



Department
for Education

Assessment of the effect of the removal of the spare room subsidy on foster carers, adopters and special guardians

Research report

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Executive Summary

In April 2013, new rules were introduced removing the Spare Room Subsidy for social housing tenants of working age who were judged to be under-occupying their home. Those affected have their Housing Benefit entitlement reduced by 14 per cent if they have one extra bedroom and 25 per cent if they have more than one extra bedroom. Exemptions were introduced allowing one bedroom for an approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks (from the end of the last placement or following the date of approval).

Local authorities were provided with assistance to support priority groups. The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) fund provides short-term assistance to those households that qualify for Housing Benefit (or other benefits such as universal credit that includes a housing element) and are facing additional hardship related to housing costs. The decision to offer a DHP is made by the local authority based on the circumstances of an individual household.

Aims

Until now, only limited anecdotal evidence existed on the number of current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians who may be affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and how local authorities are responding to and supporting these groups. The Department for Education therefore, commissioned this research to understand for England and Wales:

- The extent and nature of the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on current and prospective foster carers, adopters, and special guardians (who are of working age, living in social housing and claiming Housing Benefit)
- How effectively local authorities are supporting these groups and the sustainability of these approaches

Method

Following a feasibility study, carried out to assess the range and nature of relevant quantitative data held by local authorities and to design an appropriate process to collate these data, the fieldwork involved:

1. Structured telephone interviews in 65 local authorities to understand the perceived scale of effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and local authority response to the policy reform. The sample covered all English

regions, North and South Wales, rural, urban and coastal areas and all types of authority

2. Collation of quantitative data from 69 local authorities to explore the scale of the effect of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and use of DHPs to compensate those affected
3. Telephone interviews with 19 current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians in England and Wales who may have been affected by the Housing Benefit reforms, to explore their experiences of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy
4. Online self-selecting survey of 62 current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians, to understand what had happened to those affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and their experiences
5. Development of case studies using interview data gathered from local authorities and a range of carers

Key messages

Scale of the issue

The number of people reported by each local authority to have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was low. An average of three foster carers, one special guardian and no adopters per local authority were known to be affected by the policy reform. However, whilst the policy reform does not appear to have had a significant effect in terms of scale, the minority of households that are affected can experience considerable consequences.

Availability of data

Estimating the full extent of the scale of the effect of the policy reform on carers was challenging. Most local authorities do not routinely collate data on approved and prospective carers who may have been affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy or the number of carers receiving DHPs. The lack of data, inconsistency between data storage in different local authority departments, issues around local authority boundary control and focus on carers approved/known to local authorities meant that local authorities were unable to provide fully comprehensive figures.

Carer experiences

The rule change in size criteria (allowing foster carers an unused bedroom for up to 52 weeks), helped to alleviate initial concerns within local authorities about the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on foster carers.

One third of carers responding to the online survey said that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was having a negative effect on their household and one-quarter said that it was having a very negative effect. A small number said there was a positive effect, such as, a member of the household taking up additional employment. Carers reported current and future effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy included reductions in household budgets, difficulties in paying rent and downsizing property.

Specific groups affected

Whilst the scale of those reported to be affected to date is small, some specific groups of carers and types of placements were reported by local authorities to be more affected by the financial implications of the policy reform. A small number of local authorities raised concerns about the effect on these groups particularly:

Single foster carers and kinship carers

Those requiring more than one bedroom for looked after children - this included carers providing placements for sibling groups (including kinship carers) and more than one unrelated child

Respite carers, due to requiring a spare room to remain empty for placements

Placements for those children with complex needs who require their own bedroom, children who are unable to share a bedroom (e.g. due to past experiences) and those caring for teenagers

Recruitment and retention

Three-quarters of local authorities did not perceive there to be any effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on the recruitment of foster carers, adopters and special guardians in the last 18 months. The large majority of local authorities did not report any known effect on retention in the last 18 months.

However, some respondents to the online survey of carers reported that their ability to apply to be a carer had been affected (half of these were special guardians) and one-quarter of carers said their ability to continue fostering had been affected. A

small number of local authorities had also noted some prospective carers (foster carers and special guardians) withdrawing applications due to not being able to afford to retain an empty bedroom throughout the approvals process.

Over the next 12 months, whilst half of local authorities did not foresee an effect on recruitment of carers, one-quarter speculated that applications would be affected, particularly for those needing more than one bedroom.

Carer capacity issues

Where carers have been affected, small numbers were known to have downsized to negate any financial loss resulting from the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. They reported that this had reduced their capacity to provide placements for looked after children due to no longer having adequate spare bedrooms to support their caring capacity.

Use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

DHP funding was the predominant method of financial support used by local authorities in reducing the negative effect. This covered the shortfall in Housing Benefit experienced by current carers. Local authorities reported that an average of two DHPs per local authority were awarded to foster carers since the policy change, none to adopters and less than one per authority for special guardians; this is broadly in line with the total number of affected cases they report.

Support via DHPs for prospective carers going through the approval process appeared to be rare. This was said to have affected those coming forward, with some withdrawing from the process.

DHP application process

Generally, local authorities reported that DHPs were always approved for foster carers. DHP approvals were less common for adopters and special guardians.

However, local authority policy on administering and awarding DHPs varied, as did the number, duration and therefore, frequency of applications that individuals were required to make for DHPs. Carers said that the application process was complex and confusing, to the point that some had not completed the necessary form. They also reported poor communications about their DHP application status.

Sustainability of DHPs

There were significant concerns within local authorities and carer groups over whether DHP budgets will continue to be made available in the longer term and,

therefore, over the sustainability of providing financial support to those affected. This affects longer term planning for local authorities and carers considering their future role.

Alternative support

Local authorities' use of other sources of funding (such as an increase in carer allowance), to provide financial compensation to those affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was minimal (only nine of 63 local authorities were aware of any other financial support offered in the last 18 months).

Consistency in policy/ regulations

Carers reported difficulties arising from conflicting regulations of fostering and housing/benefit teams in relation to the age at which children can share a bedroom and when looked after children qualify for a separate bedroom.

Carers and local authorities highlighted inconsistencies in policies between Children's Services and housing/benefits teams (in relation to DHP applications), particularly where carers live outside the fostering/adoption local authority boundary.

Carer awareness and understanding

Whilst local authorities had reported providing relevant information, findings suggested that current and prospective carers were neither fully aware of the implications of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on their circumstances, nor of the range of financial and other support available to them and how to access it. One third of carer survey respondents did not know that local authorities offered DHPs to cover Housing Benefit shortfalls.

Points for consideration

Although the reported number of carers affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was low, the points for consideration below take into account that where there is an effect on current carers this can have considerable consequences for them. Future implications for prospective groups of carers are also addressed.

- To aid local and regional planning (particularly to predict future demand for DHPs or other assistance for these groups), it would be beneficial for local authorities to explore how they could identify and collect and collate relevant data on carers affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

- It is important for local authorities to monitor the ongoing impact of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy through better data collection and cooperation between housing and Children's Services departments. Fostering teams can be proactive in making sure that prospective carers, where relevant, have all the necessary information about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and the support available to them.
- Better communication between fostering/adoption and housing/benefits teams is needed to ensure that carers who need help are not overlooked. It would be helpful to improve dissemination of guidance and information materials that are nationally available, e.g. on 'gov.uk' website.
- Government and local authorities may wish to consider if there are carers who require additional support above and beyond DHPs (e.g. respite carers and those accommodating sibling groups, multiple placements and placements for children/young people who are unable to share a bedroom) and explore what alternative funds can be used to assist them.
- It would be helpful if DfE and DWP explored current size criteria alongside the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards to address differences in the minimum age for a looked after child to have their own room. They may also wish to explore how carers can be supported if they require an extra room, because they care for: a child(ren) who cannot share a bedroom.
- The carer approval process has been a particular sticking point. Government and local authorities may want to consider how prospective carers can be better supported through the process to ensure that fewer are deterred from applying and fewer withdraw. This could include financial support for keeping a bedroom free and support in moving to a larger home if this is required.
- It is important that current and prospective carers are fully aware of the range of support available and know where to find help. Local authorities may wish to consider disseminating this information through a broader range of channels and review their application processes to provide as clear and straightforward a process to apply for financial support as possible. This needs to include regular communication with carers about the status of an application.
- It would be beneficial if there was greater clarity about the future availability of DHP or similar funding to support future planning.

1. Introduction

The drive to improve life experiences of and services for looked after children, given momentum through the *Children Act* (1989), the *Adoption and Children Act* 2002 and the *Children and Families Act* (March 2014), has prompted reforms to adoption, special guardianship and fostering services. These reforms ensure that children and young people are placed quickly with suitable families where this is in their best interests. Strategies aimed at providing permanency for children in care are central to Government policy. Where children are unable to live with their birth parents or return to them from the care system, permanence may be secured through the use of adoption, special guardianship, child arrangement orders or (if it is in the best interests of children) through provision of long-term stable foster care. The Government and the Welsh Government have both set out measures that aim to increase the number of people who adopt looked after children and seek special guardianship orders as well as increase the recruitment and retention of a broader range of foster carers able to meet the needs of looked after children.¹

In tandem, reforms to the benefits systems are taking place. Through the Welfare Reform Act 2012², the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced changes to the welfare system including to tax credits, employment benefits and social housing.

In April 2013, new rules were introduced on the size of accommodation that Housing Benefit covered for tenants across the social housing sector. These rules remove the 'Spare Room Subsidy' for social housing tenants of working age. This means that any household in social housing that is judged to be under-occupied has its Housing Benefit (used to assist with paying rent and other charges) reduced according to new criteria:

- 14 per cent reduction if judged to have one extra bedroom
- 25 per cent reduction if judged to have more than one extra bedroom

Exemptions were introduced allowing one bedroom for an approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks (from the end of the last placement or following the date of approval), but additional bedrooms occupied by looked after children (e.g. sibling groups or groups of unrelated children) are not exempt.

¹ See Annex 4 for additional statistical data relating to looked after children across England and Wales.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/simplifying-the-welfare-system-and-making-sure-work-pays>

Local authorities were provided with funding to offer support, made available through a separate Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) fund. These funds are made available each financial year so that assistance can be offered to those households that qualify for Housing Benefit (or other benefits such as universal credit that includes a housing element) and are facing additional hardship related to housing costs. The decision to offer a DHP is made by the local authority based on the circumstances of an individual household, and may be a lump sum or a number of payments made over a period of time. The DHP may be used to cover, for example:

- Assistance with Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy or other changes to housing allowance rules (including, where additional rooms are required, such as to foster sibling groups or unrelated foster children)
- Expenses for the additional room due to care requirements, disability or medical needs etc.
- Assistance to prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians in social housing who are going through the approval process and need to show that they have a spare room for the purpose of the approval, but who are not entitled to the Spare Room Subsidy due to the fact that they are not yet an approved foster carer, adopter or special guardian
- Assistance to approved adopters prior to a child forming part of a household to cover the interim period where the household is reserving a bedroom for the adopted child's arrival³

Until now, only limited anecdotal evidence existed on the number of current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians who may be affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and how local authorities are responding.⁴ Therefore, to inform Government housing policy and to understand the consequences of these reforms, evidence is required on the nature and scale of the issue and potential effect on recruitment and retention of these groups.

1.1 Aims

The overarching purpose of this research was to understand for England and Wales:

- The extent and nature of the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on current and prospective foster carers, adopters, and special guardians

³ DWP (2014), *Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual: including Local Authority Good Practice Guide*, p.28

⁴ The social housing size criteria covering these groups is included in Annex 5.

- How effectively local authorities are supporting these groups and the sustainability of these approaches

1.2 Objectives

To meet these overarching aims, a series of questions framed the research:

- What is the scale of the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians?
- In what ways has the policy change affected these groups? What has the change in policy meant for affected current and prospective foster carers, adopters, and special guardians and their attitude towards continuing with these roles in the future?
- Has the policy change had any effect on families in specific circumstances, such as children who are now expected to share rooms when this is not appropriate because of the child's circumstances or in the placement of sibling groups?
- How has the policy change affected the recruitment of foster carers, adopters and special guardians to date and what is the future effect likely to be?
- How are local authorities responding to the policy change and supporting those who may be affected and what are their views on providing support in the future?

1.3 Key cohorts

This project has focused on several groups and the effect on these households of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Please note that the term 'carer' used throughout this report applies to current foster carers, adopters and special guardians. Where we refer to prospective groups, this is made explicit.

The key cohorts included in this research were:⁵

- Foster carers of working age receiving Housing Benefit for social housing who need more than one bedroom for looked after children

⁵ Whilst the groups identified in this section were the key focus of the study, the online survey for key cohorts was made available to a wide range of organisations to allow a broader profile of carers to respond.

- Prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians of looked after children receiving Housing Benefit for social housing (those who might consider fostering, adoption or seeking a special guardianship order)
- People of working age in social housing whose Housing Benefit has been reduced because they are going through the foster carer/adoption approval process and need to have a room available as part of this process, and are keeping bedrooms free for a child/children for whom they hope to provide placement(s)
- People of working age in social housing whose Housing Benefit has been reduced because they are keeping bedrooms free for a child/children they hope to adopt or for whom they hope to obtain a special guardianship order
- People of working age in social housing whose Housing Benefit has been reduced because they have either adopted a child/children or have a child/children placed with them for adoption, who cannot share a bedroom
- People of working age in social housing whose Housing Benefit has been reduced because they are a special guardian of a child/children who cannot share a bedroom

1.4 Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy evaluation

Several related pieces of research have been undertaken, or are underway, to assess the overall effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Three of these – two across Britain and one focusing specifically on Wales – are mentioned below.

In August 2013, approximately 522,905 households were reported to have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy – 11.1 per cent of all social housing tenants.⁶ The Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research and Ipsos MORI are carrying out a longitudinal evaluation of the overall impact of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy throughout Britain on behalf of the DWP. The final report will be published in 2015, with interim findings published in July 2014.

The effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on foster carers specifically had been covered in interviews with Children's Services during the case study work for the Ipsos MORI evaluation.

⁶ DWP data available at Stat-Xplore: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>; DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.14

The report states that although there is currently ‘no real evidence of foster carers having ceased to care because of the [removal of the subsidy] ... it is harder to know whether others could be deterred from coming forward because of it’. ⁷

The report also highlights difficulties in identifying how many foster carers are social tenants. It states that social workers – individuals who are allocated to work alongside foster families to offer them consistent and personal support – were still only ‘sometimes aware which of their foster carers were on Housing Benefit, and therefore likely to be affected by the [Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy]’. ⁸

Ipsos MORI case study work highlighted that **neither social landlords nor local authorities held reliable records on the number of** groups of tenants who were exempt under specific rules (including foster carers who are allowed one extra bedroom). As a result, landlords were requiring tenants to self-identify in these cases. ⁹ There were 322 foster carers (according to the social landlords surveyed) who were allowed an extra bedroom under the Local Housing Allowance size criteria, 0.35 per cent of tenants affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. ¹⁰ This proportion is the proportion *known* to landlords as being foster carers, but as follow up interviews with social workers revealed, it is generally the tenants who are in control of these issues affecting the household rather than the landlords or services involved with them.

In June 2014, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published an evaluation of the ‘initial impacts’ of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy across Britain. ¹¹ This research found that in the first six months, six per cent of affected tenants had moved property, and 22 per cent were awaiting a transfer or mutual exchange; other actions included tenants finding additional employment, accommodating lodgers or other family members to meet occupancy criteria. ¹² Pertinent to carers of children with complex needs, the report highlighted difficulties for households where affected tenants have a longstanding illness or disability that make ‘room-sharing inappropriate’, or where residences have been ‘adapted to the requirements of a disabled member’ or that require ‘room to store essential equipment’. Although the

⁷ Ibid., p.18

⁸ DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.18 and 99

⁹ Ibid., p.28

¹⁰ DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.18 and 99, p.29

¹¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014), *Housing Benefit Size Criteria: Impacts for Social Sector Tenants and Options for Reform*, p.3

¹² Ibid., p.4-5

evaluation found that these cases were referred for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), the ‘widespread variation in [DHP] application’ was a concern:¹³

‘Some councils take Disability Living Allowance (DLA) into account in income assessments, and this can mean claimants do not then meet the hardship requirements for DHPs. There are also concerns about the typically short-term nature of DHPs, particularly for tenants with longstanding health or disability issues’.¹⁴

Finally, a programme of research was commissioned by the Welsh Government’s Ministerial Task and Finish Group on Welfare Reform between 2012 and 2014 to assess the impact of a range of welfare reforms and benefits sanctions. The impact of the new social housing size criteria on housing benefit claimants was considered as part of this work.¹⁵ This identified 33,900 recipients of Housing Benefit affected by the Spare Room Subsidy in Wales. The average financial loss per affected claimant across Wales was calculated to be £682 per year.¹⁶ Ipsos MORI’s interim report also identified that more than 60 per cent of social landlords in Wales were experiencing difficulties letting properties as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.¹⁷

The most adversely affected regions were those in which high proportions of social housing make up the rental sector (70 – 80 per cent) and where there are also ‘relatively high proportions of the population claiming working-age benefits’: the three most adversely affected regions were Torfaen, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil.¹⁸

All of these evaluations focus on the effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy overall, whereas this report complements the results of those studies by examining the effects of the policy reform specifically on current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians.

¹³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014), *Housing Benefit Size Criteria: Impacts for Social Sector Tenants and Options for Reform*, p.5

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Welsh Government (2014), *Analysing the impact of the UK Government’s welfare reforms in Wales – Stage 3 analysis*, p.50-51

¹⁶ Ibid., p.50

¹⁷ DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.80

¹⁸ Welsh Government (2014), *Analysing the impact of the UK Government’s welfare reforms in Wales – Stage 3 analysis*, p.51

2. Methodology

A mixed method approach was utilised to explore the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians.

The project started with a brief **literature review** to provide the contextual background for the report and to gather existing evidence on the effect of the Housing Benefit reforms. This literature review has been used to inform analysis presented in this report. As a starting point, it was important for us to know what information local authorities held in relation to the effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on our groups of interest and how readily they would be able to access that information.

A **feasibility study** was therefore carried out to:

- Identify and assess the range and nature of relevant data held by local authorities and the feasibility of collating evidence on the numbers of current and prospective carers who may have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy
- Refine the process of collating the above data from local authorities via a structured proforma and interview schedule

A proforma was designed to provide a consistent approach to collating data on the numbers of those affected by the Housing Benefit reform, the numbers of specific groups affected (e.g. carers affected because a child cannot share a bedroom or because they are keeping a bedroom free for a child they hope to adopt), the numbers of carers receiving Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to compensate for loss of Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and the numbers receiving other compensation or taking alternative action (e.g. moving house). The interview schedule used structured and open questions to explore the scale of the issue across local authorities and contextual variations.

The feasibility study was conducted with ten local authorities, an independent fostering agency (IFA) and a voluntary adoption agency (VAA). Consultation with the IFAs and VAAs highlighted that these organisations do not collect and record data related to benefits received by carers (including Housing Benefit) and it was therefore decided not to include these agencies in the main fieldwork due to a lack of available data.

It revealed that whilst local authorities could provide some information on the nature and extent of any effect on key cohorts, they held limited numerical data, particularly for prospective carers of all types and for current adopters and special guardians. As

a result, the proforma was simplified to three basic questions prior to it being rolled out to a larger number of local authorities:

1. How many foster carer, adoptive and special guardianship families live in your local authority area (insert total number of households per group)?
2. How many of these families include carers of working age, living in social housing, claiming Housing Benefit and who have had their Housing Benefit reduced due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?
3. How many current foster carer, adoptive or special guardianship families living in your local authority area are receiving DHPs to compensate for the loss of Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy reforms, to enable them to continue in their role?

Given limitations in the numerical data that was likely to be available from local authorities, the interview schedule was re-designed to allow for more flexibility in providing scaled responses and qualitative evidence on the extent and nature of any effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. In light of feasibility findings, we targeted 65 local authorities for the main survey. This sample size was large enough for quantitative data to be meaningful but small enough to allow the survey to include more detailed qualitative evidence.

The **main data collection phase** was carried out between November 2014 and January 2015 and involved:

1. Structured telephone interviews with representatives (e.g. Fostering/Adoption Team Manager, Children's Services Manager, Head of Service, Group Manager for Looked After Children), in all 65 local authorities, to explore the level and nature of any effect on key cohorts, recruitment and retention of key cohorts, effects on specific groups (e.g. sibling group placements), support mechanisms and use of DHPs. Local authorities were also able to respond via an online survey. However, the vast majority completed telephone interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the scale of effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and local authority response to the policy reform.
2. Collation of proformas (as described above) to explore the scale of the effect of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and use of DHPs to compensate those affected. Whilst the proforma was simplified following the initial feasibility study, some local authorities did have difficulty in completing all fields as data on the numbers of the key groups who had been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and numbers receiving DHPs were not routinely collated or stored. Data on these groups are known to different

teams or departments within local authorities whose systems are not easily aligned. Furthermore, local authorities could only provide data for carers registered with them; informal carers and those living outside the local authority boundary could not be included in their estimations/figures.

3. Telephone interviews with current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians in England and Wales who may have been affected by the Housing Benefit reforms, to explore their experiences of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Respondents volunteered to take part in these interviews via local authorities or third sector organisations advertising the research or through completion of an online survey (detailed below).
4. Online survey for current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians, to complement the telephone interviews. Respondents self-selected to respond to the survey, which aimed to understand what had happened to carers who said that they were affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and their experiences. It was disseminated with help from local authorities and a range of third sector organisations (e.g. housing associations, British Association of Adoption and Fostering, Fostering Network, Grandparents Plus) and was made publically available via websites and social media platforms, therefore allowing a wide range of carers to respond. The survey was designed to screen respondents for those current and prospective carers who had been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, living in social housing and of working age. The screening questions checked if respondents were in receipt of Housing Benefit although this was reliant on self-disclosure. Wide dissemination of the survey allowed a varied profile of carers to respond, including informal carers not registered with local authorities and those registered with voluntary adoption agencies or independent fostering agencies. It also opened up the possibility of duplicate responses being made. To counteract this, it was designed with simple partial personal detail checks in place.
5. Development of case studies using interview data gathered from local authorities and a range of carers. These are presented throughout the findings in this report to illustrate how different people and local authorities have dealt with or experienced the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Names have been changed to protect the identities of respondents.

2.1 Sample breakdown

Local authority sample

This research focused on the 152 local authorities in England and the 22 in Wales that have Children's Services responsibilities (174 authorities in total). Analysis in this report is based on proformas completed by 69 local authorities across England and Wales and 63 interviews/survey responses.

The sample of local authorities was selected to cover all English regions as well as North and South Wales, as shown in Table 1. Local authorities from rural, urban and coastal areas were included in the sample.

Table 1: Local authority sample representation across regions¹⁹

	Local authorities returning a proforma		Local authorities completing the interview/ online survey		National profile of local authorities	
Region	n	% of sample	n	% of sample	n	% of all 174
East Midlands	6	9%	6	10%	9	5%
East of England	6	9%	6	10%	11	6%
London	8	12%	7	11%	33	19%
North East	7	10%	6	10%	12	7%
North West	8	12%	7	11%	23	13%
South East	7	10%	6	10%	19	11%
South West	6	9%	6	10%	16	9%
West Midlands	7	10%	6	10%	14	8%
Yorkshire and the Humber	6	9%	6	10%	15	9%
Wales	8	12%	7	11%	22	13%
Total	69	102%	63	103%	174	100%

Whilst the sample of local authorities providing proformas and completing the interview or online survey was broadly representative of the national regional profile (see Table 1), there was an emphasis on gaining reasonable coverage across all regions rather than proportional representation. All types of authority were also included in the sample, in proportions roughly similar to the national profile (see Table 2).

¹⁹ Please note that percentages for the sample of local authorities sum over 100 due to rounding.

Table 2: Local authority sample representation across type of authority

Type of authority	Local authorities returning a proforma		Local authorities completing the interview/online survey		National profile of local authorities	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
County	14	20%	13	21%	27	16%
London Borough	8	12%	7	11%	33	19%
Metropolitan	13	19%	12	19%	37	21%
Unitary	34	49%	31	49%	77	44%
Total	69	100%	63	100%	174	100%

Carer online survey sample

The online survey was disseminated widely to allow a range of current and prospective carers to respond. The carer survey link was shared with: Adoption UK, British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF), Consortium of Adoption Support Agencies (CASA), Consortium for Voluntary Adoption Agencies (CVAA), Family Rights Group, First4Adoption, Foster Care Associates, FosterTalk, Grandparents Association, Grandparents Plus, Hyde Group (The) (Housing Association), Liverpool Housing Trust, National Housing Federation, Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers, PAC-UK (merger of Post Adoption Centre and After Adoption Yorkshire), Symphony Housing Group, The Fostering Network.

At least ten organisations distributed the link via their websites and social media networks, or shared directly with their mailing lists of known carers. All 174 local authorities in England and Wales with Children's Services responsibilities were also sent the link, requesting them to forward details of the survey to their carers. The online survey ran for 17 days during January and February 2015.

In total, 112 responses were received. Screening questions around type of housing, receipt of Housing Benefit, age of respondent and current circumstances, meant that 50 of these were routed out of the survey (although they were able to provide free text feedback before exiting). Respondents lived across all English regions and Wales, and nearly three-quarters stated that they lived in a council or housing association home. Nearly two-thirds (46 of 72 respondents) reported experiencing a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.²⁰

²⁰ Respondents not fitting the criteria for the survey were routed out at different stages during the profile questions. Seventy-nine of 109 respondents answering the questions stated that they lived in a council or housing association home (30 did not). Sixty-five of 72 responding to the question stated

Of the 70 respondents providing an indication of their current 'carer status', two-thirds (48 respondents) were current approved foster carers, another three were approved but had not had a child placed with them in the last year. There were a small number of adopters (3) and special guardians (7) responding as well as six who were considering or in the process of becoming a foster carer, adopter or special guardian. Those who selected 'other' stated that they were kinship carers or carers of children with disabilities and/or learning difficulties. The breakdown of respondents' carer status is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Current carer status. Which of the following statements describe your current situation?²¹

Carer status	n	Per cent
I am currently approved as a foster carer (includes local authority approved kinship carers) and have one or more foster children placed with me, or have had a child placed with me within the last 52 weeks	48	69%
I am currently approved as a foster carer but have not had a foster child placed with me for more than 52 weeks	3	4%
I have an Adoption Order for 1 or more children	3	4%
I have a Special Guardianship Order for 1 or more children	7	10%
I am considering, or in the process of applying, to become a foster carer, adopter or special guardian	6	9%
I am not an approved foster carer, adopter or special guardian and have no plans to do so	-	0%
Other (e.g. if you are not an approved foster carer and have an informal arrangement to look after a child of friends or family)	3	4%
Total	70	100%

In terms of the number and range of children living with the carers who responded to the survey, the majority (45 of 61 responding) had one or more foster children currently placed with them, four had adoptive children and eight were special

that they did not claim Universal Credit. Forty-six of 72 responding to the question experienced a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, a further six said that it might be reduced in the future or it was in the process of being assessed, 20 (just over one-quarter) either did not know or had not had a reduction in Housing Benefit. The vast majority (72 respondents answering the question), were aged 16 to 64 years, just one respondent was 65 or over. Respondents lived across all regions of England, with the North West (27 respondents), South East (17 respondents) and South West (12 respondents) being slightly over-represented compared to other regions (average of 8 respondents). There were four respondents from Wales. Just over half (33 of 61 respondents) said that they felt that they had a reasonable or good knowledge of the policy reform prior to completing the survey – see Annex 3 Table 20.

²¹ For Table 3 please note that the sum of responses totals 70 due to respondents being able to provide more than one response to describe their current situation.

guardians to either one or two children. Two-fifths (24 of 61) also had birth children living with them. One respondent stated that they had one 'other child' living with them, who was said to be a grandchild (although it is not known if there was a legal order in place).

Table 4: Number of respondents with foster, adoptive, special guardianship and birth children by children's demographics

Children	Age group				Gender		Physical or learning difficulty					
	0 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 16	17 - 21	male	female	physical/sensory disability	learning disability	mental health problem	chronic physical health problem	attachment disorder	none of these
Foster	23	15	27	6	34	37	12	10	7	5	17	30
Adoptive	4	-	-	1	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	4
Special Guardian	2	6	2	2	8	3	3	3	2	-	-	9
Birth	5	3	13	9	16	14	1	2	1	2	-	23

Note: not all survey respondents chose to provide data for each child.

The ages of the looked after children cared for by survey respondents were varied (see Table 4). The majority of carers responding to the survey had foster children living with them aged up to five years and 11 to 16 years although other age groups were also covered in the sample. Where respondents had birth children living with them, these tended to be aged over 11 years. As a small number of adopters responded to the survey, different age groups of adopted children were less well represented. Survey respondents who were special guardians were caring for children across all age groups.

Over half of foster carers responding to the survey said that their foster children had some form of physical/learning impairment and/or behavioural or emotional difficulties. Most common was attachment disorder. One-quarter of special guardian respondents reported that they had one or more children with a disability/learning impairment and/or behavioural and emotional difficulties.

Carer interview sample

In addition to the online survey, carers were invited to opt into a telephone interview. There were six who contacted CooperGibson Research directly to provide their feedback, nine were followed up from their survey submission and four were contacted by CooperGibson Research following a referral from either a local authority or housing association.

In total, 19 interviews were completed with carers:

- 12 foster carers (one was a prospective foster carer)
- Three special guardians (two were former foster carers)
- Three kinship carers
- One adopter

All of those interviewed were in the 16 to 64 age range. All but one interviewee (an adopter) received Housing Benefit paid directly to their landlord and had experienced a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to having one or more extra bedrooms additional to the one already allowed for foster carers. All but one (an adopter) of the interviewees lived in a Council or Housing Association home, although one chose to move into private rented accommodation as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. The interviews included carers from across seven English regions and Wales and covered all types of authority.

3. Overall Scale

This chapter explores the extent to which the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy has affected **current** foster carers, adopters and special guardians, the nature of these effects and the experiences of different types of carers.

Headline findings – overall scale

An average of three foster carers, one special guardian and no adopters per local authority were known by local authorities to have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

Local authorities did not routinely collate and record data on whether or not current and prospective carers would be affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy; data storage was inconsistent across Children's Services/Housing teams, and many carers lived outside of the local authority boundary meaning that their housing data was not recorded by the fostering/adoption team. This meant that the local authorities could not provide fully comprehensive data.

Effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy were reported by local authority representatives to be more likely among foster carers and special guardians. Half (31 of 62) reported a slight negative effect on foster carers, 15 of 60 reported a slight negative effect on special guardians. Four of 60 local authorities noted a slight negative effect on adopters.

One third of carers responding to the online survey (22 of 61) said that the policy change had had a bad effect on their household; 15 said that the policy had had a very bad effect. These effects most commonly included a reduction in household income/working out a new household budget and experiencing difficulties paying the rent. When asked about how they thought their household would be affected in the future, 30 of 61 respondents anticipated having less money to spend on household items/working out a new household budget.

Seven respondents to the online survey of carers also reported that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had a positive effect on their household. This included the main carer taking up better paid employment and somebody in the household (other than the main carer) looking for additional employment.

3.1 Scale of the issue

Data provided on proformas by local authorities revealed that:

Out of the 52 local authorities providing data, 139 foster carer households (just less than one per cent of the foster carer households identified by the research) were reported by local authorities to have experienced a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. An average of three foster carer households per authority were therefore reported to have lost some of their Housing Benefit since the introduction of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

Out of 35 local authorities, no approved adoption households were reported to have experienced a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

Of 31 local authorities, a total of 26 (0.6 per cent of the special guardianship households identified) approved special guardianship households were reported to have experienced a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. This averaged out at just less than one per authority.²²

Overall, although the proforma data provided by local authorities suggests that small numbers of key cohorts have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy in each local authority, analysis in the following sections shows that effects on some specific groups are considerable.

Some local authority representatives suggested that the data recorded did not provide a full picture of the effects of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on carers of all types, mainly due to:

- Data recording/collection processes differing according to each local authority
- Fostering/adoption teams not knowing whether or not carers lived in social housing or whether they were in receipt of Housing Benefit (particularly an issue with adopters and special guardians who were less engaged with the local authority)
- Carers living outside local authority boundaries, and housing data not being recorded by the authority with which they are registered as a carer

‘I think people are being missed because the information we keep is not robust enough. We don't know if they are in social housing so it could look like Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy has had minimal impact but we don't have enough information’. (Local authority representative)

²² Further details and analysis are provided in Annex 2.

‘The impact is probably greater ...there are more foster carers negatively affected but the figures are not recorded officially. [I] think that there are more affected but some live outside of the local authority boundary... so don't have data on these.’ (Local authority representative)

Two local authority representatives reported that there could be a ‘hidden impact’ of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on established adopters and special guardians of whom they are not aware. This is because they were not in contact with these individuals to know if there were any issues or concerns in these households, or these families lived outside the local authority boundary.

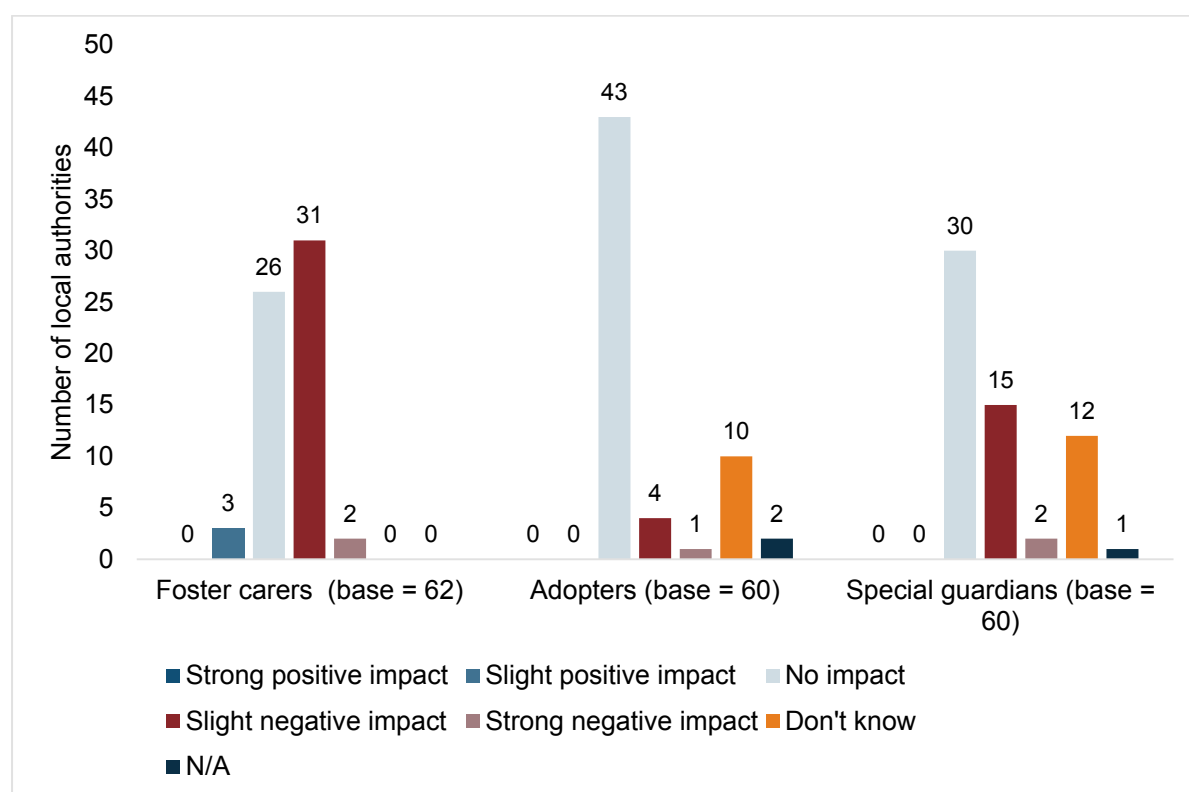
‘[We] have 30 special guardianship orders, in rented accommodation, mainly grandparents and more likely to have a negative impact as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy but they mostly live outside of the borough and therefore [we] do not have access to information about their financial circumstances/benefits etc. to know for certain’. (Local authority representative)

The following analysis is based on feedback from local authority interviews, the online survey and in-depth interviews with carers, providing further detail as to the nature of the effects of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on affected households.

3.2 Extent of perceived effect

As Figure 1 shows, during the telephone interviews with local authorities, where an effect from the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on current groups of carers was known among local authority representatives, this was related most commonly to foster carers and special guardians.

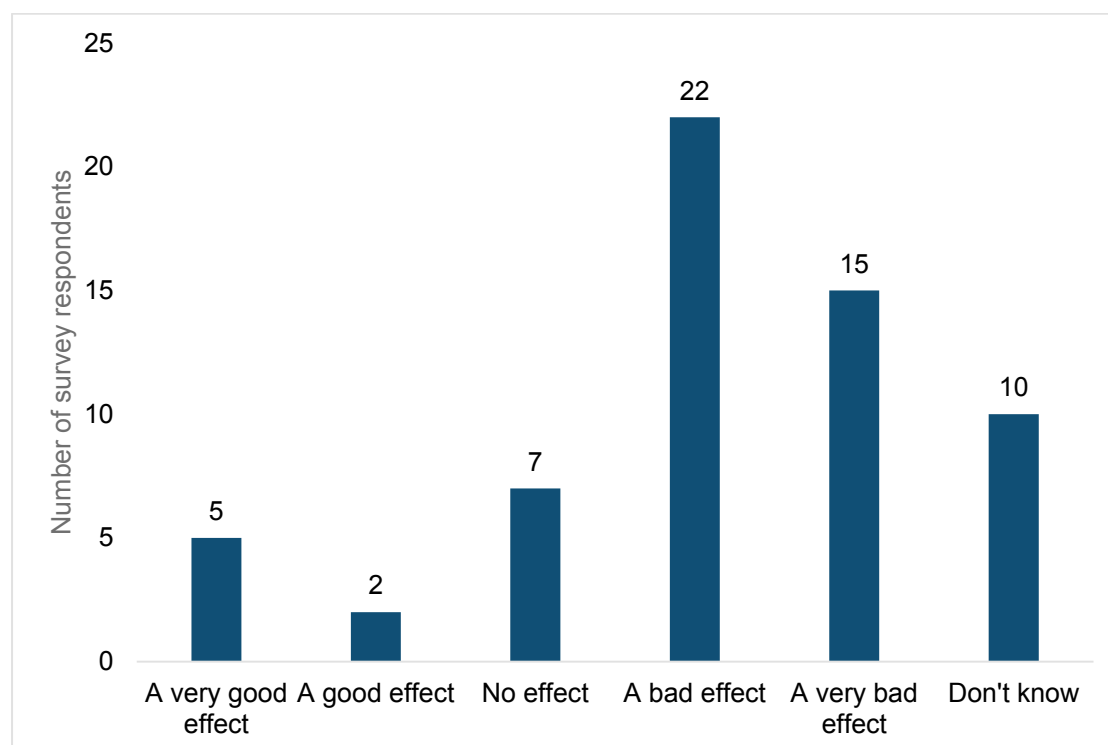
Figure 1: Over the last 18 months, to what extent has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had an impact on current foster carers, adopters and special guardians?



A slight negative effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was identified among current foster carers by half (31) of local authority representatives. Fifteen local authority representatives reported a slight negative effect among special guardians. Effects were least likely to be reported by local authority representatives in relation to current adopters.

When carers responding to the online survey were asked what effect the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had on their household, over one-third (22 of 61) said that it had had a bad effect on their household. A further quarter (15 of 61) said that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had a very bad effect on their household – see Figure 2. However a small number (7) thought it had had some positive effects.

Figure 2: Online survey of carers - What effect, if any, has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had on your household?



Base: All respondents to this question during the online survey of carers (61).

Further detail on the nature of the effects that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy is perceived to have had on carers of different types is provided in sections 3.3 and 3.4 and in chapter 5.

3.3 Negative effects

Several local authority representatives mentioned that there had been concerns among foster carers when the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was first announced, about what it would mean for them, and this was echoed during our interviews with carers that were affected.

‘There were quite a lot of carers who had initial concerns about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, and we wrote letters for them to have when contacting their housing departments to explain that they were foster carers to help with covering [their] spare room/claiming Discretionary Housing Payments’.²³ (Local authority representative)

²³ Discretionary Housing Payments are provided by local authorities on a discretionary basis to those requiring additional financial support to cover the cost of living – see section 6.3 for their use in relation to foster carers, adopters and special guardians.

The rule change in the size criteria to cover the first bedroom for foster carers was thought by local authority representatives to have alleviated the initial concern – ‘it did cause some anxiety until they understood what was happening’. (Local authority representative)

However, interviews with carers highlighted that worries remained for those individuals caring for more than one child, or with financial difficulties.

‘Panic set in as I spoke to different people at the council and couldn’t get any answers. Eventually I spoke to my local MP and asked him what he wanted me to do, downgrade my property and give up one of my foster children and if so which one! They just said I would have to pay for the second bedroom’. (Foster carer)

Financial implications

Where representatives from local authorities and respondents from carer interviews provided further details of the nature of any negative effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, these were related to the financial implications for households affected, particularly for single foster carers.

‘The impact where it is felt is more on single carers who are not working and rely on caring allowance and benefits as their income and therefore will notice the reduction...some did think of moving until the DHP was sorted and [the] housing department understand the importance of paying DHP to carers’. (Local authority representative)

Carers of all types who had been affected said that the loss of household income had led to tightening budgets for basic items such as food and clothes, not spending on extras such as family holidays and children not going on school trips.

‘I struggle to pay for things for my granddaughter for school, and I can’t pay the bills. Every week we pay the bedroom tax and every week we have nothing left. We have to go without things. She misses out on school trips because I can’t afford to pay for her to go – there are always things the school are expecting them to have; clothes, food - it is a real struggle’. (Special guardian)

This supports the interim findings of the larger evaluation of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy being undertaken by Ipsos MORI, which identified that making cuts in household essentials or incurring debts was a major concern among those claimants who were paying the shortfall in rent as a result of the subsidy removal. Over half of claimants (57 per cent) ‘reported cutting back on what they deemed household essentials’, and just over a quarter (26 per cent) ‘had borrowed

money...although we do not know whether they have a history of borrowing for other purposes'.²⁴

Downsizing to smaller properties had been considered by several carer interviewees, but this had not been possible due to a variety of reasons including:

- Lack of smaller housing stock
- Perceived lack of support from the local authority in finding/moving to a new property
- Requiring specially adapted housing to support the needs of disabled children in their care
- Young children in their care needing stability in the placement and not the upheaval of a move
- Financial barriers (e.g. rent arrears)

During the feasibility phase of the study, a local authority representative noted that for special guardians there may be issues of experiencing 'overcrowding' whilst they care for a child, and financial implications once a child that has been cared for moves out of the property and leaves an empty room:

'Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy might have an impact if special guardians for instance moved to a bigger property to accommodate an extra child, then in the future the children leave so there could be an impact then'.
(Local authority representative)

Two local authorities noted that some foster carers had reduced their caring capacity as a result of the financial implications of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, where they had moved to smaller properties and therefore could no longer take on as many placements for the agency – '[the number] of foster children a foster carer can look after has been reduced as they have had to move to smaller accommodation'. (Local authority representative)

A variation of this situation was echoed by a foster carer, whose caring capacity was minimised because they could not move to a larger property despite their wish to: 'I would like a third bedroom to enable me to foster more children but the Spare Room Subsidy is preventing me from doing this'. (Foster carer)

One local authority representative was also concerned that the capacity of foster carers with narrow approvals status²⁵ may be adversely affected in the longer term if

²⁴ DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.17

they had not had a placement within the 12 months stipulated by the current size criteria.

‘This carer has a narrow approval status and the placements she can take are limited so as a result she has had gaps between placements. She has accessed DHP but if she hasn't had a placement for a whole year the subsidy has to be reviewed’. (Local authority representative)

Single foster carer: financial effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

Jane is a single foster carer for a child with learning disabilities, in a three-bedroomed property that she has lived in for 13 years. She gave up working to become a full-time foster carer, and then heard about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy in the media.

She approached her local authority and learned that she would need to pay £14 per week for the one spare bedroom, even though she is planning to take on a second foster placement.

‘It is a lot of money, £56 a month, so that is a lot over 12 months’

Jane considered downsizing, and saw the benefit of trying to find a property perhaps on a quieter street that might be safer for the children.

‘I put some notes in some of the two-bedroomed properties to see if they wanted to move or a house exchange...I went to look at a few properties and thought if I moved I would have to get rid of a lot of my furniture... I have spent a lot of money on this house... I can't afford to do another one up

There was another three-bedroomed house that came up quite near me and I asked if I could exchange it for mine... but there was a bidding war going on for it.’

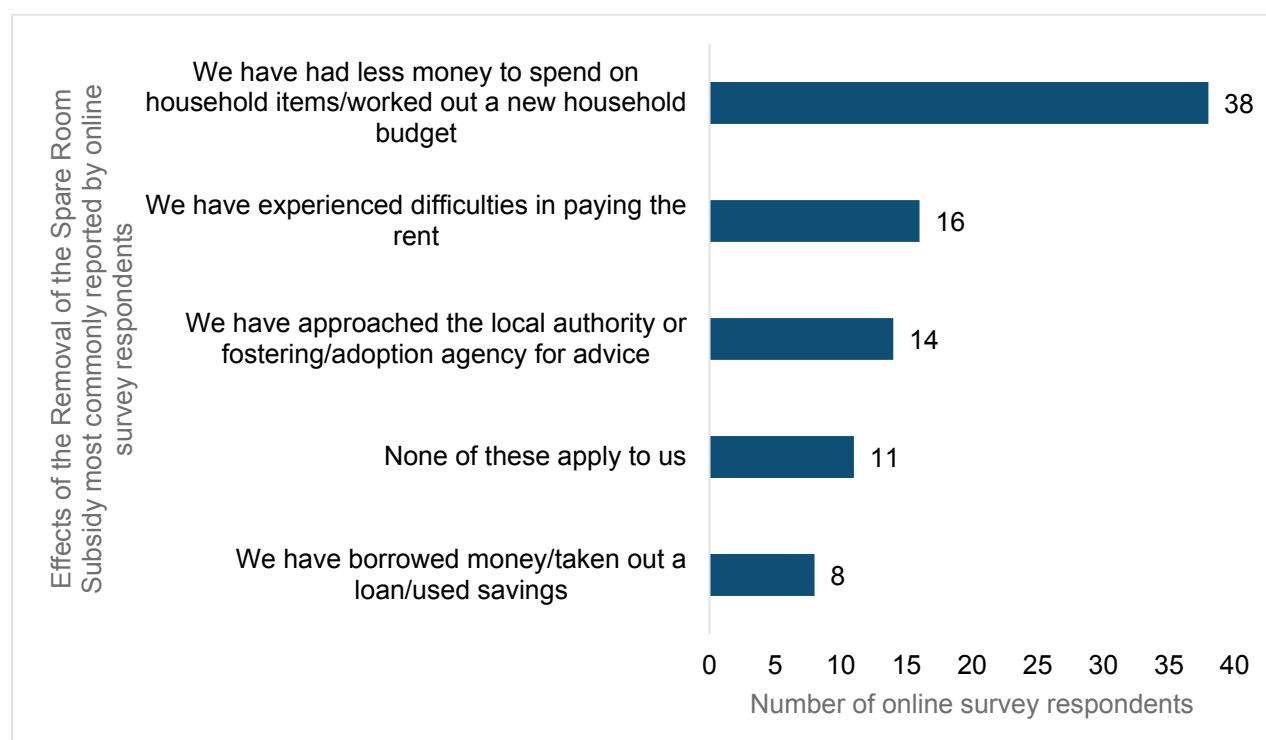
Jane has stayed in the same property and feels she has received little support as a foster carer experiencing the effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

‘I was prepared to give up my house but no one was going to help me so I thought I would just get on with it and pay it. I won't make up the shortfall, it is me that suffers’.

²⁵ A foster carer's approval status reflects the number and nature of children that he/she is agreed by the authority/agency to be suitable to care for.

Figure 3 shows the five most common responses in relation to what respondents to the online survey of carers said has happened in their household as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy to date. Over half of the carers responding suggested that they have reduced their household spending and around one-quarter had experienced difficulties in paying their rent.

Figure 3: Online survey of carers - Which of these, if any, has happened in your household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?



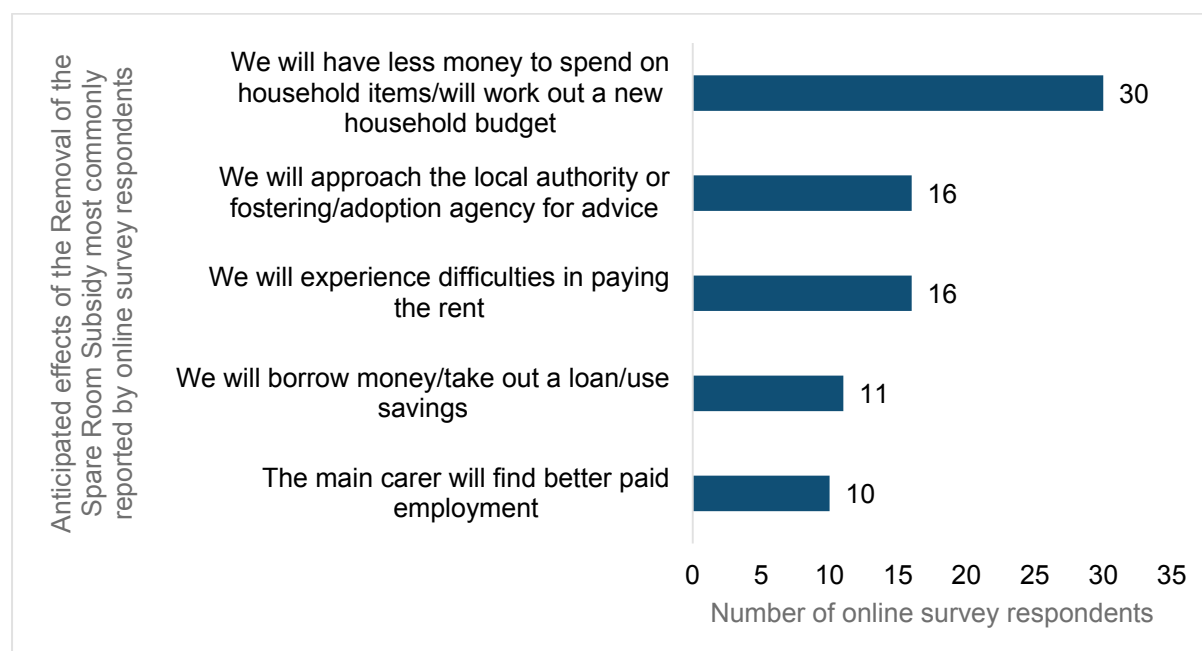
Base = All respondents to this question during the online survey of carers (61).

Less common responses included six carers who said that the main carer was looking for better paid employment; four respondents said that the children they care for were sharing a bedroom; and four said that the main carer had taken up additional employment.²⁶

In the future, carers see themselves responding in similar ways. Figure 4 highlights the five most common responses in terms of what respondents to the online survey think will happen in their household as a result of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Again, reducing household spending was most common, followed by experiencing difficulties in paying the rent.

²⁶ Annex 3 – Table 24

Figure 4: Online survey of carers – In the future which of these, if any, do you think will happen in your household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?



Base = All respondents to this question during the online survey of carers (61).

In addition, seven respondents said that the main carer will take up additional employment outside the home, seven said that the main carer will work longer hours outside the home and seven said that they will no longer be able to continue in their role as a carer.²⁷ The drive for a main carer to take up additional employment could conflict with fostering agency regulations since there can be a requirement, particularly for those looking after children with complex needs, to remain at home full time.

3.4 Positive effects

Where a slight positive effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was identified among foster carers by local authority representatives, this was connected with how the local authorities thought that they had dealt with the reform and supported foster carers, rather than the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy bringing about positive effects directly to foster care households.

‘[There was] a slight positive impact when one child was subsidised, in general terms. For those that responded to our survey regarding Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy we were able to give them the support they needed

²⁷ Annex 3 – Table 25

and help them access the discretionary grant'. (Local authority representative)

During the online survey of carers, when asked what, if anything had happened in their household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, five respondents said that it had had a 'very good effect' on their household, and two said that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had a 'good effect'.

Three said that they had less money to spend on household items and/or had worked out a new household budget – the latter of which (working out a new household budget) could have been regarded by respondents as a positive effect. Three responded that the main carer was looking for better paid employment and one said that another member of the household (rather than the main carer) had taken up additional employment, so this may have had or was hoped to have a positive effect on household finances.

4. Recruitment and Retention

This chapter examines the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on the recruitment and retention of foster carers, adopters and special guardians over the last 18 months. It also looks at the anticipated effects, if any, on the recruitment and retention of carers over the next 12 months.

Headline findings – recruitment and retention

The majority (three-quarters) of local authority representatives did not think that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on the recruitment of carers of all types over the last 18 months, although there was a level of uncertainty due to these data not being routinely collected and recorded.

The large majority of local authorities did not report any known effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on the retention of carers over the last 18 months. Likewise for the next 12 months, a significant minority did not know whether or not there would be an impact on retention rates for adopters (16 of 61) and special guardians (19 of 61), highlighting the level of uncertainty of the longer-term effects of the policy change. Where local authority representatives did anticipate an effect on future retention, concerns were raised about the sustainability of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs).

For the next 12 months, approximately half of local authority representatives did not anticipate an effect on the recruitment of all carer types. However, one-quarter did think that it might affect the recruitment of foster carers due to issues such as the size criteria deterring applicants, a lack of awareness among potential applicants of the support available to them, and the financial implications of the policy change.

The approvals process for prospective carers was identified as a particular concern for some local authorities, due to applicants not being able to afford to retain empty bedrooms throughout the approvals process.

During the online survey of carers 12 of 61 respondents said that their ability to apply to become a carer of a young person had been affected by the policy change. They attributed this to reasons such as the financial implications and not having as much time due to working longer hours. Just less than one quarter (14 of 61) of survey respondents said that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to continue fostering.

4.1 Effect on recruitment – last 18 months

Approximately three-quarters of local authority representatives did not think that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on the recruitment of foster carers (49 out of 63), adopters (48 out of 61) or special guardians (45 out of 61) over the last 18 months.²⁸

Just four local authority representatives noted a negative effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on the recruitment of special guardians, noting that these ‘tend to be from lower income brackets’ and therefore, the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy made taking on the care of a young person more of a financial challenge for these families.

An adoption agency interviewed during the feasibility study for the research felt that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy would make it more difficult for prospective adopters to come forward:

‘It does put people off - we have to turn people away if they don’t have the spare room. There are people in a one-bed home with no spare room and the only way to adopt is to leave the secure tenancy and rent privately and people don’t want to enter the private rented sector, it is more risky’.

(Adoption agency)

During the online survey, just 12 of the 61 respondents said that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to apply to become a carer of a young person (21 said that their ability to become a foster carer had not been affected, 5 did not know; 13 said that their ability to become an adopter had not been affected, 3 did not know; 15 said that their ability to become a special guardian had not been affected, 2 did not know; the remainder reported that this question did not apply to them).

Where their ability to apply to become carers had been affected, six these had their ability to become a special guardian affected, a further four had their ability to adopt affected; the remaining two had their ability to apply to become a foster carer affected.²⁹

Their reasons were:

- Financial implications/can no longer afford to become a carer (4 respondents)

²⁸ See Annex 1 – Table 8

²⁹ See Annex 3 – Table 23

- Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy 'put me off' (3 respondents)
- Working longer hours as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (1 respondent)
- Denied adoption because of limited finances (1 respondent)
- No longer having a spare room (1 respondent)

4.2 Withdrawals

Of the 63 local authority representatives, 53 reported that none of the prospective carers had withdrawn from the process as a result of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, seven did not know and three had withdrawn.³⁰ Where local authorities knew that individuals had withdrawn from the application process for fostering as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, this was due to the necessity to downsize during the time of the application and therefore no longer having a spare bedroom available for a foster child.

One local authority interviewee gave an example where a prospective special guardian had withdrawn from the application process as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy – 'a kinship carer at this stage has not moved to a special guardianship order due to potentially not qualifying for the discretionary payment'. (Local authority representative)

Of the 62 local authorities 53 had not turned anyone away during the application/approval process as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, five had, four did not know.

Local authority representatives did not report turning away any prospective adopters or special guardians as a result of the Removal of Spare Room Subsidy although for 11 and 10 authorities respectively, the interviewees did not know if this had happened (for the remainder, the question did not apply).³¹ One local authority representative highlighted during the feasibility study that 'this would place the burden on us to support them to try to find a solution through the process rather than reject them, we are not going to turn people away unless it is a child safeguarding issue or unless we really have to'. (Local authority representative)

³⁰ See Annex 1 – Table 9

³¹ See Annex 1 – Table 10

Nonetheless, it does appear that the motivations of some applications have been queried by fostering teams following the introduction of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy:

‘We have had a significant number of unsuitable people in social housing applying to be foster carers to maintain their benefits - they are not recruited’.
(Local authority representative)

‘Some fostering enquiries appear to have been made on the basis of potential avoidance of losing the Spare Room Subsidy, leading to concerns for assessors around motivation. Conversely, some potentially good applicants have been lost because clearly it is not possible at the early stage of an enquiry to give assurances about approval, and applicants have in the meantime to suffer loss of benefits for an uncertain outcome’. (Local authority representative)

Prospective carer: Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy - a factor in reconsidering fostering as a new career

Peter was working part-time but his contracted employment ended. He lives in a two-bedroomed council property and he lived in the property caring for his elderly mother until she died. After her death he took over the tenancy and was considering becoming a foster carer because a friend of his is also a foster carer.

The property currently only has a shower room rather than a bathroom and Peter approached the housing association to ask about having the room converted back to a bathroom so that it would be more suitable for the needs of a foster family.

‘I went to the housing association and they weren’t interested in helping me convert it back – they just said I had to move into a one-bed property as the second bedroom was empty, but if I did that I wouldn’t be able to foster. I was quite shocked that they took that attitude when all I wanted to do was give something back to the community and help someone worse off than me. I would have thought they would be a bit more understanding’.

The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy is a ‘considerable amount’ for Peter whilst he is not in work, ‘and at the moment it is making me think twice about fostering’.

‘I have read about DHPs but it is my understanding they are not easy to get and there is some doubt as to how long they will be available for.

At this time I think my best option is to find employment outside the home and ...see what other options I have as at the moment I feel as if I am in a no win situation’.

4.3 Positive recruitment

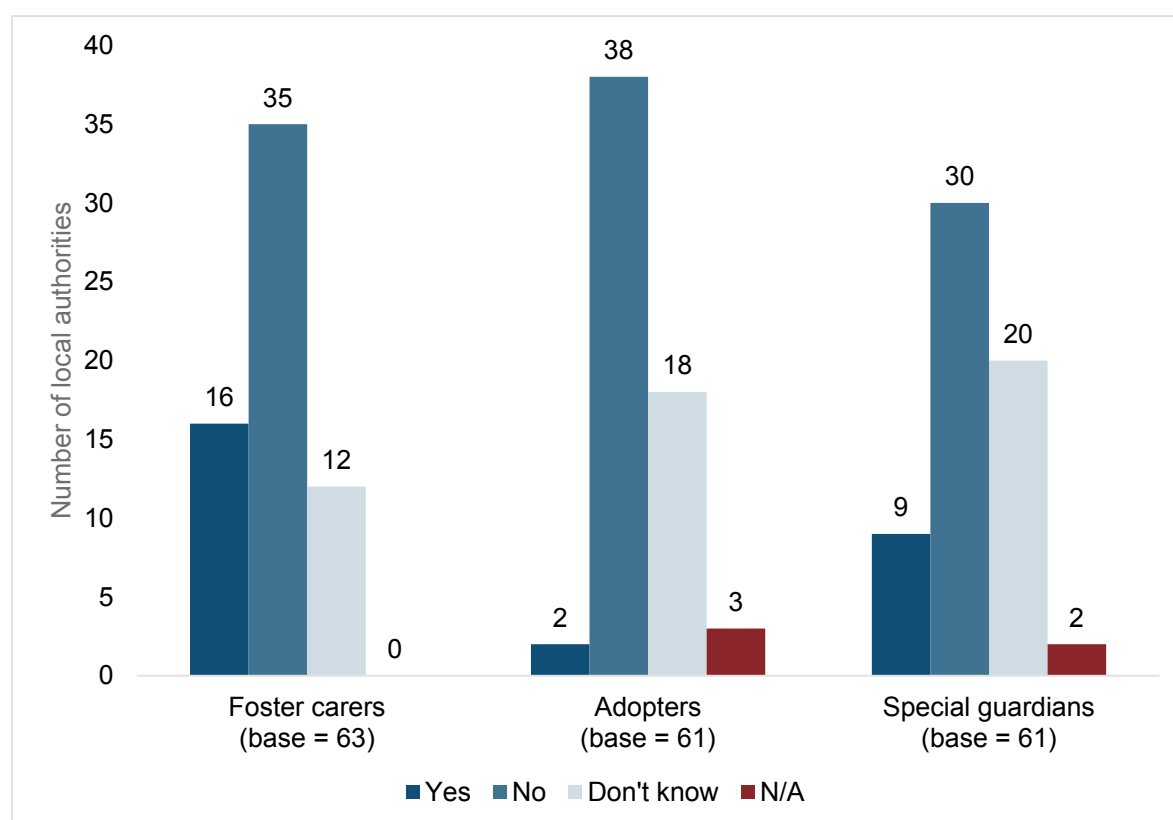
Where there had been a slight positive effect on the recruitment of foster carers, a small number had suggested that when the policy change was first introduced, this brought about a larger number of enquiries into fostering, which meant considerable screening to filter out those who were not suitable. Local authority representatives suggested that this was an attempt to avoid moving house or experience a reduction of Housing Benefit. During the telephone interviews, one local authority mentioned approaching the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy as ‘a positive recruitment issue’ within their overall marketing strategies to potential foster carers ‘i.e. if you have a spare room why not use it positively and become a foster carer and it will generate an income?’ (Local authority representative)

Another local authority representative said that ‘it may be positive in that [the carer] would no longer have a spare bedroom - but they are unlikely to state this as a motivating factor when applying’. (Local authority representative)

4.4 Recruitment – next 12 months

Over half of local authority representatives did not think that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy would have an effect on their recruitment of foster carers or adopters over the next 12 months (35 and 38 respectively). Nearly half (30) did not think that it would have an effect on applications for special guardianship orders (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: As a consequence of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, do you expect there to be an impact on the recruitment of foster carers, adopters or special guardians in the next 12 months?



However Figure 5 also shows that one-quarter (16 of 63) of local authorities did anticipate an effect on the recruitment of foster carers over the next 12 months due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

‘We are already finding it difficult to recruit foster carers, particularly for sibling groups where the carers need more than one bedroom, and although we expect the impact to be small it will now be more difficult to recruit foster

carers because of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy'. (Local authority representative)

Nine of 61 local authorities also anticipated an effect on the recruitment of special guardians over the next 12 months as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (Figure 5). Two of 61 local authorities anticipated an effect on the recruitment of adopters. Where local authority representatives expected an effect on future levels of recruitment of carers of all types, this was due to issues such as:

- **Lack of guarantees regarding the long term sustainability of DHPs**

'If the government take the DHPs away it will have a strong impact on recruitment, people will think twice about approaching us'. (Local authority representative)

- **Additional rules deterring individuals from making initial enquiries**

'Attracting potential foster carers is difficult anyway; this has just created another barrier, especially if the understanding of the rules is mixed or not very clear among people'. (Local authority representative)

- **Lack of awareness of the support available from local authorities**

- **Financial implication of being left without a placement**

- **Financial problems – particularly for special guardians**

'Our special guardians are more likely to live in social housing and the foster carers in the main have their own homes. If the special guardians have financial problems for whatever reason, rent increase for example, then yes, I think [the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy] will impact on recruitment.' (Local authority representative)

- **Concerns from the local authority that applications are driven by inappropriate motivations such as financial considerations alone**

Two local authorities expressed concern that the current size criteria would deter existing foster carers from taking on more placements as they develop in their career and experience as a carer, thereby negatively impacting on the capacity of the agency.

'[Downsizing due to Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy] makes less people available for fostering - we don't place children unless there is a spare room.' (Local authority representative)

Communicating local authority support

The prospect of challenges to future recruitment initiatives meant that some local authority teams were considering 'how we are going to address this in our marketing and help people understand that there is support available to them. It is going to put people off coming forward to foster if they think there are financial penalties'. (Local authority representative)

During the feasibility study and the main fieldwork, local authority fostering and adoption teams provided examples of ways in which they engaged with carers, tried to minimise any confusion or concern among existing carers and publicise the availability of support available through the local authority.

This included:

- Producing leaflets explaining the introduction of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and what it means to carers in social housing and the support and help available at the local authority, including direct telephone contact details
- Writing letters to all existing carers known to be in social housing and potentially affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy to inform them of how they could get help and advice
- Automatically referring existing carers known to be affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy to local authority housing departments to process DHP applications
- Providing information about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy at foster carer and adopter recruitment events, including information about the availability of DHPs

4.5 Retention – last 18 months

One of the concerns of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was that it might have an effect on local authority carer retention rates. When asked during the telephone interviews, the large majority of local authorities stated that there had been no known effect on the retention of current foster carers (60 out of 63),

adopters (51 of 61) and special guardians (50 of 61).³² Of those local authorities answering this question, one local authority representative reported an effect on the retention of foster carers and two did not know; none reported an effect on the retention of adopters and one reported an effect on the retention of special guardians; eight did not know the effect on retention of adopters and special guardians and for two this question did not apply. During the telephone interviews with individuals who said that they have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, none of them said that their view of their role had changed.

‘I will never give up fostering; it is my vocation to be a foster carer. I will never give up these three little children, they have been through enough’. (Foster carer)

‘These are my grandchildren and I will always look after them. I will continue to foster as well as I have been doing it for 15 years’. (Special guardian/foster carer)

Despite the challenges that these individuals experienced, they had all decided that continuing to care was of greater importance:

‘at first I did give some thought about stopping but I have been fostering for about four years now and I don’t want to stop’. (Foster carer)

‘We have considered giving up fostering because of this tax as it causes a lot of arguments...but on the other hand you are doing some good and some of these kids need all the help they can get’. (Foster carer)

When asked for further details as to why the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy may have prompted individuals to have given up their role, a local authority representative commenting on the case of special guardians said that ‘there is a generous package for foster carers [in terms of allowances], and adopters have support plans... guardians law around this [is] not as strong for support, so financial issues’ were the motivating factor.

This was not wholly supported by the results of the online survey which found that 14 individuals responding had had their ability to continue fostering affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.³³ For most of these individuals, the financial implications resulting from Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy were the reason for this.

³² See Annex 1 – Table 6

³³ See Annex 3 – Table 23

‘I simply will not be able to continue. I have fostered for 17 years and fostered over 100 children and young adults’. (Foster carer)

4.6 Retention – next 12 months

The majority of local authorities interviewed did not anticipate an effect on the retention of foster carers (48 out of 63), adopters (41 of 61) or special guardians (41 of 61) over the next 12 months.³⁴

Just eight local authorities expected to see a future effect on the retention of foster carers, four expected a future effect on the retention of special guardians and just one expected an effect on the future retention of adopters.

Where they anticipated an effect on retention, this was related to concerns about the sustainability of DHP support.³⁵

‘Potentially there will be an impact on being able to retain foster carers in the future if the exemption rules are changed, DHP is not guaranteed/the subsidy shortfall is not covered’. (Local authority representative)

‘Currently, foster carers looking after sibling groups are still having their second bedrooms covered by the DHP, but this cannot be guaranteed in the long-term, and if the household budget increases (e.g. other bills increase) and DHP stays the same or the DHP is taken away then they will either have to downsize, or the carer may have to take in a lodger, or go out to work’. (Local authority representative)

Notably, a significant minority of local authorities did not know whether or not the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy would have an effect on their retention rates of adopters (19 of 61) and special guardians (16 of 61) over the next 12 months.

³⁴ See Annex 1 – Table 11.

³⁵ The availability and use of DHPs is covered in further detail in chapter 6.

5. Effect of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on Specific Groups and Placements

In the months before the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was introduced, concerns were raised by a range of agencies and voluntary and community organisations that – among other groups such as armed forces families – looked after children and their families would be disproportionately adversely affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. This led to exceptions being made within the size criteria and the one additional bedroom being permitted for foster carers within the new rules.³⁶ This chapter examines specific circumstances where the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy may have had an effect on households keeping bedrooms vacant so that they could place more than one child (e.g. sibling groups), or where they looked after specific groups such as teenagers or children and young people with complex needs.

Headline findings – effect on specific groups and placements

Although we have established that small numbers of carers have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, this chapter specifically focuses on the experiences of carers who have been affected.

Placements that were most affected were those for children with complex needs, children who are unable to share a bedroom (e.g. due to past experiences or personal characteristics), sibling groups, unrelated children placed with one household, and teenagers.

Carers responding to the online survey and taking part in the telephone interviews reported that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to take on these types of placement due to the financial implications of caring for children with complex needs, no longer being able to afford a property large enough for sibling groups, and conflicting regulations between fostering/housing benefit teams in relation to the age at which a child requires their own bedroom.

Kinship and respite carers were noted by local authority representatives to be more likely to be affected by the financial implications of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

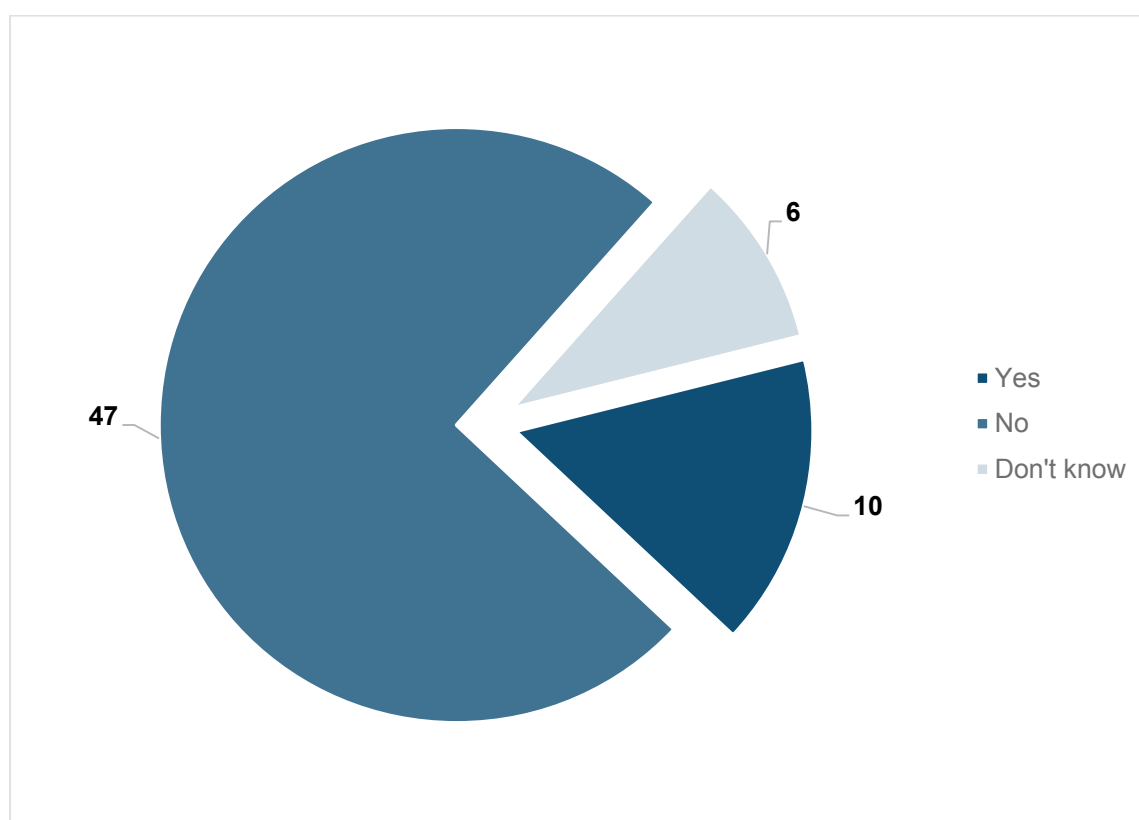
³⁶ DWP (2013), *Written Ministerial Statement: Housing Benefit Reform*, www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/March-2013/12-3-13/6.WorkandPensions-HousingBenefitreform.pdf

5.1 Effect on specific groups and placements

Maintaining vacant bedrooms for multiple children or sibling groups

When asked about whether they knew of any circumstances where the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on current foster carers keeping bedrooms vacant for more than one looked after child, three quarters of local authority representatives (47 of 63) said that they did not know of any examples of these circumstances. Just under one-in-six (10) did feel there had been an effect; six did not know (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Do you know of any foster carers who have had their Housing Benefit reduced because they were keeping bedrooms vacant for more than one looked after child e.g. enabling them to foster large sibling groups?



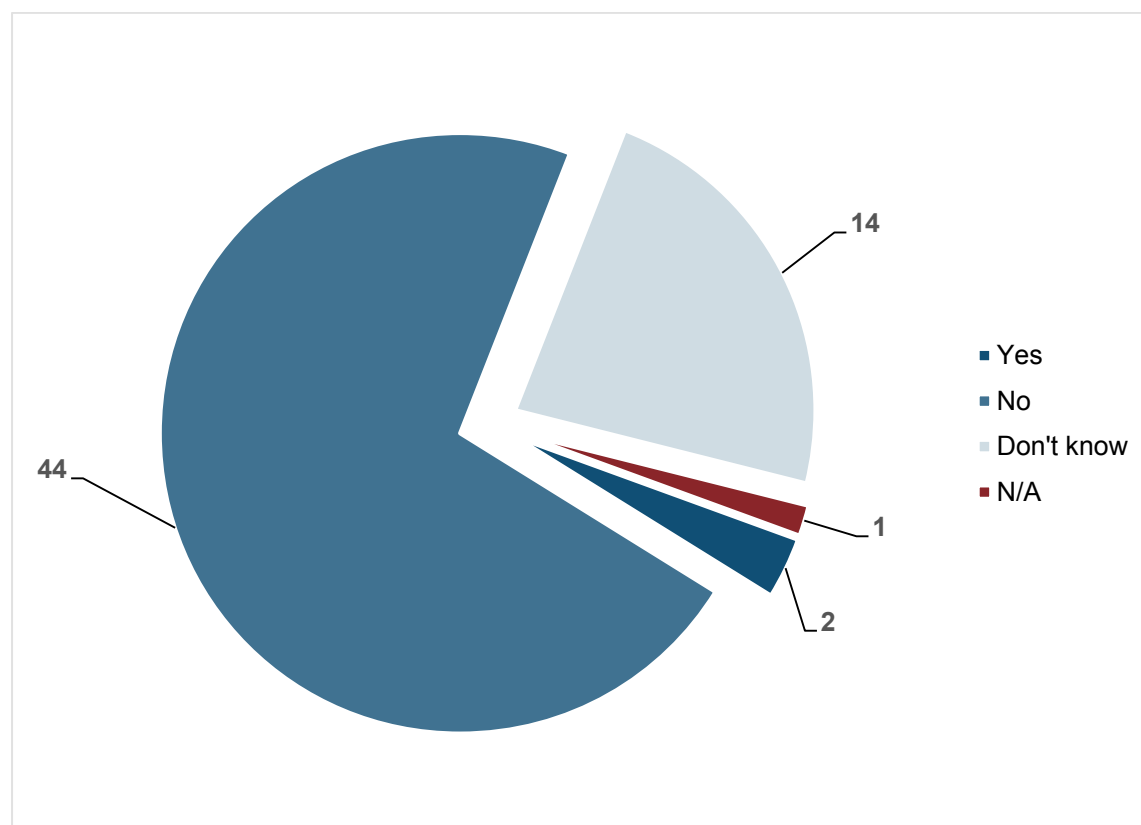
Base = Number of local authorities responding to this question during the telephone interviews/online survey (63). Figures total 101% due to rounding

Children unable to share bedrooms

Nearly three-quarters (44 of 61) of local authority representatives did not know of circumstances where current adopters and special guardians have had their Housing Benefit reduced because their child cannot share a bedroom, and two reported that they did know of these circumstances (see Figure 7). However, echoing earlier comments that data about current adopters and special guardians are not as easy to

identify, nearly one quarter (14 of 61) of local authority representatives noted that they would not know whether or not these groups had been affected.

Figure 7: Do you know of any adopters or special guardians who have had their Housing Benefit reduced, because their child cannot share a bedroom (e.g. due to emotional or behavioural difficulties) when Housing Benefit regulations require them to?



Base = Number of local authorities responding to this question during the telephone interviews/online survey (61).

Effects on specific placements

During the telephone interviews with local authorities, representatives were also asked about whether they thought that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on *specific types of placement* over the last 18 months. The majority of representatives did not think so. Fifty-four of 63 local authority representatives did not think that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on the placement together of unrelated children (four did not know and for one this did not apply); 54 of 63 did not think the policy change had had an effect on the placement of sibling groups (five did not know); 51 of 63 did not think that there was an effect on the placement of teenagers (nine did not know), and 49 of 62 did not think that there was an effect on the placement of children who are unable to share a bedroom

because of emotional/behavioural difficulties or previous experiences (6 did not know).³⁷

However, there were some examples given by local authorities.

Complex needs

Children who are unable to share a bedroom because of emotional, behavioural difficulties or previous experiences – seven of 62 local authority representatives reported examples of this³⁸ and over half (11 out of 19) of the carers we spoke to during the telephone interviews who said that they had been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy were caring for children with complex needs. They described how this had affected their ability to:

- Pay for household items such as extra cleaning materials, bedding, clothes
- Pay for carers to provide overnight care
- Travel to special schools when they were required to use personal transport (i.e. couldn't use public transport instead)

Eleven respondents to the online survey of carers reported that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to care for children with complex needs.³⁹ This was due to the financial implications of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, with four of the 11 highlighting that additional space and resources were required when caring for children and young people with complex needs.

'I will need every penny I can earn in order to care for a child with complex needs'.

'Space is needed for children with complex needs to hold extra equipment needed'.

Sibling groups

The care of sibling groups is a key challenge for fostering and adoption agencies. Data are not routinely collected on the foster care of sibling groups, but a recent Freedom of Information request by Action for Children to all UK local authorities identified that 11,082 children from sibling groups were placed in local authority foster care between April 2013 and March 2014 and that 3,598 children (one-third)

³⁷ See Annex 1 – Table 7

³⁸ See Annex 1 – Table 7

³⁹ See Annex 3 – Table 23

had been separated from their siblings.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the placement of sibling groups is common in special guardianship arrangements – in a recent study, over one-third (35.5 per cent) of children were placed with their special guardian with at least one other sibling; a further six per cent joined a sibling already resident.⁴¹

Criteria on the age up to which sibling groups can share bedrooms varies according to each fostering agency, but the Government's National Minimum Standards (2011) for local authority fostering services recommends that 'each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom'.⁴²

During the telephone interviews, four of 63 local authority representatives thought Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on the placement of sibling groups:

'There have been two fostering households in the local authority who care for sibling groups who have been affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and need to make sure that DHP remains consistent - if the second bedroom does not stay covered by DHP in the longer term this could prove to be a problem for the households'. (Local authority representative)

In the online survey of carers, just less than one-quarter of respondents (14 of 61) said that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to care for more than one child or a sibling group (26 said that it had not affected their ability to care for more than one child/sibling groups, four did not know and for ten this question was not applicable).⁴³

Where respondents to the online survey reported that their ability to care for more than one child or a sibling group had been effected, this was due to not being able to afford the larger properties required, because although the size criteria may state children can share until they are ten, 'the fostering policy says that a child should not share after the age of six'. (Foster carer)

Another respondent said that although they were registered to care for sibling groups they now 'would have to limit it to babies only' because otherwise the children would require their own bedrooms according to agency rules.

⁴⁰ Action for Children (2014), 'One in three children split from siblings in foster care', <http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/news/archive/2014/september/keeping-siblings-together>

⁴¹ Wade, J., Sinclair, I., Stuttard, L. and Simmonds, J (2014) *Investigating Special Guardianship: Experiences, Outcomes and Challenges*, London: Department for Education.

⁴² DfE (2011), *Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards*, p.22

⁴³ See Annex 3 – Table 23

Other respondents said that their ability to care for sibling groups or more than one child had been affected because they 'might give up caring' entirely, had been 'put off' caring for more than one child as a response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, or because of the financial implications of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

Fostering for sibling groups and complex needs but 'one bedroom is empty'

Angela has been a foster carer for ten years. She is a single full-time carer to three foster children aged ten and under (all of whom are siblings), and a fourth young child who was initially fostered with Angela before she became the child's special guardian. One of the children has complex physical needs. According to the rules of Angela's fostering service, now that one of the children has turned ten years old they are required to have their own bedroom and cannot share with their siblings.

'It is difficult if you have a sibling group for a while then they become of an age when they can no longer share – obviously that is what happened to me'.

Angela had lived in a three-bedroomed council house for 18 years when the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was introduced. She found that she received little support or help from her local council in moving to a new property, and in October 2014 she moved into 4-bedroomed private rented accommodation.

'I knew I was paying bedroom tax even though all the bedrooms were full...according to the housing people one bedroom is empty even though it isn't...'

Angela found the experience difficult because of the different messages that were communicated by separate local authority departments. The fostering service said that the older child could no longer share with their siblings, but the housing department was stating that the three siblings could share one room.

'It is annoying as we are looking after [local authority] children and as much as I told them I did not have a spare room they never came for a visit to see what the set up was.'

Angela found that as a result the household budget was tightened - 'the money coming in is taken up by all the essentials so you just have to make cut backs on the little luxuries, like food and clothes. It wasn't one particular area that suffered; you just have to tighten your belt'. Angela was told about DHP support by her fostering team, but her application was refused and after feeling that she was not receiving much support from the local authority housing department she decided to move into private accommodation despite higher rents and the size criteria also applying in the private rental sector.

'I was told I didn't qualify, that was all...The DHP application forms don't ask if you are a foster carer, I did add it on the bottom but it didn't seem to make any difference. I think they should have visited me so they could verify that what I was saying was right'.

Unrelated children and teenagers

Four of 63 local authority representatives thought that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had an effect on the placement together of unrelated children.

Fostering unrelated children

Sahiba fosters two children for one local authority, but lives within a different local authority.

‘We were told we had to pay £25 bedroom tax a week and could only be exempt for one bedroom even though we do not have an empty bedroom’.

The housing department of the local authority in which she lives informed Sahiba that the two children could share a bedroom according to the size criteria, but her fostering agency will not allow this because the children are not siblings.

‘We wrote a letter to [the housing authority] saying the children couldn’t share... but they told us we would still have to pay for one bedroom’.

Sahiba cuts back on food shopping – ‘*only get the necessities*’ – and applying for the DHP has been difficult because Sahiba does not speak English as a first language. This makes completing the application form a daunting process.

Finding placements for teenagers can be difficult for some local authorities. Three of 63 local authority representatives noted an effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on the placement of teenagers.

‘Have found with special guardianship for teenagers that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy has had an impact on families who have wanted to care for a teenager but haven’t got the accommodation for them, but they can’t afford the empty bedroom whilst the approvals are going through and so if they are in a smaller property they find that they cannot go back into larger housing.’ (Local authority representative)

Fourteen (nearly one-quarter) respondents to the online survey of carers reported that the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to care for older children (teenagers) – 22 said that it had not, five did not know and for 20 respondents this question was not applicable.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ See Annex 3 – Table 23

Where their ability to care for teenagers had been affected, five of these online survey respondents said that this was due to room requirements – ‘teenagers need their own space, I would be unable to provide this’. Three said that the cost of caring for teenagers had become prohibitive, another three said that they had been ‘put off’ or ‘won’t want to be involved any more’ in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

5.2 Effect on kinship and respite carers

Family and friends carers

Local authority representatives noted instances where individuals with informal care arrangements had been affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. These individuals are commonly known as family and friends or connected (kinship) carers.

‘Where it could impact is when family and friends become carers - these might be aunts, uncles and grandparents and tend to be the ones on lower incomes’. (Local authority representative)

The effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy specifically on family and friend carers was mentioned during several interviews with local authorities:

- A grandmother taking on six grandchildren to stop the children being placed into formal care – this family needed to be moved into a five-bedroomed house and the size criteria would only cover a proportion of these
- A family and friends carer taking on two children from traumatic backgrounds who required separate bedrooms, was having to go through the appeals process as DHP was not initially granted to cover the second child’s bedroom

‘In my experience it would be family members...and there may be a high proportion of them who would be living in social housing and would be likely to be impacted as they are usually on pensions/lower incomes.’ (Local authority representative)

‘Kinship carers don’t get the support like foster carers – I am not raising my own children so where is the difference?’

Karen has a residence order for her two grandchildren, both aged less than ten years old. They live in a three-bed property. One of the children is autistic and she has cared for them since they were both infants. Due to their age, the social housing size criteria currently stipulate that the two children could share one bedroom.

‘The problem is kinship carers do not get the same benefits as foster carers’.

Karen did not know about DHPs until social services told her about them and said that she was eligible to apply.

‘I filled in the application form then took it to the library where they scanned it in and it went straight to the council. It was for three months and £15 a week; however they never told me that I had got it so I was still paying the bedroom tax as I didn’t want to get into arrears with my rent. I was £100 in credit with my rent when anyone found out which was just as [the DHP] was running out but they wouldn’t give it back to me they said they would hold it against my future rent’.

This happened again with her second DHP application, and Karen was then told that she could not apply for any more.

‘I am £15 a week down which is taken away from the kids really. There are no holidays, Christmas was difficult, and there is no money to pay for school uniforms and things like that’.

Karen said that she would have considered moving to a one-bedroomed property if she had not become a kinship carer for her grandchildren - ‘I have even asked the council if we could move into a two-bed but there aren’t any so there is nowhere for me to move to – I have no choice I have to stay here’.

Respite carers

Three local authority representatives noted the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy specifically on foster carers who offer respite care. These are essential short-term placements, often for young people with complex needs or behavioural difficulties, and therefore requiring specialist care resources.

‘A short-term/respite carer had Housing Benefit reduced as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and the local authority have had to

work closely with them to work out how to support that carer with an enhanced allowance that also considers the needs of the child (complex behavioural needs). A DHP wouldn't be sufficient to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit and the needs of the respite carer for this type of child, so additional financial support is having to be sourced by the local authority'. (Local authority representative)

The three local authority representatives acknowledged that foster carers offering respite were 'financially disadvantaged' with a room 'sitting empty more than most' specifically because these types of placements tend to be required at short notice.

Respite carer:

Josie is a full-time foster carer. She is an approved foster carer for two children. The child she currently cares for is a solo placement because of his severe complex needs, but she is also registered as a respite carer.

'I got a letter from the council saying that I would have to pay [the subsidy] – at that time when it first came out, I had two foster children in place. I rang them up and told them that I was a foster carer and they told me that I would be exempt for one foster child only and yet, I am available to take an emergency child at two in the morning'.

Josie enquired about DHP support, but felt 'embarrassed' and 'like I was scrounging – I was told again that I could only be exempt for one child'.

The money that Josie receives as an allowance does not cover all of her costs as a carer for a child with complex needs: 'I have to do a lot of cleaning and washing of clothes as he soils himself, he is on his fourth bed because he smashes everything'.

For Josie, the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy makes the future a little more uncertain – 'I don't know how it will affect me - it does make an impact, not on the children but me - I know they are looking for a permanent home for this child but I think he will be with me for a while yet so I will just have to keep paying it'.

5.3 Effect on local authorities

Some local authority representatives spoke about the negative effects of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on their authorities as well as on the individuals that they were working with as foster carers, adopters and special guardians. These effects were based upon:

- Use of fostering team resources to provide additional support to carers

- Complexities in the DHP communication/application process

Use of local authority resources

Two local authority representatives mentioned that providing additional funding for carers as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had directly come out of the fostering team budget.

This had also created financial implications for the fostering service in terms of future recruitment and selection procedures for prospective foster carers, and also on the amount of resources the service had available for supporting households.

‘Special guardians in particular – there have been instances where these are family and friends carers and they have requested increases in their allowances to ensure that they could afford accommodation of the right size and this has a direct impact on the council's social care budget’. (Local authority representative)

Communications and support

Some local authority representatives spoke about the amount of additional work they had undertaken and the difficulties that had been experienced due to the difficulties inherent in working across Looked after Children and Housing teams.

‘It has taken quite a lot of work to get different departments (housing, placements) and social workers, fostering/adoption teams working together to understand the policy and the support available to carers - and then to let carers know that the support is available and that they can come forward. It has been about ensuring publicity and understanding within the community - if there are any policy changes, we would be very wary of that’. (Local authority representative)

These challenges were then further compounded by the varying messages relating to DHPs that were being distributed to carers by different local authorities. This was creating confusion amongst carers, and complexity in the advice that fostering teams could provide.

‘I just wish the local council and the benefits office were clear on the policy and procedures for this subsidy where foster carers are concerned. When I asked for help with this nobody had a clue and everyone said different’. (Foster carer)

This lack of clarity seemed especially true for local authorities that were being asked for advice by carers who were living outside of their authority boundaries, since each authority makes different decisions related to DHPs.

‘The problem is consistency and the agencies that the carers are dealing with – inside this local authority area they have all been OK because of the DHP payment, but those outside of the area have been more negatively affected because the rules are different’. (Local authority representative)

It was clear among local authority representatives that ‘housing departments [need to] understand the importance of paying DHP to carers’. These internal communications, for some, had been effective and they had been able to arrange for DHPs to be made available for foster carers if they were required. For others, this was not such a straight-forward process.

‘We contacted the housing department to make sure that they look favourably on foster carers in terms of support/DHP, it was a very frustrating process to get them to understand why’. (Local authority representative)

5.4 Effect on prospective groups

Local authority representatives were asked about:

- Prospective foster carers who have had their Housing Benefit reduced because they were keeping a bedroom vacant for a looked after child once they were approved
- Prospective adopters or special guardians who have had their Housing Benefit reduced because they were keeping a bedroom vacant for a child they hope to adopt or a child for whom they hope to

In both cases the majority of local authority representatives (49 and 44 respectively) did not know of any examples.⁴⁵

Where they did, five local authorities knew of circumstances where prospective foster carers had had their Housing Benefit reduced because they were keeping a bedroom vacant for a looked after child once they were approved.

One local authority knew of an example where a prospective adopter or special guardian had their Housing Benefit reduced whilst going through the approvals process.

⁴⁵ See Annex 1 – Figures 7 and 8

One of our carer interviewees was an approved adopter of one child, who was going through the approvals process for a second adoptive child. She would need to move in order to be able to pass the approvals process and accommodate the second child. However, the process had highlighted the problem of being able to find and secure appropriate housing whilst waiting for a child to be placed. The adopter was in the Property Pool - the application process for social housing – for a three-bedroomed property, but the housing department had informed her that it is doubtful that she would be allocated a three-bedroomed property because she currently only had one adoptive child and did not need an extra bedroom.

‘I am trying to help with [getting children out of care] and if people like me don’t help, these children will linger in the care system at greater cost’.
(Adopter)

Although decisions related to social housing and the availability of housing stock are separate to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, the issue of finding a larger property with an extra bedroom that will be made available whilst going through the approvals process, or subsidised during the approvals process, emphasises the additional complexities that carers and prospective carers in social housing can face when affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

6. Supporting Those Affected

This chapter looks at the types of support offered by local authorities, fostering and adoption agencies to foster carers, adopters and special guardians affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

Headline findings – supporting those affected

An average of two DHPs per local authority were reported to have been awarded to foster carers affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy since the policy change, none to adopters and less than one per local authority was awarded to special guardians.

The policy for administering and awarding DHPs varied according to each local authority, as did the number and duration of awards and also therefore the frequency of applications that carers were required to make. In most cases (15 out of 21) local authorities reported that DHP applications made by foster carers are always approved – less so for adopters and special guardians.

DHP support for prospective carers appeared to be rare, only one was reported by a local authority – an application made by a prospective special guardian – and this was awarded.

Carers taking part in the telephone interviews reported finding the DHP application process complicated and lengthy, with poor communications from local authority housing/benefit teams meaning that they had not always been aware if they were able to apply for DHP, or if a pending application had been successful. One third of carer survey respondents did not know that local authorities offered DHPs to cover Housing Benefit shortfalls.

Nine of 63 local authority representatives were aware of other financial support (apart from DHPs) offered to carers over the last 18 months as a response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. This included increases in carer allowances and use of Children's Services budgets to provide additional resources to carers.

There were significant concerns among local authority representatives and carers taking part in the interviews and the online survey about the medium term sustainability of DHPs and whether financial support for those carers affected by the policy change would continue to be available in future.

6.1 Discretionary Housing Payments⁴⁶

Where shortfalls are being experienced by households containing looked after children, it is possible for an application to be made for a Discretionary Housing Payment. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are managed by local authorities. These funds are made available each financial year so that short-term assistance can be offered to those households that qualify for Housing Benefit (or other benefits, such as Universal Credit, that include a housing element) and are facing additional hardship related to housing costs. In 2013-14, £55m in DHPs were allocated by local authorities to assist individuals as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy specifically (31 per cent of DHP allocations).⁴⁷ The decision to offer a DHP is made by the local authority based on the circumstances of an individual household, and may be a lump sum or a number of payments made over a period of time. The DHP may be used to cover, for example:

- Assistance with rent arrears due to benefit caps, Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy or other changes to housing allowance rules
- Expenses for an additional room due to care requirements, disability or medical needs etc.
- Start-up costs on tenancy if down-sizing/relocating as a result of welfare changes
- Rent shortfalls to prevent a household becoming homeless whilst exploring other options
- Covering costs on two homes where, for example, a claimant needs to be absent from their main home such as in incidents of domestic violence

The DWP has produced an updated good practice guide for local authorities to support the decision-making process for the distribution of DHPs in the wake of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

Foster carers are allowed one extra bedroom under the current size criteria providing that they have fostered a child within the previous 52 weeks (or in the 52 weeks following their approval). However, for those carers looking after sibling groups or two or more unrelated foster children, more than one additional bedroom will be required – ‘therefore a DHP may be awarded to help cover any reduction in Housing

⁴⁶ DWP (2014), *Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual: including Local Authority Good Practice Guide*; DWP (2013), *Housing Benefit Claimant Factsheet: Claiming Discretionary Housing Payments*

⁴⁷ DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.38

Benefit due to the additional rooms that are required'.⁴⁸ A DHP may also be paid to prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians in social housing who are going through the approval process and need to show that they have a spare room for the purpose of the approval. For approved adopters *prior to a child forming part of a household*, the guide suggests that consideration may be given for providing a DHP to cover the interim period where the household is reserving a bedroom for the adopted child's arrival.⁴⁹ Likewise, where an adopted child is specified by a local authority as requiring their own bedroom, a DHP 'may be used on an on-going basis to provide support where an additional bedroom is not allowed for Housing Benefit purposes'.⁵⁰

The Local Government Association's 2013 *Discretionary Housing Payment Survey* of all 326 housing authorities in England (with a response from 154 – 47 per cent) was conducted between December 2013 and January 2014 to provide evidence on the awareness, levels of demand and allocation of DHPs. Respondents to the survey stated that the most important objectives for allocating DHPs were preventing homelessness (88 per cent) and alleviating poverty (56 per cent). Over three-quarters of respondent authorities said that they used DHPs to support the on-going needs of claimants, rather than to pay one-off claims; the large majority (81 per cent) reported that between April and November 2013 applications for DHPs had increased 'greatly', and nearly all (95 per cent) cited the new social sector size criteria as a reason for this increase.⁵¹ Three per cent of respondent housing authorities (a count of 5), said that supporting the work of foster carers was one of the most important objectives for the housing department when making DHP applications.⁵²

In terms of receiving additional support via DHPs, information offered anecdotally by the Fostering Network has included some foster carers being told that in their local areas they will.⁵³

- Have access to the discretionary fund – but only receive a contribution to the loss of Housing Benefit, rather than covering the full amount
- Have access to the discretionary fund, but will have to reapply every four to six weeks (even if they have children placed with them on a long-term or permanent basis)

⁴⁸ DWP (2014), *Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual: including Local Authority Good Practice Guide*, p.29

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.28

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.29

⁵¹ LGA (2014), *Report of the Discretionary Housing Payment Survey 2013*, p.2

⁵² LGA (2014), *Report of the Discretionary Housing Payment Survey 2013*, p.3

⁵³ Fostering Network (2013), *Briefing on Housing Benefit*, p.2

- Receive access to the fund, but only for a short period of time

The Fostering Network also heard concerns from carers that because they live in a different local authority to the one that they foster in, they were uncertain as to whether they would be 'looked at favourably when assessing their need for the discretionary fund'.⁵⁴

6.2 Information about Discretionary Housing Payments

Communications about DHPs

In the interviews with local authorities some representatives said that they provided information about DHPs in their information evenings for prospective foster carers, or had written to all of their current carers to inform them of the support available to them if they were affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. This does not appear to be consistent across regions. More than one-third (24) of online survey respondents did not know that local authorities can offer DHPs to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit.⁵⁵

A foster carer told us:

'Information is not out there to tell foster carers about DHPs and you are not always told which route to go down to get it. I was lucky with the support I had from the Housing Benefits officer'. (Foster carer)

For some local authorities, this may be connected to the earlier issues highlighted relating to the differences in approach across authorities towards the DHPs, and not all authorities will have ring-fenced DHP support for carers.

A kinship carer had not heard of DHPs and suggested that she had not had any financial help for a number of years (including previous to the introduction of DHPs): 'it has never been mentioned...I didn't get any financial help for the first five years. My granddaughter was left with me on a Friday by social services when she was six weeks old and that was that. She is nine now'. (Kinship carer)

One interviewee, another kinship carer, suggested that more help and advice needs to be available for individuals going through the application process to support them with understanding the details of the specific circumstances that affect their claim.

A foster carer agreed that more information and help was needed:

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See Annex 3 – Figure 10

'I do think that this whole process is not explained very well or clearly – the authorities need to put out some leaflets/brochures, specifically for carers, that are clear and concise, that people with differing levels of intelligence can understand.' (Foster carer)

'I think I can safely say that as foster carers nearly all our attention goes on looking after the children we have in placement, it is easy to overlook where you are with rent, DHPs, keeping records etc. etc. Authorities need to keep carers up to date with any changes in policy and offer them support in understanding what is going on'. (Foster carer)

Kinship carer: the need for individual support

John is a kinship carer for his teenage grandson who has complex needs. They live in a specially adapted property with a bedroom designated for a carer who is required to stay overnight. It is this bedroom that is assessed as a 'spare' bedroom according to the Housing Benefit size criteria, but it has been designated as a requirement as part of the social services' assessment of need.

'If the overnight care had been for my wife or myself we would have been exempt from paying it [the subsidy]. Because it is my grandson who requires the overnight care...we have to pay it'.

The household expenses include the cost of caring for the special needs of John's grandson – 'we need the carer to stay over sometimes as we are exhausted most of the time'.

It took four applications for John to be successful in receiving a DHP, after he understood how he needed to provide a detailed 'breakdown of where and on what I spent my money' – this included the additional bedding, clothes and cleaning materials he uses when providing care.

'There has to be an assessment done on an individual basis. Filling in a form is not sufficient...The trouble is people get stuck and don't know who to turn to for help and how to appeal so they just accept it when their application gets turned down...They [local authorities] really need to assess each situation, look at and measure room sizes, include any social services assessments of needs'.

John thinks that carers trying to understand the DHP application process or understand the reasons for rejected applications need more information and support.

'There should be volunteers, people like me, that people can turn to if they get turned down for DHP someone they can talk to on the telephone or email'.

The application process

The carers participating in the telephone interviews said that applying for a DHP could be a complicated, unwieldy and confusing process. This was due to the:

- Length of and detail in the application form
- Required frequency of re-applications

- Length of time waiting prior to a decision

One foster carer from Yorkshire and Humberside who cares for three children said that they had support from their housing officer when applying for the DHP, which they were required to re-apply for three times, although they have now been told that this will become an annual reassessment process. A special guardian has also had to re-apply three times: 'The first time the payment was for six months, then three months and this time it was for four months. This last time I applied just before Christmas'. (Special guardian)

These individuals have been very grateful for help from authority staff such as housing officers because they found the application process a challenge: 'I would have found the form really difficult to complete on my own. It is all that stuff about incomings and outgoings that is really difficult'. (Foster carer)

This was supported by another foster carer: 'The form was quite difficult to fill out and there was not one question that asked if you were a foster carer'. This carer was told that they needed to re-apply for DHPs every six weeks but this has since been changed to once a year following the carer receiving support from her local authority fostering team, local MP and interest from local media outlets.

6.3 Use of Discretionary Housing Payments

Data provided on proformas by local authorities revealed that:

Across the 51 local authorities able to provide these data, a total of 91 approved foster carer households, an average of **just less than two households per authority** had received DHPs.

No approved adoption households were reported to have received any DHP.

Of 33 local authorities providing data, a total of **eight special guardianship households** had received DHPs.

Further details and analysis are provided in Annex 2.

Local authorities had difficulty identifying the number of carers who were receiving DHPs. This information is not recorded consistently or coordinated between Children's Services and housing/benefit departments. Often local authority representatives said that in fostering/adoption teams, they would not always have a detailed knowledge of prospective and current carers' financial arrangements or that this would be known by a case worker but not easily extractable from databases or case files.

Twenty-one of 63 local authority representatives said that they knew of requests for DHPs from current foster carers (25 reported no requests from foster carers, 16 did not know and for one this question was not applicable). Only small numbers of local authority representatives reported requests from special guardians (five out of 61, 26 reported no requests, 27 did not know and for three the question was not applicable) and adopters (one out of 61, with 31 reporting no requests, 26 did not know and three not applicable).⁵⁶

However, local authority representatives participating in the interviews were not always aware of the financial arrangements of carers, and therefore could not answer – nearly half did not know whether the local authority had received requests for DHPs from current adopters or special guardians; this dropped to one quarter not knowing about requests from foster carers.

Where requests for DHPs had been made by foster carers, nearly three quarters of local authority representatives who knew about them (15 out of 21) said that these were always approved. Four said that the requests were sometimes approved, one said that they were never approved, and one did not know.⁵⁷ DHPs for prospective groups appear to be rare. Only one local authority reported a known DHP – for a prospective special guardian – having been applied for and approved.⁵⁸

Where DHPs were sometimes approved, this was due to their discretionary nature and representatives explained that applications have to be considered on a ‘case-by-case basis’: the assessment ‘depends on the number of available bedrooms, and occupancy, and also the financial situation and the number of places they are approved for’. One local authority said that they would only agree to support applications for DHPs where a carer was prepared to take on the additional placement:

‘Sometimes the foster carers are approved for more than one placement - where they are making a request for a DHP then they need to show that they are prepared to accept more than one placement...otherwise, it won't be supported’. (Local authority representative)

The one local authority that had received a request for a DHP from an adopter, reported that this request was approved.

⁵⁶ See Annex 1 – Table 12

⁵⁷ See Annex 1 – Table 13

⁵⁸ See Annex 1 – Table 14

Three of the five local authorities that noted requests for DHPs from special guardians said that these requests were always approved, one said that the requests were sometimes approved, and one did not know.

Twenty-three respondents to the online survey of carers had applied for a DHP in the last 18 months as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy – 14 reported that they had not. The majority (13 of 23) had applied once for a DHP, four had applied twice, three had applied three times, and three respondents said that they had applied for a DHP five or more times in the last 18 months.

Nine (over one-third of respondents to the question) said that none of these applications had been successful, eight said that one application was successful. Two had applied successfully twice, three had applied successfully three times and one had applied successfully five or more times.⁵⁹

6.4 Requests for additional support and assistance

Whilst DHPs have been a key source of additional funding for those experiencing a shortfall in Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, local authorities have powers to make provision from other budgets, such as, by increasing fostering, adoption or special guardianship allowances or using other funding streams.

Of the 63 local authority representatives, 40 said adopters or special guardians had not requested an increase in support and assistance as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy in the last 18 months. Nine said that they had and a further 14 did not know.⁶⁰ Of the nine local authorities, only one said that these requests were never approved – five said that they were always or sometimes approved for special guardians, the others did not know (particularly for adopters). In the instance where requests for increased support and assistance were never approved, no reasons were given as to why this was the case.

Three local authority representatives said that they were using fostering allowance payments to support foster carers affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy outside of their local authority boundary, although the vast majority (48 local authority representatives) said that this was not happening and ten did not know.⁶¹ For adopters and special guardians, one local authority for each said that they were using allowance payments to support affected households outside of the local

⁵⁹ See Annex 3 – Tables 26, 27 and 28

⁶⁰ See Annex 1 – Figure 9

⁶¹ See Annex 1 – Table 15

authority. Forty-one local authority representatives reported that they were not using allowance payments to support adopters affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy outside of their local authority boundary (15 did not know); and 42 local authority representatives reported that they were not using allowance payments to support special guardians outside of their local authority boundary (14 did not know).

Other compensation

Seven local authority representatives reported that their authorities paid other financial allowances or compensation to foster carers, adopters or special guardians because they had been affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (49 local authorities did not, 4 representatives did not know).⁶² Four of the local authority representatives who said that they offer alternative forms of financial support also said that they always approve DHP requests for foster carers and one said this happens sometimes. One local authority representative offering other forms of financial support noted that they always approve DHP requests for special guardians and one said sometimes.

Other financial support included:

- Additional local authority support through community care funding
- Funding sourced directly from Children's Services budgets to cover the shortfall in a carer's ability to offer respite care/short breaks for foster children with complex needs
- Additional discretionary allowances paid to special guardians prior to DHP being put in place
- 'Extra financial support is provided to foster carers on a case by case basis. This is provided in order to ensure stability for the foster children – it used to be a pot of money known as the Community Care Grant and provided food vouchers etc. The council has continued this and it would be made available for foster carers if necessary because of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy'. (Local authority representative)

Only one respondent to the online survey of carers reported that they had applied for or been offered other compensation or an increased allowance to cover the shortfall

⁶² See Annex 1 – Table 16

in Housing Benefit as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. This application was successful.⁶³

Three respondents to the online survey of carers had been offered other forms of support from their local authorities in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.⁶⁴ However, when they were asked for further details, the two that offered information gave standard exemptions – that the room inhabited by the child that they cared for is covered by the size criteria.

This supports the finding of the local authority interviews that authorities do not generally appear to be offering carers support beyond that available via the DHP.

When asked what additional forms of support they felt could be provided by the local authority or other agencies following the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, respondents to the online survey suggested:

- Carers to be exempt from the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy – ‘all my bedrooms are full to the max but I still have to pay we should be exempt because we are foster carers’
- An increased allowance to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit – ‘additional payment to cover cost of Housing Benefit’
- Continual DHP to cover the shortfall – ‘foster carers should not have to continually apply for the DHP and it should be payable to carers for as long as they need it whilst caring for LAC and are registered to foster’

6.5 Sustainability

Concerns were raised by several local authority representatives about financial sustainability if there was a change in the rules covering the first bedroom for foster carers, or if DHP funding did not continue: ‘[sustainability] is very dependent on the availability of DHP funding. It will become very difficult to sustain any form of support should carers want to move to larger properties to care for sibling groups/more than one child or if the current exemption of one room for foster carers is withdrawn’. (Local authority representative)

According to Ipsos MORI’s interim report on the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy evaluation, local authorities reported not being able to make long-term

⁶³ Annex 3 – Table 29 and 31

⁶⁴ Annex 3 – Table 32

resourcing plans for the DHP as the size and availability of the allocation on an annual basis is uncertain, and future demand for the DHP is also unknown.⁶⁵

The interviews with local authority representatives gave a clear indication, however, that continuity in DHP funding was critical to placement supply:

‘If there is nothing to replace the DHPs when they finish I think it will have a huge impact’ on key cohorts and this, in turn, would have a potential effect on placements.’

‘DHP will only last for a certain amount of time, it is not guaranteed funding, and eventually a decision will have to be made about whether this funding will be continued or whether families receive additional support – the main concern is about safeguarding and stability for foster placements and [I am] not sure the current rules make this sustainable’. (Local authority representative)

A recently approved adopter responding to the online survey was concerned about the sustainability of DHP support.

‘I am an approved adopter, and I have a three bedroom fully adapted house, which is perfect for my soon to be adopted daughter. We cannot move anywhere else, as we need the lift and hoists. When she moves in, I will be a full time carer and will claim Housing Benefit, but I have no idea how we would manage if you remove the subsidy’. (Adopter)

⁶⁵ DWP (2014), *Evaluation of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy: Interim report*, p.15

7. Conclusions and Points for Consideration

This report presents the evidence gathered from local authorities and current and prospective carers via surveys and interviews. Its purpose has been to assess the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians. The following discussion summarises the scale and nature of the effect on carers, the perceived effect on retention and recruitment and how local authorities have responded to the policy reform by providing support to those affected. The discussion also includes highlighted points for consideration going forward.

7.1 Key messages

- Most local authorities do not routinely collate data on approved and prospective carers who may have been affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy or the number of carers receiving DHPs

This is particularly an issue for prospective carers and current adopters and special guardians who are more distant from local authority engagement, making it difficult to ascertain a true estimation of the scale of the issue. The lack of data, inconsistency in data storage by different local authority departments, issues around carers looking after children from different authorities than those in which they live and the focus on carers approved by/known to local authorities meant that data was not fully comprehensive.

- The number of carers who have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy was low

An average of three foster carers, one special guardian and no adopters per local authority, were known by local authority representatives (generally Fostering/Adoption team managers, Children's Service Managers), to be affected by the policy reform. The rule change in size criteria (allowing foster carers an unused bedroom for up to 52 weeks), alleviated initial concerns about foster carers.

- Whilst the policy reform has not had a significant effect in terms of scale, for the small numbers who are affected the consequences can be considerable

One third (22 of 61) of self-selected carers responding to the online survey, when asked what effect the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had had on their household, said that it was having a bad effect on their household and one-quarter (15 of 61) said that it was having a very bad effect. To date and into the future, half of carers (38 and 30 of 61) reported in the survey that they have already or will reduce their household spending and one-quarter (16 of 61) have/will experience difficulties in paying their rent.

- The effect of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy seems to have been felt in small pockets of specific groups

Single carers were thought by local authorities to be more affected by the financial implications of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, particularly in areas with high proportions of social housing and benefit claimants. Kinship carers and respite carers were also noted to be more prone to experiencing negative effects of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy - kinship carers due to their tendency to be on lower incomes/pension and taking sibling groups who need extra bedrooms, and respite carers due to the financial disadvantage of requiring a spare room to remain empty for placement as and when needed; again numbers affected were very low.

The small numbers of placements that were affected were those for children with complex needs who require their own bedroom, children who are unable to share a bedroom (e.g. due to past experiences or personal characteristics), for sibling groups, unrelated children being placed with one family, and teenagers. Carers responding to the online survey noted that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to take on these types of placement due to:

- The financial implications of caring for children with complex needs (additional space and resources required)
- No longer being able to afford a property large enough to care for sibling groups/more than one foster child
- Conflicting regulations of fostering and housing/benefit teams in relation to the age up to which children can share a bedroom
- Three-quarters of local authorities did not report there to be any effect of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on the recruitment of foster carers, adopters and special guardians in the last 18 months

Whilst local authorities did not report an effect of the policy reform on recruitment of carers, a small number reported a slight negative effect on the recruitment of special guardians due to their tendency to be from low income backgrounds.

- The majority of local authorities did not report any known effect on retention.

When asked during the telephone interviews, 60 out of 63 local authority representatives stated there had been no known effect on the retention of current foster carers, 51 out of 61 reported no known effect on the retention of adopters, and 50 out of 61 reported no known effect on the retention of special guardians. In the online survey, however, just under one-quarter of carers said that Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had affected their ability to continue fostering. Concerns over retention generally related to the sustainability of DHPs, particularly if a second bedroom is currently covered by the DHP for sibling groups or a second foster child.

- Over the next 12 months, around half of local authorities did not think that there would be an effect on recruitment of key groups. However, one-quarter of local authorities did anticipate that it might affect foster carer applications particularly for sibling groups where they need more than one bedroom.
- As the perceived numbers of approved carers affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy is small, so too is the number of DHPs made to those affected.
- Local authorities reported that in most cases DHPs were always approved for foster carers, less so for adopters and special guardians.

They were generally awarded to keep additional rooms available for children, for example, where they were not able to share a bedroom. However, support from DHPs for prospective carers to keep a room free during the approval process was rare. This was said to have had an effect on those coming forward and some withdrawing from the process.

- Local authority policy on administering and awarding DHPs varies, as does the number, duration and therefore, frequency of applications that individuals are required to make for DHPs.

Difficulties arise for carers applying for DHPs when:

- DHPs are awarded for varying durations and carers therefore, have to reapply at different intervals
- Communications between local authorities and carers are poor, leaving carers unsure if they have received a DHP, when they may need to apply again or what they can apply for
- Different local authority departments (i.e. Children's Services and housing) have different policy or procedural requirements - e.g. when fostering/adoption teams determine that a separate bedroom is needed for a looked after child, whilst housing/benefit teams suggest that the child should share a bedroom
- Carers who live outside a local authority boundary are faced with different regulations when, for example, dealing with fostering/adoption teams in one authority and benefits/housing teams in another
- Fostering/adoption teams do not have a full understanding of Housing Benefit regulations and DHP processes
- Current and prospective carers are not fully aware of the support available via DHPs, or have found the application process difficult and complex

One third of carer survey respondents did not know that local authorities offered DHPs to cover Housing Benefit shortfalls. Among those that had applied, a number reported having difficulty in completing the forms that local authorities had issued and some said that they had not gone through the application process as it had been too complicated.

- Local authorities' use of other sources of funding to provide financial compensation to those affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy is minimal

Only nine of 63 local authorities were aware of and able to report on any other financial support offered in the last 18 months to carers affected by Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, such as an increase in carer allowance or use of Children's Services budgets.

- There were significant concerns within local authorities and carer groups over whether DHP budgets will continue to be made available to them and, therefore, over the sustainability going forward of providing financial support to those affected

Use of DHPs is clearly relied upon to compensate for any loss in income as a result of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Local authorities have highlighted the difficulties in long term planning due to the size and allocation of the budget being calculated annually, resulting in an uncertain future. If the DHP budget is removed this could have a much larger and more profound effect on carers and their families.

7.2 Points for consideration

Although the numbers of carers affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy appears to be small, the points for consideration in Table 5 below take into account that where there is an effect on current carers this can be quite significant. Future implications for prospective groups of carers are also addressed.

Table 5: The effect of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on existing and prospective carers: key issues and points for consideration

Key Issue	Actions to consider
<p>The lack of consistently recorded data on those affected (and those within our key cohorts applying for and receiving DHPs or other compensation) has made the assessment of the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy difficult.</p>	<p>To aid local and regional planning (particularly to predict future demand for DHPs or other assistance for these groups), it would be beneficial for local authorities to explore how they could identify and collect and collate relevant data on carers affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.</p>
<p>There are particular groups of carers, and types of placement, which are more adversely affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, particularly those offering specialist placements (e.g. sibling groups, complex needs, respite care).</p>	<p>Better communication between fostering/adoption and housing/benefits teams is needed to ensure that carers who need help are not overlooked. It would be helpful to improve dissemination of guidance and information materials that are nationally available, e.g. on 'gov.uk' website.</p> <p>Government and local authorities may wish to consider if there are carers who require additional support above and beyond DHPs (e.g. respite carers and those accommodating sibling groups, multiple placements and placements for children/young people who are unable to share a bedroom) and explore what alternative funds can be used to fill the shortfall.</p> <p>It would be helpful if DfE and DWP explored current size criteria alongside the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards to address differences in the minimum age for a looked after child to have their own room. They may also wish to explore how carers can be supported if they require an extra room, because they care for: a child(ren) who can not share a bedroom.</p>

Currently there is a lack of support available for prospective carers, with some withdrawing their applications due to the financial implications of Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy whilst having to keep a bedroom free during the approval process.	The carer approval process has been a particular sticking point. Government and local authorities may want to consider how prospective carers can be better supported through the process to ensure that fewer are deterred from applying and fewer withdraw. This could include financial support for keeping a bedroom free and support in moving to a larger home if this is required.
Ongoing recruitment of foster carers needs to be monitored to ensure that numbers are not negatively affected by the Removal of the Spare Rooms Subsidy.	<p>It is important for local authorities to monitor the ongoing impact of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy through better data collection and cooperation between housing and Children's Services departments.</p> <p>In addition, fostering teams can be proactive in making sure that prospective carers, where relevant, have all the necessary information about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and the support available to them.</p>
There is a lack of awareness among the carer population about the availability of DHPs and alternative forms of support offered by local authorities.	<p>It is important that current and prospective carers are fully aware of the range of support available and know where to find help. Local authorities may wish to consider disseminating this information through a broader range of channels and reviewing their application processes to provide as clear and straightforward a process to apply for financial support as possible. This needs to include regular communication with carers about the status of an application.</p> <p>Whilst budgets are limited, there are carers who require additional support above and beyond DHPs where these payments are not meeting children's needs. There is a need to consider what alternative funds can be used to fill the shortfall.</p>
Long term sustainability of DHP funding and impact on future planning is a major concern for local authorities.	It would be beneficial if there was greater clarity about the future availability of DHP or similar funding to support for future planning.

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Annex 1: Figures and Tables – Local Authority Survey

Table 6: As a consequence of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, has there been an impact on the retention of foster carers, adopters or special guardians in the last 18 months?

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	1	60	2	-
Adopters	61	-	51	8	2
Special guardians	61	1	50	8	2

Table 7: Over the past 18 months, do you think the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy has had an impact on the:

		Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Placement together of unrelated children	63	4	54	4	1
Placement of sibling groups	63	4	54	5	-
Placement of teenagers	63	3	51	9	-
Placement of children who are unable to share a bedroom because of the emotional behavioural difficulties or previous experiences	62	7	49	6	-

Table 8: Has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had an impact on the recruitment of prospective foster carers, adopters or special guardians?

Respondents	Base	Strong positive impact	Slight positive impact	No impact	Slight negative impact	Strong negative impact	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	-	1	49	5	1	7	-
Adopters	61	-	-	48	1	-	10	2
Special guardians	61	-	-	45	4	-	10	2

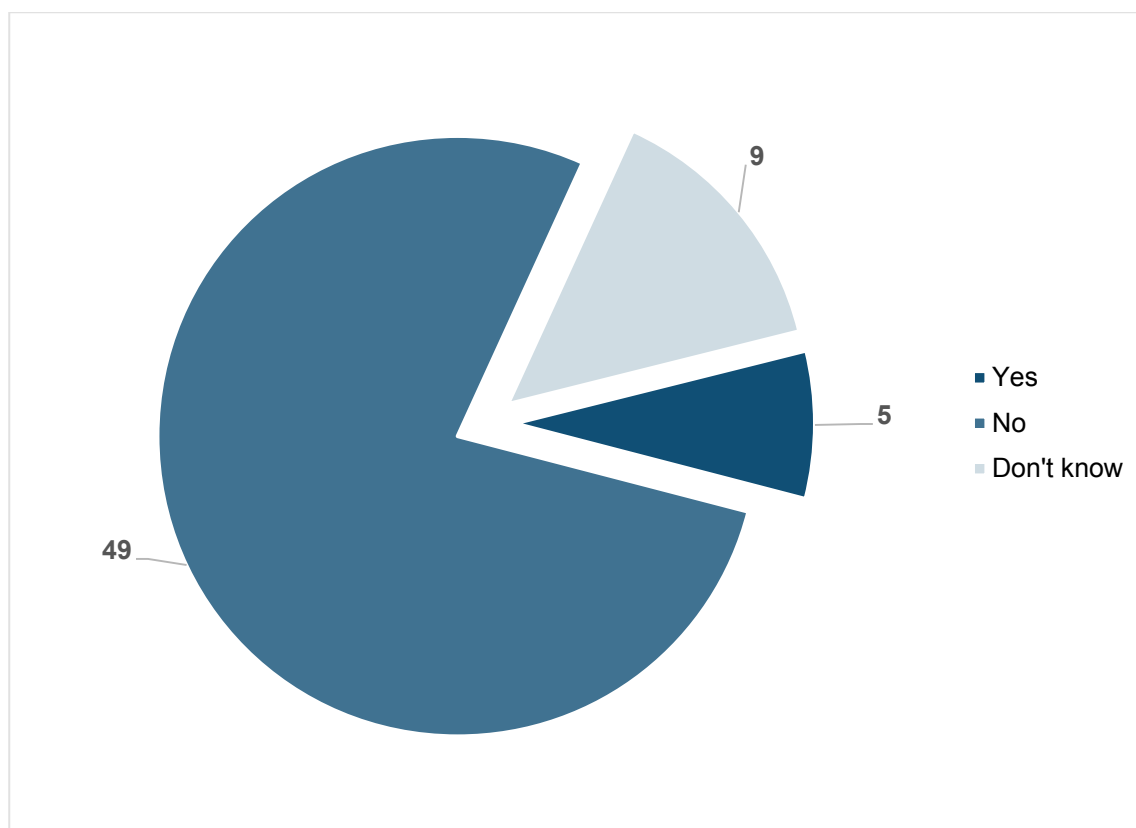
Table 9: Over the past 18 months, have any prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians withdrawn from the application process as a result of the Spare Room Subsidy?

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	3	53	7	-
Adopters	61	-	46	13	2
Special guardians	61	1	47	11	2

Table 10: Have you had to turn away any prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians during the enquiry/application process as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

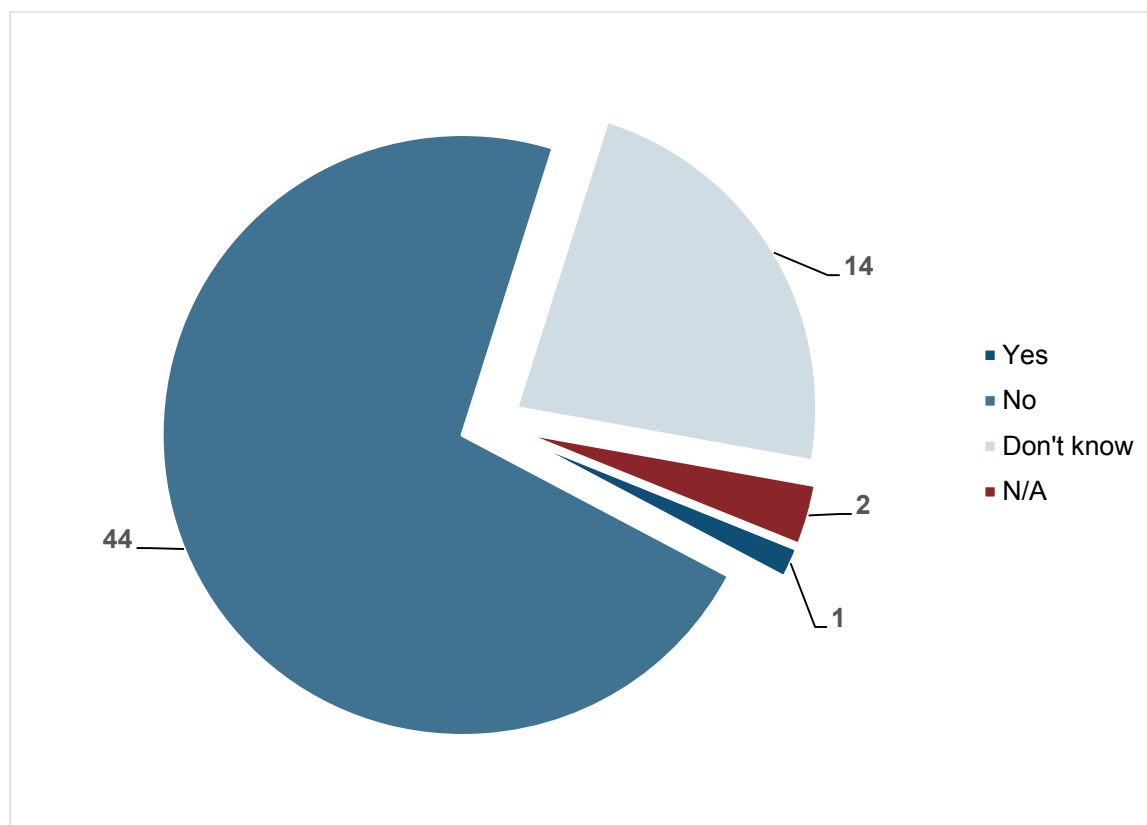
	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	62	5	53	4	-
Adopters	59	-	46	11	2
Special guardians	60	-	49	10	1

Figure 8: Do you know of any prospective foster carers who have had their Housing Benefit reduced because they were keeping a bedroom vacant for a looked after child once they are approved? (Number of local authorities)



Base = Number of local authorities responding to this question during the telephone interviews/online survey (63).

Figure 9: Do you know of any prospective adopters or special guardians who have had their Housing Benefit reduced because they are keeping a bedroom vacant for a child they hope to adopt or obtain an SGO for? (Number of local authorities)



Base = Number of local authorities responding to this question during the telephone interviews/online survey (61).

Table 11: As a consequence of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, do you expect there to be an impact on the retention of foster carers, adopters or special guardians in the next 12 months?

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	8	48	7	-
Adopters	61	1	41	17	2
Special guardians	61	4	41	14	2

Table 12: Has your local authority received any requests for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) from current foster carers, adopters or special guardians, as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	21	25	16	1
Adopters	61	1	31	26	3
Special guardians	61	5	26	27	3

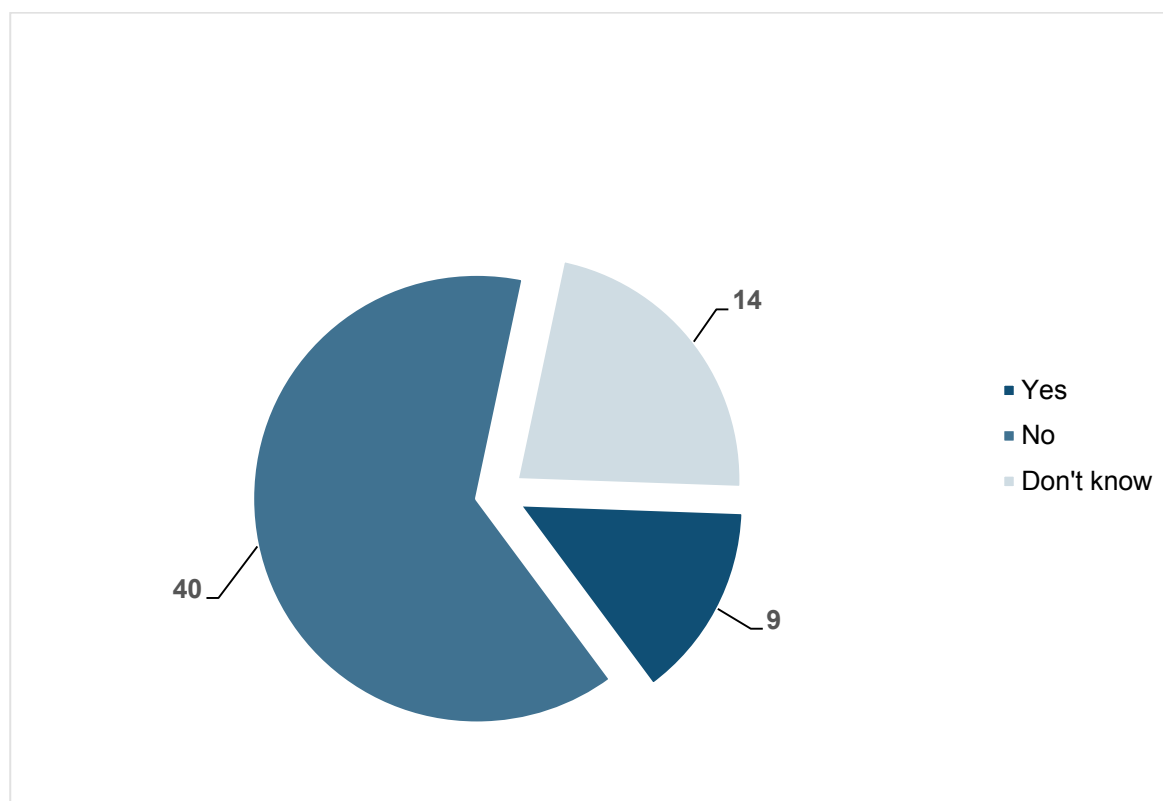
Table 13: How often have these requests for DHPs been approved?

	Base	Always	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
Foster carers	21	15	4	1	1
Adopters	1	1	-	-	-
Special guardians	5	3	1	-	1

Table 14: Has your local authority received any requests for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) from prospective foster carers, adopters or special guardians who are going through the approval process?

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	-	41	21	1
Adopters	61	-	35	23	3
Special guardians	61	1	32	25	3

Figure 10: In the last 18 months have any adopters or special guardians requested an increase in their support and assistance as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy? (Number of local authorities)



Base = Number of local authorities responding to this question during the telephone interviews/online survey (63).

Table 15: Are you using allowance payments to support foster carers, adopters or special guardians affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy outside your local authority boundary?

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	N/A
Foster carers	63	3	48	10	2
Adopters	61	1	41	15	4
Special guardians	61	1	42	14	4

Table 16: Do you pay any other financial allowances or compensation to foster carers, adopters or special guardians because they have been affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Base	61
Yes	7
No	49
Don't know	4
N/A	1

Annex 2: Analysis of Proforma Data

Local authorities recorded on their proformas, a total of 14,355 approved foster carer households living in their area (across 68 authorities), ranging from 15 to 1,106 and a mean of 211 per local authority (median of 144). Of these, 52 authorities provided data on numbers affected by the benefit reform - 139 (just less than 1 per cent) were reported by local authorities to have been families including carers of working age, living in social housing, claiming Housing Benefit and experiencing a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. An average of 3 per authority (mean of 2.7, median of 1), were therefore, reported to have lost some of their Housing Benefit. There were variations across authorities, ranging from none being affected to 16 approved foster carer households. In terms of supporting those who have been affected, across the 51 authorities able to provide data, a total of 91 approved foster carer households were recorded as having received DHPs, an average of just less than 2 per authority (mean of 1.8, median of 0), ranging from 0 to 25 households.

Detail on the numbers of approved adopters and those experiencing a reduction in their Housing Benefit, was much less complete than data for foster carers. Across 56 local authorities, 4,640 approved adoption households were recorded, a mean of 83 per local authority (median of 42), ranging from 0 to 498 approved households. Of these, 35 local authorities were able to provide data on the numbers affected by the Housing Benefit reform. Indeed, none of the approved adoption households were reported to have been families including carers of working age, living in social housing, claiming Housing Benefit and experiencing a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. Similarly, none were recorded to have received any DHP.

In terms of special guardianship, as for adopters, the data made available was patchy. Across the 57 local authorities providing data, 4100 approved special guardian households were identified, an average of 72 per authority (median of 54), ranging from 0 to 278 special guardianship households. Of these, 31 authorities were able to provide data on the numbers of approved special guardianship households affected by the Housing Benefit reform. A total of 26 (0.6 per cent) approved special guardianship households were reported to be families including carers of working age, living in social housing, claiming Housing Benefit and experiencing a reduction in their Housing Benefit due to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy. This averaged out at just less than 1 per authority (mean of 0.8, median of 0), ranging from 0 to 8 households. Just 33 local authorities provided data on the number of these receiving DHPs – a total of 8 (mean of 0.3 per authority), ranging from 0 to 3 households.

Regional variation

Using mean values to compare the number of affected foster carer and special guardianship households across England and in Wales, the table below illustrates that there are only minimal variations. The North West (4.1 households) and London (3.2

households) have higher average numbers of foster carers affected by the Housing Benefit reforms and the South West (3.5 households), South East (3.0 households) and Wales (2 households) have comparatively higher average numbers of special guardianship households affected. Wales also has markedly higher numbers (5.0 households) of affected foster carer households receiving DHP, as do Yorkshire and the Humber (4.0 households) and London (3.0 households). Whilst in most cases there are fewer carers receiving DHPs in each region than there are affected by the reforms, average figures in London suggest that most of those foster carer households which are affected, also receive a DHP.

Table 17: Average number of affected carer households and households receiving DHPs by region⁶⁶

	Mean number of affected foster carer households	Mean number of affected special guardianship households	Mean number of affected foster carer households receiving DHPs	Mean number of affected special guardianship households receiving DHPs
East Midlands	2.4	0.0	0.4	0.0
East of England	2.0	0.3	0.2	0.2
London	3.2	0.0	3.0	0.0
North East	2.8	0.5	1.3	0.5
North West	4.1	0.3	0.3	0.0
South East	1.5	3.0	0.7	1.0
South West	1.8	3.5	1.0	1.5
West Midlands	1.2	0.5	0.0	0.3
Yorkshire and the Humber	2.5	0.5	4.0	0.0
Wales	1.7	2.0	5.0	0.4

Variation by local authority type

The table below presents the mean number of foster carer and special guardianship households having had their Housing Benefit reduced and DHPs, according to the type of local authority. Whilst London Borough local authorities have a slightly higher average (3.2) of affected foster carer households, the variation across local authority types is minimal. There is a slight difference across local authority types in the mean number of DHPs received by these carers. Metropolitan authorities have a lower average (1.4 households) with London Boroughs being highest (3 households). Unitary authorities have reported higher numbers of special guardianship households affected by the Housing Benefit reforms, whilst the average number of DHPs received by these households are very similar across the different authority types. Overall, variation across authority types is minimal.

⁶⁶ For Wales and for Yorkshire and the Humber the mean number of affected foster carer households receiving DHPs was reported by local authorities to be higher than the mean number of foster carer households. This could be due to data being provided by different departments within the local authorities.

Table 18: Average number of affected carer households and households receiving DHPs by type of local authority

Local authority type	Mean number of affected foster carer households	Mean number of affected special guardianship households	Mean number of affected foster carer households receiving DHPs	Mean number of affected special guardianship households receiving DHPs
County	2.9	0.3	2	0.2
London Borough	3.2	0	3	0
Metropolitan	2.6	0.7	1.4	0.3
Unitary	2.5	1.2	2.1	0.3

Note that adoption households are not included due to none being identified by local authorities as affected.

Annex 3: Figures and Tables – Survey of Carers

Table 19: Before you agreed to complete this survey, how much did you know about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy benefits change?

Base	61
I had a good knowledge of it	12
I had a reasonable knowledge of it	21
I had a very limited knowledge of it	20
I knew nothing about it	8

Table 20: Have you received information or guidance from your local authority, fostering or adoption agency about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and its implications for your Housing Benefit?

Base	61
Yes	19
No	42

Table 21: How did you receive this information?

Base	23
Verbal information / telephone call	7
Local authority leaflet / fact sheet / guide	5
Letter	6
Visit / meeting arranged by my local authority	2
Newsletter	2
Other	1

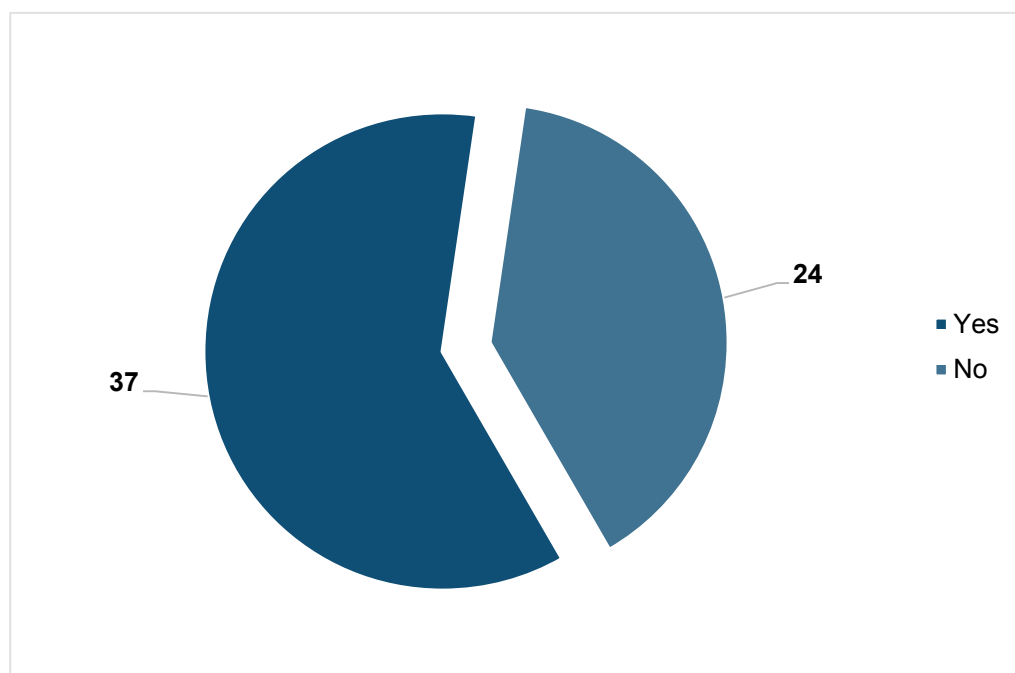
Table 22: Did you find the information helpful?

Base	19
Very helpful	2
Fairly helpful	11
Not very helpful	5
Not at all helpful	1

Table 23: Has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy affected your ability to

	Base	Yes	No	Don't know	Does not apply to us
Apply to be a foster carer	61	2	21	5	33
Apply to be an adopter	61	4	13	3	41
Apply to be a special guardian	61	6	15	2	38
Continue fostering	61	14	23	10	14
Care for more than one child/sibling groups	61	14	26	4	17
Care for a child with complex needs	61	11	23	5	22
Care for older children (teenagers)	61	14	22	5	20

Figure 11: Are you aware that local authorities can offer DHPs to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit?



Base = Number of respondents answering this question during the online survey of carers (61).

Table 24: Which of these, if any, has happened in your household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Base	61
We have moved to a smaller property	0
The children we look after are now sharing a bedroom	4
We are caring for more children than we used to	2
The main carer has taken up additional employment outside the home	4
Someone else in the household (other than the main carer) has taken up additional employment outside the home	2
The main carer is working longer hours outside the home	2
Someone else in the household (other than the main carer) is working longer hours outside the home	2
The main carer is looking for better paid employment	6
Someone else in the household (other than the main carer) is looking for better paid employment	1
We have experienced difficulties in paying the rent	16
We have had less money to spend on household items/worked out a new household budget	38
We have borrowed money/taken out a loan/used savings	8
We have taken in a lodger/someone else has moved in	2
We have been unable to continue in our role as carers	1
We have changed our plans to become carers	1
We have approached the local authority or fostering/adoption agency for advice	14
None of these apply to us	11
Other actions (please provide details)	4

Table 25: In the future which of these, if any, do you think will happen in your household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Base	61
We will move to a smaller property	9
The children we look after will share a bedroom	6
We will care for more children than we used to	3
The main carer will take up additional employment outside the home	7
Someone else in the household (other than the main carer) will take up additional employment outside the home	4
The main carer will work longer hours outside the home	7
Someone else in the household (other than the main carer) will work longer hours outside the home	2
The main carer will find better paid employment	10
Someone else in the household (other than the main carer) will find better paid employment	1
We will experience difficulties in paying the rent	16
We will have less money to spend on household items/will work out a new household budget	30
We will borrow money/take out a loan/use savings	11
We will take in a lodger/someone else will move in	1
We will be unable to continue our role as carers	7
We will change our plans to become carers	2
We will approach the local authority or fostering/adoption agency for advice	16
None of these apply to us	9
Other actions (please provide details)	1

Table 26: Have you made an application for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) in the last 18 months as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Base	37
Yes	23
No	14

Table 27: How many times have you applied for Discretionary Housing Payments as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy in the last 18 months?

Base	23
1	13
2	4
3	3
4	0
5 or more	3

Table 28: How many of these applications were successful?

Base	23
None	9
1	8
2	2
3	3
4	0
5 or more	1

Table 29: Have you applied for or been offered any other compensation or increased allowance to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Base	61
Yes	1
No	60

Table 30: How many times have you applied for this?

Base	1
1	1
2	-
3	-
4	-
5 or more	-

Table 31: How many of these applications were successful?

Base	1
1	1
2	-
3	-
4	-
5 or more	-
	-

Table 32: Has your local authority offered any other support to help with the reduction in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Base	61
Yes	3
No	58

Annex 4: Key Statistics: Looked After children in England and Wales⁶⁷

As at March 2014, there were 68,840 looked after children across England (an increase of 1 per cent on the previous year).⁶⁸ A further 5,755 children were looked after in Wales in the same period.⁶⁹

Adoption - The number of adoptions in England is increasing, and is at its highest level since data collection started in 1992. In the year April 2013 – March 2014, there were 5,050 children adopted from care in England (an increase of 26 per cent on the previous year).⁷⁰

In addition, there were 290 adoptions from care across Wales during the same time period.⁷¹

Foster Care - Of all looked after children in England at March 2014, 51,340 were living with foster families.⁷² In addition, there were 4,405 children in foster care in Wales as at March 2014.⁷³

Special Guardianship - From 30 December 2005, a further legal form of permanence for children unable to live with their birth parents was enacted through amendment to the Children Act 1989. Special guardianship orders (SGOs) are private legal orders available to the carers of both looked after and non-looked after children.⁷⁴ National statistics for England indicate that 2,740 children ceased to be looked after in year ending 31 March 2013 as a result of an SGO, rising to 3,300 in 2014.⁷⁵ This demonstrates a year-on-year increase in the use of special guardianship since its introduction.

⁶⁷ Note that this section provides child-centred data, rather than the number of households involved in each of the key cohorts, as this is the basis on which DfE/Welsh Assembly publish its LAC statistics.

⁶⁸ DfE (2014), *SFR 36/2014: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014*, p.1

⁶⁹ StatsWales, 'Children looked after at 31 March by local authority, gender and age', <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/ChildrenLookedAfterAt31March-by-LocalAuthority-Gender-Age>

⁷⁰ DfE (2013), *SFR 36/2014: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014*, p.1

⁷¹ StatsWales, 'Children looked after at 31 March by local authority and placement type', <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Social-Services/Childrens-Services/Children-Looked-After/ChildrenLookedAfterAt31March-by-LocalAuthority-PlacementType>

⁷² DfE (2014), *SFR 36/2014: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2014*, p.7

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Special Guardianship Guidance: Children Act 1989: The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005*, London: Department for education and Skills.

⁷⁵ DfE (2013), *SFR 36/2013: Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2013*.

However, a recent survey of all local authorities in England revealed considerable variation in the extent to which they could provide accurate information on SGOs.⁷⁶ This survey estimated that, between December 2005 and March 2012, around 13,000 SGOs had been made, around one-third of which had been made for children who had not been looked after by the local authority. Considerable take-up is therefore being made by kinship carers caring for children in the community and, overall, the vast majority of special guardians in this study were family and friends carers.

⁷⁶ Wade, J., Sinclair, I., Stuttard, L. and Simmonds, J (2014) *Investigating Special Guardianship: Experiences, Outcomes and Challenges*, London: Department for Education.

Annex 5: Social sector size criteria

The social sector size criteria are summarised in Table 33 below.

Table 33: Local Housing Allowance size criteria

One bedroom for:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Every adult couple (married or unmarried) ▪ Any other adult (aged 16 or over) ▪ Any two children of the same sex aged 16 or under* ▪ Any two children regardless of sex, aged 10 or under** ▪ Any other child (other than a foster child, or a child whose home is elsewhere)*** ▪ Children who would normally be expected to share a bedroom but cannot, due to a disability or medical condition ▪ A carer/team of carers (who does not live with the claimant but where the claimant requires overnight care) ▪ Adult children in the armed or reserve forces who are deployed and intend to return home ▪ Adult children who are students and are away at their educational institution and intend to return home
Foster carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One bedroom allowed for an approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks from the end of the last placement, if no child is currently placed with them ▪ One bedroom allowed for a newly approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks following the date of approval, if no child has been placed with them yet
Maximum allowance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Four bedrooms

(Sources: DWP 2014, *Local Housing Allowance Guidance Manual*; DWP 2013, *Housing Benefit Claimant Factsheet: Removal of Spare Room Subsidy*)

//*** Please note that adopted children and children for whom adult(s) in the household have received a special guardianship order would be included under these criteria.*

Annex 6: Local Authority Questions

Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) - Assessing the Impact on those Currently or Considering Fostering, Adoption or Special Guardianship.

Introduction:

The Department for Education (DfE) with support from the Welsh Government, has commissioned CooperGibson Research to contact a sample of local authorities in England and Wales to conduct an interview to explore:

1. The impact of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) on current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians who are social housing tenants of working age and claiming housing benefit
2. How local authorities, independent fostering agencies and voluntary adoption agencies have supported those groups who are affected by the housing benefit reforms

We are specifically interested in the impact of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (not general welfare reforms) on:

- approved foster carers, adopters and special guardians
- prospective foster carers (past the first stage of the assessment process)
- prospective adopters (undertaking the first stage of the approval process)
- prospective special guardians (within the 13 week assessment process)
- those above who are renting a home from a council or housing association and claiming housing benefit and are of working age

[The questionnaire will take 20-30 minutes to complete.](#)

All responses are completely confidential and your names or responses from individual organisations will not be identified in any report resulting from this research.

Organisation details:

Q1 Your name:

Q2 Job title:

Q3 Department / team:

Q4 Telephone number:

Q5 Email address:

Q6 Organisation / local authority name:

Q7 Local authority type:

☐ Unitary

☐ Metropolitan

☐ County

☐ London Borough

☐ other:

other: please specify below.

Q8 Location:

☐ East Midlands

☐ East of England

☐ London

☐ North East

☐ North West

☐ South East

☐ South West

☐ West Midlands

☐ Yorkshire & Humberside

☐ North Wales

☐ South Wales

Impact of RSRs in the past 18 months on current foster carers, adopters and special guardians.

Q9 To what extent has the RSRS had an impact on [current](#) foster carers, adopters and special guardians?

	<i>strong positive impact</i>	<i>slight positive impact</i>	<i>no impact</i>	<i>slight negative impact</i>	<i>strong negative impact</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q10 If there has been some impact (whether this has been positive or negative), please explain the impact as fully as possible.

Q11 As a consequence of RSRS, has there been an impact on the [retention](#) of foster carers, adopters or special guardians in the last 18 months?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q12 If yes, what has the impact been? Please give as much detail as possible.

Impact of RSRS in the past 18 months on prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians.

Q13 Has the RSRS had an impact on the recruitment of [prospective](#) foster carers, adopters or special guardians?

	<i>strong positive impact</i>	<i>slight positive impact</i>	<i>no impact</i>	<i>slight negative impact</i>	<i>strong negative impact</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q14 If there has been some impact (whether this has been positive or negative), please explain the impact as fully as possible.

Q15 Over the past 18 months, have any [prospective](#) foster carers, adopters and special guardians withdrawn from the application process as a result of RSRS?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q16 Please can you explain in as much detail as possible what the impact was and the reasons behind it.

Q17 Have you had to turn away any [prospective](#) foster carers, adopters and special guardians during the enquiry/application process as a result of RSRS?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Impact of RSRS in the last 18 months on specific groups.

Q18 Do you know of any circumstances where RSRS has had the following impact?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
Current Carers:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foster carers who have had their housing benefit reduced because they were keeping bedrooms vacant for more than one looked after child e.g. enabling them to foster large sibling groups				

Adopters or special guardians who have had their housing benefit reduced, because their child cannot share a bedroom (e.g. due to emotional or behavioural difficulties) when housing benefit regulations require them to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

<u>Prospective Carers:</u> Prospective foster carers who have had their housing benefit reduced because they were keeping a bedroom vacant for a looked after child once they are approved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

Prospective adopters or special guardians who have had their housing benefit reduced because they are keeping a bedroom vacant for a child they hope to adopt or obtain an SGO for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

Q19 Over the past 18 months, do you think RSRS has had an impact on the:

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
placement together of unrelated children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
placement of sibling groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
placement of teenagers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
placement of children who are unable to share a bedroom because of the emotional behavioural difficulties or previous experiences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please note any identified difficulties in the space provided, providing examples to illustrate your response.

Impact of RSRS on recruitment and retention in the next 12 months.

Q20 As a consequence of RSRS, do you expect there to be an impact on the [recruitment](#) of foster carers, adopters or special guardians in the next 12 months?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q21 Please can you explain in as much detail as possible what you expect the impact to be and the reasons behind it.

Q22 As a consequence of RSRS, do you expect there to be an impact on the [retention](#) of foster carers, adopters or special guardians in the next 12 months?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q23 Please can you explain in as much detail as possible what you expect the impact to be and the reasons behind it.

Supporting those affected by RSRS.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is an extra payment (not Housing Benefit) which the local authority may grant to provide financial assistance with housing costs.

Q24 Has your local authority received any requests for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) from current foster carers, adopters or special guardians, as a result of the RSRS?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q25 How often have these requests for DHPs been approved?

	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q26 If you answered 'sometimes' to the question above for any group, please tell us in what circumstances this might apply.

Q27 Has your local authority received any requests for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) from [prospective](#) foster carers, adopters or special guardians who are [going through the approval process](#)?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q28 How often have these requests for DHPs been approved?

	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q29 If you answered 'sometimes' to the question above for any group, please tell us in what circumstances this might apply.

Q30 In the last 18 months have any adopters or special guardians requested an increase in their support and assistance as a result of the RSRS?

- ☐yes
- ☐no
- ☐don't know
- ☐N/A

Q31 How often have these requests for increased support and assistance been approved? (Current Carers)

	<i>always</i>	<i>sometimes</i>	<i>never</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q32 Do you pay any other financial allowances or compensation to foster carers, adopters or special guardians because they have been affected by RSRS?

- ☐yes
☐no
☐don't know
☐N/A

Q33 If yes, what is the type/source of the compensation?

Q34 Are you using allowance payments to support foster carers, adopters or special guardians affected by RSRS [outside your local authority boundary](#)?

	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>don't know</i>	<i>N/A</i>
foster carers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
adopters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
special guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q35 Do you think that current arrangements for financial compensation are sustainable in the medium term? Please insert your response below explaining what the arrangements are and why they are or are not sustainable.

Access to those affected by RSRS.

Q36 As part of this research, we would like to talk to current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians who have been affected by RSRS. Would you be willing to help us contact 3 or 4 of these individuals within your authority area?

- ☐yes
☐no

Please let us know who to liaise with in your organisation to discuss this with.

:
 :

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Annex 7: Online Survey Questions for Carers

Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

Exploring the Effect on those Currently or Considering Fostering, Adoption or Special Guardianship

Introduction

The Government has reduced the amount of Housing Benefit that those renting from a council or housing association receive if they have more bedrooms than it is assessed they need. These changes came into effect on 1st April 2013 and are called the 'Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy'. You may have heard of this being referred to as Bedroom Tax or Under Occupancy Charge.

The Department for Education (DfE) with support from the Welsh Government, has asked CooperGibson Research to explore the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) on those currently or thinking about fostering, adopting or becoming special guardians. They would also like to know how local authorities are supporting those people who are affected.

Are you:-

- Renting a home from a council or housing association and claiming Housing Benefit and are of working age?
..... and either
- Considering or going through an application to foster, adopt or become a special guardian?
..... or
- An approved foster carer or have adopted a child/young person or you are a special guardian?

We would really like to hear about your experiences. Please complete this survey; it should take 10-15 minutes.

All responses are completely confidential and your names will not be used in any report resulting from this research. Taking part will not affect any benefits you receive in any way or any contact you have with a Government department or agency, now or in the future.

About you and your household.

Q1 Please add the initial of your first name here (this is only so that we can monitor for duplicate responses)

Q2 Please provide the month of your birth (this is only so that we can monitor for duplicate responses).

- ☐ January
- ☐ February
- ☐ March
- ☐ April
- ☐ May
- ☐ June
- ☐ July
- ☐ August
- ☐ September
- ☐ October
- ☐ November
- ☐ December

Q3 Please provide the year of your birth (this is only so that we can monitor for duplicate responses)
options - 2000 to 1930

Q4 What region do you live in?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Midlands | <input type="checkbox"/> South West |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East of England | <input type="checkbox"/> West Midlands |
| <input type="checkbox"/> London | <input type="checkbox"/> Yorkshire & Humberside |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North East | <input type="checkbox"/> North Wales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North West | <input type="checkbox"/> South Wales |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South East | |

Q5 Do you live in a council or housing association home?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

Q6 Do you currently receive Housing Benefit either paid directly to you or to your landlord?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

Q7 Are you

- ☐ 15 years of age or younger
- ☐ 16 - 64 years of age
- ☐ 65 years of age or over

Q8 Are you claiming Universal Credit?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

Q9 Have you had a reduction in your Housing Benefit due to having one or more extra bedrooms?

- ☐yes, it has been reduced already
☐it might be reduced in the future/it is in the process of being assessed
☐no
☐don't know

Q10 Which of the following statements describe your current situation? *Tick as many as apply*

- ☐ I am currently approved as a foster carer (includes local authority approved kinship carers) and have one or more foster children placed with me, or have had a child placed with me within the last 52 weeks
☐ I am currently approved as a foster carer but have not had a foster child placed with me for more than 52 weeks
☐ I have an Adoption Order for 1 or more children
☐ I have a Special Guardianship Order for 1 or more children
☐ I am considering, or in the process of applying, to become a foster carer, adopter or special guardian
☐ I am not an approved foster carer, adopter or special guardian and have no plans to do so
☐ other (e.g. if you are not an approved foster carer and have an informal arrangement to look after a child of friends or family)

If you answered 'other' - please provide details in the box below

--

We are now going to ask you some questions about the children living with you.

Q11 How many foster children are currently living with you?

- ☐0 ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Please tell us about each Foster Child currently living with you.

Foster Child 1:

Q12 Age:

- ☐0 - 5
☐6 - 10
☐11 - 16
☐17 - 21

Q13 Gender:

- ☐male
☐female

Q14 Does this child have a recognised ...*Tick as many as apply*

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical/sensory disability | <input type="checkbox"/> chronic physical health problem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> learning disability | <input type="checkbox"/> attachment disorder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mental health problem | <input type="checkbox"/> none of these |

Note: questions repeated for further foster children.

Q27 How many adoptive children are currently living with you?

☐0 ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Please tell us about each Adopted Child currently living with you.

Adopted Child 1:

Q28 Age:

☐0 - 5
☐6 - 10
☐11 - 16
☐17 - 21

Q29 Gender:

☐male
☐female

Q30 Does this child have a recognised ...*Tick as many as apply*

<input type="checkbox"/> physical/sensory disability	<input type="checkbox"/> chronic physical health problem
<input type="checkbox"/> learning disability	<input type="checkbox"/> attachment disorder
<input type="checkbox"/> mental health problem	<input type="checkbox"/> none of these

Note: questions repeated for further adoptive children.

Q43 How many children for whom you are a special guardian do you currently have living with you?

☐0 ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Please tell us about each child, currently living with you, for whom you are a Special Guardian.

Special Guardianship Child 1:

Q44 Age:

☐0 - 5
☐6 - 10
☐11 - 16
☐17 - 21

Q45 Gender:

☐male
☐female

Q46 Does this child have a recognised ...*Tick as many as apply*

<input type="checkbox"/> physical/sensory disability	<input type="checkbox"/> chronic physical health problem
<input type="checkbox"/> learning disability	<input type="checkbox"/> attachment disorder
<input type="checkbox"/> mental health problem	<input type="checkbox"/> none of these

Note: questions repeated for further special guardianship children.

Q59 How many birth children do you currently have living with you?
☐0 ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Please tell us about each birth child you currently have living with you.

Birth Child 1:

Q60 Age:
☐ 0 - 5
☐ 6 - 10
☐ 11 - 16
☐ 17 - 21

Q61 Gender:
☐male
☐female

Q62 Does this child have a recognised ...*Tick as many as apply*
☐physical/sensory disability ☐chronic physical health problem
☐learning disability ☐attachment disorder
☐mental health problem ☐none of these

Note: questions repeated for further birth children.

Q75 Do you have any other children currently living with you, who you have not already told us about?
☐0 ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5

Please tell us about any other children you currently have living with you.

Other Child 1:

Q76 Please tell us about their relationship to you:

Q77 Age:
☐0 - 5
☐6 - 10
☐11 - 16
☐17 - 21

Q78 Gender:
☐male
☐female

- Q79 Does this child have a recognised ...*Tick as many as apply*
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> physical/sensory disability | <input type="checkbox"/> chronic physical health problem |
| <input type="checkbox"/> learning disability | <input type="checkbox"/> attachment disorder |
| <input type="checkbox"/> mental health problem | <input type="checkbox"/> none of these |

Note: questions repeated for further other children.

The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (also known as the Bedroom Tax)

The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (also occasionally referred to as an under Occupancy Charge or the Bedroom Tax) is a change to Housing Benefit entitlement that means you will receive less in Housing Benefit if you live in a housing association or council property that is deemed to have one or more spare bedrooms than your family is assessed as requiring.

- Q96 Before you agreed to complete this survey, how much did you know about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy benefits change?
- ☐ I had a good knowledge of it
- ☐ I had a reasonable knowledge of it
- ☐ I had a very limited knowledge of it
- ☐ I knew nothing about it
- Q97 Have you received information or guidance from your local authority, fostering or adoption agency about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and its implications for your Housing Benefit?
- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- Q98 How did you receive this information? *Tick as many as apply*
- ☐ verbal information / telephone call
- ☐ local authority leaflet / fact sheet / guide
- ☐ letter
- ☐ visit / meeting arranged by my local authority
- ☐ newsletter
- ☐ other

If you answered 'other' - please provide details in the box below.

- Q99 Did you find the information helpful?
- ☐ very helpful
- ☐ fairly helpful
- ☐ not very helpful
- ☐ not at all helpful

- Q100 What further information would have been or would be useful?

How has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy affected your household?

Q101 What effect, if any, has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy had on your household?

- ☐ a very good effect
- ☐ a good effect
- ☐ no effect
- ☐ a bad effect
- ☐ a very bad effect
- ☐ don't know

Q102 Which of these, if any, has happened in your household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy? *Please note that the term "carer" used below applies to current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians. Tick as many as apply*

- ☐ we have moved to a smaller property
- ☐ the children we look after are now sharing a bedroom
- ☐ we are caring for more children than we used to
- ☐ the main carer has taken up additional employment outside the home
- ☐ someone else in the household (other than the main carer) has taken up additional employment outside the home
- ☐ the main carer is working longer hours outside the home
- ☐ someone else in the household (other than the main carer) is working longer hours outside the home
- ☐ the main carer is looking for better paid employment
- ☐ someone else in the household (other than the main carer) is looking for better paid employment
- ☐ we have experienced difficulties in paying the rent
- ☐ we have had less money to spend on household items/worked out a new household budget
- ☐ we have borrowed money/taken out a loan/used savings
- ☐ we have taken in a lodger/someone else has moved in
- ☐ we have been unable to continue in our role as carers
- ☐ we have changed our plans to become carers
- ☐ we have approached the local authority or fostering/adoption agency for advice
- ☐ none of these apply to us
- ☐ other actions (please provide details)

If you answered 'other actions' - please provide details.

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Q103 In the future which of these, if any, do you think will happen in your household in response to the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy? *Please note that the term "carer" used below applies to current and prospective foster carers, adopters and special guardians. Tick as many as apply*

- ☐ we will move to a smaller property
- ☐ the children we look after will share a bedroom
- ☐ we will care for more children than we used to
- ☐ the main carer will take up additional employment outside the home
- ☐ someone else in the household (other than the main carer) will take up additional employment outside the home

- ☐ the main carer will work longer hours outside the home
- ☐ someone else in the household (other than the main carer) will work longer hours outside the home
- ☐ the main carer will find better paid employment
- ☐ someone else in the household (other than the main carer) will find better paid employment
- ☐ we will experience difficulties in paying the rent
- ☐ we will have less money to spend on household items/will work out a new household budget
- ☐ we will borrow money/take out a loan/use savings
- ☐ we will take in a lodger/someone else will move in
- ☐ we will be unable to continue our role as carers
- ☐ we will change our plans to become carers
- ☐ we will approach the local authority or fostering/adoption agency for advice
- ☐ none of these apply to us
- ☐ other actions (please provide details)

If you answered 'other actions' - please provide details.

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Q104 Has the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy affected your ability to... *(Please tick one option in every row)*

	yes	no	don't know	does not apply to us
apply to be a foster carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
apply to be an adopter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
apply to be a special guardian	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
continue fostering	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
care for more than one child/sibling groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
care for a child with complex needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
care for older children (teenagers)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q105 The options you ticked 'yes' to in the previous question are presented below, for each one please explain how the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy has affected your ability to....

apply to be a foster carer	
apply to be an adopter	
apply to be a special guardian	
continue fostering	
care for more than one child/sibling groups	
care for a child with complex needs	
care for older children (teenagers)	

Supporting those affected.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) is an extra payment (not Housing Benefit) which the local authority may grant to provide financial assistance with housing costs.

Q106 Are you aware that local authorities can offer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit?

- ☐yes
☐no

Q107 Have you made an application for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) in the last 18 months as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

- ☐yes
☐no

Q108 How many times have you applied for Discretionary Housing Payments as a result of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy in the last 18 months?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q109 How many of these applications were successful?

- ☐none ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q110 Have you applied for or been offered any other compensation or increased allowance to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy? (e.g. fostering/special guardianship allowance increase)?

- ☐yes
☐no

Q111 If 'yes', please tell us what you most recently applied for.

Q112 How many times have you applied for this?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q113 How many of these applications were successful?

- ☐none ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q114 Have you applied for any other type of compensation or increased allowance to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

- ☐yes
☐no

Q115 If 'yes', please tell us what you applied for.

Q116 How many times have you applied for this?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q117 How many of these applications were successful?

☐none ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q118 Is there any other type of compensation or increased allowance, not already mentioned, that you applied for to cover the shortfall in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

☐yes

☐no

Q119 If 'yes', please tell us what you applied for.

Q120 How many times have you applied for this?

☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q121 How many of these applications were successful?

☐none ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 or more

Q122 Has your local authority offered any other support to help with the reduction in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

☐yes

☐no

Q123 What support has your local authority offered to help with the reduction in Housing Benefit caused by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Q124 What, if any, forms of support do you think the local authority or other agencies (e.g. fostering/adoption agency) could provide you, or those considering fostering/adoption/special guardianship with, following the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy?

Q125 Do you have any other comments/feedback that we've not covered about the effect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy on your household?

Q126 Would you be happy for us to contact you to take part in a short telephone interview?

☐yes

☐no

Q127 Please provide your contact details below (please be assured that these will remain confidential to CooperGibson Research and you will not be identified in any reports produced as a result of this research)

Name:	
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Telephone/Mobile:	
Email:	

Q128 Sorry you do not fit the criteria to continue the survey. If you have anything to say about the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy and the effect on your household, please tell us here.

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