



Ministry
of Justice

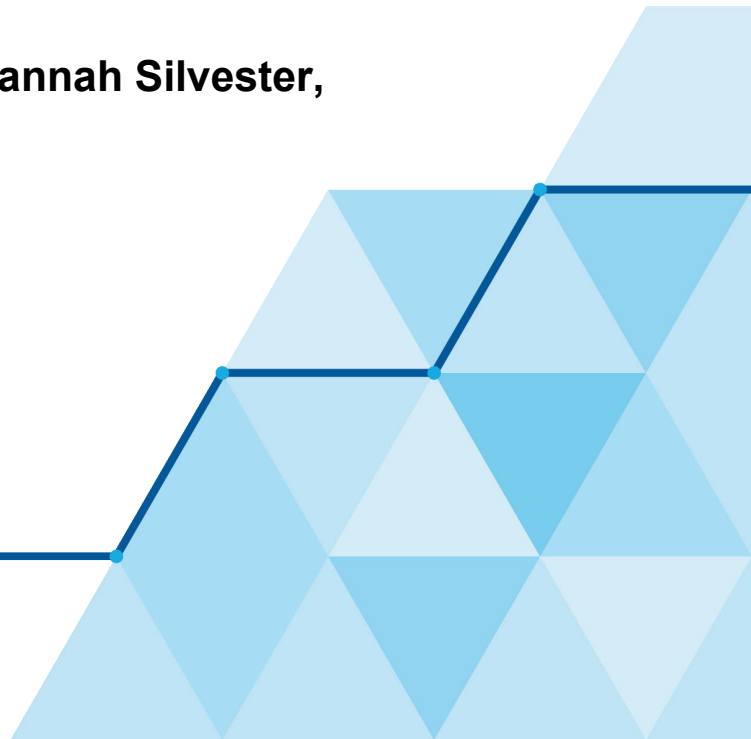
Understanding the funding, provision and outcomes measurement of free advice services provided by local authorities in England and Wales

**Lorna Adams, Daniel Pearmain, Hannah Silvester,
Emily Clark and Olivia Podmore**

IFF Research

Ministry of Justice Analytical Series

2026



Data and Analysis exists to improve policy making, decision taking and practice by the Ministry of Justice. It does this by providing robust, timely and relevant data and advice drawn from research and analysis undertaken by the department's analysts and by the wider research community.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy).

First published 2026



© Crown copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at researchsupport@justice.gov.uk

This publication is available for download at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj>

ISBN 978 1 911763 19 2

Contents

List of tables

List of figures

Ministry of Justice foreword	1
1. Key findings	3
1.1 Key findings	4
1.2 Local authorities as significant funders of advice services	4
1.3 Monitoring practices are well-established but varied	4
1.4 Outcomes measurement is developing but not yet systematic	5
1.5 Barriers to outcomes measurement are practical and structural	6
1.6 Commissioning cycles could provide a route to change	6
1.7 Implications for policy and practice	6
2. Introduction and methodology	7
2.1 Background and context	7
2.2 Research approach	8
3. Local authority funding of free advice services	13
3.1 The types of advice services being funded	13
3.2 External advice-provision landscape	15
4. Monitoring information about advice services	20
4.1 Collection of monitoring information from external providers	20
4.2 Use of monitoring information from external providers	21
4.3 Assessing the quality of externally provided services	23
4.4 Collection of monitoring information about in-house advice	23
4.5 Use of monitoring information about in-house advice	24
5. Outcomes information about advice services	26
5.1 Types of data being recorded	26
5.2 How outcomes information is being recorded	29
5.3 Assessing outcomes information	29
6. Use of outcomes frameworks	31
6.1 Incorporating an outcomes framework in their strategy	31
6.2 Challenges associated with measuring outcomes	32
7. Conclusion	34

List of tables

Table 1: Response rate by country	10
Table 2: Response rate by authority type	10
Table 3: The source of advice provision, by issue type	15

List of figures

Map 1: Representation of where responding local authorities are located	11
Figure 3.1: Areas of advice services funded by local authorities	14
Figure 3.2: How local authorities award funding to external organisations to deliver advice	16
Figure 3.3: Length of funding cycle for external providers before needing to go through a new commissioning process	17
Figure 3.4: Whether local authorities thought funding for advice services had changed in the last five years	18
Figure 3.5: If funding for free advice will decrease or increase over the next 5 years	19
Figure 4.1: Type of monitoring information most commonly collected by local authorities funding external advice provision	21
Figure 4.2: How monitoring data collected from external organisations is used	22
Figure 4.3: Reporting requirements stipulated as a condition of advice funding	23
Figure 4.4: Types of monitoring data most commonly collected in-house by local authorities	24
Figure 4.5: How monitoring data about in-house provision is used	25
Figure 5.1: Outcomes information collected for in-house provision	27
Figure 5.2: Outcomes information collected for external provision	28
Figure 5.3: How regularly performance on outcomes is being checked	29
Figure 5.4: How outcomes information was being used	30
Figure 6.1: Why local authorities collect information on outcomes	32
Figure 6.2: Reasons why local authorities do not collect information on outcomes	33

Ministry of Justice foreword

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) commissioned IFF Research to undertake research into local authority funding of free advice services and their associated data collection practices, including whether they use an outcomes framework to assess the outcomes achieved by funding these services. IFF conducted an online survey, aiming to secure one response from each of the 339 local authorities in England and Wales. The survey achieved 62 responses (a response from 18% of all local authorities) and therefore, while the findings can be used to give an indication of local authority practices, they cannot be treated as representative of all local authorities.

The findings support MoJ's existing understanding – based on stakeholder engagement and sector reporting (for example, [State of the Advice Sector, Advice UK, 2025](#)) – that local authorities play a key role within the legal support sector as both funders and providers of free advice services. The research highlights variation in funding practices: while some local authorities actively coordinate advice provision (e.g. through sharing or pooling some of their advice services, funding networks, or funding infrastructure such as partnership arrangements or shared referral systems), others do not. There may, therefore, be an opportunity for the MoJ to play a more active role in fostering further co-ordination and collaboration between organisations; an approach recommended by the sector to improve holistic support, enable smoother referrals for clients, and improve efficiency for organisations (e.g., [Conditions and Benefits in the London Social Welfare Advice Sector, Advice Workforce Development Programme, 2025](#); [The role of communities and connections in social welfare legal advice, University of Manchester, 2024](#)).

Previous work within the sector (e.g. [Developing Data standards for Access to Justice Organisations, The Legal Education Foundation, 2022](#)) has advocated for the adoption of agreed standards for how data should be recorded to support consistent data collection and shared understanding. While outcomes frameworks are generally viewed positively, organisations can be overwhelmed by the variety and complexity of existing frameworks

and/or lack the expertise or capacity to explore the development of a tailored framework ([Measuring Justice, The Access to Justice Foundation, 2024](#)).

Findings from this research seem to support this: while those local authorities that responded regularly collect monitoring information from the providers they fund, outcomes data collection is less prevalent, and the use of an outcomes framework even less so. Where outcomes frameworks are used, their content is likely to vary between local authorities, even when they may be funding the same organisations (20% reported funding national organisations). Barriers to outcomes data collection include limited resources and capability within both local authorities and the advice providers, and difficulty in defining outcomes. Among those already measuring outcomes, differences in interpretation of data requirements were cited as a challenge. These findings suggest that the development of a flexible and proportionate outcomes framework could increase the number of local authorities collecting outcomes data for the advice services they fund and make it easier for those already measuring outcomes to collect the necessary data.

The MoJ's broader engagement with stakeholders across the advice sector indicates that organisations are experiencing capacity pressures. The development of an outcomes framework could help alleviate administrative burdens on both local authorities and advice providers by introducing consistency in outcomes data requirements across funders, including local authorities.

Local authorities that collect outcomes data report using it for various purposes, including providing feedback to advice providers and supporting future funding bids. The implementation of an outcomes framework could further strengthen the evidence base for funders on the value of the advice sector and support continuous improvement among advice organisations. Notably, 68% of local authorities collecting outcomes data said they use it to inform future strategy documents. This suggests that an outcomes framework could help to enhance strategic planning and decision-making and support other local authorities to incorporate and align advice outcomes with their overarching organisational aims.

1. Key findings

About the research

IFF Research was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to conduct research with the aim of improving understanding of the provision of free advice services by local authorities to residents. Of particular interest were the types of advice provided, whether services were delivered directly by local authorities ('in-house') or commissioned from specialist organisations, and whether local authorities collected data to monitor the delivery of services and/or measure the outcomes of those services.

The MoJ is developing an outcomes framework to support advice organisations and funders to better evidence the outcomes they achieve for service users and engage in reflective practice. Central to the development of such a framework is ensuring the views and needs of advice organisations and funders are accounted for in the final product. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to build an understanding of current practices of local authorities, including the metrics currently in use and any barriers to collecting outcomes data. The findings of the research will feed into the development of the outcomes framework, specifically with the aim of ensuring it is tailored to the capacity and capability of the sector.

IFF's approach and interpretation of findings

IFF Research contacted local authorities across England and Wales to gather an understanding of how free advice services are provided. Of the 339 local authorities, 62 responded to the survey, resulting in a 18% response rate. This means that the findings presented can only be treated as a snapshot of those local authorities that actively engaged with the research and may not accurately reflect the situation amongst all local authorities across England and Wales. It is possible, for example, that local authorities more engaged in providing advice or collecting data were more inclined to respond to the survey.

When interpreting the findings, it should also be noted that due to a relatively low survey completion overall, the response rate for some questions was low. In these instances, we have reported on the number of responses instead of the percentage to avoid misinterpretation of the strength of the finding.

Below, we summarise the key findings, with the above caveats in mind.

1.1 Key findings

This research provides an indicative overview of how local authorities in England and Wales fund, deliver, and evaluate free advice services. While the findings are based on a limited response rate (18%), they offer valuable insights into current practice and highlight areas that may warrant further exploration as part of the MoJ's development of a sector-wide outcomes framework.

1.2 Local authorities as significant funders of advice services

The vast majority of local authorities that responded (97%) reported funding free advice services for residents, with most delivering support through a combination of in-house provision and externally commissioned organisations. Advice on welfare benefits, debt, and housing emerged as the most commonly funded areas, reflecting the central role of local authorities in supporting residents with complex legal and social welfare needs.

This suggests that local authorities are not only key funders within the legal support sector but also integral to its delivery. Development of an outcomes framework would benefit from recognising the scale and diversity of local authority involvement and ensuring that their working practices and constraints are taken into account.

1.3 Monitoring practices are well-established but varied

Monitoring information is routinely collected by local authorities, particularly for externally commissioned services (96%) and, to a slightly lesser extent, for in-house provision (71%).

Commonly collected data includes case types, referral volumes, and resolution rates. Data is used for performance analysis, strategic planning, and reporting.

However, the survey also found variation in how monitoring data is collected and used. Only half of local authorities provided standard templates to external providers, and fewer than a third collected the same information across all providers. This variation may limit the ability to compare performance or aggregate data across services. These findings suggest that there could be benefits to developing a set of standards that supports greater consistency in monitoring practices across the sector.

1.4 Outcomes measurement is developing but not yet systematic

While many local authorities are collecting outcomes data (80% for external services, 69% for in-house), the scope and consistency of this data vary. Financial improvements, wellbeing gains, and money saved were the most commonly recorded outcomes – possibly because they are easier to capture through existing casework processes.

Only half of the local authorities collecting outcomes data for external services reported using a formal outcomes framework, and just 34% did so for in-house services. This suggests that outcomes measurement is still emerging and not yet embedded across local authorities. The findings indicate that there may be value in exploring whether a shared framework could help local authorities and other providers of free advice to measure the benefits of their work more consistently and comprehensively. Strategic integration of outcomes measurement is limited.

Outcomes measurement is not yet widely embedded in strategic planning. Just 32% of local authorities collecting outcomes data said it was a requirement in their current strategy documents, although 68% reported collecting outcomes data to inform future strategy. This points to a potential gap between operational data collection and strategic use, and suggests that clearer guidance or tools could support local authorities to better integrate outcomes measurement into their planning and decision-making processes.

1.5 Barriers to outcomes measurement are practical and structural

Local authorities cited several barriers to collecting outcomes data, including limited resources, lack of software, and inconsistent data capabilities among external providers. These challenges highlight the importance of ensuring that a future outcomes framework is proportionate, flexible, and aligned with the operational realities of both local authorities and advice organisations.

1.6 Commissioning cycles could provide a route to change

Most local authorities reported stable relationships with external providers, with 76% saying the same organisations are funded over time. However, 60% of commissioning cycles are three years or shorter, with 30% renewed annually. These cycles may offer a practical opportunity to introduce new expectations around outcomes measurement, once a framework is developed. Embedding outcomes requirements into commissioning processes and service level agreements could support uptake and consistency.

1.7 Implications for policy and practice

The findings suggest that local authorities are already engaged in monitoring and evaluating the advice services they fund, but that outcomes measurement is less developed and more variable. There is evidence of interest in using outcomes data to inform strategy and improve services, but also clear barriers that would need to be addressed.

As the MoJ continues to develop an outcomes framework for the legal support sector, this research provides useful insight into the current landscape. It suggests that a shared framework could help improve consistency, support reflective practice, and strengthen the evidence base for the impact of legal support services.

2. Introduction and methodology

2.1 Background and context

In recent years, through the provision of grants, pilot interventions, and direct engagement with organisations and researchers, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has developed an understanding of the types of outcomes associated with the provision of free advice services relating to social welfare issues experienced by individuals (such as housing, debt and immigration). However, challenges remain when it comes to effectively measuring those outcomes in a resource proportionate manner that aligns with the capabilities of the free advice sector. To begin to address some of those challenges, the MoJ is exploring the option of co-developing an outcomes framework with direct input from the sector. Local authorities provide a range of free advice services to their residents so it is therefore important to understand their current practices and challenges, to ensure they are accounted for within any potential outcomes framework and associated data collection requirements. As such, the MoJ commissioned IFF Research to conduct a survey of local authorities to attempt to understand more about the types of advice they provide; the data they collect to monitor service delivery and measure outcomes achieved for their clients; and whether any authorities already have outcomes frameworks in place.

Aims and objectives

The MoJ is currently exploring the co-development of an outcomes framework that could be used consistently by free advice organisations and funders of the legal support sector to more convincingly link interventions to specific outcomes, to enable reflective practice and improvement of service delivery, and to evidence the positive impact of organisations and the sector more broadly. Key to the development of any framework would be ensuring that it has been developed with input from organisations and stakeholders within the sector to minimise burden and maximise uptake by aligning to current practices around data collection and outcome measurement wherever possible. Local authorities provide free advice services to their residents and therefore this research was designed to ensure the MoJ has an understanding of the type of provision they provide and current practices

around the collection of monitoring information and outcomes measurement for inclusion in the development of any outcomes framework.

This report provides data and discussion on the following research questions:

- If and how local authorities provide funding to advice sector organisations.
- The views of local authorities about providing funding to the advice sector.
- Whether local authorities evaluate the impact of providing this funding. And if they do, understanding what outcomes they measure and how they collect the data they require.
- What local authorities' plans are for future funding.
- Barriers to monitoring and evaluating the longer-term impact of funding.

2.2 Research approach

Sample building

IFF Research conducted desk research via the web to find an email address and phone number for an appropriate contact within each of the 339 local authorities in England and Wales. Following further advice from the MoJ, we refined our approach to focus specifically on identifying Section 151 Officers who have responsibility for the administration of financial affairs, and those in senior leaderships roles associated with welfare support. The MoJ was able to provide contact details for some of these people. It should be noted that not all local authorities employed a Section 151 Officer and, in some cases, the same individual was responsible across multiple authorities.

When we were unable to find an appropriate email address – a priority since respondents would be invited to complete the survey via an email – experienced telephone interviewers were used to call the phone numbers found via desk research, to obtain further details. The telephone interviewers were also instructed to work through the sample to find a telephone number for any local authority still without any contact details and to call to enquire who would be the most appropriate person to send the survey to. Telephone contact began in February 2025 and continued throughout the fieldwork period until May 2025.

Research approach

IFF conducted an online survey from 6th March 2025 to 9th May 2025, seeking responses from someone at each local authority with knowledge of how free advice services were being funded and how impact was being monitored and measured. Due to difficulties identifying and reaching the most appropriate contact within each local authority (building the sample, 'gatekeeping' and the target role being different between the local authorities) fieldwork was extended multiple times to maximise responses.

Once the first invite email was sent, the telephone interviewing team called the local authorities to ensure it had been received, checking that it had reached the most appropriate person and, if not, obtaining additional contact details. The invite email was then manually resent. A research-specific email address was provided so that respondents could get in contact with someone if they had any questions. This was monitored on a daily basis.

Over the course of fieldwork, five reminder emails encouraging participation were issued to any local authorities that had not yet completed the survey. This included an email sent from IFF Research on behalf of the MoJ's Deputy Director for Legal Support. The MoJ was also able to secure the support of the Local Government Association (LGA) and other advice sector membership organisations, to raise awareness about the survey and encourage participation via their regular e-newsletters.

The final weeks of fieldwork involved a telephone chasing stage, during which telephone interviewers attempted to contact all those local authorities who were yet to complete the survey, or those who had partially completed it, to encourage them to complete the survey over the phone.

Response rate

Please note while reading this report, that 62 local authorities completed the survey (around 18% of the total local authorities in England and Wales). Two of them did not provide funding for advice services but did answer other questions and are therefore included in the bases. A number of questions in the survey were answered by very few local authorities and are described as having low base size.

Due to the low response rate and the low base size for a number of questions, data in this report should be considered as indicative of the landscape but not wholly representative of all local authorities within England and Wales. It should also be noted that there is the potential of bias in the data since local authorities more engaged with data collection and outcomes measurement may have been more inclined to complete the survey than those that are not. Furthermore, differences in population characteristics between geographical locations may influence the types and frequency of legal issues being presented, and in turn the focus of monitoring and outcomes data collected. The capacity for local authority data collection could also be affected by geographical and population differences. Without a sample that fully represents England and Wales, certain regions and the populations which they serve may be over/underrepresented and therefore caution should be exercised when generalising the results across all local authorities.

Tables 1 and 2 below outline the response rate, based on the country in which the responding local authority was situated, and also by type of local authority. Map 1 below shows where the responding local authorities are located.

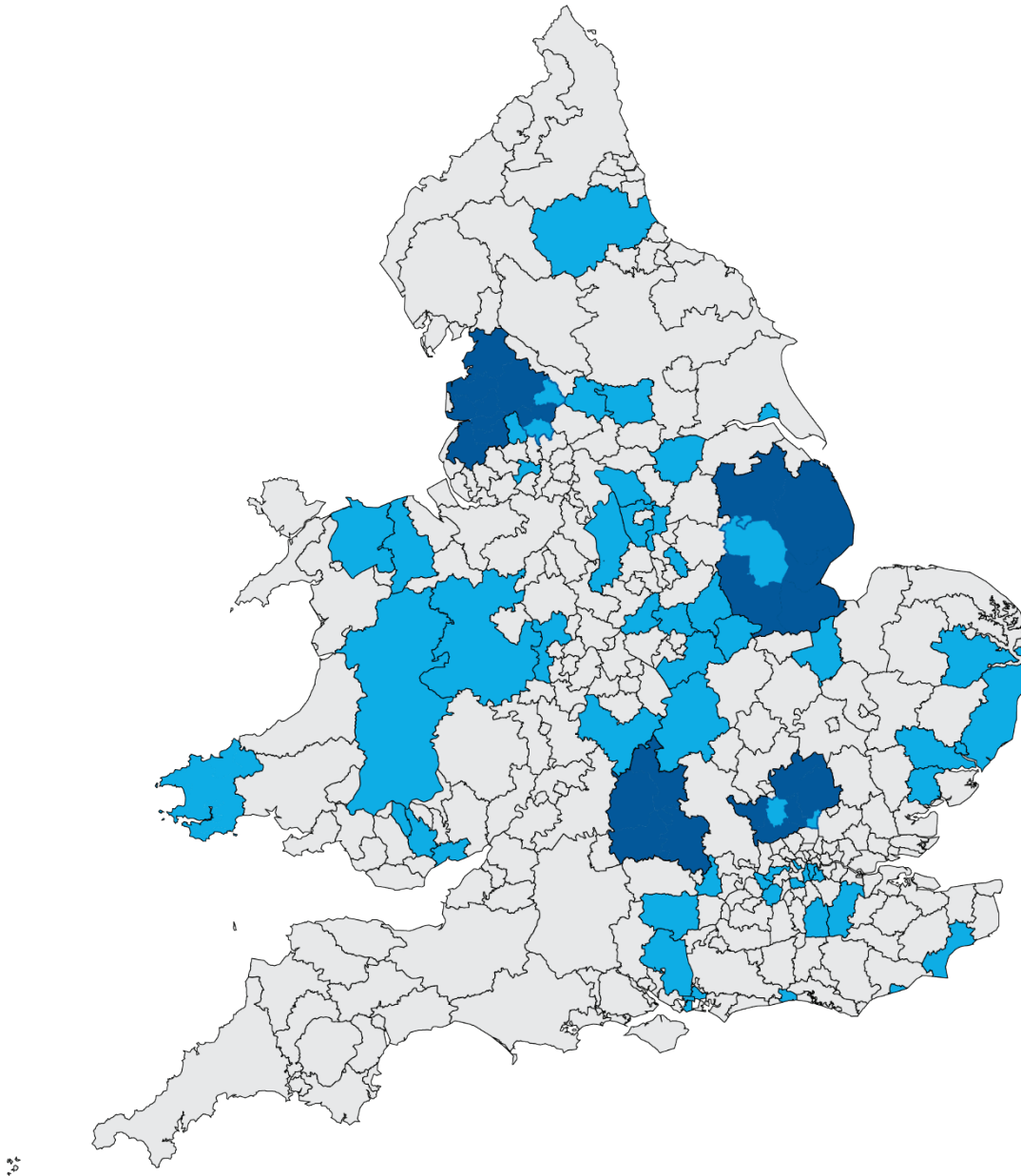
Table 1: Response rate by country

Local authority country	Number of local authorities contacted	Number of completed surveys	Completed surveys as a proportion of contacted local authorities	% of all completed surveys	% of the total local authority population represented by each category
England	266	55	21%	89%	16%
Wales	22	7	32%	11%	2%

Table 2: Response rate by authority type

Local authority type	Number of completed surveys	Completed surveys as a proportion of contacted local authorities	% of all completed surveys	% of the total local authority population represented by each category
Metropolitan Districts	5	2%	8%	1%
London Boroughs	6	2%	10%	2%
Unitary Authorities	15	5%	24%	4%
County Councils	4	1%	6%	1%
District Councils	32	11%	52%	9%

Map 1: Representation of where responding local authorities are located



Please note district authorities, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts have been highlighted in light blue. County councils have been highlighted in dark blue. In some

cases, the district authority and county council for an area have both responded, this is denoted by light blue highlight with a dark blue outline.¹

Below are the final figures that were achieved from fieldwork. Overall IFF Research achieved 62 completed surveys of which:

- 53 were completed by the local authorities online.
- 9 were conducted by interviewers over the phone with a local authority representative

Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection

It was explained in the invite email and at the beginning of the survey that the MoJ team commissioning the research would be provided with a non-anonymised dataset from the survey (in the sense that the local authorities would be named but not the individuals who responded, or their contact details). However, assurances were given that the MoJ would not use the responses to evaluate the performance of any local authority, nor make comparisons between them. The MoJ would instead keep the survey data for use in the development of an outcomes framework.

Any contact details provided by the MoJ, or found by IFF Research, for people who could be approached about the survey, or of those who responded, were stored securely by IFF Research and can only be accessed by the named research team. All contact details will be used only for the purposes of this research. Respondents to the survey were asked if they would like to provide their contact details to allow the MoJ to recontact them about this or similar future research.

Under data protection law, all local authorities had the right to request a copy of their data, change their data or withdraw from the research at any time.

¹ Different types of council have different responsibilities and governance. Many parts of England have two tiers of local government (county councils and district, borough or city councils). In Wales, and in some parts of England, there is just one unitary tier of local government (unitary authorities in shire areas, London boroughs, and metropolitan boroughs). You can find out more about types of local authorities here: [Understand how your council works: Types of council - GOV.UK](#)

3. Local authority funding of free advice services

The Ministry of Justice was keen to understand in more detail how local authorities are delivering free advice services to their residents: through providing in-house provision, commissioning external provision or a mix of both.

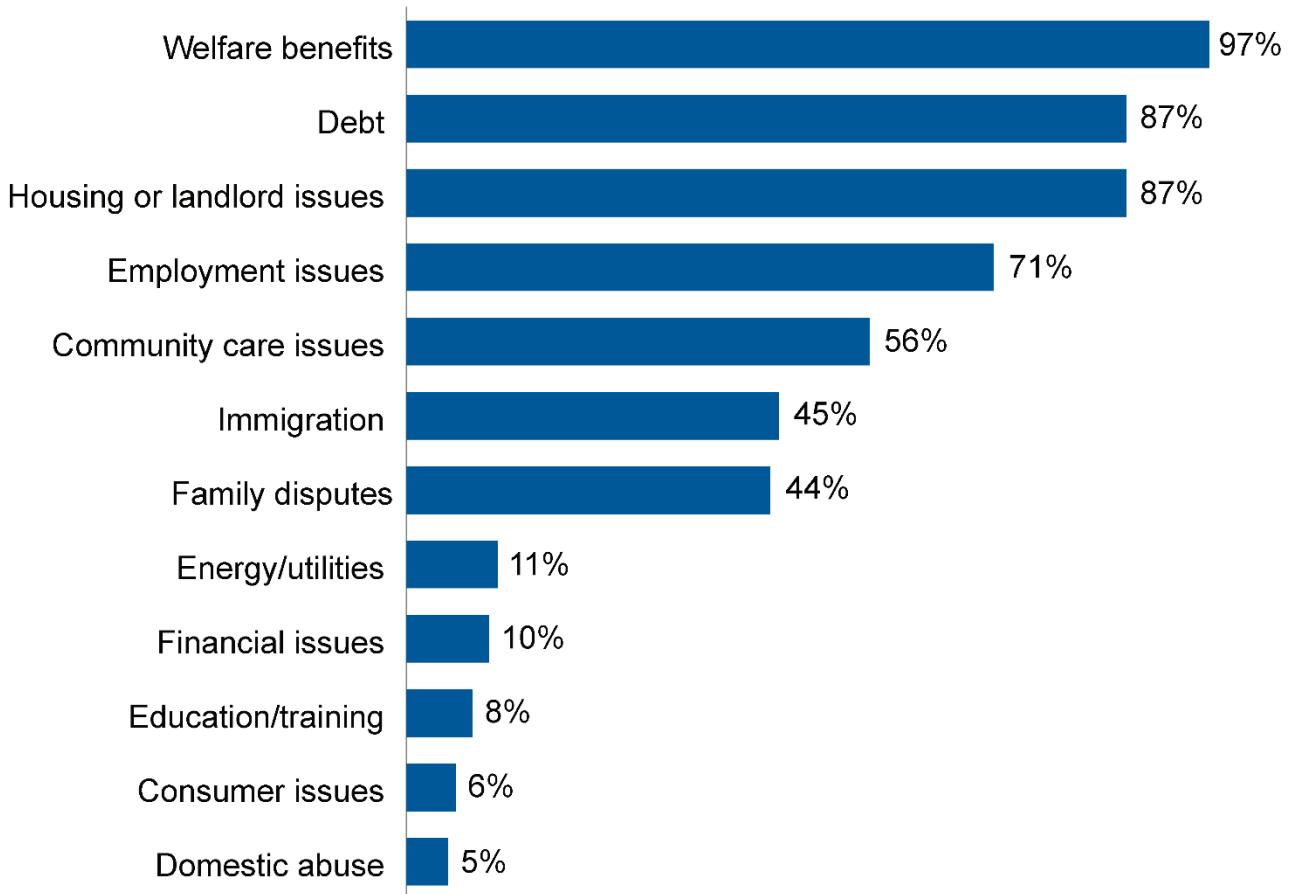
This chapter also describes the areas of advice being funded by local authorities and their wider funding arrangements e.g. sharing advice services with other local authorities.

Additional data concerning the external service provider landscape are also reported, including how regularly re-commissioning takes place. Finally, local authorities' perceptions about the level of funding required and available for them to provide advice services are presented.

3.1 The types of advice services being funded

The local authorities surveyed were typically funding free advice on a wide range of issues for their residents. Figure 3.1 below displays the areas of advice funded by local authorities – both in-house and externally provided.

Figure 3.1: Areas of advice services funded by local authorities



Base Size: A1. Does your local authority fund any advice services that are provided free for residents to access on the following social welfare matters? Any advice provided (60) Percentages based on local authorities providing each advice type.

Welfare benefits advice was the most commonly funded service among the local authorities surveyed (97%), followed by support for debt, and housing or landlord issues (both 87%) and employment matters (71%). In contrast, advice on education and training (8%), consumer issues (6%) and domestic abuse (5%) were least frequently funded. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) wanted to understand how local authorities were delivering the advice: either by funding external organisations to provide it, or by use of internal resources. 73% of local authorities funded both in-house and external advice services, while 16% relied solely on in-house provision and 8% exclusively commissioned external providers. The variation in how advice is provided by type of issue is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: The source of advice provision, by issue type

	External provision only	In-house provision only	Both external and in-house provision	Neither
Welfare benefits	8%	17%	75%	0%
Debt	8%	10%	72%	10%
House or landlord issues	8%	10%	72%	10%
Employment issues	7%	8%	58%	27%
Community care issues	5%	8%	45%	42%
Immigration	7%	7%	33%	53%
Family dispute	2%	7%	37%	55%

The data show that all of the local authorities funding advice were providing some form of advice for welfare benefits, although this was the only type of advice that was universally provided. Aside from welfare benefits advice which was more than twice as frequently provided in-house than externally, there was very little discernible difference between the types of service local authorities commissioned external organisations to provide, compared with those they provided themselves.

The MoJ was also keen to understand the extent to which advice services were being pooled, or shared, between local authorities. One in four (25%) authorities funding advice said that they shared or pooled some of their advice services. An equal proportion (25%) reported that they funded networks, organisations or infrastructure that provided support for social welfare problems e.g. shared referral systems or funding for partnership arrangements. Nearly one in five (18%) did not know whether they provided funding in such a way. The types of funded networks mentioned included the voluntary sector, advice/information networks, food banks/networks and Citizens Advice.

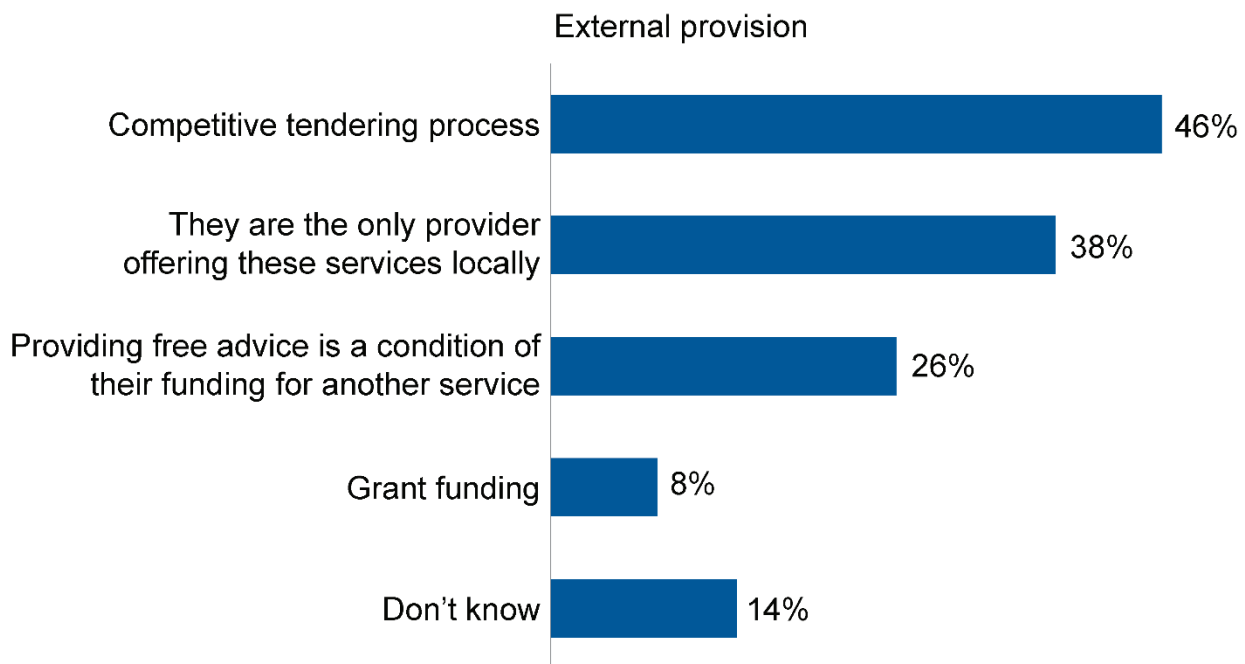
3.2 External advice-provision landscape

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the landscape of external advice being commissioned by local authorities, authorities funding external provision were asked how

many organisations they had funded to provide advice services in the past 12 months. The majority (66%) were reliant on fewer than four external organisations, a quarter (26%) funded between four and seven, and 8% were commissioning eight or more.

Most local authorities funding external provision (80%) worked with locally based providers, typically engaging with only a few organisations. In contrast, 20% partnered with national organisations such as Citizens Advice. Local authorities that fund external provision were asked about the process for commissioning advice providers. The most frequently cited process was via competitive tendering (46%), followed by the provider being selected as the only one offering that service type locally (38%). More detail can be found in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2: How local authorities award funding to external organisations to deliver advice



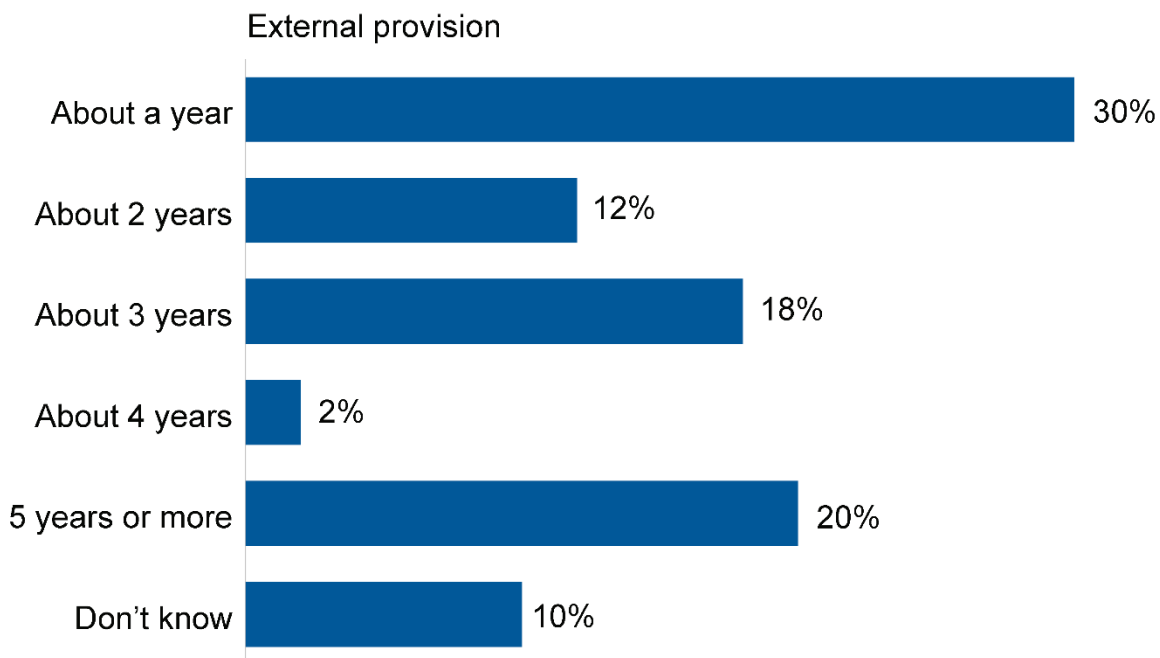
Base Size: B3. Is any of the funding that you provide to external organisations to deliver advice awarded under the following conditions? Those who funded external advice service provision (52)

Three-quarters (76%) of local authorities funding external provision said the organisations that they were commissioning to provide free advice services had remained stable over time. One in five (20%) noted some changes in the organisations they funded, while 4% (just two local authorities) reported experiencing significant changes. In some instances,

local authorities may be commissioning the same organisations repeatedly because they are the only one in the area to provide the required advice service.

The length of the funding cycle before a new commissioning process was needed to (re)obtain an external provider varied (see in Figure 3.3). Short-term contracts (of two years or less) were being used by 42% of the local authorities surveyed, a fifth (20%) had medium-term commissioning cycles of three to four years, and another fifth (20%) were making use of long-term contracts of five years or more.

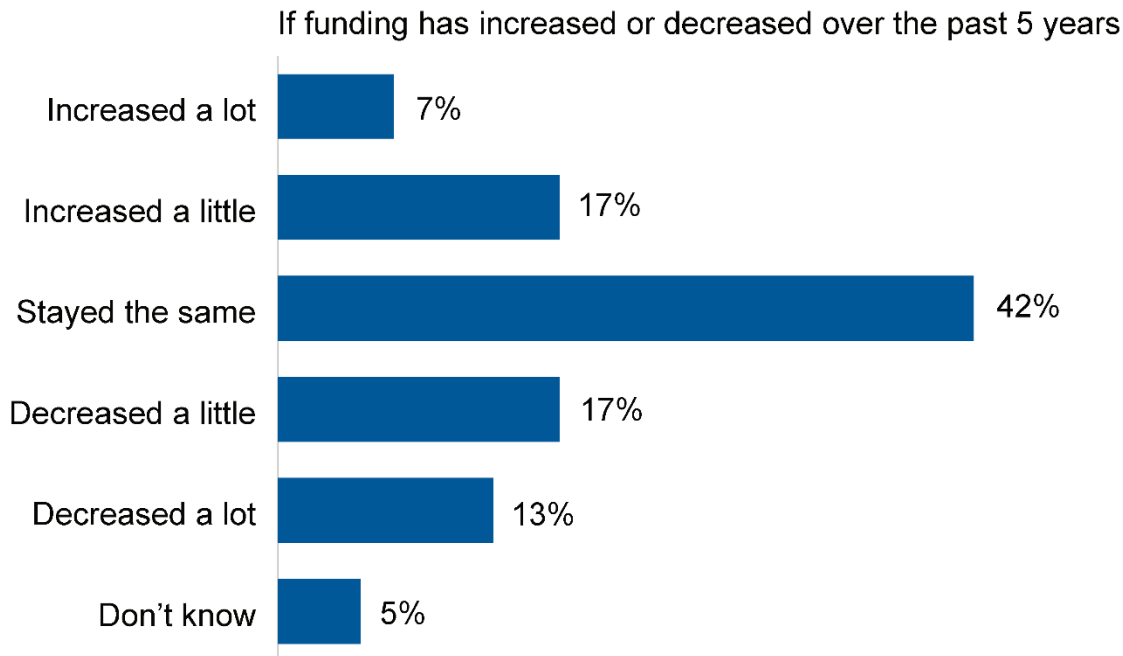
Figure 3.3: Length of funding cycle for external providers before needing to go through a new commissioning process



Base Size: B1. How long is the funding cycle for external providers before needing to go through a new commissioning process? Those who funded external advice service provision (50).

In a time of constrained budgets, the MoJ felt it was important to gain anecdotal evidence about the health of local authorities' budgets for free advice services. As such, local authorities were asked whether the funding they had made available for external and internal provision had increased, decreased, or remained the same over the past five years. Responses from those surveyed were mixed. Around two fifths (42%) reported that funding levels had stayed about the same. A quarter (24%) said they thought funding had increased, whilst nearly a third (30%) noted a decrease. This is shown in Figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4: Whether local authorities thought funding for advice services had changed in the last five years

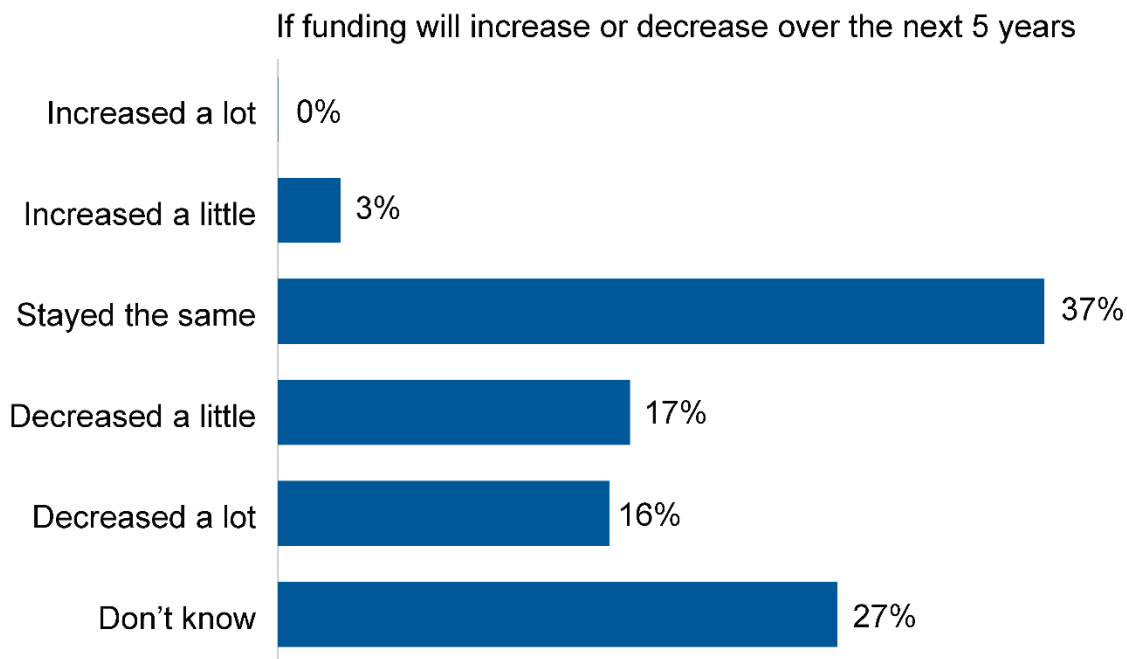


Base Size: E3. Over the last 5 years, would you say that the funding provided for free advice services by your local authority has ...All funding advice (60).

Looking forward, more than two-thirds (70%) of local authorities surveyed believed that the funding they could make available for free advice services over the next five years would either stay the same (37%), decrease (30%), or even be stopped (3%). All of the Welsh local authorities that responded to the survey believed their funding would decrease.

Figure 3.5 below shows local authorities' thoughts on whether they feel funding for free advice services would decrease or increase over the next 5 years. Only a small proportion (3%) thought that the funding they could make available would increase.

Figure 3.5: If funding for free advice will decrease or increase over the next 5 years



Base Size: E5. To the best of your knowledge, over the next five years, will the funding provided by your local authority for free advice services ... (60)

Reasons given by the surveyed local authorities about why they thought funding would decrease included:

- Council budget cuts / service reductions
- Lack of funding from central government
- Lack of funding from other sources

4. Monitoring information about advice services

In order to understand the data currently being collected by local authorities about the delivery of the advice services they provide, the survey asked whether monitoring information was being collected, what data was being requested and how frequently, and how that data was being used.

In the case of externally funded provision, respondents were also asked about reporting stipulations attached to funding and the use of any quality standards or auditing.

This chapter firstly outlines how monitoring information is being collected and used overall, before looking at how monitoring information is being collected for external and in-house provision respectively.

4.1 Collection of monitoring information from external providers

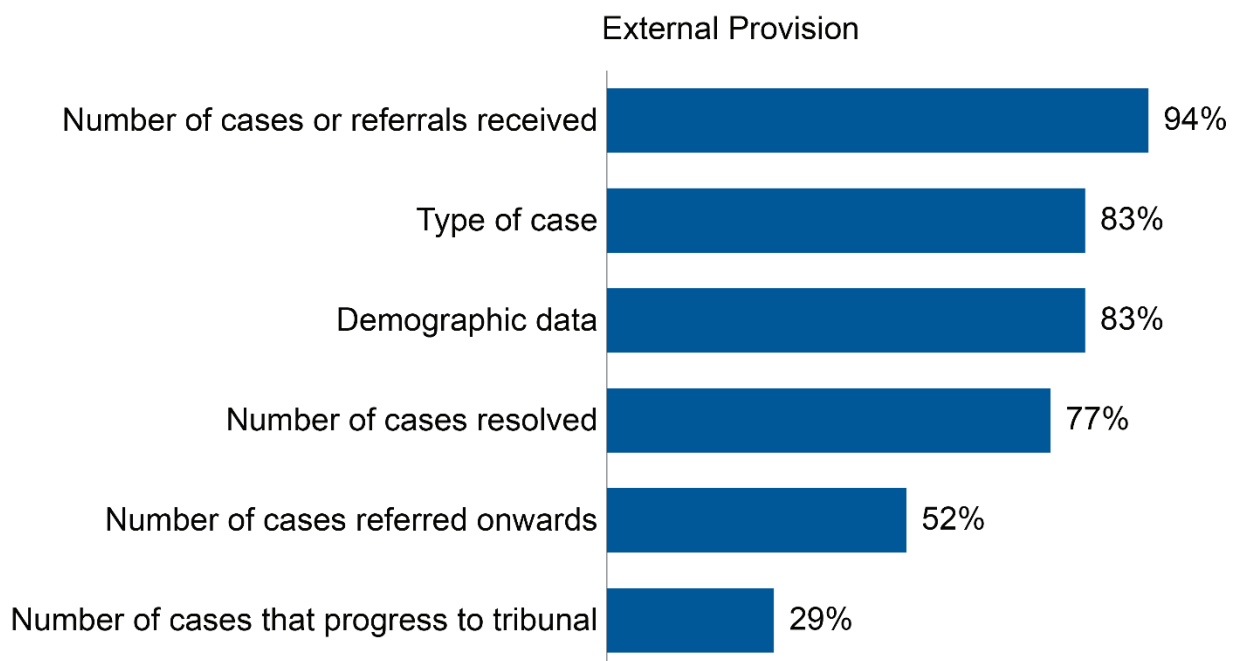
Nearly all (96%) of the local authorities that responded to the survey and commissioned external advice services, were collecting some monitoring information. The majority (80%) were collecting monitoring information from all of their commissioned providers but close to a fifth (16%) were collecting it from only some. Those that were not collecting monitoring information or were collecting it from only some of their providers, were asked their reasons. The most frequently mentioned reasons were different services being provided and different funding requirements.

The majority of local authorities (83%) that collected monitoring information were recording it on at least a quarterly basis if not more often, but 14% reported requesting it less often (twice a year or annually).

While most of the surveyed local authorities funding external organisations collected some form of monitoring information there was variation in the data collected with only half (50%)

providing external organisations with a standard template, and less than a third (32%) collecting the same information across all providers. Figure 4.1 presents the types of monitoring information most commonly being collected. Nearly all local authorities commissioning external providers and requesting monitoring information required information on the number of cases or referrals received (94%). A lower proportion asked for data on case-type (83%), demographic information (83%), and the number of cases the external provider had managed to resolve (77%).

Figure 4.1: Type of monitoring information most commonly collected by local authorities funding external advice provision

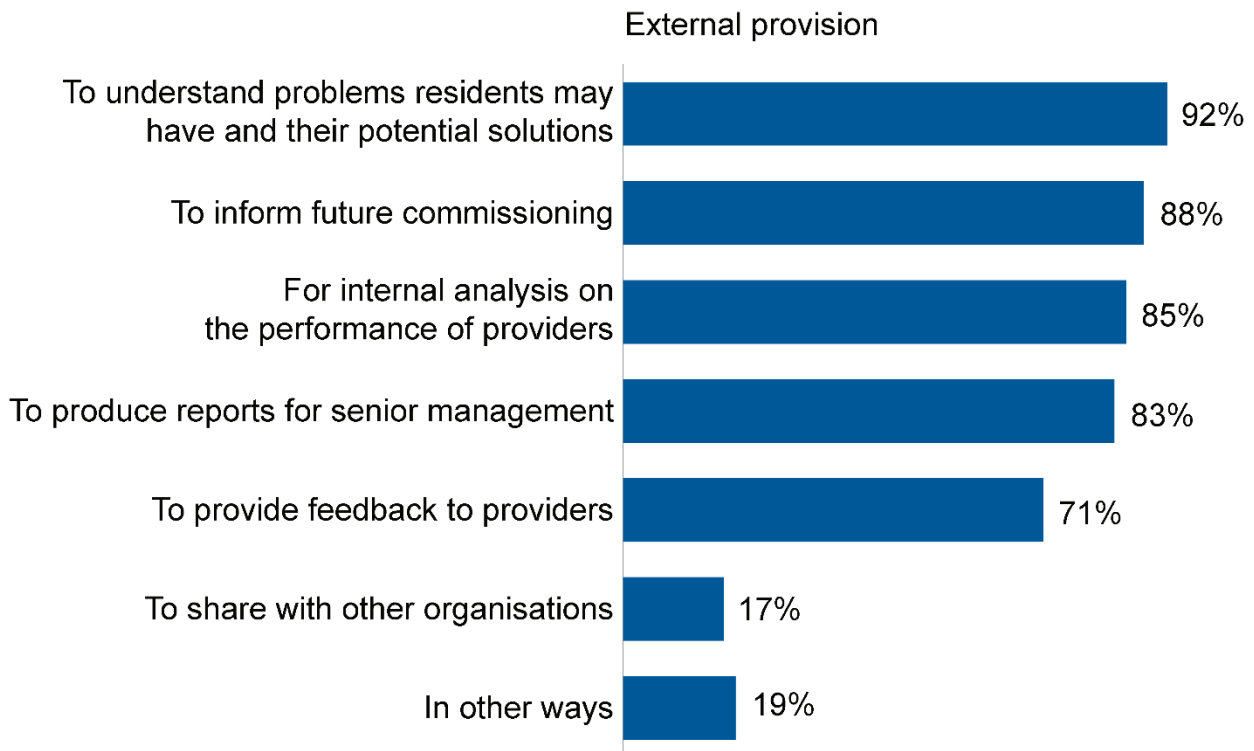


Base Size: C6. What monitoring data do you collect? Those collecting monitoring information from external providers (48). Percentages based on those selecting each answer option.

4.2 Use of monitoring information from external providers

All of the surveyed local authorities that collected monitoring information from external organisations reported using it in some way. The most common purposes included understanding problems residents may have and their potential solutions (92%), to inform future commissioning (88%), for internal analysis of the performance of external organisations (85%) and to produce reports for senior management (83%) (see figure 4.2 below).

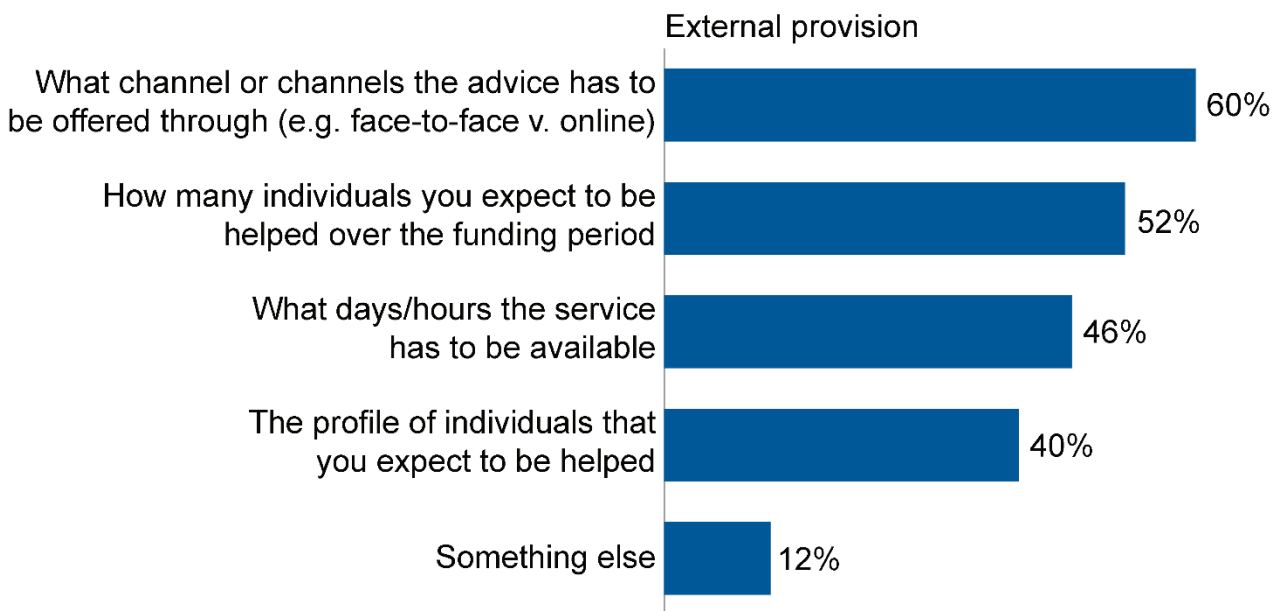
Figure 4.2: How monitoring data collected from external organisations is used



Base Size: C9. How monitoring data collected from external organisations is used? Those collecting monitoring information from external organisations (48).

Local authorities were asked whether the external organisations receiving funding were required to meet any other conditions as part of their funding. Recording the channel through which advice was delivered (e.g. face-to-face or online), was most commonly reported by the local authorities that responded (60%). Figure 4.3 shows how commonly other stipulations were made.

Figure 4.3: Reporting requirements stipulated as a condition of advice funding



Base Size: C10 As a condition of the funding for providing advice, do you stipulate that any of the following are reported on by the providers? All funding external provision (50).

4.3 Assessing the quality of externally provided services

Quality standards or auditing were being used by a third (34%) of the surveyed local authorities who were commissioning external providers. However, 46% did not use anything to assure the quality of the services that were being provided and 20% of local authorities were not sure if any standards were being used at all.

Amongst those using some form of assessment, the most common was the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) (47%), set out by the Advice Services Alliance (ASA). Other quality standards included: assessment against KPI targets or contract specifications, “Citizens Advice Accreditation”, customer feedback / surveys, and Immigration Asylum Accreditation (IAA).

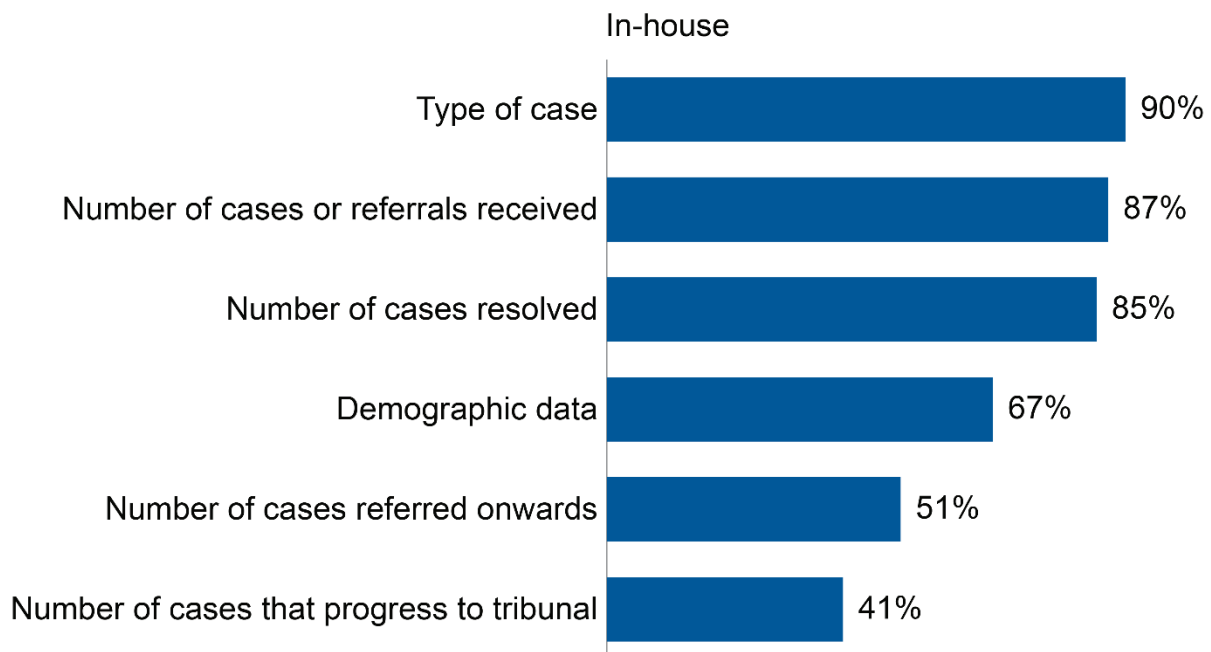
4.4 Collection of monitoring information about in-house advice

To gather a more complete picture about current overall consistency, the MoJ wanted to explore what monitoring information local authorities are recording and using in relation to their in-house advice provision.

Local authorities that responded to the survey are less likely to collect monitoring information about the free advice services they deliver internally compared to those they commission external organisations to provide (71% versus 96% respectively). When it was recorded, 85% of local authorities collecting internal monitoring information were doing so on at least a quarterly basis, if not more frequently, a similar figure to external monitoring (83%)

Figure 4.4 shows the most common types of monitoring information local authorities are collecting about in-house advice provision. The most common types of data included type of case (90%), number of cases or referrals received (87%) and number of cases resolved (85%).

Figure 4.4: Types of monitoring data most commonly collected in-house by local authorities



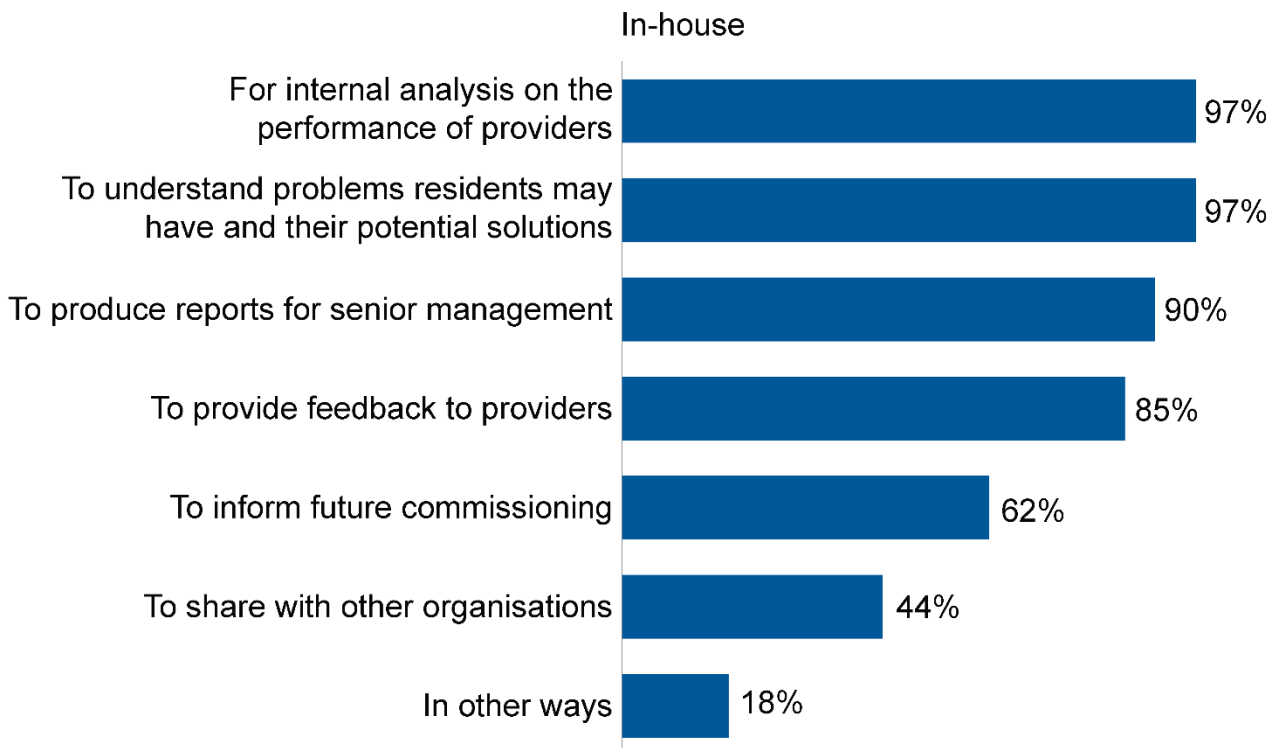
Base Size: D2: What monitoring data do you collect? All those collecting monitoring information about internal provision (39). Percentages based on those selecting each answer option.

4.5 Use of monitoring information about in-house advice

As presented in Figure 4.5 below, nearly all local authorities offering in-house advice reported that they used their monitoring information for analysing the performance of services (97%) and to understand problems residents may have and their potential

solutions (97%). Other commonly cited purposes were to produce reports for senior management (90%) and to provide feedback to internal services (85%).

Figure 4.5: How monitoring data about in-house provision is used



Base Size: D4 Summary. How do you use the monitoring data you collect about your in-house advice provision? All those collecting monitoring information about internal provision (39).

5. Outcomes information about advice services

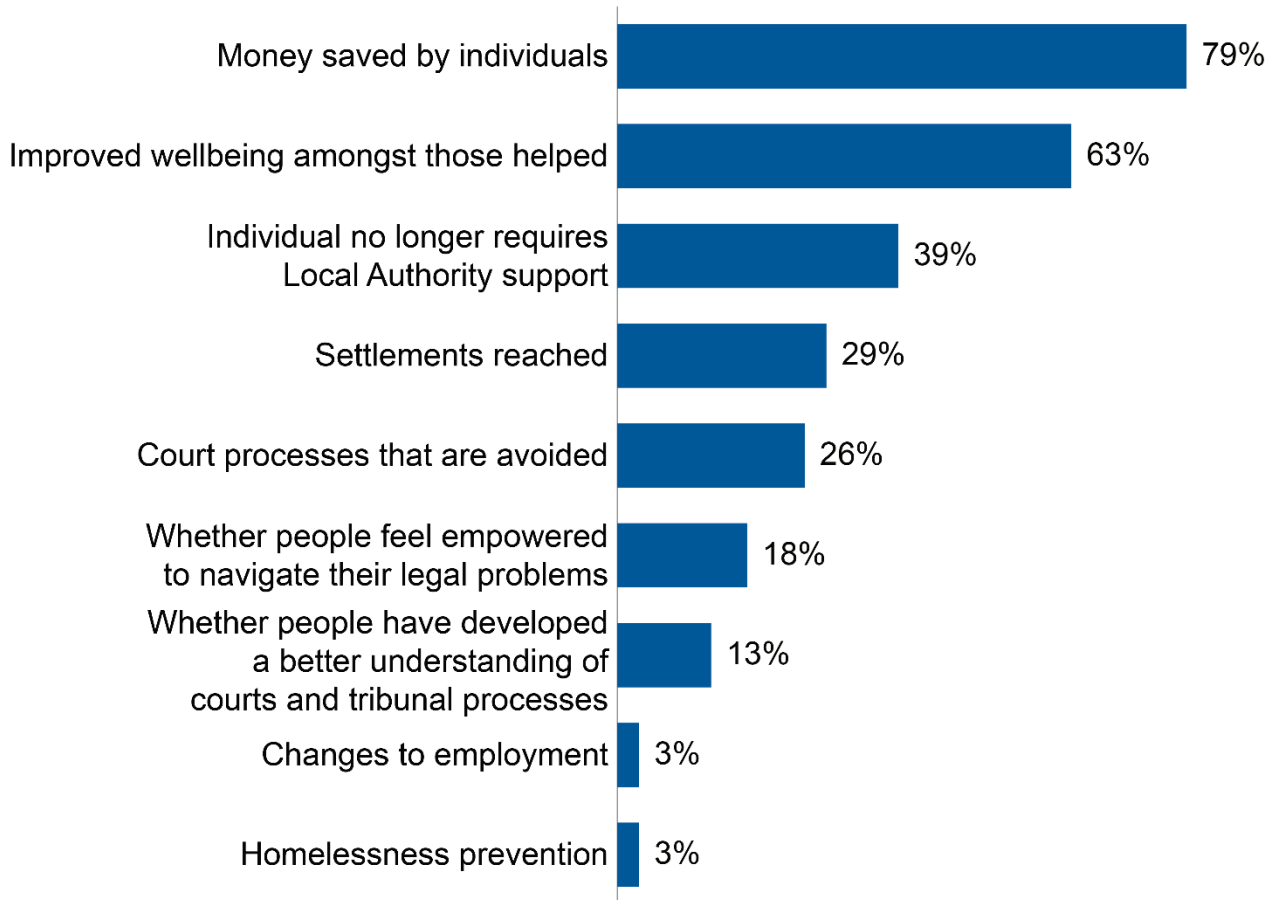
Outcomes data and monitoring information serve different functions within the evaluation of advice services. Monitoring information is typically collected during service delivery and provides insights into service activity, whereas outcomes data is gathered after service use. It focuses on the longer-term changes experienced by users as a result of the support received. Outcomes data offers a complementary perspective to monitoring information, providing evidence of the impact of advice services. To understand current approaches towards collecting outcomes information, the survey asked what information local authorities were collecting (if any), how frequently, what software was being used to record and report it, and how it was being used (if at all).

5.1 Types of data being recorded

The local authorities that were surveyed were more likely to collect outcomes information from the external advice that they were funding (80%), than about their internally provided advice (69%).

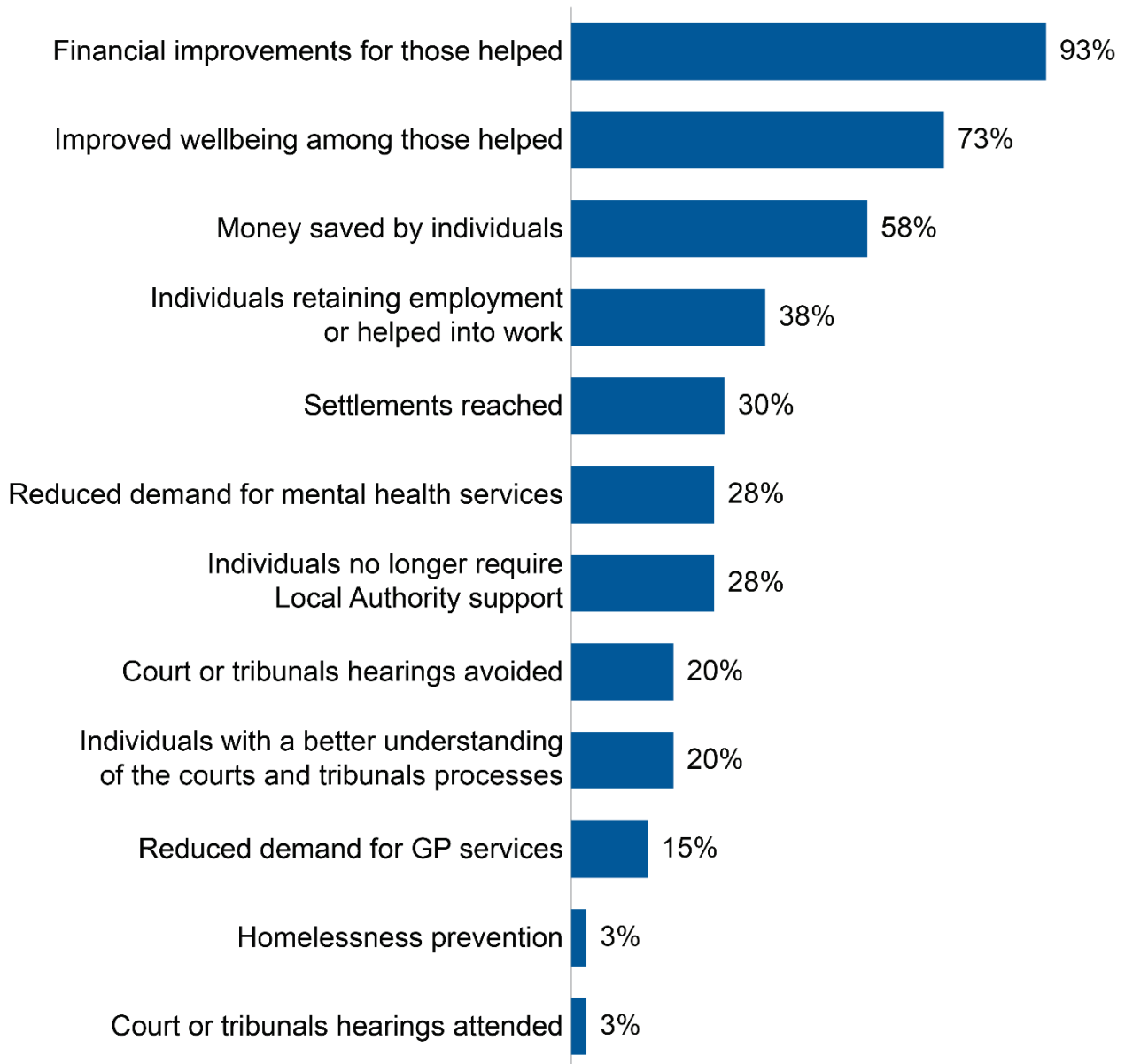
Data about financial improvements (93%) and improved wellbeing amongst those helped (73%) were most likely to be collected in relation to externally provided advice. Information about money saved by the individual was the data point most likely to be collected about internally provided advice (79%). Figures 5.1 and 5.2 below provide more details.

Figure 5.1: Outcomes information collected for in-house provision



Base Size D9. What outcome information do you collect about your in-house provision? All those collecting outcomes information for in-house provision (38)

Figure 5.2: Outcomes information collected for external provision



Base Size: C15. What outcome information do you collect? Those who collect outcomes data from external providers (40).

5.2 How outcomes information is being recorded

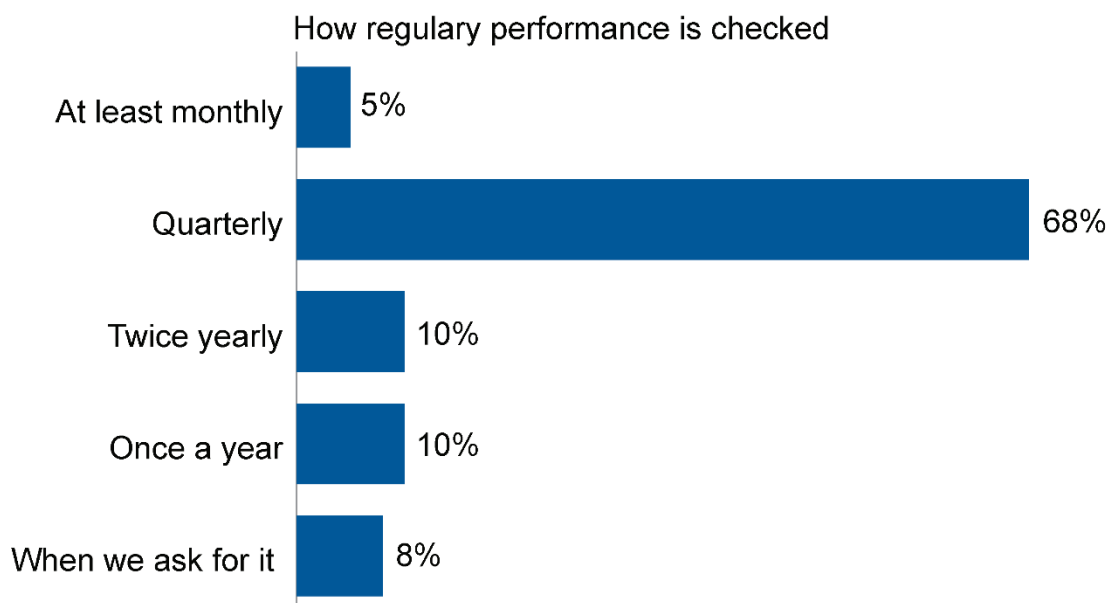
The Ministry of Justice sought to gain a more detailed understanding about the format of the outcomes information being collected (via the 40 local authorities that funded external advice services and who were recording outcomes information). The most common was written responses in spreadsheets and reports (43%), then customer feedback surveys (30%), followed by case studies (25%).

Microsoft Office, for example Excel and Word, was the most commonly cited software used to record outcomes information. A notable minority were making use of PowerBI. Other software mentioned included Atamis and Hanlon, though these had only one response each.

5.3 Assessing outcomes information

Nearly three-quarters of the local authorities that were funding external advice services were checking performance at least quarterly (73%), if not more often, as can be seen in Figure 5.3 below.

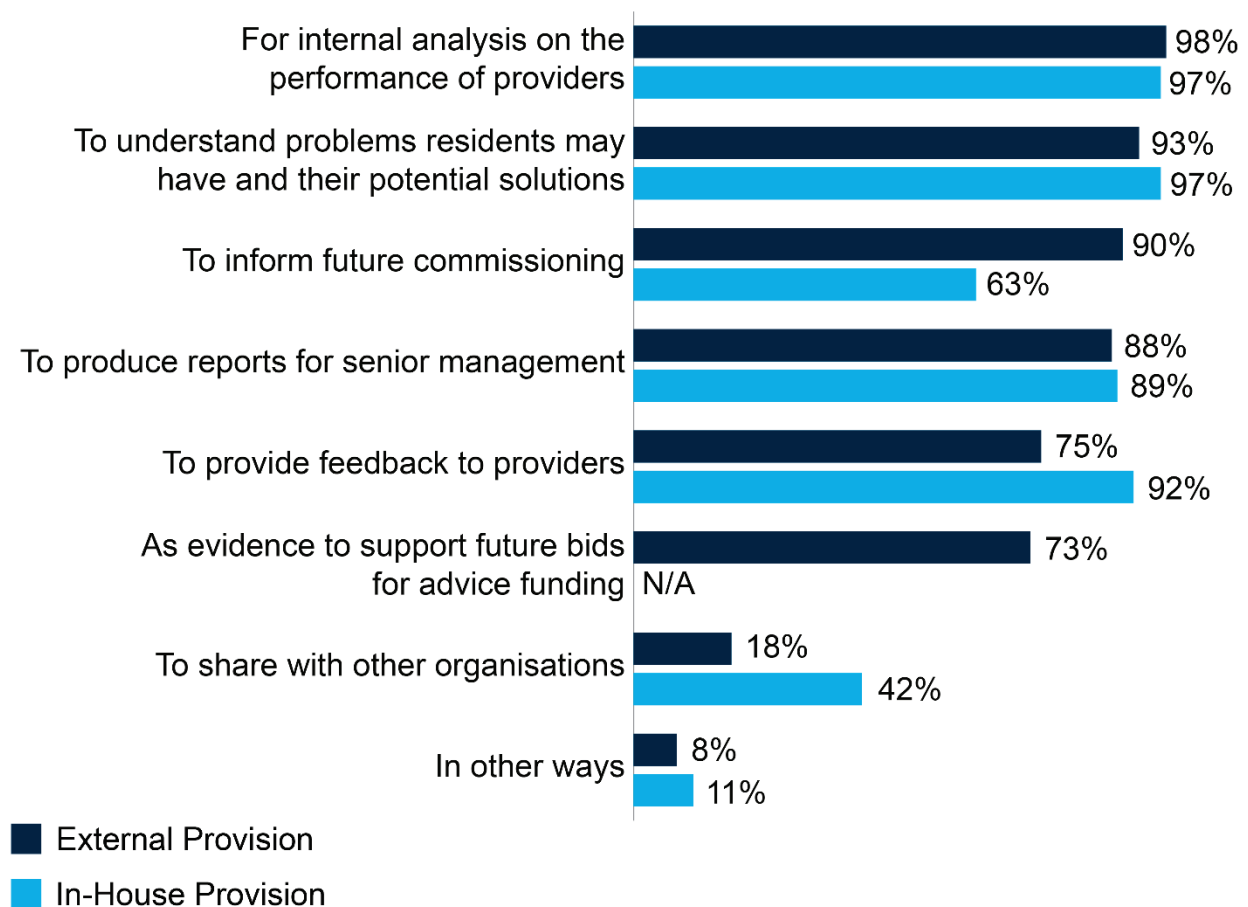
Figure 5.3: How regularly performance on outcomes is being checked



Base Size: C16. How regularly does your local authority check on the performance / outcomes achieved by the advice provider(s) that you fund? Those who collect outcomes data from external providers (40)

Both those collecting outcomes on external provision and in-house advice would most commonly use the outcomes information they collected for performance analysis (98% and 97% respectively), as well as to help understand what problems residents may be having and the potential solutions (93% and 97% respectively). As with monitoring information, outcomes information was least likely to be shared with other organisations. More detail is provided in Figure 5.4 below.

Figure 5.4: How outcomes information was being used



Base Size: C17_X. How the outcomes information collected from external providers is used. Those who collect outcomes data from external providers (40). D10_X. How do you use the information collected about outcomes from in-house advice provision? All those collecting outcomes information for in-house provision (38)

6. Use of outcomes frameworks

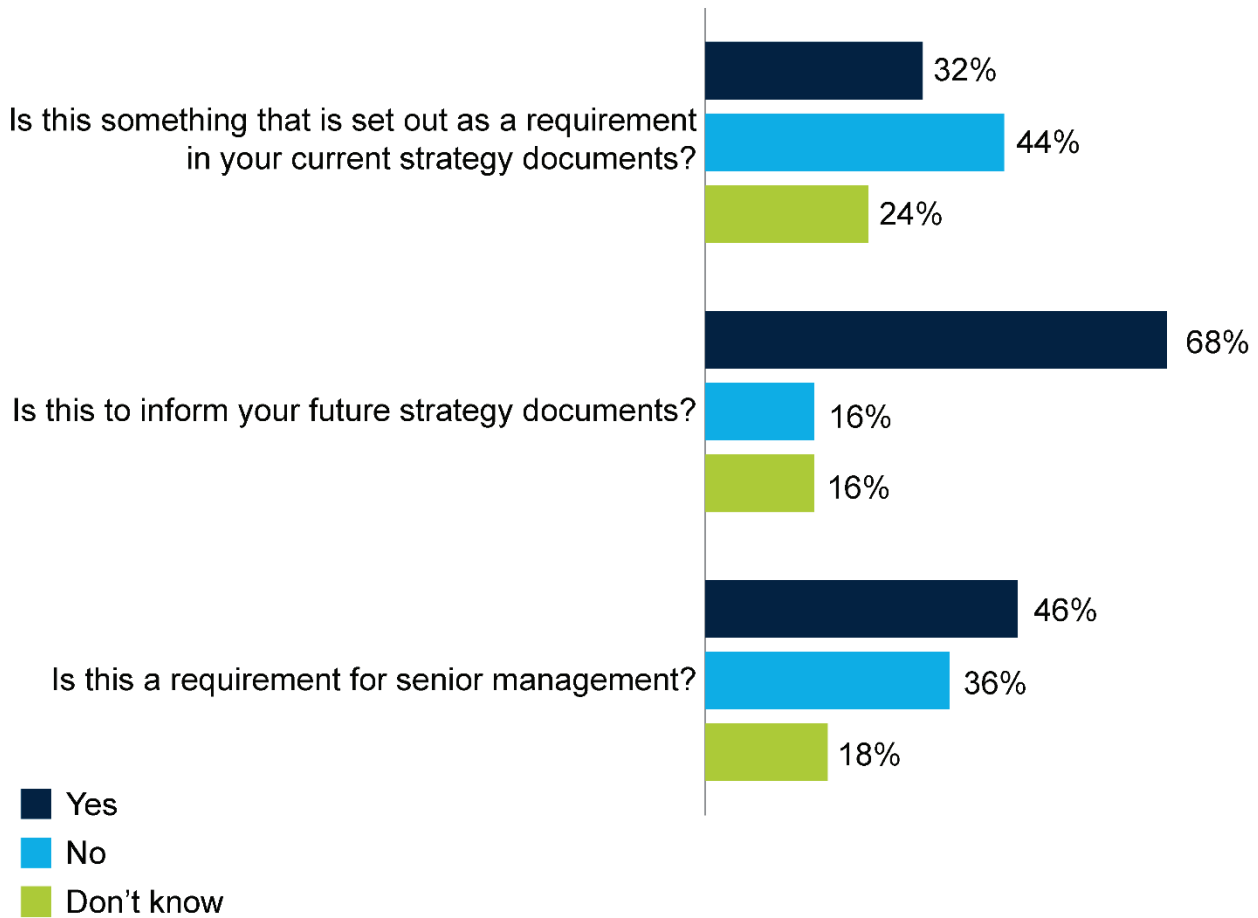
An outcomes framework is defined in this context by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) as a set of outcomes that are expected to be achieved as a result of the advice and support provided. This may cover short, medium or long-term outcomes and will go beyond the immediate outputs of a service, such as the number of individuals who received support. For example, outcomes may include the wellbeing of people who have been supported, their understanding of legal processes, a change in their financial situation (e.g. benefits received) or a resolution that avoided court processes (where appropriate).

This section provides data about the current existence and use of outcomes frameworks by the local authorities surveyed, as well as the barriers to collecting the monitoring and outcomes data that a framework would be built on.

6.1 Incorporating an outcomes framework in their strategy

An outcomes framework was reported to be in place by 50% of local authorities that were collecting outcomes information about externally provided advice, and by 34% of those providing in-house support. The survey results (see Figure 6.1) indicate that only a third of local authorities that collect outcomes data have outcomes measurement requirements in their strategy documents (32%). Just over two-thirds (68%) of those local authorities explained that they collect outcomes information to inform future strategy documents.

Figure 6.1: Why local authorities collect information on outcomes



Base Size: E2_X. Earlier you said that you measure outcomes of providing free legal advice. Is this ...
All who measure outcomes of external and/or in-house provision (50).

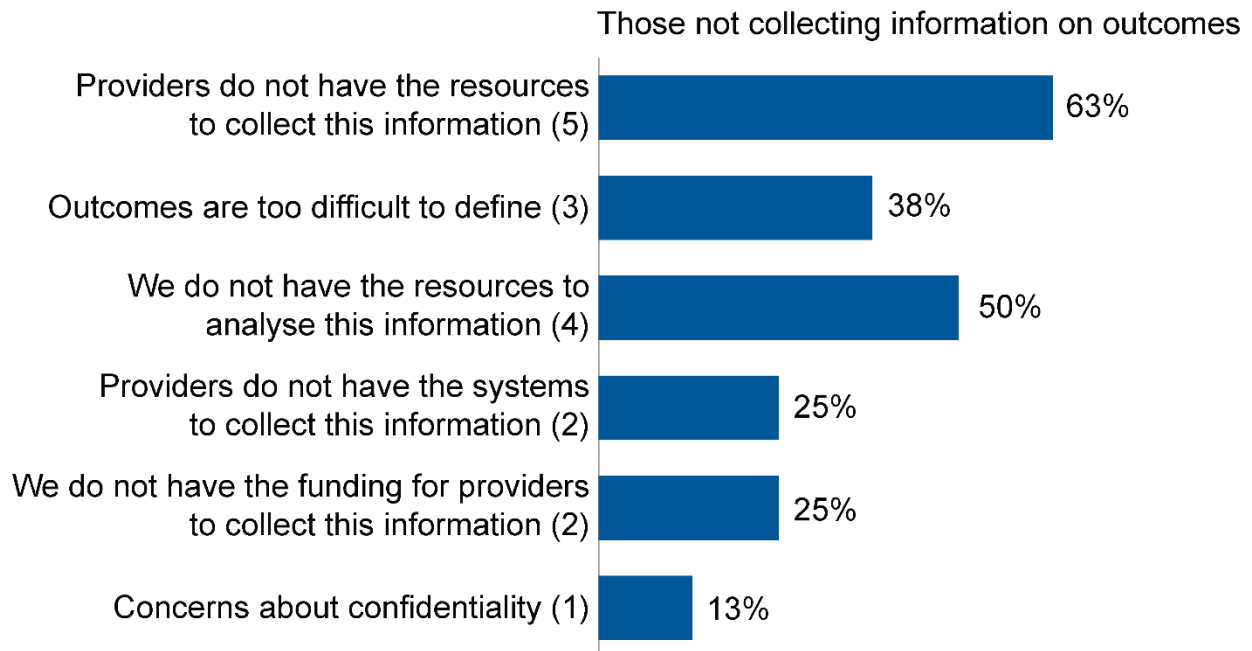
6.2 Challenges associated with measuring outcomes

The survey explored the challenges experienced by local authorities collecting outcomes data from external organisations providing advice on their behalf. The challenges mentioned, in order of prevalence, were:

- External advice organisations interpreting data requirements in different ways;
- Data capabilities of external advice organisations;
- Information not provided on time; and
- Information is provided with fields missing – which then makes it hard to analyse.

In the case of the surveyed local authorities that have never collected outcomes data, lack of resource to collect the information was the most mentioned reason why (63%). The other reasons can be seen in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2: Reasons why local authorities do not collect information on outcomes



Base Size: C20. You mentioned earlier, that you do not currently collect information about outcomes from the advice providers that you fund. Why is this? (8) * Please note the small base size and treat data with caution.

7. Conclusion

The data collected through this survey have shown that local authorities are providing free advice services to members of the public (with 97% of those surveyed funding such services) through both externally commissioned organisations as well as the provision of in-house support. Support services cover a broad range of advice types (welfare benefits, debt and housing were the three most commonly funded among the sample) often provided through multiple external organisations for each local authority.

A high proportion of the local authorities surveyed regularly collect and use basic monitoring information to monitor the advice services they fund external organisations to provide. They also, albeit to a lesser extent, collect information around internal advice service provision.

In the case of measuring outcomes, while the most commonly collected outcomes data are collected by the majority of the surveyed local authorities for both their in-house and externally provided services, other outcomes measures are noticeably less likely to be collected. It could be that the most commonly collected outcomes measures (financial improvements, improved wellbeing and money saved) are such, because they are outcomes that lend themselves to being logged by an advisor as part of a casework process, and are therefore collected without the need for additional data collection processes or methodologies (only 32% of the local authorities surveyed indicated that outcomes measurement is something set out in their strategy documents).

Responses around reasons that some local authorities do not collect outcomes data *could* also be indicative of barriers faced by all local authorities when it comes to collecting certain outcomes measures. Resources both in terms of providing and analysing data, as well as difficulty defining outcomes are the most mentioned, although the small number of responses to this question should be noted.

While the achieved survey sample size should be kept in mind, it does seem that there is scope for an MoJ co-developed outcomes framework to play a role in the measurement

practices of local authorities, as well as the potential to expand the range of outcomes measured. Although any framework and associated data collection and analysis procedures would need to account for the challenges mentioned by local authorities (resourcing and data capabilities of external organisations), with an outcomes framework being used by only 50% of local authorities measuring outcomes of external provision and 34% for in-house provision, there does appear to be an opportunity for local authorities to make use of a shared outcomes framework to more consistently demonstrate the impact of services across England and Wales.

While the external organisations funded by local authorities have largely remained the same over the recent past, about half (46%) are selected through competitive tendering processes, with 60% being (re)commissioned every three years or less (30% every year), which may have implications for the way an outcomes framework could be approached and implemented. Since most (re)commissioning cycles will need to be renewed regularly, this could offer an opportunity to introduce an outcomes framework via the process of contract renewal and Service Level Agreements.

The limitations of what can be asked through a short survey mean there may be benefit in further engaging with those local authorities willing to do so, to delve deeper into the specific reasons for the monitoring and evaluation data collected from each external organisation or for each type of advice provided. This could provide useful insight into the dictating factors and likely nuance beyond the high-level response data collected through this survey.