



Department
for Education

Children's Services Omnibus

Wave 6 Research Report

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Social Research

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the sixth wave of the DfE Children's Services Omnibus Survey. The survey explored senior local authority and Children's Services Trust's leaders' perceptions on, and activities relating to, a range of policy areas. These included children's social care; early years and childcare provision in authorities; and services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The questionnaire comprised a mix of open response questions and fixed category response questions.

The online survey was sent to all 152 upper tier local authorities (LAs) in England. Overall, 52 LAs took part, representing a survey response rate of 34%. In total 50 LAs answered all the survey questions, whilst an additional 2 LAs partially completed the survey (meaning they completed at least one full section of the survey).

The profile of LAs which completed the survey is largely in-line with the overall profile, based on the type of authority, region, Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) score and rates of children in need (see Appendix).

The research was carried out between 25 January and 25 March 2022. The key findings are outlined below.

Children's social care

A total of 50 LAs answered questions on children's social care.

Social worker workforce

- Seven in 10 LAs were not confident they would have enough permanent child and family social workers to meet their needs over the next 12 months.
- The majority of LAs (76%) offer the social worker apprenticeship and have social worker apprenticeships currently on this scheme.
- Nine in 10 LAs felt the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme was effective in supporting newly qualified support workers to make the transition from training to practice.
- Of the 50 LAs that responded, 14% believed that newly qualified social workers were prepared for all areas of this role with appropriate support.

Relationship with partner services

- Of the LAs that responded, 44% rated their relationship with the local judiciary over care proceedings as very good and 44% rated them good.

- Around 9 in 10 LAs (96%) rated their relationship with the police statutory safeguarding partners and health statutory safeguarding partners as very or fairly good.

Challenges in children's social care services

- LAs top 3 priorities in improving children's social care services over the next 3 years were recruiting high quality staff (80%), retaining high quality staff (62%) and ensuring sufficient budget to maintain or improve children's services (60%).
- A higher proportion of LAs reported that the main risks to effective delivery of children's social care services in their authority over the next 3 years were being unable to recruit high quality staff (84%), being unable to retain high quality staff (70%) and social work practice becoming or continuing to be variable (26%).
- When LAs were asked what key challenges they face when delivering and/or commissioning family help services, affordability (66%), staff capacity to deliver services in house (34%) and changing local needs (30%) were the top risks selected.

Sufficiency of care/adoption placements

- Around 1 in 10 (14%) LAs said it was fairly likely they would have sufficient care placements to meet projected needs for all children over the next year. None of the LAs felt it was very likely that they would have sufficient care placements to meet projected needs for all children over the next year.
- LAs thought they were most likely to have sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year for children under 5 years old (68%).
- LAs thought the group they were least likely to have sufficient care placements to meet project needs over the next year for were children aged 14-15 years old (72%).

Early Help

- Nearly all LAs (94%) felt confident that Early Help reduces demand on Children in Need.
- Of the LAs that responded, 79% reported that they had been able to focus investment in Early Help.

Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)

A total of 52 LA's answered questions on SEND.

Ensuring sufficient SEN provision

- Of the LAs that responded, 68% said they thought LA officers had a great deal of choice or some choice when commissioning appropriate school and post-16 placements for children and young people with EHC plans.
- Around 4 in 10 LAs (46%) reported monitoring outcomes for young people with an EHC plan after they have left education.
- The three biggest challenges LAs described for providing psychology services were capacity in the educational psychology (EP) workforce (88%), statutory workload (79%) and recruitment and retention of educational psychologists (EPs) (69%).
- LAs were asked if they had systems in place for monitoring SEND issues. Of the 50 LAs that responded, 87% had systems in place to monitor pressures on high needs budgets; 85% had systems in place for monitoring outcomes for children and young people with SEND and around 8 in 10 LAs (83%) had systems in place for monitoring progress of implementing the SEND reforms.

Preparation for Adulthood

- The majority of LAs co-produced their Preparation for Adulthood Strategy with people who work with young people with SEND (92%), parents / carers of young people with SEND (90%) and young people with SEND (88%).
- Just over a third (35%) of LAs strongly agreed they had a clearly defined PfA strategy, 31% tended to agree. Of the LAs that responded, 48% measured the success of its Preparation for Adulthood Strategy.
- Eight in ten LAs had a forum in place to support young people with SEND into employment.

School age childcare

A total of 51 LAs answered questions on Early Years and Childcare.

Childcare

- Nine in ten of the LAs responding said that they publish information for parents about the availability of school-age childcare in their area.
- When asked how concerned they were about childcare providers' sufficiency to meet parents' needs in their area, LAs were concerned most about childminders (49%), after-school clubs or activities (45%) and holiday clubs (31%).

- All LAs responding reported using the Ofsted register of providers to collect information on school-aged childcare.
- The majority of LAs used information direct from schools (94% of respondents), information direct from other providers (84%) and information as part of other LA processes (92%) to collect information on school-aged childcare.

Introduction

Background

The Department for Education (DfE) is currently implementing a range of policies designed to strengthen and reform children's services.

The commitments set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 signified an ambitious response to the challenges faced by local authorities trying to meet the needs of children and families. Wide-ranging reforms to services included the expansion of funded early years' provision, workforce development for Early Years' professionals and social workers, reforms to SEND services including the introduction of Education, Health and Care Plans, testing new approaches through the Innovation Programme, greater integration between services and with health, and the introduction of children's services trusts. Local Authorities (LAs) played a pivotal role in these landmark reforms, assessing need, innovating, restructuring and delivering reformed services.

In 2016 the Department commissioned a bi-annual Children's Services Omnibus Survey to provide a clear and up-to-date understanding of the key issues facing children's services, and of local authorities' implementation of policy related to children's services. In 2019 this survey was moved to an annual basis, partly in order to try and improve response rates, and was conducted in-house by researchers from the Department for Education.

The children's services omnibus is a survey sent to all 152 upper tier LAs (and Children's Services Trusts) in England. It has three aims:

- To gather information from senior leaders and managers in LAs on policy-related activity and explore their perceptions of these activities;
- To gain a greater understanding of the key issues affecting children's services and local authorities' delivery of them; and
- To consolidate ad-hoc LA surveys into omnibus surveys.

The first wave was undertaken in September to October 2016. The second wave took place in June to July 2017. The third wave took place in October to November 2017. The fourth wave took place in June to August 2018. The fifth wave took place in October to December 2019. The reports on findings from the first to the fifth waves can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-services-omnibus>. There were no waves in 2020 or 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report presents findings from wave 6 of the Children's Services Omnibus series, which took place in January to March 2022.

Survey methodology

All Directors of Children’s Services across 152 local authorities were sent an email inviting them to take part in the survey. The email included further information about the survey and a unique link to the web survey. A copy of the survey questions was also provided to give respondents the opportunity to prepare answers in advance of accessing the online survey. This enabled a single point of contact for the LA to share the full questionnaire with colleagues within different teams who might help with collating data about the different policy areas.

Prior to the mainstage fieldwork the survey questionnaire was first tested and refined with members of an independent advisory group of LA staff. A small-scale pilot was then conducted with a sample of 15 LAs. As well as the substantive survey questions intended to be included in the mainstage survey, the pilot survey included probing questions that explored how easy or difficult respondents found answering the survey questions. The pilot fieldwork ran from 25 January – 7 February. In total, 4 authorities took part in the pilot survey.

During the mainstage fieldwork, all non-responding LAs were sent two reminder emails, a physical letter and one reminder call from DfE researchers. Invitation emails were also re-sent to existing and new points of contact upon request. The fieldwork ran from 9 February - 25 March 2022.

Overall, 52 LAs took part in the survey, a response rate of 34%. This compares with a response rate of 66% at Wave 1 (Autumn 2016), 50% at Wave 2 (Summer 2017), 51% at Wave 3 (Autumn 2017) and 37% at Wave 4 (Summer 2018).

A total of 50 LAs answered questions on Children’s Social Care, 51 LAs answered questions on Early Years and Childcare, 52 answered questions on Special Educational Needs and Disability.

The response to each section compared with previous waves is demonstrated in Table 1. The profile of LAs which completed the survey is largely in-line with the overall profile, based on the type of authority, region, Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) score, Ofsted rating and rates of children in need.

A full breakdown of responses can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Wave 5 response rate compared to previous waves by questionnaire section

Section	Wave 1 (Autumn 2016)	Wave 2 (Summer 2017)	Wave 3 (Autumn 2017)	Wave 4 (Summer 2018)	Wave 5 (Autumn 2019)	Wave 6 (Autumn 2022)
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Children's Social Care	60%	45%	47%	32%	60%	33%
SEND	54%	34%	36%	32%	60%	34%
Early Years and Child Care	56%	38%	39%	33%	59%	34%
LA Leadership	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	59%	N/A

Presentation and interpretation of data

It should always be remembered that a sample, and not the entire population, of upper tier LAs and Children's Services Trusts in England, responded to the survey. Further, the total number of LAs is small (n=152), which means that care is required when interpreting the results. Significance testing was not conducted due to the small sample size.

Minimal changes were made to the survey between the pilot and mainstage fieldwork, and so, where possible, pilot responses have been included in the final data.

In order to maximise analysis opportunities, all respondents who completed at least one section of the survey in full were included in the analysis. However, respondents who only partially completed a section of the survey have not been included when analysing that particular section, even if they fully completed other sections of the survey. This means that base sizes differ slightly between the sections.

Children's social care

The next chapter presents findings relating to children's social care services. Of the 152 LAs invited to complete the survey, 50 LAs responded to questions on children's social care. This section covers questions on social worker workforce, relationship with partner services, challenges in children's social care services, sufficiency of care / adoption placements, early help, upcoming challenges for children's services and barriers to effective delivery.

The term 'family help' was used as a broad concept for both universal help (i.e., Family Hubs) and targeted help (i.e., Supporting Families key workers). The Independent Review of Children's Social Care has since published recommendations, which includes their definition of Family Help¹.

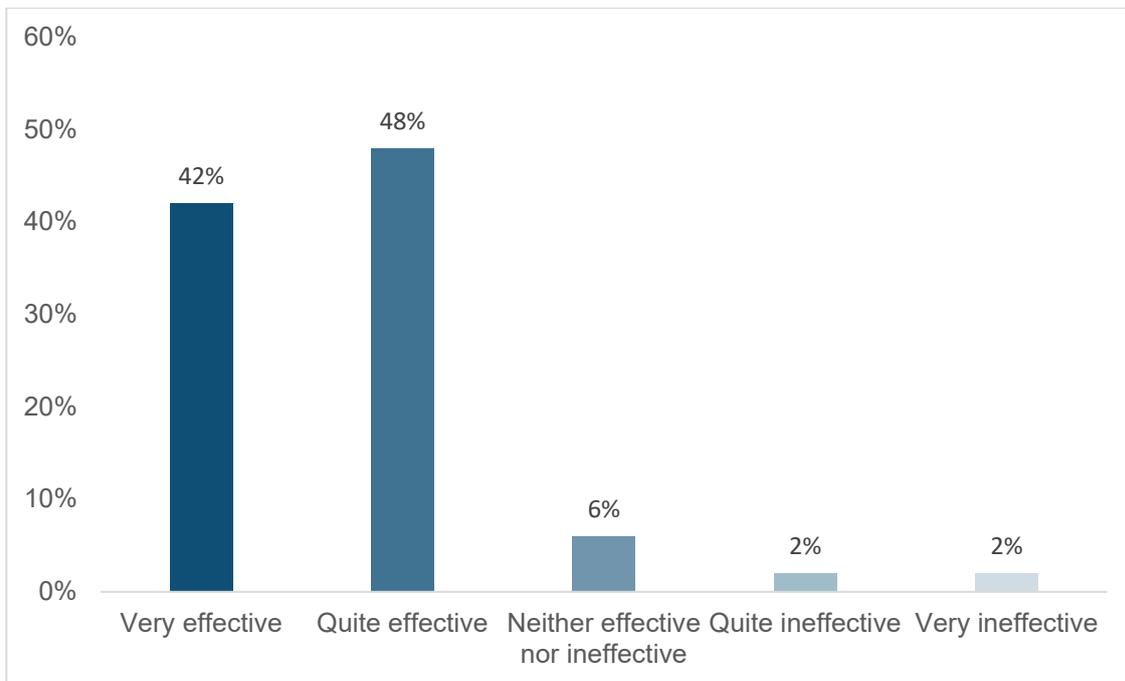
This survey was conducted to monitor perceptions of Newly Qualified readiness and perceptions on the effectiveness of DfE's ASYE programme. The DfE was interested in examining the scale of interest in providing social work apprenticeships from local authority perspective, to understand how much untapped capacity there might be. Recruitment and retention are longstanding concerns and these findings will help the Department to understand the latest picture and to help with prioritisation of the policy development in this area.

Social worker workforce

LAs were asked about the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme. Almost all (90%) LAs felt this was effective in supporting newly qualified support workers to make the transition from training to practise.

Figure 1: The Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme supporting newly qualified social workers to make the transition from training to practice

¹ [A-revolution-in-Family-Help.pdf \(childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk\)](#)

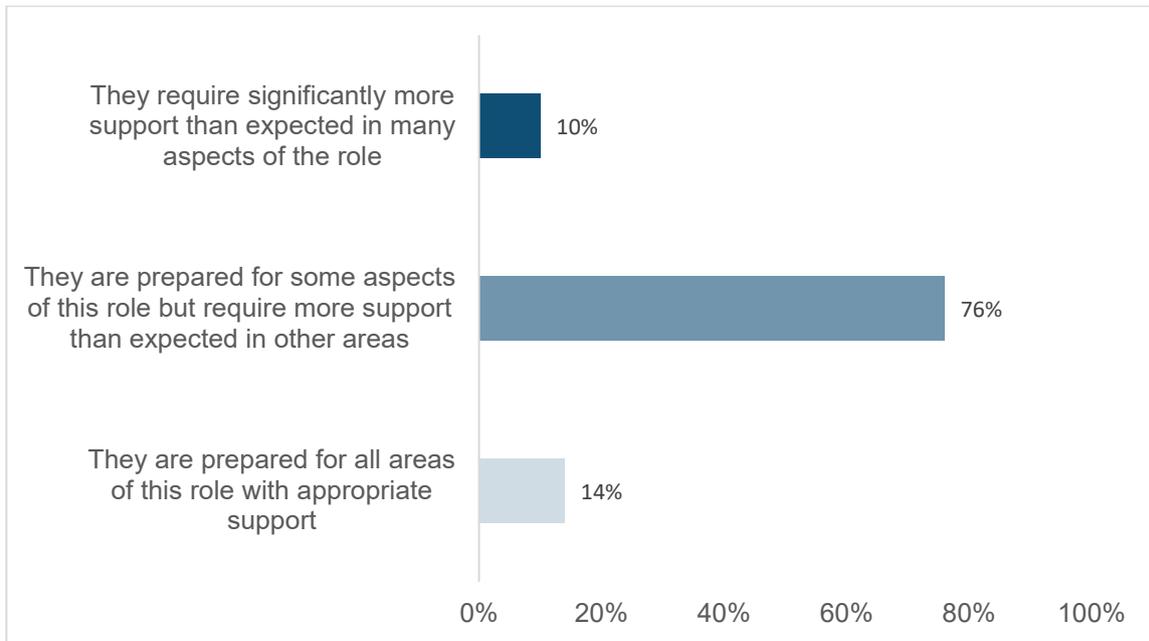


Question: How effective, if at all, do you find the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme in supporting newly qualified social workers to make the transition from training to practice?

Base: All LAs responding to children’s social care section (*n* = 50)

Wave 6 of the Children’s Services Omnibus survey asked LAs about how prepared they thought their newly qualified social workers were to work in child and family social care. Responses showed that 14% of LAs believed that newly qualified social workers were prepared for all areas of this role with appropriate support. Of the LAs that responded, 76% of LAs felt newly qualified social workers were prepared for some aspects but required more support than expected in other areas. A further 10% of LAs felt newly qualified social workers required significantly more support than expected.

Figure 2: Newly qualified social workers working in child and family social care

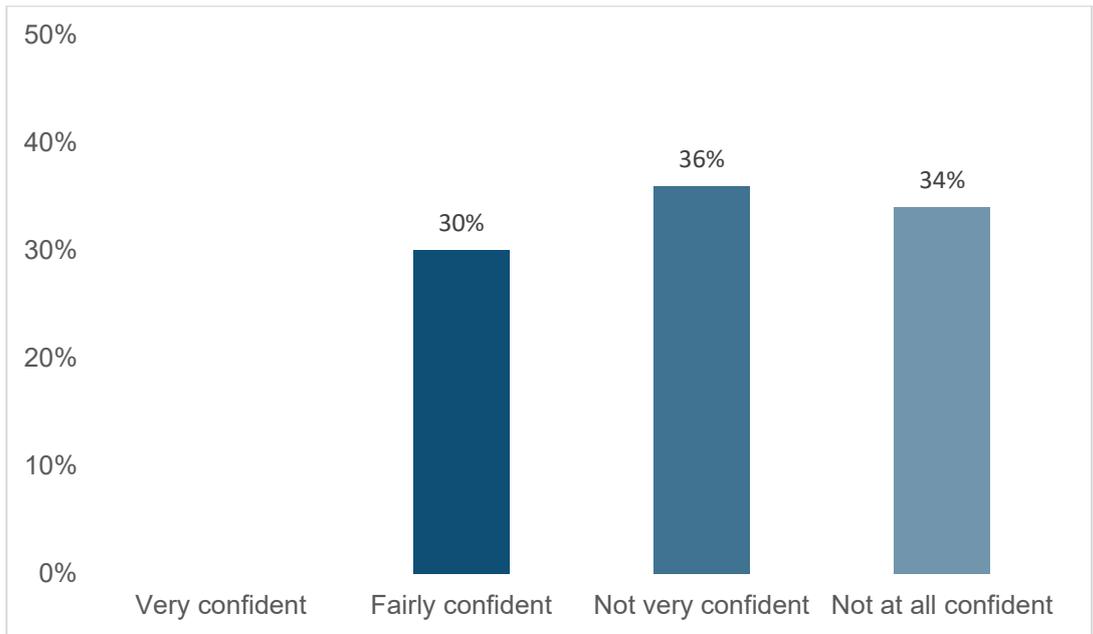


Question: Now thinking about newly qualified social workers specifically, please select the statement which best describes how prepared you feel they normally are to work in child and family social care?

Base: All LAs responding to children’s social care section (*n* = 50)

Fifty LAs responded to whether they thought they would have enough permanent child and family social workers to meet their needs over the next 12 months. Seven in 10 LAs were not confident they would have enough permanent child and family social workers to meet their needs over the next 12 months. Meanwhile 3 in 10 LAs felt fairly confident about this and no LAs were very confident about this.

Figure 3: LA confidence in having enough permanent child and family social workers to meet their needs over the next 12 months



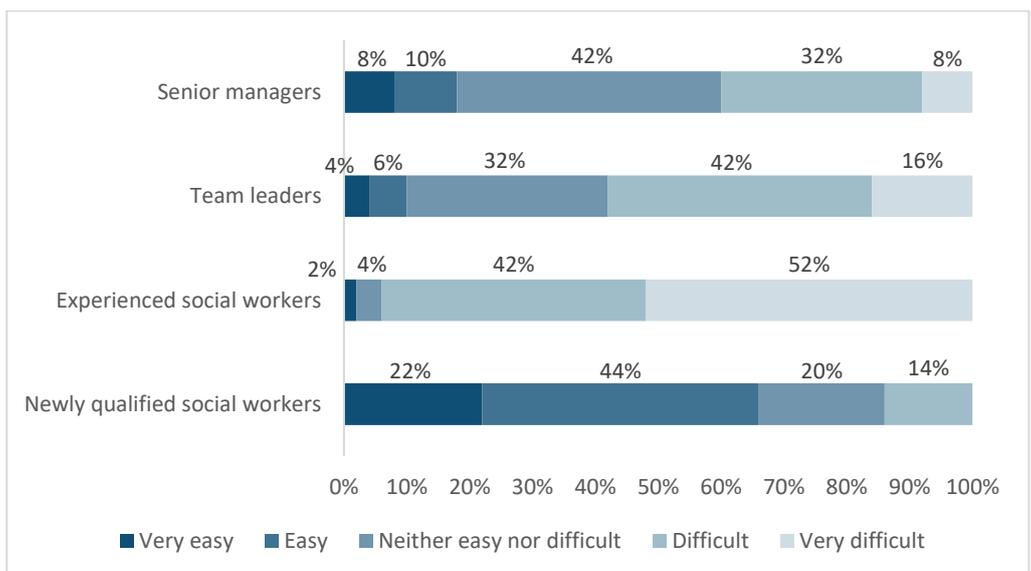
Question: How confident, if at all, are you that your Local Authority will have enough permanent child and family social workers to meet its needs over the next 12 months?

Base: All LAs responding to children’s social care section (*n* = 50)

LAs were asked how easy or difficult they find it to fill newly qualified social worker, experienced social worker, team leader and senior manager vacancies.

For newly qualified social workers, 22% of LAs felt it was very easy and 44% felt it was easy to fill vacancies. Meanwhile 14% felt it was difficult to fill these vacancies and 20% said it was neither easy nor difficult to fill these vacancies.

Figure 4: LA ability to fill vacancies



Question: How easy or difficult do you generally find it to fill vacancies when they occur for the following roles?

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section (*n* = 50)

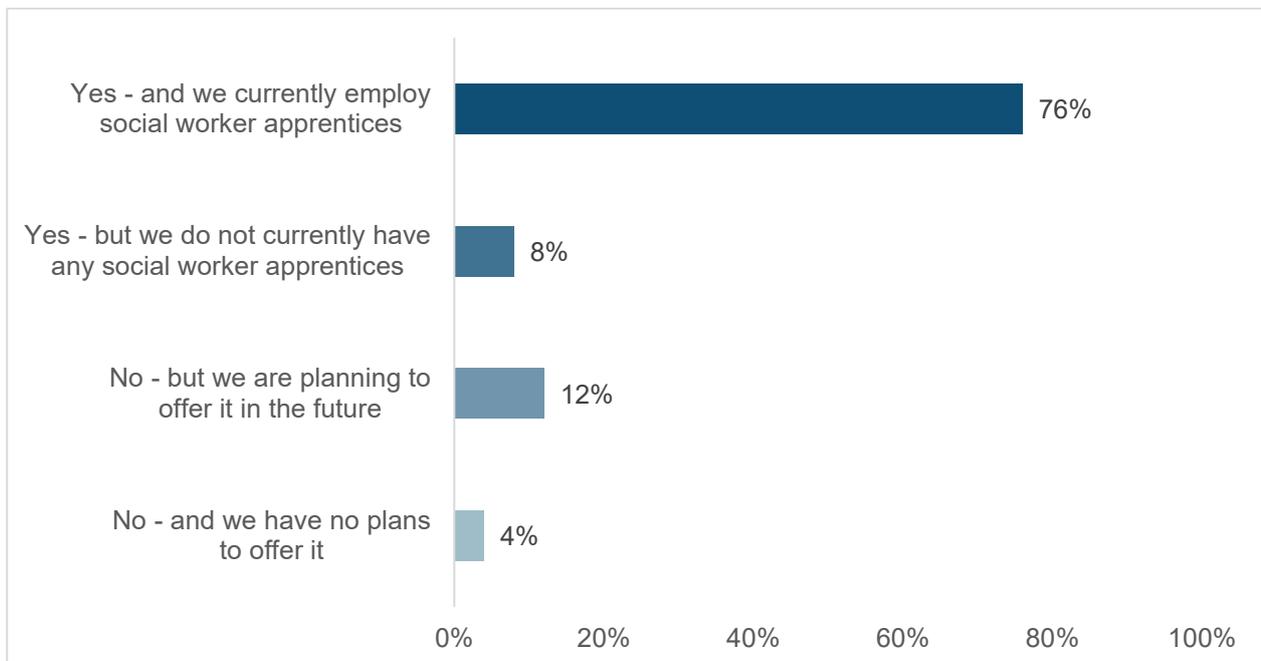
The majority of LAs (94%) found it difficult (42%) or very difficult (52%) to fill vacancies for experienced social workers.

Regarding filling vacancies for team leaders, the majority of LAs found it difficult (42%) or very difficult (16%) to fill vacancies for team leaders. A further 6% of LAs found it easy and 4% very easy to fill vacancies for team leaders. Around 3 in 10 found it neither easy nor difficult to fill vacancies for team leaders.

Four in 10 LAs found it difficult (32%) or very difficult (8%) to fill vacancies for senior managers. Around 2 in 10 LAs felt it was easy (8%) or very easy (10%) to fill vacancies for senior managers. Of the LAs that responded, 42% found it neither easy nor difficult to fill vacancies for senior managers.

Results from this Children's Services Omnibus survey found 76% of LAs offer the social worker apprenticeship and have social worker apprenticeships currently on this scheme. Of the 50 LAs that responded, 8% offer the apprenticeship but did not currently have any apprenticeships on the scheme. A further 12% responded that they did not currently offer the apprenticeship but planned to in the future. This left just 4% of LAs responding that they do not offer the social worker apprenticeship and had no plans to.

Figure 5: LAs that offer the social worker apprenticeship



Question: Does your Local Authority offer the social worker apprenticeship?

Relationship with partner services

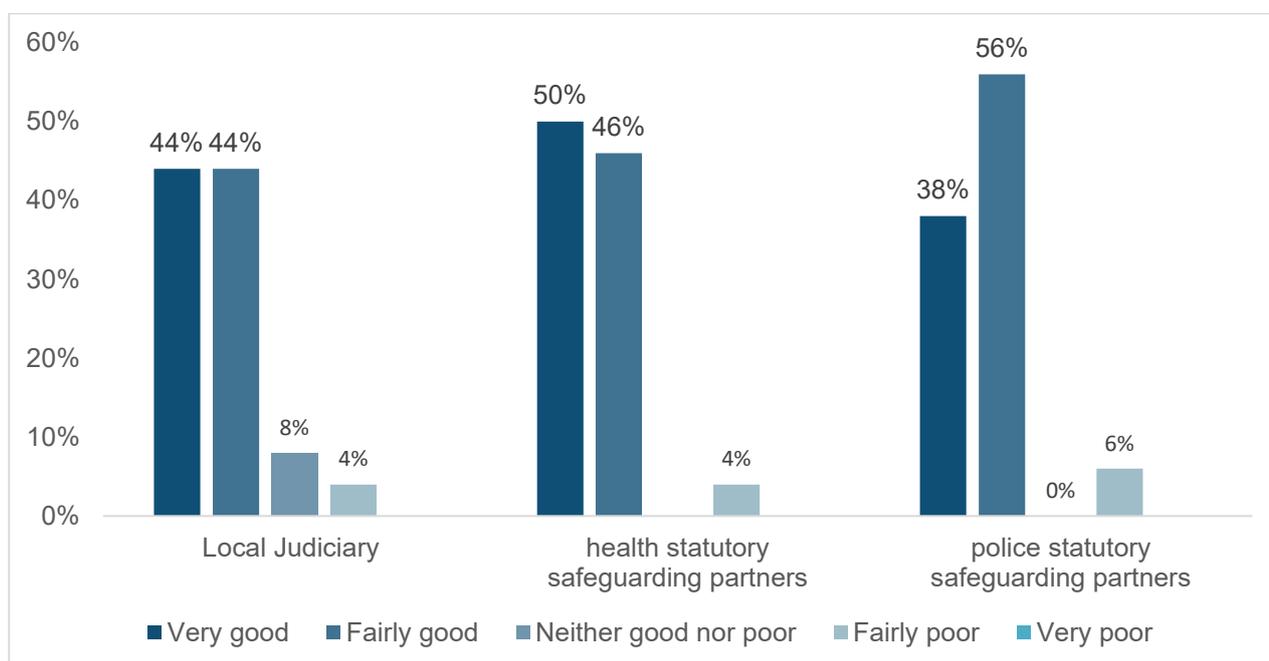
Wave 6 of the Children’s Services Omnibus survey asked LAs to rate their relationship with the local judiciary over care proceedings, health statutory safeguarding partners and the police statutory safeguarding partners.

Of the 50 LAs that responded (96%), 44% rated their relationship with the local judiciary over care proceedings as very good and 44% rated them good. A small minority of LAs rated their relationship with the local judiciary over care proceedings as fairly poor (4%). Nearly 1 in 10 LAs rated their relationship as neither good nor poor.

The majority of LAs rated their relationship with the police statutory safeguarding partners as very good (38%) or fairly good (56%), with 6% rating their relationship as fairly poor.

The majority of LAs rated their relationship with the health statutory safeguarding partners as very good (50%) or fairly good (46%), with 4% rating their relationship as fairly poor.

Figure 6: 6LA relationship with the local judiciary, health and police statutory safeguarding partners



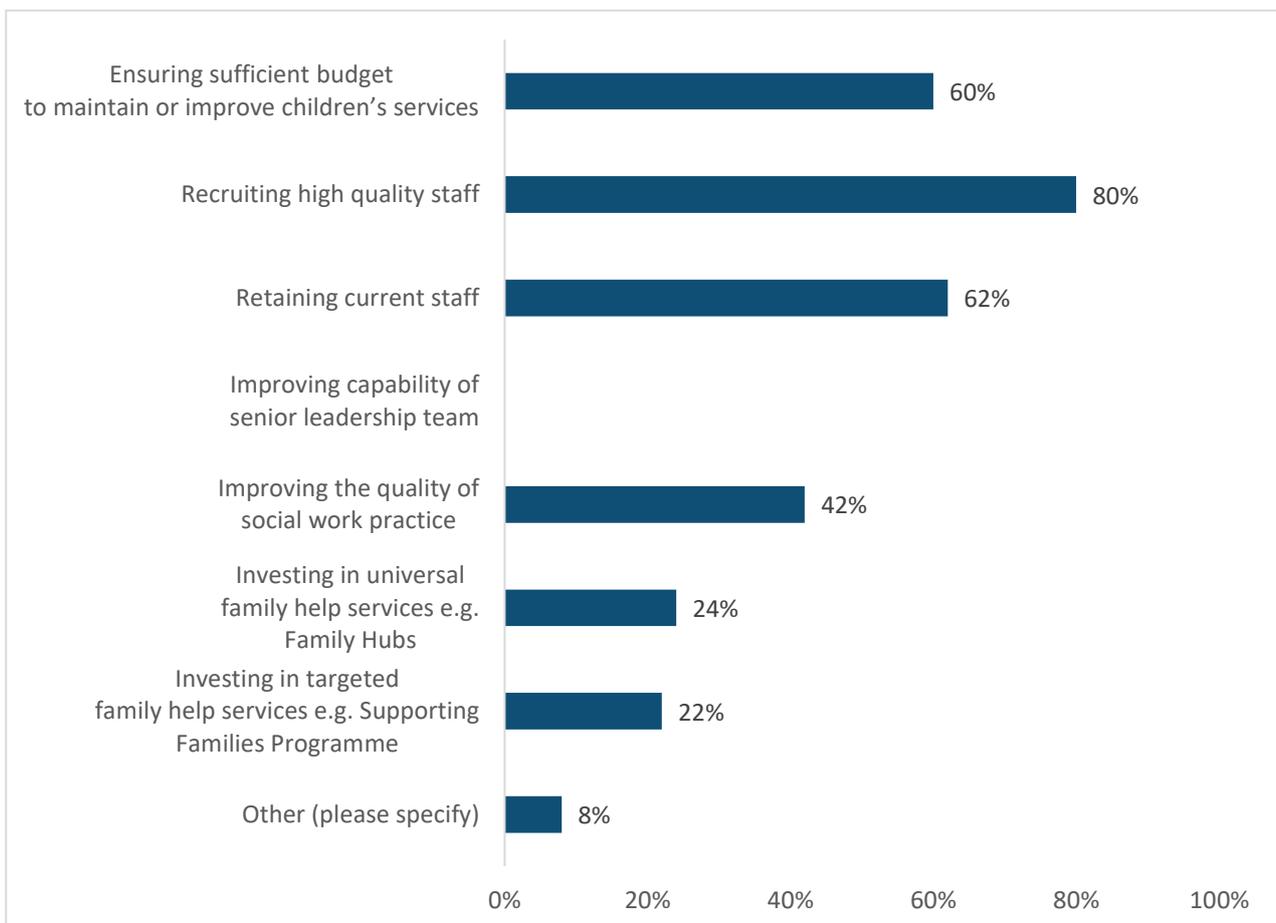
Question: How would you rate your Local Authority's relationship with the following safeguarding partners in relation to child safeguarding in your area? – Local judiciary care proceedings, police and health statutory safeguarding partners.

Challenges in children’s social care services

Wave 6 of this Children’s Services Omnibus survey asked LAs to rate the top 3 priorities in improving children’s social care services over the next 3 years. The 3 most frequently selected answers were recruiting high quality staff (80%), retaining current staff (62%) and ensuring sufficient budget to maintain or improve children’s services (60%).

Improving the quality of social work practice was another common answer with 42% of LAs selecting this category. Of the 50 LAs that responded, 24% selected investment in universal family help services and 22% selected targeted family help services. An ‘other (please specify)’ option was provided for this question and 8% of LAs selected this option. Some key responses were that LAs have good quality social workers but due to high case loads they are unable to provide a high quality services. Other answers included quality placement availability that was at a reasonable cost whilst being in close proximity to children’s homes.

Figure 7: Top priorities in improving children’s social care services over the next 3 years



Question: In your opinion, what are your Local Authority's top priorities in improving children's social care services over the next 3 years? Please select up to 3 answers.²

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section (*n* = 50)

Local authorities were asked what they thought the main risks were to the effective delivery of children's social care services in their authority over the next 3 years. Respondents could select up to three answers and provide their own. The most frequent answers from the 50 LAs that responded were being unable to recruit high quality staff (84%), being unable to retain high quality staff (70%) and social work practise becoming or continuing to be variable (26%). Of the 12% of LAs who selected an 'other (please specify)' option, LAs explained that risks also included young people's mental health and placement availability and stability. A frequently cited theme was the difficulty in increasing social need without any additional investment, and competing to secure additional resources, especially as children's social care is less predictable than adult care.

Figure 8: Main risks to the effective delivery of children's social care services over the next 3 years



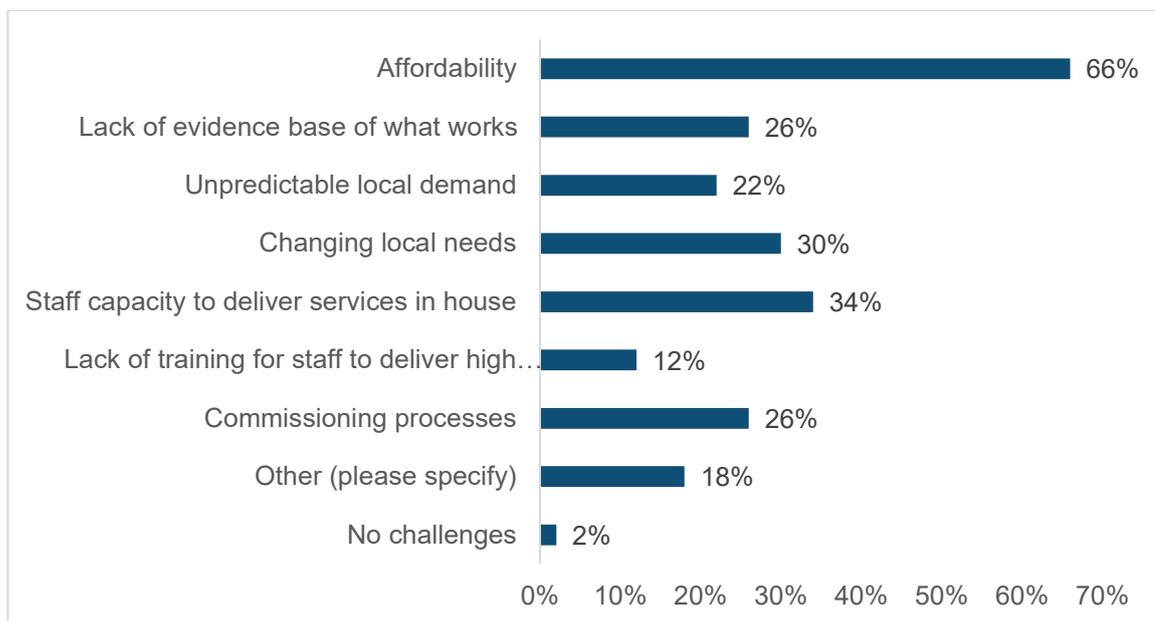
Question: In your opinion, what are the main risks to the effective delivery of children's social care services in your Local Authority over the next 3 years? Please select up to 3 answers.²

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section (*n* = 50)

² Note: Respondents could select more than one answer, and so, values will not total 100.

LAs were asked what they thought were the key challenges they face when delivering and/or commissioning family help services. The 3 most frequent responses were affordability (66%), staff capacity to deliver services in house (34%) and changing local needs (30%). LAs that selected an 'other (please specify)' response (18%) explained that the significant reduction in government funding was a key challenge. Another financial challenge small authorities faced was securing short break services due to a lack of certainty over guaranteed business. There were also responses about not having an agreed practice model and consistent partnership arrangement and engagement. Some LAs faced challenges in co-designing shared budgets.

Figure 9: Key challenges when delivering and/or commissioning family help services



Question: What are the key challenges you face when delivering and/or commissioning family help services?²

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section (*n* = 50)

Sufficiency of care/adoption placements

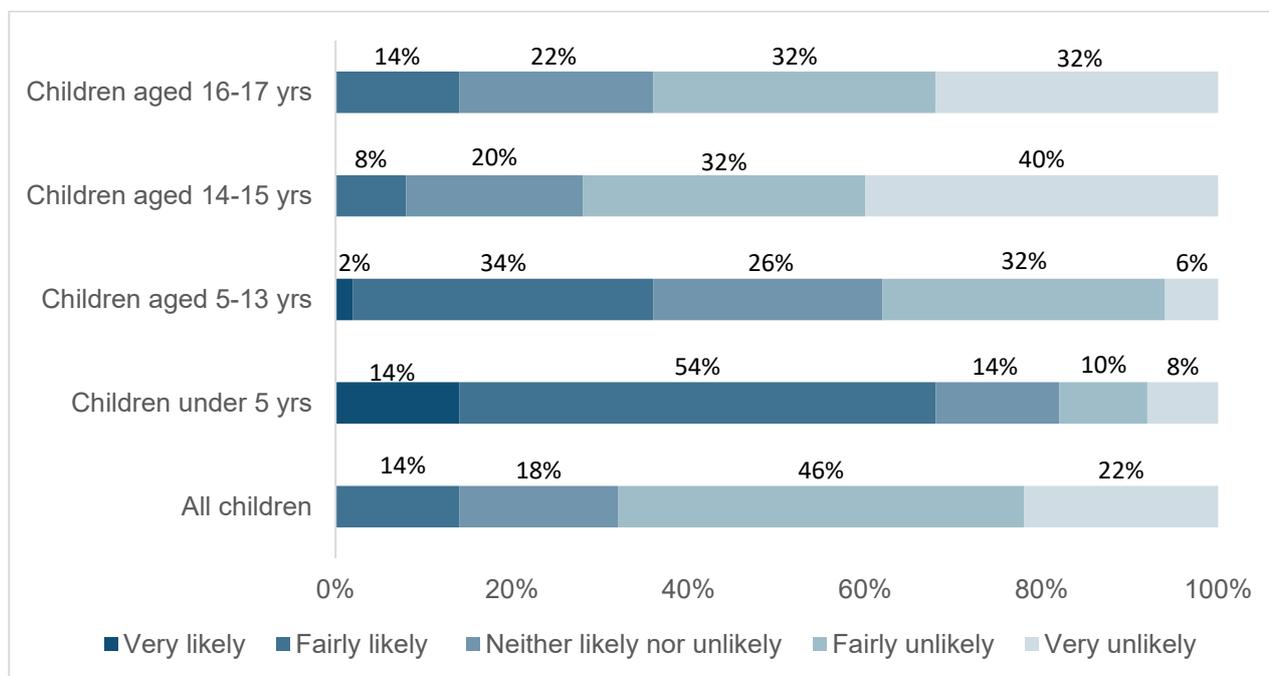
Wave 6 of the Children's Services Omnibus survey asked local authorities whether they will have sufficient care placements to meet projected need over the next year for: all children, children under 5 years, children aged 5-13 years, children aged 14-15 years,

children aged 16-17 years, children from ethnic minorities³, children with a disability and sibling groups.

For all children, the majority of the 50 LAs felt it was very unlikely (46%) or fairly unlikely (22%) they would have sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year. Of the LAs that responded, 14% felt it was fairly likely that they would have sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year. A further 18% of LAs felt it was neither likely nor unlikely.

LAs were most likely to be confident in being able to provide sufficient care placements for children aged under 5 years (68%). LAs thought the group they were least likely to have sufficient care placements to meet project needs over the next year for were children aged 14-15 years old (72%).

Figure 10: LA confidence in providing sufficient care placements to meet the projected needs of children and young people



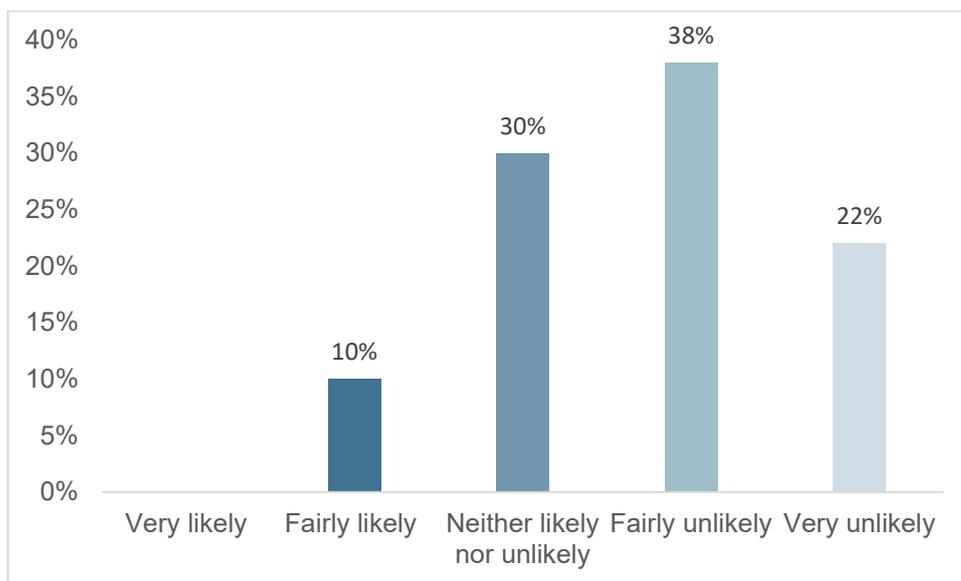
Question: In your opinion, how likely, if at all, is it that your Local Authority will have sufficient care placements to meet projected need over the next year for: all children, children under 5, children aged 5 – 13 years, children aged 14 – 15 years, children aged 16 – 17 years?

Base: All LAs responding to children’s social care section (n = 50)

³ Please note that whilst the original question asked about children from BME backgrounds, this report instead uses ethnic minority or children from an ethnic minority background to comply with the shift in terminology. Please see this article for further information on terminology: [Why we no longer use the term ‘BAME’ in government - Equality Hub \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://www.equalityhub.org/why-we-no-longer-use-the-term-bame-in-government/)

For sibling groups, over half of LAs felt it was fairly unlikely (38%) or very unlikely (22%) to meet sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year would be met. One in 10 LA felt it was fairly likely that they would meet sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year. A further 3 in 10 LAs felt it was neither likely nor unlikely.

Figure 11: LA confidence in providing sufficient care placements to meet the projected needs of sibling groups

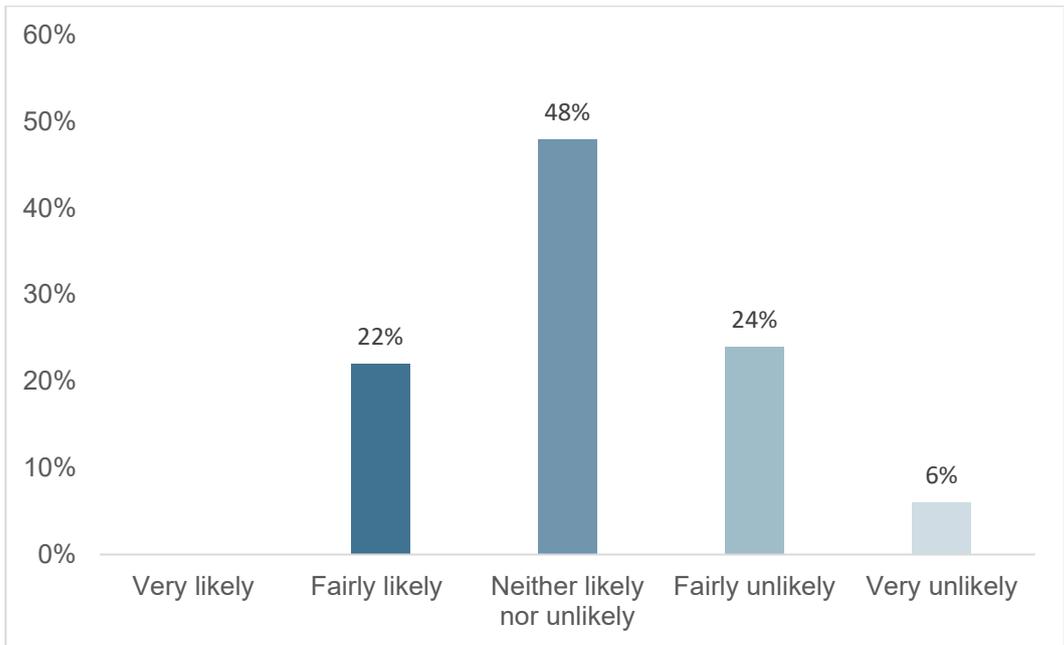


Question: In your opinion, how likely, if at all, is it that your Local Authority will have sufficient care placements to meet projected need over the next year for: sibling groups

Base: All LAs responding to children’s social care section (*n* = 50)

For children from ethnic minorities, the majority of the 50 LAs felt it was fairly unlikely (48%) or very unlikely (6%) to meet sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year. Around 2 in 10 LA felt it was fairly likely that they would meet sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year. Around 5 in 10 LAs felt it was neither likely nor unlikely.

Figure 12: LA confidence in providing sufficient care placements to meet the projected needs of ethnic minorities

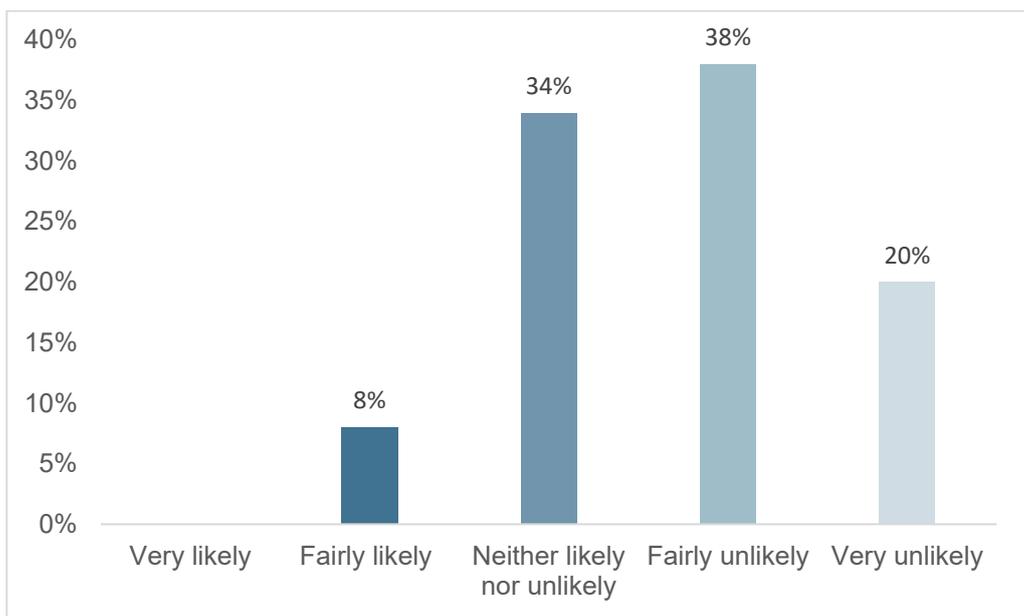


Question: In your opinion, how likely, if at all, is it that your Local Authority will have sufficient care placements to meet projected need over the next year for: children from ethnic minorities

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section ($n = 50$)

For children with a disability, over half of LAs felt it was fairly unlikely (38%) or very unlikely (20%) to meet sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year would be met. Around 34% felt this was neither likely nor unlikely. Around 1 in 10 felt it was fairly likely that they would be sufficient care placements to meet projected needs over the next year.

Figure 13: LA confidence in providing sufficient care placements to meet the projected needs of children with a disability



Question: In your opinion, how likely, if at all, is it that your Local Authority will have sufficient care placements to meet projected need over the next year for: children with a disability

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section (*n* = 50)

Early Help

Fifty LAs answered an open text question about their definition of early help. Early help was often defined as a process or an approach or a shared responsibility or a range of support. Many LAs described early help as “the right support, at the right time in the right place”.

Many responses mentioned how early help was not limited to a certain age:

“Early help does not only mean offering support to very young children. Support may be offered early in life, or early after the emergence of a particular need”

“Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the early years through to the teenage years”

A key theme was that early help is about partnership working. Some responses focused on this not just being the child but their family and community. Several other responses focused on partnership working relating to various charity, community sector and statutory services.

“Our approach to Early Help remains one where partnership working with statutory agencies, voluntary and community sector and most importantly partnership working with children, young people and families is at the core of how we work”

“Working in partnership with children, young people, parent/carers, adults and families within their communities to stay safe through promoting happy, healthy lifestyles, wellbeing and resilience”

“Our locality targeted early help teams work in partnership with schools, health and other universal support teams who can offer information, advice and practical support before the involvement of children's services”

A key theme was that early help involved identifying emerging needs at the earliest time point.

“Working together to identify emerging needs and inequalities at the earliest opportunity and ensure that help is available to support and empower individuals to address needs and prevent them getting worse”

“Early Help is about identifying needs within families early”

“Our approach supports a shift of focus away from managing short-term crises and towards effective support for children and young people and their families at an earlier stage”

After early identification, the next stage in early help for many LAs was early intervention to prevent statutory social care involvement.

“A social work intervention that support vulnerable children and their families in a preventative way, to stop or reverse escalation to statutory services”

“Based upon assessed need and are designed to improve outcomes for children and families and prevent the need for statutory social care intervention”

“Preventative support for families prior to needing statutory services”

Another key theme was that early help aimed to promote resilience for children and families.

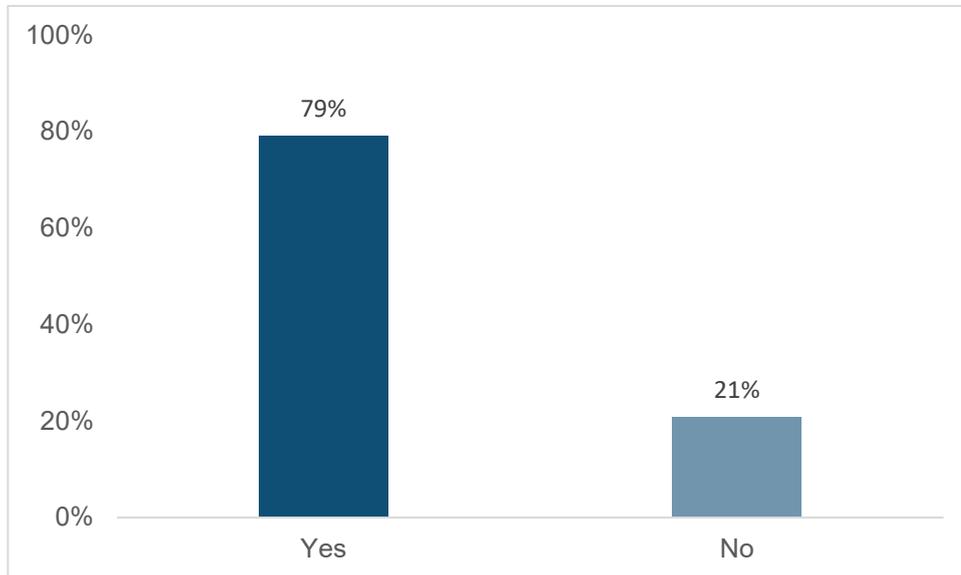
“Build the resilience of parents, children's, young people and communities to support each other”

“Increase family resilience and enable families to manage well without statutory interventions”

“...promote resilience in the child, young person and family”

Wave 6 of the Children’s Services Omnibus survey asked LAs if they had been able to focus investment in Early Help. Of the LAs that responded, 79% had been able to focus investment in Early Help.

Figure 14: Investment in early help

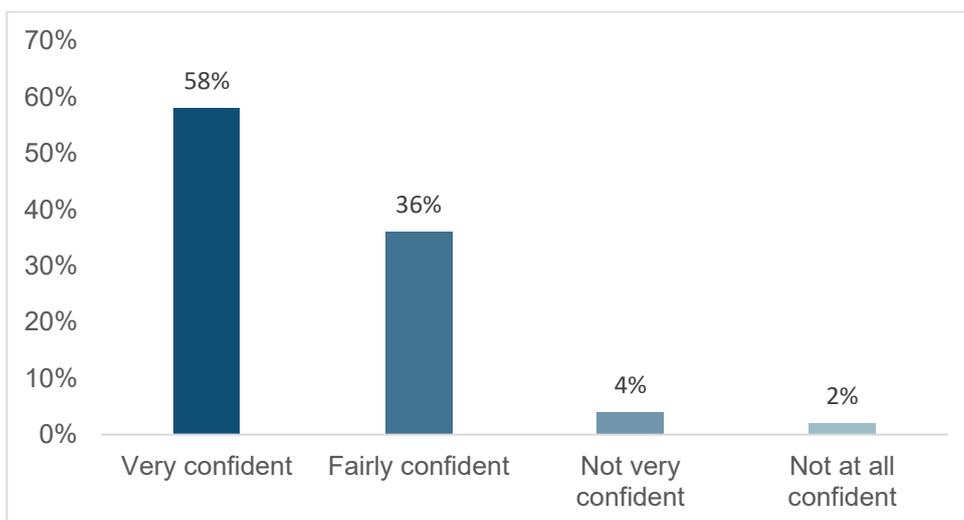


Question: Have you been able to focus investment in Early Help?

Base: All LAs responding to children’s social care section (*n* = 48)

All LAs were then asked to rate their confidence that a greater focus on early help reduces demand on Children in Need. The majority of LAs felt fairly confident (36%) or very confident (58%) that early help did reduce demand on Children in Need. Only 6% did not feel confident.

Figure 15: Whether early help reduces demand on children in need



Question: Thinking about your own Local Authority, how confident, if at all, are you that a greater focus on Early Help reduces demand on Children in Need?

Base: All LAs responding to children's social care section ($n = 50$)

Upcoming challenges for children's social care

Wave 6 of the Children's Services Omnibus survey asked LAs what the main challenges were for them over the coming months. This survey ran from Jan – March 2022.

Workforce stability

The majority of LAs responded about the retention and recruitment of workforce being a key challenge.

“This has an inevitable impact on the number of children that social workers are working with. We have utilised secondment opportunities to support social work CPD to cover temporary vacancies but experience difficulties in finding good quality agency social workers to back fill temporary posts. In addition with regard to permanent employment although [Local authority] can recruit ASYE social workers and we have a variety of routes into social work including Step up, Frontline and apprenticeships, there is a shortage of experienced social workers in our region looking for permanent employment.”

Low morale amongst staff due to adverse media reports about the sector was another reason that impacted retention and recruitment.

Financial pressures

The second most common theme related to the financial pressures LAs were facing. LAs had challenges around small funding grants or specific funding grants because these do not provide long term support and so would not impact on outcomes for children. There was pressure to make savings and challenges around the cost of those with complex needs.

“Dealing with budgetary pressures and requirement to make corporate savings in 2023/4 and 2024/5.”

“Financial pressures and lack of funding for children's services that is not initiative based, ring fenced and short term.”

“Financial pressures relating to care placements for children with complex needs.”

“Short term funding opportunities do not help to provide sustainable services and impact on outcomes for children.”

COVID-19 and mental health and well-being

Another theme was the interplay between the COVID-19 lockdowns that had affected mental health and well-being for children, young people, parents and staff. The challenges for LAs was having the budget and provision in place to meet the complexity and increase in cases.

“We have concerns about the emotional well-being and mental health of children and families. We are concerned about the pressures this may place on our Early Help services through an increase in demand.”

“Covid Recovery: Increased demand due to impact of Covid. Mental Health and wellbeing across all areas, for children, families and for staff.”

“The pandemic has resulted in a number of challenges for children and families. The impact of services being closed and usual family and friend support being inaccessible as well as children and young people having their education disrupted. We are still unclear about the longer term impact of this on our children and young people and their families. We have concerns about the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and families. We are concerned about the pressures this may place on our Early Help services through an increase in demand.”

Increased and complex demand

It's clear that the pandemic had increased the complexity of cases as well as an increase in demand. There were a high proportion of comments relating to the challenge of managing increasing demand. There was increasing demand particularly for sufficiency placements and the complexity of cases which was challenging for LAs.

“Sufficiency of placement resources for children in care, particularly vulnerable adolescents. Evidence of increasing complexity of need (particularly associated with domestic abuse, neglect and parental

mental health), which places pressure of capacity of resources to respond appropriately.”

“Increased demand for children’s social care services (at least 20%) over the last 12 months that shows no signs of reducing.”

Early help

A smaller theme was the challenges linked to providing early help. The specific challenges LA faced in regard to early help was around getting enough investment, developing a strong strategy and a lack of understanding and shared accountability for early help.

“Achieving effective early help when there is a lack of common understanding and shared accountability for early help work.”

“Working with partners to develop a strengthened early help Strategy”

Schools

Some LAs mentioned challenges they had in schools. These included, improving attainment and attendance in schools (including reducing exclusions), making schools more inclusive and recruitment and retention of school staff.

“Falling pupil admission numbers across the primary school systems in both LAs.”

“Improving attainment and attendance at schools including reducing exclusions.”

Policies and inspections

There was a small theme around challenges regarding the number of different policies which were disruptive to LAs. There was a particular challenge with the SEND review and the current SEND system. LAs were unsure what their priorities would be and were feeling the effect of potential changes.

“Multiple policy clashes at the same time.”

“The regulatory regime disrupting children's placements.”

“SEND review - what this will mean for LA priorities.”

“The SEND system which almost pitches parents and carers against the system.”

Barriers to effective delivery

The final question of the wave 6 Children’s Services Omnibus survey asked LAs to explain what would be the most helpful actions that the Government could take to facilitate / remove barriers to the delivery of good children’s social care services in their Local Authority.

Increasing workforce

One of the most frequent answers was encouraging social workers into the profession. National campaigns were commonly suggested. Other suggestions included building multi-disciplinary teams to tackle complex issues like exploitation and improving and enforcing agency standards.

“Ensure there is a national workforce planning taskforce to ensure a better supply of quality staff and to tackle the growing issue of agencies.”

“National support on recruitment and pay for social workers and regulations of agencies providing agency social workers.”

Investment

The second most common answer was around adequate funding of services. There were particular comments about how the bidding process needs improvement as currently it is short term and inflexible. There were also particular comments around funding early help and early intervention services. Barriers to investment affected the quality of staff, services and long-term planning.

“Increase sustained investment, with local flexibilities.”

“Long term budget setting. Our colleagues in NHS services have a 10 year plan with funding to go alongside it, whereas we are still going year to year with our grant awards which is a barrier to long term planning.”

“Enable local authorities to invest in early intervention services without the need for bidding processes that are lengthy and provide relatively short-term funding opportunities.”

“Greater flexibility in grant funding in terms of the scope of spend and the timescales to spend that allows funding to be truly targeted at local need.”

“Stop putting funding into the sector through short term, ring fenced, initiative based grants and provide sufficient fund to enable LAs to support children in the way they want to.”

“Fund it they way it funds school i.e based on need defined by numbers.”

Regulation

Another key theme was around regulation. Some LAs wanted reduced regulation and others wanted government to regulate agency social workforce, private placement providers and the cost of payments.

“Allow for some ability to flex on regulatory requirements to allow for innovation and to promote best practice.”

“Review and reduce the regulatory requirements for children’s social workers to undertake such a wide range of tasks that could be undertaken by other suitably qualified practitioners.”

“Remove the requirement for Independent Reviewing Officers for all looked after children, allow for discretion.”

“Take action on the CMA report on the residential market, have a sensible solution to unregistered and unregulated placements instead of saying "computer says no" and just trying to solve the problem through regulation.”

“Regulate the costs of fostering and residential payments - provide LAs with the finance and support to invest in in house provision.”

Linking with others

Many LAs want more cohesion amongst government departments and Ofsted. Some LA felt better cohesion between central and local government was required.

“Linking policy with other Government departments.”

“Government also has to ensure much better join up and liaison across Government Departments.”

“The lack of coherence between DfE, Home Office and DHSC for example continues to be deeply concerning.”

“Clearer join up within central government and support to increase placement sufficiency across the country.”

“Effective commissioning framework for joint commissioning across LA, CCGs and Police on share agendas.”

“DfE and Ofsted being on the same page e.g. use of digital tech/social media during Covid and developing agile practice.”

“Better join up across Ofsted departments to ensure consistent approach to inspection.”

Placements

Some LAs would like a review of the placement providers to ensure quality of placement sufficiency.

“Ensure regional placement commissioning arrangements are in place to increase sufficiency and quality for children in care.”

“National campaign to assist with placement sufficiency and completing with pace current review into the effectiveness and competitiveness of the placement marketplace.”

“Take action following CMA review of child placements.”

“Provide regulation of agency Social Workers and private child care placement providers.”

“Cost of care placements continues to increase and become more unsustainable and needs to be addressed via the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.”

Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND)

This chapter presents findings relating to SEND. It covers questions on ensuring sufficient SEN provision and preparation for adulthood, 52 LAs completed this section of the survey. We want all children and young people, no matter what their SEN or disability, to be able to reach their full potential and receive the right support to succeed in their education and as they move into adult life. Ensuring sufficient SEN provision, monitoring outcomes for Children and Young People with SEND and provision for Preparation for Adulthood are essential to ensuring the best outcomes for Children and Young People with SEND. The findings in this report will feed into SEND workforce, outcomes work and the SEND Review.

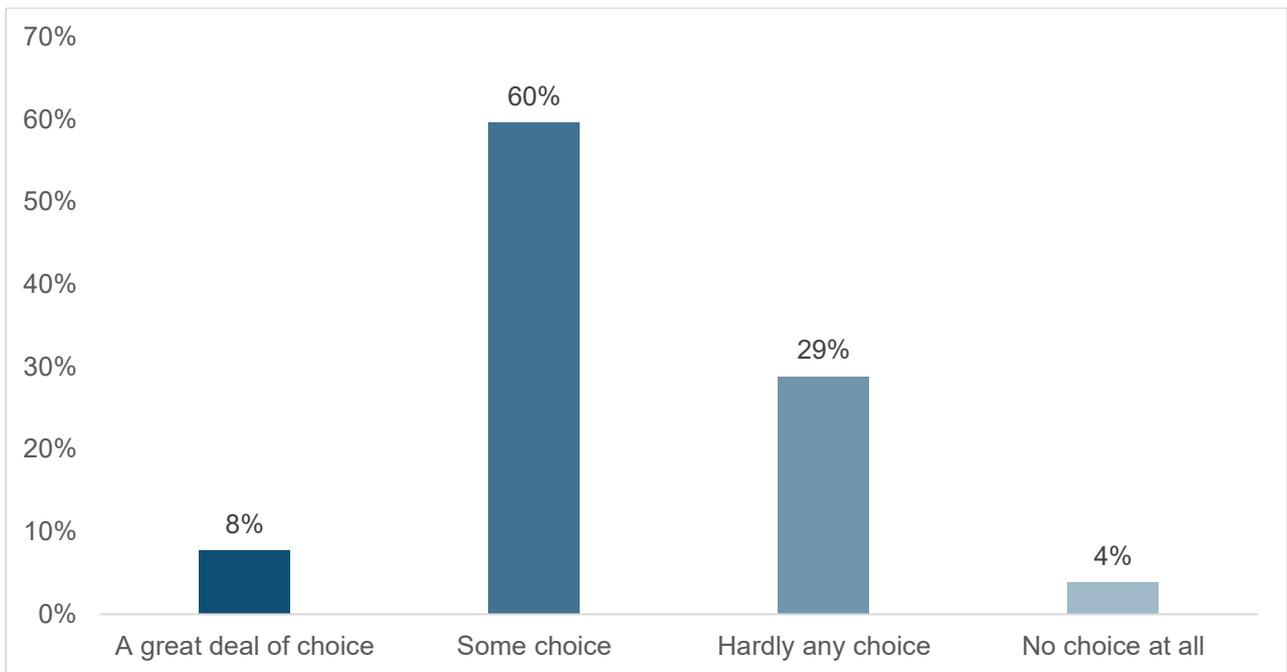
Under the Children and Families Act 2014, a child or young person has Special Educational Needs (SEN) if they have a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. A child of compulsory school age or a young person has a learning difficulty or disability if they:

- Have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
- Have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools (or mainstream post-16 institutions).

EHC Plans and placements

This wave of the Children's Services Omnibus survey asked LAs about how much choice LA officers had when commissioning appropriate school placements for children with EHC plans. Six in 10 (60%) LAs reported having some choice and 8% of respondents said they had a great deal of choice. Nearly 3 in 10 (29%) LAs reported having hardly any choice and 4% reported having no choice at all.

Figure 16: Choice when commissioning appropriate school placements for children with EHC plans

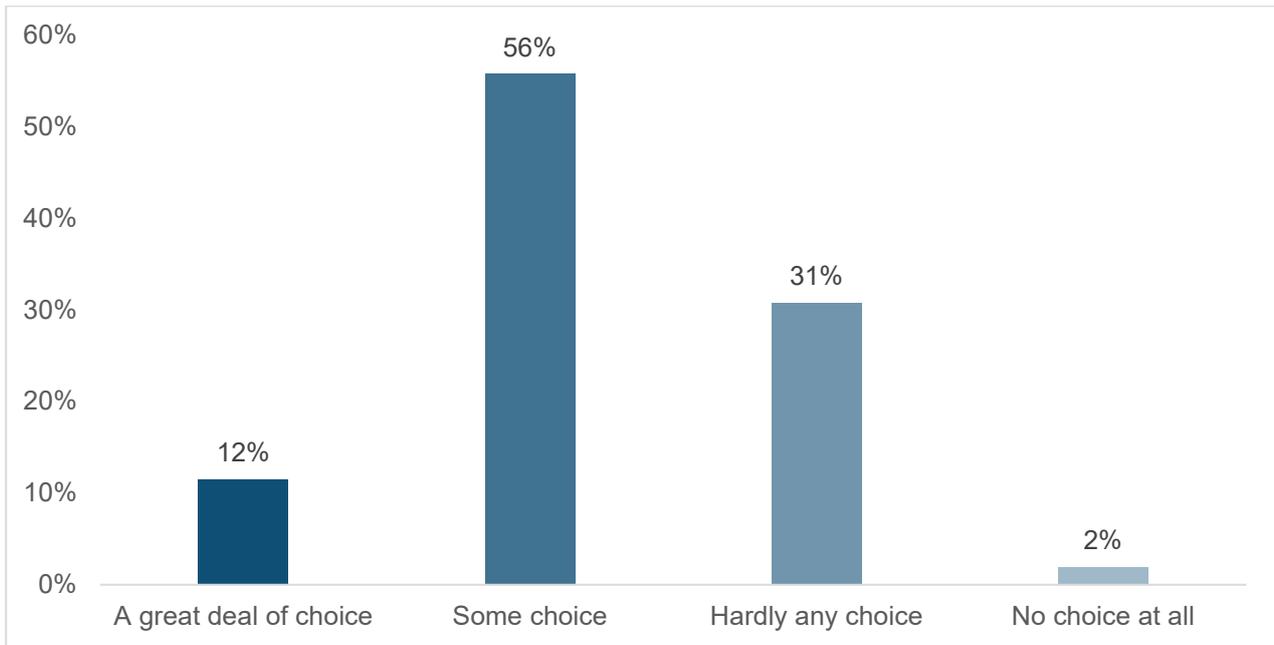


Question: Thinking about the range of schools and their capacity in your local area, how much choice would you say that LA officers have when commissioning appropriate school placements for children with EHC plans?

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section (*n* = 52)

LAs were also asked about how much choice LA officers had when commissioning appropriate post-16 placements for young people with EHC plans. Of the LAs that responded, 12% said they had a great deal of choice, over half of LAs said they had some choice (56%), 31% said they had hardly any choice and 2% said they had no choice at all.

Figure 17: Choice when commissioning appropriate post-16 school placements for young people with EHC plans



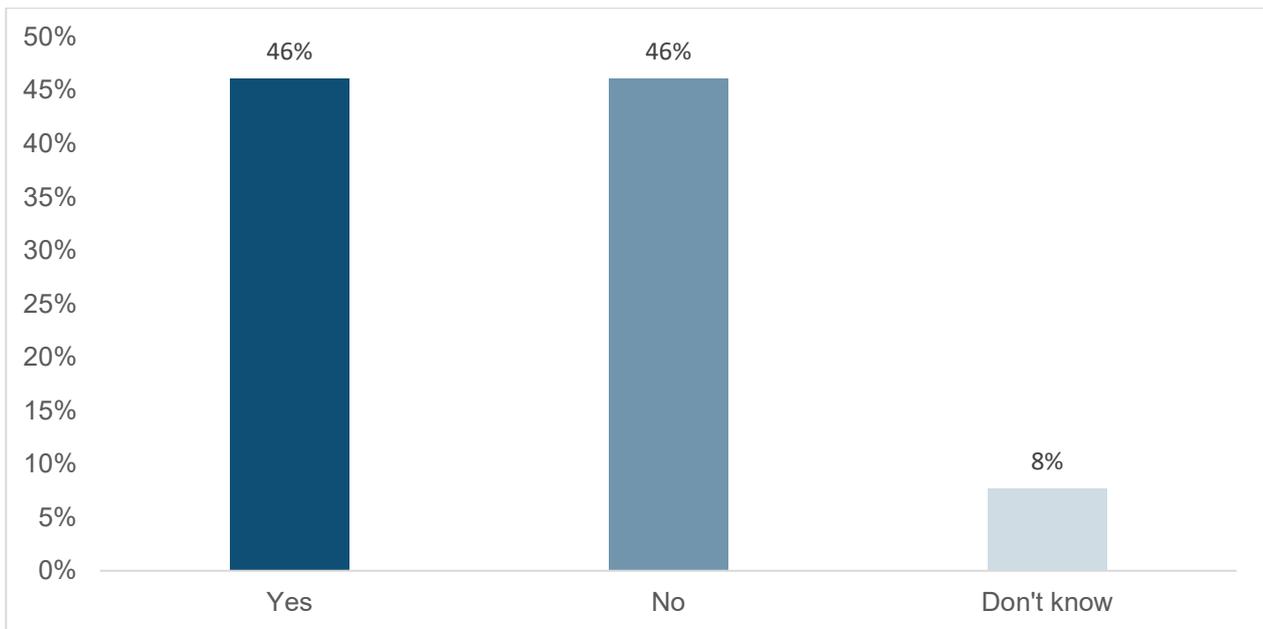
Question: Thinking about the range of schools and their capacity in your local area, how much choice would you say that LA officers have when commissioning appropriate post-16 placements for young people with EHC plans?

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section (*n* = 52)

Monitoring SEND outcomes

LAs were asked if they monitor outcomes for young people with an EHC plan after they have left education. Whilst 8% of LAs did not know, the number of LAs that did and did not monitor outcomes for young people with an EHC after they have left education was split evenly at 46%.

Figure 18: Monitoring outcomes for young people with an EHC plan after they have left education



Question: Do you monitor outcomes for young people with an EHC plan after they have left education?

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section ($n = 52$)

Of the 46% LAs that responded yes, an open text question was provided for LAs to explain in what way the LA monitors outcomes for young people with an EHC plan after they have left education. Of the 21 LAs that responded, some common themes were identified.

- **Data and statistics**

LAs described using NEET data and using destination data which is commonly gathered from Connexions and other employability services. Data collection was also gathered from post-16 teams and FE colleges. Some LAs explained how this data is 'limited' or 'imperfect' and were considering how they could improve monitoring.

- **EHC Reviews**

Another method of monitoring outcomes for young people with an EHC plan was at EHC review meetings and monitoring visits. Some LAs had lifelong learning services and employment pathways across the council.

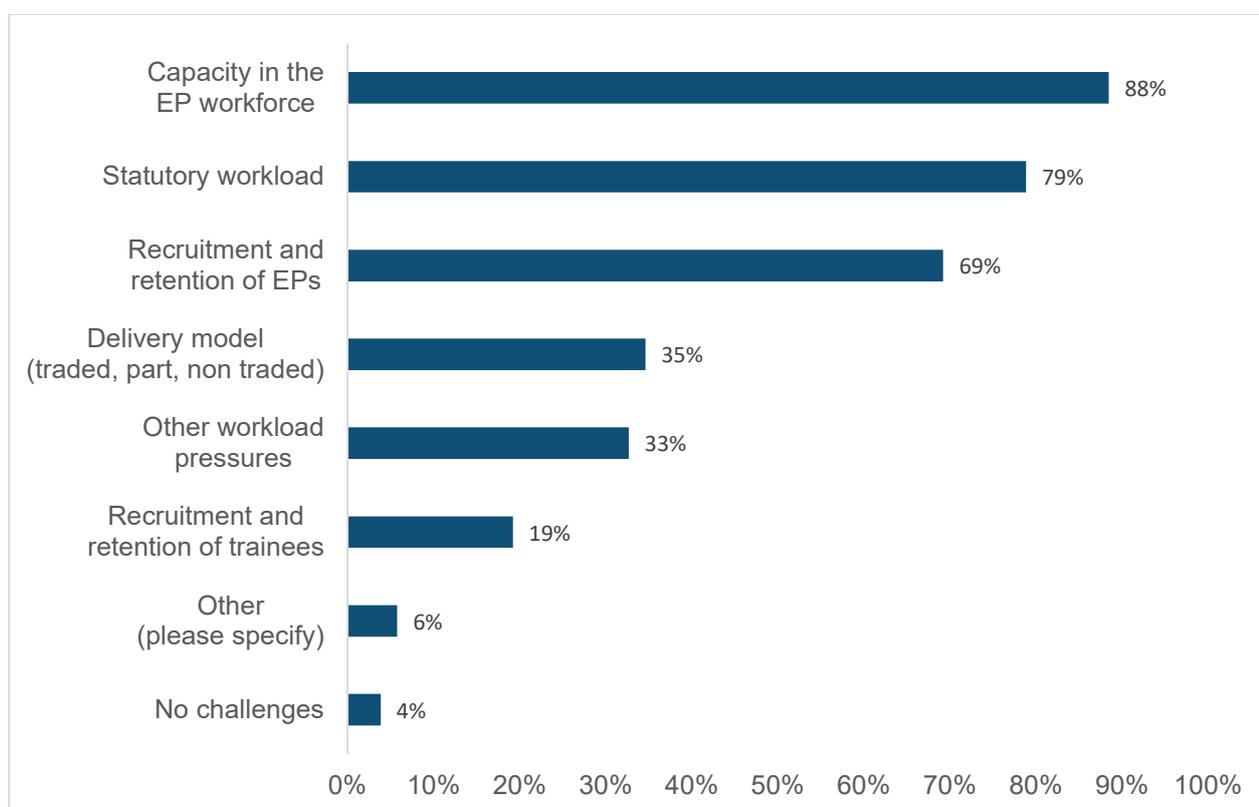
- **Key groups and services**

Some LAs described liaising with other key groups and services: case workers, parents, Adult Social Care and Connexions were some of the groups mentioned in the open text responses. Some LAs provided programmes and services targeted at post 16 education/employment such as a PfA training programme, an employability service and transition teams providing support.

Educational Psychologists

LAs were asked about any challenges that may be experienced when providing an educational psychology (EP) service. The three biggest challenges LAs described were capacity in the educational psychology workforce (88%), statutory workload (79%) and recruitment and retention of educational psychologists (EPs) (69%). Three LAs selected the 'other (please specify)' option. Key themes from these responses were that although they are adequately staffed there has been an increase in demand. There were specific issues with smaller areas experiencing difficulty in recruiting due to location and contracted hours.

Figure 19: Challenges in providing an educational psychology service?



Question: Which of the following, if any, challenges in providing an Educational Psychology Service in your Local Authority do you experience? (Please select all that apply.)

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section ($n = 52$)

Monitoring SEND issues

LAs were asked about the systems that were in place for monitoring SEND issues. The majority of LAs had systems in place for monitoring the following SEND issues: pressures on high needs budgets (87%), outcomes of children and young people with SEND (85%) and progress implementing the SEND reforms (83%). Open text responses

were provided for LAs to expand on how they monitor SEND issues and key themes were identified.

- **Meetings**

The majority of LAs measured SEND issues at a SEND board. Most LAs had an action plan or strategy and progress was reviewed at board meetings. For monitoring the pressures on high needs budgets, many LAs had monthly budget meetings.

- **User groups**

Another way LAs monitored progress was through feedback via parent carer forums. To represent children and young people, there were youth forums and councils that provided feedback. Schools were an additional user group that questionnaires and reviews were conducted with to gather information on SEND issues.

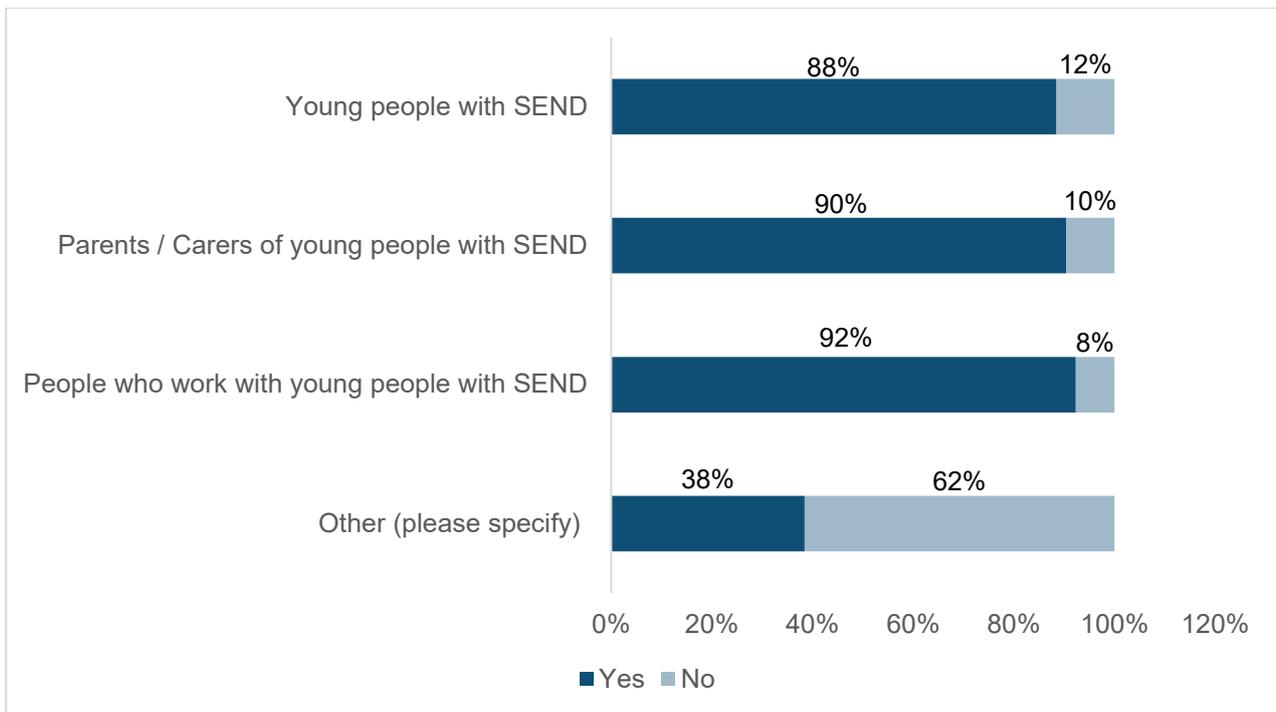
- **Data, reports, and other insight tools**

LAs explained that they used dashboards, reports, survey data and audits to supplement board meetings. Some LAs conducted deep dives and consultations. Specifically, most LAs also had budget reports for monitoring the pressures on high needs budgets. A few LAs also used the deficit management plan. For monitoring the outcomes of children and young people with SEND, many LAs specifically mentioned using their annual report.

Preparation for Adulthood

Wave 6 of the Children's Services Omnibus survey asked all LAs who they developed their preparation for adulthood strategy with. The majority of LAs co-produced their preparation for adulthood strategy with people who work with young people with SEND (92%), parents / carers of young people with SEND (90%) and young people with SEND (88%). Of the 52 LAs that responded, 38% selected the 'other (please specify)' option. The key groups from the 'other (please specify)' answers were adult and children's health and social care providers; schools, colleges and post-16 providers; parent carer forums; and elected groups such as elected members and the youth cabinet.

Figure 20: Groups involved in the development of a Preparation for Adulthood Strategy?



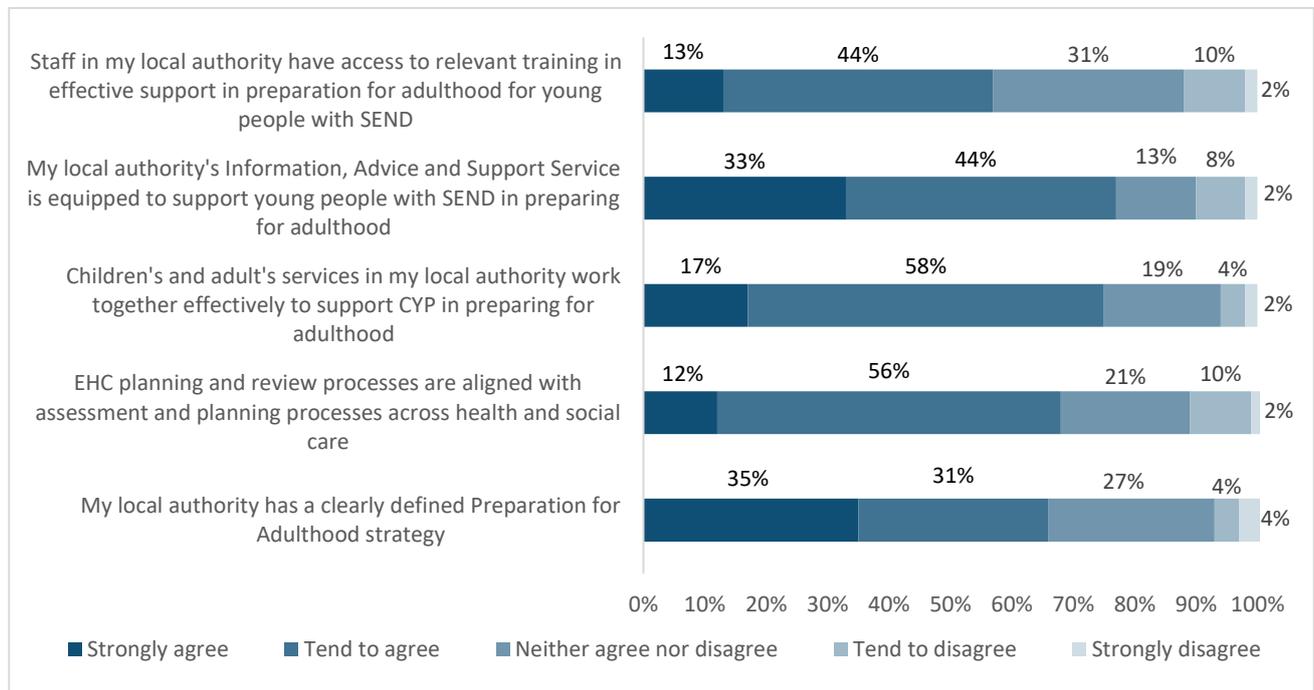
Question: When developing your Preparation for Adulthood Strategy did your Local Authority co-produce this with any of the following: Parents / Carers of young people with SEND, people who work with young people with SEND, other (please specify).

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section (*n* = 52)

LAs were asked to indicate their agreement with a number of statements relating to their preparation for adulthood strategy. Of the 52 LAs who took part in the survey:

- 66% agreed that their authority has a clearly defined preparation for adulthood strategy, 8% disagreed;
- 68% of LAs agreed that EHC planning and review processes are aligned with assessment and planning processes across health and social care;
- around 75% of LAs agreed children's and adult's services in their authority work together effectively to support Children and Young People (CYP) in preparing for adulthood;
- 77% of LAs agreed their authority's Information, Advice and Support Service is equipped to support young people with SEND in preparing for adulthood;
- the majority of LAs (57%) also agreed that staff in their authority have access to relevant training in effective support in preparation for adulthood for young people with SEND.

Figure 21: Extent LAs agree or disagree with the following statements about Preparation for Adulthood for children and young people (CYP) with SEND who have an EHC plan

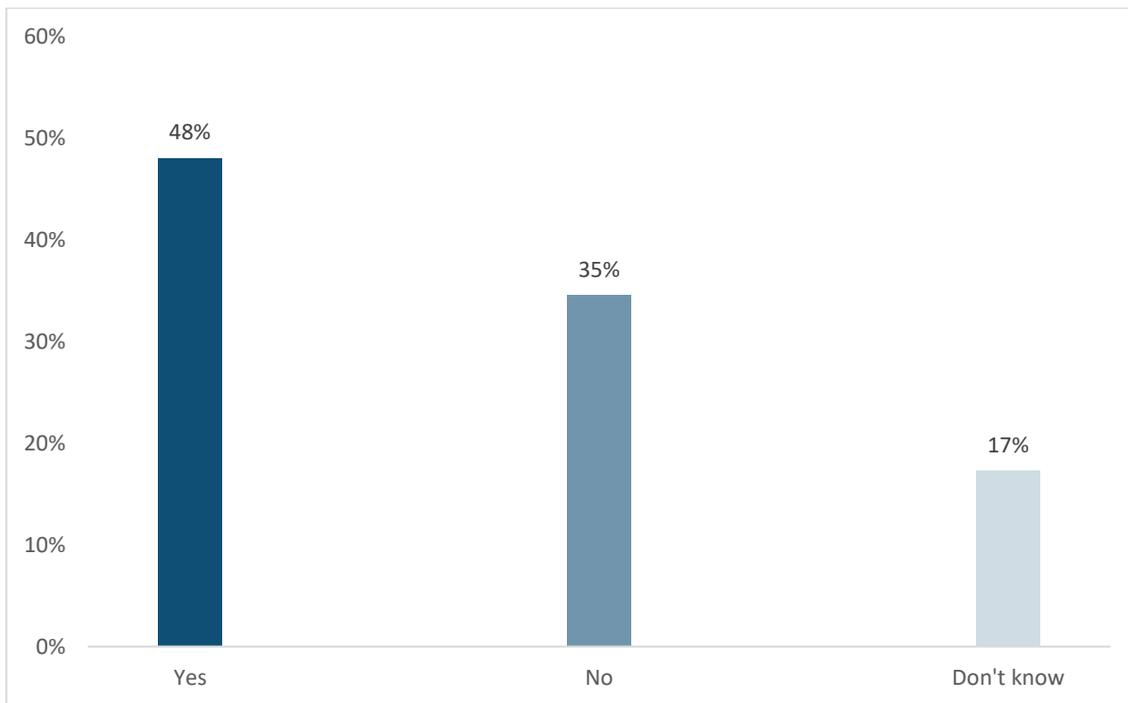


Question: The following statements are about Preparation for Adulthood for children and young people (CYP) with SEND who have an EHC Plan / Statement. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section (*n* = 52)

LAs were asked if they measure the success of their Preparation for Adulthood strategy. Of the 52 LAs that responded, 48% did measure the success of their Preparation for Adulthood strategy, 35% did not and 17% did not know.

Figure 22: Whether LAs measure the success of their Preparation for Adulthood Strategy



Question: Does your Local Authority measure the success of its Preparation for Adulthood strategy?

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section ($n = 52$)

Additionally, LAs were asked what key metrics they use to measure the success of their Preparation for Adulthood strategy. Of the 24 open text responses, key themes were Education, Employment or Training metrics and Health and Social Care metrics. Some LAs also mentioned measuring the success of its PfA strategy through the number of young people with SEND who are living independently.

- **Education, Employment or Training (EET) metrics**

For the majority of LAs, a key metric was whether the individual was in education, employment or training. Linked to this was attainment results, and the number of young people that have a supported internship. This was often identified through destination data, surveys and in reviews.

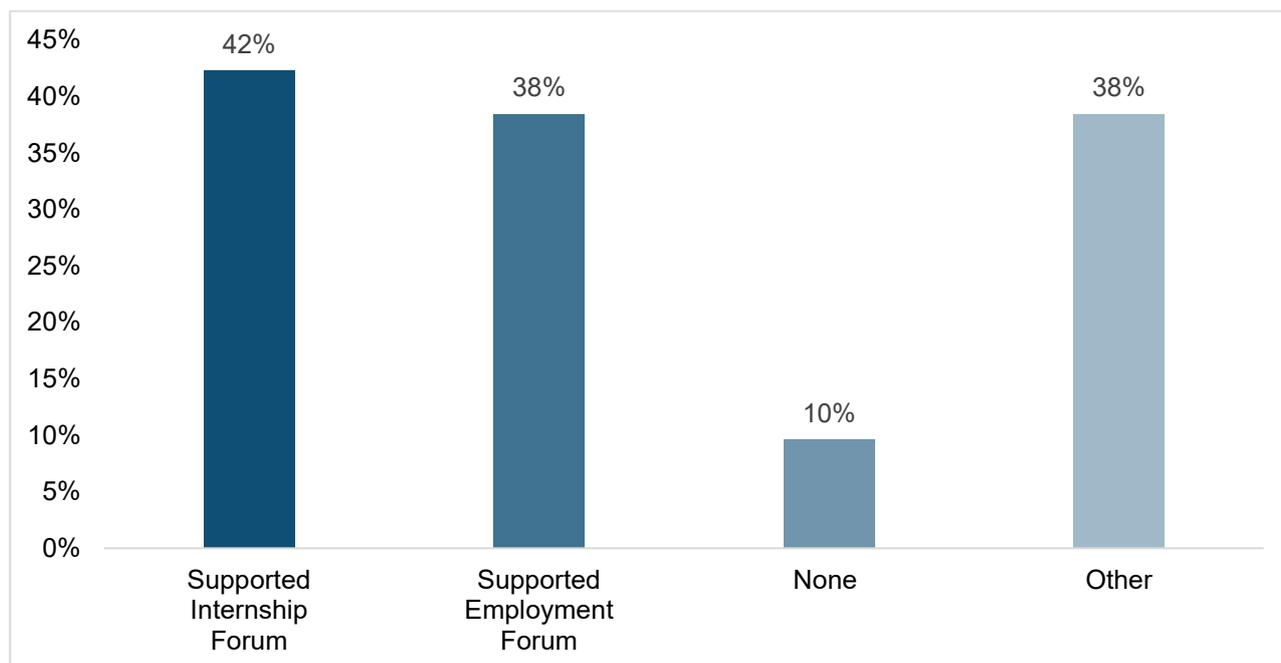
- **Health and Social Care metrics**

Personal budgets and independent living were also key metrics for LAs. LAs also measured the number of individuals who have an annual health check as well as the number of young people transferring from child to adult social care. This was often reviewed through annual EHCP reviews and other EHCP reviews.

LA employment forums and supported internships

This children's services omnibus survey contained questions on the forums LAs have to help young people with SEND into employment. Of the LAs that responded, 10% said they don't have any forums, 42% said they had a supported internship forum and 38% said they had a supported employment forum.

Figure 23: Forums LAs have to help young people with SEND into employment (Please tick ALL that apply.)



Question: Does your LA have any forums to help young people with SEND into employment? (Please tick ALL that apply.)

Base: All LAs responding to SEND section ($n = 52$)

An 'other (please specify)' response was available and 38% of LAs selected this. Key themes from these responses were integrated forums and targeted interventions.

- **Integrated forums**

Some LAs spoke of not having a dedicated SEND employment forum but had alternative employability forums and employability services that integrated to provide support to young people with SEND. Some LAs mentioned how they were waiting for funding to create a dedicated forum.

- **Targeted Intervention**

Some LAs focused on providing targeted interventions and bespoke guidance and support to help young people with SEND into employment. This was something

that smaller LAs were able to provide. Some LAs also spoke about having a designated member of staff that focused on this.

The LAs that indicated not having a forum (10%) were asked what the barriers were to introducing a supported internship forum or a supported employment forum. Some LAs reported the following barriers; 'funding pressures', LA workforce capacity, lack of engagement from other parties and a lack of support and/or guidance..

School-age childcare

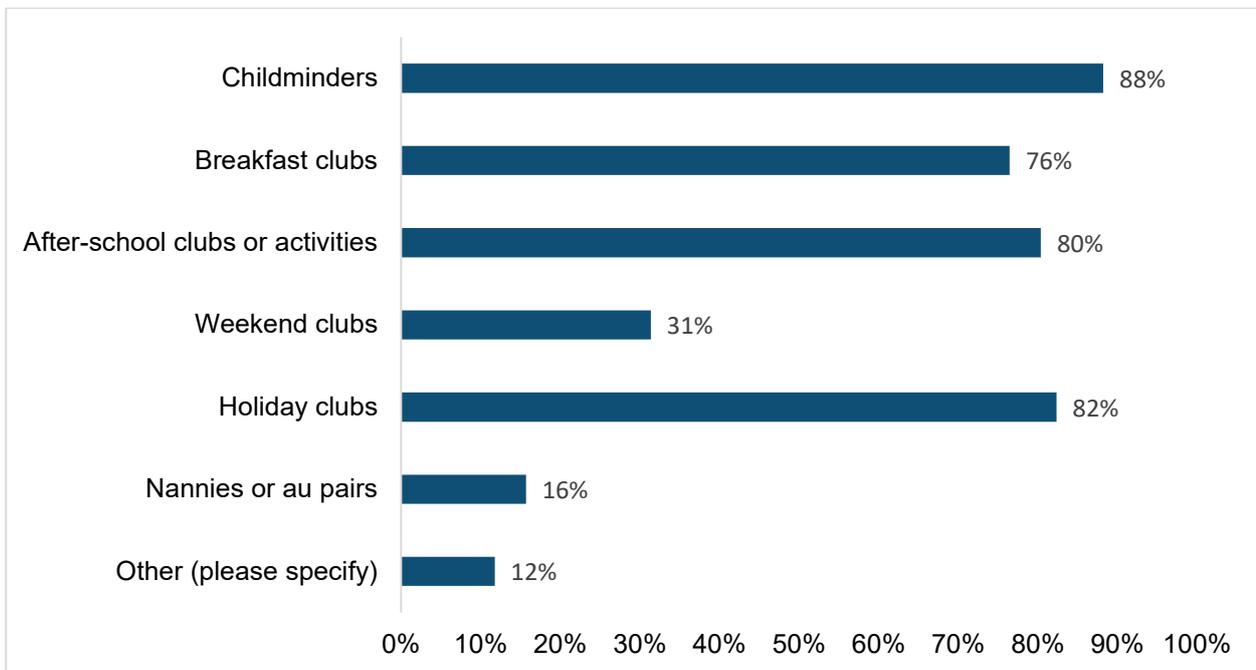
The next chapter presents findings relating to school-age childcare. It covers questions on recording and publishing information related to childcare, concerns on the sufficiency of childcare provision, and if local authorities make this information readily available to parents. Fifty-one LAs completed this section of the survey. These findings help build a picture of how local authorities carry out their sufficiency duty in relation to school-age childcare⁴.

This chapter reports on key findings around school age childcare. It focuses on the sufficiency of childcare provision, which childcare settings local authorities keep records on, how they collect that information, and if they make it readily available to parents and carers.

LAs were asked about the types of school-age childcare that they keep a record of in their local area. Most LAs that responded recorded information about childminders (88%), holiday clubs (82%) and after-school clubs or activities (80%). Around 8 in 10 LAs recorded information for breakfast clubs (76%). Around 3 in 10 LAs recorded information for weekend clubs (31%). Of the LAs that responded, 16% also recorded information for nannies or au pairs. There was an 'other (please specify)' response option which 12% of LAs selected. An alternative type of childcare that was recorded in this option was children's centres.

Figure 24: Types of school-age childcare recorded

⁴ Section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on local authorities in England to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for children aged 0-14 years old, and up to 18 years old for disabled children, of working parents in their areas.

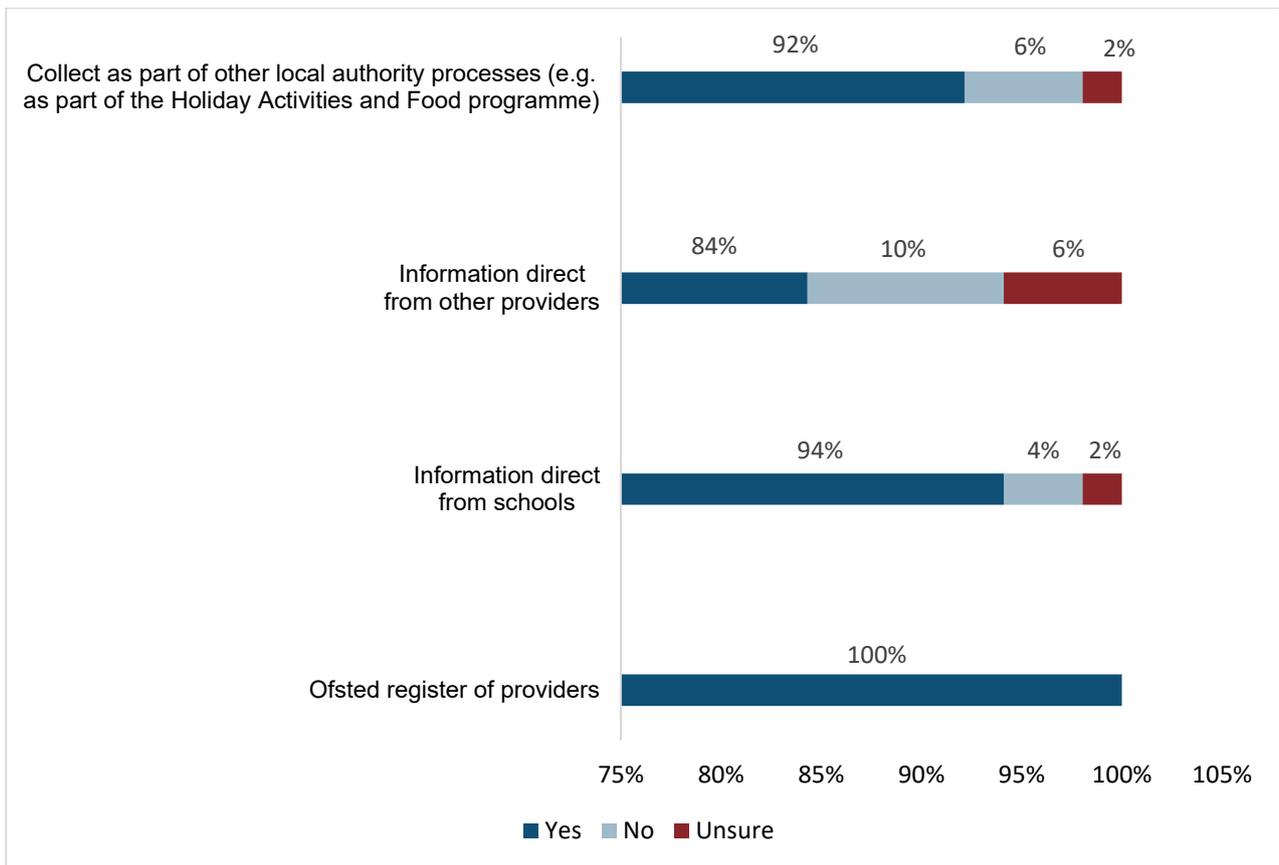


Question: Which, if any, of the following type of school-age childcare do you keep a record of in your local area?

Base: All LAs responding to Early years and childcare section ($n = 51$)

LAs were asked about where information is collected from for school-age childcare provision in their area. All 51 LAs that responded used the Ofsted register for providers to collect information on school-age childcare. The majority also used information direct from schools (94%), information direct from other providers (84% LAs) and collected information as part of other local authority processes (e.g. as part of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme) (92% LAs).

Figure 25: Information sources used to collect information on school-age childcare



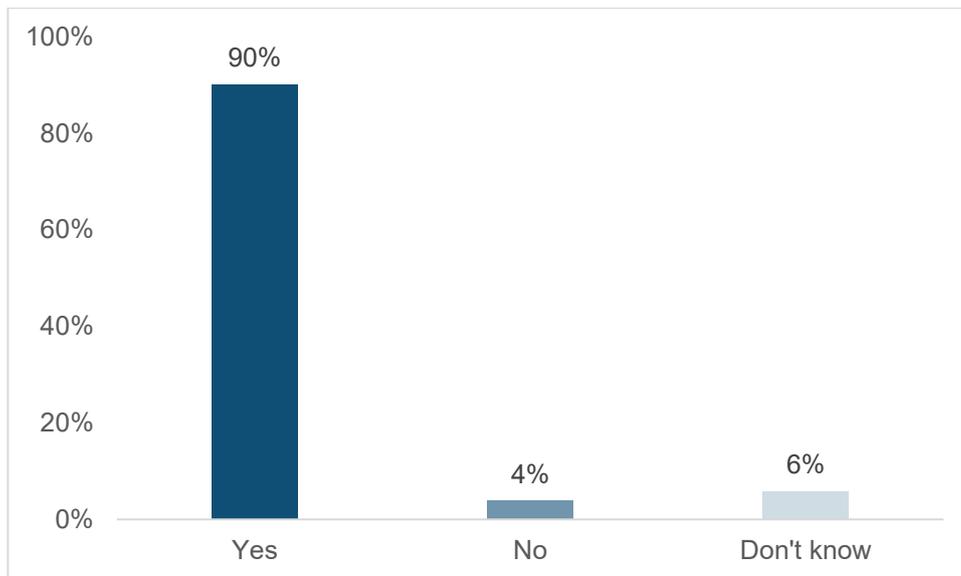
Question: Do you use any of the following to collect information on school-age childcare in your local area?

Base: All LAs responding to Early years and childcare section ($n = 51$)

LAs were asked if there were any other ways that they collected information on school-age childcare and 35% reported that they also collect information in other ways (usually through other data collections).

LAs were asked whether they publish information for parents about the availability of school-age childcare in their area. The majority of LAs that responded to the survey (90%) said that they did publish information, 4% did not and 6% of LAs did not know.

Figure 26: Proportion of LAs that publish information for parents about the availability of school-age childcare in their area

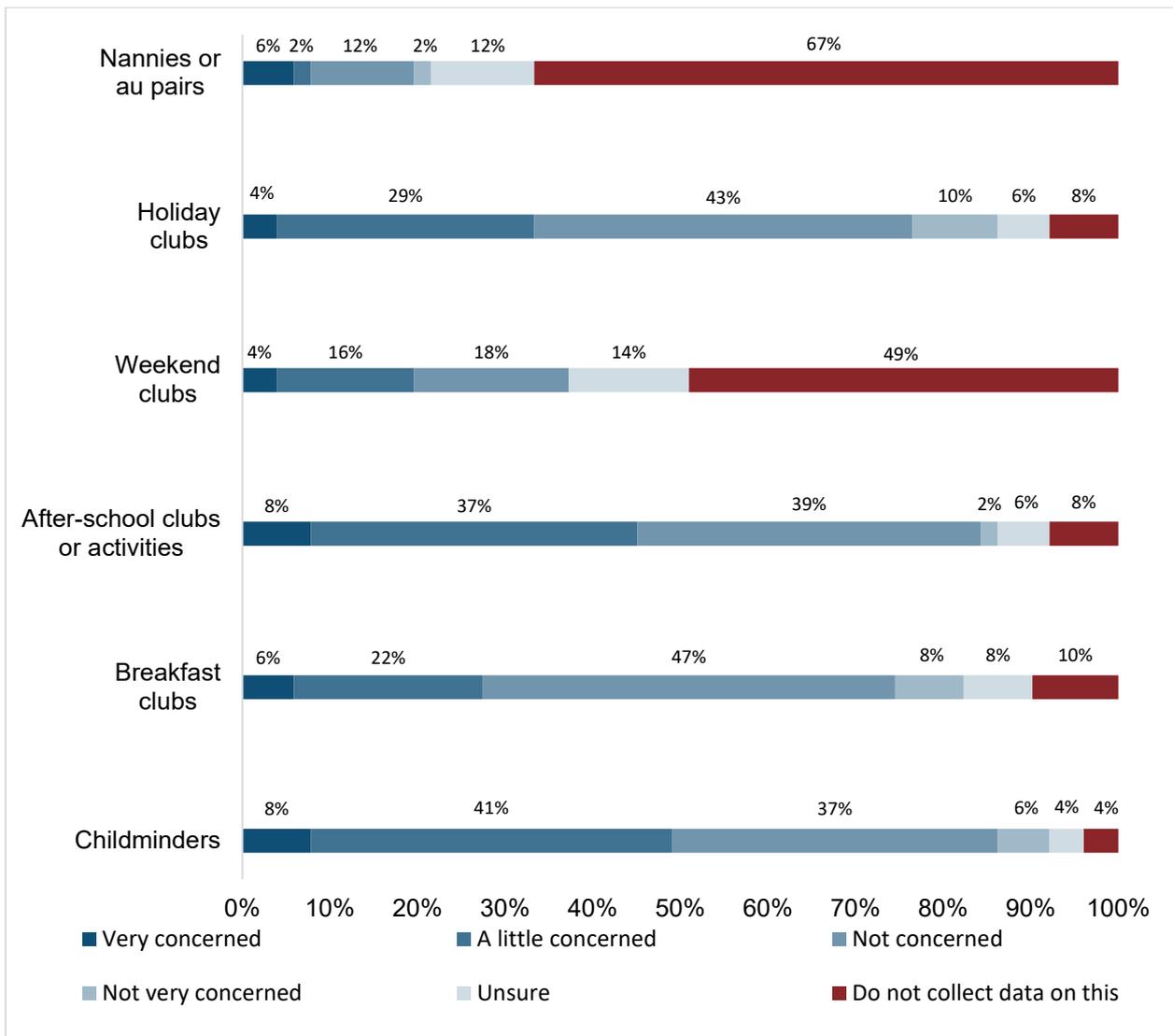


Question: Do you publish information for parents about the availability of school-age childcare in your area?

Base: All LAs responding to Early years and childcare section ($n = 51$)

LAs were asked whether they were concerned about the sufficiency of different types of childcare provision to meet parents' needs. LAs most frequently reported having a concern (very or a little concerned) about the sufficiency of childminders (49%) and after-school clubs or activities (45%). Around 3 in 10 LAs reported having concern about sufficiency for holiday clubs (33%) and breakfast clubs (28%); and a fifth reported having concern about the sufficiency of weekend clubs (20%). There was less concern about the sufficiency to meet parent's needs of nannies and au pairs (8%).

Figure 27: Concern about the sufficiency to meet parents' needs for school-age childcare



Question: The following are a list of school age childcare provider types. For each, how concerned are you, if at all, about their sufficiency to meet parents needs in your area?

Base: All LAs responding to Early years and childcare section (*n* = 51)

Annex

Table 2: Response rate by authority type and region

Variable	Sub-variable	England (N)	England (%)	Took part (N)	Took part (%) took part / 52	Response rate (%) Took part / England
Region	North	50	33%	15	29%	30%
Region	East & Midlands	35	23%	13	25%	37%
Region	London & South	67	44%	24	46%	36%
IDACI average score	0.0-0.1	11	7%	3	6%	27%
IDACI average score	0.1-0.15	43	28%	11	21%	53%
IDACI average score	0.15-0.2	38	25%	17	33%	45%
IDACI average score	0.2-0.25	41	27%	12	23%	29%
IDACI average score	0.25+	18	12%	9	17%	50%
Numbers of CiN (Rate per 10,000)	100-300	43	28%	15	29%	35%
Numbers of CiN (Rate per 10,000)	300-400	61	40%	23	44%	38%

Numbers of CiN (Rate per 10,000)	400-500	36	24%	8	15%	22%
Numbers of CiN (Rate per 10,000)	500+	9	6%	5	10%	56%
Ofsted rating	Outstanding	18	12%	8	15%	44%
Ofsted rating	Good	57	38%	22	42%	39%
Ofsted rating	Requires improvement	52	34%	16	31%	31%
Ofsted rating	Inadequate	21	14%	5	10%	24%
Ofsted rating	Not yet inspected	2	1%	0	0%	0%

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