 (308) 75%	338 (251) **74%**
Other - **80%**	1642 (1461) 89%	1696 (1397) 82%	1473 (1275) 87%	997 (875) **88%**
Misc. - **N/A**	954 (806) 84%	951 (790) 83%	945 (840) 89%	**TBD**
Appeals (Sect 78 BV204) - **<40%**	79 (28) 35%	51 (16) 31%	67 (15) 22%	53 (11) **21%**

WDC P&S special measures targets

	Gov't target	For period
Over a period of two years up to and including the most recent quarter the % of decisions on applications for **Major** development. (include ext. of time)	>60%	1/1/18-31/12/19 92 (76) **83%**
The percentage of decisions for **Major** development that have been overturned at appeal. Measured quarterly on a rolling 2 year basis, but nine months after the end of the period being measured. (conditions and splits not included)	<10%	1/4/17-31/12/19 161 (1) **0.62%**
Over a period of two years up to and including the most recent quarter the % of decisions on applications for **Non-Major** development. **(13Q,14Q, 15Q, 16Q, 17Q,18Q,20Q,21Q)**	>70%	1/1/18-31/12/19 3513 (2745) **78%**
The percentage of decisions for **Non-Major** development that have been overturned at appeal. Measured quarterly on a rolling 2 year basis, but nine months after the end of the period being measured. (conditions and splits not included) **(13Q,14Q, 15Q, 16Q, 17Q,18Q,20Q,21Q)**	<10%	1/4/17-31/12/19 4982 (51) **1%**

Background
Challenges faced in 2016

- UK Government exploring market competition in planning system
- UK Government proposing unitary merger of Wycombe DC with other Buckinghamshire councils
- Austerity placing pressure on council finances
- Statutory workload with no fee increasing (following changes to permitted development rules)
- Unpaid overtime worked on a routine basis (in excess of £500k pa)

Background
Preparatory work 2016 - 2017

- April 2016 - All staff meeting, positive response to competition concept

- Working groups explored issues and made recommendations

- Costs - data collection and analysis to understand unit costs, dead time etc. with the aim of charging maximum fees by March 2017

- Clients - client workshops to understand their needs and expectations, aiming to maintain and improve the scope and quality of services

- Culture - survey and analysis of culture, aiming to develop a culture of 'end in mind', solution focused, responsive and responsible

- Customer - survey and analysis of customer interactions and satisfaction

Background
Senior Management Board April 2017

Establishing a positive, responsive, responsible culture

- Learning culture
- Understanding the cost of time
- Clarity and consistency
- Solution focussed
- Client centred
- Public trust
- Clear expectations
- Active delegation

Reducing Costs and Maximising Income

- Keeping options open
- WDC support
- Costs
- Income
- Investment reserve

5.3 The service will be judged on the inward investment, housing and jobs it enables, the income it generates for the Council, how it keeps costs down and the regard it is held in by developers, residents and the public at large.

Background
Cabinet Paper June 2017

1.1. This paper has two key deliverables: sustaining the service through short term bottlenecks; and preparing for a change programme. It is not the business plan for the change programme itself.

iv b) Finance a business transformation and cultural change programme with the aim of modernising the service and delivering significant cost efficiency gains and additional income with the aim of reducing the level of taxpayer subsidy to the service to the minimum achievable without compromising quality standards;

16. Key to the review is reducing the ongoing subsidy that is provided to the Planning Service each year by the tax-payer. This currently sits in the region of £1.5m. This will be reduced to a maximum of £1m, with an ambition of £500k, and an aspiration of £0.

Background
Improvement Plan LSB May 2018

1.4. The goal of P&S becoming cost-neutral has been adopted into the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and is broken down thus:

Year	0	1	2	3
	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Subsidy	£1.5m	£1m	£0.5m	£0m

2.2. Additional programme objectives are:

- Member level agreement on the standard of service offered
- Client satisfaction to average 'good' or better in client surveys
- Customer trust to average 'good' or better in satisfaction surveys
- Staff satisfaction to average 'good' or better in staff surveys

Background Improvement Plan LSB May 2018

- Programme objectives quantified

Target for 19/20	Value
Non-statutory income above budget	£300k
CIL, corporate and capital projects staff costs offset	£150k
Cash Savings	£90k
Staff satisfaction	75%
Client Satisfaction	TBD
Customer satisfaction	TBD

"Managing the financial performance of a team without considering delivery is as naïve as managing delivery without considering cost." Peter Forest

Background
Agreement with Head of Finance

Following the unitary announcement, the targets beyond April 2021 were scrapped.

Year	0	1	2	3
	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Subsidy	£1.5m	£1m	£0.5m	£0.5m

As Wycombe would cease to exist, there was little relevance in having a target. Also, it would allow a focus on unitary and bringing common services, systems and fees across the council.

Research
Jan – Feb 2018

10% of programme time was given over to research:

- Work to date, existing documentation

- Services register identified all activities undertaken, legal requirements, income generating or has potential, online delivery or has potential, staff training and succession plans

- 1 to 1 meetings with staff to understand talents and aspirations

- Discussed client needs and expectations at Agents' Panel meeting

- Explored inter-departmental relationships: IT, Fraud and Audit, Finance, Legal, Regeneration, Democratic Services, HR, Procurement

- Agreed change due process, risk appetite and governance requirements

Strategy
Programme traits

- 75+ diverse staff available on ad-hoc basis

- Need for culture change to ensure service quality

- Need for changes to continue after programme end

- New Local Plan due sometime during programme

- Unitary merger likely sometime during programme

- Member led authority (with ultimate control on standards) but also a highly influential Senior Management Board

Strategy
Programme methodology

Waterfall

- Plan focussed
- Rigid
- Document heavy
- Periodic meetings
- Top down

Agile

- User focussed
- Responsive
- Light documentation
- Frequent meetings
- Inclusive

Strategy Agile

- Governance
- Project methodology
- Resources
- Tracking tools – Board report, Agile list

- Staff guidance
- Monitoring
- Communication

Delivery
Programme structure

- All staff welcome, all ideas welcome

- Weekly meetings (Monday – senior staff, Wednesday - all staff) covering 'show and tell' and 'opportunities and consequences'

- Open dialogue with staff and clients allowed feedback, deliberation, and a rapid response to changing circumstances

- Originally Sprint with 2 week sprints

- Changed to Kanban as a better suited solution

- Teams varying from led to guided to supported

Delivery Programme monitoring

- Regular communications with staff and members
- Monthly board reports
  - Slow
  - Inefficient
  - In addition to normal work
  - Out of date and retrospective
- Client satisfaction surveys introduced for each service
- Quarterly staff satisfaction surveys continued
- Customer satisfaction surveys replaced by Planning Community Panel, after GDPR issues
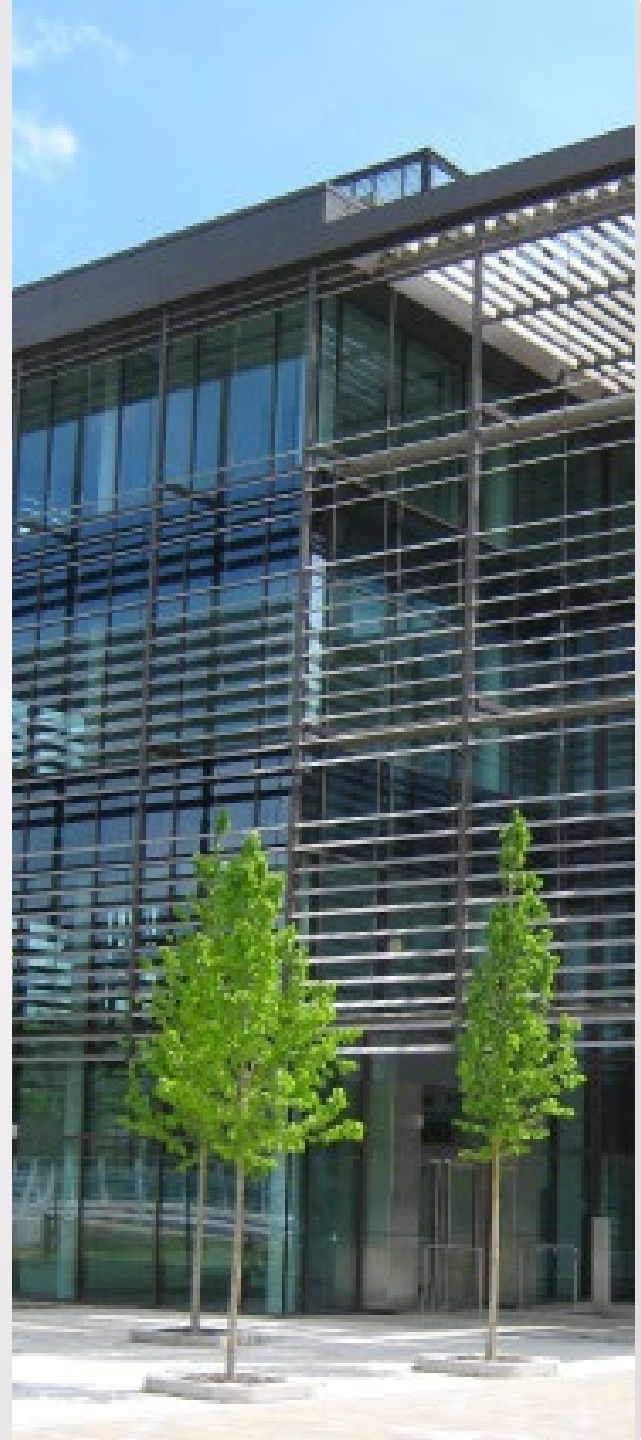
Delivery
Service Performance Reporting

- Scores of access reports maintained by two staff

- Reports were scheduled and ad hoc

- Retrospective, out of date

- Only by request, with an obvious delay in response

- You get what you ask for

- Replaced with online, real-time, self-serve reports

- One dashboard for eFin, Uniform, agendas, satisfaction surveys

Delivery
Improved services

- Each service was process mapped and a 'How To...' guide written
- Process flows were displayed for staff to write comments on
- Processes were refined to avoid handovers, delays and wasted effort
- Quality gates were added
- Even the smallest of gains was important

- Services improved:
  - Is planning permission or listed building consent required?
  - Planning / Building Control history check
  - Amend a determined application

Delivery
Payments and aged debt

- Jan 2018, massive majority of payments over the phone by credit card
- Risk of fraud, dull work, no added value
- Scores of CIL, DM and BC aged debt cases, many over 90 days late
- Move to online forms requiring upfront payment
- Established a team to chase aged debtors

Delivery
Cultural change

- 3 clear behaviours to drive cultural change, devised with staff in workshop sessions and adopted into performance objectives

- Management skills support to improve performance management

- Training
  - IT (all staff) to improve use of Outlook, SharePoint, Uniform
  - Plain English (all staff) to improve clarity and brevity
  - Developer process (DM, PSS) to improve understanding of clients
  - Managing change (all staff) to build resilience during the merger

Delivery Communications

- Planning website and client documentation completely re-written, becoming comprehensive, clear and concise

- FAQ and glossary added to website

- Quality Management System created in SharePoint giving all staff access to the latest templates

- All Planning Portal documentation updated to direct applicants to our guidance

Delivery Validation

- Validation list shortened and made clearer
- Split into 'must' submit and 'may be asked to' submit
- Examples of good and bad practice given

- Work split between basic 'registration' and full 'validation'
- Only one invalid reason given per invalidation 'round'
- New validation advice services launched
- Support staff head-count reduced from 25 to 16 by not needing to replace staff who left through natural turnover, thanks to efficiencies

Delivery
New discretionary services

- Planning advice:
  - Initial advice
  - Follow-on advice
- Validation advice:
  - Telephone
  - Face to face
- Specialist advice:
  - Heritage and conservation
  - Ecology
  - Trees

- Planning application amendments
- Total Tree Management
- Fast track:
  - ADRCS
  - Non-material amendments
  - ANYTHING!

Delivery PlanTech

- Improvements can only go so far without a technological step change

- Partner on pioneering 'Permitted Development tool' with Open System Labs, Southwark

- Partner on exemplar MHCLG Local Digital Fund project 'Reducing Invalid Planning Applications', with Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham and Camden

- Working to partner on research into Planning Value with Connected Places Catapult, University of Sheffield, Royal Town Planning Institute, Town and Country Planning Association, Office for National Statistics

Explore Refine Prepare Submit Track Amend Decision Appeal Close

PlanX

Challenges
Market conditions

- In 19/20 statutory services income fell to less than 75% of 18/19, 30% below 17/18, reflecting the drops seen nationally (source MHCLG)

- This made the market for discretionary services much smaller than expected

- An uplift in statutory fee income after the general election in December 2019, suggests Brexit was a major factor

Outcomes
Programme targets

Target	Target Value	As at Q3 2019/20	Forecast
Non-statutory income above budget	£300k	£30k below	On target
CIL, corporate and capital projects staff costs off set	£150k	On target	On target
Cash Savings	£90k	On target	On target
Staff satisfaction	75%	77%	Above
Client Satisfaction	TBD (working to 75%)	80%	Above
Customer satisfaction	TBD (GDPR preventing this)	N/A	N/A

Outcomes Reporting

- At least 0.5 FTE saved
- Big data cleanse when issues became visible
- Improved decision making based on statistics not opinion
- Online, real-time, self-serve reporting was critical to culture change
- Management can see EVERYTHING
- In fact, ANYONE can see ANYTHING (subject to licenses / suitability)
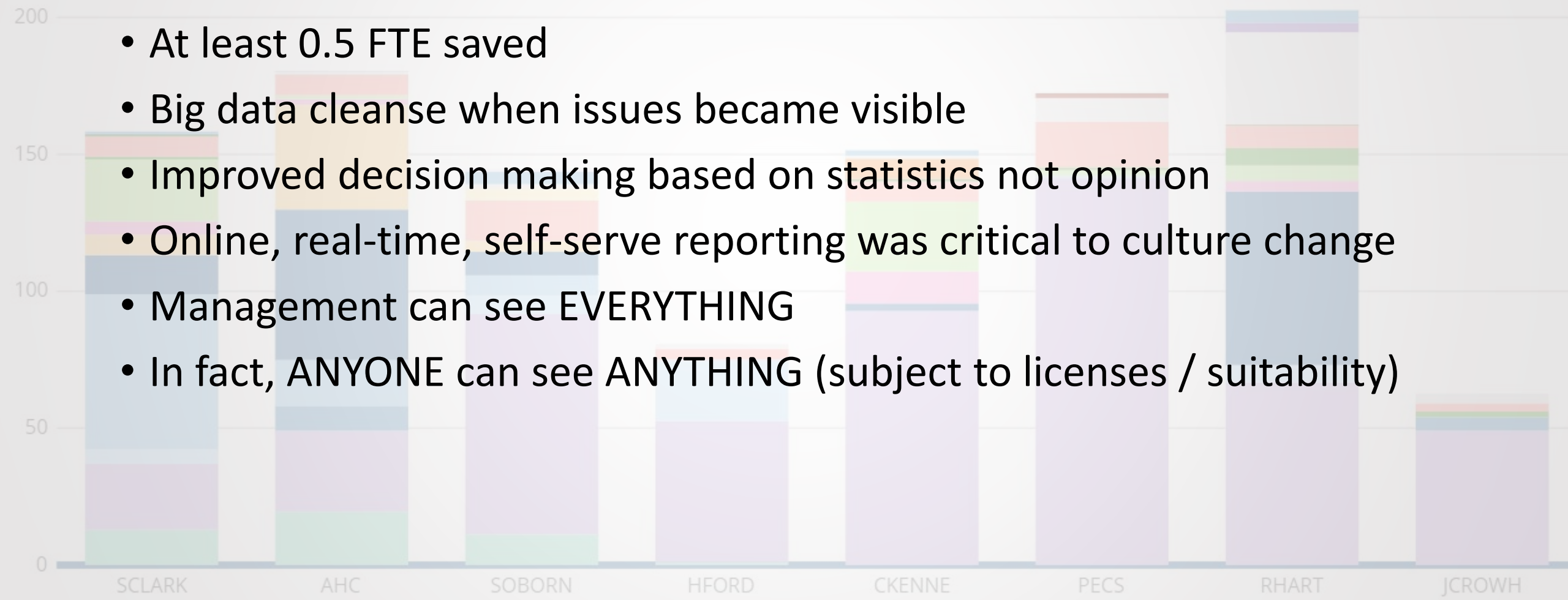
Outcomes
Discretionary income 16 – 20

Outcomes
Discretionary net income 16 – 20

Note: Spatial team (including specialist internal advisors on DM cases) began time recording in 2017

Outcomes
Discretionary net income

- The increase in net income can be attributed to:
  - The removal of loss making services (notably written advice)
  - Process redesign
  - Concise writing following training in plain English
  - Online forms capturing all required data and payment

- The activity surplus shown is for discretionary services only:
  - Activity surplus = discretionary fee – activity time recorded costs (pro rata salary + 30% on-costs)
  - It does not account for the cost of other activities, such as training, and does not include department or corporate overheads.
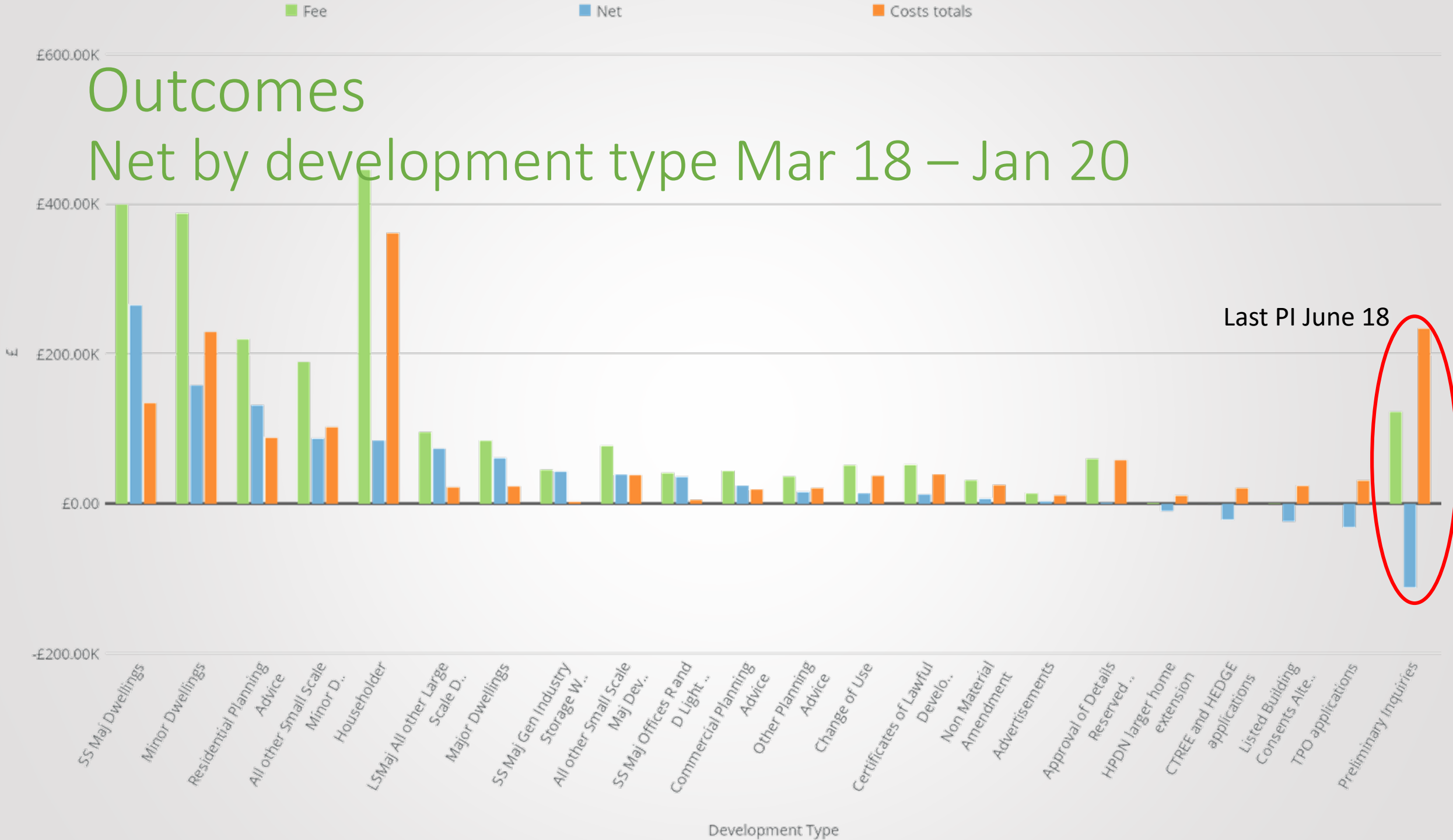
Outcomes
Statutory income Jan 15 – Jan 20
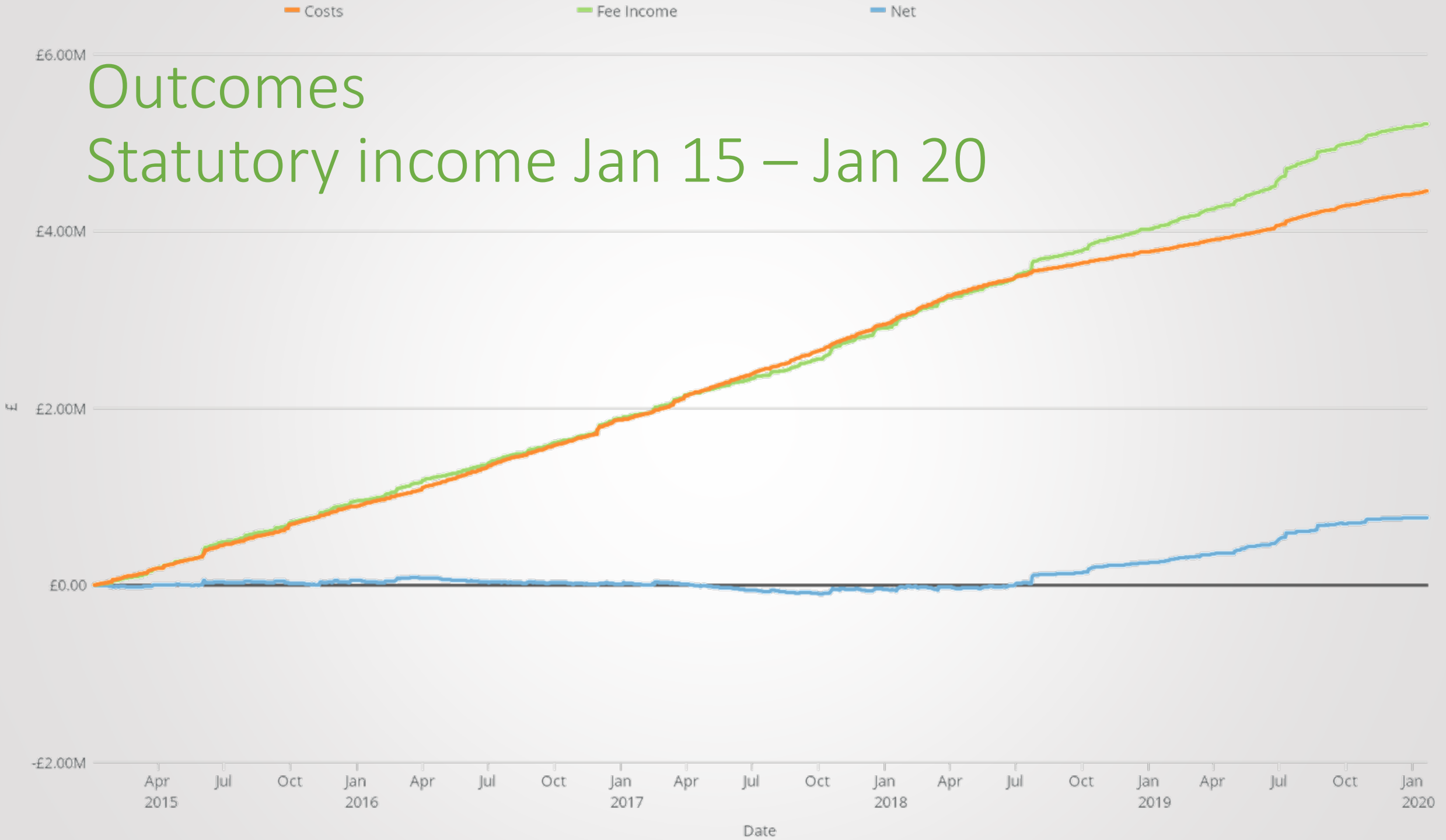
Outcomes
Statutory income Apr 18 – Jan 20
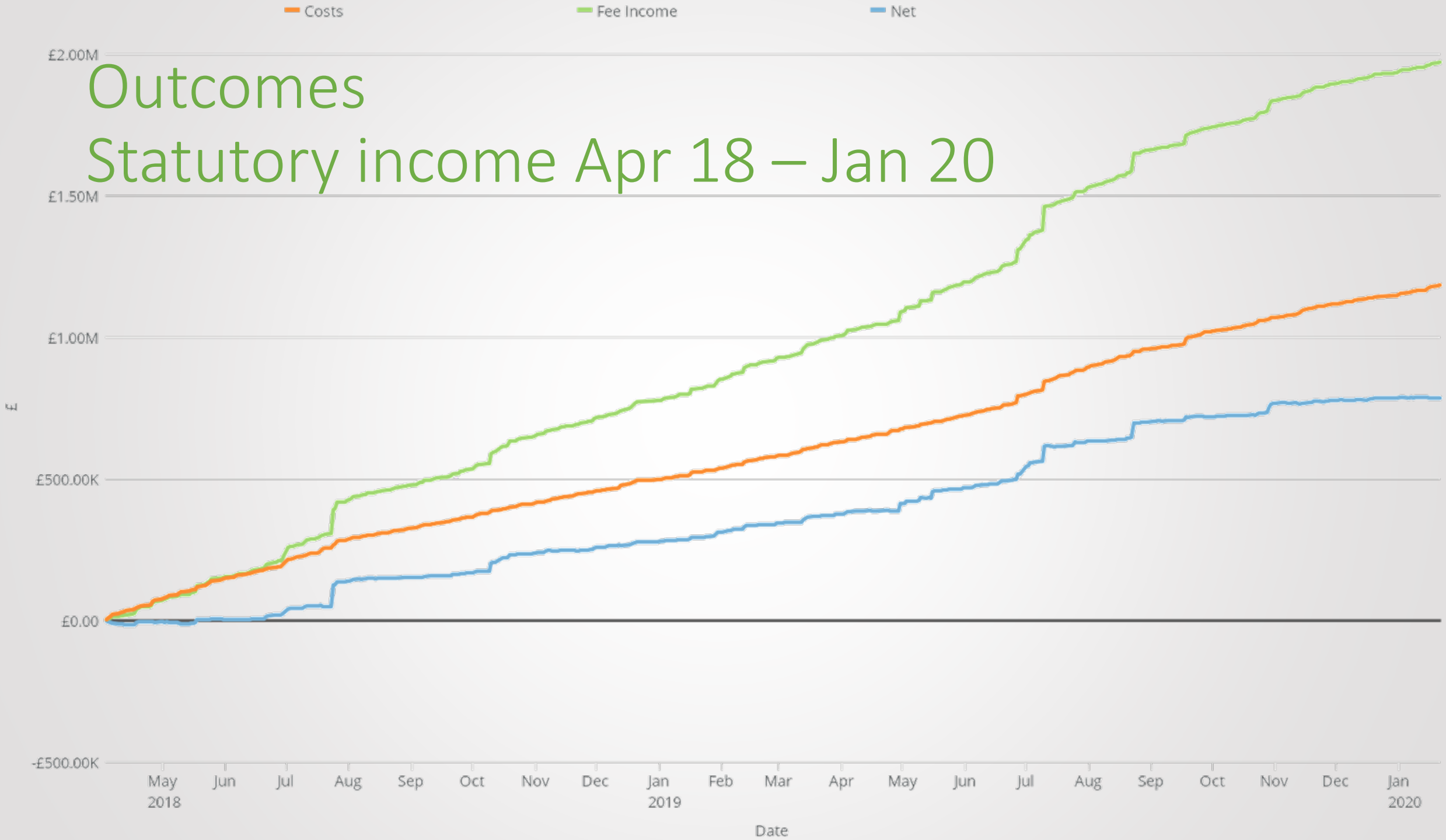
Outcomes
Statutory net income

- The increase in net income can be attributed to:
  - Process redesign
  - Training in plain English
  - Online forms capturing all required data and payment
  - Improved use of IT systems such as the rapid 'check-in check-out' tool
  - Many costs (e.g. site visits) traditionally borne by statutory services were offset against discretionary services (e.g. initial advice, amendments)
  - Where discretionary services were bought for a case, officers were familiar with the detail and could process the statutory work more quickly

- The activity surplus shown is for statutory services only:
  - Activity surplus = statutory fee – activity time recorded costs (pro rata salary + 30% on-costs)
  - It does not account for the cost of other activities, such as training, and does not include department or corporate overheads.

Outcomes
Net by development type Jan 15 – Mar 18

Outcomes
DM delivery surplus 19/20

- Almost every service that attracts a fee now operates in surplus
- Service surplus = all income – (all DM salaries + 30% on costs)

	Q1 + Q2	Annual forecast
All DM delivery staff (individuals, not FTE)	33	33
Staff costs: salary + 24% (SU, NI, pension)	**£630k**	**£1,260k**
Applications income	£442k	£884k
Advice income	£139k	£278k
PPA income	£95k	£190k
DM other income	£24k	£48k
Total income	**£700k**	**£1,400k**
Surplus	£70k	£140k
Surplus average per person	£2.1k	£4.2k

Outcomes
Planning Performance Agreements

- Improvements to the PPA service were made in 14/15, before Fit4
- In 2013, there had been just 1 PPA
- 19/20 healthy despite statutory income drop
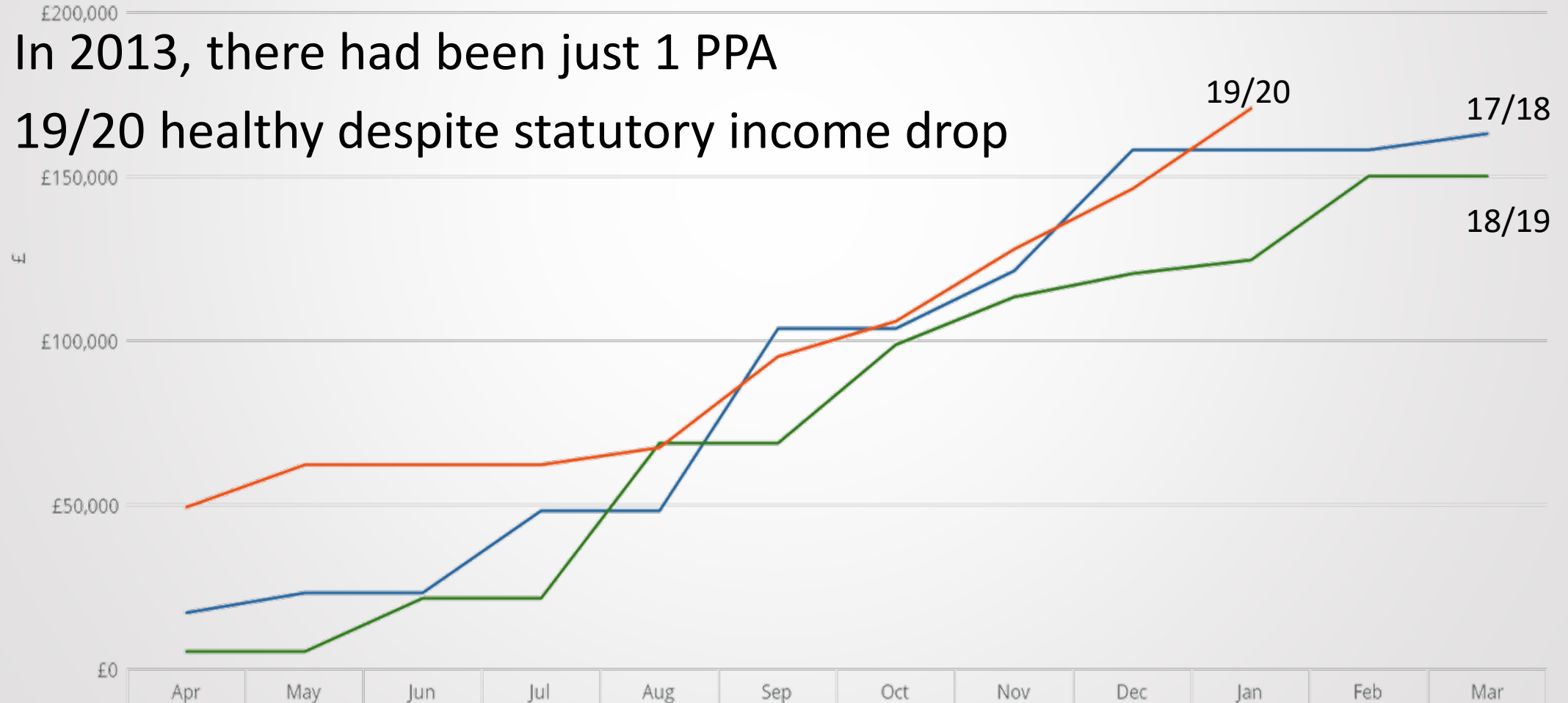
Outcomes
Community Infrastructure Levy 19/20

- Fit4 did not include changing CIL, only its financial target
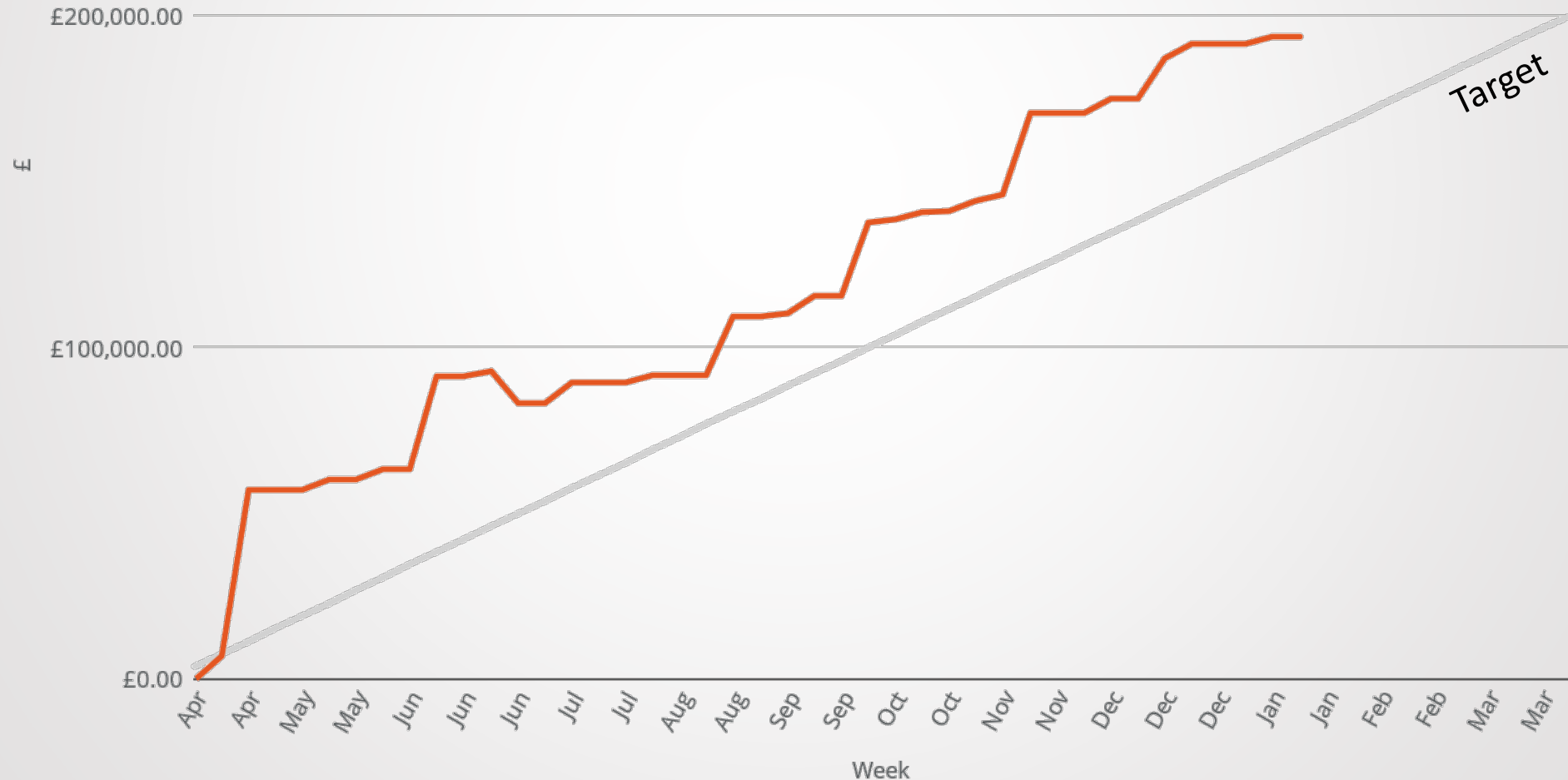
Outcomes
Aged debt >30 days outside payment plan

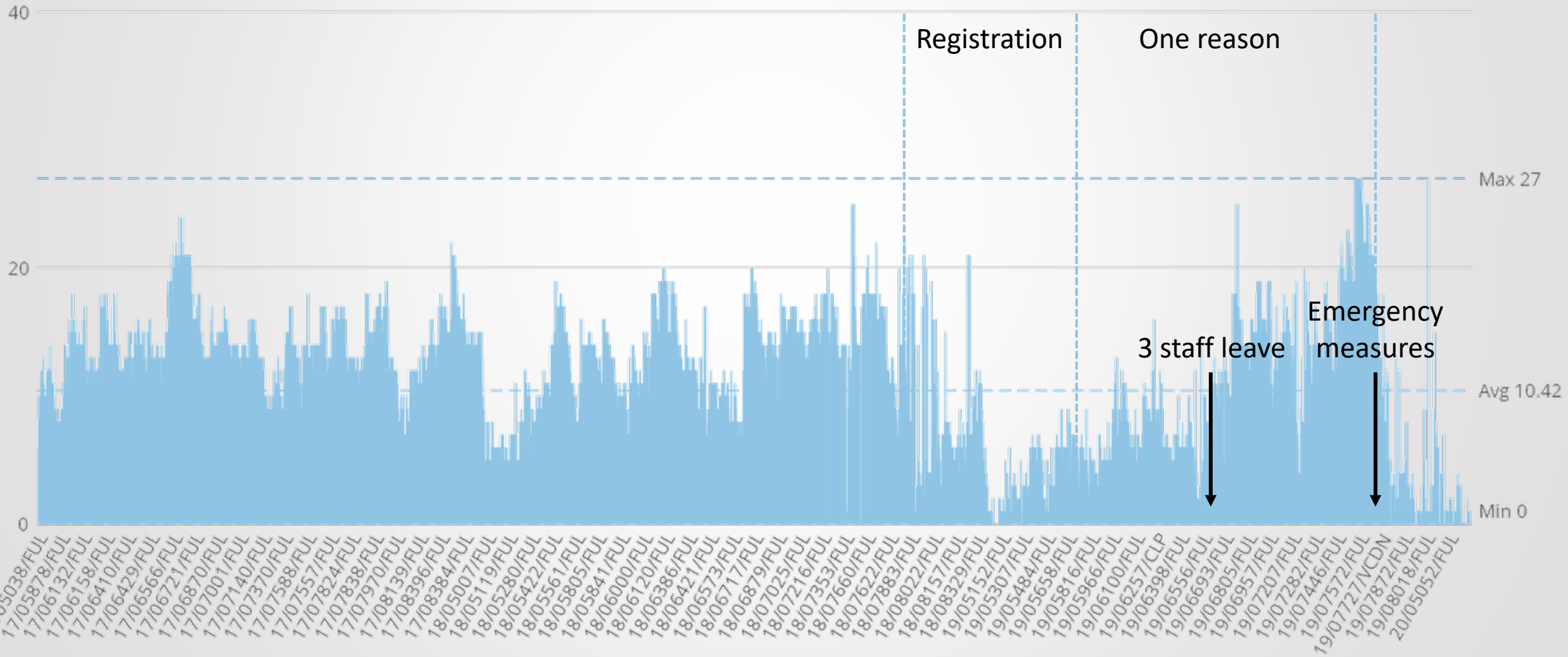- Whilst CIL is not technically a debt, it is recorded on the aged debt register

	Jan 2018	Jan 2020
Building Control	82 cases	20 cases
Development Management	£52,000	£2,000
Community Infrastructure Levy	£1,207,000	£230,000
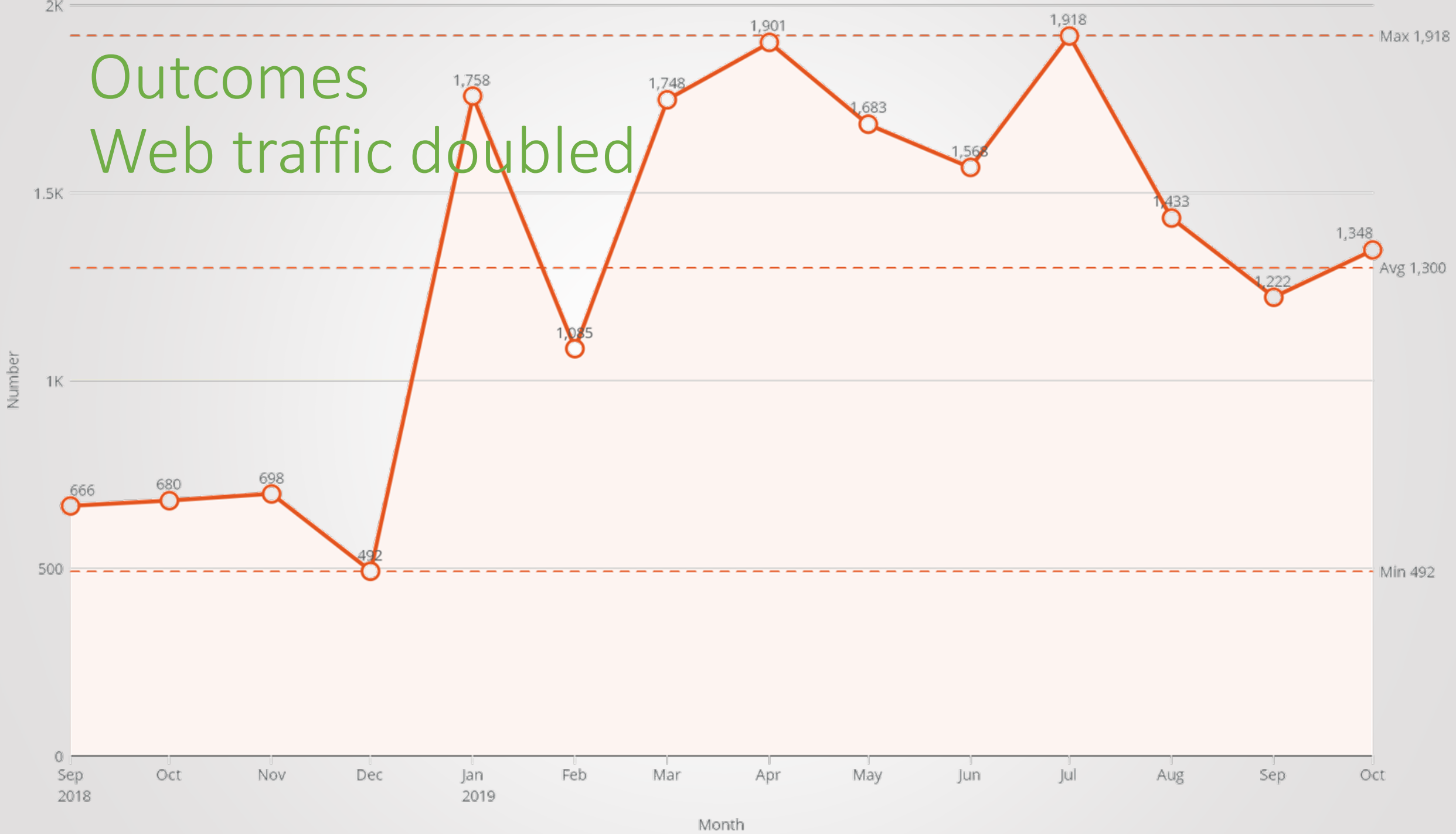
Outcomes
Validation Jan 16 – Jan 20

Outcomes Validation

- Registration reduced average processing to just a couple of days
- Changes to the team structure meant that approach couldn't be sustained
- 'One reason' introduced, but without registration clients were not incentivised to buy validation advice and it was cancelled
- New validation list largely adopted by Unitary and a London authority

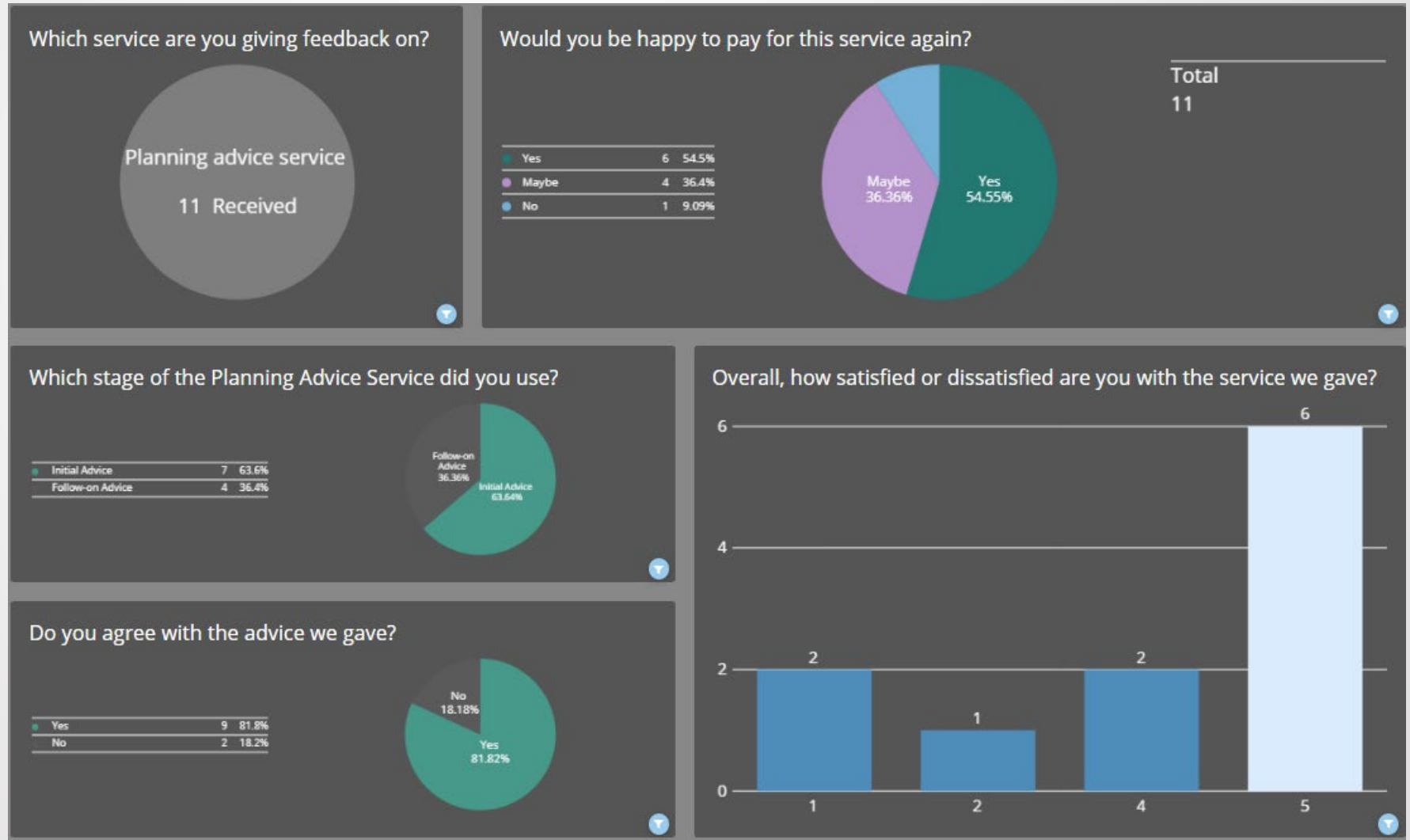# Outcomes
Client satisfaction – statutory services

Feedback response rates are low <2%, which is common.
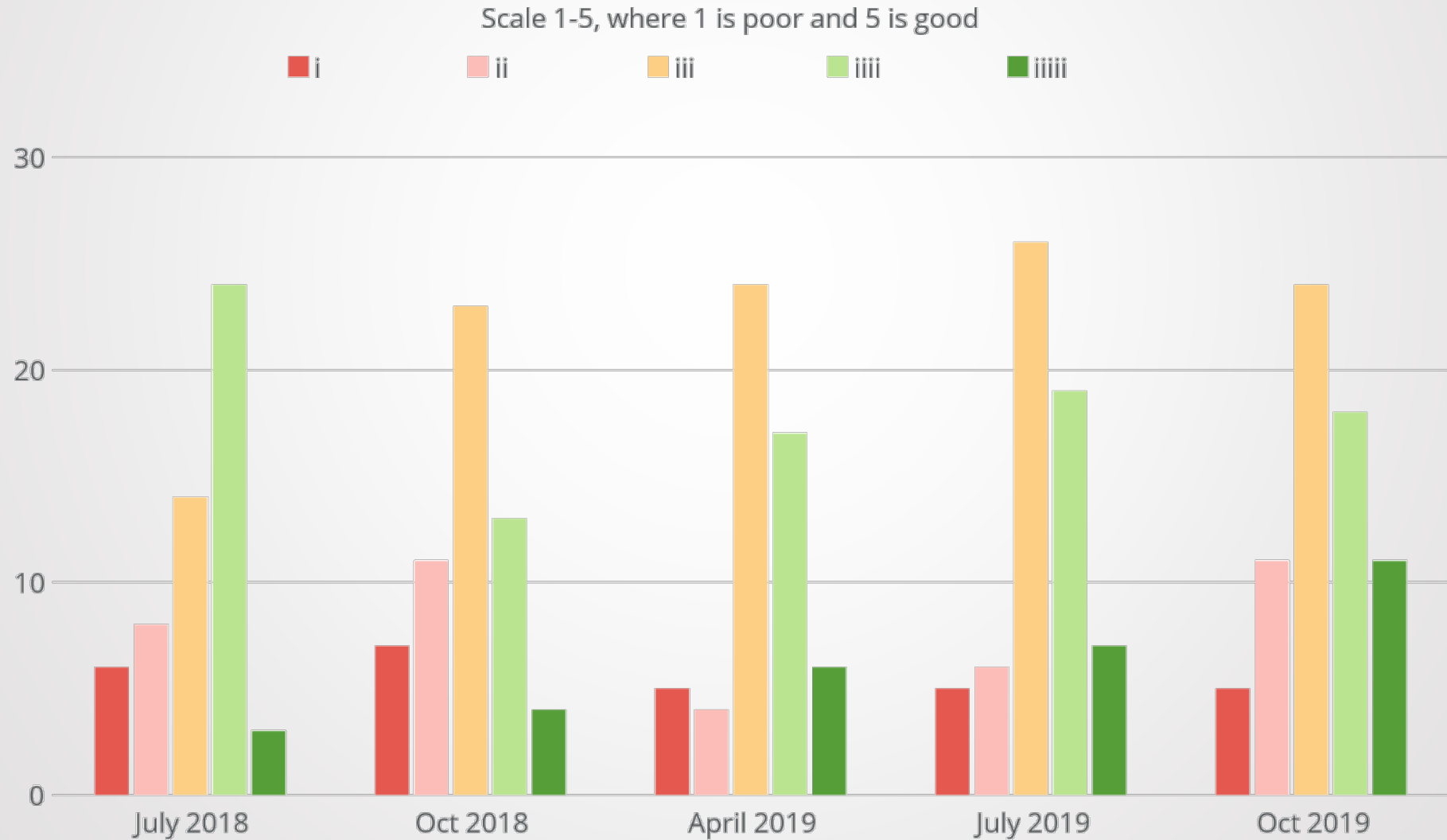
We intend to improve this system post unitary.
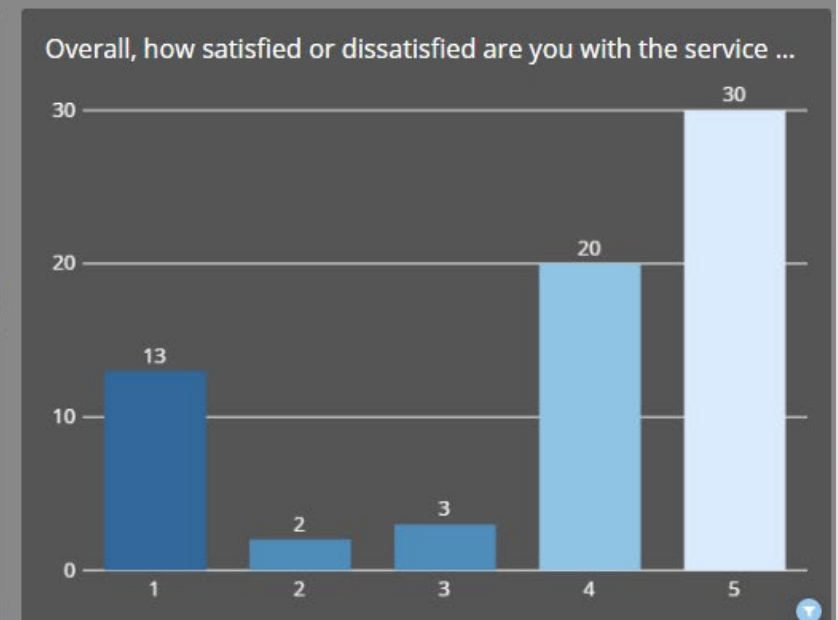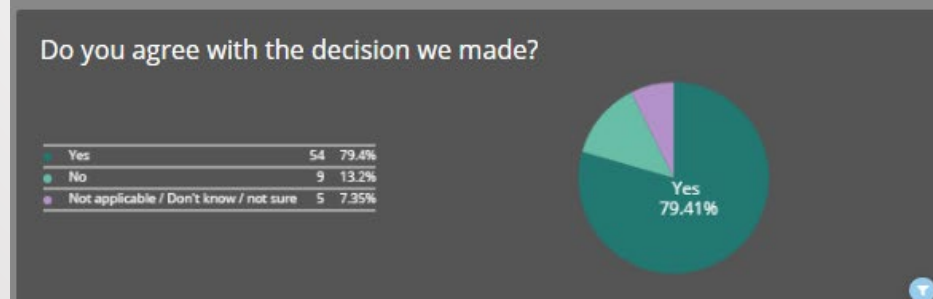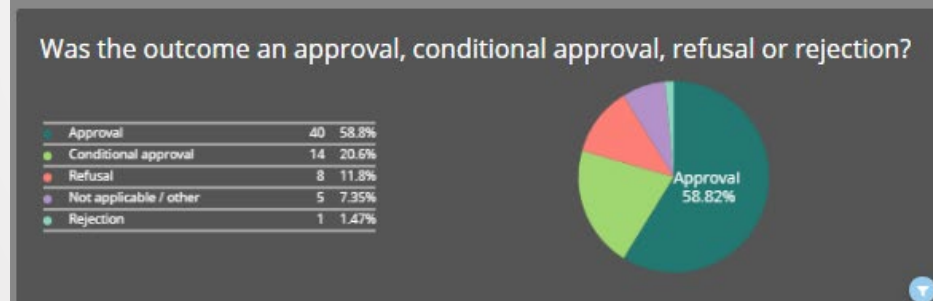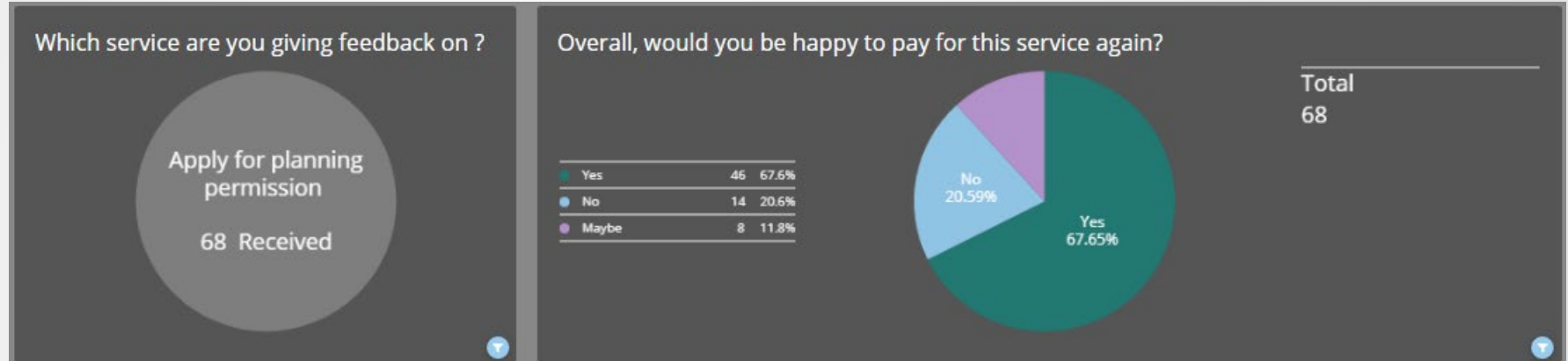
Outcomes
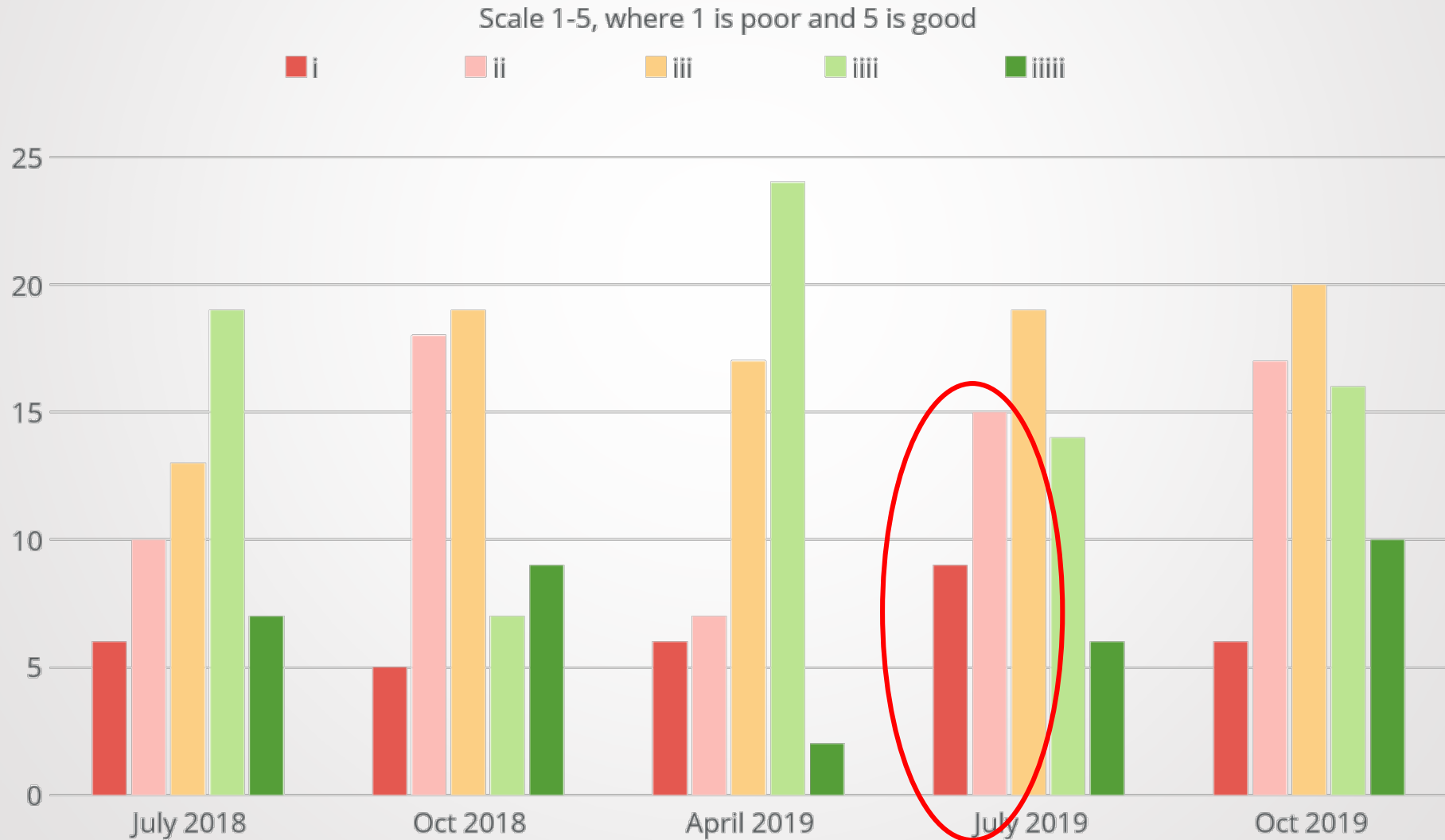## Client satisfaction – discretionary services

Outcomes
Staff – Do you feel able to manage your workload?

- Programme delivery and staff wellbeing were carefully balanced

- Mental health was a key corporate issue

- Staff responded well to both the change programme and unitary work, although the demands on them were clear

- Strong belief that pushing staff any harder would have been counter-productive and resulted in increased sickness
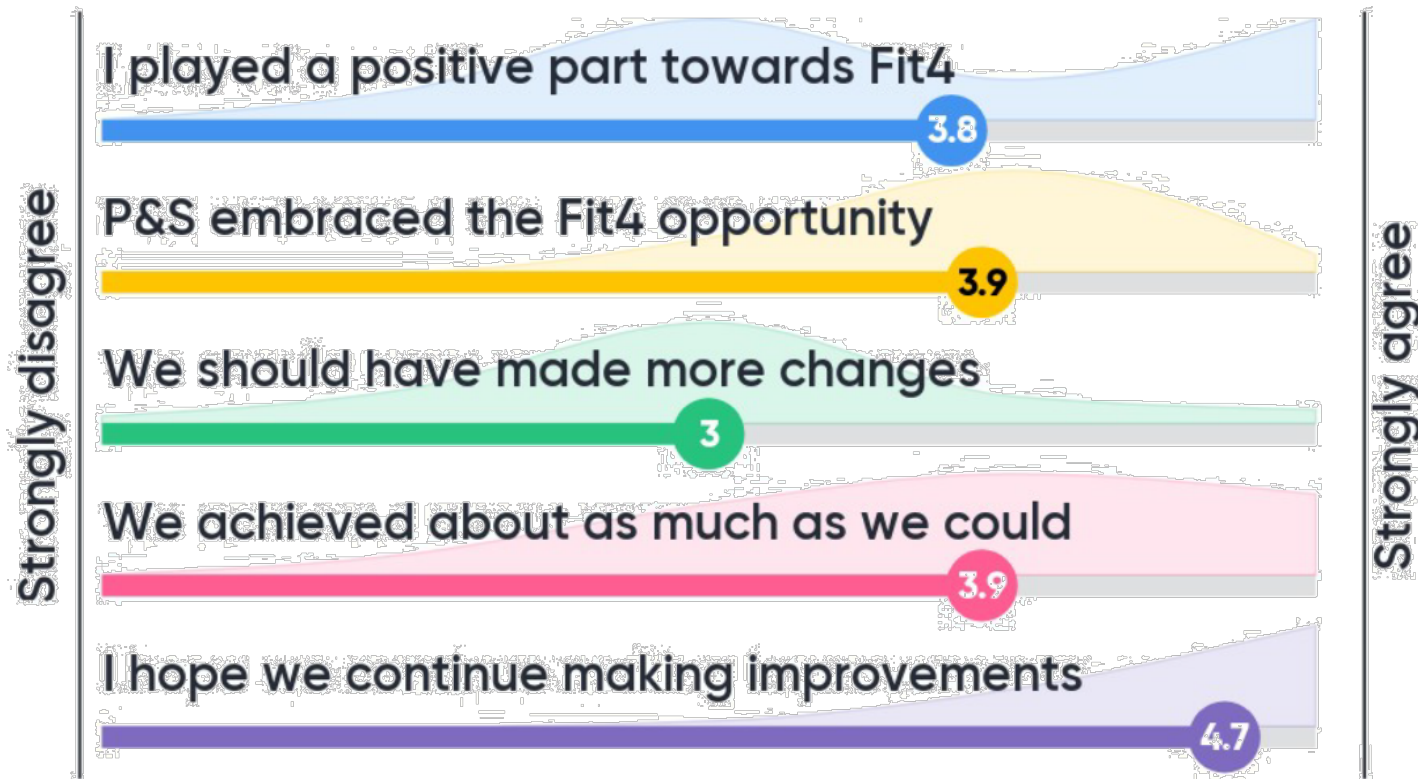
Outcomes
Final staff meeting Nov 2019

Outcomes
Final staff meeting Nov 2019

Do you agree with the following statements?

Mentimeter

Strongly disagree — Strongly agree

- I played a positive part towards Fit4 — 3.8
- P&S embraced the Fit4 opportunity — 3.9
- We should have made more changes — 3
- We achieved about as much as we could — 3.9
- I hope we continue making improvements — 4.7

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Outcomes
Business as usual achievements 18/19

- Local plan successfully adopted August 2019; the first of three plans which cover the strategic housing market area. Prepared with joint evidence through the duty to cooperate

- Housing completions above target

2016/17	2017/18	New Local Plan target
788	551	546

- Development Briefs adopted for 1,500-2,000 houses on 4 'reserve sites' – sites reserved for housing for many decades, released for development ahead of their allocation in the local plan to address the five year housing land supply

Outcomes
Business as usual achievements 18/19

- 43 enforcement notices issued in 2018. 12th highest nationally (nearly 3 times as many as the other Buckinghamshire authorities combined)

- £20m HIF funding (marginal viability) awarded for two road infrastructure projects, unlocking 3,500 homes

- Completed a £15m programme of road improvements, in partnership with Buckinghamshire County Council; the first phase of the town centre Masterplan

Benchmarking Planning Advisory Service

PAS (July 2019) compared Wycombe with a cohort of anonymised LPAs of the same type (district) and similar size (by workload) in **2017** and **2018**.

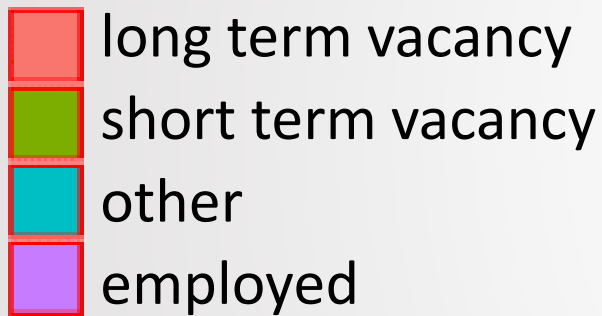2019 will show an increase in discretionary income.
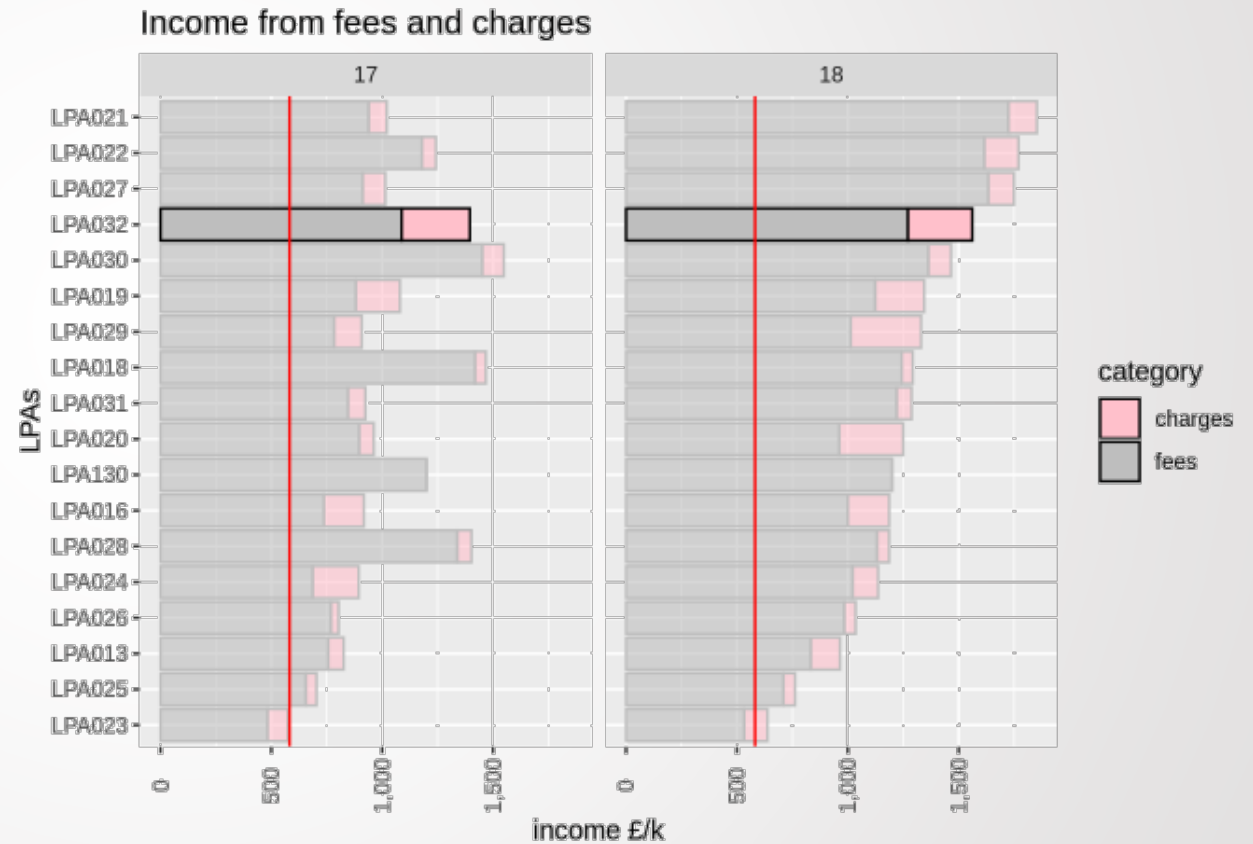
Income from fees and charges

Source: PAS 2019 Survey

Benchmarking
Planning Advisory Service

Income from fees and charges
Broken out into category

Source: PAS 2019 Survey

Benchmarking
Planning Advisory Service

- Note no vacancies
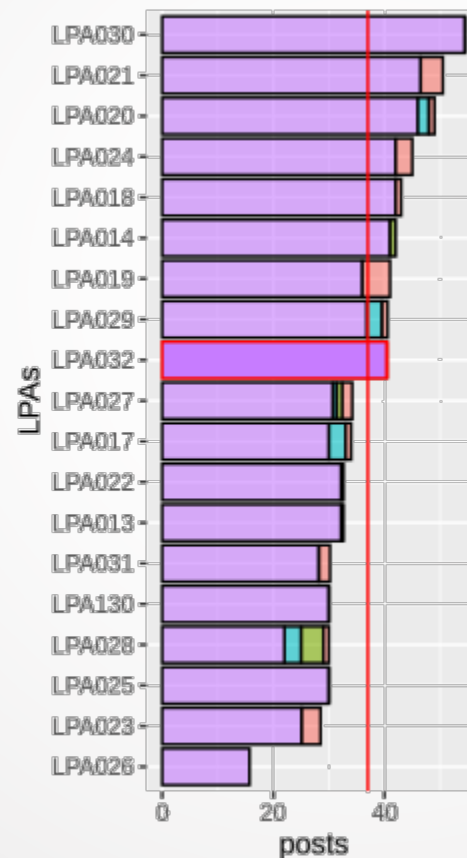
long term vacancy

short term vacancy
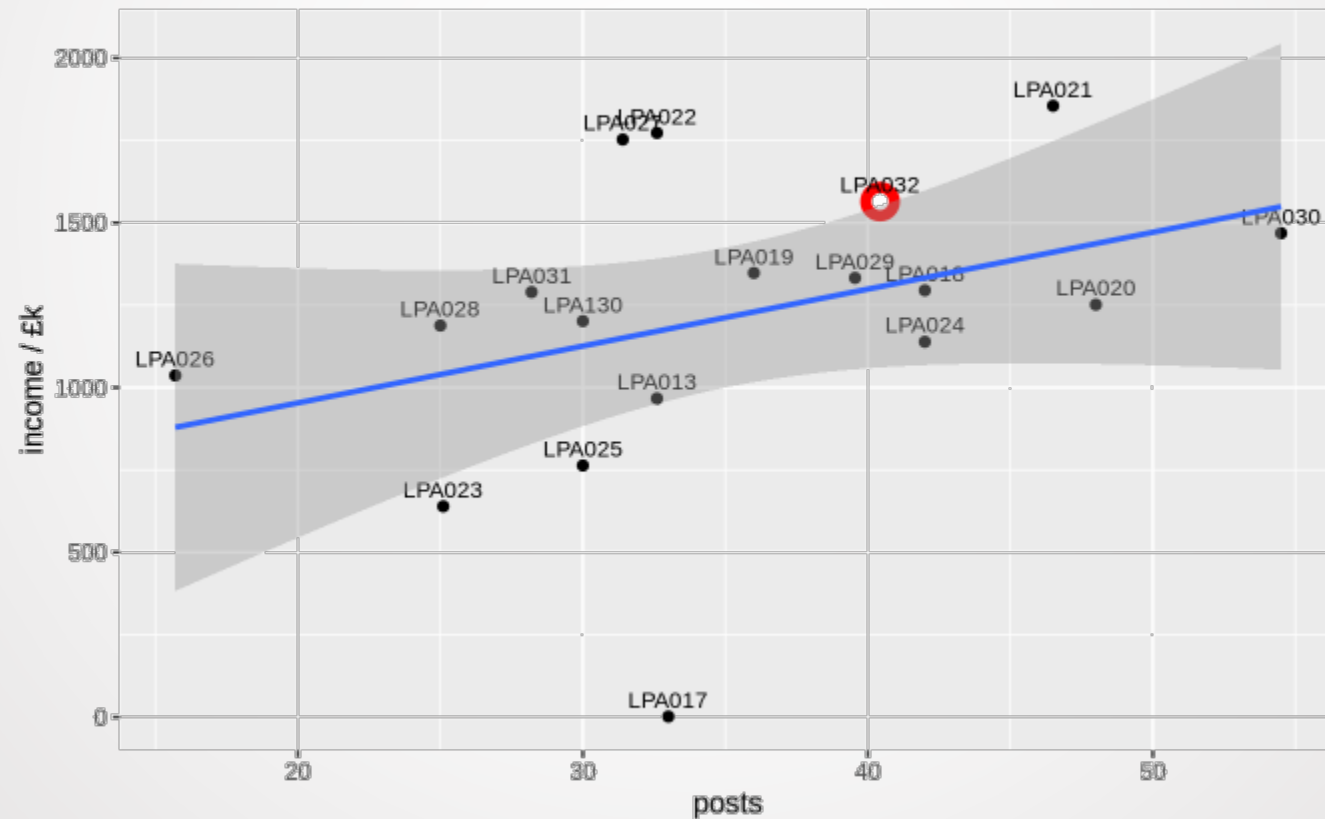
other

employed
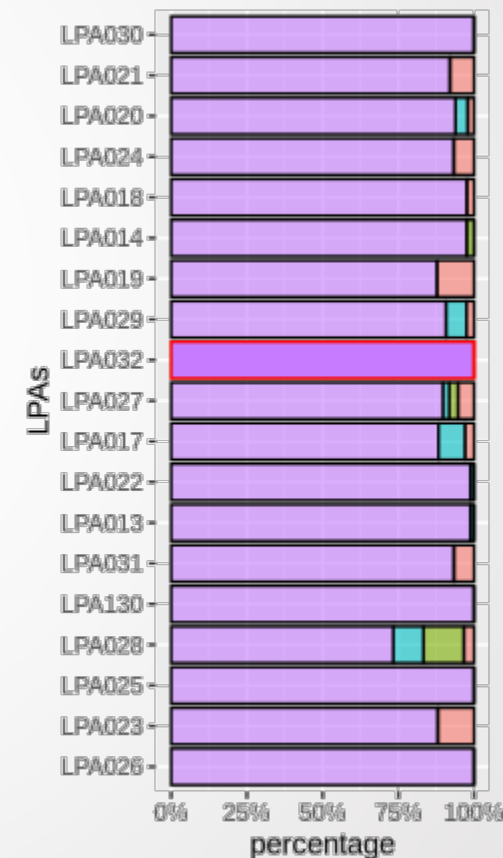
Benchmarking
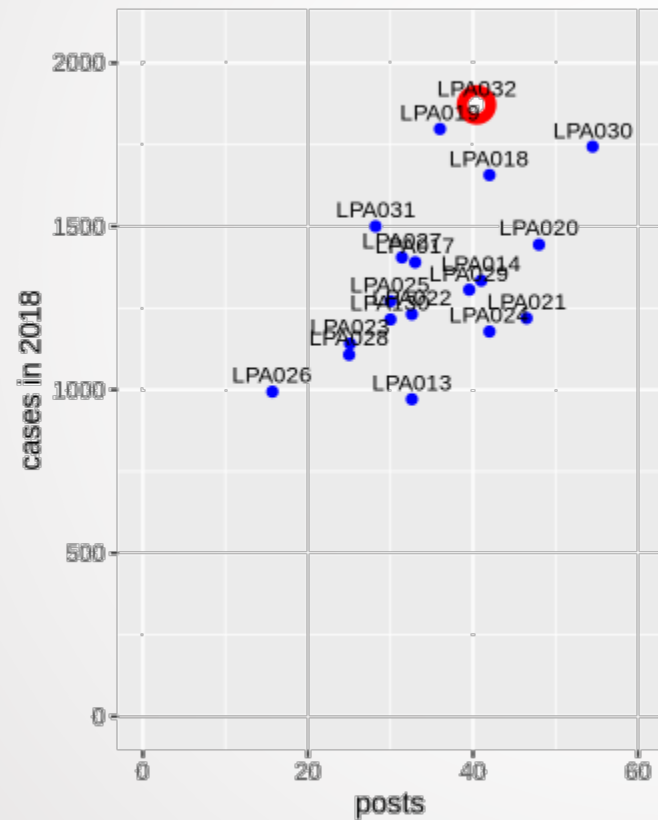# Planning Advisory Service

[1] �Average income per post is �34568�

Compare total income (fees + charges) 2018 to posts
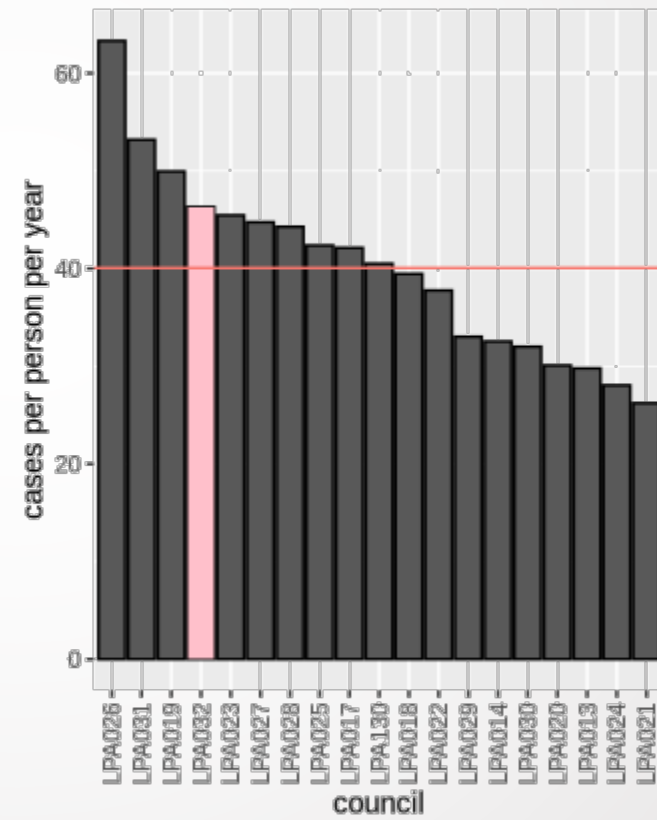You are the red dot

Source: 2019 Survey

Benchmarking
Planning Advisory Service

Lessons learned

- Staff were critical to success. The inclusive approach helped build support. Teams self selected and were supported according to need
- Regular, in-depth discussions with clients were key to success in developing and refining services
- Clarity on the priority of financial and non-financial targets is essential. One target should not be at the total expense of another
- New senior staff benefit from full briefings on programmes in progress, especially on how targets are weighted
- Member support before and during the programme is important in speeding delivery and managing other stakeholders

Lessons learned

- Online, real-time, self-serve, available to all reporting had a huge impact on almost every aspect of Fit4, especially culture change.
- Time-recording was a lot of extra work. Staff were only happy to do this where the data was used to make a difference
- Progress through the change curve varied greatly among staff. Having a broad suite of 'tools' allowed plenty of support for staff as they made a sometimes difficult transition
- Explaining 'why' was hugely advantageous in all training courses. It motivated staff, allowed them to make suggestions for improvement and helped them manage departures from process
- Weekly sessions were really useful, embedding culture change and new practices

Lessons learned

- Being unable to measure the true value a service delivers is a huge hinderance to its effective management

- Targets should only be based on evidence and follow SMART guidelines

- Targets are important guides, but they should be pragmatically reviewed following high impact, unforeseen events; especially when striving to hit a short term target has damaging longer term implications

- Staff mental health and wellbeing should be critical considerations when setting and reviewing financial targets

Lessons learned

- Improved services, notably statutory, had markedly reduced costs. They could not be cashed as they were largely consumed by:
  - a significant reduction in unpaid overtime
  - costs of backfilling staff during unprecedented staff issues
  - training and adopting new work methods
  - unitary commitments
- Continuous improvement is demanding. It must be a regular feature of the working week or it will fall away to business as usual pressures.
- Mental health and service delivery should be critical considerations when setting and reviewing financial targets.

Lessons learned

- Agile Kanban was a key factor in the programme's success. Using dedicated teams of staff for short periods was hugely beneficial

- Agile Scrum failed because teams were split between Fit4 and business as usual

- Senior staff were unfamiliar with agile. Training would have improved acceptance of agile and its reporting style

- As reliance on reporting increased, so did the risks around data accuracy and system maintenance

Recommendations

Measure non-market value

- The inability to measure the full impact of planning is an industry failure. It is impossible to know the true impact of the planning system without it

Continue time recording

- Time recording is hugely valuable for business improvement

Set staff morale as a key objective

- Having data that demonstrates good morale retains and attracts talented permanent staff improving wellbeing, service delivery and planning value

Recommendations

Promote Development Management services

- Promoting discretionary services would increase sales. The margins are now high enough to cover any required additional resource

- All fee paying statutory services operate at a surplus. Encouraging development would increase statutory income, but should be balanced against the higher margin discretionary services

- Two regeneration campaigns are proposed: "Don't move, improve" and "Open for Business" targeting home-owners and larger-scale developers respectively

Recommendations

Continue to digitise

- The digitisation of services has been key to efficiencies, client and staff satisfaction. Full digitisation would transform the entire planning system from policy to monitoring, aiding regeneration

Agile

- Agile has shown its value in the right circumstances. During the unsettled merger phase, it should be considered before other methodologies
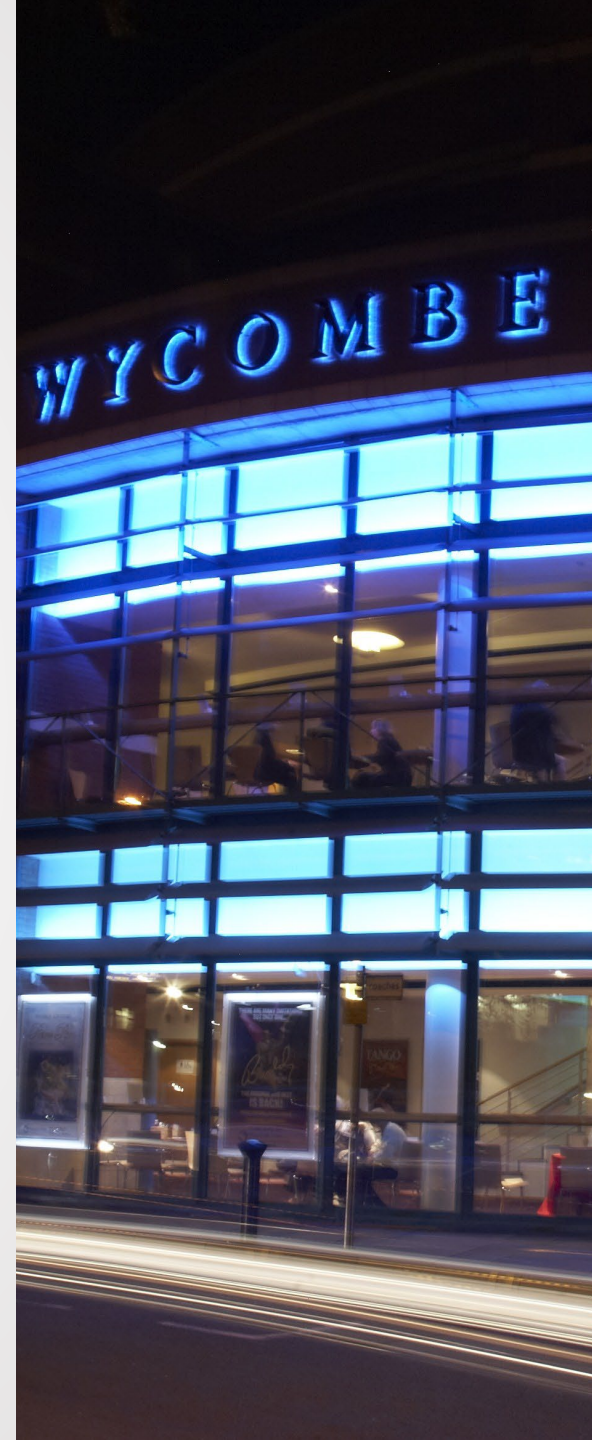
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peter@protean6.com