

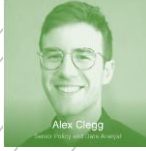
# Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

25 September 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
- Kirsty Brooksmith, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- 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



What does your S151  
officer willing to cut?



**VISIONARY NETWORK**  
The Independent Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

Welcome to a  
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council tax  
deduction  
schemes

[Bristol City  
Council Case  
Study](#)

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right  
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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.

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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.



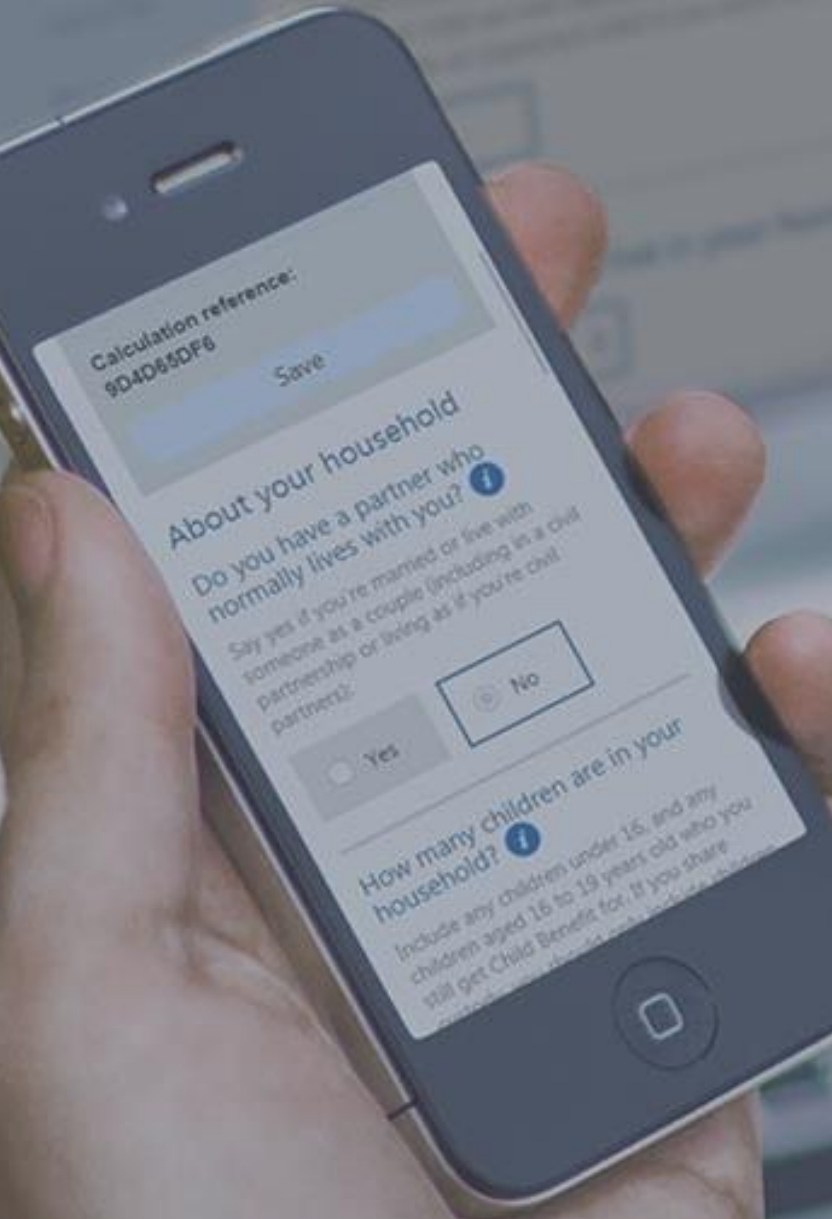
### our customers:

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**®

# 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

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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.

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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

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

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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.

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To sign up just email [malcolm@visionarynetwork.co.uk](mailto:malcolm@visionarynetwork.co.uk) with your name, organisation and email address. We are inclusive because sharing information and good practice is essential. You don't have to attend every session; recordings will be available.

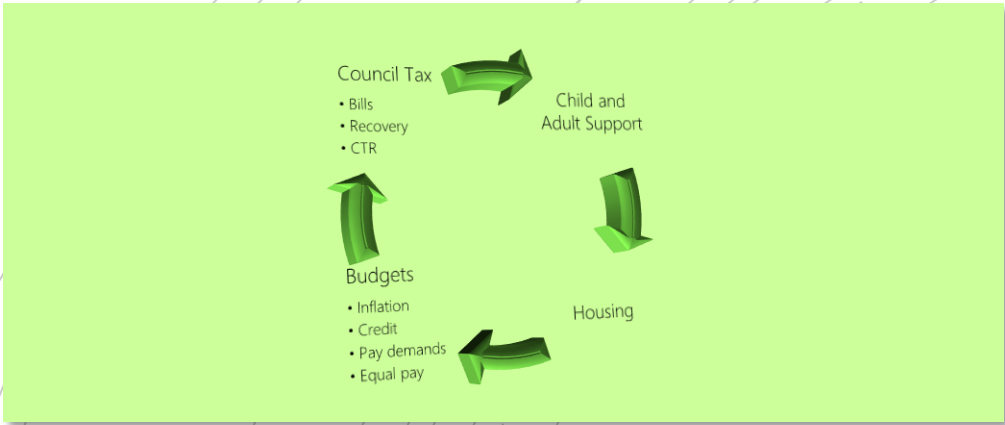


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# Main Discussion Points



# Councils: The impending risks for 24/25 budgets



Equal Pay



Council Tax Setting



Fear The Walking Dead



There's no place like Birmingham



Where to cut?



## Equal Pay Claims

- Councils all over the country face hundreds of new equal pay claims from female workers, which could cost them tens of millions of pounds.
- In Cumbria, Coventry and Dundee, hundreds of women are filing new claims with evidence being collected in another 20 councils.
- As an example of "job creep", roles of carers or teaching assistants have changed dramatically over time and are much more skilled and demanding.
- However, pay has fallen behind, especially in female-dominated roles.
- A male-dominated job may offer higher bonuses or perks - either linked to annual holidays or task and finish, where workers can either go home or earn overtime after finishing a task.
- If these claims are successful (or more likely if councils choose to settle them), who pays?
- It has been almost two decades since Glasgow fought for equal pay.
- People had died waiting for the payments - and they are still waiting for Glasgow to complete a new job evaluation process.
- During a recent review of care roles in South Lanarkshire, salaries were raised from £12.59-£12.76 to £15.36-£15.80.



## Equal Pay Claims

- Sheffield City Council faces a mass equal pay claim; women underpaid by up to £11,000/year.
- Examples: Cleaners (grade 1) vs. Caretakers (grade 3) with a pay difference of £1,710/year. Senior teaching assistants (grade 5) vs. Night noise officers (grade 7) with a difference of £11,383/year.
- Council argues it has an appeal process for grade challenges.
- 12 years ago, the council settled a similar claim, recompensing 1,100 staff.
- GMB uncovers "rotten job allocation" and urges female workers to make claims.
- Councillor Fran Belbin states the scheme, in place since 2010, reviews and grades jobs fairly.
- The GMB also supports 3,000 claims against Birmingham City Council and has disputes in Coventry, Westmorland, Cumberland, Glasgow, Dundee, and Fife. Birmingham's budget strained partly due to equal pay bills.

# Council Tax Crisis in England

- **Unprecedented Funding Gaps:** Nearly all councils in England are expected to raise council tax by the maximum amount (~5%) next April.
  - This would add £103 to the average Band D council tax bill, bringing it to £2,168/year.
- **Past Trends:** Last year, 84 out of 114 councils imposed the maximum 4.99% increase.
  - Councils exceeding government-set thresholds must hold a referendum.
- **Financial Strain:** The average council predicts a £33m deficit by 2025-26, a 60% increase from two years ago.
  - Central government funding for local councils has reduced by 60% since 2010.

# Council Tax Crisis in England

- **Consequences & Stakeholder Views**
- **Service Cuts & Other Charges:** Councils are considering cutting services like childcare, adult care, and environmental campaigns.
  - Additional charges like parking fees could also rise.
- **Special Cases:** Councils like Birmingham, which recently went bankrupt, may consider even higher tax raises.
- **Debt & Vulnerable Households:** Leading debt charities warn the poorest are hit hardest.
  - Over 3 million people were taken to court for council tax debt in recent years.
- **Political Perspective:** Over 13 years, the average Band D tax increased by 43.5% to £2,065
  - whereas under Labour it increased it by 109% from £688 to £1,439 during their tenure.

# One in ten SIGOMA councils facing Section 114 notice

- 1. Section 114 Notice:** Issued by a council's Chief Finance Officer when the council cannot meet its budget. It stops all new non-statutory spending and signifies the council can't balance the annual budget. A solution must be found within 21 days.
- 2. SIGOMA Survey:**
  1. Represents 47 urban authorities in northern, midlands, south-coast regions.
  2. 10% of members might issue a S114 notice this year.
  3. ~20% see the possibility next year.
  4. For many, it's the first time due to lack of cash reserves.
- 3. Main Financial Pressures:**
  1. Children's social care demand.
  2. Inflation, energy costs, wage hikes.
  3. Upcoming high-interest rates from maturing loans.

Councils who have  
already issued 114  
notices or are  
under special  
measures

- Hackney (2000)
- Northamptonshire (2018)
- Slough (2021)
- Thurrock (2022)
- Croydon (2022)
- Woking (2023)
- Birmingham (2023)
- Back in 2020 the following were at risk
  - Liverpool
  - Leeds
  - Wiltshire
  - Trafford
  - Tameside
  - Barnet
  - Highland Council
  - Birmingham
- On the 2023 Radar
  - Kent
  - Nottingham

# Moody's List of Councils with levels of Debt

## Top 20 English councils with high levels of debt for their size

Local authorities ranked by borrowing level versus their income

Local authority	Total borrowing	Borrowing to income ratio	Local authority	Total borrowing	Borrowing to income ratio
1. Spelthorne	£1.1bn	86.9x	11. Brentwood	£226m	9.7x
2. Woking	£2.0bn	62.0	12. Mole Valley	£103m	9.6
3. Eastleigh	£522m	41.1	13. East Hampshire	£120m	9.5
4. Runnymede	£643m	23.4	14. Thurrock	£1.5bn	7.5
5. Worthing	£204m	14.4	15. Adur	£165m	7.1
6. Surrey Heath	£170m	13.7	16. Epsom and Ewell	£64m	6.8
7. Rushmoor	£120m	10.6	17. Broxbourne	£58m	6.3
8. Cherwell	£188m	10.3	18. Guildford	£295m	6.0
9. Uttlesford	£302m	10.0	19. Chorley	£78m	5.9
10. Warrington	£1.8bn	9.9	20. Warwick	£268m	5.9

Guardian graphic. Source: Moody's investors service

# Governance Crisis at Birmingham City Council

- **Background:** Longstanding governance issues since 2014 have plagued Birmingham City Council.
- **Immediate Trigger:** A recent Section 114 notice was issued due to an £87m budget gap and potential £760m pay discrimination claims. General fund reserves are exhausted.
- **Government Response:** Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove proposes to appoint commissioners, possibly led by Max Caller.
- **Commissioners' Role:** If approved, they will oversee senior officer recruitment and financial & strategic decision-making.
- **Local Inquiry:** Government has also commissioned an inquiry to investigate the council's persistent issues despite previous interventions.
- **Council's Stance:** Welcomes the move and pledges to work towards financial sustainability and improved services.
- **Objective:** To restore effective, efficient, and accountable local governance in Birmingham.



# Governance Crisis at Birmingham City Council



- **Issues:** Botched Oracle IT system and equal pay liabilities contributed to a Section 114 notice, risking up to £860m.
- **Audit:** Grant Thornton will issue statutory recommendations; council has 10 days to respond. They flag that Oracle issues prevent accurate accounts for 2022-23.
- **Improvement Plan:** £46.5m allocated this year to stabilize Oracle. It was rated "red" before going live and led to manual cash transactions.
- **Union Negotiations:** Unions refused to sign a new non-discriminatory pay structure.
  - Failing to resolve by 2025-26 could cost £5m-£14m/month.
- **Government Involvement:** If unresolved, government may take direct action.
- **Capitalisation Direction:** In talks to enable the use of capital funds for revenue spending.
- **Urgency:** Critical point for the council's future, action needed to avoid governmental takeover.



## Example of Savings: School Uniforms

- **Background:**
  - The return to school see parents face the significant cost of buying school uniforms.
  - The average uniform cost is £422 (secondary) and £287 (primary) - *Children's Society*.
  - Many schools necessitate branded items from specialist outlets, increasing expenses.
- **Government Assistance:**
  - Research indicates many English councils no longer offer school uniform grants.
  - In contrast, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland still provide such grants.
  - Of 20 large English councils, only Barnet and Dorset offer grants.
- **Alternatives & Support:**
  - Charity-driven efforts: Second-hand uniform demands have doubled, and 'swap-shops' have been set up.
  - Some councils use the Household support fund for school costs.
- **Key Takeaway:** Rising costs and lack of financial support make school uniform expenses a prominent concern for many English parents.



# Cuts

- Back in 2021 an Action Children report stated that local authorities have reduced spending on early intervention and non-statutory services by 44% while increasing spending on late intervention and statutory services such as safeguarding and CLA by 29%
- In late 2022 Unison collected data from 391 Councils that showed that councils will closing libraries and children's centres and reducing pick-ups for young disabled people.
- Birmingham and Edinburgh were identified in their figures as struggling along with kent and Lancashire. Some of the biggest cuts being made by Wirral, Gateshead, Hilligdob, Hampshire, Norfolk and Leeds



# Cuts

- In Revenues and Benefits departments what is statutory and what is discretionary?
- Think about this against what is statutory in terms of service levels not just what is mandatory targets
- Also consider Supported Accommodation – time to get tough



Other news

# Net Zero Efforts Amid Cost of Living Crisis: Key Facts

- **Context:** Councils' strides towards net zero by 2050 are at risk due to diminished public interest in reducing emissions during the current cost of living crisis, according to a report by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) and Browne Jacobson.
- **Government Stance:** PM Rishi Sunak has shifted the government's approach, delaying the ban on diesel and petrol vehicles to 2035 and abandoning plans for seven different household bins, among other changes. He cited the importance of not burdening families with "unnecessary costs."

# Net Zero Efforts Amid Cost of Living Crisis: Key Facts

- **LGiU Report Insights:**
  - Councils play a pivotal role in achieving zero emissions by 2050 due to their control over major emission sources.
  - Rising living costs, inflation, and fuel and energy costs could divert local net zero efforts.
  - Public disagreements, such as ULEZ expansion and low-traffic neighborhoods, have strained public support.
  - Achieving net zero democratically is vital for fostering shared understanding and building public support.
- **Quotes:**
  - Jonathan Carr-West, LGiU: Local net zero efforts need broad democratic support, involving residents, businesses, and the public sector.
  - Ben Standing, Browne Jacobson: Achieving national net zero targets involves difficult decisions at the local level, highlighting the role of local democracy.

# Overview of August CPIH and CPI

- CPIH Yearly Rate (Aug 2023): +6.3% (July 2023: +6.4%)
- CPIH Monthly Change (Aug 2023): +0.4% (Aug 2022: +0.5%)
- CPI Yearly Rate (Aug 2023): +6.7% (July 2023: +6.8%)
- CPI Monthly Change (Aug 2023): +0.3% (Aug 2022: +0.5%)

# Overview of August CPIH and CPI

- Key Contributors to Rate Changes
  - Downward Contributions:
    - Food prices rose less in August 2023 than a year ago.
    - Accommodation services prices fell in August 2023.
  - Upward Contribution: Rising motor fuel prices.
- Core Rate Analysis (Excluding energy, food, alcohol, and tobacco)
  - Core CPIH Yearly Rate (Aug 2023): +5.9% (July 2023: +6.4%)
    - Goods: 6.1% to 6.3%
    - Services: 6.5% to 6.1%
  - Core CPI Yearly Rate (Aug 2023): +6.2% (July 2023: +6.9%)
    - Goods: 6.1% to 6.3%
    - Services: 7.4% to 6.8%

# Overview of August CPIH and CPI

Table 1: CPIH, OOH component and CPI index values, and annual and monthly rates, UK August 2022 to August 2023

		CPIH Index (UK, 2015 = 100)	CPIH 12-month rate	CPIH 1-month rate	CPI Index (UK, 2015=100)	CPI 12-month rate	CPI 1-month rate	OOH Index (UK, 2015=100)	OOH 12-month rate
2022	Aug	121.8	8.6	0.5	123.1	9.9	0.5	113.8	3.5
	Sep	122.3	8.8	0.4	123.8	10.1	0.5	114.2	3.5
	Oct	124.3	9.6	1.6	126.2	11.1	2.0	114.5	3.6
	Nov	124.8	9.3	0.4	126.7	10.7	0.4	115.0	3.7
	Dec	125.3	9.2	0.4	127.2	10.5	0.4	115.5	3.8
2023	Jan	124.8	8.8	-0.4	126.4	10.1	-0.6	115.9	3.8
	Feb	126.0	9.2	1.0	127.9	10.4	1.1	116.2	3.9
	Mar	126.8	8.9	0.7	128.9	10.1	0.8	116.6	4.0
	Apr	128.3	7.8	1.2	130.4	8.7	1.2	116.9	4.0
	May	129.1	7.9	0.6	131.3	8.7	0.7	117.5	4.2
	Jun	129.4	7.3	0.2	131.5	7.9	0.1	118.1	4.4
	Jul	129.0	6.4	-0.3	130.9	6.8	-0.4	118.6	4.5
	Aug	129.4	6.3	0.4	131.3	6.7	0.3	119.2	4.8



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# Scottish Council Tax Reform Criticisms

- **Proposed Changes:** Plans to raise council tax rates for highest bands (E to H) by 7.5% to 22.5% in Scotland.
- **Criticism:** Reform Scotland think-tank labels it as "tinkering round the edges," calling for a complete overhaul of what it considers an "unfair and outdated" tax system.
- **Missed Opportunity:** The changes don't address the fundamental issue of replacing the entire council tax system or revaluing properties based on current market rates (still based on 1991 values).
- **Local Control:** The think-tank argues local authorities should have complete control over local taxes, enabling them to tailor rates, bands, and forms to their specific needs.
- **Government Stance:** Scottish Government says only 28% of properties will be affected and aligns rates closer to England's.
- **IFS Perspective:** Institute for Fiscal Studies sees it as a "small step in the right direction" but criticizes the lack of revaluation, making the tax regressive and possibly inaccurate for many properties.

# PIP Statistics Overview (July 2023)

- **Total Claimants:** 3.1 million in England & Wales (a 3% increase from April 2023). An additional 280,000 claimants in Scotland.
- **Award Levels:** 36% received the highest level of award in England & Wales, consistent with the previous quarter.
- **Diverging Trends:** Following the introduction of Adult Disability Payment in Scotland, Scottish PIP trends are deviating from the rest of the country.
- **Factors Impacting Trends:** Influences include customer demand, assessment & DWP resources, and external situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Quarterly Figures (ending July 2023):**
  - New claims: 220,000 registrations and clearances.
  - Changes in circumstances: 30,000 reported, 24,000 cleared.
  - DLA reassessments: 21,000 registered, 17,000 cleared.
  - Planned award reviews: 120,000 registered, 110,000 cleared.
  - MRs: 71,000 registered, 67,000 cleared.

# PIP Statistics Five-Year Trends & Assessment Outcomes (2018-2023)

- **Award Receipt Rates (excluding withdrawn claims):**
  - New claims under normal rules: 40% received an award.
  - DLA reassessment under normal rules: 69% received an award.
  - SREL claims: 99% received an award.
- **Award Review Results:**
  - 70% of planned award reviews resulted in increased/no change in award.
  - 81% of changes in circumstances led to increased/no change in award.
  - 34% of cleared MRs led to a change in award.
- **Appeals Post-PIP Assessment (April 2018-March 2023):**
  - Initial decisions: 35% of MRs lodged an appeal. Before tribunals, 24% saw DWP change decisions in the customer's favor (lapsed appeals). 4% of decisions were overturned at tribunals.
  - Award review outcomes: 33% of MRs lodged an appeal. 43% experienced DWP decisions changed in their favor before tribunals (lapsed appeals), while 2% were overturned at tribunals.

# Key Findings on Disability Benefits and Health Issues

- Research from LCP, a firm of business consultants which specialises in the pension and health sectors, forecasts:
- **Cost of Disability Benefits:** The annual cost for pensioners claiming Personal Independence Payment (PIP) might increase by 75% to £10.5bn by 2033.
- **Drivers of the Rise:** Increases in heart disease, back pain, mental illness, and other health problems will be significant contributors.
- **Current PIP Claims:** 3.3 million UK adults receive PIP. This number has risen by one million in the past decade and is expected to increase by another million in the next three years.
- **LCP's Prediction:** The total number of pensioners claiming PIP is forecasted to rise from about one million today to 1.6 million by 2033. This can lead to an average cost of £70,000 per person over 11 years.

# Key Findings on Disability Benefits and Health Issues

- **Recommendations:**
- **Early Interventions:** Expanding the NHS Health Check program, targeted mental health treatment, and monitoring devices for conditions like type 2 diabetes could reduce the future welfare bill.
- **Long-Term Impact:** Dr. Pearson-Stuttard warns of a "disability benefit timebomb" and emphasizes the importance of interventions, especially in areas with the highest health needs.
- **Government's Strategy:** A new major conditions strategy was launched in August to better prevent significant health issues like cardiovascular disease and musculoskeletal disorders.
- **Government's Investment:** An extra £2bn is being invested to help more people with disabilities and health conditions enter the workforce and stimulate the economy.

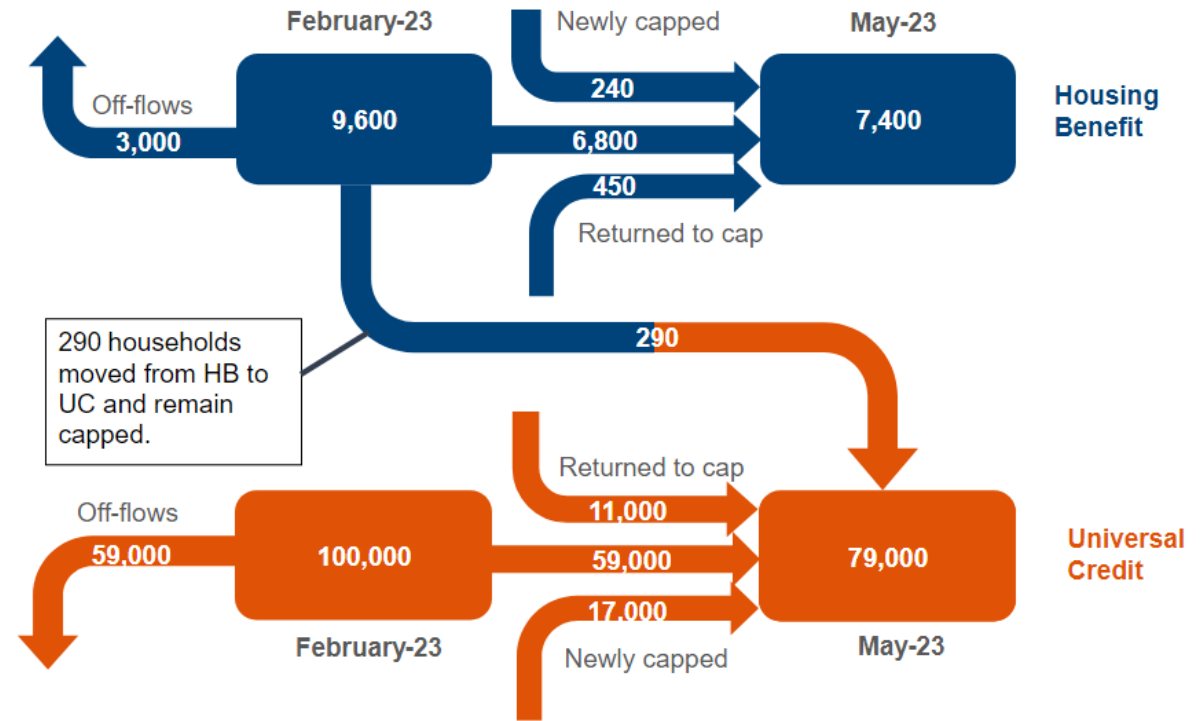
# UK Inflation and Economic Outlook: Key Points

- **OECD's Prediction:** UK inflation will average at 7.2% in 2023, the highest rate among the G7 countries. By comparison, Germany and Italy are predicted at 6.1%, France at 5.8%, the US at 3.8%, Canada at 3.6%, and Japan at 3.1%.
- **Future Forecast:** Inflation in the UK is expected to decrease to 2.9% in 2024.
- **Bank of England's Response:** Since December 2021, interest rates have been raised 14 times, however rates were held in the latest quarter. The goal was to curb inflation by making borrowing more expensive, thus reducing excessive spending.
- **Economic Growth:** The OECD has lowered its economic growth forecast for the UK in 2023 to 0.3%, one of the lowest in the G7. The expected growth for 2024 is 0.8%.
- **Government's Stance:** The UK government remains confident in its strategy, aiming to halve inflation by the end of 2023. They highlight that the OECD's predictions might not factor in the UK's faster recovery from the Covid pandemic.

# Benefit cap: number of households capped to May 2023

- 86,000 households had their benefit capped at May 2023:
  - 79,000 households were capped on UC at May 2023
  - 7,400 households were capped on HB at May 2023
- the total number of capped households has decreased by 22% (24,000) in the latest quarter to May 2023, when compared to the previous quarter (February 2023):
  - volumes of UC capped households have decreased by 22% (22,000)
  - volumes of HB capped households have fallen by 23% (2,200)
- 1.4% of working age households claiming HB or UC had their benefits capped at May 2023, a decrease from 1.7% capped at February 2023.
  - the majority of the decrease is due to the increased benefit cap levels which were implemented from April 2023.
  - the weekly average cap amount was £53 at May 2023 which is an increase from £50 at February 2023.

# Benefit cap: number of households capped to May 2023



Note: Figures in the flow chart may not sum, due to households which flow on and off the cap between quarters not being included in the quarterly totals.

# Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Update

- **Context:** Rising number of councils issuing section 114 notices due to financial issues.
- **Committee Session:** Questioned by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee on 18 September.
  - **Key Points:**
    - Despite financial stress of councils, the standard of scrutiny will remain unchanged.
    - Council service users shouldn't bear the brunt of council financial pressures.
    - Public expects the Ombudsman to hold councils accountable for legitimate complaints.
- **Transition:** Amardeep Somal set to replace interim Ombudsman, Paul Najsarek, in January 2024

# Renter's Reform Bill & Schools Cooking Scheme

- A rift has opened within the Conservative Party about who's responsible for the Renters Reform Bill being delayed over concerns it could be "dropped like net zero". While Michael Gove is said to be "hell-bent" on passing the Bill, Westminster insiders say it is being blocked by Tory landlord MPs and special advisers in Downing Street who are sympathetic to them.
- The Government has scrapped a £5m plan to fund a "school cooking revolution" just 19 months after it was unveiled. In 2022, the Government announced plans for a school cooking revolution as part of its levelling up agenda. The scheme aimed to tackle the country's rising child obesity problem.

## New DLUHC Minister

Jacob Young has been appointed as Levelling Up Minister in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) following the resignation of Dehenna Davison.

The incoming Levelling Up Minister, Young, will steward the DLUHC's handling of devolution deals, investment zones, planning casework and local growth funding, among other things.

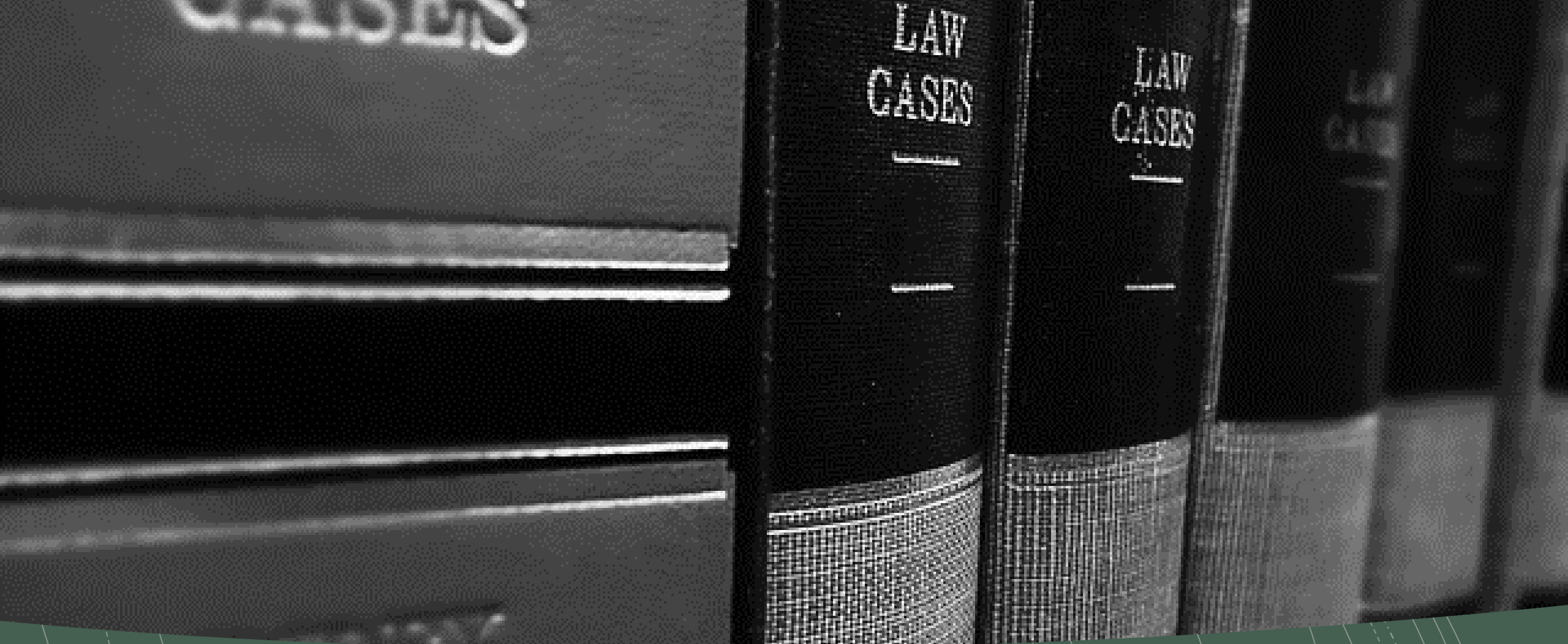


## Quote of the Week

"Money is a public good; as such, it lends itself to private exploitation." — Charles P. Kindleberger

Charles P. Kindleberger (1910–2003) was an American economic historian and author, best known for his influential work on the history of financial crises. He served as a professor of economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and authored numerous books, with "Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises" being one of his most notable contributions.





# Legal Issues of Note

# Unlawful Access to Social Services Records

- **Individual:** Rachel Anderton, former family intervention officer at St Helens Borough Council.
- **Offense:** Unlawfully accessed 145 social services records between Jan 17 and Oct 17, 2019, without a business need.
- **Detection:** The Information Commissioner's Office reported an internal council audit discovered the breach.
- **Legal Proceedings:** Pleaded guilty on Sep 11, 2023, to unlawfully obtaining personal data, breaching s170(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018.
- **Penalty:** Fined £92, ordered to pay £385 in court costs, and a £32 victim surcharge.

[For more detail see nearby legal](#)

# Davies v Benwell Road RTM Company Ltd (2023) UKUT 197 (LC)

- 1. Background:
  - Complex history between Mr. Davies (Mr D) and the Management Company in County Court and FTT.
  - FTT judge acting as County Court judge found Mr D must pay £8,500 in costs.
- 2. Limitation Defense:
  - £616 demand from May 2014 invalid as proceedings began only in 2021; exceeding the six-year limitation.
- 3. Costs of Proceedings:
  - Two sets claimed as administration charges.
  - 1st set (£2,400) not related to recovery of rent or service charges; shouldn't have been payable.
- Upper Tribunal (UT) Decision & Implications
  - FTT incorrectly assumed Management Company's full success.
  - Charges should be recalculated considering the £616 and £2,400 were not payable.
  - Only £840 for four debt collection letters should be payable.
  - FTT failed to address Mr D's application to reduce/extinguish administration charge for litigation costs.
  - County court lacked jurisdiction to make orders on Tribunal costs.
  - Separate county court application needed to set aside its order.
  - Procedural and jurisdictional confusion continues, requiring two appeals/applications for one decision.



In  
Partnership  
with

LA Directories  
Limited

[For more detail see nearby legal](#)

# Douglas & Ors v RMB 102 Ltd & Anor (2023) UKUT 207 (LC)

- Appeal against FTT striking out leaseholders' challenge to insurance premiums' reasonableness.
- FTT Decision: Struck out the case, saying only the management company, not the freeholder (RMB), could be challenged under s.27A. Relied on *Berrycroft (1997)*.
- Upper Tribunal Ruling:
  - Appeal allowed; both freeholder and management company could be considered 'landlords' as per *Cinnamon Ltd v Morgan (2001)*.
  - No payment by leaseholders yet, but FTT could still scrutinize service charges under s.27A.
- Notable Points:
  - UT emphasized the broad scope of s.27A.
  - Leaseholders suspect inflated policy due to multiple layers of commission.
  - 180% premium increase compared to 17% in similar properties; UT found this "striking" and called for explanation.
- Outcome: FTT was wrong to strike out; matter remitted for determination.

[For more detail see nearly legal](#)

## FirstPort Property Services Ltd v Various Leaseholders of Switch House (2023) UKUT 219 (LC)

- 1. Background:
  - FTT reduced a service charge of £69,136.85 by £3,161.85.
  - Issued a s.20C order preventing the landlord from recovering tribunal costs via service charge.
- 2. Key Concern: FTT highlighted landlord's failure to establish proper trust accounts for reserve funds.
- 3. Appeal Outcome:
  - Landlord appealed and won.
  - Trust account issue found irrelevant to the s.27A application and charge reasonableness.
  - Minimal reduction in charges did not warrant a s.20C order.

# Job Adverts

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



## Your Revenues and Benefits Recruitment Partner

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.



# Housing Benefits Officer (Capita One / Academy)

3+ Months | £25.53 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

Our client in London is seeking an experienced Housing Benefits Assessor to work on the Housing Benefits Accuracy Award Initiative (HBAA).

This will be a mix of full claim & self-employed reviews.

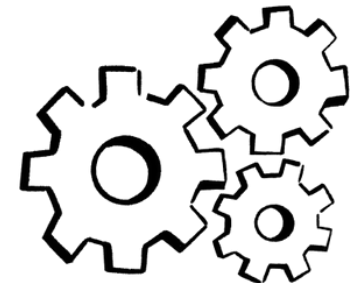
## What we're looking for

We're looking for candidates who have 4 main skills/knowledge:

- Proven experience of processing all types of Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction claims
- Extensive experience of Capita One (Academy) Benefits system
- Up to date knowledge of Housing Benefit legislation and the ability to apply this accurately on a case by case basis
- A proactive and customer-focused approach to resolving queries Work will be in all areas including : New claims and changes in circumstances, HBAA, Work on VEP, ATLAS and Universal Credit files

To find out more or to apply

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



# Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Officer (Academy)

3+ Months | £23.14 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

Our good client in the South-East is seeking 3 skilled Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Officer's.

The successful candidate will need to be a HBOP Debt collection specialist and an advanced Capita Once (Academy) user.

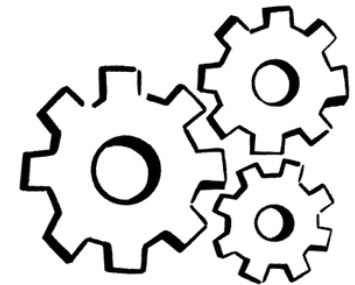
## What we're looking for

We're looking for candidates who have 4 main skills/knowledge:

- A least 3 years experience as a Housing Benefit Assessor
- A skilled Capita One/Academy user
- Comino document management system preferred

To find out more or to apply

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



# Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Officer (Academy)

3+ Months | £25 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

Our good client in the South-West is seeking a skilled Housing Benefit Overpayment / Corporate Debt Recovery Officer.

The successful candidate will need to be a HBOP Debt collection specialist or a Council Sundry Debt collection specialist. They will join the 'Invoiced debt collection team' which focuses on the collection of ALL invoiced debt.

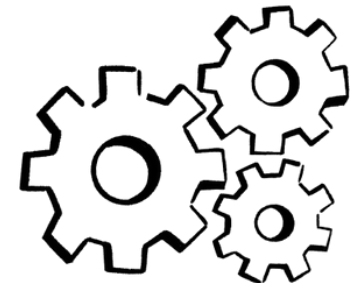
## What we're looking for

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

- A minimum of 3 years experience of the Capita One (Academy) software
- Strong Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery / Corporate Debt Recovery skills

To find out more or to apply

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



# Council Tax Recovery Officer (Academy)

3+ Months | £25 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

Our good client in the South-West is seeking a Council Tax Recovery Officer on a fully remote basis.

It is essential the applicant has experience of Capita One (Academy) processing system and post liability order arrangements/recovery.

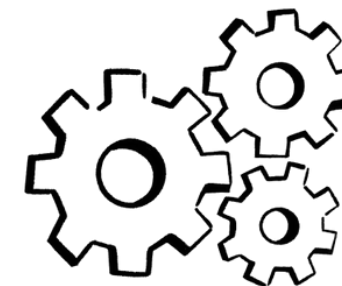
## What we're looking for

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

- 5 Years experience of Council Tax billing & recovery
- 3 years experience of Capita One (Academy)

To find out more or to apply

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



# Council Tax Customer Service Officer (Civica OPENRevenues)

4+ Months | £25 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

Business Smart Solutions is pleased to be working with a Local Authority in the South-East to source multiple fully remote Council Tax Customer Service Officers to assist the Revenues team with incoming phone calls and to clear outstanding Council Tax work and correspondence.

Duties will include dealing with customers on the telephone and also working from daily post, emails and online forms, as well as:

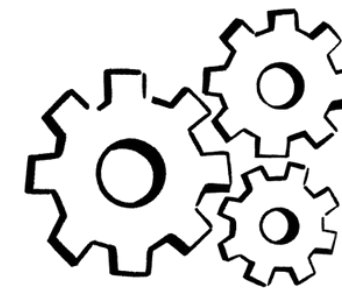
- Establishing the Council Tax liability;
- Creating and updating Council Tax accounts, including (but not limited to): Change of addresses, Determinations and awards including Single Person Discount (SPD), Severely Mentally Impaired Discount (SMI), second homes and empty properties, Exemption determinations, including student exemptions and Deaths
- Setting up and amending Direct Debits;
- Taking payments

## What we're looking for

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

- You are a skilled Council Tax Officer with at least 3 years experience of Council Tax/Revenues (billing & recovery)
- Experience of working in a Local Authority
- Essential that the applicant has recent experience of Civica Open Revenues (IBS)

To find out more or to apply  
[>> Click here to visit the full advert](#)



# Council Tax Customer Service Officer (Academy)

6+ Months | £21.86 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

The Main duties will be recovery and enforcement work, dealing with incoming telephone calls, correspondence and system generated reports. Other ad hoc work required includes tracing, dealing with enforcement agent returns, potential attendance at evening surgeries and court.

Generally working from home, officers will occasionally be required to attend the office in London for team meetings, training or when attending an evening surgery or court hearing. Must be prepared to deal with telephone calls, usually twice a week on an all day rota, plus lunchtime cover on other days & for emergencies.

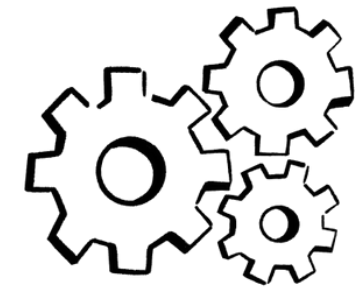
## What we're looking for

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

- We are looking for a skilled Revenues Officer who has at least 3 years experience in Council Tax
- A skilled Capita One (Academy) user

To find out more or to apply

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



# Revenues Officer (NEC) - SPD Project

18+ Months | £22 ph Umbrella | Remote

## The Assignment

Business Smart Solutions is proud to welcome its newest client, one of the largest Local Authorities in the UK to #TeamBSS.

We are seeking 4 Revenues Officers on a contract basis to assist with a large scale Single Person Discount review. The client has chosen to partner with BSS on this, as they feel a hands on approach opposed to automated software will get the best results for the city.

Assignment length is expected to be in the region of 18 months, and will be on a fully remote basis. Equipment will be couriered.

Are you a skilled Revenues Officer and NEC (Northgate) user, seeking a long term contract? This may be the position for you!

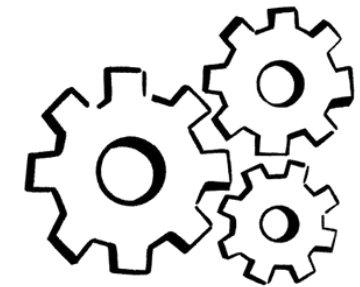
## What we're looking for

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

- A minimum of 3 years Revenues/Council Tax experience
- 2 years NEC (Northgate) experience

To find out more or to apply

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



## Senior Revenues Officer (Tax Base Project) - NEC

3+ Months | £27 ph Umbrella | Remote

### The Assignment

Our London based client is looking for a skilled NEC (Northgate) trained Senior Revenues Officer to assist with setting of / managing the tax base.

This is an ongoing project support role.

The ideal candidate will have strong financial skills as well as being a trained Council Tax / Business Rates Officer.

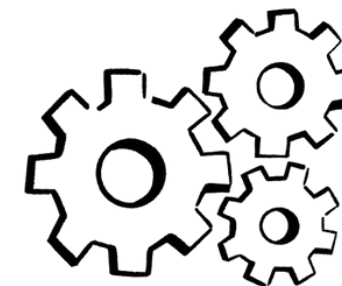
### What we're looking for

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

- A minimum of 5 years Revenues (Council Tax / Business Rates skills)
- 2 years NEC (Northgate) experience

To find out more or to apply

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





Partner with #TeamBSS, achieve together

Visit: [www.businesssmartsolutions.co.uk](http://www.businesssmartsolutions.co.uk)





# Other Information

# Previous Recordings



In Partnership with

LA Directories Limited

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



Dates where  
there will be  
no sessions

# Impact assessment calculator



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

# Visionary Network



- Visionary Network is a not for profit organisation, whose objective is to encourage thought leadership and good practice in the field of public service.
- We are independent and will draw on views, ideas and practices from any practitioner and/or organisation committed to public service.
- We encourage debate, and the fair exchange of ideas, viewpoints and philosophies.
- Any products we do produce will be for the betterment of society, public sector led and if costed will reflect our not for profit values.
- Our focus is on improving the knowledge, health, environment and lives of our citizens through better administration and access to services.

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.