

Local Authority Omnibus Survey – Wave 20

by Claire Durrant, Elaine Winter and Darren Yaxley

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 671

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Claire Durrant, Elaine Winter and Darren Yaxley

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

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Claire Durrant has been jointly responsible for managing the LA Omnibus Survey with her colleague Elaine Winter since Wave 6 in 2001. She joined GfK NOP in 1996, having previously worked for MORI, where she worked for seven years in the Social Research Unit, and before that, the Gallup Organisation. At GfK NOP she has worked on a wide variety of studies for central government, as well as local authorities and academics. This includes the British Household Panel Study and the Home On-Line Study, both run by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), based at the University of Essex, as well as other studies for the Department for Work and Pensions, including the Maternity Rights and Benefits Survey among employers and parents.

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1 Local Housing Allowance administration

1.1 Introduction and summary

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is only initially being applied to new claims for mainstream private rental sector cases and claimants who change addresses. This means that the LHA operates alongside the previous Housing Benefit (HB) schemes. In this section, the survey asked about how local authorities (LAs) were finding the operation of LHA when compared with the previous HB scheme for private sector tenants:

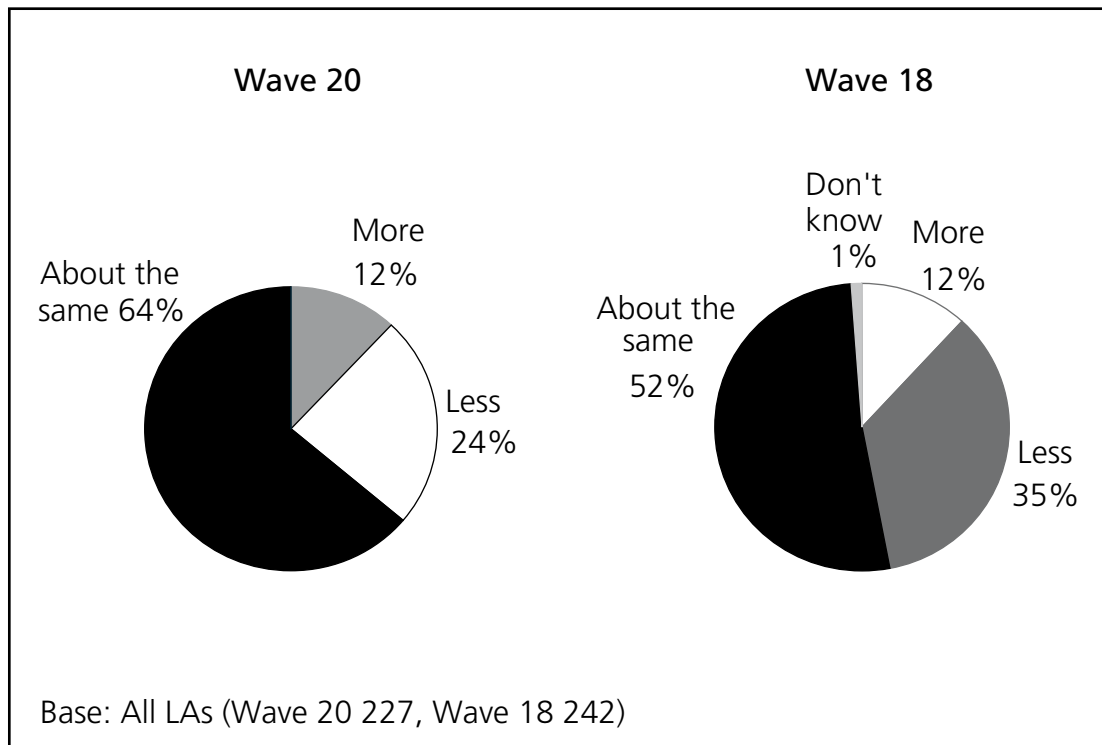
- The majority of LAs said that the amount of time needed to administer LHA was in line with the time taken for the previous scheme but one in eight (12 per cent) said it took more time to administer.
- Operation of the safeguards policy and dealing with landlords' complaints or queries seem to be what is taking more time for that group.
- The majority of LAs said that LHA administration efficiency had either remained the same (44 per cent) or become more efficient (48 per cent) in the previous year.
- There were a number of problems with LHA claims and payments between the LA and the claimant such as expectations of the amount in relation to actual rent level.
- Tenant queries appeared to centre on whether the LHA could be paid direct to landlords whilst other types of queries appeared to be decreasing.
- Landlord queries appeared to be concentrated around the perceived inconvenience of having rent paid to tenants with other types of queries decreasing significantly.
- The average proportion of claimants (or their agents) who requested to have their LHA payments go to their landlord or letting agent was 25 per cent.

- The main reasons for this request were: rent arrears were 8+weeks; drug or alcohol addiction; debt; poor rent history; mental health problems.
- The main reason for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA was changed and paid direct to them was that the claimant was no longer in rent arrears or arrears were less than eight weeks.
- Half (52 per cent) of LAs said a change to claimants receiving the payment themselves caused problems with the landlord or letting agency.

1.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

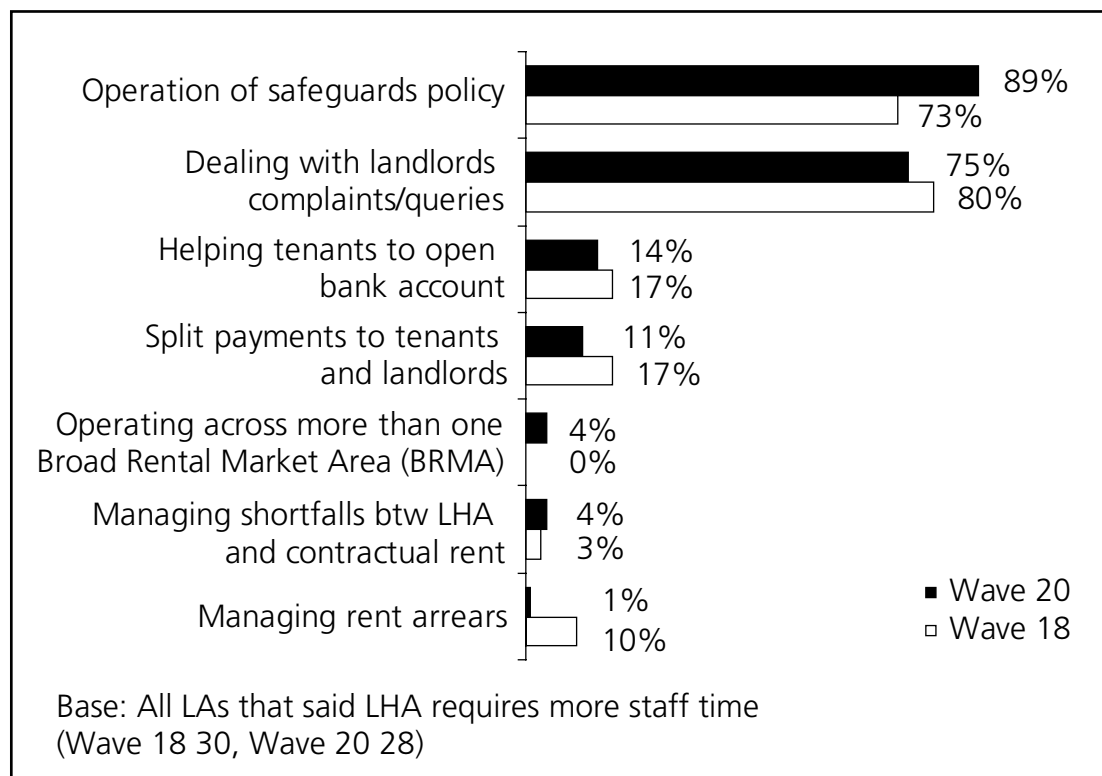
Figure 1.1 Overall, does your LA find that it requires more, less or about the same staff time to administer LHA than the old HB scheme for Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenants?



It is interesting to note that comparing results for Wave 20 with the results a year previously (Wave 18), an identical amount (12 per cent) of LAs said that LHA required more time to administer than previous schemes for the Private Rented Sector (PRS). At Wave 20 Welsh authorities (36 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (20 per cent) were significantly more likely to have said that LHA took more time to administer, whilst English Unitary authorities and English Districts were more likely to have said that LHA takes less time to administer (27 per cent and 29 per cent respectively).

There has been a shift over time in the proportions of LAs that said that it took less time to administer LHA than previous schemes. At Wave 18 just over a third (35 per cent) said that LHA took less time but this had decreased significantly at Wave 20 to a quarter (24 per cent). There was a corresponding increase in the number of LAs that said it took about the same time to administer LHA as it did to administer alternative PRS schemes (up to 64 per cent at Wave 20 from 52 per cent at Wave 18).

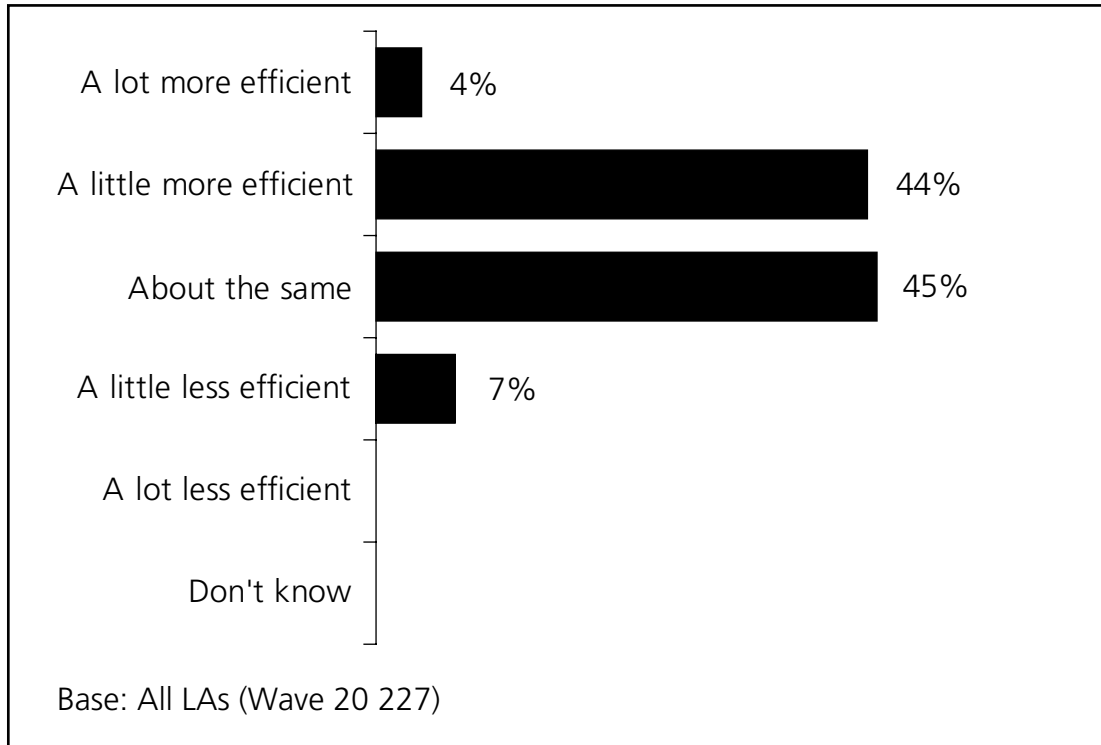
Figure 1.2 In what particular areas do you think it requires more staff time to operate LHA than the old HB scheme for PRS tenants?



Those LAs that said LHA took more time to administer than other PRS schemes were asked what in particular was taking more time. Operation of safeguards policy and dealing with landlords' complaints or queries were key factors at both Wave 18 and at Wave 20.

Operation of safeguards policy appeared to have increased between Wave 18 and Wave 20 but it should be noted that the base size for both waves was small and that this is not actually a significant finding.

Figure 1.3 Now that LHA has been in operation for some time, taking into account all aspects of LHA, would you say that in the last year the administration of LHA has got more or less efficient or has it stayed about the same?

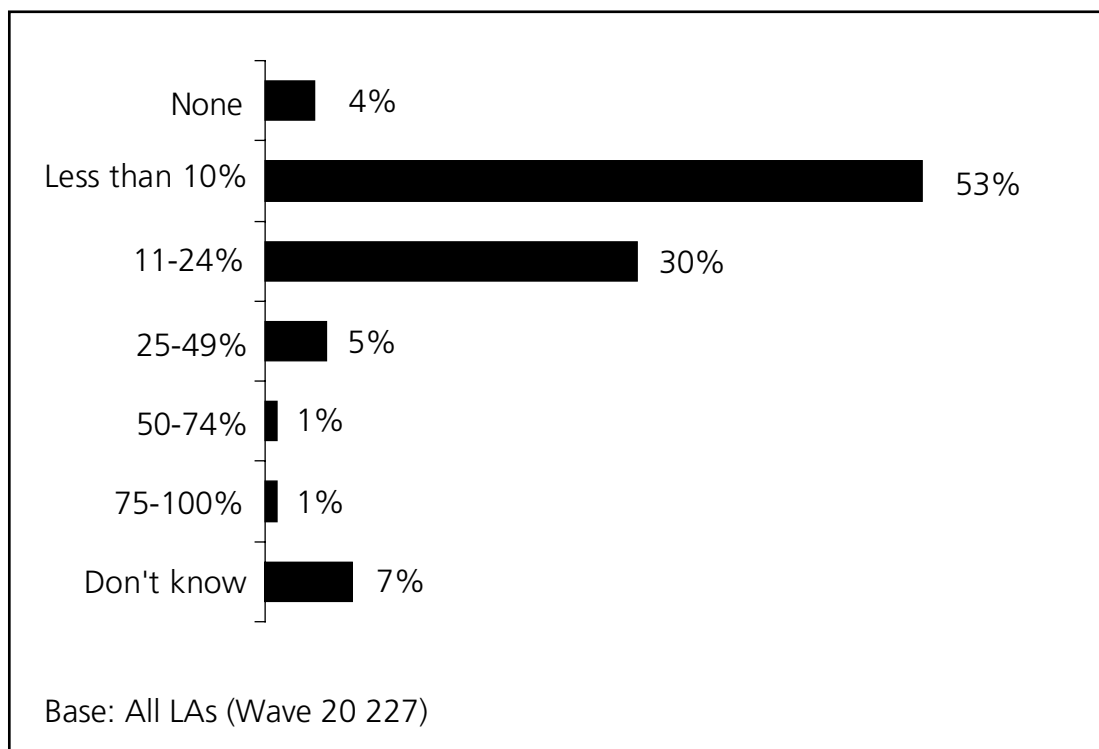


This was a new question at Wave 20 which asked if the administration of LHA had got more or less efficient during the previous year.

Nearly half (48 per cent) of LAs in total said that administration had become more efficient over the course of the last year. London Boroughs were much more likely to have said that efficiency had improved over the last year than any other type of authority. Approximately two-thirds (64 per cent) of London Boroughs said that LHA administration had become more efficient during the previous year.

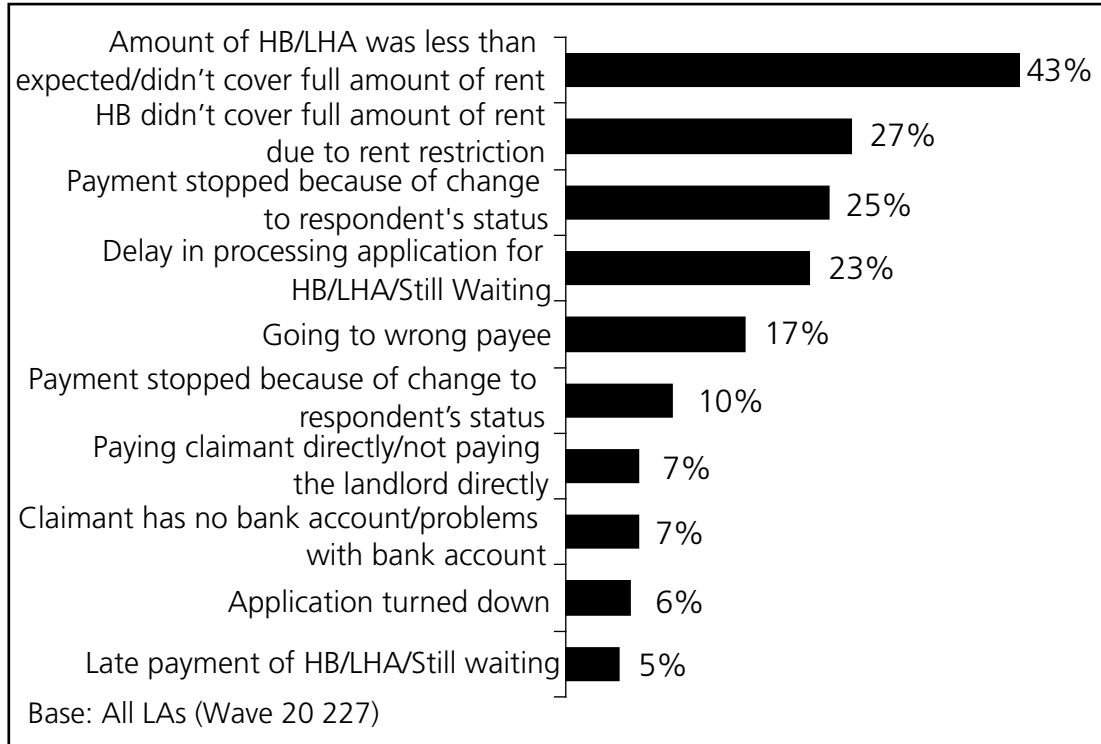
Forty-five per cent of LAs said administration of LHA had stayed about the same and seven per cent said it had become less efficient. Welsh, English Metropolitan and English Unitary authorities (18 per cent, 12 per cent, and ten per cent respectively) were significantly more likely than their English District counterparts (three per cent) to have said that it had become less efficient.

Figure 1.4 What percentage of claimants do you estimate have experienced problems with their LHA payments?



At Wave 20 the majority (53 per cent) of LAs said that under ten per cent of claimants had experienced problems with their LHA payments. Three in ten (30 per cent) said 11 to 24 per cent of claimants had problems, and five per cent said that between 25 and 49 per cent of claimants had experienced problems.

Figure 1.5 What are the most common problems with LHA claims and payments between the LA and the claimant?



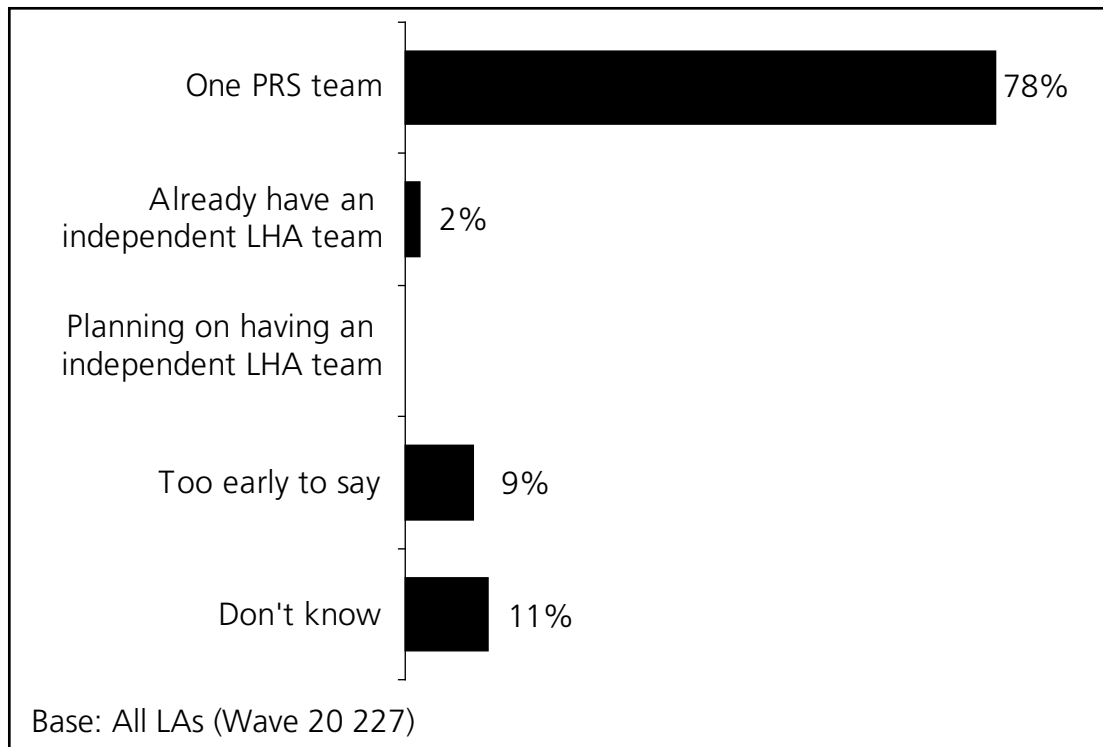
When asked about the most common problems with LHA claims and payments between the LA and the claimant, the main problem appeared to be that the amount of HB/LHA was less than expected or did not cover the full amount of rent; mentioned by 43 per cent of LAs. This was cited by a significantly greater number of LAs with low overall caseloads (51 per cent), than by LAs with high overall caseloads (35 per cent).

Another problem mentioned was HB not covering the full amount of rent due to rent restriction (27 per cent). LAs with low (40 per cent) or medium (29 per cent) caseloads were more likely to have said this than those with high caseloads (18 per cent). Other issues which were mentioned with some frequency were payment stopped because of change to respondent's status (25 per cent) and delays in processing applications (23 per cent).

It should be noted that the preceding chart shows all answers mentioned with a frequency of five per cent or more but the following responses were also recorded:

- Landlord not receiving payment from claimant/rent arrears four per cent
- Claimant requesting payment direct to landlord three per cent
- BRMA review/reduction in LHA rates two per cent
- Increased correspondence/queries from landlord two per cent
- Safeguarding issues/policy two per cent
- Disputes between claimant and landlord one per cent

Figure 1.6 Does your LA have one PRS team (incorporating LHA) or does your LA/will your LA have an independent LHA team?

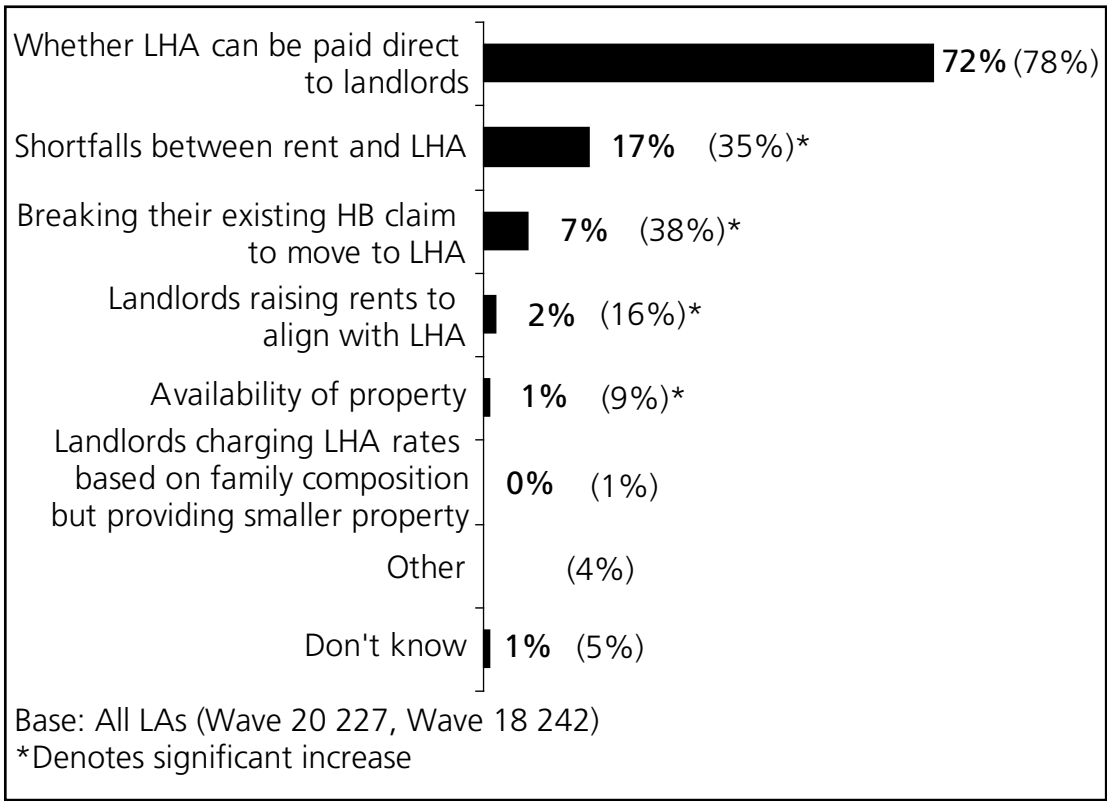


At Wave 20 the majority of LAs (78 per cent) had one PRS team of staff for dealing with LHA while two per cent had an independent LHA team in place.

At Wave 16 a similar question was asked to find out initially if LAs had teams in place already by sector or if they had plans to organise by sector. At Wave 16 only seven per cent in total were in the category of organising by sector. Of that small number of LAs, the majority said their plans were to have one PRS team rather than an independent team.

Figure 1.7 Have queries from tenants for advice and information increased, decreased or stayed the same with the introduction of LHA? What are the two areas that TENANTS query most often in relation to the LHA? (Wave 20 and Wave 18 findings in brackets)

37 per cent of LAs said that queries from tenants have increased as a result of the introduction of LHA (up from 19 per cent at Wave 18).

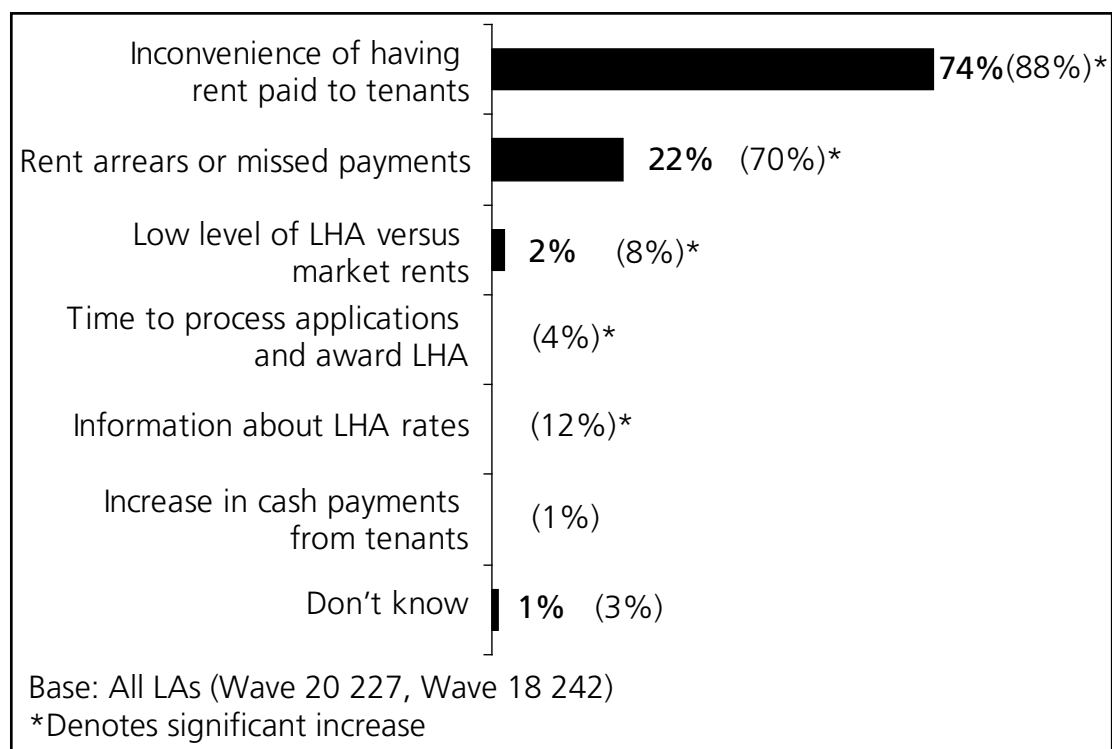


At Wave 20 37 per cent of LAs said that queries from tenants had increased since the introduction of LHA. The corresponding finding at Wave 18 was just 19 per cent. It should be noted that this increase is particularly significant in that this is based specifically on increases in queries as a result of LHA, and excludes increases caused by other factors (which was not the case at Wave 18). Welsh (73 per cent), English Metropolitan (48 per cent) and English Unitary authorities (47 per cent) were significantly more likely at Wave 20 to have said that queries from tenants had increased at some level due to LHA. Similarly authorities with medium or high caseloads (both 41 per cent) were more likely to have said that queries from tenants had increased due to LHA compared to authorities with low caseloads (23 per cent).

When asked about the kinds of queries that came up most often from tenants, whether LHA could be paid direct to landlords (72 per cent) was mentioned the most frequently. This was in line with what was found at Wave 18 (78 per cent).

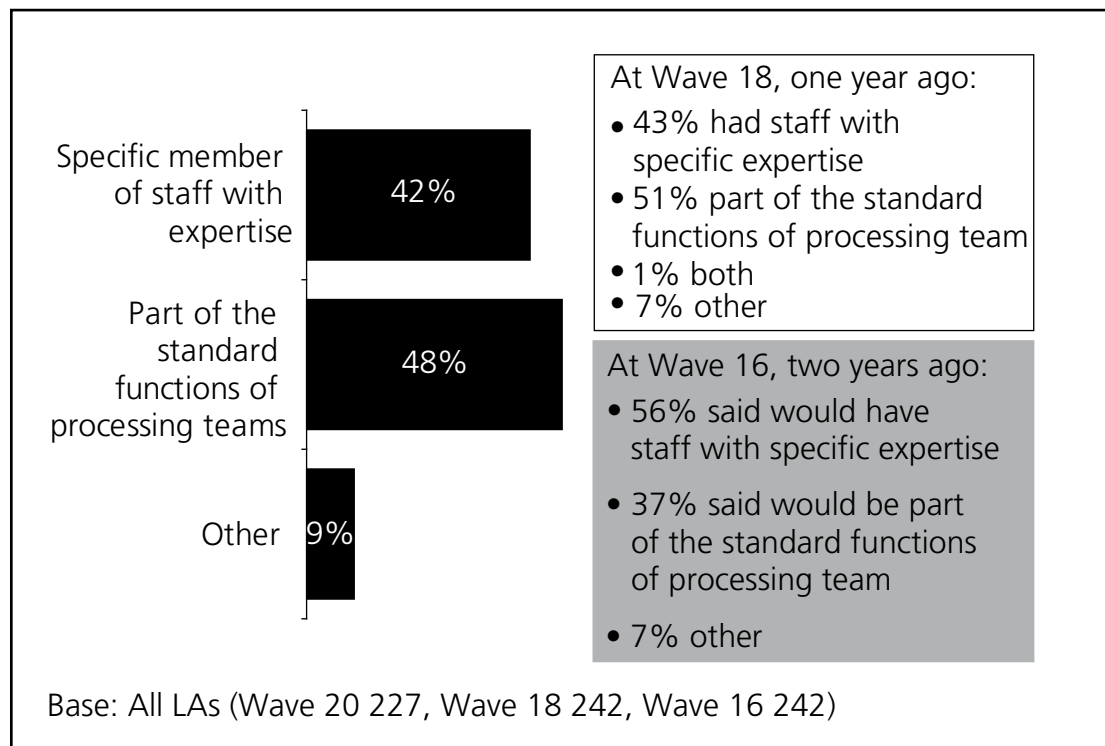
Some significant changes have occurred however between the results recorded at Wave 18 and those at Wave 20. At Wave 18 a third or more mentioned shortfalls between rent and LHA (35 per cent) and breaking their existing HB claim to move to LHA (38 per cent). These two types of queries from tenants appear to have decreased significantly at Wave 20, as do queries about landlord raising rents to align with LHA (down to two per cent at Wave 20 from 16 per cent at Wave 18). Queries about availability of property have also decreased significantly from nine per cent at Wave 18 to one per cent at Wave 20.

Figure 1.8 What are the two areas that LANDLORDS query most often in relation to the LHA? (Wave 20 and Wave 18 findings in brackets)



It is interesting to note the changes that have taken place since this question was first asked at Wave 18. Although inconvenience of having rent paid to tenants was still mentioned by three quarters (74 per cent) at Wave 20, it had decreased significantly from the 88 per cent mentioned at Wave 18. Even more striking is the decrease in the number of landlords querying rent arrears or missed payments (down to 22 per cent at Wave 20 from 70 per cent at Wave 18). All the other starred decreases marked in brackets in orange were also significant decreases that had been noted as a change from what was recorded at Wave 18 compared to the situation at Wave 20.

Figure 1.9 Are determinations about whether safeguards should be applied to an LHA case referred to a specific member of staff who has expertise in this area or are they dealt with as part of the standard functions of the teams processing HB?



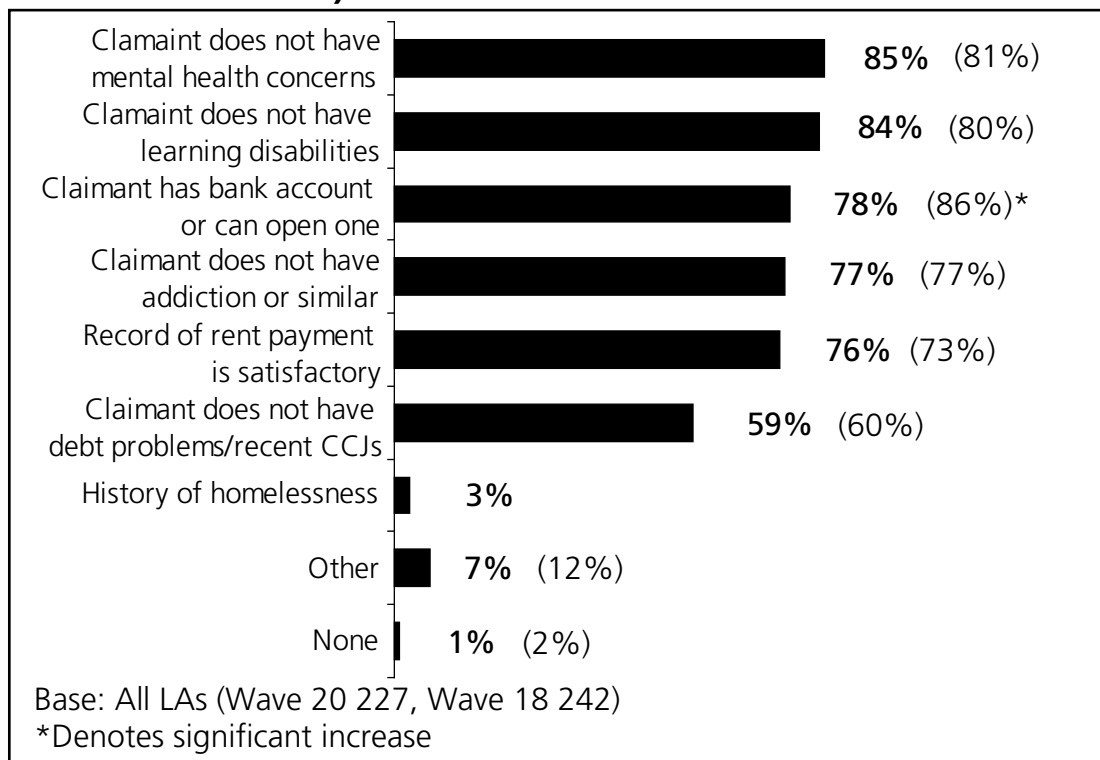
At Wave 20 42 per cent of LAs said determinations about whether safeguards should be applied to an LHA case were referred to a specific member of staff with expertise, and 48 per cent said they were dealt with as part of the standard functions of the processing teams. Within the 'other' category, four per cent mentioned team leaders, and one per cent said it was a combination of both a specific member of staff and part of the standard functions processing team.

At Wave 20 it is interesting to note that authorities that had contracted out services were significantly more likely to have said that they had a specific member of staff (61 per cent) compared to those that were not contracted out (41 per cent). English Metropolitan authorities (60 per cent) and English Districts (48 per cent) were also more likely to have said this than were English Unitary authorities (30 per cent) or London Boroughs (18 per cent).

A year previously at Wave 18 the split was very similar: 43 per cent had staff with specific expertise and 51 per cent with determinations as part of the standard functions of the processing team.

More interesting comparisons can be made however from two years previous at Wave 16. In 2008 (Wave 16) 56 per cent said they would have staff with specific expertise and 37 per cent said it would happen as part of the standard functions of the processing team, indicating that LAs initial predictions of how this would work have not been accurate in the longer term.

Figure 1.10 Local Housing Allowance payments are made direct to tenants but under certain circumstances can be made to landlords instead. What checks does your LA have in place when considering making payments directly to the claimant? (Wave 20 and Wave 18 findings in brackets)

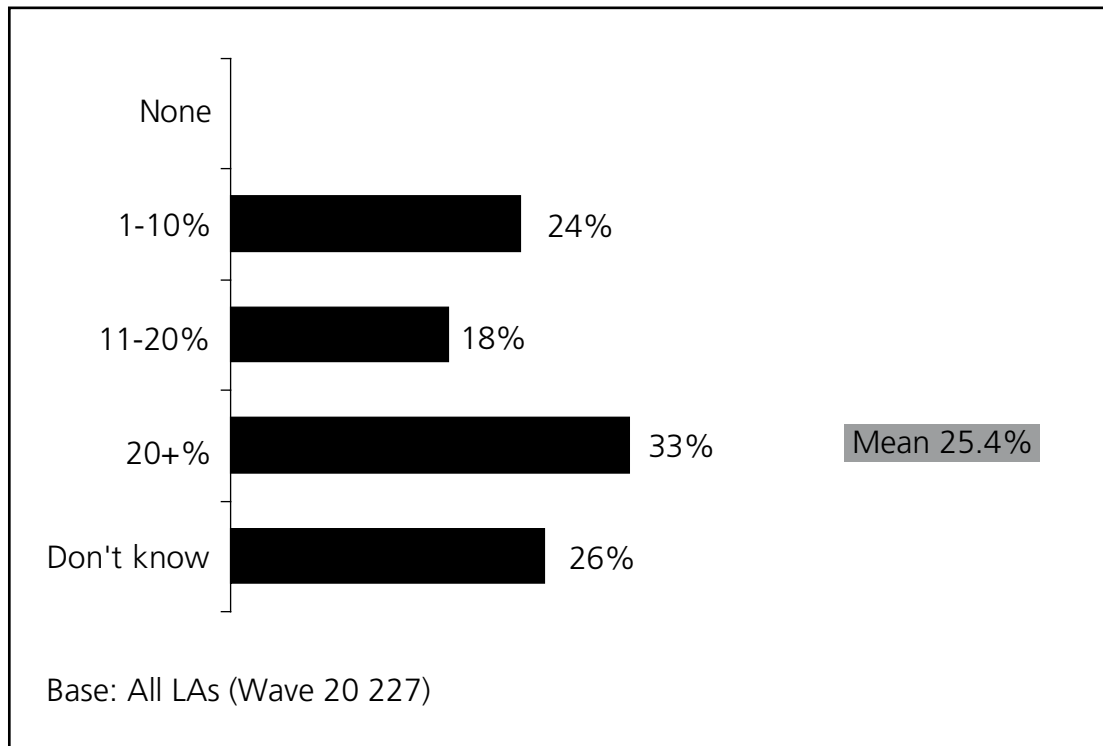


Although the default position for the LHA is that clients receive their benefit directly, safeguards are in place for customers for whom this may not be a suitable payment method.

The frequency distribution for the kinds of checks that are in place remained very similar at Wave 20 to those recorded a year previously at Wave 18, with the exception of a significant decrease in the frequency of checks that the claimant had a bank account or could open one (from 86 per cent at Wave 18 to 78 per cent at Wave 20).

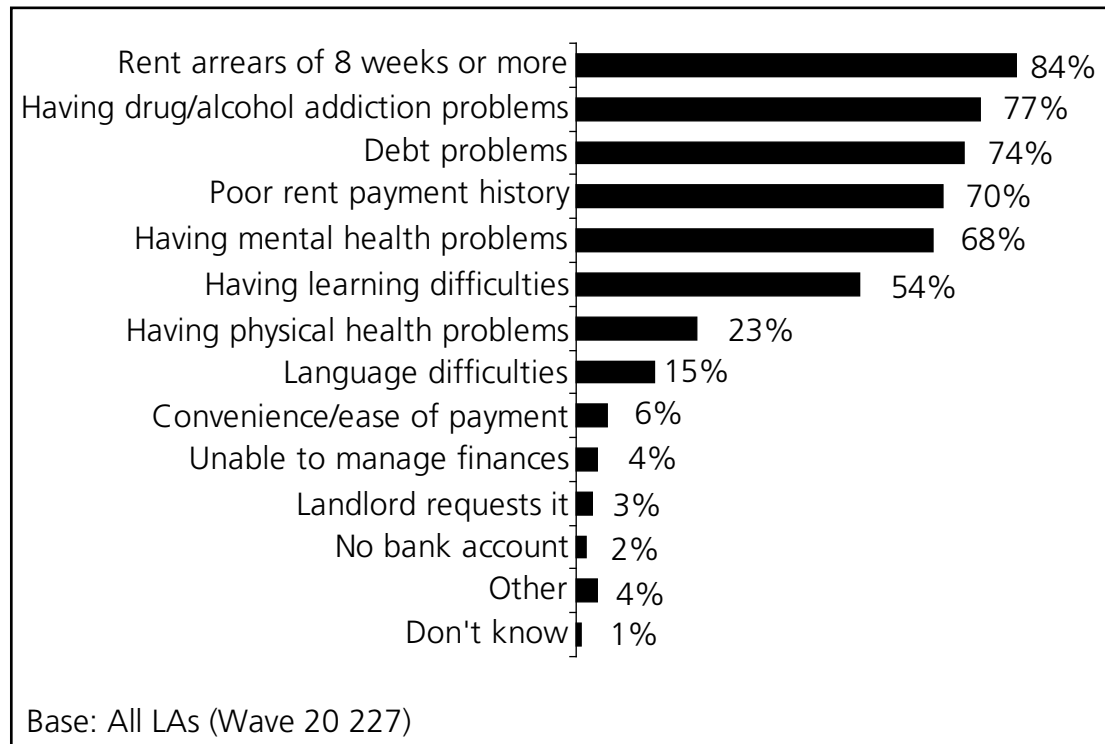
At Wave 20 it is interesting to note that LAs with a low caseload were significantly more likely to have said that they checked if the claimant had a bank account or could open one (85 per cent) compared to LAs with a high caseload (72 per cent).

Figure 1.11 What proportion of claimants (or their agents) do you estimate request, at any time, to have their payment go to their landlord or letting agent?



When asked about the proportion of claimants (or their agents) who requested to have their payment go to their landlord or letting agent, the mean score for all the proportions collected was approximately a quarter (25.4 per cent). The mean score was significantly higher among English Unitary authorities, where it peaked at 35.7 per cent compared to mean scores of just 22.4 per cent for Scottish authorities and 22.3 per cent for English Districts.

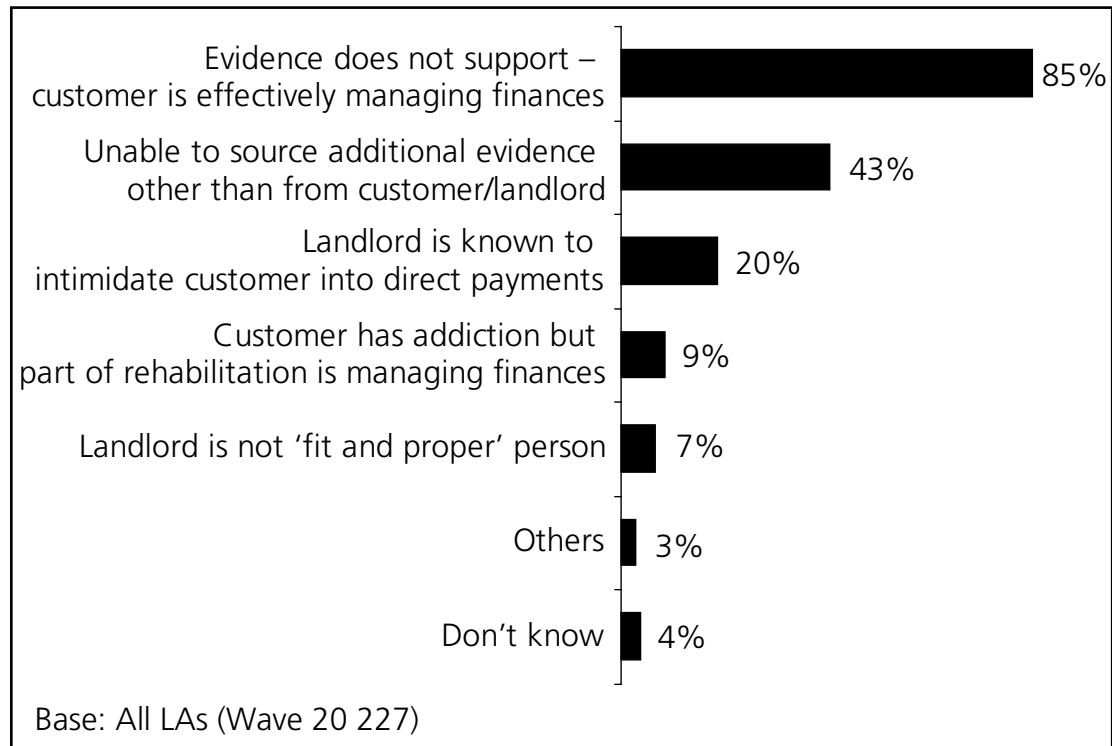
Figure 1.12 What are the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA is paid to their landlord?



At Wave 20 the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA was paid to their landlord was having rent arrears of eight weeks of more (84 per cent), having drug or alcohol addiction problems (77 per cent), debt problems (74 per cent), poor rent payment history (70 per cent) and mental health problems (68 per cent).

Having drug or alcohol addiction problems was a reason that was more frequently cited by English Metropolitan authorities (92 per cent) and also Scottish authorities (90 per cent), compared with, for instance, London Boroughs, where just 68 per cent mentioned this as a reason. Rent arrears of eight weeks or more was significantly more likely to be mentioned as a reason by English Metropolitan authorities (92 per cent) and English Districts (86 per cent), compared to Scottish authorities (70 per cent) and London Boroughs (73 per cent). Scottish authorities were significantly more likely to have said that debt problems were given as a reason (95 per cent in Scotland compared to, for instance, 55 per cent in the London Boroughs).

Figure 1.13 What are the most common reasons a request to have rent paid to the landlord is rejected?



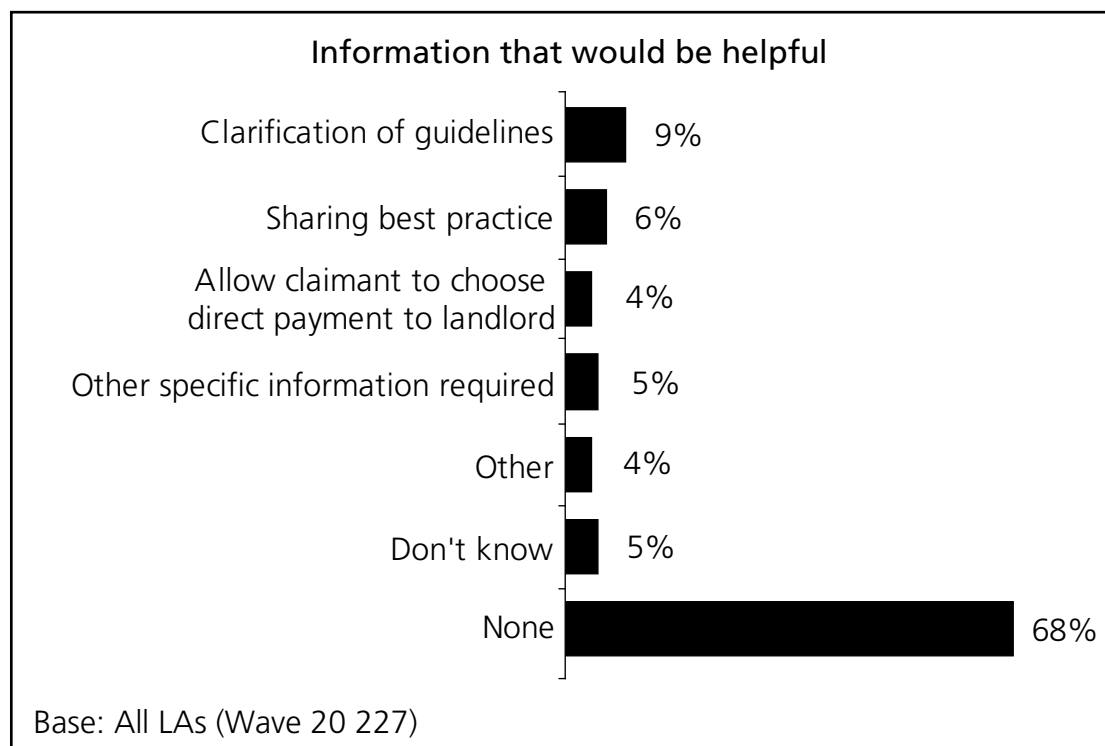
The most common reason for a request to have rent paid to the landlord being rejected appears to be that the evidence did not support it – the customer was effectively managing finances, mentioned by 85 per cent. This was significantly higher among English Metropolitan authorities (96 per cent) than it was amongst London Boroughs (77 per cent).

Forty-three per cent mentioned the inability to source additional evidence as a reason for rejections. This rose to 64 per cent amongst Welsh authorities, 60 per cent amongst English Metropolitan authorities and 50 per cent amongst English Unitary authorities, compared to just 34 per cent amongst English District authorities.

A further one in five (20 per cent) mentioned that rejections were based on the knowledge that the landlord intimidated the customer into requesting direct payments.

Figure 1.14 Do you feel your LA receives enough guidance from DWP to implement the safeguards consistently? What other information, if any, would your LA find helpful to receive from DWP to help implement the safeguards?

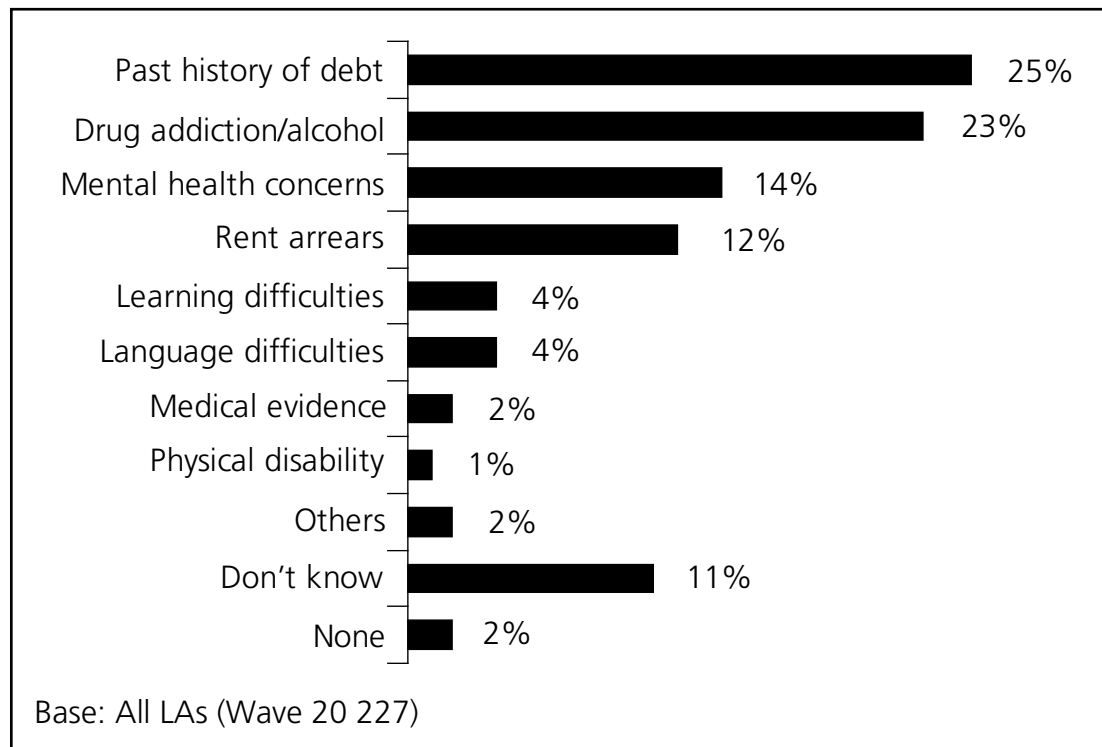
87 per cent think that they receive enough guidance from DWP to implement the safeguards consistently. 11 per cent think they don't receive enough.



A majority, 87 per cent, of LAs thought that they received enough guidance from DWP to implement the safeguards consistently. This was significantly higher amongst London Boroughs, 100 per cent of whom said that they thought they received enough guidance.

When asked about what other information would be helpful to receive, small numbers mentioned clarification of guidelines, sharing best practice and allowing a claimant to choose direct payment to their landlord, but the majority (68 per cent), said they could think of no other information that would be helpful. It is worth noting however that amongst English Unitary authorities the proportion that said clarification of guidelines would be useful rose significantly to 23 per cent.

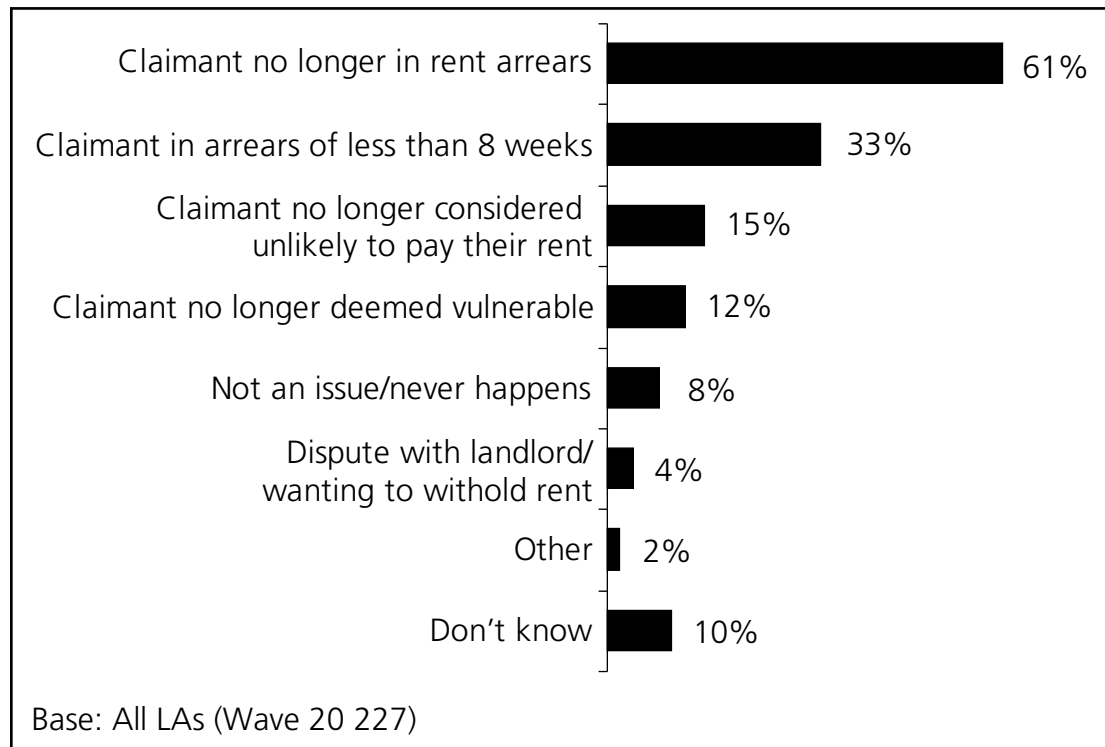
Figure 1.15 What evidence (in support of a claim to pay to the landlord) is the most difficult to collect/causes the most problems?



When asked about what kinds of evidence were the most difficult to collect or caused the most problems, past history of debt and drug addiction/alcohol were mentioned by around one in four (25 per cent and 23 per cent respectively). Mental health concerns (14 per cent) and rent arrears (12 per cent) were also mentioned.

There were some significant differences by LA type. Scottish authorities and English Metropolitan authorities were more likely to have said rent arrears was the evidence that was the most difficult to collect or caused the most problems (both 20 per cent), compared with English Unitary authorities (three per cent). Drug addiction/alcohol problems were more frequently cited as being difficult to collect amongst Scottish (45 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (36 per cent), than for example amongst English Unitary authorities (ten per cent) and English Districts (20 per cent).

Figure 1.16 What are the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA is changed so that it is paid direct to them?



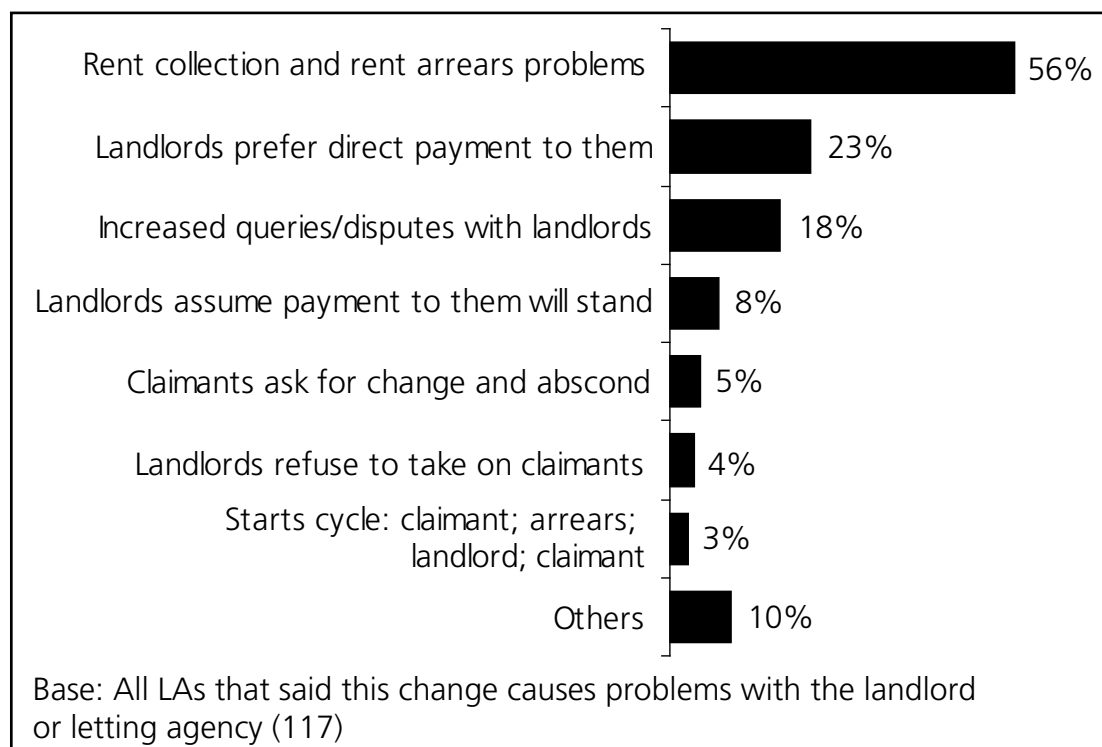
When asked about the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA was paid direct to them, the most frequently mentioned reason was that the claimant was no longer in rent arrears (61 per cent).

Other reasons included the claimant being in arrears of less than eight weeks, mentioned by a third (33 per cent), claimant no longer considered unlikely to pay their rent (15 per cent) and claimant no longer deemed vulnerable (12 per cent).

It is worth noting that a fifth of Scottish authorities (20 per cent) said one of the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA is changed so that it is paid direct to them was because of a dispute with the landlord/wanting to withhold rent (for example, until repairs are done) compared to, for example, just three per cent of English Unitary authorities and two per cent of English Districts.

**Figure 1.17 Does this change (to claimants receiving the payment themselves) generally cause problems with the landlord or the letting agency?
Please describe how this change (to claimants receiving the payment themselves), causes problems with the landlord or letting agency?**

52 per cent said that this change causes problems with the landlord or letting agency. 28 per cent said that it does not cause problems, 21 per cent were unsure.



Approximately half (52 per cent) of LAs said that the change to claimants receiving the payment themselves caused problems with the landlord or letting agency. This rose significantly to 72 per cent amongst English Metropolitan authorities and 67 per cent amongst English Unitary authorities. There also appeared to be a greater prevalence of these kinds of problems amongst authorities with medium or high caseloads (52 per cent and 63 per cent respectively) compared to authorities with low caseloads (30 per cent).

When the group that said these changes caused problems were asked to give details about the kinds of problems caused, 56 per cent mentioned it caused problems with rent collection and claimants falling back into arrears.

Several aspects of landlords' opposition to the change were mentioned: 23 per cent said that landlords prefer direct payment to them; 18 per cent said it caused increased correspondence/complaints and entering into disputes with landlords.

Approximately one in 12 (eight per cent) said landlord assumed payment to them would continue indefinitely, five per cent said claimants ask for the change and then abscond without notice, four per cent said landlords refuse to take on claimants and three per cent said it starts a cycle of payments going back and forth between claimants and landlords.

2 Local Housing Allowance and financial management

2.1 Introduction and summary

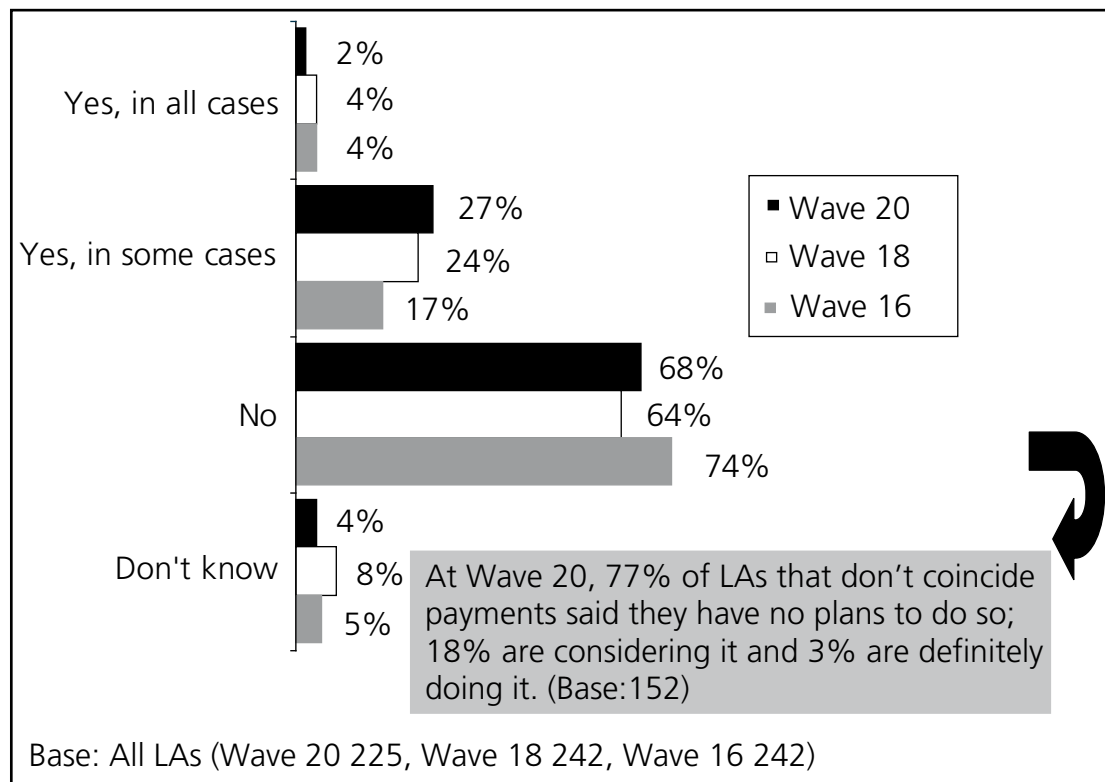
This section of the survey asked about the effect of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) on rent arrears, Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and the provision of money advice:

- Many local authorities (LAs) could not say what effect LHA has had on rent arrears although a third (32 per cent) thought they had increased since LHA had been introduced.
- The majority of LAs thought that DHPs had increased in the last year and many thought this was due to a combination of both LHA and the economic climate.
- LAs' predictions for how money advice would be split between in-house provision of money advice and provision by other agencies, has proven to be very accurate.
- Regarding volume of advice required however, more LHA cases have needed money advice than was expected.
- Three-quarters of LAs have experience of claimants terminating a Housing Benefit (HB) claim to leave a weeks gap to move to LHA.

2.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

**Figure 2.1 As you are aware, receiving payments means tenants must manage their own money. In cases where your LA currently make HB payments directly to tenants, how often are payment periods made to coincide with rent charging periods?
Does your authority have any plans to make changes to your payment systems so that payment periods coincide with rent charging periods?**

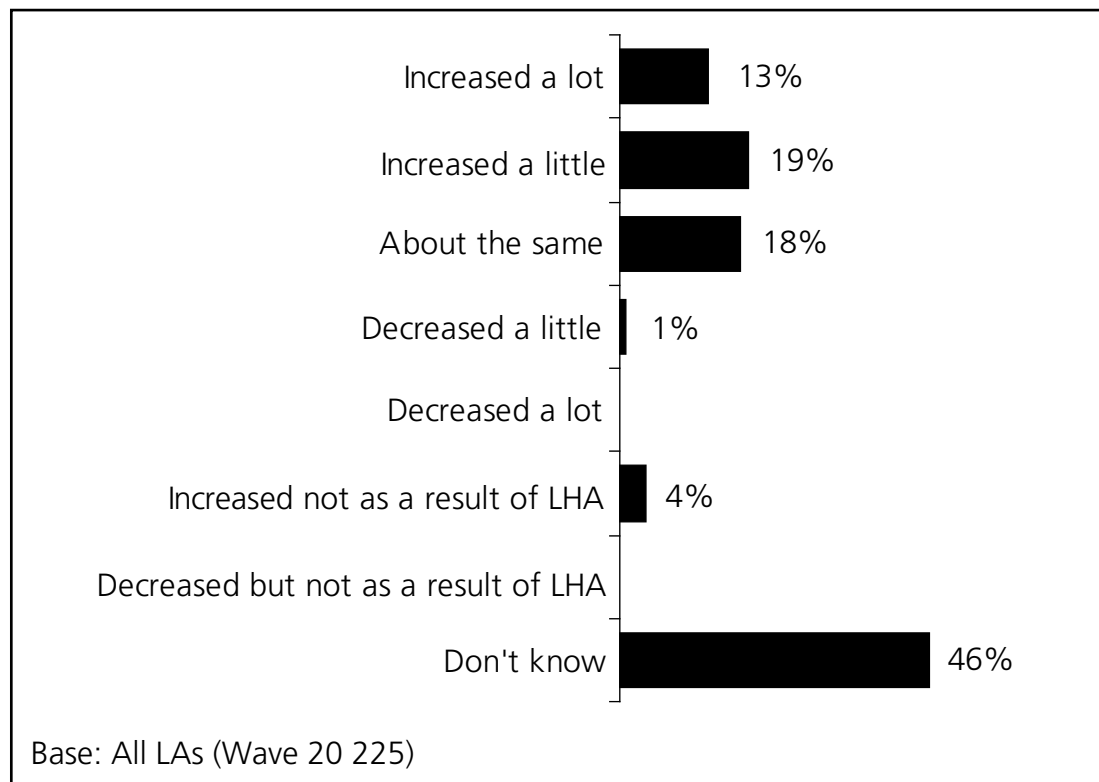


In cases where LAs currently made HB payments directly to tenants, they were asked how often payment periods were made to coincide with rent charging periods.

The responses were broadly similar to those recorded at Wave 18. Around three in ten (29 per cent) said yes they coincided, although most of those were just a 'yes, in some cases' rather than 'in all cases'. The corresponding findings for Wave 16 (blue bars on the preceding chart) look lower than those noted for Wave 20 but it needs to be noted that these changes are not actually significant.

The majority of LAs (68 per cent at Wave 20) that said their payment periods do not coincide with rent charging periods, were then asked if they had plans to coincide them, 18 per cent said they were considering it, three per cent were definitely doing it, but the majority (77 per cent) said that they had no plans to do so. These proportions were broadly similar to those recorded at previous waves where 74 per cent (Wave 18) and 67 per cent (Wave 16) said they had no plans to coincide.

Figure 2.2 Have rent arrears increased, decreased or stayed the same in your LA because of LHA?

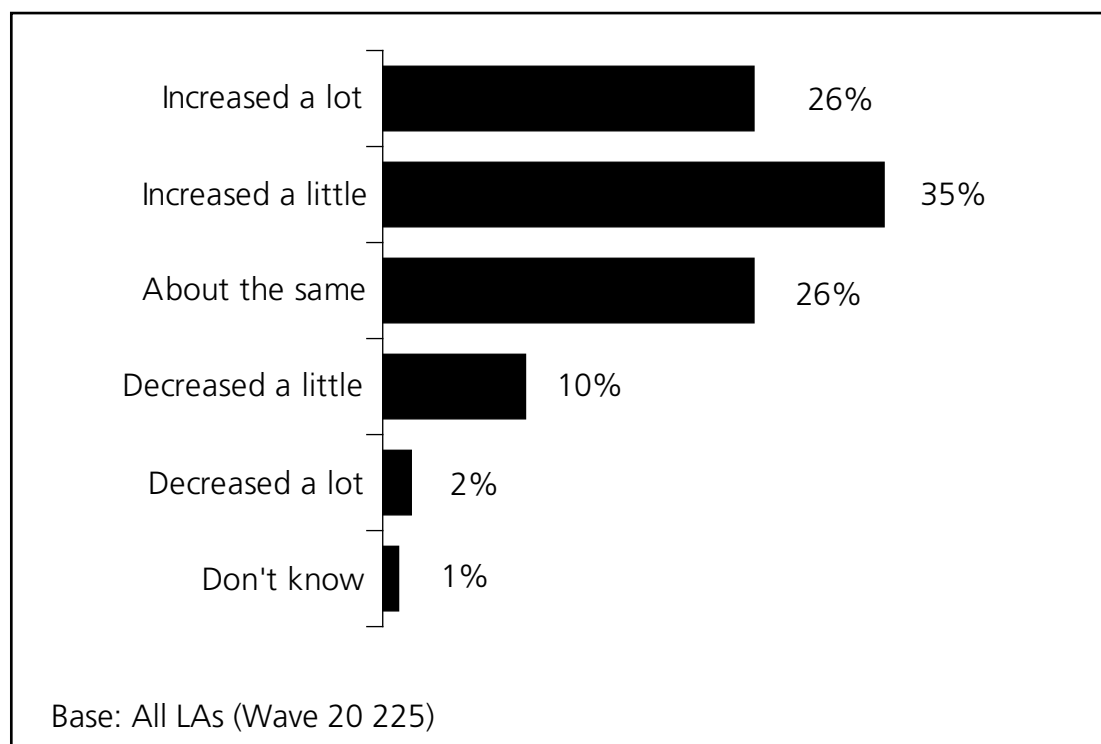


This was a new question at Wave 20 which asked about the effect of LHA on rent arrears. It is interesting to note the amount of don't knows to this question was unusually high at 46 per cent.

Of those that had a view, the general consensus seems to be that rent arrears had increased due to LHA (mentioned by a third 32 per cent) or that they have stayed the same (18 per cent). It is interesting to note that those LAs with a medium or high caseload were more likely to have said that rent arrears had increased due to LHA (34 per cent and 39 per cent respectively) compared to LAs with a low caseload (17 per cent).

LAs in Wales (64 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (44 per cent) were also significantly more likely to have said that rent arrears have increased due to LHA than were for example English Districts (27 per cent).

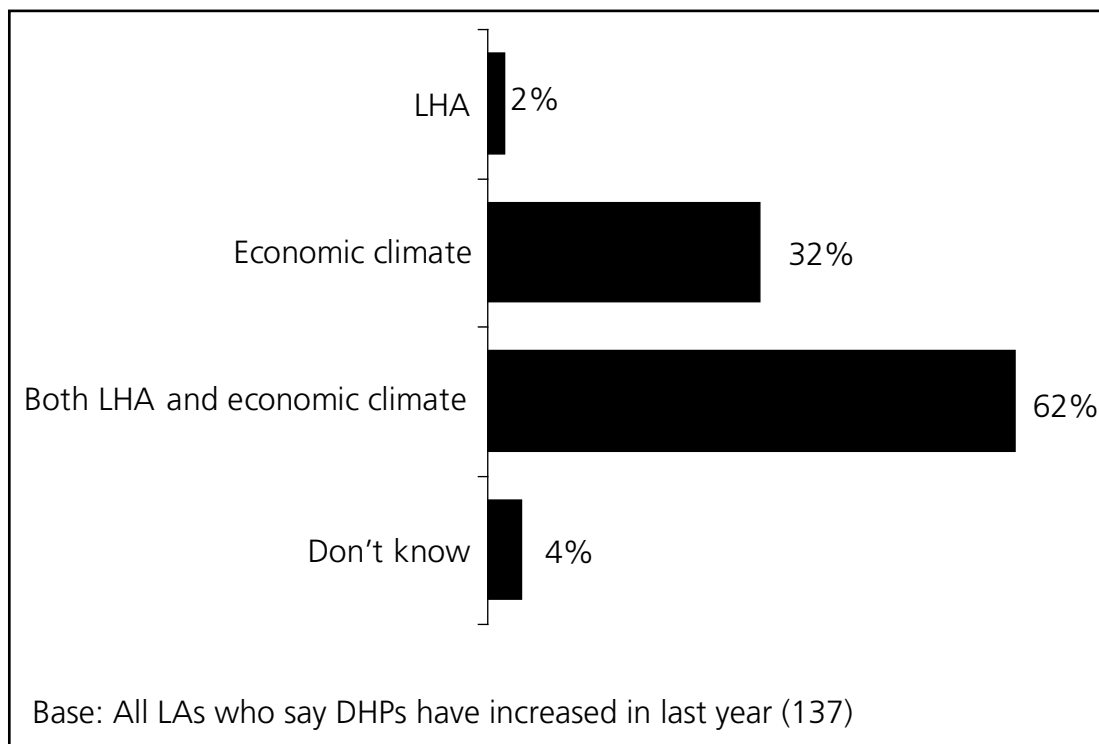
Figure 2.3 Have your LA's DHPs to the Private Rented Sector (PRS) increased, decreased or stayed the same in the last year?



When asked about changes in levels of DHPs in the previous year, the majority (61 per cent) of LAs said they had increased to some extent, a quarter (26 per cent) said they were about the same and just ten per cent said they had decreased.

English Metropolitan authorities (32 per cent) and English Districts (29 per cent) were significantly more likely to have said levels of DHPs had increased than were Scottish authorities (ten per cent).

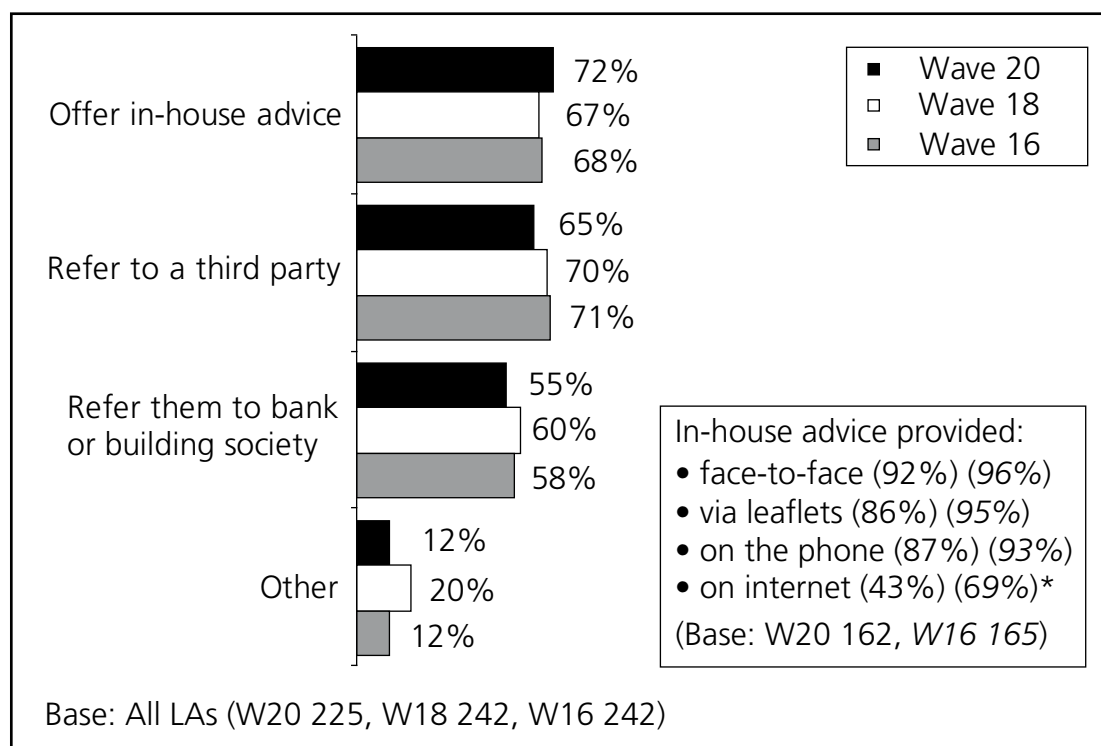
Figure 2.4 Do you think this is because of LHA, the economic climate, or both?



When asked about the reasons for increases in DHPs over the last year, it is interesting to note that only two per cent of LAs in this group of LAs that said their DHPs had increased in the last year, said it was due to LHA alone.

A third (32 per cent) said it was due to the economic climate alone but the majority (62 per cent) said it was due to a combination of both LHA and the economic climate combined.

Figure 2.5 Where a claimant does not have a bank account or does not understand how bank accounts operate, which of the following actions does your LA take? How do you provide this in-house advice to claimants who do not have a bank account or do not understand how bank accounts operate?

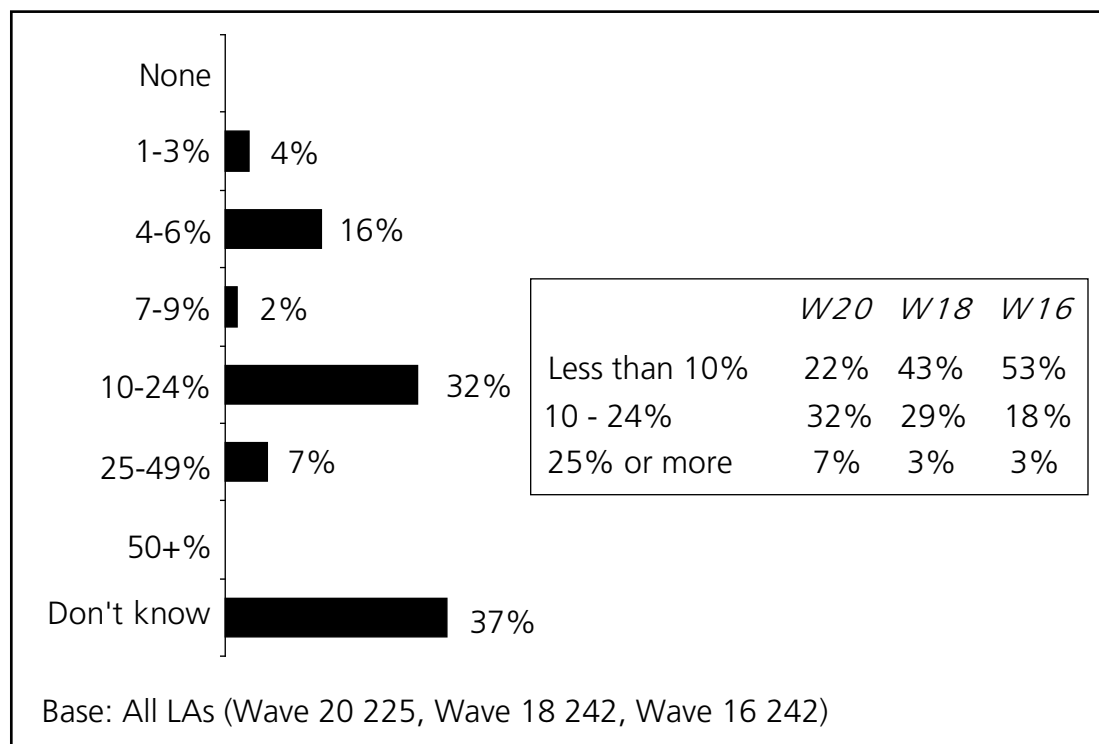


The preceding chart shows the results for Waves 20, 18 and 16. It should be pointed out that the results for all waves were very similar and there were no significant changes over time. That in itself however, is an interesting finding, because it shows that LAs' predictions of how much money advice they would need to offer and how many referrals they would make, have been fairly accurate. It is worth noting that London Boroughs (29 per cent) were significantly less likely to refer claimants to a third party. Welsh authorities on the other hand were more likely than other authority types to have referred claimants to a bank or building society (91 per cent).

There has been a significant difference in findings over time regarding how LAs thought in-house advice would be provided and how, in reality it has actually been provided. LAs' projections for advice being given face-to-face, via leaflets, and on the phone have proved to be relatively accurate but estimations for advice via the internet have, in reality, been much lower than predicted in 2008 (69 per cent said this in 2008 at Wave 16 compared to 43 per cent in 2010 at Wave 20). At Wave 20 those authorities with high caseloads (51 per cent) were more likely to offer advice via the internet than their counterparts with low and medium caseloads (29 per cent and 42 per cent respectively). Analysis of this finding by authority type

reveals that English Metropolitan authorities (68 per cent) and London Boroughs (64 per cent) were also more likely to offer internet advice than were, for example Welsh authorities (17 per cent).

Figure 2.6 What proportion of LHA cases do you estimate have needed money advice in your LA?

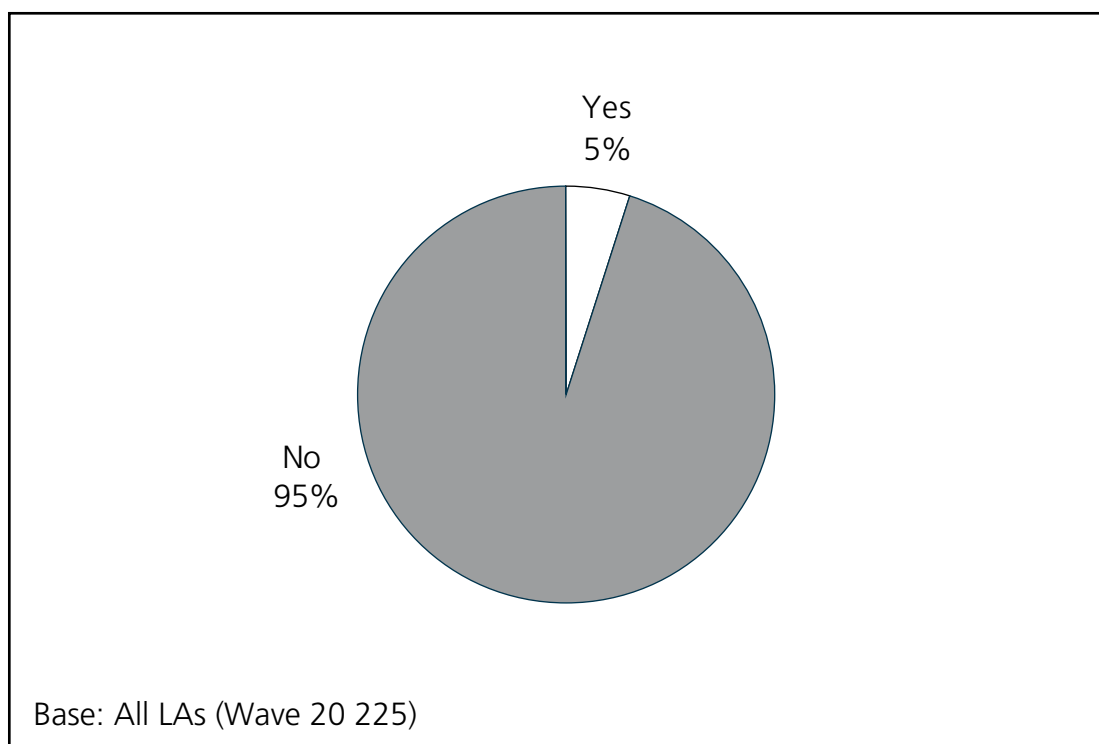


At Wave 20, 22 per cent said less than ten per cent of LHA cases had needed money advice, 32 per cent said ten to 24 per cent had needed it and seven per cent said 25 per cent or more needed it. This is a change from what was recorded at Wave 18. At Wave 18, 43 per cent said less than ten per cent needed money advice, 29 per cent said ten to 24 per cent needed it and three per cent said 25 per cent or more needed it.

At Wave 16 53 per cent said less than ten per cent needed money advice, and 18 per cent said ten to 24 per cent needed it, so overall the reality would appear to be that higher percentages have needed money advice at Wave 20 than were estimated two years previously at Wave 16.

**Figure 2.7 Does your LA currently have facilities for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques free of charge?
Did you introduce this facility for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques free of charge as a result of LHA?**

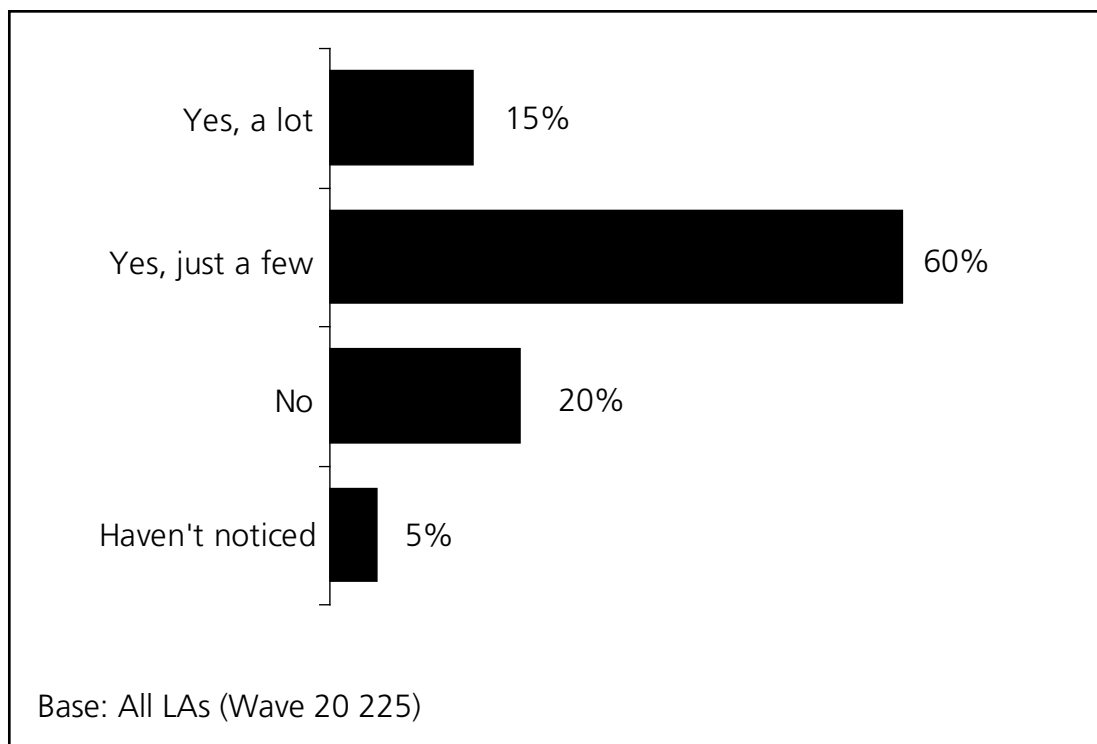
43 per cent of LAs have facilities for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques free of charge. 57 per cent do not have the facility.



Just over two in five (43 per cent) of LAs have facilities for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques free of charge but when this group were asked if this facility was introduced as a result of LHA the answer was yes for only a tiny minority of five per cent.

It is interesting to note that English Metropolitan authorities were much more likely to have facilities for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques (72 per cent) than were, for instance, English Unitary authorities or English Districts (38 per cent and 36 per cent respectively).

Figure 2.8 Have you noticed any claimants terminating an HB claim in order to leave a week's gap so that they can move on to LHA, or not? *IF YES: are a lot of claimants doing this or just a few?*



Experience of claimants terminating an HB claim in order to leave a weeks gap so that they can move on to LHA appeared to be widespread at Wave 20 with three quarters (75 per cent) of LAs saying that this happened to some extent. 15 per cent said it happened a lot and it appeared that LAs with a high caseload experienced this more (28 per cent of which said it happened a lot), than those with a low or medium caseload (just four per cent and nine per cent respectively said that this happened a lot). Analysis by type of authority revealed that English Metropolitan authorities (52 per cent) and London Boroughs (33 per cent) were more likely to have said this happens a lot than, for example, Welsh authorities or English Districts (nine per cent and seven per cent respectively).

3 Local Housing Allowance and homelessness

3.1 Introduction and summary

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are concerned about the impact of any new policies on homelessness and the intention with this section was to ask questions about whether the introduction of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in April 2008 had had any impact on homelessness or not:

- There has been a small but significant increase in the number of LAs that felt that homelessness had gone up as result of LHA.
- Contact between LAs and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) about homelessness has increased.
- One in eight LAs thought that LHA has led to an increase in Social Rented Sector waiting lists.

3.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 3.1 What are the three main reasons for homelessness in your LA for those who would normally be housed in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)? (Wave 20 and Wave 16 in brackets)

- Relationship breakdown 76 per cent (75 per cent)
- Family dispute 57 per cent (59 per cent)
- Rent arrears 54 per cent (49 per cent)
- Domestic violence 43 per cent (33 per cent)*
- No suitable accommodation 18 per cent (33 per cent)*
- End of Assured Shorthold Tenancy seven per cent
- Reduction in available PRS properties five per cent
- End of tenancy/loss of rented accommodation five per cent
- Landlord requiring possession of property two per cent
- Neighbourhood harassment two per cent (three per cent)
- Other six per cent (25 per cent)
- Don't know seven per cent

Base: All LAs (Wave 20 218, Wave 16 242)

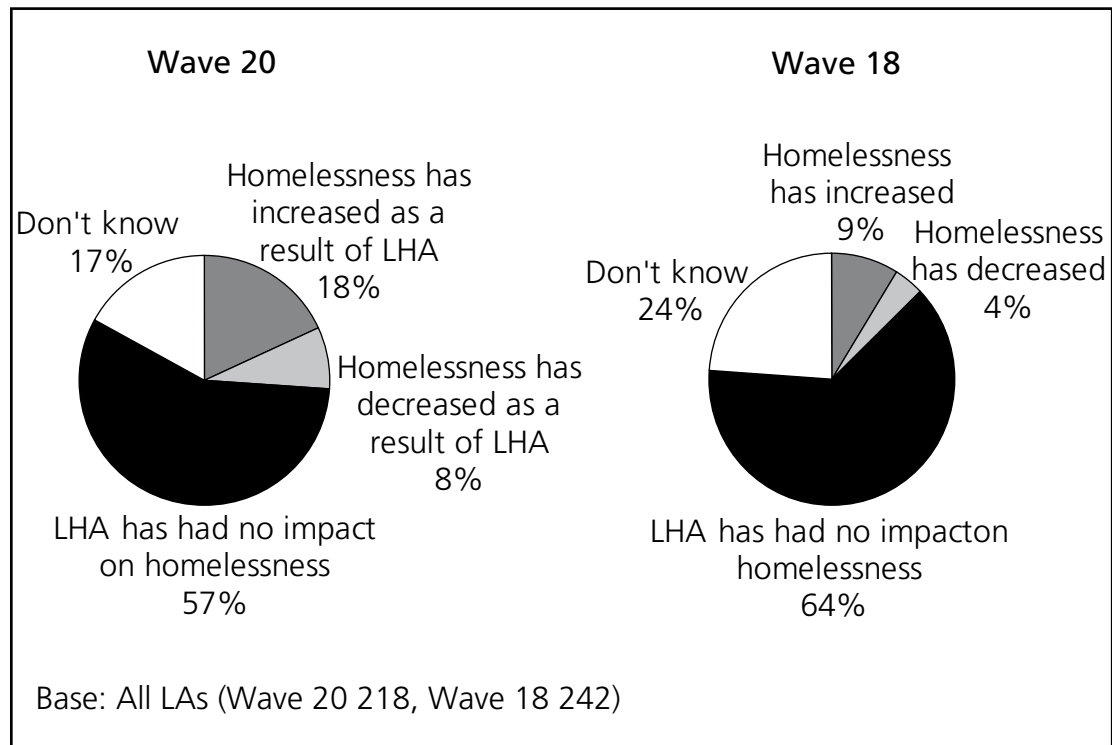
*Denotes significant change

LAs were asked to name the three main reasons for homelessness for those who would normally be housed in the PRS. Relationship breakdown and family dispute, and loss of accommodation as a result of rent arrears, remained clear factors at Wave 20. It is worth noting at Wave 20 that loss of accommodation due to rent arrears was more likely to be mentioned by Welsh authorities (91 per cent) and London Boroughs (67 per cent) than other types of authority, whilst suitable accommodation not being available was more likely to be mentioned by London Boroughs (38 per cent) and Scottish authorities (32 per cent).

It is interesting that when comparing the results of Wave 16 (two years previous) and Wave 20, there appears to have been a significant increase in the number of LAs that said that homelessness resulting from domestic violence was one of the three main reasons (up to 43 per cent at Wave 20 from 33 per cent at Wave 16).

Meanwhile there has been a significant decrease in those LAs that said that no suitable accommodation was one of the three main reasons for homelessness (down to 18 per cent at Wave 20 from a level of 33 per cent at Wave 16 two years ago).

Figure 3.2 Since the roll-out of LHA do you think that homelessness has increased as a result of LHA, decreased as a result of LHA or that LHA has had no impact on homelessness?

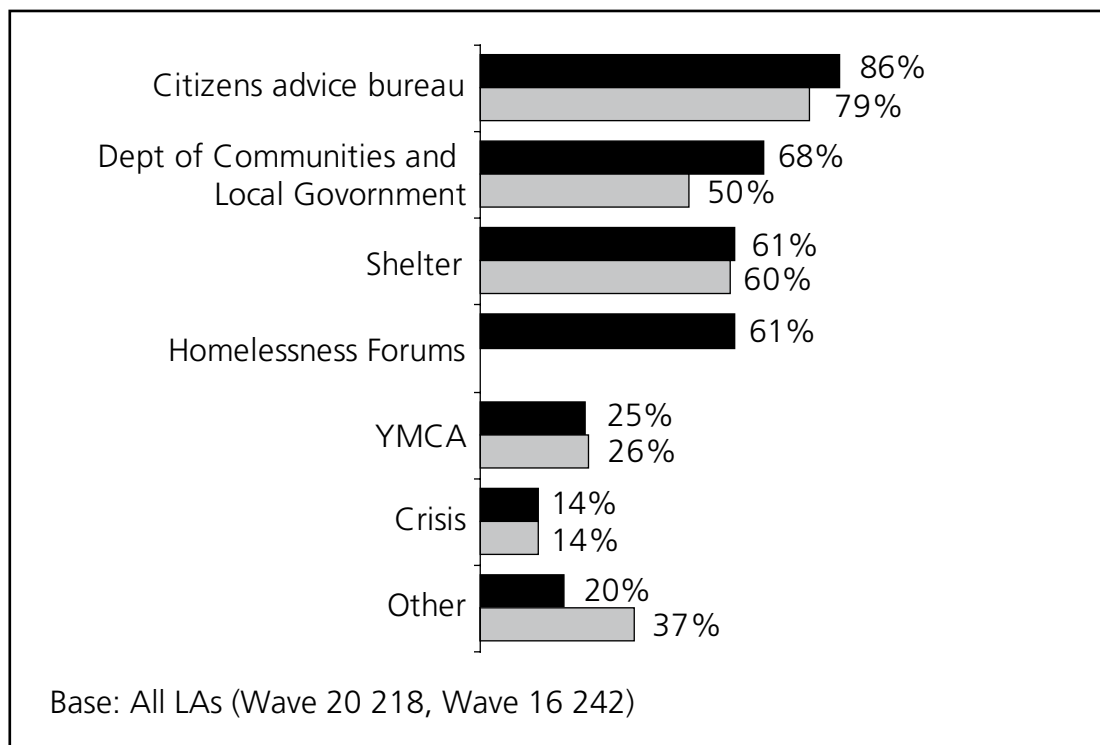


At Wave 20 there appeared to have been a shift in thought about the impact of LHA on homelessness. The key finding was that more LAs overall were saying that LHA has had at least some impact: either positive or negative; 26 per cent at Wave 20 compared with 13 per cent at Wave 18.

The number of LAs that thought homelessness had increased as a result of LHA had increased from nine per cent at Wave 18 to 18 per cent at Wave 20, and this is a significant increase. This increase was felt particularly strongly amongst authorities in Wales (45 per cent said they thought it had increased).

Although those that thought homelessness had decreased as a result of LHA appeared to have gone up between Waves 18 and 20 this is not actually a significant finding.

Figure 3.3 Which organisations is your LA in touch with regularly about homelessness issues? Wave 20 compared to Wave 16

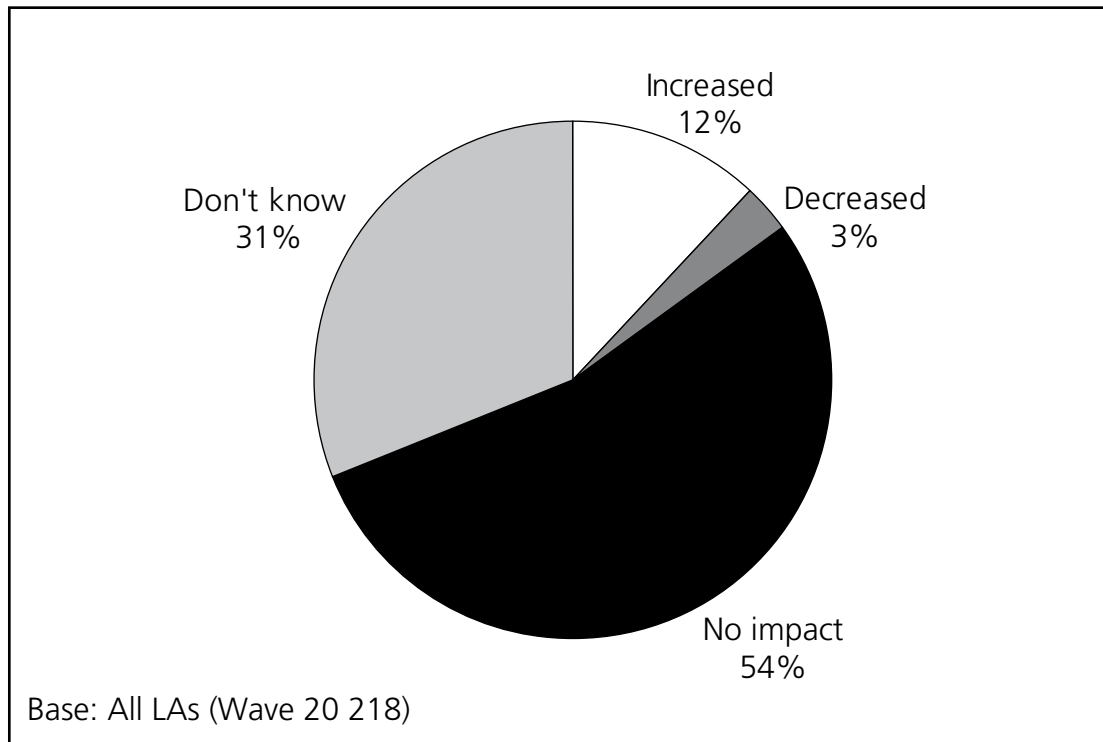


Although the broad pattern of agencies that LAs were in touch with regularly about homelessness remained relatively similar between Wave 16 and Wave 20 there has been a significant increase at Wave 20 in the amount of contact with the Citizens Advice Bureau (up from 79 per cent at Wave 16 to 86 per cent at Wave 20). There has also been an increase in the number of LAs that said they were in touch with the Department of Communities and Local Government (up to 68 per cent at Wave 20 from 50 per cent at Wave 16). Within the 'other' category, six per cent mentioned 'other charities/voluntary organisations, three per cent mentioned Registered Social Landlords, three per cent a Law Centre, two per cent said supported accommodation providers and one per cent mentioned each of the following: Connexions, Housing Association, Probation Service and Social Services.

At Wave 20, authorities in Scotland and Wales (91 per cent and 79 per cent respectively), plus English Metropolitan authorities (68 per cent) were more likely to be in touch with Shelter than were authorities in other areas such as English Unitary authorities (44 per cent). Crisis was more likely to be a point of contact for English Metropolitan authorities (32 per cent) and London Boroughs (24 per cent) than other authority types such as English Unitary authorities (11 per cent).

Homelessness Forums featured strongly too at Wave 20, with three in five (61 per cent) of LAs saying that they were in touch with them about homelessness issues.

Figure 3.4 Since the roll-out of LHA do you think that Social Rented Sector waiting lists have increased as a result of LHA, decreased as a result of LHA or that LHA has had no impact on Social Rented Sector waiting lists?



At Wave 20 just over a half (54 per cent) of LAs said that LHA has had no impact on the Social Rented Sector waiting lists and a further third (31 per cent) could not give a definite answer. One in eight (12 per cent) thought LHA had led to an increase in the waiting lists for this sector and three per cent thought they had decreased since LHA.

4 Local Housing Allowance and landlords

4.1 Introduction and summary

This section of the survey aimed to investigate local authorities (LAs) perceptions of how landlords have reacted to the introduction of Local Housing Allowance (LHA). Specifically it asked about landlords' general willingness to let properties to Housing Benefit (HB) tenants and young single people as well as aiming to establish if landlords were raising their rents to LHA levels:

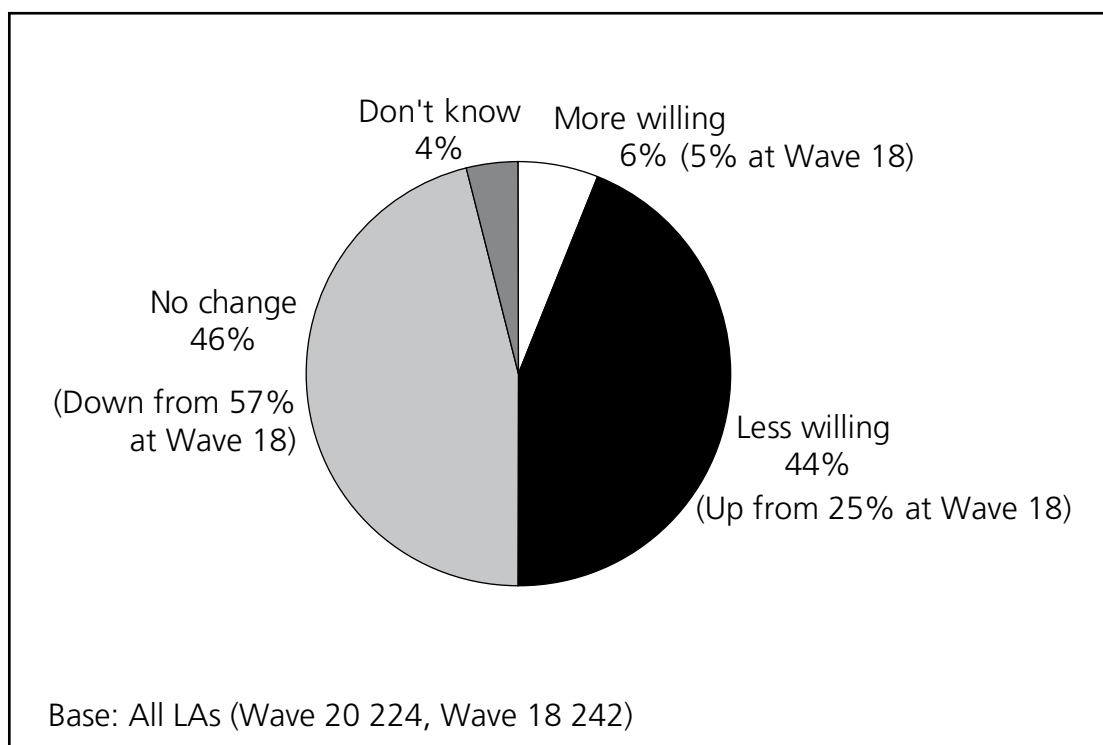
- Forty-five per cent of LAs said that since LHA, landlords were less willing to let property to HB tenants.
- Eleven per cent of LAs thought that customers who claimed LHA were moving more frequently than had been the case under previous schemes.
- Since the introduction of LHA, 69 per cent of LAs felt that landlords had raised their rents to LHA levels.

4.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

**Figure 4.1 Thinking generally, are landlords in your area happy to let property to people on HB?
In your opinion, since LHA, have private sector landlords been more or less willing to let property to HB tenants or has there been no change?**

67 per cent said landlords in their area happy to let property to people on HB, 25 per cent said no and 8 per cent don't know.

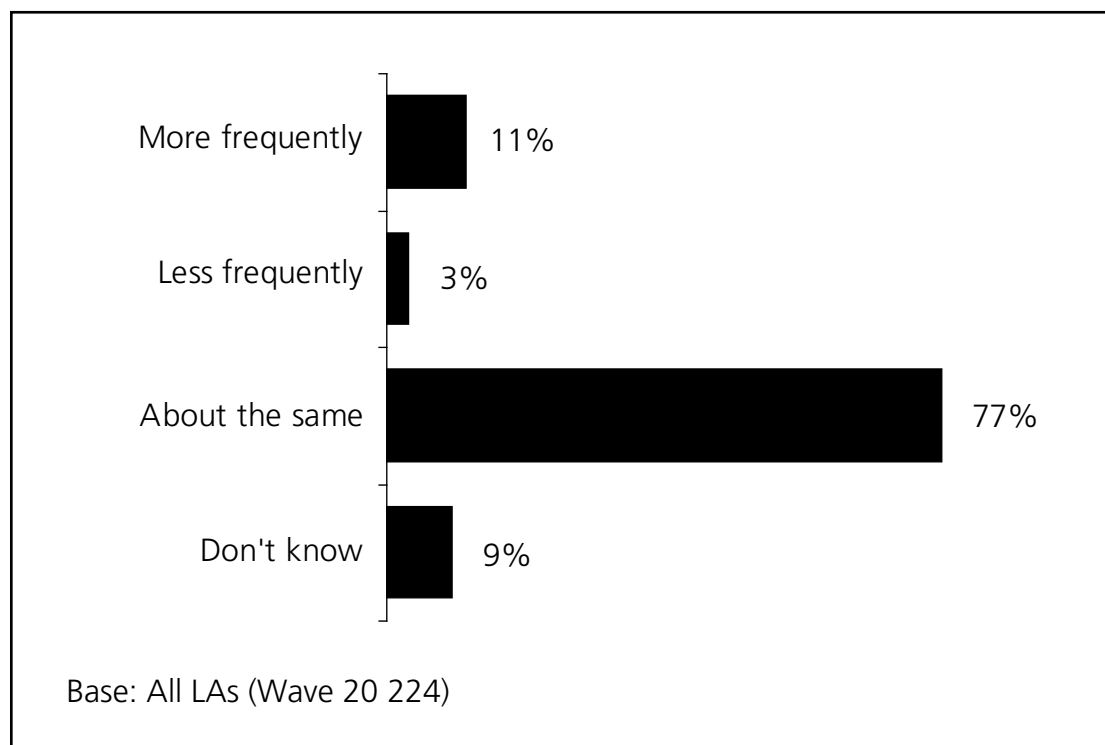


At Wave 20 LAs were asked if, in general, landlords in their area were happy to let property to people on HB, and while 67 per cent said yes they thought they were happy, a quarter (25 per cent) said no, they did not think that this was the case. Welsh authorities and English Districts (36 per cent and 31 per cent respectively) were more likely to have said no, that in general, landlords in their area were not happy to let property to people on HB.

When asked specifically about the willingness of private sector landlords to let property to HB tenants since the introduction of LHA, there was a significant change over time when comparing results from Wave 20 with those from a year previously at Wave 18. The number of LAs that thought that landlords were less willing to let property to HB tenants has increased from 25 per cent recorded at Wave 18 to 44 per cent at Wave 20.

At Wave 20 there were some significant differences in responses to this question when the data was analysed by LA type. Scottish authorities (15 per cent), English Metropolitan authorities (20 per cent), and London Boroughs (19 per cent) were more likely to have said that landlords were more willing to let property to HB tenants since LHA. On the other hand, Welsh authorities (73 per cent), English Unitary authorities (59 per cent), and English Districts (46 per cent) were more likely to have said that they felt that landlords were less willing to let to HB tenants since the introduction of LHA.

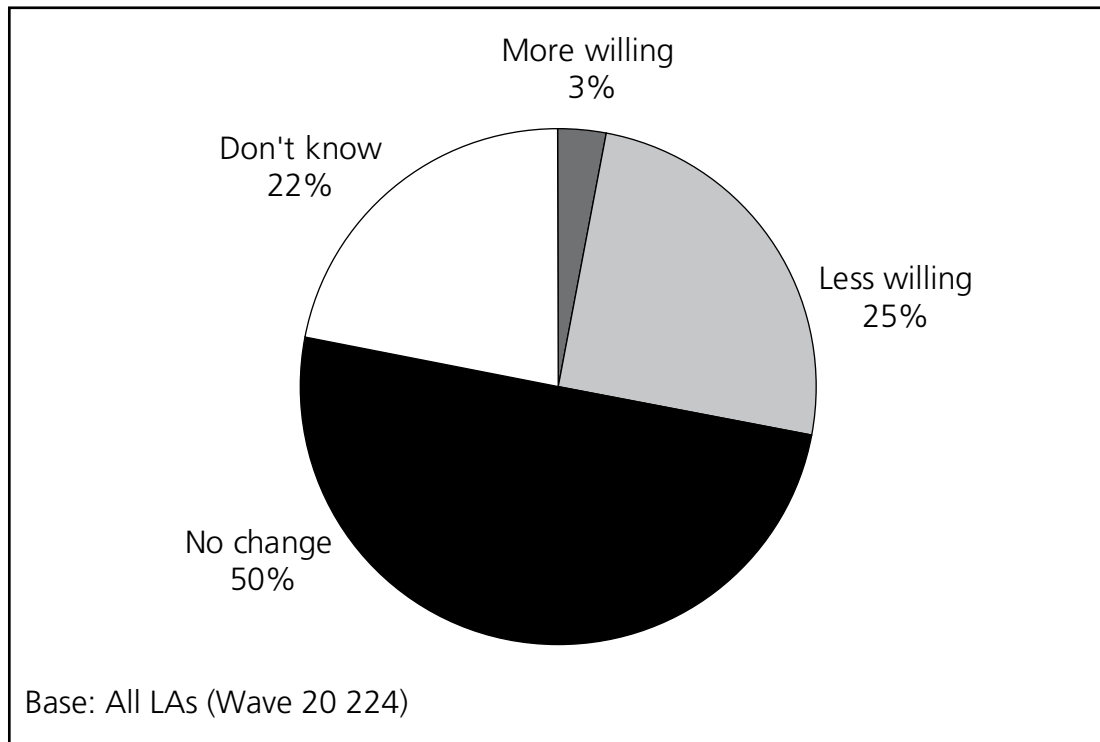
Figure 4.2 Do you think that customers claiming LHA move house more frequently, less frequently or about the same under LHA than under the pre-LHA system?



At Wave 20 one in nine (11 per cent) LAs thought that customers claiming LHA moved house more frequently. Just three per cent thought that these customers moved less frequently, and approximately three quarters (77 per cent) thought the amount of times they moved was about the same.

Welsh authorities (27 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (20 per cent) were more likely to have said that they thought that customers claiming LHA moved house more frequently than for instance, English Unitary authorities were, of whom just three per cent expressed this opinion.

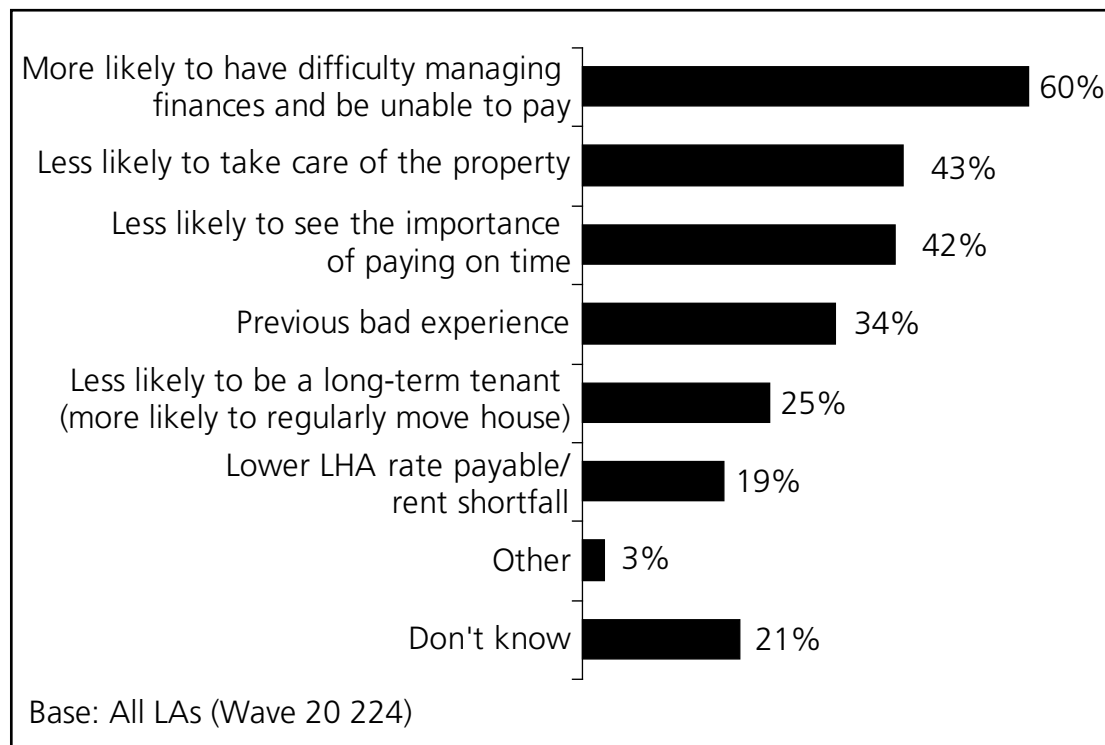
Figure 4.3 Since the introduction of LHA in April 2008, have private sector landlords been more or less willing to let to single people aged under 25 (compared with under the pre-LHA HB scheme for private sector tenants)?



Since the introduction of LHA, three per cent of LAs thought that private sector landlords had been more willing to let to single people aged 25 and under, 25 per cent thought that they had been less willing and 50 per cent thought that there had been no change in their attitude on this matter.

Welsh authorities (45 per cent), English Unitary authorities (31 per cent), English Metropolitan authorities (24 per cent), and English Districts (26 per cent) were more likely to have said they thought that private sector landlords were less willing to let to single people under the age of 25 than were Scottish authorities (five per cent).

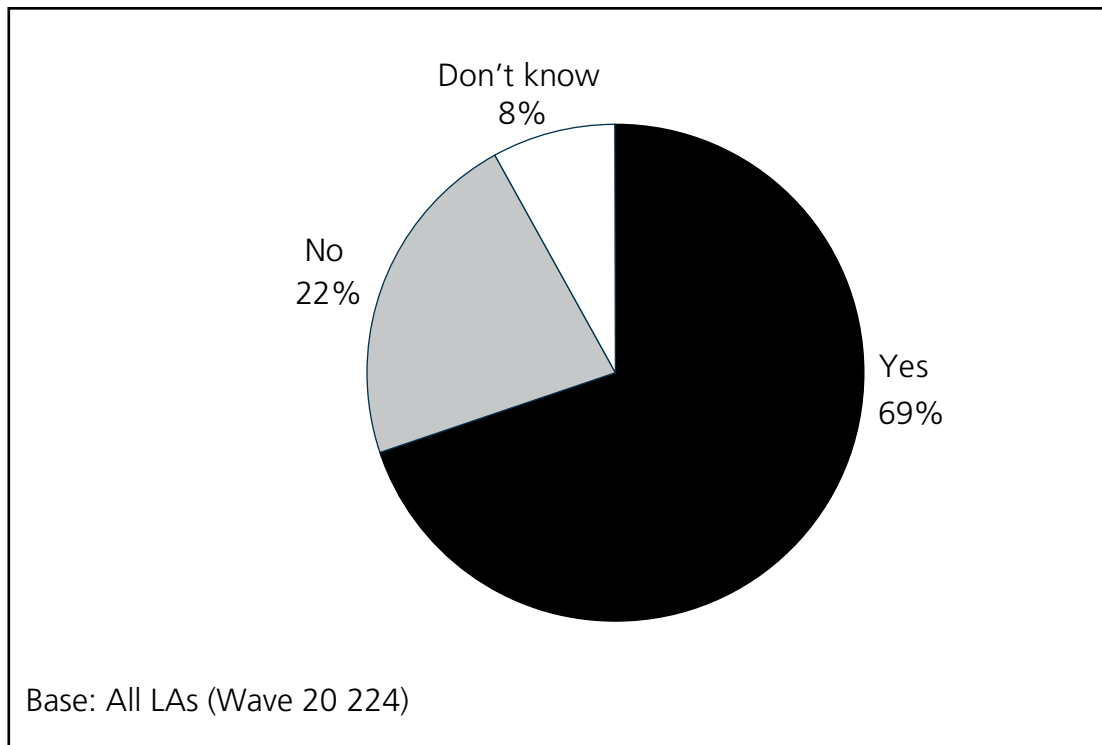
Figure 4.4 Why do you feel that some landlords do not want to let to single people under 25?



When LAs were asked about the reasons why landlords may not have wanted to let property to single people under 25, three in five LAs (60 per cent) said it was because they were more likely to have difficulty managing finances and be unable to pay. 43 per cent said they were less likely to take care of the property and a similar amount (42 per cent) said paying on time would be an issue.

It is interesting to note that LHA rate payable/rent shortfall as a reason why some landlords may not have wanted to let to single people under 25 was more likely to be mentioned by authorities with a high caseload (30 per cent) than those with a low or medium caseload (13 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). It is also worth noting that as a general pattern, English Metropolitan authorities were generally more likely than many of their counterparts to cite the full range of reasons. For instance four in five (80 per cent) English Metropolitan authorities mentioned that single people may have more difficulty managing finances and be unable to pay compared with less than half of London Boroughs (43 per cent).

Figure 4.5 Again, thinking generally, do you feel that landlords in your area are raising their rents to LHA levels?



Since the introduction of LHA, 69 per cent of LAs felt that landlords had raised their rents to LHA levels. This proportion increased significantly amongst English Metropolitan authorities and London Boroughs where 96 per cent and 90 per cent said that they felt landlords had raised their rents to LHA levels contrasting, for example, with English Districts (57 per cent).

LAs with high caseloads (83 per cent) were more likely to have said that they felt that landlords had raised their rents to LHA levels than were LAs with low or medium caseloads (48 per cent and 67 per cent respectively).

5 Local Housing Allowance and fraud and error

5.1 Introduction and summary

Following on from a series of questions asked at Waves 16 and 18, local authorities were asked a number of questions about the effect that Local Housing Allowance (LHA) has had on fraud and error.

The key findings based on all local authorities (LAs) answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings which include charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences:

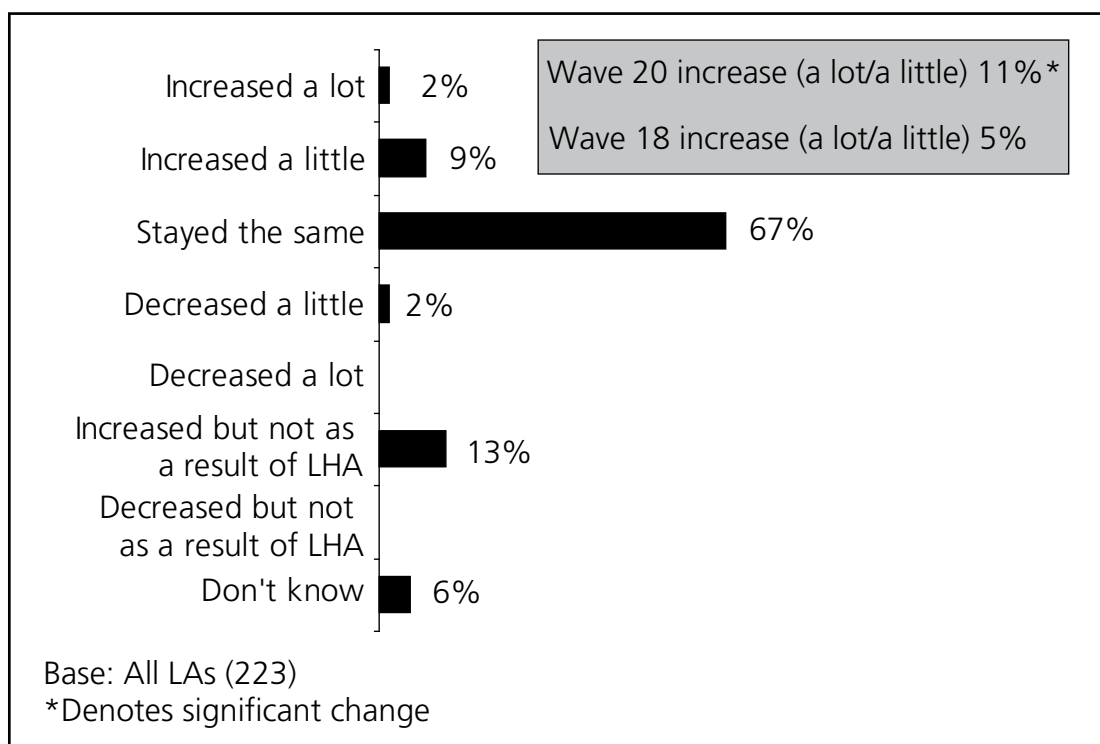
- Eleven per cent of LAs said that fraud and error had increased as a consequence of LHA. This is significantly higher than the percentage saying this at Wave 18, nine months after LHA was introduced (five per cent).
- A quarter of LAs said overpayments had increased as a result of LHA (26 per cent). However, half (51 per cent) said that they had stayed the same.
- Among LAs that thought fraud and error had increased, three in five (61 per cent) said that 'Changes in circumstance not being declared' had been one of the main areas where overpayments had increased. At Wave 16, just 12 per cent of those expecting LHA to pose different challenges to Housing Benefit (HB) claims in terms of minimising fraud and error anticipated that 'Changes in circumstance not being declared' would be a problem, suggesting that this may be more of an issue than previously thought. Over a third (34 per cent) said that they have had 'Difficulty proving residency/claimants moving out' and 24 per cent mentioned the 'Higher level of benefit paid'. A further 17 per cent mentioned the 'False declaration of household composition to increase LHA rate'. This was anticipated by half (50 per cent) of those expecting LHA to pose different challenges back at Wave 16 which may suggest that 'False declaration of household composition' has been less of a problem than was anticipated in 2008.

- Three-quarters of LAs said that the level of underpayment had stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of the LHA scheme. Just three per cent said that there has been a small increase as a result of LHA.
- More than seven in ten LAs said that there had been no change in the likelihood of both tenants and landlords reporting change of circumstances. However, a significantly higher percentage of LAs said that landlords were less likely to report change of circumstances under LHA than tenants – 18 per cent of LAs said landlords were less likely compared with 9 per cent that said this about tenants.
- LAs most often recovered overpayments from claimants by ‘Deduction from ongoing benefits’ (85 per cent) which is virtually the same percentage of LAs that most often recovered overpayments from existing claimants at Wave 18. The second most often used method of recovering overpayments was by ‘Invoicing the claimant’ (57 per cent). Significantly fewer LAs gave this as their second most often used method for recovering overpayments from existing claimants at Wave 18 (45 per cent).

5.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 5.1 Do you think the level of fraud and error has increased, decreased or stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of the LHA scheme (compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants)?



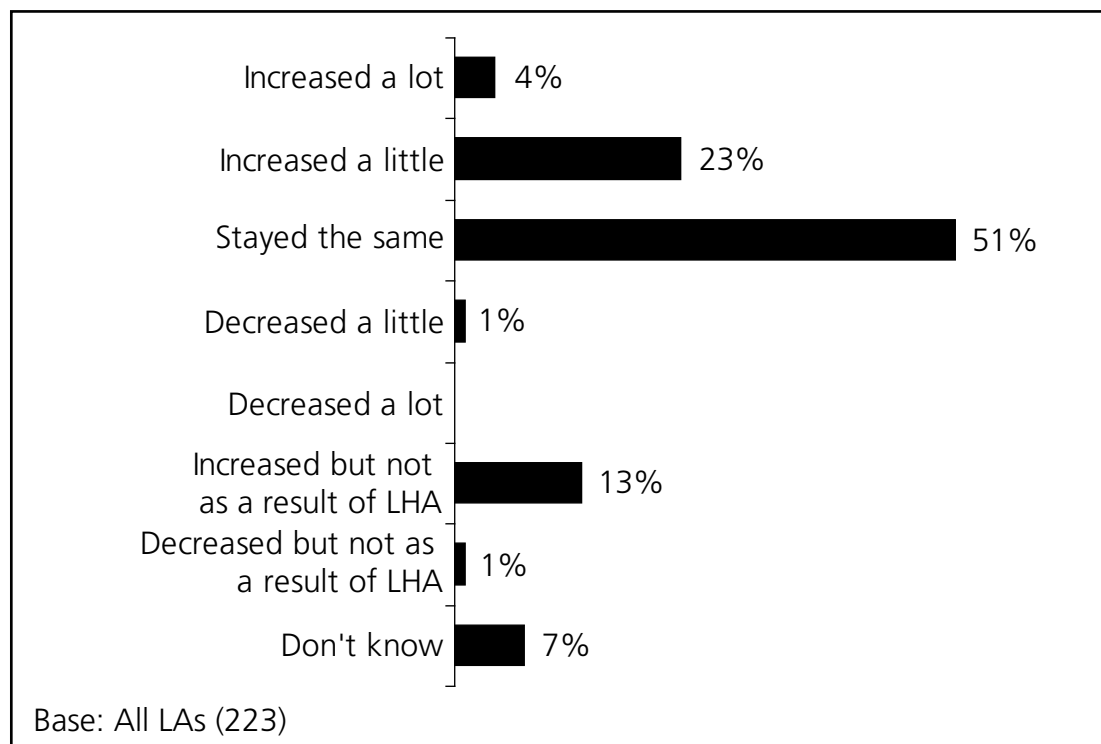
The first question in this section asked whether or not LAs had seen a change in the level of fraud and error since LHA had been introduced. When this question was asked at Wave 18 in early 2009 (9 months after the introduction of LHA), 11 LAs (five per cent) said fraud and error had increased. This has, however, increased significantly at Wave 20 to 25 LAs (11 per cent).

Two thirds of LAs at Wave 20 (67 per cent) said that the level of fraud and error had stayed the same and, interestingly, 13 per cent said that fraud and error had increased but not as a result of LHA. It is worth noting that a significantly higher percentage of LAs at Wave 18 (82 per cent) said that fraud and error had stayed the same.

Just two per cent said that there had been a decrease in fraud and error which is the same percentage as gave this answer at Wave 18.

The only significant difference by sub-group was for contracted out LAs; around a quarter of contracted out LAs (26 per cent) said that fraud and error had increased as a result of LHA compared with just ten per cent of LAs that were not contracted out.

Figure 5.2 Do you think the level of overpayment has increased, decreased or stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of the LHA scheme (compared to the pre-LHA HB scheme for private sector tenants)?

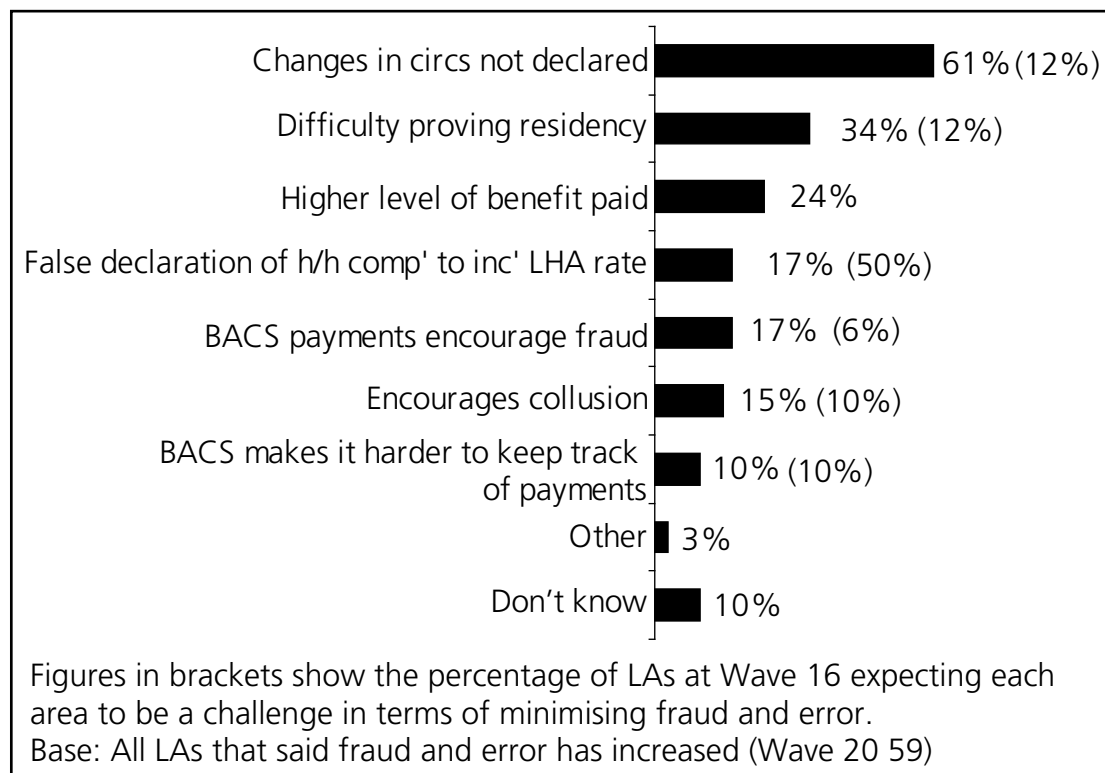


Moving on now to overpayments and whether they have increased, decreased or stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of LHA. Around a quarter of LAs (26 per cent) said that there had been an increase in overpayments as a consequence of LHA. However, half (51 per cent) said that they had stayed the same. Just one per cent of LAs said that there had been a decrease.

As for fraud and error, 13 per cent of LAs said that overpayments have increased but not as a result of LHA.

There are a couple of differences in the findings by LA Type. English Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs were significantly more likely than English Unitary authorities and English Districts to have said that there had been an increase in overpayments as a consequence of the introduction of LHA (40 per cent, 43 per cent, 18 per cent and 21 per cent respectively).

Figure 5.3 What are the two main areas in which overpayments have increased under the LHA compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants?



When LAs saying that fraud and error had increased were asked what were the two main areas in which overpayments had increased under the LHA compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants, three in five (61 per cent) said 'Changes in circumstance not being declared'. Interestingly, this was anticipated by just 12 per cent of those expecting LHA to pose different challenges to HB claims in terms of minimising fraud and error back at Wave 16, which may suggest that 'Changes in circumstances not being declared' has been more of a problem than anticipated.

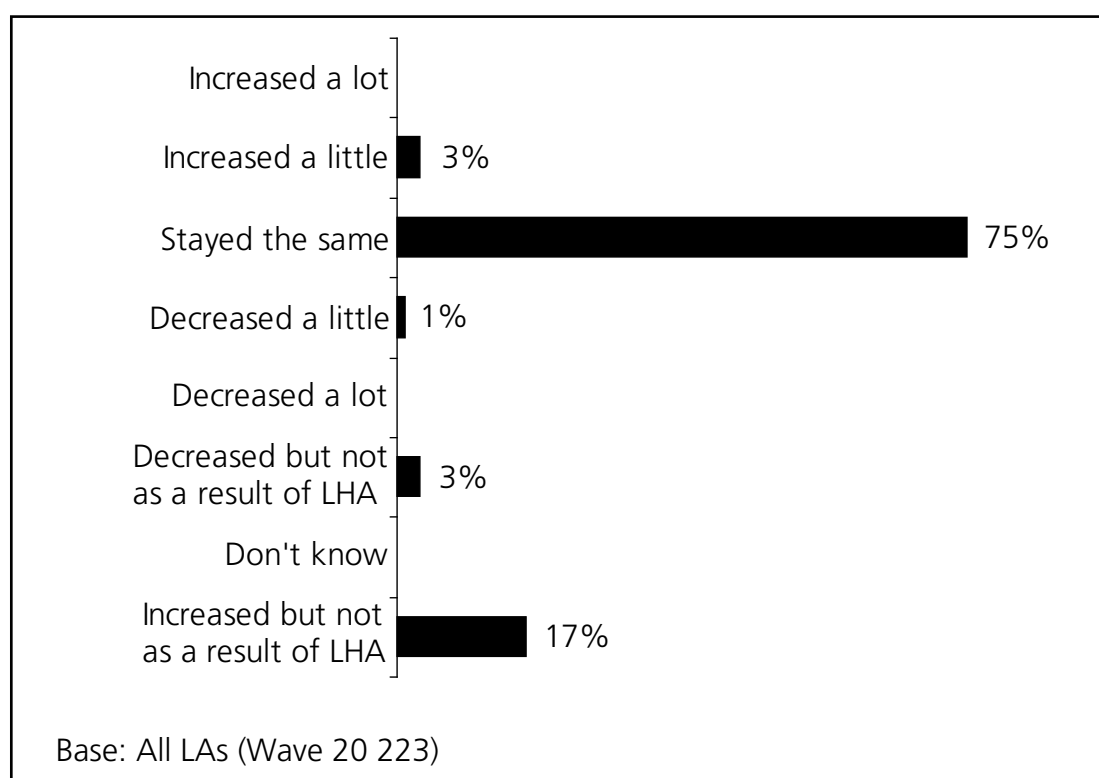
Over a third (34 per cent) said that they have had 'Difficulty proving residency/claimants moving out'. This was anticipated by 12 per cent of those expecting LHA to pose different challenges to HB claims in terms of minimising fraud and error back at Wave 16.

A quarter of LAs (24 per cent) mentioned the 'Higher level of benefit paid' and 17 per cent cited the 'False declaration of household composition to increase LHA rate'. This was anticipated by half (50 per cent) of those expecting LHA to pose different challenges back at Wave 16 which may suggest that 'False declaration of household composition' has been less of a problem than was anticipated in 2008.

A further 17 per cent mentioned 'BACS payments encouraging fraud/making fraud easier'. This was anticipated by just six per cent of those expecting LHA to pose different challenges back at Wave 16. Fifteen per cent of LAs said that 'LHA encourages collusion between landlords and tenants' and one in ten (ten per cent) said 'BACS makes it harder to keep track of payments'.

Looking at the findings in terms of sub-group differences, medium and high caseload authorities were significantly more likely than low caseload authorities to have said that they had 'Difficulty proving residency/claimants moving out but still receiving payments' (29 per cent, 48 per cent and 0 per cent respectively). Low caseload authorities were also significantly more likely than high caseload authorities to have said that 'BACS payments makes it harder to keep track of payments' (22 per cent versus three per cent).

Figure 5.4 Do you think the level of underpayment due to fraud and error has increased, decreased or stayed the same since the introduction of the LHA scheme (compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants)?

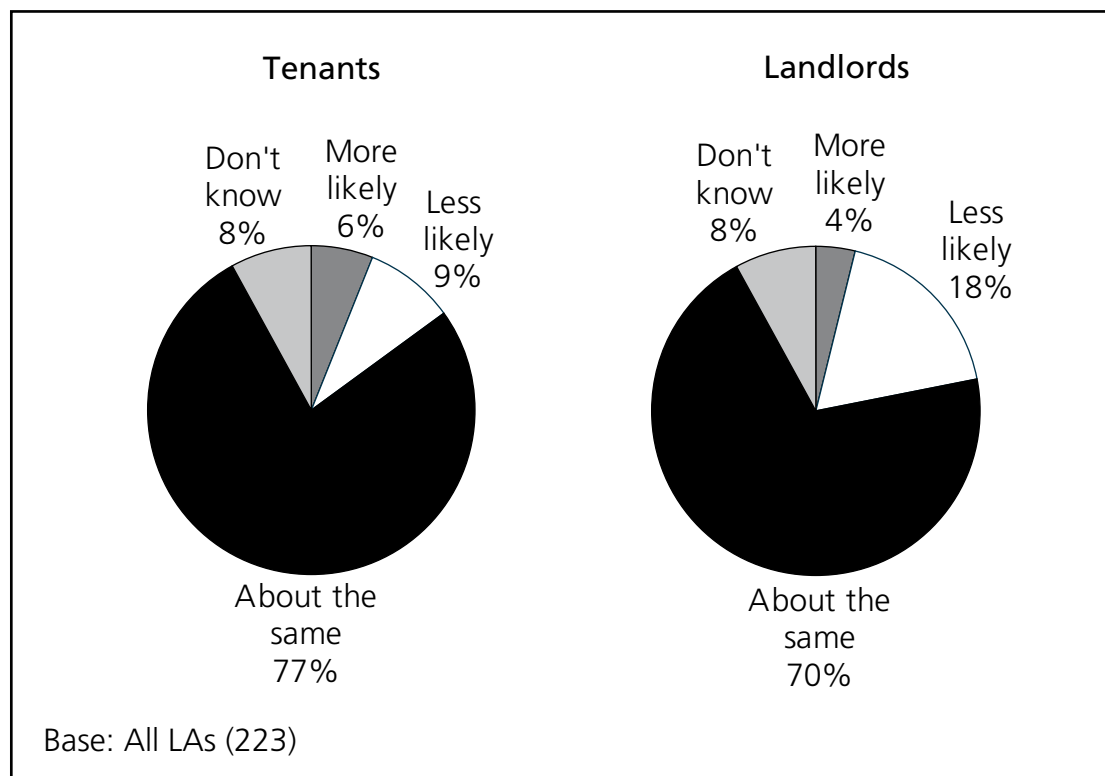


Three-quarters of LAs said that the level of underpayment had stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of the LHA scheme.

Just three per cent said that there has been a small increase and a further three per cent said that there has been an increase but not as a result of LHA. Just one per cent thought that there had been a decrease in the level of underpayment.

There were no significant differences by any sub-groups.

Figure 5.5 Do you think tenants and landlords are more or less likely to report change of circumstances under LHA than under the previous housing benefit scheme for Private Rented Sector (PRS) or is it about the same?



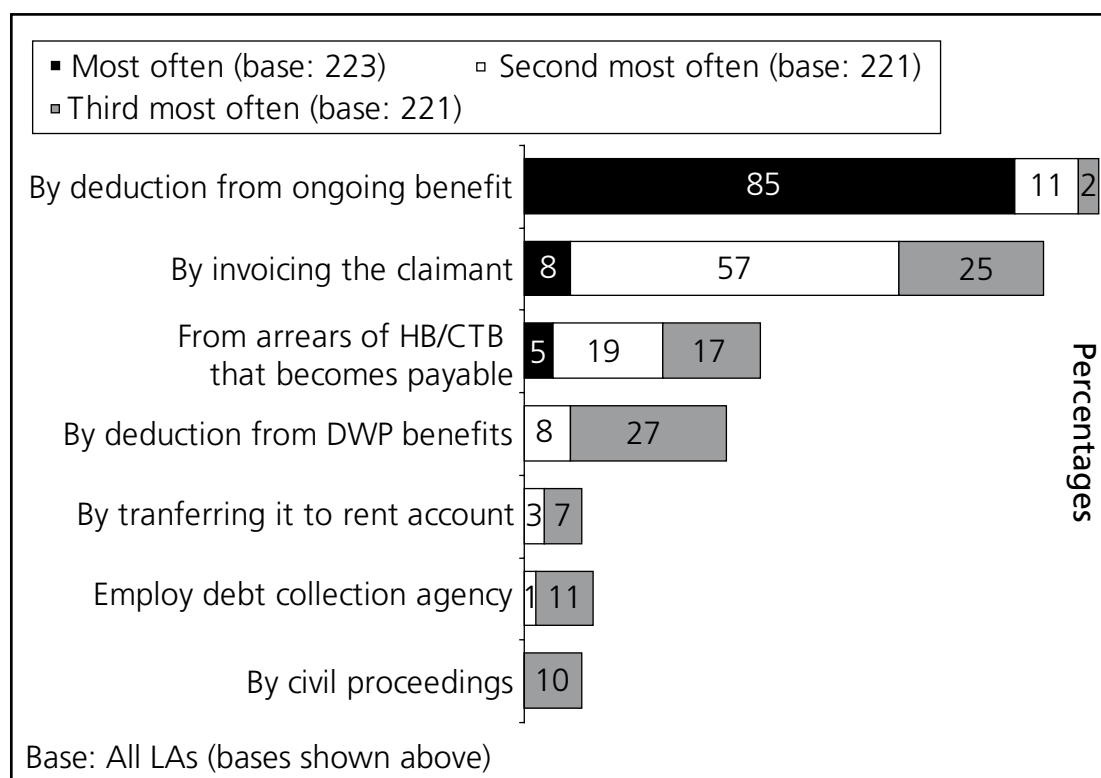
These charts show the likelihood of tenants and landlords reporting a change of circumstances under LHA compared with the previous benefit scheme for the PRS.

The majority of LAs said that there had been no change in the likelihood of both tenants and landlords reporting change of circumstances (77 per cent said this about tenants and 70 per cent about landlords).

However, a significantly higher percentage of LAs said that landlords were less likely to report changes of circumstances under LHA than tenants – 18 per cent of LAs said landlords were less likely compared with nine per cent that said this about tenants.

A similar percentage said that both tenants and landlords were more likely to report changes of circumstances under LHA (six per cent tenants and four per cent landlords).

Figure 5.6 Please tick the one that your LA does most often to recover overpayments from claimants, then tick the one that your LA does second and third most often



This question about recovering overpayments was also asked at Wave 18, although it was asked separately for existing and former claimants. For the purposes of this report we discuss below how the Wave 20 findings compare with existing clients at Wave 18.

At Wave 20 LAs most often recovered overpayments from claimants by 'Deduction from ongoing benefits' (85 per cent). It is interesting to note that at Wave 18, virtually the same percentage of LAs (83 per cent), said that they most often recovered overpayments from existing claimants by deduction from ongoing benefits.

At Wave 20 the second most often used method of recovering overpayments was by 'Invoicing the claimant' (57 per cent). Significantly fewer LAs gave this as their second most used method for recovering overpayments from existing claimants at Wave 18 (45 per cent). In addition, at Wave 20, 19 per cent of LAs said that their second most used method was 'From arrears of HB/CTB that become payable', although a greater percentage mentioned this at Wave 18 (30 per cent).

As the chart above shows, fewer recovered overpayments 'By deduction from DWP benefits', 'By transferring it to rent account', 'Employing a debt collection agency' and 'By civil proceedings'.

At Wave 20 there are few differences by sub-group, however, it is worth mentioning that Welsh and Scottish LAs were particularly likely to have said that their second most used method of recovering overpayments was 'By deduction from DWP benefits' (36 per cent and 25 per cent respectively). Low caseload authorities (in particular English Unitary authorities and English Districts) were significantly more likely than medium and high caseload authorities to say that their second most used method of recovering overpayments was 'By invoicing the claimant for the amount outstanding' (75 per cent, 54 per cent and 51 per cent respectively).

6 Rent levels and the general state of repair in the Private Rented Sector

6.1 Introduction and summary

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) were interested in finding out more about rent levels and the general state of repair in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and how this has changed, if at all, since Local Housing Allowance (LHA). These questions were added to a questionnaire about Hygiene Rating Schemes which was commissioned by the Food Standards Agency as part of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus and sent direct to Environmental Health Officers.

Fieldwork took place at the same time as the main LA Omnibus Survey of Benefit Officers and questionnaires were returned by a total of 236 Environmental Health Officers across England, Scotland and Wales.

Environmental Health Officers were asked to pass the questions on rent levels to the Residential or Private Rented Sector Environmental Health Officers. It would seem, however, from the high level of 'don't know' answers to the rent level questions (around a half for many questions) that some Environmental Health Officers either did not pass the questions on or simply were unable to answer them.

The key findings are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings which include charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- Almost half of local authorities were unable to provide a figure for the percentage of PRS homes let to Housing Benefit (HB)/LHA tenants which were in an excellent, good, adequate or poor state of repair. Few LAs described their PRS homes as in excellent condition (6 per cent said 'none', 41 per cent said between one and 20 per cent and five per cent said between 21 per cent and 40 per cent). Higher proportions described them as in a good or adequate state of repair but still over a third (35 per cent) said between one and twenty per cent were in a poor state of repair, 14 per cent said between 21 per cent and 40 per cent, three per cent said between 41 per cent and 60 per cent and one per cent said between 61 per cent and 80 per cent.
- When LAs were asked whether or not the state of repair was reflected in the rent level charged, again more than half of authorities were unable to give an answer. However, 41 per cent of LAs said that it was reflected in the rent charged.
- More than half of the LAs questioned were unable to say whether or not they had noticed landlords increasing rents to LHA levels. However, 43 per cent said that they had noticed this happening.
- Just 28 per cent did not know whether or not landlords increased rent to LHA levels without carrying out the appropriate repairs and maintenance. Two in three (69 per cent) said that landlords had increased rent without carrying out repairs.
- Six out of ten authorities (61 per cent) did not know whether or not landlords were carrying out more or less repairs and renovations to improve property standards since the introduction of LHA. However, a third (33 per cent) thought that they were doing about the same, five per cent said less and one per cent said more.

6.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Table 6.1 What percentage of homes let to HB/LHA tenants in the PRS in your LA would you say are in an excellent state of repair, a good state of repair, an adequate state of repair and a poor state of repair?

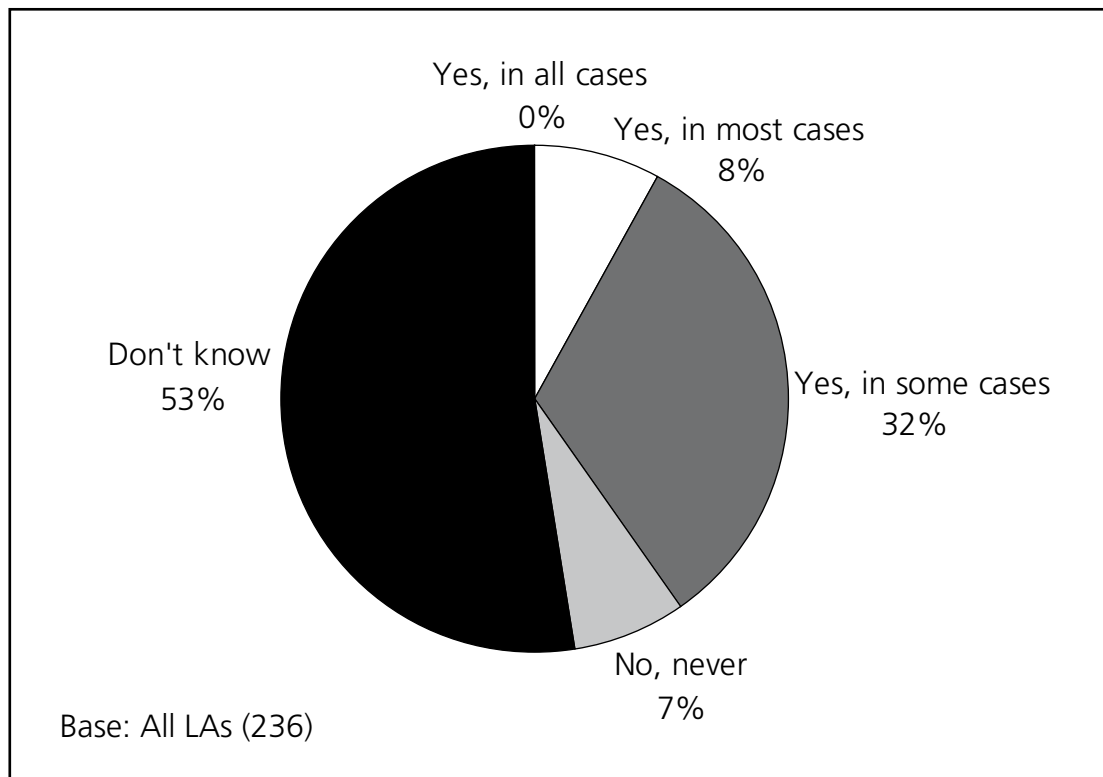
	Excellent %	Good %	Adequate %	Poor %
Zero	6	1	2	–
1-20	41	18	10	35
21-40	5	22	24	14
41-60	–	8	13	3
61-80	–	3	3	1
81- 100	–	1	–	–
Don't know	48	47	47	47

Base: All LAs (236)

Almost half of LAs were unable to provide a figure for the percentage of PRS homes let to HB/LHA tenants which were in an excellent, good, adequate or poor state of repair.

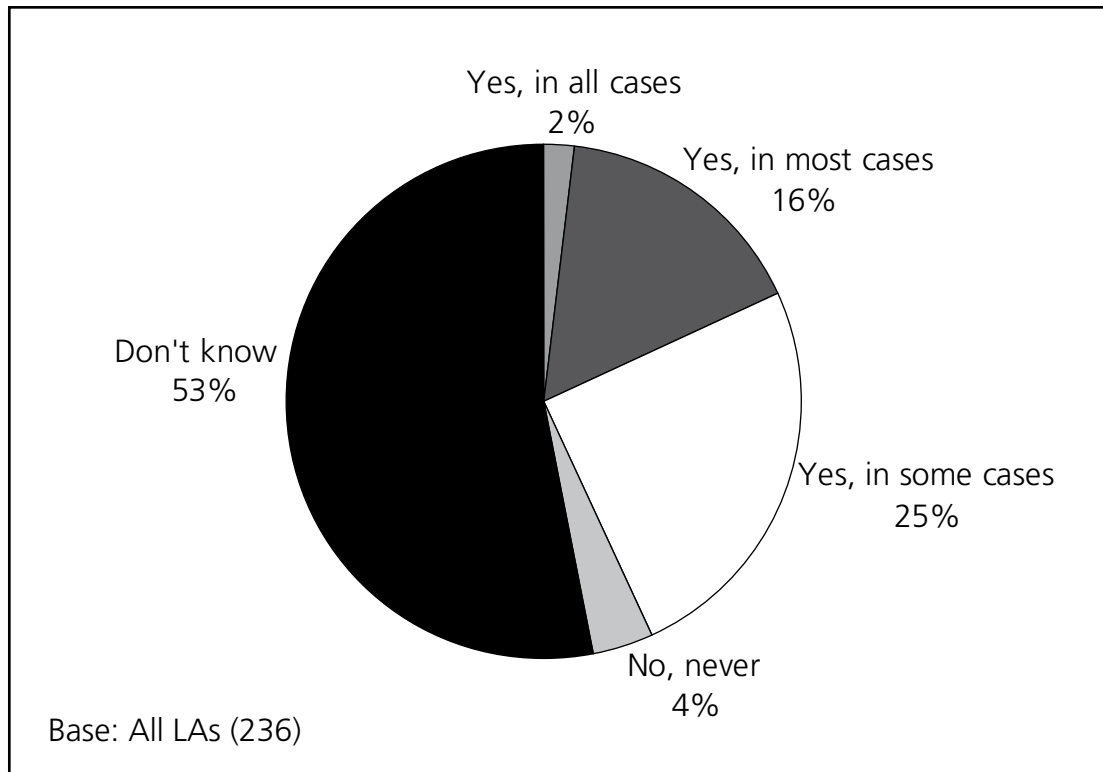
Table 6.1 shows that just 6 per cent of LAs said that none of their PRS homes were in an excellent condition. On the other hand, 41 per cent said that between one and 20 per cent of these properties were in an excellent condition and five per cent said between 21 per cent and 40 per cent.

Higher proportions of LAs described their PRS homes as in a good or adequate state of repair but still over a third (35 per cent) said between one and 20 per cent were in a poor state of repair, 14 per cent said between 21 per cent and 40 per cent, three per cent said between 41 per cent and 60 per cent and one per cent said between 61 per cent and 80 per cent.

Figure 6.1 Is the state of repair reflected in the rent level charged?

Once again, when LAs were asked whether or not the state of repair was reflected in the rent level charged, more than half of authorities were unable to give an answer. However, overall 41 per cent of LAs said that it was reflected in the rent charged, although most of these said 'Yes, in some cases' (32 per cent) rather than 'Yes, in most cases' (8 per cent).

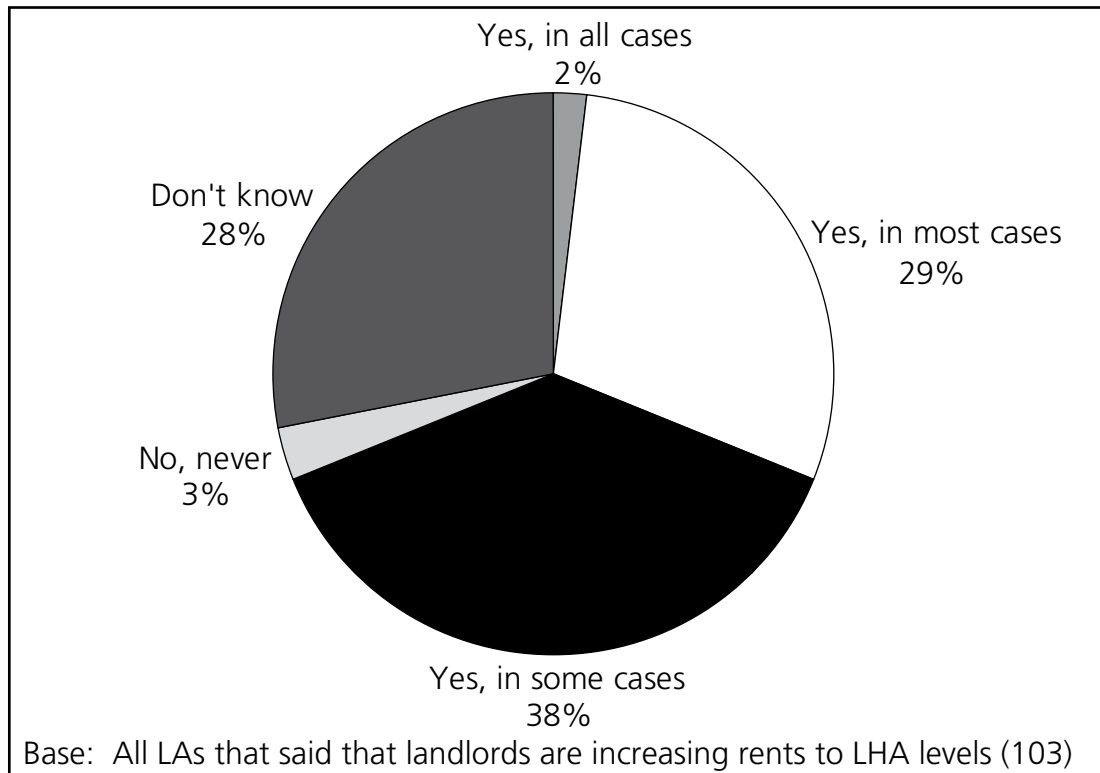
Figure 6.2 Have you noticed landlords increasing rents to LHA levels?



More than half of the LAs questioned were unable to say whether or not they had noticed landlords increasing rents to LHA levels. However, 43 per cent said that they had noticed this happening – 25 per cent in some cases, 16 per cent in most cases and two per cent in all cases.

High caseload authorities were more likely to have said that they have noticed landlords increasing their rent to LHA levels than low and medium caseload authorities (54 per cent, 34 per cent and 39 per cent respectively).

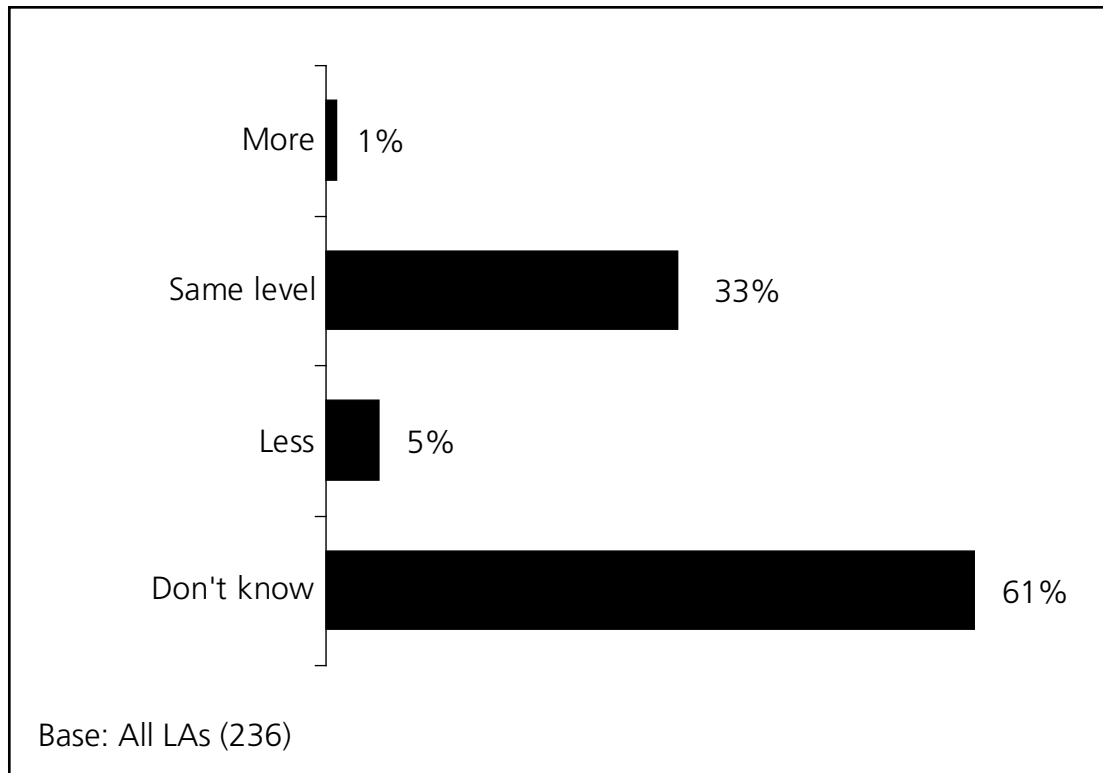
Figure 6.3 Do you feel that landlords are increasing rent to LHA levels without carrying out appropriate repairs and maintenance, or not?



Local authorities were considerably more able to answer the question on whether or not they felt that landlords increased rent to LHA levels without carrying out the appropriate repairs and maintenance. Just 28 per cent did not know, while more than two in three (69 per cent) said that landlords had increased rent without carrying out repairs – 38 per cent in some cases, 29 per cent in most cases and two per cent in all cases.

It is worth pointing out that 100 per cent of English Metropolitan Districts said that they felt that landlords had increased rent to LHA levels without carrying out appropriate repairs and maintenance.

Figure 6.4 In your experience, are landlords carrying out more or less repairs and renovations to improve property standards since the introduction of LHA in April 2008 when compared with the pre-LHA period?



Six out of ten authorities (61 per cent) did not know whether or not landlords were carrying out more or less repairs and renovations to improve property standards since the introduction of LHA. However, a third (33 per cent) thought that they are doing about the same amount of repairs and renovation while five per cent said less and one per cent said more. The percentage that said less repairs and renovations were being carried out rises to 14 per cent in London Boroughs.

Appendix

The survey

Methodology

At Wave 9 of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey respondents were given a choice of completing the questionnaire on the telephone, as a self-completion questionnaire on paper or as a self-completion questionnaire on the Internet. This 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 20 was 60 per cent (see below for more detail).

Sample

Using the updated Contacts database from Wave 19, the LA manager with responsibility for the most areas (out of Rent Rebate, Rent Allowance, Council Tax Benefit, Overpayment Recovery and Benefit Fraud) was identified. This manager then became our contact for Wave 20 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 Department for Work and Pensions (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 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.

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 20 questionnaire was solely about Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and contained a number of questions which were asked previously at Wave 16 or 18. It covered five areas of LHA: Administration, Financial Management, Homelessness, Landlords and Fraud and Error. LAs were asked to pass the section on Homelessness to the Housing Manager, Head of Housing or, if the LA's stock has been transferred, Social or Community Services.

Once the questionnaire had been through several drafts, eight LA 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 LA managers and on the telephone with a further five. 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 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 (23-27 November 2009). The questionnaire was tested on a total of 11 LA 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 mrlInterview, 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 26 February 2010. 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 (HB) 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 18 January 2010 and was supposed to finish on 26 February 2010, although it was held open for two weeks longer to try and increase the response rate. By the end of fieldwork we had achieved interviews with a total of 227 local authority managers, representing a response rate of 60 per cent. Within this achieved sample of 227 there were 11 LAs that did not complete

every section of the questionnaire. These 227 LAs break down as 148 web-based questionnaires, 63 paper questionnaires and 16 telephone interviews (including the 11 pilot telephone interviews). The percentage of authorities completing the questionnaire has gone up from 57 per cent at Wave 19 to 60 per cent at Wave 20.

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 Table A.1:

Table A.1 Data analysis variables

Local authority type	Welsh, Scottish, English Unitary, English Metropolitan, English District, London Borough
Contracting-out status	Contracted out, not contracted out
Housing/Council Tax Benefit 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 HB managers has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. Where bases are low, care should be taken when interpreting the data
- where percentages do not 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 HB managers was interviewed. We cannot therefore be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the 'true' values). We can however, predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with

which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95 per cent - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

However, given that this sample comprises 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. Table A.2 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 20 sampling error

	Sample size	Universe	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
All local authorities	227	380	2.5	3.8	4.1
Local authority type:					
Welsh	11	22	12.5	19.1	20.9
Scottish	20	32	8.1	12.3	13.4
English Unitary	30	57	7.4	11.3	12.3
English Metropolitan	25	36	6.5	9.9	10.8
English District	119	200	3.4	5.2	5.7
London Borough	22	33	7.2	11.1	12.1

Response rates

As mentioned earlier a total of 227 LAs participated in Wave 20 of the survey, which represents a response rate of 60 per cent. As Table A.3 shows, response rate varies by LA type, from a high of 69 per cent of English Metropolitan districts to just 50 per cent of Welsh and 53 per cent of English Unitary authorities.

Table A.3 Response rates by local authority type for Benefit Officers

	Total	London	Scotland	Wales	English District	English Unitary	English Metropolitan District
Telephone: Mainstage completes	5				4	1	
Telephone: Pilot completes	11	1	1		7	1	1
Web: completes	138	13	13	7	63	22	20
Partial web completes (we are phoning them to ask them to complete)	10	1	1		3	5	
Paper: completes	63	7	5	4	42	1	4
Completes – total	227	22	20	11	119	30	25
Soft call back	39	3	3	6	21	2	4
Will complete paper questionnaire	6				3	3	
Will complete on web	26	3	3	2	10	7	1
Refusal (insufficient time/resources)	34	3	3	1	21	4	2
Refusal (other/no reason provided)	9				6	2	1
No answer/engaged/voicemail	37	2	3	2	18	9	3
No eligible respondent	2				2		
Total	380	33	32	22	200	57	36
Response rate	60%	67%	63%	50%	60%	53%	69%

Sample profile

Table A.4 Sample profile

	Number	%
Total	227	100
Local authority type:		
Welsh	11	5
Scottish	20	9
English Unitary	30	13
English Metropolitan	25	11
English District	119	52
London Borough	22	10
Contracting out status (based on 222 only as 5 LAs did not answer this question):		
Contracted out	23	10
Not contracted out	199	90
HB/CTB caseload:		
Low	53	23
Medium	82	36
High	92	41
Decentralisation status (based on 223 only as 4 LAs did not answer this section):		
Centralised	213	96
Decentralised	10	4
Region		
Scotland	20	9
North East	5	2
Yorkshire and Humberside	15	7
North West	24	11
East Midlands	25	11
West Midlands	20	9
East	26	11
South East	35	15
South West	24	11
London	22	10
Wales	11	5

Advance letter

Housing and Fraud Research
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London
SW1H 9NA
Tel: 020 7449 5729

<<ID>>
«REName»
«REJob»
«LA_Name2»
«REAdd1»
«REAdd2»
«REAdd3»
«REAdd4»
«REAdd5»
«REPCD»

4 January 2010

Dear «REName»,

LA Omnibus Survey Wave 20 on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA)

I am writing to ask for your help with Wave 20 of the LA Omnibus Survey. As you probably know, the Survey is undertaken every six months and covers a wide range of issues relating to Housing and Council Tax Benefit administration, fraud and policy. 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 20 Survey is all about various aspects of LHA:

- Administration
- Financial Management
- Homelessness
- Landlords
- Fraud and Error.

Each of the above sections should be easily answered by your department with the exception of Homelessness (Section C) which would be best answered by either the Housing Manager or Head of Housing (if your LA has its own housing stock) or Social or Community Services (if your stock has been transferred). We would be very grateful if you could pass this section on to whoever you think is the most appropriate person and ask them to complete it.

If you choose to fill-in the *internet version of the questionnaire*, you may access it anytime from 18 January 2010. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: <http://www.surveys.com/lao20>

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 26 February 2010.

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. There are also some sections of the questionnaire that may benefit from prior consideration with other colleagues or contractors. You will receive a call from a GfK NOP interviewer some time between 18 January and 26 February 2010 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 26 February 2010 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.

If you are interested in looking at the findings for Wave 19 of the LA Omnibus Survey you will be able to access the summary through the DWP website from the end of January:

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

We hope you find the summary report interesting and informative.

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

Questionnaire

USER ID: label

JN 452207

Local Authority Omnibus Wave 20

Thank you for taking part in Wave 20 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 sections on to them, or send them a web link as soon as possible.

PLEASE NOTE THAT YOU MAY NEED TO ASK THE HOUSING MANAGER OR HEAD OF HOUSING (IF YOUR LA HAS ITS OWN HOUSING STOCK) OR SOCIAL OR COMMUNITY SERVICES (IF YOUR STOCK HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED) TO FILL IN SECTION C WHICH IS ABOUT HOMELESSNESS.

Self-completion questionnaire on the Internet: If you choose to fill in the questionnaire on the internet, you may access it anytime from 18 January to 26 February 2010. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: <http://www.surveys.com/lao20> 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 18 January and 26 February 2010 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 26 February 2010 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. A summary of the results will be sent to you in due course.

Section A: LHA Administration

General Administration

As you are aware, the LHA is only initially being applied to new claims. This means that the LHA operates alongside the previous HB schemes. In this section, we would like to ask about how your LA is finding the operation of LHA when compared with the previous HB scheme for private sector tenants.

ALL ANSWER

A1 Overall, does your LA find that it requires more, less or about the same staff time to administer LHA than the old HB scheme for Private Rented Sector (PRS) tenants?

- More Answer A2
- Less Go to A3
- About the same Go to A3
- Don't know Go to A3

ANSWER IF 'MORE' AT A1, OTHERS GO TO A3

A2 In what particular areas do you think it requires more staff time to operate LHA than the old HB scheme for PRS tenants. TICK THE TWO MOST FREQUENT CATEGORIES FROM THE LIST BELOW

- Helping tenants to open bank account
- Split payments to tenants and landlords
- Operation of safeguards policy
- Managing rent arrears
- Managing shortfalls between LHA and contractual rent
- Dealing with landlords complaints or queries
- Operating across more than one BRMA area
- Other (please write in)

.....
 Don't know

ALL ANSWER

A3 Now that LHA has been in operation for some time, taking into account all aspects of LHA, would you say that in the last year the administration of LHA has got more or less efficient or has it stayed about the same? TICK ONE BOX BELOW

- A lot more efficient
 A little more efficient
 About the same
 A little less efficient
 A lot less efficient
 Don't know

A4 What percentage of claimants do you estimate have experienced problems with their LHA payments? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX BELOW

- None
 Less than 10%
 10-24%
 25-49%
 50-74%
 75-100%
 Don't know

A5 What are the most common problems with LHA claims and payments between the LA and the claimant? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Delay in processing application for HB/LHA / Still Waiting
 Late payment of HB/LHA / Still waiting
 Payment stopped because of HB/LHA review
 Payment stopped because of change to respondent's status
 Amount of HB/LHA was less than expected/didn't cover full amount of rent
 HB didn't cover full amount of rent due to rent restriction
 Application turned down
 Going to wrong payee
 Other problem (please specify)

.....
 Don't know

A6 Does your LA have one Private Rented Sector team (incorporating LHA) or does your LA/ will your LA have an independent LHA team? TICK ONE ONLY

- One private rented sector team
 Already have an independent LHA team
 Planning on having an independent LHA team
 Too early to say
 Don't know

Queries (tenant and landlord)

ALL ANSWER

A7 Have queries from tenants for advice and information increased, decreased or stayed the same with the introduction of LHA? TICK ONE ONLY

- Increased a lot
- Increased a little
- Stayed the same
- Decreased a little
- Decreased a lot
- Increased but **not** as a result of LHA
- Decreased but **not** as a result of LHA
- Don't know

A8 What are the two areas that TENANTS query most often in relation to the LHA? PLEASE TICK THE AREA THAT TENANTS QUERY MOST OFTEN IN THE FIRST COLUMN BELOW AND THE AREA THEY QUERY SECOND MOST OFTEN IN THE SECOND COLUMN.

	Most often	Second most often
Breaking their existing HB claim in order to move to LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Landlords raising their rents to align with LHA rates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Landlords charging LHA rates based on their family composition but providing a smaller property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Availability of property	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shortfalls between rent and LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Whether LHA can be paid direct to landlords instead of themselves	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A9 What are the two areas that LANDLORDS query most often in relation to the LHA? PLEASE TICK THE AREA THAT LANDLORDS QUERY MOST OFTEN IN THE FIRST COLUMN BELOW AND THE AREA THEY QUERY SECOND MOST OFTEN IN THE SECOND COLUMN.

	First choice	Second Choice
Inconvenience of having rent paid directly to tenants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time to process applications and award LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low level of LHA when compared to market rents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rent arrears or missed payments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in cash payments from tenants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information about LHA rates	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A10 Are determinations about whether safeguards should be applied to an LHA case referred to a specific member of staff who has expertise in this area or are they dealt with as part of the standard functions of the teams processing housing benefit? TICK ONE ONLY

Specific member of staff who has expertise in this area

Part of the standard functions of processing teams

Other (please specify)

.....

Don't know

A11 Local Housing Allowance payments are made direct to tenants but under certain circumstances can be made to landlords instead. What checks does your LA have in place when considering making payments directly to the claimant? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Claimant has a bank account or can open one

Claimant does not have debt problems or recent CCJs

Claimant's record of rent payment is satisfactory

Claimant does not have learning disabilities that may impact rent payments

Claimant does not have mental health concerns that may impact rent payments

Claimant does not have an addiction or similar dependency that may impact rent

payments

Other (please specify)

.....
None

Don't know

A12 What proportion of claimants (or their agents) do you estimate request, at any time, to have their payment go to their landlord or letting agent? PLEASE WRITE IN THE BOXES BELOW

%

Don't know

A13 What are the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA is paid to their landlord? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Having learning difficulties

Having mental health problems (anxiety/depression)

Having drug/alcohol addiction problems

Having physical health problems (sight/hearing/mobility)

Language difficulties

Poor rent payment history

Rent arrears of 8 weeks or more

Debt problems

Other (please specify)

.....

A14 What are the most common reasons a request to have rent paid to the landlord is rejected? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Landlord is known to intimidate customer into direct payments
 - Evidence does not support – customer is effectively managing finances
 - Landlord is not “fit and proper” person
 - Customer has addiction but part of rehabilitation is managing finances
 - Unable to source additional evidence other than from customer/landlord
 - Other (please specify)
-
Don't know

A15 Do you feel your LA receives enough guidance from DWP to implement the safeguards consistently?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

A16 What other information, if any, would your LA find helpful to receive from DWP to help implement the safeguards? PLEASE WRITE IN

.....

.....

A17 What evidence (in support of a claim to pay to the landlord) is the most difficult to collect/causes the most problems? TICK ONE ONLY

- Rent arrears
- Mental health concerns
- Learning difficulties
- Drug addiction/alcohol
- Past history of debt
- Physical disability
- Language difficulties
- Other (please specify)

.....
Don't know

A18 What are the main reasons for claimants (or their agents) requesting that their HB/LHA is changed so that it is paid direct to them? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Claimant no longer in rent arrears
 Claimant in arrears of less than 8 weeks
 Claimant no longer deemed vulnerable
 Claimant no longer considered unlikely to pay their rent
 Other (please specify)

 Don't know

A19 Does this change (to claimants receiving the payment themselves) generally cause problems with the landlord or the letting agency?

- Yes Answer A20
 No Go to Section B
 Don't know Go to Section B

ANSWER IF 'YES' AT A19. OTHERS GO TO SECTION B

A20 Please describe how this change (to claimants receiving the payment themselves), causes problems with the landlord or letting agency? PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW

.....

.....

.....

Section B - Financial Management**Direct Payments (including aligning payment with rent)**

ALL ANSWER

B1 As you are aware, receiving payments means tenants must manage their own money. In cases where your LA currently make housing benefit payments directly to tenants, how often are payment periods made to coincide with rent charging periods? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes, in all cases Go to B3
 Yes, in some cases Go to B3
 No Answer B2
 Don't know Go to B3

ANSWER IF 'NO' AT B1

B2 Does your authority have any plans to make changes to your payment systems so that payment periods coincide with rent charging periods?

- Yes
 Considering, but too early to say
 No
 Don't know

ALL ANSWER

B3 Have rent arrears increased, decreased or stayed the same in your LA because of LHA?

- Increased a lot
 Increased a little
 Stayed the same
 Decreased a little
 Decreased a lot
 Increased but **not** as a result of LHA
 Decreased but **not** as a result of LHA
 Don't know

Discretionary Housing Payments

B4 *Have your LA's Discretionary Housing Payments to the Private Rented Sector increased, decreased or stayed the same in the last year?*

- Increased a lot Answer B5
 Increased a little Answer B5
 Stayed the same Go to B6
 Decreased a little Go to B6
 Decreased a lot Go to B6
 Don't know Go to B6

ANSWER IF 'INCREASED' AT B4. OTHERS GO TO B6

B5 Do you think this is because of LHA, the economic climate, or both?

- LHA
 Economic climate
 Both LHA and economic climate
 Don't know

Financial Inclusion (Bank accounts/Money Advice)**Money Advice**

As you are aware, customers claiming the LHA usually have their payments made directly to them. Other Rent Allowance claimants may also be paid direct to the tenants. Direct payments are most likely to be made by Automated Credit Transfer (ACT) or cheque. We would now like to ask some questions about how your LA answers customer questions on how to set up a bank account or how bank accounts operate.

ALL ANSWER

B6 Where a claimant does not have a bank account or does not understand how bank accounts operate, which of the following actions does your LA take? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Offer in-house advice Answer B7
 Refer customer to a third party organisation that can offer help in this area GO
 TO B8
 Refer them to a bank or building society GO TO B8
 Other (please specify) GO TO B8

 Don't know GO TO B8

ANSWER IF 'OFFER IN-HOUSE ADVICE' AT B6. OTHERS GO TO B8

B7 How do you provide this in-house advice to claimants who do not have a bank account or do not understand how bank accounts operate? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Face-to-face advice
 Advice over the telephone
 Internet
 Leaflets
 Other (please specify)

 Too early to say

ALL ANSWER

B8 What proportion of LHA cases do you estimate have needed money advice in your LA? TICK ONE ONLY. IF YOU TICK 'LESS THAN 10%' PLEASE ALSO WRITE IN THE ACTUAL PERCENTAGE IF KNOWN.

- Less than 10% (PLEASE TICK BOX AND WRITE IN ACTUAL PERCENTAGE IN BOX BELOW IF KNOWN)
-
- 10% - 24%
- 25% - 49%
- 50% - 74%
- 75% to 100%
- Don't know

B9 Does your LA currently have facilities for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques free of charge?

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

ANSWER IF YES AT B9. OTHERS GO TO B11

B10 Did you introduce this facility for claimants to cash their HB/LHA cheques free of charge as a result of LHA?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

ALL ANSWER

B11 Have you noticed any claimants terminating an HB claim in order to leave a week's gap so that they can move on to LHA, or not? IF YES: are a lot of claimants doing this or just a few? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, just a few
- No
- Haven't noticed

Section C: Homelessness

PLEASE CONTACT AN APPROPRIATE MEMBER OF STAFF IN YOUR LA AND ASK THEM TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS C1-C4 BELOW. IF YOUR LA HAS ITS OWN HOUSING STOCK, THEN THE HOUSING MANAGER OR HEAD OF HOUSING IS LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS. IF YOUR STOCK HAS BEEN TRANSFERRED, THEN HOMELESSNESS MAY FALL TO SOCIAL OR COMMUNITY SERVICES.

We are concerned about the impact of any new policies on homelessness and would like to ask you a question about whether the introduction of LHA in April 2008 has had any impact on homelessness or not.

ALL ANSWER

C1 What are the three main reasons for homelessness in your LA for those who would normally be housed in the Private Rented Sector? PLEASE TICK THE THREE MAIN REASONS BELOW

- Relationship breakdown
- Family dispute
- Domestic violence
- Neighbourhood harassment
- Loss of accommodation due to rent arrears
- Suitable accommodation not available
- A reduction in the number of properties available in the PRS
- Other (please specify)

.....
Don't know

C2 Since the roll-out of LHA do you think that homelessness has increased as a result of LHA, decreased as a result of LHA or that LHA has had no impact on homelessness? TICK ONE ONLY

- Homelessness has increased as a result of LHA
- Homelessness has decreased as a result of LHA
- LHA has had no impact on homelessness
- Don't know

C3 Which organisations is your LA in touch with regularly about homelessness issues? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Shelter
- Crisis
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- YMCA
- Homelessness Forums
- Department of Communities and Local Government
- Other (please specify)

.....

C4 Since the roll-out of LHA do you think that Social Rented Sector waiting lists have increased as a result of LHA, decreased as a result of LHA or that LHA has had no impact on Social Rented Sector waiting lists? TICK ONE ONLY

- Social Rented Sector waiting lists have increased as a result of LHA
- Social Rented Sector waiting lists have decreased as a result of LHA
- LHA has had no impact on Social Rented Sector waiting lists
- Don't know

Section D: Landlords

ALL ANSWER

D1 Thinking generally, are landlords in your area happy to let property to people on Housing Benefit?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know

D2 In your opinion, since LHA, have private sector landlords been more or less willing to let property to housing benefit tenants or has there been no change?
 TICK ONE BELOW

- More willing
 Less willing
 No change
 Don't know

D3 *Do you think that customers claiming LHA move house more frequently, less frequently or about the same under LHA than under the pre-LHA system? TICK ONE ONLY*

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

Under 25s

ALL ANSWER

D4 Since the introduction of LHA in April 2008, have private sector landlords been more or less willing to let to single people aged under 25 (compared with under the pre-LHA HB scheme for private sector tenants)? TICK ONE BELOW

- More willing
 Less willing
 No change
 Don't know

D5 Why do you feel that some landlords do not want to let to single people under 25? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- More likely to have difficulty managing finances and be unable to pay
 Less likely to see the importance of paying on time
 Less likely to take care of the property
 Less likely to be a long term tenant (more likely to regularly move house)
 Previous bad experience
 Other (please specify)

.....
 Don't know

LHA Rates

ALL ANSWER

D6 Again, thinking generally, do you feel that landlords in your area are raising their rents to LHA levels?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

Section E: Fraud and Error

ALL ANSWER

E1 Do you think the level of fraud and error has increased, decreased or stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of the LHA scheme (compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants)?

- Increased a lot
- Increased a little
- Stayed the same
- Decreased a little
- Decreased a lot
- Increased but **not** as a result of LHA
- Decreased but **not** as a result of LHA
- Don't know

E2 Do you think the level of overpayment has increased, decreased or stayed the same as a consequence of the introduction of the LHA scheme (compared to the pre-LHA HB scheme for private sector tenants)?

- Increased a lot Answer E3
- Increased a little Answer E3
- Stayed the same Go to E4
- Decreased a little Go to E4
- Decreased a lot Go to E4
- Increased but **not** as a result of LHA Go to E4
- Decreased but **not** as a result of LHA Go to E4
- Don't know Go to E4

ANSWER IF 'INCREASED' AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE LHA SCHEME AT E2. OTHERS GO TO E4

E3 What are the two main areas in which overpayments have increased under the LHA compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants? TICK THE TWO MOST FREQUENT CATEGORIES FROM THE LIST BELOW

- False declaration of household composition to increase LHA rate
- Changes in circumstances not declared
- Difficulty proving residency/claimants moving out but still receiving payments
- Encourage collusion between landlords and tenants
- BACS payments makes it harder to keep track of payments
- BACS payments encourage fraud/ make fraud easier
- Other (please write in)

.....
Don't know

ALL ANSWER

E4 Do you think the level of underpayment due to fraud and error has increased, decreased or stayed the same since the introduction of the LHA scheme (compared to the HB scheme for private sector tenants)?

- Increased a lot
- Increased a little
- Stayed the same
- Decreased a little
- Decreased a lot
- Increased but **not** as a result of LHA
- Decreased but **not** as a result of LHA
- Don't know

E5 Do you think tenants and landlords are more or less likely to report change of circumstances under LHA than under the previous housing benefit scheme for private rented sector or is it about the same? PLEASE ANSWER FOR BOTH TENANTS AND LANDLORDS. TICK ONE BOX PER COLUMN

	Tenants	Landlords
More likely under LHA than under pre-LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less likely under LHA than under pre-LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
About the same under LHA and under pre-LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Overpayments

E6 Which of the following does your LA do to recover overpayments from claimants?
TICK ALL THAT APPLY IN THE FIRST COLUMN BELOW

E7 Now please tick the one that your LA does most often to recover overpayments from claimants, then tick the one that your LA does second and third most often.
TICK ONE BOX IN EACH OF THE SECOND, THIRD AND FOURTH COLUMNS

	<i>E6</i>	<i>E7</i>		
		<i>Most often</i>	<i>Second most often</i>	<i>Third most often</i>
From arrears of housing benefit or council tax benefit that become payable while there is an outstanding payment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By deduction from ongoing benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By transferring a rent rebate overpayment to the tenant's rent account	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By deduction from DWP benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By invoicing the claimant for the amount outstanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By civil proceedings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By employing a debt collection agency to recover the debt on behalf of LA				
By selling the debt to a debt collection agency for less than what is outstanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
.....				
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section F: Contracting Out and Contact Information

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

ALL ANSWER

F1 Is HB and CTB administration:

Centralised i.e. one or two offices deal with and process claims

Decentralised i.e. on three or more sites/offices – (by decentralised we mean that the management of the service is decentralised and not the access points for claimants)

Don’t know

F2 Is HB and CTB administration contracted out?

Yes, fully Go to F3
 Yes, partially Go to F3
 No Go to F5

Don’t know Go to

F5

ANSWER IF “YES” AT F2, OTHERS GO TO F5

F3 When did this contract start?

Enter month and year

F4 Please write in below which services are contracted out (WRITE IN)

.....

.....

ALL ANSWER

F5 Has your authority contracted out HB/CTB fraud investigations?

Yes
 No

Don’t know

F6 Managers often have split or shared responsibilities for HB/CTB administration, can you please specify which aspects of the role you personally have full responsibility for, which are shared and which other manager/s have full responsibility for.
PLEASE TICK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW

	I have sole responsibility	I share responsibility	Other manager/s full responsibility
Rent Rebate/Rent Allowance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Council Tax Benefit/Revenues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overpayment Recovery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefit Fraud	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visiting Services (Combined)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Front Office/Call Centres	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discretionary Housing Payments/vulnerability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE COMPLETE DETAILS FOR OVERPAYMENT RECOVERY AND BENEFIT FRAUD IF YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THEM YOURSELF OR SHARE RESPONSIBILITY. IF YOU ARE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR BOTH, PLEASE GO TO F8

F7 Please provide details of the manager with overall responsibility for each of the following...

a) Overpayment recovery:

NAME: -----

JOB TITLE: -----

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: -----

FAX NO: -----

EMAIL ADDRESS: -----

ADDRESS: -----

b) Benefit Fraud:

NAME: -----

JOB TITLE: -----

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: -----

FAX NO: -----

EMAIL ADDRESS:-----

ADDRESS: -----

ALL ANSWER

F8 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.

F9 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 THE WAVE 20
 LOCAL AUTHORITY OMNIBUS SURVEY

This report presents findings from the 20th wave of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey. The survey takes place every six months and attempts to survey Housing Benefit (HB) managers in every LA in Great Britain. This wave of the survey concentrated solely around the administration of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and included questions on:

- administration;
- financial management;
- homelessness;
- landlords;
- fraud and error.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
Paul Noakes, Commercial Support and Knowledge Management Team,
3rd Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

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