

2 Efficiency Work Programme

2.1 Introduction and summary

This section repeated questions asked at the previous wave about changes local authorities (LAs) may have made, or plans they may have in the future, for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) services in order to improve the overall value for money of the service.

Most likely to be included in those plans were training (70 per cent), improved performance management (68 per cent), on-line claim forms (68 per cent), benchmarking (67 per cent) and homeworking (62 per cent).

The main difference in findings when compared with Wave 17 was that a slightly higher proportion mentioned improved performance management (a rise of six per cent, from 62 per cent to 68 per cent).

Three-quarters (75 per cent) of those including joint working/shared services in their initiatives expected a planned net saving and similarly high proportions expecting planned net savings were recorded for organisational restructure (71 per cent) and accommodation changes (71 per cent). These initiatives were also viewed six months ago as being some of the most likely to achieve net savings. LAs were most likely to expect high net savings for accommodation changes (17 per cent), organisational restructure (16 per cent), joint working/shared services (12 per cent) and improving IT (11 per cent).

When asked about the barriers LAs would need to overcome to improve efficiency and effectiveness of HB/CTB services, the most frequently mentioned six months ago were budgetary control (60 per cent), IT issues (48 per cent) and staffing issues (41 per cent). However, at Wave 18 a new barrier was cited by a significant proportion of LAs: the current financial situation, mentioned by more than two-thirds (69 per cent). In addition, staffing/resource constraints were seen as a barrier by 65 per cent which was significantly more than mentioned this at the previous wave (41 per cent).

LAs were asked which resources they had used in the last year to support their plans to improve efficiency. The findings for Wave 18 were broadly similar to those for Wave 17 for some categories: Revised Performance and Good Practice Guide (65 per cent at Wave 17 and 68 per cent at Wave 18); Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) (57 per cent at Wave 17 and 56 per cent at Wave 18). There has, however, been a marked increase in the numbers using the LA Efficiency section of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) website, with just over a third (36 per cent) having used it at Wave 17 and 45 per cent at Wave 18. In addition, the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) was used by 60 per cent of LAs at Wave 17 and 70 per cent of LAs at Wave 18.

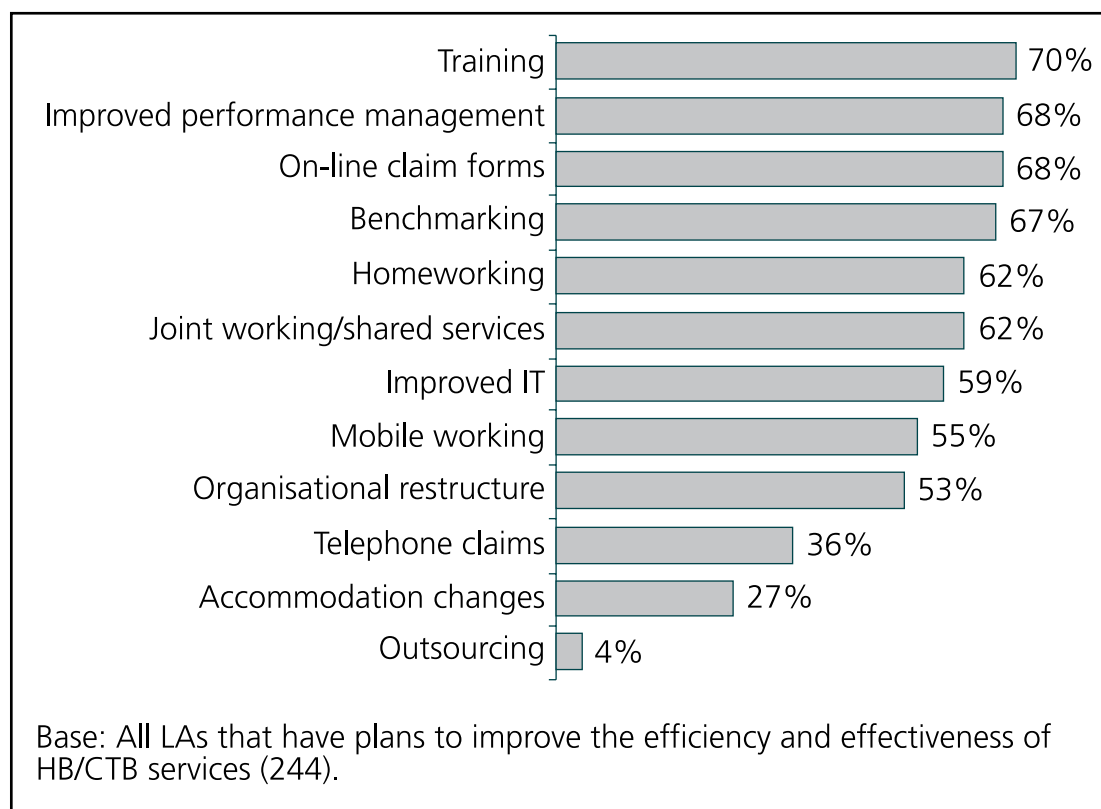
Users of the various resources available were asked to rate how useful their experience of them had been. At Wave 17, CIPFA, the Performance Development Team and IRRV were the most commonly cited resources that users claimed were very useful (47 per cent, 37 per cent and 36 per cent respectively). However, at Wave 18 the percentage saying that the Performance Development Team consultancy was very useful had gone up to 45 per cent.

All the interviewed authorities were asked to list the resources they planned to use in the future for improving efficiency. The resources that featured in the majority of LA's plans were the Revised Performance and Good Practice Guide (67 per cent plan to use from 66 per cent in Wave 17), the LA Efficiency section of the DWP website (58 per cent from 54 per cent in Wave 17) and IRRV (58 per cent plan to use from 51 per cent in Wave 17).

2.2 Main findings

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

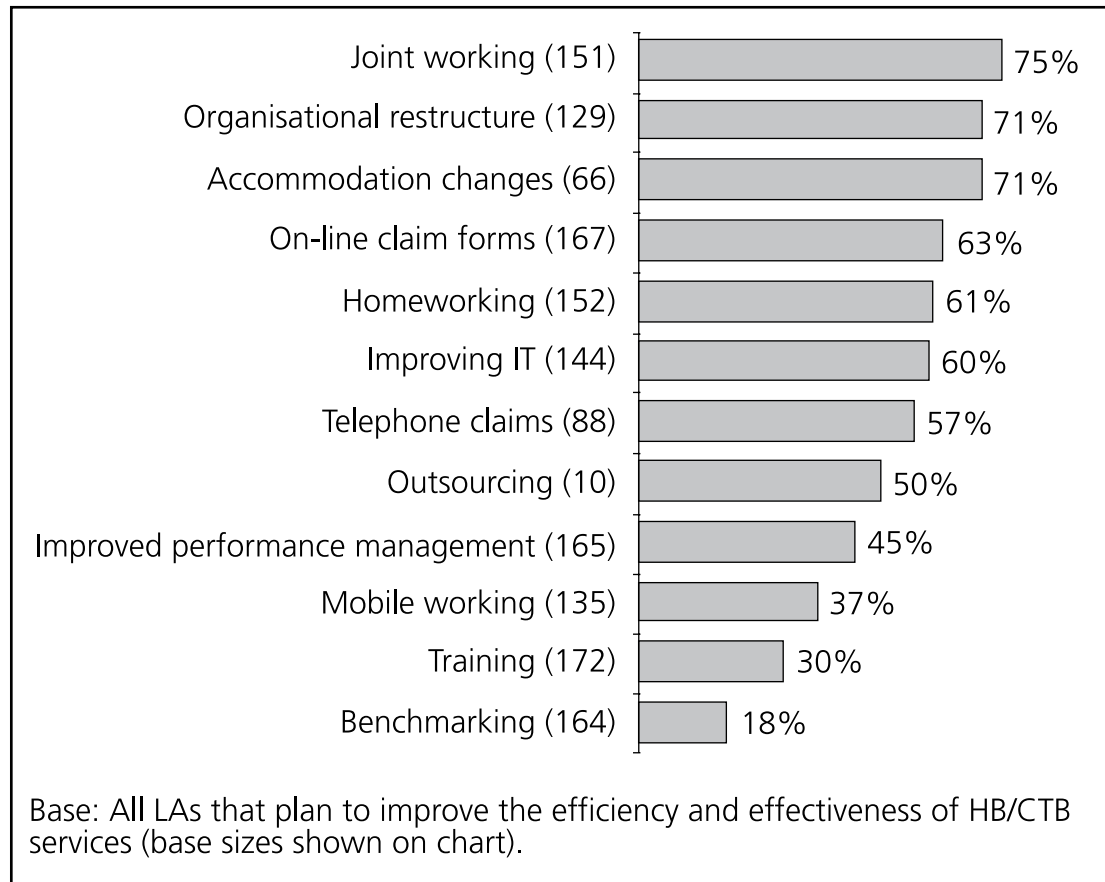
Figure 2.1 Which of the following initiatives are included in your LA's overall plans to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your HB/CTB services?



It is interesting to note that many of these initiatives were significantly more likely to be included in the plans of authorities which had high caseloads than they were for those authorities with low or medium caseloads. This applied to homeworking, where 73 per cent of LAs with high caseloads included it in their plans, compared with 49 per cent of those with low, and 62 per cent of those with medium caseloads. There were similar findings for improved performance management (80 per cent for high caseload LAs, compared with 54 per cent and 66 per cent respectively for low and medium caseloads) and improving IT (72 per cent for high caseload LAs, compared with 45 per cent and 58 per cent respectively for low and medium caseloads). Mobile working, benchmarking, organisations restructure and training all shared this pattern where the greater the caseload the more likely the authority had the initiative included in their plans.

Mobile working and organisational restructure were more likely to be included in plans for authorities that were not contracted out than those that were contracted out. Three in five (58 per cent) of LAs that were not contracted out had included mobile working in their plans whereas 35 per cent of those that were contracted had. Similarly 55 per cent of LAs that were not contracted out had included organisational restructure whereas 24 per cent of those that were contracted out had.

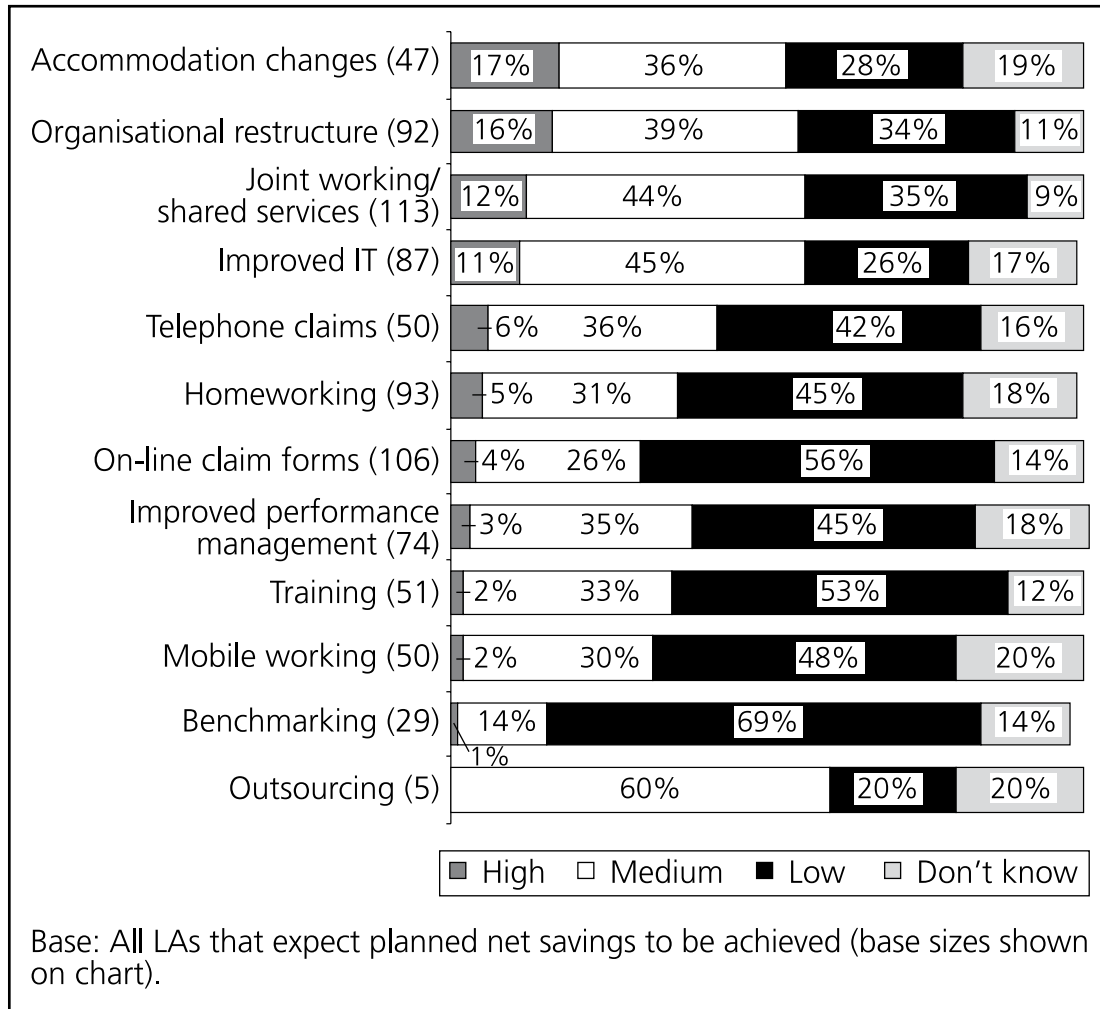
Figure 2.2 For which of the initiatives included in your LA's plans do you expect planned net savings to be achieved?



Joint working/shared services were significantly more likely to hold expectation of planned net savings for authorities with a low caseload (82 per cent) than those with a high caseload (66 per cent). Training was also more likely to hold expectation of planned net savings for LAs with a low caseload (45 per cent) than those with a high (29 per cent) or medium (21 per cent) caseload.

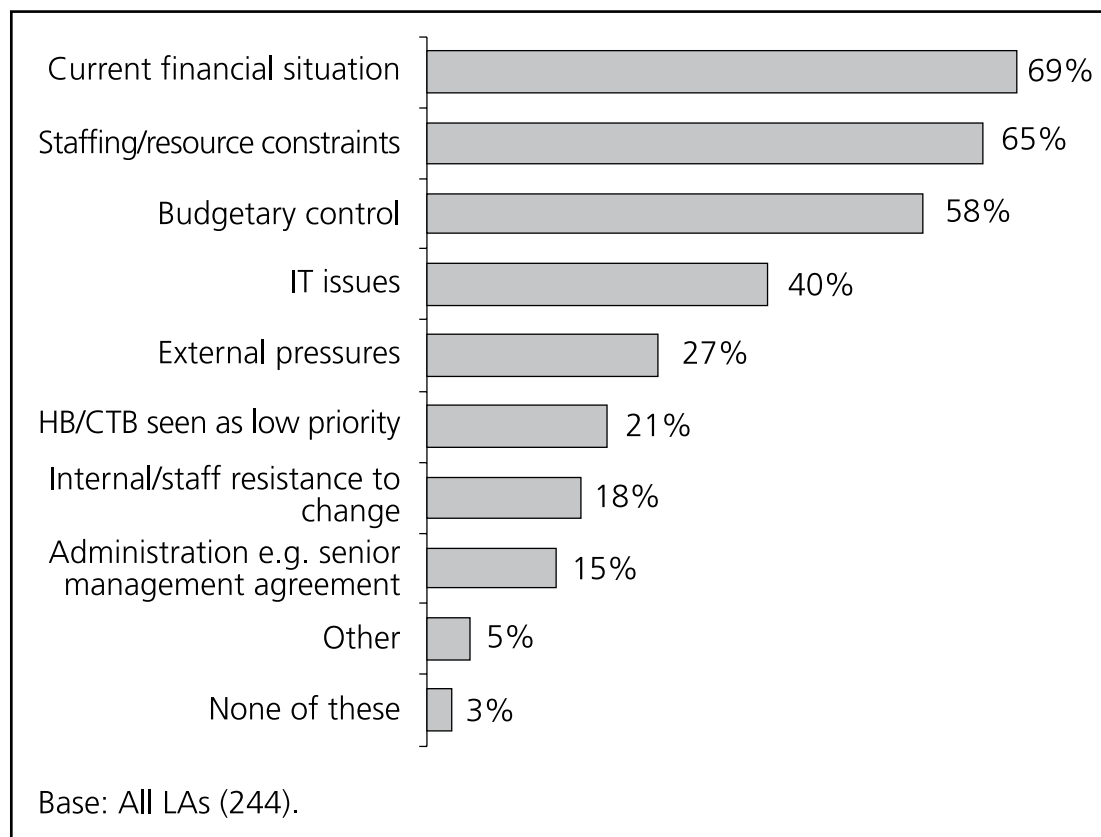
Accommodation changes was, on the other hand, more likely to hold expectation of planned net savings for authorities with a high caseload (88 per cent) compared with those with a medium or low caseload (57 per cent and 50 per cent respectively).

Figure 2.3 Do you expect this net saving to be high, medium or low?



LAs that had included an initiative in their LA's overall plans to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of HB/CTB services were asked to state if they expected the net savings to be high, medium or low. Net savings at a high level were expected from accommodation changes (17 per cent), organisational restructure (16 per cent), joint working/shared services (12 per cent) and improved IT (11 per cent).

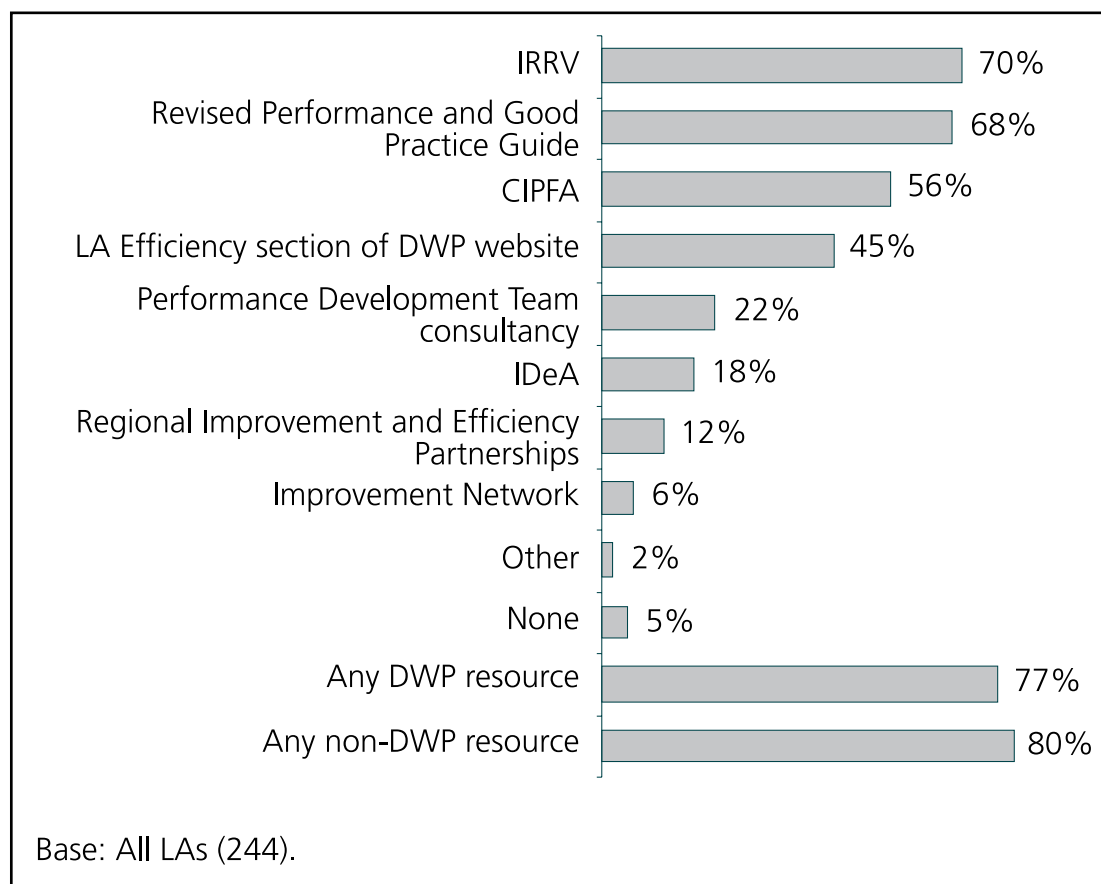
Figure 2.4 Which, if any, of the following barriers do you feel your LA will need to overcome in trying to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your service?



When asked about the barriers LAs would need to overcome to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the service, the most frequently mentioned was the current financial situation, mentioned by approximately seven in ten authorities (69 per cent). Staffing/resource constraints was cited by 65 per cent of authorities as a barrier and LAs that were not contracted out were more likely to mention this (66 per cent) than those that were contracted out (41 per cent). Budgetary control, cited by three in five (58 per cent) shared this pattern, with 59 per cent of those not contracted out citing this as a barrier compared with 35 per cent of those contracted out. This was viewed as a particular problem to be overcome by English metropolitan authorities amongst whom 78 per cent cited it as a barrier, in contrast to London boroughs of whom just 38 per cent said this was a barrier.

Internal management/staff resistance to change was more likely to be cited as a barrier by LAs with a high caseload (27 per cent) than those with a low (14 per cent) or medium (13 per cent) caseload.

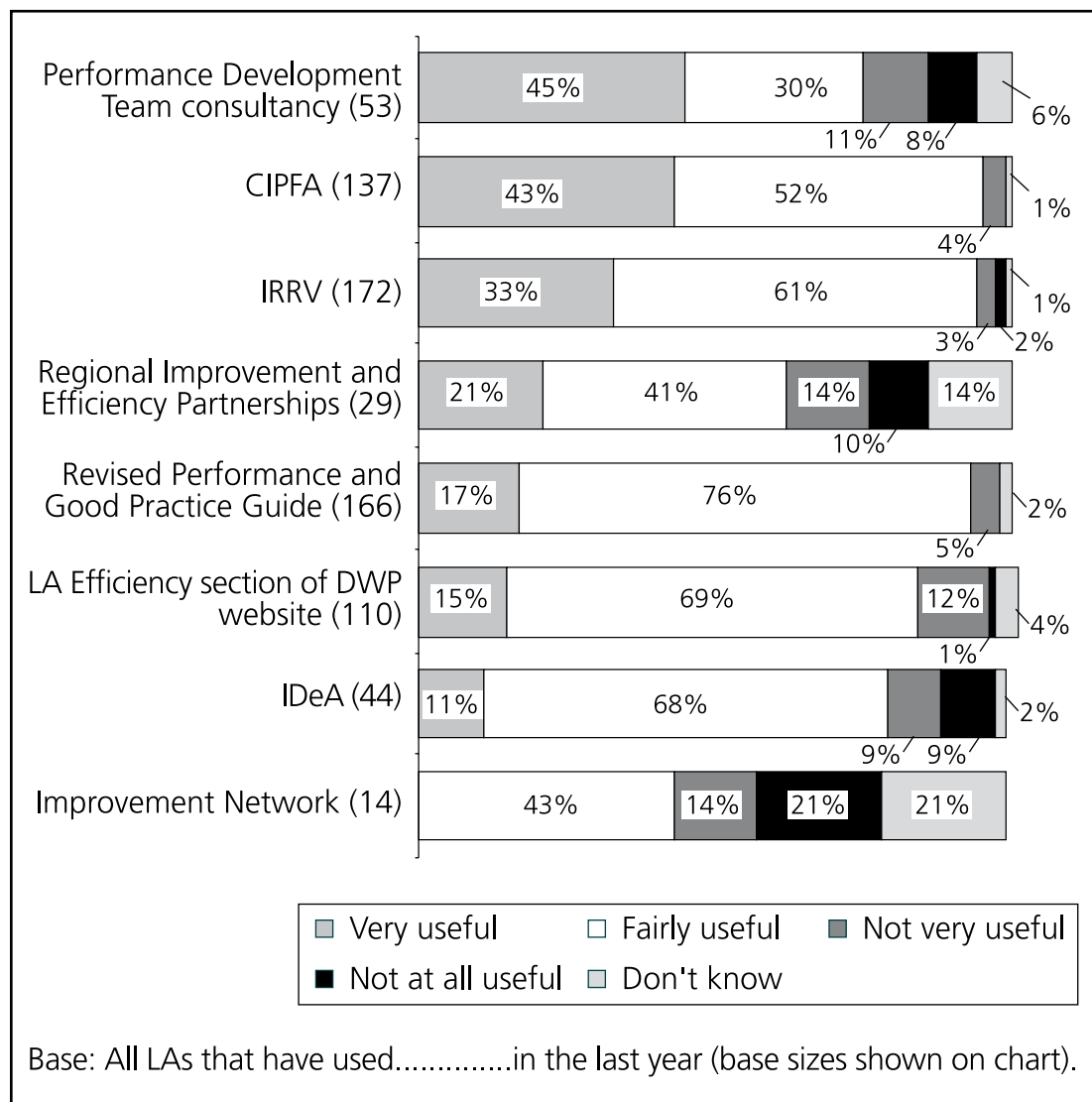
Figure 2.5 Which, if any, of the following resources that can support your LA's plans to deliver your HB/CTB service more efficiently and effectively have you used in the last year?



When LAs were asked which resources they had used in the last year to support their plans to improve efficiency, IRRV had been used by 70 per cent, the Revised Performance and Good Practice Guide by slightly more than two-thirds (68 per cent), and CIPFA by 56 per cent. The proportion that had used the LA Efficiency section of the DWP website had risen from 36 per cent at Wave 17 to 45 per cent at Wave 18.

CIPFA was more likely to have been used by London boroughs (69 per cent), English metropolitans (74 per cent) and English unitaries (80 per cent), but was used at a low level in Welsh (36 per cent) and Scottish authorities (27 per cent). IRRV, however, had been used very little by Welsh authorities in the last year with just over a third of authorities in Wales (36 per cent) using this resource contrasting to 81 per cent of English metropolitan authorities and 86 per cent of Scottish authorities.

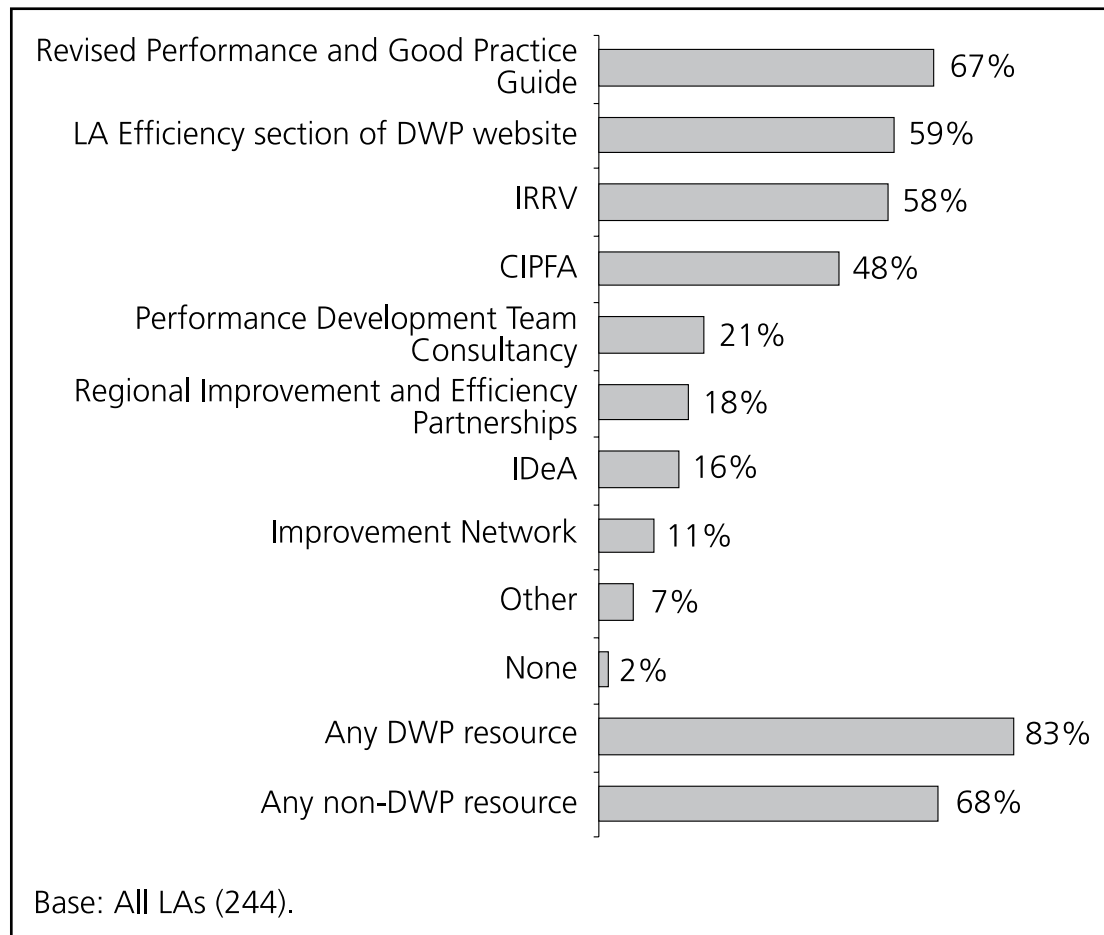
Figure 2.6 How useful have you found this/these resource/s to date?



The resources that had the greatest percentage of users that claimed they were very useful were the Performance Development Team (45 per cent), CIPFA (43 per cent), and IRRV with 33 per cent.

When the findings for very useful and fairly useful were combined, it is interesting to note that the pattern changes so then the most useful at any level was CIPFA (95 per cent found either very or fairly useful). This was followed by IRRV (94 per cent at all useful), Revised Performance and Good Practice Guide (93 per cent at all useful) and LA Efficiency section of DWP website (84 per cent at all useful).

Figure 2.7 Which, if any, of these resources, does your LA plan to use as part of your plans to deliver your HB/CTB service more efficiently and effectively in the future?



The resources that featured in the majority of LA's plans were the Revised Performance and Good Practice Guide (67 per cent plan to use), the LA Efficiency section of the DWP website (59 per cent) and IRRV (58 per cent).

It is interesting to note that LAs with high caseloads were generally more likely to be planning to use resources in the future than those with low or medium caseloads. Nine out of ten (91 per cent) LAs with high caseloads said that they planned to use DWP resources in order to help deliver their HB/CTB service more efficiently and effectively in the future, compared with 77 per cent of those with low and 80 per cent of those with medium caseloads. Similarly three-quarters (77 per cent) of those with high caseloads said they planned to use non-DWP resources to this aim compared with 65 per cent of those with low and 63 per cent of those with medium caseloads.

