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Partnership
with

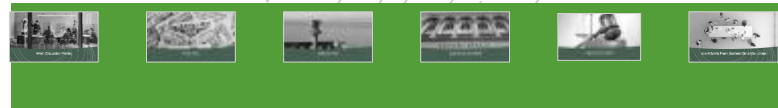


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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

[Meeting Link](#)

1 June 2026



Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

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

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



Visionary on Tour 2026



LACEF 2026
See us at
LACEF
Visionary Network is exhibiting

 **25 JUN 2026**
The Belfry Hotel & Resort, B76 9PT

 **BBQ Tues 24 Jun** — sponsored by **Rundles**
RSVP for the BBQ by **15 May 2026**
Agenda & timings to follow

REGISTER **FREE** for Local Authority staff

eventbrite.co.uk/e/lacef-2026-tickets-1464093796959



Annual Conference 2026
PUBLIC FINANCE LIVE
15-16 July, Olympia, London

VISIONARY NETWORK • FIND US ON THE FLOOR

Public Finance Live is back in London at ICC at Olympia on 15-16 July 2026. This flagship event brings together public sector practitioners, commentators and experts for updates, discussions and insights into public finance and public service management.

WHY ATTEND?
Public sector leaders share ideas and best practice to unpack the issues impacting the sector and plan for the future. CIPFA's annual conference is the ideal event both for the big public policy picture and for insight from the public finance frontline — a unique opportunity to connect with peers, inspire new thinking and strengthen networks.

SEE YOU IN LONDON!

HI! COME SAY HI!



EASTBOURNE

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VISIONARY NETWORK
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WINTER GARDENS, 14 COMPTON STREET

25TH - 26TH AUGUST 2026

FREQUENT TRAINS EXPRESS SERVICES **SOUTHERN RAILWAY** ILLUSTRATED GUIDE FREE FROM TOWN CLERK, EASTBOURNE



VISIONARY NETWORK

STAND 27

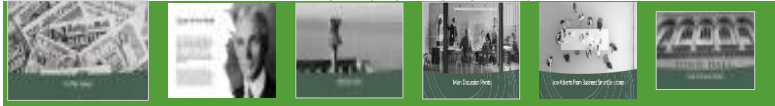
IRRV
Conference
TELFORD

20-30
SEPT 2026

TELFORD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HALL

NEETS

Citizen's AI



Discussion Points

PANEL DISCUSSION | JUNE 2026

Youth, Welfare & the Public Sector Pipeline

What the IFS, ONS and Milburn Review tell us about the NEET crisis, the talent pipeline, and the pressure now landing on local welfare services — Framed for panel discussion.

- 01 The NEET crisis
- 02 The pipeline paradox
- 03 Local welfare risk

Sources: IFS (May 2026) | ONS Labour Force Survey | Milburn Interim Review | Council Revenue & Benefits Briefings

AI-Generated Legal Arguments

Public Law Workload & Compliance Risk

PANEL DISCUSSION PACK | 2026

Context
BEA v Staffordshire County Council
 Mr Justice Kimblin raised urgent concerns about the growing use of AI-generated legal arguments by litigants in person — arguments that may lack proper legal grounding, source-checking, or restraint.

- Case dismissed**
Placement had ended — court would only decide theoretical questions
- Civil Restraint Order**
Issued against the claimant following the proceedings
- Core risk identified**
AI arguments with no legal understanding, source-checking or proper review

Top Three Things In Your In-tray

DISCUSSION

What are the top 3 things I learned from conference?

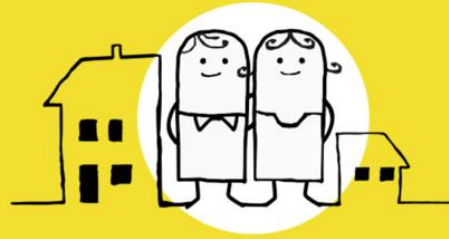
The things most on your mind right now — share with the group.

- 1
- 2
- 3





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.

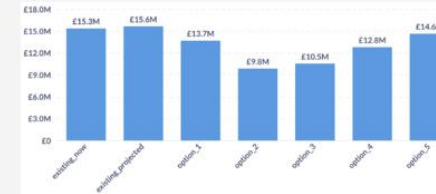
Automatic Reporting

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

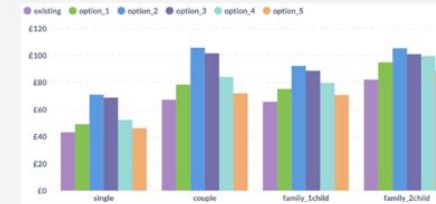
Total annual cost options



Detailed analysis per CTR band

ctr_discount	number_residents	percentage_residents	single
100%	127	0.7%	119
70%	11,032	60.91%	6,002
50%	767	4.23%	258
40%	1,352	7.46%	359
25%	3,382	18.67%	672
12%	1,452	8.02%	283

Average CT payment by households



Identification of impacted residents

householdType	decreased_number	decreased_pct
single	2,763	35.92%
partnerChildren	1,579	44.73%
singleChildren	2,178	36.85%
partner	773	79.04%
total	7,293	40.27%

"Working with Inbest has completely transformed the way we understand our CTR data. Inbest has helped us extract meaningful insights that enabled us to make informed decisions when modelling and designing the best possible scheme for our residents."

Inbest is always working on innovative solutions to support the streamlining of our processes and enhancing our services. As well as the work modelling the CTR Schemes, this year they have also supported us with our Pension Credit caseload and a Data Mismatches report."

Penny Mitchell, Council Tax Service Manager at Salford Council

"We asked Inbest to model different CTS schemes for us at short notice. We had our results in the dashboard within a few days and this enabled us to review the data which reflected each scheme option. This included areas such as cost and savings and how each scheme would affect our residents."

"When we required tweaks to the results Inbest ensured these were made instantly. An excellent service for a reasonable rate."

Nick Houlton, Finance Manager (Revenues and Benefits) at London Borough of Barnet

"Modelling a new Council Tax Reduction scheme can be challenging. However, working with Visionary Network and Inbest on the 2025/2026 scheme was a resounding success due to their support, knowledge, and technology."

"The service provided under tight deadlines was exceptional. Appreciation is extended to Manu, Malcolm, and Paul for their time and patience."

Lucie White, Operational Finance Manager at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

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

MALG
MEMBER

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Book a meeting with Malcolm: [Book Time with MG](#)



VISIONARY NETWORK
The independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Join the discussion

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

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

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

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

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



Main Discussion Points

PANEL DISCUSSION · JUNE 2026

Youth, Welfare & the Public Sector Pipeline

What the IFS, ONS and Milburn Review tell us about the NEET crisis, the talent pipeline, and the pressure now landing on local welfare services — framed for panel discussion.

01

The NEET crisis

02

The pipeline paradox

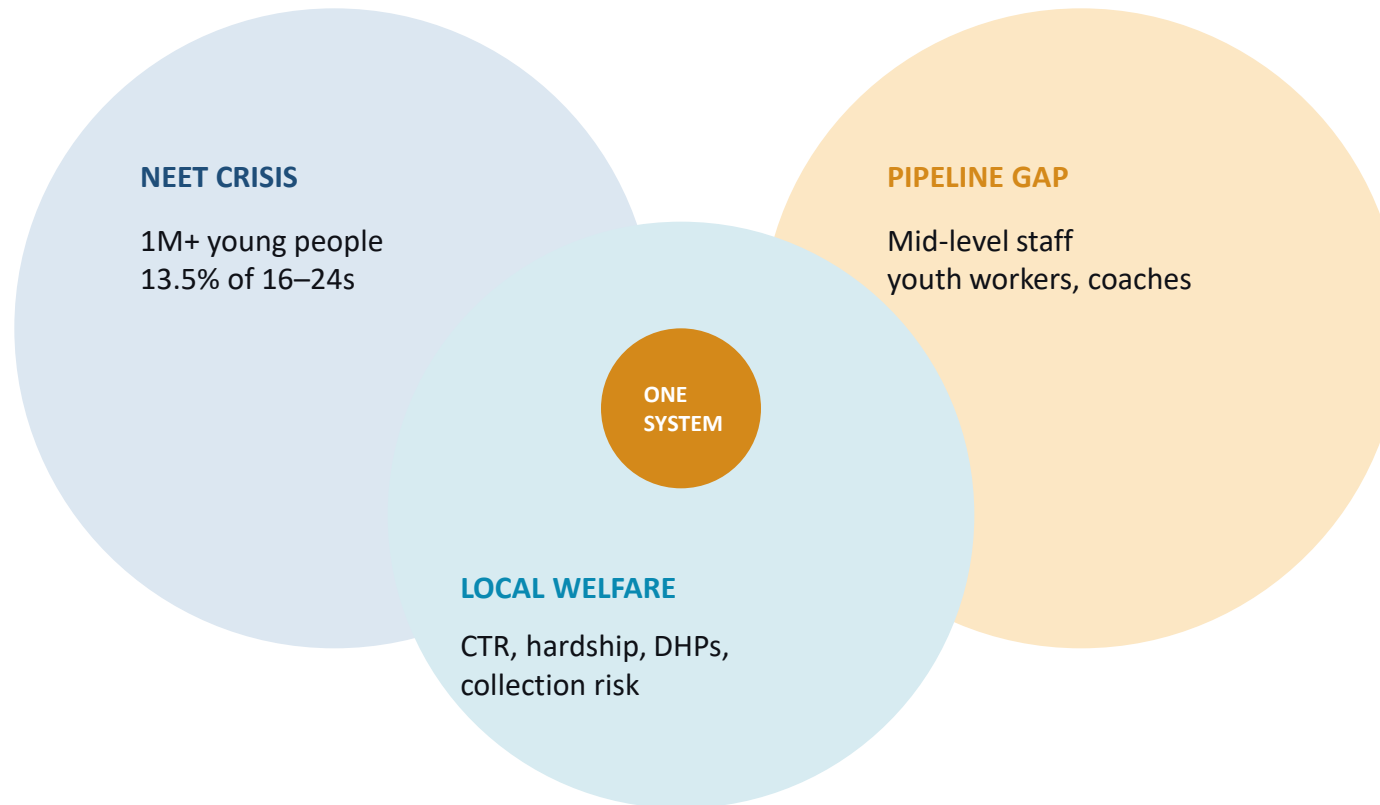
03

Local welfare risk

FRAMING

Three crises, one system failure

The youth labour market, the talent pipeline and local welfare services are not three separate stories — they share the same drivers and the same households.



WHAT LINKS THEM

- Same households appear in all three datasets
- Same drivers: health, education, entry-level jobs
- Same fix needed: the employment-support gap

Headline numbers

Five figures the panel should hold in mind for every question that follows.

1.01M

Young people NEET

16–24, Jan–Mar 2026 (ONS). Highest in 12 years.

13.5%

NEET rate

Share of all 16–24 year-olds.

84%

Want to work or train

Of NEETs — a structural failure, not a motivation problem.

£125bn

Annual cost

Estimated economic cost of youth inactivity (Milburn).

1.25M

Projected NEETs by 2031

If reform stalls (Milburn).

A generational fault line

Over 1 million 16–24 year-olds are out of work, education or training — and the bigger story is hidden inside that figure.

WHO ARE THE 1 MILLION?



84% want to work or train

~50% signed off for long-term health

28% of NEETs signed off — more than doubled since 2005

WHAT MILBURN SAYS

“We are at risk of a lost generation. That is a moral crisis. It has economic consequences.”

Alan Milburn, Interim Review, 2026

DRIVERS THE REVIEW IDENTIFIES

- Mental health (anxiety, ADHD, autism)
- Shrinking entry-level jobs in retail/hospitality
- Long-term effects of Covid disruption

The public-sector pipeline isn't broken at the top

IFS (May 2026): elite graduates still enter Whitehall, the NHS and councils at stable rates. The crisis is one tier below — and that tier touches every NEET household.

THE MYTH

“Top graduates are abandoning public service.”

Headline narrative says the brightest leave for the private sector. IFS finds entry rates for top graduates into Whitehall, NHS, councils and teaching are broadly stable.

Stable

Top-decile graduate entry into public service, 2015–2025 (IFS).

THE REALITY

The pipeline gap is in the middle, not the top.

Shortages are sharpest among youth workers, employment coaches, social care and front-line council staff — the exact roles that catch NEETs early.

Mid-pipeline

Youth workers, work coaches, care staff, front-line officers — the entry layer that absorbs young people at risk.

Reform is moving on three fronts at once

Each reform individually is defensible. The combined effect on young people in low-wage areas is what the panel needs to weigh.

01

Youth minimum wage

72% → 85%

of adult NLW since 2023

- Cost of employing 18–20s up ~25%
- Retail/hospitality = ~50% of under-25 jobs
- Sunak warns of higher youth unemployment

02

IPS expansion

Milburn

proposal: GP-referred employment support

- Extends IPS to common mental health, ADHD, autism
- Links treatment to work, not benefits alone
- Currently limited to serious mental illness

03

Health-driven inactivity

28%

of NEETs signed off — doubled since 2005

- Two-thirds cite mental health or autism
- Long-term sickness now the main NEET driver
- GP-to-work-coach handoff is the missing link

On Revenues & Benefits desks

National statistics become local casework. Five operational pressure points to monitor over the next 12 months.

01

Council Tax Reduction claims

Rising CTR demand in households with young adults out of work or moving between benefits, training and inactivity.

02

Non-dependant changes

Adult children remaining at home; status changes affecting CTR deductions and Housing Benefit calculations.

03

Hardship & DHP demand

Higher volumes of crisis referrals, hardship fund applications and discretionary housing payments.

04

Collection risk

Lower household incomes raise arrears and bad-debt risk on council tax and overpayment recovery.

05

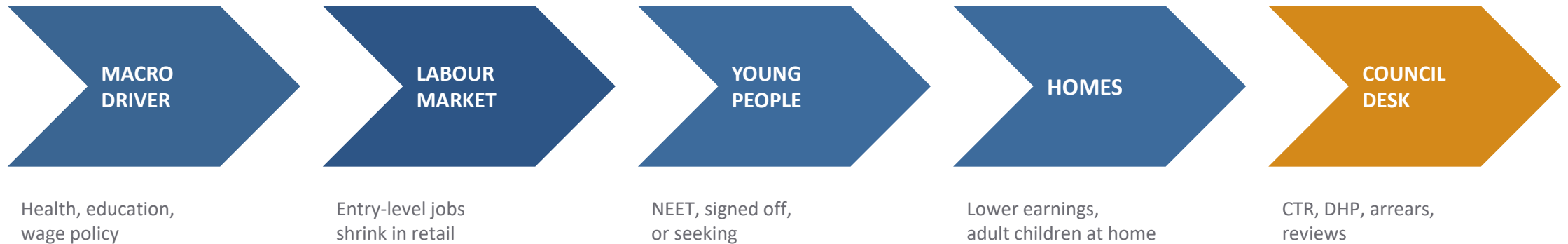
Compliance & fraud/error

Late reporting of work, training and household changes increases overpayments and review workload.

HOW THE ISSUES INTERLOCK

From macro driver to council casework

National decisions land in five steps on the household income statement — and the Revenues & Benefits queue.



WORKED EXAMPLE

An 18-year-old in a low-wage area is signed off with anxiety → the youth wage rise prices entry-level retail jobs out of reach → they remain a non-dependant at home → CTR and Housing Benefit on the household recalculate → a DHP claim opens, plus a compliance review when training status changes.

THE SPENDING RATIO AT THE HEART OF THE DEBATE

£25 : £1

spent on out-of-work benefits

spent on employment support

The UK spends roughly £25 on cash benefits for every £1 it spends on helping people back into work. The panel question: at what ratio does this become the binding constraint on the NEET problem?

DISCUSSION

Questions for the panel

Six prompts spanning national policy, local delivery and household impact.

Q1

Is the youth NEET figure a crisis of jobs, or a crisis of health?

Q2

Does raising the youth minimum wage solve a fairness problem or create an employment one?

Q3

Where in the public-sector pipeline should investment go first?

Q4

Is IPS-via-GP a credible route at scale, or a niche pilot?

Q5

What early signals should Revenues & Benefits track now to model demand for 2027?

Q6

Where can the £25:£1 ratio realistically be shifted within current envelopes?

Decisions the panel needs to express a view on

Three decisions where a panel view this session would shape briefings for the next quarter.

01

Should we treat youth inactivity as a structural risk, not a cyclical one?

Implication: model R&B demand on a 3–5 year horizon for CTR, DHP and hardship, with a youth-household segment built into forecasts.

02

Where does the council position itself on IPS-style integrated support?

Implication: clarify the role of councils vs JCP, NHS and DWP in any GP-referral or employment-coaching pathway — and what data we share.

03

Which operational signals do we monitor and report monthly from this point?

Implication: a single dashboard combining CTR youth-related claims, non-dependant changes, hardship volume, arrears and review backlog.

AI-Generated Legal Arguments

Public Law Workload
& Compliance Risk

PANEL DISCUSSION PACK | 2026

Context

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Mr Justice Kimblin raised urgent concerns about the growing use of AI-generated legal arguments by litigants in person — arguments that may lack proper legal grounding, source-checking, or restraint.

Case dismissed

Placement had ended — court would only decide theoretical questions

Civil Restraint Order

Issued against the claimant following the proceedings

Core risk identified

AI arguments with no legal understanding, source checking or proper review

AI Tools: Democratising Access or Flooding the Courts?

65%

Rise in litigants in person (LiPs) since 2013
in family/public law courts

3×

More written submissions flagged as
potentially AI-generated by judges in 2024–
25

£2.1bn

Estimated annual burden of unmeritorious
appeals on HMCTS and tribunal system

Key Concerns Raised by the Court

- Litigants in person using AI to construct legal arguments they do not understand
- Submissions that fail to engage properly with binding authorities — or cite hallucinated cases
- Non-lawyers driving litigation without appropriate restraint or legal literacy
- Increased burden on judicial and court staff to identify and address unmeritorious claims

The Perfect Storm: Four Accelerants

01

Barrier to Entry Has Collapsed

ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Copilot let anyone produce plausible-sounding legal arguments in seconds. No legal training required.

02

Legal Aid Deserts

With legal aid dramatically curtailed since LASPO 2012, many claimants have no alternative but to represent themselves — and turn to AI.

03

Confidence Illusion

AI output looks authoritative. LiPs often believe they have a strong case because the AI said so — without understanding the underlying law.

04

Complaints Infrastructure Under Pressure

Ombudsman services, tribunals and councils all face AI-augmented complaint volumes — without tools to triage or filter at scale.


Triaging Merit Before Cases Reach Decision-Makers

PROCEDURAL & POLICY TOOLS

- Mandatory declaration on submissions: 'AI was/was not used to draft this'
- Pre-screening panels to assess legal coherence before admission
- Tiered filing fees to disincentivise speculative volume claims
- Fast-track civil restraint orders where AI misuse is evident
- Judicial training on identifying hallucinated case citations

AI-POWERED TRIAGE TOOLS

- NLP classifiers trained to detect AI-generated text patterns in submissions
- Legal coherence scoring — does the argument cite real, relevant authorities?
- Hallucination detection: automated case citation verification against legal databases
- Sentiment and complexity analysis to flag vexatious patterns
- Automated pre-response letters when claims lack legal basis on their face

 *Key principle: the court must have confidence in the research and understanding behind every submission (Kimblin J). AI triage tools must augment — not replace — that confidence.*

Before we deploy AI to police AI – what could go wrong?

Access to Justice Risk

Automated triage may disproportionately screen out valid claims from vulnerable, less articulate claimants — the very people who need protection most.

Algorithmic Bias

If the triage model is trained on historic 'successful' claims, it may embed existing systemic biases against certain demographics or claim types.

The Right to be Heard

Article 6 ECHR (fair trial) may be engaged if AI screening acts as a gatekeeping function without adequate human review or appeal mechanisms.

False Negatives & Gaming

Sophisticated actors will learn to write around AI detectors. Triage tools may create a false sense of security — catching the naive but not the determined.

Accountability Gap

When an AI triage decision is wrong, who is liable? The developer, the public body, the court? Current law provides no clear answer.

Chilling Effect

If claimants know AI will scrutinise their submissions, genuine claimants may be deterred from bringing legitimate human rights or judicial review claims.

PANEL DEBATE: QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Push the panel to take a position on each:

POLICY	Q1 Should courts require mandatory AI-use declarations on all submissions — and what sanctions should apply for false declarations?
ETHICS	Q2 Is deploying AI to filter AI-generated claims an appropriate response, or does it risk creating a two-tier justice system?
LIABILITY	Q3 Where does responsibility lie when AI hallucinations produce a false legal argument that harms another party or wastes public funds?
GOVERNANCE	Q4 Should local authorities and public bodies invest in AI complaint-triage systems — and who should set the standards for those tools?
LAW REFORM	Q5 Is the existing civil restraint order regime sufficient, or do we need new statutory powers to deal with AI-augmented vexatious litigation?

A Framework for Responsible AI Use in Legal and Complaint Contexts

For Individuals & LiPs

- Use AI for research and drafting — not as a substitute for legal advice
- Always verify case citations independently before submitting
- Declare AI use transparently in submissions
- Seek McKenzie Friend or pro-bono support where possible
- Understand that AI cannot assess merits — only lawyers can

For Public Bodies

- Develop AI-assisted complaint triage with human oversight at every decision point
- Publish clear AI use policies for incoming correspondence
- Train frontline staff to identify signs of AI-augmented complaints
- Maintain audit trails for all AI-assisted decisions
- Engage legal advisers early where AI-generated claims are identified

For Courts & Tribunals

- Issue practice directions requiring AI disclosure in all proceedings
- Invest in judicial training on AI detection and evaluation
- Explore pilot AI triage tools with robust ECHR-compliant safeguards
- Create fast-track pathways to dismiss AI-generated unmeritorious claims
- Report on AI-related case volumes to inform policy reform

The courts must have confidence in the research and understanding behind legal submissions.

— Mr Justice Kimblin
BEA v Staffordshire CC, 2025

PANEL DISCUSSION PACK
Visionary Network Ltd | 2026

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR TODAY

- AI is already reshaping who can make legal arguments — and courts are not yet equipped to cope at scale
- Mitigation requires a dual approach: procedural reform AND AI-powered triage tools
- Any AI triage solution must be designed with Article 6 ECHR safeguards built in from day one
- Public bodies face growing AI-augmented complaint volumes with no sector-wide framework to respond
- The liability question — for hallucinated citations, wasted costs, and wrongful refusals — remains legally unresolved
- This panel has an opportunity to shape the policy response before the problem becomes unmanageable



DISCUSSION

What are the top 3 things I learned from conference?

The things most on your mind right now — share with the group.

1

2

3

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.

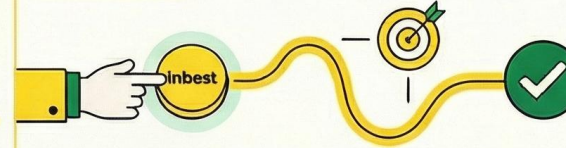
The CRF Challenge



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-fitted 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.

Email info@inbest.ai or visit www.inbest.ai to begin.
Get in touch to start your council's transition to data-driven CRF delivery.



COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION CLEAR & CONCISE

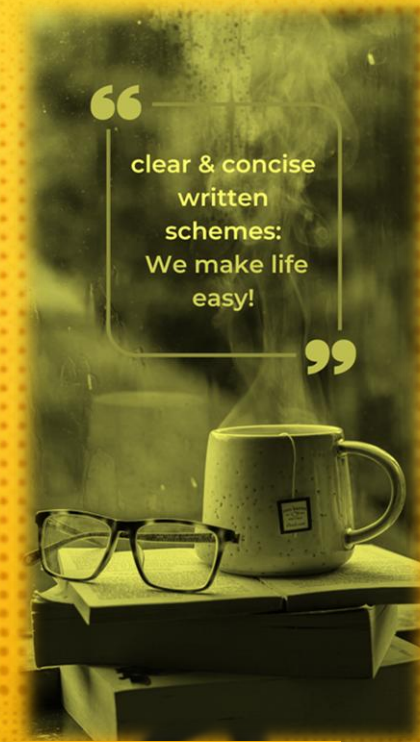
Let us make it simple for you

- ✓ Save money
- ✓ Improve efficiency
- ✓ Help your vulnerable citizens
- ✓ Build trust

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new era of
council tax
deduction
schemes

Bristol City
Council Case
Study



For more information email info@visionarynetwork.co.uk



In the news

Youth employment, minimum wage policy and local welfare risk



Core facts and policy position

- UK government is reported to be divided over how quickly to equalise the minimum wage for 18- to 20-year-olds with the adult rate. Labour's manifesto committed to ending lower youth rates but did not set a timetable.
- The current debate follows Alan Milburn's government backed interim report on young people and work, which warned that youth worklessness has become a major economic and social risk.
- The number of young people not in education, employment or training has passed 1 million for the first time in more than a decade, with warnings that this could rise further without intervention.
- Some ministers and business voices are concerned that faster increases in youth minimum wage rates may discourage employers in low margin sectors such as hospitality and retail from taking on younger workers.
- Other ministers, trade unions and the Low Pay Commission point to limited evidence that recent youth minimum wage increases have caused the deterioration in youth employment.
- The adult minimum wage and youth rate increased in April 2026, with the adult rate rising by 4.1% and the 18 to 20 rate by 8.5%, to £12.71 and £10.85 respectively.

Making Tax Digital, self-employment and local welfare risk

Core facts and policy issue

- New Making Tax Digital rules will require affected sole traders and landlords to keep digital records and submit quarterly income and expense summaries to HMRC.
- The rules apply from 6 April 2026 for qualifying income above £50,000.
- The threshold will reduce to £30,000 from April 2027 and £20,000 from April 2028.
- HMRC estimates around 864,000 people will be affected initially, with a further two million brought in over the following two years.
- The policy aim is to make the tax system more streamlined and fair, reduce errors and give HMRC more timely financial information.
- Tax experts warn the thresholds may create a new “cliff edge”, with some self-employed people tempted to limit income, turn down work, rely more on cash or avoid business growth.
- Concern is being driven by confusion, software costs, the absence of a standard free HMRC portal route and perceived administrative burden.
- Experts stress that quarterly updates are not the same as filing four full tax returns each year.



HM Revenue
& Customs

Making Tax Digital, self-employment and local welfare risk

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services may see increased uncertainty in self-employed income evidence, particularly where residents misunderstand the new HMRC requirements.
- Customer contact may rise where claimants ask for help with fluctuating income, digital records, tax evidence, Council Tax Reduction assessments or local welfare support.
- There is a risk of more delayed or incomplete income evidence, affecting assessment timeliness, backlogs and decision quality.
- If some self-employed residents suppress income, reduce work or move towards cash payments, this may increase fraud and error risk in local welfare claims.
- Digital exclusion may become more visible, particularly for smaller traders, landlords, older residents or those with limited confidence using software.
- Councils may need clearer procedures for accepting MTD records, quarterly summaries and other digital income evidence within CTR, HB legacy and discretionary support processes.
- Financial impacts may include weaker council tax collection where self-employed households experience reduced income, income volatility or higher administrative costs.
- Services should prepare customer guidance, staff briefing notes and evidence checklists so that MTD changes do not create avoidable contact or inconsistent decision making.



HM Revenue
& Customs

Neighbourhood Guarantee: local service standards and public accountability

Core facts, decisions and risks

- Government has announced a new Neighbourhood Guarantee setting clearer expectations for local public services.
- The stated aim is to let residents see whether public services are meeting minimum standards in their area.
- The guarantee is expected to cover visible local priorities such as cleaner streets, potholes, high streets and core public services.
- Residents will be able to monitor performance through published data on the Local Outcomes Framework platform.
- Community Power Pilots will run in up to 25 areas, with councils, community groups and residents co-designing local services.
- Government also intends to act on private sector profiteering in council commissioned services, especially services supporting vulnerable children in care.
- Ministers describe the policy as part of a wider devolution and community empowerment agenda.
- The Local Government Association has warned that meaningful devolution needs sufficient and sustainable funding for councils.

Neighbourhood Guarantee: local service standards and public accountability



Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- This feels like the return of Audit Commission style Key Lines of Enquiry, but with a more public facing, data driven and resident monitored model.
- Revenues and Benefits may not be the headline focus, but the same logic could extend to local taxation and local welfare performance.
- Likely service impacts include greater scrutiny of:
 - council tax collection and arrears management;
 - speed and accuracy of Council Tax Reduction processing;
 - customer contact performance;
 - complaint handling and avoidable contact;
 - fraud, error and debt recovery controls;
 - accessibility of digital and non digital routes.
- Performance management may need to shift from internal KPIs to outcomes residents can recognise, including timeliness, fairness, clarity and visible problem solving.
- Resourcing risks arise if new expectations are introduced without matching funding, staffing or system investment.
- Compliance risks include councils publishing performance data that is incomplete, inconsistent or not comparable across areas.
- Customer impact could be positive if standards drive clearer service design, but negative if councils chase narrow metrics at the expense of vulnerable or complex cases.
- For Revenues and Benefits, the practical question is whether the service can evidence not just activity, but fairness, accuracy, accessibility and outcomes

Neighbourhood Guarantee: local service standards and public accountability

Why it feels like the return of KLOE

- It reintroduces the idea that local services should be judged against clear expectations.
- It creates a framework through which residents, not just inspectors or councillors, can monitor performance.
- It risks becoming a national template for “what good looks like” across local public services.
- The difference is that this version appears more data driven, more public facing and more tied to devolution, place and community power than the old Audit Commission model.
- The danger is a new burden of reporting and compliance without the independent improvement support, funding or sector capacity that would make it useful.



JOSEPH ROWNTREE
FOUNDATION

Rent controls and landlord tax reform: affordability, welfare and local service impacts

Core facts, decisions and risks

- JRF argues that high private rents have squeezed renters' living standards for 15 to 20 years, contributing to insecurity, poverty and homelessness.
- The report says increasing housing supply is necessary but will not materially improve rent affordability in the short term.
- JRF cites OBR analysis suggesting rents will absorb average wage growth until at least the end of the decade, even if the Government comes close to delivering 1.5 million homes.
- JRF models a rent control approach that would cap rent increases at CPI within tenancies and CPI plus 2% between tenancies.
- The report argues this could make renting households almost £1,200 a year better off by 2030/31.
- JRF recognises the main policy risk: rent controls could prompt landlord sales or reduced investment in existing stock if poorly designed.
- Its proposed mitigation is tax reform: restore full mortgage interest relief while applying National Insurance Contributions to rental income.
- JRF argues this would protect more highly leveraged landlords with thinner margins, while shifting more tax onto landlords making larger profits.



Rent controls and landlord tax reform: affordability, welfare and local service impacts

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services would be affected because private rent levels directly shape housing cost support, Council Tax Reduction demand, homelessness risk and household affordability.
- If rent controls slowed rent growth, potential service impacts could include:
 - reduced rent shortfalls for some low-income households;
 - lower pressure on Discretionary Housing Payments and crisis support;
 - fewer affordability driven moves, homelessness presentations and associated local welfare demand;
 - more stable household circumstances, supporting timelier benefit administration.
- However, if landlords exit the market or supply tightens, councils may face:
 - higher homelessness and temporary accommodation pressures;
 - more complex housing advice and welfare support cases;
 - increased demand for discretionary help where households cannot find affordable private lets;
 - greater risk of rent arrears and council tax arrears where housing costs remain unaffordable.
- Compliance and process impacts include the need to track rent changes, tenancy status, Local Housing Allowance shortfalls, CTR claims, DHP demand and landlord or tenant disputes.
- Financial position impacts could include reduced pressure on housing support if rent growth slows but increased local costs if supply disruption increases temporary accommodation or homelessness demand.
- Local welfare teams would need clear guidance on how any rent control rules interact with UC housing costs, Housing Benefit, LHA, DHPs and local CTR schemes.

Pensions 2050: adequacy, ageing and future welfare pressure

Core facts, decisions and risks

- The Second Pensions Commission warns that the UK needs a renewed, sustainable pensions settlement for retirement adequacy.
- The population is ageing: the share of people over 65 is projected to rise from 19% today to 28% by 2075.
- Pensioner benefit spending, including the State Pension, is projected to rise from around 6% of GDP in 2024/25 to around 9% by the early 2070s.
- Automatic enrolment has been successful, creating around 11 million extra savers since 2012, but many people are still not saving enough.
- Around 43% of the working age population, about 15 million people, are projected to be under saving against target replacement rates.
- Key at risk groups include low and middle earners, private renters, people without private pension income, women, carers, disabled people, some ethnic minority groups and the self-employed.
- The Commission will consider future changes to automatic enrolment eligibility, thresholds and minimum contributions, although any rate changes would not be for the current Parliament and would need notice and phasing.
- The report also highlights the need for stronger retirement income “guardrails” because pension freedoms have left individuals carrying more risk when drawing down defined contribution savings

Pensions 2050: adequacy, ageing and future welfare pressure

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits should treat pension adequacy as a long-term local welfare and local taxation risk.
- Future pensioner poverty and housing cost pressures may increase demand for:
 - Council Tax Reduction for pension age households;
 - Housing Benefit or housing cost support for pensioner renters;
 - discretionary welfare support;
 - debt advice, income maximisation and Pension Credit take up work.
- Local taxation risks include increased council tax arrears among older households with inadequate private pension income, especially private renters and single pensioners.
- Service delivery impacts may include:
 - more complex mixed age, pension age and housing cost cases;
 - higher demand for assisted digital and non digital support;
 - increased contact from older residents about entitlement, debt and changes in circumstances;
 - greater need for clear, accessible communications.
- Compliance risks include incorrect awards where pension income, capital drawdown, earnings, private pensions or household composition change.
- Fraud and error controls will need to distinguish deliberate non-disclosure from complexity, vulnerability, cognitive decline or misunderstanding.
- Financial position risks include increased demand for means tested support and pressure on local discretionary budgets, while national pension and health spending pressures may constrain wider public funding.
- Councils should monitor pensioner CTR trends, arrears, private rented pensioner households, Pension Credit take up, vulnerability flags, overpayments and hardship referrals.

Redcar and Cleveland counter fraud activity: implications for Revenues and Benefits



Core facts, decisions and risks


- The Northern Echo reports 118 referrals of suspected fraud against Redcar and Cleveland Council in the last year.
- The Council's counter fraud service is provided by Veritau, which supports prevention, detection, deterrence, data matching and investigation of suspected fraud.
- Fraud is presented as a significant public sector risk, with financial loss reducing the Council's ability to support services and creating reputational risk.
- The Council's counter fraud activity covers multiple service areas, including Council Tax, Council Tax Support, NNDR, debt recovery, parking and adult social care.
- The Council's counter fraud framework includes:
 - fraud awareness activity for staff and the public;
 - proactive data matching;
 - investigation of suspected fraud;
 - participation in the National Fraud Initiative;
 - fraud reporting routes for staff and residents;
 - policy updates and an annual counter fraud plan.
- Cybercrime is specifically identified as an ongoing organisational risk.

Redcar and Cleveland counter fraud activity: implications for Revenues and Benefits



Implications for Revenues and Benefits


- Revenues and Benefits should be treated as a key fraud and error risk area because referrals and completed cases include Council Tax, Council Tax Support, NNDR and debt recovery.
- Operational impacts include:
 - need for accurate referrals from frontline staff;
 - stronger evidence checking and document verification;
 - effective use of data matching;
 - clear handoffs between assessment, recovery and counter fraud teams;
 - robust recording of decisions, evidence and outcomes.
- ▶ Service delivery risks include delays if suspected fraud cases are not triaged quickly or if evidence requests are unclear.
- Compliance risks include incorrect awards, missed income, avoidable write offs and weak audit trails.
- Customer impact must be managed carefully, ensuring legitimate claimants are not deterred from claiming Council Tax Support or engaging with the Council.
- The service should monitor:
 - Council Tax Support fraud and error referrals;
 - Single Person Discount and discount/exemption misuse;
 - NNDR avoidance or false entitlement risks;
 - debt recovery cases where fraud, misrepresentation or vulnerability may overlap;
 - repeat fraud indicators from data matching and customer contact.



Benefit fraud and error 2025/26: accuracy, recovery and local welfare risk

Core facts, decisions and risks

- DWP estimates that 3.2% of benefit expenditure was overpaid in FYE 2026, worth £9.9 billion.
- Underpayments remained at 0.4% of benefit expenditure, worth £1.2 billion.
- Total benefit expenditure increased to £308.6 billion, up from £286.6 billion in FYE 2025.
- The overall overpayment and underpayment rates showed no statistically significant change from FYE 2025.
- Fraud remained the largest overpayment category at 2.2% of expenditure, followed by claimant error at 0.6% and official error at 0.4%.
- Universal Credit continues to have a major influence on the overall fraud and error picture because UC expenditure and caseload share have increased.
- Universal Credit earnings and employment fraud fell, but earnings, living together and capital remained the three main UC fraud overpayment causes.
- Pension Credit and Housing Benefit continue to show significant risks around capital, income and pension age claims.
- PIP overpayments increased significantly, mainly linked to functional needs changes and fraud.



Benefit fraud and error 2025/26: accuracy, recovery and local welfare risk

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services should treat fraud and error as a mainstream service performance issue, not only a counter fraud issue.
- Housing Benefit remains directly relevant to councils, especially pension age, supported, sheltered and temporary accommodation cases.
- Local Council Tax Reduction schemes are exposed to similar risk themes:
 - undeclared earnings or self-employment;
 - undeclared capital;
 - living together and household composition;
 - pension income;
 - failure to report changes promptly;
 - official error in assessment, evidence handling or decision making.
- Service delivery risks include:
 - backlogs delaying change processing and increasing overpayments;
 - weak quality checks creating official error;
 - poor evidence requests causing underpayments, delay or repeat contact;
 - poor handoffs between benefits, revenues, recovery and fraud teams.
- Financial impacts include lost public funds, recoverable overpayments, recovery costs, subsidy risk, write offs and pressure on collection where household incomes are unstable.
- Customer impact cuts both ways: fraud and error controls must prevent incorrect awards while avoiding unnecessary hardship, underpayments or punitive recovery from vulnerable residents.
- Services should strengthen data matching, risk-based reviews, quality assurance, change of circumstances processing, vulnerability checks and clear claimant communications.

UK Benefit System: Fraud and Error Estimates (FYE 2026)

NATIONAL OVERVIEW (FYE 2026)

**£308.6
BILLION**

Total Benefit Expenditure

To approx. 24.3 million people across England, Scotland, and Wales.

3.2%

Total Overpayment Rate

£9.9bn incorrectly paid out (slight decrease from 3.3% in FYE 2025).

0.4%

Total Underpayment Rate

£1.2bn that should have been paid, rate unchanged.

THE DRIVERS OF INCORRECT PAYMENTS



Fraud: The Leading Cause of Loss (2.2% of total expenditure)

Claimant provides inaccurate info with intent.



Claimant Error: 0.6% Rate

Unintentional mistakes by the claimant.



Official Error: 0.4% Rate

Errors by DWP, local authorities, or HMRC (delays, mistakes).

BENEFIT-SPECIFIC OVERPAYMENT HIGHLIGHTS



8.5% Overpayment Rate for Universal Credit

Totalling £6,720m, mainly due to 'Earnings/Employment' fraud (under-declared income).



10.0% Overpayment Rate for Pension Credit

Highest rate, totaling £620m, primarily driven by 'Capital' errors (financial assets).



2.3% Overpayment Rate for PIP

Rose from 1.3% in 2025, largely due to 'Functional Needs' misreporting.



6.2% Overpayment Rate for Housing Benefit

Totalling £800m, main cause is under-declaration of 'Capital'.

24 in 100 Universal Credit Claims are Incorrect

Universal Credit claims involve an overpayment or an underpayment.

THE BOTTOM LINE: RECOVERIES & NET LOSS

£1.3 BILLION

Recovered



DWP recovered from Universal Credit (£0.6bn), Housing Benefit (£0.4bn), and other benefits (£0.2bn).

2.8% NET RATE OF LOSS



After recoveries, final net loss to taxpayer is £6.6bn (matches FYE 2025 rate).

Universal Credit fraud allegation: capital disclosure and compliance risks

Core facts, decisions and risks

- A Millom couple have denied a fraud charge linked to Universal Credit claims.
- The allegation is that they failed to tell DWP they held capital above the permitted limit.
- The alleged offence period was 7 March 2022 to 7 March 2023.
- The case was reported as moving from South Cumbria Magistrates' Court to Preston Crown Court.
- No finding of guilt has been made; the charge remains an allegation.
- The case highlights the importance of accurate declarations where income, savings, investments or capital affect means tested benefit entitlement.
- Universal Credit rules require claimants to report changes in money, savings and investments; late reporting or failure to report can create overpayments.

Universal Credit fraud allegation: capital disclosure and compliance risks

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services should treat capital, savings and household financial changes as key fraud and error risks across local welfare and local taxation.
- Council Tax Reduction schemes may use different local rules, but most working age schemes rely on accurate disclosure of income, capital and household circumstances.
- Operational impacts include:
 - stronger evidence checks where capital or savings affect entitlement;
 - clear claimant communications on reporting changes;
 - accurate recording of evidence, declarations and decision making;
 - timely referral routes between assessment, recovery and counter fraud teams;
 - risk based review activity for cases with changing financial circumstances.
- Customer impact must be managed carefully, ensuring that fraud controls do not deter genuine claimants or create unclear evidence demands.
- Financial risks include overpaid support, delayed recovery, avoidable write offs and loss of public funds.
- Compliance risks include weak audit trails, inconsistent decision making and failure to act on relevant data or evidence.

Fit note reform: work, health and benefit system implications

Core facts, decisions and risks

- Government is piloting a major reform of the fit note system in England.
- The current system is described as a “tick box” process that often signs people off work without providing practical return to work support.
- Around 11 million fit notes are issued each year, with more than nine in ten declaring the person “not fit for work”.
- Four pilots will test personalised “stay in work” and “return to work” plans.
- The pilots will run through selected NHS WorkWell sites and major employers, covering up to 100,000 appointments over up to one year.
- Some areas will retain an initial GP fit note before referral; others will test direct referral to a separate support service without an initial GP fit note.
- The support model will include patients, employers and trained professionals discussing reasonable adjustments and early workplace support.
- Government says the pilots are the first step before further legislation to reform the fit note system

Fit note reform: work, health and benefit system implications

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services should treat fit note reform as part of the wider work, health and welfare agenda, especially where illness, employment and income instability affect household finances.
- Local welfare impacts may include:
 - changes in Universal Credit and legacy benefit pathways;
 - increased need for signposting to employment, health and community support;
 - more complex Council Tax Reduction cases where work status, sick pay, earnings and benefit entitlement change;
 - higher demand for hardship support where residents move between work, sickness absence and benefit claims.
- Service delivery risks include confusion for residents if fit notes, work ability plans, Statutory Sick Pay and benefit evidence requirements do not align clearly.
- Compliance risks include incorrect CTR awards where earnings, SSP, UC awards, household income or work status are not updated promptly.
- Customer impact could be positive if earlier support helps people remain in work, but negative if residents feel pressured to work when unwell or cannot navigate the new system.
- Digital and process changes should include clear staff guidance, evidence standards, escalation routes and signposting scripts.
- Councils should monitor CTR changes linked to sickness absence, hardship referrals, arrears, repeat contact, vulnerability flags and recovery cases involving ill health.



Scottish fiscal squeeze: spending choices, tax reform and service risk

Core facts, decisions and risks

- IFS warns that the Scottish Government faces a difficult fiscal outlook, with spending cuts or tax rises likely.
- Day to day public service funding is forecast to grow by only 0.6% a year above inflation between 2026/27 and 2028/29.
- A 1.3% real terms cut in day-to-day funding is projected for 2027/28, the first full budget for new ministers.
- The Scottish Government faces competing pressures:
 - protecting NHS and social care spending;
 - delivering SNP manifesto commitments;
 - reducing corporate costs and workforce numbers;
 - improving productivity;
 - managing higher inflation and uncertain tax revenues.
- IFS says manifesto pledges are unlikely all to be deliverable without clearer prioritisation.
- Key risk: if health spending is protected, other portfolios, including local government, education, justice, housing and rural affairs, may face deeper reductions.



Scottish fiscal squeeze: spending choices, tax reform and service risk

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits should expect pressure from both sides: reduced public funding and increased household need.
- Local taxation services may be affected by:
 - pressure to improve collection performance;
 - increased arrears if household incomes remain under strain;
 - greater scrutiny of reliefs, exemptions, discounts and debt recovery;
 - renewed interest in council tax reform and property revaluation.
- Local welfare services may face:
 - increased demand for crisis support, discretionary funds and income maximisation;
 - more complex customer contact where cost of living pressures overlap with debt, health and employment issues;
 - pressure to process support quickly while maintaining compliance and audit controls.
- Service delivery risks include backlogs, slower response times, reduced capacity for quality checking, and weaker fraud and error controls if staffing or corporate support is reduced.
- Digital and process changes are likely to be used to support productivity savings, but need careful governance to avoid poor decisions, exclusion or increased customer failure demand.
- Councils may need to prepare for policy and system change if Scotland moves towards council tax revaluation, mansion tax implementation, or wider property tax reform.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP debt recovery error: evidence, enforcement and customer harm

Core facts, decisions and risks

- The Guardian reports that DWP wrongly pursued a woman's employer for a Universal Credit overpayment that had already been overturned by a tribunal.
- The woman, identified as Ms C, was a full time unpaid carer for her disabled mother and had not claimed benefits for five years.
- DWP issued a direct earnings attachment notice to her employer, seeking recovery from her salary.
- Ms C told DWP that a tribunal had dismissed the overpayment in 2022, but officials said they had no record of the decision and asked her to send a copy by post.
- DWP cancelled the debt and issued a correction to the employer after being approached by The Guardian.
- The case highlights risks from poor record keeping, weak internal communication, outdated systems, and enforcement action continuing despite previous legal decisions.
- DWP apologised for errors in processing the case.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP debt recovery error: evidence, enforcement and customer harm

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services should treat this as a warning about debt recovery controls, especially where previous decisions, appeals or tribunals have changed liability or entitlement.
- Service delivery risks include:
 - enforcement continuing after a decision has been revised, withdrawn or overturned;
 - weak links between appeals, benefits assessment, recovery and customer contact teams;
 - poor access to historic records and evidence;
 - avoidable complaints, escalation and reputational damage.
- Customer impact can be severe where recovery action affects wages, employment checks, professional standing or household stability.
- Compliance risks include unlawful or inappropriate recovery, failure to act on evidence, poor audit trails and inadequate vulnerability consideration.
- Local taxation and welfare teams should ensure:
 - recovery holds are applied promptly where liability or entitlement is disputed;
 - tribunal and appeal outcomes are clearly recorded;
 - direct earnings or attachment action is checked before issue;
 - customers have practical routes to submit urgent evidence;
 - vulnerable customers and carers are identified before enforcement escalates.

UK inflation easing: market reaction and local finance implications



Bank of England

Core facts, decisions and risks

- UK inflation eased to 2.8% in April 2026, below Bank of England and market forecasts of 3%.
- Core inflation fell from 3.1% to 2.5%, while services inflation fell sharply from 4.5% to 3.2%.
- Government borrowing costs fell, with ten-year gilt yields dropping below 5%.
- UK equities rallied, with both the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 closing higher.
- Oil prices fell after US moves on Iran and sanctions waivers linked to Russian oil products.
- Traders reduced expectations for Bank of England rate rises this year from three to one.
- Main risk remains energy driven inflation, especially where higher petrol costs feed into wider prices, wages and service costs.
- Economists quoted in the article suggest there is limited evidence so far that higher oil prices are creating broader second round inflation effects.

AI and the future of work: service readiness, workforce change and local welfare risk



Bank of England

Core facts, decisions and risks

- King's College London's Policy Institute report presents new survey findings on AI and work, based on polling of the public, young people, university students and employers in April 2026.
- Public attitudes are cautious: 48% would rather avoid AI based technologies, 41% are afraid of AI, and only 24% think AI is positive for humanity.
- Concern about job impacts is widespread, with around seven in 10 worried about the economic impacts of AI related job losses.
- Entry level work is a particular risk: nearly six in 10 agree with the prediction that AI could eliminate half of all entry level white collar jobs within five years.
- Employers are already using AI widely, especially for data analysis, research, administrative tasks, customer service, communications and finance.
- Employers report productivity benefits, but also risks around skills gaps, morale, reduced headcount and reduced hiring.
- A majority across groups support government backed retraining for workers displaced by AI, although employers are more likely than others to say individuals should keep their own skills up to date.

AI and the future of work: service readiness, workforce change and local welfare risk

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services should treat AI as both a productivity opportunity and a workforce, compliance and customer risk.
- Potential service delivery benefits include faster drafting, summarisation, data analysis, triage, quality checking, customer communications and process redesign.
- Main operational risks include:
 - inaccurate AI outputs being used in decisions, letters, reports or appeal responses;
 - weak audit trails where officers cannot explain or evidence AI assisted work;
 - over reliance on AI in complex CTR, recovery, vulnerability, fraud or complaint cases;
 - inconsistent staff use where local guidance is unclear;
 - reduced entry level roles affecting future service resilience and succession planning.
- Customer impact risks include poor explanations, automated tone, digital exclusion, and decisions that feel less human or less accountable.
- Financial impacts are not quantified for councils, but AI could affect staffing costs, productivity expectations, training budgets, procurement, system integration and future service design.
- Local welfare demand may increase if AI contributes to labour market disruption, reduced entry level opportunities or income instability.
- Services should prioritise:
 - clear AI governance and permitted use guidance;
 - staff training and prompt standards;
 - human review of decisions and correspondence;
 - source checking and fact checking;
 - data protection controls;
 - monitoring of error, complaints, turnaround times and customer outcomes.



Agentic enterprise: AI agents, content governance and service transformation

Core facts and strategic direction

- Box reported Q1 FY2027 revenue of \$305.9 million, up 11% year on year, with remaining performance obligations of \$1.6 billion.
- Box's net retention rate improved to 105%, with Enterprise Advanced identified as a key driver of growth.
- Aaron Levie argued that enterprises are moving towards having “hundreds of times more agents than people”, with agents becoming a major user of software and data inside organisations.
- Box is positioning itself as a secure content layer for the “agentic enterprise”, where AI agents access, interpret and act on business content at scale.
- The core proposition is that enterprise AI will depend on controlled access to reliable documents, records, contracts, case files and internal knowledge.
- The direction of travel is from AI as a user-facing assistant towards AI agents embedded in workflows, approvals, records management and operational processes.
- The main strategic risk is not only whether AI agents work, but whether organisations can govern what they access, what they change and how their actions are audited.

box

Agentic enterprise:
AI agents, content
governance and
service
transformation

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services could see similar pressures as AI agents become embedded in casework, evidence handling, correspondence, debt recovery, fraud/error checks and management reporting.
- Service delivery benefits may include faster document review, better triage, improved drafting, more consistent decision support and reduced manual handling.
- The main operational risk is uncontrolled automation: agents acting on incomplete records, outdated policies, poor data quality or unclear permissions.
- Compliance risks are significant because Revenues and Benefits decisions depend on statutory rules, local schemes, audit trails, data protection, equality duties and explainable decision making.
- Customer impact could be positive where AI reduces delays and avoidable contact, but harmful if automated processes produce unclear letters, incorrect evidence requests or inappropriate recovery action.
- Resourcing impacts may shift from manual processing towards supervision, exception handling, quality assurance, data governance and policy interpretation.
- Fraud and error controls will need to adapt, because AI agents may identify anomalies faster, but may also create new risks if assumptions are not checked by officers.
- Financial impacts are not evidenced directly for councils in the Box results, but the wider direction suggests future investment pressure around secure content platforms, licensing, integration, staff training, governance and assurance.
- Councils should treat AI agent adoption as a controlled service redesign issue, not simply an IT upgrade.

Quote of the Week

“There should be no unemployment. There is large percentage of labor now which cannot make a living because wages are not high enough. That is industry's 2nd job. 1st job is to make good product. 2nd pay a good wage.” – Henry Ford

Henry Ford was an American industrialist who revolutionised manufacturing by introducing the moving assembly line, making automobiles affordable for millions. A complex figure, he shaped modern industry while leaving a legacy marked by both innovation and deeply controversial personal views.



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

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

The 2024/25 audit brings:

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

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

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

We'll:

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

Don't go hungry without CAKE.

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

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



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network



Sideway View



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LGR & Finance Watch



Local government
reorganisation legal
challenges: service
transition and delivery
risk

Core facts, decisions and risks

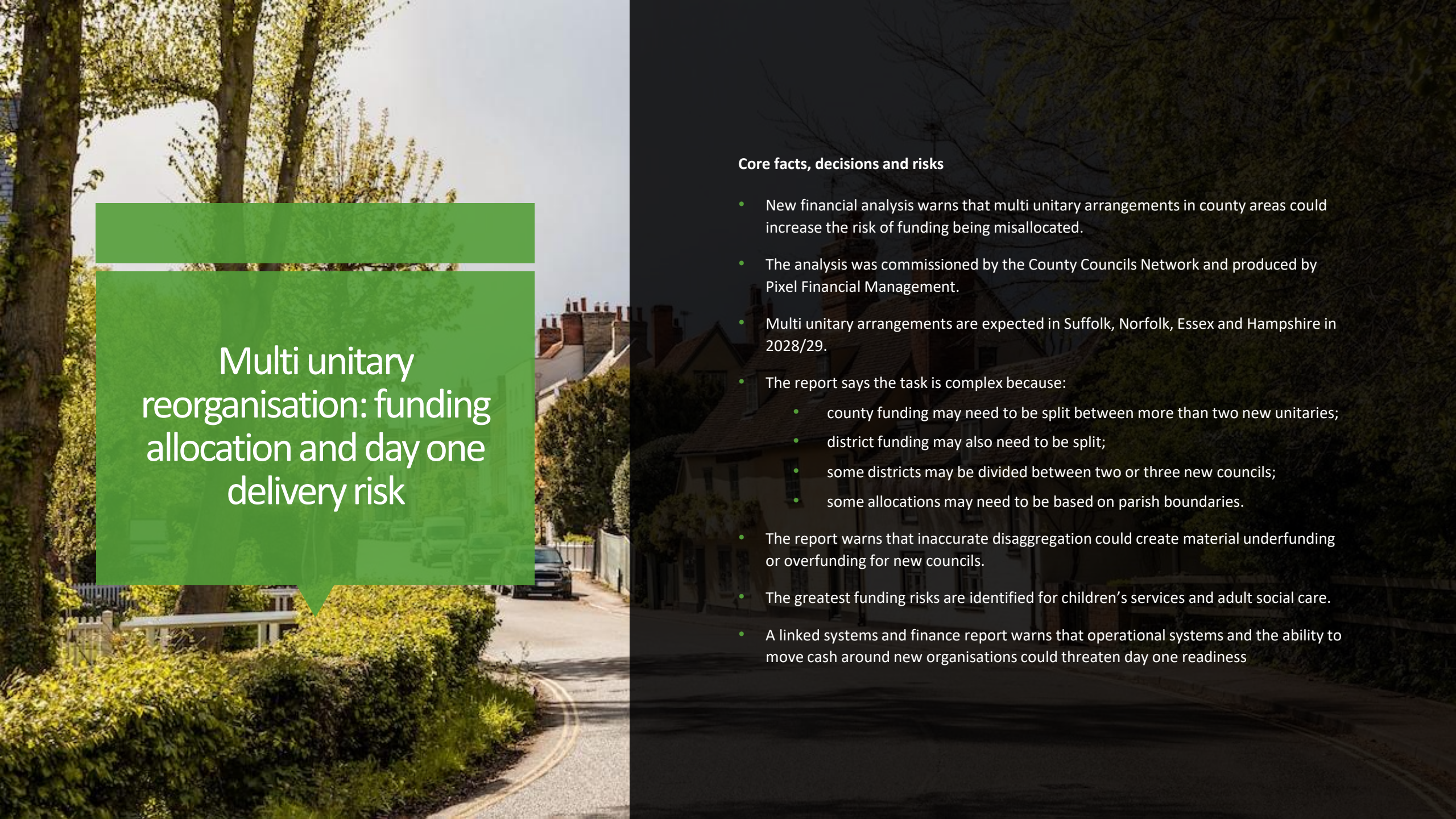
- Reform UK administrations in Norfolk County Council and Suffolk County Council have pledged legal challenges against local government reorganisation plans.
- Essex County Council's incoming Reform leader has also issued a pre action protocol letter challenging reorganisation proposals.
- Suffolk's incoming leader has said his administration will focus on blocking plans to divide the county into three unitary authorities.
- Norfolk Reform's leader has argued that legal action is necessary where government does not listen to local objections.
- Essex's incoming leader has described the plans as "ill thought, expensive" and "purely ideological".
- MHCLG's position is that reorganisation will place one council in charge of local decisions, speed up homes and infrastructure, improve public services and support regional growth.
- Key risks include legal delay, political uncertainty, transition cost, officer capacity pressure and disruption to planning assumptions.



Local government
reorganisation legal
challenges: service
transition and delivery
risk

Implications for Revenues and Benefits


- Revenues and Benefits services may face uncertainty over future operating models, governance, staffing, systems and service boundaries.
- Legal challenge could delay decisions on:
 - target operating models;
 - council tax harmonisation and collection fund planning;
 - business rates administration;
 - CTR scheme design and consultation;
 - system migration and data cleansing;
 - staffing structures and shared service arrangements.
- Service delivery risks include:
 - distraction from day to day collection and benefit administration;
 - delays to transformation and procurement decisions;
 - reduced capacity for quality assurance, fraud and error work, and customer support;
 - uncertainty for staff, increasing retention and sickness risks.
- Financial risks include transition costs, delayed savings, uncertainty over reserves, council taxbase planning and collection performance.
- Customer impact could arise if reorganisation planning disrupts billing, recovery, CTR changes, contact handling or local welfare support.
- Services should maintain a clear “business as usual” control plan while separately preparing transition options for different LGR outcomes.



Multi unitary reorganisation: funding allocation and day one delivery risk

Core facts, decisions and risks

- New financial analysis warns that multi unitary arrangements in county areas could increase the risk of funding being misallocated.
- The analysis was commissioned by the County Councils Network and produced by Pixel Financial Management.
- Multi unitary arrangements are expected in Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Hampshire in 2028/29.
- The report says the task is complex because:
 - county funding may need to be split between more than two new unitaries;
 - district funding may also need to be split;
 - some districts may be divided between two or three new councils;
 - some allocations may need to be based on parish boundaries.
- The report warns that inaccurate disaggregation could create material underfunding or overfunding for new councils.
- The greatest funding risks are identified for children's services and adult social care.
- A linked systems and finance report warns that operational systems and the ability to move cash around new organisations could threaten day one readiness



Multi unitary
reorganisation: funding
allocation and day one
delivery risk

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services are directly exposed because district council systems and functions may need to be split, transferred or rebuilt.
- Key service delivery risks include:
 - council taxbase, billing and collection data being split inaccurately;
 - CTR caseloads, scheme rules and entitlement records needing migration;
 - NNDR accounts, reliefs, enforcement history and appeals being transferred;
 - recovery records, arrears, refunds, write offs and court costs being misallocated;
 - cash, suspense, control accounts and bank reconciliation processes not being ready on day one.
- Resourcing impacts may include heavy officer demand for data cleansing, testing, reconciliations, system configuration, quality assurance and customer communications.
- Performance risks include delayed annual billing, slower change processing, increased backlogs, contact pressure and weaker recovery performance.
- Compliance risks include incorrect liability, duplicated accounts, lost audit trails, fraud and error exposure, and inconsistent treatment across predecessor areas.
- Financial risks include misaligned funding, uncertain collection fund baselines, delayed savings, transition costs and councils being financially unsustainable from vesting day.
- Local areas should press MHCLG for source data, disaggregated data, clear funding calculations and realistic timescales.



Local government reorganisation: legal challenge risk and transition planning

Core facts and decision point

- New Forest District Council’s Cabinet is due to consider its response to the Government’s preferred local government reorganisation option for Hampshire and the Solent on 3 June 2026.
- On 25 March 2026, the Secretary of State decided to proceed with “Option 1A”, which would split New Forest District Council’s current area between two new unitary councils.
- The new unitary councils are scheduled to begin delivering services in April 2028.
- New Forest District Council had preferred a different option, becoming part of a new Mid Hampshire unitary authority.
- A “Keep the New Forest Together” petition gathered more than 14,000 signatures and asked the council to seek legal advice on a possible judicial review.
- Independent legal advice obtained by the council concluded that a legal challenge would have no real prospect of success and would fail.
- The advice stressed that judicial review is not a merits appeal; the court would not simply substitute its view for that of the Secretary of State.
- Cabinet is being advised not to pursue judicial review, but instead to focus on protecting New Forest interests through transition arrangements while maintaining its objection to the Government’s decision.



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Legal Issues of Note

AI generated legal arguments: public law workload and compliance risk

Slide 1: Core facts, decisions and risks

- Local Government Lawyer reports comments by Mr Justice Kimblin in BEA v Staffordshire County Council.
- The claim concerned Staffordshire County Council's placement of a child with his paternal aunt under interim care arrangements.
- The judge dismissed the claim because the disputed placement had already ended, meaning the court would have been deciding theoretical legal questions.
- The judge raised concerns about:
 - litigants in person using AI generated legal arguments;
 - written submissions that may not properly engage with key legal authorities;
 - non lawyers driving litigation without proper restraint;
 - increasing judicial and court staff workload in public law cases.
- The judge said the court must have confidence in the research and understanding behind legal submissions.
- A limited civil restraint order was made against the claimant in relation to the case.
- The judgment highlights wider risks where AI is used to generate legal arguments without legal understanding, source checking or proper review.

AI generated legal arguments: public law workload and compliance risk

Implications for Revenues and Benefits

- Revenues and Benefits services may see more AI assisted challenges, complaints, appeals, judicial review threats and Freedom of Information requests.
- Service delivery impacts include:
 - more lengthy or legally framed correspondence from residents, representatives or pressure groups;
 - increased officer time responding to arguments that may be inaccurate, incomplete or irrelevant;
 - greater need for clear decision notices, evidence records and audit trails;
 - higher demand for legal input where AI generated arguments appear authoritative but are poorly founded.
- Compliance risks include inconsistent responses, over defensive wording, failure to identify genuine legal points, or unnecessary escalation.
- Customer impact must be managed carefully; AI assisted correspondence may still contain valid concerns, even if the legal framing is flawed.
- Digital and process changes should include staff guidance on handling AI generated submissions, checking citations and separating facts, law, assumptions and opinion.
- Services should maintain strong quality assurance around CTR decisions, recovery decisions, hardship decisions, complaints and vulnerability assessments.
- Councils should avoid relying on AI generated legal analysis unless it is checked against legislation, guidance, case law and local policy by a competent officer or legal adviser.



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Benefits Officer (NEC)



Permanent | £24,784.50 per annum | Herts

Location: Office-based (full-time: Monday–Friday)

Hours: 37.5 hours per week

Salary: £24,784.50 per annum

About the Role

Our client is looking for a professional, resilient, and empathetic Inbound Call Handler to join their enforcement contact centre.

You will be the first point of contact for members of the public calling in relation to outstanding debts referred to us by local authorities and other public sector clients — including council tax arrears, business rates, parking penalties, housing benefit overpayments, and sundry debt.

This is a busy, fast-paced role that requires you to handle sensitive conversations with confidence, professionalism, and compassion, while working within strict legislative and regulatory frameworks.

What we're looking for:

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

- Previous experience in a customer-facing or call-handling role, ideally within enforcement, debt recovery, local government, or financial services
- Strong verbal communication skills with the ability to adapt tone and approach to a wide range of callers
- Ability to remain calm, professional, and empathetic when handling difficult or emotionally charged conversations
- Good negotiation skills with the ability to reach mutually acceptable outcomes
- Accurate data entry and attention to detail
- Proficiency with IT systems and case management software

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Benefits Officer (NEC)



3 months initially | £24.46 per hour Umbrella | Remote

Purpose:

- To support those in financial difficulty by paying Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payments and provide the appropriate advice and support relating to other welfare benefits
- Process Housing Benefit / Council Tax Reduction applications within the relevant legal framework & assist in the statutory appeal submissions for Appeal Tribunal if required
- Process Applications for Discretionary Housing claims and any other relevant welfare initiative
- Manage the resolution of customer complaints and issues within area of expertise and escalate where appropriate

What we're looking for:

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

- At least 5 years Housing Benefit assessment skills
- Be a killed NEC (Northgate) user

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Revenues Officer (Academy)



3 months initially | £25 per hour PAYE | Remote

We are recruiting for 2 fully remote Revenues & Recovery Officers for a Local Authority in the South. It is essential applicants have recent experience of MRI/Capita One (Academy) Revenues & Benefits Software, and Council Tax, Business Rates (NNDR) and/or Recovery.

Duties will include dealing with customers on the telephone and also working from daily post, emails and online forms. For example:

Establishing Council Tax liability and/or Business Rates Liability;
Progressing recovery of debts at summons stage and beyond;
Creating and updating Council Tax/Business Rates accounts, including (but not limited to):

- Change of addresses;
- Determinations and awards including Single Person Discount (SPD), Severely Mentally Impaired Discount (SMI), second homes and empty properties;
- Exemption determinations, including student exemptions;
- Deaths;

Setting up and amending Direct Debits;
Actioning BACS amendments;

What we're looking for:

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

- 3 experience of MRI/Capita One (Academy) Revenues & Benefits Software
- 5 years experience of Council Tax, Business Rates (NNDR) and/or Recovery

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Benefits Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)



3 months initially | £25 per hour Umbrella | Basildon

The purpose of this interim post is to assess the 2026 Housing Benefit Award Accuracy (HBAA) Reviews.

The Opportunity

The Revenues and Benefits Service administers the billing and collection of Council Tax, Business Rates liabilities and corporate debt, the assessment of Housing Benefit and the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme. The Service is responsible for ensuring that benefits are paid timely and accurately and that the tax base is protected.

The post holder will ensure that decisions on Housing Benefit entitlement are made in accordance with law and policy guidelines.

All staff must be mindful of potential fraud and that suspected irregularities are referred for investigation in all cases. A common factor in Revenues and Benefits services is that any member of staff may be called upon to act as a witness in proceedings in courts or tribunals to give factual evidence.

What we're looking for:

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

- At least 3 years experience working as a Benefits Officer
- A good working knowledge of HB/CTR law and procedures
- A skilled Civica OpenRevenues user
- Professionally qualified to IRRV level

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Head of Corporate Revenues

Permanent | £72,031.00 – £77,783 per annum | Hybrid

Business Smart Solutions is pleased to be working exclusively with Manchester City Council to recruit their new Head of Corporate Revenues.

The post holder will lead a high performing, large scale, revenues service team and have responsibility for the development and delivery of short, medium and long term collection and recovery strategies, initiatives and activities for the Council, maximising revenue for the Council to fund essential Council Services. This will include leading the design and implementation of digital and automated solutions that streamline processes, improve accessibility for residents, deliver sustainable efficiencies and strengthen collection performance.

For full advert, please use the link below

What we're looking for:

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

- Experience of successful strategic leadership of a high performing Revenues function or similar within a Local Government setting or similar size organisation
- A proven ability to harness the full commitment and responsibility of all staff and key stakeholders in delivering the Organisation and Service vision
- Experience of developing and implementing strategic ideas and objectives into practical, well organised plans with a focus on results, standards and objectives on time to quality, within budget and to reprioritise, plan and organise own and others' work effectively to ensure these are met

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NDR Officer (Academy)



3 months initially | £27 per hour Umbrella | Remote

The role requires an experienced Interim NDR/Business Rates Officer.

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

Rate: £27.00 per hour (umbrella)

Term: 3 months initially

Location: Remote after laptop collection

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
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Supported Accommodation Housing Benefit Appeals Specialist



3 months initially | £28 per hour Umbrella | Remote

To provide a professional and effective Benefit Appeals service. To make decisions, provide advice and guidance to members of the public, agents, advice agencies, landlords, and other Council staff.

Maintaining an excellent knowledge of Benefits Legislation, Commissioners decisions and Case Law. Determine Appeals within legislative guidelines and submit cases for submission to Housing Benefit Appeals Tribunals and represent the Council at Tribunal Hearings.

Meet and maintain a high standard in respect of the National Appeals and Benefits 'Performance Measures.' Although these measures have changed, we will continue to monitor and review these indicators.

The job is offered on a remote basis, but there is a requirement to attend Tribunal and Commissioner hearings wherever these are held. Attendance at forum and training meetings will also require an ability to travel.

What we're looking for:

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

- At least 5 years Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support experience
- Extensive knowledge of the Housing Benefit Regulations 1999 and Decisions & Appeals Regulations 2001
- A proven track record of preparing appeal submissions and presenting in front of a Tribunal
- Be a skilled Civica OpenRevs User

To find out more or to apply
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Revenues & Benefits Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)



Permanent | Circa £31,022.00 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

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

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

Congratulations to Ben and the team !"

#TeamBSS Client – Simon Rosser



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.



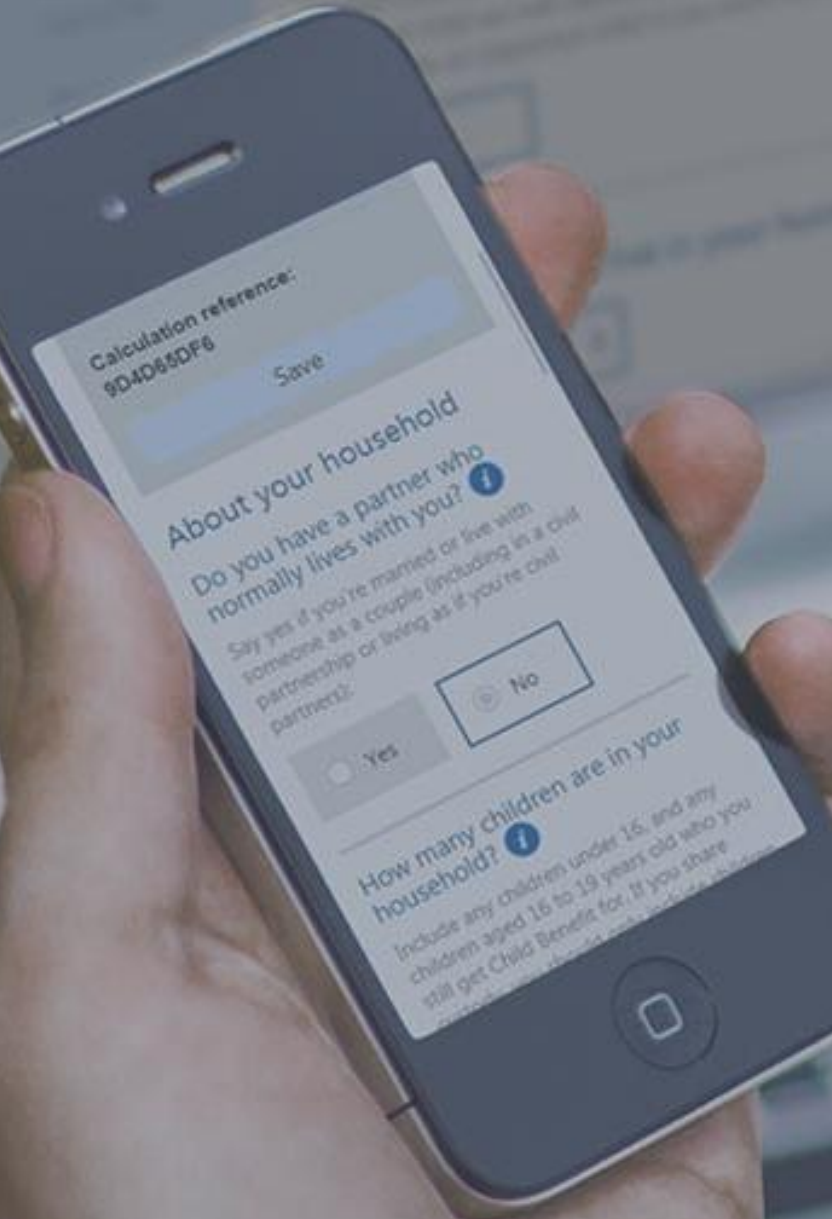
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Our mission is to help everyone to access the benefits they're entitled to.

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

Youth employment, minimum wage policy and local welfare risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- More than 1 million young people are now not in education, employment or training.
- Milburn's report warned that youth worklessness could cost the UK more than £125 billion a year if its long term impacts become embedded.
- The Reuters summary of the report said the number of young people outside work or education could rise from around one in eight to one in six within five years.
- The Guardian reported the youth unemployment rate at 14.7%, the highest for more than a decade.
- The adult minimum wage is £12.71 and the 18 to 20 rate is £10.85 from April 2026.
- The Low Pay Commission is due to make recommendations in October 2026 for rates applying from 1 April 2027.

References and links

- The Guardian, "UK government divided over minimum wage increase in face of youth jobs crisis", 29 May 2026.
- GOV.UK, "Young people and work: interim report", 28 May 2026.
- Reuters, "One in six young Britons risk joblessness trap, report warns", 28 May 2026.
- The Guardian, "Labour poised for fresh welfare changes after scale of youth jobs crisis revealed", 28 May 2026.
- The Guardian, "Rise in youth unemployment driving more to homelessness, UK charities say", 30 May 2026.

Making Tax Digital, self- employment and local welfare risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- £50,000 threshold from April 2026.
- £30,000 threshold from April 2027.
- £20,000 threshold from April 2028.
- Around 864,000 people affected at the first stage.
- A further two million expected to be affected over the following two years.
- Once a business crosses the threshold, it remains within MTD unless income stays below the limit for three consecutive tax years.
- Quarterly updates are income and expense summaries, not four full tax returns each year.

References and links

- iNews, “Self-employed people making over £20,000 ‘encouraged’ to get income down to avoid new tax rules”, Laura Purkess

Neighbourhood Guarantee: local service standards and public accountability

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Community Power Pilots will launch in up to 25 areas.
- The government announcement was made on 21 May 2026.
- Public Finance reported the announcement on 27 May 2026.
- The wider reform package is linked to the £5.8 billion Pride in Place programme.
- The policy is also linked to the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.
- No specific Revenues and Benefits performance measures, funding allocations or quantified council cost impacts are set out in the article.
- The announcement does not yet provide detailed metrics for council tax, local welfare, benefits administration or debt recovery.

References and links

- Public Finance, “Government to set local service expectations for residents to monitor”, Simone Rensch, 27 May 2026.
- GOV.UK, “Neighbourhood Guarantee to improve villages, towns and cities”, 21 May 2026.
- Local Government Lawyer, “Meaningful devolution and sufficient funding key to delivery of ‘Neighbourhood Guarantee’, say councils”, 26 May 2026.

Rent controls and landlord tax reform: affordability, welfare and local service impacts

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Private renters spent an average of 34% of household income on rent in 2024/25.
- This compares with 19% for households with mortgages and 28% for social renters.
- The private rented sector grew from 11% to 19% of total housing stock over the two decades to 2020.
- Around one in five UK households now rent privately.
- Just under a quarter of all children now live in the private rented sector, up from 8% in 2000.
- Around 1 million households receiving UC or Housing Benefit for housing costs live in properties with rents above the 30th percentile of similar local rents.
- JRF polling found 79% of the public agree government should have a role in ensuring private rents are affordable.
- JRF's modelled rent control approach could leave renting households almost £1,200 per year better off by 2030/31.
- With tax reform and CPI/CPI plus 2% rent controls, the proportion of mortgaged landlords making a loss is modelled at 17.3% by 2030, lower than the 20.3% projected under current tax arrangements with no rent control.

References and links

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation, "How tax reform would make rent controls feasible to deliver", Rosie Worsdale, Joseph Elliott, Darren Baxter and Ruby Blower, 14 May 2026.
- Autonomy Institute analysis of landlord returns for JRF, as cited in the report.
- Office for Budget Responsibility rent and wage growth forecasts, as cited in the report.
- More in Common polling for JRF, as cited in the report.

Pensions 2050: adequacy, ageing and future welfare pressure

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Over 65s projected to rise from 19% of the population today to 28% by 2075.
- People aged 75 or over projected to double between 2025 and 2075, increasing by 6 million.
- Old age dependency ratio expected to reach 3 pensioners for every 10 working age adults over the next decade, and 4 for every 10 by the 2070s.
- Pensioner benefit spending projected to rise from around 6% of GDP in 2024/25 to around 9% by the early 2070s.
- Health and social care spending could rise by around 8% of GDP over a similar period.
- 43% of working age people, around 15 million, are projected to be undersaving.
- 13% of working age people, and 15% of Generation X, are not projected to afford the Pensions UK Minimum Retirement Living Standard.
- Poverty rate after housing costs is 9% for pensioners with private pension income, rising to 33% for pensioners without private pension income.
- By 2050, half of pensioners in poverty are projected to be renters.
- 9 in 10 eligible employees now save into a workplace pension.
- 14% of employees, around 4 million, are not eligible for automatic enrolment because of age limits and the £10,000 earnings trigger.
- Only 17% of self employed people currently save into a pension, falling to 4% for those earning only from self employment.
- Median uncrystallised private pension wealth in people's late 50s was £156,000 for men and £81,000 for women, 48% less.

References and links

- Department for Work and Pensions, "The Second Pensions Commission, Pensions 2050: Evidence and Future Priorities, Interim Report", May 2026.
- DWP, Analysis of Future Pension Incomes 2025, as cited in the report.
- DWP, Workplace pension participation and savings trends of eligible employees: 2009 to 2024, as cited in the report.
- ONS, National population projections: 2022 based, as cited in the report.
- OBR, Fiscal risks and sustainability, as cited in the report.

Redcar and Cleveland counter fraud activity: implications for Revenues and Benefits

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- 118 referrals of suspected fraud were reported by The Northern Echo.
- The 2024/25 counter fraud annual report recorded £41.8k in counter fraud savings for Redcar and Cleveland Council.
- Veritau received and triaged 165 suspected fraud referrals in 2024/25.
- 31 investigations were completed in 2024/25.
- Savings were identified across Adult Social Care, NNDR and Council Tax.
- Completed cases included Adult Social Care, Council Tax, Council Tax Support, debt recovery and parking.
- No whistleblowing reports were received by Veritau in 2024/25; one previous whistleblowing matter was concluded with no fraud found.

References and links

- The Northern Echo, “118 suspected frauds Redcar Cleveland Council”, 2026.
- Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Counter Fraud Annual Report 2024/25, Governance Committee, 21 July 2025.
- Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Fraud reporting page

Benefit fraud and error 2025/26: accuracy, recovery and local welfare risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Total benefit expenditure: £308.6 billion.
- Total overpayments: 3.2%, £9.9 billion.
- Total underpayments: 0.4%, £1.2 billion.
- Net loss from overpayments after recoveries: 2.8%, £8.6 billion.
- Recoveries in FYE 2026:
 - Universal Credit: £0.6 billion;
 - other DWP benefits: £0.2 billion;
 - Housing Benefit: £0.4 billion.
- Universal Credit expenditure: £79.2 billion.
- Universal Credit overpayment rate: 8.5%, £6.72 billion.
- Universal Credit incorrectness: 24 in 100 claims.
- Housing Benefit expenditure: £12.9 billion.
- Housing Benefit overpayment rate: 6.2%, £800 million.
- Housing Benefit incorrectness fell to 18 in 100 claims.
- Pension Credit overpayment rate: 10.0%, £620 million, the highest relative to expenditure.
- Pension Credit incorrectness increased to 37 in 100 claims.
- PIP overpayment rate increased to 2.3%, £660 million.
- PIP “Not Reasonably Expected To Know” cases rose to 3.6%, £1.03 billion.

References and links

- Department for Work and Pensions, “Fraud and error in the benefit system: Financial Year Ending 2026 estimates”, updated 19 May 2026.
- DWP reference tables and methodology note accompanying the FYE 2026 fraud and error release.
- DWP Spring Forecast 2026 benefit expenditure figures, as used in the release.

Universal Credit fraud allegation: capital disclosure and compliance risks

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Universal Credit normally cannot be claimed where a single claimant or couple has more than £16,000 in money, savings and investments.
- Capital below £6,000 normally does not affect a Universal Credit award.
- Capital between £6,000 and £16,000 reduces Universal Credit by £4.35 per month for every £250, or part £250, above £6,000.
- Alleged offence period: 12 months, from 7 March 2022 to 7 March 2023.
- Fraud by failing to disclose information under section 3 of the Fraud Act 2006 requires an alleged failure to disclose information where there is a legal duty to do so, with dishonest intent to make a gain or cause loss.

References and links

- North West Evening Mail, “DWP: Couple deny making fraudulent Universal Credit claims”, URL supplied by user. The original page could not be directly fetched, so case details are drawn from accessible reporting of the same article.
- Westmorland Watch, “Millom couple deny Universal Credit fraud charge”.
- GOV.UK, “Universal Credit: money, savings and investments”.
- Crown Prosecution Service, “Fraud Act 2006”.

Fit note reform: work, health and benefit system implications

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Around 11 million fit notes are issued each year.
- More than nine in ten fit notes declare the person “not fit for work”.
- The pilots will cover up to 100,000 appointments.
- The pilots will last up to one year.
- Only 29% of primary care staff see issuing fit notes as a good use of GP time.
- Six in ten employers think the current process is ineffective at supporting employees’ work and health needs.
- Four WorkWell pilot areas are named:
 - Birmingham and Solihull;
 - Coventry and Warwickshire;
 - Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly;
 - Lancashire and South Cumbria.
- The pilots are backed by £3 million in the first year.
- WorkWell is expanding nationally to support up to 250,000 people with a disability or health condition to get into or stay in work.
- The wider employment support package is worth £3.5 billion.
- Statutory Sick Pay reforms are expected to put an extra £400 million a year into people’s pockets.
- Regional WorkWell allocations include £47.1 million for the Midlands, £40.3 million for London, £36.3 million for North East and Yorkshire, £35.4 million for the North West, £30.5 million for the South East, £24.2 million for the East of England and £21.6 million for the South West.

References and links

- GOV.UK, “Broken fit note system to be overhauled”, Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health and Social Care, published 20 May 2026, updated 22 May 2026.
- Fit Note Reform: Call for Evidence results, as referenced in the GOV.UK announcement.
- Keep Britain Working Review, chaired by Sir Charlie Mayfield, as referenced in the GOV.UK announcement.

Scottish fiscal squeeze: spending choices, tax reform and service risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Public service funding growth:
 - 2.3% a year above inflation between 2019/20 and 2025/26.
 - 0.6% a year above inflation forecast for 2026/27 to 2028/29.
- 2027/28 day to day funding is projected to fall by 1.3% in real terms.
- Additional unallocated funding from UK Government top ups:
 - £542 million in 2026/27.
 - £13 million in 2027/28.
 - £345 million in 2028/29.
- Scottish Spending Review plans include real terms cuts averaging 1.8% a year for several non health portfolios.
- Productivity plans include a 20%, £1 billion, reduction in corporate costs.
- If earnings growth underperforms official assumptions, Scottish Government funding could be:
 - around £0.5 billion lower in 2028/29;
 - around £1 billion lower in 2030/31.
- SNP manifesto pledges are estimated by the SNP to cost £1.4 billion a year by 2030.
- Expanded childcare is estimated by the SNP to cost £540 million a year.
- Council tax revaluation and reform could be revenue neutral, revenue reducing or revenue raising, depending on policy design and council decisions.

References and links

- Institute for Fiscal Studies, “The Scottish Government faces a fiscal reckoning: with spending cuts or tax rises on the way”, David Phillips, 27 May 2026.
- Scottish Government, Scottish Spending Review, as cited by IFS.
- Scottish Government consultation on council tax revaluation and reform, as cited by IFS.
- Scottish Government plans for a mansion tax from April 2028, as cited by IFS.

DWP debt recovery error: evidence, enforcement and customer harm

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- The disputed Universal Credit overpayment was £163.73.
- The tribunal decision overturning the overpayment was made in September 2022.
- DWP sought recovery through the woman's employer in May 2026, nearly four years later.
- The woman had not claimed benefits for five years.
- She said the direct earnings attachment could have triggered financial conduct compliance checks because she worked in financial services.
- DWP initially indicated it might not respond until the following month, by which time salary deductions could have been made.
- The Guardian article does not quantify wider compensation, administrative cost or redress.

References and links

- The Guardian, "DWP pursued woman's employer for nonexistent 'benefit debt'", Patrick Butler, 20 May 2026.
- First tier tribunal decision from September 2022, as reported by The Guardian.
- Independent government commissioned review of carer benefit overpayments, as referenced by The Guardian.

UK inflation easing: market reaction and local finance implications

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Headline CPI inflation fell to 2.8% in April 2026.
- Bank of England and City forecasts had expected 3%.
- Core inflation fell from 3.1% to 2.5%.
- Services inflation fell from 4.5% to 3.2%, its weakest level in four years.
- Food price inflation fell from 3.4% to 3%.
- Petrol price inflation rose from 4.9% to 23%, the highest since 2022.
- Ten year gilt yields fell to 4.99%.
- Two year gilt yields fell by 0.17 percentage points to 4.37%.
- The Bank of England base rate remained at 3.75%.
- Brent crude fell more than 6% to \$105.
- FTSE 100 rose 1%, gaining 101.79 points.
- FTSE 250 rose 1.2%, gaining 270.41 points.
- Sterling rose 0.3% against the dollar to \$1.34 and 0.15% against the euro to €1.16.

References and links

- The Times, "Oil price falls, while equities rally as UK inflation eases", Mehreen Khan, 20 May 2026.
- Office for National Statistics inflation figures for April 2026, as cited in The Times.
- Bank of England inflation and interest rate commentary, as cited in The Times.
- Market data on gilts, oil, equities and sterling, as reported by The Times.

AI and the future of work: service readiness, workforce change and local welfare risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- General public survey: 2,000 UK adults aged 16 and over.
- Young people survey: 1,002 people aged 16 to 29 in Great Britain.
- University student survey: 1,000 students in Great Britain.
- Employer survey: 506 UK business decision makers in organisations with 11 or more employees.
- 77% of students use AI regularly, compared with 46% of workers.
- 56% of students use AI at least a few times a week, compared with 33% of workers.
- 75% of workers who use AI say they at least sometimes check outputs before using them.
- 56% of employers use AI for data analysis, 41% for research and 40% for administrative tasks.
- 62% of employers using AI cite productivity as a main reason.
- 86% of employers say AI has improved productivity.
- 22% of employers using AI have made roles redundant or reduced hiring because of AI.
- 51% of employers support government guaranteed retraining for workers displaced by AI; 43% say skills updating should mainly be up to individuals.

References and links

- King's College London Policy Institute, "AI and the Future of Work: Attitudes, beliefs and behaviour among the British public, workers, university students and employers", May 2026.
- Opinium survey fieldwork, April 2026, as reported in the KCL Policy Institute report.
- International Monetary Fund analysis on AI exposure, as cited in the report.
- GOV.UK assessment of AI capabilities and the UK labour market, as cited in the report.

Agentic enterprise: AI agents, content governance and service transformation

. Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Box Q1 FY2027 revenue: \$305.9 million.
- Revenue growth: 11% year on year.
- Remaining performance obligations: \$1.6 billion.
- Net retention rate: 105%.
- GAAP operating margin: 9%.
- Non-GAAP operating margin: 27.7%.
- GAAP net income per share: \$0.08.
- Non-GAAP net income per share: \$0.37.
- Reported Enterprise Advanced premium: 30% to 40% above Enterprise Plus.

References and links

- Box Investor Relations, “Box Reports First Quarter Fiscal 2027 Financial Results”, 26 May 2026.
- Yahoo Finance, “AI CEO just made a wild prediction about AI agents”, May 2026.
- Dealroom, “Box CEO predicts enterprises will deploy ‘hundreds of times more agents than people’”, May 2026.
- TradingView, “BOX Q1 Earnings Call Highlights”, May 2026.

Local government reorganisation legal challenges: service transition and delivery risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Reform won 41 of 70 seats on Suffolk County Council.
- Reform is expected to lead Norfolk County Council after winning 40 seats, short of the 43 needed for a majority.
- Essex's incoming Reform leader issued a pre action protocol letter on 18 May 2026.
- Local Government Lawyer published the report on 19 May 2026.
- The Suffolk proposal referred to in the article would divide the county into three unitary authorities.
- The article does not provide quantified transition costs, savings, council tax impacts or legal costs.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, "Reform councils vow to legally challenge local government reorganisation", 19 May 2026.
- Suffolk Local Democracy Reporting Service, as cited by Local Government Lawyer.
- Norfolk Local Democracy Reporting Service, as cited by Local Government Lawyer.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government statement, as cited by Local Government Lawyer.

Multi unitary reorganisation: funding allocation and day one delivery risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Four county areas are identified for multi unitary arrangements: Suffolk, Norfolk, Essex and Hampshire.
- Implementation is expected in 2028/29.
- The report notes there has been no recent experience of splitting a county into more than two unitaries.
- Berkshire in 1998 is cited as the last example of a county being split into more than two unitaries.
- Some districts may be split into three new unitary areas.
- The analysis warns of material underfunding or overfunding if disaggregation is wrong.
- The article does not quantify estimated transition costs, savings, council tax impacts or collection fund effects.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, “Plans for multi unitaries in county areas risk funding misallocation, analysis warns”, 19 May 2026.
- Pixel Financial Management, financial analysis commissioned by the County Councils Network, as reported by Local Government Lawyer.
- Pixel Financial Management, accompanying report on systems and financial issues, as reported by Local Government Lawyer.
- County Councils Network response, as reported by Local Government Lawyer.

Local government reorganisation: legal challenge risk and transition planning

Key numbers and dates

- 25 March 2026: Secretary of State decided to proceed with Option 1A.
- 3 June 2026: New Forest District Council Cabinet due to consider its response.
- April 2028: new unitary councils scheduled to begin delivering services.
- Four unitary authorities proposed for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton overall.
- Isle of Wight Council would remain a standalone authority.
- More than 14,000 signatures were gathered by the “Keep the New Forest Together” petition.
- Independent legal advice came from Jane Oldham of 11KBW, supplemented by advice from Richard Harwood KC of 39 Essex Chambers.
- Hampshire County Council’s Leader confirmed on 21 May 2026 that the county council would move to pursue judicial review of the LGR outcome.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, “Legal challenge over decision on reorganisation ‘would fail’, council told”, 28 May 2026

AI generated legal arguments: public law workload and compliance risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Public law case receipts increased by 35% last year.
- The judge said receipts had increased by similar amounts the year before.
- The child's placement with the paternal aunt ran between August 2025 and February 2026.
- Permission had been granted on limited grounds on 12 February 2026.
- The placement ended on 25 February 2026.
- The claim was dismissed because no practical relief could be granted.
- The article does not quantify costs beyond noting that costs were awarded against the claimant.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, "High Court Judge raises concerns over litigants in person, AI-generated arguments and 'substantial and increasing' workload of public law cases", 20 May 2026.
- BEA, R (on the application of) v Staffordshire County Council [2026] EWHC 1190 (Admin), as reported by Local Government Lawyer.
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, regulation 25, as referenced in the article.

Previous Recordings



Dates where there will be no sessions





Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

Blogs



[The danger is not change. The danger is not knowing what you do not know](#)

[When good intentions meet council tax reality, residents may pay the price](#)

[DWP spring forecast 2026 why the real welfare story is not just higher spending but a changing social contract](#)

[Subscription Spending, Household Budgets and Consumer Behaviour](#)

[How Councils Can Use Administrative Data to Support the Delivery of the CRF](#)

[The Stagflation Trap: Why the UK's Cost-of-Living Crisis is Making a Dangerous Return](#)

[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](#)

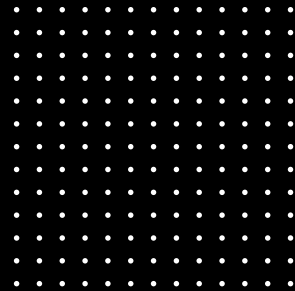
[The Case for Plain English Council Tax Reduction Schemes by Paul Howarth](#)

<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

- [Child Benefit take-up hits a new low: the downside to 'wealth testing' benefits](#) by Phil Agulnik
- [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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How income inequality between ethnic minorities and their White counterparts has changed over the past three decades

[A clearer picture of household incomes – but no cause for complacency on poverty by Alex Clegg](#)

The latest Households Below Average Income release uses survey data linked to benefit administration records for the first time – but what does this mean for poverty rates?

[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



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

[JRF: Poverty Statistics Are Changing](#)

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

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

[IFS: Are Pensioners really better off?](#)

[More or Less: Can You Really Get £71,000 in Benefits?](#)

Podcasts



Stats & References

Youth unemployment, welfare reform and local welfare risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- 1,012,000 young people were NEET between January and March 2026.
- NEET young people represented 13.5% of all young people in the UK.
- Around 613,000 young people were economically inactive.
- Around 400,000 young people were unemployed but seeking work.
- Six in 10 NEET young people have never had a job, compared with four in 10 in 2005.
- 84% of NEET young people surveyed said they wanted a job or training.
- Mid and lower skilled jobs have fallen by around 1.6 million over 20 years.
- Hospitality vacancies have halved in the last four years.
- The estimated annual economic cost is £125 billion, including lost economic potential, economic scarring, lost tax revenue, and increased health and benefits spending.

References and links

- The Guardian, “UK risks £125bn hit from youth unemployment, landmark report warns”, 28 May 2026.
- Alan Milburn interim review on young people not in education, employment or training, as reported in the article.
- Office for National Statistics NEET figures for January to March 2026, as cited in the article.
- Institute for Fiscal Studies comments on minimum wages and employer National Insurance, as cited in the article.

Apprenticeship incentives and benefit rules: implications for local welfare and youth employment

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Nearly 1 million young people are not in education, employment or training.
- Alan Milburn's review is examining 957,000 young people classed as NEET.
- For every £25 spent keeping young people on benefits, only £1 is spent helping them into work through employment support.
- In the worst affected scenario identified by the Social Security Advisory Committee, a single parent whose disabled child was the last person on the benefit claim could be £339 a week worse off if the teenager took up an apprenticeship.
- Young people's National Minimum Wage is £8 per hour.
- The National Minimum Wage rises to £10.85 for 18- to 20-year-olds.
- Apprentices receive the lower apprentice rate in their first year regardless of age.
- Young people starting apprenticeships have fallen by 40% over the past decade.
- Government states it is investing £2.5 billion to tackle youth unemployment and create 50,000 additional apprenticeships for young people.

References and links

- The Times, "Parents on benefits could be paid to let teenagers be apprentices", Max Kendix and Geraldine Scott, 24 May 2026.
- Alan Milburn review into young people not in education, employment or training, as reported in The Times.
- Social Security Advisory Committee analysis on apprenticeship impacts on benefit entitlement, as reported in The Times.
- Department for Work and Pensions statement on youth unemployment and apprenticeships, as reported in The Times.

Youth NEETs, health barriers and work coach support

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Almost 1 million people aged 16 to 24 are NEET.
- Just under half are reported as signed off due to long term health problems.
- Two thirds of NEET young people are economically inactive.
- Since 2005, the proportion of NEETs signed off work has more than doubled to 28%.
- Two thirds of those signed off cite mental health problems or autism.
- The article says Denmark and the Netherlands have lower NEET rates where employment support is more integrated with treatment and therapy.
- Proposed employment support could last up to a year for affected young people.

References and links

- The Times, “Send young with ADHD to work coaches, says former health secretary”, 1 April 2026.
- Alan Milburn review into young people not in education, employment or training, as reported by The Times.
- Individual Placement and Support, IPS, as referenced in the article.
- Centre for Social Justice comment, as reported by The Times.

Minimum wage, youth employment and local welfare risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- UK unemployment is reported at 5%.
- Only around half of under 25s are in paid employment.
- The National Living Wage has risen by almost a third in real terms over the past decade.
- Productivity is reported to have increased by only 6% over the same period.
- Retail and hospitality account for around one third of minimum wage jobs.
- Retail and hospitality account for almost half of all jobs held by under 25s.
- The youth rate was 72% of the National Living Wage in 2023; it is now reported as 85%.
- In lower wage areas, the National Living Wage can represent a much higher share of median earnings, with Wigan cited at 80%.
- Sunak argues that increasing the cost of employing 18- to 20-year-olds by around a quarter is likely to increase youth unemployment.

References and links

- The Times, “Rishi Sunak: What I got wrong on the minimum wage”, 23 May 2026.
- City A.M., “Sunak calls for minimum wage quango to be abolished”, 24 May 2026.
- Rishi Sunak profile, Hoover Institution, for author context.



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.