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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

22 July 2024



Nicki Duckworth, EntitledTo, Marshalling

Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

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

- Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Cambridge City Council
- Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager, Oxford City Council
- Kirsty Brooksmith, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- Alex Clegg, Resolution Foundation
- Robert Fox, Charnwood Borough Council
- Malcolm Gardner & Kevin Stewart, Visionary Network
- Paul Howarth, Independent Consultant
- Tylor-Maria Johnson, Policy in Practice
- Gareth Morgan, CEO Ferret Information Systems
- Sean O’Sullivan, Independent Subsidy Expert
- Megan Shepherd, Mid-Sussex District Council
- Bob Wagstaff PSPS (Boston, South Holland, East Lindsey)
- Liz Whitehead-Davis, Hexagon Housing



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New MHCLG Ministers



The Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP

Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
Deputy Prime Minister



Jim McMahon OBE MP

Minister of State



Matthew Pennycook MP

Minister of State



Alex Norris MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State



Rushanara Ali MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State



Baroness Taylor of Stevenage

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State



Lord Khan of Burnley

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State



Discussion Points



Barnsley:
Pathways to work

TBIFGC: Reimagining The State & DWP



The State



DWP



Risks

Design of Council Tax Reduction Schemes

Visionary Network, Ascendant Solutions, and Inbest collaborate with local authorities to design their Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS).

Combining our extensive experience in Revenues & Benefits with our software and data analytics tools, we deliver customised designs, in-depth impact analysis, and enhanced communication of CTRS.

Our primary focus is ensuring financial stability for councils and safeguarding vulnerable households.



Planning to Design or Review Your CTRS for 2025/26?

Lets collaborate on your new CTRS! We're here to support you at every step, guaranteeing a seamless launch.

With our expertise and proprietary technology, we'll help you design a scheme that not only secures your council's financial stability but is also easy to administer and safeguards your vulnerable residents.



Book a call today!

Or email us:

support@ascendantsol.co.uk

info@inbest.ai

malcolm@visionarynetwork.co.uk



Finding the
right
information
has never been
easier with



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

LA Directories Ltd is here to help professionals across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland correctly and efficiently identify and understand the ever-changing law and guidance that governs the calculation of entitlement to Housing Benefit, Rates (Northern Ireland), Universal Credit, Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payment.

LA Directories Ltd takes the law and guidance relating to Housing Benefit, Rates, Universal Credit, Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payment then interprets and consolidates it into three product ranges...

- The Benefits Directory a web-based knowledge management solution
- The Training Directory provision of open and in-house training courses at all levels
- Consultancy services

Local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland are using our services as well as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

E-mail services.enquiries@ladirectories.com

Peter Davis, Marketing & Account Management

E: peter.davis@ladirectories.com

M: 07807 009 959

Ferret Information Systems Ltd



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



our training services:

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



our products:

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



our platforms:

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



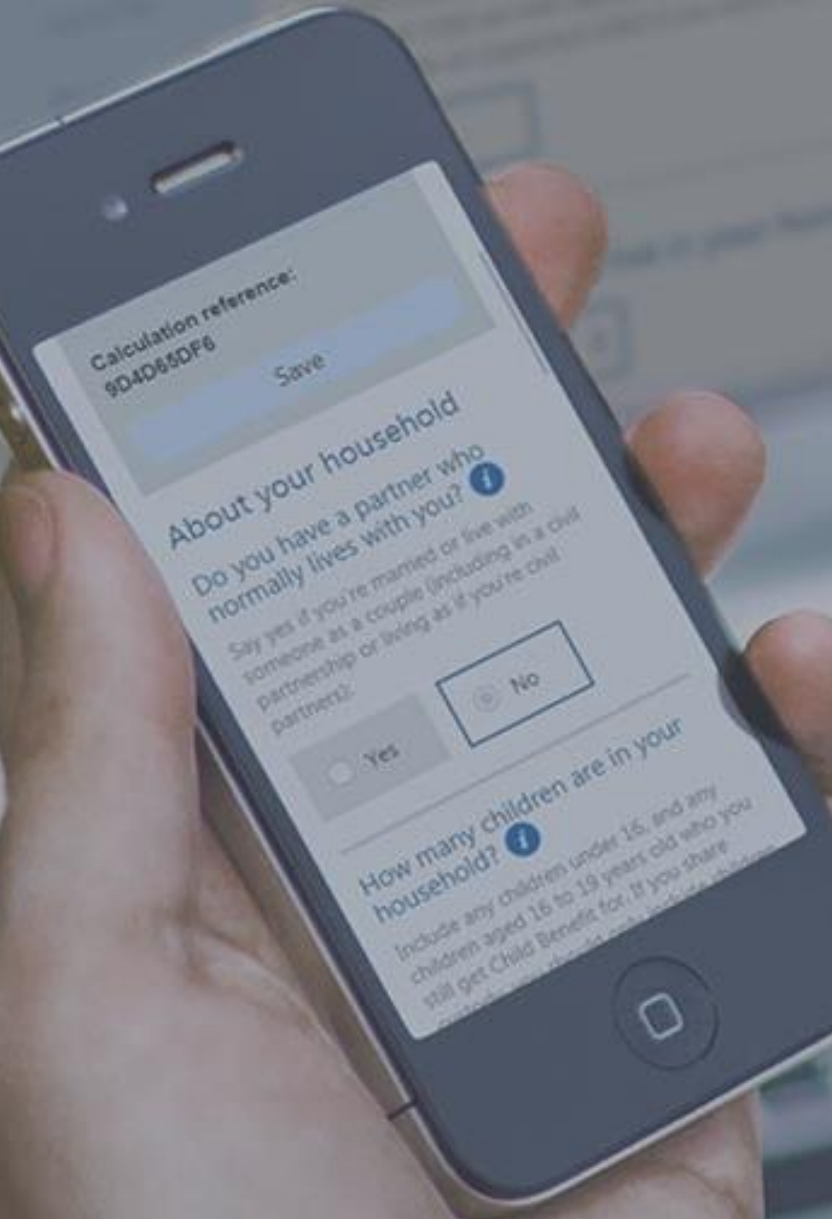
our customers:

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

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

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.

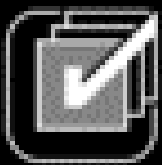
The InBest benefits calculator has been integrated into Ascendant's apply4.online support application, to make it easier for people who are experiencing financial difficulties to find out what support is available to them.

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
- 07946800171
mg@malcolmgardner.com
Book a meeting with Malcolm <https://bit.ly/VNMGTime>



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.



Main Discussion Points



Barnsley 2030

Study Overview:

- Largest in-depth study of long-term worklessness.
- Focus on 700 economically inactive individuals in Barnsley, South Yorkshire.
- Led by Alan Milburn, with contributions from prominent Labour figures and experts.

Key Conclusions:

- **Current System Ineffective:** Benefit sanctions-based regime has failed to reduce economic inactivity.
- **Health-Centric Approach Needed:** Personalized support integrating health services into job centers recommended.
- **Role of NHS and Local Authorities:** Local NHS integrated care boards to collaborate with regional mayors.

Statistics:

- 2.8 million economically inactive due to long-term ill-health.
- Current policies target job seekers, ignoring those unable to work for health reasons.

Local NHS integrated care boards should be tasked with working alongside regional mayors to help people back into work in their areas, the report suggests.

Barnsley 2030

- Barnsley residents are 12% more likely to be economically inactive than the national average. This is different to unemployment. It means that people aren't taking part in the labour market for a number of reasons. It's often linked to barriers like ill-health or caring responsibilities.
- Inclusive economic growth benefits people, families, and communities. However, not everyone can access these.
- “Data tells us that there are thousands of Barnsley residents who want to work but are currently unable to.”



Barnsley 2030

Recommendations:

- **Personalized Support:** Tailored advice and support for individuals and employers.
- **Integrated Services:** NHS care boards to play a central role in employment support.
- **Shift Focus:** Move from benefit sanctions to health-based support.

Political Context:

- **Labour's Priorities:**
 - Addressing economic inactivity is a key focus for growth.
 - Keir Starmer's government pushing for higher growth and better employment support.
- **Skills England Launch:**
 - Initiative to streamline post-16 skills training.
 - Led by Richard Pennycook, aimed at aligning skills training with job market needs.



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The Economic Case for Reimagining the State

Tony Blair Institute for Global Change



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Economic Challenges Facing the New Government

- **Difficult Inheritance:** Weak growth, high taxes, and tripled government debt since 2007.
- **Public Spending Crisis:** Spending near crisis levels with crumbling public services.
- **Fiscal Pressure:** Ageing and unhealthy population adding to financial strain.
- **High Taxes and Debt:** Projected tax rises to stabilize debt; potential need for a 4.5% GDP increase by 2040.
- **Need for Growth:** To avoid austerity and manage rising fiscal challenges, boosting growth is essential.



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AI-Era Technology as a Gamechanger

- **AI-Driven Economic Growth:** Potential to boost UK growth by up to 1.5 percentage points annually.
- **Technological Diffusion:** AI advancements could add £40 billion in tax revenues annually by 2040.
- **Public Sector Transformation:** AI can save up to 20% of workforce time, leading to £34 billion in annual savings by the next Parliament.
- **Health Services Improvement:** AI in preventative health care can yield £6 billion in annual savings by 2040.



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Transforming Public Services with AI

- **Workforce Efficiency:** AI adoption could result in significant workforce time savings and net annual savings.
- **Preventative Health Care:** Expanding digital health records and access to health checks; significant savings from reduced disease incidence.
- **Digital ID Implementation:** Improved citizen interaction with government services, reducing benefit fraud, and enhancing tax collection efficiency.



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Strategic Actions for Local Government

- **Pro-Innovation Stance:** Encourage adoption of AI-era technology across local government sectors.
- **Mission Control for AI:** Establish central and departmental roles focused on productivity and technological adoption.
- **Incentivizing Long-Term Investment:** Adjust fiscal rules to prioritize investment in AI and technology to drive public-sector efficiency.
- **Holistic Fiscal Planning:** Update Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) roles to extend forecasts and consider long-term technology impacts.



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Reimagining the UK Department for Work and Pensions

Governing in the Age of AI: Tony Blair Institute for
Global Change



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Introduction and Need for Reimagining the DWP

- **Key Issues:**

- The DWP's current welfare system is slow, inefficient, and fails to address root causes of need.
- High welfare bill due to ageing population, healthcare, and cost-of-living crises.
- AI offers tools to transform DWP into a proactive, efficient, and supportive entity.



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The Potential of AI in the DWP

- **AI Opportunities:**
 - AI can reduce DWP's workload by 40%, equating to nearly £1 billion in productivity gains annually.
 - AI can streamline paperwork, improve service delivery, and reduce fraud and error.
- **Signature Policies Enabled by AI:**
 - **Reduce Benefit Backlogs:** Achieve zero backlogs within a year through improved prioritization and process enhancements.
 - **Reimagine Job Centres:** Introduce digital employment assistants for personalized job and training support.
 - **Become an AI Exemplar:** Promote cross-government collaboration, reduce long-term benefit costs, and drive economic growth.



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Current DWP Challenges

- **Operating Model Issues:**
 - Bureaucratic and labor-intensive processes leading to delays and inefficiencies.
 - High levels of fraud and error costing close to £9 billion annually.
 - Insufficient support for claimants, especially the vulnerable and long-term unemployed.
- **Service Delivery Problems:**
 - Long wait times for benefits like Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and pension credits.
 - Inadequate job support from overburdened work coaches.
 - Poor data integration and legacy IT systems leading to costly errors.



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Transformative AI Strategies

- **Citizen Engagement:**
 - AI tools for better information delivery, application pre-approval, and streamlined communication.
- **Operational Efficiency:**
 - AI for demand forecasting, case prioritization, and fraud detection.
- **Policy Development:**
 - AI for real-time data analysis, policy modeling, and stakeholder consultation.
- **Long-term Vision:**
 - Transition to an AI-driven, proactive DWP that enhances service quality, economic participation, and taxpayer value.



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Issues with AI in Assessing Housing Benefit Claims

Overview:

- Over 200,000 people wrongly investigated for housing benefit fraud due to an underperforming government algorithm.
- Two-thirds of claims flagged as high risk by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) automated system were legitimate.
- Resulted in unnecessary investigations and £4.4 million spent on checks that did not save money.

Criticism and Concerns:

- **Big Brother Watch:** Criticizes DWP's overreliance on technology, highlighting risks to disadvantaged groups.
- **Turn2us Charity:** Calls for closer collaboration with users to ensure automation works effectively.
- **Susannah Copson (Big Brother Watch):** Warns against repeated poor performance of algorithm-led fraud detection.

Issues with AI in Assessing Housing Benefit Claims

Algorithm Performance:

- Initial pilot showed 64% accuracy in identifying wrong benefit entitlements.
- Subsequent reviews showed a significant drop to 34-37% accuracy.
- Despite low accuracy, saved £2.71 for every pound spent on case reviews in 2021/22.

Responses and Recommendations:

- **Information Commissioner Inquiry:** Found no evidence of harm or financial detriment from algorithms.
- **DWP Actions:** Ceased routine suspension of claims flagged by AI-powered fraud detector due to feedback.
- **Privacy Concerns:** Ongoing issues with transparency and potential for future privacy-invasive technologies.



In the news



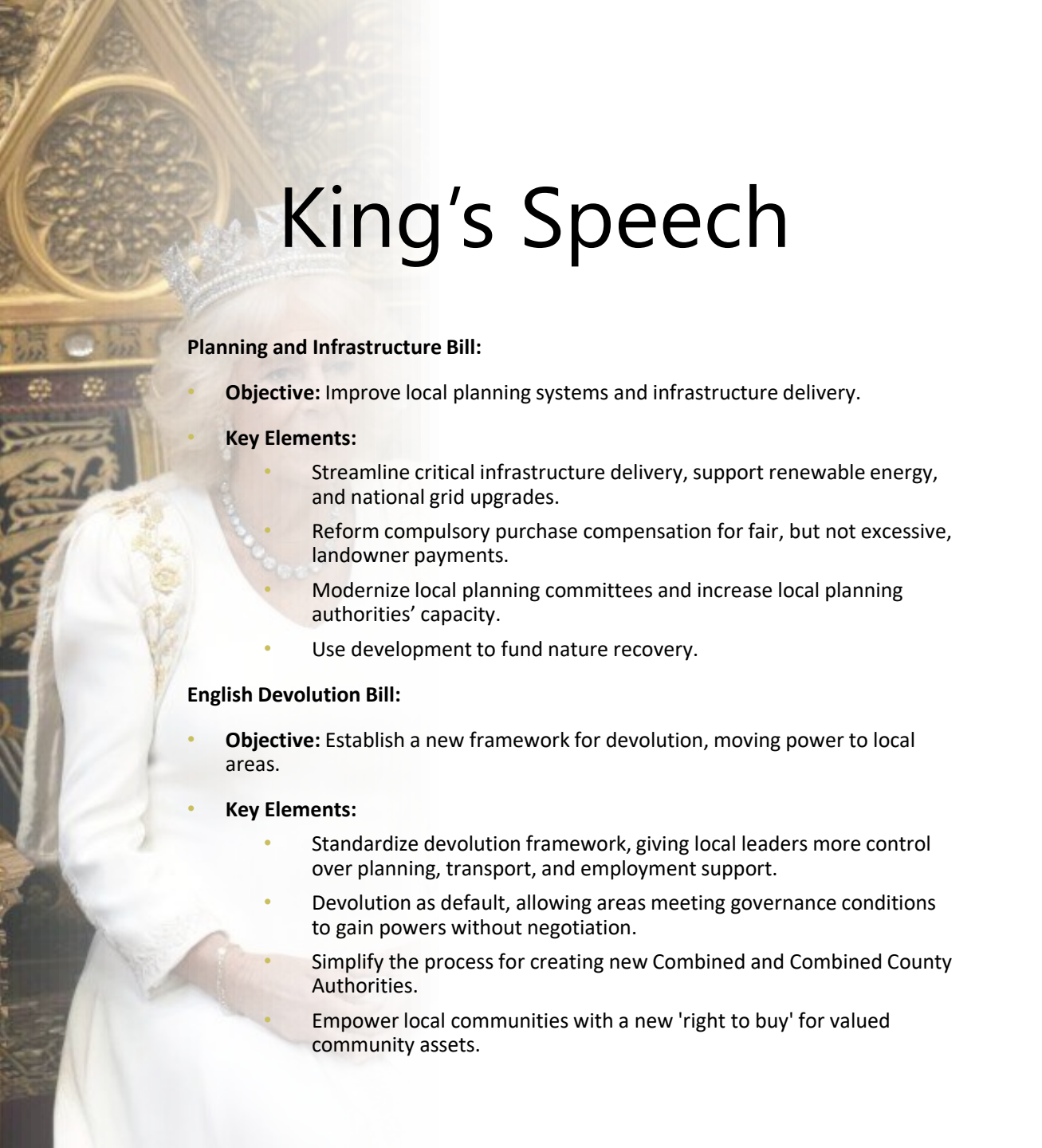
King's Speech

Planning and Infrastructure Bill:

- **Objective:** Improve local planning systems and infrastructure delivery.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Streamline critical infrastructure delivery, support renewable energy, and national grid upgrades.
 - Reform compulsory purchase compensation for fair, but not excessive, landowner payments.
 - Modernize local planning committees and increase local planning authorities' capacity.
 - Use development to fund nature recovery.

English Devolution Bill:

- **Objective:** Establish a new framework for devolution, moving power to local areas.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Standardize devolution framework, giving local leaders more control over planning, transport, and employment support.
 - Devolution as default, allowing areas meeting governance conditions to gain powers without negotiation.
 - Simplify the process for creating new Combined and Combined County Authorities.
 - Empower local communities with a new 'right to buy' for valued community assets.





King's Speech

National Wealth Fund Bill:

- **Objective:** Deliver growth and a greener economy through transformative investments.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Capitalize with an additional £7.3 billion, mobilizing private sector investment.
 - Direct investment in priority sectors, supporting local growth.
 - Simplify support for businesses and investors, aligning critical institutions.

Employment Rights Bill:

- **Objective:** 'Make Work Pay' by enhancing workers' rights.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Ban zero-hour contracts and 'Fire and Rehire' practices.
 - Extend parental leave, sick pay, and unfair dismissal protections from day one.
 - Make flexible working default from day one.
 - Strengthen protections for new mothers and establish a Fair Work Agency.



King's Speech

Digital Information and Smart Data Bill & Children's Wellbeing Bill

- **Digital Information and Smart Data Bill:**
- **Objective:** Reform data laws for better public services and innovation.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Establish Digital Verification Services and a National Underground Asset Register.
 - Enable Smart Data schemes for secure data sharing.
 - Modernize and strengthen the ICO with new powers and structure.
 - Support data preservation for child death investigations.

Children's Wellbeing Bill:

- **Objective:** Center children's wellbeing in education and social care.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Strengthen child protection and safeguarding.
 - Require free breakfast clubs in primary schools.
 - Limit branded school uniforms to reduce costs.
 - Maintain Children Not in School registers and improve independent school regulations.
 - Enhance teacher misconduct investigations and cooperation with local authorities on school admissions.





King's Speech

Renters' Rights Bill & Hillsborough Law

- **Renters' Rights Bill:**
- **Objective:** Overhaul the private rented sector for tenant security and fairness.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Abolish Section 21 'no fault evictions'.
 - Empower tenants to challenge unfair rent increases and request pets.
 - Apply Decent Homes Standard and 'Awaab's Law' to the private sector.
 - Create a digital rented sector database and new ombudsman service.
 - Prohibit discrimination against tenants on benefits or with children.

Hillsborough Law:

- **Objective:** Enhance transparency and accountability in public services.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Establish a legal duty of candour on public servants and authorities.
 - Reduce defensiveness in the public sector.
 - Ensure transparency in public investigations to prevent future misconduct.





Overview of the Code of Practice for Local Authority Statutory Officers

CIPFA

■ Introduction:

- Authored by Lawyers in Local Government (LLG), the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), and Solace.
- Purpose: Address the gap in legislation, policy, and guidance on local government governance, focusing on statutory officers' roles.

■ Key Points:

- Aimed at the governance 'Golden Triangle': Head of Paid Service, Chief Finance Officer, and Monitoring Officer.
- Document title: "Code of Practice on Good Governance for Local Authority Statutory Officers".

■ Objectives:

- Provide best practices and set expectations for the three statutory officers.
- Enhance understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- Promote effective teamwork and robust governance to avoid failures.



Overview of the Code of Practice for Local Authority Statutory Officers

Seven Standards of the Golden Triangle:

- **Understand Governance:** Clarify roles and responsibilities.
- **Act Wisely:** Enforce duty of enquiry and exercise statutory functions.
- **Lead Ethically:** Uphold the Seven Principles of Public Life.
- **Act Effectively:** Ensure robustness in working arrangements.
- **Resource the Roles:** Provide necessary tools.
- **Build Resilience:** Focus on deputies and development.
- **Deliver Sound Decision Making:** Aim for good governance outcomes.

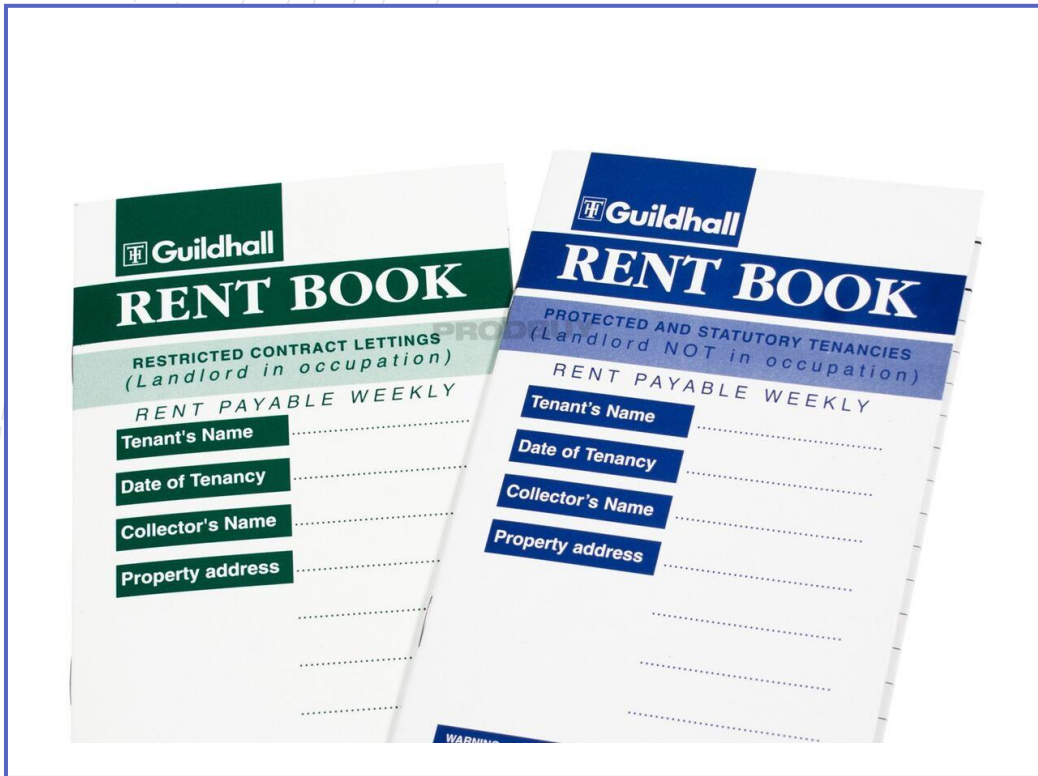
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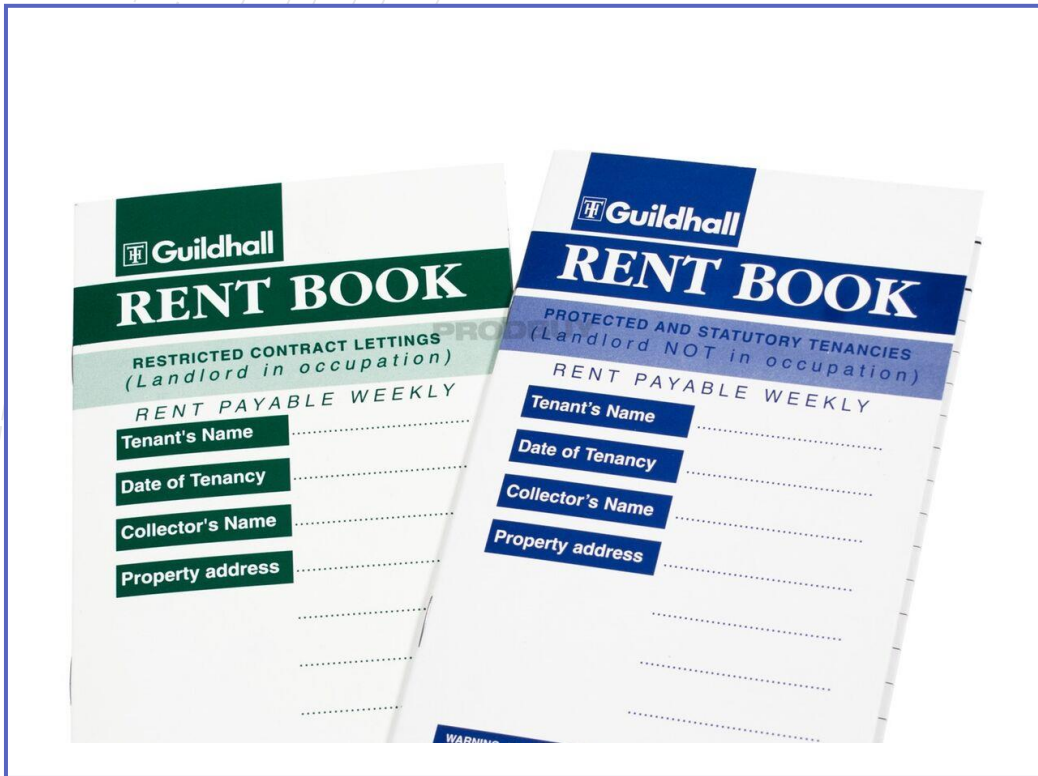
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Overview of the Renters' Rights Bill



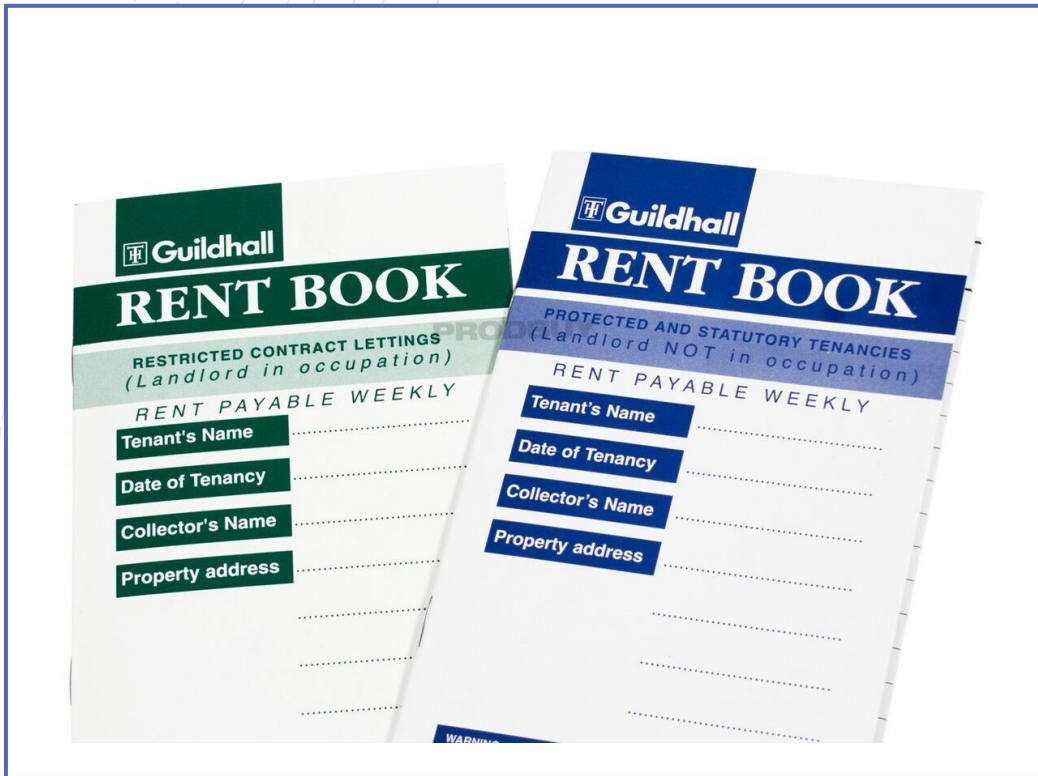
- **Objective:**
 - End no fault evictions and reform the private rented sector for greater tenant security and improved housing quality.
- **Key Elements:**
 - Abolish Section 21 'no fault evictions' to increase tenant security.
 - Introduce clear and expanded grounds for landlords to reclaim properties.
 - Strengthen tenants' rights and protections against unfair rent increases.
 - End rental bidding wars by landlords and agents.
 - Give tenants the right to request pets, with reasonable conditions for landlords.

Overview of the Renters' Rights Bill



- **Housing Quality Improvements:**
 - Apply the Decent Homes Standard to ensure homes are safe, secure, and hazard-free.
 - Extend 'Awaab's Law' to the private sector, setting legal expectations for timely hazard remediation.
- **Enhanced Enforcement:**
 - Create a digital private rented sector database for better information sharing among landlords, tenants, and councils.
 - Strengthen councils' enforcement powers with new investigatory powers to identify and fine unscrupulous landlords.
 - Establish a new ombudsman service for quicker, cheaper dispute resolution, reducing the need for court proceedings.
 - Make it illegal for landlords to discriminate against tenants in receipt of benefits or with children.

Overview of the Renters' Rights Bill



- **Support from Local Government:**
 - Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen (District Councils' Network): Supports improved standards and tenant rights, urging collaboration and funding for effective implementation.
- **Concerns from Landlords:**
 - Chris Norris (NRLA): Stresses the need for a fair, workable replacement for Section 21 and a more efficient justice system to address tenant anti-social behavior and serious rent arrears.
- **Advocacy for Tenants:**
 - Polly Neate (Shelter): Emphasizes the importance of scrapping no fault evictions and setting limits on in-tenancy rent increases to prevent tenant displacement.
- **Calls for Social Housing:**
 - Urges focus on delivering 90,000 social rent homes annually to meet housing targets and reduce homelessness.



New Devolution Revolution Initiative

Key Announcements:

- **Secretary of State for Local Government:** Angela Rayner pledges a new "devolution revolution."
- **Target Areas:** Urges county and unitary leaders in "devolution deserts" to adopt devolved powers.
- **Encouragement for Collaboration:** Councils to discuss forming new combined or combined county authorities.
- **Focus Areas for Devolution:**
 - Transport
 - Adult education and skills
 - Housing and planning
 - Employment support
- **Mayoral Combined Authorities:**
 - **Advantages:** Highlighted, though not mandated.
 - **Economic Geographies:** Devolution settlements tailored to effective economic scales.
- **Recent Developments:**
 - **Government Meeting:** 12 metro mayors discussed increasing devolution.
 - **Council of Nations and Regions:** Proposed to include the Prime Minister, devolved administrations, and metro mayors.



New Devolution Revolution Initiative

Implementation Strategy:

- **Integrated Settlements:** More regions to benefit with strong accountability and financial management.
- **Presumption Towards Devolution:** Automatic power transfer if certain conditions are met.
- **Financial Support:** Assurance of resources to deliver new devolved powers.
- **New Devolution Framework:**

Publication: Set to outline new powers and flexibilities available to councils.

- **Proposals Deadline:** Councils to submit by the end of September.

Responses:

- **CLlr Tim Oliver (County Councils Network):**
 - Welcomes continuation of county combined authority model.
 - Advocates for direct devolution to county or unitary authorities where applicable.
- **CLlr Sam Chapman-Allen (District Councils' Network):**
 - Supports district councils' central role in devolution.
 - Anticipates positive discussions for future devolution initiatives to enhance community prosperity.



Overview of Hackney Council Cyber-Attack and ICO Reprimand

ico.

Information Commissioner's Office

Incident Summary:

- **Date of Attack:** October 2020
- **Attack Details:** Hackers accessed, encrypted, and exfiltrated records containing personal data.
- **Impact:**
 - 440,000 files encrypted
 - Affected at least 280,000 residents and staff
 - Disruption of council systems for months, with some services not returning to normal until 2022.
- **Affected Data Types:**
 - Racial or ethnic origin
 - Religious beliefs
 - Sexual orientation
 - Health data
 - Economic data
 - Criminal offence data
 - Personal identifiers (e.g., names and addresses)



Overview of Hackney Council Cyber-Attack and ICO Reprimand



Information Commissioner's Office

ICO Findings:

• Failures Identified:

- Lack of proper security and processes to protect personal data.
- Inadequate security patch management system.
- Unchanged insecure password on a dormant account.

- **Reprimand:** Issued due to preventable security shortcomings.

Recommendations for Avoiding Cyber-Attacks:

- Secure external connections with multi-factor authentication.
- Log and monitor systems for unexpected activity.
- Act on alerts from endpoint protection.
- Use strong and unique passwords, especially for privileged accounts.
- Apply critical patches within 14 days to mitigate known vulnerabilities



Overview of Hackney Council Cyber-Attack and ICO Reprimand

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) logo, consisting of the lowercase letters "ico." in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

Information Commissioner's Office

Hackney Council's Response:

- Disagreed with ICO's findings, claiming a misunderstanding of facts and law.
- Emphasized remedial steps taken post-attack:
 - Informing residents, especially those at significant risk.
 - Engaging with NCSC, NCA, and the Metropolitan Police.
 - Improving processes and security measures.
- Commitment to continue working with relevant authorities to defend against cyber threats.



Key Findings of the Covid Inquiry Module 1 Report

Significant Flaws Identified:

- Government and civil services failed citizens during the pandemic.
- Inadequate engagement with local authorities, voluntary sector, and community groups.
- Prepared for the wrong pandemic: focused on influenza, not a global pandemic like COVID-19.
- Pre-existing issues:
 - Slowdown in health improvement.
 - Widening health inequalities.
 - Overstretched public services, especially health and social care.

Strain and Societal Impact:

- Extraordinary strain on health, care, financial, and educational systems.
- Widespread societal damage:
 - Exacerbation of existing inequalities.
 - Weakened access to opportunities.
- Lack of scalable systems for testing, tracing, and isolating.



Regulator of Social Housing

Overview of RSH Consumer Regulation Work (2023-24)

Referrals:

- **Total Referrals:** 986 (5% increase from 940 in 2022-23)
 - **Sources of Referrals:**
 - Individuals: 58%
 - Registered Providers (Self-Referrals): 16%
 - Other Reports: 13%
 - Local Authorities (Self-Referrals): 3%

Investigations:

- **Total Investigations:** 217
- **Non-Compliance Findings:** 9 landlords not meeting consumer standards (down from 13 in 2022-23)
- **Consumer Standards:**
 - **Most Cited Standard:** Home Standard (53% of referrals)
 - **Second Most Cited Standard:** Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard (34%)
 - **Other Standards:** Neighbourhood and Community Standard, Tenancy Standard



Regulator of Social Housing

Overview of RSH Consumer Regulation Work (2023-24)

Key Points for Landlords:

- **Health and Safety:** Must meet all health and safety requirements to ensure tenant safety.
- **Home Conditions:** Maintain accurate, up-to-date data on the condition of tenants' homes.
- **Complaint Handling:** Implement an effective complaint handling process.
- **Tenant Engagement:** Engage with tenants fairly and respectfully.
- **Self-Referral:** Refer material issues to RSH promptly for resolution.

RSH Initiatives:

- **Proactive Regulation:** New regulatory approach and programme of inspections started.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Landlords urged to apply lessons from the report to improve tenants' homes and services.

CROWDSTRIKE

Overview of Global IT Outage and Impact

Cause of Outage:

- **Disruption Trigger:** CrowdStrike Falcon update caused global IT outages.
- **Affected Systems:** Windows hosts experienced crashes and the 'blue screen of death' (BSOD).
- **Unimpacted Systems:** Mac and Linux hosts remained unaffected.

Key Affected Sectors:

- **Hospitals:** Thousands of appointments cancelled or postponed.
- **Banks:** Disruptions in banking services.
- **Airlines:** Numerous airports globally had to close.
- **Railways:** Delays and cancellations across multiple UK rail lines (e.g., Avanti West Coast, Gatwick Express).
- **Broadcasters:** Sky News experienced shutdowns.

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- **Banks:** Disruptions in banking services.
- **Airlines:** Numerous airports globally had to close.
- **Railways:** Delays and cancellations across multiple UK rail lines (e.g., Avanti West Coast, Gatwick Express).
- **Broadcasters:** Sky News experienced shutdowns.

Current Economic Situation

Headlines:

- **CPI Inflation:** Steady at 2%, meeting target.
- **Real Wages:** Growing at the fastest rate in over a decade.

Positive Aspects:

- **Inflation Control:** Headline CPI suggests inflation is under control.
- **Wage Growth:** Much-needed boost following recent pay traumas.

Current Economic Situation

Issues Beneath the Surface:

- **Domestically-Generated Inflation:** Remains high despite overall CPI stability.
- **Non-Productivity-Enhanced Pay Rises:** Wage increases not driven by productivity gains, potentially leading to further inflation.

Bank of England's Dilemma:

- **Trend Wage Growth:** Rising, currently slightly above the headline rate.
- **Interest Rate Uncertainty:** Complications in decision-making on interest rate cuts, affecting re-mortgaging prospects.

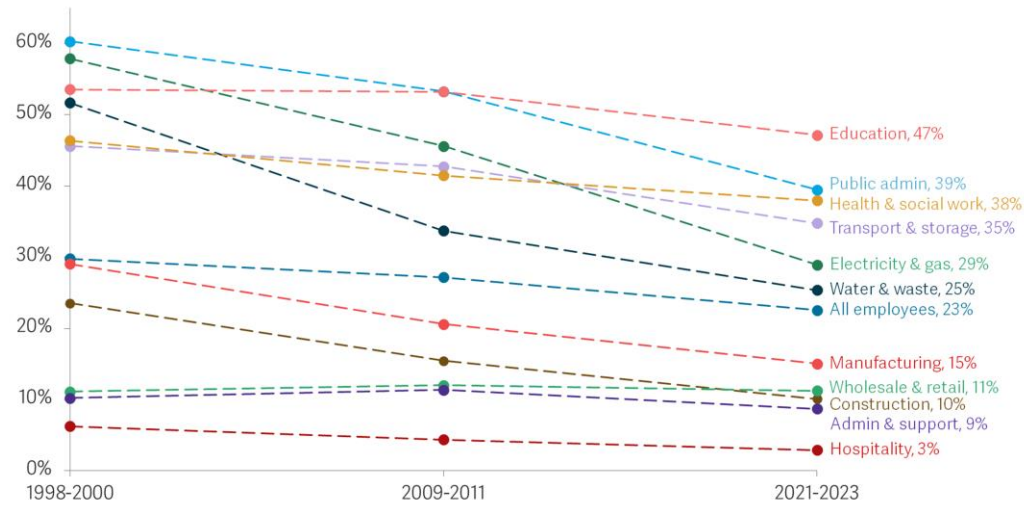
Future Implications:

- **Living Standards:** Potential reduction if inflation generated by wage increases.
- **Economic Stability:** Challenges in balancing wage growth and inflation control.

Current Economic Situation

Proportion of employees who are members of a trade union, by industry: UK

Resolution
Foundation



Notes: A version of this chart previously appeared in: D Tomlinson, Four of a kind: Analysis of trade union membership statistics, Resolution Foundation, May 2021.
Source: RF analysis of DBT, Trade union statistics 2023, May 2024.

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HM Prison & Probation Service

Probation Service Crisis and Early Prisoner Release

Current State of Probation Service:

- **Warning:** Martin Jones, Chief Inspector of Probation, reports 97% of areas failing.
- **Current Struggles:** Service struggling with current prisoner supervision and management.

Government Action:

- **Early Release Scheme:**
 - Releasing 5,500 prisoners early due to overcrowding.
 - Prisoners served as little as 40% of their sentence.
- **New Recruits:** 1,000 additional probation staff pledged by spring 2025.

Challenges Highlighted:

- **Overstretched Service:**
 - Current staffing 25% below required levels.
 - High caseloads and mental health-related staff sickness.



HM Prison & Probation Service

Probation Service Crisis and Early Prisoner Release

Concerns:

- **Public Safety:** Potential risk with early release of potentially dangerous criminals.
- **Resource Adequacy:** Doubts about the probation service's readiness and resource allocation.

Inspector's Recommendations:

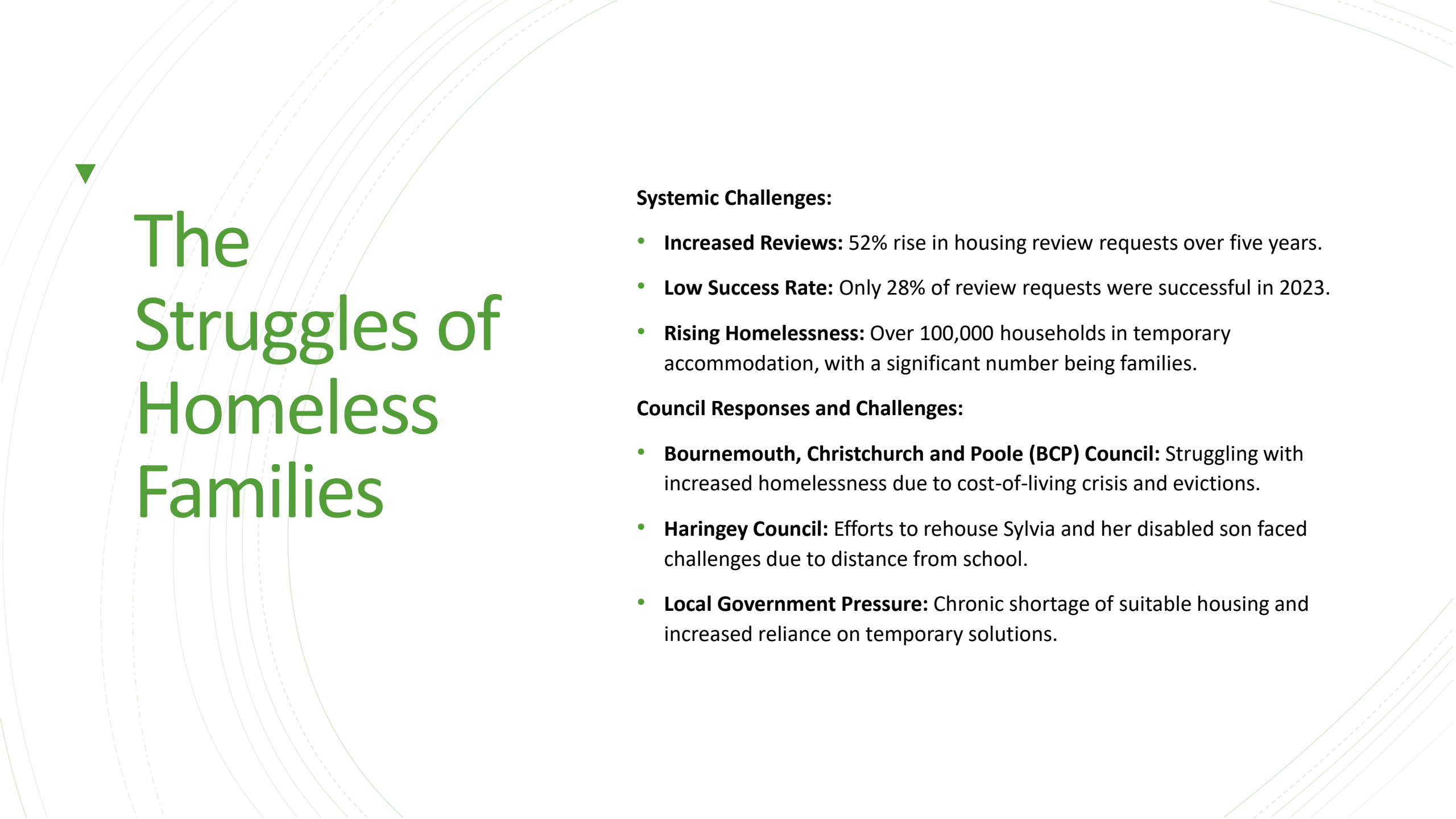
- **Scrutiny Required:** Ensure effective supervision of released prisoners.
- **Experience Gap:** New recruits need time to gain necessary experience.

Government and Expert Reactions:

- **Ms Mahmood (Justice Secretary):** Plans to address crisis with new recruits.
- **Ian Lawrence (Napo Union Chief):** Describes chaos due to short notice releases.
- **Need for Reform:** Calls to reassess IPP sentences and address broader systemic issues.

Immediate Actions Needed:

- **Probation Service Support:** Adequate training and integration of new staff.
- **Monitoring Mechanisms:** Ensure robust supervision and public safety measures




The Struggles of Homeless Families

Systemic Challenges:

- **Increased Reviews:** 52% rise in housing review requests over five years.
- **Low Success Rate:** Only 28% of review requests were successful in 2023.
- **Rising Homelessness:** Over 100,000 households in temporary accommodation, with a significant number being families.

Council Responses and Challenges:

- **Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council:** Struggling with increased homelessness due to cost-of-living crisis and evictions.
- **Haringey Council:** Efforts to rehouse Sylvia and her disabled son faced challenges due to distance from school.
- **Local Government Pressure:** Chronic shortage of suitable housing and increased reliance on temporary solutions.



The Struggles of Homeless Families

Policy Recommendations:

- **Improved Support:** Need for better support and understanding of local council roles.
- **Legislative Changes:** Outlawing Section 21 evictions to provide more stability for renters.
- **Increased Awareness:** Ensuring people know their rights to challenge council housing decisions.

Additional Points:

- **New Legislation:** Government aims to build 1.5 million new homes and address child poverty.
- **Support Networks:** Role of housing charities like Shelter in advocating for homeless families.

Delay in Social Care Cost Cap Implementation

Background:

- **Social Care Cost Cap:** Designed to limit individuals' lifetime care cost contributions to £86,000.
- **Original Plan:** Introduced by Boris Johnson in 2021 to prevent pensioners from selling homes to fund care.
- **Postponed:** Initially set for October 2025, now facing further delays due to funding and staffing shortages.

Challenges:

- **Funding Shortage:** County Councils Network (CCN) claims multibillion-pound cash injection is needed.
- **Staffing Shortage:** 131,000 care jobs unfilled, with 400,000 extra staff needed over the next decade.
- **Financial Impact:** Without additional funding, councils risk bankruptcy.

Delay in Social Care Cost Cap Implementation

Government and CCN Response:

- **Martin Tett (CCN):** Implementation impossible without funding; calls for delay and reassessment.
- **Government Commitment:** Ensuring everyone lives an independent, dignified life; new deal for care workers.
- **Economic Priorities:** Labour's focus on economic growth and housing over immediate social care reform.

Next Steps:

- **Delay Request:** CCN suggests delaying reforms by at least a year to reassess costs and secure funding.
- **Department of Health and Social Care:** Aims to address workforce crisis and create a National Care Service for consistent care across the country.

Potential Impact:

- **Campaigners' Concerns:** Fear that further delays push social care reform into the long grass.
- **Ongoing Debate:** Balancing immediate economic needs with long-term social care reform commitments.



British Red Cross

Overview and Key Findings of British Red Cross Report On Homes for Ukraine Scheme



- **Homes for Ukraine Scheme:** Launched in 2022 to provide sanctuary to Ukrainian refugees.
- **Scope:** Over 200,000 families accommodated in the UK.

Key Findings:

- **Risk of Homelessness:** More than 9,000 families placed at risk due to breakdowns with host families and difficulties in the private housing market.
- **Homelessness Likelihood:** Ukrainians are four times more likely to experience homelessness compared to the general population.
- **Unsuitable Accommodation:**
 - Two ships in Glasgow and Edinburgh criticized for lack of facilities.
 - Extreme cases of exploitation and unsuitable living conditions highlighted.



British Red Cross

Overview and Key Findings of British Red Cross Report On Homes for Ukraine Scheme



Specific Examples:

- **Housing Difficulties:** A woman had to apply to 65 housing associations before finding accommodation.
- **Immediate Homelessness:** Instances of refugees being made homeless at short notice, including sleeping rough.
- **Exploitation:** A woman offered accommodation set up for sexual exploitation.
- **Instability:** A woman lived in six different places in two years and had to return to Ukraine temporarily.
- **Overcrowding:** Instances of three generations sharing one bed.



British Red Cross

Overview and Key Findings of British Red Cross Report On Homes for Ukraine Scheme



British Red Cross Recommendations:

- **Safeguarding:** Improved safeguarding arrangements for accommodation schemes.
- **Support for Private Renting:** Enhanced assistance for displaced people to access the private rented sector.
- **Increase in Affordable Housing:** Urgent need for more affordable housing options.
- **National Integration Strategy:** Promotion of equal support for all displaced people and integration into society.

Calls for Improvement:

- **Learning from Ukraine Schemes:** Apply lessons learned to future refugee resettlement programs.
- **Stability and Support:** Ensure safety and stability for refugees to rebuild their lives.

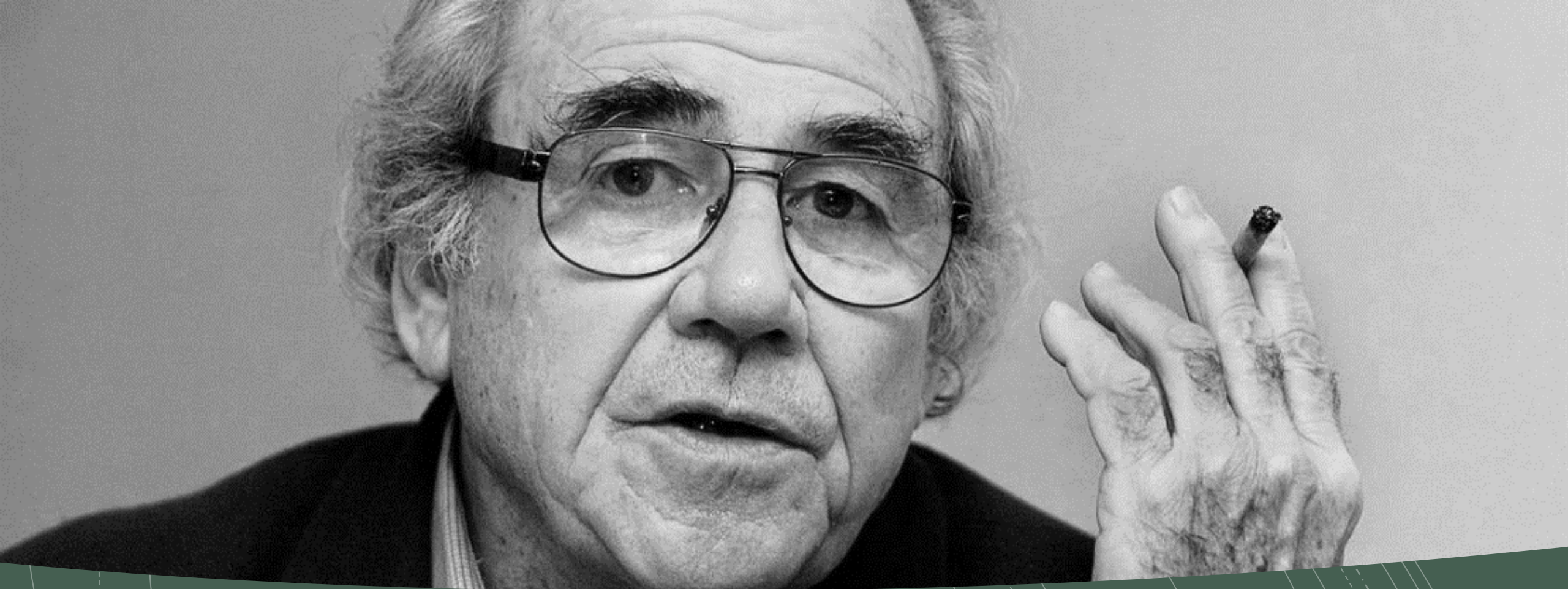
Key Survey Findings on Hybrid Working Among CEOs

Hybrid Working Prevalence:

- **90% of CEOs** split their time between the head office, flexible workplaces, and home.
- Only **7% work** from a central office five days a week.
- **2% spend** most of their week working from home.

Benefits of Hybrid Working:

- **Avoiding long commutes** is a major attraction.
- **Retention and Attraction:**
 - **Two-thirds** believe hybrid working retains key staff.
 - **Three-quarters** find it helps attract top talent.
 - **More than two-thirds** see increased flexibility aiding in hiring a more diverse range of candidates.



Quote of the Week

"The sad thing about artificial intelligence is that it lacks artifice and therefore intelligence." -- Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard was a French sociologist, philosopher, and cultural theorist known for his theories on hyperreality, simulation, and the effects of mass media on contemporary society. His influential works, including "Simulacra and Simulation," explore the interplay between reality, symbols, and society, profoundly impacting postmodern thought.



Job Adverts



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 Benefit Subsidy Officer (Civica Open Revenues)

Permanent | £36,900.00pa | Remote/London

The Assignment

We are recruiting for a Housing Benefit Subsidy Officer on behalf of a Local Authority in London. The role is available on a remote basis with occasional office visits for team meetings.

Ideally applicants will have experience of Civica Open Revenues although not essential.

Housing Benefit subsidy experience essential.

Hours: The role will be full time (37 hours per week), 5 days per week

Salary: £36,900.00pa PAYE + Local Government benefits

Contract Type: Permanent

Start Date: July 2024

Leave Entitlement: 27 days + 1 flexi day per month

What we're looking for

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

- 1.A minimum of 3 years experience of Civica Open Revenues
- 2.A minimum of 5 years experience of Housing Benefit Subsidy

To find out more or to apply

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



Housing Benefit Fraud Investigator

Until 26/10/2024 initially | £29.00 per hour (umbrella) | London / Hybrid

The Assignment

We are looking for an experienced Housing Benefit (Financial) Fraud Investigator that sits within the Housing Benefit / Financial Assessment structure. The main purpose of the role is to work as part of a new multidisciplinary team, and assist with reviewing our existing and potential new caseload of supported (exempt) accommodation tenants and providers. The Council offers flexible hybrid working arrangements.

The purpose of the team will be to assess the need for and provision of care, support, and supervision from a housing duty perspective. Challenging tenant eligibility for supported housing and provider eligibility under Housing Benefit regulations will be the main focus, as well as reducing the elements that make up the eligible rent.

What we're looking for

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

1. Extensive experience of working in an investigative environment, including undertaking interviews, obtaining and preparing reports and materials for disciplinary or Court hearings, and in accordance with strict guidelines and procedures.
2. An Investigation qualification such as Accredited Counter Fraud Specialist, PINS, FOCUS, BTEC, CIPFA Investigative Practice or equivalent.
3. A good understanding of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006.

To find out more or to apply

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



Income Officer - Accounts Receivable

3 Months | £25.00 per hour (umbrella) | London / Hybrid

The Assignment

Overall Role Purpose: Member of the Income/Accounts Receivable Team dealing with all areas of the invoicing and collection of fees and charges raised by all Council Departments.

Role Context: The post holder is responsible for providing a customer focussed service, effectively collecting a wide range of fees and charges from individuals, companies and public sector organisations in accordance with procedures, the relevant legislation, Council Policy and required timescales. Duties also require ensuring that all debts have been properly raised and liaising with relevant staff in Revenues, Benefits & Transactional Centre, as well as other Council Departments and external representatives.

What we're looking for

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

- 1.Experience of debt collection from a diverse range of debtors is desirable.
- 2.Good communication skills, both verbally and in writing and ability to effectively deal with all customers.
- 3.Self-motivated, able to work on own initiative and demonstrate problem solving ability.
- 4.Develop and maintain collaborative working with colleagues and customers to deliver continuous improvement.

To find out more or to apply

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



Team Leader - Accounts Receivable

3 Months | £29.00 per hour (umbrella) | London / Hybrid

The Assignment

Overall Role Purpose: Lead officer for the management and operation of the Income/Accounts Receivable Team dealing with all areas of the invoicing and collection of fees and charges raised by all Council Departments.

Role Context: Responsible for Ensuring that the collection processes are carried out in accordance with the relevant legislation, Council Policy, required timescales and providing a customer focussed service. Ensuring that all debts have been properly raised and are in accordance with the relevant legislation. Ensuring that the service meets all of the agreed objectives and performance targets through planning, prioritising and organising the work of the Team, establishing and reviewing procedures. Liaise with Operational Directors and other senior officers within Revenues, Benefits & Transactional Centre, ASC Finance, Planning & Regeneration, Education, Children's Services, Communities, Housing, Pay & Contracts, Legal as well as external stakeholders.

What we're looking for

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

- 1.Experience of debt collection, particularly collecting a range of fees and charges from a diverse range of debtors
- 2.CIPFA and IRRV Professional guidance and LGO decisions.
- 3.Ability to manage, motivate and develop workers and resources within the relevant area(s) of responsibility to deliver required service outcomes, ensuring understanding of how personal objectives align with service and corporate objectives.

To find out more or to apply

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



Benefits Officer (NEC)

Until 25/11/2024 | £26.48 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

The Assignment

We are looking for 1 experienced Benefits Assessment Officer with great working knowledge of NEC (Northgate) to join our client's team based in London (on a remote basis after initial setup).

Main duties will be dealing with customers on the telephone and working from daily post, emails and online forms.

Candidates will need a minimum of 2 years experience of all HB assessment including New Claims, Atlas, VEPs, HBAA and all change of circs. Also a good knowledge of iWorld and Information@work systems

Term: Until 25/11/2024

Pay rate: £26.48 p/h (Umbrella)

Hours: 36 per week, 5 days a week

Start date: ASAP

Location: Remote - following the initial set up

What we're looking for

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

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

To find out more or to apply

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



Revenues and Benefits System Administrator (Capita One/Academy)

Permanent | £35,000pa starting salary | Hybrid (1 day per fortnight on site in Leicestershire)

The Assignment

As part of the ICS Development Team, administer, support, and develop the Revenue and Benefits systems and associated ICT services.

The post-holder will be the main point of contact for assigned systems and be involved in all phases of the development, maintenance and improvement of systems, changes, and documentation.

To deliver an effective and appropriate service to all service users, fairly and without discrimination.

What we're looking for

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

- 1.Strong Revenues & Benefits skills
- 2.Advanced Capita One (Academy) user
- 3.The ability to transition from a Revenues & Benefits Officer to a Systems Officer role
- 4.Able to work from the Leicestershire office 1 day per fortnight

To find out more or to apply

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





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Other Information

Previous Recordings



- 5 August 2024
- 12 August 2024
- 19 August 2024
- 26 August 2024
- 2 December 2024
- 9 December 2024
- 16 December 2024
- 23 December 2024
- 30 December 2024



Dates where
there will be
no sessions



Blogs

Thoughts from the panel



Visionary Network Blogs

The DWP Fraud Case: A Reflection of System Failures, Not Success by Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/04/12/the-dwp-fraud-case-a-reflection-of-system-failures-not-success/>

Risk Warning: Confidential Data and Intellectual Property Vulnerabilities Due to Generative AI Systems by Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/03/20/risk-warning-confidential-data-and-intellectual-property-vulnerabilities-due-to-generative-ai-systems/>

The High-Income Parental Penalty: Navigating the Tax System's Cliff Edge by Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/03/20/the-high-income-parental-penalty-navigating-the-tax-systems-cliff-edge/>

Analyzing the Fiscal Path: Insights from Jeremy Hunt's Recent Remarks on UK Government Policies by Doug Key


<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/03/06/analysing-the-fiscal-path-insights-from-jeremy-hunts-recent-remarks-on-uk-government-policies/>

Reforming Council Tax Reduction Schemes by Paul Howarth

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2023/11/10/reforming-council-tax-reduction-schemes/>



Benefits in the Future Blogs



Benefits in the Future

Benefits in the Future

- AI – The accurate answer to benefits information – Gareth Morgan
 - <https://benefitsinthefuture.com/ai-the-accurate-answer-to-benefits-information/>
- The government is continuing to be extremely generous...to itself? – NLW 2024
 - <https://benefitsinthefuture.com/the-government-is-continuing-to-be-extremely-generousto-itself-nlw-2024/>
- Mortgage help, for claimants with earnings, begins again in 2023 by Gareth Morgan:
 - <https://benefitsinthefuture.com/mortgage-help-for-claimants-with-earnings-begins-again-in-2023/>

EntitledTo Blogs

entitledto
independent | accurate | reliable

- Council Tax Reduction schemes in England 2024/25 by Karen Holmes
 - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2024/may/15/council-tax-reduction-schemes-in-england-202425>
- High Income Child Benefit Charge changes: will there be winners and losers? By Phil Agulnik
 - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2024/march/12/is-it-time-to-change-the-high-income-child-benefit-charge>
- Spring Budget update March 2024 by Wendy Alcock
 - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2024/march/06/spring-budget-update-march-2024>



Policy in Practice Blogs

- Carer's Allowance: We can, and should, care more about carers by Rachel Walker
 - <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/carers-allowance-we-can-and-should-care-more-about-carers/>
- Disability benefits system review: the devil is in the detail by Jack Rowlands
 - <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/disability-benefits-system-review-the-devil-is-in-the-detail/>
- Back to work? How a tougher conditionality regime risks moving people away from employment by Jack Rowlands
 - <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/back-to-work-how-a-tougher-conditionality-regime-risks-moving-people-away-from-employment/>

Resolution Foundation Blogs

How to weigh up minimum wage manifesto promises by Gavin Kelly, Nye Cominetti & Helen Slaughter

- Money talks but the bite is what matters. <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/how-to-weigh-up-minimum-wage-manifesto-promises/>

We can easily end child poverty in the UK. Here are five things to know by Torsten Bell

- Progress can be made. We must not let stubbornly high rates turn us into fatalists <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/we-can-easily-end-child-poverty-in-the-uk-here-are-five-things-to-know/>

Firm Foundations: Understand why employers use flexible contracts by Hannah Slaughter

- <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/firm-foundations/>

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 organisation is a type of organisation 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 organisation to further its mission, rather than being distributed as profits to owners or shareholders.