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# Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

21 July 2025

Happy Pirate  
Day, Mateys





# Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

- Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Cambridge City Council
- Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager, Oxford City Council
- Kirsty Brooksmith, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- 
- Alex Clegg, Resolution Foundation
- Nicki Duckworth, EntitledTo, Marshalling
- Robert Fox, Swindon Council
- Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network
- Paul Howarth, Independent Consultant
- Gareth Morgan, CEO Ferret Information Systems
- Sean O’Sullivan, Visionary Network
- 
- Kevin Stewart, Visionary Network
- Julie Smethurst, Tameside Council
- Rachael Walker, The Campaign for Better Policy
- Bob Wagstaff, Visionary Network
- Christina Ward, CIPFA
- Liz Whitehead-Davis, Hexagon Housin

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



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# Discussion Points

## Headlines

**Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax**

- **Charity Campaign**  
Marie Curie and Hospice UK are calling for a **council tax exemption** for people with a **terminal diagnosis of less than 12 months to live**.
- **Current Progress**
  - Manchester City Council introduced the first known scheme in June 2023.
  - Campaigners argue for a **nationwide rollout** across councils and devolved governments.
- **Why it Matters**
  - Council tax can be **£150-£250/month**, a significant burden during terminal illness.
  - Exemption would offer **financial relief and peace of mind** during end-of-life care.

**£100 Million Innovation Squads – Purpose and Approach**

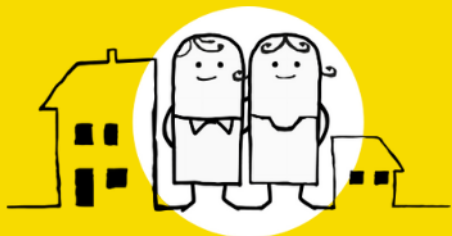
- **Programme Overview**  
Government investment of **£100 million** to establish **Innovation Squads in 10 pilot areas** across England.
- **Objective**  
Address **longstanding challenges** in local services, including early years support, special educational needs, and housing.
- **Delivery Model**
  - Multidisciplinary teams combining policy experts, technologists, and frontline practitioners.
  - Focus on **co-designing solutions** with local authorities and communities.
  - Uses a **“test, learn and grow”** approach to create rapid, scalable improvements.
- **Shift in Delivery Culture**  
Moves away from **top-down Whitehall reform**, embedding innovation at a **local service level**.

**What's at the Top of Your In-Tray?**

- **What is the most pressing issue in your current role?**  
What challenge or priority is dominating your workload at the moment?
- **What is top of your service's agenda?**  
What are the main priorities, pressures or opportunities shaping your service area right now?
- **What are the live challenges you are navigating?**  
Are there specific risks, tensions, or opportunities that are proving particularly difficult to manage?

**Purpose:** This session is about practical, current realities. We want to hear what you are dealing with right now; beyond the headlines and formal strategies.

# 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

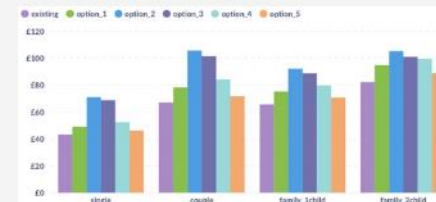
### Total annual cost options



### 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 Director
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[mg@malcolmgardner.com](mailto:mg@malcolmgardner.com)  
Book a meeting with Malcolm: [Book Time with MG](#)



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

# £100 Million Innovation Squads – Purpose and Approach

- **Programme Overview**  
Government investment of **£100 million** to establish **Innovation Squads** in **10 pilot areas** across England.
- **Objective**  
Address **longstanding challenges** in local services, including early years support, special educational needs, and housing.
- **Delivery Model**
  - Multidisciplinary teams combining policy experts, technologists, and frontline practitioners.
  - Focus on **co-designing solutions** with local authorities and communities.
  - Uses a **“test, learn and grow”** approach to create rapid, scalable improvements.
- **Shift in Delivery Culture**  
Moves away from **top-down Whitehall reform**, embedding innovation at a **local service level**.

# £100 Million Innovation Squads – Purpose and Approach

- **Early Local Outcomes**
  - **Sheffield:** Increased engagement with Best Start Family Hubs.
  - **Liverpool:** Introduced a **data platform** to improve management of temporary accommodation.
- **Administrative Benefits**
  - **More adaptive services** through rapid prototyping and frontline feedback.
  - Encourages **cross-sector collaboration** between central government and local services.
  - Promotes **evidence-led practice**, reducing reliance on rigid national frameworks.
- **Implementation Considerations**
  - Challenge to ensure **equitable impact** across all pilot areas.
  - Risk of **scaling difficulties** from local pilots to national systems.
  - **Resource demands** in deploying and maintaining specialist teams.

# £100 Million Innovation Squads – Purpose and Approach

## Metric

Total investment

Number of pilot areas

Focus sectors

Early outcomes

Delivery model

Programme ethos

## Detail

£100 million

10 local authority areas

Early years, SEND, housing

Family hub uptake,  
accommodation data  
systems

Multidisciplinary innovation  
squads

“Test, learn and grow”

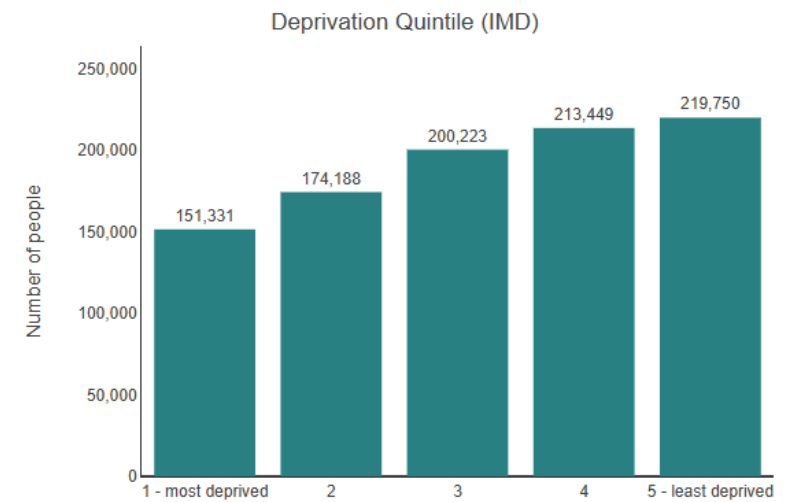
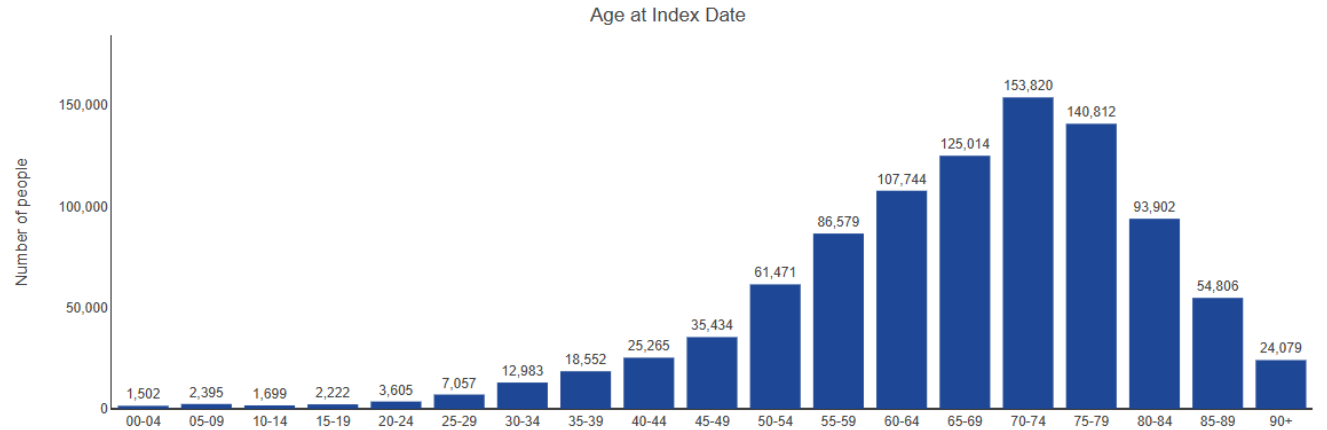
# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax

- **Charity Campaign**  
**Marie Curie** and **Hospice UK** are calling for a **council tax exemption** for people with a **terminal diagnosis of less than 12 months to live**.
- **Current Progress**
  - **Manchester City Council** introduced the **first known scheme** in June 2025.
  - Campaigners argue for a **nationwide rollout** across councils and devolved governments.
- **Why It Matters**
  - Council tax can be **£150–£250/month**, a significant burden during terminal illness.
  - Exemption would offer **financial relief** and **peace of mind** during end-of-life care.

# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax

- **Manchester Model**
  - Requires **clinician confirmation** of life expectancy under 12 months.
  - Exemption continues until **end of financial year after death**, or for a few months if death occurs near year-end.
  - Aims to remove **one of the largest household bills** during a difficult time.
- **Benefits to Residents**
  - Reduces risk of **arrears and enforcement action**.
  - Provides **emotional reassurance**, enabling terminally ill people to spend resources on comfort and family.
- **Local Authority View**
  - **LGA and devolved governments** say some **discretionary relief** exists already.
  - Councils are monitoring Manchester's approach as a **potential model for wider adoption**.
- **Cost Considerations**
  - Charities highlight **minimal impact on public finances** but **substantial benefits for affected households**.

# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax



# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax

## Key Findings – Poverty at End of Life (2023)

- **Scale of Issue**  
→ **111,000 people died in poverty in 2023** – 18% of all deaths, up from 93,000 (16%) in 2019.
- **Age Breakdown**  
→ **Working-age (20-64)**: 28% in poverty at end of life (vs 22% of same-age population).  
→ **Pensioners (65+)**: 16% in poverty at end of life (vs 13% of peers), largest increase since 2019.
- **Subgroup Risks**  
→ **Women, minority ethnic groups, non-cancer diagnoses, and renters face higher risks.**  
→ **Regional disparities**: highest end-of-life poverty in the **North East, North West, and parts of London.**
- **Pathways into Poverty**  
→ Most working-age deaths involve prior poverty spells; **75% of pensioners avoid poverty pre-death but risks are rising.**

# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax

- **Administrative Pressures**
  - Terminally ill people experience **rapid income shocks** due to employment exit and rising care costs.
  - **Social security** often fails to offset income loss, especially for those below pension age.
- **Local Variation**
  - **Targeted support** may be required in areas with highest risk (e.g., **Middlesbrough, Manchester, Birmingham**).
- **Policy Gaps**
  - Current welfare systems do not **adequately compensate for the financial impact of terminal illness**.
  - Evidence supports **early pension access** or **council tax exemptions** for the terminally ill.
- **Monitoring Need**
  - **Ongoing tracking of poverty trajectories** is essential to guide interventions and monitor system fairness.

# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax

## Category

Total deaths in poverty

Working-age poverty risk

Pension-age poverty risk

Regional hotspots

Key vulnerable groups

Suggested policy lever

## Statistic

111,000 (18%) in 2023

28% at end of life vs 22%  
peers

16% at end of life vs 13%  
peers

North East, North West,  
London

Women, ethnic minorities,  
renters

Early pension access, council  
tax relief

# Calls to Exempt Terminally Ill People from Council Tax

## Feature

Eligibility

Who benefits

Duration of exemption

Administrative process

Projected cost to councils

Charities campaigning

## Details

Clinician-confirmed prognosis of less than 12 months

Terminally ill individual and their household

Until end of financial year after death

Letter from clinician; council tax exemption granted

Minimal due to low claimant numbers

Marie Curie and Hospice UK



## What's at the Top of Your In- Tray?

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**Purpose:** This session is about practical, current realities. We want to hear what you are dealing with right now; beyond the headlines and formal strategies.



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

Welcome to a  
new era of  
council tax  
deduction  
schemes

Bristol City  
Council Case  
Study



In  
Partnership  
with

**LA Directories  
Limited**

“  
**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](mailto:services.enquiries@ladirectories.com)

Peter Davis, Marketing & Account Management

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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.



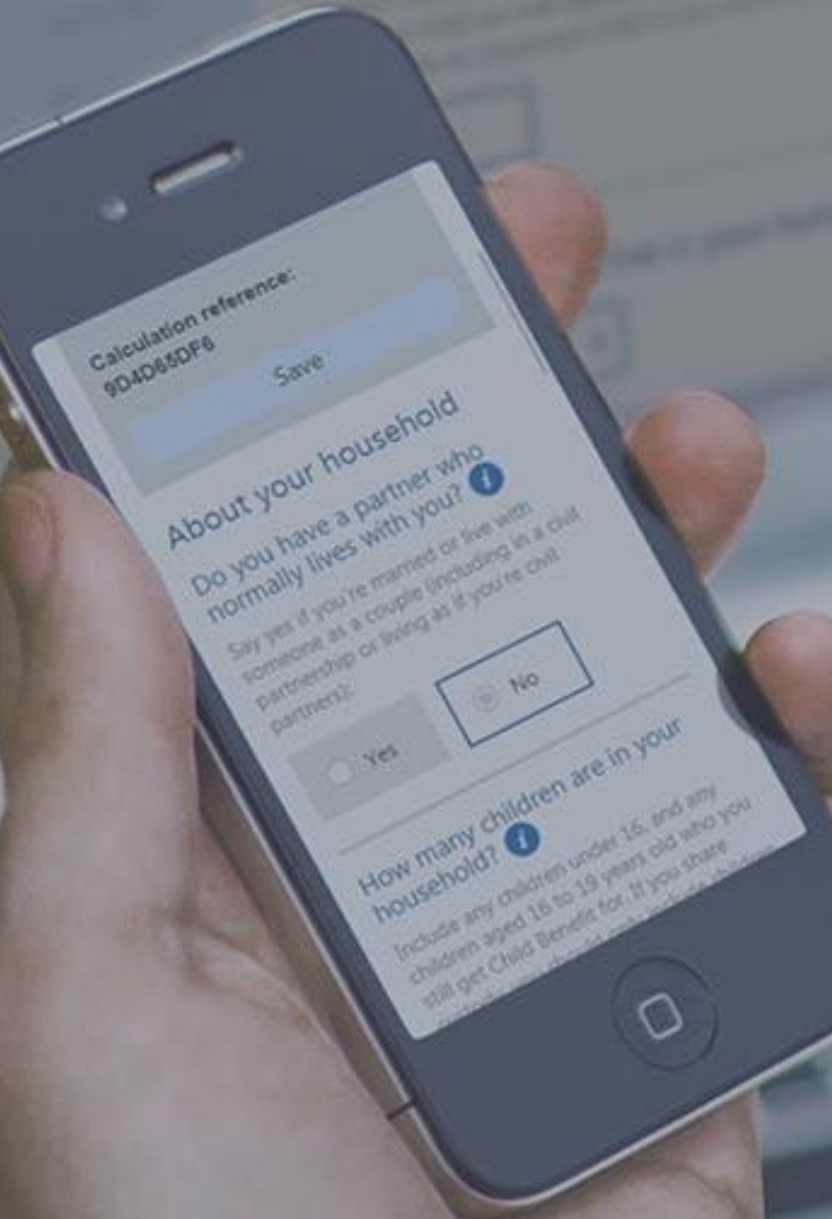
### our customers:

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.

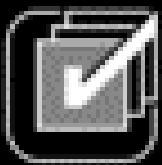
The InBest benefits calculator has been integrated into Ascendant's apply4.online support application, to make it easier for people who are experiencing financial difficulties to find out what support is available to them.

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

## Benefit Thieves

It's not if we catch you, it's when

TARGETING  BENEFIT THIEVES

# DWP Fraud Crackdown – Latest Data and Progress

- **Reduction in Fraud and Error**  
The **DWP fraud and error rate** fell to **3.3%** of total benefit expenditure in **2024–25**, down from **3.6%** in the previous year.
- **Universal Credit Overpayments Improve**  
Overpayments on **Universal Credit** reduced by **over a fifth year-on-year**, according to the **DWP Permanent Secretary**.
- **Continued Focus on Accuracy**
  - DWP reports improved **payment accuracy** and stronger use of **data matching and detection tools**.
  - The crackdown aims to **return fraud and error to pre-COVID levels**.
- **National Audit Office (NAO) Qualification**  
The NAO **qualified the DWP accounts again** due to the continued scale of fraud, claimant error, and official error in the system.

**Benefit Thieves**  
It's not if we catch you, it's when

**TARGETING**  **BENEFIT THIEVES**

# DWP Fraud Crackdown – Latest Data and Progress

- **Intensified Compliance Measures**
  - DWP has recruited **6,000 new staff** to expand fraud checks and case reviews.
  - **Increased debt recovery activity** targeting overpayments, including repayment demands on claimants.
- **Financial Impact (2024–25)**
  - **£9.5 billion overpaid** (3.3% of expenditure).
  - **£1.2 billion underpaid** (0.4% of expenditure), broadly unchanged from the previous year.
- **Ongoing Risks and Pressures**
  - Continued **scrutiny from the NAO** over financial control.
  - Claimant groups and charities warn of **rising hardship risks** linked to **aggressive repayment enforcement**.
- **Policy Focus**
  - Targeted **data use** to prevent fraud upfront.
  - **Enhanced reviews** of Universal Credit claims, with more robust checks at application and in-payment stages.

**Benefit Thieves**  
It's not if we catch you, it's when

**TARGETING  BENEFIT THIEVES**

# DWP Fraud Crackdown – Latest Data and Progress

Indicator	Value
Fraud and error rate	3.3% (down from 3.6%)
Total overpayments	£9.5 billion
Total underpayments	£1.2 billion
Universal Credit overpayment trend	Down over 20% year-on-year
NAO audit opinion	Qualified due to fraud and error
New compliance staffing	6,000 new anti-fraud officers

# Universal Credit – New Data on Work Status and Nationality

- **Record Caseload**  
As of mid-2025, there are **7.9 million Universal Credit claimants** in the UK.
- **Work Requirement Breakdown**
  - **3.6 million (46%)** have **no work requirements** (mainly due to sickness, disability or caring responsibilities).
  - **2.2 million** are **in work** but receiving UC due to low income.
  - **1.6 million** are **actively seeking work**.
  - **0.5 million** are **preparing for work** (e.g. with health-related restrictions).
- **Non-UK Citizens on Universal Credit**
  - **1.26 million** claimants have **non-UK immigration status**, representing **16% of claimants**.
  - Largest group: **250,000+ EU citizens with settled status**.
  - Other groups include those with **indefinite leave to remain, refugees**, and other long-term residents.

# Universal Credit – New Data on Work Status and Nationality

- **Political Controversy**
  - Opposition MPs and Reform UK criticise the scale of claims by non-UK nationals.
  - Government proposals include **tightening benefit eligibility** and extending contribution periods before access.
- **Employment Rates Among Non-UK Claimants**
  - **41% of non-UK claimants are in work**, higher than the **34% average** for all UC claimants.
- **Administrative Challenges**
  - System originally designed for short-term unemployment now supports growing numbers with **long-term sickness** and **disability**.
  - Policy reforms are shifting **work incentives**, particularly by reducing incapacity elements for new claimants.
- **Future Welfare Reforms**
  - Proposed shift towards **contribution-based eligibility**.
  - **Tighter access rules for migrants**, including a **10-year qualifying period** for settlement support.
  - Debate over the balance between **fairness, sustainability, and support for working low-income families**.

## Universal Credit – New Data on Work Status and Nationality

Category	Number / % of Claimants
Total Universal Credit claimants	7.9 million
No work requirements	3.6 million (46%)
In work	2.2 million (28%)
Searching for work	1.6 million (20%)
Non-UK claimants	1.26 million (16%)
Non-UK claimants in work	41%
Planned qualifying period change	5 → 10 years for settlement access



# HM Revenue & Customs

## Public Accounts Committee Criticism of HMRC – Key Findings

- **Limited Visibility on Wealthiest Taxpayers**
  - HMRC cannot identify how many UK billionaires pay tax or how much they contribute.
  - Relies on broad 'wealthy' category (income > £200k or assets > £2m), making it difficult to distinguish billionaires from millionaires.
- **Weak Use of External Data**
  - Fails to utilise sources like the Sunday Times Rich List to cross-check tax contributions of the ultra-wealthy.
- **Administrative Impact**
  - Inability to profile high-value taxpayers risks inefficient resource allocation.
  - Lack of segmentation creates operational blind spots, weakening HMRC's risk-based compliance approach.



# HM Revenue & Customs

## Public Accounts Committee Criticism of HMRC – Key Findings

- **Ineffective Investigations**
  - Nearly half (46%) of investigations yield no tax return, with average duration exceeding three years.
  - Yield from wealthy taxpayers increased but may mask higher levels of undetected non-compliance.
- **Falling Enforcement Actions**
  - Sharp fall in penalties issued (from 1,747 to 456 year-on-year) and only 25 prosecutions last year.
  - No penalties issued against tax advisers or enablers, reducing deterrence effect.
- **Impact on Public Services**
  - Failure to recover taxes owed by the wealthiest reduces funding for public services.
  - Lengthy casework ties up compliance resources, limiting capacity for wider enforcement activities.



# HM Revenue & Customs

## Public Accounts Committee Criticism of HMRC – Key Findings

Metric	2019–20	2023–24	Target
Compliance yield from wealthy	£2.2 bn	£5.2 bn	£7.5 bn/year by 2029–30
High-net-worth taxpayers managed	700,000	850,000	—
Penalties issued	—	456	—
Prosecutions	—	25	—
Average case duration	—	40 months	—
Offshore assets held (2019 figure)	£849 bn	—	—



# HM Treasury

## Treasury Cancels UK Green Taxonomy

- **Policy Decision**  
The Treasury has **abandoned plans** to introduce a UK Green Taxonomy, intended to standardise definitions of ‘green’ investments and reduce greenwashing.
- **Consultation Outcome**
  - Consultation (Nov 2024–Feb 2025) received **150 responses**.
  - **45% supported** the taxonomy; **55% raised concerns** over complexity, cost, and compatibility with existing frameworks.
- **Government Rationale**  
The Treasury concluded the taxonomy would not be the **most effective route** to deliver net-zero objectives and would **distract from higher-priority policies**.
- **Key Administrative Impact**  
Avoids adding **new regulatory burdens**, especially for businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions.



# HM Treasury

## Treasury Cancels UK Green Taxonomy

- **Shift in Focus**  
The government will instead focus on:
  - **UK Sustainability Reporting Standards (UK SRS)**
  - **Mandatory corporate transition plans**
  - **Sector-specific decarbonisation roadmaps**
- **Complementary Measures**  
Regulators (FCA, CMA, ASA) will continue to address greenwashing through **labelling and advertising rules**.
- **Administrative Benefits**
  - **Simplified compliance** by aligning with global reporting standards (e.g. ISSB).
  - Redirects resources to **practical transition planning** rather than classification systems.
  - Provides **greater clarity** for businesses on sustainability expectations.
- **Risks to Consider**
  - Lack of taxonomy could lead to **inconsistent sustainability claims**.
  - Success depends on **effective enforcement** of reporting and transition plans.



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# HM Treasury

## Treasury Cancels UK Green Taxonomy

Metric	Detail
Consultation period	Nov 2024 – Feb 2025
Total responses	150
Support vs concerns	45% support, 55% mixed/negative
Official decision announced	15 July 2025
Main replacement focus	Reporting standards, transition plans
Key regulators acting on greenwashing	FCA, CMA, ASA



National Audit Office

# NAO Disclaims Opinion on Whole of Government Accounts

- **Key Issue**  
The National Audit Office (NAO) has **disclaimed its opinion** on the **2023–24 Whole of Government Accounts (WGA)** for the **second consecutive year**.
- **Primary Cause**  
**Severe delays in local authority audits** in England.
  - Only **4%** of councils submitted **audited accounts**.
  - **55%** submitted **unaudited data**.
  - **41%** submitted **no data at all**.
- **Consequences**  
Large gaps in financial data covering **property, pensions, and staffing costs**, undermining the reliability of national accounts.



National Audit Office

# NAO Disclaims Opinion on Whole of Government Accounts

- **Loss of Oversight**  
Parliament, the Office for Budget Responsibility, and the public are **unable to scrutinise national finances effectively**.
- **Operational Impact**
  - Missing data affects forecasting and fiscal planning.
  - Potential for **higher borrowing costs** for councils due to reduced financial transparency.
- **Government Response**
  - **Statutory deadlines** for local audits introduced.
  - Creation of a **new Local Audit Office** to improve capacity.
  - **Earlier publication deadlines** reinstated (May–July cycle).
- **Ongoing Risk**  
Full recovery of the local audit system is expected to take **several years**, with further **disclaimed WGAs likely** in the interim.



National Audit Office

# NAO Disclaims Opinion on Whole of Government Accounts

Metric	2022–23	2023–24
Councils submitting audited data	10%	4%
Councils submitting unaudited data	46%	55%
Councils submitting no data	44%	41%
Major unverified amounts	£134bn property, £105bn pensions, £26bn staff costs	
Local audit deadline	28 February 2025	
WGA publication schedule	Returned to pre-pandemic May–July timeline	

# Adult Social Care Overspend at Highest Level in a Decade

- **Significant Overspend**  
Councils in England overspent on adult social care by approximately **£774 million** in 2024–25, marking the **largest overspend in ten years**.
- **Cuts to Prevention Services**  
Preventative care spending fell by over **10%**, with total prevention budgets reduced to around **£1.3 billion**, the lowest since 2021–22.
- **Rising Demand Pressures**
  - **75%** of adult social care directors reported an increase in complex cases.
  - Increased care needs often stem from **reduced NHS Continuing Healthcare support**, placing more demand on local services.
- **Warnings from Sector Leaders**  
Directors and sector bodies have raised concerns that underfunded adult social care risks further strain on NHS services and poorer outcomes for individuals.

# Adult Social Care Overspend at Highest Level in a Decade

- **Shift from Prevention to Crisis Response**  
Overspending on statutory duties limits councils' ability to fund early intervention, increasing long-term costs and demand pressures.
- **Impact on NHS Reform Goals**  
Under-resourced social care undermines national ambitions to **shift healthcare towards prevention and community-based models**.
- **Workforce and Service Sustainability Concerns**  
Increased reliance on social care staff to take on **NHS-type tasks** without additional funding raises risks to service quality and workforce stability.
- **Calls for Reform**  
Sector leaders have called for:
  - **Sustainable funding models**
  - **Strengthened preventative services**
  - Consideration of a **National Care Service** or stronger national oversight mechanisms.

# Adult Social Care Overspend at Highest Level in a Decade

Indicator	Value
Adult social care overspend	£774 million
Reduction in prevention budgets	Over 10% cut
Total prevention spend	£1.3 billion
Directors reporting higher complexity	75%
Prevention as share of social care spend	5.6%
Lowest prevention spend since	2021–22

# Temporary Accommodation Demand and Costs Continue to Rise

- **Record Levels of Temporary Accommodation**  
By September 2024, **126,040 households** were living in temporary accommodation—an increase of **15.7%** on the previous year.
- **Escalating Council Spending**  
Councils spent nearly **£2.3 billion** on temporary accommodation in 2023–24.
- **Significant Local Funding Gaps**  
Only **£399.8 million** was funded through central government grants, leaving councils to fund a **£1.06 billion shortfall** from local resources.
- **Reduction in Prevention Flexibility**  
Recent grant rule changes have reduced councils’ ability to redirect prevention funding to meet immediate accommodation pressures.

# Temporary Accommodation Demand and Costs Continue to Rise

- **Growing Funding Gap**  
A **£76 million gap** has opened due to changes in the Homelessness Prevention Grant, adding pressure to already stretched council budgets.
- **Increased Reliance on Reserves**  
Councils are drawing down on reserves and reallocating funds from other services to meet temporary accommodation costs.
- **Service Delivery Challenges**
  - Rising use of **out-of-area placements** disrupts continuity of care and community links.
  - Increasing numbers in temporary accommodation threaten progress on prevention targets and housing stability.
- **Sustainability Concerns**  
The current funding and housing supply environment presents serious risks to **long-term service sustainability** and **financial resilience**.

# Temporary Accommodation Demand and Costs Continue to Rise

Indicator	Value
Adult social care overspend	£774 million
Reduction in prevention budgets	Over 10% cut
Total prevention spend	£1.3 billion
Directors reporting higher complexity	75%
Prevention as share of social care spend	5.6%
Lowest prevention spend since	2021–22

# Proposal to Pause Council Tax Bills

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Proposal under discussion to **pause council tax bills for three months.**

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**Driven by public petitions**, citing concerns about poor local service delivery (e.g. bins, potholes, street cleaning).

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Petition argues **households should not pay** when key services are not delivered.

---

Gaining traction following **Labour government discussions** on council tax reform.

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Reached thresholds for **government response at 10,000 signatures** and eligible for **parliamentary debate at 100,000 signatures.**

# Proposal to Pause Council Tax Bills

---

Cashflow pressures for councils, with upfront funding gaps during the pause period.

---

Increased administrative complexity if local authorities must implement, track, and manage three-month payment pauses.

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Potential rise in enforcement and arrears management costs after pause period ends.

---

Risk of public confusion and communication burden on councils to explain eligibility, implementation, and timelines.

---

Scope for local service disruption if council budgets are destabilised mid-financial year.

# Proposal to Pause Council Tax Bills

---

Typical council tax bills are paid in **10 monthly instalments**, with an option to spread over 12 months.

---

Councils can already offer **flexibility** for payment difficulties, but **mandatory pauses** would create new obligations.

---

Petitions have already **surpassed 10,000 signatures**, approaching debate threshold.

---

Wider public frustration focused on **perceived poor service standards** linked to council tax contributions.

# Bereavement Benefits Remedial Order 2023 – Key Facts

The 2023 Remedial Order extended eligibility for:

- Bereavement Support Payment (BSP) and
- Widowed Parent's Allowance (WPA)
- to cohabiting parents with dependent children where the death occurred from 30 August 2018.

Backdating rules:

- Claims made by **8 February 2024** eligible for **full backdating**.
- Claims made after this date receive **limited backdating** only.

Aim: to correct previous discrimination against unmarried, cohabiting bereaved parents.

# Bereavement Benefits Remedial Order 2023 – Key Facts

## Significant increase in claims volume within a short timeframe:

- Over **4,800 BSP** and **3,400 WPA** claims processed with full backdating.
- Early months saw sharp peaks, e.g., **1,690 BSP** claims in February 2023.

## Operational impacts:

- Additional workload for DWP processing backdated claims.
- Required **targeted communication campaigns** and **system updates**.
- **Payment system adaptations** to handle large retrospective payments.
- Highlights the administrative challenge of implementing **retrospective policy changes**.

# Bereavement Benefits Remedial Order 2023 – Key Facts

Benefit Type	Full Backdated Claims	Partial Claims (post-deadline)
BSP	4,830	130
WPA	3,400	Not applicable

- **Total claims processed: over 8,200.**
- **Peak BSP month:** February 2023 with **1,690 claims.**
- **Peak WPA month:** March 2023 with **290 claims.**
- **Source:** Department for Work and Pensions (July 2025).

# Universal Credit – Headline Trends (June 2025)

- **Total claimants:** 6.65 million people on Universal Credit (UC), with a steady increase from early 2023.
- **Breakdown:**
  - **In employment:** 2.3 million (35%)
  - **Searching for work:** 1.6 million (24%)
  - **No work requirements:** 2.6 million (41%) – including those ill, disabled, or carers.
- **Regional disparities:**
  - Highest claimant rates in North East and North West.
  - London continues to see significant in-work claimant numbers.
- **Post-pandemic trend:** sustained high numbers in ‘no work requirement’ group reflecting rising long-term sickness and caring responsibilities.

# Universal Credit – Headline Trends (June 2025)

- **Caseload complexity:**
  - Growing proportion of UC caseload is long-term with no work expectations, increasing demand for **health-related support** and **complex case management**.
- **In-work claimant growth:**
  - Continued pressure on **in-work conditionality** services and **work coach resources**.
- **Regional administration:**
  - Disparities necessitate **area-specific planning**, especially in high-claimant regions.
- **IT and systems impact:**
  - Ongoing demand to maintain **real-time earnings data processing** and adapt systems to evolving conditionality rules.

# A11/2024

## Housing Benefit Uprating 2025–26 – Key Changes

- **Effective from April 2025**, standard benefit rates increased in line with the September 2024 Consumer Prices Index (CPI) of **6.7%**.
- **Applicable amounts and premiums** uprated for:
  - Personal allowances
  - Dependent children
  - Carers, disabled children, and pensioners
- **Non-dependant deductions** increased, affecting the amount of Housing Benefit payable where other adults live in the household.
- **Benefit cap levels** remain unchanged in 2025–26.
- **Temporary absence rules**, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and **Earnings Disregards** unchanged

# A11/2024

## Housing Benefit Uprating 2025–26 – Key Changes

- **Annual systems update** required by all councils, with revised uprated figures to be applied from **week commencing 7 April 2025**.
- **Software providers' updates essential**, with risk of manual adjustments where automated processes are delayed.
- **Increased communications workload** to update claimants, especially those impacted by rising non-dependant deductions.
- **No change to benefit cap and LHA rates** may lead to more **discretionary housing payment (DHP)** requests.
- Uprating affects calculations across **working-age and pension-age Housing Benefit claims**, necessitating careful verification and audit checks.

# A11/2024

## Housing Benefit Uprating 2025–26 – Key Changes

- Standard Personal Allowances (weekly rates):
  - Single claimant (aged 25+): £96.60 (up from £90.50)
  - Couple (both aged 18+): £151.20 (up from £141.70)
  - Dependent child: £78.20 (up from £73.30)
- Key Premiums:
  - Disability Premium (single): £41.70
  - Carer Premium: £45.60
  - Enhanced Disability Premium (child): £37.10

# A11/2024

## Housing Benefit Uprating 2025–26 – Key Changes

- Non-Dependant Deductions (weekly):
  - Highest deduction: £135.35 (up from £126.80)
  - Lowest (other cases): £19.70 (up from £18.45)
- Pension Credit Applicable Amount (single):
  - £252.80 per week (up from £237.80)
- Benefit Cap: No change
  - £23,000 (London), £20,000 (rest of UK)

All figures rounded to nearest 5p for presentation clarity.

## Rising Rental Fraud Targeting Tenants

- Significant increase in rental scams targeting prospective tenants via social media platforms, especially Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree.
- Scammers advertise non-existent or unavailable properties, then request advance rent and deposits before disappearing.
- Victims often lose **£1,000 to £3,000** per case, with deposits and first-month rent stolen.
- Reported cases to Action Fraud have **doubled in a year**, reflecting growing demand and pressures in the private rental market.
- Law enforcement faces challenges tracking fraudsters, who frequently operate anonymously or from abroad.

## Rising Rental Fraud Targeting Tenants

- **Increased demand for housing advice services**, particularly from scam victims requiring emergency accommodation or help accessing legitimate rentals.
- **Greater pressure on homelessness prevention teams** as tenants defrauded of deposits struggle to secure housing.
- **Need for strengthened public communications** by councils warning residents of rental fraud risks.
- Possible knock-on impact on **local enforcement resources** in Trading Standards and community safety teams.
- **Rising fraud may fuel demand for social housing**, prolonging already extended waiting lists.

# Rising Rental Fraud Targeting Tenants

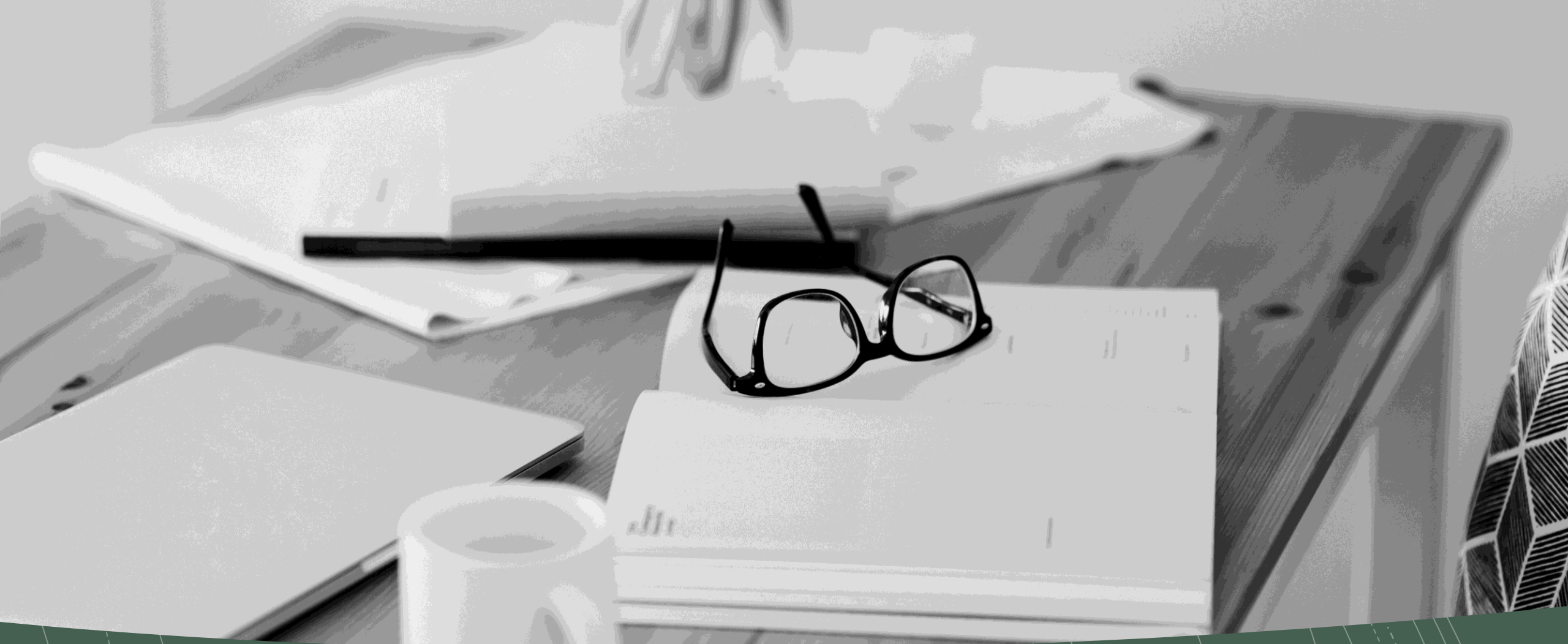
- **£1,200** – Typical amount lost per victim, including deposits and advance rent.
- **100%+ increase** – Rental scam reports to Action Fraud have doubled in 12 months.
- **Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree** – Most commonly used platforms by fraudsters.
- **Case examples:**
  - Victims losing **£1,000–£3,000** upfront before realising the property does not exist.
  - Multiple renters scammed using the same fake advert for high-demand rental areas.
- **Law enforcement challenges:**
  - Majority of cases unresolved due to **anonymous profiles** and **overseas fraud rings**.
  - Increasing use of **fake landlord credentials** and **falsified tenancy agreements**.

## Quote of the Week

"You can do anything, but not everything,..." David Allen

David Allen is an engineering expert and co-founder of Boulies Chairs, a UK-based company known for blending ergonomic design with professional aesthetics in gaming and office seating. Inspired by long hours at his desk and a lack of suitable options, he helped launch Boulies in 2015 to create chairs that prioritize comfort, support, and understated style.





## Additional Ideas and Analysis



# 114 & Reform Watch

- Councils reporting their struggling budgets, impacts of local government reform and impact of political change

- **Improved Financial Position**

Nottingham City Council projects a **balanced budget** and reduced reliance on government bailout funding.

- **Reduced Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) Usage**

Of **£41 million** EFS available in 2024–25, only **£7.7 million** used due to in-year savings delivery.

- **Core Budget Performance**

- **Net spending:** £323.5 million

- **Total funding envelope:** £356.8 million

- **Underspend:** £33.3 million below total funding.

- **Council Outlook**

Leadership describes the figures as “**very encouraging**”, supporting plans to achieve **financial independence by 2027–28**.



# Nottingham Council – Progress Towards Financial Stability

- **Reduced Reliance on Central Support**

Lower use of EFS strengthens **local financial autonomy** and reduces exposure to external interventions.

- **Positive Budget Management**

In-year savings and spending controls indicate improved **budget discipline** and effective financial oversight.

- **Ongoing Financial Management Priorities**

- Continued focus on **service efficiencies**.
- Importance of **maintaining reserves** and managing demand-led services.
- **Regular performance monitoring** to safeguard service delivery during transition to self-sufficiency.

- **Long-Term Goal**

Aim to **fully exit reliance on EFS by 2027–28**, ensuring a **sustainable and balanced budget**.



# Nottingham Council – Progress Towards Financial Stability



## Key Financial Indicators 2024–25

1. Exceptional Financial Support: £41 million allocated, £7.7 million used
2. Net Spending: £323.5 million
3. Total Funding Envelope: £356.8 million
4. In-Year Surplus: £33.3 million
5. Target for Financial Independence: 2027–28

# Nottingham Council – Progress Towards Financial Stability

- **Commissioners Appointed**

The Government has appointed **four commissioners** to oversee Croydon Council from **July 2025 to July 2027** (subject to a 12-month review), due to **failures in governance, leadership, and financial management**.

- **Commissioner Team**

- **Lead Commissioner:** Gerard Curran
- **Supporting Commissioners:** Debra Warren, Jackie Belton, Abi Brown OBE


- **Scope of Powers**

Commissioners will have powers over:

- **Senior officer appointments and dismissals**
- **Governance arrangements**
- **Budget oversight and financial decision-making**

- **Council Response**

Croydon's Executive Mayor opposed the intervention, citing recent local improvements and arguing it was **“wrong and inconsistent”**.



# Government Intervention at Croydon Council

- **Financial Distress**

- **£1.4 billion debt** accumulated
- **£553 million** in government **exceptional financial support** since 2021
- **£30 million overspend** in 2023–24 including a **£136 million bailout**

- **Reasons for Intervention**


A **final assurance report** concluded Croydon failed its **Best Value duty**, with finances **deteriorating rapidly**.

- **Governance Impact**

- Elected members remain but **lose direct control** over key financial and governance decisions.
- Commissioners will enforce the council's **Stabilisation Plan**.
- Croydon Council will fund the costs of the intervention.

- **Operational Risks**

Potential for **slower decision-making**, reduced local autonomy, and **additional financial pressures** from commissioner oversight.



# Government Intervention at Croydon Council



## Financial Overview Highlights

1. Indicator and detail
2. Total debt: £1.4 billion
3. Exceptional financial support: £553 million since 2021
4. Latest overspend for 2023–24: £30 million
5. Latest bailout for 2024–25: £136 million
6. Intervention period: 2 years (mid-2025 to mid-2027)
7. Number of commissioners appointed: 4

# Government Intervention at Croydon Council

- **Extension of Government Oversight**

The Government has **extended intervention at Thurrock Council until 30 April 2028**, continuing oversight due to concerns over governance, leadership, and financial management.

- **Commissioners Reappointed**

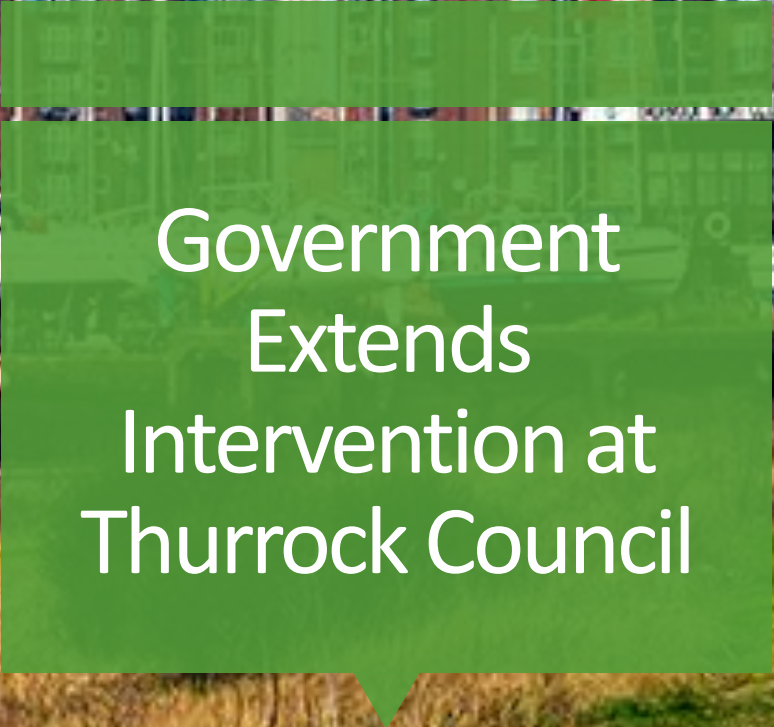
- **Lead Commissioner:** Gavin Jones CBE
- **Supporting Commissioners:** Denise Murray and Dr Dave Smith

- **Scope of Intervention**

- Commissioners will oversee:
  - **Financial recovery and budget control**
  - **Governance and transparency improvements**
  - **Delivery of a revised corporate plan**
  - **Organisational capacity and service redesign**

- **Reason for Extension**

The council's progress remains **"fragile"**, with risks to **financial sustainability** and **effective governance**.



# Government Extends Intervention at Thurrock Council

- **Background to Intervention**

- Intervention began in **September 2022** after the council issued a **Section 114 notice**.
- A **£470 million funding gap** was uncovered, linked to failed commercial investments.

- **Exceptional Financial Support**


- Thurrock continues to rely on significant central government financial support.
- Ongoing oversight is deemed essential for recovery.

- **Administrative Implications**

- **Reduced local autonomy:** Commissioners retain control over major decisions.
- **Cost pressures:** Thurrock funds commissioner costs, with estimated costs exceeding **£2 million to date**.
- Risk of **slower decision-making** while stabilisation continues.

- **Future Focus**

- Links to **Greater Essex governance reform** and **long-term sustainability goals**.



# Government Extends Intervention at Thurrock Council

## Indicator

Total funding gap identified

Intervention start date

Current extension period

Commissioners appointed

Intervention costs to date

Next formal review date

## Detail

£470 million

September 2022

Until April 2028

Gavin Jones CBE, Denise Murray, Dr Dave Smith

~£2 million (funded by Thurrock)

Summer 2026

# Government Extends Intervention at Thurrock Council



# Legal Issues of Note

# Council Employee Fraud – Key Case Summary

- **Overview**

A former council employee, Bryn Howells, was found guilty of **fraud** after working **four simultaneous roles** across multiple councils.

- **Details of the Fraud**

- Employed by **Tewkesbury Borough Council, South Gloucestershire Council, Publica Group**, and via an agency at a fourth council.
- Submitted **false timesheets** and failed to declare multiple contracts.
- Fraud committed between **February 2022 and June 2023**.

- **Financial Impact**

Illegally claimed approximately **£236,000** in salaries and benefits.

- **Outcome**

Detected via the **National Fraud Initiative**, convicted at Gloucester Crown Court, with **sentencing scheduled for 28 August 2025**. Councils are seeking to recover public funds, including salaries and pension contributions.

# Council Employee Fraud – Key Case Summary

- **Breach of Standards**  
The case highlights **serious failures in employment checks, declarations, and oversight.**
- **Remote Working Risks**  
The post-pandemic environment created **greater opportunity for fraud**, with limited visibility on work patterns across multiple employers.
- **Council Actions**
  - **Disciplinary dismissals** and internal investigations undertaken.
  - Councils reviewing and tightening **timesheet verification and secondary employment declaration processes.**
- **Wider Implications**
  - Increased focus on **cross-authority data matching.**
  - Strengthened **fraud prevention and monitoring procedures** needed to protect public finances and uphold trust in local government.

# Council Employee Fraud – Key Case Summary

## Indicator

Number of concurrent roles

Period of fraudulent activity

Total financial loss

Detection method

Sentencing date

Recovery actions

Key governance issue

## Detail

4 local authority positions

Feb 2022 – Jun 2023

£236,000

National Fraud Initiative data match

28 August 2025

Salary, pension, and NI clawback sought

Failure of declaration and verification controls

# Hounslow Council U-turn Following Ombudsman Investigation

- **Case Summary**

A **pregnant homeless woman** was left **sofa-surfing**, prompting a complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

- **Initial Council Response**

- Council agreed to **apologise** and pay **£3,750 compensation**.
- Initially **refused** to follow the Ombudsman's recommendation to offer the **next suitable two-bedroom property**.

- **Reversal of Decision**

- Following intervention by the **Council Leader**, Hounslow reversed its decision.
- The woman was offered and accepted a **suitable property**, complying fully with Ombudsman findings.

# Hounslow Council U-turn Following Ombudsman Investigation

- **Accountability Upheld**  
This case highlights the **importance of adhering to Ombudsman recommendations**, particularly in housing services.
- **Leadership Oversight**  
The **Council Leader's intervention** was key in ensuring the complaint was properly addressed, showing the role of political oversight in safeguarding service standards.
- **Learning Points for Councils**
  - Risks to **legal compliance** and **reputation** when Ombudsman recommendations are initially disregarded.
  - Need for **clear internal processes** to escalate and act on complaints.
  - **Better oversight of housing allocations**, especially in vulnerable cases, to prevent service failures.

# Hounslow Council U-turn Following Ombudsman Investigation

## Indicator

Ombudsman compensation

Initial council position

Final outcome

Leadership role

Governance lesson

## Detail

£3,750

Refused housing remedy recommendation

Two-bedroom property offered and accepted

Council Leader intervened

Full compliance with Ombudsman essential

# Climate Protest Leads to Council Tax Enforcement Action

- **Case Summary**

A **74-year-old woman with terminal cancer** withheld around **£5,000 in council tax** over three years in protest against **Buckinghamshire Council's fossil fuel investments**.

- **Legal Outcome**

- The council obtained a **final charging order** on her property.
- The council is now legally entitled to **force a sale of her home** to recover the debt.

- **Protester's Position**

The individual described her actions as **“conscientious objection”**, stating she would prefer to pay local charities than contribute to investments in fossil fuels.

# Climate Protest Leads to Council Tax Enforcement Action

- **Council's Statutory Duty**  
Councils are **legally required to collect council tax** and **cannot make exceptions** based on personal objections or protest.
- **Pension Fund Investment Debate**
  - Local authority pension schemes across the UK hold approximately **£88 billion in fossil fuel investments**.
  - Campaigners argue for stronger **climate risk considerations** in investment decisions.
- **Policy Context**
  - The upcoming **Pension Schemes Bill** is expected to address climate risk duties for pension trustees.
  - Highlights ongoing tension between **individual ethics** and **mandatory public finance enforcement**.
- **Reputational Considerations**  
The case has triggered **public scrutiny** of council investment practices and **enforcement approaches** against vulnerable individuals.

# Climate Protest Leads to Council Tax Enforcement Action

## Indicator

Protest duration

Amount withheld

Legal enforcement

Pension fund fossil fuel  
holdings

Protest motivation

Enforcement authority

## Detail

3 years of council tax non-  
payment

~£5,000 including fees

Final charging order granted

~£88 billion nationally

Objection to public money  
funding fossil fuels

Council legally required to  
collect tax



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# Meet The Team



**Ben  
Moreton**

CEO



**Mark  
Thomas**

Operations



**Robert  
Fox**

Lead Consultant



"Best decision I've made in years was to join BSS. Ben has been fantastic at every stage during the past 10 months, and is already putting me forward for more senior roles where I had struggled to do so in permanent roles for the past few years.

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*





# Benefits Officer (MRI/Academy)

3 months initially | £25ph (umbrella) | Remote

Our good client in the North West is seeking a Benefits Assessment Officer on a fully remote basis for 3 months initially.

The successful candidate must have strong Housing Benefit assessment skills and be an advanced MRI(Academy) user.

## Role

The ability to assess all claim types to include new claims, changes in circumstances, 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 MRI (Academy) user

**To find out more or to apply**

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



# Council Tax Officer (MRI/Academy)

3 months initially | £25ph (umbrella) | Remote

- All aspects of Council Tax billing and recovery
- Experience of using the MRI/Capita One (Academy) system, processing account amendments, reviewing accounts at various stages of recovery in accordance with local and legislative guidelines
- Dealing with customer enquiries in a variety of formats
- Experience of Business Rates would be useful but not essential
- Confident in processing on all aspects of Council Tax adjustments to including moves, discounts, arrangements
- Knowledge of Council Tax legislation and its practical application

## What we're looking for:

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

- At least 5 years Council Tax billing and recovery experience
- Experience of using the MRI (Academy) system

**To find out more or to apply**

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



# Council Tax Account Officer (MRI/Academy)

3 months initially | £29.50ph (umbrella) | Remote

- All aspects of Council Tax billing and recovery
- Experience of using the MRI/Capita One (Academy) system, processing account amendments, reviewing accounts at various stages of recovery in accordance with local and legislative guidelines
- Dealing with customer enquiries in a variety of formats
- Experience of Business Rates would be useful but not essential
- Confident in processing on all aspects of Council Tax adjustments to including moves, discounts, arrangements
- Knowledge of Council Tax legislation and its practical application

## What we're looking for:

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

- At least 5 years Council Tax billing and recovery experience
- Experience of using the MRI (Academy) system

**To find out more or to apply**

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



# Revenues & Benefits CSO (MRI/Academy)

6 week contract | £23ph (umbrella) | Remote

- All aspects of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support & Council Tax in a Customer Service environment
- Must have knowledge of the MRI/Capita One (Academy) system
- Experience of processing/amending HB/CTR claims and dealing with Council Tax enquiries
- 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 MRI/Capita(Academy) database
- Job involves taking incoming calls and processing HB/CTR/CT amendments
- Proficient in administration of Housing Benefit and appropriate legislation

**To find out more or to apply**

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



# Benefits Team Leader (MRI/Academy)

3 month contract | £32ph (umbrella) | Remote

- To deal with all aspects of Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support team management
- The ability to write and present appeals at Tribunal
- Performance Management
- Carry out Quality Assurance checks
- A strong understanding of Housing Benefit Subsidy
- Must have knowledge of MRI (Academy) system and EDMS
- Experience of leading a team of Benefit Officers

## What we're looking for:

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

- Experience in using the MRI (Academy) database
- Advanced Knowledge of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and Local Welfare Assistance
- Strong understanding of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 and Decision and Appeals Regulations 2001

**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 role where you can make a real impact – we're here to help.

[!\[\]\(b97c980e060a14f2b840056a1270051b\_img.jpg\) Start your journey today – register now!](#)

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"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 in 30 years.

Congratulations to Ben and the team !"

#TeamBSS Client – Simon Rosser



# Previous Recordings





## Dates where there will be no sessions

11 August 2025

Summer Break

18 August 2025

Summer Break

25 August  
2025

Summer Bank Holiday

1 September  
2025

Summer Break

29 September  
2025

Conference Week

8 December  
2025

December Break

15 December  
2025

December Break

22 December  
2025

December Break

29 December  
2025

December Break



# Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

# Blogs



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

The Case for Plain English Council Tax Reduction Schemes by Paul Howarth

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/06/19/the-case-for-plain-english-council-tax-reduction-schemes/>

Reform UK's "Department of National Efficiency": A High-Stakes Gamble in Local Government Reform By Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/06/09/reform-uks-department-of-national-efficiency-a-high-stakes-gamble-in-local-government-reform/>

A Grim Spring Statement: Fiscal Straightjackets and Political Short-termism

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/03/26/a-grim-spring-statement-fiscal-straightjackets-and-political-short-termism/>

Pathways to a More Empowering Welfare State: Winners, Losers, and the Cost of Inaction

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/03/19/pathways-to-a-more-empowering-welfare-state-winners-losers-and-the-cost-of-inaction/>

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/>

# Blogs

## Benefits in the Future

- 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/>

# Blogs

**entitledto**  
independent | accurate | reliable

- Could settling disputes through back-pay put benefits at risk?  
By Phil Agulnik
  - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2023/january/could-settling-disputes-through-back-pay-put-benefits-at-risk>
- Council Tax Reduction (CTR) - 25/26 by Phil Agulnik and Karen Holmes
  - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2025/may/20/council-tax-reduction-ctr-2526>
- Spring Statement: Policy changes & behavioural responses by Wendy Alcock & Phil Agulnik
  - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2025/march/26/spring-statement-policy-changes-behavioural-responses>



# Institute of Fiscal Studies Blogs

Exploring regional differences in public spending across England by Bee Boileau Max Warner Ben Zaranko

<https://ifs.org.uk/articles/exploring-regional-differences-public-spending-across-england>

IFS Spring Statement Analysis

<https://ifs.org.uk/collections/spring-statement-2025>

The IFS Scottish Budget Report – 2025–26 by Stuart Adam Bee Boileau Jonathan Cribb Magdalena Domínguez Laurence O'Brien David Phillips Sam Ray-Chaudhuri Luke Sibieta Darcey Snape

<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/ifs-scottish-budget-report-2025-26>

The short- and long-run effects of the Education Maintenance Allowance by Jack Britton Nick Ridpath Carmen Villa Ben Waltmann

<https://ifs.org.uk/publications/short-and-long-run-effects-education-maintenance-allowance>

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>





# Other Workshops





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

**Public Finance x Visionary Network - 2 April - 12:00**

Title: Crisis, Cuts & Community: Rethinking Local Tax & Support in the 114 Era

Link: <https://view6.workcast.net/register?cpak=6070531364001666>

Access the recording



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# 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.



A VISIONARY NETWORK PARTNER  
ENHANCING PUBLIC SERVICES VIA INNOVATION, COLLABORATION, AND SHARED VALUES.



# Visionary Network Partnership



A dynamic consortium of private sector companies is uniting to transform public service delivery across the nation. By harnessing cutting-edge technologies and innovative methodologies, this partnership is dedicated to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector performance. Their focus is on optimising the use of resources and budgets, ensuring that every pound of public funds is directed towards improving citizens' lives. This group is at the forefront of digital transformation, leveraging data analytics and advanced technological solutions to streamline operations and reduce waste, ultimately supporting a more responsive and agile public sector.

Working closely with public sector organisations and collaborating amongst themselves, the partnership fosters a culture of innovation and disruption. By pooling their diverse expertise, the companies involved can tackle longstanding challenges with fresh, inventive approaches that deliver measurable improvements in service delivery. Their cooperative efforts not only drive substantial cost savings but also set a new benchmark for how the public sector can benefit from private sector ingenuity. In doing so, they reaffirm their commitment to ensuring that public funds are utilised to create a tangible, positive impact on the community.