



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Local Authority Insight Survey – Wave 25

July 2014

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Summary

This report presents the findings from Wave 25 of the Local Authority (LA) Insight Survey, which was conducted between 14 October and 7 December 2013.

The survey is conducted approximately every 6-12 months among managers with responsibility for the administration of Housing Benefit (HB). It aims to provide the Department with a regular means of finding out how LAs organise their benefit administration and their views on the implications of current and future policy.

Wave 25 of the survey covered the following areas:

- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs);
- Universal Credit (UC);
- Risk Based Verification (RBV);
- the benefit cap;
- Automated Transfers to Local Authority System (ATLAS);
- HB advice and wider issues;
- Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR);
- supported accommodation.

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The Authors

Claire Durrant has been jointly responsible for managing the LA Insight Survey with her colleague Elaine Winter since Wave 6 in 2001. She joined GfK NOP in 1996, having previously worked for MORI, where she worked for seven years in the Social Research Unit, and before that, the Gallup Organisation. At GfK NOP she has worked on a wide variety of studies for central government, as well as local authorities and academics. This includes the British Household Panel Study and the Home On-Line Study, both run by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), based at the University of Essex, as well as other studies for the Department for Work and Pensions, including the Maternity Rights and Benefits Survey among employers and parents. She has also co-managed projects for Jobcentre Plus in recent years.

Elaine Winter joined NOP as a graduate trainee in 1988, having gained a degree in Geography from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. She has worked on a wide variety of studies but has specialised in managing longitudinal and employment/benefit policy surveys. Her experience includes managing a seven-year cohort study of the effects of benefit policy change on lone parents for PSI and a panel survey with the unemployed and those on low incomes researching the introduction of the Earnings-Top-Up benefit, also for PSI. In addition to these surveys Elaine works regularly for local government clients and co managed projects for Jobcentre Plus.

Elaine and Claire were assisted with the management of the LA Insight Survey by their colleague, Darren Yaxley.

Darren Yaxley (Research Manager) joined GfK NOP in 2004 from the National Centre for Social Research having graduated from The University of Birmingham with a BA (with honours) in Political Science in July 2003. Since joining GfK NOP's Social Research team Darren has worked extensively for various public sector organisations, including both central and local government clients, using a variety of data collection methods. Darren has worked on 12 waves of the LA Insight Survey since joining. Darren is a full member the Market Research Society (MRS) and a member of the Social Research Association (SRA).

1 Discretionary Housing Payments

1.1 Introduction and summary

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) provide claimants with further financial assistance when a Local Authority (LA) considers that help with housing costs is needed. The 2001 Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations cover DHPs and specify the criteria for what can be considered and what is excluded. LAs exercise a significant amount of discretion over DHPs and decisions on how to administer DHPs are largely employed at the discretion of LAs.

From April 2011 until the end of the spending review period in March 2015 an extra £355 million of funding is being provided to LAs towards DHPs. The following section examines how LAs' use of DHPs may have changed since April 2013, in light of very recent policy changes such as the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) and the benefit cap, and earlier changes such as those introduced to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) in 2011.

The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences. When possible, comparisons are made with the findings from the previous wave of the survey which was conducted in the autumn of 2012.

- Almost all LAs (98 per cent) carry out affordability tests before issuing DHPs.
- LAs said that an average of 35 per cent of people applying for a DHP do so themselves and 30 per cent have their claim initiated by the LA.
- Advice on the LA's website is the most popular form of guidance before a claim has been approved (89 per cent), followed by liaison with other parts of the LA (78 per cent). London Boroughs are the most active overall.
- Once a DHP has been approved the most common type of guidance is sending a letter to the claimant (92 per cent) which is followed by liaison with other parts of the LA (64 per cent).
- Over half (56 per cent) of LAs said they are awarding larger individual DHPs since April 2013 and 32 per cent said they are awarding smaller individual DHPs.
- 70 per cent of LAs said that the maximum period for which DHPs have been awarded is 52 weeks – an increase of 19 per cent on 2012; around one in five (21 per cent) said it is 26 weeks.
- LAs were asked to indicate all situations where they had awarded DHPs from a pre-coded¹ list. Virtually every LA had awarded DHPs because of changes to LHA and RSRS (99 per cent and 98 per cent respectively). However, a roughly equal proportion of LAs indicated that they had awarded DHPs to claimants for reasons unrelated to policy changes - for example, help with moving costs, emergencies, or changes in family circumstances (99 per cent). Fewer have awarded DHPs for reasons related to the benefit cap (86 per cent).

¹ Identified during piloting.

- When asked about spending priorities for **short-term** DHPs, 73 per cent awarded these because of RSRS, while slightly fewer cited reasons not directly affected by Housing Benefit (HB) policy changes (66 per cent) and LHA (62 per cent). Just a third (33 per cent) mentioned the benefit cap, although this rises to 75 per cent in London Boroughs.
- When asked about spending priorities for **long-term** DHPs, 86 per cent awarded these for reasons relating to RSRS, while fewer mentioned reasons not directly affected by HB policy changes (62 per cent) and LHA (42 per cent). Just 22 per cent of LAs said that they have awarded DHPs for a benefit cap-related reason (67 per cent of London Boroughs).
- Looking at all the reasons given by LAs for awarding both short- and long-term DHPs, the highest proportion cited ‘Supporting people who suffer loss through RSRS’ (48 per cent and 46 per cent respectively). In addition, a third of LAs made short-term awards ‘because rent can’t be met in full because of the LHA rate’ and more than two in five (44 per cent) made long-term awards because ‘the claimant is in a significantly adapted property due to their disability needs’.
- 14 per cent of LAs said that they had already topped up the Government DHP contribution and 17 per cent said that they have not topped it up yet but intend to do so. The majority of LAs do not intend to top up the Government DHP contribution (56 per cent).

1.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Does your LA carry out a test of affordability before issuing a DHP?

Tick one only.

Affordability tests

98% of LAs carry out affordability tests before issuing DHPs

- 76% always including DLA
- 10% always excluding DLA and
- 9% sometimes including DLA
- * sometimes excluding DLA
- 1% including DLA care but not mobility

Base: All LAs (237)

Almost all LAs (98 per cent) carry out affordability tests before issuing DHPs. An affordability test is a financial assessment in which a claimant has to demonstrate that they are unable to meet housing costs from their available income. Across the regions, Welsh authorities were the only LA type where 100 per cent carry them out.

The majority of LAs (76 per cent) always carry out affordability tests including Disability Living Allowance (DLA), while a smaller minority always carry it out but excluding DLA (ten

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per cent) or sometimes carry it out including DLA (nine per cent). Just one LA (an English district) says that they sometimes carry out an affordability test excluding DLA while three LAs (one per cent) include DLA care but not DLA mobility.

Table 1.1 Roughly what proportion of people would you say have applied for a DHP on their own initiative (i.e. they know what DHPs are and that they might be entitled to it) and what proportion have had a DHP effectively arranged for them by their landlord or has been suggested by the LA itself, or by other means?

	Mean (percentages)
Apply themselves	35
Initiated by LA	30
Arranged by landlord	23
Via CAB/advice agency	11
Other	1

Base: All LAs (237).

LAs said that an average of 35 per cent of people applying for a DHP did so themselves – i.e. they know what DHPs are and that they might be entitled to one, 30 per cent of people have their claim initiated by the LA, 23 per cent are arranged by a landlord and 11 per cent by a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) or advice agency.

Across Great Britain, it is notable that London Boroughs said that an average of just 12 per cent of people had their claim arranged by a landlord which is significantly lower than other regions.

Figure 1.1 What type of guidance, if any, has your LA given to claimants before and after a DHP has been approved, about what the DHP is for and what will happen when the DHP comes to an end?

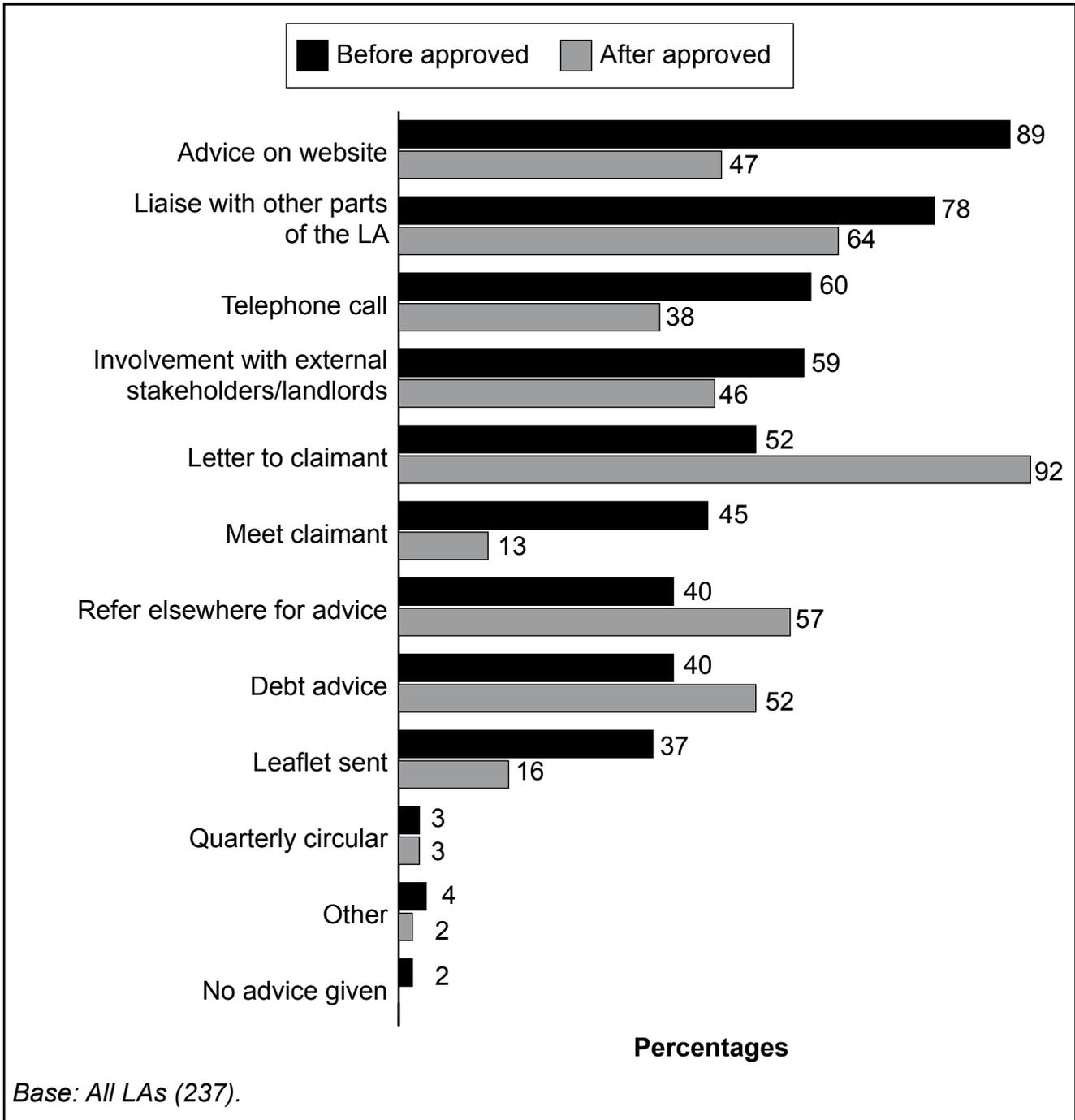


Figure 1.1 shows the types of guidance given to claimants both before (i.e. before claimants have applied for a DHP, as well as once they have put a claim in but before it has been approved) and after a DHP has been approved, about what the DHP is for and what will happen when the DHP comes to an end.

Advice on the LA's website is the most popular form of guidance before a claim has been approved (89 per cent), followed by liaison with other parts of the LA (78 per cent). Around three in five mentioned telephone calls and involvement with external stakeholders and

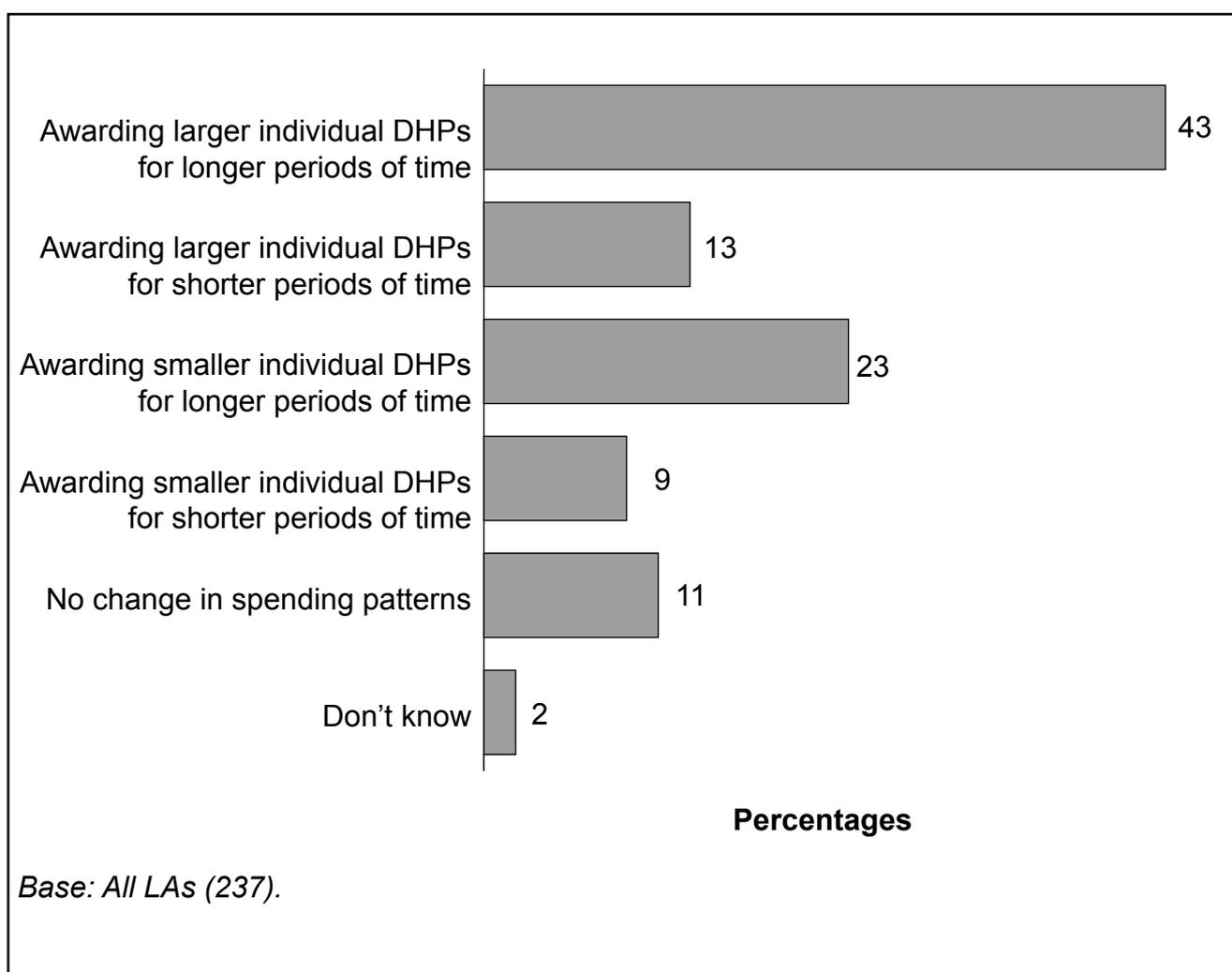
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landlords (60 per cent and 59 per cent respectively), while just over half (52 per cent) send a letter to claimants and 45 per cent actually meet with them.

Once a DHP has been approved the most common type of guidance is sending a letter to the claimant (92 per cent) which is followed by liaison with other parts of the LA (64 per cent), referral elsewhere for advice (57 per cent) and debt advice (52 per cent).

London Boroughs reported being the most active in terms of offering guidance, particularly before a claim has been approved. For example, 71 per cent of London Boroughs meet with claimants and 62 per cent provide debt advice before a claim has been approved.

Figure 1.2 Thinking about how the spending pattern for DHPs has changed in your LA since April 2013, please tick one from the following statements that applies best to your LA



LAs were asked about how their spending patterns for DHP awards have changed since April 2013 in terms of whether or not the awards are larger or smaller. These are obviously relative terms and therefore the purpose of this question was to assess general trends.

When LAs were asked how spending patterns had changed for DHP awards since April 2013, over half (56 per cent) said that they were awarding larger individual DHPs – 43 per cent for longer periods of time and 13 per cent for shorter periods of time. On the other hand,

around one in three (32 per cent) are awarding smaller individual DHPs – 23 per cent for longer periods of time and 9 per cent for shorter periods of time. One in nine (11 per cent) have not noted any change in spending patterns.

It is notable that a significantly high proportion of Scottish LAs (70 per cent) said that they are awarding larger individual DHPs for longer periods of time and that London Boroughs are particularly likely to have said that they are awarding larger individual DHPs for shorter periods of time (38 per cent). Not a single Scottish authority is awarding larger individual DHPs for shorter periods of time and just one London Borough said that they are awarding smaller individual DHPs. Authorities in Yorkshire and Humberside are also particularly likely to have said that they have not seen any change in spending patterns (38 per cent).

Since April 2013, what is the maximum period that DHPs have been awarded for at your LA?

Maximum period that DHPs have been awarded

- 70% of LAs are awarding DHPs for a maximum of 52 weeks
- 2% are awarding DHPs for more than 52 weeks
- 9% sometimes including DLA
- Of those awarding DHPs for less than 52 weeks:
 - 4% are awarding DHPs for up to 39 weeks
 - 21% are awarding DHPs for up to 26 weeks
 - 3% are awarding DHPs for up to 12 weeks

Base: All LAs (237)

When LAs were asked about the maximum period for which DHPs have been awarded a majority of 70 per cent of LAs said 52 weeks. Just two per cent award DHPs for a longer period.

Around one in five (21 per cent) said that the maximum period is 26 weeks, while four per cent said 39 weeks and three per cent 12 weeks.

When these findings are compared with those from the same question last year, the proportion of LAs saying 52 weeks has increased significantly from 51 per cent in 2012 to 70 per cent in 2013. Those saying 26 weeks has decreased from 27 per cent in 2012 to 21 per cent in 2013.

Ninety-five per cent of Scottish LAs said that their maximum period is 52 weeks. This is significantly higher than all other LA types except London Boroughs: 83 per cent also said that their maximum period is 52 weeks. In addition, a higher than average proportion of Welsh LAs said that the maximum period is 26 weeks (46 per cent).

Figure 1.3 Overview of the situations in which all DHPs and short- and long- terms DHPs have been awarded

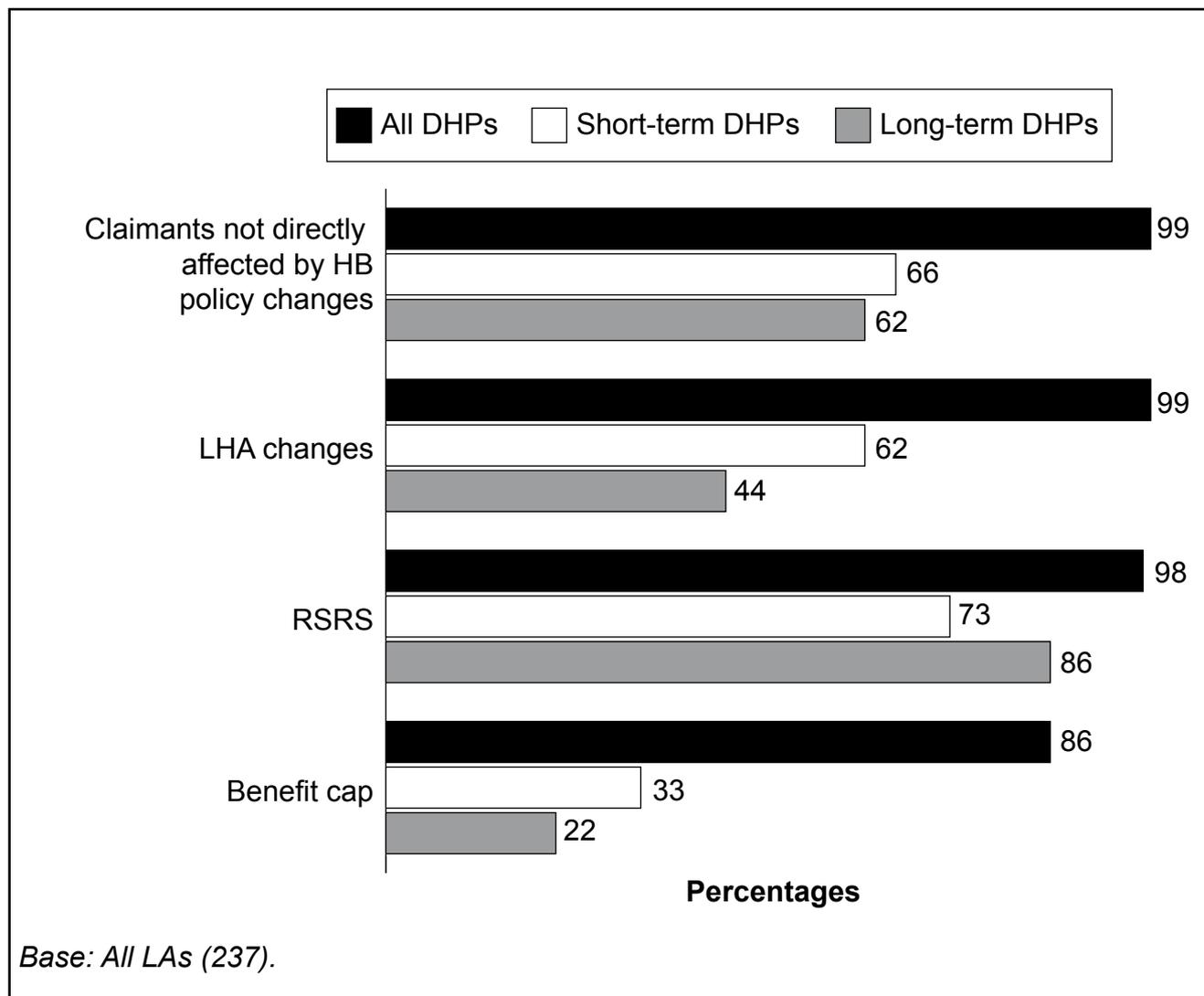


Figure 1.3 groups the situations in which LAs have awarded DHPs since April 2013 into four types of reasons – situations not immediately associated with HB policy change, LHA changes, RSRS and benefit cap. It summarises the findings of three questions: one which asks about all of the situations in which DHPs have been awarded since April 2013, another about the three most important reasons for offering short-term awards and a third about the three most important reasons for offering long-term awards.

Almost all LAs have awarded DHPs to claimants for reasons that are not directly linked to recent HB policy changes such as RSRS, LHA changes and benefit cap (99 per cent). Such reasons included, for instance, emergencies, helping claimants through a change in family circumstances, providing assistance with moving costs and other general issues. Virtually every LA has also awarded DHPs because of changes to LHA and RSRS (99 per cent and 98 per cent respectively). Fewer have awarded DHPs for a situation related to benefit cap (86 per cent).

There are, however, differences by LA type and caseload: English Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs are significantly more likely to have awarded DHPs for a benefit cap-related reason, as might perhaps be expected given the spatial distribution of claimants affected by the cap, than English Districts (100 per cent, 96 per cent and 79 per cent respectively) and high and medium caseload authorities are significantly more likely than low caseload authorities to have awarded DHPs for this reason (94 per cent, 89 per cent and 79 per cent respectively).

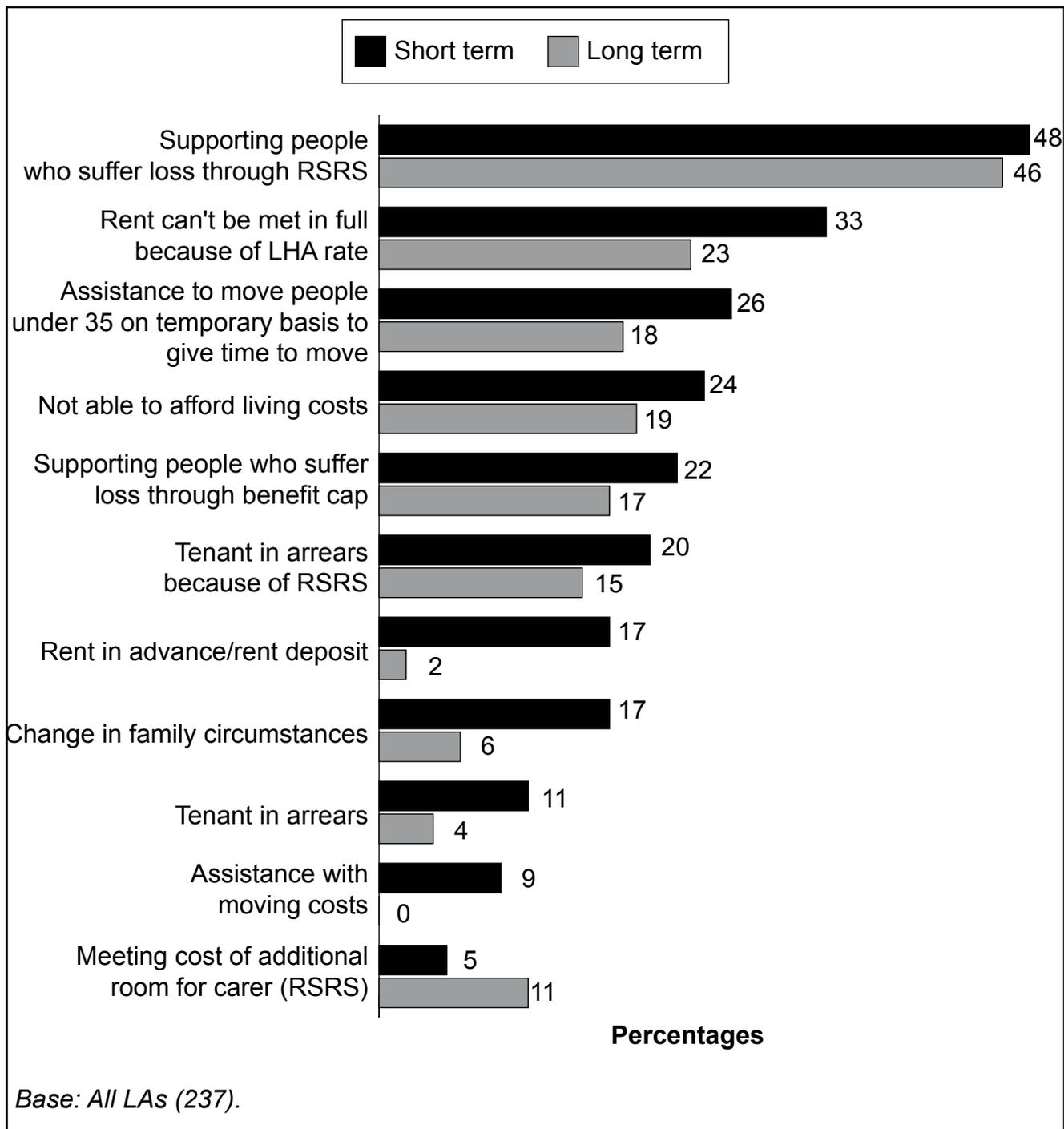
When respondents were asked about the reasons for awarding short-term awards almost three-quarters (73 per cent) mentioned RSRS while slightly fewer cited reasons not directly affected by HB policy changes (66 per cent) and LHA (62 per cent). Just a third (33 per cent) mentioned the benefit cap but this rises significantly among London Boroughs to 75 per cent and Scottish authorities to 55 per cent.

Long-term awards are also most likely to be awarded for reasons relating to RSRS (86 per cent) while fewer mentioned reasons not directly affected by HB policy changes (62 per cent) and LHA (42 per cent). Just 22 per cent of LAs said that they have awarded DHPs for a benefit cap-related reason, although this once again rises to 67 per cent of London Boroughs.

The following five charts examine the three most important reasons why LAs have been awarding short- and long-term DHPs since April 2013². The first charts and commentary give an overview of the top ten situations in which both short- and long-term DHPs have been awarded and this is followed by a full breakdown of all reasons broken down in to four categories: situations not immediately associated with HB policy change, LHA changes, RSRS and benefit cap.

² LAs were provided with a list of options that had been identified through piloting and cognitive testing, however, they were also able to add additional options when specifying other reasons.

Figure 1.4 Top 10 situations in which a DHP has been awarded



Supporting people who suffer loss through RSRS was the reason given by the highest proportion of LAs for awarding both short- and long-term DHPs (48 per cent and 46 per cent respectively).

A third of LAs (33 per cent) said that they made **short-term awards** because rent can't be met in full because of the LHA rate, while around a quarter (26 per cent) mentioned that they have given assistance to move people under 35 on a temporary basis to give them time to move and to those who are unable to afford living costs (24 per cent). One in five also mentioned supporting people who suffer loss through the benefit cap (22 per cent) and those in arrears because of RSRS (20 per cent).

In addition to supporting people who suffer losses through RSRS mentioned above (46 per cent), the most commonly mentioned other reasons for awarding **long-term awards** often related to disability: more than two in five (44 per cent) had made long-term awards because the claimant is in a significantly adapted property due to their disability needs. LAs were less likely to make long-term awards for the following reasons: rent couldn't be met in full due to the LHA rate (23 per cent); meet the additional costs because a family member is ill/disabled (21 per cent); unable to afford living costs (19 per cent); living in adapted accommodation (general, not related to RSRS) (19 per cent).

1.2.1 Reasons not associated with HB policy change

Table 1.2 Since April 2013, what have been the three most important reasons for offering a short-term (short-term meaning three months or less) and long-term (more than three months) DHP award?

Three most important situations in which DHP is awarded: claimants not directly affected by HB policy changes		
	Short term (%)	Long term (%)
Not able to afford living costs	24	19
Rent in advance/rent deposit	17	2
Change in family circumstances	17	6
Tenant in rent arrears	11	4
Meet additional cost because family member is ill/disabled	6	21
Assistance with moving costs	5	*
Meet cost of an additional room for carer/other	1	7
Emergencies	1	–
Tenant living in significantly adapted accommodation	*	19
Other general issue	2	1

Note: An asterisk indicates a value of less than 0.5 per cent but not zero.

Within the category of situations not directly affected by HB policy changes the key reason for awarding short-term DHPs is because claimants cannot afford living costs (24 per cent). Other key reasons for awarding short-term awards are to help with rent in advance/rent deposits and a change in family circumstances (both 17 per cent) and rent arrears (11 per cent).

On the other hand, the main reason within this category for LAs awarding long-term DHPs is to meet additional costs arising because a family member is ill/disabled (21 per cent). In addition, almost one in five (19 per cent) said that they have awarded long-term DHPs to claimants who are not able to afford their living costs and/or have significantly adapted accommodation. English Metropolitan Districts are significantly more likely than Scottish authorities, English Unitary authorities and English Districts to award long-term DHPs to claimants who have significantly adapted accommodation (36 per cent compared with five per cent, 15 per cent and 19 per cent respectively).

1.2.2 Reasons associated with the LHA changes

Table 1.3 Since April 2013, what have been the three most important reasons for offering a short-term (short-term meaning three months or less) and long-term (more than three months) DHP award?

Three most important situations in which DHP is awarded: LHA changes		
	Short term (%)	Long term (%)
Rent can't be met in full because of LHA rate or Rent Officer accommodation	33	23
Assistance to people under 35 on a temporary basis to give time to move	26	18
Tenant in rent arrears because of change to LHA	7	3
Assistance with moving costs	4	1
Where there is a non-dependant deduction and non-dependant cannot pay	1	1
Other LHA-related issue	1	1

Base: All LAs (237).

Looking now at the three most important situations in which DHPs are awarded to help claimants deal with LHA changes, the two most important reasons for awarding both short- and long-term awards are because the rent cannot be met in full because of the LHA rate or Rent Officer determination (33 per cent short term and 23 per cent long term) and assistance for people under 35 on a temporary basis to give them time to move (26 per cent short-term and 18 per cent long-term). Considerably fewer mentioned any of the other reasons, such as arrears or assistance with moving costs.

There are some interesting differences in the findings by region with a significantly high proportion of LAs in Yorkshire and Humberside, the West Midlands and the East of England saying that they have awarded short-term DHPs because the rent cannot be met in full because of the LHA rate or Rent Officer determination (62 per cent, 56 per cent and 52 per cent respectively). On the other hand, significantly high proportions of LAs in Wales and the East Midlands said that they have awarded long-term DHPs to give assistance to people under 35 on a temporary basis to give them time to move (54 per cent and 34 per cent respectively).

1.2.3 Reasons associated with RSRS

Table 1.4 Since April 2013, what have been the three most important reasons for offering a short-term (short-term meaning three months or less) and long term (more than three months) DHP award?

Three most important situations in which DHP is awarded: RSRS		
	Short term (%)	Long term (%)
Supporting people who have suffered losses through RSRS	48	46
Tenant in arrears because of RSRS	20	15
Assistance with moving costs	9	3
Meeting cost of an additional room for carer/ other non-resident	5	11
Claimant in significantly adapted properties due to disability needs	3	44
Claimant is a Shared Lives Carer	*	*
Meet cost of additional bedroom for foster children where required	*	7
Other RSRS issue	2	3

Note: An asterisk indicates a value of less than 0.5 per cent but not zero.

Base: All LAs (237).

The key reasons for LAs giving both short- and long-term DHP awards are to support people who have suffered losses through RSRS (48 per cent and 46 per cent). In addition, one in five LAs (20 per cent) said that they have awarded short-term DHPs to help tenants in rent arrears and one in eleven (nine per cent) to assist with moving costs. On the other hand, a significant minority of LAs (44 per cent) have awarded long-term awards to claimants in significantly adapted properties due to their disability needs, 15 per cent because the tenant is in rent arrears because of RSRS and one in nine (11 per cent) to meet the cost of an additional room for a carer or non-resident.

Looking at differences by region, it is worth noting that although just seven per cent of all LAs say that they awarded DHPs to meet the cost of an additional bedroom for foster children, this rises to 43 per cent of those in the North East.

1.2.4 Reasons associated with the benefit cap

Table 1.5 Since April 2013, what have been the three most important reasons for offering a short-term (short-term meaning three months or less) and long term (more than three months) DHP award?

Three most important situations in which DHP is awarded: benefit cap		
	Short term (%)	Long term (%)
Supporting people who have suffered losses through the benefit cap	22	17
Tenant in arrears because of the benefit cap	8	4
Assistance with moving costs	3	1
Exempt benefit application in progress	2	*
Increase in amount of non-dependant deductions	*	–
Other benefit cap issue	2	1

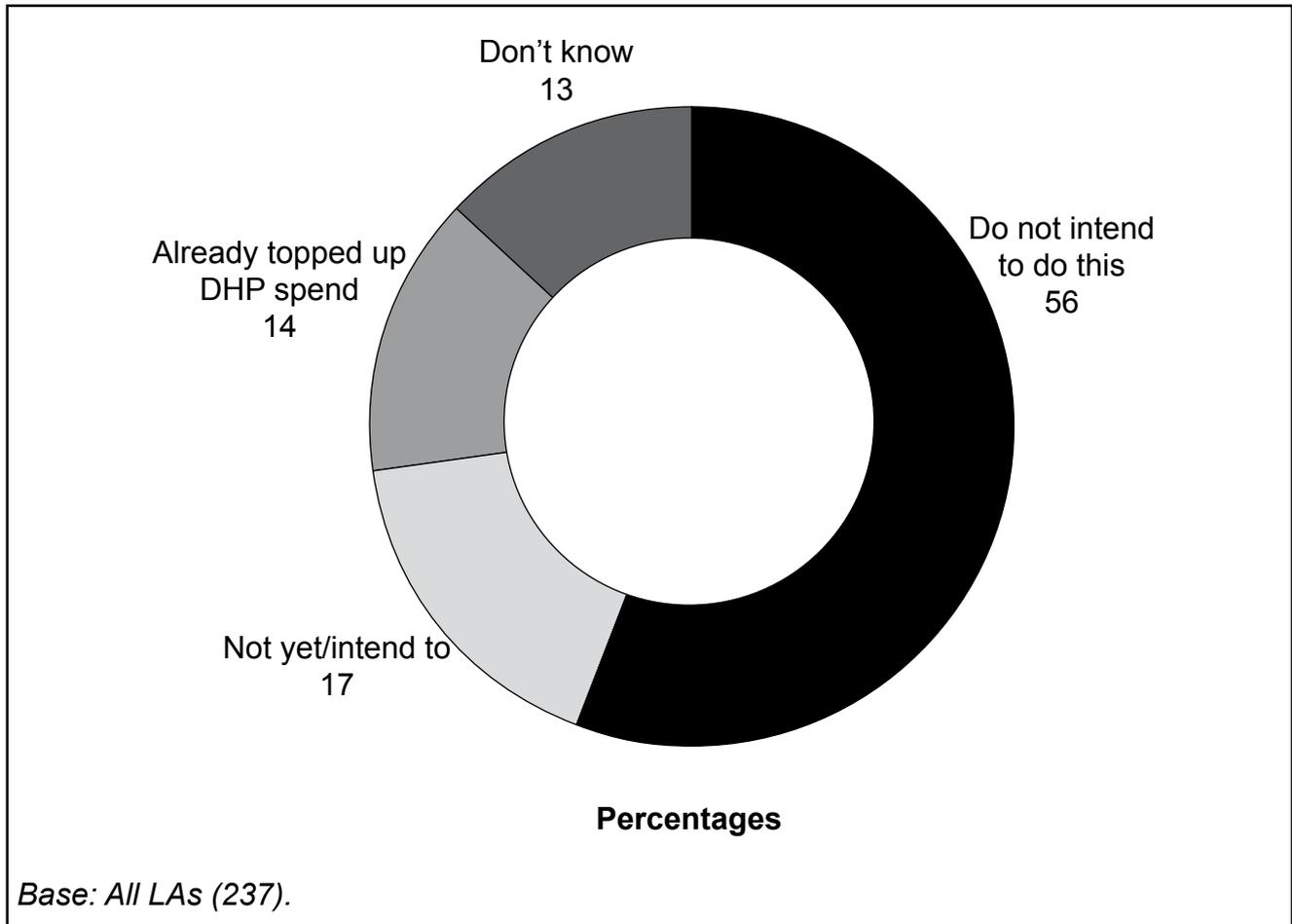
Note: An asterisk indicates a value of less than 0.5 per cent but not zero.

Base: All LAs (237).

LAs were most likely to have awarded DHPs in both the short and long term to support people who have suffered losses through the benefit cap (22 per cent and 17 per cent respectively). A further 8 per cent have made short-term awards because tenants are in arrears due to the benefit cap.

There are once again some clear differences by LA type and region. Supporting people who have suffered losses through the benefit cap is particularly likely to be mentioned as an important short-term reason by LAs in London, Scotland, and the South West (50 per cent, 45 per cent and 33 per cent respectively). On the other hand, LAs in London are significantly more likely than all other LA types to be awarding DHPs to tenants in rent arrears because of the benefit cap (33 per cent). The findings follow a similar pattern for long-term awards – London Boroughs and Scotland are the LA types most likely to be awarding DHPs to support people who have suffered losses due to the benefit cap (46 per cent and 35 per cent respectively) and London Boroughs are significantly most likely to be granting awards to those who are in rent arrears (21%).

Figure 1.5 Thinking about your LA as a whole, including departments other than your own, does your LA intend to top up the Government DHP contribution?



Local authorities were asked whether or not they, including departments other than their own, intended to top-up the Government DHP contribution. A majority do not intend to top it up (56 per cent), however, 17 per cent said that they had not topped it up yet but intend to. Just 14 per cent of LAs said that they have already done so, bringing the total of LAs who have or intend to top up the Governments' DHP contribution to 31 per cent. Thirteen per cent were unable to give a definitive answer.

Scottish authorities were significantly more likely than any other LA type to say that they have already topped-up the Government contribution (60 per cent). English Districts and English Unitaries were also significantly more likely than Welsh, Scottish, English Metropolitan Districts and London Boroughs to say that they do not intend to top it up (65 per cent and 61 per cent compared with 31 per cent, 35 per cent, 36 per cent and 54 per cent respectively).

2 Universal Credit

2.1 Introduction and summary

The foundation of the Government's reforms is the introduction of one single benefit for working-age adults which, during 2013, started to replace several income-related in-work and out-of-work benefits, including Housing Benefit (HB) in certain live site areas. As of April 2014 there are ten live sites where Universal Credit (UC) is operating, taking claims from single people who would otherwise claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). UC is an attempt to make work pay and simplify and clarify the benefits system, making it easier to administer and reduce fraud and error.

Under UC, HB will be paid directly to most tenants within the social rented sector. This will mirror the private rented sector (PRS) where currently around 80 per cent of HB in the PRS is paid to tenants. This section examines how local authorities (LAs) are dealing with the transition to UC in terms of preparation and support for claimants, providers and landlords.

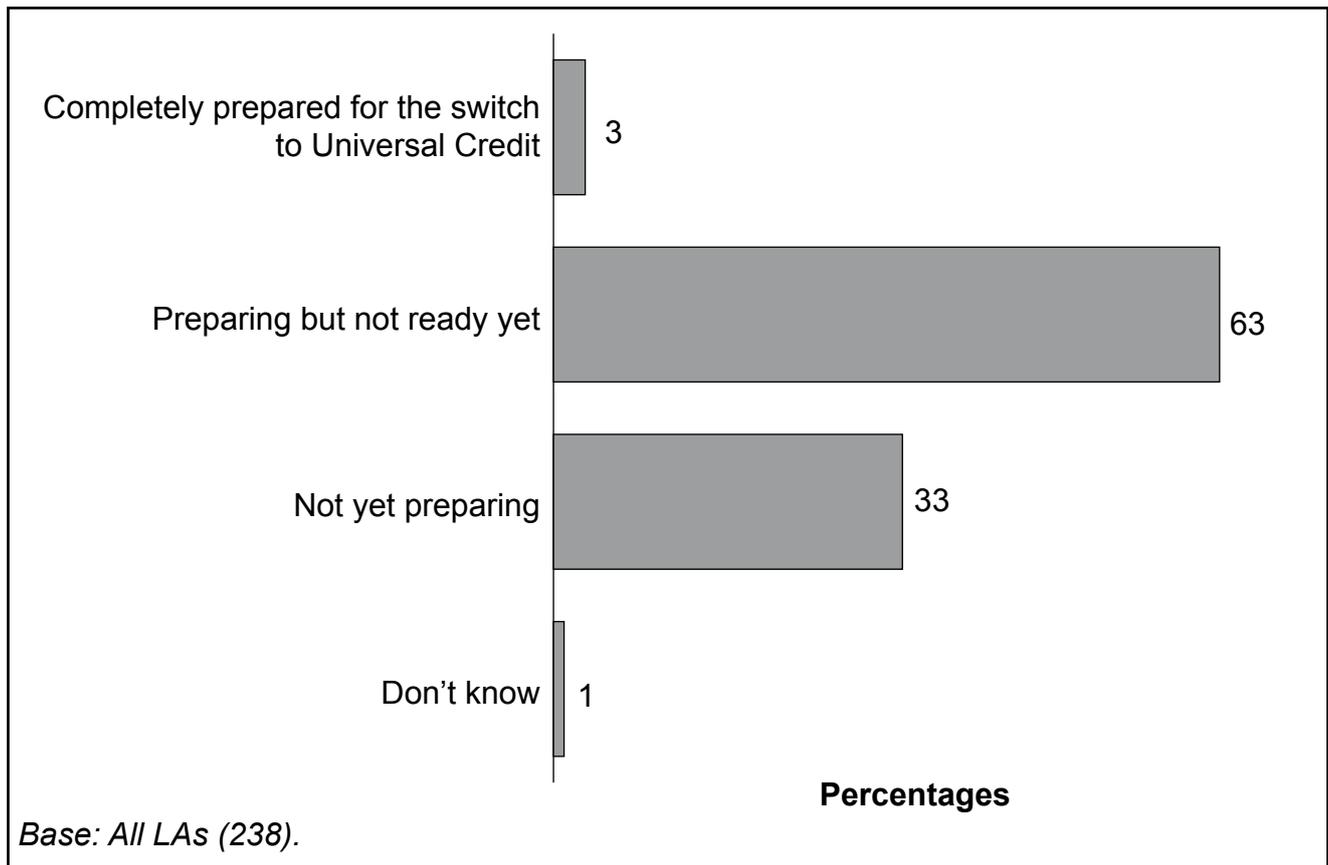
The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- 63 per cent of LAs said that they are preparing for UC but are not ready yet; 33 per cent said that they are not preparing yet and three per cent describe their authority as completely prepared for the switch to UC.
- In terms of preparing **staff and systems** for UC, 61 per cent said that they have already attended workshops, while around half have met with voluntary groups (53 per cent), had awareness training and held meetings (both 52 per cent), sent out generic information (50 per cent) and formed a working group (46 per cent). Just 8 per cent of LAs said that they have not done anything.
- 64 per cent said that they are planning specific training to prepare staff and systems, 45 per cent are planning awareness training and 43 per cent are planning to send tailored guidance to staff. Seven per cent of LAs said that they are not preparing to do anything.
- 26 per cent of LAs have done nothing to prepare claimants. The three most popular things to have already been done are to direct claimants to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Money Advice websites (36 per cent and 29 per cent) respectively) and develop their own website (28 per cent).
- 91 per cent of LAs said that they are planning to prepare claimants for UC. Authorities' plans for preparing claimants in the future are most likely to include developing information on their website (53 per cent), providing help with computer use (46 per cent) and advising claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and be paid direct to claimants (45 per cent).
- Local authorities' main activity in terms of preparing social housing provider landlords is to share generic information (72 per cent). Just 14 per cent said that they are looking at potential easements for direct payments.
- In terms of what LAs are planning to do to prepare private landlords for UC, 72 per cent are planning to arrange landlord forums, 49 per cent will include articles in the newspapers aimed at private landlords and 40 per cent will send them information direct. Overall 87 per cent of LAs have or are planning to prepare private landlords.

2.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

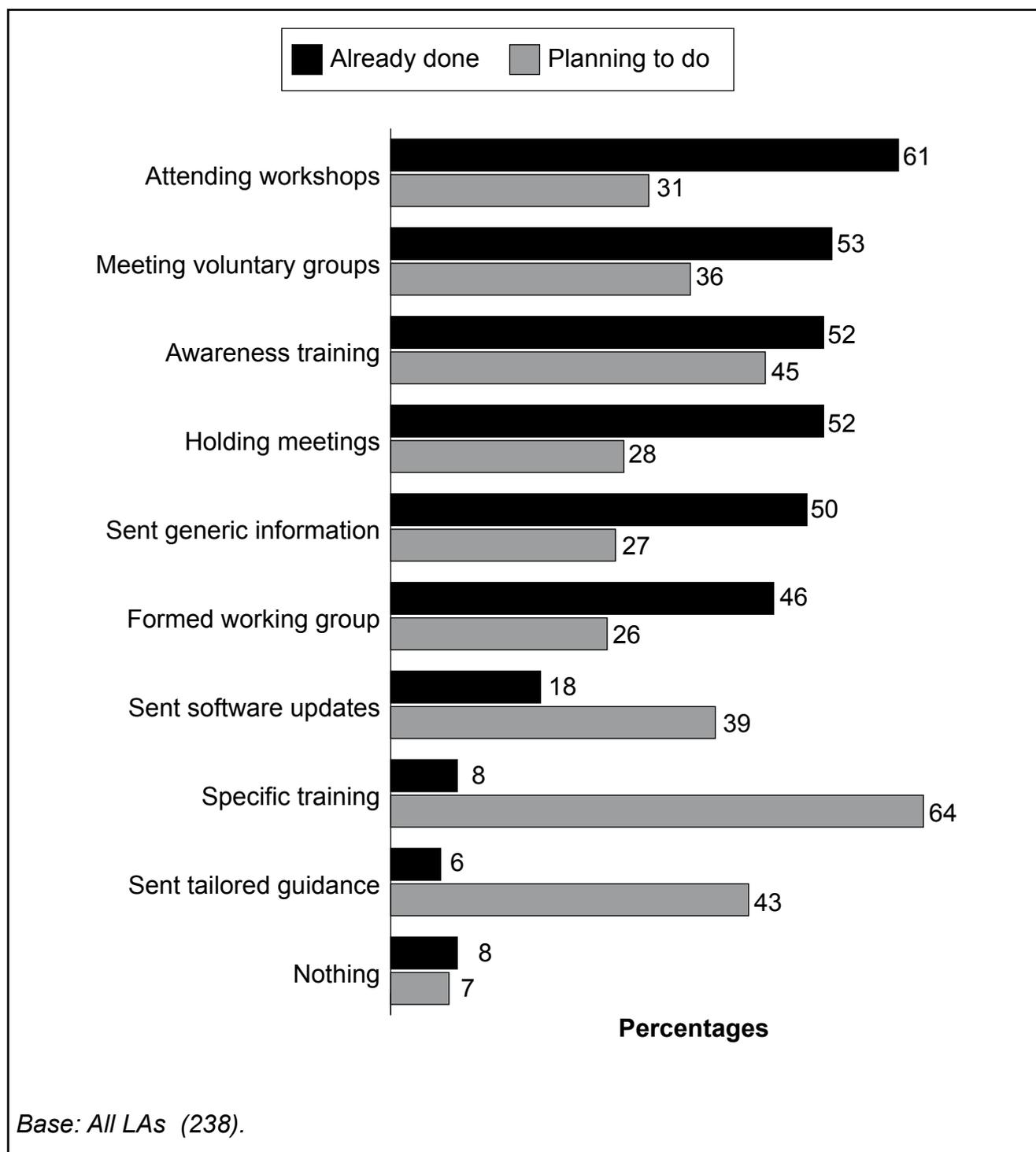
Figure 2.1 In general, which of the following statements best describes the current level of preparedness of staff and systems for the switch to UC at your LA?



At the time of the survey, UC was live across ten sites. A majority of LAs (63 per cent) said that they are preparing for UC but are not ready yet. One in three LAs (33 per cent) said that they are not preparing yet, while three per cent describe their authority as completely prepared for the switch to UC.

A significantly high proportion of Welsh and Scottish LAs said that they are preparing for UC but are not ready for it yet (85 per cent and 90 per cent respectively). On the other hand, English metropolitan districts are significantly more likely than Scottish LAs and English Districts to have said that they are completely prepared for UC (14 per cent versus zero per cent and two per cent respectively).

Figure 2.2 What has your LA done already, or is planning to do, to prepare *staff and systems* for UC



All LAs were asked what they have done, or what they are planning to do, to prepare their staff and systems for UC.

Around three in five LAs (61 per cent) said they have already attended workshops, while around half have met with voluntary groups (53 per cent), had awareness training and held meetings (both 52 per cent), sent out generic information (50 per cent) and formed a working group (46 per cent). Fewer have been sent software updates, had specific training and sent

tailored guidance (18 per cent, eight per cent and six per cent respectively). In addition, two per cent mentioned cross-department/agency working and one per cent working with Jobcentre Plus. Overall 92 per cent of LAs said that they have undertaken some form of action in preparing staff and systems for UC. These results show that local authorities are taking the initiative to prepare their staff and systems for UC at a time when there is minimal information about when UC will be rolled out the areas.

Scottish authorities would seem to have been the most active with more than four in five saying that they have already done the following: formed a working group (90 per cent), held meetings (85 per cent), attended workshops and met voluntary groups (both 80 per cent). It is also interesting that a considerably higher than average proportion of LAs in the North East of England (43 per cent) said that they have not done anything already. This is something that we have noted with interest and we are working on plans to engage with all LAs in more depth in particular areas where participation is low.

When asked what they were planning to do to prepare staff and systems for UC, 64 per cent said that they are planning specific training, 45 per cent are planning awareness training and 43 per cent are planning to send tailored guidance to staff. Slightly fewer are planning to send software updates (39 per cent), meet voluntary groups (36 per cent) and attend workshops (31 per cent). Around a quarter of LAs plan to hold meetings, send generic information and form a working group (28 per cent, 27 per cent and 26 per cent respectively). Three LAs (one per cent) plan to work with Jobcentre Plus and three per cent said that they need more information/detail. Ninety-three per cent of LAs overall have reported that they are planning to prepare for UC.

In terms of plans for the future, the greatest activity would seem to be in the West Midlands where a higher than average proportion of LAs mentioned that they are planning to receive software updates (72 per cent), send tailored guidance and meet voluntary groups (both 67 per cent) and attend workshops (56 per cent).

Local authorities were also asked about what they have been doing to prepare claimants for UC and then what they are planning to do.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that just over two-thirds (68 per cent) had done something to prepare claimants for UC, at a time when minimal detailed information is available.

The three most popular things to have already been done are to direct claimants to the DWP and Money Advice websites (36 per cent and 29 per cent) respectively) and develop their own website (28 per cent). Around one in five or fewer have mapped the local free digital service (20 per cent), given one-to-one guidance (19 per cent), provided help with computer tasks (18 per cent), commissioned third parties to provide advice on budgeting (17 per cent) and set up local service delivery projects (16 per cent). A further 14 per cent have advised claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and be paid direct to claimants and one in ten (ten per cent) have provided group guidance.

In terms of sub-group differences, English metropolitan districts and London Boroughs are least likely to have said that they have not done anything to prepare claimants (both 9 per cent), while those in Scotland are most likely to have already provided claimants help with computer use (55 per cent).

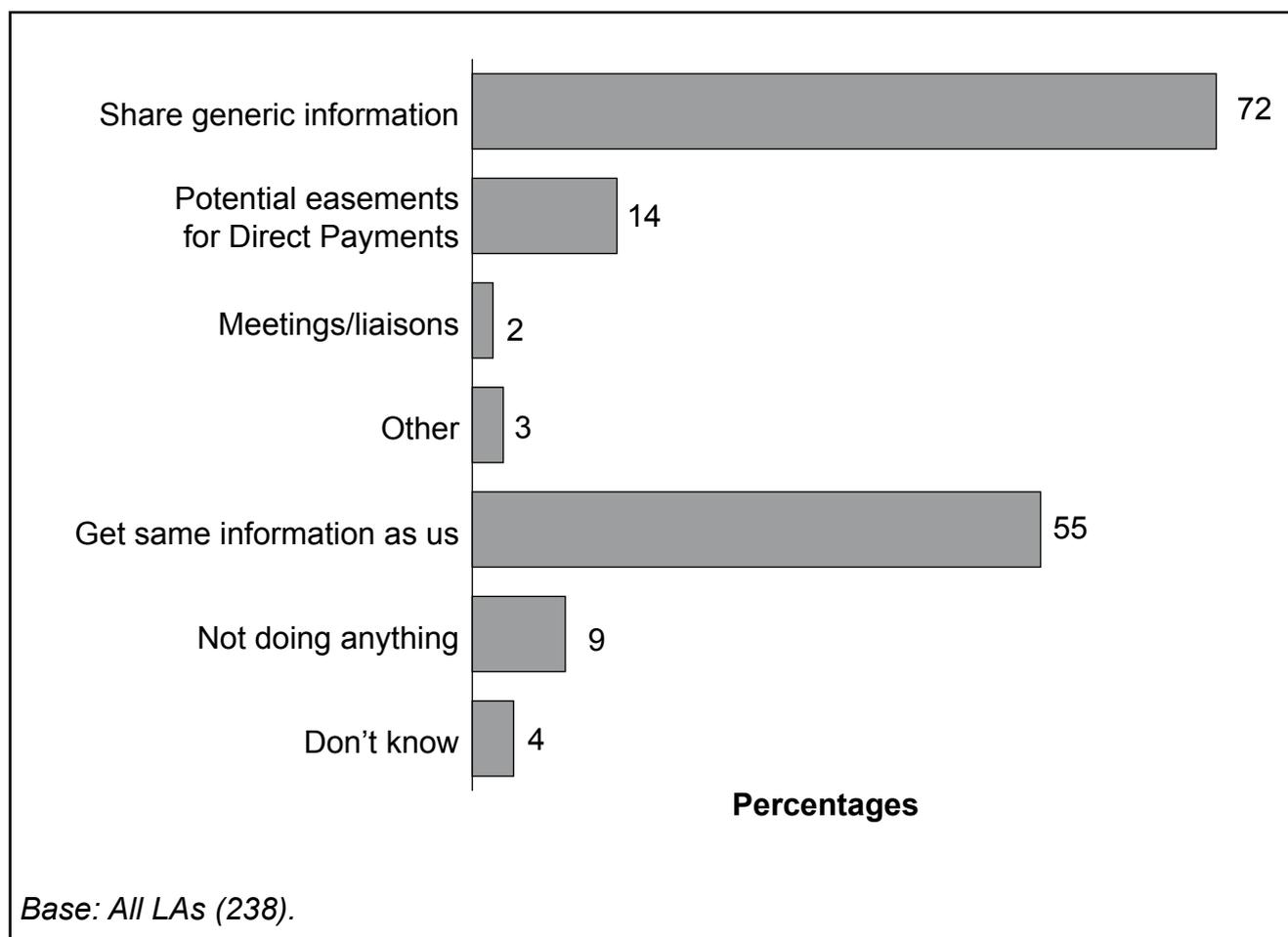
Authorities were also asked about their future plans for preparing claimants and 83 per cent of LAs have some future plans for preparing claimants for UC, this figure does not include any Scottish authorities.

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Authorities' plans for preparing claimants in the future are most likely to include developing information on their website (53 per cent), providing help with computer use (46 per cent) and advising claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and be paid direct to claimants (45 per cent). In addition, more than three in ten plan to direct claimants to the Money Advice and DWP websites (39 per cent and 37 per cent respectively), set up local service delivery projects (37 per cent), provide one-to-one guidance (33 per cent), map the local free digital service (31 per cent) and provide group guidance (31 per cent). Slightly fewer have commissioned third parties to provide advice on budgeting (28 per cent), have provided different help to those in work (19 per cent) and classes on UC budgeting (17 per cent).

There are a few notable differences in the findings by region: those in the East Midlands and the South West are particularly likely to be planning to develop information on their own website (76 per cent and 70 per cent respectively), while LAs in the North West were the most likely to say that they are not planning on doing anything (26 per cent).

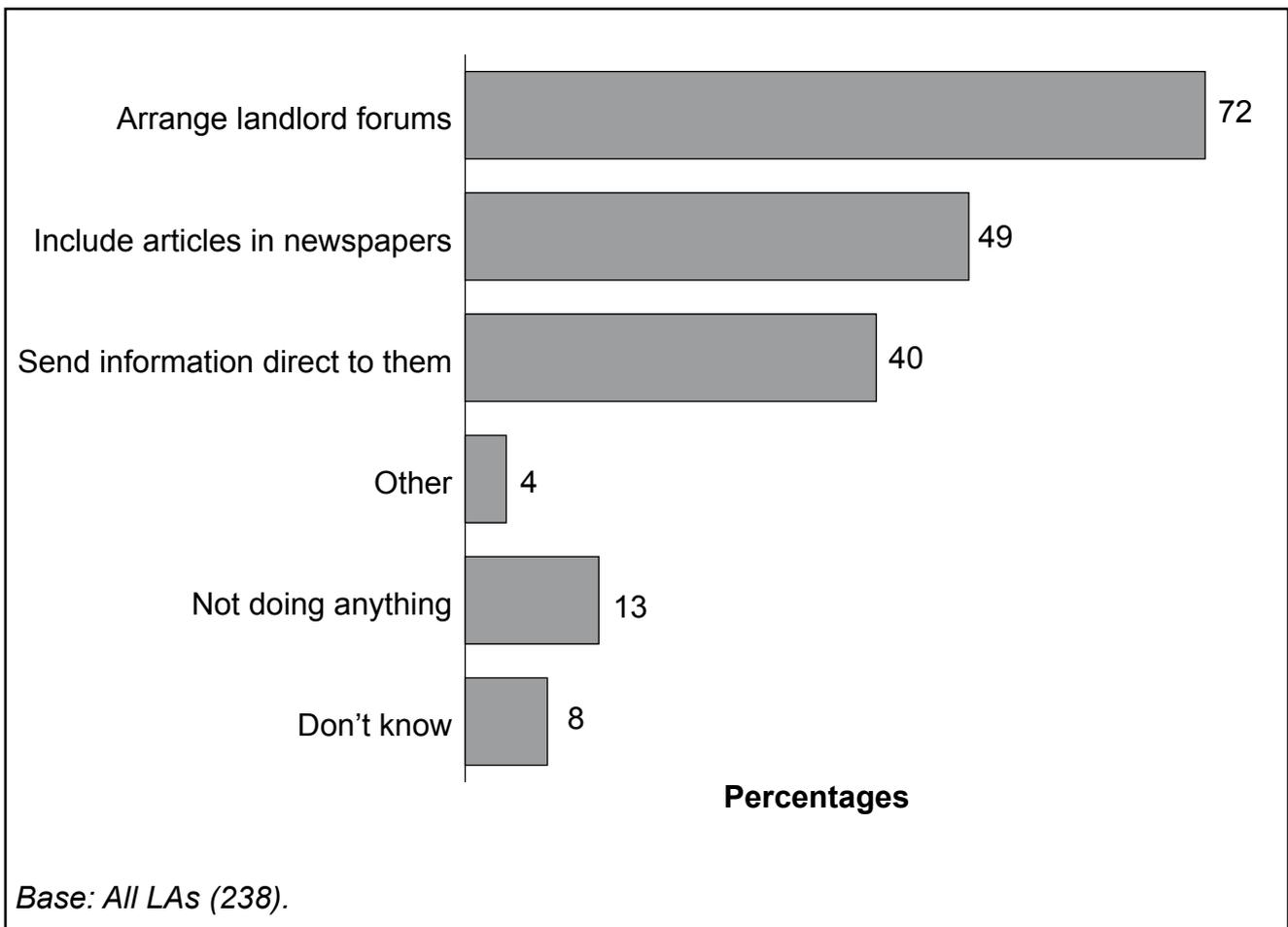
Figure 2.3 What, if anything has your LA done/is doing to prepare social housing provider landlords for the switch to UC?



LAs’ main activity in terms of preparing social housing provider landlords is to share generic information (72 per cent). Considerably fewer said that they are looking at potential easements for Direct Payments (14 per cent) and are having meetings (two per cent). One in eleven (9 per cent) are doing nothing to prepare social housing provider landlords and more than half (55 per cent) pointed out that they receive the same information as them anyway.

The greatest amount of sharing of generic information is happening in Wales, Scotland and English Metropolitan districts (92 per cent, 90 per cent and 86 per cent).

Figure 2.4 What, if anything, is your LA planning to do to prepare *private landlords* for the switch to UC?



Local authorities are planning several activities to prepare private landlords for UC. Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) will be arranging landlord forums and almost half (49 per cent) will include articles in the newspapers aimed at private landlords. A further two in five (40 per cent) plan to send them information direct and one per cent will be putting information on the website. Overall 79 per cent of LAs are planning to engage private landlords on UC.

Scottish LAs are particularly likely to be planning to send them information direct (70 per cent). Authorities in the West Midlands, Wales and the East Midlands are more likely than average to be planning landlord forums (94 per cent, 92 per cent and 86 per cent respectively).

3 Risk Based Verification

3.1 Introduction and summary

Risk Based Verification (RBV) assigns a risk rating to each HB claim which determines the level of verification required. It allows more intense verification activity to be targeted at those claims which are deemed to be at the highest risk of involving fraud and/or error.

RBV is practiced on aspects of claims in Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Disability and Carers' Service (PDCS), and from April 2012 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) extended it on a voluntary basis to all local authorities (LAs). The following section examines take-up of the scheme and LAs' views on how efficient and effective it is.

The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences and comparisons with last year's findings where appropriate.

- Around a quarter of LAs (24 per cent) are currently applying RBV which is significantly higher than at the same time last year (14 per cent).
- More than half of those LAs that are not currently applying RBV (56 per cent) said that it is not a priority at the moment and 41 per cent mentioned cost as a reason for why they weren't applying RBV.
- A significant majority of LAs (82 per cent) have used IT tools provided by an external provider to risk profile their HB claimants.
- There are very high levels of satisfaction among LAs with the approach they are currently using to risk profile HB claimants (86 per cent).
- When LAs that are currently applying RBV were asked about the effectiveness of it, the highest percentage of LAs rated RBV as effective at improving processing times (80 per cent), compared with 70 per cent for freeing up time/resources to do other work and 63 per cent for reducing fraud and error.
- 53 per cent of all LAs did not know what proportion of cases are categorised as high risk. However, among those able to respond to the question, LAs said that an average of 17 per cent of cases are categorised as high risk.
- Three-quarters of all LAs (75 per cent) have increased their checking of documents when a high risk claim has been identified, while 58 per cent visit the claimant's home and a third (33 per cent) have a meeting with the claimant.

3.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Is your LA currently applying RBV on HB claims?

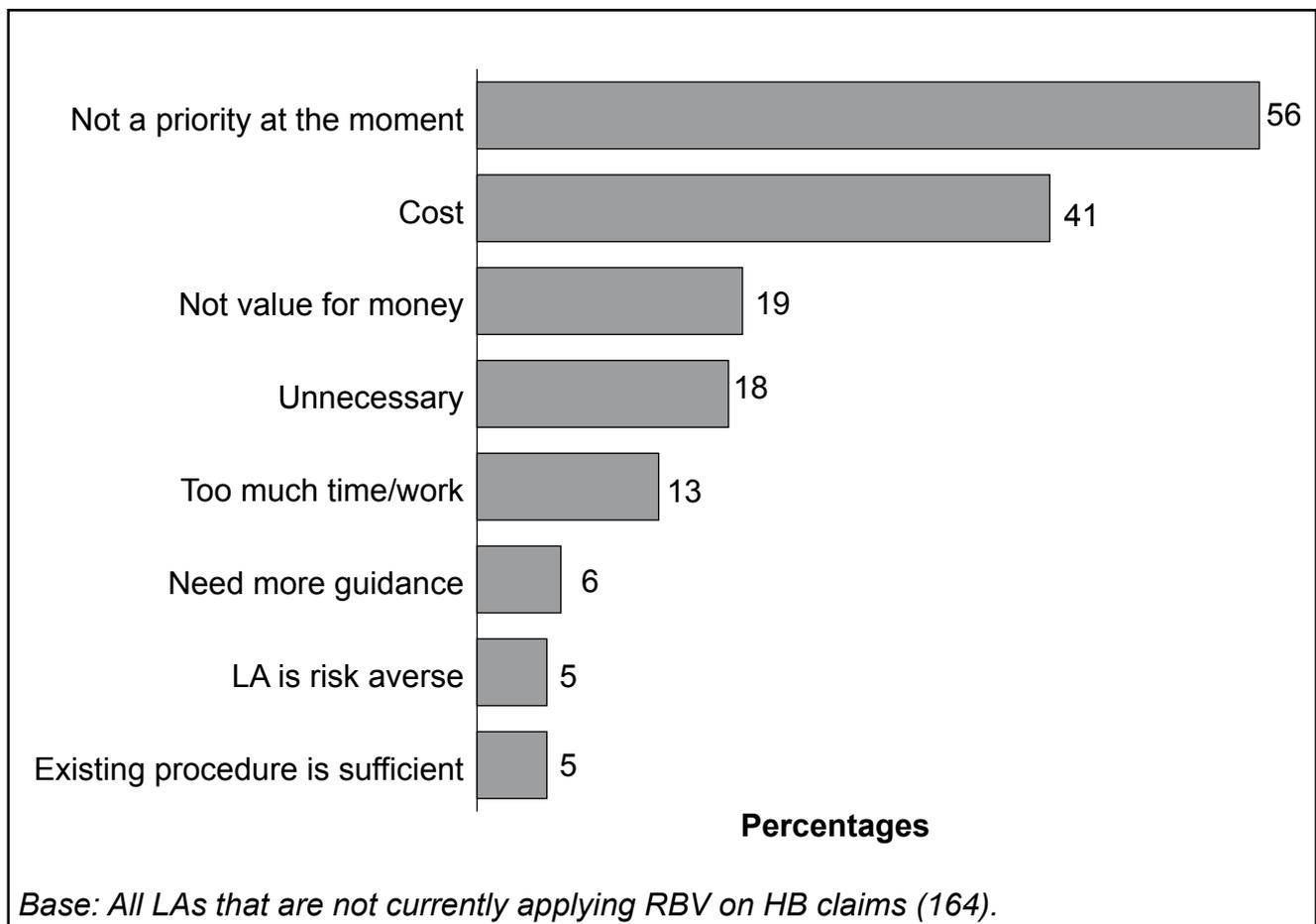
- 24% are applying RBV – a 10% increase on last year
- 19% intend to start applying it
- 51% have no intention of starting to apply it

Base: All LAs (236)

Around a quarter of LAs (24 per cent) are currently applying RBV, while 19 per cent intend to start applying it; bringing the total number of LAs who are using, or intend to use, RBV to 43 per cent. On the other hand, around half (51 per cent) said that they had no intention of starting to apply it. The proportion of LAs that are currently applying RBV is significantly higher than at the same time last year (14 per cent).

There are a few differences in the findings by sub-group. London Boroughs are significantly more likely than Scottish authorities and English Districts to be applying RBV currently (39 per cent, 10 per cent and 21 respectively), while a significantly high proportion of authorities in the East of England said that they are already applying it (42 per cent). On the other hand, low caseload authorities are significantly more likely than medium and high authorities to have said that they have no intention of starting to apply RBV (60 per cent, 46 per cent and 43 per cent respectively).

Figure 3.1 The main reasons why your LA does not currently apply RBV on HB claims?

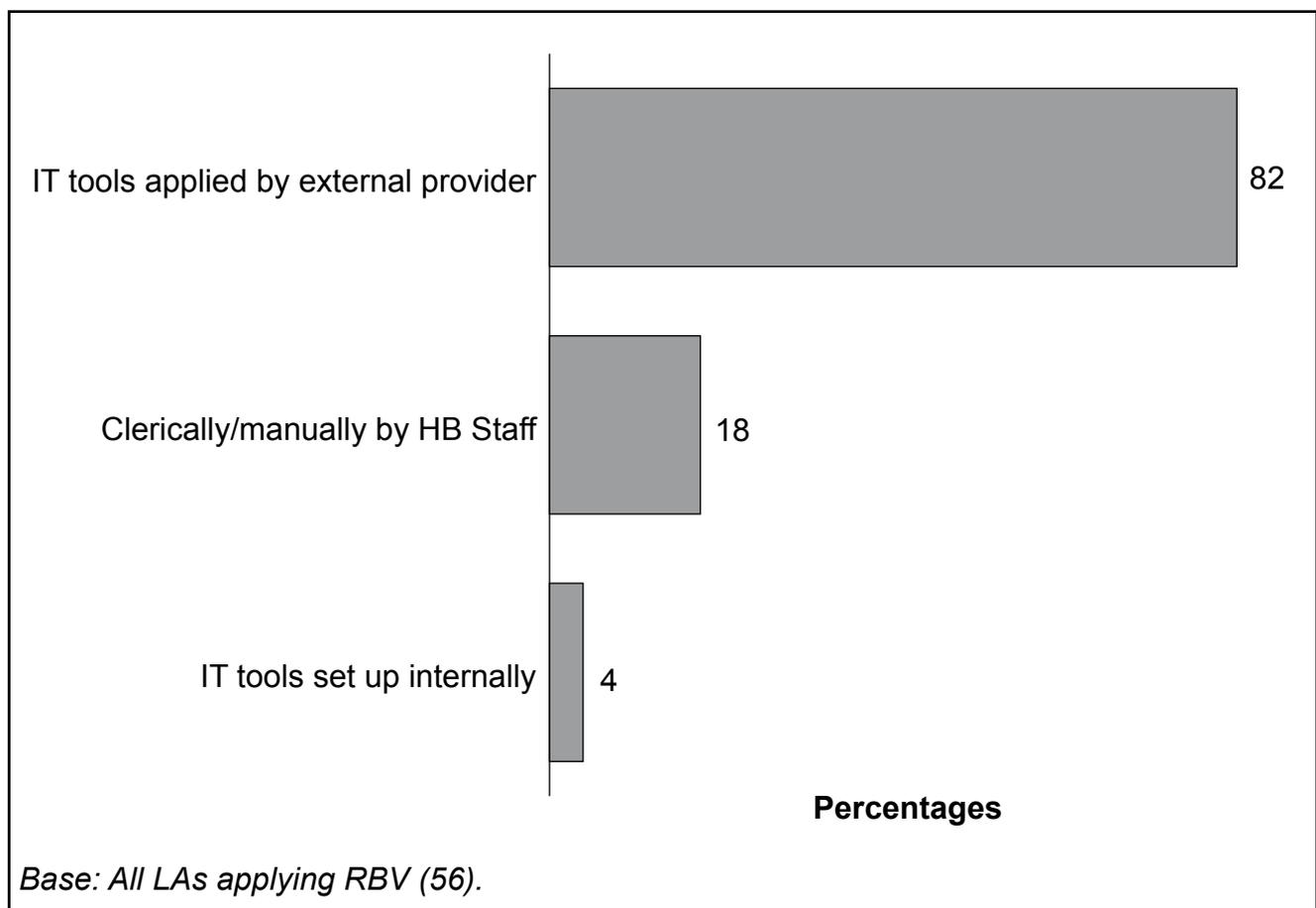


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Those LAs that are not currently applying RBV on HB claims were asked why they are not doing so. More than half (56 per cent) said that it is not a priority at the moment and 41 per cent mentioned cost. Fewer said that it is not value for money (19 per cent), that they felt it was unnecessary (18 per cent), or that it takes too much time/work (13 per cent). In addition, 6 per cent would like more guidance and five per cent said that their LA is risk averse and that the existing procedure is sufficient.

The only significant difference by sub-group of note is that low caseload authorities are more likely than medium and low caseload authorities to have said that RBV is not a priority for them at the moment (71 per cent, 44 per cent and 42 per cent respectively).

Figure 3.2 Which of the following approaches has your LA adopted to risk profile your HB claimants?³



A significant majority of LAs (82 per cent) have used IT tools provided by an external provider to risk profile their HB claimants. Just 18 per cent have risk profiled their claimants manually and four per cent used IT tools set up internally.

Given the small base size for this question there are no sub-group differences.

³ Note that LAs were asked to select all that apply.

How satisfied are you with the approach you are currently using to risk profile HB claimants?

Is your LA currently applying RBV on HB claims?

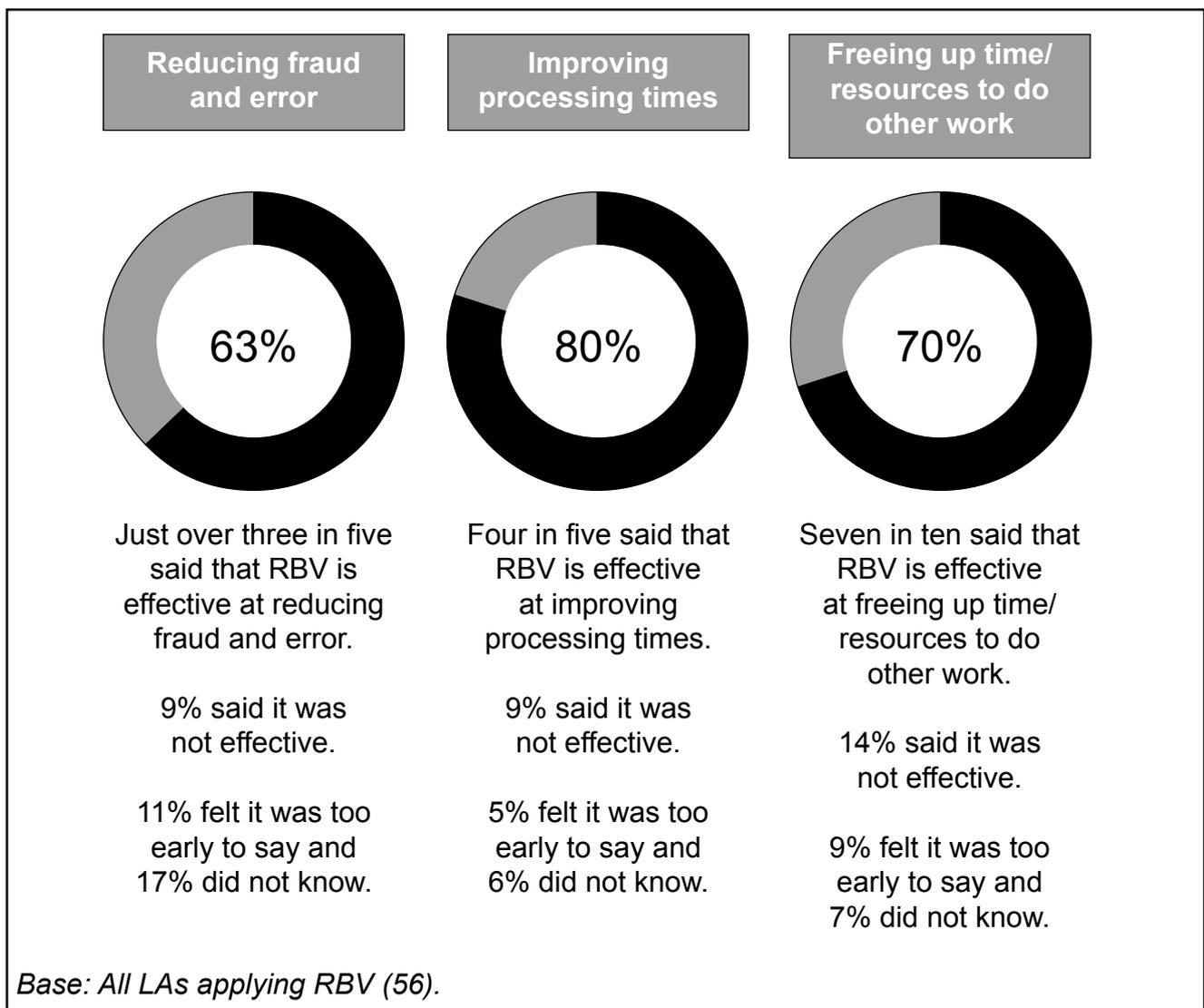
- 86% are satisfied with the approach they are taking (45% very satisfied)

Base: All LAs applying RBV (56)

There are very high levels of satisfaction among LAs with the approach they are currently using to risk profile HB claimants. Eighty-six per cent of LAs are satisfied overall and most of these are very satisfied (45 per cent). Just two per cent are dissatisfied, with the remainder saying that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Given the small base size for this question there are no sub-group differences.

Figure 3.3 Overall, how effective would you say that RBV has been in terms of each of the following?



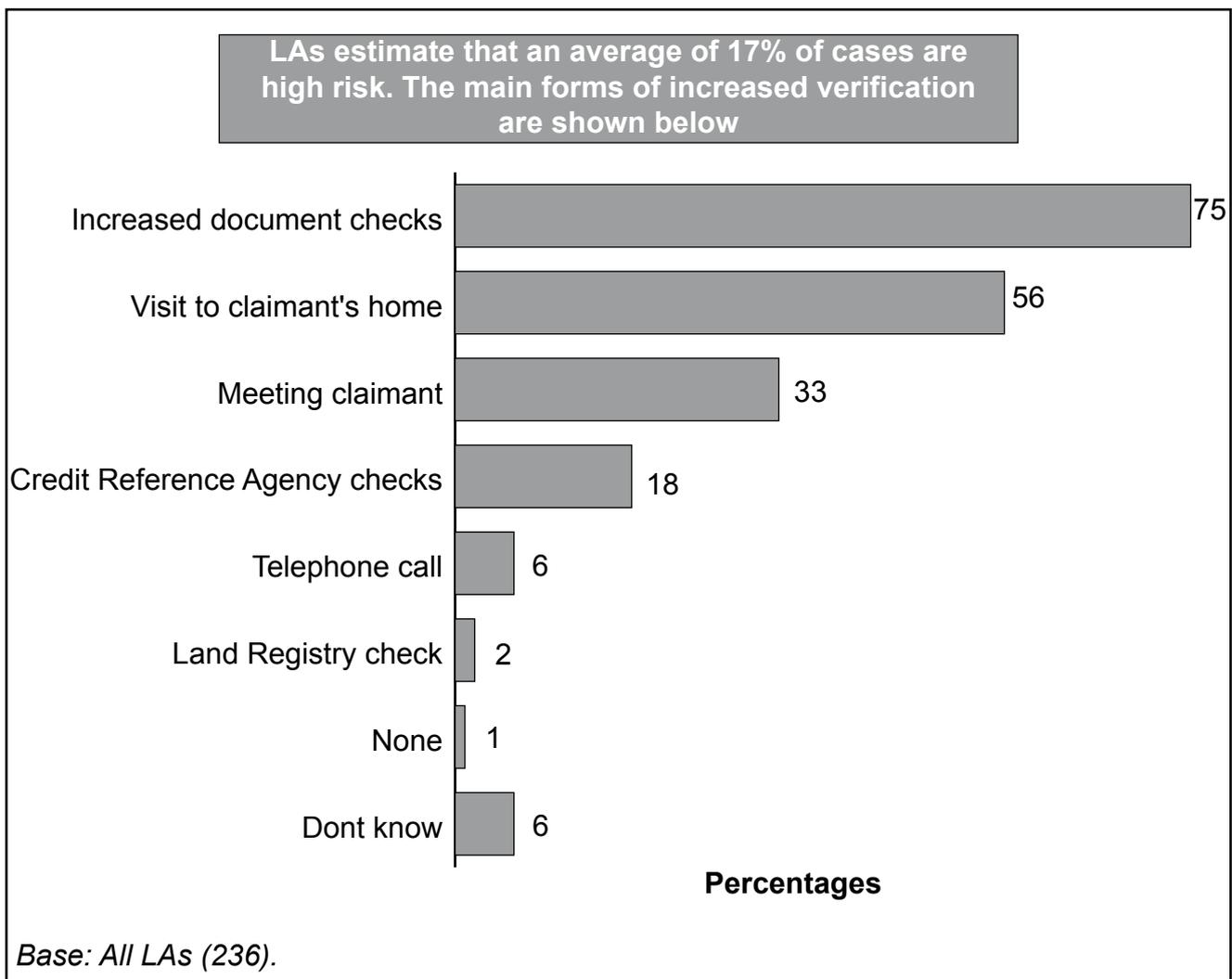
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LAs that are currently applying RBV were asked about its effectiveness in terms of reducing fraud, improving processing times and freeing up time/resources to do other work. The vast majority of LAs rated RBV as effective at improving processing times (80 per cent), 70 per cent said it had effectively freed up time/resources to do other work and 63 per cent found it was effective in reducing fraud and error. One in seven or fewer described each of the criteria measured as ineffective, while the remainder felt that it was too early to say (as high as 11 per cent for reducing fraud and error) or did not know (as high as 17 per cent for reducing fraud and error).

It is worth noting that roughly equal proportions of LAs rated RBV as very and fairly effective at improving processing times (38 per cent and 43 per cent respectively), however, this was not the case for the other criteria measured. In terms of freeing up time/resources, 21 per cent described RBV as very effective compared with 48 per cent that described it as fairly effective; 11 per cent said that RBV is very effective at reducing fraud and error compared with 52 per cent that described it as fairly effective.

Given the small base size for this question there are no sub-group differences.

Figure 3.4 And approximately what proportion of cases in your LA (as a percentage of your entire caseload) would you categorise as being high risk?
When your LA identifies high risk claims, what increased verification is carried out?



All LAs, regardless of whether or not they were applying RBV, were asked approximately what proportion of cases in their LA would be categorised as high risk. Although 53 per cent of LAs were unable to answer this question, among those able to respond to the question, LAs said that an average of 17 per cent of cases are categorised as high risk. This rises to 23 per cent in London (significantly higher than Scottish authorities, English Unitary authorities and English Districts) and 21 per cent in English Metropolitan Districts (higher than in English Unitary authorities and English Districts).

All local authorities were also asked what increased verification they carried out when a high risk claim has been identified. Three-quarters (75 per cent) have increased their checking of documents, while 58 per cent visit the claimant's home and a third (33 per cent) have a meeting with the claimant. Fewer LAs make a Credit Reference check (18 per cent), telephone the claimant (six per cent), or make a Land Registry check (two per cent).

Welsh authorities are significantly more likely than London Boroughs to visit claimants at home in verifying a high risk claim (77 per cent versus 43 per cent) and those in the West Midlands are most likely to either visit the claimant's home or meet with the claimants (78 per cent and 67 per cent respectively). In addition, a higher than average proportion of LAs in the South West said that they did not know what increased verification was being carried out (22 per cent).

4 Benefit cap

4.1 Introduction and summary

From April 2013 a cap of £500 per week (£350 for childless single people) on the total amount of benefit that working-age (with certain exemptions for disabilities, those who have recently worked etc.) people can receive was introduced in four local authorities (LAs). This means that workless households can no longer receive more in benefits than the average earnings of working households. The cap was rolled out nationally (in two stages) between July and September 2013, although it is worth noting that not all LAs have capped households and many only have very small numbers. The cap is being administered by LAs through deductions from Housing Benefit (HB) payments. These arrangements will continue until Universal Credit (UC) is fully in place and the cap from HB is no longer required. This section assesses how LAs and claimants are coping with the changes.

The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- The benefit cap is more likely to have led to new ways of working within LAs than with registered providers and other LAs. The most common new way of working within LAs is targeting for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) (71 per cent). London Boroughs are more likely than other LA types to be working in new ways within the LA and with registered providers.
- 91 per cent of respondents had written to claimants who are affected by the benefit cap⁴ while slightly fewer said that they have responded to queries (85 per cent) and put information on their website (79 per cent). London Boroughs have been most active, reflecting that around half of the capped caseload is in London.
- LAs have had considerably less communication with claimants who might be affected by the benefit cap in the future and most of this is indirect contact such as putting information on their website (62 per cent) and responding to queries (45 per cent). Once again, London Boroughs have been most active.
- Other than putting information on their website (57 per cent) and placing articles in the newspapers (a third) aimed at both private and social landlords, LAs are generally more likely to have had direct communication with social, rather than private, landlords about the benefit cap. In particular they are more likely to have conducted awareness training, sent letters and held meetings/had visits with social landlords.
- When asked what actions claimants had taken to prevent being capped, 34 per cent of LAs said that claimants have moved into work in advance of the benefit cap being applied and 20 per cent said that households have started claims for exempt benefit. Just 6 per cent of LAs said that their claimants have moved to another area in advance of benefit cap being applied but this rises to 26 per cent of London Boroughs.

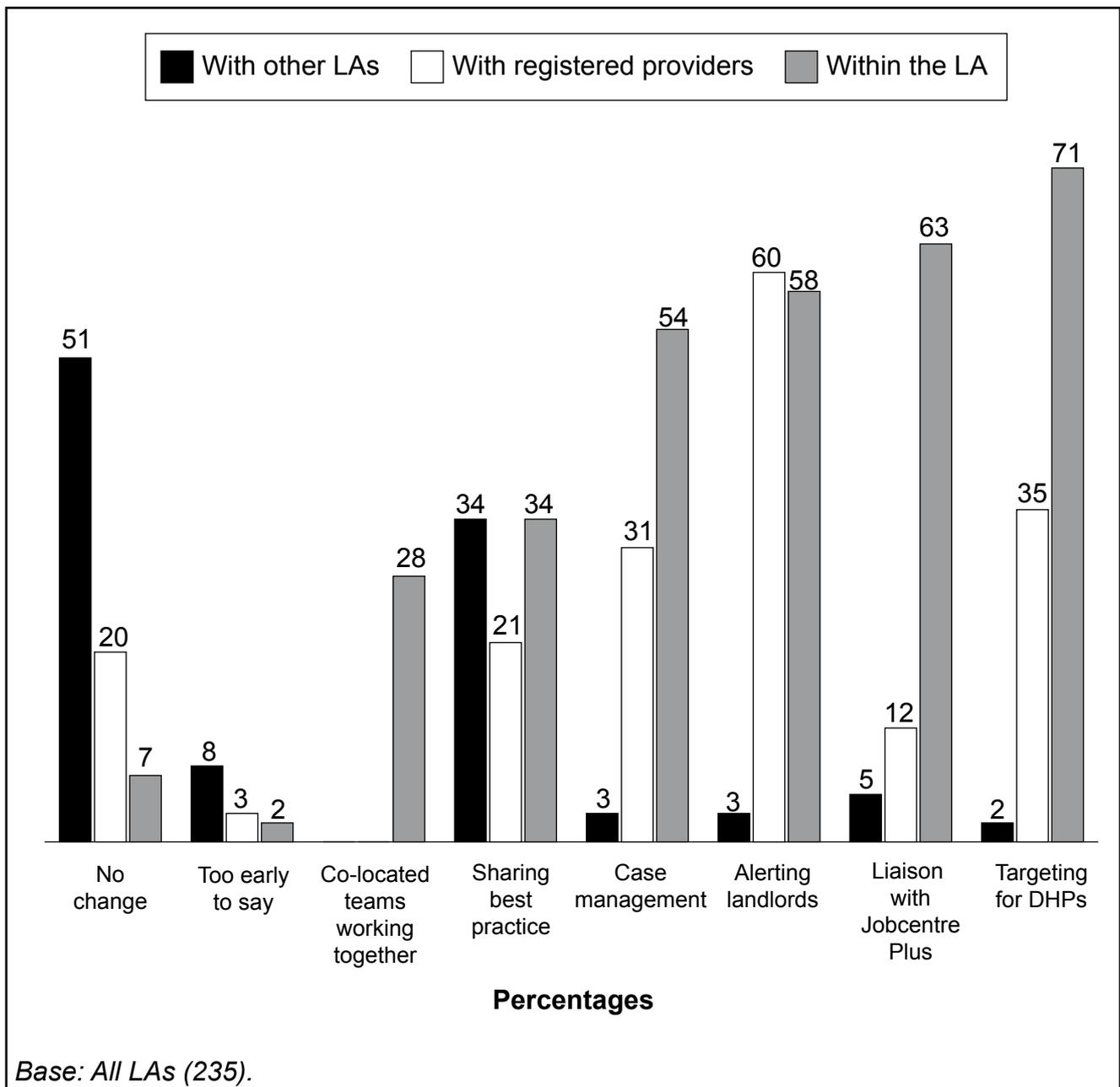
⁴ All LAs with capped claimants should have done this. However, it is worth noting that not all LAs will have claimants affected by the cap.

- When asked what actions claimants had taken after the cap had been applied, 37 per cent of LAs said that claimants had moved into work. In addition 19 per cent said that households had started claims for exempt benefit and taken budget advice and 17 per cent that claimants had moved to cheaper properties. Once again, London Boroughs are significantly more likely to have said that their claimants have taken the major action of moving to another area (30 per cent compared with 6 per cent overall).

4.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 4.1 In what ways has the benefit cap led to new ways of working a) with other LAs, b) with registered providers and c) within the LA?



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The benefit cap is more likely to have led to new ways of working within LAs than with registered providers and other LAs.

A majority of LAs mentioned the four different ways that they are now working **within their LA**: 71 per cent cited targeting for DHPs, 63 per cent liaison with Jobcentre Plus, 58 per cent alerting landlords and 54 per cent case management. A further one in three (34 per cent) said that they are sharing best practice and 28 per cent that co-located teams are working together.

The findings for London are significantly different to other LA types with considerably larger majorities mentioning targeting for DHPs (96 per cent), case management (91 per cent), liaison with Jobcentre Plus colleagues (87 per cent), sharing best practice (83 per cent) and co-located teams working together (78 per cent). These findings reflect the fact that around half of the capped caseload is in London and that LAs here generally have co-located Jobcentre Plus teams.

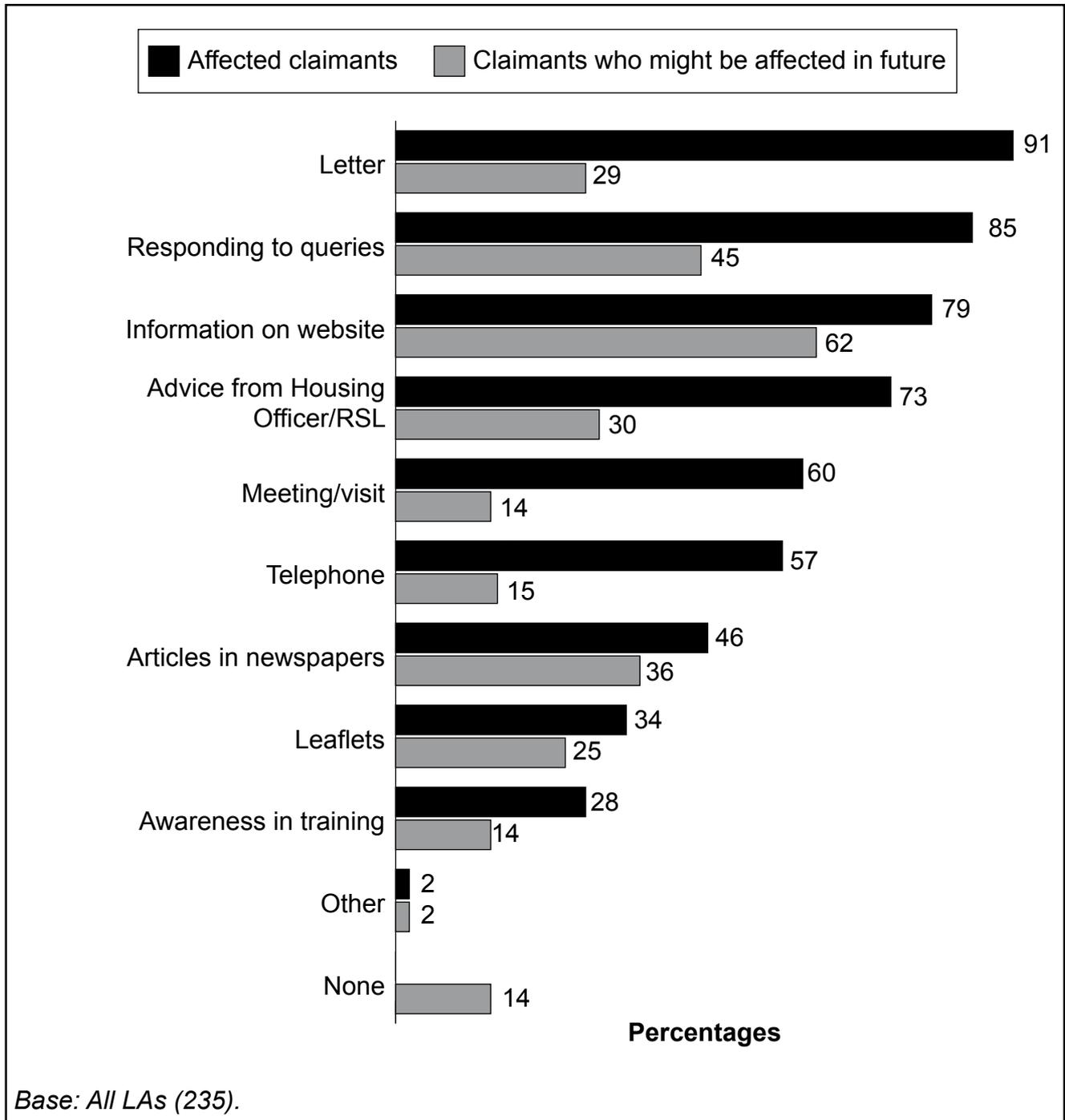
When LAs were asked about the effect the benefit cap has had on how they work with **registered providers**, one in five (20 per cent) said that there has been no change. However, among those LAs that have changed their way of working, the most common change is that they are alerting landlords (60 per cent). In addition, around a third have been working with registered providers to target for DHPs (35 per cent) and on case management (31 per cent). A further one in five (21 per cent) has shared best practice.

Once again, London Boroughs are significantly more likely to have changed the way they are working with registered providers: targeting for DHPs (65 per cent), sharing best practice (61 per cent) and case management (57 per cent). It is also worth noting that a significantly high proportion of LAs in Wales (15 per cent) said that it is too early to discuss new working practices.

In terms of how LAs have changed their working practices with **other local authorities**, around half (51 per cent) said that there has been no change. A third (34 per cent) has been sharing best practice but fewer than one in ten mentioned each of the other activities.

The findings for London Boroughs are very similar to those for other LA types, although they are significantly more likely to be sharing best practice with other LAs than Scottish authorities and English Unitary authorities (52 per cent, zero per cent and 28 per cent). It is also worth noting that LAs in the North East are particularly likely to be liaising with Jobcentre Plus colleagues (29 per cent).

Figure 4.2 What type of communication has your LA had with a) claimants who are affected by the benefit cap, b) claimants who are not currently affected by the benefit cap but might be in the future



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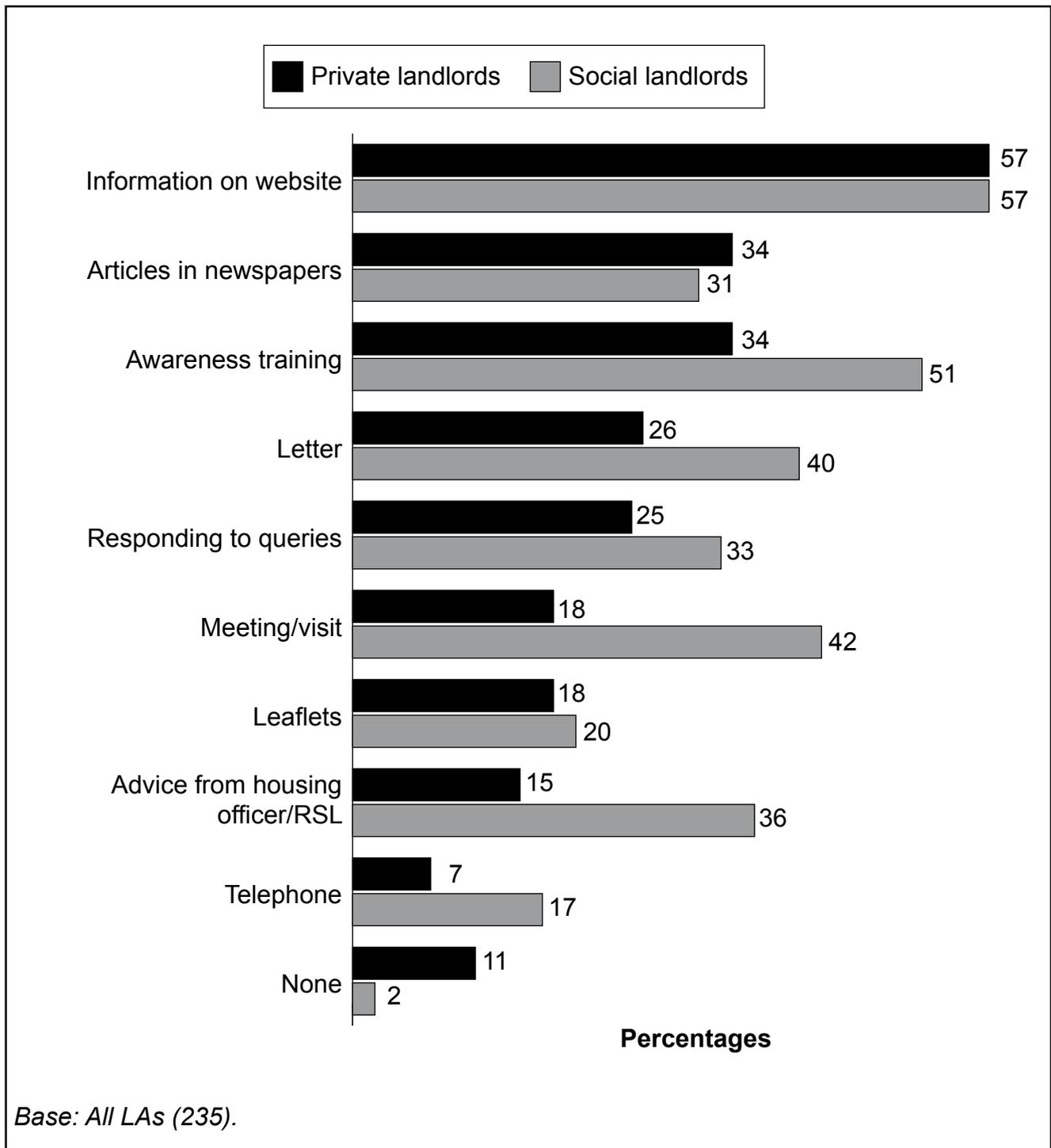
Nine in ten LAs (91 per cent) have written to claimants who are **affected by the benefit cap**. This happened as part of the process of applying the cap, so all local authorities with affected claimants should have written out to them and many additional individuals were written to as part of preventative work. Slightly fewer said that they have responded to queries (85 per cent) and put information on their website (79 per cent). Just under three-quarters (73 per cent) said that their Housing Officers/registered social landlords (RSL) have given advice and around three in five have had meetings/visits or spoken on the phone with affected claimants (60 per cent and 57 per cent). Fewer LAs have placed articles in newspapers directed at affected claimants, produced leaflets and held awareness training (46 per cent, 34 per cent and 28 per cent respectively).

A higher than average proportion of London Boroughs have been active in terms of communicating with claimants affected by the benefit cap, in particular in terms of holding meetings and visiting claimants, putting information on their website and Housing Officers/RSLs giving advice (all 96 per cent). It should, however, be pointed out that a higher than average proportion of Welsh authorities (85 per cent) also said that they are holding meetings and visiting claimants.

LAs have had considerably less communication with claimants **who might be affected by the benefit cap in the future**, with 14 per cent saying that they have had none. Perhaps not surprisingly as these claimants are not currently affected, LAs are at this stage having less direct contact. Sixty-two per cent of authorities have put information on their website, 45 per cent have been responding to queries, while 36 per cent have put articles in the newspaper and given advice (30 per cent). On the other hand, 29 per cent of LAs have sent letters out to this group of claimants, 25 per cent have made leaflets available and 15 per cent have telephoned them.

The trend of London Boroughs being more active extends to their communication with claimants not directly affected by benefit cap. They are significantly more likely than all other LA types to be providing advice and to have held awareness sessions (65 per cent and 39 per cent).

Figure 4.3 What type of communication has your LA had with c) private landlords and d) social landlords about the benefit cap



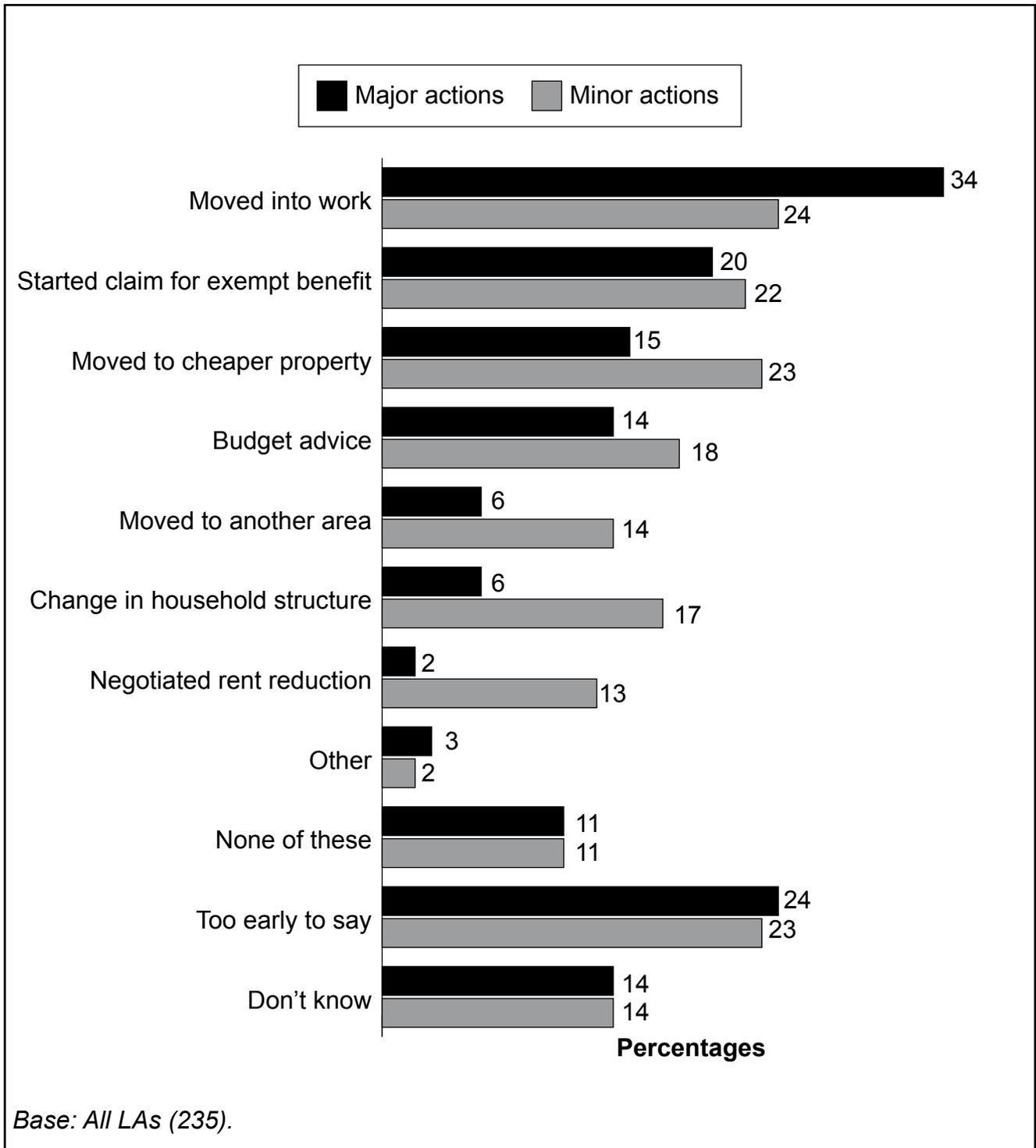
Local Authority Insight Survey – Wave 25

LAs were also asked about the types of communication they have had, if any, with private and social landlords about the benefit cap. Patterns of communication are similar for both types of landlord but it is noticeable that LAs have had more direct contact with social landlords. In fact, one in nine LAs (11 per cent) said that they have not had any contact with private landlords.

Fifty-seven per cent of LAs said that they have put information on the website aimed at both landlord types and around one in three have placed articles in newspapers (34 per cent private landlords and 31 per cent social landlords). However, LAs are more likely to have had every other type of communication with social rather than private landlords: in particular they are more likely to have conducted awareness training, sent letters and held meetings/had visits for social landlords (51 per cent, 40 per cent and 42 per cent respectively) than for private landlords (34 per cent, 26 per cent and 18 per cent respectively).

There are fewer differences by LA type on the question of communication with landlords. Both Welsh authorities and London Boroughs are more likely than all other types of LA except English Metropolitan Districts to say that they have telephoned private landlords (23 per cent and 17 per cent respectively). London Boroughs are also significantly more likely than English Unitary authorities, English Metropolitan Districts and English Districts to have given advice to social landlords (65 per cent, 18 per cent, 36 per cent and 34 per cent respectively).

Figure 4.4 What actions, if any, have claimants taken to *prevent* being capped (i.e. actions claimants have taken to avoid the cap being applied to them in advance)? Please indicate perceived major and minor reasons



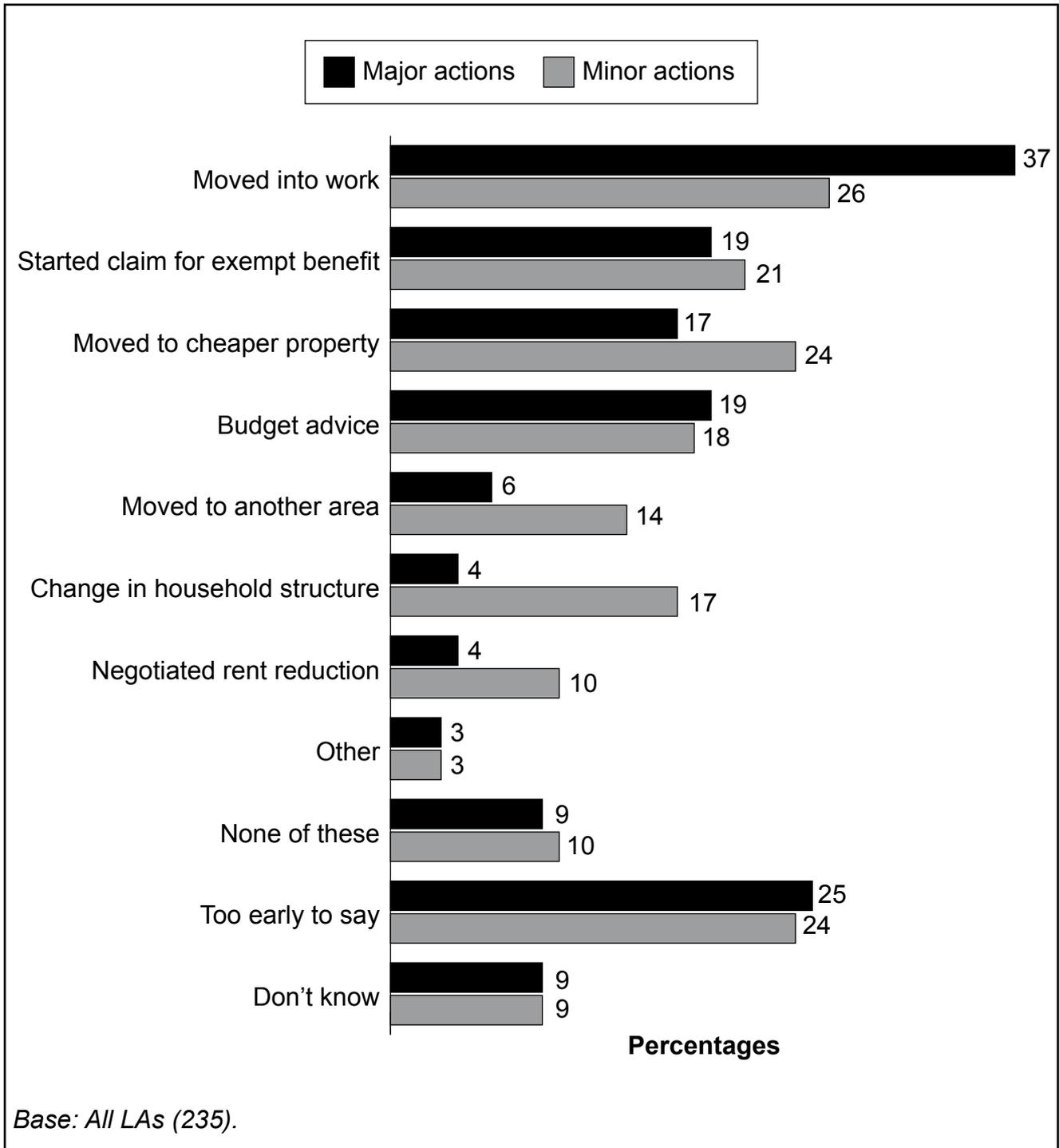
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When LAs were asked about the perceived major and minor⁵ actions claimants have taken in advance to prevent the benefit cap being applied to them, nearly a quarter said that it was too early to say (fieldwork took place between October and December 2013 after the roll out of the policy completed at the end of September), 14 per cent did not know and one in nine (11 per cent) said that claimants have done nothing. However, just over half did provide answers and the most common of these was that claimants have moved into work (34 per cent major action and 24 per cent minor action). In addition, around one in five said that households have started claims for exempt benefit (20 per cent major and 22 per cent minor) and 23 per cent that claimants have taken the minor action of moving to a cheaper property. As the chart above indicates fewer mentioned budget advice, moving to another area, changing the household structure and negotiating a rent reduction.

There are some differences by LA type, with a significantly higher proportion of London Boroughs saying that there have been incidences of some claimants moving to another area (26 per cent major and 39 per cent minor). London Boroughs are also significantly more likely than every other LA types except English Districts to have said that claimants have taken a major action and moved into work (57 per cent). In terms of minor actions taken London Boroughs are also significantly more likely than all other LA types to have said that claimants have changed their household structure and taken budget advice (both 43 per cent). They are also more likely than all other LA types except English Metropolitan Districts to have said that claimants are moving to another area or negotiating a rent reduction (both 39 per cent).

⁵ LAs were provided with a list of actions, which had been identified through piloting and cognitive testing of the survey, and asked to indicate which were major or minor reasons.

Figure 4.5 What actions, if any, have claimants taken to avoid *the cap after it's been applied* to them (i.e. actions claimants have taken after they've been capped)?



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LAs were also asked about what claimants in their area have done in order to no longer be affected by the benefit cap after it has been applied to them. Again, a significant minority did not provide any answers in terms of actions taken: a quarter said it was too early to say, and around one in ten said either that they did not know or that claimants have done nothing. However, among the majority mentioning a major or minor action taken, the pattern is similar to the previous question asked about claimants who have already had the cap applied to them.

Again, the most common action taken was for claimants to have moved into work (37 per cent major action and 26 per cent minor action). In addition, around one in five said that households had started claims for exempt benefit (19 per cent major and 21 per cent minor) and had taken the minor action of moving to a cheaper property (24 per cent). Once again, as the chart above indicates fewer mentioned budget advice, moving to another area, changing the household structure and negotiating a rent reduction.

Once again, though mentioned by a minority, London Boroughs are significantly more likely to have said that their claimants have taken the major action of moving to another area (30 per cent of London LAs compared with 6 per cent overall). In terms of minor actions taken, London Boroughs and English Metropolitan Districts are both significantly more likely than other LA types to have said that their claimants have negotiated rent reductions (35 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).

Table 4.1 DWP is keen to find out more about the experiences of LAs in implementing the benefit cap. Have there been any particular issues in implementation and lessons learned so far about the implementation of the cap that you would like to tell us about?

	<i>Percentages</i>
Main lessons learned include:	
Inaccurate/conflicting data given to us/poor quality	9%
Only have a few cases/delay in cases coming through	7%
Fewer cap numbers affected than anticipated	3%
Good liaison with Jobcentre Plus/DWPCo-location/joint interviews	3%
Direct contact with those affected was helpful	3%

Base: All LAs (235).

At the end of the section of the questionnaire about the benefit cap, LAs were asked to share any lessons they have learnt so far about the implementation of the benefit cap. Overall more than a third (35 per cent) said that they have learnt lessons, while 36 per cent felt that it was too early to say and 29 per cent had nothing to share on this issue. London Boroughs were more likely than all other LA types except English Metropolitan Districts to have shared the lessons they have learnt so far (61 per cent).

The answers provided were very diverse and the main lessons learned are noted above, however, the lesson cited by the highest proportion of LAs was that they are given poor quality/inaccurate data (9 per cent). It is important to note, however, that this referred to time lagged data which was sent preceding implementation for anticipatory work with potentially affected households and additional checks were built into the live process that ensure that nobody is incorrectly capped.

5 Automated Transfers to Local Authority System (ATLAS)

5.1 Introduction and summary

The Automated Transfers to Local Authority System (ATLAS) project has increased the amount of information that can be sent automatically to local authorities (LAs), in a format that allows direct loading into LA systems. ATLAS phase 1 was successfully rolled out to all LAs on 4 July 2011, providing Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) Tax Credits award data. Phase 2 extended ATLAS to additionally deliver notifications for a range of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits in January – February 2012.

Receiving information automatically significantly reduces Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) overpayments and underpayments, in particular where the customer fails to notify the LA of the claim or change, or provides the information late. This section examines how LAs are processing notifications and their views on ATLAS.

The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- The benefits software used most often by LAs is Northgate (42 per cent) and Capita Academy (38 per cent).
- Overall, LAs said that an average of 36 per cent of notifications are looked at by an assessor completely, 27 per cent are partially automated, 24 per cent have no manual intervention (full batch processing) and 13 per cent require no assessor activity and the cases are completed with no action taken (auto complete/filter action).
- Among those LAs that said full batch or partial automation has been achieved for one per cent or more of notifications, 61 per cent achieved it via an IT supplier while 47 per cent did so in-house and ten per cent had external help. There is a split between those that have set tolerances (47 per cent) and those that have not (45 per cent). Fifty-six per cent of LAs have reviewed their tolerances – 26 per cent have reviewed and revised them and 30 per cent have reviewed them but not revised them. A further 43 per cent have not reviewed them yet.
- Among all LAs, except those that said full batch processing is already 100 per cent, 65 per cent plan to increase the level of automation – 35 per cent within three to six months, 21 per cent within six to 12 months and four per cent over a longer period. A quarter of LAs (24 per cent) said that they are not planning to increase automation and 16 per cent did not know. This group of LAs expects an average of 66 per cent of notifications to be fully automated in the future. The main obstacles to achieving full/increased levels of automation are that they need to follow up on associated changes (75 per cent), around half expect to have to review their results (53 per cent) and cited poor quality/incorrect information (50 per cent).

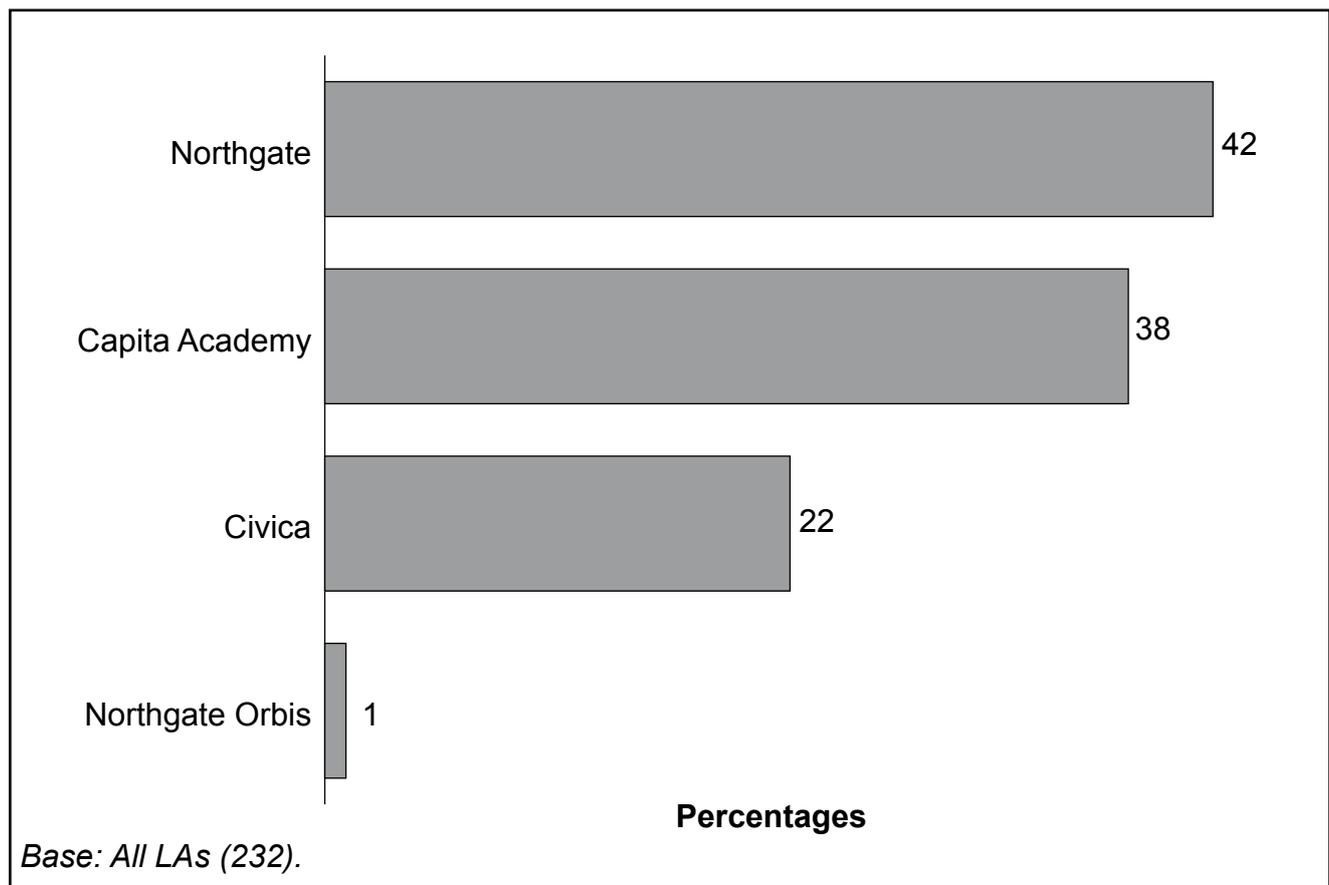
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- Over half of all LAs (56 per cent) said that ATLAS has improved their processing performance – 14 per cent described it as a big improvement (26 per cent in London) and 42 per cent as a small improvement. On the other hand, a third said that there has been a deterioration in processing performance – 16 per cent a big deterioration and 17 per cent a small deterioration.
- A very high proportion of LAs (94 per cent) have processes in place to ensure that HB Y/N indicators are set/removed to ensure that the correct ATLAS notifications are received.
- Three-quarters of LAs said that the DWP guidance has helped them to make good use of ATLAS. The sources of guidance regarded as particularly helpful are the ATLAS Good Practice Guide (58 per cent), DWP circulars (46 per cent) and Huddle (37 per cent).

5.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 5.1 What benefits software does your LA use?



The benefits software used most often by LAs is Northgate (42 per cent) and Capita Academy (38 per cent). Fewer use Civica (22 per cent) and Northgate Orbis (one per cent). Just one English Unitary authority uses in-house benefits software.

There are no particular significant differences of note across LA types, except that low caseload LAs are significantly more likely than medium caseload LAs to use Capital Academy (45 per cent and 29 per cent respectively). In addition, medium caseload authorities are more likely than low caseload LAs to use Northgate (50 per cent versus 35 per cent).

Table 5.1 ATLAS allows LAs to automate and batch process as many notifications received as possible. Please write in below what proportion of all notifications are processed in each of the following ways

Ways in which notifications are processed	<i>Percentages</i>	
	Base* (N)	Mean (%)
Looked at by assessor completely	155	36
Partial automation (some assessor activity, e.g. automated up to suspension)	150	27
Full batch processing (no manual intervention)	139	24
Auto complete/filter action (no assessor activity, cases completed with no action taken)	106	13

Base: All LAs using each method.

Overall, LAs said that an average of 36 per cent of notifications are looked at by an assessor completely, 27 per cent are partially automated, 24 per cent have no manual intervention (full batch processing) and 13 per cent require no assessor activity and the cases are completed with no action taken (auto complete/filter action).

London Boroughs and English Unitary authorities are most likely to have a higher than average percentage of notifications which have no manual intervention (an average of 38 per cent and 35 per cent full batch respectively). English Metropolitan Districts, on the other hand, have a higher than average percentage of notifications which are auto complete/filter action (an average of 29 per cent).

Table 5.2 How did your LA achieve automation?

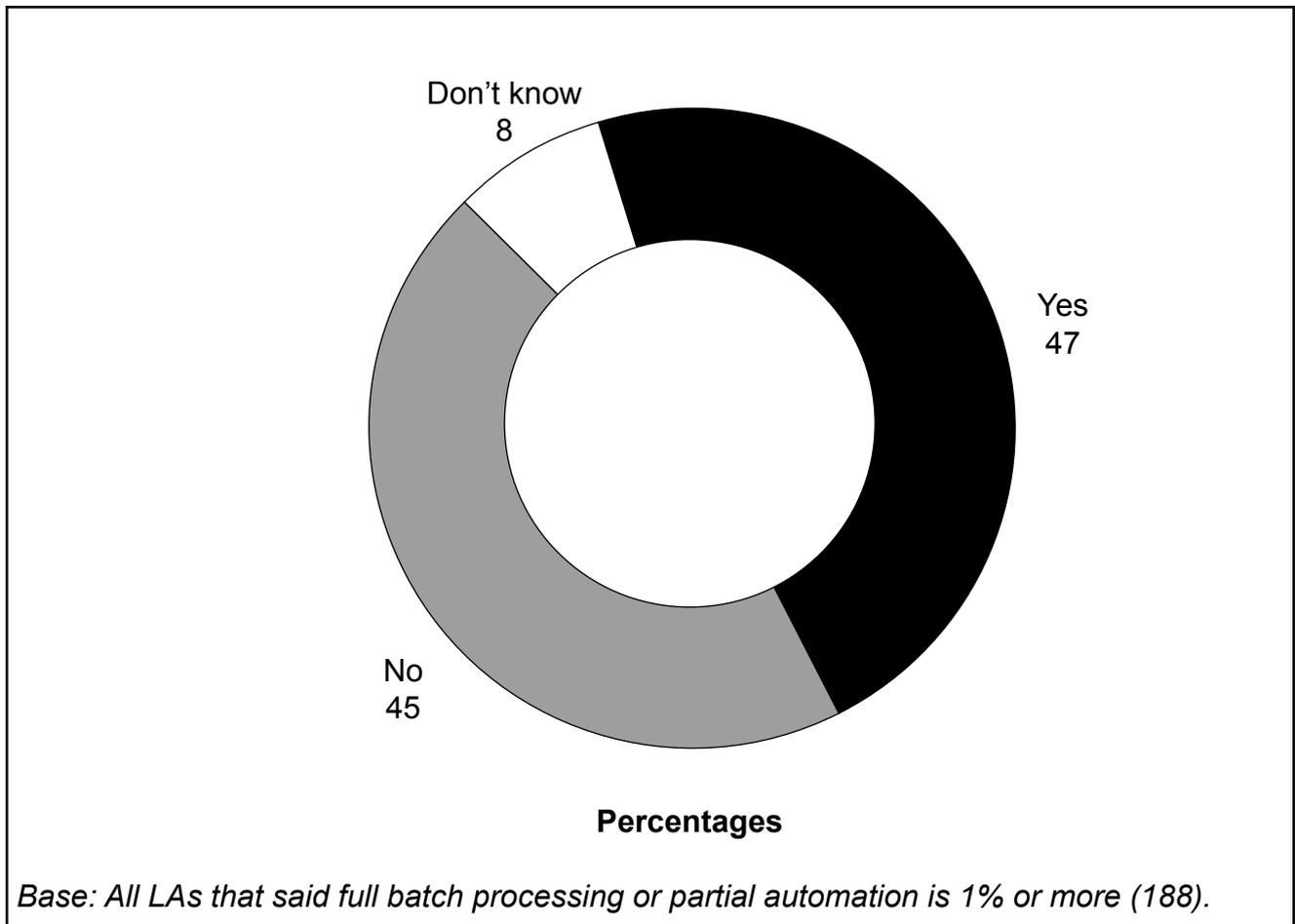
	<i>Percentages</i>
The main ways in which full/partial automation were achieved include:	
Via IT supplier	61
In-house	47
External help	10

Base: All LAs that said full batch processing or partial automation is 1% or more (188).

Those LAs that said that full batch or partial automation have been achieved for one per cent or more notifications were asked how they achieved this. More than three in five (61 per cent) achieved it via an IT supplier while 47 per cent did so in-house and one in ten (10 per cent) had external help.

Welsh authorities were most likely to have received external help (43 per cent).

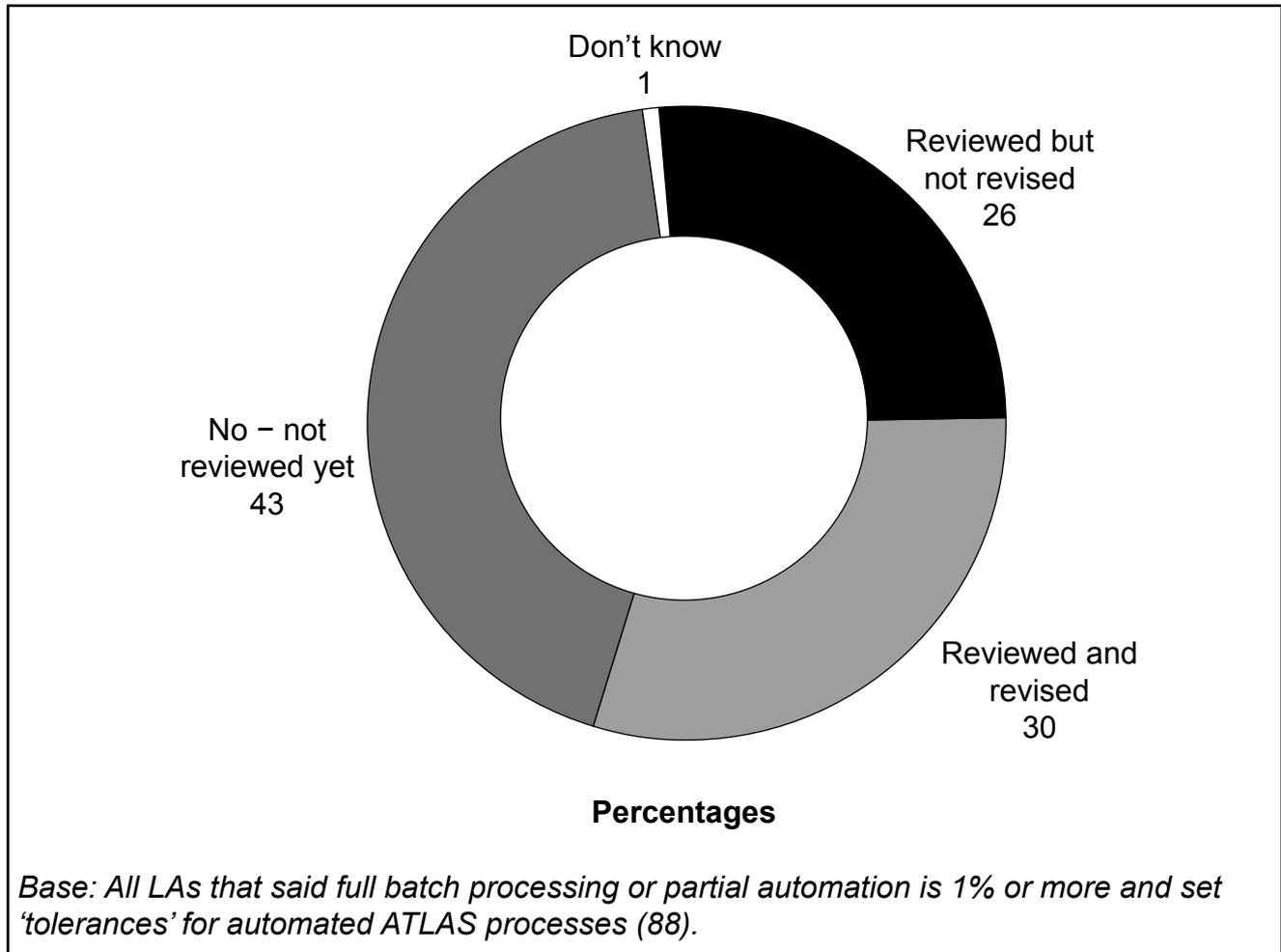
Figure 5.2 Some IT systems allow LAs to set ‘tolerances’ for automated ATLAS processes (for example, if a change is over a certain amount the system produces a separate report). Has your LA set tolerances for automated ATLAS processes?



Among those LAs that said full batch or partial automation has been achieved for one per cent or more notifications there is a split between those that have set tolerances (47 per cent) and those that have not (45 per cent).

There were no significant differences across sub-groups.

Figure 5.3 Have these tolerances been reviewed and or revised?



Fifty-six per cent of LAs have reviewed their tolerances – 26 per cent have reviewed and revised them and 30 per cent have reviewed them but not revised them. A further 43 per cent have not reviewed them yet.

Given the small sample sizes there were no significant differences across sub-groups.

Does your LA plan to increase the level of automation?

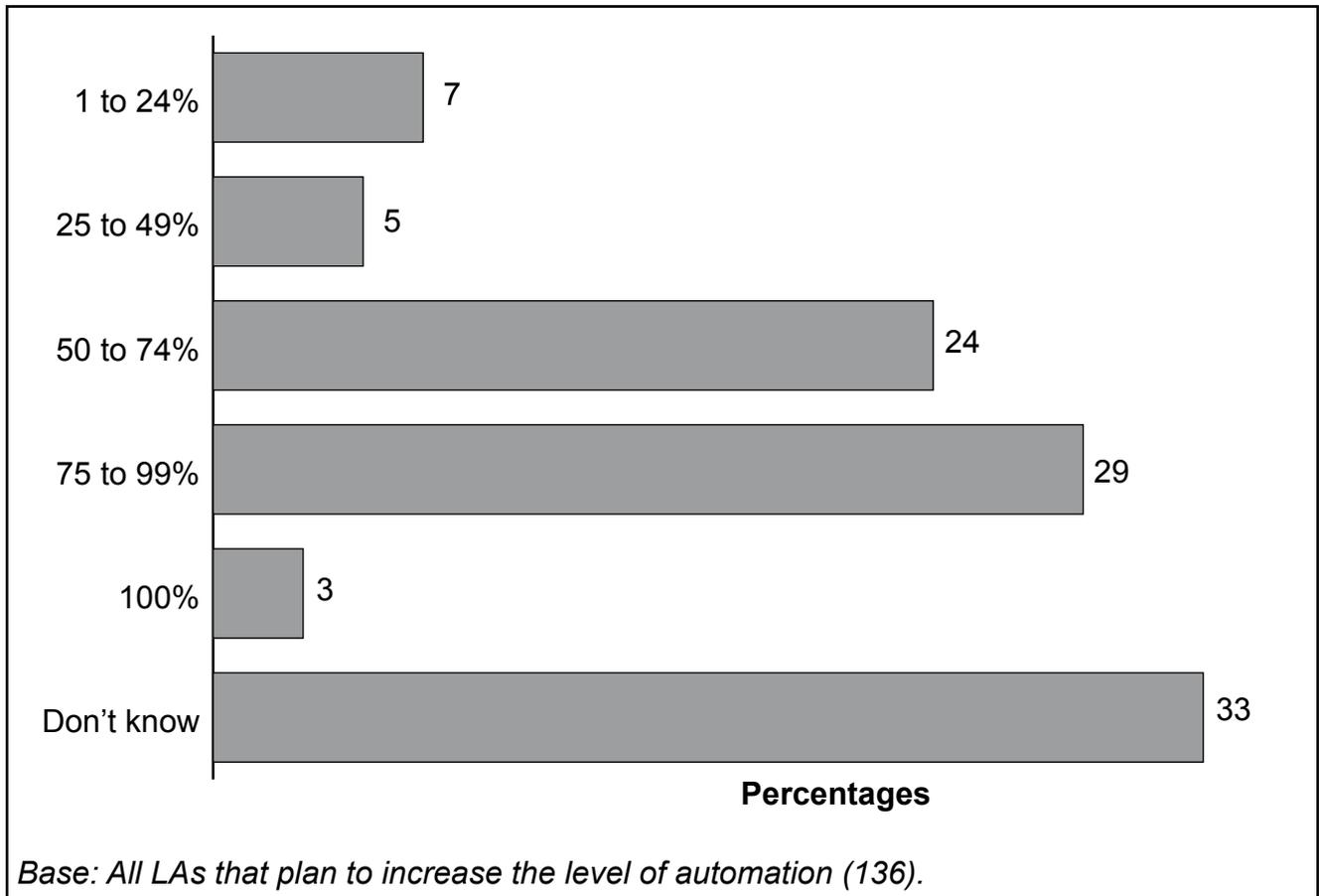
60% of LAs plan to increase the level of automation (35% within 3-6 months, 21% within 6-12 months and 4% over a longer period)

Base: All LAs except those that said full batch processing is 100% (226)

All LAs, except those that said full batch processing is already at 100 per cent, were asked whether or not they plan to increase automation. Overall, three in five (60 per cent) plan to increase the level of automation – 35 per cent within three to six months, 21 per cent within 6-12 months and four per cent over a longer period. Around a quarter of LAs (24 per cent), on the other hand, said that they are not planning to increase automation and 16 per cent did not know.

Scottish authorities are the least likely to say that they will be increasing automation within three to six months (11 per cent).

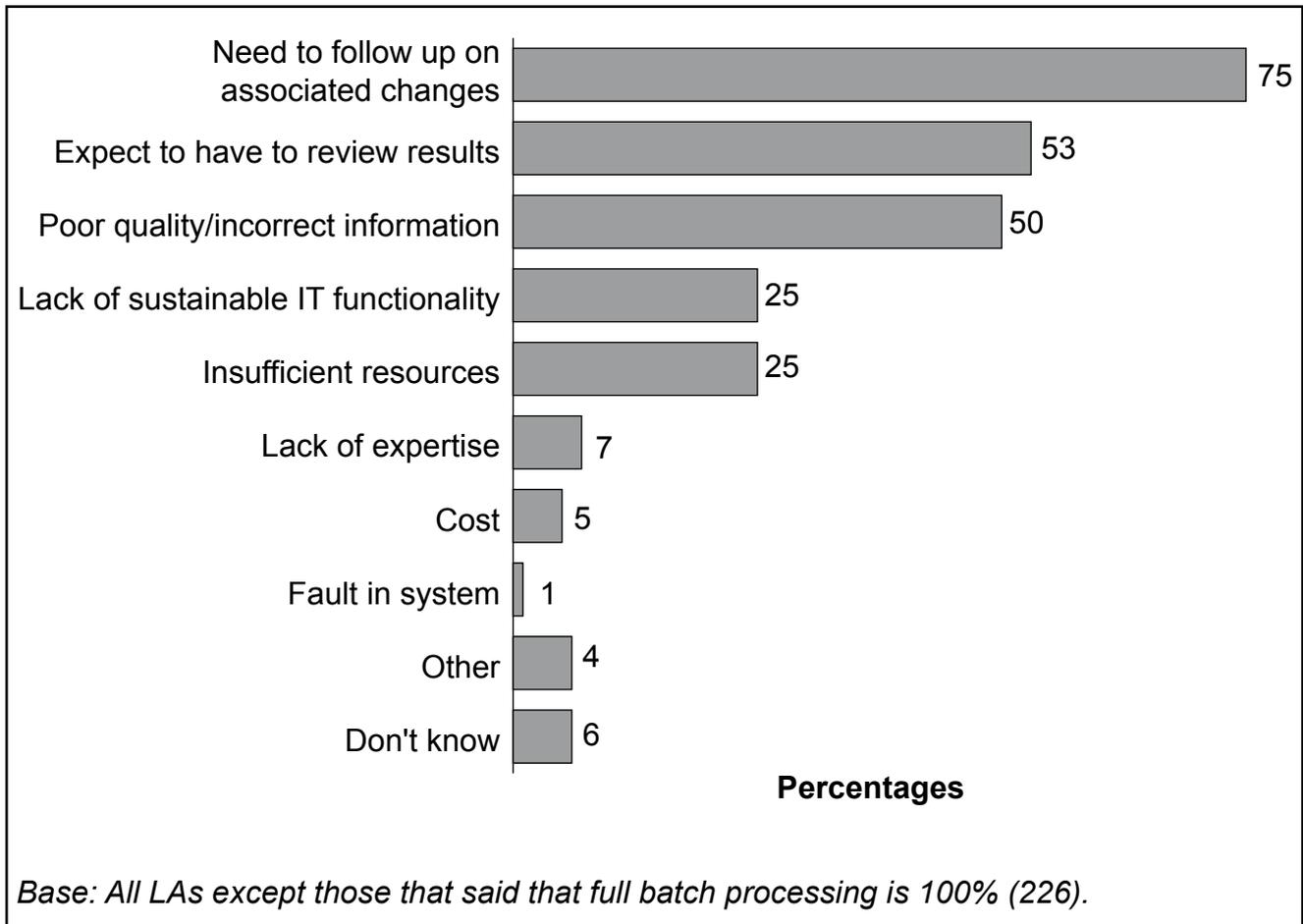
Figure 5.4 When this increase in automation has taken place, what proportion of notifications do you expect to require no manual intervention (ie. full batch processing)?



When LAs that are planning to increase the level of automation were asked what proportion of notifications they expect to require no manual intervention a third said that they did not know (33 per cent). Among those providing an answer, LAs said that they expect an average of 66 per cent to be fully automated.

Once again, the small sample size precludes much discussion about sub-group differences, although it is worth noting that Scottish authorities gave an answer that is significantly lower than that for English Unitary authorities, English Districts and London Boroughs (average of 44 per cent, 66 per cent, 69 per cent and 69 per cent respectively).

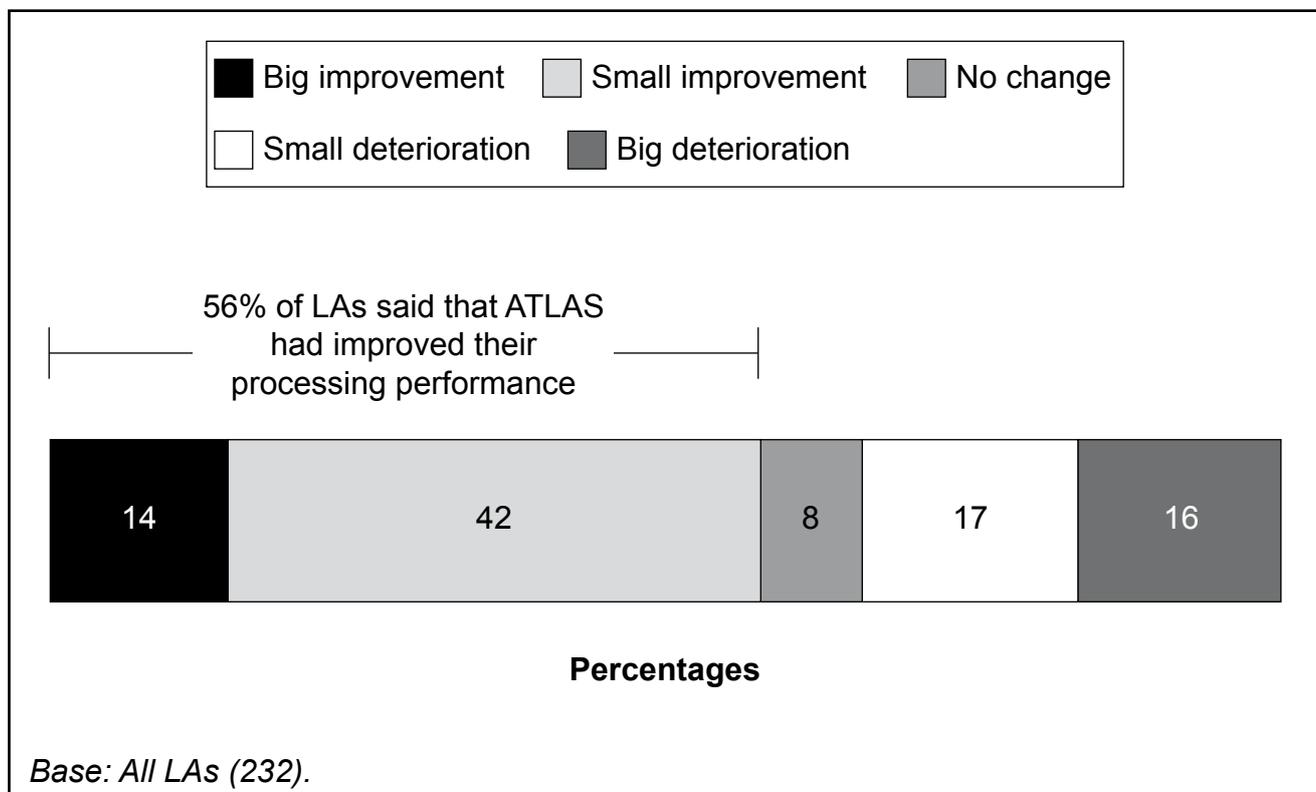
Figure 5.5 What would you say are the obstacles to your LA achieving full/increased levels of automation?



All LAs, except those that have already achieved 100 per cent full batch processing, were also asked to describe the obstacles to them achieving full/increased levels of automation. Three-quarters (75 per cent) said that they need to follow up on associated changes and around half expect to have to review their results (53 per cent) and cited poor quality/incorrect information (50 per cent). A further quarter mentioned lack of sustainable IT functionality and insufficient resources (both 25 per cent). Fewer than one in ten mentioned lack of expertise (7 per cent), cost (five per cent) and a fault in the system (one per cent).

There were no significant differences by sub-group.

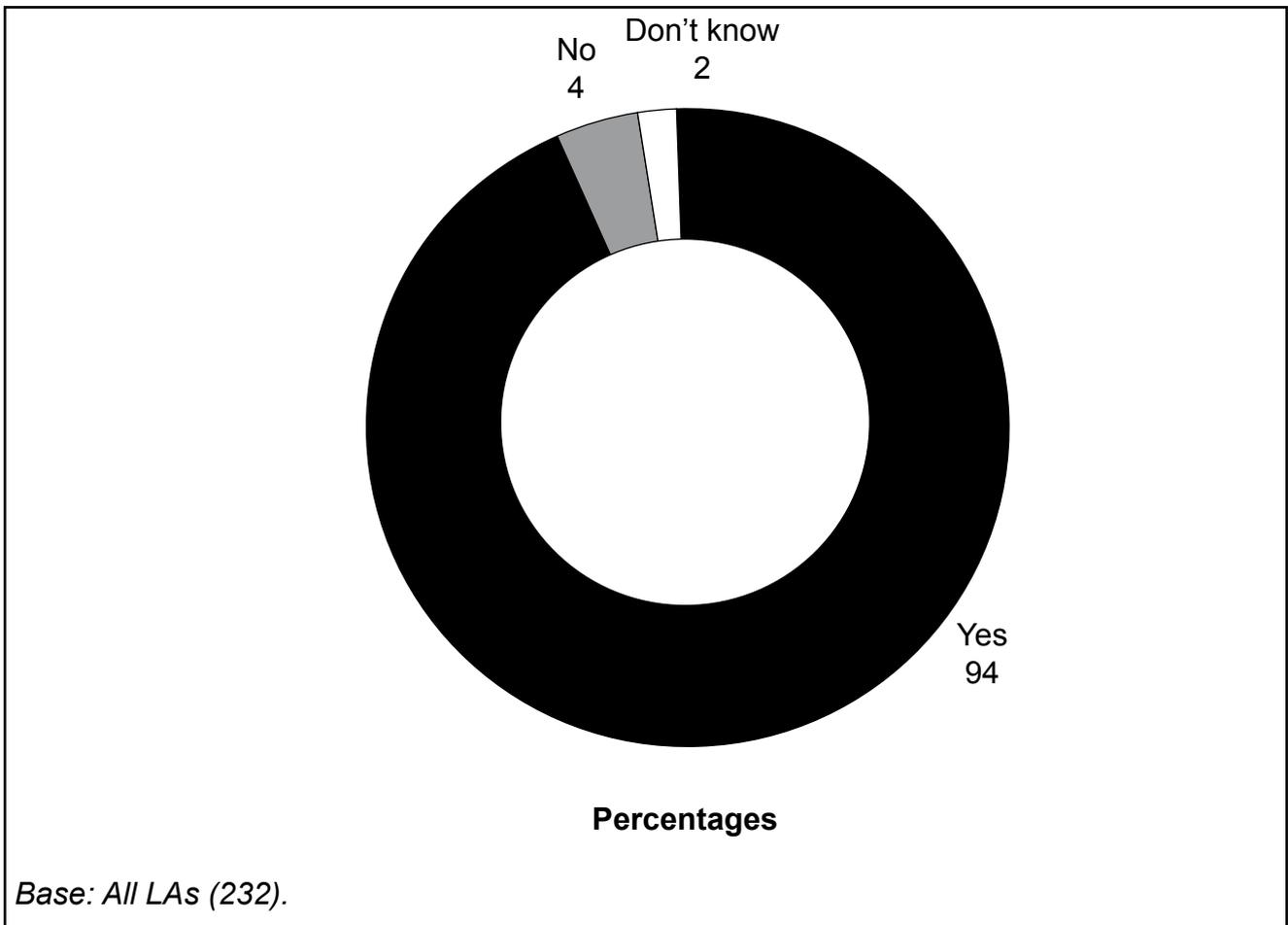
Figure 5.6 What impact, if any, has ATLAS had on your LA’s processing performance?



All local authorities were asked what impact, if any, Atlas has had on their processing performance. Over half (56 per cent) said that it had improved their processing performance – 14 per cent described it as a big improvement and 42 per cent as a small improvement. On the other hand, a third said that there had been a deterioration in processing performance – 16 per cent a big deterioration and 17 per cent a small deterioration. Eight per cent said that there has been no change.

London Boroughs are more likely than Welsh and Scottish authorities and English Metropolitan Districts to have seen a big improvement (26 per cent, zero per cent, six per cent and five per cent respectively), while Welsh LAs are more likely than English Metropolitan authorities, English Districts and London Boroughs to say that they have noticed a small deterioration (42 per cent, 10 per cent, 14 per cent and four per cent respectively).

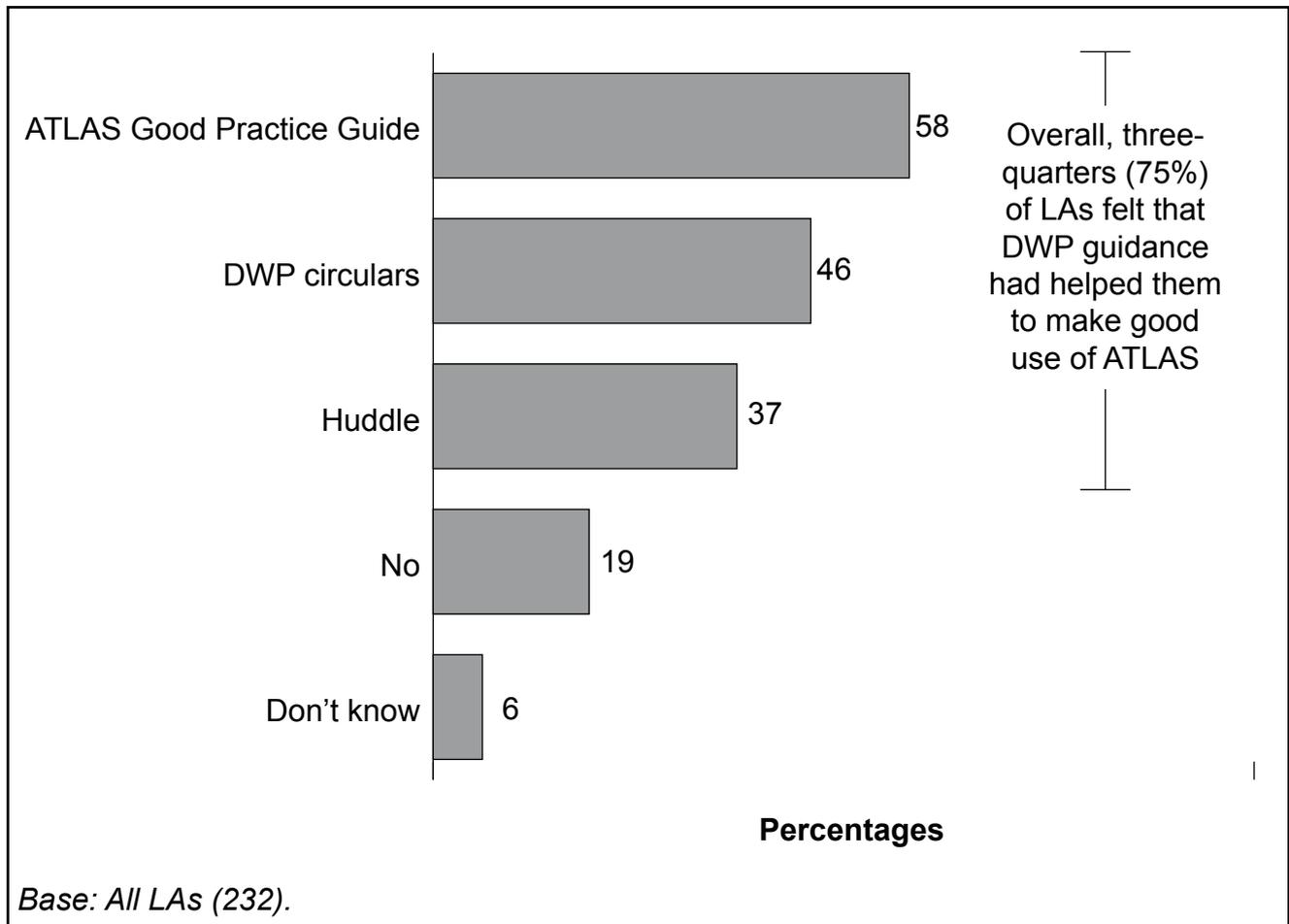
Figure 5.7 Has your LA processes in place to ensure that HB Y/N indicators are set/ removed to ensure that the correct ATLAS notifications are received



A very high proportion of LAs (94 per cent) have processes in place to ensure that HB Y/N indicators are set/ removed to ensure that the correct ATLAS notifications are received. Just four per cent do not have them in place and two per cent did not know.

There were no differences by LA sub-groups.

Figure 5.8 Has any of the available DWP guidance helped you make good use of ATLAS?



Three-quarters of LAs said that the DWP guidance has helped them to make good use of ATLAS. Almost one in five (19 per cent), however, said that it had not helped them to make good use of it.

The sources of guidance regarded as particularly helpful are the ATLAS Good Practice Guide (58 per cent), DWP circulars (46 per cent) and Huddle (37 per cent).

6 Housing Benefit advice and wider issues

6.1 Introduction and summary

A number of changes have been made to Housing Benefit (HB) in both the private and social rented sectors over the years immediately preceding this survey. These changes included changing the basis for setting Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in the private rented sector (PRS) from the median (50th percentile) to the 30th percentile of local market rents; capping LHA rates by property size and removing the five bedroom rate; raising the age for the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) in the PRS from 25 to 35; capping total household benefits at £500 per week and £350 per week for childless single people (introduced in four London boroughs from April 2013, and to be rolled out nationally in two tranches from 15 July 2013), and Removing the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) in the SRS. The following section reports on whether the new regulations in the 12 months previous to the survey have had an effect on the work done by benefit advisers within local authorities (LAs), and the broader impacts of all of these changes.

The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- Around a quarter (26 per cent) of all LAs said the number of benefit advisers employed by their LA had increased, slightly fewer LAs (23 per cent) said the number had decreased and approximately half (48 per cent) said the level had stayed the same.
- The majority of LAs (86 per cent) said they could meet the need for benefit advice either fairly well (60 per cent) or very well (26 per cent) in their LA but around one in ten (11 per cent) said they could not meet that need well.
- Changes such as the RSRS appear to have had an impact on types of advice needed: nine in ten (90 per cent) LAs said RSRS advice was needed (highest at 100 per cent in the West Midlands region). Eighty-five per cent said advice was needed for issues to do with the benefit cap.
- When asked about causes of rent arrears, this was most commonly attributed to reasons other than the recent policy changes (67 per cent). Slightly fewer LAs named issues to do with RSRS (65 per cent). Changes to do with LHA were mentioned by 45 per cent of LAs and the benefit cap was mentioned by 27 per cent of LAs as main reasons causing rent arrears and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the distribution of claimants affected by it, the benefit cap was a much bigger factor affecting rent arrears in London (59 per cent) than elsewhere.
- Around four-fifths (82 per cent) of LAs mentioned issues other than those to do directly with recent HB policy changes as being the main reason for homelessness acceptances in their LA. Changes to do with LHA were mentioned by 15 per cent of LAs, RSRS was mentioned by nine per cent and the benefit cap was mentioned by 7 per cent of LAs as main reasons for homelessness acceptances. Reasons to do with a reduction in the number of properties available in the PRS, LHA changes and the benefit cap were more likely to be mentioned by London Boroughs as main reasons for homelessness acceptances.

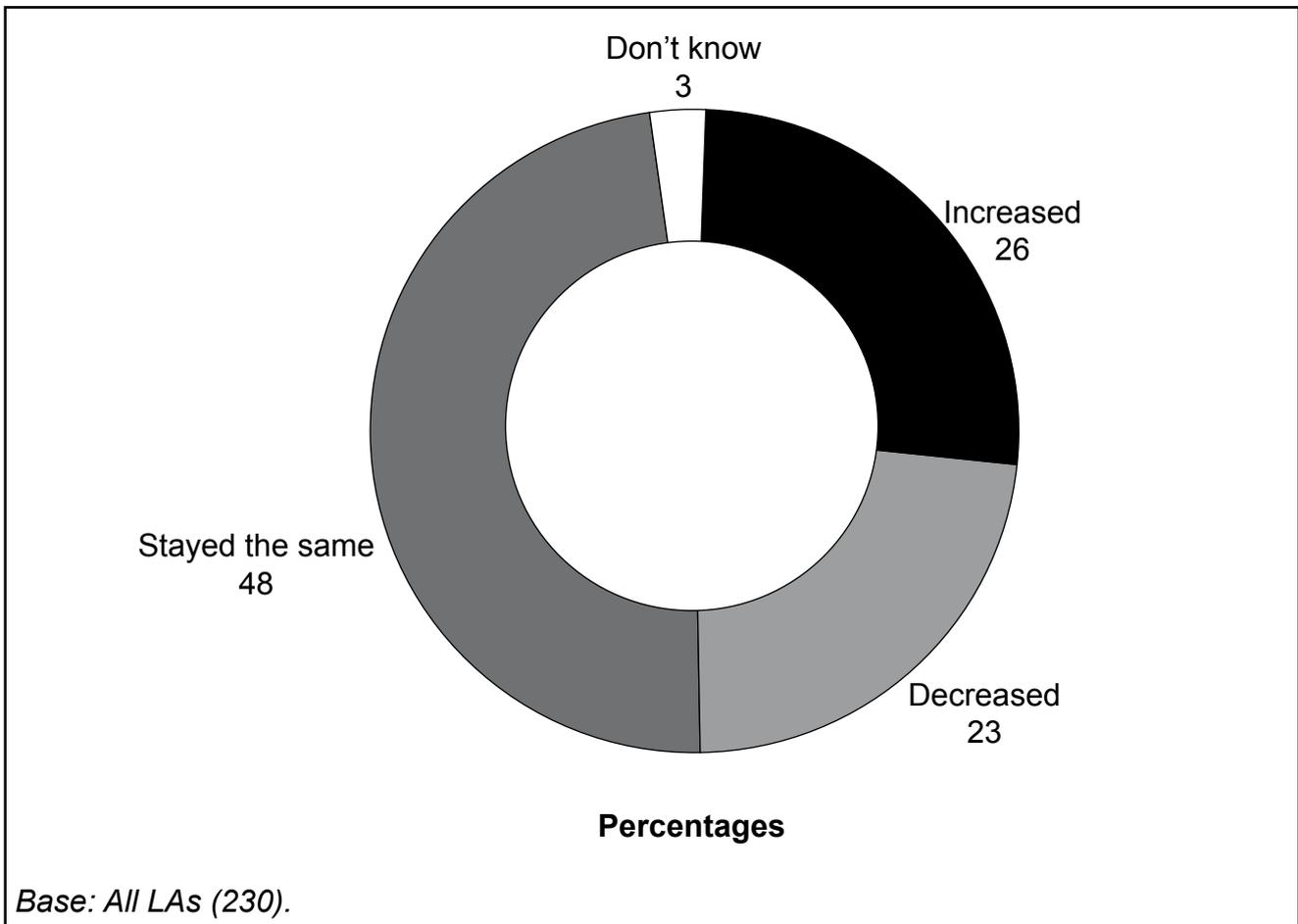
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- Approximately half (46 per cent) of LAs said that they did not place claimants out of borough in order to discharge a homeless duty. Households that were made up of a single person aged 35+ were also more likely to be placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty (17 per cent) than were couples (13 per cent) or couples with children (15 per cent). The household types most likely to be placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty were single, under 35; and single, parent with children, both of whom 18 per cent were placed out of borough.
- Where claimants had been placed out of the borough to discharge a homeless duty, the most usual location was to a neighbouring LA (20 per cent), followed by the same region (but not neighbouring LA) (11 per cent) and then further afield (five per cent).
- Forty five per cent of LAs said they were finding it more difficult to source temporary accommodation (rising to 82 per cent in London and 71 per cent in the South East).
- Four in five (80 per cent) LAs said they were very aware, in general terms, of homeless hostels in their area and a further nine per cent said they were fairly aware.
- Around a third (34 per cent) of LAs said they were doing more work to find out about homeless hostels by talking to homeless charities. There were greater levels of LAs engaged in this in the South East (52 per cent), the West Midlands (50 per cent) and London (45 per cent).

6.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 6.1 On the whole, in the last 12 months has the number of benefit advisers employed by your LA, increased, decreased or stayed the same?



Around a quarter (26 per cent) of all LAs said the number of benefit advisers employed by their LA had increased, slightly fewer LAs (23 per cent) said the number had decreased and approximately half (48 per cent) said the level had stayed the same.

LAs with high HB caseloads were more likely to have said the numbers of advisers in their LA had gone up during the previous 12 months than were LAs with low⁶ caseloads (35 per cent high caseloads versus 19 per cent low caseloads). English Metropolitan authorities (40 per cent), Scottish authorities (42 per cent) and London Boroughs (45 per cent) were also more likely to have said the numbers of benefit advisers in their LA had gone up over the 12-month period prior to the survey.

In the last 12 months how well would you say your LA has been able to meet the need for benefit advice?

86% of LAs say they are able to meet the need for benefit advice (either well or fairly well) with these levels of staffing but 11% say they are not able to meet the need

Base: All LAs (230)

⁶ Low caseloads are defined as = upto 10,000, Medium caseloads are defined as 10,001-20,000. High caseloads are defined as over 20,000.

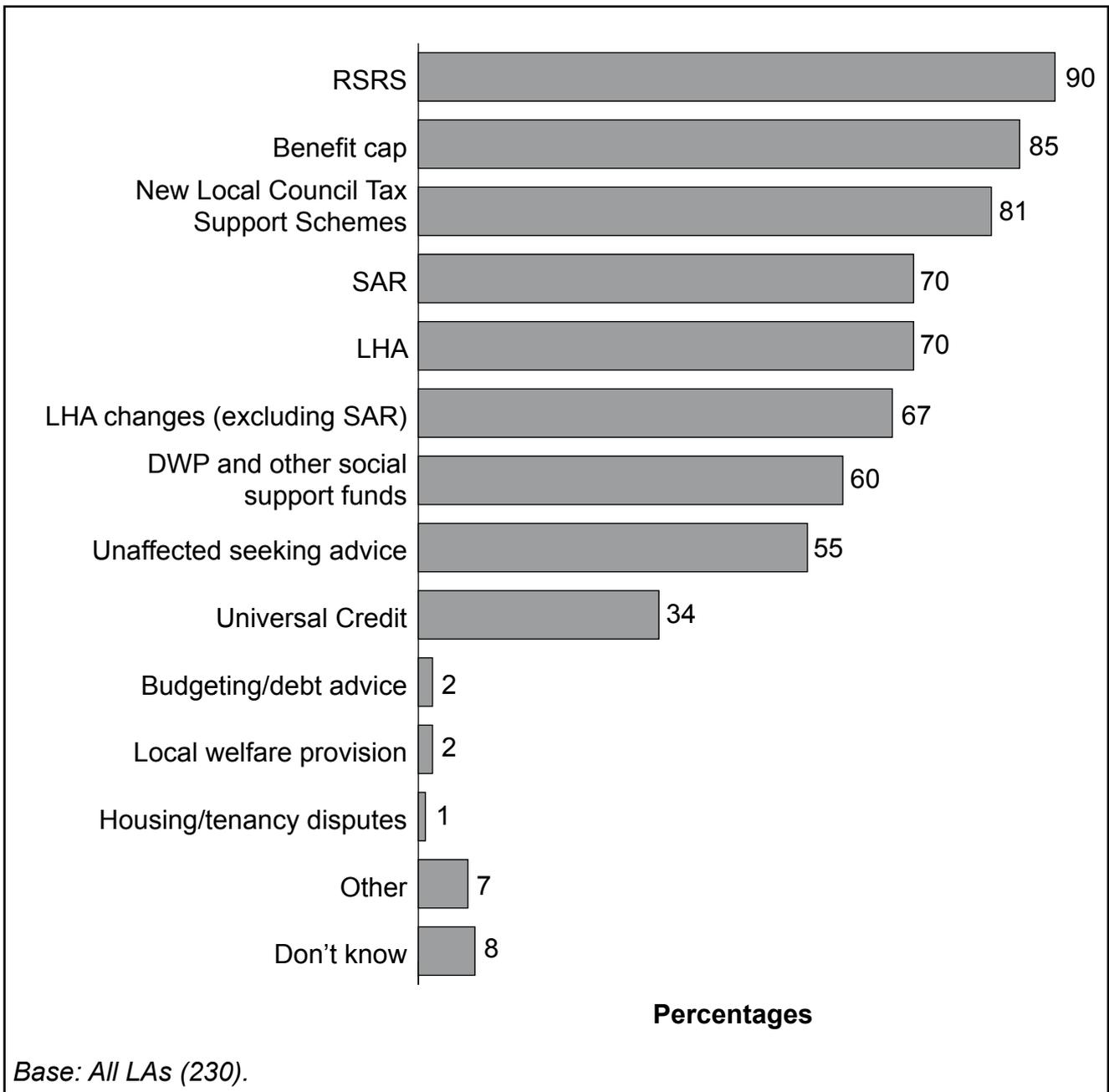
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The majority of LAs (86 per cent) said they could meet the need for benefit advice either fairly well (60 per cent) or very well (26 per cent) in their LA but around one in ten (11 per cent) said they could not meet that need well.

LAs in the Yorkshire and Humberside region were more likely to have said that they could not meet the need for benefit advice well (25 per cent either not very or not at all well) compared to LAs in London (five per cent) and Wales where none of the LAs in this sample said they were not meeting the need of benefit advice in their authority well.

The results of this question, asking about how well the need for benefit advice was being met, were analysed by the results of the question about levels of benefit advisers (increasing, decreasing or staying the same over the previous 12 months) to check for an effect of changing levels of advisers on being able to meet need for advice but there were no significant findings to report. To clarify this means that the LAs that had not increased staff were not significantly more likely to have said that they were not able to meet the need for benefit advice. Equally, those LAs who had increased staff were not significantly more likely to have said that they were able to meet the need for advice.

Figure 6.2 In the last 12 months, what type of advice has been needed by HB claimants?



Changes such as the introduction of the RSRS appear to have had an impact on types of advice needed: nine in ten (90 per cent) LAs said RSRS advice was needed (highest at 100 per cent in the West Midlands region). Eighty-five per cent said advice was needed for issues to do with the benefit cap although this was higher in London Boroughs (95 per cent), the South East region (94 per cent), LAs with high caseloads (91 per cent) and English Districts (87 per cent).

Around four in five (81 per cent) of all LAs said advice was needed about the New Local Council Tax Support Schemes and the need for this kind of advice appeared to be particularly prevalent in the West Midlands (100 per cent) and the East Midlands (93 per cent).

Approximately seven in ten LAs said advice was needed on the SAR (70 per cent), with greater prevalence for this kind of advice being needed in the following regions: Wales (92 per cent); London (86 per cent) and the West Midlands (83 per cent).

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LHA advice being needed was mentioned by 70 per cent of LAs, with greater need stated by LAs in the West Midlands (94 per cent) and London (86 per cent).

Advice about LHA changes (excluding SAR) was mentioned by 67 per cent with higher levels recorded among LAs in London (86 per cent).

Three in five (60 per cent) of all LAs said the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and other social support funds issues triggered a need for advice, 55 per cent said there was a demand for advice by claimants unaffected by changes and around a third (34 per cent) said there was a demand for advice about Universal Credit (UC).

Table 6.1 Indicate what approximate percentage each type of advice has made up of all advice given to HB claimants in the last 12 months

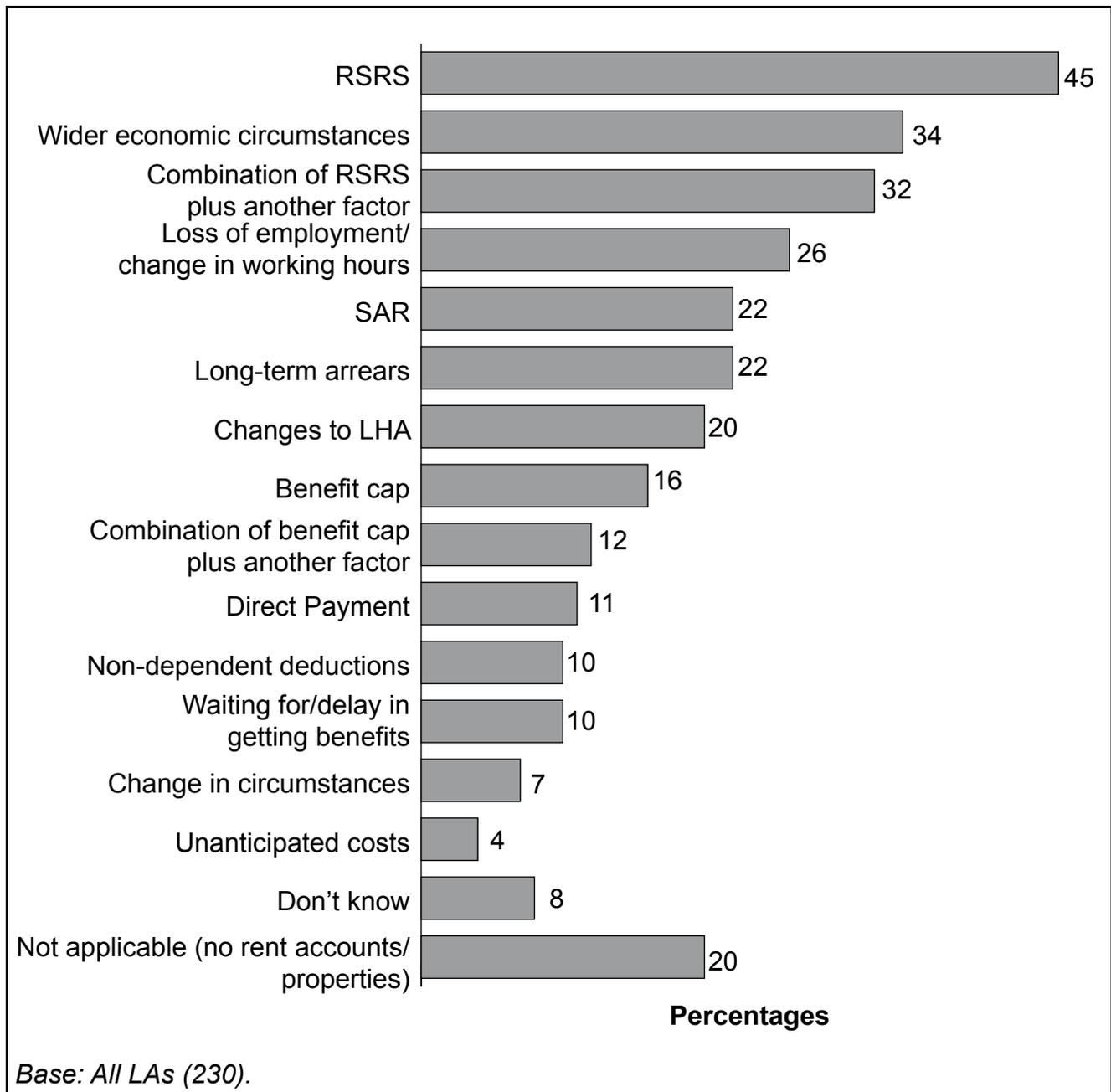
	Mean (%)
RSRS	34
New Local Council Tax Support Schemes	20
LHA	8
Benefit cap	8
LHA (excluding SAR)	6
SAR	6
Those unaffected by policy changes	5
DWP and other social support funds	5
UC	1
Other	1

Base: All LAs excluding those that answered don't know regarding what type of advice had been needed by HB claimants (211).

LAs were asked what approximate percentage each type of advice has made up of all advice given to HB claimants in the last 12 months. Advice about the RSRS received the highest mean average at 34 per cent, followed by the mean average proportion of advice for New Local Council Tax Support Schemes at 20 per cent.

The mean average proportion for advice relating to RSRS varied according to region, with the higher proportions recorded in the North East (49 per cent), Wales (47 per cent) and Scotland (45 per cent). The mean proportion for benefit cap advice was higher among London Boroughs (19 per cent). London Boroughs (ten per cent) and Welsh LAs (11 per cent) had higher mean average proportions of advice relating to LHA changes (excluding SAR).

Figure 6.3 In the last 12 months, what have been the four main reasons for rent arrears in your LA? Choosing from the *entire list* within the table below please tick the four main reasons below

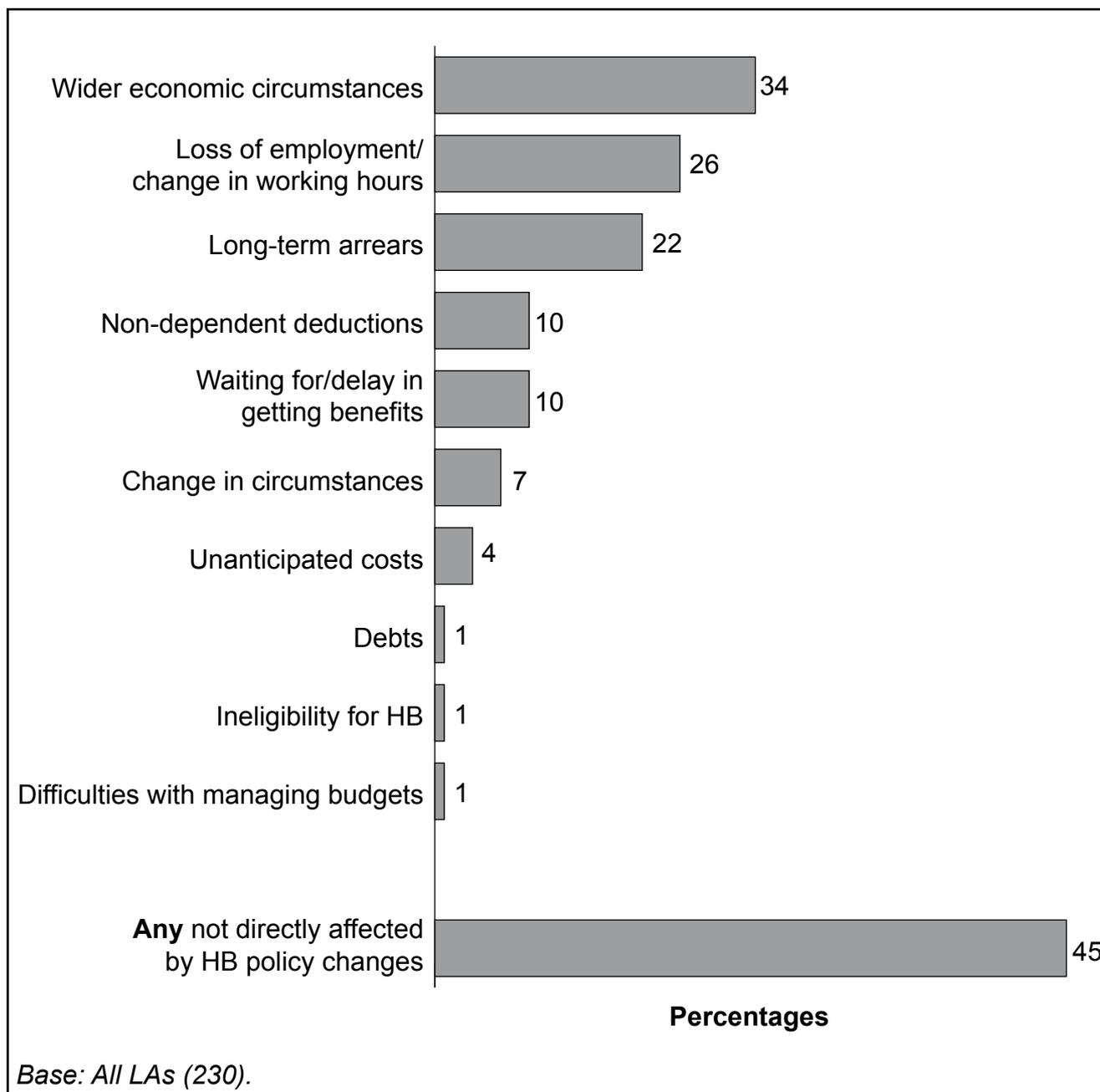


The following sub-section of the report deals with reasons for rent arrears. LAs were asked to give up to four main reasons for rent arrears in their LA. Around two-thirds of LAs mentioned RSRS (65 per cent) and issues other than those to do with recent HB policy changes (67 per cent) as being the main reasons for rent arrears in their LA. Changes to do with LHA were mentioned by 45 per cent of LAs and the benefit cap was mentioned by 27 per cent of LAs as main reasons causing rent arrears and the striking regional finding is that Benefit Cap was a much bigger factor affecting rent arrears in London (59 per cent) than elsewhere.

For comparison purposes the reasons have been further divided by: reasons not directly affected by HB policy changes; reasons to do with LHA changes; reasons to do with RSRS; and reasons

to do with the Benefit Cap. The detail of how these findings relate to non HB policy as well as policy related arrears is reported in the following sections.

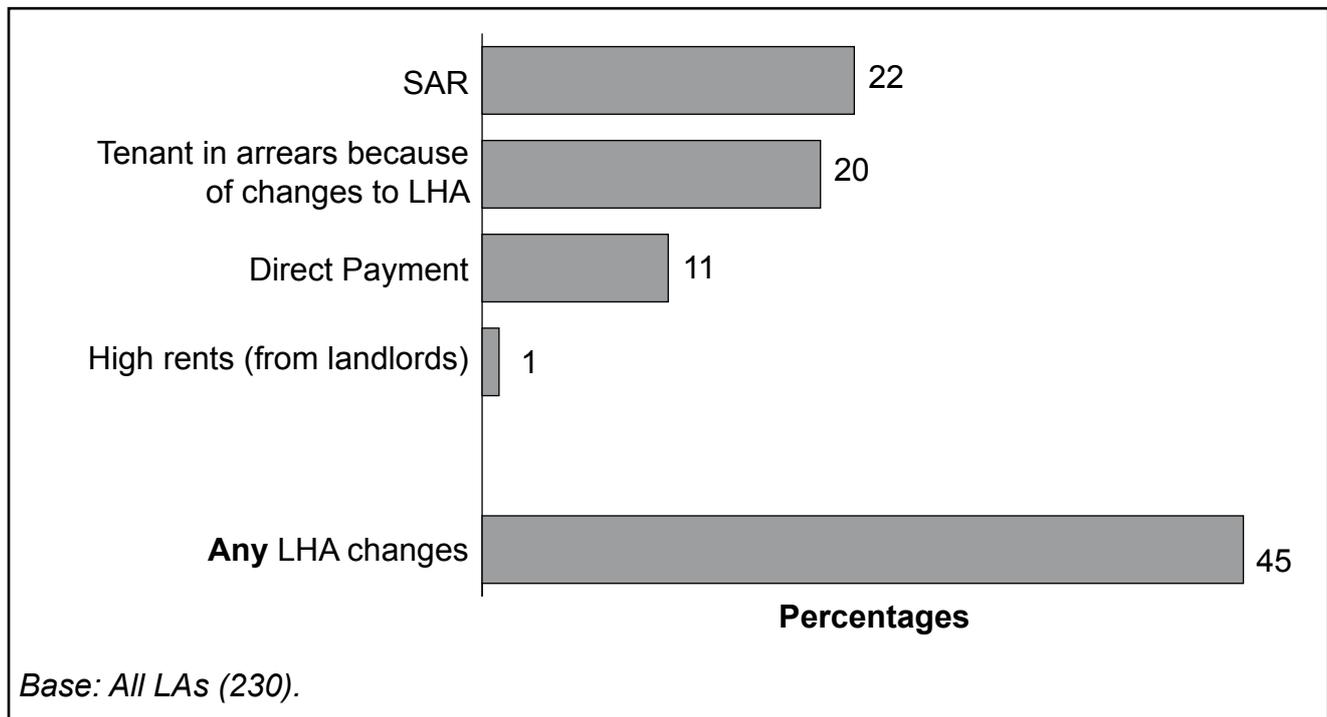
Figure 6.4 Main reasons for rent arrears (not directly affected by HB policy changes)



Around two-thirds (67 per cent) of LAs mentioned at least one reason for rent arrears that was caused by factors other than the recent HB policy changes. Such reasons included wider economic circumstances (34 per cent), loss of employment/working hours (26 per cent), and long-term arrears (22 per cent).

Wider economic circumstances was more frequently stated, as a reason for rent arrears, among English Metropolitan LAs (50 per cent). In terms of regional differences, wider economic circumstances was higher among LAs in the North East (71 per cent), the West Midlands (50 per cent) and Yorkshire and Humberside (50 per cent).

Figure 6.5 Main reasons for rent arrears (LHA changes)



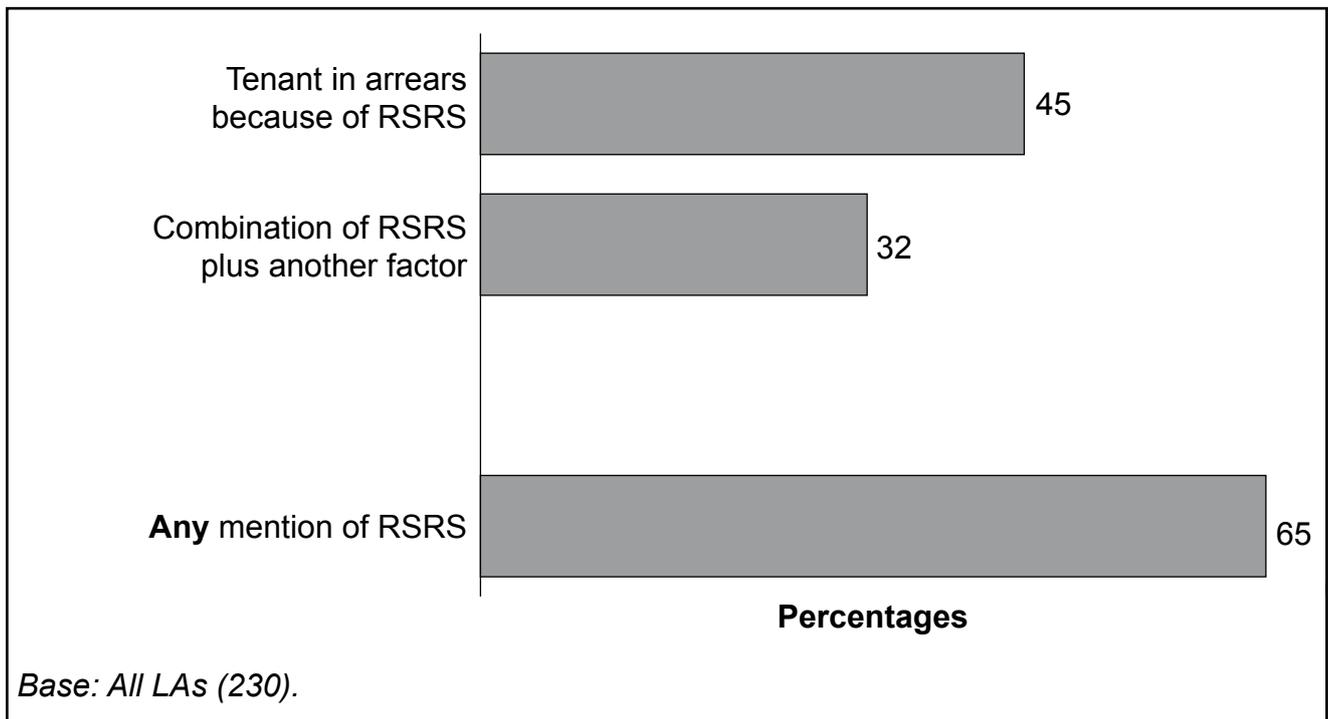
A total of 45 per cent of LAs said changes to LHA policy were among the main reasons causing rent arrears in their LA. SAR was mentioned by 22 per cent of LAs as the main reason and one in five (20 per cent) said they had experience of tenants being in rent arrears because of changes to LHA. A further 11 per cent said Direct Payment⁷ was one of the main contributing reasons to rent arrears.

English Districts (24 per cent) and London Boroughs (32 per cent) were more likely to have said they had tenants in arrears because of changes to LHA than were Welsh LAs (none) and LAs in Scotland (16 per cent).

SAR was less likely to be given as a reason for rent arrears among than English Metropolitan authorities (five per cent) than in other types of authority (for example, 33 per cent of Welsh LAs, 27 per cent of London Boroughs).

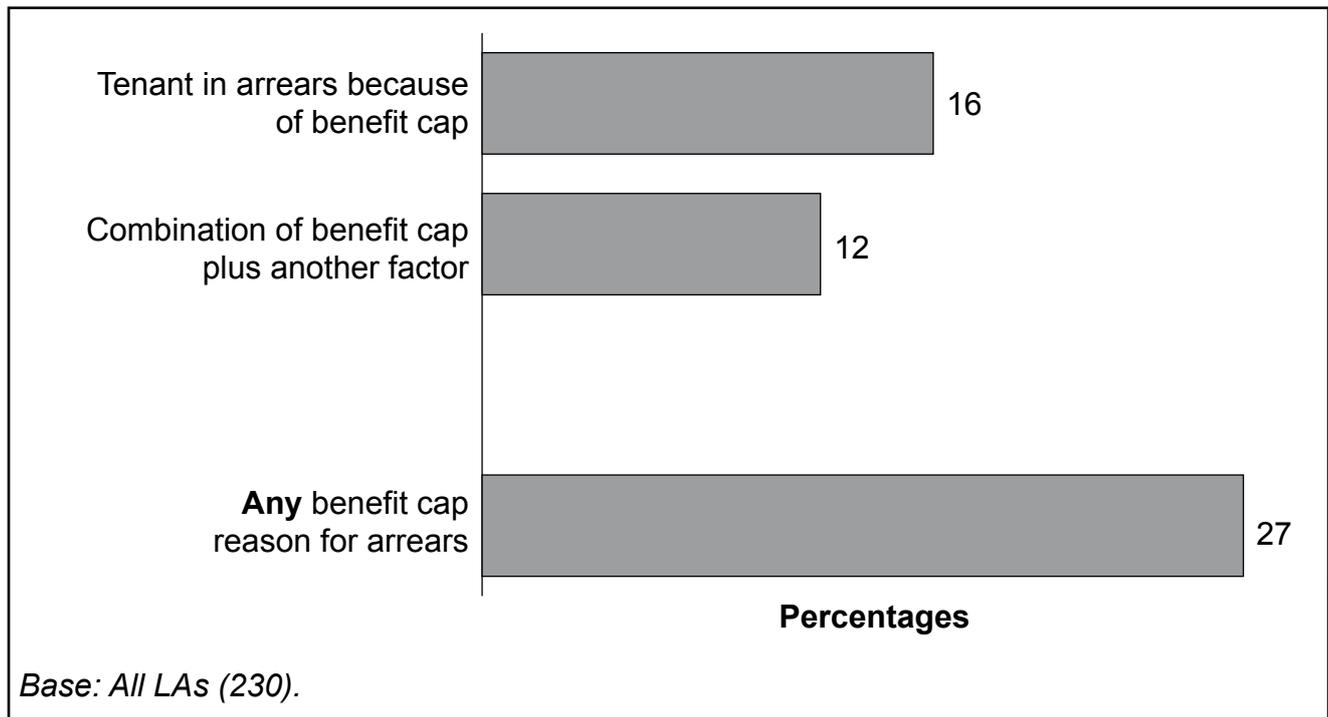
⁷ Although LHA has always been paid directly to claimants (as opposed to landlords), some LAs identified this as a reason for arrears. The LHA evaluation has also provided indicative evidence of some landlords securing direct payment of rent to themselves by requesting eight weeks rent up front. As such the claimant is eight weeks in arrears when they move in and thus qualify for direct payment to landlords.

Figure 6.6 Main reasons for rent arrears (RSRS)



Around two-thirds (65 per cent) of LAs mentioned at least one reason for rent arrears that was caused by an aspect of RSRS. Forty-five per cent of LAs said they had experience of the tenant being in arrears because of RSRS and almost a third (32 per cent) said rent arrears was caused by a combination of RSRS plus another factor.

LAs in Scotland were more likely to have said tenants were in arrears because of RSRS (63 per cent) in comparison to English Unitary authorities (37 per cent).

Figure 6.7 Main reasons for rent arrears (benefit cap)

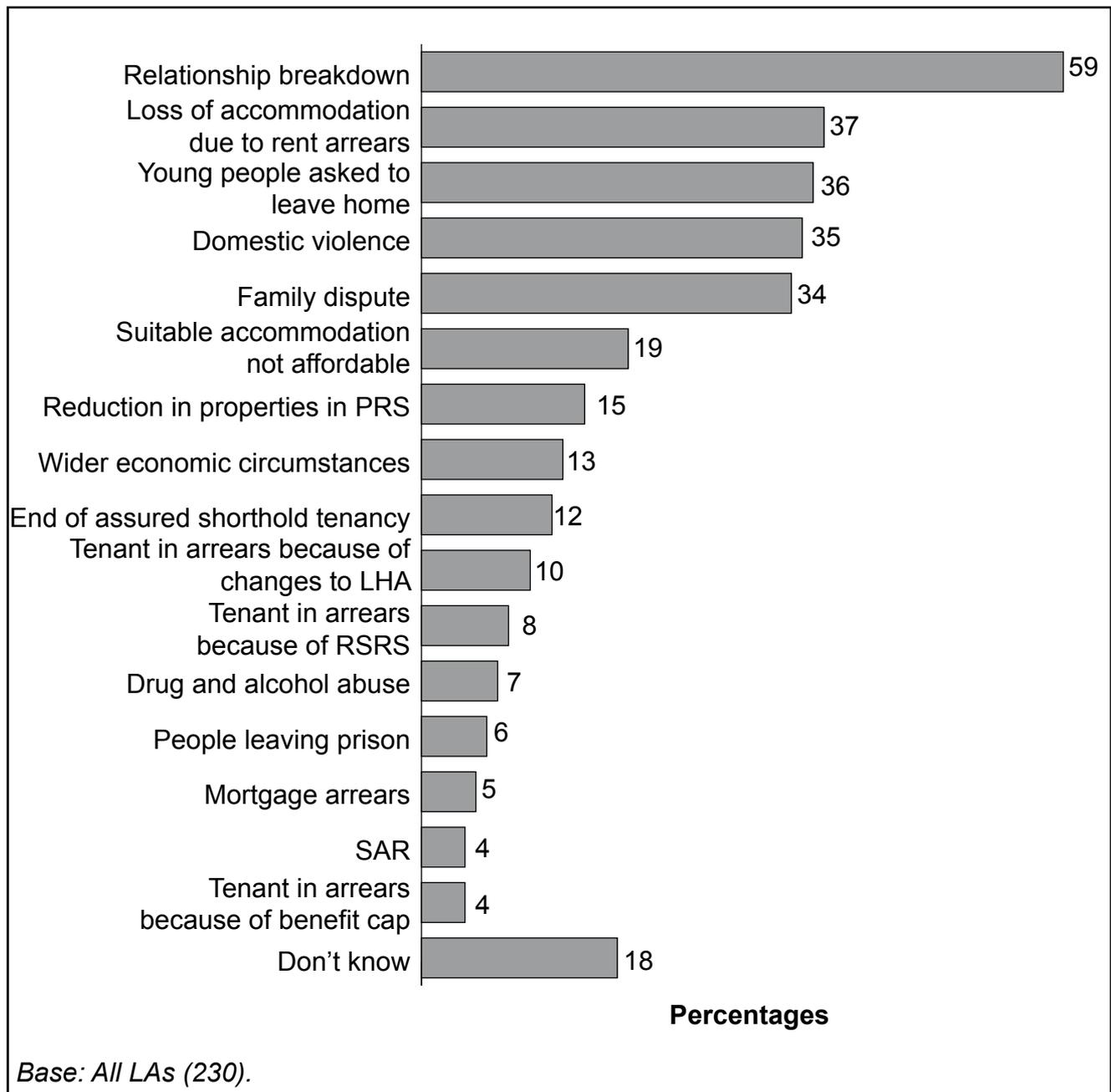
A total of 27 per cent of LAs said reasons associated with the benefit cap were among the main reasons contributing to rent arrears in their LA. Sixteen per cent of LAs said they had tenants in arrears because of the benefit cap and 12 per cent said arrears was being caused in their LA due to the combination of the benefit cap plus another factor.

London Boroughs had a very different pattern of responses regards the benefit cap being given as a main reason for rent arrears compared to other types of LAs. Almost three in five (59 per cent) of London Boroughs said benefit cap reasons (any) and a half (50 per cent) of London Boroughs said tenants were in arrears because of the benefit cap. This contrasts with the equivalent findings in other types of authorities; for example, none of the Scottish LAs said tenants were in arrears because of the benefit cap and nine per cent of English Districts gave this as a main reason for tenants being in arrears.

6.2.1 Main reasons for rent arrears summary

To summarise the findings of this sub-section of the report, two thirds of LAs mentioned RSRS (65 per cent) and issues other than those to do with recent HB policy changes (67 per cent) as being the main reasons for rent arrears in their LA. Changes to do with LHA were mentioned by 45 per cent of LAs and the Benefit Cap was mentioned by 27 per cent of LAs as main reasons causing rent arrears and the striking regional finding is that Benefit Cap was a much bigger factor affecting rent arrears in London (59 per cent) than elsewhere.

Figure 6.8 In the last 12 months, what have been the *four* main reasons for homelessness acceptances in your LA? Choosing from the entire list within the table below please tick the *four* main reasons below



The following sub-section of the report deals with reasons for homelessness acceptances. LAs were asked to give up to four main reasons for homelessness acceptances in their LA and for the purposes of this report the reasons have been divided by: reasons not directly affected by HB policy changes; reasons to do with LHA changes; reasons to do with RSRS; and reasons to do with the benefit cap.

6.2.2 Main reasons for homelessness acceptances summary

The results in this section show that the main reasons for homelessness are unrelated to specific policies and policy changes: four-fifths of LAs mentioned issues other than those to do directly with recent HB policy changes as being the main reasons for homelessness acceptances in their LA. Changes to do with LHA were mentioned by 15 per cent of LAs, RSRS was mentioned by nine per cent and the benefit cap was mentioned by seven per cent of LAs as main reasons causing homelessness acceptances. Reasons to do with a reduction in the number of properties available in the PRS, LHA changes and the benefit cap were more likely to be mentioned by London Boroughs as main reasons for homelessness acceptances.

Around four in five LAs (82 per cent) gave main reasons for homelessness acceptances in their LA that were not directly affected by HB policy changes. The most frequently mentioned main reason for homelessness acceptance was relationship breakdown (59 per cent). Approximately a third each said the following were the main reasons for homelessness acceptances: loss of accommodation due to rent arrears⁸ (37 per cent); young people asked to leave home (36 per cent), domestic violence (35 per cent) and family dispute (34 per cent).

LAs in London (45 per cent) and the South East (39 per cent) were more likely to have said a main reason for homelessness acceptance in their LA was a reduction in the number of properties available in the PRS; in contrast to none of the LAs in the following regions stating this was a main reason: Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West, Wales.

⁸ Note that this type of arrears was explicitly listed as not being related to policy changes.

Figure 6.9 Main reasons for homelessness acceptances (not directly affected by HB policy changes)

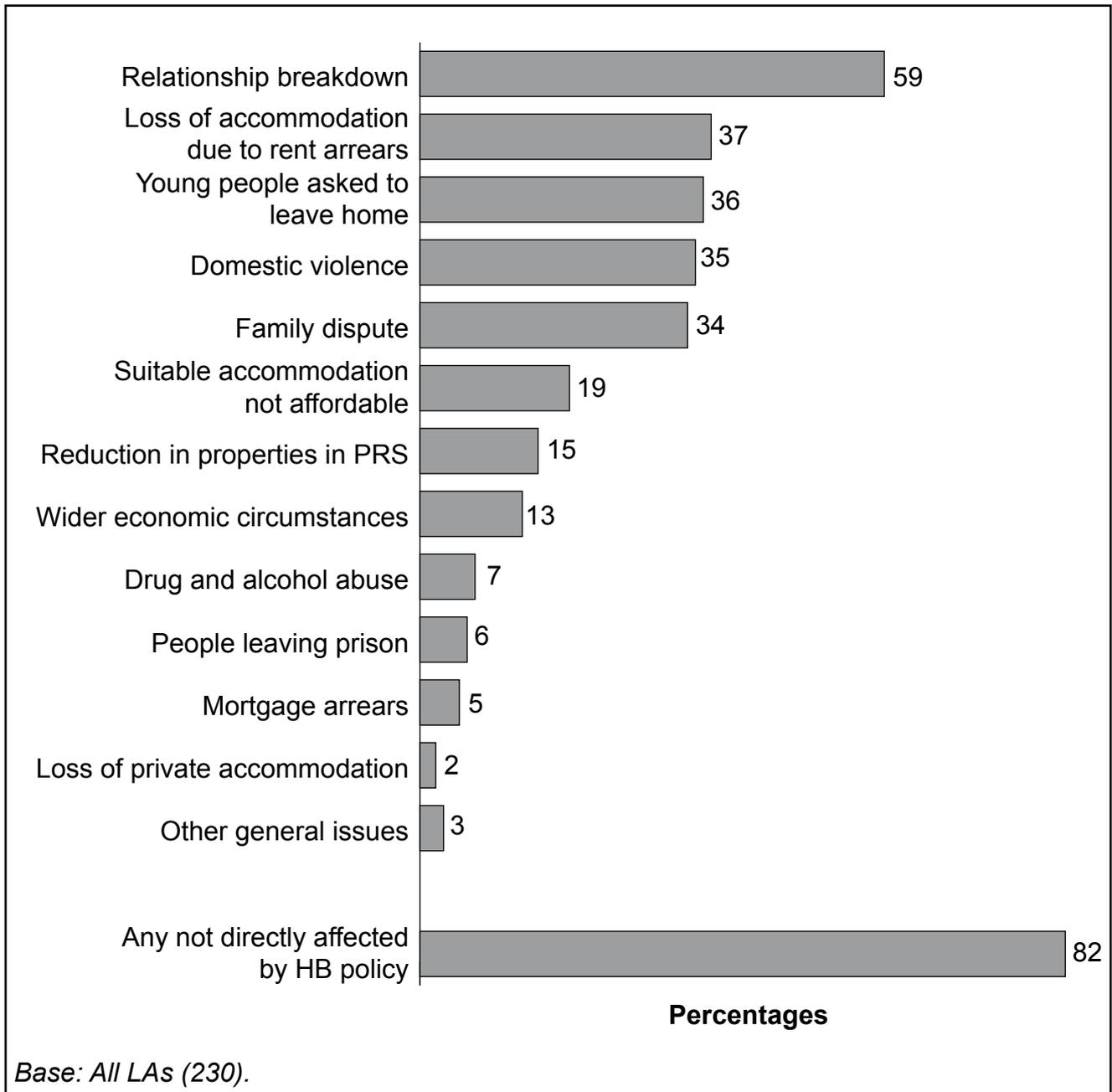
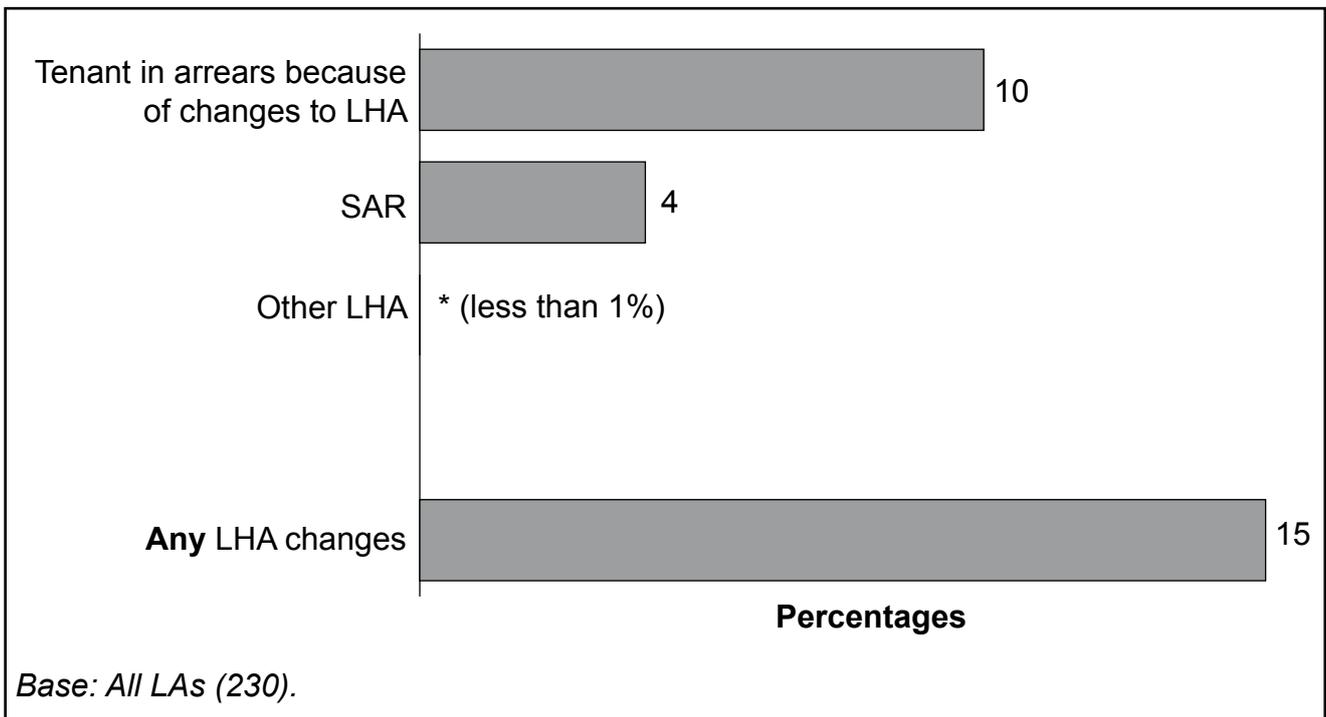


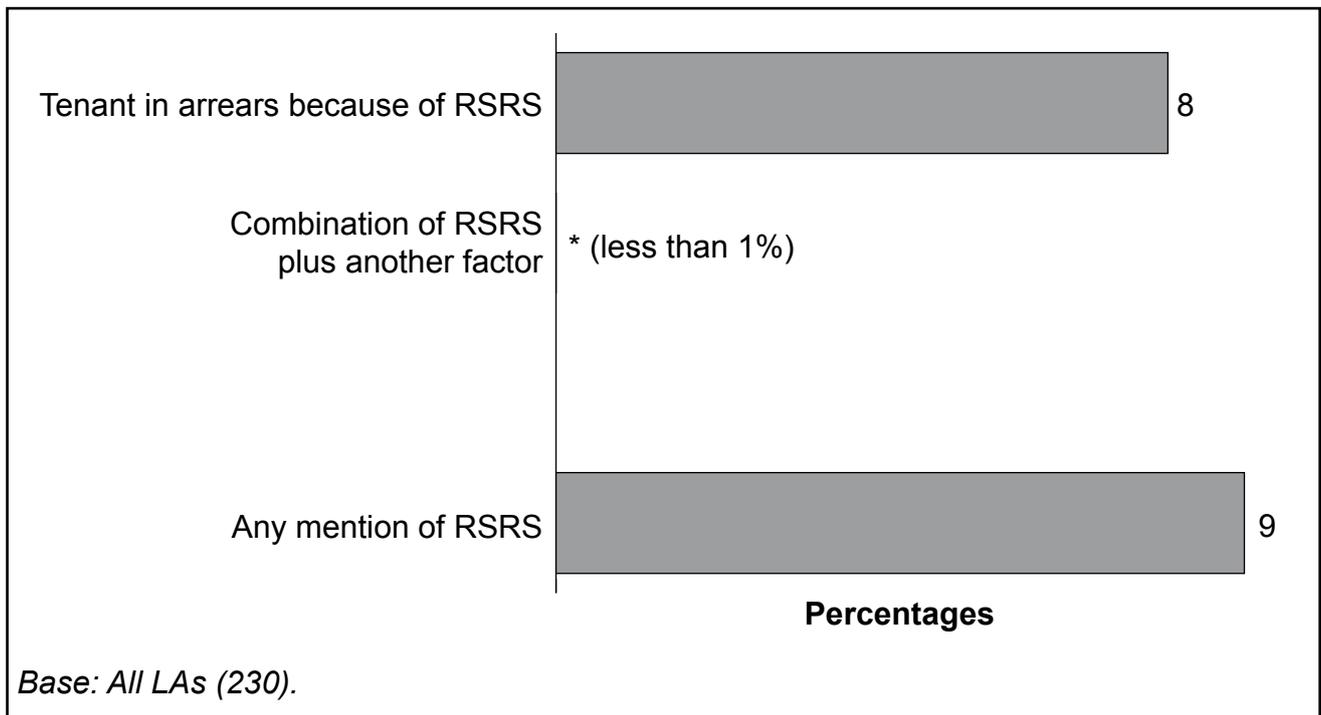
Figure 6.10 Main reasons for homelessness acceptances (LHA changes)



There were 15 per cent of LAs that said LHA changes were among the main reasons for homelessness acceptances in their LA. One in ten (10 per cent) said homelessness acceptances were because of tenants being in arrears because of changes to LHA, a further four per cent said the SAR change was a main reason and other LHA factors were mentioned by less than one per cent.

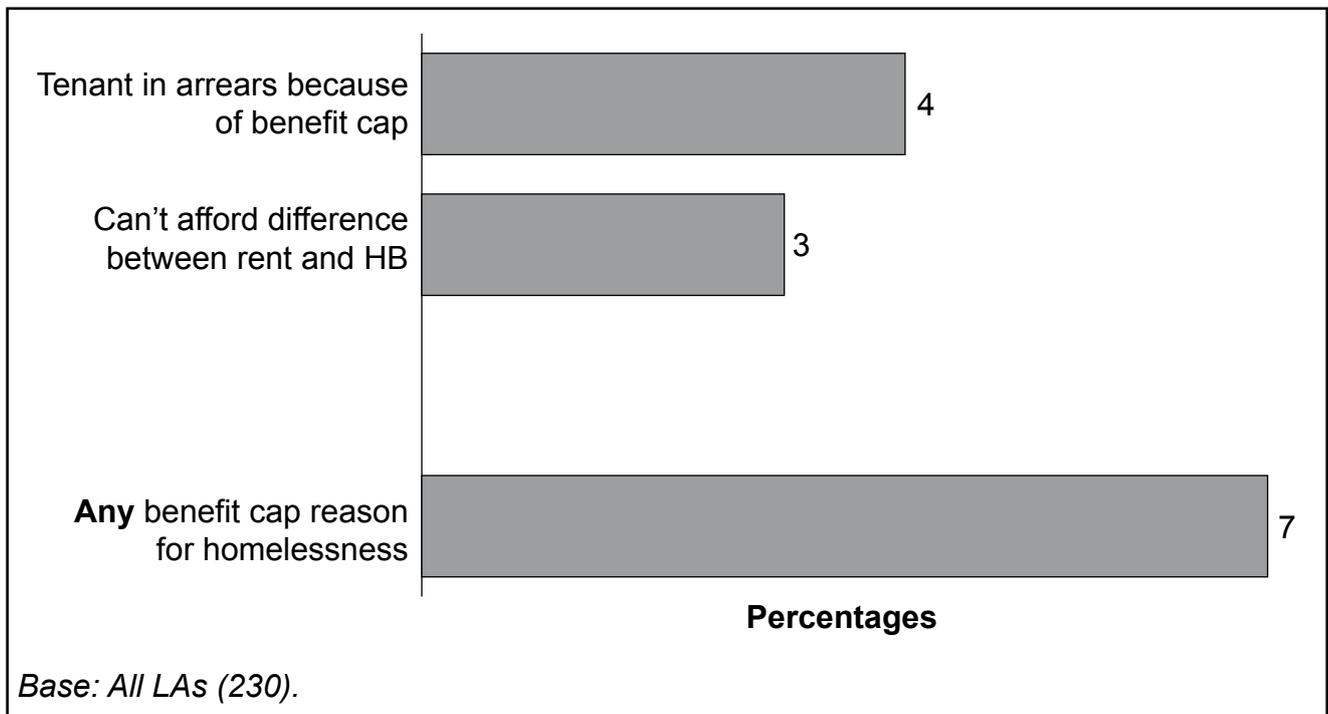
London Boroughs were more likely to have said that in their LA, tenants in rent arrears because of changes to LHA, was a main reason for homelessness acceptances (32 per cent in London Boroughs compared to for example five per cent in Scottish LAs and 14 per cent of English Districts).

Figure 6.11 Main reasons for homelessness acceptances (RSRS)



RSRS was given as a main reason for homelessness acceptance by nine per cent of LAs, rising to 15 per cent among English Unitary authorities.

Figure 6.12 Main reasons for homelessness acceptances (benefit cap)



The benefit cap was given as a main reason for homelessness acceptance by seven per cent of LAs, rising to 14 per cent among London Boroughs.

Table 6.2 Thinking of all the claimants placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty roughly what proportion were from each of the following household types?

	Single, under 35 (%)	Single, 35+ (%)	Couple (%)	Couple with children (%)	Single parent with children (%)
None	50	51	55	53	50
Under 1-9%	2	1	4	*	–
10-24%	6	8	8	7	5
25-49%	7	6	*	6	7
50-74%	2	1	–	*	4
75-99%	*	–	–	–	*
100%	*	*	–	1	–
Don't know	32	32	32	32	32
Any	18	17	13	15	18

Base: All LAs (230).

Approximately half (46 per cent) of LAs said that they did not place claimants out of borough in order to discharge a homeless duty.

Where claimants were placed out of borough, the differences by household type on the table above show that single people were more likely to be placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty than were couples.

The household types most likely to be placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty were single, under 35 and single parent with children, 18 per cent of both types were placed out of borough. Households that were made up of a single person aged 35+ were also more likely to be placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty (17 per cent) than were couples (13 per cent) or couples with children (15 per cent).

Analysis by LA type shows that English Districts were more likely to have placed all the households asked about out of borough. For example, 25 per cent of English Districts had placed single, under 35-year-old households out of borough compared to just five per cent of LAs in Scotland.

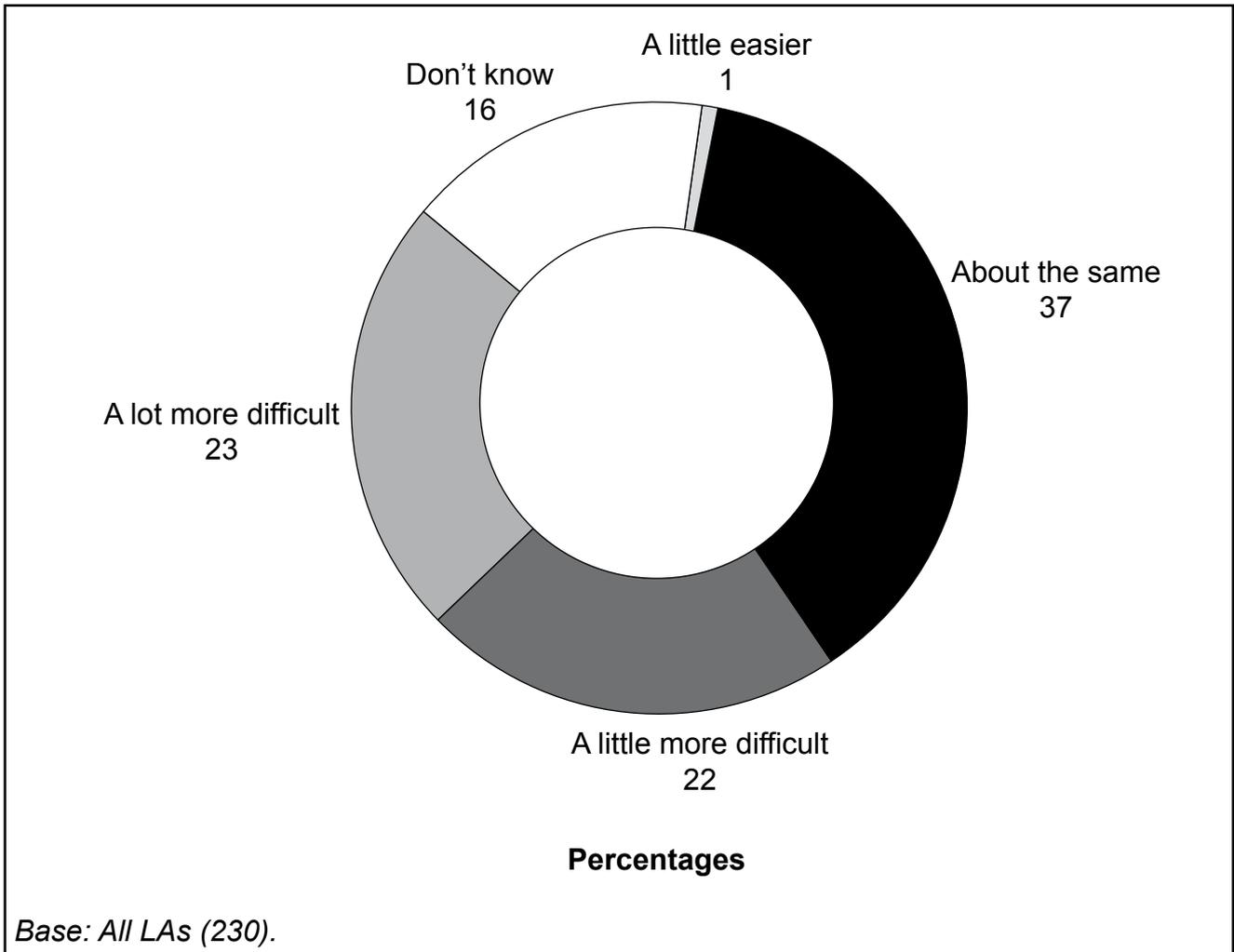
Table 6.3 Please provide a rough breakdown to indicate proportions for how far claimants have been placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty.

	Neighbouring LA (%)	Same region (but not neighbouring LA) (%)	Further afield (%)	Have not placed claimants out of borough (%)
None	45	54	60	19
Under 1-9%	*	1	1	–
10-24%	2	3	2	–
25-49%	2	3	1	1
50-74%	2	*	*	2
75-99%	3	–	–	–
100%	10	2	–	43
Don't know	35	35	35	35
Any	20	11	5	46

Where claimants had been placed out of the borough to discharge a homeless duty, the most usual location was a neighbouring LA (20 per cent), with one in ten (10 per cent) of LAs stating that 100 per cent of claimants had been placed in a neighbouring LA in order to discharge a homelessness duty. Approximately one in ten (11 per cent) of LAs said at least some of claimants in this category had been placed in the same region (but not neighbouring LA) and then further afield (beyond the same region) was mentioned as a location to discharge a homeless duty by one in 20 LAs (five per cent).

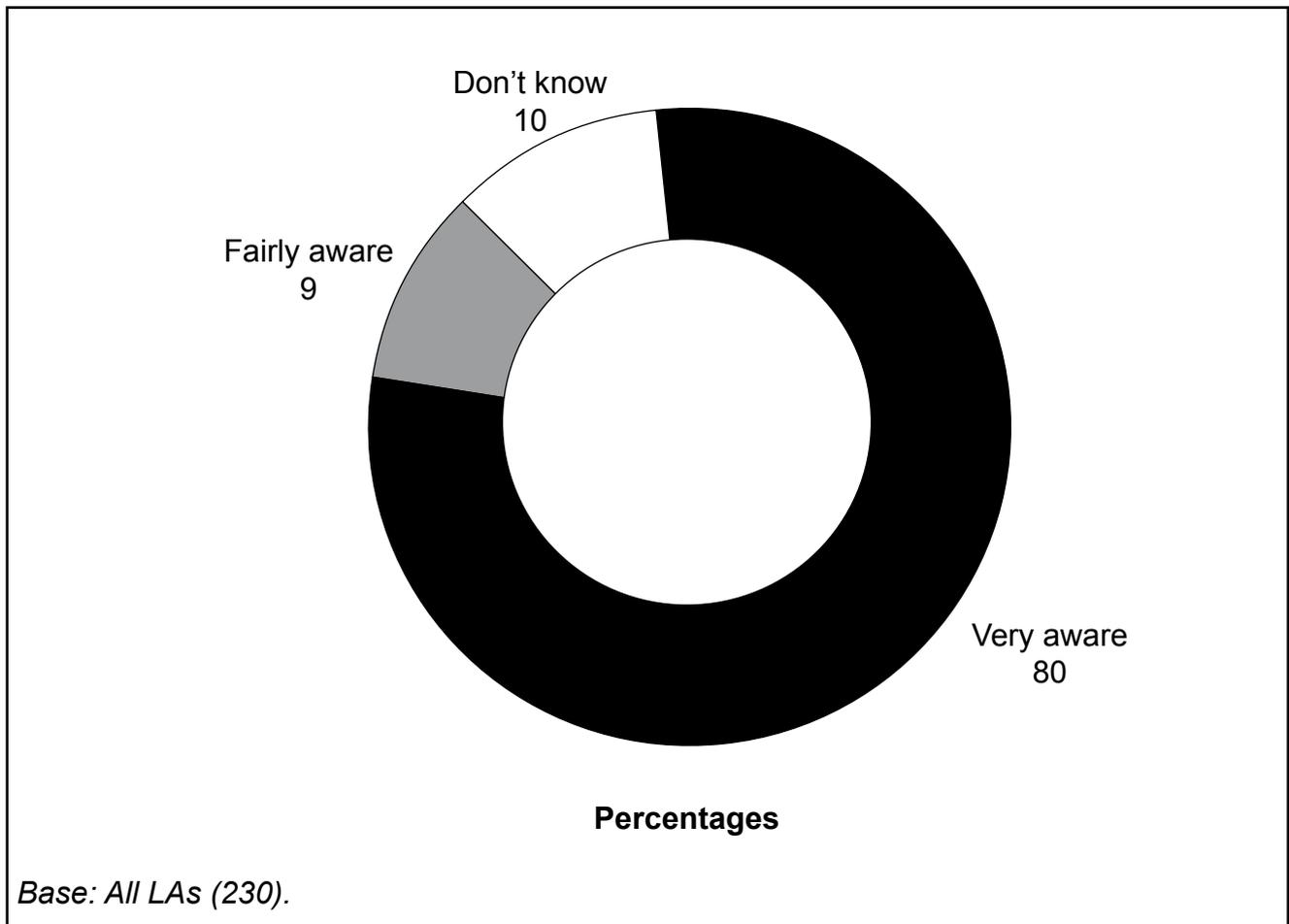
There were a substantial number of LAs (46 per cent) stating that they did not place claimants out of borough to discharge a homeless duty; 43 per cent of LAs responded 100 per cent when asked how many claimants had not been placed outside the borough. To clarify, this means that 46 per cent of LAs had incidences of when they had not placed claimants out of borough and for 43 per cent of LAs this was their usual course of action. The levels of LAs stating that they did not place out of borough were highest in the following regions: Scotland (58 per cent) and the East Midlands (55 per cent).

Figure 6.13 In the last 12 months, would you say that your LA has found it easier or more difficult to source Temporary Accommodation, or has it been about the same?



Very few LAs (just one per cent) said they had found it easier in the last 12 months to source temporary accommodation. Among the 45 per cent of LAs that said they were finding it more difficult (22 per cent a little more difficult, 23 per cent a lot more difficult) there were significantly greater concentrations among London Boroughs (82 per cent said it was more difficult, either a lot or a little) and LAs in the South East region (71 per cent).

Figure 6.14 In general terms, how aware is your LA of homeless hostels in your area?



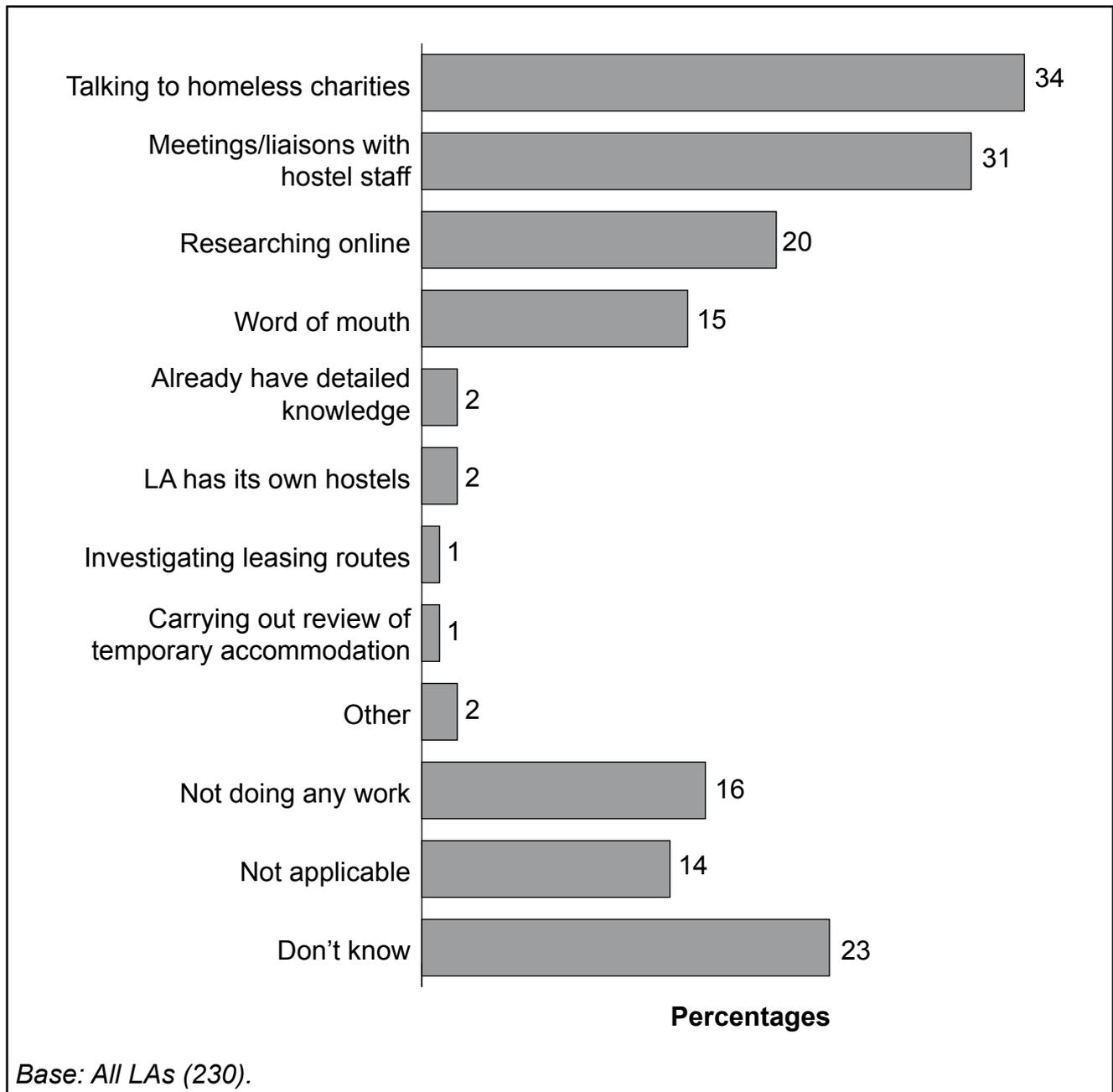
Four in five (80 per cent) LAs said they were very aware, in general terms, of homeless hostels in their area and a further nine per cent said they were fairly aware. English Metropolitan authorities (100 per cent said they were either very or fairly aware) appear to have significantly higher levels of awareness of homeless hostels in their areas than other LA types (for example, 83 per cent of Welsh LAs said they were either very or fairly aware).

Has your LA opened any of its own homeless hostels?

- 22% of LAs have opened their own homeless hostels
 - 7% plan to open their own
 - 71% have no such plans
- Base: All LAs (230)

Almost three in ten (29 per cent) of LAs have either opened their own homeless hostels already (22 per cent) or were planning to (seven per cent) LAs in Scotland (37 per cent) and London (32 per cent) were more likely to have said they have already opened their own hostels.

Figure 6.15 What work is your LA doing, if any, to find out more about homeless hostels?



Around a third (34 per cent) of LAs said they were doing more work to find out about homeless hostels by talking to homeless charities. There were greater levels of LAs engaged in this kind of work in the following regions: the South East (52 per cent), the West Midlands (50 per cent) and London (45 per cent).

Around three in ten (31 per cent) of authorities said they were having meetings/liason with hostel staff and there were greater levels of LAs actively doing this kind of work in the following regions: the West Midlands (50 per cent), the South East (48 per cent), the East of England (45 per cent), and Yorkshire and Humberside (42 per cent).

Why is your LA not doing anything to find out more about homeless hostels?

- 17 LAs said sufficient resources available/already have our own hostel/
we have enough supply/no demand
- 8 LAs said they were already aware
- 5 LAs said alternative solution are being explored
- 3 LAs said there are none and none are planned

Base: All LAs who said they were not doing any work to find out more about homeless hostels (37)

Among the 16 per cent (37 LAs) that said they were not doing anything to find out more about homeless hostels the reasons for not doing so were problems with finding sufficient resources available (17 LAs mentioned this), eight LAs said they were already aware and six LAs said alternative solutions were being explored.

7 Shared Accommodation Rate

7.1 Introduction and summary

From January 2012 the age threshold for the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) increased from 25 to 35. This section reports on findings about the broader impacts of the SAR, specifically on the two exemptions introduced for the 25 to 34 age-group; former homeless claimants receiving support to resettle them into the community and those ex-offenders subject to MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements).

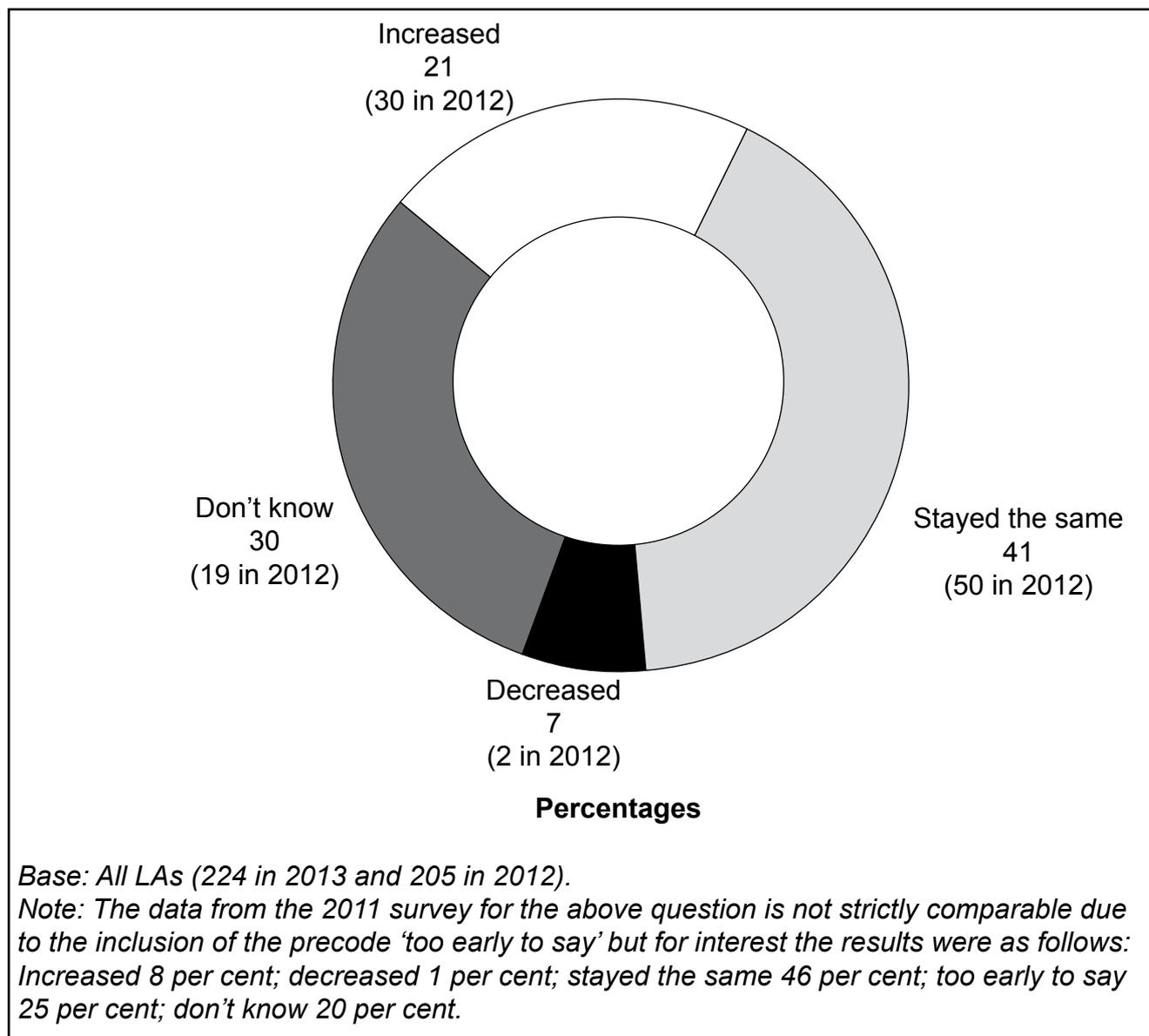
The key findings based on all local authorities (LAs) answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- Approximately one in five (21 per cent) LAs said the incidence of landlords letting properties which were previously let to families, or as self-contained accommodation as shared housing/House in Occupation (HMO), had increased.
- Amongst those LAs that could provide an answer, the mean proportion of claimants who could apply for homeless hostel exemptions that were successful was 64 per cent.
- When asked for the most important reason for claimants being rejected from homeless hostel exemptions, around a quarter (26 per cent) of LAs responded that there were no hostels in the area, 22 per cent said it was because there was not enough evidence provided by the claimant.
- Around two in five (42 per cent) of LAs said they verified a claim for an exemption by getting written confirmation from the hostel.
- Approximately three in five (61 per cent) of LAs could not answer how many MAPPA exemptions their LA currently has. One in five (20 per cent) said none and the average number held among all LAs was between one and two (mean average 1.74).
- One in five (20 per cent) said identification of MAPPA was easy, 11 per cent said it was difficult, 16 per cent said it was neither.

7.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

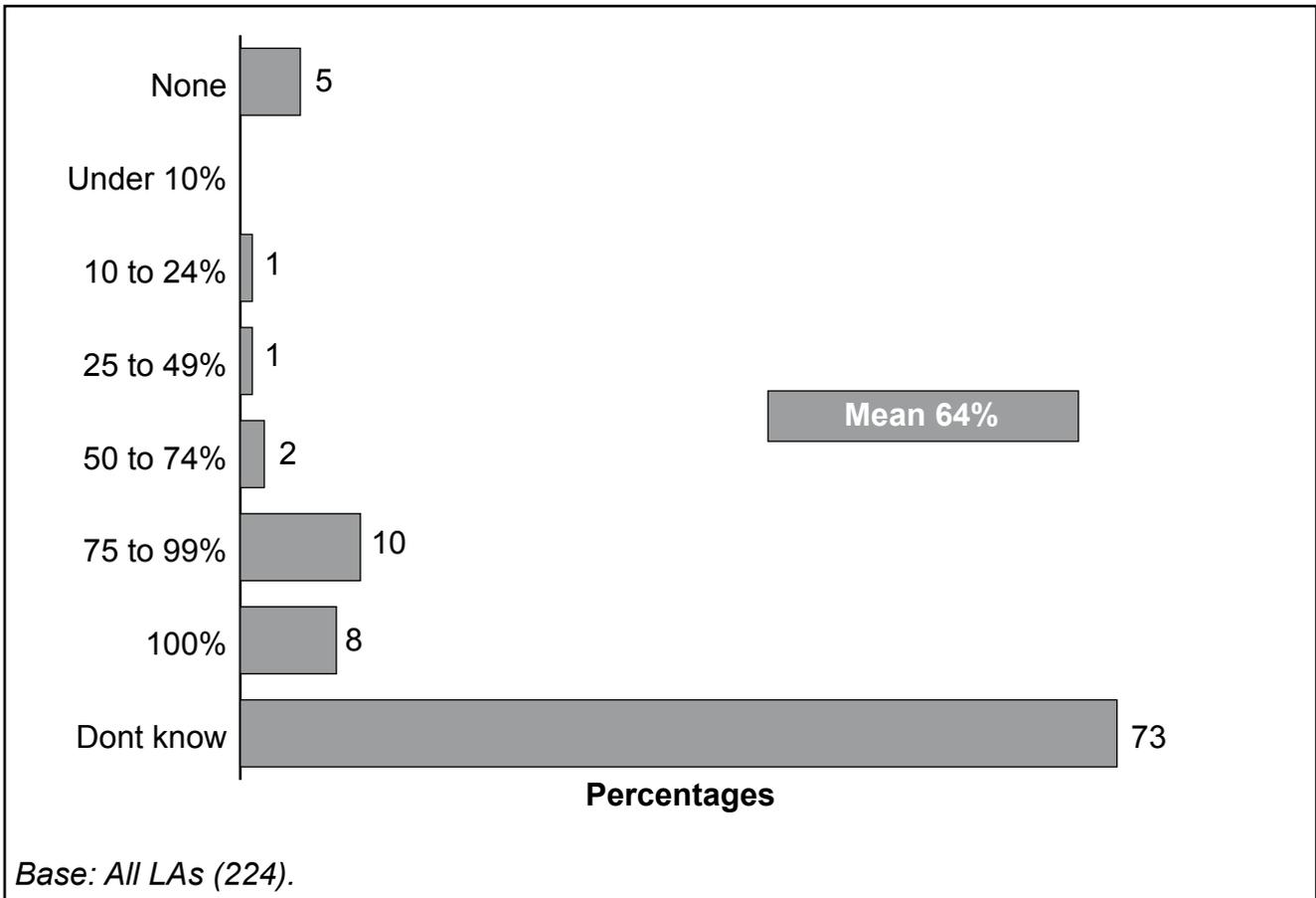
Figure 7.1 Would you say that in the last 12 months the number of landlords in your area who are letting properties as shared housing/House in Occupation (HMO) that were previously let to families or as self-contained accommodation has increased, decreased (a lot or a little) or stayed the same



Approximately one in five (21 per cent) LAs said the incidence of landlords letting properties which were previously let to families, or as self-contained accommodation as shared housing/HMO, had increased. This represents a decrease from the previous year's results where 30 per cent of LAs indicated that the number of HMOs had increased. These figures can potentially be attributed to the 2012 changes to the SAR. Around two in five (41 per cent) said it had stayed the same (in comparison to 50 per cent, last year); just seven per cent said it had decreased but three in ten (30 per cent) said don't know.

The levels of LAs that said the number of landlords in their area engaged in letting of this nature was higher amongst English Metropolitan authorities (43 per cent increased at all) and London Boroughs (36 per cent increased at all).

Figure 7.2 Roughly what proportion of claimants who apply for homeless hostel exemptions are successful?



From January 2012, the age threshold for the SAR increased from 25 to 35. One of the exemptions to SAR is for former residents of specialist hostels for homeless people (the other exemption specific to the 25-35 age group being ex-offenders who were subject to active MAPPA).

Although LAs are required to record exemptions on their system, almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of LAs could not give the proportion of claimants who successfully apply for homeless hostel exemptions, this was also despite the question wording stating clearly that their answer could be based on their general perception if the LA did not keep records of this information.

Amongst those LAs that could provide an answer, the mean proportion recorded was 64 per cent.

What are the main reasons for claimants being rejected from homeless hostel exemptions?

- 17% Not enough evidence provided by claimant
- 15% Hostel does not qualify
- 13% Claimant did not stay for the required duration
- 13% No hostels in the area
- 6% Person making claim not accepting support to enable them to be rehabilitated or resettled
- 2% Hostel can't be identified
- 54% Don't know

Base: All LAs that have less than 100 per cent successful applicants for homeless hostel exemption (207)

The main reasons LAs gave for claimants not qualifying for homeless hostel exemptions were because there was not enough evidence provided by the claimant (17 per cent) and the hostel does not qualify (15 per cent).

There were significant differences by LA type. English Metropolitan authorities (37 per cent) and LAs in the North East (43 per cent) were more likely to have said the reason was not enough evidence provided by claimant. English Districts were more likely to have said it was because there were no hostels in the area (21 per cent) as were Scottish LAs (18 per cent).

What is the most important reason for claimants being rejected from homeless hostel exemptions?

- 26% No hostels in the area
- 22% Not enough evidence provided by claimant
- 21% Hostel does not qualify
- 9% Claimant did not stay for the required duration
- 8% Person making claim not accepting support to enable them to be rehabilitated or resettled

Base: All LAs that have less than 100 per cent successful applicants for homeless hostel exemption and gave reasons for rejections (96)

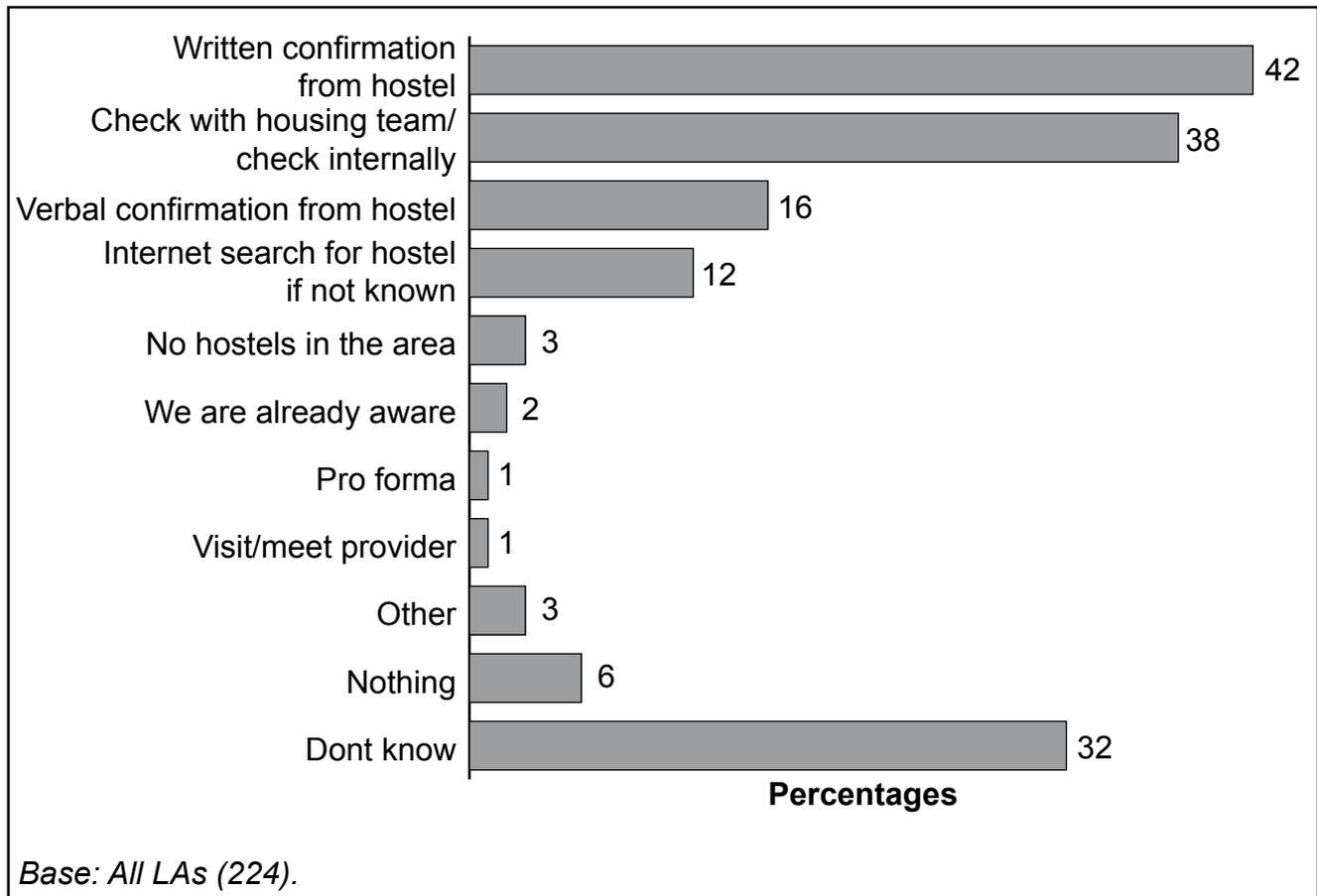
All responses mentioned by at least 5 per cent shown, please refer to the tabulated data for responses mentioned by less than 5 per cent

When asked for the most important reason for claimants being rejected from homeless hostel exemptions, around a quarter (26 per cent) of LAs responded that there were no hostels in the area, 22 per cent said it was because there was not enough evidence provided by the claimant (this rose to 45 per cent among English Metropolitan authorities). One in five

(21 per cent) said the hostel did not qualify and there were significantly more LAs in the West Midlands (44 per cent) stating this, more English Unitary authorities stating this (42 per cent), and more LAs with high caseloads (36 per cent).

Nine per cent said the claimant did not stay for the required duration and eight per cent said the claimant did not accept the support required to enable them to be rehabilitated or resettled.

Figure 7.3 What does your LA do to verify a claim for an exemption?⁹

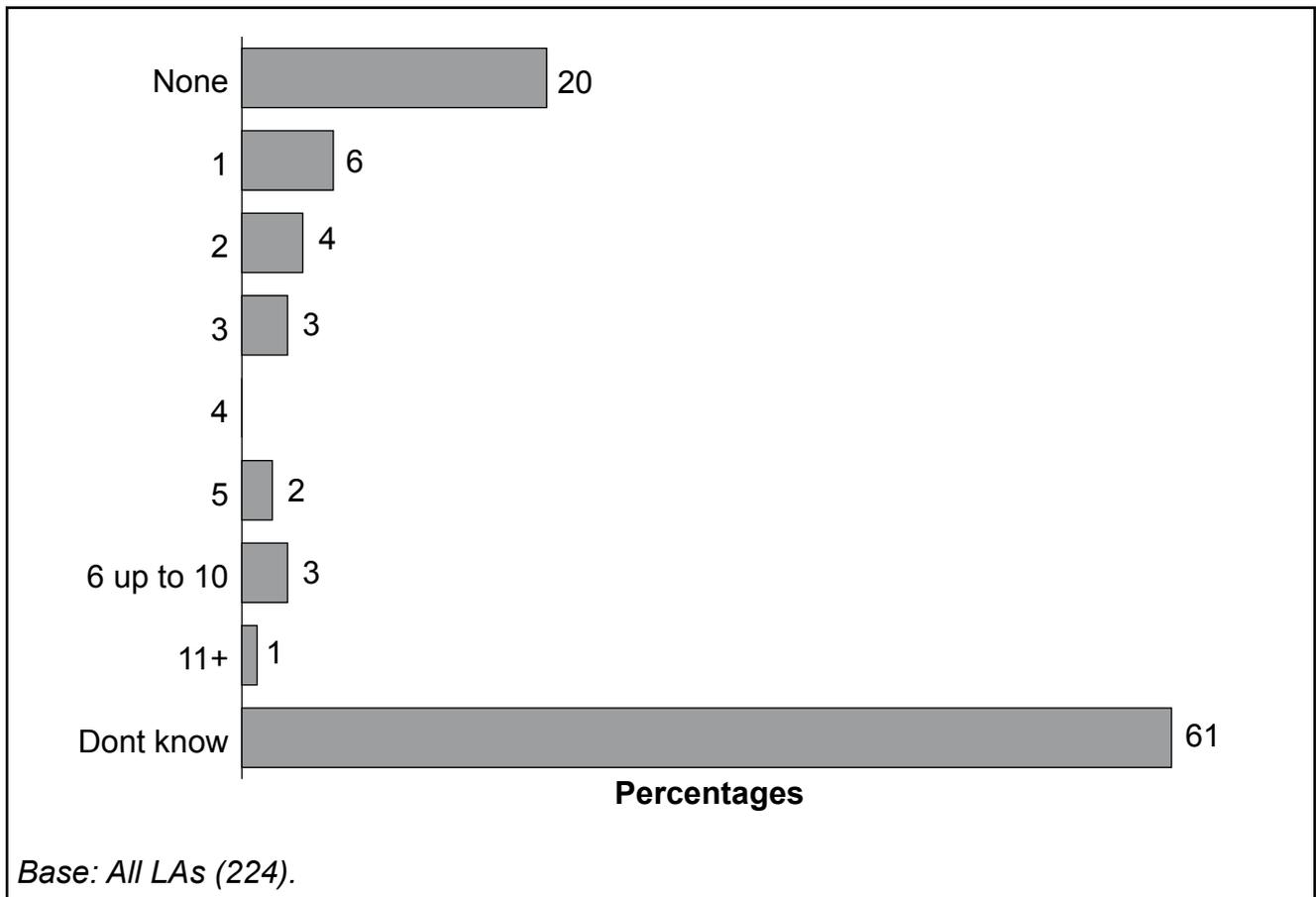


Overall, approximately three in five (58 per cent) of LAs carry out some form of verification for exemptions. Around two in five (42 per cent) of LAs said they verified a claim for an exemption by getting written confirmation from the hostel and there were higher levels of English Metropolitan authorities (67 per cent) and London Boroughs (59 per cent) reporting this. Sixteen per cent of all LAs said that verbal confirmation from the hostel was sufficient, with higher proportions of LAs stating this among English Metropolitan authorities (38 per cent) and London Boroughs (27 per cent).

Almost Two in five (38 per cent) said they verified by checking with the Housing team or checking internally. Twelve per cent said they verified by conducting an internet search for the hostel if it was not known to the LA.

⁹ LAs were asked to tick all that apply.

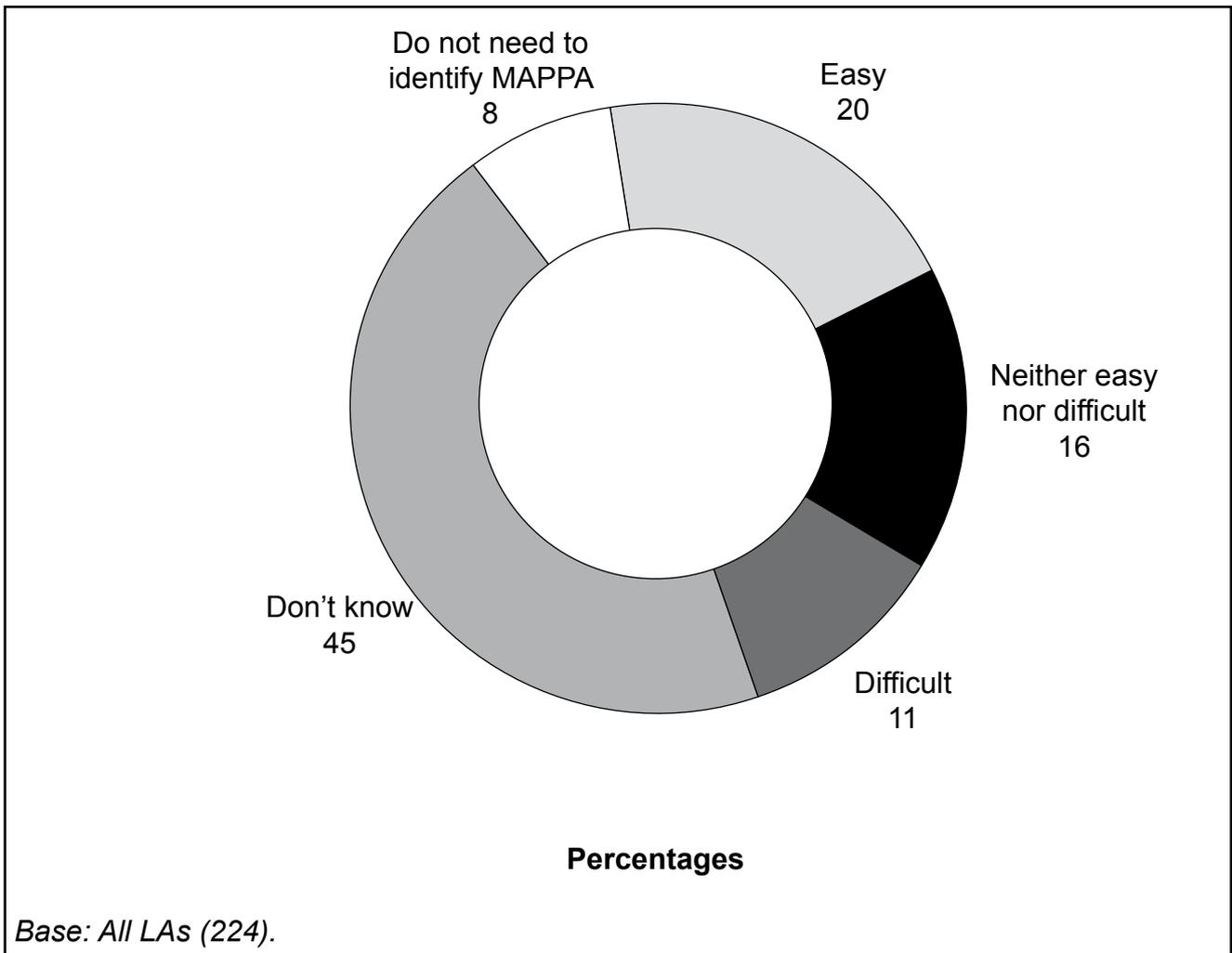
Figure 7.4 Roughly how many MAPPA exemptions does your LA currently have?



Around three in five (61 per cent) of LAs could not answer how many MAPPA exemptions their LA currently has.

One in five (20 per cent) said none and the average number held among all LAs was between one and two (mean average 1.74). The average number held was higher among English Metropolitan authorities (4.00) and London Boroughs (4.40) than among English Districts (0.87). Somewhat unsurprisingly it was also higher among LAs with high caseloads (3.76) than among LAs with low (0.78) and medium caseloads (1.12).

Figure 7.5 How easy or difficult is your LA finding the process of identifying MAPPA?



A significant proportion (45 per cent) could not answer the question about how easy or difficult it was for their LA to identify MAPPA and a further eight per cent said they did not need to identify MAPPA. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that, in theory, LAs do not identify those who qualify for an exemption – rather this is done by a relevant lead agency, who processes this and sends to the LA.

One in five (20 per cent) said identification was easy, 11 per cent said it was difficult, 16 per cent said it was neither. Higher levels of LAs that said identification was easy were recorded among Scottish LAs (44 per cent), and English Metropolitan LAs (29 per cent) compared to English Districts (12 per cent).

Why is your LA finding the process of identifying MAPPA difficult?

- Checking verification and confirmation of MAPPA categorisation (6 mentions)
- Have very few/not involved enough (6 mentions)
- Uncertain where.who to contact (5 mentions)

Base: All LAs that said the process of identifying MAPPA was difficult (25)

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Of the twenty-five LAs that found identification difficult, six LAs said it was due to checking verification and confirmation of MAPPA categorisation, six said it was because they have very few and were not really involved enough, five said they were uncertain where/who to contact and two said people were not aware. There were ten LAs who mentioned other reasons.

8 Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

8.1 Introduction and summary

The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) was brought into effect on 1 April 2013 for working age social tenants renting from a local authority (LA), a Housing Association or other registered social landlords (RSLs). Defined criteria restrict the size of accommodation a claimant can receive Housing Benefit (HB) for, based on their household size. If a claimant is assessed as having more bedrooms than is necessary for their household they will be considered to be under-occupying that property and there will be a reduction in their HB. The following section asks about the impact of this change from the period when the changes were brought into effect through to the time of this survey, October to December 2013.

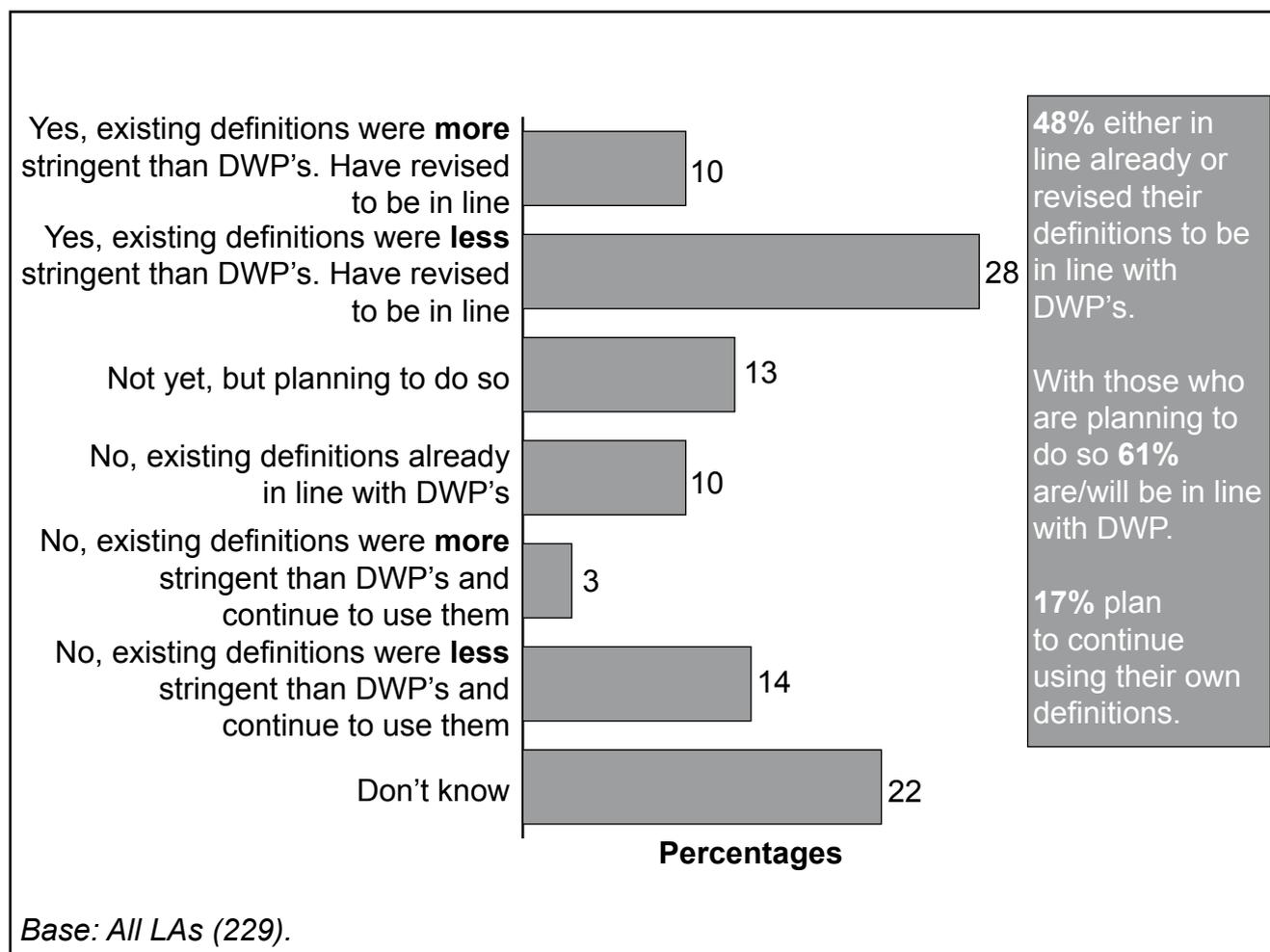
The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- Almost two in five (38 per cent) LAs have revised their allocation policy to bring definitions of the size of property applicants require to be in line with the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) size criteria, and a further 13 per cent plan to do so. Ten per cent were already in line.
- The main types of communication LAs said they had with claimants who were affected by the RSRS were letters (96 per cent), responses to claimants' queries (92 per cent), advice from Housing Officers/RSLs (91 per cent) and information on the website (86 per cent).
- There were greater numbers of LAs (64 per cent) who said the number affected by RSRS had decreased since April 2013 compared to the proportion of LAs that said the number affected by RSRS had increased (13 per cent).
- When LAs that said the numbers affected by RSRS had decreased since April 2013 were asked to state all the reasons for that decrease, the most frequently mentioned included downsizing (77 per cent), household change (68 per cent) and identifying exempt households (67 per cent).
- Around three-quarters (76 per cent) of LAs had housing stock. Among LAs that held housing stock, approximately a third (34 per cent) of LAs showed a positive intent or action towards building smaller houses or converting existing units; nine per cent had already started this and 25 per cent said that although they had not started this yet, they planned to.
- Of LAs that held housing stock, the most common reason for why they did not have plans to build or convert was that the LA did not have housing stock that could be converted (39 per cent).
- Among the 34 per cent of LAs that said they had learned lessons about the implementation of RSRS that they would like to tell DWP about, one in ten (ten per cent) said insufficient (smaller) properties/excess of three bedroom properties; four per cent mentioned the definition of 'bedroom' required to cover all scenarios.

8.2 Main findings

The main findings are detailed below along with charts for all questions and commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 8.1 Has your LA reformed its allocation policy in order to bring definitions of the size of property applicants require in line with the DWP’s size criteria?



Almost two in five (38 per cent) of LAs have revised their allocation policy to bring definitions of the size of property applicants require to be in line with DWP's size criteria. Of this group one in ten (ten per cent) said their definitions were more stringent than DWP's and this was higher among Welsh LAs (25 per cent) and also English Unitary authorities (13 per cent). Among all LAs, 28 per cent said their definitions were less stringent than DWP's but have been revised to be in line and there were greater numbers of LAs that said this among English Districts (34 per cent) and London Boroughs (38 per cent).

A further 13 per cent of all LAs were planning to revise their policy to be in line with DWP's and ten per cent were in line already which showed that around three in five (61 per cent) LAs were either already in line with or planned to be in line with DWP.

Seventeen per cent said they would continue to use their own definitions; three per cent said their definitions were more stringent than DWP's and fourteen per cent of LAs in said their definitions were less stringent than DWP's. The types of authorities that were more likely to

have said their definitions were less stringent and they would continue to use them were: Scottish authorities (47 per cent) and English Metropolitan authorities (24 per cent).

Table 8.1 What type of communication has your LA had with a) claimants who are affected by the RSRS, b) claimants not currently affected but might be in the future, c) claimants not currently affected but who might be worrying that they are?

	Claimants who were affected by the RSRS (%)	Claimants not currently affected but might be in future (%)	Claimants not currently affected but who might be worrying that they are (%)
Letter	96	24	20
Responding to claimants' queries	92	63	67
Advice from Housing Officers/RSLs	91	57	55
Information on the website	86	76	75
Liaison with CAB	68	36	34
Meeting/visit	60	12	13
Joint communication from LA and landlords	59	30	28
Telephone call	54	13	17
Leaflets available at LA	53	45	43
Advice team	3	1	–
Newsletter	2	3	3
Flyer with notification letter	2	2	2
Not issued any communication	–	8	8

Base: All LAs (229).

The main types of communication LAs said they had with claimants who were affected by the RSRS were letters (96 per cent), responses to claimants' queries (92 per cent), advice from Housing Officers/RSLs (91 per cent) and information on the website (86 per cent). Claimants who were affected by RSRS were also receiving the following types of communication more frequently than were other kinds of claimants: liaison with Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) (68 per cent); meeting/visit (60 per cent); joint communication from LA and landlords (59 per cent); and telephone call (54 per cent).

For claimants affected by the RSRS, LAs with high caseloads were more likely to have said they were engaged in interactive communications than were LAs with low caseloads. LAs with high caseloads were more likely to have said they had significantly higher proportions of the following types of communication with claimants who were affected by the RSRS; 97 per cent of high caseload LAs said responding to claimants' queries; 72 per cent mentioned meeting/visit; 69 per cent said joint communication from LA and landlords; 62 per cent mentioned telephone calls.

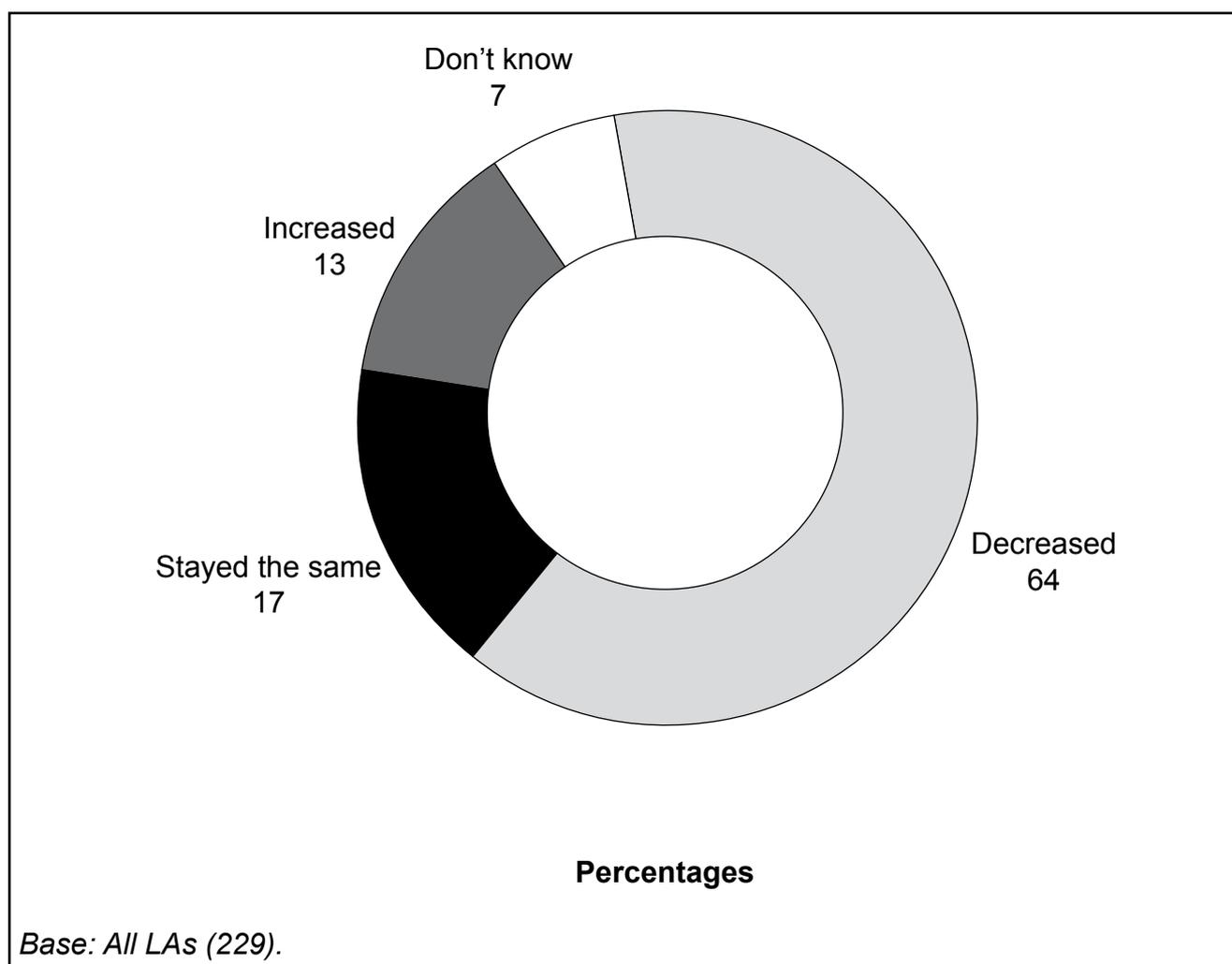
For those claimants that were not currently affected by RSRS but might be in the future, communication was less likely to be by letter (24 per cent). Communication on this issue for this group of claimants most frequently took the form of information made available on

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the website (76 per cent), responding to claimants' queries (63 per cent) and advice from Housing Officers/RSLs (57 per cent).

For those claimants that were not currently affected by RSRS but who were worrying that they might be, again the communication was less likely to be by letter (20 per cent). Communication on the RSRS issue for this group of claimants most frequently took the form of information made available on the website (75 per cent), responding to claimants' queries (67 per cent) and advice from Housing Officers/RSLs (55 per cent).

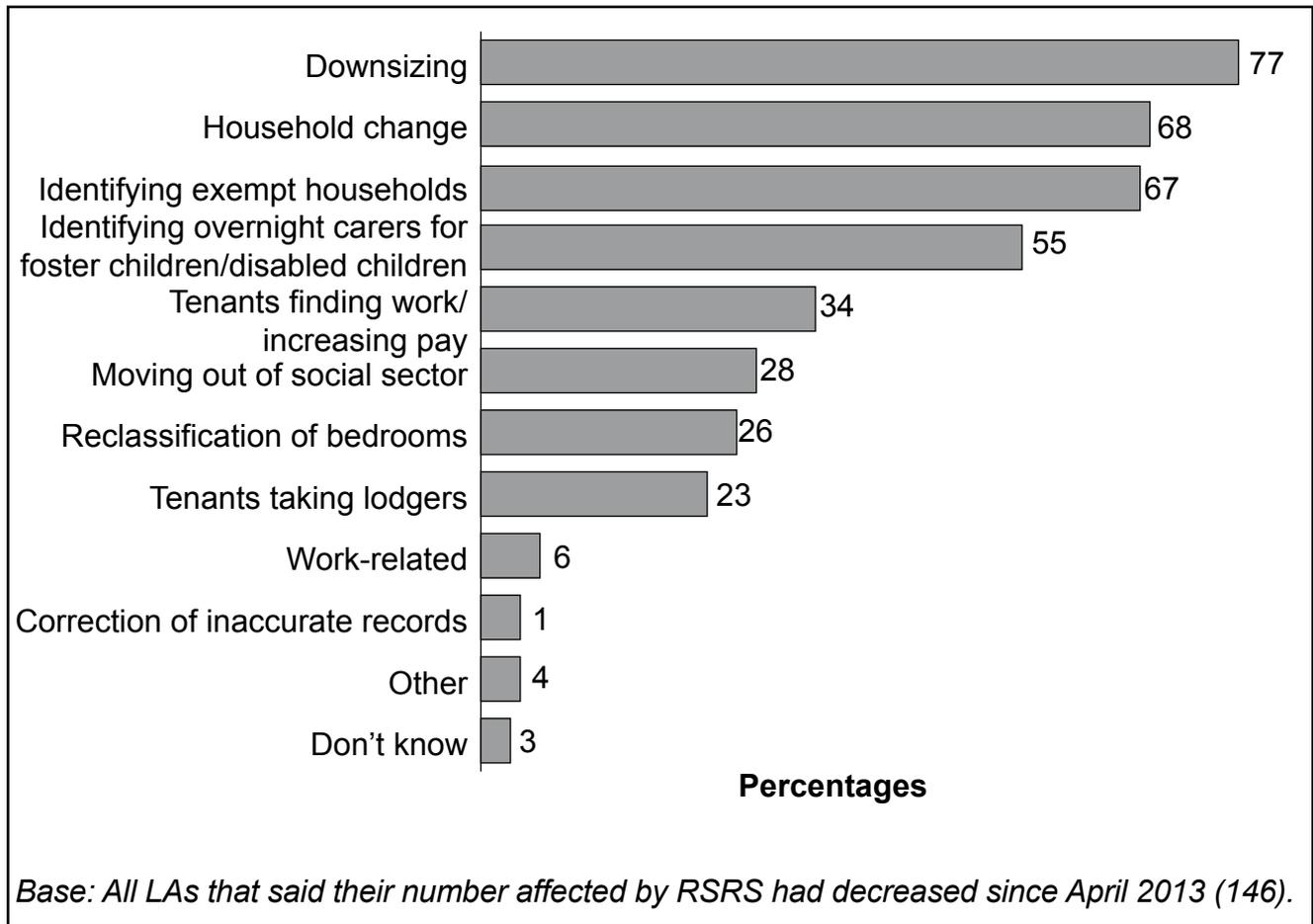
Figure 8.2 Has the number affected by RSRS increased, decreased or stayed the same since April 2013?



There were greater numbers of LAs (64 per cent) that said the number affected by RSRS had decreased since April 2013 compared to the proportion of LAs that said the number affected by RSRS had increased (13 per cent).

The level of LAs that said the numbers affected by RSRS had decreased since April 2013 was significantly higher among LAs with high caseloads (72 per cent) compared to those with low caseloads (55 per cent). English Unitary authorities were more likely to have said this level had decreased (80 per cent) as were English Metropolitan authorities (76 per cent).

Figure 8.3 Why has this change occurred? Please tick all that apply¹⁰

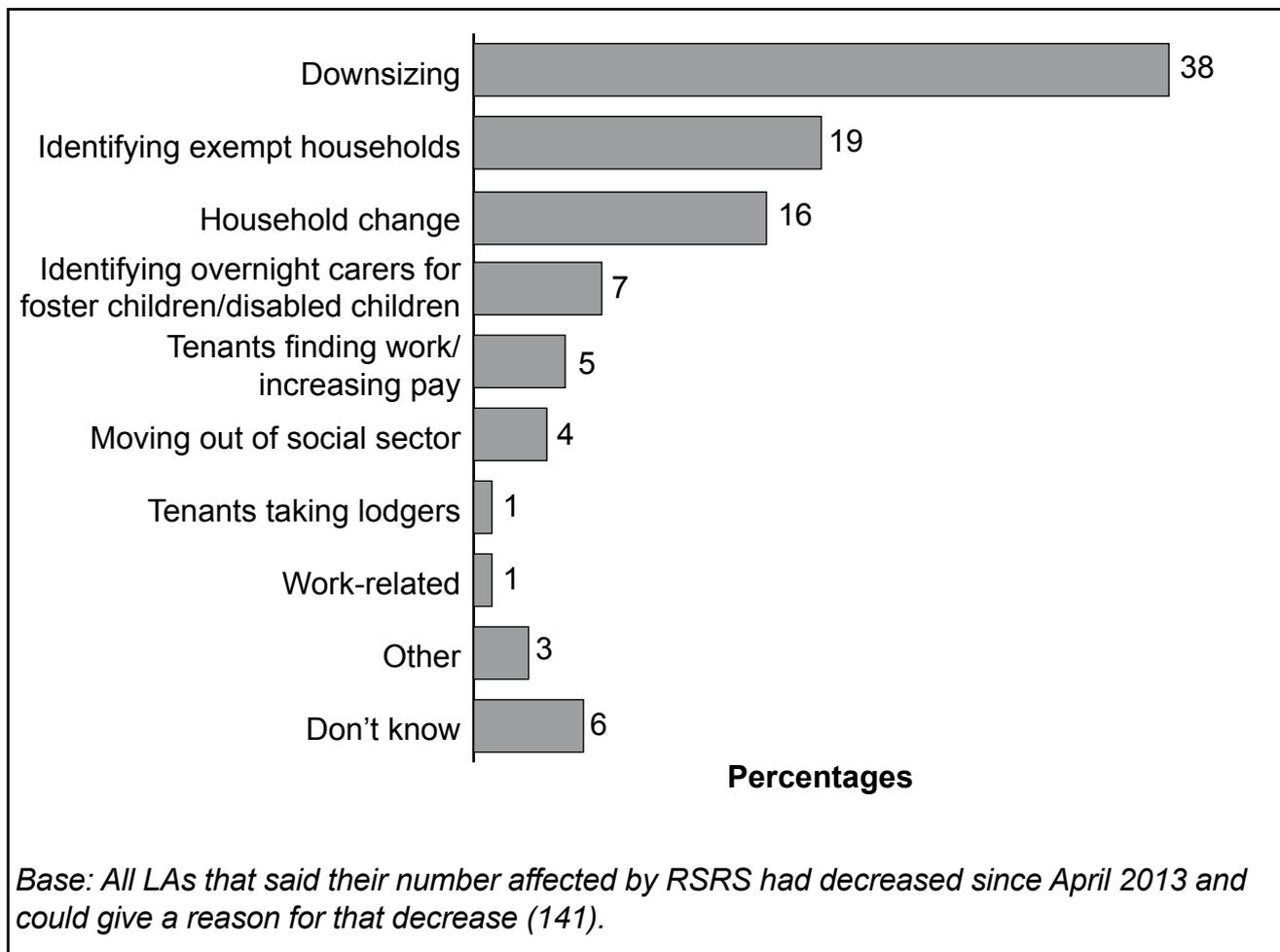


When LAs that said the numbers affected by RSRS had decreased since April 2013 were asked to state all the reasons for that decrease, the most frequently mentioned included downsizing (77 per cent), household change (68 per cent) and identifying exempt households (67 per cent).

There were significant differences by local authority type. English Metropolitan authorities were more likely to give ‘moving out of the social sector’ as a reason (63 per cent) while London Boroughs were more likely to give downsizing as a reason (92 per cent).

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, the only households which are exempt are those where the claimant or partner is under State Pension Credit age. However, in reality it is likely that many LAs will have interpreted this more widely to include households where an additional room is allowed, for example, foster carers, adult children in armed forces who normally live there but are away on operations, disabled child who cannot share. There could potentially be some overlap with the ‘overnight carers for claimant or parent’.

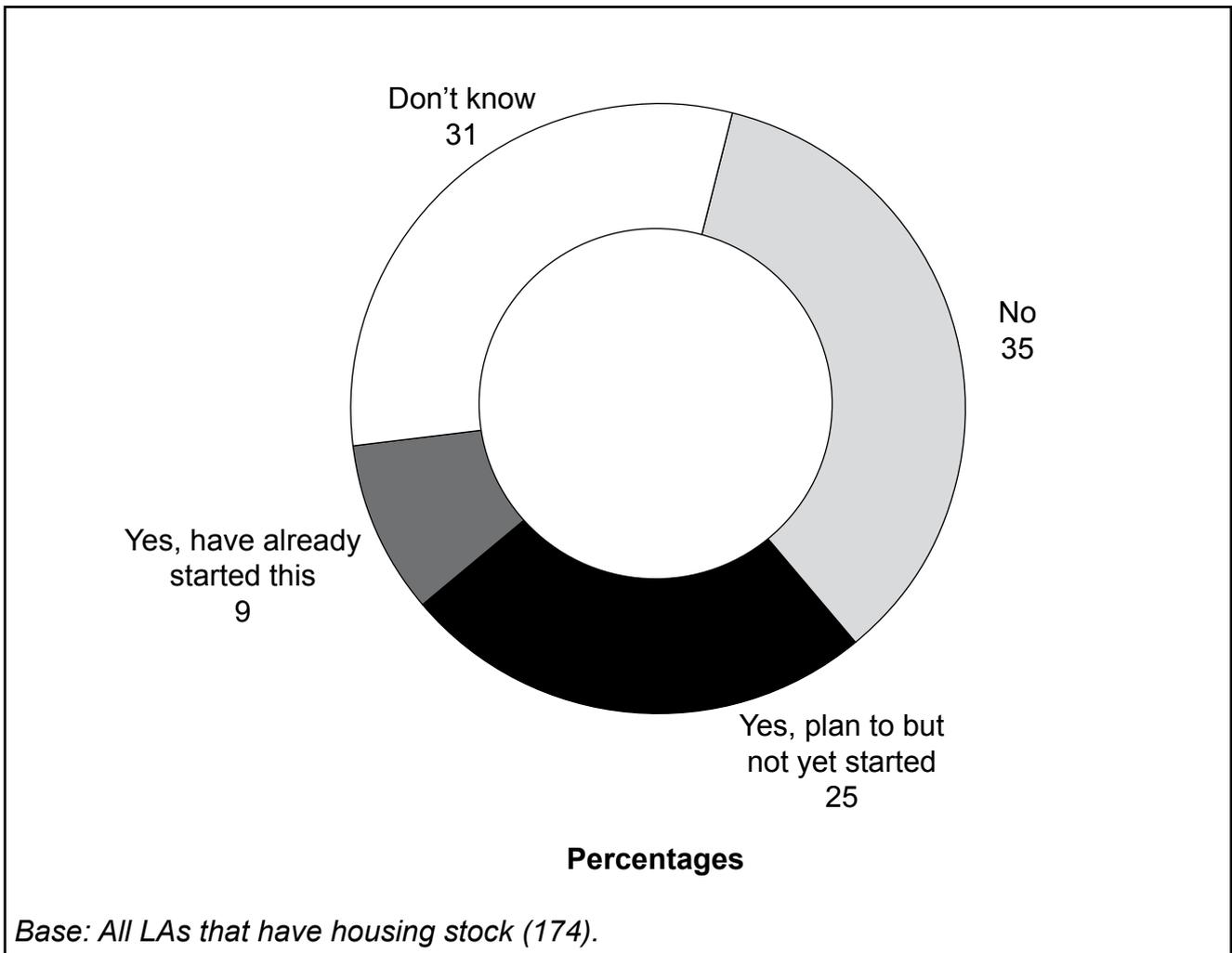
Figure 8.4 Why has this change occurred? Please indicate which is the *most significant reason*



When the 141 LAs that said the numbers affected by RSRs had decreased since April 2013 were asked to state the most significant reason for that decrease, almost two in five (38 per cent) said it was due to downsizing, almost one in five (19 per cent) said the main reason was identifying exempt households, and 16 per cent said household change. It is also worth noting that ‘reclassification of bedrooms’ was not mentioned by any of the LAs as the most significant reason for the decrease in the numbers affected by RSRs since April 2013.

There were significant differences by LA type. English Unitary Authorities (43 per cent) and English Districts (43 per cent) were more likely to mention downsizing as the most significant reason for the decrease in numbers affected by RSRs, than were London Boroughs (15 per cent). Welsh (33 per cent), London Boroughs (31 per cent) and English Districts (26 per cent) were more likely to mention identifying exempt households as the most significant reason, compared to seven per cent of English Unitary authorities and none of the English Metropolitan authorities.

Figure 8.5 Does your LA have any plans to build smaller houses or convert existing units?



Almost a third (34 per cent) of LAs that held housing stock showed a positive intent or action towards building smaller houses or converting existing units; nine per cent had already started this and approximately a quarter (25 per cent) said that although they had not started this yet, they planned to. The levels of LAs that planned to but were yet to start were highest among LAs in the West Midlands (40 per cent), the South East (41 per cent) and Wales (67 per cent).

Please indicate why you do not have plans to build smaller houses or convert existing units

- 39% have no stock that could be converted
- 23% have no capital
- 7% already have smaller units
- 5% do not require smaller properties
- 3% have not considered this
- 2% liaise directly with developers
- 18% had other reasons

Base: All LAs with housing stock that do not plan to build smaller houses or convert existing units (61)

Amongst the 61 LAs with housing stock that said they do not plan to build smaller houses or convert existing units, the reason given most frequently was that they had no housing stock suitable to convert (39 per cent). This reason was significantly more likely to be stated among LAs in the North West (83 per cent) and LAs in the East of England (58 per cent).

Table 8.2 DWP is keen to learn more about the implementation of RSRS. Have there been any lessons learnt so far about implementation of RSRS that you would like to tell us about?

Lessons learned were wide ranging and included:	Percentages
Insufficient (smaller) properties/excess of three bed properties	10
Definition of 'bedroom' required to cover all scenarios	4
Legislation required concessions to disabled children and adults	3
Confusion of disabled regulations, DWP should have sought advice on this issue	3
Need longer lead time for communication	3
Better planning needed/policies were ill thought out	3
Late/rushed regulation changes were unhelpful	3
Customers are confused	3

Base: All LAs (229).

Around a third (34%) of LAs said they have learnt lessons, 38% said too early to say, 28% had nothing to share on this issue. LAs were asked to share any lessons learned so far about the implementation of RSRS. Almost two in five (38 per cent) said it was too early to say what lessons had been learned, 28 per cent said they had nothing to share. Among the third (34 per cent) of LAs that said they had learned lessons about the implementation of RSRS that they would like to tell DWP about, one in ten (ten per cent) said insufficient (smaller) properties/excess of three bedroom properties; four per cent mentioned the definition of 'bedroom' required to cover all scenarios. A wide range of other responses were mentioned and the full records of these can be viewed in the tabulated data.

9 Supported and supported exempt accommodation

9.1 Introduction and summary

The following section examines supported and supported exempt accommodation, including group homes, hostels or night shelters, refuges, sheltered housing, supported living complexes, extra care housing, adapted housing for the disabled and other types. Housing Benefit (HB) recognises the often higher costs of providing such accommodation in certain circumstances. Following the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) consultation last year on reforming this area of support for housing costs, the Department were seeking to update their data on caseloads and expenditure in this area to inform further development of the reforms.

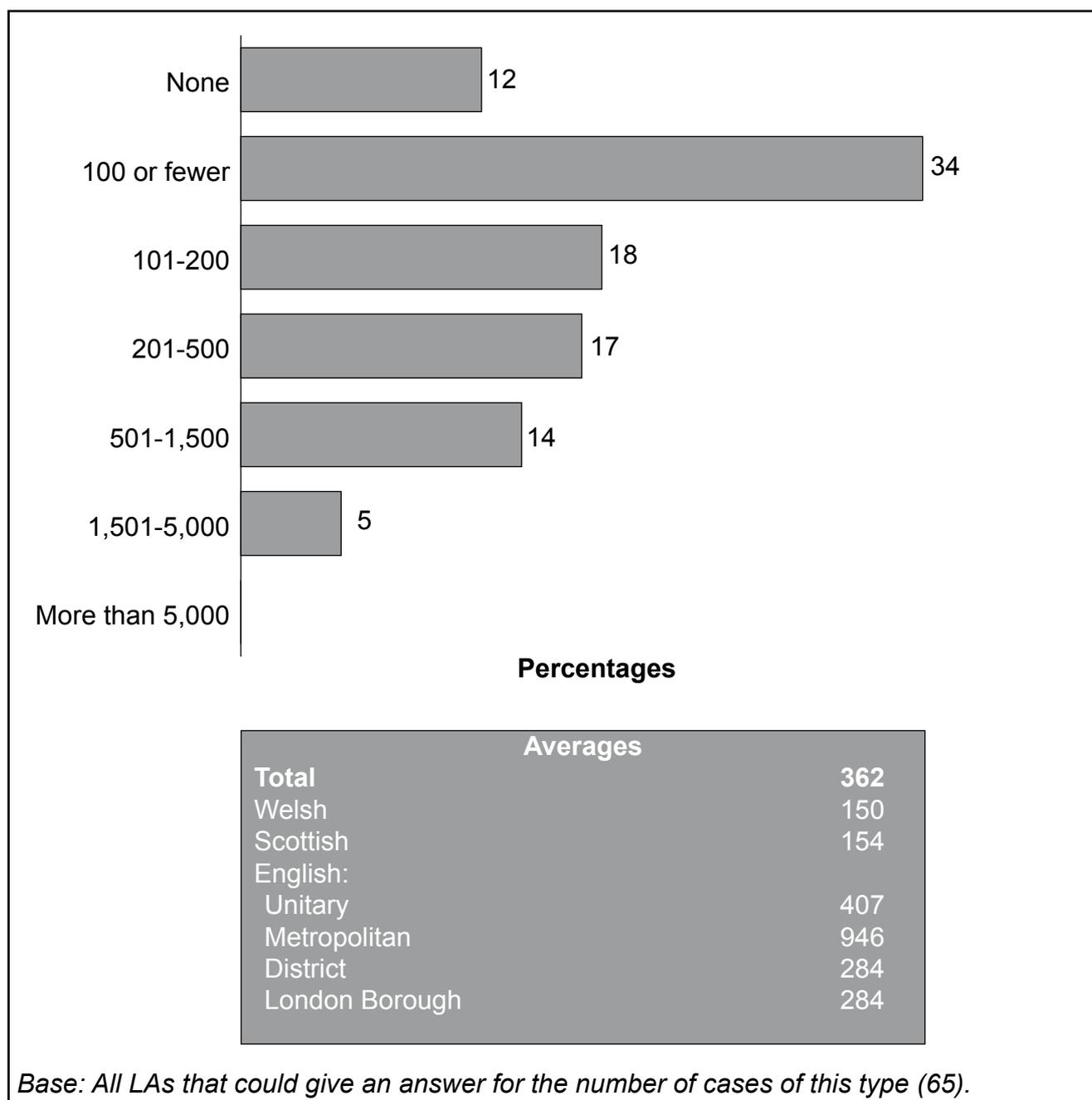
The key findings based on all local authorities (LAs) answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings, which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

- The mean average number of cases LAs currently had in supported accommodation where the landlord is a county council or housing association is 362.
- The mean average number of cases LAs currently had in supported accommodation where the landlord is a registered charity or voluntary organisation is 67.
- The mean average number of cases LAs currently had in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a county council or housing association is 278.
- The mean average number of cases LAs currently had in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a registered charity or voluntary organisation is 110.
- Around two in five LAs (42 per cent) said none of their HB cases in supported exempt accommodation, where the landlord was a county council or housing association were referred to a Rent Officer.
- LAs said that when HB cases in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord was a county council or housing association were not referred to a Rent Officer, the most usual reason, mentioned by three-quarters (75 per cent) was that the LA judged the rent reasonable compared to social sector rents for similar accommodation.
- The main difficulties LAs said they experienced in identifying supported exempt housing were identifying the level of care (70 per cent) and establishing that the minimum level of care was provided (61 per cent).
- Three in ten (30 per cent) of LAs said they had experienced the practice of landlords using 'not for profit organisations' they had created to increase their income through artificially increasing the volume of supported exempt accommodation claims to HB (and therefore leaving LAs to pick up the shortfall in subsidy).

9.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 9.1 How many cases do you currently have in a) supported accommodation where the landlord is a county council/housing association?



Where the landlord was a county council or housing association, almost one in five (19 per cent) of LAs said they had between 501 and 5,000 cases in this type of supported accommodation. The majority (69 per cent) of LAs had between 1 and 500 cases housed in this type currently, 34 per cent had 100 or less cases in this type of accommodation and 12 per cent had none of their cases in this type of accommodation.

The mean average number of cases of this kind is 362. There were variations by LA type, English Metropolitan authorities had higher incidence of these cases, at 946.

LAs were asked to state if their answers to this question were based on records or were estimates and 46 per cent responded that they had checked records, 54 per cent estimated.

There were no significant differences by LA type.

Figure 9.2 How many cases do you currently have in a) supported accommodation where the landlord is a registered charity/voluntary organisation?

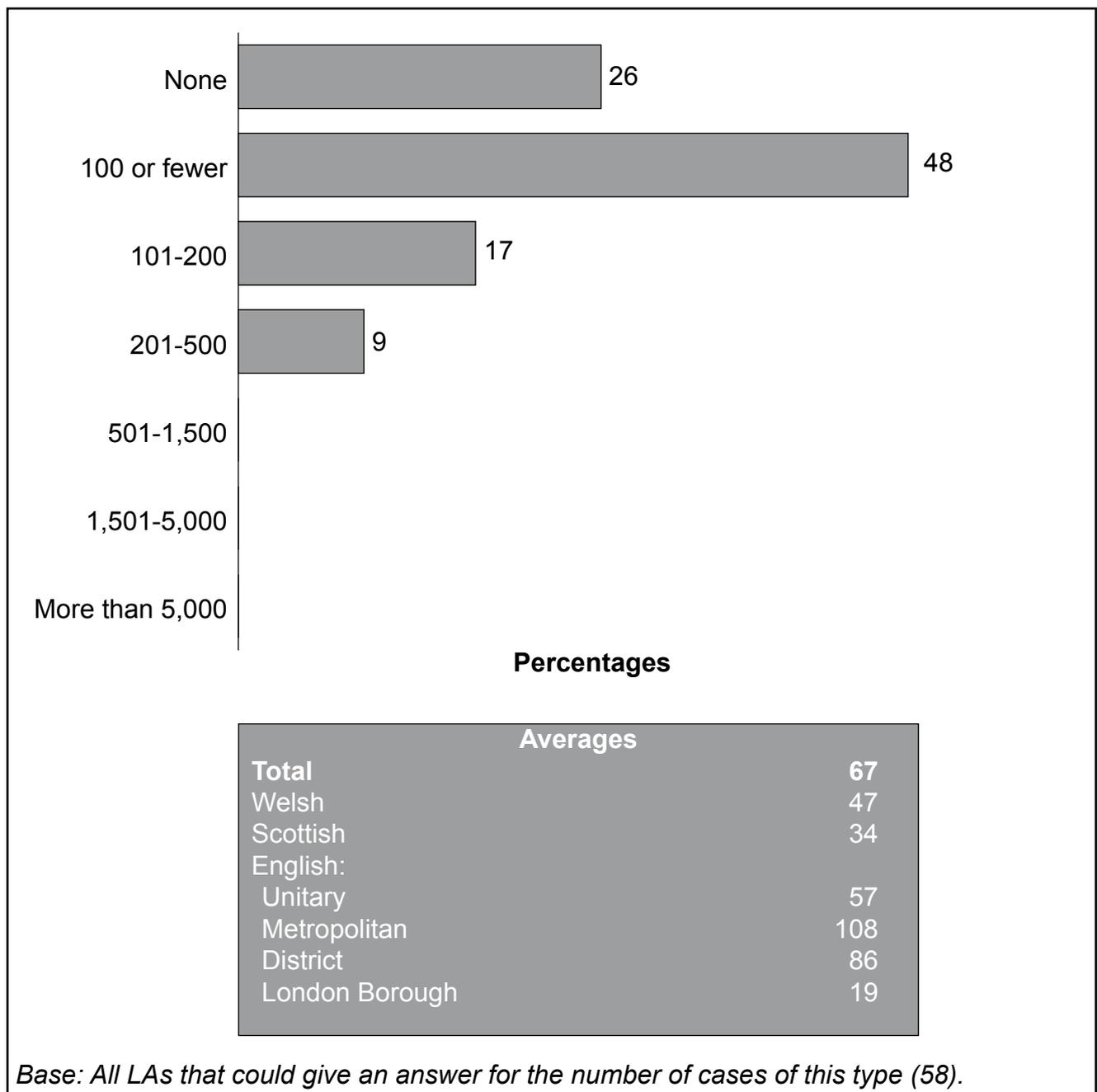
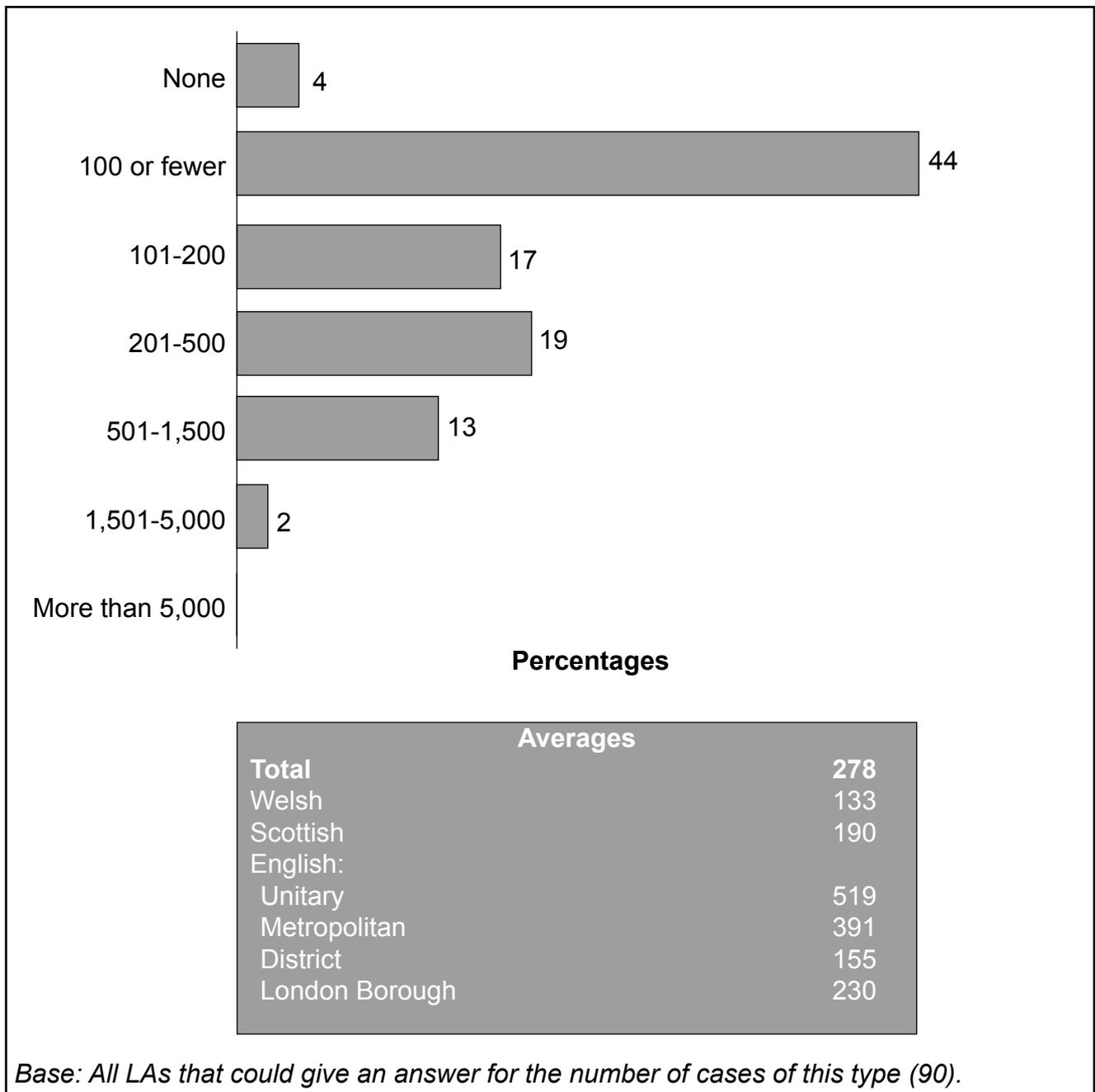


Figure 9.3 How many cases do you currently have in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a county council/housing association?



Where the landlord was a registered charity or voluntary organisation, almost three-quarters (74 per cent) of LAs had between 1 and 500 cases in that type of supported accommodation. approximately a quarter (26 per cent) of LAs said they had none of their cases in this type of accommodation.

The mean average number of cases of this kind was 67.

LAs were asked to state if their answers to this question were based on records or were estimates and 57 per cent responded that they had checked records, 43 per cent estimated.

There were no significant differences by LA type.

Where the landlord was a county council or housing association, 15 per cent had between 501 and 5,000 cases. However, the majority (80 per cent) of LAs had between 1 and 500 cases of this type currently in this type of supported exempt accommodation, 44 per cent had 100 or less cases in this type and four per cent had none.

The average number of cases of this kind was 278. There were variations by LA type, English Unitary authorities had a higher incidence of these cases, at 519, as did English Metropolitan authorities (391 on average).

LAs were asked to state if their answers to this question were based on records or were estimates and 43 per cent responded that they had checked records, 57 per cent estimated.

Where the landlord of the supported exempt accommodation was a registered charity or voluntary organisation, just three per cent had between 501 and 5,000 cases while a high majority (88 per cent) of LAs had between 1 and 500 cases in this type of accommodation. Around three in five (61 per cent) had 100 or less cases in this kind of accommodation and nine per cent had none.

The mean average number of cases of this kind was 110. There were variations by LA type, English Metropolitan LAs had higher incidence of these cases, at 299; English Unitary authorities were significantly higher at 159.

LAs were asked to state if their answers to this question were based on records or were estimates and 53 per cent responded that they had checked records, 47 per cent estimated.

Figure 9.4 How many cases do you currently have in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a registered charity/voluntary organisation?

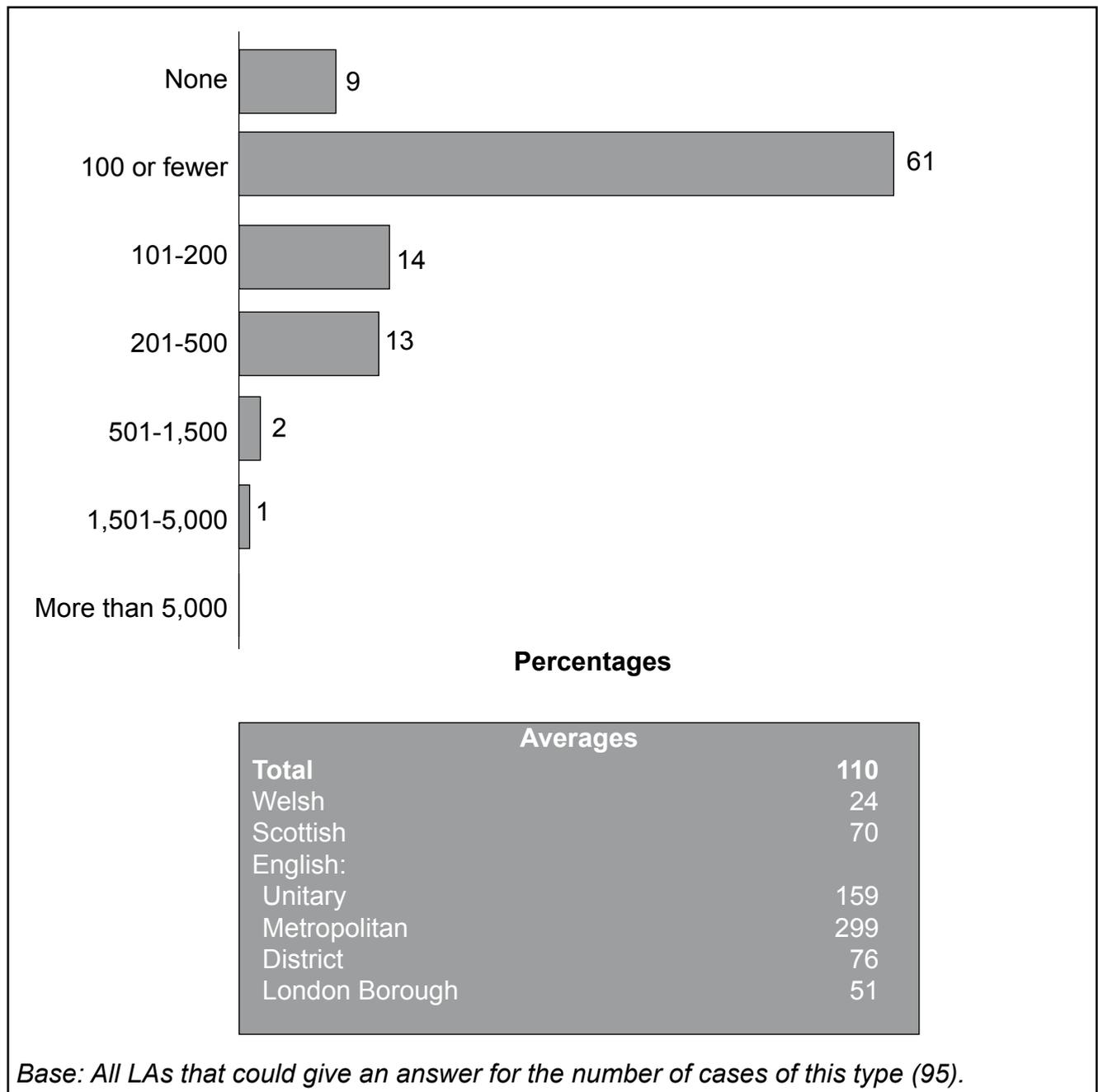
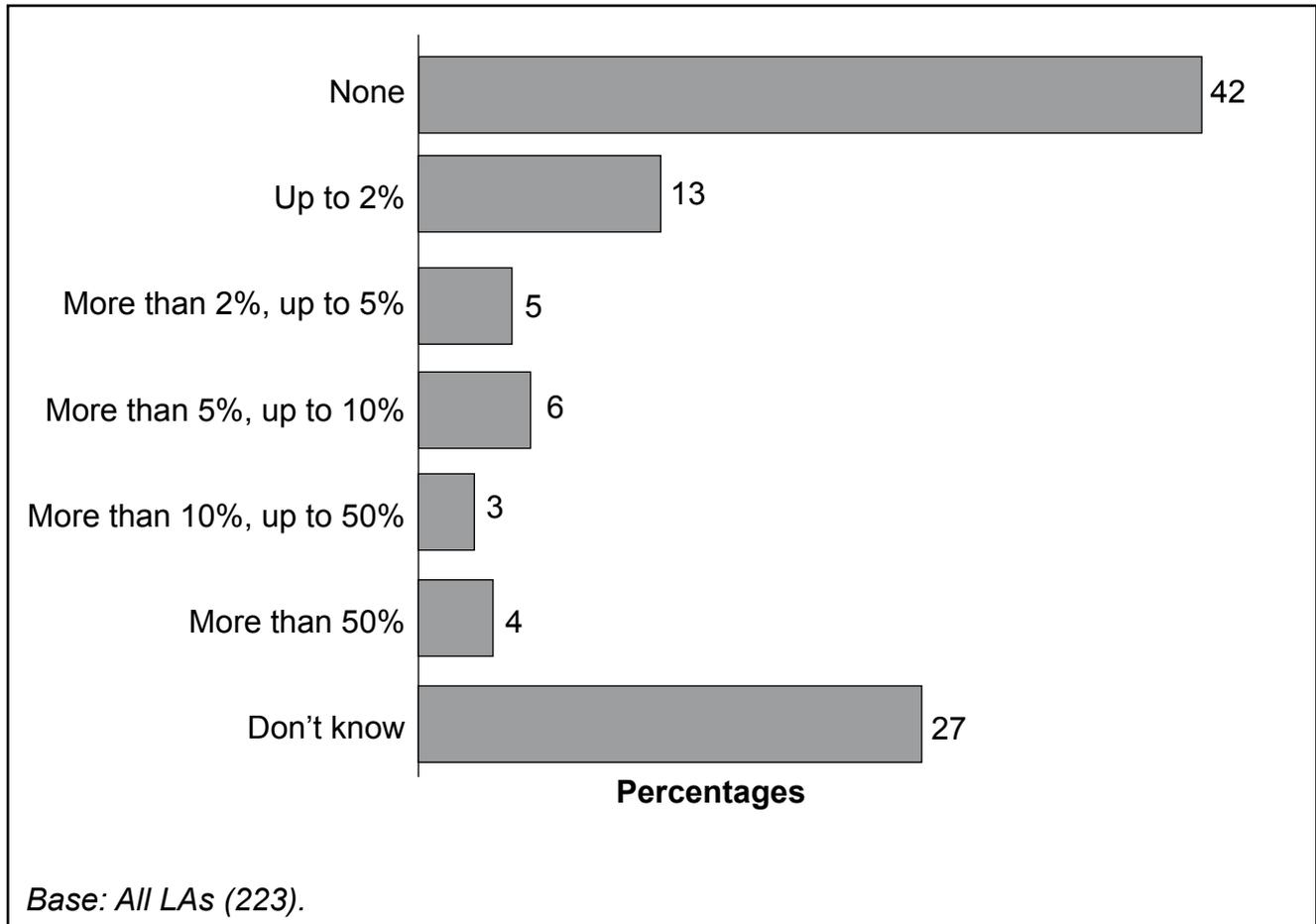


Figure 9.5 For HB cases in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a county council or housing association, what proportion of cases are referred to a Rent Officer? If reports indicating these amounts cannot be obtained then estimates are acceptable, but we would strongly encourage the running of reports where possible.

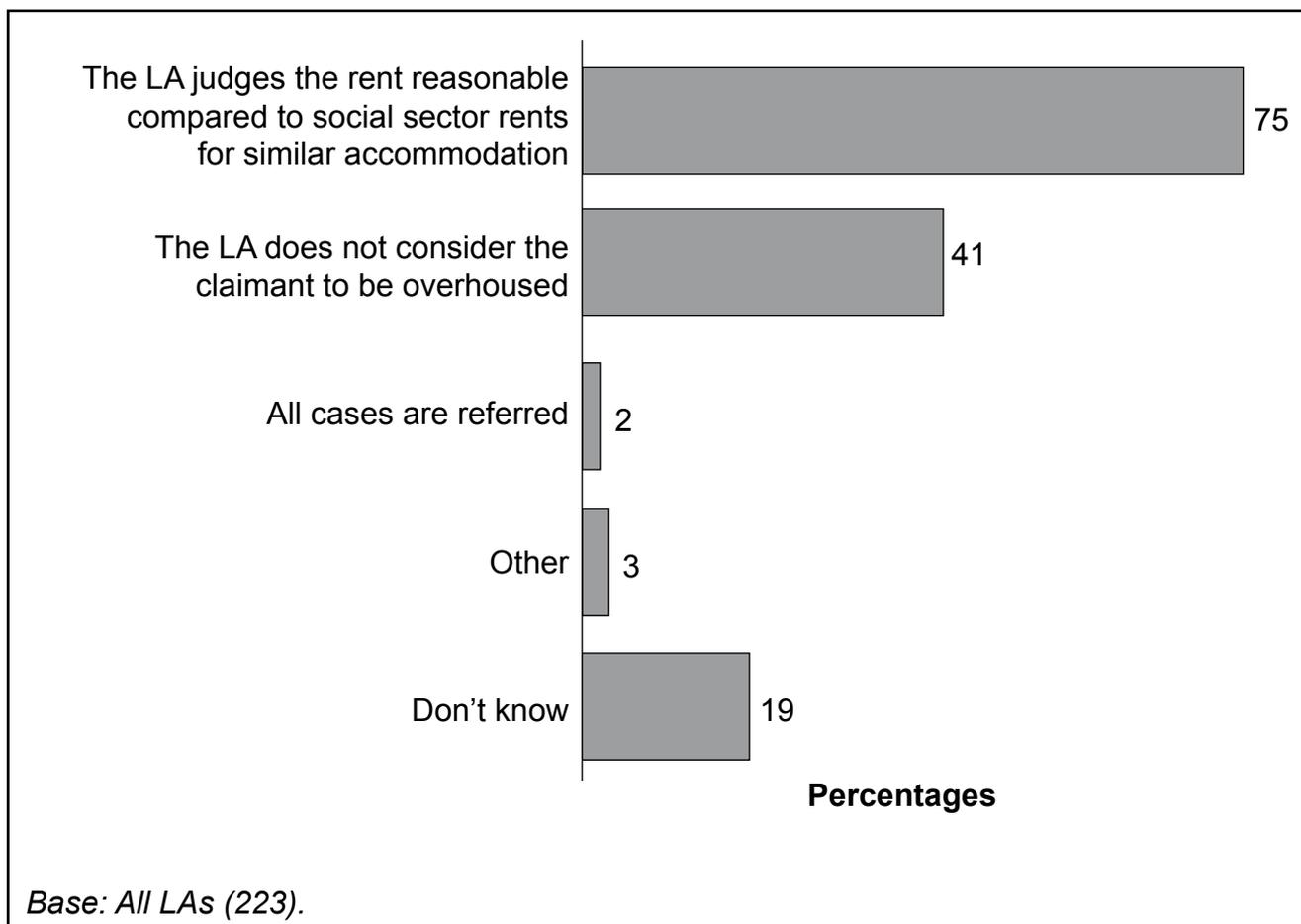


Around two in five LAs (42 per cent) said none of their HB cases in supported exempt accommodation, where the landlord was a county council or housing association were referred. LAs in the following regions were more likely to have said that none of these kinds of cases in their LA were referred: the North East (71 per cent), Scotland (59 per cent), East of England (55 per cent), and the South East (50 per cent).

Thirteen per cent of all LAs said up to two per cent of these kind of HB cases were referred, 11 per cent said it was between two and ten per cent. A further 27 per cent said don't know to this question.

The findings for this question for the 2013 survey were analysed with reference to data from the equivalent question in the 2012 survey and there were no significant changes over time to report.

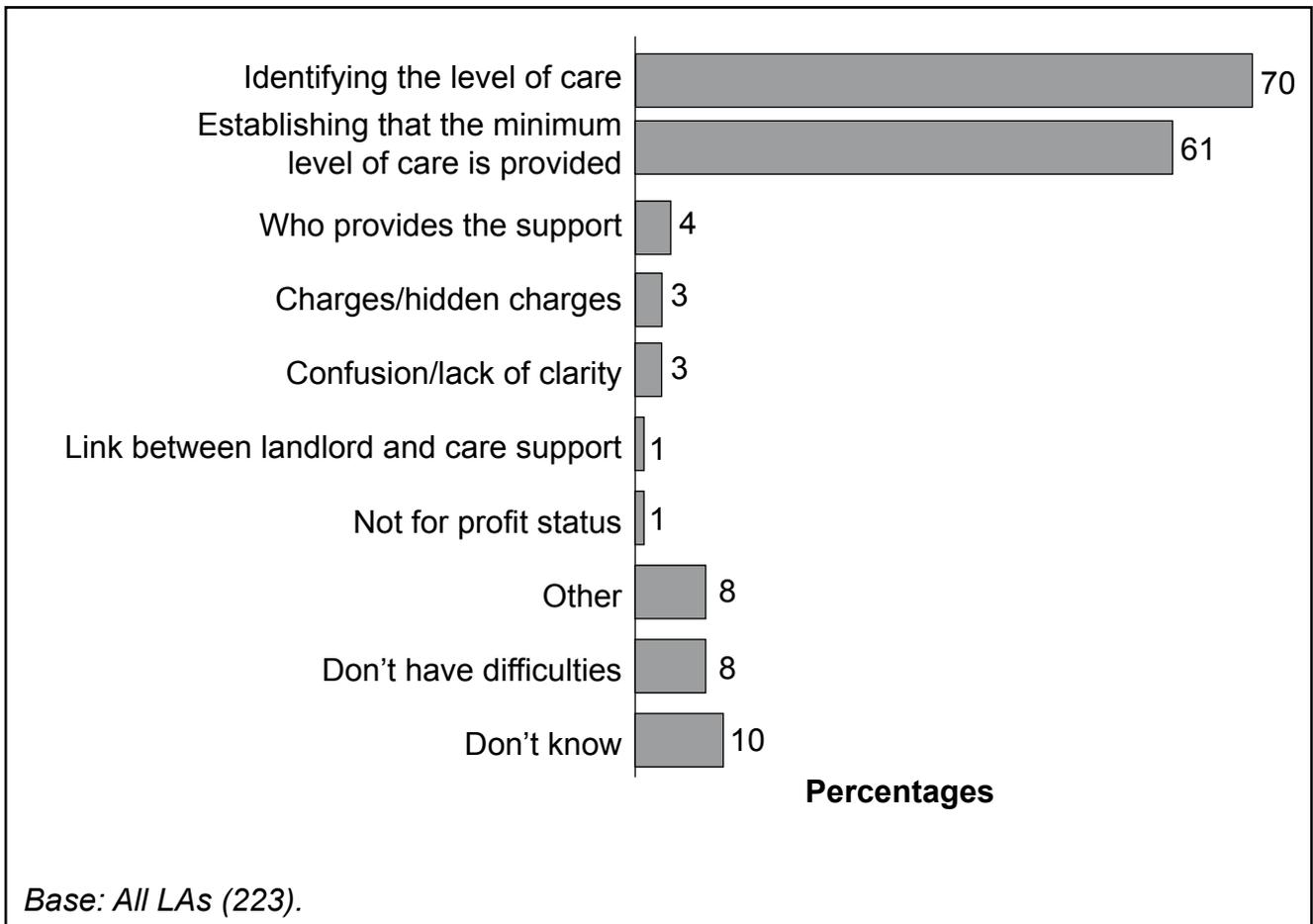
Figure 9.6 Thinking of HB cases in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a county council or housing association, that are not referred to a Rent Officer, what are the reasons for not referring?



LAs said that when HB cases in supported exempt accommodation where the landlord was a county council or housing association were not referred, the most usual reason, mentioned by three-quarters (75 per cent) was that the LA judged the rent reasonable compared to social sector rents for similar accommodation. The level of LAs stating this as a reason was significantly higher in the West Midlands (94 per cent) and the East Midlands (89 per cent). A further two in five or so (41 per cent) of all LAs said the reason for not referring was that the LA does not consider the claimant to be over housed. Authorities in Scotland (59 per cent) were more likely to have said that their LA does not consider the claimant to be over housed.

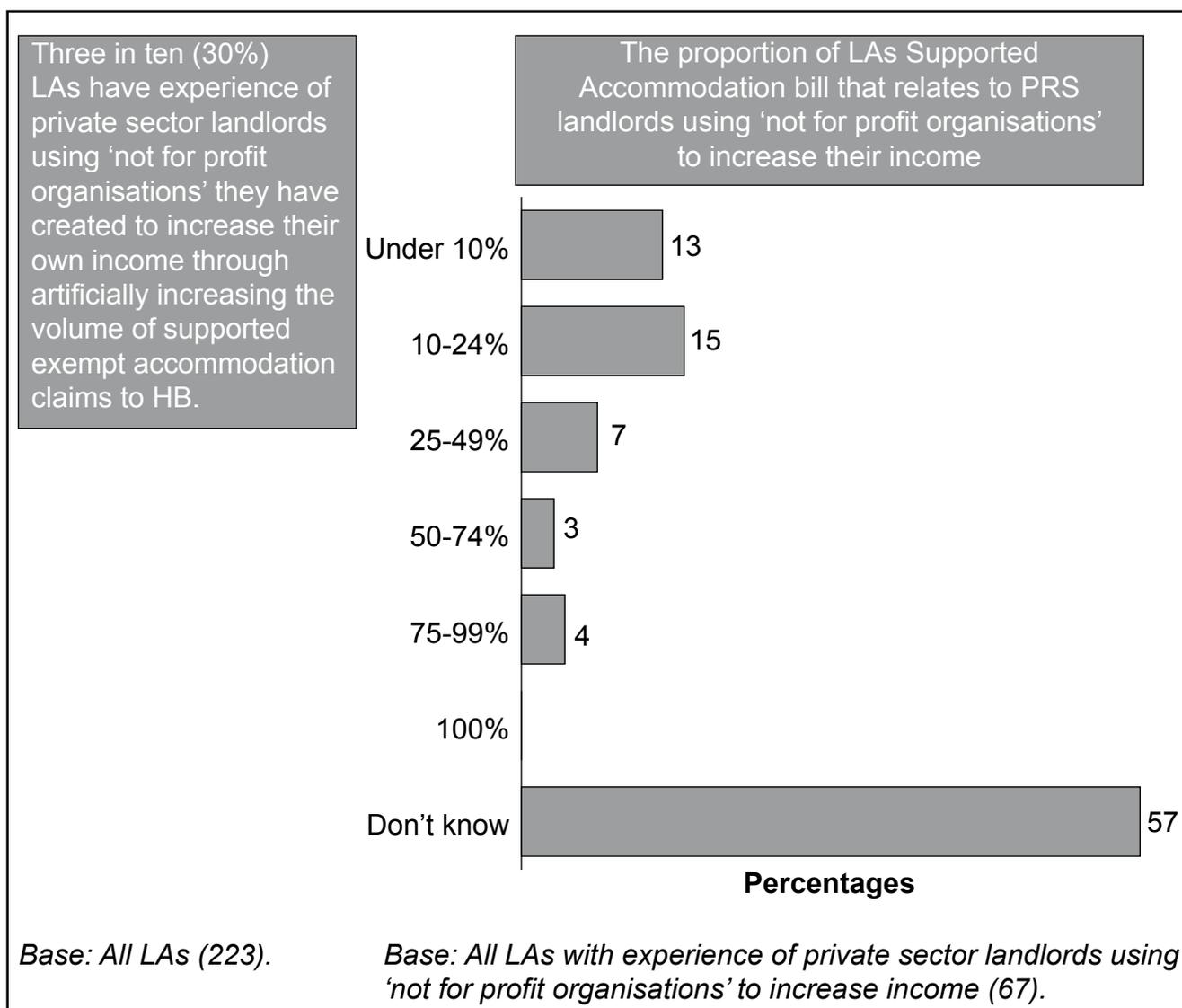
The findings for this question for the 2013 survey were analysed with reference to data from the equivalent question in the 2012 survey and there were no significant changes over time to report.

Figure 9.7 What are the main difficulties in identifying supported and supported exempt housing?



The main difficulties LAs said they experienced in identifying supported exempt housing were identifying the level of care (70 per cent) and establishing that the minimum level of care was provided (61 per cent). LAs in the following regions were more likely to have said they experience difficulty in identifying the level of care: Yorkshire and Humberside (92 per cent) and the East Midlands (79 per cent). LAs in the West Midlands (83 per cent), Yorkshire and Humberside (77 per cent) and the South East (67 per cent) were more likely to state the main difficulty in terms of identifying supported and exempt housing was establishing the minimum level of care.

Figure 9.8 Does your LA have any experience of private sector landlords using ‘not for profit organisations’ they have created to increase their income through artificially increasing the volume of supported exempt accommodation claims to HB (and therefore leaving LAs to pick up the short fall in subsidy)?
Roughly what proportion of your supported accommodation bill does this relate to?



Three in ten (30 per cent) of LAs said they had experienced the practice of landlords using ‘not for profit organisations’ they had created to increase their income through artificially increasing the volume of supported exempt accommodation claims to HB (and therefore leaving LAs to pick up the shortfall in subsidy). LAs in the following regions were more likely to have said they had experience of this practice: the North West (48 per cent), the South West (46 per cent), the West Midlands (39 per cent) and the East Midlands (36 per cent). Analysis by LA type shows that English Metropolitan authorities (50 per cent) and English Districts (32 per cent) were more likely to have had experience of this practice than, for example, Welsh authorities (eight per cent).

When the 67 LAs that said they had experience of this practice were asked roughly what proportion of their supported accommodation bill this practice related to, 13 per cent of this group of LAs said it related to under ten per cent, 15 per cent said between ten and 24 per cent and seven per cent said between 25 and 49 per cent and three per cent said between 50 and 74 per cent. Four per cent said 75 per cent or more.

Appendix A

The survey

A.1 Methodology

Up to Wave 9 of the Local Authority (LA) Omnibus Survey we interviewed respondents on the telephone. However, at Wave 9 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 mixed mode approach achieved a relatively good response rate of 71 per cent and therefore has been used from Wave 9 onwards. The response rate achieved at Wave 25 was 62 per cent (see the following sections for more detail).

A.2 Sample

Using the updated contacts database from Wave 24, the LA manager with responsibility for the most areas (out of Rent Rebate, Rent Allowance, Council Tax Benefit, Overpayment Recovery and Benefit Fraud) was identified. This manager then became our contact for Wave 25 and was sent the questionnaire and letter which set out the aims of the survey, explained the nature of the input required and advised the recipient that they had a choice of how to complete the questionnaire. The letter was signed by a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) signatory and included contact names at both GfK NOP and DWP for queries or if the respondent wanted to opt out of the survey.

The advance letter included details of each methodology – web-based questionnaire, paper questionnaire and telephone interview. Each respondent was assigned a user ID/password, which had to be entered at the start of the web survey. This enabled GfK NOP to keep track of interviews and ensure no one completed a survey more than once. Including an ID also allowed respondents to stop and restart an interview at any point and meant that different managers could easily access and complete the sections relevant to them.

The advance questionnaire allowed respondents to prepare their answers in advance, or if they chose to, use it to fill-in their answers and return it to GfK NOP in the reply-paid envelope provided. It emphasised that, if necessary, they should consult other managers and staff for their input into the questionnaire.

A.3 Questionnaire design

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

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

The Wave 25 questionnaire was made up of nine sections and comprised questions about Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), Universal Credit, Risk Based Verification, Benefit Cap, ATLAS, HB Advice and wider issues, Shared Accommodation Rate, Removal of Spare Room Subsidy and Supported Accommodation.

Once the questionnaire had been through several drafts, eight LA managers were contacted in order to ask them about their understanding and comprehension of the questions. We discussed the questionnaire face-to-face with three LA managers and on the telephone with a further five. These discussions also gave managers an opportunity to raise any issues that were particularly important and relevant to them at the time. They 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, wherever possible, 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 (9-13 September 2013). The questionnaire was tested on a total of 11 LA managers on the telephone, using a paper version of the questionnaire.

As for the main stage of fieldwork, each pilot respondent was sent an advance letter and questionnaire. The GfK NOP executive team 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.

Our specialist web department within GfK NOP developed the web-based questionnaire. It was written in mrlInterview, software supplied by SPSS and hosted on the GfK NOP facility. Every attempt has been made to make sure that the web questionnaire is as user-friendly and straightforward as possible, in order to encourage as many authorities as possible to use it. For example, respondents do not have to input their own and their colleagues' contact details – they are on the screen for them to check and amend; more than one person can be in the questionnaire at one time; respondents can fill in a section at a time, in any order.

A.4 Fieldwork

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

As in previous waves of the survey, interviewers' first task was to telephone LAs and check how they planned to complete the questionnaire. Those selecting to complete the questionnaire on paper or on the web were asked to complete it as soon as possible before 22 November 2013. 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. This process continued throughout fieldwork. An invitation email plus two reminder emails from GfK NOP and a reminder email from DWP were also sent to all non-respondents during fieldwork.

Given the fact that this was a census of all LAs and that Housing Benefit managers are difficult to get hold of due to workload and turnover of staff, interviewers were not given a maximum number of call backs. Instead, in order to maximise the response rate across the country as a whole, they were asked to adopt a flexible approach in terms of call-backs and to liaise closely with head office throughout the fieldwork period.

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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.

Fieldwork started on 14 October 2013 and was supposed to finish on 22 November 2013, although it was actually held open until 7 December 2013 to try and increase the response rate. By the end of fieldwork a total of 238 LA managers had participated in the survey, representing a response rate of 62%.

This total sample of 238 LAs breaks down as 176 web-based questionnaires, 51 paper questionnaires and 11 telephone interviews (all of these were pilot interviews). Just two LAs filled in one questionnaire for their own and another LA with which they share services.

The overall percentage of authorities completing the questionnaire has increased on the previous wave in 2012 when 55 per cent of LAs participated.

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

LA type	Welsh, Scottish, English Unitary, English Metropolitan, English District, London Borough
Housing/Council Tax Benefit Caseload	Low (up to 10,000 cases), Medium (10,001-20,000 cases), High (20,001+ cases)
Region	Scotland, North East, Yorkshire and Humberside, North West, East Midlands, West Midlands, East, South East, South West, London, Wales

Information on LA Type, Housing/Council Tax Benefit Caseload and Region was provided as part of the Contacts Database.

The following points should be noted when using this report:

- a sample, not the entire “population”, of LA housing benefit 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 sum 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 Housing Benefit managers was interviewed. We cannot, therefore, be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the ‘true’ values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the ‘true’ values from knowledge of the size of

the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95 per cent – that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

However, given that this sample comprises 62 per cent of the total population, the level of statistical reliability is slightly higher than if the sample had come from a larger population. On this basis, responses to the questionnaire provide data with a maximum sampling error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points at the 95 % level. In practice this means that where 50% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the “true” value will fall between 46.1% and 53.9%. The table below shows the sampling error for the whole sample and key sub-groups across a range of parameters. Note that the closer a finding is to 50% the greater the variability of responses within the sample.

Table A.2 Wave 24 Sampling Error

	Sample size	Universe	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
All LAs	238	381	2.3	3.6	3.9
LA type					
Welsh	13	22	10.4	15.9	17.4
Scottish	20	32	8.1	12.3	13.4
English Unitary	41	57	4.9	7.4	8.1
English Metropolitan	22	36	7.8	11.9	13.0
English District	119	201	3.4	5.3	5.7
London Borough	23	33	6.7	10.3	11.2

A.6 Response rates

As mentioned earlier, a total of 238 LAs participated in Wave 25 of the Survey, which represents a response rate of 62 per cent. As the chart below shows, response rate varies by LA type, from a high of 72 per cent of English Unitary authorities and 70 per cent of London Boroughs to 59 per cent of English Districts and Welsh authorities.

Figure A.1 and Table A.3 provide further details of response rate by LA type.

Figure A.1 Response rates by LA type

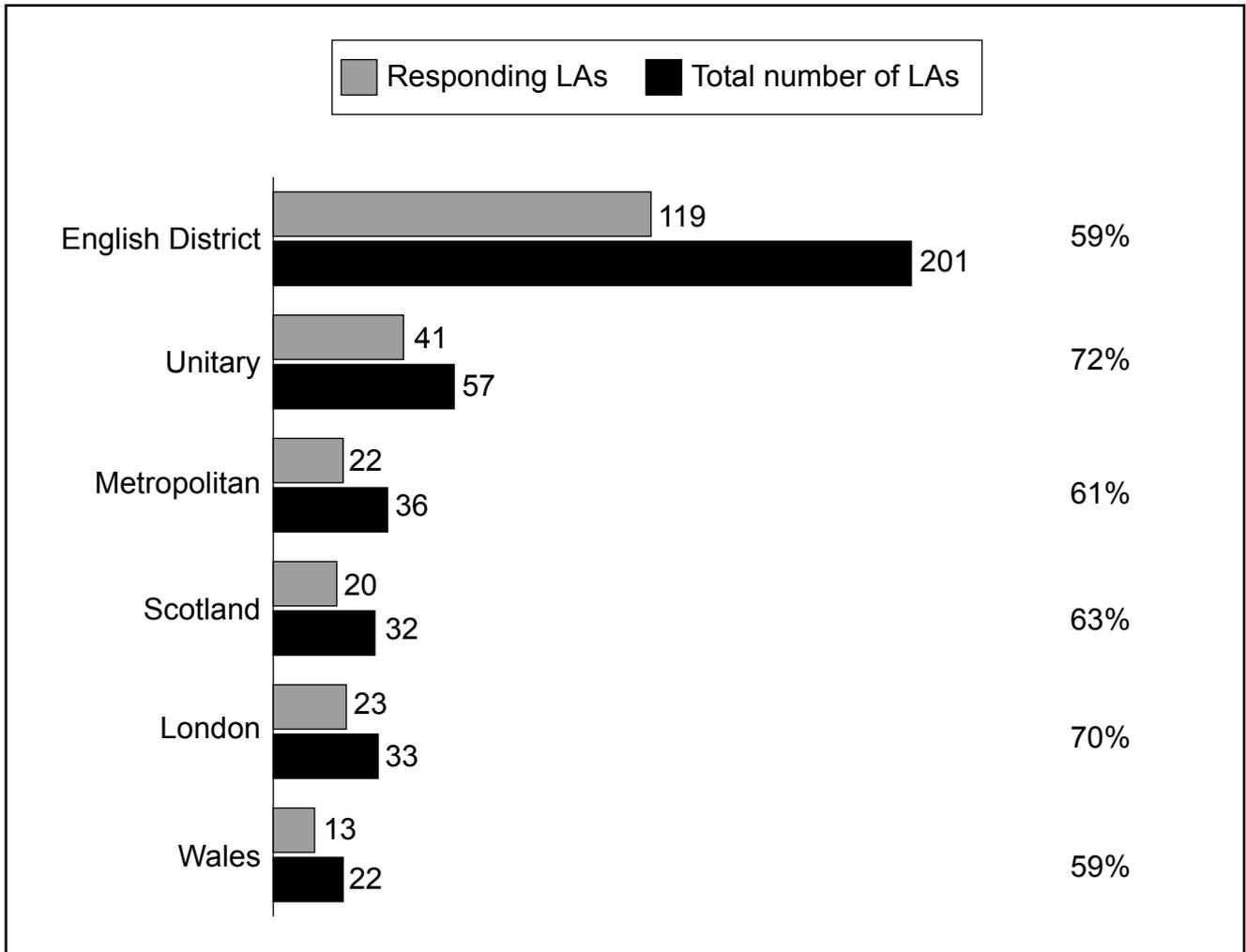


Table A.3 Response rates by LA type

	Total	Wales	Scotland	English District	English Metropolitan District	English Unitary	London Borough
Telephone: pilot completes	11	1	1	4	-	3	2
Web: completes	143	9	15	59	15	29	16
Web: partial completes	33	1	2	21	4	3	2
Paper: completes	51	2	2	35	3	6	3
Total: completes and partial completes	238	13	20	119	22	41	23
Soft call back	17	1	2	10	2		2
Will complete paper q'aire	17	1	1	8	2	2	3
Will complete on web	42	1	4	23	3	9	2
Refusal (insufficient time/ resources)	50	4	3	32	6	4	1
No answer/ engaged / voicemail	17	2	2	9	1	1	2
Total	381	22	32	201	36	57	33
Response rate	62%	59%	63%	59%	61%	72%	70%

A.7 Sample profile

Table A.4 Sample profile

	Number	%
Total	238	100
Local Authority type		
Welsh	13	5%
Scottish	20	8%
English Unitary	41	17%
English Metropolitan	22	9%
English District	119	50%
London Borough	23	10%
HB/CTB caseload		
Low	98	41%
Medium	72	30%
High	68	29%
Region		
Scotland	20	8%
North East	7	3%
Yorkshire & Humberside	13	5%
North West	23	10%
East Midlands	29	12%
West Midlands	18	8%
East	32	13%
South East	33	14%
South West	27	11%
London	23	10%
Wales	13	4%

Appendix B

Questionnaire

ID Number:

JN 14500283

Local Authority (LA) Insight Survey Wave 25

Dear Benefit Manager

I am writing to ask for your help with Wave 25 of the LA Insight Survey (previously known as LA Omnibus). A key aim of this wave of the survey is to explore the impact of changes to Housing Benefit (HB) in the private rented sector (PRS) and social rented sector (SRS). These changes were announced in the June 2010 Budget and the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010 and included:

- changing the basis for setting Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in the PRS from the median (50th percentile) to the 30th percentile of local market rents;
- capping LHA rates by property size;
- uprating LHA rates annually from April 2013 by the September 2012 Consumer Price Index rate or the 30th percentile of market rents if lower; and
- removing the spare room subsidy (RSRS).

Other relevant measures included increasing the Government's contribution to the Discretionary Housing Payment budget by £30m in 2011/12 and an additional £60 million per year in 2012/13, £180m in 2013/14 and £120m in 2014/15. The value of non-dependant deductions from HB and Council Tax Benefit were restored in three stages from 2011-12 to 2013-14. Two further changes were announced in October 2010: raising the age for the Shared Accommodation Rate in the PRS from 25 to 35 (introduced in January 2012) and capping total household benefits at £500 per week (£350 for single people), introduced in four London boroughs from April 2013, and nationally from Summer 2013. This wave of the survey also asks about ongoing preparations for Universal Credit, as well as Risk Based Verification and ATLAS.

The Insight Survey that you may have completed last year has played a key role in monitoring a number of the early implementation issues with recent changes to HB. Your views have enabled us to better understand the impact of policy changes and the support needed by Local Authorities in implementing some of these changes. I appreciate that DWP has distributed more surveys over the past few months than usual. All the information gathered is essential for delivering an effective business and the surveys provide the best method for collating important information during these changing and challenging times. The Department appreciates and is grateful for your effort in completing this survey.

The deadline for completing the survey is 22 November 2013 and you can complete it online, on this paper version or on the telephone (please see overleaf for instructions). If you need any help completing the survey itself please contact Darren Yaxley at GfK NOP on 020 7890 9759 or darren.yaxley@gfk.com. Alternatively for general queries about the survey contact Rachel Tsang at DWP on 020 7449 5378 or rachel.tsang@dwp.gsi.gov.uk. Thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Yours sincerely



DWP Project Manager – Rachel Tsang – Housing Policy and Working Age Benefit Research

Local Authority Insight Survey – Wave 25

Self-completion survey on the internet: If you choose to fill-in the survey on the internet, you may access it anytime from **14 October – 22 November 2013**. You will find it at

<http://www.surveys.com/lao25>

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

To access the survey you will be asked for your User ID. Please copy this carefully from the top of the letter for this survey. You, or your colleagues, can access the survey more than once using this User ID until you have completed it. All information is password protected and no one other than the GfK NOP team will be able to access your site or see your personal entries.

Self-completion survey on paper: If you choose to fill-in the survey 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 **22 November 2013** 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) that applies to your local authority
- Sometimes you are invited to write in your answer in your own words
- 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 GO TO another question
- Please ensure that you check and amend the contact information at the back of the questionnaire (Section J)
- When you have finished, please post the survey using the pre-paid envelope provided.

Telephone interview: If you choose to conduct a telephone interview, then please use the hardcopy of this survey to prepare your answers in advance of the interview. By doing this, you should find that the interview itself will take no longer than 10-15 minutes. You will receive a call from a GfK NOP interviewer sometime between **14 October and 22 November 2013** or please contact paul.bodle@gfk.com if you would prefer to make an appointment.

Section A – Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

From April 2011 until the end of the spending review period in March 2015 an extra £390 million of funding is being provided to local authorities towards Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). The following questions are about how your use of DHPs may have changed since April 2013, in light of LHA changes introduced in 2011, RSRS and the Benefit Cap.

All answer.

- A1** Does your LA carry out a test of affordability before issuing a DHP?
Tick one only.

Yes always (including DLA where appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes always (excluding DLA)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes sometimes (including DLA where appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes sometimes (excluding DLA)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

- A2** Thinking about how the spending pattern for DHPs has changed in your LA since April 2013, please tick one from the following statements that applies best to your LA.

Awarding larger individual DHPs for longer periods of time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awarding larger individual DHPs for shorter periods of time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awarding smaller individual DHPs for longer periods of time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awarding smaller individual DHPs for shorter periods of time	<input type="checkbox"/>
No change in spending pattern	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

A3 Since April 2013, what is the maximum period that DHPs have been awarded for at your LA? Tick one only.

12 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
26 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
39 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
52 weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 52 weeks (please tick box then specify number of weeks in boxes below) <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> weeks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

A4 Since April 2013, in what situations has your LA awarded a DHP? Please tick all that apply.

Type of reason	Tick all that apply from entire list below	
Claimants not directly affected by HB policy changes:	Rent in advance/rent deposit	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet cost of an additional room for carer/other non-resident (eg. visiting children)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant in rent arrears (not because of LHA changes, RSRS and Benefit Cap)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet additional cost because family member is ill/disabled	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Change in family circumstances mean they can't meet rent commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Helping with mortgage payments in certain circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Emergencies, e.g. house fire, car accident etc	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not being able to afford living costs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant living in significantly adapted accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other General issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

LHA changes:	Rent can't be met in full because of LHA rate or rent officer determination	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant in Rent Arrears because of changes to LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Where there is a non-dependant deduction and non-dependant can't pay	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance to people under 35 on a temporary basis to give them time to move home	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other LHA related issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
RSRS:	Tenant in arrears because of RSRS	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet cost of an additional room for carer/other non resident (e.g.visiting children)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet cost of additional bedroom for foster children where more than one room required	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Supporting people who suffer losses though Removal of Spare Room Subsidy	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Claimant is a Shared Lives Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Claimant in significantly adapted properties due to disability needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other RSRS issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefit Cap:	Tenant in arrears because of Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Supporting people who suffer losses though the Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Exempt benefit application in progress	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Increase in amount of non-dependent deductions	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Benefit Cap issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

A5 Since April 2013, what have been the 3 most important reasons for offering a short-term (short-term meaning 3 months or less) and long term (more than three months) DHP award? Please note your answer can be based on your general perception if you do not keep records of this information. Please tick up to 3 in each column choosing each time from the entire list in the table below.

Local Authority Insight Survey – Wave 25

Type of reason	Please choose <u>up to 3</u> for short term and up to 3 for long term from the entire list below	Short term	Long term
Claimants not directly affected by HB policy changes:	Rent in advance/rent deposit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet cost of an additional room for carer/other non-resident (e.g. visiting children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant in rent arrears (not because of LHA changes, RSRS and Benefit Cap)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet additional cost because family member is ill/disabled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Change in family circumstances mean they can't meet rent commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Helping with mortgage payments in certain circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Emergencies, e.g. house fire, car accident etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not being able to afford living costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant living in significantly adapted accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other General issue (please specify)		
	LHA changes:	Rent can't be met in full because of LHA rate or rent officer determination	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tenant in Rent Arrears because of changes to LHA		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where there is a non-dependant deduction and non-dependant can't pay		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistance to people under 35 on a temporary basis to give them time to move home		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Assistance with moving costs		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other LHA related issue (please specify)			

RSRS:	Tenant in arrears because of RSRS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet cost of an additional room for carer/other non resident (eg.visiting children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Meet cost of additional bedroom for foster children where more than one required	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Supporting people who suffer losses though Removal of Spare Room Subsidy		
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Claimant is a Shared Lives Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Claimant in significantly adapted properties due to disability needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other RSRS issue (please specify)		
Benefit Cap:	Tenant in arrears because of Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Supporting people who suffer losses though the Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Assistance with moving costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Exempt benefit application in progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Increase in amount of non-dependent deductions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Benefit Cap issue (Please specify)		
	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A6 **Roughly** what proportion of people would you say have applied for a DHP on their own initiative (i.e. they know what DHPs are and that they might be entitled to it) and what proportion have had a DHP effectively arranged for them by their landlord or has been suggested by the LA itself, or by other means? Please write in what approximate percentage each situation makes up of total DHPs. The total for all percentages should add to 100%.

	%
Apply themselves	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Arranged by landlord	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Initiated by LA	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Via CAB/advice agencies	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	100%
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

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A7 What type of guidance, if any, has your LA given to claimants before and after a DHP has been approved, about what the DHP is for and what will happen when the DHP comes to an end? Tick all that apply in both columns.

	Before DHP approved	After DHP approved
Meet with claimant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter sent to claimant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaflet sent to claimant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice on website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refer elsewhere for advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Liaise with other parts of LA, eg. Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Debt advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quarterly circular	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Involvement with external stakeholders/landlords	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone call	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify under appropriate ticked box)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do not give guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A8 Thinking about your LA as a whole, including departments other than your own, does your LA intend to top up the Government DHP contribution? Tick one only.

Yes, we have already topped up our DHP spend	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not yet, but intend to	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, we do not intend to do this	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section B – Universal Credit (UC)

The foundation of the Government's reforms is the introduction of one single benefit for working-age adults which, from October 2013, will replace several income-related in-work and out-of-work benefits, including Housing Benefit. Universal Credit, and how it impacts on claimants, local authorities, landlords, advice services and voluntary organisations, will be a key component of research and will overlap with many of the previously described areas for study. Universal Credit is an attempt to simplify and clarify the benefit system, making it easier to administer and reduce fraud and error. Research will be required to monitor and evaluate how it measures up against these objectives as well as assessing how it works for people without internet access, sustainability of monthly payments among those applying for help and the single payment per household. Attention will also need to be given to how claimants and local authorities cope in the interim period between the phasing out of the current system and the start of the new one.

Under Universal Credit (UC) HB will be paid directly to most tenants within the Social Rented Sector. This will mirror the Private Rented Sector where currently around 80% of HB in the PRS is paid to tenants. This section seeks to find out how LAs are dealing with the transition to UC in terms of Preparation and support for claimants, providers and landlords.

All answer.

B1 In general, which of the following statements best describes the current level of preparedness of staff and systems for the switch to UC at your LA?

Tick one only

In our LA, staff and systems are completely prepared for the switch to UC	<input type="checkbox"/>
In our LA, staff and systems are preparing for the change to UC but we are not ready yet	<input type="checkbox"/>
In our LA staff and systems are not yet making preparations for the switch to UC	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

B2 What has your LA done already, or is planning to do, to prepare staff and systems for UC? Tick all that apply in both columns.

	Already done	Planning to do
Training courses aimed at improving general awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Specific training in implementing UC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent generic information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent tailored guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sent software updates from software supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting/updating voluntary groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attending workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Formed a working group	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Holding meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B3 What, if anything, has your LA done already, or is planning to do, to prepare claimants for UC? Please tick all that apply in both columns.

	Already done	Planning to do
Providing one-to-one guidance/ advice on budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing group guidance/ advice on budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Commissioning 3rd party providers to provide guidance/ advice on budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Providing guidance/help with computer use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing information on own website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directing claimants to Money Advice website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directing claimants to DWP website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signposting claimants to other websites for information (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mapping local free digital service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classes for claimants on UC budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Special/different help for HB claimants already in work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advising claimants specifically that UC payments will include housing costs and be paid direct to claimants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local service delivery projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

B4 What, if anything has your LA done/is doing to prepare social housing provider landlords for the switch to UC?

Share generic information	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potential easements for Direct Payments	<input type="checkbox"/>
The social housing providers are getting all the information we have	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not doing anything	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

B5 What, if anything, is your LA planning to do to prepare private landlords for the switch to UC?

Arrange Landlord forums	<input type="checkbox"/>
Send written information about UC directly to them	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include articles in newsletters etc	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not doing anything	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section C – Risk Based Verification

Risk Based Verification (RBV) assigns a risk rating to each HB claim which determines the level of verification required. It allows more intense verification activity to be targeted at those claims which are deemed to be at highest risk of involving fraud and/or error.

It is practiced on aspects of claims in Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and the Pension Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) and from April 2012 DWP extended it on a voluntary basis to all LAs. The following questions are about take-up of the scheme and LAs views on how efficient and effective it is.

All answer.

C1 Is your LA currently applying RBV on HB claims? Tick one only.

Yes, currently applying RBV	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to C3
No, but intend to start applying RBV	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer C2
No, and have no intention of starting to apply RBV	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer C2
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to C6

Answer if 'No' at C1.

C2 Why does your LA not currently apply RBV on HB claims?

Takes too much time/work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feel it is unnecessary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't understand it	<input type="checkbox"/>
Need more guidance	<input type="checkbox"/>
LA is risk averse	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost, particularly as UC is going to take HB away	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not a priority at the moment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Now go to C6.

Answer if 'Yes' at C1. Others go to C6.

C3 Which of the following approaches has your LA adopted to risk profile your HB claimants? Tick all that apply.

IT tools set up internally	<input type="checkbox"/>
IT tools applied by external supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clerically/ manually by HB staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

C4 How satisfied are you with the approach you are currently using to risk profile HB claimants? Tick one only.

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

C5 Overall, how effective would you say that RBV has been in terms of each of the following. Tick one in each row below.

	Very effective	Fairly effective	Not very effective	Not at all effective	Too early to say	Don't know
Reducing fraud and error	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Improving processing times	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Freeing up time/resources to do other work	<input type="checkbox"/>					

All answer.

C6 When your LA identifies high risk claims, what increased verification is carried out? Tick all that apply.

Credit Reference Agency checks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Visit to claimants home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting claimant	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased document checks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

C7 And approximately what proportion of cases in your LA (as a percentage of your entire caseload) would you categorise as being high risk? Write in percentage below.

%

Don't know

Section D – Benefit Cap

D1 In what ways has the benefit cap led to new ways of working a) within your LA, b) with registered providers, and c) with other LAs? Tick all that apply in each column.

	a) Within your LA	b) With registered providers	c) With other LAs
Case management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Co-located teams are working together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Targeting for DHPs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alerting landlords	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Liaison with JCP colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sharing best practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too early to say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D2 What type of communication has your LA had with a) claimants who are affected by the benefit cap, b) claimants who are not currently affected by the benefit cap but might be in the future, c) private landlords, d) social landlords? Tick all that apply in all columns.

	a) Claimants who are affected by the cap	b) Claimants who are not currently affected by the cap but might be in the future	c) Private Landlords	d) Social landlords
Letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone call	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting/visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaflets available at LA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice from Housing officers/RSLs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responding to claimants' queries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Articles in newsletters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Awareness session/training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not issued any communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

D3a What, if any, actions have claimants taken to prevent being capped (i.e. actions claimants have taken to avoid the cap being applied to them in advance)? Please indicate major and minor reasons from the list below. Tick all that apply.

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D3b What, if any, actions have claimants taken to avoid the cap after it's been applied to them (i.e. actions claimants have taken after they've been capped)? Please indicate major and minor reasons from the list below. Tick all that apply.

	a) Actions taken to prevent the cap being applied		b) Actions taken after the cap was applied	
	Major reason	Minor reason	Major reason	Minor reason
Households starting a claim for exempt benefit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claimants moving into work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving to cheaper properties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving to another area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change in household structure (reduction in benefits)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claimant negotiated rent reduction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Budget advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of these (types of) reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too early to say	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

All answer.

D4 DWP is keen to find out more about the experiences of Local Authorities in implementing the Benefit Cap. Have there been any particular issues in implementation and lessons learned so far about the implementation of the Cap that you would like to tell us about? If yes, please write in below.

Yes:

Too early to say

No

Section E – Automated Transfers to Local Authority System (ATLAS)

The ATLAS project has increased the amount of information that can be sent automatically to local authorities (LAs), in a format that allows direct loading into LA systems. ATLAS phase 1 was successfully rolled out to all authorities on 4 July 2011, providing Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Tax Credits award data. Phase 2 extended ATLAS to additionally deliver notifications for a range of DWP benefits in January – February 2012.

Receiving information automatically significantly reduces HB/CTB overpayments and underpayments, in particular where the customer fails to notify the local authority of the claim or change, or provides the information late.

All answer.

E1 What benefits software does your LA use? Tick all that apply.

Capita Academy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Northgate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Northgate Orbis	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civica	<input type="checkbox"/>
In-house	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

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E2 **ATLAS allows LAs to automate and batch process as many notifications received as possible. Please write in below what proportion of all notifications are processed in each of the following ways. The total for all percentages should add to 100%. Please note your answer can be based on your general perception if you do not keep records of this information. If this is the case, write in your % answer/s and then tick box for ‘estimate’.**

	%
Full batch processing (no manual intervention)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Partial automation (some assessor activity, eg. automated up to suspension)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Auto complete/ filter action (no assessor activity, cases completed with no action taken)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Looked at by assessor completely	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	100%
None/not using ATLAS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tick this box if any answers here are estimates	<input type="checkbox"/>

Answer if ‘Full batch processing’ or ‘Partial automation’ at E2 is 1% or more. Others go to instruction before E6.

E3 **How did your LA achieve automation? Tick all that apply.**

In-house	<input type="checkbox"/>
IT supplier	<input type="checkbox"/>
External help (e.g. third party commercial suppliers providing support/package)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

E4 **Some IT systems allow LAs to set ‘tolerances’ for automated ATLAS processes (for example, if a change is over a certain amount the system produces a separate report). Has your LA set tolerances for automated ATLAS processes?**

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E5
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to E6
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to E6

Answer if 'Yes' at E4.

E5 Have these tolerances been reviewed and or revised? Tick one only.

Yes, reviewed but not revised	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E7
Yes, both reviewed and revised	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E7
No not reviewed yet	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E7
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to E8
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to E8

All answer except LAs that said 100% 'Full batch processing' at E2. 100% 'Full batch processing' go to E9.

E6 Does your LA plan to increase the level of automation. Please indicate when your LA plans to do this. Tick one only.

Yes, within 3-6 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E7
Yes, within 6-12 months	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E7
Yes, after 12 months or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer E7
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to E8
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to E8

Answer if 'Yes' at E6.

E7 When this increase in automation has taken place, what proportion of notifications do you expect to require no manual intervention (ie. full batch processing)? Please write in percentage below.

%

Don't know

All answer except LAs that said 100% 'Full batch processing' at E2.

E8 What would you say are the obstacles to your LA achieving full/increased levels of automation? Tick all that apply.

Lack of suitable IT functionality	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of expertise to set-up	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insufficient resources/time to set up	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poor quality/incorrect information	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expect to have to review /look at some of the results	<input type="checkbox"/>
Need to follow up on associated changes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please write in)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

All answer.

E9 What impact, if any, has ATLAS had on your LA's processing performance? Tick one only.

Big improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Small improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>
No change	<input type="checkbox"/>
Small deterioration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Big deterioration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

E10 Has your LA processes in place to ensure that HB Y/N indicators are set/ removed to ensure that the correct ATLAS notifications are received? Tick one only

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

**E11 Has any of the available DWP guidance helped you make good use of ATLAS?
If yes, please tick all that apply:**

Yes – ATLAS Good Practice Guide	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, DWP Circulars	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, Huddle	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

Section F – HB Advice and wider issues

Please note that this section (or questions within this section) may be best answered by colleagues in Housing and Homelessness teams so may need to be passed on to them.

A number of changes have been made to housing benefit in both the private and social rented sectors over the past few years. This includes changing the basis for setting LHA rates in the PRS from the median (50th percentile) to the 30th percentile of local market rents; capping LHA rates by property size; raising the age for the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) in the PRS from 25 to 35; capping total household benefits at £500 per week and £350 per week for single people (introduced in four London boroughs from April 2013, and to be rolled out nationally in two tranches from 15 July 2013), and removing the Spare Room Subsidy in the SRS. The following questions concern whether the new regulations in the last 12 months have had an effect on the work done by benefit advisers within your Local Authority and the broader impacts of all of these changes.

F1 On the whole, in the last twelve months has the number of benefit advisers employed by your LA, increased, decreased or stayed the same? Tick one only.

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

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F2 In the last 12 months how well would you say your LA has been able to meet the need for benefit advice? Tick one only.

Very well	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fairly well	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not very well	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not at all well	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

F3a In the last 12 months, what type of advice has been needed by HB claimants? Please tick all that apply in the first column below.

F3b Indicate what approximate percentage each type of advice has made up of all the advice given to HB claimants in the last 12 months. The total for all percentages should add to 100%. Please note your answer can be based on your general perception if you do not keep records of this information.

	F3a	F3b %	DK
LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LHA changes (excluding Shared Accommodation Rate)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shared Accommodation Rate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
New Local Council Tax Support Schemes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Universal Credit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
People seeking housing advice who are unaffected by policy changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DWP and other social support funds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		100%	
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>		

F4 In the last 12 months, what have been the four main reasons for rent arrears in your LA? Choosing from the entire list within the table below please tick the four main reasons below.

Type of reason	Select four from the entire list in this column	
Claimants not directly affected by HB policy changes:	Loss of employment/ change in working hours	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Wider economic circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other change in circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Long term arrears	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Unanticipated costs leading to arrears	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Non-dependent deductions	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Waiting for/delays in getting benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other General issues (Please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
LHA Changes:	Tenant in Rent Arrears because of changes to LHA	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Shared Accommodation Rate	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Direct payment	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other LHA related issue (Please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
RSRS:	Tenant in arrears because of RSRS	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant in arrears because of the combined effect of RSRS and another factor	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other RSRS related issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefit Cap:	Tenant in arrears because of Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tenant in arrears because of the combined effect of Benefit Cap and another factor	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Benefit Cap related issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Not applicable (no rent accounts/no properties owned by LA)	<input type="checkbox"/>

F5 In the last 12 months, what have been the four main reasons for homelessness acceptances in your LA? Choosing from the entire list within the table below please tick the four main reasons below.

Type of reason	Select four from the entire list in this column	
Claimants not directly affected by HB policy changes:	Relationship breakdown	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Family dispute	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Loss of accommodation due to rent arrears	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Young people asked to leave home	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Domestic violence	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Neighbourhood harassment	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Suitable accommodation not affordable	<input type="checkbox"/>
	A reduction in the number of properties available in the PRS	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Wider economic circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Drug and alcohol abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>
	People leaving prison	<input type="checkbox"/>
	End of support for mortgage interest	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Mortgage arrears	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other General issues (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	LHA Changes:	Tenant in Rent Arrears because of changes to LHA
Shared Accommodation Rate		<input type="checkbox"/>
Other LHA related issues (please specify)		<input type="checkbox"/>
RSRS:	Tenant in arrears because of RSRS	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other RSRS issues (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Benefit Cap:	Tenant in arrears because of Benefit Cap	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Can't afford difference between rent and HB	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other Benefit Cap issue (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

F6 Thinking of all the claimants placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty roughly what proportion were from each of the following household types? Please write in a percentage for each that applies and make sure that your answers add to 100%.

Single, under 35	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Single, 35+	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Couple	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Couple with children	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Single parent with children	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	100%
We do not currently place claimants out of borough	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

F7 Please provide a rough breakdown to indicate proportions for how far claimants have been placed out of borough to discharge a homeless duty. Note that figures should sum to 100.

Neighbouring LA	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Same Region (but not neighbouring LA)	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Further afield	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Have not placed claimants out of borough	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	100%
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

F8 In the last 12 months, would you say that your LA has found it easier or more difficult to source Temporary Accommodation, or has it been about the same? Tick one only.

A lot easier	A little easier	About the same	A little more difficult	A lot more difficult	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>					

F9a In general terms, how aware is your LA of homeless hostels in your area? Tick one only.

Very aware	Fairly aware	Not very aware	Not at all aware	Don't know
<input type="checkbox"/>				

F9b Has your LA opened any of its own homeless hostels? Tick one only.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not yet, but planning to	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

F10 What work is your LA doing, if any, to find out more about homeless hostels? Tick all that apply.

Researching online	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G
Talking to homeless charities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G
Word of mouth	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G
Meetings/liaison with hostel staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G
Other (please specify	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G
Not doing any work to find out more about homeless hostels	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer F11
Not applicable/do not have homeless hostels	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section G

Answer if 'Not doing any work to find out more about homeless hostels' at F10.

F11 Why is your LA not doing anything to find out more about homeless hostels? Please write in.

Section G – Shared Accommodation Rate

Please note that this section (or questions within this section) may be best answered by colleagues in Housing and Homelessness teams so may need to be passed on to them.

From January 2012 the age threshold for the Shared Accommodation Rate increased from 25 to 35. This section asks about the broader impacts of the SAR, specifically on exemptions and MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements).

All answer.

- G1** Would you say that in the last 12 months the number of landlords in your area who are letting properties as shared housing/HMO that were previously let to families or as self-contained accommodation has increased, decreased (a lot or a little) or stayed the same. Tick one only.

Increased a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increased a little	<input type="checkbox"/>
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased a little	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decreased a lot	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

- G2** Roughly what proportion of claimants who apply for homeless hostel exemptions are successful? Please note your answer can be based on your general perception if you do not keep records of this information. Please write in below.

%

Don't know

Answer G3a and G3b if answered less than 100% at G2. If 100% at G2 go to G4.

- G3a** What are the main reasons for claimants being rejected from homeless hostel exemptions? Tick all that apply in the first column below.

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G3b What is the most important reason for claimants being rejected from homeless hostel exemptions? Tick one only in the second column below.

	G3a	G3b
Hostel does not qualify	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hostel can't be identified	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Claimant did not stay for the required duration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hostel no longer open	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not enough evidence provided by claimant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Person making claim not accepting support to enable them to be rehabilitated or resettled	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No hostels in the area	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

All answer

G4 What does your LA do to verify a claim for an exemption? Tick all that apply.

Verbal confirmation from hostel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written confirmation from hostel	<input type="checkbox"/>
Internet search for hostel if not known	<input type="checkbox"/>
Check with Housing team/check internally	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not doing any work to verify claims	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

<p>If necessary please consult with colleagues in the appropriate department to complete G5-G7. Thank you.</p>

G5 Roughly how many MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) exemptions does your LA currently have? Please write in the number below.

%

Don't know

G6 How easy or difficult is your LA finding the process of identifying MAPPA? Tick one only.

Very easy	<input type="checkbox"/> Go to Section H
Fairly easy	<input type="checkbox"/> Go to Section H
Neither easy nor difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Go to Section H
Fairly difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Answer 7
Very difficult	<input type="checkbox"/> Answer 7
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/> Go to Section H
Do not need to identify MAPPA	<input type="checkbox"/> Go to Section H

Answer if 'Fairly' or 'Very difficult' at G6.

G7 Why is your LA finding the process of identifying MAPPA difficult? Please write in below.

Section H – Removal of Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS)

All answer.

H1 Has your LA reformed its allocation policy in order to bring definitions of the size of property applicants require in line with the DWP’s size criteria? Tick one only

Yes, existing definitions were more stringent than DWP’s definitions and we have revised these in line with DWP definitions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, existing definitions were less stringent than DWP’s definitions and we have revised these in line with DWP definitions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not yet, but planning to do so	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, existing definitions were already in line with DWP’s definitions	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, existing definitions were more stringent than DWP’s definitions and we have continued to use these	<input type="checkbox"/>
No, existing definitions were less stringent than DWP’s definitions and we have continued to use these	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don’t know	<input type="checkbox"/>

H2 What type of communication has your LA had with a) claimants who are affected by the RSRS, and b) claimants who are not currently affected by RSRS but might be in the future, and c) claimants who aren’t currently affected by RSRS but might be worrying that they are? Tick all that apply in each column.

	a) Claimants who are affected by the RSRS	b) Claimants who are not currently affected by RSRS but might be in the future	c) Claimants who are not currently affected by RSRS but might be worrying that they are might be in the future
Letter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone call	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting/visit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on website	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Leaflets available at LA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Joint communication from LA and landlords	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Advice from Housing officers/RSLs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responding to claimants' queries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Liaison with CAB	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not issued any communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

H3 Has the number affected by RSRS increased, decreased or stayed the same since April 2013? Tick one only

Increased	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to H5a
Decreased	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer H4
Stayed the same	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to H5a
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to H5a

Answer if 'Decreased' at H3.

H4 Why has this change occurred? Please tick all that apply in the first column and indicate which is the most significant reason in the second column. Please note your answer can be based on your general perception if you do not keep records of this information.

	Reasons	Most significant reason
Identifying exempt households	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tenants finding work/increasing pay	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tenants taking lodgers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reclassification of bedrooms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Downsizing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Household change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving out of the social sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Increase in caseload	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work-related	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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Identifying overnight carers for foster children & disabled children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please tick box and specify under the relevant column)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

All answer.

H5a Does your LA have any plans to build smaller houses or convert existing units? Tick one only

Yes, have started this already	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to H6
Yes, plan to but have not yet started	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer H6
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to H5b
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to H6

Answer if 'No' at H5a. Others go to H6

H5b Please indicate why you do not have plans to build smaller houses or convert existing units. Tick all that apply.

No capital	<input type="checkbox"/>
No plans	<input type="checkbox"/>
LA does not have housing stock to convert	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other reason (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

All answer

H6 DWP is keen to learn more about the implementation of RSRS. Have there been any lessons learnt so far about implementation of RSRS that you would like to tell us about? If yes, please write in below.

Yes (please specify) -----

Too early to say
No

Section I – Supported & Supported Exempt Accommodation

The following questions are about Supported and Supported Exempt Accommodation, including group homes, hostels or night shelters, refuges, sheltered housing, supported living complexes, extra care housing, adapted housing for the disabled and other types. Housing Benefit recognises the often higher costs of providing such accommodation in certain circumstances.

Following our consultation last year on reforming this area of support for housing costs, we are now seeking to update our information on caseloads and expenditure in this area to inform further development of the reforms.

- 11 How many cases do you currently have in a) supported accommodation and b) supported exempt accommodation where the landlord is a county council/ housing association or a registered charity/voluntary organisation. If reports indicating these amounts can be run easily then we would strongly encourage that. Note that totals for supported accommodation should include supported exempt accommodation. Please indicate whether your answer is based on records or is an estimate.

	Where landlord is a county council or housing association	Where landlord is a registered charity or voluntary organisation
a) Supported Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Based on records	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Estimate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Supported Exempt Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Based on records	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Estimate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 12 For HB cases in Supported Exempt Accommodation where the landlord is a county council or housing association, what proportion of cases are referred to a rent officer? If reports indicating these amounts cannot be obtained then estimates are acceptable, but we would strongly encourage the running of reports where possible.**

None	<input type="checkbox"/>
Up to 2%	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 2% up to and including 5%	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 5% up to and including 10%	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 10% up to and including 50%	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than 50%	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tick this box if answer here is an estimate	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 13 Thinking of HB cases in Supported Exempt Accommodation where the landlord is a county council or housing association, that are not referred to a rent officer, what are the reasons for not referring? Tick all that apply.**

The LA judges the rent reasonable compared to social sector rents for similar accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>
The LA does not consider the claimant to be over housed (i.e. in a property that is too large)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 14 What are the main difficulties in identifying supported and supported exempt housing? Please tick all that apply and write in below.**

Identifying the level of care	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establishing that the minimum level of care is provided	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't have any difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

15 Does your Local Authority have any experience of private sector landlords using ‘not for profit organisations’ they have created to increase their income through artificially increasing the volume of Support Exempt Accommodation claims to Housing Benefit (and therefore leaving LAs to pick up the short fall in Subsidy)?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Answer I6
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section J
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	Go to Section J

Answer if ‘Yes’ at I5. Others go to Section J.

16 Roughly what proportion of your supported accommodation bill does this relate to?

%

Don't know

Section J – Contact Details

All Answer.

J1 Would you be willing for DWP to get in touch with you in the future to pick up on any issues you may have raised and/or to offer advice or support where appropriate.

Yes

No

J2 We are interested in receiving your opinions/views on this or future waves of the LA Insight Survey or any issues around HB. Please use the space below for your comments.

J3 And finally please can you check your own contact details (printed below) and tick the appropriate box below.

All my contact details are correct

I have made some amendments

I have written in the missing contact details

Full name: <<RENAME>>

Job title: <<REJOB>>

LA Name: <<LA_NAME2>>

Telephone number, with extension: <<RETEL>>

Fax number: <<REFAX>>

Email address: <<EMAILADDRESS>>

Address (inc, postcode): <<READD1>>, <READD2>>, <<READD3>>, <<READD4>>, <<READD5>>, <<REPCD>>

**Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in
Wave 25 of the Local Authority Insight Survey.**