Local Authority Omnibus Survey

Wave 10

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A report of research carried out by NOP and the Office for Public Management on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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### Glossary of terms

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

**Council Tax Benefit (CTB)**
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.

**Housing Benefit (HB)**
This is the income-related benefit paid to tenants or their landlords to help meet their rent.

**Income Support/Jobseeker’s Allowance (IS/JSA)**
Income Support is a means-tested benefit paid to people on low income who are unemployed (including lone parents and pensioners). Jobseeker’s Allowance is the main benefit for unemployed people. It is partly contribution-based and partly-income based.

**Jobcentre Plus**
From April 2002, the Benefits Agency and Employment Service were replaced by two new businesses, the Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service. These businesses offer improved services, better tailored to meet the needs of different customers.
### Local Housing Allowance (LHA)
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 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. Local Housing Allowance was initially known as Standard Local Housing Allowance (SLHA).

### Local Reference Rent (LRR)
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 (MIS)
Data is collected by 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 (NTC)
New Tax Credits extended the scope of the earlier Working Families’ Tax Credit by introducing two new Credits: Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. Working Tax Credit is payable to people in paid work below a certain income and Child Tax Credit 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 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 Improvement Action Team (PIAT)
Working in partnership with authorities BFI’s PIAT offers free, expert advice and guidance on how to increase administrative efficiency and achieve sustainable improvements in benefit delivery performance.
Remote Access Terminal (RAT)  
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 RAT computer link to the Departmental mainframe systems operated by LA staff.

Registered Social Landlord (RSL)  
Housing associations that are registered with the Housing Corporation.

Security Against Fraud and Error (SAFE)  
This 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 an 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 (SRR)  
The 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 Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance 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 Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance 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 Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance 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 Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance 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 (VF)** | 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 (WIB)** | WIB is an essential component of the Security Against Fraud and Error 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 10 of the Local Authority Omnibus Survey, conducted between June and August 2004 on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). All local authorities are asked to participate in the Survey and responses were received from 222 managers, representing a response rate of 55%.

Wave 10 of the Omnibus Survey covers questions on the following issues: Performance Standards, Council Tax Benefit Take-Up Campaign, Banking and Revised Claim Forms, monthly data matching and risk-based reviews, Overpayment Guide, Extended Access to DWP Data for Local Authorities, Benefit Fraud Inspectorate and Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) Website.

Key findings

Performance Standards

Eighty seven per cent of authorities use the Performance Standards to inform their improvement plans, while just under three-quarters use them to monitor performance (74%) and make staff much more aware of what they are trying to achieve (70%). Around two in five use them to inform applications to the Performance Standards Fund (68%) and to confirm any performance improvements they have made (63%). Around half (54%) use them as a tool for benchmarking.

Around nine in ten or more local authorities have done a full assessment on each of the seven Performance Standards modules. Local authorities that have done a full assessment were very positive about the modules in terms of their usefulness; around nine in ten described each module as very or fairly useful.

In around two out of five authorities (43%), just one person has responsibility for undertaking self-assessment against the Performance Standards. However, in just over a half of authorities (52%) different people have responsibility for individual/some modules.
Just four authorities— all English Districts— said that Internal Audit have responsibility. Splitting responsibility among different people mostly occurs in the case of Counter-fraud (80%). However, around two-thirds split responsibility for Strategic Management (70%), Internal Security (68%) and Customer Services (64%). Fewer give different people responsibility for Overpayments (59%), Processing of Claims (56%) and Working with Landlords (50%).

More than four in five authorities said that the content of the Counter-fraud, Working with Landlords, Processing of Claims and Overpayment modules enables them to divide the work easily. Around three-quarters said this about the Internal Security, Customer Services and Strategic Management modules.

A majority of authorities described the balance between Standards relating to outcomes and the Standards relating to Processes as about right. Those that did not give a positive response were more likely to say that there are too many processes rather than too many outcomes. This is particularly the case with Processing of Claims, for which 16% said that there are too many processes. However, in the case of Strategic Management, one in ten said that there are too many outcomes and too many processes (10% and 11% respectively).

Local authorities are generally very positive about how clearly Part 1 sets out the criteria to be achieved for each standard. Four in five or more said that it sets out the criteria very or fairly clearly for each module, although in each case they were more likely to say fairly, rather than very, clearly. In addition, around one in ten said that the criteria are set out not very or at all clearly, although this rises to 16% for Strategic Management.

Large majorities of authorities (around nine in ten) described the self-assessment questions as clear, although most of these said that they are fairly, rather than very, clear. Once again, authorities are least positive about Strategic Management, with 82% saying clear and 13% saying not clear.

Opinion is, however, more divided on whether the number of questions is about right or not. Authorities were most positive about Internal Security, Working with Landlords and Overpayments, with around two-thirds describing the number of questions as about right (66%, 65% and 64% respectively). They were slightly less positive about the number of questions in Processing of Claims, Customer Services and Counter-fraud, with around two in five saying there are too many questions (40%, 40% and 36% respectively). Opinion was, however, most negative about Strategic Management, with just 30% saying the number of questions is about right and 65% saying there are too many.

Local authorities were asked if they think the current scoring system for measuring the results of self-assessment is about right or whether more weight should be given to other factors. Opinion is very divided on this question, with around one-third mentioning each of the three options— current system is about right 36%, more weight should be given to outcomes rather than processes 38% and more weight should be given to BV/Statutory Pls 36%.
Just over three-quarters of authorities (77%) have used the Form Flow Self-Assessment Tool. The main technical difficulties mentioned are as follows: slow response times when using it on a PC (55%), the process for migrating data to the updated version is too laborious (45%), the software is difficult to install (38%), the rules for inputting data is too rigid (26%).

Authorities were asked which reporting regime would best suit their needs in monitoring performance. Firstly in terms of key elements, around one-third said that they would prefer quarterly (36%) and annually (35%), while 28% would prefer six monthly. Secondly, in terms of completing a full self-assessment, they were very clearly in favour of doing it annually as a one-off exercise (61%). In addition, one in five (20%) said that they would like it to be annually as a phased exercise, 12% would prefer six monthly and five per cent mentioned quarterly.

Authorities were asked about how they would like the Performance Standards to be laid out. Just over three in five (61%) chose to place the self-assessment questions next to the definition of each standard and 23% preferred to retain the current two-part format.

Authorities were very enthusiastic about the introduction of the Performance Standards in an electronic format; four in five (80%) said ‘yes’ they would prefer to use an electronic format.

At the end of the section on Performance Standards, authorities were asked an open-ended question about how the Performance Standards for the administration of Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) could be improved. Although 45% of authorities did not come up with any suggestions for how it could be improved, the main suggestions were as follows: 14% said that more account should be taken of local authority (LA) size/caseload/location. One in eight said that the amount of duplication should be reduced (12%) and some of the standards should be more flexible (12%). One in ten (10%) said make questions clearer and nine per cent thought the number of standards should be reduced. Nine per cent also suggested making self-assessment results available for information sharing and benchmarking and having a more progressive system of scoring rather than above/at/not at standard.

Council Tax Benefit take-up campaign

Ninety-five per cent of authorities claimed to have received the letter sent out on 19 February about the DWP campaign to increase the numbers claiming Council Tax Benefit.

Although, over half of authorities (57%) said that they used neither the electronic flyer nor the headline graphic, 15% used both, one in five (20%) used just the electronic flyer and six per cent used just the headline graphic. Authorities that used neither, mostly did not because they had their own promotional material (46%), they arrived too late (32%) or they had enough time to use the actual flyer received in the bulk mailing (29%).
The CTB posters, flyers and leaflet GL17 ‘Help with your Council Tax’ that were sent to authorities were mostly put in local authority offices (mentioned by more than four in five in each case). This was followed by libraries and voluntary organisation outlets. However, seven per cent of authorities said that they did not put the posters, flyers and leaflets anywhere, while four authorities said that they did not receive the poster and flyers and seven authorities said that they did not receive the leaflets. Council Tax Benefit leaflets achieved an overall slightly lower distribution than the poster and flyer.

Attitudes towards the posters used in the DWP campaign are divided. Although 36% describe them as good, a further 37% said that they were neither good nor poor and 21% described them as poor.

When authorities were asked for their views on the flyers used in the DWP campaign, once again opinion was divided. Over one-third described them as good (36%) and neither good nor poor (38%). Whereas, one in five (19%) said that the flyers were poor.

A majority of LAs (59%) described the Best Practice Guide on Council Tax Benefit Take-up as useful. Of the others, nearly three in ten said that it is not very (25%) or not at all useful (five per cent).

Eight per cent of authorities have not introduced any initiatives that overlap with, or as a result of, the DWP campaign. Around half have provided information on their own website (50%), devised their own promotional literature (47%) or advertised in the local press (46%). In addition, around one-quarter mentioned Benefits Road shows (27%) and Benefit Calculators (21%) and one in ten local radio advertising (10%) and publicity when people are renewing their bus passes (10%).

Fifty-eight per cent of authorities targeted these initiatives at all groups but over half singled out pensioners (53%) and almost one in five (19%) mentioned working age people.

A majority believe that all of the initiatives (the DWP campaign, together with their authority’s own take-up initiatives) have increased the number of enquiries - a lot (13%) and a little (51%). On the other hand, just over one-quarter of authorities (25%) do not think that it has made any difference. Those authorities that said they have increased were asked which campaign out of their own and DWP’s was most effective. One half (50%) said that they both played an equal part, while three in ten felt that their own initiatives were most effective and six per cent said that the DWP campaign was most effective. Authorities said that an average of 67.4% of the increased enquiries were from pensioners and 29.5% from working age people.

Approximately two-thirds (64%) of all authorities said that, taking each of the various take-up initiatives into account, their caseload has increased. For the majority (58%) it had increased a little, but six per cent said it had increased a lot. Just over one-quarter (27%) claimed that the various initiatives had made no difference to their caseload. Authorities said that an average of 69.2% of the increased caseload was from pensioners and 28.2% was from working age people.
In order to manage any extra workload, the most frequently mentioned strategies were increased visiting capacity (30%), applying for funding from the Performance Standards Fund (20%), buying in additional processing capacity (20%) and screening claims for eligibility (17%).

Authorities perceived the reasons for low take-up of Council Tax Benefit amongst pensioners to be the stigma associated with claiming benefits (mentioned by 84%), fear of bureaucracy (66%), the length of the claim form (62%) and the documentation required (61%).

Authorities were also asked to state what one thing would encourage pensioners to claim Council Tax Benefit. Around one in four (28%) could not provide a suggestion at this point but amongst those that could the most frequently mentioned responses were ‘shorter/simpler form’, mentioned by 17%, and home visits to help fill-in form (12%).

The authorities that said that their LA is below standard at the Customer Service module of the Performance Standards dealing with ‘Encouraging benefit take-up, reducing poverty’ were asked what plans they had made to move towards being ‘At standard.’ A wide range of responses was recorded here but the most frequently mentioned plans, stated by around three in five were to inform council tax payers of CTB with their council tax bill (59%), display posters/leaflets at key public access points (59%) and co-operate with local Pension Service staff on national campaigns to promote take-up of non-HB/CTB benefits, such as Pension Credit (57%).

**Banking and revised claim forms**

More than two in five authorities (44%) said that they do not pay Housing Benefit directly into the bank accounts of landlords or tenants. On the other hand, just over two in five (42%) said that they pay directly into the bank accounts of both landlords and tenants, one in eight (12%) pay directly into landlords’ accounts only and a very small proportion, just one per cent pay directly into tenants accounts only.

Around three in five authorities (62%) were unable to estimate the proportion of tenants receiving Housing Benefit in their authority that have a bank account into which Housing Benefit could be paid. Amongst those that were able to estimate, the average proportion of tenants receiving Housing Benefit that have a bank account was 77.6%.

Around two in five authorities (41%) that pay Housing Benefit directly into bank accounts of either tenants or landlords were unable to estimate the proportion of all tenants (including Registered Social Landlords (RSL) tenants) receiving Housing Benefit in their authority that currently receive it via a bank. Amongst those authorities that could estimate the proportion, the average was 52.8%.

When asked about the proportion of private sector tenants who receive Housing Benefit via a bank account, again, a substantial proportion of respondents (44%) could not answer. Amongst those giving a proportion, the average was 54.7%. 
The main reasons why authorities think that tenants might be reluctant to have their Housing Benefit paid into their bank account are as follows: tenants have never had a bank account (57%), tenants might be worried about getting into debt (32%) and they have a County Court judgement against them (27%).

In addition, authorities believe that the following main barriers exist which prevent the payment of Housing Benefit into tenants’ bank accounts: the banks’ position/stance (32%), software and security issues (27% and 30% respectively) and clients not having appropriate identity (21%).

Just over one-third of authorities (36%) said that they are currently active in promoting payment via tenants’ bank accounts.

Three-quarters of authorities in the survey either operated a deposit scheme (45%) or were aware of such a scheme even if their LA does not operate it (29%). Just over one in five (22%) neither operated a deposit scheme nor were aware of one.

**Monthly data matching and risk-based reviews**

Most local authorities (94%) have undertaken monthly matching and three-quarters (75%) have undertaken risk-based reviews since April 2004.

The eleven authorities that said they have not carried out either monthly matching or risk-based reviews said it was because they were not compliant with the Verification Framework (VF) Reviews module (six authorities), that they are planning on introducing them from a future date (five authorities) and that they were not able to organise in time (four authorities).

Around three-quarters (78%) of authorities have set-up a referral management system. Of the 49 LAs that have not done this yet, more than half (53%) expect to have done so by October 2004. Smaller proportions said November 2004 and January 2005 (six per cent and four per cent respectively). In addition, a third (33%) said that they did not know when they would set up such a system.

In terms of the management information produced on reviews since the changes came into effect in April 2004, a third of authorities (33%) have used the Excel spreadsheet, just over one-quarter (26%) have returned the new HBSD/IAD data extract and one in nine (11%) have sent in reports from their own system or provided the 2004/05 VF Management Information (MI) (nine per cent).

Attitudes towards the software solution supplied to their authority to implement monthly data-matching and reviews were divided. Around a third (32%) were satisfied but a similar proportion (33%) were dissatisfied, with 12% very dissatisfied. When asked why they were dissatisfied, just over half (56%) of this group said it was because the department had specified changes too late and two in five (40%) said it simply did not meet their requirement.

However, satisfaction with the software solution to implement Security Against Fraud and Error (SAFE) was higher (44% satisfied); just a quarter (25%) were
dissatisfied. Of this group, just over half (52%) were dissatisfied because of late specification changes, 43% because it does not meet the requirement and one in seven (14%) because it costs too much.

The most frequently mentioned software suppliers were SX3 (used by 31%), Academy (22%), Anite (17%) and IBS (12%).

Monthly data matching

Around two thirds (61%) think monthly data matching is working either very or fairly well in terms of detecting fraud and error. Twenty nine per cent think it is too soon to tell and only eight per cent said it is not working.

When asked about problems with monthly data matching, over half (55%) had no problems to report whatsoever. On the other hand, the main problems highlighted were poor quality referrals (15%) and problems with the quality of the data they were able to provide (13%). One in five of the authorities with problems said that they have not resolved them yet.

Just under a quarter (24%) of authorities said that they have had more data matches than anticipated, just under a fifth (19%) said they have had less. The majority however, (53%) said they had had about the same. Three-quarters of those that have had more than expected said that they are managing the increased workload well (very 11% and fairly well 66%). Seventeen per cent said they were not doing very well and just four per cent said not at all well.

Overall the average number of referrals actioned since April 2004 is 121 (32% could not answer the question). When asked how many overpayments have been detected as a result of referrals, the average is 28.5. However, over half (52%), could not answer this question.

Just under half (48%) of authorities that said that their LA has actioned one or more data matching referrals did not know if this was more, less or about the same as they had got from data matching before April 2004. Seventeen per cent said that it was more than they had got from data matching before April 2004, eight per cent in fact said that it was less than they had got from before that date and 27% said that it was about the same as they had got from data matching before April 2004.

The authorities that said that they had actioned one or more data matching referrals were then asked how many fraud investigations had commenced as a result of matching referrals. Although 28% said that they did not know the answer to this question, among those that did, the average was 32.5.

Before the changes in April 2004, the majority of authorities (89%) said the fraud manager had been responsible for data matching. A further 14% said the benefit manager had been responsible. However, just under two in five (38%) said responsibility for this task had changed since April 2004. In around two-thirds of cases (64%), it was the benefit manager who is now taking responsibility, while just
under a quarter (24%) mentioned the fraud manager, just over a fifth (21%) mentioned new teams and 18% the Verification Framework team.

In order to accommodate monthly data matching, around four in five authorities (79%) have trained staff on the changes required and just over two in five (41%) have recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with it. Two-thirds or so (68%) are making organisational changes to cope with the new regime and 43% are working with software suppliers on the changes required.

**Risk-based reviews**

Over a half of authorities (53%) believe that risk-based reviews are working well in their authority. Just under three in ten (29%) say it is too soon to tell and 18% say they are not working well.

A majority (69%) of authorities said that they use DWP’s risk-based review, only four per cent use their own and around one-quarter (23%) use both.

Authorities have started on average of 549.5 reviews since April 2004 (around three in ten (28%) could not answer the question). Of the authorities that have started more than one review since April 2004, an average of 56.1 resulted in fraud and error being detected (however, 67% said that they did not know how many have resulted in fraud and error being detected). Although two-thirds of authorities (66%) said that they did not know whether this was more, less or about the same as they had found from renewal activity before April 2004, seven per cent said more, nine per cent said less and 19% about the same.

Authorities were asked to state how many reviews had been investigated for fraud as a result of a review and once again a high proportion (52%) did not know. However, the average overall among those that were able to give an answer was 6.9.

Looking now at authorities’ ability to meet the target to commence review action on at least 2.5% (see circular A38/2003 Appendix) of their caseload per calendar month. More than half (54%) met their target but around a third (35%) did not. The main reasons for not meeting the target were IT problems (specified by 64%), not undertaking it in one or two months (36%), staff not trained in time (27%) and lack of clarity on new VF (13%).

Authorities made the following key changes to accommodate risk-based reviews:

- training of staff on the changes required (81%);
- making organisational changes to cope with the new regime (72%);
- recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with this (50%); and
- working with software suppliers on making organisational changes to cope with the new regime (49%).
Finally, local authorities were asked overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied there authority is with all of the changes discussed in this section of the survey, ie. monthly data matching and risk-based reviews. Just over half (51%) of local authorities were satisfied while 14% expressed dissatisfaction. The main reasons for dissatisfaction were that it was hard to manage referrals (34%) and they were not getting results in terms of detection and error (32%).

**Overpayment Guide**

Most authorities (94%) had received the Guide and of these a majority (64%) said they use it occasionally to look things up/refer to. Just over one-fifth (22%) use it regularly and one in eleven (nine per cent) have never used it.

A large majority of 93% said that they found the Guide either very or fairly useful. The main ways in which it was described as useful were that ‘all guidance is in one place’ (90%), a good level of information (55%), to refer to (48%) and guidance given is clear and concise (47%).

Users of the Guide were asked to suggest ways in which it might be improved. Issuing it as a Word document was mentioned most often, by 44% of users, while a third (34%) wanted more practical examples.

Around three-quarters (74%) of authorities have a separate section(s) within the Benefits department that deals with Overpayments.

Three-quarters of authorities (75%) said that they use other DWP benefits to recover HB/CTB overpayments, 15% never have and one in ten (10%) said that they don’t currently but have in the past. The main reasons why authorities do not use other DWP benefits to recover overpayments is that other methods are perceived as more successful (48%) and they have had very little success in the past (38%).

There was a high level of agreement with the statement ‘Overpayments Recovery is an important way of a local authority raising money (67%) and also with ‘Overpayments Recovery has a high priority within the Benefits Departments (71%). On the other hand, just 19% of authorities agreed that Overpayments Recovery staff are often pulled off to cover other sections of the Benefits Department at times of sickness/leave.

The main problems with recovering HB/CTB overpayments appear to be difficulties in tracing customers after they stop receiving benefits, mentioned by more than four in five (83%) and that people can’t afford to pay them back, mentioned by seven in ten (70%).

**Extended access to DWP data for local authorities**

Ratings of the additional dialogues for Department Central Index were very positive with almost nine out of ten authorities (89%) finding them useful (44% very useful and 45% fairly useful). The main reason for finding the additional dialogues useful was that it speeds up the processing of claims (86%), they are less reliant on the
DWP for information (75%) and they do not have to contact the customer again (71%).

Authorities rated the additional information on the Remote Access Terminal (RAT) very positively, with over nine out of ten rating it as useful (50% very useful and a further 43% fairly useful).

Around three in ten authorities (28%) felt that the information for Pension Credit on the RAT was sufficient for processing claims for HB and CTB. However, 66% of authorities said that it is not sufficient.

Less than one in five authorities (18%) have an additional RAT terminal in the Fraud and Overpayment Section. Of the authorities that have an additional terminal, less than half (45%) said that it had helped them to reduce fraud and overpayment (35% did not know. The most common reason why authorities said it had reduced fraud and overpayment were that they can obtain immediate answers (94%).

Three in five of the authorities that have a RAT terminal believed that it has helped them to reduce their Fraud and Overpayment workload (60%). This is mainly because it has reduced the amount of contact needed with DWP and there is less correspondence to get information from a third party (79% and 71% respectively).

**Benefit Fraud Inspectorate**

Just over three in five authorities had contact (61%) with the BFI in the last six months. The most common type of contact was via the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) (74% - 48% district and 26% single tier). This was followed by the BFI Website, which over a third (35%) of authorities had visited. Approximately a quarter of authorities had contact either via a BFI exhibition at an Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) conference or through a telephone call (both 24%). Around one in five had contact through a BFI speaker (22%), email (20%) or Performance Improvement Action Team (PIAT) (18%). Only around one in ten had been contacted for first inspection (11%) or a follow up inspection (nine per cent). Less than one in twenty (three per cent) had contact via the customer helpline and only one authority had had contact from the Welsh Improvement Inspection. None of the Scottish authorities have had contact via Scottish Best Value.

Overall, the authorities that had contact with the various services rated the usefulness of the final report or outcome positively. Almost nine out of ten authorities (88%) rated PIAT as useful, three-quarters (75%) CPA - District, and two-thirds (67%) for CPA – single tier, first inspection and follow-up inspection.

The professionalism ratings of staff for all types of contact were very high. All authorities (100%) that had contact via the following methods rated the staff as professional: BFI exhibition stand at an IRRV conference, BFI Speaker, enquiries to BFI helpline (NB. Sample size of 4) and Welsh Improvement Inspection (NB. Sample size of one). These were very closely followed by telephone calls to BFI staff for which over 19 out of 20 authorities (97%) rated the staff as professional. Approximately nine out of ten authorities rated PIAT (92%) and CPA District (89%) as professional.
Overall satisfaction levels were very good for all aspects of the BFI. Nine out of ten authorities were satisfied with the BFI Speaker (90%). This was closely followed by a cluster of services for which approximately seventeen out of twenty authorities were satisfied; telephone call (85%), BFI exhibition (84%), PIAT (83%), CPA District (83%) and follow up inspection (83%). Three-quarters of authorities (75%) were satisfied with CPA single tier, around seven in ten with email (70%) and the BFI website (69%) and the lowest was first inspection for which only three in five (60%) were satisfied. The customer helpline and the Welsh Improvement Inspection gained the highest results (100%), however it is worth noting that while these results are excellent they are based on very small sample sizes – just four authorities for the customer helpline and only one authority for the Welsh improvement inspection.

All authorities were asked to rate the importance of various aspects of the BFI Service and overall the results were positive. Nearly nine in ten authorities rated adequate notice before inspections (89%) and recommendations in the BFI report to be useful and workable for the LA (89%) as important. Around four in five rated the following as important: Inspection Report being produced within 17 weeks (83%), 2-3 weeks advanced notice of publication date of report (81%) and receiving the first draft of CPA report at same time as its sent to the audit commission (78%). The aspect rated as the least important was the LA working with PIAT to achieve performance improvements or efficiencies (62%).

Just over four out of five authorities (82%) felt that it was very important that the BFI undertakes inspections on DWP agencies and a further eight per cent felt it was fairly important.

**Joint working between LA and Counter-fraud Investigation Service**

Four in five authorities (80%) carried out some form of joint working with the Counter-Fraud Investigation Service.

Of the authorities that had carried out regular joint working, the most frequently mentioned type was via regular meetings (68%). This was closely followed by sharing information (59%), joint visits/investigations (64%), and by telephone (57%).

Around three-quarters of authorities (78%) thought the joint working process with the Counter-Fraud Investigation Service, in terms of counter-fraud work, was effective. The most common suggestion for improvement to the Counter-Fraud Investigation Service was to increase staff resources (40%). A third (34%) wanted improved liaison with Counter-fraud Investigation.

Four out of five authorities (80%) felt there had been an improvement in fraud detection as a result of joint-working. Results were slightly less positive for fraud prevention; just over three in five authorities (62%) considered it to have improved.
BFI website

The majority of respondents have personally visited the BFI website (90%); this is an increase of five per cent since 2003 which is significant at the 95% level. Of these authorities, around two in five (41%) had found it for the first time by using a search engine, a quarter (25%) just surfed in, 22% linked from another site and just one in twenty (five per cent) from the CSM newsletter.

Around four in five respondents (81%) said that they were aware of colleagues in their authority who visited the site (this is the same as in 2003).

Nineteen out of twenty authorities that have used the website (95%) considered the site to be user friendly (15% very user friendly and 80% fairly user friendly). These results match very closely to 2003 when 94% of respondents found it to be user friendly.

The majority of authorities (94%) also described the information provided on the website as useful. This is mainly because of the comprehensive collection of BFI reports (84%).

In terms of improving the Website, authorities made the following key suggestions: more examples of what seems to work (62%), more examples of proactive measures that the authorities could use (57%) and more examples of specific improvements achieved by LAs (50%).

Looking specifically now at the purpose of authorities’ last visit to the Website, the most common reasons were to compare their performance with a similar authority (55%) and to find examples of good practices (52%).

Only one authority checks the website daily and less than one in ten (seven per cent) do it weekly. Around one in three (32%) check it once or twice a month and the majority (41%) once or twice every three months. Seventeen per cent of authorities check the website just once or twice a year, two per cent less often and two per cent only when there is something new. Overall, authorities are visiting the site less frequently in 2004 than in 2003.

The vast majority of authorities (98%) believe that they will access the BFI website in the future.
1 Introduction

Since 1999 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has run a Local Authority Omnibus Survey among managers with responsibility for the administration of Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). The main reason for running such an Omnibus is to provide the Department with a regular and flexible means of finding out how local authorities organise their benefit administration and how relevant managers view current policy and regulations, as well as future initiatives and changes. The frequency with which the Omnibus is conducted, combined with the relatively short timescale for reporting means that it is a useful vehicle for providing the Department with feedback on issues that are current and relevant at the time. By conducting one regular survey, the Department is seeking to reduce the number of individual surveys that local authority managers are involved in and as such reduce the burden on them.

Since Wave 9 of the LA Omnibus Survey, respondents have been 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. By the end of the Wave 10 fieldwork we had achieved interviews with a total of 222 local authority (LA) managers, with considerably more LAs opting to complete the questionnaire on the web than at the previous Wave of the Survey. This breaks down as 51 telephone interviews, 89 web-based questionnaires and 82 paper questionnaires.

A total of 222 interviews represents a response rate of 55%. This is a lower response rate than has been achieved at previous Waves and will have an impact on the statistical reliability of the data (for more information please see the Appendix). We are hoping to increase this response rate considerably at the next Wave.
This report presents the findings of Wave 10 of the Omnibus and covers questions on the following issues:

- Performance Standards;
- Council Tax Benefit Take-Up Campaign;
- Banking and Revised Claim Forms;
- Monthly data matching and risk-based reviews;
- Overpayment Guide;
- Extended Access to DWP Data for Local Authorities;
- Contact with the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate;
- BFI website.

Respondents were also asked about the status of their LA in terms of decentralisation and outsourcing.

1.1 Performance Standards

1.1.1 Introduction

In 2002, LAs have had the opportunity to bid for funding from the DWP to help them achieve the Performance Standards. The £200 million Performance Standards Fund is available for three years from April 2003. For the first round of bidding, DWP’s priorities were improvements in claims processing times, accuracy and overpayments recovery through increased staff numbers, more training and better IT.

This module in the 2004 survey aimed to provide feedback on the usefulness of the Performance Standards toolkit, in order to inform its redesign.

1.1.2 Use of the Performance Standards

The very first question that LAs were asked was about their use of the Performance Standards. Figure 1.1 shows that nearly nine in ten authorities (87%) use the Performance Standards to inform their improvement plans. Slightly fewer use them to monitor performance (74%) and make staff much more aware of what they are trying to achieve (70%), while around seven in ten use them to inform applications to the Performance Standards Fund (68%) and to confirm any performance improvements they have made (63%). Around half (54%) use them as a tool for benchmarking.
These findings are mostly similar across all sub-groups, although Scottish authorities were significantly less likely to say that they use the Performance Standards as a tool for benchmarking (19%) and Welsh authorities were less likely to say that they use them to confirm any performance improvements they have made (33%).

As Figure 1.2 illustrates, around nine in ten or more LAs have done a full assessment on each of the seven modules.

All of the English Metropolitan districts interviewed have done a full assessment on every module, while 100% of London Boroughs have done full assessments on Customer Services, Working with Landlords and Counter-fraud. In addition, all Welsh authorities have undertaken a full assessment of Processing of Claims. On the other hand, Scottish authorities are less likely than others to have undertaken a full
assessment of Customer Services and Overpayments (63%), Working with Landlords and Internal Security (56%) and Counter-fraud (50%).

1.1.3 Usefulness of the modules

Local authorities that have done a full assessment are very positive about the modules in terms of their usefulness. As Figure 1.3 shows, around nine in ten described each module as very or fairly useful. Two in five or more described Customer Service (46%), Counter-fraud (46%), Strategic Management (45%), Overpayment (43%) and Internal Security (40%) as very useful, while over half (52%) described Processing of Claims as very useful. Although 93% of authorities described Working with Landlords as useful, slightly fewer said that it is very useful (36%).

![Figure 1.3 Usefulness of modules over the last two years: all useful](image)

1.1.4 Undertaking self-assessments

Respondents were asked who in their LA has responsibility for undertaking self-assessment against the Performance Standard. In around two out of five authorities (43%) just one person has responsibility for all of the modules. This rises to 56% of Scottish authorities and decreases to 28% of London Boroughs and 25% of Welsh authorities.

However, in one-half of authorities (52%) different people have responsibility for individual/some modules. Once again, this varies by LA type: 67% of Welsh authorities and London Boroughs, 63% of English Metropolitan Districts, 55% of English Unitary authorities, 47% of English Districts and 44% of Scottish authorities.

Just four authorities – all English Districts – said that Internal Audit have responsibility.
Those 115 authorities that said different people have responsibility for self-assessment were asked which modules this involves. As Figure 1.4 shows, splitting responsibility among different people mostly occurs in the case of Counter-fraud (80%). However, around seven in ten split responsibility for Strategic Management (70%), Internal Security (68%) and Customer Services (64%). Fewer give different people responsibility for Overpayments (59%), Processing of Claims (56%) and Working with Landlords (50%).

**Figure 1.4 Different people responsible for...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counter-fraud</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic management</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal security</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer services</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing of claims</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with landlords</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the English Metropolitan districts that said they divide responsibility, all of them do so for Strategic Management, Processing of Claims, Internal Security and Counter-fraud. Nine out of ten of the English Metropolitan districts divide responsibility for Customer Services and Overpayments and eight out of ten for Working with Landlords. Although eight out of twelve Welsh authorities said that they divide responsibility for self-assessment, there is a tendency for them to be less likely to give different people responsibility for Processing of Claims and Working with Landlords (both 38%).

In a further question of this group of 115 authorities that said different people have responsibility for self-assessment, three-quarters said that the content of the modules enables them to divide the work easily.
Table 1.1  Views on the content of the modules in terms of dividing the work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Bases</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counter-fraud</td>
<td>(92)</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Landlords</td>
<td>(58)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing of Claims</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
<td>(68)</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Security</td>
<td>(78)</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td>(74)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Management</td>
<td>(81)</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base (in brackets): All LAs that said different people have responsibility

1.1.5  Views on the balance between outcomes and processes

Authorities were asked for their views on the balance between Standards relating to outcomes and the Standards relating to processes. As Figure 1.5 shows, for each module, a majority described the balance as about right. Those that did not give a positive response were more likely to say that there are too many processes than too many outcomes. This is particularly the case with Processing of Claims, for which 16% said that there are too many processes. However, in the case of Strategic Management, one in ten said that there are too many outcomes and too many processes (10% and 11% respectively). It is also worth noting that for each module, between one in seven and one in five said that they did not know whether or not the balance is about right or is skewed too much towards outcomes or processes.

Figure 1.5  Balance between standards relating to outcomes/processes
There are some differences in response to this question by LA type. Scottish authorities are generally less likely than other authority types to describe the balance as about right and more likely to say that there are too many outcomes. This is particularly the case for Strategic Management (about right 25%, too many outcomes 56%), however they are also less likely to say about right for Customer Services (31%).

1.1.6 Clarity of Part 1 in terms of setting out the criteria to be achieved

Local authorities were generally very positive about how clearly Part 1 sets out the criteria to be achieved for each standard. Around 80% or more said that it sets out the criteria very or fairly clearly for each module, although in each case they were more likely to say fairly, rather than very, clearly. In fact, for each module, around two in three authorities said that they set out the criteria fairly clearly. In addition, around one in ten said that the criteria are set out not very or at all clearly, although this rises to 16% for Strategic Management. It is, however, worth pointing out that most of these said not very, rather than at all, clearly (14% and 3% respectively).

Figure 1.6 How clearly Part 1 sets out criteria to be achieved for each Standard

On the question of clarity of the criteria, English Metropolitan districts were less likely to say ‘clearly’ and more likely to say ‘not clearly’ than other authority types.

1.1.7 Self-assessment questions in Part 2

Authorities were also asked for their views of the self-assessment questions in terms of their clarity. As Figure 1.7 shows, large majorities of authorities described them as clear, with most of these saying that they were fairly, rather than very, clear. Authorities were least positive about Strategic Management, with 82% saying clear and 13% saying not clear.
There is a tendency for English Metropolitan districts to be less positive than other authority types, however one of these differences is significant (25% of English Metropolitan districts described the self-assessment questions for Processing of Claims as not clear compared with 4% of English districts).

Opinion is, however, more divided on whether the number of questions is about right or not. As Figure 1.8 shows, authorities were most positive about Internal Security, Working with Landlords and Overpayments, with about two-thirds describing the number of questions as about right (66%, 65% and 64% respectively). They were slightly less positive about the number of questions in Processing of Claims, Customer Services and Counter-fraud, with around two in five saying there are too many questions (40%, 40% and 36% respectively). Opinion was, however, most negative about Strategic Management, with just 30% saying the number of questions is about right and 65% saying there are too many. As Figure 1.8 clearly shows, for each module, very few authorities said that there are not enough questions.

There are no significant differences across the different sub-groups.
The current scoring system for measuring the results of self-assessment weights each question equally. Local authorities were asked if they think this is about right or whether more weight should be given to other factors. As Figure 1.9 shows, opinion is very divided on this question, with around one-third mentioning each of the three options – current system is about right 36%, more weight should be given to outcomes rather than processes 38% and more weight should be given to Best Value (BV)/Statutory Performance Indicators (PIs) 36%. Very small numbers, two per cent each, had other suggestions to make. These were: ‘should give credit for improvements made/partial successes’; ‘should be weighted on the more important questions’; ‘should favour customer services more’.

Figure 1.8  Number of questions about right, too many or not enough?

Figure 1.9  Current scoring system
Opinion is generally divided across each LA type, although Scottish authorities were more likely to say that the current system is about right (63%) than the other options (more weight should be given to outcomes than processes 19% and more weight should be given to BV/Statutory Pls 25%).

1.1.8 Form Flow Self-Assessment Tool

Three-quarters of authorities (77%) have used the Form Flow Self-Assessment Tool, however, this varies by LA type from 90% of English Unitaries to 58% of Welsh and 50% of Scottish authorities. In addition, authorities that are fully Verification Framework (VF) compliant are more likely to use the Form Flow Self-Assessment Tool than those that are only partially compliant (81% versus 59%).

Users of the Form Flow Self-Assessment Tool (171 authorities) were then asked whether or not they have experienced any technical difficulties when using it. Over half (55%) mentioned slow response times when using it on a PC, while 45% said that the process for migrating data to the updated version is too laborious. In addition, 38% said that the software is difficult to install and just over one-quarter (26%) felt that the rules for inputting data is too rigid. A further seven per cent said that the quality of printing is poor. Other difficulties that were reported included limited functions/can’t save/send/no reporting facility and slow and confusing to use/not user friendly, both mentioned by six per cent of this group. One in twenty (five per cent) said that they had experienced faulty software/found anomalies/ errors.

1.1.9 Preferred reporting regimes

The current system in terms of reporting is that LAs are asked to complete and return to DWP at least one full self-assessment each year and to report their performance to DWP quarterly where Performance Standards Funding has been awarded. Authorities were therefore asked which reporting regime, from a list of options, would best suit their needs in monitoring performance.

Firstly in terms of key elements, around one-third said that they would prefer quarterly (36%) and annually (35%), while 28% would prefer six monthly.
These findings are similar across all sub-groups with the exception of Verification Status: just 10% of non-compliant authorities would prefer quarterly, compared with 47% of partially compliant and 39% of fully compliant authorities.

When authorities were asked about how often they would like to complete a full self-assessment, they were very clearly in favour of doing it annually as a one-off exercise (61%). In addition, one in five (20%) said that they would like it to be annually as a phased exercise, 12% would prefer six monthly and five per cent mentioned quarterly.

Figure 1.11  Which regime best suits LAs’ needs for monitoring performance?

These findings are similar across all sub-groups with the exception of Verification Status: just 10% of non-compliant authorities would prefer quarterly, compared with 47% of partially compliant and 39% of fully compliant authorities.

When authorities were asked about how often they would like to complete a full self-assessment, they were very clearly in favour of doing it annually as a one-off exercise (61%). In addition, one in five (20%) said that they would like it to be annually as a phased exercise, 12% would prefer six monthly and five per cent mentioned quarterly.
It is interesting that a majority of each local authority type, except Welsh and Scottish authorities, said that they would prefer annually as a one-off exercise (English Metropolitan districts 69%, English districts 66%, London Boroughs 61% and English Unitary authorities 59% versus Scottish 44% and Welsh 33%).

1.1.10 Layout and preferred format

Authorities were asked about how they would like the Performance Standards to be laid out. They were given two options to choose from. Around three in five (61%) chose to place the self-assessment questions next to the definition of each standard and 23% preferred to retain the current two-part format. However, it is worth pointing out that one in seven (14%) said that they have no preference.

Figure 1.12 Performance Standards options

The Performance Standards are currently published as a (hard copy) manual and in HTML format. Authorities were therefore asked whether or not they would prefer to use an electronic format that allowed them to manipulate the data locally, should it be made available. Figure 1.13 shows that authorities were very clearly enthusiastic about the introduction of the Performance Standards in an electronic format. Four in five (80%) said ‘yes’ they would prefer to use an electronic format, while just 13% said ‘no’ and seven per cent ‘don’t know’.
1.1.11 Improving Performance Standards
At the end of the section on Performance Standards, authorities were asked an open-ended question about how the Performance Standards for the administration of HB/CTB could be improved. Although 45% of authorities did not come up with any suggestions for how it could be improved, fourteen per cent said that more account should be taken of LA size/caseload/location. One in eight (12%) said that the amount of duplication should be reduced and the same number said make some of the standards more flexible (12%). One in ten (10%) said make questions clearer and nine per cent thought the number of standards should be reduced. Nine per cent made the suggestion to make self assessment results available for information sharing and benchmarking and the same number (9%) suggested have a more progressive system of scoring rather than above/at/not at standard.

1.2 Council Tax Benefit take-up campaign

1.2.1 Introduction
On 1 March 2004, the DWP launched a national press and poster campaign to try and increase the number of people, particularly pensioners claiming CTB.

1.2.2 19 February letter and use of the flyer and headline graphic
On 19 February 2004, DWP sent authorities a ‘Dear Benefit Manager’ letter about the DWP campaign to increase the take-up of CTB. The letter contained information about the availability of electronic versions of the flyer and of the headline graphic ‘Cut your Council Tax - Find out if you can get a rebate’.

Ninety-five per cent of authorities claimed to have received this letter (100% of Scottish authorities and London Boroughs), while two per cent said that they definitely did not receive it and three per cent did not know.
The letter provided authorities with information on how to download versions of the electronic flyer and headline graphic. Although, over half of authorities (57%) said that they did not use either of them, 15% used both, one in five (20%) used just the electronic flyer and six per cent used just the headline graphic. Welsh authorities were most likely to have not used either (91%), while London Boroughs were more likely than Scottish authorities to have used both (28% versus six per cent).

**Figure 1.14  Did your authority use the flyer/headline graphic?**

Authorities that used neither the electronic flyer nor the headline graphic were asked for the reasons why. As Figure 1.15 shows, the main reasons were that they had their own promotional material (46%), they arrived too late (32%) or did not need it because they had enough time to use the actual flyer received in the bulk mailing (29%). One in seven (14%) described them as not suitable in terms of presentation and four per cent said that they simply do not undertake take-up activity (two English Unitary authorities and two English districts). Three per cent said they had no campaign yet/were planning one for later.
There are a couple of interesting differences by LA type, with London Boroughs most likely to say that they have their own promotional material (90%) and Welsh authorities most likely to say that they had enough time to use the flyer received in the bulk mailing (60%). In addition, authorities with a high caseload were more likely than those with a low or medium caseload to say that they have their own promotional material (81%, 24% and 39% respectively).

1.2.3 Location of posters, flyers and CTB leaflet GL17

Authorities received a bulk mailing at the beginning of March 2004 containing copies of the new poster and flyer and of the CTB leaflet GL17 ‘Help with your Council Tax’. Authorities were therefore asked where they put them. The findings are shown in Table 1.2.
Table 1.2 Location of posters, flyers and CTB leaflet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Poster %</th>
<th>Flyer %</th>
<th>CTB leaflet %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA offices</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary organisation outlets</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council-run clubs for the elderly</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure centres</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP offices</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the CTB bills</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the CTB reminders</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t put them anywhere</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t receive bulk mailing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/no answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

Table 1.2 shows that the CTB leaflet achieved an overall slightly lower distribution than the poster and flyer. However, local authority offices were the most popular location for each type of publicity (mentioned by more than four in five in each case). This is followed by libraries and voluntary organisation outlets. Around one in seven put the posters and flyers in council-run clubs for the elderly (15% and 14% respectively), while one in eleven (nine per cent) placed CTB leaflets in this location. Around one in ten said that they put posters and flyers in leisure centres (six per cent for CTB leaflets) and each of the three types of publicity in DWP offices. Flyers were most likely to be placed in bills (17%) and reminders (11%).

However, seven per cent of authorities said that they did not put posters, flyers and leaflets anywhere and four authorities said that they did not receive the poster and flyers (two English Metropolitan districts, one London Borough and one Scottish authority) and seven said that they did not receive the leaflets (two English Metropolitan districts, two English districts, one London Borough, one English Unitary and one Scottish authority).

London Boroughs are more likely than English districts and Welsh authorities to have placed posters (67%, 19% and 33% respectively) and flyers (61%, 14% and 25% respectively) in libraries. They are also more likely to have placed the leaflet in libraries than all authority types except Scottish authorities (London Boroughs 56%, English districts 15%, English Metropolitan districts (25%), Welsh authorities 25%, English Unitary authorities 24% and Scottish authorities 38%).

1.2.4 Attitudes towards the posters and flyers

Attitudes towards the posters used in the DWP campaign are divided. Although 36% describe them as good (nine per cent very and 27% fairly), a further 37% said that they were neither good nor poor and 21% described them as poor (five per cent very and 15% fairly).
Welsh authorities were most positive about the posters, with 75% rating them as good, 25% as neither good nor poor and none saying that they were poor. English Metropolitan authorities were overall least positive, with 44% describing them as poor and just 13% saying that they were good.

Those that described the posters as poor were asked why they said this. Out of 46 authorities, 18 said that they prefer to use their own localised material and 16 said that they were not as useful as local material. Seventeen LAs said that they thought the design was bland/uninspiring and five said the wording was poor/non-specific/no contact details.

When authorities were asked for their views on the flyers used in the DWP campaign, once again opinion was divided. Over one-third described them as good (seven per cent very and 29% fairly) and neither good nor poor (38%). Whereas, almost one in five (19%) said that the flyers were poor (six per cent very and 13% fairly).
In terms of looking at the findings by LA type, the patterns are very similar as for posters. Once again, Welsh authorities were most positive, with 67% rating the flyers as good, 25% as neither good nor poor and none saying that they were poor. English Metropolitan authorities were once again overall least positive, with 50% describing them as poor and just 13% saying that they were good.

The main reasons for finding the flyers poor were once again that they prefer to use their own localised material (14 out of 42) and that they were not as useful as local material (17). Eighteen local authorities said that they thought the design of the flyers was ‘bland/uninspiring’ and three said that the wording was poor/non-specific/no contact details were given.

### 1.2.5 Usefulness of Best Practice Guide

Authorities were asked how useful they found the Best Practice Guide on Council Tax Benefit Take-up that was sent out by DWP by e-mail on 8 March 2004 and was followed up with a hard copy. A majority of 59% described the Guide as useful, with 12% saying it is very useful and 47% fairly useful. Of the others three in ten said that it is not very (25%) or not at all useful (five per cent). A further two per cent claimed not to have seen it and one in eleven (nine per cent) were unable to give an opinion.
1.2.6 Other initiatives introduced

Local authorities were asked what other initiatives they have introduced that overlap with, or were as a result of, the DWP campaign. Eight per cent of authorities have not introduced any initiatives. English Metropolitan districts and London boroughs were the only authority types that have all introduced some kind of initiative, while 17% of Welsh authorities said ‘none’, as did 10% of English Unitary authorities, nine per cent of English districts and six per cent of Scottish authorities.

As Figure 1.19 shows around half have provided information on their own website (50%), devised their own promotional literature (47%) or advertised in the local press (46%). In addition, around one-quarter mentioned Benefits road shows (27%) and Benefit Calculators (21%) and one in ten local radio advertising (10%) and publicity when people are renewing their bus passes (10%).

Figure 1.18 Best Practice Guide on Council Tax Benefit: How useful?

- Very useful: 12%
- Fairly useful: 47%
- Not very useful: 25%
- Not at all useful: 5%
- Didn’t see it: 2%
- Don’t know: 9%

Base: All (222)
Figure 1.19  Initiatives introduced overlapping with/result of DWP campaign

It is worth pointing out that Welsh authorities were less likely than other authority types to have introduced the following initiatives: local press advertising (17%), devising their own promotional literature and providing information on their website (both 25%). In addition, London boroughs were most likely to provide information on their website (83%) and devise their own promotional material (94%), while English Metropolitan districts were most likely to hold Benefits road shows (63%).

A majority of authorities targeted these initiatives at all groups (58%) but over half singled out pensioners (53%) and almost one in five (19%) mentioned working age people. Table 1.3 shows that findings for this question vary by local authority type. Clearly not all of these differences are significant, however it is interesting that Welsh authorities did not target any initiatives at working age people and that they were less likely to target initiatives at pensioners (30%) than English Unitary authorities (69%) and English Metropolitan districts (75%). On the other hand, they were more likely to say that they targeted the initiatives at everyone than English Unitary authorities (35%) and English Metropolitan districts (38%).
Table 1.3  At whom were initiatives targeted?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pensioners</th>
<th></th>
<th>Working age</th>
<th></th>
<th>All groups</th>
<th></th>
<th>Other</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English district</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London borough</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All that mentioned initiatives (202)

1.2.7 Number of enquiries

Authorities were asked whether they think the DWP campaign, together with their authority’s own take-up initiatives (where applicable), have increased the number of enquiries about CTB a lot or a little or whether it has made no difference. A majority believed that all of the initiatives have increased the number of enquiries - a lot 13% and a little 51%. On the other hand, one-quarter of authorities (25%) do not think that it has made any difference, rising to 63% of Scottish authorities. No Scottish or Welsh authorities said that the number of enquiries had increased a lot, however, the proportion of London boroughs saying this increases to 33%.

Table 1.4  Number of enquiries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increased a lot</th>
<th>Increased a little</th>
<th>Made no difference</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English district</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London borough</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

Following on from the question on the number of enquiries, those authorities that said they have increased, were asked which campaign out of their own and DWP’s was most effective. A half (50%) said that they both played an equal part, while three in ten felt that their own initiatives were most effective and six per cent said that the DWP campaign was most effective. The nine authorities that said the DWP campaign was most effective were made up of one Welsh authority and eight English districts. London boroughs were the only authority type that were more likely to say that their own local initiatives were more effective (57%) rather than both played an equal part (36%).
Authorities that said that the number of enquiries had risen were asked to estimate the proportion that has been from each of the following groups: pensioners and working age people. This proved, as expected, to be a difficult question for authorities to respond to. More than two-thirds (68%) could not give a full answer to this question. Amongst the authorities that could respond with a figure, the average, that is mean score for the proportion of increased enquiries that could be attributed to pensioners was 67.4 whilst the mean score for the proportion of increased enquiries that were related to working age people was 29.5.

### 1.2.8 Size of caseload

Approximately two-thirds (64%) of all authorities said that taking all of the various take up initiatives into account, including their own and DWP’s, that their caseload has increased. For the majority (58%) it had increased a little, but six per cent said it had increased a lot. Just over one-quarter (27%) claimed that the various initiatives had made no difference to their caseload. It is perhaps unsurprising that those with an already high caseload were most likely to say that they felt that their caseload had increased as a consequence of the initiatives. As shown in Table 1.5, approximately two-thirds (67%) of those with a high caseload said that their caseload had increased a little compared with around one-half (49%) of those with a low caseload.
Table 1.5  Increase in caseload as a result of local authority’s and DWP’s initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HB/CTB caseload</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased a lot</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased a little</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made no difference</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

The 142 authorities that said that their caseload had increased as a consequence of the initiatives were asked to estimate how much of that increased caseload could be attributed to pensioners and how much to people of working age. Clearly this was similarly a difficult question for authorities to answer and in excess of three in five authorities simply said don’t know to this question. The table below shows that most of the increase can be attributed to pensioners rather than working age people. Overall, authorities that were able to give an answer said that an average of 69% of the increase came from pensioners and 28% came from people of working age.

Table 1.6  Increase in caseload: proportion of increase attributable to pensioners and working age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pensioners</th>
<th>Working age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All that said caseload had increased (142)

The group of 142 authorities that said that their caseload had increased were asked what strategies their authority had introduced in order to manage the extra workload. The most frequently mentioned strategy was increased visiting capacity, mentioned by three in ten (30%). Other strategies mentioned by around a fifth included applying for funding from the Performance Standards Fund (20%), buying in additional processing capacity (20%) and screening claims for eligibility (17%). One in eight (13%) screened claims for those already in receipt and eleven per cent had set up a dedicated phone-line.
1.2.9 Perceived barriers to pensioners claiming CTB

The survey looked at the reasons for low take-up of Council Tax Benefit amongst pensioners and asked authorities what they thought were the barriers to pensioners claiming CTB as well as what would encourage more of them to claim. Firstly, in terms of barriers, one of the key problems as perceived by authorities is the stigma associated with claiming benefits. This was mentioned by in excess of four in five (84%) of authorities. Fear of bureaucracy was mentioned by two thirds (66%) and other associated issues to do with the forms were frequently mentioned: 62% felt the length of the claim form was a barrier and 61% said that the documentation required was problematic for pensioners.

Table 1.7 Main barriers to pensioners claiming CTB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stigma associated with claiming benefits</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of bureaucracy</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of claim form</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation required</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex interaction with other benefits</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not worthwhile financially</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of capital holdings</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrusion on their privacy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All
Authorities were also asked to state what one thing would encourage pensioners to claim CTB. One in five (20%) did not know how to encourage this, but amongst those that could the most frequently mentioned responses were ‘shorter/simpler form’ (17%), and home visits to help fill-in form (12%). Other responses of note included eight per cent who said it would be encouraging if it were possible to lose the stigma of a benefit and present it as a right. Six per cent thought changes to the claiming process would make a difference.

1.2.10 Customer Services Module

Around three-quarters (76%) of the authorities surveyed said that they were below standard for the Customer Service module of the Performance Standards dealing with ‘Encouraging benefit take-up, reducing poverty’ before 1 March 2004. In more detail, one in ten (10%) were at standard (100%), one-third (33%) were below but at 80-99%, almost one-quarter (24%) were at 60-79% and almost one-fifth (19%) were below 60%. Just one per cent of authorities were above standard before that date (13% did not know).

Approximately half of the authorities interviewed (47%) had undertaken a self-assessment on or after 1 March 2004 and this group of 105 authorities were then asked if this assessment had changed since 1 March 2004. Half (50%) said that the assessment had changed. It is interesting to note that amongst this group of 52 authorities that said the assessment had changed, Scottish and Welsh authorities were absent.

The 52 LAs that had experienced a change in assessment were then asked if their authority is now above, below or at standard. One-quarter (25%) said that it was at or above standard. Amongst those authorities that were below standard, nearly two in five (38%) were at the level of 80-99%, almost one-quarter (23%) were at 60-79% and six per cent were below 60%.

The 170 authorities that said that their LA was below standard were asked what plans they had made to move towards being ‘At standard.’ A wide range of responses was recorded here but the most frequently mentioned plans, stated by around six in ten were to inform people via their Council Tax bill and display posters/leaflets at key public access points (both mentioned by 59%). A similar proportion (57%) said that they planned to co-operate with local Pension Service staff on national campaigns to promote take-up of non-HB/CTB benefits, such as Pension Credit. Other plans included: work with local DWP offices to encourage the legitimate take-up of HB/CTB (46%), provide literature on HB/CTB in LA tenancy details and advise when tenant signs up (45%), have a strategy beyond general awareness raising (40%), communicate our strategy/approach to potential claimants/representative groups (39%) and offer advice to all working age claimants considering starting work or who have terminated their out of work claim (36%).
1.3 Banking and revised claim forms

1.3.1 Introduction
This section of the survey aimed to find out information about tenants receiving their HB via their bank account in order to support the implementation of Local Housing Allowance.

1.3.2 Paying Housing Benefit into bank accounts
When asked if their LA pay HB directly into the bank accounts of landlords, tenants or both, more than two in five (44%) of authorities said that they do not pay by bank transfer at all. On the other hand, just over two in five (42%) do pay directly into the bank accounts of both landlords and tenants, one in eight (12%) pay directly into landlords’ accounts only and a very small proportion, just one per cent pay directly into tenants accounts only.

Figure 1.22 Banking and Revised Claim Forms: Payment of HB direct into bank accounts

There appears to be a correlation between caseload and whether or not authorities pay directly into accounts. As Table 1.8 illustrates, those authorities with a high caseload were significantly more likely to be paying directly into accounts than those with a low caseload. For instance, just a third (33%) of those authorities with a low caseload pay HB directly into the bank accounts of both landlords and tenants compared to half (50%) of those authorities with a high caseload.
Table 1.8  Does your local authority pay Housing Benefit direct into the bank accounts of landlords, tenants or both?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HB/CTB caseload</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlords only</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants only</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both landlords and tenants</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not pay by bank transfer</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

1.3.3 Tenants receiving Housing Benefit via a bank account

Authorities were asked to estimate the proportion of tenants receiving HB in their authority that have a bank account into which HB can be paid. This was obviously always going to be a difficult question for authorities to respond to and more than three in five (62%) of those surveyed were unable to give a definitive answer. Amongst those that were able to estimate, almost three in ten (29%) of respondents said that the proportion was 75% or more, and one in twenty (five per cent) said that it was between 50% and 74%. Very small proportions, just four per cent gave estimates below 50%: one per cent estimated the proportion was up to 24%, and three per cent estimated it was between 25% and 49%. The mean score for the proportion of tenants receiving HB that have a bank account into which HB could be paid was 77.6%.

The group of 96 authorities that pay HB directly into the bank accounts of tenants or landlords were then asked to estimate the proportion of all tenants receiving HB in their authority that currently receive it via a bank account. The definition of tenants for this included all tenants receiving payments via a bank account, including Registered Social Landlord (RSL) tenants. Again, there was a significant proportion of authorities that responded ‘don’t know’ to this question (41%). However, 14% of authorities said that the proportion of all tenants currently receiving it via a bank account was between 0 and 24 while one in ten (10%) said it was between 25 and 49 per cent. Around one-third (35%) said that the proportion was over 50%: 18% said it was between 50 and 74 and the same proportion said it was 75% or more. Amongst those respondents who could give an estimated proportion the mean score for that proportion was 52.8%.
A similar question was asked of this same group of 96 authorities but this time in terms of the proportion of private sector tenants who receive HB via a bank account. The proportions given were very similar to those for all tenants as can be seen in Figure 1.24. Again, there were a substantial number of respondents (44%) who could not answer. Amongst those giving a proportion, thirteen per cent said it was 24% or under, eight per cent said it was between 25% and 49% and almost one in five (19%) said it was between 50% and 74%. Seventeen per cent said the proportion of private sector tenants receiving HB via a bank account was over 75%. The mean score for this question amongst those authorities who could offer a proportion was 54.7%.
1.3.4 Barriers to paying Housing Benefit into tenants’ bank accounts

Local authorities were asked why they thought tenants might be reluctant to have their HB paid into their bank account. As can be seen in Figure 1.25, the most frequently mentioned reason was because tenants had never had a bank account. This was cited by approximately three in five authorities (57%). Almost one-third (32%) thought that one of the reasons for reluctance over this method of payment was that tenants might be worried about getting into debt, whilst just over a quarter (27%) said that some tenants can’t because they have a County Court judgement against them. One in eight (12%) said it was because the account is overdrawn so can’t access the money. Almost one in five (18%) could not give an answer.

Figure 1.25 Why are tenants reluctant?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never had a bank account</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about getting into debt</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t because have County Court judgement against them</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Account overdrawn/can’t access money</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To fully understand this issue, a further question asked authorities to think in terms of the barriers that exist which may in some way prevent the payment of HB into tenants’ bank accounts. A number of potential barriers were mentioned. Almost one-third (32%) of authorities thought that one barrier was the banks’ position/stance and three in ten (30%) said security issues. Software was mentioned as a barrier by 27% of LAs and just over one in five (21%) said a barrier was clients not having appropriate ID. Other barriers that were suggested were bankruptcy (18%), DWP failing to lead on shared information (16%) and that it was not seen as a priority for the LA (14%).
1.3.5 Promoting paying Housing Benefit to tenant’s bank accounts

Authorities were asked if they are currently doing anything to promote paying HB into tenants’ bank accounts. Just over a third (36%) said that they were currently active in this way. It is worth noting that partially compliant authorities were more likely to be actively promoting the payment of HB into tenants’ bank accounts than fully or non-compliant authorities.

Table 1.9 Is your local authority currently doing anything to promote paying Housing Benefit into tenants’ bank accounts?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VF status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>VF compliant</th>
<th>VF Partially compliant</th>
<th>Non-compliant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

1.3.6 Deposit scheme

Some LAs currently operate a ‘Deposit Scheme’ whereby the scheme underwrites deposits for landlords. In this survey, authorities were asked if they either operate such a scheme or if they were aware of the scheme (even if they do not currently operate it). Almost three-quarters (74%) of the authorities either operate a deposit scheme (45%) or were aware of such a scheme even if they do not operate it (29%). Just over one in five (22%) neither operated a deposit scheme nor had any
awareness of one. Across LA types, English Unitaries were the most likely to operate this scheme (59%).

Table 1.10  Does your local authority operate, or are you aware of, a ‘deposit scheme’ whereby the scheme underwrites deposits for landlords?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes, my LA operates this scheme</th>
<th>Aware of scheme, but my LA does not operate it</th>
<th>Neither (not aware of and do not operate scheme)</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welsh</strong></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scottish</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Unitary</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Metro’</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English District</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>London Borough</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

1.4  Monthly data matching and risk-based reviews

1.4.1  Introduction

Tackling fraud and abuse in the benefits system has been a high priority for the government for some time. The Security Against Fraud and Error (SAFE) incentive scheme pays LAs for identifying and acting on fraud and error in their HB caseload. This was introduced initially across Great Britain in April 2002 and further changes were introduced in April 2004.

In this survey, LAs were asked about the enhanced data-matching and risk-based interventions that have been incorporated into the VF scheme from April 2004, and the changes also that have been made to the SAFE scheme. This section of the report details how well authorities are coping with their introduction and also examines what changes LAs have made as a result.

1.4.2  Have they been carried out?

From April 2004, both the VF and the Performance Standards have required LAs to carry out monthly matching and risk-based reviews. The survey asked LAs if they have done either monthly matching or risk-based reviews.

Most LAs (94%) have done monthly matching and three quarters (75%) have done risk-based reviews. A very small proportion have done neither because they have decided to delay the process (three per cent) or for some other reason (two per cent).
It is interesting to note that those authorities that are not fully compliant are less likely to have carried out monthly matching since April 2004 (82% of authorities that are partially compliant and 83% of authorities that are non-compliant have carried out monthly matching) compared to 97% of fully compliant authorities.

### Table 1.11 Monthly data matching and risk-based reviews since April 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VF status</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>VF compliant</th>
<th>VF Partially compliant</th>
<th>Non-compliant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - monthly matching</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes - risk-based reviews</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, neither, because our LA decided to delay the process</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - neither (other reason)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

The eleven authorities that said they have carried out neither monthly matching nor risk-based reviews were asked why they had not done so. Six said it was because they were not compliant with the VF Reviews module, five said they are planning on introducing them from a future date and four said they were not able to organise it in time. One gave their reason as it not being a legal requirement.

### 1.4.3 Setting up a referral management system

Local authorities need to import the data matches and risk-based reviews on to some form of referral management system to ensure their actioning is progressed
and to avoid duplication. Around three quarters (78%) of authorities have set-up a referral management system. There appears to be a correlation between whether or not a referral management system has been set up and level of compliance. For instance, more than four in five (82%) of authorities that are fully compliant have set up a system, just over three-quarters (76%) of those that are partially compliant have set one up whereas just over half (55%) of those that are non-compliant have set up such a system. It is interesting to note that authorities who have their benefits software supplied by Academy are much more likely to have set up a referral management system (90%) than those who have SX3 software (72%).

**Table 1.12 Has your local authority set-up a referral management system?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VF status</th>
<th>Total %</th>
<th>VF compliant %</th>
<th>Partially compliant %</th>
<th>Non-compliant %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

Of the 49 authorities that have not done this yet, more than half expected to have done so by October. In more detail, 22% expected to have the referral management system up and working in either May, June or July 2004. Six per cent said they expected to have it working by August 2004, ten per cent by September 2004 and 14% by October 2004. Smaller numbers, six per cent and four per cent said November 2004 and January 2005. Two per cent said they did not see the need to set up a referral management system and one-third (33%) said they did not know when they would set up such a system.
1.4.4 Management Information produced

The survey asked the question ‘What management information has your authority produced on reviews since the changes came into effect in April 2004?’. One-third (33%) have used the Excel spreadsheet, one-quarter (26%) returned the new HBSD/IAD data extract and approximately one in ten (11%) sent in reports from their own system or provided the 2004/5 VF MI (9%).

Those authorities that use Anite software were much more likely to have used the Excel spreadsheet (58%) than for example SX3 users (38%) and Academy users (14%). Academy users however, were more likely to have returned the HBSD/IAD scan: 45% of Academy users had done this compared to 26% of Anite users and 21% of SX3 users.

Figure 1.29 Management information produced on review since April 2004
1.4.5 Software solutions

Local authorities were asked, overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the software solution supplied to their authority to implement monthly data-matching and reviews. Feelings towards the software solution supplied were divided. Around a third (32%) were satisfied but a similar proportion (34%) were dissatisfied (12% were very dissatisfied).

Academy software users were significantly more likely to state that they were satisfied (49%) compared to for example around one-quarter (24%) of Anite users and around one-fifth (21%) of SX3 users.

![Figure 1.30 Satisfaction with software solution](image)

When asked why they were dissatisfied, over half (56%) of this group said it was because they perceived (or they had been told by the software companies) that the Department had specified the changes too late and two in five (40%) said it simply did not meet their requirement. Smaller numbers, 18% in fact, said that it costs too much. Problems with software were also mentioned. Six per cent mentioned each of the following specifics related to software: software phased in stages/not fully implemented yet; problems with the software; and five per cent said that the software was not fully developed/tested.
Local authorities were then asked, overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the software solution supplied to their authority to implement SAFE. Satisfaction with the software solution for SAFE was higher (44% satisfied) than the level of satisfaction for the software for monthly data matching and risk-based reviews. Just one-quarter (25%) were dissatisfied with the software solution for SAFE.

Reasons for dissatisfaction were similar to those expressed in relation to dissatisfaction with the software solution for monthly data matching and reviews. Just over one-half (52%) were dissatisfied because of perceived late specification changes, two in five or so (43%) because it does not meet the requirement and one in seven (14%) because it costs too much. Other reasons mentioned by smaller numbers were that it was delivered late (7%) and they were still implementing/testing the system (5%).
1.4.6 Software suppliers

Local authorities were asked to name their benefits software supplier. The most frequently mentioned suppliers are listed below and, as the chart shows, SX3 are used by more than three in ten (31%) with Academy the next most frequently used, by around a fifth (22%). Anite was used by 17% and IBS by 12%.

Table 1.13 Benefits software suppliers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supplier name</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SX3</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anite</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bull</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northgate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanderson</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comino</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flex</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffron</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (222)
1.5 Monthly data matching

1.5.1 Views on how it is working

Authorities were asked overall, how well monthly data matching is working in their authority in terms of detecting fraud and error. Around three in five (61%) said that monthly data matching is working either very or fairly well in terms of detecting fraud and error. Almost three in ten (29%) think it is too soon to tell and only eight per cent are negative, with six per cent saying it is not working very well and two per cent saying it is not working at all well.

Figure 1.34 Monthly data matching

It is interesting to note that those authorities with a low HB/CTB caseload were more likely to say that they thought monthly data matching was working well in their authority. Just over seven in ten (72%) of those authorities with a low caseload said that they thought it was working well (either very well or fairly well) compared to just 59% of those with a medium caseload and 53% of those authorities with a high caseload.

Table 1.14 Overall how well is monthly data matching working in your authority in terms of detecting fraud and error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HB/CTB caseload</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very/fairly well</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very/at all well</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All
When asked about problems with monthly data matching, a positive finding is that more than half (55%) had no problems to report whatsoever. Those authorities that did say they had problems, said they were to do with poor quality referrals (15%) or problems with the quality of the data they were able to provide (13%). Four per cent said that the problem was that it was out of date/duplicated records/need manual editing and the same amount (4%) said a problem was high volume/staff not able to deal with it. Three per cent said the problem was that they were not able to provide the data-extract.

Figure 1.35 Problems with monthly data matching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor quality referrals - too few identified incorrectness</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with the quality of the data we were able to provide</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of date</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High volume</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not able to provide data extract</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No problems</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The authorities that had experienced problems with monthly data matching were asked how they were managing to resolve them. The most frequently mentioned response, given by one in eight (12%) of this group was manual editing/connecting data/deleting duplicates. One in twelve (8%) said they had spoken to Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) but more than a fifth (22%) said it was not resolved as yet/still working on it.

1.5.2 Amount of data matches

The survey aimed to establish whether authorities have had more, less or about the same amount of data matches as they had expected. Almost one-quarter (24%) said they had more and almost one-fifth (19%) said they had less. Over half (53%), however, said they had about the same.
The 53 authorities that said they have had more data matches were asked how they were managing their increased workload. Over three-quarters (77%) said they were either doing very (11%) or fairly well (66%). Seventeen per cent said they were not doing very well and just four per cent said not at all well.

1.5.3 Number of data matching referrals actioned

Authorities were asked to state the number of data matching referrals they have actioned since April 2004. Approximately half of LAs (49%) said that they have actioned 149 or less referrals. One-fifth or so (21%) have actioned up to 49 since April, 16% have actioned between 50 and 99 and just over one in ten (11%) have actioned between 100 and 149 referrals. Smaller proportions of authorities have actioned 150 or more referrals. As Table 1.15 illustrates, one in five (20%) of
authorities have actioned between 150 and 250 + referrals and the mean score for the number of referrals actioned is 120.95. Interestingly, one-third or so (32%) were unable to give a definitive answer to this question.

**Table 1.15** Since April 2004, how many data matching referrals has your local authority actioned?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of data matching referrals actioned</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-149</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150-199</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-249</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250+</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>120.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.16** How many overpayments have been detected as a result of referrals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of overpayments detected as a result of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked how many overpayments have been detected as a result of referrals, a significant proportion of authorities that claimed to have actioned at least one data matching referral could not answer this question (52%). Amongst those authorities that could give a response, the majority were in the range of 0-29 and this is reflected in the mean score of 28.5. One in ten (ten per cent) had detected 0-9, 14% had detected 10-19 and six per cent had detected between 20 and 29.

**Table 1.16** How many overpayments have been detected as a result of referrals?

**Table 1.16** How many overpayments have been detected as a result of referrals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of overpayments detected as a result of referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All that say their LA has actioned one or more data matching referrals (145)
As a follow-up to this question, this same group of authorities were asked if this was more, less or about the same as they had got from data matching before April 2004. Approximately half (48%) said that they did not know the answer to this question. Seventeen per cent said that it was more than they had got from data matching before April 2004. Far fewer, just eight per cent, said that it was less than they had got from before that date, and just over a quarter (27%) said that it was about the same as they had got from data matching before April 2004.

The authorities that said they had actioned one or more data matching referrals were then asked how many fraud investigations had commenced as a result of matching referrals. A higher proportion of authorities than previously gave a definitive answer to this question, although still 28% said don’t know. Approximately half (47%) of authorities in this group said that the number of fraud investigations that have commenced as a result of matching referrals was in the range of 0-29. As Table 1.17 shows, just over a fifth (22%) said between 0-9 fraud investigations had commenced, 13% said that between 10 and 19 had commenced and 12% between 20 and 29. The mean score for the number of fraud investigations that have commenced as a result of matching referrals is 32.5.

Table 1.17  How many fraud investigations have commenced as a result of matching referrals?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of fraud investigations commenced as result of matching referrals</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-99</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All that say their LA has actioned one or more data matching referrals (145)

1.5.4 Responsibility for data matching

Local authorities were asked who was responsible for data matches before the changes in April 2004. The majority (89%) said that the fraud manager had been responsible and a further 14% said the benefit manager had been responsible. A small proportion, just three per cent, said the VF team was responsible before April 2004.
Authorities were then asked how this has changed since April 2004. Almost two in five (38%) said the responsibility had moved since April 2004.

Figure 1.39  Responsibility for data matches since April 2004

The change since April 2004 appears to be that benefit managers are now taking responsibility, mentioned by nearly two-thirds (64%). Almost one-quarter (24%) said that the fraud manager is now responsible. Just over one-fifth (21%) said that new teams are now responsible and a similar proportion (18%) said that the Verification Framework team is now responsible.

1.5.5  Changes made to accommodate data matching

Authorities were asked to state what changes they have made to accommodate monthly data matching. Staff changes appear to have been the most common;
Introduction

around four in five (79%) have informed staff via training about the changes required and just over two in five (41%) have recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with it. It is interesting to note that Anite software users were significantly more likely to have implemented training of staff on the changes required (92%) compared to for example SX3 users (76%). Around two-thirds (68%) have made organisational changes to cope with the new regime and 43% are working with software suppliers on the changes required.

Figure 1.40  Changes made for monthly data matching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training of staff on the changes required</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made/making organisational changes to cope with new regime</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with software supplier on changes required</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with this</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (222)

1.6  Risk-based reviews

1.6.1  Views on how they are working

When authorities were asked about their views of risk-based reviews in terms of how they are working in their authority, over half (53%) said that they are working well. Almost three in ten (29%) said that it is too soon to tell and 18% said they are not working well, (15% not very well and three per cent not at all well). It is interesting to note that those authorities with a high caseload were less likely to say that it is working well in their authority (45% of those with a high caseload said it is working well compared with 57% of those with a low caseload and 55% of those with a medium caseload).
When asked what problems, if any, they had experienced with risk-based reviews around one-third (34%) of LAs had not had any. Those that had were divided between problems with establishing contact with claimants (21%), problems with data on scans (20%) and problems with volume (17%). Seven per cent mentioned software problems/issues/delays.

Those who have experienced problems with risk-based reviews were asked if they had managed to resolve these problems. Three in ten or so (28%) said that they had not managed to resolve these problems yet. Actions that were mentioned in an attempt to resolve the problems included: manual intervention/checking (15%); change/review policy procedures (15%); and contact/liaison with software company (11%). Smaller numbers said that they had additional resources/staff working on them (7%) and more telephone/postal reminders (6%).
1.6.2 Risk-based review used

Authorities were asked if it was their own, the DWP, risk-based review, or both. A majority of over two-thirds (69%) said that they use DWP’s risk-based review, only four per cent use their own and around one-quarter (23%) use both.

Figure 1.43 Risk-based reviews – using own or DWP?

Authorities were asked if they thought that the DWP risk-based reviews represented an accurate assessment of risk. The majority (65%) said it was simply too soon to tell but amongst those that had an opinion on the reviews, responses were divided. Eighteen per cent agreed it was accurate and fifteen per cent said it was inaccurate.

Figure 1.44 Reasons for disagreeing about the accuracy of risk-based reviews

Base: All who disagree that Department for Work and Pensions risk-based reviews are accurate (33)
The 33 authorities that disagreed with the statement that DWP risk-based reviews are an accurate assessment of risk were asked to give their reasons for their point of view on this issue. Fifteen of the 33 said it was because it does not give details of the risks, 14 said they may have their own local risk assessments and six said it generates more results than DWP.

1.6.3 Number of reviews started

Authorities were asked to state how many reviews they had started since April 2004. Around one in five (19%) had started between 0 and 199, 14% had started between 200 and 399 and 15 per cent had started between 400 and 599. The mean number of reviews that had been started since April 2004 was 549.5. As Table 1.18 illustrates, a significant proportion of authorities, around three in ten (28%) were unsure of the number of reviews that had started since April 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of reviews started since April 2004</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-199</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-399</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-599</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600-799</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800-999</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1499</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500-1999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>549.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

All those authorities that said their LA has started more than one review since April 2004 were then asked to state how many had resulted in fraud and error being detected. A high proportion of these authorities (67%) said that they did not know how many have resulted in fraud and error being detected. Amongst those that could provide a definitive response, 15 per cent said 0-19 had resulted in fraud and error being detected, seven per cent said between 20-39, one per cent 40-59, four per cent 60-79 and five per cent 80+. The mean score for those providing a response to this question was 56.1.
Table 1.19  How many have resulted in fraud and error being detected?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. that have resulted in fraud and error being detected</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-19</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-39</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80+</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>56.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base : All that say their LA has started more than one review since April 2004 (150)

All authorities that said their LA has started more than one review since April 2004 were asked if this was more, less or about the same as found from renewal activity before April 2004. Around two-thirds (66%) said that they did not know, seven per cent said more and nine per cent said less. Around one in five (19%) said about the same number had been found as from renewal activity before April 2004.

Finally in this section, authorities were asked to state how many reviews have been investigated for fraud as a result of a review. More than half (52%) did not know how many. Just fewer than one in five (18%) said that none had been investigated for fraud as a result of a review. Thirteen per cent said between one and five, seven per cent six and ten and three per cent eleven and fifteen. Seven per cent said that twenty or more had been investigated for fraud as a result of a review. The mean score for the number that have been investigated for fraud as a result of a review was 6.9.

Table 1.20  How many have been investigated for fraud as a result of a review?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. that have been investigated for fraud as result of review</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.6.4 Meeting the target to commence review action on at least 2.5%

Local authorities taking part in this wave were asked if they have been able to meet the target to commence review action on at least 2.5% (see circular A38/2003 Appendix) of their caseload per calendar month. More than half (54%) have met their target but slightly more than one-third (35%) had not and 12% were unsure.

Figure 1.45 Meeting the target to commence review action

It is interesting to note that those authorities with a high caseload were significantly less likely to have been able to meet the target than those with a low caseload (41% compared to 64%), as can be seen in Table 1.21.

Table 1.21 Has your authority been able to meet the target to commence review action on at least 2.5 per cent (see Circular A38/2003 Appendix) of its claimant caseload per calendar month?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Able to meet the target?</th>
<th>HB/CTB caseload</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All

The 77 LAs that had not met their monthly volume target were asked for reasons. IT problems were specified by around two-thirds (64%). Other reasons included: not undertaking it in one or two months (36%), staff not trained in time (27%), lack of resources/staff (18%), disk received late/started late (13%) and lack of clarity on new VF (13%).
1.6.5 Changes made to accommodate risk-based reviews

Authorities were asked to state what changes they have made in order to accommodate risk-based reviews. The main changes appear to be training of staff on the changes required (81%) and making organisational changes to cope with the new regime (72%). Around half had also been working with software suppliers on making organisational changes to cope with the new regime (49%) and a similar proportion have recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with this (50%).

Figure 1.46 Reasons for not meeting monthly volume target

1.6.6 Overall satisfaction with monthly data matching and risk-based reviews

Local authorities were asked to say how satisfied or dissatisfied they are overall with all of the changes discussed in this section of the questionnaire, ie. monthly data matching and risk-based reviews. Just over one-half (51%) of LAs were either very or fairly satisfied with changes overall. Only 14% expressed dissatisfaction and of that group just three per cent were very dissatisfied.
Those authorities that were either dissatisfied or neither satisfied nor dissatisfied were asked why. The most frequently mentioned reason was that it was hard to manage referrals (34%). However, in addition, nearly a third (32%) said they were not getting results in terms of detection and error, and around one in five (19%) said DWP could change. Seventeen per cent said they had experienced software issues/problems/received late and one in seven (14%) said it was simply too early to tell.

Figure 1.48 Why dissatisfied?

- Hard to manage referrals: 34%
- Not getting results in terms of detection and error: 32%
- Department for Work and Pensions could change: 19%
- Software issues: 17%
- Too early to tell yet: 14%
- Other: 15%
1.7 Overpayment Guide

1.7.1 Introduction

On 1 December 2003, the HB/CTB Overpayments Guide was issued to LAs. We were interested in finding out how authorities were using the guide as well as their views on it. Managers were instructed to ask the person who uses the guide to answer this section of the questionnaire.

1.7.2 Using the guide

Most authorities (94%) had received the guide and of these a majority (64%) said they use it occasionally to look things up/refer to. Just under one-fifth (22%) use it regularly and almost one in ten (9%) have never used it.

![Figure 1.49 Overpayment Guide](image)

The nineteen authorities that had not made use of the guide were asked for their reasons for not using it. Fourteen of this group said it was because of lack of time/too much pressure, eight said it was because of lack of resources, seven said have our own/don’t need to use DWP guide and two said it was not very user friendly.

1.7.3 Usefulness of the guide

All authorities that use the Overpayments Guide were asked to state how useful they found it. A large majority of 93% said that they found it either very or fairly useful. Ways in which it was described as useful included most significantly, that ‘all guidance is in one place’ (90%). Other ways in which it was described as useful included good level of information (56%), guidance given is clear and concise (47%) and to refer to (48%). Around two in five (42%) said it was easy to navigate, around one-third (35%) said they used it for training and 26% said it was useful in terms of being new guidance/not given before.
The eleven authorities that said that the information in the guide was either not very or not at all useful were asked to describe in what ways the information was not useful. Six of the eleven said there was not enough technical detail, three said there were gaps in the information and two each mentioned not enough practical examples and difficult to find information.

1.7.4 Improving the guide

Users of the guide were asked to suggest ways in which it might be improved. Issuing it as a Word document was mentioned most often, by 44% of users. Just over one-third (34%) wanted more practical examples, one-quarter (25%) said that examples of all forms would be an improvement and 22% wanted more technical information. Nine per cent said an improvement would be a clearer contents list. It is worth noting that a substantial number (26%) could not provide a suggestion for improving the guide.
All respondents who said that they used the guide either regularly or occasionally were asked what else, if anything they would like to see in the guide. The majority of this group, almost two-thirds in fact (65%) said don’t know in response to this question. Amongst the minority that expressed a view, the most frequently mentioned responses were more practical examples (13%), some recognition that LAs have their own anti-poverty strategies and recognition of different recovery regimes/options is needed (both mentioned by 9%).

### 1.7.5 Dealing with overpayment recovery

Almost three-quarters (74%) of authorities have a separate section(s) within the Benefits department that deals with overpayments. Those with a high caseload are more likely to have a separate section that deals with overpayments (92% of those with a high caseload have a separate section compared with 57% of those with a low caseload).

Three-quarters of authorities (75%) said that they use other DWP benefits to recover HB/CTB overpayments, 15% never have and one in ten (10%) said that they don’t currently but have in the past.

The fifty-six authorities that said that they do not use other DWP benefits to recover HB/CTB overpayments were asked why they do not. The main reason would appear to be that other methods are more successful, mentioned by almost one-half (48%). Two in five (38%) said that they had very little success in the past, while just over one-quarter (27%) said it was because there was not much value to be gained and 23% said that it was because it was too complicated. Eleven per cent said that they will do in the future/not in place yet.
Figure 1.52 Reasons for not using other DWP benefits to recover HB/CTB overpayments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other methods are more successful</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had very little success in the past</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because not much value to be gained</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too complicated</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will in future</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trained staff/resources</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t know that we could</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know where to send the referral</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who do not use other Department for Work and Pensions benefits to recover (56)

1.7.6 Attitudes towards overpayment recovery

LAs were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with three statements relating to overpayments recovery. There was a high level of agreement with the statement ‘overpayments recovery is an important way of a local authority raising money (67%) and also with ‘overpayments recovery has a high priority within the Benefits Departments (71%). However, just 19% of authorities agreed that overpayments recovery staff are often pulled off to cover other sections of the Benefits Department at times of sickness/leave.

Figure 1.53 Attitudes to overpayments recovery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments recovery is an important way of a local authority raising money</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments recovery staff are often pulled off to cover other sections of Benefits Departments at times of sickness/leave</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments recovery has a high priority within the Benefits Departments</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (222)
1.7.7 Perceived problems with recovering overpayments

Authorities were asked what they perceive to be the main problems with recovering HB/CTB overpayments. The main problems appear to be difficulties in tracing customers after they stop receiving benefits, mentioned by more than four in five (83%) and that people can’t afford to pay them back, mentioned by seven in ten (70%). Other problems included relying on so many different people/other departments to get information and incompatibility between LA system and DWP requirements, both mentioned by 27%, and difficulties with specific recovery methods: recovery from ongoing benefits mentioned by 18%. One in ten (10%) don’t have confidence in the computer system and nine per cent said they have difficulties with other specific recovery methods.

Figure 1.54 Main problems when recovering HB/CTB overpayments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties in tracing customers after they stop receiving benefits</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People can’t afford to pay them back</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility between LA system and DWP requirements</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on so many different people/other departments to get information</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with specific recovery methods from ongoing benefits</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have confidence in computer system</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with specific recovery methods: other</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (222)

1.8 Extended access to DWP data for local authorities

1.8.1 Introduction

Extended access to DWP data for local authorities was a project to provide LAs with on-line access to a wide range of DWP benefit data and also provide an additional 140 Remote Access Terminals (RATs) to a number of offices. The additional on-line information provided tailored access to Retirement Pension and Incapacity Benefit data and also provided information on Severe Disablement Benefit, Widow’s Benefit, Bereavement Benefit and Maternity Allowance. It also provided a tailored version of the Department Central Index (DCI).
1.8.2 Usefulness of additional dialogues for DCI

Ratings of the additional dialogues for DCI were very positive with almost nine out of ten authorities (89%) finding them useful (44% very useful and 45% fairly useful). Approximately one in twenty authorities (four per cent) found it not very useful and only one authority (an English district) found it not at all useful.

As shown in Figure 1.55, the main reason for finding the additional dialogues useful was because it speeds up the processing of claims (86%). This was closely followed by being less reliant on the DWP for information (75%), not having to contact the customer again (71%) and preventing fraudulent claims (29%).

Figure 1.55 Additional dialogues for Department Central Index – why have they been useful?

The nine authorities that did not find the additional dialogues useful were asked the main reasons why. These reasons are illustrated in Table 1.22:

Table 1.22 Reasons for not finding the additional dialogues useful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number of authorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not enough information</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too many matches so details cannot be shown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not find customer without a National Insurance number</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much information</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: LAs that did not find the additional dialogues useful (9)
1.8.3 Usefulness of additional information on the RAT

Overall, authorities rated the additional information on the RAT very positively, with over nine out of ten rating it as useful (50% very useful and a further 43% fairly useful). Only five authorities did not find it of use (three not very useful and two not at all useful), of which four were English Districts. All five of these authorities reported lack of information as the reason for not being useful.

Around three in ten authorities (28%) felt that the information for Pension Credit on the RAT was sufficient for processing claims for HB and CTB. (This figure rose to 50% for London Boroughs). However, 66% of authorities said that it is not sufficient.

Figure 1.56 Information for Pension Credit sufficient for processing claims?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (222)

1.8.4 Use of additional RAT terminal

Less than one in five authorities (18%) have an additional RAT terminal in the Fraud and Overpayment Section but this figure rises to almost two in five (38%) for English Metropolitan authorities. Of the authorities that have an additional terminal, less than half (45%) said that it had helped them to reduce fraud and overpayment; over one- third (35%) said that they did not know. The eighteen authorities that said it had reduced fraud and overpayment were asked how it had helped. As illustrated in Table 1.23, the most common response was because they can obtain immediate answers (17).
### Table 1.23 How the RAT terminal has helped to reduce fraud and overpayment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of authorities</th>
<th>Base: All LAs that say the additional RAT terminal has helped reduce fraud and overpayment (18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can obtain immediate answers</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can trace debtors addresses more easily when they move away</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stops overpayments running on while waiting for information</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speeds up service to the public</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three in five of the authorities that have a RAT terminal believed that it has helped them to reduce their fraud and overpayment workload (60%). The 24 authorities that gave this answer said that it had reduced the amount of contact needed with DWP (19), there was less correspondence to get information from third party (17) and they can trace the debtor more quickly (13).

Conversely, 16 authorities (of which half were English district) stated that it had not helped reduce their fraud and overpayment workload. Four authorities stated that their workload had actually increased, three said that they had not used it full-time yet and five didn’t know.

### 1.9 Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

#### 1.9.1 Introduction

The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) was set up in 1997 to improve counter-fraud performance and minimise the risk of fraud throughout the social security system. Part of the DWP, it reports directly to the Secretary of State on fraud administration across both central government agencies and LAs.

BFI has powers to inspect LAs and their private sector contractors for standards of benefit administration, counter-fraud and security performance.

BFI are committed to improving customer service. They 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.

#### 1.9.2 Contact with BFI

All authorities were asked whether they have had any contact with BFI in the last six months. Overall, around three in five authorities had contact (61%) and this figure rose to almost four in five (78%) for London Boroughs, which was significantly higher than either Scottish or Welsh authority types (31% and 50% respectively).
Authorities in Yorkshire & Humberside and the South West had very high levels of contact (83% and 87% respectively). This is significantly higher than authorities in Scotland (31%), the North West (5%), the South East (53%) and Wales (50%).

As illustrated in Figure 1.57, the most common type of contact was via the CPA with almost three-quarters (74%) of authorities having this (48% of district authorities and 26% of single tier authorities). This was followed by the BFI Website, which over one-third (35%) of authorities had visited. Approximately one-quarter of authorities (24%) had contact either via a BFI exhibition at an IRRV conference or through a telephone call. Around one in five had contact through a BFI speaker (22%), email (20%) or PIAT (18%). Only around one in ten had been contacted for first inspection (11%) or a follow up inspection (9%). Less than one in twenty (3%) had contact via the customer helpline and only one authority had had contact from the Welsh Improvement Inspection. None of the Scottish authorities had had contact via Scottish Best Value.

**Figure 1.57  Type of contact with BFI in the last six months**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPA - District</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI website</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA - single tier</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone call</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI exhibition at IRRV conference</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BFI speaker</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIAT</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First inspection</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up inspection</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer helpline</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh Improvement Inspection</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All (222)

### 1.9.3 Usefulness of final report/outcome of contact

Overall, the authorities that had contact with the various services rated the usefulness of the final report or outcome positively. The most highly rated type of contact was the Welsh Improvement Inspection (100%) but it is worth noting this is based on only one authority. Almost nine out of ten authorities (88%) rated PIAT as useful, three-quarters (75%) CPA-District and two-thirds (67%) for CPA – single tier, first inspection and follow-up inspection.
1.9.4 Professionalism of staff

The professionalism ratings of staff for all types of contact were very high. All authorities (100%) that had contact via the following methods rated the staff as professional: BFI exhibition stand at an IRRV conference, BFI speaker, enquiries to BFI helpline (NB. sample size of four) and Welsh Improvement Inspection (NB. Sample size of one). These were very closely followed by telephone calls to BFI staff where over 19 out of twenty authorities (97%) rated the staff as professional.

Approximately nine out of ten authorities rated PIAT (92%) and CPA District (89%) as professional. These were closely followed by first inspection (87%), CPA single tier (86%), follow-up inspection (83%) and approximately four in five authorities rated the staff via email (81%) and the BFI website (79%) as professional.

1.9.5 Overall satisfaction

All authorities were asked their overall satisfaction for the various types of contact they have had with BFI. As illustrated in Figure 1.59, overall satisfaction levels were very good for all aspects. Nine out of ten authorities were satisfied with the BFI speaker (90%). This was closely followed by a cluster of services of which approximately seventeen out of twenty authorities were satisfied; telephone call (85%), BFI exhibition (84%), PIAT (83%), CPA District (83%) and follow-up inspection (83%). Three-quarters of authorities (75%) were satisfied with CPA single tier, around seven in ten with email (70%) and the BFI website (69%) and the lowest was first inspection where only three in five (60%) were satisfied. The customer helpline and the Welsh Improvement Inspection gained the highest results (100%) however it is worth noting that while these results are excellent they are based on very small sample sizes – just four authorities for the customer helpline and only one authority for the Welsh improvement inspection.
All authorities that were not totally satisfied with the service received (i.e. fairly satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and fairly/very dissatisfied) were asked the reasons why:

**First inspection** – nine authorities were less than totally satisfied with the first inspection and the top six reasons are listed below:

- more time to gather information (four LAs (44%));
- more time to comment on draft report (four LAs (44%));
- more co-operation between inspectorates (four LAs (44%));
- more notice of inspection (three LAs (33%));
- inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks in workload or holiday time (three LAs (33%));
- more feedback on how customer feedback has been used (two LAs (22%)).

**Follow-up inspection** – five authorities were less than totally satisfied and their reasons are divided fairly equally:

- more information available on good practices (two LAs (40%));
- more notice of inspection (one LA (20%));
- more time to comment on draft report (one LA (20%));
- inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks in workload or holiday time (one LA (20%));
- service should be faster (one LA (20%));
- more feedback on how customer feedback has been used (one LA (20%)).
CPA – Single tier – Around three in five authorities (61%) were less than totally satisfied with the service received. The most common reason, cited by around two in five authorities (41%), was the need for more information to be available on good practices. Around one-third required more time to gather information (36%) and more notice of an inspection (32%). Approximately a quarter felt that the inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks in workloads or holidays (27%) and they required more time to comment on the draft report (23%).

CPA – District – Three in five authorities (60%) were less than totally satisfied with the service they received. Over one-third (37%) said that there should be more information available on good practices, more time to comment on draft reports and more time to gather information. Just over one-quarter (26%) felt the inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks in workload or holiday time, around one in seven (16%) wanted more notice of inspections and over one in ten wanted more co-operation between inspectorates (13%), more feedback on how customer feedback has been used (11%) and the service should be faster (11%).

PIAT – Only six authorities were less than totally satisfied with the service from PIAT with the reasons listed below:

- more information available on good practices (two LAs (33%));
- more notice of inspection (one LA (17%));
- more time to gather information (one LA (17%));
- staff could be more helpful (one LA (17%)).

BFI exhibition stand at IRRV conference – Just under half of authorities (47%) were less than totally satisfied with the service received. Of these 15 authorities, the most common reason was more information being available on good practice (five LAs/33%). This was followed by more feedback on how customer information has been used (four LAs/27%), more co-operation between inspectorates (four LAs/27%) and more time to gather information (three LAs/20%).

BFI speaker at a seminar or event – Half of authorities were less than totally satisfied with the BFI speaker. Two in five authorities (40%) felt there should be more information available on good practices, one in five (20%) wanted more feedback on how customer feedback has been used and more information on BFI and its activities. Other comments made; need more time to gather information (13%), inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks (13%), more co-operation between inspectorates (13%) and staff could be more helpful (13%).

Enquiries to the BFI customer helpline - Only one English District was not totally satisfied with the service received and they cited the following reasons:

- more notice of inspection;
- more time to gather information;
• more time to comment on the draft report;
• inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks in workload or holiday time;
• more information available on good practice;
• more feedback on how customer feedback has been used;
• more information on BF and its activities;
• more co-operation between inspectorates.

Email – Ten authorities were less than totally satisfied by the service they had received via email and they were predominately English Districts (six). The most common reason was more time to comment on the draft report (three LAs/30%), followed by no feedback/response to enquiry (three LAs/30%) and service should be faster (two LAs/20%).

1.9.6 Importance of various aspects of BFI’s service

All authorities were asked to rate the importance of various aspects of BFI’s service and, overall the results were positive. Nearly nine in ten authorities rated adequate notice before inspections and recommendations in the BFI report to be useful and workable for the LA (both 89%) as important. Around eight in ten authorities said that the inspection report being produced within 17 weeks (83%), two to three weeks advanced notice of publication date of report (81%), and receiving the first draft of CPA report at same time as it’s sent to the audit commission (78%) are important. The aspect rated as the least important was the LA working with PIAT to achieve performance improvements or efficiencies, although it should be noted that around two-thirds (62%) of authorities still rated this as important.

Figure 1.60 Importance of aspects of BFI’s service
1.9.7 Importance of BFI undertaking inspections on DWP agencies

Around eight in ten authorities (82%) felt that it was very important that BFI undertakes inspections on DWP agencies and a further eight per cent felt it was fairly important. Only two authorities thought that it was not very important, while seven per cent didn’t know. London Borough authorities were the most likely to state the inspections were important (94%).

1.9.8 Joint working between local authorities and Counter-Fraud Investigation Service

All responding authorities were asked whether they carried out any joint working with the Counter-Fraud Investigation Service (CFIS). Overall, approximately two in three authorities (80%) carried out some form of joint working. However, these figures varied widely for authority type. The majority of Welsh authorities had carried out joint working (92%) followed by London Borough (78%), English District (82%), English Metro (81%), Scotland (75%) and English Unitary (69%).

Interestingly, sixteen per cent were unaware if their authority did any joint working and only three respondents claimed their authorities did no joint working at all.

1.9.9 Type of joint working

Of the authorities that had carried out regular joint working, the most frequently mentioned type was via regular meetings (68%). This was closely followed by joint visits/investigations (64%), sharing information (59%) and by telephone (57%).

Figure 1.61 Joint working between local authorities and the Counter-Fraud Investigation Service
1.9.10 Effectiveness of joint working

More than three-quarters of authorities (78%) thought the joint working process with CFIS, in terms of counter-fraud work, was effective (29% very effective and 49% fairly effective). Only around one in five (19%) thought it was not effective (15% not very effective and 3% not at all effective).

All authorities that work with CFIS were asked how they thought the joint working process could be improved. The most common response was to increase staff resources (40%). Around one-third (34%) wanted improved liaison with CFIS and just over one in five (21%) didn’t know. Six per cent said they had no problems and five per cent said the speed of decisions/ administration of DWP.

1.9.11 Perceived improvement in fraud detection and prevention

All authorities that worked with CFIS were asked whether there had been an improvement to fraud detection and prevention due to the joint working process. As can be seen in Figure 1.62 there was a perceived improvement for both.

Four out of five authorities (80%) felt there had been an improvement in fraud detection (24% a lot and 56% a little). Approximately one in seven (14%) felt there had been no improvement at all and this figure rose to one-quarter (25%) for Scottish authorities.

Results were slightly less positive for fraud prevention. Just over three in five authorities (61%) considered it to have improved, but the majority felt that it had only improved a little (49%). Almost three in ten (28%) authorities did not feel that it had improved at all.
1.9.12 Reasons for not joint working

The two authorities that did not conduct any joint working were asked the reasons for not doing so. One respondent did not give a reason and the other stated a lack of resources.

1.10 BFI website

1.10.1 Introduction

The BFI website is a general access site, and provides Best Value and Inspectorate reports on individual LAs, as well as providing general information on the BFI and the DWP. This section explores LA experiences of using the website in 2004 and contrasts this with earlier experiences reported in 2003.
1.10.2 Experience of BFI website

The majority of respondents have personally visited the BFI website (90%); this is an increase of five per cent since 2003, which is significant at the 95% level. Of these authorities, around two in five (41%) had found it for the first time by using a search engine, one-quarter (25%) just surfed in, 22% linked from another site and just one in twenty (five per cent) from the CSM newsletter. This differs from 2003 when one-third (33%) surfed in and 29% found it via a search engine.

Table 1.24 How the website was found

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wave 10</th>
<th>Wave 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using a search engine</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just surfed in</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked from another site</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSM newsletter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have visited the BFI website (Wave 10 199 LAs, Wave 8 243 LAs)

Four in five respondents (81%) said that they were aware of colleagues in their authority who visited the site (this is the same as in 2003).

1.10.3 Attitudes to BFI website

The authorities that have visited the website were asked their opinions of it. Once again it has proved to be very popular. Nineteen out of twenty authorities (95%) considered the site to be user friendly (15% very user friendly and 80% fairly user friendly). These results match very closely to 2003 when 94% of respondents found it to be user friendly.

Table 1.25 How user-friendly is the website?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wave 10</th>
<th>Wave 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very user friendly</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly user friendly</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very user friendly</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all user friendly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have visited the BFI website (Wave 10 199 LAs, Wave 8 243 LAs)

The majority of authorities (94%) also described the information provided on the website as useful. This is only a one per cent decrease on last year’s figure. Among these, over four in five authorities (84%) found it useful due to its comprehensive collection of BFI reports, two-thirds (66%) due to the LA reports being easy to find and thirdly, finding out what other LAs are doing (65%).
Only twelve authorities felt that the information on the website was not useful (nine of these were English districts). This is similar to 2003 (11 authorities). When asked to explain this, eight authorities said the site does not have the information they are looking for and four because it only contains reports. Only two authorities thought the site was not easy to navigate.

All respondents who have visited the website were asked how they thought it could be improved. The most common response was more examples of what seems to work, with around three in five authorities stating this (62%). This was closely followed by more examples of proactive measures that the LA’s could use (57%) and half (50%) wanted more examples of specific improvements achieved by LAs. Around one in eight authorities (12%) were happy with the website as it is and had no specific suggestions. A further one in eight (12%) said that ‘didn’t know’.

### 1.10.4 Using the BFI website

Authorities that have visited the website were asked their reasons for doing so. Looking specifically at the purpose of their last visit, the most common reason was to compare their performance with a similar authority (55%). This figure rose to three-quarters of London Boroughs (75%), which was significantly higher than Welsh (17%), Scottish (40%) and English Metro (40%) authorities. Over half of authorities (52%) went on the website to find examples of good practices and around a quarter for both to prepare for an inspection (26%) and to compare their performance with all LAs (24%). Around one in seven (14%) went on the website to get a copy of the performance standards. As Table 1.26 shows the reasons for using the BFI website in 2004 were very similar to those given in 2003, although with the exception of ‘to get a copy of the performance standard’ a greater proportion of authorities has mentioned each one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for using the website</th>
<th>Wave 10</th>
<th>Wave 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To compare performance of my LA with a similar authority</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To find examples of good practice</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To prepare for an inspection</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To compare performance of my LA with all authorities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get a copy of the performance standards</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have visited the BFI website (Wave 10 199 LAs, Wave 8 243 LAs)

Only one authority checks the website daily and less than one in ten (seven per cent) do it weekly. Around one in three (32%) check it once or twice a month and the majority (41%) once or twice every three months. Approximately one in seven (17%) check the website just once or twice a year, two per cent less often and two
per cent only when there is something new. As Table 1.27 shows, these results differ to those in 2003 with a greater proportion saying ‘once or twice a month’ in 2003 and a smaller proportion saying ‘once or twice a year’ in 2003. This suggests that authorities are visiting the site overall less frequently in 2004 than in 2003.

Table 1.27 Frequency of visiting the website

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wave 10</th>
<th>Wave 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice every three months</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less often</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only when there is something new</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All who have visited the BFI website (Wave 10 199 LAs, Wave 8 243 LAs)

The vast majority of authorities (98%) believe that they will access the BFI website in the future.
2 Conclusions

2.1 Performance Standards

Authorities appear to be positive generally about the Performance Standards for Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). They use the tool widely and for a range of reasons including general performance improvement, monitoring and staff awareness training. Ratings for usefulness are encouraging. There is some evidence of differentiation, in terms of staff responsibility, within authorities in the use and application of the different modules of the tool.

However, there are some issues around the balance of standards relating to outcomes and processes, the way that criteria are set out for each standard and the number of questions in each module. Of all areas mentioned, Strategic Management is the module where most people feel that improvements could be made. Suggestions have been made to change the layout of the Standards. Local authorities (LAs) also wanted increased flexibility, clarity and streamlining, along with benchmarking ability and different (more progressive) scoring systems. More specifically, many authorities mention that the Form Flow Assessment Tool causes them technical and logistical problems.

So, with increased maturity of the tool within local authorities, it appears that there is some demand for increased flexibility within, and differentiation between, elements of it. However, this will need to be balanced against the need for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to be seen to be curtailing bureaucracy and complexity where it is not needed, and limiting IT changes unless strictly necessary. In asking questions about the tool, the Department is showing that it is willing to listen to LAs and respond to their feedback. It would be worth DWP considering a selection of suggested changes, therefore, and drawing together an expert user group to pilot these changes and recommend the most helpful ones. These expert users could also be asked to comment on other procedure changes suggested later on in this section.
2.2 Council Tax Benefit take-up campaign

It is encouraging that a high proportion of local authorities used the DWP materials to help raise awareness of CTB among the public. Only a small minority – one-tenth - did not publicise Council Tax Benefit using these materials. However, a similar proportion of authorities had not introduced initiatives that linked or overlapped with the DWP campaign.

More specifically, ratings of the distributed posters and flyers were mixed, with one in five rating both the posters and flyers as poor. Following the point made above, it is likely here that local authorities preferred to use their own products where available, which would enable them to adapt these to reflect local circumstances and, where appropriate, target them more specifically to particular client groups. However, there is still an issue with the small group of authorities which had neither introduced their own initiatives nor had utilised the DWP campaign.

Some targeting of take-up initiatives, especially towards pensioners, was evident; when authorities saw an increased level of enquiries, they also said these came from pensioners in the main. Bureaucracy and stigma were recognised as major reasons for pensioners not taking up CTB, and plans in place among LAs which were below standard in encouraging benefit take up included mailing with the Council Tax Bill, display of posters and leaflets and joint work with the Pension Service.

There was some sense that authorities believed that DWP and LA activity in this area had increased take-up and their own caseload, although most thought this had happened only a little and one-quarter of authorities believed that the activity had made no clear difference. Therefore, local authorities did not seem wholly convinced of the utility of promotional campaigns, although they had recognised some increased activity.

2.3 Direct payment

A large minority of authorities do not use Direct Payment for HB for landlords or tenants, despite DWP encouragement. Reasons given included those to do with banking, security and identification. Leading on from this, three in five authorities were unable to estimate proportions of tenants who had a bank account. Authorities say that clients’ worries about using a bank account, debt problems and inability to get an account due to County Court Judgements are among the main reasons for lack of use of the Direct Payment scheme. Leading on from this, only one-third of authorities are currently active in promoting Direct Payment options.

It appears that at present, relatively large proportions of authorities do not have sufficient management information on which to develop practice in this area. It may also be that authorities are working under false assumptions about their client base’s ability or willingness to accept Direct Payments, although there are clearly some real issues about some clients’ use of bank accounts.
2.4 Monthly data matching and risk-based reviews

The vast majority of authorities are conducting data matching, but one-quarter are not conducting risk-based reviews. Also one-fifth have not set up a referral management system, with approaching one in ten authorities in total not knowing when they would.

Targeted communication and liaison with such authorities to assess issues with these mechanisms and work towards solutions might be beneficial. Continued straightforward guidance and support around tracking, monitoring, staffing, IT and training issues will assist in local authorities feeling able to implement new systems.

2.4.1 Monthly data matching

Most think monthly data matching is working well, but there appear to be some issues with poor quality referrals and data quality generally. However, most feel that they are managing the caseload well. Some authorities – between one-third and a half - do not have a handle on referrals actioned or overpayments detected as a result of data matching, and again there is patchy knowledge on whether referrals or overpayments have changed since the new protocols were introduced. Numbers of referrals actioned, overpayments detected and fraud investigations initiated are clear from around two-thirds of authorities. There have been training, staffing and organisational changes as a result of introducing data matching among many authorities.

2.4.2 Risk-based reviews

Again, most authorities think risk-based reviews are working well, although a slightly smaller proportion feel this than for monthly data matching. An average of 550 reviews per authority have been conducted since inception, although one-third could not give an estimate. Around one-tenth of these resulted in fraud/error being detected – but again significant numbers of authorities could not give a figure. Asked about meeting targets for Reviews, half of authorities did meet them but one-third did not. The group not meeting standards cited IT problems and staff training issues as among the reasons why. Again, there have been reported implications for training and organisational changes and staffing as a result of the introduction of Reviews.

It appears that the new protocols asked about here need to be given more time to bed down. Authorities have implemented substantial changes for the systems to go live, and some teething problems can be expected. However, data quality issues need to be continually monitored by DWP and progress made communicated to authorities.
2.5 Overpayment Guide

The vast majority of authorities have used the Guide, but around one in ten never use it; for reasons mainly to do with lack of time or resources. The Guide gains good ratings for usefulness, but improvements suggested included issuing as an e-document in Word, and including more case study/practical examples. On dealing with overpayments, three-quarters of authorities have separate sections to deal with overpayments. Three-quarters say that they use other DWP benefits to recover overpayment. It is generally recognised by authorities as a high priority area but difficulties are identified in tracing customers, and concerns expressed about their ability to pay back overpaid benefits.

2.6 Extended Access to DWP Data for local authorities

Local authorities’ views of extended access to DWP data are very positive, with almost nine in ten saying access is useful, particularly in terms of speeding up claims processing. The Remote Access Terminal (RAT) is also rated as useful, although two-thirds of authorities feel system information is insufficient on Pension Credit. However, only one in five authorities have an additional RAT terminal. There is some evidence that District authorities are less likely to have an additional terminal, with Metropolitan authorities more likely.

2.7 Benefit Fraud Inspectorate

The three in five local authorities who had had contact with the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) – mainly via Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and the BFI website – are positive about the experience and the professionalism of the service, although slightly less positive about inspection processes, as might be expected. As mentioned above more generally for the DWP, increased segmentation and sophistication in the relationships between the BFI and groups of authorities may be needed in the future. It may be that high performing authorities’ experiences can be used as exemplars for others through general DWP publications and communication.

2.7.1 Joint working between LA and Counter-Fraud Investigation Service

Most authorities report that they are involved in joint working and that it has been effective; LAs appear to be happy with joint working overall. Fraud detection and prevention are both thought to have improved as a result.

Increased staffing within Counter-Fraud Investigation Service (CFIS), and better liaison between authorities and the service, were both suggested as improvements; examining staffing allocation within the service and monitoring existing liaison arrangements with a view to change and improvement, and perhaps involving customers in this process, might be ways forward to bear in mind.
2.8  BFI website

The BFI website is rated very positively, and numbers of authorities using the site have increased, although frequency of visit has declined slightly. Again an emphasis on real life, practical examples of ‘what works’ has been suggested as a potential improvement.

Content managers for the site may want to consider a rolling programme of web updates of this type of information, and awareness raising about this activity (perhaps by email alerts), to encourage people to return to the site.
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% and therefore it was used again at Wave 10.

A.2 Sample

Using the updated contacts database from Wave 9, the local authority (LA) 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 10.

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

The advance letter included details of each methodology – telephone interview, web-based questionnaire and paper questionnaire. For the web-based questionnaire we provided a URL, allowing respondents to link directly to the survey and each respondent was assigned a user ID/password, which had to be entered at the start of the survey. This enabled 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 either, use it to prepare their answers before the telephone interview or use it to fill-in their answers and return it to 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 LA managers were consulted about the content of the questionnaire to gain as much useful information as possible from the research.

The first stage of questionnaire development involved a meeting between 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 to test the understanding and comprehension of the questions, as well as give managers an opportunity to raise any issues that are 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 (21-26 May 2004). 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 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

As for the pilot, all interviewers working on the main stage of interviewing attended a half-day briefing. This covered both general interviewing skills and survey-specific instructions. The briefing was attended by a social research representative from the Department. Interviewers were also issued with full interviewer instructions, which included all survey materials including a hard copy of the questionnaire and the advance letter.

Interviewers’ task was to phone each LA and ask respondents how they intended completing the questionnaire. Respondents choosing to undertake the survey on the telephone were then either interviewed or an appointment for another more convenient time was set-up. Those selecting to complete the questionnaire on paper or on the web were asked to complete it as soon as possible (between 14 June and 23 July 2004) and, in the case of the paper questionnaire, return it to NOP in the reply-paid envelope provided. 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 NOP’s Wimbledon Telephone Interviewing Centre. Given the fact that this was a census of all LAs and that Housing Benefit (HB) managers are difficult to get hold of due to workload and turnover of staff, interviewers were not given a maximum number of call-backs. Instead, in order to maximise the response rate across the country as a whole, they were asked to adopt a flexible approach in terms of call-backs and to liaise closely with head office throughout the fieldwork period.

The web-based questionnaire was developed by our specialist Web department within NOP. It was written in mriInterview, software supplied by SPSS and hosted on the NOP World 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. In addition, two emails were sent to LAs that said they would fill-in the questionnaire on paper or on the web but had not done so. The first of these was during the fourth week of fieldwork and acted as a reminder to fill in the questionnaire. The second email was sent in the last week of fieldwork and informed them that the fieldwork period was being extended until 20 August.

By the end of fieldwork we had achieved interviews with a total of 222 LA managers, representing a response rate of 55%. This breaks down as 89 web-based questionnaires, 82 paper questionnaires and 51 telephone interviews. This is clearly a much lower response rate than has been achieved at previous Waves and will have an impact on the statistical reliability of the data (discussed below).
Since fieldwork has ended, NOP, in conjunction with DWP have been investigating the reasons why there has been a decline in response rate. This has involved analysing LAs’ participation, or reasons for non-participation, in the survey across Waves 6 to 10, as well as looking at how they completed the questionnaire at Wave 9 and 10. In addition, NOP emailed each of the LAs that said they would fill-in a questionnaire on the web or on paper but did not do so, to get feedback on the reasons why they did not participate, as well as any suggestions for ways of improving the LA Omnibus Survey and encouraging more authorities to take part.

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>Local authority type</th>
<th>Welsh, Scottish, English Unitary, English Metropolitan, English District, London Borough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verification status</td>
<td>Fully compliant, Working to/partially (this category combines VF LA/not yet compliant’ and ‘Partially compliant’), Non-compliant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracting-out status</td>
<td>Contracted out, Not contracted out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing/Council Tax Benefit caseload</td>
<td>Low, Medium, High</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, verification status, Housing/Council Tax Benefit caseload, and region was provided as part of the contacts database, while software contractor and contracting-out status was asked as part of the interview.

The following points should be noted when using this report:

- a sample, not the entire ‘population’ of LA HB managers has been interviewed. In consequence, all results are subject to sampling tolerances, which means that not all differences are statistically significant. Where bases are low, care should be taken when interpreting the data;

- where percentages do not 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% 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% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

However, given that this sample comprises 55% of the total population, the level of statistical reliability is slightly higher than if the sample had come from a larger population. On this basis, responses to the questionnaire provide data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 4.4 percentage points at the 95 per cent level. In practice this means that where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the ‘true’ value will fall within the range of plus or minus 4.4% from the sample result. The table below shows the sampling error for the whole sample and key sub-groups across a range of parameters for Waves 9 and 10. By comparing the two tables you can see what effect a smaller sample size has had on confidence intervals for some of the key sub-groups.

### Table A.2 Wave 10 sampling error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>222</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English District</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A.3  Wave 9 sampling error

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>10% or 90%</th>
<th>30% or 70%</th>
<th>50%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All respondents</td>
<td>289 1.9</td>
<td>2.9 3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>13 10.4</td>
<td>15.9 17.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>23 6.5</td>
<td>9.9 10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>30 6.6</td>
<td>10 11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
<td>25 6.5</td>
<td>9.9 10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English District</td>
<td>176 2.2</td>
<td>3.4 3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough</td>
<td>22 7.2</td>
<td>11.1 12.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A.7  Response rates

As mentioned earlier, a total of 222 interviews were conducted with LA managers, which represents a response rate of 55%. However, as the table below shows, response rate varies by LA type, from 60% for Unitary authorities to just 44% for English Metropolitan districts.

Table A.4  Response rates by local authority type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local authority type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Welsh</th>
<th>Scottish</th>
<th>English Unitary</th>
<th>English Metropolitan</th>
<th>English District</th>
<th>London Borough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telephone completes</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web-based completes</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper completes</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL COMPLETES</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Soft’ appointment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed to complete on paper/web but didn’t</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Away on maternity leave</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit interview</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sample</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## A.8 Sample profile

### Table A.5 Sample profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>222</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local authority type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welsh</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Unitary</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Metropolitan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English District</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Borough</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verification status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fully compliant</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working to/partially</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-complaint</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contracting-out status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracted out</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not contracted out</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HB/CTB caseload</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decentralisation status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralised</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralised</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Region</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire &amp; Humberside</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
The questionnaire

Local Authority Omnibus 2004 (Wave 10)

Thank you for conducting Wave 10 of the survey. As mentioned in the enclosed letter, we are now giving you a choice of completing the survey on the telephone, as a self-completion questionnaire on the Internet or as a self-completion questionnaire on paper. Please read the instructions below before you start:

**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 30 minutes. You will receive a call from a NOP interviewer some time between 17 June and 23 July.

**Self-completion questionnaire on the Internet:** If you choose to fill-in the questionnaire on the internet, you may access it anytime from 14 June to 23 July. You will find the questionnaire at the following URL: [http://www.surveys.com/s.aspx?project=j450363](http://www.surveys.com/s.aspx?project=j450363)

This method is quite simple and you will be automatically routed through the questionnaire as you answer each question. It also 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. The information is password protected and no one other than the NOP team will be able to access your site or see your personal entries.

The first screen will prompt you for a User ID. Please copy this carefully from the label at the top of this questionnaire or the enclosed letter. You, or your colleagues, can access the questionnaire more than once using this User ID until you have completed it. However, please note that only one person can be in the questionnaire at a time.

**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 23 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 fill in 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.
CONTENTS

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| Section C: Banking and Revised Claim Forms | 14 |
| Section D: Monthly Data Matching and Risk-based reviews | 16 |
| Section E: Overpayment Guide | 24 |
| Section F: Extended Access to DWP Data for Local Authorities | 27 |
| Section G: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) | 30 |
| Section H: BFI Website | 35 |
| Section I: Decentralisation, Contracting Out and Contact Information | 37 |

The information you provide will be used for research purposes only. You or your authority will not be identified in any report. A summary of the results will be sent to you in due course.

Please note that in some parts of the questionnaire, questions do not run sequentially.
ALL ANSWER

Section A: Performance Standards

It is now more than two years since DWP and BFI (Benefit Fraud Inspectorate) issued Performance Standards for the administration of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit. This section is designed to find out your views on these Performance Standards.

A1 Have you used the Performance Standards for any of the following purposes? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- As a tool for benchmarking
- For informing improvement plans
- For monitoring performance
- For informing applications to the Performance Standards Fund
- Making staff much more aware of what we are trying to achieve
- Confirming any performance improvements we have made
- Other (please specify) .............................................
- Don’t know

A2 As you know, the Performance Standards are divided into seven modules each covering a functional area. Against which of the modules has your authority done a full assessment? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Strategic Management Answer A3
- Customer Services Answer A3
- Processing of Claims Answer A3
- Working with landlords Answer A3
- Internal Security Answer A3
- Counter fraud Answer A3
- Overpayments Answer A3
- Don’t know Go to A4
- None Go to A4
**ANSWER FOR EACH MODULE FOR WHICH YOUR AUTHORITY HAS DONE A FULL ASSESSMENT**

**A3** How useful would you say that each of these modules (for which your authority has done a full assessment) has been to your authority over the past two years? TICK ONE FOR EACH MODULE FOR WHICH YOUR LA HAS DONE A FULL ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Fairly useful</th>
<th>Not very useful</th>
<th>Not at all useful</th>
<th>Don't Know/NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing of claims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with landlords</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-fraud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ALL ANSWER
We would now like to ask you a couple of questions about how you self-assess.

A4 Who has responsibility for undertaking self-assessment against the Performance Standards in your authority? TICK ONE ONLY

One person has responsibility for all the modules  □  Go to A8
Internal Audit has responsibility  □  Go to A8
Different people have responsibility for individual/some modules  □  Answer A5
Other (please specify)  □  Go to A8

Don’t know  □  Go to A8

ANSWER IF “DIFFERENT PEOPLE” AT A4

A5 For which modules do different people have responsibility? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Strategic Management  □  Answer A6
Customer Services  □  Answer A6
Processing of Claims  □  Answer A6
Working with Landlords  □  Answer A6
Internal Security  □  Answer A6
Counter Fraud  □  Answer A6
Overpayments  □  Answer A6
Don’t know  □  Go to A8

Appendices – The questionnaire
**ANSWER FOR EACH MODULE MENTIONED AT A5**

**A6** Does the content of ............ (MODULE MENTIONED AT A5) enable you to divide the work easily? TICK ONE FOR EACH MODULE MENTIONED AT A5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing of Claims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Landlords</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter Fraud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ALL ANSWER

A8  Within each module there are a number of Standards, some which relate to Outcomes and some which relate to Processes. An example of an outcome is “Are decision notices issued to all persons affected within 14 calendar days of the decision that an overpayment has occurred”. An example of a process is “Are copies of overpayment notification accessible for use in responding to requests for revision, supersession and appeal”. Would you say that for each of the modules, the balance between Standards relating to Outcomes and Standards relating to Processes is about right or that there are too many Outcomes or too many Processes? TICK ONE IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>About right</th>
<th>Too many Outcomes</th>
<th>Too many Processes</th>
<th>Don't Know/NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing of claims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with landlords</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-fraud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each functional area of the Performance Standards is divided into two parts. Part 1 details the criteria for the Standards and Part 2 consists of a self-assessment questionnaire.

A9  Overall, thinking about each module in turn, how clearly would you say that Part 1 sets out the criteria to be achieved for each Standard? TICK ONE IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very clearly</th>
<th>Fairly clearly</th>
<th>Not very clearly</th>
<th>Not at all clearly</th>
<th>Don’t Know/NA</th>
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<td>Strategic Management</td>
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<td>Internal Security</td>
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<td>Counter-fraud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A10 Thinking now about Part 2, for each module, in your opinion how clear are the self-assessment questions? TICK ONE IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Very clear</th>
<th>Fairly clear</th>
<th>Not very clear</th>
<th>Not at all clear</th>
<th>Don't Know/NA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Counter-fraud</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A11 In your opinion, for each module, is the number of questions about right, too many or not enough? TICK ONE IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>About right</th>
<th>Too many</th>
<th>Not enough</th>
<th>Don't Know/NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Management</td>
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<td>Customer Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overpayments</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

A12 The current scoring system for measuring the results of your self-assessment weights each question equally. In your opinion is this about right or should more weight be given to other factors? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Current system is about right
- More weight should be given to outcomes than processes
- (see A8 for definitions)
- More weight should be given to BV/Statutory Pls
- Other (please specify)
- Don’t know
We would now like to ask you some questions about submitting the results of your self-assessments to DWP and the layout of the Performance Standards.

**A13** Have you used the Form Flow self-assessment tool issued by the DWP?
- Yes □ Go to A14
- No □ Go to A16
- Don’t know □ Go to A16

**ANSWER IF “YES” AT A13**

**A14** Have you experienced any technical difficulties? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Software difficult to install □
- Slow response times when using on a PC □
- Rules for inputting data too rigid □
- Process for migrating data to updated version too laborious □
- Quality of printing poor □
- Other (please specify) □

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

Don’t know □

**ALL ANSWER**

**A16** Local authorities are currently asked to complete and return at least one full self-assessment to DWP each year and to report their performance to DWP quarterly, where Performance Standards Funding has been awarded. Thinking to the future, which one of these reporting regimes would best suit your local authority’s needs in monitoring performance? TICK ONE BOX FOR “KEY ELEMENTS” AND ONE FOR “FULL ASSESSMENT”

**Key elements:**
- Quarterly □
- Six monthly □
- Annually □
- Other (please specify) □

..........................................................................................
Full Assessment:

- Quarterly ☐
- Six monthly ☐
- Annually (as a one-off exercise) ☐
- Annually (as a phased exercise submitting data over four quarters as each module is completed) ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐

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

Don’t know ☐

A17 Thinking about the layout of the Performance Standards, which one of these options would you prefer? TICK ONE ONLY

- Retain the current two Part format ☐
- Place the self-assessment questions next to the definitions of each Standard ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐

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

No preference ☐

Don’t know ☐

A18 The Performance Standards are currently published as a (hard copy) manual and in HTML format. If it were made available, would your authority prefer to use an electronic format that allowed you to manipulate the data locally?

- Yes ☐
- No ☐
- Don’t know ☐

A19 Finally, how do you think the Performance Standards for the administration of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit could be improved? PLEASE WRITE IN

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

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

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
Section B: Council Tax Benefit Take-up Campaign

On 1 March 2004, the DWP launched a national press and poster campaign to try and increase the number of people, particularly pensioners claiming, Council Tax Benefit.

B1 We would first of all like to check whether or not your authority received the “Dear Benefit Manager” letter that was sent out on 19 February 2004 about the DWP campaign to increase the take-up of Council Tax Benefit. The letter contained information about the availability of electronic versions of the flyer and of the headline graphic “Cut you Council Tax - Find out if you can get a rebate”? TICK ONE ONLY

- Received 19 February letter
- Didn’t receive 19 February letter
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “19 FEBRUARY LETTER RECEIVED” AT B1

B2 The 19 February letter provided information on how to download versions of the electronic flyer and headline graphic. Did your authority use any of these? TICK ONE ONLY

- Used electronic flyer
- Used headline graphic
- Used both
- Didn’t use either
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “DIDN’T USE EITHER” AT B2

B3 Can you tell me why your authority did not use either the electronic flyer or the headline graphic? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- We have our own promotional material
- They arrived too late
- Didn’t need it because we had enough time to use the actual flyer received in the bulk mailing
- Not suitable presentationally
- We don’t undertake take-up activity
- Other (Please specify)

- Don’t know
ALL ANSWER
Your authority should also have received a bulk mailing at the beginning of March 2004 containing copies of the new poster and flyer and of the Council Tax Benefit leaflet GL17 "Help with your Council Tax".

B4a  Can you tell me where, if anywhere, your authority has put these posters? TICK ALL THAT APPLY IN APPROPRIATE COLUMN

B4b  Can you tell me where, if anywhere, your authority has put these flyers? TICK ALL THAT APPLY IN APPROPRIATE COLUMN

B4c  Can you tell me where, if anywhere, your authority has put the CTB leaflet GL17? TICK ALL THAT APPLY IN APPROPRIATE COLUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>B4a Posters</th>
<th>B4b Flyers</th>
<th>B4c CTB leaflet GL17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA offices</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP offices</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council-run clubs for the elderly</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure centres</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>In the council tax bills</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the council tax reminders</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary organisations outlets</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn’t use them/put them anywhere</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn’t receive the bulk mailing</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know/can’t remember</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
B5a  How useful did you find the Best Practice Guide on Council Tax Benefit Take-up that was sent out by DWP by e-mail on 8 March 2004 and was followed up by a hardcopy which was sent to all Benefit Managers? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very useful
- Fairly useful
- Not very useful
- Not at all useful
- Didn’t see it
- Don’t know

B5b  What other initiatives, if any, has your authority introduced, either overlapping with, or as a result of, the DWP campaign? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Local press advertising
- Advertising on buses
- Council’s Website
- Benefits Road Shows
- Benefit Calculators
- Benefit Bus
- Publicised when reviewing the single person discount
- Publicised when renewing applications for bus passes
- Devised own promotional literature
- Local radio advertising
- Other (please specify)

- Nothing
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF ANY INITIATIVES MENTIONED AT B5

B6  Which of the following groups were these initiatives targeted at? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Pensioners
- Working age
- Other specific group (Please specify)

- All groups
- Don’t know
ALL ANSWER

B7a How would you personally rate the posters used in the DWP campaign? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very good
- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “FAIRLY” OR “VERY POOR” AT B7a

B7b Why do you say this? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Prefer to use localised material
- Not as useful as local material
- Other (Please specify)

ALL ANSWER

B8a How would you personally rate the flyers used in the DWP campaign? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very good
- Fairly good
- Neither good nor poor
- Fairly poor
- Very poor
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “FAIRLY” OR “VERY POOR” AT B8a

B8b Why do you say this? PLEASE WRITE IN

- Prefer to use localised material
- Not as useful as local material
- Other (Please specify)
1.1.1 ALL ANSWER

B9 Would you say that the DWP campaign, together with your authority’s own take-up initiatives where applicable, has increased the number of enquiries about CTB to your local authority a lot, a little, or has it made no difference? TICK ONE ONLY

- Increased a lot [ ] Answer B10
- Increased a little [ ] Answer B10
- Made no difference [ ] Go to B11
- Don’t know [ ] Go to B11

ANSWER IF “INCREASED” AT B9

B10a Which do you think was more effective in increasing the number of enquiries – the DWP campaign or your authority’s initiatives, or do you think they both played an equal part? TICK ONE ONLY

- DWP campaign more effective [ ]
- Our own local initiatives more effective [ ]
- Both played equal part [ ]
- Other (Please specify) [ ]

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

- Don’t know [ ]

B10b Thinking about this increase in the number of enquiries, can you estimate the proportion that has been from each of the following groups? A rough guess will do. PLEASE WRITE IN THE % OR “0” AS APPROPRIATE. ANSWERS SHOULD ADD TO 100%

- Pensioners ……………….%

- Working Age ……………….%

- Don’t know/unable to provide figure [ ]
ALL ANSWER

B11 Would you say that, taking all of the various take up initiatives into account, including your local authority’s and DWP’s, that your authority’s caseload has increased a lot, a little, or have they made no difference? TICK ONE ONLY

- Increased a lot □ Answer B12
- Increased a little □ Answer B12
- Made no difference □ Go to B13
- Don’t know □ Go to B13

ANSWER IF “INCREASED” AT B11

B12a Thinking about this increase in caseload, can you estimate the proportion that has been from each of the following groups? A rough guess will do. PLEASE WRITE IN THE % OR “0” AS APPROPRIATE. ANSWERS SHOULD ADD TO 100%

- Pensioners ................... %
- Working Age ................. %

Don’t know/unable to provide figures □

ANSWER IF “INCREASED” AT B11

B12b What strategies did your authority introduce to manage the extra workload? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Applied for funding from the Performance Standards Fund □
- Set-up a dedicated phone-line □
- Screened claims for eligibility □
- Increased visiting capacity □
- Set-up a dedicated processing section for CTB only claims □
- Screened claims for those already in receipt □
- Pooled resources with neighbouring authorities □
- Bought in additional processing capacity □

- Other (Please specify) □

- Don’t know □
- None □
B13 In your opinion, what are the main barriers to pensioners claiming CTB? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Documentation required
- Length of claim form
- Lack of knowledge
- Fear of bureaucracy
- Stigma associated with claiming benefits
- Not worthwhile financially
- Complex interaction with other benefits
- Other (Please specify)

Don’t know

B14 What one thing do you think would encourage pensioners to claim CTB? PLEASE WRITE IN

The next few questions are about the Performance Standards

B15 Before 1 March 2004, in terms of the Customer Service module of The Performance Standards dealing with "Encouraging benefit take-up, reducing poverty", was your authority above, below or at standard? TICK ONE ONLY

- Above standard
- At standard (100%)
- Below standard (80-99%)
- Below standard (60-79%)
- Below standard (below 60%)
- Don’t know
B16  Has your authority undertaken a self-assessment on or after 1 March 2004?

Yes  ☐  Ask B17
No  ☐  Go to Section C
Don’t know  ☐  Go to Section C

**ANSWER IF “YES” AT B16**

B17  Has this assessment changed since 1 March 2004?

Yes  ☐  Ask B18
No  ☐  Go to Section C
Don’t know  ☐  Go to Section C

**ANSWER IF “YES” AT B17**

B18  Is your authority now above, below or at standard? TICK ONE ONLY

Above standard  ☐  Go to Section C
At standard (100%)  ☐  Go to Section C
Below standard (80-99%)  ☐  Ask B19
Below standard (60-79%)  ☐  Ask B19
Below standard (below 60%)  ☐  Ask B19
Don’t know  ☐  Go Section C
ANSWER IF “BELOW” AT B15 OR B18. OTHERS GO TO SECTION C

B19 What plans has your authority made to move to “At standard”? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Have a strategy beyond general awareness raising □

Have a strategy that includes work to identify and target information at particular groups □

Communicate our strategy/approach to potential claimants/representative groups □

Provide literature on HB/CTB in LA tenancy details and advise when tenant signs up □

Inform council tax payers of CTB with their council tax bill □

Work with local DWP offices to encourage the legitimate take-up of HB/CTB □

Offer advice to all working age claimants considering starting work or who have terminated their out-of-work claim □

Display posters/leaflets at key public access points □

Co-operate with local Pension Service staff on national campaigns to promote take-up of non HB/CTB benefits, such as Pension Credit? □

Other (please specify) .............................................................................................................. □

Don’t know □
ALL ANSWER

Section C: Banking and Revised Claim Forms

This section of the questionnaire is aimed at finding out information about tenants receiving their Housing Benefit via their bank account in order to support the implementation of Local Housing Allowance.

C1 Does your local authority pay housing benefit direct into the bank accounts of landlords, tenants or both? TICK ONE ONLY

- Landlords only
- Tenants only
- Both landlords and tenants
- Do not pay by bank transfer
- Don’t know

C2 Can you estimate what proportion of tenants receiving Housing Benefit in your authority have a bank account (by bank account we mean an account into which housing benefit can be paid)? WRITE IN BELOW

………………%  
Don’t know

ANSWER IF “TENANTS ONLY” OR “BOTH LANDLORDS AND TENANTS” AT C1

C3 What proportion of all tenants receiving Housing Benefit in your authority currently receive it via a bank account? (By “tenants” we mean all tenants receiving payments via a bank account, including RSL tenants) WRITE IN BELOW

………………%  
Don’t know

ANSWER IF “TENANTS ONLY” OR “BOTH LANDLORDS AND TENANTS” AT C1

C4 What proportion of private sector tenants receiving Housing Benefit in your authority currently receive it via a bank account? WRITE IN BELOW

………………%  
Don’t know
C5  **Why do you think that tenants might be reluctant to have their Housing Benefit paid into their bank account?** TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Worried about getting into debt
- Never had a bank account
- Can’t because have County Court judgement against them
- Other - please specify

C6  **Is your local authority currently doing anything to promote paying Housing Benefit into tenants’ bank accounts?**

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

C7  **In your opinion, what barriers are there to paying Housing Benefit into tenants’ bank accounts?** TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- DWP failing to lead on shared information
- Software
- Security issues
- Banks’ position/stance
- National agreement with banks
- Clients not having ID
- Bankruptcy
- Other - please specify

Don’t know
C8 Does your local authority operate, or are you aware of, a “Deposit scheme” whereby the scheme underwrites deposits for landlords? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes, my LA operates this scheme
- Aware of scheme, but my LA does not operate it
- Neither (not aware of and do not operate scheme)
- Don’t know
ALL ANSWER

Section D: Monthly Data Matching and Risk-based reviews

Monthly data matching and Risk-based reviews were introduced for all LAs in April 2004 and were incorporated into both the Performance Standards and the VF at the same time.

D1 From April 2004, both the VF and the Performance Standards require LAs to carry out monthly matching and Risk-based reviews. Has your authority done either of these since April 2004? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Yes – monthly matching □ Go to D3
Yes – Risk-based reviews □ Go to D3
No, neither, because our LA decided to delay the process □ Answer D2a
No, neither (because of another reason – please specify) □ Answer D2a

ANSWER IF “NO” AT D1

D2a Why has your authority not carried out monthly matching and Risk-based reviews from April? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Not compliant with the VF Reviews module □
Not able to organise in time □
Fraud and error not a priority □
Not a legal requirement □
Other (please specify) □

Are planning on introducing them from (If you know when, please write in month below) □

Don’t know □
**ALL ANSWER**

**D3 Can you tell me the name of your benefits software supplier/s?**  **TICK ALL THAT APPLY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Software Supplier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBS</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manual</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mouncey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northgate (formerly MDIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saffron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SX3 (formerly First Software)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other -please specify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Don’t know
D4  Local authorities will need to import the data matches and Risk-based reviews on to some form of referral management system to ensure their actioning is progressed and to avoid duplication. Has your authority set-up a referral management system?

Yes  □  Go to D6
No   □  Answer D5

ANSWER IF “NO” AT D4
D5  When do you expect to be able to set-up a referral management system? PLEASE WRITE IN MONTH AND YEAR BELOW

Month ........................

Year ..........................

Existing one is adequate □
Don’t see the need □
Don’t know □

ALL ANSWER
D6  What management information has your authority produced on reviews since the changes came into effect in April 2004? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Returned the new HBSD/IAD (see circular A16/2004 paragraph 23-29)

data extract □

Sent in reports from own system □

Used the excel spreadsheet □

Provided the 2004/5 VF MI □

Other (please specify) □

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

None □
Don’t know □
Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the software solution supplied to your authority to implement monthly data-matching and reviews? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Too soon to tell
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “FAIRLY/VERY DISSATISFIED” OR “NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED” AT D7

Why do you say this? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Department specified changes too late
- Costs too much
- Does not meet our requirement
- Other - please specify

ALL ANSWER

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the software solution supplied to your authority to implement SAFE? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Too soon to tell
- Don’t know
ANSWER IF “FAIRLY/VERY DISSATISFIED” OR “NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED”
AT D9
D10 Why do you say this? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Department specified changes too late □
Costs too much □
Does not meet our requirement □
Other - please specify ........................................................................................................... □

Don’t know □

Monthly Data Matching
ALL ANSWER
D11 Overall, how well is monthly data matching working in your authority in terms of detecting fraud and error? TICK ONE ONLY

Very well □
Fairly well □
Not very well □
Not at all well □
Too soon to tell □
Don’t know □

D12 What problems, if any, has your authority experienced with monthly data matching? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Not able to provide data-extract □ Answer D13
Problems with the quality of the data we were able to provide □ Answer D13
Poor quality referrals - too few identified incorrectness □ Answer D13
Other (please specify) □ Answer D13
........................................................................................................

Not experienced any problems □ Go to D14
Don’t know □ Go to D14
**ANSWER IF AUTHORITY HAS EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS AT D12**

**D13** How has your authority managed to resolve this/these problems? WRITE IN

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

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

**ALL ANSWER**

**D14** Has your authority had more, less or about the same amount of data matches as you thought you would have? TICK ONE ONLY

- More [ ] Answer D15
- Less [ ] Go to D16
- About the same [ ] Go to D16
- Don’t know [ ] Go to D16

**ANSWER IF “MORE” AT D14**

**D15** How well has your authority managed this increased workload?  TICK ONE ONLY

- Very well [ ]
- Fairly well [ ]
- Not very well [ ]
- Not at all well [ ]
- Don’t know [ ]

**ALL ANSWER**

**D16** Since April 2004, how many data matching referrals has your authority actioned?

WRITE IN NUMBER OF REFERRALS AND THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF WEEKS THIS COVERS, FOR EXAMPLE, 1 APRIL TO 8 JULY WOULD BE 14 WEEKS.

…………… referrals

The figure given above is an estimate only [ ]

The figure given above covers approximately (WRITE IN)………………………. weeks

Don’t know [ ]
ANSWER IF “ONE OR MORE” AT D16. OTHERS GO TO D20

D17 How many overpayments have been detected as a result of referrals? WRITE IN

…………… detections

The figure given above is an estimate only

Don’t know

D18 Is this more, less or about the same as you got from data matching before April 2004?

More

Less

About the same

Don’t know

D19 How many fraud investigations have commenced as a result of matching referrals? WRITE IN

…………… investigations

The figure given above is an estimate only

Don’t know
D20 What changes have your authority made in order to accommodate monthly data matching? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Training of staff on the changes required
- Working with software supplier on changes required
- Recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with this
- Made/making organisational changes to cope with new regime
- Other - please specify
  ………………………
- Don’t know

D21 Who was responsible for data matches before April 2004? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Fraud Manager
- Benefit Manager
- Verification Framework Team
- Other (please specify)
  ………………………
- Don’t know

D22a Has this changed since April 2004?

- Yes
- No
- Don’t know

ANSWER IF “YES” AT D22a

D22b Who has been responsible for data matches since April 2004? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Fraud Manager
- Benefit Manager
- Verification Framework Team
- A New Team
- Other (please specify)
  ………………………
- Don’t know
Risk-based reviews

ALL ANSWER

D23 Overall, how well are the Risk-based reviews working in your authority? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very well □
- Fairly well □
- Not very well □
- Not at all well □
- Too soon to tell □
- Don’t know □

D23a Is your local authority using your own, or the DWP, risk based review, or do you use both? TICK ONE ONLY

- LA’s own □
- DWP □
- Use both □
- Don’t know □

D24 Do you agree or disagree that the DWP Risk-based reviews represent an accurate assessment of risk? TICK ONE ONLY

- Agree □ Go to D26
- Disagree □ Answer D25
- Too soon to tell □ Go to D26
- Don’t know □ Go to D26

ANSWER IF “DISAGREE” AT D24

D25 Why do you say this? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- May have own local risk assessments □
- Generating more results than DWP □
- Does not give details of risks □
- Other(Please specify) □
- ........................................
- Don’t know □
ALL ANSWER

D26 What problems, if any, has your authority experienced with Risk-based reviews? WRITE IN

Problems with data on scans □
Problems with volume □
Problems with establishing contact with claimants □
Chosen wrong way to review cases □
Other (please specify) □
........................................................
Not experienced any problems □ Go to D28
Don’t know □ Go to D28

ANSWER IF AUTHORITY HAS EXPERIENCED PROBLEMS AT D26

D27 How have you managed to resolve this/these problems? WRITE IN

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

ALL ANSWER

D28 Since April 2004, how many reviews has your authority started? WRITE IN NUMBER OF REVIEWS AND THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF WEEKS THIS COVERS, FOR EXAMPLE, 1 APRIL TO 8 JULY WOULD BE 14 WEEKS.

................. reviews

The figure given above is an estimate only □

The figure given above covers approximately (WRITE IN)......................... weeks

Don’t know □
ANSWER IF “ONE OR MORE” AT D28. OTHERS GO TO INSTRUCTION AT D32

D29 How many have resulted in fraud and error being detected? WRITE IN

............... detections

The figure given above is an estimate only  □
Don’t know  □

D30 Is this more, less or about the same as found from renewal activity before April 2004?

More  □
Less  □
About the same  □
Don’t know  □

D31 How many have been investigated for fraud as a result of a review? WRITE IN

............... investigations

The figure given above is an estimate only  □
Don’t know  □

ALL ANSWER

D32 Has your authority been able to meet the target to commence review action on at least 2.5% (see circular A38/2003 Appendix) of its caseload per calendar month?

Yes  □  Go to D34
No  □  Answer D33
Don’t know  □  Go to D34
ANSWER IF "NO" AT D32

D33 Why has your authority not been able to meet your monthly volume target? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- IT problems
- Staff not trained in time
- Target too high
- Did not undertake activity in one or two months as permitted under VF/Performance Standards
- Lack of clarity on new VF
- Conflicting advice from security division
- Other (please specify)
- .........................
- Don’t know

ALL ANSWER

D34 What changes has your authority made in order to accommodate Risk-based reviews? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Training of staff on the changes required
- Working with software supplier on changes required
- Recruited/allocated specific staff to deal with this
- Made/making organisational changes to cope with new regime
- Other - please specify
- .........................
- Don’t know

D35 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied is your authority with all of the changes discussed in Section D of this questionnaire, ie. monthly data matching and Risk-based reviews? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don’t know

Go to Section E
Answer D36
**ANSWER IF “NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED” OR “FAIRLY/VERY DISSATISFIED” AT D35**

**D36 Why do you say that? TICK ALL THAT APPLY**

- Not getting results expected in terms of detection fraud and error
- Hard to manage referrals
- DWP could change
- Other (please specify)
- ........................................
- Don’t know

**ALL ANSWER**

**Section E: Overpayment Guide**

*On 1 December 2003, the HB/CTB Overpayments Guide was issued to local authorities. We are interested in finding out how authorities are using the Guide as well as their views on it. Please ask the person who uses it*

**E1a Has your local authority received the Guide?**

- Yes  
  Answer E2
- No  
  Go to E8
- Don’t know  
  Go to E8

**ANSWER IF “YES”, HAVE RECEIVED THE GUIDE AT E1a**

**E1b How would you describe your authority’s use of the Guide? TICK ONE ONLY**

- Use it regularly to look things up/refer to  
  Answer E2
- Use it occasionally to look things up/refer to  
  Answer E2
- Have never used it  
  Go to E7
- Don’t know  
  Go to E8
2. **E2** Overall, how useful does your authority find the Guide? TICK ONE ONLY

- **Very useful** [ ] Answer E3
- **Fairly useful** [ ] Answer E3
- **Not very useful** [ ] Go to E4
- **Not at all useful** [ ] Go to E4
- **Don’t know** [ ] Go to E5

3. **E3** In what ways do you find the information useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- New guidance/not given before [ ]
- *All guidance on overpayments is in one place* [ ]
- Guidance given is clear and concise [ ]
- Good level of information [ ]
- Easy to navigate [ ]
- To refer to [ ]
- For training [ ]
- Other - please specify [ ]
- …………………………… [ ]
- Don’t know [ ]

4. **E4** In what ways is the information not useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Not enough technical detail [ ]
- Not enough practical examples [ ]
- Difficult to find information [ ]
- Gaps in information [ ]
- Other - please specify [ ]
- …………………………… [ ]
- Don’t know [ ]
ANSWER IF “USE THE GUIDE REGULARLY/OCCASIONALLY” AT E1b

E5 How do you think the Guide could be improved? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- More practical examples
- Clearer contents list
- More technical information
- Examples of all forms
- Issue it as a Word document
- Other - please specify
- Don’t know

E6 What else, if anything, would you like to see in the Guide? PLEASE WRITE IN

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

NOW GO TO E8

ANSWER IF “NEVER USED THE GUIDE” AT E2

E7 Why has your authority not made use of the Guide? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Not very user-friendly
- Lack of resources
- Lack of time/too much pressure
- Have our own/don’t need to use DWP guide
- Other - please specify
- Not heard/aware of it
- Don’t know

ALL ANSWER

E8 Does your authority have a separate section(s) within the Benefits department that deals with Overpayments?

- Yes
- No
### E9

Shown below are some statements that have been made by local authorities about Overpayments Recovery. Please say how strongly you agree or disagree with each one? TICK ONE IN EACH ROW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Tend to agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Tend to disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Overpayments Recovery is an important way of a local authority raising money</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Overpayments Recovery staff are often pulled off to cover other sections of the Benefits Department at times of sickness/leave</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Overpayments Recovery has a high priority within the Benefits Departments</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### E10

Does your authority use other DWP benefits to recover HB/CTB Overpayments? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes □ Go to E12
- No, never have □ Answer E11
- No, not currently, but have used in the past □ Answer E11

**ANSWER IF “NO” AT E10**

### E11

Why does your authority not use other DWP benefits to recover HB/CTB Overpayments? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Didn’t know that we could □
- Don’t know where to send the referral □
- Had very little success in the past □
- Other methods are more successful □
- Because not much value to be gained □
- Too complicated □
- Other (please specify) □
- Don’t know □
ALL ANSWER
E12  What would you say are the main problems with recovering HB/CTB Overpayments?  TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Difficulties with specific recovery methods:
- Recovery from ongoing benefits  
- Other specific recovery method (please specify)  

Relying on so many different people/other departments to get information  
- Don’t have confidence in computer system  
- Difficulties in tracing customers after they stop receiving benefits  
- Incompatibility between LA system and DWP requirements  
- People can’t afford to pay them back  
- Other – please specify  

Don’t know  

ALL ANSWER

Section F: Extended Access to DWP Data for Local Authorities

Extended Access to DWP Data for Local Authorities was a project to provide local authorities with on-line access to a wide range of DWP benefit data and also provide an additional 140 Remote Access Terminals to a number of offices. The additional on-line information provided tailored access to Retirement Pension and Incapacity Benefit data and also provided information on Severe Disablement Benefit, Widow’s Benefit, Bereavement Benefit and Maternity Allowance. It also provided a tailored version of the Department Central Index (DCI).

5  F1 Overall, how useful has your authority found the additional dialogues for Department Central Index (DCI)? TICK ONE ONLY

Very useful [ ] Go to F2a
Fairly useful [ ] Go to F2a
Not very useful [ ] Answer F2b
Not at all useful [ ] Answer F2b
Don’t know [ ] Go to F3

ANSWER IF “VERY/FAIRLY USEFUL” AT F1

F2a Why do you say that the additional dialogues have been useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Less reliance on DWP for information [ ]
Speeded up the processing of claims [ ]
Prevented fraudulent claims [ ]
Don’t have to contact the customer again [ ]
Other (please specify) [ ]
………………………………
Don’t know [ ]

ANSWER IF “NOT VERY/AT ALL USEFUL” AT F1

F2b Why do you say that the additional dialogues have not been useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Too much information [ ]
Not enough information [ ]
Too many matches so details can not be shown [ ]
Could not find customer without a National Insurance Number [ ]
Other (please specify) [ ]
………………………………
Don’t know [ ]
ALL ANSWER

6  F3 Overall, how useful has your authority found the additional information on the Remote Access Terminal (RAT) for Retirement Benefit and Incapacity Benefit enquiries? TICK ONE ONLY

- Very useful [ ] Go to F5
- Fairly useful [ ] Go to F5
- Not very useful [ ] Answer F4
- Not at all useful [ ] Answer F4
- Don’t know [ ] Go to F5

ANSWER IF “NOT VERY/AT ALL USEFUL” AT F3

F4 Why do you say that the additional dialogues have not been useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Too much information [ ]
- Not enough information [ ]
- Other (please specify) [ ]
- …………………………….
- Don’t know [ ]

ALL ANSWER

F5 Would you say that the information for Pension Credit on the Remote Access Terminal (RAT) is sufficient for processing claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit? TICK ONE ONLY

- Yes, it is sufficient [ ]
- No, it is not sufficient [ ]
- Don’t know [ ]

(Please note, Qs F6-F8 have been left out)
ALL ANSWER
F9 Has your authority got an additional RAT terminal in the Fraud and Overpayment Section?

Yes ☐ Answer F10
No ☐ Go to Section G
Don’t know ☐ Go to Section G

ANSWER IF “YES” AT F9
F10 Has this additional RAT terminal helped to reduce your fraud and overpayment figures?

Yes ☐ Answer F11
No ☐ Go to F12
Don’t know ☐ Go to F13

ANSWER IF “YES” AT F10
F11 How do you think this has helped to reduce the figures? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Can obtain immediate answers ☐
- Stops overpayments running on while waiting for information ☐
- Speeds up service to the public ☐
- We can trace debtors addresses more easily when they move ☐
  Other (please specify) ☐
  ........................................
  Don’t know ☐

Now go to F13

ANSWER IF “NO” AT F10
F12 Why do you think this has not helped to reduce the figures? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- Information is not helpful ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐

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

Don’t know ☐
ANSWER IF “YES” AT F9
F13 Has this additional RAT terminal helped to reduce your Fraud and Overpayment workload?

Yes ☐ Go to F14
No ☐ Go to F15

ANSWER IF “YES” AT F13
F14 How do you think this has helped to reduce your workloads? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Less correspondence to get information from third party ☐
Can quickly trace debtor ☐
Reduced the amount of contact needed with DWP ☐
Other (please specify) ☐

………………………….
Don’t know ☐

ANSWER IF “NO” AT F13
F15 Why do you think this has not helped to reduce your workloads? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Intake of work has actually increased ☐
Other (please specify) ☐

……………………………………………..
Don’t know ☐
Section G: Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI)

BFI are committed to improving customer service. They 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.

G1 Has your LA had any contact with the BFI in the last 6 months?

Yes ☐ Answer G2

No ☐ Go to G7

Don’t know ☐ Go to G7

**ANSWER IF “YES” AT G1**

G2 What type of contact have you had in the last 6 months? **TICK ALL THAT APPLY**

First inspection ☐ Answer G3

Follow-up inspection ☐ Answer G3

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) – Single Tier ☐ Answer G3

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) - District ☐ Answer G3

Welsh Improvement Inspection ☐ Answer G3

Scottish Best Value ☐ Answer G3

Performance Improvement Action Team (PIAT) ☐ Answer G3

BFI Exhibition stand at IRRV Conference ☐ Go to G4

BFI Speaker at a seminar or event ☐ Go to G4

Enquiries to the BFI Customer Helpline ☐ Go to G4

Telephone call to BFI staff ☐ Go to G4

E-mail ☐ Go to G4

BFI Website ☐ Go to G4

None ☐ Go to G7

Don’t know ☐ Go to G7
ANSWER FOR THOSE MENTIONED AT G2 (SEE INSTRUCTION AT G2)

G3 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 6 MONTHS. TICK ONE BOX IN EACH RELEVANT COLUMN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First inspection</th>
<th>Follow-up inspection</th>
<th>CPA – Single Tier</th>
<th>CPA - District</th>
<th>Welsh Improvement Inspection</th>
<th>Scottish Best Value</th>
<th>PIAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly useful</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not very useful</td>
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<td>Not at useful</td>
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<td>Not yet received</td>
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<td>Don’t know</td>
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</table>

ANSWER FOR EACH MENTIONED AT G2

G4 Overall, how professional would you rate the staff? **ANSWER FOR EACH YOU HAVE HAD CONTACT WITH IN THE LAST 6 MONTHS. TICK ONE BOX IN EACH RELEVANT COLUMN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First inspection</th>
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<th>CPA – Single Tier</th>
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<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>E-mail</th>
<th>BFI Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very professional</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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<tr>
<td>Not at all professional</td>
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<td>Don’t know</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
ANSWER FOR EACH MENTIONED AT G2

G5  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 6 months. Tick one box in each relevant column

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Inspection</th>
<th>Follow-up Inspection</th>
<th>CPA – Single Tier</th>
<th>CPA – District</th>
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<th>BFI Speaker</th>
<th>Enquiries to Helpline</th>
<th>Telephone call to BFI staff</th>
<th>E-mail</th>
<th>BFI Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly satisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied</td>
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<td>nor dissatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairly dissatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ANSWER IF “FAIRLY SATISFIED”, NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED”, “FAIRLY DISSATISFIED” OR “VERY DISSATISFIED” AT G5**

**G6 Why do you say this? TICK ALL THAT APPLY IN EACH RELEVANT COLUMN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Inspection</th>
<th>Follow-up inspection</th>
<th>CPA – Single Tier</th>
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<th>BFI Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service should be faster</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More notice of inspection</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time to gather information</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time to comment on the draft report</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Inspection/assessment could be scheduled to avoid LA peaks in workload or holiday time</td>
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<td>More information available on good practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>More feedback on how customer feedback has been used</td>
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<td>More information on BFI and its activities</td>
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<td>More co-operation between inspectorates</td>
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<td>Staff could be more helpful</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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<td>Don’t know</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**ALL ANSWER**

**G7  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></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>
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<tbody>
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<td>a)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**LA**

**G8  How important do you think it is that BFI undertake inspections on DWP agencies, eg. Job Centre Plus, Pensions Service? TICK ONE ONLY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></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>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
**G9** Is there any joint working between your local authority and the Counter Fraud Investigation Service? IF YES: What form does this take? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

Yes, we do joint work:
- By telephone  □ Go to G11
- Regular meetings  □ Go to G11
- Share information/data linking/matching  □ Go to G11
- Joint visits/investigations  □ Go to G11
- Other - please specify  □ Go to G11

No, do not joint work  □ Answer G10
Don’t know  □ Go to Section H

**ANSWER IF “NO, DO NOT JOINT WORK” AT G9**

11 **G10** Why do you not joint work with the Counter Fraud Investigation Service? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

12
- Lack of resources  □
- Geographical location of offices not convenient  □
- IT incompatibility  □
- Lack of Senior commitment  □
- Lack of team commitment  □
- Other - please specify  □
- Don’t know  □

Now go to Section H

**ANSWER IF “YES” AT F9**

14 **G11** Overall, how effective do you think the joint working process with the Counter Fraud Investigation Service is in terms of counter fraud work? TICK ONE ONLY

15
- Very effective  □
- Fairly effective  □
- Not very effective  □
- Not at all effective  □
- Don’t know  □
16
17  G12  How do you think this joint working process could be improved, if at all?

   Improved liaison with Counter Fraud Investigation Service □
   Increase in staff resources □
   Other (please specify) □
   ………………………
   Don’t know □

18
19  G13  Would you say that this joint working process has improved fraud detection a little, a lot, or not at all? TICK ONE ONLY

   A lot □
   A little □
   Not at all □
   Don’t know □

20
21  G14  Would you say that this joint working process has improved fraud prevention a little, a lot, or not at all? TICK ONE ONLY

   A lot □
   A little □
   Not at all □
   Don’t know □

22
23  ALL ANSWER

Section H: BFI Website

We now want to ask you some questions about the Benefit Fraud Inspectorates (BFI) website and your general IT arrangements.

24  H1  Have you ever personally visited the BFI Website?

   Yes □  Go to H2
   No □  Go to H3
H2 Thinking about the first time you visited the (BFI) Website, how did you discover it? TICK ONE ONLY

- Just surfed in
- Linked from another site
- Using a search engine
- CSM newsletter
- By other means

25 H3 Are you aware of other colleagues in your LA who may visit the site?

- Yes
- No

26 H4 How user friendly do you think the website is? Please use the following scale: very, fairly, not very, not at all. TICK ONE ONLY

- Very user friendly
- Fairly user friendly
- Not very user friendly
- Not at all user friendly

27 H5a Did you find the information on the website useful?

- Yes
- No

28 ANSWER IF “YES” AT H5a

29 H5b In what way did you find the information useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- It has a comprehensive collection of BFI reports
- LA reports are easy to find
- Finding out what other Las are doing
- Other (please specify)

………………………………..
Appendices – The questionnaire

ANSWER IF “NO” AT H5a

30  H5c  In what ways was the information not useful? TICK ALL THAT APPLY

- The site is not easy to navigate
- It only contains reports
- The reports are only available in a PDF format
- It does not have the information I am looking for
- Other (please specify)

30.1.1.1.1.1  ANSWER IF YOU HAVE USED BFI WEBSITE. (“YES” AT H1)

H6  What was the purpose of your last visit to the site? TICK ALL THAT APPLY. What else?

- To compare performance of my LA with a similar authority
- To compare performance of my LA with all authorities
- To prepare for an inspection
- To find examples of good practice
- To get a copy of the performance standards
- Other - please specify

31  H7  How frequently do you visit the BFI Website? TICK ONE ONLY

- Daily
- Weekly
- Once or twice a month
- Once or twice every three months
- Once or twice a year
- Less often
- Only when there is something new
- Other
H8  How do you think the BFI website could be improved?  TICK ALL THAT APPLY

   More examples of specific improvements achieved by Las ☐
   More examples of pro-active measures which LAs could use ☐
   More examples of what seems to work ☐
   Other – please specify
   ……………………………………… ☐
   Happy with it as it is/no specific proposals ☐
   Don’t know ☐

ALL ANSWER

H9  Do you think you will access the BFI website in the future?

   Yes ☐
   No ☐

ALL ANSWER

Section I: Decentralisation, Contracting Out and Contact Information

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

32   I1   Is HB and CTB administration:

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

38  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?**

38.1 ENTER NAME: ________________________________________________________________

38.2 JOB TITLE: ________________________________________________________________

ADDRESS (INCLUDE POSTCODE): ________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

38.3 TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: ________________________________

38.4 FAX NO: __________________________________________________________________

38.5 __________________________________________________________________________

38.6 E MAIL ADDRESS: ____________________________________________________________
ALL ANSWER

I4 Is HB and CTB administration contracted out?

Yes ☐ Go to I5
No ☐ Go to I7

38.7

Don’t know ☐ Go to I7

ANSWER IF “YES” AT I4

I5 When did this contract start?

Enter month ☐☐ and year ☐☐

38.8

I6 What is the name of the contractor? (WRITE IN)

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

39

ALL ANSWER

I7 Which of the following do you personally have overall 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 I9

39.1

39.2

I8 Please provide details of the manager with overall responsibility for each of the following...

a) Rent Rebate:

39.3 ENTER NAME: -------------------------------

39.4 JOB TITLE: -------------------------------

39.5 -------------------------------

39.6 JOB TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: -------------------------------

39.7 -------------------------------

39.8 FAX NUMBER: -------------------------------

39.9 -------------------------------

39.10 EMAIL ADDRESS: -------------------------------

39.11 ADDRESS: -------------------------------

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39.12 -----------------------------------------------------
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 managers details above
No - Go to below (Rent Allowance)

b) Rent Allowance:

39.13

39.14 ENTER NAME:_______________________________________________________________

39.15 JOB TITLE:______________________________________________________________

39.16______________________________________________________________

39.17 TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:____________________________________

39.18______________________________________________________________

39.19 FAX NO:______________________________________________________________

39.20______________________________________________________________

39.21 EMAIL ADDRESS:________________________________________________________

39.22 ADDRESS:______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________
c) Council Tax Benefit

39.23

39.24 ENTER NAME: 

39.25 JOB TITLE: 

39.26 

39.27 TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: 

39.28 

39.29 FAX NO: 

39.30 

39.31 EMAIL ADDRESS: 

39.32 ADDRESS: 

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------
d) Overpayment recovery

39.33

39.34 ENTER NAME:---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.35 JOB TITLE:---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.36---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.37 TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION:--------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.38---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.39 FAX NO:---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.40---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.41 EMAIL ADDRESS:---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.42 ADDRESS:---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
e) Benefit Fraud

39.43

39.44 ENTER NAME: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.45 JOB TITLE: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.46---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.47 TELEPHONE NUMBER WITH EXTENSION: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.48---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.49 FAX NO: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.50---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.51 EMAIL ADDRESS: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

39.52 ADDRESS: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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ALL ANSWER

I9 And finally please can you write in your own details?

FULL NAME: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

AUTHORITY NAME: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

TELEPHONE NUMBER, WITH EXTENSION: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

ADDRESS: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

POSTCODE: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

FAX NUMBER: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

EMAIL ADDRESS: -------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN WAVE 10 OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY OMNIBUS SURVEY.