

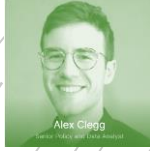
Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

20 February 2023



In
Partnership
with

LA Directories
Limited



Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

- Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Cambridge City Council
- Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager, Oxford City Council
- Alex Clegg & Tylor-Maria Johnson, Policy in Practice
- Nicki Duckworth, EntitledTo, Marshalling
- Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network, Chair
- Paul Howarth, Independent Consultant
- Gareth Morgan, CEO Ferret Information Systems
- Megan Shepherd, Mid-Sussex District Council
- Kevin Stewart, Erewash District Council
- Bob Wagstaff, PSPS (Boston, South Holland, East Lindsey)
- Liz Whitehead-Davis, Hexagon Housing

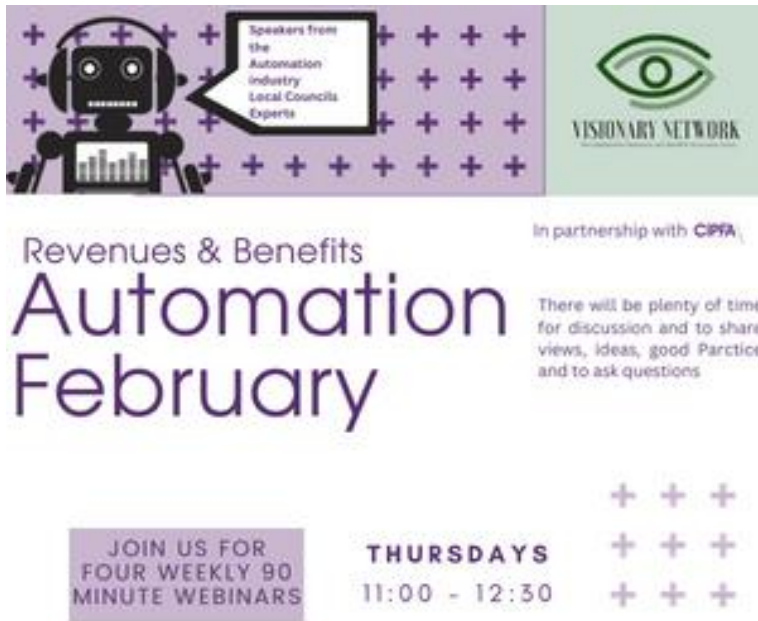


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Any comments made by panellists are their own personal views and do not necessarily reflect the positions of their organisations.

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Speakers from the Automation Industry Local Councils Experts

VISIONARY NETWORK

In partnership with CIPFA

Revenues & Benefits
Automation February

There will be plenty of time for discussion and to share views, ideas, good Practice and to ask questions

JOIN US FOR FOUR WEEKLY 90 MINUTE WEBINARS

THURSDAYS
11:00 - 12:30

2/2 Week One

- 1) Gareth Morgan CEO Ferret Systems & Benefits of the Future -- RPA Issues
- 2) Daren Kelk, Ascendant Solutions -- Case study
- 3) Andrew Melvin, Director GovTech Solutions -- Case Study

9/2 Week Two

- 1) Ademola Adekunbi, Data protection & Information Security Leader, Data Privacy Advisory Service – Data Protection & Security Issues
- 2) Gemma Atkinson & Matthew Henderson, Newham LBC - DigiStaff Case Study
- 3) Tracey Stone, Director Welfare Together

16/2 Week Three

- 1) Zoe Charlesworth, Independent Consultant, Welfare Services – How far can the UCDS be used to automate benefit take-up?
- 2) Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Automation in Sweden's Welfare System
- 3) Daniel Pearce-- TelSolutions Case Study

23/2 Week Four

- 1) Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network– Decision Bias in RPA
- 2) Jon Gibbs, Civica Case Study
- 3) TBC

To register:
<https://bit.ly/VNAF>

CIPFA



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Discussion Points



Year End



Missing Workers



Retail closures and Job Losses



Free School Meals

“

clear & concise
written
schemes:
**We make life
easy!**

”

Clear and Concise Council Tax Reduction Schemes

Are you tired of trying to decipher quasi-legal language of your Council Tax Reduction Scheme? Look no further! Our clear and concise re-write of your legalistic rules is the perfect solution.

Our easy-to-understand format ensures that you and your stakeholders can quickly and easily understand the scheme without the headache of trying to interpret complex legal language. We do all that for you!

If you order your plain English April 2023 CTR scheme today, you will get it in time for publication this coming March.

Default, Banded, Discount .. we have simplified them all

“

clear & concise
written
schemes:
**We make life
easy!**

”

Clear and Concise Council Tax Reduction Schemes

Here are five good reasons for using our redrafted scheme:

- 1) **We do not change your scheme**, just demystify the language. But we offer advice if we feel that your scheme is not fully compliant with the regulations.
- 2) **Increased transparency** and better understanding of the scheme by the public: with a plain English scheme, the rules and conditions are more easily understood by both citizens and stakeholders alike. This helps to reduce confusion and misinformation, allowing people to make informed decisions about their council tax reduction entitlement.
- 3) **Easier administration**: a plain English scheme simplifies the application and assessment processes. This makes it easier for local authorities to administer and manage their scheme, leading to more efficient and cost-effective services.
- 4) **Increased access and compliance**: by using clear and concise language to explain the scheme, the public is able to access and understand the scheme more easily, potentially leading to increased take-up. This also increases compliance and reduces the number of potential appeals.
- 5) **Improved equity**: plain English schemes help to ensure that everyone is treated fairly, by clearly setting out the eligibility criteria and entitlement levels. This helps to reduce any potential inequalities that may arise from a lack of understanding of the scheme.

Default, Banded, Discount .. we have simplified them all

Finding the
right
information
has never been
easier with



The law and practice relating to Welfare Benefits is complex, detailed, open to interpretation and endlessly dynamic

LA Directories Ltd is here to help professionals across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland correctly and efficiently identify and understand the ever-changing law and guidance that governs the calculation of entitlement to Housing Benefit, Rates (Northern Ireland), Universal Credit, Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payment.

LA Directories Ltd takes the law and guidance relating to Housing Benefit, Rates, Universal Credit, Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payment then interprets and consolidates it into three product ranges...

- The Benefits Directory - a web-based knowledge management solution
- The Training Directory - provision of open and in-house training courses at all levels
- Consultancy services

Local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland are using our services as well as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

E-mail services.enquiries@ladirectories.com

Peter Davis, Marketing & Account Management

E: peter.davis@ladirectories.com

M: 07807 009 959

Ferret Information Systems Ltd



Ferret Information Systems was established in 1987 and is the largest company in Europe in the field of law dealing with welfare benefits and similar areas of determinative, compliance, and regulatory law.



our training services:

Ferret is well placed to provide training services and its team of specialists have wide experience of benefits and housing grant legislation. We also provide consultancy to organisations, companies and government on the impact of legislative and policy changes.



our products:

Ferret produces a wide variety of systems, designed to provide support tools for advice workers, and also to provide information and advice directly to the public. Ferret specialises in a holistic assessment of financial circumstances relating to welfare benefits and tax credits entitlement, coupled with software development methodology which offers a high level of flexibility and rapid updating to reflect rule changes.



our platforms:

Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.



our customers:

Users of Ferret systems include government departments, local authorities, housing associations, CABx, HIA's and other advice agencies, universities, social welfare organisations, libraries, solicitors and financial advisers.

<https://www.ferret.co.uk/>

A request

- Ferret, EntitledTo & Policy in Practice all have to update the CTR element of their calculators. All three have asked if you would you be kind enough to email copies of your 2023/24 schemes to ctax@visionarynetwork.co.uk
- This will really help those vulnerable families who rely on their calculators for advice and to increase their incomes.

End

Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Consultant

07946800171

mg@malcolmgardner.com



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Join the discussion

Each Monday lunchtime, a panel of professionals leads a discussion on revenue and benefits administration issues. The panel consists of council & housing officers, policy advisors, and analysts.

It is a free service that is well attended. Attendees make good contributions; everyone gets a chance to speak. Attendees includes senior managers, team leaders, suppliers, and support staff

You can join in the discussion during the week (and start some new ones) by joining our WhatsApp group: <https://bit.ly/3Qjrkqe>

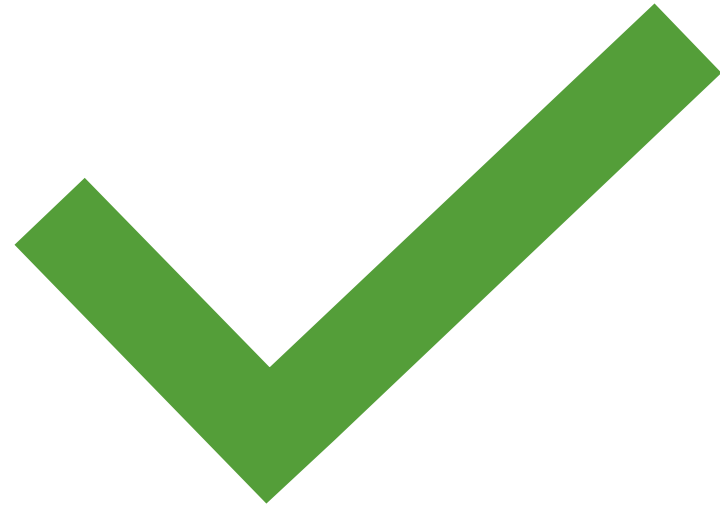
Links to the recordings and the slide packs plus other relevant documents will be posted into both the WhatsApp group and in the Teams Channel and emailed to those who attended and subscribers to the group.

To sign up just email malcolm@visionarynetwork.co.uk with your name, organisation and email address. We are inclusive because sharing information and good practice is essential. You don't have to attend every session; recordings will be available.

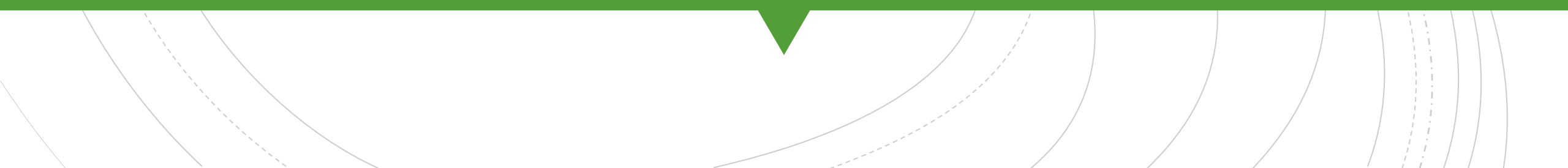


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Discussion Points



Year End

How is it
going?

Lessons
learned?

Tricky
bits?



Missing Workers

- According to a report from the Learning and Work Institute 600,000 people have become economically inactive during the pandemic, bringing the total number to 9 million working-age people
- Over the next 13 years, 1.4 million more people are projected to retire than young people entering the workforce, reducing the ratio of working-age people to those above state pension age from 3.5 to 2.3
- There has been a sharp rise in people with long-term sickness, which varies from 1 in 100 in parts of Surrey to 1 in 7 in Merseyside
- Around one in three people taking early retirement were in better-paid and male-dominated roles, while one quarter of such moves were from lower-paid and traditionally female-dominated roles

Loss of Retail Jobs

- Nearly 15,000 British retail jobs have already been cut since January in a “brutal start to the year” for the high street.
- •1,689 job losses are at large retailers such as Tesco and Asda who are carrying out cost cutting programmes and restructuring operations.
- 3,185 jobs have been lost at large retailers which have collapsed and undergoing insolvency proceedings.
- Paperchase fell into administration in January, resulting in 250 immediate job losses and an uncertain future for the remaining 500 staff.
- Business rates relief means that new bills will be discounted by 75% for the tax year from April 2023 to the end of March 2024, up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business.
- Most retailers with multiple stores will only benefit from the discount on a handful of their branches due to the cap.

Outcomes for 2023 (based on current information to 20 Feb 2023)

Retailing 2023 (to 20 Feb)	Administration	CVAs	Rationalisation	Totals
specific redundancies & rationalisation	NA	NA	5,18	5,188
multiples: stores closed	353		322	675
multiples: jobs lost	3,185		11,689	14,874
self-employed/concessions in larger shops	NK		NK	NK
independent store closures	NK		NK	NK
independent job losses	NK		NK	NK
Total Job losses	3,185		11,689	14,874
Total store closures	353		322	675

Outcomes for 2022

Retailing 2022 (12 months)	Administration	CVAs	Rationalisation	Totals
specific redundancies & rationalisation	NA	NA	13,240	13,240
multiples: stores closed	549		5,506	6,055
multiples: jobs lost	6,732		69,977	76,709
self-employed/concessions in larger shops	1,678		6,106	7,784
independent store closures	4,960		6,130	11,090
independent job losses	23,504		30,237	53,741
Total Job losses	31,914		119,560	151,474
Total store closures	5,509		11,636	17,145



Other News

Job Figures

- Pay ex-bonus +6.7% vs Reuters poll +6.5%
- Total pay growth slows to +5.9% on bonus effect
- Bank of England worries about inflation heat in pay growth
- Unemployment rate holds at 3.7%
- Vacancies and inactivity rate fall again

Stores in England put baby formula behind the tills to deter theft

- Some Co-op stores in England put baby formula behind the tills to prevent theft.
- The Co-operative said it was trialling a new deterrent to stop theft in a number of stores, but would not say how many.
- Many staple products are becoming more expensive.
 - In a recent report, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that vegetable oil and pasta cost more than double they did a year ago.
- Cow & Gate follow-on formula costs £10.25 for an 800g tub.
- The cheapest brand, Aldi own label, of infant formula has increased by 22% in the past year.
- Even if parents can access Aldi's own label, the cash value of Healthy Start vouchers, £8.50 a week, is no longer enough to cover the infant formula needed in the first six months of a baby's life.



Blue Badge Misuse

- Figures released by the Department for Transport (DfT) show that Lambeth, Birmingham, Hammersmith and Fulham, and Bromley carried out 54% of all legal cases for people misusing the blue badge system, for the year up to the end of March 2021.
 - Lambeth had the highest amount, at 119.
- Permits are given to people whose disabilities or health mean that their mobility is limited.
 - It entitles them to park free of charge in spaces that are often closer to shops and destinations. They can also park on most single and double yellow lines.
- Overall, the DfT says councils took legal action against 698 people.
- The majority of prosecutions, 97%, were for people who used someone else's blue badge.
 - The maximum fine is £1,000.
- There have been calls in recent weeks for the permits to be made paperless to cut down on the problem of thefts, with Haringey council in north London saying that incidences of the crime had fallen by 65% since November 2022 when it introduced paperless permits.
- The AA has raised concerns that councils do not take enforcement seriously, after the data also showed that more than two-thirds of councils, 110 out of England's 140 local authorities, had not prosecuted anyone at all for misusing them.
- In 2019, the government extended the scheme's availability to include people with Parkinson's, dementia and epilepsy.



Case Law of Note



Teixeira v Zaika Restaurant Limited

- The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) found it wrong to assume that a redundancy dismissal was inevitable and that nil compensation should have been awarded.
- A fair procedure must be followed by employers when deciding on redundancy, including a fair selection process.
- Mr Teixeira was employed as a “tandoor chef” for a London restaurant with a team of 10 chefs.
- He was dismissed by reason of redundancy in the early days of the COVID pandemic, with no procedure followed.
- The EAT disagreed with the Tribunal's decision that his dismissal was inevitable and found that compensation was not automatically nil.
- Genuine consultation and consideration of any selection criteria must be carried out before dismissing any employee.



Teixeira v Zaika Restaurant Limited

- Employers should be mindful when making decisions to make someone redundant that a failure to consult can result in a Tribunal needing to think through each element of a hypothetical process to decide what the likely outcome would have been if a fair process had been followed.
- Furthermore, an employee has the option of challenging the redundancy pool, so employers should carry out some consultation, if possible, and work through the rationale for the pooling process if it is a pool of one.
- Doing this can help to reduce the risk of compensation from a Tribunal and ensure that the dismissal is seen to be likely or inevitable.



McAllister v Commissioners of HMRC

- The Employment Appeal Tribunal found that dismissal for poor attendance arising from disability was objectively justified
- Mr McAllister worked for HMRC from May 2011 and suffered from anxiety and depression
- He was dismissed in December 2018 and received a payment under the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS) which was reduced by 50%
- Mr McAllister brought claims for discrimination arising from disability
- The Tribunal found that Mr McAllister had been dismissed due to something arising in consequence of his disability
- The dismissal was objectively justified because HMRC was able to show that its decision to dismiss for long term sickness absence was a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim
- The EAT said that any reduction made to payments under the CSCS would not constitute discrimination arising from disability



FKJ v RVT and Others

- The High Court has considered whether there can be a reasonable expectation of privacy in private WhatsApp messages found at work
- FKJ brought a claim against her former employer, which included on the grounds of sex discrimination and alleged sexual harassment by the managing partner, RVT
- The employer used 18,000 private WhatsApp messages (including some being “of the most intimate kind”) as evidence in the tribunal claim
- FKJ brought a High Court claim in tort for misuse of private information which was not struck out
- The Court noted that given the nature of the messages, with day-to-day information about FKJ’s professional, social and private life, an expectation of privacy existed
- The employer should have immediately notified FKJ and returned these messages to her, even if there had been tribunal proceedings on foot at that time



FKJ v RVT and Others

- This case highlights the importance of employers respecting an employee's right to privacy even when private information is downloaded on a work laptop.
- Employers owe a duty to return the private information when it is clear that it is meant to remain private.
- Furthermore, this decision serves as a warning to employers that relying on private WhatsApp messages as evidence in tribunal or court proceedings could result in substantial damages being awarded in High Court claims for misuse of private information.



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Job Adverts

Ben Moreton, Director, Business Smart Solutions
0204 529 1139 / 07807058828 www.businesssmartsolutions.co.uk

Remote

Benefits Team Manager (Quality Assurance)

We are seeking an experienced Benefits Team Manager to supervise and manage a team of Benefits Officers. The successful candidate will manage a Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support team dealing specifically with Quality Assurance & Changes in Circumstances.

The role is full-time (36 hours per week) and can be worked fully remote (home based).

Equipment will be couriered.

The successful candidate will support delivery of an integrated, high quality, customer focussed service supporting those in need of assistance with rent, council tax or in financial hardship.

Requirements

- Advanced knowledge of the Housing Benefit regulations 2006 & Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
- 5 years experience of Housing Benefits, Council Tax Support and Local Welfare Provisions
- A competent Capita One (Academy) user

[To view full details and to apply, click here](#)

Bracknell

Welfare & Assessment Team Leader (HB/CTAX Support)

We are looking for an experienced Benefits Team Leader to supervise and manage a team of Welfare Support and Assessment Officers being responsible for the timely and accurate assessment of eligibility and entitlements of the council's services for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments and Local Welfare Provision (e.g. Household Support Fund).

The role will require 1 day per week to be worked from the office in Bracknell and the rest of the week can be worked at home.

The successful candidate will support delivery of an integrated, high quality, customer focussed service support for those in need of assistance with rent, council tax or in financial hardship.

Requirements

- Advanced knowledge of the Housing Benefit regulations 2006 & Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
- Experience of Financial Assessments
- A competent NEC (Northgate) NEC user

[To view full details and to apply, click here](#)

Northampton

Debt Recovery Officer

Reporting to the Debt Recovery Team Manager, you will be customer focused and have the ability to achieve challenging targets and help to make process improvements. Your main priority will be to reduce aged debt and collect income from new invoices in a timely and effective manner.

Debt Recovery Officer duties include; providing operational services within the Debt Recovery team through the use of telephone, emails and letters. Giving advice to vulnerable customers in receipt of adult social care will need empathy and sensitivity. Provide accurate and timely information and support in response to internal and external customer enquiries.

Your IT skills will enable you to maximise use of our new ERP system, write individual customer letters and prepare customer statements.

A few things to note

- The rate is £16.90 per hour Umbrella
- The term is until the end of December, with the potential to turn Permanent for the right candidate

Requirements

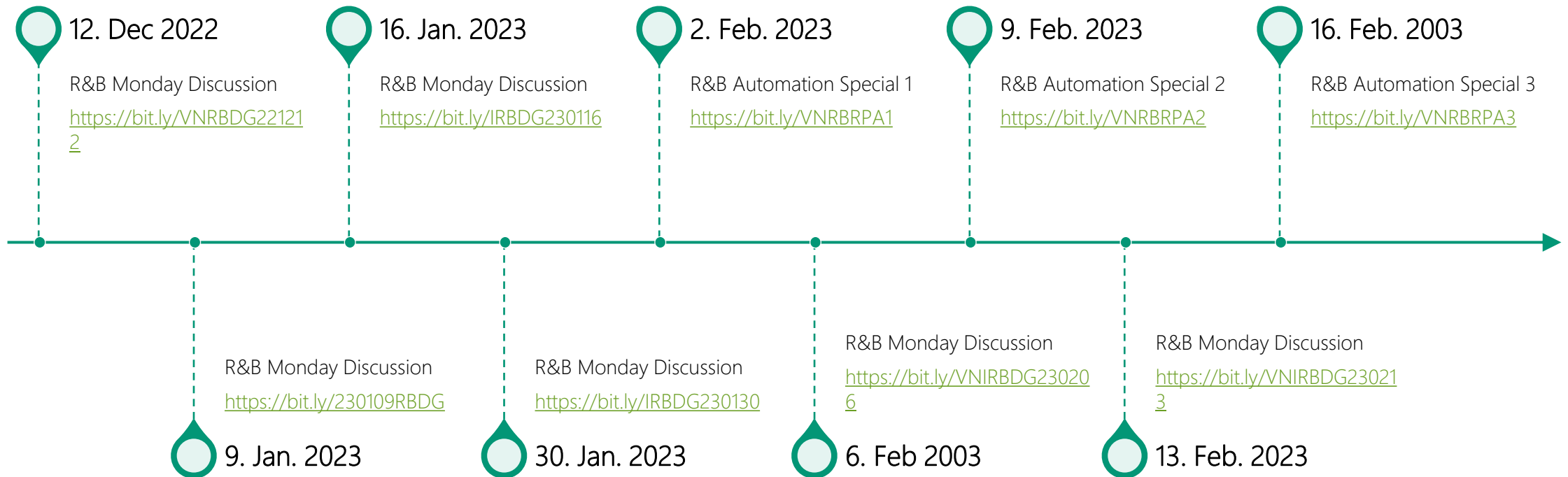
- No previous experience in debt recovery is needed, however you must have some face to face customer service experience and be good with numbers.
- Proactive, confident and customer focused, you must have the ability to communicate effectively with customers / service users, remaining calm and being able to influence behaviour in order to negotiate win-win solutions resulting in debt being recovered. You will also need to adopt a partnership approach to service delivery, liaising with; service directorates, internal teams, solicitors and debt collection agencies.
- Public or private sector experience is equally valued to deal with our business / residential customers. A sound background in debt recovery with experience of customer service in a finance operations environment is a distinct advantage.

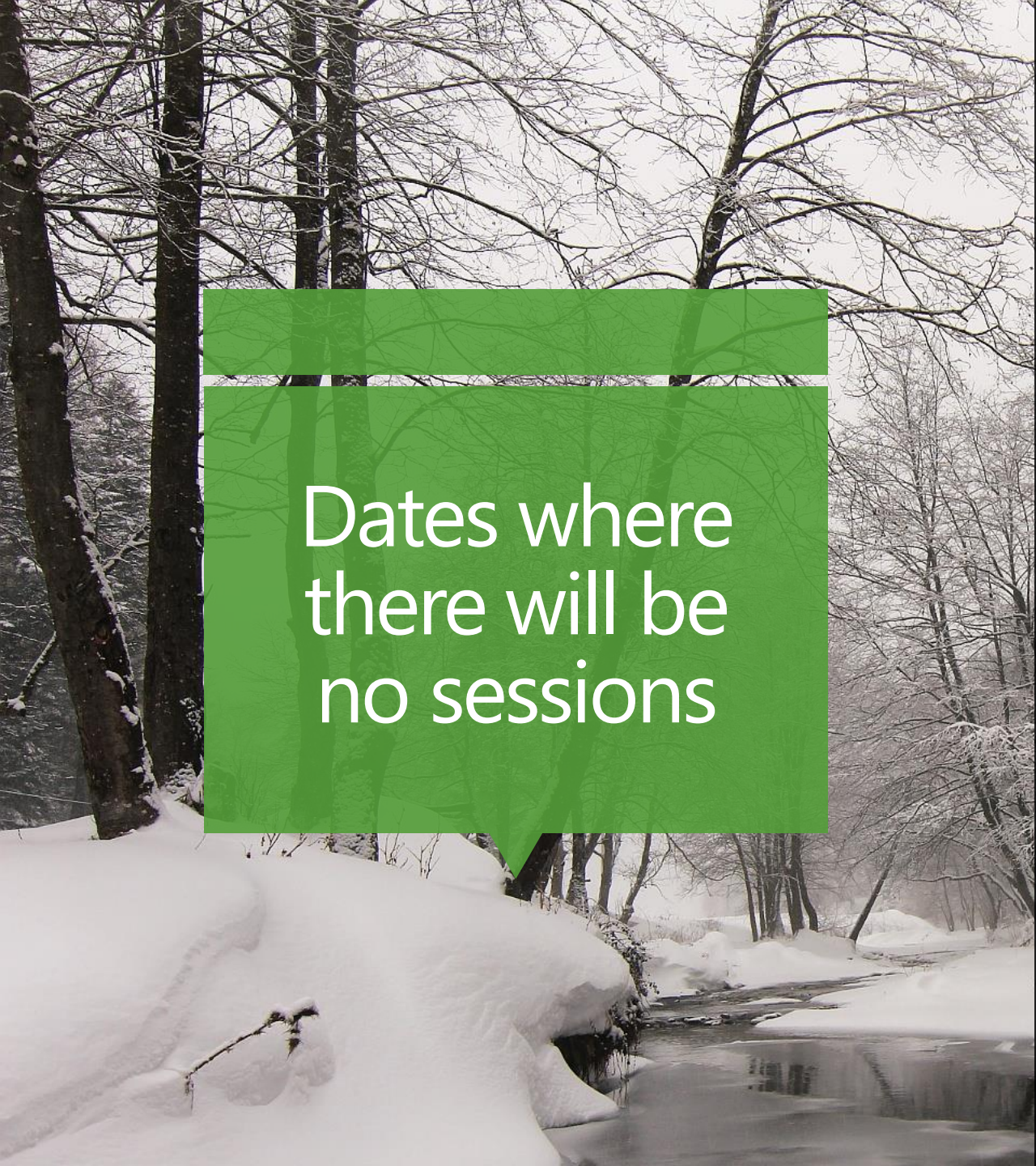
[To view full details and to apply, click here](#)



Other Information

Previous Recordings





Dates where
there will be
no sessions

- 20 March 2023
- 10 April 2023
- 1 May 2023
- 8 May 2023
- 10 May 2023
- 28 August 2023
- 18 December 2023
- 25 December 2023
- 1 January 2024

Visionary Network



- Visionary Network is a not for profit organisation, whose objective is to encourage thought leadership and good practice in the field of public service.
- We are independent and will draw on views, ideas and practices from any practitioner and/or organisation committed to public service.
- We encourage debate, and the fair exchange of ideas, viewpoints and philosophies.
- Any products we do produce will be for the betterment of society, public sector led and if costed will reflect our not for profit values.
- Our focus is on improving the knowledge, health, environment and lives of our citizens through better administration and access to services.