Local Authority Omnibus Survey Wave 13

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A report of research carried out by GfK NOP on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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Acknowledgements

This report is based on research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

GfK NOP would like to thank Andy Brittan and Mike Tibble and their colleagues at DWP for the advice and support given during the research and in the drafting of this report. We would also like to thank all the local authority officers who spared the time to take part in the survey.

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

**Benefit Fraud Inspectorate**  
The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI), launched in 1997, aims to strengthen benefits administration by inspection and support.

**Council Tax Benefit**  
This is the income-related benefit available to help cover the Council Tax for those on low incomes. It is available to both people renting and owner-occupiers.

**Customer Management System**  
Jobcentre Plus uses the scripted questions on the Customer Management System (CMS) to gather the necessary benefit claim information from the customer over the telephone. This allows working age customers to experience, as far as possible, a single claims process when claiming Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) alongside Income Support (IS), Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB). Rollout of the CMS commenced in 2003 and will achieve national coverage during 2007.

**Disability Discrimination Act**  
The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) requires employers, service-providers and others to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people are not excluded. From December 2006, the DDA will cover public authorities (such as local authorities) when they are exercising ‘public functions’ such as making decisions on HB. It will also introduce the Disability Equality Duty which will place a duty on the public sector to have ‘due regard’ to the need to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people. This means that all public authorities
will need to consider the needs of disabled people as they carry out their business. Major authorities, including central and local Government, police forces, National Health Service (NHS) trusts, schools, colleges and universities must publish a Disability Equality Scheme that sets out how they will implement the Disability Equality Duty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary Entry</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary Housing Payment</td>
<td>Introduced on 2 July 2001 to enable a local authority to provide claimants with additional financial assistance towards their rent or Council Tax.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality Standard for Local Government</td>
<td>The Equality Standard is a voluntary scheme administered by the Improvement and Development Agency for local Government (IDeA), which gives local authorities a framework for building equality into their activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
<td>This is the income-related benefit paid to tenants or their landlords to help meet their rent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Support/Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
<td>IS is a means-tested benefit paid to people on low income who are not in employment or unemployed (including lone parents and pensioners). JSA is the main benefit for unemployed people. It is partly contribution-based and partly-income based.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>From April 2002, the Benefits Agency and Employment Service were replaced by two new businesses, the Jobcentre Plus and The Pensions Service. These businesses offer improved services, better tailored to meet the needs of different customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA Input Documents</td>
<td>Once all the necessary claim information and supporting evidence has been obtained and recorded onto the CMS the relevant HB/CTB details are sent to the Local Authority (LA) on a paper LA Input Document. When this is received by the LA they will consider whether they need to contact the customer for any further information or evidence before making a decision on the claim and any payment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Local Housing Allowance

In October 2002, as part of the HB reform package, the Secretary of State made an announcement about the proposed introduction of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for private sector tenants. It will represent an average rent for an area and will be normally paid directly to the tenant rather than the landlord. LHA was initially known as Standard Local Housing Allowance (SLHA).

Local Reference Rent

Used by Rent Officers for private sector HB claims, to compare the rent being charged with the average rent for similar properties in the area.

Management Information System

Data is collected by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) from LAs to provide information on caseloads, processing times, number of claims, staffing complements etc. The data is important to the Department to enable effective evaluation of policies and performance monitoring.

New claims

Claims for benefit from people who do not have a current live claim for that benefit.

New Tax Credits

New Tax Credits (NTC) extended the scope of the earlier Working Families’ Tax Credit (WFTC) by introducing two new credits: Working Tax Credit (WTC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). WTC is payable to people in paid work below a certain income and CTC is paid to families responsible for one or more children, again below a certain income level.

Pension Credit

From October 2003, Pension Credit replaces the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) for people aged 60 and over. For these pensioners, Pension Credit provides a contribution towards a guaranteed income. For the first time, it also rewards people aged 65 and over who have modest savings.
| **Performance Development Team** | Working in partnership with authorities, BFI’s Performance Development Team (PDT) offers free, expert advice and guidance on how to increase administrative efficiency and achieve sustainable improvements in benefit delivery performance. |
| **Remote Access Terminal** | DWP and its agencies allows local authorities viewing access to specified Departmental benefit data and/or access to electronic systems to receive benefit information. This access is given via a Remote Access Terminal (RAT) computer link to the Departmental mainframe systems operated by LA staff. |
| **Royal Mail Do not Redirect** | This is a scheme whereby suitably marked benefit-related envelopes issued by the local authority will not be re-directed by the Royal Mail service, but will be sent back to the local authority for further investigation. Local authorities have the discretion whether to use the service. |
| **RSL** | Registered Social Landlord (RSL), i.e. housing associations that are registered with the Housing Corporation. |
| **SAFE** | The Security Against Fraud and Error (SAFE) incentive scheme makes additional subsidy payments to LAs for identifying and acting on fraud and error in their HB caseload. This was introduced across Great Britain in April 2002. Further changes were introduced in April 2004. |
| **Section 19** | Part of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act, requiring local authorities to verify identity. Stipulates that claimants must produce either a National Insurance (NI) number or other evidence enabling their NI number to be traced or for one to be allocated for the first time. |
| **Single Room Rent** | The Single Room Rent (SRR) restricts the amount of rent which can be used to determine HB claims from single people under 25 who live in deregulated private sector tenancies and is based on the average cost of a room with shared facilities in the locality. |
Stats 116
This collects information on a one per cent sample of HB/CTB claimants, who are also in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit) in May of each year.

Stats 121
This collects information on quarterly caseload stock counts, for HB/CTB claimants, who are also in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit).

Stats 122
This collects information on quarterly caseload stock counts, for HB/CTB claimants, who are not in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit).

Stats 123
This collects information on a one per cent sample of HB/CTB claimants, who are not in receipt of IS, income-based JSA or Pension Credit (Guarantee Credit) in May of each year.

Stats 124
This collects information on a quarterly basis on areas such as administration, Claims, Overpayment, Fraud and Staffing.

Stats 124A
This collects information on an annual basis on areas such as Fraud, Claims, Overpayments and Best Value Performance Indicators.

Verification Framework
Details minimum standards for collecting acceptable evidence to reduce fraud. Includes guidance on subsequent review and visits. The scheme is not mandatory.

Weekly Incorrect Benefit
Weekly Incorrect Benefit (WIB) is an essential component of the SAFE scheme introduced in April 2001 and modified in April 2002 and April 2004. SAFE offers all LAs the opportunity to obtain additional subsidy payments by proactively managing their caseload. Any overpayments detected as a result of LA action or change of circumstances reported to the LA within 28 days of the commencement of review activity or fraud investigation that leads to a reduction in benefit can earn a WIB payment.
Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of Wave 13 of the Local Authority Omnibus Survey, conducted between January and March 2006 on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). All Local Authorities (LAs) are asked to participate in the Survey and responses were received from 257 managers, representing a response rate of 63 per cent.

Wave 13 of the Omnibus Survey covers questions on the following issues: Performance Standards Fund, Claim Forms and Rapid Reclaim, Cheque Cashing, Organisational Models, Reporting changes in circumstances, Working with Jobcentre Plus, Contracting Out, Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI).

Performance Standards Fund

Eighty-eight per cent of LAs have received funding from the Performance Standards Fund (PSF). Just eight per cent of these have not completed any projects while 42 per cent have completed all of their projects. The average number of projects not completed was one while the average number of completed projects was two (24 LAs have completed five or more).

When asked why some projects were not completed, more than a third (35 per cent) blamed the implementation of a new computer system. Other reasons included corporate priorities (nine per cent) and a protracted tendering exercise (seven per cent). Three in five (60 per cent), said there was no particular reason or that simply the project was still in progress.

Approximately half (54 per cent) of LAs have worked with another LA or group of LAs on PSF funded projects and for around three-quarters (77 per cent) this was a positive experience (two per cent negative, 20 per cent neither).

The kinds of completed projects were very varied but the main types were: recruitment/training of new staff (41 per cent), recruitment of training officers
(31 per cent), introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow systems (31 per cent),
and provision of technical benefits training (29 per cent).

The impact of the individual projects on performance were generally very positive
indeed with very few reporting a negative impact. The only projects that received
negative feedback were ‘replacement Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit
(CTB) processing systems’ (eight per cent) and quality control management assurance
etc.’ (five per cent).

The PSF has had a number of effects on staffing levels. Around half (52 per cent) of
LAs used the PSF to recruit more staff, with the average number of staff recruited
being five. Due to the high proportion of authorities that were not able to provide a
figure for the number of staff they had working on benefits administration in 2002
it is difficult to make conclusions about the affect PSF funding has had on the overall
number of staff. On the surface of it, it would seem that the average number of staff
has decreased over the period from 2002 (average 65) to 2006 (average 52), even
though an average of five have been recruited using PSF funds. However, this may
not have been the case if those LAs that answered ‘don’t know’ had been able to
provide a figure for 2002. A further question asking about how many PSF funded
staff are no longer working in benefits administration in their authority for a range of
reasons, shows that 17 per cent left to join another benefits department or left for an
unspecified reason, 15 per cent because of unsatisfactory performance and 14 per
cent left to join another agency/private contractor. Slightly fewer left to go to
another department within the same authority (11 per cent), were promoted within
this authority (ten per cent), left when the contract ended and funding ran out (nine
per cent) or resigned/left to do something different (two per cent).

The overall impact of the projects on various aspects of performance was good, and
especially so for new claims processing and changes of circumstances processing
(82 per cent and 78 per cent respectively said the involvement in the projects had
resulted on a positive impact on these activities). When asked about other benefits/
spin-offs of completed projects, approximately half (53 per cent) did not have
anything else to add but those that did mentioned aspects such as: DIP system/
reduced workload (ten per cent), better training (seven per cent) and improvements
in: working relationships/technology/staff morale/customer service.

Claim forms and rapid reclaim

The four main claim forms were widely used or accepted in the LAs we interviewed
– HBBR1 (89 per cent), HCTB1 (PCA) (97 per cent), HCTB1 (PC) (98 per cent), HCTB1
(100 per cent).

In terms of the main form used, around half (51 per cent) said it was based on the BFI
model claim form, a quarter said it was designed by the authority, and almost a fifth
(19 per cent) said it was based on the HCBT1 design. Forty-two per cent of
authorities have a different process for rapid reclaim. On average five HBRR1 claims
are received by LAs each week and it takes, on average, five days to process a HBRR1 claim if there are no problems. Half (50 per cent) of LAs give priority to HBRR1 forms over other HB/CTB claim forms.

An average of 30 per cent of all HBRR1 claims are delayed and the main reasons appear to be due to Jobcentre Plus reinstating primary benefit (64 per cent), claimant not entitled to Income Support (IS)/Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) (32 per cent) and time taken to check entitlement to primary benefit (27 per cent). Forty-six of authorities are processing JSA reclaims as Rapid Reclaims.

**Cheque cashing**

Half (50 per cent) of authorities have a free encashment facility, 62 per cent have it at their own authority, 50 per cent by way of an agreement with a bank and three per cent via an agreement with another source. Fifty-five per cent have a limit on the number of times the facility can be used and for 42 per cent this is limited to single use only.

Very few authorities (six per cent of those with the facility) publicise free encashment. Almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of those providing the facility say they are likely to continue providing it. The authorities that are uncertain about future provision cite concerns such as moving to/prefer Bank Automated Clearing System (BACS) (36 per cent), rarity of use (19 per cent) and reduction in number of cash offices (17 per cent).

Among the authorities that do not currently have the facility, ten per cent said they will introduce it if Local Housing Allowance (LHA) is rolled out, 59 per cent said they would not introduce it and 31 per cent were unsure.

**Organisational models**

The majority (69 per cent) of authorities organise the assessment of new claims by way of individual assessors dealing with it. A quarter (25 per cent) said they split it between pre-assessors and assessors. When asked how they manage the HB/CTB caseload, 56 per cent said assessment officers work on any HB/CTB claim received, 13 per cent do so based on a geographical areas and 12 per cent on a customer’s name.

In terms of adoption of various controls, the one most frequently used in all cases was to reconcile HB/CTB claims with their paper or electronic records (58 per cent). The controls used least often were visiting business addresses of all landlords/ Housing Associations (HAs) before direct payment of HB is made and making annual visits to all third parties.

In their day-to-day roles, nearly all authorities said their assessment staff input information (99 per cent), amend details following changes of circumstances
(99 per cent), authorise payments where the customer is the recipient (94 per cent) and authorise payments where the landlord is the recipient (92 per cent). Half or fewer create and authorise new landlord accounts, amend landlord account details, create and authorise new landlord accounts which have been authorised by a team leader or manager and amend landlord account details which are then authorised by a team leader or manager.

The main roles and responsibilities of team leaders were to assess and authorise payments (68 per cent), carry out checks before a payment of HB is made to a customer above a set amount (65 per cent), and carry out checks before a payment is made to a landlord above a set amount (62 per cent).

When asked what the maximum amount of HB/CTB overpayment is that can be written off, the average was £1,137. The average amount above which a check is made before a payment is made to a customer is £730 and the average amount above which a check is made before a payment is made to a landlord is £1,001.

Reporting changes in circumstances

At the start of a claim the majority of authorities said that the notification letter (99 per cent) and/or the claim form (96 per cent) mentions that claimants needs to inform change of circumstances details to the authority. Fifty-five per cent send/give a written information sheet and 39 per cent discuss it with the claimant.

The actions taken most frequently throughout the claim to let claimants know they need to tell the LA about changes of circumstances were: notification letter mentions it (93 per cent), discuss it with claimant at visits (85 per cent), mentioned at postal reviews (81 per cent), and the Council website (77 per cent). Most authorities send/give a written information sheet once (41 per cent) or twice (24 per cent), a year.

The most effective awareness raising activities for increasing reporting changes of circumstances were: visits (79 per cent), notification letters (72 per cent), postal reviews (66 per cent) and giving information at time of claim (65 per cent).

Accepted reports of changes of circumstances were most commonly: post (99 per cent), in person at the benefits office (97 per cent), email (95 per cent), phone (88 per cent). Reports of changes of circumstances that claimants are notified of are most commonly: post (98 per cent), in person at the benefits office (93 per cent).

Three-quarters (75 per cent) of authorities that do not currently accept reports on an Internet site would like to do so in the future. Reasons for not currently accepting reports on an Internet site included website not set up/being set up (28 per cent), and website not yet interactive/able to accept changes (21 per cent). When asked what would allow their authority to accept changes of circumstances via the Internet the most frequently mentioned response was development of a website for this purpose (22 per cent).
Fifty-seven per cent use DWP risk lists sent by Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) completely and 38 per cent use them partly. Risk lists are most frequently used by starting at the top and working down as a team (58 per cent), splitting the list by geographical area (30 per cent) and working down the list until locally identified are higher risk (24 per cent).

Working with Jobcentre Plus

When asked how often in a year management meet with their main associated Jobcentre Plus office, the average overall was three times a year. Those that have meetings with their main Jobcentre Plus office were asked about various aspects of those meetings. Almost all of them said the meetings covered Service Level Agreement (SLA) targets, were formally minuted and actions agreed and that other informal liaison was done on an ad hoc basis (94 per cent, 95 per cent and 95 per cent respectively). Four-fifths said their current arrangements with Jobcentre Plus are sufficient whilst just under half (49 per cent) said that they exchange information about Performance Indicators.

The relatively small group (41) who thought that arrangements with Jobcentre Plus were insufficient were asked to state why. Main reasons appear to be lack of frequency of meetings, lack of focus, too much personnel change and poor communication. This same group were asked what action their authority has taken to initiate liaison with Jobcentre Plus. A range of actions were noted: 27 per cent contacted them directly, a fifth or so (22 per cent) have had meetings, 12 per cent have requested meetings that have not happened and one in ten requested a named contact.

With regards to the specifics of working with Jobcentre Plus on an individual benefit claim, the most usual means was by telephone. Fax is still used substantially (46 per cent) and post is used by a third for obtaining information. Just two per cent obtain information face-to-face from Jobcentre Plus. Those authorities that telephone about a claim were asked if they have direct dial telephone numbers for contacts in Jobcentre Plus and almost four-fifths (79 per cent) do. The majority of authorities (85 per cent) that fax Jobcentre Plus about claims have a dedicated fax machine in Jobcentre Plus.

A quarter or so (26 per cent) of authorities felt that arrangements for day-to-day liaison with Jobcentre Plus regarding claims was insufficient. More than a quarter (27 per cent) said the telephone was not answered, while other issues included no direct contact/line, out of date numbers, delays in response. Actions that have been taken to rectify this include: raising the issue at meetings (27 per cent), arranging a contact post/direct line (14 per cent), arranging for email contact (11 per cent), and raising the issue with senior management (eight per cent).

Eighty-five per cent of authorities are aware of Joint Regional Boards and of that group just over four-fifths (81 per cent) said that there is a route to contribute to/ receive feedback from them. When asked how Joint Regional Boards could be...
improved, a fairly high proportion failed to give a suggestion – over half (53 per cent) said either nothing or don’t know/no answer.

Over three-quarters (78 per cent) were aware of Joint Operational Boards and of that group 87 per cent were aware of a route to contribute to/receive feedback from them. Once again about half (54 per cent) could not suggest any improvements.

Contracting out

Sixteen per cent of LAs have a contractor involved in HB/CTB. Much of this involvement began in 2005 (32 per cent) or 2006 (24 per cent). Almost a quarter (24 per cent) said all areas of HB are contracted out, 22 per cent call centres, 15 per cent processing, 12 per cent Front line service and five per cent fraud.

Those authorities that are not involved with a contractor were asked how likely it is that they would contract out HB services in the future. The majority (80 per cent) said unlikely and none said very likely.

Forty-four per cent of LAs work in partnership with others. When asked how many authorities they work in partnership with, the average was seven. Authorities that work in partnership with other authorities were asked which aspects of their work were covered by these arrangements. Most frequently mentioned were benchmarking (67 per cent), take up campaign (53 per cent), training provision/National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessment (34 per cent) and mentoring/project management (30 per cent). When those that do not work in partnership with another authority were asked about the likelihood of doing so in the future, around a half (49 per cent) said it was likely whilst almost a third (32 per cent) said it was unlikely.

Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

Sixty-three per cent of authorities have had contact with BFI in the last 12 months. Most frequently mentioned types of contact are: BFI website (37 per cent), Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)-single tier (35 per cent), Performance Development Team (PDT) (33 per cent), BFI speaker (29 per cent).

In terms of usefulness of the final report or outcome of the contact with BFI, generally speaking these were rated as useful by the majority. Professionalism of BFI staff was also highly rated across all aspects of contact. When asked about how satisfied they were with the service received, high majorities were satisfied for nearly all types of contact.

Regarding relative importance of different aspects of BFI service, the aspects rated most highly were: recommendations in reports are useful and workable (97 per cent say important), adequate notice before inspection/assessment (96 per cent), and inspection report produced within agreed timescales (93 per cent).

A large majority (91 per cent) said BFI inspections on DWP agencies were very important and seven per cent said they were fairly important.
1 Conclusions

1.1 Performance Standards Fund

Take-up of funding is very high, particularly among authorities with a medium and high caseload. However, among the authorities that did not apply, lack of resources to complete the application form seems to have been a key reason.

Completion rates are good with most projects having been completed or still in progress. However it is worth pointing out that around a third of those with incomplete projects blamed the implementation of a new computer system.

Over half worked in conjunction with another Local Authorities (LA) on Performance Standards Fund (PSF) funded projects, in particular those with a low or medium caseload. The experience seems to have been very positive (77 per cent), with just two per cent having a negative experience.

Overall, funding from the PSF would seem to have had a positive effect on most authorities, in particular on new claims processing and change of circumstance processing, with rather less on customer service, accuracy and overpayment recovery.

In addition, very high proportions of authorities described PSF funded projects as having a positive impact on their authority’s performance. The only projects that attracted any negative feedback were ‘replacement Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) processing systems’ (eight per cent), quality control management assurance etc.’ (five per cent) and the introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow systems (two per cent).

The PSF has certainly had an impact on staffing levels. Around half (52 per cent) of LAs used the PSF to recruit more staff with the average number of staff recruited being five. Due to the high proportion of authorities that were not able to provide a figure for the number of staff they had working on benefits administration in 2002 it is difficult to make conclusions about the affect PSF funding has had on the overall number of staff. On the surface of it, it would seem that the average number of staff
has decreased over the period from 2002 (average 65) to 2006 (average 52), even though an average of five have been recruited using PSF funds. However, this may not have been the case if those LAs that answered ‘don’t know’ had been able to provide a figure for 2002.

A further question asking about how many PSF funded staff are no longer working in benefits administration in their authority for a range of reasons shows that the greatest number left to join another benefits department, left for an unspecified reason, because of unsatisfactory performance or left to join another agency/private contractor. Although, the majority of staff recruited with PSF funding are still working in the benefits departments of the authority that recruited them, these findings must also raise questions about recruitment and retention of staff.

1.2 Claim forms and rapid reclaim

HCTB1 is used by all the authorities interviewed, but there was also very high levels of use of HCTB1 (PC), HCTB1 (PCA) (both with supplementary forms), and (slightly less so) HBBR1. A significant proportion, one in every four, of authorities are using as their main form a document that has been designed by the authority themselves and it is interesting to note that the proportion doing so is significantly higher among Scottish authorities, where the proportion is greater than two in five. Overall however, the greatest proportion, half in fact, have as their main form one that is based on the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) model and one in five are using, as their main form one that is based on the HCBT1 design.

When authorities were probed to find out what other forms they currently issue, more than two in five said they issued HCTB1 (PCA), a third issued one that was based on HCB1 (PC), and just over one in five issued one that was based on the HCTB1 (PCA). One in five or so said they issued a shortened claim form for Hostel Dwellers and one in ten used a form, which was based on HBRR1.

Regarding the processes involved for rapid reclaim, the majority of approximately three in five have the same process for rapid reclaim whereas two in five have a different process. It is interesting to note that English Metropolitan authorities are much more likely to have a different process for rapid reclaim than others. The average number per week of HBRR1 claims that are received is five and in terms of processing time it take on average five days to process a HBRR1 claim, providing there are no problems.

Half (50 per cent), of LAs give priority to HBBR1 forms over other HB/CTB claim forms within their authority. When asked how many HBRR1 claims are delayed it is notable that the majority, three-quarters in fact, did not know. Amongst those authorities that could give an answer, there was an average finding that 30 per cent of all HBBR1 claims are delayed. The main reasons for delay appear to be due to Jobcentre Plus reinstating primary benefit (64 per cent), the claimant not entitled to IS/JSA (32 per cent) and time taken to check entitlement to primary benefit (27 per cent). Forty-six per cent of authorities are processing JSA reclaims as Rapid Reclaims.
Overall then it would seem that the new variations on the HCTB1 form are being used widely in the field and that a substantial number of authorities are designing forms of their own.

1.3 Cheque cashing

Half (50 per cent) of authorities have a free encashment facility, half do not. Three in five have the facility at their own authority, half have it by way of an agreement with a bank and three per cent via an agreement with another source. It is notable that London Boroughs and English Unitary authorities were more likely than the others to provide the facility at their own authority (this was the case for all the London authorities interviewed).

When asked about the limit on the number of times the free encashment facility could be used, just over half have a limit on the number of times the facility can be used and for 42 per cent this is limited to single use only. Very few authorities (six per cent of those with the facility) publicise free encashment.

In terms of planning for the future, three-quarters of those currently providing the facility say they are very or fairly likely to continue providing it. The authorities that are uncertain about future provision cite concerns such as moving to/prefer BACS (36 per cent), rarity of use (19 per cent) and reduction in number of cash offices (17 per cent) as the reasons why they are not committed to definitely providing free encashment in the future.

Among the authorities that do not currently have the facility, it is interesting that willingness to introduce it was low. None of this group said that they would introduce it regardless of whether LHA is rolled out or not, one in ten said they will introduce it if LHA is rolled out, but the majority, three in five said they would not introduce it and three in ten were unsure.

It would seem then that there has been growth overall in the number of authorities that provide free encashment facilities. Looking back at the findings from Wave 11, which was conducted in the summer of 2005, 37 per cent of the authorities interviewed then offered the service compared to 50 per cent at this Wave. The proportions that plan to continue providing it however have remained at a similar level. In 2005, three quarters said they intended to maintain the service and in this wave three-quarters again are planning to continue providing it. The issue that is interesting perhaps is that around a quarter of those currently providing the service are likely to drop it in the future and that amongst those that do not currently provide it there is relatively little interest in providing it.

1.4 Organisational models

A majority of seven in ten of all types of authorities organise the assessment of new claims and changes of circumstances by individual assessors, while a quarter split it between pre-assessors and assessors.
In terms of managing HB/CTB caseload, over half have assessment officers working on any claim received. This means the remainder (slightly under half) split it in some way – mostly geographical area, customer name and tenure. Low and medium caseload authorities are most likely to not split the work, while high caseload authorities are most likely to split it, in particular by geographical area and tenure.

Nearly three in five authorities always reconcile HB/CTB claims with paper or electronic records and only four per cent said that they never do so. However, only around a third always ensure that assessment officer’s caseloads are rotated at least annually or always monitor any activity on benefit that takes place outside of normal office hours. Worryingly, around a quarter of authorities never do either. It is also very rare for authorities to visit the business addresses of all landlords before a direct payment of HB is made or make annual visits to third parties. On the basis of these findings and given the known levels of fraud and error in the system, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) may want to consider how it could encourage a greater adoption of the controls mentioned above.

A very high proportion of authorities’ assessment staff are doing the same tasks: inputting information, amending details following changes of circumstances, authorising payments where the customer/landlord is recipient. There is however, less consistency on other tasks that assessment staff might do, with just a half or fewer creating and authorising new landlord accounts, amending landlord account details and creating, authorising and amending landlord accounts with authorisation by a team leader or manager.

On the other hand, the roles and responsibilities of team leaders are not as uniform. Unlike assessment staff, none of the tasks mentioned in the question were said to be the responsibility of team leaders in virtually all authorities. In contrast, around two in three mentioned assessing and authorising payments, carrying out checks before a payment of HB is made to a customer above a set amount and carrying out checks before a payment is made to a landlord above a set amount while just over half mentioned amending existing landlord account details, authorising new landlord accounts and writing off HB/CTB overpayments. It is interesting, however, that 18 per cent of authorities said that their team leaders never assess or authorise payments for claims themselves.

There is some evidence, perhaps not surprising, that assessment officers in authorities with a low caseload are doing a greater variety of tasks, while team leaders in authorities with a high caseload are less likely to be doing a variety of tasks. In addition, it is interesting that low caseload authorities are more likely to say that their team leaders never assess or authorise payments for claims.

1.5 Reporting changes in circumstances

As would be expected, almost all authorities said that at the start of a claim the notification letter and/or the claim form mentions that claimants needs to inform
them of change of circumstance details. However, fewer go one step further and send/give a written information sheet (just over half) or discuss it with the claimant (two in five).

In the view of LAs, the most effective awareness raising activities for increasing reporting changes of circumstances were visits, notification letters, postal reviews and giving information at the time of the claim. Not surprisingly, these, as well as the Council website, feature strongly in the list of measures that authorities already take. Far fewer mention change of circumstances on payment schedules, discuss it with claimants at telephone reviews and, as mentioned above, send/give a written information sheet. Given that failure to report changes in circumstances is an important cause of error, we believe that authorities should be reminding claimants of their responsibility to inform them of changes of circumstances at every opportunity.

Large majorities of authorities accept reports of changes of circumstances via the post, in person at the benefits office, email, phone and in person at another LA office. However, for some of these methods – email, phone and in person at another LA office – there is a gap between the proportion of authorities that allow them and the proportion that tell claimants that they allow then. This is also true for a lesser used method – Internet site – where 52 per cent accept changes of circumstances in this way but only 40 per cent tell claimants that they do so. These gaps should be narrowed and claimants made aware of their rights.

Most authorities that do not currently accept reports on an Internet site would like to do so in the future and it is just a matter of time before the development work is done.

Encouragingly, only five per cent of authorities do not use DWP risk lists sent by Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS). However, only 57 per cent use them completely, while 38 per cent use them partly. Risk lists are most frequently used by starting at the top and working down as a team, splitting the list by geographical area and working down the list until locally identified are higher risk.

1.6 Working with Jobcentre Plus

When asked how often in a year management meet with their main associated Jobcentre Plus office, the average overall was three times a year. Those that have meetings with their main Jobcentre Plus office were asked about various aspects of those meetings. Almost all of them said the meetings covered SLA targets, were formally minuted and actions agreed and that other informal liaison was done on an ad hoc basis. Half said that they exchange information about Performance Indicators. Overall, a significant majority, four fifths in fact, said that they felt that their current arrangements with Jobcentre Plus are sufficient.
The relatively small group of 41 authorities who thought that their arrangements with Jobcentre Plus were insufficient were asked to state why. The main reasons appear to be lack of frequency of meetings, lack of focus, too much personnel change and poor communication. This same group were asked what action their authority has taken to initiate liaison with Jobcentre Plus. A range of actions were noted: just over a quarter contacted them directly, a fifth or so have had meetings, fewer have requested meetings that have not happened and one in ten requested a named contact.

With regard to the specifics of working with Jobcentre Plus on an individual benefit claim, telephone is the most usual form of contact between the two parties; this method of contact was mentioned by nine in ten. Fax is still used substantially, by nearly half, and post is used by a third for obtaining information from Jobcentre Plus. Those authorities that telephone about a claim were asked if they have direct dial telephone numbers for contacts in Jobcentre Plus and almost four-fifths (79 per cent) do. The majority of authorities (85 per cent) that fax Jobcentre Plus regarding claims have a dedicated fax machine in Jobcentre Plus.

The authorities that felt that arrangements for day-to-day liaison with Jobcentre Plus regarding claims were insufficient were asked to elaborate on why this was the case. More than a quarter said the telephone was not answered while other issues included no direct contact/line, out of date numbers, delays in response. Actions that have been taken to rectify this include: raising the issue at meetings (27 per cent), arranging a contact post/direct line (14 per cent), arranging for email contact (11 per cent), and raising the issue with senior management (eight per cent).

Awareness of Joint Regional Boards and Joint Operational Boards was high. For both of these, approximately four in five authorities claimed to be aware and similarly high numbers were aware that these Boards had routes to contribute to and/or receive feedback from them. There were few suggestions for how to improve these Boards in order to develop relations between Jobcentre Plus and LAs.

In the main then it appears that most authorities feel that their current communications and arrangements with Jobcentre Plus are sufficient. Telephone communication appears to be the most frequent link between LAs and their main associated Jobcentre Plus office and this was facilitated in the main by direct dial numbers for specific contacts.

1.7 Contracting out and Local Authority partnerships

Authorities that are involved with a contractor are in the minority: sixteen per cent of those interviewed for this wave have a contractor involved in HB/CTB. Whilst some of the authorities have had such arrangements for a relatively long time (late 1990’s) much of this involvement began in 2005 (a third) or 2006 (a quarter). Regarding the areas of HB that are contracted out, a quarter said all areas of HB are contracted out, 22 per cent said call centres, 15 per cent processing, 12 per cent Front line service, and five per cent fraud.
Those authorities that are not involved with a contractor were asked how likely it is that they would contract out in the future. Just one in 20 said that is was fairly likely that they may get involved with a contractor in the future and none said that it was very likely.

Forty-four per cent of LAs currently work in partnership with others. When this group who work in this way were asked how many authorities they work in partnership with, the average number was seven. It is interesting to note that the type of authority most likely to work in partnership with others is an English District and that those least likely to do so are London Boroughs.

Authorities that work in partnership with other authorities were asked which aspects of their work were covered by these arrangements. Most frequently mentioned were benchmarking (67 per cent), take up campaign (53 per cent), training provision/National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) assessment (34 per cent) and mentoring/project management (30 per cent).

When those that do not work in partnership with another LA were asked about the likelihood of doing so in the future, around a half said it was likely, a third said it was unlikely and a fifth or so were unsure.

Overall, therefore, it would seem that authorities are more frequently engaged in working in partnership with other authorities than they are to have contracted out areas of HB. Characteristically English Districts are the most likely to be working in partnership with others, possibly for reasons of scale and that they have the most to gain from working in conjunction with others. This is borne out by the findings that some of the main benefits of working in this way are sharing knowledge/expertise/networking and cost cutting/saving money/shared costs/value for money.

1.8 Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

Sixty-three per cent of the authorities interviewed at this wave have had contact with BFI in the last 12 months. In 2005, at Wave 11, 67 per cent had had contact with BFI in the previous 12 months so the levels of contact are entirely in line over time. The most frequently mentioned types of contact at this wave were: BFI website (37 per cent), Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)-single tier (35 per cent), Performance Development Team (PDT) (33 per cent), BFI speaker (29 per cent). This shows a shift from the 2005 findings when although the BFI website (38 per cent) and CPA Single Tier (35 per cent) were similarly frequent types of contact, BFI speakers were more frequently mentioned as a form of contact (by 37 per cent in 2005).

In terms of usefulness of the final report or outcome of the contact with BFI, generally speaking these were rated as useful by the majority. Professionalism of BFI staff was also highly rated across all aspects of contact and this is very much in line with the findings from the 2005 survey. When asked about how satisfied they were with the service received, high majorities were satisfied for nearly all types of contact. Regarding the relative importance of different aspects of BFI service, the
aspects rated most highly were: recommendations in reports are useful and workable (97 per cent say important), adequate notice before inspection/assessment (96 per cent), and inspection report produced within agreed timescales (93 per cent).

A large majority (91 per cent) said BFI inspections on DWP agencies were very important, and seven per cent said they were fairly important. Once again these findings are very much in line with those found in 2005 at Wave 11 when 94 per cent said that these kinds of inspections were very important and six per cent said they were fairly important.

Once again then it would appear that overall satisfaction with the service that BFI provide has been maintained at a very high level and that importance of various aspects of the service also continue to be rated very highly.
2 Key findings

2.1 Section A: Performance Standards Fund

2.1.1 Introduction

It is now more than three years since Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) first started making awards from the Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) Performance Standards Fund (PSF) to help Local Authorities (LAs) make improvements in their benefits’ administration. Funding has been awarded for a wide range of projects including the recruitment and training of new staff, better training, new IT systems, better ways of working and a number of national products.

The majority of LAs have now benefited either as a lead authority or indirectly as a partner or through the roll out of national products. As part of the reporting process LAs have given DWP immediate feedback, through progress reports, on improvements achieved with the funding. The purpose of this part of the survey was to find out which projects have had the most impact on performance and assess how this impact has been felt across the different areas of HB/CTB administration. The information will be used for further evaluation of the fund’s effectiveness and the development of best practice.
There were significant differences by **caseload**:  
- Authorities with a low caseload were significantly less likely to have received funding from the PSF than those with a medium or high caseload.

There were significant differences by **region**:  
- All authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside and the North West have received funding compared with just 75 per cent in the North East, 79 per cent in the East Midlands and 80 per cent in the South East.
Figure 2.2  Why has your authority not received any funding from the PSF?

Authority is a better performer and did not qualify 42%
Did not have capacity/resource to complete application form 32%
Couldn't secure matched funding 19%
Application was unsuccessful 13%
Couldn't identify areas for improvement 6%
Others 6%
Don't know 6%

Base: All LAs that have not received any funding from the PSF (31).

The base size for this question is very small and, therefore, there are no significant differences.
The average number of completed projects was 2.36, while the average number of not completed projects was 0.90.

There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- English Unitary authorities had the highest average number of completed projects at 2.93 and English Metropolitan districts had the lowest at 1.75.
- Scotland had the lowest average number of not completed projects (0.56) while Wales had the highest (1.44).
There were significant differences by **region**:

- Authorities in the North East and North West had the lowest average number of completed projects (1.58 and 1.73 respectively) and the West Midlands had the highest (3.33).

- Apart from Scotland, the South East had the lowest average number of not completed projects (0.58), while the West Midlands and the North West had the highest (1.20 and 1.11 respectively).

**Figure 2.4 Why are some of your projects not completed?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of new computer system</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate priorities</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protracted tendering exercise</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under/over estimate of funding requirement</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to recruit necessary staff</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular reason/still in progress</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have any uncompleted projects (121).

There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- There are very few significant differences between sub-groups, however, London Boroughs are significantly more likely than Scottish authorities and English Districts to cite the implementation of a new computer system as the reason why some of their projects are not completed (64 per cent, zero per cent and 29 per cent respectively).
There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- Seventy per cent of Welsh authorities and 64 per cent of English districts have worked with another LA or group of LAs compared with 44 per cent of Scottish authorities, 43 per cent of English Metropolitan districts, 31 per cent of London Boroughs and 28 per cent of English Unitary authorities.

There were significant differences by **caseload**:

- In addition, around three in five low and medium caseload authorities (63 per cent and 60 per cent respectively) worked with other LAs or groups of LAs compared with just 36 per cent of high caseload LAs.

There were significant differences by **region**:

- The North West and Wales stand out as the regions most likely to work with another LA or group of LAs (79 per cent and 70 per cent respectively), while London was the least likely (31 per cent).
Figure 2.6  Overall how would you describe working with another LA, or group of LAs, on PSF funded projects?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A positive experience</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A negative experience</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have worked with another LA, or group of LAs, on PSF funded projects (122).

Findings are generally positive across all LA types. There are no significant differences although it is worth noting that the three LAs that gave a negative response were all English districts.
There were significant differences by LA type:

- Wales: provision of technical benefits training 67 per cent, increasing overpayment recovery 33 per cent, recruitment/training of new processing staff 22 per cent, business process improvements or re-engineering 22 per cent, introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow system 22 per cent, new IT equipment/hardware replacement 22 per cent.

- Scotland: introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow system 50 per cent, recruitment of training officer(s) 31 per cent, recruitment/training of new processing staff 22 per cent.

- English Unitary authorities: recruitment/training of new processing staff 59 per cent, recruitment of training officer(s) 37 per cent, provision of technical benefits training 37 per cent.

- English Metropolitan districts: replacements HB/CTB processing systems 50 per cent, recruitment/training of new processing staff 38 per cent, provision of technical benefits training 38 per cent.

- English districts: recruitment/training of new processing staff 38 per cent, recruitment of training officer(s) 33 per cent, introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow system 31 per cent.

- London Borough: recruitment/training of new processing staff 60 per cent, introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow system 47 per cent, provision of technical benefits training 33 per cent.
### Key findings

**Figure 2.8** Overall how much of an impact did each completed project have on your authority’s performance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Description</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment/training of new processing staff (81)</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of training officers (61)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow systems (60)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of technical benefits training (58)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing overpayment recovery (41)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement HB/CTB processing systems (38)</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of more flexible ways of working (27)</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business process improvements or re-engineering (23)</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service - new staff or process (22)</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality control, management assurance etc (21)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call centres and telephone systems (12)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All with each type of completed project (bases in brackets).

The small base sizes preclude any sub-group analysis on this question.
There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Unitary authorities and London Boroughs were significantly more likely than Scottish and Welsh authorities to have used the PSF to recruit more staff (70 per cent, 67 per cent, 33 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).

There were significant differences by region:

- Authorities in the North East and West Midlands were more likely to have used the PSF to recruit staff than those in Scotland and the North West (75 per cent, 70 per cent, 31 per cent and 32 per cent respectively).
Overall the average number of staff working on benefits administration in 2002 was 64.8. It is however, worth bearing in mind when interpreting these findings that there was a high proportion of don’t know answers (43 per cent).

Overall the average number of staff working on benefits administration in 2002 was 64.8. It is however, worth bearing in mind when interpreting these findings that there was a high proportion of don’t know answers (43 per cent).

- The base size for this question is very small and there are no significant differences by LA type. However, there are differences in terms of caseload. The average number of staff in high caseload authorities working on benefits administration in 2002 was 56.5, compared with just 8.83 in low caseload authorities.
Figure 2.11  How many staff did you recruit using Performance Standards Fund funding?

- Overall the average number of staff recruited using funding from the PSF was 5.15.
- The base size for this question is very small and there are no significant differences by LA type. However, there are differences in terms of caseload. The average number of staff recruited using funding from the PSF in high caseload authorities was 9.20, compared with just 2.08 in low caseload authorities.
Figure 2.12 How many staff do you currently have working on benefits administration?

- Overall the average number of staff currently working on benefits administration is 51.8.
- The base size for this question is very small and there are no significant differences by LA type. However, there are differences in terms of caseload. The average number of staff currently working on benefits administration is significantly higher in high caseload authorities (103) than it is in medium and low caseload authorities (29.7 and 17.7).

Base: All LAs that used PSF to recruit staff (103).
Figure 2.13  How many staff recruited with the PSF are no longer working in benefits administration in your LA for the following reasons?

Figure 2.13 shows that 17 per cent left to join another benefits department or left for an unspecified reason, 15 per cent because of unsatisfactory performance and 14 per cent left to join another agency/private contractor. Slightly fewer left to go to another department within the same authority (11 per cent), were promoted within this authority (10 per cent), left when the contract ended and funding ran out (nine per cent) or resigned/left to do something different (two per cent).

It is interesting to look at the average for each of the reasons why staff are no longer working in the benefits departments:

- Promoted within this authority: 2.1, rising to 2.8 in authorities with a high caseload and going down to zero in low caseload authorities and one in medium caseload authorities.
- Performance unsatisfactory: 1.9.
- Left to join an agency/private contractor: 1.7.
- Left for another department in another LA: 1.6.

Base: All LAs that use the PSF to recruit staff (103).
- Contract ended when funding ran out: 1.6.
- Left for another LA’s benefits department: 1.3.
- Resigned/ left to do something different: 1.0.

**Figure 2.14** Overall how much of an impact on performance did completed projects have on each of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Neither</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New claims processing</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of circumstances</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayment recovery</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have completed at least one PSF project (199).

- On all aspects of performance the impact was more positive than negative and this was especially so for new claims processing, change of circumstances processing and customer service.
- There were no significant differences in the answers across any sub-groups.
Figure 2.15 Thinking again just about completed project/s, would you say that there have been any benefits/spin-offs that have not been covered in previous years in previous questions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIP system/reduced workload</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved working relationship with other LAs/organisations</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved technology/equipment</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Better training</strong></td>
<td><strong>7%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved staff morale</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved customer service</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More space</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of training officer</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/nothing</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have completed at least one PSF project (199).

There were no significant differences in the findings between sub-groups.

2.2 Section B: Claim Forms and Rapid Reclaim

2.2.1 Introduction

This section asked questions about what forms LAs use, in order to check that the new variations on the main HCTB1 claim form are being used in the field. It also asks LAs to consider if the introduction of the range has impacted on the LA’s own design of forms and whether they have also increased the range of forms they have available to different client groups. Finally it was hoped to consider if LAs have identified any other areas where they have developed forms, which should be considered for future development.
Figure 2.16  Which of the following does your authority use/ accept?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HCTB1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCTB1 (PC) and supplementary forms</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCTB1 (PCA) and supplementary forms</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBRR1</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

The four main claims forms are widely used or accepted in the LAs we interviewed. There were no significant differences by sub-groups.

Figure 2.17  Is your authority’s main HB/CTB form…….? 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Based on the BFI model claim</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed by</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on the HCTB1</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mixture/designed by</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jointly designed by several</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).
There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Unitaries (32 per cent) were more likely to have a main HB/CTB form that is based on the HCTB1 design than English Districts (16 per cent).

- English Districts (55 per cent) were more likely to have as their main form one that was based on the BFI model claim form than were Scottish authorities of whom just a third (33 per cent) had this kind of main form.

- Scottish authorities were more likely (44 per cent) than English Unitaries (13 per cent) to have as their main HB/CTB form one that has been designed by the LA.

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- Three in five (60 per cent) of authorities with a low caseload had a form based on the BFI model claim form as their main form compared to 47 per cent of authorities with a medium caseload and 48 per cent of those with a high caseload.

There were significant differences by region:

- Authorities from the South West (31 per cent) and London (29 per cent) were more likely to have a main form based on the HCTB1 design and authorities from the East region (seven per cent) were significantly less likely to do so.

- Scottish authorities (44 per cent) were more likely to have a main form designed by the LA than those in the North West (18 per cent) and South West (19 per cent).

Figure 2.18  Does your authority issue any of the following types of HB/CTB claim forms, or any other forms not mentioned on the list below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HCBT1 (PCA)</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on the HCB1 (PC)</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on the HCTB1 (PCA)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened claim form for Hostel Dwellers</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on the HBRR1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of address form</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of circs form</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened change of address</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions form</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designed by LA (unspec)</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened change of circs</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened interventions</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened review</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).
There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- HCTB1 (PCA) was more likely to be used by Scottish authorities; around two-thirds (67 per cent) of them used it compared to approximately to English Unitaries (29 per cent), English Metropolitans (30 per cent) and London Boroughs (35 per cent) who were less likely to use this form.

- Another form based on the HCB1 (PC) was significantly more likely to be used by the English Districts (35 per cent) and less likely to be used by the English Unitaries (16 per cent).

There were significant differences by **contracting out status**:

- Authorities that have not contracted out are more likely to use the shortened claim form for Hostel Dwellers (23 per cent) than those that have contracted out (12 per cent).

There were significant differences by **HB/CTB caseload**:

- Authorities with a low or medium caseload (46 per cent and 50 per cent respectively) are more likely to use the HCTB1(PCA) than were authorities with a high caseload (32 per cent).

- Authorities with a low caseload were less likely (12 per cent) than those with a medium or high caseload (23 per cent and 31 per cent respectively) to issue a shortened claim form for Hostel Dwellers.

There were significant differences by **region**:

- Scottish authorities were markedly more likely (67 per cent) to issue the HCTB1(PCA).

- South East (44 per cent), Yorkshire and Humberside (38 per cent), South West (35 per cent), London (35 per cent), North West (32 per cent) and East (30 per cent) were less likely to issue the HCTB1(PCA).

- South East (37 per cent), London (35 per cent) and East (33 per cent) were more likely to issue the shortened claim form for Hostel Dwellers than authorities in the North West (14 per cent) and East Midlands (seven per cent).
There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Metropolitan authorities are more likely to have a different process for rapid reclaim (65 per cent of them) compared to Scottish authorities, of whom just 22 per cent have a different process.

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- Authorities with a medium caseload were more likely (47 per cent) to have a different process for rapid reclaim than those with a low caseload (35 per cent)

There were significant differences by region:

- The region that was most likely to have a different process for rapid reclaim was the North West where three in five (61 per cent) of authorities do so.
- The regions that were least likely to have a different process for rapid reclaim were: Scotland (22 per cent), East Midlands (31 per cent), and South West (38 per cent).
There were significant differences by LA type:

- Welsh authorities and English Unitaries were more likely to receive on average 1-25 claims per week; four in five (83 per cent) and three-quarters (74 per cent) did so in these authorities respectively.

There were significant differences by region:

- Wales (83 per cent) had significantly higher numbers receiving between one and 25 claims per week.
- The North West had the lowest proportion of authorities receiving between one and 25 claims per week; just two in five (39 per cent) did so.
Figure 2.21  How many days on average does it take to process an HBRR1 claim if there are no problems with the case?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&gt;5</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6&gt;10</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11&gt;15</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16&gt;20</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Unitaries had the highest average number of days to process an HBRR1 claim with average of 7.77 days.
- Scottish and Welsh authorities had the lowest average number of days to process an HBRR1 claim with averages of 1.11 and 3.58 respectively.

There were significant differences by region:

- The region with the singles highest average for the number of days to process an HBRR1 claim was the South West where an average of 7.62 days was recorded.
- The region with the lowest average for the number of days to process an HBRR1 claim was Scotland with 1.11.
Figure 2.22  Is there any priority given to HBRR1 claim forms above other HB/CTB claim forms within your authority?

There were significant differences by LA type:

- Welsh and Scottish authorities were more likely to say that priority was given to HBRR1 claim forms above other HB/CTB claim forms within their authority (67 per cent and 61 per cent respectively).

- English Unitaries were least likely to say priority was given to HBRR1 claim forms; just a third or so (35 per cent) of them said this was the case.

There were significant differences by region:

- The regions that were most likely to give priority to HBRR1 claim forms above others were the North West (71 per cent) and Wales (67 per cent).

- The regions that were least likely to give priority to HBRR1 claim forms were Yorkshire and Humberside (25 per cent), the North East (31 per cent) and the East Midlands (38 per cent).
Figure 2.23  What proportion of all HBRR1 claims are delayed?

There were significant differences by LA type:

- The proportion of HBRR1 claims that are delayed is significantly higher amongst English Metropolitan authorities (average of 54.6 per cent claims delayed) and significantly lower in Scottish authorities where the average proportion of claims delayed is just five.

There were significant differences by contracting out status:

- Authorities that have contracted out have on average a higher proportion of HBRR1 claims that are delayed than those that have not contracted out (averages 50.63 per cent and 27.73 per cent respectively).

There were significant differences by region:

- The regions with the highest average proportions of HBRR1 claims that are delayed are: North West (44 per cent), Yorkshire and Humberside (40 per cent).
- The regions with the lowest proportions of HBRR1 claims that are delayed are: Scotland (five per cent), West Midlands (18.43 per cent) and South West (18.43 per cent).
Figure 2.24 In your authority, what are the most common reasons why an HBRR1 claim could be delayed?

![Bar chart showing the most common reasons for HBRR1 claim delays.]

There were significant differences by LA type:

- Around four in five (81 per cent) English Unitaries said that the most common reason for delay was ‘delays in Jobcentre Plus reinstating primary benefit compared to just over a third (35 per cent) of London Boroughs that said this was the most common reason for delay to a HBRR1 claim.

- Welsh authorities were significantly more likely to say that the most common reason for delay was that previous entitlement ended more than 12 weeks ago (50 per cent) than English Districts (17 per cent), English Unitaries (16 per cent) and London Boroughs (12 per cent).

There were significant differences by region:

- Authorities in the East region were more likely to say that the main reason for delay was that the claimant was not entitled to IS/JSA (47 per cent) whereas authorities from the North West (25 per cent), North East (19 per cent), London (18 per cent) and South East (17 per cent)

- Welsh authorities (50 per cent) were significantly more likely to say that the main reason for delay was that previous entitlement ended more than 12 weeks ago whereas South Eastern ones were less likely than average to say this was the main reason (seven per cent).
Figure 2.25  In your authority, can/do you process JSA (Contributory) re-claims as Rapid Reclaims (i.e. process them without completing a full claim form)?

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- Authorities with a medium caseload were significantly less likely (36 per cent) to say that their authorities can/do process JSA (Contributory) Reclaims as Rapid Reclaims.

- Authorities with a low caseload (56 per cent) and also those with a high caseload (51 per cent) were significantly more likely to say that their authorities can/do process JSA (Contributory) Reclaims as Rapid Reclaims.

There were significant differences by region:

- West Midlands authorities were more likely (58 per cent) to say that the can/do process JSA (Contributory) Reclaims as Rapid Reclaims than authorities from the North East region (31 per cent).

2.3  Section C: Cheque cashing

2.3.1  Introduction

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for private rented sector tenants is currently being tested by eighteen LAs, with an aim to roll it out nationally in 2008. Under LHA, payments will be normally made to tenants. We asked questions about ACT at Wave 11 of the Local Authority Omnibus Survey and authorities largely said that they have the facility already or intend to have it in the future. At this Wave of the Survey, we were interested in getting information on those tenants who do not have access to bank accounts and have to rely on LAs to cash cheque payments free of charge. It was hoped that the responses to the questions in this section would help the Department to establish the nature and extent of cheque cashing facilities.
Figure 2.26  Does your authority have a mechanism whereby residents can get cheques cashed free of charge (this may be in another part of the authority)?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- There were three types of authorities where the likelihood of having a mechanism for free encashment was significantly lower; English Districts (47 per cent), London Boroughs (41 per cent) and Scottish (33 per cent).

- The authorities where there were more incidences of free encashment mechanisms being in place were: English Unitaries (61 per cent); English Metropolitans (65 per cent) and Welsh (67 per cent).

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- Those authorities with a low caseload were less likely to have a free encashment mechanism (42 per cent) compared to those with a high caseload where around three in five (58 per cent) have one.

There were significant differences by region:

- The individual regions with the lowest proportions of authorities offering a free encashment mechanism are: London (41 per cent), West Midlands (38 per cent), Scotland (33 per cent) and North East (25 per cent).

- Regions with higher than average proportions of authorities offering free cash encashment mechanisms are: North West (61 per cent), Yorkshire and Humberside (63 per cent), and Wales (67 per cent).
Figure 2.27  Does your authority provide this free encashment facility itself or is it provided through an agreement with a bank or another source?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At local authority</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement with bank</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement with other source</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have a mechanism whereby residents can get cheques cashed free of charge (129).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- London Boroughs (100 per cent) and English Unitary authorities (84 per cent) were more likely to provide this facility at the LA.
- Scottish authorities were less likely to provide the facility at the LA (33 per cent) and more likely to provide it via an agreement with a bank (67 per cent).

There were significant differences by contracting out status:

- Authorities that have contracted out are more likely to provide this mechanism through an agreement with a bank (67 per cent) than those authorities that have not contracted out (47 per cent).

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- There appears to be a trend in that the greater the caseload the greater the likelihood of providing the free encashment facility at the LA. Half (50 per cent) of those with low caseloads did so compared to 61 per cent of authorities with a medium caseload and 73 per cent of authorities with a high caseload.
Figure 2.28  Is there a limit on the number of times people can use this free encashment facility? If yes, what is the limit?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know the limit</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55% of LAs have limit, 40% do not and 5% don’t know.

Base: All LAs that have a free encashment facility (129).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- Scottish (83 per cent) authorities were more likely to have a limit on the number of times this facility could be used and London Boroughs (43 per cent) were less likely to have a set limit.

- The highest average for the limit on the number of times the facility could be used was for English Unitary authorities where the average number of times was 1.6.
Figure 2.29  Does your authority publicise this free encashment? If yes, how does your authority publicise this facility?

Just 6% (eight LAs) publicise free encashment

- 5 direct information to claimants
- 3 publicise within the LA
- 2 have information displayed at HB offices
- 2 publicise at Welfare organisations
- 1 at Service provider/banks

- A tiny minority, just six per cent of those authorities that have a mechanism for free encashment actually publicise that facility.
- The majority (92 per cent) do not publicise it and two per cent said don’t know.

Figure 2.30  How likely is your authority to continue providing this free encashment facility?

Base: All that have a free encashment facility (129).

There were significant differences by contracting out status:
- Those authorities that have contracted out were much more likely (88 per cent either very or fairly likely) to continue providing this facility than those that have not contracted out (71 per cent either very or fairly likely).
There were significant differences by region:

- Yorkshire and Humberside, for instance were more likely (90 per cent) to say that they were likely (either very or fairly) to continue offering this facility than were authorities in Scotland where just half (50 per cent) said they were not at all likely to continue offering it.

**Figure 2.31  Why is your authority only fairly/not very/not at all likely to continue providing this service?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moving to/prefer BACS</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely used/emergencies</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing number of cash offices</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costly/budget constraints</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging claimants to open bank accounts</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on banking agreement</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash service is under review</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only used for new claimants</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to abuse/fraud</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that are fairly/not very/at all likely to continue providing service (53)

Due to the small base size there were no significant differences by sub-groups.
Figure 2.32  Does your authority have any plans to introduce a free encashment facility, either provided through an agreement with a bank or another source?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, if LHA is rolled out</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All that do not currently have a free encashment facility (127).

- It is interesting to note that respondents were offered a ‘yes’ category without the proviso of if LHA is rolled out and not a single authority said yes in that form.

Figure 2.33  Why is your authority not willing to introduce a free encashment facility?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not necessary/no demand for it</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving to/prefer to use BACs</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No cash offices/cash on premises</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging claimants to open bank accounts</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not been discussed/considered</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that do not have any plans to introduce a free encashment facility (75).

There were no significant differences by sub-groups.
2.4  Section D: Organisational models

2.4.1  Introduction

This section of the report aims to develop our understanding of the organisational structure of Benefit Departments and the impact this may have on the delivery of HB. In particular, it looks at how the HB/CTB caseload is managed, the role of assessment officers and team leaders/managers and the controls adopted by authorities to prevent fraud and error.

Figure 2.34  Please tick the one that comes closest to describing how your authority organises the assessment of new claims and changes of circumstances

![Pie chart showing distribution of assessment methods.](image)

Base: All (257).

There were no significant differences in the findings to this question by any sub-groups.
There were significant differences by **LA type**:  
- English districts and unitary authorities were most likely to have assessment officers working on any HB/CTB claim (66 per cent and 55 per cent respectively), while English Metropolitan districts, Welsh and Scottish authorities are least likely to organise their work in this way (26 per cent, 33 per cent and 33 per cent respectively). On the other hand, 41 per cent of London Boroughs organise their work along these lines.

There were significant differences by **caseload**:  
- It is also interesting that high caseload authorities are significantly less likely than authorities with a medium or low caseload to have assessment officers working on any HB/CTB claim (37 per cent, 63 per cent and 63 per cent respectively). They are, conversely, more likely to work on HB/CTB claims based on a particular geographical area or tenure (20 per cent and 15 per cent respectively).
There were some interesting sub-group differences as follows:

- The two authorities that visit the business address of all landlords or associations before a direct payment of HB is made in all cases were both Scottish while the two authorities that do so in most cases were both English districts.

- The two authorities making annual visits to all third parties in receipt of direct payments of HB either by cheque or direct payment in all cases were both English districts. London Boroughs were more likely that other LA types to do so in some capacity (just 47 per cent said that they never do so).

- No London Boroughs or English Unitary authorities said that they never reconcile HB/CTB claims with their corresponding paper or electronic records. Similar proportions of each type of LA said that they do so in all cases.

- In terms of ensuring that assessment officer’s caseloads are rotated at least annually, findings are similar across all sub-groups, however high caseload authorities were less likely than low caseload authorities to do so in all cases (30 per cent and 43 per cent respectively).
• English Unitary authorities were more likely than Scottish authorities to say that they monitor any activity on benefit that takes place outside normal office hours in some capacity (ten per cent and 33 per cent respectively said that they never do so). In addition, high caseload authorities were significantly more likely than medium caseload authorities to say that they monitor any activity on benefit that takes place outside of normal office hours in some capacity (14 per cent and 25 per cent respectively said that they never do so).

**Figure 2.37 Which of the following do your assessment staff do?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Input information received on HB/CTB application forms to a benefits computer system</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend claim/payment details following change of circs notification</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorise HB/CTB payments where the customer is the recipient</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorise HB/CTB payments where the landlord is the recipient</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and authorise new landlord</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend landlord account details</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and authorise new landlord accounts which have been authorised by a Team Leader</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend landlord account details which are then authorised by a Team Leader</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write-off HB/CTB overpayments</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

For those tasks that very large majorities of assessment staff perform there were no sub-group differences. However, there were differences for those tasks mentioned less frequently:

• Assessment staff in Welsh and Scottish authorities were most likely to create and authorise new landlord accounts (75 per cent and 61 per cent respectively), while those in English Metropolitan districts and London Boroughs were least likely to amend landlord details (17 per cent and 24 per cent respectively).

• On the other hand, assessment officers in English Metropolitan districts were also least likely to amend landlord account details which are then authorised by a team leader or manager (17 per cent).
• Low caseload authorities were more likely than those with a medium or high caseload to say that their assessment officers create and authorise new landlord accounts (65 per cent, 46 per cent and 31 per cent respectively). They were also more likely to amend landlord account details (65 per cent, 45 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).

**Figure 2.38** Which of the following apply to team leaders/managers (i.e. those immediately responsible for the day-to-day management of assessment staff) in your authority?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess and authorise payments for 1 or more HB/CTB claims each week</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out checks before a payment of HB is made to a customer above a set amount</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carry out checks before a payment of HB is made to a landlord above a set amount</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amend existing landlord account</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorise new landlord</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write off HB/CTB overpayments</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never assess or authorise payments for HB/CTB claims</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by **LA type**:

• Team leaders/managers in Welsh authorities are significantly more likely to write off HB/CTB overpayments than Scottish authorities, London Boroughs and English Metropolitan districts (75 per cent, 33 per cent, 41 per cent and 48 per cent respectively). They are also significantly more likely than London Boroughs to assess and authorise payments for one or more HB/CTB claims each week (75 per cent versus 47 per cent).

• Team leaders/managers in English Metropolitan districts are significantly less likely than those in English Unitary authorities, English districts, Scottish authorities and London Boroughs to say that they never assess or authorise payments for HB/CTB claims (four per cent, 19 per cent, 19 per cent, 22 per cent and 24 per cent respectively).
There were significant differences by caseload:

- Low caseload authorities are significantly more likely than medium and high caseload authorities to say that their team leaders/managers never assess or authorise payments for HB/CTB claims (27 per cent, 12 per cent and 17 per cent respectively).

- High caseload authorities are significantly less likely than medium caseload authorities to say that their team leaders/managers authorise new landlord accounts (45 per cent and 64 per cent respectively). They are also less likely than both low and medium caseload authorities to say that their team leaders authorise existing landlord account details (46 per cent, 60 per cent and 65 per cent respectively).

Figure 2.39 What is the maximum amount of HB/CTB overpayments that can be written off?

There were significant differences by LA type:

- The proportion of Scottish and Welsh authorities that were unable to answer this question was higher than average at 67 per cent.

- The proportion saying none differs by LA type from 78 per cent of Welsh authorities, 71 per cent of London Boroughs and 67 per cent of Scottish authorities to 37 per cent of English Unitary authorities, 40 per cent of English districts and 45 per cent of English Metropolitan districts.
• Average amounts written off also differ by LA type from £150 for London Boroughs to £1,991 for English Metropolitan districts. However, given the very high level of ‘don’t know’ answers and small base sizes, mean scores should be treated with some caution.

There were significant differences by caseload:

• It is however interesting to note that low caseload authorities are likely to write off a similar proportion of overpayments as high caseload authorities, but more than medium caseload authorities (averages of £1,612, £1,326 and £618 respectively).

Figure 2.40 Please state the amount above which a check is made before a payment of HB is made to a customer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caseload Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-250</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251-500</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001+</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that said their team leaders/managers write off HB/CTB overpayments (134).

There were significant differences by LA type:

• A lower proportion of LAs did not know the answer to this question than previously, with no Scottish and English Unitary authorities unable to answer.

• In addition, no Scottish or English Unitary authorities answered zero, meaning that they all specify an amount above which a check is made.

• Average amounts above which a check is made vary from £559 among Scottish authorities to £1,400 among London Boroughs.
2.5 Section E: Reporting change of circumstance

2.5.1 Introduction

DWP is committed to reducing claimant error. Failure to report changes in circumstances is an important cause of error. This section of the report focuses on what authorities are doing to encourage claimants to report changes in their circumstances, as well inform them of the ways this can be done. It also reports on the findings of a series of questions aimed at finding out about authorities’ use of the DWP risk lists sent by HBMS to select cases for review.

Figure 2.41 Please state the amount above which a check is made before a payment of HB is made to a landlord?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-250</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251-500</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-1,000</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,001+</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean score: 1,001

Base: All LAs that said their team leaders/managers carry out checks before a payment of HB is made to a customer above a set amount (160).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- No Scottish or Welsh authorities answered zero, meaning that they all specify an amount above which a check is made.
- Average amounts above which a check is made vary from £707 among English Metropolitan districts to £1,567 among London Boroughs.
**Figure 2.42** What does your authority do at the start of a claim to let claimants know that they need to tell the LA about any changes in their circumstances?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notification letter mentions it</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim form mentions it</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send/give written information sheet</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss it with claimant</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council website</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- Scottish authorities were significantly less likely than English Metropolitan authorities to discuss change of circumstances with claimants at the start of a claim. There were no other differences in terms of the findings by sub-groups.

It is interesting to highlight the answers that were given in the ‘Other’ category:

- Information leaflets (unspecified) 3%
- Sent change of circumstances form/leaflet 2%
- Posters/posters in reception 2%
- Leaflet with notification 2%
- All letters/documents contain information 2%
- Cheque/remittance slip 2%
- Information required letter states it 1%
- Others 5%
Figure 2.43  What does your authority do throughout the claim to let claimants know that they need to tell the LA about any changes in their circumstances?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notification letter mentions it</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss it with claimant at visits</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned at postal reviews</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council website</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss it with claimant at claim review</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss it with claimant when they report (another) change of circs</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment schedules mention it</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss it with claimant at telephone reviews</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send/give written information sheet</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss it with claimant at other time</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- Scottish and English Metropolitan districts were least likely to send/give written information (17 per cent and 13 per cent respectively), while London Boroughs were least likely to discuss it with the claimant at a claim review (29 per cent). Scottish authorities were also least likely to say that their payment schedules and Council web site mention change in circumstances (17 per cent and 44 per cent respectively). In addition, fewer than average Welsh authorities said that their Council web site mentions it (50 per cent).

It is interesting to highlight the answers that were given in the ‘Other’ category:

- Leaflets/information leaflets 2%
- Newsletters 2%
- All letters/documents 2%
- Change of circumstances form sent out with notification letter 1%
- Posters/notices in reception area 1%
- Others 4%
**Figure 2.44** How many times a year does your authority send/give a written information sheet?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three times</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four times</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five times +</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that give/send an information sheet (80).

Base sizes are small and therefore there are no significant differences by sub-groups. It is however, important to note that there were a fairly high proportion of don’t know answers across all LA types.

**Figure 2.45** Which of the following awareness raising activities do you think are the most effective in terms of increasing reporting of changes in circumstance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visits</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notification letters</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal reviews</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving information at time of claim</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with claimants when they report a change of circumstance</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General mail out to claimant</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment schedules to landlord</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone reviews</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment schedules to claimant</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General mail out to landlord</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mailshot reminders</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).
There were significant differences by LA type:

- London Boroughs were more likely than all other LA types to say that they think a general mail-out to landlords and mail-shot reminders are the most effective (47 per cent and 53 per cent respectively). They were also more likely than Welsh, Scottish and English Metropolitan districts to say that they think a general mail-out to claimants is most effective (47 per cent versus 17 per cent, 17 per cent and 17 per cent respectively).

- On the other hand, almost all English Metropolitan districts (96 per cent) said that they think visits are the most effective. There were no significant differences by caseload.

**Figure 2.46 How does your authority accept reports of changes in circumstance?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In person at the benefits office</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In person at another LA office</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet site</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- It is interesting that, with the exception of internet site (42 per cent), all Welsh authorities (100 per cent) said that they accept every other means of informing them about change of circumstances. English districts were more likely than Scottish and English Unitary authorities to accept reports of change of circumstances via their internet site (62 per cent, 28 per cent and 35 per cent respectively), while London Boroughs were less likely than all other LA types to accept them in person at a LA office other than benefits (47 per cent).
Thirteen per cent of authorities gave an answer under the ‘Other – specify’ category. These are broken down below:

- Visits/home visits 4%
- Registered Social Landlords 4%
- Through housing offices 2%
- Through other departments/agencies 2%
- VF scheme 2%

**Figure 2.47  Which of these methods to report changes in circumstance do you let claimants know they can use?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In person at the benefits office</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In person at another LA office</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet site</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- Significantly fewer London Boroughs inform claimants that they can use the internet to report changes in circumstance (18 per cent) English Metropolitan districts and English districts (48 per cent and 45 per cent respectively). In addition, a significantly high proportion of English Metropolitan districts tell claimants that they report changes of circumstance at a LA office other than benefits (96 per cent).
Ten per cent of authorities gave an answer under the ‘Other – specify’ category. These are broken down below:

- Visits/home visits: 2%
- Registered Social Landlords: 2%
- Through housing offices: 1%
- Through other departments/agencies: 1%

**Figure 2.48 Reports of changes of circumstances that LAs would like to accept (currently not accepted)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that do not currently accept this form of reporting (bases in brackets).

Due to the small base sizes, there were no significant difference by sub-groups.
Among the 30 authorities that do not currently accept changes of circumstance by telephone, 13 (43 per cent) would like to be able to do so. The reasons why they are not accepted in this way and what would allow their authority to be able to are shown above. However the base sizes are too small to allow sub-group analysis.
Among the 13 authorities that do not currently accept changes of circumstance by email, eight would like to be able to do so.
• Three out of 13 LAs do not accept change of circumstances by email because of the requirement for a signature and a further three mentioned authenticity issues.

• Three out of 13 said that nothing would allow their authority to accept change of circumstances by email; three said there would have to be a different approach to caller verification, one mentioned change in legislation and one said a relaxation in the signature requirement.

**Figure 2.51 Changes of circumstances by the internet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why does your LA not currently accept?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website not set up yet</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website is not interactive</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under review</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature required</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity issues</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to complete form on-line</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility unavailable</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What would allow your LA to accept?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of website</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-forms available</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced software</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxing of signature requirement</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already underway</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having technology underway</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different approach to verification</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that do not currently report changes of circumstances by the internet (122).
Among the 122 authorities that do not currently accept changes of circumstance by Internet, 75 per cent would like to be able to do so. The reasons why they are not accepted in this way and what would allow their authority to be able to are shown above. However the base sizes are too small to allow sub-group analysis.

**Figure 2.52** Does your authority use the DWP risk lists sent by HBMS to select cases for review?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, completely</th>
<th>Yes, use them partly</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- London Boroughs were most likely to say that they use the DWP risk lists completely (77 per cent), however the difference is not significant when compared with other types of authorities except Scottish authorities, where the difference is significant (44 per cent).

When the 12 authorities that do not use risk lists were asked why not, the main answers were as follows:

- Lists don’t accurately assess risk: 7 authorities
- Lists include too many recently reviewed cases: 6 authorities
- Risks missing 50 per cent target: 4 authorities
- Lists include too many cases under review: 2 authorities
- The lists aren’t clear enough to use: 1 authority
- Software: 1 authority
There were significant differences by LA type:

- It is interesting that London Boroughs and English districts were significantly less likely than other LA types to say that they split the list by geographical area (13 per cent and 21/5 respectively).

There were significant differences by caseload:

- Authorities with a low caseload were significantly less likely than those with a medium and large caseload to split by geographical area (14 per cent, 36 per cent and 38 per cent respectively) and those with a large caseload were significantly less likely than those with a low caseload to start at the top and work down as a team (45 per cent and 66 per cent respectively).

Eleven per cent of authorities gave an answer under the ‘Other – specify’ category. These are broken down below:

- Use high risk for visits 2%
- Software/system sorts it out 2%
- Prioritise high risk (unspecified) 2%
- Use low risk for postal reviews 1%
- Split by surname 1%
- Tenure type 1%
- Remove recently reviewed cases 1%
2.6 Section F: Working with Jobcentre Plus

2.6.1 Introduction

This section asked about liaison between LAs and their main associated Jobcentre Plus offices. Some of the questions asked about day-to-day contact between Jobcentre Plus and the authority’s processing officers and participating authorities were asked if they could check the views of processing officers before completing the questions in this section.

Figure 2.54 Thinking about management liaison with your main associated Jobcentre Plus office, how often do managers from the two organisations meet each year to discuss general local issues such as performance, transfer of information, communications, day-to-day liaison matters, discussing and agreeing the LA/Jobcentre Plus Service Level Agreement etc.?

There were no significant differences by sub-groups for this question.
There were significant differences by **LA type**:  
- Scottish authorities (89 per cent) and English Unitaries (89 per cent) were more likely to consider the arrangements their authority has in place for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are sufficient for their authority’s own purposes than were London Boroughs (64 per cent).

There were significant differences by **contracting out status**:  
- Higher numbers of authorities that have contracted out (90 per cent) considered the arrangements their authority has in place for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are sufficient for their authority’s own purposes than did those authorities that have not contracted out (80 per cent).

There were significant differences by **HB/CTB caseload**:  
- Slightly fewer (89 per cent) of those authorities with a low caseload than those authorities with a medium (98 per cent) or high (97 per cent) caseload said that when these meetings take place they are formally minuted and actions agreed.
Figure 2.56  Why do you consider that the arrangements that you have in place for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are insufficient for your purposes?

- Meetings too infrequent: 22%
- Lack of local focus: 20%
- Too much personnel change: 17%
- Poor communication: 17%
- Problems occurring after recent reorganisation: 15%
- They don’t attend meetings: 10%
- Backlog of work at Jobcentre Plus: 10%
- Unable to contact staff: 5%
- Other: 37%

Base: All LAs that consider their arrangements for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are not sufficient (41).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Figure 2.57  Thinking about staff liaison in particular, when your authority needs information on an individual benefit claim, perhaps because it is not available on the RAT (or its desktop replacement if that is now in place), how do you normally go about obtaining this information from Jobcentre Plus?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were significant differences by LA type and region:

- English Unitary authorities were less likely to use fax as their normal method for this activity (just 32 per cent) compared to English Metropolitan authorities of whom 61 per cent use fax as the normal method.

- Authorities in the East region were much more likely to use fax as their normal method for obtaining information on an individual benefit claim from Jobcentre Plus. Just over three-quarters (77 per cent) of them did so.
Figure 2.58  What action, if any, has your authority taken to set up appropriate liaison?

- Contacted them directly: 27%
- Set up/attended meetings with them: 20%
- Requested meetings which haven’t happened: 12%
- Requested a named contact: 10%
- Drawn up a service level agreement: 7%
- Other: 29%
- Nothing: 12%

Base: All LAs that consider their arrangements for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are not sufficient (41).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Key findings

Figure 2.59 Does your authority have direct dial telephone numbers for the relevant contacts in Jobcentre Plus?

There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- English Districts were least likely to have direct dial telephone numbers for relevant contact in Jobcentre Plus (72 per cent) whereas amongst London Boroughs 100 per cent had direct dial numbers.

There were significant differences by **contracting out status**:

- Contracted out authorities were much more likely (92 per cent) to have these direct dial numbers compared to not contracted out authorities (77 per cent).

There were significant differences by **HB/CTB caseload**:

- Authorities with a high caseload were much more likely (90 per cent) to have these direct dial numbers than authorities with a low caseload (70 per cent).

There were significant differences by **region**:

- The region least likely to have these direct dial numbers was the South East (61 per cent) and the region with the highest number of authorities with these numbers was London (100 per cent).

Base: All LAs that telephone about an individual benefit claim (234).
There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- All of the Welsh (100 per cent) authorities said they were able to fax information to a dedicated fax machine in Jobcentre Plus whereas just 70 per cent of English Unitaries could do so.

There were significant differences by **contracting out status**:

- All (100 per cent) of authorities that are contracted out said that they were able to fax to a dedicated fax in Jobcentre Plus compared to 82 per cent of those that were not contracted out.
Key findings

Figure 2.61  Why do you consider that the arrangements that you have in place for day-to-day liaison about individual benefit claims are insufficient for your purposes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone not answered</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No direct contact/line</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reorganisations result in out-of-date contact numbers</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delays in response</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to answer questions</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t contact local office</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of resources/personnel</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted times for contact</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backlog of work at Jobcentre Plus</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26% consider arrangements for day-to-day liaison not sufficient

Base: All LAs that consider their arrangements for day-to-day liaison about benefit claims are not sufficient (66).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Unitaries were more likely (39 per cent) to say that their arrangements for individual benefits claims were insufficient than were English Metropolitans (17 per cent).

There were significant differences by region:

- Around half (51 per cent) of authorities in the South East said their arrangements for day-to-day liaison about individual benefit claims were insufficient compared to just six per cent of North Eastern and 11 per cent of North Western authorities that said the same.
Figure 2.62  What action, if any, have you taken to set up appropriate liaison?

Raised the issue at meetings 27%
Arranged a contact point/direct line 14%
Arranged for email contact 11%
Raised issue with senior management 8%
Contacted them directly 6%
Arranged for replies to be faxed 5%
Raised issue with liaison 3%
Other 26%
Nothing 15%

Base: All LAs that consider their arrangements for day-to-day liaison about benefit claims are not sufficient (66).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.

Figure 2.63  Is there a route for your authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, your local Joint Regional Board?

85% of LAs are aware of Joint Regional Boards

Base: All LAs that are aware of Joint Regional Boards (219).
There were significant differences by **LA type**:

- Awareness of Joint Regional Boards was highest in Scotland where 100 per cent claimed to be aware of their existence and lower in Wales (67 per cent) and the London Boroughs (76 per cent).

- Scottish (89 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (95 per cent) were more likely to say there is a route for their authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, their local Joint Regional Board compared to just 62 per cent of London Boroughs who said the same.

There were significant differences by **region**:

- Awareness of Joint Regional Boards was highest in Scotland (100 per cent) and the North West (100 per cent) and lowest in the South East (66 per cent) and Wales (67 per cent).

- All (100 per cent) of authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside said that there is a route for their authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, their local Joint Regional Board compared to just 62 per cent of those in London who were the least likely to say this route existed for them.

**Figure 2.64**  In your opinion, how could Joint Regional Boards be improved to further develop relations between Jobcentre Plus and LAs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get more agencies to attend/be more inclusive</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More regular meetings</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More local focus/meetings</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulate minutes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More publicity</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage/assist joint working arrangements</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing/no improvements</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/no answer</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that were aware of Joint Regional Boards (219).
There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question but the range of other suggestions for improvements was so wide ranging that we have listed them below here.

- Less focus on fraud 4%
- Better communication/feedback 4%
- Introduce benchmarks/monitor performance levels 2%
- Joint Regional Boards irrelevant/a waste of time 2%
- More focused/structured/themed meetings 1%
- Involve lower level staff/those with practical/day-to-day experience 1%
- Greater autonomy/flexibility for local managers 1%

**Figure 2.65** Is there a route for your authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, your local Joint Operational Board?

- There were significant differences by **LA type**:
- All (100 per cent) of the Scottish authorities were aware of the existence of Joint Operation Boards whereas awareness was significantly lower amongst Welsh (58 per cent) and London Boroughs (59 per cent).
There were significant differences by region:

- All (100 per cent) of authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside said that there is a route for their authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, their local Joint Operational Board whereas the existence of such routes was significantly lower in the East Midlands (73 per cent) and the East (78 per cent).

**Figure 2.66 In your opinion, how could Joint Operational Boards be improved to further develop relations between Jobcentre Plus and LAs?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get more agencies to attend</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More publicity</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More regular meetings</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More local focus/meetings</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage more joint working arrangements</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Regional Boards irrelevant</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing/no improvements</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know/no answer</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that were aware of Joint Regional Boards (201).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question but the range of other suggestions for improvements was so wide ranging that we have listed them below here.

- Involve lower level staff/those with practical/day-to-day experience 2%
- Better communication/feedback 2%
- Circulate minutes/issues raised in meetings 1%
- Less focus on fraud 1%
- More focused/structured/themed meetings 1%
- Greater autonomy/flexibility for local managers 1%
- Introduce benchmarks/monitor performance levels 1%
- Fewer personnel changes 1%
- Others (miscellaneous) 18%
2.7 Section G: Contracting out and Local Authority partnerships

2.7.1 Introduction

This section asked about the extent of LAs’ contracting out activities in terms of length of duration and areas covered. It also asked about authorities working in partnership with other LAs and if they currently did so to what degree and attitudes towards working in such partnerships.

Figure 2.67 Start date of contractor’s involvement in HB/CTB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1998</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that are involved with a contractor (41).

There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Metropolitan authorities were more likely to have a contractor involved in any area of HB/CTB (39 per cent).

- Welsh and Scottish authorities were notable in that none (zero per cent for both) of either had a contractor involved in any area of HB/CTB.

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- Authorities with high caseloads (27 per cent) were more likely to have a contractor involved in any area of HB/CTB than those with low (12 per cent) or medium (11 per cent) caseloads.
There were significant differences by region:

- The region with the highest likelihood of having a contractor involved in any area of HB/CTB was Yorkshire and Humberside (38 per cent).

The names of the contractors used by this group were Capita (mentioned by 13), Liberata (eight), HBS (four) and others.

**Figure 2.68  Working in partnership with other LAs: how many?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Partnerships</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean score: 6.5

Base: All LAs that work in partnership with other authorities (112).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Figure 2.69  Which of the following areas of Housing Benefit are contracted out?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of it</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call centres</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontline services</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that are involved with a contractor (41).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.

Figure 2.70  How likely is your authority to contract out any HB services in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly likely</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very likely</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all likely</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All likely</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All unlikely</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that are not involved with a contractor (215).
There were significant differences by region:

- Authorities in the East (92 per cent) and the South West (91 per cent) had higher than average numbers saying that it was unlikely that they would be contracting out any HB services in the future.
- Authorities in the North East (14 per cent) and North West (20 per cent) were the most likely to say they would be contracting out any HB services in the future.

Figure 2.71  Does your authority work in partnership with any other LAs?

![Pie chart showing 56% no and 44% yes. Base: All (253).]

There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Districts (53 per cent) were much more likely to work in partnership with other authorities than Scottish authorities (17 per cent) or London Boroughs (12 per cent).

There were significant differences by HB/CTB caseload:

- Authorities with a low caseload were much more likely to work in partnership with others (51 per cent) than those with a high caseload (31 per cent).

There were significant differences by region:

- Authorities from the North West (61 per cent) and the East Midlands (59 per cent) were the most likely to work in partnership with other authorities.
- Authorities from Scotland (17 per cent) and London (12 per cent) were least likely to work in partnership with other authorities.
There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.

There were a number of additional less frequently mentioned areas of HB covered by this/these partnerships which are listed below:

- Centralised benefit processing 6%
- Claim/application forms 5%
- Leaflets 4%
- Performance management 2%
- Same neighbourhood offices 2%
There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Metropolitan authorities and English Districts were the most likely to say that there was some likelihood of their authority working in partnership with other authorities (with or without the private sector/a contractor) in the future (64 per cent and 56 per cent respectively saying they were either very or fairly likely to do so).

- Welsh (13 per cent) and Scottish (33 per cent) authorities were significantly less likely to say that they would be working in partnership with another LA in the future.

Figure 2.73  How likely is your authority to work in partnership with another LA, with or without the private sector/a contractor, in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likelihood</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very likely</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly likely</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very likely</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all likely</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All likely</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All unlikely</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that do not work in partnership with a contractor (144).
### Figure 2.74 What if any would you say are the legislative or other barriers to working in partnership with another LA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diff IT/comp systs/software</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff internal procedures</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political diffs/will/politics</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial/budgeting diffs</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality/diff areas/local knowledge</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPA/security issues</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff priorities/initiatives/cultures/demographics</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance/resistance from staff/management</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self interest/preservation/loss of identity/control</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diff pay scales/grades/job structures</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that work in partnership with other authorities (112).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.

### Figure 2.75 What would you say are the benefits, if any, of working in partnership with another LA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing ideas/knowledge/expertise/networking</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost cutting/saving money/shared costs/value for money</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared resources/staff/skills</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing good/best practice</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economies of scale</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved efficiency/time saving/reduced</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved consistency/decision making</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved service/customer service/performance</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that work in partnership with other authorities (112).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
2.8 Section H: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

2.8.1 Introduction

BFI is committed to improving customer service. The organisation has recently achieved Charter Mark standard for excellent customer service and are monitoring customer satisfaction to ensure that these standards are maintained and where possible, improved upon.

Figure 2.76 Has your LA had any contact with the BFI in the last 12 months? If YES, what type of contact has your LA had in the last 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BFI website</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA – Single tier</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDT</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI speaker</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone call</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused inspection</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibition stand at Institute of Revenues,</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rating and Valuation (IRRV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Practice Review</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiries to helpline</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full inspection</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh improvement programme</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were significant differences by LA type:

- English Metropolitan and London Boroughs were the most likely to have had contact with BFI in the last 12 months (100 per cent each had had contact).
- Scottish and English District authorities were the least likely to have had contact with BFI in the last 12 months (44 per cent and 49 per cent respectively had had contact).
There were significant differences by **contracting out status**:

- Authorities that have contracted out were more likely (80 per cent) to have had contact with BFI in the last 12 months than those that have not contracted out (60 per cent).

- Authorities that have contracted out were more likely (55 per cent) to have had a CPA – Single Tier than authorities that have not contracted out (30 per cent).

- Authorities that have not contracted out were more likely (37 per cent) to have had contact with a PDT than those that have not contracted out (15 per cent).

There were significant differences by **HB/CTB caseload**:

- Authorities with a high caseload were more likely (93 per cent) to have had contact with BFI in the last 12 months than those with a medium caseload (56 per cent).

**Figure 2.77 Overall, how useful did you find the......?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>All useful</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>All not useful</th>
<th>Not yet received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDT (53)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh improvement programme (1)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA – Single tier (57)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Practice Review (8)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused inspection (32)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full inspection (4)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have had contact (bases in brackets).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
### Figure 2.78 Overall, how professional would you rate the staff?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>All professional</th>
<th>All not professional</th>
<th>Don’t know/not stated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BFI website (61)</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail (32)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone call (35)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiries helpline (5)</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI speaker (47)</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand at IRRV Conference (26)</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDT (53)</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh improvement programme (1)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA – Single tier (57)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Practice Review (8)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused inspection (32)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full inspection (4)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have had contact (bases in brackets).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Figure 2.79  Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service you received from BFI?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>All satisfied</th>
<th>All dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BFI website (61)</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail (32)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone call (35)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiries helpline (5)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI speaker (47)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand at IRRV Conference (26)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDT (53)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh improvement programme (1)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA – Single tier (57)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Practice Review (8)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused inspection (32)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full inspection (4)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All LAs that have had contact (bases in brackets).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Figure 2.80  How important are each of the following aspects of BFI’s service to your LA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>All satisfied</th>
<th>All dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BFI website (61)</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail (32)</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone call (35)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiries helpline (5)</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI speaker (47)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stand at IRRV Conference (26)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDT (53)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh improvement programme (1)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA – Single tier (57)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Practice Review (8)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td></td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused inspection (32)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full inspection (4)</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (257).

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Figure 2.81  How important do you think it is that BFI undertake inspections on DWP agencies, e.g. Jobcentre Plus, Pensions Service?

There were no significant differences by sub-group for this question.
Appendix A
The survey

A.1 Methodology

At Wave 9 of the LA Omnibus Survey, respondents were given a choice of completing the questionnaire on the telephone, as a self-completion questionnaire on paper, or as a self-completion questionnaire on the Internet. This methodology achieved a relatively good response rate of 71 per cent and, therefore, has been used from Wave 9 onwards. The response rate achieved at Wave 13 was 63 per cent (see 10.7 below for more detail).

A.2 Sample

Using the updated Contacts database from Wave 12, the local authority manager with responsibility for the most areas (out of Rent Rebate, Rent Allowance, Council Tax Benefit (CTB), Overpayment Recovery and Benefit Fraud) was identified. This manager then became our contact for Wave 13.

This manager was sent a letter on Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) headed paper which set out the aims of the survey, explained the nature of the input required and advised the recipient that they have a choice of how to complete the questionnaire. The letter was signed by a DWP signatory and included contact names at both GfK NOP and DWP for queries, or if the respondent wanted to opt out of the survey.

The advance letter included details of each methodology – web-based questionnaire, paper questionnaire and telephone interview. In addition, each respondent was sent an email containing a link to the survey site. Each respondent was assigned a user id/password, which had to be entered at the start of the survey. This enabled GfK NOP to keep track of interviews and ensure no one completed a survey more than once. Including an ID also allowed respondents to stop and restart an interview at any point and meant that different managers could easily access and complete the sections relevant to them.
Respondents were also sent a copy of the questionnaire so that they could prepare their answers in advance, or if they chose to, use it to fill-in their answers and return it to GfK NOP in the reply-paid envelope provided. It emphasised that, if necessary, they should consult other managers and staff for their input into the questionnaire. Telephone interviewers were instructed to check that the respondent had completed the questionnaire sent in advance and that it was readily available for reference during the interview.

A copy of the questionnaire and advance letter is shown in Appendix B.

A.3 Questionnaire design

Both Department officials and Local Authorities (LAs) managers were consulted about the content of the questionnaire in order to gain as much useful information as possible from the research.

The first stage of questionnaire development involved a meeting between GfK NOP and relevant officials within the Department to discuss current issues and policy initiatives and establish the question areas that they would like to be included in the questionnaire.

Once the questionnaire had been through several drafts, face-to-face meetings were set up with five LA managers in order to test the understanding and comprehension of the questions, as well as give managers an opportunity to raise any issues that were particularly important and relevant to them at the time. These meetings were structured around the draft questionnaire but the structure of the session was kept fluid enough to allow managers to raise new issues and enlarge on existing subjects as they wished.

The comments of these managers were reviewed with the relevant officials at DWP and the questionnaire was amended to take on board their views. The questionnaire was then piloted to test the wording and coverage of the draft document as well as the length of the questionnaire (17-25 May 2006). The questionnaire was set up on the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system and tested on a total of 12 LA managers. At this stage, the questionnaire was piloted only with respondents on the telephone and not on the web and self-completion.

As for the main stage of fieldwork, each pilot respondent was sent an advance letter and questionnaire. The GfK NOP executive team and a representative from DWP briefed a small team of interviewers. The briefing covered the purpose of the survey and explanations of any particular questionnaire points, as well as allowing time for practice on the questionnaire by means of dummy interviewing. A debrief was held at the end of the pilot interviewing which involved interviewers talking through their experiences in carrying out the pilot work and highlighting any areas of confusion or ambiguity they had observed.
A.4 Fieldwork

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

Around two and a half weeks after authorities had been sent the advance letter and questionnaire (just one week after the official start date of the survey of 21 June) GfK NOP sent each authority an email to check that they had received the questionnaire and asking them to complete it as soon as possible before 28 July 2006. A week later, interviewers were provided with a list of all the authorities that had not yet completed the questionnaire and were asked to telephone them to check that they had received the questionnaire and establish how they intended completing the questionnaire – telephone, web or paper. Respondents choosing to undertake the survey on the telephone were then either interviewed or an appointment for another more convenient time was set up. Those selecting to complete the questionnaire on paper or on the web were asked to complete it as soon as possible before 28 July 2006. Interviewers were then instructed to ‘telephone chase’ those respondents who did not return their completed questionnaire within the following ten days or so and ask them to complete it as soon as possible.

All telephone interviewing was conducted using CATI at GfK NOP’s Wimbledon Telephone Interviewing Centre. Given the fact that this was a census of all local authorities and that housing benefit managers are difficult to get hold of due to workload and turnover of staff, interviewers were not given a maximum number of call backs. Instead, in order to maximise the response rate across the country as a whole, they were asked to adopt a flexible approach in terms of call-backs and to liaise closely with head office throughout the fieldwork period.

Our specialist Web department within GfK NOP developed the web-based questionnaire. It was written in mrInterview, software supplied by SPSS and hosted on the GfK NOP facility. Both the web and paper questionnaires were designed to be professional looking and straightforward to complete.

Interviewers were required to provide weekly progress figures that were used to identify response difficulties during fieldwork. Unobtainable numbers, no answers, wrong numbers etc. were all investigated immediately.

By the end of the fieldwork we had achieved interviews with a total of 257 local authority managers, representing a response rate of 63 per cent. This is a slightly lower response rate than was achieved at Wave 12, even though fieldwork was extended until 18 August. This may be due to the fact that the end of fieldwork coincides with the holiday period. The impact of this response rate on the statistical reliability of the data is shown below. This breaks down as 148 web-based questionnaires, 90 paper questionnaires and 19 telephone interviews. Comparing this with Wave 12, there has been a further increase in the proportion of authorities
completing the questionnaire on the web (49 per cent chose to complete it on the web at Wave 12, compared with 58 per cent at Wave 13).

A.5 Interpretation of the data

Data used for the analysis is derived from three sources: the Contacts Database, DWP and the interview itself. The data was analysed by a number of different variables as shown below:

Table A.1 Data analysis variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LA type</th>
<th>Welsh, Scottish, English Unitary, English Metropolitan, English District, London Borough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contracting-out status</td>
<td>Contracted out, Not contracted out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HB/CTB caseload</td>
<td>Low (up to 10,000 cases), Medium (10,001-20,000 cases), High (20,001+ cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Scotland, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, North West, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South East, South West, London, Wales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information on LA type, HB/CTB caseload, and region was provided as part of the Contacts Database, while Contracting-out Status was asked as part of the interview.

The following points should be noted when using this report:

- a sample, not the entire ‘population’ of LA Housing Benefit (HB) managers has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. Where bases are low, care should be taken when interpreting the data;
- where percentages do not add up to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of ‘don’t know’ or ‘other’ categories, or multiple answers;
- throughout the report, an asterisk indicates a value of less than 0.5 per cent but not zero, and ‘0’ denotes no observation in that cell.

A.6 Statistical reliability

It should be remembered that a sample, not the entire population, of HB managers was interviewed. We cannot, therefore, be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the ‘true’ values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the ‘true’ values from knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95 per cent – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.
However, given that this sample comprises 63 per cent of the total population, the level of statistical reliability is slightly higher than if the sample had come from a larger population. On this basis, responses to the questionnaire provide data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 3.7 percentage points at the 95 per cent level. In practice this means that where 50 per cent give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the ‘true’ value will fall within the range of plus or minus 3.7 per cent from the sample result. The table below shows the sampling error for the whole sample and key sub-groups across a range of parameters.

**Table A.2 Wave 13 sampling error**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>10% or 90%</th>
<th>30% or 70%</th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LA type:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English District</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A.7 Response rates**

As mentioned earlier a total of 257 interviews were conducted with LA managers, which represents a response rate of 63 per cent. However, as Table A.3 shows, response rate varies by LA type, from 66 per cent of English districts and 65 per cent of English Unitary authorities to just 52 per cent of London Boroughs.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>London</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
<th>Wales</th>
<th>English Districts</th>
<th>Unitary</th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: Mainstage completes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone: Pilot completes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web: completes</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper: completes</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completes – total</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft call backs</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will complete paper questionnaire</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will complete on web</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer/ engaged</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A.8 Sample profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A.4 Sample profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LA type:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contracting Out Status:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracted out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not contracted out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HB/CTB caseload:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decentralisation status:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humberside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
The questionnaire
Local Authority Omnibus 2006 (Wave 13)

Thank you for conducting Wave 13 of the Survey. As mentioned in the enclosed letter, you have the choice of completing the Survey on the Internet, the telephone or on paper. Please read the instructions below before you start:

**Self-completion questionnaire on the Internet:** If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on the internet, you may access it anytime from 21 June to 28 July 2006. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: [http://www.surveys.com/lao13](http://www.surveys.com/lao13)

This method is quite simple and you will be automatically routed through the questionnaire as you answer each question. It allows you to enter your site any number of times, saving your details whenever you exit, allowing you to complete the questionnaire at your own pace and convenience. However, please note that once you have input answers into the final section of the questionnaire, you will be unable to re-start again and your responses will be sent directly to GFK NOP Research.

For each section you will be asked for your User ID. Please copy this carefully from the top of the letter or this questionnaire. You, or your colleagues, can access the questionnaire more than once using this User ID until you have completed it. It is possible for more than one person to be in the questionnaire at a time and the questionnaire is set up so that if you need a colleague to complete a section you can send them the link for it in an email. All information is password protected and no one other than the GFK NOP team will be able to access your site or see your personal entries. Please complete the questionnaire by 28 July.

**Telephone Interview:** If you choose to conduct a telephone interview, then please use this questionnaire to prepare your answers in advance of the interview. By doing this, you should find that the interview itself will take no longer than 20-25 minutes. You will receive a call from a GFK NOP interviewer some time between and 21 June and 28 July.

**Self-completion questionnaire on paper:** If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on paper and post it back in the pre-paid envelope enclosed, please follow the instructions below and return it as soon as possible – by 28 July at the latest.

- Most questions can be answered simply by putting one (or more) tick(s) in the box(es) next to the answer(s) which applies to your local authority.
- Sometimes you are invited to write in your answer in your own words.
- If you are unable to answer a particular question, please tick the ‘don’t know’ box.
- Sometimes you are asked to write in a number. Please use leading zeros where necessary.
- Normally, after answering each question, you go on to the next one, UNLESS a box you have ticked has an instruction to SKIP to another question.
- Please ensure that you check and amend the contact information at the back of the questionnaire (Section I).
- When you have finished, please POST THE QUESTIONNAIRE to us as soon as possible in the PRE-PAID ENVELOPE provided.
Section A: Performance Standards Fund

It is now more than three years since DWP first started making awards from the HB/CTB Performance Standards Fund to help local authorities make improvements in their benefits’ administration. Funding has been awarded for a wide range of projects including the recruitment and training of new staff, better training, new IT systems, better ways of working and a number of National Products.

The majority of local authorities have now benefited either as a lead authority or indirectly as a partner or through the roll out of national products. As part of the reporting process local authorities have given us immediate feedback, through progress reports, on improvements achieved with the funding. The purpose of this survey is to find out which projects have had the most impact on performance, whether improvements in performance have been sustained and provide feedback on projects which may not have had an impact at the time your progress reports were submitted. The information you provide will be used for further evaluation of the fund’s effectiveness and the development of best practice.

Please answer these questions if you have benefited from funding from the performance standards fund. Do not answer the questions if you have had funding for a National Product only. You should enter details for all your performance standard funded projects, except those for National Products. If you have had more than one award please tick all the relevant categories.
A1 Has your local authority received funding from the Performance Standards Fund?

Yes ☐ ☐ Answer A2
No ☐ ☐ Go to A11

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT A1

A2 Thinking about projects funded by the Performance Standards fund. How many of these projects have been completed and how many are not completed? By ‘completed’ we mean that you are seeing the benefits of a project, eg. an IT system has been implemented, a member of staff is fully trained or a trainer is in place.

WRITE IN BELOW

a) Completed ☐ ☐
Don’t know ☐

b) Not completed ☐ ☐
Don’t know ☐

ANSWER IF YOUR AUTHORITY HAS COMPLETED AT LEAST ONE PROJECT AT A2. IF NONE OF YOUR PROJECTS ARE COMPLETED, GO TO A9. IF YOU DON’T KNOW HOW MANY ARE COMPLETED OR NOT COMPLETED, GO TO A10a

A3 From the following list, how would you describe the COMPLETED projects? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

(a) Recruitment/training of new processing staff ☐
(b) Customer service - new staff or process ☐
(c) Introduction of more flexible ways of working ☐
(d) Recruitment of training officer(s) ☐
(e) Provision of technical benefits training ☐
(f) Provision of management training ☐
(g) Call centres and telephone systems ☐
(h) Increasing overpayment recovery ☐
(i) Quality control, management assurance etc ☐
(j) Business process improvements or re-engineering ☐
(k) Provision of peer group support ☐
(l) Prevention of court action for rent arrears ☐
(m) Enhanced data cleansing ☐
(n) Replacement HB/CTB processing systems ☐
(o) Introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow system ☐
(p) Other (please specify) ☐

…………………………………………
Don’t know ☐
**ANSWER FOR EACH TYPE OF PROJECT MENTIONED AT A3**

**A4** Overall how much of an impact did ............. (TYPES OF PROJECT/S MENTIONED AT A3) have on your authority’s performance? PLEASE ANSWER FOR EACH TYPE OF PROJECT MENTIONED AT A3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very positive impact</th>
<th>Fairly positive impact</th>
<th>Neither positive or negative impact</th>
<th>Fairly negative impact</th>
<th>Very negative impact</th>
<th>Don’t know/no opinion</th>
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<td>(a) Recruitment/training of new processing staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>(b) Customer service – new staff or process</td>
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<td>(c) Introduction of more flexible ways of working</td>
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<td>(d) Recruitment of training officer(s)</td>
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<td>(e) Provision of technical benefits training</td>
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<td>(f) Provision of management training</td>
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<td>(g) Call centres and telephone systems</td>
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<td>(h) Increasing overpayment recovery</td>
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<td>(j) Business process improvements or re-engineering</td>
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<td>(k) Provision of peer group support</td>
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<td>(l) Prevention of court action for rent arrears</td>
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<td>(n) Replacement HB/CTB processing systems</td>
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<td>(o) Introduction or replacement of DIP/workflow system</td>
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<td>(p) Others (please specify)</td>
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</table>

…………………………
ANSWER IF YOUR AUTHORITY HAS COMPLETED AT LEAST ONE PROJECT AT A2
A5 Did your authority use the Performance Standards Fund to recruit more staff?
   Yes ☐ Answer A6a
   No ☐ Go to A7

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT A5. OTHERS GO TO A7
A6a How many staff did you have working on benefits administration in 2002?
WRITE IN BELOW

Don’t know ☐

A6b How many staff did you recruit using Performance Standards Fund funding?
WRITE IN BELOW

Don’t know ☐

A6c How many staff do you currently have working on benefits administration? Do not include temporary agency staff you used during the implementation period of your IT projects. WRITE IN BELOW

Don’t know ☐

A6d How many staff recruited with Performance Standards Fund funding are no longer working in benefits administration in your local authority for the following reasons? PLEASE WRITE IN FOR ALL THAT APPLY (FOR NONE PLEASE WRITE “00”)

Left for another authority:
Benefits department ☐
Another department ☐
Left to join an agency/private contractor ☐
Performance unsatisfactory ☐
Promoted within this authority ☐
Contract ended when funding ran out ☐
Other (please specify)

……………………………………………………

…………………………………………………...
### A7
Thinking again just about the completed project/s, overall how much of an impact on performance did they have on each of the following? PLEASE TICK ONE BOX IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Very positive impact</th>
<th>Fairly positive impact</th>
<th>Neither positive or negative impact</th>
<th>Fairly negative impact</th>
<th>Very negative impact</th>
<th>Don’t know/no opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New claims processing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change of circumstances processing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overpayment recovery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### A8
Thinking again just about completed project/s, would you say that there have been any benefits/spin-offs that have not been covered in previous questions. PLEASE WRITE IN BELOW

----------------------------------------------------------------------
----------------------------------------------------------------------

NOW GO TO A10a

### A9
Why are some of your projects not completed? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Corporate priorities
- Protracted tendering exercise
- Implementation of new computer system
- Failure to recruit necessary staff to deliver the project/s
- Under/over estimate of funding requirement
- No particular reason/still in progress
- Other (please specify)
Appendices – The questionnaire

ANSWER IF YOUR AUTHORITY HAS RECEIVED FUNDING FROM THE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FUND (‘YES’ AT A1)

A10a Have you worked with another LA, or group of LAs, on PSF funded projects?
   Yes □ Answer A10b
   No □ Go to Section B

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT A10a

A10b Overall, how would you describe working with another LA, or group of LAs, on PSF funded projects? TICK ONE ONLY
   A positive experience □
   A negative experience □
   Neither a positive or negative experience □

   NOW GO TO SECTION B

ANSWER IF YOUR AUTHORITY HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY FUNDING FROM THE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FUND (‘NO’ AT A1)

A11 Why has your local authority not received any funding from the Performance Standards Fund? PLEASE TICK ALL THAT APPLY

   Authority is a better performer and as such did not qualify □
   Authority did qualify but did not need PSF funding □
   Did not have the capacity and resource to complete application form and business case needed to apply for funding □
   Couldn’t secure matched funding □
   Couldn’t identify areas for improvement □
   Application was unsuccessful □
   Did not know the Fund existed □
   Other (please specify) □

   ……………………………………………………………………………………………
   Don’t know □
Section B: Claim Forms and Rapid Reclaim

This section asks questions about what forms LAs use, so that we can check that the new variations on the main HCTB1 claim form are being used in the field. We further want to consider if the introduction of the range has impacted on the LAs own design of forms and whether they have also increased the range of forms they have available to different client groups. Finally we want to consider if LAs have identified any other areas where they have developed forms which we should consider for future development.

B1 Which of the following does your authority use/accept? TICK ALL THAT APPLY
- HCTB1
- HCTB1 (PC) and supplementary forms
- HCTB1 (PCA) and supplementary forms
- HBRR1

B2 Is your authority’s main HB/CTB form ………………? TICK ONE ONLY
- Based on the HCTB1 design
- Based on the BFI model claim form
- Designed by LA
- Other (please specify)

……………………………………………
Don’t know

B3 Does your authority issue any of the following types of HB/CTB claim forms, or any other forms not mentioned on the list below? TICK ALL THAT APPLY
- Based on the HCB1(PC)
- The HCTB1 (PCA)
- Based on HCTB1(PCA)
- Based on the HBRR1
- Shortened claim form for Hostel Dwellers
- Other (please specify)

……………………………………………
Don’t know

Rapid Reclaim

ALL ANSWER

B4 Does your authority have a different process for rapid reclaim?
- Yes
- No
On average, how many HBRR1 claims are received per week? WRITE IN NUMBER BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

Don’t know

How many days on average does it take to process a HBRR1 claim if there are no problems with the case (e.g. there are no changes of circumstances, IS and/or JSA has been re-instated)? WRITE IN NUMBER BELOW. PLEASE GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE

Don’t know

Is any priority given to HBRR1 claim forms above other HB/CTB claim forms within your authority?
Yes
No

In your authority, what are the most common reasons why a HBRR1 claim could be delayed? TICK THE 2 OR 3 MOST COMMON REASONS

Claimant not entitled to IS/JSA
Previous entitlement ended more than 12 weeks ago
Claimant reports a change of circumstance
Time taken to check entitlement to primary benefit (IS, JSA)
Delays in Jobcentre Plus reinstating primary benefit
Other (please specify)

Don’t know

What proportion of all HBRR1 claims are delayed? WRITE IN PERCENTAGE BELOW

Don’t know

In your authority, can/do you process JSA (Contributory) re-claims as Rapid Reclaims (ie process them without completing a full claim form)?
Yes
No
Don’t know
ALL ANSWER

Section C: Cheque Cashing

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for private rented sector tenants is currently being tested by 18 local authorities, with an aim to roll it out nationally in 2008. Under LHA, payments will be normally made to tenants. We asked questions about ACT at Wave 11 of the LA Omnibus Survey and authorities largely said that they have the facility already or intend to have it in the future. At this Wave of the Survey, we are interested in getting information on those tenants who do not have access to bank accounts and have to rely on LAs to cash cheque payments free of charge. The following questions will help us to establish the nature and extent of cheque cashing facilities.

C1 Does your authority have a mechanism whereby residents can get cheques cashed free of charge (this may be in another part of the authority)?

Yes □ Answer C2
No □ Go to C8

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT C1

C2 Does your authority provide this free encashment facility itself or is it provided through an agreement with a bank or another source? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

At local authority □
Agreement with a bank □
Agreement with other source (please specify) □

Don’t know □

C3 Is there a limit on the number of times people can use this free encashment facility? IF YES: What is this limit?

Yes (please tick box and write in the limit below) □

………………times

No □
Don’t know □

C4 Does your authority publicise this free encashment facility?

Yes □ Answer C5
No □ Go to C6
Don’t know □ Go to C6
Appendices – The questionnaire

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT C4
C5 How does your authority publicise this facility? TICK ALL THAT APPLY
  Information displayed at HB offices
  Within the LA
  Direct information to claimants
  Welfare organisations
  Service Provider/banks
  Other (please specify)
  ........................................................................
  Don’t know

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT C1
C6 How likely is your authority to continue providing this free encashment facility? TICK ONE ONLY
  Very likely
  Fairly likely
  Not very likely
  Not at all likely
  Don’t know
  ........................................................................
  Go to Section D
  Answer C7

ANSWER IF ‘FAIRLY/NOT VERY/NOT AT ALL LIKELY’ AT C6
C7 Why is your authority only fairly/not very/not at all likely to continue providing this service? WRITE IN
  ........................................................................
  ........................................................................
  ........................................................................
  ........................................................................
  ........................................................................
  NOW GO TO SECTION D

ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT C1
C8 Does your authority have any plans to introduce a free encashment facility, either provided by the LA or through an agreement with a bank or another source?
  Yes
  Yes, planning to introduce if LHA is rolled out
  No
  Don’t know
  ........................................................................
  Go to C10
  Go to Section D
  Answer C9
  Go to Section D
ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT C8

C9 Why is your authority not willing to introduce a free encashment facility? WRITE IN

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT C8

C10 When is the free encashment facility likely to be introduced? WRITE IN MONTH AND YEAR

Month ………………..

Year ………………………..

Don’t know □

ALL ANSWER

Section D: Organisation Models

This section of the questionnaire aims to develop our understanding of the organisational structure of local authorities and the impact this may have on the delivery of Housing Benefit.

D1 Previous research has suggested that local authorities organise the assessment of new claims and changes of circumstances in two basic ways (shown below). Please tick the one that comes closest to describing how your authority organises this work. If you feel that neither adequately describes how your authority organises this work, then please describe what your authority does under ‘Other’ below.

Individual assessors deal with new claims or change of circumstance □

Work is split between Pre-assessors (who check whether all the relevant evidence is with the claim and ask claimants for any missing information/evidence) and assessors (who do the detailed checking and assess the claim) □

Other (please specify)

………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………

Don’t know □
D2  How does your authority manage its HB/CTB caseload? TICK ONE BELOW

Assessment officers work on any HB/CTB claim received
Assessment officers work on HB/CTB claims based on a particular geographical area
Assessment officers work on HB/CTB claims based on the customer’s name
Assessment officers work on HB/CTB claims based on tenure
Assessment officers work on HB/CTB claims based on whether the claimant is of pension age or working age
Other (please specify)

............................................................

Don’t know

D3  How often does your authority adopt the following controls? TICK ONE BOX PER ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control</th>
<th>In all cases</th>
<th>In most cases</th>
<th>In some cases</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Visit the business address of all landlords or associations before a direct payment of HB is made</td>
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<tr>
<td>(b) Make annual visits to all third parties in receipt of direct payments of HB either by cheque or direct payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>(c) Reconcile HB/CTB claims with their corresponding paper or electronic records</td>
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<tr>
<td>(d) Ensure that assessment officer’s caseloads are rotated at least annually</td>
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<tr>
<td>(e) Monitor any activity on benefit that takes place outside of normal office hours</td>
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</table>
D4 In your authority you may have a number of staff involved in the assessment of claims for HB/CTB. We are looking at the day-to-day roles and responsibilities of these officers. Which of the following do your assessment staff do? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Input information received on HB/CTB application forms to a benefits computer system
- Authorise HB/CTB payments where the customer is the recipient
- Authorise HB/CTB payments where the landlord is the recipient
- Amend claim/payment details following notification of a change of circumstance
- Create and authorise new landlord accounts
- Create and authorise new landlord accounts which have been authorised by a team leader or manager
- Write-off HB/CTB overpayments
- Amend landlord account details
- Amend landlord account details which are then authorised by a team leader or manager

D5 In your authority you may have various management tiers. We are looking at the role played by the staff in your authority that are immediately responsible for the day-to-day management of staff that assess claims for HB/CTB (these staff may be called either team leaders or managers in different authorities). Which of the following apply to these team leaders/managers in your authority? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- a) Never assess or authorise payments for HB/CTB claims
- b) Assess and authorise payments for 1 or more HB/CTB claims each week
- c) Write off HB/CTB overpayments
- d) Authorise new landlord accounts
- e) Amend existing landlord account details
- f) Carry out checks before a payment of HB is made to a customer above a set amount
- g) Carry out checks before a payment of HB is made to a landlord above a set amount

ANSWER IF TICKED ‘C) WRITE-OFF HB/CTB OVERPAYMENTS’ AT D5. OTHERS GO TO INSTRUCTION ABOVE D7

D6 What is the maximum amount of HB/CTB overpayments that can be written off?
WRITE IN BELOW
£

Don’t know
ANSWER IF TICKED ‘F) CARRY OUT CHECKS BEFORE A PAYMENT OF HB IS MADE TO A CUSTOMER ABOVE A SET AMOUNT’ AT D5. OTHERS GO TO INSTRUCTION ABOVE D8

D7 Please state the amount above which a check is made before a payment of HB is made to a customer? WRITE IN BELOW

£

Don’t know □

ANSWER IF TICKED ‘G) CARRY OUT CHECKS BEFORE A PAYMENT OF HB IS MADE TO A LANDLORD ABOVE A SET AMOUNT’ AT D5. OTHERS GO TO SECTION E

D8 Please state the amount above which a check is made before a payment of HB is made to a landlord? WRITE IN BELOW

£

Don’t know □
Section E: Reporting Change of Circumstance

DWP is committed to reducing claimant error. Failure to report changes in circumstances is an important cause of error. We are interested in anything your authority is doing to encourage claimants to report changes in their circumstances.

E1 What does your authority do at the start of a claim to let claimants know that they need to tell the LA about any changes in their circumstances? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Send/give written information sheet
Discuss it with claimant
Claim form mentions it
Notification letter mentions it
Other (please specify)

Nothing

E2 What does your authority do throughout the claim to let claimants know that they need to tell the LA about any changes in their circumstances? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Send/give written information sheet

E3 Discuss it with claimant at claim review
Discuss with claimant when they report (another) change of circumstance
Discuss it with claimant at visits
Discuss it with claimant at telephone reviews
Discuss it with claimant at other time (please specify)

Payment schedules mention it
Council Web site
Notification letter mentions it
Mentioned at postal reviews
Other (please specify)

Nothing

ANSWER IF TICKED ‘SEND/GIVE WRITTEN INFORMATION SHEET’ AT E2

E3 How many times a year do you send/give a written information sheet? WRITE IN BELOW

Don’t know
ALL ANSWER

E4 Which of the following awareness raising activities do you think are the most effective in terms of increasing reporting of changes in circumstance? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- General mail-out to claimant
- General mail-out to landlord
- Payment schedules to claimant
- Payment schedules to landlord
- Giving information at time of claim
- Visits
- Telephone reviews
- Postal reviews
- Mailshot reminders
- Discussion with claimants when they report a change of circumstance
- Notification letters
- Other (please specify)

Don’t know

E5 How does your authority accept reports of changes in circumstance? Please note that this excludes verification (for example, you could accept a report of a change by phone, though this would need to be verified by producing physical evidence later).

TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Phone
- Email
- Internet site
- Post
- In person at the benefits office
- In person at another LA office
- Other (please specify)

E6 Which of these methods to report changes in circumstance do you let claimants know they can use? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Phone
- Email
- Internet site
- Post
- In person at the benefits office
- In person at another LA office
- Other (please specify)
ANSWER IF YOUR LA DOES NOT CURRENTLY ACCEPT REPORTS OF CHANGES IN CIRCUMSTANCE VIA THE PHONE/EMAIL/INTERNET AT E5. OTHERS GO TO E10

E7 For each change that your authority does NOT accept, please say whether or not your authority would like to accept changes of circumstance in this/these ways? PLEASE ONLY ANSWER FOR THOSE THAT YOUR AUTHORITY DOES NOT ACCEPT. TICK ALL THAT APPLY

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
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<td>Email</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
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</table>

E8 Why does your authority not currently accept reports of changes in circumstance via the phone/email/the internet? PLEASE WRITE IN ON APPROPRIATE LINE

Telephone:...........................................................................................................

Email:.....................................................................................................................

Internet:................................................................................................................

E9 What would allow your authority to accept changes of circumstance via the phone/internet site/email? PLEASE WRITE IN ON APPROPRIATE LINE

Telephone:...........................................................................................................

Email:.....................................................................................................................

Internet:................................................................................................................

ALL ANSWER

E10 Does you authority use the DWP risk lists sent by HBMS to select cases for review?

TICK ONE BOX ONLY

Yes, completely  □  Go to E12

Yes, use them partly □  Go to E12

No  □  Answer E11
ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT E10

E11 Why does your authority not use the risk lists? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- The lists aren’t clear enough to use
- Using the lists risks missing 50% target
- Lists don’t accurately assess risk
- Lists include too many recently reviewed cases
- Lists include too many cases currently under review
- Software
- Other (please specify)

……………………………………..

NOW GO TO SECTION F

ANSWER IF ‘YES, COMPLETELY’ OR ‘YES, PARTLY AT E10

E12 How do you use the risk lists? If different managers adopt different approaches, please tick all that apply. TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Start at the top and work down, as a team
- Work down DWP list until locally identified cases are higher risk
- Split the list between team members (so that each team member gets a mix of high and low risk cases)
- Split the list between team members (so some get all high risk and others all low risk cases)
- Split the list by geographical area
- Other (please specify)

……………………………………..
ALL ANSWER

Section F: Working with Jobcentre Plus
This section asks about liaison between your local authority and your main associated Jobcentre Plus office. Some of the questions ask about day-to-day contact between Jobcentre Plus and your authority’s processing officers. It would therefore be very useful if you could check the views of processing officers before completing these questions.

F1 Thinking about management liaison with your main associated Jobcentre Plus office, how often do managers from the two organisations meet each year to discuss general local issues such as performance, transfer of information, communications, day-to-day liaison matters, discussing and agreeing the LA/Jobcentre Plus Service Level Agreement etc? WRITE IN

☐ ☐ meetings per year

Don’t know ☐

ANSWER IF HAS MEETINGS AT F1. IF ‘NONE’ OR ‘DON’T KNOW’ AT F1, GO TO F8

F2 Do these meetings include discussions about performance compared with SLA targets?

Yes ☐

No ☐

F3 When these meetings take place are they formally minuted and actions agreed?

Yes ☐

No ☐

F4 Does any other informal liaison between managers (perhaps by phone/email) take place on an ad hoc basis to deal with any sudden problems or issues that arise?

Yes ☐

No ☐

F5 Does your authority and your main associated Jobcentre Plus office exchange information about new claim and change of circumstance clearance times, ie. Performance Indicators on a frequent basis? By ‘frequent basis’ we mean quarterly or more regularly.

Yes ☐

No ☐
Appendices – The questionnaire

F6 Do you consider that the arrangements your authority has in place for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are sufficient for your authority’s own purposes?

Yes [ ] Go to F8
No [ ] Answer F7a

ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT F6. IF ‘YES’ AT F6, GO TO F8

F7a Why do you consider that the arrangements that you have in place for management liaison with Jobcentre Plus are insufficient for your purposes? PLEASE WRITE IN

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........................................................................................................................................................

F7b What action, if any, has your authority taken to set up appropriate liaison? WRITE IN

........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................

ALL ANSWER

F8 Thinking about staff liaison in particular, when your authority needs information on an individual benefit claim, perhaps because it is not available on the Remote Access Terminal (RAT) (or its desktop replacement if that is now in place), how do you normally go about obtaining this information from Jobcentre Plus? TICK ALL THAT APPLY.

Telephone [ ] Answer F9a
Fax [ ] Answer F9b
Post [ ] Go to F10
Face-to-face [ ] Go to F10
Other (please specify) [ ] Go to F10

........................................................................................................................................................
Never needed to [ ] Go to F10
Don’t know [ ] Go to F10
ANSWER IF ‘TELEPHONE’ AT F8
F9a Does your authority have direct dial telephone numbers for the relevant contacts in Jobcentre Plus?

Yes ☐
No ☐

ANSWER IF ‘FAX’ AT F8
F9b Is your authority able to fax information and requests for information to a dedicated fax machine in Jobcentre Plus?

Yes ☐
No ☐

ALL ANSWER
F10 Do you consider that the arrangements that you have in place for day-to-day liaison about individual benefit claims are sufficient for your authority's own purposes?

Yes ☐ Go to F12
No ☐ Answer F11a

ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT F10
F11a Why do you consider that the arrangements that you have in place for day-to-day liaison about individual benefit claims are insufficient for your purposes?

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........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................

F11b What action, if any, have you taken to set up appropriate day-to-day liaison? WRITE IN

........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................................
APPENDICES – THE QUESTIONNAIRE

ALL ANSWER

F12 Joint Regional Boards are jointly chaired by Jobcentre Plus and local authorities with the purpose of improving how the two organisations can work together to improve the customer experience, prevent and detect fraud, achieve value for money and pay benefit accurately and in a timely fashion. The meetings are also attended by other key stakeholders such as The Pensions Service and HM Revenues and Customs. Were you aware of the existence of Joint Regional Boards before reading this question?

Yes [ ] Answer F13
No [ ] Go to F15

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT F12

F13 Is there a route for your authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, your local Joint Regional Board?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]
Don’t know [ ]

F14 In your opinion, how could Joint Regional Boards be improved to further develop relations between Jobcentre Plus and local authorities? PLEASE WRITE IN

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

ALL ANSWER

F15 Joint Operational Boards report to, and are steered by, the Joint Regional Board. Joint Operational Boards operate at more of a practitioners level, resolving issues and improving service. Were you aware of the existence of Joint Operational Boards before reading this question?

Yes [ ] Answer F16
No [ ] Go to Section G

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT F15

F16 Is there a route for your authority to contribute to, or receive feedback from, your local Joint Operational Board?

Yes [ ]
No [ ]
Don’t know [ ]
F17 In your opinion, how could Joint Operational Boards be improved to further develop relations between Jobcentre Plus and local authorities? PLEASE WRITE IN

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

ALL ANSWER

Section G: Contracting Out and Local Authority Partnerships

G1 Is a contractor involved in any area of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit in your authority?

Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t know ☐

Go to G3 Answer G2 Go to G6

ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT G1

G2 How likely is your authority to contract out any HB services in the future?

Very likely ☐ Fairly likely ☐ Not very likely ☐ Not at all likely ☐ Don’t know ☐

ANSWER IF “YES” AT G1

G3 When did this contract start?

Enter month ☐ and year ☐

G4 What is the name of the contractor? WRITE IN

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
G5 Which of the following areas of Housing Benefit are contracted out?

- All of it
- Individual areas:
  - Fraud
  - Call centres (this may include other services)
  - Front line services (this may include other services)
  - Other (please specify)
- Don’t know

ALL ANSWER

G6 Does your authority work in partnership with any other local authorities?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF ‘NO’ AT G6

G7 How likely is your authority to work in partnership with another local authority, with or without the private sector/a contractor, in the future?

- Very likely
- Fairly likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely
- Don’t know

NOW GO TO SECTION H

ANSWER IF ‘YES’ AT G6

G8 With how many local authorities do you work in partnership? WRITE IN

- authorities

- Don’t know
G9 What areas of Housing Benefit are covered by this/these partnership/s? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Same neighbourhood offices
- Centralised benefit processing
- Backlog busting
- Take-up campaign/work
- Mentoring/consultancy/project management
- Joint fraud team
- Benchmarking
- Other (please specify)


Don’t know

G10 What, if any, would you say are the legislative or other barriers to working in partnership with another local authority? WRITE IN


There are not any legislative or other barriers to working in partnership

G11 What would you say are the benefits, if any, of working in partnership with another local authority? WRITE IN


There are not any benefits to working in partnership with another local authority
ALL ANSWER

Section H: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI)
BFI is committed to improving customer service. It/the organisation have recently achieved Charter Mark standard for excellent customer service and are monitoring customer satisfaction to ensure that these standards are maintained and improved further where possible. The information you provide will be used for research purposes only. You or your authority will not be identified in any report.

H1 Has your LA had any contact with the BFI in the last 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “YES” AT H1

H2 What type of contact has your LA had in the last 12 months? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Full inspection
- Focused inspection
- Good Practice Review
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) – Single Tier
- Welsh Improvement Programme
- Scottish Best Value
- Performance Development Team (PDT)
- BFI Exhibition stand at IRRV Conference
- BFI Speaker at a seminar or event
- Enquiries to the BFI Customer Helpline
- Telephone call to BFI staff
- E-mail to BFI staff
- BFI Web Site
- Don’t know
ANSWER FOR THOSE MENTIONED AT H2 (SEE INSTRUCTIONS AT H2)

H3 Overall, how useful did you find the final report or outcome of your contact?
ANSWER FOR EACH YOU HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS. TICK ONE BOX IN EACH RELEVANT COLUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full inspection</th>
<th>Focused inspection</th>
<th>Good Practice Review</th>
<th>CPA-Single Tier</th>
<th>Welsh Improvement Programme</th>
<th>Scottish Best Value</th>
<th>PDT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly useful</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>Not very useful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not at all useful</td>
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<td>Not yet received</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
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</table>

ANSWER FOR EACH MENTIONED AT H2

H4 Overall, how professional would you rate the staff? ANSWER FOR EACH YOU HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS. TICK ONE BOX IN EACH RELEVANT COLUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full inspection</th>
<th>Focused Inspection</th>
<th>Welsh Improvement Programme</th>
<th>Scottish Best Value</th>
<th>BFI Exhibition stand at IRRV Conference</th>
<th>BFI Speaker</th>
<th>Enquiries to Helpline</th>
<th>Telephone call to BFI staff</th>
<th>BFI E-mail</th>
<th>BFI Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very professional</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not very professional</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not at all professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
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</table>
### H5 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service you received from the BFI?

ANSWER FOR EACH YOU HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS. TICK ONE BOX IN EACH RELEVANT COLUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Fairly satisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Fairly dissatisfied</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full inspection</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focused Inspection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good Practice Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPA – Single Tier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welsh Improvement Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scottish Best Value</td>
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<td>PDf</td>
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<tr>
<td>BFI Exhibition stand at IRRV conference</td>
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<tr>
<td>BFI Speaker</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Enquiries to Helpline</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone call to BFI staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>BFI Website</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANSWER IF “FAIRLY SATISFIED”, NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED”, “FAIRLY DISSATISFIED” OR “VERY DISSATISFIED” AT H5

H6 Why do you say this? PLEASE WRITE IN THE SERVICE YOU ARE NOT FULLY SATISFIED WITH AND THEN YOUR REASON WHY

Service (WRITE IN)……………………….. ……..

Reason (WRITE IN) …………………………………………………………………………………….
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Service (WRITE IN)……………………….. ……..

Reason (WRITE IN) …………………………………………………………………………………….
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Service (WRITE IN)……………………….. ……..

Reason (WRITE IN) …………………………………………………………………………………….
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Service (WRITE IN)……………………….. ……..

Reason (WRITE IN) …………………………………………………………………………………….
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Service (WRITE IN)……………………….. ……..

Reason (WRITE IN) …………………………………………………………………………………….
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…………………………………………………………………………………………………………
H7 Please say how important each of the following aspects of BFI’s service are to your LA? TICK ONE IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Fairly important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) That you have adequate notice before the inspection/Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) BFI Inspection Report is produced within agreed timescales</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) 2-3 weeks advance notice is given of the publication date of the report</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Recommendations in BFI reports are useful and workable for the LA concerned</td>
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<tr>
<td>e) LAs working in partnership with the PDT achieve performance improvements or efficiencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>f) LAs receive their final draft of the BFI’s CPA report at the same time as it is sent to the Audit Commission</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H8 How important do you think it is that BFI undertake inspections on DWP agencies, eg. Job Centre Plus, Pensions Service? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very important
- Fairly important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Don’t know
Section I: Decentralisation and Contact Information

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

I1 Is HB and CTB administration:

- Centralised i.e. one or two offices deal with and process claims  □ Go to I4
- Decentralised i.e. on three or more sites/offices – (by decentralised we mean that the management of the service is decentralised and not the access points for claimants)  □ Go to I2
- Don’t know  □ Go to I4

ANSWER IF “DECENTRALISED” AT I1
I2 Are you the manager with overall responsibility for the decentralised offices?

- Yes  □ Go to I4
- No  □ Go to I3
- No manager with overall responsibility  □ Go to I4
- Don’t know  □ Go to I4

ANSWER IF “NO” AT I2
I3 Please can you provide details of the manager who has overall responsibility for the decentralised offices?

- NAME: ..............................................................................................................

- JOB TITLE: ......................................................................................................

- ADDRESS (INCLUDE POSTCODE): ..............................................................

- TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: ..............................................

- FAX NO: ...........................................................................................................

- EMAIL ADDRESS: ...........................................................................................
I4 Which of the following do you personally have responsibility for?
TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Rent Rebate
- Rent Allowance
- Council Tax Benefit
- Overpayment recovery
- Benefit Fraud
- None of these

PLEASE COMPLETE DETAILS FOR EACH AREA YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR.
IF RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL AREAS, GO TO I6

I5 Please provide details of the manager with overall responsibility for each of the following…
a) Rent Rebate:

NAME: ..........................................................................................................

JOB TITLE: ......................................................................................................

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: ........................................................

FAX NO: ........................................................................................................

EMAIL ADDRESS: ...........................................................................................

ADDRESS: ......................................................................................................

....................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................

Tick this box if no-one is responsible for Rent Rebate □

If no-one is responsible for RR: Can I just check, do you have any LA rent rebate stock?

Yes - Please write in above details of manager with overall responsibility □

No - Go to below (Rent Allowance) □
b) Rent Allowance:
   NAME: ............................................................................................................
   JOB TITLE: ........................................................................................................
   TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: ....................................................
   FAX NO: .......................................................................................................... 
   EMAIL ADDRESS: ...........................................................................................
   ADDRESS: ........................................................................................................

   .....................................................................................................................
   .....................................................................................................................


c) Council Tax Benefit
   NAME: ............................................................................................................
   JOB TITLE: ........................................................................................................
   TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: ....................................................
   FAX NO: .......................................................................................................... 
   EMAIL ADDRESS: ...........................................................................................
   ADDRESS: ........................................................................................................

   .....................................................................................................................
   .....................................................................................................................
d) Overpayment recovery
NAME: ..........................................................................................................

JOB TITLE: ......................................................................................................

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: .......................................................

FAX NO: ........................................................................................................

EMAIL ADDRESS: ...........................................................................................

ADDRESS: ......................................................................................................

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e) Benefit Fraud
NAME: ..........................................................................................................

JOB TITLE: ......................................................................................................

TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: .......................................................

FAX NO: ........................................................................................................

EMAIL ADDRESS: ...........................................................................................

ADDRESS: ......................................................................................................

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.......................................................................................................................
ALL ANSWER

16 DWP appreciates the time and effort LA staff put into completing the Omnibus Survey. We are keen to make the Survey as useful as possible to HB/CTB managers and staff. If you have any suggestions for topics we could ask about in the next few waves of the Survey, that you would find useful, please give some brief details below. Please note that in order to develop these ideas into questions we may need to contact you about your suggestions.

....................................................................................................................... 

....................................................................................................................... 

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

All my contact details are correct
I have made some amendments
I have written in the missing contact details

FULL NAME: <<NAME>>

JOB TITLE: <<JOB TITLE>>

TELEPHONE NUMBER, WITH EXTENSION: <<PHONE>>

FAX NUMBER: <<FAX>>

EMAIL ADDRESS: <<EMAIL>>

ADDRESS (INC, POSTCODE): <<ADD1>>, <<ADD2>>, <<ADD3>>, <<ADD4>>, <<ADD5>>, <<POSTCODE>>

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN WAVE 13 OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY OMNIBUS SURVEY.