

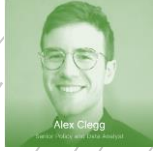
Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

27 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

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

Discussion Points



Free School Meals



Performance Bonuses

“

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

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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

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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>

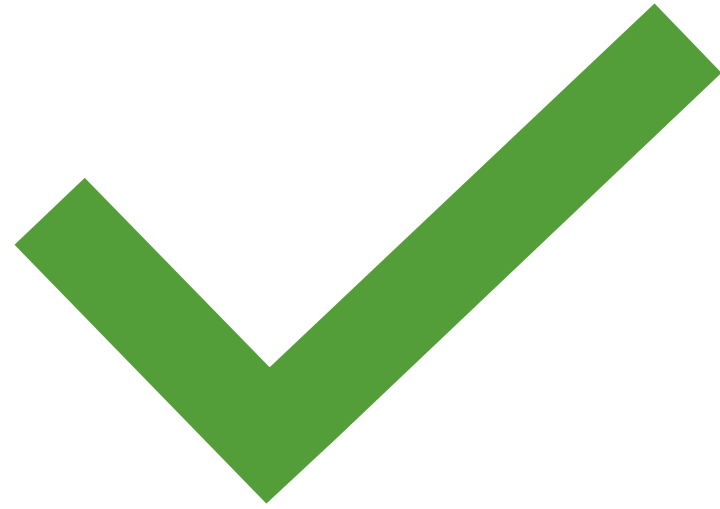
Links to the recordings and the slide packs plus other relevant documents will be posted into both the WhatsApp group and in the Teams Channel and emailed to those who attended and subscribers to the group.

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.

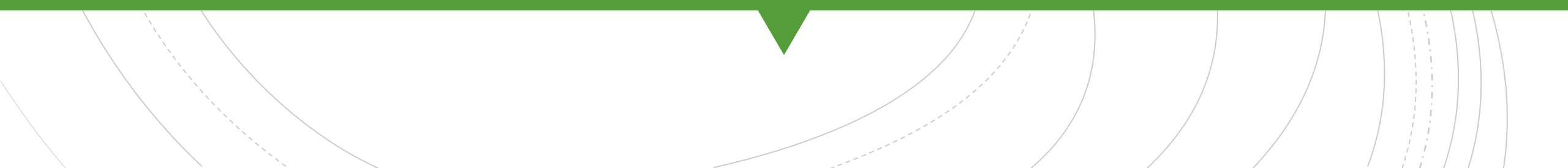


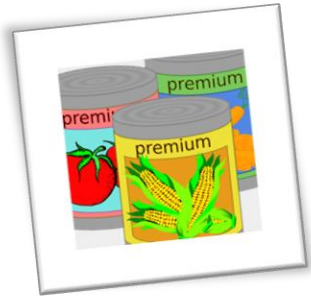
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Discussion Points





London: Free School Meals

- London Mayor Sadiq Khan is launching a £130m scheme to provide free school meals for every primary school pupil in the capital for the next academic year
- The scheme is estimated to benefit over 270,000 children and save families £440 per child over the year
- The scheme will be implemented in September and will run during term-time only
- The funding for the scheme has been made possible by higher than expected council tax and business rates returns
- Other London councils have already implemented similar schemes
- Wales will launch its own scheme in 2024
- Charities and teaching unions have called for wider support from central government
- Countries with universal FSM: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, The Netherlands, and France





Sweden

- In Sweden, national efforts to provide free schools meals started in the early 20th century, and comprised the majority of schoolchildren since the 1970s.
- All children in the ages 7-16 and to most students ages 16-19 are offered school meals on a daily basis.
- Schools and municipalities are responsible for quality assurance.
- Nutritional content and other aspects of school meals are evaluated from a holistic perspective.
- SkolmatSverige (School Food Sweden) is a web-based tool used by schools to manage six areas of meal quality.
 - Tool is free from commercial influence and was developed by scientific institutes.
 - Approximately half of all Swedish elementary schools and 6/10 municipalities have used the tool since 2012.
 - Schools using the tool have improved nutritional quality, service, pedagogic lunch, and environmental impact.



Advantages of Sweden's Free School Meal Scheme

- The scheme is funded by the government and helps to ensure that all children have access to healthy food during their school day.
- It helps to reduce the disparities in health outcomes between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Studies have shown that the scheme has improved educational outcomes for students, as well as reducing the amount of food insecurity in the country.
- The scheme also helps to promote a healthier diet in children, and teaches them about the importance of healthy eating.



Stats

- In Sweden, the free school meal scheme covers around one million children, representing about 80% of all school meals served in the country.
- The average cost of a meal in Sweden is about SEK 77 (£6.13), with the government covering about 75% of the cost.
 - London is investing £2.31 to each meal)
- In 2018, Swedish schools served around 100 million meals, including free school meals.
- Swedish school meal programs have been proven to reduce the risk of malnutrition in children, improve overall health and academic performance, and reduce school absenteeism.
- The Swedish government invests around SEK 5 billion (£398 million) annually in school meal programs.



Norway Free School Meal Scheme

- Introduction of free school meals in Norway began in 1997
- Aim of free school meal scheme is to provide quality and healthy meals for children
- All public primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schools in Norway provide free meals to students
- Financed by the Norwegian government
- Nutritious meals are served each day that meet the national dietary guidelines
- Meals are prepared in-house or outsourced to a caterer
- The scheme is not only about providing meals but also about teaching children about nutrition and health
- The scheme is closely monitored and evaluated to ensure it meets the goals of providing healthy meals
- The scheme has been successful in providing quality and healthy meals for children, as well as helping to reduce childhood obesity in Norway



Finland's Free School Meal Scheme

- Finland provides free meals to all students attending public schools
- All primary and secondary school students are eligible to receive free meals
- Meals are provided at breakfast, lunch and dinner
- Meals are nutritious and meet the national nutrition guidelines
- Meals are served with a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables
- The program is funded by the government and supported by local authorities
- The program has been credited with improving student health and academic performance
- It has also been linked to a reduction in childhood obesity and food insecurity



Denmark's Free School Meal Scheme

- The Danish government introduced a free school meal scheme in 2014
- The scheme was introduced to ensure that all children have access to healthy, nutritious meals
- All primary and lower secondary school students in Denmark now receive a free meal during the school day
- The scheme has improved children's health and nutrition
- It has also reduced the financial burden on families
- It has been successful in reducing the number of children who go hungry at school
- The Danish free school meal scheme has proven to be successful in providing children with access to healthy, nutritious meals
- It has proven to be beneficial for both children's health and families' finances
- The scheme is an example of how governments can provide support to families and ensure that all children have access to healthy meals.



Germany's Free School Meal Scheme

- Free meals for all children attending public schools
- The program is funded by the federal government
- Schools are reimbursed for the cost of meals
- Parents are not required to pay for meals
- Improved health and academic performance of children
- Reduced poverty and food insecurity
- Increased access to healthy foods for children
- Improved food security in vulnerable populations



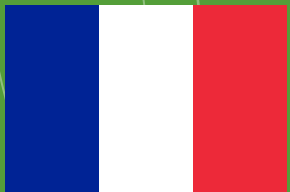
Netherlands' Free School Meal Scheme

- The Netherlands Free School Meal Scheme is a government initiative that provides free meals to students in primary and secondary schools.
- It is available to children aged 4-18 who are enrolled in a Dutch public school.
- The scheme covers breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks throughout the day.
- The scheme ensures that all students have access to nutritious meals regardless of their family's financial situation.
- This scheme was introduced in 2017 and has helped to improve student's health and well-being, as well as their academic performance.



France's Free School Meal Scheme

- The Free School Meal Scheme (FMS) provides free meals to all school children in France, regardless of their social background.
- The scheme aims to fight against malnutrition, reduce school dropouts, and provide access to healthy meals to all children.
- The meals are provided to children in preschool, primary, and secondary schools, and are made with locally sourced, seasonal ingredients.
- The meals are designed to provide a balanced diet and meet the nutritional needs of growing children.
- The FMS has been successful in helping to reduce food insecurity and social inequalities, and has received praise from the World Food Programme.



Food Banks

- New research by the Independent Food Aid Network (Ifan) found that almost 90% of food banks surveyed reported increased demand in December 2022 and January 2023 compared with a year earlier
- The Trussell Trust, which with more than 1,300 food banks is the UK's biggest provider, expects this winter to have been its busiest ever
- Food inflation is at 16.7% and the cost of gas is nearly 130% higher than a year ago
- More than 80% reported supporting a significant number of people for the first time, while many said demand was growing among pensioners and families with babies
- Cost of living increases were given as the biggest problem, followed by inadequate wages and waiting times for initial universal credit payments
- A third of independent food banks said benefit sanctions and deductions were a driving factor
- Many food banks are also reporting issues with burnout among staff and volunteers
- Half of NHS trusts providing or planning food banks for staff

A quarter of UK households are regularly short of cash

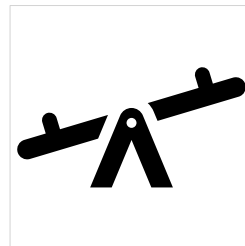
- A survey by a group of charities has found that 24% of people in the UK run out of money for essentials either most months or most days, with 67% believing the government is not doing enough to address the cost of living crisis.

Job centre staff to get bonuses for helping people into work.

- The Government is setting up a Job Centre League Table and giving £250 bonuses to staff who get the most people into work.
- This is part of a pilot scheme in 60 job centres aimed to get more Universal Credit claimants into employment.
- Staff at the top performing job centres will receive £250 each and the next best performing staff will get £125 each.
- The pilot will make it compulsory for Universal Credit claimants who have been on the benefit for thirteen weeks to visit a job centre every weekday for a fortnight for intensive support.
- The PCS union's DWP staff have recently been on strike over pay. They have been offered a 2% pay increase for 2022-23 but are demanding a rise of 10%.

Performance Related Bonuses

- Are Performance Related Bonuses a good thing or a bad thing?



Pros & cons



Stats

Pros and Cons

- Good Points of Performance Related Bonuses

1. Motivates employees to work harder and strive for better results.
2. Can help to improve productivity and efficiency.
3. Encourages teamwork and collaboration.
4. Helps to increase employee engagement.
5. Rewards employees for their hard work and effort.

- Bad Points of Performance Related Bonuses

1. Can create a competitive atmosphere between employees.
2. Can lead to resentment if bonuses are not distributed fairly.
3. Can lead to employees focusing on the bonus rather than their work.
4. Can create a sense of entitlement among employees.
5. Can be too costly for the organisation if performance goals are not met.

The Stats

- In the UK, performance-related bonuses vary widely by industry, job role, and company size.
- According to a survey of over 2,000 UK employees, conducted in May 2019, nearly two-thirds (62%) of UK employees receive a performance-related bonus, with the median bonus being £1,500. The average bonus was £2,100.
- The highest percentage of employees receiving a performance-related bonus was in the banking, finance, and insurance industries, with 79% reporting they receive a bonus, followed by the IT industry, with 76%.
- The highest median bonus was in the banking, finance, and insurance industries, at £2,500, followed by the construction and engineering industries, both with a median bonus of £2,000.
- The lowest median bonus was in the hospitality and tourism industry, at £500, followed by the education industry, with a median bonus of £700.
- The highest average bonus was in the banking, finance, and insurance industries, at £3,000, followed by the IT industry, with an average bonus of £2,800.
- The lowest average bonus was in the hospitality and tourism industry, at £250, followed by the education industry,



Other News

Housing

More people own their home outright in the UK (8.2 million) than have a mortgage (7 million)

4.61 Million Private Renters

Just over 4 Million Social Renters

Rogue UK landlords con taxpayers out of millions with 'ghost tenants'

- Rogue landlords are conning the government out of millions of pounds by fraudulently claiming housing benefits for so-called “ghost tenants”, it has been revealed.
- Criminal gangs are among those buying cheap property to convert into housing for vulnerable people, in some cases claiming welfare payments for tenants who do not live there.
- Police have said that owners of a collection of these properties are making up to £500,000 a month by providing supported exempt accommodation for people such as care leavers and domestic abuse survivors.

Rogue UK landlords con taxpayers out of millions with 'ghost tenants'

- Now it has emerged that some landlords are also claiming housing benefits for people who have moved out of the property, or never existed in the first place, known as “ghost tenants”.
- Crisis workers in Birmingham have reported vulnerable people feeling more safe sleeping on the streets than in exempt accommodation.
- Providers make money by buying up cheap property with a mortgage for about £800 a month, then carving up the house into multiple bedrooms which they can rent out for £1,000 a month each
 - paid for by enhanced housing benefit. These profits are then used to buy more properties to convert into houses of multiple occupancy.

DWP PIP Warning: Thousands of Claimants Have Payments Stopped.

- The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has revealed that tens of thousands of people have lost their disability benefit due to issues with returning their review forms.
- Up to 42,000 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claims were disallowed in 2021, an increase of almost 300% from 2020.
- It is unclear how many people challenged the decision that they had failed to return their form on time and Benefits and Work expresses concern that the number of claimants allegedly failing to return their forms is far outstripping any rises in awards.
- The DWP spokesperson stressed that their priority is to ensure people receive the benefits they are entitled to as soon as possible.

Local government 2023-24 pay offer announced

- The National Employers for local government services have announced a "full and final pay offer" for 2023-24 which would represent a 9.42% pay rise for the lowest-paid workers and a 3.88% increase for higher salaries.
- This follows a similar pay deal for 2022-23, accepted in November, which raised the lowest-paid worker's salaries by 22%.
- The three largest unions representing council workers had called for wages to rise by 12.7%, citing that wages have been frozen or below inflation since 2010, effectively decreasing their wages by 25% in real terms.

TUC analysis: Women work two months for free

- Analysis of official data by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has revealed that women earn on average 15.8% less than men and effectively work for free for 54 days a year.
- This gender pay gap is widest for older women, with those aged 50-59 suffering a 20.8% pay gap, and is further exacerbated for women after having children.
- The unions' umbrella body is demanding the government do more to close the gap and the government has taken action to support women at work.



Clive Savage

23 February at 20:05 · 🌐

Marie Antoinette, 1789: "Let them eat cake"
Therese Coffey, 2023: "Let them eat turnips"





BUSINESS SMART
SOLUTIONS LTD



Job Adverts

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

Hackney

Benefits & Housing Needs Officer

We are seeking an experienced Benefits & Housing Needs Officer, who has experience of processing housing register applications for residents who wish to join Hackney's waiting list, applicants must have experience of allocations, homelessness and dealing with vulnerable residents or residents with complex needs. 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

- Experience Of Operating A Personal Computer Using Software For Accounting, Allocations, Communications Or Similar Purposes
- Knowledge of housing options and advice, and an understanding of housing remedies including housing allocations
- Ability To Communicate Effectively Both Orally & In Writing To A Wide Range Of People
- Applicants must have experience of allocations, homelessness and dealing with vulnerable residents or residents with complex needs
- Ability To Organise Own Workload To Meet Targets & Deadlines
- Ability To Work As Part Of A Team And On Own Initiative
- Previous experience in similar role
- Experience of processing housing register applications, social housing allocations and homelessness

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

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](#)

Remote

Revenues Officer (Northgate/NEC)

We are working with a Local Authority in the South East to source a fully remote Revenues Officer to assist the Revenues Team with incoming phone calls and clear outstanding Council Tax & NNDR correspondence. The role will be full-time (36 hours a week), working from home, to start as soon as possible. **Experience of NEC(Northgate) is essential.**

Duties will include dealing with customers on the telephone and also working from daily post, emails and online forms, as well as:

- Establishing the CT & NNDR liability
- Creating and updating CT & NNDR accounts, including (but not limited to):
- Change of addresses, determinations and awards including Single Person Discount, Small Business Rates Relief (SBR), Retail Discount, Charitable Rate Relief and Discretionary Rate Relief
- Working in all areas of Revenues (billing & recovery)
- Setting up and amending Direct Debits
- Making payment arrangements
- Taking payments

Requirements

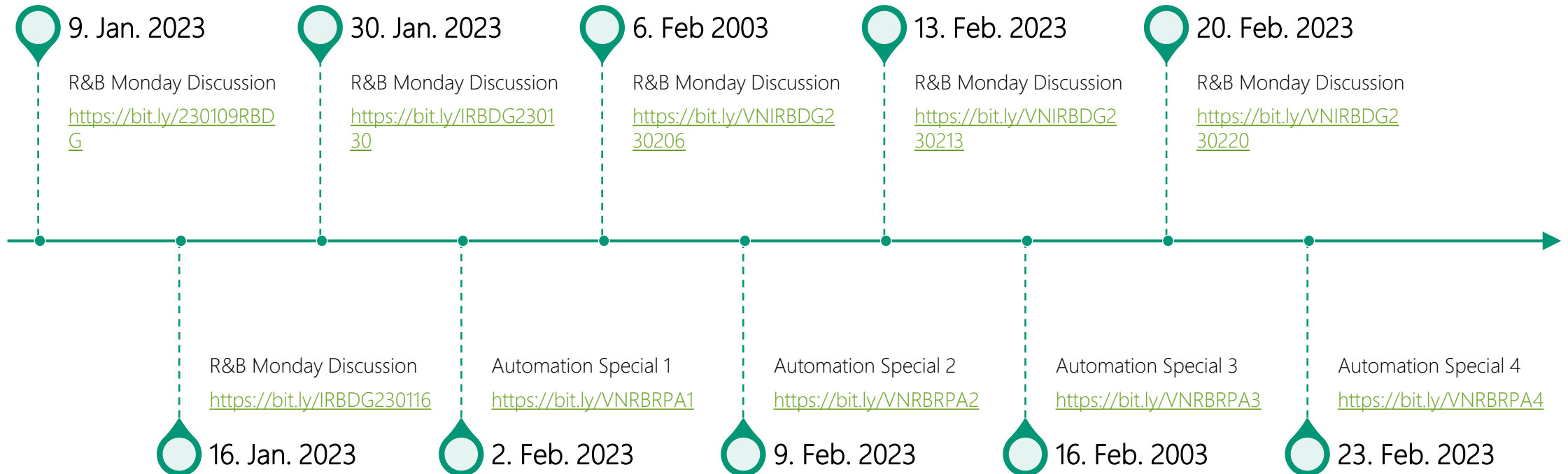
- A minimum of 3 years billing & recovery experience
- A minimum of 3 years NEC (Northgate) experience

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



Other Information

Previous Recordings





Dates where
there will be
no sessions

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

The Subsidy Claim and Audit Requirements

The Subsidy Claim and Audit Requirements

For the first time we will be extending the length of this course to the equivalent of one and half days. Each course will comprise of three sessions.

We will be delivering three of the one and half day courses via MS Teams, one course for each of England, Wales and Scotland on the following dates; -

16 – 16 March – England;

Day one – 9:45 am to 12:30 pm and 13:30 pm to 16:00 pm

Day two – 09:45 am to 12:45 pm

The Subsidy Claim and Audit Requirements

Since the introduction of various welfare reforms and despite the continued roll-out of universal credit, scrutiny on the HB Subsidy claim has increased year on year, so a good understanding of the HB Subsidy requirements is essential to ensure an accurate subsidy claim and maximisation of income.

Remember, any costs incurred by the LA that are not reimbursed by the DWP or losses due to financial penalties becomes a charge on the General Fund.

The Subsidy Claim and Audit Requirements

The course is split between an examination of –

the administrative and audit requirements;

those cells that are benefit-type specific, being non-housing revenue account, (non-HRA), housing revenue account (HRA), and rent allowance (RA) broken down into the many rent schemes currently in operation, which includes an examination of temporary accommodation and exempt accommodation; and

those cells that are common to all benefit-types being backdating, overpayments, extended payments and local scheme.

This course is suitable for those with no or limited knowledge of Subsidy, including senior assessors, or those who are experienced in Subsidy and looking for a refresh of their knowledge.

The fee per delegate for the whole one and half day course is –

£225 plus VAT for TBD members;

£295* plus VAT for non-members,

Numbers are limited to ensure maximum learning.

The Subsidy Claim and Audit Requirements

*Non-members who become members within three months of the date of the training will receive a refund of the £70 difference per delegate that attended from the 1st member subscription invoice.

To request a booking form, or to ask any questions about the training course or any other courses offered by LA Directories Ltd, please contact kim.larkin@ladirectories.com

This course is also delivered as an in-house course, specifically targeting issues experienced by the particular LA.

We also deliver a very popular in-house course – Subsidy for Assessors

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.