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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

17 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
- Alex Clegg, Resolution Foundation
- 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
- Sean O'Sullivan, Visionary Network
- Darren Smith, Liberata
- Kevin Stewart, Visionary Network
- Bob Wagstaff PSPS (Boston, South Holland, East Lindsey)
- 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.



In Partnership with

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How is yearend going?
Challenges?
What's next?



Discussion Points

LACEF

Local Authority Civil Enforcement Forum (LACEF)

LACEF 2025
About this Event
LACEF 2025: Shaping the Future Together

- Join us for LACEF 2025, now in its 28th year, a conference to inform, inspire, and connect professionals working in local and central government in debt recovery and management. This year's event takes place at the stunning Wing at the Brighton Centre, situated on the seafront, and providing the perfect backdrop for a day of learning and collaboration.
- What to Expect:**
 - An outstanding line-up of speakers, sharing their expertise on relevant and pressing topics.
 - A carefully curated agenda addressing the most important issues facing the industry today (agenda to follow).
 - Opportunities to network with peers and thought leaders in the field.
- Date:** Wednesday, 14th May 2025
Venue: The Wing, Brighton Centre, Russell Road, Brighton, BN1 2RL

LACEF

NHS

Lack of Supported Housing Worsens NHS Delayed Discharges

Key Findings from the NHF Report

- Biggest cause of delayed discharges from mental health hospitals in 2023-24 was lack of supported housing.
- 109,029 days of delays, costing the NHS £71m.
- Housing-related delays have tripled since 2021.
- 17% of all delays in September 2024 were due to patients waiting for supported accommodation.

Impact on Patients & NHS Capacity

- Patients fit for discharge remain stuck in hospitals due to no suitable housing, worsening mental health conditions.
- Lack of space leads to patients being sent out of area, disrupting care.
- Half a million supported homes exist, but numbers are falling due to financial pressures.

Next Generation of New Towns

Key Developments

- 100+ sites proposed for new towns across England.
- Each new town could deliver 10,000+ homes.
- Final shortlist due this summer from the New Towns Taskforce.
- Highest number of submissions from London, South East, South West, and East of England.

Types of Proposals

- Majority: Urban extensions to existing towns/cities.
- Minority: Standalone new settlements.
- Ministers hope up to 12 new towns will be under construction by the next election.

Housing

Government Cracks Down on Rogue Landlords & Housing Benefit Abuse

New Measures to Tackle Rogue Landlords

- Housing benefit payments will be stopped for landlords providing substandard housing.
- New licensing scheme & tougher standards for supported housing landlords to be unveiled next week.
- Aims to protect tenants from unsafe or poor-quality housing while preventing exploitation of the benefits system.

Additional Housing Investment

- £300m allocated to build 2,800 affordable homes over the next year.
- £50m for councils to add 250 homes, reducing reliance on temporary housing like B&Bs.

Labour's Housing Commitment

- Target: 1.5 million homes over the course of the Parliament.
- Expansion of the Affordable Homes Programme (AHP), taking total investment to £12.3bn over five years.

'Jobcentre on Wheels' – A New Initiative to Boost Employment

Key Features of the Mobile Jobcentre Scheme

- New mobile jobcentres launched to bring employment support directly into communities.
- Currently operating in Bolton, Wales (Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham), with expansion to Scotland.
- Locations visited:
 - Football matches (e.g. Bolton Wanderers FC).
 - Retail parks, mosques, family hubs – targeting high-unemployment areas.

Objectives of the Scheme

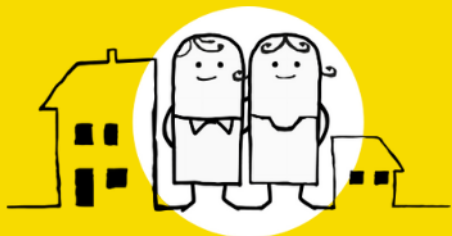
- Part of the government's 'Plan for Change' to tackle economic inactivity.
- Makes job search & training support more accessible for both DWP claimants & the wider public.
- Offers specialist help for individuals with health conditions, disabilities, or childcare needs.

Impact in Bolton

- 1 in 3 people inactive – significantly higher than national average.
- Breaking down barriers by bringing DWP services directly into communities.

Welfare reform

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

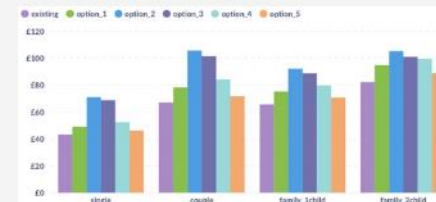
Total annual cost options



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
Book a meeting with Malcolm <https://bit.ly/VNMGTime>



VISIONARY NETWORK
The independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Join the discussion

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

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

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

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

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



Main Discussion Points



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Local Authority Civil Enforcement Forum (LACEF)

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- **What to Expect:**
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Government Cracks Down on Rogue Landlords & Housing Benefit Abuse



New Measures to Tackle Rogue Landlords

- **Housing benefit payments will be stopped** for landlords providing **substandard housing**.
- **New licensing scheme & tougher standards** for supported housing landlords **to be unveiled next week**.
- Aims to **protect tenants from unsafe or poor-quality housing** while preventing **exploitation of the benefits system**.

Additional Housing Investment

- **£300m allocated** to build **2,800 affordable homes** over the next year.
- **£50m for councils** to add **250 homes**, reducing reliance on **temporary housing like B&Bs**.

Labour's Housing Commitment

- **Target: 1.5 million homes** over the course of the Parliament.
- Expansion of the **Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)**, taking total investment to **£12.3bn over five years**.

Government Cracks Down on Rogue Landlords & Housing Benefit Abuse



Why the Crackdown?

- **Rogue landlords exploit the benefits system** by charging **high rents for low-quality accommodation**.
- Many tenants are forced into **unsafe or overcrowded housing**, funded by taxpayers.
- **Government aims to stop housing benefit being misused**, ensuring it supports **decent housing**.

Reactions & Challenges

- **Shelter**: Welcomes the crackdown but warns **more action is needed** to protect renters.
- **National Housing Federation**: Supports stronger rules but stresses **funding alone won't fix the housing crisis**.
- **Local Government Association (LGA)**: Urges **long-term funding** for councils to **properly regulate housing**.

What's Next?

- **New enforcement measures against rogue landlords announced next week**.
- **Spring Spending Review** will detail a **replacement for AHP** & further housing reforms.
- Ongoing debate on **whether these measures go far enough** to tackle the housing crisis **and benefits misuse**.

'Jobcentre on Wheels' – A New Initiative to Boost Employment

Key Features of the Mobile Jobcentre Scheme

- **New mobile Jobcentres launched** to bring employment support directly into communities.
- **Currently operating in Bolton, Wales (Flintshire, Denbighshire, Wrexham), with expansion to Scotland.**
- **Locations visited:**
 - Football matches (e.g., **Bolton Wanderers FC**).
 - **Retail parks, mosques, family hubs** – targeting high-unemployment areas.

Objectives of the Scheme

- **Part of the government's 'Plan for Change'** to tackle economic inactivity.
- **Makes job search & training support more accessible** for both DWP claimants & the wider public.
- **Offers specialist help** for individuals with **health conditions, disabilities, or childcare needs.**

Impact in Bolton

- **1 in 3 people inactive** – significantly higher than national average.
- **Breaking down barriers** by bringing DWP services directly into communities.

'Jobcentre on Wheels' – A New Initiative to Boost Employment

Government's Vision & Ministerial Support

- **Minister for Employment, Alison McGovern:**
 - "We want everyone, in every part of the country, to be better off."
 - Mobile Jobcentres ensure no one misses out on job support.
- **Bolton-based Work Coach, Sam Ashton:**
 - "We've already helped job seekers with career advice, training, and childcare costs."

Future Expansion & Wider Employment Reforms

- **Scotland's first mobile Jobcentre launching in Moray & the Highlands later this month.**
- **Part of the broader 'Get Britain Working' White Paper reforms, including:**
 - **Overhauling Jobcentres** to improve employment support.
 - **Introducing a Youth Guarantee** to ensure all 18–21-year-olds are either earning or learning.
 - **Better integration of local work, health & skills plans** to support long-term employment.

What's Next?

- **Continued monitoring of impact** in trial locations.
- **Potential nationwide rollout** if the initiative proves successful.
- **Aims to support thousands back into work**, reducing economic inactivity and increasing prosperity.

NHS

Lack of Supported Housing Worsens NHS Delayed Discharges

Key Findings from the NHF Report

- **Biggest cause of delayed discharges from mental health hospitals in 2023-24 was lack of supported housing.**
- **109,029 days of delays, costing the NHS £71m.**
- **Housing-related delays have tripled since 2021.**
- **17% of all delays in September 2024 were due to patients waiting for supported accommodation.**

Impact on Patients & NHS Capacity

- Patients **fit for discharge** remain stuck in hospitals due to **no suitable housing**, worsening mental health conditions.
- Lack of space leads to **patients being sent out of area**, disrupting care.
- **Half a million supported homes exist, but numbers are falling** due to financial pressures.

NHS

Lack of Supported Housing Worsens NHS Delayed Discharges

Housing & Healthcare Leaders' Concerns

- **Chris Hampson (Look Ahead):** Supported housing sector facing a “**perfect storm**” – inflation, recruitment issues, and local government cuts.
- **Sophie Boobis (Homeless Link):** Calls for **better NHS & housing integration** to break the cycle of **delayed discharges & blocked hospital beds**.
- **David Fothergill (LGA):** Urges **dedicated housing support fund & long-term investment** in preventative care.

Government Response

- Acknowledges **severe supported housing shortage** as part of the UK’s housing crisis.
- Committed to **building 1.5m new homes**, with a focus on **social & affordable housing**.
- **10-year NHS plan** (£26bn investment) aims to shift **care from hospitals to the community**.
- Pledges to **improve links between NHS & social care** to tackle **delayed discharges**.

Next Steps

- **Upcoming Spending Review** presents an opportunity for **targeted investment** in supported housing.
- Calls for **NHS & housing providers to collaborate** in the national housing strategy.
- Debate continues on whether **current funding plans are sufficient** to address the growing crisis.



Next Generation of New Towns

Key Developments

- **100+ sites** proposed for **new towns** across England.
- Each new town could deliver **10,000+ homes**.
- **Final shortlist due this summer** from the New Towns Taskforce.
- Highest number of submissions from **London, South East, South West, and East of England**.

Types of Proposals

- **Majority:** Urban extensions to existing towns/cities.
- **Minority:** Standalone new settlements.
- Ministers hope up to **12 new towns** will be under construction by the next election.



Next Generation of New Towns

New Homes Accelerator Programme: Purpose & Progress

- Call for evidence identified **725 developments** (500+ homes each) facing **barriers to delivery**.
- **50% of these sites** aim to deliver **1,500+ homes**.
- **20,000 homes already unlocked** through planning interventions.

Successful Interventions

- **Cowley Hill, Liverpool** – 1,000+ homes unlocked after resolving flood risk & biodiversity concerns.
- **Wolborough, Devon** – Collaboration with Natural England to accelerate housing while ensuring environmental protection.



Next Generation of New Towns

Commitments to Speed Up Housebuilding

- **1.5 million homes target** by 2029.
- Focus on **large sites** (1,500+ homes) to maximise impact.
- **Fast-tracking planning** by resolving disputes between:
 - National Highways
 - Natural England
 - Environment Agency
- **Building Safety Regulator** to improve tall building approvals.

New Funding Announcements

- **£1m** to agencies for **faster planning approvals**.
- **£2m** for the **Building Safety Regulator** to streamline new-build applications.
- **£3m+ in grants** to help **local councils** strengthen planning capacity.



Next Generation of New Towns

Future Actions

- **Government to assess barriers** to large-scale developments.
- **Greater collaboration** between MHCLG, Homes England & local authorities.
- Focus on **energy-efficient, sustainable housing**.



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Welcome to a
new era of
council tax
deduction
schemes

Bristol City
Council Case
Study



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“
**COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION
CLEAR & CONCISE**
Let us make it simple for you
”

Save money, improve efficiency,,
help your vulnerable citizens,
build trust.

<http://www.visionarynetwork.co.uk>



Finding the
right
information
has never been
easier with



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

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

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

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

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

E-mail services.enquiries@ladirectories.com

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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.



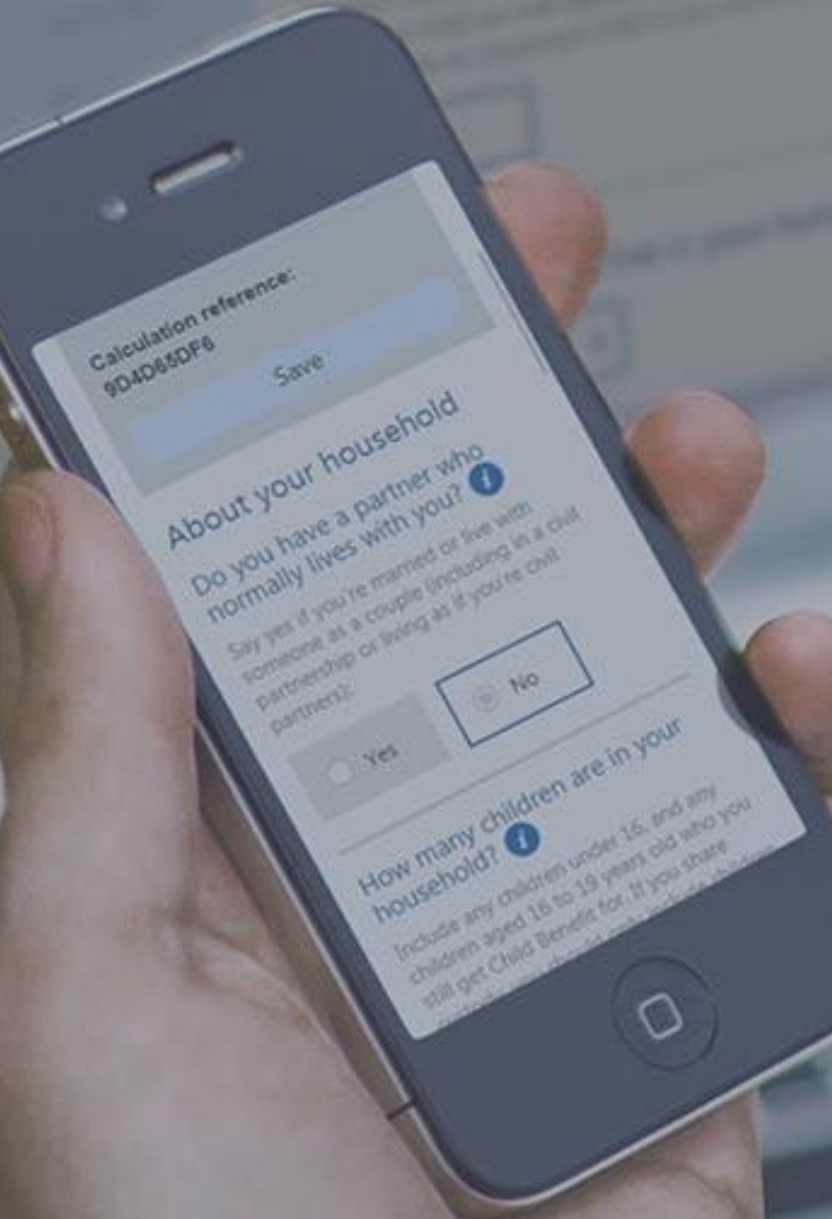
our customers:

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.

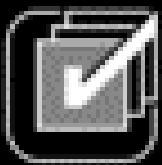
The InBest benefits calculator has been integrated into Ascendant's apply4.online support application, to make it easier for people who are experiencing financial difficulties to find out what support is available to them.

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](#)






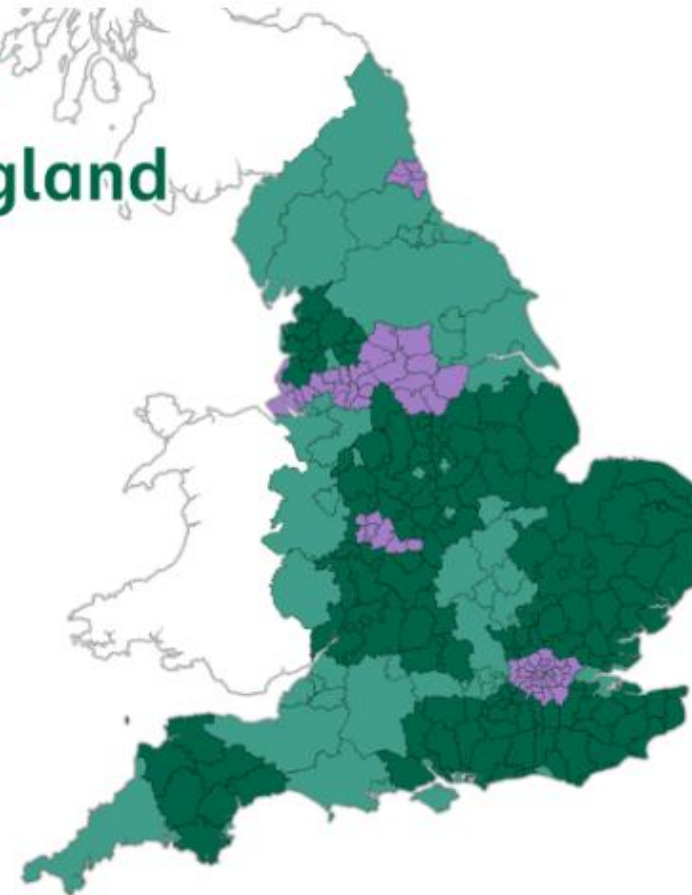
Apply4.Online®



In the news

Local authority structure in England

-  Two-tier council (district and county)
-  Unitary authority
-  Metropolitan or London borough



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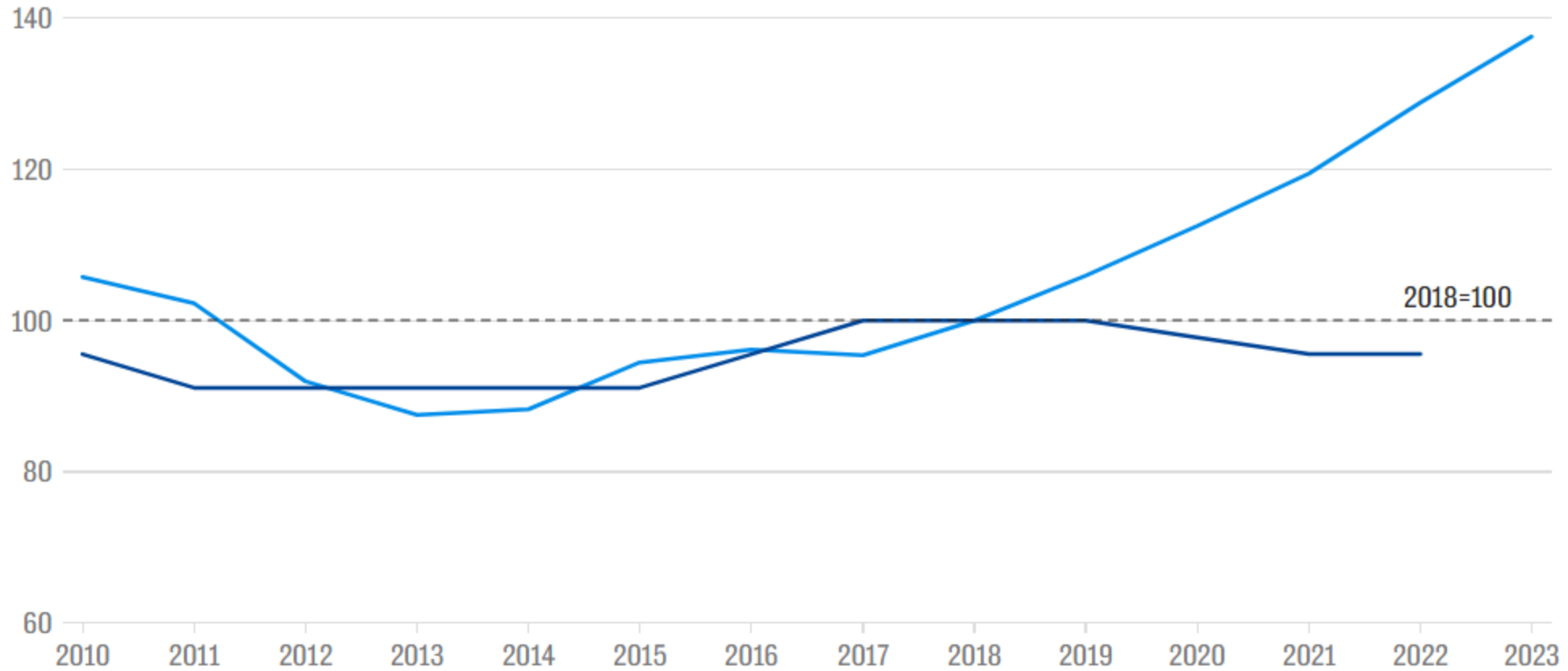
LA Directories Limited

Spending on health and disability benefits (£bn)



Benefit claims have detached from illness levels

Combined incapacity benefit caseload vs adults with a long-term sickness (indexed)



Source: OBR, NHS Digital



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Councils Face £8bn Funding Gap by 2028/29

Local Government Association (LGA) Warning

- **Councils in England** face an **£8.4bn funding gap** by 2028/29 without additional funding.
- Rising **costs & demand pressures** will add **£21.4bn** to council service costs since 2024/25 (**29.8% increase**).
- **Funding gap projections:**
 - **£1.9bn** in 2025/26
 - **£4.0bn** in 2026/27
 - **£6.0bn** in 2027/28
 - **£8.4bn** in 2028/29

Rising Financial Pressures

- **18 councils** required **Exceptional Financial Support (EFS)** for 2024/25 budgets.
- **25% of CFOs** expect their councils will need EFS in 2025/26 or 2026/27.
- Key cost pressures:
 - **Demographic change & inflation.**
 - **Unfunded increases to National Living Wage.**
 - **Employer National Insurance Contribution changes.**

Councils Face £8bn Funding Gap by 2028/29

LGA's Key Asks from the Spending Review

- **Sufficient funding** to avoid councils making “impossible choices” on service cuts.
- **Long-term financial certainty** – warns against **one-year settlements** (2025/26 will be the **seventh in a row**).
- **Three-year settlements** welcomed for better **planning & service delivery**.

Impact of Underfunding

- Risk to **vital services** such as:
 - **Social care** for older & vulnerable adults.
 - **SEND provision & school transport**.
 - **Temporary accommodation & homelessness support**.

LGA Chair, Cllr Louise Gittins:

- **Councils are key to public sector reform & local economic growth**.
- **Huge savings & efficiencies have already been made** but further cuts will impact essential services.
- **Without investment, councils cannot help the government achieve its long-term growth ambitions**.

Next Steps

- **Spending Review to be announced 11 June**.
- Government must address **funding shortfalls** to secure **sustainable local services**.

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

Macmillan Cancer Support Faces Financial Crisis & Service Cuts

Key Findings from the Guardian Investigation

- **Macmillan Cancer Support has spent £100m more than it raised** over the past six years.
- **Major service reductions announced** to ensure “long-term financial sustainability.”
- **£232m raised in 2023** but **£265m spent**, leading to further financial strain.
- **Rising demand** due to an **ageing population & better cancer detection** increasing pressure on services.

Impact of Financial Shortfall

- **431 staff made redundant** (26% of workforce).
- **Cuts to Macmillan’s helpline** – fewer operators & reduced specialist financial/emotional advice.
- **Vital cancer hardship grants scrapped**, affecting:
 - **50,000 low-income patients annually.**
 - Households with **less than £1,000 in savings** who relied on **one-off £200 payments** for transport & heating.

MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT

Macmillan Cancer Support Faces Financial Crisis & Service Cuts

Public & Patient Reactions

- Patients express shock & concern over hardship fund closure.
 - Laura (breast cancer patient): Grant helped pay rent & heating bills.
 - Linda (kidney & breast cancer patient): Grant was critical for heating post-surgery.
- Macmillan's hardship fund was the UK's only national cancer support grant.
- Scrapping it coincides with record levels of destitution & deep poverty.

Macmillan's Justification & Future Plans

- Spokesperson:
 - "We had to make very difficult decisions but remain in a strong financial position."
 - "We will focus on scalable services to reach more patients."
- Unclear how future financial assistance for cancer patients will be provided.

What's Next?

- Public & political pressure may mount to restore financial aid.
- Macmillan must rebuild trust & funding streams to maintain essential cancer support services.
- Uncertainty over how low-income cancer patients will access support moving forward.

Schools Facing Job Cuts Despite Government's Teacher Recruitment Pledge

Key Issues

- **Labour pledged to recruit 6,500 teachers, but schools are cutting staff to avoid deficits.**
- **Teacher recruitment crisis:**
 - **Missed secondary recruitment target by 40%.**
 - **One in four new teachers leave within three years.**
- **Government proposes a 2.8% teacher pay rise, but without extra funding, schools fear more job losses.**

Impact on Schools

- **Survey of Calderdale primary schools:**
 - **Over 50% plan to make teachers redundant.**
 - **Nearly 70% cutting support staff, despite rising special needs demands.**
 - **Almost 90% not replacing staff who leave, worsening class sizes & workload.**
- **Teachers now expected to support pupils facing homelessness, domestic violence & social care failures.**
- **Headteacher: "It feels like things are about to implode."**

Schools Facing Job Cuts Despite Government's Teacher Recruitment Pledge

Impact on Education & Pupils

- Larger class sizes, fewer SEN assistants, and reduced support for struggling pupils.
- Headteachers warn they can't afford basic operational costs – even school maintenance & heating.
- NEU warns: If schools must self-fund pay increases →
 - 76% of primary schools & 94% of secondary schools will need to make cuts.

Government Response & Ongoing Concerns

- Government blames "challenging fiscal context", citing a £22bn shortfall.
- £2.3bn extra funding pledged, but unions say it is insufficient to cover real costs.
- NEU warns Labour risks being the first government to enforce school cuts since the 1970s.

What's Next?

- School budget decisions in the coming months will determine teacher job losses.
- Final teacher pay award recommendations expected by March.
- Pressure mounts on government to fully fund pay rises to prevent further cuts

Claimants Fear Losing Benefits If They Attempt to Work

Key Concerns from Benefit Claimants

- Many people **want to work but fear losing financial support** if they struggle.
- **Government survey: 200,000 people on health-related benefits** said they would work if the right **job and support** were available.
- **Half of respondents said a key barrier was the risk of losing benefits** if they moved into work and it didn't work out.

Why the Current System Creates Fear

- People **completely unable to work** receive an extra **£416 per month**.
- The **£156 supplement for those able to work with support** was **scrapped in 2017**, removing a safety net for gradual returns to employment.
- **Strict assessment rules** mean claimants fear being permanently reclassified as "fit to work" if they try employment, even temporarily.

Claimants Fear Losing Benefits If They Attempt to Work

Concerns & Challenges

- **Claimants fear they will be left worse off** if they lose their benefits and cannot sustain work.
- **Welfare groups warn cuts could come before proper safeguards are in place.**
- **Basic benefits are already too low**, meaning incapacity benefits are often the only viable safety net.

What's Next?

- **Final reform proposals expected later this year.**
- Ministers must **balance cost-cutting with protecting vulnerable people.**
- The success of reforms **depends on reassuring claimants that returning to work won't leave them financially stranded.**

Surrey Councils Reject Single Mega- Authority

Key Decisions & Background

- **Surrey council leaders** have ruled out a **single county-wide unitary authority**.
- Agreement reached by leaders of **all 11 district & borough councils**.
- **Alternative proposals** being considered:
 - **Dividing Surrey into two or three smaller unitary councils.**
 - **Introducing an elected Surrey mayor.**

Why This Matters

- **Government supports unitary councils for cost-effectiveness & decentralisation.**
- **Local leaders argue** a single unitary would be **too large & reduce accountability.**
- Elections postponed until **at least 2026** as part of the **devolution process.**

A green map of Surrey is shown with several council names: Woking, Epsom, Dorking, Farnham, Haslemere, and Godalming. A central white box with a green border contains the text 'Surrey Councils Reject Single Mega-Authority'.

Surrey Councils Reject Single Mega-Authority

Key Figures & Perspectives

- Catherine Sayer (Tandridge District Council Leader):
 - Opposes a single unitary, arguing it lacks accountability.
- Tim Oliver (Surrey County Council Leader):
 - Acknowledges government's preference for mayoral devolution.
- Richard Biggs (Reigate & Banstead), Mike Rollings (Elmbridge), and Catherine Sayer:
 - Concerned that **fiscally responsible councils** should not be **burdened with neighbouring council debts**.

Timeline & Next Steps

- **Weekly meetings** to refine proposals.
- **Interim proposal due: 21 March.**
- **Final proposal submission: 9 May.**
- Awaiting **government response** on devolution plans for Surrey.

MPs Warn of Rough Sleeping 'Emergency' in England

Key Findings from Parliamentary Inquiry

- Rough sleeping levels are at a national crisis point and increasing.
- 17% of all delayed hospital discharges in September 2024 were due to lack of supported housing.
- Main causes include:
 - Rising rents & frozen Local Housing Allowance.
 - Section 21 "no-fault" evictions forcing tenants out.
 - Five-week Universal Credit waiting period, worsening financial instability.
- MP Florence Eshalomi (HCLG Committee Chair):
 - "The shocking levels of rough sleeping should be a national shame."
 - Urges urgent government action to prioritise prevention.

Council & Charity Struggles

- Housing stock has declined due to Right to Buy & lack of replacements.
- Councils & charities cannot house all presenting as homeless.
- Example: Manchester Council cleared a homeless camp, but struggles to house everyone permanently.

MPs Warn of Rough Sleeping 'Emergency' in England

Committee's Key Recommendations

- Prevent homelessness before it happens by:
 - Ending Section 21 evictions via the Renters' Rights Bill.
 - Reforming Universal Credit to ensure payments cover essential costs & scrapping the five-week wait.
 - Shifting to long-term funding models for councils to plan better.
- Address housing shortages by:
 - Building 1.5m new homes, with a specific sub-target for social & affordable housing.
 - Revitalising supported housing to transition rough sleepers into permanent tenancies.
 - Restoring funding from the Supporting People programme.

Government Response

- Deputy PM Angela Rayner & Minister Rushanara Ali reviewing committee proposals.
- Tripled winter homelessness funding to £30m in 2024.
- £1bn pledged for homelessness support & emergency accommodation.
- Commitment to abolish Section 21 evictions and increase affordable housing supply.

What's Next?

- Government must act quickly to prevent rough sleeping from worsening.
- Debate over whether funding & housing targets are enough to meet demand.
- Cross-party pressure mounting for urgent legislative action.

Labour MPs Push for Government Support on a Four-Day Working Week

Key Developments

- **12 Labour MPs and one Green MP** support an amendment to the **Employment Rights Bill** to explore a four-day working week.
- Proposed by **Labour MP Peter Dowd**, who argues that **AI and automation** enable greater efficiency, so workers should benefit.
- Deputy Prime Minister **Angela Rayner's bill** already includes:
 - **Stronger flexible working rights.**
 - **A ban on exploitative zero-hours contracts.**

Government Response

- **Not part of Labour's manifesto** or current policy.
- **Building Safety Minister Alex Norris:**
 - The government is focused on **expanding workers' rights** but does **not support a four-day week.**
- **Official government statement:**
 - **No plans** to mandate a four-day week with five days' pay.
 - Businesses must retain **flexibility to reject unworkable requests.**

Labour MPs Push for Government Support on a Four-Day Working Week

Supporters' Arguments

- **Higher productivity** – workers achieve more in four days than in five.
- **Improved wellbeing & lower burnout** – happier, healthier employees.
- **Proven success** – **200+ UK companies** and **one local council** have adopted the model permanently.
- **Maya Ellis MP (Labour, Ribble Valley):**
 - “A four-day week can **increase capacity in public services.**”

Critics' Concerns

- **Compressed vs. true four-day week** – critics warn that longer workdays could offset benefits.
- **Remote work concerns** – some business leaders argue employees are already working less efficiently.
 - **Lord Rose (Asda, M&S):** “Remote working is **not proper work.**”
- **Economic impact** – fear of **lower output & increased costs** for businesses.

What's Next?

- The amendment will be debated **as the Employment Rights Bill progresses.**
- The **4 Day Week Foundation** urges the government to **properly explore** a reduced-hour model.
- Ongoing business pushback could **limit policy adoption in the private sector.**



HM Revenue & Customs

Parliamentary Report on HMRC & Tax Evasion

Key Findings of the Public Accounts Committee

- **Tax evasion may be vastly underestimated** – the reported **£5.5bn** lost in **2022-23** is likely just the "**tip of the iceberg**".
- HMRC **lacks a clear strategy** to combat tax evasion effectively.
- Additional taxation from **online marketplace VAT reforms** was **five times higher than expected**, suggesting previous underestimates.
- **Weak deterrents:**
 - Fewer **prosecutions** than pre-pandemic levels.
 - Too few **rogue directors struck off**.
 - **Lax checks** at HMRC & Companies House enable overseas traders to **avoid VAT**.
- **Lack of collaboration** between **HMRC, Companies House, and the Insolvency Service** despite acknowledged benefits.



In
Partnership
with

LA Directories
Limited



HM Revenue & Customs

Parliamentary Report on HMRC & Tax Evasion

Committee Criticism

- Chair **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** raised concerns over:
 - Billions in lost tax revenue.
 - HMRC's **lack of curiosity** in diagnosing systemic fraud issues.
 - **Slow progress** in tackling tax evasion due to bureaucratic obstacles.

HMRC's Response

- Plans to recover **£6.5bn over the next five years** to close the tax gap.
- Will continue using **civil and criminal powers** against non-compliant taxpayers.
- Claims the UK has **one of the lowest tax gaps globally**.
- Collected and protected **£41.8bn in the past year** for public services.

UK's AI Strategy – Urgent Action Needed

Key Concerns

- The UK is “**late to the game**” in AI infrastructure and must act quickly.
- **AI Growth Zones** proposed to boost local infrastructure and investment.
- The **AI Opportunities Action Plan** aims to create **thousands of jobs** and bring in **billions in investment**.
- **Social Market Foundation (SMF) report warns:**
 - The UK cannot **rely solely on research and talent** to remain competitive.
 - **Supercomputer capacity and digital connectivity** are key weaknesses.

Infrastructure Challenges

- **Lack of supercomputer capacity** threatens AI growth.
- **Electricity grid constraints and high energy costs** create obstacles.
- **Planning delays for data centres** slow progress.
- **Global competition** from Norway, Canada, and Singapore is increasing.

UK's AI Strategy – Urgent Action Needed

Proposed Solutions

- **Fund & build national AI supercomputers** (e.g. ARCHER's success).
- **Connect low-carbon energy sources** to the national grid for sustainability.
- **Introduce zonal electricity pricing** to lower AI data centre costs.
- **Simplify and speed up planning approvals** for new data centres.

Expert Perspective

- **Sam Robinson, SMF Senior Researcher:**
 - **“Datacentres are critical infrastructure”** for AI and digital economy.
 - **Urgent action needed** to tackle energy costs and planning delays.
 - **Strategy must focus on affordability, faster approvals, and green energy investment** to secure the UK's AI future



Department for Science, Innovation & Technology

DSIT AI Playbook – Key Principles & Purpose

What is the AI Playbook?

- Published by the **Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)**.
- Sets out **10 principles** for **responsible AI use** in the public sector.
- Aims to ensure AI is used **lawfully, ethically, securely, and effectively**.

Why It Matters

- Encourages **transparency & collaboration** in AI use.
- **Improves efficiency & decision-making** across public services.
- Helps mitigate **risks, security concerns & ethical issues**.



Department for Science, Innovation & Technology

DSIT AI Playbook – Key Principles & Purpose

Key AI Principles for Civil Servants

1. Know AI & its limitations.
2. Use AI lawfully, ethically & responsibly.
3. Ensure AI security.
4. Maintain meaningful human control.
5. Manage the AI life cycle effectively.
6. Use AI only when necessary.
7. Be open & collaborative.
8. Engage commercial colleagues early.
9. Ensure skills & expertise are in place.
10. Align with policies & assurance processes.



Department for Science, Innovation & Technology

DSIT AI Playbook – Key Principles & Purpose

Real-World Use Cases

- **Natural England's "Living England" Project:**
 - Uses **AI & satellite images** to track habitat changes.
 - Speeds up **planning approvals** while supporting **nature conservation**.
- **AI helping accelerate planning & decision-making** across the public sector.
- DSIT highlights **12+ AI-powered projects** improving public services.

Government Vision

- **Technology Secretary Peter Kyle:**
 - AI can **save money, speed up processes, and improve public services**.
 - Calls for **rapid AI adoption** to help fix **"broken public services"**.

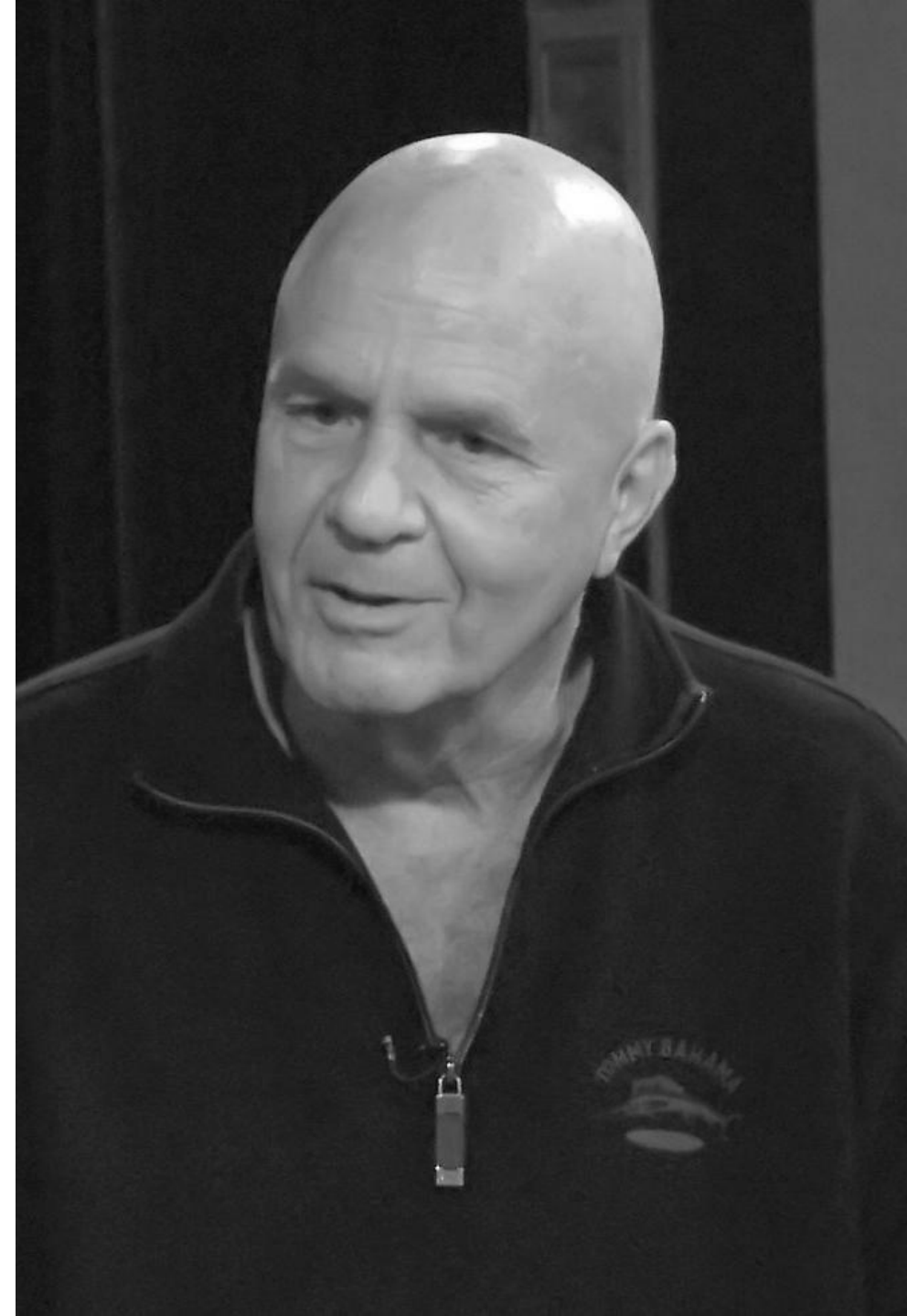
What's Next?

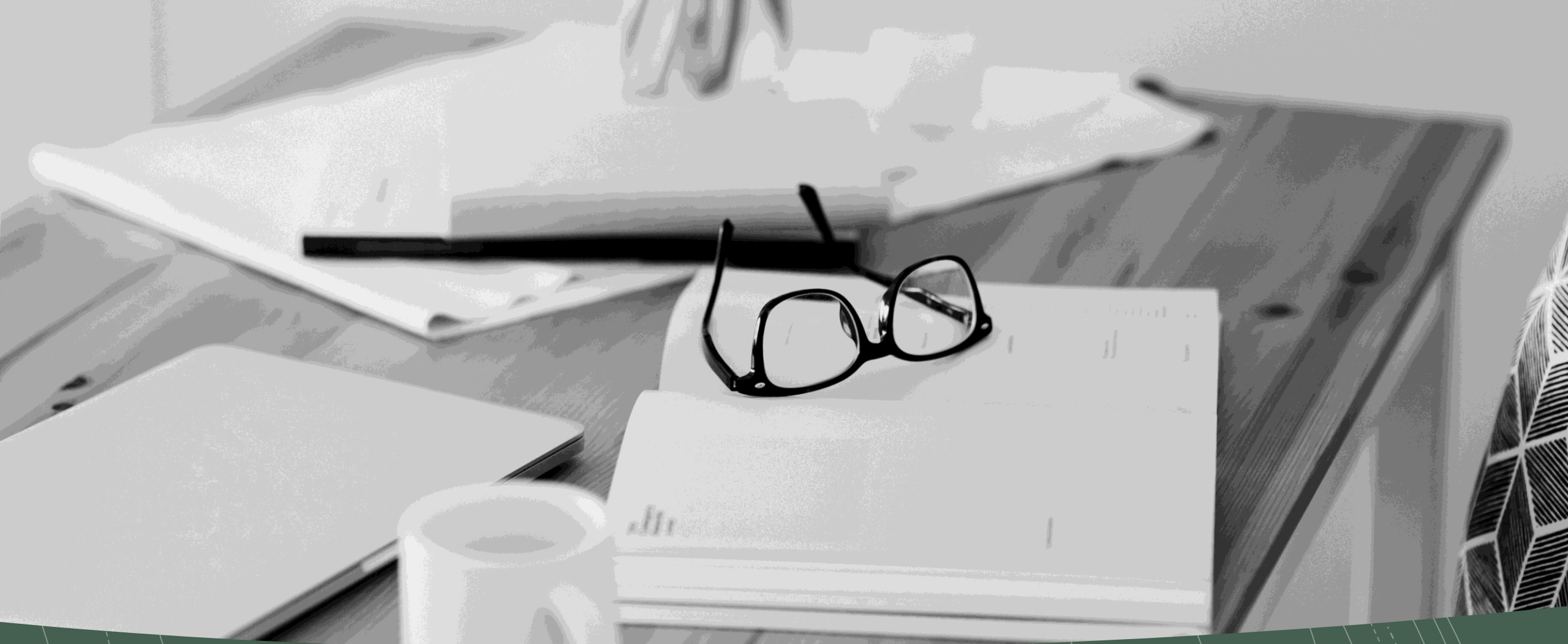
- AI will be **expanded across government services**.
- **Faster planning approvals** and **improved efficiency**.
- **Focus on security, skills development, and ethical deployment**.

Quote of the Week

“What goes around comes around. The karma of life insists on it.” – Wayne Dyer

Wayne Dyer (1940–2015) was an American self-help author and motivational speaker known for his bestselling book *Your Erroneous Zones*, which promoted personal growth and self-empowerment. Often called the “father of motivation,” he combined psychology, spirituality, and practical advice to inspire millions worldwide.





Additional Ideas and Analysis

Local Government Finance Settlement 2025- 2026 – Overview

Key Financial Commitments

- **£69 billion in funding for councils** – a **6.8% cash terms increase** from 2024-2025.
- **£5 billion in new funding** to support local services, beyond council tax revenue.
- **No local authority will see a reduction in Core Spending Power.**

Strategic Goals

- **Stabilising local government finances** following years of underfunding.
- **First multi-year settlement from 2026-27**, allowing councils to plan long-term.
- **Strengthening oversight & governance** through audit and standards reforms.
- **Encouraging devolution and unitary restructuring** to streamline governance.

Consultation on Local Authority Funding Reform

- **Assessment of council financial needs** to determine future funding allocations.
- **Simplifying funding pots** to give councils **more flexibility** in budget planning.
- **Consultation remains open until 12 February 2025.**

Local Government Finance Settlement 2025- 2026 – Overview

Significant Social Care Funding Increases

- **£3.7 billion additional social care funding** in 2025-26, including:
 - **£880m increase in Social Care Grant** (total **£5.9bn**).
 - **£10bn total grant funding for social care** across multiple programmes.
- **Children’s Social Care Prevention Grant: £270m** to protect vulnerable children.
- **Children and Families Grant, Better Care Grant, and Market Sustainability Fund** to further support care services.

Additional Local Investment

- **£233m for homelessness services** to address rising need.
- **£500m for pothole repairs** and road maintenance.
- **£600m Recovery Grant** as a **temporary funding boost** while reforms are implemented.
- **£60m to support local governance & audit improvements.**

Local Government Finance Settlement 2025- 2026 – Overview

General Council Tax Principles for 2025-26

- **5% general limit on increases** (3% core + 2% for adult social care).
- **Councils can set lower increases**, but exceeding 5% triggers a local referendum.

Approved Additional Increases for 6 Councils

- **Windsor & Maidenhead (+4%)**
- **Birmingham (+2.5%)**
- **Bradford (+5%)**
- **Newham (+4%)**
- **Somerset (+2.5%)**
- **Trafford (+2.5%)**

Stricter Approach to Council Tax Hikes

- **Requests for excessive increases rejected** to protect taxpayers.
- **Government expects councils to consider household financial impact** when setting rates.
- **Final budget-setting decisions remain with individual councils.**

Local Government Finance Settlement 2025- 2026 – Overview

■ Key Funding Reforms from 2026-27

Fairer assessment of council needs & resources to guide long-term allocations.

- **Resetting the Business Rates Retention System** to ensure sustainable growth.
- **Reducing the number of separate funding pots to increase flexibility for councils.**
- **Reform of the New Homes Bonus**, with consultation on new proposals in 2025.

Strengthening Local Governance

- **Local audit reforms** to improve financial oversight & accountability.
- **Encouraging devolution & unitary council restructuring** to reduce inefficiencies.

Next Steps

- **Final council budget-setting decisions due in the coming months.**
- **Continued government consultation on funding reform until 12 February 2025.**
- **Implementation of major funding reforms in 2026-27** to stabilise local government.



114 Watch


- Councils reporting their struggling budgets

Key Developments

- **Bradford Council is considering a 9.99% council tax increase** following government approval.
- **Final decision to be made next month.**
- **Reason for the rise:** Exceptional financing needs due to **past funding cuts & financial pressures.**

Political Debate in the Commons

- **Anna Dixon (Labour, Shipley):**
 - Blames **Conservative cuts to local government funding** for Bradford's financial struggles.
 - Argues the **increase is necessary** and will still be **below the national average.**
- **Robbie Moore (Conservative, Keighley):**
 - Calls the **9.99% rise "shameful"**.
 - Criticises **Labour's management of Bradford Council.**
 - **Demands a reversal** of the proposed increase in an open letter to council leader Susan Hinchcliffe.



Bradford Council's Proposed 9.99% Council Tax Hike Sparks Political Clash

Council's Financial Challenges

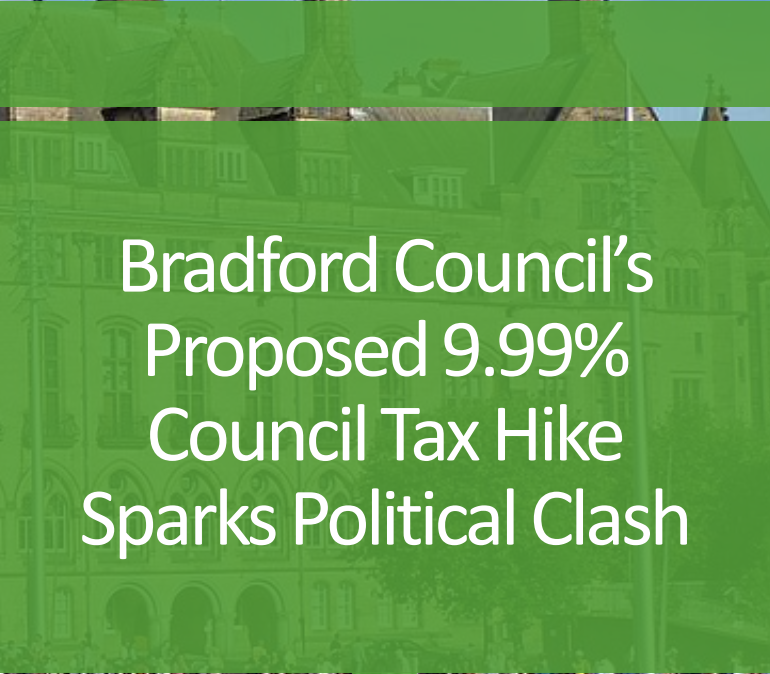
- **Years of funding cuts** have forced local authorities to **borrow more**.
- **Exceptional financing needed** to maintain services.
- Even with the increase, **Bradford's council tax remains below average**.

Public & Political Reactions

- **Supporters argue:**
 - Without the increase, **key local services may be at risk**.
 - The rise is necessary due to **past government funding cuts**.
- **Critics argue:**
 - The increase **places an unfair burden on residents**.
 - **Labour-run council mismanagement** has contributed to financial instability.

What's Next?

- **Final decision at council meeting next month**.
- Continued **political debate** over whether funding cuts or local mismanagement is to blame.
- Residents await the impact on **local services & household budgets**.



Bradford Council's Proposed 9.99% Council Tax Hike Sparks Political Clash

The image shows a large green speech bubble containing the title text, set against a background of a busy city square with people playing in a water fountain and historic buildings.

England

9 regions

Local Government Reorganisation & Council Debt

Government Stance on Debt Write-Off

- The government insists there is **“no proposal”** to write off council debt as part of local government reorganisation.
- Local authorities must **manage assets and liabilities locally**.
- Exceptional financial support may be considered for councils with **failure linked to capital practices**.

Thurrock's £1.5bn Debt & Greater Essex

- **Essex County Council** warns Thurrock's **£1.5bn debt** threatens the sustainability of any new authority.
- They continue to push for **government support**, citing the **exceptional level of debt**.
- Government seeks **local solutions** where possible but acknowledges challenges.

civil parishes

London boroughs

City of London

Surrey & Other Local Authorities

- Discussions continue on how to handle **Woking and Spelthorne's debts** within Surrey's reorganisation plans.
- **Surrey County Council** is developing a business case, aiming for the **best outcome for residents**.
- Despite **not being in the priority programme**, Surrey's local elections have been postponed due to reorganisation urgency.

General Reorganisation Approach

- The government warns councils **against competing bids** for unitary government.
- **Lack of consensus** between councils **will not block** reorganisation.
- Proposals will be **considered individually**, even without full local agreement.

England

Local Government
Reorganisation &
Council Debt

civil parishes

London
boroughs

City
of
London

Key Facts

- **Financial Reporting Council (FRC)** has launched an **investigation** into two former finance professionals.
- Concerns stem from "**potentially unlawful**" **lending** and **weak governance**.
- Woking issued a **Section 114 notice in 2023** and has debts of **£2.1bn**.
- **Scope of the Investigation:**
 - Compliance with governance, reporting, regulations, and professional standards.
 - Covers **six financial years up to March 2023**.

Audit & Commissioner Reports

- **Grant Thornton audit** highlighted:
 - **Weak financial controls** and **risk management**.
 - Excessive borrowing leading to **unprecedented debt levels**.
- **Government-appointed commissioners** confirmed Woking's debt is **twice the value of its realisable assets**.



Investigation into Woking Borough Council's Financial Collapse

Financial Assistance & Debt Write-Off Debate

- Woking is seeking **£171.1m in exceptional government financial support** for 2025-26.
 - **£162.8m** of this is for servicing the existing debt.
- Pressure on ministers to **write off the debt** to support **Surrey local government reorganisation**.

Leadership Response

- **Woking leader Ann-Marie Barker:**
 - Supports the **FRC investigation** for transparency and accountability.
 - Confirms **council commissioners** have engaged with relevant professional bodies.
- **FRC inquiry led by Elizabeth Barrett**, Executive Counsel and Director for Enforcement.



Investigation into Woking Borough Council's Financial Collapse

Key Details

- 555 job losses approved to help close a £66m budget shortfall.
- No services will be stopped, but resources will be prioritised for essential areas.
- Represents an 11% workforce reduction for Somerset Council.
- Part of an ongoing major restructuring following the merger of five councils in April 2023.

Breakdown of Job Cuts

- 171 roles already cut through voluntary redundancies (2023).
- 30 positions transferred to town & parish councils.
- Some roles are currently vacant, with staff encouraged to apply for alternative positions.



Somerset Council to Cut 555 Jobs Amid £66m Budget Gap

Expected Savings & Restructuring Goals

- Total savings of **£34m**, including:
 - **£1.5m reduction** in senior leadership costs.
- Aim to create "a radically different way of working" while maintaining long-term financial sustainability.

Reactions & Concerns

- **Council Leader Bill Revans:**
 - Describes the cuts as "difficult and heartbreaking".
- **Neil Guild (Unison, Somerset Branch):**
 - Warns of **staff uncertainty** and **reduced public services**.

Next Steps

- **Final number of compulsory redundancies** to be confirmed by end of March.
- Council restructuring aims to **increase efficiency with fewer staff** while maintaining service impact.



Somerset Council to Cut 555 Jobs Amid £66m Budget Gap



Legal Issues of Note

Overview of the Social Security (Infected Blood Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

Key Changes

- **Effective from 10 October 2024** under **SI 2024/964**.
- Amends:
 - **Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/213)**.
 - **Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for State Pension Credit) Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/214)**.
- **New Capital Disregard Introduced** for certain payments from the **estate of a deceased infected person**.

Scope of the Disregard

- Applies to payments derived from:
 - **An approved blood scheme.**
 - **The Scottish Infected Blood Support Scheme.**
- Ensures that these payments **do not count as capital for Housing Benefit eligibility**.

Overview of the Social Security (Infected Blood Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations 2024

How It Works

- **Housing Benefit will indefinitely disregard** any payments from an estate, if the money originates from:
 - **Approved infected blood support schemes.**
 - **Payments made to the estate of a person infected by contaminated blood products.**

Example Case

- **Stephen is claiming Housing Benefit.**
- **He receives £20,000 from his late uncle's estate.**
- **His uncle had received compensation from an approved blood scheme.**
- **Outcome:** The £20,000 is **disregarded indefinitely** when assessing Stephen's Housing Benefit eligibility.

Key Impact

- **Protects beneficiaries from financial penalties** due to inherited infected blood scheme payments.
- **Ensures affected families retain access to crucial benefits.**

Munemo v City of Wolverhampton Council (2025) – Key Case Summary

Background & Initial Decision

- **Ms M applied as homeless in 2020, was granted a secure tenancy by Wolverhampton.**
- **Later discovered she already had a Birmingham Council tenancy at the time.**
- **Wolverhampton obtained a possession order in 2022, leading to her eviction in 2023.**
- Ms M reapplied for homelessness assistance but was found **intentionally homeless** due to **fraudulently obtaining her Wolverhampton tenancy.**
- **Review upheld the decision, stating:**
 - She **provided false information** about never holding a council tenancy.
 - She **obtained the Wolverhampton tenancy by deception.**
 - The property was **reasonable for her to occupy** at the time.

Munemo v City of Wolverhampton Council (2025) – Key Case Summary

Main Appeal Issues

- **Could Ms M raise a new legal argument on appeal?**
 - **Yes**, if it addressed how the review officer applied the law, not the facts.
 - A review officer must consider legal implications **even if not explicitly argued in submissions**.
- **Was Ms M legally "intentionally homeless"?**
 - **No**, based on precedents from *Chishimba v Kensington & Chelsea RLBC (2013)* and *Gliddon (1984)*.
 - **A tenancy obtained by deception is never reasonable to occupy**, as the applicant was never eligible for it.
 - The review decision **failed to consider this legal principle**, focusing only on deception.

Final Judgment

- **Review decision quashed** for failing to assess whether it was legally reasonable for Ms M to continue occupying the property.
- Judge expressed sympathy for **the complexity of homelessness law**, expecting potential further appeal.

Bereaved Parents Challenge UK Government Over Benefit Cutoff Date

Key Issue: Discrimination Against Unmarried Parents

- **Jyotee Gunnoo & Andrew Byles** have taken their case to the **European Court of Human Rights**.
- They were **denied Widowed Parent's Allowance (WPA)** because they were **not married or in a civil partnership** when their partners died.
- **Supreme Court ruled in 2018** that this policy was illegal, but the government only allowed **backdated claims from 30 August 2018**.
- This means families like **Gunnoo's & Byles'** **missed out on thousands of pounds** in financial support.

Financial Impact on Families

- **Gunnoo's partner died in 2016** – she was excluded from WPA for two years, costing her **£16,000**.
- **Byles' partner passed away in 2017** – he lost out on **£14,000**.
- Both faced **serious financial struggles** while grieving & raising their children.

Bereaved Parents Challenge UK Government Over Benefit Cutoff Date

Why This Matters

- **Widowed Parent's Allowance** supported families after the loss of a partner.
- **2018 ruling confirmed denying benefits to unmarried parents was unlawful**, yet the government's response **excluded those widowed before 30 August 2018**.
- **Families argue this discriminates against bereaved children** based on their parents' marital status.

Statements from the Parents

- **Gunnoo:** "My son has been a victim of discrimination simply because his parents weren't married."
- **Byles:** "I had to take on debt just to provide for my children while grieving."

What's Next?

- **The European Court of Human Rights will decide whether to hear the case.**
- If successful, the ruling **could force the UK government to compensate all affected families.**
- Campaigners argue **all bereaved children deserve equal financial support, regardless of their parents' marital status**



Glasgow Man Guilty of £710,000 Leeds Council Grant Fraud

Key Details of the Fraud

- **Aftab Baig, 47**, defrauded **Leeds City Council** out of **£710,000** in pandemic business grants.
- Fraud involved **32 properties**, falsely claiming to represent **Greggs Head Office**.
- Money came from the **Small Business Grant Fund**, intended to support businesses with **rates relief during Covid-19**.

How the Fraud Was Carried Out

- **May 2020** – Baig contacted Leeds Council, **posing as a Greggs property manager**, requesting business rates numbers.
- Used **stolen details** to submit fraudulent grant applications.
- Funds were **paid into his catering business account**.

Investigation & Arrest

- **Leeds Council detected fraud & froze the account** before all funds could be withdrawn.
- **£90,000 remains unreturned**.
- **National Investigation Service (NATIS)** led the inquiry.
- **July 2020** – Baig **arrested in Glasgow** by Police Scotland.



Glasgow Man Guilty of £710,000 Leeds Council Grant Fraud

Legal Outcome

- **February 12, 2025 – Baig found guilty of three counts of fraud at Leeds Crown Court.**
- At his home, officers found:
 - **£16,000 in cash.**
 - **Forged remittance slips**, believed to be part of a plan to recover frozen funds.

Official Statements & Asset Recovery

- **Kelly Ward (Crown Prosecution Service):**
 - **"Baig exploited the pandemic to steal taxpayer money."**
 - **"Fraud cheats the public purse and deprives communities of essential funding."**
 - **"We will pursue asset recovery to reclaim stolen funds."**

What's Next?

- Proceedings to **recover any remaining fraudulent assets.**
- Further **measures to strengthen grant security** and prevent similar frauds.

Legal Victory for Carer Over Unfair DWP Repayment Demand

Key Case Details

- **Andrea Tucker**, an unpaid carer and part-time charity worker, **won a tribunal case** against the **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**.
- The DWP demanded she **repay £4,600** in alleged **Carer's Allowance overpayments**.
- The tribunal ruled in her favour, stating her **income averaging method** was **lawful** and she was **always entitled to the benefit**.
- Tucker's case was raised by **Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey** at **Prime Minister's Questions**.
- **Keir Starmer** **promised to investigate** the issue.

Carer's Allowance & the Earnings Rule

- **Earnings limit:** Carers cannot earn over **£151 per week** while claiming.
- The "**cliff-edge rule**" means exceeding the limit by **just £1 per week** could result in thousands of pounds in repayment demands.
- **137,000 carers** are currently repaying **over £251m in debts** due to these rigid rules.

Legal Victory for Carer Over Unfair DWP Repayment Demand

Tribunal & Expert Opinions

- **Judge's Verdict:**
 - Tucker **was entitled to Carer's Allowance.**
 - The **£4,600 overpayment does not stand.**
- **Carers UK CEO Helen Walker:**
 - Calls for **fairer rules & quicker notifications** to prevent carers from unknowingly breaching limits.

DWP & Government Response

- **DWP acknowledges** the issue was "**technical and administrative**" rather than fraud.
- The government has:
 - **Launched an independent review** into Carer's Allowance overpayments.
 - **Raised the earnings threshold**, helping **60,000 carers** stay in work without penalty.
- Future reforms expected to **address injustices** in the system.

Sheffield Council Sent Debt Collectors to Wrong Address

Incident Summary

- **Sheffield City Council** mistakenly sent **debt collectors** to the wrong address **seven years** after an outstanding bill.
- The error occurred due to **incorrect address records** following the tenant's move in **June 2016**.
- The complainant (**Ms X**) claimed she left due to **unresolved repairs**, while the council stated she **vacated without notice**.

Key Timeline

- **June 2016** – Ms X moved out; **Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)** notified the council of an address change.
- **Council wrote to new address** requesting confirmation, but Ms X **did not respond**.
- **Council records remained outdated**, and tax notices continued to be sent to the old address.

Sheffield Council Sent Debt Collectors to Wrong Address

Council's Actions

- **Council Tax Reminders & Legal Notices Sent to Old Address:**
 - **August & September 2016** – Reminder & summons issued.
 - **March 2017** – 2017/18 council tax bill also sent to the wrong address.
- **Debt collectors sent out years later due to outdated records.**

Ombudsman Investigation & Findings

- **Council failed to properly verify new address**, despite receiving information from DWP.
- Ms X **missed crucial correspondence** about debt, **preventing her from responding**.
- The council's actions resulted in **unfair enforcement proceedings**.

Next Steps & Lessons Learned

- **Sheffield Council expected to review procedures** for updating tenant records accurately.
- Highlights **importance of verifying address changes** before enforcement action.
- **Better communication & follow-ups needed** to prevent similar issues.



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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



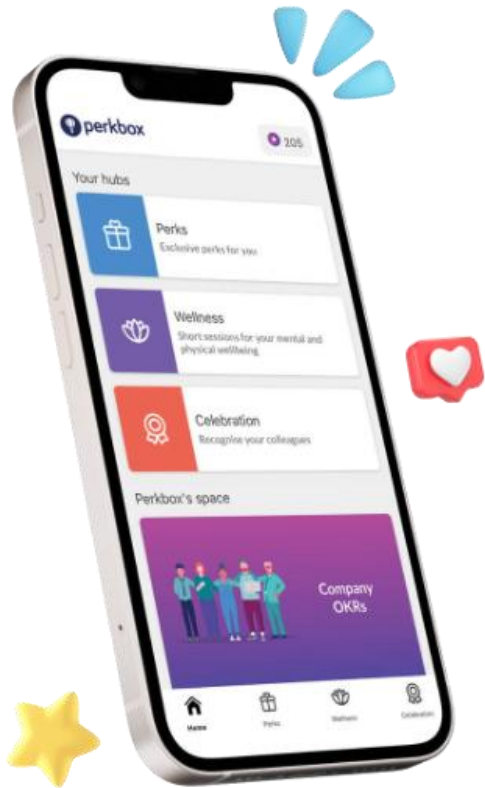
At BSS, we are dedicated to simplifying your contractor journey by providing you with efficient, tailored payroll solutions.

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?

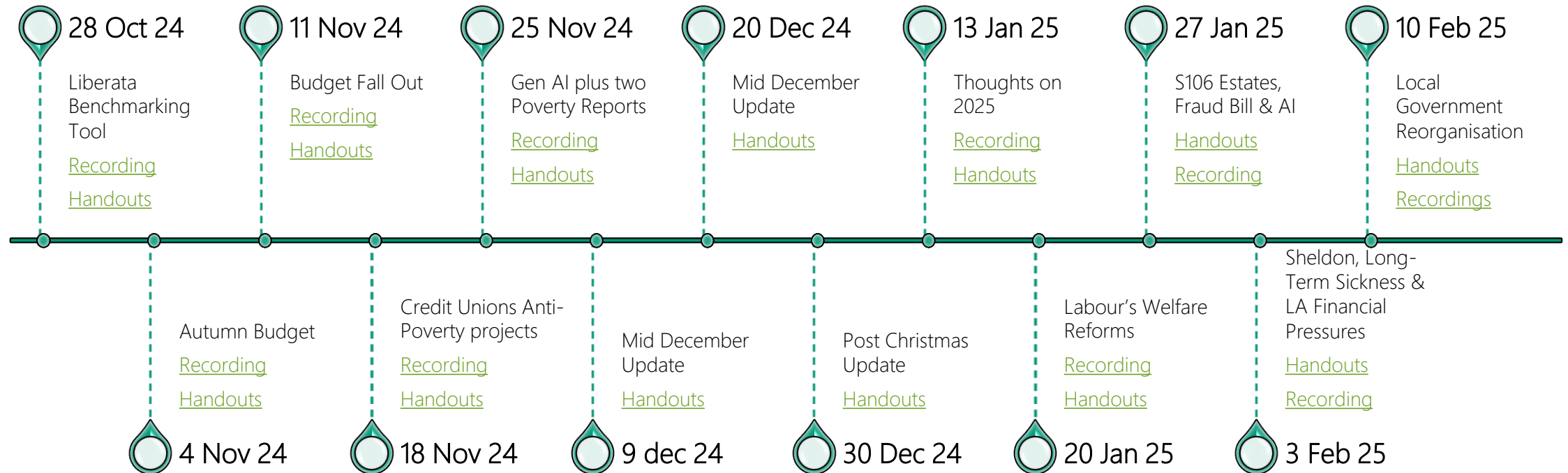
- | Robust Cost-Benefit Analysis
- | Comprehensive Impact Analysis of Council Tax Support & Arrears
- | Simple Scheme in Plain English
- | King's Award-Winning Online Application Forms

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Previous Recordings





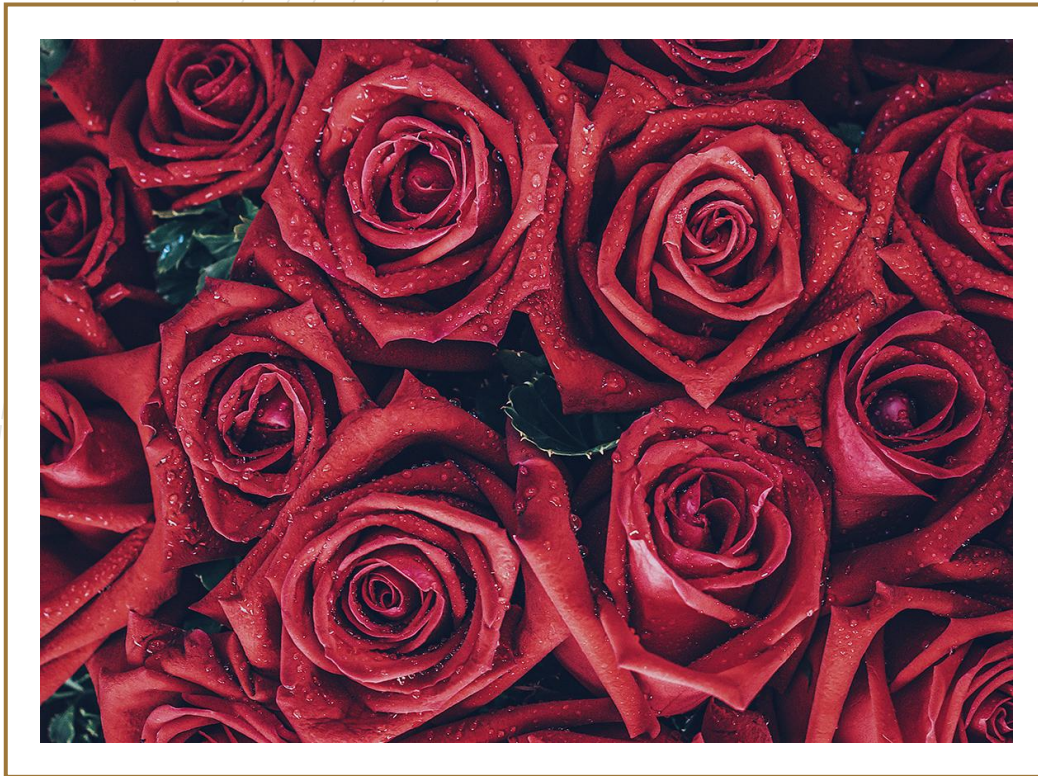
VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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).
- 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

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



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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.