

3 Corporate Contact Centres

3.1 Introduction and summary

Many local authorities (LAs) are introducing Corporate Contact Centres (CCCs) to deal with council wide face-to-face and telephone enquiries, including Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) enquiries. The aim of this section of questions was to establish how this is working in practice for Benefits Service.

A CCC for the purpose of these questions meant that either phone enquiries or face-to-face enquiries are dealt with corporately, usually funded and staffed separately from the Benefits Service.

Three-quarters (76 per cent) of all LAs interviewed had a CCC. However, considerably fewer (56 per cent) had a CCC that dealt with HB/CTB enquiries. When asked whether this included dealing with HB/CTB enquiries from customers who contact the centre in person, by telephone or both, 18 per cent of LAs with a CCC that deals with HB/CTB enquiries said in person only, 17 per cent said on the telephone only and 65 per cent said both in person and on the telephone.

When asked to give the percentage of HB/CTB enquiries that were resolved by the CCC without recourse to the Benefits Service it is interesting to note that around a third did not know (37 per cent for face-to-face enquiries and 32 per cent for telephone enquiries). Amongst the LAs that gave an answer around half said that more than two-fifths of enquiries were resolved by the CCC alone. However, that still leaves a small, but significant, number of LAs that said very few enquiries were resolved by the CCC alone. For example, nine per cent of LAs said that between one per cent and 20 per cent of personal enquiries, and seven per cent said that between one per cent and 20 per cent of telephone enquiries, were resolved by the CCC without being referred on to the Benefits Service.

Overall it would appear that the CCCs were doing slightly better at resolving telephone enquiries without involving the Benefits Service than they were in person; over a half of LAs (54 per cent) said that more than two-fifths of enquiries that were made by telephone were resolved without recourse to the Benefits Service; on the other hand, under half (47 per cent) of LAs said that more than two-fifths of enquiries made in person were resolved without recourse to the Benefits Service.

Three-quarters of LAs that have a CCC (74 per cent) took a reduction in their budget to pay for it. This amounted to an average of six Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts. In addition, 57 per cent of LAs that have a CCC have had experienced staff transfer over to it.

Around half (49 per cent) of LAs know how much the Benefits Service is charged for the CCC, however, just 18 per cent of these think that the amount represents value for money.

Just two in five LAs that have a CCC (40 per cent) regarded it as a successful way of dealing with HB/CTB. When asked about the reasons why they regard it as successful 91 per cent said that it takes the burden off benefits staff and 82 per cent mentioned that there is good communication between the Benefits Service and the CCC.

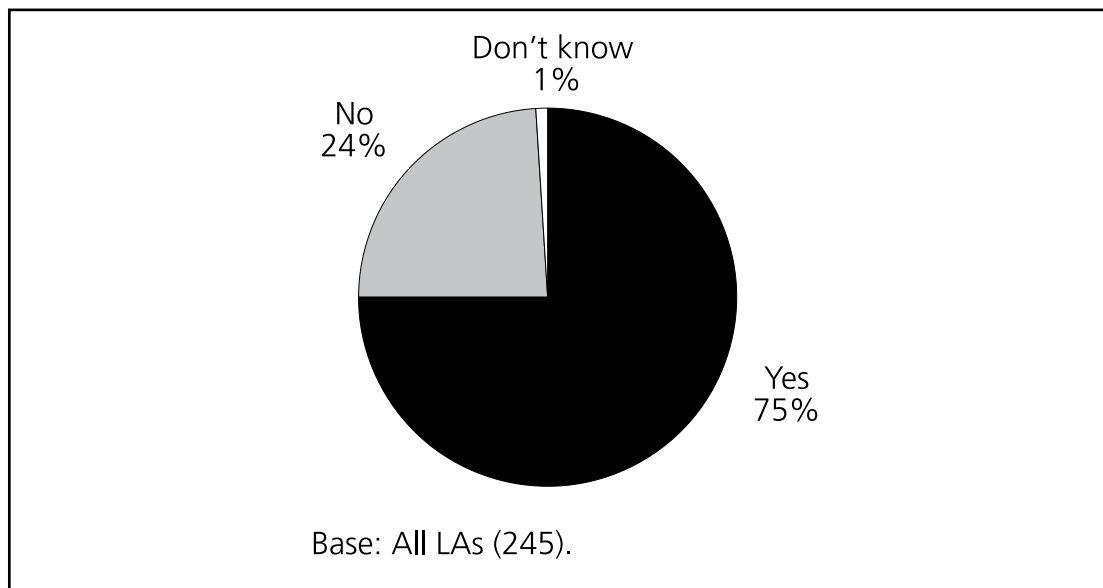
When the 52 per cent of LAs that did not regard their CCC as a successful way of dealing with HB/CTB were asked why they gave this response, 90 per cent said that benefits staff still have to get involved in detailed enquiries and 87 per cent said CCC staff are not fully trained in benefits work.

Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) of LAs that do not currently have a CCC have no plans to introduce one that deals with HB/CTB enquiries. When asked why this was the case, the main responses were that benefits staff still have to get involved in detailed enquiries (56 per cent), CCC staff were unlikely to be fully trained (44 per cent) and also that they have received poor feedback from other LAs that have experience of them (41 per cent).

Amongst those that do not currently have a CCC, just 22 per cent plan to introduce one. However, for the majority, that will be in more than a year.

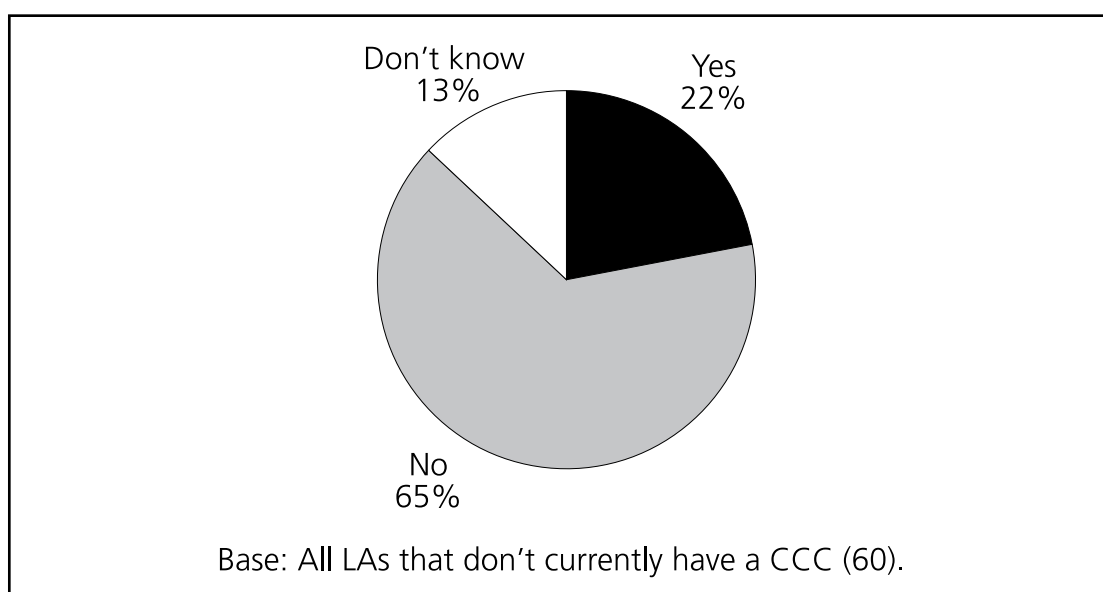
3.2 Main findings

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

Figure 3.1 Does your LA have a Corporate Contact Centre?

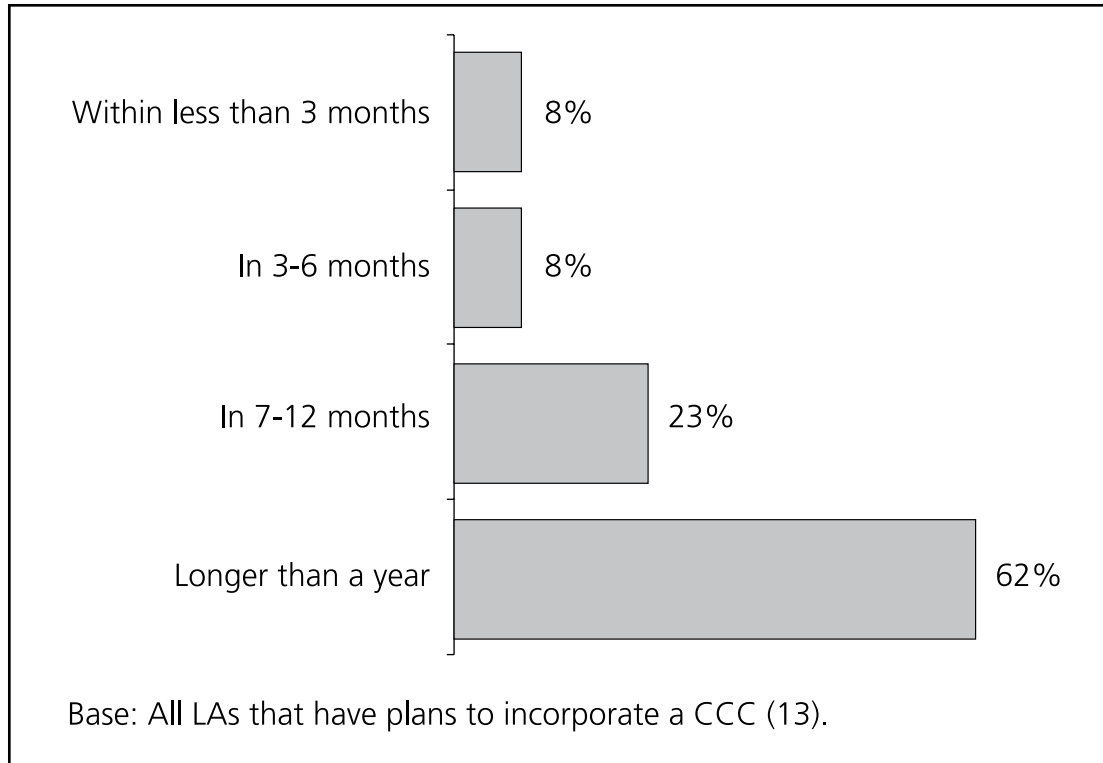
Three-quarters of the LAs interviewed had a CCC. LAs with a high caseload were more likely to have a CCC (84 per cent) than LAs with a low (71 per cent) or medium (71 per cent) caseload.

English metropolitan authorities were the type of authority most likely to have a CCC (96 per cent compared to, for example, 69 per cent of London boroughs).

Figure 3.2 Does your LA have any plans to introduce a Corporate Contact Centre which will deal with HB/CTB enquiries?

LAs with high caseloads that did not currently have a CCC were more likely to say that they had plans to introduce one (36 per cent) than were LAs with low (11 per cent) or medium (22 per cent) caseloads.

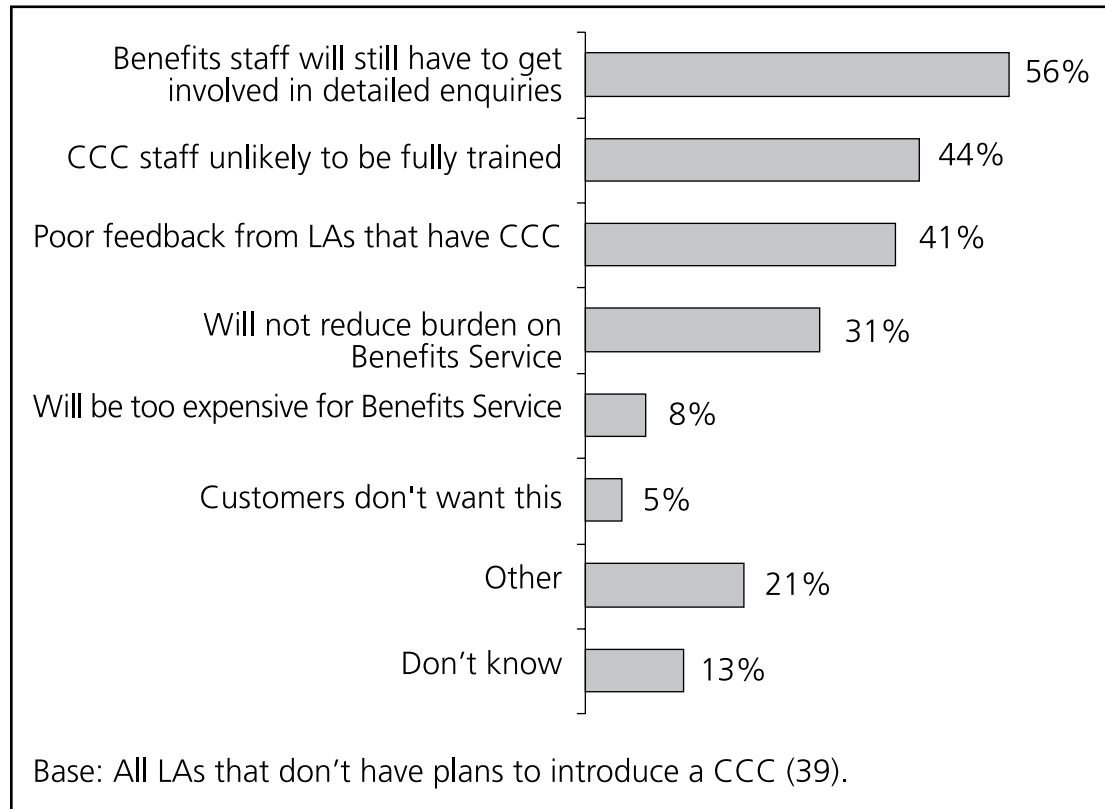
Figure 3.3 When does your LA plan to do this? (introduce a Corporate Contact Centre)



Amongst those LAs that do not currently have a CCC, the 13 authorities that plan to introduce one said that in most cases this would happen in more than a years time.

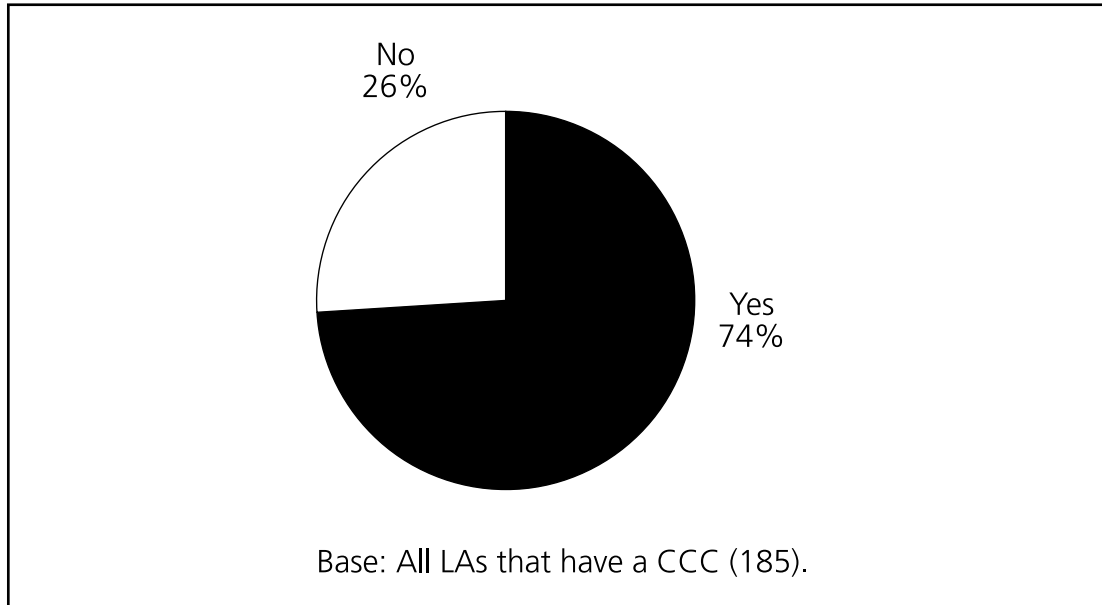
It should be noted that the base size for this slide is extremely low so the findings should be treated with caution.

Figure 3.4 Why does your LA not plan to introduce a Corporate Contact Centre which deals with HB/CTB enquiries?



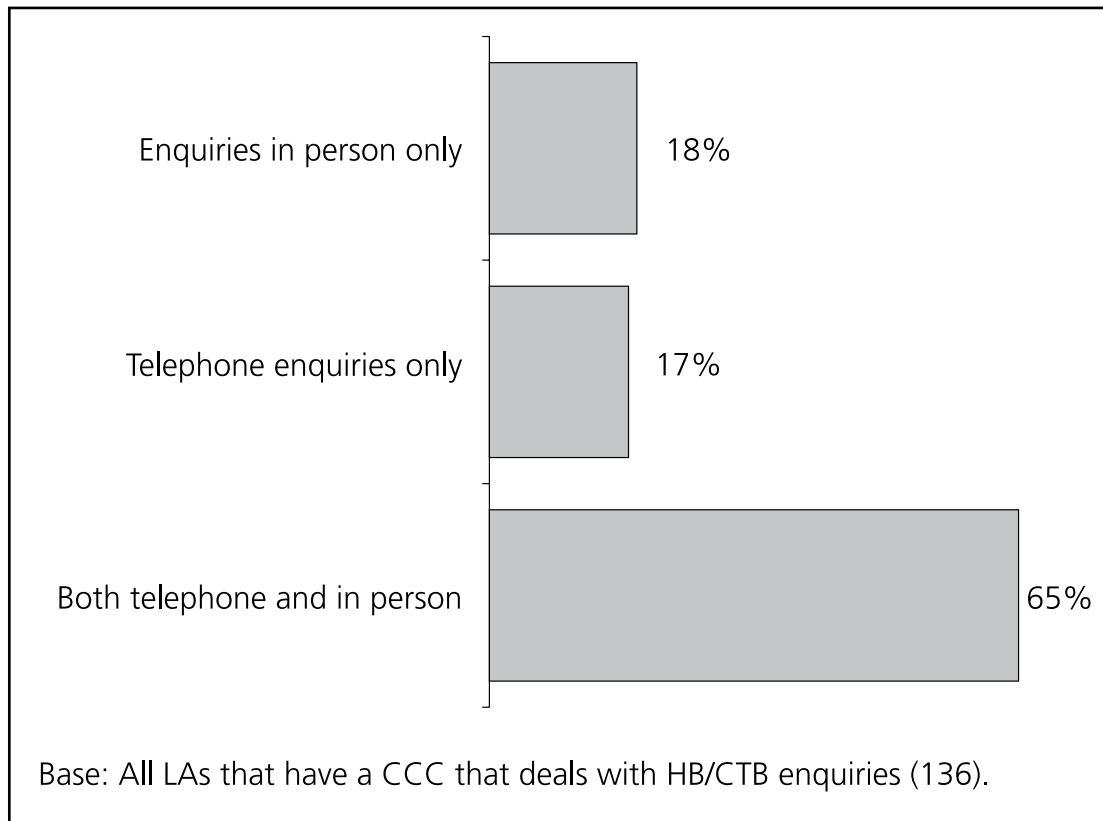
Those LAs that were not contracted out were more likely to have said that the reason for not having plans to introduce a CCC was that *'Benefits staff will still have to get involved'* (63 per cent for not contracted out compared with none of those LAs that were contracted out). Similarly approximately half (49 per cent) of LAs that were not contracted out said that they thought that *'the Corporate Contact Centre staff was unlikely to be fully trained in HB/CTB work'* compared with none of those LAs that were contracted out.

Figure 3.5 Does the Corporate Contact Centre deal with HB/CTB enquiries?



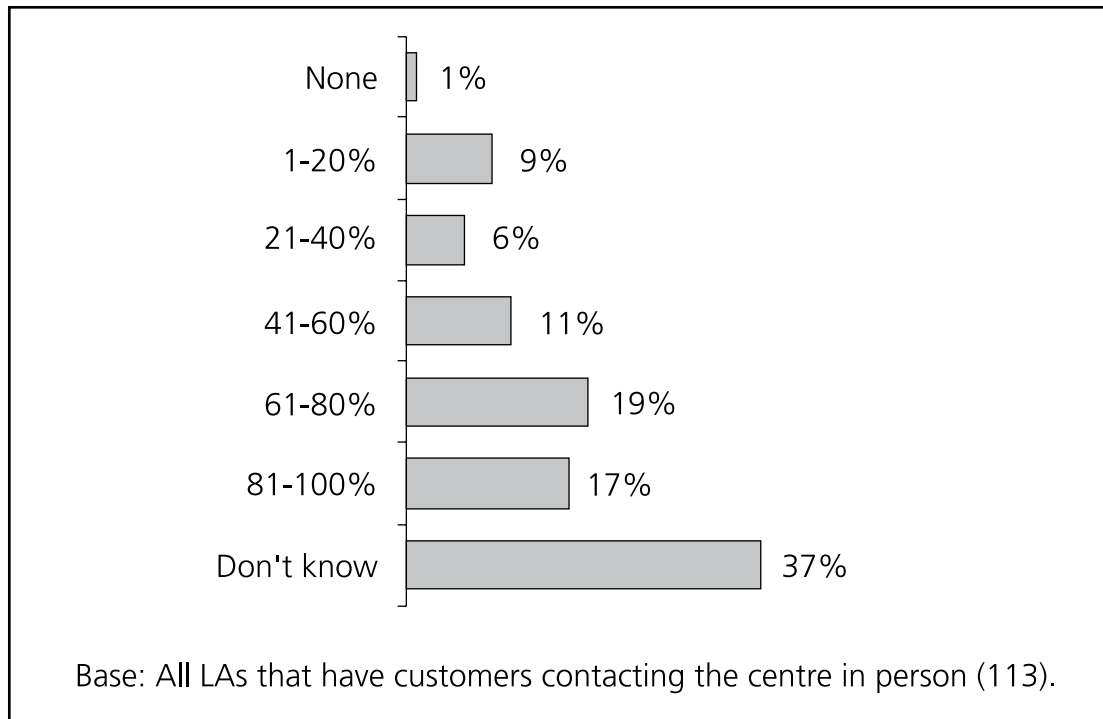
Amongst those LAs that had a CCC, English districts (81 per cent) and English unitaries (75 per cent) were more likely to say that their Centres dealt with HB/CTB enquiries compared with, for example, Scottish authorities, where just 47 per cent had CCCs that dealt with HB/CTB enquiries.

Figure 3.6 Does this include dealing with HB/CTB enquires from customers who contact the centre in person, by telephone or both?



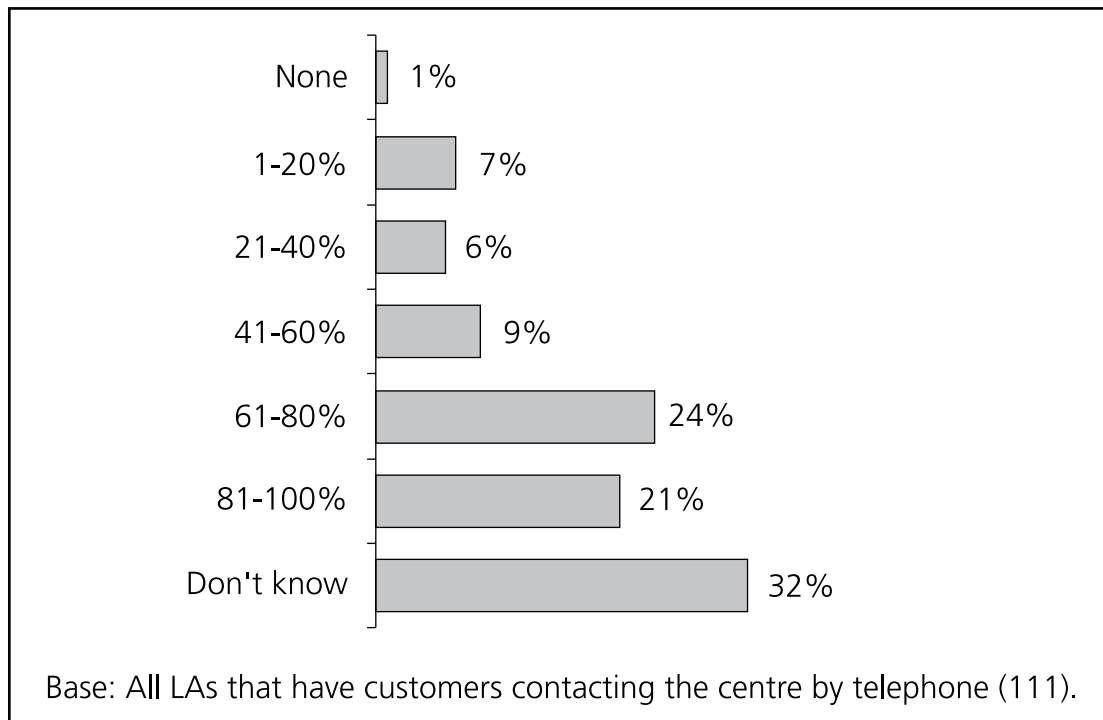
Scottish authorities were the most likely to have said that their CCC dealt with telephone enquiries only (50 per cent in Scottish LAs compared to, for example, seven per cent in the LAs in the East Midlands).

Figure 3.7 Approximately, what percentage of HB/CTB enquiries that are made in person at the centre are resolved by Corporate Contact Centre staff without recourse to the Benefits Service?



When asked to give the percentage of HB/CTB enquiries that were resolved by the CCC without recourse to the Benefits Service it is interesting to note that significant proportions did not know. For face-to-face enquiries 37 per cent of LAs did not know the percentage of HB/CTB enquiries that were resolved entirely at the CCC.

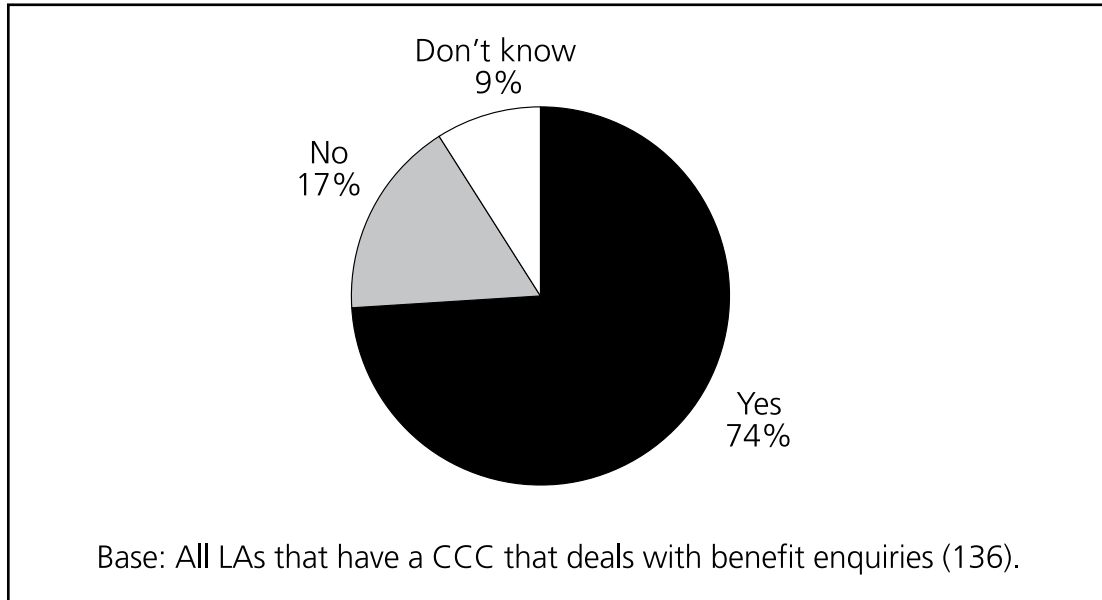
Figure 3.8 Approximately, what percentage of HB/CTB enquiries that are made by telephone to the centre are resolved by Corporate Contact Centre staff without recourse to the Benefits Service?



When asked to give the percentage of HB/CTB telephone enquiries that were resolved by the CCC without recourse to the Benefits Service it is interesting to note that 32 per cent of LAs in this group did not know.

Overall it would appear that the CCCs were doing slightly better at resolving telephone enquiries without involving the Benefits Service than they were at resolving face-to-face enquiries for HB/CTB.

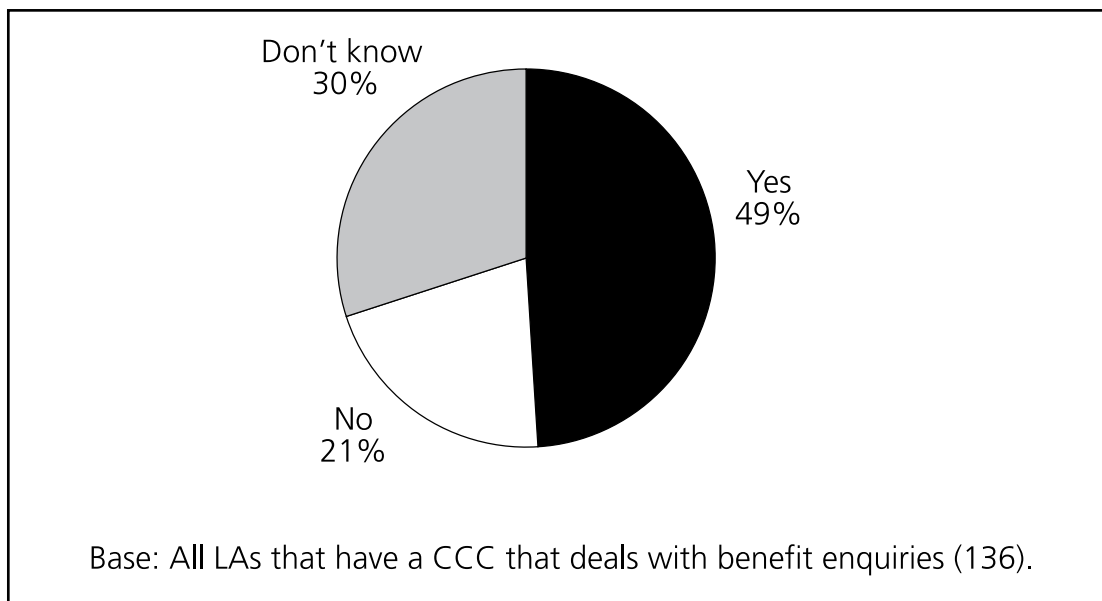
Figure 3.9 Did the Benefits Service take a reduction in its budget to pay for the Corporate Contact Centre?



Authorities with a high caseload (84 per cent) were more likely to have said that their LA's Benefits Service took a reduction in its budget to pay for the CCC than were those with a low (58 per cent) or medium (76 per cent) caseload.

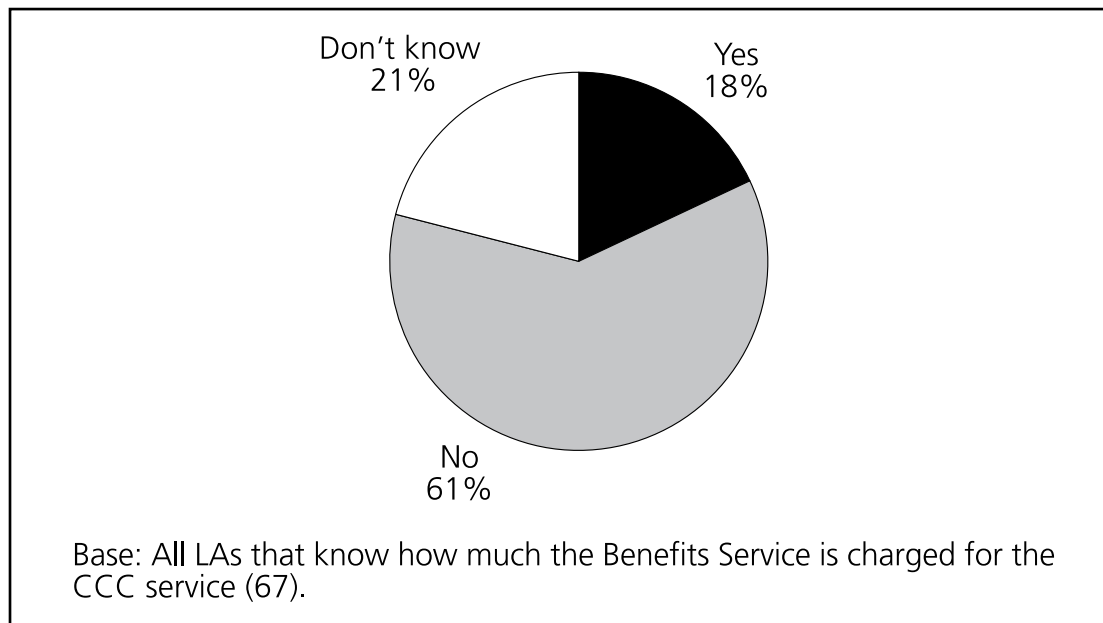
When asked how many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts this reduction amounted to, the mean number of FTE posts for the 101 LAs that answered was six.

Figure 3.10 Do you know how much the Benefits Service is charged for the Corporate Contact Centre service?



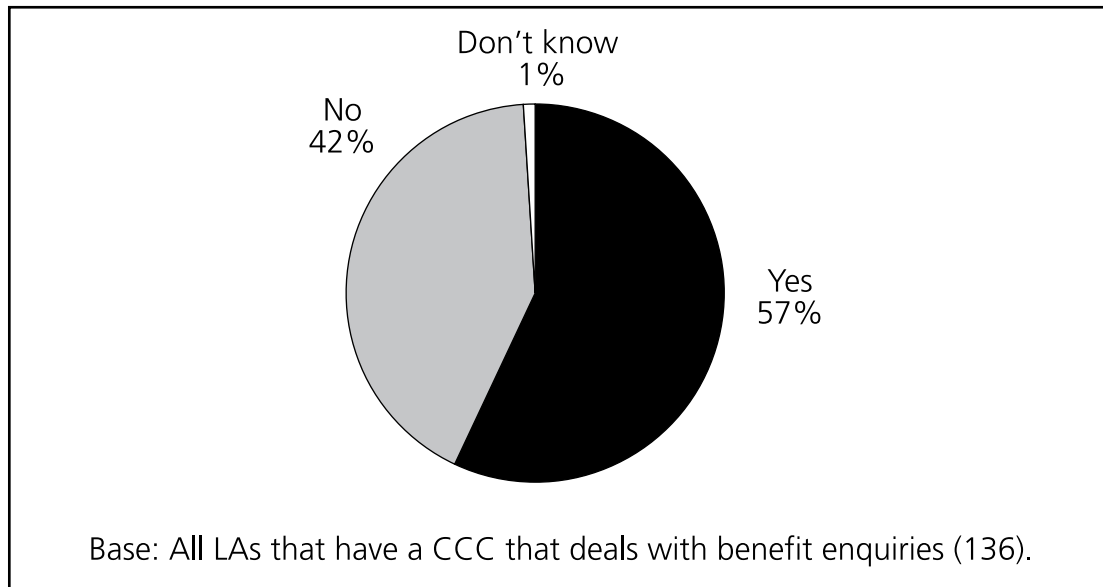
A relatively low proportion of LAs (49 per cent) said that they were aware of how much the Benefits Service in their LA is charged for the CCC service.

Figure 3.11 Do you think the amount charged for the Corporate Contact Centre represents value for money for the Benefits Service?



Amongst the LAs that were aware of the amount that the Benefits Service was charged for the CCC service, three in five (61 per cent) said that it did not represent value for money. Just 18 per cent said that it did represent value for money.

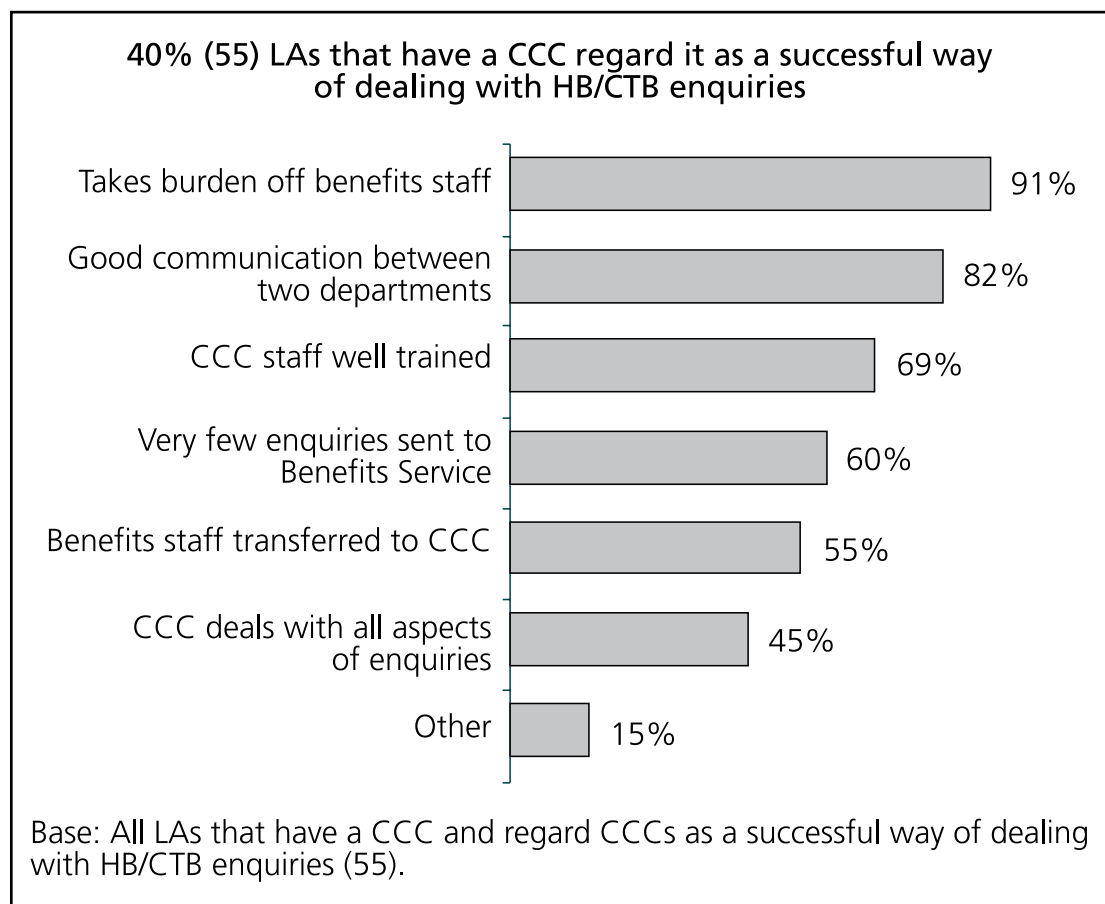
Figure 3.12 Have any experienced HB/CTB staff transferred to the Corporate Contact Centre?



LAs with high caseloads (71 per cent) were more likely to have said that experienced HB/CTB staff had transferred to the CCC, compared with those with low (45 per cent) and medium (52 per cent) caseloads.

Those LAs that were contracted out (88 per cent) were more likely to have had experienced HB/CTB staff transferred compared with those that were not contracted out (55 per cent).

Figure 3.13 Do you regard having a Corporate Contact Centre as a successful way to deal with HB/CTB enquiries? Why do you regard having a Corporate Contact Centre as a successful way to deal with HB/CTB enquiries?

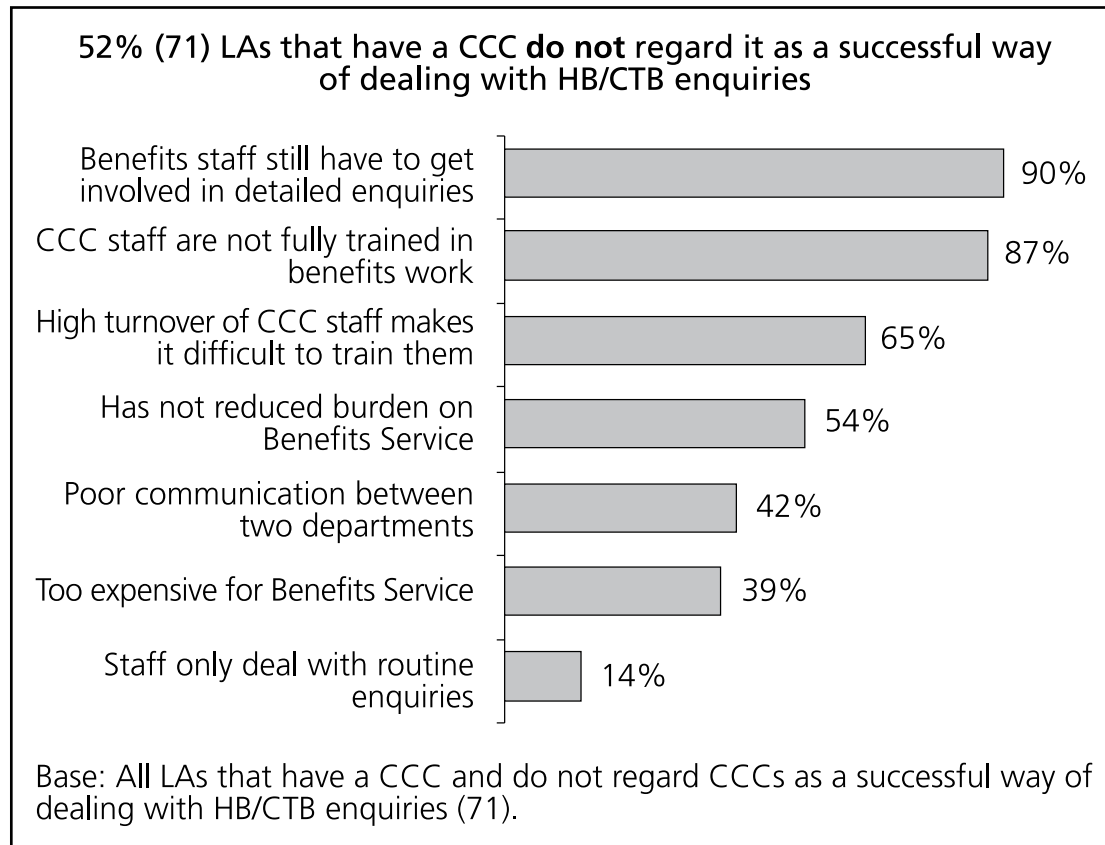


LAs that were contracted out were more likely to have regarded having a CCC as a successful way to deal with HB/CTB enquiries (88 per cent) than those that were not contracted out (37 per cent).

English metropolitan authorities were the type of authority most likely to regard the Centres as successful (65 per cent) compared with for instance, Scottish authorities (25 per cent) and London boroughs (25 per cent).

When asked about the reasons why they regarded it as successful, 91 per cent said that it takes the burden off benefits staff, 82 per cent said it was because of good communication between the Benefits Service and the CCC.

Figure 3.14 Why do you NOT regard having a Corporate Contact Centre as a successful way to deal with HB/CTB enquiries?



A greater number of LAs (52 per cent) regarded the CCC as not being a successful way of dealing with HB/CTB enquiries than those that thought it was successful.

When asked why they thought it was an unsuccessful way of dealing with enquiries, 90 per cent said that benefits staff still had to get involved in detailed enquiries and 87 per cent said CCC staff were not fully trained in benefits work.

High turnover of CCC staff was also mentioned by many (65 per cent) and more than half (54 per cent) said it had not reduced the burden on the Benefits Service. Poor communication was mentioned by 42 per cent and 39 per cent said it was too expensive.