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# Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

10 February 2025

Coming in February / 2 April 2025 12pm



Public  
Finance

CIPFA

Liberata



## FREE Webinar: Redesigning and Repositioning Local Tax and Support: Unlocking Transformative Value Across Services

Embrace the Future: Shaping Local Government for the Next Generation

We are at a pivotal moment, facing the most significant technological, economic, and political challenges to local revenues and benefit services in three decades. How we rise to these challenges will define the agenda for the next thirty years.

The traditional models of policy-making and service delivery are no longer viable. It's time to innovate, collaborate, and redefine what's possible.

Join a transformative discussion panel featuring senior local government officers, renowned economists, and performance experts. This event marks the beginning of a groundbreaking series of webinars, seminars, and conferences designed to address the pressing issues facing local government today.

Gain insights into this influential period of change—one that will reshape services critical to the operation of local government and vital to every household in our communities. Understand how these shifts will impact your region, borough, or district.

Local Government is evolving. The way services are delivered—and by whom—is changing. The question is, where will you, your team, and your citizens be in ten years?

Be part of the conversation. Be part of the future.

To be a delegate or for sponsorship options go to <https://tinyurl.com/VNCTR>



# Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

- Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Cambridge City Council
- Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager, Oxford City Council
- Kirsty Brooksmith, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- Tom Clark, London Borough of Enfield
- Nicki Duckworth, EntitledTo, Marshalling
- Robert Fox, Charnwood Borough Council
- Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network
- Paul Howarth, Independent Consultant
- Gareth Morgan, CEO Ferret Information Systems
- Kevin Stewart, Visionary Network
- Bob Wagstaff PSPS (Boston, South Holland, East Lindsey)
- Alex Clegg, Resolution Foundation
- Sean O’Sullivan, Visionary Network
- Darren Smith, Liberata
- Liz Whitehead-Davis, Hexagon Housing

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



# Discussion Points

- Preparation / Impact on day-to-day
- Budgets
- Recruitment
- Investment in improvements

## Local Government Reorganisation

Tax

## Welfare Reform

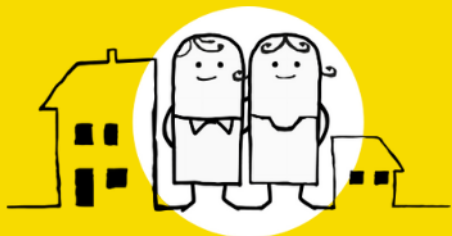
Welfare reform

NAO National Audit Office

## Fraud: A Dysfunctional Strategy

Fraud

# Redesign your CTR scheme with ease



## Opportunity

The Inbest CTR Design Tool is an online application to help Revenues & Benefits teams design Council Tax Reduction Schemes.

Upload your anonymised CTRS caseload and use our analytics and modelling features to design schemes that meet the council's budget requirements, simplify administration, and protect vulnerable households.

This tool provides the following features to support you through every step of the CTRS design process.

## Resident Insights

Get a clear understanding of your caseload by analysing your residents' circumstances and financial situation.

Use these insights—such as the number of residents with capital above certain thresholds or those out of work—to identify opportunities for savings while ensuring continued support for those in need.

## CTRS Modelling

Set up different CTRS options and assess their impact using your caseload data.

Then, you can use our analytics dashboard to view potential savings, see how changes affect different segments of residents, and assess the risk of arrears.

Each simulation takes only a few seconds, and you can run as many as needed, refining them until you find the perfect fit for your council.

## Automatic Reporting

The tool generates a detailed impact report and the information you need for your Equality Impact Analysis.

This report presents clear, data-driven insights to elected members, supports internal reviews, and informs consultations for confident decision-making.

## Our dashboard provides the insights you need to make informed decisions

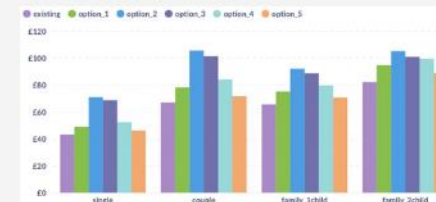
### Total annual cost options



### Detailed analysis per CTR band

ctr_discount	number_residents	percentage_residents	single
100%	127	0.7%	119
70%	11,032	60.91%	6,002
50%	767	4.23%	258
40%	1,352	7.46%	359
25%	3,382	18.67%	672
12%	1,452	8.02%	283

### Average CT payment by households



### Identification of impacted residents

householdType	decreased_number	decreased_pct
single	2,763	35.92%
partnerChildren	1,579	44.73%
singleChildren	2,178	36.85%
partner	773	79.04%
total	7,293	40.27%

*"Working with Inbest has completely transformed the way we understand our CTR data. Inbest has helped us extract meaningful insights that enabled us to make informed decisions when modelling and designing the best possible scheme for our residents."*

*Inbest is always working on innovative solutions to support the streamlining of our processes and enhancing our services. As well as the work modelling the CTR Schemes, this year they have also supported us with our Pension Credit caseload and a Data Mismatches report."*

**Penny Mitchell**, Council Tax Service Manager at Salford Council

*"We asked Inbest to model different CTS schemes for us at short notice. We had our results in the dashboard within a few days and this enabled us to review the data which reflected each scheme option. This included areas such as cost and savings and how each scheme would affect our residents."*

*"When we required tweaks to the results Inbest ensured these were made instantly. An excellent service for a reasonable rate."*

**Nick Houlton**, Finance Manager (Revenues and Benefits) at London Borough of Barnet

*"Modelling a new Council Tax Reduction scheme can be challenging. However, working with Visionary Network and Inbest on the 2025/2026 scheme was a resounding success due to their support, knowledge, and technology."*

*"The service provided under tight deadlines was exceptional. Appreciation is extended to Manu, Malcolm, and Paul for their time and patience."*

**Lucie White**, Operational Finance Manager at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

# End



**VISIONARY NETWORK**  
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

- Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Consultant
- 07946800171  
[mg@malcolmgardner.com](mailto:mg@malcolmgardner.com)  
Book a meeting with Malcolm <https://bit.ly/VNMGTime>



VISIONARY NETWORK  
The independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

# Join the discussion

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Each Monday lunchtime, a panel of professionals leads a discussion on revenue and benefits administration issues. The panel consists of council & housing officers, policy advisors, and analysts.

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It is a free service that is well attended. Attendees make good contributions; everyone gets a chance to speak. Attendees includes senior managers, team leaders, suppliers, and support staff

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

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

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



## Main Discussion Points

- Preparation / Impact on day-to-day
  - Budgets
  - Recruitment
  - Investment in improvements

# Local Government Reorganisation

**Local Government Finance Settlement 2025-26**

**Key Funding Measures**

- Core Spending Power increased by 6.8% (above inflation)
- £880m increase in the social care grant
- £515m grant to cover rising employer National Insurance costs
- New £600m recovery grant for councils "most in need"

**Challenges & Concerns**

- County Councils Network: Majority of counties and unitaries miss out – only 3% of recovery grant allocated to county councils
- London councils: Still facing a £500m funding gap despite a 5.7% rise in spending power
- Seven London boroughs may need Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)

**Trade Unions' Pay Claim for Local Authority Workers**

**Key Demands**

- £3,000 pay rise for all council and school staff
- Minimum hourly rate of £15
- Extra day of annual leave
- Reduction of two hours in the working week
- School staff to have at least one day of term-time leave

**Why Unions Are Making This Demand**

- Real-terms pay cut of 25% since 2010
- 2024-25 wage increase only 2.5%, while other public sector workers received 5.5%+
- Rising cost of living and high workloads
- Risk of staff leaving for better-paid private sector jobs

**New Mayoral Authorities & Local Government Reorganisation**

**Key Announcements**

- Six new mayoral strategic authorities to be established by May:
  - Greater Essex, Cumbria, Cheshire & Warrington, Norfolk & Suffolk, Sussex & Brighton, Hampshire & Solent
- Part of a major local government reorganisation affecting two-tier areas and smaller unitaries
- Nine councils' elections postponed to allow reorganisation, including:
  - East & West Sussex, Essex & Thurrock, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey
- Surrey not part of the priority programme but reorganisation is being accelerated
- Additional new authorities:
  - Greater Lincolnshire & Hull & East Yorkshire (mayoral authorities)
  - Devon & Torbay, Lancashire (combined county authorities)

**Greater Essex**

- The term "Greater Essex" refers to the combined area represented by Essex County Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council, and Thurrock Council. This encompasses the non-metropolitan county of Essex and the two unitary authorities of Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. [essex.gov.uk](https://www.essex.gov.uk)
- In February 2025, a devolution deal was agreed upon to establish a mayoral combined authority for Greater Essex, with the first mayoral election scheduled for May 2026. This new governance structure aims to facilitate greater collaboration and strategic decision-making across the entire Greater Essex area.
- The Greater Essex area includes the following local authorities:
  - Essex County Council: Covering districts such as Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Castle Point, Chelmsford, Colchester, Epping Forest, Harlow, Maldon, Rochford, Tendring, and Uttlesford.
  - Southend-on-Sea City Council: A unitary authority responsible for the city of Southend-on-Sea.
  - Thurrock Council: A unitary authority covering the borough of Thurrock.
- This collaborative framework is designed to enhance regional development and streamline governance across Greater Essex.

**Local Government Reorganisation – Government Expectations**

**Key Messages from the Ministry for Housing, Local Government and Communities**

- Councils urged to submit single, joint proposals to avoid inefficiencies
- Government prefers collaboration over competing bids, but will consider multiple proposals if necessary
- Services must continue as normal during the transition
- Reorganisation should be funded through efficiencies, including flexible use of capital receipts

**Financial Considerations**

- Default position: Assets & liabilities remain locally managed
- Indebted councils must propose how financial challenges will be addressed
- Commissioners to be engaged where councils have capital failure issues

**Local Elections Postponed for Council Reorganisation**

**Key Announcement**

- Elections in nine areas delayed until 2026:
  - East Sussex, West Sussex, Essex, Thurrock, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey
- Reason for Delay:
  - Major local government reorganisation to form unitary authorities
  - Merging smaller district councils with county councils
  - Avoids electing councillors to soon-to-be-scrapped councils

**Government Position**

- Angela Rayner (Local Government Secretary):
  - Describes reorganisation as a "generational power shift"
  - Delaying elections avoids "waste of taxpayers' money"

# Local Government Finance Settlement 2025- 26

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# Local Government Finance Settlement 2025- 26

## Council Tax & Funding Reforms

- **5% cap on council tax increases** (including social care precept)
- **Stricter controls on EFS-related tax hikes** – only allowed in low-tax areas
- **Ministers rejected calls for 25% council tax increases** in crisis-hit councils

## Sector Responses

- **LGA:** Councils face tough choices despite tax increases – service cuts likely
- **CCN & London Councils:** **Structural underfunding** remains, fair funding review needed
- **Fair funding review consultation ongoing** – concerns over targeting of funds

## Next Steps

- **House of Commons debate on Wednesday**
- Government aims to "**fix local government foundations**" under its **Plan for Change**

# Trade Unions' Pay Claim for Local Authority Workers

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# Trade Unions' Pay Claim for Local Authority Workers

## Union Concerns

- **Public services at risk:** Staff shortages could affect **waste collection, social care, education & libraries**
- **Increasing workloads & funding cuts** making jobs less attractive
- **Growing anger** among lowest-paid workers over pay stagnation

## Union Statements

- **Unison:** “Staff feel undervalued and are looking for better-paid work elsewhere.”
- **GMB:** “Government must invest to retain these vital workers.”
- **Unite:** “Employers must meaningfully negotiate to ensure a decent pay rise.”

## Next Steps

- **Negotiations with local government employers** expected
- **Potential for industrial action** if demands are not met

# New Mayoral Authorities & Local Government Reorganisation

## Key Announcements

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# New Mayoral Authorities & Local Government Reorganisation

## Impact & Government Justification

- Aims to **boost growth, housing, transport & opportunities**
- **44 million people (80% of England)** to be under mayoral devolution
- Essex reorganisation must address **Thurrock's £1.5bn debt**

## Challenges & Criticism

- **Kent & Medway excluded** despite meeting criteria – Kent CC called decision “incomprehensible”
- **District councils concerned** about rushed timeline & lack of local discussion
- **Funding concerns:** Local Government Association warns reorganisation costs could reach **£100m**

# Greater Essex

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## Financial Considerations

- Default position: **Assets & liabilities remain locally managed**
- **Indebted councils** must propose how financial challenges will be addressed
- **Commissioners to be engaged** where councils have capital failure issues

# Local Government Reorganisation – Government Expectations

## Non-Priority Regions – Deadlines

- Interim plans due: 21 March 2025
- Full proposals due: 28 November 2025
- Affected areas: **Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Devon, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire**

## Priority Regions – Accelerated Timeline

- Interim plans due: 21 March 2025
- Full proposals due: 26 September 2025
- Mayoral elections set for May 2026
- Elections in these areas postponed from May 2025 to May 2026
- Affected areas: **East Sussex, Essex, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, Southampton, Norfolk, Suffolk, West Sussex**

## Surrey's Unique Timeline

- Interim plan due: 21 March 2025
- Full proposal due: 9 May 2025
- Local elections postponed to May 2026 to accelerate reform

# Local Elections Postponed for Council Reorganisation

## Key Announcement

- **Elections in nine areas delayed until 2026:**
  - East Sussex, West Sussex, Essex, Thurrock, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey
- **Reason for Delay:**
  - Major local government reorganisation to form unitary authorities
  - Merging smaller district councils with county councils
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## Government Position

- **Angela Rayner (Local Government Secretary):**
  - Describes reorganisation as a "generational power shift"
  - Delaying elections avoids "waste of taxpayers' money"

# Local Elections Postponed for Council Reorganisation

## Opposition & Criticism

- **Conservative Shadow Minister Kevin Hollinrake:**
  - Calls it a "mass postponement" & a "worrying day for democracy"
  - Accuses Labour of centralising power through "strategic authorities"
- **Reform UK (Nigel Farage):**
  - Petition launched against election delay
  - Claims 5.5 million voters have been "cancelled"
- **Liberal Democrats (Sir Ed Davey):**
  - Calls it a "stitch-up" between Labour & Conservatives
  - Argues Tory-led councils are "running scared" after election losses

## Implications

- **Delays impact council control battles** for both Labour & Conservatives
- **Unitary authorities to be in place for elections in May 2026**
- **Ongoing debate over democratic accountability & reorganisation process**



# National Audit Office

# Fraud: A Dysfunctional Strategy



National Audit Office

## NAO Findings on Fraud Detection in Government

### Key Issues Identified

- Senior officials may downplay fraud risks to protect organisational reputation
- Barriers to improving fraud detection:
  - Lack of leadership commitment ("tone from the top")
  - Incomplete understanding of fraud risks
  - Low-quality or missing data
  - Insufficient resources for fraud detection
- Fraud Estimates (2023-24)
  - Total fraud & error: £55bn - £81bn
  - £12bn detected (mostly by HMRC)
  - £41bn estimated but undetected
  - £28bn unmeasured



## Trading Standards Crisis – Key Findings

### Investigation by Which?

- Huge variation in enforcement: Some areas have less than 1 officer per 100,000 people, others have up to 51
- Severe staff shortages: A London borough has only one officer for 300+ lanes
- Cuts in spending: Trading standards funding down 50% in the past decade, staff numbers down 30-50%
- Impact of Underfunding
  - Consumers at risk from crime, unsafe products & fraud
  - Some areas unable to carry out routine inspections or test purchases
  - Small teams enforcing compliance on global businesses with inadequate resources



## Benida Reyes, CTR Fraud Case – Key Facts

### Fraud Overview

- Offender: Benida Reyes, 53 (Thetford, Norfolk)
- Total fraud amount: £9,473 in Council Tax Support
- Fraudulent period: 4+ years
- Actual income: Over £4,000/month while renting out a second home

### Investigation & Findings

- Council believed she earned ~£200/week, but National Fraud Intelligence flagged income of £1,000/week
- Failed to report property purchase in April 2021
- Excuse: "She did not think about it"



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National Audit Office

# NAO Findings on Fraud Detection in Government

## Key Issues Identified

- **Senior officials may downplay fraud risks** to protect organisational reputation
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National Audit Office

# NAO Findings on Fraud Detection in Government

## Recommendations for Public Bodies

- **Prioritise fraud detection** despite reputational risks
- **Improve fraud measurement skills**, focusing on prevention rather than just investigation
- **Invest proportionately** in counter-fraud work
- **Increase transparency** with better reporting in annual accounts

## Why It Matters

- **Lessons from COVID-19:** Many departments failed to assess their losses
- **Parliament & the public need transparency** to ensure effective use of taxpayer money
- **Start small:** Focus on targeted fraud estimates, then build regular reporting frameworks

**Which?**  
Trusted traders

# Trading Standards Crisis – Key Findings

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- **Cuts in spending:** Trading standards funding **down 50%** in the past decade, staff numbers **down 30-50%**

## Impact of Underfunding

- Consumers **at risk from crime, unsafe products & fraud**
- Some areas **unable to carry out routine inspections** or test purchases
- Small teams **enforcing compliance on global businesses** with inadequate resources

**Which?**  
Trusted traders

# Trading Standards Crisis – Key Findings

## Sector Responses

- **LGA:** Budget constraints are **weakening enforcement**, urgent **funding boost needed**
- **Which?:** Trading standards is “**no longer fit for purpose**”, calls for:
  - **Consumer enforcement reform** in the Spending Review
  - **Better intelligence sharing & oversight**
- **Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers:**
  - **Investment in apprenticeships** to attract new staff
  - **Rejects another review** of consumer protection structures

## Next Steps

- **Spending Review crucial** to securing more funding
- **Government urged to overhaul system** to ensure public safety and effective enforcement



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## Benida Reyes, CTR Fraud Case – Key Facts

### Norwich Magistrates' Court Outcome

- **Pleaded guilty to fraud** (failure to declare financial changes)
- **Penalty:**
  - **£1,666 fine**
  - **£3,952 investigation costs**
  - **Full repayment of the £9,473 overclaimed amount**

### Lessons & Wider Implications

- **Authorities using data matching (National Fraud Initiative) to detect fraud**
- **Failure to report changes in financial circumstances is a serious offence**
- **Councils increasing fraud detection efforts to protect taxpayers**

# Welfare Reform

## Labour's Proposed Disability Benefits Reform – Key Issues

### Proposed Changes & Context

- Labour Government plans to reform health & disability benefits
- Consultation set for Spring 2025, following legal ruling against previous Conservative plans
- Tories' previous proposals deemed 'misleading & unfair' by High Court
  - Would have denied £400/month Universal Credit to 424,000 disabled individuals
  - Up to 100,000 people could be pushed into poverty

### Legal & Public Backlash

- Court ruling: Previous consultation failed to disclose impact on disabled individuals
- Charities (JRF, Disability Rights UK) call for rethink, warning Labour risks repeating past mistakes
- Concerns that short-term cuts are prioritised over meaningful welfare reform

## Impact of Labour's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Freeze

### Key Findings from Big Issue Analysis

- LHA freeze in 2025-26 means real-terms housing benefit cuts for almost all private sector tenants
- Average benefit reductions per year:
  - £445 – Shared accommodation
  - £399 – One-bedroom homes
  - £753 – Two-bedroom homes
  - £930 – Three-bedroom homes
  - £1,275 – Four-bedroom homes
- Some renters face cuts above £2,000, particularly in London, South East & West Midlands
- Gap between LHA & actual rent in Central London:
  - £8,700 (1-bed), £12,750 (2-bed), £20,800 (3-bed), £30,400 (4-bed)

### Consequences for tenants

- Increased risk of homelessness, especially for families
- Benefit cap limits affordability of larger homes, particularly in London
- Disproportionate impact on low-income renters, forcing many to cover shortfalls themselves

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- **Concerns that short-term cuts are prioritised over meaningful welfare reform**

# Labour's Proposed Disability Benefits Reform – Key Issues

## Government Justifications

- **Liz Kendall (DWP Secretary):**
  - Welfare system must be put on a **'sustainable course'**
  - Plans to **shift more people from benefits into employment**
  - Blames **Tory failure on welfare & work policies** for rising costs
- **Chancellor Rachel Reeves:**
  - **Vows 'fundamental reform'** of the welfare system
  - **Green Paper on benefits reform expected in Spring**

## Concerns & Next Steps

- **Charities warn changes could push disabled people into poverty**
- **Government must ensure consultation is fair & transparent**
- **Potential for significant opposition & legal challenges if reforms mirror previous Tory plans**

**Upcoming Spring consultation will be key in shaping the future of disability benefits in the UK.**

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# Impact of Labour's Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Freeze

## Criticism from Housing Organisations

- **Shelter:**
  - “LHA should cover the bottom third of rents, but it doesn’t”
  - **Calls for an immediate LHA increase** to prevent homelessness
  - **Over 161,000 children growing up homeless in England**
- **Sir Stephen Timms (Social Security Minister)** previously criticised LHA freezes but now faces pressure over Labour’s decision

## Government’s Response

- **Defends decision**, citing:
  - **£233m extra funding for councils** to tackle homelessness
  - **Household Support Fund extension**
  - **Uprating of other benefits & National Living Wage increase**
- **Labour’s focus remains on long-term reform**, but short-term crisis in housing affordability remains unresolved

**Next Steps:** Calls for an urgent review of LHA levels ahead of the **June Spending Review** to address the worsening housing crisis.



**VISIONARY NETWORK**  
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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new era of  
council tax  
deduction  
schemes

Bristol City  
Council Case  
Study



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

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

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

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

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

E-mail [services.enquiries@ladirectories.com](mailto:services.enquiries@ladirectories.com)

Peter Davis, Marketing & Account Management

E: [peter.davis@ladirectories.com](mailto: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.



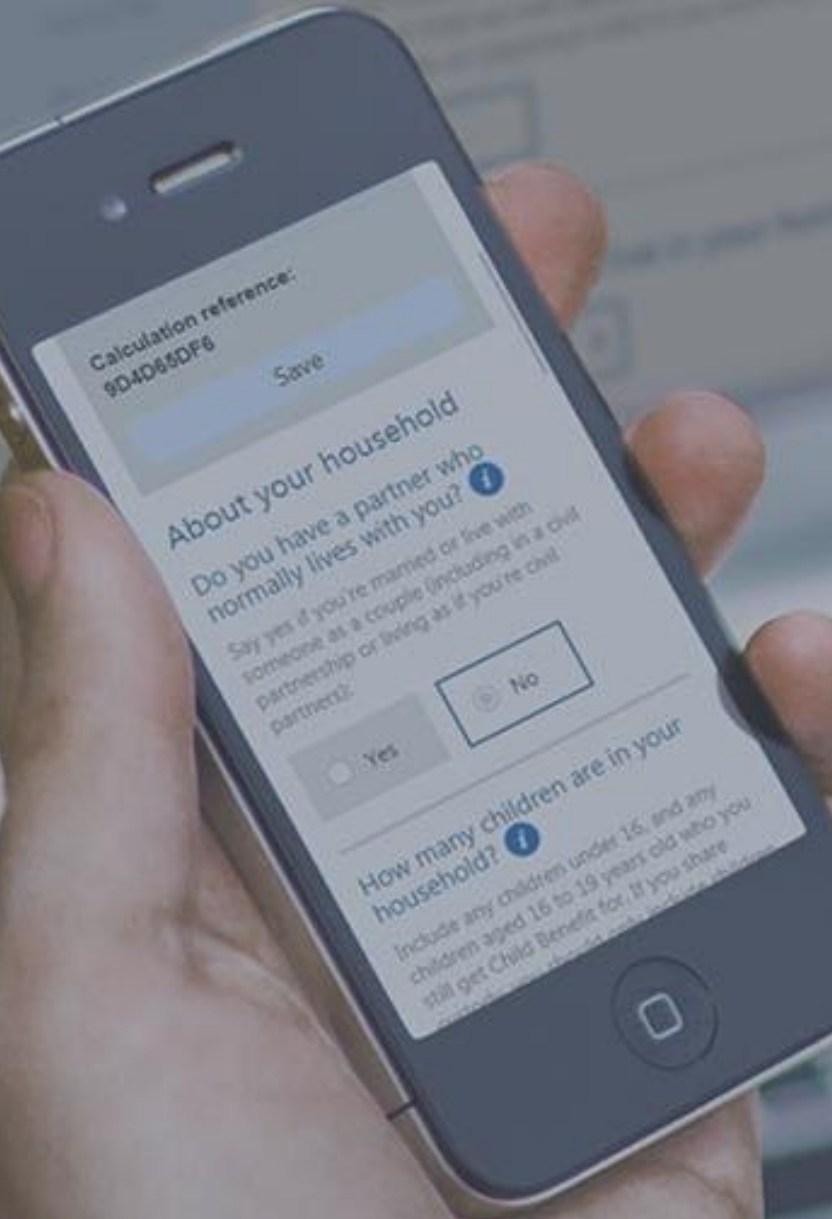
### our customers:

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**®



In the news

# Kirklees Council's Plan to Expand Temporary Accommodation

## Current Challenges

- Demand for temporary accommodation far exceeds supply
- 180 properties available, but many more households qualify
- Heavy reliance on hotels & B&Bs, costing **£7.84m** in 2024/25 (budget: £3.42m)

## New Approach to Reduce Costs & Increase Housing

- 2025/26 budget increased to **£7.02m**
- **Plan: Secure lease agreements with private landlords** to expand housing supply
- **Successful pilot:** 14 families housed in **former student accommodation**
- **Plan extended to 38 properties** with a long-term lease

# Kirklees Council's Plan to Expand Temporary Accommodation

## Benefits of the New Strategy

- Reduces dependence on costly hotels & B&Bs
- More stable, appropriate housing for homeless families
- Allows higher Housing Benefit claims, improving financial sustainability

## Next Steps & Council Commitment

- Authority sought to secure similar lease agreements
- Council aims to more than double temporary housing capacity
- Cllr Moses Crook (Deputy Leader):
  - Statutory & moral duty to help the homeless
  - Rising homelessness is straining resources
  - Providing better accommodation saves money & improves lives

If approved, these plans mark a significant step toward sustainable homelessness support in Kirklees.



**Bank of England**

# UK Economic Growth Forecast & Bank of England Rate Cut

## Key Economic Indicators

- **UK economy expected to grow by just 0.75% in 2025** (previous forecast: 1.5%)
- **Inflation set to rise from 2.5% to 3.7% by summer 2025**
- **Bank of England cuts interest rates to 4.5%** (third cut in six months)
- **Business & consumer confidence remains weak**

## Challenges & Concerns

- **Concerns over stagflation:** Weak growth + rising inflation
- **Employer National Insurance rise (£25bn from April)** hitting business confidence
- **Global risks:** Potential **trade war under Donald Trump** could affect UK economy



# Bank of England

## UK Economic Growth Forecast & Bank of England Rate Cut

### Government & Political Responses

- **Rachel Reeves (Chancellor):**
  - Committed to **private sector investment in infrastructure**
  - Potential **spending cuts if fiscal rules are at risk**
- **Keir Starmer (PM):**
  - Acknowledges slow recovery: "**More to do**"
- **Unions (TUC & Unite):**
  - Call for **public investment to drive growth**

### Market & Bank of England Reactions

- **Interest rates could be cut further** to boost economic activity
- **Government borrowing costs may fall**, easing fiscal pressure
- **Bank of England monitoring global trade war risks**

**Overall Outlook: Slow growth, rising inflation, fiscal pressure, and potential interest rate cuts ahead.**



## Rachel Reeves Faces Fiscal Constraints Ahead of Spring Statement

### Key Economic Challenges

- **£9.9bn “fiscal headroom” has evaporated** due to:
  - **Low economic growth** (2024 forecast cut from 1.1% to 0.7%)
  - **Higher borrowing costs**
  - **Stubborn inflation & fewer-than-expected interest rate cuts**
- **JP Morgan & Goldman Sachs warn of a significant “fiscal hole”**
- **Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) expected to downgrade growth forecasts on March 26**

### Potential Government Responses

- **Spending cuts likely** in the Spring Statement
- **Possible tax rises in Autumn** (e.g. extending income tax band freeze)
- **Treasury considering accounting adjustments** to avoid immediate cuts



## Rachel Reeves Faces Fiscal Constraints Ahead of Spring Statement

### Reeves' Strategy & Government Priorities

- **Rejecting an emergency budget**, opting for gradual spending restraint
- **Announcing pro-growth policies** (e.g. Heathrow expansion, planning reforms)
- **Bank of England expected to cut interest rates to 4.5%**, but with limited impact on growth

### Expert Warnings

- **Paul Johnson (IFS):** "Small changes in forecasts have big political impacts."
- **JP Morgan & Capital Economics:** Growth projections for 2025 likely to be revised down from **2.0% to 1.3%**
- **Potential political fallout:** Balancing fiscal rules while avoiding deep cuts or tax hikes

**Next Steps:** The **Spring Statement (March 26)** will confirm the government's fiscal strategy amid economic uncertainty.



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

## Increased LBTT Surcharge in Scotland – Key Issues

### What's Changing?

- Land and Buildings Transaction Tax (LBTT) surcharge on second homes/rental properties increased from 6% to 8%
- Mirrors England & Northern Ireland's stamp duty surcharge rise (3% to 5%)

### Think Tank Criticism (IFS)

- "Scotland's most ill-conceived tax ever" – makes an already damaging tax worse
- Hurts landlords & tenants:
  - Discourages rental property investment
  - Limits property sales between landlords, reducing rental stock
- Fails to provide a clear tax strategy despite Scottish Government's December tax policy document



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Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
gov.scot

## Increased LBTT Surcharge in Scotland – Key Issues

### Economic Concerns

- Tax increase lacks economic justification
- No clear long-term vision for Scotland's tax system
- Calls for a proper tax strategy after the 2026 Holyrood election

### Scottish Government's Response

- Defends policy as progressive & evidence-based
- Supports first-time buyers & home movers
- Revenue raised will fund public service

Percentage  
of LAs satisfied or very  
satisfied by each data  
share

Data share	Satisfied or Very Satisfied 2022	Satisfied or Very Satisfied 2023	Satisfied or Very Satisfied 2024	Change over three years
<b>Automated Transfer to LA Systems (ATLAS)</b>	89%	88%	94%	+5%
<b>Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP)</b>	76%	87%	90%	+14%
<b>Searchlight</b>	75%	85%	87%	+12%
<b>Housing Benefit Debt Service (HBDS)</b>	63%	74%	77%	+14%
<b>Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS)</b>	62%	75%	75%	+13%
<b>UC Local Council Tax Reduction data share (UC-LCTR)</b>	65%	67%	72%	+7%
<b>HB Debt Recovered by DWP's Debt Management data share</b>	44%	58%	64%	+20%
<b>Apollo</b>	42%	55%	52%	+10%
<b>Housing Benefit Risk Model</b>	34%	53%	51%	+17%
<b>Average</b>	61%	71%	74%	+13%



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# New Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) Rule – Overseas Addresses

## Overview of the New Rule

Effective from February 2025

Identifies Housing Benefit (HB) claimants or partners who have moved abroad but have not updated their HB claim

Referrals will be flagged as HBRM011

## Purpose & Impact

Targets "abroad fraud", the second biggest cause of fraud & error in pension-age HB cases

Match is triggered if an HB claimant's address is redirected abroad for 4+ weeks

Low volume but high-quality referrals expected

LAs must prioritise investigation of these cases

## Additional Information

Rule added to the HBMS guide on Glasscubes

Contact for queries: [lawelfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk)

# Changes to HBMS Rule HBUC007 (HB & UC Housing Element Overlap)

## Key Updates (Now Live)

- Improved filtering of Supported & Temporary Accommodation cases
  - Ensures no incorrect referrals for these claimants
- Duplicate referrals now reissued only after six months
  - Reduces unnecessary repeated referrals
- Date of birth check added
  - Removes referrals for claimants who have reached State Pension Age

## Benefits of Changes

- Higher accuracy in fraud detection referrals
- Reduces administrative burden on Local Authorities
- Improved efficiency in identifying genuine HB/UC discrepancies

## Next Steps

- LAs should use updated HBMS Guide on Glasscubes
- For queries, contact: [lawelfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk)

# UC – Local Council Tax Reduction Data Feed Enhancements

## Implementation Update

- **Enhanced Version 2 files rollout continues**
- **Aligned with software suppliers' latest releases**
- **Current rollout progress:**
  - **Capita software users:**
    - **Successful testing** with a group of test LAs
    - **Five LAs (Anglia Revenues Partnership) going live** imminently
    - **Full rollout to all Capita LAs planned for February 2025**
  - **Civica software users:**
    - **Testing planned for February 2025**
    - **Full rollout expected in March 2025**

# UC – Local Council Tax Reduction Data Feed Enhancements

## What's Next?

- **Capita LAs:** Final rollout date to be confirmed in February 2025
- **Civica LAs:** Testing in February, rollout planned for March 2025
- **Continuous improvements based on feedback**

## Feedback & Support

- **DWP welcomes feedback** from LAs on:
  - **Implementation experience**
  - **Technical guidance & communications**
- **Email feedback**  
to: [lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk)

**Final rollout dates to be confirmed soon – feedback will help refine future updates**

# Identifying Local Vulnerability Data Sharing Working Group

## Discovery Workshops Completed

- **Face-to-face workshops held in Cardiff & Glasgow (Jan 2025)**
- **Findings will be shared** with participants & the working group
- **Workshops helped identify LA needs & capabilities** for future data sharing

## Purpose & Impact

- **Supports the development of a Local Vulnerability Data Sharing Service**
- **Findings will shape a business case & delivery timeline**
- **Enhances local authority ability to support vulnerable residents**

# Identifying Local Vulnerability Data Sharing Working Group

## Future Developments

- Findings to be analysed & shared with working group members
- Progress updates to be provided via the LAWD bulletin
- Business case & timeline to be developed based on LA feedback

## Acknowledgements & Contact Information

- DWP thanks all LA contributors for their input
- Further queries & engagement:
  - Email: [lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk)

Continued collaboration will shape the future of local vulnerability data sharing.

# Turing AI Fellowships – Overview & Objectives

## What Are the Turing AI Fellowships?

- **£46 million initiative** supporting world-class AI researchers in the UK
- **Aims:**
  - **Attract & retain top AI talent**
  - **Support innovative AI research**
  - **Foster academia-industry collaborations**
- **Key Fellowship Categories:**
  - **Turing AI Fellowships (2019)** – Initial phase delivered by The Alan Turing Institute
  - **Turing AI Acceleration Fellowships (2020)** – Supports mid-career researchers
  - **Turing AI World-Leading Researcher Fellowships** – Attracts top global AI researchers

## Recent Expansion & Funding

- **Additional £20 million investment** (announced by Rishi Sunak)
- **New fellows added in 2023 & 2024**
- **Fellows can apply for a Global Talent visa**

# Turing AI Fellowships – Overview & Objectives

## Turing AI Acceleration Fellowships (Mid-Career Researchers)

- Supports 15 high-potential researchers
- Goals:
  - Strengthen UK AI leadership
  - Develop diverse AI research community
  - Encourage ethical AI adoption
  - Enhance academia-industry collaboration

## Turing AI World-Leading Researcher Fellowships (Top Global Talent)

- Established AI Centres of Excellence
- Initial 5 Fellows (2021), 2 new Fellows (2023), 3 additional Fellows (2024)
- Responsibilities:
  - Lead major AI research programmes
  - Build UK's AI competitiveness
  - Engage with AI ethics & innovation
  - Develop next-generation AI researchers

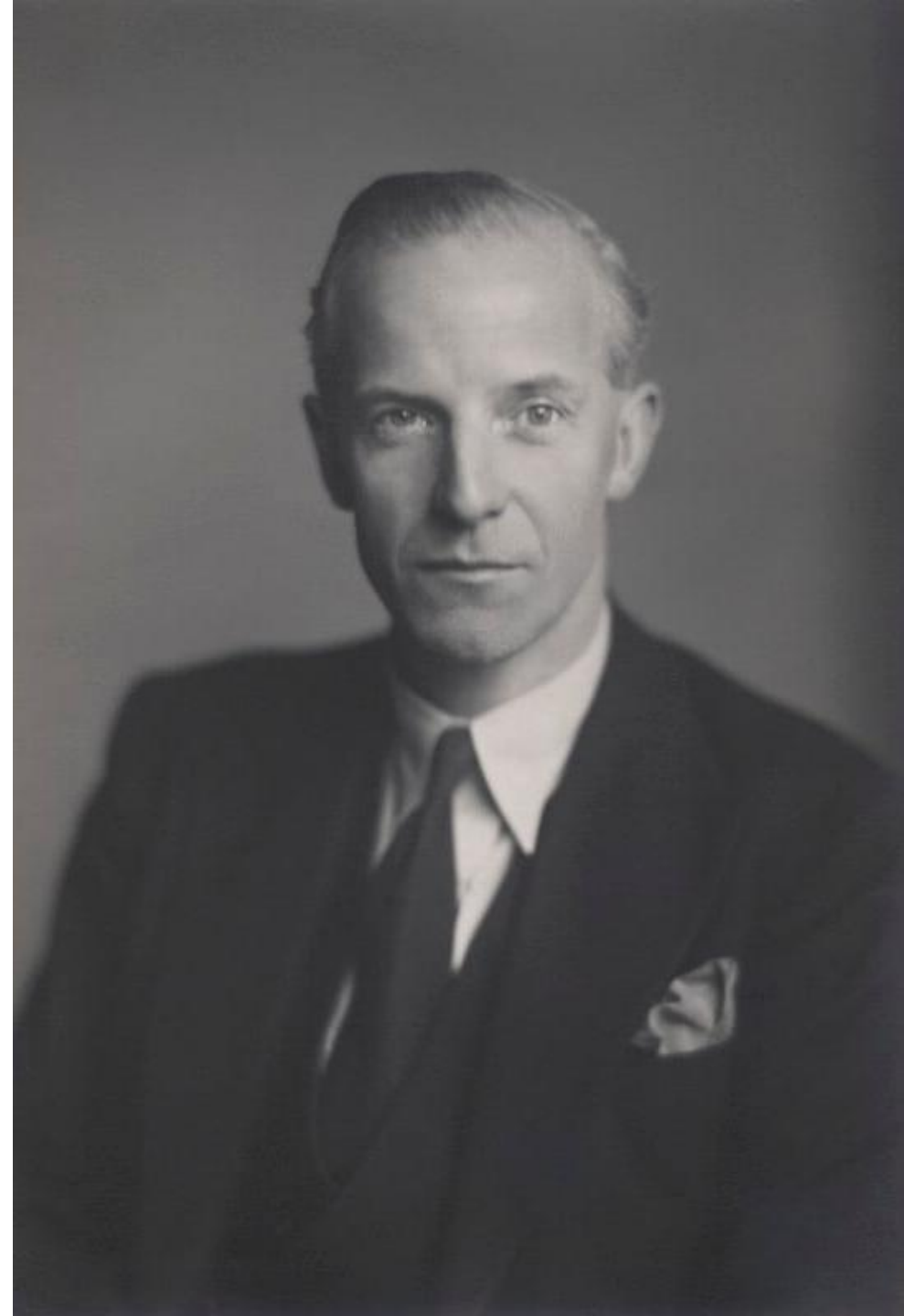
## Next Steps & Industry Engagement

- Encouraging cross-sector collaboration
- Fellows available for research partnerships
- For general inquiries, contact: [AI.robotics@epsrc.ukri.org](mailto:AI.robotics@epsrc.ukri.org)

## Quote of the Week

“If this process showing location of consultation is to be carried too far, there is grave risk that the Government's bold plans to introduce legislation this autumn and have a new system working by 1974 will be disappointed.” – Lord Redcliffe-Maud

Lord Redcliffe-Maud (1906–1982) was a British civil servant and diplomat, best known for his role in local government reform, including the 1969 Redcliffe-Maud Report, which proposed sweeping changes to England's administrative structure. A former Master of University College, Oxford, he also served as High Commissioner to South Africa, advocating for anti-apartheid policies.





# 114 Watch

- Councils reporting their struggling budgets



# Guildford Borough Council – Balanced Budget & Financial Stability

## Key Achievements

- **Balanced budget for 2025-26** despite an unfavourable funding settlement
- **Non-ringfenced reserves at £17.7m**, well above the recommended minimum
- **Section 114 notice avoided**, but medium-term deficit remains a challenge

## Financial Measures

- **Council tax rise: 2.99%**
- **Fees & charges increase: At least 3.75%**
- **Cost reduction & income growth needed** to cover inflation and rising service demand



# Guildford Borough Council – Balanced Budget & Financial Stability

## Past Issues & Investigations

- **£300m debt & governance concerns** raised risk of financial crisis
- **Housing fraud investigation** uncovered serious weaknesses
- **Independent reviews** found failures in leadership, financial oversight & contract management

## Council's Response & Future Outlook

- **Stronger financial controls & leadership improvements** in place
- **Action plan for medium-term financial sustainability**
- Council confident in **meeting future financial challenges** with experienced team



# Kirklees Council Budget 2025-26 – Key Measures

## Budget Highlights

- **4.99% Council Tax increase** (*2% allocated to social care*)
- **£63m additional funding** for social care & essential services
- **£0.5m added for winter maintenance** to improve transport resilience

## Scrapped Plans (Following Public Feedback)

- No reduction in grey bin sizes across the borough
- Libraries will not become community-run

## Cost-Saving Measures (£11m Savings Target)

- Reduced administrative costs & job recruitment freeze
- Up to 100 council job redundancies expected



# Kirklees Council Budget 2025-26 – Key Measures

## Leadership Statements

- **Cllr Carole Pattison (Council Leader):**
  - Budget provides **financial stability** after years of austerity
  - Aims to get **the basics right** while investing in Kirklees' economy
- **Cllr Graham Turner (Finance & Regeneration):**
  - Budget shaped by **resident feedback**
  - Acknowledges **rising demand & costs for public services**
  - Calls for **more government funding** but sees **hope for future stability**

## Next Steps

- **Cabinet approval on Feb 11**
- **Final council vote on March 5**, with opposition amendments possible



# Hampshire County Council's Rejected 15% Council Tax Increase

## Key Issues

- Hampshire County Council requested a **15% council tax increase** for 2025/26
- **Government rejected the request**, limiting the increase to **4.99% without a referendum**
- **£182m budget gap**, worsened by **£10m rise in National Insurance costs** (only £7m covered by government support)

## Council's Response & Concerns

- **Leader Nick Adams-King:**
  - Using reserves is **“not sustainable in the long term”**
  - **Warns essential services & vulnerable residents at risk**
  - Accuses government of **favouring Labour councils in Midlands & North**
- **Alternative options to be considered by Cabinet today**



# Hampshire County Council's Rejected 15% Council Tax Increase

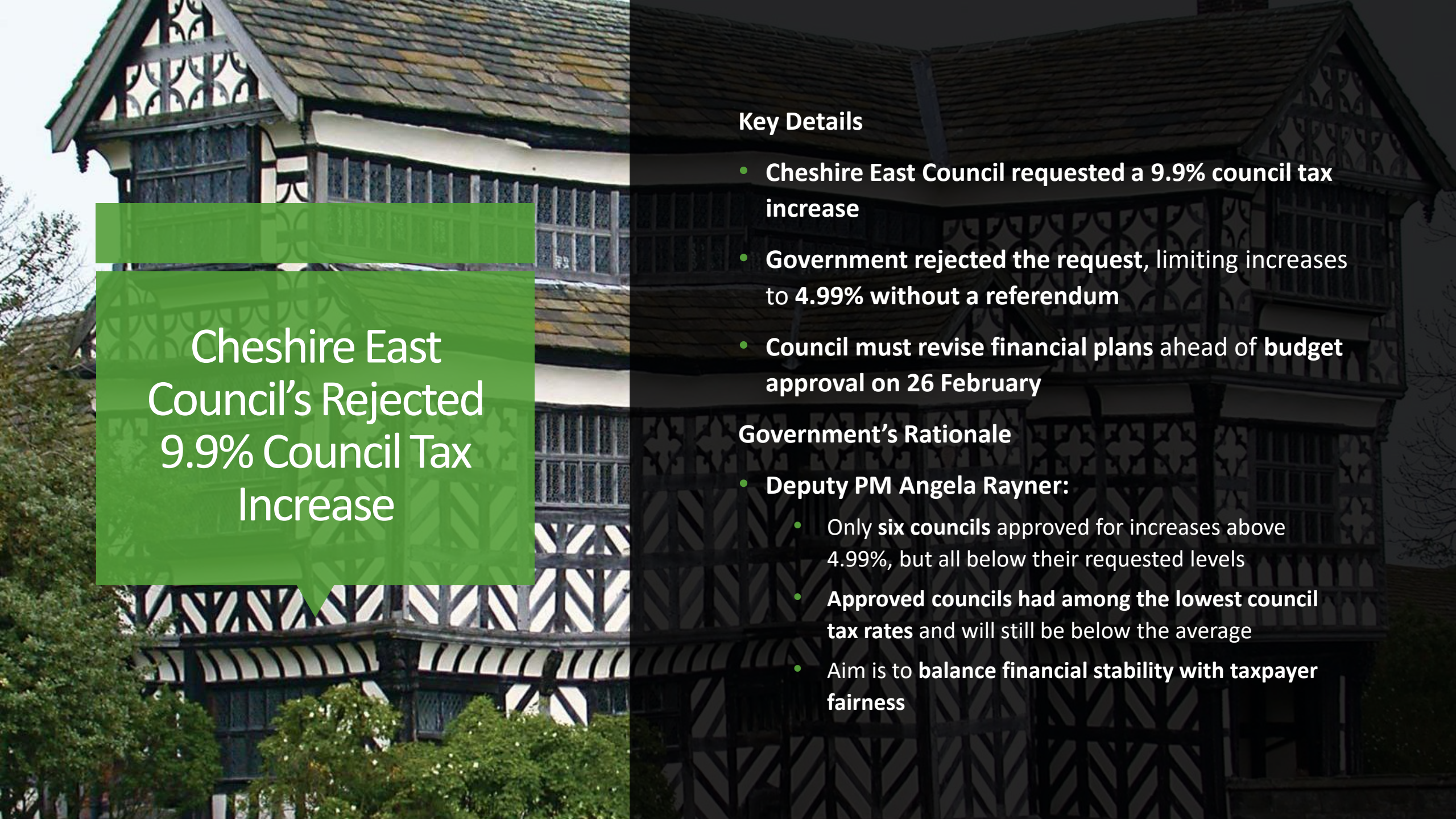
## Government Stance

- **Deputy PM Angela Rayner:**
  - **Limited tax increases approved for six councils**, but all below their requests
  - **Balancing council financial stability vs. taxpayer burden**
- **Hampshire must hold a referendum** if it wants to go beyond 4.99%

## Implications & Next Steps

- **Uncertain future funding for Hampshire services**
- **Possible pressure on central government** for additional emergency funding
- **Potential wider debate on local government funding fairness**

**Final decision on Hampshire's budget to be made after Cabinet discussions.**




## Cheshire East Council's Rejected 9.9% Council Tax Increase

### Key Details

- Cheshire East Council requested a **9.9% council tax increase**
- Government rejected the request, limiting increases to **4.99% without a referendum**
- Council must revise financial plans ahead of **budget approval on 26 February**

### Government's Rationale

- Deputy PM Angela Rayner:
  - Only **six councils** approved for increases above 4.99%, but all below their requested levels
  - **Approved councils had among the lowest council tax rates** and will still be below the average
  - Aim is to **balance financial stability with taxpayer fairness**



## Cheshire East Council's Rejected 9.9% Council Tax Increase


### Council Response

- **Cheshire East Council** reviewing options to maintain financial stability
- **Budget will be adjusted accordingly** but may require cost-cutting measures

### Wider Local Government Funding Debate

- **Record number of councils sought tax hikes** due to budget pressures
- **Only six councils approved**, raising concerns over fairness in funding distribution
- **Possible need for additional government support** to struggling councils

**Final decision on Cheshire East's revised budget expected on 26 February.**

An aerial photograph of the Birmingham City Council building, a large, modern structure with a distinctive blue and white facade. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the title text. The background shows a city street with traffic and trees.

# Birmingham City Council's Council Tax Increase Decision

## Key Outcomes

- Requested 9.99% increase for 2025/26 was rejected by the government
- Approved increase: 7.5% from April 2025 (above the usual 4.99% cap, but below request)
- Council previously warned it could not set a legal budget without the higher increase

## Government Rationale

- Deputy PM Angela Rayner:
  - Only limited requests approved, none at full requested amounts
  - Increases allowed for councils with among the lowest tax rates
  - Aim is to balance council financial stability with taxpayer fairness





# Legal Issues of Note

# Housing Benefit for Polygamous Marriages – 2025 Rates

## Key Information

- **Working Age polygamous marriage cases** are covered under **Regulation 23 of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006**
- **Rates for additional spouses are not included in the annual uprating order** but must be calculated manually

## Calculation for Additional Member (from April 2025)

- **Couple rate (one over 18):** £144.65
- **Single person rate (over 25):** £92.05
- **Rate for additional spouse: £52.60** (£144.65 - £92.05)

# Housing Benefit for Polygamous Marriages – 2025 Rates

## Key Considerations

- **Ensure correct calculation** is applied for any relevant cases
- **Manual adjustment needed**, as the uprating order does not include these rates

## Support & Queries

- **Contact DWP Housing Policy Enquiries** for further clarification
  - **Email:** [housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk)
- **Stay updated** on future guidance and regulatory changes

# Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 – Key Changes

## Overview of the Act

- **Came into force on 1 December 2022**
- **Standardises rental agreements** – all tenants now referred to as “**contract-holders**”
- **Improves tenant rights**, including:
  - **Better protection from eviction**
  - **Right to a written occupation contract**
  - **Requirement for landlords to ensure homes are “fit for human habitation”**

## New Rent-Free Clause

- If a home is deemed **unfit for human habitation**, the tenant:
  - **Does not have to pay rent** for the affected period
  - **Can enact this clause in their contract** to withhold rent

# Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 – Key Changes

## Effect on Housing Benefit (HB) Claimants

- **If a tenant enacts the “unfit for habitation” clause, they:**
  - Cease to be liable for rent
  - Are no longer eligible for HB, and payments must stop
- **Tenants on HB should seek advice** before enacting this clause to understand financial implications

## Further Support & Guidance

- **Guidance available:** Fitness for Human Habitation: Guidance for Tenants
- **DWP Contact for Housing Policy Enquiries:**
  - **Email:** [housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk)



# Job Adverts From Business Smart Solutions

**Celebrating 1000 Assignments!**



**BUSINESS SMART**  
SOLUTIONS LTD

**Your Revenues and Benefits Recruitment Partner**





We've teamed up with  
JUST ONE Tree to plant  
❖ 1000 TREES



# The Team



**BEN MORETON**  
Chief Executive Officer



**MARK THOMAS**  
Operations



**ROBERT FOX**  
Business Development  
Manager



**SADIE ANSELL**  
Finance Administrator



"BSS has provided us with excellent support since 2022. The range of expertise they have on their books is second to none, and they are without doubt my first choice when looking for staff.

What I particularly like is how well they support everyone, and they really look after their people, which is unlike any other agency I have worked with

Congratulations to Ben and the team !" #TeamBSS Client - Simon Rosser





# Benefits Officer (Capita One/Academy)

**Until 31/03/2025 initially | £25.50ph (umbrella) | Remote**

Our client in the midlands is seeking a Benefits Officer on a fully remote basis.

The successful candidate must have strong Housing Benefit

Rate: £25.50ph (umbrella)  
Term: Until 31/03/2025 initially  
Location: Fully remote

## Role

circumstances, DHP's, VEP's, HBAA & ATLAS.



## What we're looking for

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

- Strong Housing Benefit assessment skills
- Knowledge & understanding of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 and Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
- Skilled in the assessment of supported accommodation claims
- An advanced Capita One (Academy) user

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**



# Revenues CS0 (Capita One / Academy)

**5 weeks to start 07/03/2025 | £23ph (umbrella) | Remote**

Rate: £23.00 per hour (umbrella)

Hours per week: 37

Location: Fully remote

- All aspects of billing and recovery for Council Tax in a Customer Service environment
- Must have knowledge of the Capita One (Academy) system
- Experience of processing account amendments, reviewing and legislative guidelines
- Dealing with customer enquiries in a variety of formats including taking incoming calls



## What we're looking for

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

- Experience in using the Capita One(Academy) database
- Job involves taking incoming calls and processing / arrangements
- Knowledge of both Council Tax billing and recovery (as opposed to one or the other)
- Proficient in administration of Council Tax billing and Recovery and appropriate legislation

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**



# Housing Benefit Appeals Officer Academy

**Long Term | £30ph (umbrella) | Remote**

Rate: £30.00 per hour (umbrella)

Term: Ongoing/Long-term

Location: Fully remote

Our good client is seeking a fully-remote, part-time Housing Benefit / Council Tax Reduction Appeals Officer.

This is an ideal second income for someone wanting a fully flexible 2nd job to top-up their income.

Receive, acknowledge, review and determine Benefit applications for revision or supersession and/or Appeals made by customers, agents landlords in accordance with the Decisions & Appeals

Prepare cases for submission to the Tribunals Service/Valuation Tribunal



## What we're looking for

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

- At least 5 years Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support experience
- Extensive knowledge of the Housing Benefit Regulations 1999 and Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
- A proven track record of preparing appeal submissions and presenting in front of a Tribunal

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**



# Debt Recovery Officer

**6 months | £25ph (umbrella) | Hybrid - London**

Rate: £25.00ph (umbrella)

Term: 6 month contract

Hours per week: Full time

based the other 4 days

Job Purpose:

are required to maximise the recovery and enforcement of debts owed to the Council



What we're looking for

Experience of debt recovery, with experience of working with one or more of the following Revenues systems:

- Abacus - Adult Social Care
- Oracle Advanced Collections – Sundry Debt Recovery
- NEC (Northgate) Revenues – Council Tax Recovery
- NEC (Northgate) Benefits – Housing Benefit

Ability to work independently as well as being able to contribute to a “total team” culture where there is a shared responsibility to achieve recovery target objectives. Effective persuasion, numerical, analytical, problem

Strong Microsoft Excel skills.

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**



# Housing Benefit Subsidy Officer (Capita/Academy)

**3 months | £35ph (umbrella) | Remote**

Our good client is seeking a Housing Benefit Subsidy Officer to assist with Workbooks/CAKE assurance testing.

This is a fully remote role, available on a full-time or part-time basis.

Hours: Ideally 37 hours per week/flexible working  
Salary: £35.00 per hour (umbrella)

Contract Length: 3 months initially  
Location: Fully remote



## What we're looking for

- A minimum of 3 years experience of Capita
- A minimum of 5 years experience of Housing Benefit Subsidy
- High level of literacy to read, understand and interpret legislation and case law
- IRRV Benefits Technician or full IRRV (advantageous)

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**



# Business Rates Officer (Northgate/NEC)

**3 months | £27.50ph (umbrella) | Remote**

We are recruiting for a 'Home-Based' Business Rates/NNDR Officer for a Local Authority in the South. It is essential the applicant has experience of Northgate (NEC) Revenues & Benefits Software.

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

- Establishing Business Rates (NNDR) liability;
- Creating and updating NNDR accounts, including (but not limited to):
  - -Change of addresses;
  - -Determinations and awards such as Small Business Rates Relief (SBR), Retail Discount RD), Expanded Retail Discount (ERD) - Exemption determinations;
- Setting up and amending Direct Debits;
- Actioning BACS amendments;
- Actioning Direct Debit recalls in order to understand the method going forward;



What we're looking for

- Experience of Northgate (NEC) Revenues & Benefits Software
- 5+ years experience of Business Rates (NNDR)

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**



# Business Rates Officer (Civica Open Revenues)

**3 months | £23ph (umbrella) | Remote**

Rate: £23.00ph (umbrella)

Term: 3 months

- Thorough understanding of legislation governing Housing Support schemes, including Homeless Prevention Grants
- Previous experience in assessing claims for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction
- Strong communication skills across diverse demographics and communication channels
- Experience with Civica OpenRevs is essential



## What we're looking for

- A minimum of 3 years experience assessing applications for Housing Benefit & Council Tax Reduction
- Experience with Civica OpenRevs is essential
- Basic DBS required

**To find out more or to apply**  
**>> Click here to view the full advert**

## Are you ready to take the next step in your career?

As an experienced Revenues or Benefits professional, the new year is the perfect time to explore exciting interim/contract opportunities in the public sector. Whether you're looking for a fresh challenge, greater flexibility, or a



Want to learn more about increasing your earning potential and fast track your career progression? Reach out and we'll be more than happy to help

[Contact us here](#)



"Best decision I've made in years was to join BSS. Ben has been fantastic at every stage, and is already putting me forward for more senior roles where I had struggled to do so in permanent roles for the



Very personal approach from day one, reassuring and highly knowledgeable! Would highly recommend for anyone wanting to progress their career or just looking for a change!" #TeamBSS - *Sam Goddard*





# Payroll Solutions



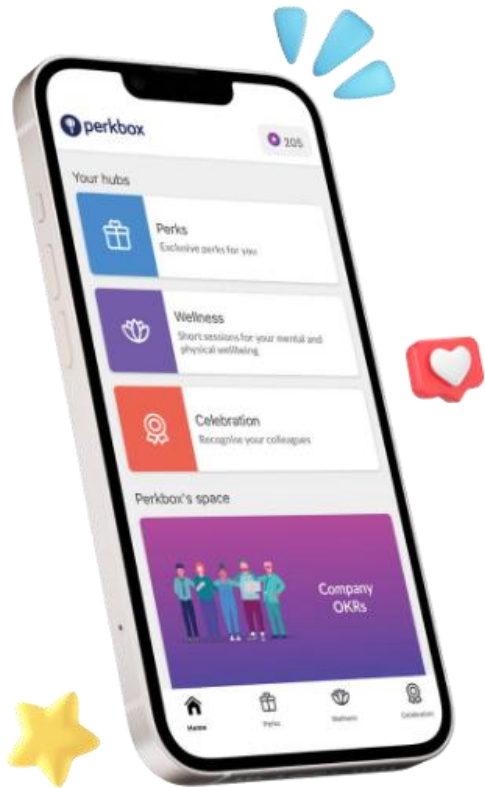
At BSS, we are dedicated to simplifying your contractor journey by providing you with efficient, tailored payroll solutions.

Our partnership with Umbrella.co.uk solidifies our pay, get paid on time and keep things stress free.

Umbrella.co.uk is one of the UK's leading umbrella companies.

Managed by qualified accountants and being FCSA accredited, it assures you of its high standards.

# Perkbox



In a world that's continuously evolving, it's crucial to foster an environment where every team member feels valued and connected. We've teamed up with Perkbox to ensure that, whether you're working from the comfort of your home or in the office, you have access to a comprehensive suite of benefits that improve your work-life

From recognising accomplishments to maintaining health, we're committed to making all our employees feel appreciated and part of our wider team.

- Access hundreds of global and local perks online 24/7
- Enjoy free monthly lifestyle perks and year-round shopping discounts from your favourite brands
- Utilise comprehensive wellness resources including workout videos and a confidential mental health helpline
- Celebrate and recognise your colleagues through the Celebration Hub
- Stay informed and connected through the Culture Hub, your go-to place for all company-related updates.

# Are you looking to redesign your Council Tax reduction scheme?

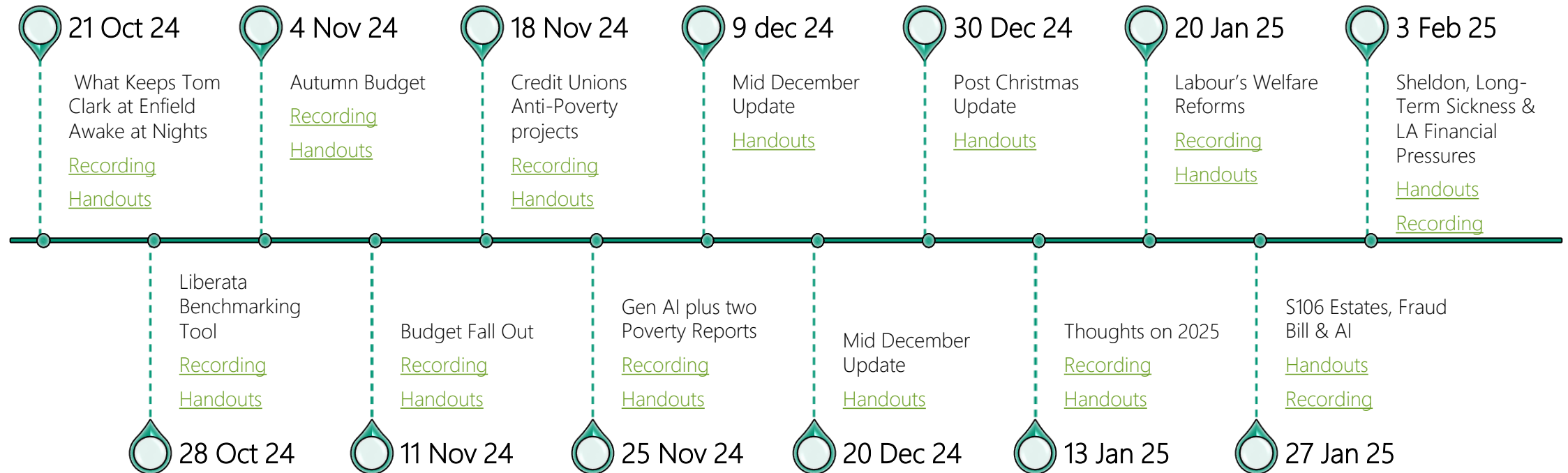
- | Robust Cost-Benefit Analysis
- | Comprehensive Impact Analysis of Council Tax Support & Arrears
- | Simple Scheme in Plain English
- | King's Award-Winning Online Application Forms

In Partnership With



inbest.ai  
ascendantsol.co.uk  
visionarynetwork.co.uk

# Previous Recordings





VISIONARY NETWORK  
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

# Pension Credit Support Offers

- Many of you are feeling the pressure to run targeted Pension Credit campaigns. In partnership with InBest, we're making it easier and more efficient for local authorities to identify pension-age residents who are missing out on Pension Credits and Winter Fuel Payments.
- We're offering a **free data analysis** of your SHBE and/or CTR caseload to help identify those missing out on these benefits. With this offer, you'll get access to a web analytics platform that provides:
  - - Insights into the personal and financial circumstances of your residents.
  - - A snapshot of who is eligible for Pension Credits and those currently missing out.
  - - Detailed ward and street-level data to help target outreach efforts.
- This service is **completely free**. If you're interested, contact Manu at Inbest ([manu@inbest.ai](mailto:manu@inbest.ai)).
- This is a great example of how Visionary Network and our partners aim to deliver meaningful, effective services to benefit you and your citizens without focusing on profit or publicity. We have already done this for a number of councils and Laura and her team from Oxford Council shared with us how impressed they were with the service and the quick turnaround.
- <https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/09/13/free-offer-to-identify-pension-age-residents-missing-out-on-pension-credit/>
- ASCENDANT SOLUTIONS are also offering a complete package including their award-winning apply4, the production of letters and follow-up. [support@ascendantsol.co.uk](mailto:support@ascendantsol.co.uk)

**inbest**

# Dates where there will be no sessions



21 April 2025	Easter
5 May 2025	May Bank Holiday
26 May 2025	Spring Bank Holiday
4 August 2025	Summer Break
11 August 2025	Summer Break
18 August 2025	Summer Break
25 August 2025	Summer Bank Holiday



# Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

# Visionary Network Blogs



**VISIONARY NETWORK**  
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

English Devolution White Paper: Housing, finance, council tax, business rates, welfare benefits, and social security

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/12/18/english-devolution-white-paper-housing-finance-council-tax-business-rates-welfare-benefits-and-social-security/>

Budget: Welfare, Social Security & Benefits, Local Government Funding, and Support in the UK

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/10/30/briefing-paper-welfare-social-security-benefits-local-government-funding-and-support-in-the-uk/>

Why Removing the Single Person Discount (SPD) Could Be a Positive Move

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/09/19/why-removing-the-single-person-discount-spd-could-be-a-positive-move/>

The Impending End of the Household Support Fund: A Crisis for Families on Low Incomes and Local Economies

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2024/08/19/the-impending-end-of-the-household-support-fund-a-crisis-for-families-on-low-incomes-and-local-economies/>

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



- The 'new' government is continuing to be extremely generous...to itself?
  - <https://benefitsinthefuture.com/the-new-government-is-continuing-to-be-extremely-generousto-itself/>
- 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/>

# EntitledTo Blogs

**entitledto**  
independent | accurate | reliable

- Budget 2024: Small steps for benefit claimants, but structural problems remain By Phil Agulnik
  - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2024/october/30/budget-2024-small-steps-for-benefit-claimants-but-structural-problems-remain>
- The Winter Fuel Payment debate illustrates long-standing policy conundrum by Phil Agulnik
  - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2024/september/06/the-winter-fuel-payment-debate-illustrates-long-standing-policy-conundrum>
- How smoothly is the Move to UC campaign going? By Wendy Alcock & Phil Agulnik
  - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2024/august/14/how-smoothly-is-the-move-to-uc-campaign-going>

# Resolution Foundation Blogs & Reports

The Government's economic strategy becomes more concrete *by [Greg Thwaites](#)*

- <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/concrete-economic-strategy/>

Whose price is it anyway? Comparing the spending power of low-to-middle income families in Britain and abroad by Zaynah Janan & Simon Pittaway

- <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/whose-price-is-it-anyway/>

Enforcing rights: The new Fair Work Agency is a creature of the right shape, but will it have the eyes and teeth it needs? *by [Hannah Slaughter](#) and [Tom Clark](#)*

- <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/comment/enforcing-rights-the-new-fair-work-agency-is-a-creature-of-the-right-shape-but-will-it-have-the-eyes-and-teeth-it-needs/>

# Institute of Fiscal Studies Blogs



- Hotel of Mum and Dad? Co-residence with parents among those aged 25–34  
<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/hotel-mum-and-dad-co-residence-parents-among-those-aged-25-34>
- The 2025–26 English Local Government Finance Settlement explained  
<https://ifs.org.uk/articles/2025-26-english-local-government-finance-settlement-explained>
- The government’s 80% employment rate target: lessons from history and abroad  
<https://ifs.org.uk/articles/governments-80-employment-rate-target-lessons-history-and-abroad>
- How is tax damaging the housing market?  
<https://ifs.org.uk/articles/how-tax-damaging-housing-market>
- How cuts to youth clubs affected teen crime and education by Carmen Villa  
<https://ifs.org.uk/articles/how-cuts-youth-clubs-affected-teen-crime-and-education>



# Other Workshops



Coming in February / 2 April 2025 12pm



Public  
Finance

CIPFA

Liberata



## FREE Webinar: Redesigning and Repositioning Local Tax and Support: Unlocking Transformative Value Across Services

Embrace the Future: Shaping Local Government for the Next Generation

We are at a pivotal moment, facing the most significant technological, economic, and political challenges to local revenues and benefit services in three decades. How we rise to these challenges will define the agenda for the next thirty years.

The traditional models of policy-making and service delivery are no longer viable. It's time to innovate, collaborate, and redefine what's possible.

Join a transformative discussion panel featuring senior local government officers, renowned economists, and performance experts. This event marks the beginning of a groundbreaking series of webinars, seminars, and conferences designed to address the pressing issues facing local government today.

Gain insights into this influential period of change—one that will reshape services critical to the operation of local government and vital to every household in our communities. Understand how these shifts will impact your region, borough, or district.

Local Government is evolving. The way services are delivered—and by whom—is changing. The question is, where will you, your team, and your citizens be in ten years?

Be part of the conversation. Be part of the future.

To be a delegate or for sponsorship options go to <https://tinyurl.com/VNCTR>

# Visionary Network



**VISIONARY NETWORK**  
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare 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.