



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Findings from the Local Authority Insight Survey

Wave 29: Communications and the Targeted
Affordability Fund

December 2015

DWP ad hoc research report no. 29

A report of research carried out by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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1 Survey background and methodology

This summary has been prepared by Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation, commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It presents findings from wave 29 of the Local Authority (LA) Insight survey, which focuses on communications and the Targeted Affordability Fund (TAF).

1.1 Background to the policy

1.1.1 Communications

DWP communicates with LAs about housing in various ways. These include Housing Benefit (HB) Direct and the General Information Bulletin.

HB Direct is a monthly newsletter sent by DWP to LAs. It contains general updates, mainly about HB, but also about other things of relevance or interest to LAs, particularly around Welfare Reform.

The General Information Bulletin is another monthly publication, which DWP sends mid-monthly to LAs. It contains more detailed general information and guidance about Housing Benefit and other topics.

1.1.2 The Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) Good Practice Guide

The RSRS¹ Good Practice Guide² was published on 15 July 2014. It gave examples of good practice by LAs in three main areas: supporting claimants affected by RSRS; reducing the numbers of claimants affected by RSRS; and increasing the number of smaller homes.

1.1.3 The Targeted Affordability Fund (TAF)

Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates determine the maximum amount of Housing Benefit people on a low income renting in the private sector are entitled to. In the 2012 Autumn Statement, the Government announced that most LHA rates will be increased by a maximum of 1 per cent in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Alongside this, the Government set aside some of the savings to create a TAF. In certain areas where

¹ Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/removal-of-the-spare-room-subsidy--2>

² RSRS Good Practice Guide: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/removal-of-the-spare-room-subsidy-good-practice-guide>

the difference between rents and LHA rates was increasing the most, these rates were targeted to receive an increase of 4 per cent subject to the maximum LHA rates.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 Quantitative stage

Ipsos MORI conducted an online survey of Benefit Managers or those in a similar position at 380 LAs in England, Scotland and Wales who administered HB. Email invitations containing unique links to the survey were sent to each organisation³.

In total, Ipsos MORI received 116 responses to the survey. Of the 380 individual contacts, 12 participants could not be contacted. Many LAs reported operating some form of shared services for benefits management – 49 authorities invited to take part in the survey were managed by 19 named individuals.

Adjusting for this, the survey received a response rate of 33%. As can be seen in Appendix 2, there was a good spread of participants by type of authority and region. Nevertheless, the response rate varies somewhat between regions. This may affect the generalisability of the findings.

Questionnaire areas included:

- Communications
- The Targeted Affordability Fund
- Sharing good practice and the RSRS Good Practice Guide

The full questionnaire can be found in appendix 1 of this summary.

Fieldwork for the survey was conducted between 17th February and 12th March 2015.

1.2.2 Qualitative stage

In order to explore issues around the TAF specifically, Ipsos MORI conducted four telephone interviews with Benefit Managers (or most appropriate person in the LA) in the Aberdeen and Shire Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA)⁴, as well as a discussion group with six Benefit Managers (or similar roles) from four BRMAs in London. These BRMAs were selected as they received some of the TAF for at least three out of five LHA rates two years in a row (2014-15 and 2015-16).

The interviews lasted approximately half an hour each, and the discussion group ran for two hours.

³ With the exception of one LA which requested not to be re-contacted for future waves of the Local Authority Insight Survey during wave 26.

⁴ BRMAs are geographical areas used to determine the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for Housing Benefit and Universal Credit.

The research was conducted by experienced Ipsos MORI moderators, who led participants through semi-structured, informal discussions.

Discussion areas included:

- How effective the TAF has been in achieving its aim of preventing further areas from becoming unaffordable for housing benefit claimants;
- The impact that the TAF has had; and
- Suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of the TAF.

The full discussion guide can be found in appendix 3.

The qualitative fieldwork was conducted between 28th September and 5th October 2015.

1.3 Summary of the findings

1.3.1 Communications

- The majority of LAs receive HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin. Generally, Benefit Managers view these positively. They were usually received initially by key managers then cascaded through the LA to relevant teams.
- Over half of LAs (58%) would prefer the two mailings to be combined. If they were combined, most (71%) would like to receive the mailing once a month, however three in ten (29%) would like it only when there is new information to communicate. The majority (79%) think the number of mailings at the moment is about right but some (12%) do think there are too many.
- Letters are usually initially received by senior officers, however Benefit Managers would prefer that they were also copied in as they are often best placed to act on the information.
- Six in ten LAs (61%) have come across the RSRG Good Practice Guide. Almost three quarters (75%) found it helpful, and over half (56%) have made changes as a result.
- The majority of intervention schemes implemented were brought in before the RSRG Good Practice Guide, with offering advice or support around managing money and debt being the most common.
- The majority of LAs did not have intervention schemes operating across LA areas, however those that did manage this with support from external organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Money Advice Service.
- LAs that had made changes to Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) as a result of the RSRG Good Practice Guide say they have made policies more flexible for customers.
- In some LAs, DHPs have been very successful in assisting customers into affordable accommodation or allowing them to stay in their own homes.

However other LAs say the lack of affordable housing provision means the benefits of DHP are limited, as the strain on the DHP budget is too high.

- The majority of LAs share best practice in some way, although this is slightly more common within (99%) and between (98%) authorities, than with external organisations (88%) and landlords (88%).

1.3.2 The Targeted Affordability Fund (TAF)

- None of the 19 LAs surveyed with rates increased by the TAF thought it had been effective (53% say 'not very effective', 21% say 'not effective at all' and 36% don't know) – they say this is because rents tend to be higher than LHA rates. However, the qualitative stage revealed that those LAs who had the most experience of the TAF, did think it was a step in the right direction and was helping some people continue to live in areas that had become more expensive.
- Particularly in London, participants in the qualitative research reported that market rents surpass LHA rates, even with the TAF. Furthermore, participants explained that affordability remains an issue, with increasing homelessness due to eviction for not keeping up rent payments.
- Although the impact of the TAF across the two years is not clear, participants did feel strongly that the TAF would need to at least remain consistent, if not increase, in future years in order to prevent further areas becoming unaffordable.
- Some felt that BRMA boundaries caused issues, specifically where there are more expensive areas and neighbourhoods which may contribute to rents throughout the whole BRMA becoming inflated, even within the less affluent locations.
- In many cases, the increase to LHA rates using the TAF still does not cover the difference between the rates and market rents and recipients are required to make up the shortfall.
- Full local control of the setting of LHA rates and the TAF, the introduction of rent controls, and reorganisation of BRMAs were suggested as things that could be done differently. Participants were cautious about using the TAF to increase specific LHA rates or help certain demographic groups, as they felt claimants might lose out if analysis used to allocate the TAF failed to keep up with market fluctuations.

2 Key Findings

2.1 Communications

2.1.1 HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin

The vast majority of LAs say they receive both HB Direct (97%) and the General Information Bulletin (94%).

These publications are usually received initially by key managers, and then cascaded through the LA to relevant teams by email, links in internal newsletters, team meetings or saving them on shared drives. Depending on the issues raised in the newsletters, they may then be passed on to relevant specialist teams e.g. customer service, finance and debt recovery.

Attitudes towards HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin are generally positive. All of those LAs who receive HB Direct say they found it clear, and nine in ten (90%) found it useful. Similarly, of those who receive the General Information Bulletin, nearly all find it clear (99%) and useful (97%).

Six in ten LAs (58%) would prefer the two mailings to be combined, however some (13%) are happy keeping them separate. Almost three in ten (28%) have no preference.

If the two mailings were combined, most (71%) would like to receive the mailing once a month, however three in ten (29%) would like it only when there is new information to be communicated.

2.1.2 The RSRS good practice guide

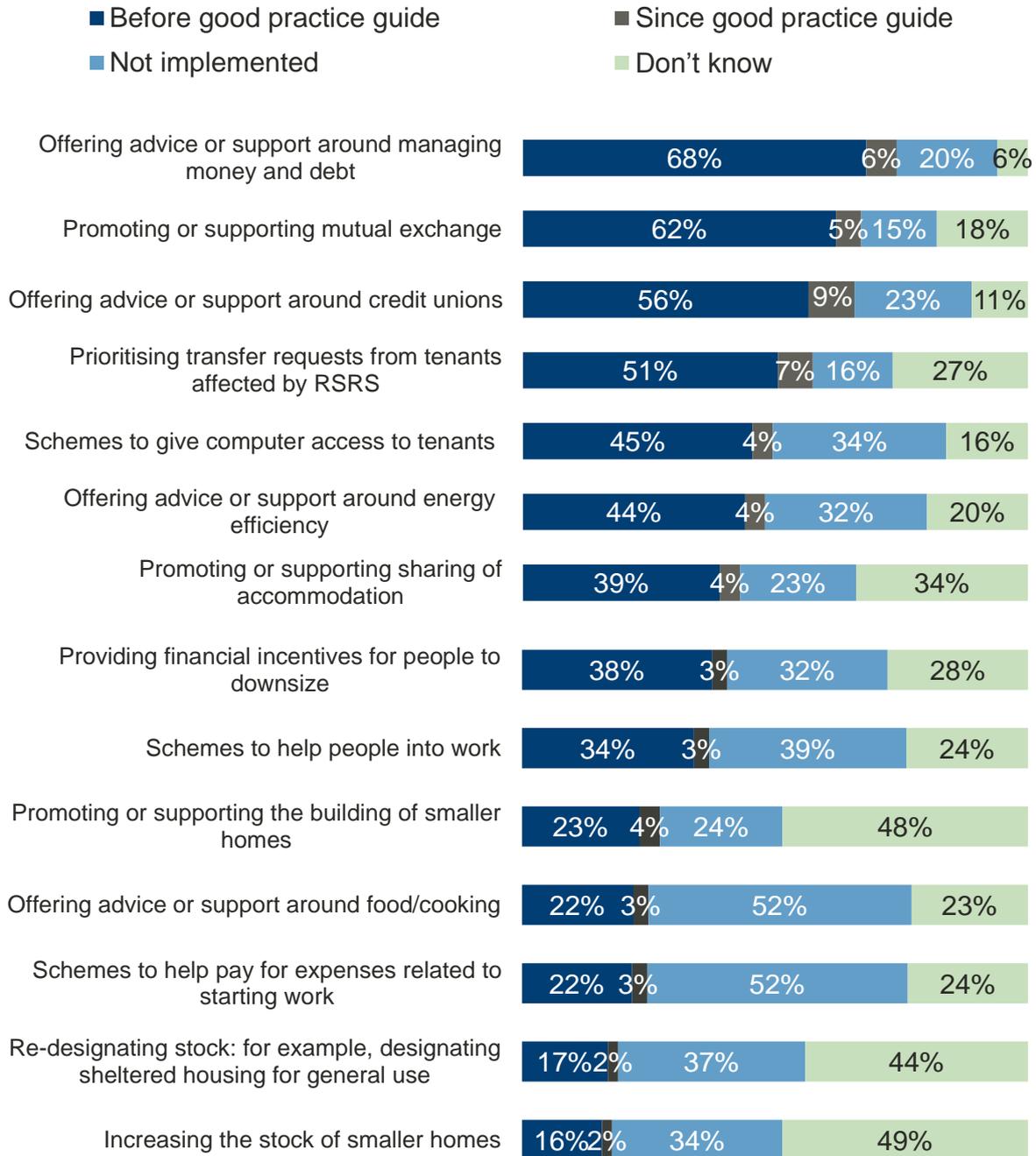
Six in ten LAs (61%) have come across the RSRS Good Practice Guide. Almost three quarters of these LAs (75%) found it useful, and over half (56%) have made changes as a result.

Many of the LAs have implemented interventions mentioned in the RSRS Good Practice Guide, however the majority of these were implemented before the guide was published. Offering advice or support around managing money and debt was the most frequently selected intervention (68% of LAs said they implemented this before the Guide was published, 6% said they had implemented it since).

Q22 Which of these interventions have you implemented or are you in the process of implementing?



1



In general LAs did not have intervention schemes operating across LA areas. Those that did operate schemes across LA areas managed this with support from external organisations. LAs who did not have their own housing stock said they did not need to implement the interventions. Where LAs were implementing interventions, several mentioned working in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Money Advice Service. Housing departments within LAs tend to oversee property schemes, and Employment and Skills teams deal with interventions around helping tenants to find work.

LAs have made changes to DHPs to incorporate those customers affected by RSRs. Changes include greater flexibility in length of DHP awards so they become either shorter or longer-term. Additionally, some LAs have widened the scope of what DHPs are used for, adding a new condition that people should register to downsize, increasing provision of guidance on financial management for tenants, and some are supporting people to stay in work.

“Now we work with colleagues in our housing options team. They offer advice on down-sizing, how to reduce their energy bills, and offer household expenditure advice etc. loosely with Housing/Registered Social Landlords to target individuals affected.”
– Survey participant

Opinion on the success of these changes was mixed. In some LAs, DHPs have been very successful in assisting customers into affordable accommodation or allowing them to stay in their own homes. Here, increased provision for guidance means customers were seeking advice when they may not have before.

“As well as financial assistance through DHP we now offer far more constructive advice and assistance where possible.” – Survey participant

“It is too early to say the impact that these changes are having. We are receiving less DHP requests at present than this time last year although this may be due to the fact that longer term awards have been made.” – Survey participant

“More flexibility regarding DHPs is having a positive impact.” – Survey participant

However, other LAs felt that although the changes are a step in the right direction, they do not go far enough. For these LAs, the lack of affordable housing provision means the benefits of DHP are limited, as the strain on the budget is too high. Tenants are now entering arrears when they had not previously, with some LAs reporting higher rates of evictions and crisis support applications.

“There are increased rent arrears and anxious tenants - we can't cover all shortfalls with a DHP.” – Survey participant

2.1.3 Other communications

As well as HB Direct, the General Information Bulletin, and the RSRs Good Practice Guide; DWP sends LAs additional letters and emails about housing.

The majority (79%) think the number of mailings at the moment is about right, but some (12%) do think there are too many.

When letters and emails are sent, Chief Executives or other senior staff members usually receive them initially, but, to the frustration of Benefit Managers, do not always read them or cascade them immediately. Generally, Benefit Managers reported that they would prefer to be copied in on letters to Chief Executives so they can act on the information appropriately and efficiently.

“It really depends on who they are sent to. If they are sent to a member of the Benefits Team, they get circulated within the Benefits Team and with any senior manager that the topic is relevant to. If not received by a member of the Benefits Team, Benefits do not always know about the communication.” – Survey participant

Benefit Managers did have some suggestions for improving communications:

- Generally, email was preferred to paper communication as it is easier to track and circulate within the LA;
- To reduce the number of different channels which communications are shared through – consider summarising information letters with General Information Bulletins sent once a month;
- Avoid circulating information about initiatives which are not yet finalised and therefore may not come to fruition; and
- Use generic, not personal, email addresses in mailings so it is easier for LAs to approach the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with queries.

2.2 The Targeted Affordability Fund (TAF)

This section combines high level data from relevant questions in the quantitative survey with more in-depth findings from the qualitative stage.

2.2.1 Affordability of housing

The survey demonstrated that LAs with more affordable local rents that closely match the LHA in that area, or those with a surplus of private rental accommodation, tend not to report any issues with housing affordability. However, the majority of LAs who participated in the survey reported a lack of suitable affordable housing, as well as other issues, specific to their local areas.

Issues reported include:

- Lack of one and two-bedroomed properties needed to meet spare room subsidy requirements, requiring the claimants or LA to make up the shortfall;
- In affluent areas, private rental sector housing is in high demand and too expensive for those on HB as rents are often higher than LHA rates even with the TAF increase;
- Social landlords charge rent upfront, when HB is paid in arrears, sometimes creating debt for claimants; and

- Individuals not wanting to move away from their families and/or social networks and areas where they can find work, to more affordable areas.

Those who took part in the qualitative stage reported that affordability becomes more of a concern the closer you are to urban centres (for example, in London and Aberdeen):

“The further out you are from Aberdeen, the higher the chance that your contractual rent will fall within the LHA rate.” – Qualitative research participant

Particularly in London and urban areas with housing shortages, participants explained that even with the TAF increase, LHA rates are far below the rents of properties available to claimants.

“The rents are outstripping the LHAs wherever you go. Because of the price of houses going up in London, the young professionals are going for the rented market, which I think is forcing up rents as well, and so as a result, even for single room, the actual cost of it is more than the LHA.” – Qualitative research participant

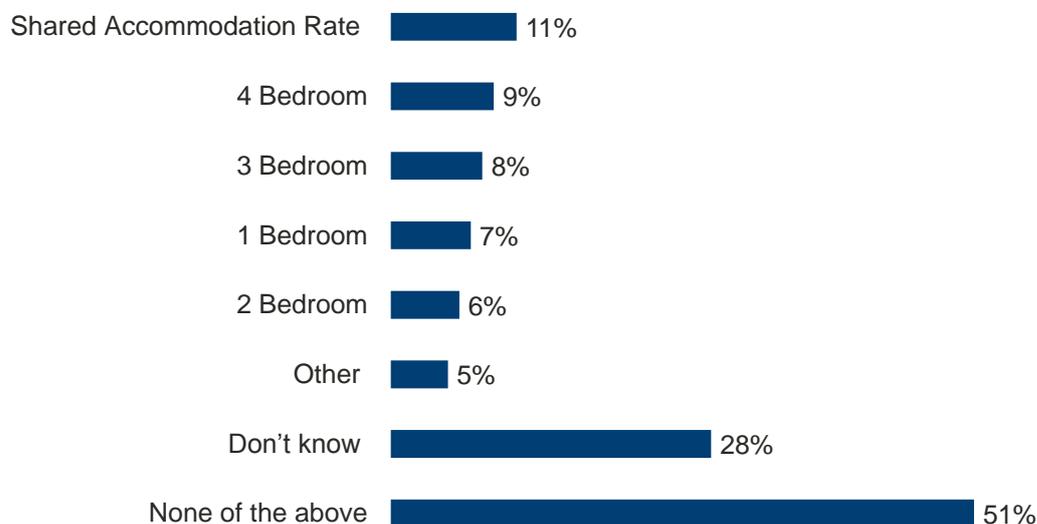
Participants reported that BRMA boundaries caused issues, specifically where there are more expensive areas and neighbourhoods which may contribute to rents throughout the whole BRMA becoming inflated, even within the less affluent locations. They also explained that landlords raised rents across neighbourhoods in order to match those of the more affluent areas, often outstripping the LHA rate.

“In places like Islington, Camden...they were grouped in with Kensington. Because the rents that are in Kensington far exceed the rents that were being charged in Islington and Camden, the consequence was the landlords were thinking oh great I can start charging that because Housing Benefit will pay that.” – Qualitative research participant

2.2.2 Effectiveness of the TAF

Around half of LAs taking part in the survey (51%) did not have any rates affected by the TAF. Those rates that have been affected were fairly equally spread.

Q13 In your Local Authority area, which, if any, of the following rates were increased by Targeted Affordability Funding (TAF)?



Base: All Local Authorities (116)

Source: Ipsos MORI

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None of those LAs with rates increased by the TAF thought it had been effective (53% say 'not very effective', 21% say 'not effective at all' and 36% don't know) – they said this is because rents still tended to be higher than the LHA rate and TAF combined .

“As many of our claimants are capped the LHA rate is not the main issue for affordability. Many landlords charge above the LHA rate in any event, so there remains a shortfall for the tenant.” – Survey participant

2.2.3 To what extent has the funding helped prevent further areas from becoming unaffordable for HB claimants?

The qualitative stage focused in on those LAs with rates increased by the TAF for at least three out of five LHA rates for the last two years, in order to explore the issues behind this low effectiveness rating.

In contrast to the quantitative findings, views on the TAF were generally positive. Overall, the sentiment was that the use of the TAF to increase rates in certain areas is a step in the right direction, and that it does play a role in maintaining affordability and availability of housing in certain areas - its main aim. It was felt to have positively impacted some claimants, to the extent that they would struggle if it were withdrawn, although no specific demographic groups were identified.

“To me the TAF does very well; it keeps people in, it keeps landlords in the market...they're still accommodating a lot of people.” – Qualitative research participant

“Withdrawing the TAF would make a huge difference to people who receive it.” – Qualitative research participant

There was however, a feeling that much more could be done to improve access to the private rental sector for HB claimants.

“I think this sounds like a sticking plaster really rather than resolve; getting at the underlying problem.” – Qualitative research participant

It is however, important to note that assessing the impact of the TAF was difficult for participants for several reasons:

- The short amount of time in which the TAF has been in place, makes it difficult to assess the extent to which it has had an impact.

“It’s been a help for us this year, but whether it’s achieved its aim, it’s too early to tell.” – Qualitative research participant

- The complexity of both recent welfare reforms and the private rental property market make it difficult to determine causality.

“DHP awards in the private rented sector have dropped, although whether it’s down to the TAF, I don’t know. I’d have to do a piece of work to look at that.” – Qualitative research participant

- Among those who participated in the study, these difficulties were often compounded by the fact that participants tended to view the TAF as part and parcel of LHA rates in their area. This therefore made it difficult for participants to separate out the exact impact of the TAF. This may also affect LAs awareness of the TAF in general, and their ability to measure its effectiveness.

2.2.4 How has the funding helped prevent further areas from becoming unaffordable for HB claimants?

It was suggested that the TAF has helped to some extent, with participants reporting that in some less-affluent areas, benefit claimants to remain living in the area.

“We went from having 50% of households having rents above the contractual, to probably around 45%, which is probably because of that 8% kick over the two years, so actually it’s helping reduce the gap but there’s still a large number of households who have a rent higher than the LHA [including the TAF].” – Qualitative research participant

“I mean I think for us [at the LA] the big problem is that rent inflation is pushing people out of the more expensive areas, so where people want to live is then displacing, so we end up with people in the middle of the borough, we have poor condition housing and that’s generally what people are accessing.” – Qualitative research participant

In rural areas of Scotland, there are properties available for rent at affordable costs to HB claimants. Here, the TAF provides a financial cushion which helps LAs to save their DHP budget for its intended use.

“We welcome the fact that it is there, because without it we would be looking at severe pressures on our DHP budget from the private sector.” – Qualitative research participant

However, some affordability issues remain unresolved in urban areas where there is still a shortfall between increased LHA rates and market rents.

“It’s the people at the bottom who always lose out. The people who can’t make up any shortfall. Working households will make up shortfalls. If people on fixed benefits can’t make up the difference, and the landlord fancies kicking you out, they’ll end up with us again.” - Qualitative research participant

While there may be causal factors other than the difference between rent levels and the levels of LHA rates, participants suggested that evictions for those not able to keep up with rent payments remains an increasing issue in all areas. For these claimants, areas are becoming unaffordable.

“We’ve had an increase in numbers in our homelessness section because people can’t secure tenancies. There isn’t enough affordable property so we’ve had to put them in B&Bs.” – Qualitative research participant

2.2.5 Is the TAF continuing to help claimants (over both financial years)?

As discussed earlier, the mix of factors at play, combined with short timescales and possible lack of awareness of the specific increase due to the TAF; make it difficult for Benefit Managers to assess the impact that the TAF has had in practice. And generally, there was a sense that rent levels were being increasingly driven by the private rental market. However, participants did explain that for the TAF to achieve its aim of preventing further areas from becoming unaffordable for HB claimants, it would need to increase year-on-year in accordance with market rents. This would offer long-term stability, and act as an incentive for private landlords to rent to HB claimants, rather than private tenants⁵.

“If there’s not going to be some kind of reflection of market conditions for those authorities where rents rise, then that will put pressures on DHP budgets at a time when council budgets are already being squeezed.” – Scottish telephone interview

“Provide some stability around this. If you are in an area where rents are increasing year on year, and LHA does not increase, all its going to do is limit benefit claimants to areas which are far from the economic centres, which will limit their options for employment.” – Qualitative research participant

⁵ In the coming years, Government plans are for 30% of potential savings from the freeze to LHA rates to be used to create more TAF to support areas where rent increases are causing a shortage of affordable accommodation.

2.2.6 Is there anything that could be done differently?

A suggestion from the London discussion group was that LAs could be given the funding directly, rather than it being distributed centrally. This would allow each LA to use the money in the most appropriate way for the issues in their area.

For example, it could be used to prevent landlords with properties in poor condition from receiving income from HB claimants. This could act as an incentive for these landlords to make improvements to their properties, resulting in an overall improvement in quality of housing available to HB claimants in that area.

“I think I might be able to use that better if you gave that to me as a grant to do something in the private rented sector like deal with conditionality [i.e. property standards].” – Qualitative research participant

Another suggestion in London was that the introduction of rent controls would prevent landlords from charging above LHA rates to HB claimants.

“Rent control is always the elephant in the room that no-one wants to talk about. The Housing Benefit bill has been spiralling ever since rents were deregulated in '89.” – Qualitative research participant

Additionally, BRMAs could be made smaller and more tailored. Avoiding the grouping of affluent areas with less affluent ones would help minimise rent increases by landlords in the less affluent neighbourhoods.

“They should group localities together [into BRMAs], where the rents would actually reflect what rents should be in that area.” – Qualitative research participant

2.2.7 Opinions on more effective ways of targeting funding

Participants expressed some reservations around using the TAF to increase specific room rates or for allocating by demographic groups. This was because of the need to have the distribution method set at the beginning of the financial year which could leave certain groups vulnerable if there were changes in the rental market throughout the year.

“Markets can shift quite quickly. I don't think it's subtle or specific enough to take account of how things change through the year, or to target at a specific rate.” – Qualitative research participant

“Whatever changes you make, there are always winners and losers.” – Qualitative research participant

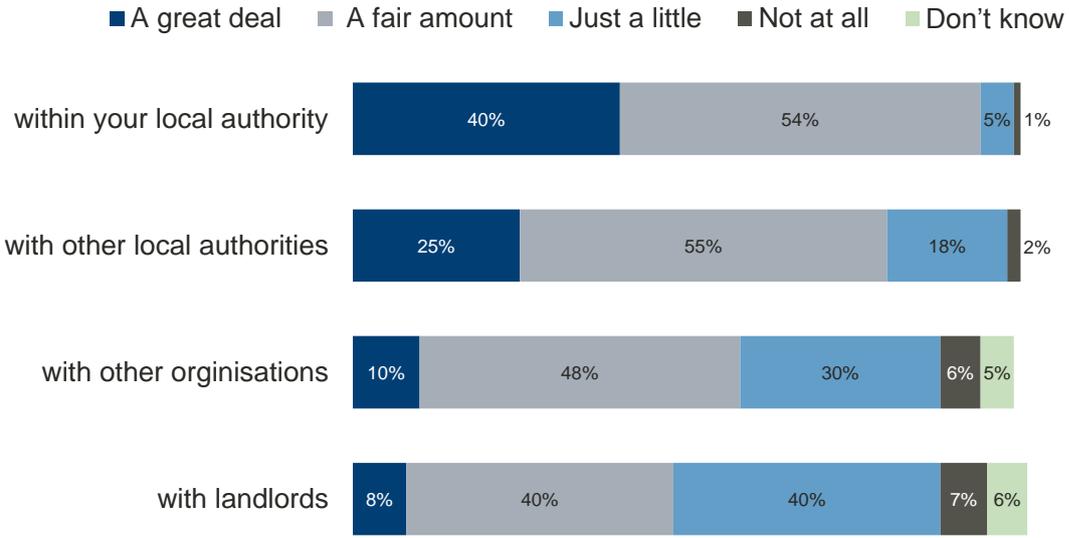
Also, some participants felt current data provision was not adequate or timely enough to be used to tailor the TAF.

“It's not going to be nuanced enough for that and the data won't be there because there's always that lag.” – Qualitative research participant

2.3 Sharing good practice

The majority of LAs share best practice in some way, although this is slightly more common within (99%) and between (98%) authorities, than with external organisations (88%) and landlords (88%).

Q17 To what extent do you share best practice...



Base: All Local Authorities (116) Source: Ipsos MORI
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Within LAs, best practice is shared through staff meetings, training sessions and internal newsletters across departments.

Best practice is shared between LAs through regional partnership groups (e.g. the London Policy Officers Group), benchmarking groups (e.g. CIPFA, Core Cities and regional groups), quarterly Benefit Manager meetings, and working groups on specific issues (e.g. Universal Credit).

LAs share best practice with external organisations through dissemination of information by email, posting information on the council website, taking part in cross-organisation working groups, and regular meetings (e.g. training on Universal Credit for Jobcentres).

LAs share best practice with landlords through landlord forums, liaison meetings, newsletters, by attending user group meetings and providing training for large social landlords.

Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

DWP LA Insight Wave 29: Communications and the Targeted Affordability Fund

In this wave of the DWP LA Insight Survey we're focusing on:

- DWP communications to LAs
- Targeted Affordability Funding

Your answers to this survey are completely confidential to the research team at Ipsos MORI.

Please feel free to consult colleagues when answering this survey. Please note that you can close the survey and reopen it at the most recent point should you need to do so.

GENERAL COMMUNICATIONS

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) communicates with LAs about housing in various ways. These include HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin. We would like to know what you find useful and what you think could be improved.

HB DIRECT

PLEASE ANSWER

HB Direct is a regular publication sent by DWP to LAs. It contains general information, mainly about Housing Benefit, but also about other things of relevance or interest to LAs, particularly around Welfare Reform.

Q1. Does your LA receive HB Direct?

Please select one answer only

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' AT Q1.

Thinking about the issues of HB Direct you have received in the past 3 months:

Q2. How *clear* did you find these issues of HB Direct?

Please select one answer only

1. Very clear
2. Fairly clear
3. Not very clear
4. Not clear at all
5. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' AT Q1.

Q3. How *useful* did you find these issues of HB Direct?

Please select one answer only

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not useful at all
5. Don't know

THE GENERAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

PLEASE ANSWER

The General Information bulletin is another publication, which DWP sends every month to LAs. It contains general information about Housing Benefit and other topics.

Q4. Does your LA receive the General Information Bulletin?

Please select one answer only

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Thinking about the issues of the General Information Bulletin you have received in the past 3 months:

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' AT Q4.

Q5. How *clear* did you find these issues of the General Information Bulletin?

Please select one answer only

1. Very clear
2. Fairly clear
3. Not very clear
4. Not clear at all
5. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' AT Q4.

Q6. How *useful* did you find these issues of the General Information Bulletin?

Please select one answer only

1. Very useful
2. Fairly useful
3. Not very useful
4. Not useful at all
5. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' AT Q1 OR Q4.

Q7. We would like to know how HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin get circulated within your LA. Please tell us a little about who receives them, how they are circulated and who reads them.

OPEN ENDED

CHANGES TO HB DIRECT AND THE GENERAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

PLEASE ANSWER

At the moment, we send HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin on a regular basis, once a month.

We could change this and combine both of these publications, so that you no longer receive them separately once a month. This would mean that your LA would receive one update instead of two.

Q8. Which of the following would be most useful to your LA?

Please select one answer only

1. Send HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin separately, which is what happens now.
2. Combine HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin, so that your LA receives only one update
3. It is equally useful either way
4. Don't know

PLEASE ANSWER

Q9. If HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin were combined, what would be your preferred frequency?

Please select one answer only

1. Once per month
2. Twice per month
3. Only when there is new information to communicate

OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

PLEASE ANSWER

As well as HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin, we send other communications about housing.

These include letters and email alerts. These might go to the Chief Executive, Revenues and Benefits Managers or other people in your LA.

Q10. Thinking about the amount of letters and email alerts you receive, would you say you receive too many, too few or about the right number?

Please select one answer only

1. Too many
2. Too few
3. About the right number
4. Don't know

Q11. We would like to know how these letters get circulated within the LA. Please tell us a little about how they are circulated and who reads them.

OPEN ENDED

Q12. Is there anything else about our communications, which you think we should know about?

OPEN ENDED

TARGETED AFFORDABILITY FUNDING

As you may know, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates determine the maximum amount of Housing Benefit people on a low income renting in the private sector are entitled to. In the 2012 Autumn Statement, the Government announced that most LHA rates will be increased by a maximum of 1% in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Alongside this, the Government set aside some of the savings to create the Targeted Affordability Funding. (TAF).

In Local Authority areas where the difference between rents and LHA rates was increasing the most, these rates will be targeted to receive an increase of up to 4% subject to the maximum LHA rates.

PLEASE ANSWER

Q13. In your Local Authority area, which, if any, of the following rates were increased by Targeted Affordability Funding (TAF)? Please select all that apply.

Answers 6, 7 and 8 cannot be selected with any other answer

1. Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR)

2. 1 bedroom
3. 2 bedroom
4. 3 bedroom
5. 4 bedroom
6. None of the above
7. Other (please explain)
8. Don't know

ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED ANY CODES 1-5 AT Q13

Q14. How effective do you think this funding has been at addressing issues with affordability of housing in the private rented sector?

Please select one answer only

1. Very effective
2. Fairly effective
3. Not very effective
4. Not effective at all
5. Don't know

ASK ONLY IF ANSWERED ANY CODES 1-4 AT Q14

Q15. Could you tell us a bit more about why you think this funding has been effective or ineffective?

OPEN ENDED

AFFORDABILITY

PLEASE ANSWER

Q16. What issues, if any, are there with housing affordability in your Local Authority area?

OPEN ENDED

SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

PLEASE ANSWER

Now we want to understand how your Local Authority shares good practice.

Q17. To what extent do you share best practice...

A ... within your Local Authority

B ... with other Local Authorities

C ... with landlords

D ... with other organisations

Please select one answer only for each question (A-D)

1. A great deal
2. A fair amount
3. Just a little
4. Not at all
5. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF YOU SHARE BEST PRACTICE

Q18. Please use the box below to tell us about some of the ways you share best practice with these organisations.

OPEN ENDED

THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

PLEASE ANSWER

Q19. DWP is interested to know whether or not information it circulates is reaching the right people.

The RSRS Good Practice Guide was published on 15 July. It gave examples of good practice by Local Authorities in three main areas: supporting claimants affected by RSRS; reducing the numbers of claimants affected by RSRS and increasing the number of smaller homes.

Have you come across the RSRS Good Practice Guide?

Please select one answer only

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' Q19

Q20. How helpful did your Local Authority find the RSRS Good Practice Guide?

Please select one answer only

1. Very helpful
2. Fairly helpful
3. Not very helpful
4. Not helpful at all
5. Don't know

ANSWER ONLY IF ANSWERED 'YES' Q19

Q21. To what extent has your Local Authority made changes as a result of the RSRS Good Practice guide?

Please select one answer only

1. A great deal
2. A fair amount
3. Just a little
4. Not at all
5. Don't know

SCHEME FROM THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

PLEASE ANSWER

Q22. The following interventions were all mentioned in the Good Practice Guide. Which of them have you implemented or are you in the process of implementing?

Helping tenants make better use of their money

- A. Offering advice or support around managing money and debt
- B. Offering advice or support around energy efficiency
- C. Offering advice or support around food or cooking
- D. Offering advice or support around credit unions

Helping tenants find work

- E. Schemes to give computer access to tenants/improve IT skills
- F. Schemes to help people into work (e.g CV writing, interview practice, job-related training)
- G. Schemes to help pay for expenses related to starting work.

Housing stock

- H. Re-designating stock: for example, designating sheltered housing for general use.
- I. Promoting or supporting mutual exchange
- J. Prioritising transfer requests from tenants affected by RSRS/Removing obstacles that might prevent tenants from downsizing.
- K. Promoting or supporting the building of smaller homes
- L. Promoting or supporting sharing of accommodation
- M. Providing financial incentives for people to downsize
- N. Increasing the stock of smaller homes

Please select one answer for each intervention listed

1. Implemented before the Good Practice Guide
2. Implemented since the Good Practice Guide
3. Have not implemented
4. Don't know

Q23. Do any of these schemes operate across Local Authority areas? How do you manage this?

OPEN ENDED

ANSWER ONLY IF YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY MADE CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE RSRG GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE (ANSWER 1, 2 OR 3 AT Q21)

Q24. What changes has your Local Authority made to Discretionary Housing Payment policies as a result of the RSRG Good Practice guide?

OPEN ENDED

ANSWER ONLY IF YOUR LOCAL AUTHORITY MADE CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE RSRG GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE (ANSWER 1, 2 OR 3 AT Q21)

Q25. Finally, what impact are these changes having?

OPEN ENDED

Thank you for your time.

Appendix 2 – Responses by LA type and region

There is generally a good spread of completed questionnaires (those who completed the survey) by type of authority and region which mirrors that of non-responders (those who didn't complete the survey), although Welsh LAs are under-represented. Column totals may not equal 100%, due to rounding.

Type of authority	Total number of LAs	% of all LAs	Number of LAs that completed the survey	% of all completed surveys	Response rate ⁶
English District	201	53%	58	50%	25%
London	33	9%	12	10%	30%
Metropolitan	36	10%	11	10%	28%
Scottish	32	8%	10	9%	28%
Unitary	56	15%	24	21%	38%
Welsh	22	6%	1	*%	5%
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>33%⁷</i>

Region	Total number of LAs	% of all LAs	Number of completed questionnaires	% of all completed surveys	Response rate ⁸
East Midlands	40	11%	10	9%	25%
East of England	44	12%	17	15%	39%
London	33	9%	12	10%	36%
North East	13	3%	5	4%	38%
North West	38	10%	11	9%	29%
Scotland	32	8%	10	9%	31%
South East	70	18%	22	19%	31%
South West	37	10%	11	9%	30%
Wales	22	6%	1	*%	5%

⁶ Completed questionnaires as a percentage of type of authority population.

⁷ Overall, adjusting for shared services.

⁸ Completed questionnaires as a percentage of type of authority population.

West Midlands	30	8%	12	10%	40%
Yorkshire and the Humber	21	6%	5	4%	24%
<i>Total</i>	<i>380</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>116</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>33%⁹</i>

⁹ Overall, adjusting for shared services.

Appendix 3 – Discussion guide

Notes	Guide Sections	Guide Timings
1. Introductions and background	Sets the scene, reassures participants about the interview, confidentiality and anonymity, intros.	15min
2. Opening discussion	This section is designed to set out the intentions of the introduction of TAF and gauge participants' views of whether this has been achieved.	25min
3. Understanding the impact TAF	In this section we want to understand the implementation of TAF. In this section we will ask for case studies of how TAF has affected HB claimants, and how this has changed over the two years.	40min
4. Increasing the effectiveness of TAF	Participants will offer suggestions of realistic changes that could be made to how TAF is targeted in order to make it more effective. The group will deliberate on how these changes could work in practice.	30min
5. Final thoughts and close	Opportunity for final reflections and any other issues important for participants. Reminder of confidentiality and close.	10min

We use several conventions to explain to you how this guide will be used, described below.

Timings	Questions	Notes and Prompts
	<p><u>Underlined</u> = <u>Title</u>: This provides a heading for a sub-section</p> <p>Bold = Question or read out statement: Questions that will be asked to the participant if relevant. Not all questions are asked during fieldwork based on the moderator's view of progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bullet = prompt: Prompts are not questions – they are there to provide guidance to the moderator if required. 	<p>This area is used to summarise what we are discussing, provides informative notes, and some key prompts for the moderator</p>
	<p>Typically, the researcher will ask questions and use the prompts to guide where necessary. Not all questions or prompts will necessarily be used during the discussion.</p>	

Timing	<u>1. Introductions and background</u>	Notes and prompts to moderator
15 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank participants for taking part - Introduce self, Ipsos MORI - Background to the research: Qualitative groups intended to compliment the Local Authority Insight Survey. Wave 29, which they may have seen in March 2015, asked about the effectiveness of TAF. These groups aim to further explore the issues and produce strategies for improvement. Participants selected in regions most affected by TAF. - Confidentiality: reassure that all responses are anonymous and that information about individuals, and specific LAs, will not be passed on to anyone, outside the research teams at Ipsos MORI and DWP, who will use it for research purposes only. - Role of Ipsos MORI – independent research organisation (i.e. independent of GOVERNMENT), gather all opinions: all opinions valid. - Remind that there are no right or wrong answers. 	<p><i>The aim of this section is to warm up participants, and to find out their level of involvement with TAF and LHA rates as a whole.</i></p> <p><i>This context is important and will frame the rest of the discussion. This section is also helpful as it gets the participant used to talking about their role and how this links with TAF.</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commissioned by DWP to conduct the research. - Get permission to digitally record – transcribe for quotes, no detailed attribution, held securely in line with Data Protection Act. <p><u>Introductions and background</u></p> <p>Let's start by learning a little about you and your role.</p> <p>Can we go round the group, please give your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name • your LA • your job title/role, and • how you are involved in LHA (and TAF) in your day-to-day work. 	
Timing	<u>2. Opening discussion</u>	Notes and Prompts
20 mins	<p>To kick off, we would like your general views on the higher increase to LHA rates using the TAF in your areas.</p> <p>Just to provide some initial national context:</p> <p><i>At Autumn Statement 2012, the Government announced that most Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates will be increased by a maximum of 1% in 2014-15 and 2015-16.</i></p> <p><i>In recognition of the fact that rental markets differ across the country, the Government committed to using some of the forecast savings to increase rates in certain areas by more than the 1 per cent limit. The funding for this is known as the 'LHA Targeted Affordability Funding'. In 2014/15, 126 out of 960 individual LHA rates were increased by 4% (subject to the LHA caps) using the TAF. In 2015/16, this increased to 191 out of 960. There was £45 million available for TAF in 2014/15 and £95 million in 2015/16.</i></p> <p><i>The main aim of TAF is to prevent further areas from become unaffordable for housing</i></p>	<p><i>This section is designed to set out issues around the use of TAF to increase rates in certain areas where there are affordability issues for HB claimants. Participants comments should be noted down on a flipchart and ensure they are addressed throughout the next two hours.</i></p>

	<p><i>benefit claimants.</i></p> <p>In your LA, how effective do you think the TAF has been in achieving its aim of preventing further areas from become unaffordable for housing benefit claimants?</p> <p>Please note your thoughts down on the post-its provided.</p> <p>ALLOW 2 MINS FOR NOTING DOWN, GO ROUND THE TABLE AND NOTE DOWN ANSWERS ON A FLIPCHART, GROUPING TOGETHER SIMILAR ISSUES.</p> <p>PROBE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why? - Are areas that have historically been affordable for HB claimants within your LA still affordable? - Have new areas become more affordable? Why? - Have new areas become unaffordable? Why? 	
Timing	<u>3. Understanding the impact of TAF</u>	Notes and Prompts
45 mins	<p>To what extent, if at all, has the increase in the LHA rates (using TAF) made any different to claimants in your area?</p> <p>Which groups of claimants have been affected in your area?</p> <p>MODERATOR HAND OUT CASE STUDY FORMS</p> <p>We'd like to pull together some examples of the impact (positive and negative) that the extra increase to LHA rates (using TAF) can have on HB claimants. Please fill in the form, either with a real or generic example of a person in your LA who has received a higher LHA</p>	<p><i>In this section we want understand how TAF impacts claimants.</i></p> <p><i>NOTE: The decisions about which rates in which areas get TAF is made by DWP after analysis of rental data provided by Rent Officers and an</i></p>

rate. . We'd like to know how the HB they receive has changed, and what impact this has had on their lives. If you are using a generic example, please choose something which is representative of claimants in your LA.

ALLOW 5 MINUTES TO COMPLETE CASE STUDY FORMS. EACH PARTICIPANT MAY COMPLETE UP TO 3 IF THEY ILLUSTRATE DIFFERENT POINTS

SPEND 15 MINUTES TALKING THROUGH THE CASE STUDIES

PROBES:

- Why did you select this case study?
- In your case study, has TAF had a positive, negative or no impact on the claimant?
- How typical of your LA is this case study?
- What is the key point that this case study demonstrates?
- What do other participants think of the case studies? Surprising?
- Have other participants experienced similar cases?

Funding allocated to TAF has risen from £45m in 2014/15 to £95m in 2015/16 What impact, if any, has this increase in funding had in your LA?

- If you've had TAF over both years, how has the impact of TAF changed or been consistent over the two years it has been running (2014/15 and 2015/16)?
- From your point of view, has the impact of TAF funding changed?
- Does it help claimants now more or less than last year (2014/15)?

assessment made of which LHA rates have diverged the most from market rents. These rates and areas are then set out in a schedule in legislation to receive a higher increase than the 1% uprating. Rent Officers then set LHA rates in accordance with the legislation. [The legislation is the Rent Officers Order]

Everyone who qualifies for that rate in that LA will be eligible for the increase due to the TAF.

This section will produce some examples and case studies of how TAF has effected HB claimants, and how this has changed over the two years

		Reference data on TAF received by each LA present across the two years
Timing	<u>4. Increasing the effectiveness of TAF</u>	Notes and Prompts
30 mins	<p>What are the key issues you think need to be addressed to improve the effectiveness of the TAF in preventing further areas from become unaffordable for housing benefit claimants.</p> <p><i>MODERATOR NOTE: if mentioned, acknowledge need for more funding, but steer participants away from this, to discuss other issues.</i></p> <p>PROBE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you say that? - How would that work? - Distribution of funding? – e.g. TAF to be higher but in fewer areas or to be lower but in larger number of areas. - Target specific rates e.g Shared Accommodation Rate? - Are there any views on whether the funding should be used in this way to increase certain rates or do they think there are more effective ways of doing this? <p>Assuming the amount of funding stays at a similar level, what would be the best way of targeting funding?</p> <p><i>MODERATOR NOTE: In 2016/17 will be that the rates will either be the 2015/16 rates or the 30th percentile of the 2015/16 rates, whichever is lowest.</i></p>	<p><i>Participants will offer suggestions of realistic changes that could be made to how TAF is applied in order to make it more effective. The group will deliberate on how these changes could work in practice.</i></p>

	<p>Thinking about budgetary and operational issues, how realistic do you think these revisions to TAF are?</p> <p><i>MODERATOR NOTE: Encourage participants to reflect on how approaches could work realistically in their respective local authorities, or others.</i></p>	
Timings	<u>5. Final thoughts and close</u>	Notes and Prompts
10 mins	<p>Thinking about all of the areas we've covered today, what is the most important issue you want to make DWP aware of when considering the effectiveness of the TAF?</p> <p>Thank participant and provide further reassurance about confidentiality.</p>	<p><i>Here participants have a chance for some final reflections on the discussion.</i></p>