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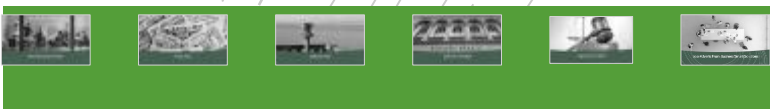


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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

[Meeting Link](#)

19 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
- Kevin Stewart, Visionary Network
- 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.

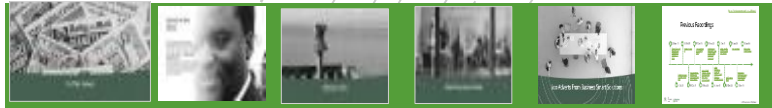


In Partnership with

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Discussion Points



Other discussion points

House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee

Career's Allowance overpayments: MPs challenge DWP leadership and culture change

- MPs criticised senior DWP officials in a stark and Pensions Committee session, describing their conduct and impact on unemployment and tax equity, in relation to the Career's Allowance overpayments scandal.
- An independent review led by Sir Francis, published in November 2025, found longstanding and unacceptable systemic leadership failures, poor benefit design, and outdated internal governance around errors.
- The review identified career impacts on unpaid carers, including major abuses, with some carers contemplating suicide.
- During the hearing, MPs raised concerns about internal messages that appeared to blame carers, contrast to the review's findings that problems were systemic.

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Manchester City Council £2,500 'right-to-leave' incentive for social housing tenants to downsize

Policy intent and offer

- Manchester City Council is offering a £2,500 cash incentive, along with moving costs, to encourage social rent, shared and housing association tenants to move to smaller homes where their current property is under-occupied or has become difficult to manage.
- The council frames this as 'right-sizing', it is presented as existing with no requirement to leave. If the tenant does not want to, it is not required to leave.
- Initial benefits for tenants include access to mortgage advice and accessible home visit and household bills for the city. The long-term objective is to release larger family homes for households waiting longer on the housing register.
- The council links the offer to housing pressure and the need to make best use of existing stock alongside building more social housing.

PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL

Peterborough emergency accommodation spend found unlawful, government and procurement failings

- Peterborough City Council's Monitoring Officer and the Local Council found a joint cabinet report stating that more than £2m of emergency accommodation payments were unlawful, due to failures in lawful procurement, written contracts, and internal governance.
- The report says there was no evidence of proper authorisation for payments, and no compliant procurement contracts attached to the emergency.
- The report was made under section 10(1)(A) of the Local Government Act 2002 and section 10(1)(A) of the Local Government Finance Act 2009, reflecting the seriousness of the issue.
- The issue emerged following a Freedom of Information request in July 2025, followed by a broader Freedom of Information which again found evidence of proper governance or oversight processes.

Cabinet Office PROJECT RESET

Rewiring the UK state for faster digital delivery and stronger civil service accountability

- Rewiring the UK state for faster digital delivery and stronger civil service accountability.
- Charmeen, Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, set out a "reset list and the things" agenda for public services at an event at Westminster on 18th, framed as a "top-down" approach to meet taxpayer expectations and to bring winning public sector productivity back.
- The highlighted "Project reset" as the practical mechanism to set internal success metrics with objectives intended to reduce reported performance from back, giving more autonomy to delivery to return for greater accountability.
- A pilot pilot with HMRC's modernisation plans, reduced approval processes from 40 to 10, with a claimed delivery gain of around half to three months.

Crisis & Resilience Fund

CRISIS AND RESILIENCE FUND

Crisis and Resilience Fund

Purpose and outcomes the guidance expects

- Fund is meant to do two things at once; provide a safety net for financial shocks, and invest in longer term resilience, so crisis demand reduces over time.
- Three outcome frame to keep coming back to:
 - effective crisis support,
 - improved individual resilience,
 - stronger joined up local support landscape.

CTR JR

Judicial review challenge to Somerset Council Tax Reduction scheme following Universal Credit migration

What is happening, and what is being challenged

- Disabled families resident in Somerset are challenging Somerset Council for the High Court, having requested permission to proceed with a judicial review on 7 January 2026.
- The challenge relates to Somerset's Council Tax Reduction scheme changes made ahead of the February 2025 budget, intended to provide support across the county and respond to wider financial pressures.
- Mr Mills fell case for its introduction and would have not changed, but after being required from being eligible for Universal Credits he was not eligible and he Council Tax Reduction reduced abruptly.
- Mr Mills argues the scheme unlawfully penalises disabled people and others with additional needs, he alleges that history of cuts and loss of care of equality duties, and says the scheme is arbitrary and unfair.
- The case is presented as being under reference because it concerns how entitlement is assessed for people on Universal Credits, including those seeking the CTRR allowance.

Workwell

Department for Work & Pensions

WorkWell national rollout: integrated health and employment support to reduce sickness related economic inactivity

- DWP is rolling out WorkWell across England, expanding on early intervention, health and employment support services to help people with health conditions stay in work or return to work.
- The expansion follows a pilot in 15 areas, more than 25,000 people were supported, with 4,000 reporting mental health or three main barriers to employment and 30% act of work at their first appointment.
- The national rollout is backed by up to £250m over three years and is expected to reach up to 250,000 more people.
- WorkWell is positioned within the wider Pathways to Work offer and is designed to integrate with local NHS, council and community services, including support such as coaching, mentoring, workplace adjustments and return to work plans.

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.

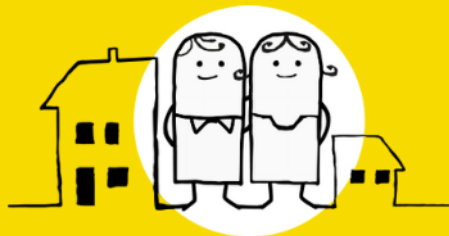
We will cover practical use cases such as:

- 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

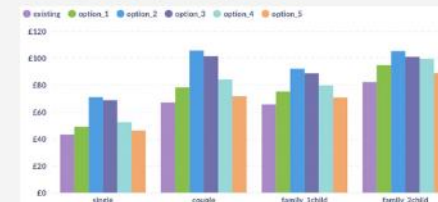
Total annual cost options



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

MALG
MEMBER

- 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 Info@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



Crisis and Resilience Fund

Purpose and outcomes the guidance expects

- Fund is meant to do two things at once; provide a safety net for financial shocks, and invest in longer term resilience, so crisis demand reduces over time.
- Three outcome frame to keep coming back to;
 - effective crisis support,
 - improved individual resilience,
 - stronger joined up local support landscape.



Crisis and Resilience Fund

Non negotiables in scheme design

- Funding must be allocated across four components; Crisis Payment, Housing Payment, Resilience Services, Community Coordination.
- Schemes must be named; “Crisis Payment” and “Housing Payment”.
- Crisis Payments must be cash first as the default, but not cash only; councils can use vouchers or in kind where that best meets needs.
- Crisis Payment and Housing Payment schemes must accept applications continuously throughout the year; councils must also provide at least two application routes, to include people who are digitally excluded or face barriers to travel.
- Councils should avoid first come, first served models, and aim to keep Crisis Payments open all year by allocating budgets accordingly.
- Service expectation worth pressure testing; aim to deliver Crisis Payments within 48 hours of application (unless in kind is awarded).



Crisis and Resilience Fund

Housing Payment transition and two-tier implications

- DHP ends in England 31 March 2026; CRF Housing Payment starts 1 April 2026 and broadly replicates DHP guidelines.
- Years 1 and 2; current DHP recipients continue to receive allocations, but Year 3 allocation moves to unitaries and remaining counties, with expected Housing Payment spend levels and a suggested tolerance of plus or minus 20 percent.



Crisis and Resilience Fund

Governance, assurance, and reporting disciplines

- Delivery plans, and MI returns, must be signed off by Section 151 Officer or CFO; delivery plan due 1 July 2026 for relevant upper tier authorities.
- MI is six monthly; Year 1 interim due 29 October 2026, Year 1 final due 6 May 2027.
- Councils must publish plans, including a dedicated web page titled “Crisis and Resilience Fund”, plus a non-digital offer.

Crisis and Resilience Fund

Discussion prompts

- Which rules will be most operationally difficult; continuous applications, two routes, 48-hour ambition, or cash first at scale?
- In two tier areas, what is the plan for Year 3, so capability is not lost, and residents do not see a postcode lottery as allocations change?

So what

- The guidance is pushing councils towards a year-round, cash first, needs based model with stronger governance and evidence; this will expose weak operating models quickly.

Source

- DWP CRF Guidance, updated 21 January 2026; DWP CRF MI reporting requirements, updated 21 January 2026.

Crisis and Resilience Fund: Managing

How councils might manage demand and avoid “running out early”

- Budget strategy choices; monthly profiles, reserves for seasonal spikes, and clear in year controls that do not become first come, first served by another name.
- Triage model; needs based assessment plus warm referrals, so repeat crisis reduces, and resilience services are not an optional extra.
- Delivery partners; if delegated, the lead authority remains accountable and must collate MI, so contract management and audit trail matter.



Crisis and Resilience Fund: Managing

Innovation ideas that fit the rules, and reduce admin drag

- Faster cash first; pay by text and cash out mechanisms, expiry controls to recycle unspent balances, bulk processing for efficiency.
- Better targeting; use data and analytics as an allowable admin cost to target support and improve scheme performance, without turning the scheme into a bureaucratic gatekeeper.
- Joined up local support landscape; use Community Coordination to map pathways, fix handoffs, and reduce “no wrong door” failure points.
- Practical alignment; consider aligning Crisis and Housing Payment administration to streamline delivery during the transition.

Crisis and Resilience Fund: Managing

Are budgets sufficient, and will this make a difference

- Housing Payment pressure; Years 1 and 2 expectation is to maintain existing levels of Housing Payment spend using 2025 to 26 DHP allocations as a guide, with a structural distribution change in Year 3.
- Core tension for local leadership; how much do you spend on immediate awards versus resilience and coordination, when demand, reputational risk, and homelessness pressures are live?
- Key question for Section 151 and members; does the local envelope cover awards plus administration, MI, accessibility, and evaluation expectations?



Crisis and Resilience Fund: Managing

Outcomes councils should consider, and how to measure results credibly

- Use the national outcomes frame, then add local service metrics; repeat presentation rate, time to award, referral uptake, and sustained housing outcomes.
- MI requires councils to build an evidence base over time; DWP explicitly wants measurable outcomes and learning to mature reporting.
- Resilience outcomes evidence examples DWP expects councils to record, where held; reduced material deprivation, reduced need for emergency food parcels, improved access to quality advice, increased savings, reduced priority debt, income maximisation, reduced need for Crisis or Housing Payments.
- Equity check; who is accessing resilience services and outcomes by demographic category, councils are encouraged to make every effort to gather this.



Crisis and Resilience Fund: Managing

Discussion prompts

- What would “success” look like locally by March 2027, and what one or two measures will you hold yourselves to, not just report to DWP?
- What governance rhythm will you use; monthly operational dashboard, quarterly member oversight, six monthly MI milestones?
- What is the plan if demand rises sharply; tightening criteria, reducing award size, shifting investment into resilience, or seeking corporate top ups?

So what

- The fund only “makes a difference” if councils can protect year-round access and use resilience investment to reduce repeat crisis, and they can prove it with clean MI and credible local measures.

Source

- DWP CRF Guidance, updated 21 January 2026; DWP CRF MI reporting requirements, updated 21 January 2026.



House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee

Carer's Allowance overpayments: MPs challenge DWP leadership and culture change

- MPs criticised senior DWP officials in a Work and Pensions Committee session, describing their conduct and responses as unacceptable and too vague, in relation to the Carer's Allowance overpayments scandal.
- An independent review led by Liz Sayce, published in November 2025, found longstanding and unacceptable systemic leadership failures, poor benefit design, and unlawful internal guidance as root causes.
- The review described severe impacts on unpaid carers, including major distress, with some carers contemplating suicide.
- During the hearing, MPs raised concerns about internal messaging that appeared to blame carers, contrary to the review's findings that problems were systemic.





House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee

Carer's Allowance overpayments: MPs challenge DWP leadership and culture change

Administrative impacts on services

- Reassessment programme workload: reviewing historic cases will drive significant operational demand across decision making, debt management, dispute resolution, and customer contact, alongside quality assurance and audit trails.
- Complaint handling and vulnerability support: increased volumes of complaints, hardship support requests, safeguarding referrals, and signposting to mental health and carer support services; stronger case sensitivity and escalation pathways will be needed.
- Governance and guidance control: the findings on unlawful internal guidance imply a reset of policy interpretation, staff training, assurance checks, and stronger controls over internal communications that shape front line decision making.
- Public trust and external scrutiny: sustained parliamentary and media scrutiny is likely to increase the reporting burden, the need for measurable management actions, and tighter evidence of cultural change in performance management.



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Manchester City
Council £2,500
'rightsizing'
incentive for social
housing tenants to
downsize

Policy intent and offer

- Manchester City Council is offering a £2,500 cash incentive, plus help with moving costs, to encourage social rent, council and housing association tenants to move to smaller homes where their current property is under occupied or has become difficult to manage.
- The council frames this as 'rightsizing'; it is presented as voluntary, with no requirement to move if the tenant does not want to.
- Stated benefits for tenants include a more manageable home and potentially lower rent and household bills; for the city, the key objective is to release larger family homes for households waiting longer on the housing register.
- The council links the offer to housing pressure and the need to make best use of existing stock alongside building more social housing.



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

Manchester City
Council £2,500
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Administrative impacts on housing and support services

Implications for council housing, allocations and partner housing associations:

- Increased casework and triage: eligibility checks (household size, tenancy type, property type), prioritisation rules, and consistency across council and housing association stock.
- Dedicated team and workflow management: higher demand on 'rightsizing' officers for assessment, matching, viewings, offers, refusals, and move coordination; plus capacity planning if take up rises.
- Payments and audit: administering incentive payments and move cost support needs clear controls, fraud prevention, and reconciliation, particularly where multiple landlords are involved.
- Customer communications: careful messaging is required to maintain trust, avoid perceptions of coercion, and manage expectations where supply of smaller homes is constrained.
- Wider system effects: tenancy changes, void turnaround, property condition checks, adaptations and accessibility needs, and links to welfare advice where rent changes, bedroom tax, or benefit interactions are relevant for the tenant.

Peterborough
emergency
accommodation spend
found unlawful,
governance and
procurement failings

- Peterborough City Council's Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer issued a joint statutory report stating that more than £17m of emergency accommodation payments were unlawful, due to failures in lawful procurement, written contracts, and internal governance.
- The report says there was no evidence of proper authorisation for payments, and no compliantly procured contracts attached to the arrangements.
- The report was made under section 5A(3)(a) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and section 114A(2)(a) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, reflecting the seriousness of the issues.
- The issue emerged following a Freedom of Information request in July 2025, followed by a broader transaction review which again found no evidence of proper governance or compliant procurement

Peterborough
emergency
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Administrative impacts on services

- Immediate procurement and contracting correction: urgent work to regularise spot purchase and provider arrangements, including tendering or compliant frameworks, formal contract terms, and record keeping.
- Governance reset for high risk spend: tighter decision logging, forward plan discipline for key decisions, and clearer delegations to prevent repeat failures, particularly where spend exceeds constitutional thresholds.
- Financial control and audit workload: expanded assurance testing, evidence retention, and transaction reviews across third party arrangements, with knock on capacity demands for finance, legal, commissioning, and service leads.
- Operational continuity risk: homelessness and emergency accommodation services may face disruption while provider arrangements are re procured; officers will need mitigations to avoid gaps in statutory provision.
- Workforce implications: training and potential investigations into conduct where actions caused the council to act unlawfully, plus strengthened compliance culture and management oversight



Cabinet Office
**PROJECT
RESET** 

Rewiring the UK state for faster digital delivery and stronger civil service accountability

Rewiring the UK state for faster digital delivery and stronger civil service accountability

- Darren Jones, Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, set out a “move fast and fix things” agenda for public services at an event at What3Words HQ, framed as a “complete rewiring” to meet taxpayer expectations and tackle long running public sector productivity issues.
- He highlighted “Project reset” as the practical mechanism to cut internal bureaucracy, with changes intended to reduce repeated permissions from April, giving more autonomy nearer to delivery in return for clearer accountability.
- A cited pilot with HMRC’s modernisation plans reduced approval processes from 40 to two, with a claimed delivery gain of around two to three months.



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Cabinet Office
**PROJECT
RESET** 

Rewiring the UK
state for faster
digital delivery and
stronger civil service
accountability

Administrative impacts on services and delivery systems

- Governance and assurance: fewer internal gates can shorten delivery cycles, but it increases the need for crisp decision rights, robust risk ownership, clearer audit trails, and rapid escalation routes when delivery goes off track.
- Workforce and performance management: Jones signalled a shift in Senior Civil Service hiring towards delivery, innovation and private sector experience; performance would be marked against minister set KPIs, with a tougher stance on underperformance and dismissal where improvement does not follow. This implies more formal KPI frameworks, evidence capture, and more active performance casework.
- Skills and capability building: a new National School of Government and Public Services is proposed, funded from existing budgets, bringing training in house with a curriculum including technology and AI; this implies programme design, cohort planning, release time, and measurable outcomes linked to service transformation.
- Portfolio management: departments may need to re plan delivery timelines, controls, and reporting, as “fewer approvals” changes how business cases, digital procurement, and delivery assurance are sequenced and evidenced.



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Department
for Work &
Pensions

WorkWell national
rollout: integrated
health and
employment support to
reduce sickness related
economic inactivity

- DWP is rolling out WorkWell across England, expanding an early intervention, health led employment support service to help people with health conditions stay in work or return to work.
- The expansion follows a pilot in 15 areas; more than 25,000 people were supported, with 48% reporting mental illness as their main barrier to employment and 59% out of work at their first appointment.
- The national rollout is backed by up to £259m over three years and is expected to reach up to 250,000 more people.
- WorkWell is positioned within the wider Pathways to Work offer and is designed to integrate with local NHS, council and community services, including support such as physiotherapy, counselling, workplace adjustments and return to work plans.



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Department for Work & Pensions

WorkWell national
rollout: integrated
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economic inactivity

Administrative impacts on services

- Local delivery model: services are to be delivered through NHS Integrated Care Boards working with local authorities, Jobcentre Plus and community organisations; this increases coordination, commissioning and governance demands across partners.
- Referral and triage management: “no wrong door” access routes include employer, GP or primary care, Jobcentre Plus, local services and self-referral; systems will need consistent triage, eligibility handling, and handoffs between organisations.
- Data sharing and assurance: integrated working implies more operational data flows, shared outcomes and reporting, information governance, and audit trails across health and local government settings.
- Primary care and fit note pressure: government expects WorkWell to reduce demand for GP appointments by routing people earlier to appropriate health and work support; councils and NHS partners should plan for pathway changes and communications.
- Workforce and capability: scaling nationally requires recruitment, training and supervision of work and health coaches, plus capacity to broker local service access (for example mental health support and MSK pathways), with consistent quality control.



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

E: peter.davis@ladirectories.com

M: 07807 009 959

Ferret Information Systems Ltd



Ferret Information Systems was established in 1987 and is the largest company in Europe in the field of law dealing with welfare benefits and similar areas of determinative, compliance, and regulatory law.



our training services:

Ferret is well placed to provide training services and its team of specialists have wide experience of benefits and housing grant legislation. We also provide consultancy to organisations, companies and government on the impact of legislative and policy changes.



our products:

Ferret produces a wide variety of systems, designed to provide support tools for advice workers, and also to provide information and advice directly to the public. Ferret specialises in a holistic assessment of financial circumstances relating to welfare benefits and tax credits entitlement, coupled with software development methodology which offers a high level of flexibility and rapid updating to reflect rule changes.



our platforms:

Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.



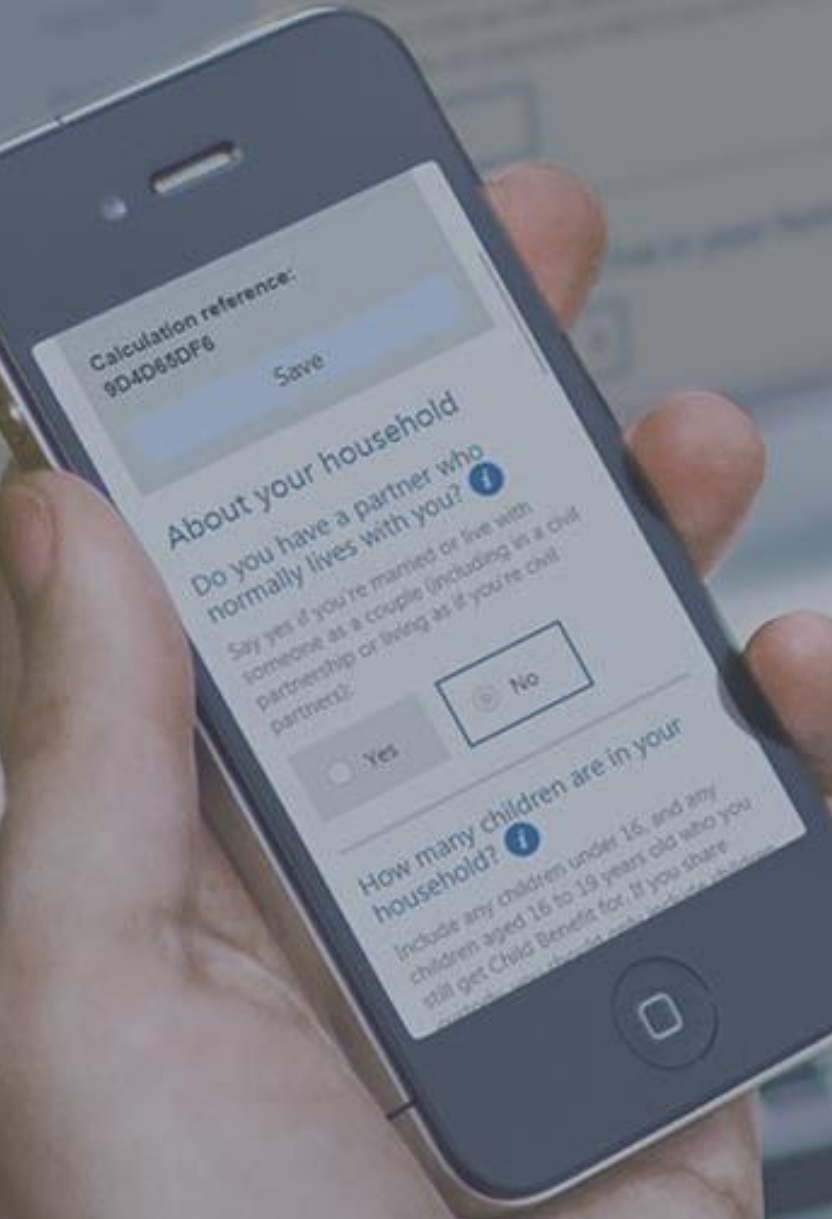
our customers:

Users of Ferret systems include government departments, local authorities, housing associations, CABx, HIA's and other advice agencies, universities, social welfare organisations, libraries, solicitors and financial advisers.

<https://www.ferret.co.uk/>

entitledto

independent | accurate | reliable



Our mission is to help everyone to access the benefits they're entitled to.

Since 2000 we have used our in-depth knowledge of the UK's social security system to build a range of authoritative and accurate calculators to help you and your clients understand their legitimate benefits entitlement.

Our tools are designed to be quick, simple and easy to use, so your staff and clients feel empowered to deal with the benefits system with confidence.

In response to evolving business needs and ongoing local and national policy changes, we will continue to work with and for our clients to develop new features and functionality.

Our goal is to assist your teams in adapting to legislative changes and welfare reform so you can help more people find out what benefits they are entitled to, thereby improving their circumstances and those of their families.



Ascendant Solutions
data management

Barnet Council has become the first local authority to launch the Ascendant apply4.online application form, designed to support residents with the rise in cost of living.

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

It includes information on benefits such as Universal Credit, Pensions Credit, Attendance Allowance and Personal Independence Payment, as well as local financial support initiatives including council tax support and the residents support fund.

Barnet Council Leader, Cllr Barry Rawlings said: "The cost-of-living crisis is affecting us all, and we want to ensure Barnet residents know what financial support is available to them and how they can access these services.

"It is very positive to see Barnet is the first local authority to launch this free tool, and we hope to see many other local councils doing the same to help their residents."

To find out what financial support is available to help with the cost-of-living visit [Barnet Council Benefits Calculator](#)



Apply4.Online®



In the news

London labour market downturn, rising unemployment and job losses in retail and hospitality

- ONS labour market data indicates London is losing payrolled jobs faster than any other UK region; London payrolled employee numbers fell 1.1% across 2025.
- London's unemployment rate rose to 7.2% in the three months to September to November 2025, the highest regional rate in the UK, and the worst since early 2021.
- Local hotspots cited include Westminster (3% fall in employment year to December), Newham (8.7% unemployment), and East Ham constituency (17.8% unemployment).
- Nationally, payrolled employment fell by 184,000 (0.6%) in the year to December 2025, with the largest falls in wholesale and retail (down 72,000) and hospitality (down nearly 70,000).
- Over the same period, regular pay growth (excluding bonuses) slowed to 4.5% (three months to November 2025).

London labour market downturn, rising unemployment and job losses in retail and hospitality

Administrative impacts on local services

- Increased demand for support: higher unemployment, especially among younger people, is likely to increase contact volumes and caseload pressure across benefits advice, discretionary support, debt support, housing options, and homelessness prevention.
- Collection and arrears risk: reduced household incomes can raise council tax arrears and hardship applications, increasing workload for billing, recovery, and vulnerability processes.
- Employment support and skills: growing need for targeted employability and youth pathways, including coordination with DWP and local providers, plus monitoring outcomes.
- Business impacts: job losses concentrated in retail and hospitality may translate into higher churn for business rates accounts, increased relief queries, and greater support needs for small employers.
- Communications and expectation management: higher profile statistics can increase resident concern and media scrutiny, driving comms workload and demand for clear local narrative and mitigations.

Key Worker Living Rent, London plan for rent controlled homes for key workers

- The Mayor of London has launched a plan to start at least 6,000 rent controlled Key Worker Living Rent homes in London by 2030, aimed at key workers priced out of the private rented sector but unlikely to secure social rent.
- The Mayor is urging London boroughs and housing associations to bid for funding through the Affordable Homes Programme, supported by £11.7 billion of government investment for affordable homes in London over the next 10 years.
- Rents are designed to be linked to earnings, set at 40% of key workers' average net household incomes; the Mayor's office says this could save a two-bedroom household around £7,000 a year on average compared with private rents, using ONS comparisons.
- The product includes homes for sharers, and there is no expectation for tenants to buy a share of the home; rent setting and increases are described as simpler than Shared Ownership.

Key Worker Living Rent, London plan for rent controlled homes for key workers

Administrative impacts on services and delivery

- Commissioning and funding bids: councils and housing associations will need bid development capacity, scheme appraisal, pipeline management, and grant compliance reporting tied to the Affordable Homes Programme.
- Eligibility and allocations: services will need clear definitions of eligible key worker roles, consistent income verification, treatment of household composition (including sharers), and transparent allocations processes to manage demand and fairness.
- Rent setting operations: the 40% of net income approach implies new data handling, regular income benchmarking, systems configuration for rent charging, and robust audit trails for rent changes and tenant communications.
- Partnership delivery: coordination across boroughs, the GLA, and multiple landlords increases the need for standard templates, shared reporting, and consistent customer journeys from enquiry to letting.
- Performance monitoring: expected scrutiny around affordability outcomes, retention, and workforce impacts means services should anticipate additional monitoring, evaluation, and public reporting

CIPFA Financial Resilience Index warns of rising demand, SEND deficits and homelessness pressures

- CIPFA is urging a comprehensive, long-term plan for local government, particularly for SEND, after its latest Financial Resilience Index highlighted mounting strain across English councils.
- The index indicates a more leveraged system overall; external debt rose to £106.9bn and usable reserves reduced in relative terms, increasing exposure to demand shocks and cost pressures.
- Social care continues to dominate budgets; councils spend around 78% of core, discretionary funding on adult and children's social care, rising to around 86% for county councils, limiting headroom for other services.
- SEND related DSG deficits are described as critical; accumulated deficits are around 20 times the value of councils' unallocated reserves, implying a structural risk rather than a short-term issue.
- Homelessness costs are a growing pressure, particularly for London boroughs and non-metropolitan districts, where spend is reported at around 11 to 12% of net revenue expenditure, far above other council types.

CIPFA Financial Resilience Index warns of rising demand, SEND deficits and homelessness pressures

Administrative impacts on services

- Budget setting and in year controls: higher leverage and thinner reserves increase the need for tighter forecasting, earlier corrective action, and clearer governance around demand led pressures.
- Social care commissioning and market management: with social care absorbing most discretionary funding, councils are likely to re prioritise or de scope non statutory services, and intensify contract monitoring, fee setting work, and prevention activity to manage demand.
- SEND operations: growing DSG deficits drive additional administrative load in high needs placement controls, tribunal readiness, workforce planning, and evidence-based review of EHCP pathways and provider capacity.
- Homelessness and temporary accommodation: higher spend ratios translate into pressure on procurement of placements, casework throughput, safeguarding, and move on capacity, with knock on effects for housing options and customer contact.
- Financial reporting and assurance: increased reliance on exceptional financial support and structural reforms (including reorganisation and multiyear settlements) heighten the need for consistent narrative reporting, audit trails, and scenario modelling across services.



Rural councils warn 2026 to 2029 settlement changes may widen urban rural funding gaps

- The provisional local government finance settlement for 2026 to 27 was published in mid-December 2025, with consultation closing on 14 January 2026; rural leaders raised concerns ahead of the final settlement due in late January or early February.
- The Rural Services Network says the planned approach would embed existing disparities, estimating that the most urban councils would receive around 41% more government funded spending power per resident than the most rural councils in 2026 to 27.
- RSN also projects that by 2028 to 29, the most urban authorities would have around 8% more overall spending power than the most rural, with the most urban able to spend around £100 more per resident on services; it also argues rural residents pay around 20% more council tax on average.
- Key areas of dispute include the continued use of the Recovery Grant, and removal of the remoteness adjustment from the Area Cost Adjustment in most relative needs formulas, with remoteness retained only for adult social care.
- County and rural leaders, including those in Northumberland, Shropshire, and Suffolk, argue these changes do not reflect the higher unit costs of delivering services across larger geographies and dispersed communities.

Rural councils warn 2026 to 2029 settlement changes may widen urban rural funding gaps



Administrative impacts on services

- Budget setting and medium term planning: reduced grant certainty and a perceived shift in distribution increases the need for scenario modelling, faster in year controls, and clearer political decisions on service prioritisation.
- Pressure on high cost, hard to scale services: rural councils cite adult social care, highways maintenance, and waste collection as services with higher per unit delivery costs; this increases commissioning workload, route planning, contract management, and asset maintenance triage.
- Council tax dependency and collection risk: assumptions that councils raise council tax to the maximum intensify the admin load around annual billing, reliefs, hardship support, and arrears management, especially where residents are already paying comparatively more.
- Formula and evidence challenge work: removal of remoteness outside adult social care creates additional policy, finance, and analytics workload to evidence rural cost drivers, support consultation responses, and prepare for any appeals, lobbying, or redistribution changes.
- Local service impact communications: leaders are already linking funding changes to visible service outcomes, which typically increases member briefings, public communications, and customer contact as expectations are managed



Report Fraud replaces Action Fraud, new national reporting route for cybercrime and fraud

- City of London Police, the national lead force for fraud, has launched Report Fraud as the new national service for reporting cybercrime and fraud, replacing Action Fraud.
- The service went live in early December 2025, with users redirected from Action Fraud to Report Fraud; the January 2026 announcement marks the full public launch.
- A national awareness campaign runs from week commencing 19 January across radio and social channels, using the message “Every Report Counts”.
- Report Fraud is positioned as the front door for reporting in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Scotland continues via Police Scotland.



Report Fraud replaces Action Fraud, new national reporting route for cybercrime and fraud

Administrative impacts on services, including councils and partner organisations

- Customer contact and signposting: websites, leaflets, scripts, automated messages and staff guidance need updating to reflect the new route (online and phone), including the Scotland distinction.
- Casework pathways: higher quality triage and advice may increase reporting confidence, creating more enquiries that require support, reassurance, onward referral, and safeguarding for vulnerable victims.
- Data and intelligence: the service is intended to generate richer intelligence from reports; this can support faster pattern recognition and more targeted disruption activity, but it also increases expectations around feedback, updates and information governance.
- Operational coordination: organisations that handle fraud adjacent contacts (revenues, benefits, housing, adult social care, customer services, IT security) may need clearer internal handoffs, including when to advise Report Fraud versus local incident reporting or emergency response.
- Performance reporting: if Report Fraud improves consistency and transparency of fraud and cybercrime data, local and national reporting products may need re baselining and careful explanation during transition.

- GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has warned that Russian state aligned "hacktivists" are persistently targeting UK organisations, particularly local government and operators of critical infrastructure.
- The alert highlights denial of service (DoS) style attacks, typically low sophistication but capable of disrupting websites and online systems that residents rely on for essential services.
- The NCSC recommendation to local authorities is to review defences, improve resilience, and be prepared to respond to DoS attacks, including engaging with NCSC heightened threat guidance.

NCSC warning on Russian state aligned hacktivists, DoS disruption risk for UK local government



National Cyber
Security Centre
a part of GCHQ

Administrative impacts on services

- Service continuity planning: councils should assume disruption to public facing platforms (web, online forms, payments, customer portals) and ensure alternative channels, failover arrangements, and clear internal playbooks.
- Incident response workload: even “simple” DoS attacks create significant operational overhead in triage, traffic analysis, mitigation, recovery, and post incident reporting, often requiring IT, comms, customer services and leadership coordination.
- Supplier and network coordination: increased need to work with hosting providers, telecoms, DDoS protection services and monitoring partners, and to confirm roles, escalation routes, and evidence retention.
- Resident communications and trust: rapid messaging is needed when systems are intermittently unavailable, including status updates, expected restoration steps, and signposting to offline support for vulnerable users.

NCSC warning
on Russian
state aligned
hacktivists, DoS
disruption risk
for UK local
government



National Cyber
Security Centre
a part of GCHQ

Sentencing Council consultation on sentencing guidelines for housing offences

- The Sentencing Council has opened a 12 week public consultation on a new package of draft sentencing guidelines for housing related offences.
- There are currently no definitive sentencing guidelines for housing offences; the Council says this creates a risk of inconsistent sentencing across the country.
- The draft package includes guidelines for individuals and for organisations.
- Coverage includes draft guidelines for unlawful eviction and unlawful harassment of an occupier, plus draft guidelines for Houses in Multiple Occupation and other housing standards offences.
- The consultation is open to the public, judiciary, practitioners, and those with an interest in criminal justice or the private rented sector.

Sentencing
Council

Sentencing Council consultation on sentencing guidelines for housing offences

Administrative impacts on services

- Local authority housing enforcement: likely increase in requests for advice, evidence standards, and prosecution readiness, particularly for unlawful eviction, harassment, HMO breaches and housing standards offences.
- Consistency and decision making: clearer sentencing frameworks can change how councils assess proportionality and public interest, and may affect when they pursue formal action rather than informal compliance.
- Court and legal processes: training and guidance updates for enforcement teams, legal services and prosecutors will be needed if definitive guidelines are introduced, including alignment of templates, witness care processes, and victim support pathways.
- Data and performance reporting: once guidelines are in force, councils and partners may need to re baseline outcomes and ensure reporting can show offence types, aggravating factors, harm, culpability and sentencing outcomes in a consistent way.
- Implementation dependency: the Sentencing Council notes it will not publish definitive guidelines until the Sentencing Bill has received Royal Assent and come into force, so services should treat this as preparation and engagement now, with operational change to follow once commencement is confirmed.

Hastings Borough Council to wind up Hastings Housing Company and bring housing portfolio in house

- Hastings Borough Council will bring its wholly owned housing company, Hastings Housing Company (HHC), back under council control and cease its trading activities, citing financial, governance and reputational concerns.
- HHC was established in 2017 to generate income for the council; it encountered financial difficulties during the pandemic when the lessee managing the properties struggled to meet rental payments.
- Due to debt and operational risks, the council's in house housing team took over day to day management of the properties in June 2024.
- Councillors considered options including continuing as a separate company, selling the company and disposing of the portfolio, or bringing it in house; the chief finance officer recommended the in house option and members voted unanimously to proceed.
- The report also flagged the company as inquorate, with only two directors appointed against a minimum of three, undermining decision making and control.

Hastings Borough Council to wind up Hastings Housing Company and bring housing portfolio in house

Administrative impacts on services

- Governance and assurance reset: bringing the company in house requires clearer decision records, strengthened delegations, and tighter controls to address auditor concerns and reduce reputational risk.
- Finance and accounting workload: consolidation of income, costs, assets and liabilities into council reporting, plus resolving intercompany loan and interest positions and ensuring a robust audit trail.
- Asset and landlord management: an internal portfolio approach increases demands on housing operations, including repairs planning, compliance, voids, tenancy management, rent collection and customer contact.
- Programme delivery and timescales: managing the transition while maintaining service continuity, including decisions on whether to retain or dispose of assets and aligning the approach with wider housing and temporary accommodation pressures.



HM Treasury

Treasury thematic reviews to cut duplication across homelessness, youth services, community healthcare and public sector assets

- HM Treasury is launching a programme of “sweeping” thematic value for money reviews, using expert teams from across the public and private sectors, to identify inefficiency and wasteful duplication in how services are funded and delivered.
- Four areas are in scope: bringing healthcare out of hospitals, homelessness, out of classroom youth provision, and the management and maintenance of public sector assets.
- The Chief Secretary to the Treasury, James Murray, will lead the work with Secretaries of State and Ministers, with recommendations intended to inform the 2027 Spending Review.



HM Treasury

Treasury thematic reviews to cut duplication across homelessness, youth services, community healthcare and public sector assets

Administrative impacts on services

- Stronger cross system governance: likely requirement for clearer shared outcomes, decision rights and accountability across departments, the NHS and local government, especially where costs fall in one place and savings accrue elsewhere.
- Data, reporting and evidence burden: councils and partners may face increased requests for consistent cost, activity and outcomes data, plus common definitions for spend lines, cohorts and service results to support the reviews and any subsequent implementation.
- Homelessness service redesign: focus on prevention and reducing temporary accommodation reliance implies additional work on upstream triage, joint working with health, policing and employment services, and tighter commissioning and contract management across accommodation pathways.
- Youth provision commissioning: consolidation of a fragmented landscape may drive mapping of provision, duplication removal, new grant and contract models, and more coordinated local delivery planning across council services and partner bodies.
- Public assets maintenance: likely push towards better asset intelligence, prioritisation, planned maintenance pipelines and more standardised assurance, with knock on implications for procurement, FM contracts, capital planning and compliance reporting.
- Healthcare shift to communities: if funding flows are redesigned, expect operational changes affecting local pathways, interface arrangements and reporting between acute trusts, community services, primary care and social care.

Universal Credit caseload growth and shifting claimant needs, October 2025

- 8.3 million people were on Universal Credit in October 2025, up from 7.2 million in October 2024; growth is driven in part by migration from legacy benefits through Move to Universal Credit.
- The caseload mix continues to change: 49% of people are in the no work requirements conditionality regime, which is now the largest group; the searching for work regime is 1.6 million.
- Claims and starts remain high: in October 2025 there were around 60,000 claims and 54,000 starts per week, slightly above October 2024.
- Households data (published in arrears): 6.9 million households were on Universal Credit in August 2025; 6.3 million, or 92%, had a payment.

Universal Credit caseload growth and shifting claimant needs, October 2025



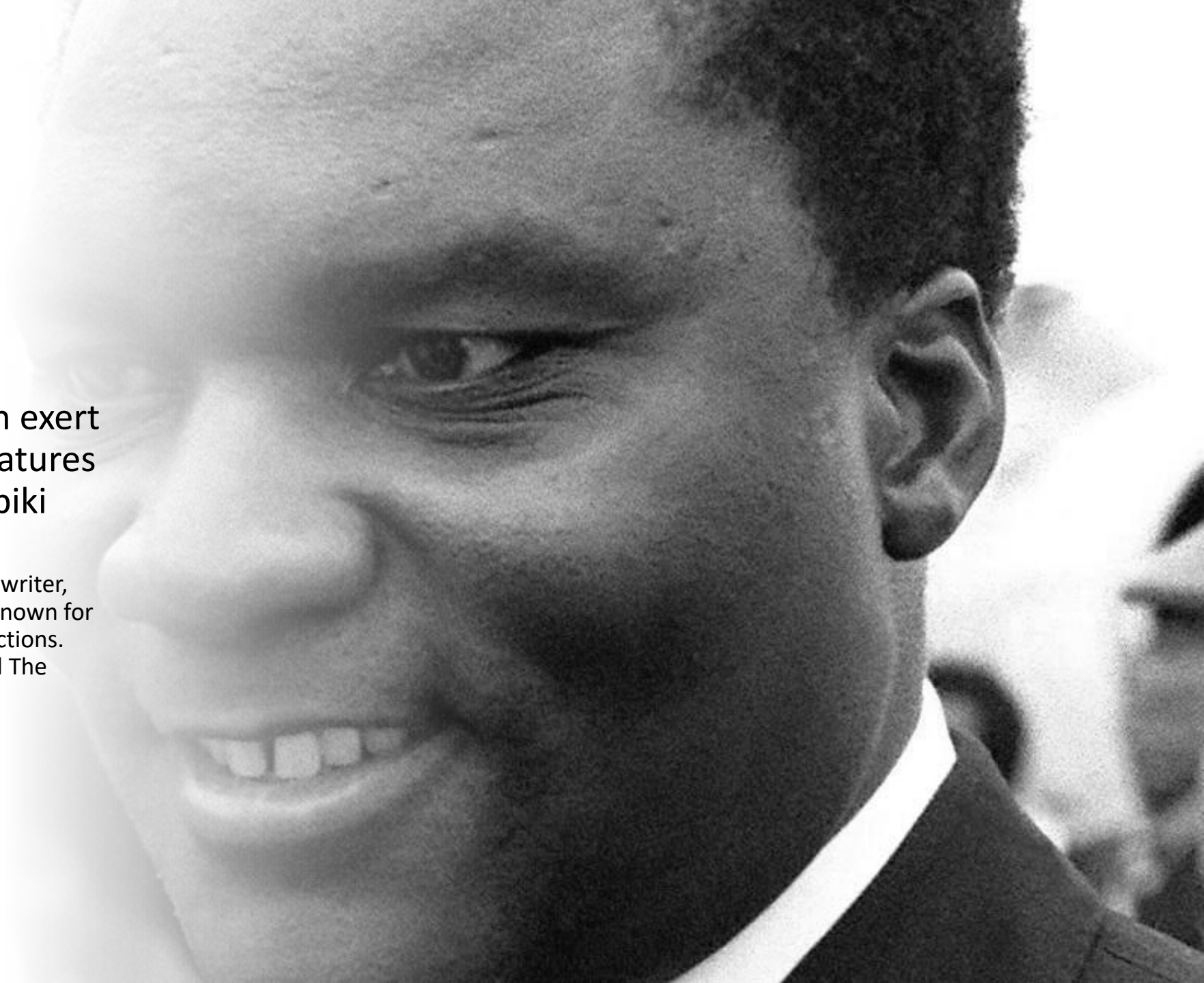
Impacts on administration of services

- Managed migration and reassessment workload: continuing Move to Universal Credit increases volumes of complex transitions, evidence checks, communications, and dispute handling, with higher risk of error and customer contact.
- Frontline service model shift: a rising share in no work requirements implies more health and caring related support needs, different work coach activity, and closer links to work capability and safeguarding processes.
- Child and childcare administration: with nearly half of paying households including children, and childcare element recipients falling, there is ongoing demand for advice, verification, and support with childcare cost rules and changes of circumstance.
- Deductions and affordability pressures: almost half of households having deductions points to sustained operational load in debt management, budgeting support, hardship routes, and enquiries about advances and third-party deductions.
- Payment operations: high payment timeliness overall still leaves a material minority of new successful claims not paid in full and on time, generating additional escalation, temporary support demand, and complaints handling.

Quote of the Week

“The universe runs on the principle that one who can exert the most evil on other creatures runs the show.” - Bangambiki Habyarimana

Bangambiki Habyarimana is a Rwandan writer, community worker, and youth mentor known for his philosophical and motivational reflections. He's the author of Pearls of Eternity and The Great Pearl of Wisdom






Sideway View

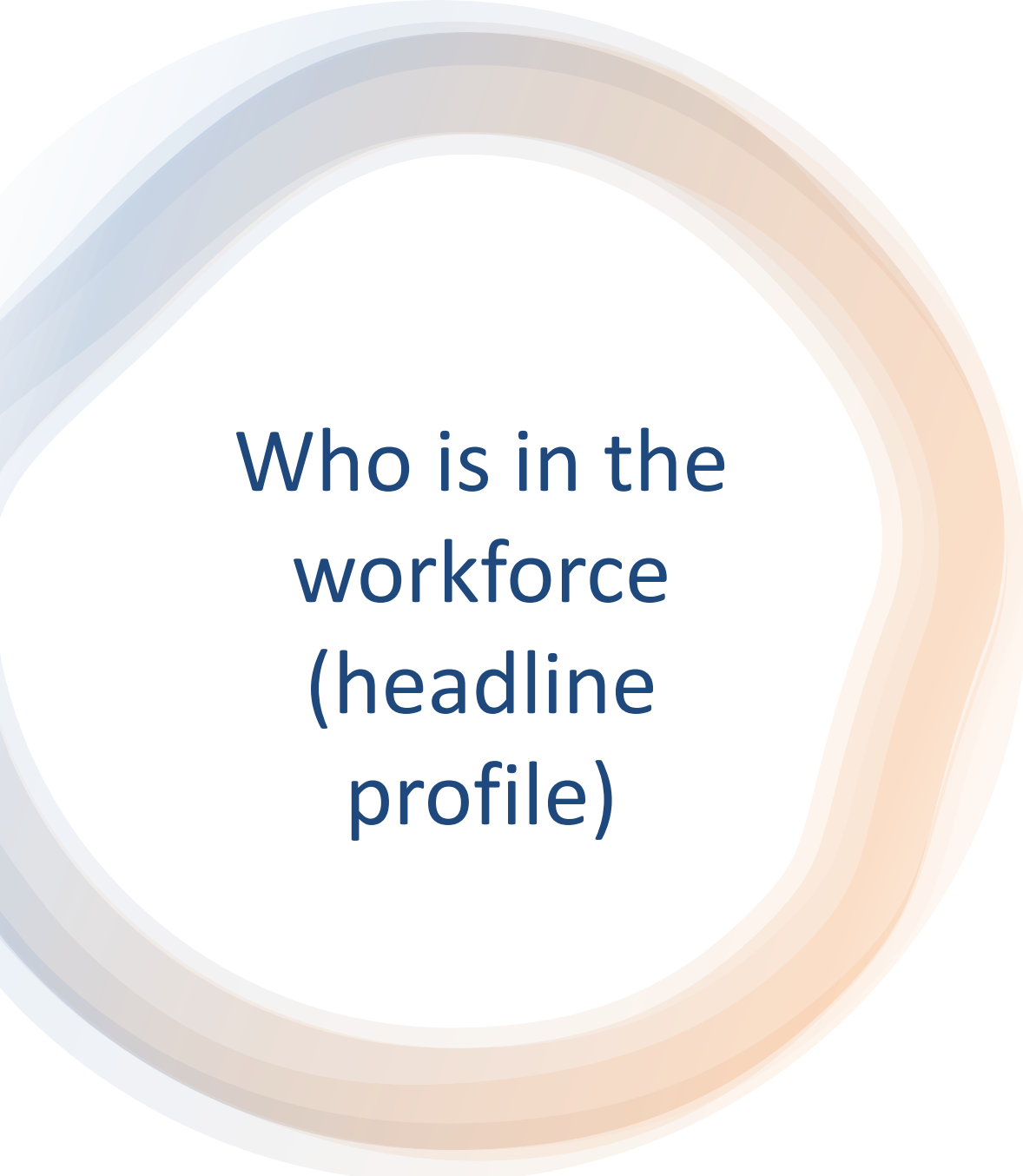


**DWP SURVEY OF
EMPLOYEES AND
SELF EMPLOYED**



What this research is, and why it matters

- National survey of workers aged 16 to 75 in Great Britain (employees and self-employed)
- Purpose: understand how people manage health and wellbeing at work; sickness absence, support, and workplace practices
- Sample: 4,234 workers (3,763 employees; 471 self-employed)
- Fieldwork: 7 Nov 2024 to 16 Mar 2025; weighted to ONS APS profile to be representative of the working population



Who is in the workforce (headline profile)


- Employment status: 87% employee, 13% self employed
- Working pattern: 67% full time; 17% part time (8 to 29 hours); 2% part time (under 8 hours)
- Age mix: 33% aged 35 to 49; 29% aged 50 to 64; 23% aged 25 to 34; 11% aged 16 to 24; 4% aged 65 to 75
- Sector (employees): 59% private; 32% public; 5% charity/voluntary

Occupations: largest group is Professionals (29%)




Health and long-term conditions

- Self-rated health: 66% “good”, 25% “fair”, 8% “bad”
- Long term health conditions (12 months or more): 32% of workers
 - Of those with long term conditions: 77% physical; 43% mental; 11% cognitive
 - 30% reported a combination of physical, mental or cognitive conditions
- Impact on day-to-day life (among those with long term conditions): 65% said it reduced their ability to carry out day to day activities
- Menopause: 36% of female and non-binary workers had experienced symptoms; of these, 82% said it affected their ability to work



Sickness absence and “working while ill”

- Sickness absence in last 12 months: 49% of all workers
 - Most commonly due to short term illness (39%)
- Longer absences exist but are a minority:
 - 7% had cumulatively taken more than 4 weeks off in the past year
 - 8% had a continuous sickness absence of 4 weeks or more
- Presenteeism is widespread: 58% worked despite not feeling well enough
 - Common driver: not wanting to add to colleagues' workload (46% of those who worked while unwell)



Sick pay: who gets what support

Among employees who took sickness absence in the past year:

- 60% received Occupational/Company Sick Pay (OSP) only
- 10% received Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) only
- 4% received a mix of OSP and SSP
- 17% received neither (often due to short absences, or SSP eligibility rules)


Self-employed workers were much less protected:

- 79% who had taken sickness absence reported receiving no income during that period
- Survey of Employees and Self-Em...




Fit notes: expectations and usefulness

- After sickness absence, evidence requirements vary:
 - 52% of employees who were absent said they had to provide a fit note after day 7
 - 12% had to provide a fit note on or before day 7
 - 18% needed no fit note or medical evidence
- 27% of employees with sickness absence received a fit note in the last 12 months
- “May be fit for work” fit notes appear helpful to many: 72% found suggestions helpful
- Survey of Employees and Self-Em...



Returning to work, support, and occupational health

- Returning to work:
 - Employees typically returned when recovered and ready (74%)
 - Self-employed workers also cited recovery (56%) but financial necessity was a major factor (50%)
- For long absences (4+ weeks), 73% had or planned a meeting with their employer about return
- Occupational Health (OH):
 - Awareness is high (75% of workers)
 - Access is lower (52%); use is lower still (16% of all workers)
 - 83% of employees said they would be likely to agree to a voluntary OH assessment if offered



Adjustments, flexible working, unpaid carers: where the gaps are


- Workplace adjustments (employees with long term conditions, currently working):
 - 58% had discussed their condition with their employer; 89% felt supported
 - 69% had some support/adjustment in place (for example, time off at short notice: 44%)
 - 59% would like further adjustments
- Access to Work (among workers with long term conditions):
 - Awareness is low: 73% had not heard of it
 - Only 4% had received support via the scheme
- Flexible working: 79% of employees had access to at least one arrangement
 - Most common: flexible hours (54%), hybrid working (40%), part time (39%)
- Unpaid carers: 15% of workers provide unpaid care
 - 35% said caring worsened their physical health to some extent; 63% said it harmed mental health to some extent
 - 21% reduced working hours due to caring responsibilities



· TOWN · HALL ·

LGR & S114 Watch


- North Yorkshire Council's executive agreed to recommend a maximum council tax increase for 2026/27, ahead of a Full Council decision due the following week.
- The proposal is a 4.99% rise in the Council's Band D charge (2.99% general council tax plus a 2% adult social care precept), taking the Band D figure to £2,036.32, up £96.78 per year, or £8.07 per month.
- Local reporting attributes the pressure to a combined "£43m wallop" when factoring changes in the funding environment (including fair funding impacts, loss of the rural services grant, and employer National Insurance cost impacts).
- The council's budget papers describe the 2026/27 settlement as disappointing; direct government funding is forecast to fall by £11.4m in cash terms, and core funding is reported as down £19.6m in cash terms once new grants with new spending requirements are accounted for.



North Yorkshire Council budget pressures and maximum council tax rise for 2026/27

Administrative impacts on services

- Budget setting and controls: a maximum council tax rise reduces, but does not remove, the need for savings and close in year financial management, including stronger budget holder controls and faster escalation of forecast overspends.
- Billing and customer contact: implementing the new charge requires annual billing updates, communications, payment plan impacts, and higher contact volumes from residents, particularly where affordability is tight.
- Delivery of savings programmes: the council is planning significant savings over the medium term, which increases workload for service reviews, consultation, workforce change, procurement, and contract renegotiation.
- Reliance on reserves and sustainability reporting: papers highlight reserve strategy and the risk of reserves depletion if recurring deficits are not corrected, increasing the governance and assurance burden for finance, audit, and members.
- Adult social care interface: using the adult social care precept reinforces the need to demonstrate how additional income supports demand led pressures, alongside clearer reporting on outcomes and cost drivers



North Yorkshire Council
budget pressures and
maximum council tax
rise for 2026/27

- Sheffield plans for council tax to rise by 4.99% a year across the medium term financial strategy period; this includes the adult social care precept.
- The council is seeking to stabilise its finances after several years of overspends, driven mainly by rising demand and costs in housing and care, with inflationary pressures in major service areas.
- Budget setting is being reset so that in year overspends are built into the following year's baseline; the 2026/27 position is presented as balanced on that basis, but with continuing structural pressures.
- The council is planning service and organisational change through its "Future Sheffield" programme, including improved customer services, more joined up working, and greater use of technology to work smarter and reduce costs




Sheffield City Council: multiyear council tax rises and financial recovery, 2026 to 2029

- Revenues and customer contact: repeated annual increases mean higher volumes of billing queries, affordability concerns, and complaints; stronger front door triage, clearer standard letters, and better digital self-service become essential.
- Collection and hardship management: higher bills typically increase arrears risk; this can increase caseload in council tax support, discretionary support, and recovery activity, so teams need tighter early intervention and consistent vulnerability pathways.
- Finance and governance: embedding overspends into baselines and tracking savings requires more frequent, more granular budget monitoring, clearer ownership of savings delivery, and audit ready evidence for decisions and benefits realisation.
- Programme delivery capacity: “Future Sheffield” style transformation creates extra admin load (process redesign, comms, training, data work, performance reporting); councils often need to protect specialist capacity so transformation does not crowd out statutory delivery.
- Funding uncertainty management: time limited grants and a multiyear settlement approach still require scenario planning, especially where grant funding is not permanent, and where demand pressures can outpace funding uplifts.



Sheffield City Council: multiyear council tax rises and financial recovery, 2026 to 2029


- The council leader says the authority's debt is about £800m and needs to be reduced; he says it has already fallen by about £5m since the new administration took office.
- He expects council tax to rise, while aiming to keep increases as low as possible.
- Major new road projects are to be paused, with an emphasis on dealing with legacy commitments and affordability.
- Existing highways schemes and issues cited include:
 - North Hykeham Relief Road, a live project expected to add to borrowing pressures.
 - Grantham Southern Relief Road delays attributed to a supplier design error.
 - Spalding "road to nowhere", with delivery dependent on further funding.
- The council's medium term financial planning continues to require major savings, with demand pressures (notably adult social care) highlighted as a key cost driver.



Lincolnshire County Council debt reduction, council tax rise and pause on major road projects


Administrative impacts on services

- Capital programme reprioritisation: pausing new schemes and re sequencing existing ones increases the workload on business case governance, programme controls, and member reporting.
- Treasury management and borrowing: a stronger focus on debt reduction usually drives tighter controls on new borrowing, minimum revenue provision planning, and scrutiny of affordability, especially where large schemes have cost variance risk.
- Highways delivery and contract management: handling design errors, claims, and revised timetables increases demands on procurement, legal, commercial assurance, and supplier performance management.
- Council tax and income: planning for sustained council tax increases requires clear communications, billing impacts management, and stronger support routes for residents struggling to pay.
- Value for money and audit activity: any “waste” audit approach, even if delivered in house, typically increases internal audit, finance, and directorate reporting burdens, and can surface governance and documentation gaps that require remedial work.



Lincolnshire County
Council debt reduction,
council tax rise and
pause on major road
projects


- Staffordshire County Council's Reform UK administration is proposing a 2026/27 net budget of £840.8m, including a 3.99% council tax rise and £21.5m of savings and efficiencies.
- Councillors on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee called for stronger scrutiny after no cabinet members attended the scrutiny session, including the finance portfolio holder, and requested a further meeting before Full Council approval in February.
- The administration position is that a balanced budget can be achieved for 2026/27 while keeping council tax below the assumed 4.99%; the council's breakdown states the 3.99% comprises a 1.99% general rise plus a 2% social care element.
- Opposition concerns include that the budget is largely a roll over, and that the council has moved from a three-year balanced budget position to a one-year balanced budget, with projected gaps beyond 2026/27.



Staffordshire County Council 2026/27 budget, scrutiny concerns and council tax proposal

Administrative impacts on services

- Governance and assurance workload: the scrutiny dispute signals increased demand for clearer budget narratives, decision records, and member engagement, especially where the timetable limits challenge and testing.
- Savings delivery and service monitoring: even where described as efficiencies, proposals (for example on grit bins, tree management and school crossing patrols) require operational changes, tracking of service standards, and evidence that reductions do not create risk or hidden demand elsewhere.
- Demand led pressures dominate: the council notes that around two thirds of the budget is spent on care, which increases the operational burden of demand management, commissioning oversight, and placement cost control.
- Budget choices and contact volumes: a council tax rise, even below the maximum, drives additional annual billing communications, affordability enquiries and recovery related work, particularly where future gaps imply further measures later.
- Delivery capacity implications: planned investments (highways uplift and children's services recruitment) require recruitment, onboarding, training, caseload management and performance reporting to realise the intended benefits.



Staffordshire County Council 2026/27 budget, scrutiny concerns and council tax proposal



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Legal Issues of Note

Judicial review challenge to Somerset Council's Council Tax Reduction scheme following Universal Credit migration

What is happening, and what is being challenged

- Disabled Taunton resident Andy Mitchell is taking Somerset Council to the High Court, having been granted permission to proceed with a judicial review on 9 January 2026.
- The challenge relates to Somerset's Council Tax Reduction scheme changes made ahead of its February 2025 budget, intended to standardise support across the county and respond to wider financial pressures.
- Mr Mitchell says his circumstances and needs have not changed, but after being migrated from legacy benefits to Universal Credit he was reassessed and his Council Tax Reduction reduced sharply.
- His claim argues the scheme unlawfully penalises disabled people and others with additional needs; he alleges discriminatory structural flaws and breaches of equality duties, and says the scheme is arbitrary and irrational.
- The case is presented as having wider relevance because it concerns how entitlement is assessed for people on Universal Credit, including those receiving the LCWRA element.

Judicial review challenge to Somerset Council's Council Tax Reduction scheme following Universal Credit migration

Administrative impacts on services

- Increased contact, disputes and appeals from residents migrating to Universal Credit, including requests for explanations, recalculations, and reconsiderations.
- Higher demand for discretionary support, including exceptional hardship applications, short term payment arrangements, and referrals to advice agencies.
- Additional casework complexity where rules treat legacy benefit income differently from Universal Credit income, requiring careful verification, audit trail, and consistent decision making.
- Equality and compliance workload, including strengthened equality impact assessment, review of protected group impacts, and evidence preparation for litigation.
- Budget setting and billing risks, as legal uncertainty can drive urgent policy fixes, communications updates, and potential billing adjustments.
- Programme and change overheads, as scheme redesign requires consultation, member decision, system reconfiguration, testing, staff training, and resident communications.

Judicial review
challenge to Somerset
Council's Council Tax
Reduction scheme
following Universal
Credit migration

Next steps stated in public reporting:

- Somerset Council says it will contest the judicial review; the substantive hearing is expected later in 2026.
- The council indicates it will undertake a fundamental review of the scheme over the next 12 months, consult in summer 2026, and aim for implementation in April 2027.
- This follows increased legal scrutiny nationally, including a High Court decision that found Trafford Council's scheme unlawful in a similar challenge.

High Court clarifies business rates 'owner of hereditament' test in rates mitigation scheme

- The High Court dismissed A&P68's appeal by case stated against City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, upholding a magistrates' liability order for unpaid nondomestic rates on a property in Keighley.
- The central issue was the correct legal test for determining who is the "owner" of a hereditament for sections 45(1) and 65(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, and how the Supreme Court approach in Hurstwood should be applied.
- A&P68 used a rates mitigation arrangement devised by Verity Commercial Services, involving leases to two newly incorporated entities, Room for Faith and Local Faith, intending that Local Faith would use the property for religious worship to access the Schedule 5 exemption.
- The courts found Local Faith was not in rateable occupation and did not have a real or practical entitlement to possession; practical control remained with A&P68, so A&P68 remained the "owner" for empty rates purposes and the liability order was valid.

High Court clarifies business rates 'owner of hereditament' test in rates mitigation scheme

Administrative impacts on services

- Stronger challenge position for billing authorities: decisions can be anchored in evidence of who has real and practical control over occupation, not just paper title, helping resist artificial lease-based mitigation where occupation is not genuine.
- Investigation and evidence workload: increased need to document practical control, access arrangements, ability to put others into occupation, and genuine activities of purported occupiers, to support summonses and liability orders.
- Process changes for NNDR teams and legal services: tighter internal guidance for identifying “unusual” mitigation cases, escalation criteria, and consistent case building for magistrates’ court proceedings and appeals.
- Governance and fraud risk management: repeat use of structured schemes (including faith themed vehicles) increases demand for pattern recognition, supplier and agent intelligence, and coordinated responses across authorities.
- Communications impact: clearer public messaging may be needed for landlords and agents on what will and will not succeed, reducing avoidable disputes and improving payment compliance.



Stats & References

Carer's Allowance overpayments: MPs challenge DWP leadership and culture change

Key numbers and stats

- Ministers ordered around 200,000 historic cases to be reassessed where earnings averaging rules may not have been applied correctly; DWP estimates about 26,000 carers may have debts cancelled or reduced.
- DWP data cited in the independent review: in February 2025, 81,503 carers in England and 5,359 carers in Wales had an outstanding Carer's Allowance debt linked to exceeding the earnings limit.
- The Work and Pensions Committee session on DWP's Annual Report and Accounts 2024 to 25 included questioning on Carer's Allowance overpayments.

References and links

- The Guardian, MPs criticise behaviour of senior DWP officials over carer's allowance scandal (21 January 2026).
- DWP, Independent Review of Carer's Allowance Overpayments (Liz Sayce), and government response (25 November 2025).
- DWP press release, Government to accept key recommendations of Sayce review on Carer's Allowance (25 November 2025).
- UK Parliament, Work and Pensions Committee oral evidence publications and session page (January 2026).
- The Guardian, background reporting on key findings and impacts from the Sayce review (25 November 2025).

London labour market downturn, rising unemployment and job losses in retail and hospitality

Key numbers and stats

- London unemployment: 7.2% (Sep to Nov 2025); compared with 3.8% at the low point referenced as three months to January 2024.
- UK unemployment: 5.1% (Sep to Nov 2025).
- UK payrolled employees: 30.2m in December 2025; down 184,000 (0.6%) year on year; down 43,000 (0.1%) month on month.
- Sector changes, year to December 2025: wholesale and retail down 72,000; accommodation and food services down 69,000; health and social work up 37,000; public administration up 16,000.
- London payrolled employees: down 1.1% across 2025.
- Youth unemployment: 18.8% in the year to September (as cited in the article).

References and links

- Evening Standard, Jobs crisis for London as unemployment rate doubles in less than two years (published January 2026).
- ONS, Labour market overview, UK: January 2026 (includes UK unemployment rate 5.1% for Sep to Nov 2025).
- ONS, Earnings and employment from PAYE RTI: January 2026 (includes payrolled employees 30.2m, down 184,000 year on year; sector changes).
- Reuters, UK wage growth slows and payrolls fall, January 2026 write up of the ONS release.
- House of Commons Library, UK labour market statistics briefing (context on labour market indicators and volatility).

Manchester City Council £2,500 'rightsizing' incentive for social housing tenants to downsize

Key numbers and operational indicators

- £2,500: cash incentive (can be spent as the tenant chooses), plus help with moving costs.
- 20,000: households estimated to be on the housing register (reported by the council).
- Around one third: estimate of social rented family homes thought to be under occupied (reported by the council).
- 109: households supported to rightsize last year (reported by the council).
- 432: households reported as having expressed interest in rightsizing.

References and links

- Manchester City Council, Struggling with a larger home? £2500 available to support people to move house (news page, January 2026).
- Housing Today, Manchester City Council offers £2,500 incentive for social tenants to downsize (January 2026).
- Yahoo News UK, Council to offer £2,500 incentive to help social housing tenants to downsize (22 January 2026).
- MCC Housing Services, Help to move if you're 50+ and live alone or with a partner (rightsizing support page).

Peterborough emergency accommodation spend found unlawful, governance and procurement failings

Key numbers and dates

- Total spend: around £17.4m on emergency accommodation payments over 11 years (2015 to 2026).
- Concentration risk: just over £7.7m paid to a single provider.
- Trigger and publication: transactions raised via FOI in July 2025; report published 16 January 2026; scheduled for Cabinet consideration on 20 January 2026.
- Governance thresholds cited: multiple provider payments exceeding £500,000, and at least 13 cases under £25,000 where required written quotation records were not complied with.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, "Report at city council labels £17m emergency accommodation spend unlawful" (21 January 2026).
- Peterborough City Council, Joint statutory report to Cabinet, section 5A(3)(a) LGHA 1989 and section 114A(2)(a) LGFA 1988 (Cabinet pack PDF, 20 January 2026).
- Peterborough City Council, Cabinet decision record: Joint statutory report to Cabinet.
- Peterborough City Council, Cabinet minutes referencing the statutory report item (20 January 2026).

Rewiring the UK state for faster digital delivery and stronger civil service accountability

Key numbers and dates

- From April (year stated in the speech and announcement): fewer repeated permissions are intended under “Project reset”.
- HMRC pilot: approval processes reduced from 40 to two; claimed saving of around two to three months.
- Senior Civil Service performance context cited by Jones: seven out of nearly 7,000 senior civil servants reportedly on a development plan for underperformance last year; two reportedly dismissed for poor performance.
- National School of Government and Public Services: proposed establishment and launch later in 2026 (as reported).

References and links

- Public Finance, “UK state requires ‘complete rewiring’, says Darren Jones” (22 January 2026).
- GOV.UK speech, “Move fast. Fix things.” (text of remarks).
- GOV.UK press release, “Move fast, fix things: Darren Jones sets out plan to rewire Whitehall and incentivise innovation in the civil service”.
- The Guardian, reporting on the reforms and accountability proposals (20 January 2026).
- The Guardian, reporting on the proposed school of government (18 January 2026).
- Civil Service World, “Hiring, firing and rewarding” summary of Senior Civil Service changes (January 2026).
- Institute for Government, commentary on taskforces and reform package (January 2026).

Key Worker Living Rent, London plan for rent controlled homes for key workers

Key numbers and dates

- At least 6,000 homes by 2030.
- £11.7 billion Affordable Homes Programme investment for London over the next 10 years.
- Rent level set at 40% of key workers' average net household incomes.
- Around £7,000 average annual saving for a two-bedroom home versus private rent, based on ONS comparisons cited by the Mayor's office.
- Key workers are around a third of London's workforce, across public and private sectors.
- Haringey cited as building 1,000 council homes already and at least 3,000 by 2031 and supporting the Key Worker Living Rent approach for key workers locally.

References and links

- Greater London Authority press release, Mayor launches new plan to deliver thousands of rent controlled, affordable homes for London's key workers (created 20 January 2026).
- Public Finance, London Mayor launches plan for thousands of rent controlled homes (23 January 2026).
- Greater London Authority, Key Worker Living Rent Homes information page (rent benchmarks and scheme overview).

CIPFA Financial Resilience Index warns of rising demand, SEND deficits and homelessness pressures

Key numbers and stats

- External debt: £106.9bn; reported as a 10 to 11% increase (depending on source) to 2025 levels.
- Usable reserves: down in relative terms; reported as a 4% reduction overall, or a drop from 43.7% to 39.6% of net revenue expenditure in one summary.
- Social care share of core budgets: 78% average; 86% for county councils; 72% for London boroughs.
- SEND deficits: around 20 times councils' unallocated reserves (average position).
- Homelessness spend ratio: around 11 to 12% of net revenue expenditure for London boroughs and non-metropolitan districts; around 2 to 3% for metropolitan districts and unitary authorities.

References and links

- Public Finance, CIPFA local government data highlights deepening demand and deficit risks (21 January 2026).
- The Carer, Social Care Dominates Local Authority Spending Study Reveals (23 January 2026).
- Sky News, England's councils spending 78% of their main budgets on social care (20 January 2026).
- LocalGov, CIPFA: Councils' demand and deficit risks deepen (20 January 2026).

WorkWell national rollout: integrated health and employment support to reduce sickness related economic inactivity

Key numbers and stats

- Funding: up to £259m over three years.
- Scale: up to 250,000 additional people supported across England.
- Pilot reach: approximately 25,000 starts between October 2024 and end November 2025.
- Participant profile: 48% reported mental illness as main barrier; 41% were in work and 59% out of work at first appointment.
- Referral route (pilot): GP or primary care was the main route, 28% of starts.
- Fit notes: issued more than 11 million times a year, with WorkWell intended to provide earlier support through the right route.
- Wider context cited by government: 2.8 million people out of work due to long term sickness, described as the highest in the G7.

References and links

- DWP press release, "Expansion of support scheme to help thousands of people back into work" (20 January 2026).
- DWP, WorkWell pilot management information (1 October 2024 to 30 November 2025).
- UK Parliament written statement, "WorkWell, England wide expansion" (20 January 2026).
- Keep Britain Working Review, final report (Sir Charlie Mayfield, 5 November 2025).

Rural councils warn 2026 to 2029 settlement changes may widen urban rural funding gaps

Key numbers and dates

- Consultation window: provisional settlement issued mid December 2025; consultation closed 14 January 2026; final settlement expected late January or early February 2026.
- RSN estimates: 41% more government funded spending power per resident for the most urban councils than the most rural in 2026 to 27; around 8% more overall spending power by 2028 to 29; around £100 more per resident spending power by 2028 to 29; rural residents projected to pay around 20% more council tax on average.
- Shropshire: council statements say it is down significantly in 2026 to 27 versus October projections, linking this to removal of remoteness from most funding.
- Suffolk: local reporting in the article states a £6m budget gap, £3.5m worse than previously forecast.

References and links

- Public Finance, Rural authorities fear local government settlement will leave them 'struggling' (19 January 2026).
- Rural Services Network, Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 (6 January 2026).
- Rural Services Network, RSN Serious Concerns Over 'Fairness' Of Settlement (13 January 2026).
- GOV.UK, Provisional local government finance settlement 2026 to 2027 (consultation page, 17 December 2025).
- GOV.UK, Local government finance policy statement 2026 to 27 to 2028 to 29 (20 November 2025).
- Local Government Association, briefing on provisional settlements 2026/27 to 2028/29 (17 December 2025).
- Northumberland Council, response to provisional settlement (18 December 2025).
- Shropshire Council, reacts to Fair Funding Review and settlement (19 December 2025).

Report Fraud replaces Action Fraud, new national reporting route for cybercrime and fraud

. Key numbers and dates

- 4 December 2025: Report Fraud live, with redirection from Action Fraud; full public launch publicised in January 2026.
- Week commencing 19 January 2026: national radio and social campaign, “Every Report Counts”.
- 4.6 million: Report Fraud states this is the number of people affected by cybercrime and fraud every year.
- Contact route: online reporting and a contact centre phone line are available; GOV.UK signposts the same reporting route for England and Wales.
- Scale context (reported): The Times cites around 35,000 fraud reports per month, and highlights intended improvements in accessibility and intelligence sharing.

References and links

- City of London Police, Report Fraud launches (January 2026).
- City of London Police, Report Fraud service goes live with full public launch in January 2026 (December 2025).
- GOV.UK guidance on reporting online scams and fraud (updated to signpost Report Fraud).
- Report Fraud site, service overview and reporting guide.
- ONS, note on Report Fraud improving fraud and cybercrime statistics and public communications (December 2025).

NCSC warning on Russian state aligned hackers, DoS disruption risk for UK local government

Key dates and service prompts

- 21 January 2026: warning reported as issued by the NCSC, with local government specifically called out as a priority sector for action.
- Practical focus: preparedness and response for DoS disruption, plus use of NCSC heightened threat guidance and collection.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, “Russian state aligned hackers are targeting local government in UK, Government cyber security organisation warns” (21 January 2026).
- Government Technology, “Local government urged to strengthen DoS defences” (21 January 2026).
- IT Pro, “NCSC names and shames pro Russia hacker group amid escalating DDoS attacks on UK public services” (20 January 2026)

Sentencing Council consultation on sentencing guidelines for housing offences

Key numbers and dates

- Consultation period: 15 January to 9 April 2026 (12 weeks).
- Draft guideline set:
 - 2 draft guidelines covering the nine offences of unlawful eviction of occupier and unlawful harassment of occupier
 - 4 draft guidelines covering offences related to HMOs and other housing standards offences
- Publication timing: Sentencing Council says definitive guidelines will follow once the relevant sentencing legislation has Royal Assent and is in force; the Sentencing Act received Royal Assent on 22 January 2026, but commencement can still be staged.

References and links

- Sentencing Council, Housing offences consultation page (15 January 2026).
- Sentencing Council press release, Consultation launched for proposed housing offences sentencing guidelines (15 January 2026).
- Online consultation portal (Ministry of Justice platform): Housing offences sentencing guidelines consultation.
- Local Government Lawyer, Sentencing Council consults on guidelines for courts on housing offences (19 January 2026).
- Ministry of Justice, Sentencing Act receives Royal Assent (22 January 2026).

Hastings Borough Council to wind up Hastings Housing Company and bring housing portfolio in house

Key numbers and dates

- Outstanding loans: £5,489,398, plus overdue interest costs and recharges of £563,439.
- Governance: company inquorate with two directors appointed, below the minimum of three.
- Management change: council in house team assumed management responsibility in June 2024.
- Implementation: council decision records state HHC is to cease trading from 1 April 2026.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, “Council to close housing firm and bring company back under council control” (19 January 2026).
- Hastings Borough Council, “Hastings Housing Company (HHC Ltd) Update Report v1.4” (Full Council report PDF).
- Hastings Borough Council, decision record: Hastings Housing Company Ltd, cease trading from 1 April 2026.
- Hastings Borough Council, Cabinet minutes pack referencing recommended option (1 December 2025).
- Hastings Borough Council, July 2024 cabinet report setting out loan position and background.

Treasury thematic reviews to cut duplication across homelessness, youth services, community healthcare and public sector assets

Key numbers and timings

- Youth provision spend: out of classroom youth provision described as costing over £1 billion a year across government.
- Homelessness spend profile: the Treasury states over three quarters of government expenditure on homelessness goes to temporary accommodation.
- Rough sleeping public service costs: cited at around £14,000 per person, linked to higher usage of multiple services.
- Next Spending Review: recommendations are intended to feed into the 2027 Spending Review.

References and links

- HM Treasury announcement, expert teams to scrutinise public service inefficiencies and waste (20 January 2026).
- HM Treasury, terms of reference: Thematic Value for Money Reviews (published 20 January 2026), including homelessness, youth provision, and maintenance of public sector assets.
- Financial Times reporting on the Treasury reviews and the four priority areas (19 January 2026).
- Civil Service World summary of the review programme and leadership arrangements (January 2026).

Universal Credit caseload growth and shifting claimant needs, October 2025

Key numbers and stats

- People on Universal Credit: 8.3 million (October 2025); no work requirements: 49% and 4.0 million; searching for work: 1.6 million.
- Weekly flow in October 2025: 60,000 claims; 54,000 starts.
- Households on Universal Credit: 6.9 million (August 2025); with a payment: 6.3 million (92%).
- Households with children: 47% of households with a payment (August 2025).
- Childcare element: 160,000 households (August 2025), down 6% since August 2024.
- Deductions: about 3.1 million households, 46% of all UC households, had one or more deductions (August 2025).

References and links

- [Universal Credit statistics, 29 April 2013 to 9 October 2025 \(official bulletin\).](#)
- [Universal Credit childcare element statistics to August 2025 \(supporting breakdown\).](#)
- [Universal Credit statistics collection page \(release catalogue and updates\).](#)

North Yorkshire Council budget pressures and maximum council tax rise for 2026/27

Key numbers and dates

- Proposed council tax rise for 2026/27: 4.99% (2.99% general; 2% adult social care precept).
- Band D impact: +£96.78 per year (+£8.07 per month), Band D becomes £2,036.32.
- Funding pressures cited in council papers: direct government funding down £11.4m cash; core funding down £19.6m cash after adjusting for new grants with new spending requirements.
- Scale of budget: proposed net revenue budget for 2026/27 is about £650.0m.
- Savings: council papers set out £28.8m gross new savings proposals, plus £28m already approved within the budget and MTFS; local reporting describes savings programmes of £56m over three years.
- Sensitivity: council papers indicate each 1% change in council tax is about £4.9m; local reporting describes this as about £5m per year.
- Forward look from local reporting: shortfall of £17m in 2027/28, rising to around £25m in 2028/29.

References and links

- North Yorkshire Council, Revenue Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2028/29, Executive Summary (PDF).
- North Yorkshire Council, Revenue Budget MTFS 2026/27 to 2028/29 (full report PDF).
- Your Skipton, Council to increase council tax by maximum after £43m “wallop” from government (20 January 2026).
- Hambleton Today, Tough decisions ahead say council chiefs as North Yorkshire Council left with £20m funding loss (14 January 2026).

Sheffield City Council: multiyear council tax rises and financial recovery, 2026 to 2029

- Council tax assumption: 4.99% increase each year across the MTFS period (including the adult social care precept).
- In year position: Q2 forecast overspend of £23.6m, with an aim to bring it below £20m by year end.
- Past reliance on reserves: around £112m used in recent years to balance budgets, as described in the council's finance papers.
- Transformation savings: "Future Sheffield" programme total shown as £44.9m across the MTFS, with an annual savings profile.
- Recovery Grant: referenced as time limited, with a "cliff edge" effect highlighted in the council's reporting.
- Reported in local coverage: government funding over three years described as "more than £400m", plus prevention and early intervention services aiming to save £70m by 2030.

References and links

- Sheffield City Council, Finance and Performance Policy Committee public report pack (MTFS, council tax assumption, reserves use, savings programme).
- Sheffield City Council news release on Q2 budget monitoring and overspend reduction.
- Sheffield City Council budget consultation page (2026 to 2029 context and engagement).
- BBC Local Democracy Reporting Service story as syndicated via AOL (headline narrative and public facing figures).

Lincolnshire County Council debt reduction, council tax rise and pause on major road projects

Key numbers and stats

- Reported debt level: about £800m; reported reduction since change of administration: about £5m.
- Savings requirement referenced in budget papers: medium term financial plan deficit previously forecast at £25.4m in 2026/27, rising to £55.6m by 2028/29.
- Council tax planning assumption referenced in budget papers: scenarios include 4.99% for 2026/27, with an expectation of maximising increases over multiple years within the settlement period.
- North Hykeham Relief Road funding: £110m allocated from the Department for Transport's Large Local Majors programme, with the remaining budget funded by the council and developer contributions (with forward funding).
- North Hykeham Relief Road: report references an additional council contribution of £13.989m being recommended through budget setting.

References and links

- Lincolnshire County Council, Council Budget 2026/27 report (includes savings requirements and council tax scenarios).
- Lincolnshire County Council, North Hykeham Relief Road, cost and funding summary.
- Lincolnshire County Council, North Hykeham Relief Road scheme update and Full Business Case report (includes additional contribution figure).
- Lincolnshire County Council news release, Grantham Southern Relief Road delayed due to supplier design error.
- The Independent, reporting on the Spalding "bridge to nowhere" funding gap context.

Staffordshire County Council 2026/27 budget, scrutiny concerns and council tax proposal

Key numbers and stats

- Net budget 2026/27: £840.8m; care spend cited at around £506m.
- Council tax proposal: 3.99% (1.99% general plus 2% for social care), described as £1.24 a week for a Band D property.
- Savings and efficiencies: £21.5m for 2026/27.
- Forecast gaps beyond 2026/27: £11.5m in 2027/28, rising to £25.2m in 2028/29 (as cited in scrutiny discussion).
- Service changes and investments cited by the administration: £15m additional highways budget; £5.5m additional for Children's and Families, funding the equivalent of 119 extra full time roles over two years.
- Examples raised at scrutiny: proposed savings include grit bins (£30,000), tree management (£50,000), and school crossing patrols (£47,000), with officers stating no service reductions.

References and links

- Staffordshire County Council Newsroom, Investment and efficiencies help deliver balanced budget (posted 6 January 2026).
- Express and Star, Call for more scrutiny over Staffordshire council's £840m budget (19 January 2026).

High Court clarifies business rates 'owner of hereditament' test in rates mitigation scheme

Key numbers and dates

- Rates claimed: £14,348.90 (issued by Bradford in 2023).
- Scheme timeline: Room for Faith incorporated March 2022; Local Faith incorporated July 2022; lease and sub lease granted October 2022; property sold September 2023.
- Worship evidence: no certificate under section 2 of the Places of Worship Act 1855 was obtained for the property.
- Judgment reporting: High Court decision reported January 2026.

References and links

- ICLR case report, *A&P68 Ltd v City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council* (Admin Court, January 2026).
- Local Government Lawyer, summary of the decision (22 January 2026).
- Estates Gazette, legal summary (January 2026).
- UKSC Blog, overview of *Hurstwood Properties v Rossendale* (2021)

Judicial review challenge to Somerset Council's Council Tax Reduction scheme following Universal Credit migration

Key numbers and dates

- 4,000 plus: Citizens Advice Somerset reported more than 4,000 people on Universal Credit with the LCWRA element had higher Council Tax bills linked to the local scheme changes and national benefit reforms.
- Individual impact example (Mr Mitchell): now pays 90 per cent of council tax, receiving about £2 per week reduction; annual bill reported as more than £1,100.
- Key dates:
 - February 2025: Somerset scheme changes made before annual budget setting
 - 9 January 2026: High Court grants permission for judicial review to proceed
 - 25 February 2026: Somerset Council annual budget date (reported)
 - Summer 2026: consultation planned (reported)
 - April 2027: intended implementation of revised scheme (reported)

References and links (for the pack)

- Yahoo News UK, "Disabled Taunton man to take Somerset Council to court over council tax support" (22 January 2026).
- Leigh Day, "Disabled Somerset resident granted permission to challenge Council Tax Reduction scheme in High Court" (news release).
- Local Government Lawyer, coverage of the permission decision and scheme design issues (January 2026).
- Somerset Council, "Council Tax support for those impacted by benefit changes" (17 December 2025).
- Leigh Day, "Victory for Trafford residents as High Court rules Council Tax Reduction scheme unlawful" (19 September 2025).
- Law Gazette, report on the Trafford scheme being quashed (September 2025).



Job Adverts From Business Smart Solutions



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Revenues Manager (Academy)



3 months initially | £450 per day Umbrella | Hybrid

Purpose and impact:

The role of the Revenues Manager is to ensure delivery of a high-quality Council Tax and Business Rates (NDR) billing and recovery service in line with customer requirements and regulations and to drive forward cost-efficient digital services and performance. As part of the Management Team the role holder will deputise for the AD and provide strong professional leadership and management for the Revenues service for West Northamptonshire Council.

Accountable to:

As part of the Revenues and Benefits Team in the wider Finance Directorate, the role holder is accountable to the Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits, responsible for the direct line management of 7 Team Leaders.

What we're looking for:

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

- Management experience is essential as this role will be managing 7 direct reports
- Needs somebody who has experience dealing with poor performance
- Strong technical and management skills
- Extensive knowledge of Council Tax and Business Rates legislation
- Up to date knowledge of current best practice in both Council Tax and Business Rates
- Proven track record of finding creative solutions to a wide range of people management challenges
- Knowledge of local government policies and procedures

To find out more or to apply

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Revenues Manager (MRI/Academy)



Until 31/03/2026 initially | £350 per day Umbrella | Hybrid

Hours per week: 37

Location: Hybrid working (office attendance will be required in the midlands)

Job Purpose

1. To manage and lead the billing, collection and recovery section ensuring the effective, economic administration of the billing and collection service in order to maximise revenue for service in respect of Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates, and for Housing Benefit Overpayments, Sundry Debts in accordance with legislation, local policies and strategies.

2. To work with the Head of Revenues and Benefits and the other Section Heads to ensure the team achieves excellence in its services to its customers, both internal and external.

What we're looking for:

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

- Strong technical and management skills
- Strong MRI/Academy user
- Extensive knowledge of Council Tax and Business Rates legislation
- Up to date knowledge of current best practice in both Council Tax and Business Rates
- Proven track record of finding creative solutions to a wide range of people management challenges
- Knowledge of local government policies and procedures

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Revenues & Benefits Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)



Permanent | Circa £30,000.00 per annum | Remote

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 1 day per month, and initially for the first few days for training & set-up.

Duties include:

- Assessment of HB & CTR claims
- 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 accordance with primary legislation and case law
- Gather information, explain decisions, and provide advice to the public and their representatives by email, letter, and telephone regarding council tax liability

What we're looking for:

We're looking for candidates who have these 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
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Benefits Customer Service Officer MRI (Academy)



3 months initially | £26 per hour Umbrella | Hybrid

Our client in the Midlands is seeking a Benefits Customer Service Officer.

The successful candidate must have strong Housing Benefit assessment skills and be an advanced MRI/Capita (Academy) user, and be willing to assess claims whilst picking up incoming calls.

Location: Hybrid / 2 days on-site in the Midlands

Role

The ability to assess all claim types to include new claims, changes in circumstances, DHP's, VEP's, HBAA & ATLAS.

What we're looking for:

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

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

To find out more or to apply
[>> Click here to view the full advert <<](#)

Benefits Assessment Officer (MRI/Academy)



12 months | £23 per hour Umbrella | Remote

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

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

Role

The ability to assess all claim types to include new claims, changes in circumstances, DHP's, VEP's, HBAA & ATLAS.

What we're looking for:

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

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

To find out more or to apply
[>> Click here to view the full advert <<](#)

Benefits Officer (Civica Open Revenues)



3 months | £24 per hour Umbrella | Remote

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

What we're looking for:

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

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

To find out more or to apply
[>> Click here to view the full advert <<](#)

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

As an experienced Revenues or Benefits professional, the new year is the perfect time to explore exciting interim/contract opportunities in the public sector. Whether you're looking for a fresh challenge, greater flexibility, or a role where you can make a real impact – we're here to help.

[!\[\]\(f6896632a254eed8a29907cb605e501c_img.jpg\) Start your journey today – register now!](#)

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

[Contact us here](#)



Payroll Solution

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



Our partnership with Umbrella.co.uk solidifies our commitment to ensuring you maximise your take-home pay, get paid on time and keep things stress free.

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

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



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

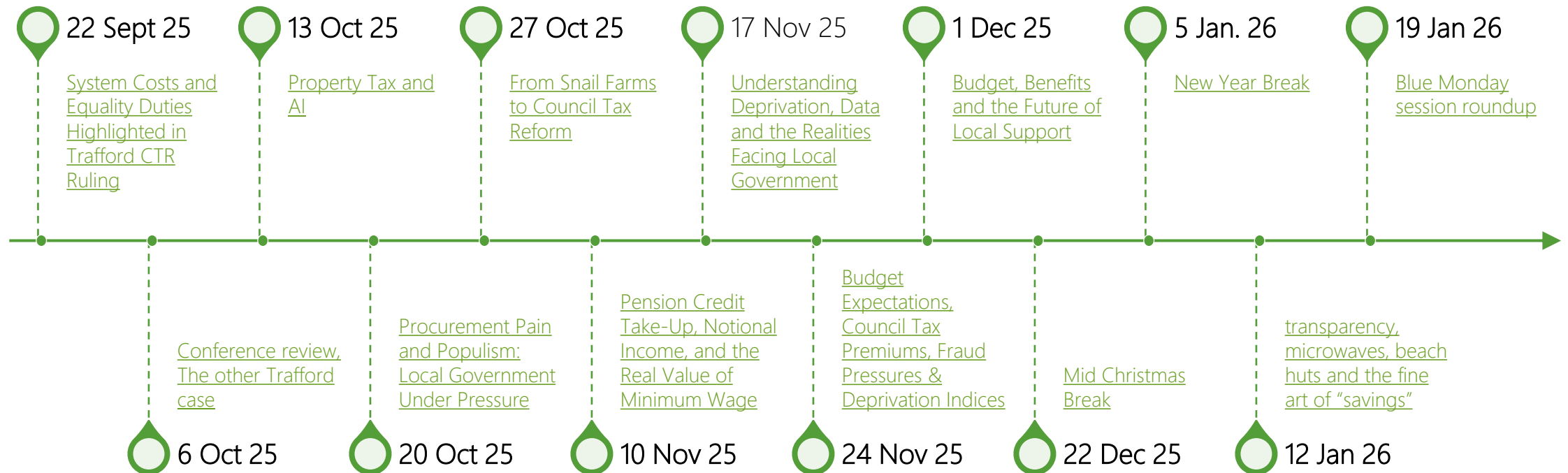
What I particularly like is how well they support everyone, and they really look after their people, which is unlike any other agency I have worked with in 30 years.

Congratulations to Ben and the team !"

#TeamBSS Client – Simon Rosser



Previous Recordings



Dates where there will be no sessions





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

link<https://preview.mailerlite.io/forms/657684/168311692752585951/share>



WELFARE TOGETHER

Vulnerability & Debt Advice Skills Training



Welfare
Together

Join Tracey Stone & Fiona Monk in Leeds 26th January 2026

Improve your teams key support skills

Focus areas for the day:

Spot vulnerability indicators and adapt support accordingly
Identify and prioritise debts effectively

Tackle difficult money conversations without judgement
Connect people with the right debt advice services

What attendees have said:



“It’s not often you attend a course and find that you’re totally engaged from start to finish, and the time seemed to go by very quickly.” – FK



“I really enjoyed the session.”- LP





“REACHING, HELPING, AND EMPOWERING”

We're excited to offer **in-person training** - on 26th January 2026,
@1 Park Lane, Leeds LS3 1EP.

Registration from 9:30am
Start 10am - 3pm

details to be confirmed.

Special offer: £99 + vat per person – **only £79 + vat** if booked
st December 2025.

Guest Speakers – Greg Flewitt & Deborah Nigh

Book now to secure your team's place - Spaces are limited, so please book early.

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



In
Partnership
with

LA Directories
Limited



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

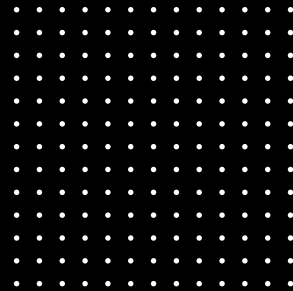
<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/06/09/reform-uks-department-of-national-efficiency-a-high-stakes-gamble-in-local-government-reform/>

<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>

entitledto
independent | accurate | reliable

[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

[A healthhttps://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/healthy-state/hy State? • Resolution Foundation](https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/healthy-state/hy State?)



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.

