

Appendix A

The survey

Methodology

Up to Wave 9 of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey we interviewed respondents on the telephone. However, at Wave 9 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 mixed mode approach achieved a relatively good response rate of 71 per cent and therefore has been used from Wave 9 onwards. The response rate achieved at Wave 22 was 60 per cent (see below for more detail).

Sample

Using the updated Contacts database from Wave 21, the LA manager with responsibility for the most areas (out of Rent Rebate, Rent Allowance, Council Tax Benefit (CTB), Overpayment Recovery and Benefit Fraud) was identified. This manager then became our contact for Wave 22 and was sent a letter on DWP headed paper which set out the aims of the survey, explained the nature of the input required and advised the recipient that they had 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 – web-based questionnaire, paper questionnaire and telephone interview. Each respondent was assigned a user id/password, which had to be entered at the start of the web 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 prepare their answers in advance, or if they chose to, 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 Summary of Wave 21 Key Findings was also included in the mail-out to respondents, detailing the main results plus details of how DWP would be using the data.

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.

The Wave 22 questionnaire comprised six sections as follows: Publications, Direct payments and LHA safeguards, Discretionary Housing Payments, Customer satisfaction, Decision Notices and Contracting Out and Contact Information.

Once the questionnaire had been through several drafts, seven local authority managers were contacted in order to ask them about their understanding and comprehension of the questions. We discussed the questionnaire face-to-face with three local authority managers and on the telephone with a further four. These discussions also gave managers an opportunity to raise any issues that were particularly important and relevant to them at the time. They 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, wherever possible, 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 (22-26 November 2010). The questionnaire was tested on a total of 19 local authority managers on the telephone, using a paper version of the questionnaire.

Our specialist Web department within GfK NOP developed the web-based questionnaire. It was written in mrInterview, software supplied by SPSS and hosted on the GfK NOP facility. Every attempt has been made to make sure that the web questionnaire is as user-friendly and straightforward as possible, in order to encourage as many authorities as possible to use it. For example, respondents do not have to input their own and their colleagues' contact details – they are on the screen for them to check and amend; more than one person can be in the questionnaire at one time; respondents can fill in a section at a time, in any order.

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.

Fieldwork

The same team of interviewers that worked on the pilot was briefed on the telephone for the main stage of the survey. Interviewers were also issued with full interviewer instructions, which included all survey materials including a hard copy of the questionnaire and the advance letter.

As in previous Waves of the survey, interviewers' first task was to telephone LAs and check how they planned to complete 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 before 25 February 2011. 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. This process continued throughout fieldwork. Two reminder emails were also sent to all non-respondents after four and six weeks of fieldwork.

Given the fact that this was a census of all LAs 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 call backs. 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.

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.

Fieldwork started on 17 January 2011 and was supposed to finish on 25 February 2011, although it was actually held open until 11 March 2011 to try and increase the response rate. By the end of fieldwork a total of 227 local authority managers had participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 60 per cent. Within this achieved sample of 227 there were ten LAs that did not complete every section of the questionnaire. The section filled-in by the highest number of LAs (227) was Publications.

This total sample of 227 LAs breaks down as 150 web-based questionnaires, 57 paper questionnaires and 20 telephone interviews (including the 19 pilot telephone interviews). The percentage of authorities completing the questionnaire has remained around the same as at Wave 21 when 61 per cent of LAs participated.

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
Contracting-out status	Contracted out, Not contracted out
Housing/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, Housing/Council Tax Benefit 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 housing benefit 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 sum 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.

Statistical reliability

It should be remembered that a sample, not the entire population, of housing benefit 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.

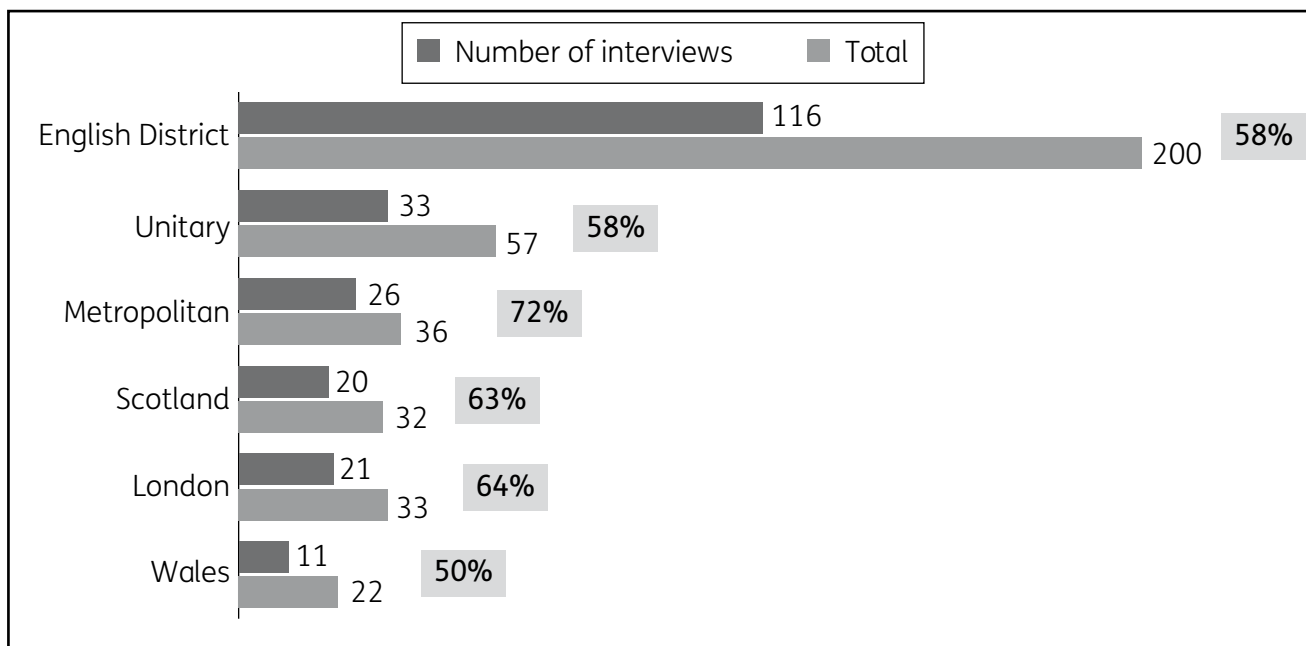
However, given that this sample comprises 60 per cent of the total population, the level of statistical reliability is slightly higher than if the sample had come from a larger population. On this basis, responses to the questionnaire provide data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 4.1 percentage 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 between 45.9 per cent and 54.1 per cent. The table below shows the sampling error for the whole sample and key sub-groups across a range of parameters. Note that the closer a finding is to 50 per cent the greater the variability of responses within the sample.

Table A.2 Wave 22 sampling error

	Sample size	Universe	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
All LAs	227	380	2.5	3.8	4.1
LA type					
Welsh	11	22	12.5	19.1	20.9
Scottish	20	32	8.1	12.3	13.4
English Unitary	33	57	6.6	10.1	11.1
English Metropolitan	26	36	6.1	9.3	10.1
English District	116	200	3.5	5.4	5.9
London Borough	21	33	7.7	11.8	12.9

Response rates

As mentioned earlier, a total of 227 LAs participated in Wave 22 of the Survey, which represents a response rate of 60 per cent. As the chart below shows, response rate varies by local authority type, from a high of 72 per cent of English Metropolitan districts to just 50 per cent of Welsh authorities.

Figure A.1 Response rates

The table below provides further details of response rate by LA type.

Table A.3 Response rates by local authority type

	Total	Scotland	Wales	English District	English Unitary	English Metropolitan District	London
Telephone: Mainstage completes	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Telephone: Pilot completes	19	2	-	14	2	-	1
Web: completes	140	12	8	66	20	21	13
Paper: completes	57	4	2	33	10	3	5
Total completes	217	18	10	113	32	24	20
Partial Web Completes (we are phoning them to ask them to complete)	10	2	1	3	1	2	1
Total completes + partial completes	227	20	11	116	33	26	21
Soft call back	28	1	6	14	3	2	2
Will complete paper questionnaire	10	-	-	6	1	-	3
Will complete on web	41	1	2	23	5	7	3
Refusal (insufficient time/resources)	36	4	1	25	5	1	-
Refusal (other/no reason provided)	15	-	1	7	4	-	3
No answer/engaged/voicemail	23	6	1	9	6	-	1
Total	380	32	22	200	57	36	33
Response rate	60 per cent	63 per cent	50 per cent	58 per cent	58 per cent	72 per cent	64 per cent

Sample profile

Table A.4 Sample profile

	Number	%
Total	227	100
Local authority type		
Welsh	11	5
Scottish	20	9
English Unitary	33	15
English Metropolitan	26	11
English District	116	51
London Borough	21	9
Contracting Out Status (based on 220 only as seven LAs did not answer this question)		
Contracted out	27	12
Not contracted out	193	88
HB/CTB caseload		
Low	98	43
Medium	65	29
High	64	28
Region		
Scotland	20	9
North East	5	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	16	7
North West	23	10
East Midlands	24	11
West Midlands	23	10
East	29	13
South East	37	16
South West	18	8
London	21	9
Wales	11	5

Appendix B

Advance letter



Housing and Fraud Research
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<<ID>>

«REName»
«REJob»
«LA_Name2»
«REAdd1»
«REAdd2»
«REAdd3»
«REAdd4»
«REAdd5»
«REPCD»

4 January 2011

Dear «REName»,

LA Omnibus Survey Wave 22

I am writing to ask for your help with Wave 22 of the LA Omnibus Survey.

As you probably know, the Survey is undertaken every six months and aims to provide up-to-date information on how LAs organise benefit administration and find out managers' views of current policy and regulations, future initiatives and changes. By conducting one regular survey, as opposed to a number of individual ones, we are trying to reduce the burden on local authority managers. You can complete the questionnaire on the web, on the enclosed paper version or on the telephone with an interviewer.

The Wave 22 Survey covers the following areas:

- Publications
- Direct payments and LHA safeguards
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Customer satisfaction
- Decision Notices
- Contracting Out and Contact Information

Each of the above sections should be easily answered by your department. However, if you feel that all, or part, of this questionnaire would be better completed by someone else, either in your authority or a contractor, please pass the relevant sections on to them, or send them a web link as soon as possible.

If you choose to fill-in the internet version of the questionnaire, you may access it anytime from 17 January 2011. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: <http://www.surveys.com/lao22>

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. Please complete it by 25 February 2011.

Alternatively, you may choose to complete the survey in one of the following ways:

Telephone Interview: If you choose to conduct a telephone interview, then it would be very useful if you could prepare your answers in advance of the interview (on the enclosed questionnaire), in particular for those questions which involve you giving us numerical answers. You will receive a call from a GfK NOP interviewer some time between 17 January and 25 February 2011 or please contact jo.hrabi@gfk.com if you would prefer to make an appointment.

Self-Completion Questionnaire on Paper: If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on paper, please use the enclosed questionnaire and follow the instructions on the front page. Please return it as soon as possible – by 25 February 2011 at the latest – in the pre-paid envelope provided.

The information provided in the survey is completely confidential and will be used only for research purposes by GfK NOP Research and analysts within the Department (part of IAD - who may look at the data in conjunction with other management information collected by the Department). Neither you nor your authority will be identified in any report.

We hope that you find the enclosed Wave 21 Key Findings interesting and informative. The second page includes details of how DWP is using the findings which we hope you will find useful. If you are interested in looking at the findings for Wave 21 in more detail, you will be able to access the full report through the DWP website from late January/early February:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

Thank you in advance for your co-operation. If you have any queries about the survey please contact Dan Heap at the DWP on 020 7449 5729 or Darren Yaxley (GfK NOP) on 020 7890 9759.

Yours sincerely



Dan Heap – Housing Research and Analysis Division

Appendix C

Questionnaire

USER ID: label JN 452458

Local Authority Omnibus Survey Wave 22

Thank you for taking part in Wave 22 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. If you feel that all, or part, of this questionnaire would be better completed by someone else, either in your authority or a contractor, please pass the relevant section/s on to them, or send them a web link as soon as possible.

Self-completion questionnaire on the Internet: If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on the internet, you may access it anytime from 17 January to 25 February 2011. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: <http://www.surveys.com/lao22> and will need the User ID at the top of this questionnaire to access it.

This method is quite simple and you will be automatically routed through the questionnaire as you answer each question. You can access the questionnaire more than once until you have completed it. Please read the instructions on the contents page of the web questionnaire before starting. All information is password protected and no one other than the GfK NOP team will be able to access your site or see your entries.

Telephone Interview: If you choose to conduct a telephone interview, then it would be very useful if you could prepare your answers in advance of the interview (on the enclosed questionnaire). 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 17 January and 25 February 2011 or please contact jo.hrabi@gfk.com if you would prefer to make an appointment.

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 25 February 2011 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) that applies to your local authority
- If you are unable to answer a particular question, please tick the ‘don’t know’ box
- Normally, after answering each question, you go on to the next one, UNLESS a box you have ticked has an instruction to GO TO another question
- When you have finished, please POST THE QUESTIONNAIRE to us as soon as possible in the PRE-PAID ENVELOPE provided.

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The information you provide will be used for research purposes only. You or your authority will not be identified in any report.

Section A: Publications

DWP is currently reviewing the way they keep you up-to-date about Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit matters with the aim of streamlining the publications they produce and the way they deliver them to you. To help understand your views and preferences we have included the following questions about your LA’s use of DWP publications.

ALL ANSWER

A1 How does your LA (either you personally or members of your team) currently access information from DWP (inc Job Centre Plus and PDCS) about HB/CTB?
TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Directgov website
- DWP internet site
- Emails from DWP
- Mail from DWP
- Contact DWP via email/phone/meeting
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

56 Appendices – Questionnaire

A2 Which of DWP's HB/CTB publications does your LA use? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

ANSWER A3 FOR EACH RESOURCE USED AT A2

A3 How useful have you found this/these publication/s to date?
TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH PUBLICATION USED

	A2	A3					Don't know
	Publications used	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Very useful	
Circulars							
Adjudication & Operations (A) circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidy (S) circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fraud (F) HB/CTB circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manuals/Guides							
HB/CTB guidance manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB/CTB overpayments guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LHA guide published in March 2008	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB/CTB good practice guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidy guidance manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bulletins							
Fortnightly general information bulletin – contains general updates and non-technical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Urgent bulletin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletters							
HB Direct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
moredirect magazine – issued twice yearly in hard copy format	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Touchbase – monthly e-zine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> GO TO A5						

ANSWER A4 FOR EACH RESOURCE USED AT A2

A4 How would you describe the frequency with which these publications are issued, or in the case of manuals/guides, the frequency with which they are revised or updated?
TICK ONE ONLY FOR EACH PUBLICATION USED

	Too frequent	About right	Not frequent enough	Don't know
Circulars				
Adjudication & Operations (A) circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidy (S) circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fraud (F) HB/CTB circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manuals/Guides				
HB/CTB guidance manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB/CTB overpayments guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LHA guide published in March 2008	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB/CTB good practice guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidy guidance manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bulletins				
Fortnightly general information bulletin – contains general updates and non-technical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Urgent bulletin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletters				
HB Direct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
moredirect magazine – issued twice yearly in hard copy format	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Touchbase – monthly e-zine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ALL ANSWER

A5 How would you prefer to receive or access each of these publications?
PLEASE ANSWER FOR EACH PUBLICATION, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER OR NOT YOUR LA CURRENTLY USES IT. TICK ALL THAT APPLY.

	Internet	Email	Other	Don't know
Circulars				
Adjudication & Operations (A) circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidy (S) circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fraud (F) HB/CTB circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manuals/Guides				
HB/CTB guidance manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB/CTB overpayments guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LHA guide published in March 2008	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HB/CTB good practice guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subsidy guidance manual	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bulletins				
Fortnightly general information bulletin – contains general updates and non-technical information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Urgent bulletin	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletters				
HB Direct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
moredirect magazine – issued twice yearly in hard copy format	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Touchbase – monthly e-zine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A6 Does your LA use the RSS feed to receive information about new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites? An RSS feed lets you know when a website has added something new as soon as it is published – without you having to visit the website.
TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

A7 Would your LA find a regular e-mail alerting you to new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites useful? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

Section B: Direct Payments and the Local Housing Allowance safeguards

This section asks about LHA guidance publications that have been issued in the last year. The first set of questions asks about the Revised Local Housing Allowance Guidance issued at the end of 2009. The second set asks about the supplementary Good Practice Guidance issued in May 2010.

Revised Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Guidance

At the end of 2009, DWP made amendments to its guidance to LAs on paying Housing Benefit under the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) arrangements. The aim of the Revised LHA Guidance was to make it clearer when Housing Benefit can be paid direct to landlords and to provide more information on the sources of evidence which can be used when deciding whether the safeguards apply. The amendments also included clarification on the application of the eight weeks arrears rule. We want to evaluate the effectiveness of the revised guidance and establish whether local authorities have made changes to their procedures as a consequence of it.

ALL ANSWER

B1 Have you (or a colleague in your department) read or used the Revised LHA Guidance issued at the end of 2009 in relation to direct payments and the LHA safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes Go to B2
- No Go to B6
- Don't know Go to B6

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT B1. OTHERS GO TO B6

B2 How helpful did your LA find the Revised LHA Guidance issued at the end of 2009 in relation to direct payments and the LHA safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

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

B3 How would your LA rate the clarity of the Revised LHA Guidance issued at the end of 2009 in relation to direct payments and the LHA safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

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

B4 As a result of the Revised LHA Guidance has your LA made changes to the way you administer direct payments and the LHA safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B5 |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B6 |
| No, procedures already in line with guidance | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B6 |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B6 |

ANSWER IF 'YES' HAVE MADE CHANGES AT B4. OTHERS GO TO B6

B5 How has your LA changed the way you administer direct payments and the LHA safeguards since the Revised LHA Guidance was issued? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Making more direct payments to landlords under the eight week rule | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Making more direct payments to landlords under the Local Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Making decisions on direct payments more quickly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Working more closely with homelessness prevention teams | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Allowance safeguards | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Good Practice Guidance – paying benefit and applying the safeguards

The revised guidance asked about above was supplemented by the publication LHA Good Practice Guidance – paying benefit and applying the safeguards, issued in May 2010. The aim of this guide was to provide additional guidance around the operation of the safeguards and covered preventing arrears, publicising the safeguards and reviewing decisions.

ALL ANSWER

B6 Have you (or a colleague in your department) read or used the LHA Good Practice Guidance - paying benefit and applying the safeguards - that was issued in May 2010? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B7 |
| No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B11 |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> | Go to B11 |

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT B6. OTHERS GO TO B11

B7 How helpful did your LA find the LHA Good Practice Guidance- paying benefit and applying the safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Very helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Fairly helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not very helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not at all helpful | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B8 How would your LA rate the clarity of the LHA Good Practice Guidance - paying benefit and applying the safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

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

B9 As a result of the LHA Good Practice Guidance - paying benefit and applying the safeguards – has your LA made changes to the way you administer direct payments and the LHA safeguards? PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes Go to B10
- No Go to B11
- Don't know Go to B11

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT B9, OTHERS GO TO B11

B10 How has your LA changed the way you make payments or administer the safeguards since the LHA Good Practice Guidance was issued in May 2010? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Making more first/initial HB payments straight to the landlord
- Aligning more benefit payments with rent payment patterns
- Doing more work on money advice
- Have reviewed local safeguard policy and publicity
- Have reviewed or changed liaison arrangements with:
 - a) landlords
 - b) other local authority department
 - c) other stakeholder such as CAB
- Aligning more benefit payments with rent payment patterns
- Reviewing how we make payments
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER

B11 Since the Department issued its Revised LHA Guidance at the end of 2009 and LHA Good Practice Guidance in May 2010, in relation to direct payments and the LHA safeguards, would you say that your LA is making more, less or about the same number of payments?
TICK ONE ONLY

- More Answer B12
- Less Answer B12
- About the same Go to B13
- Don't know Go to B13

ANSWER IF 'MORE' OR 'LESS' AT B11. OTHERS GO TO B13

B12 What would you say is the main reason that this increase/decrease in the number of payments has happened? Is it because of the new guidance, because of economic circumstances or some other reason?
PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

- Because of the new guidance
- Because of economic circumstances
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER

B13 Since the Department issued its Revised LHA Guidance at the end of 2009 and LHA Good Practice Guidance in May 2010, in relation to direct payments and the LHA safeguards, is your LA making more, less or about the same number of payments under the eight weeks arrears rule?

- More
- Less
- About the same
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER

B14 Since the Department issued its Revised LHA Guidance at the end of 2009 and LHA Good Practice Guidance in May 2010, in relation to direct payments and the LHA safeguards, has your LA noticed any changes in the behaviour of landlords regarding direct payments? IF YES, PLEASE SPECIFY AND TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Yes:
- Some are demanding 2 months rent or more in advance to put tenant into 8 weeks arrears
 - Some are contacting the local authority sooner about arrears
 - Other (please specify)
 -
 - No:
 - Don't know

Section C: Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are available to people who are entitled to Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit and are intended to make up shortfalls in entitlement to benefit where the local authority considers that the person concerned is in need of further help with their housing costs. Although the Department issued good practice guidance in 2001 (and updated in 2008), how local authorities administer DHPs is very much a local decision. Changes to the Local Housing Allowance arrangements announced in the 2010 budget are likely to see an increase in demand for these payments from 2011/12. DWP is keen to gather information about how local authorities administer payments, manage their budgets and whether they are planning to change these arrangements for 2011/12.

ALL ANSWER

C1 In what situations does your LA currently award a DHP? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Rent can't be met in full because of LHA rate or rent officer determination
- Where there is a non-dependant deduction and non dependant can't pay
- To meet cost of an additional room for carer/other non resident
- Meet cost of an additional room needed because a family member is ill or disabled
- Family circumstances mean they can't meet rent commitment
- Helping with mortgage payments in certain circumstances
- Emergencies, e.g. house fire, car accident etc
- Help with council tax
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

C2 In your authority, who currently makes the decision about when to allocate a DHP? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Benefits Manager
- Finance Team
- Housing Team
- Other benefit officer including Senior Benefit Officer
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

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C3 In your authority, who deals with disputes about a decision on a DHP?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Benefits Manager/Officer
- Finance Team
- Housing Team
- Review Board
- Appeals committee/officer
- Other (please specify)
-
Don't know

C4 What is the value of an average DHP award in your authority?
PLEASE NOTE: YOU MAY NEED TO PASS C4, C5, C6 ON TO ANOTHER COLLEAGUE WHO
MAY HAVE THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW. ESTIMATES ACCEPTED AND IF
ESTIMATE GIVEN PLEASE INDICATE IN BOX PROVIDED.

£ IF ESTIMATE GIVEN TICK HERE
Don't know

C5 What is the length of an average DHP award in your authority? PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW.
ESTIMATES ACCEPTED AND IF ESTIMATE GIVEN PLEASE INDICATE IN BOX PROVIDED.

MONTHS WEEKS IF ESTIMATE GIVEN TICK HERE
Don't know

C6 Thinking about the applications for DHPs that your LA receives, what percentage of them
are refused? PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW. ESTIMATES ACCEPTED AND IF ESTIMATE GIVEN
PLEASE INDICATE IN BOX PROVIDED.

per cent IF ESTIMATE GIVEN TICK HERE
Don't know

C7 Is your LA making any preparations for the likely increased demand on your DHP budgets
in light of the changes to Housing Benefit announced in the June 2010 Budget that will
take effect in 2011/12? TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes Go to C8
- No Go to C9
- Don't know Go to C9

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT C7. OTHERS GO TO C9

C8 How is your LA making preparations for the likely increased demand on your DHP budgets in 2011/12 in light of the changes announced in the June 2010 Budget?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Taking steps to predict likely demand
- Reviewing internal procedures
- Making changes to the application process
- Increasing numbers of staff who deal with DHPs
- Reviewing appeals process
- Other (please specify)
-
Don't know

ALL ANSWER

C9 Do you think the 2011/12 changes announced in the June 2010 Budget will affect how your LA makes decisions to allocate DHPs? TICK ONE BOX ONLY

- Yes Go to C10
- No Go to Section D
- Too early to say Go to Section D
- Don't know Go to Section D

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT C9. OTHERS GO TO SECTION D

C10 In what ways do you think the 2011/12 changes announced in the June 2010 Budget will affect the way in which your LA awards DHPs in the future?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Will make shorter awards
- Will make more awards for help with deposits and rent in advance
- Will be more likely to spend beyond the government contribution
- Other (please specify)
-
Don't know

Section D: Customer Satisfaction

DWP are interested to hear what, if any, customer satisfaction work your LA carries out with benefits service customers. We are interested in hearing about channels for customer feedback (D1) as well as asking about more formal structured customer surveys (D2-D8), as well as general views about customer satisfaction.

ALL ANSWER

D1 Thinking firstly about the ways your LA collects customer feedback, other than by conducting customer satisfaction surveys (face-to-face, telephone, web, post, at LA, focus groups). Please indicate below which methods your authority currently uses? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Suggestion boxes
- Monitor the number of complaints
- Informal staff feedback
- Collect and monitor compliments
- Monitor the number of appeals and redecisions
- Email feedback
- Information from voluntary organisations (e.g. CAB)
- Govmetric (smiley faces)
- Feedback via interactive tower/pod at LA offices
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

D2 Has your authority carried out any customer satisfaction surveys to measure the effectiveness of the benefits service within the last 2 years? If yes, please specify whether this was face-to-face, telephone or self-completion (postal, web based survey or survey completed at LA)? TICK ALL THAT APPLY
ANSWER IF 'YES', SURVEY CONDUCTED AT D2. OTHERS GO TO D9

D3 Which of the following best describes how your authority organises its customer satisfaction surveys in terms of carrying out the interviewing/collecting responses?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY FOR EACH TYPE OF SURVEY CONDUCTED AT D2

	D2	D3				
	Type of survey conducted in the last 2 years	Use an external organisation	Use in-house staff	Use the CIPFA survey	Other (please tick box and write in)	Don't know
Yes, face-to-face survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, telephone survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, self completion survey via the post	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, self completion survey on the web	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, self completion at the LA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, focus groups/group discussion/forums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/> GO TO D9					
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> GO TO D9					

ANSWER IF 'YES', SURVEY CONDUCTED AT D2

D4 Which of the following best describes how your authority organises its customer satisfaction surveys in terms of who analyses the data?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY FOR EACH TYPE OF SURVEY CONDUCTED

	Use an external organisation	Use in-house staff	Other (please tick box and write in)	Don't know
Yes, face-to-face survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self completion survey via the post	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self completion survey on the web	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self completion at the LA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus groups/group discussion/forums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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ANSWER IF 'YES', SURVEY CONDUCTED AT D2

D5 How many times a year does your LA conduct these customer satisfaction surveys?
PLEASE TICK ONE BOX FOR EACH TYPE OF SURVEY CONDUCTED

	Once	Twice	3 or 4 times	5 or 6 times	7+ times	Continuously	Don't know
Face-to-face survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone survey	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self completion survey via the post	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self completion survey on the web	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Self completion at the LA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Focus groups/group discussion/forums	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ANSWER IF 'YES', SURVEY CONDUCTED AT D2

D6 Does your LA make the results of any of your surveys available to the public in any way?

- Yes Go to D7
- No Answer D8
- Don't know Answer D8

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT D6, OTHERS GO TO D8

D7 How are the results made available to the public? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- The results are published in the council's annual report
- The results are on the Council's website
- Benefits newsletter
- Council magazine
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ANSWER IF 'YES', SURVEY CONDUCTED AT D2

D8 How does your authority use data relating to customer satisfaction?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- It informs decision making on resource allocation within the Council
- It helps the Benefits teams when discussing the improvement of customer focus
- We compare our results with other similar authorities
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER

D9 In your opinion, has customer satisfaction with the benefits service in your authority increased or decreased in the last 12 months?
PLEASE TICK ONE ONLY

- Increased a lot Answer D10
- Increased a little Answer D10
- Stayed the same Go to Section E
- Decreased a little Answer D11
- Decreased a lot Answer D11
- Don't know Go to Section E

ANSWER IF 'INCREASED' AT D9

D10 Why do you think customer satisfaction has increased in your authority?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Success of take up campaigns
- Helpfulness of staff
- Better trained staff
- On-line claiming
- Satisfaction with benefit award
- More face-to-face contact
- Speed of processing
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

ANSWER IF 'DECREASED' AT D9

D11 Why do you think customer satisfaction has decreased in your authority?
PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Long waiting time for payment to be made
- Long waiting time to speak to an adviser
- Difficulties with on-line claiming
- Staff need better training
- Dissatisfaction with benefit award
- Lack of privacy
- Lack of respect
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

Section E: Decision Notices

The current legislation requires local authorities to provide customers with full and detailed information explaining their decision notices. DWP are keen to find out how this legislation affects the workloads of benefits departments.

ALL ANSWER

E1 Would you say that your LA receives a lot, a few or no queries at all from landlords as a result of the information on decision notices that current legislation requires local authorities to provide?

- A lot
- A few
- None at all
- Don't know

E2 What changes, if any, do you think would make the Decision Notices simpler to understand? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Shorter notifications
- Legislation removed from notification
- Leaflet explaining terms in decision notices
- Simplify what is issued to customers
- Present information in the decision notification more logically and clearly
- Ensure outcome details feature on the first page of the decision notice with detailed information more to the back of the decision notice
- Look at terminology/use plain English
- Other (please specify)
-
- Nothing needs to be changed
- Don't know

E3 At the moment the legislation requires your LA to issue a separate Decision Notice for HB and CTB which means that there is a degree of duplication. Do you think it would be helpful to combine the decision notices for HB and CTB where possible?

- Yes, it would be helpful
- No, it would not be helpful
- Already combining HB/CTB notices where possible
- Don't know

E4 Does your LA do anything to try to overcome the problem of customers not understanding Decision Notices?

- Yes Answer E5
- No Go to Section F
- Don't know Go to Section F

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT E4. OTHERS GO TO SECTION F

E5 What workarounds does your LA use to overcome the problem of customers not understanding Decision Notices? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Producing a simpler summary letter that is sent with the decision notice
- Sending an explanatory leaflet
- Use plain English
- Send out a visiting officer if required
- Face-to-face processing
- Telephoning the customer to explain the decision notice for benefit awards
- Telephoning the customer to explain the decision notice for overpayment
- Suppressing notifications
- Emailing customer to advise a decision has been made to explain the decision
- Combine CTB bill with decision notice
- Send revised rent account with decision notice
- Contracting out the formatting, printing, despatch of decision notices
- Send out formal letter with link where customer can log in to secure website to view full decision notice
- Links to help and advice on Council benefits websites FAQs etc
- Phone system with diversion to advice, pre-recorded advice lines
- Other (please specify)
-
- Don't know

Section F: Contracting Out and Contact Information

DWP is keen to keep the 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.

ALL ANSWER

F1 Is HB and CTB administration in your LA contracted out?

- Yes, fully
- Yes, partially
- No
- Don't know

F2 Are Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation within your LA dealt with by the same team or are they dealt with by different teams?

- The same team Go to F4
- Different teams Answer F3

ANSWER IF 'DIFFERENT TEAMS' AT F2. OTHERS GO TO F4

F3 To assist further evaluation work, we would be grateful if you could provide (for internal use only) the contact details of someone who deals with Homelessness in your LA. This may be within a separate Homelessness team or part of the Housing Department.
PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW

Homelessness manager:

NAME: _ _ _ _ _

JOB TITLE: _ _ _ _ _

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: _ _ _ _ _

FAX NO: _ _ _ _ _

EMAIL ADDRESS: _ _ _ _ _

ADDRESS: _ _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

ALL ANSWER

F4 We are interested in receiving your opinions/views on this or future waves of the LA Omnibus Survey or any issues around HB. Please use the space below for your comments.

_ _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

F5 And finally please can you check your own contact details (printed below) and tick the appropriate box below.

All my contact details are correct

I have made some amendments

I have written in the missing contact details

FULL NAME: <<RENAME>>

JOB TITLE: <<REJOB>>

TELEPHONE NUMBER, WITH EXTENSION: <<RETEL>>

FAX NUMBER: <<REFAX>>

EMAIL ADDRESS: <<REEMAIL>>

ADDRESS (INC, POSTCODE): <<READD1>>, <READD2>>, <<READD3>>, <<READD4>>, <<READD5>>, <<REPCD>>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN WAVE 22 OF THE LOCAL
AUTHORITY OMNIBUS SURVEY

This report presents findings from Wave 22 of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey. The survey takes place every six months and attempts to survey Housing Benefit managers in every LA in Great Britain. The survey is divided into sections which are individually commissioned by DWP Policy and Research Analysis teams, for Wave 22 these were:

- publications;
- Direct Payments and LHA safeguards;
- Discretionary Housing Payments;
- customer satisfaction; and
- Decision Notices.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
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<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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