

NRPF Connect – Annual data report 2019-2020: local authority support for people with no recourse to public funds (NRPF)

This report provides information about the households that requested, and were provided with, local authority accommodation and financial support in the financial year 2019-2020. This support is provided by social services in order to alleviate destitution when a person is excluded from mainstream benefits by their immigration status and has 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). The data is not broken down by UK region, but the geographic spread of participating local authorities ensures that local variations are captured within the national data-set.

Summary of key findings

- The number of households being supported is reducing and overall spend has decreased as a result, but demand for assistance remains high.
- The reduction in caseload is mainly attributed to family households being more expediently resolved than cases involving adults with care needs, which are comparatively more costly to support and more challenging to resolve.
- A significant number of households have been supported on a long-standing basis but remain unresolved, contributing to the high number of average days on support.
- The majority of households exit support following a grant of leave to remain, demonstrating that case resolution will usually be achieved through making successful immigration claims, rather than other outcomes, such as return to country of origin.
- This year sees a small but significant increase in the number of EEA nationals being supported (family and adult households).
- Overall, the data continues to demonstrate that local authorities are making good use of the system to help reduce expenditure and manage cases efficiently, with the expertise of Home Office teams contributing positively to this effort, but that a more strategic approach to expediting and resolving long-standing cases is required.

Headline data

- 66 local authorities supported 2450 households at an annual cost of £44 million at year end.
- Local authorities saw an overall reduction of £118,000 per week (12% over the year) due to a decrease in the number of households receiving support by year-end.
- Average cost per household per annum (accommodation and subsistence) is £17,887. (£18,596 for adults and £15,592 for families).
- The Home Office responded to 14625 requests for immigration status information over the database.

- 5232 referrals (requests for support) were recorded, an increase of 11% compared to the total number recorded in 2018/2019.
- Average number of days on support for families and adult cases is 758 (2 years). The average is 1055 days for single adults and 629 days for family households.
- 27% of 'unresolved / non EEA' family and adult households have been supported for over 1000 days, with the average time on support for the '1000 day' cases being 1932 days (5 years and 4 months).
- 77% of households exited support due to a grant of leave to remain, enabling them to access mainstream benefits and housing, and/or employment (82% for family households).
- Households where the main applicant has EEA nationality or is exercising a European residence right increased from 9% of total supported caseload at year-end in 2018-2019 to 13% as of the 31 March 2020 (family and adult cases combined).

Background information

The NRPF Connect database supports a long-established partnership between local authorities and the Home Office by providing a data protection compliant mechanism to monitor caseloads, obtain immigration status information and help resolve cases expediently. Because collective data evidences cost pressures and informs policy development, it is important that local authorities do record requests for, and provision of, social services support for NRPF households on the national database designed for this purpose.

The 2019-2020 report reviews caseload trends across 66 participating local authorities and focuses on key performance indicators such as volume of households supported, accommodation and subsistence expenditure, immigration status and the duration of financial support. A focus on high-level data means that we do not capture the casework effort of local authority staff that is required to resolve dependency on 'safety net' support, or the experiences of vulnerable people to whom the data relates, but the statistics should nevertheless help budgetary planning in light of known service pressures.

Next steps

Maintaining the quality and accuracy of information provided over the database whilst looking for new ways to progress supported cases will be central to Home Office and local authority efforts to reduce the £44 million that was being spent on accommodation and subsistence support as at the 31 March 2020.

In response to the impact of increasing workflows on Home Office capacity, correspondence between Chief Executives of eight participating local authorities and the Director of National and International Operations at the Home Office has also helped bring attention to how demand for information over the database can be better managed, thereby ensuring SLA response timescales can continue to be met.

For local authority teams responding to the Covid-19 emergency and leading the ‘everyone-in’ housing response, the experience of social services’ departments or NRPF teams in providing statutory safety-net support and resolving cases will be of assistance to future step-down planning, with routes to immigration advice or alternative statutory provision essential if a return to the streets is to be avoided.

Referral rates recorded on NRPF Connect are likely to remain high and our initial analysis of 2020-21 data is showing a significant rise in the number of support requests. As local government continues to protect vulnerable residents during the Covid-19 pandemic, responds to the economic impacts, and prepares for a new immigration system following the UK’s departure from the EU, the Home Office and the NRPF Network will continue to support local authorities during this period of change through the operation of NRPF Connect.

The NRPF Network will continue to use the data to inform our policy work raising the need for financial reimbursement for local government and policy changes that are required to reduce homelessness, destitution, and cost-shunts to councils. More information about this work is set out on the policy pages of the [NRPF Network website](http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/) <<http://www.nrpfnetwork.org.uk/>>.

The positive outcomes for supported households and reduction in overall costs clearly reflects the considerable commitment of all staff working in this complex area of work. The achievements being made by individual teams in really difficult circumstances should be widely acknowledged.

Henry St Clair Miller
NRPF Network

Local authority users

Region	Council
England	
East of England	Essex County Council, Luton Borough Council, Norfolk County Council, Thurrock Council
East Midlands	Derby City Council, Leicester City Council, Northamptonshire County Council, Nottingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council
Greater London boroughs	Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Camden, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Redbridge, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Wandsworth, Westminster
North East	Durham County Council, Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council, Middlesbrough Council
North West	Manchester City Council, Salford City Council
South East	Brighton & Hove City Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, East Sussex County Council, Hampshire County Council, Kent County Council, Medway Council, Milton Keynes Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Surrey County Council, West Sussex County Council
South West	Bristol City Council, Gloucestershire County Council
West Midlands	Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Council, Warwickshire County Council, Wolverhampton City Council
Yorkshire & the Humber	City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Leeds City Council
Scotland	City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council, North Lanarkshire Council

The number of local authorities subscribing to NRP Connect increased in 2019/2020 from 59 to 67 by the end of the financial year – 66 of the 67 local authorities had data uploaded by 31 March 2020.

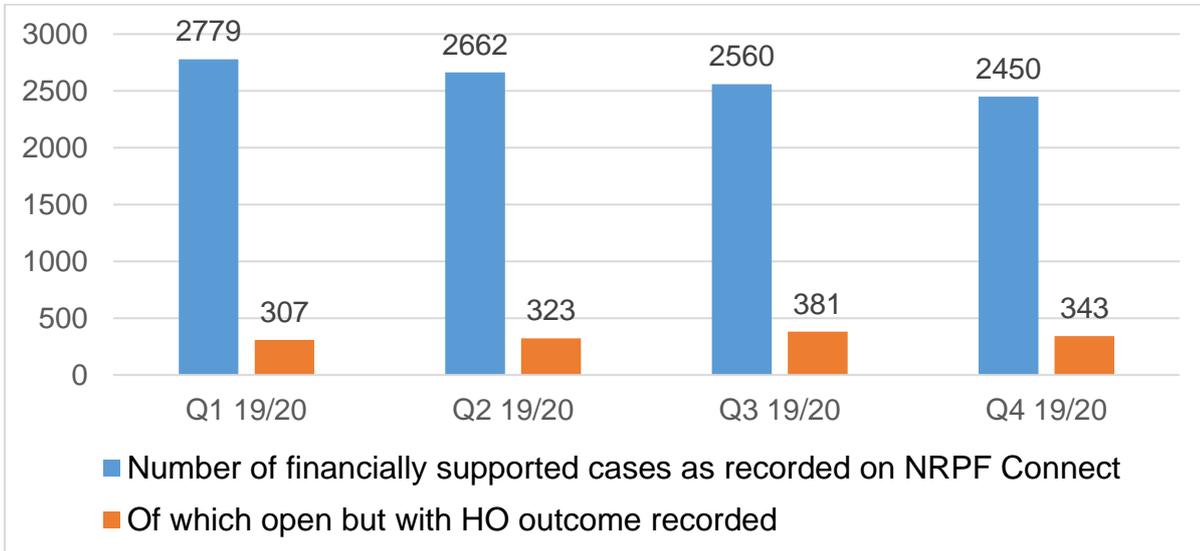
Since 31st March 2020, Slough Borough Council and Sheffield City Council have also joined the service, taking the number of local authorities subscribing to 69 as of September 2020. There has been some delay in bringing new local authorities on board due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Over one third of the local authorities in England that are responsible for delivering social care use the database, including 31 out of 33 (including City of London) London boroughs.

Data analysis

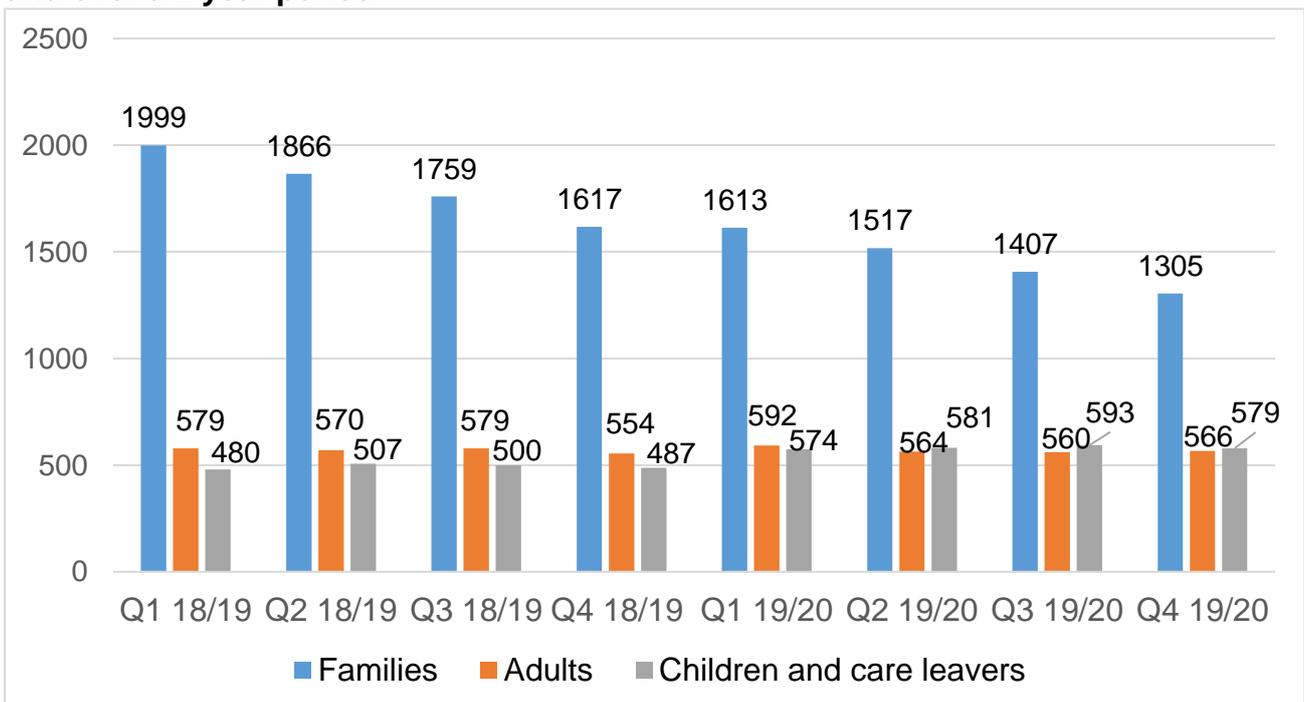
Caseload trends – referrals, cases supported, costs

Figure 1A - Number of financially supported cases at end of quarter



The overall number of households provided with accommodation and / or financial support has decreased over the year, from 2779 at the end of Quarter 1 to 2450. The proportion of households with a Home Office outcome recorded (343 at year end) are the households that have been granted a form of Leave to Remain permitting recourse to public funds who are transferring onto mainstream services.

Figure 1B - Number of financially supported cases at end of quarter, by case type and over a 2 year period

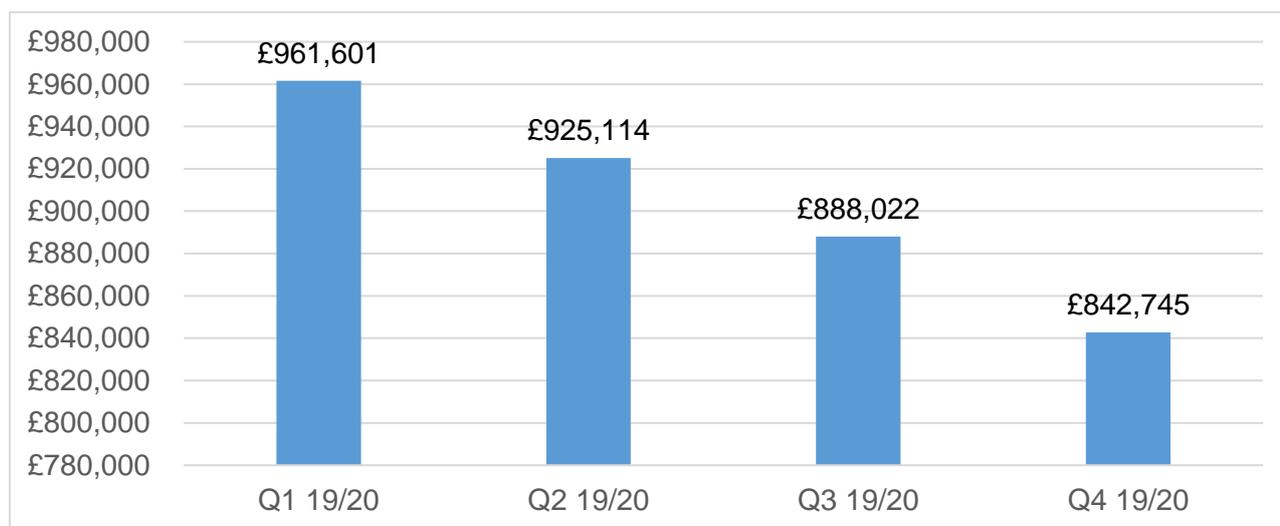


On account of the high number of family cases supported comparative to other cohorts, it is more common for specialist teams or lead professionals to be established for the purpose of providing a dedicated service to this group. 62 of the 66 subscribing local authorities use NRPF Connect for recording family cohorts, compared to 40 local authorities using the database for adults and 26 local authorities using the database for children or care leavers. With use between the participating authorities varying, not all NRPF cases for each of the 66 local authorities are captured.

When comparing the different caseload types, it is noticeable that the overall reduction in caseload is solely driven by the decrease of families, with a 35% reduction in family caseload achieved over the last two financial years (see figure 1B)

Even if cases are complex, using NRPF Connect to identify supported households and confirm immigration status is the first step in establishing a viable route off support and it is positive to see targeted work for families yielding significant results. Managing long-term NRPF support and achieving resolution may be more difficult when individual cases are spread across multiple teams and the overall volume of the caseload not accounted for.

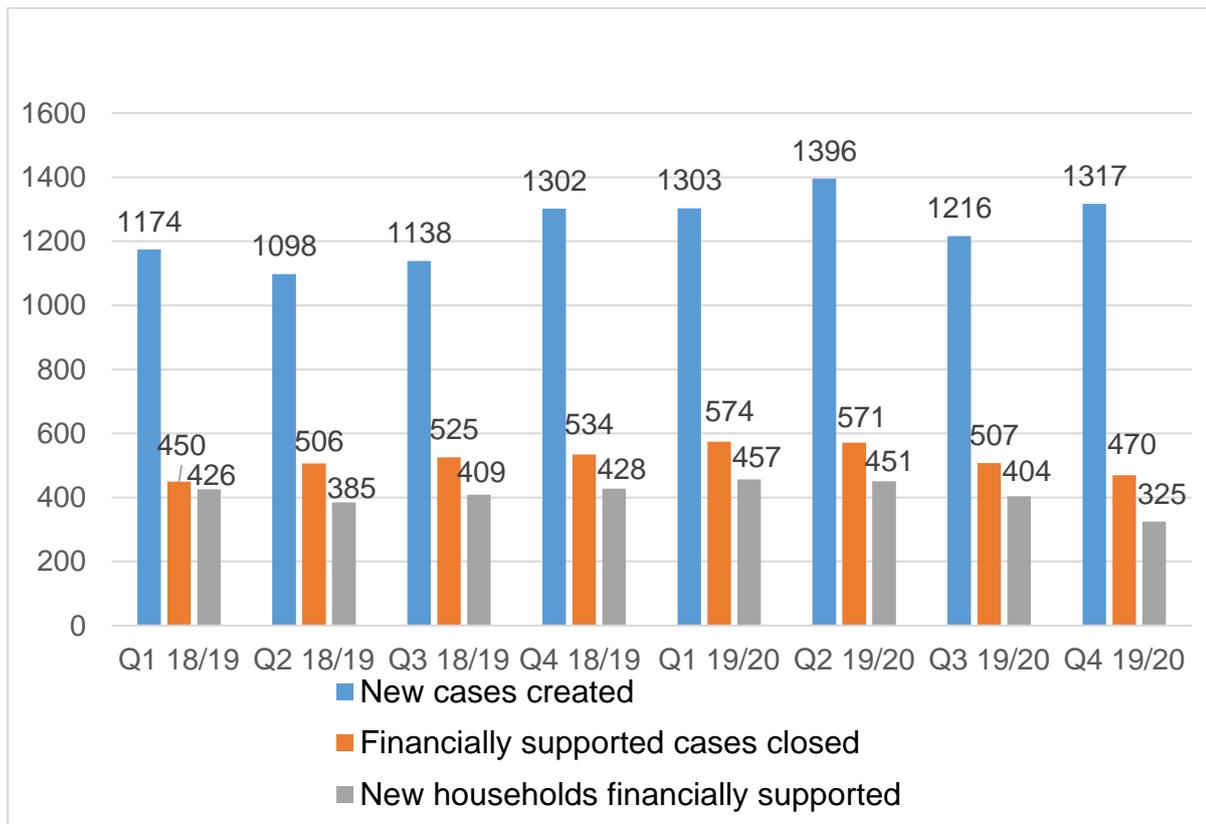
Figure 2 – Total weekly accommodation and subsistence expenditure, open cases as at end of quarter



Using NRPF Connect helps a local authority to operate efficient services and save money, overall expenditure for participating authorities decreased from 12% from Quarter 1 to Quarter 4, with £118,850 less being spent per week on caseloads by year end (see figure 2). The reduction in spend was slightly higher than the 10% reported in 2018/2019.

The cost of NRPF Service provision is of considerable concern to local authorities given the importance of ‘safety net’ services to support vulnerable people and the wider pressures on council budgets. Average annual accommodation and subsistence expenditure per household, across all cohort types, was £18,000 at year end. A £44 million per annum spend across 66 local authorities (total weekly expenditure multiplied by number of households, 31 March 2020) remains a significant financial burden, despite successes in case resolution.

Figure 3 – Number of referrals, new cases supported and cases closed, total recorded per quarter and over a 2 year period



The number of new cases being created on the system has increased over a two-year period (see figure 3), which is in-part due to more local authorities using the system but also reflective of rising demand for advice, guidance and support.

The number of households accepted for financial assistance are typically fewer than cases referred because there is no blanket responsibility under governing legislation to accommodate all people with NRPF who are homeless. In some cases, destitution can also be averted by informed signposting, such as when it is appropriate to access asylum support or if immigration advice can help a person establish a route to public funds quickly.

By March 2020 the ‘everyone-in’ response to the Covid 19 pandemic had begun, with many thousands of rough sleepers accommodated. Typically the humanitarian response during the pandemic was led by Housing Departments rather than NRPF Teams based in Social Services. As of the 31 March 2020, collective data indicated no rise in caseload numbers or referrals, although in the first quarter of 2020/2021, total number of new cases created on the system rose to 1504, exceeding past referral rates.

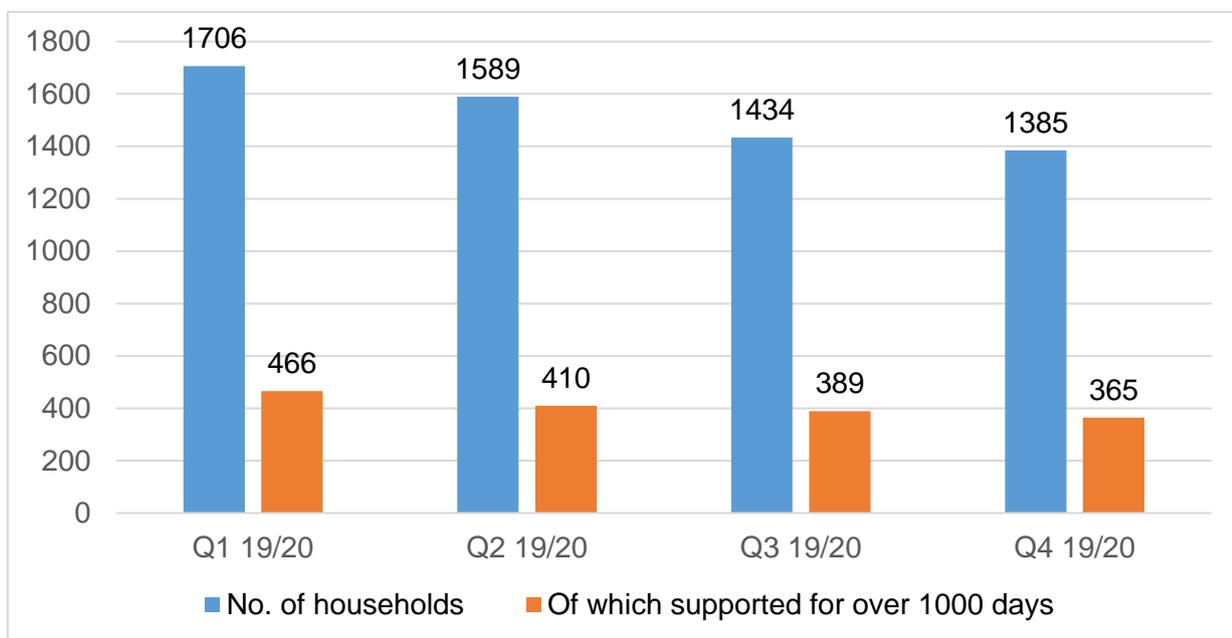
Referral rates recorded on NRPF Connect are likely to remain high, with ‘step-down’ planning requiring consideration of longer-term safety-net support from social services and a potential rise in unemployment figures necessitating assistance for families who would otherwise have enjoyed a right to work despite restrictions on out-of-work benefits.

Average time on support and 1000 day cases – families and adults with care needs

If a family or adult case has financial costs recorded on NRPF Connect then it will be treated with priority by the Home Office. Particular attention is also paid to the ‘1000 day cases’ who have been in receipt of accommodation and subsistence support for an exceptionally long period of time (i.e. 1000 days or more) and at great cumulative cost.

Targeting high-cost and long-term cases will help reduce the average number of days on support per case, recognising that although caseloads are reducing, duration before resolution is not. Despite a continued focus on long-standing cases, finding a route off local authority support for this vulnerable group remains challenging.

Figure 4 – Adult and family households financially supported at end of quarter, excluding EEA nationals and cases with a Home Office outcome recorded



In figure 4, households who have been granted LTR and are transitioning off local authority support and European Economic Area Nationals who will have a route to settlement under the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) are discounted. Of 1385 ‘unresolved and non EEA’ households at the end of the financial year, 365 had been supported for a 1000 days or more and the proportion of such cases compared to overall caseload remained approximately 27% for the year (showing no proportionate reduction over the year).

1932 days (5.2 years) is the average time on support for the 365 ‘1000 day cases’ captured at the end of 2019/2020 and the total cost from start date of support to the 31 March 2020 stood at £38 million (accommodation and subsistence only).

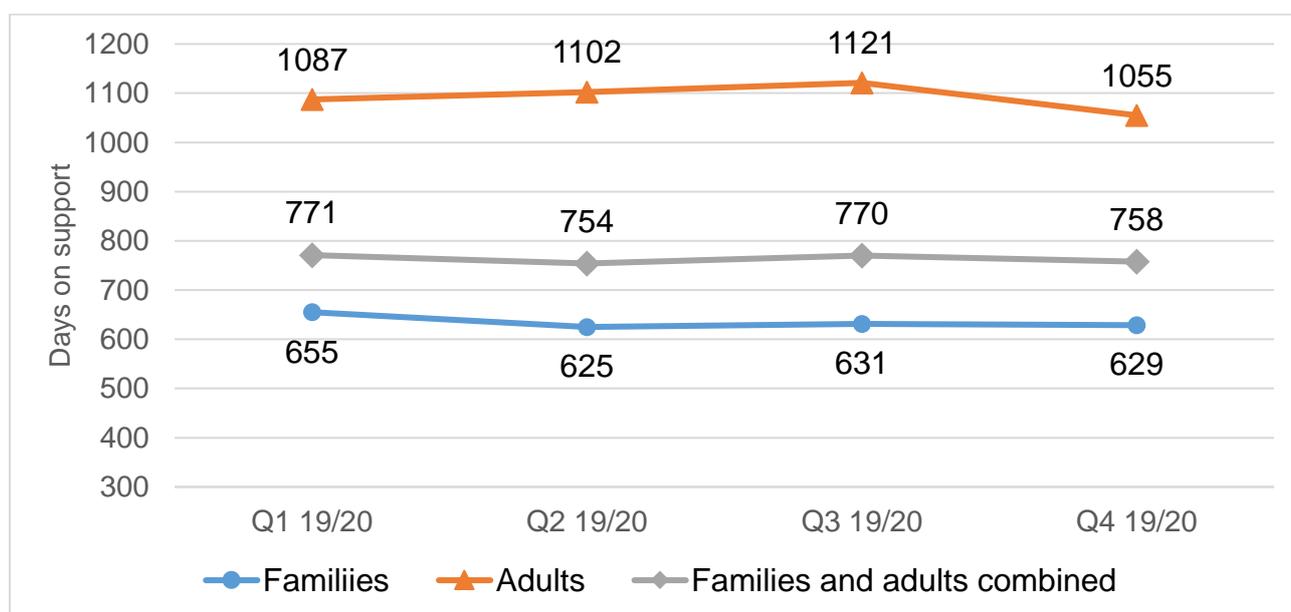
The Home Office and NRPF Network will continue to work with local authorities to address the 1000 day cases, but common challenges include:

- Resolution under the Immigration Rules delayed by additional complexities relating to criminal casework

- People not having immigration representation, including vulnerable single adults who do not have capacity to instruct immigration advisors independently
- Lengthy appeal processes with months and even year's delays in the scheduling of court hearing dates
- Competing priorities for Home Office time and resources in light of wider commitments beyond local authority NRPF service provision
- Policy limitations, where there may be no right to remain in the UK under Immigration Rules but where there is also little prospect of a council concluding that return to Country of Origin is compatible with Human Rights law, as set-out under the exclusions to social services support under Schedule 3 Nationality Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 – or these exclusions simply do not apply.

The high proportion of long standing cases means that the average number of days on support remains high, even as caseload numbers reduce (figure 5 below).

Figure 5 – Average number of days on support, households financially supported at end of quarter



The average number of days on support for a single adult is considerably higher than for a family at 1055 days compared to 629 (see figure 5). Average per-annum cost for an adult case is also higher at £18,596 compared to £15,592.

NRPF Connect data demonstrates that although there are comparatively more families being supported than single adults, single adults are the most costly to support on a case-by-case basis; £53,750 will be spent on average per single adult before resolution is achieved, reducing to £26,870 for a family (average cost per household multiplied by average days on support).

Higher costs for single adult cases can be attributed to residential (e.g. nursing home) placements and the additional expense of care packages. The number of adult cases in receipt of social services support may be under-reported in the statistics because only 40 of the 66 local authorities using NRPF Connect have adult data recorded.

Family households – immigration status and closure reason

Figure 6A reflects the immigration status of the main applicant that has been recorded by the Home Office on the system. In family households, the main applicant will be a parent.

Figure 6A – Immigration status, family households financially supported, 31 March

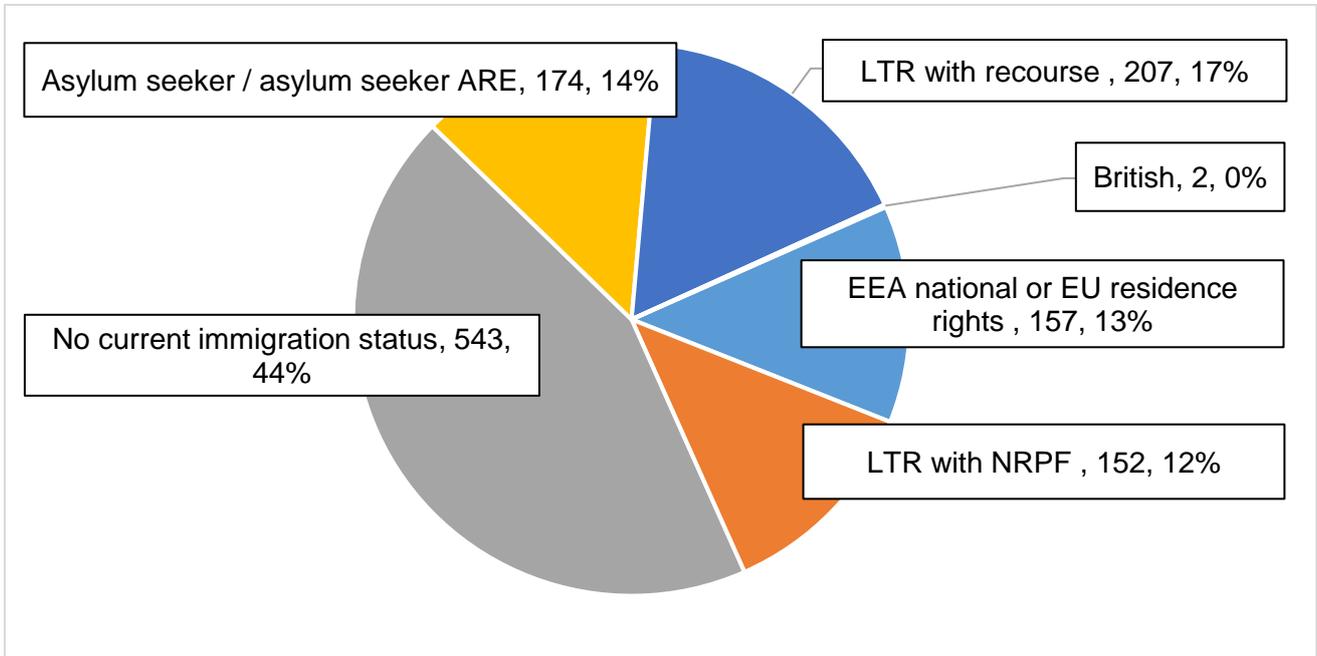
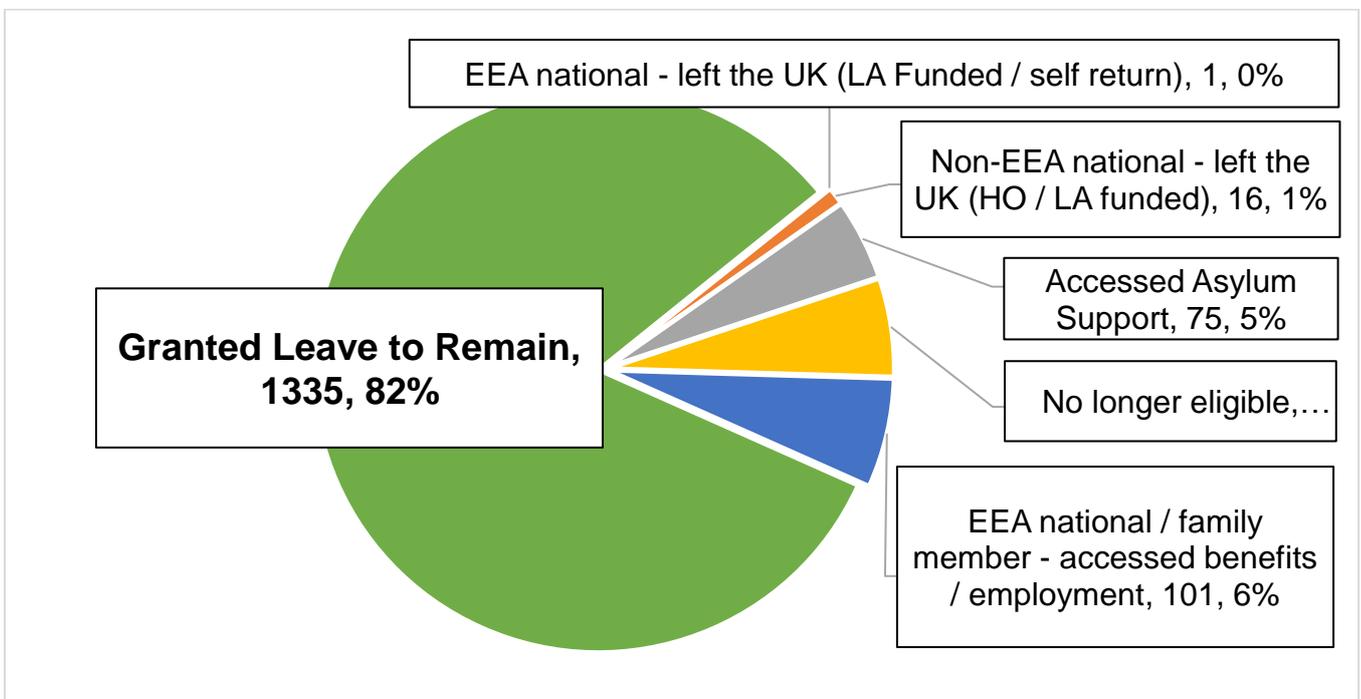


Figure 6B – Closure reason, 1619 family households closed in 2019-2020



Data indicates that although families often have no immigration status (fig. 6A) when first supported, the vast majority will exit support because a form of Leave to Remain allowing access to public funds is granted. Average days on support for family cases was 629 days as of 31 March 2020 with £26,870 likely to be spent per-household before resolution.

Adult households – immigration status and reason for closure

Compared to families, a higher proportion of single adult cases are asylum seekers, or people who were in the asylum process before becoming ‘Appeal Rights Exhausted’ (ARE).

Figure 7A – Immigration status, adult households financially supported at 31 March

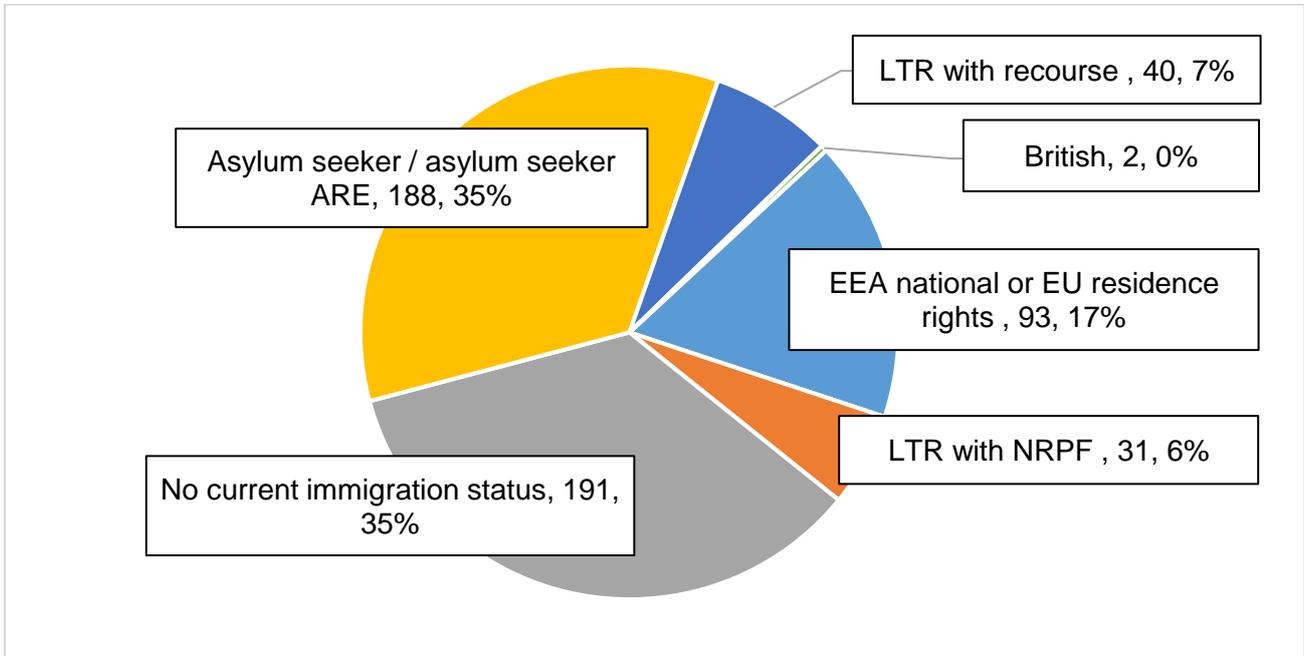
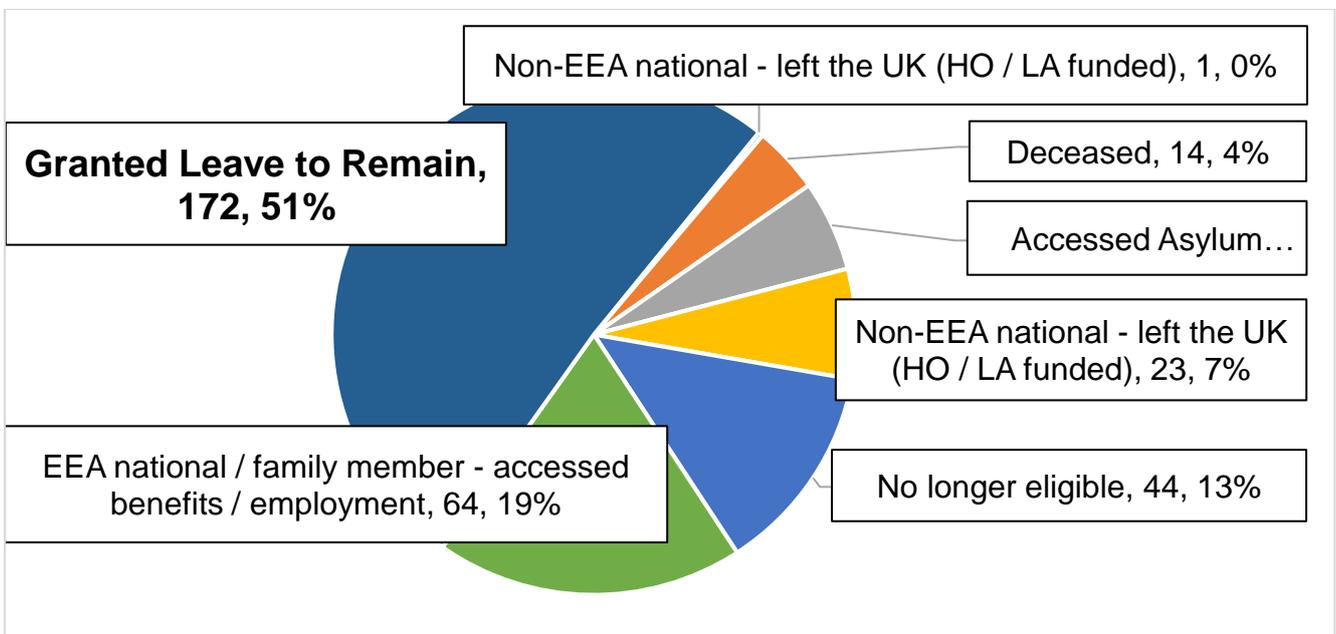


Figure 7B – Closure reason, 337 adult households closed in 2019-2020



Fewer adult cases are resolved on account of leave to remain being granted (51% instead of 82% for families), which may reflect the more limited routes through which an application to the Home Office can be made to stay on long-residence or health grounds. Average days on support for adult cases was 1055 days as of 31 March 2020, with £53,750 likely to be spent per-case before resolution is achieved.

Home Office immigration status checking and response times

A local authority will require immigration information from the Home Office to fulfil statutory assessment and review responsibilities and it is necessary for the Home Office and the local authority to be aware of each other’s involvement when making decisions, even if confidential information held by either parties remains protected. Operation of NRPF Connect does not negate the need for service users to also be engaged with qualified immigration advisers, but it can complement efforts to support access to immigration advice based on a clear understanding of a person’s immigration or asylum journey.

For local authorities, a status check within the agreed response time of the Service Level Agreement (5 working-days for new cases, 10 working-days for Queries on existing cases) is of great assistance, with a facility to request a same-day check in urgent cases.

It is acknowledged that as increased numbers of enquiries are generated over the system, the Home Office’s ability to meet the response times of the SLA are put under pressure. Correspondence between Chief Executives of participating local authorities and the Director of National and International Operations at the Home Office have helped to bring attention to these pressures and the actions required to address them.

Figure 8 – Total number of requests / notifications requiring Home Office action

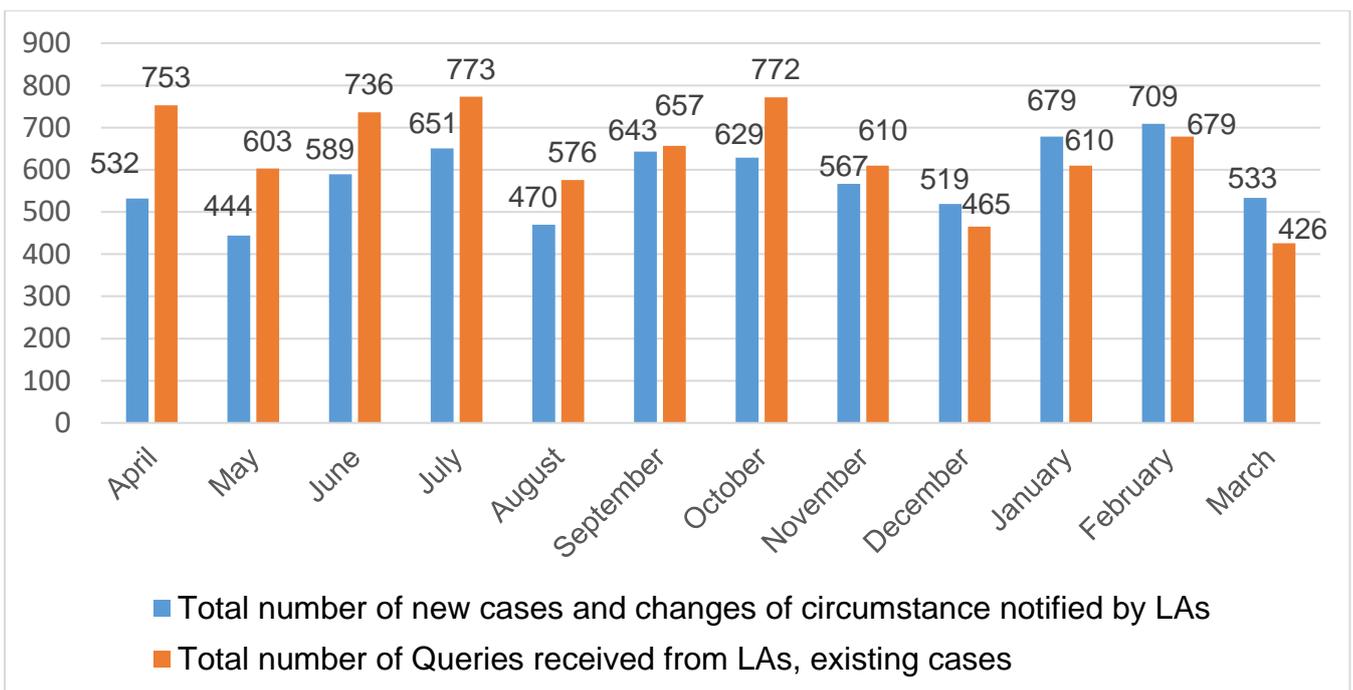


Figure 8 reflects the considerable work that is done by the Home Office teams using NRPF Connect on a monthly basis, comprising of completing initial status checks on new cases and responding to changes of circumstances notified (e.g. dependant born to a supported household), as well as responding to Queries from local authorities on existing cases (e.g. a request for an update on a person’s immigration status, or progress of an immigration or asylum application). In total, the Home Office responded to 14625 requests for immigration status information, comprising of 6965 notifications of new cases and changes of circumstances and 7660 ‘Queries’ on existing cases.

Figure 9 – Average monthly Home Office response times in working-days

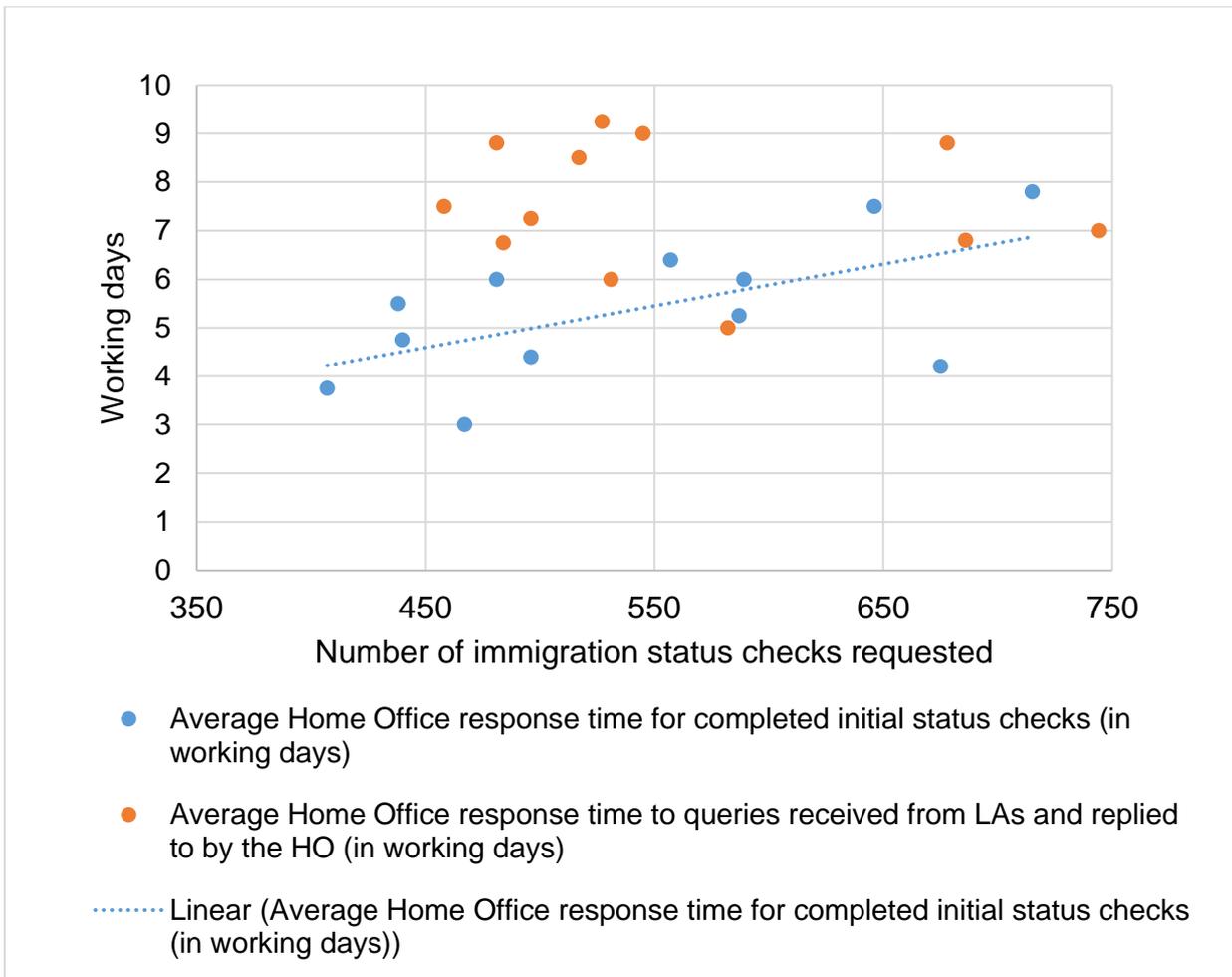


Figure 9 demonstrates how the 5 working-day response target for new cases and notifications is more likely to be exceeded as volume of notifications increase, as indicated by the trend line tracking the rise in average number of days to complete the check.

In the financial year, 2506 immigration status checks for a total of 4641 new cases notified were answered within the 5 working-day target period (54% completed within target timescale of the SLA). The 10 working-day period for replying to Queries is more achievable, noting that the average number of days before a reply is made is always below the 10 working-day target. Local authorities using NRPF Connect are able to make use of the Home Office Duty Line to bring the Home Office’s attention to cases which are outside of SLA responses.

Following senior management correspondence on the matter of the SLA, it is acknowledged that from the 1st April 2020 to the 30 August 2021, only 532 of 2212 new cases notified were answered outside of the 5 day response time and a 76% success rate in meeting the SLA for new cases is currently being achieved.

Local authorities benefit considerably from the dedicated support of the Home Office teams using the database and look forward to maintaining the partnership as efficiently as possible in future months of operation.

Key terms

No Recourse to Public Funds – an immigration restriction preventing access to certain welfare benefits, applying both to people with a right to be in the UK (often with employment permitted) and to those unlawfully present (with no immigration status) who will also face further restrictions to services (e.g. healthcare) and employment.

NRPF Services – describes when a local authority may have a duty / responsibility to provide financial support (usually under social services' legislation) despite the NRPF condition, or – in the case of European Economic Area nationals – when a right to benefits through economic activity / the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) has not been established.

Financially supported – Accommodation and or financial support is provided by social services, including cost of care packages, travel and other expenses when recorded by a local authority user of the database.

Family cases - Families are supported when there is a child in need in the household, duties arise under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 / section 22 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Adult cases - Adults are supported in order to meet care and support needs. Duties arise under the Care Act social work Scotland Act 1968 and other legislation.

Children or Care Leaver case – children looked after by the local authority and owed a responsibility of care post 18 years of age, duties arise under s20 of the Children Act /

A priority case – A single adult or family case with financial information recorded on NRPF Connect (i.e. financially supported). All children and care leavers.

1000 day case – An adult or family case supported for over 1000 days since start date of financial support.

Case resolution – Refers to work undertaken to end financial support, whether that is self-sufficiency through employment, accessing public funds and mainstream services through a change of immigration status, or leaving the UK.

'Unresolved case' – a non-European Economic National who has no immigration status, or has a valid form of status which does not permit recourse to public funds and is in receipt of financial support from the local authority.

'Resolved case' – either closed because case resolution has been achieved, or waiting to leave local authority support because a viable resolution route has been found, e.g. waiting to access mainstream benefits and housing services.