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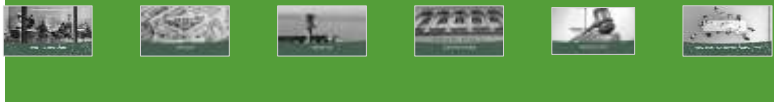


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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

[Meeting Link](#)

16 March 2026



Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

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

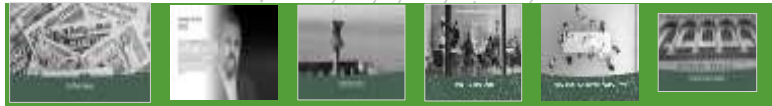
Any comments made by panellists are their own personal views and do not necessarily reflect the positions of their organisations.



In Partnership with

LA Directories Limited





Discussion Points

IFS CTR/UC & NEETS

THE MISALIGNED BLUEPRINT

Integrating Council Tax Support and Universal Credit to Fix the Localisation Trap

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Youth Employment Support and the Youth Guarantee

Key facts

- The government has announced a major package of support aimed at reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- The package is intended as part of a wider youth-investments approach, with around £2.5 billion of funding over a three-year period to create large numbers of new work, training and apprenticeship opportunities.
- The key measures focus first on over 1,000 local hubs (open for six months or more), expansion of the existing sub-sector so that eligible young people on Universal Credit can access a six-month subsidised paid job, and a £1.5bn apprenticeship scheme for small and medium-sized businesses or apprentices aged 16 to 24.
- The package also includes a new employment support, such as Youth Hubs, additional apprenticeships and foundation apprenticeships, support with work experience, and targeted support into sectors including construction, care and hospitality.
- The stated aim is to reduce youth unemployment and improve the transition from education into work.

Benefits, The Sub Hub & Ombudsman Reform

The Shifting Landscape of UK Benefits: 2025 Starburst Snapshot

Total Claimants
24.3 million (2019) to 12.2 million (2025)

The 'New to UC' Transition
Includes: Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit, Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit, Universal Credit, Universal Credit, Universal Credit.

Scottish Government Riaghailtas no ri-Albo

Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland, 2026 to 2031

Strategic direction and key messages

- The Scottish Government's 2026 to 2031 delivery plan will set a wider system approach to reducing child poverty, with statutory obligations of its own.
- It is built around four themes: increasing earned incomes, reducing living costs, mainstreaming income from social security and benefits in kind, and supporting children and families to thrive.
- The plan places particular emphasis on vulnerability family types, where around 60% of children in poverty are found, and on 'vulnerable' support for all the remaining 40% of children.
- The measures focus on: providing further information and support through universal family hubs; providing further information and support through universal family hubs; providing further information and support through universal family hubs.
- The plan also proposes a range of new data sharing and public services to be developed to identify needs for care and support for vulnerable children.

IBS Subsidy Hub – New Online Subsidy System Coming Late 2026

What is the IBS Subsidy Hub?
A new online system for claiming and managing your IBS subsidy. It will be available from late 2026.

Who will use it?
Local authorities, health and care providers, and businesses.

Benefits
Faster and easier to use, with a user-friendly interface.

Immediate Next Steps
Local authorities and health and care providers should start testing the system now.

ETHICS & INTEGRITY Commission

Ombudsman Reform and Systemic Public Sector Failure

What the issue is about

- The Ethics and Integrity Commission has identified a number of public sector organisations that are at risk of systemic failure. This includes the NHS, local authorities, and other public sector bodies.
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NEW COURSE

Using AI in Revenues & Benefits Services

Practical. Safe. Effective.

A practical online training course for council Revenues and Benefits teams — use AI safely, confidently, and effectively.

▶ Starts Wednesday 25 March 2026 — 10 weekly sessions — online



Starts 25 March 2026

10 Wednesdays, 10:00 am



Practical & Hands-On

Live demos & real scenarios



Safe Governance

Data protection & guardrails



All Team Levels

Officers to Heads of Service

- ✓ Save time with AI drafting, analysis & communication tools
- ✓ Use ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity & NotebookLM
- ✓ Apply AI safely with legal awareness & professional judgement



VISIONARY NETWORK
THE UK'S LEADING COUNCIL REVENUES & BENEFITS SERVICE

COURSE FEES

£450 + VAT

per person

£250 + VAT

2nd person, same organisation

£125 + VAT

each additional person

WHO IS THIS FOR?

Heads of Service · Revenues & Benefits Managers · Team Leaders · Policy & Performance Leads · Front Line Officers · Contact Centre Staff

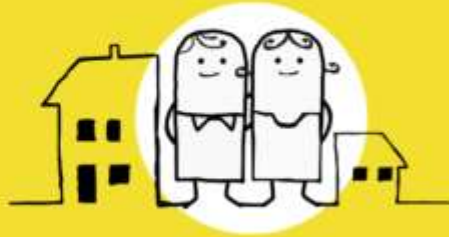


Register: send PO + names & email addresses to info@visionarynetwork.co.uk Download the [Syllabus](#) & [Brochure](#)

[visionarynetwork.co.uk](https://www.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.

Simply 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 easy-to-use tool provides the following features to support you through every step of the CTRS design process.

Resident Insights

Get a clear and detailed 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

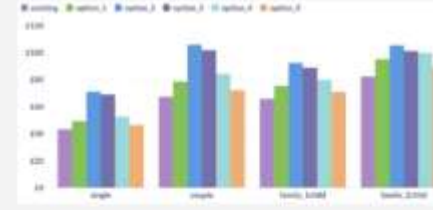
Total annual cost options



Detailed analysis per CTR band

ctr_band	number_residents	percentage_residents	single
00%	127	0.7%	119
70%	11,002	60.9%	6,802
90%	767	4.2%	258
40%	1,282	7.0%	339
20%	3,382	18.4%	671
10%	4,451	24.5%	363

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	34.85%
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 CTR 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

inbest



Designing Defensible CTR Schemes

See how councils model change, understand impact,
and make defensible decisions

[Play Video](#)

End



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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



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

Youth Employment Support and the Youth Guarantee

Key facts

- The government has announced a major package of support aimed at reducing the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- The package is presented as part of a wider Youth Guarantee approach, with around £1 billion of funding and a stated ambition to create large numbers of new work, training and apprenticeship opportunities.
- The key measures described include a £3,000 Youth Jobs Grant for employers hiring 18- to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for six months or more, expansion of the existing Jobs Guarantee so that eligible young people on Universal Credit can access a six-month subsidised paid job, and a £2,000 apprenticeship incentive for small and medium sized firms taking on apprentices aged 16 to 24.
- The package also includes wider employment support, such as Youth Hubs, additional apprenticeship and foundation apprenticeship opportunities, work experience, and targeted support into sectors including construction, care and hospitality.
- The stated aim is to reduce youth unemployment and improve the transition from education into work.

Youth Employment Support and the Youth Guarantee

Administrative impacts for services

- For public services, the package would have implications across Jobcentre Plus, local employment support, skills providers, schools, colleges and apprenticeship systems.
- Delivery will depend not only on funding, but also on local capacity to identify eligible young people, match them to opportunities, and keep them engaged.
- There is also an administrative challenge in coordinating several different schemes at once. Jobs grants, apprenticeship incentives, subsidised jobs, Youth Hubs and work experience all require clear eligibility rules, employer engagement, monitoring, and referral routes.
- Without strong coordination, there is a risk of duplication, confusion for employers, or young people moving between programmes without sustained support.
- For local government and partner services, the proposals may create opportunities to link employability support with wider youth services, transport, mental health support, and family assistance.
- This matters because many young people who are NEET need more than a simple vacancy match; they often need wrap around support to remain in work or training.

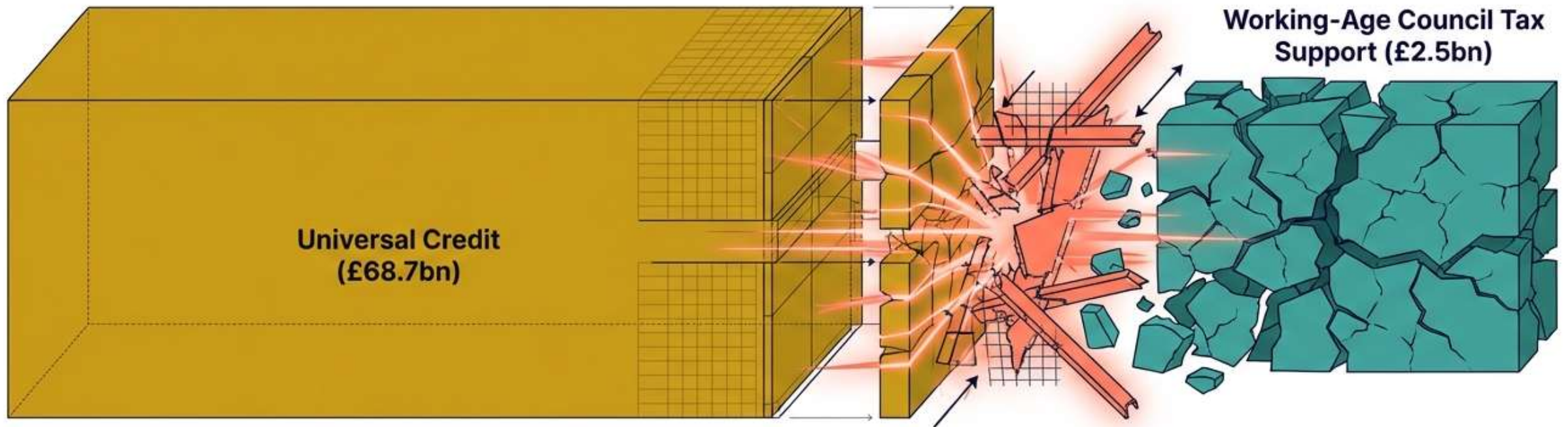
THE MISALIGNED BLUEPRINT

Integrating Council Tax Support and Universal Credit
to Fix the Localisation Trap



Economic
and Social
Research Council

A dual-system architecture to that punishes the poorest



3.7 million

Total CTS claimants in England.

£4.2 billion

Total CTS expenditure
(£2.5bn for working-age).

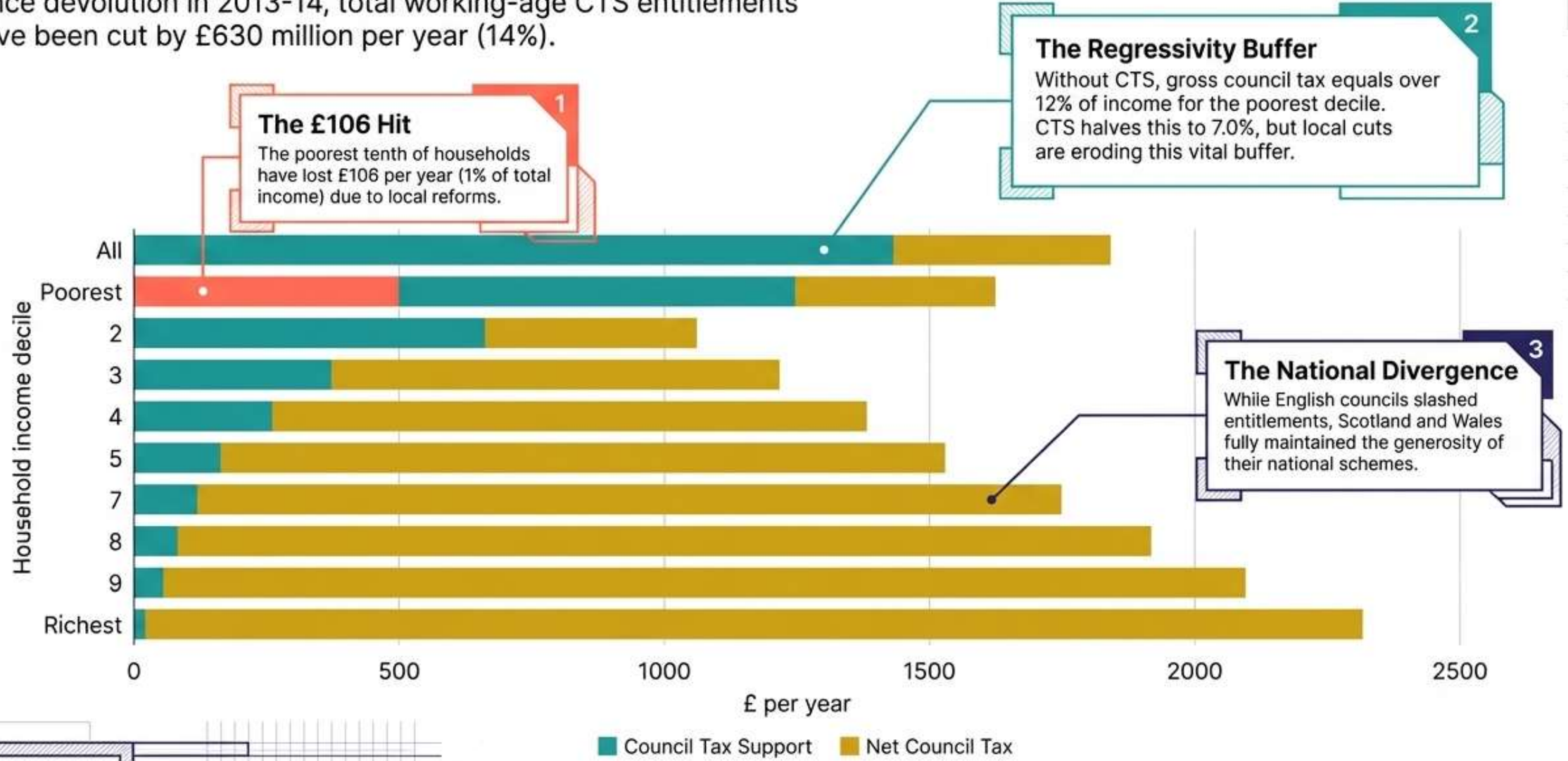
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English councils that have fragmented the system by shifting to 'banded schemes'.

Council Tax Support operates entirely separately from Universal Credit. This separation forces claimants to navigate misaligned means-testing rules, creating unintended administrative traps and destroying work incentives.

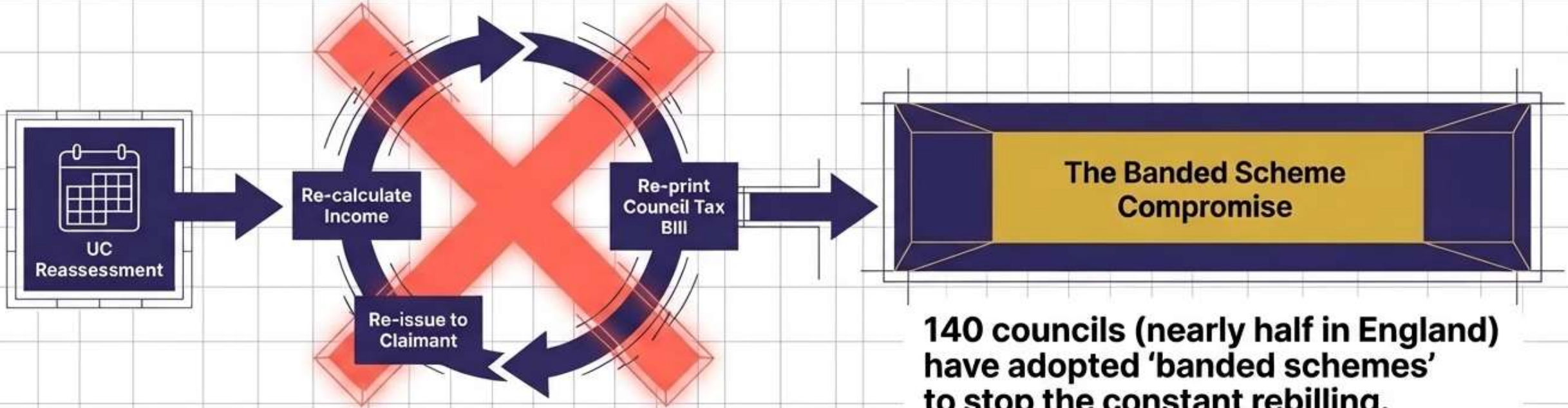
Localisation has systematically extracted income from the lowest deciles

Since devolution in 2013-14, total working-age CTS entitlements have been cut by £630 million per year (14%).



The Banded Scheme: An administrative coping mechanism

Universal Credit provides timely, monthly updates on claimant earnings. For local councils, recalculating CTS and issuing a new council tax bill every month is an administrative nightmare.



The Benefit

Small changes in income no longer trigger a new council tax bill.

The Cost

Introduces massive, unpredictable cliff-edges into the welfare system.

The Cliff-Edge vs. The Taper: Destroying the incentive to earn

The fundamental promise of Universal Credit was that 'earning an additional £1 from work never leaves claimants worse off.' **Banded CTS schemes actively break this promise**, creating effective marginal tax rates that can exceed 100%.

The Taper



Default 20% Taper Rate.
Earning £1 loses 20p in CTS.

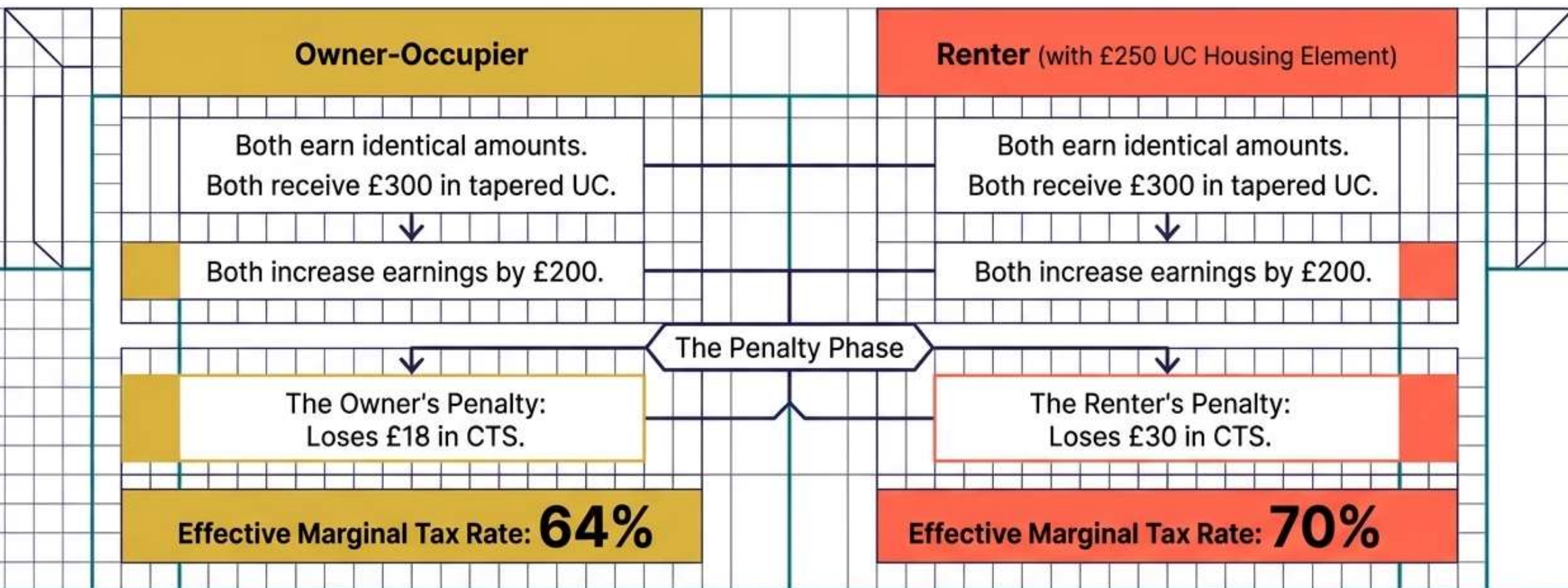
The Cliff-Edge



The Banded Scheme.
Earning £1 tips the household into a higher band, instantly wiping out a massive share of CTS.

The Renter Penalisation: An accidental tax on housing status

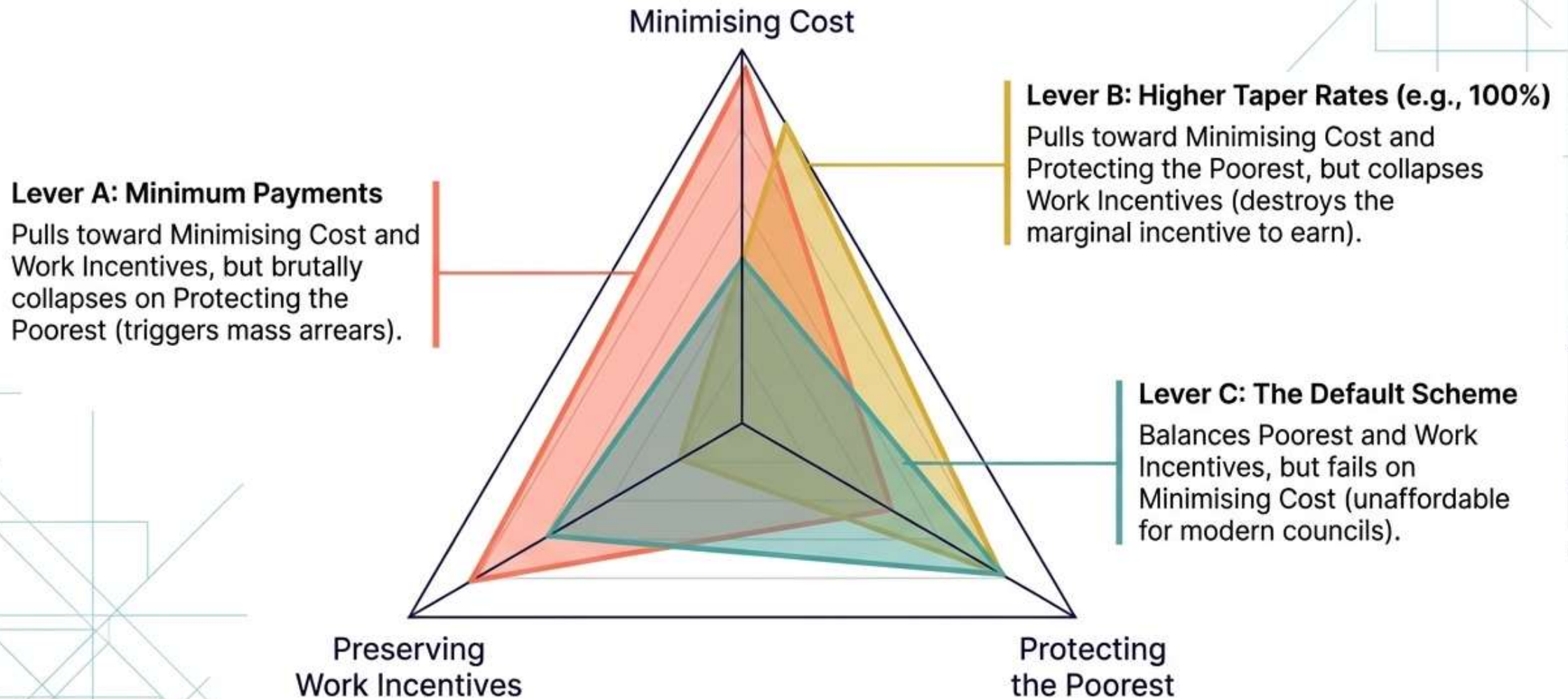
To simplify banded schemes, many councils exclude the UC housing element from their means test. Mathematically, this artificially inflates the effective taper rate for working renters compared to identical owner-occupiers.



Takeaway: The point at which support drops depends arbitrarily on council tax band, family size, and housing costs. The design is broken.

The Local Policy Trilemma: There are no cost-free levers

Local authorities are forced to trade one failure (budget deficits) for another (punishing the working poor).



The Limits of **Local Tinkering**

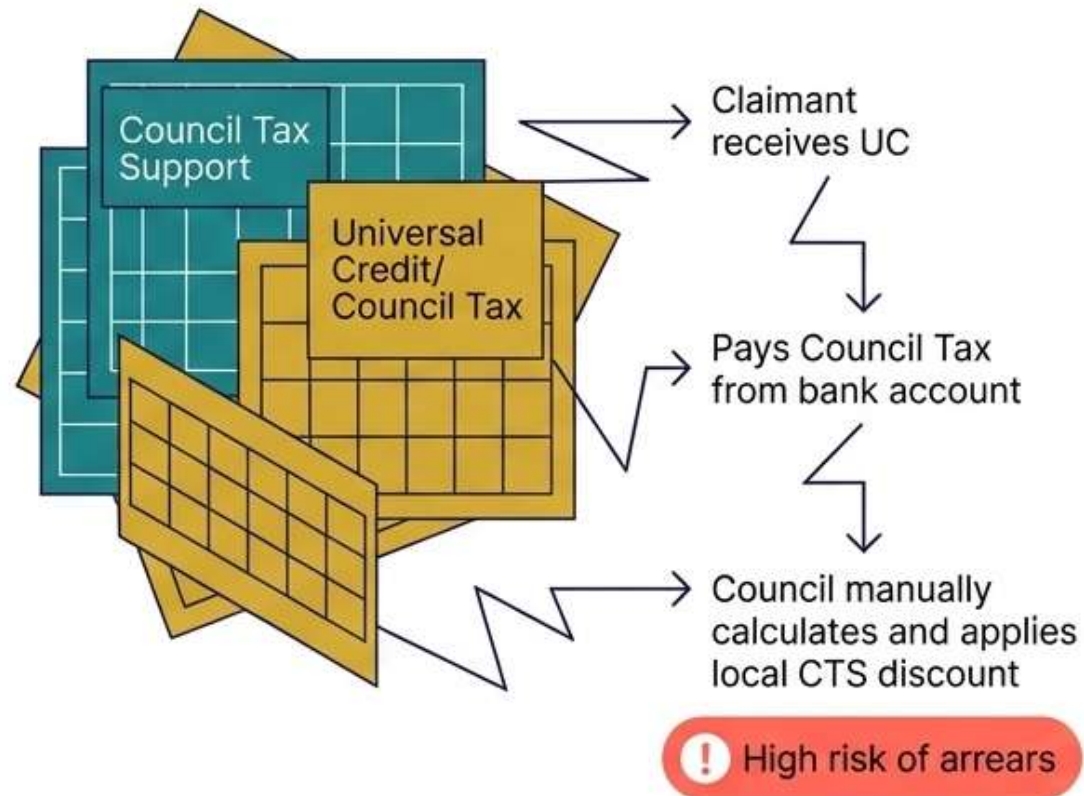
“Local councils have exhausted their policy levers. The patchwork of minimum payments and banded schemes proves that administering a highly targeted local tax discount on top of a dynamic national benefit creates unmanageable friction. National integration is no longer just an option; it is an administrative necessity.”

Evaluating the paths to
Universal Credit integration →

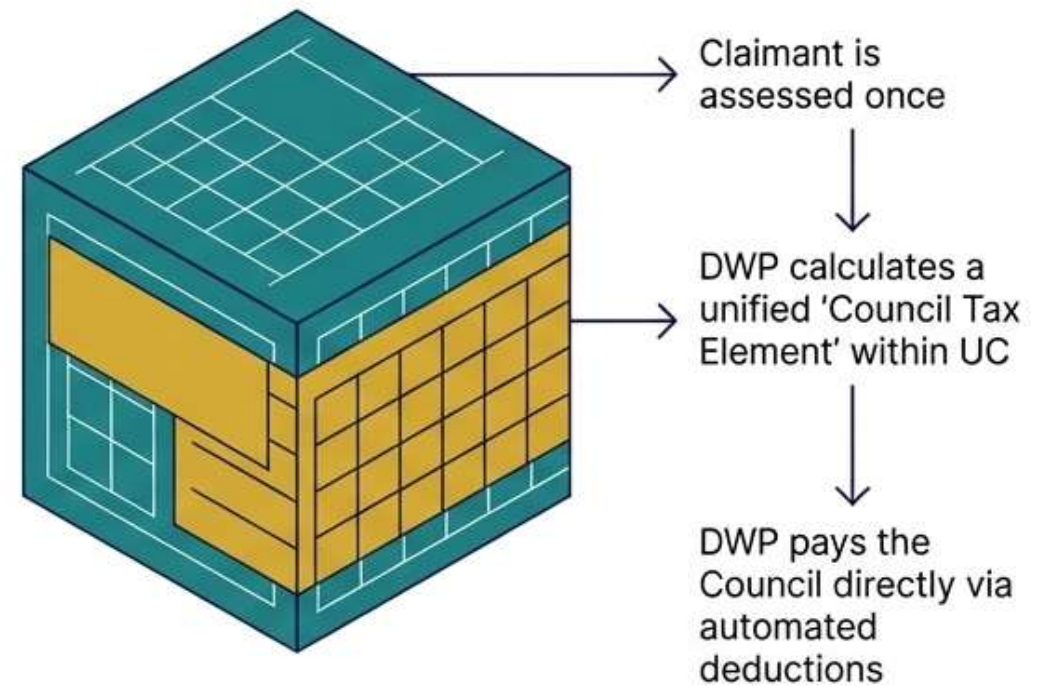
The Integration Mechanism: Snapping the blueprint together

Eliminating the secondary means test removes the cliff-edges, clarifies total entitlement for the claimant, and secures revenue for the local authority without expensive enforcement action.

Current State



Integrated State

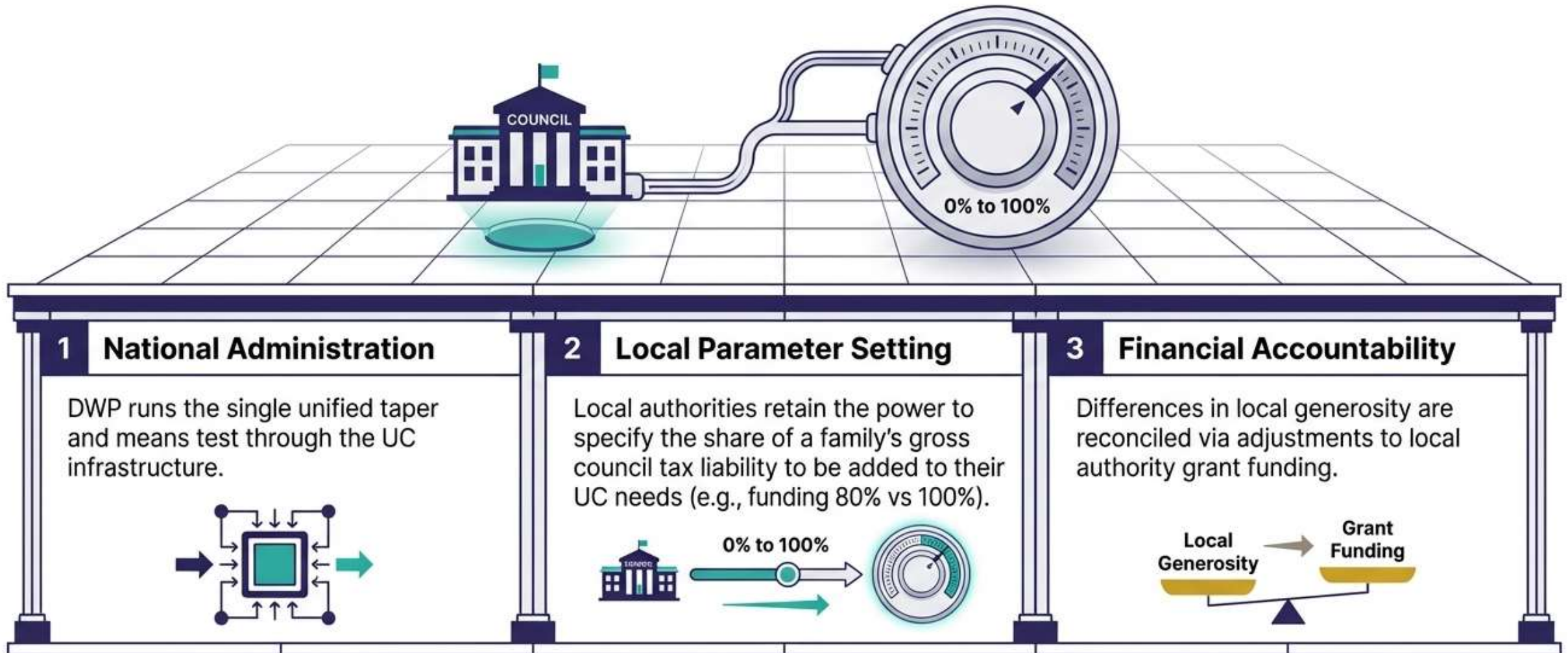


The Integration Options Matrix: Choosing your trade-offs

	Option 1: Pure UC Integration	Option 2: UC + 47% Minimum Payment	Option 3: UC + 62% Taper Rate
Fiscal Cost to Taxpayer	+£5.0bn	Revenue Neutral	Revenue Neutral
Impact on Poorest (Cash)	Gain	Devastating cuts (risk of severe arrears)	Protected from severe losses
Impact on Work Incentives (PTR/MTR)	PTR drops to 43.8%, MTR rises slightly to 50.2%	Strengthened (out-of-work support cut)	Worsened (pushes means-testing further up income distribution)
Administrative Complexity	Simplest	Moderate	Moderate

Resolving the political risk: Retaining local democratic choice

Integrating CTS into UC does not require total centralization. The system can unify administration while retaining local policy discretion.



Framing the Panel Debate

The Fiscal Reality

Is the administrative simplification and removal of 100%+ marginal tax rates worth the **£5.0 billion** cost of pure integration?

The Arrears Threat

If integration must be revenue-neutral, can local government survive the spike in enforcement costs that a 47% minimum payment would trigger?

The Transparency Mandate

If the goal—that claimants are transparently better off for every hour worked—is to be realized, can we tolerate the continued existence of a localized, parallel welfare system?

The Shifting Landscape of UK Benefits: 2025 Statistical Snapshot



The Big Picture
(August 2025)

State Pensioners

13.2 MILLION

+1.9% (+243,000)



24.3 Million
Total Claimants

Total individuals claiming some combination of 16 DWP benefits.

December 2025



Universal Credit

Primary support system for millions of working-age households.

8.3 Million Claimants

The "Move to UC" Transition

Legacy Phase-Out

ESA:
1 MILLION
(DROP 33.1%)

Natural & managed migration to UC continues.

Housing Benefit:
1.5 MILLION
(FALL 25.6%)

Working-age tenants transition to UC housing element (Nov 2025)

Managed Migration

Universal Credit

+1,072,000
Annual Change



MARCH 2026

Closing all older benefit systems.



Sept 2024

Migration notices for 800,000 ESA-only claimants began to accelerate goal.

Pensions and Older Age Support

New State Pension:
£216.46/week



Pre-2016:
£207.20/week



Gender Gap Narrowing
New rules evening out payment gap.



Pension Credit Trends
(1.4 MILLION)

Upward trend began Nov 2024.

Health, Disability, and Devolution



PIP Growth
(3.8 MILLION, ROSE 9%)
Moving away from old DLA.



Attendance Allowance
(1.7 MILLION, +110,000)
6% of entitled do not receive payment (e.g., in hospital).



Scottish Devolution
Adult Disability Payment & Carer Support Payment now administered by Scottish Gov.



**Scottish
Government**
Riaghaltas
na h-Alba

Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland, 2026 to 2031

Strategic direction and key measures

- The Scottish Government's 2026 to 2031 delivery plan sets out a whole system approach to reducing child poverty, with statutory 2030 targets at its core.
- It is built around four themes: increasing earned incomes, reducing living costs, maximising income from social security and benefits in kind, and supporting children and families to thrive.
- The plan places particular emphasis on six priority family types, where around 90% of children in poverty are found, and on Whole Family Support as the organising principle for delivery.
- This means more joined up services, earlier intervention, and support shaped around how families actually live.
- Key measures include further investment in employability support, childcare, breakfast clubs, affordable housing, homelessness prevention, fuel poverty action, welfare advice, Scottish Child Payment, Free School Meals, and local wrap around family services.
- The plan also proposes stronger use of data sharing and public service coordination to identify need earlier and target support more effectively.



Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas
na h-Alba

Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland, 2026 to 2031

Administrative impacts for services

- The plan has significant implications for administration across local government, health, education, advice services and the third sector.
- Key impacts on service administration include:
 - stronger expectation of joined up delivery across councils, NHS bodies, schools, Social Security Scotland and third sector partners
 - increased need for cross service case coordination through Whole Family Support models
 - greater use of data sharing, data matching and referral pathways to identify families earlier and target support more proactively
 - additional delivery demands linked to new and expanded schemes, including breakfast clubs, transport to employment, childcare support, debt advice, and family support funds
 - pressure on local systems to align employability, housing, education, welfare and mental health support rather than operating in separate silos
 - potential improvement in service quality and access through multiyear funding, workforce stability and more consistent local delivery arrangements
- The plan is ambitious and service intensive. If delivered well, it could make support easier to access and more preventative. However, it will require strong local coordination, clear governance, robust data handling, and sustained delivery capacity.

HB Subsidy Hub – New Online Subsidy System Coming Late 2026

KEY FACTS

What is the HB Subsidy Hub?

A new browser-based application being developed by LA-PED that will replace:

- PDF subsidy estimate and claim forms
- Audit workbooks (HB Assurance Process Module 3)

Go-live: Late 2026

Guidance & Support

Details on how to access and use the Hub will be shared with LAs over the coming months. DWP will provide support as the go-live date approaches.

Who Will Use It?

Local Authorities

Submit subsidy estimates and final claims online.

Auditors

Will access the Hub directly to complete HB audit work.

Immediate Next Steps

An information gather will be issued to **LA single inboxes imminently**. LAs should respond as soon as possible. Further requests will follow via bulletins and direct communications.

HB Subsidy Hub – New Online Subsidy System Coming Late 2026

ADMINISTRATION IMPACTS

01 User Onboarding Information

LAs will need to provide information to DWP to facilitate setting up users on the Hub. The first information gather will be sent to LA single inboxes imminently — respond promptly. Further requests will follow in the coming weeks and months.

02 Process Transition

Existing PDF-based subsidy estimate/claim forms and HB Assurance Process Module 3 audit workbooks will be retired. Staff currently using these will need to transition to the new browser-based Hub ahead of go-live in late 2026.

03 Subsidy Leads to Note

Subsidy leads should be aware this change is coming and should monitor bulletins and direct communications for further guidance on access, timelines, and user setup requirements as the go-live date approaches.

⚠ Action required: Watch for the information gather arriving in your LA single inbox and respond as soon as possible.

HB Subsidy Hub – New Online Subsidy System Coming Late 2026

KEY NUMBERS & MILESTONES

1

New browser-based application replacing all PDF forms & workbooks

2

User types: LAs (claims) and Auditors (audit access)

3

Items replaced: estimate forms, claim forms, Module 3 workbooks

Late
2026

Anticipated go-live date

Imminently

Info gather sent to LA single inboxes

Weeks/Months

Further updates via bulletins & direct comms

Coming Months

Guidance & access details shared

Late 2026

HB Subsidy Hub go-live

HB Subsidy Hub – New Online Subsidy System Coming Late 2026

REFERENCES & LINKS

LA-PED – Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery

DWP division responsible for the HB Subsidy Hub development and LA onboarding | Contact your DWP relationship manager or subsidy lead for further information

HB Assurance Process Module 3

Current audit workbook to be replaced by the HB Subsidy Hub | <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-for-local-authorities-assurance-process>

HB Subsidy Claim & Estimate Forms (current PDF versions)

To be replaced by online versions within the Hub | <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-subsidy>

Information Gather – LA Single Inboxes

First onboarding information request issued directly to LA single inboxes — monitor and respond promptly | No public URL — watch for direct email to your LA single inbox

ETHICS & INTEGRITY Commission

Ombudsman Reform and Systemic Public Sector Failure

What the review is asking

- The Ethics and Integrity Commission has launched a review of the public sector ombudsman system to examine whether ombudsman services could play a stronger role in identifying systemic failure earlier, before issues escalate into major scandals or lengthy public inquiries. The review was launched on 3 March 2026 and the call for evidence closes on 30 April 2026.
- The review follows earlier work by the Committee on Standards in Public Life on recognising early warning signs in public sector bodies.
- It is framed around whether ombudsmen, through the complaints they already receive and investigate, are well placed to spot patterns, support institutional learning and help public bodies act sooner.
- The published terms of reference cover seven issues:
 - public expectations of ombudsmen; the balance between individual complaint handling and systemic investigations;
 - the powers needed to investigate systemic failings;
 - oversight arrangements; whether complaint standards should become statutory;
 - whether recommendations should be binding; and
 - how to make the ombudsman landscape easier for the public to navigate.

ETHICS & INTEGRITY Commission

Ombudsman Reform and Systemic Public Sector Failure

Impacts on administration of services

- For public services, the review points towards a more preventative model of complaints and assurance.
- If ombudsmen are given a stronger systemic role, councils and other public bodies may face greater expectation to identify patterns in complaints earlier, respond more quickly to recurring faults, and demonstrate organisational learning before problems become entrenched.
- This is an inference from the review scope, but it is strongly supported by the commission's focus on early warning signs and institutional learning.
- Administrative impacts could include more formal complaint standards, stronger internal escalation routes, better data analysis of complaints and service failure, and tighter governance over how recommendations are implemented.
- If recommendations became binding or standards became statutory, this would increase compliance and monitoring demands on public authorities.
- There is also a service design implication.
- A clearer and simpler ombudsman landscape could improve access for the public, but public bodies may need to review signposting, complaint handling processes and case recording so that concerns can move more easily from frontline services to formal resolution and, where necessary, wider systemic review.

Simplifying Crisis and Resilience Fund Delivery for Councils with the Inbest CMS

A comprehensive platform designed to help local authorities meet DWP requirements while building long-term resident financial resilience.

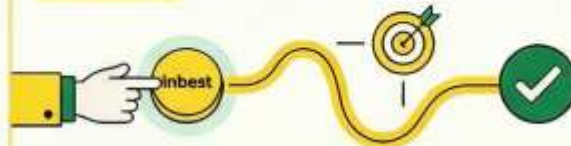
The CRF Challenge



Navigating the New £842m Consolidated Grant

The CRF replaces HSF and DHPs, requiring councils to deliver crisis payments and resilience services. However, mandatory six-monthly reporting across 30+ data tables—covering demographics, spend, and outcomes—creates a significant administrative burden for local teams tasked with building long-term financial stability for low-income households.

The Nudge



A Cost-Neutral Solution for Smarter Delivery

The Inbest CMS automates CRF delivery by identifying eligible residents and tracking outcomes, importantly, CRF guidance permits using funds for "data and analytics for targeting support" and "digital referral systems," meaning the grant itself can fully fund the Inbest platform.

How It Works: Six Tiles

- ### 1 Enrichment and Segmentation

Process administrative data to identify residents missing benefits or eligible for specific Crisis and Resilience Fund support strands.
- ### 2 Targeted Campaign Definition

Define campaign objectives and select resident segments using pre-configured, automated workflows and communication templates for email or text.
- ### 3 Proactive Resident Outreach

Reach residents via SMS or WhatsApp with personalized links to a pre-fied benefits calculator to check eligibility in minutes.
- ### 4 Flexible Case Management

Support self-serve or advice-led delivery with a structured audit trail for recording advice, actions, and referral outcomes.
- ### 5 Reach Previously Unknown Households

Deploy web-based landing pages to reach households not currently receiving Council Tax Reduction or Housing Benefit.
- ### 6 Automated MI Reporting

Generate DWP-required six-monthly returns automatically, covering demographics, spend categories, and resilience outcomes without manual work.

What Councils Get

- End-to-end platform for identifying vulnerable residents. A single system to manage the entire resident journey from identification to outcome.
- Automated reporting aligned with DWP requirements. Pre-configured reports that eliminate the need for manual spreadsheets and data gathering.
- Improved benefit take-up and financial resilience. Direct impact on resident income through automated eligibility checks and warm referrals.
- Reduced administrative burden through digital workflows. Automation of follow-ups and reminders to increase efficiency for internal teams.
- Cost-neutral implementation using CRF administrative. Full compliance with DWP guidance for allowable digital and IT costs.

Proof Points

- £36**
Resident income generated for every £1 invested.
- £5.2M**
Pension Credit secured through targeted campaigns.
- 30+**
Councils currently using the Inbest Benefits Calculator.

Delivery Options

- Internal delivery with Inbest support.** Full set-up, configuration, and training for council teams.
- Fully managed service by partner agencies.** Turnkey delivery using welfare agencies already on the platform.
- Flexible self-serve and hybrid models.** Tailored delivery approaches to fit council capacity and needs.



Book a meeting to see the Inbest CMS in action.
Schedule a demo to explore how the platform fits your specific CRF requirements.

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Get in touch to start your council's transition to data-driven CRF delivery.



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In the news



Preston
City Council

Key facts

- Preston City Council is offering up to £100 per household to help vulnerable pensioners with the cost of food and fuel.
- The support is aimed at pensioners who live in Preston, receive Council Tax Support, and are not receiving Pension Credit.
- The council announced the scheme on 6 March 2026 and provides an online application route on its website.
- The scheme is a targeted local response to ongoing cost of living pressures on older residents, especially those who may be on low incomes but are missing out on Pension Credit.
- Preston's council statement presents it as quick financial help for essential living costs.

Preston Pensioner Cost of Living Support



Preston
City Council

Administrative impacts for services

- For administration, this type of scheme creates a need for clear targeting, straightforward application handling, and prompt verification of eligibility against Council Tax Support records and Pension Credit status.
- It also requires customer contact capacity, accessible communications, and safeguards where another person applies on behalf of the pensioner.
- There is also a wider service implication: the scheme highlights a group of pensioners who are receiving Council Tax Support but not Pension Credit, which may indicate missed benefit take up.
- That creates an opportunity for revenues and benefits teams, welfare support and advice services to use the application process as a route into broader income maximisation work.
- This last point is an inference from the published eligibility criteria rather than a stated council objective.

Preston
Pensioner
Cost of
Living
Support

Digital ID and Public Service Reform

- **Key facts**

- The UK Government launched an eight-week consultation on 10 March 2026 on how digital ID could be used to make public services quicker, easier and more secure to access.
- The consultation closes at 12:30 pm on 5 May 2026 and is framed around a proposed national digital ID system for British and Irish citizens, and foreign nationals with permission to be in the UK.
- The government is now presenting digital ID less as an enforcement tool and more as core public infrastructure for modern public services.
- Its published case for change highlights heavy reliance on legacy processes, including 45,000 letters a day at DVLA, 500 paper forms used by Defra, and 100,000 phone calls a day handled by HMRC.
- The consultation states that existing non digital routes will remain available, and it is accompanied by a public engagement exercise through a people's panel.
- Independent commentary from the Institute for Government says this marks a notable shift in tone, from digital ID as a response to illegal working towards digital ID to improve user experience and service usability.



Digital ID
scheme

Digital ID and Public Service Reform

- **Administrative impacts for services**
- For public services, the proposal points towards a more integrated front door for government, where identity verification is handled once and then reused across services.
- If implemented, this could reduce repeated evidence checks, repeated storytelling by residents, and some manual paper and telephone processes. That is the government's intended direction, though the extent of delivery remains uncertain at this stage.
- The administrative implications are likely to include redesign of service access routes, stronger digital identity assurance processes, changes to records and case handling workflows, and more consistent cross department data use.
- Services would also need to preserve assisted and offline access for those who do not want, or cannot use, digital routes.
- There may also be new burdens around public trust, privacy, inclusion and communications.
- The Institute for Government notes that public buy in is not yet secured, and some people question whether digital ID benefits users enough to justify wider adoption, especially for services they access infrequently.
- That means implementation would need to balance convenience, reassurance and choice, not simply digitise existing friction.



Digital ID
scheme

PSN Decommissioning – Searchlight & VEP Migration to Internet Access

KEY FACTS

Background

Searchlight and Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) are currently accessed via the Public Service Network (PSN).

The PSN is expected to be decommissioned for DWP in **early 2027**. DWP is migrating both services to internet-based access.

Call for LA Volunteer Testers – Searchlight

DWP is seeking additional volunteer LAs to adopt the new internet routeway ahead of national rollout.

Note: Only LAs not outsourcing HB work to a third party are eligible at this stage.

Current Status

Implementation is taking longer than anticipated due to complexity. Progress is being made.

Searchlight: Phase 2 testing underway. National rollout expected **late spring / early summer 2026**.

VEP: Solution in progress; testing planning underway.

National Rollout

DWP will progress national rollout of both internet-based solutions in **tranches**. Each LA will be contacted in advance to discuss next steps.

PSN Decommissioning – Searchlight & VEP Migration to Internet Access

ADMINISTRATION IMPACTS

01 LA IT Action Required

Volunteer LAs must: obtain a current PSN certificate; request a new internet-specific certificate; install certificates; safelist a new URL; and test user access. Guidance will be provided by DWP.

02 Timeline & Effort

Testing is straightforward in most cases. Previous LAs have completed the process in around 10 working days end-to-end with support from their IT team and DWP.

03 MoU & Eligibility

Volunteer LAs must hold a current PSN certificate and agree to additional terms and conditions under the Memorandum of Understanding between DWP and LAs. Only LAs that do not outsource HB work to a third party are eligible at this stage.

To volunteer: email lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk with subject: '*PSN Private Beta Testing volunteer*'

PSN Decommissioning – Searchlight & VEP Migration to Internet Access

KEY NUMBERS & MILESTONES

2

DWP data shares still on PSN
(Searchlight & VEP)

~10

Working days for LAs to
complete testing end-to-end

2027

Estimated PSN
decommission year for DWP

Phase 2

Current Searchlight
testing phase

LAWD2/2025

Bulletin reminder issued

Early 2026

Searchlight volunteer testing

Late Spring/
Summer 2026

Searchlight national rollout

Early 2027

PSN decommission (DWP)

PSN Decommissioning – Searchlight & VEP Migration to Internet Access

REFERENCES & LINKS

LAWD2/2025 Bulletin

Original DWP bulletin referencing PSN decommission and Searchlight/VEP migration | Contact your DWP relationship manager for access

PSN Private Beta Testing – Volunteer Contact

To register as a volunteer LA tester for the Searchlight internet routeway | lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk | Subject: 'PSN Private Beta Testing volunteer'

DWP Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Additional terms and conditions required for volunteer LAs undertaking testing | Contact DWP via the volunteer email above for further details

GOV.UK – Public Service Network (PSN)

Background on PSN and government network transition | <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/public-services-network>



Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas
na h-Alba



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Public Service Recovery in Scotland and Wales

Key facts

- New Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis says several major public services in Scotland and Wales are still performing materially worse than before the pandemic, despite significant spending increases.
- In Scotland, the report highlights weaker hospital productivity, falling education performance on some measures, and pressure on the justice system.
- In Wales, the report points to continued weakness in health and education outcomes, with performance often below both pre pandemic levels and England.
- For Scotland, IFS says hospital activity has not returned to pre-Covid levels despite higher funding and staffing, suggesting productivity is well below where it was five years ago.
- The report also says school absence remains above pre pandemic levels and court backlogs remain elevated.
- For Wales, IFS says waiting lists for planned treatment are still much higher than before Covid, A and E performance has continued to worsen, school absence remains around 50% above 2019 levels, and post 16 participation is lower than a decade ago.
- It also says these problems persist despite substantial real terms increases in funding.



Scottish
Government
Riaghaltas
na h-Alba



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Public Service Recovery in Scotland and Wales

Administrative impacts for services

- The main service implication is that extra spending on its own is not translating into restored performance. For administration, this suggests a growing need to focus on productivity, service design, workflow, data, and operational delivery rather than assuming that higher budgets and staffing will automatically improve outcomes.
- In Scotland, the findings point to pressures for NHS management, education leaders and justice agencies to review how capacity is being used, how demand is flowing through systems, and whether current delivery models are too slow or fragmented.
- The report also warns that the funding outlook for the next Scottish Parliament is tight, which could mean budget cuts for some services and make recovery harder.
- In Wales, the administrative challenge appears even more focused on delivery reform. IFS suggests policy design and service organisation may be contributing to weaker outcomes, including longer average hospital stays and weaker school accountability arrangements.
- That implies pressure for stronger performance management, better use of comparative data, and more direct diagnosis of what is not working in frontline systems.



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Oil Price Shock and UK Recession Risk

Key facts

- New economic commentary suggests the UK is especially exposed to the latest oil price shock because growth had already stalled before the energy spike.
- Official ONS data shows monthly GDP recorded no growth in January 2026, with services flat, production down 0.1% and construction up 0.2%.
- The warning that an oil shock could push the UK into recession is a forecast, not a confirmed outcome.
- It reflects economist concern that higher oil and gas prices could hit household spending, business confidence and inflation at the same time.
- The Guardian reported that Brent crude moved above \$100 a barrel, while Oxford Economics said that if oil averaged around \$140 per barrel for two months, parts of the global economy, including the UK, could slip into a mild recession.
- This matters because the UK appears to have entered the latest energy shock with very little economic momentum.
- ONS says GDP was flat in January, and recent commentary linked to the data release says the combination of weak growth and higher energy prices raises the risk of stagflation, with low or negative growth alongside renewed inflation pressure



Oil Price Shock and UK Recession Risk

Administrative impacts for services

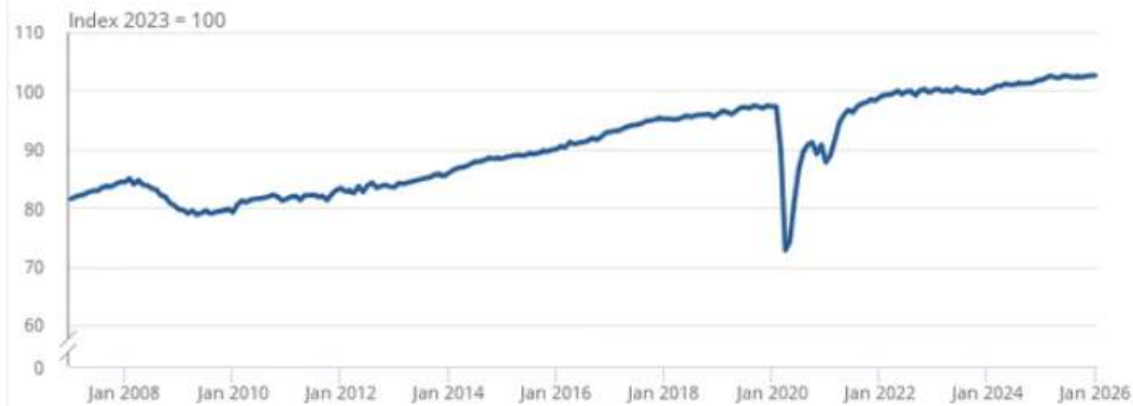
- For public services, the main implication is indirect but important. If higher oil prices feed through into inflation, transport, utilities, procurement and contractor costs are likely to rise, while a weaker economy could increase demand for support from households and businesses.
- That would put additional pressure on already stretched budgets and service planning. This is an inference from the economic outlook rather than a formal government impact assessment.
- There is also a policy risk. If inflation proves stickier because of energy prices, interest rate cuts may be delayed, which would keep borrowing costs higher for longer.
- That could affect local authority capital plans, housing markets, and wider public spending choices.
- Recent reporting on the OBR's view suggests Middle East driven energy disruption could lift UK inflation back towards 3% by the end of 2026.
- Operationally, services may need to prepare for a mix of cost pressure and rising demand rather than a simple downturn.
- Energy led shocks tend to affect lower income households first, so councils may see knock on effects in local welfare, homelessness, council tax collection, debt advice and discretionary support.
- That final point is a reasoned implication rather than something stated directly in the sources.



Oil Price Shock and UK Recession Risk

Figure 2: Real GDP is estimated to have grown by 0.9% in the three months to January 2026 compared with the three months to January 2025

Monthly index, January 2007 to January 2026, UK



Source: Gross domestic product (GDP) monthly estimate from the Office for National Statistics



Multiple Employment Fraud Risk in Local Government

Key facts

- A BBC report highlighted the case of a council employee, using the name “Paul”, who said he worked in two full time council jobs at the same time for around 18 months before his contracts were terminated after an internal investigation.
- The article presents this as an example of what government has described as “polygamous working”, meaning multiple jobs held in secret.
- The Cabinet Office told the BBC that, since 2016, the National Fraud Initiative has identified 301 public sector employees involved in this issue and recovered £1.35 million in salary payments.
- The wider government position is that payroll, pension and benefits data can be matched to identify possible cases.
- This is not simply a remote working story. It is an employment, governance and fraud risk issue.
- Whether it is unlawful will depend on the facts, including contract terms, disclosure, working time, conflict of interest and whether the employee was actually carrying out the work they were paid to do.
- The BBC article is a case study rather than a legal ruling on all multiple employment.

Multiple Employment Fraud Risk in Local Government

Administrative impacts for services

- For councils and other public bodies, the issue creates pressure for stronger pre employment checks, clearer declarations of other employment, tighter contract clauses, and more active monitoring of conflicts, attendance and productivity.
- The Cabinet Office's use of National Fraud Initiative data matching suggests that local payroll governance is now part of the anti-fraud control environment, not just an HR matter.
- There are also workforce management implications.
 - Hybrid and remote working can make legitimate flexible working easier, but they can also reduce visibility where controls are weak.
 - That means councils need a balanced approach that distinguishes fraud or misrepresentation from lawful secondary employment, while protecting staff wellbeing and avoiding over intrusive monitoring.
 - This balance is reflected in the Local Government Association comments reported by the BBC, which note that councils must manage a wide range of working patterns within employment law and local policies.
- Operationally, the risk is not just financial loss. Hidden multiple employment can affect service continuity, data security, conflicts of loyalty, safeguarding, and public trust, especially in roles involving vulnerable residents or sensitive information.
- That is a reasoned service implication from the facts reported, rather than a direct Cabinet Office statement.

Statutory Sick Pay – Entitlement Changes from April 2026

KEY CHANGES

Removal of Lower Earnings Limit

Effective: 6 April 2026

All eligible employees will be entitled to SSP regardless of their income.

SSP will be paid at the lower of:

- 80% of normal weekly earnings
- Flat rate of £123.25 per week

Removal of the Waiting Period

Effective: 6 April 2026

SSP will be paid from the first full day of sickness absence — not from day 4 as previously.

The previous 3-day waiting period is abolished.

Statutory Sick Pay – Entitlement Changes from April 2026

ADMINISTRATION IMPACTS

01 Eligibility Assessment

Remove income-threshold checks from SSP eligibility processes. All employees meeting absence criteria will qualify — update systems and guidance accordingly.

02 Payment Calculations

Update payroll to calculate SSP at 80% of normal weekly earnings (capped at £123.25/week). Review lower-paid workers whose rate will now differ from the flat rate.

03 Absence Recording

Day-1 entitlement replaces the 3-day waiting period. Absence management systems and HR processes must be updated to trigger SSP from the first full day of absence.

⚠ Transitional rule: Absences beginning before 6 April 2026 continue under the old eligibility and payment rules.

Statutory Sick Pay – Entitlement Changes from April 2026

KEY NUMBERS & STATISTICS

£123.25

Weekly flat rate cap
(2026/27)

80%

Of normal weekly earnings (if
lower than flat rate)

Day 1

SSP now payable from first
full day of absence

3 days

Waiting period abolished
(previously unpaid)

5 March 2025 Changes announced by Government

6 April 2026 New rules take effect

Statutory Sick Pay – Entitlement Changes from April 2026

REFERENCES & LINKS

Employment Rights Act 2025

Primary legislation introducing the SSP changes | <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/employment-rights>

Government Announcement – 5 March 2025

Official announcement of the SSP entitlement reforms | <https://www.gov.uk/government/news>

Statutory Sick Pay – Employer Guidance (GOV.UK)

Updated employer guidance on SSP eligibility and payment from April 2026 | <https://www.gov.uk/employers-sick-pay>

Policy Enquiries Contact

DWP Housing Policy Enquiries | <mailto:housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk>

Quote of the Week

“They say in the Middle East a pessimist is simply an optimist with experience.” - Ehud Barak

Ehud Barak is an Israeli former prime minister and the most decorated soldier in the country's history, rising from elite special-forces commander to IDF chief of staff before entering politics. He served as Israel's 10th prime minister from 1999 to 2001, overseeing major peace negotiations and a withdrawal from southern Lebanon.



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)



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Sideway View

Social Security Data Security and DOGE Allegations



Key facts

- The Social Security Administration's inspector general is investigating a whistleblower complaint alleging that a former DOGE engineer claimed to have retained highly sensitive Social Security data and intended to use or share it after leaving government.
- Reporting from The Washington Post was subsequently matched by Associated Press reporting that the SSA watchdog had opened a formal probe and notified congressional leaders.
- The allegations concern two tightly restricted SSA datasets, Numident and the Master Death File, which together contain identifying information on hundreds of millions of living and deceased Americans.
- According to the reporting, the complaint alleges the former employee said one dataset was on a thumb drive and that he wanted help moving data to a personal computer so it could be "sanitized" before use.
- The former employee, SSA and the company involved have denied wrongdoing, and there is no public evidence that the alleged upload or transfer was successfully completed.
- The case sits within a wider pattern of concerns about DOGE access to SSA systems. Earlier whistleblower claims and later court filings reported that DOGE staff had improperly accessed and shared sensitive Social Security data, including through unapproved services and arrangements outside normal controls.

Social Security Data Security and DOGE Allegations



Administrative impacts for services

- For public service administration, the immediate issue is data governance.
- If even part of the allegations is substantiated, it would indicate serious weaknesses in identity and access management, offboarding controls, device return processes, audit logging and supervision of privileged users.
- In practical terms, agencies handling sensitive personal data would need to review who can access what, how that access is monitored, and how quickly credentials and equipment are revoked when staff leave.
- There is also a wider trust and assurance issue. SSA serves more than 70 million people, and the alleged datasets cover records on more than 500 million living and dead Americans.
- Even unproven allegations of this kind can damage public confidence and increase pressure for tighter oversight from inspectors general, Congress and auditors such as GAO.
- Operationally, the story points to the risks of rapid system access being granted to politically backed or externally connected teams without equally strong controls.
- It also suggests that whistleblower routes, independent audit and legal challenge have become central safeguards where normal internal governance is perceived to have failed.
- That final point is an inference from the reported investigations, court filings and congressional responses.



DWP Benefits Trends and Universal Credit Transition

Key findings

- The latest DWP benefits statistics show a continued shift away from legacy working age benefits and towards Universal Credit.
- By December 2025 there were 8.3 million Universal Credit claimants, while Housing Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance and Jobseeker's Allowance all fell sharply over the year.
- This reflects the continuing managed migration of claimants and the planned closure of legacy benefits by March 2026.
- State Pension remains the largest benefit, with 13.2 million recipients at August 2025, up 1.9% over the year.
- Pension Credit was broadly stable at 1.4 million claimants, while disability and care related benefits remained high, including 3.8 million Personal Independence Payment claimants and 1.7 million Attendance Allowance claimants under DWP policy ownership.
- The statistics also reflect the growing impact of Scottish devolution.
- For Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Payment, published DWP figures now mainly reflect England, Wales and cases still under DWP policy ownership, with Scotland increasingly covered through separate Scottish Government benefits.



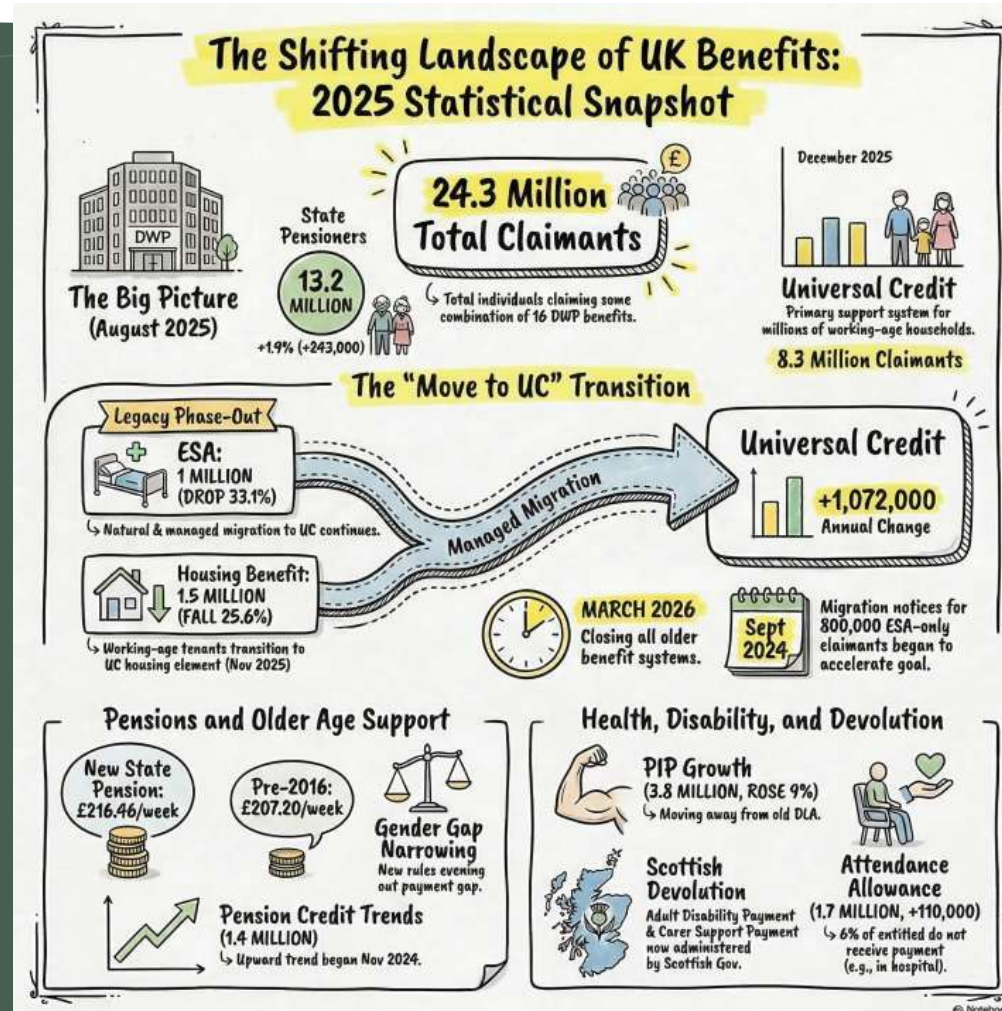
DWP Benefits Trends and Universal Credit Transition

Administrative impacts for services

- The main administrative issue is the rapid transition from legacy benefits to Universal Credit.
- This affects council services, DWP operations and advice agencies through case transfers, changes in entitlement, increased need for claimant support, and ongoing reductions in Housing Benefit and income related ESA caseloads.
- Revenues and benefits services will continue to see shrinking working age Housing Benefit caseloads and greater interaction with Universal Credit housing support instead.
- The statistics also point to continuing pressure on pension age, disability and carer related services. Although some working age benefits are falling, claimant numbers remain high for disability benefits, State Pension and Pension Credit, which means ongoing demand for assessment, support, signposting and linked local services.
- A further administrative issue is complexity in the data itself.
- Scottish devolution, managed migration, and methodological changes, such as the removal of inactive JSA claims, all affect trend interpretation.
- This means services need to use caution when comparing time series and should avoid assuming all movements reflect underlying need alone.



DWP Benefits Trends and Universal Credit Transition





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Legal Issues of Note

Council Tax Premium Governance Failure at Nuneaton and Bedworth

Key facts

- Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council's Monitoring Officer has issued a section 5 report stating that the council acted unlawfully in how it introduced its empty homes and second homes council tax premiums.
- The report will be considered by full council on 18 March 2026.
- The report says Cabinet approved the additional levies in October 2024, but full council did not make the decision it should have made.
- It also says the council should have revisited its position after statutory guidance was issued on 1 November 2024, and that the original report did not provide sufficient detail, analysis or options to decision makers.
- It further notes that an Empty Homes Premium Policy 2025 to 2026 was published without evidence of formal approval by Cabinet or full council.
- The Monitoring Officer recommends withdrawing the second homes premium, withdrawing the additional empty homes levies introduced from 1 April 2025, refunding affected taxpayers, notifying preceptors, and restarting the process in full accordance with statutory guidance through future Cabinet and full council reports.

Council Tax Premium Governance Failure at Nuneaton and Bedworth

Administrative impacts for services

- The immediate administrative effect is significant for revenues and benefits and corporate governance teams.
- The report says the second homes premium has not yet been billed, but the empty homes premium has been collected since 1 April 2025 and would require refunds. Officers will need to suspend billing, review affected accounts, process refunds, update systems, and handle additional customer enquiries.
- There is also a governance impact. The report indicates weaknesses in decision routing, report drafting, and legal compliance, especially where council tax changes ought to go to full council and where statutory guidance must be demonstrably considered.
- The council has already changed its report templates to include wider implications, options, and clearer identification of matters that may need full council approval.
- For billing authorities more widely, this is a warning that council tax premiums are not just a policy choice but a formal legal process.
- The link to Warwick District Council's earlier section 5 issue suggests other councils may need to recheck whether premiums were lawfully approved, properly evidenced and aligned with the November 2024 guidance.
- That last point is an inference from the two councils' published positions rather than a formal government statement

Judicial Review Pressures in Public Law

Key facts

- Ministry of Justice data shows that 1,100 judicial review applications were lodged in October to December 2025, up 56% from 700 in the same quarter of 2024.
- The official statistical note says this was the highest quarterly level since Q1 2017, driven by increases in civil other and civil immigration and asylum claims.
- Across the whole of 2025, there were 3,700 judicial review applications: 2,200 civil other, 1,300 civil immigration and asylum, and 130 criminal.
- Civil other applications rose by 25% year on year, civil immigration and asylum by 26%, while criminal applications fell by 6%.
- In Q4 2025, the Home Office was the largest single recipient of applications, with 390, followed by local authorities with 320, and the Ministry of Justice with 130. So far, 23 of the claims against local authorities have been granted permission, or permission in part, to proceed to a final hearing.

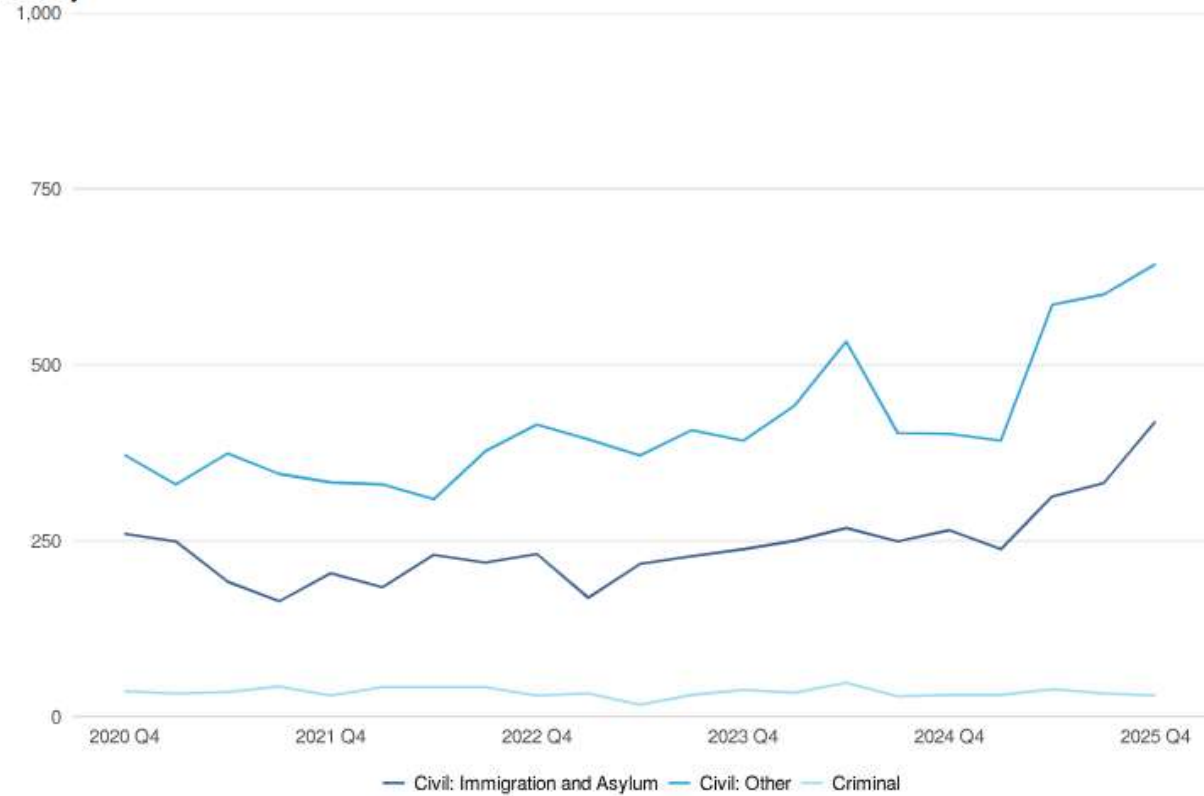
Judicial Review Pressures in Public Law

Administrative impacts for services

- For public authorities, especially councils, the rise suggests a more demanding litigation environment. It increases pressure on decision making, record keeping, consultation processes, reasons for decisions, and internal review procedures, because weaknesses in any of these can increase exposure to challenge.
- This is an inference from the increase in claim volumes and the scale of claims involving public bodies.
- For legal and governance teams, the figures point to a need for stronger early risk identification and tighter coordination between policy, operational and legal services.
- Local authorities being the second largest recipient group in Q4 2025 means councils in particular need to treat judicial review risk as a live service issue, not just a legal back-end matter.
- The data does not itself explain why claims are rising. Commentary reported by Local Government Lawyer suggests a mix of factors may be in play, including post Covid normalisation, multiple claims from different affected groups, higher stakes in commercial cases, wider use of fundraising, and increased attention to public decisions through social media.
- Those points are commentary rather than official MoJ findings.

Judicial Review Pressures in Public Law

Figure 7: Judicial Review Applications, by type; Q4 2020 to Q4 2025 (Source: JR CSV)



SEND Tribunal Pressures and Administrative Failure

Key facts

- A Freedom of Information response reported by Local Government Lawyer says Surrey County Council received formal SEND tribunal sanctions in 38 cases between February and June 2025 because of missed administrative deadlines.
- Of those 38 cases, most were resolved or withdrawn, while four resulted in the council being fully barred from hearings.
- The council said this occurred during a period of exceptionally high demand, when around 725 tribunal cases were open.
- Surrey says it has since recruited additional staff, restructured its tribunals team, and expanded its mediation and dispute resolution service.
- The council says that service resolved 93% of cases before tribunal between January and December 2025, and that it currently has around 675 open SEND tribunal appeals.
- The wider national context is also shifting. The government's February 2026 SEND reform consultation proposes a greater role for mediation and complaints resolution, with the SEND Tribunal intended to remain a genuine last resort.
- The consultation also proposes that tribunals would no longer name the placement for the child.

SEND Tribunal Pressures and Administrative Failure

Administrative impacts for services

- The Surrey case underlines how missed deadlines in SEND appeals are not just procedural errors; they can directly weaken a council's position in legal proceedings and delay outcomes for children and families.
- For administration, this points to pressure on tribunal case management, document handling, legal coordination, and staffing resilience within SEND services.
- The figures also suggest that dispute resolution capacity is becoming a core operational issue.
- Surrey's response has been to expand mediation and restructure its tribunal function, which implies that councils facing high appeal volumes may need to invest earlier in case resolution, workflow management and specialist administrative support to avoid escalation.
- National reform proposals would reinforce this direction.
- If mediation and complaints handling take on a larger role, councils, schools and health partners are likely to need stronger front end resolution processes, clearer communication with families, and better joined up decision making before cases reach tribunal.
- At the same time, the proposal to remove tribunal power to name placements could significantly alter how placement disputes are managed and resolved



Other Workshops





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





Job Adverts From Business Smart Solutions



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**Ben
Moreton**

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**Mark
Thomas**

Operations



**Chris
Sharratt**

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

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

#TeamBSS - Sam Goddard



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

Subsidy Officer (MRI/Academy)



6 months initially | £32 per hour Umbrella | Hybrid

Hours per week: 37

Location: Part Remote (ideally 2-3 days in the office)

1. To ensure that benefit claims are being assessed accurately and paid correctly and in line with legislation and guidance.
2. To assist in the completion of the Housing Benefit subsidy returns and claims including working with auditors
3. To ensure that the subsidy position improves and income to the Council is maximised.
4. To support the Training and Resilience team by identifying development needs of officers through Subsidy checking.

What we're looking for:

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

- Strong technical skills
- Strong MRI/Academy user
- Demonstrate the ability to take on board and understand complex legislation
- 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
[>> Click here to view the full advert <<](#)

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

Revenues Officer (Civica Open Revs)



2 months initially | £22.35 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

Rate: £22.35 per hour (umbrella)

Term: 2 months initially

Hours per week: 37 hours per week

Location: Fully Remote

PURPOSE OF THE JOB: To ensure that all Council Tax, NDR and Sundry Income records are maintained to enable correct billing and recovery of charges.

What we're looking for:

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

- Experience of interpreting legislation.
- Previous experience of working within a revenues environment for at least two years.
- Have a working knowledge of Council Tax and NDR legislation and a basic knowledge of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit Overpayment Sundry Income
- IRRV Technician

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

Revenues Officer (Academy)



Maternity Cover | £26 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

The role requires an experienced Interim Revenues Officer (Billing and Recovery).

The role is offered on a remote basis, with the occasional office day.

Rate: £26.00 per hour (umbrella)

Term: Maternity Cover

Location: Remote

What we're looking for:

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

- Strong Revenues/NDR Skills
- Experience of the MRI/Capita One (Academy) system
- IRRV qualified or relevant experience

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

Senior Application Support Officer (NEC)



16 weeks initially | £2400 per day (umbrella) | Hybrid

This role is to support some specific project work for our Revenues and Benefits department.

The Senior Application Support Officer is responsible for day to day supervision and management of an identified area of the Application Support Team. The team are responsible for managing the day to day running of Bristol City Councils IT applications, this includes a helpdesk function; system upgrades; access, event and request fulfilment processes, and for ensuring all other associated tasks are carried out effectively and timely. Ensuring effective management of IT incidents/requests and their resolution, providing appropriate and timely updates minimising impact to customers and stakeholders.

The postholder will be responsible for a team of up to 10 officers who carry out monitoring, advise, and upkeep of IT systems/processes and liaison with stakeholders/suppliers. To help planning, productivity and functioning of the team.

The postholder will oversee team development of systems and processes to ensure effective running of IT systems and recording of data in line with statutory legislation changes; change programmes and data protection/GDPR.

What we're looking for:

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

- Must have extensive knowledge of NEC EDM (previously call Info@Work document management) and NEC Revs and Bens Applications in particular the back end administration function in order to support the implementation of new modules
- NEC EDM modules to be implemented are Data Integration Hub, Email Connect and Document Bundling
- Must be able to demonstrate previous experience of leading on implementation of modules including planning and scoping of work involved, liaising with business users, setting up back end parameters, managing and undertaking testing

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

Product Specialist (Benefits Directory)



Permanent | £45,000.00 pa | Predominantly Remote

Business Smart Solutions is pleased to be working with its partners at Infoshare+ to source a Product Specialist for the Benefits Directory. Infoshare+ acquired the Benefits Directory in August 2025 and is looking to further support Kim Larkin and her team by introducing this exciting new role.

This opportunity would be well suited to someone who thrives on interpreting complex Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support legislation into an easy-to-digest format.

The role is offered on a permanent, full-time basis and is predominantly remote, with clearly defined career progression for the right candidate.

What we're looking for:

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

- Ability to read and interpret complex Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support legislation and case law changes
- Update the Benefits Directory in line with legislative and case law changes
- Provide technical responses to incoming Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support queries, and offer guidance on wider welfare schemes
- A genuine interest in Housing Benefit Temporary, Supported and Specified Accommodation
- Interpret Council Tax Support schemes, including the prescribed pensioner scheme and local working-age schemes
- Provide product user training
- Support business development activities

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.

[!\[\]\(b1297194d7c82318a4266d0917bd4e3f_img.jpg\) 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

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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



NEW COURSE

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Starts 25 March 2026

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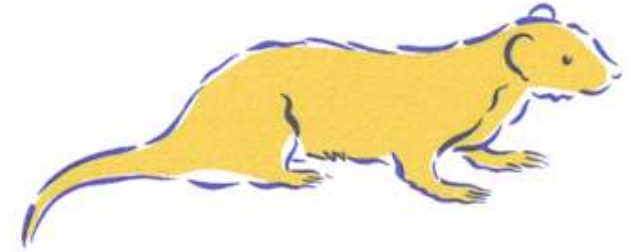
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[visionarynetwork.co.uk](https://www.visionarynetwork.co.uk)

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](#)

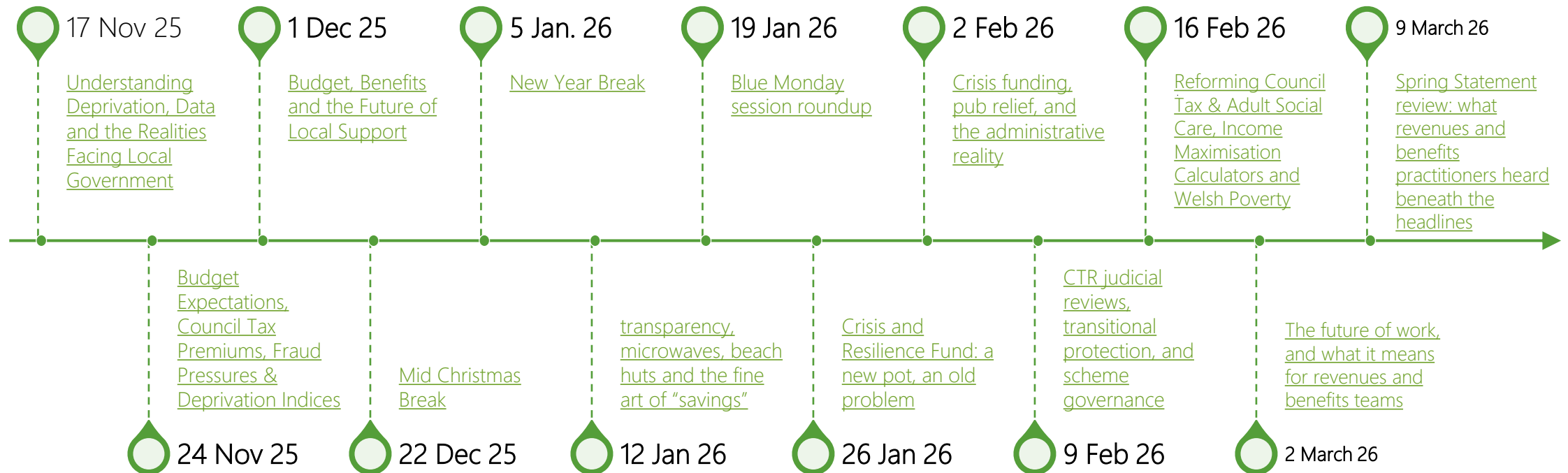


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Session Information

Previous Recordings





Dates where there will be no sessions





Stats & References

Youth Employment Support and the Youth Guarantee

Key numbers and statistics

- Around £1 billion of funding announced
- Government ambition to create 200,000 jobs
- More than 350,000 new training and work opportunities referenced
- £3,000 grant for employers hiring eligible 18 to 24 year olds
- £2,000 apprenticeship grant for SMEs hiring new apprentices aged 16 to 24
- Existing Jobs Guarantee expanded from 18 to 21 year olds to include up to age 24
- Around 60,000 young people expected to be directly supported by the new proposals
- 50,000 extra apprenticeship places referenced
- More than 360 Youth Hubs across Great Britain
- Around one million young people were reported to be NEET in the final quarter of the previous year

Council Tax Support Reform

Key numbers and statistics

- Council tax support contributes more than £500 a year on average to the poorest tenth of households
- This is worth around 6% of income for the poorest tenth
- Since localisation in England, the aggregate size of working age schemes has fallen by around £630 million in today's prices
- This is a reduction of around 14%
- The poorest households have lost an average of £106 a year in disposable income, around 1%
- In a typical example, if earnings rise by £100:
 - £55 may be withdrawn through universal credit
 - a further £9 may be lost through lower council tax support
 - this implies an effective marginal tax rate of 64%

References and links

Institute for Fiscal Studies, An examination of council tax support schemes across England, Scotland and Wales, and the case for reform

Quoted findings and commentary from the report summary, including remarks by Matthew Oulton, Research Economist at IFS

Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland, 2026 to 2031

Key numbers and statistics

- 2030 statutory targets:
 - under 10% relative child poverty
 - under 5% absolute poverty
 - under 5% low income and material deprivation
 - under 5% persistent poverty
- Scottish Child Payment has supported more than 244,000 parents since 2021
- almost £1.5 billion has been paid to low income families through Scottish Child Payment
- Scottish Government policies are estimated to keep 100,000 children out of relative poverty in 2026 to 2027
- rates of relative and absolute child poverty in Scotland were 9 percentage points lower than the UK as a whole in 2023 to 2024
- £4.1 billion planned over four years for affordable homes, within up to £4.9 billion overall
- estimated 36,000 affordable homes supported, with up to 24,000 children benefiting
- over £100 million across three years for a national breakfast club offer
- over 125,000 children a year expected to benefit from breakfast clubs
- £524 million for Five Family Payments in 2026 to 2027
- Scottish Child Payment to rise to £28.20 per week in 2026 to 2027
- under 1 premium planned to take Scottish Child Payment to £40 per week from 2027 to 2028
- over £27 million for welfare, income maximisation and debt advice over two years
- at least 80,000 households a year expected to be supported through advice funding
- £20 million Whole Family Support Third Sector Delivery Fund
- £2 million for the Once for Scotland Data Exchange programme

Tackling Child Poverty in Scotland, 2026 to 2031

References and links

- Bringing Hope, Building Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2026 to 2031, Scottish Government, March 2026
- Supporting documents referenced in the plan include:
 - Cumulative Impact Assessment
 - Equalities Impact Assessment
 - Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment
 - Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment
 - Child Poverty Evaluation Strategy
 - Child Poverty Measurement Framework
- Publisher:
Scottish Government, St Andrew's House, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG
- Website:
www.gov.scot

Preston Pensioner Cost of Living Support

Key numbers

- Up to £100 per household.
- Announced by Preston City Council on 6 March 2026.
- Available to pensioners on Council Tax Support who are not on Pension Credit.

References and links

Preston City Council, “Preston City Council Offers Additional Cost Of Living Support for Vulnerable Pensioners”.

Preston City Council, “Cost of Living Targeted Support”.

Preston City Council application page, “Cost of Living Support for Pensioners”.

Ombudsman Reform and Systemic Public Sector Failure

Key numbers and facts

- Review launched: 3 March 2026.
- Call for evidence closes: 30 April 2026.
- The review has 7 formal terms of reference.
- It is the first review undertaken by the Ethics and Integrity Commission.
- The predecessor report on early warning signs was published on 25 March 2025.

References and links

Ethics and Integrity Commission, *Ombudsman Review*.

Ethics and Integrity Commission, *Letter from Chair EIC to the Prime Minister announcing the launch of the Ombudsman Review*.

Ethics and Integrity Commission, *Documents: Ombudsman Review – Terms of Reference; Call for Evidence; Press Notice*.

Committee on Standards in Public Life, *Recognising and responding to early warning signs in public sector bodies*.

Public Finance, Ewen Fergusson, *Could public sector ombudsman services prevent systemic public sector failures?*

Digital ID and Public Service Reform

Key numbers and facts

- Consultation launched: 10 March 2026.
- Consultation closes: 5 May 2026 at 12:30 pm.
- Public engagement includes a people's panel of 100 citizens.
- DVLA processes 45,000 letters a day.
- Defra uses 500 paper forms.
- HMRC handles 100,000 phone calls a day.
- The consultation document is described by techUK as 91 pages long.

References and links

UK Government, *Making public services work for you with your digital identity.*

UK Government press notice, *Government launches consultation on making public services quicker, easier and more secure to access with digital ID.*

Institute for Government, Heloise Dunlop, *The government's consultation on digital ID marks a shift in tone and substance.*

Public Finance, Rachel Willcox, *Digital ID consultation shifts focus to public services.*

Public Service Recovery in Scotland and Wales

Key numbers and statistics

- In Wales, health spending per person is up 17% in real terms since 2019 to 2020, yet A and E waiting times are still rising.
- In Wales, per pupil school spending is up 14%, but school absences remain about 50% higher than in 2019.
- In Scotland, school absence is around 9%, compared with around 7% in England.
- IFS says average hospital stays in Wales are around 40% longer than in England, which reduces patient throughput.
- The Scottish IFS report was published on 7 March 2026; the Welsh report was published on 10 March 2026.

References and links

Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Public service spending and performance in Scotland*, published 7 March 2026.

Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Despite recent progress, Scottish public services are still performing substantially worse than before COVID*, published 7 March 2026.

Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Public service spending and performance in Wales*, published 10 March 2026.

Institute for Fiscal Studies, *Welsh health and educational systems are underperforming*, published 10 March 2026.

Public Finance, Rachel Willcox, *Scottish and Welsh public services struggling to recover since Covid, IFS warns*, published 11 March 2026.

Oil Price Shock and UK Recession Risk

Key numbers and statistics

- UK monthly GDP growth in January 2026: 0.0%.
- Production output in January 2026: down 0.1%.
- Construction output in January 2026: up 0.2%.
- GDP growth over the three months to January 2026: 0.2%.
- Brent crude moved above \$100 per barrel during the latest shock.
- Oxford Economics scenario: around \$140 oil for two months could push parts of the global economy into a mild recession.
- OBR related reporting says UK inflation could rise to 3% by the end of 2026 if the energy shock persists.

References and links

Office for National Statistics, *GDP monthly estimate, UK: January 2026*.

The Guardian, *Oil price shock likely to 'push the UK economy into recession'; US growth revised down*.

Oxford Economics, *Iran war scenarios: The oil price that breaks parts of the economy*.

The Guardian, *Middle East crisis could push UK inflation back up to 3%, says OBR*.

Multiple Employment Fraud Risk in Local Government

Key numbers and facts

- 301 public sector employees identified by the National Fraud Initiative since 2016.
- £1.35 million in salary payments recovered, according to the Cabinet Office.
- One featured council worker said he held two full time council jobs for 18 months.
- The National Fraud Initiative reported identifying £510 million in fraud and error between 2022 and 2024 across its wider work.

References and links

BBC London, Meghan Owen, *I was pursued for fraud for having two council jobs at once.*

A related Cabinet Office and National Fraud Initiative summary was also reported in connection with wider public sector multiple employment investigations

Social Security Data Security and DOGE Allegations

Key numbers and facts

- SSA serves more than 70 million Americans.
- The two datasets at issue reportedly contain records relating to more than 500 million living and dead Americans.
- The whistleblower complaint was filed on 9 January 2026 and amended on 26 January 2026, according to the reporting.
- DOGE staff were reported to have been embedded at SSA beginning in February 2025.
- AP reported that the inspector general alerted leaders of four congressional committees to the probe.

References and links

The Washington Post, 10 March 2026, reporting on the whistleblower complaint and inspector general investigation.

Associated Press, 11 March 2026, reporting that SSA's watchdog opened a probe and notified Congress.

House Oversight Democrats letter, 9 March 2026, referring to SSA OIG and prior court filings on DOGE data handling.

Federal News Network and FedScoop coverage of related congressional and watchdog scrutiny.

DWP Benefits Trends and Universal Credit Transition

Key numbers and statistics

- 13.2 million State Pension recipients at August 2025, up 1.9%
- 8.3 million Universal Credit claimants at December 2025
- 8.0 million Universal Credit claimants at August 2025, up 1.07 million on the year
- 1.5 million Housing Benefit claims at November 2025, down 25.6%
- 1.0 million Employment and Support Allowance claimants at August 2025, down 33.1%
- 71,000 Jobseeker's Allowance claimants at August 2025, down 24%
- 24.3 million people claimed some combination of DWP benefits at August 2025
- 13.4 million combined benefit claimants were of State Pension age
- 10.0 million were of working age
- 860,000 were under 16
- 3.84 million PIP claimants under DWP policy ownership at August 2025
- 1.74 million Attendance Allowance claimants under DWP policy ownership
- 1.38 million Carer's Allowance claimants under DWP policy ownership
- 1.37 million DLA claimants under DWP policy ownership
- 4.4 million households had a Universal Credit housing element at November 2025, with 4.2 million in payment

DWP Benefits Trends and Universal Credit Transition

References and links

- Department for Work and Pensions, DWP benefits statistics summary, latest release
- Stat-Xplore, DWP benefits statistics and Universal Credit statistics
- Related official data sources referenced in the summary:
 - Universal Credit statistics
 - Benefit Combination statistics
 - Move to Universal Credit statistics
 - Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit statistics
 - Bereavement Support Payment statistics

Council Tax Premium Governance Failure at Nuneaton and Bedworth

Key numbers and statistics

- Full council meeting to consider the report: 18 March 2026.
- Second homes premium not yet charged; estimated value: £432,744 per annum.
- Empty homes premium to be refunded: £258,963 per annum.
- Further premiums requiring review: £214,684 across 143 accounts.
- Worst case in year impact identified in the report: about £473,547, with the forecast council tax surplus reduced by an estimated £269,770.
- Refund due to the HRA within the above total: £14,054.
- Statutory guidance referenced by the report was issued on 1 November 2024.

References and links

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Extraordinary Council agenda and Monitoring Officer report, 18 March 2026.

Local Government Lawyer, “MO issues section 5 report on empty homes and second homes council tax premium”, 11 March 2026.

Warwick District Council, “Statement: Council Tax second homes premium”, 1 December 2025.

Judicial Review Pressures in Public Law

Key numbers and statistics

- 1,100 judicial review applications in Q4 2025.
- 56% increase on Q4 2024.
- Highest quarterly level since Q1 2017.
- 3,700 applications in calendar year 2025.
- 2,200 civil other applications in 2025.
- 1,300 civil immigration and asylum applications in 2025.
- 130 criminal applications in 2025.
- 320 Q4 2025 applications against local authorities.
- 23 local authority cases granted permission, or permission in part, to proceed to final hearing.
- 170 Q4 cases had reached permission stage; 21 were found totally without merit.

References and links

Ministry of Justice, Civil Justice Statistics Quarterly: October to December 2025.

Ministry of Justice, Judicial Review Data Visualisation Tool.

Local Government Lawyer, Number of judicial review applications at “highest” since 2017, Government data shows.

SEND Tribunal Pressures and Administrative Failure

Key numbers and statistics

- 38 formal sanctions issued against Surrey in SEND tribunal cases between February and June 2025.
- 4 cases resulted in the council being fully barred from hearings.
- Around 725 tribunal cases were open during the period the sanctions were issued.
- Surrey says it currently has around 675 open SEND tribunal appeals.
- Surrey says 93% of cases were resolved before tribunal through mediation and dispute resolution between January and December 2025.
- The government says it will invest £3.7 billion to 2030 in SEND capital improvements, alongside wider reforms.

References and links

Local Government Lawyer, “County council sanctioned in dozens of SEND appeals, FoI request reveals”, 9 March 2026.

Department for Education, “SEND reform: putting children and young people first”, consultation published 23 February 2026.

Department for Education, consultation PDF, “SEND Reform: Putting Children and Young People First”.



Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

Blogs



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

[Briefing note: fiscal and economic context and what it means for local tax, welfare support and local government finance \(March 2026\) by Malcolm Gardner](#)

[Budget 2025: Impacts on Revenues & Benefits Administration, Housing and Local Government Finance by Malcolm Gardner](#)

[Why We Should Not Be Surprised That Reform UK's Councils Are Struggling by Malcolm Gardner](#)

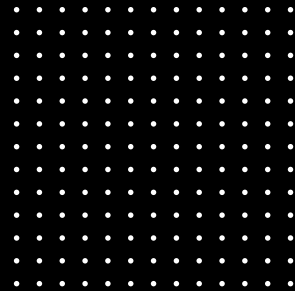
[The Case for Plain English Council Tax Reduction Schemes by Paul Howarth](#)

<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

- [Local Authorities left with their hands-tied by lifting of the 2-child limit](#) by Phil Agulnik and Karen Holmes
- [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

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[Unsung Britain: working harder, getting nowhere](#) by Mike Brewer

How recent decades have squeezed the households who can least afford it

[Lifting living standards](#) By Ruth Curtis

Resolution Foundation's priorities for 2026 and beyond

[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.



[Better Policy: Is Council Tax A Rip-Off?](#)

[IFS: Is the minimum wage costing jobs?](#)

[Farage's Flagship Council \(And Other Stories From Rotten Boroughs\)](#)

Podcasts



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.

