
Behind closed doors

Housing Benefit shortfall and the secret work of Rent Officers

A report by CHAS Housing Aid

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Executive summary

Housing Benefit does not always cover the full cost of someone's rent. This means that people have to make up the shortfall from their already very low incomes.

This can cause a lot of problems around child poverty, social exclusion and homelessness.

Jane is a single mum, aged 20. Due to her housing benefit shortfall of £22.65 per week she was struggling to buy food for herself and her 2-year old son, so.....

.....she looked around for somewhere cheaper, but there was nothing available for less money, so....

.... Jane's mother and 12-year old brother who has learning difficulties both moved-in. With her mother providing childcare Jane was then able to start to work full-time. This means she can now pay her rent, but.....

....the whole family now live in overcrowded conditions: Jane and her toddler share one bedroom, her mum and 12-year old brother share the other bedroom.

Key findings

1. We carried out a survey of people who had a Housing Benefit shortfall. We found that:

- 50% of people with a shortfall went without meals on a regular basis. On average they missed 3 meals per week.
- 50% of people were behind with their bills. 15% faced court action as a result.
- 50% of people were behind with their rent. 20% faced eviction as a result.

2. We carried out surveys of properties in 10 localities across England. We found that:

- less than 10% of properties advertised were affordable within the rates set by Rent Officers.
- in one area there were no single rooms at all within the levels set by Rent Officers.

3. We carried out surveys with 37 landlords who owned 2756 properties. We found that:

- for 2% of properties landlords said they might agree to reduce their rents to the amount covered by Housing Benefit.
- most landlords said they had costs to cover or that "business is business".

4. The secrecy with which Rent Officers carry out their business makes it:

- very difficult for us to analyse our results because they won't give us key information.
- very difficult to understand why there is such a discrepancy between the rates Rent Officers set and the rents our clients are asked to pay.

Background information

CHAS Kirklees is an independent charity providing specialist advice and assistance in housing matters. We help over 2500 households each year to find or keep their homes.

The mainstay of our work is to provide housing advice, advocacy and support to those in need. We deal with all kinds of housing problems including homelessness, overcrowding, rent arrears and representing at possession proceedings in the County Court.

This report has come about in response to a recurring problem that we are seeing in our day-to-day work.

Time and time again people are coming to us either because they are unable to find accommodation that they could afford, or because they are struggling to pay their rent. There seems to be a particular problem for people claiming Housing Benefit and who live in the private rented sector.

We therefore carried out some surveys to try and get a better understanding of the issues.

To produce this report we worked with 7 other front-line housing organisations across the country. We each carried out a survey of rents in our area and interviewed clients and landlords.

The participating organisations are:

- CHAS Kirklees
- Keyhouse Project (Bradford and North Yorks)
- Exeter Housing Action Group
- Ricochet Project (Rotherham)
- M25 Group (Doncaster)
- CHAS Croydon
- CHAS York
- CHAS Bradford.

Why does the work of Rent Officers matter?

Rent Officers have an important role in setting Housing Benefit levels. One of their jobs is to set a limit, or maximum amount, of Housing Benefit that can be paid for a particular type and size of property in an area. This is called the Local Reference Rent.

Housing Benefit is essential to those on low incomes and welfare benefits. It is the means by which many people on low incomes pay for their accommodation.

Our day-to-day experience of housing advice and support work is that Housing Benefit often does not cover the full rent for people living in the private rented sector.

In most cases that we see this is not because people are renting properties that are larger than they need. Nor is it because they are living in luxurious properties, beyond the scope of the Housing Benefit system.

It is simply that they cannot find anywhere to rent within the amount that Housing Benefit will pay.

For many people there is no other choice available to them. There are no cheaper properties available.

They either rent a property where they have a shortfall, or they become, or remain, homeless.

Aren't we changing the system, though?

The Welfare Reform Bill currently before Parliament proposes to change to a system with a fixed-rate Local Housing Allowance.

However it will still be Rent Officers who carry out the role of setting the Local Housing Allowance.

It is therefore important to make sure that failings in the current system are not repeated under the Local Housing Allowance.

What is it like to live with a housing benefit shortfall?

We carried out a survey of clients who had a housing benefit shortfall. Weekly shortfalls ranged from £5 to £66 per week. This is what we found:

- 50% went without meals on a regular basis. On average people missed 3 meals per week. Some missed a meal a day, others reported poor diets consisting of cheap food.
- 50% got behind with their bills in order to pay their rent.
- 15% faced court action over unpaid bills.
- 50% were in arrears with their rent.
- 20% faced eviction and homelessness as a result.

“My landlord is evicting me and I am unable to find any other accommodation so me and my son are applying to the council as homeless”.

Tony has long-term health problems and is currently unable to work. He had been sleeping in his car and on friends’ floors for 5 weeks. He finally found a flat to move into, but he will have to find £100 per month to make up the shortfall.

- More than 4 out of 5 relied on family and friends to lend them money to cover their rent.

John is unable to work due to ill-health. He has to use £12 per week of his Incapacity Benefit to pay towards his rent. As a result he has to turn down his heating, take his washing to his mother’s house and has to borrow money in order to pay for his prescriptions.

- One person borrowed money from a doorstep lender in order to pay their rent. Interest was charged at 32% on the loan.
- Many had to make other sacrifices to make ends meet:

A disabled man was using his Disability Living Allowance to pay his shortfall and “...not for my care needs”

“I have been selling my personal possessions to pay for the shortfall”

“We had to give our dog away”

It is important to remember the context of the above:

A single person in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance receives £57.45 per week to live on. For under 25 year-olds this drops to £45.50 and only £34.60 for 16 and 17 year-olds. A single parent with one child may only have £68.30 to live on. These amounts of money are the bare minimum that people need to live on.

None could afford to pay £66 per week to top-up their rent. Even £5 per week means having to cut down on essentials such as food or heating. Any amount of shortfall brings these people into real poverty as they have less than the minimum income the law says they need to live on.

Freedom of Information or damaging the national economic interests?

The secret work of Rent Officers

We wanted to do some research to see how many properties we could find within the Local Reference Rent levels set by Rent Officers.

- ☺ We carried out a survey of advertised properties
- ☺ Then we rang The Rent Service and asked for the Local Reference Rent figures.
- ☹ We were told we couldn't have them.
- ☺ So we wrote requesting the figures under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- ☹ The Rent Service refused to tell us.
- ☺ We asked them to reconsider.
- ☹ Again The Rent Service said no, this time in a 7-page letter. We also have letters refusing to disclose for York and Croydon.

Some of the reasons in their 7-page letter were:

“unhelpful and misleading for us to release recent data”

“there is a danger that national economic interests...could be adversely affected”

In our appeal letter to the Information Commissioner we said that the response of The Rent Service:

“smacks of smoke and mirrors”

and is *“patronising and paternalistic”*

.....12 months on, we have a preliminary indication that the Information Commissioner will rule in favour of releasing the data.

“I considered the arguments put forward by the Rent Service but I found some of those arguments to have limited relevance”

This is really basic information that we are requesting, ie what are the local figures? Yet we are told releasing this information could damage the national economy.

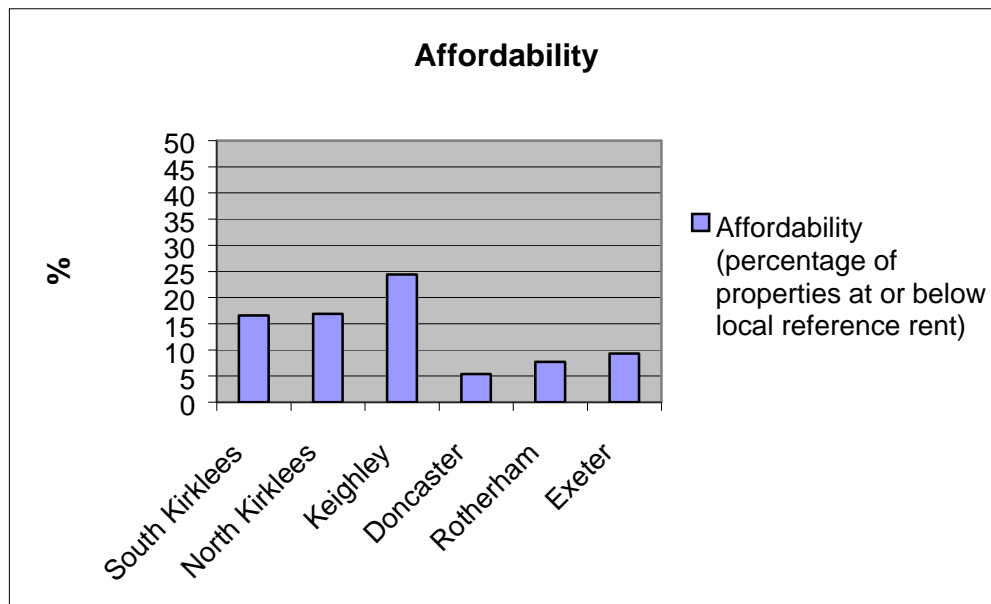
The question that we have yet to ask is how did Rent Officers arrive at these figures? Maybe this could damage the global economy?

√ Every other part of the benefits system has clear and published rules and procedures with independent appeal mechanisms.

X Rent Officers on the other hand still strive to work in isolation, behind closed door and with no independent appeal mechanism (other than Judicial Review).

An overview of the rent surveys

In all the survey areas only a small percentage of properties could be found within the levels set by Rent Officers.



Within each area there were variations in the affordability of different sizes of properties (see Appendices for more detailed analysis). For instance:

- In Doncaster only 2% of 3-bedroom properties were affordable
- In Rotherham less than 3% of 2-bedroom and 4% of 4-bedroom properties were affordable
- In North Kirklees there were no single rooms that were affordable. This is the second year running that we have found this. It means that, for example, all under 25 year-olds will have had a shortfall, on average of £27 per week. This would have to be found from a Jobseekers Allowance of £45.50 per week. It is not acceptable for anyone to have to eek out and existence on £18.50 per week.
- We could not analyse our results at all for York or Bradford as Rent Officers will not tell us the Local Reference Rent figures, nor could we gather the information from other sources.

Note: even if a property appears affordable it does not mean that someone claiming Housing Benefit could live there. This because:

Some landlords refuse to rent to people who claim benefits (no DSS, or Professionals Only).

Other landlords put up additional barriers for people in receipt of Housing Benefit, such as asking for a double deposit or bond.

Shelter research suggests that as little as one third of properties advertised within Housing Benefit levels are actually accessible to Housing Benefit claimants¹.

People who are not receiving Housing Benefit may also be interested in these properties and they will get preference from virtually all landlords.

¹ On the right path? Shelter 2005, Brighton case study, page 15

Limitations to our research

(i) In comparing our data with local reference rents we had to use local knowledge to judge the localities used by Rent Officers. This is because the exact boundaries used by Rent Officers are not publicly available.

(ii) Rent Officers have refused to tell us the Local Reference Rent figures we need to do the analysis. Thus the local reference rent figures used in our comparisons were based on our best local knowledge. However the figures are not confirmed by Rent Officers.

See page 6, regarding the Freedom of Information challenge regarding the refusal to provide local figures.

(iii) We recognise that sometimes landlords may let properties less than the advertised rent. However, this data was not readily available to us in any of the survey areas.

In order to, at least in part, address this issue we also carried out a survey of landlords (see page 9). We found that around 2% of properties could be available at less than the advertised rent.

(iv) We had to make educated guesses regarding significantly high, significantly low and exceptionally high rents. When looking at data sets (often of several hundred properties) it was often apparent that there was a normal price range, or “going-rate”, for a particular size of property. All properties outside this “norm” were removed. Often this involved us removing more properties at the higher end than at the lower end.

(v) Some of the properties in our survey may end up being related to Housing Benefit claims. These properties would be excluded by Rent Officers in their database. We were unable to make this distinction as we do not have sufficient information from landlords.

However, if anything, this will actually have lowered our view of the market since many Housing Benefit-related properties are at the lower end of the market.

(vi) No information was gathered regarding existing tenancies. Rent Officers use rents achieved. This can include existing tenancies of some duration. A number of landlords did say they would consider not increasing rents for longer-term tenants that they want to keep (see page 9). This means some longer-term tenants pay lower rents than new tenants.

However it should be noted that these lower rents are not necessarily available to new tenants. New tenants have to pay the open market rate. We think this may be one of the reasons why Rent Officers come out with figures so much lower than the advertised rents.

Landlord surveys

We asked 37 landlords whether they reduced their rents for people on Housing Benefit. Between them they owned or managed 2,756 properties.

This is what they said:

- For 98% of the properties (2698 dwellings) in the survey landlords said they never lowered their rents:

“we give the same deal to housing benefit as to working people, no better, no worse.”

“no need to”

“there is not a shortage of people who are prepared to pay the advertised rent”

“because we are not a charity and need to cover the mortgage”

“because this is a business and business is business”

“cannot afford to”

....and finally:

“cleverer people than me in government set benefit amounts and housing allowances. Why should I reduce the rent from a market rent because government have got the figures wrong?”

- 2% of the properties (58 dwellings) were potentially available at rents lower than the advertised rate:

“to maintain a good tenant”

“if house has been let for a long time”

“it depends on the tenant”

“to have a tenant for an empty property”

“if the tenant looks like a good tenant I will settle for housing benefit payment”

- As to writing off arrears caused through Housing Benefit shortfall:

“never, as it leads to a larger problem in the future”

“I will not tolerate tenants who do not pay their rent in full”

“the landlord expects his rent to be paid”

“never, because the owner should receive the full rent as contractually agreed”

Why is there such a difference between the figures set by Rent Officers and the market rents that we see?

We don't know why, but here are some possible reasons:

- The size and content of localities used by Rent Officers can vary tremendously.

Sometimes more expensive areas are lumped together with cheaper areas. Rural areas can be included with urban areas, even though rural rents are often higher.

The cheaper areas can pull-down the average figures, meaning there can be large parts of boroughs that are not affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

- The issue of the size and content of localities is further highlighted in the recent High Court judgement in the case of *Heffernan and The Rent Service* (10 October 2006, EWHC 2478²). It is clear from this judgement that The Rent Officers Order 1997 (the legislation that defines the work of Rent Officers) is open to misinterpretation and misapplication by both The Rent Service and individual Rent Officers.

To quote the Judge's closing remark:

"The Rent Service has also elected to use a number of non-statutory criteria which have the effect of cutting down or modifying those approved by Parliament."

This highlights the need for an external, independent appeal mechanism to a body that understand local housing markets.

- Rent Officers use "rents achieved" rather than advertised rents. This involves looking at existing tenancies rather than advertised rents.

However, some of these existing tenancies may be quite long-term. In our survey we found some landlords hold-down rents for long-term tenants that they want to keep.

However, new tenants are usually faced with the open-market rate, which is often higher.

- Housing Benefit claimants are not in a good position to barter with landlords. They are often in competition with people who are working and can afford to pay the asking price.

So many Housing Benefit claimants have to either pay the asking price and find the shortfall themselves, or look elsewhere – except that there may not be anywhere available cheaper.

- Some landlords do try to push-up rents, but will accept less than the advertised rent, if that is all that Housing Benefit will pay. But this does not seem to happen very often.

In our survey we found that 2% of properties could be available at less than the advertised rent.

- The exclusion of significantly high and low rents is incredibly subjective. Very different answers can be obtained depending on what is included or excluded.

² download from <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2006/2478.html>

Appendix 1 – Rent surveys

Methodology

1. 10 localities across the country were used for the surveys. These localities were chosen because local organisations able find the resources to participate.

They were not selected because they were known to have particularly high or low levels of shortfall. The exception here is the original survey area, Kirklees, which was felt to have a particular problem with housing benefit shortfall.

Around 6 other organisations were invited to participate but could not find the resources to carry out the survey work.

2. A database was given to each survey area.
3. Participants were asked to identify a local area that, based on their local knowledge, corresponded to a “locality” used by Rent Officers for housing benefit purposes.
4. Participants were asked record on the database details of all advertised properties in their locality. Details recorded included the number of rooms, locality, weekly rent and whether the advert specifically excluded housing benefit claimants (eg: “no DSS”, “professionals only”).
5. This was done over a 4-month period between April and September 2006.
6. The results were then compiled centrally by CHAS Kirklees.
7. The rent data was examined and rents that were considered high or low were removed from the data sets. Generally it was easy to see a bulk of rents towards the middle of each data set, with some rents clearly on the fringes. We do not know how Rent Officers decide what is a “significantly high” or significantly low” rent. However, we have some indication of highs and lows from Rent Officer re-determination letters.
8. Rents that appeared to be higher or lower than the norm were deleted. Usually this involved removing more rents at the higher end than at the bottom.
9. We then compared the adjusted rent data from our survey with the local reference rents for that area.

Rent database

This is a picture of the database form, used to collect the rent data:

The screenshot shows a software window titled "Rent Monitoring" with a standard Windows-style menu bar (File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Records, Tools, Window, Help) and a toolbar. The main content area displays a "NewEntryForm" with the following fields and controls:

- Date: Text input field
- Advertiser: Dropdown menu
- Broad Area: Dropdown menu
- Specific Area: Text input field
- Accommodation Type: Dropdown menu
- Number Of Bedrooms: Spin box with value 0
- Rent: Text input field with value 0, followed by "per week"
- Note: To Convert a per calendar monthly rent to weekly use the formula:
$$\text{PCM Rent} \times 12 (\text{months}) / 365 (\text{days} - 366 \text{ if leap year}) \times 7 (\text{days}) = \text{Weekly Rent}$$
- "No DSS" Statement: Unchecked checkbox
- Close Form: Button

Rent Survey results

Doncaster

Survey of Local Rents (Doncaster) 9th March 2006 to 1st June 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	70	50.00	62.5	12.50	30.00
1-bed	108	57.50	86.00	28.50	7.44
2-bed	538	75.25	110.00	34.75	5.39
3-bed	487	77.50	118.00	40.50	2.26
4_bed	75	88.00	155.50	67.50	0.00
	1278				

30% of single rooms were affordable within the Local Reference Rent, but overall there was an average shortfall of £12.50 per week.

2 - 8% of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

No 4-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

Exeter

Survey of Local Rents (Exeter) 7th April to 11th July 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	300	57	74	17.00	14.23
1-bed	213	95	111.00	16.00	17.84
2-bed	272	117	153.00	36.00	1.47
3-bed	129	134	178.00	44.00	2.32
4_bed	32	149	207.00	58.00	0.00
	946				

Only 14% of single rooms advertised were affordable within the Local Reference Rent. The average shortfall was £17 per week.

There was a huge shortage of affordable 2, 3 and 4-bedroom properties, with average shortfalls ranging from £36 to £58 per week.

Keighley

Survey of Local Rents (Keighley) 24th March to 14th July 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	n/a	not known	n/a	n/a	n/a
1-bed	21	66	70.50	4.50	61.9
2-bed	26	74	87.00	13.00	7.69
3-bed	35	81.5	107.50	26.00	5.71
4_bed	4	89	110.00	21.00	25.00
	86				

Only 6 – 8% of 2 and 3-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

Average shortfalls ranged from £4.50 - £26 per week.

North Kirklees (Dewsbury, Batley and surrounding areas)

Survey of Local Rents (North Kirklees) 1st July to 15th September 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	12	50	74	24.00	0
1-bed	80	75	82.50	7.50	23.75
2-bed	129	89.5	103.5	14.00	19.37
3-bed	57	95.5	120.50	25.00	5.26
4_bed	5	not known	130.50	not known	not known
	283				

We could not find any single rooms available within the Local Reference Rent. This means that under 25-year olds will have particular problems with shortfalls in their Housing Benefit. This is the second year running that we have found this.

19 - 24% of 1 and 2-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

5% of 3-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

South Kirklees (Huddersfield and surrounding areas)

Survey of Local Rents (South Kirklees) 1st July to 15th September 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	36	50	70	20.00	18.75
1-bed	147	75	86.50	11.50	28.00
2-bed	209	89.5	103.50	14.00	16.76
3-bed	96	95.5	126.00	30.50	3.26
4_bed	8	not known	149.00	not known	not known
	496				

Less than 19% of single rooms advertised were affordable within the Local Reference Rent.

17 - 28% of 1 and 2-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

3% of 3-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

Rotherham

Survey of Local Rents (Rotherham) 16th June 2006 to 8th September 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	20	52.08	67.50	15.42	20.00
1-bed	41	65.33	84.50	19.17	19.51
2-bed	185	79.32	109.50	30.18	2.70
3-bed	118	82.75	123.50	40.75	10.17
4_bed	24	93.20	172.50	79.30	4.17
	388				

20% of single rooms advertised were affordable within the Local Reference Rent.

Only 3% of 2-bedroom properties and 4% of 4-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

Less than 20% of 1-bedroom properties were affordable to people claiming Housing Benefit.

York

Survey of Local Rents (York) 9th March 2006 to 13th July 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	35	not known	67	not known	not known
1-bed	90	not known	124.50	not known	not known
2-bed	217	not known	172	not known	not known
3-bed	67	not known	206.00	not known	not known
4_bed	25	not known	300.00	not known	not known
	434				

We are unable to analyse these results because The Rent Service have refused to tell us the Local Reference Rents (see also chapter on Freedom of Information) and we have not been able to obtain this information from any other source.

Bradford

Survey of Local Rents (Bradford) 20th March to 5th September 2006

Size of Property	Number of properties in survey	Local Reference Rent (LRR) (£)	Midpoint Advertised Rent (£)	Average Shortfall against Midpoint Rent (£)	% Properties advertised at or below LRR
Single Room	22	Not known	57	Not known	Not known
1-bed	56	Not known	79.50	Not known	Not known
2-bed	124	Not known	102.00	Not known	Not known
3-bed	76	Not known	108.00	Not known	Not known
4_bed	27	Not known	119.00	Not known	Not known
	305				

We are unable to analyse these results because The Rent Service have refused to tell us the Local Reference Rents (see also chapter on Freedom of Information) and we have not been able to obtain this information from any other source.

Croydon

Due to technical problems we are still awaiting survey results from Croydon. These will be published shortly.

Comparison of mid-point and median rents

The current Local Reference Rent method uses the “mid-point” of the market (ie the highest eligible rent plus the lowest, divided by two).

Under Local Housing Allowance it is proposed to use the “median” rent (ie the middle number in a set of data).

We have done some comparisons of the mid-point and median.

We found that the proposed “median” rents come out lower than the current levels.

		Unadjusted Median	Adjusted Median	Mid-point
Doncaster	S. room	55	55	62.5
	1 bed	85	85	86
	2 bed	104	92	110
	3 bed	115	115	118
	4 bed	150	150	155.5
Exeter	S. room	70	70	74
	1 bed	110	110	109.5
	2 bed	149	149	153
	3 bed	171	166	178
	4 bed	218	207	207
Kirklees	S. room	65	63	70
	1 bed	86	86	86.5
	2 bed	103	103	103.5
	3 bed	121	121	126
	4 bed	138	137	142
Bradford	S. room	57	57	57
	1 bed	72	72	79.5
	2 bed	90	90	102
	3 bed	103	103	108
	4 bed	111	109	119

The unadjusted median includes significantly high and low rents. The adjusted median has the significantly high and low rents removed before taking the median.

Appendix 2 – Client surveys

The following questionnaire was used to gather the information:

Housing Benefit Shortfall Questionnaire

This questionnaire is an essential part of the work we are doing to lobby Parliament over housing benefit shortfall. The information gathered here will be used to inform MPs as the Welfare Reform Bill passes through Parliament.

Case ref:

Do you have a shortfall in housing benefit?

How much?

Do you receive any Discretionary Housing Payment

How much?

In order to make up the shortfall do you:

1. Go without food

How many times per week/month?

2. Not pay some bills?

Have you been cut off as a result?

Have you been taken to court as a result?

3. Get behind with your rent?

How much?

Have you ever lost a previous tenancy as a result of housing benefit shortfall?

4. Borrow/owe money to someone else?

How much?

5. Something else?

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Client survey – table of results:

Area	Shortfall	DHP?	Food?	Bills?	arrears ?	Borrow? ?????
Kirklees	20n			3 court	y	family
Kirklees	36n			3y	n	y
Kirklees	8n			4n	y	y
Kirklees	5n			7y	y	y
Rotherham	8n			0y	y	y gave dog away
Rotherham	15n			3y	n	y borrowed from loan company
Rotherham	23n			0y	court	n BEING EVICTED
Rotherham	45n			2 court	evicted	y EVICTED
Rotherham	22.62n		0.5n		n	y Mum moved in so therefore overcrowded
Exeter	12n			0n	n	y has to borrow to pay for prescriptions, poor diet
Exeter	35n			3y	y	family
Kirklees	66.5n			2 court	y	family depression, anxiety and suicidal
Kirklees	65n			0n	court	y BEING EVICTED
Kirklees	34n			0n	n	n Selling personal possessions
Kirklees	25n			0y	n	y client homeless, had to take-on £25 pw shortfall
Kirklees	22.5y			0n	n	n but uses DLA to pay rent
Doncaster	24n			0n		0 family
Doncaster	11.34n			1n	y	n BEING EVICTED
Doncaster	8n			0n	n	n

Appendix 3 – Landlord surveys

The following questionnaire was used to gather the information:

Landlord Questionnaire

We are researching the views of landlords as part of a report to MPs. This report will be used to lobby MPs to get improvements in the rates of housing benefit paid to claimants. We would be grateful for your co-operation in this matter.

1. Approximately how many properties in total do you have for rent?

2. Do you let properties to people who need to claim housing benefit?

3. Housing benefit does not always cover the full cost of rents. When dealing with housing benefit claimants, how often do you accept rents lower than the amount you have advertised? Please circle your answer and add any comments

Never	very occasionally (less than 1 in 10)	sometimes (1 in 5 tenancies)	often (1 in 2 or more)
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Why?

4. If you have a tenant and they fall in to arrears because their housing benefit does not cover their full rent, how often do you agree to

- (i) write-off the arrears

Never	very occasionally (less than 1 in 10)	sometimes (1 in 5 tenancies)	often (1 in 2 or more)
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Why?

- (ii) reduce their contractual rent to the amount that housing benefit will cover

Never	very occasionally (less than 1 in 10)	sometimes (1 in 5 tenancies)	often (1 in 2 or more)
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Why?

Thank you for participating in our survey

Table of results:

Landlord Survey results

Area	No of properties	Lower rents?	write-off arrears?	Reduce rent?	No of reduced properties
Exeter	7	1	1	1	
Exeter	18	1	1	1	
Exeter	5	4	3	4	3
York	49	1	1	1	
York	348	1	1	1	
York	200	1	1	1	
York	35	2	1	1	3
York	76	1	1	1	
York	200	1	1	1	
Doncaster	50	1	1	1	
Doncaster	50	1	1	1	
Doncaster	140	2	2	1	7
Doncaster	15	1	1	1	
Doncaster	35	2	1	1	3
Doncaster	900	1	1	1	
Doncaster	150	1	1	2	
Doncaster	140	1	2	1	2
Doncaster	120	1	1	1	
Doncaster	8	1	2	1	
Kirklees	6	2	2	2	1
Kirklees	90	3	2	1	18
Kirklees	1	2	1	1	
Exeter	1	1	1	1	
Exeter	1	1	1	1	
Exeter	1	3	3	4	1
Rotherham	4	1	2	1	
Rotherham	10	1	1	1	
Kirklees	4	2	1	1	1
Kirklees	2	1	1	1	
Kirklees	5	4	4	3	3
Kirklees	8	1	1	1	
Kirklees	1	1	4	2	
Kirklees	3	2	2	1	1
Kirklees	1	3	1	1	1
Kirklees	2	2	1	1	1
Kirklees	63	3	2	2	13
Kirklees	7	1	1	1	
	2756				58

Key

- 1 = never
- 2 = very occasionally (less than 1 in 10)
- 3 = sometimes (less than 1 in 5)
- 4 = often (1 in 2)

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