



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Wave 34:

Fraud and Error in Housing Benefit

Changes to local authority structures and services

Housing Benefit limiting absences outside Great Britain

December 2018

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

Research Report 969

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Value of this research

- Findings from this report have informed the ongoing development of the CMI and VEP services for LAs, helping to improve the systems to reduce Fraud and Error in HB
- Additionally, this research has developed the evidence base on how LAs are responding to HB welfare reforms, including the internal review of US
- The findings also confirmed that the vast majority of LAs found the limiting of absences outside GB to four weeks for HB claimants was manageable and therefore the policy was not placing undue burden in aligning with UC

Trustworthiness

- This research was conducted, delivered, and analysed impartially by the National Centre for Social Research, working to the Government Social Research code of practices.
- Authors: National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) – Joanne Maher and Tim Buchanan

Quality

- The survey took place using established quantitative research methodology
- It has been quality assured using NatCen's internal processes which are subject to the requirements of the international quality standard for social research, ISO 20252
- Additionally this report has been checked thoroughly by DWP HB analysts and Housing Policy colleagues, to ensure it meets the highest standards of analysis and drafting.

Executive Summary

This research report has been prepared by NatCen Social Research, an independent social research organisation commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It presents findings from Wave 34 of the Local Authority Insight Survey (LAIS), which focuses on Fraud and Error in Housing Benefit (including Caseload Management Information and Verify Earnings and Pensions service), changes to local authority (LA) structures and services in order to deliver Welfare Reform and the impact of limiting absences outside Great Britain (GB) to 4 weeks on LAs and claimants. This online survey of Housing Benefit (HB) managers was conducted in spring 2018. All 380 LAs were invited to take part and 38 per cent responded. A summary of key findings is presented below:

Fraud and Error in Housing Benefit

- Encouraging or educating HB claimants to report changes of circumstances was the most commonly used way to combat Fraud and Error but it is very difficult to measure the success of it.
- The next most likely method was data matching of claimant records; which was considered a success by many LAs and can be measured from management information.
- The top two influences on Fraud and Error were pressures on resources and the fluctuating earnings of claimants, both of which were considered the most significant influences.
- LAs would like more resource to tackle Fraud and Error and they would like to take back control of it. They also ask that data provided through Real Time Information and Verified Earnings and Pensions (VEP) service be accurate, that DWP fraud services are more accessible to them, and ensuring that DWP definitions match those of LAs.

Caseload Management Information

- LAs use Customer Management Information (CMI) primarily to compare themselves with other LAs and as a means to judge performance. A majority (90 per cent) understand the data (partly or fully) and those who use it overwhelmingly consider it accurate. LAs want clearer guidance on the methodology used and request that the information is easier to understand.

Verify Earnings and Pension service

- The VEP service is considered very easy to use and very effective by a small majority. Most others thought it fairly easy to use and fairly effective.

Changes to local authority structures and services in order to deliver Welfare Reforms

- The most likely services to be introduced in response to Welfare Reform were Personal Budgeting Support funded by Universal Credit (UC) through Universal Support (US), Assisted Digital/Digital support, again funded by UC through US and UC information.
- The most commonly contracted out services were debt advice, and Personal Budgeting Support (funded by UC through US).
- Half of LAs utilise a mixture of direct service provision and contracted out services, whereas a third of LAs provide all services directly
- All LAs had carried out multiple preparations for Welfare Reform.
- The top three key partners to LAs to assist them with HB and welfare services are Jobcentre Plus, Citizen's Advice Bureau and Housing Associations.
- LAs consider their relationship with DWP locally to be largely good.
- LAs priorities for the next 12 months (Feb 2018-Feb 2019) include the rollout of UC, managing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) as well as changes to temporary accommodation.
- LAs would like DWP to assist by improved funding, better and more timely communications, continued support and liaison through partnership managers, removing barriers to data sharing and better quality data.

The impact of limiting absences outside GB to four weeks on local authorities and claimants

- Whilst the majority (60 per cent) of LAs said that they had not seen an increase in denials of HB, just over a fifth (22 per cent) had seen an increase since the limit of four weeks was introduced in July 2016. The remaining 18 per cent were unsure and similar proportion (but not the same LAs) said the new limit was impacting specific groups, examples included Asian families going home to visit family or on pilgrimage, EU workers going home for long holidays and pensioners going away in the winter for their health.

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- The new limit has had either a small or no impact on LA workloads and any impact is largely manageable.

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List of abbreviations

CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CMI	Caseload Management Information
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FERIS	Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme
HB	Housing Benefit
JCP	Jobcentre Plus
LA	Local authority
NatCen	NatCen Social Research
SFIS	Single Fraud Investigation Service
UC	Universal Credit
US	Universal Support
VEP	Verify Earnings and Pensions

1 Background and methodology

1.1 Background to the policies and study aims

1.1.1 Fraud and Error

The Right Benefit Initiative scheme, which ran for 12 months from April 2017, provided local authorities (LAs) with funding to tackle earnings and employment related Fraud and Error by processing Real Time Information (RTI) referrals.

LAs were asked:

- Which other activities they had implemented to manage their caseloads and help reduce fraud and error
- To rate the success of these activities
- To identify the influences on Fraud and Error in the LA
- What things DWP could do to support the LA in reducing the levels of Housing Benefit (HB) Fraud and Error

1.1.2 Caseload Management Information (CMI)

Caseload Management Information (CMI) is a proxy measure of Housing Benefit (HB) Fraud and Error and provides an estimate of how well each LA is managing their HB Caseload. By identifying the changes of circumstances that lead to a reduction in entitlement LAs can take action to minimise or prevent overpayments from occurring – thereby minimising Fraud and Error.

The study sought to understand how widely CMI is used and whether LAs find it useful.

Due to methodological changes in CMI, current statistics are delayed and the revised date will be published on the statistics release calendar and the [Housing Benefit entitlement reduction statistics page](#).

1.1.3 Verify Earnings and Pension (VEP) service

The verification of employment and pension income is a lengthy clerical process, which relies on claimants providing accurate information. Department for Work and Pensions' mission is to provide DWP and LA users with a simple, fast and reliable way to verify claimants' earnings and to help users identify claimant error before it enters the welfare system. This is done by allowing HB processing staff in LAs access to the Verify Earning and Pensions (VEP) service which is a user interface that shows the latest and historic payment information for the claim duration as reported by employers to HM Revenue and Customs.

For 2018-19, £25 million has been allocated to support the administration of the VEP Service Alerts; with a similar amount available in 2019-20. This will reduce thereafter in line with Universal Credit (UC) rollout plans and migration. Funding is to provide LAs with the capacity to process VEP Alerts and RTI referrals where LAs are awaiting the rollout of the service.

Again this study sought to understand how widely the VEP service is used and whether LAs find it useful.

1.1.4 Changes to LA structures and services

Since 2013 a series of Welfare Reforms have been implemented which aim to make the welfare system fairer and improve work incentives. The rollout of UC during the same period, accompanied by US, has changed the role of LAs in delivering welfare and support services.

This study aimed to quantify and capture changes to LAs' structures and services in response to these reforms, as well as their priorities for financial year 2018/19.

The fieldwork for this research took place between 26 February 2018 and 29 March 2018, developing the evidence base for US ahead of an internal review. Therefore the responses do not take into account changes that have been made to UC and US since this date. In October 2018 it was announced that DWP will enter into a new partnership with Citizens Advice to develop US Help to Claim alongside local authority US, and Citizens Advice will deliver the full service (including Help to Claim) solely from April 2019, funded by DWP.

1.1.5 The impact of limiting absences outside GB to four weeks on local authorities and claimants

In July 2016 DWP introduced a limit of four weeks to absences outside Great Britain (GB) for HB (bringing it in line with UC), although there are still some exceptions (e.g. absence relating to bereavement).

Claims with absences of more than four weeks (including those that state they will have such an absence at the New Claim stage) are automatically stopped and the claimant must reapply on their return to GB.

In respect of the potential impact on claimants, the DWP expected (with the Office of Budget Responsibility that over half of claimants would adapt their behaviours to avoid any benefit losses and that around 35,000 will continue to take an absence between four and 13 weeks and incur a loss of benefit of, on average, around £600 in total per year.¹ The impact on LA workloads was therefore projected to be minimal.

The aim of this part of the research was to understand:

¹ Explanatory memorandum to the Housing Benefit and State Pension Credit (Temporary Absence) (Amendment) regulations 2016 2016 no. 624, 10.8

- If the expected impact was as manageable as predicted
- If any specific claimant groups had been impacted to a greater extent than predicted

1.2 Methodology

NatCen Social Research (NatCen) conducted an online survey among HB Revenues and Benefits Managers and those in a similar position (who will be referred to as the Benefit Manager for the purpose of describing the methodology) at the 380 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales. Email invitations, containing unique links to the survey, were sent to each LA. Some LAs reported operating a shared service to manage benefits – 49 authorities invited to take part in the survey were managed by 21 named individuals. This meant that 352 Benefit Managers represented the 380 LAs. A copy of the questionnaire in Word format (Appendix B) was provided to give LA respondents the opportunity to prepare answers in advance of accessing the online survey.

The Benefit Manager was responsible for sharing the Word questionnaire with colleagues who might help with collating data and submitting the questionnaire. Any person with the relevant information to answer the questions was able to complete the survey online. The questionnaire was divided into question sections which could be completed independently. In total, NatCen received responses from 132 Benefit Managers which covered 140 LAs. This amounts to an overall response rate of 38 per cent. This is not an uncommon level of response for an online survey. Participation in this study will have been affected by the respondents' ability and willingness to complete the questionnaire as participation was entirely voluntary.

Competing demands on the LA employees' time, including their workload and statutory requests for information, will also have had an impact. Producing end of year reports was given as a reason by some LAs for not being able to participate in this wave. Table 1.1 below shows there was a good spread of participants by type of authority. Nevertheless, the response rate varies somewhat between regions.

The overall response rate and variance between different types of LA may affect the generalisability of the findings. London and Wales had a particularly low response rate compared to other regions.

All quotes used are verbatim from LA responses, anonymously attributed to the LA which has been abstracted to size and any relevant characteristics. Therefore quotes represent the views of the individual HB Revenue and Benefit Manager in an LA and not the entirety of that LA. Additionally, as these are verbatim quotes from individual staff, they do not represent LA or DWP policy.

Table 1.1 Responses by type of authority and region

Type of authority	Total	% of all LAs	% Completed survey	Number of LAs that completed the survey	% Response rate
English District	201	53	55	77	38
London	33	9	6	9	27
Metropolitan	36	9	12	17	47
Scottish	32	8	9	13	41
Unitary	56	15	14	19	34
Welsh	22	6	4	5	23
Total	380	100	100	140	37

Table 1.2 Response rates by LA and Benefit Managers

	LAs	Benefit Managers
Total number issued	380	352
Full survey completed	109	103
Partial survey completed	31	29
Total number of responses	140	132
Response rate	37%	38%

2 Key findings

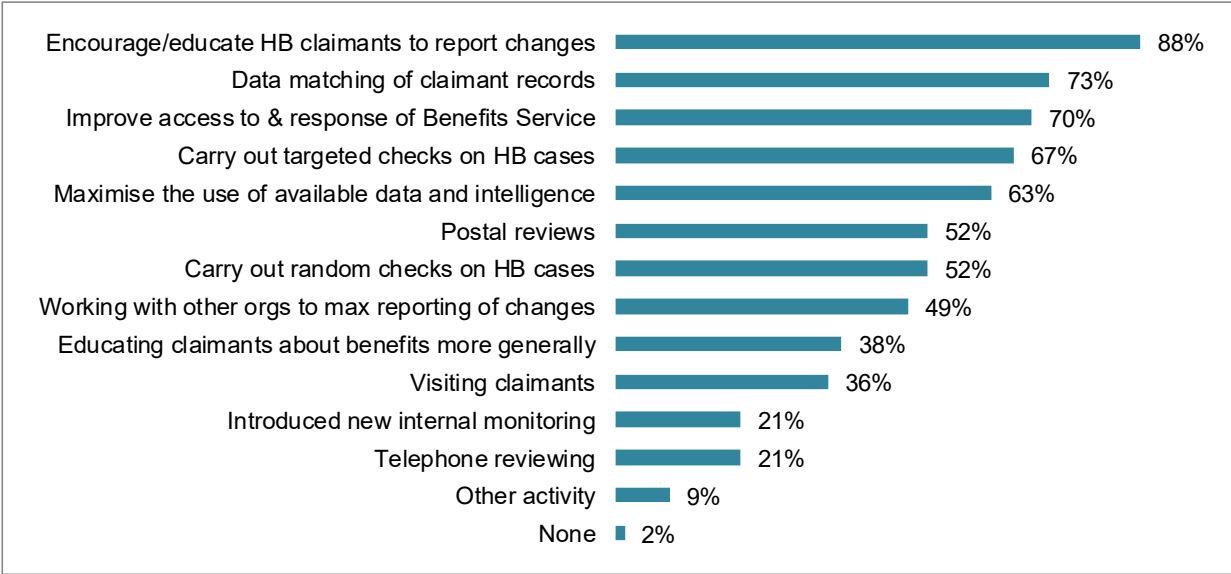
2.1 Fraud and Error in Housing Benefit

Local authorities (LAs) were asked to consider which activities they had implemented to manage their caseloads and help reduce Fraud and Error as well as to rate the success of these activities. They were also asked to identify the influences on fraud and error in the LA. In addition, LAs were asked what support they require from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with regard to reducing the levels of Housing Benefit (HB) Fraud and Error.

2.1.1 Activities implemented to manage caseloads and help reduce Fraud and Error

To help manage caseloads and reduce fraud and error, 88 per cent of LAs encouraged or educated HB claimants to report changes of circumstances. Around three quarters (73 per cent) of LAs reported that they undertook data matching of claimant records and 70 per cent said they had improved accessibility and responsiveness of their Benefits Service. Other common actions included carrying out targeted checks on HB claimants (67 per cent) and maximising the use of available data and intelligence (63 per cent). Chart 2.1 below gives the full breakdown.

Chart 2.1 Activities LAs have implemented to manage caseloads and help reduce Fraud and Error



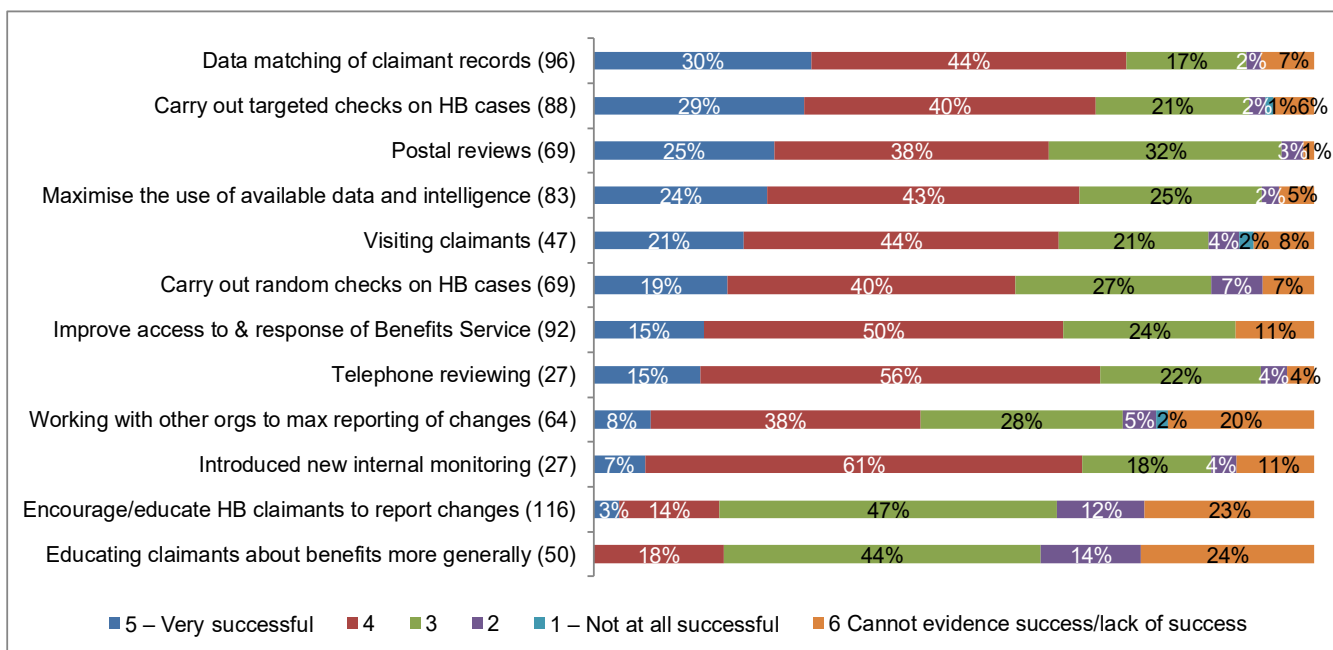
Base: Valid responses (132)

Note: Wording of labels has been reduced to fit in the chart. See Appendix A for full wording.

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The data matching of claimant records was reported to be more successful than encouraging claimants to report changes in their circumstances at reducing fraud and error (where 30 per cent reported data matching as very successful compared with three per cent for educating HB claimants). Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of LAs who have encouraged claimants to report changes were unable to measure its success or not. As Chart 2.2 shows, carrying out targeted checks on HB claimants, postal reviews, maximising the use of available data and visiting claimants all had a good measure of success.

Chart 2.2 Success of activities LAs have implemented to manage caseloads and help reduce Fraud and Error



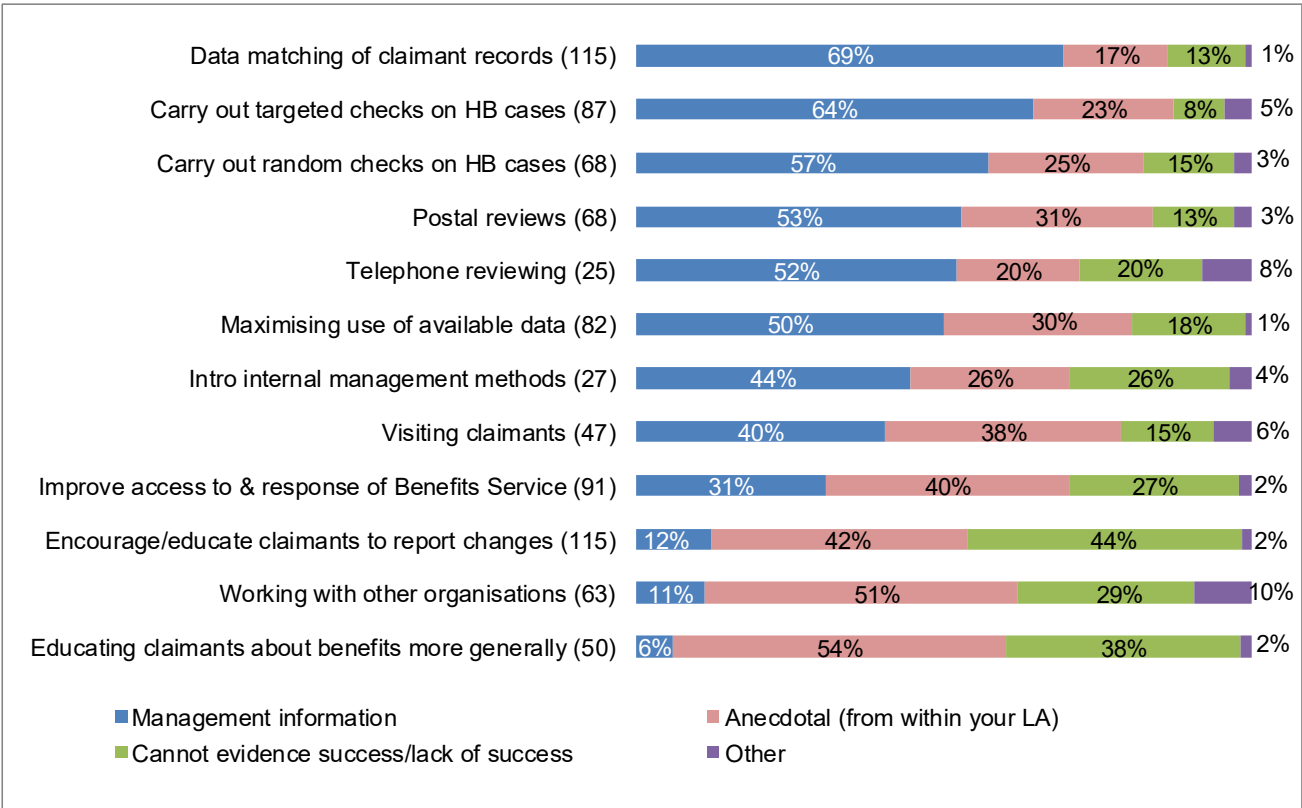
Base: All who carry out the activities who responded (bases in brackets by each response)

Note: Wording of labels has been reduced to fit the chart. See Appendix A for full wording.

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LAs were asked what evidence they had available to measure the success of activities to reduce fraud and error. LAs were most likely to have management information to measure the success of data matching of claimant records as Chart 2.3 shows, one of the most common activities amongst authorities to manage case loads and reduce fraud and error. On the other hand the most popular method, encouraging claimants to report change, has mostly no evidence or at best anecdotal evidence by which to measure success which explains why a quarter of LAs said they had no way to measure its success in the previous question.

Chart 2.3 Evidence of success of activities LAs have implemented to manage caseloads and help reduce Fraud and Error



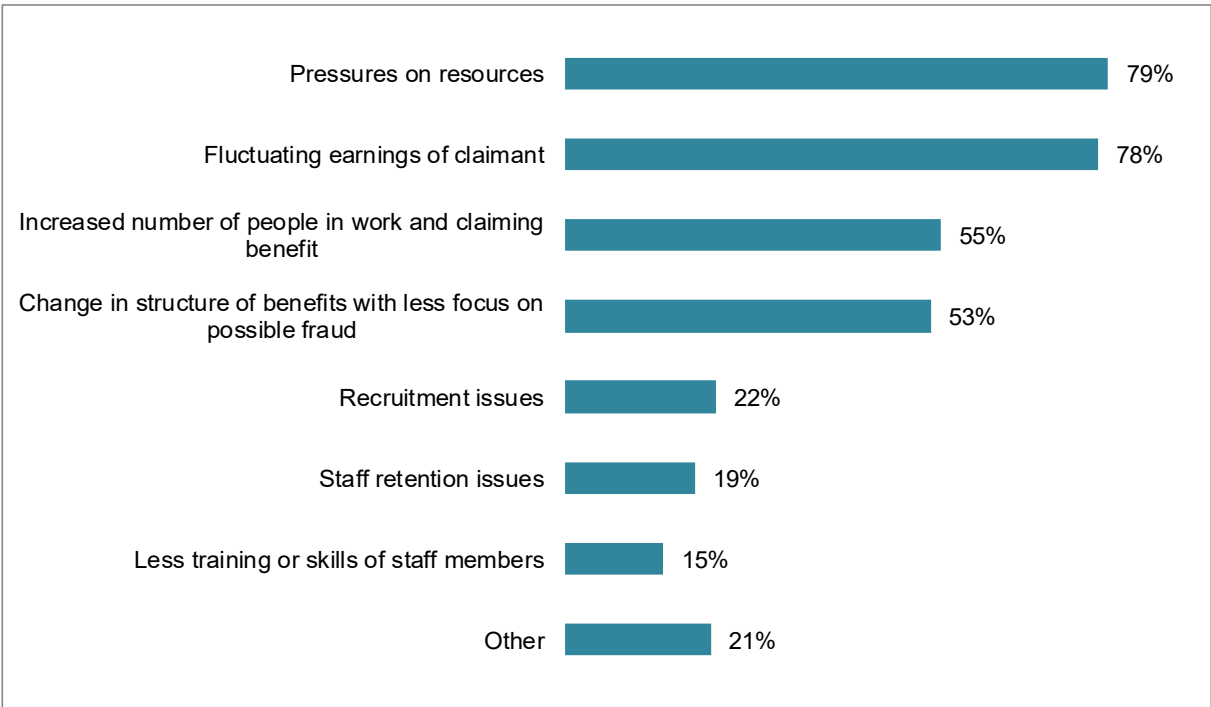
Base: All who carry out the activities who responded (bases in brackets by each response)

Note: Wording of labels has been reduced to fit the chart. See Appendix A for full wording.

2.1.2 The influences on Fraud and Error

Four fifths (79 per cent) of LAs reported that pressure on resources influenced fraud and error in their LA. A similar proportion (78 per cent) cited fluctuating earnings of claimants. Of less influence but still important were an increased number of claimants (55 per cent) and the change in structure of benefits with less focus on possible fraud (53 per cent). Recruitment issues (22 per cent), staff retention issues (19 per cent) and less training or skills of staff member (15 per cent) were mentioned by smaller proportions of LAs.

Chart 2.4 The influences on Fraud and Error in LAs

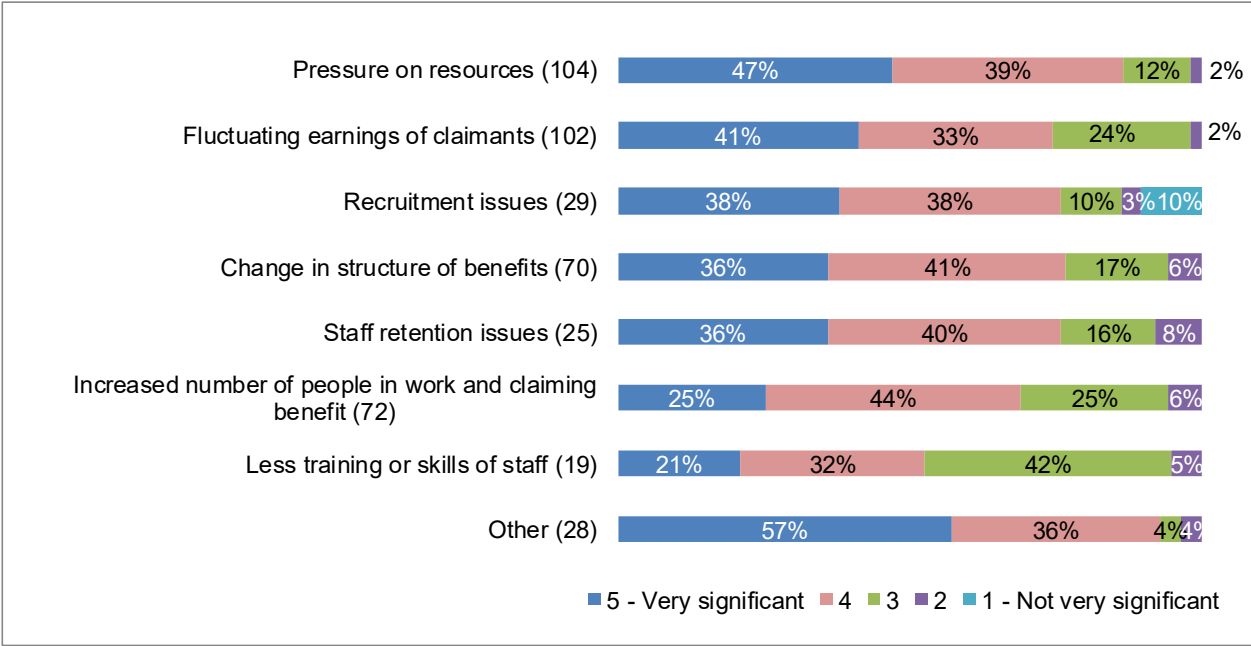


Base: Valid responses (131)

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LAs were asked how significant an influence each of the influences on Fraud and Error were. Those things which were thought to have the most influence on Fraud and Error were also the most likely to be considered a significant influence. For example 79 per cent of LAs identified pressure on resource as an influence, with 86 per cent of those LAs rating it as very significant or significant which implies that it is the most significant common influence. Fluctuating earnings of claimants was also identified as an influence by a majority (78 per cent) and three quarters of those (74 per cent) rated it as very significant or significant. While recruitment issues was the next most significant influence (76 per cent) it was identified as such by only 29 LAs so this may be an LA-specific issue. The increased number of people in work and claiming benefit as an influence on Fraud and Error was not as significant (69 per cent very significant or significant on a base of 55 per cent of LAs who considered it an influence) whereas a change in the structure of benefits was more significant an influence (77 per cent very significant or significant with a similar number of considering it an influence).

Chart 2.5 LA’s perceived significance of the influences on fraud and error in LAs



Base: All who indicated each item was an influence who responded (bases in brackets by each response)

2.1.3 Support LAs need from DWP to help with reducing Fraud and Error

LAs were asked what DWP could do to support LAs in driving down the levels of HB fraud and error. The main activities given were:

- Increase funding for administration of Fraud and Error
- Bring back HB fraud to LA teams who can then work more effectively by combining resources.
- Ensure data provided by Real Time Information (RTI) and VEP is accurate.
- Make DWP fraud services more accessible to LAs
- Matching DWP definitions with those used by LAs (e.g. change in earnings not being a change in circumstances).

The following quote illustrates one LA's comments to support the second point, about bringing back HB fraud to LA teams,

'HB fraud needs to move back to local authorities who have the local knowledge and expertise to investigate HB fraud. The work now being done by LA fraud teams around housing fraud has such a huge crossover with HB fraud, it would be far more efficient for LAs to take back HB fraud'

(Large rural LA)

The following quotes illustrate two LAs' comments to support the fifth point, matching DWP definitions with those used by LAs. The first is from a large LA: *'Understand how the calculation of earnings within HB allows for fluctuation of earnings – they are not changes in circumstances'*. The second is from a medium sized LA:

'Understand what constitutes a change in circumstances for the purposes of changes in earnings. A large number of RTI and ORTI records show that someone has fluctuating earnings. There has been no notifiable change but depending on what period an average is taken over, earnings reported through these methods may vary considerably to the one we are using, even if our own figure is based on relatively up to date information'.

Broadly, the responses on the support LAs need from DWP reflected the influences on fraud and error identified in previous questions, for example one of the most significant influences LAs identified is pressure on resources, and one of the things LAs want DWP to help with is increased funding for the administration of Fraud and Error.

Additionally, another significant influence of Fraud and Error is the fluctuating income of claimants over the length of a claim, which reflects the LAs' desires for ensuring that data provided by RTI and VEP is accurate, to prevent Fraud and Error arising due to this issue.

2.2 Caseload Management Information

DWP publishes quarterly statistics on 'Housing Benefit: entitlement reductions' known as Caseload Management Information (CMI). CMI is a proxy measure of HB Fraud and Error and provides an estimate of how well each LA is managing their HB caseload. By identifying the change of circumstances that lead to a reduction to entitlement LAs can prevent or minimise overpayments from occurring, thereby minimising Fraud and Error.

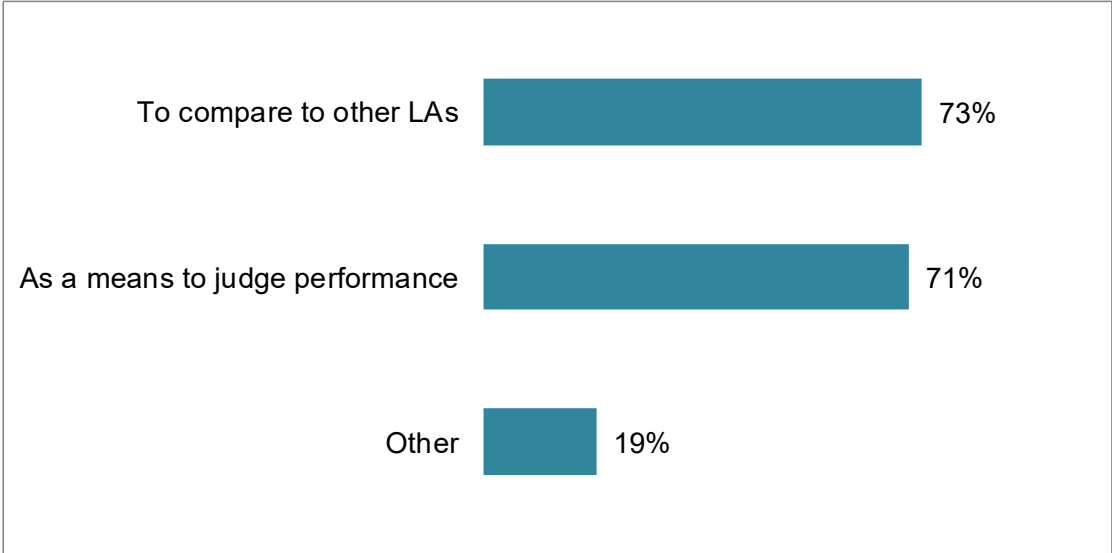
Due to methodological changes in CMI, current statistics are delayed and the revised date will be published on the statistics release calendar and the [Housing Benefit entitlement reduction statistics page](#).

Most LAs use CMI data (only 5 per cent said that no-one in their LA use CMI data and 4 per cent had never heard of it).

2.2.1 What CMI is used for

Almost three quarters of those who either used CMI themselves or knew what a colleague uses it for said it was used to compare to other LAs (73 per cent) and to judge performance (71 per cent).

Chart 2.6 How CMI data are used



Base: Those who use CMI and answered (103)

The 19 per cent of other answers included (verbatim)

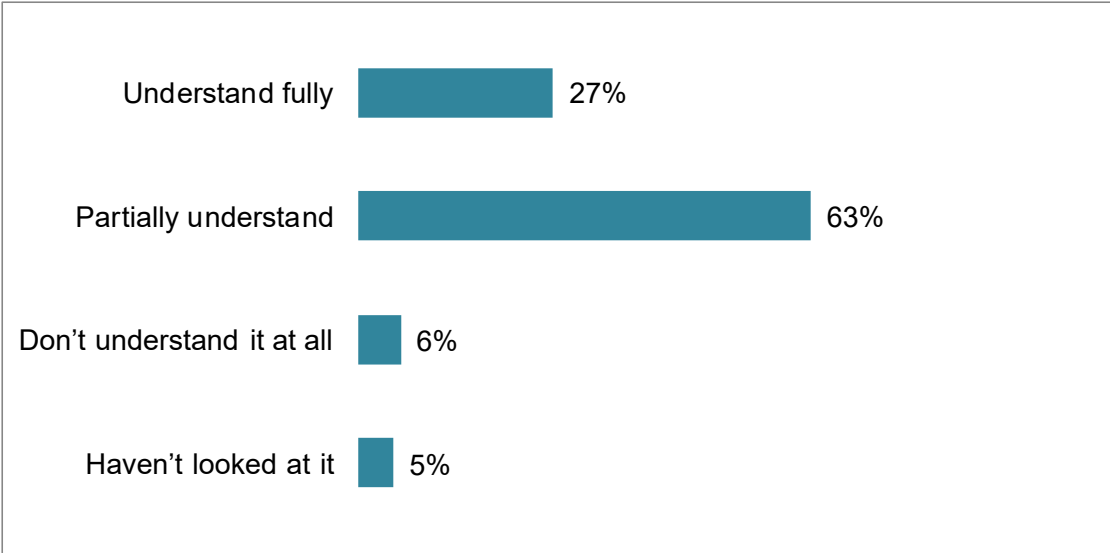
- As a training aid for staff awareness
- Future planning

- Used alongside Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS)²
- To consider targets

2.2.2 Understanding of CMI and its accuracy

The majority of those who had heard of CMI or were using it felt they had at least a partial understanding of the data as Chart 2.7 demonstrates. Nearly all (90 per cent) indicated that they understood it either fully (27 per cent) or partially (63 per cent). Since the question was asked of those who had heard of it but were not using it as well as those who use it a small minority (five per cent) said that it had not been looked at yet.

Chart 2.7 Extent to which LAs understand the information CMI data provides



Base: Heard of CMI but not utilising it or using it themselves (104)

The minority of LAs who were using CMI themselves (37), were questioned about its accuracy and while eight did not know, 23 considered it accurate (four very accurate and 19 fairly accurate) and six thought CMI inaccurate (only one saying very inaccurate).

When asked what, if anything, DWP could do better to improve understanding of the information or to support LAs using CMI, 18 said they would like DWP to provide clearer guidance on the methodology used, 17 requested that the information be made easier to understand and ten said that DWP could provide more resource. These were responses offered and clearly with 37 respondents some answered more than one. Three individual comments were offered as follows. One person said they would like DWP to get the data out quicker; other comments were related to this

² The Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) offered financial rewards and funding to LAs who reduced Fraud and Error in their HB cases, which was replaced by the Right Benefit Initiative which ran from April 2017 for 12 months.

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including a request to make the information more up to date and someone else requested that the CMI date be updated and published regularly.

2.3 Verify Earnings and Pension Service

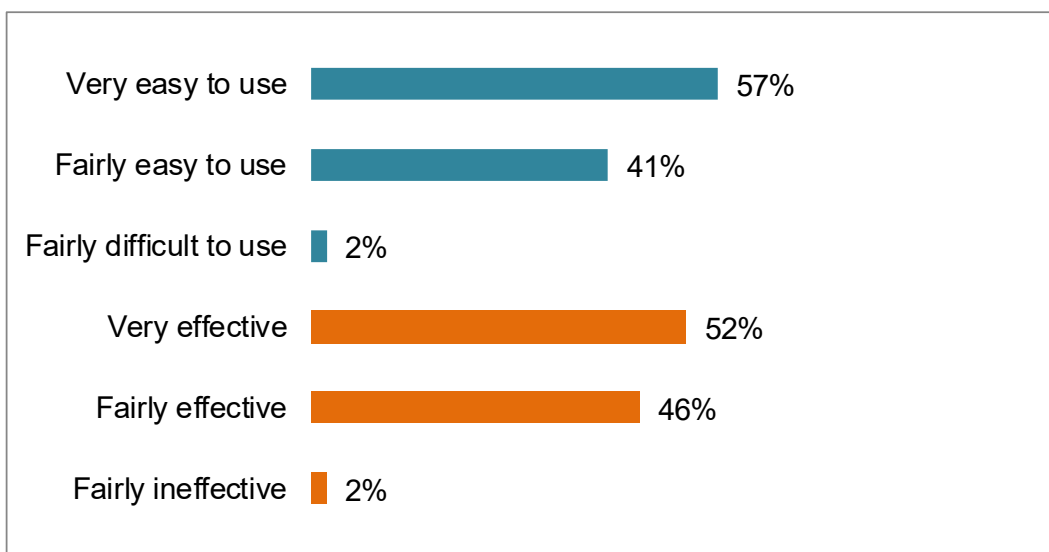
The verification of employment and pension income is a lengthy clerical process, which relies on claimants providing accurate information. DWPs’ mission is to provide DWP and LA users with a simple, fast and reliable way to verify claimants’ earnings and to help users identify claimant error before it enters the welfare system. This is done by allowing HB processing staff in LAs access to the VEP service which is a user interface that shows the latest and historic payment information during the life of a claim as reported by employers to HM Revenue & Customs.

A small minority of LAs do not use the VEP service (two per cent reported that no one in their LA uses the VEP service to assess entitlement to HB and one per cent had never heard of it). Just over a quarter of those responding to the survey used it themselves (27 per cent). Where possible this section of the survey was answered by the actual service user within the LA. However, it was not always possible to find a respondent for this section which means the sample is quite small.

2.3.1 How easy or difficult to use and how accurate or inaccurate is the VEP service

As the chart below indicates, almost all of those who use the VEP service themselves think it is easy to use (98 per cent - with a majority saying very easy to use 57 per cent) and effective (a similar proportion 98 per cent with 52 per cent saying very effective). No LAs said that the VEP service was very difficult to use or very ineffective.

Chart 2.8 Ease of use and accuracy of the VEP service



Base: All who use VEP themselves (46)

2.4 Changes to local authority structures and services in order to deliver Welfare Reform

Since 2013 a series of Welfare Reforms have been implemented which aim to make the welfare system fairer and improve work incentives. The rollout of UC during the same period, accompanied by US, has changed the role of LAs in delivering welfare and support services.

This section aims to quantify and capture changes to LAs' structures and services in response to these reforms, as well as their priorities for financial year 2018/19.

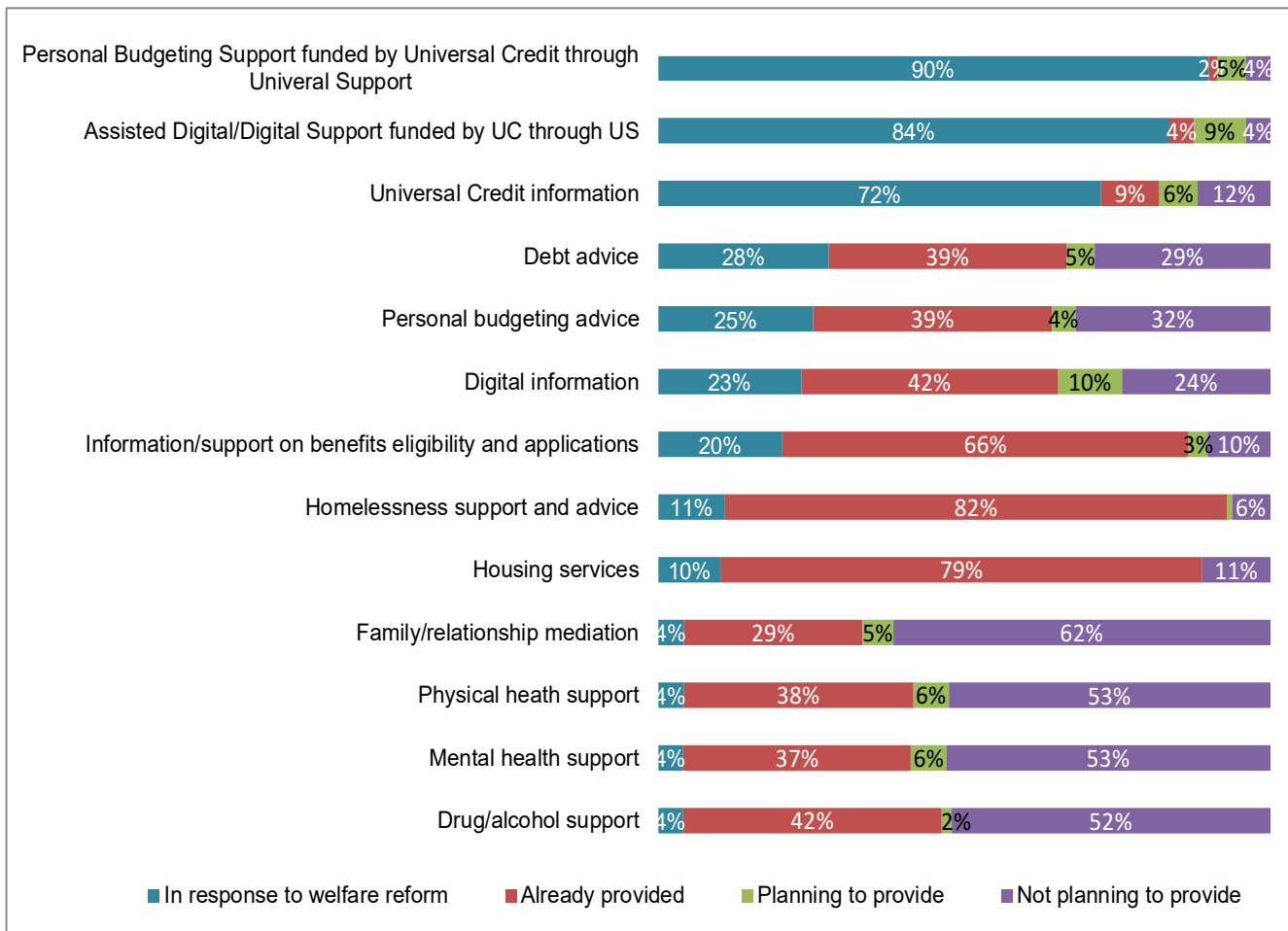
The fieldwork for this research took place between 26 February 2018 and 29 March 2018 and therefore the responses do not take into account changes that have been made to UC and US since this date, and make no reference to the 2018 internal review of US which will help to shape the future of provision, including the increase of US funding.

For 2018/19 DWP made funding available to LAs to ensure US is in place. These agreements will end on March 31 2019. This research was conducted prior to this policy change. DWP will enter into a new partnership with Citizens Advice to develop US Help to Claim alongside local authority US, and Citizens Advice will deliver the full service (including Help to Claim) solely from April 2019, funded by DWP.

2.4.1 Whether services have been introduced as a result of Welfare Reform

LAs were shown a list of services and asked - for each one - whether they had provided it before these welfare reforms, if it was provided in response to Welfare Reforms, or if they were preparing to provide such services or not. The two services mostly introduced in response to Welfare Reform were Personal Budgeting Support funded by UC through US (US) (90 per cent) and Assisted Digital/Digital Support, funded by UC through US (84 per cent). A majority (72 per cent) also provided UC information and support in response to Welfare Reform. Thereafter more LAs were already providing services prior to Welfare Reform than in response to it.

Chart 2.9 Whether services were introduced as a result of Welfare Reforms, already provided, planning to be provided or not planning to provide



Base: All valid responses (140)

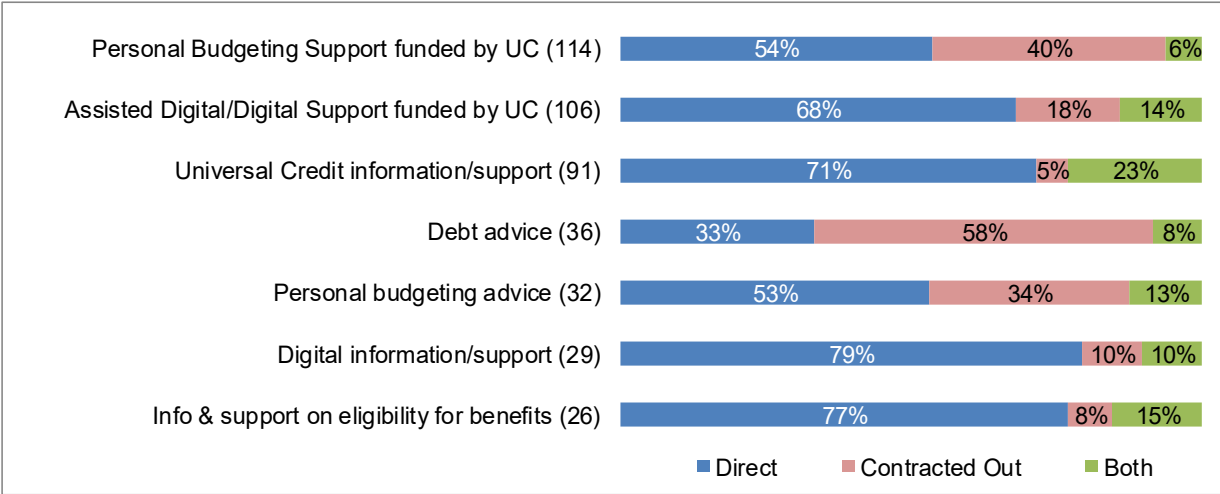
Note: Wording of labels has been reduced to fit in figure. See Appendix A for full wording.

2.4.2 Services introduced in response to Welfare Reforms and whether provided directly, contracted out or both directly and contracted out.

Chart 2.10 shows whether services are provided in response to Welfare Reforms directly by LAs or are contracted out. The different services are shown in order of their likelihood to have been introduced in response to Welfare Reform.

Most LAs introduced Personal Budgeting Support funded by UC through US and two fifths (40 per cent) contract this service out. The most likely to be contracted out is debt advice (58 per cent) and then personal budget advice (not funded by UC) (34 per cent).

Chart 2.10 Services introduced in response to Welfare Reform and whether provided directly, contracted out or both directly and contracted out



Base: Valid responses (bases in brackets by each response)

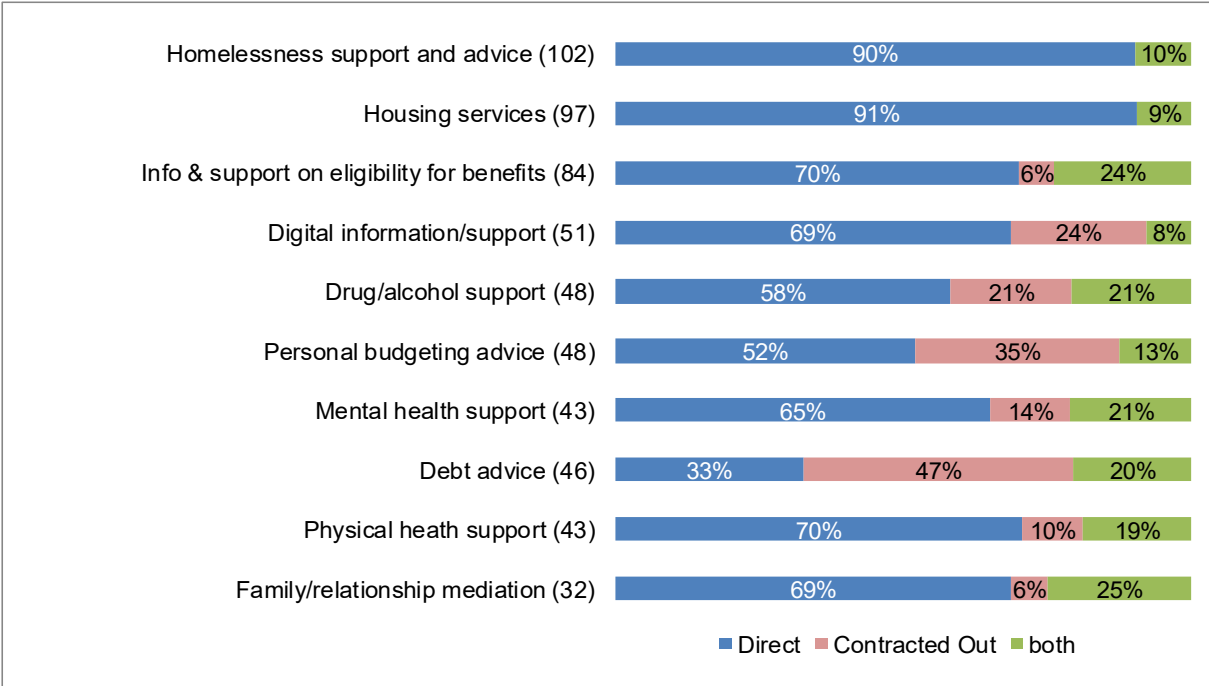
Note: Wording of labels has been reduced to fit in figure. See Appendix A for full wording.

2.4.3 Services already provided before Welfare Reform and whether provided directly, contracted out or both directly and contracted out.

Chart 2.11 shows whether services are provided *before* Welfare Reform directly or contracted out.

Debt advice is the most likely to be contracted out (47 per cent) followed by personal budget advice (35 per cent). Personal Budgeting Support funded by UC through US and Assisted Digital had too few LAs providing prior to Welfare Reform to show. Again nothing with a base of less than 25 is shown.

Chart 2.11 Services already provided before Welfare Reform and whether provided directly, contracted out or both directly and contracted out



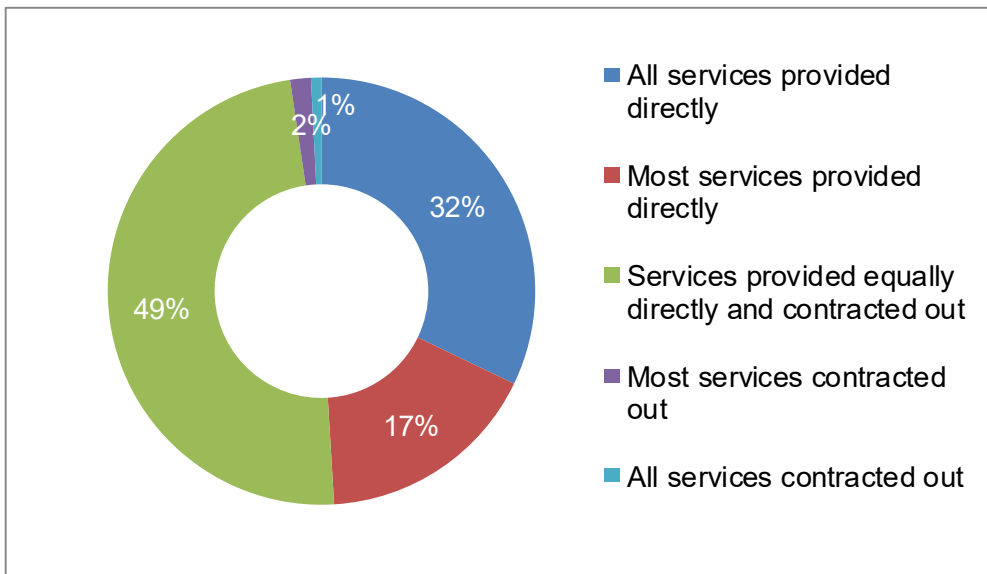
Base: Valid responses (bases in brackets by each response)

Note: Wording of labels has been reduced to fit in figure. See Appendix B for full wording.

2.4.4 Whether services are provided directly or contracted out.

Analysis of which LAs provide services directly and which contract out, indicates that a third (32 per cent) offer all services directly, 17 per cent mostly offer services directly, half (49 per cent) provide services split between contracted out and directly, fairly evenly, and only a small minority (two per cent) mainly contracted out or have all services contracted out (one per cent).

Chart 2.12 Whether services are provided directly or contracted out.



Base: All valid responses (127)

2.4.5 LAs’ preparations for Welfare Reforms

LAs were presented with a number of activities they could potentially have provided in preparation for Welfare Reform and in all cases most LAs had undertaken these activities. LAs are least likely to have sent generic information to staff or tailored guidance to staff but nonetheless eight out of ten (81 per cent and 80 per cent respectively) had done so.

Chart 2.13 LAs’ preparations for the Welfare Reforms

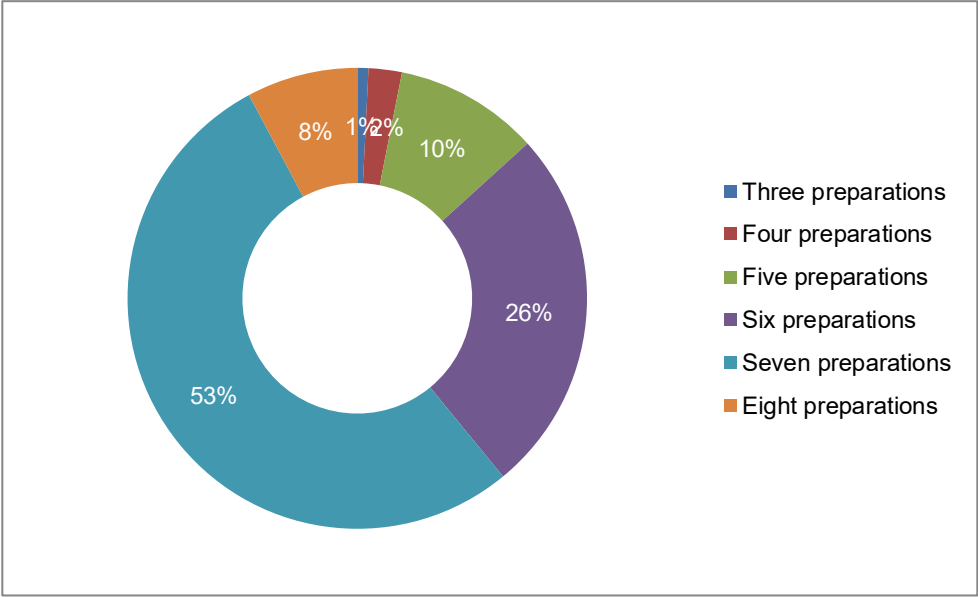


Base: Valid responses (128)

The ‘Other’ category included landlord forums, stakeholder events, and getting external trainers in.

All LAs had carried out more than one of these preparations. The minimum was three, by one LA, but a quarter (26 per cent) had undertaken six preparations and a majority (53 per cent) had undertaken seven of them.

Chart 2.14 The number of preparations taken



Base: Valid responses (128)

2.4.6 Examples of how LAs have worked with partners to support particular groups

LAs were asked an open question to understand what they have actually done by way of support to help the particular groups they support as a result of welfare reform. The main responses included

- Welfare reform meetings
- Courses run for particular groups
- Stakeholder / Delivery Partnership group meetings
- Close liaison with Housing Associations and private landlords
- Advice sessions to groups representing customers with physical and/or mental health issues

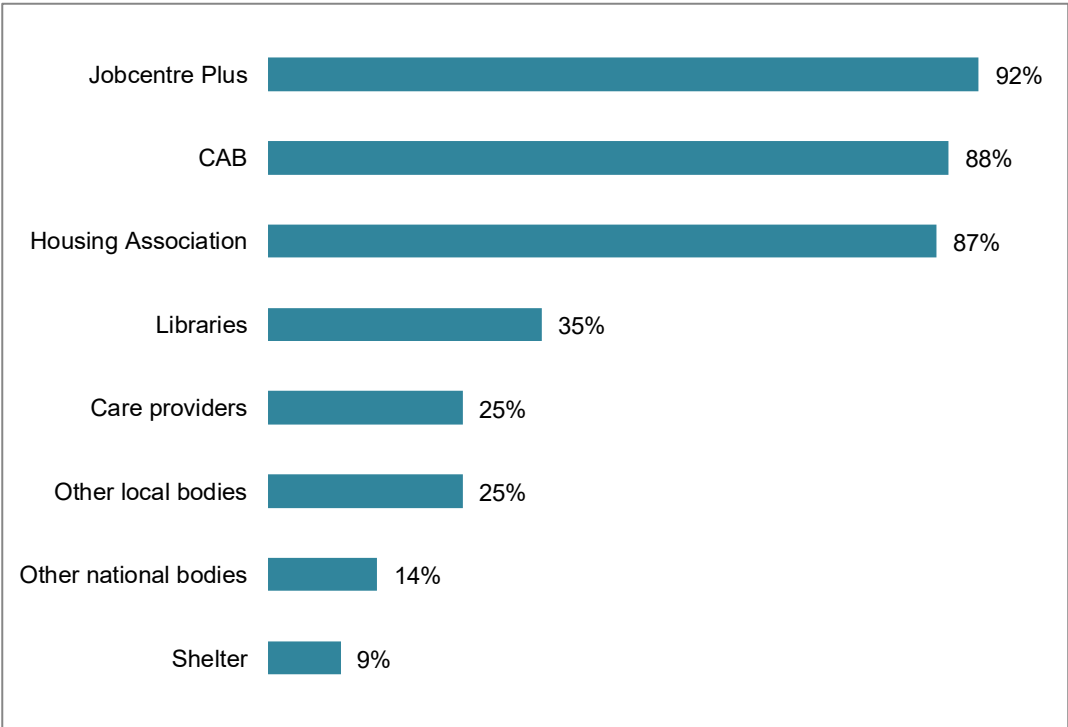
One example of welfare reform meetings was shown in the following quote from a large urban authority: *‘We have regular meetings of a Welfare Reform group including outside bodies such as CAB and County Financial Inclusion & Advice Service’.*

Additionally, other LAs gave examples of close liaison with landlords and Housing Associations, such as: *‘Engagement sessions with landlords in the district. Engagement with LA housing to manage arrears and prevent homelessness’* from a large LA and *‘Working with Housing Sections and Housing Associations as well as private landlords where permitted’* from a large rural LA.

2.4.7 Key partners in the overall delivery of Housing Benefit and welfare services

Reflecting some of the comments in the previous question, LAs most often-mentioned partners in the overall delivery of HB and Welfare Reforms are Jobcentre Plus (JCP - 92 per cent), Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB – 88 per cent) and Housing Associations (87 per cent). Other partners were used in much lower levels with a third of LAs (35 per cent) saying libraries and a quarter mentioning care providers and other local bodies (both 25 per cent).

Chart 2.15 Key partners in the overall delivery of Housing Benefit and welfare services



Base: Valid responses (127)

2.4.8 Examples of good practice showing how LAs work with partners to deliver welfare services

LAs were asked to provide examples of good practice. This was answered by 77 of the 129 eligible to respond. Responses can best be grouped under which claimants are affected. Themes were as follows.

- Working with Housing Associations and landlords on housing
- Working with JCP
- Working with the CAB
- Some of the partnerships are to do with providing Personal Budgeting Support and helping those in financial difficulties

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

The most common mention was ‘Holding Forums jointly with JCP’ which four respondents said.

One very large LA gave the following example of working in partnership with providing Personal Budgeting Support:

‘Personal Budgeting support provision making referrals into wider support including Warm Homes, Welfare Rights Service, Fuel grants Co-location of advice services within Job centre. Regular meeting with DWP partnership managers. Holding Marketplace events targeted at specific group types, maximising income and money management activities i.e. promoting bank accounts, take up of welfare benefits, joint health and money campaigns’.

Just under a third (30 per cent) of the Benefit Managers said that the example they gave of good partnership working was funded through Universal Support.

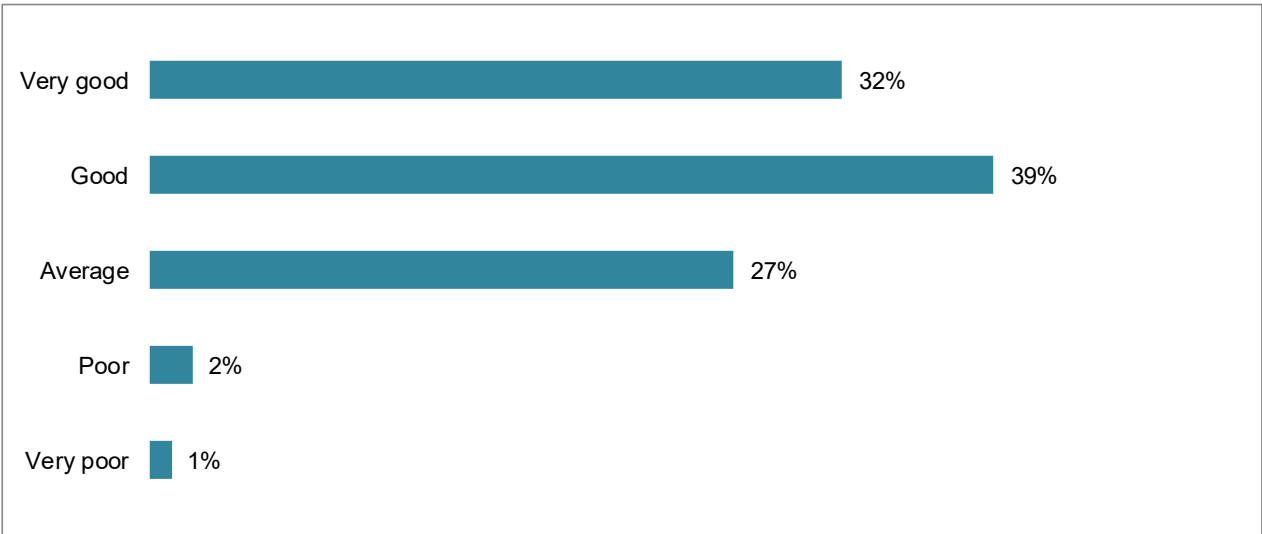
LAs were asked which of the examples were provided through Universal Support. Again this was an open question. Four common themes were as follows.

- Assisted Digital support
- Personal Budgeting Support
- Support Officers to assist with UC claims
- Part-funding of a CAB position to assist with Assisted Digital and Budgeting support

2.4.9 LAs’ relationship with DWP locally

Nearly all LAs (97 per cent) consider that they have at least an average relationship with DWP, 32 per cent saying it is very good and a further 39 per cent saying it is good.

Chart 2.16 LAs’ relationship with DWP locally



Base: Valid responses (127)

LAs were asked what factors were most important to successfully work with DWP locally. The factors that came out most commonly included the following:

- Communication and working together
- Continuity of staff representation
- Regular contact
- Accessibility

One example from a very large urban LA illustrates the importance of communication and working together locally: *'Good communication, local staff being aware of current status of policy centrally, availability of local staff, ability of local staff to make decisions without the need to escalate'*.

Additionally, a large urban coastal LA gave the following example to support the importance of regular contact with DWP: *'We've always had an excellent working relationship with DWP Investigators as we have worked jointly for many years. With the introduction of UC its very important that regular monthly contact is maintained'*.

The most likely barriers to a good relationship with DWP locally include:

- DWP's national procedures do not always take into account local needs
- Constant changes in DWP staff and contacts
- Communication – being able to contact people in DWP when needed
- Time restrictions/resources

One very large coastal LA gave the following examples of barriers to a good relationship with DWP, focused on DWP national procedures and understanding at a local level:

'Barriers are dealing with national DWP, not at local level. DWP seems to work in silos; e.g. a Housing Benefit manager is dealing with many strands of DWP, e.g. Universal Credit, WURTI, RTI, SFIS; PDT; Subsidy etc. DWP staff seem to operate in their silo and can't answer questions about other aspects that may be relevant to Housing Benefit. Also, DWP in general don't appear to understand that Council Tax (collection and claims for support) remain of utmost importance to local authorities so more awareness is definitely needed'.

Another example from a medium sized rural LA highlighted the issue of staff changes in DWP and lack of understanding and influence from LAs:

'Named contacts change frequently leading to inconsistencies and lack of continuity. Nationally, the DWP is not understanding the issues facing LA's and it's citizens due to Welfare Reform. Minimal influence by LA's on improvements for national processes'.

2.4.10 LAs' priorities for the next 12 months, in relation to Welfare Reform and how DWP could help LAs address them

LAs' priorities over the next 12 months (since Feb-Mar 2018 when the survey took place) include two main themes:

- UC full rollout
- Managing Discretionary Housing Payments

A question on how DWP could help with these resulted in the following main areas:

- Improve funding
- Better and more timely communication
- Don't roll out UC until ready
- Continued support and liaison through Partnership Managers
- Remove barriers to data sharing
- Better quality data

One medium sized rural LA stated that DWP could help support LAs with '*Adequate funding. Pause UC until you actually have it figured out properly for all claimants - do not 'test and learn' on unsuspecting individuals who are in need of your help.*

Another example given by a large LA on how DWP could help with further consultation and UC support suggested: '*Consulting individual affected LAs prior to signing off on a national plan. This would enable the most affected LAs to explain the consequences and the additional administrative burden for example the postcode roll-out of UC full service.*

Additionally one large coastal LA felt that DWP should '*Ensure appropriate funding, clear guidance, clear and timely communication. Remove barriers regarding data share*' in order to best support UC rollout.

2.5 The impact of limiting absences outside GB to four weeks on local authorities and claimants

In July 2016 DWP introduced a limit of four weeks to absences outside Great Britain (GB) for HB (bringing it in line with UC), although there are still some exceptions (e.g. absence relating to bereavement).

Claims with absences of more than four weeks (including those that state they will have such an absence at the New Claim stage) are automatically stopped and the claimant must reapply on their return to GB.

2.5.1 The impact of the limit of four weeks to absences outside GB for HB on claimants.

Whilst the majority (60 per cent) of respondents said that they had not seen an increase in denials of HB, just over a fifth (22 per cent) had seen an increase since the limit of four weeks was introduced in July 2016. The remaining 18 per cent were unsure.

A majority of LAs (58 per cent) responding to this question said that they had given their response as a result of personal experience, a third (32 per cent) had got it anecdotally and a fifth (21 per cent) said it was from claimant data. Some LAs said their information came from more than one source, hence the proportions adding to more than 100 per cent.

A fifth (21 per cent) of respondents said that the new limit was impacting specific demographic groups. Some of these respondents gave one or more examples, along with the reasons for extended travel amongst some communities. Whilst not all respondents gave the same examples, they were able to be grouped into the following types:

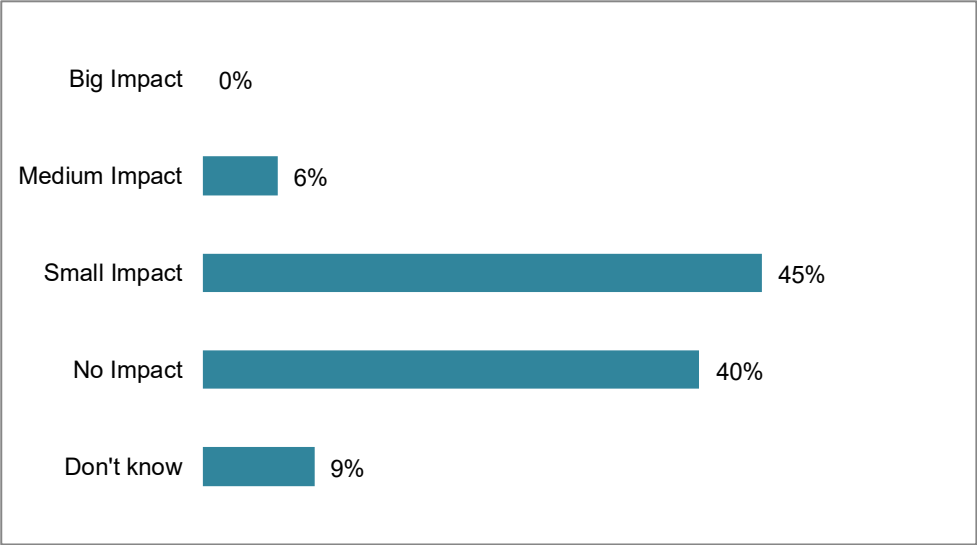
- Asian families returning to Bangladesh, India and Pakistan to visit family or for pilgrimage
- European/EU workers returning home for family/holiday visits
- Nepalese/Ghurkhas
- Pensioners who are visiting family/staying abroad for winter due to ill health/able to take extended holiday
- People going on pilgrimage

Note: The order does not represent the frequency of responses

2.5.2 The impact of the limit of four weeks to absences outside GB for HB on LA workloads.

The change to the four week limit has not had a great deal of impact on local authority workloads with 45 per cent reporting a small impact, only six per cent a medium impact and no LAs reporting a big impact. One in ten (nine per cent) were not sure.

Chart 2.20 The impact of the limit of 4 weeks to absences outside GB for HB on LA workloads



Base: Valid responses (116)

Those who reported an impact (medium or small – 59 LAs) mostly indicated that it was manageable (86 per cent) with only eight per cent finding it difficult to manage and the rest ‘don’t know’.

Looking at this from the point of view of all LAs in the survey we can see that of the 116 LAs that responded to the question, four per cent are finding it difficult to manage, most of the remainder, bar a few ‘don’t knows’, are managing.

Appendix A – Questionnaire

Local Authority Insight Survey Wave 34 Questionnaire

Please note that this Word version of the questionnaire is for reference only. All answers to the questions need to be entered into the web questionnaire that is available at:

<https://survey.natcen.ac.uk/LAinsight>

The question order in this word version of the questionnaire may differ from that in the web version so please take care when copying your answers to the web questionnaire.

Thank you for taking part in this survey. This wave of the survey includes questions about Fraud and Error, the Limiting of absences outside the UK and changes to local authority (LA) services in order to deliver welfare reform. The information you provide will help the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) understand how current and future housing policy decisions affect LAs and claimants. It will help DWP understand the support that LAs need from DWP and will inform the future policy strategy.

Please consult other colleagues who can help you in providing relevant information when completing these questions.

Section A: Fraud & Error

A1) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Fraud and Error.

.....GO TO A2

A2) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....GO TO A3

A3) The Right Benefit Initiative provides LAs with funding to tackle earnings and employment related Fraud and Error by processing Optional Real Time Information referrals.

What other activities have you implemented to manage your caseloads and help reduce Fraud and Error?

	Tick all that apply	
Encouraging or educating Housing Benefit (HB) claimants to report changes of circumstances		GO TO A5
Educating claimants about benefits more generally		GO TO A5
Improving accessibility and responsiveness of your Benefits Service		GO TO A5
Working with other organisations to maximise the reporting of changes in circumstances		GO TO A5
Maximising the use of available data and intelligence		GO TO A5
Data matching of claimant records		GO TO A5
Carry out random checks on HB cases		GO TO A5
Carry out targeted checks on HB cases		GO TO A5
Visiting claimants		GO TO A5
Telephone reviewing		GO TO A5
Postal reviews		GO TO A5
Introduced new internal management or monitoring methods		GO TO A5
Other activity (please specify)		GO TO A5
None		GO TO A7
Don't know		GO TO A4

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

A4) Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....

.....GO TO A7

COMPLETE FOR ANSWERS GIVEN AT A3

A5) Please can you rate the success of each activity, on a scale of 1 (not at all successful) to 5 (very successful).

	1 – Not at all successful	2	3	4	5 – Very successful	Cannot evidence success/lack of success	
Encouraging or educating Housing Benefit (HB) claimants to report changes of circumstances							GO TO A6
Educating claimants about benefits more generally							GO TO A6
Improving accessibility and responsiveness of your Benefits Service							GO TO A6
Working with other organisations to maximise the reporting of changes in circumstances							GO TO A6
Maximising the use of available data and intelligence							GO TO A6

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

Data matching of claimant records							GO TO A6
Carry out random checks on HB cases							GO TO A6
Carry out targeted checks on HB cases							GO TO A6
Visiting claimants							GO TO A6
Telephone reviewing							GO TO A6
Postal reviews							GO TO A6
Introduced new internal management or monitoring methods							GO TO A6
Other activity (please specify)							GO TO A6

COMPLETE FOR ANSWERS GIVEN AT A3

A6) What evidence do you have for the success or lack of success this activity has had in reducing Fraud and Error?

	Management Information	Anecdotal (from within your LA)	Other (please specify)	Cannot evidence success/lack of success	
Encouraging or educating Housing Benefit (HB) claimants to report changes of circumstances					GO TO A7
Educating claimants about benefits more generally					GO TO A7

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

Improving accessibility and responsiveness of your Benefits Service					GO TO A7
Working with other organisations to maximise the reporting of changes in circumstances					GO TO A7
Maximising the use of available data and intelligence					GO TO A7
Data matching of claimant records					GO TO A7
Carry out random checks on HB cases					GO TO A7
Carry out targeted checks on HB cases					GO TO A7
Visiting claimants					GO TO A7
Telephone reviewing					GO TO A7
Postal reviews					GO TO A7
Introduced new internal management or monitoring methods					GO TO A7
Other activity (please specify)					GO TO A7

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

A7) To inform our future strategies for continuing to address the levels of Fraud and Error, particularly for HB Working Age claimants, please tell us what you think are the influences on Fraud and Error in your LA.

	Tick all that apply	
Increased number of people in work and claiming benefit		GO TO A9
Pressures on resources		GO TO A9
Recruitment issues		GO TO A9
Staff retention issues		GO TO A9
Less training or skills of staff members		GO TO A9
Change in structure of benefits with less focus on possible fraud		GO TO A9
Fluctuating earnings of claimant		GO TO A9
Other		GO TO A9
Don't know		GO TO A8

A8) Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
GO TO A10

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

A9) Please can you rate the significance of each response on a scale of 1 (not very significant) to 5 (very significant)

	1 - Not very significant	2	3	4	5 - Very significant	
Increased number of people in work and claiming benefit						GO TO A10
Pressures on resources						GO TO A10
Recruitment issues						GO TO A10
Staff retention issues						GO TO A10
Less training or skills of staff members						GO TO A10
Change in structure of benefits with less focus on possible fraud						GO TO A10
Fluctuating earnings of claimant						GO TO A10
Other						GO TO A10

A10) What are the top three things the DWP could do to support you in driving down the levels of HB Fraud and Error?

1st:

.....

2nd:

.....

3rd:

.....

GO TO NEXT SECTION

Section B: Caseload Management Information

DWP publishes quarterly statistics on 'Housing Benefit: entitlement reductions' known as Caseload Management Information (CMI).

CMI is a proxy measure of HB Fraud and Error and provides an estimate of how well each LA is managing their HB caseload. By identifying the changes of circumstances that lead to a reduction to entitlement LAs can prevent or minimise overpayments from occurring; thereby minimising Fraud and Error.

B1) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Caseload Management Information (CMI).

.....
GO TO B2

B2) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....
GO TO B3

B3) Before today how aware were you of CMI data?

	Tick all that apply	
Never heard of it		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Heard of it but not utilising it		GO TO B4
I use it myself		GO TO B5
Colleagues use it		IF THIS IS THE ONLY ANSWER RECORDED AT THIS QUESTION GO TO B10 OTHERWISE GO TO B5
No-one in my LA uses it		GO TO NEXT SECTION

B4) To what extent do you understand the information CMI data provides?

	Tick one box	
Understand fully	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION
Partially understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't understand it at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION
Haven't looked at it	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION

B5) To what extent do you understand the information CMI data provides?

	Tick one box	
Understand fully	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO B6
Partially understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO B6
Don't understand it at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION
Haven't looked at it	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO NEXT SECTION

B6) How do you use the CMI data?

	Tick all that apply	
As a means to judge performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO B7
To compare to other Las	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO B7
Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO B7
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO B7

ANSWER IF YOUR COLLEAGUES USE CMI DATA

B7) How do your colleagues use the CMI data?

	Tick all that apply	
As a means to judge performance		GO TO B8
To compare to other Las		GO TO B8
Other (specify)		GO TO B8
Don't know		GO TO B8

B8) How accurate or inaccurate is the CMI as a reflection of your own LA's performance in this area?

	Tick one box	
Very accurate		GO TO B9
Fairly accurate		GO TO B9
Fairly inaccurate		GO TO B9
Very inaccurate		GO TO B9
Don't know		GO TO B9

B9) What, if anything, do you think DWP could do better to improve understanding of the information or support you using it?

Make the information easier to understand		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Provide more resource		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Provide clearer guidance on the methodology used		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Other (specify)		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't know		GO TO NEXT SECTION

IF ONLY ANSWER AT B3 IS 'Colleagues use it'

B10) It would be helpful if you could ask a colleague who uses CMI to answer the rest of this section. Please confirm whether a person who uses CMI data will answer this section of questions.

	Tick one box only	
Yes - my colleague will continue to answer this section		ASK COLLEAGUE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS B11 TO B16
No		GO TO NEXT SECTION

IF COLLEAGUE ANSWERING PLEASE COMPLETE QUESTIONS B11 TO B16

B11) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Caseload Management Information (CMI).

.....GO TO B12

B12) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....GO TO B13

B13) To what extent do you understand the information CMI data provides?

	Tick one box	
Understand fully		GO TO B14
Partially understand		GO TO B14
Don't understand it at all		GO TO B14
Haven't looked at it		GO TO B14
Don't know		GO TO B14

B14) How do you use the CMI data?

	Tick all that apply	
As a means to judge performance		GO TO B15
To compare to other Las		GO TO B15
Other (specify)		GO TO B15
Don't know		GO TO B15

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

B15) How accurate or inaccurate is the CMI as a reflection of your own LA's performance in this area?

	Tick one box	
Very accurate		GO TO B16
Fairly accurate		GO TO B16
Fairly inaccurate		GO TO B16
Very inaccurate		GO TO B16
Don't know		GO TO B16

B16) What, if anything, do you think DWP could do better to improve understanding of the information or support you using it?

Make the information easier to understand		END OF QUESTIONS ON CMI DATA
Provide more resource		END OF QUESTIONS ON CMI DATA
Provide clearer guidance on the methodology used		END OF QUESTIONS ON CMI DATA
Other (specify)		END OF QUESTIONS ON CMI DATA
Don't know		END OF QUESTIONS ON CMI DATA

Section C: Verify Earnings and Pensions service (previously known as Wider Use of Real-Time Information (WURTI))

The verification of employment and pension income is a lengthy clerical process, which relies on claimants providing accurate information. DWP’s mission is to provide a simple, fast and reliable way of checking employment and pension income to reduce Fraud and Error. This is done by allowing HB processing staff in LAs access to the VEP Service which is a user interface that shows the latest and historic payment information during the life of a claim as reported by employers to HM Revenue and Customs.

C1) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Verify Earnings and Pensions Service (VEP).

.....GO TO C2

C2) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....GO TO C3

C3) Before today how aware were you, or your colleagues, of the VEP Service to assess entitlement to HB?

	Tick all that apply	
Never heard of it		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Heard of it but not utilising it		GO TO NEXT SECTION
I use it myself		GO TO C4
Colleagues use it		IF THIS IS THE ONLY ANSWER RECORDED AT THIS QUESTION GO TO C6 OTHERWISE GO TO C4
No one in my organisation uses it		GO TO NEXT SECTION

C4) How easy or difficult is the VEP Service to use?

	Tick one box	
Very easy to use		GO TO C5
Fairly easy to use		GO TO C5
Fairly difficult to use		GO TO C5
Very difficult to use		GO TO C5
Don't know		GO TO C5

C5) How effective or ineffective is the VEP Service in helping your LA to make accurate HB assessments?

	Tick one box	
Very effective		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Fairly effective		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Fairly ineffective		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Very ineffective		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't know		GO TO NEXT SECTION

IF ONLY ANSWER AT C3 IS 'Colleagues use it'

C6) Please confirm whether a person who uses the VEP Service will answer this section of questions.

	Tick one box only	
Yes - my colleague will continue to answer this section		ASK COLLEAGUE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS C7 TO C10
No		GO TO NEXT SECTION

C7) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Verify Earnings and Pensions Service (VEP).

.....

.....GO TO C8

C8) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....

.....GO TO C9

C9) How easy or difficult is the VEP Service to use?

	Tick one box	
Very easy to use		GO TO C10
Fairly easy to use		GO TO C10
Fairly difficult to use		GO TO C10
Very difficult to use		GO TO C10
Don't know		GO TO C10

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

C10) How effective or ineffective is the VEP Service in helping your LA to make accurate HB assessments?

	Tick one box	
Very effective		END OF QUESTIONS ON VEP
Fairly effective		END OF QUESTIONS ON VEP
Fairly ineffective		END OF QUESTIONS ON VEP
Very ineffective		END OF QUESTIONS ON VEP
Don't know		END OF QUESTIONS ON VEP

Section D: Limiting absences outside GB to 4 weeks

In July 2016 DWP introduced a limit of 4 weeks to absences outside GB for HB (bringing it in line with Universal Credit), although there are still some exceptions (e.g. absence relating to bereavement).

Claims with absences of more than 4 weeks (including those that state they will have such an absence at the New Claim stage) are automatically stopped and the claimant must reapply on their return to GB.

If you do not work with HB claims where there is an absence outside GB yourself please ask a colleague who works with HB claims to complete this section.

D1) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on limit of 4 weeks to absences outside the GB for Housing Benefit.

.....GO TO D2

D2) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....GO TO D3

D3) Are more new claims being denied due to the limiting introduced since July 2016?

	Tick one box	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D5
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D5
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D4

D4) Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
GO TO D6

D5) Please can you explain how you arrived at the previous response?

	Tick all that apply	
Personal experience/opinion	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D6
Anecdotal (within the wider LA)	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D6
From claimant data	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D6
Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	GO TO D6

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

D6) Are any specific groups, such as any demographic or ethnic groups, being impacted by the limit of 4 weeks to absences outside GB for HB, if at all?

	Tick one box	
Yes		GO TO D7
No		GO TO D9
Don't know		GO TO D8

D7) Which specific groups, such as any demographic or ethnic groups, are being impacted by the limit of 4 weeks to absences outside the GB for HB.

.....
GO TO D9

D8) Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
GO TO D9

D9) Has the limit of 4 weeks to absences outside the GB for HB impacted on workloads, for example more frequent opening and closing of claims?

	Tick one box	
Big impact		GO TO D11
Medium impact		GO TO D11
Small impact		GO TO D11
No impact		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't know		GO TO D10

D10) Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....
GO TO NEXT SECTION

D11) Would you say that the size of impact on workloads of the limit of 4 week absences outside the GB has been manageable within current workloads?.

	Tick one box	
Yes - manageable		GO TO NEXT SECTION
No – difficult to manage		GO TO NEXT SECTION
Don't know		GO TO NEXT SECTION

Section E: Changes to LA structures and services in order to deliver Welfare Reform

WRINTRO

The past few years have seen varied and large-scale programmes impact on the role of LAs in the delivery of support and welfare services, including changes to HB/Universal Credit, the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy, benefit cap, and delivery of Universal Support.

Universal Support is advice, assistance or support provided by DWP or locally specified partners [e.g. Citizen’s Advice; Credit Unions; LAs; charities; Registered Social landlords to a Universal Credit claimant for the purpose of assisting them with:

- Managing their claim or award of Universal Credit including accessing and using online services or
- Managing their financial affairs

For the period of the transition to Universal Credit to 2022, the UC Programme has made available Universal Support funding to LAs (in 2017/18 this is via a grant model) based on a cost model that makes assumptions of the level of claimant need for Assisted Digital/Digital Support and for Personal Budgeting Support/managing financial affairs) to help claimants with the transition to Universal Credit.

E1) Please state your job title to help us understand who has answered questions on Welfare Reform.

.....GO TO E2

E2) In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

.....GO TO E3

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

E3) Which of the following local welfare services does your LA provide?
(Include services your LA delivers directly as well as any your LA contracts out)

	A service we have introduced in response to welfare reform	A service we already provided before welfare reform	We are planning to provide in the next two years	We are not planning to provide	
a) Debt advice					GO TO E4
b) Personal Budgeting Support funded by Universal Credit through Universal Support*					GO TO E4
c) Assisted Digital/Digital Support, funded by Universal Credit through Universal Support					GO TO E4
d) Personal budgeting advice (not Universal Support)					GO TO E4
e) Digital information/support (not Universal Support)					GO TO E4
f) Universal Credit information/support					GO TO E4
g) Information and support on eligibility for benefits and application process					GO TO E4
h) Mental health support					GO TO E4
i) Physical health support					GO TO E4
j) Family/relationship mediation					GO TO E4
k) Housing services					GO TO E4
l) Homelessness support and advice					GO TO E4
m) Drug/alcohol support					GO TO E4
n) Something else (specify)					GO TO E4

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

ANSWER THIS QUESTION FOR EACH OF THE SERVICES MENTIONED AT E3 AS 'Service already provided' or 'Service introduced in response to Welfare reform'

E4) And do you deliver those services directly, or are they contracted out?

	Direct	Contract out	Both	
a) Debt advice				GO TO E5
b) Personal Budgeting Support, funded by Universal Credit through Universal Support*				GO TO E5
c) Assisted Digital/Digital Support, funded by Universal Credit through Universal Support				GO TO E5
d) Personal budgeting advice (not Universal Support)				GO TO E5
e) Digital information/support (not Universal Support)				GO TO E5
f) Universal Credit information/support				GO TO E5
g) Information and support on eligibility for benefits and application process				GO TO E5
h) Mental health support				GO TO E5
i) Physical health support				GO TO E5
j) Family/relationship mediation				GO TO E5
k) Housing services				GO TO E5
l) Homelessness support and advice				GO TO E5
m) Drug/alcohol support				GO TO E5
n) Something else (specify)				GO TO E5

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

E5) And which of the following did you do when preparing for the Welfare reforms?

	Tick all that apply	
Training courses with LA staff, aimed at improving general awareness		GO TO E6
Specific training in specific reforms (e.g. Universal Credit)		GO TO E6
Sent generic information to staff		GO TO E6
Sent tailored guidance to staff		GO TO E6
Having internal meetings with staff		GO TO E6
Having meetings with partner organisations		GO TO E6
Used the LA Support Pack, provided by DWP		GO TO E6
Other (please specify)		GO TO E6

E6) Has your LA provided additional support to any of the following groups, as a result of welfare reform?

	Tick all that apply	
a) Disabled claimants		GO TO E8
b) Young claimants		GO TO E8
c) Claimants with arrears		GO TO E8
d) Single parents		GO TO E8
e) Claimants in domestic violence refuges		GO TO E8
f) Claimants with learning difficulties		GO TO E8
g) Claimants with mental health issues		GO TO E8
h) Other groups (specify)		GO TO E8
i) None of these		GO TO E8
Don't know		GO TO E7

E7) Can you please explain why you couldn't answer the previous question. This will help us understand why the question could not be answered so we can improve these questions in the future.

.....

E8) Do you have any examples of how you have worked with partners in your area to support the groups mentioned in the previous question?

.....
GO TO E9

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

E9) Thinking about overall delivery of Housing Benefit and welfare services in your area, who would you describe as your key partners?

	Tick all that apply	
Shelter		GO TO E10
CAB		GO TO E10
JobCentre Plus		GO TO E10
Libraries		GO TO E10
Housing Association		GO TO E10
Care providers		GO TO E10
Other national bodies (Please specify)		GO TO E10
Other local bodies (Please specify)		GO TO E10
No partners		GO TO E10

E10) Do you have any examples of good practice showing how you work with partners to deliver welfare services?

	Tick one box	
.....		GO TO E11
No examples of working with partners delivering HB and welfare services		GO TO E13

E11) Are any of the good practice examples you described in the last question funded through Universal Support?

	Tick one box	
Yes		GO TO E12
No		GO TO E13

E12) Which activities are delivered in Universal Support?

.....
.....GO TO E13

Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey: Wave 34

E13) How would you describe your relationship with DWP locally on a scale from very poor to very good?

	Tick one box	
Very poor		GO TO E14
Poor		GO TO E14
Average		GO TO E14
Good		GO TO E14
Very good		GO TO E14

E14) What are the most important factors to working successfully with DWP locally?

.....
GO TO E15

E15) What are the key barriers to working successfully with DWP locally?

.....
GO TO E16

E16) What are your LA’s priorities for the next 12 months, in relation to welfare reform?

.....
GO TO E17

E17) How could DWP help your LA to address them?

.....
GO TO NEXT SECTION

Section F: Permissions to pass LA level data to DWP

Ask all

F1) LADatP

NatCen Social Research will pass responses from the survey back to DWP on an anonymised basis. However, to help improve the advice and support it offers to LAs, DWP would like to be able to see the responses you have given linked to you and your LA.

Would you be willing for us to pass your responses back to DWP in this way?

- Yes
- No

F2) DWPCont

DWP may want to contact you again in relation to this survey to pick up on some of the issues you have raised and/or to offer advice or support where appropriate.

Would you be willing for the DWP to contact you about this survey in the future?

- Yes
- No

Contact details updates

ContDInt

Finally, we would be grateful if you could confirm or amend the contact details we have for you.

F3) FrstnmC (first name)

F4) LstnmC (last name)

F5) Job title-----

F6) LATeam

In which team do you work and what is this team responsible for?

OPEN RESPONSE [2000]

F7) Phone number-----

F8) E-mail)-----

F9) Postal address

Adr1C -----

Adr2C-----

Adr3C-----

Adr4C-----

PCodeC-----

Thank you for taking part in this survey