

# 1 Information

## 1.1 Introduction

This section asked about local authorities' (LAs') views of the Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) and Housing Benefit Strategy Division – Information and Analysis Division (HBSD-IAD) scan, which Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ask LAs to run every month.

LAs have raised concerns about the length of time it takes to extract scan data, but prior to this survey, DWP had no information on run times. If the scan is to be further developed, DWP need to assess the scale of this problem and some of the questions in this section help to illustrate this. Further questions in this module aimed to identify how well prepared LAs are for the implementation of changes to the HBSD-IAD scan from April 2007. Awareness and use of the Housing Benefit Operational Database (HoBOD), the data resource available to each LA on the internet were also asked about here. The data in HoBOD is taken from Management Information Statistics (MIS) returns made by LAs to DWP and provides information on reported performance.

We asked on average, how much time per month it usually takes to run the HBMS scan, differentiating between the time to extract the data and time for follow-up queries or issues. For extraction of information the average time is 48 minutes, whilst for follow-up queries or issues the average is much higher at 132 minutes. It is worth bearing in mind that this average has been skewed by a few authorities giving very high answers of 12 hours or more, most authorities say it takes 60 minutes or less. It is also worth noting that half of authorities (49 per cent) are unable to say how long follow-up queries or issues take.

We also asked how long it takes to run the HBSD-IAD and in this case extracting information seems to take longer than follow up queries – an average of 112 minutes for extracting the information compared to 63 minutes for the follow-up queries. Once again, around half (53 per cent) are unable to say how long it takes to deal with follow-up queries or issues.

Around two-thirds (64 per cent) say they are prepared to some extent for the new specification of HBSD-IAD to be implemented in April 2007. Approximately one in five (18 per cent) say they are not very well prepared and a further seven per cent

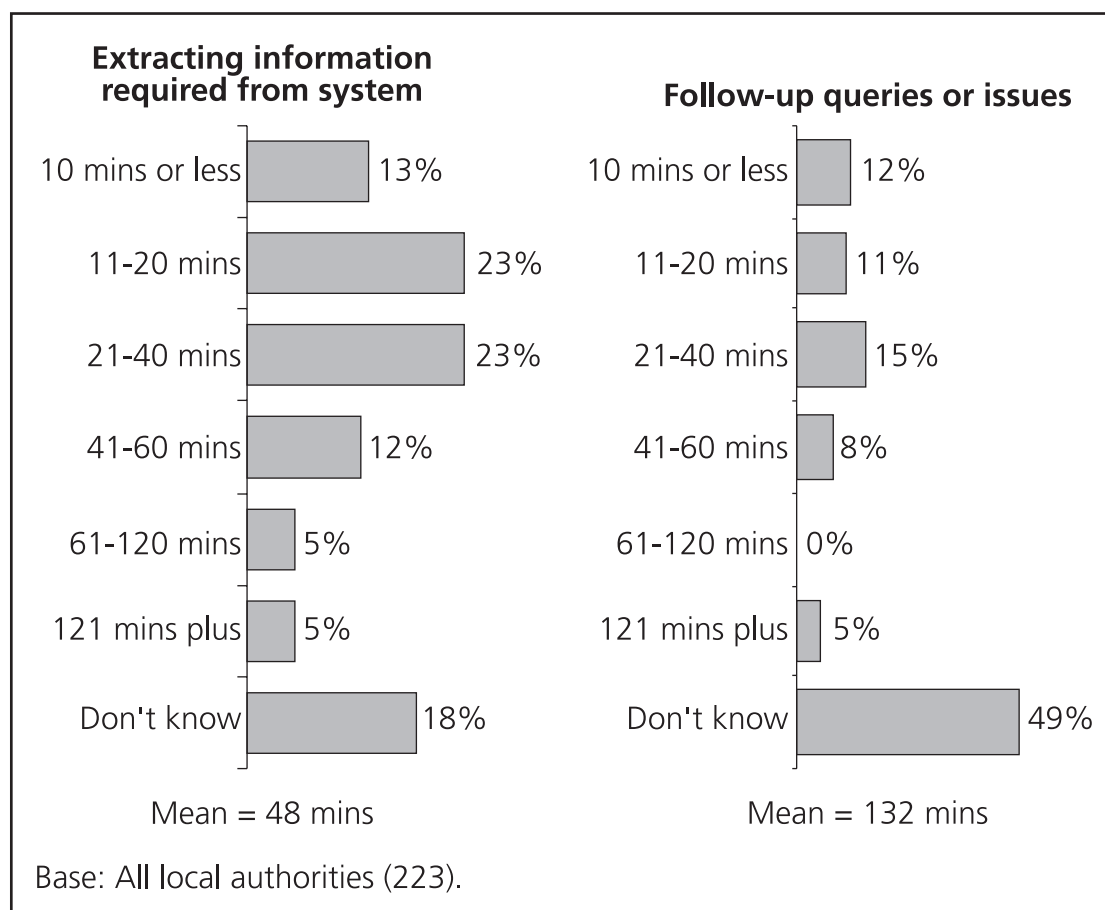
say they are not at all well prepared or have done nothing. Although over half (54 per cent) did not have software in place for the new specification, they did have plans to make changes. Three in ten (30 per cent) did have the software in place and of that group ten per cent had done tests on it already while 20 per cent had not yet tested it.

Awareness of HoBOD is high at 88 per cent and among those who are aware, three-quarters (76 per cent) use it. Most frequently it is used for Performance Management (73 per cent), Benchmarking (70 per cent), and General Information (69 per cent). It is also used, to a lesser extent, to contact other authorities for advice (nine per cent) and for security (seven per cent).

When asked about what information, if any, authorities feel is missing from the HoBOD, the most frequently mentioned answer was nothing (52 per cent) and a further 28 per cent say don't know. Similarly, when asked about what improvements, if any, could be made to the HoBOD, the majority (53 per cent) said nothing and a further fifth (21 per cent) say don't know. Potential improvements that were mentioned included up-to-date information/data/statistics (seven per cent) and need easier navigation/make more user friendly (four per cent)

## 1.2 Main findings

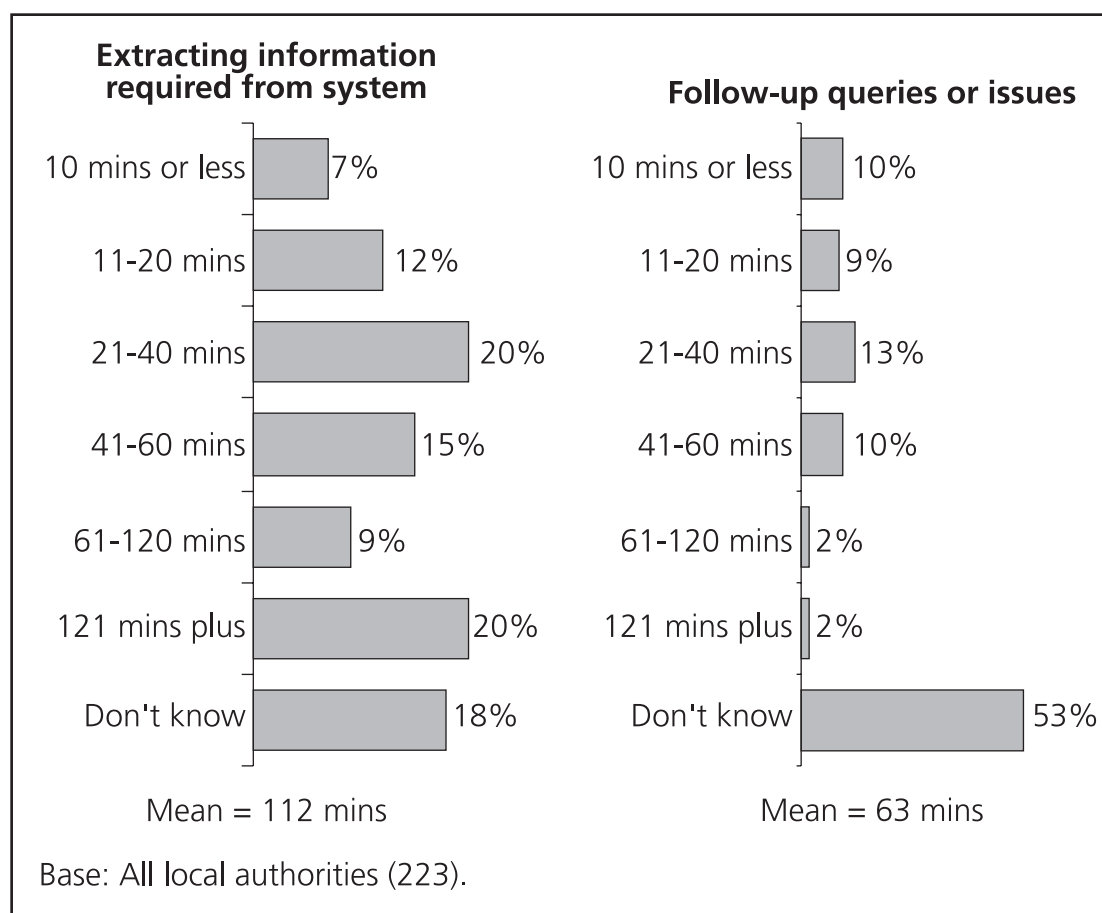
**Figure 1.1 On average, how many hours and minutes per month would you say it usually takes to run the HBMS scan?**



This question was split into time taken to extract information (left-hand figure) and follow-up queries or issues (right-hand figure). Looking at the mean (average) times it appears follow-up queries take a lot longer but it should be noted that this average was skewed by a few authorities giving very long times.

Caseload appears to be a factor affecting time for the run. High caseload authorities took an average of 75 minutes to extract information compared to low caseload authorities where the average for this task was 30 minutes.

**Figure 1.2 On average, how many hours and minutes per month would you say it usually takes to run the HBSD-IAD scan?**

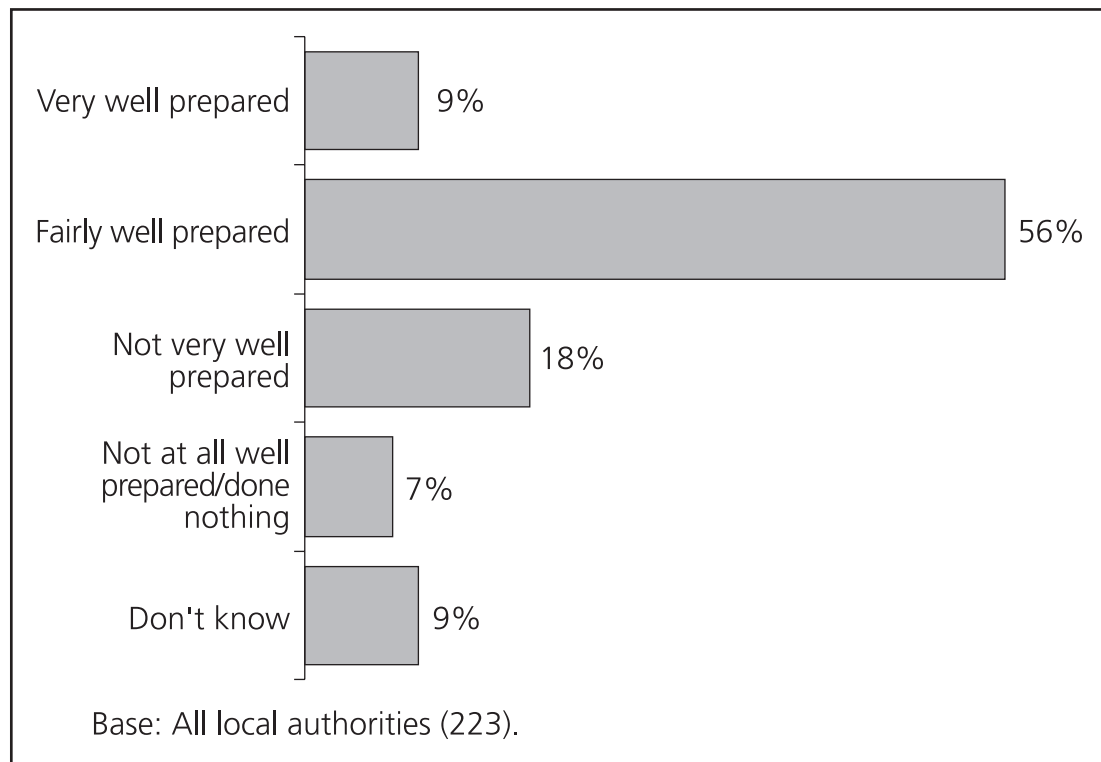


Similarly, we asked how long it takes to run the HBSD-IAD scan split by extracting information (on the left) and follow-up queries or issues (on the right).

The balance of time for these slides was weighted more heavily to extracting information: a sizeable proportion (a fifth) said this process took over two hours and the average was 112 minutes. Again, caseload was a factor affecting the time taken. Authorities with a high caseload took an average of 173 minutes to extract information compared to those with a low caseload – 59 minutes on average.

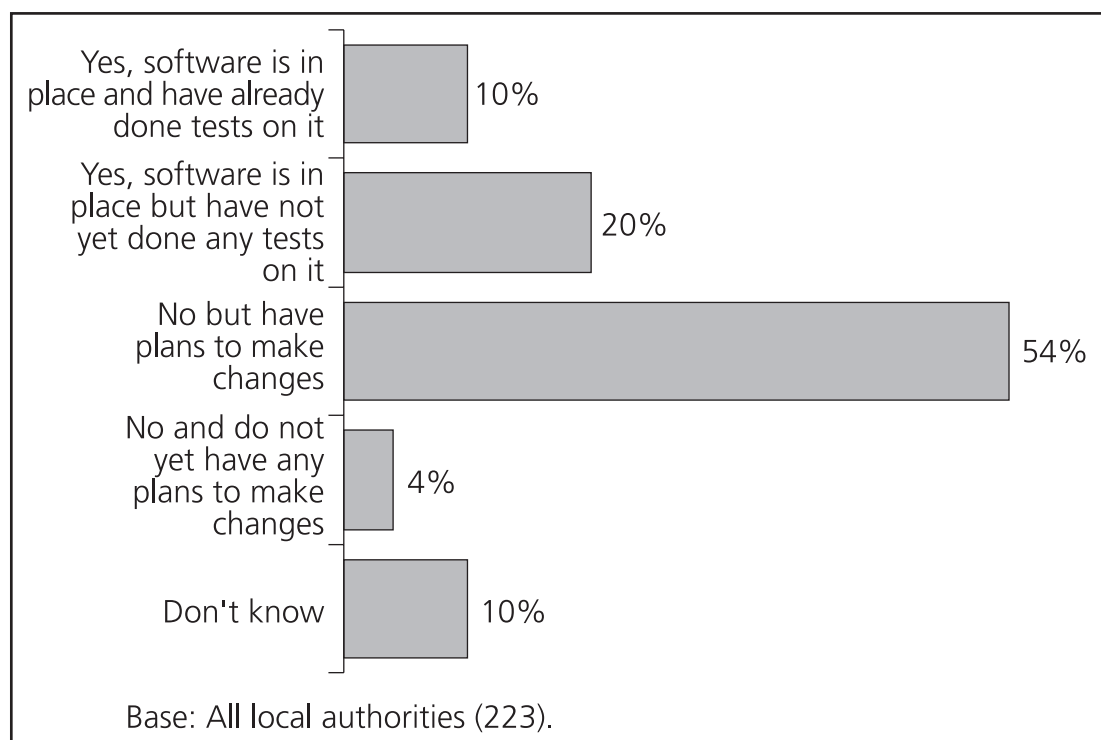
The follow-up queries or issues took an average of 63 minutes.

**Figure 1.3 How prepared would you say your local authority is for the new specification of HBSD-IAD to be implemented in April 2007?**



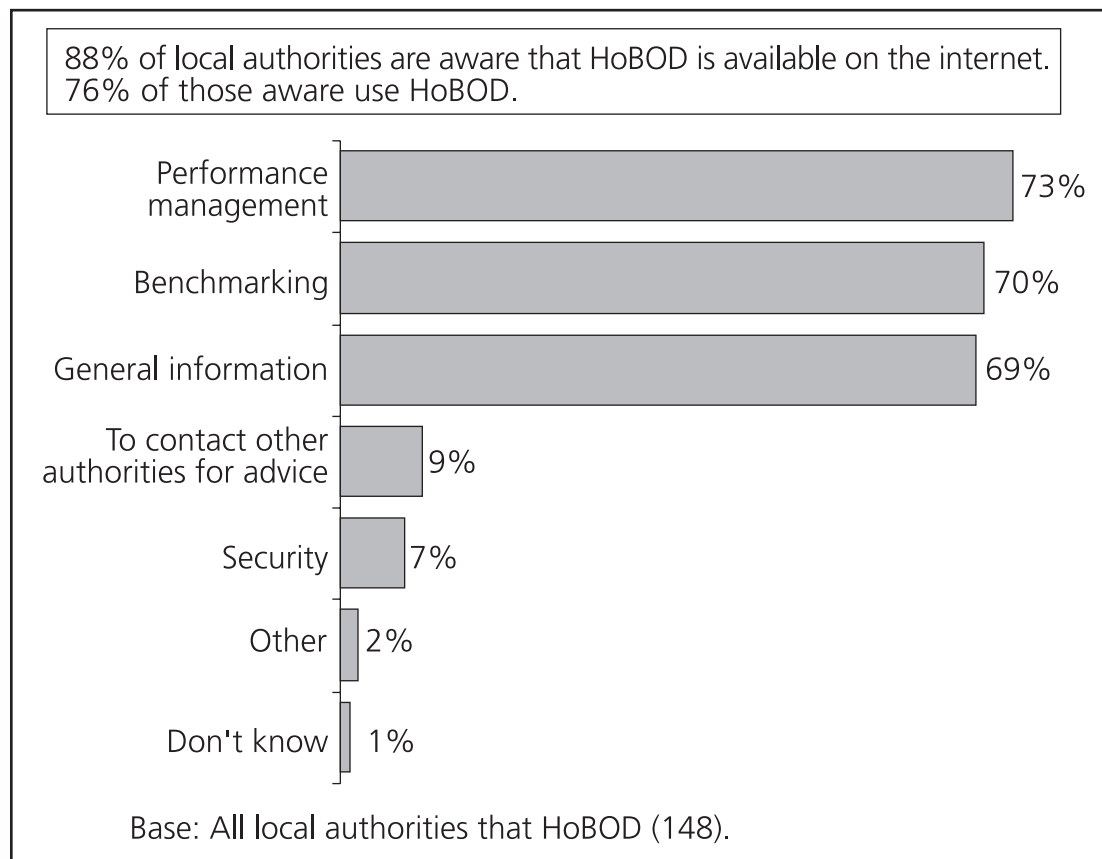
This figure does not require any commentary because it is self-explanatory and there are no significant differences in the findings by any sub-groups.

**Figure 1.4 Is the software in place for your local authority to run the new HBSD-IAD specification in April 2007?**



Authorities that are contracted out were more likely to have the software in place and already done tests on it (55 per cent of this group) compared to just eight per cent of those not contracted out.

**Figure 1.5 Awareness and use of HoBOD**

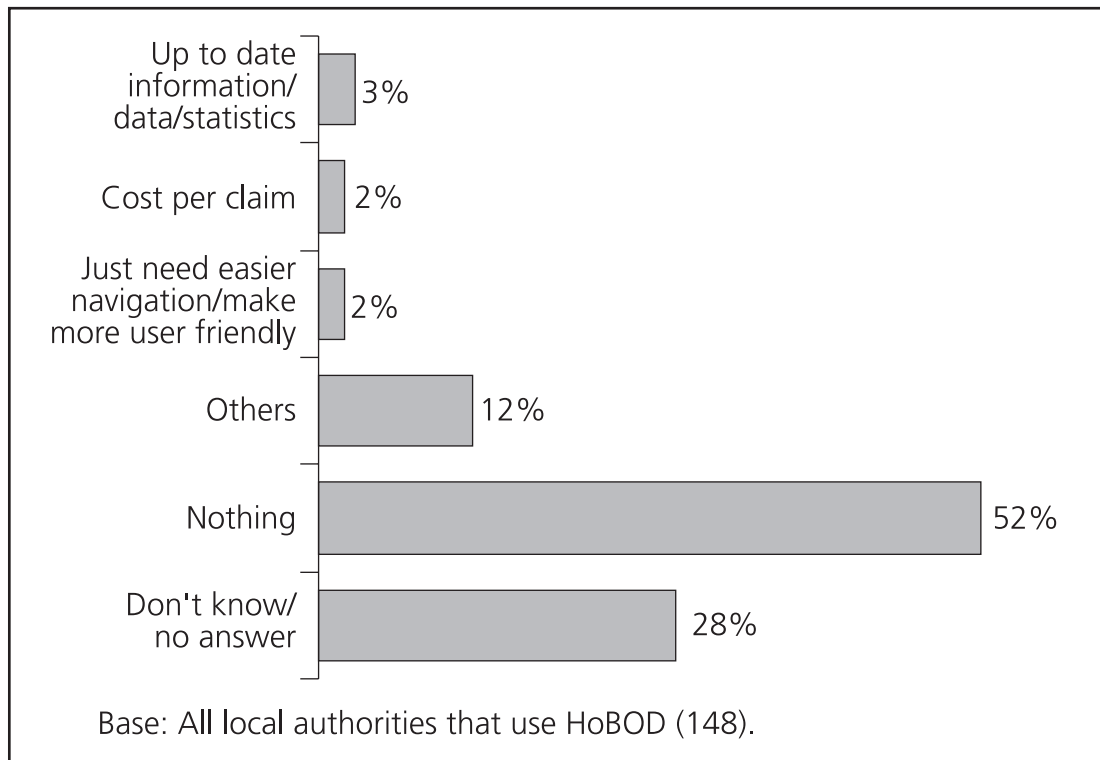


Authorities with a medium or high caseload (91 per cent and 94 per cent respectively) were more likely to be aware of that HoBOD is available on the internet than low caseload authorities (79 per cent). In line with that finding, medium and high caseload authorities were more likely to use HoBOD (79 per cent and 83 per cent) compared to low caseload authorities (63 per cent).

In terms of LA type, Scottish and English Metropolitan authorities were most likely to use HoBOD (94 per cent and 92 per cent respectively), Welsh the least likely (38 per cent).

It was used for benchmarking by all (100 per cent) of the London Boroughs interviewed and by high numbers (82 per cent) of English Unitary authorities.

**Figure 1.6 What information, if any, would you say is missing from the HoBOD?**



Neither of the figures on this page require any commentary because they are self-explanatory and there are no significant differences in the findings by any sub-groups.

**Figure 1.7 What improvements, if any, would you like to see made to the HoBoD?**

