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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

13 August 2024

Summer break

- As we do not hold sessions during August, I still produce a pack every couple of weeks to avoid being overwhelmed on our return.
- Some noteworthy items show that even during August, the world of revenues, benefits, and housing continues to change.

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.

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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.



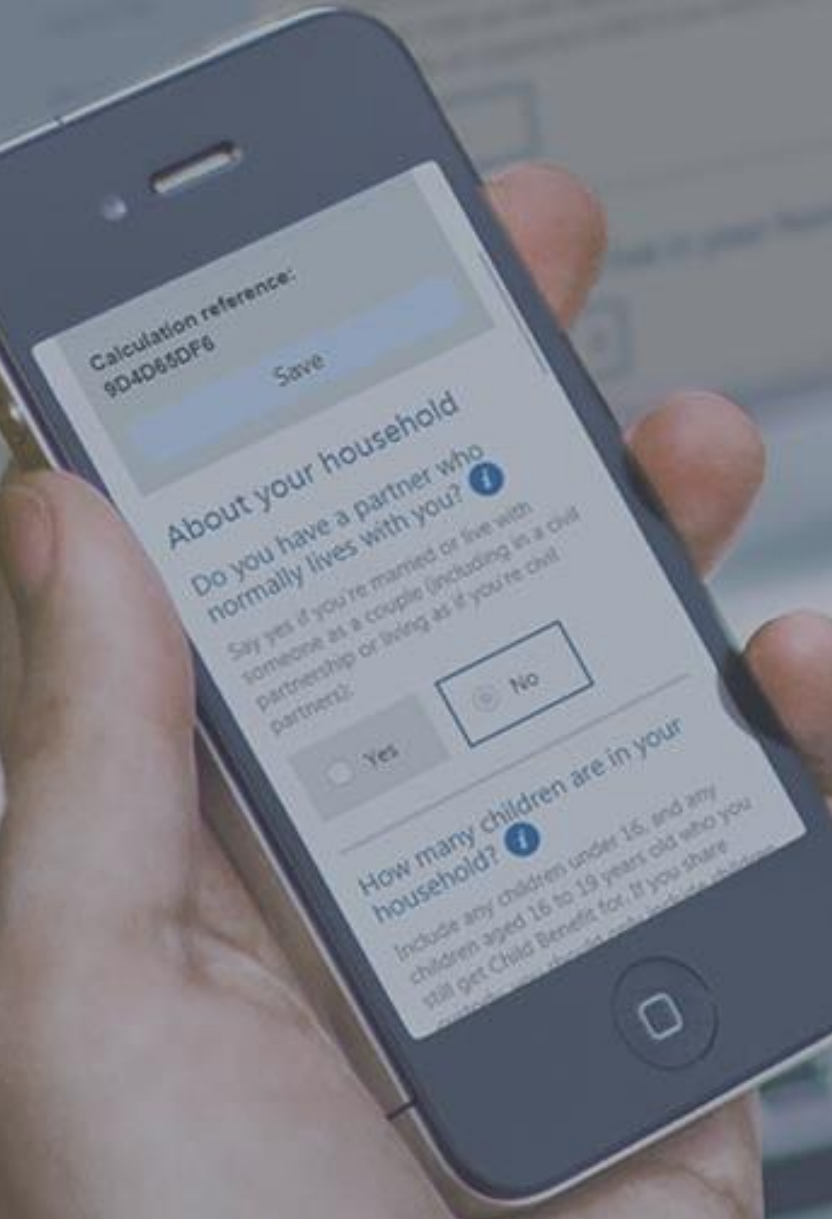
our customers:

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®



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.



In the news

Greater Flexibility for Councils on Right to Buy Receipts

- **New Flexibilities:** The UK Government will allow councils more flexibility in using Right to Buy receipts to build and acquire social homes.
 - **Caps Removed:** Restrictions on the percentage of replacements delivered as acquisitions and the cost of replacements funded by these receipts will be lifted.
 - **Combining Funds:** Councils can now combine Right to Buy receipts with Section 106 contributions.
 - **Initial Period:** These changes are effective for two years, subject to review.
- **Wider Review:** A broader review of the Right to Buy scheme will examine eligibility criteria and protections for new homes, with a consultation planned for the autumn.

Greater Flexibility for Councils on Right to Buy Receipts

- **Future Investment:** The next spending review will detail future government investments in social and affordable housing to enable better planning and significant increases in affordable housebuilding.
- **Rent Stability:** Councils and housing associations will receive assurances on rent stability, facilitating borrowing and investment in new and existing homes while protecting tenants.
- **Local Authority Housing Fund:** A third round of funding, totaling £450 million, will help councils acquire and create homes for families at risk of homelessness.
- **Awaab's Law:** The Government confirmed the introduction of Awaab's Law into the social rented sector, with further details and secondary legislation to follow.



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Xantura and Inbest Join Forces to Enhance Local Authority Services

inbest

- **Integration Announcement:**

- **Date:** February 7, 2024
- **Partnership:** Xantura integrates the Money and Pension Service (MaPS) Debt Advice Tool into its OneView platform with Inbest.
- **Objective:** Automate and streamline debt management and welfare advice processes for Local Authorities, increasing adviser capacity and service efficiency.

- **Challenges for Local Authorities:**

- **Budget Pressures:** Need to maximize Council Tax collections for economic stability.
- **Rising Demand:** Increased need for Debt and Welfare Advice services.
- **Siloed Systems:** Inefficiencies and fragmented resident views hinder optimal service delivery.



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Xantura and Inbest Join Forces to Enhance Local Authority Services

inbest

- **Holistic Solution:**
 - **OneView Platform:** Data as a Service platform integrating structured and unstructured data for a single resident view.
 - **MaPS Debt Support Tool:** Digitizes and streamlines processes using the Standard Financial Statement (SFS) and Inbest Benefits Calculator.
- **Key Features and Benefits:**
 - **Streamlined Processes:** Automates data population, reducing manual tasks and increasing adviser efficiency.
 - **Comprehensive Advice:** Provides detailed resident financial views, ensuring consistent service and adherence to best practices.
 - **Enhanced Collaboration:** Facilitates effective teamwork between departments, balancing revenue collection and resident financial support.
 - **Support for Wider Agencies:** Extendable to other local support services, enhancing holistic community support.
- **Call to Action:**
 - **Availability:** Debt Advice Tool is ready for immediate use on the OneView platform.
 - **Engagement:** Local Authorities encouraged to schedule a demo to explore how the tool can improve debt and welfare advice services. Contact Tom at Xantura or Manu at Inbest.



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Netcall Acquires Govtech to Enhance Local Government Services

- **Acquisition Overview:**

- **Netcall**, a leader in AI-powered automation and customer experience solutions, acquires **Govtech**, a pioneer in Revenues and Benefits automation.
- Goal: Improve local government services and achieve cost savings.

- **Strategic Benefits:**

- **Extended Presence:** Enhances Netcall's presence in the local government sector.
- **Enhanced Portfolio:** Integrates Govtech's innovative digital solutions into Netcall's Liberty platform.
- **Improved Capabilities:** Streamlines operations, improves citizen experiences, and delivers efficient solutions.



GOVTECH
EVERY CITIZEN MATTERS



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Netcall Acquires Govtech to Enhance Local Government Services



GOVTECH
EVERY CITIZEN MATTERS

- **Govtech's Contributions:**
 - Handles ~30 million transactions annually.
 - Achieves up to 80% automation for 47 councils.
 - Increases Revenues and Benefits teams' efficiency by up to 50%.
 - Enhances citizen service and accelerates service delivery.
- **Integration Plan:**
 - **AI Enhanced Technologies:** Incorporates AI for better citizen experiences.
 - **Capabilities Leveraged:** Chatbots, RPA, rapid application development.
 - **Combined Strengths:** Streamlines income collection across Revenues and Benefits, Housing, and Social Care.
- **Leadership Comments:**
 - **James Ormondroyd, CEO of Netcall:** Praises Govtech's workforce and service quality, anticipates growth and new opportunities.
 - **Andrew Melvin, MD of Govtech:** Highlights team's accomplishments, expresses excitement for collaboration and enhanced customer solutions.



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Newton Acquires Xantura to Enhance AI and Digital Capabilities



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- **Acquisition Overview:**
 - **Newton**, a strategic delivery consultancy, acquires **Xantura**, a specialist in AI and advanced analytics for public services.
 - Goal: Boost holistic services around business and organizational transformation.
- **Newton's Background:**
 - Over 20 years in business.
 - Shaped and delivered programs across 100+ public sector organizations, defense, infrastructure, retail, and manufacturing supply chains.
- **Xantura's Expertise:**
 - Founded in 2008.
 - Provides data sharing and advanced analytics to the public sector.
 - Joins up data across public services to understand individual needs and enable targeted interventions.



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Newton Acquires Xantura to Enhance AI and Digital Capabilities



- **Enhanced Capabilities:**
 - **AI and Analytics:** Xantura’s AI and advanced data analytics bolster Newton’s digital capabilities.
 - **Public Service Impact:** Combined expertise aims to achieve brilliant outcomes for public services and optimize resource use.
- **Joint Projects and Future Plans:**
 - **Previous Collaboration:** Built a data platform for a local authority, using predictive analytics and AI to reduce falls among older residents.
 - **Future Integration:** Xantura will merge its offerings and work as an integrated part of Newton, continuing to offer its OneView product to local government, healthcare, and central government.
- **Leadership Comments:**
 - **Steve Philips, Managing Partner of Newton:** Excited about delivering greater impact by combining expertise and achieving excellent public service outcomes.
 - **Wajid Shafiq, CEO of Xantura:** Confident in the partnership’s potential to expand proven solutions and innovate, improving public sector outcomes.



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New Approach to Setting Minimum Wage

Key Changes:

- **Cost of Living Consideration:**
 - For the first time, the Low Pay Commission (LPC) will factor in the cost of living when setting the Minimum Wage and National Living Wage.
 - Aimed at increasing wages in line with rising living costs, putting more money into working people's pockets.
- **Age-Based Wage Gap Reduction:**
 - Steps towards equalizing the wage rates for all age groups.
 - Narrowing the gap between the National Minimum Wage for 18-20-year-olds and the National Living Wage.

LPC Remit:

- Continues to consider impacts on business, competitiveness, labor market, and the wider economy, alongside the new cost of living consideration.

Housing Reform Overview

Government's New Housing Plans:

Angela Rayner, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government, outlined plans to reform housing rules aimed at delivering 1.5 million new homes by 2029.

Focus Areas: The new rules prioritize construction in high-demand areas, though London's target has been reduced from 100,000 to 80,000 new homes.

LGA's Initial Response: The Local Government Association (LGA) welcomed these reforms as "positive first steps on affordable housing," emphasizing collaboration between local and national governments.

Housing Reform Overview

Right to Buy Scheme: The LGA supports the consultation on the Right to Buy scheme, seeing it as beneficial for councils with diminished housing stock.

Research Findings: The LGA's report, "*Building a Better Future*," suggests that implementing five-year local housing deals by 2025 could result in 200,000 additional social homes over 30 years.

Devolution and Funding: Effective reform requires more than devolution; consistent and secure five-year funding regimes are essential. The LGA estimates this could boost social housebuilding by 21%.

IfG's Response to Rachel Reeves' Spending Reforms

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Chancellor's Speech: Rachel Reeves, the new Chancellor, delivered a speech addressing the state of public finances, signaling a shift in approach.

Institute for Government (IfG) Report: The IfG released a report titled "*How to run the next multi-year spending review*," criticizing the current approach to spending reviews as inadequate for achieving Labour's missions.

Positive Signs: The IfG welcomed Reeves' decision to limit the government to one major fiscal event per year, which is expected to lead to more strategic and deliberate policymaking.

IfG's Response to Rachel Reeves' Spending Reforms

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Five-Year Spending Reviews: The IfG advocates for the introduction of five-year spending reviews to enhance long-term planning and stability in public finances.



Mission-Focused Spending: The report calls for missions to be clearly defined at the outset and integrated into a reformed performance framework for government departments.



Cross-Government Collaboration: It suggests that budgets should be allocated across departments to encourage collaboration, with negotiations involving multiple secretaries of state simultaneously.



Improving Evidence Base: The upcoming months present an opportunity for the government to strengthen the evidence base for its key priorities through comprehensive policy reviews.

Overview of Spending Cuts on Technology Projects



Fiscal Black Hole: The Treasury has identified a £22 billion fiscal shortfall, leading to cuts in various sectors, including technology.



Cancelled Tech Funding: Plans to spend £1.3 billion on AI and technology projects, including £800 million for an exascale supercomputer at Edinburgh University, have been scrapped.

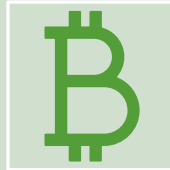


Previous Commitments: The now-cancelled funding was part of a broader initiative announced in 2023 to boost the UK's tech industry, including a £500 million investment in AI.

Overview of Spending Cuts on Technology Projects



Exascale Supercomputer: The shelved project at Edinburgh University was expected to revolutionize research in AI, climate change, drug discovery, and more.



AI Research Resource: A £900 million fund for AI research has also been affected, with £500 million in planned funding now withdrawn.



Government's Position: Despite cuts, the government reiterates its commitment to AI, launching the AI Opportunities Action Plan to explore alternative investments and strategies to support AI development in line with the new Industrial Strategy.

Tweet of the Week



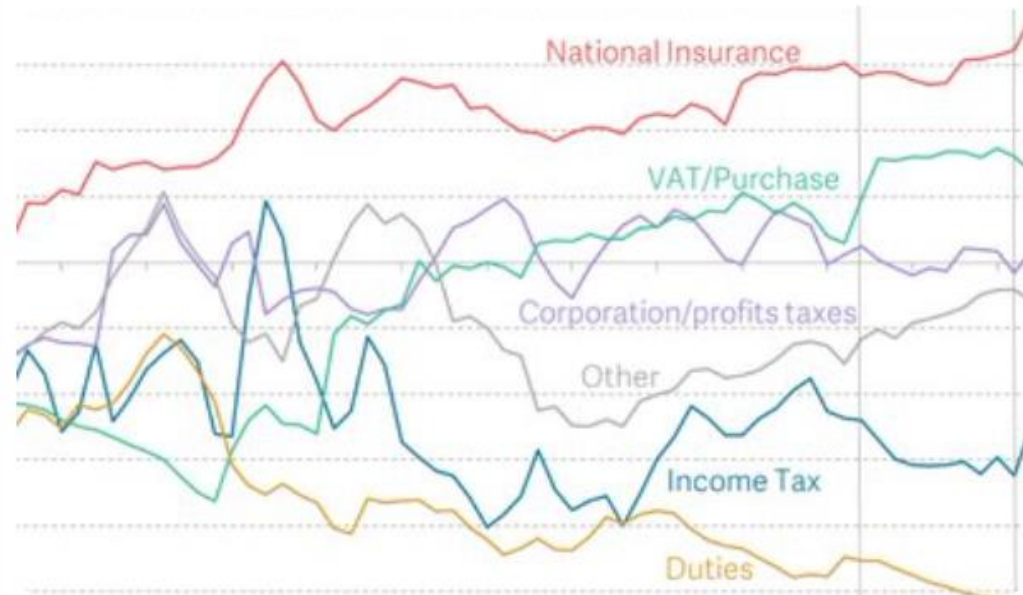
Resolution Foundation
@resfoundation

Revenues from wealth-related taxes have not kept up with increases in wealth.

The burden of higher taxation has instead fallen elsewhere.

Both income Tax and Corporation Tax rose sharply in the last Parliament.

Learn more [👉 resolutionfoundation.org/publications/w...](https://resolutionfoundation.org/publications/w...)



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Hardship in Liverpool Due to the Benefit Cap

- **Impact on Families:** The two-child benefit cap, introduced in 2017, has been cited as a major factor contributing to child poverty, affecting millions of children across the UK.
- **Case Study - Louise:** A single mother of five in Liverpool struggles to make ends meet, going without meals and facing difficult choices between basic needs like food and electricity.
- **Support Systems:** Local initiatives like Babykind and Fans Supporting Foodbanks provide essential support, but demand has surged due to increasing financial pressures on families.

Hardship in Liverpool Due to the Benefit Cap

- **Political Tensions:** The issue of the two-child benefit cap has caused division within the Labour Party, with some MPs like Ian Byrne losing the whip for voting against the government's stance.
- **Calls for Change:** Local MPs and community leaders are pushing for the cap to be scrapped, arguing that it exacerbates poverty and puts undue pressure on families.
- **Community Efforts:** Grassroots organizations like Fans Supporting Foodbanks, co-founded by Ian Byrne, play a crucial role in providing food and essentials to those in need, highlighting the immediate need for policy change.



Economic Outlook and Interest Rates

- **UK Economic Recovery:** The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) predicts a modest economic recovery over the next year, leading to a slower reduction in interest rates.
- **Interest Rate Forecast:** NIESR forecasts that the Bank of England will reduce interest rates gradually:
 - 2024: 5%
 - 2025: 4.6%
 - 2026: 4.1%
 - 2028: 3.1%
- **Impact on Borrowing:** Higher interest rates will result in more expensive mortgages and business loans, potentially leading to increased bankruptcies and unemployment.

Impact of Restricting Winter Fuel Payments

- **Policy Change:** The government, led by Chancellor Rachel Reeves, has introduced a means test for winter fuel payments, limiting eligibility to those on pension credit.
- **Affected Population:** Approximately 10 million pensioners in England and Wales will lose access to the payment, including 130,000 pensioners who are just above the threshold for pension credit.
- **Consequences:** The decision may push many pensioners into "silent poverty," leading to cold, damp homes, increased hospital admissions, and potentially more deaths due to inadequate heating.

Impact of Restricting Winter Fuel Payments

- **Criticism from Experts:** Former Pensions Minister Ros Altmann and other experts have criticized the decision, calling it a "blunder" that will leave many pensioners unable to afford heating.
- **Public Opinion:** The decision has been unpopular, with 49% of people thinking it was the wrong course of action, according to a recent Opinium poll.
- **Government Response:** The government defends the move as necessary to fix the economy, while committing to protect pensioners through other measures like the triple lock and warm homes plan. However, public health officials warn of the potential long-term costs of increased fuel poverty.

Overview of the Repeal of Strikes Legislation

Key Points:

- **Repeal of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023:**
 - Act was intended to enforce minimum service levels during industrial actions.
 - Criticized for inflaming tensions rather than resolving strikes.
 - Industrial action in the NHS alone cost £1.7bn last year.
- **Employment Rights Bill:**
 - To be introduced within the first 100 days of the new government.
 - Will repeal the minimum service levels mandated by the 2023 Act.
 - Aimed at resetting industrial relations and improving public services.

Overview of the Repeal of Strikes Legislation

Rationale for Repeal:

- **Deputy PM Angela Rayner:**
 - Law seen as a failure in clamping down on workers' rights.
 - Repeal is part of a broader plan to create a new partnership between business, trade unions, and workers.
- **Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds:**
 - The Strikes Act failed to reduce strike actions and caused more harm than good.
 - Repeal aims to reset industrial relations, promoting good faith negotiation and restoring trust in public services.

Next Steps:

- **Health Secretary Wes Streeting:**
 - Emphasized the failure of the Act to resolve NHS strikes.
 - Repeal is a step towards mending relationships with staff and fixing the health service.
- **Broader Communication:**
 - Government has communicated its intentions to relevant departments, devolved governments, and trade unions



The Overcrowding Crisis in England's Housing Sector

- **Key Issue:** 850,000 families in England are living in overcrowded homes.
- **Social Rented Sector:** Overcrowding is particularly severe, with 9% of households affected.
- **Required Action:** 140,000 larger homes needed (8,000 three-bed, 113,000 four-bed, and 25,000 five-bed homes).
- **Current Housing Stock:** England has added 13 million bedrooms since the 1990s, but overcrowding persists.
- **Inequality Worsened:** Single parents, renters, low-income, and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected.

Homelessness Crisis in the UK

- **Record Numbers:** As of March, 151,630 dependent children are living in temporary accommodation, the highest on record.
- **Rising Demand:** 117,450 households in temporary housing, up 12.3% from the previous year.
- **Government Response:**
 - Angela Rayner, Secretary of State for Housing, calls the situation a "national scandal."
 - Focus on long-term strategies to end homelessness.
 - Ongoing efforts include the largest social and affordable homebuilding increase in a generation, abolishing Section 21 'no fault' evictions, and financial support for at-risk families.

Homelessness Crisis in the UK

- **Financial Strain on Councils:**
 - Local authority spending on homelessness services has doubled since 2010-11, reaching £2.44 billion.
 - £1.6 billion spent on temporary accommodation, causing unsustainable financial pressure.
- **Local Government's Call to Action:**
 - The Local Government Association emphasizes the need for cross-departmental government action.
 - Urgent revision of the temporary accommodation subsidy, stuck at 2011 levels.
 - Fast-tracking the ban on 'no-fault' evictions.
- **Broader Impact:**
 - The Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlights the adverse effects on public services and the need for a cross-government strategy to tackle homelessness and its impacts on health and wellbeing.

The Crisis in Local Government Audits

- **Scale of the Problem:**
 - Only 1% of councils in England published audited accounts on time last year.
 - The backlog of unaudited accounts is expected to approach 1,000 by this year's deadline.
- **Government Response:**
 - Introduction of backstop dates to clear the audit backlog.
 - Backstop deadlines set for each financial year, with final clear-up expected by November 2028.
 - Aims to gradually restore the audit system, reducing disclaimed opinions by February 2026.

The Crisis in Local Government Audits

- **Challenges:**
 - Huge spending on vital services remains less assured due to delays.
 - Backstop dates mean delayed financial assurance for several years.
 - Restoration of the system is crucial to maintaining public trust and accountability.
- **Sector Response:**
 - Support from CIPFA, LGA, and ICAEW for the backstop measures.
 - Emphasis on the importance of restoring timely audits and financial reporting.
 - Calls for a long-term overhaul of the local audit system, with robust involvement from local government.
- **Next Steps:**
 - Autumn 2024: Anticipation of longer-term plans to further stabilize and improve the audit system.
 - Focus on preventing future backlogs and ensuring audits add value to public finance management.

Government's Interest in Hybrid Council Meetings

- **Minister's Statement:** Jim McMahon, Minister for Local Government, expressed the Government's openness to discussing hybrid council meetings.
- **Purpose:** The goal is to make local government more modern, efficient, flexible, and diverse by breaking down barriers to participation.
- **Potential Benefits:** Hybrid meetings could increase accessibility for women, working-age individuals, and minority ethnic groups.
- **District Councils' Network:** Welcomes the discussion, supporting the idea that councils should decide on holding remote or hybrid meetings.
- **Previous Opposition:** The Government previously rejected an amendment in October 2023 to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill that would have allowed virtual meetings, citing the importance of in-person debate for local democracy.
- **Current Stance:** The Government is now open to an evidence-based discussion on the merits of hybrid meetings, reflecting a shift in approach.

Financial and Operational Risks in the SEND and AP System

- **Critical Risks Identified by DfE:**
 - **SEND and Alternative Provision:** The system is "very likely" to become financially unsustainable due to high needs pressures exceeding available funding.
 - **Child and Family Social Work:** Second highest turnover and vacancy rates since 2017, risking the capacity and stability of the workforce.
 - **Care Placements:** Local authorities struggle to access appropriate placements, with rising costs and the risk of providers exiting the market.
 - **RAAC Concerns:** The collapse of school buildings due to RAAC (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) is still rated as "critical – very likely."

Financial and Operational Risks in the SEND and AP System


- **Government Mitigation Efforts:**
 - **Children's Social Care Reform:** Investment in early support to reduce children entering care, and recruitment of 500 extra fostering households by March 2026.
 - **Financial Investment:** £67 million spent on RAAC-related issues in the last financial year.
- **ADCS Perspective:**
 - **Systemic Issues:** The 2014 SEND reforms have led to an unsustainable demand for EHCPs and a projected £5 billion high-needs funding deficit within two years.
 - **Dysfunctional Placements Market:** A lack of suitable homes and concerns about profiteering by private providers highlight the need for a national placements strategy.
 - **Urgent Government Action Needed:** Address profiteering, ensure availability of suitable homes, and make placements affordable to protect children's welfare.

UK Government's Comprehensive Review of IT and Engineering Sectors

- **Review Announcement:**
 - The UK government, led by Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, has commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to review the IT and engineering sectors.
 - The focus is on addressing persistent labour shortages and reducing reliance on international workers.
- **Key Objectives:**
 - Identify specific roles in tech and engineering experiencing shortages.
 - Assess the impact of pay, training, and working conditions on these shortages.
 - Evaluate how companies are adapting beyond international recruitment.
 - Examine the effectiveness of immigration policies, including the Shortage Occupation List and the Immigration Salary List.

UK Government's Comprehensive Review of IT and Engineering Sectors

- **Policy Changes Under Consideration:**
 - Potential adjustments to the Immigration Salary List and visa rules to encourage domestic recruitment.
 - Coordination with bodies like Skills England and the Department for Work and Pensions to address labour market challenges.
 - A shift from the Conservative approach of limiting low-skilled immigration to a more balanced system.
- **Industry Concerns:**
 - Fears of further restrictions on skilled worker visas, which could exacerbate existing shortages.
 - The tech sector relies on one in six skilled worker visas, with high demand for roles in cybersecurity, data centers, and telecoms.
 - Manufacturing sector faces 62,000 live vacancies, with concerns about replacing retiring workers.
- **Next Steps:**
 - The MAC's review will take nine months, with extensive stakeholder engagement.
 - Findings will inform future government policies aimed at balancing immigration with domestic labour needs and promoting a sustainable workforce.



Transition from Tax Credits to Universal Credit/Pension Credit

- **End of Tax Credits:** Tax Credits will end on April 5, 2025.
- **Affected Claimants:** Eligible pension-age claimants will receive letters (starting July 2024) informing them to apply for Universal Credit or Pension Credit.
- **Deadline for Application:** Claimants must apply within three months of receiving the notice, with possible extensions for valid reasons.
- **Types of Notices:**
 - **Migration Notice:** For those moving to Universal Credit.
 - **Closure Notice:** For those moving to Pension Credit.
- **Transitional Protection:** Ensures benefits are not reduced during the transition for those eligible.
- **Special Rules:** Apply to mixed-age couples and those already on Pension Credit, with specific guidelines for maintaining or adjusting benefits.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves' Pivotal Public Finance Review

- **Objective:** Rachel Reeves, Chancellor, initiates a crucial review of public spending, with a focus on cost-cutting and raising taxes.
- **Budget Challenge:** Reeves faces a £22bn spending gap, with £16bn still to be addressed after ending universal winter fuel allowance for pensioners.
- **Spending Priorities:** Focus on reducing NHS waiting lists, launching new border security, teacher recruitment, and addressing antisocial behavior.
- **Mission Boards:** New boards will evaluate spending requests against these priorities.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves' Pivotal Public Finance Review

- **Reforms Required:** Cabinet ministers directed to find cost-saving reforms and technological innovations.
- **Tough Decisions:** Departments may need to maintain services with reduced funding.
- **Fiscal Rules:** Labour aims for a balanced budget and debt reduction within five years; potential tax increases on capital gains, pension reliefs, and inheritance tax.
- **Treasury's Position:** Committed to fixing financial foundations to support long-term rebuilding of Britain.

ONWARD

Onward Thinktank's Call for a "New Deal for Parents"

- **Objective:** Conservative-leaning thinktank, Onward, proposes measures to close the "birth gap" between desired and actual birth rates in the UK.
- **Birth Gap:** Record low 1.49 children per woman in 2022, despite an average desire for 2.35 children.
- **Economic Insecurity:** Financial challenges cited as a key barrier to having more children, with families three times more likely to face financial difficulties compared to childless households.
- **Core Proposal:** Abolish the two-child benefit cap, which affects 450,000 families and contributes to rising child poverty.



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ONWARD

Onward Thinktank's Call for a "New Deal for Parents

- **Tax and Benefits Reforms:**
 - **Child Tax Allowance:** Introduce a £1000 allowance.
 - **Freeze Personal Allowance Threshold:** Prevent further erosion of tax-free income.
 - **Abolish High Income Child Benefit Charge:** Remove penalties for higher earners.
 - **Increase Statutory Maternity Pay & Introduce a Cap:** Improve financial support for new mothers.
 - **Increase Statutory Paternity Pay and Leave:** Encourage father involvement.
- **Cost Estimate:** Full implementation of these measures estimated at £8.17 billion annually.
- **Rationale:** Aimed at supporting parents financially, encouraging higher birth rates, and addressing child poverty.



Quote of the Week

“Much of what is called investment is actually nothing more than mergers and acquisitions, and of course mergers and acquisitions are generally accompanied by downsizing.” – Susan George

Susan George is a renowned businesswoman recognized for her innovative strategies and leadership in the technology sector. With over 20 years of experience, she has successfully led multiple companies to significant growth and industry recognition.



114 Watch

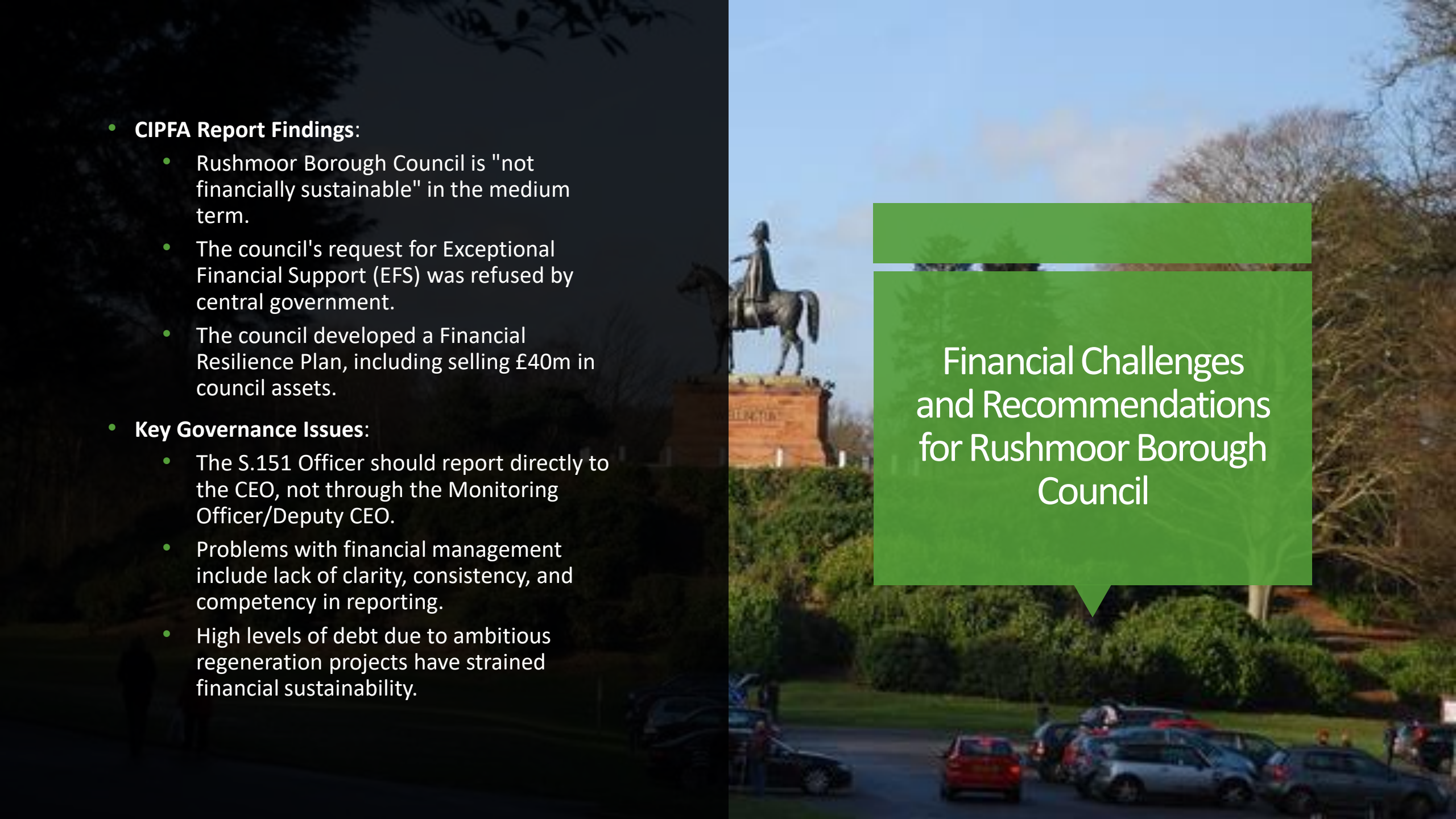
- Councils reporting their struggling budgets

- **CIPFA Report Findings:**

- Rushmoor Borough Council is "not financially sustainable" in the medium term.
- The council's request for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) was refused by central government.
- The council developed a Financial Resilience Plan, including selling £40m in council assets.

- **Key Governance Issues:**

- The S.151 Officer should report directly to the CEO, not through the Monitoring Officer/Deputy CEO.
- Problems with financial management include lack of clarity, consistency, and competency in reporting.
- High levels of debt due to ambitious regeneration projects have strained financial sustainability.



Financial Challenges and Recommendations for Rushmoor Borough Council

- **CIPFA's Recommendations:**

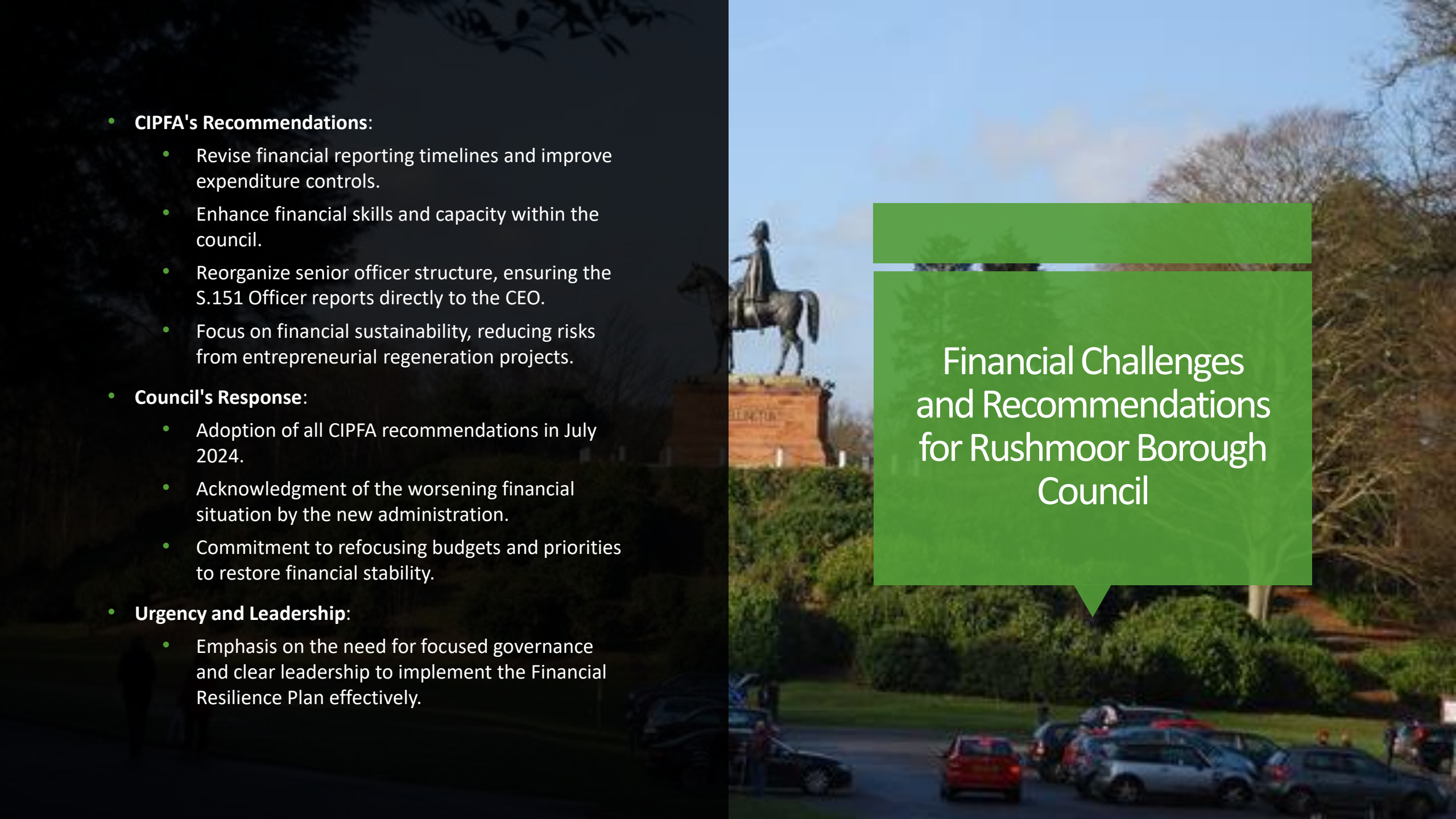
- Revise financial reporting timelines and improve expenditure controls.
- Enhance financial skills and capacity within the council.
- Reorganize senior officer structure, ensuring the S.151 Officer reports directly to the CEO.
- Focus on financial sustainability, reducing risks from entrepreneurial regeneration projects.

- **Council's Response:**


- Adoption of all CIPFA recommendations in July 2024.
- Acknowledgment of the worsening financial situation by the new administration.
- Commitment to refocusing budgets and priorities to restore financial stability.

- **Urgency and Leadership:**

- Emphasis on the need for focused governance and clear leadership to implement the Financial Resilience Plan effectively.




Financial Challenges and Recommendations for Rushmoor Borough Council



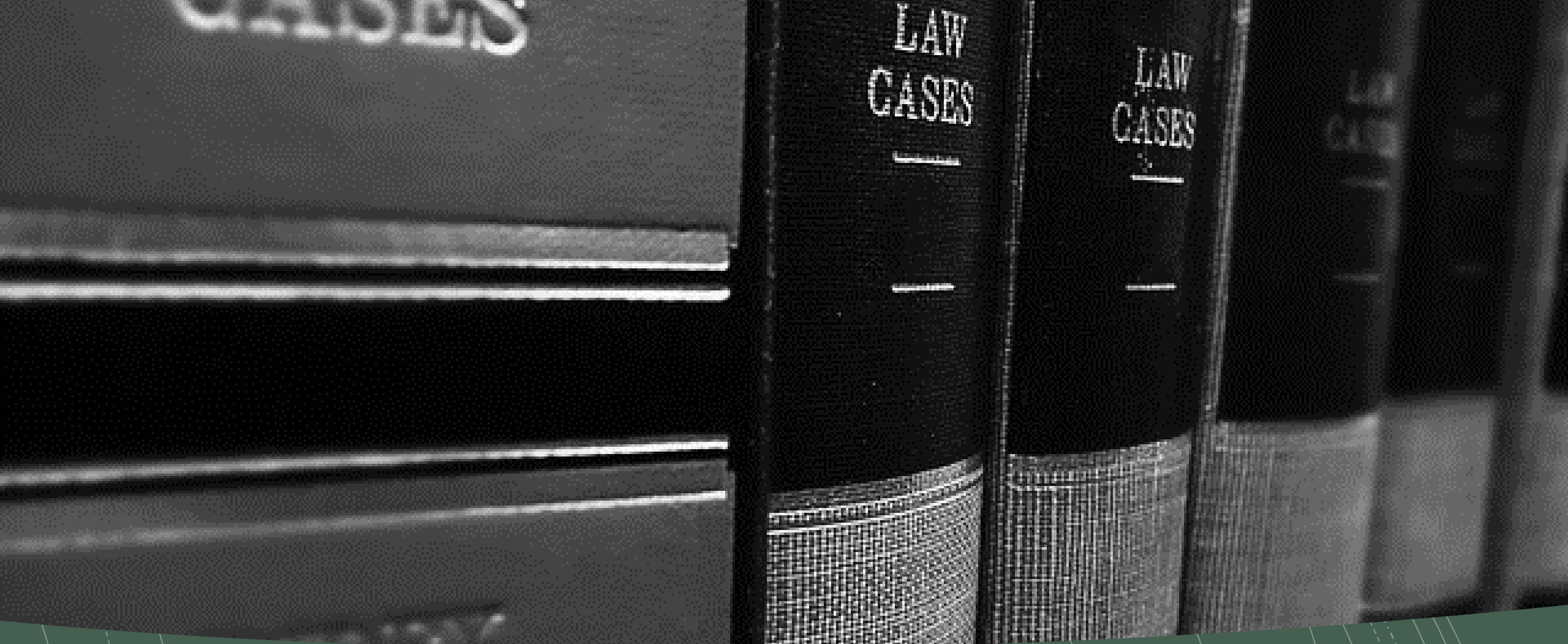
Financial Crisis in Newham Council Due to Homelessness Costs

- **Spiraling Costs:**
 - Newham Council projects spending on temporary accommodation (TA) to exceed £40 million in the 2024 financial year.
 - Despite an additional £18.5 million allocated to the TA budget, costs may still account for one-third of the council's total spending.
 - Combined with social care spending (two-thirds of the budget), this leaves minimal funds for other services.
- **Challenges:**
 - Lead Member for Finance, Zulfiqar Ali, noted that existing prevention strategies and financial management efforts are insufficient to curb rising costs.
 - Ali warned that government assistance might be required to maintain service delivery.



Financial Crisis in Newham Council Due to Homelessness Costs

- **London-wide Crisis:**
 - London Councils data shows a 25% increase in spending on accommodation for homeless households from April 2023 to April 2024.
 - London boroughs collectively overspent their homelessness budgets by £208 million, with 29 out of 33 boroughs breaching their spending goals.
 - Contributing factors include a shortage of affordable housing and a 41% reduction in available rental properties in London compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- **Government Response:**
 - The Ministry of Housing acknowledges the crisis, with homelessness levels rising significantly.
 - The government is committed to working on a long-term, cross-government strategy to address homelessness and support councils like Newham.



Legal Issues of Note

Regulatory Judgements on Four Councils for Failing Consumer Standards

- **Councils Affected:**

- Brighton and Hove City Council
- London Borough of Hackney
- South Derbyshire District Council
- Ashford Borough Council

- **Key Failings:**

- **Brighton and Hove:** 3,600 homes without current electrical condition reports, 500+ overdue water safety actions, 1,700 fire safety remedial actions pending.
- **Hackney:** 15,000 homes without electrical safety certificates, 9,000 homes lacking smoke detectors, 1,400 unresolved damp and mold cases.
- **South Derbyshire:** Less than half of required fire risk assessments completed, multiple homes without valid electrical safety certificates.
- **Ashford:** Overdue electrical safety checks, incomplete fire safety actions, no full stock condition survey in over 10 years.

Regulatory Judgements on Four Councils for Failing Consumer Standards

- **Council Responses:**
 - **Brighton and Hove:** Acknowledged serious issues; introduced new measures but recognizes further improvements are needed.
 - **Hackney:** Admitted need for service improvement; working on improving performance and resident satisfaction amidst broader challenges.
 - **South Derbyshire:** Self-referred to RSH; committed to improving safety checks and tenant engagement through the Tenants' Voice Group.
 - **Ashford:** Self-referred following an external review; implemented a new IT system for compliance monitoring, working on a robust action plan to achieve full compliance.
- **RSH Stance:**
 - Emphasized the need for landlords to proactively ensure tenant safety and compliance with standards.
 - Working closely with the councils to address issues and ensure significant improvements.

Misconduct Warning for Employment Tribunal Member

- **Incident Overview:** Mr. Purkis, a non-legal member of the Employment Tribunal, was issued a formal warning for misconduct.
- **Cause of Misconduct:** Tweets of a political nature, discovered during a tribunal hearing, raised concerns about his impartiality and integrity as a judicial office holder.
- **Specific Tweets:**
 - Responded to a tweet advocating only atheists running for office with "Damn right, you won't catch us killing in the name of our non-god."
 - Suggested the collective noun for Conservatives should be a "tumour."
- **Case Details:** The tweets were discovered during a politically sensitive case involving a Christian teacher claiming unlawful dismissal due to religious beliefs.

Misconduct Warning for Employment Tribunal Member

- **Tribunal Recusal:** The tribunal panel recused itself after six days of an eight-day hearing due to concerns over potential bias, leading to significant costs and inconvenience.
- **Explanation and Apology:** Mr. Purkis claimed his tweet was meant to be a light-hearted comment on the misuse of religion by politicians but acknowledged the possibility of misinterpretation.
- **Formal Warning:** The Judicial Conduct Investigations Office, along with the Senior President of Tribunals and the Lord Chancellor, issued a formal warning, considering Mr. Purkis's explanation and apology.
- **Implications:** The incident highlights the importance of maintaining impartiality and avoiding public statements that could undermine judicial integrity.



Reform UK Data Collection Controversy

- **Party Involved:** Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, accused of secretly collecting private data of millions of website visitors.
- **Investigation:** The Observer revealed the presence of a hidden Meta pixel tracking tool on the Reform UK website.
- **Data Collected:** Browsing habits, page visits, button clicks, and potentially sensitive information like political beliefs.
- **Privacy Concerns:** The data was linked to Facebook user IDs and shared with Meta, allowing for targeted political ads, despite lack of explicit consent from users.

Reform UK Data Collection Controversy

- **Potential GDPR Violation:** The data could expose sensitive political beliefs, raising issues under data protection laws.
- **Impact:** Over 1.1 million visitors potentially affected; data possibly used for "dark advertising" to influence voters.
- **Response:** Reform UK removed the pixel, claiming unintentional tracking due to a website template; ICO investigation ongoing.
- **Party's Stance:** Despite privacy advocacy, the party denies using the data for political ads and is reviewing its procedures for compliance.



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](#)



Revenues & Benefits Systems Support Officer (NEC)

Until 28/10/2024 initially | £24.54 Per hour (umbrella) | London

The Assignment

To work as part of a team maintaining the integrity and availability of all Revenues and Benefits systems

Ensuring the accurate and timely delivery of Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit Overpayments documentation and notices

Take responsibly for elements of the day to day systems management, planning and coordinating system and subsidy reconciliations and managing batch schedules

To provide technical expertise to support departmental projects and transformational change

What we're looking for

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

1. Good knowledge of NEC (Northgate) systems and/or specialist IT tools e.g. SQL, VB and Business Objects
2. Good knowledge of Revenues and Benefits business processes

To find out more or to apply

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



Council Tax Officer (NEC)

3 Months | £28.77 Per hour (umbrella) | Remote

The Assignment

Business Smart Solutions is seeking multiple Revenues/Council Tax Officers on a contract basis.

Assignment length is expected to be in the region of 3 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 remote contract, this may be the position for you!

What we're looking for

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

1. A minimum of 3 years Revenues/Council Tax/Business Rates experience
2. 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



Previous Recordings



- 
- 19 August 2024
 - 26 August 2024
 - 23 September 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

Economic Challenges and AI Opportunities for Local Government
By Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/07/22/economic-challenges-and-ai-opportunities-for-local-government/>

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/>

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

A one-year holding policy on the minimum wage signals a shift of focus to employment rights by Nye Cominetti

- For the 2025 National Living Wage, the new Government's approach is broadly the same as the previous Government's

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/>

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.