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Local Housing Allowance Evaluation: Final Wave Topic Guide for Jobcentre Plus Officers

Objective of the interviews

There are three main objectives:

- To identify the way in which the LHA has been implemented and what lessons can be learnt from the process.
- To identify the possible impacts to date of LHA on customers and in particular work incentives.
- To consider administration of LHA from the Jobcentre Plus perspective.
- To gather any views on the four broad areas that the Evaluation is trying to address (though see note preceding Section E).

A. Introduction

- Respondent details
 - o Name
 - o Job title
 - o Main responsibilities

B. Impact on customers

- In what ways, if any, do you deliver your services to customers differently under the LHA compared to under the previous HB regime [which still applies to social rented tenants]. PROBE: Particularly, any changes since Wave Two in:
 - o assistance with LHA applications/queries compared to HB
 - o collection of information for LHA claims compared to HB
 - o explicitly informing customers of 'work incentive' aspects of LHA
 - o how income/benefits balance is now worked out
 - PROBE: Any IT issues
- What impact has direct payment had on colleagues' work/customers in respect of bank accounts: [PROBE]
 - o any issues re: bank accounts for customers
 - o JC+ role in any customer issues involving bank accounts [EXAMPLES]
 - o JC+ policy/procedures re: bank accounts
 - o overall, is the number of claimants facing bank accounts problems greater/less than (a) at Wave Two (b) when LHA was first implemented

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- Has the LHA had any further impact on the frontline service provision in your district since Wave Two. IF SO, which ones, how and why
- Do you think that, compared to the early months of the LHA implementation, your customers now:
 - o find that the LHA reduces processing time for benefit
 - o find that the LHA makes the system simpler and more transparent
 - o are aware that the LHA is set for a property before any tenancy is agreed
 - o are aware that there is the possibility that a gain/surplus can be made from LHA without other benefits being affected

[IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE ASK FOR EXAMPLES]

- Overall, do you think the LHA is well known/understood among customers
 - 1. is the word spreading
 - 2. what are customers saying about the LHA

[FOLLOWING TWO QUESTIONS RELATE TO WORK INCENTIVE THEME]

- Confirm what JC+ respondent said about LHA and work incentives at Wave Two. Two years after going live, do you think that the LHA has had an impact on your customers in making them:
 - o more or less likely actively to look for work, or no change. Reasons and examples
 - o more or less likely to take up work offers, or no change. Reasons and examples
- PROBE:
- o are advisors changing their employment recommendations where the claimant has an LHA surplus. Examples
- In summary, the intention of the LHA was to reduce the work disincentives that were a consequence of the way in which HB was administered.
 - o do you think that the LHA has succeeded in this regard to date
 - o does it appear more or less successful in this regard than in the early months of its introduction

C. Evaluation of LHA JC+ administration

- Confirm any claim processing/evidence collection arrangements at Wave Two. Has the impact of the LHA on claim processing/evidence collection in your office changed in the last few (nine) months. IF SO:
 - o in what way has it changed
 - o any noticeable impacts on use of staff time and resources. Evidence and examples
 - o have these effects become more noticeable over time
- Confirm any organisational relationships between HB administration and JC+ and their processing or advice roles at Wave Two. Have any of these relationships changed in the last few (nine) months. IF SO:

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- o why
- o what is the nature of the relationships/roles now
- o do you think that these represent an improvement. IF SO, in what ways

[IF CMS NOT MENTIONED TO THIS POINT, discuss early and current experiences with CMS (telephone claims processing) where applicable to LHA work]

- Overall do you/your colleagues find LHA easier or harder to administer than non-LHA HB
 - o in what ways
- **THEME QUESTION:** Does the LHA carry substantial administrative advantages from the point of view of (a) JC+ (b) claimants? In particular, in your view PROBE:
 - o Which, if any, aspects of the new regulations have had greatest impact on the way in which the benefit is administered in terms of key areas (e.g., the speed of claim processing, the detection of fraud and the incidence of overpayment)?
 - o Is the LHA in practice essentially equitable (fairer) as a way of delivering assistance with housing costs?
 - o Has the hoped-for transparency with regard to LHA administration been achieved, and have any administrative consequences that were unforeseen come to light during the evaluation period?
- What, if any, changes to LHA administration do you think would be beneficial from the perspective of JC+

D. Reflections on the implementation of LHA [if not covered in responses above]

- Thinking back to the early months of the introduction of the LHA how do you think JC+ locally and nationally handled the preparations for the introduction of the LHA and its subsequent implementation?
 - o liaison arrangements with the local authority (authorities)
 - o staff training
 - o production of LHA forms and scripts
 - o production of literature/materials on LHA more generally
 - o PROBE IF NOT MENTIONED ABOVE AND APPROPRIATE:
 - any impacts of CMS introduction/approach on early LHA implementation
- What, in your view, might have been handled differently/better?

E. Overall evaluation questions

[HERE WE ARE ASKING FOR RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE FOLLOWING. IT IS RECOGNISED THAT IN MANY CASES THEY MAY FEEL THAT THEY ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO GIVE AN OPINION ON THESE PARTICULAR POINTS. NOTE THAT SOME POINTS HAVE BEEN COVERED IN THE PRECEDING PART OF THE INTERVIEW SO

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THE THEME QUESTIONS ON WORK INCENTIVES AND HB ADMIN ARE OMITTED BELOW. AS A MINIMUM, THE TWO REMAINING 'TOP' BULLETS RELATING TO THE EVALUATION ARE PROBABLY WORTH ASKING.]

Given your experience in dealing with claimants and HB administrators under the LHA, in your opinion:

- Does the LHA work as a 'shopping incentive'? PROBE:
 - o Are the new HB regulations for the LHA so transparent to claimants (i.e., knowing the rates to which they are entitled, knowing that their entitlement will be paid to them) that housing decisions are influenced?
 - o How important is the LHA among the range of factors that influence housing decisions?
 - o In what, if any, ways has the reintroduction of financial exchange between tenant and landlord - previously obscured by the incidence of direct payment - affected power relationships within the tenancy? Is the tenant more able to act as a 'housing consumer' under LHA?
 - o Are tenants choosing to trade up or down (i.e., choosing to trade between quality and price) as a result of the LHA, and if so have these choices impacted positively or negatively on tenant satisfaction?
- * As far as you are aware, have there been any changes to the local 'housing benefit' market (ie landlords or letting agents that routinely let to HB claimants) since the introduction of the LHA (ask as open question, then probe):
 - supply of rental property: is it now more or less difficult for tenants to secure property, or much the same as before?
 - landlords and letting agents: are they more or less willing to let to people on housing benefit, or is that much as before?
 - IF supply and willingness to let have become more restricted, what are tenants on HB doing?
 - have rent levels in the HB sector changed as a consequence of LHA?
 - have landlord/letting agent management practices changed, as far as you are aware (eg higher deposits, more formal rent collection, general improvement or decline in management practice standards).

Are there any other factors, do you think, that are important to understanding change in the market? (ask as open question, then probe):

 - effects of landlord/HMO licensing or other type of landlord accreditation
 - changes in the wider housing market
 - any neighbourhood renewal programmes

Close

- Anything else they want to add

Thank and close

Local Housing Allowance evaluation: Final wave topic guide for welfare/housing needs/housing strategy staff

Objective of the interview

This topic guide is to be used with welfare professionals, housing advisers, homelessness officers and tenancy relations officers. Section C can be used with strategy officers. Its objectives are to assess the impacts of LHA on the agency's work after 15 months; to see what changes agencies are making in response; and to identify any market/welfare impacts of LHA for claimants which might lead to homelessness, harassment or poor housing conditions.

Note that because of the nature of the topics addressed below, the questions addressing the key themes of the Evaluation are integrated into the Guide below rather than being in a separate section.

A. Introduction

- Respondent details
 - o Name
 - o Job title
 - o Volunteer or paid worker: F/T or P/T
 - o Name of organisation
 - o Main remit/functions of organisation
 - o Respondent's main responsibilities

B. Involvement in LHA cases

B1. Impact of LHA on agency's work

- Overall what impact has LHA had on agency's work. PROBE: have the impacts been greater since Wave Two than in the earlier period after going live with LHA
- Ways in which agency has adjusted to changed demands from LHA, if any (a) over the two years since going live with LHA (b) since Wave Two
- Any changes envisaged for the future in response to LHA

FOLLOW UP ON ANY GENERAL IMPACTS REPORTED, FOR EXAMPLE

B2. Involvement in LHA cases in course of 'mainstream' activities

- Number of cases

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- o CONFIRM: in the first 'year or so' (to Wave Two) after introducing the LHA
- o since Wave Two
- o reason for any noticeable increase or decrease
- Common circumstances of involvement
 - o have these circumstances changed over the LHA implementation period. How and why
- Have numbers and/or circumstances changed significantly (a) since the introduction of LHA and (b) particularly since Wave Two:
 - o more/fewer cases now than with HB claimants from PRS
 - o different sort of cases now than with HB claimants from PRS
 - o were these changes more significant in the early months after the going live or more significant in recent months. How and why
- Has LHA made it harder/easier than before to assist claimants
 - o in what way
- Have 'mainstream' processes been changed as a consequence of LHA. PROBE: When changed and why
 - o staff levels
 - o working patterns
 - o policies/procedures
 - o other

B2. Direct involvement in LHA administration

- Confirm nature of involvement. Has this changed since Wave Two. In what way and why. CHECK:
 - o advising clients on 'vulnerability'
 - o taking up 'vulnerability' claims on behalf of clients
 - o membership of LHA working group
 - o training
 - o other
- Assessment of involvement
 - o things that have gone well
 - o things that have gone less well
 - o main issues that have arisen
- Any lessons for others from experience so far
- THEME QUESTION: Thinking of your involvement with the LHA and LHA/HB Administration, does the LHA carry substantial administrative advantages in your view? PROBE:

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- o Which, if any, aspects of the new regulations have had greatest impact on the way in which the benefit is administered (e.g., in areas such as the speed of claim processing, the detection of fraud and the incidence of overpayment)?
- o Is the LHA in practice essentially equitable (fairer) as a way of delivering assistance with housing costs?
- o Has the hoped-for transparency with regard to LHA administration been achieved, and have any administrative consequences that were unforeseen come to light during the evaluation period?

C. Evidence of impact of LHA

C1. Monitoring

- Is your agency specifically monitoring the impacts of LHA. IF SO:
 - o how are you doing this
 - o any results so far
 - o do the results show any changes between the early months of the LHA and more recently

C2. Evidence of impact of LHA

[NB: Where any impacts on landlords or claimants are reported below ask:

- o Extent/numbers affected
- o Details of circumstances and examples
- o What advice/assistance is being offered to claimants or others adversely affected
- o Whether numbers/circumstances/advice has changed since Wave Two and reasons]
- Confirm what responses were evident from landlords by Wave Two. Since Wave Two have there been CHECK:
 - o changes to rent levels IF MENTION RENT INCREASES DUE TO LHA ASK:
 - Are rents being raised to level of LHA. Evidence
 - Are landlords attempting to/raising rents during current tenancy agreements. Evidence
 - Are you aware of any action being taken to seek to constrain rent levels. Examples
 - o eviction of claimants
 - o increased evidence of landlords refusing LHA claimants
 - o any evidence of landlords targeting LHA claimants
 - o increased/reduced housing opportunities for non-claimants (e.g., students, working households)
 - o evidence of increased harassment or discrimination
- Have there been any changes to landlords' management practices since Wave Two or since the implementation of the LHA. PROBE

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- o rent collection
- o attitude to shortfalls and arrears
- o tenancy conditions
- o RIA/bond requirements
- o increase in record keeping/'professionalism'
- o other

THEME QUESTION: As far as you are aware, have there been any changes to the local 'housing benefit' market (ie landlords or letting agents that routinely let to HB claimants) since the introduction of the LHA (ask as open question, then probe):

- supply of rental property: is it now more or less difficult for tenants to secure property, or much the same as before?
- landlords and letting agents: are they more or less willing to let to people on housing benefit, or is that much as before?
- IF supply and willingness to let have become more restricted, what are tenants on HB doing?
- have rent levels in the HB sector changed as a consequence of LHA?
- have landlord/letting agent management practices changed, as far as you are aware (eg higher deposits, more formal rent collection, general improvement or decline in management practice standards).

Are there any other factors, do you think, that are important to understanding change in the market? (ask as open question, then probe):

- effects of landlord/HMO licensing or other type of landlord accreditation
- changes in the wider housing market
- any neighbourhood renewal programmes
- THEME QUESTION: Overall, do you think that in these respects the LHA is working as a beneficial 'shopping incentive' for claimants? In particular, PROBE:
 - o are the new HB regulations for the LHA so transparent to claimants (i.e., knowing the rates to which they are entitled, knowing that their entitlement will be paid to them) that housing decisions are influenced?
 - o how important is the LHA among the range of factors that influence housing decisions?
 - o in what, if any, ways has the reintroduction of financial exchange between tenant and landlord - previously obscured by the incidence of direct payment - affected power relationships within the tenancy? Is the tenant more able to act as a 'housing consumer' under LHA?
- THEME QUESTION: Do you think that the LHA brings with it wider financial benefits for claimants? PROBE: In your experience:
 - o Does the LHA obviate the work disincentives that are evident under the previous HB system so that tenants more likely to take up work offers under the new system?
 - o Which types of household are benefiting from any difference between the LHA and the rent charged?

C3. Anticipated impact of the LHA on housing opportunities etc

- Given the previous answers, do you think that there may be the further impacts of LHA in the future (e.g. over the next 12 months)? PROBE:
 - o on landlords/landlords' behaviour
 - o on claimants
 - o housing market
 - o will the impact generally be beneficial or harmful

CLOSE

- Anything else they want to add
- Thank and close

Local Housing Allowance evaluation: Final wave topic guide for Local Authority Housing Benefit officers

Objective of the interviews

There are five main objectives:

- To confirm/identify any changes in the way in which the LHA has been implemented over the two years and any additional lessons can be learnt from the process.
- To see how the LHA is now working, with special reference to areas where the LA has discretion, and what changes might be made.
- To summarise any other significant changes in HB service administration since the Wave Two stage, not linked to LHA.
- To identify any impacts of the LHA on claimants, landlords, housing need, the PRS and the wider housing market.

Note that the last of these objectives relate to the broad areas that the Evaluation is intended to address and are covered by additional questions in Sections B and E.

A. Introduction

- Respondent details
 - o Name
 - o Job title
 - o Main responsibilities

B. Reflections on implementing the LHA

[DEPENDING ON THE RESPONDENT, THIS SECTION MAY BE TAKEN AFTER SECTION C BELOW, AS PART OF SECTION E OR MAY FORM A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH SENIOR STAFF/PROJECT MANAGER]

- Given the two year Pathfinder period is now ending:
 - o any issues in 'ending' the project phase of LHA. What are these?
 - o CONFIRM reallocation of tasks during course of Pathfinder and reasons. What is the future of the Pathfinder Team and how are its remaining tasks to be reallocated?
- Thinking back over the last two years since going live with the LHA
 - o Probe for main issues, and why they were issues

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- Views on what was the most important element of pre-LHA planning and initial implementation
- Overall, how well have things gone during the Pathfinder period
 - o Things which went well
 - o Things which went less well
 - o Things might have done differently
- What are the main issues still perceived
 - o long running issues/issues endemic to LHA/HB
 - o current/short term issues
- Assessment/evidence of impact on HB performance
 - o speed of processing
 - o staff time taken
 - o staff resources.
 - probe for impact on staffing numbers/grading
 - clarify who paid for which posts (DWP/LA Resources)
 - o cost of service overall and on particular parts of the HB Service
- THEME QUESTION: Overall, in your view, does the LHA carry substantial administrative advantages?
PROBE:
 - o Which, if any, aspects of the new regulations have had greatest impact on the way in which the benefit is administered in terms of key areas such as the speed of claim processing, the detection of fraud and the incidence of overpayment?
 - o Is the LHA in practice essentially equitable (fairer) as a way of delivering assistance with housing costs?
 - o Given your experiences with the way in which LHA rates have been set by Rent Officers locally, will it be possible to replicate practices relating to the setting of the LHA across all types of market?
 - o Has the hoped-for transparency with regard to LHA administration been achieved, and have any administrative consequences that were unforeseen come to light during the evaluation period?
- Any good practice
- Any lessons for others

C. The LHA in operation

THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS EXPLORE SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE LHA. IF OTHER ASPECTS ARE RAISED AS ISSUES, PLEASE PROBE FURTHER TO IDENTIFY THE NATURE OF THE ISSUE, AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING ABOUT IT. ASK RESPONDENTS TO IDENTIFY ANY CHANGES IN THESE ASPECTS SINCE THE WAVE TWO STAGE.

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C1. Administering LHA

- Since Wave Two have there been any organisational or staffing changes in the HB Service as a result of the LHA. CHECK, ASK WHY AND GET DETAILS:
 - o change to departmental structure
 - o creation of new posts
 - o re-grading of post
 - o reduction in staff resources
 - o any further changes in staffing anticipated
- Since Wave Two have there been any further changes in HB services, policies and procedures as a result of LHA:
 - o services to tenants and landlords
 - o processing changes
 - any effect on processing times
 - are staff finding the LHA simpler/quicker/easier to process in general
 - o get copies of any new/revised policy or procedure documents
 - o any further changes anticipated
- Since Wave Two have there been any on-going or additional IT issues in respect of the LHA: CONFIRM the nature of any IT issues at the Wave Two stage
 - o how were these/are they being dealt with
 - o are any problems remaining
 - o overall, during the Pathfinder period, how well or badly did the software 'package' respond to LHA
 - o any further changes to IT anticipated

C2. Applications

- Any changes in the application process due to LHA since Wave Two. CHECK THE FOLLOWING:
- Any changes in forms and leaflets. IF SO:
 - o what information is no longer required
 - o any additional information required
 - o in your view, is it an easier or harder form to complete
- Any changes in support to claimants given by HB staff in making applications. IF SO:
 - o what are the main queries/issues raised by LHA claimants. Have these changed since Wave Two
 - o are they easy to answer/explain

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- Any changes in support claimants receive from other agencies in making HB applications
 - o which agencies have changed their support
 - o how has this changed
 - o why has this changed
 - o views on impact on work of HB administration

C3. Verification and assessment

- Has LHA had any implications for verification
 - o in what way
 - o have the number/reasons for verification visits changed as a result of the LHA. IF SO:
 - o how and why
 - Any role for visits in vulnerability decisions/reviews
- Have any aspects of the LHA raised significant issues for assessment
 - o which aspects
 - o how have issues been resolved

C4. Discretionary Housing Payments

- Since Wave Two has LHA had any implications for DHPs. More generally, what have been the implications since going live with the LHA:
 - o in what way
 - o increase/decrease in applications
 - o source of referrals
 - o change in type of cases coming forward
 - o change in the nature of decisions/decision making
- Are DHPs being explicitly monitored in relation to the LHA

C5. Assessing 'vulnerability'

[NB: NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED IN THIS SECTION WITH ARREARS]

- Confirm Wave Two arrangements for vulnerability decisions. Have there been any changes since Wave Two in respect of [AND IN EACH CASE ASK WHY]:
 - o who makes the decisions
 - o how many people within the HB administration are responsible for making the decisions (FTEs)
 - o policies/procedures

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- o criteria used
- o how cases are categorised/recorded (e.g., are the categories of vulnerable and unlikely to pay used, or are other categories used)
- o use of visits/interviews
- o information re: vulnerability provided to claimants
- o evidence required from claimants
- o agencies involved
- o role of money advice or other independent agencies
- o role of other LA/statutory agencies
- How long does it take to make vulnerability decisions 'on average' (from receipt of request to decision)
 - o has this time increased or decreased since Wave Two. Why
 - o which types of vulnerability decisions take the longest time and why
 - o any steps taken to shorten time taken (e.g., no longer asking for certain sorts of evidence)
- How are potentially 'vulnerable' claimants identified and has this changed since Wave Two:
 - o claimant requests
 - o landlord requests
 - o other (specify and explore)
- Requests for vulnerability status:
 - o how many/what proportion of claimants are claiming vulnerability. Is this increasing or decreasing (impressions) since (a) Wave Two (b) early days of LHA implementation
 - o is this being formally monitored [IF SO, GET FIGURES AND/OR DOCUMENTATION]
 - o what proportion of 'vulnerability' claims are successful. Is this increasing or decreasing
 - o is this being formally monitored [IF SO, GET FIGURES AND/OR DOCUMENTATION]
- Have the reasons for requesting vulnerable status changed/been changing since (a) Wave Two (b) early days of LHA implementation
 - o how [CHECK: What were the main reasons before and now]
 - o why is this happening
 - o any implications for HB administration/vulnerability decision making
- What are the arrangements for reviewing vulnerability decisions. Have they changed since Wave Two?
 - o how often are they reviewed. What determines this period
 - o who reviews the decisions

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- o what evidence/information is required for the review
- o any information/figures on the numbers of reviews undertaken (e.g., monthly) or on 'backlogs'
- o any information/figures on the outcome of reviews
- o how are the decisions communicated
- o impressions about how landlords, claimants and other stakeholders feel about the review procedures
- Overall assessment of current 'vulnerability' arrangements. Have views changed since Wave Two in respect of:
 - o how successful the arrangements are
 - o the main problems
 - o how these have been/should be overcome
- As a result, any proposed changes to arrangements for assessing 'vulnerability' in the future

C6. Arrears/Missed Rent Payments

- Confirm arrangements for identifying arrears/missed payments at Wave Two. At what stage would HB take some action at Wave Two (e.g., 8+ weeks arrears or as soon as informed). Since Wave Two:
 - o has the stage at which some action been taken changed. Why
 - o has the way in which arrears/missed payments are identified changed. How and why
 - o what evidence is required. Has this changed and if so why
 - o is transfer to landlord payment automatic – after what period of time (i.e., 8 weeks or earlier?). Has this changed and if so why
- When landlord receives payment for arrears (including where any LHA surplus is paid to landlords for arrears):
 - o does this continue until all arrears are paid or until arrears amount to less than 8 weeks
 - o is the payment of any surplus to the landlord ever switched back to the claimant before all arrears are paid off
 - o who makes the decision about switching payments to landlords/resuming some or all payments to claimants in arrears. What determines these decisions
 - o impressions about how landlords, claimants and other stakeholders feel about the arrears procedures
- What are the arrangements for reviewing arrears decisions
 - o how often are they reviewed. What determines this period
 - o how do HB know is time for review (e.g., IT flags this up, manual inspection, reliant on landlord/tenant informing HB)

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- o who reviews the decisions
- o what evidence/information is required for the review
- o how are the decisions communicated
- o any information/figures on the outcome of reviews
- o impressions about how landlords, claimants and other stakeholders feel about the review procedures

C7. Payment Issues

- How many/what proportion of LHAs are currently being paid:
 - o to landlords
 - o to tenants
 - o is this higher/lower than at Wave Two. Why
 - o is this higher/lower than anticipated. Why
- Issues around split payments:
 - o how many/what proportion of split payments are being made PROBE: Does IT handle split payments or manual?
 - o is this proportion higher/lower than at Wave Two. Why
 - o is this higher/lower than expected. Why
 - o what have been the main issues. Are these as at Wave Two
 - o how have these been/are being addressed
- Issues around payment to claimants
 - o payment methods. Have these changed since Wave Two. How and why
 - o proportion of cheque/standing order payments. Has this changed since Wave Two – by how much.
 - o Where claimant receives payment, what information is given to landlords about:
 - payment frequency (payment schedules), delays and progress of claims
 - how successful are these arrangements
 - have they changed since Wave Two. How and why
 - how are any continuing problems being addressed
 - o bank accounts. Confirm main issues, if any, at Wave Two.
 - who gives advice to claimants. Has this changed since Wave Two. Why
 - advice/leaflets/information provided by HB administration. Has this changed. Why.
 - availability of accounts. How many (what proportion of) claimants are known not to have accounts
 - nature/type of accounts

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- how many cases (proportion of cases) where payment to landlord is this because of no claimant bank account. Increased or decreased since Wave Two
- are these cases reviewed. How and by whom
- feedback on issues around bank accounts for claimants. Is the situation improving compared to Wave Two/early days of implementation
- o how are these and any other continuing issues/problems being addressed
- Issues around payments to landlords
 - o what have been the main issues over the life of the Pathfinder and since Wave Two
 - o what payment details are given to landlords. PROBE: Have any of the following changed since Wave Two:
 - which claimant the payment is for
 - precise address
 - period covered
 - whether payment includes any surplus for arrears
 - o how have these/any other issues been addressed. PROBE: Any Data Protection Act issues re: the above
- Overall assessment of payment arrangements for LHA. Ask respondent to think of the following in relation to experience since Wave Two and over the Pathfinder period:
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - o what are the main problems
 - o how have these been overcome
 - o how are payment issues being monitored
 - o any proposed changes to payment arrangements

C8. Overpayments

- Any change in number of overpayments attributable to LHA since Wave Two:
 - o increase/decrease
 - o how big a change
 - o what are the reasons for this
 - o were these changes anticipated
- Compared to Wave Two, any change in the nature of overpayments attributable to LHA. PROBE Impact of direct payment on overpayments:
 - o what sort of overpayments have increased/decreased
 - o were these changes anticipated

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- Any change in overpayment recovery procedures as a consequence of LHA since Wave Two [NB: SOME OFFICERS OF THE VIEW THAT O/PAYMENT RECOVERY IS MORE DIFFICULT BECAUSE OF NEED TO CLAIM FROM TENANT IN MOST CASES]
 - o policies
 - o procedures
 - o staffing
- Assessment of overpayment recovery arrangements/changes for LHA
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - o what are the recovery rates. Have these changed since Wave Two. Why
 - o what are the main problems
 - o how have these been overcome
 - o are overpayment recovery issues being monitored
- Any proposed changes to overpayment recovery arrangements

C9. Fraud

- Any change in the extent of detected fraud attributable to LHA compared to Wave Two and compared to previous HB arrangements (Baseline)
 - o increase/decrease
 - o how big a change (no. of cases/value)
 - o were these changes anticipated
- Any change in the nature of detected fraud attributable to LHA compared to Wave One and compared to previous HB arrangements (Baseline)
 - o what sort of frauds have increased/decreased
 - o were these changes anticipated
- Any change in fraud policies and procedures as a consequence of LHA compared to previous arrangements:
 - o policies
 - o procedures
 - o staffing
 - o working with other agencies (inc DWP)
- Assessment of fraud detection, investigation and prosecution arrangements for LHA compared to Wave Two and compared to previous HB arrangements (Baseline)
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - detection rates

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- prosecutions/administrative penalties etc
- fraud prevention (rather than detection)
- o what are the main problems
- o how have these been overcome
- o are fraud issues being monitored. Figures available
- Any changes to fraud work not associated with the LHA since Wave Two. ASK AS OPEN QUESTION AND PROBE
 - o DWP changes to Verification Framework/SAFE
 - o interventions work
 - o steps/plans to adopt VF (if not fully compliant)
- Any proposed changes to fraud detection, investigation and prosecution arrangements

C10. Complaints and appeals

IN ALL OF THE FOLLOWING DISTINGUISH BETWEEN COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS ABOUT VULNERABILITY DECISIONS AND ALL OTHER HB COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS. ALSO, AS LAs ONLY REFER CASES TO THE APPEALS SERVICE IF THE ORIGINAL DECISION IS NOT CHANGED FOLLOWING REVIEW, DISTINGUISH BETWEEN COMPLAINTS/GRUMBLES, REVIEW REQUESTS AND CASES THAT GO TO THE APPEALS SERVICE

- Any change in number of complaints and appeals attributable to LHA since Wave Two
 - o how are complaints monitored. What counts as a complaint
 - o increase/decrease
 - o how big a change
 - o were these changes anticipated
- Any change in the nature of complaints and appeals attributable to LHA since Wave Two
 - o what sort of complaints and appeals have increased/decreased
 - o who has made these complaints and appeals
 - o were these changes anticipated
- Any change in appeals and complaints procedures as a consequence of LHA since Wave Two
 - o policies
 - o procedures
 - o staffing
 - o why were these changes necessary
- Assessment of current complaints and appeals arrangements for LHA over the period of the Pathfinder:

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- o how successful are the arrangements
- o what are the main problems
- o how have these been overcome
- o are LHA complaints/reviews/appeals being monitored
- Any proposed changes to appeals/reviews/complaints arrangements

C11. Inter-agency working and the LHA

- Confirm working arrangements with the following at Wave Two. Have inter-agency working arrangements changed as a consequence of the LHA since then. PROBE: Why changed
 - o other LA departments/sections PROBE
 - housing/homelessness
 - social services
 - environmental health
 - tenancy relations
 - o Rent Service
 - any/what sort of information provided to TRS by HB (e.g., property/rent info for cleaning db)
 - nature of contacts with TRS. Any changes and why
 - o JobCentre Plus
 - confirm initial/Wave Two working arrangements with JC+
 - have these changed in last 9 months. Why and how
 - o DWP Housing Support Division/policy staff
 - o Pension Service
 - o Inland Revenue
 - o voluntary welfare and advice agencies
 - o other
- Assessment of current inter-agency working for LHA
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - o what are the main problems
 - o how have these been overcome
- Any proposed changes to inter-agency working arrangements

C12. Relations between HB and claimants and landlords

- Confirm nature of relationships with claimants at Wave Two. Have relationships between HB and claimants changed since then.

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- o in what way (examples)
- o generally improved/harmed
- o how/why is this due to the LHA
- Confirm nature of relationships with landlords at Wave Two. Have relationships between HB and landlords changed since then
 - o in what way
 - o generally improved/harmed
 - o is this due to the LHA
 - o any distinction landlords/letting agents
 - o landlords as individuals or corporately

D. Any other changes affecting hb

D1. Any other changes affecting HB administration not related to LHA

- Nature of any changes/continuing impact from other initiatives, eg
 - o Pension Credit
 - o Tax Credits
 - o end of review periods
 - o CMS
 - o JobCentre Plus rollout
- Have there been any other significant changes not related to the LHA since Wave Two and since going live with LHA in respect of:

[SUGGEST WE ASK THIS AS AN OPEN QUESTION]

- o Staffing structures
- o Staffing levels
- o Premises
- o IT
- o Reception/customer care arrangements
- o Assessment etc policies and procedures
- o Fraud/overpayments policies and procedures
- o Other policies and procedures

E. Impact of Local Housing Allowance

E1. Impact of LHA on behaviour, need etc

THEME QUESTION: As far as you are aware, have there been any changes to the local 'housing benefit' market (ie landlords or letting agents that routinely let to HB claimants) since the introduction of the LHA (ask as open question, then probe):

- supply of rental property: is it now more or less difficult for tenants to secure property, or much the same as before?
- landlords and letting agents: are they more or less willing to let to people on housing benefit, or is that much as before?
- IF supply and willingness to let have become more restricted, what are tenants on HB doing?
- have rent levels in the HB sector changed as a consequence of LHA?
- have landlord/letting agent management practices changed, as far as you are aware (eg higher deposits, more formal rent collection, general improvement or decline in management practice standards).

Are there any other factors, do you think, that are important to understanding change in the market? (ask as open question, then probe):

- effects of landlord/HMO licensing or other type of landlord accreditation
- changes in the wider housing market
- any neighbourhood renewal programmes
- Confirm what responses were evident from claimants by Wave Two. Since Wave Two is there evidence of CHECK AND GET EXAMPLES OF TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS INVOLVED:
 - o claimants 'trading down' to maximise LHA benefit. Examples
 - o claimants 'trading up' to properties that better meet their needs. Examples
 - o claimants moving between tenures (e.g. from social to PRS) as a result of LHA
 - o claimants migrating into Pathfinder (or out of it)
 - area of origin
 - reasons where known
 - o growth in homelessness applications
 - figures/evidence, priority/non-priority
 - evidence that this is LHA related (e.g. no of households who were previously LHA claimants in the area, households migrating into Pathfinder area)
 - households reporting that reasons for homelessness are LHA related (inc arrears, financial issues)

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- o any child protection issues from overcrowding etc. Examples
- o other

THEME QUESTION: Given the above, do you think the LHA acts as a shopping incentive? In particular, PROBE:

- o Are the new HB regulations for the LHA so transparent to claimants (i.e., knowing the rates to which they are entitled, knowing that their entitlement will be paid to them) that housing decisions are influenced?
- o How important is the LHA among the range of factors that influence housing decisions?
- o In what, if any, ways has the reintroduction of financial exchange between tenant and landlord - previously obscured by the incidence of direct payment - affected power relationships within the tenancy? Is the tenant more able to act as a 'housing consumer' under LHA?

E2. Anticipated impact of the LHA on housing opportunities etc

- Given the previous answers, what do you think may be the future impacts of LHA (e.g. over the next 12 months)
 - o on landlords
 - o on claimants. PROBE:
 - THEME QUESTION: Any evidence/examples aware of that LHA improves work incentives?
 - o housing market
 - o will the impact generally be beneficial or harmful

CLOSE

- Anything else they want to add
- Thank and close

Document and information availability check

- Benefits section organisation chart – if changed
- LHA application form – if revised
- All current LHA information leaflets aimed at PRS (claimants, landlords etc) – if revised
- LHA policies and procedures wherever available – where revised

Overall evaluation questions

1. Does the LHA work as a ‘shopping incentive’?

- i. Are the new HB regulations for the LHA so transparent to claimants (i.e., knowing the rates to which they are entitled, knowing that their entitlement will be paid to them) that housing decisions are influenced?
- ii. How important is the LHA among the range of factors that influence housing decisions?
- iii. In what, if any, ways has the reintroduction of financial exchange between tenant and landlord - previously obscured by the incidence of direct payment - affected power relationships within the tenancy? Is the tenant more able to act as a ‘housing consumer’ under LHA?
- iv. Are tenants choosing to trade up or down (i.e., choosing to trade between quality and price) as a result of the LHA, and if so have these choices impacted positively or negatively on tenant satisfaction?

2. Does the LHA carry wider financial benefits for the claimant?

- i. Does the LHA obviate the work disincentives that are evident under the previous HB system so that tenants more likely to take up work offers under the new system?
- ii. Which types of household are benefiting from any difference between the LHA and the rent charged?

3. Can the HB segment of the PRS accommodate the LHA?

- i. What impact have the various aspects of the LHA had on landlords’ management practices within the PRS (e.g., deposits, rent collection, time spent on management)?
- ii. Has the LHA made landlords and letting agents more or less likely to let to benefit recipients? How is this related to the nature of the local market (i.e., excess demand or supply in the local PRS)?
- iii. Are any differences between the LHA and the rent (excesses or shortfalls) being sustained or are rent levels increasing or decreasing in those parts of the market most affected by these differences?

4. Does the LHA carry substantial administrative advantages?

- i. Which, if any, aspects of the new regulations have had greatest impact on the way in which the benefit is administered in terms of key areas such as the speed of claim processing, the detection of fraud and the incidence of overpayment?
- ii. Is the LHA in practice essentially equitable (fairer) as a way of delivering assistance with housing costs?
- iii. Will it be possible to replicate practices relating to the setting of LHA across all types of market?
- iv. Has the hoped-for transparency with regard to LHA administration been achieved, and have any administrative consequences that were unforeseen come to light during the evaluation period?

Local Housing Allowance evaluation: Final wave topic guide for LHA money advice staff

Objective of the interview

Recall that several Pathfinders have established Money Advice Services to assist claimants with the LHA. These Services, which may be located within or external to the LA, have a variety of functions with differing emphases on basic money advice and debt counselling, negotiating with banks about accounts for claimants, advice to claimants on setting up basic bank accounts, and providing an independent contribution to the assessment of 'vulnerability'. The main purposes of these interviews is to identify any changes to the service being provided since Wave Two and since the early days of the MAS, how it the service is working and any further lessons to be learnt from the experience so far.

Section D asks for respondents' views on the impact of the LHA on the four broad areas which the Evaluation is trying to address. Some MAS officers will be well placed to give an opinion on these.

A. Introduction

- Respondent details
 - o name
 - o job title
 - o volunteer or paid worker: F/T or P/T
 - o name of organisation within which post is located
 - o main remit/functions of organisation
 - o respondent's main responsibilities

B. The LHA money advice service

[THIS SECTION AND SECTION C CONCERN CHANGES IN THE MAS SINCE WAVE TWO AND OVER THE PERIOD SINCE ITS INCEPTION. WHILE MANY OF THE 'FACTS' MAY JUST NEED TO BE CONFIRMED OR UPDATED THE KEY CONSIDERATIONS ARE WHY AND HOW THE SERVICE HAS CHANGED OVER THE PERIOD, AND WHAT LESSONS THERE MAY BE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAS IN OTHER LAs UNDER THE PROPOSED LHA ROLL OUT.]

B1. Background to the LHA Money Advice Service

- Confirm when the Service was established (i.e., first Advisor appointed)
- Looking back over the period since establishment, how important were the following in influencing (a) the initial development of the Service (b) its development to date? Are these factors still important?

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- o the LA's attitude/approach
- o available funding (CHECK: If All of MAS is DWP Funded)
- o the agency in which located
- o experience of other Pathfinders
- o other
- Confirm main issues considered/debated when setting up the service. Are these still matters that need to be discussed/addressed at present?
 - o where the Service was to be located
 - o negotiating financial and accountability issues
 - o other particular concerns
- Are there any plans/proposals for continued MAS funding at the end of the Pathfinder period?
 - o What are these proposals?
 - o Do they involve changes in role, staffing or location of the MAS?
 - o View of proposed changes and/or what changes should be in respondent's view
- Overall, how do you think this LA has handled the introduction of the MAS?
- Any lessons for others from the experience of establishing the MAS

B2. Terms of reference etc

- Confirm main aims, objectives and terms of reference for the Service
- Confirm the nature of the agreement between the Service and the LA in terms of:
 - o what the agreement is
 - o who the agreement is with for day-to-day purposes
 - o how formal/informal
 - o how detailed
- Has this agreement been changed in any way since Wave Two or since the MAS was established? How and why
- Confirm monitoring arrangements for agreement/SLA:
 - o who monitors the agreement/SLA for the LA
 - o formal
 - o informal
 - o nature of reports required
 - o frequency of reports required
 - o nature/frequency of meetings with LA and with whom

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- Have these arrangements been changed in any way since Wave Two or since the MAS was established? How and why
- Any lessons for others from the terms of reference/form of agreement etc

B3. Main services offered under the LHA agreement/Service Level Agreement

- Confirm (a) the main services offered (b) which are seen to help claimants most. Have the services offered changed since Wave Two and/or since the establishment of the MAS? How and why? CHECK [NB: Client numbers etc are considered in Section C]:
 - o negotiation with banks etc
 - o advice on bank accounts
 - o general money advice
 - o debt counselling
 - o general advice on LHA
 - o help with assessments of vulnerability
 - o training etc for HB and other staff
 - o other
- Any negotiations with landlords on claimant's behalf: Have these changed since Wave Two and or since establishment of the MAS? How and why?
 - o frequency of such negotiations
 - o over what issues
 - o with what sort of outcomes
- How is advice generally given now LHA claimants? Has this changed since Wave Two/establishment of the MAS. Why? CHECK:
 - o telephone/face to face
 - o one-off/casework
- Relationship to other 'mainstream' agency services? Have these relationships changed since Wave Two/establishment of the MAS. Why? CHECK:
 - o other 'mainstream' services that are offered to claimants
 - o what services
 - o by whom (i.e. MAS Officer or someone else)
- Any lessons for others from changes in services offered and delivered or changes in the nature of relationships?

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B4. Staffing of LHA Money Advice Service

- Staff levels in the MAS. CHECK: have these changed since Wave Two. Why?
 - o no. of people (FTEs)
 - o roles
- Staff skills in the MAS. CHECK: have these changed since Wave Two. Why?
 - o specialist advisers
 - o general advisers
 - o admin
- Need for/amount of staff training for the MAS since Wave Two
- Any lessons for others from MAS staffing experience since establishment of Service?

B5. Premises

- Premises used for the Service. CHECK: have these changed since Wave Two
 - o any issues about quality/privacy for interviewing etc
 - o any issues about independence (if LA offices)
- Other locations for service delivery: CHECK: have these changed since Wave Two
 - o home visits?
 - o surgeries, eg in another agency
- Any lessons for others from the experience of premises/location of service delivery since establishment of the MAS?

B6. Access, applications etc

- How do clients reach the Service. CHECK: has this changed since Wave Two. Why?
 - o open access/self referral
 - o LA referrals/LA advise to self referral. Who/which Dept in LA, mainly
 - o other referrals. From whom
- What publicity is there for the Service. CHECK: has this changed since Wave Two. Why?
 - o posters
 - o leaflets
 - o LA letter etc
 - o other agencies
- Access hours for claimants. CHECK: has this changed since Wave Two. Why?

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- o hours
- o appointments
- o drop in
- Any lessons for others from the experience of access/referrals since establishment of MAS?

C. Service experience to date

C1. Number of cases

- Number of cases referred by others
 - o between introduction of Service and Wave One (Confirm)
 - o between Wave One and Wave Two (Confirm)
 - o between Wave Two and Final Visit
 - o reason for any noticeable changes over these periods
- Number of clients seen
 - o between introduction of Service and Wave One (Confirm)
 - o between Wave One and Wave Two visit (Confirm)
 - o between Wave Two and Final Visit
 - o reason for any noticeable changes

C2. Nature of cases/clients dealt with

- Main types of cases dealt with. PROBE: What is role of LHA in these cases
 - o currently
 - o have the types of cases changed since Wave Two? How and why?
 - o have these types of cases changed since MAS was first established? How and why?
- Main types of clients seen
 - o age
 - o household type
 - o have the ages/household types changed since Wave Two? How and why?
 - o have the types of clients changed since MAS was first established? How and why?
- Example of 'typical' current cases/clients. Ask how/why money and debt problems arise 'typically'. PROBE for significance of LHA

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C3. Bank account issues [IF APPROPRIATE]

- Main issues seen currently. PROBE:
 - o opening accounts
 - o understanding accounts
 - o managing accounts
 - o other
- Are these the same issues as at Wave Two? If differences, why?
- Are these the same issues as at start of MAS? If differences, why?
- How have these issues been handled. In general and examples
- What outcomes have been achieved. In general and examples
- Assessment of performance re: bank account advice/assistance since start of MAS
 - o things that went well
 - o things that went less well
- Anything they would change in the light of experience
- Lessons for others in this area

C4. Money advice/debt counselling [IF APPROPRIATE]

- Main sorts of circumstances met with. In general and examples. PROBE for effects of LHA – more or fewer cases now compared to Wave Two and compared to start of MAS where positive or negative impact of LHA on client's financial circumstances is significant
- What sort of advice has been given in general and examples
- Speed of service achieved
 - o average waiting time for an appointment/to be seen
 - o has this increased/decreased since Wave Two?
- What outcomes have been achieved. In general and examples
- Assessment of performance re: money advice/debt counselling
 - o things that went well
 - o things that went less well
- Anything they would change in the light of experience
- Lessons for others in this area

C5. Assessing 'vulnerability' [IF APPROPRIATE: IF MAS HAS NO ROLE IN ASSESSING VULNERABILITY, GO TO LAST QUESTION IN THIS SECTION]

- Does the MAS (a) make the vulnerability decision or (b) are their decisions always accepted by decision maker.

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- IF (b)
 - o any exceptions at all to date
 - o is this de facto decision making power explicit/formally recognised
 - o any changes in this since Wave Two
 - o main changes in this since start of MAS
- IF NEITHER (a) or (b)
 - o what form does the vulnerability recommendation take
 - o why are they not always accepted
 - o any changes in this since Wave Two
 - o any changes in this since start of MAS
 - o respondent's views on changes
- Nature of evidence usually provided by claimant to MAS
 - o type and source
 - o usefulness
- Criteria used by MAS in vulnerability decisions
 - o formal, case-by-case, or precedent based
 - o clarity
 - o practicality
 - o usefulness
 - o PROBE: have any of the above changed since (a) Wave Two (b) start of MAS. Why
- How are assessments made
 - o what sort of recommendations are made (e.g., review period suggested)
 - o have assessment procedures changed since Wave Two. Why
 - o have they changed since the start of MAS
- Speed of service achieved
 - o average turn-round time (from first interview with client to decision)
 - o 'difficult' cases which take longer. Examples
 - o changes since Wave Two. Why
 - o changes since start of MAS
- Administrative arrangements
 - o changes since Wave Two and reasons
 - o changes since start of MAS and reasons

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- What outcomes have been achieved to date
- Assessment of performance
 - o things that went well
 - o things that went less well
- Anything they would change in the light of experience
- Lessons for others in this area

[IF NO ROLE IN VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT]

- What is MAS's general experience of vulnerability decisions in the Pathfinder:
 - o have they found it easy to find out how vulnerability is defined
 - o how has the process been administered by the HB
 - is it clear who to apply to
 - how long the process takes
 - what evidence is required
 - what interim arrangements are in place while the decision is being made

C6. Overall assessment of progress so far with the Service

- Assessment of performance
 - o things that went well
 - o things that went less well
 - o any performance measures/PIs. GET COPIES
- Anything else they would change in the light of experience. PROBE (e.g., priorities, information provided, working arrangements)
- Lessons for others in this area

D. Overall evaluation questions

[HERE WE ARE ASKING FOR RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON THE FOLLOWING. IT IS RECOGNISED IN SOME CASES THEY MAY FEEL THAT THEY ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO GIVE AN OPINION ON EACH POINT]

Given your experience with claimants, HB administrators/the LA and with landlords under the LHA, in your opinion:

- Does the LHA work as a 'shopping incentive'? PROBE:
 - o Are the new HB regulations for the LHA so transparent to claimants (i.e., knowing the rates to which they are entitled, knowing that their entitlement will be paid to them) that housing decisions are influenced?

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- o How important is the LHA among the range of factors that influence housing decisions?
- o In what, if any, ways has the reintroduction of financial exchange between tenant and landlord - previously obscured by the incidence of direct payment - affected power relationships within the tenancy? Is the tenant more able to act as a 'housing consumer' under LHA?
- o Are tenants choosing to trade up or down (i.e., choosing to trade between quality and price) as a result of the LHA, and if so have these choices impacted positively or negatively on tenant satisfaction?
- Does the LHA carry wider financial benefits for the claimant?
 - o Does the LHA obviate the work disincentives that are evident under the previous HB system so that tenants more likely to take up work offers under the new system?
 - o Which types of household are benefiting from any difference between the LHA and the rent charged?
 - o As far as you are aware, have there been any changes to the local 'housing benefit' market (ie landlords or letting agents that routinely let to HB claimants) since the introduction of the LHA (ask as open question, then probe):
 - supply of rental property: is it now more or less difficult for tenants to secure property, or much the same as before?
 - landlords and letting agents: are they more or less willing to let to people on housing benefit, or is that much as before?
 - IF supply and willingness to let have become more restricted, what are tenants on HB doing?
 - have rent levels in the HB sector changed as a consequence of LHA?
 - have landlord/letting agent management practices changed, as far as you are aware (eg higher deposits, more formal rent collection, general improvement or decline in management practice standards).
- Are there any other factors, do you think, that are important to understanding change in the market? (ask as open question, then probe):
 - o effects of landlord/HMO licensing or other type of landlord accreditation
 - o changes in the wider housing market
 - o any neighbourhood renewal programmes
- Does the LHA carry substantial administrative advantages?
 - o Which, if any, aspects of the new regulations have had greatest impact on the way in which the benefit is administered in terms of key areas such as the speed of claim processing, the detection of fraud and the incidence of overpayment?
 - o Is the LHA in practice essentially equitable (fairer) as a way of delivering assistance with housing costs?
 - o Has the hoped-for transparency with regard to LHA administration been achieved, and have any administrative consequences that were unforeseen come to light during the evaluation period?

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CLOSE

- Anything else they want to add
- Thank and close

COLLECT ANY RELEVANT REPORTS, LEAFLET ETC

Local Housing Allowance evaluation: Final topic guide for rent officers

Objective of the interview

The main objective is to establish how the Rent Service is implementing the LHA, and how it is operating under the LHA. Any wider lessons from the process should be explored. A further objective is to identify any impacts of the LHA on claimants, landlords, housing need, the PRS and the wider housing market.

A. Introduction

- Respondent details
 - o Name
 - o Job title
 - o Main responsibilities

B. The LHA in operation

THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS EXPLORE SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE LHA. IF OTHER ASPECTS ARE RAISED AS ISSUES, PLEASE PROBE FURTHER TO IDENTIFY THE NATURE OF THE ISSUE, AND WHAT THEY ARE DOING ABOUT IT

B1. Collecting market evidence and setting the LHA

- Who collects market evidence
 - o number of officers/posts
 - o has this changed since Wave Two. Why
- How is it collected
 - o sources, methods. Why and how these are used
 - o confirm if these are different from pre-LHA arrangements
 - o have these changed since Wave Two. Why
- Cleaning the db of LHA properties
 - o how is this done. Any change since Wave Two. How and why. PROBE:
 - role and use of DWP data for this. How used and how useful
 - any arrangements for information transfer from Pathfinder HB admin for this purpose. What is transferred, how, how often, how used

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- Scale of market evidence in Pathfinder
 - o is this different from pre-LHA. Larger or smaller scale
 - o has the amount of evidence collected changed since Wave Two. Why and by how much
- Overall assessment of collection of market evidence
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - o what are the main problems
 - o how have these been overcome
 - o more/less difficult than at Wave Two and pre-LHA
- In the light of the above responses, does the evidence collected/removed from db (or local knowledge) indicate:
 - o that landlords housing claimants are raising/lowering rents to LHA levels. IF SO which property types/areas/landlords and agents (e.g. large or small landlords/agents)
 - o that landlords not currently housing claimants are taking into account LHA levels. IF SO which property types/areas/landlords and agents (e.g. large or small landlords/agents)
- Any proposed changes to collection of market evidence/setting the LHA, particularly in the 'post pathfinder' period.

B2. Monthly reviews of LHA

- Reviewing the LHA
 - o who does this/who is involved
 - o how is it done (e.g., evidence used, methods, use of judgement/discussion)
- Extent of change in LHAs (a) since introduction (b) since Wave Two
 - o reasons for any change
 - o factors involved
- Assessment of monthly review arrangements
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - o what are the main problems
 - o how have these been overcome
- Any proposed changes to monthly review processes
- Do TRS publicise the LHA rates? How and where:
 - o are there many queries direct to TRS over the rates set
 - o do these indicate that landlords/tenants are clear about LHA principles and arrangements

B3. Reviewing the BRMA

[TRS ARE 'REQUIRED TO REVIEW THE BRMA AS OFTEN AS IT IS THOUGHT APPROPRIATE']

Confirm BRMAs same as at Wave Two

- What have been the main changes in the BRMAs and contiguous areas since Wave Two. PROBE:
 - o house prices
 - o rent levels
 - o rental housing supply (any significant buy to let activity)
 - o rental vacancies/excess demand
 - o reasons (local factors/national trends) for this
- Are TRS satisfied that the BRMAs as defined are still as appropriate:
 - o as at going live date
 - o as at Wave Two
- Any plans to review BRMAs
 - o process - formal or informal review
 - o when
 - o who would be involved and how
 - o any special data/information requirements for BRMA review

[WHERE THERE IS MORE THAN ONE BRMA IN THE PATHFINDER]

- Any evidence of confusion/uncertainty among other stakeholders over LHA levels in different areas/BRMAs

B4. Non-LHA determinations in Pathfinder area

- Scale of non-LHA determinations required since Wave Two
- Nature of non-LHA determinations as at Wave Two
 - o large properties
 - o shared accommodation
 - o excluded categories
 - o other
- Confirm issues in making non-LHA determinations at Wave Two
 - o have these been resolved. How
 - o further issues emerging since Wave Two. What are these and how are they dealt with, e.g.:
 - any additional uncertainties about whether particular types of property are inside/outside LHA scheme

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B5. Shadow determinations

- Arrangements for making shadow determinations. EXPLORE what these arrangements are, whether they have changed since Wave Two, and views of adequacy, e.g.:
 - o how information received
 - o how many cases
 - o how frequently
 - o whether information is useful for cleaning db
- How are the determinations made
 - o desk-top exercise or visits (what proportion)
 - o issues in making determinations
 - o any indications of relationship/spread of rents from individual determinations and LHA
 - o any implications of this for number/proportion of 'imputed' shortfalls/surpluses
- Views on usefulness of exercise
 - o to TRS
 - o more generally
- Workload implications (FTEs/days/proportion of time)
- Following the end of the 2 year Pathfinder period, and the cessation of the shadow determinations, are any changes envisaged in the approach to gathering market information and setting LHA levels?

B6. Staffing

- Have any changes been made as a consequence of the LHA (a) since its introduction (b) since Wave Two
 - o staffing structures
 - o staff numbers
 - o workloads
- Any issues experienced in staffing matters
 - o how have these been resolved
- Are any (further) changes envisaged in this area 'post pathfinder'?

B7. Inter-agency working and the LHA

- Confirm inter-agency working at Wave Two. Have inter-agency working arrangements in the Pathfinder area changed as a consequence of the LHA since Wave Two
 - o LA HB personnel

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- o other LA departments/sections
- o voluntary welfare and advice agencies
- o other
- Assessment of current inter-agency working for LHA
 - o how successful are the arrangements
 - o what are the main problems
 - o how have these been overcome
 - o better/worse compared to pre-LHA/first 15 months of LHA
- Any proposed changes to inter-agency working arrangements

B8. Relations between Rent Service and claimants and landlords

- LHA effects on relationships between TRS and claimants
 - o in general
 - o since Wave Two
 - o generally improved/harmed
- Has the LHA affected relationships between TRS and landlords
 - o in general
 - o since Wave Two
 - o generally improved/harmed
 - o any distinction landlords/letting agents
 - o landlords as individuals or corporately
- Any proposed changes to relations with claimants and landlords

B9. Overall assessment of LHA

- Overall how well has it worked
- What impact has the LHA had on Rent Service performance
 - o in Pathfinder area
 - o in other LAs
- Has the impact on Rent Service performance generally been
 - o beneficial
 - o harmful
- Any good practice
- Any lessons for TRS colleagues in other areas

C. Any other changes affecting HB

C1. Any other changes affecting Rent Service not related to LHA since Wave Two

- Any significant changes. PROBE Transfer of TRS to DWP. Impact on work

D. Views on impact of Local Housing Allowance

D1. Impact of LHA on behaviour, need etc

- As far as you are aware, have there been any changes to the local 'housing benefit' market (ie landlords or letting agents that routinely let to HB claimants) since the introduction of the LHA (ask as open question, then probe):
 - o supply of rental property: is it now more or less difficult for tenants to secure property, or much the same as before?
 - o landlords and letting agents: are they more or less willing to let to people on housing benefit, or is that much as before?
 - o IF supply and willingness to let have become more restricted, what are tenants on HB doing?
 - o have rent levels in the HB sector changed as a consequence of LHA?
 - o have landlord/letting agent management practices changed, as far as you are aware (eg higher deposits, more formal rent collection, general improvement or decline in management practice standards).
- Are there any other factors, do you think, that are important to understanding change in the market? (ask as open question, then probe):
 - o effects of landlord/HMO licensing or other type of landlord accreditation
 - o changes in the wider housing market
 - o any neighbourhood renewal programmes
- Confirm what responses were evident from claimants by Wave Two. Since Wave Two is there evidence of CHECK:
 - o claimants 'trading down' to maximise LHA benefit. Examples
 - o claimants 'trading up' to properties that better meet their needs. Examples
 - o claimants moving between tenures (e.g. from social to PRS) as a result of LHA
 - o claimants migrating into Pathfinder (or out of it)
 - area of origin
 - reasons where known

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- o growth in homelessness applications
 - figures/evidence, priority/non-priority
 - evidence that this is LHA related (e.g. no of households who were previously LHA claimants in the area, households migrating into Pathfinder area)
 - households reporting that reasons for homelessness are LHA related (inc arrears, financial issues)
- o any child protection issues from overcrowding etc. Examples
- o other

D2. Anticipated impact of the LHA on housing opportunities etc

- Given the previous answers, what do you think may be the future impacts of LHA 'post pathfinder'
 - o on landlords
 - o on claimants
 - o housing market
- will the impact generally be beneficial or harmful

D3. Wider market changes and impacts on the LHA

- How would you summarise the changes in the wider housing market over the last two years
- Would you say those changes were favourable to
 - o landlords
 - o claimants
 - o the LHA
- Do you anticipate any wider housing market changes in the near future that would impact on the future operation of the LHA
 - o Possible decline in buy to let investment
 - o New HMO regulatory framework
 - o Other

CLOSE

- Anything else they want to add
- Thank and close



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