

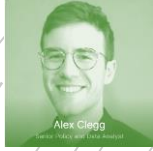
Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

15 May 2023



In
Partnership
with

LA Directories
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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.

Autumn Season 2023: Monthly series of focused Workshops

Thursday 21 Sept – 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 19 Oct – 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 23 Nov – 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



Underclaiming



Overclaiming



Adequate Benefits



Scottish Experience



LAs Do it Better



Council Tax Reform



Council Tax Discount for Green Gardens



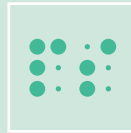
Bevan Foundation on Welsh Benefits

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
- 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

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/>



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

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>

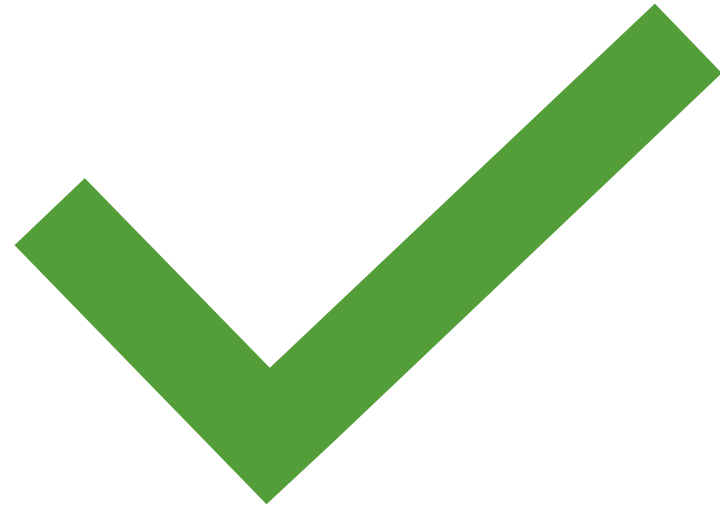
Links to the recordings and the slide packs plus other relevant documents will be posted into both the WhatsApp group and in the Teams Channel and emailed to those who attended and subscribers to the group.

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.

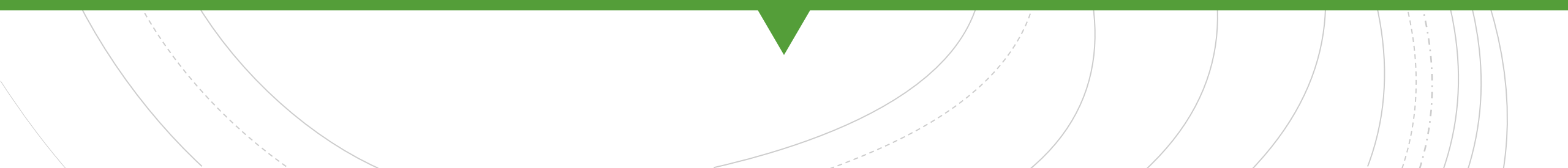


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Discussion Points



An Adequacy Standard for benefits

- Professor Donald Hersh of the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust has published a report addressing the adequacy of benefits
- The UK's working-age benefit safety net is currently very low, putting people at risk of severe deprivation.
- There is no consensus on the minimum level of benefits, and there are no objective benchmarks that inform current benefits.
- Public opinion is shifting towards a view that benefits are too low, but relying solely on public opinion would be troublesome.
- To prevent benefits from dropping below a very minimalist level, it may be possible to combine evidence from different sources and develop an "alarm bell" system.
- Another step would be to aim for a more ambitious target that helps people escape poverty and reach a basic standard of living.
- The government could be given non-binding recommendations on where to move in terms of adequacy benefits by an independent commission.
- <https://www.financialfairness.org.uk/docs?documentid=AA-260423-161871-1>

Millions miss out on benefits

- According to a new study from Policy in Practice (www.policyinpractice.co.uk), millions of UK households are missing out on at least £19bn in welfare benefits due to rising living costs and debt. Many low-income households do not claim the benefits and cash support they are entitled to, with some missing out on up to £4,000 a year.
- Unclaimed benefits are a result of the complexity of the benefits system, lack of public awareness, and fear of stigma. Approximately 1.3 million households do not claim universal credit (£7.5bn), 3 million families do not receive council tax support (£2.9bn), and 5 million households do not receive water, energy, and broadband bills assistance (nearly £2bn).
- The study revealed that 850,000 pensioner households fail to claim £1.8bn in pension credit every year. In order to reduce stigma and simplify the application process, the study recommends that the government commit to positive messaging about benefits.

Poverty (the Scottish Experience)

- An interesting editorial on poverty in Scotland was published in The Guardian (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/apr/30/the-guardian-view-on-poverty-in-scotland-a-contradictory-history?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other).
- Scotland's government has taken steps to ease the impact of welfare cuts by introducing discretionary housing payments and a weekly child allowance of £25 per child.
- Despite this, new research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that there has been a significant increase in people living in extreme poverty in Scotland over the past two decades.
- While child poverty may have helped those just below the poverty line, it left behind childless adults. Policymakers should avoid equating problematic behaviours with disadvantages because targets can distort their thinking.
- Despite committing to develop a minimum income guarantee, the Scottish government only controls 15% of its social security spending, limiting its ability to do so. If we were to end up with a universal guarantee, it would set an example for others to follow.

LAs Manage Benefits Better



- Local government association resource board chair Peter Marland believes local authorities should manage welfare spending themselves.
- His remarks highlighted the success of the £500m Household Support Fund distributed by councils between October 2021 and March 2022 in helping people cope with Covid-19 disruptions.
- Marland suggested that devolving the entire Department for Work and Pensions budget to local authorities would result in lower unemployment, fewer skills gaps, a more productive economy, and greater efficiency.
- Local authorities understand the support needed to boost employment locally, and evidence indicates that every pound spent locally generates more benefits than is spent by the Department for Work and Pensions.

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

March GDP

Monthly real gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have fallen by 0.3% in March 2023, after showing no growth in February 2023 (unrevised from our previous publication).

Looking at the broader picture, GDP grew by 0.1% in the three months to March 2023.

The services sector fell by 0.5% in March 2023, after an unrevised fall of 0.1% in February 2023, and was the main contributor to the fall in monthly GDP.

Output in consumer facing services fell by 0.8% in March 2023, after unrevised growth of 0.4% in February.

Production output grew by 0.7% in March 2023, which was its strongest monthly growth since May 2021, following a fall of 0.1% in February 2023 (revised up from a 0.2% fall in our last publication).

The construction sector grew by 0.2% in March 2023 after growth of 2.6% in February 2023 (revised up from a 2.4% growth in our previous publication).

Affordable Housing for Disabled People

- There is an expose in Big Issue Magazine (<https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/young-disabled-people-shut-out-housing/>) about Isabelle Atkins, a disabled 26-year-old woman struggling to find affordable, accessible housing.
- She is dropped down the social housing list because her council assumes that she can live with her parents indefinitely. There are only 9% of homes in England with basic accessibility features, making it difficult to find affordable rental housing.
- Only 427 wheelchair-accessible homes are built each year, meaning that the waiting list for such homes is 47 years long.
- Due to the situation, some people have had to crowdfund to buy their own homes and adapt them.
- It is imperative that disabled people speak up for their needs in the housing sector, says Atkins.



The Rising Demand for Food Banks Amidst the Cost-of-Living Crisis

- More people than ever are turning to food banks due to affordability issues, creating a "pressure cooker" situation for these institutions.
- Over 760,000 people used Trussell Trust food banks for the first time, equivalent to more than the population of Sheffield.
- Nearly 3 million emergency food parcels were distributed, a record figure and a 37% increase from the previous year.
- Over 1 million of these parcels were given to children.
- Demand has more than doubled from 2017-2018 when just over 1.3 million parcels were distributed.





Households are getting poorer

- Huw Pill, the Bank of England's chief economist, has stated that households will have to accept declining living standards as a result of inflation.
- He suggested that workers need to stop demanding pay increases to help control rising prices.
- Andrew Bailey, the Bank of England's governor, echoed this sentiment last year, noting that the moderation of wage rises would be difficult but necessary to address the issue.
- Rising costs of essential items, such as food, energy, and broadband services, have burdened families and businesses. Grocery inflation hit 17.3% in the four weeks leading up to April 16, and broadband and mobile phone users are facing price increases of up to 17.3%.
- The UK's headline inflation rate was 10.1% in March.
- To combat this, the Bank of England raised interest rates by 0.25 percentage points to 4.5%.

Which?

Limited Access to Budget Food Items in Small Supermarket Stores

- Key Finding: A study by consumer group Which? found that less than 1% of small stores from leading supermarket chains stock budget-range essentials, impacting low-income families.
- Method: Mystery shoppers were sent to search for approximately 30 budget own-label items at Sainsbury's, Tesco, Asda, and Morrisons stores.
- Results: Large supermarket stores had 87% of the items, while small Tesco Express, Sainsbury's Local, and Morrisons Daily stores stocked these items less than 1% of the time.
- Impact: This lack of budget-range items in small stores affects low-income families who can't afford to travel to larger supermarkets. A Food Foundation survey found 78% of lower-income households would like budget ranges in every store.
- Action Needed: Which? is urging supermarket bosses to ensure budget ranges supporting a healthy diet are available in convenience stores, particularly in areas where people struggle the most.
- Case Study: In three constituencies most vulnerable to food insecurity (Don Valley, Northwest Durham, and Rhondda), none of the budget essentials were found in any of the small stores visited.



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Pension Payment Error

- 1.3 million pensioners were underpaid by £530 million due to processing errors last year.
- Underpayments averaged over £400 per person. The underpayments were discovered after the government began actively conducting checks rather than using estimates, suggesting that underpayments in previous years might have been greater.
- During the 2021-22 financial year, the errors cost benefits and state pension claimants £1.1 billion.

Tech & Fraud

Due to concerns about the impact on the technology industry, the UK government is planning to relax a proposal requiring technology companies to reimburse victims of online financial fraud.

In place of a new national fraud strategy, the government is expected to unveil a voluntary agreement where the technology sector commits to tackling online fraud.

As part of their commitments to reduce fraud, technology companies will change platform interfaces, and some, such as Microsoft and Meta, have committed to revising advertising onboarding processes to ensure UK financial firms are authorised.

Welsh Gov. to simplify the grant system

As a result of councils' concerns regarding stretched resources and tight schedules, the Welsh Government plans to simplify the grant system.

Rebecca Evans, Minister of Finance and Local Government, believes that local governments should deliver more value for money.

She will work with local leaders to develop a new funding framework.

In addition, the government will collaborate with councils to establish principles for future policy-related funding.

According to the Welsh Local Government Association, the announcement reinforces the role of local government in the governance process.

Furthermore, Evans reaffirmed the government's commitment to reforming council tax, including the creation of new tax bands from 2025. The purpose of this reform is to reduce wealth disparities and to provide direct benefits to lower-income households.

Council Strikes on the Cards

- It has been announced that 75% of Unite members in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland voted against a proposed salary increase of £1,925, or 3.88%, which would result in a 9.4% rise for the lowest-paid workers but a smaller increase for most others.
- Members of GMB and Unison, two other trade unions, were also advised to reject this deal.
- The union plans to hold a ballot for industrial action this month, with strikes potentially starting within two months if approved.
- This salary offer would represent another real-terms pay cut for council employees, who have faced such reductions for more than a decade.
- Considering the predicted Retail Prices Index inflation rate for 2023 of 10.7%, the three unions had demanded a 12.7% universal pay increase.
- To avoid a summer of strikes, Unite called for a significantly better pay offer from council leaders.
- There has also been a lack of communication between the union and the employers, despite the possibility of disruptive industrial action.

MPs Who Are Landlords

The campaign group 38 Degrees found that five cabinet ministers earn at least £10,000 a year from renting out properties, including Chancellor Jeremy Hunt and Home Secretary Suella Braverman.

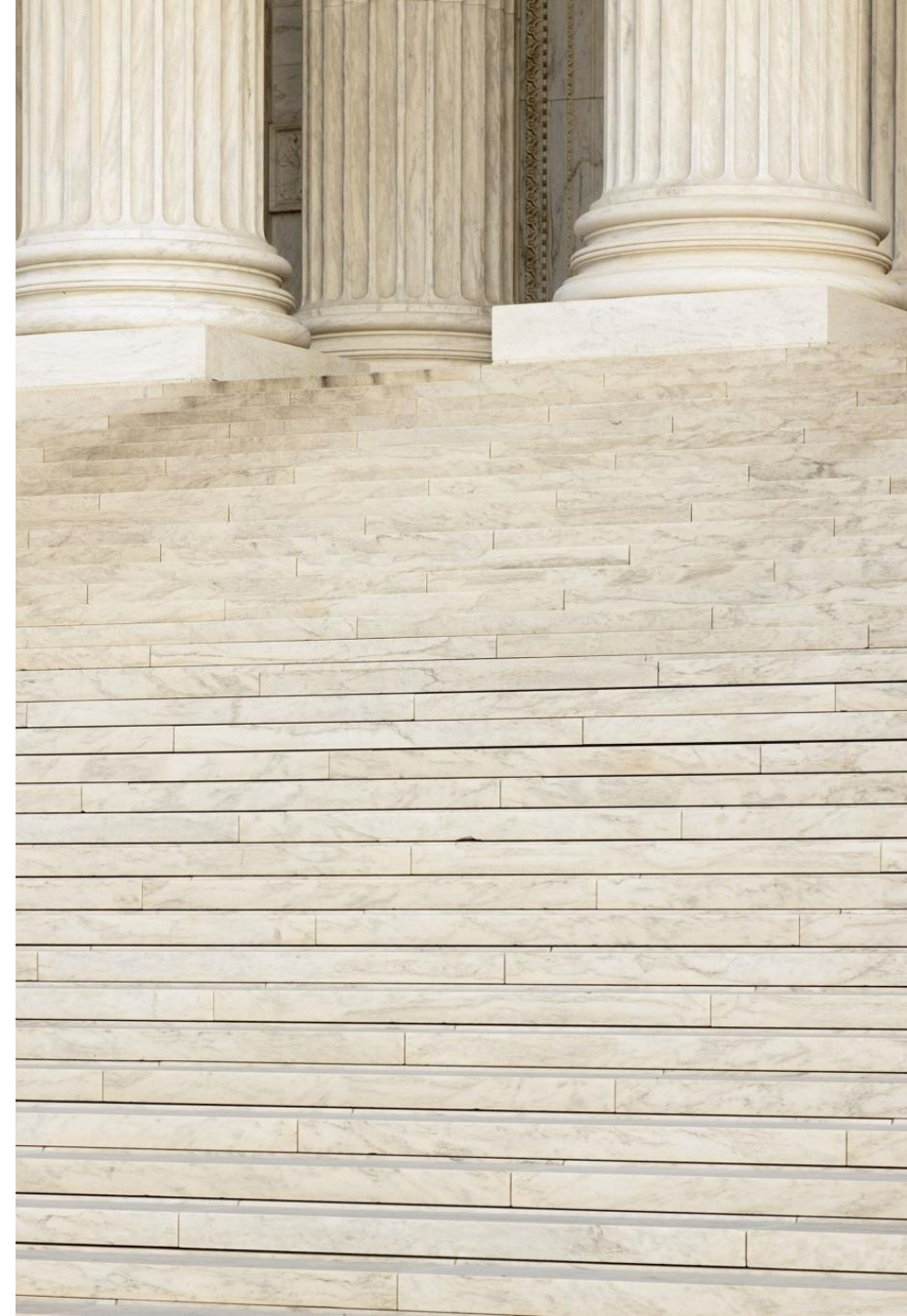
Nearly one-fifth of Conservative MPs own rental properties. As a result, calls have been made for the government to implement a 2019 promise to reform private renting, including banning no-fault evictions and enhancing tenant rights.

There are 87 MPs who are landlords, more than 13% of the Commons, compared to only 4% of the UK population.

MPs could earn up to £2.2 million a year from rental income.

The then Prime Minister, Theresa May, and Boris Johnson promised to reform renting in 2019, including banning no-fault evictions.

Since then, nearly 47,000 households have received no-fault eviction notices under Section 21.



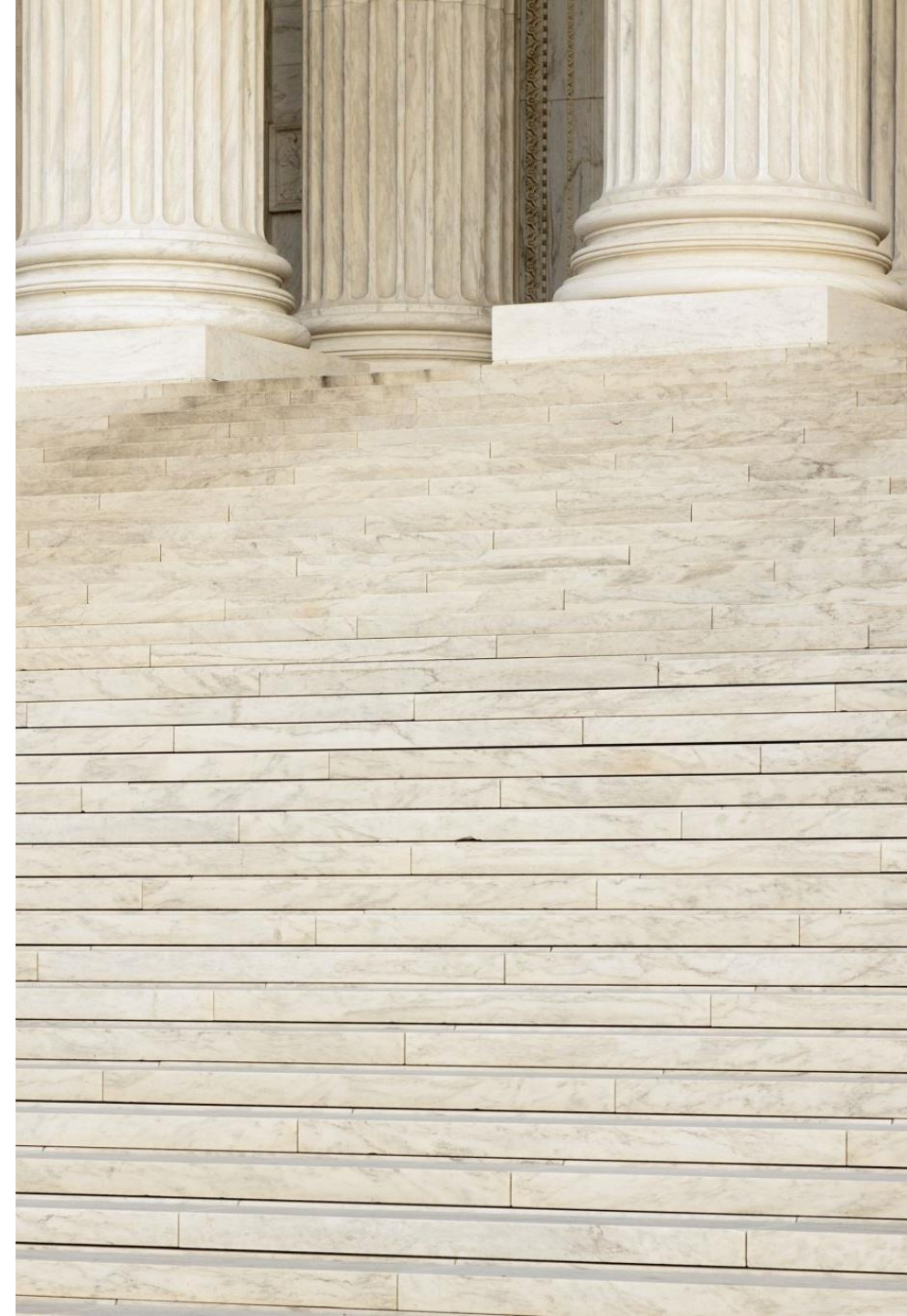
MPs Who Are Landlords

A white paper on rental reform was published by the government in 2022, but the draft legislation has not yet been debated in Parliament due to several changes in housing ministers.

The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has announced that a draft bill will be published shortly.

With the number of renting households more than doubling in the last two decades, there is a growing demand for improved conditions.

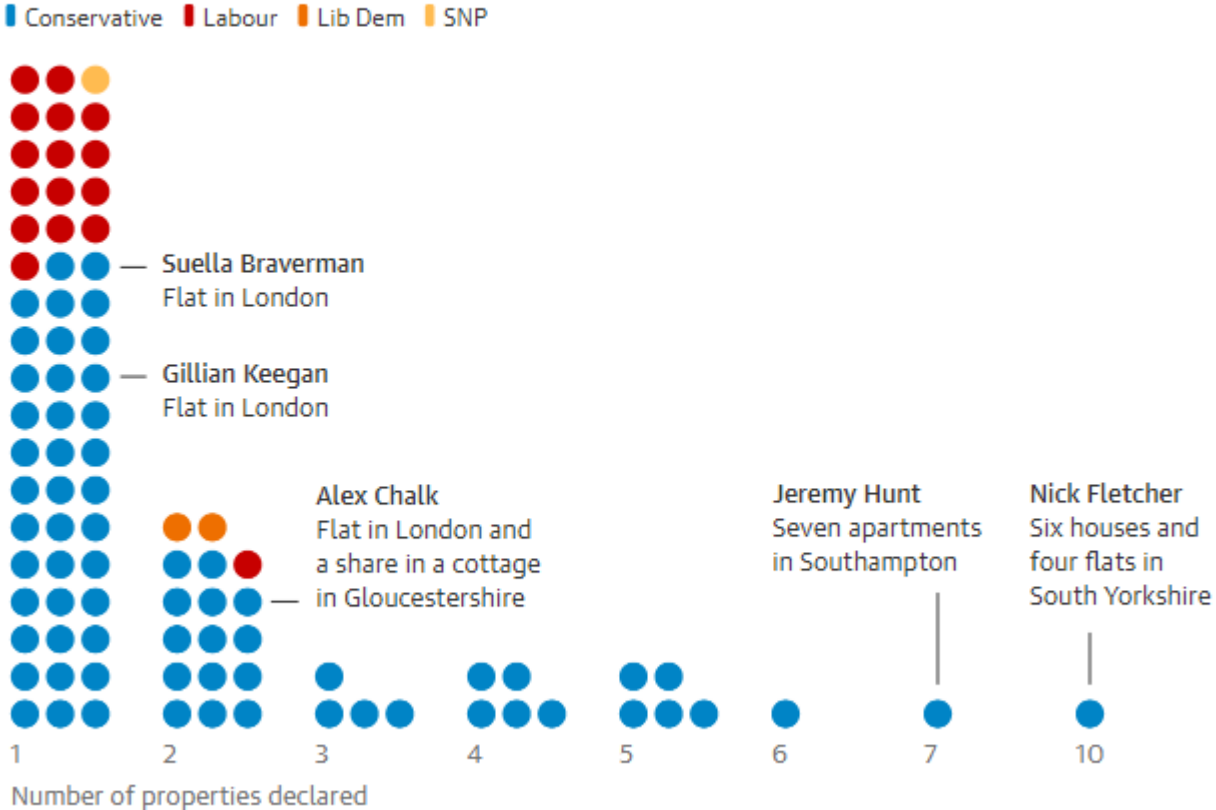
Nearly 800,000 private rented homes in England failed to meet the government's "decent homes standard" in 2021.



MPs Who Are Landlords

Of the 87 MPs who are residential landlords, 68 are Conservatives

MPs who own residential properties with a declared annual income of over £10,000

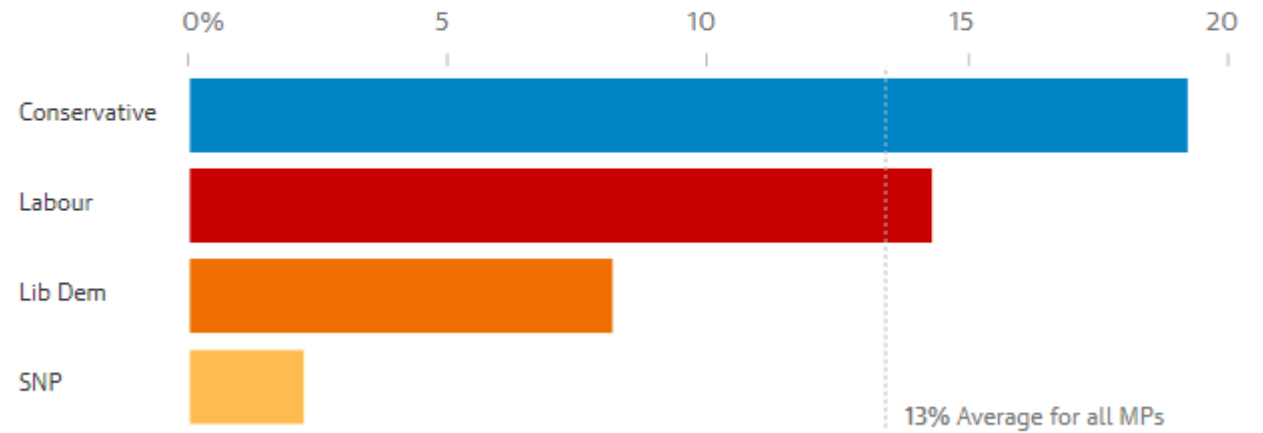


Guardian graphic. Source: 38 Degrees analysis of UK parliament data. Note: Register of MPs' financial interests as of 17 April 2023

MPs Who Are Landlords

Nearly one in 5 Conservative MPs are residential landlords

% of MPs who own residential properties with a declared annual income of over £10,000



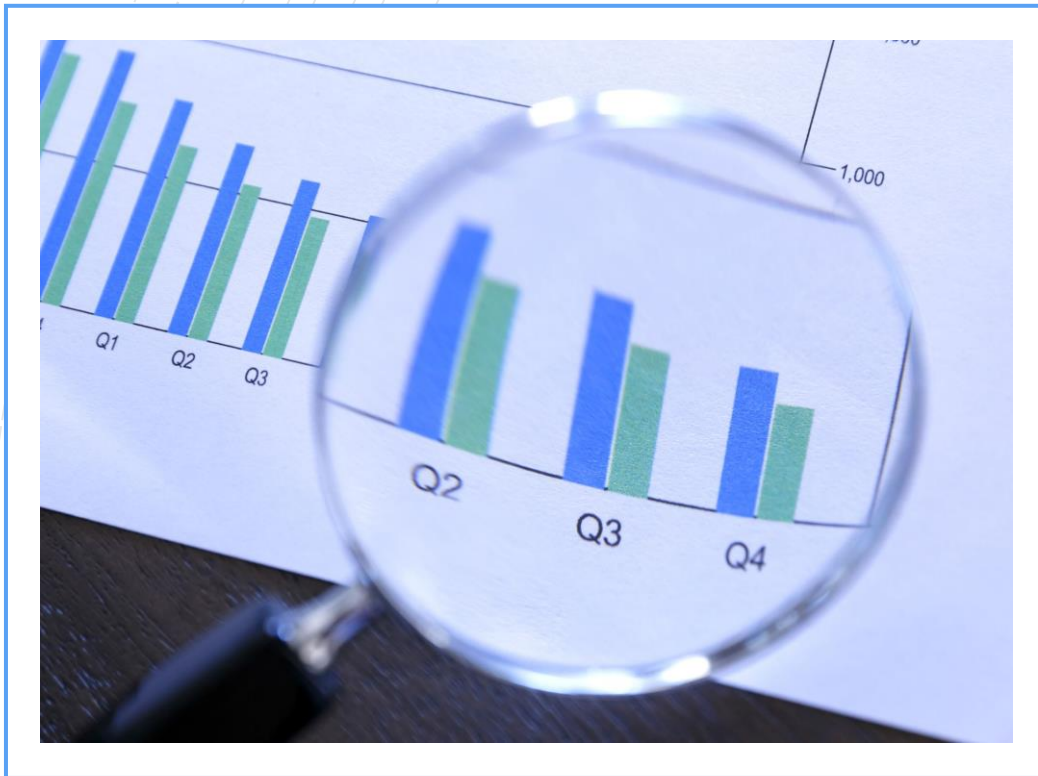
Guardian graphic. Source: 38 Degrees analysis of UK parliament data. Note: Register of MPs' financial interests as of 17 April 2023



New Housing & Planning Restrictions

- UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak faces a cabinet backlash over new planning restrictions that may cause the number of homes built in England to fall by a third.
- In December, the government dropped mandatory housebuilding targets and introduced new planning restrictions after facing opposition from over 100 Tory MPs.
- Labour has pledged to reintroduce the targets, leading to criticism of the government by ministers and Conservative backbenchers.
- Some cabinet ministers and backbenchers believe the lack of new housing is becoming a multigenerational issue, as young people struggle to enter the housing market.
- There are concerns that the government's stance on housing could cost them the election and label the Tories as the "party of nimbyism."

Mortgage & rent defaults rise



- The news that 700,000 UK households missed or defaulted on rent or mortgage payments last month is alarming.
- The data from Which? Magazine points to renters being disproportionately affected, with 2 million households missing or defaulting on various payments in April.
- This news, coupled with the Bank of England's expected increase in borrowing costs and record high average rents, is exacerbating the strain on household finances.
- The situation is a cause for concern, as the burden of financial hardship is increasingly falling on the shoulders of renters.
- With rents continuing to rise and the cost of borrowing becoming more expensive, the outlook for UK households is bleak.
- While the government has taken some steps to assist those affected, it is clear that further measures are needed to help those struggling to make ends meet.
- The government must take action to protect households from spiraling financial difficulties.
- This could include better regulation of rent prices, increased support for those with mortgage or rent arrears, and improved access to financial advice.
- By taking these steps, the government can help to ease the burden on UK households and ensure that those struggling financially can get the support they need.

No Deposit Mortgage

- A deposit-free mortgage has been launched by Skipton Building Society for UK renters.
- Unlike other no-deposit deals, it does not require a guarantor, but it does require a good credit history and 12 months of on-time rental payments.
- The lack of affordable homes remains a key issue for first-time buyers, according to Generation Rent, a campaign group. Currently, 15 other zero-deposit products are available in the UK, making up 0.3% of the market.
- A five-year fixed-rate mortgage from Skipton costs 5.49%, which is higher than the average 5% rate but does not require a guarantor.
- In order to build a track record, borrowers must still pass credit and affordability checks. Finding affordable rental properties can be challenging as well.
- Help to Buy closed in October 2022, but reports indicate that a similar scheme may be reintroduced.
- As high loan-to-value mortgages contributed to the 2008 financial crash, some worry that a rise in zero-deposit mortgages may increase risk.



NAO on Supported Accommodation

- The National Audit Office has found that increasing numbers of landlords are exploiting gaps in regulation to profit by providing substandard supported housing with little to no support, supervision, or care for vulnerable people, such as recovering drug addicts, former prisoners, homeless people, and domestic abuse victims.
- An exemption from normal limits on housing benefit payments is being exploited by some unscrupulous landlords.
- There is a need for government support to address regulatory gaps that come at a great cost to taxpayers, according to the Commons select committee on levelling up, housing, and communities.
- In an effort to raise standards and prevent rogue landlords from exploiting the system, the government has provided some funding to improve quality and value for money in supported housing.
- <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/investigation-into-supported-housing-summary.pdf>

DULAC Leasehold Scheme Dropped



- Plans to abolish the leasehold system in England and Wales have been dropped following a disagreement between Downing Street and Housing Secretary Michael Gove.
- Instead, Gove will announce measures next month to protect the 10 million Britons with leasehold properties, including a cap on ground rents, more tenant powers to choose property management companies, and a ban on building owners forcing leaseholders to pay legal costs in disputes.
- Although Gove had pledged to end the leasehold system, Downing Street officials argued that there wasn't enough time before next year's election to enact such major reforms.
- The housing secretary had hoped to replace leaseholds with a "commonhold" system, allowing flat owners to make joint decisions on shared areas of buildings.



Capita Cyber Attack: An Update

- Limited Damage and Steps Taken
 - Cyber attack on outsourcing firm Capita occurred last month.
 - Staff were temporarily locked out of computers.
 - A small amount of data was taken.
 - Security measures prevented a larger incident.
- Financial Impact and Affected Entities
 - Cost estimates from the attack could reach £20m.
 - Councils including Barnet and Barking and Dagenham were promptly informed.
 - The Information Commissioner's Office was notified.

Capita Cyber Attack: An Update

- Origin and Extent
 - Some pension data was taken by the attackers.
 - Attackers have unofficially been linked to Russia.
 - Less than 0.1% of Capita's server estate was affected.
- Mitigation and Prevention
 - Capita worked with specialist advisers and forensic experts.
 - Extensive steps were taken to recover and secure affected data.
 - Investment in reinforcing Capita's cyber security environment is underway.
- Cost and Commitment
 - Capita plans to incur £15m to £20m in costs related to the incident.
 - This cost includes professional fees, recovery and remediation costs, and security investment.
 - Additional steps are being taken to ensure the integrity, safety, and security of Capita's IT infrastructure.

VEP service individual LA allocations for the FYE March 2024

Top Ten largest awards

Local Authority name	Funding allocations
London Borough of Newham	£243,581.60
Enfield Council	£221,870.24
London Borough of Hackney	£199,192.91
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	£197,308.67
Brent Council	£196,100.89
Lewisham Council	£175,274.20
London Borough of Lambeth	£172,979.81
Birmingham City Council	£171,270.45
Royal Borough of Greenwich	£145,189.93
Croydon Council	£138,885.12



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VEP service individual LA allocations for the FYE March 2024


Top Smallest awards

Local Authority name	Funding allocations
Council of the Isles of Scilly	£0.00
Angus Council	£6,000.00
Argyll and Bute Council	£6,000.00
Babergh District Council	£6,000.00
Blaby District Council	£6,000.00
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	£6,000.00
Brentwood Borough Council	£6,000.00
Burnley Borough Council	£6,000.00
Chorley Council	£6,000.00
City of London Corporation	£6,000.00
Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar	£6,000.00
East Dunbartonshire Council	£6,000.00
Halton Borough Council	£6,000.00
Harborough District Council	£6,000.00
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council	£6,000.00
Isle of Anglesey County Council	£6,000.00
Lichfield District Council	£6,000.00
Malvern Hills District Council	£6,000.00
Melton Borough Council	£6,000.00
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	£6,000.00
North Kesteven District Council	£6,000.00
North West Leicestershire District Council	£6,000.00
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council	£6,000.00
Orkney Islands Council	£6,000.00
Pendle Borough Council	£6,000.00
Ribble Valley Borough Council	£6,000.00
Rossendale Borough Council	£6,000.00
Rutland County Council	£6,000.00
Shetland Islands Council	£6,000.00
South Ribble Borough Council	£6,000.00
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	£6,000.00
Tamworth Borough Council	£6,000.00
West Devon Borough Council	£6,000.00
West Lancashire Borough Council	£6,000.00
West Lindsey District Council	£6,000.00



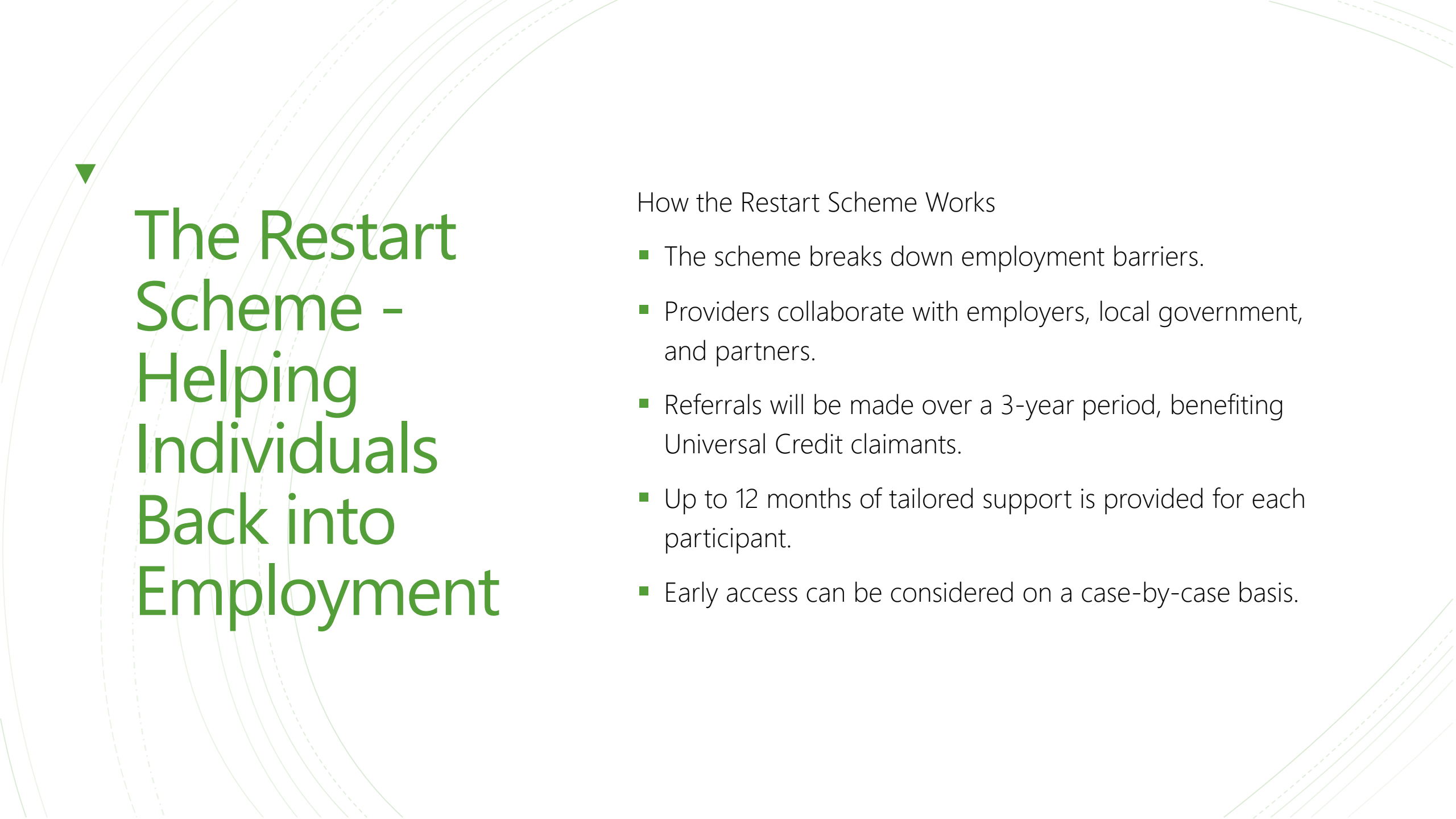
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The Restart Scheme - Helping Individuals Back into Employment

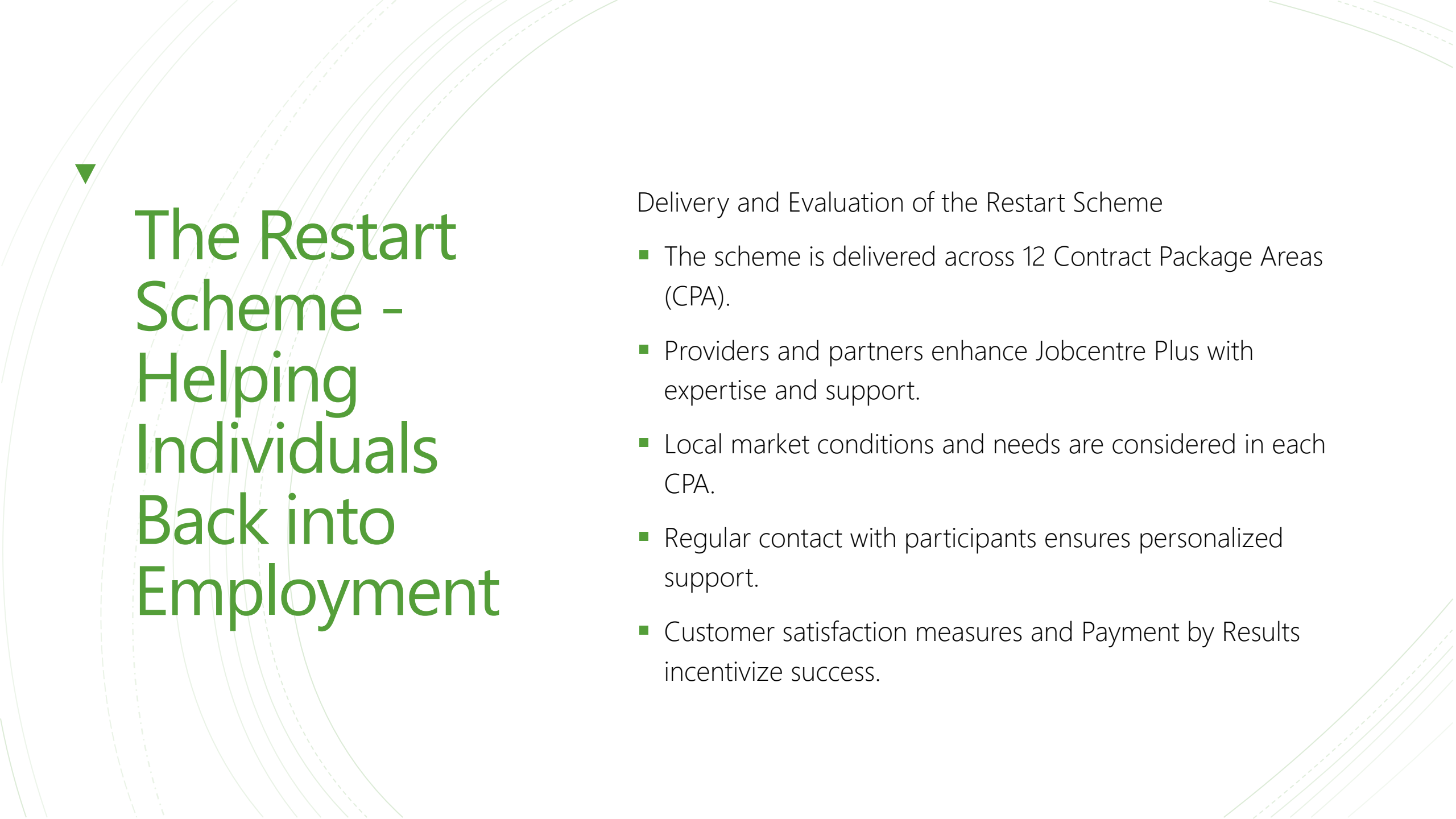
- The Restart Scheme will give Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for at least 9 months enhanced support to find jobs in their local area.
- The government's Plan for Jobs is supporting people impacted by COVID-19.
- The Restart Scheme provides tailored support for those out of work.
- Referrals began in July 2021, initially targeting Universal Credit claimants.
- From January 2022, the scheme expanded to include more claimants.
- Eligibility criteria were further expanded in late April 2022.



The Restart Scheme - Helping Individuals Back into Employment

How the Restart Scheme Works

- The scheme breaks down employment barriers.
- Providers collaborate with employers, local government, and partners.
- Referrals will be made over a 3-year period, benefiting Universal Credit claimants.
- Up to 12 months of tailored support is provided for each participant.
- Early access can be considered on a case-by-case basis.



▼ The Restart Scheme - Helping Individuals Back into Employment

Delivery and Evaluation of the Restart Scheme

- The scheme is delivered across 12 Contract Package Areas (CPA).
- Providers and partners enhance Jobcentre Plus with expertise and support.
- Local market conditions and needs are considered in each CPA.
- Regular contact with participants ensures personalized support.
- Customer satisfaction measures and Payment by Results incentivize success.



Apprenticeships

- In a recent statement, Tesco CEO Ken Murphy criticised the apprenticeship levy system for favouring higher-level courses for high-earners while declining uptake of lower-level apprenticeships.
- He notes that apprenticeships equivalent to bachelor's degrees have increased by 400% from 2014 to 2022, while those equivalent to GCSEs have fallen by 70%. Since 2017, more than £1bn has been spent on master's courses funded by the apprenticeship levy, including £100m for MBAs for high earners.
- Over £13 million has been allocated to six universities to subsidise senior leadership apprenticeships in the past two years.
- As part of his proposal, Murphy urges the government to make the levy more flexible, allowing companies to invest in skills-enhancing programmes for young and inexperienced employees. Moreover, unused levy funds were returned to the government in 2021 as a tax due to a decline in lower-level training.

A green speech bubble graphic with a white outline, containing the text 'An Adequacy Standard for benefits'.

An Adequacy
Standard for
benefits



Introduction

The working-age benefit safety net in the UK has fallen to alarmingly low levels.

This puts those depending on it at risk of severe deprivation.

Correcting this is made difficult by the lack of agreement on what minimum level of benefits are adequate.

Additionally, the lack of any evidence-based benchmarks informing current benefit levels makes it challenging to determine what level of benefits is adequate.



Objective Benchmarks for Adequate Safety-Net Benefits

Objective benchmarks for adequate safety-net benefits are elusive.

The evidence-based Minimum Income Standard (MIS) shows what the public thinks people need for a decent life, but not the level they think benefits should support.

Expenditure benchmarks tell us about spending norms on different incomes, but not whether people lower down the income distribution are spending enough to meet their needs.



The Need to Look at Outcomes

There is scope for looking more closely at the outcomes of living at benchmarks relative to MIS or spending levels.

For example, in terms of the increased risks of experiencing material deprivation faced by people on given income levels.



Public Opinion on Benefit Levels

Public opinion is moving towards the view that benefits have become too low.

This may help endorse a better minimum benefit level.

However, fluctuations in public opinion would be a problematic basis for establishing benefit entitlements.



The "Alarm Bell" System

One approach could be to combine these strands of evidence in an "alarm bell" system.

This system would prevent benefits from breaching a very "minimalist" level on any one criterion.



Moving Towards a Minimum Acceptable Standard of Living

A further step would be to move benefits towards a more ambitious target.

This target would be designed to enable people to escape poverty and get closer to a minimum acceptable standard of living.



Independent Commission

An independent commission could consider these options.

The commission could potentially make non-binding recommendations to government.

These recommendations would show what level of “adequacy” benefits should be moving towards.



Quote of the Week

“Dance like nobody is watching. Email like it might be read out at a tribunal.” – Anon

The attribution "Anon" is short for anonymous, meaning the author or source of the information is not identified or disclosed. It is a way to indicate that the source is unknown or wishes to remain anonymous for various reasons, such as fear of retaliation, protection of privacy, or other concerns. In journalism and other forms of communication, "Anon" is often used to indicate that the author's identity is not disclosed, but the information has been verified by the publisher or editor.



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.



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Building Teams That Redefine Excellence

Empowering both clients and candidates to achieve their goals



Welcome to #TeamBSS

Your Public Sector Recruitment Partner

Expertise

Since we started back in 2018, we've been focused on public sector recruitment, and it's become our specialty! We're excited to bring our experience and know-how to the table when it comes to supporting public sector organisations by connecting them with amazing candidates.

Understanding the challenges

We truly "get" the unique needs and challenges faced by both clients and candidates in the public sector. This understanding allows us to provide solid support and guidance throughout the entire recruitment journey. Our expertise in handling the ins and outs of public sector hiring means that clients and candidates alike can trust us to make the right connections and contribute to the success of their organisations.

Matchmakers

Our agency is passionate about finding the perfect match between local government positions and top-notch professionals. We know that getting the right person for the job is crucial, and our expert recruiters go the extra mile to source and evaluate candidates who have the right mix of skills, experience, and personality to thrive in public sector roles.

Tailored solutions

We're all about offering customised solutions for both our clients and candidates. We understand that everyone has different needs, so we take the time to really listen and get to know what's important to each party. This way, we can create recruitment strategies that make everyone happy and lead to successful outcomes.



Civica Open Revenues Systems Manager

12 Months+ | £450 per day Umbrella | Remote

The Assignment

We are seeking a qualified and dedicated Revenues & Benefits Systems Manager for a 12-month remote contract, offering up to £450.00 per day (umbrella). The successful candidate will be responsible for managing the Revenues & Benefits ICT systems and the Business Support team, ensuring the smooth operation and proactive management of the department.

This role requires close collaboration with Revenues Teams and the Revenues and Benefits Service management team to drive the effective delivery and continuous improvement of Revenues Services. The Systems Manager will also be expected to provide cover for the Benefits Project and Development Manager when needed, showcasing adaptability and versatility in their skill set.

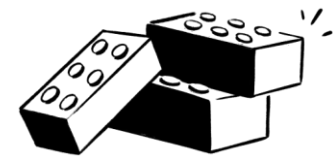
What we're looking for

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

1. Essential experience with Civica Open Revenues as a back-end user
2. Expertise in managing Revenues Service ICT systems and providing support to colleagues
3. Proven ability in leading a Business Support team and working proactively with software suppliers for service optimization and value for money

To find out more or to apply

[>> Click here to visit the full advert](#)



Debt Recovery Officer

12 Weeks | £16.21 ph Umbrella | Huntingdon

The Assignment

The Debt Recovery Specialist is responsible for providing an effective and customer-focused support service to users of the Income and Debt Recovery service, systems, and processes. As a key point of contact for colleagues and service users, the successful candidate will ensure an integrated approach to transactions, maximize income recovery for customers, and achieve resolution and payment of outstanding debt in accordance with the Collections Strategy.

This role requires working independently while scheduling and prioritizing tasks to meet service requirements. It also involves implementing new technologies, methodologies, and processes that meet the needs of clients, customers, and the client organization, while continuously striving for service improvements and collaborating on projects that support developments and enhancements for the Transactions Service.

What we're looking for

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

1. NVQ Level 2 or equivalent in Business & Administration or Finance, or significant experience in a similar or related service
2. Proven experience in transactional processing and knowledge of debt recovery processes
3. Strong customer service background with conflict resolution, negotiation, and diplomacy skills

To find out more or to apply

[>> Click here to visit the full advert](#)





Partner with #TeamBSS, achieve together

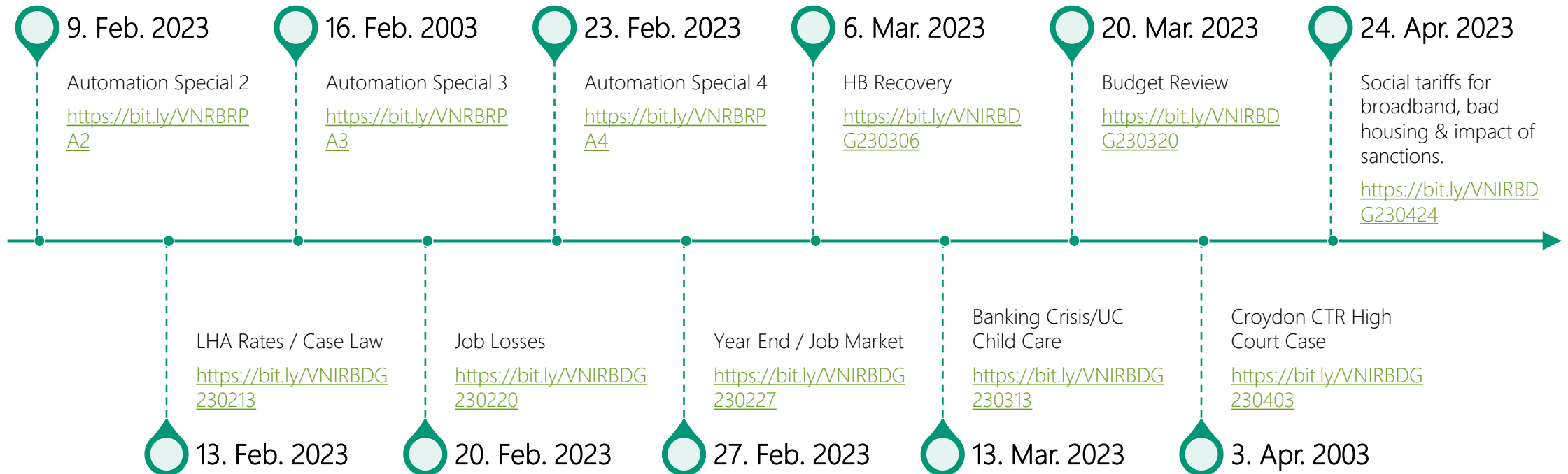
Visit: www.businesssmartsolutions.co.uk





Other Information

Previous Recordings



- 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

Welsh Benefits System

- [Heraeth Pod Cast](#)



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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.

A nonprofit organization is a type of organization that is formed for a specific social or charitable purpose rather than for profit. Its primary goal is to serve the needs of a particular community, cause, or interest, and any profits or revenue generated are reinvested back into the organization to further its mission, rather than being distributed as profits to owners or shareholders.