

Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

10 July 2023



In
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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



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

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Discussion Points



OfLog



Digital Exclusion



Food banks



DWP Underpayments



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

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The law and practice relating to Welfare Benefits is complex, detailed, open to interpretation and endlessly dynamic

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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

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Ferret Information Systems Ltd



Ferret Information Systems was established in 1987 and is the largest company in Europe in the field of law dealing with welfare benefits and similar areas of determinative, compliance, and regulatory law.



our training services:

Ferret is well placed to provide training services and its team of specialists have wide experience of benefits and housing grant legislation. We also provide consultancy to organisations, companies and government on the impact of legislative and policy changes.



our products:

Ferret produces a wide variety of systems, designed to provide support tools for advice workers, and also to provide information and advice directly to the public. Ferret specialises in a holistic assessment of financial circumstances relating to welfare benefits and tax credits entitlement, coupled with software development methodology which offers a high level of flexibility and rapid updating to reflect rule changes.



our platforms:

Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.



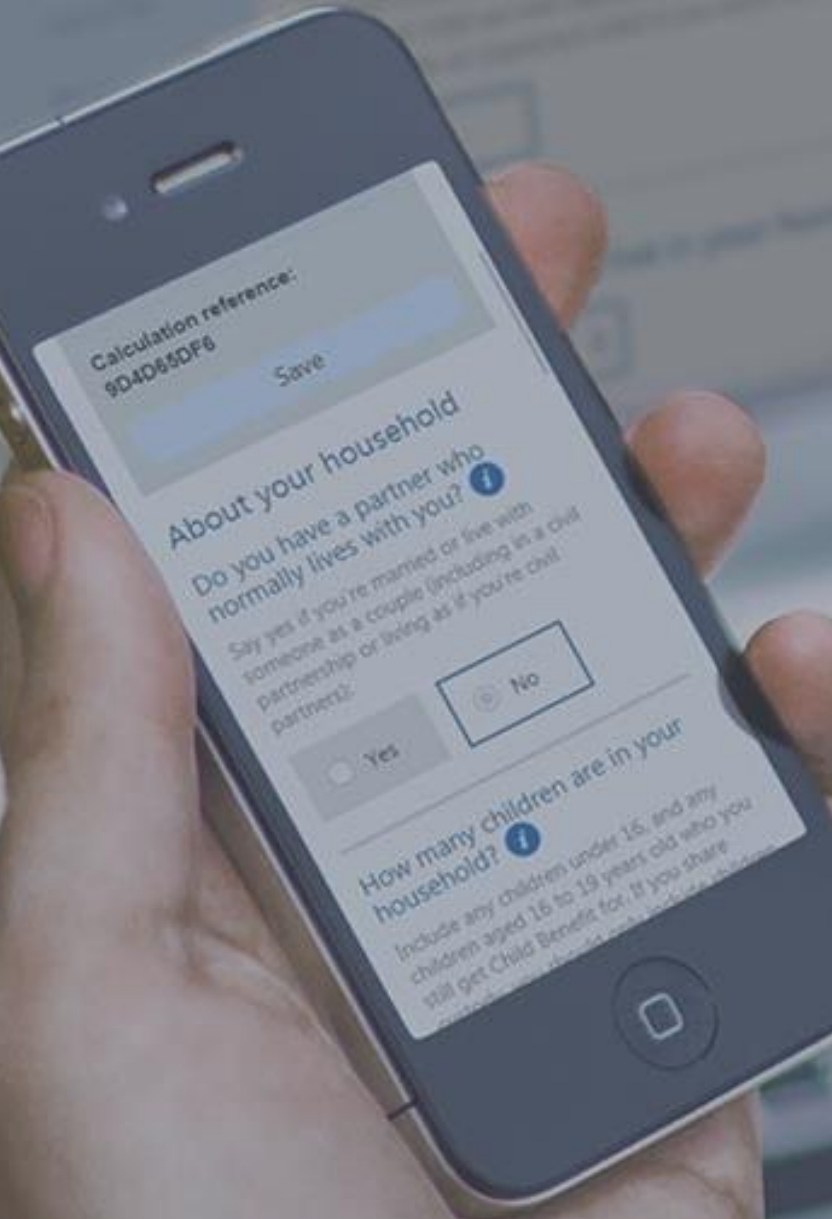
our customers:

Users of Ferret systems include government departments, local authorities, housing associations, CABx, HIA's and other advice agencies, universities, social welfare organisations, libraries, solicitors and financial advisers.

<https://www.ferret.co.uk/>

entitledto

independent | accurate | reliable



Our mission is to help everyone to access the benefits they're entitled to.

Since 2000 we have used our in-depth knowledge of the UK's social security system to build a range of authoritative and accurate calculators to help you and your clients understand their legitimate benefits entitlement.

Our tools are designed to be quick, simple and easy to use, so your staff and clients feel empowered to deal with the benefits system with confidence.

In response to evolving business needs and ongoing local and national policy changes, we will continue to work with and for our clients to develop new features and functionality.

Our goal is to assist your teams in adapting to legislative changes and welfare reform so you can help more people find out what benefits they are entitled to, thereby improving their circumstances and those of their families.



Ascendant Solutions
data management

Barnet Council has become the first local authority to launch the Ascendant apply4.online application form, designed to support residents with the rise in cost of living.

The InBest benefits calculator has been integrated into Ascendant's apply4.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](#)



Apply4.Online®

A request



- Ferret, EntitledTo, Policy in Practice & InBest all must update the CTR element of their calculators. All four 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.
- If you operate local welfare schemes, can you tell them about those too.

End

Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Consultant

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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>

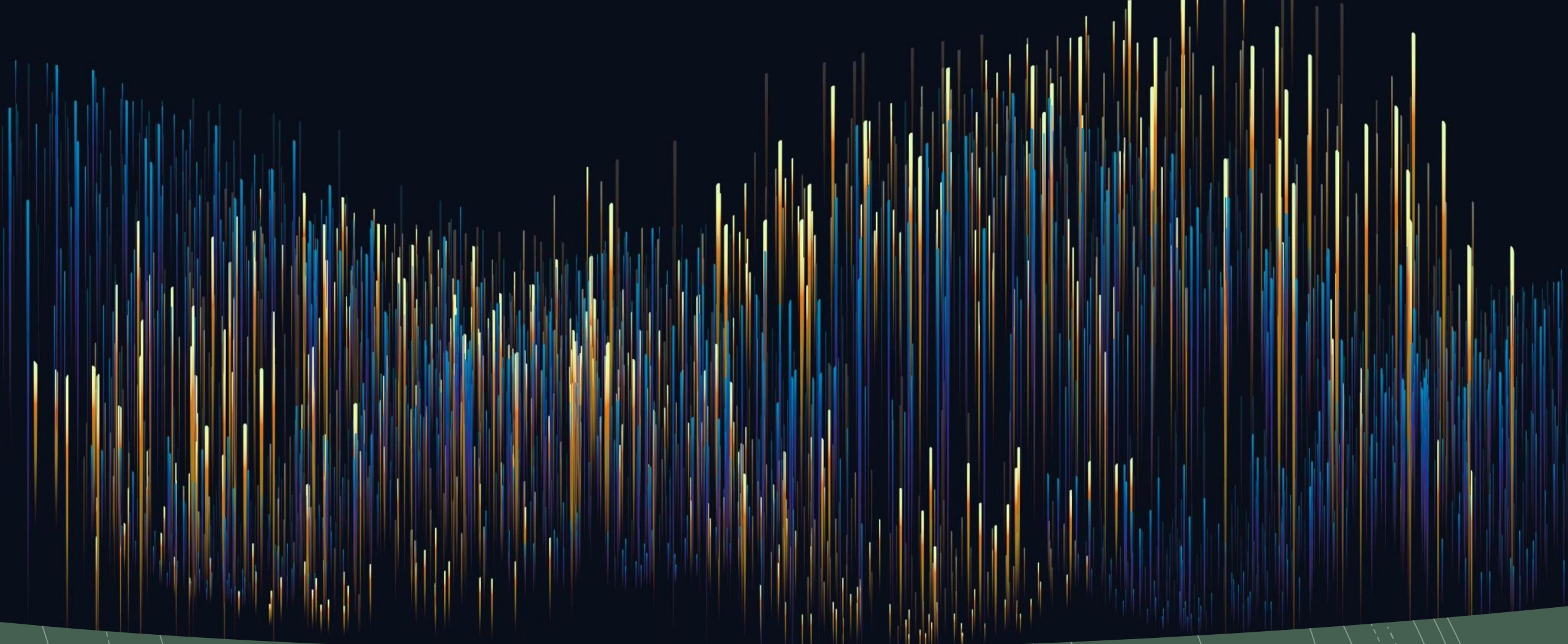
Links to the recordings and the slide packs plus other relevant documents will be posted into both the WhatsApp group and in the Teams Channel and emailed to those who attended and subscribers to the group.

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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Main Discussion Points



Oflog

- The Office for Local Government (Oflog) is expected to be launched before the Local Government Association's annual conference in July.
- Oflog is a new body established to assess local government performance across England.
- The announcement of Oflog was made by levelling up Secretary Michael Gove at the LGA conference in 2022.
- Oflog aims to measure local authorities' performance in four key areas: adult social care, skills, reserves, and waste management.
- One metric used by Oflog to assess local government performance will be bin collection.
- The purpose of Oflog is to increase transparency, foster accountability, and drive local government performance.

Oflog

- Oflog will produce an annual report used by central government to improve understanding of local government and inform necessary action.
- Lord Amyas Morse, former head of the National Audit Office, will chair Oflog.
- Local government minister Lee Rowley stated that Oflog would act as a "protective shield" around councils.
- Oflog is not a resurrection of the audit commission but aims to genuinely help local authorities.
- The body is due to launch shortly, with input and improvement from representatives across local government.

Oflog: Gove at the LGA conference

- Secretary of State Michael Gove launched the Office for Local Government (Oflog), aimed at celebrating and extending local government excellence, while addressing issues in councils.
- Despite concerns over financial problems, he downplayed the number of troubled councils.
- Oflog will partner with the LGA improvement team and is currently accepting applications for its leadership.
- Promises were made to end the competition for funding pots, to solve the audit backlog, and to change the bidding system for levelling up funds.
- Gove praised Swindon's use of AI in cost reduction and form processing, and affirmed the government's commitment to a five-day work week in councils.
- Future consultations for allocation methodologies are planned.

Oflog LG Data Explorer

- The Office for Local Government (Oflog) has introduced an online Local Authority Data Explorer.
- The tool aims to bring together existing data and provide contextualised and comparable information on local government performance and national trends.
- Secretary of State Michael Gove announced the establishment of Oflog and the launch of the Data Explorer in a statement to Parliament.
- The Data Explorer is currently in beta and focuses on indicators such as waste management, adult social care, adult skills, and finance for local authorities in England.
- It allows users to compare performance against other councils, selected authorities, or neighboring councils as defined by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) indicators.
- Oflog plans to expand the range of data available and improve existing metrics based on user feedback.
- It will also utilise the data to identify local authorities at risk of potential failure and facilitate dialogues with expert local leaders.

Digital Exclusion

Issue of Digital Exclusion in the UK

A House of Lords report has found that the UK's ambition to become a technology superpower is hampered by significant digital exclusion.

The digital skills shortage costs the economy up to £63 billion a year.

The report claims the scale of the problem is a "direct consequence of political lethargy", and the government lacks a credible plan to combat digital exclusion.

The committee recommends a new digital inclusion strategy and investment in basic digital skills and digital inclusion hubs.

The Impact of the Digital Skills Divide

The report finds that four million people in the UK cannot complete a single basic digital task, with seven million households lacking broadband or mobile internet access.

The committee predicts that by 2030, five million workers will be significantly under-skilled.

90% of jobs are only advertised online, causing those without internet access to miss out on opportunities.

The digital divide also affects businesses with 57% of UK IT firms citing the digital talent shortage as a significant barrier.

Recommendations and Government Response

The committee warns that the government should not assume digital exclusion will disappear with the aging workforce.

The report calls on the government to establish a cross-government digital exclusion unit to tackle this issue.

It also advises continuous development of digital skills for all age groups as technology evolves.

In response, a government spokesperson said that measures are being taken, including essential digital skills training, promoting affordable internet tariffs, and expanding gigabit broadband coverage.

Rural Broadband

CityFibre secures £318m government funding and £170m private investment to boost connectivity in rural areas.

Gigabit-capable infrastructure will be delivered to 218,000 homes and businesses in Norfolk, Suffolk and Hampshire.

The initiative is part of Project Gigabit, a £5bn government mission for reliable, high-speed broadband UK-wide.

Post-funding, the gigabit coverage will rise to 76% from just 6% in 2019, supporting speeds up to 10Gbps.

This step is seen as crucial in reducing digital exclusion, enhancing access to services like online banking, healthcare, and education.

The Digital Poverty Alliance stresses the importance of affordable connectivity, digital skills training, and device accessibility alongside this rollout.

Problems with Broadband

Over 50% of UK broadband customers experienced connection problems according to a Which? report.

Telecoms providers, including Sky, Virgin Media, and EE, criticised for "greenflation", implementing mid-contract price rises up to 17.3%.

Even among the best performers, over 40% of customers experienced at least one issue with their connection.

Customers also dissatisfied with customer service, with 44% encountering problems.

Telecoms industry under scrutiny for increasing bills annually by inflation rates plus additional increase, a practice under investigation by Ofcom.

Ofcom and government discussing potential solutions, such as better promotion of cheaper social tariffs for vulnerable customers.

Advocacy calls for changes ensuring customers are not trapped in contracts with above-inflation price hikes or high exit fees.

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The Limitations of Food Banks: Moving Towards Sustainable Solutions

- Food banks have been unable to address the cost-of-living crisis and widespread hardship in the UK.
 - Denise Bentley closed her food bank, realising it was not a long-term solution.
 - Trussell Trust, the largest food bank network, acknowledges the need for a social security system to provide essential support.
- Food banks face challenges due to increased demand and limited food supplies.
 - Record demand and decreased donations during the pandemic have strained food banks.
 - Food banks are purchasing food and exploring new procurement methods to meet demand.
- Charity food alone cannot alleviate poverty and is unsustainable.
 - Food banks have become overwhelmed and operate like "food conveyor belts."
 - The focus should shift to addressing underlying issues, such as income insecurity and lack of support.

The Limitations of Food Banks: Moving Towards Sustainable Solutions

- First Love Foundation exemplifies a new approach to tackle poverty.
 - The foundation shifted its focus from food provision to providing support and advocacy.
 - By addressing underlying issues, they have transformed lives and increased household incomes.
- A better way forward is needed beyond food poverty; it's about addressing “poverty as a whole”.
 - Sustainable solutions require a comprehensive approach to support individuals and families.
 - Moving away from charity food and investing in support services can have a lasting impact.

Overview of DWP Underpayments

Last year, benefit claimants in the UK were underpaid by £3.3bn, the highest level on record.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) revealed as many as 330,000 people may have missed out on £1.5bn of state pension entitlement.

National insurance records for 10 million universal credit claimants have not been properly updated.

The National Audit Office qualified the DWP's accounts due to material fraud and error, for the 35th consecutive year.

The Personal Independence Payment had the highest underpayment rate, largely due to claimant errors.

State Pension Underpayment and Measures

DWP admitted that a significant number of people, mostly women, who received child benefits before 2000, did not have their national insurance records updated to reflect periods of “home responsibilities protection”.

It is estimated that around 210,000 people were underpaid an estimated total of £1.3bn in state pensions, though these numbers could vary.

The department will have to repay an estimated amount between £310m and £1.5bn.

The DWP and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) are working together to find the affected individuals and correct their records.

HMRC will initiate a tracking effort later this year to expedite the corrections.



Other news

IFS: Living standards and inequality

- Average disposable household income before deducting housing costs:
 - Rose by 0.5% in 2021–22.
 - Remained 1.2% lower than pre-pandemic levels.
 - Muted increase due to a rebound in nominal incomes offset by inflation.
 - After deducting housing costs, average incomes were 0.2% higher in 2021–22 than in 2019–20.

IFS: Living standards and inequality

- Income growth among poorer households:
 - Bottom third of households saw a rise in income between 2019–20 and 2021–22.
 - Rise of 1.5% before deducting housing costs and 2.7% after deducting housing costs.
 - Fall in employment income offset by a rise in benefit incomes and a fall in housing costs.
 - Low-income households were more affected by benefit increases and housing cost changes.

IFS: Living standards and inequality

- Increase in benefit incomes among low-income households:
 - Not solely due to a fall in employment income.
 - Average benefit receipt in 2021–22 higher than in 2019–20 at all earnings levels.
 - Result of the temporary £20 uplift to universal credit and increased generosity of universal credit for in-work households.
 - Share of low-income households receiving disability benefits rose by 26%.

IFS: Living standards and inequality

- Impact of inactivity among individuals aged 50–70:
 - Those who became economically inactive in 2020–21 more likely to end up in poverty.
 - Decline in self-reported well-being greater for recently inactive individuals in 2020.
 - 2021–22 cohort had similar outcomes to pre-pandemic inactive individuals.

IFS: Living standards and inequality

- Perception of exits into inactivity:
 - Exits into inactivity over the pandemic not driven by wealthy individuals retiring comfortably.
 - Many individuals forced into early retirement, leading to a decline in living standards and well-being.
 - Inactive individuals at older ages often do not re-enter the workforce, resulting in persistently low living standards.
 - Those who became inactive in 2021–22 likely did so by choice, as labor market disruption and health risks had subsided.

DWP Guidance withdrawn

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has recently retracted a guidance document, in circulation since 2010, that was intended for physicians evaluating benefit claims, specifically those related to osteoporosis. This decision comes in response to the detection of a racial slur directed at Black people within the material.
- The controversial document was disseminated among medical professionals by Atos, a firm subcontracted by the government to administer disability benefit evaluations. Following the exposure of the racially offensive language, which was broadly denounced, an MP branded the document as "lazy and racist," and a race campaigner suggested the language implied a dehumanising view of Black people.
- Atos has issued an apology and immediately retracted the document. Meanwhile, the government has conceded that the offensive language was indeed present in the document, but it has categorically denied endorsing such language.

Covid Business Loans

- Due to soaring interest rates on debt repayments, thousands of businesses already weakened by the Covid-19 pandemic are now at risk of closure.
- This particularly affects hospitality businesses like pubs and restaurants, which took on various forms of finance, including government-backed Covid loans, to survive the crisis.
- The Federation of Small Businesses, Hospitality UK, and the British Beer and Pub Association are urging Chancellor Jeremy Hunt to extend the extra financial support offered to homeowners to businesses.
- Suggestions include payment holidays or interest-only deals.
- Government figures show £26bn was loaned to around 100,000 firms under the government-backed Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), with only one in four firms having paid off their crisis loan.

Disability benefit system designed to fail



- Former disability assessors claim that the disability benefits system is designed to catch people out and is target-driven, causing disabled people to fail.
- Assessors face pressure to increase the number of assessments completed, leading to little empathy for claimants and inaccurate results.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) uses private contractors to carry out assessments for the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) benefit.
- Initial challenges over benefit decisions are rejected by the DWP in almost 90% of cases, but 68% of claimants win their case when appealing at tribunal.
- Claimants experience severe psychological distress and negative impacts on their health due to the assessment and appeals process.
- The disability benefits system has been linked to avoidable deaths of disabled people.
- Assessors have little control over final decisions, and audits are carried out by individuals who have not met the claimants.
- Financial incentives may exist for assessors to increase the number of assessments completed.

Living Together Fraud and Error (LTFE)

- LTFE refers to cases where a claimant with a partner receives benefits as a single person, either intentionally (fraud) or due to error.
- This is a significant issue in the UK, costing taxpayers approximately £760m per year.
- For Universal Credit (UC), both partners' circumstances are assessed, resulting in a couple rate lower than the amount for single adults.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) uses guidance on Living Together as a Married Couple (LTAMC) to determine couple status.
- UC payments typically go to one partner unless specific circumstances (like domestic abuse) necessitate separate payments.

Findings from the Evidence Review

- There is minimal direct evidence on LTFE and its relationship with living together policy.
- Research implies living together policy may deter some from cohabitation due to concerns over financial implications of joint assessment.
- Existing policy reflects assumptions about who will financially support whom, potentially out of step with modern couple behaviors.
- More couples are choosing to maintain separate incomes, but direct evidence on how changing social norms affect LTFE is scant.

Potential Policy Reforms for LTFE Reduction

- The report discusses potential reform without making specific recommendations, given the issue's complexity and lack of policy evaluations.
- One option is reducing reliance on household means-testing by making certain UC components separate, individual benefits.
- Alternatively, a partner's income could only be considered above a certain threshold.
- Expanding split payment circumstances or making it default may also help tackle LTFE.
- A potential solution could be introducing a transition period where new couples are individually assessed for an initial period (e.g., first six months).

Local Government Minister Lee Rowley requests the end of South Cambridgeshire District Council's four-day working week trial.



Rowley argues that the approach could impact the council's 'Best Value Duty' under the Local Government Act.



The council extended the trial until March 2024 after considering it successful in staff recruitment and retention.



Reports state that productivity was broadly maintained during the trial, recommending its continuation and extension to facilities management staff.



Rowley expresses concerns about the value for money for taxpayers and believes local government should not experiment with the four-day week.



He suggests that the approach may affect the council's 'Best Value Duty' and mentions forthcoming guidance from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.



Cllr Bridget Smith, the council leader, responds to Rowley's letter, expressing surprise and requesting a meeting with ministers to discuss the matter.



Smith highlights the positive impact of the trial on recruitment, reduction of agency bills, and improved performance.

Lambeth's Cost of Living support program

- Lambeth Council has launched a £250,000 small grants program as part of a £10 million Cost of Living support package.
- The program aims to provide relief to Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups in Lambeth that are running projects to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.
- VCS organisations have experienced increased demand for their services due to inflation and rising energy bills.
- The small grants program offers five different funding amounts, ranging from £2,000 to £20,000.
- The funding will support organisations that understand the crisis and have plans to reduce its impact on the communities they serve.
- The program builds on the success of last year's warm spaces fund, which helped over 30 organisations keep their doors open during winter for those unable to heat their homes.

Quote of the Week

"Today's announcement means that many important and essential functions will be brought back into departments meaning the line of accountability will run right up to the very top where it always should have been. In many cases, today's proposals will ensure we preserve the quality of vital services, while allowing them to become more efficient and, where appropriate, giving more power to the front-line professionals who know those services best." – Francis Maude on the closure of quangos, including the audit Commission in 2010

Francis Maude's ministerial career culminated in his position as Cabinet Minister, 2010-2015. He created the Efficiency and Reform Group (ERG), which he claims saved money, improved services and built lasting capability in government. He oversaw the creation of gov.uk.





Legal Issues of Note

AM: Child Trafficking Case

- The High Court is currently hearing a judicial review challenge brought by a child trafficking victim, AM, who claims he was not provided with specialist support for his trafficking-related needs by the Home Office and his local authority for several years.
- AM, who is now 22 years old and has refugee status, experienced repeated episodes of trafficking as a child, including forced labor and domestic servitude.
- Despite being recognized as a likely victim of child trafficking, AM did not receive any support for his recovery during his childhood and transition to adulthood.
- The law firm representing AM, Leigh Day, argues that the lack of support for child victims is a result of the Home Office's reliance on local authorities' duty to safeguard children, while arrangements for adult victims are in place.
- The case has been granted permission to proceed to a full hearing, where it will examine whether the Home Secretary and the local authority breached their obligations, including under international conventions.
- It will also investigate whether the different treatment for adults and children discriminates against children.
- The outcome of this case could have broader implications for the support provided to child trafficking victims by the Home Office and local authorities, as thousands of child victims are reportedly left without adequate state support for their recovery.

High Court grants council summary judgment in procurement challenge over bailiff services

Dukes Bailiffs challenged Breckland Council's appointment of a rival firm to a contract on behalf of Anglia Revenues Partnership.

In May 2021, the High Court granted Breckland's application for summary judgment on claims made by Dukes Bailiffs under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR) and refused permission for judicial review.

Dukes Bailiffs argued that Breckland's award was unlawful due to procedural unfairness, irrationality, and failure to provide reasons.

Breckland argued that the contract was below the 'concession' contract threshold, making it outside the scope of the PCR 2015.

The council also opposed the judicial review claim, stating that it concerned commercial decisions and was not amenable to judicial review

High Court grants council summary judgment in procurement challenge over bailiff services

- Dukes Bailiffs became the enforcement provider for Anglia Revenues Partnership in 2019, but lost a re-tender competition to rival bidder Bristow & Sutor in 2022.
- Dukes criticized Breckland's tender scoring, the reasons for the decision, and alleged bias by a Breckland officer with connections to a Bristow manager who previously worked for Dukes.
- The case involved determining whether the PCR 15 or the Concession Contracts Regulations 2016 (CCR 16) applied to a local authority contracting-out enforcement of its debts.
- The judge noted the lack of statutory remedies under the CCR 16 and the limited common law contract claim available to Dukes.
- The judge concluded that Dukes had no real prospect of success on the PCR 15 claim and granted summary judgment.
- The challenge regarding apparent bias was deemed not arguable, as the alleged connections between the officer and the manager were considered relatively harmless and her scores were comparable to other evaluators.



▼

Landlord claimed to be “lost at sea” ordered to pay £44k over housing offence

- South Gloucestershire landlord Giuseppe Sutera has been ordered to pay over £44,000 after being found guilty of a serious housing offense and contravening the Local Government Act.
- Sutera rents out homes in the South Gloucestershire and Bristol area.
- South Gloucestershire Council brought the prosecution after receiving a complaint from a tenant in August 2022 regarding a property.
- In court, Sutera refused to identify himself, resulting in the court finding him guilty in his absence.
- He was ordered to pay a record fine of £44,270.26.



▼

Landlord claimed to be “lost at sea” ordered to pay £44k over housing offence

- Sutera breached an Emergency Prohibition Order (EPO) served by the council's Private Sector Housing Team by continuing to let a property with serious fire safety issues.
- He failed to respond to a notice requiring him to provide his address and property details.
- The property had a high category 1 hazard for fire due to the absence of a safe fire escape route, lack of fire doors in the bedrooms, and no working smoke alarms.
- Sutera continued to let the property despite the EPO, putting tenants' lives at risk.
- South Gloucestershire Council will investigate Sutera's other properties to ensure tenant safety, and Bristol City Council has identified four licensed HMOs owned by Sutera in their area.
- The council emphasized its commitment to enforcing landlords' legal responsibilities and ensuring safe and decent rental properties for tenants.

ECDC CTR Fraud Case

- Alan Coogan, 69, avoided prison despite being found guilty of two acts of fraud related to council tax support.
- Coogan dishonestly failed to disclose his capital assets, including property and bank accounts, exceeding the allowed limit for claiming council tax support.
- He also did not declare his ownership of another property that he was renting out for profit.
- Between January 2021 and March 2023, Coogan illegally claimed £6,351.42 in council tax support.
- Coogan received a suspended prison sentence of 26 weeks for his fraudulent activities, along with a requirement to pay £799.50 in costs and a victim surcharge of £128.
- The East Cambridgeshire District Council (ECDC) encourages those genuinely in need of support to contact them, while stressing that fraudulent claims will be prosecuted to protect public resources and maintain services for all residents.

New or Updated Guidance

- Practice Statement from the Senior president of Tribunals: Authorising Registrars and Legal Officers to carry out functions of a judicial nature in the First-tier Tribunal (General Regulatory Chamber)
 - <https://www.judiciary.uk/guidance-and-resources/practice-statement-from-the-senior-president-of-tribunals-authorising-registrars-and-legal-officers-to-carry-out-functions-of-a-judicial-nature-in-the-first-tier-tribunal-general-regulatory-chamber/>



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Consultation: Best value standards and intervention

- The Best Value Duty consultation seeks views on statutory guidance for local authorities in England, including combined authorities and combined county authorities. Local authorities in England are required to have regard to this guidance under section 26 of the Local Government Act 1999.
- By describing what constitutes best value, the department's expectations, and the models of intervention at the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' disposal in the event of failing to meet these standards, the guidance clarifies how local government can fulfill the Best Value Duty.
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/best-value-standards-and-intervention-a-statutory-guide-for-best-value-authorities-consultation>

Consultation: Rates Avoidance and Evasion: Consultation

- A consultation was announced at the Spring Budget 2023 to explore the causes of, and potential measures to combat, avoidance, evasion, and poor agent behaviour within the business rates system.
- Consultation purpose:
 - Consult on specific measures to reform Empty Property Relief
 - Investigate wider avoidance and evasion practices in business rates, and assess whether billing authorities have adequate power and information to combat them
 - Gather evidence of "rogue" rating agent behavior and discuss how to resolve it
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/business-rates-avoidance-and-evasion-consultation>

Consultation: Proposals to exempt categories of dwellings from the council tax premiums

- The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill strengthens the empty homes premium and introduces a new second homes premium. It is being considered whether there may be circumstances when council tax premiums should not apply, and whether exceptions to the premium should be introduced.
- Views are sought on government proposals for exceptions to the premium, and if any additional exceptions should be considered.
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposals-to-exempt-categories-of-dwellings-from-the-council-tax-premiums>



Job Adverts

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



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.



Benefits Team Manager

3 Months+ (Long term) | £27.33 ph Umbrella | Remote

The Assignment

We are looking for an experienced Benefits Team Manager to supervise and manage a team of Benefits Officers. The successful candidate will manage a Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support team dealing specifically with either Quality Assurance & Changes in Circumstances, New Claims or Supported Accommodation

The role is full-time (36 hours per week) and can be worked fully remote (home based).

Equipment will be couriered.

The successful candidate will support delivery of an integrated, high quality, customer focussed service supporting those in need of assistance with rent, council tax or in financial hardship.

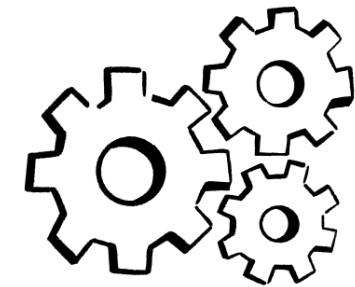
What we're looking for

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

1. Advanced knowledge of the Housing Benefit regulations 2006 & Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
2. 5 years experience of Housing Benefits, Council Tax Support and Local Welfare Provisions
3. A competent Capita One (Academy) user

To find out more or to apply

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



Revenues Officer (Capita One/Academy)

3 Months+ | £25 ph Umbrella | Remote

The Assignment

To work as a member of the Council Tax Billing team dealing with the demand, collection and recovery of the Council Tax. To assist in Revenue Services' aim of achieving a multi-skilled staff.

1. Timely collection of Council Tax.
2. Accurate Council Tax amendments
3. Effective collection processed / promote direct debit take up
4. No non-conformances / complaints

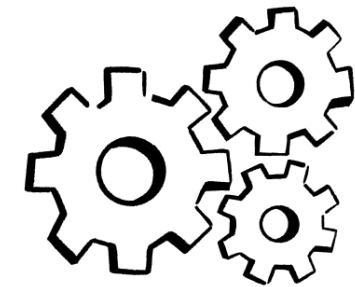
What we're looking for

We're looking for candidates who have 2 main skills/knowledge:

1. Must have Capita One (Academy) system experience
2. Must be experience and be experienced in all billing and recovery matters for Council Tax

To find out more or to apply

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



Revenues Officer (Capita One/Academy)

3 Months+ | £25.25 ph Umbrella | Remote

The Assignment

To assist the Revenues & Recovery Team Leader in the supervision of the Revenues and Recovery Team, ensuring that Council Tax accounts are administered in accordance with prevailing legislation, litigation, guidance, best practice and local policy in order to maximise collection rates

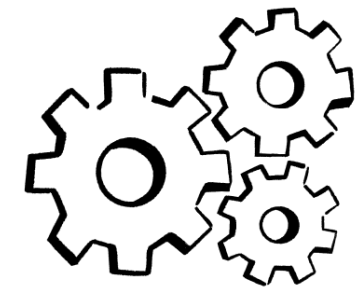
What we're looking for

We're looking for candidates who have 2 main skills/knowledge:

1. Must have Capita One (Academy) system experience
2. Must be experience and be experienced in all billing and recovery matters for Council Tax

To find out more or to apply

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



Revenues Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)

3 Months+ | £25 ph Umbrella | Remote

The Assignment

To work as a member of the Revenues team (billing & recovery) dealing with the demand, collection and recovery of the Council Tax.

To assist in Revenue Services' aim of achieving a multi-skilled staff.

1. Timely collection of Council Tax
2. Accurate Council Tax amendments
3. Effective collection processed / promote direct debit take up
4. No non-conformances / complaints

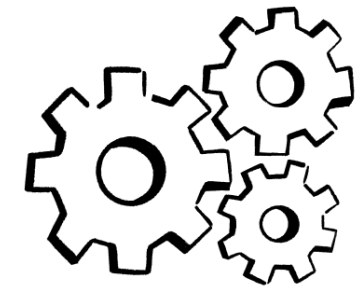
What we're looking for

We're looking for candidates who have 2 main skills/knowledge:

1. Must have Civica Open Revenues system experience
2. Must be experience and be experienced in all billing and recovery matters for Council Tax

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

Government Changes

- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has been replaced by the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).



In Partnership
with

LA Directories
Limited

Previous Recordings





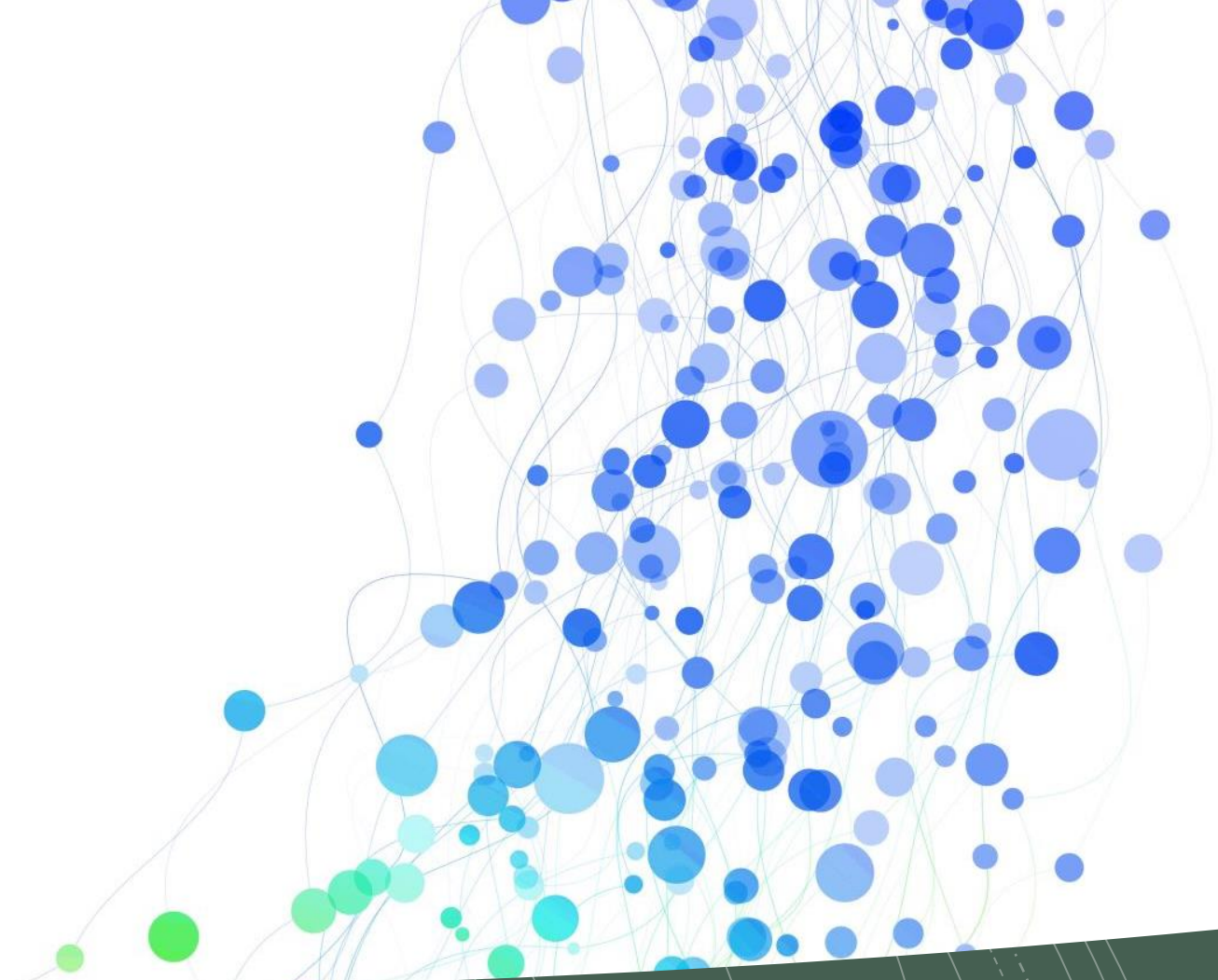
Dates where
there will be
no sessions

- 28 August 2023
- 18 December 2023
- 25 December 2023
- 1 January 2024

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



Other Workshops

Two-day Specified Accommodation and Service Charges Training Course Online

- Fourth Date Added: 5-6 December 2023
 - Previous Dates: Sold out within days (11-12 October, 8-9 November, 21-22 November)
 - Course Overview:
 - Complex areas of decision making for HB officers
 - Subjectivity and caselaw references
 - Minimum two-day duration with workshops and case studies
 - Cost:
 - Members: £320 + VAT per person
 - Non-members: £400 + VAT per person
 - Limited availability, first come first served basis
 - Bookings confirmed upon receipt of the purchase order
 - In-house courses also available (online or face-to-face on-site delivery)
 - Contact Julia Papoutsis (julia.papoutsis@ladirectories.com) for booking form and content list
 - Contact Kim Larkin (kim.larkin@ladirectories.com) for in-house course details
 - 2023 dates for in-house courses almost sold out
- Course Objectives:
 - Principles of decision making in complex legislation
 - Caselaw considerations for subjective decisions
 - Understanding different types of specified accommodation
 - Legal definitions and step-by-step approach
 - Landlord condition and specified accommodation interactions
 - Eligible rent calculation and rent officer referrals
 - Service charges: definitions, eligibility, and management
 - Housing management, excessive service costs, and evidence requirements

Supported Accommodation

- **A Directories Ltd** is very pleased to announce that we will be holding a one-day conference on 31 October 2023, dedicated solely to Supported Accommodation, with the emphasis being on Exempt Accommodation.
- We will be looking at, amongst other things, the progress of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Bill, which is today 29 June 2023 about to receive Royal Assent and become an Act of Parliament.
- It is our hope that we will be privileged with the presence of some very distinguished speakers on the day.
- The conference will be held online, two people from each LA that are members of **The Benefits Directory (TBD)** as of 1st October 2023, will be able to attend FREE of charge.
- Invitations to this event will be sent to the two people from each member LA that registered with us in May 23 as regular attendees of the Exempt Accommodation Discussion Group meetings.
- For those members that did not respond to the request for the names of two people, we will still send an invitation to two people chosen by us from the Newsletter distribution list.
- Please do not email any requests for invitations, there will be opportunity for the invitation to be forwarded where the person is unable to attend on that day.
- Invitations will also go to a few selected non-members who have contributed to our group in the past or are showing a current interest in becoming a member of **TBD**.
- The agenda for the day is being finalised over the coming weeks after which the invitations will be sent with a copy of the day's agenda.
- Exempt Accommodation Discussion Group Panel
- I am delighted to announce that Jayne Brown from East Kent Services and Dan Hill from Medway Council have kindly volunteered as panel members to the discussion group.
- I had a very productive meeting with them both yesterday, they are full of exciting ideas for the future of these meetings as well as being able to facilitate introductions to some very key people!
- Our group has also sparked the interest of the DWP and of DLUHC!

JULY

10th July



BCS Practitioner Certificate in
Data Protection

was £2,050, now £1,537.50

18th July



Managing Privacy by Design in
Modern Technology

was £395, now £296.25

SEPTEMBER



12th September



BCS Foundation Certificate in
Data Protection

£1,095

12th September



Foundation Certificate in
Freedom of Information

£395

13th September



Managing CCTV and
Data Protection

£395

18th September



BCS Practitioner Certificate in
Data Protection

£2,050

26th September



Caldicott Guardian
Course

£300

26th September



Handling Data
Subject Access Requests

£395

27th September



Data Champion
Training

£395

28th September



BCS Practitioner Certificate in
Freedom of Information

£1,800

28th September



Senior Information
Risk Owner

£300

<https://www.dataprivacyadvisory.com/dpas-training/>

OCTOBER

10th October



The Effective
DPO

£995

17th October



Auditing Data Protection
Compliance

£395

NOVEMBER

7th November



BCS Foundation Certificate
in Data Protection

£1,095

20th November



BCS Practitioner Certificate
in Data Protection

£2,050

14th November



Data Sharing in the
Public Sector

£395

21st November



Caldicott Guardian
Course

£300

23rd November



Senior Information
Risk Owner

£300

15th November



Managing CCTV and
Data Protection

£395

21st November



Handling Data Subject
Access Requests

£395

DECEMBER

5th December



Data Champion
Training

£395

<https://www.dataprivacyadvisory.com/dpas-training/>

Get 20% off any course with code **200FF!**

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](#)



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.