

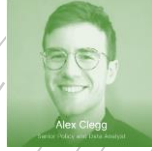
# Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

24 April 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.

## Spring Season 2023: Monthly series of focused Workshops

### Thursday 25 May– ChatGPT & AI

Join us for an exciting workshop on ChatGPT and AI! In this workshop, you will get a chance to learn about the latest advancements in AI technology and how it is disrupting the world in which we live. We will look at ChatGPT, a cutting-edge language model trained by OpenAI, we will look at working with AI tools and techniques. And the issues that arises from such tools. Make no mistake these tools are going to have an impact whether that is for good or ill, and they are going to make an impact soon.

### Thursday 29 June– Social Prescribing

Social prescribing is a healthcare approach that involves linking patients with non-medical resources and services to improve their overall well-being. This session will look at SP in depth and understand how and why Revenues and Benefits could have synergies with local prescribers and SP stakeholders.

### Thursday 27 July– 15 Minute Cities

The concept of 15-minute cities has gained popularity in recent years as a way to promote sustainable and liveable urban environments. Cities such as Paris and Melbourne have already begun implementing 15-minute city initiatives, and the concept is gaining traction globally as urban planners seek to create more equitable and accessible cities for all residents. In the UK Oxford City has the most developed plan, Birmingham, canterbury, Sheffield and Ipswich at not far behind. This has quite a wide impact on communities, especially vulnerable households. Not only does it speak to health, transport but also to the wider demands of Government departments, such the DWP policy of expecting people to apply for jobs within a 90 min travel time. Not mention LAs own staff.

[Click here to register](#)



# Discussion Points



Council Tax & Business Rates Update



Council Tax Reform



Impact of Sanctions



Health Assessments for Benefits



Council Tax Discount for Green Gardens



Affordability of Communications



HB for Bad Housing



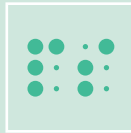
Bevan Foundation on Welsh Benefits

# 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](https://bit.ly/CTR2324)
- This will really help those vulnerable families who rely on their calculators for advice to increase their incomes.

## 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!

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

## 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](mailto:services.enquiries@ladirectories.com)

Peter Davis, Marketing & Account Management

E: [peter.davis@ladirectories.com](mailto: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/>



Barnet Council has become the first local authority to launch the InBest benefits calculator, designed to support residents with the rise in cost of living.

The InBest benefits calculator has been integrated into Barnet's online support application, to make it easier for people who are experiencing financial difficulties to find out what support is available to them.

It includes information on benefits such as Universal Credit, Pensions Credit, Attendance Allowance and Personal Independence Payment, as well as local financial support initiatives including council tax support and the residents support fund.

Barnet Council Leader, Cllr Barry Rawlings said: "The cost-of-living crisis is affecting us all, and we want to ensure Barnet residents know what financial support is available to them and how they can access these services.

"It is very positive to see Barnet is the first local authority to launch this free tool, and we hope to see many other local councils doing the same to help their residents."

To find out what financial support is available to help with the cost-of-living visit [Barnet Council Benefits Calculator](#)

**inbest**

# End

Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Consultant

07946800171

[mg@malcolmgardner.com](mailto:mg@malcolmgardner.com)

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



In  
Partnership  
with

**LA Directories**  
Limited

# 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.

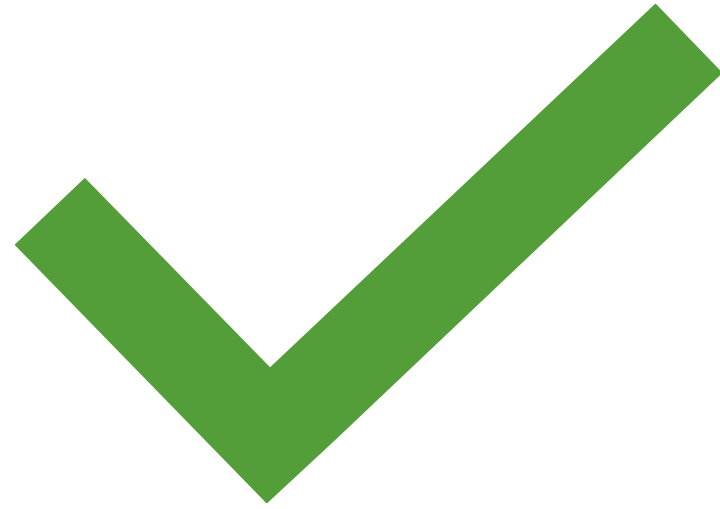
---

To sign up just email [malcolm@visionarynetwork.co.uk](mailto: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.

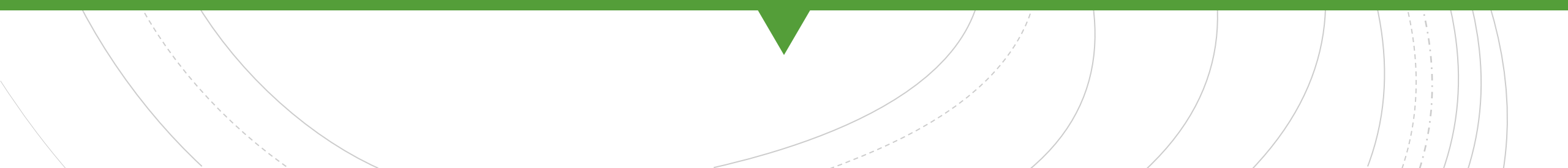


In Partnership  
with

LA Directories  
Limited



# Discussion Points



# Impact of Benefit Sanctions on Employment Outcomes

## Impact on Spell Durations

- Sanctions reduce the duration of a claimant spell on Universal Credit.
  - This is driven by increased exit rates into no PAVE earnings. Exits rates into PAVE earnings decrease.
- Sanctions have a small negative impact on the rate at which claimants exit 'UC Intensive' into a state where they are earning, either on or off UC.
- Taken together, these results suggest that the impact of a sanction is to decrease the rate of exit into higher paid work, while the exit rate into some kind of work is not greatly affected.
- The results segmented by characteristic show that in contrast to the aggregate result, claimants with a health condition, with a partner and males all exit 'UC Intensive' into earnings more quickly as a result of a sanction.
  - Sanctioned claimants with children exit 'UC Intensive' 7% more slowly.

## Impact on Earnings

- Upon exiting 'UC Intensive', sanctioned claimants earn on average £34 per month less than non-sanctioned claimants over a 6-month period.
  - This is driven by lower earnings while employed, rather than fewer months spent in employment.
- The results segmented by characteristic show that, in contrast to the aggregate results, there is no evidence that sanctioned claimants with a health condition, with a partner, caring, or male face earn less than non-sanctioned claimants in the 6 months after exiting 'UC Intensive'.
  - Conversely, sanctioned claimants under the age of 26 fare worse than average, earning £43 per month less than non-sanctioned claimants in the same age group.

## Summary

- The average claimant exits PAVE earnings less quickly and earns less once they leave. A sanction has a negative impact on claimant finances.
- This excludes a sanction's role in incentivizing compliance with a conditionality regime that encourages work search and earnings increases.
- Sanctions have a likely positive deterrent effect, which must be balanced against the negative financial impact reported.
- Regardless of whether claimants are sanctioned, conditionality will incentivize claimant attendance.
- Since August 2018, the sanction rate has declined from over 6% to below 3%, meaning that fewer claimants are subject to the impacts described in this report.
- Sanctions policy is not to sanction claimants, but to create a consequence if they don't comply with the requirements.
- A sanction should maintain the insurance principles of benefit receipt while encouraging work search.

# Impact on Spell Durations

- Sanctions reduce the duration of a claimant spell on Universal Credit.
  - This is driven by increased exit rates into no PAYE earnings. Exits rates into PAYE earnings decrease.
- Sanctions have a small negative impact on the rate at which claimants exit 'UC Intensive' into a state where they are earning, either on or off UC.
- Taken together, these results suggest that the impact of a sanction is to decrease the rate of exit into higher paid work, while the exit rate into some kind of work is not greatly affected.
- The results segmented by characteristic show that in contrast to the aggregate result, claimants with a health condition, with a partner and males all exit 'UC Intensive' into earnings more quickly as a result of a sanction.
  - Sanctioned claimants with children exit 'UC Intensive' 7% more slowly

# Impact on Earnings

- Upon exiting 'UC Intensive', sanctioned claimants earn on average £34 per month less than non-sanctioned claimants over a 6-month period.
  - This is driven by lower earnings while employed, rather than fewer months spent in employment.
- The results segmented by characteristic show that, in contrast to the aggregate results, there is no evidence that sanctioned claimants with a health condition, with a partner, caring, or male face earn less than non-sanctioned claimants in the 6 months after exiting 'UC Intensive'.
  - Conversely, sanctioned claimants under the age of 26 fare worse than average, earning £43 per month less than non-sanctioned claimants in the same age group

# Summary

- The average claimant exits PAYE earnings less quickly and earns less once they leave. A sanction has a negative impact on claimant finances.
- This excludes a sanction's role in incentivizing compliance with a conditionality regime that encourages work search and earnings increases.
- Sanctions have a likely positive deterrent effect, which must be balanced against the negative financial impact reported.
- Regardless of whether claimants are sanctioned, conditionality will incentivise claimant attendance.
- Since August 2018, the sanction rate has declined from over 6% to below 3%, meaning that fewer claimants are subject to the impacts described in this report.
- Sanctions policy is not to sanction claimants, but to create a consequence if they don't comply with the requirements.
- A sanction should maintain the insurance principles of benefit receipt while encouraging work search

# Health Assessments for Benefits

A report from the Work and Pensions Committee expresses concerns over the psychological distress caused by health assessments and issues with the assessment system leading to deaths of claimants.

The report recommends regular reviews of the impacts of assessments, training for staff, and making data available to external researchers.

The trust in the system is low and there is a fundamental problem with decision-making. The report suggests recording assessments and providing claimants with assessment reports as standard.

The report also discusses improvements in the quality of reports from assessment providers, but highlights concerns regarding the use of evidence and covert surveillance.

The report welcomes the work of the Health Transformation Programme and recommends targeted interventions to address low awareness and take-up of certain benefits.

The Scottish Government's plans for the Adult Disability Payment are also discussed, and the report urges the Department to consider making changes based on its evaluation.

# Affordability of communications services

► Ofcom Report

# Broadband Social Tariffs

- 4.2 million eligible households for discounted broadband packages
- Potential annual savings of £144 per household
- Only 1.2% of eligible households are taking advantage of these deals
- Six broadband providers currently offer social tariffs
- Broadband firms urged to introduce and promote social tariffs
- Simplify sign-up process for customers
- 1.1 million households struggling to afford broadband service

# Financial Relief through Social Tariffs

- Standard commercial broadband costs 8.3% of monthly disposable income for unemployed Universal Credit recipients
- £15 social tariff reduces costs to 4.6% of disposable income
- 84% of benefits recipients are unaware of social tariffs
- Limited promotion of social tariffs by providers
- Providers must promote discounted deals, make information clear, and simplify sign-up process
- Offer a social tariff, especially for those not currently doing so (EE, Plusnet, Shell, Sky, TalkTalk, Vodafone)
- Partner with local authorities and consumer advice agencies to promote social tariffs
- Ensure prominent display of social tariff details and eligibility information on websites

Product	Price	Speed	Eligibility
<a href="#">BT Home Essentials</a>	£15 a month	Around 36 Mbit/s	Various benefits (in and out of work)
<a href="#">BT Home Essentials 2</a>	£20 a month	Around 67 Mbit/s	Various benefits (in and out of work)
<a href="#">Community Fibre</a>	£10 a month	10 Mbit/s	Various benefits (in and out of work)
<a href="#">G.Network Essential Fibre Broadband</a>	£15 a month	50 Mbit/s	Various benefits (in and out of work)
<a href="#">Hyperoptic Fair Fibre 50</a>	£15 a month	50 Mbit/s	Various benefits (in and out of work)
<a href="#">KCOM Full Fibre Flex</a>	£19.99 a month	30 Mbit/s	Various benefits (in and out of work)
<a href="#">Virgin Media Essential Broadband</a>	£15 a month	15 Mbit/s	Universal Credit

Social tariffs offered by communications providers



▼

# £1.6bn a year is given to private landlords for 'decent' housing in England

- £1.6bn annual housing benefit earnings for substandard homes
- Worst affected region: London, with £500m in welfare funds for poor-quality homes
- 5 million households rent privately, a 28% increase in a decade
- 310,000 children sharing beds due to overcrowding
- Renters Reform Bill delayed, aimed to reduce housing benefits for non-decent homes
- Calls for rent freeze, increased social housing stock, and stronger enforcement against rogue landlords



£1.6bn a year  
is given to  
private  
landlords for  
'decent'  
housing in  
England

- The London Renters Union said *housing benefit had become "a free handout to private landlords, and public money would be better spent increasing the stock of social homes"*.
- Ben Beadle, the chief executive of the National Residential Landlords Association, responded by calling on councils to use existing laws *"to enforce the powers they already have to tackle the minority of sub-standard homes in the rental market"*. He said Khan's desired rent freeze would *"drive responsible landlords out of the market ... and leave them at the mercy of rogue and criminal landlords"*.
- But the Generation Rent campaign group called for tougher penalties for landlords of unsafe homes and said *"increasing reliance on the private sector to provide housing has resulted in a higher bill for the public purse with nothing to show for it but poorer living standards"*.
- A spokesperson for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities said: *"Councils should use the powers we've given them to crack down on rogue landlords, including issuing fines of up to £30,000 and banning those who rent out unsafe homes."*

# Reforming UK Property Taxation

- UK's current property tax system is regressive, inter-generationally unfair, and accentuates north-south divide.
- Fairer Share lobby group proposes replacing council tax, stamp duty, and bedroom tax with a proportional property tax (PPT) based on annually updated values.
- PPT would raise an extra £5bn annually, and benefit 77% of households with an average £556 annual tax cut for 19m low- and middle-income households.
- 99% of households in the 10% most deprived constituencies in England would gain from the reform.
- Polls suggest PPT is popular and would garner political support in key electoral regions.
- Change to PPT could address issues with current property taxes and promote economic growth by improving labor mobility.

# Perspectives on UK Property Tax Reform

- Proportional property tax (PPT) considered fairer than council tax, but misses opportunity to address wealth inequality through land value tax (LVT).
- LVT could fairly share land value, which constitutes 60% of the UK's wealth and is highly concentrated in ownership.
- PPT proposal may lead to revenue disparities among local authorities, raising questions about fairness and potential need for subsidies.
- Opposing views argue that the value of properties does not directly correlate with the demand for council services.



# Council Tax Cut for Eco-Friendly Gardeners

- Research shows cities may have lost up to 50% of green garden space in the past two decades.
- Paving and plastic grass contribute to urban temperature increase and biodiversity decline.
- University of Sheffield study recommends council tax or water bill discounts for environmentally sensitive gardening.
- Financial incentives proposed for gardens with over 50% of their space planted.
- Banning environmentally damaging materials and practices, such as pesticides and astroturf, could also benefit the environment.

# The Bevan Foundation's Welsh Benefits System Proposal

The Bevan Foundation & Policy in Practice

# Proposal

- Importance of grants and allowances for low-income households
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Free School Meals examples
- Proposal for a single framework: Welsh Benefits System
- Improve access to benefits for eligible households
- Increase take-up of available support
- Ensure efficient and consistent administration across Wales
- Potentially lift people out of poverty

# Assessment & Recommendation

- Evaluation of implementing a common approach to Welsh benefits
- Focus on data requirements
- Findings show feasibility and potential for millions in unclaimed benefits to reach low-income households
- Establish an implementation group with relevant experts
- Pursue medium-term actions for comprehensive arrangements
- Use data to boost uptake of existing grants and allowances as an urgent priority



## Other News



# Inflation remains stubbornly in double digits

- In the 12 months to March 2023, the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) rose by 8.9%, down from 9.2% in February.
- Housing and household services (mainly electricity, gas and other fuels) and food and non-alcoholic beverages contributed the most to the annual CPIH inflation rate in March 2023.
- CPIH rose by 0.7% in March 2023, compared with 0.9% in March 2022.
- In the 12 months to March 2023, Consumer Prices Index (CPI) increased by 10.1%, down from 10.4% in February.
- CPI rose by 0.8% in March 2023, compared with 1.1% in March 2022.
- In both the CPIH and CPI annual rates, motor fuels, housing and household services (particularly liquid fuels), and food contributed the most downward changes, while recreation and culture contributed upward changes.
- CPIH core (excluding energy, food, alcohol, and tobacco) rose by 5.7% in the 12 months to March 2023, unchanged from February; CPIH goods rose from 13.4% to 12.7%, while CPIH services rose slightly from 5.6% to 5.7%.

# Right to buy bonus for councils

- In order to replenish lost social housing stock, the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities will now pay councils 100% of the proceeds from right-to-buy sales.
- Before, income from property sales was split between local authorities and the central government, limiting councils' ability to replace homes that had been sold.
- A campaign by the Local Government Association has advocated the full retention of right-to-buy sales, claiming that only 43,000 homes could be replaced under current law of the 100,000 homes expected to be sold by 2030.
- It is anticipated that the change will be in place for two years.

# One in three UK tech pros want to change jobs



- According to a study of 1,000+ professionals, more than three quarters (77 percent) of UK tech workers are unhappy with their jobs.
- According to the survey, 83 percent of tech talent would prefer a four-day work week, while one in five would like to leave their jobs as soon as possible.
- Hackajob's research corresponds with Gartner's findings earlier this year that despite widespread layoffs in the tech sector, there was still a severe skills shortage, forcing employers to compete to hire the right people.
- Additionally, after pay (29 percent), tech workers were most attracted by an organization's culture (15 percent) and mission (13 percent).
- According to the report, demand for technology talent still exceeds supply.
- In a Gartner survey of around 18,000 employees conducted in November and December 2022, 86 percent of CIOs said qualified candidates were harder to find, and 73 percent were concerned about IT talent loss.
- At the time of the survey, Meta, Google, and Salesforce had already laid off staff. According to Layoffs.fyi, 570 tech companies have cut around 168,000 employees since 2023.
- The Gartner analyst, said that tech skills in application development, AI, and machine learning, software engineering, and cloud architecture remain hard to come by.

# 10,000 women fleeing domestic abuse denied safe housing in England

Over 10,000 women escaping domestic abuse across England were denied safe housing in 2022 due to a lack of capacity in shelters or their needs not being met.

The figures were published in the first annual progress report from the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation National Expert Steering Group set up to monitor progress under landmark laws designed to protect victims of domestic abuse.

The report highlighted a lack of specialist provision for ethnic minority, disabled, LGBTQ+ and male domestic abuse victims, as well as those needing mental health or drug and alcohol support.

# One in Six Young Adults in the UK Live in Poor- Quality Housing

- Resolution Foundation has found that up to 2.6 million people aged 18-34 in the UK are living in poor-quality housing, defined as homes that are not in a good state of repair, where heating, electrics, or plumbing are not in full working order, and where damp is present.
- Up to one in 10 people in the UK, 6.5 million in total, live in such properties, with the highest concentrations among young people, low-income families, and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- Poor-quality housing disproportionately affects young adults, with 18% of 18- to 34-year-olds affected compared with 6% of people over 45.
- Poor-quality housing is strongly associated with poor health, with those living in substandard homes twice as likely to experience a health problem compared with people who live in decent homes.
- The government is investing £11.5bn to deliver tens of thousands of homes for sale and rent, and introduce "Awaab's law," which will require landlords to fix damp, mould, and other hazards within a strict timeframe.
- More affordable homes need to be built, and improvements need to be made to existing housing stock to tackle the twin housing crisis in the UK, according to Resolution Foundation.

# Torsten Bell on Levelling-Up

- In his article Resolution Foundation's Torsten Bell discusses the concept of "levelling up" in the post-Brexit era, which aims to reduce income disparities between regions.
- It cites research from the EU showing that while levelling up programs lead to economic growth in poorer regions, they also tend to increase income inequality within those regions.
- Bell argues that policy tweaks alone won't solve this problem and that a more egalitarian approach is needed.
- Bell also notes that levelling up will likely lead to more inequality within regions, and suggests that a better strategy would be to level up poorer regions' productivity while also reducing income inequality between rich and poor.



# UK Government Proposes Registration Scheme for Short-term Let Owners

- Aimed at preventing holiday lets from flooding housing market and driving up prices
- Crackdown to help seaside resorts in England where holiday lets have squeezed out affordable housing
- Investigation found number of holiday lets outnumbered rental homes in some UK staycation hotspots
- Housing Secretary aims to ensure more people have access to local homes at affordable prices
- Consultation to consider if short-term let owners should have the right to let out their home for a specific number of nights without planning permission.

# UK Economy Flatlines Amid Strikes Impact



- GDP growth was 0.0% in February, according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), due to widespread strike action, mainly by teachers and civil service workers.
- Education was the biggest drag on GDP with a decline of 1.7% due to teacher strikes.
- The services sector declined while the construction sector saw growth.
- Analysts expected GDP to grow by 0.1%, but it only increased by 0.02% in February.

# London's Poorest Areas Face Higher Risk of Traffic-Related Deaths

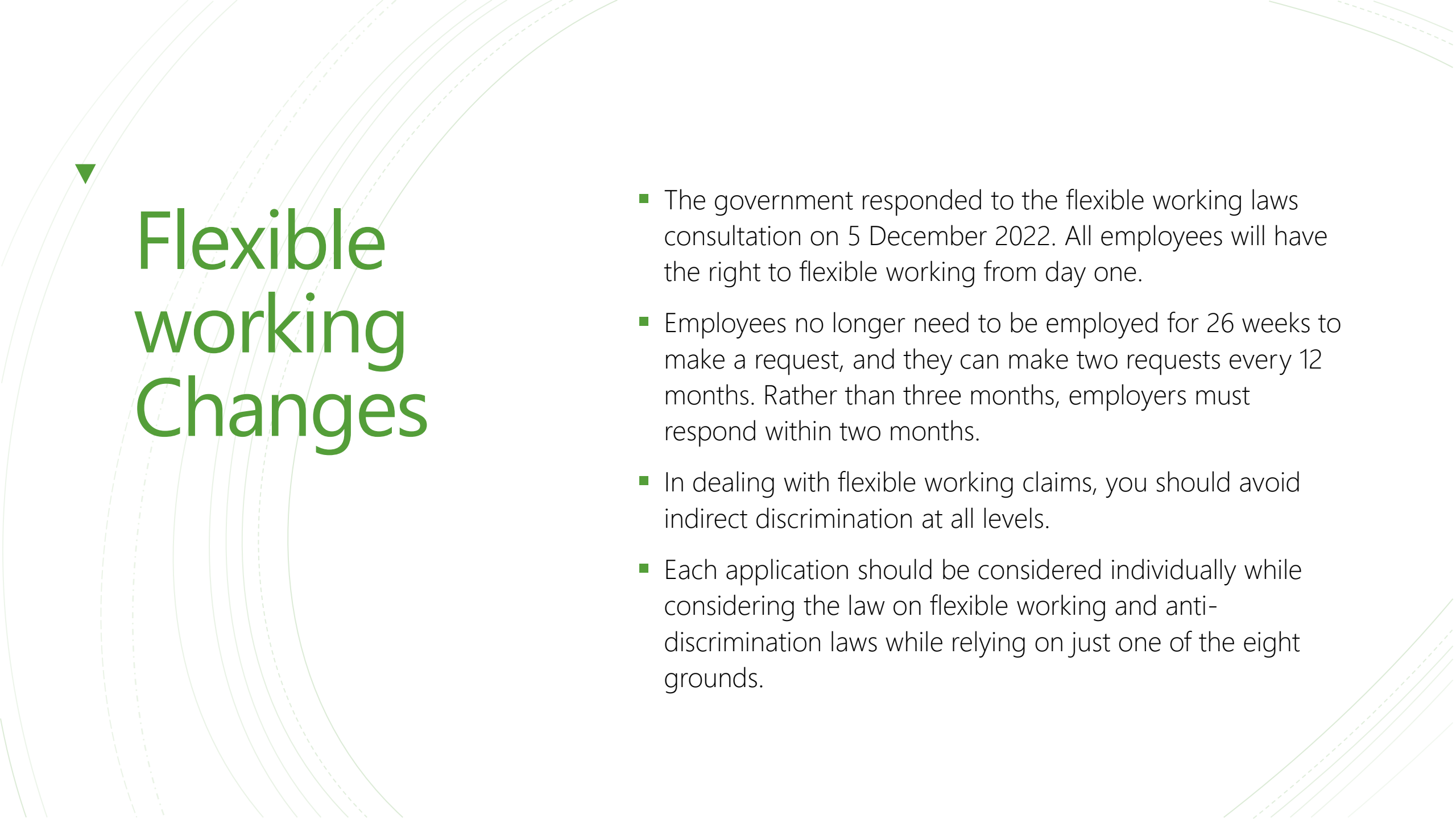
- A Transport for London (TfL) study found that people in London's poorest areas face a higher risk of traffic-related deaths or serious injury than those in wealthier neighbourhoods.
- Deprived postcodes have more than double the casualties for each kilometre on their roads, with residents almost twice as likely to be killed or injured while travelling throughout London.
- Casualty rates are highest in areas including Lambeth, Tower Hamlets, and Westminster.
- Men are at particular risk, with those living in the most deprived postcodes nearly three times as likely to be casualties in road collisions as women.
- Lowering speeds is key to reducing danger, according to London's walking and cycling commissioner, Will Norman.
- TfL is planning to cut speeds on about 90 miles of its managed roads across London by May 2024.

# Energy Bills Discount Scheme

- [Letter from Permanent Secretary to Chair of Public Accounts Committee re Energy Bills Discount Scheme, 28 March 2023](#)

# Digital identity certification for right to work, right to rent and criminal record checks

- [Digital identity certification for right to work, right to rent and criminal record checks](#)
- According to the government, on 27 December 2021, employers and landlords will be able to conduct identity checks on their behalf using certified digital identity service providers, including British and Irish citizens, who aren't eligible for Home Office online services. Legislation takes effect on 6 April 2022.
- By introducing its Identity Trust Scheme, the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) proposes to enable digital identity checking within their criminal record check process.
- In line with the UK Digital Identity and Attributes Trust Framework ('the trust framework'), this guidance outlines how providers can become certified to perform digital identity checks.



# Flexible working Changes

- The government responded to the flexible working laws consultation on 5 December 2022. All employees will have the right to flexible working from day one.
- Employees no longer need to be employed for 26 weeks to make a request, and they can make two requests every 12 months. Rather than three months, employers must respond within two months.
- In dealing with flexible working claims, you should avoid indirect discrimination at all levels.
- Each application should be considered individually while considering the law on flexible working and anti-discrimination laws while relying on just one of the eight grounds.

# UK Unemployment and Wage Growth Overview



- Unemployment rate increased to 3.8% in the three months to February.
- Job vacancies declined for the ninth consecutive month, down by 47,000 to 1.1 million.
- Employment rate increased slightly to 75.8% as people returned to the job market.
- Wage growth remains below soaring costs, with real earnings falling by 4.1%.
- Government's focus on halving inflation and supporting families with cost of living measures.

# UK Homeless Deaths Surge in 2022

- Over 1,300 homeless people died in the UK in 2022, an 85% increase from three years earlier.
- Research by Museum of Homelessness highlights regional differences and the impact of cuts to services.
- Most deaths occurred in emergency housing or hostels (83%), with 85% of fatalities under age 65.
- Leading causes of death include drug and alcohol use (36%) and suicide (10%).

# Benefit Fraud and Error Could Have Funded Extra Payments

- DWP overpaid £8.5 billion in benefits, excluding state pension, in 2021-22.
- Labour claims reducing fraud and error to pre-pandemic levels could have funded an enhanced cost-of-living package.
- The extra funds could have provided a fourth £300 payment for low-income families, bringing total support to £1,200 in 2023-24.
- Lost DWP funds could have also added £100 to the £300 pension cost of living payment and a similar disability program.

# The Decline of Cash and Rise of Digital Payments

- Cash is becoming less usable as digital payments grow and high street shops reject banknotes.
- Card payments surpassed cash as the dominant form of payment in 2016.
- In 2021, 85% of payments were made digitally, and 90% of people used contactless payments.
- Bank of England's Sir Jon Cunliffe supports the development of a "digital pound".
- The central bank plans to regulate stablecoins to maintain financial stability.

# Implementing Tourist Taxes in the UK

- Manchester introduces a £1 per night City Visitor Charge, generating an estimated £3m annually for tourism-related and cultural projects, and infrastructure.
- Welsh government plans to give councils the power to institute tourist taxes for beach, park, pavement, and footpath maintenance.
- Edinburgh considers a £2 a night tourist tax, pending Scottish parliament approval.
- Northern Powerhouse Partnership study suggests a £1 tourism levy across England could raise £428m annually for local authorities.
- Tourist taxes can help address infrastructure challenges in regions like Cornwall and Cumbria and promote a better balance between residents and visitors.
- Example: Valencia plans to use tourism tax revenue for affordable housing construction for local residents.

# DWP Awards Softcat Microsoft Software Contract

- Softcat awarded a £249.7 million (\$310 million) contract for Microsoft software licensing subscription service.
- Contract includes product suites such as Office 365, Windows, and Server products for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- Five-year deal ends on 31 March 2028, part of a framework agreement aimed at increasing value for money.
- DWP faced criticism over legacy IT systems preventing social security payment increases.
- MPs urged DWP to consider costs of not upgrading 34-year-old legacy systems.

## Quote of the Week

“When something is important enough, you do it even if the odds are not in your favour.” – Elon Musk

Elon Musk is a visionary entrepreneur and engineer known for co-founding companies like PayPal, Tesla, SpaceX, Neuralink, and The Boring Company. He is recognised for his ambitious and often unconventional approach to innovation, as well as his ambitious goals for humanity, such as colonizing Mars and revolutionizing transportation through sustainable energy sources. Musk's leadership has earned him both admiration and controversy, with his outspoken personality and occasional public controversies making him a highly visible figure in the tech and business worlds.



# Kevin Stewart

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



# Case Law of Note

## R (Timson) v DWP – Published Apr '23

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must significantly alter its Third Party Deductions Scheme, which allows third parties to claim a portion of a person's benefits as debt repayments and ongoing usage costs.
- According to the legal challenge, heard in September 2022 the written guidance was unlawful, as it failed to provide benefit claimants with the opportunity to make representations or provide information before deductions were made.
- Revisions to the guidance should emphasise the importance of allowing claimants to contest debts or suggest alternative payment methods.
- A decision-maker has a duty of fairness to seek representation in all cases, according to Mr. Justice Cavanagh's judgment. Miss Timson experienced deductions from her disability-related benefits that left her unable to pay rent and included debts she didn't owe.



**BUSINESS SMART**  
SOLUTIONS LTD



## Job Adverts

Ben Moreton, Director, Business Smart Solutions  
0204 529 1139 / 07807058828 [www.businesssmartsolutions.co.uk](http://www.businesssmartsolutions.co.uk)



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](#)



In  
Partnership  
with

LA Directories  
Limited

Remote

# Benefits Assessment Officer (Northgate/NEC)

The overall purpose of the role is to administer Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction new claims and change in circumstances efficiently and promptly to minimise fraud and overpayments and to maximise subsidy income to the Council, in accordance with government legislation, and corporate priorities.

## Requirements

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

- Demonstrate ability to understand, interpret and explain complicated government legislation and the ability to keep up to date with frequent legislative and procedural changes.
- Experience of assessing claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction and knowledge of welfare benefits.
- Demonstrable knowledge and experience of Capita or Northgate Revenues and Benefits systems.

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



Remote

# Council Tax Recovery Officer (Northgate/NEC)

We are currently seeking skilled and experienced Council Tax Recovery officers to join our team on a contract basis. As a Council Tax Recovery officer, you will play a crucial role in assisting with all aspects of the debt recovery process from liability order onwards.

With your specialist knowledge of Council Tax legislation, in particular, recovery and enforcement actions, you will be instrumental in ensuring that the recovery process is carried out efficiently and effectively. You will be the primary point of contact for the Contact Centre, Enforcement Agents, legal teams, and debt help organisations.

You will be responsible for providing expert advice and guidance on Council Tax legislation to your colleagues and external partners. Your role will also involve working closely with other departments to ensure that all debts are collected in a timely and effective manner.

## Requirements

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

- Proficient in the use of NEC and I@W processing systems
- Ability to administer and deal with Council Tax Recovery queries according to legislation and the council policies
- Ability to negotiate payment plans on Council Tax debt from liability order onwards (Includes taking payments and setting up Direct Debits)

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



In Partnership  
with

LA Directories  
Limited

Remote

# Council Tax 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

We're looking for candidates who have 5 main skills/knowledge:

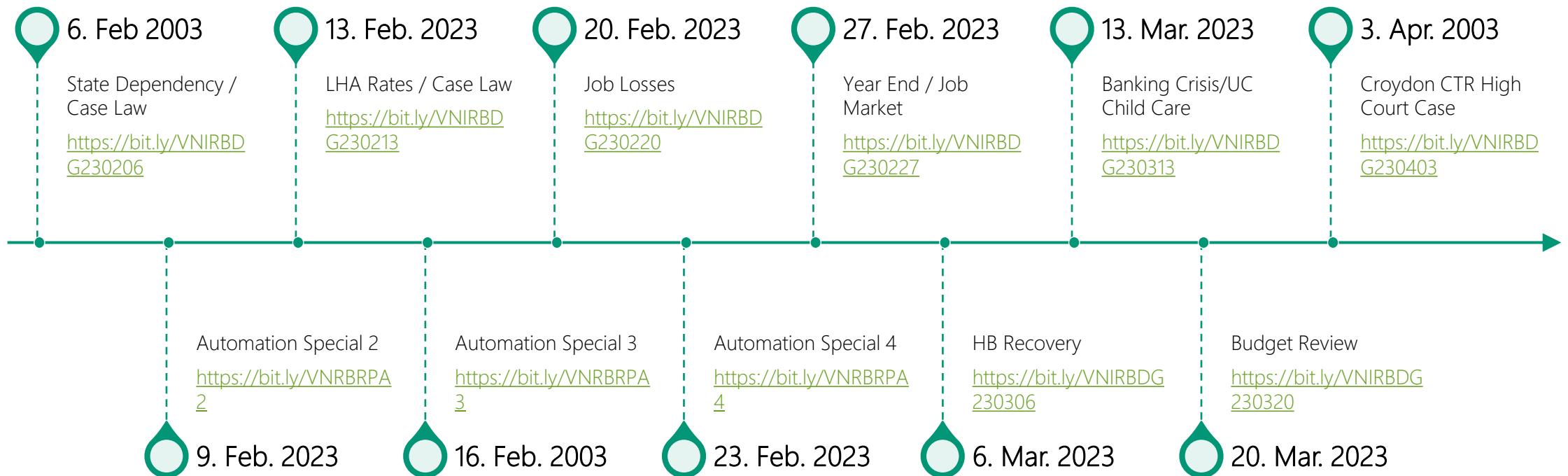
- Knowledge of Local Authority (or similar) billing, recovery and invoicing systems and procedures
- Knowledge of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support procedures and legislation including the Welfare Reform Act 2012
- Knowledge of Revenues billing and recovery statutory legislation
- Knowledge of 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

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



Other Information

# Previous Recordings



- 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

# Impact assessment calculator

- Help for policy officials to calculate figures for impact assessments.
  - From: Department for Business and Trade and Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
- [https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment\\_data%2Ffile%2F1150244%2Fimpact-assessment-calculator-april-2023.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment_data%2Ffile%2F1150244%2Fimpact-assessment-calculator-april-2023.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

# 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.