



Local Strategic Engagement Project

Report on provider's local strategic engagement

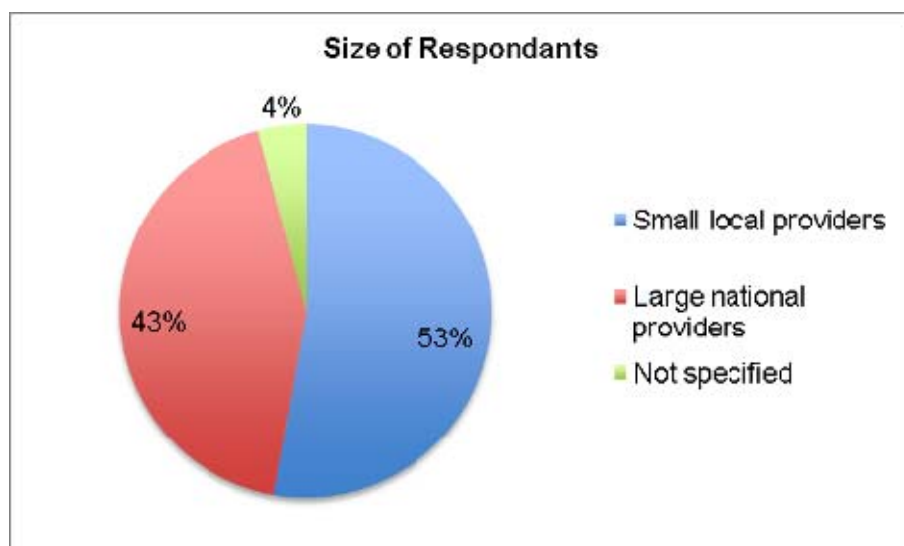
Background

In 2009/2010, Sitra was funded by Communities and Local Government in order to promote the effective engagement of housing related support providers, commissioners and users in strategic planning and service commissioning. In addition the work, which was known as the Local Strategic Engagement Project (LSEP), aimed to support providers in developing mechanisms for engaging in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) and to ensure that housing related support (HRS) is understood within Local Strategic Partnerships and that housing related support services continue to be effectively commissioned and provided.

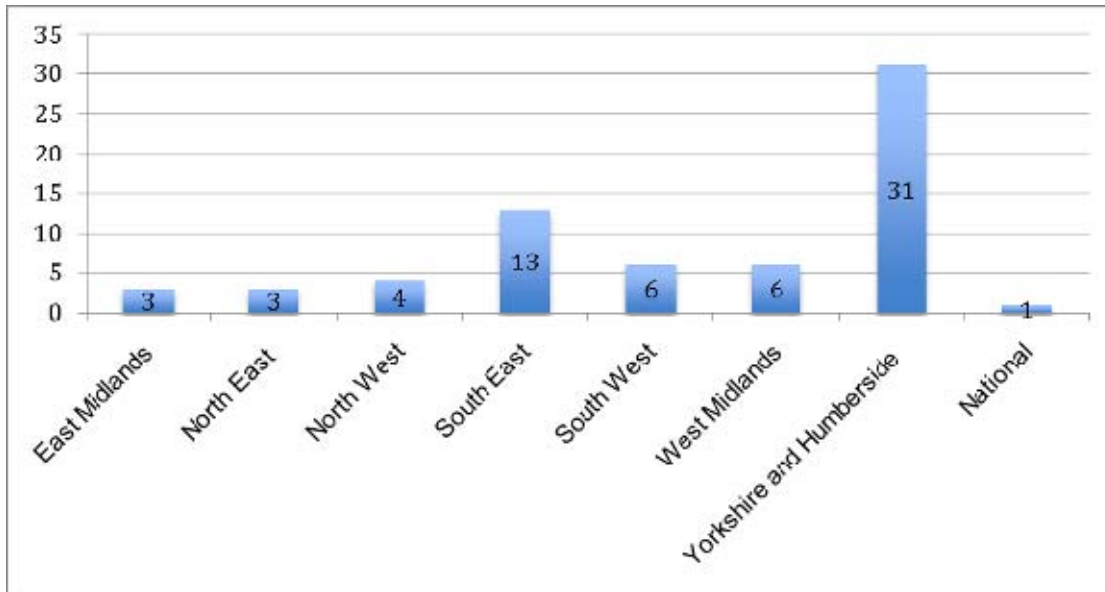
In order to gain a better understanding of how providers and service users were engaging with the local decision making structures, including the Local Strategic Partnerships, Sitra sent out a questionnaire in the period December 2009 to February 2010 to providers of housing related support. The questionnaire comprised multiple choice and open-ended questions, and was distributed to Sitra's membership base within the nine England regions. We also attended Provider Forums across the country and distributed questionnaires to the forum members. This report details the responses to the questions asked, provides analysis and draws some conclusions that should inform the work of providers of housing related support as well as second tier voluntary organisation like Sitra. Commissioners will also be interested in the responses.

Survey response

There was a good response to this questionnaire, with a total of 68 providers from across the country taking part, of which 54% classed themselves as small local providers, and 42% classed themselves as large national providers.



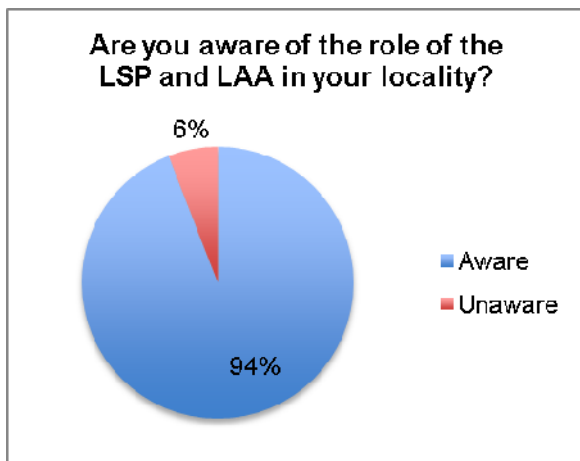
Responses were received from 7 of the 9 Government Office Regions, with one national response.



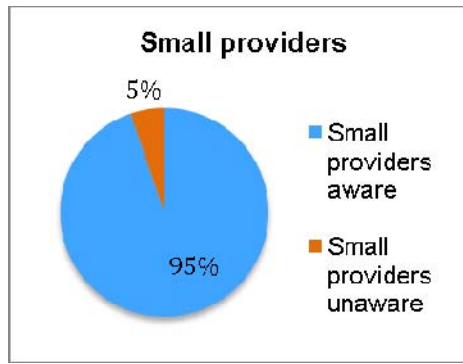
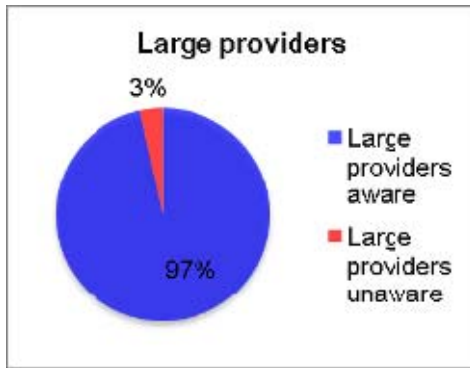
Survey analysis

Respondents' levels of awareness of how they, and their service users, are represented in local decision making structures

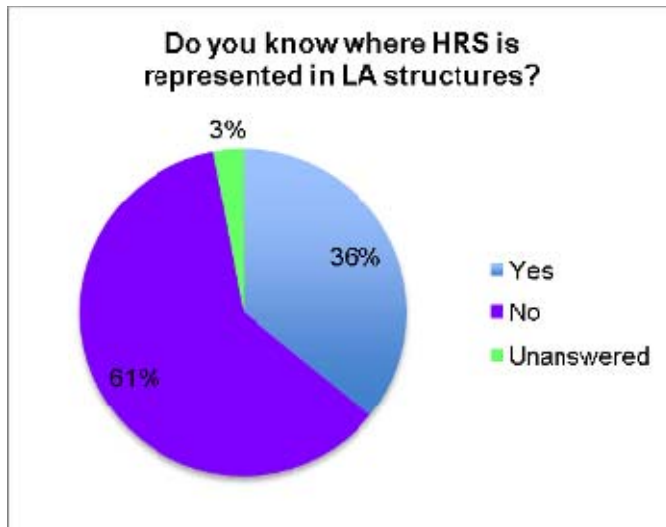
Providers were asked if they were aware of the role of the LSP and Local Area Agreement (LAA) in their locality in meeting the needs of vulnerable people. As the pie chart below demonstrates, the majority of providers described themselves as 'aware' with only 4 respondents, 6%, describing themselves as 'unaware'.



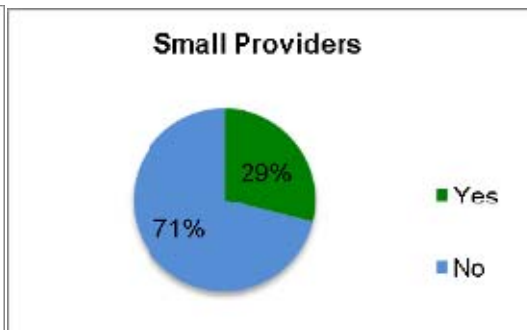
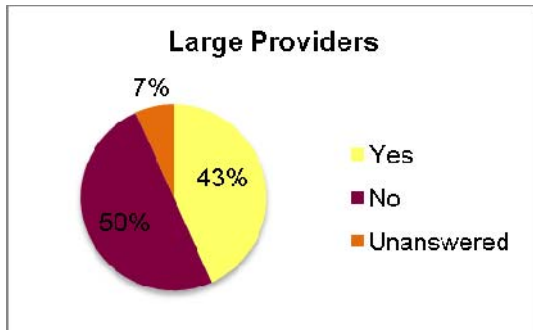
These proportions are similar in both smaller and larger providers, with 95% of small providers and 97% of large providers aware of the role of the LSP and LAA in their locality in meeting the needs of vulnerable people.



This indicates a high level of awareness of providers in the sector of the existence of the LSPs and LAAs throughout the country, and that also both have a role to play in meeting the needs of their service users.



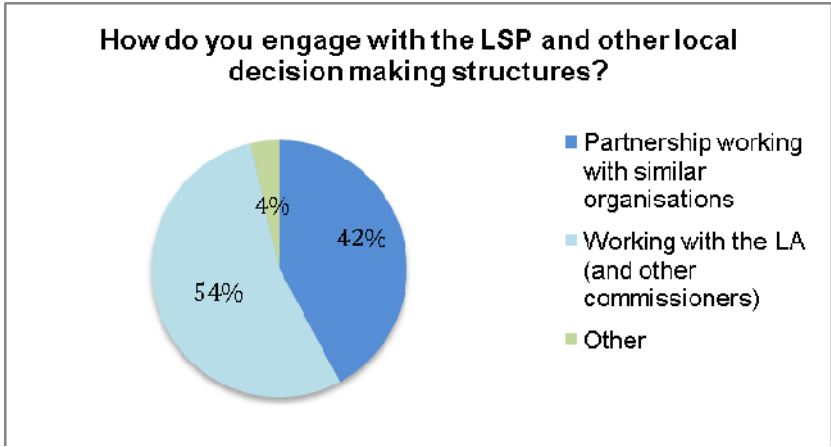
However, providers were less knowledgeable about where Housing Related Support (HRS) is represented in local authority (LA) structures, with only 36% of respondents answering 'yes' to this particular query.



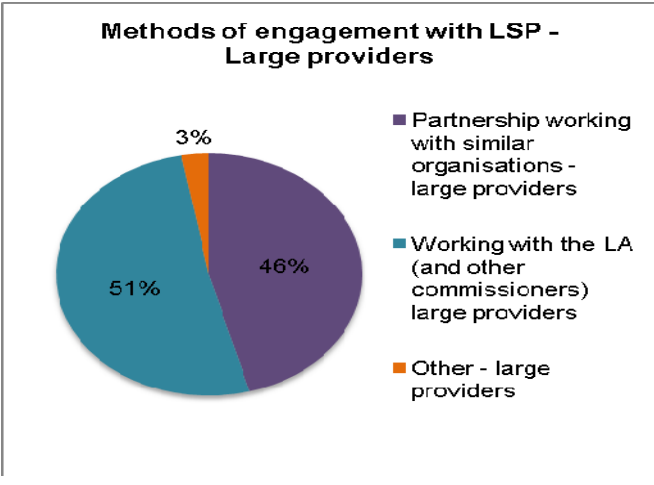
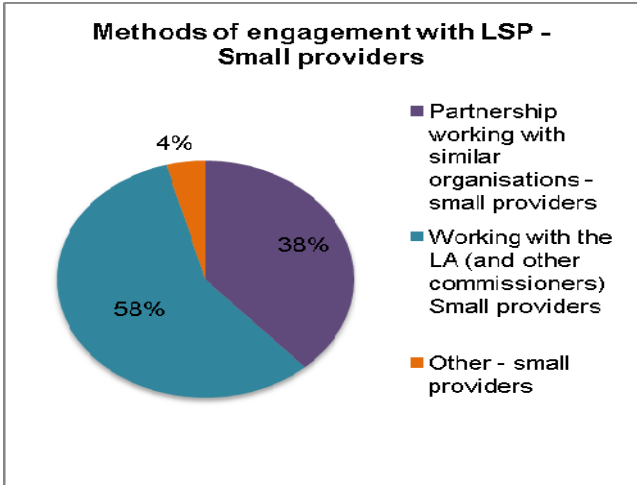
This was particularly apparent in the small providers group, with only 29% of respondents answering 'yes', compared to 43% of large providers. Some of the larger provider respondents did not answer the question, which may mean that they do not know, or perhaps do not understand the question, which could be seen as a further indication of lack of awareness.

Current forms of engagement

Respondents were then asked to identify the ways in which they engaged with their LSP. As the chart on page 4 illustrates, most providers engage with the LSP through some type of partnership work, either through working with similar organisations, or as the majority do, working with the LA or other commissioners.

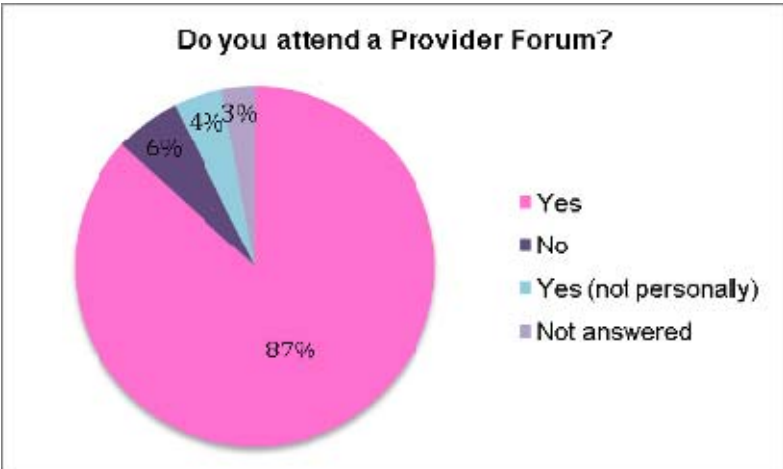


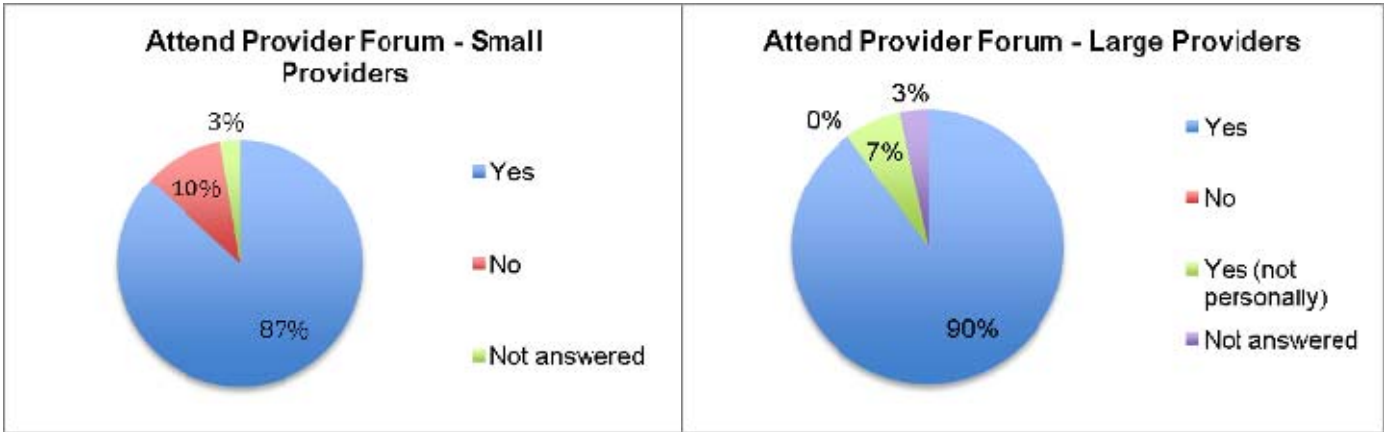
This balance of engagement between partnership working with similar organisations, and working with commissioners, remains the same in both smaller and larger providers, although larger providers were slightly more inclined to work with partnership organisations than commissioners, and vice versa for smaller providers.



This indicates that there is already a willingness by providers to work collaboratively in order to ensure the needs of their clients are represented at a local strategic level, whether this is with other providers, or the commissioners of services.

Providers were asked whether they attended a Provider Forum, whether locally or nationally, of which the majority did, although not all respondents attended in person. This finding however may have been influenced by our promotion of the questionnaire when attending Provider Forums.

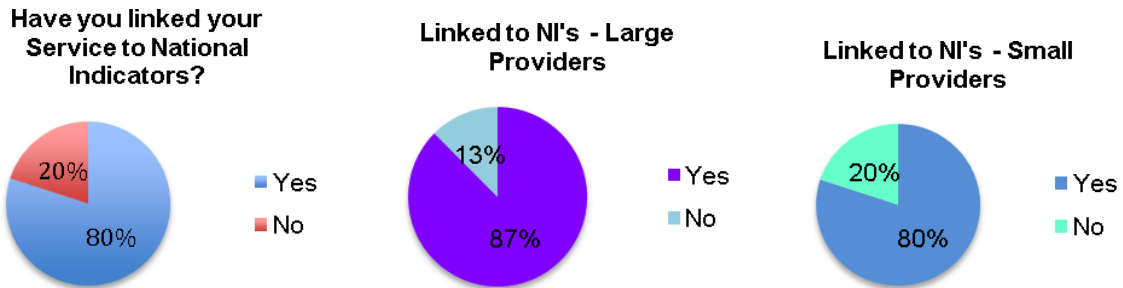




This again indicates that providers are engaging in discussions around the priorities in their local areas, and that Provider Forums can be used as a useful tool in ensuring engagement at this level. There was a relatively large difference between the number of smaller and larger providers who answered 'no' to this question which may indicate a propensity for smaller providers not to engage with their Provider Forums. If this is the case they may risk not using all avenues available for engagement at a local level and this may impact negatively on their ability to safeguard the services they provide.

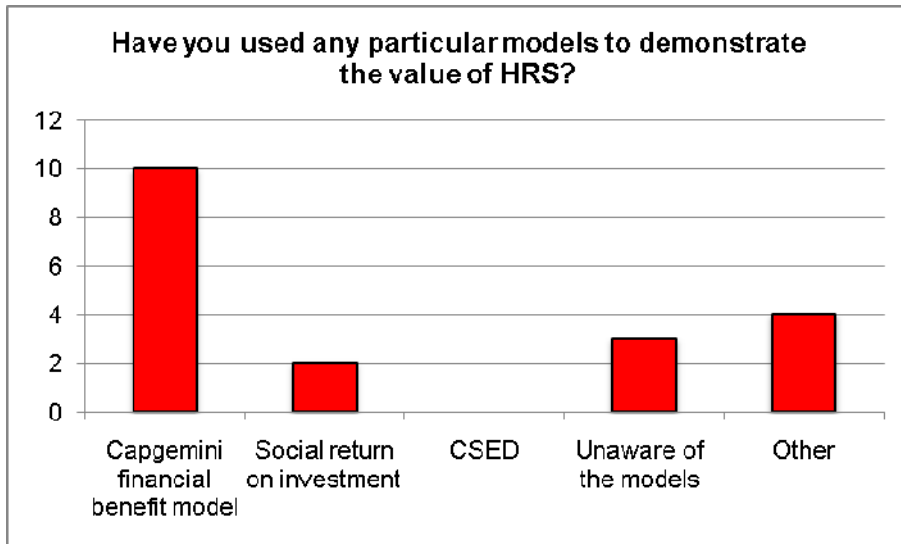
Demonstrating value

Providers were asked if they have linked their services with National Indicators (NIs).



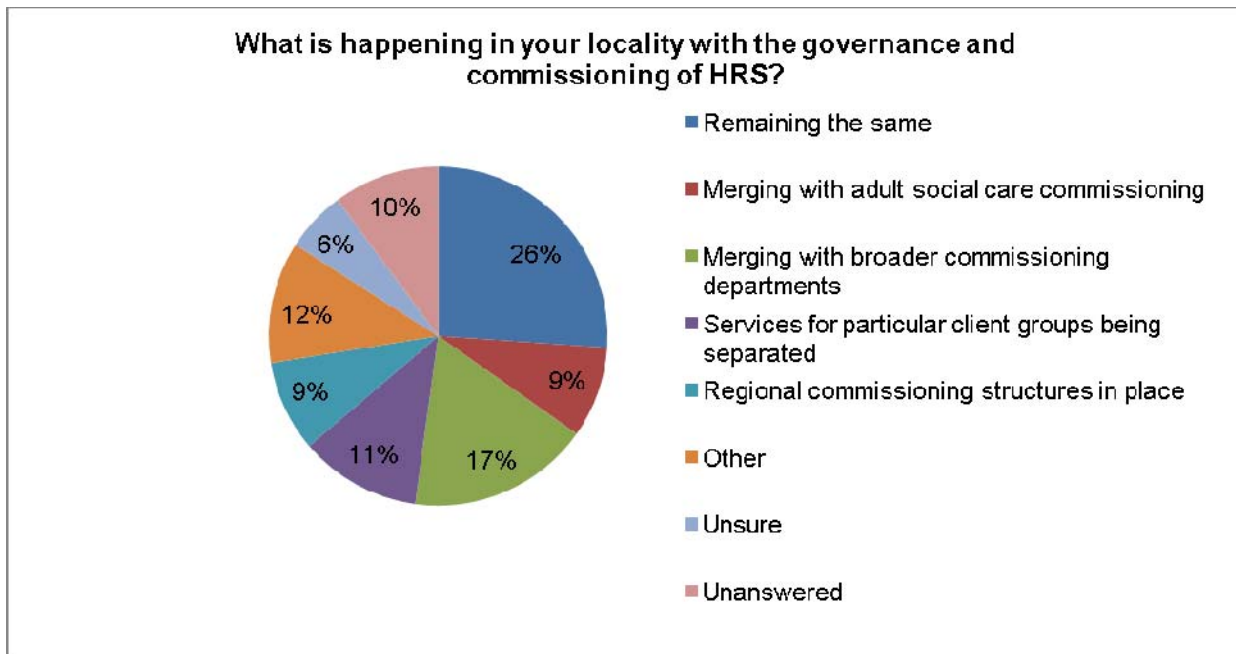
As indicated in the charts above, 80% of providers had linked their services to NIs. When split into large and small providers the percentages remained roughly the same, however the larger providers who had were slightly more (7%) than the smaller providers, which may indicate this is a slightly higher priority for them, or perhaps that they have more resources available to do this.

16 respondents had used models to demonstrate the value of HRS. Of these 10 had used the Capgemini financial benefit model, 2 had used a social return on investment model and 4 had used other methods. 3 respondents were unaware of any of these models, however the actual number may be higher as not all respondents answered this question. This demonstrates that only a few of the providers are using these particular tools to demonstrate value of their services, and might require support and encouragement to use the resources available.



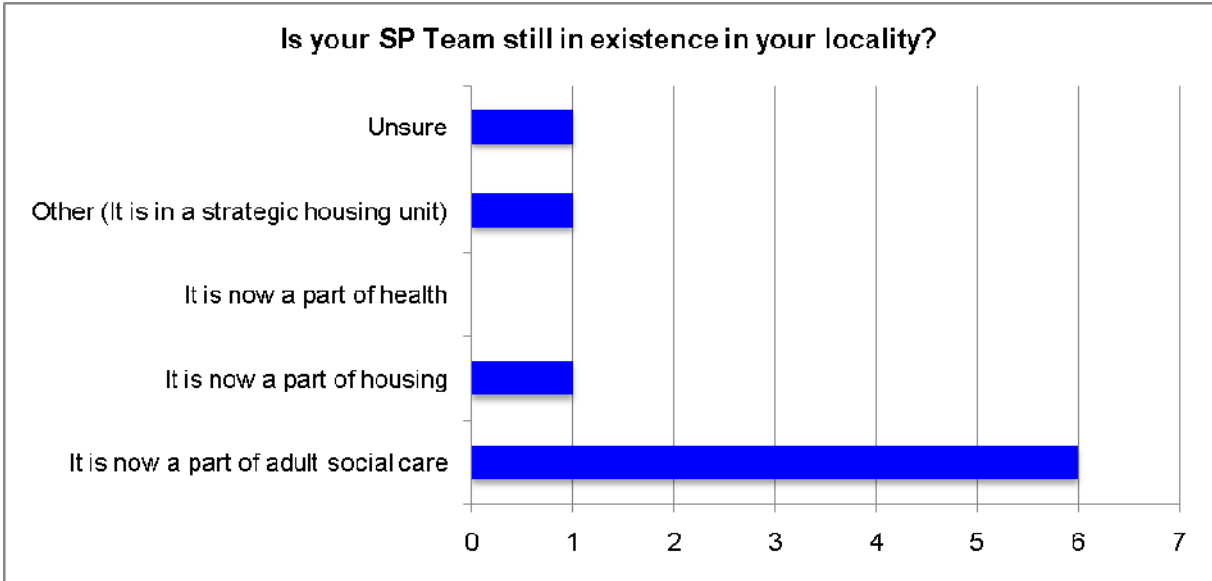
Local pictures

Providers were asked what was happening in their locality with the governance and commissioning of HRS.



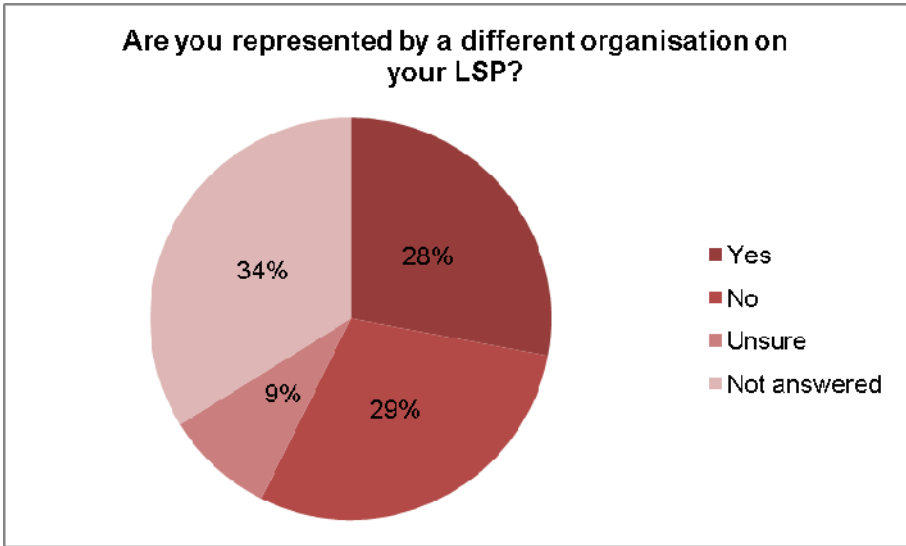
At the time of responding the just over a quarter (26%) of respondents said governance and commissioning of HRS in their locality were remaining the same, however a significant proportion (17%) seemed to be merging with broader commissioning departments. This is one of the most interesting findings as it shows a rather scattered picture of how things are changing throughout the country, which may well indicate a snapshot of a period of change, which is still on going.

Respondents were asked if there was still a Supporting People Team (SP Team) in their locality, and the overwhelming majority (96%) replied these were still in existence. Where the SP Team was no longer in existence 6 respondents stated it had merged with Adult Social Care, and others were part of Housing, a Strategic Housing Unit, or they were unsure. None had merged with Health.



Representation of providers to the Local Strategic Partnership

Providers were asked if they were represented by another organisation to the LSP. Those who responded in a definite way ('yes' or 'no') were roughly equal (28% yes, 29% no). However significantly 34% did not answer the question and 9% were unsure which may indicate that many of those filling out the questionnaire were also unsure on this point. If the unanswered and unsure proportions are taken together it would mean that 43% of respondents were unable to answer in a definite way on this question. This could indicate that they weren't in a position in their organisation to know the answer, or perhaps that they did not consider this to be a priority.

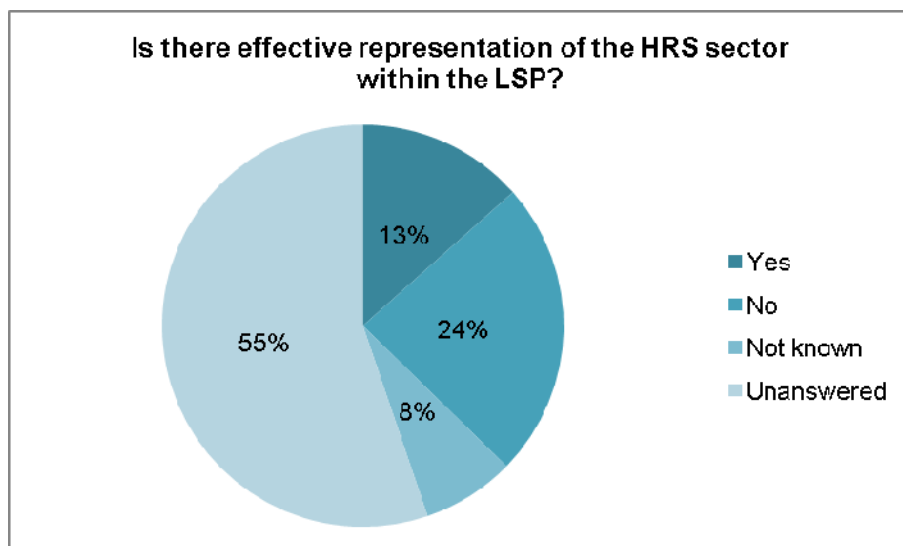


Respondents were also asked if the representation of the HRS sector within the LSP was effective to which 24% responded no, to 13% responding yes. 8% of respondents didn't know, and the majority 55% did not answer this question either.

As in the previous question this may indicate a lack of knowledge on behalf of the particular respondents, or there may be other factor such as not feeling this question was relevant to the particular respondent, or feeling unqualified to make this judgement.

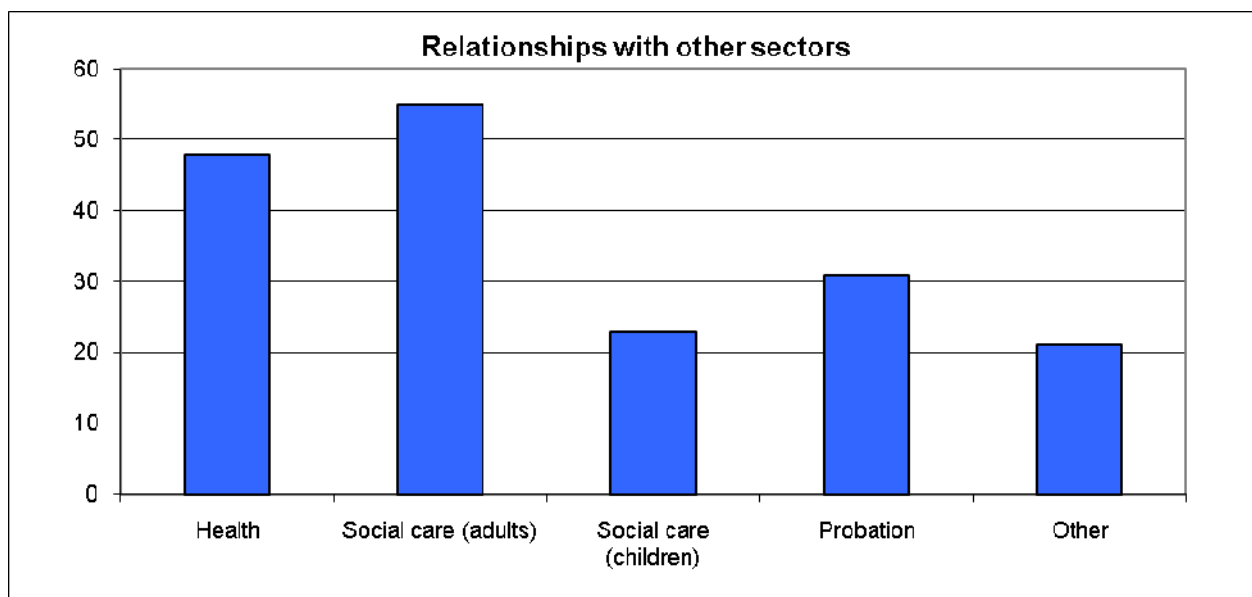
Of those who responded they didn't know, 2 out of 5 felt it was 'too early to tell' whether the representation was going to be effective or not.

It is worth noting however that for the definite 'yes' and 'no' answers a significant proportion thought the representation of the HRS sector within their LSP was not effective.

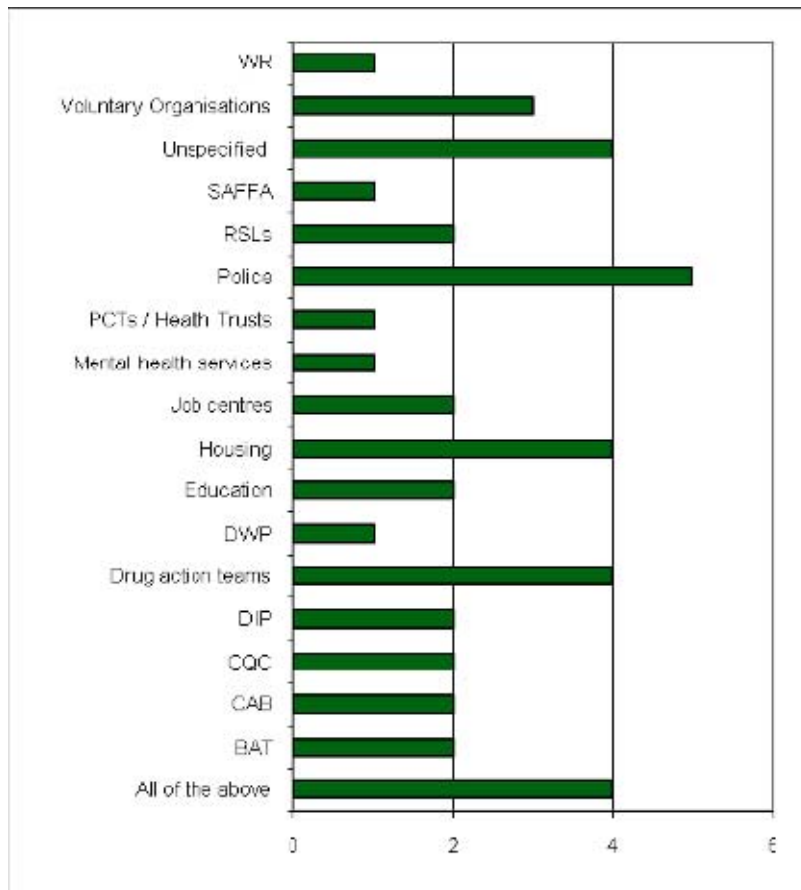


Relationships with other sectors

Many of the providers questioned had relationships with other sectors. The majority (55) had relationships with Adult Social Care, however there were also strong relationships with Health (48) and Probation (31).



The 'other' relationships included the Police (5), Drug Action Teams (4), Housing (4) and Voluntary Organisations (3). 4 respondents had relationships with Health, Adult and Children's Social Care and Probation.



Conclusion

The findings of the questionnaire are particularly helpful for providers, commissioners and Sitra in identifying the work that is required to ensure that local strategic engagement becomes a reality for providers. We identified that protecting the future of housing related support services depends on three things:

- Identifying and influencing local decision makers
- Evidencing the value of housing related support and
- Working collaboratively to achieve maximum effect.

The response to this questionnaire indicates that there is already good work going into engaging with LSPs in localities, and that many Providers are engaging with the sector through their Provider Forums and forging good collaborative working relationships with other providers and commissioners. Many also have good working relationships with other sectors which should help them when representing the value of their services to the LSP both in terms of their local visibility, and in terms of recognition of the value of the services they offer.

This survey represents a snapshot of the changes which are happening with regards to the SP Teams, and the governance and commissioning of HRS within localities. It is interesting to note that overall there is not a consensus from providers that HRS is represented effectively within the LSPs, and that some respondents are unaware of how they are represented within the LSP, including whether they are represented through another organisation.

Many providers are aware of the importance of linking their service to National Indicators and have actively done so. The remaining 20% that have not, however, may be unaware of the importance of doing this to demonstrate the value of the services they are offering, and this may put them at risk.

Whilst providers have linked their services to NIs, the majority are not utilising the tools at their disposal to demonstrate the financial benefits of HRS services, which may be essential in order to represent the real value of HRS to LSPs.

It may be that Providers are unaware of these models (3 respondents indicated this) or perhaps they are unaware of how to utilise them. Sitra's *Navigating the Maze: guide to local strategic engagement* could therefore be a useful tool in signposting Providers to these tools and persuading them of their benefits. Providers also need to become aware of, and utilise, the tools already in existence they can use to demonstrate the value, both social and financial, of their services, to ensure that this is visible to the LSP.

Overall, it would seem that there are excellent working relationships in the sector between providers and commissioners, as well as other sectors, however providers need to be looking beyond these relationships to ensuring HRS is being represented to the key decision making figures in their locality through the LSP, and building on these working relationships to do so, where necessary.

The survey indicates that providers (individually and collectively) and commissioners need to invest time and resources in engagement with local decision making structures. The continuation of preventative services for disadvantaged people will require concerted effort and energy to remain on the local political radar especially in the current climate of public sector cuts if preventative services for disadvantaged people. Sitra and other second-tier organisation have a clear role in supporting both providers and commissioners demonstrate the value of services, work collectively, engage with and influence more effectively at a local level.