

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 389

Local Authority Omnibus Survey Wave 12

Claire Durrant, Elaine Winter and Darren Yaxley

A report of research carried out by GfK NOP on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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First Published 2006.

ISBN 1 84712 096 2

ISBN13 978 1 84712 096 0

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

Printed by Corporate Document Services.

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Acknowledgements

This report is based on research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

GfK NOP would like to thank Andy Brittan and Mike Tibble and their colleagues at the DWP for the advice and support given during the research and in the drafting of this report. We would also like to thank all the local authority officers who spared the time to take part in the survey.

The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department or any other Government Department.

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GfK NOP

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Glossary

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate	The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI), launched in 1997, aims to strengthen benefits administration by inspection and support.
Council Tax Benefit	This is the income-related benefit available to help cover the Council Tax for those on low incomes. It is available to both people renting and owner-occupiers.
Customer Management System	Jobcentre Plus uses the scripted questions on the Customer Management System (CMS) to gather the necessary benefit claim information from the customer over the telephone. This allows working age customers to experience, as far as possible, a single claims process when claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB alongside Income Support (IS), Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB). Rollout of the CMS commenced in 2003 and will achieve national coverage in early 2007. CMS Release 3 was implemented in October 2005 and removed some of the clerical processes that were causing problems with Release 2.
Disability Discrimination Act	The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requires employers, service-providers and others to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people are not excluded. Since 1 October 1999, providers of services to the public have been required to make reasonable adjustments to the way that they deliver their services, if it would otherwise be impossible or

unreasonably difficult for disabled people to access the service. They may have to adjust a practice, policy or procedure (like allowing an assistance dog user to bring their dog on to premises where animals are normally banned), or provide an auxiliary aid (like providing information in an accessible format). If a physical feature of the service provider's creates a barrier to disabled people accessing the service, the service provider has to take reasonable steps to provide the service in a reasonable alternative way. Since 1 October 2004, service providers have had to take reasonable steps to remove, alter, or provide a reasonable means of avoiding the feature. From December 2006, the DDA will cover public authorities (such as local authorities) when they are exercising 'public functions' such as making decisions on housing benefit. It will also introduce the Disability Equality Duty which will place a duty on the public sector to have 'due regard' to the need to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. This means that all public authorities will need to consider the needs of disabled people as they carry out their business. Major authorities, including central and local Government, police forces, National Health Service (NHS) trusts, schools, colleges and universities must publish a Disability Equality Scheme that sets out how they will implement the Disability Equality Duty.

Discretionary Housing Payment Introduced on 2 July 2001 to enable a local authority to provide claimants with additional financial assistance towards their rent or council tax.

Equality Standard for Local Government The Equality Standard is a voluntary scheme administered by the Improvement and Development Agency for local Government (IDeA), which gives local authorities a framework for building equality into their activities.

Housing Benefit This is the income-related benefit paid to tenants or their landlords to help meet their rent.

**Income Support/
Job Seekers Allowance**

IS is a means-tested benefit paid to people on low income who are not in employment or unemployed (including lone parents and pensioners). JSA is the main benefit for unemployed people. It is partly contribution-based and partly-income based.

Jobcentre Plus

From April 2002, the Benefits Agency and Employment Service were replaced by two new businesses, the Jobcentre Plus and The Pensions Service. These businesses offer improved services, better tailored to meet the needs of different customers.

LA Input Documents

Once all the necessary claim information and supporting evidence has been obtained and recorded onto the CMS the relevant HB/CTB details are sent to the Local Authority (LA) on a paper LA Input Document. When this is received by the LA they will consider whether they need to contact the customer for any further information or evidence before making a decision on the claim and any payment.

Local Housing Allowance

In October 2002, as part of the HB reform package, the Secretary of State made an announcement about the proposed introduction of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for private sector tenants. It will represent an average rent for an area and will be normally paid directly to the tenant rather than the landlord. LHA was initially known as Standard Local Housing Allowance (SLHA).

Local Reference Rent

Used by Rent Officers for private sector HB claims, to compare the rent being charged with the average rent for similar properties in the area

**Management Information
System**

Data is collected by DWP from LAs to provide information on caseloads, processing times, number of claims, staffing complements etc. The data is important to the department to enable effective evaluation of policies and performance monitoring.

New claims	Claims for benefit from people who do not have a current live claim for that benefit.
New Tax Credits	New Tax Credits (NTC) extended the scope of the earlier Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) by introducing two new credits: Working Tax Credit (WTC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). WTC is payable to people in paid work below a certain income and CTC is paid to families responsible for one or more children, again below a certain income level.
Pension Credit	From October 2003, Pension Credit replaces the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) for people aged 60 and over. For these pensioners, Pension Credit provides a contribution towards a guaranteed income. For the first time, it also rewards people aged 65 and over who have modest savings.
Performance Development Team	Working in partnership with authorities BFI's Performance Development Team (PDT) offers free, expert advice and guidance on how to increase administrative efficiency and achieve sustainable improvements in benefit delivery performance.
Remote Access Terminal	DWP and its agencies allows LAs viewing access to specified departmental benefit data and/or access to electronic systems to receive benefit information. This access is given via a Remote Access Terminal (RAT) computer link to the Departmental mainframe systems operated by LA staff.
Royal Mail Do not Redirect	This is a scheme whereby suitably marked benefit-related envelopes issued by the LA will not be re-directed by the Royal Mail service, but will be sent back to the LA for further investigation. LAs have the discretion whether to use the service.
RSL	Registered Social Landlord (RSL), i.e. housing associations that are registered with the Housing Corporation.

SAFE	The Security Against Fraud and Error (SAFE) incentive scheme makes additional subsidy payments to LAs for identifying and acting on fraud and error in their HB caseload. This was introduced across Great Britain in April 2002. Further changes were introduced in April 2004.
Section 19	Part of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act, requiring LAs to verify identity. Stipulates that claimants must produce either a National Insurance (NI) number or other evidence enabling their NI number to be traced or for one to be allocated for the first time.
Single Room Rent	The Single Room Rent (SRR) restricts the amount of rent which can be used to determine HB claims from single people under 25 who live in deregulated private sector tenancies and is based on the average cost of a room with shared facilities in the locality.
Stats 116	This collects information on a one per cent sample of HB/CTB claimants, who are also in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit) in May of each year.
Stats 121	This collects information on quarterly caseload stock counts, for HB/CTB claimants, who are also in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit).
Stats 122	This collects information on quarterly caseload stock counts, for HB/CTB claimants, who are not in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit).
Stats 123	This collects information on a one per cent sample of HB/CTB claimants, who are not in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit) in May of each year.
Stats 124	This collects information on a quarterly basis on areas such as administration, Claims, Overpayment, Fraud and Staffing.
Stats 124A	This collects information on an annual basis on areas such as Fraud, Claims, Overpayments and Best Value Performance Indicators.

Verification Framework

Details minimum standards for collecting acceptable evidence to reduce fraud. Includes guidance on subsequent review and visits. The scheme is not mandatory.

Weekly Incorrect Benefit

Weekly Incorrect Benefit (WIB) is an essential component of the SAFE scheme introduced in April 2001 and modified in April 2002 and April 2004. SAFE offers all LAs the opportunity to obtain additional subsidy payments by proactively managing their caseload. Any overpayments detected as a result of LA action or change of circumstances reported to the LA within 28 days of the commencement of review activity or fraud investigation that leads to a reduction in benefit can earn a WIB payment.

Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of Wave 12 of the Local Authority Omnibus Survey, conducted between January and March 2006 on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). All Local Authorities (LAs) are asked to participate in the survey and responses were received from 278 managers, representing a response rate of 68 per cent.

Wave 12 of the Omnibus Survey covers questions on the following issues: Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System (CMS), Supported Housing, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), use of intelligence, disability, Royal Mail Do not Redirect (RMDNR).

Key findings

Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System

Seven in ten of the participating authorities (70 per cent) currently receive LA Input Documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS. Most of these (64 per cent) started receiving them in this way between 1 January and 31 October 2005.

Overall, authorities receive an average of 33 LA Input Documents generated by CMS each week. Not surprisingly this varied according to LA type, with English Unitary authorities receiving the most (83) and English districts receiving the least (18). Authorities said that on average 18 per cent of all new claims are received through CMS.

The majority of authorities (82 per cent) that currently receive any input documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS, had contact with Jobcentre Plus other than about individual Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) claims, e.g, liaison meetings which aim to raise generic CMS related issues and resolve problems. On the other hand, 15 per cent did not have any such contact.

The average time taken from a customer's first contact until the Input Documents are received by the authority through CMS was 3.6 weeks.

Overall, authorities said that on average 63 per cent of LA Input Documents are complete in terms of the information that should be provided. Any respondents who said that the information was anything less than 100 per cent complete, were asked what type of information is usually missing. Just over half (51 per cent) said that rent details are usually missing, while around a third mentioned landlord details and non-dependent details (36 per cent and 30 per cent respectively). Fewer cited capital details (27 per cent), partner details (21 per cent), income details (17 per cent), personal and dependent details (11 per cent) and current work (six per cent).

In terms of comparing the completeness of information on CMS Release 3 with previous releases, three in five (60 per cent) said that they had not noticed any difference. On the other hand, 26 per cent felt that it had improved (five per cent a lot and 21 per cent a little), while just 6 per cent thought it had got worse (one per cent a lot and five per cent a little).

Overall, authorities said that an average of 65 per cent of LA Input documents were accurate.

Comparing the accuracy of the information generated by CMS Release 3 with earlier releases, 57 per cent said that they had not noticed any difference. On the other hand more than a quarter (28 per cent) said that the accuracy had improved (seven per cent a lot and 21 per cent a little), while a tenth said that it had got worse (five per cent a lot, five per cent a little).

Opinion was divided on the impact that CMS 3 has had on their authority's current performance in terms of the clearance of HB/CTB claims. The largest proportion (44 per cent) said that it had made no difference to their authority's performance, while more than a quarter (26 per cent) said that it had made their performance a little worse and 12 per cent thought that it had made it a lot worse. On the other hand, 11 per cent thought that it had improved their authority's performance a little. No authorities said that CMS3 had improved their performance a lot.

Respondents were asked what problems, if any, their authority has when receiving claims through CMS. Fifteen per cent of authorities said that they do not have any problems with CMS. However, 18 per cent said that verifying claimants' details was the main problem, followed by lack of/missing information (14 per cent), delays in receiving documents (13 per cent), lack of/incomplete documentation (10 per cent), delays in processing primary benefits/claims (eight per cent) and problems with system/reverting to clerical/paper claims (seven per cent).

In terms of resolving any of the problems that they have with CMS, over half of the authorities that said they had problems when receiving claims through CMS, said they meet regularly with Jobcentre Plus to discuss the problems and/or resolutions (57 per cent) and contact Jobcentre Plus on individual claims where errors have been identified (55 per cent). A third (33 per cent) said that they gather Management

Information to feedback to Jobcentre Plus, while a fifth (20 per cent) provide support to Jobcentre Plus in the form of training and/or resources and 15 per cent escalate any issues to the Housing Benefit Strategy Division.

In the last year, 60 per cent of authorities said that they have not had to request any original customer statements from Jobcentre Plus. Among the 19 authorities that had requested an original customer statement in the last year:

- two said that they always receive them
- five mostly receive them
- eight sometimes receive them, and
- two never receive them.

Supported housing

Although around one in five authorities (21 per cent) said that they did not know if the amounts of housing benefit claimed for supported housing in their area had increased, decreased or stayed about the same, around half said that it had increased (17 per cent a lot and 34 per cent a little). In addition, around a quarter (24 per cent) thought that it had stayed about the same and four per cent said it had decreased (one per cent a lot and three per cent a little).

Those respondents who said that the amounts of housing benefit claimed for supported housing had increased in their area were asked what they thought the reasons were for this change in costs. A quarter (25 per cent) of authorities said that the increase was due to the usual increases in rent/costs, reduced funding from supporting people/restrictions in other payments (24 per cent) and the true costs being reassessed/costs moved over/support to rent (24 per cent). In addition, 13 per cent of authorities said that additional accommodation had opened up/new schemes started. Fewer than one in ten said that consultants were getting involved/helping landlords to raise charges (nine per cent), landlords were taking advantage of housing benefit Regulation 11/authorities find it very hard to limit housing benefit claims (eight per cent) and there has been a move from residential to supported housing schemes with higher eligible support costs (four per cent). It is also worth noting that 13 per cent of authorities said that they did not know what the reason was for the increase in costs.

Over half of authorities (56 per cent) that had noted a change in the amounts of housing benefit for supported housing said that they often see cases where they cannot restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported accommodation, because it was provided by a not-for-profit organisation, charity or housing association where support is provided by, or on behalf of, the landlord. Seventeen per cent said that they see cases like this very often and 39 per cent said fairly often. On the other hand, over a fifth (22 per cent) said that they do not see them very often and one in eight (12 per cent) said not at all often. Five per cent have never seen cases of this nature.

Respondents who have seen cases where they cannot restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported housing were asked how often, if at all, their authority sees a range of different eligible rents being met above the average rent for that type of accommodation. Nearly half of authorities (48 per cent) had never seen eligible rent of £200 or more per week being met above the average rent for this type of accommodation. In addition, 41 per cent had never seen rent of £150-£199 per week being met, a third (33 per cent) had never seen rent of £125-£149 per week being met, a quarter (25 per cent) had never seen rent of £100-£124 per week being met, 17 per cent had never seen rent of £75-£99 being met.

Conversely, the rents that they are most likely to have seen being met are under £50 (12 per cent very often, 28 per cent fairly often) and £50-£74 (very often six per cent, fairly often 30 per cent). In addition, around a quarter of authorities had often seen rent of £75-£99 (four per cent very often and 22 per cent fairly often) and £100-£124 (four per cent very often and 20 per cent fairly often) being met.

Discretionary Housing Payments

Views of the guidance on DHPs, which was sent to LAs in March 2001, was generally positive. Over seven in ten described it as useful – ten per cent very useful and 62 per cent fairly useful. On the other hand, 16 per cent of respondents said the guidance was not very useful and three per cent said it was not at all useful.

In terms of improving the guidance, bearing in mind the nature of DHPs and the fact that the guidance cannot be too prescriptive, a clear majority of authorities would like to see more examples of Good Practice (78 per cent), while just over half (52 per cent) would like more information on the types of cases that can be helped. Fewer authorities said that they would like more details (17 per cent) and a better layout (six per cent).

Three in five authorities (61 per cent) supplement the DWP guidance with a separate policy on the types of circumstances in which DHPs should be awarded. Over a quarter of authorities (28 per cent) did not have a policy and one in ten (ten per cent) did not have one at the time of the interview but were working on it.

When respondents were asked if they give particular consideration to certain groups or circumstances, one in four (25 per cent) said 'no, none' and a further 15 per cent did not know. The two groups most likely to be favoured were people at risk of homelessness (55 per cent) and people with unforeseen short-term need (51 per cent). In addition, around two in five (43 per cent) mentioned disabled people, while around a third cited young people (36 per cent) and pensioners (32 per cent).

By far the most common type of shortfall covered by DHPs is Local Reference Rent, which was mentioned as the first most common by 69 per cent of authorities. In addition, one in ten mentioned Single Room Rent and size criteria (ten per cent and ten per cent respectively). Just three per cent cited Income Tapers (HB/CTB) and three per cent another type of Rent Restriction.

Authorities make a DHP award for four main reasons: the risk of homelessness/eviction (83 per cent), extent of rent restrictions (82 per cent), only a short-term need (79 per cent) and not enough other means of support (78 per cent). Just over three-quarters (76 per cent) also said that they make a DHP award for vulnerable groups (eg. pensioners), while half (50 per cent) cited unforeseen circumstances (eg. non-dependent moving in).

Looking now at the client groups that DHPs benefit most, lone parents were mentioned most often (41 per cent). A further one in five (21 per cent) said that the long-term sick/disabled benefit most, while around one in ten cited young people under 25/SRR cases (ten per cent) and couples with children (nine per cent). In addition, five per cent cited pensioners and unemployed people without children, three per cent mentioned the short-term sick/disabled and one per cent said DHPs are used to prevent homelessness.

More than two in five (43 per cent) said that they do not have any problems with the administration of DHPs. However, fairly small minorities mentioned that assessment takes too long (18 per cent), process of submitting estimates/claiming the contribution is too complex/time consuming (14 per cent), guidance inadequate (12 per cent), not enough staff (11 per cent).

The vast majority of authorities accept a written claim form (91 per cent), while three in five (62 per cent) accept a claim in writing, for example, a letter. Fewer said that their authority accepts a claim in person (37 per cent), electronically, for example, on a web-site or email (28 per cent) or by telephone (nine per cent). Nine in ten authorities (91 per cent) do not make people claiming DHP attend in person for an interview.

The largest majority of authorities make claimants aware of DHPs if they come to the benefits office to discuss a claim (84 per cent). In addition, more than three in five said that their authority has leaflets/posters (65 per cent), informs people through liaison and training with outside/internal bodies who may give advice to claimants (63 per cent) and gives personal advice to claimants as part of a general welfare rights service (60 per cent). Slightly fewer (53 per cent) said that there is notation on the HB/CTB decision notice/letter and on the HB/CTB claim form (35 per cent).

Over half of authorities (58 per cent) said that its DHP expenditure had increased over the past three years. Just under three in ten (29 per cent) thought it had stayed the same and one in ten (10 per cent) said it had decreased. Over half (55 per cent) thought that this increase was due to changes in the local rental market, while slightly fewer (50 per cent) said that the increase has been because staff are becoming more familiar with the system. Just under one in four (24 per cent) felt that the increase was due to more publicity for the scheme/take-up campaign, while 16 per cent thought that the increase was due to changes in the awards policy and one in eight (12 per cent) cited change in the amount of contribution.

Use of intelligence services

The National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) and the Operational Intelligence Unit (OIU) were the two organisations that had been used most frequently by LAs with approximately four in five authorities using them (83 per cent and 77 per cent respectively). One in five or so (19 per cent) had used the National Intelligence Unit (NIU) and fewer had made use of the intelligence services provided by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and 'other' intelligence services (12 per cent and four per cent respectively).

Observations of the average numbers of years that local authorities had been using these services reveal that the majority of authorities have been engaged in this kind of activity for between two and five years or so. For instance the mean score for the number of years that authorities had been using NAFN was 4.7, for OIU 3.00, NCIS 2.9, and NIU 2.7.

The LAs that use NAFN, NCIS and 'other' intelligence services rated these organisations more highly than those authorities that use OIU and NIU. For instance, two thirds (66 per cent) of NAFN users said that they had found them very effective in terms of improving the authority's investigation service compared to just one in four (23 per cent) of NIU users.

Those authorities that use intelligence services were asked to state how effective they thought they were in terms of reducing fraud and error. Those that currently use NAFN rated them the highest, with the majority of their users saying they found them to be either very (44 per cent) or fairly (40 per cent) effective in terms of reducing fraud and error. 'Other' intelligence services and NCIS were rated strongly by their users, though not as highly as NAFN, whilst OIU and NIU were not rated as highly.

Not surprisingly, given the effectiveness ratings for different aspects of the service, the intelligence service rated the highest by its users in terms of overall satisfaction was NAFN (96 per cent satisfied). 'Other' intelligence services were also rated highly with more than three-quarters (78 per cent) saying they were satisfied. The remaining three intelligence services were rated at a lower level but the majority of users were satisfied rather than dissatisfied overall.

Focusing now on NAFN, awareness of the range of different services provided by them was especially high for Credit Referencing Data Service (92 per cent), Social Security Fraud Act (SSFA) 2001 Authorised officer service (90 per cent), Company data service (86 per cent) and Land registry on-line service (85 per cent). The General Registry Service also had a high level of awareness amongst NAFN users with four in five (79 per cent) aware.

Awareness levels were lower, but still in the majority for the circulation service (67 per cent), sanctions database (63 per cent) and report of fraud service (55 per cent). Awareness was significantly lower however for the analysts service with less than two in five (37 per cent) of NAFN users claiming to have heard of this service.

The Credit Referencing Data Service appears to be used the most frequently by NAFN members with an average use of 91 days per year. The SSFA 2001 Authorised Officer service and Land Registry on-line service were also used relatively frequently (46 days and 34 days per annum averages respectively). The services that were used the least frequently were the Analysts Service (four days per annum average use) and the report of fraud service (seven days per annum average).

A total of forty-eight LAs were recorded as not currently being members of NAFN. These authorities were asked why they are not currently members of NAFN. The main reasons given by this group appear to centre around the fact that non-NAFN users simply get this kind of service from a different source. Around three in ten (29 per cent) use other intelligence providers and 27 per cent use their own intelligence. Cost implications also play a part here; a quarter (23 per cent) said that NAFN were too expensive and one on five (19 per cent) said that they were not value for money.

Disability

Approximately three quarters (77 per cent) of the authorities interviewed said that they ask if a claimant is disabled at some point in the claim process. Over half (55 per cent) of authorities ask whether disabled people need any adjustments to the processing and administration of their HB/CTB claim, for example, by providing alternative ways of filling the form in.

The vast majority of authorities do not monitor for the satisfaction levels of disabled claimants. Just less than half (46 per cent) of the authorities we interviewed said that they didn't know because their authority doesn't monitor for this and a further 37 per cent said don't know. One in seven (15 per cent) of LAs said that they thought disabled people were as satisfied as non-disabled people while one per cent thought that disabled people are less satisfied than non-disabled people.

When asked about the level of equality standard for local government that their LA currently achieves, the majority of approximately three in five (58 per cent) in fact, said don't know. A fifth (21 per cent) said Level 1, one in eight (12 per cent) said Level 2 and one in twelve (eight per cent) said Level 3.

The authorities that manage their own stock or operate a combine list (56 per cent) were asked about the kind of adjustments they make for disabled tenants. The changes most frequently made were to practices, policies or procedures (44 per cent) and also to provide auxiliary aids or services (e.g. letters in Braille or large print), mentioned by a similar amount (45 per cent). One in eight (12 per cent) of authorities said that they would change a term of a tenancy but nearly three in ten (28 per cent) said they did not know and one in five (18 per cent) said that they made none of these changes.

The same group of 155 LAs that manage their own stock or operate through a combined list were asked about the adjustments they currently make for prospective disabled tenants or occupiers in stock that is allocated through the combined list. The pattern of responses was similar to that for current tenants although fewer authorities overall said that they were making changes.

Three in five (61 per cent) of this group of LAs that manage their own stock did not know if their authority is required to make these adjustments by law. A third (33 per cent) thought that their authority was required to make these adjustments and six per cent said that they thought it was not required by law to do so.

Two thirds of LAs (65 per cent) that manage their own stock or operate through the combined list make physical adjustments to their housing stock to make premises more accessible. Most (77 per cent) made these physical adjustments to both rented premises and communal areas, while seven per cent did so only to rented premises and a very small proportion, just one per cent did so to the communal areas only.

Four in five authorities (82 per cent) said that they make adjustments to rented premises at tenants' request. Over half (55 per cent) said that they carried out these adjustments as part of general upgrading of authority properties.

Around seven in ten authorities (68 per cent) also make changes to communal areas at tenants' request, and slightly fewer (64 per cent) do so as part of general upgrading of authority properties. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) said that they experience difficulties making adjustments to communal areas, but slightly more (31 per cent) said that they do not. A substantial number, more than two in five (46 per cent) said that they don't know.

Lack of awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was fairly high, with more than two in five (43 per cent) saying that they were not aware and a further 17 per cent saying don't know. Two in five (40 per cent) were aware of the act and this was divided between 13 per cent who were aware and also aware of the details and timings of the new provision and 27 per cent who claimed they were aware but did not know the details and timings.

Three in ten (29 per cent) claimed to be aware that the DDA covers making changes to practices, policies and procedures. One in five (19 per cent) were aware that it covered providing auxiliary aids and services and one in ten (ten per cent) were aware that it involved changing terms of a lease. Two thirds (67 per cent) were not aware of any of these aspects of the DDA.

Only one in ten (ten per cent) knew that the provisions of the DDA do not require the removal or alteration of a physical feature of the residential premises. A third (33 per cent) said that they thought this was not the case and more than half (57 per cent) did not know.

Royal Mail Do Not Redirect

Ninety-five per cent of authorities interviewed used RMDNR. Overall, those authorities that currently use RMDNR receive an average of 47 items of mail through RMDNR per month. This is an increase on 2002 when authorities received an average 15 items per month. Not surprisingly, authorities with a low caseload receive on average 12 items, medium authorities receive on average 33 items and high caseload authorities receive on average 115 items.

A quarter of authorities (26 per cent) said that none of the items returned contain details of the new address. A further 18 per cent of authorities were unable to give an answer to this question, however among those that did, the average returned with details of the new address was 26 per cent.

Fifty-nine per cent of authorities that currently use RMDNR said that the amount of returned mail had remained constant in the last financial year. On the other hand, similar proportions said that it had increased (eight per cent) or decreased (nine per cent). In addition, four per cent of authorities said that they had not had any returned and 19 per cent were unable to answer the question.

Large majorities of authorities put payment cheques, HB mail, CTB mail and cheques, renewal forms and reminders in 'Do not redirect envelopes' (87 per cent, 86 per cent, 83 per cent and 83 per cent respectively). In addition, four per cent said that their authority puts everything in 'Do not redirect' envelopes.

Eight per cent of authorities said that they do not investigate any of the post that is returned due to redirection, rising to 23 per cent of English Metropolitan districts. However, authorities said that on average 50 per cent is investigated. In addition, authorities said that 23 per cent of returned mail that is investigated, leads to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit. On the other hand, eight per cent said that none of the returned mail leads to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit and one in five (20 per cent) did not know how much.

Opinion was divided on the usefulness of RMDNR in uncovering fraud and overpayments, with 49 per cent describing it as useful (nine per cent very useful and 40 per cent fairly useful) and 48 per cent saying that it is not useful (32 per cent not very and 16 per cent not at all useful).

Respondents were slightly more positive about the usefulness of RMDNR in terms of preventing fraud and overpayments. Over half (54 per cent) described it as useful (14 per cent very useful and 39 per cent fairly useful) and 39 per cent said that it is not useful (26 per cent not very useful and 12 per cent not at all useful).

1 Conclusions

1.1 Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System

The main objective of this section of the survey was to evaluate the impact of Customer Management System (CMS) on local authorities' performance following the implementation of Release 3 on 31st October 2005. There are many aspects to consider in making this evaluation, however, in a direct question asking authorities to assess CMS3 in terms of the impact it has had on authority's clearance of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) claims, the findings are not altogether positive, with more than two in five authorities saying that CMS3 had made no difference to their authority's performance and almost as many saying that it had made their performance worse.

Although the impact on authority's overall performance in terms of clearance of claims might be minimal it would seem that authorities are trying to do something to improve the situation, with a high proportion of authorities communicating with Jobcentre Plus other than about individual HB/CTB claims, such as liaison meetings which aim to raise generic CMS related issues and resolve problems. This must be seen as a positive step in the right direction.

An average of around two in three LA Input Documents are said to be complete (in terms of the information that should be provided) and accurate. However, in terms of comparing the completeness and accuracy of information on CMS Release 3 with previous releases, around three in five said that they had not noticed any difference and just a quarter said that it had improved, indicating that there is still more work to be done. In terms of improving completeness, Jobcentre Plus should concentrate on making sure that the most common missing details are provided: rent details, landlord details, non-dependent details, capital details and partner details.

The fact that 85 per cent of authorities identified at least one problem with receiving claims through CMS suggests that there is still some way to go before CMS3 can start having a real impact. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should look at ways of improving the problems highlighted by authorities, in particular concentrating on the following: problems verifying claimants' details, lack of/missing information, delays in receiving documents and lack of/incomplete documentation.

There are encouraging signs, however, that authorities with problems are actively taking steps to resolve them locally. In particular, meeting regularly with Jobcentre Plus, contacting Jobcentre Plus on individual claims where errors have been identified, gathering Management Information to feedback to Jobcentre Plus and providing support to Jobcentre Plus in the form of training and/or resources. DWP would be advised to continue to foster this kind of communication.

The average time taken from a customer's first contact until the Input Documents are received by the authority through CMS is 3.6 weeks. This is in line with what other research (on a limited number of case studies) has found, however, the average of 3.6 weeks masks the findings at the higher end of the scale: five per cent said that it takes five weeks, seven per cent said that it takes six weeks and five per cent said seven weeks or more. Notably, one London borough said that it generally takes more than 20 weeks. These higher timeframes, although in a minority, are significant to those experiencing them and will make the views of these authorities towards CMS considerably more negative.

Our overall conclusion therefore is that the performance of CMS3 and its associated processes could be improved and that the best way of doing this is to further encourage, what is already a fairly strong working relationship between Jobcentre Plus and the authorities, so that they continue to have a forum to resolve problems locally.

1.2 Supported housing

The problem of significantly increasing costs for supported accommodation was recognised by around half of authorities and this figure could be higher if the fifth of authorities that said they did not know whether the amounts of housing benefit claimed for supported housing in their area had increased, decreased or stayed about the same, had given an answer.

Therefore, the problem identified anecdotally to DWP definitely exists, however, the extent of it would seem to differ by LA type, caseload and region; English Metropolitan districts and those in the North West were most likely to say that the amounts of HB claimed for supported housing had increased in their area, while authorities with a medium and high caseload were more likely than those with a low caseload to say that it had increased.

It is, however, interesting that authorities do not unilaterally attribute the increasing costs for supported accommodation to unrestricted rents. A quarter said that the increase was due to the usual increases in rent/costs, reduced funding from supporting people/restrictions in other payments and the true costs being reassessed/costs moved over/support to rent. Fewer than one in ten said that consultants are getting involved/helping landlords to raise charges, landlords are taking advantage of housing benefit Regulation 11/authorities find it very hard to limit housing benefit claims and there has been a move from residential to supported housing schemes with higher eligible support costs. It is also interesting to note that English

metropolitan districts were more likely than other LA types to say that there had been an increase but were also most likely to say that they did not know why this had occurred.

When those authorities that had noted a change in the amounts of housing benefit for supported housing were asked a specific question about how frequently they see cases where they can not restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported accommodation, over half said 'often'. A majority of authorities across Britain therefore have frequent experience of this problem, however it is worth noting that it is those in the North West that are most likely to have often seen these kind of cases.

Clearly, authorities are seeing cases where they cannot restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported housing and this can involve eligible rent of £200 or more per week being met above the average rent for this type of accommodation. The proportions seeing these high rents increased steadily until a quarter of authorities said that they have often seen rents of £100-£124 per week being met. There would seem to be a tendency for English Metropolitan authorities to have seen higher rents being met more often than other LA types.

In conclusion therefore, the problem of unrestricted rents has been recognised by around half of authorities, but more by those with a medium and high caseload. We would recommend that DWP undertakes further analysis to ascertain if there is a relationship between region and the problem of unrestricted rents. On the surface, it looks as though there could be a greater problem among the Metropolitan districts in the North West of England, but it is our view that this requires further analysis.

1.3 Discretionary Housing Payments

A clear majority of authorities were positive about the guidance on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). However, in terms of making improvements to it, DWP should concentrate on providing more of what is already there - more examples of Good Practice and more information on the types of cases that can be helped.

DWP should note that more than half of authorities have experienced problems with the administration of DHPs. Complaints to be most aware of range from the assessment taking too long and the process of submitting estimates/claiming the contribution being too complex/time consuming to the guidance being inadequate and not having enough staff.

Given that three in five authorities supplement the DWP guidance with a separate policy on the types of circumstances in which DHPs should be awarded, it will be interesting for DWP to discover which groups of circumstances these policies give particular consideration to – people at risk of homelessness and people with unforeseen short-term need. These are followed by disabled people, young people and pensioners.

By far the most common type of shortfall covered by DHPs was the Local Reference Rent and the client groups benefiting most were said to be lone parents and the long-term sick/disabled. More than three-quarters said that they make a DHP award for the following reasons: the risk of homelessness/eviction, extent of rent restrictions, only a short-term need, not enough other means of support and vulnerable groups (eg. pensioners).

Still a majority of authorities did not accept a claim for DHP in person, electronically or by telephone. If DWP believes that this is an acceptable means of making a claim, then perhaps they could facilitate this move.

More than half of authorities thought that DHP expenditure had increased over the past three years. However, just one in four felt that this increase was due to more publicity for the scheme/take-up campaign. Although majorities of authorities are taking a number of steps to advise claimants about DHPs, there is still plenty more that they could be doing. In particular, authorities should be encouraged to include notation about DHPs on HB/CTB decision notice/letter and on the HB/CTB claim form plus providing information about them on their website. At the same time, however, it may be worth reiterating the other more common, but still not universal, methods of informing claimants.

1.4 Use of intelligence services

The findings show that the majority of LAs are now using intelligence services. In the main this pattern of use has become more established in recent years and within the last two to five years many LAs have started to consistently use these services.

Although the research asked about all the intelligence services on offer including the National Intelligence Unit (NIU), the Operational Intelligence Unit (OIU), and the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), as well as other services, the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) emerges from this survey's findings as being the most prominent intelligence organisation for a number of reasons.

Those authorities that use NAFN have, in the main, been using NAFN for a longer period of time than other intelligence service providers and it has more users overall than the other comparable services. The NAFN received high ratings for effectiveness in terms of improving the authority's investigation service and its effectiveness in reducing fraud and error. NAFN enjoy, as a result, encouragingly high overall satisfaction ratings amongst the substantial number of LAs that use them.

Awareness, among current users, of the range of services that NAFN have to offer was generally very high but with some notable exceptions, which may warrant some attention. The analysts service and the report of fraud service were less well known than the other services provided by NAFN and potentially require more promotion. The pattern of awareness of the range of services NAFN provide is strongly reflected by the density of use of each of the services. The analysts service is used an average of just four times a year by users compared to the widely used Credit Referencing Data Service which is used on average twice a week.

The minority of local authorities not using NAFN have two main reasons for not using them. Barriers to using NAFN are largely split between perceived cost implications and due to using other sources of intelligence services, in some cases their own.

NAFN clearly have a large, relatively long-term and satisfied user base. To extend this even further it may be necessary to promote and publicise the range of services and address the negative perceptions of cost and value for money amongst non-users. To encourage greater membership they should capitalise on their strong position with their current members.

1.5 Disability

The findings relating to disability are noteworthy because of the substantial numbers of authorities that could not provide a definitive answer to many of the questions relating to how disabled claimants are catered for with regard to the claiming process and adjustments made to housing stock. It has to be pointed out that to some extent this pattern of response may be explained by the fact that our main respondents were asked to contact the housing department in order to get more accurate answers. It is difficult to estimate the level at which this is actually the case but the results do need to be interpreted with the possibility in mind that the person most able to answer the questions accurately was not participating.

In terms of how the findings reveal how LAs deal with disabled claimants, the majority do ask if the claimant is disabled or not as part of the claiming process but a far reduced proportion ask disabled claimants if they need any adjustments to the processing and administration of their HB/CTB claim.

The numbers of authorities that monitor for the satisfaction amongst disabled claimants was low and perhaps this is an area for DWP to address in the future to encourage more formal monitoring systems to be put in place. The number of authorities who could state the level of equality standard they have achieved was also relatively low, but this is an area of the findings that could be explained to some degree by a lack of involvement from the housing departments representatives, with the survey.

Authorities that manage their own stock or operate a combined list, and in this survey sample, that amounts to more than half, on the whole do make adjustments to stock for both disabled tenants and occupiers and, to a lesser extent, for prospective disabled tenants and occupiers. The majority of authorities also make physical adjustments to both the rented premises and the communal areas, most usually at the tenant's request. DWP should note that some of the key difficulties encountered by authorities when making these adjustments were the cost and physical restrictions.

Awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) was relatively low overall and knowledge of certain specific aspects of the act, such as changing the terms of a lease were particularly low. Low awareness here may be a factor of the knowledge of the respondent, which in this case, may not be the person most qualified to respond.

On this basis, the findings for this section would tend to suggest that DWP need to encourage more awareness of the DDA amongst LAs as the date for the provisions of the act comes closer.

1.6 Royal Mail Do Not Redirect

Take-up of Royal Mail Do Not Redirect (RMDNR) is still extremely high, but has not increased since 2002 when the question was last asked. However, the overall average amount of items received per month through RMDNR had increased considerably, which must be seen as a positive finding. On the other hand, a quarter of authorities said that none of these returned items contain details of the new address and those that do get details of the new address only receive them for an average of 26 per cent, which is still a fairly low success rate. This clearly has a limiting effect on authorities' ability to track down potential fraudsters and should perhaps be taken up with the Post Office.

Authorities are still only investigating half of returned post, which may be because the likelihood of it actually leading to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit are said to be at only 23 per cent. DWP may wish to work with LAs to increase their efforts in this area.

Not surprisingly, given the figures above, opinion was divided on the usefulness of RMDNR in uncovering fraud and overpayments but authorities were slightly more positive about its usefulness in terms of preventing fraud and overpayments. Clearly, authorities' views on usefulness are unlikely to change until they can see more positive outcomes, however, RMDNR does still seem to serve a useful purpose in terms of prevention.

2 Introduction

Since 1999 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has run a Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey among managers with responsibility for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB). The main reason for running such an Omnibus is to provide the Department with a regular and flexible means of finding out how LAs organise their benefit administration; and how relevant managers view current policy and regulations, as well as future initiatives and changes. The frequency with which the omnibus is conducted, combined with the relatively short time-scale for reporting means that it is a useful vehicle for providing the Department with feedback on issues that are current and relevant at the time. By conducting one regular survey the Department is seeking to reduce the number of individual surveys that LA managers are involved in and as such reduce the burden on them.

Since Wave 9 of the LA Omnibus Survey respondents have been given a choice of completing the questionnaire on the telephone, as a self-completion questionnaire on paper, or as a self-completion questionnaire on the Internet. By the end of the Wave 12 fieldwork we had achieved interviews with a total of 278 LA managers. Just under half of authorities (49 per cent, 137 authorities) chose to complete the questionnaire on the web, while 38 per cent completed it on paper (105 authorities) and 13 per cent (36 authorities) completed it by telephone. Comparing this with Wave 11, there has been an increase in the proportion of authorities completing the questionnaire on the web (just 26 per cent chose to complete it on the web at Wave 11).

A total of 278 interviews represents a response rate of 68 per cent. This is a higher response rate than was achieved at Wave 11, although it is still slightly down on earlier waves. The impact of this response rate on the statistical reliability of the data is shown in Appendix A.

This report presents the findings of Wave 12 of the omnibus and covers questions on the following issues:

- Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System (CMS)
- Supported Housing
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)
- Use of Intelligence
- Disability
- Royal Mail Do not Redirect (RMDNR).

Respondents were also asked about the status of their LA in terms of de-centralisation and outsourcing.

3 Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System

3.1 Introduction

By October 2005 most Local Authorities (LAs) were receiving at least some, if not all, of their Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) claims, when associated with Jobcentre Plus primary benefits (Income Support (IS), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB)), through the Customer Management System (CMS). This section evaluates the impact of CMS on LAs' performance following the implementation of Release 3 on 31st October 2005.

3.2 Receiving claims through Customer Management System

Seven in ten of the participating authorities (70 per cent) currently receive LA Input Documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS. London boroughs and English districts were the least likely to receive the data via CMS (50 per cent and 67 per cent respectively), while Scottish authorities were the most likely (90 per cent).

A majority of 64 per cent of authorities started receiving LA Input Documents generated by CMS between 1 January and 31 October 2005, rising to 100 per cent of English metropolitan districts. Sixteen per cent started in 2004, 15 per cent between 1 November and March 2005, three per cent in 2003 and one per cent in 2002.

3.3 Receiving claims through Customer Management System

Overall, across all authorities interviewed, an average of 33 LA Input Documents generated by CMS are received each week. This breaks down as follows: 22 per cent received between one and nine per week, 27 per cent between ten and 19, 18 per

cent between 20 and 39, nine per cent between 40 and 59, three per cent between 60 and 79 and three per cent 100 or over (no authorities received between 80 and 99). It is interesting to note that included in this last category was one English district that received between 500 and 999 per week and one English Unitary and one English metropolitan district that received 1000 or more per week. It is also worth bearing in mind that 19 per cent of authorities were unable to answer this question.

Following on from this finding, as the Table 3.1 below illustrates, there are significant sub-group differences in the average number of LA Input documents generated each week. For example, on average, English unitary authorities received the most (83) and English districts received the least (18).

Table 3.1 Average number of LA Input documents generated each week

	Base	Average number generated each week
Total	194	32.50
LA Type:		
Welsh	10	25.00
Scottish	19	63.18
English Unitary	24	83.45
English Metropolitan	19	31.18
English district	110	18.47
London Borough	12	35.67
HB/CTB caseload:		
Low	59	10.00
Medium	74	27.25
High	61	59.25

Base: All who currently receive any input documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS

When asked what proportion of new claims are received through CMS, nearly three in ten authorities (29 per cent) could not give an answer. However, among those that did, looking at an average across all authorities, 18 per cent of all new claims are received through CMS. One in five authorities (20 per cent) said that between one per cent and nine per cent of claims are received via CMS, a further one in five (20 per cent) said 10-19 per cent, 23 per cent said 20-39 per cent, while just 6 per cent said 40-59 per cent and two per cent 60 per cent or more (one English unitary and one English district 60-79 per cent and two English districts 80-99 per cent).

The following table shows that the proportion of new claims received through CMS is fairly similar by LA type, as well as caseload. However, there is a tendency for Scottish and English unitary authorities to receive a higher proportion of new claims through CMS than other LA types. On the other hand, the real differences in the proportion of new claims received via CMS is shown in the bottom section of Table 3.2: authorities receiving between one and nine LA Input documents each week said

that just 8.6 per cent of all new claims are received via CMS, compared with 34.2 per cent of those authorities receiving 100 or more LA Input documents per week.

Table 3.2 Proportion of new claims received through CMS

	Base	Proportion of new claims received %
Total	194	17.94
LA type:		
Welsh	10	17.50
Scottish	19	20.91
English unitary	24	20.85
English metropolitan	19	16.31
English district	110	17.53
London borough	12	15.42
HB/CTB caseload:		
Low	59	18.21
Medium	74	15.73
High	61	19.88
Number of LA Input documents generated by CMS received each week:		
1-9	42	8.61
10-19	52	16.19
20-59	52	22.88
60-99	5	30.00
100+	7	34.17

Base: All who currently receive any input documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS

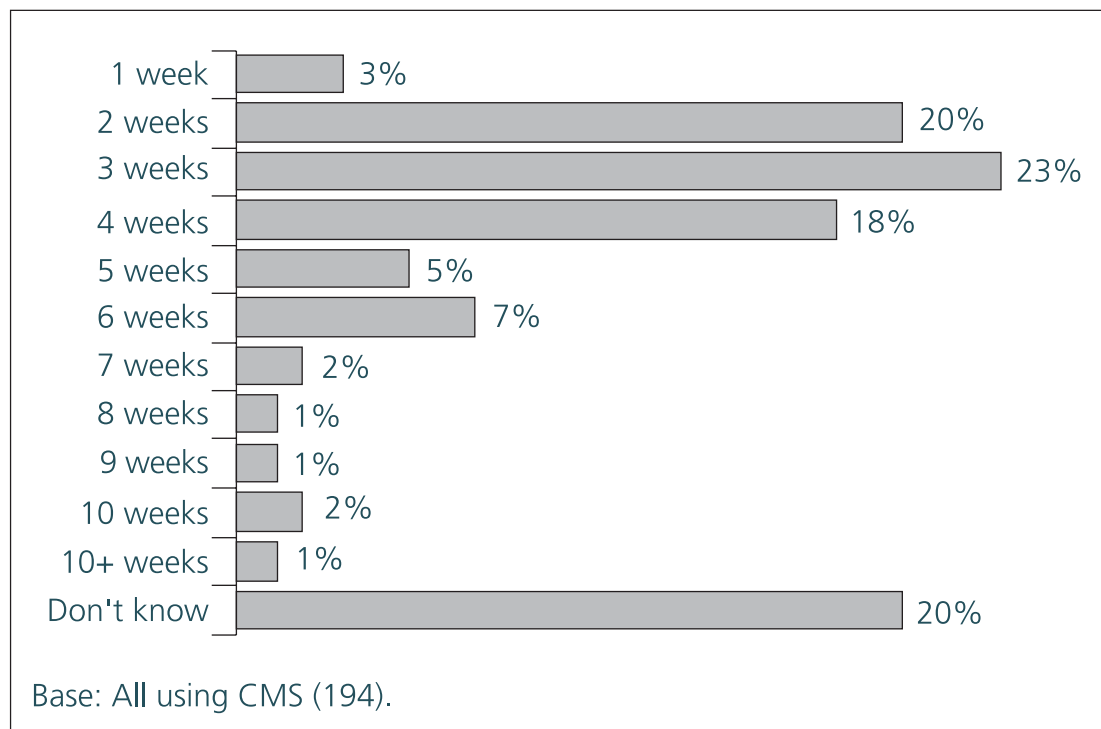
The majority of authorities (82 per cent) have contact with Jobcentre Plus other than about individual HB/CTB claims, for example liaison meetings which aim to raise generic CMS related issues and resolve problems. On the other hand, 15 per cent did not have any such contact.

3.4 Time taken from customer's first contact until input documents received through Customer Management System

The average time taken from a customer's first contact until the Input Documents are received by the authority through CMS was 3.6 weeks. Just three per cent of authorities said that it takes a week (two English districts, one English Unitary, one English metropolitan district and one London borough), while rather more said two weeks (20 per cent), three weeks (23 per cent) and four weeks (18 per cent). In addition, five per cent said that it takes five weeks, seven per cent said that it takes six weeks and five per cent said seven weeks or more. Notably, one London borough said that it generally takes more than 20 weeks.

Looking at the sub-group analysis for the average time taken from customer’s first contact until the Input Documents are received by the authority, there are no significant differences.

Figure 3.1 CMS Release 3: time taken from customer’s first contact until input documents received



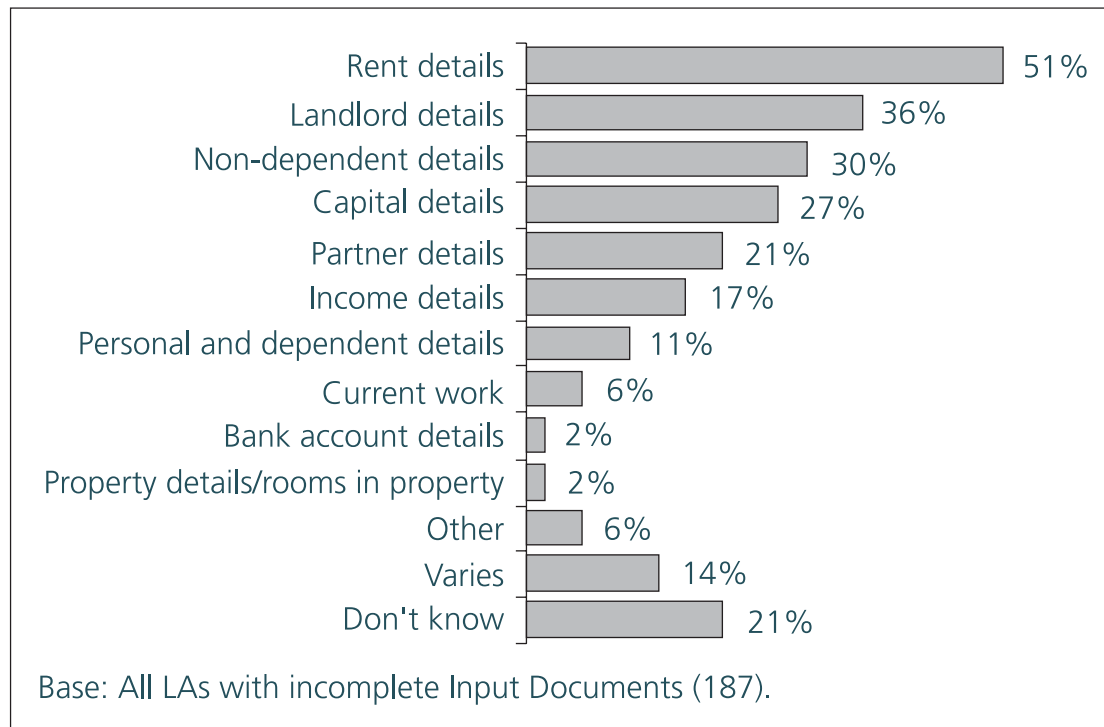
3.5 Completeness of information received through CMS3

Overall, authorities said that on average 63 per cent of LA Input Documents are complete in terms of the information that should be provided. At the two ends of the scale, four per cent of authorities said that they do not receive any complete Input Documents (one English metropolitan district and seven English districts) while four per cent said 100 per cent are complete. In between, eight per cent said that 1-19 per cent are complete, four per cent said 20-39 per cent, eight per cent said 40-59 per cent, 14 per cent said 60-79 per cent and 29 per cent said 80-99 per cent.

Any respondents who said that the information was anything less than 100 per cent complete, were asked what type of information is usually missing. Just over half (51 per cent) said that rent details are usually missing, while around a third mentioned landlord details and non-dependent details (36 per cent and 30 per cent respectively). Fewer cited capital details (27 per cent), partner details (21 per cent), income details (17 per cent), personal and dependent details (11 per cent) and current work (six per cent). A further two per cent mentioned bank account details and property details/rooms in property. On the other hand, 14 per cent said the type of information varied and 21 per cent did not know.

London boroughs mentioned problems more often than other authority types, with missing information on rent, landlord, partner and income details (73 per cent, 55 per cent, 36 per cent and 27 per cent respectively), but fewer problems with missing capital details (nine per cent).

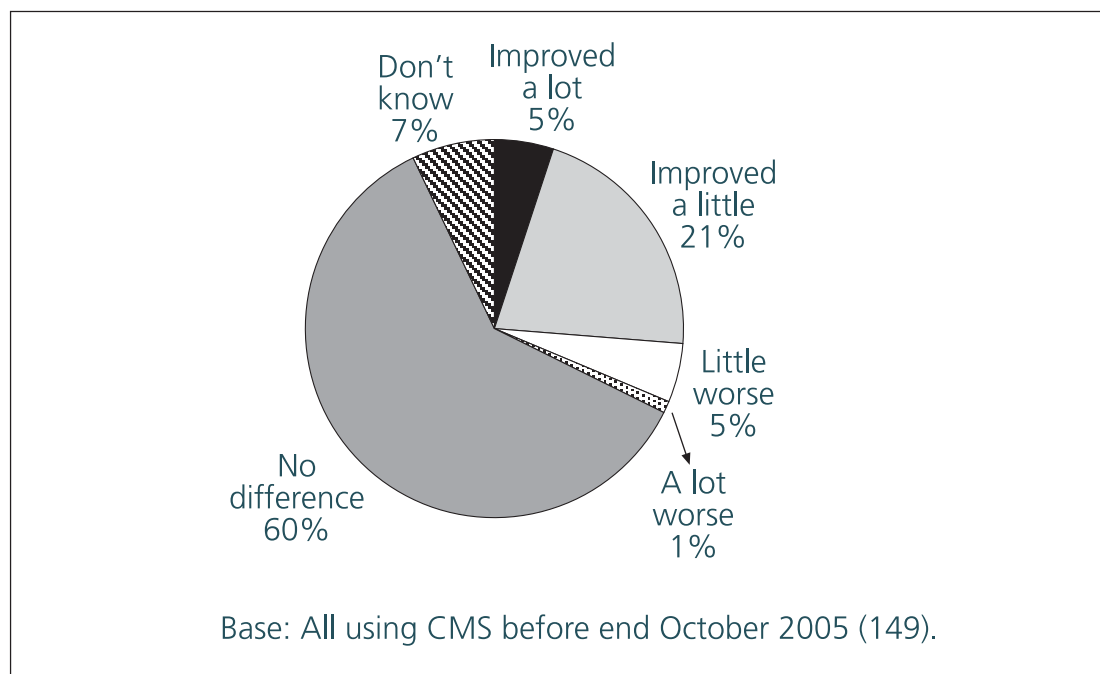
Figure 3.2 CMS 3: Missing information



In terms of comparing the completeness of information on CMS Release 3 with previous releases, three in five (60 per cent) said that they had not noticed any difference. On the other hand, 27 per cent felt that it had improved (five per cent a lot and 21 per cent a little), while just seven per cent thought it had got worse (one per cent a lot and five per cent a little).

Looking at the findings by LA type shows that Welsh authorities were most positive, with 83 per cent saying that they had seen an improvement and the remaining 17 per cent saying that they had not noticed any difference.

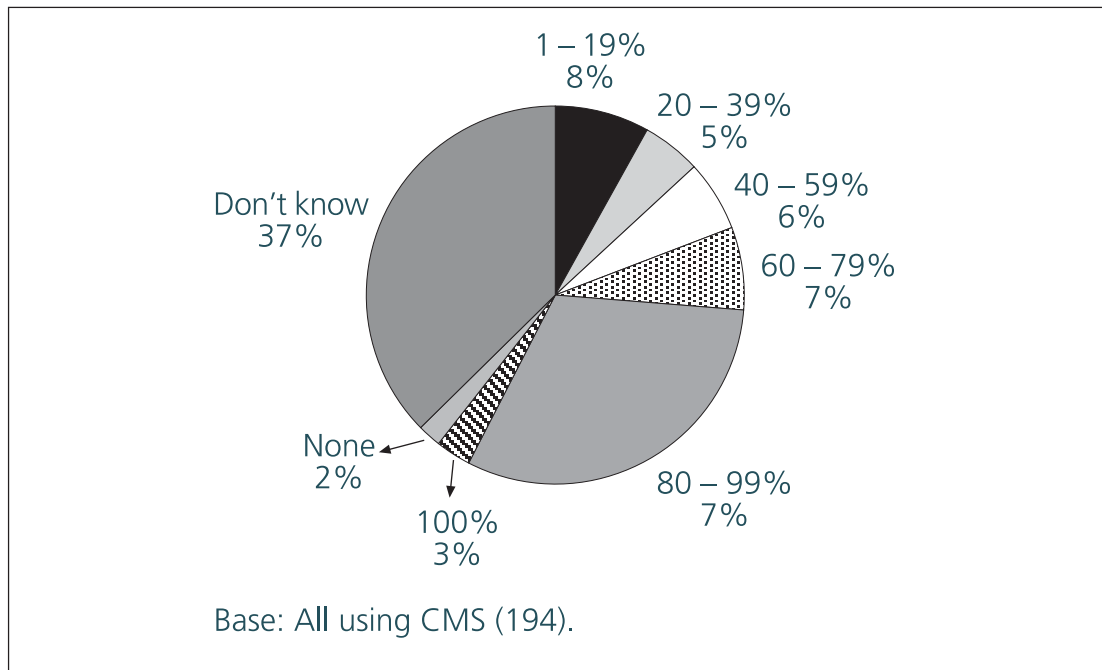
Figure 3.3 Quality of information since CMS Release 3 - completeness



3.6 Accuracy of information since CMS Release 3

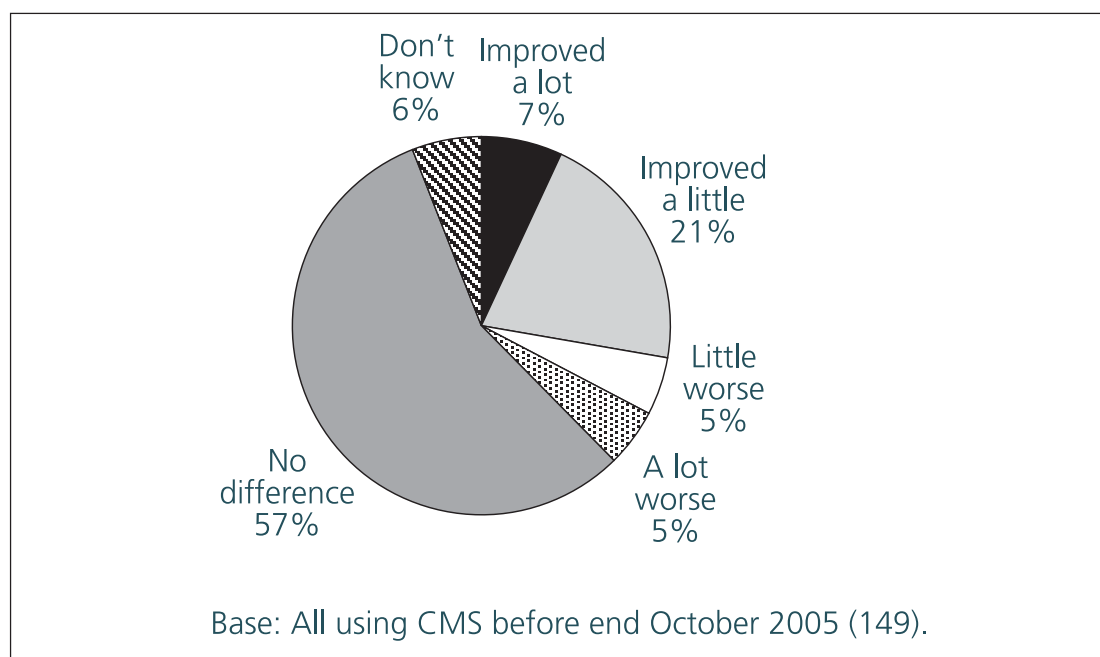
Overall, authorities said that an average of 65 per cent of LA Input documents are accurate. Just two per cent of authorities said that LA Input documents are never accurate (four English districts). Breaking this average down, eight per cent per cent said that between one and nineteen per cent are accurate, five per cent said 20-39, six per cent said 40-59 per cent, seven per cent 60-79 per cent, 31 per cent 80-99 per cent and three per cent said 100 per cent.

English metropolitan districts were most likely to be positive about the accuracy of LA Input documents, with an average of 83 per cent accuracy.

Figure 3.4 CMS 3: Accuracy of input documents

Comparing the accuracy of the information generated by CMS Release 3 with earlier releases, 57 per cent said that they had not noticed any difference. More than a quarter (28 per cent), on the other hand, said that the accuracy had improved (seven per cent a lot and 21 per cent a little), while one in ten said that it had got worse (five per cent a lot, five per cent a little).

As with completeness, Welsh authorities were most positive. Around two in three (67 per cent) had noticed an improvement and the remaining third (33 per cent) had not noticed any difference. Scottish authorities, on the other hand, were most negative, with over three in ten (31 per cent) saying that the accuracy had got worse since CMS 3 had been implemented.

Figure 3.5 Quality of information since CMS Release 3 – accuracy

3.7 Impact of CMS 3 on clearance of claims

Opinion was divided on the impact that CMS 3 has had on their authority's current performance in terms of the clearance of HB/CTB claims. The largest proportion (44 per cent) said that it had made no difference to their authority's performance, while more than a quarter (26 per cent) said that it has made their performance a little worse and 12 per cent thought that it had made it a lot worse. On the other hand, 11 per cent thought that it had improved their authority's performance a little. No authorities said that CMS3 had improved their performance a lot.

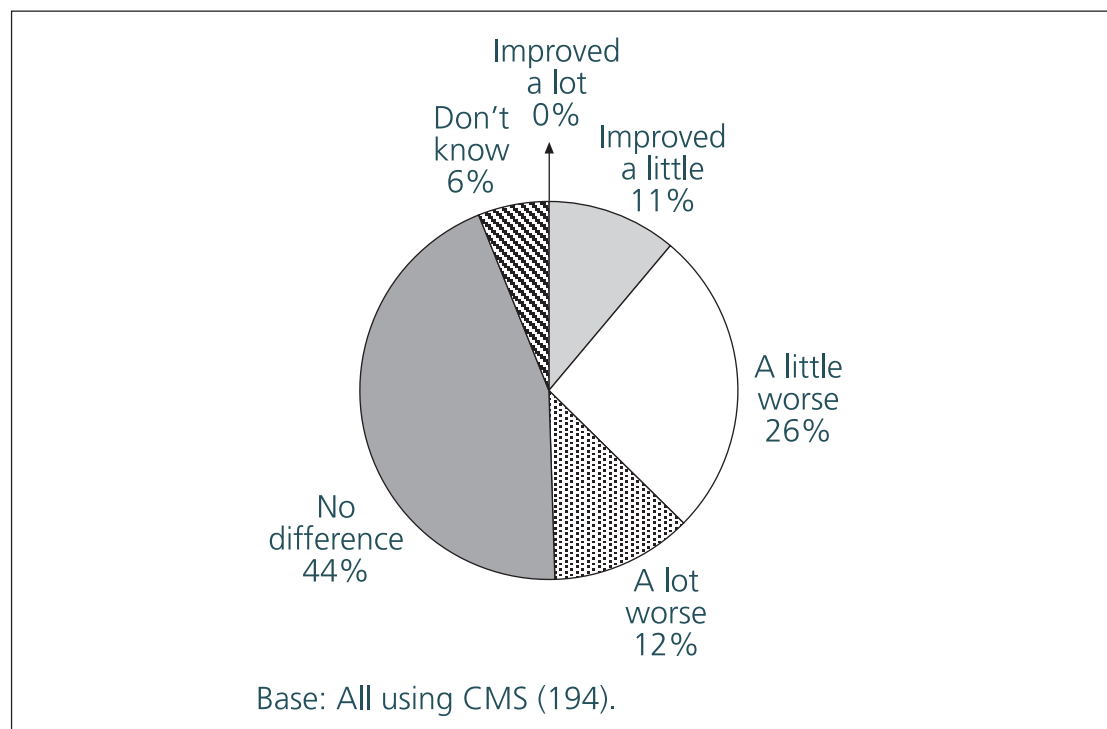
The table below includes mean scores, which gives a good indication of overall opinion. For example, it can be seen that Scottish authorities are overall more negative about the impact of CMS3 on current performance than other authority types, in particular London Boroughs.

Table 3.3 Impact of CMS on current performance

	Base	Improved		Made no difference %	Worse		Mean Score
		A lot %	A little %		A little %	A lot %	
Total	194	-	11	44	26	12	-0.42
Welsh	10	-	10	40	30	20	-0.60
Scottish	19	-	5	32	32	26	-0.83
English unitary	24	-	17	38	33	8	-0.35
English metropolitan	19	-	16	37	16	16	-0.38
English districts	110	-	9	50	26	10	-0.39
London boroughs	12	-	25	33	17	8	-0.10

Base: All who currently receive any input documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS

Figure 3.6 Impact of CMS3 on clearance of claims



3.8 Problems experienced with Customer Management System

Respondents were asked what problems, if any, their authority has when receiving claims through CMS. This was an open-ended question where respondents were asked to write in their main problem experienced, followed by their second and third most important problems.

Table 3.4 shows that 15 per cent of authorities said that they do not have any problems with CMS. However, 18 per cent said that verifying claimants' details is the main problem, followed by lack of/missing information (14 per cent), delays in receiving documents (13 per cent) and lack of/incomplete documentation (ten per cent). Other reasons, mentioned by fewer than one in ten authorities, are shown in Table 3.4.

The table below also shows a similar pattern for the second and third most mentioned problems.

Table 3.4 Problems experienced when receiving claims through CMS

	Main problem %	Second problem %	Third problem %
Verifying claimants' details	18	18	10
Lack of/missing information	14	16	11
Delays in receiving documents	13	2	2
Lack of/incomplete documentation	10	4	2
Delays in processing primary benefits/claims	8	6	3
Problems with system/reverting to clerical/paper claims	7	-	1
Format/layout/not user-friendly	4	5	3
Inaccurate information	3	5	3
Delays (unspecified)	3	2	2
Lack of staff knowledge/understanding	2	3	3
Others	5	10	5
Don't have any problems	15	15	25
Not stated	-	15	31

Base: All who currently receive any input documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS (194)

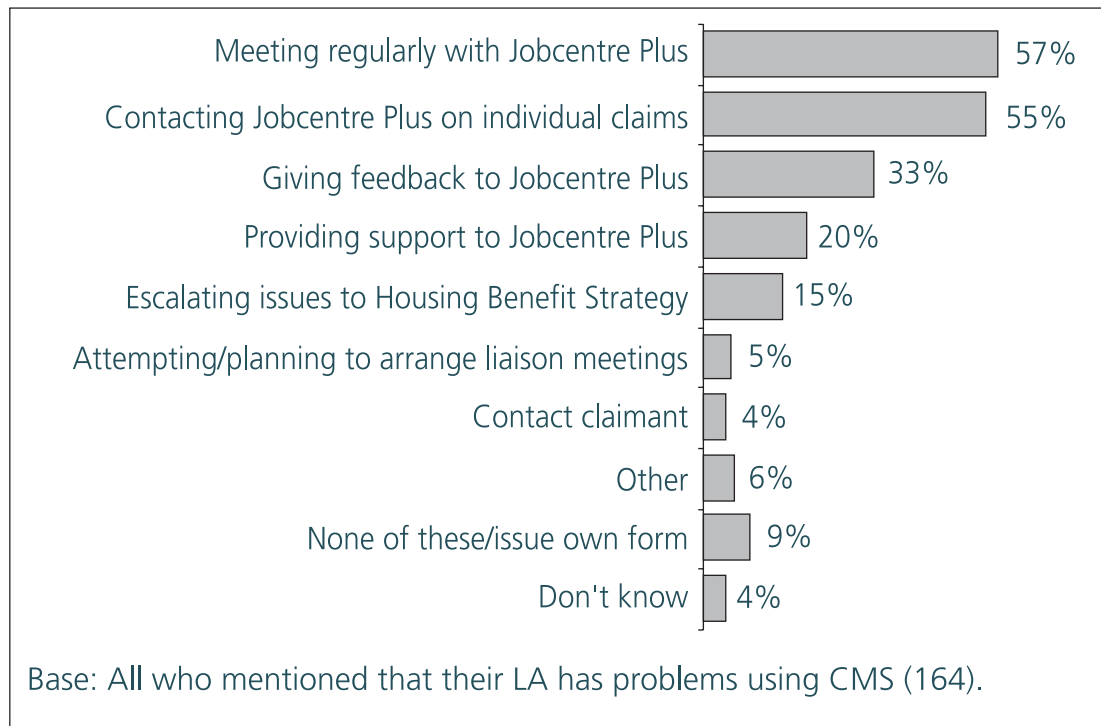
3.9 Resolving the problems associated with Customer Management System

The 164 respondents who said that their authority has at least one problem when receiving claims through CMS were asked what steps, if any, they were taking locally to try and resolve these problems.

Over half said that they meet regularly with Jobcentre Plus to discuss problems and discuss resolutions (57 per cent, including every Welsh authority) and contact Jobcentre Plus on individual claims where errors have been identified (55 per cent). A third (33 per cent) said that they gather Management Information to feedback to Jobcentre Plus, while a fifth (20 per cent) provide support to Jobcentre Plus in the form of training and/or resources and 15 per cent escalate any issues to the Housing Benefit Strategy Division (no Welsh authorities do this). One in twenty or fewer said

they were attempting or planning to arrange liaison meetings (five per cent) and contact claimants direct (four per cent). On the other hand, nine per cent of authorities said that they were not actually doing anything to resolve the problem/s because they issue their own claim form; no Scottish authorities gave this answer.

Figure 3.7 Problems when using CMS – main problem



3.10 Receiving original customer statements

In the last year, 60 per cent of authorities said that they had not had to request any original customer statements from Jobcentre Plus. A further 30 per cent did not know whether or not they had requested any. Among the minority of authorities that had to put in a request, 11 out of 19 had to obtain a customer statement between one and nine times, three had to make a request 10-19 times, three 20-39 times and a further two 50-59 times. Overall, an average of two original customer statements were requested from Jobcentre Plus in the last year. The average number of original customer statements varied by LA type, with Scottish authorities and London Boroughs not requesting any at all and Welsh authorities requesting a high of seven.

Among the 19 authorities that had requested an original customer statement, two said that they always receive them, five mostly receive them, eight sometimes receive them and two never receive them (one English Metropolitan district and one English district).

The original customer statements were received by most (seven out of sixteen) between two and three weeks after requesting them. However, two said it took less than a week, one a week to two weeks, one three to four weeks, while four said four weeks or more.

4 Supported housing

4.1 Introduction

The issue of significantly increasing costs of supported accommodation has been brought to the attention of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) by a number of Local Authorities (LA). The problem relates to the unrestricted rents payable for some supported accommodation and concerns tenants of charities, housing associations, county councils and voluntary organisations where care, support or supervision is provided by, or on behalf of, the landlord. This section of the report aims to increase understanding of the problem and expand on the anecdotal evidence that the DWP has on the subject.

4.2 Change in amount of Housing Benefit claimed

Although around one in five authorities (21 per cent) said that they did not know whether the amounts of Housing Benefit (HB) claimed for supported housing in their area had increased, decreased or stayed about the same, around half said that it had increased (17 per cent a lot and 34 per cent a little). In addition, around a quarter (24 per cent) thought that it had stayed about the same and four per cent said it had decreased (one per cent a lot and three per cent a little).

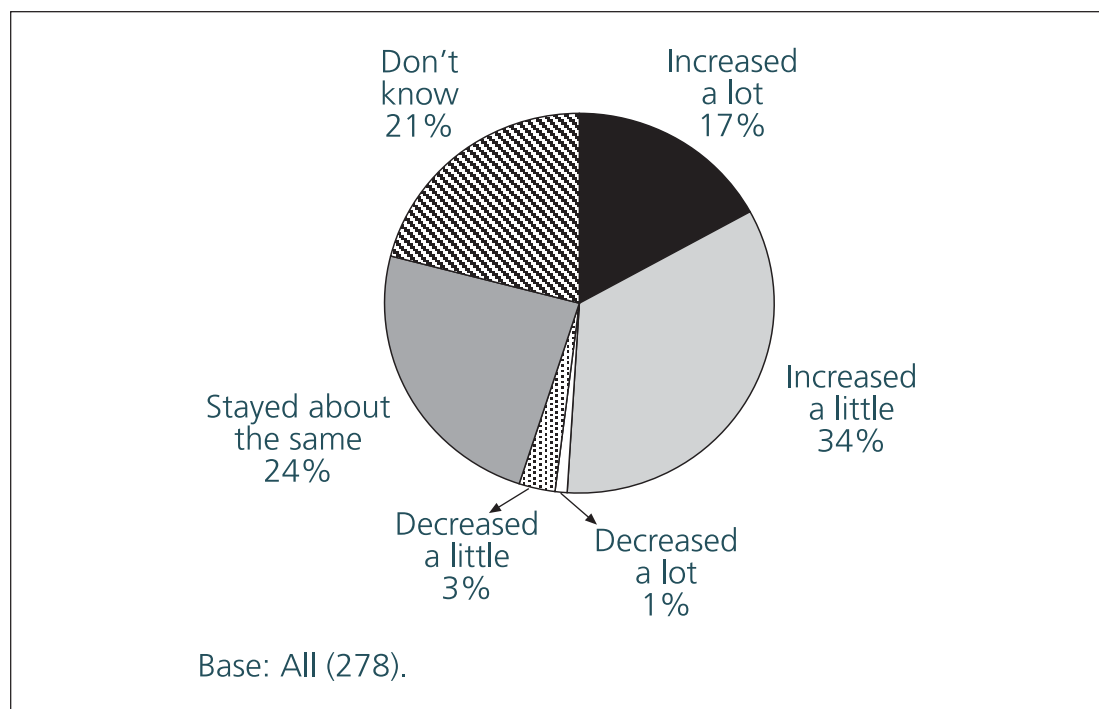
Figure 4.1 Supported housing: amount of HB claimed

Table 4.1 shows, findings differ by LA type, caseload and region. English metropolitan districts and those in the North West were most likely to say that the amounts of HB claimed for supported housing has increased in their area (83 per cent and 85 per cent respectively). In addition, authorities with a medium and high caseload were more likely than those with a low caseload to say that it has increased (56 per cent and 56 per cent compared to 40 per cent).

It is also worth noting that the proportion of respondents saying that they did not know whether or not the amounts of housing benefit claimed for supported housing has changed was highest among authorities in London, the South East and South West (33 per cent, 38 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).

Table 4.1 Change in amount of housing benefit claimed, by region

	Base	Increased		Decreased	About the same	Don't know
		A lot	A little			
Total	278	17	34	4	24	21
LA type:						
Welsh	12	33	25	8	25	8
Scottish	21	19	29	10	24	19
English unitary	32	6	50	-	25	19
English met	24	25	58	4	4	8
English district	165	19	30	3	25	22
London borough	24	4	25	4	33	33

Table 4.2 Change in amount of housing benefit claimed, by HB/CTB caseload

	Base	Increased		Decreased	About the same	Don't know
		A lot	A little			
HB/CTB caseload:						
Low	81	7	32	5	32	23
Medium	111	29	27	3	20	22
High	86	12	44	4	22	17

Table 4.3 Change in amount of housing benefit claimed, by region

	Base	Increased		Decreased	About the same	Don't know
		A lot	A little			
Region:						
Scotland	21	19	29	10	24	19
North East	12	17	25	-	33	25
Yorks & Humbs	18	17	39	-	28	17
North West	27	26	59	-	11	4
East Midlands	27	22	33	4	26	15
West Midlands	28	25	29	7	18	21
East	32	19	41	9	28	3
South East	45	13	22	2	24	38
South West	32	6	41	-	22	31
London	24	4	25	4	33	33
Wales	12	33	25	8	25	8

4.3 Reasons for change in amount claimed

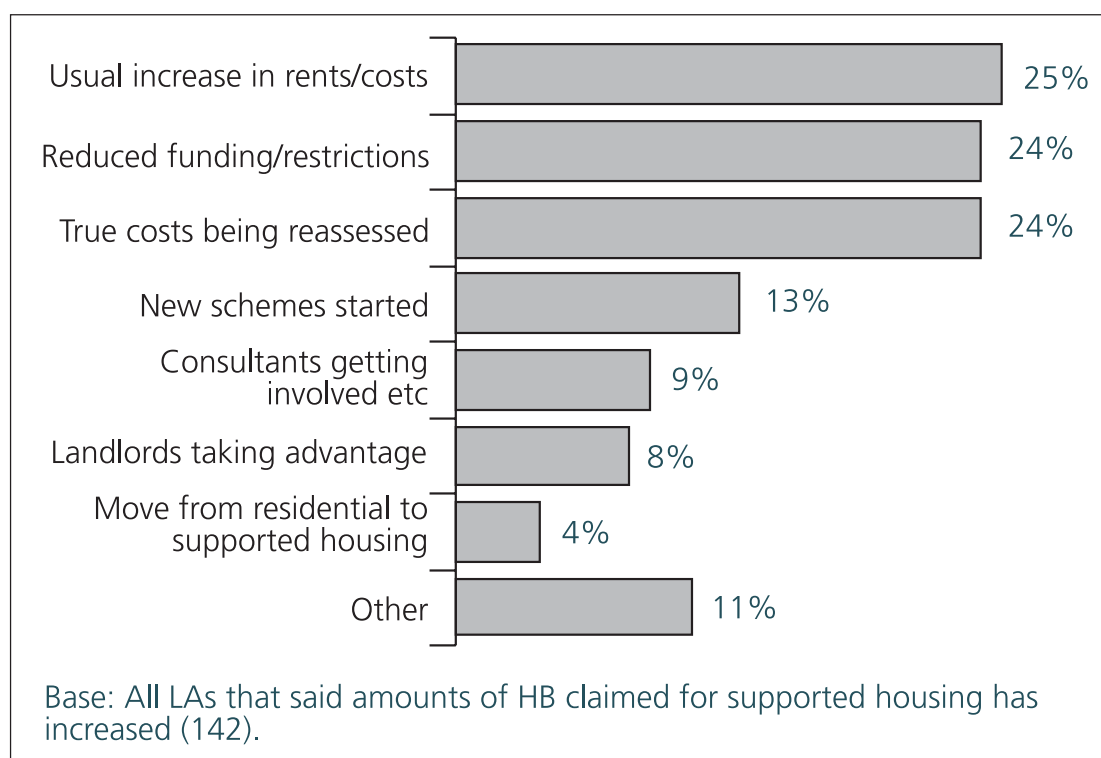
The 142 respondents who said that the amounts of HB claimed for supported housing has increased in their area were asked what they think the reasons are for this change in costs.

A quarter (25 per cent) of authorities said that the increase was due to the usual increases in rent/costs, reduced funding from supporting people/restrictions in other payments (24 per cent, rising to 32 per cent of authorities with a medium Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) caseload) and the true costs being reassessed/costs moved over/support to rent (24 per cent, rising to 31 per cent of authorities with a medium HB/CTB caseload). In addition, 13 per cent of authorities said that additional accommodation has opened up/new schemes started, rising to 43 per cent of Welsh authorities. Fewer than one in ten said that consultants are getting involved/helping landlords to raise charges (nine per cent), landlords are

taking advantage of housing benefit Regulation 11/authorities find it very hard to limit housing benefit claims (eight per cent) and there has been a move from residential to supported housing schemes with higher eligible support costs (four per cent).

It is also worth noting that 18 authorities (13 per cent) said that they did not know the reason for the increase in costs; this is made up of 9 English districts (11 per cent), six English metropolitan districts (30 per cent) and three English unitary authorities (17 per cent). It is interesting that English metropolitan districts were more likely than other LA types to say that there had been an increase but were also most likely to say that they did not know why this had occurred.

Figure 4.2 Reasons for increase

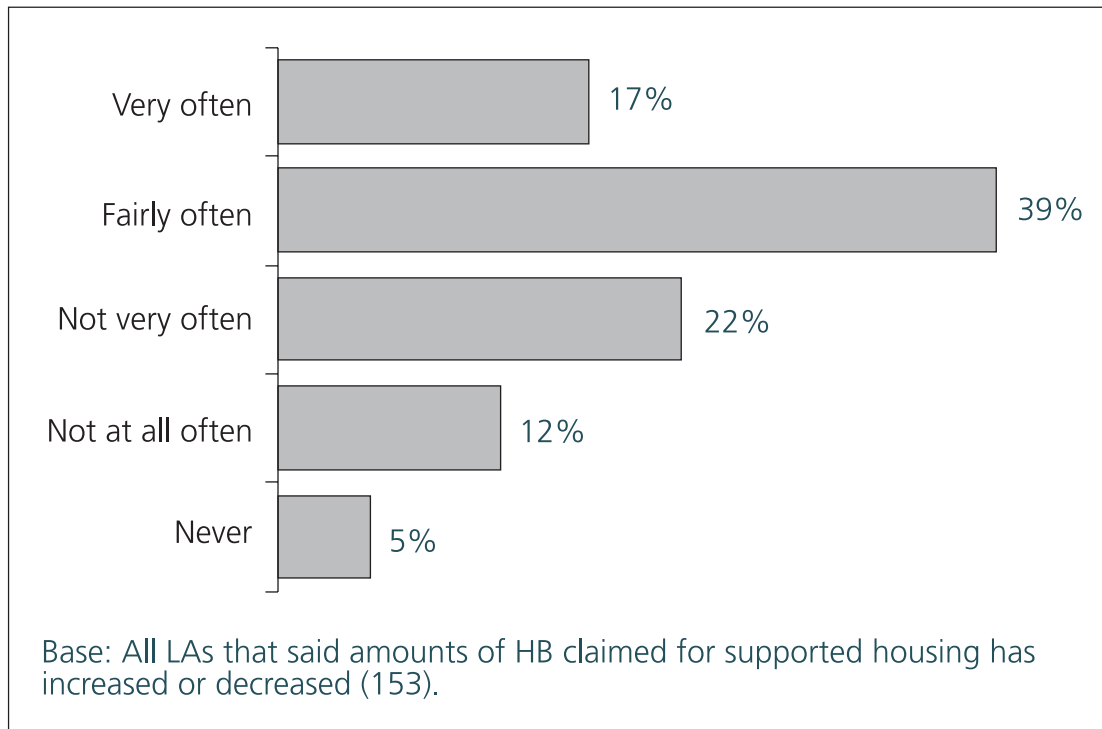


Just 11 authorities said that the amounts of housing benefit claimed for supported housing in their area had decreased. Most of these were unable to give a reason for the decrease.

4.4 Frequency of cases where rent cannot be restricted

Over half of authorities (56 per cent) that had noted a change in the amounts of housing benefit for supported housing said that they often see cases where they cannot restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported accommodation, because it is provided by a not-for-profit organisation, charity or housing association where support is provided by, or on behalf of, the landlord. Seventeen per cent said that they see cases like this very often and 39 per cent said fairly often. On the other hand, over a fifth (22 per cent) said that they do not see them very often and one in eight (12 per cent) said not at all often. Five per cent had never seen cases of this nature.

Figure 4.3 Frequency of cases where rent cannot be restricted because it is provided by not-for-profit organisation/charity/HA



As you can see from Table 4.4, there are some differences in the findings by LA type, caseload and region. English unitary authorities were most likely to have said that they often see these kind of cases, while authorities in the North West were significantly more likely than those in Scotland, East Midlands, East, South East, South West, London and Wales to have said that they have seen these kind of cases often.

Table 4.4 Frequency of cases where rent can not be restricted

	Base	Very often	Fairly often	Not very often	Not at all often	Never	Don't know/ Not stated
Total	153	17	39	22	12	5	4
LA type:							
Welsh	8	25	13	25	25	-	13
Scottish	12	8	33	25	17	8	8
English unitary	18	22	50	11	17	-	-
English met	21	19	43	19	10	10	-
English district	86	17	37	26	10	5	5
London borough	8	-	50	13	13	13	13
Region:							
Scotland	12	8	33	25	17	8	8
North East	5	20	60	-	20	-	-
Yorks & Humbs	10	20	40	20	-	20	-
North West	23	26	61	13	-	-	-
East Midlands	16	13	38	44	6	-	-
West Midlands	17	29	35	18	12	-	6
East	22	9	36	23	18	5	9
South East	17	18	18	24	24	12	6
South West	15	13	40	27	13	7	-
London	8	-	50	13	13	13	13
Wales	8	25	13	25	25	-	13

4.5 Frequency of eligible rent being met above the average rent

Respondents who have seen cases where they cannot restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported housing were asked how often, if at all, their authority sees a range of different eligible rents being met above the average rent for that type of accommodation.

Figure 4.3 shows that nearly half of authorities (48 per cent) had never seen eligible rent of £200 or more per week being met above the average rent for this type of accommodation. In addition, 41 per cent had never seen rent of £150-£199 per week being met, a third (33 per cent) had never seen rent of £125-£149 per week being met, a quarter (25 per cent) had never seen rent of £100-£124 per week being met and 17 per cent had never seen rent of £75-£99 being met. Conversely, the rents that they were most likely to have seen being met were under £50 (12 per cent very often, 28 per cent fairly often) and £50-£74 (very often six per cent, fairly often 30 per cent). In addition, around a quarter of authorities had often seen rent of £75-£99 (four per cent very often and twenty two per cent fairly often) and £100-£124 (four per cent very often and 20 per cent fairly often) being met.

Figure 4.4 Frequency of eligible rent being met above the average rent

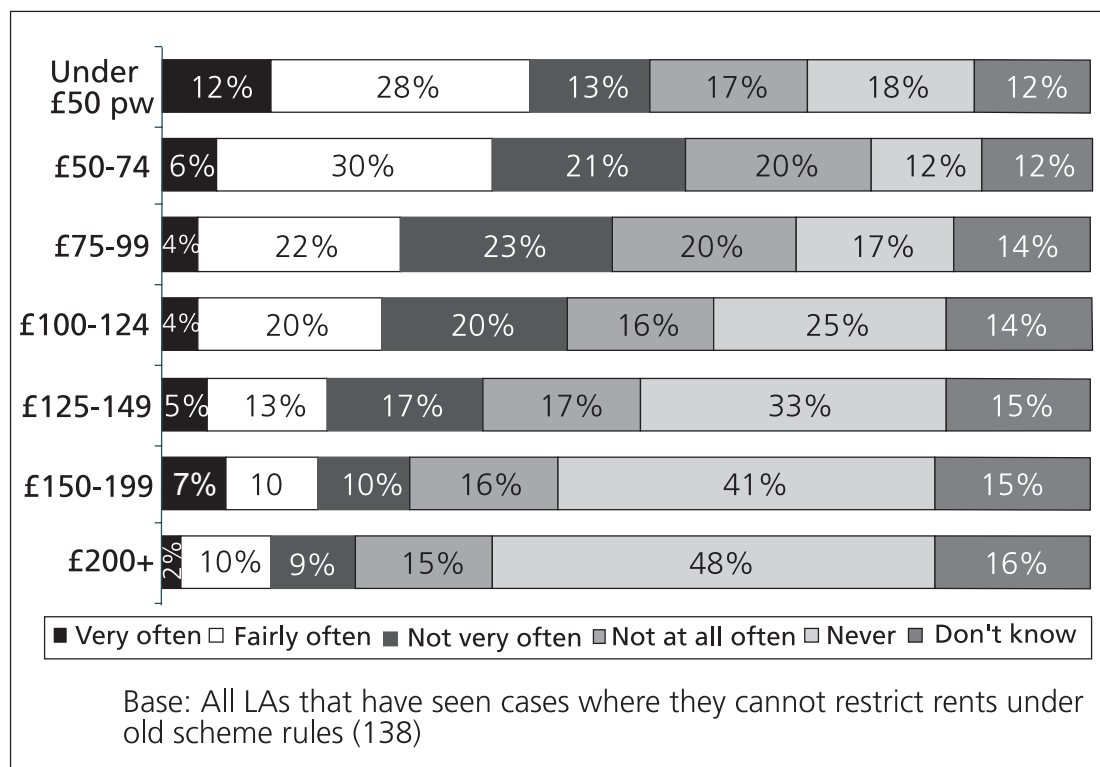


Table 4.5 shows how often the higher rents of £100 and over were seen by different LA types. Bases are small and therefore findings should be treated with caution, however there is a tendency for English metropolitan authorities to have seen these higher rents being met more often than other LA types.

Table 4.5 Rents seen very/fairly often by local authority type

	Total	Welsh	Scottish	English unitary	English metropolitan	English district	London borough
Base:	138	7	10	18	19	78	6
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
£100-£124	24	29	20	17	37	23	17
£125-£149	18	57	10	17	26	15	-
£150-£199	17	29	20	17	26	15	-
£200 or more	12	-	20	6	21	12	17

5 Discretionary Housing Payments

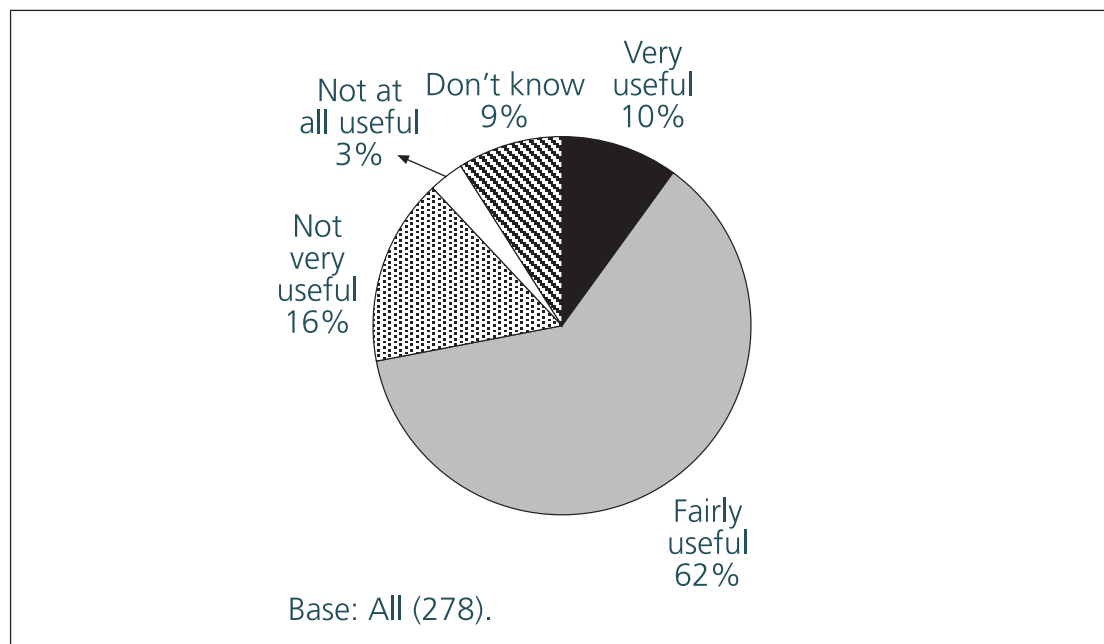
5.1 Introduction

Prior to July 2001, Local Authorities (LAs) had the discretion to increase a claimant's Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) where they considered the claimant or a member of his/her family would suffer hardship or meet an exceptional circumstance. These were known as exceptional hardship or exceptional circumstances payments and were part of the HB and CTB schemes.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) were introduced on 2 July 2001 and enable a LA to provide claimants with additional financial assistance towards their rent or council tax. They are entirely at the discretion of the LA and are subject to an annual cash limit set by the Government. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is currently looking at the effectiveness of the DHP scheme. This information will help them to assess the effectiveness and ease of administration of the scheme, and to decide on any future action to be taken.

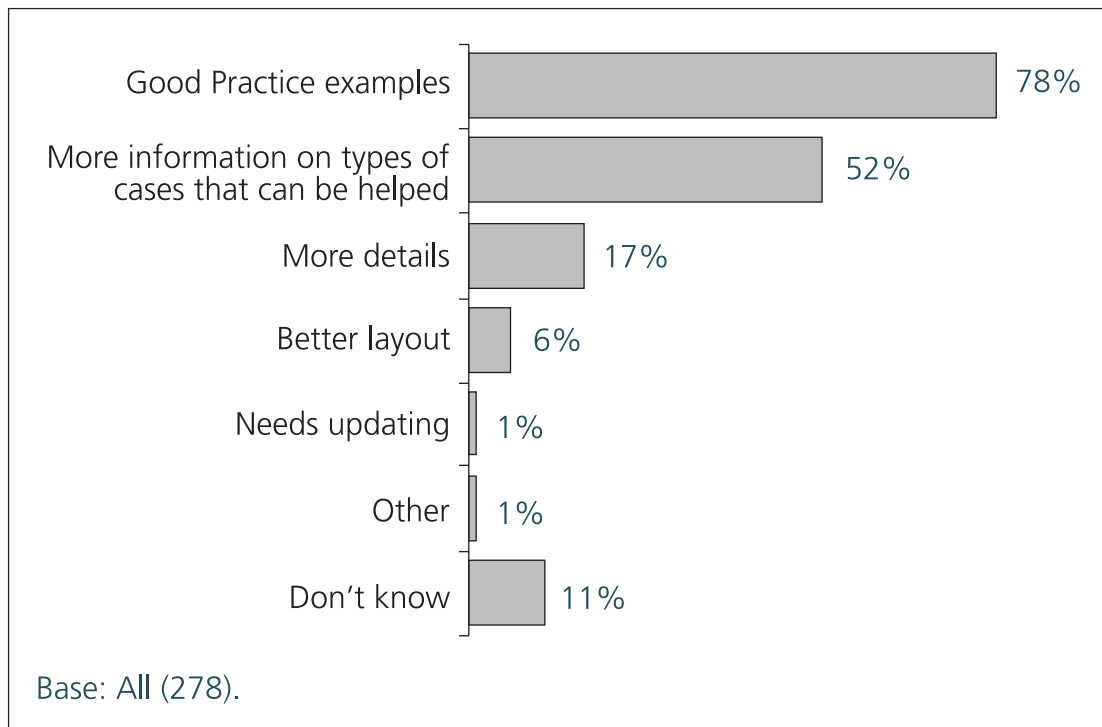
5.2 Attitudes to the guidance

Views of the guidance on DHPs, which was sent to LAs in March 2001, is generally positive. Over seven in ten described it as useful – ten per cent very useful and 62 per cent fairly useful. On the other hand, 16 per cent of respondents said the guidance was not very useful and three per cent said it was not at all useful. One in ten (nine per cent) did not feel able to give an opinion either way.

Figure 5.1 Usefulness of DHPs guidance

Overall, Welsh authorities were least positive about the usefulness of the guidance, while English unitary authorities and English metropolitan districts were most positive. No Welsh authorities described the guidance as very useful, while 67 per cent said it was fairly useful. On the other hand, 81 per cent of English unitary authorities and 79 per cent of English metropolitan districts described the guidance as very (16 per cent and 13 per cent respectively) or fairly (66 per cent and 67 per cent respectively) useful.

All respondents were then asked how they think the guidance could be improved, bearing in mind the discretionary nature of DHPs and the fact that the guidance cannot be too prescriptive. A clear majority of authorities would like to see more examples of Good Practice (78 per cent), while just over half (52 per cent) would like more information on the types of cases that can be helped. Fewer authorities said that they would like the guidance to be more detailed (17 per cent) and a better layout (six per cent). One in nine (11 per cent), however, said that they did not know what could be improved.

Figure 5.2 Improving the guidance

5.3 Policy on types of circumstances in which Discretionary Housing Payments are awarded

Three in five authorities (61 per cent) supplement the DWP guidance with a separate policy on the types of circumstances in which DHPs should be awarded. Over a quarter of authorities (28 per cent) did not have a policy and one in ten (ten per cent) did not have one but were working on it. Welsh authorities and English unitary authorities were most likely to already have a policy (75 per cent and 72 per cent respectively).

When respondents were asked if they give particular consideration to certain groups or circumstances, one in four (25 per cent) said 'no, none' and a further 15 per cent did not know. Figure 5.3 shows that the two groups most likely to be favoured were people at risk of homelessness (55 per cent) and people with unforeseen short-term need (51 per cent). In addition, around two in five (43 per cent) mentioned disabled people, while around a third cited young people (36 per cent) and pensioners (32 per cent). A small minority of authorities said that they give particular consideration to single pregnant women (three per cent) and people with health problems (two per cent).

Figure 5.3 Policy on types of circumstances in which DHPs are awarded

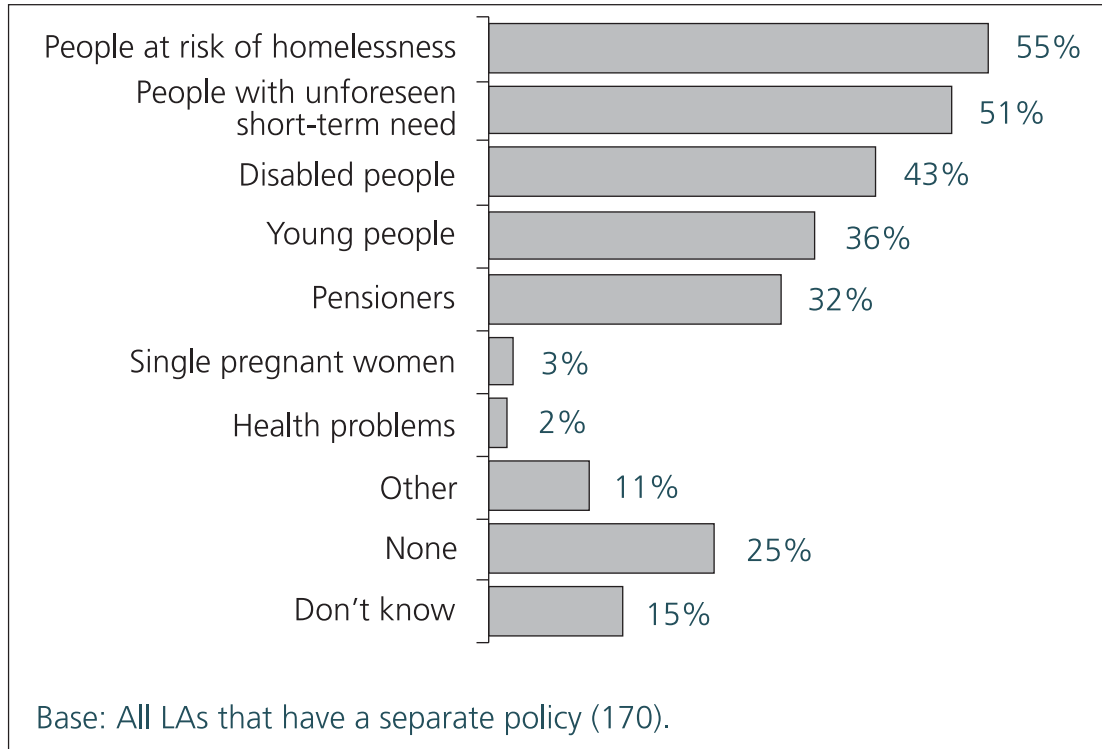


Table 5.1 shows that there are some differences in the findings according to LA type. In particular, English unitary authorities were most likely to mention each type of group or circumstance and none of them said that they do not give consideration to particular groups or circumstances.

Table 5.1 Groups or circumstances given particular consideration

Base	Total	Welsh	Scottish	English unitary	English met	English district	London borough
Base: All LAs that have a separate policy	170	9	12	23	12	99	15
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
People at risk of homelessness	55	89	33	74	58	47	67
People with unforeseen short-term need	51	78	33	74	58	43	53
Disabled people	43	56	33	57	42	39	47
Young people	36	56	33	61	25	28	47
Pensioners	32	56	33	43	8	29	40
Single pregnant women	3	-	8	9	-	2	-
People with health problems	2	-	-	4	-	2	7
Other	11	11	17	13	17	7	27
No groups or circumstances given particular consideration	25	33	17	-	33	30	20
Don't know	15	11	25	17	-	17	7

5.4 Types of shortfall most commonly covered

Respondents were asked to say which are the three most common types of shortfall that DHPs cover in their authority. By far the most common type was the Local Reference Rent (LRR), which was mentioned as the most common by 69 per cent of authorities. In addition, one in ten mentioned the Single Room Rent (SRR) and the size criteria rent restriction (ten per cent and ten per cent respectively). Just three per cent cited Income Tapers (HB/CTB) and three per cent another type of Rent Restriction. Even smaller minorities mentioned claim related, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and rent increases that can not be referred to the rent officer for 12 months (each one per cent).

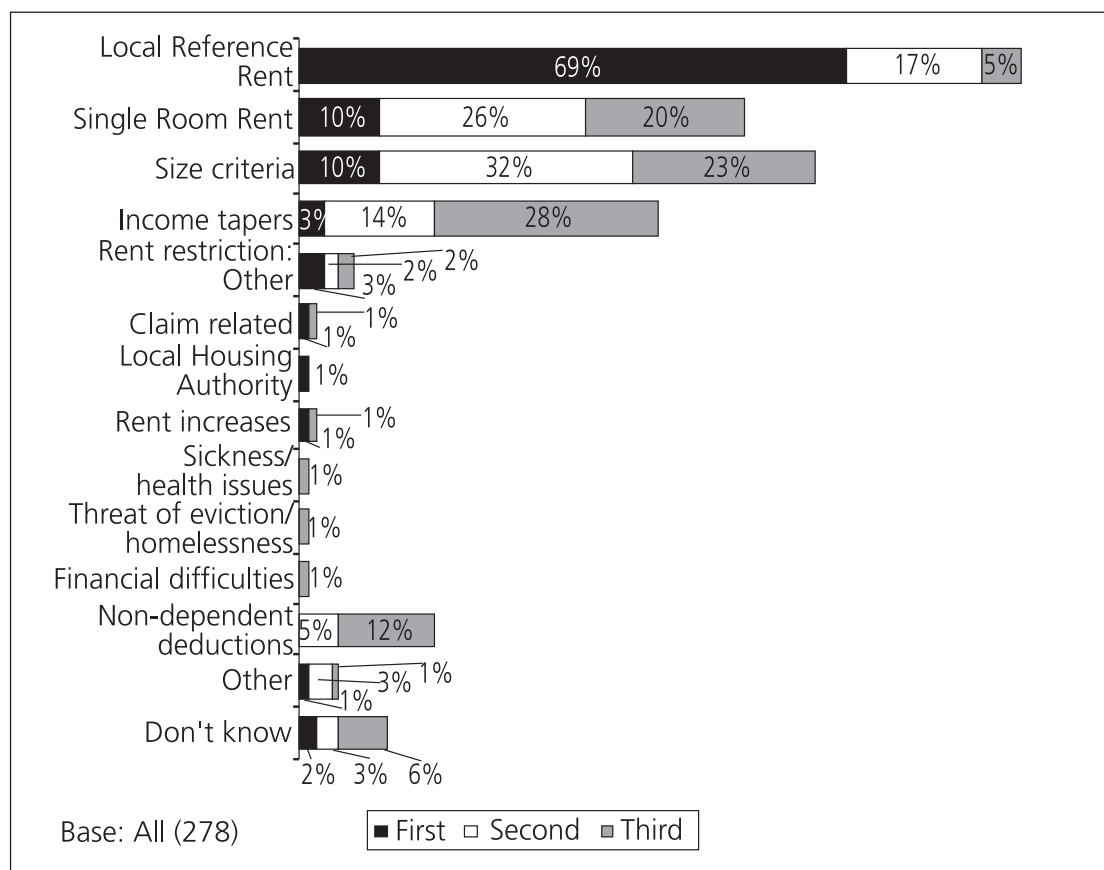
In terms of sub-group differences, English unitary, Scottish and Welsh authorities were least likely to mention LRR (56 per cent, 57 per cent and 58 per cent respectively). On the other hand, English districts were more likely than other authority types to mention size criteria (22 per cent) and Scottish and Welsh authorities were more likely than other authority types to mention SRR (24 per cent and 25 per cent respectively).

When asked to say which is the second most common type of shortfall that DHPs cover, a third (32 per cent) mentioned size criteria and around a quarter (26 per cent) cited SRR. Even though a high proportion of authorities mentioned LRR as being the most common in their authority, still another 17 per cent said it was the second most

common in their authority. In addition, 14 per cent cited Income Tapers as the second most common in their authority, 5 per cent Non-Dependent Deductions (HB/CTB) and two per cent other rent restrictions.

In terms of the third most common type of shortfall covered by DHPs, around a quarter mentioned Income Tapers (HB/CTB) and size criteria (28 per cent and 23 per cent respectively), while a fifth (20 per cent) cited SRR. One in eight (12 per cent) said that Non-Dependent Deductions (HB/CTB) are third most common and five per cent mentioned LRR. In addition, a very small percentage mentioned the following: other Rent Restrictions (two per cent), claim related (one per cent), sickness/health issues (one per cent), threat of eviction/homelessness (one per cent), rent increases that can not be referred for 12 months (one per cent) and financial difficulties (one per cent).

Figure 5.4 Types of shortfall most commonly covered



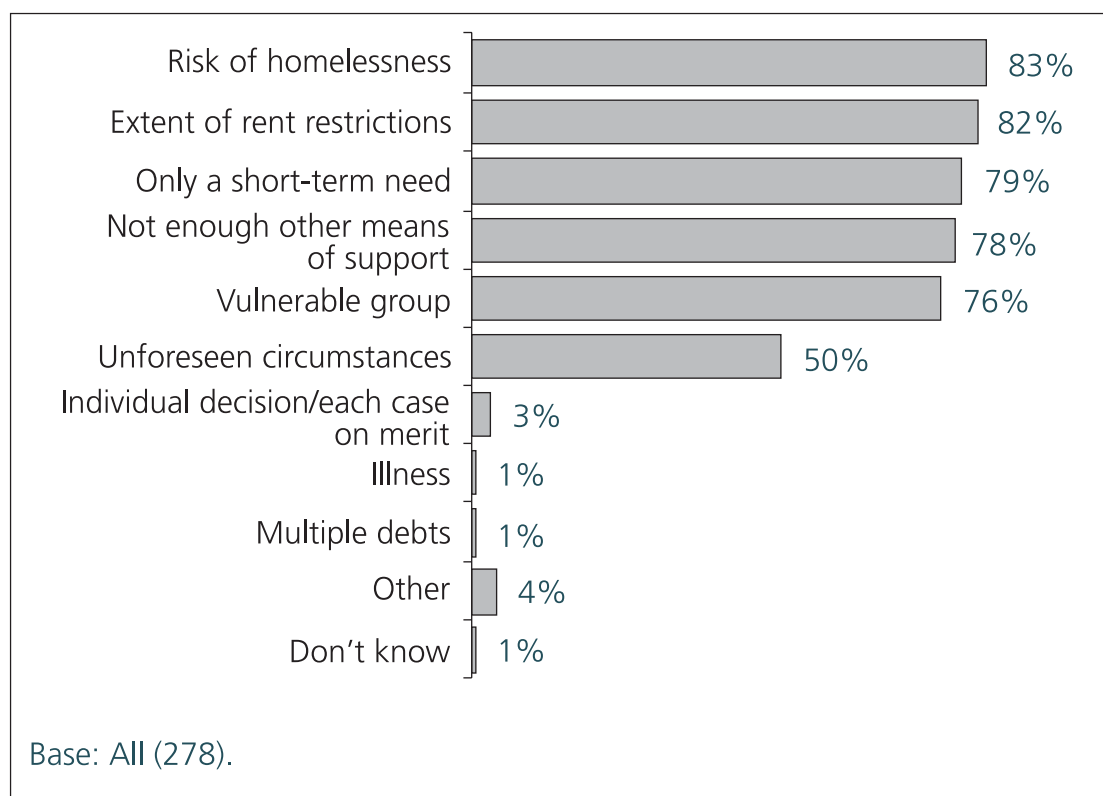
5.5 Reasons for making a DHP award

The question about types of shortfall covered by DHPs was followed up with a question about the reasons for authorities making a DHP award. Four reasons were all mentioned by around four in five authorities: the risk of homelessness/eviction (83 per cent), extent of rent restrictions (82 per cent), only a short-term need (79 per cent) and not enough other means of support (78 per cent). Just over three-quarters (76 per cent) also said that they make a DHP award for vulnerable groups (eg.

pensioners), while half (50 per cent) cited unforeseen circumstances (eg. non-dependent moving in). A further three per cent (eight English districts) said that each case is decided individually on merit, one per cent mentioned illness and another one per cent multiple debts.

Findings are similar across all sub-groups, although there are differences in terms of the proportion of respondents mentioning 'only a short-term need'. Welsh authorities and London boroughs were less likely than other authority types to mention 'only a short-term need' (58 per cent and 67 per cent respectively); partially and non-VF (Verification Framework) compliant authorities are less likely than VF compliant authorities to mention 'only a short-term need' (64 per cent, 67 per cent and 81 per cent respectively); low and medium caseload authorities were less likely to cite 'only a short-term need' than high caseload authorities (74 per cent, 77 per cent and 87 per cent respectively).

Figure 5.5 Reasons for making a DHP award



5.6 Client groups benefiting most

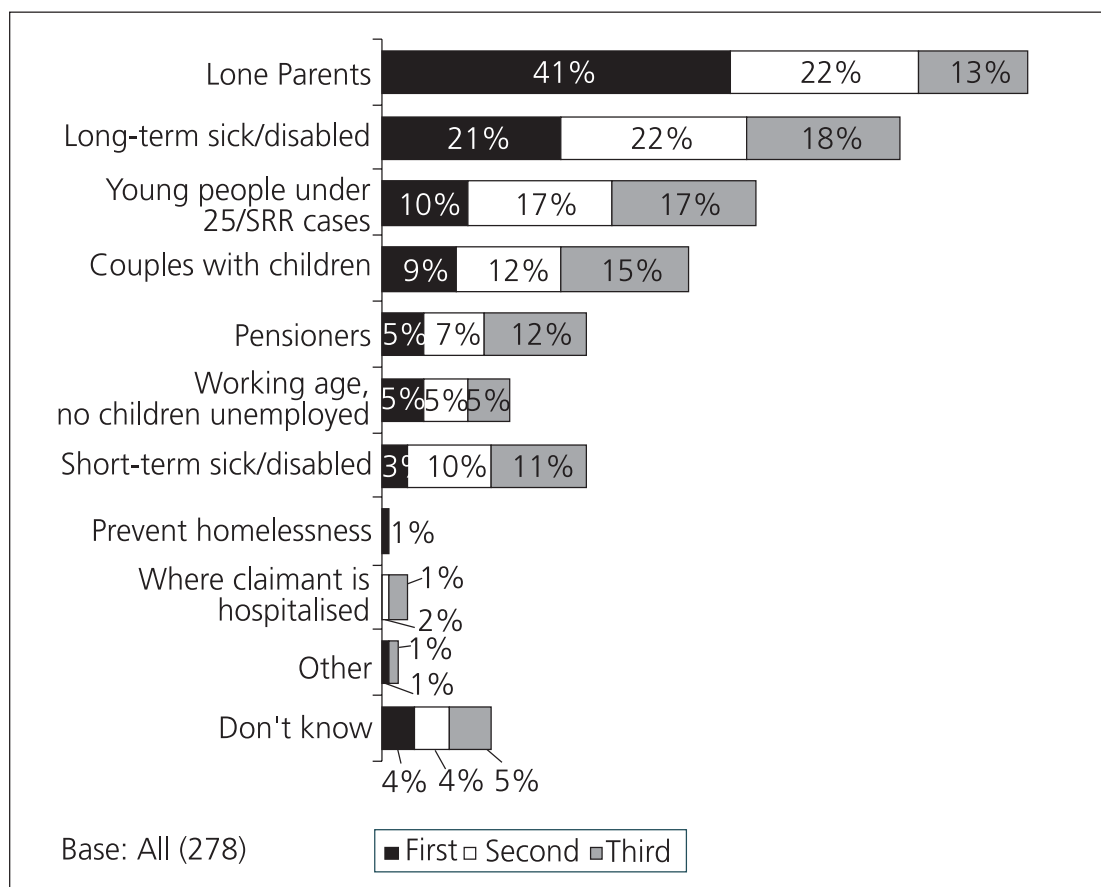
Looking now at the client groups that DHPs benefit most, lone parents were mentioned most often, with 41 per cent saying that they were the group benefiting most overall. A further one in five (21 per cent) said that the long-term sick/disabled benefit most, while around one in ten cited young people under 25/SRR cases (ten per cent) and couples with children (nine per cent). In addition, five per cent cited pensioners and unemployed people without children, three per cent mentioned the short-term sick/disabled and one per cent said DHPs are used to prevent homelessness.

Interestingly, none of the Welsh authorities, English unitary authorities and English metropolitan districts that were interviewed said that DHPs benefit pensioners and none of the Welsh authorities and London boroughs said that they benefit unemployed people without children.

The groups to benefit second most were once again lone parents and the long-term sick/disabled (both mentioned by 22 per cent). Young people under 25/SRR cases were also mentioned by a further 17 per cent, while 12 per cent cited couples with children, ten per cent mentioned the short-term sick/disabled, seven per cent pensioners, five per cent unemployed people without children and one per cent where the claimant is hospitalised.

In terms of the client groups that DHPs benefit third most often, six groups were mentioned by between ten per cent and 20 per cent: long-term sick/disabled (18 per cent), young people under 25/SRR cases (17 per cent), couples with children (15 per cent), lone parents (13 per cent), pensioners (12 per cent) and the short-term sick (11 per cent). Fewer mentioned unemployed people without children (five per cent) and where the claimant is hospitalised (two per cent).

Figure 5.6 Client groups benefiting most



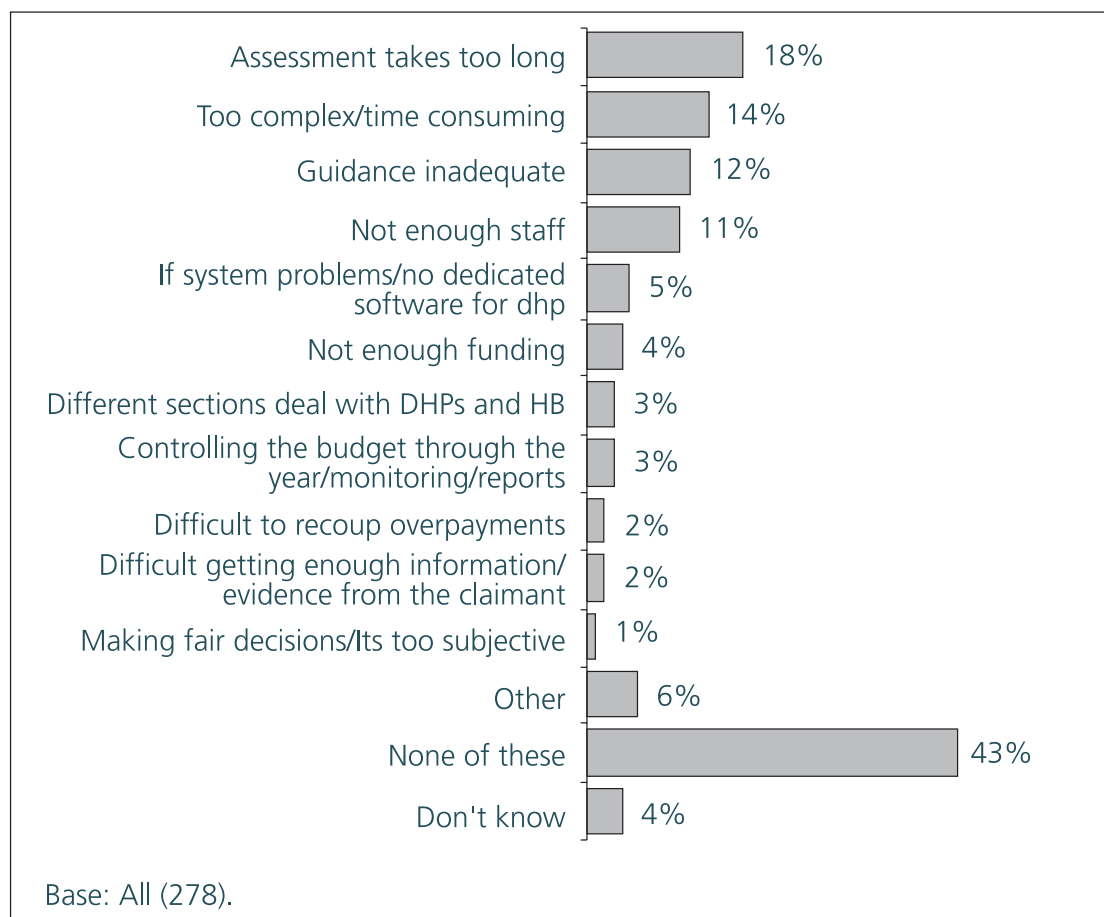
5.7 Problems with administering DHPs

More than two in five (43 per cent) said that they do not have any problems with the administration of DHPs. This varied by LA type, from 25 per cent of English metropolitan districts to 47 per cent of English unitary authorities and English districts.

Those problems that were articulated were mentioned by only fairly small minorities: assessment takes too long (18 per cent), process of submitting estimates/claiming the contribution is too complex/time consuming (14 per cent), guidance inadequate (12 per cent) and not enough staff (11 per cent). In addition, fewer than one in ten mentioned IT system problems/no dedicated software for DHPs (five per cent), not enough funding (four per cent), different sections dealing with DHPs and HB (three per cent), controlling the budget through the year/monitoring reports (three per cent), difficulty in recouping payments (two per cent), difficulty in getting enough information/evidence from the claimant (two per cent) and making fair decisions/too subjective (one per cent).

As mentioned above, English metropolitan districts were least likely to say that they do not have any problems. Conversely, they were more likely than other authority types to say that the process of submitting estimates/claiming the contribution is too complex/time consuming (29 per cent) and that the guidance is inadequate (21 per cent).

Figure 5.7 Problems with administering DHPs

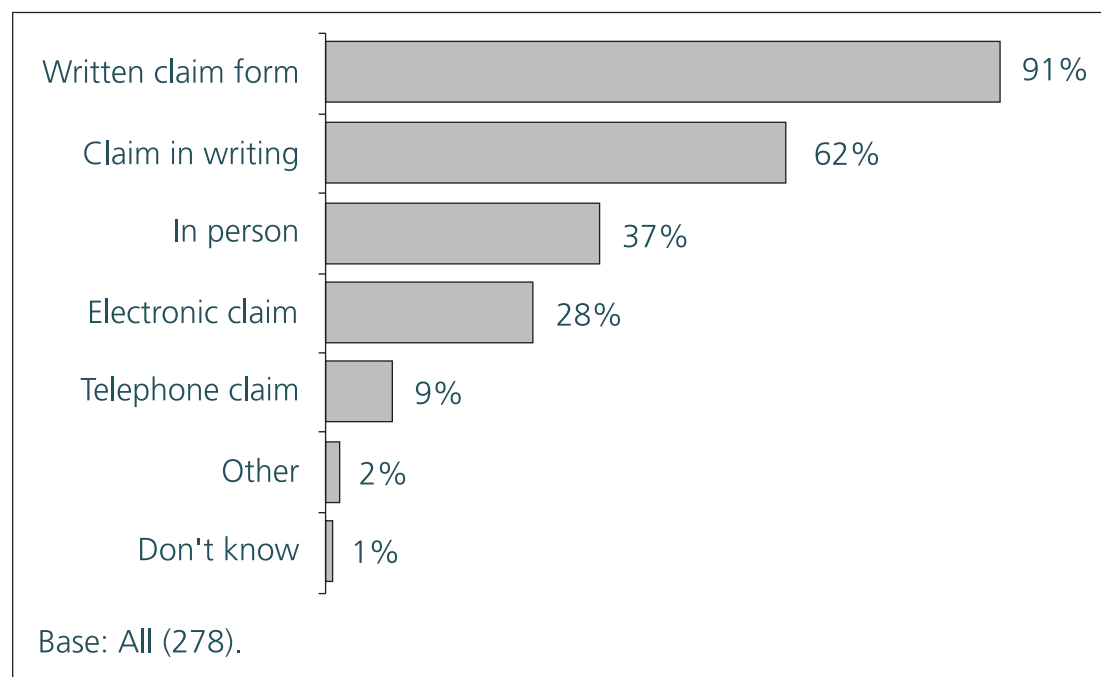


5.8 Types of claim accepted

The vast majority of authorities accept a written claim form (91 per cent), while three in five (62 per cent) accept a claim in writing, e.g, a letter. Fewer said that their authority accepts a claim in person (37 per cent), electronically, e.g, on a web-site or email (28 per cent) or by telephone (nine per cent).

It is interesting to note that none of the Welsh authorities that we interviewed said that they accept a telephone claim. In addition, high caseload authorities are more likely to accept an electronic claim than low caseload authorities (38 per cent and 19 per cent respectively).

Figure 5.8 Types of claim accepted



Nine in ten authorities (91 per cent) do not make people claiming DHP attend in person for an interview.

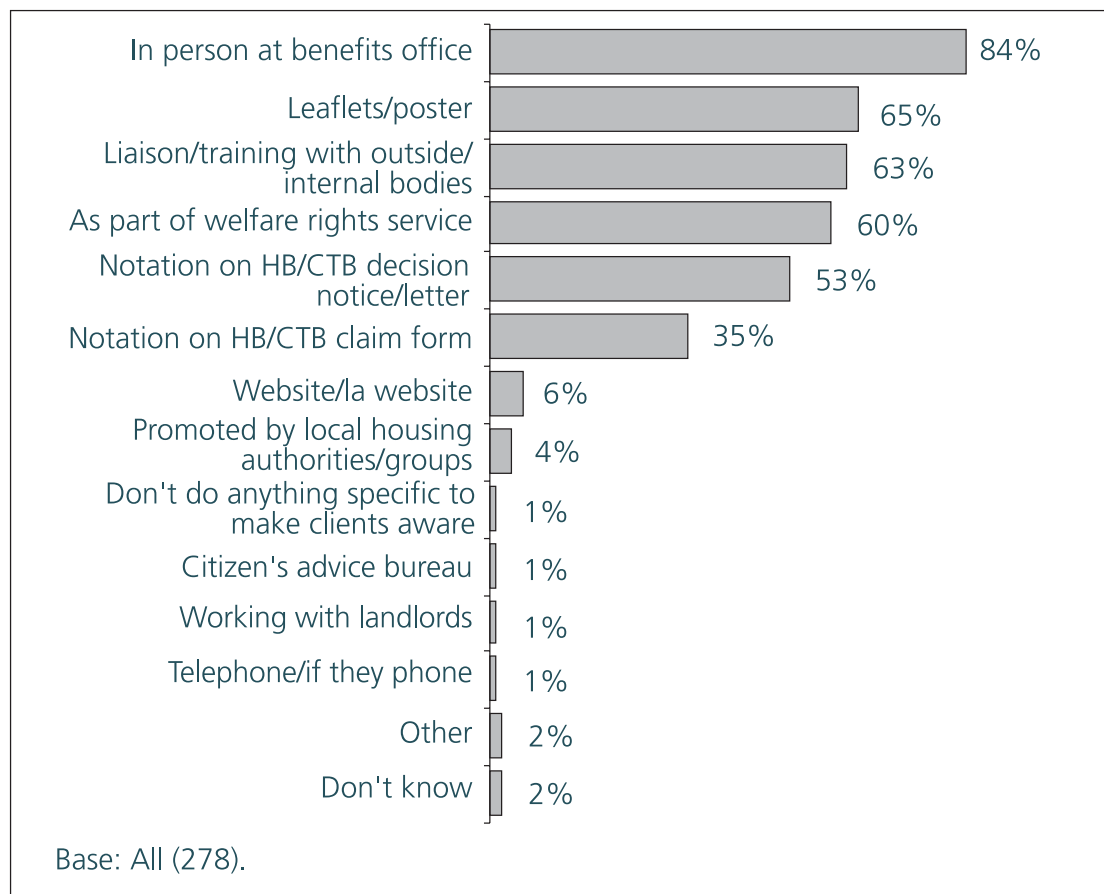
5.9 Making claimants aware of Discretionary Housing Payments

Respondents were asked what their authority does to ensure that claimants are aware of the existence of DHPs.

The largest majority said that claimants are advised if they come to the benefits office to discuss a claim (84 per cent). In addition, more than three in five said that their authority has leaflets/posters (65 per cent), informs people through liaison and training with outside/internal bodies who may give advice to claimants (63 per cent) and gives personal advice to claimants as part of a general welfare rights service (60 per cent). Slightly fewer (53 per cent) said that there is notation on the HB/CTB

decision notice/letter and on the HB/CTB claim form (35 per cent). Six per cent of authorities include information on DHPs on their website, while four per cent said that it is promoted by their local housing groups and one per cent mentioned each of the following: Citizen's Advice Bureau, working with landlords, and telephone conversations with claimants. Just one per cent of authorities (two English districts) said that they do not do anything specific to make clients aware.

Figure 5.9 Making claimants aware of DHPs



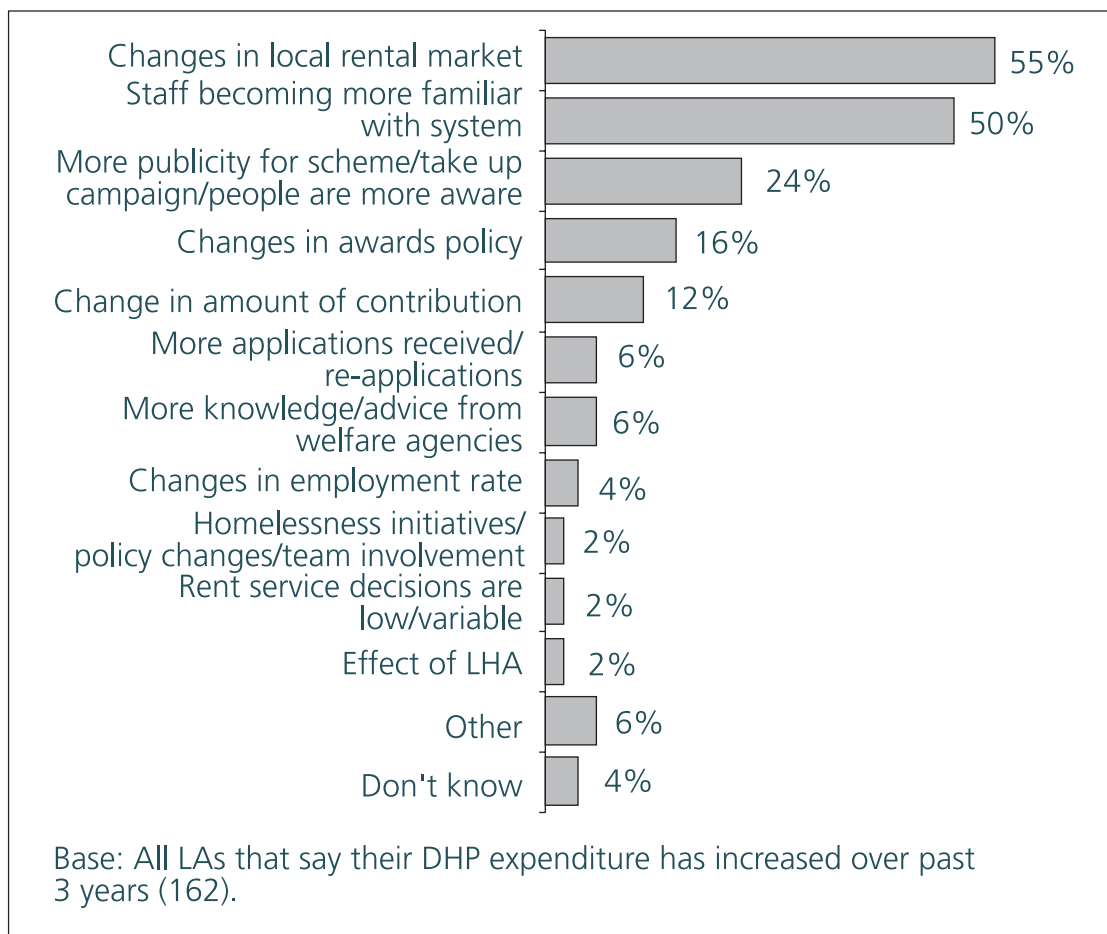
5.10 Increases in Discretionary Housing Payments expenditure

Over half of authorities (58 per cent) said that their DHP expenditure had increased over the past three years. Just under three in ten (29 per cent) thought it had stayed the same and one in ten (ten per cent) said it had decreased. Looking at the findings by sub-group shows that none of the Welsh authorities and English metropolitan districts said that their DHP expenditure had decreased. Although not statistically significant, Welsh authorities tended to be more likely than other authority types to say that their DHP expenditure has increased (75 per cent).

Those respondents who said that DHP expenditure has increased were then asked why, in their opinion, they have seen this increase. Over half (55 per cent) cited changes in the local rental market, while slightly fewer (50 per cent) said that the

increase has been because staff were becoming more familiar with the system. Just under one in four (24 per cent) felt that the increase was due to more publicity for the scheme/take-up campaign, while 16 per cent thought that the increase was due to changes in the awards policy and one in eight (12 per cent) cited change in the amount of contribution. Six per cent attributed the increase in expenditure to more applications being received and more knowledge/advice from welfare agencies. Just four per cent mentioned changes in employment rate and two per cent the effect of LHA, homelessness initiatives/policy changes and rent service decisions being low/variable.

Figure 5.10 Reasons for increases in DHP expenditure



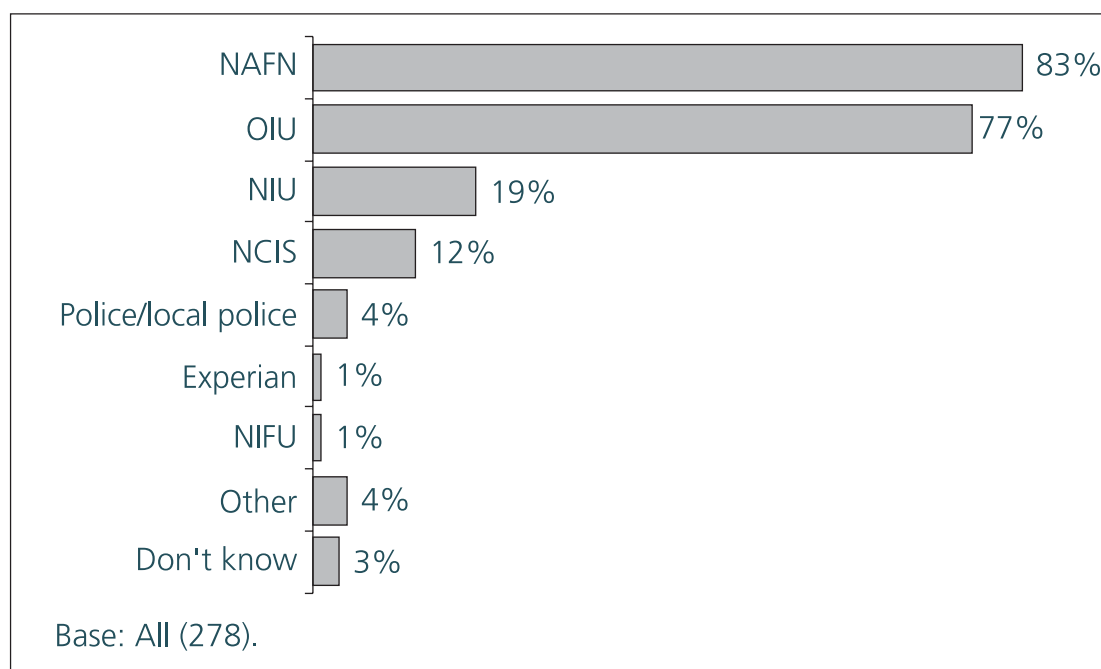
6 Use of intelligence

6.1 Introduction

DWP is continuing to promote the use of intelligence led investigation within Local Authorities (LAs). The information gathered in this section of the report, it is hoped, will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the range of intelligence service.

6.2 Use of intelligence services

LAs were asked if they currently use any of the intelligence services provided by a range of organisations. The National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN) and the Operational Intelligence Unit (OIU) were the two organisations that had been used most frequently by LAs with approximately four in five authorities using them (83 per cent and 77 per cent respectively). One in five or so (19 per cent) had used the National Intelligence Unit (NIU) and fewer had made use of the intelligence services provided by the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and other intelligence services (12 per cent and four per cent respectively). In addition, four per cent used the police/local police, while one per cent used Experian or the National Identity Fraud Unit (NIFU).

Figure 6.1 Current use of intelligence services

There were differences in the pattern of use of intelligence services according to the size of caseload. LAs with low caseloads were more likely than authorities with medium and high caseloads to use NIU. A third (33 per cent) of those with low caseloads use NIU compared to around one in seven of those with medium and high caseloads (13 per cent and 14 per cent respectively). Similarly, authorities with low caseloads were more likely to use NCIS (20 per cent) than those with medium and high caseloads (nine per cent and seven per cent respectively).

Table 6.1 Does your authority currently use any of the intelligence services provided by these organisations?

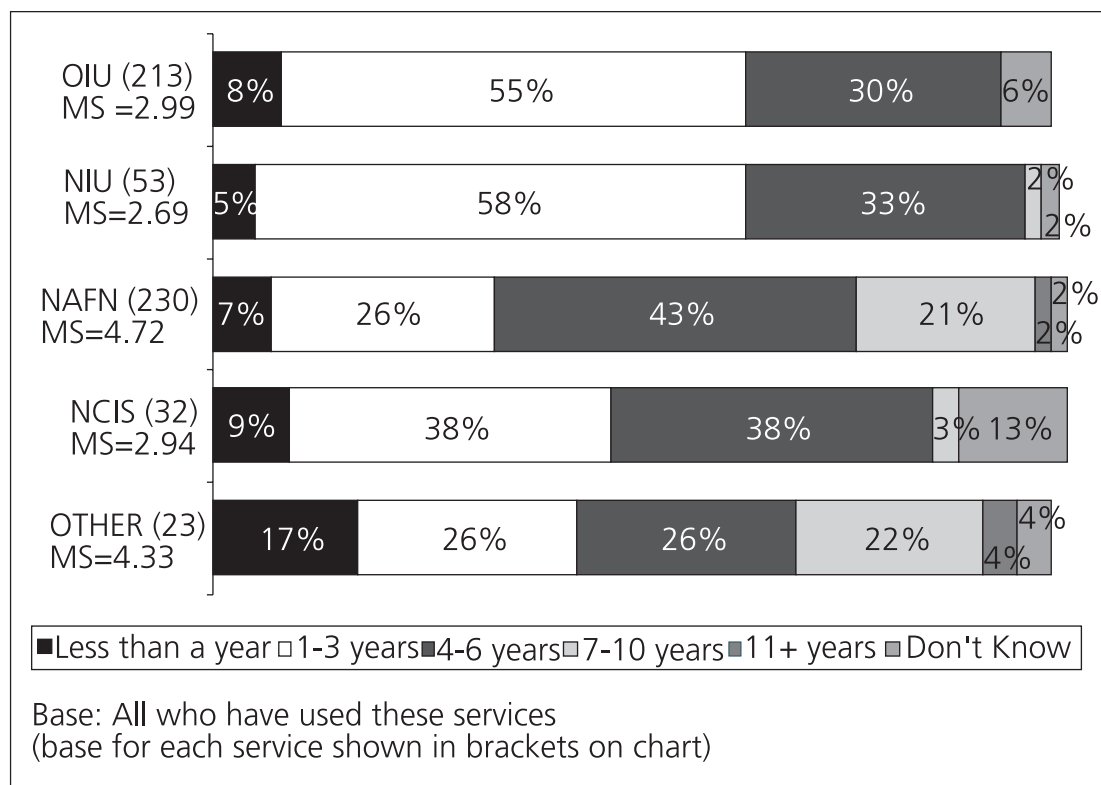
	Total	Low caseload	Medium caseload	High caseload
Base: All	278	81	111	86
	%	%	%	%
NAFN	83	85	81	83
OIU	77	68	77	85
NIU	19	33	13	14
NCIS	12	20	9	7
Police	4	6	5	2
Others	4	2	4	7

It is also worth noting that NAFN users were particularly concentrated among English unitary (97 per cent) or English metropolitan (92 per cent) authorities and less frequently found among Welsh (75 per cent), London boroughs (71 per cent) or Scottish (67 per cent) authorities. More detailed analysis, by region, shows that the

South East had the highest concentration of NAFN users at 98 per cent yet interestingly London was significantly lower than average at 71 per cent whilst Scotland had the lowest number of NAFN users at 67 per cent.

Where an authority has been using an intelligence organisation they were asked to state how long they had been making use of that organisation’s services. Observations of the average numbers of years that local authorities had been using these services reveal that the majority of authorities have been engaged in this kind of activity for between two and five years or so. For instance the mean score for the number of years that authorities had been using NAFN was 4.72, for OIU 2.99, NCIS 2.94, and NIU 2.69. ‘Other’ intelligence services had been used by those authorities who use them for an average of 4.33 years.

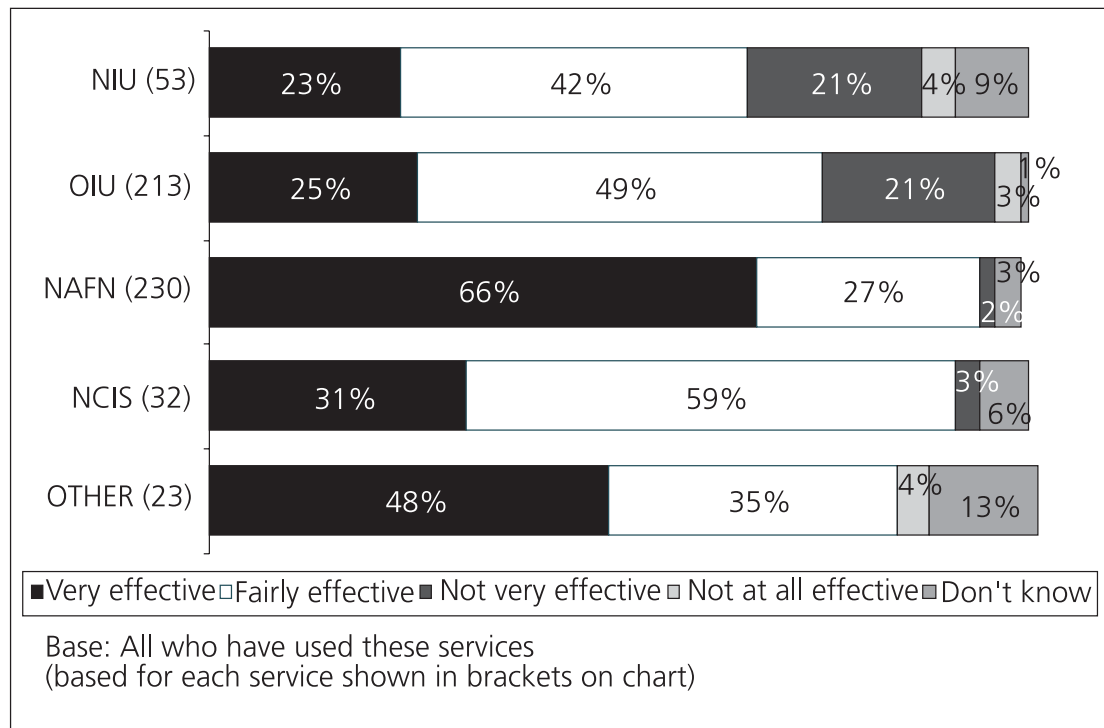
Figure 6.2 Length of time using different intelligence services



6.3 Effectiveness of intelligence services in terms of improving the performance of LA’s Investigation Service

The authorities that currently use intelligence services were then asked to rate them in terms of how effective they had been at improving the authority’s investigation service. The LAs that use NAFN, NCIS and ‘other’ intelligence services rated these organisations more highly than those authorities that use OIU and NIU. For instance, two thirds (66 per cent) of NAFN users said that they had found them very effective in terms of improving the authority’s investigation service compared to just one in four (23 per cent) of NIU users.

Figure 6.3 Effectiveness of different intelligence services at improving performance of investigation service

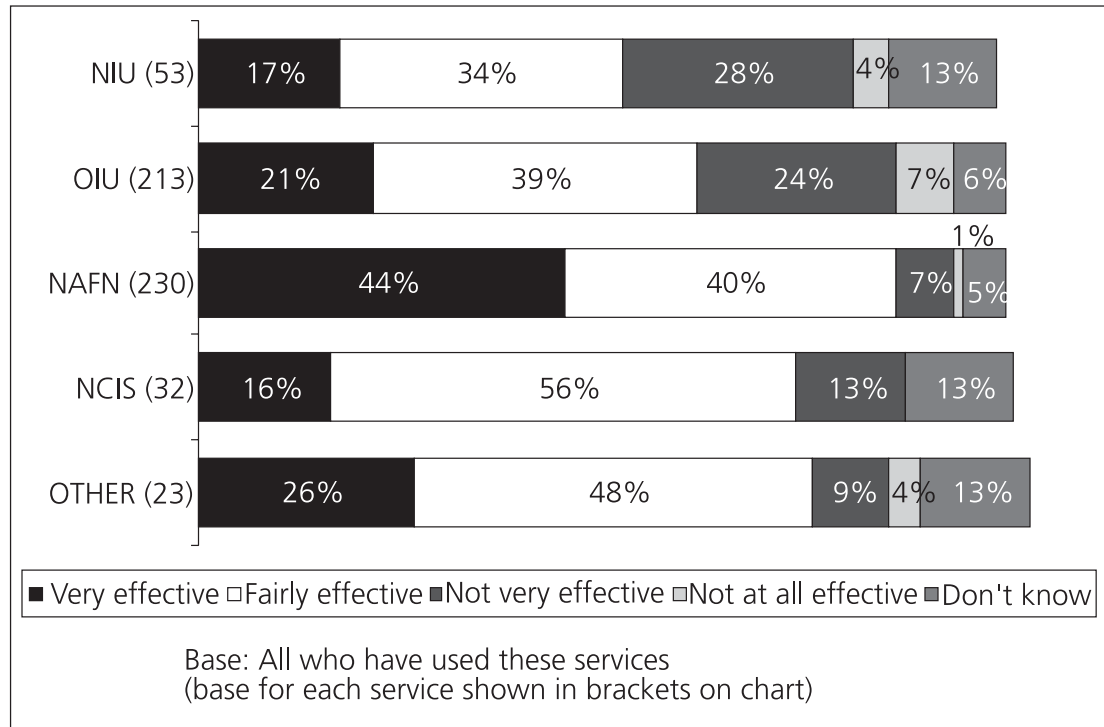


Another way to look at the ratings for improving the performance of LA's Investigation Service is by comparing the mean scores and these clearly show NAFN as being rated as the most effective with a mean score of 1.61. Other intelligence services and NCIS are rated second and third most effective at 1.22, and 1.19 respectively. OIU and NIU are rated less well for effectiveness in terms of improving the performance of the authority's investigation service with mean scores of 0.72 and 0.60 respectively.

6.4 Effectiveness of intelligence services in terms of reducing fraud and error

Those authorities that use intelligence services were asked to state how effective they thought they were in terms of reducing fraud and error. Those authorities that currently use NAFN rated them the highest for effectiveness at this kind of activity, with the majority of their users saying they found them to be either very (44 per cent) or fairly (40 per cent) effective in terms of reducing fraud and error. 'Other' intelligence services and NCIS were rated strongly by their users, though not as highly as NAFN, whilst OIU and NIU were not rated as highly. A third or so (32 per cent) of NIU users said they found them to be either not very (28 per cent) or not at all (four per cent) effective at reducing fraud and error. Similarly, approximately a third (31 per cent) of OIU users found them to be not effective (24 per cent not very effective and seven per cent not at all effective).

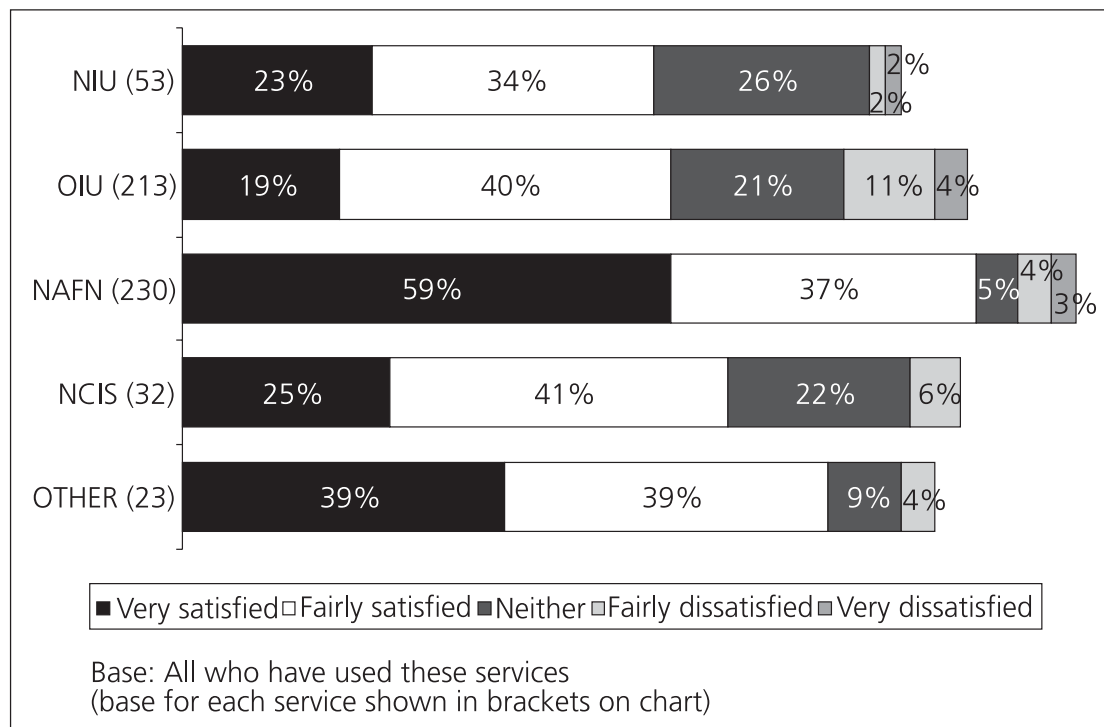
Figure 6.4 Effectiveness of different intelligence services at reducing fraud and error



6.5 Overall satisfaction with intelligence services

LAs using intelligence services were then asked to give an overall rating of satisfaction with the services they had experience of. Not surprisingly, given the effectiveness ratings for different aspects of the service, the intelligence service rated the highest by its users in terms of overall satisfaction was NAFN. Three in five (59 per cent) of NAFN users were very satisfied and a further 37 per cent were fairly satisfied overall. 'Other' intelligence services were also rated highly with two in five (39 per cent) of users saying they were very satisfied and an equal number (39 per cent) claiming to be fairly satisfied.

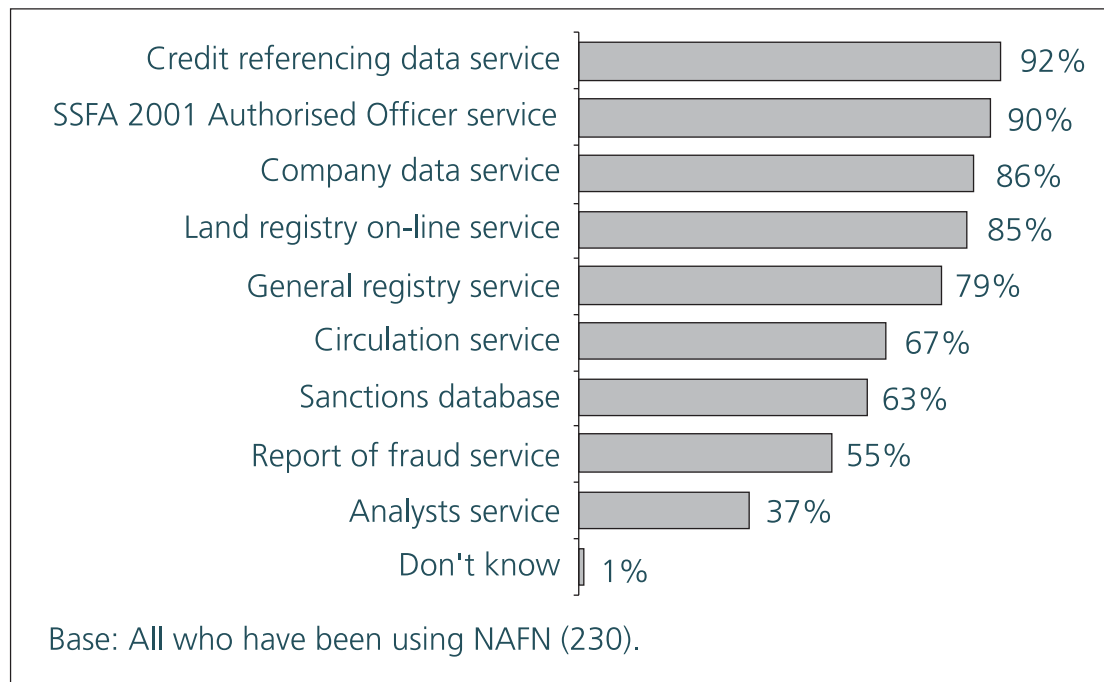
The remaining three intelligence services were rated at a lower level but the majority of users were satisfied rather than dissatisfied overall. For instance, a quarter (25 per cent) of NCIS users were very satisfied and a further two in five (41 per cent) were fairly satisfied. Similarly 23 per cent of NIU users were very satisfied and 34 per cent were fairly satisfied with the intelligence service they received from them. OIU had the lowest overall satisfaction levels with one in five (19 per cent) of OIU users saying they were very satisfied and two in five (40 per cent) fairly satisfied.

Figure 6.5 Overall satisfaction with intelligence services

6.6 Awareness and use of National Anti-Fraud Network Services

The questionnaire had a number of questions for users of NAFN. Initially, users of this service were asked about awareness of the range of different services provided by NAFN and generally the levels of awareness were high. Awareness was especially high for Credit referencing data service (92 per cent), SSFA 2001 Authorised Officer service (90 per cent), Company Data Service (86 per cent) and Land registry on-line service (85 per cent). The General Registry Service also has a high level of awareness amongst NAFN users with four in five (79 per cent) aware.

Awareness levels were lower for the circulation service (67 per cent), sanctions database (63 per cent) and report of fraud service (55 per cent) though, importantly, the majority did know that NAFN provides these services. Awareness was significantly lower however for the analysts service with less than two in five (37 per cent) of NAFN users claiming to have heard of this service.

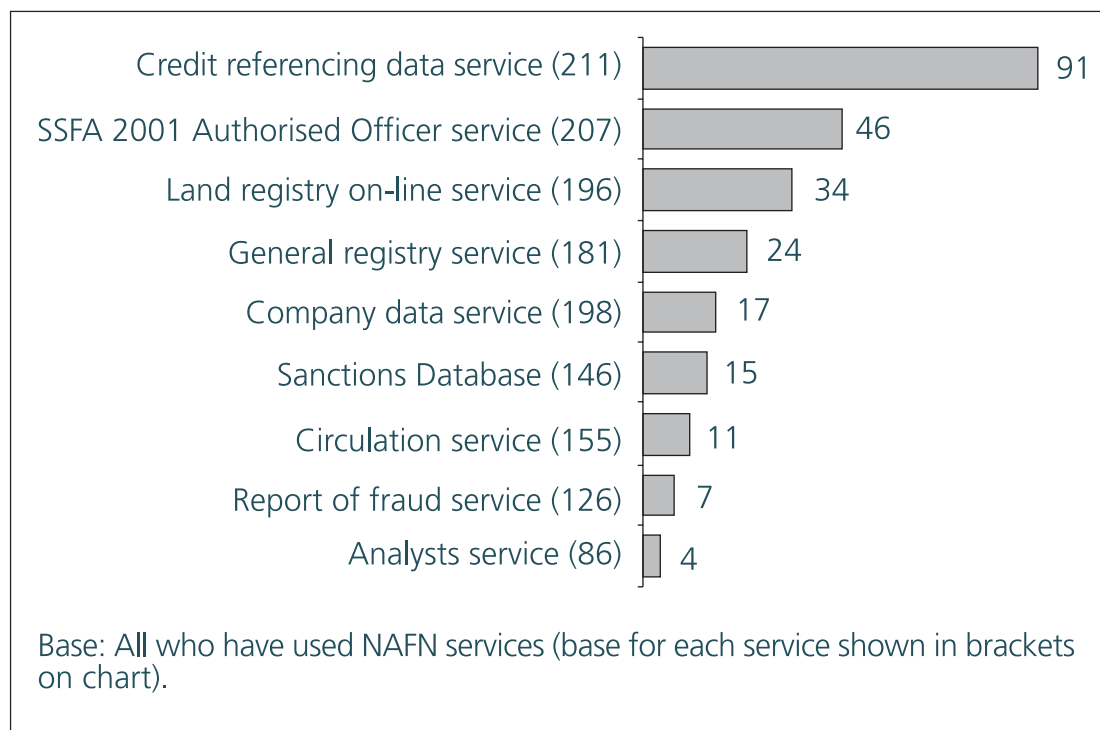
Figure 6.6 Awareness of services provided by NAFN

LAs that are currently NAFN users were asked approximately how often they used each of the services that NAFN provide. Authorities gave responses such as once a week, once a month and so on and for ease of analysis this has been translated into number of days per annum (once a month equates to 12 times per annum and so on).

The Credit Referencing data service appears to be used the most frequently by NAFN members with an average use of 91 days per year. The SSFA 2001 Authorised Officer service and Land Registry on-line service were also used relatively frequently (46 days and 34 days per annum averages respectively).

The services that were used the least frequently were the Analysts service (four days per annum average use) and the report of fraud service (seven days per annum average).

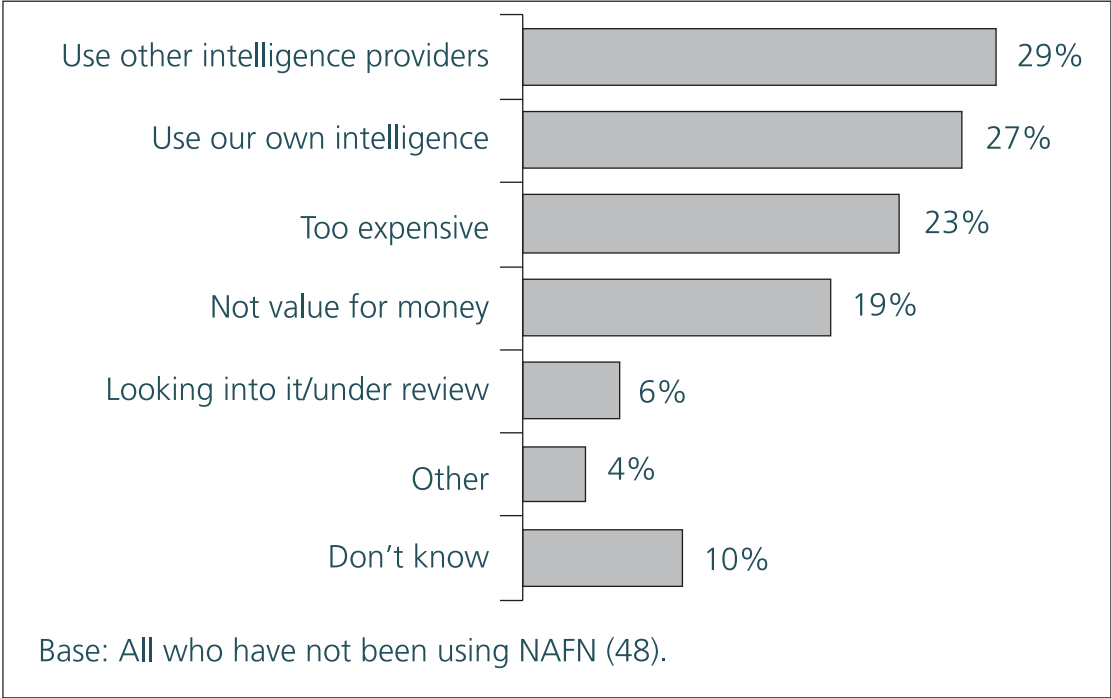
Figure 6.7 Average number of days per year NAFN services are used



6.7 Reasons for not being a member of National Anti-Fraud Network

A total of forty-eight LAs were recorded as not currently being members of NAFN. These authorities were asked why they are not currently members of NAFN. The main reasons given by this group appear to centre around the fact that non-NAFN users simply get this kind of service from a different source. Three in ten (29 per cent) use other intelligence providers and 27 per cent use their own intelligence. Cost implications also play a part here. A quarter (23 per cent) said that NAFN were too expensive and one in five (19 per cent) said that they were not value for money.

Figure 6.8 **Reasons for not being a member of NAFN**



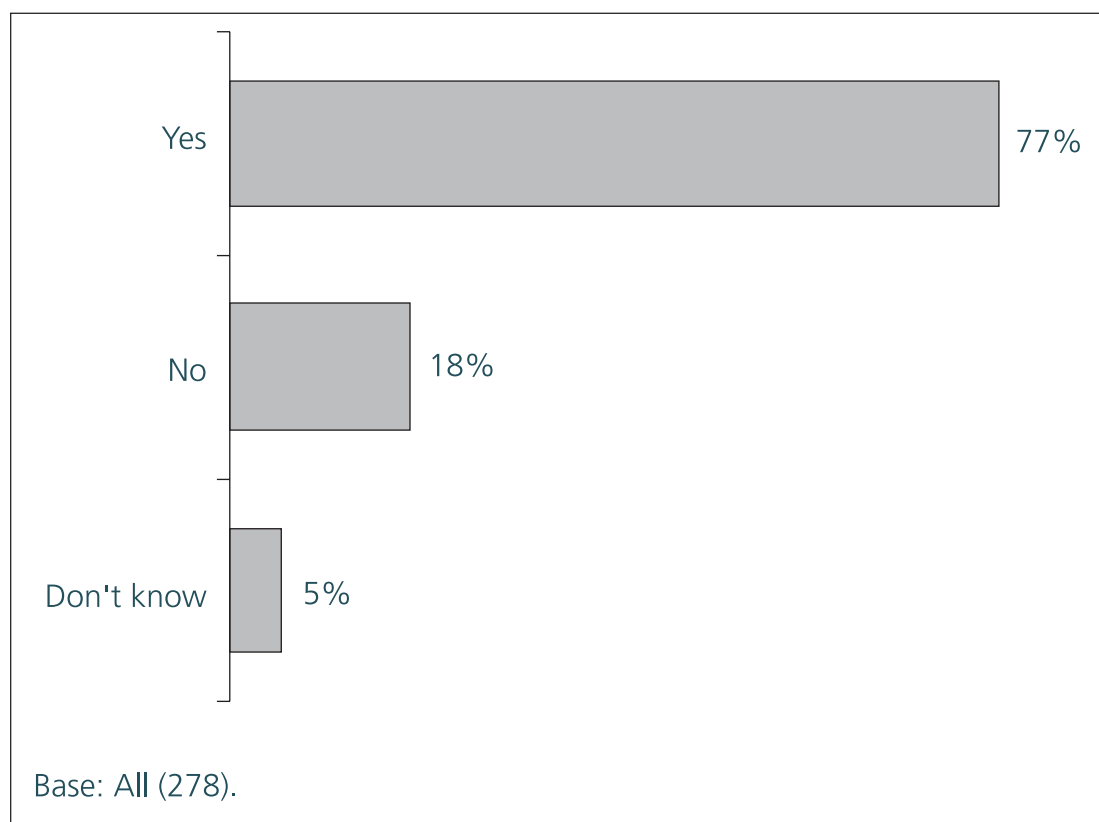
7 Disability

7.1 Introduction

The Disability and Carers Directorate of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is interested in how often adjustments to assist disabled people are offered as part of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) claim process, and also how commonly adjustments are made to Local Authority housing stock.

7.2 Claiming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as a disabled person

Initially, the LAs surveyed were asked whether or not they ask if a claimant is disabled during any point of the claiming process. Approximately three quarters (77 per cent) of the authorities interviewed said that they do ask about disability at some point in the claim process, one in five (18 per cent) said they did not and five per cent said don't know.

Figure 7.1 Do LAs ask if the claimant is disabled?

Analysing this question by region showed that the regions that were significantly more likely to ask whether a claimant is disabled at some point during the claiming process were the North East (all, 100 per cent ask this question), the West Midlands (89 per cent), East Midlands (85 per cent) and the South West (81 per cent). London is notable as the region that is least likely to ask this question with just three in five (58 per cent) of the London authorities interviewed saying that they did so. Looking at the findings for this question by the equality standard authorities achieve, there are no significant differences.

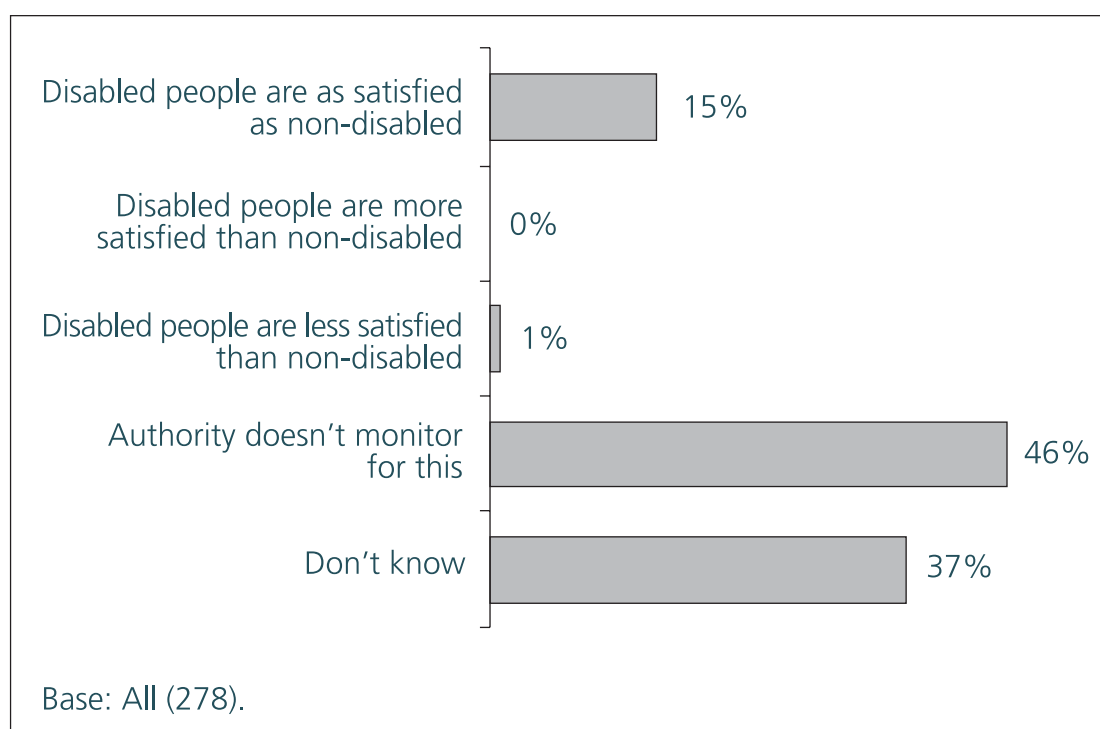
Just more than half (55 per cent) of the authorities interviewed said that they ask whether disabled people need any adjustments to the processing and administration of their HB/CTB claim, for example, by providing alternative ways of filling the form in. There were some significant differences in the response to this question according to the type of local authority. English unitary authorities were more likely (72 per cent) than English metropolitan authorities (46 per cent), Scottish (43 per cent) and Welsh authorities (42 per cent) to ask disabled people if they need adjustments. Looking at the findings for this question by the equality standard authorities achieve, Level 2 authorities were significantly more likely than Level 3 authorities to say that they ask disabled people if they need adjustments to the processing and administration of their HB/CTB claim.

Table 7.1 Do LAs ask disabled people whether they need any adjustments to the processing and administration of their HB/CTB claim?

	Total	Welsh	Scottish	English unitary	English metro	English district	London Boro
Base: All	278	12	21	32	24	165	24
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	55	42	43	72	46	56	50
No	40	58	57	25	46	39	38
Don't know	5	-	-	3	8	5	13

Authorities were also asked if they knew whether disabled claimants were as satisfied with their service as non-disabled claimants. In order to answer this question accurately, the authority must monitor for this aspect of their service in a way such as a survey or some other formal monitoring method. The vast majority of authorities do not monitor for the satisfaction levels of disabled claimants. Just less than half (46 per cent) of the authorities we interviewed said that they did not know because their authority doesn't monitor for this and a further 37 per cent said did not know. One in seven (15 per cent) of LAs said that they thought disabled people were as satisfied as non-disabled people while one per cent thought that disabled people are less satisfied than non-disabled people. None of the LAs interviewed said that disabled claimants were more satisfied than non-disabled.

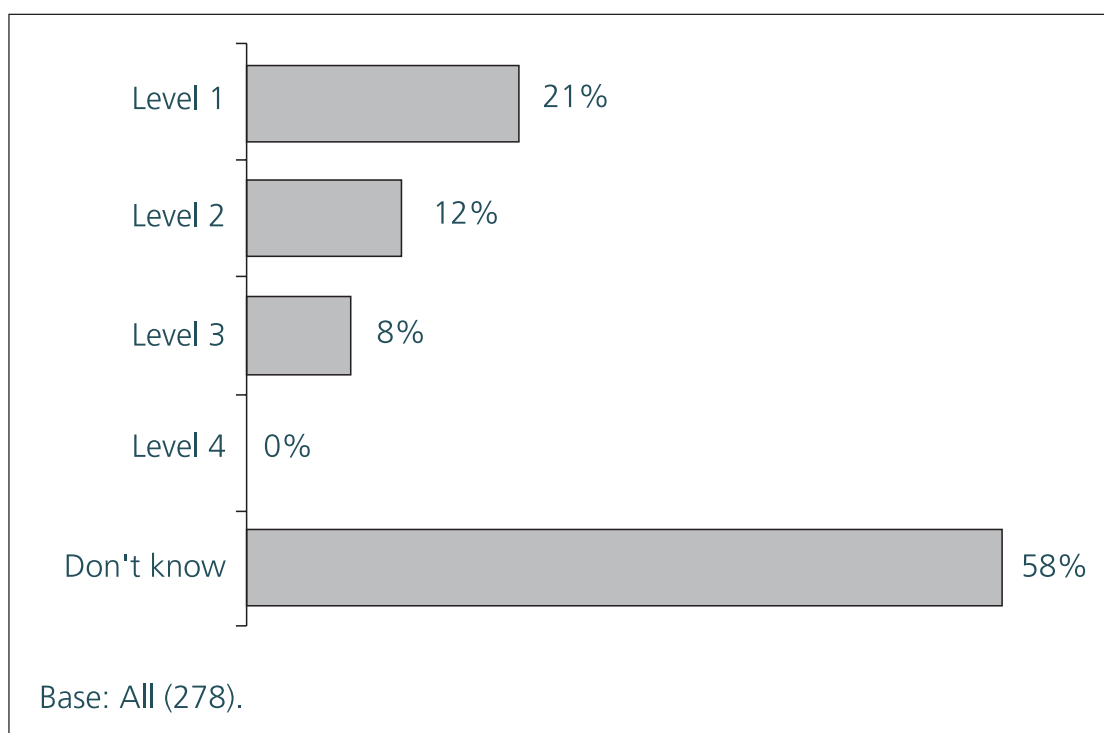
Figure 7.2 Satisfaction with service of disabled versus non-disabled



7.3 Equality standard

When asked about the level of equality standard for local government that their LA currently achieves, the majority of approximately three in five (58 per cent) in fact, said don't know. A fifth (21 per cent) said Level 1, one in eight (12 per cent) said Level 2 and one in twelve (8 per cent) said Level 3. Authorities that said they were currently achieving Level 1 of the equality standard were typically more likely to be from the North East or South West regions (42 per cent and 38 per cent respectively achieving Level 1). The regions that had the lowest concentrations of authorities achieving Level 1 were Scotland (five per cent) and the East (six per cent).

Figure 7.3 Level of quality standard currently achieved



It is interesting to note that the authorities with high caseloads appear to differ here from those with low and medium caseloads. The authorities with high caseloads are more likely to be currently achieving Level 2 or 3 of the equality standard and less likely to be achieving Level 1 than authorities with low or medium caseloads.

Table 7.2 Level of quality standard currently achieved, by HB/CTB caseload

	Total	Low caseload	Medium caseload	High caseload
Base: All	278	81	111	86
	%	%	%	%
Level 1	21	27	23	14
Level 2	12	6	9	22
Level 3	8	2	8	14
Level 4	*	-	1	-
Don't know	58	64	59	50

When analysed by region there were some notable differences. The North East and the South West were more likely to have achieved Level 1 (42 per cent and 38 per cent respectively) and Scotland and the East were much less likely to have achieved Level 1 (five per cent and six per cent respectively).

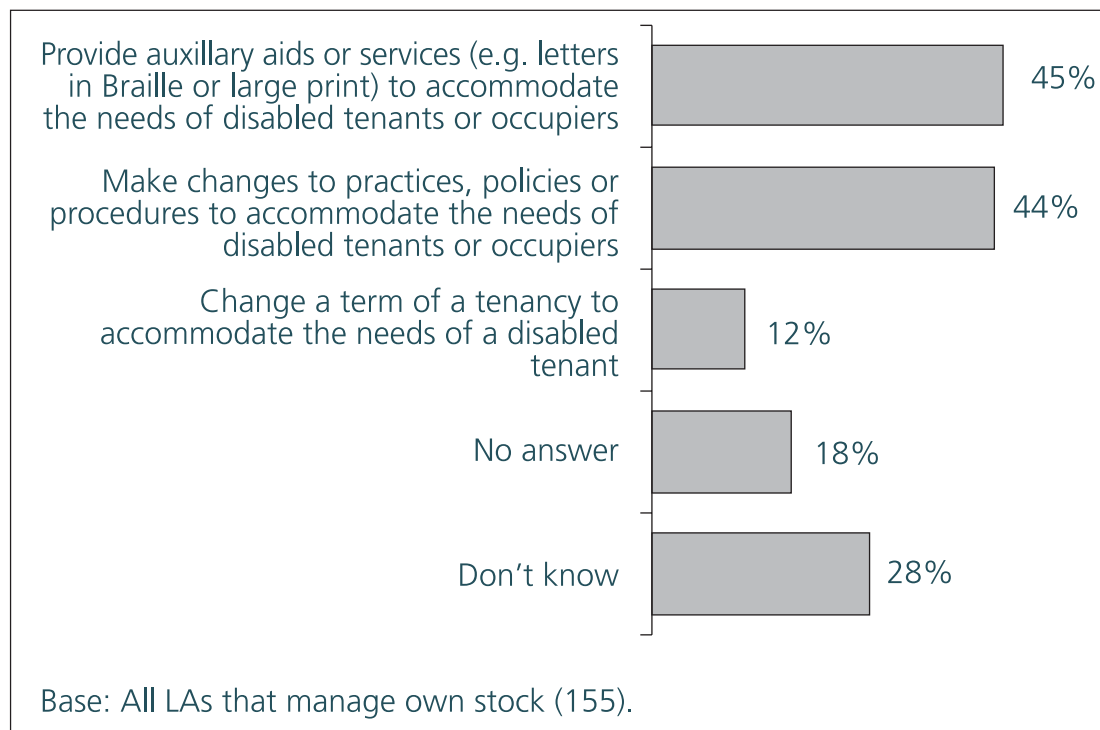
7.4 Adjustments made for disabled tenants

The next part of this module of the questionnaire went on to ask about adjustments made for disabled tenants. However, as a precursor to this sub-section, a baseline question was asked to establish whether or not the LA manages its own stock or operated a combined list with housing associations. More than half (56 per cent) did manage their own stock, two in five (40 per cent) said they did not and four per cent did not give an answer.

There were a number of regions that had higher frequencies of authorities that manage their own stock. Notably, the North East (83 per cent), East (72 per cent), Scotland (71 per cent), East Midlands (70 per cent), Wales (67 per cent) and London (63 per cent) had the highest concentrations of authorities that operate in this way. The region with exceptionally low numbers of authorities managing their own stock was the West Midlands where just three in ten (29 per cent) of those interviewed manage their own stock or operate a combined list with housing associations.

The authorities that manage their own stock or operate a combined list were asked about the kind of adjustments they make for disabled tenants. The changes most frequently made were to practices, policies or procedures (44 per cent) and also to provide auxiliary aids or services (e.g. letters in Braille or large print), mentioned by a similar amount (45 per cent). One in eight (12 per cent) LAs said that they would change a term of a tenancy. Interestingly, the number of authorities that said don't know to this question was substantial at three in ten (28 per cent) and one in five (18 per cent) said that they did none of these changes.

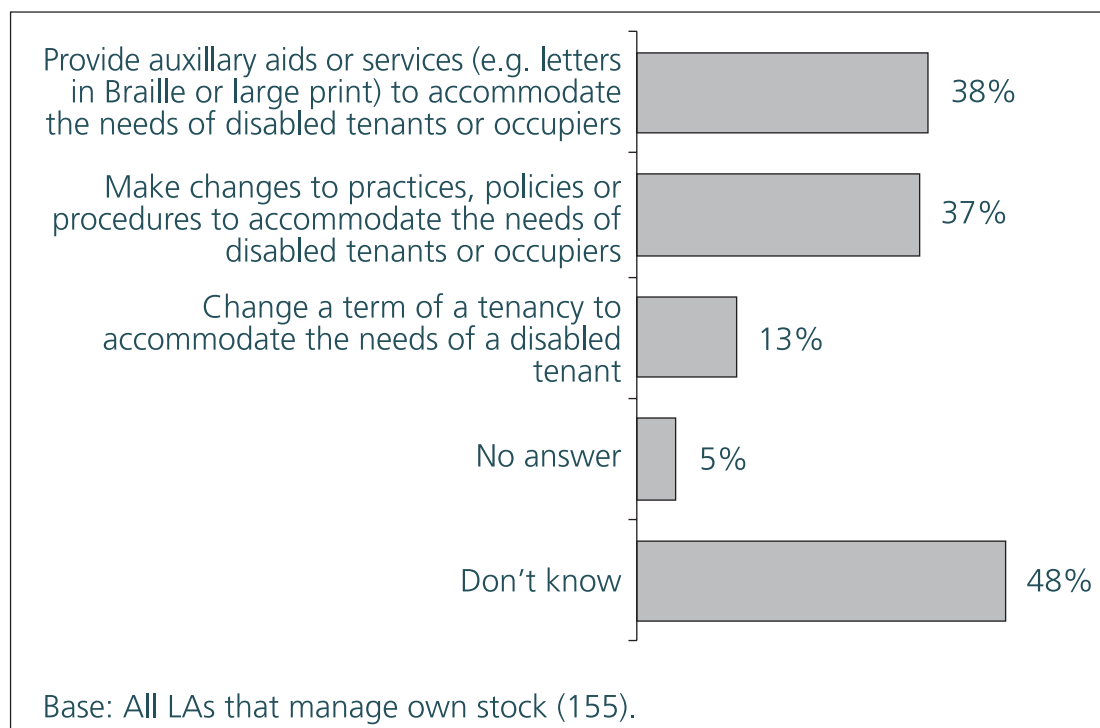
Figure 7.4 Adjustments made for disabled in stock allocated through combined list



The same group of 155 LAs that manage their own stock or operate through a combined list were asked about the adjustments they currently make for prospective disabled tenants or occupiers in stock that is allocated through the combined list.

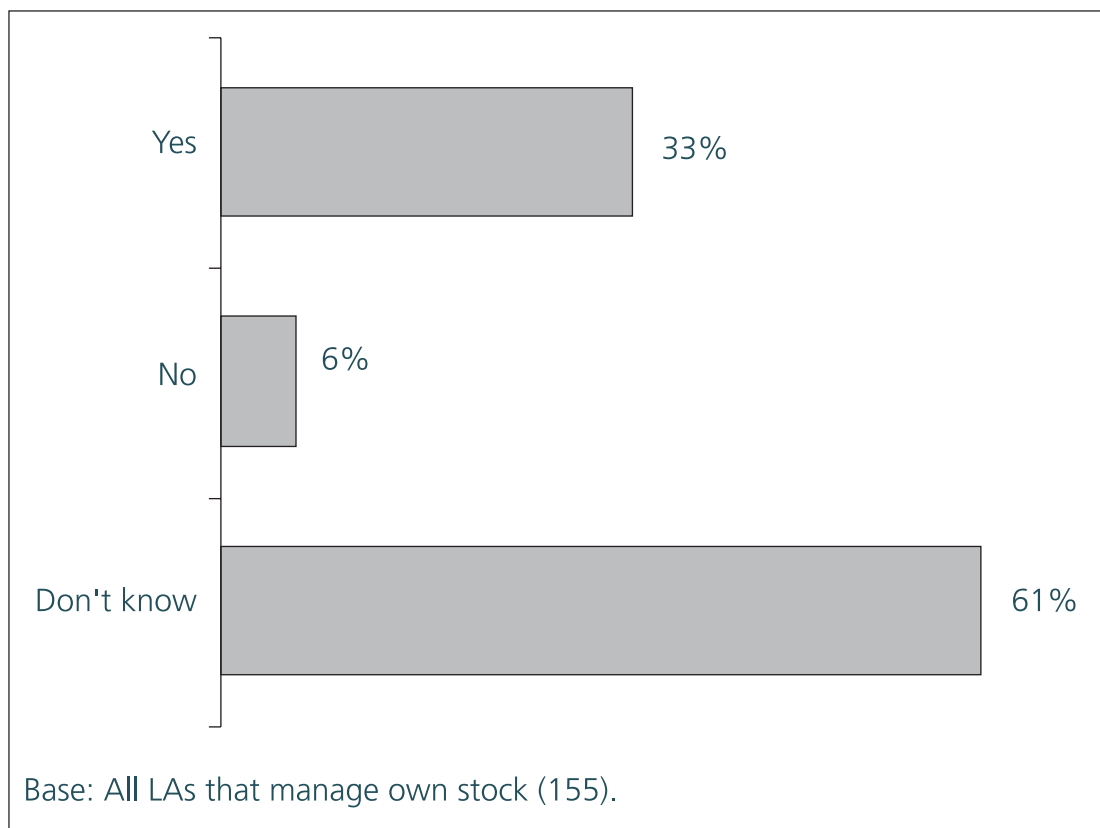
The pattern of responses was similar to that for current tenants although fewer authorities overall said that they were making changes: two in five or so (37 per cent) make changes to practices, policies and procedures and similar numbers (38 per cent) provide auxillary aids or services. One in eight (13 per cent) said that they change a term of tenancy to accommodate the needs of a prospective disabled tenant or occupier and five per cent said they do none of these adjustments. A much higher proportion, approximately half (48 per cent) said that they did not know what adjustments were currently made for prospective disabled tenants.

Figure 7.5 Adjustments made for prospective disabled tenants/occupiers



Three in five (61 per cent) of the LAs that manage their own stock did not know if their authority is required to make these adjustments by law. A third (33 per cent) thought that their authority was required to make these adjustments and six per cent said that they thought it was not required by law to do so.

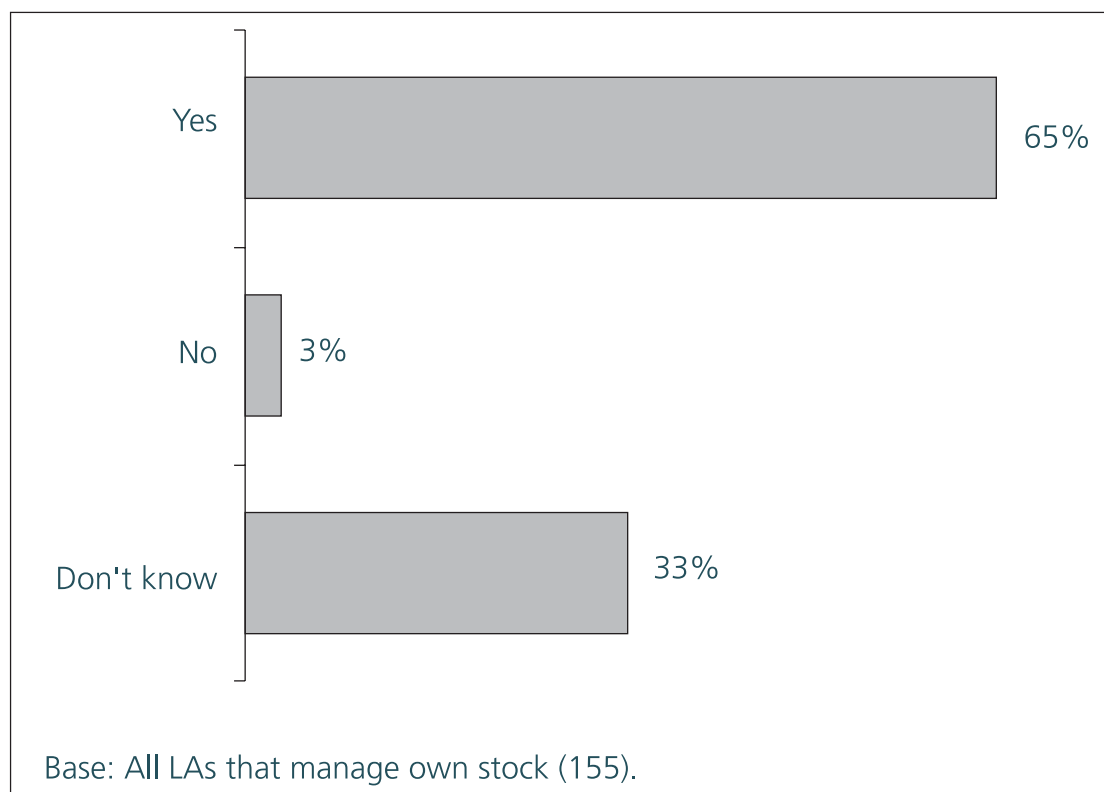
Figure 7.6 Do you know if you are required to make these adjustments by law?



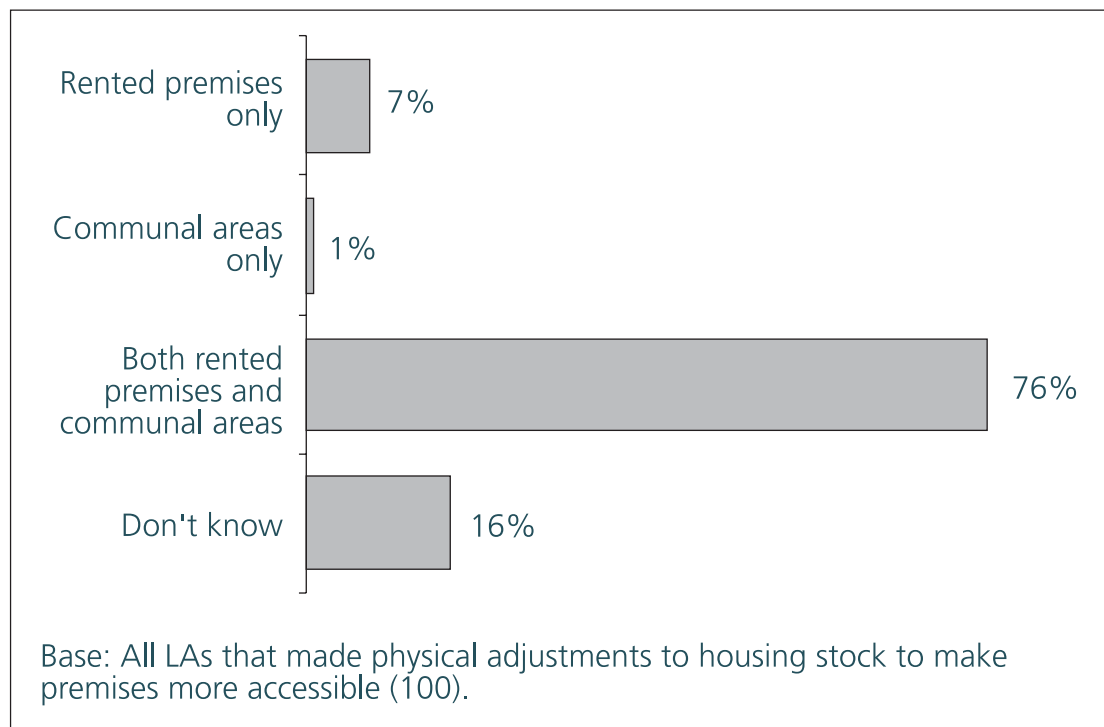
7.5 Physical adjustments to improve accessibility

Two thirds of LAs (65 per cent) that manage their own stock or operate through the combined list make physical adjustments to their housing stock to make premises more accessible. Three per cent said that they did not make physical adjustments and a third (33 per cent) were unsure.

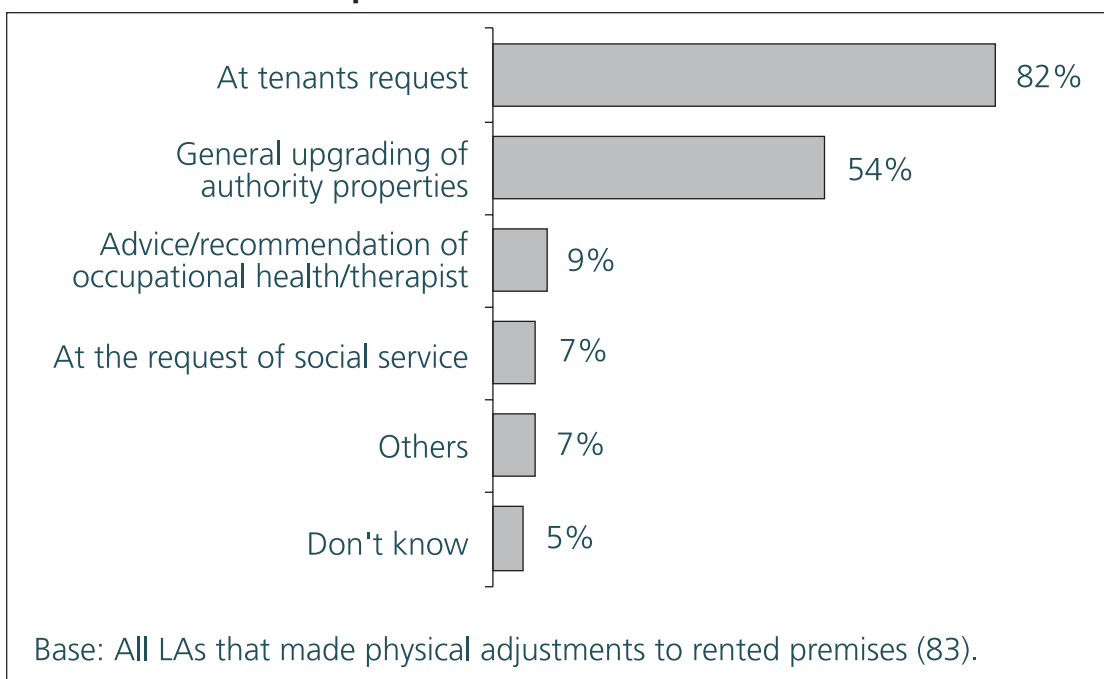
Figure 7.7 Do you make any physical adjustments to housing stock to make it more accessible?



LAs that currently make physical adjustments to make premises more accessible were asked whether they did this to rented premises only, communal areas only or both kinds of areas. Most, three quarters or so (77 per cent), made these physical adjustments to both rented premises and communal areas, while seven per cent did so only to rented premises and a very small number, just one per cent did so to the communal areas only.

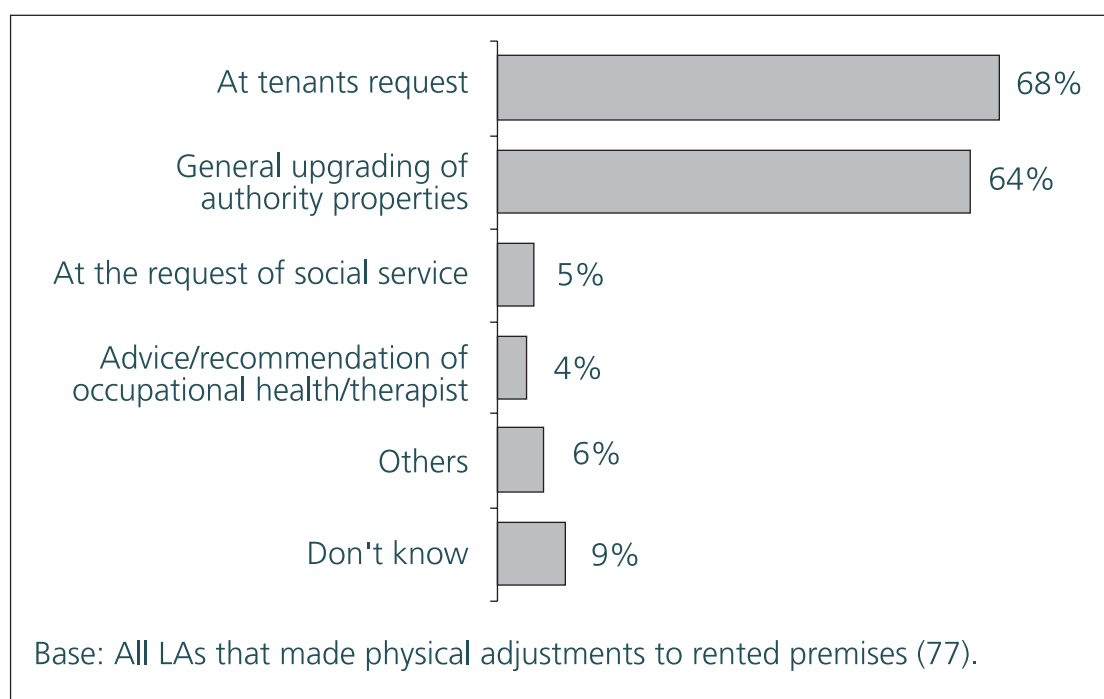
Figure 7.8 Physical adjustments to stock made for disabled

Reasons given for making physical adjustments to rented premises were frequently centred around the tenants' requests (82 per cent). Over half (55 per cent) of authorities said that they carried out these adjustments as part of general upgrading of authority properties while one in ten (nine per cent) did so as a result of advice/recommendation of an occupational health therapist. Seven per cent made adjustments following a request from social services.

Figure 7.9 Why does the LA make physical adjustments to the rented premises?

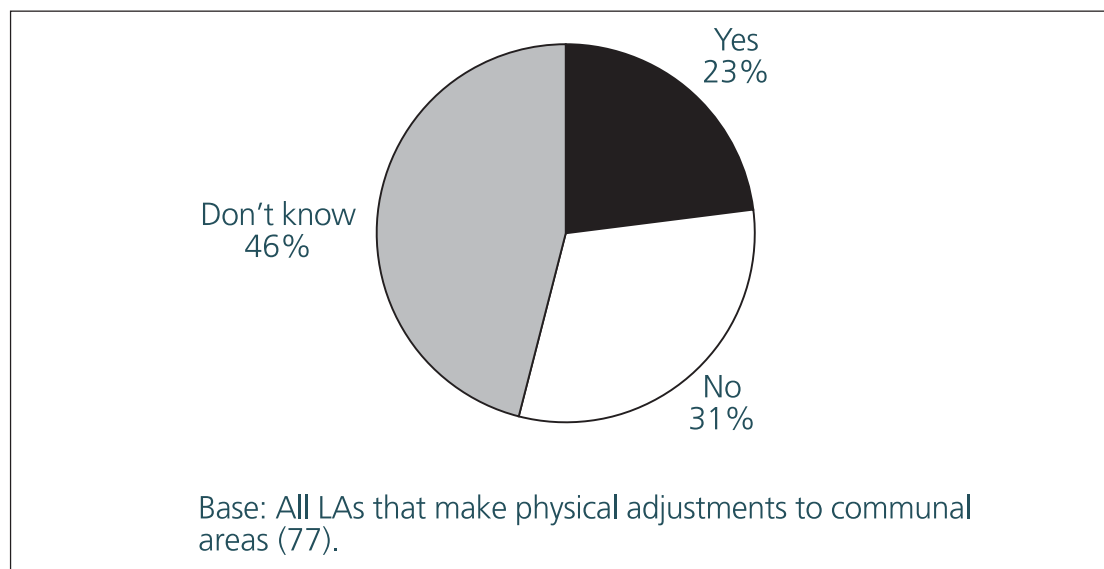
The 81 LAs that said that they make physical adjustments to communal areas were asked why they made these adjustments. Around seven in ten (68 per cent) do so at tenants' request, and slightly fewer (64 per cent) do so as part of general upgrading of authority properties. One in twenty (five per cent) make physical adjustments to communal areas as a result of a request from social services and four per cent did so following advice/recommendation of an occupational health therapist.

Figure 7.10 Why does the LA make physical adjustments to the communal areas?



The group of LAs that make physical adjustments to communal areas were asked if they experience difficulties in making disability-related physical adjustments to the communal areas. Almost a quarter (23 per cent) said that they do experience difficulties but slightly more (31 per cent) said that they do not. A substantial number, more than two in five (46 per cent) said that they don't know.

Figure 7.11 Difficulties in making disability-related physical adjustments to communal areas

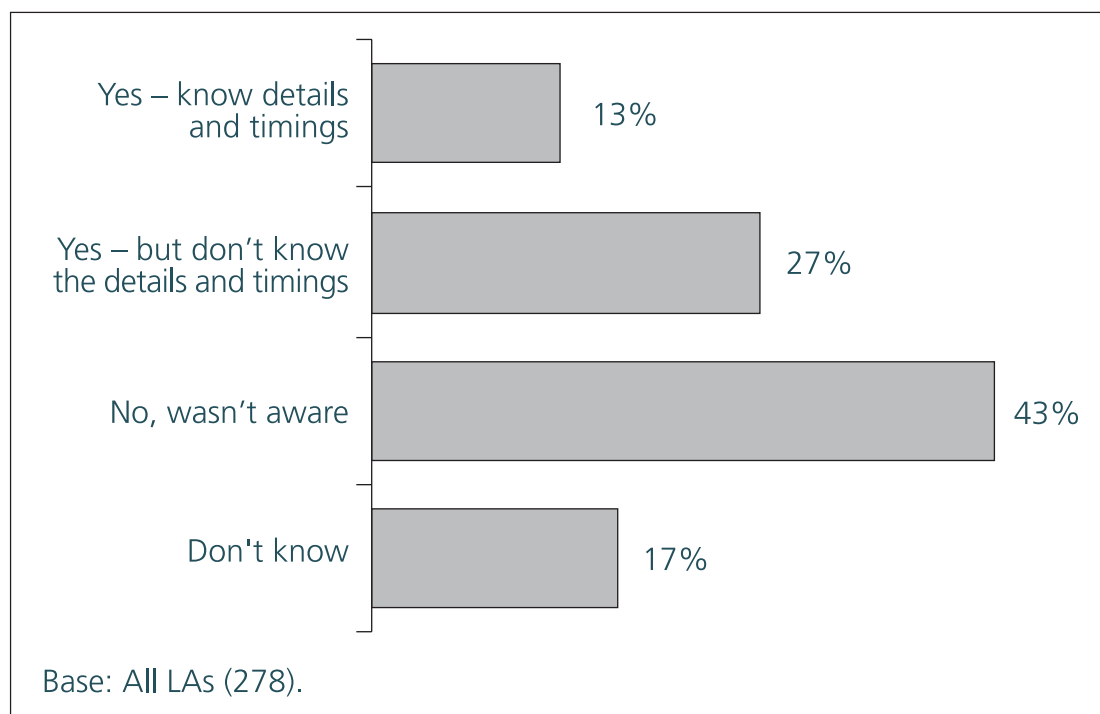


There were 19 LAs that said they experienced difficulties in making disability-related adjustments to the communal areas. When they were asked to explain what these difficulties were, eight said it was just the costs, seven said it was physical restrictions of existing buildings, three said it was reconciling the rights of able bodied tenants in shared areas and three mentioned getting permission for the work when owner occupiers are involved in shared areas.

7.6 Awareness of Disability Discrimination Act

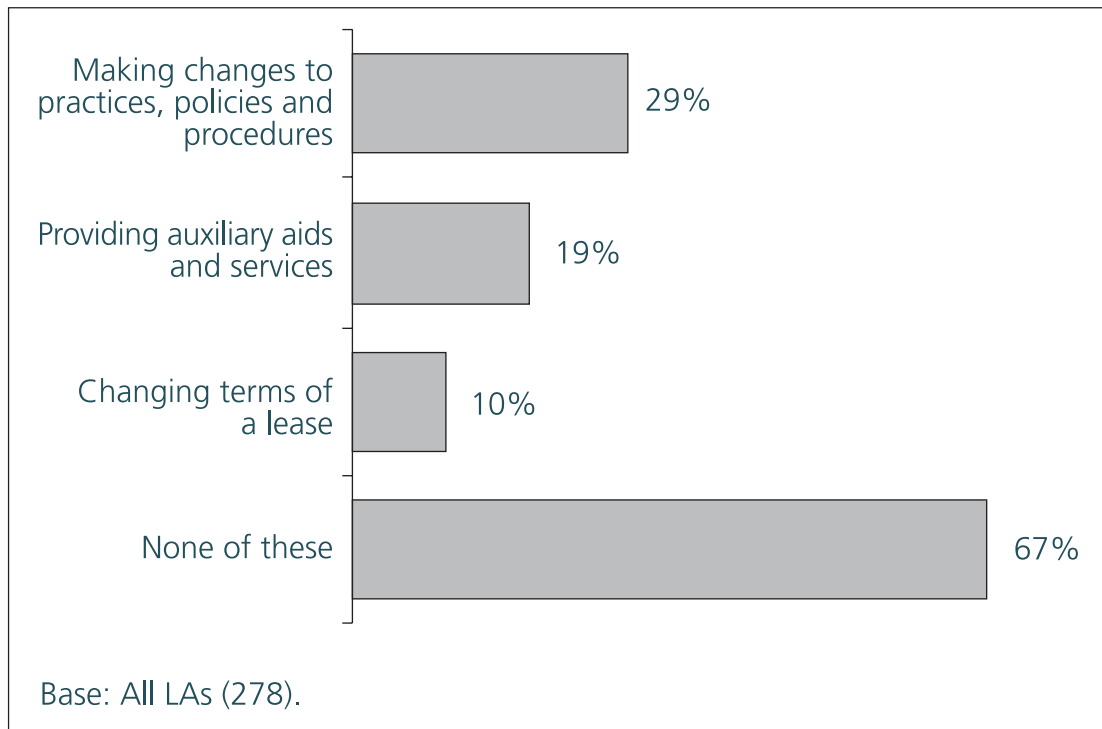
From December 2006, provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) covering reasonable adjustments to housing stock that are let, and to let, are coming into force.

All LAs in this sample were asked if they were aware of this before reading about it during the course of the interview. The lack of awareness was fairly high, with more than two in five (43 per cent) saying that they were not aware and a further 17 per cent saying don't know. Two in five (41 per cent) were aware of the Act and this was divided between 13 per cent who were aware and also aware of the details and timings of the new provision and 27 per cent who claimed they were aware but did not know the details and timings.

Figure 7.12 Awareness of the Disability Discrimination Act

Awareness of the detail of the DDA was asked about. Three in ten (29 per cent) claimed to be aware that the DDA covers making changes to practices, policies and procedures. One in five (19 per cent) were aware that it covered providing auxiliary aids and services and one in ten (ten per cent) were aware that it involved changing terms of a lease. Two thirds (67 per cent) were not aware of any of these aspects of the DDA. Only one in ten (ten per cent) knew that the provisions of the DDA do not require the removal or alteration of a physical feature of the residential premises. A third (33 per cent) said that they thought this was not the case and more than half (57 per cent) did not know.

Figure 7.13 Awareness of the different provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act



8 Royal Mail Do Not Redirect

8.1 Introduction

Following a successful trial in West London in 1997, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), in partnership with the Post Office and Local Authorities, introduced the Royal Mail Do Not Redirect (RMDNR) Service in February 1999.

Under the service, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) correspondence is placed in specially-marked envelopes. If there is an attempt to redirect mail in these envelopes, this is identified by Royal Mail and the mail is returned to the issuing LA.

Previously, fraudulent benefit claimants could use postal redirection in a number of different ways: e.g, a claimant could make a number of false benefit claims from different addresses and, by making use of redirection, have all benefit cheques forwarded to their home address.

RMDNR was last included in the Local Authority Omnibus Survey in October/November 2002. Where the same questions have been asked again, we have included comparisons below.

8.2 Use of Royal Mail Do not Redirect

Ninety-five per cent of authorities interviewed used RMDNR, which is no change on October/November 2002 when the question was last asked at Wave 7. Two per cent did not use the service and three per cent did not give an answer.

8.2.1 Average number of items returned each month via RMDNR

Overall, those authorities that did use RMDNR received an average of 47 items of mail through RMDNR per month. This is an increase on 2002 when authorities received an average 15 items per month. Table 8.1 compares the 2002 and 2006 findings, broken down as they were at the Wave 7 survey.

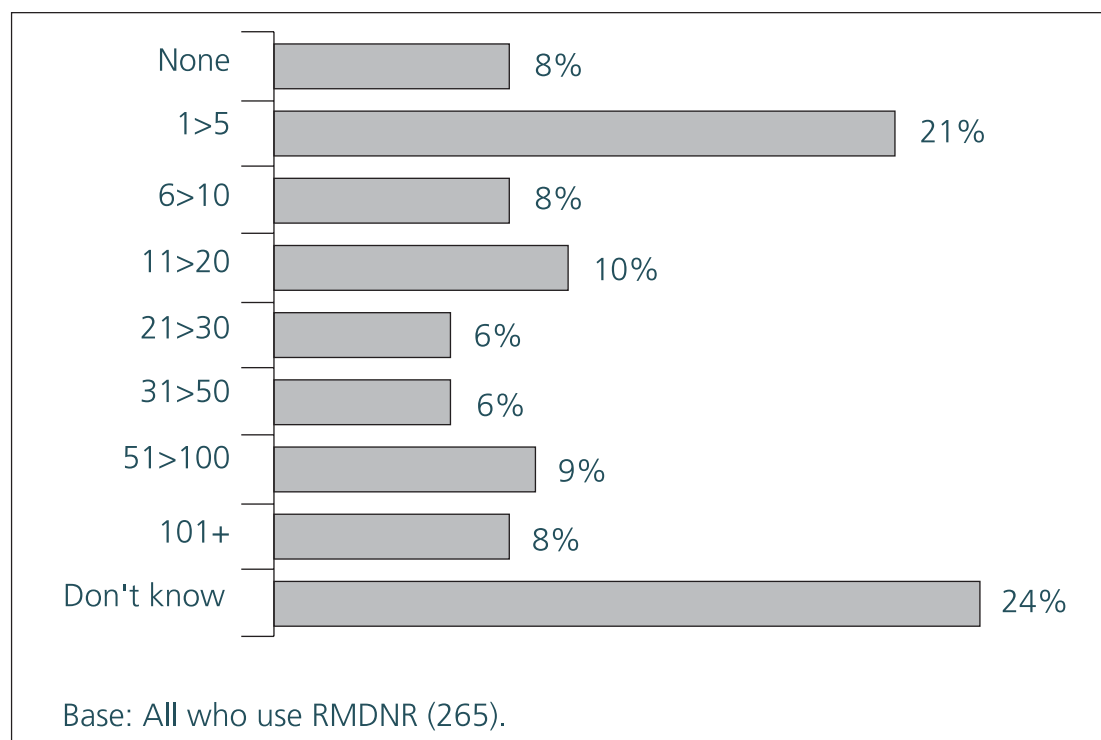
Table 8.1 Average number of items returned each month via RMDNR – comparing 2002 and 2006 findings

	2006	2002
Base: All who use RMDNR	265	294
	%	%
Less than 5	25	47
5-14	15	19
15-49	18	14
50-99	8	3
100+	11	2
Don't know	24	15
Mean	47	15

Among London boroughs this 2006 average rises to an average of 135 items and 107 items for English unitary authorities. However, the average decreases to 26 items for English districts. Not surprisingly, the average also changes according to caseload. Authorities with a low caseload receive on average 12 items, medium authorities receive on average 33 items and high caseload authorities receive on average 115 items.

Nearly a quarter of authorities were not able to say how many items are returned and eight per cent said that they do not receive any. Figure 8.1 shows the full breakdown of findings.

Figure 8.1 Number of items returned each month as a result of RMDNR

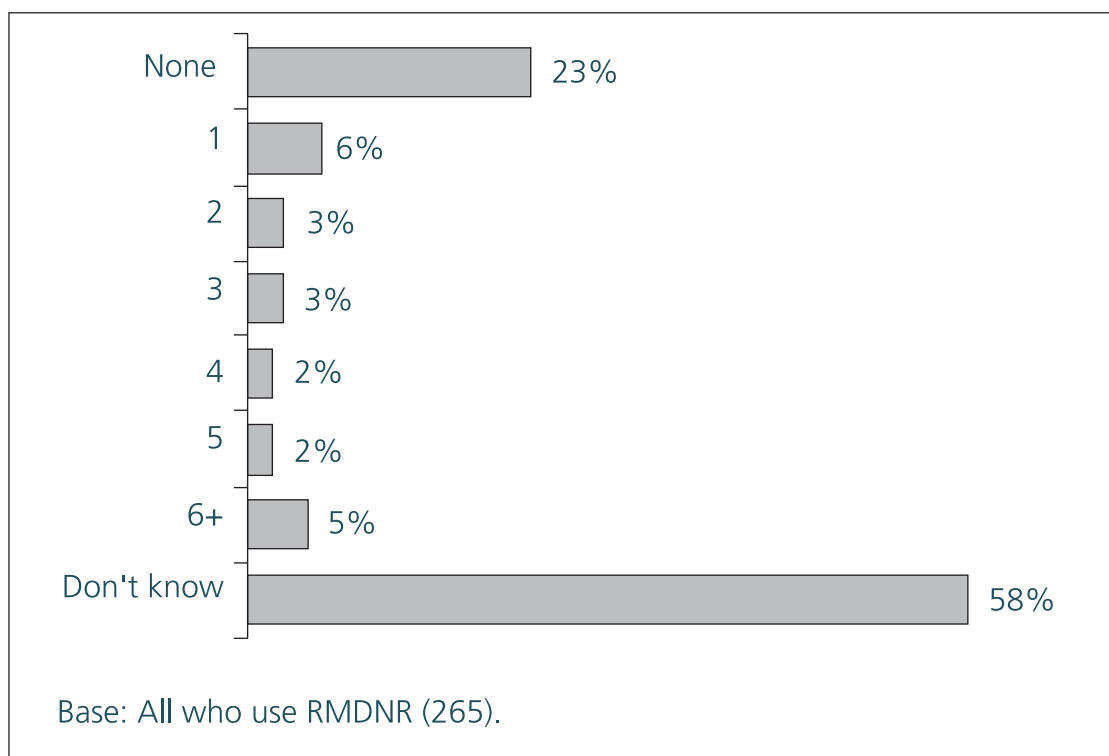


8.2.2 Average number of items returned per month via mail collect

Respondents who currently use RMDNR were then asked how many items are returned because they would have been redirected to the 'Mail Collect' service (previously known as 'Call and Collect'). Nearly a quarter of authorities (23 per cent) said that they do not receive any items in this way and a further 58 per cent were unable to give an answer. However, among those that did provide an answer, the average number of items returned in this way per month is just two and ranges from six for Welsh authorities to 0.6 for Scottish authorities.

Figure 8.2 shows how this average breaks down. It is worth pointing out that the six and over category contains 12 authorities and 11 of them said that they receive ten or more items – three Welsh authorities, six English districts and two London boroughs.

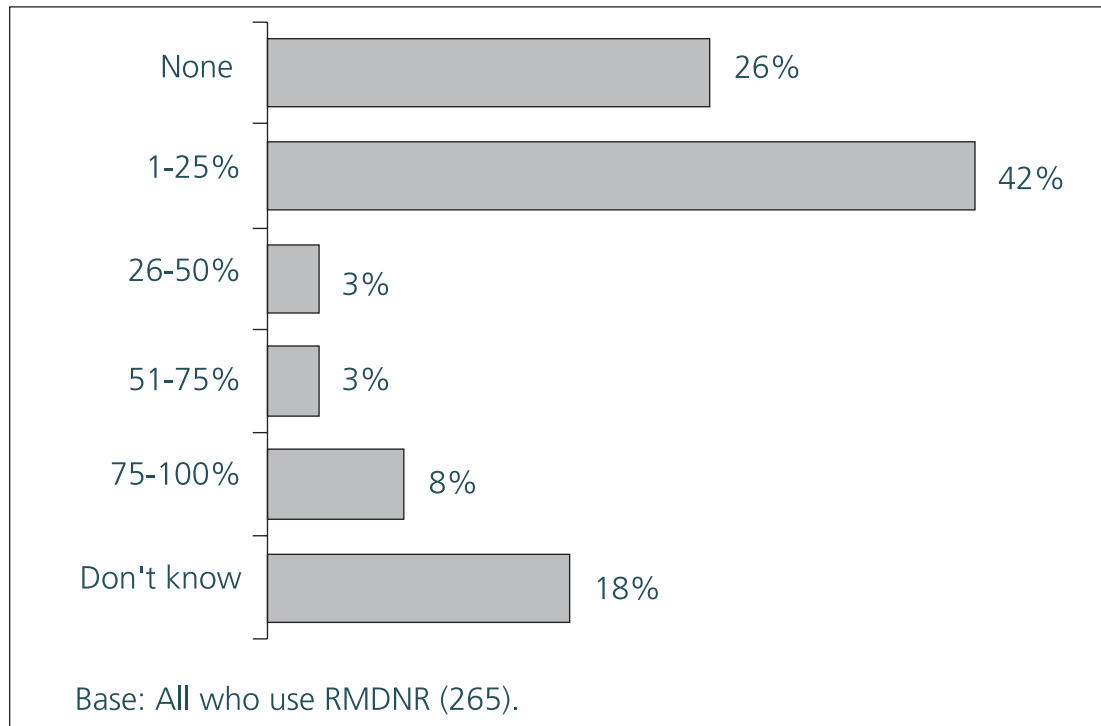
Figure 8.2 Number of items returned through 'mail collect'



8.2.3 Proportion returned with new address

A quarter of authorities (26 per cent) said that none of the items returned contain details of the new address. This ranges from 42 per cent of Scottish authorities to nine per cent of London boroughs. A further 18 per cent of authorities were unable to give an answer to this question, however among those that did, the most common answer was between one and twenty-five per cent (42 per cent). Three per cent said that between 25 and 50 per cent and 51 –75 per cent have a new address, while eight per cent said between 76 and 100 per cent. Overall, authorities said that an average of 26 per cent of returned items are returned with details of the new address. This rises to 43 per cent of Scottish authorities and 41 per cent of English metropolitan districts.

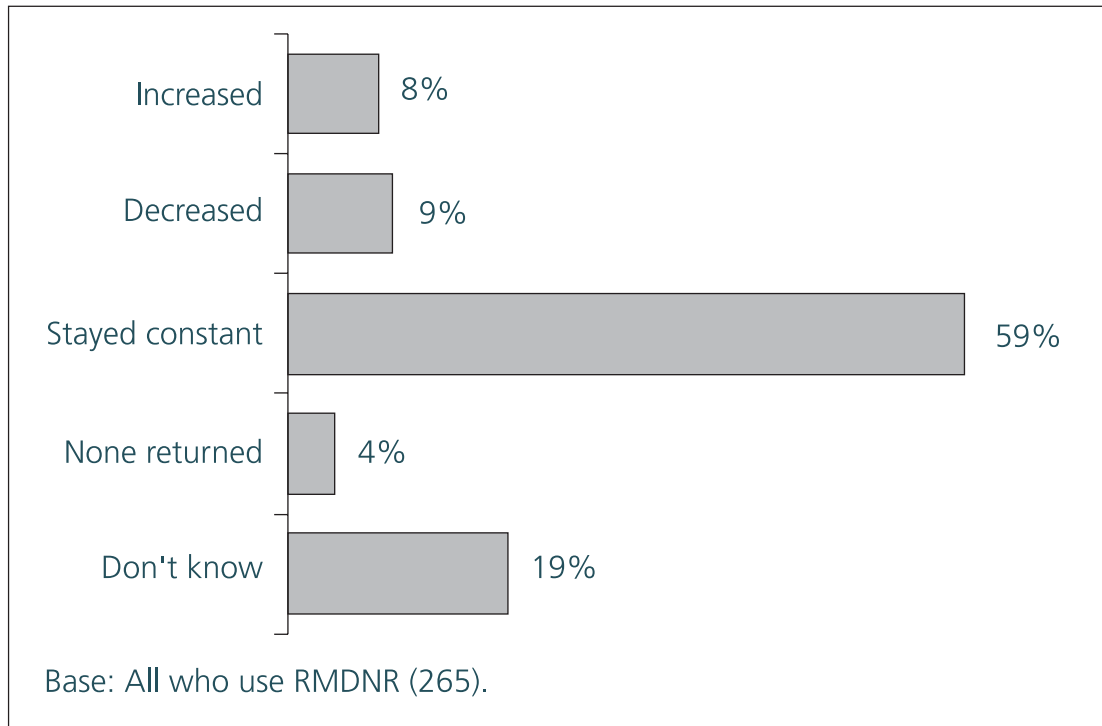
Figure 8.3 Proportion of returned items with details of new address



8.2.4 Level of returned mail

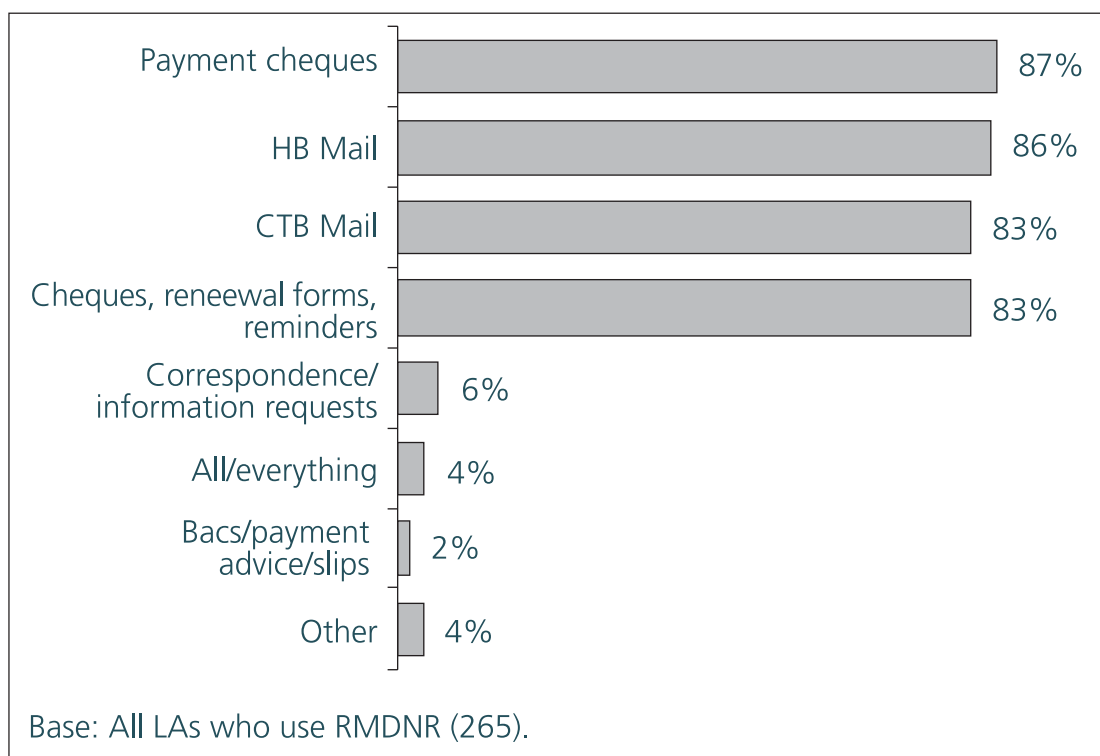
Fifty-nine per cent of authorities that currently use RMDNR said that the amount of returned mail has remained constant in the last financial year. However, the proportion of English metropolitan districts saying this was just 36 per cent. On the other hand, similar proportions said that it had increased (eight per cent) or decreased (nine per cent). In addition, four per cent of authorities said that they have not had any returned (rising to 14 per cent of English metropolitan districts) and 19 per cent were unable to answer the question.

Figure 8.4 The amount of returned mail compared to the previous financial year



8.2.5 Types of mail put in 'Do not redirect' envelopes

Large majorities of authorities put payment cheques, HB mail, CTB mail and cheques, renewal forms and reminders in 'Do not redirect envelopes' (87 per cent, 86 per cent, 83 per cent and 83 per cent respectively). Considerably fewer mentioned correspondence/ information requests (6 per cent) and BACs/payment advice/slips (two per cent). In addition, four per cent said that their authority puts everything in 'Do not redirect' envelopes. There are no significant sub-group differences.

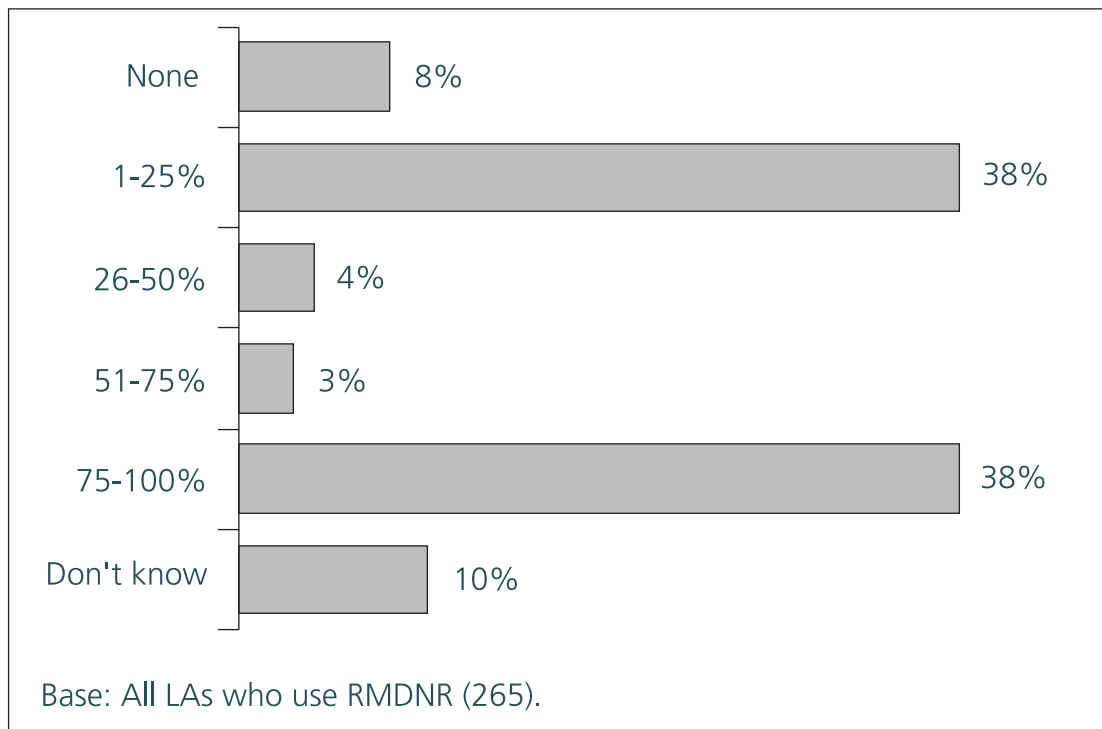
Figure 8.5 'Do not redirect' mail types

Although a similar question was asked at the Wave 7 survey, the findings are not directly comparable.

8.3 Level of investigation

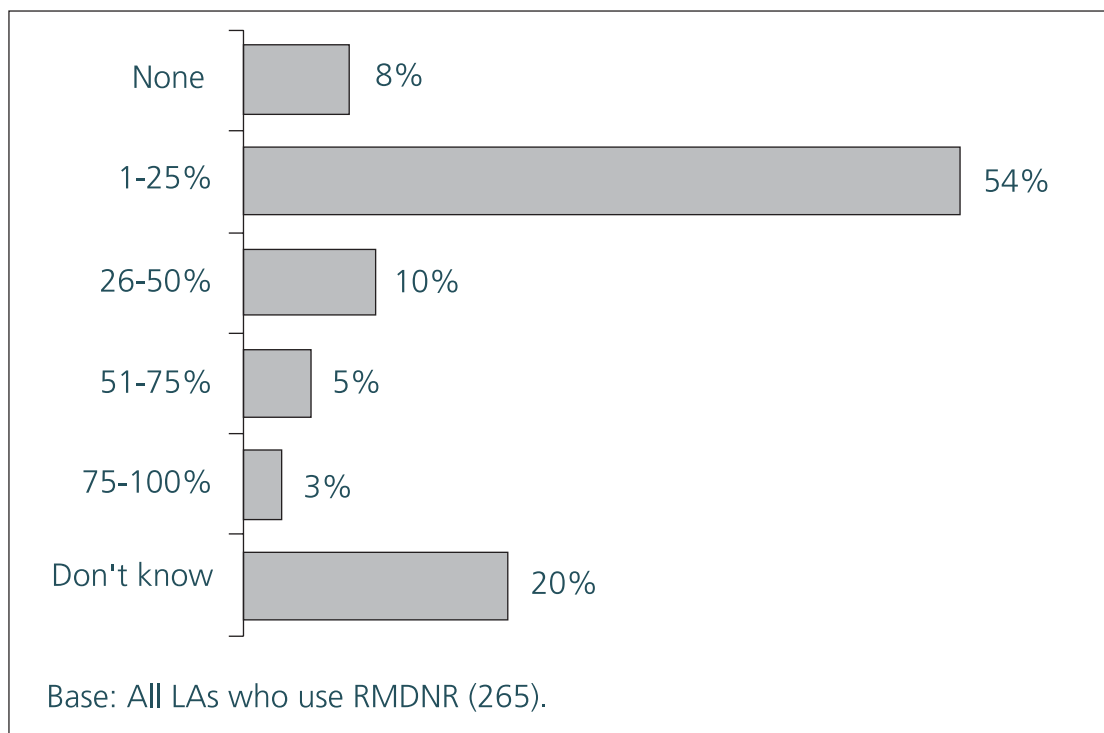
Eight per cent of authorities said that they do not investigate any of the post that is returned due to redirection, rising to 23 per cent of English Metropolitan districts. However, 38 per cent investigate between one and twenty-five per cent or between 76 and 100 per cent (rising to 67 per cent of Welsh authorities). The remainder said that they investigate 25-50 per cent (four per cent) or 51-75 per cent (three per cent). One in ten (10 per cent) did not know how much is investigated.

Looking overall, authorities said that on average 50 per cent of post that is returned is investigated, rising to 67 per cent in Welsh authorities. It is interesting to note that authorities receiving a higher number of returned post are not necessarily more likely to investigate a greater proportion of it. For example, authorities receiving 101 or more returned items investigate on average 46 per cent and those receiving between 76 and 100 investigate 33 per cent. This compares with authorities receiving between one and five returned items that investigate 58 per cent and those receiving between 11 and 15 that investigate 47 per cent.

Figure 8.6 Proportion of mail investigated

Overall, authorities said that 23 per cent of returned mail that is investigated leads to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit. This ranges from 18 per cent in English metropolitan districts to 29 per cent in Welsh authorities. Over half of authorities (54 per cent) said that between one and twenty-five per cent of returned mail that is investigated leads to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit. One in ten (ten per cent) said 26-50 per cent, five per cent said 51-75 per cent and three per cent 76-100 per cent. On the other hand, eight per cent said that none of the returned mail leads to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit and one in five (20 per cent) did not know how much.

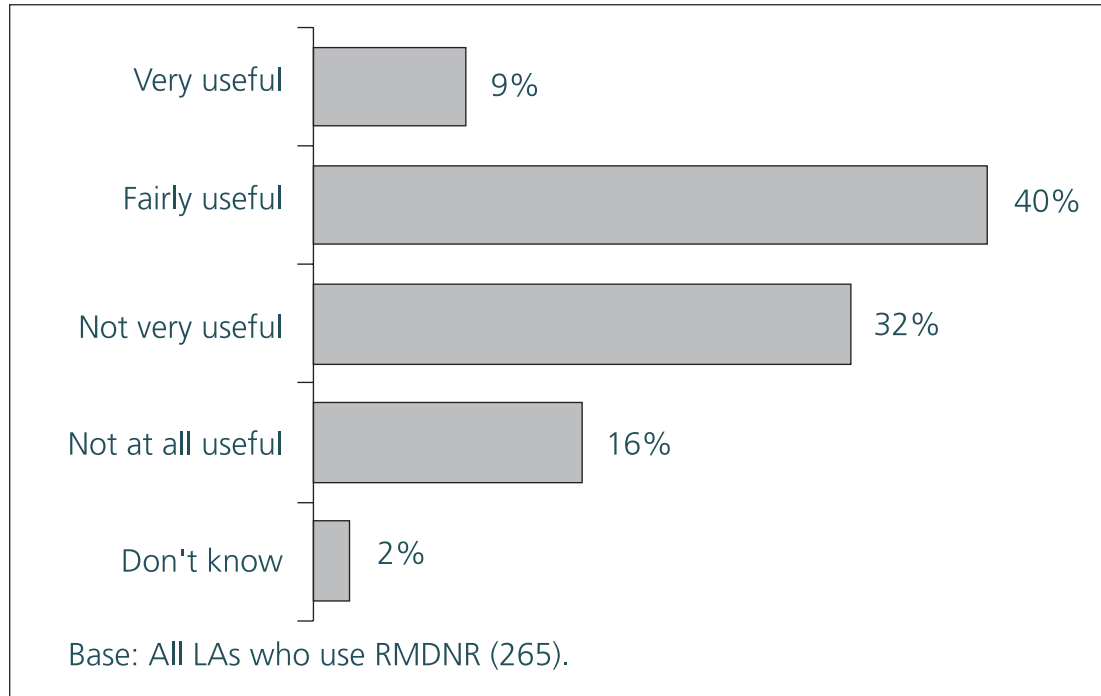
Figure 8.7 Proportion of mail that leads to an overpayment being detected/reduction in benefit



8.4 Usefulness of Royal Mail Do not Redirect

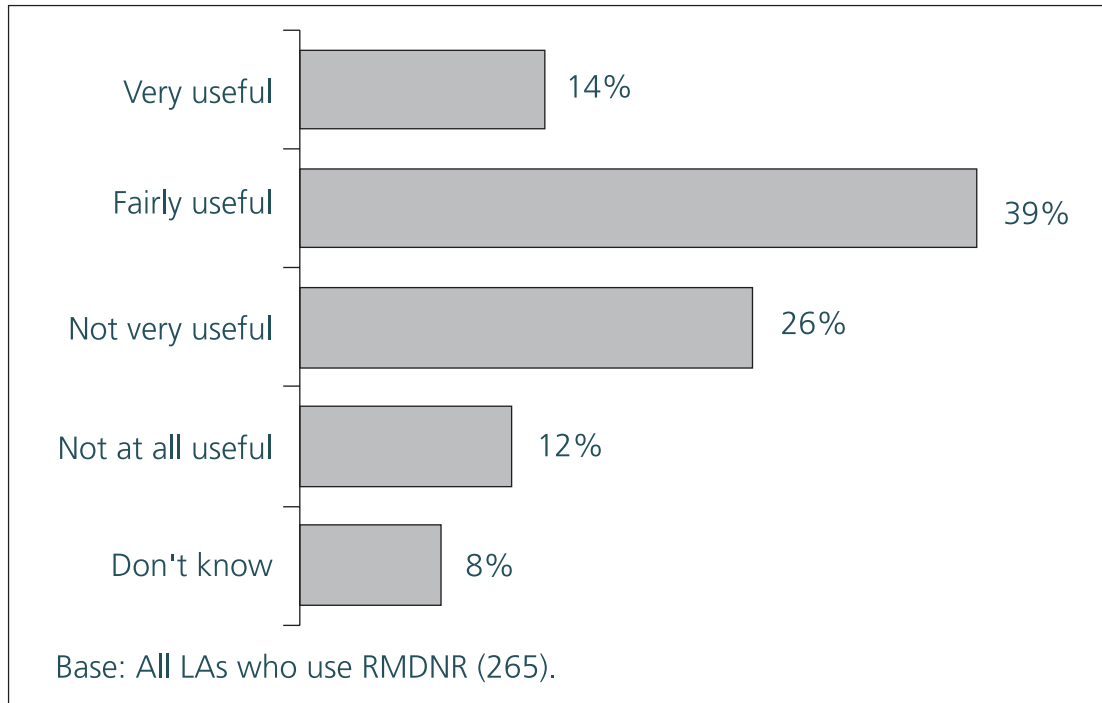
Opinion was divided on the usefulness of RMDNR in uncovering fraud and overpayments, with 49 per cent describing it as useful (nine per cent very useful and 40 per cent fairly useful) and 48 per cent saying that it is not useful (32 per cent not very and 16 per cent not at all useful). These findings vary by LA type, with English metropolitan districts and Scottish authorities most likely to say that it is not useful in uncovering fraud and overpayments (82 per cent and 74 per cent respectively) and London boroughs most likely to say that it is useful (70 per cent). There is not a direct correlation between opinion and the average number of items returned through RMDNR per month and the proportion investigated. Opinion appears to be getting more positive as the number of items returned/proportion investigated gets higher, but it is not consistent.

Figure 8.8 Usefulness of RMDNR at uncovering fraud and overpayments



Respondents were slightly more positive about the usefulness of RMDNR in terms of preventing fraud and overpayments. Over half (54 per cent) described it as useful (14 per cent very useful and 39 per cent fairly useful) and 39 per cent said that it is not useful (26 per cent not very useful and 12 per cent not at all useful). Once again London boroughs were most positive, with 70 per cent describing it as useful. As for attitudes to uncovering fraud and overpayments opinion appears to be getting more positive as the number of items returned/proportion investigated gets higher, but it is not consistent.

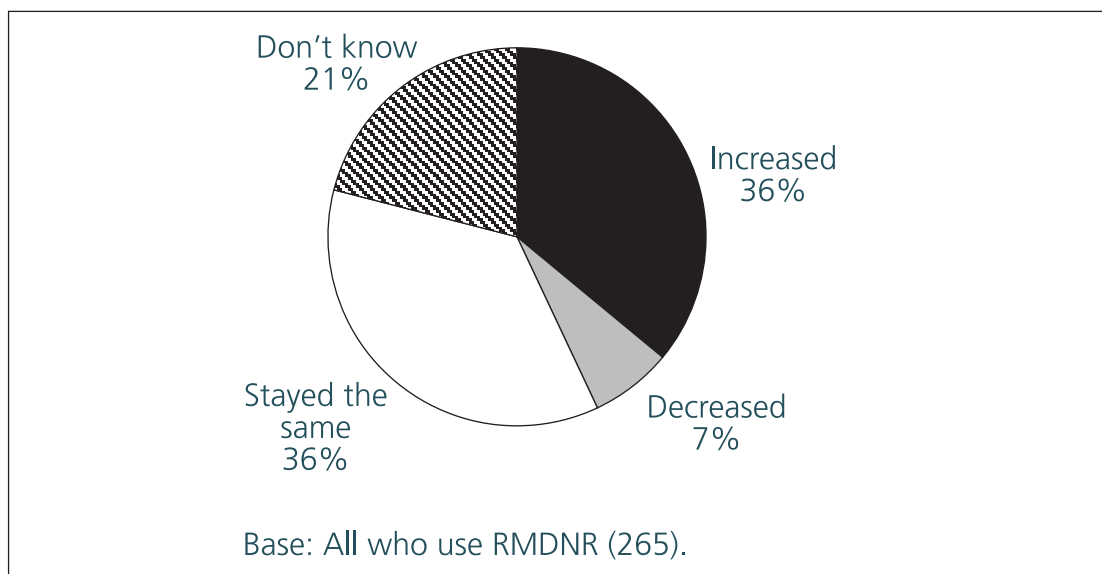
Figure 8.9 Usefulness of RMDNR at preventing fraud and overpayments



8.5 Effect of Local Housing Allowance on the amount of post sent out

The 14 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) authorities in the sample were asked if the amount of HB and CTB related post that has been sent out since the introduction of LHA had increased, decreased or stayed the same. Five authorities said that it had increased, one said that it had decreased and a further five said that it had stayed the same. Three were unable to give an answer.

Figure 8.10 Since introduction of LHA has amount of HB and CTB post increased?



Appendix A

The survey

A.1 Methodology

At Wave 9 of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey respondents were given a choice of completing the questionnaire on the telephone, as a self-completion questionnaire on paper, or as a self-completion questionnaire on the Internet. This methodology achieved a relatively good response rate of 71 per cent at Wave 9 and therefore it has been used from Wave 9 onwards. The response rate achieved at Wave 12 was 68 per cent (see Chapter A.7 below for more detail).

A.2 Sample

Using the updated Contacts database from Wave 11, the LA manager with responsibility for the most areas (out of Rent Rebate (RR), Rent Allowance (RA), Council Tax Benefit (CTB), Overpayment Recovery and Benefit Fraud) was identified. This manager then became our contact for Wave 12.

This manager was sent a letter on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) headed paper which set out the aims of the survey, explained the nature of the input required and advised the recipient that they have a choice of how to complete the questionnaire. The letter was signed by a DWP signatory and included contact names at both GfK NOP and DWP for queries, or if the respondent wanted to opt out of the survey.

The advance letter included details of each methodology – telephone interview, web-based questionnaire and paper questionnaire and the same information was sent in an email which had the link to the survey site inviting their participation. For the web-based questionnaire we provided a URL, allowing respondents to link directly to the survey and each respondent was assigned a user ID/password, which had to be entered at the start of the survey. This enabled GfK NOP to keep track of interviews and ensure no one completed a survey more than once. Including an ID

also allowed respondents to stop and restart an interview at any point and meant that different managers could easily access and complete the sections relevant to them.

Respondents were also sent a copy of the questionnaire so that they could either, use it to prepare their answers before the telephone interview or use it to fill-in their answers and return it to GfK NOP in the reply-paid envelope provided. It emphasised that, if necessary, they should consult other managers and staff for their input into the questionnaire. Telephone interviewers were instructed to check that the respondent had completed the questionnaire sent in advance and that it was readily available for reference during the interview.

A copy of the questionnaire and advance letter is shown in Appendix B.

A.3 Questionnaire design

Both Department officials and LA managers were consulted about the content of the questionnaire in order to gain as much useful information as possible from the research.

The first stage of questionnaire development involved a meeting between GfK NOP and relevant officials within the Department to discuss current issues and policy initiatives and establish the question areas that they would like to be included in the questionnaire.

Once the questionnaire had been through several drafts, face-to-face meetings were set up with five LA managers in order to test the understanding and comprehension of the questions, as well as give managers an opportunity to raise any issues that are particularly important and relevant to them at the time. These meetings were structured around the draft questionnaire but the structure of the session was kept fluid enough to allow managers to raise new issues and enlarge on existing subjects as they wished.

The comments of these managers were reviewed with the relevant officials at DWP and the questionnaire was amended to take on board their views. The questionnaire was then piloted to test the wording and coverage of the draft document as well as the length of the questionnaire (5-9 December 2005). The questionnaire was set up on the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system and tested on a total of 12 LA managers. At this stage, the questionnaire was piloted only with respondents on the telephone and not on the web and self-completion.

As for the main stage of fieldwork, each pilot respondent was sent an advance letter and questionnaire. The GfK NOP executive team and a representative from DWP briefed a small team of interviewers. The briefing covered the purpose of the survey and explanations of any particular questionnaire points, as well as allowing time for practice on the questionnaire by means of dummy interviewing. A debrief was held at the end of the pilot interviewing which involved interviewers talking through their experiences in carrying out the pilot work and highlighting any areas of confusion or ambiguity they had observed.

A.4 Fieldwork

As for the pilot, all interviewers working on the main stage of interviewing attended a half-day briefing. This covered both general interviewing skills and survey-specific instructions. The briefing was attended by a representative from the Housing Research and Analysis Division at the Department. Interviewers were also issued with full interviewer instructions, which included all survey materials including a hard copy of the questionnaire and the advance letter.

Interviewers' task was to phone each LA and ask respondents how they intended completing the questionnaire. Respondents choosing to undertake the survey on the telephone were then either interviewed or an appointment for another more convenient time was set-up. Those selecting to complete the questionnaire on paper or on the web were asked to complete it as soon as possible (between 16 January and 17 March 2006) and, in the case of the paper questionnaire, return it to GfK NOP in the reply-paid envelope provided. Interviewers were then instructed to 'telephone chase' those respondents who did not return their completed questionnaire within the following ten days or so and ask them to complete it as soon as possible.

All telephone interviewing was conducted using CATI at GfK NOP's Wimbledon Telephone Interviewing Centre. Given the fact that this was a census of all local authorities and that housing benefit managers are difficult to get hold of due to workload and turnover of staff, interviewers were not given a maximum number of callbacks. Instead, in order to maximise the response rate across the country as a whole, they were asked to adopt a flexible approach in terms of call-backs and to liaise closely with head office throughout the fieldwork period.

Our specialist web department within GfK NOP developed the web-based questionnaire. It was written in mriInterview, software supplied by SPSS and hosted on the GfK NOP facility. Both the web and paper questionnaires were designed to be professional looking and straightforward to complete.

Interviewers were required to provide weekly progress figures that were used to identify response difficulties during fieldwork. Unobtainable numbers, no answers, wrong numbers, etc, were all investigated immediately. In addition, e-mails were sent to local authorities that said they would fill-in the questionnaire on paper or on the web but did not do so.

By the end of fieldwork we had achieved interviews with a total of 278 LA managers, representing a response rate of 68 per cent. This is a higher response rate than was achieved at Wave 11, although it is still slightly down on earlier waves. The impact of this response rate on the statistical reliability of the data is shown below. This breaks down as 137 web-based questionnaires, 105 paper questionnaires and 36 telephone interviews. Comparing this with Wave 11, there has been an increase in the proportion of authorities completing the questionnaire on the web (26 per cent chose to complete it on the web at Wave 11, compared with 49 per cent at Wave 12).

A.5 Interpretation of the data

Data used for the analysis is derived from three sources: the Contacts Database, DWP and the interview itself. The data was analysed by a number of different variables as shown below:

Table A.1 Data analysis variables

LA type	Welsh, Scottish, English unitary, English metropolitan, English district, London borough
Verification status	Fully compliant, working to/partially (this category combines 'VF LA/ not yet compliant' and 'partially compliant'), non-compliant
Contracting-out Status	Contracted out, not contracted out
HB/CTB caseload	Low (up to 10,000 cases), medium (10,001-20,000 cases), high (20,001+ cases)
Region	Scotland, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, North West, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South East, South West, London, Wales

Information on LA type, verification status, HB/CTB caseload, and region was provided as part of the Contacts Database, while Contracting-out Status was asked as part of the interview.

The following points should be noted when using this report:

- a sample, not the entire 'population' of LA HB managers has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. Where bases are low, care should be taken when interpreting the data
- where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' or 'other' categories, or multiple answers
- throughout the report, an asterisk indicates a value of less than 0.5 per cent but not zero, and '0' denotes no observation in that cell
- 20 LAs out of our sample of 278 only partially completed the questionnaire on the web. They have been coded as 'don't know' for the section/s that they have omitted. The sections omitted were as follows:

Section	Number of LAs
A	3
B	7
C	4
D	6
E	11
F	6

We believe that the reason Section E was most often omitted was that respondents were required to refer this section to the Housing Department.

A.6 Statistical reliability

It should be remembered that a sample, not the entire population, of HB managers was interviewed. We cannot therefore be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the 'true' values). We can however, predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95 per cent – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

However, given that this sample comprises 68 per cent of the total population, the level of statistical reliability is slightly higher than if the sample had come from a larger population. On this basis, responses to the questionnaire provide data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points at the 95 per cent level. In practice this means that where 50 per cent give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value will fall within the range of plus or minus 3.3 per cent from the sample result. Table A.2 shows the sampling error for the whole sample and key sub-groups across a range of parameters.

Table A.2 Wave 12 sampling error

	Sample size	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
All respondents	278	2.0	3.0	3.3
LA type:				
Welsh	12	11.4	17.5	19.1
Scottish	21	7.5	11.5	12.5
English unitary	32	6.0	9.2	10.0
English metropolitan	24	6.9	10.6	11.5
English district	165	2.5	3.9	4.2
London borough	24	6.3	9.6	10.4

A.7 Response rates

As mentioned earlier a total of 278 interviews were conducted with LA managers, which represents a response rate of 68 per cent. However, as the table below shows, response rate varies by LA type, from 73 per cent of London boroughs and 70 per cent of English districts to just 55 per cent of Welsh authorities.

Table A.3 Response rates by local authority type

	LA type						
	Total	London	Scotland	Wales	English District	English Unitary	English Metro
Telephone completes	36	6	3	3	23	1	-
Web completes	137	9	12	6	75	21	16
Paper completes	105	9	6	3	67	10	8
Completes	278	24	21	12	165	32	24
Soft call back	26	3	5	-	12	4	2
Will complete paper questionnaire	10	-	1	1	6	2	-
Will complete on web	45	2	3	6	25	3	6
Refusals	41	4	2	3	24	5	3
No answer/ unobtainable	8	-	-	-	5	2	1
Total sample	408	33	32	22	237	48	36
Response rate	68%	73%	66%	55%	70%	67%	67%

A.8 Sample profile

Table A.4: Sample profile

	Number	%
Total	278	100
LA type:		
Welsh	12	4
Scottish	21	8
English unitary	32	12
English metropolitan	24	9
English district	165	59
London borough	24	9
Verification Status:		
Fully compliant	248	89
Working to/partially	22	8
Non-complaint	6	2
Contracting out status:		
Contracted out	16	6
Not contracted out	262	94
HB/CTB caseload:		
Low	81	29
Medium	111	40
High	86	31
Decentralisation status:		
Centralised	267	96
Decentralised	10	4
Region:		
Scotland	21	8
North East	12	4
Yorkshire & Humberside	18	6
North West	27	10
East Midlands	27	10
West Midlands	28	10
East	32	12
South East	45	16
South West	32	12
London	24	9
Wales	12	4

Appendix B

The questionnaire

Local Authority Omnibus 2006 (Wave 12)

Thank you for conducting Wave 12 of the Survey. As mentioned in the enclosed letter, you have the choice of completing the Survey on the Internet, the telephone or on paper. Please read the instructions below before you start:

Self-completion questionnaire on the Internet: If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on the internet, you may access it anytime from 18 January to 28 February. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: http://www.surveys.com/LA_Omnibus_wave12

This method is quite simple and you will be automatically routed through the questionnaire as you answer each question. We have redesigned the web questionnaire for Wave 12 to make it more user-friendly for you and your colleagues. It allows you to enter your site any number of times, saving your details whenever you exit, allowing you to complete the questionnaire at your own pace and convenience. We have set up the questionnaire this time so that if you need a colleague to complete a section you can send them the link for it in an email.

For each section you will be asked for your User ID. Please copy this carefully from the top of this letter or the enclosed questionnaire. You, or your colleagues, can access the questionnaire more than once using this User ID until you have completed it. We have improved access to the web questionnaire for this wave and now it is possible for more than one person to be in the questionnaire at a time. Please complete it by 28 February. The information is password protected and no one other than the GFK NOP team will be able to access your site or see your personal entries.

Telephone Interview: If you choose to conduct a telephone interview, then please use this questionnaire to prepare your answers in advance of the interview. By doing this, you should find that the interview itself will take no longer than 10-15 **minutes**. You will receive a call from a GFK NOP interviewer some time between 16 January and 24 February.

Self-completion questionnaire on paper: If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on paper and post it back in the pre-paid envelope enclosed, please follow the instructions below and return it as soon as possible – by 28 February at the latest.

- Most questions can be answered simply by putting one (or more) tick(s) in the box(es) next to the answer(s) which applies to your local authority
- Sometimes you are invited to write in your answer in your own words. If you are unable to answer a particular question, please tick the 'don't know' box
- Sometimes you are asked to write in a number. Please use leading zeros where necessary
- Normally, after answering each question, you go on to the next one, UNLESS a box you have ticked has an instruction to SKIP to another question
- Please ensure that you fill in the contact information at the back of the questionnaire (Section I)
- When you have finished, please POST THE QUESTIONNAIRE to us as soon as possible in the PRE-PAID ENVELOPE provided.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes only. You or your authority will not be identified in any report. A summary of the results will be sent to you in due course.

ALL ANSWER***Section A: Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System (CMS)***

By October 2005 most local authorities will be receiving at least some, if not all, of their HB/CTB claims, when associated with Jobcentre Plus primary benefits, through the Customer Management System (CMS). This section assesses the impact of CMS on local authorities' performance. This information will be used to help evaluate the impact upon local authorities of the Customer Management System (CMS) following implementation of Release 3 on 31st October 2005. Feedback will assist with and inform us about the need for any future development of CMS.

A1 Does your local authority currently receive any LA Input Documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS?

Yes

 Answer A2

No

 Go to Section B

Don't know

 Go to Section B**ANSWER IF YES AT A1**

A2 When did your local authority start receiving LA Input Documents from Jobcentre Plus generated by CMS?

WRITE IN MONTH AND YEAR BELOW

Month Year

Don't know

ANSWER IF BEFORE 31 OCTOBER 2005 AT A2. IF AFTER 31 OCTOBER 2005 GO TO A4

A3a Have you noticed any change in the accuracy of the information that CMS has generated in the past two or three months, i.e. since CMS Release 3 was implemented?

Yes, it has improved a lot

Yes, it has improved a little

Yes, it has got a little worse

Yes, it has got a lot worse

No, not noticed any difference

Don't know

A3b Have you noticed any change in the completeness of the information that CMS has generated in the past two or three months, i.e. since CMS Release 3 was implemented?

Yes, it has improved a lot

Yes, it has improved a little

Yes, it has got a little worse

Yes, it has got a lot worse

No, not noticed any difference

Don't know

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT A1

A4 On average, approximately how many LA Input Documents generated by CMS does your authority currently receive per week? WRITE IN NUMBER BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

Don't know

A4a What proportion of all new claims would you say are received through CMS? WRITE IN % BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

%

Don't know

Please answer the following questions in terms of your experience of CMS over the last three or four months only i.e. since CMS 3 was first implemented.

A5 How long does it generally take from the customers' first contact until you receive the input document from Jobcentre Plus? WRITE IN AMOUNT OF TIME IN WEEKS BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

Weeks

Don't know

A6 What proportion of LA input documents are complete in terms of information (rather than evidence) that should be provided on a clerical form (eg. details about the claimant and their partner, the rent/landlord details etc.)? WRITE IN PERCENTAGE BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

%

Don't know

ANSWER IF LESS THAN 100% AT A6

A7 What type of information is usually missing? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Personal and dependent details
- Non-dependent details
- Rent details
- Landlord details
- Capital details
- Income details
- Partner details
- Current work
- Other (please specify)
-
- Varies
- Don't know

A8 What proportion of input documents are accurate/correct? WRITE IN PERCENTAGE
BELOW

PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

%

Don't know

A9 How would you describe the impact of CMS3 on your authority's current performance
in terms of the clearance of HB/CTB claims?

Would you say that CMS3 currently.....

Improves your LA's performance a lot

Improves your LA's performance a little

Made no difference

Made your LA's performance a little worse

Made your LA's performance a lot worse

Don't know

A10 What problems, if any, does your local authority have when using CMS? PLEASE WRITE
IN THE MAIN PROBLEM FIRST, THEN THE SECOND, THIRD ETC IN ORDER OF
IMPORTANCE

Main problem:

.....

Second:

.....

.....

Third:

.....

.....

Don't have any problems Go to A12

ANSWER IF PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED AT A10

A11 What steps, if any, is your local authority taking locally to try and resolve the problems that you mentioned at the previous question (A10)?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Gathering Management Information to feedback to Jobcentre Plus
- Contacting Jobcentre Plus on individual claims where errors identified
- Meeting regularly with Jobcentre Plus to discuss problems / discuss resolution
- Providing support to Jobcentre Plus in form of training and/or resources
- Escalating any issues to Housing Benefit Strategy Division
- Other (please specify)
-
- None of these, because we issue our own claim form
- Don't know

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT A1

A12 Now that CMS is operational by Jobcentre Plus Offices associated with your local authority, do you have any contact with Jobcentre Plus other than about individual HB/CTB claims? By this we mean, for example, liaison meetings, which aim to raise generic CMS related issues and resolve problems between your authority and Jobcentre Plus?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

In an evaluation undertaken in summer 2004 the issue of obtaining the original CMS Customer Statement from Jobcentre Plus was raised and we would like to know your experience of obtaining them, perhaps for the purpose of a prosecution.

A13 In the last year, how many original customer statements has your local authority had to request from Jobcentre Plus? WRITE IN BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

- Answer A14
- None Go to Section B
- Don't know Go to Section B

ANSWER IF 'ONE OR MORE' AT A13

- A14 Thinking about the times your authority has requested an original customer statement from Jobcentre Plus, would you say that you have always, mostly, sometimes or never received them? TICK ONE ONLY

Always

Mostly

Sometimes

Never

Don't know

 Answer A15 Answer A15 Answer A15 Go to Section B Go to Section B

ANSWER IF 'ALWAYS', 'MOSTLY' OR 'SOMETIMES' AT A14

- A15 On average, how long would you say that it took to receive the original customer statement? TICK ONE ONLY

Less than a week

A week to less than 2 weeks

2 weeks to less than 3 weeks

3 weeks to less than 4 weeks

4 weeks or more

Don't know

ALL ANSWER

Section B: Supported Housing

This section is trying to gather some definite information about costs of supported housing, as there is only anecdotal evidence on this at present.

B1 Over the last year or so, would you say that the amounts of HB claimed for supported housing in your area has

- Increased a lot Answer B2
- Increased a little Answer B2
- Decreased a lot Answer B2
- Decreased a little Answer B2
- Stayed about the same Go to Section C
- Don't know Go to Section C

ANSWER IF 'INCREASED A LOT/A LITTLE', OR 'DECREASED A LOT/A LITTLE'

B2 What do you think are the reasons for this change in costs?
PLEASE WRITE IN

.....
.....

.....
.....

Don't know

B3 How often do you see cases where you cannot restrict rents under old scheme rules for supported accommodation, because it is provided by a not for profit organisation, charity or housing association where support is provided by, or on behalf of, the landlord?

- Very often Answer B4
- Fairly often Answer B4
- Not very often Answer B4
- Not at all often Answer B4
- Never Go to Section C
- Don't know Go to Section C

ALL ANSWER

Section C: Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

DHPs were introduced on 2 July 2001 and enable a local authority to provide claimants with additional financial assistance towards their rent or council tax. DWP is currently looking at the effectiveness of the Discretionary Housing Payments scheme. This information will help us to assess the effectiveness and ease of administration of the scheme, and to decide on any future action to be taken.

C1 DWP sent guidance on DHPs to each local authority in March 2001. Overall, how useful does your authority find this guidance?

- Very useful
- Fairly useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful
- Don't know/can't remember

C2 Bearing in mind the nature of DHPs and the fact that the guidance cannot be too prescriptive, how do you think the guidance could be improved? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Better layout
- More details
- More information on the types of cases that can be helped
- Good Practice examples
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know/can't remember

C3 Does your local authority supplement the DWP guidance with a separate policy on the types of circumstances in which DHPs should be awarded? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes, we have a policy Answer C4
- No, we do not have a policy Go to C5
- No, not now, but we are working on a policy Go to C5
- Don't know Go to C5

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT C3

C4 Does your authority give particular consideration to certain groups or circumstances?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Young people
- Pensioners
- Disabled people
- People at risk of homelessness
- People with unforeseen short-term need
- Other (please specify)

.....

No, none (don't give consideration to particular groups of circumstances)

Don't know

ALL ANSWER

C5 From your experience, which types of shortfall do DHPs most commonly cover in your authority? Please tick the three most common types, with the most common first (ie. Most common shortfall first, then second and third most common shortfalls).

	<i>First</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Third</i>
<i>Rent restrictions: Local Reference Rent</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Rent restrictions: Single Room Rent</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Rent Restrictions: Size Criteria</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Rent Restrictions: Other (please specify)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....			
<i>Non-Dependent Deductions (HB/CTB)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Income tapers (HB/CTB)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Others (please specify)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....			
<i>Don't know</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C6 For what reasons does your authority make a DHP award? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Extent of rent restrictions
- Not enough other means of support
- Only a short-term need
- Unforeseen circumstances (eg. non-dependent moving in)
- Vulnerable group (eg. pensioner)
- Risk of homelessness/eviction
- Other (please specify)

.....

C7 From your experience, which client groups do DHPs benefit most in your authority? Again please say the three that benefit most in rank order with the client group that benefits most first (ie. Client group that benefits most, then second and third most).

	<i>First</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Third</i>
<i>Pensioners</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Couples with children</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Lone parents</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>People of working age without children who are unemployed</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Young people under 25/SRR cases</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Long-term sick/disabled</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Short-term sick/disabled</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Where claimant is hospitalised</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Young people under 25/SRR cases</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other (please specify)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....			
<i>Don't know</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C8 What problems, if any, does your local authority have with the administration of DHPs?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Not enough staff
- Assessment takes too long
- Guidance inadequate
- Different sections deal with DHPs and HB
- Process of submitting estimates, claiming the contribution is too complex/time consuming
- Other (please specify)
-
- None of these
- Don't know

C9 Which of the following types of claim for DHP does your authority accept? **TICK ALL THAT APPLY**

- Written claim form
- Claim in writing, eg. letter
- Telephone claim
- Electronic claim, e.g. Web-site, email
- In person
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

C10 Do people claiming DHP have to attend in person for an interview?

Yes

No

Don't know

C11 How do you ensure that claimants are aware of the existence of DHPs? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Leaflets/posters

Notation on HB/CTB claim form

Notation on HB/CTB decision notice/letter

Advised if come in person to benefits office to discuss claim

Personal advice given to claimants as part of a general welfare rights service

Through liaison/training with outside/internal bodies who may give advice to claimants
ie Age Concern, welfare rights bodies, BA staff, Rent Service

Other (please specify)

.....

Don't do anything specific to make clients aware

C12 Has your local authority's DHP expenditure increased, decreased or stayed about the same over the past 3 years?

Increased

Answer C13

Decreased

Go to Section D

Stayed the same

Go to Section D

Don't know

Go to Section D

ANSWER IF 'INCREASED' AT C12

C13 Why do you think your local authority's DHP expenditure has increased? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Changes in local rental market

Changes in employment rate

Effect of Local Housing Allowance

Staff becoming more familiar with the system

Change in amount of contribution

Change in awards policy

Other (please specify)

.....

Don't know

ANSWER FOR EACH OF THOSE USED AT D1

D5 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the intelligence service you receive from..... (ANSWER FOR EACH USED AT D1)? IF YOU WROTE IN MORE THAN TWO 'OTHER' ANSWERS AT D1, PLEASE ANSWER ABOUT THE TWO USED MOST OFTEN

	NIU	OIU	NAFN	NCIS	Other (write in)	Other (write in)
Very satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly satisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very dissatisfied	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ANSWER IF 'USE NAFN AT D1. OTHERS GO TO D8

D6 Which of the following services did you know that NAFN provides? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- SSFA 2001 Authorised officer service
- Credit referencing data service
- Land registry on-line service
- Company data service
- General registry service
- Circulation service
- Sanctions database
- Report of fraud service
- Analysts service
- None of these
- Don't know

ANSWER IF 'USE NAFN AT E1. OTHERS GO TO D8

D7 Approximately how often do you use each of these services provided by NAFN? TICK

ONE ANSWER FOR EACH SERVICE

	Daily	Weekly	2-weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Yearly	Never	DK
a) SSFA 2001 Authorised officer service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Credit referencing data service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Land registry on-line service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Company data service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) General registry service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Circulation service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Sanctions database	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Report of fraud service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Analysts service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

NOW GO TO SECTION E

ANSWER IF NAFN NOT MENTIONED AT D1

D8 Why is your authority currently not a member of NAFN? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Too expensive
- Not value for money
- Other funding issue (please specify)
-
- Use our own intelligence
- Use other intelligence providers
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER***Section E: Disability***

The Disability and Carers Directorate of DWP is interested in how commonly adjustments to assist disabled people are offered as part of the HB/CTB claim process, and are made to local authority housing stock itself. This information will be used as a baseline for the new duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 coming into force in 2006 and to inform decisions about whether more guidance is needed around when and how to make adjustments.

- E1** Does your authority ask whether a claimant is disabled at any point during the claim process?
- Yes
- No
- Don't know
-
- E2** Does your authority ask disabled people whether they need any adjustments to the processing and administration of their HB/CTB claim, for example, providing alternative ways of filling the form in?
- Yes
- No
- Don't know
-
- E3** Do you know whether disabled claimants are as satisfied with your service as non-disabled claimants? (Some ways of finding out about this would include monitoring complaints made by disabled people, or analysing your customer survey results to find out whether disabled people gave different answers to those given by non-disabled people).
- Disabled people are as satisfied as non-disabled people
- Disabled people are more satisfied than non-disabled people
- Disabled people are less satisfied than non-disabled people
- Don't know, authority doesn't monitor this
- Don't know

E4 What level of equality standard for local government does your local authority currently achieve?

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3
- Level 4
- Don't know

E5i Does your local authority manage its own stock or operate a combined list with housing associations?

Yes Answer E5 overleaf No Go to E14

ANSWER IF YOUR AUTHORITY MANAGES ITS OWN STOCK AT E5i (previous question).

OTHERS GO TO E14

E5 Which of these adjustments does your authority currently make for disabled tenants and occupiers in stock that is allocated through the combined list? **TICK ALL THAT APPLY**

- Make changes to practices, policies or procedures to accommodate the needs of disabled tenants or occupiers
- Provide auxiliary aids or services (e.g. letters in Braille or large print) to accommodate the needs of disabled tenants or occupiers
- Change a term of a tenancy to accommodate the needs of a disabled tenant or occupier
- None of these
- Don't know

E6 And which of these adjustments does your authority currently make for prospective disabled tenants or occupiers in stock that is allocated through the combined list? TICK

ALL THAT APPLY

Make changes to practices, policies or procedures to accommodate

The needs of prospective disabled tenants or occupiers

Provide auxiliary aids or services to accommodate the needs of prospective disabled tenants or occupiers

Change a term of a tenancy to accommodate the needs of a prospective disabled tenant or occupier

None of these

Don't know

E7 Do you know if your authority is required to make these adjustments by law?

Yes

No

Don't know

E8 Does your authority make any physical adjustments to your housing stock to make premises more accessible?

Yes Answer E9

No Go to E14

Don't know Go to E14

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT E8

E9 Does your authority make physical adjustments to.....? TICK ONE ONLY

The rented premises only Answer E10

The communal areas only Answer E11 and E12/13

Both the rented premises and communal areas Answer E10, E11 & E12/13

Don't know Go to E14

ANSWER IF 'RENTED PREMISES' AT E9

E10 Why does your authority make physical adjustments to the rented premises? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- At the tenant's request
- General upgrading of authority properties
- Others (please specify)
-
- Don't know

IF RENTED PREMISES ONLY, NOW GO TO E14

ANSWER IF 'COMMUNAL AREAS' AT E9

E11 Why does your authority make physical adjustments to the communal areas? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- At the tenant's request
- General upgrading of authority properties
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ANSWER IF 'COMMUNAL AREAS' AT E9

E12 Does your authority experience difficulties in making disability-related physical adjustments to the communal areas?

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Answer E13 |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to E14 |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to E14 |

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT E12

E13 What are the difficulties that your authority experiences in making disability-related physical adjustments to the communal areas? PLEASE WRITE IN

.....

.....

.....

ALL ANSWER

- E14 From December 2006, provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) covering reasonable adjustments to housing stock that are let, and to let, are coming into force.

Before reading this question were you aware of this?

- Yes and I know the details and timing of the new provision
- Yes, but I don't know the details and timing of the new provisions
- No, I wasn't aware
- Don't know

- E15 Which of the following provisions of the DDA (coming into force in 2006) that relate to reasonable adjustments to housing stock are you aware of? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Making changes to practices, policies and procedures
- Providing auxiliary aids and services
- Changing terms of a lease
- None of these

- E16 Did you know that the provisions of the DDA (coming into force in 2006) do not require the removal or alteration of a physical feature of the residential premises?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER***Section F: Royal Mail Do not Redirect***

DWP will soon be evaluating the effectiveness of the Do Not Re-Direct service with Royal Mail. In order to do this, it is important to know who uses the service and how well they think it is performing.

F1 Does your authority currently use the Royal Mail Do Not Redirect Service (RMDNR)?

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Answer F2 |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to F11 |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to F11 |

ANSWER IF 'YES" AT F1

F2 On average how many items of mail are returned through the Do Not Redirect service per month?

WRITE IN NUMBER BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

Do not count

Don't know

F3 On average, how many items per month are returned because they would have been redirected to the 'Mail Collect' service (previously known as 'Call and Collect')?

WRITE IN NUMBER BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

Do not count

Don't know

F4 Approximately what proportion of returned items are returned to your local authority with details of the new address?

- | | |
|------------|--------------------------|
| None | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1-25% | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26-50% | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 51-75% | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 76-100% | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |

F5 In the last financial year has the amount of returned mail

TICK ONE ONLY

- Remained constant
- Increased
- Decreased
- None returned
- Don't know

F6 Roughly what proportion of the post that is returned due to a redirection, is investigated?

- None Go to F8
- 1-25% Answer F7
- 26-50% Answer F7
- 51-75% Answer F7
- 76-100% Answer F7
- Don't know Go to F8

ANSWER IF 1-100% AT F6

F7 Approximately what proportion of returned mail that is investigated leads to an overpayment being detected or a reduction in benefit?

- None
- 1-25%
- 26-50%
- 51-75%
- 76-100%
- Don't know

ANSWER IF 'YES" AT F1

F8 What mail do you put in "Do not redirect" envelopes?

TICK ALL THOSE THAT APPLY

- CTB mail
- HB mail
- Cheques, renewal forms and reminders
- Payment cheques
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

F9 How useful do you find the Do Not Redirect service in uncovering fraud and overpayments? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very useful
- Fairly useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful
- Don't know

F10 How useful do you find the Do Not Redirect service in preventing fraud and overpayments? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very useful
- Fairly useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful
- Don't know

ANSWER IF YOUR AUTHORITY IS A LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE PATHFINDER AUTHORITY OR IN THE SECOND WAVE GROUP (ADMINISTERING LHA). OTHERS GO TO SECTION G

F11 Since the introduction of the LHA in your authority, has the amount of HB and CTB related post you have sent out, on average:

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed the same
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER***Section G: Decentralisation, Contracting Out and Contact Information***

DWP is interested in identifying in which LAs CTB and HB administration is contracted out and or de-centralised. They are also keen to keep the contact information they have for your LA updated. The information that you provide on the following questions will only be passed back to DWP Policy Group, where appropriate.

G1 Is HB and CTB administration:

- Centralised i.e. one or two offices deal with and process claims Go to G4
 Decentralised i.e. on three or more sites/offices – (by decentralised we mean that the management of the service is decentralised and not the access points for claimants) Go to G2
 Don't know Go to G4

ANSWER IF "DECENTRALISED" AT G1**G2 Are you the manager with overall responsibility for the decentralised offices?**

- Yes Go to G4
 No Go to G3
 No manager with overall responsibility Go to G4
 Don't know Go to G4

ANSWER IF "NO" AT G2**G3 Please can you provide details of the manager who has overall responsibility for the decentralised offices?**

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

ADDRESS (INCLUDE POSTCODE):

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

FAX NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

ALL ANSWER**G4 Is HB and CTB administration contracted out?**

- Yes Go to G5
 No Go to G7
 Don't know Go to G7

ANSWER IF "YES" AT G4

G5 When did this contract start?

Enter month and year

ALL ANSWER

G7 Which of the following do you personally have responsibility for?

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Rent Rebate | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rent Allowance | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Council Tax Benefit | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Overpayment recovery | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Benefit Fraud | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| None of these | <input type="checkbox"/> |

PLEASE COMPLETE DETAILS FOR EACH AREA YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR.

IF RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL AREAS, GO TO G9

G8 Please provide details of the manager with overall responsibility for each of the following...

Rent Rebate:

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

FAX NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

ADDRESS:

Tick this box if no-one is responsible for Rent Rebate

If no-one is responsible for RR: Can I just check, do you have any LA rent rebate stock?

Yes - Please write in managers details above

No - Go to below (Rent Allowance)

Rent Allowance:

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

FAX NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

ADDRESS:

c) Council Tax Benefit

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

FAX NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

ADDRESS:

d) Overpayment recovery

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

FAX NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

ADDRESS:

e) Benefit Fraud

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

FAX NO:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

ADDRESS:

ALL ANSWER**G9** And finally please can you write in your own details?

ENTER NAME:

JOB TITLE:

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:

ADDRESS:

POSTCODE:

FAX NUMBER:

EMAIL ADDRESS:

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN WAVE 12 OF THE
LOCAL AUTHORITY OMNIBUS SURVEY.**