

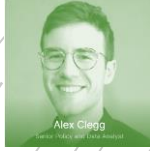
Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

20 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

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

Discussion Points



New, New Tech & SVB



Policy in Practice Report

A request



- Ferret, EntitledTo, Policy in Practice & InBest all have to update the CTR element of their calculators. All three have asked if you would you be kind enough to upload copies of your 2023/24 schemes to bit.ly/CTR2324
- This will really help those vulnerable families who rely on their calculators for advice to increase their incomes.

“
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/>

End

Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Consultant

07946800171

mg@malcolmgardner.com

Book a meeting with Malcolm <https://bit.ly/VNMGTime>



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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>

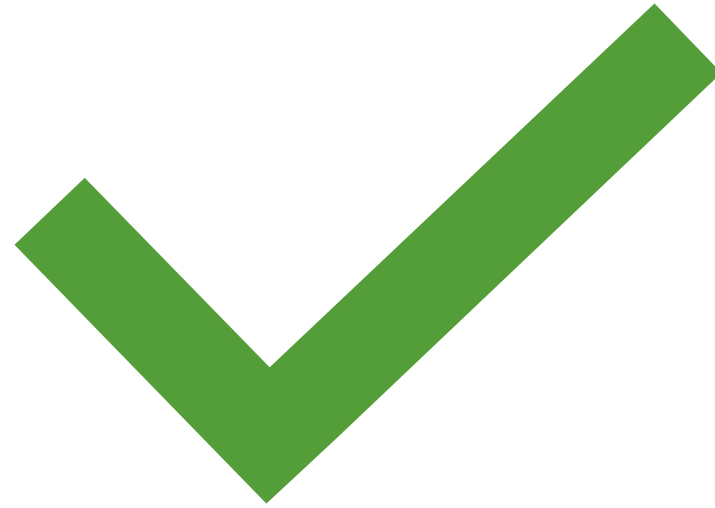
Links to the recordings and the slide packs plus other relevant documents will be posted into both the WhatsApp group and in the Teams Channel and emailed to those who attended and subscribers to the group.

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.

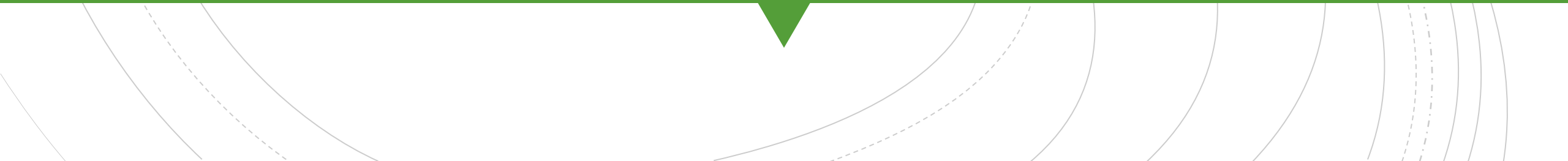


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Discussion Points



Briefing on the Budget



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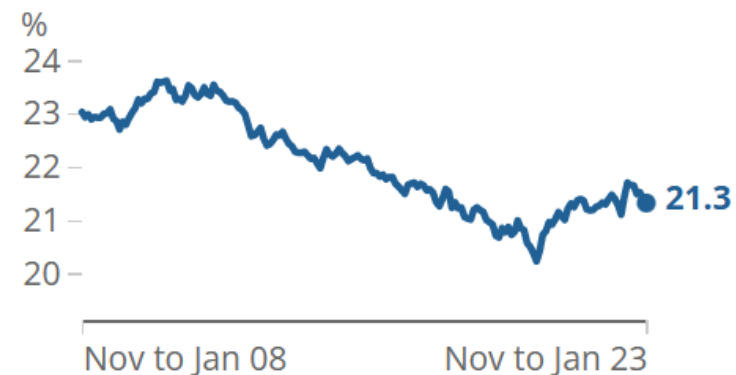
Overall context

- Better overall outlook for the economy
- Avoid technical recession in 2023
- Inflation likely to come down quickly, from 9.7 per cent at the start of 2023 to 1.5 per cent at the start of 2024
- But taxation highest in 70 years and little headroom for tax cuts
- 'Budget for growth' but OBR forecasts not too encouraging, government debt flat-lining
- Total reduction in household disposable income of 5.7% over this year and next

Labour market context



- Employment and unemployment figures little changed – 1.25m unemployed
- Economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.2 percentage points on the quarter, to 21.3% in November 2022 to January 2023.
- 8.8m people are working-age and inactive.
- 1,124,000 job vacancies
- Budget designed to address inactivity in labour market





Labour market: the carrots

- Big extension of free 30 hours childcare, eventually to all qualifying families with children aged from 9 months
- Middle to high earners gain the most, though £100k limit
- OBR says this will boost employment by 60,000, but IFS says this is uncertain because policy is essentially a redistribution measure towards families with children. Also depends on funding for providers.
- UC claimants helped by one-off payment upfront and increasing the amount that can be claimed by 50%, to £951 a month (one child) and £1,629 (two or more children) – OBR say this will boost employment by 15,000
- Schools and local authorities to provide wraparound care from 8am until 6pm by September 2026
- Significant increase in the annual limit on tax-free pension savings, and abolition of the lifetime limit - large giveaway to small number of workers – OBR 15,000 boost in employment



Labour market: the stick

- More conditionality for parents benefiting from the childcare changes
- Increase in the Administrative Earning Threshold to 18 hours, and the removal of the joint AET for couples (the hours you have to work before work search conditionality eases). About 100,000 will have to meet their work coach more regularly.
- Automated processes for sanctions to cope with higher numbers subject to conditionality
- The existing sanction regime to be strengthened for those actively seeking work
- The OBR estimates that this tightening of conditionality may result in 10,000 extra people in work.

Health and Disability



- Transforming Support – Health and Disability White Paper – aims to help more disabled people and people with health conditions to ‘start, stay and succeed in work’
- More opportunities - improved occupational health services, support for mental illness and Access to Work
- Make it easier for people to obtain the right support (notifications, facilities, training for work coaches)
- Make claiming experience easier and more transparent, e.g. more opportunity to challenge decisions, faster processes to Severe Disability Group
- Also Universal Support to help claimants back to work by matching to suitable vacancies

Benefit changes



- Scrap the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) - removes duplicate testing and the 'unable to work label' but also removes access to higher level of UC for those too ill to work – the Limited Capability for Work Related Activity (LCWRA) element
- New UC 'health element' which is passported through Personal Independence Payment, at same level as LCWRA
- Winners and losers - up to 650,000 people currently receiving LCWRA do not receive Personal Independence Payment, about 180,000 receive PIP but not LCWRA
- Unclear whether the new 'health element' will exempt claimants from the benefit cap as with the LCWRA
- To be introduced gradually from 2026



Local Government

- Little on public spending in the Budget, and not much on local government
- Investment zones – commitment to transfer responsibilities from Local Enterprise Partnerships to local authorities, from April 2024
- New discounted loans to support local authorities borrowing for Housing Revenue Accounts and the delivery of social housing
- £50m for swimming pools and £200m for potholes
- Commitment to expand local retention of business rates
- Knock on effects of benefit changes on CTR schemes

Conclusion

- Some welcome changes – e.g. childcare for UC claimants, Energy Price Guarantee, pre-payment meter tariffs
- Child care measures amount to a major extension of welfare state - £8bn by 2027
- Most commentators think that the impact of the labour market measures is overstated
- Little headroom for anything too dramatic – a ‘steady as you go’ type of budget.
- “We are investing too little and growing too slowly; our citizens living standards are stagnant; and we are asking them to pay higher taxes while cutting public services”
Resolution Foundation



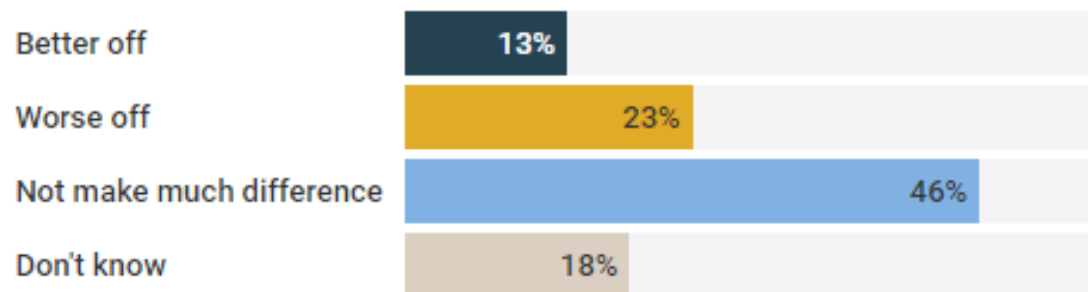
Budget Survey

- Despite the popularity of many of the flagship measures, only 6% of voters think the budget will benefit them.
- 56 per cent of people polled by YouGov thought the budget presented by the chancellor Jeremy Hunt on Wednesday would make little difference to their lives, while 25 per cent thought they would be worse off.
- 31% of voters thought the budget was fair, while 33% said it was unfair.

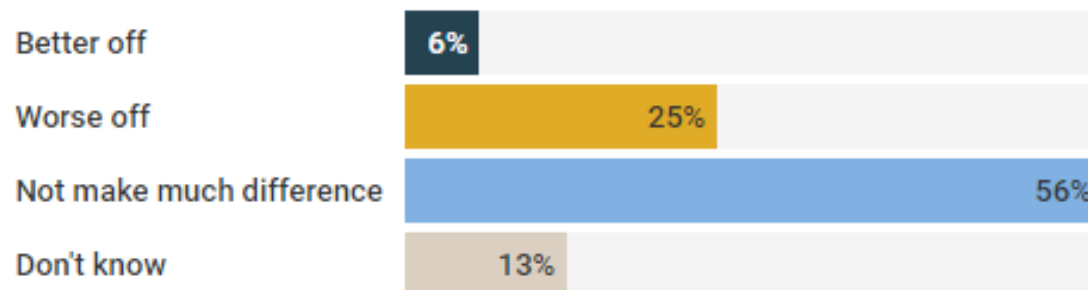
Budget Survey

How will the budget affect you?

Do you think these changes will leave the country...



Do you think these changes will leave you and your family...



Data based on a survey of 2,155 adults conducted from March 15 to 16

Chart: The Times and The Sunday Times • Source: YouGov

Policy in Practice Report

- Policy in Practice's new report has found that thousands of households in the UK paying the 45p additional tax rate will still be eligible for Universal Credit due to high housing and childcare costs, despite earning over £125,000 a year.
- The study also revealed that up to 300,000 people paying the 40p higher rate tax could potentially claim the benefit.
- The report criticises Britain's tax and benefits system for burdening middle-earners and calls for reforms.
- The report also highlights that under Universal Credit, middle-income earners can face an effective marginal tax rate of over 100% as their earnings increase and benefits are withdrawn, which disincentivises them from working longer hours or seeking promotions.



Other News

S03/2023

There is additional New Burdens funding of £4,790,000 for local authority (LA) action required to improve the quality of supported housing and temporary accommodation management information.



Uses of Health and Disability Benefits

The report presents findings from a qualitative study of how health and disability benefits are used alongside other sources of provision and support to meet health and disability related needs.

The study is based on in-depth interviews with 120 participants across England, Scotland and Wales, who had a range of health conditions and disabilities.

The report identifies additional health-related needs across all areas of participants' lives, and how these needs are met.

Health and disability benefits, alongside other income streams, helped to meet almost all identified areas of additional need relating to health conditions and disabilities.

The study also found that the way in which benefits were used was highly influenced by the wider context of resources available to participants. Participants made a number of suggestions for improving support both from DWP and other agencies.

Overall, health and disability benefits were found to be a key element of the support that is available.

PIP Stats

- In the quarter ending January 2023 there were:
- 180,000 registrations and 220,000 clearances for new claims
- 25,000 changes of circumstance reported and 29,000 cleared
- 19,000 registrations and 22,000 clearances for DLA reassessments
- 140,000 planned award reviews registered and 85,000 cleared
- 60,000 mandatory reconsiderations (MRs) registered and 61,000 cleared

PIP Stats

- Over the last five years (February 2018 to January 2023):
- 40% of normal rules new claims, 69% of normal rules DLA reassessment claims, and 99% of SREL claims received an award (excluding withdrawn claims)
- 70% of planned award reviews resulted in an increase or no change to the level of award received by the claimant
- 80% of changes of circumstances resulted in an increase or no change to the level of award received by the claimant
- 34% of MRs cleared (excluding withdrawn) have led to a change in award

Changes to PIP

- The UK government has made changes to disability benefits which will cut off support for people with invisible illnesses, such as anxiety and depression.
- The changes to the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) mean that people who cannot travel alone due to overwhelming psychological distress will no longer qualify for support.
- Campaigners have criticised the changes, saying they will cause further hardship and discrimination for people with invisible illnesses.

Business Rate Collection

In 2022-23, local authorities estimate they will collect £22.5 billion in non-domestic rating income after taking into consideration all reliefs, accounting adjustments, and sums retained outside the rates retention scheme.

During 2022-23, local authorities are estimated to grant business rate relief of £7.6 billion.

The net cost of small business rate relief is £1.5 billion, the cost of mandatory relief is £3.2 billion, and the cost of discretionary relief is £2.8 billion.

Retail, hospitality and leisure relief account for £2.7 billion of discretionary relief.

There is a net cost of £1.5 billion for small business rate relief. In order to cover some of the cost of the Small Business Rate Relief scheme, authorities estimate they will grant £2.2 billion in relief, but other businesses have contributed £629 million as supplement.

In 2022-23, charity occupations are expected to receive a total of £2.1 billion in relief (both mandatory and discretionary).

Ukrainian refugees housing crisis

- A year after the Homes for Ukraine scheme launched, more than half of Ukrainian refugees struggle to find affordable rental accommodation.
- Over 117,000 Ukrainians have arrived in the UK under the hosting scheme. Another 49,000 joined relatives already here.
- Those who need to move on from UK sponsors' housing and cannot secure social housing may face practical problems.
- According to a survey conducted by Generation Rent and Opora, which supports Ukrainian refugees in the UK, 49% of Ukrainian refugees couldn't find a guarantor and 43% couldn't find money for a tenancy deposit when looking for a place to live.

Three Councils In Trouble

- Thurrock council in Essex and Croydon council in south London are being put into special measures by the UK government
- Lee Rowley, a local government minister, announced the appointment of a managing commissioner for Thurrock and a panel to direct the running of Croydon council
- The commissioner at Thurrock will have the power to hire and fire officials and "redesign council services to achieve value for money and financial sustainability"
- Rowley criticised the leadership team of Slough council, which has debts of nearly £800 million, and the government is in the process of appointing new commissioners to run the council
- All three councils ran up huge debts after disastrous investments in commercial property, solar farms, and other businesses, compounded by a lack of scrutiny and oversight, and poor financial management
- All three councils have approved inflation-busting increases in council tax to help pay for their debts
- Croydon has asked the government to write off more than half a billion pounds of debt, a request ministers are considering

Tick-Tock

Civil servants will also be barred from accessing the TikTok's platform on government computers unless authorised on a case-by-case basis by ministers.

TikTok has been banned from all government phones with immediate effect amid security concerns over the video app's Chinese ownership.

Three times as many black people live in social housing in England and Wales

According to new census data, black people in England and Wales are almost three times more likely to live in social housing than white people.

Educational and employment outcomes, health, disability, home ownership, and overcrowding varied greatly between ethnic groups.

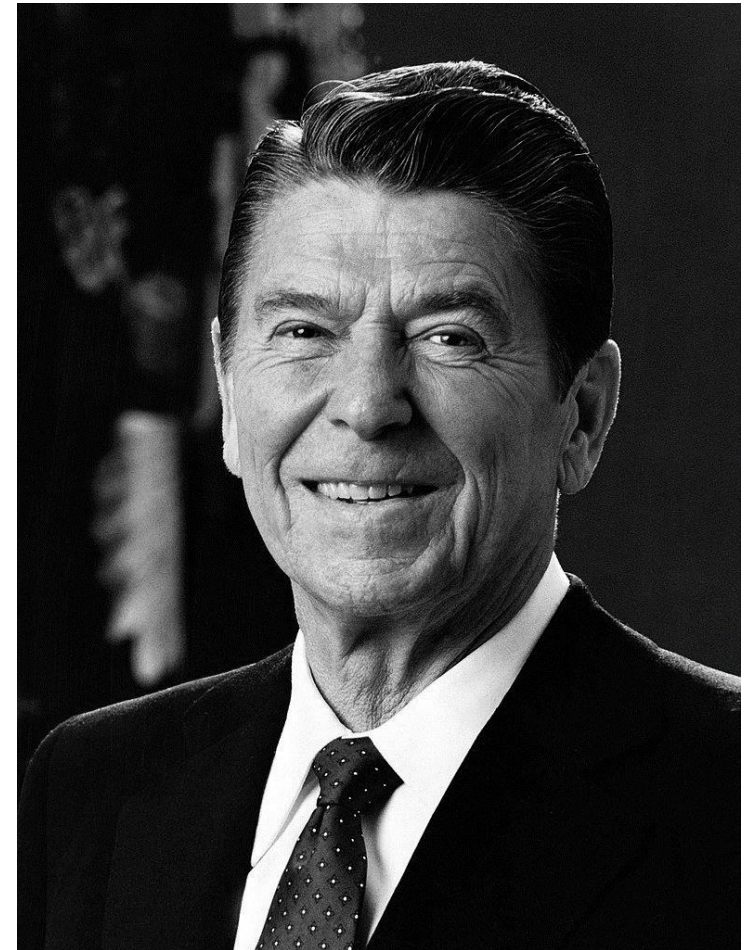
Study finds racial inequality hard-wired into housing system in England

Black Britons, including Africans and Caribbeans, accounted for 44% of people living in social housing on the 2021 census, while people of mixed race accounted for 27%.

Quote of the Week

“When government does it, it sends you the bill. And when government does it for 40 years, the bill comes in two ways: higher taxes and inflation. Make no mistake about it, inflation is a tax and not by accident.” – Ronald Regan

Ronald Wilson Reagan was an American actor who served as the 40th president of the United States from 1981 to 1989.





Kevin Stewart

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



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Job Adverts

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Remote

Housing Benefit Subsidy and Systems Specialist (Northgate/NEC)

We are seeking an experienced Housing Benefit Subsidy and Systems Specialist to take on a pivotal role within our clients organization based in Berkshire. As the primary leader overseeing the Council's statutory subsidy reporting mandates, this position is crucial in effectively monitoring and actively managing both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support expenditures. The role involves ensuring the safeguarding and optimization of benefit subsidies while identifying and addressing potential risks. This individual will also take charge in creating and refining policies and procedures to maximize subsidy outcomes, all while maintaining strict adherence to current and future legislation.

Furthermore, this role encompasses comprehensive responsibility for all aspects related to Welfare ICT systems administration, including system upgrades and software testing across all Welfare Service platforms. Finally, the candidate will be responsible for the compilation and presentation of Welfare Statistics and performance data to relevant stakeholders.

Requirements

We're looking for candidates who have 3 main skills/knowledge:

- Experience of Northgate/NEC systems administration including reports and data collection
- Detailed knowledge of completing the annual HB subsidy claim
- Experience of completing statutory returns including HBDR

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



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Remote

Benefits Officer (Northgate/NEC)

We are looking for an experienced Benefit Assessment Officer with great working knowledge of NEC (Northgate) to join our client's team. Main duties will be dealing with customers on the telephone and working from daily post, emails and online forms.

- To assess applications for Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support, to include new claims, interventions and changes in circumstances in accordance with legislation and council policy
- Issue referrals and liaise with the rent officer as appropriate
- Deal with personal, telephone and written enquiries from customers and their representatives and conduct interviews as required
- To make decisions relating to applications for backdating of claims, commerciality and for vulnerability cases in respect of direct payment to landlords for Local Housing Allowance cases
- To obtain relevant information relating to Discretionary Housing Payment applications and make decisions on the information provided
- Deal with requests from customers for the revision and/or the re-assessment of benefit entitlement in appropriate

Requirements

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

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

Peterborough

Fraud Investigation Officer (Welfare)

Our client based in Cambridgeshire is looking for a skilled Investigations Officer to investigate suspected fraud, corruption, theft and irregularity within / against the Council. Using detailed theoretical, practical and procedural knowledge to investigate cases involving potential fraud against the public purse - Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction Scheme or other welfare benefit fraud, in accordance with best practice and regulatory compliance.

Requirements

KNOWLEDGE

- Detailed theoretical, practical and procedural knowledge of rules in claiming welfare benefits - Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction Scheme and other Social Security Benefits.
- Detailed theoretical, practical and procedural knowledge of the rules governing the collection of evidence, interviewing under caution and legislation relating to investigation work.

SKILLS & ABILITIES

- Developed interpersonal skills in order to liaise effectively with customers and stakeholders and to provide guidance in this specialism.
- Ability to interpret legislation and make sound judgements in order to arrive at the correct solution.
- Ability to manage personal caseload.
- Ability to produce complex reports that support any decision to proceed through the judicial system and also support the team's Service Delivery objectives.
- Ability to deliver under pressure and to tight deadlines within a challenging environment.

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

Peterborough

Revenues Officer - NNDR (Academy)

We are currently seeking a highly motivated and organised Revenues Officer (NNDR) to join our client's Revenues and Benefits department. The successful candidate will play a crucial role in maximising revenue through assertive collection of NNDR, in accordance with the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, subsequent regulations, and the recovery policy. Reporting to the Team Leader, you will maintain the NNDR property database, negotiate payment arrangements, and assist Court Officers at Magistrates' Court.

If you have a strong commitment to customer service, excellent communication skills, and the ability to work independently with minimal supervision, we encourage you to apply.

Requirements

We are looking for a skilled Revenues Officer who has at least 3 years experience in both Council Tax and NNDR

- Extensive knowledge of NNDR including relevant legislation and regulations as well as the experience of handling complex information.
- Substantial experience and detailed knowledge of use of Information Technology.
- Understanding and commitment to promoting and implementing the Council's Equal Opportunities policies.
- Understanding, knowledge and ability to follow guidelines that ensure compliance to Health and Safety at Work, Data Protection and other statutory requirements.

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

Bromley

Interim Utilities/ Energy Manager

We are seeking seeking a knowledgeable and experienced Interim Utilities/Energy Manager to manage the procurement and administration of the council's utilities providers and energy requirements. The successful candidate will have a strong background in energy procurement for large public sector organizations or local authorities.

Requirements

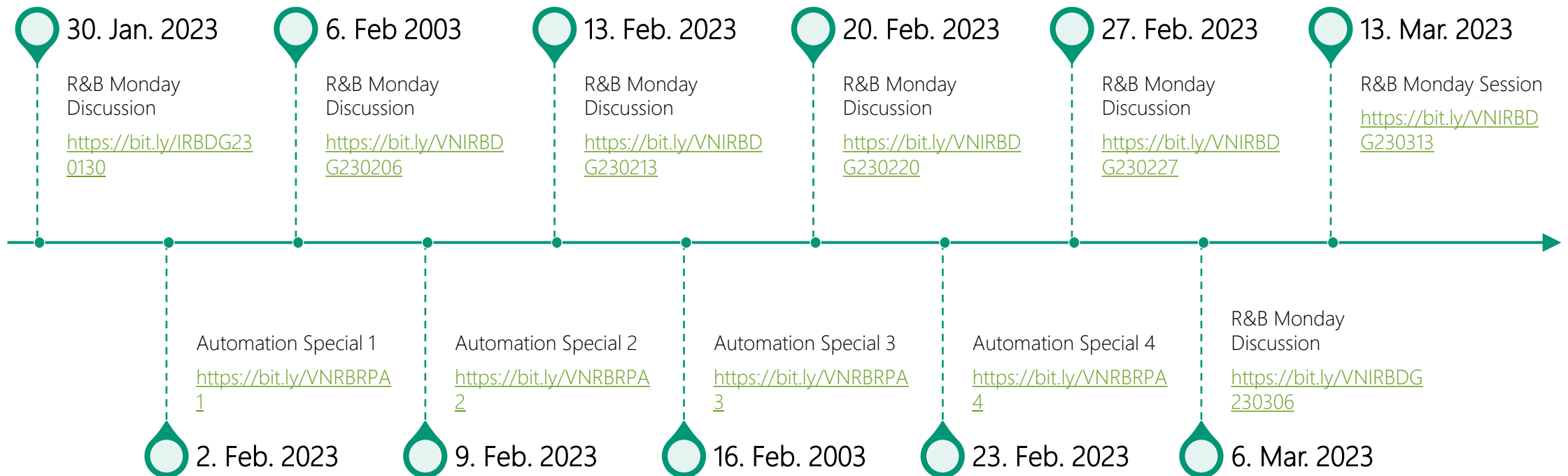
- A minimum of a Bachelor's degree in energy management, engineering, or a related field
- Proven experience in energy procurement and contract management for large public sector organizations or local authorities
- Comprehensive knowledge of the energy market, including pricing structures, regulations, and emerging trends
- Strong analytical skills and the ability to interpret complex data
- Excellent communication and negotiation skills
- Strong project management skills, with the ability to manage multiple tasks and meet deadlines
- Familiarity with energy management software and tools
- Knowledge of sustainability best practices and relevant regulations, such as carbon emissions reporting
- A commitment to environmental responsibility and the council's sustainability goals

[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:
 - [The Effective DPO](#) - 21st March
 - [BCS Practitioner Certificate in Freedom of Information](#) - 19th April
- 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.