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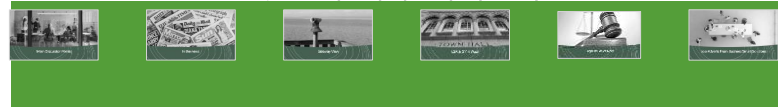
MALG
Network



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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

12 January 2026



Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

- Naomi Armstrong, Benefits Cambridge City Council
- Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager, Oxford City Council
- Kirsty Brooksmith, London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
- Tom Clark, Liverpool City Council
- Alex Clegg, Resolution Foundation
- Nicki Duckworth, EntitledTo, Marshalling
- Michael Fisher, St Helens Council
- Robert Fox, Swindon Council
- Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network
- Paul Howarth, Independent Consultant
- Gareth Morgan, Dangos Training & CEO Ferret Information Systems
- Sean O'Sullivan, Visionary Network
- Julie Smethurst, Tameside Council
- Rachael Walker, Visionary Network & The Campaign for Better Policy
- Bob Wagstaff, Visionary Network
- Christina Ward, CIPFA
- 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

LA Directories Limited





Discussion Points

Transparency

Department for Work & Pensions

DWP disability benefit cuts: assessment changes and transparency gap

What has been announced (and what is still unclear)

- Budget documents show planned reductions in disability benefit spending totalling £1.95 billion across 2024/25 to 2030/31, delivered through DWP operational changes rather than a single headline benefit rule change.
- Disability News Service reports DWP has still not set out who will lose out, how many people will be affected, or the average impact on awards; ministers have declined repeated requests to explain the distribution of the cuts.
- DWP has apologised for earlier incorrect explanations of the savings (including references to separate measures); it maintains the savings relate to assessment and review activity.
- The linked measures include: increased Work Capability Assessment measurement capacity; more face to face assessments; longer PIP award review periods; with implementation from April 2026.

Benefits in the Future

Misleading media claims about Universal Credit: childcare, housing support, and the benefit cap

What the blog argues is misleading in the Daily Mail scenario

- The Daily Mail headline compares unlike situations, a couple with three children in central London versus a single high earner, to suggest benefits can replicate a £140,000 salary.
- The Mail example is constructed to sit just above the savings level that hits the Overall Benefit Cap for a couple, using earnings of £846 per month (about £30,152 per year) from minimal hours.
- The blog highlights a key omission: the Administrative Earnings Threshold for couples is cited as £1,534 per month; below this, both claimants are expected to meet work search and availability conditions, with sanctions possible for non-compliance.
- The largest claimed "gain" comes from assuming maximum childcare support while working very few hours; the blog argues this is likely to be challenged as excessive because childcare must be to enable work.
- Housing support figures are presented as if they cover central London costs, but the blog notes typical rents exceed the Local Housing Allowance, requiring a top up from earnings.

GREAT YARMOUTH

St George Hotel HMO ruling: microwaves, cooking facilities, and licensing standards

Key facts and outcome

- Great Yarmouth Borough Council inspected the St George Hotel (Albert Square) and found 32 of 62 rooms were being used as homelessists accommodation.
- The council treated the building as meeting the Housing Act 2004 "standard test" for a house in multiple occupation (HMO); a section 205 HMO declaration was made and the owners challenged it.
- Tribunal inspection evidence recorded rooms as en suite but without food preparation space or storage; rooms typically had a fridge and a microwave, and some also had a kettle.
- The Upper Tribunal found that providing a microwave did not amount to "cooking facilities" for these purposes; the judge rejected the idea a room could be treated as a self-contained flat "simply by plugging in a microwave".
- The owners have sought permission to appeal again.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Business rates relief for pubs: planned mitigation of 2026 rises in England

Key facts

- Government is expected to announce, in the next few days, a package to soften the planned rise in business rates bills for pubs in England.
- Scope is expected to be pubs only, not the wider hospitality sector.
- The package is expected to cover business rates plus linked measures on licensing and deregulation, for example around opening hours and use of outdoor space.
- Drivers for the change include sharply higher rateable values for many pub premises ahead of the 1 April 2026 revaluation, and the scheduled end of pandemic-era rates discounts.
- Industry bodies have warned of significant impacts if the changes proceed as planned; Reuters reports BBRs concerns that 15,000 jobs could be at risk and around 5,000 smaller pubs could face business rates bills for the first time.

Savings

Staffordshire County Council

Staffordshire County Council: Reform UK efficiency review and proposed savings

Key facts and decisions in scope

- Staffordshire County Council's Reform UK administration communicated an internal efficiency review after taking control in the May 2025 elections.
- The review produced seven proposals, reported to deliver £2.67 million of savings in the next year, against a net resource budget of £734 million for 2025/26.
- Reported proposals and savings include:
 - Mobile library service review, £180,000.
 - Review of contractual spend with voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, £350,000.
 - Conservation fees charges, £1 million in 2026/27 then £500,000 in subsequent years.
 - Clow of £500,000 from bringing forward increased waste to recycling services.
 - Review of pooled building budgets, £750,000; winterize centre receive grant, £100,000; community safety contracts review, £42,000.
- Further efficiencies are expected to be set out via the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, due in early January.

REFORM UK

Reform-led council tax rises and the realities of local government budgets

Key facts

- Reform UK is facing criticism after several councils it controls proposed council tax increases close to the legal maximum, despite local election messaging that implied freezes or cuts.
- Proposed increases reported:
 - West Sussex Council: 3.9% (described as the party's "tough" admin).
 - Doncaster, North East Hampshire, West Hampshire, Lincs: average 5% (compared to the national permitted).
 - Local council officers reported a 50% increase under consultation, with consultation one being at 10% the next option was better than 4% on 4th.
- The legal and policy context is that social care authorities can generally raise council tax up to 5% in 2026/27 (5% cap plus up to 2% adult social care precept) without triggering a referendum.
- Councils cite financial pressures, especially children's and adult social care, plus inflation and demand growth; Doncaster reported a projected £28m budget gap.
- Kent's leader said the draft budget reflects financial stabilisation, including debt reduction and savings, and that 3.9% is lower than the 5% assumption when the administration took office.

BCP

Mudford beach huts: council tax reclassification and second home policy

What is proposed, and why

- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council plans to remove a historic 50% council tax discount on beach huts at Mudford Spit and Hengistbury Head.
- From 1 April 2026 the huts would be regularised as Class A second homes, meaning second homes with planning restrictions; the practical effect is to move to a full council tax charge (rather than a discounted bill).
- BCP frames the change as fairness and consistency, and as using available levers to support services under financial pressure; it also cites extra local service demand linked to visitors, such as beach cleaning and flood protection.
- The Times reports the proposal as part of closing a local funding gap, alongside national pressure on councils and growing use of second home council tax powers.

HB Subsidy Audit 2024/25: No More CAKE, and the Slice Just Got Smaller

There are now only **a very few firms** willing to audit Housing Benefit subsidy claims — and all face tougher conditions.

The 2024/25 audit brings:

- The **end of CAKE**, meaning no more easy reconciliations
- A **£50 de minimis** (a penny used to be an error)
- **Increased scrutiny** and fewer people who still understand the process

For many councils, that means **more risk, more rework, and higher costs.**

Our **subsidy support service** helps you stay audit-ready and compliant without the stress.

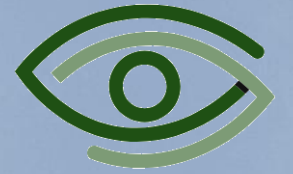
We'll:

- Review your subsidy claim before submission (or even complete it for you)
- Identify and resolve problem areas early
- Liaise with your auditors to minimise queries
- Provide targeted advice from experienced subsidy specialists

Don't go hungry without CAKE.

Let us take the weight of the subsidy audit off your plate.

Contact us to discuss a fixed-fee support package tailored to your authority. [**info@visionarynetwork.co.uk**](mailto:info@visionarynetwork.co.uk)



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

AI IMPACT

Practical sessions for Revenues and Benefit Teams in February

CLARITY

Writing clearer reports and papers enhances understanding and decision-making quality across all services involved.



EFFICIENCY

Managing workload effectively allows teams to handle inquiries faster and improve stakeholder communication through AI integration.



GOVERNANCE

Ensuring governance and information security builds trust while utilizing AI tools safely and responsibly in services.



REGISTER NOW

Secure your spot for this transformative series today!



Arriving in February 2026 Using AI in Revenues and Benefits Services

A practical series of 60-to-90-minute online sessions designed for council Revenues and Benefits teams who want to use AI safely and effectively to save time, improve consistency, and strengthen resident support, without losing professional judgement or accountability.

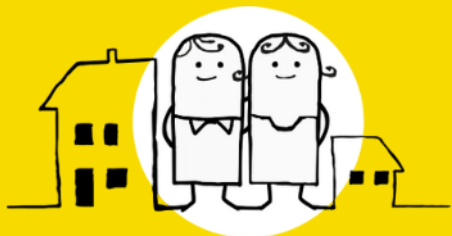
We will cover practical use cases such as:

- writing clearer reports, briefings, and committee papers in plain English
- drafting letters, emails, and decision notices that are accurate, consistent, and tone appropriate
- managing staff workload, task prioritisation, and quality checking
- handling enquiries faster, including scripts for contact centres and casework prompts for officers
- improving communication with stakeholders, preceptors, advice agencies, landlords, and internal teams
- designing take up campaigns and targeted messaging, including segmentation ideas
- analysing data, spotting patterns, and turning caseload information into insights
- reducing avoidable revisions, appeals risk, and repeat contact
- governance, information security, and practical guardrails for day-to-day use

Ideal for heads of service, team leaders, system administrators, performance and policy leads, and front-line officers.

Register your interest at info@visionarynetwork.co.uk

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

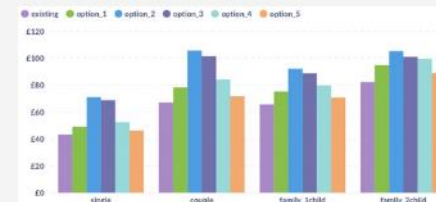
Total annual cost options



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
- 07946800171
mg@malcolmgardner.com
Book a meeting with Malcolm: [Book Time with MG](#)



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



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP disability benefit cuts: assessment changes and transparency gap

What has been announced (and what is still unclear)

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- The linked measures include: increased Work Capability Assessment reassessment capacity; more face to face assessments; longer PIP award review periods; with implementation from April 2026.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP disability benefit cuts: assessment changes and transparency gap

Likely administrative impacts on services

- Higher operational load from more face-to-face assessments: booking systems, estate and clinic capacity, travel and accessibility arrangements, and more home visits or alternative channels where reasonable adjustments are needed.
- Workforce and supplier impacts: greater dependence on assessor availability; contract management and quality assurance pressures; potential knock-on effects if capacity is shifted between PIP and WCA pipelines.
- Customer contact and dispute volumes may rise in the short term: uncertainty over “who loses out” can drive enquiries, complaints, mandatory reconsiderations, and demand for advice sector support, even before changes take effect.
- Process and data impacts: longer routine review cycles reduce some repeat processing but increase reliance on change of circumstances reporting and intelligence led interventions; this places more weight on communications, data matching, and error and fraud controls.
- Wider system impacts: potential additional pressure on evidence gathering (including health evidence), and on appeal routes if reassessment activity increases or if decisions are perceived as less consistent.

Benefits in the Future

Misleading media claims about Universal Credit: childcare, housing support, and the benefit cap

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- The blog highlights a key omission: the Administrative Earnings Threshold for couples is cited as £1,534 per month; below this, both claimants are expected to meet work search and availability conditions, with sanctions possible for noncompliance.
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Benefits in the Future

Misleading media claims about Universal Credit: childcare, housing support, and the benefit cap

Administrative impacts on services

- Decision making and evidence burdens increase if public narratives drive more claims and disputes around childcare and housing support, particularly where “maximum entitlement” assumptions are unrealistic.
- Childcare cost checks become more contentious: verifying actual paid costs, registered provision, work related necessity, and applying “excessive charges” reductions requires judgement, documentation, and consistency.
- Conditionality and sanctions administration could rise where earnings sit below the Administrative Earnings Threshold, including work coach activity, compliance monitoring, and challenge handling.
- Housing support administration may face extra pressure: LHA eligibility, bedroom entitlement, rent verification, and managing expectations about shortfalls between LHA and market rents.
- Increased contact demand: complaints, reconsiderations, and advice sector referrals driven by misinformation, especially when claimants or the public assume the system allows large childcare claims with minimal work.



**GREAT
YARMOUTH**
BOROUGH COUNCIL

St George Hotel HMO ruling: microwaves, cooking facilities, and licensing standards

Key facts and outcome

- Great Yarmouth Borough Council inspected the St George Hotel (Albert Square) and found 32 of 62 rooms were being used as homelessness accommodation.
- The council treated the building as meeting the Housing Act 2004 “standard test” for a house in multiple occupation (HMO); a section 255 HMO declaration was made and the owners challenged it.
- Tribunal inspection evidence recorded rooms as en suite but without food preparation space or storage; rooms typically had a fridge and a microwave, and some also had a kettle.
- The Upper Tribunal found that providing a microwave did not amount to “cooking facilities” for these purposes; the judge rejected the idea a room could be treated as a self-contained flat “simply by plugging in a microwave”.
- The owners have sought permission to appeal again.



**GREAT
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Impacts on administration of services

- Licensing and enforcement: strengthens councils' position when determining whether "hotel style" accommodation used for longer term stays is, in substance, an HMO requiring licensing, inspection and compliance action.
- Standards and risk management: where HMO duties apply, councils may need to schedule more frequent checks and follow up work on safety, hazards and management standards, including where occupants are vulnerable.
- Homelessness commissioning and placements: reinforces the need for clear due diligence when using hotels for temporary accommodation, including confirming regulatory status, minimum amenity provision, and accountability for works and management.
- Casework and legal workload: likely increase in contested classifications and appeals in similar settings, requiring robust evidence packs (inspection notes, room layouts, amenity details, occupancy evidence) and legal support.
- Service communications: councils may need clearer guidance for providers on what does, and does not, meet the self-contained flat test, to avoid disputes and reduce churn in temporary accommodation supply

Staffordshire County Council: Reform UK efficiency review and proposed savings

Key facts and decisions in scope

- Staffordshire County Council's Reform UK administration commissioned an internal efficiency review after taking control in the May 2025 elections.
- The review produced seven proposals, reported to deliver £2.67 million of savings in the next year, against a net revenue budget of £734 million for 2025/26.
- Reported proposals and savings include:
 - Mobile library service review, £130,000.
 - Review of contractual spend with voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations, £150,000.
 - Concessionary fares changes, £1 million in 2026/27 then £500,000 in subsequent years.
 - One off £500,000 from bringing forward increased waste to recycling revenue.
 - Review of pooled buildings budgets, £750,000; enterprise centre income uplift, £100,000; community safety contracts review, £42,000.
- Further efficiencies are expected to be set out via the council's Medium Term Financial Strategy, due in early January.

Staffordshire County Council: Reform UK efficiency review and proposed savings

Impacts on administration of services

- Libraries and outreach services: a mobile library review usually means route, timetable and vehicle decisions; this requires public communications, staff consultation, and updates to service schedules and customer information.
- Commissioning and contract management: reviewing VCSE contracts and community safety contracts creates additional procurement and contract management work, plus transition planning if provision changes.
- Concessionary fares: policy and operational changes typically drive updates to eligibility rules, reimbursement calculations, operator liaison, and customer contact, with higher query volumes during changeover.
- Corporate estates and facilities: a pooled buildings budget review often triggers recharging changes, building utilisation reviews, and revised maintenance plans, all of which increase internal coordination workload.
- Financial management and reporting: a one off “income brought forward” saving improves one year’s position but increases the need for clear explanations in budget monitoring, as the underlying pressure remains in later years.
- Governance and scrutiny: opposition members asked whether review outcomes would come to the corporate overview and scrutiny committee; the cabinet member said there were no plans, with outputs instead feeding cabinet decision making and the MTFS, which may increase the importance of clear audit trails and transparent reporting.



Reform-led council tax rises and the realities of local government budgets

Key facts

- Reform UK is facing criticism after several councils it controls proposed council tax increases close to the legal maximum, despite local election messaging that implied freezes or cuts.
- Proposed increases reported:
 - Kent County Council: 3.99% (described as the party’s “flagship” authority).
 - Derbyshire, North Northamptonshire, West Northamptonshire, Leicestershire: 5% (reported as the maximum permitted).
 - Lincolnshire: officers reported a 4.99% increase under consideration, with consultation also looking at 3.99%; the lower option was said to leave a £4.1m deficit.
- The legal and policy context is that social care authorities can generally raise council tax up to 5% in 2026/27 (3% core plus up to 2% adult social care precept) without triggering a referendum.
- Councils cite financial pressures, especially children’s and adult social care, plus inflation and demand growth; Derbyshire reported a projected £38m budget gap.
- Kent’s leader said the draft budget reflects financial stabilisation, including debt reduction and savings, and that 3.99% is lower than the 5% assumption when the administration took office



Reform-led council tax rises and the realities of local government budgets

Impacts on administration of services

- Budget governance and scrutiny workload increases: producing balanced budgets, publishing savings proposals, responding to scrutiny, and managing political accountability where campaign pledges conflict with budget reality.
- Service planning pressure intensifies: council tax rises still sit alongside savings programmes and, in some cases, service reductions, meaning redesign, commissioning changes, tighter eligibility, and demand management, particularly in social care.
- Communications and customer contact demand rises: higher bills and contested narratives typically drive enquiries, complaints, and FOI activity, requiring clearer resident messaging on what council tax funds, what is statutory, and what can realistically be cut.
- Workforce and delivery implications: if savings rely on operational changes, councils need HR planning, consultation processes, and delivery tracking; rapid political change can also complicate continuity and decision making.
- Financial resilience risk management: continued reliance on reserves, or attempting to hold increases below the maximum, can create additional in year pressures and force deeper savings elsewhere, increasing volatility in service delivery.



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Business rates relief for pubs: planned mitigation of 2026 rises in England

Key facts

- Government is expected to announce, in the next few days, a package to soften the planned rise in business rates bills for pubs in England.
- Scope is expected to be pubs only, not the wider hospitality sector.
- The package is expected to cover business rates plus linked measures on licensing and deregulation, for example around opening hours and use of outdoor space.
- Drivers for the change include sharply higher rateable values for many pub premises ahead of the 1 April 2026 revaluation, and the scheduled end of pandemic era rates discounts.
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Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Business rates relief for pubs: planned mitigation of 2026 rises in England

Impacts on administration of services

- Billing and relief administration: councils will need to implement any new pub specific adjustments, apply revised multipliers or relief rules, and generate amended 2026/27 bills at pace.
- Customer contact surge: changes landing close to year end are likely to increase queries and complaints from pubs and agents, especially where bills have already been modelled on earlier assumptions.
- Data and eligibility checks: any pub only scheme will require clear criteria, consistent evidence requirements, and more casework to resolve borderline properties, mixed use sites, and appeals activity.
- Financial planning volatility: last minute adjustments to reliefs complicate collection planning and forecasting and can increase in year reconciliation work for Section 31 style compensation and audit trails, depending on final scheme design.
- Cross service coordination: if licensing and deregulation changes are included, councils will need joined up communications across revenues, licensing, economic development and business support, so businesses receive one coherent message.



Mudford beach huts: council tax reclassification and second home policy

What is proposed, and why

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- The Times reports the proposal as part of closing a local funding gap, alongside national pressure on councils and growing use of second home council tax powers.



Mudeford beach huts: council tax reclassification and second home policy

Administrative impacts on services

- Billing and systems changes: reclassifying properties, removing discounts from a set date, recalculating liability, issuing revised bills, and handling direct debit changes.
- Increased customer contact and disputes: more enquiries, complaints and likely appeals over classification, occupancy restrictions, and whether each hut meets the criteria used for council tax purposes.
- Compliance and evidence handling: councils will need clear rules and documentation for what counts as a Class A second home, especially where properties are rented out intermittently or marketed as holiday lets.
- Financial administration and reporting: additional income needs tracking against budget assumptions, with clear audit trails for members and the public on how the change supports core services



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
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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

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.



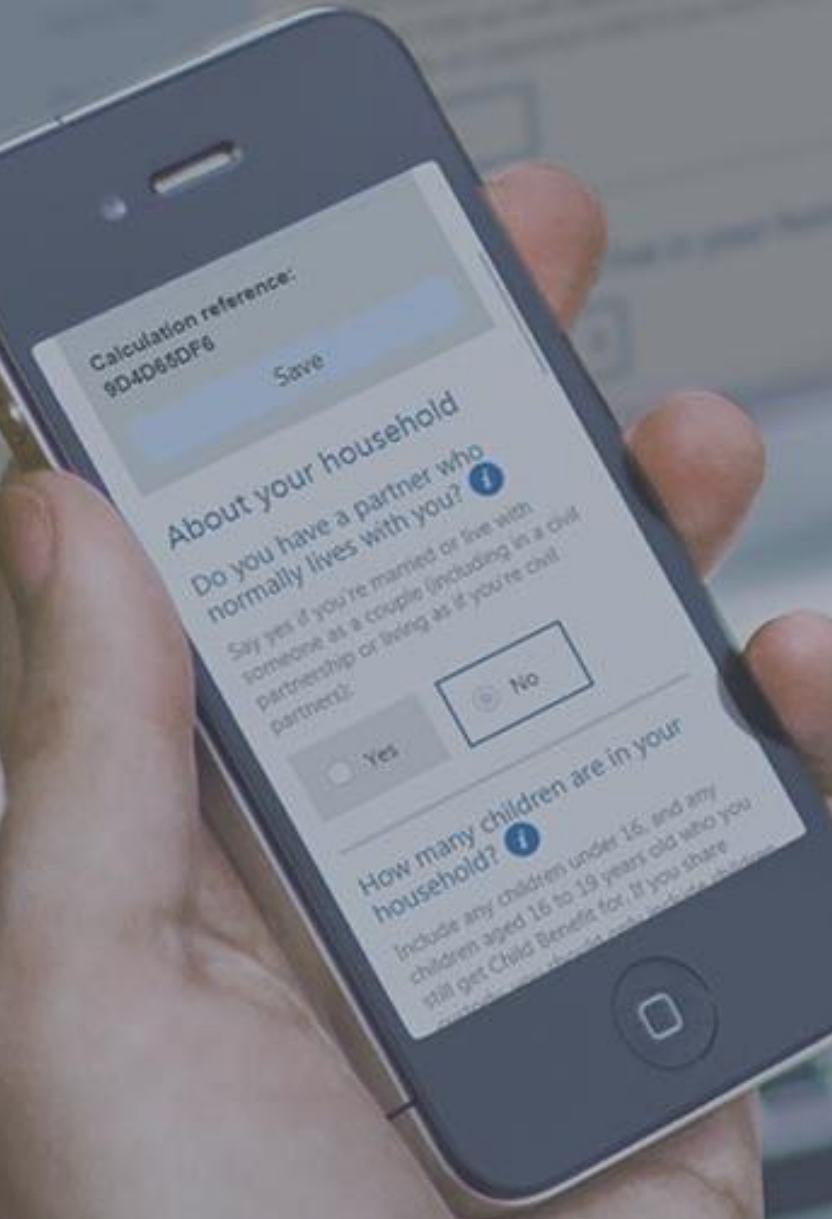
our customers:

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



Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative: Year 6- year end capture and deadlines

What DWP is asking councils to do

- Record Full Case Review (FCR) intervention activity on the LA IT system on the actual date it starts and ends, including the outcome; avoid clerical recording followed by bulk upload.
- This is intended to improve in month reporting and ensure performance is correctly attributed when moving from Year 6 into Year 7.
- If an intervention start date is recorded after the Year 6 cut off, it will count towards Year 7 performance (subject to Year 7 rules being finalised).
- Even if a completion date and outcome are recorded after the Year 6 deadline, councils must still close the intervention and record the outcome; otherwise, cases remain open indefinitely and distort HBMS management information.



Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative: Year 6- year end capture and deadlines

Administration impacts for services

- Workflow planning: teams need a clear plan to avoid backlogs, particularly in late February and March for starting interventions and in May and early June for closing them.
- Data quality and audit trail: timely start, completion and outcome recording reduces errors, supports accurate performance reporting, and avoids year end misallocation.
- Operational discipline: discouraging clerical workarounds will require clear internal guidance, supervision, and simple checklists for staff.
- Performance management: missed deadlines change which year work counts towards, so councils need reporting that highlights items at risk and prompts earlier action.
- Reduced rework: keeping interventions open, or updating outcomes late, increases avoidable follow up, customer contact, and management time.

Parliamentary inquiry into youth NEET and unemployment

Key facts and what the inquiry will examine

- The House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee has launched a new inquiry into the rise in under 25s who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), and what should be done to prevent and reduce it.
- The committee highlights:
 - Youth unemployment at 15.3%, described as the highest in the last decade outside the pandemic; around five times the rate across the wider workforce.
 - NEET levels up 50% over the last five years to 946,000 under 25s.
 - Nearly half of job losses since June 2024 affecting under 25s.
- The inquiry will focus on causes of NEET status, prevention, the support needed (including for those facing health or caring barriers), and the role of government, schools and employers.
- Written evidence is invited until 16:00 on 12 February 2026.
- Context noted by the committee: Government initiatives include the Youth Guarantee, expansion of Youth Hubs, and funding for additional apprenticeships; the inquiry is also intended to complement the Milburn Review into young people and work.

Parliamentary inquiry into youth NEET and unemployment

Impacts on administration of services

- Increased operational demand on Jobcentre Plus and partners: more intensive early intervention, tailored work coach support, and more structured progression routes for young people who are NEET but not always engaged with DWP.
- Stronger need for joined up delivery across DWP, education, local government and employers: the inquiry explicitly tests roles and responsibilities across the system; this usually means more shared protocols, referral pathways and local coordination.
- Greater focus on targeting and measurement: if government moves towards specific NEET goals or targets (a question the committee poses), services will need clearer definitions, better management information, and consistent performance reporting across programmes and places.
- Commissioning and contract management pressures: scaling placements, hubs and apprenticeship support increases requirements for provider assurance, safeguarding, quality monitoring, and outcomes tracking, particularly for vulnerable cohorts.
- Workforce and channel implications: the committee flags a narrowing pipeline of entry level jobs, including the impact of AI on entry level tasks and a decline in traditional retail and hospitality roles; services may need to adapt offer design, employer engagement, and skills pathways accordingly.



Removing domestic abusers from social tenancies in Scotland

What is changing

- Scottish Ministers have laid regulations at Holyrood to commence tenancy related provisions in the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021; the commencement date set in the regulations is 1 August 2026.
- The change is designed to let social landlords act on behalf of a survivor, so the survivor can remain in the home where it is safe to do so, instead of having to leave to escape abuse.
- In practical terms, the policy intent is that landlords can seek court orders to remove a perpetrator's interest in a social tenancy (including joint tenancies), which can support transferring the tenancy to the survivor where appropriate.
- The commencement regulations also bring into force (for these tenancy provisions) the Act's definition and interpretation of "abusive behaviour", which underpins the new tenancy ground.



Removing domestic abusers from social tenancies in Scotland

Impacts on administration of services

- More court-based casework for social landlords: preparing evidence packs, risk information, and “reasonableness” arguments; attending hearings; managing outcomes and any appeals.
- Stronger multi agency working: housing teams will need tighter protocols with specialist domestic abuse services, Police Scotland, and legal services to manage survivor safety, confidentiality, and safeguarding before, during, and after action is raised.
- Tenancy administration after an order: updating tenancy records, rent accounts, repairs responsibilities, succession style issues, and ensuring the survivor receives clear support to sustain the tenancy.
- Training and consistency: front line housing officers will need practical guidance on thresholds, evidence, managing risk of retaliation, and avoiding unintended harm; this is likely to drive new procedures, staff training, and governance oversight.
- Demand management: if more survivors can safely stay put, landlords may see reduced rehousing demand in some cases; however, there may be short term spikes in advice requests and complex case handling as the new route beds in.

Four day working week in councils: Best Value warning and service performance concerns


Key facts

- The Communities Secretary, Steve Reed, has warned councils in England not to adopt a four-day working week where staff work fewer contracted hours for full pay; he framed this as “full time pay for part time work” and linked it to Best Value expectations.
- He has written to council leaders stating that existing government guidance on four day weeks remains in force, and that “part time work for full time pay without compelling justification” can be treated as an indicator of potential Best Value failure.
- Government said it is updating Best Value Guidance and will set out further detail in due course.
- The warning follows earlier correspondence to South Cambridgeshire District Council, where government expressed “deep disappointment” about reported declines in some housing related performance measures after the council adopted a four-day week.
- Context already published by government is that, if councils disregard advice and there is evidence of service decline or failure, government may raise concerns, monitor more closely, and consider intervention options

Four day working week in councils: Best Value warning and service performance concerns

Impacts on administration of services


- Performance management and assurance burden increases: councils adopting alternative working patterns may need stronger evidence, clearer KPIs, and tighter reporting to demonstrate service standards and value for money, particularly for higher risk services such as housing repairs and rent collection.
- Governance and inspection readiness: an explicit link to Best Value means more effort on internal audit, peer challenge, improvement plans, and documentation that working arrangements are delivering outcomes, not just workforce benefits.
- HR, recruitment, and retention trade offs: councils may see improvements in recruitment and retention, but will need to manage expectations about availability, cover, and customer contact, particularly where residents expect five day access.
- Risk of increased central oversight: where performance indicators dip, councils can expect more engagement from central government, more data requests, and potentially formal improvement mechanisms, which can divert capacity from front line delivery.
- Communications and complaints handling: public debate about “part time for full pay” is likely to increase complaints, FOI activity, and member casework; councils will need consistent messaging on service performance, response standards, and the operational model



HMRC staff charged over alleged sale of taxpayer data for cash

Key facts

- Two HMRC officers, Hafsa Ahmed (29) and Mohammed Suhaib (28), both from Bradford, have been charged after allegedly accessing confidential taxpayer records and passing information to an unauthorised third party in return for payment.
- The alleged offending period is April to November 2020.
- Both have been charged with:
 - Misconduct in public office; and
 - Conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation.
- Several other individuals were also charged in the linked investigation, including offences relating to handling suspected criminal property and, for one defendant, concealing or transferring criminal property.
- The defendants were due to appear before Bradford Magistrates' Court.



HMRC staff charged over alleged sale of taxpayer data for cash

Impacts on administration of services

- Access controls and monitoring: likely renewed focus on “least privilege” access, stronger alerting for unusual record access, and tighter supervisor review of high-risk access patterns, all of which add operational overhead.
- Internal investigations and case handling: more demand on HMRC security, compliance, HR, and legal teams for evidence preservation, interview activity, disciplinary processes, and liaison with prosecutors.
- Service delivery friction: additional security steps (stronger identity verification for staff actions, tighter permissions, more auditing) can slow some casework and increase internal escalation.
- Reputation and customer trust impacts: incidents involving taxpayer confidentiality typically trigger higher volumes of complaints and reassurance queries, plus more governance reporting to demonstrate safeguards are effective.
- Cross system implications: where unauthorised access is suspected, HMRC may need extra controls around third-party requests, agent access, and data sharing, increasing administrative effort across teams that handle disclosures.

Discretionary Housing Payments in Wales: 2026/27 funding and rules

What the circular confirms for 2026/27

- DWP confirms Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding for Wales for the financial year ending March 2027 at £6.5 million, the same total level as 2025/26.
- Individual Welsh local authority allocations are unchanged from 2025/26; DWP says this was considered the fairest approach given broader economic pressures.
- Unspent 2025/26 government contribution cannot be carried forward into later years.
- England change: from the financial year ending March 2027, DHPs in England will be incorporated into the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF); Wales remains under the DHP funding route.

Discretionary Housing Payments in Wales: 2026/27 funding and rules

Administration impacts for services

- Budget setting and spend profiling: no carry over means teams need tighter in year monitoring and clearer decision making on late year awards to avoid underspends that cannot be retained.
- Local policy and governance: councils can top up from their own funds; from 2026/27 there is no limit on the top up amount, so local decisions on additional funding become more prominent.
- Performance and assurance: unchanged allocations may increase pressure to demonstrate targeting, consistency, and outcomes, particularly where rent pressures and caseload need are rising.
- Operational coordination: because England is moving into the CRF, cross border organisations and advisers may need clear comms so residents understand the Welsh position remains DHP based, with local authority application routes.
- Customer communications: emphasise eligibility and route to apply, DHPs sit on top of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing element; councils should keep signposting clear and current.

What is changing and why

- DWP is changing the way Housing Benefit (HB) subsidy is calculated for **prior year overpayments** where the local authority did not receive full subsidy on the original spend, for example **supported exempt accommodation** and **temporary accommodation**.
- Current position: the rules deduct the **full overpayment value** from the current year subsidy claim, even if the authority originally received less subsidy than the overpayment value.
- New position: the rules will limit the subsidy deduction for a prior year overpayment to **the amount of subsidy the authority originally received** on the related expenditure; this is intended to remove an identified financial risk for authorities with more restricted subsidy cases in scope.
- The amendment takes effect for subsidy purposes from **1 April 2024**; an amending order was due to be in force by **30 November 2025** at the latest.
- Authorities affected may choose to **recalculate and resubmit** their **FYE March 2025** claim; there is **no requirement** to do so if they judge it not appropriate.

Housing
Benefit
subsidy: prior
year
overpayments
where subsidy
was restricted

Housing Benefit subsidy: prior year overpayments where subsidy was restricted

Administrative impacts for services

- Manual processing: DWP does **not** plan changes to LA IT software or the subsidy claim form, so any recalculation requires **manual adjustments**.
- Claim form cell adjustments (where impacted): authorities may need to manually amend prior year overpayment expenditure in:
 - **England and Wales:** cells **029 to 033, 068 to 072, 118 to 122**
 - **Scotland:** cells **029 to 033, 118 to 122**
- Scope decisions become local: councils can choose whether to apply manual adjustments to all prior year overpayment cells, only those that make a material difference, or even a subset of overpayments within a cell.
- Audit and assurance workload increases: authorities must retain evidence explaining any differences between the values entered on the claim form and the outputs from HB subsidy modules, with a clear breakdown showing the subsidy rates originally applied.
- Operational risk management: where overpayments are recorded with an adjusted value to achieve the correct subsidy result, headline overpayment totals can appear understated in the claim form; authorities will need clear internal documentation, so the overall subsidy position remains transparent and defensible.

National council recruitment campaign: “Make a Difference, Work for Your Local Council”

Key facts

- The Local Government Association (LGA) has launched a government funded national recruitment campaign, “Make a Difference, Work for Your Local Council”, to address worsening recruitment and retention pressures across councils.
- The 2026 campaign runs for six weeks, launching 5 January 2026 and ending 15 February 2026; it is promoted across multiple media channels.
- Councils are offered a ready to use toolkit with digital and print assets to support local recruitment activity and improve public perceptions of council careers.
- LGA analysis cited in reporting suggests recruitment and retention difficulties are widespread, with 94% of respondents saying it is a challenge.
- Finance workforce context: LGA and CIPFA research has highlighted very high vacancy levels in council finance roles, with pay cited as a primary obstacle; sector messaging is therefore expected to place more emphasis on purpose, progression, skills development, and modern working practices, not just salary.

National council recruitment campaign: “Make a Difference, Work for Your Local Council”

Impacts on administration of services

- Increased HR and communications workload over the six-week window: adapting the toolkit locally, coordinating sign off, scheduling campaigns, and aligning messages across service areas, including hard to fill roles such as finance and audit.
- Stronger need for consistent candidate journeys: clearer job adverts, quicker shortlisting, improved interview scheduling, and tighter onboarding, otherwise increased interest generated by the campaign will be lost.
- Data and reporting expectations: councils are likely to monitor campaign outputs, for example application volumes, time to hire, and drop off points, to show whether activity is improving recruitment outcomes and where processes need fixing.
- Workforce planning implications: if the campaign increases applications in some roles but not others, councils will need targeted follow up, such as talent pipelines, apprenticeships, grow your own pathways, and finance profession development plans.
- Brand and perception management: the campaign explicitly targets public perceptions, so councils will need to evidence modern working offers, including hybrid and flexible working, and demonstrate progression routes and digital transformation, particularly to attract younger and mid-career candidates.

Local government equal pay claims: new 2026 caseload and growing liabilities

Key facts

- GMB says it is preparing around 10,000 new equal pay claims in 2026, focused on five councils; it warns this could add hundreds of millions of pounds to council liabilities.
- GMB reports that it has supported claims leading to £1.095bn of settlements paid to date, largely for roles dominated by women such as care, cleaning and catering, compared with male dominated roles such as refuse collection.
- GMB also states that around 40,000 claims remain outstanding at the start of 2026, across roughly the high 20s number of councils (reporting varies on whether this is 26 or 28 authorities).
- Recent reference point: Birmingham's equal pay settlement has been widely reported at around £250m, following a multi year campaign.
- Largest cited settlement remains Glasgow, reported at £770m (2022).

Local government equal pay claims: new 2026 caseload and growing liabilities

Impacts on administration of services

- Finance and budget setting pressure: equal pay back pay and legal costs can materially affect reserves, in year savings programmes, and medium-term financial planning; councils may need to revisit provisions and risk registers more frequently.
- HR and pay governance workload: councils facing claims typically need job evaluation and grading reviews, pay and reward redesign, and stronger documentation of role comparators and market supplements; this is resource intensive and can divert capacity from service reform.
- Legal and case management burden: large volumes of claims require structured case triage, document disclosure, negotiation, tribunal preparation, and settlement administration, including individual calculation and payment processes.
- Operational disruption risk: where disputes escalate, councils may face industrial relations impacts, recruitment and retention issues in affected services, and reputational harm that increases member and customer contact.
- Service prioritisation and communications: councils need clear public facing explanations of what equal pay liabilities mean for service budgets and delivery plans, including transparency about how future pay structures are being made compliant.

Social rent convergence in London: £3 per week proposal from April 2026



Key facts

- London Councils (cross party group) is urging government to allow social rent convergence of at least £3 per week from April 2026; ministers are due to confirm the convergence policy in January 2026.
- Rent convergence (used nationally between 2002 and 2015) aims to ensure tenants in similar socially rented homes pay similar rents, using a national formula.
- London Councils argues that without £3 per week convergence, boroughs will struggle to stabilise Housing Revenue Accounts and invest in new homes and existing stock, with knock on impacts for homelessness and temporary accommodation.
- Context: London boroughs own and let around 390,000 social homes, housing more than one in 10 London households

Social rent convergence in London: £3 per week proposal from April 2026



Impacts on administration of services

- Rent setting and billing: if convergence is agreed, landlords will need to implement an additional rent change from April 2026 alongside the 2026/27 rent setting process, including tenant communications, arrears risk management, and Housing Benefit and Universal Credit housing cost alignment activity.
- Repairs, management and resident services: boroughs say convergence is needed to avoid real terms cuts in core landlord services, which would otherwise affect responsiveness, tenant experience, and compliance activity.
- Compliance workload: the briefing links the housing finance squeeze to rising costs and unfunded regulatory requirements, including damp and mould and decency expectations, plus net zero retrofit; funding pressures typically translate into tougher prioritisation, more planned works deferrals, and higher complaint volumes.
- Homelessness and temporary accommodation: London Councils argues increased supply of council led homes would reduce temporary accommodation pressures; if convergence is not enabled at a sufficient rate, boroughs expect these pressures to worsen, increasing placement, procurement, safeguarding and casework volumes.
- Delivery and programme management: the case presented is explicitly about capacity to build, so a decision either way affects housing pipeline planning, business case approvals, and how boroughs resource development teams over the next decade.

Quote of the Week

“January is basically Monday, but longer.” - Unattributed

That line survives as one of those anonymous bits of modern workplace folklore — a quip that emerged from the early social-media era, where people compared the emotional “feel” of months to days of the week. It stuck because it perfectly captures January’s blend of obligation, inertia, and the faint hope that things will pick up once the year properly gets going.





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Legal Issues of Note

Proceeds of Crime recovery for financial abuse by a Power of Attorney

Key facts

- Calderdale Council, working through the West Yorkshire Trading Standards shared service, secured a Proceeds of Crime Act confiscation order against Robert Catlow after he defrauded his elderly mother while she was living in a care home.
- Catlow held Lasting Power of Attorney and was found to have used his mother's money to support his business and personal household costs, abusing a position of trust.
- He was sentenced at Bradford Crown Court on 29 April 2024, receiving a two year sentence suspended for two years, plus 30 rehabilitation days, after pleading guilty to fraud by abuse of position.
- The confiscation order was pursued by the West Yorkshire Financial Exploitation and Abuse Team within Trading Standards, following a referral in May 2021; offending was described as spanning 2016 to 2021.
- Calderdale described the outcome as part of a wider approach to holding offenders to account and supporting victims.

Proceeds of Crime recovery for financial abuse by a Power of Attorney

Impacts on administration of services

- Stronger routes to recover public funds: confiscation and compensation orders can directly support adult social care charging recovery where care fees have accrued, reducing bad debt and protecting budgets.
- More complex cross service casework: requires coordinated workflows between Trading Standards, adult social care finance teams, legal services, and where relevant safeguarding partners, to evidence loss, quantify benefit from crime, and progress POCA action.
- Higher investigation and evidential burden: detailed financial enquiries, audit trails, and clear documentation of decision making are essential, particularly where the perpetrator is a family member acting under Power of Attorney.
- Demand for consistent communications: cases like this can increase reports of suspected financial abuse; councils may need clearer public messaging on how to raise concerns, and clearer internal thresholds for referral and escalation.
- Shared service benefits and expectations: the case illustrates how a regional shared service can concentrate specialist skills (financial exploitation, POCA), but it also implies ongoing needs for governance, prioritisation, and performance reporting across participating councils



Stats & references

DWP disability benefit cuts: assessment changes and transparency gap

Key numbers and dates

- Planned savings profile (reductions in disability benefit spending): £85m (2026/27); £310m (2027/28); £520m (2028/29); £580m (2029/30); £455m (2030/31); total £1.95bn.
- Face to face assessments (DWP stated intent):
 - PIP face to face: from 6% in 2024 (57,000) to 30% of all assessments.
 - WCA face to face: from 13% in 2024 (74,000) to 30% of assessments.
- PIP award reviews: for most claimants aged 25 and over, minimum three years after a new claim; then five years at the next review if they remain entitled; earlier review still possible via reported changes or DWP triggered information.
- Timing and related operational measures: changes take effect from April 2026; DWP also refers to redeployment of 1,000 work coaches and employment support through Connect to Work (targeting 300,000 people by the end of the parliament).

References and links

- Disability News Service (John Pring), “DWP refuses to say who will lose out in £2 billion cuts to disability benefits, six weeks after budget”, 6 January 2026.
- GOV.UK, “Reforms to welfare system set to save £1.9 billion by the end of 2030/31” (DWP press release), 18 December 2025.
- GOV.UK, “Budget 2025 in full” (collection and supporting documents)

Misleading media claims about Universal Credit: childcare, housing support, and the benefit cap

Key numbers and assumptions used in the argument

- Overall Benefit Cap workaround cited: cap applies if out of work; cap removed if couple earns more than £846 per month (about £10,152 per year).
- Administrative Earnings Threshold (couples) cited: £1,534 per month, with conditionality expectations below this level.
- UC standard allowance cited: £667 per month (noted as rising by £4 from April 2026 in the blog).
- Housing support cited by the Mail: £497.10 per week (about £2,154 per month); blog contrasts this with an average three bedroom rent of £2,875 per month in Hammersmith and Fulham, implying a shortfall of about £721 per month.
- Child element cited: £304 per child per month (linked to assumptions about removal of the two child limit from April 2026).
- Childcare support: UC reimburses 85% of eligible costs up to a maximum; the blog notes that claiming £2,601 per month implies the household is still paying about £459 per month themselves under the Mail's figures.
- UC taper cited: 55p reduction per £1 earned above the work allowance (the blog suggests the Mail figure understates the clawback slightly).

References and links

- Gareth Morgan, "'tis the season to be jolly... misleading, in the Daily Mail" (Benefits in the Future), 29 December 2025
- The Daily Mail "analysis" piece discussed in the blog (headline quoted within the blog)
- Universal Credit rules referenced in the blog: conditionality via the Administrative Earnings Threshold; childcare support must enable work, with scope to reduce "excessive" charges; Regulation 33(1)(b) cited in the blog
- Nesta childcare cost reference cited in the blog (Hammersmith and Fulham rates)
- <https://benefitsinthefuture.com/tis-the-season-to-be-jolly-misleading-in-the-daily-mail/>

St George Hotel HMO ruling: microwaves, cooking facilities, and licensing standards

Key numbers and dates

- Rooms: 62 total; 32 used as homelessness accommodation at the point of inspection.
- Inspection context: the First Tier Tribunal considered a material date of 5 October 2023, based on an inspection the day before.
- What was (and was not) present in rooms seen at tribunal inspection: fridge and microwave common; no food preparation area; no storage for crockery and cutlery.
- Upper Tribunal decision coverage: published reporting in late November and early December 2025.

References and links

- First Tier Tribunal (Property Chamber) decision PDF: CAM/33UD/HMR/2023/0001, St George Hotel (Great Yarmouth).
- Local Government Lawyer, "Upper Tribunal judge finds for council in dispute over HMO licensing and provision of microwave ovens", 3 December 2025.
- Estates Gazette, "Oxford Hotel Investments Ltd v Great Yarmouth Borough Council", 27 November 2025.
- LandlordZONE, "Council scores legal win by judging homeless hotel as HMO", 19 December 2025.

Staffordshire County Council: Reform UK efficiency review and proposed savings

Key numbers and context

- Total savings stated: £2.67 million.
- Net revenue budget context: £734 million (2025/26).
- Savings scale: about 0.36% of the 2025/26 net revenue budget.
- Notable profile points:
 - £500,000 is described as one off, linked to timing of waste to recycling income.
 - The largest recurring item cited, concessionary fares, is £1 million in 2026/27, falling to £500,000 thereafter.
- Political framing in reporting: Reform UK referenced potential future savings from areas including climate policy and DEI, and also referenced a “DOGE” unit, which reporting notes has not yet visited Staffordshire.

References and links

- Express & Star, “Efficiency review finds £2.7m savings for Reform run Staffordshire council” (29 Dec 2025).
- Lichfield Live, “Mobile library service and voluntary group contracts highlighted as part of £2.6m savings plan after review” (27 Dec 2025).
- Staffordshire County Council Newsroom, “Strong budget allows for community investment” (21 Jan 2025), confirms £734 million budget figure for 2025/26.

Reform-led council tax rises and the realities of local government budgets

Key numbers and dates

- 2026/27 referendum principle for social care authorities: 5% total (3% core plus up to 2% adult social care precept).
- Kent County Council:
 - Proposed council tax increase: 3.99%.
 - Leader's figures in reporting: more than £700m debt; about £84,000 per day interest; £100m savings and income planned; debt reduced by £67m.
 - Reported impact: about £67.47 per year for the average Band D household.
- Derbyshire County Council:
 - Reported budget gap: £38m; reported budget size: £838m.
 - Reported effects of the 5% proposal: about £29m raised, alongside about £22m of cuts.
- Key dates in reporting:
 - Guardian roundup on multiple Reform councils: published 9 January 2026.
 - Guardian Derbyshire piece: published 5 January 2026.

Slide 4: References and links

- The Guardian, "Reform UK accused of betraying election pledges after council tax rises" (9 January 2026).
- The Guardian, "Reform UK accused of 'empty rhetoric' over plan to hike council tax 5% in Derbyshire" (5 January 2026).
- House of Commons Library, "Council tax: local referendums" (updated 18 December 2025).
- UK Government, "Referendums Relating to Council Tax Increases (Principles) (England) Report 2026 to 2027: draft" (17 December 2025).
- Kent County Council, "KCC announces 3.99% council tax charge in draft budget proposals" (8 January 2026).
- Derbyshire County Council, "Budget Savings Proposals 2026/27 to 2030/31 and update to Medium Term Financial Plan" (report PDF)

Business rates relief for pubs: planned mitigation of 2026 rises in England

Key numbers and dates

- Timing: announcement expected “in coming days” from 8 January 2026; 2026 revaluation takes effect from 1 April 2026.
- Discount withdrawal: Budget 2025 reduced the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure relief from 75% to 40%; it is due to end on 31 March 2026.
- Multipliers referenced in current policy material for 2026/27:
 - Standard RHL multiplier: 43p
 - Small business RHL multiplier: 38.2p
- Business rates support package size cited in government analysis: £4.3bn over three years, including £3.2bn redesigned transitional relief, and supporting small business scheme elements (with additional support for RHL properties transitioning).
- Sector impact warnings reported by Reuters: 15,000 jobs at risk; around 5,000 smaller pubs facing rates bills for the first time.
- UKHospitality estimate reported by ITV: average pub rates up 15% (about £1,400) even after the reduced multiplier, taking transitional relief into account.

References and links

- Reuters, “UK expected to soften business rates rise for pubs” (8 January 2026).
- ITV News, “U-turn on pubs business rates rise to be announced ‘in coming days’” (8 January 2026).
- GOV.UK, “Budget 2025: Retail, Hospitality and Leisure factsheet” (28 November 2025).
- GOV.UK, “Effects of the business rates retail, hospitality and leisure multipliers and high-value multiplier” (26 November 2025).
- The Caterer, “UKHospitality urges ‘hospitality-wide solution’ as government mulls business rates U-turn” (8 January 2026).

Mudford beach huts: council tax reclassification and second home policy

Key numbers and dates

- Effective date: 1 April 2026.
- Scale: just over 340 huts affected; all are band A.
- Ownership: 231 huts owned by nonresidents of the BCP council area (BCP figure).
- Indicative bill impact: based on 2025/26 band A charges, removing the 50% discount gives an annual bill of £1,503 (BCP notes 2026/27 rates not yet set).
- Estimated additional income: £211,000 per year (BCP estimate).
- Asset values referenced: huts reported as selling in the £400,000 to £575,000 range; BCP compares this to an average home price of £313,000 in the BCP area (ONS based, as quoted by BCP).
- National context: councils in England have had powers to apply a premium of up to 100% additional council tax on second homes from April 2025, subject to guidance and exceptions.

References and links

- BCP Council, “Council to end Council Tax discount for Mudford beach huts” (6 January 2026).
- The Times, “Prime Dorset beach huts to be hit with ‘second home’ tax bills” (7 January 2026).
- UK Government, “Guidance on the implementation of the council tax premiums on long term empty homes and second homes” (includes April 2025 second home premium power and exceptions).
- North Yorkshire Council, “Council Tax on second homes” (example of how billing authorities describe the premium and exceptions).

Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative: Year 6 year end capture and deadlines

Key dates and cut offs to manage

Intervention start date, last date to input for Year 6 (by SHBE week)

- Week 1 LAs: week commencing 2 March 2026
- Week 2 LAs: week commencing 9 March 2026
- Week 3 LAs: week commencing 16 March 2026
- Week 4 LAs: week commencing 23 March 2026
Practical rule: it is the day before you take the SHBE copy used for that submission.

Intervention completion date and outcome, last date to input for Year 6 (by SHBE week)

- Week 1 LAs: up to the day before taking the SHBE copy for submission week commencing 1 June 2026
- Week 2 LAs: up to the day before taking the SHBE copy for submission week commencing 8 June 2026
- Week 3 LAs: up to the day before taking the SHBE copy for submission week commencing 15 June 2026
- Week 4 LAs: up to the day before taking the SHBE copy for submission week commencing 22 June 2026
DWP position: it will refresh data for three months after the March 2026 year end SHBE returns to capture late outcomes.

Final DWP monthly risk data file in scope for Year 6 case selection

- Issued between week commencing 9 February 2026 and week commencing 2 March 2026.

References and links

- DWP note: Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative, Capturing Year 6 end of year performance, Annex A Frequently asked questions.
- Contact: lawelfare.pdtprm@dwp.gov.uk.

Parliamentary inquiry into youth NEET and unemployment

Key numbers and dates

- NEET (under 25s): 946,000; described as 50% higher than five years ago.
- NEET rate (ONS, ages 16 to 24, July to September 2025): 12.7%.
- Youth unemployment: 15.3% (committee statement).
- Job loss concentration: almost half of job losses since June 2024 among under 25s (committee statement).
- Call for evidence deadline: 16:00, 12 February 2026.
- Long run impact cited by the committee: around £1 million in lost lifetime earnings per person (and a similar cost to government).
- Data caution: ONS Labour Force Survey estimates have been flagged as more volatile, so quarter to quarter movements should be treated carefully.

References and links

- Work and Pensions Committee news release, “Committee launch new inquiry on tackling youth NEET crisis” (8 January 2026).
- Work and Pensions Committee inquiry page, “Youth employment, education and training” (evidence deadline shown).
- House of Commons Library briefing, “Youth unemployment statistics” (NEET and labour market context, includes LFS caution).
- ONS bulletin, “Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)” (20 November 2025).
- Financial Times, “Where did all the Saturday jobs go?” (10 January 2026)

Removing domestic abusers from social tenancies in Scotland

Key dates and legal hooks

- Commencement date: 1 August 2026 (set by the Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 (Commencement No. 1) Regulations 2025).
- Regulations made: 16 December 2025; laid before the Scottish Parliament: 18 December 2025.
- What is commenced: sections 2, 3 and 22 of the 2021 Act; section 22 amends the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 to create a new tenancy ground (ground 15A) linked to domestic abuse, enabling court action affecting a perpetrator's tenancy rights.
- Court decision factors (as set out in explanatory material): the court's "reasonableness" assessment includes considering risk of further abusive behaviour; recent conviction for an imprisonable offence can be a relevant trigger in the statutory scheme described in the bill notes.

References and links

- Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021 (Commencement No. 1) Regulations 2025 (SSI 2025/400), legislation.gov.uk.
- Policy Note for SSI 2025/400, legislation.gov.uk.
- Domestic Abuse (Protection) (Scotland) Act 2021, Part 2 explanatory notes, legislation.gov.uk.
- Chartered Institute of Housing, "A long-awaited step forward for victims of domestic abuse in Scotland's housing system" (23 December 2025).
- STV News coverage of the regulations and intended effect (10 January 2026).

Four day working week in councils: Best Value warning and service performance concerns

Key numbers and dates

- South Cambridgeshire: council voted in July 2025 to adopt a four day week permanently; staff expected to deliver 100% of work in around 80% of contracted hours, with no pay reduction.
- Government performance concerns referenced in reporting focus on housing related measures including rent collection, re lettings, and satisfaction with repairs.
- Number of councils reported to have debated four day week arrangements: 25; South Cambridgeshire reported as having implemented it.
- Legal and policy framework: Best Value Duty sits under the Local Government Act 1999; government has powers to intervene where an authority is judged to be failing.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, Communities Secretary warns councils not to adopt a four day working week, 23 December 2025.
- The Guardian, Four day week may be considered a sign of failure, England councils told, 23 December 2025.
- Local Government Lawyer, Government and district council at loggerheads over performance following adoption of four day working week, 30 October 2025.
- Personnel Today, Government issues fresh warning to four day week council, 29 October 2025.
- GOV.UK, Four day working week arrangements in local authorities, 26 October 2023.
- UK Parliament, Written Statement: Local Government Stewardship Update, 8 May 2024.
- GOV.UK, Formal warning to council over four day working week, 3 November 2023.

HMRC staff charged over alleged sale of taxpayer data for cash

Key numbers and dates

- Alleged offence window: April to November 2020.
- Ages: Ahmed 29; Suhaib 28.
- Core charges (each): 1 count misconduct in public office; 1 count conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation.
- Wider charging decision: multiple additional defendants charged with offences linked to handling suspected criminal property; one charged with concealing, disguising, converting, transferring, or removing criminal property.
- CPS position reported: the value of payments and the scale of data accessed have not been disclosed publicly in reporting available at the time.

References and links

- Pie Tax (Tax Pible), “HMRC Officers Charged Over Alleged Sale of Taxpayer Data for Cash” (updated 9 Jan 2026).
- AOL syndicated report, “HMRC officers charged over data leak for cash” (8 Jan 2026).

Discretionary Housing Payments in Wales: 2026/27 funding and rules

Key numbers and allocations

- Total DHP government contribution for Wales (FYE March 2027): £6.5 million.
- Rules that affect planning:
 - No carry over of unspent 2025/26 government funding.
 - No cap on local authority top up amounts from 2026/27.
- Allocation range (selected): highest Cardiff £781,533; next Gwynedd £650,017; Powys £527,613; Rhondda Cynon Taf £404,038; Swansea £395,685; lowest Monmouthshire £119,074; Isle of Anglesey £123,008.
- Full Welsh allocations (FYE March 2027):
 - Blaenau Gwent £140,170; Bridgend £258,312; Caerphilly £339,277; Cardiff £781,533; Carmarthenshire £268,324; Ceredigion £275,132; Conwy £176,335; Denbighshire £171,145; Flintshire £205,365; Gwynedd £650,017; Isle of Anglesey £123,008; Merthyr Tydfil £144,200; Monmouthshire £119,074; Neath Port Talbot £291,401; Newport £380,372; Pembrokeshire £198,191; Powys £527,613; Rhondda Cynon Taf £404,038; Swansea £395,685; Torfaen £189,926; Vale of Glamorgan £194,041; Wrexham £226,072.

References and links

- DWP Housing Benefit Subsidy Circular, S6/2025: Discretionary Housing Payment government contribution for Welsh local authorities for the financial year ending March 2027 (updated 6 January 2026).
- DWP collection page: Housing Benefit subsidy circulars 2025 (shows update entry for S6/2025).
- Welsh Government public guidance: Find out about Discretionary Housing Payments (application route via local authority).
- DWP Discretionary Housing Payments guidance manual (May 2022, England and Wales).
- Queries (as stated in the circular): lawelfare.lafunding@dwp.gov.uk; distribution queries: lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk

Housing Benefit subsidy: prior year overpayments where subsidy was restricted

Key dates, decision points, and “what to do”

- Effective for subsidy purposes: **1 April 2024** (with the amending order in force by **30 November 2025** at the latest).
- Rework window: if impacted, councils may wish to **recalculate and resubmit the FYE March 2025 subsidy claim**, ideally before the final audit; if audit has started, contact DWP for advice.
- Calculation support: DWP provides a calculator at **Appendix A** to determine the adjusted value needed in the relevant prior year overpayment cell so that subsidy is corrected to reflect what was originally received.
- Process essentials (in summary):
 - Identify the subsidy actually received on the related expenditure in the prior year, including apportionment where the overpayment is part of an award.
 - Remove any prior year overpayment expenditure already accounted for in the claim, where amending.
 - Enter the adjusted value in the correct prior year overpayment cells; in specific DWP error not recovered scenarios the adjusted value may need to be reflected in current year cells to have effect.
- If resubmitting a final claim: notify DWP at lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk.

References and links

- DWP Housing Benefit Subsidy Circular **S5/2025**, “Changes to the Housing Benefit subsidy calculation for prior year overpayments”.
- Housing Benefit subsidy circulars 2025 collection page (includes S5/2025 and Appendix A link).
- The Income-related Benefits (Subsidy to Authorities) Order 1998 (SI 1998/562).
- The Income-related Benefits (Subsidy to Authorities) Amendment Order 2025 (PDF).
- Housing Benefit subsidy guidance manual 2024 to 2025 (for wider subsidy calculation context, including references cited in the circular).

National council recruitment campaign: “Make a Difference, Work for Your Local Council”

Key numbers and dates

- Campaign period: 5 January 2026 to 15 February 2026.
- Councils reporting recruitment and retention challenges: 94% (as cited by LGA analysis in reporting).
- Finance workforce vacancies (CIPFA and LGA survey-based reporting): 26% of local authority accountancy roles vacant; 21% of internal audit roles vacant; 20% of business partnering roles vacant.
- Supporting sector work: LGA finance workforce action plan (October 2024) sets out recommendations to address finance capacity and capability challenges.

References and links

- Public Finance, “LGA campaign aims to tackle local government recruitment crisis” (7 January 2026).
- LGA, campaign announcement and details (launch 5 January 2026, runs to 15 February 2026).
- LGA, national recruitment campaign page and toolkit signposting.
- LGA, “Local government finance workforce action plan for England” (17 October 2024).
- ICAEW summary of CIPFA and LGA findings on finance vacancies (14 November 2024).

Local government equal pay claims: new 2026 caseload and growing liabilities

Key numbers and where pressure is building

- New claims flagged for 2026: 10,000, across five councils (GMB).
- Settlements paid to date (GMB headline): £1.095bn, reported as across six councils.
- Claims settled so far (Guardian reporting): almost 30,000; average payout around £30,000; some reported up to £55,000.
- Outstanding caseload: 40,000 claims, reported across 26 councils (Guardian) or 28 authorities (GMB statement).
- Named examples in reporting:
 - Birmingham settlement: about £250m.
 - Glasgow settlement: £770m (2022).
 - Other cited settlements include Sheffield (£60m), Leeds (£10m), Blaenau Gwent (£3m), Falkirk (£3m).
 - Councils cited as having pending claims in Guardian reporting include Coventry and Bradford among others.

Slide 4: References and links

- GMB, "GMB win £1billion in equal pay cases" (27 Dec 2025).
- The Guardian, "Equal pay settlements for female council workers pass £1bn" (27 Dec 2025).
- Local Government Lawyer, "Union says it will launch equal pay claims against five more councils after reaching £1bn in settlements" (29 Dec 2025).
- People Management, "Historic day for Birmingham City Council staff as equal pay settlement reached" (16 Dec 2025).
- Glasgow City Council committee papers referencing the £770m settlement context.

Social rent convergence in London: £3 per week proposal from April 2026

Key numbers and dates

- Proposed convergence rate: at least £3 per week from April 2026.
- Decision timing: government said it will confirm details of rent convergence policy, including the rate, in January 2026.
- Homes impact: London Councils forecasts at least 7,000 fewer council led homes over a decade if £3 per week convergence is not enabled.
- Temporary accommodation impact: London Councils claims at least £115m net saving in government spending over ten years from lower temporary accommodation costs if expanded social housing provision is enabled through convergence.
- HRA service impact: London Councils says boroughs would otherwise need a real terms reduction of £269m over four years in repairs, management, and resident services to balance HRAs.
- Stock scale: around 390,000 borough owned social homes, housing more than one in 10 London households.
- Briefing detail on income: London Councils estimates £3 per week could generate £422m cumulative additional revenue over four years, compared with £165m at £1 and £321m at £2.

References and links

- London Councils press release, Boroughs call for £3 per week social rent convergence from April (5 January 2026).
- London Councils briefing PDF, Social rent convergence at £3 per week: promoting fairness for tenants and securing a better future for London social housing (January 2026).
- Public Finance, London boroughs call for £3 per week social rent convergence (7 January 2026).

Proceeds of Crime recovery for financial abuse by a Power of Attorney

Key numbers and dates

- Confiscation order (POCA): £145,045.57.
- Compensation to Calderdale Council for care fees: £52,046.57.
- Prosecution costs: £10,000.
- Amount defrauded referenced in earlier reporting: about £112,001.38.
- Timescales: offending 2016 to 2021; referral May 2021; sentencing 29 April 2024; confiscation order reported December 2025 and in sector press January 2026.
- Shared service footprint: West Yorkshire Trading Standards covers Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, “Council secures £145k proceeds of crime order against man who defrauded own mother”, 6 January 2026
- Calderdale Council news release, “Confiscation Order for Calderdale man who defrauded his mother”, 19 December 2025
- West Yorkshire Joint Services, “Confiscation Order for Calderdale man who defrauded his mother”, 18 December 2025
- ITV News (Calendar), “Man defrauded elderly mum of more than £100,000 to pay own bills”, 30 April 2024
- Bradford Council document pack reference to the case (Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee papers, January 2025)



Job Adverts From Business Smart Solutions



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Generic Revenues & Benefits Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)

Permanent | Circa £30,000.00 per annum | Hybrid

Our good client in the East of England is seeking multiple Revenues & Benefits Officers, on a permanent, full-time basis.

Roles are offered on a remote basis with the understanding you may be asked to work from the office once every 2-3 days, and initially for the first few days for training & set-up.

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- To determine Council Tax liability in accordance with relevant primary legislation and case law
- To have and maintain a working knowledge of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and case law
- Determine and award discounts and exemptions in
- Gather information, explain decisions, and provide advice to the public and their representatives by email, letter, and

What we're looking for:

main skills/knowledge:

- A minimum of 3 years Revenues or Benefits experience
- Be a skilled Civica OpenRevenues user

To find out more or to apply

>> Click here to view the full advert <<

Trainee Enforcement Agent



Permanent | £25,000 basic salary | London or Nationwide

Salary: £25,000 basic salary increasing to £28,500 once your earnings are uncapped. (We pay fees on a pro-rata basis).

Core responsibilities of the role include:

- Undertaking field based/Classroom training to learn the necessary skills to become a Certificated Enforcement Agent.
- Travelling to various addresses, observing and job
- Completion of training course resulting in Level 2
- Completion of the Level 2 Taking Control of Goods examination.
- Attending the County Court, either in person or virtually to demonstrate that you are a fit and proper person to be

What we're looking for:

main skills/knowledge:

- No experience is required as all training will be supplied.
- Ideal candidates will have worked in relevant roles including Civil Enforcement, Armed Forces, Security, Police, Parking/traffic Management, and jobs where Customer Service is a key element of the role.
- Full clean UK driving license is required (minimum of 2 years).

To find out more or to apply

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Benefits Team Leader (NEC/Northgate)



3 months | £35 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

Our good client in the North West is seeking a Benefits Team Leader on a fully remote basis.

The successful candidate must have strong Housing skills, be an large team.

What we're looking for:

main skills/knowledge:

- Strong Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction assessment skills
- The ability to lead and motivate a Benefits team
- Knowledge & understanding of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 and Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
- An advanced NEC (Northgate) user

To find out more or to apply

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Senior NDR Officer (NEC) 16hrs per week



8 weeks initially | £30 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

The role requires an experienced Interim Senior NDR/Business Rates Officer on a short-term basis who can help the team with complex queries, writing procedures & training.

The role is offered on a fully remote basis, laptop will be couriered.

What we're looking for:

main skills/knowledge:

- Strong Senior Revenues/NDR skills
- Experience of NEC(Northgate)
- IRRV qualified or relevant experience
- Able to deal with complex queries and support new members of staff
- Write procedures and support with training

To find out more or to apply

>> Click here to view the full advert <<

Revenues Manager (Academy)



3 months initially | £450 per day (umbrella) | Hybrid

Location: Hybrid – 2-3 days in the office per week

Purpose and impact:

high-quality Council Tax and Business Rates (NDR) billing and service in line with customer requirements and and performance.

As part of the Management Team the role holder will deputise for the AD and provide strong professional leadership and for the Revenues service for West

What we're looking for:

main skills/knowledge:

- IRRV qualified to current Level 7
- Extensive knowledge of Council Tax and Business Rates legislation
- Up to date knowledge of current best practice in both Council Tax and Business Rates
- Management experience is essential as this role will be managing 7 direct reports

To find out more or to apply

>> Click here to view the full advert <<

Business Analyst Revenues & Benefits



Until 31 May 2026 | £450 per day (umbrella) | Hybrid

Hours per week: 18.50 -- 2.5 days per week (Tuesday & Thursday full days, half-day at candidate discretion)

We are looking for an experienced Business Analyst to support moving our NEC Revenues & Benefits System to the cloud (Software As A Service). We will be pursuing the following lines of enquiry:

- Reviewing existing processes for the “as is” solution - to determine our baseline
- Reviewing, with IT specialists, the function of existing standard processes
- Reviewing new modules that will be implemented as part of the project and producing new process flow maps for end users
- Identifying if this move present any opportunities for beneficial changes

What we're looking for:

main skills/knowledge:

- Experience with NEC Revenues & Benefits (Previously known as Northgate i-world)
- Experience with cloud migrations
- Experiencing in producing process documentation, process maps and flow charts
- Must be skilled in working proactively, methodically and collaboratively with a project team
- Domain knowledge of Local Authority highly desirable

To find out more or to apply

>> Click here to view the full advert <<

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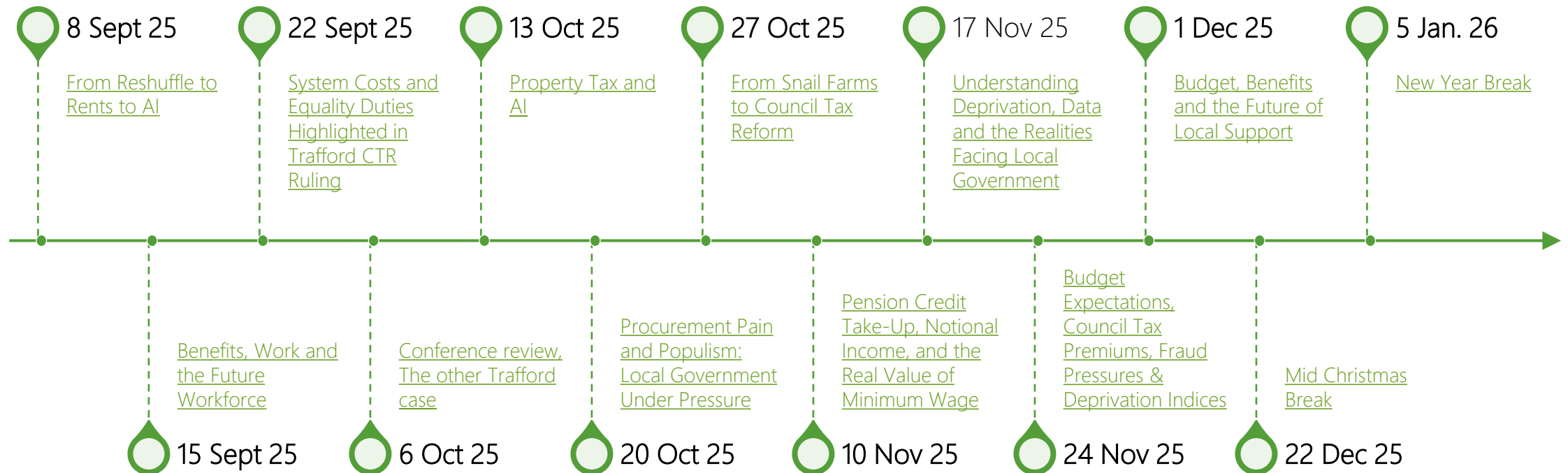
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What I particularly like is how well they support everyone, and they really look after their people, which is unlike any other agency I have worked with in 30 years.

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



Previous Recordings



Dates where there will be no sessions





Other Workshops



Thursday 29th January 2026

2026: Reorganisation, Reform & Results: Shaping the Future of Local Government

Leeds Civic Hall, Calverley
Street, LS1 1UR



Reorganisation, Reform & Results: Shaping the Future of Local Government

Event by [Ascendant Solutions Ltd](#)

Thu, Jan 29, 2026, 9:30 AM (your
local time)

Live and Online

Event

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“I really enjoyed the session.”- LP





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Start 10am - 3pm

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st December 2025.

Guest Speakers – Greg Flewitt & Deborah Nigh

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Email Tracey.stone@welfaretogether.co.uk





VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Replay: 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





Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

Blogs



Budget 2025: Impacts on Revenues & Benefits Administration, Housing and Local Government Finance by Malcolm Gardner

[Budget 2025: Impacts on Revenues & Benefits Administration, Housing and Local Government Finance – Visionary Network](#)

Why We Should Not Be Surprised That Reform UK's Councils Are Struggling by Malcolm Gardner

[Why We Should Not Be Surprised That Reform UK's Councils Are Struggling – Visionary Network](#)

The Appointment of McFadden to DWPS by Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/09/06/the-implications-of-pat-mcfaddens-appointment-to-work-pensions-and-skills/>

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

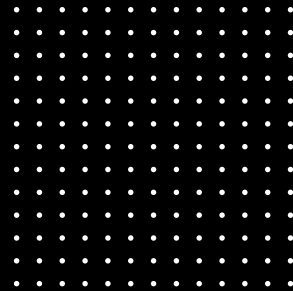
<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/06/09/reform-uks-department-of-national-efficiency-a-high-stakes-gamble-in-local-government-reform/>

<https://benefitsinthefuture.com/>



Benefits in the Future

Blogs



- 'tis the season to be jolly... misleading, in the Daily Mail
- Lies, Damned Lies and the Telegraph
- Big differences in Pension Credit take-up revealed – Benefits in the Future

Blogs

- [Benefit take-up may be getting worse, but it's hard to know](#) by Phil Agulnik
- Move to UC - Stats Update 12 August 25 by Phil Agulnik
 - [Move to UC - Stats Update 12 August 25](#)
- 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>

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[Stairway to headroom](#) Putting the Autumn Budget 2025 decisions on tax, spending and borrowing into context

by [Hannah Aldridge](#) and [Mike Brewer](#) and [Elliott Christensen](#) and [Tom Clark](#) and [Alex Clegg](#) and [Nye Cominetti](#) and [Adam Corlett](#) and [Ruth Curtice](#) and [Julia Diniz](#) and [Sophie Hale](#) and [Lindsay Judge](#) and [Zachary Leather](#) and [Jonathan Marshall](#) and [Charlie McCurdy](#) and [Louise Murphy](#) and [Simon Pittaway](#) and [Hannah Slaughter](#) and [James Smith](#) and [Imogen Stone](#) and [Greg Thwaites](#) and [Lalitha Try](#)

[The localisation era](#) Assessing the post-2013 rise of localised social security by [Alex Clegg](#)

This report is part of the project [Safety Nets: social security for families in a devolved UK](#), funded by the Nuffield Foundation. It examines the growth of *localised social security* in the UK from 2013, focusing on how responsibilities for discretionary support and Council Tax Reduction (CTR) have shifted from the UK government to local authorities. Localised support makes up only a small share of overall social security spending, but it has expanded significantly, driven first by the 2013 localism reforms and later by the Covid-19 pandemic. The report evaluates when local delivery works well, where it falls short, and what principles should guide any future reform.

What the latest Universal Credit Health data tells us about benefit claims across Britain by Louise Murphy

[What the latest Universal Credit Health data tells us about benefit claims across Britain • Resolution Foundation](#)

A healthy State? Putting the 2025 Spending Review into context by RF Staff

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VISIONARY NETWORK

About Visionary Network

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.



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.

