

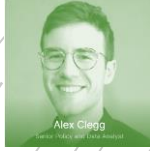
Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

6 March 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 Borough 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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Discussion Points



HB Recovery



Rail Fare Increases



Rough Sleeping



R&B Software

“

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.

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“

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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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

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mg@malcolmgardner.com



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Join the discussion

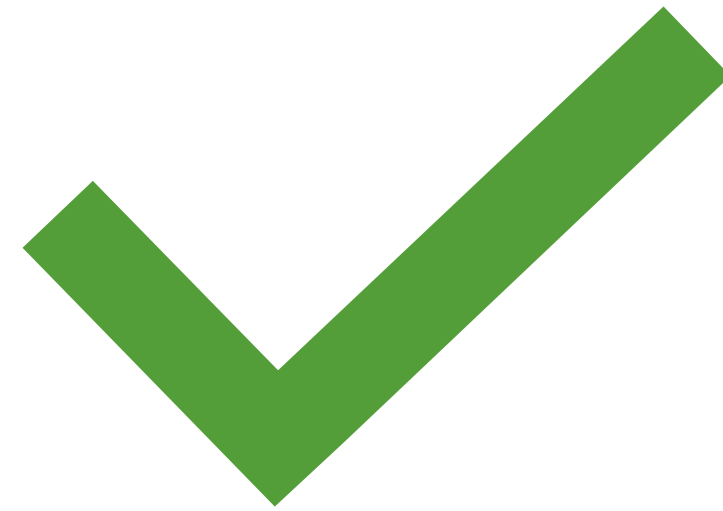
Each Monday lunchtime, a panel of professionals leads a discussion on revenue and benefits administration issues. The panel consists of council & housing officers, policy advisors, and analysts.

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

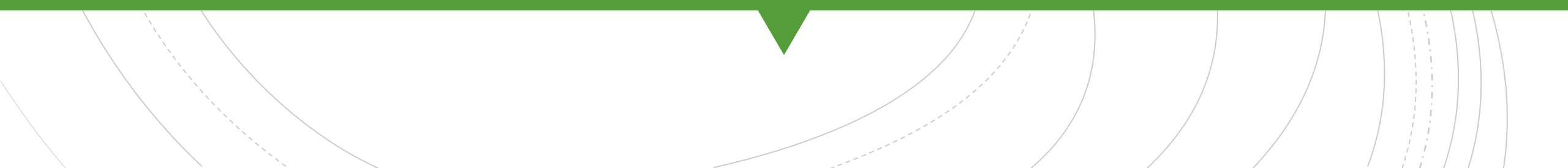
You can join in the discussion during the week (and start some new ones) by joining our WhatsApp group: <https://bit.ly/3Qjrkqe>

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.



Discussion Points



Pre Market Engagement - Revenues and Benefits Solution

- Leicester City Council in advance of their current contract that expires in November 2024 are commencing a process to gather market intelligence on what market options there are around for the provision of an IT solution for the administration of: Council Tax Business Rates Housing Benefits Council Tax Support Discretionary Payments and Sundry Debtors, and Digital Self Service Portal
- The Council are interested in understanding the market, and whether vendors can supply all (our preferred option) or one of the components they are looking to replace.
- They are not averse to using different solutions for each of these channels but would expect they would be channelled through the same provider.
- As a principle the council is embracing digitalisation moving towards streamlining, automation and channel adoption, with customer self-service at every opportunity.

HB debt recovery

During the first two quarters of FYE 2023:

at the start of Q2 of FYE 2023, there was £1.73 billion outstanding overpaid HB – £107 million less than at the start of Q2 of FYE 2022

LAs identified £206 million overpaid HB – £2 million less than the first two quarters of FYE 2022

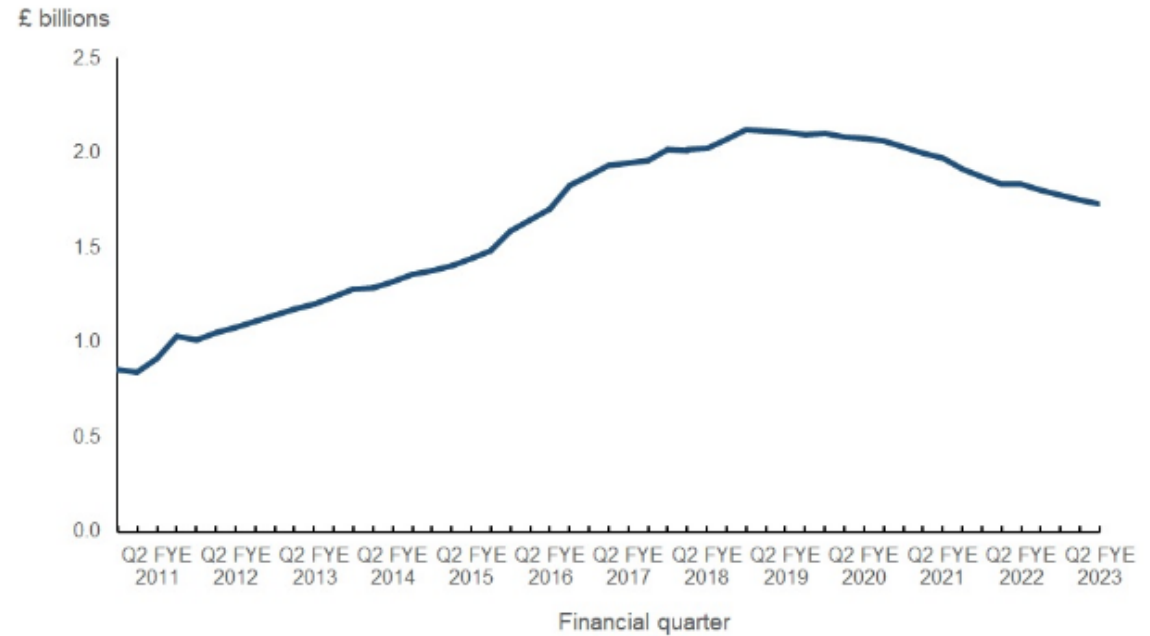
LAs recovered £198 million overpaid HB – £18 million less than the first two quarters of FYE 2022

LAs wrote off £32 million overpaid HB – £5 million more than the first two quarters of FYE 2022



HB Debt Recovery

Total outstanding HB overpayments in Great Britain from Q1 FYE 2010 to Q2 FYE 2023 (£ billions)



HB Debt Recovery

Region	Total outstanding HB over payments (£ millions)	% of GB total
Great Britain	1,730	100%
North East	57	3%
North West	170	10%
Yorkshire and The Humber	91	5%
East Midlands	80	5%
West Midlands	153	9%
East	117	7%
London	596	34%
South East	191	11%
South West	93	5%
Wales	46	3%
Scotland	136	8%

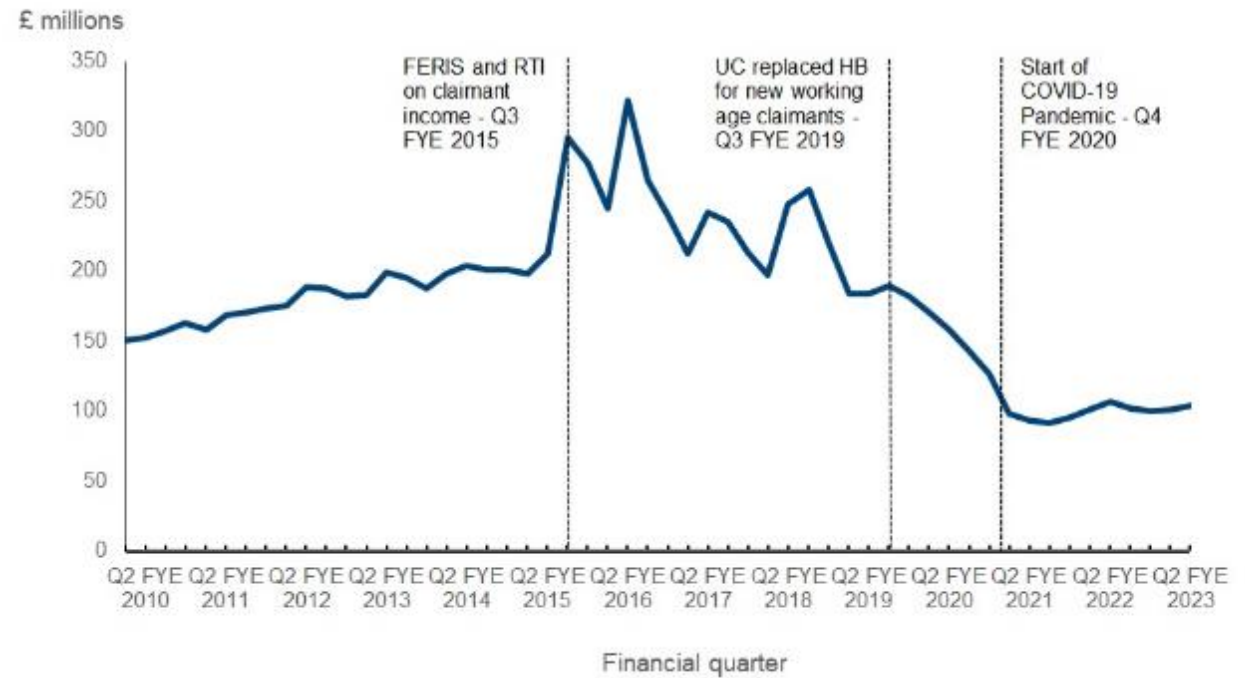


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HB Debt Recovery

HB overpayments identified in Great Britain, from Q1 of FYE 2010 to Q2 of FYE 2023 (£ millions)

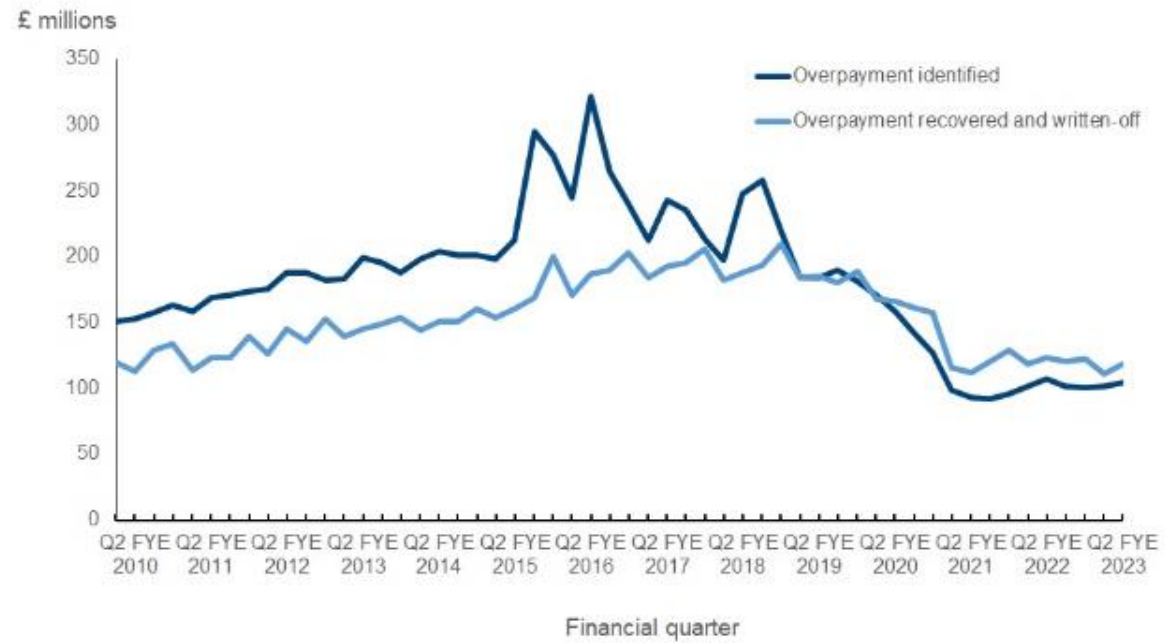


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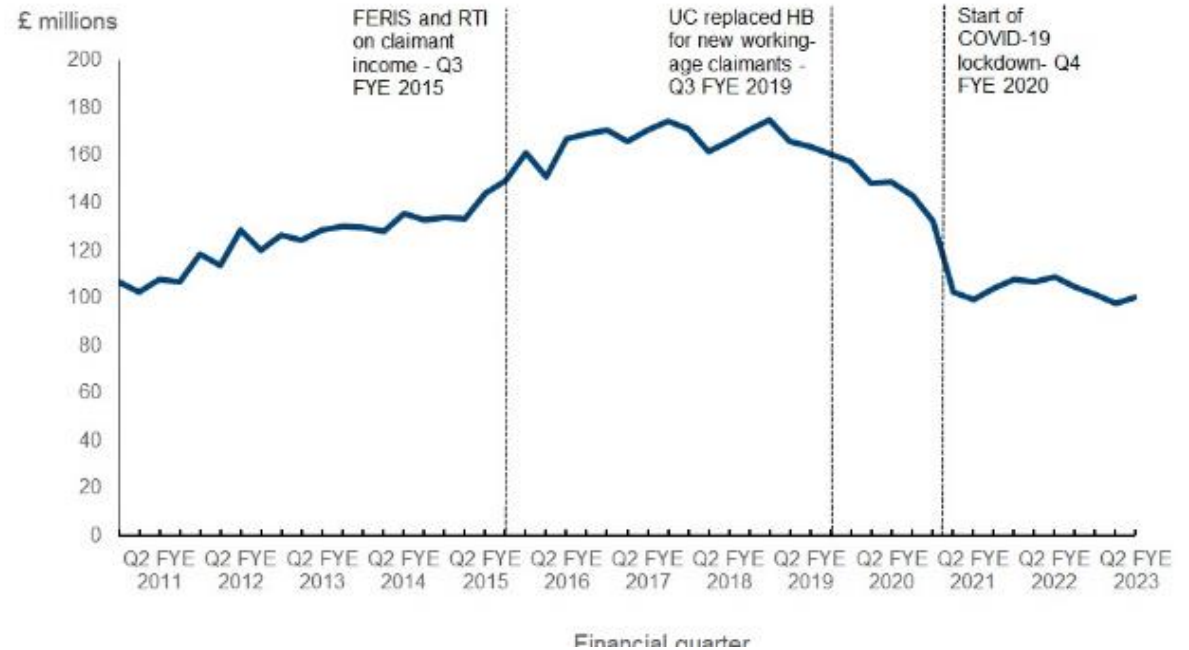
HB Debt Recovery

Amount of overpaid HB identified / recovered and written-off by LAs from Q1 FYE 2010 to Q2 FYE 2023 (£ millions)



HB Debt Recovery

HB overpayments recovered in Great Britain from Q1 of FYE 2010 to Q2 of FYE 2023 (£ millions)



HB Debt Recovery

Region	Total HB overpayments recovered (£ millions)	% of GB total
Great Britain	198	100%
North East	7	3%
North West	19	10%
Yorkshire and The Humber	11	6%
East Midlands	11	5%
West Midlands	26	13%
East	15	8%
London	56	28%
South East	25	12%
South West	13	6%
Wales	6	3%
Scotland	10	5%

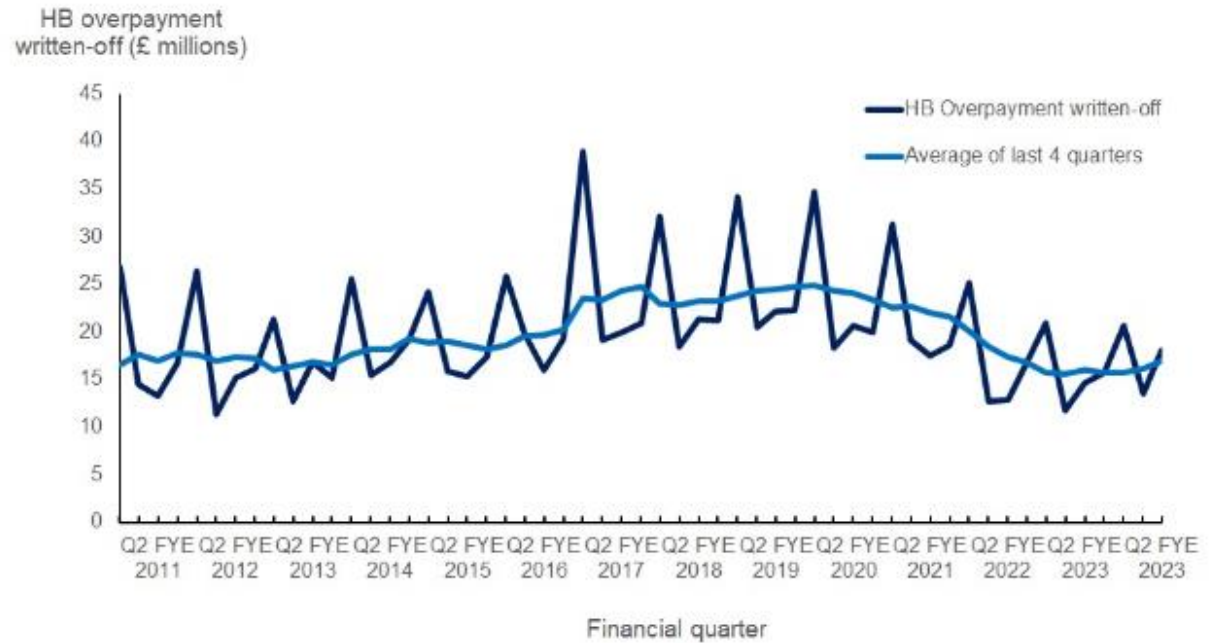


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HB Debt Recovery

HB overpayments written off in Great Britain, from Q4 of FYE 2010 to Q2 of FYE 2023 (£ millions)



HB Debt Recovery

Region	Average HB overpayment newly identified per claimant per month
Great Britain	£13.43
England	£14.51
North East	£7.59
North West	£9.23
Yorkshire and The Humber	£8.70
East Midlands	£10.52
West Midlands	£18.18
East	£11.46
London	£24.55
South East	£14.57
South West	£11.73
Wales	£8.11
Scotland	£7.11



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Rail Fares

- Rail fares in England and Wales have increased by up to 5.9%, despite months of poor services and strikes.
- These regulated fares, which include most season tickets, travelcards and off-peak returns, are above last year's 4.8% hike but below the rate of inflation.
- The government said the increase was a "fair balance" between passengers and taxpayers, while campaigners called for reform due to unreliable services.

Rail Fares

Some examples

Route	Old price	Increase	New price
Brighton to London Terminals	£5,304	+5.9%	£5,616
Huddersfield to Manchester	£2,908	+5.8%	£3,076
Swansea to Cardiff	£1,956	+5.7%	£2,068



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- These regulated fares, which include most season tickets, travelcards and off-peak returns, are above last year's 4.8% hike but below the rate of inflation.
- The government said the increase was a "fair balance" between passengers and taxpayers, while campaigners called for reform due to unreliable services.
- The Scottish government has yet to decide whether to raise general fares and suspend peak fares, while public transport fares in Northern Ireland will rise by 7% from Monday.

The State of Rough Sleeping in England

- For the first time since 2017, the number of people sleeping rough in England has increased.
- A snapshot of a single night in autumn 2022 found 3,069 people sleeping rough, which is up 626 (26%) from the previous year.
- The number is also 74% higher than in 2010 when the figures began.

Reaction to the Increase

- The increase in rough sleeping has been described as a "massive, collective failure" by a charity.
- The Homeless Link CEO attributed the rise to the cost-of-living crisis, which has exacerbated long-standing drivers of homelessness.
- The Mayor of London called for urgent action from the government to keep homelessness services open by increasing funding.

Regional Breakdown

- Rough sleeping has increased in every region of England year-on-year.
- The biggest increase was in London, where the rate rose by 34%.
- Almost half of all people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn are in London and the South East.

Looking Ahead

- The government has published its Ending Rough Sleeping For Good strategy in September, restating its manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament.
- While rough sleeping remains lower than pre-pandemic levels, there is still more to do to end rough sleeping for good.
- Urgent action is needed to address the cost-of-living crisis and restore the social security safety net to prevent people from becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.



Other News

The Courts have introduced a "common platform case management system"

It is an online case management system used by all court jurisdictions in the UK.

The platform allows court professionals to efficiently manage cases and documents, track progress, and share information in a secure environment.

- Making it easier to collaborate on cases.

It also has an integrated document management and automated workflows, which enables users to work efficiently and accurately.

The platform is designed to be user-friendly, allowing court users to access the system from any location with an internet connection.

- It is secure, reliable, and compliant with data protection regulations.

The UK Courts Common Platform has been designed to improve the efficiency of the courts and enhance the user experience.

[Watch a recording of a webinar for defence professionals](#)

[Guidance on accessing and uploading case materials using Common Platform](#)

[How to use the common Platform](#)

Fraud Investigations & Criminal Prosecutions



Jobcentre Plus is looking to collaborate with local public and voluntary agencies in order to help those who are unemployed and on benefits to gain employment.



There are opportunities available that aim to target certain measures or groups.



For more information contact [service leaders](#)

Jobcentre Plus: opportunities for public and voluntary organisations

DHP 2023/24

- DHP funding is confirmed at £100 million per year for England and Wales for the financial years ending March 2024 and March 2025 to ensure consistency and certainty in planning delivery over the next two years.
- Given broader economic pressures, LAs will receive the same allocation level as in FYE March 2023.
- LA allocations for FYE March 2025 will be announced before the end of FYE 2024. It is expected LAs will receive the same amount as FYE March 2024.
- However, there may be a slight adjustment if any LAs merge.
- Unspent funds from FYE March 2023 and March 2024 cannot be carried forward.
- A spreadsheet of the allocations can be found on <http://www.visionarynetwork.co.uk>



Council Tax Reform

- The UK government has confirmed that it has no plans to reform the council tax system despite longstanding calls from experts and local government organisations.
- Local government minister Lee Rowley acknowledged that the system has flaws, but stated that the government is prioritising stability and is not proposing a wholesale reform during this parliamentary term.
- Economists have criticised the council tax system for being highly regressive due to tariffs being set based on property values in 1991.
- The Institute for Fiscal Studies has called for a revaluation and broader reform of council tax, particularly as valuations are over 30 years old.
- The continued reliance on council tax to meet spending gaps has been criticised as disappointing by the Local Government Association.

Home Sellers Price Reductions

- UK home sellers are having to cut an average of £14,000 from the asking price in order to attract 'price-sensitive' buyers.
- This is due to the market cooling and weaker demand, with more than 40% of homes listed for sale having their values lowered.
- Separate research from Halifax highlights the sizable house price gains made by homeowners during the past three years, with owners of larger homes seeing the biggest gains from the 'race for space'.
- However, London flat owners have gained the least, with the average price of a flat up by only 3.8%, or just under £10,000, over the three years.

Pension shortfall of £250,000 for self- employed

- A report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies warns that self-employed workers are not saving enough for their pensions, and risk having a shortfall of £250,000 in retirement.
- This is due to often not increasing contributions even when their income rises, as opposed to employees whose pension payments rise with their salary.
- The most common contribution from the self-employed is only £600 a year, leading to an inadequate pension pot for a moderate retirement lifestyle.

Quote of the Week

“If we have **data**, let’s look at **data**. If all we have are **opinions**, let’s go with mine.” — Jim Barksdale

James Love Barksdale (born January 24, 1943) is an **American executive who served as the president and CEO of Netscape** from January 1995 until the company merged with AOL in March 1999.



Kevin Stewart

- Quick Update:
 - Council Tax
 - Business Rates
 - General



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

Remote

Grants Officer

Our client in London is seeking a Grants Officer on a fully remote basis.

The Grants Officer, reporting to the Team Leader is responsible for the effective and efficient analysis and recommendations for COVID-19 Business Grant applications and applications for Local Welfare Assistance (Household Support Fund).

The Grant Officer will use the Dynamics system, to update notes, record progress of the application, and detail a determination of the outcome.

This is an initial 3 month contract, working full-time hours, to start as soon as possible. Pay rate is £18.89 (umbrella).

Requirements

- Experience of Financial Assessments (essential)
- A background of working in a Local Authority (desirable)
- Revenues & Benefits experience (desirable)

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

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](#)

Remote

Revenues Officer (Northgate/NEC)

We are looking for a Revenues Officer to join our client's team to facilitate and administer the process of billing, recovery and enforcement for Council Tax, Sundry Debts and Business Rates using the NEC (Northgate) software. You will also ensure the collection & recovery of Council Tax, Sundry Debts and Business Rates in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

Requirements

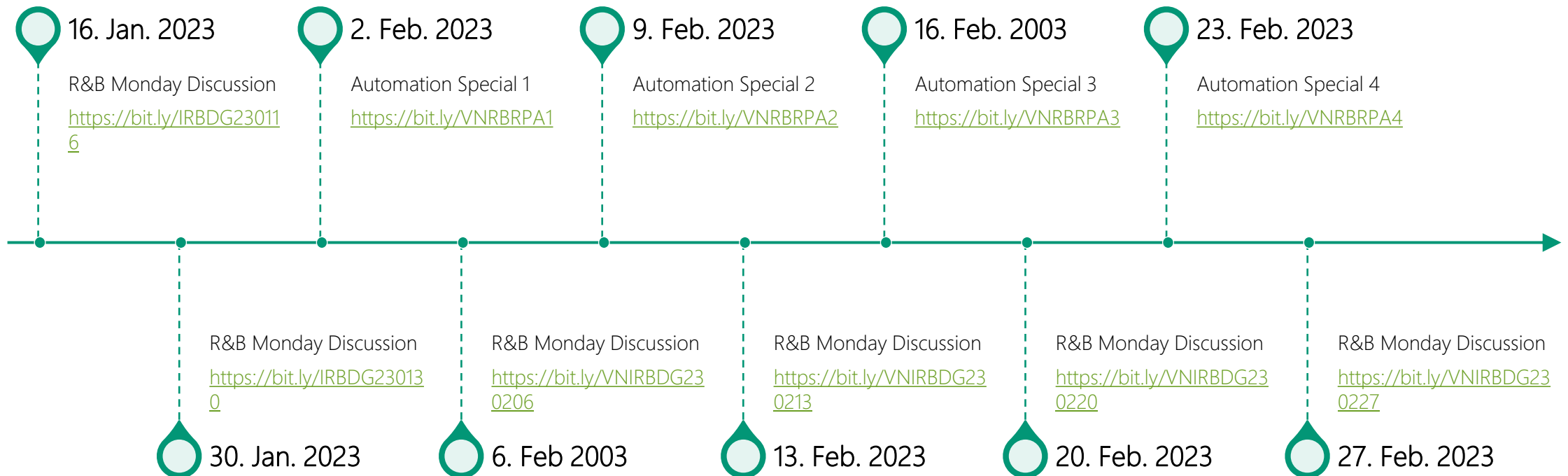
- Knowledge of Local Authority (or similar) billing, recovery and invoicing systems and procedures
- Knowledge of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support procedures and legislation including the Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Knowledge of Revenues billing and recovery statutory legislation
- Knowledge of third party organisations legislation, e.g Enforcement Agents, Citizen Advice Bureau & Insolvency.
- Knowledge of the Data Protection Act 2018, specifically around GDPR and the impact this has on the Revenues Service
- Knowledge of internal Department's legislation, Acts and processes to help with the collection of Sundry Debts
- Experience of operating billing, recovery and invoicing systems and Enforcement of Debt.
- Experience of debt recovery in a Local Authority role or similar

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



Other Information

Previous Recordings



In Partnership with

LA Directories Limited

Slide packs available at www.visionarynetwork.co.uk

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



Dates where
there will be
no sessions



Other Workshops



Discounted Data Protection Training

- Data Privacy Advisory Service have the following courses on offer with a 25% discount:
 - - [BCS Practitioner Certificate in Data Protection](#) - 8th March
 - - [The Effective DPO](#) - 21st March
 - - [BCS Practitioner Certificate in Freedom of Information](#) - 19th April
 -
- They also have the following course on offer with a 50% discount:
 - - [Data Champion Training](#) - 16th March
 -
- There are many other courses which they can offer you a 20% discount on which include how to manage and redact Subject Access Requests, the Role of the Data Champion (for those line managers, or data champions), Foundation in FOI and many more. They can also provide bespoke training on and off site if you want a more tailored course for your team.
- If you have remaining budget left for the year, DPAS can offer training credits for next year, so you can utilise your budget.
- If you'd like to have a quick [chat](#) about your requirements, then please do get in touch with DPAS.

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.