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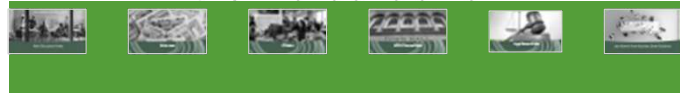


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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

[Meeting Link](#)

15 June 2026



Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

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

- 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 & Better Policy
- Bob Wagstaff, Visionary Network
- Christina Ward, CIPFA
- Liz Whitehead-Davis, Hexagon Housing



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

SEE YOU IN LONDON!

HI! COME SAY HI!

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.



EASTBOURNE

Come and see
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VISIONARY NETWORK

STAND 27

IRRV Conference
TELFORD

20-30 SEPT 2026

TELFORD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HALL



Discussion Points

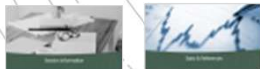
Top Three Things In Your In-tray

DISCUSSION

What are the top 3 things I learned from conference?

The change that on your next flight take — share with the group.

1	2	3
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LG Finance

REVENUES & BENEFITS PANEL — DISCUSSION

Where is this all going?

Local government finances and the future of our services

Source: House of Commons Library — Local government finances: CDP 16/21, 27 May 2020 plus the evidence in evidence. Funding outlook.

Council Tax Collection (GMB)

SUPPLEMENT — COUNCIL TAX ENFORCEMENT

1.5 million in the dock

Council tax collection under strain — a supplement to "Where is this all going?"

Source: GMB press FO investigation: financial year 2024/25. Rights are a trade — only — 100% of all GB selling authorities required.

LGR Again

PANEL DISCUSSION

Local Government Reorganisation

Challenging the panel on delivery, risk, jobs and the post-reorganisation landscape

Redistribution of Homeless

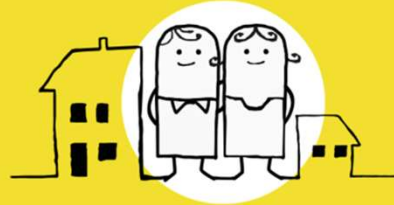
Forced out of London: the scale of displacement

What the numbers mean for councils

- Around 1,300 homeless households were moved out of London by councils in the year to March 2025, up from 670 two years earlier. The number forced out has doubled in two years.
- London holds more than half of England's homeless people, yet in 2023 only 2% of London private lets were affordable to someone on Housing Benefit.
- Placements now reach Bolton, Blackpool, Hartlepool and County Durham, hundreds of miles from the placing borough.
- The driver is financial: Croydon estimates around £5,000 saved per placement, Enfield has paid one relocation firm over £894,000 since August 2023.
- Every placement is a household that arrives in another council's area, frequently with no notification to the receiving authority.
- What presents as a London housing story is, in effect, a national redistribution of need and cost.

inbest

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

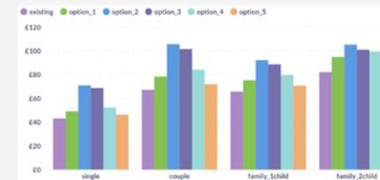
Total annual cost options



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

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

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

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

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

Lucie White, Operational Finance Manager at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council



Visit us: <https://inbest.ai>

Write to us: info@inbest.ai

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.inbest



Designing Defensible CTR Schemes

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

[Play Video](#)

End



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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



Join the discussion

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

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

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

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

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



Main Discussion Points

PANEL DISCUSSION

Local Government Reorganisation

Challenging the panel on delivery, risk, jobs and the post-reorganisation landscape



THE REFORM LANDSCAPE

Devolution and reorganisation are reshaping local government

Autumn 2026

Target for the Chancellor's fiscal devolution roadmap

8

Mayoral Strategic Authorities feeding into Devo Next

6

Design principles: flexibility, fairness, resilience, accountability

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Is the system ready for change on this scale — and on this timetable?

THE PLAN ON THE TABLE

Fifteen new unitary councils, on a fixed timetable

15

New unitary councils to be created across four areas

25 Mar 2026

Government's reorganisation decisions announced

July 2026

Further reorganisation decisions expected

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

How will you deliver reorganisation at this pace without dropping core services?

LEGITIMACY UNDER FIRE

County councils are challenging the rationale

16

Councils signed the County Councils Network letter to the PM

3 in 4

Affected county councils backed the challenge

Rationale

Letter demands the evidence behind the 25 March decisions

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Can you defend the rationale for these decisions to the councils affected?

LEGAL CHALLENGE

Disputes are heading toward the courts

4+

Councils involved in legal challenges to reorganisation

Suffolk

Pre-action letter over a three-way split; preferred a single unitary

New Forest

Weighed judicial review of Hampshire 'Option 1A', then ruled it out

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

What is the contingency if the courts pause or overturn a decision?

FINANCIAL FRAGILITY

Some councils face Section 114 before reform even lands

£40m

Savings Westmorland & Furness must find over three years

S114

Notice warned 'inevitable' without major savings delivered

£15m

Minimum target from the transformation programme

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

What happens if a council issues a Section 114 notice mid-transition?

Revenues & Benefits is the critical transition workstream

Continuity

Council tax, business rates, CTR and HB legacy must keep running

Complexity

Splitting districts multiplies systems, data and billing migration

Capacity

Recovery and local welfare cannot pause during restructure

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

What are the real operational risks — and which keep you awake at night?

MITIGATION

From risk to plan: how will these be managed?

Phasing

Sequenced cutover with parallel running to protect billing

Data

Early data cleansing and migration assurance across systems

People

Retain key R&B knowledge and skills through transition

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

How concretely will you mitigate these risks — and who is accountable?

AN UNEVEN MAP

Not every council is affected — the landscape will be patchy

New tier

A regional tier sits above the reorganised unitaries

Boundaries

Realignment and integrated settlements for combined authorities

Two-speed

Some areas restructure while neighbours stay unchanged

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

What does the post-reorganisation map look like for areas left in limbo?

What does reorganisation mean for the workforce?

TUPE

Staff transfers across new unitary boundaries

Retention

Risk of losing experienced R&B and welfare staff mid-change

Knowledge

Local expertise lost if long-standing teams fragment

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

What is your plan to protect jobs, skills and morale through change?

REVENUES & BENEFITS

Strategic enabler — or just a transactional service?

Tax base

Local tax and business rates retention central to fiscal devolution

Strategic

R&B grows in importance as revenue powers devolve locally

Frontline

Closest service to residents in financial hardship

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Is Revenues & Benefits at the strategy table — or an afterthought?

THE PREVENTION OPPORTUNITY

Could reform finally enable a shift to prevention?

Prevention

Devolution could shift services from reaction to prevention

Support

Council Tax Reduction, discretionary support and debt advice

Localism

Named the key enabler — rarely achieved in practice

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Will reform deliver prevention — or just restructure the deckchairs?

PLACE-BASED REFORM

One-size-fits-all risks deepening regional inequality

Context

Frameworks should weight each area's local economic context

Inequality

A uniform approach could widen existing regional gaps

Control

Too much economic power may stay with central government

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

How will you tailor reform to place — and avoid deepening inequality?

FUNDING & FISCAL POWER

Devolution without fiscal power won't deliver

Fairness

Equalisation so devolution doesn't punish poorer areas

Resilience

Local revenue bases must withstand economic shocks

Roadmap

Fiscal devolution plan due ahead of the Autumn 2026 Budget

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Where is the money — and the real fiscal power — in this settlement?

OVER TO THE PANEL

Five questions for the panel

- 1 Delivery** Can you hit the timetable without dropping core services?
- 2 Legitimacy** Is the rationale defensible — to councils and to the courts?
- 3 Risk** What are the real risks, and how will you mitigate them?
- 4 Jobs** How will you protect the workforce and local expertise?
- 5 Place & money** How will you avoid deepening inequality without fiscal power?



REVENUES & BENEFITS PANEL — DISCUSSION



Where is this all going?

Local government finances and the future of our services

Source: House of Commons Library — Local government finances (CBP-8431), 29 May 2026, plus the welfare-vs-defence funding outlook

THE MONEY MAP

Three income streams — and R&B runs two of them

£121bn

Central government grant to English councils in 2024/25

~50%

Of core spending power now comes from the council tax requirement

~40%

From Revenue Support Grant and retained business rates

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Council tax and business rates now anchor council finance — is R&B resourced as a strategic service, not back-office?

A DECADE OF DECLINE

More demand, less money — the long squeeze

—3%

Core spending power still below its 2010/11 level by 2028/29 (real terms)

—15%

Day-to-day service spending vs 2010/11, in real terms

£105.7bn

Total day-to-day spend in 2024/25 — dominated by social care

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

With less spending power than 15 years ago, how do you protect collection rates and benefits processing times?

THE COUNCIL-TAX SQUEEZE

Funding is shifting onto the local taxpayer

Half

Council tax requirement is now the single largest part of spending power

Cap

Referendum threshold limits how far bills can rise without a vote

Base

Growth depends on the tax base — and on collection performance

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

If half the budget now rests on council tax, how do you grow the base and lift collection without pushing residents into hardship?

WINNERS & LOSERS

Social care rises — districts get hollowed out

+12%

Wokingham's spending power vs 2010/11 — the top of the range

-50%

Pendle's spending power vs 2010/11 — the bottom of the range

Districts

Shire districts — home to most R&B teams — almost all fell

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Funding favours social-care authorities. How do you keep R&B viable in a district whose spending power is shrinking?

FUNDING VS NEED

The system that shares out money is broken

"Broken"

IFS: the funding system for local government has 'largely broken down'

FFR 2.0

Fair Funding Review redistributes funding from 2026/27, phased over three years

Cliff-edge

Transitional grant cushions the losers — then tapers away

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Fair Funding Review 2.0 reshuffles the deck. How do you budget through redistribution and the end of transitional grant?

FROM PREVENTION TO CRISIS

Money is draining away from prevention

+15%

Rise in adult social care requests,
2015/16 to 2023/24...

+2%

...but only this many more people
actually got support

Prevention

NAO: spend is shifting to crisis,
storing up higher costs later

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

CTR, discretionary payments and debt advice are prevention — how do you defend them when budgets only reward crisis?

THE BENEFITS FRONTLINE

R&B is where hardship meets the council

£12.7bn

Rent allowance and rebate subsidy
paid out in 2024/25

CTR

Council Tax Reduction caseloads
rise as household budgets tighten

Recovery

Arrears and enforcement grow —
yet teams are being trimmed

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Caseloads are rising while teams shrink — what is your plan to keep processing times and support within reach?

EXTERNAL RISK — BEYOND THE REPORT

Welfare in the firing line to fund defence

Defence ↑

Pressure to lift defence spending toward 3% of GDP and NATO targets

Welfare ↓

Working-age welfare is the biggest controllable budget — first for savings

Local fallout

Household Support Fund, DHPs and local welfare most exposed

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

If welfare grants are cut to pay for defence, what is your contingency for the residents who depend on them?

THIN SHOCK ABSORBERS

Little left to cushion the next shock

0.7%

Of day-to-day spend covered by reserves drawn down in 2024/25

No borrowing

Councils cannot borrow to fund day-to-day services

S114

More authorities edging toward effective insolvency

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

With wafer-thin reserves and no day-to-day borrowing, where is the buffer if collection dips or caseloads spike?

OVER TO THE PANEL

Where is this all going?

1 Resourcing

Is R&B funded as a strategic service — not back-office?

2 Collection

How do you grow the tax base without harming residents?

3 Prevention

How do you defend CTR, discretionary payments and debt advice?

4 Caseloads

How do you keep support within reach as hardship rises?

5 Contingency

What is the plan if welfare grants are cut to fund defence?



VISIONARY NETWORK

SUPPLEMENT — COUNCIL TAX ENFORCEMENT



1.5 million in the dock

Council tax collection under strain — a supplement to ‘Where is this all going?’

Source: GMB union FOI investigation, financial year 2024/25 (figures are a floor — only ~200 of all GB billing authorities replied)

THE HEADLINE NUMBERS

Enforcement at industrial scale in 2024/25

1.5m

Summoned to court over unpaid council tax

4.6m

Accounts in council tax arrears

3.2m

Accounts in debt-management proceedings

£4.6bn

Owed to councils in unpaid council tax

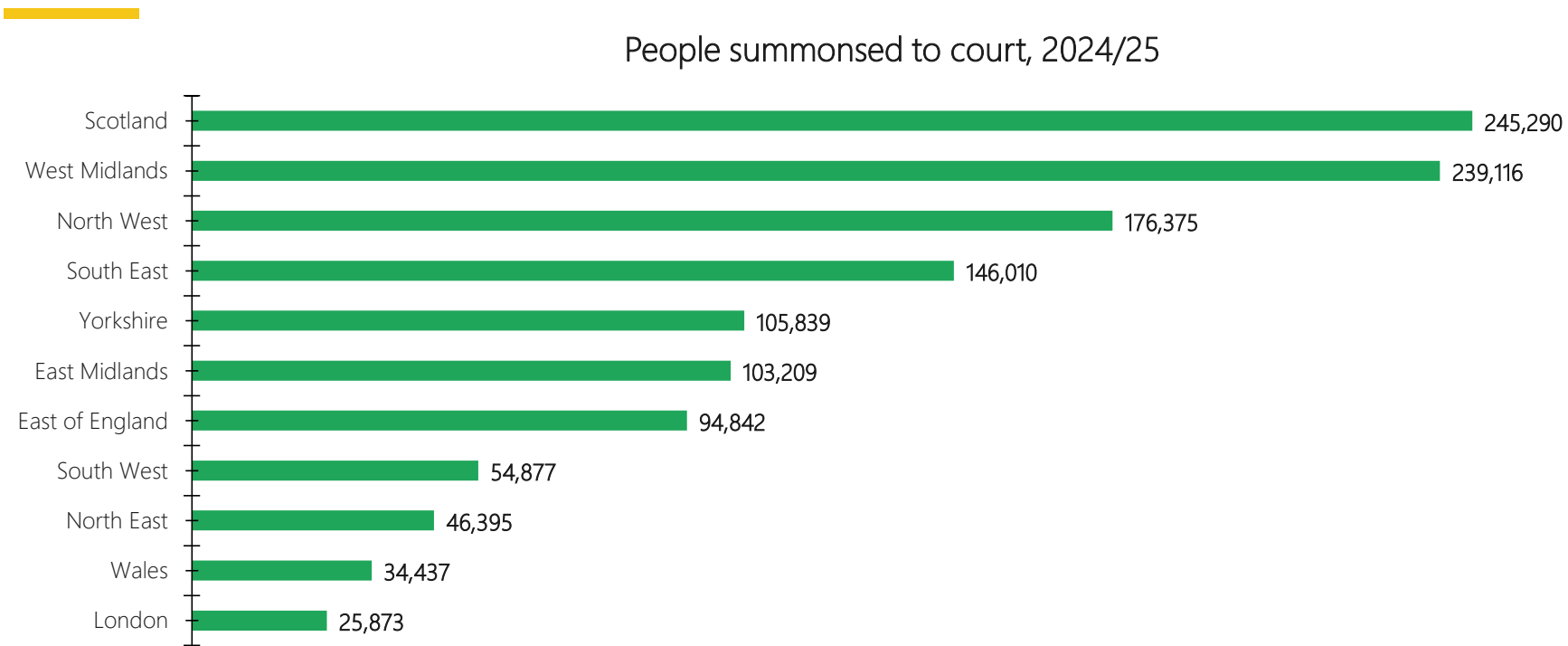
Figures are a floor: GMB FOI to all GB billing authorities, only ~200 replied within the statutory deadline — the true totals are higher.

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

Is taking 1.5 million people to court a collection strategy — or a symptom of a broken system?

THE REGIONAL PICTURE

Where the courts are busiest



Why are residents far more likely to be summonsed in some areas than others?

GMB'S VERDICT

"The council tax system is completely broken"

Rachel Harrison, GMB National Secretary — calling for three national reforms

More funding

Guaranteed central government funding for cash-strapped councils

Council tax reform

Update the out-of-date banding so the richest pay a fairer share

Business rates reform

Let authorities keep more to regenerate their high streets

CHALLENGE TO THE PANEL

National reform may be years away — what can our service change locally, now?

OVER TO THE PANEL

What kind of collector do we want to be?

- 1 Recovery** Is a court summons becoming our default — and too soon?
- 2 Hardship** How do we spot vulnerable payers before enforcement starts?
- 3 Support** Are CTR, discretionary payments and debt advice reaching them?
- 4 Cost** What does court action actually recover versus what it costs us?
- 5 Reputation** What do 1.5 million summonses say about how we treat residents?

Forced out of London: the scale of displacement

What the numbers mean for councils

- Around 1,300 homeless households were moved out of London by councils in the year to March 2025, up from 670 two years earlier. The number forced out has doubled in two years.
- London holds more than half of England's homeless people, yet in 2023 only 2% of London private lets were affordable to someone on Housing Benefit.
- Placements now reach Bolton, Blackpool, Hartlepool and County Durham, hundreds of miles from the placing borough.
- The driver is financial: Croydon estimates around £5,000 saved per placement; Enfield has paid one relocation firm over £894,000 since August 2023.
- Every placement is a household that arrives in another council's area, frequently with no notification to the receiving authority.
- What presents as a London housing story is, in effect, a national redistribution of need and cost.

One council's saving is another council's cost

Impact on local government finance and LGR

- Out of area placements export demand and cost from the placing borough to the receiving authority, with no transfer of funding alongside the household.
- Receiving councils absorb unfunded pressure on Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments, local welfare, temporary accommodation, social care and school places.
- The placing council's saving becomes the receiving council's loss: the needs of one authority uncontrollably driving the needs of another.
- These flows are invisible in baseline budgets. Receiving areas cannot forecast or fund demand they are never told about.
- Under Local Government Reorganisation, new unitary authorities may inherit concentrations of placed households they never planned or funded for, distorting baselines and equalisation.
- Without a national mechanism to make funding follow need, financial risk simply lands wherever the cheapest accommodation happens to be.

Reactive, not proactive: a ripple across the country

The systemic risk

- Each council acting rationally in isolation, to protect its own budget, produces an irrational national outcome: the reactive response, repeated across London's boroughs.
- Receiving authorities learn of placements only after arrival, leaving Revenues and Benefits to firefight liability, vulnerability and welfare needs.
- The ripple spreads outward: northern and coastal towns absorb London's displaced demand, then reach their own affordability and capacity limits.
- A proactive model would notify, fund and plan placements across boundaries, designed in through LGR rather than discovered after the event.

Questions for the panel

- **How do we surface out of area placements before households arrive, not weeks later?**
- **Who should carry the financial responsibility, the placing authority or the receiving one?**
- **What should LGR build in to stop the needs of one council rippling uncontrollably into another?**

Source: *The Guardian*, 'Vulnerable families illegally "dumped" hundreds of miles away by London councils', 7 June 2026; GOV.UK homelessness placement statistics to March 2025.



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.

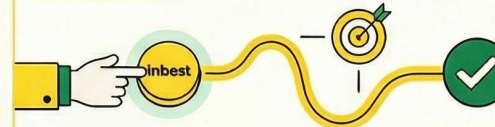
The CRF Challenge



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.



Welcome to a
new era of
council tax
deduction
schemes

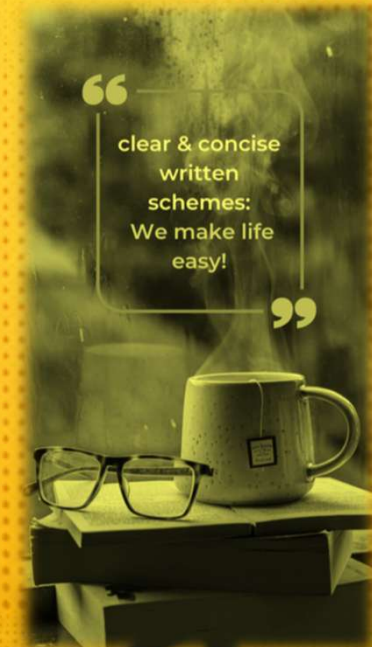
Bristol City
Council Case
Study

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION CLEAR & CONCISE

Let us make it simple for you

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

www.visionarynetwork.co.uk



For more information email info@visionarynetwork.co.uk

The Guardian

Out of area homelessness placements and cross council service pressures

Core facts and policy concern

- A Guardian investigation reports that vulnerable homeless families, including women fleeing abuse, are being moved hundreds of miles from London to cheaper accommodation in other parts of England.
- The number of homeless people forced out of London has doubled in the past two years.
- Families have reportedly been moved to areas including Bolton, Blackpool, Hartlepool and County Durham.
- Official figures suggest around 1,300 homeless households were moved out of London by councils in the year to March 2025, up from 670 in the year to March 2023.
- Housing charities argue the true figure may be higher, because some private rented placements may not appear in official statistics.
- The article reports concerns that some councils are not properly notifying receiving authorities when homeless households are placed outside their area.
- Under housing law, councils must, so far as reasonably practicable, secure accommodation within their own area; if that is not possible, accommodation should be as close as possible, and the receiving authority must be notified.
- Several London councils have reportedly been found by the High Court to have acted unlawfully in recent years.
- Charities and MPs describe the practice as harmful, particularly for refugees, families with limited English, women fleeing abuse and households with existing support needs.

The Guardian

Out of area homelessness placements and cross council service pressures

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits teams in receiving areas may see increased demand from households arriving with no local support network, limited documentation and urgent income, housing and welfare needs.
- Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit where still applicable, DHP, local welfare and crisis support may all be affected by sudden out of area placements.
- There is a timeliness risk where households arrive without prior notification, making it harder to verify liability, tenancy details, income, vulnerability and household composition.
- Customer impact may be severe: disrupted schooling, loss of support networks, digital exclusion, language barriers, health needs and safeguarding concerns.
- Backlogs may increase if cases require manual intervention, inter authority checks, safeguarding referrals, translation support or complex evidence gathering.
- Fraud and error risk may rise where receiving councils are not told placements have occurred, or where responsibilities between placing and receiving authorities are unclear.
- Compliance risks include failure to identify vulnerability, poor signposting, delayed CTR or welfare decisions, and weak links between housing, benefits, safeguarding and debt advice.
- Digital and process changes may be needed, including flags for out of area placements, standard referral routes from housing teams, and prompts for DHP, CTR, local welfare and safeguarding checks.
- Revenue collection may be affected if vulnerable households are placed in local accommodation but cannot access timely benefit, advice or support.
- Actions: create a cross-service protocol for out of area placements, require early notification from housing, track cases from placing authorities, and build welfare checks into Revenues and Benefits workflows.



Social housing shortfall, homelessness pressure and local welfare impact

Core facts and policy concern

- Shelter research suggests it would take 119 years to clear England's social housing waiting lists at the current rate of new social home delivery.
- More than 1.3 million households are on waiting lists for a social home.
- Only 12,198 new social homes were built in England last year by councils, housing associations and private developers.
- This equates to an average of 110 households waiting for every new social home delivered.
- Shelter argues that low social housing delivery is driving prolonged homelessness, temporary accommodation use and family instability.
- New social rent homes built annually have fallen by 64% over the last 15 years.
- Homeless households in temporary accommodation have increased by 155% over the same period.
- In 20% of council areas, no social homes were built in the last two years.
- Shelter links low council housebuilding to a £29bn housing debt passed to local authorities in 2012.
- The government says its Social Housing Bill and £39bn Social and Affordable Homes Programme are intended to support more social and affordable housing.



Social housing shortfall, homelessness pressure and local welfare impact

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits should expect sustained pressure from homelessness, temporary accommodation and low-income households facing insecure housing.
- Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit where applicable, DHP, local welfare and crisis support may see higher demand as households wait longer for affordable secure housing.
- Temporary accommodation cases are often more complex, with frequent changes of address, rent liability issues, overlapping benefit claims and evidence delays.
- Customer contact may increase where households face rent shortfalls, council tax arrears, moving costs, furniture needs, school disruption and digital exclusion.
- Backlogs and timeliness may be affected if housing instability leads to repeated reassessments, missing evidence, urgent DHP requests and manual casework.
- Fraud and error risk may increase where address changes, temporary accommodation charges, household composition and liability dates are not reported or processed promptly.
- Revenue collection may be affected if more residents are in financial hardship, temporary accommodation, or unable to sustain council tax payment arrangements.
- Compliance risks include delayed benefit decisions, poor vulnerability identification, weak links between housing and welfare teams, and insufficient evidence of affordability decisions.
- Digital and process changes should include stronger data sharing between housing, CTR, HB, DHP, local welfare and debt recovery teams.
- Actions: monitor temporary accommodation caseloads, review DHP policy pressure, strengthen change of address processes, and include housing insecurity in vulnerability and affordability assessments.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP consultation on releasing Defined Benefit pension scheme surpluses

Policy change and core facts

- DWP has launched a consultation on draft regulations allowing trustees of well funded Defined Benefit pension schemes to release surplus funds to sponsoring employers.
- The consultation runs until 2 September 2026, with implementation expected in April 2027.
- The change forms part of the Pension Schemes Act 2026 surplus flexibilities.
- Around four in five DB schemes are now reported to be in surplus, with aggregate surplus estimated at around £160bn.
- The proposed rules would replace the current buyout funding threshold with a requirement that schemes are fully funded on a low dependency basis before surplus can be released.
- Trustees would also need to show the scheme is expected to remain fully funded on a low dependency basis for three years after any surplus release.
- Trustees would need actuarial assessment, agreement of a provisional payment with the employer, member notification at least three months before payment, and final actuarial certification.
- Trustees must consider how members could benefit from any surplus release.
- The Pensions Regulator would need to be notified of surplus releases, including scheme assets, liabilities, employer payments and member benefits.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP consultation on releasing Defined Benefit pension scheme surpluses

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- No direct operational impact on Revenues and Benefits is evidenced in the article.
- Potential indirect customer impact: pension surplus payments, if made to members, may affect household income assessments where local welfare or means tested support requires pension income or capital to be declared.
- Revenues and Benefits teams should monitor whether HMRC and DWP confirm how direct surplus payments to members will be treated for tax and benefit purposes.
- Local welfare, CTR and discretionary support policies may need checking once final rules are published, particularly where pension lump sums or increased pension income affect entitlement.
- Customer communications and evidence requirements may need updating if pension schemes begin issuing new types of surplus payment from April 2027.
- Fraud and error risk may arise if residents do not understand that pension surplus payments could be declarable for local support assessments.
- No immediate backlog, recovery, collection or digital process impact is evidenced.
- Action: note the consultation deadline, monitor final regulations and HMRC treatment, and review local policy guidance once implementation detail is confirmed



National Audit Office

Rising essential bill debt and low awareness of support

Core facts and customer impact

- UK households owed more than £7bn to water, broadband and energy companies by March 2025.
- The National Audit Office expects total debt to have increased since then.
- Household energy debt has risen by 118% since 2021, following the sharp increase in energy prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
- Many customers in debt do not know that support is available from essential service providers.
- Only one third of eligible broadband customers were aware of social tariffs.
- Only 39% of water customers struggling to pay knew that social tariffs were available.
- Social tariffs can offer cheaper essential services, including water, energy and broadband, although schemes vary by supplier.
- Awareness of the Priority Services Register remains low, despite its role in identifying customers with extra communication, access or safety needs.
- Customer hardship is worsening, with some pensioners and low income households unable to make utility credit or pension income stretch to the next payment date.
- Billing errors, poor contact routes and weak promotion of support are pushing some households further into debt.



National Audit Office

Rising essential bill debt and low awareness of support

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits should treat essential bill debt as a growing indicator of household financial distress.
- Increased utility, broadband and water arrears are likely to increase demand for local welfare support, discretionary crisis help, debt signposting and Council Tax Reduction advice.
- Frontline teams may see more customers presenting with multiple debts, including council tax arrears alongside energy, water and telecoms debt.
- Low awareness of social tariffs creates a practical advice gap; staff should be equipped to signpost customers to supplier support, social tariffs and the Priority Services Register.
- There is a customer service risk where vulnerable residents are struggling but have not told suppliers, or do not know what evidence or contact route to use.
- There may be indirect pressure on council tax collection if essential bill repayments reduce disposable income.
- Recovery teams should consider whether essential bill debt is a vulnerability marker when assessing affordability and repayment arrangements.
- Digital and process changes may be needed to include prompts about utility debt, social tariffs and priority services in welfare, CTR, debt recovery and discretionary support conversations.
- Fraud and error risks are not directly evidenced, but financial stress may increase reporting failures, missed evidence requests and non-engagement.
- Action: update staff briefing notes, strengthen referral/signposting pathways, and include essential bill debt in affordability and vulnerability assessments



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP fraud and error reviews across major benefits

Core facts and policy concern

- DWP will review a sample of claims across five major benefits during 2026/27 to check for fraud, claimant error and official error.
- Benefits in scope are Universal Credit, Housing Benefit for pension age claimants, Pension Credit, State Pension and Personal Independence Payment.
- Results from the 2026/27 review programme are expected to be published in May 2027.
- The review forms part of DWP's annual fraud and error measurement programme, rather than individual fraud investigation activity.
- DWP's fraud and error statistics estimate overpayments and underpayments across benefits administered by DWP and local authorities.
- The latest published DWP figures for 2025/26 show total benefit overpayments of 3.2%, equivalent to £9.9bn.
- Total underpayments remained at 0.4%, equivalent to £1.2bn.
- DWP says fraud, claimant error and official error rates remained broadly similar to the previous year.
- The article links the review to wider government activity on benefit fraud, error, bank account checks and recovery powers.
- Campaign groups and disability organisations have raised concerns about privacy, surveillance and the risk of treating vulnerable claimants as suspect.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP fraud and error reviews across major benefits

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits teams should expect continued scrutiny of fraud, error and subsidy risks, especially in Housing Benefit and passported local support.
- Housing Benefit for pension age claimants remains directly relevant to local authority administration, including accuracy, evidence standards, change reporting and quality assurance.
- Council Tax Reduction may be indirectly affected where DWP data, passported benefit status, income, capital or household composition changes flow into local entitlement.
- Fraud and error reviews may increase customer contact where claimants are asked for evidence, respond late, or need support understanding DWP requests.
- Timeliness and backlogs could be affected if local teams receive more ATLAS notifications, changes of circumstance, appeals, reconsiderations or linked enquiries.
- Customer impact may be significant for pension age and disabled claimants if reviews cause confusion, anxiety, payment disruption or increased evidence burdens.
- Compliance risk includes incorrect local decisions where DWP award changes are not processed promptly or where staff do not distinguish between suspected fraud, claimant error and official error.
- Digital and process changes may be needed to strengthen prompts for capital, living arrangements, abroad indicators, housing costs and household composition.
- Recovery teams should distinguish fraud, claimant error and official error when explaining debts, arranging recovery and assessing vulnerability.
- Actions: review HB quality assurance checks, monitor DWP data flows, brief staff on the 2026/27 review benefits, and ensure CTR and local welfare processes respond promptly to DWP award changes.



Northern Ireland Audit Office

Social housing tenancy fraud and the need for stronger data and audit controls

- Social housing tenancy fraud and misuse cost Northern Ireland an estimated £8m in 2024/25.
- The Northern Ireland Audit Office says the full extent of the problem is still unknown.
- Reliable estimates are lacking because data collection and reporting remain inconsistent.
- Concerns about the need for accurate figures were raised more than a decade ago.
- Some progress has been made since the 2013 NIAO report and the subsequent Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee inquiry.
- Positive developments include the creation of a Tenancy Fraud Unit within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
- Dedicated reporting channels now allow members of the public to report suspected tenancy fraud.
- However, the Comptroller and Auditor General says significant further work is needed to address earlier NIAO and PAC recommendations.
- Northern Ireland has around 134,000 social homes, managed mainly by the Housing Executive, with the remainder managed by registered housing associations.
- Estimates suggest up to 4,000 properties may be affected by tenancy fraud or misuse, but only 284 homes were recovered in 2024/25.

Local Government Association

Local government pay dispute and workforce pressure

- Local government unions have rejected the 2026/27 pay offer for local authority employees.
- The National Joint Council for Local Government Services Trade Union Side said members were “dismayed and angered” by the offer.
- The employers’ offer was a 3.3% pay increase.
- The unions had submitted a pay claim in November 2025 seeking at least £3,000 or 10%, whichever is greater.
- The unions also called for a minimum pay rate of £15 an hour.
- The National Employers described the 3.3% offer as full and final.
- The Local Government Association said the offer was fair to both employees and employers.
- The LGA said it had hoped for a quick settlement, but that the union rejection now makes that unlikely.
- The unions are calling for meaningful negotiations as a matter of urgency.
- The dispute reflects continuing concern about the loss of real pay value across local government over the last 16 years.

Local Government Association

Local government pay dispute and workforce pressure

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits services may face increased workforce uncertainty if the pay dispute leads to prolonged negotiations, industrial action or reduced staff morale.
- Resourcing risk is significant because R&B services already rely on experienced staff for complex benefit, local taxation, recovery and welfare decisions.
- Recruitment and retention may become harder if local government pay remains uncompetitive against other sectors.
- Service delivery could be affected through slower processing, weaker telephone coverage, reduced recovery activity and less capacity for project work.
- Timeliness and backlogs may worsen if staffing gaps coincide with peak billing, annual CTR uprating, year end, benefit changes or local government reorganisation work.
- Compliance risk may increase if stretched teams have less capacity for checking, quality assurance, appeals, subsidy control, recovery safeguards and vulnerability assessment.
- Fraud and error risk may rise where staff turnover, inexperience or workload pressure weakens evidence checks and decision accuracy.
- Customer impact may include longer waiting times, delayed awards, slower responses to hardship, more arrears and reduced availability of specialist advice.
- Financial position may be affected by increased pay costs if a higher settlement is agreed, or by collection and performance risks if workforce pressures are not managed.
- Actions: review workforce resilience, identify critical R&B tasks, protect statutory deadlines, assess industrial action contingency plans and model the budget impact of different pay outcomes.

Ageing
population:
whole system
planning and local
welfare impact

Core facts and policy direction

- Public Finance reports that policymakers in England are being urged not to treat the ageing population as a separate policy issue, but as part of a wider national conversation about public services, housing, health, work, welfare and public finance.
- The central message is that ageing should be built into mainstream policy design, rather than handled as a narrow adult social care or pensions issue.
- England's older population is projected to grow significantly, with the number of people aged 65 and over expected to increase by 3.3 million over the next 20 years.
- The Health Foundation has warned that the number of people aged over 85 in England is expected to double to 2.6 million over the next 25 years.
- The ageing trend will increase demand across local services, including adult social care, housing, accessible transport, public health, advice, debt support, digital inclusion and community infrastructure.
- The key decision challenge for government and councils is whether to invest early in prevention, adaptation and joined up support, or continue to absorb rising crisis led demand.
- The issue is not only cost pressure; older people are also workers, carers, volunteers, taxpayers and community anchors, so policy should recognise contribution as well as need.

**Ageing
population:
whole system
planning and local
welfare impact**

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services should expect ageing to affect local taxation and local welfare through changes in income, household composition, disability, bereavement, caring responsibilities, property occupation and vulnerability.
- Service delivery risks include increased demand for Council Tax Reduction, pension age CTR, disability related disregards, single person discount changes, exemptions, bereavement related account changes and discretionary support.
- Customer impact may be significant where older residents face digital exclusion, poor health, cognitive decline, bereavement, low income, fuel poverty or difficulty navigating evidence requirements.
- Timeliness and backlogs may be affected if services see more complex enquiries involving appointees, powers of attorney, carers, care homes, hospital discharge, property disregards and mixed age households.
- Compliance risks include correct handling of vulnerability, data protection, mental capacity, equality duties, recovery decisions, safeguarding referrals and clear audit trails.
- Fraud and error risks may arise from unreported deaths, undeclared changes in household membership, incorrect discounts or exemptions, and misunderstanding of pension, disability or care related income.
- Financial risks include pressure on council tax collection, higher administration costs, greater demand for local welfare support, reduced recovery prospects for vulnerable households and wider pressure from adult social care budgets.
- Actions for councils include demographic mapping, age sensitive customer journeys, staff guidance, proactive data matching, clearer evidence checklists, assisted digital support and stronger links between Revenues and Benefits, adult social care, housing and advice services.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Youth Guarantee, employment support and local welfare demand

Core facts and policy direction

- Marc Bolland, former Chief Executive of Marks & Spencer, Morrisons and senior Heineken executive, has been appointed Lead Non-Executive Director at DWP.
- His role is to convene senior business leaders and support delivery of the Government's Youth Guarantee.
- The Youth Guarantee aims to ensure every young person aged 18 to 21 has access to employment, training or education.
- The appointment follows Alan Milburn's interim review into youth inactivity, which identified the scale and complexity of the youth unemployment crisis.
- Movement to Work, founded and chaired by Bolland, has helped create more than 200,000 opportunities for 16- to 30-year-olds facing barriers to work.
- The Government says the Youth Guarantee is backed by £2.5 billion investment and is intended to support 1 million young people, including those with disabilities or health conditions.
- The approach places business, charities, disabled people's organisations and young people at the centre of policy delivery.
- Early intervention is a central theme, including earlier support for children and young people with SEND, speech delays and behavioural risks.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Youth Guarantee, employment support and local welfare demand

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Youth unemployment and inactivity may increase pressure on Revenues and Benefits through higher demand for Council Tax Reduction, hardship support, DHPs, debt advice and income maximisation.
- Services may see more complex household assessments where young adults move in and out of work, training, education, Universal Credit or informal family support.
- Customer contact may rise if young people and their households need help understanding benefit entitlement, council tax liability, non dependant deductions, discounts, exemptions or local welfare support.
- Timeliness and backlogs may be affected if councils receive more changes of circumstances linked to unstable work, short term placements, apprenticeships, training schemes or health related barriers to employment.
- Fraud and error risks may increase where earnings, training status, household membership or non dependant circumstances are not reported promptly.
- Compliance risks include the need to identify vulnerability, disability, mental health issues and SEND related barriers before taking recovery or enforcement action.
- Financial risks include weaker council tax collection in affected households, higher demand for discretionary support and increased administrative costs if local systems are not aligned with employment support pathways.
- Key action: Revenues and Benefits teams should link youth employment policy to local welfare, CTR design, recovery policy, vulnerability procedures, data sharing, advice partnerships and early intervention work.

RESTART SCHEME

Restart Scheme: employment outcomes and local welfare impacts

Core facts and performance position

- Restart provides intensive and tailored employment support for Universal Credit claimants in the Intensive Work Search regime.
- The scheme was launched in June 2021 and is delivered in England and Wales by eight providers across 12 Contract Package Areas.
- Eligibility has expanded over time and currently includes UC claimants in the Intensive Work Search regime who have claimed UC continuously for at least six months.
- Participants receive up to 12 months of support, with providers paid a service fee and additional payments for achieved job outcomes.
- By the end of April 2026, 1.2 million people had been referred to Restart, with 1.1 million starts on the scheme.
- 430,000 participants had achieved first earnings from employment, while 280,000 had achieved a job outcome.
- Job outcomes are below the Tender Performance Level, at 88% of the contractual expectation, but above the Minimum Performance Level, at 118%.
- DWP cautions that outcome rates should be interpreted carefully because claimant characteristics, eligibility changes and labour market conditions all affect performance

RESTART SCHEME

Restart Scheme: employment outcomes and local welfare impacts

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Restart is relevant to Revenues and Benefits because movement into work affects Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit legacy cases, council tax liability, non dependant deductions, overpayments and recovery.
- Increased employment may reduce welfare dependency and improve collection prospects, but only where income changes are reported and processed promptly.
- Fluctuating earnings, short term work, self employment and delayed HMRC earnings data may increase reassessments, avoidable contact and evidence queries.
- Services may see more changes of circumstances where claimants start work, leave work, move between low paid jobs or reach sustained employment thresholds.
- Timeliness risks include CTR recalculation delays, overpayment creation, under award of support, recovery disputes and increased pressure on customer contact.
- Fraud and error risks arise where employment income, household changes or self employment are not declared, or where local records do not match DWP or HMRC data.
- Customer impact may be positive if Restart improves household income, but negative if benefit adjustments, recovery action or council tax bills are poorly explained.
- Councils should align local welfare, CTR and recovery processes with employment support pathways, with clear guidance on earnings evidence, fluctuating income and vulnerability

The logo for the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), featuring the lowercase letters 'ico.' in a bold, dark blue font.

Information Commissioner's Office

A large green speech bubble graphic with a white outline, containing the text 'Information Commissioner suspension: governance, data protection and regulatory continuity'.

Information Commissioner suspension: governance, data protection and regulatory continuity

Core facts and governance position

- Information Commissioner John Edwards has been suspended from his duties after an independent investigation into unspecified workplace issues found “a case to answer”.
- Edwards had already voluntarily stepped back from his duties on 26 February 2026 while the investigation took place.
- The ICO said it cannot provide further details at this stage, to protect the parties involved and the integrity of the process.
- The Information Commissioner is accountable to Parliament and is not employed by the ICO, so next steps will be determined by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.
- During any period when the Information Commissioner cannot act, Deputy Commissioners take on non delegable responsibilities under the ICO Scheme of Delegation.
- Deputy Commissioner and Chief Executive Paul Arnold will undertake those responsibilities and has been designated Temporary Acting Accounting Officer by DSIT.
- The ICO has stressed continuity of regulatory work and the need to maintain a safe and supportive environment for staff




GMB

U N I O N

Council tax arrears, court action and recovery reform

Core facts and policy issue

- GMB research found that at least 1.43 million people were summoned to court over unpaid council tax in 2024/25, based on FOI responses from nearly 200 billing authorities.
- The true total is likely to be higher, as not all councils responded within the statutory deadline.
- The investigation also identified at least 4.6 million council tax accounts in arrears, with more than 3.2 million subject to debt management proceedings.
- Councils are collectively owed at least £4.6bn in unpaid council tax.
- GMB described the figures as evidence of a “broken” council tax system and called for wider reform of council funding, council tax banding and business rates.
- The findings come alongside Government proposals to reform council tax administration and enforcement in England, including more time before formal enforcement and a cap on liability order costs.
- From April 2027, households in England are expected to have at least 63 days after a reminder before liability order action can begin.
- The reforms also include default 12-month instalments, while retaining the option for households to pay over 10 months

The GMB logo consists of the letters 'GMB' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within an orange square.The UNION logo consists of the word 'UNION' in a white, sans-serif font, centered within a black rectangular box.A large green rectangular box with a white border, containing the title text. The box has a small white triangle pointing downwards at the bottom center.

Council tax arrears, court action and recovery reform

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services face a direct operational impact because council tax recovery, arrears management, CTR entitlement, vulnerability handling and customer contact all sit within the same service area.
- High arrears volumes increase pressure on recovery teams, customer services, court preparation, liability order processing, enforcement agent referrals, complaints and member enquiries.
- There is a risk that recovery activity becomes process driven rather than risk based if teams lack capacity to distinguish between “can’t pay”, “won’t pay”, vulnerability, dispute and avoidance.
- Customer impact is significant: court summonses, liability order costs and enforcement action can escalate hardship quickly, particularly for low-income households already receiving or needing Council Tax Reduction.
- Timeliness and backlogs may worsen if staff are diverted into recovery work, repayment negotiations, vulnerability reviews and complaints.
- Fraud and error risks include incorrect liability, missed CTR entitlement, unreported household changes, duplicate recovery action and failure to update accounts where income or vulnerability has changed.
- Compliance risks include proportionality, equality duties, vulnerability assessment, fair treatment, evidence of engagement before enforcement and correct application of any new statutory safeguards.
- Financially, councils must balance collection performance against affordability, public trust and recovery costs; poor practice may increase complaints, failed enforcement, write offs and avoidable hardship.
- Key action: councils should review recovery policies, CTR take up, reminder wording, vulnerability flags, repayment plan rules, court cost levels and pre-enforcement intervention before the April 2027 changes.

Quote of the Week

"I was to learn later in life that, perhaps because we are so good at organizing, we tend as a nation to meet any new situation by reorganizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization." – Charlton Ogburn

Charlton Ogburn Jr. was an American writer and former U.S. Army intelligence officer best known for *The Marauders* and his later advocacy of the Oxfordian theory of Shakespeare authorship. His wide-ranging career spanned military service, diplomacy, and a prolific body of memoirs and non-fiction that helped revive public debate about Shakespeare's identity.



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 Councils and Housing Network



Sideway View




AI Watch



AI investment boom, adoption pressures and public service implications

Core facts and strategic risks

- AI investment is accelerating rapidly, driven by major technology firms, infrastructure spending and investor expectations.
- US stock market growth has become heavily concentrated in AI related companies, with 41 AI related stocks reported to account for nearly half of the S&P 500's market value.
- Goldman Sachs estimates AI spending, including datacentres and chips, will rise from \$765bn in 2026 to \$1.6tn in 2031.
- Companies are adopting AI quickly, with McKinsey reporting use rising from 33% in 2023 to nearly 80% now.
- Consumer adoption is also very high, with ChatGPT reported to have reached 1bn monthly active users.
- The key unresolved issue is whether AI produces enough measurable productivity gain to justify the scale of spending.
- Costs of AI use are rising, particularly where organisations move from basic chatbot use to agentic tools and high-volume token consumption.
- Datacentre capacity, energy supply, grid expansion and environmental impact are major constraints.
- AI capabilities are improving quickly, especially in coding and task completion, but large-scale workforce impact has not yet fully materialised.
- The article warns of bubble risk, high valuations, uncertain returns and possible economic consequences if AI investment slows.



AI investment boom, adoption pressures and public service implications

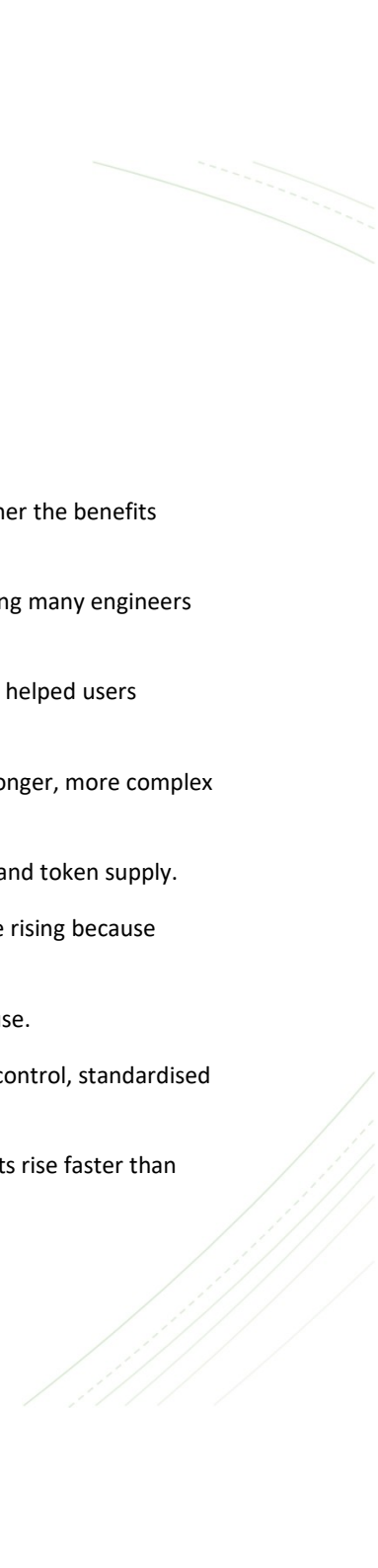
Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions


- Revenues and Benefits should expect increasing corporate pressure to use AI for productivity, automation, customer contact and workflow redesign.
- Potential use cases include evidence checking, correspondence drafting, call summaries, backlog triage, quality assurance, fraud and error prompts, and management reporting.
- Service delivery gains are only likely if AI is embedded into end to end processes, not used simply as an add on writing tool.
- Resourcing assumptions should be cautious; AI may reduce avoidable manual work, but it will also create demand for governance, checking, staff training and process redesign.
- Compliance risk is significant where AI is used in decision making, benefits assessment, recovery action, vulnerability identification or fraud related activity without human oversight.
- Customer impact may be positive if AI improves speed, consistency and plain English communication, but harmful if it creates automated barriers, poor explanations or unchallenged errors.
- Timeliness and backlog benefits are possible, especially in evidence handling and correspondence, but only if local data, workflow rules and escalation routes are reliable.
- Fraud and error controls may improve through better pattern spotting and quality checks, but weak implementation could create new error routes at scale.
- Digital change will need clear policy: what AI may do, what officers must check, what must remain human, and how outputs are recorded.
- Action: identify a small number of safe high value use cases, set governance rules, train staff, measure productivity honestly, and avoid assuming AI savings before benefits are evidenced



Rising AI costs and pressure to prove return on investment

Core facts and strategic concern

- Organisations that invested heavily in AI tools are increasingly questioning whether the benefits justify the cost.
 - Microsoft is reportedly reducing direct use of Anthropic's Claude Code and moving many engineers towards GitHub Copilot CLI.
 - Claude Code became popular with developers and non-specialist staff because it helped users complete coding tasks that would previously have needed technical expertise.
 - The main cost pressure is token usage, particularly as agentic AI tools carry out longer, more complex tasks.
 - Anthropic has changed its subscription model twice in 2026 to manage demand and token supply.
 - Gartner warns that, even if individual token prices fall, total AI bills may continue rising because agentic AI requires high levels of compute.
 - Uber is reported to be struggling to prove a clear return on investment from AI use.
 - The article indicates a shift from enthusiasm and experimentation towards cost control, standardised workflows and closer scrutiny of productivity gains.
 - The wider risk is that AI adoption stalls or becomes more tightly controlled if costs rise faster than evidenced service improvement.
- 



Rising AI costs and pressure to prove return on investment

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions


- Revenues and Benefits should avoid assuming that AI will automatically reduce costs or staffing pressure.
- AI use should be tied to clear service outcomes, such as faster evidence handling, reduced avoidable contact, better quality checking, improved correspondence and backlog reduction.
- Token based or consumption-based pricing creates budget risk if staff use AI frequently without controls, reporting or agreed use cases.
- Service delivery benefits are most likely where AI supports defined workflows, not where it is used informally by individual officers without governance.
- Resourcing plans should include the hidden costs of AI: staff training, checking, system integration, data protection review, procurement, quality assurance and management oversight.
- Compliance risk is significant if AI outputs affect benefit decisions, recovery action, vulnerability assessments or fraud and error work without proper human review.
- Customer impact could be positive if AI improves speed and clarity, but negative if cost cutting leads to reduced contact routes, poorly checked letters or automated errors.
- Fraud and error controls may benefit from AI assisted checking, but only if outputs are auditable, explainable and regularly tested.
- Digital and process changes should include usage caps, approved tools, audit trails, prompt guidance and rules for what must never be delegated to AI.
- Action: start with small measurable pilots, track cashable and non cashable benefits, set usage controls, and require evidence before building AI savings into budgets



AI regulatory sandbox: legal services, assurance and public sector adoption

Core facts and policy direction


- The legal sector will be the first participant in the Government's AI advisory "sandbox" programme.
- The programme is intended to accelerate development and deployment of AI products and services while maintaining quality and public trust.
- The "AI Growth Lab" will open to applications from legal technology companies, legal services providers and conveyancing firms in summer 2026.
- The programme will bring together regulators including the Council for Licensed Conveyancers, Solicitors Regulation Authority, Information Commissioner's Office and Legal Services Board.
- Regulators will work with innovators to identify cross regulatory challenges, unintended barriers and practical models of AI oversight.
- The SRA said the initiative will allow AI products to be tested responsibly within existing regulatory frameworks.
- The ICO stressed the importance of helping firms navigate data protection requirements while ensuring that people's rights are respected.
- The policy signal is clear: government wants AI adoption to move faster, but within clearer assurance, regulation and accountability arrangements.



AI wealth gap: adoption, capability and inequality risk

Core facts and strategic issue

- The Tom Matthews-EI argues that AI may widen existing economic and skills gaps, because those with higher income, education, time and workplace permission are more likely to adopt AI early.
- He cites Pew Research findings showing higher AI awareness among people with higher education levels, with 55% of college graduates and 60% of postgraduates saying they are familiar with current AI trends, compared with 38% of those with a high school education.
- The central risk is not that AI creates inequality from scratch, but that it accelerates advantages already held by better resourced individuals and organisations.
- Matthews-EI contrasts optimistic and cautious economic views: AI may create new opportunities, but the gains may not be evenly distributed.
- Daron Acemoglu's 2024 paper suggests AI's macroeconomic effect may be "nontrivial, but modest", with total factor productivity gains of no more than 0.71% over 10 years, and possibly below 0.55%.
- Matthews-EI highlights a practical behavioural point: people who benefit most from AI tend to experiment, iterate and use it as part of a workflow, rather than expecting a perfect answer first time.
- The positive case is that AI could also reduce barriers, including access to learning, advice, business support and productivity tools, if access and confidence are wide



AI wealth gap: adoption, capability and inequality risk

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services may face an internal AI capability gap between staff who use AI confidently and those who avoid it, affecting productivity, consistency and service redesign.
- Councils with better data, systems, training and governance may move ahead faster, widening performance gaps between authorities.
- Customer impact is significant: residents with low digital confidence may be less able to use AI enabled self service, online evidence tools, budgeting support or benefits guidance.
- Service delivery risks include creating processes that work well for digitally confident residents but increase exclusion, avoidable contact or errors for vulnerable households.
- Resourcing implications include the need for staff training, safe prompt practice, quality assurance, assisted digital support and clear rules on when AI can and cannot be used.
- Compliance risks include equality duties, data protection, explainability, audit trails, accessibility, vulnerability handling and avoiding automated assumptions in statutory decisions.
- Fraud and error work may benefit from AI assisted pattern spotting, but only if officers remain responsible for evidence, judgement and decision making.
- Financial impacts are not quantified in the article, but likely pressures include software costs, training, governance, integration, assurance and the risk of unequal productivity gains.
- Key action: treat AI adoption as an inclusion and workforce development issue, not only a technology upgrade.



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LGR & Finance Watch



Fiscal devolution roadmap: implications for local taxation and welfare

Core facts, decisions and policy direction


- Re:State welcomes the Chancellor's commitment to develop a fiscal devolution roadmap ahead of the Autumn 2026 Budget.
- The paper argues that England remains highly fiscally centralised and that devolution will not deliver its full growth benefits without meaningful fiscal autonomy.
- The roadmap should provide real financial independence and policy autonomy, not simply repackage existing grant funding.
- Funding should shift from central grants towards locally generated, retained or raised revenues.
- Mayoral Strategic Authorities should have greater discretion over devolved revenues, with less departmental ring fencing and fewer Whitehall siloes.
- Fiscal powers should be linked to local growth, including allowing places to retain a significant share of revenues generated by infrastructure, reform or higher employment.
- The paper stresses the need for fair equalisation, safeguards against shocks and proportional risk sharing between government and devolved authorities.
- Accountability should shift from upward reporting to Whitehall towards stronger local scrutiny, including possible Local Public Accounts Committees and local accounting officer arrangements



Fiscal devolution roadmap: implications for local taxation and welfare

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services may become more strategically important if local tax bases, business rates retention and revenue administration become part of wider fiscal devolution.
- Service delivery impacts could include closer links between council tax, business rates, local welfare, employment support, economic growth and regional investment planning.
- Resourcing risks may increase if councils and strategic authorities need stronger analytical capacity, forecasting, revenue modelling and policy design capability.
- Performance risk will depend on whether fiscal devolution simplifies funding or creates new reporting, forecasting and reconciliation demands.
- Compliance risks include correct governance of locally retained revenues, audit trails, equalisation arrangements, safety nets, local accountability and transparent decision making.
- Customer impacts are indirect but important, as local fiscal decisions may affect funding for discretionary support, advice, prevention, debt support and welfare linked employment interventions.
- Fraud and error controls may need to adapt if more local revenue streams, retained growth incentives or locally designed schemes sit alongside existing taxation and welfare duties.
- Financial risks include revenue volatility, unequal tax bases, weaker areas being left behind, unfunded capability demands and over optimistic assumptions about local growth.
- Key action: councils should ensure Revenues and Benefits is represented in devolution planning, especially on tax base analysis, business rates, CTR, hardship support, collection risk and revenue forecasting



Westmorland and Furness faces Section 114 risk without major savings

Core facts and decisions

- Westmorland and Furness Council has been warned that a Section 114 notice could become “inevitable” unless significant savings are delivered.
- Officers report that the council must identify and deliver around £40m of efficiencies over the next three years.
- The 2026/27 revenue budget already includes more than £30m of savings that must be delivered in-year to keep the budget balanced.
- An additional £5m of savings is reported as required in the current year.
- The council is relying on a transformation programme intended to deliver at least £15m of savings over three years.
- The transformation programme is expected to include service redesign, management restructuring, increased digital technology and changes to how residents access services.
- Officers warn that failure to deliver change could lead to widening budget deficits, reliance on short-term financial measures and reduced investment in services.
- A Section 114 notice would mean the council’s chief finance officer considers the authority unable to balance its budget; new spending commitments would be restricted while the council considers corrective action.



County councils challenge the rationale for Local Government Reorganisation decisions


Core facts and governance concern

- Three quarters of county councils due to be reorganised have signed a letter to the Prime Minister seeking the rationale behind recent reorganisation decisions.
- The letter was facilitated by the County Councils Network and signed by 16 councils.
- Councils argue that government decisions on 25 March 2026, creating 15 new unitary councils across four areas, do not align with the original criteria.
- The councils say they developed proposals in good faith against criteria based on scale, sustainability, service resilience and avoiding unnecessary fragmentation.
- They allege that the Government has departed from its own statutory criteria without clear and transparent reasoning.
- The letter calls for immediate disclosure of the evidence and departmental analysis behind decisions already taken.
- Councils argue that it is unreasonable to ask authorities to respond to decisions without seeing the analysis used to select the preferred options.
- The letter warns that smaller, fragmented unitary councils could be more costly, less stable and less effective than the current two-tier system.
- MHCLG rejects the councils' analysis and says reorganisation will save taxpayers' money, streamline services, support growth and improve public services.



New Forest rules out judicial review over Local Government Reorganisation

- New Forest District Council has decided not to pursue a judicial review of the Government's chosen Local Government Reorganisation model for Hampshire and the Solent.
- The Government selected "Option 1A" on 25 March 2026.
- Option 1A would split New Forest District Council's current area between two new unitary councils.
- Four unitary authorities will be created for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton overall.
- Isle of Wight Council will remain as a standalone authority.
- New Forest's preferred option was to be part of a new Mid Hampshire unitary authority.
- The council received independent legal advice from Jane Oldham of 11KBW and a further opinion from Richard Harwood KC of 39 Essex Chambers.
- The legal advice concluded that a judicial review had no realistic prospect of success and would not change the Government's decision.
- The council says it still fundamentally disagrees with the decision and will continue to object politically and through the transition process.
- A local campaign group, New Forest Together, disagrees with the council's position and says its own legal advice suggests credible grounds for challenge.



Suffolk issues pre action letter over Local Government Reorganisation

Core facts and governance concern

- Suffolk County Council has issued a pre action protocol letter challenging the Government's Local Government Reorganisation decision.
- The Government's March 2026 decision backed splitting Suffolk into three unitary authorities.
- Suffolk County Council's preferred option was a single unitary authority covering the whole county.
- The council argues that the Government's proposal goes beyond the Secretary of State's legal powers.
- It also argues that the statutory process has not been followed.
- Suffolk says the decision departs from the Government's own published criteria without clear justification.
- The council has asked the Secretary of State to explain how the decision was reached, including the analysis behind it.
- Suffolk has also asked the Government to withdraw the proposal.
- If the response is not satisfactory, the council may begin formal judicial review proceedings.
- MHCLG confirmed receipt of the pre action letter but said it would not comment on potential legal proceedings.



Devolution, prevention and the redesign of local public services

- Re:State argues that devolution could support a major shift in public services towards prevention.
- Public sector leaders broadly agree that prevention can improve outcomes and reduce long term costs, but few areas have achieved this shift in practice.
- The think tank identifies localism as one of the strongest opportunities for making prevention work.
- A new regional tier, unitary councils and realigned boundaries could create larger, more capable place based public bodies.
- Integrated settlements could allow combined authorities to move funding more flexibly between services.
- Bringing housing closer to other frontline services could improve visibility of residents' wider needs.
- Re:State warns against "false localism", where central government delivers through local bodies but keeps control highly centralised.
- The report argues that central government should avoid imposing uniform national models where local collaboration and innovation are needed.
- However, it also warns that local variation should not become an excuse for ignoring evidence or failing to replicate best practice.
- The report says the real test is whether NHS responsibilities are meaningfully devolved to regions, alongside neighbourhood health services co designed with local government.



Devolution, prevention and the redesign of local public services

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits should be seen as part of the preventative public service system, not only as a transactional local taxation and welfare service.
- Council Tax Reduction, discretionary support, debt recovery, local welfare, benefits advice and income maximisation can all identify early signs of financial hardship.
- Better integration with housing, health, social care and employment support could reduce crisis demand, arrears, homelessness risk and repeated customer contact.
- Service delivery may need to shift from isolated case processing to earlier identification, triage, referral and cross service intervention.
- Digital and process changes should support shared vulnerability indicators, warm referrals, common customer records and better use of local data.
- Resourcing may need to move towards preventative roles, data analysis, partnership working and specialist support for complex households.
- Performance measures should not focus only on speed and volume; they should also measure prevention, sustained payment, reduced repeat contact and improved outcomes.
- Compliance risks include data sharing, consent, accountability, decision making boundaries and ensuring statutory Revenues and Benefits functions remain accurate and timely.
- Fraud and error controls could improve through better cross service intelligence, but only with clear governance and audit trails.
- Actions: position Revenues and Benefits within local prevention strategies, map referral routes, identify high value early intervention triggers, and ensure R&B is represented in devolution and LGR design work.

A map of the Midlands region of England, showing counties such as Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire, and Staffordshire. A green callout box is overlaid on the left side of the map, containing the text 'Place based devolution, fiscal powers and prevention first public service reform'.

Place based devolution, fiscal powers and prevention first public service reform

- A new Localis study argues that English devolution frameworks should give greater weight to each area's local economic context.
- The report warns that a one size fits all approach could deepen regional inequalities and leave too much economic control with central government.
- Localis says decisions on how powers are shared between strategic authorities and councils should be finalised before Local Government Reorganisation settles.
- The study calls for a clear roadmap for fiscal devolution across all emerging strategic authorities.
- Proposed fiscal powers include revenue raising options, potentially through the distribution of income tax or VAT.
- Localis warns that prioritising mature or established authorities may reinforce existing regional imbalances.
- The report criticises the traditional deal first approach and continued top down control from Whitehall.
- Strategic authorities are seen as having a key convening role in aligning councils, ICBs, transport bodies and other local partners.
- The report recommends "whole place, prevention first delivery" as a route to public service reform.
- Stronger scrutiny and accountability arrangements are recommended, including minimum national standards for strategic authority scrutiny.

Local government reorganisation: criteria, legal challenge and transition risk



Core facts and decision position

- Government intends to stick to its local government reorganisation timetable.
- Local Government Minister Alison McGovern told MPs that decisions had been made in line with the Government's criteria, following a balancing exercise.
- MPs questioned the decision to break up some district and borough council areas, including New Forest District Council in Hampshire.
- The Minister said the objective is to create strong unitary councils within a devolved system, with every place having a plan for economic and social growth.
- At least four councils are pursuing legal challenges, with some arguing that Government departed from its own criteria.
- Sixteen county councils have asked the Prime Minister to publish the rationale behind LGR decisions, warning of risks to the sustainability of new councils.
- The Minister accepted that councils may challenge decisions, but stressed that pace remains important and the Government wants to avoid transition dragging on.
- The Minister described local government's current financial position as extremely challenging and uncertain

Local government reorganisation: criteria, legal challenge and transition risk



Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits will be a critical transition workstream because council tax, business rates, CTR, HB legacy work, recovery and local welfare must continue during structural change.
- Splitting districts creates added complexity around tax bases, property records, liabilities, arrears, appeals, recovery action, discounts, exemptions and customer ownership.
- Service delivery risk is heightened where existing teams, systems, contracts and data sets must be divided, merged or migrated while maintaining live collection and assessment work.
- Timeliness and backlogs may worsen if specialist staff are drawn into LGR planning without backfill or clear prioritisation.
- Compliance risks include lawful CTR scheme adoption, equality analysis, data protection, audit trails, financial governance, record retention and continuity of statutory decision making.
- Customer impact may include confusion about responsible authority, payment routes, bills, benefit notifications, recovery notices and local welfare access.
- Financial risks include disruption to collection, uncertainty over historic arrears, implementation costs, system integration costs and over optimistic assumptions about early savings.
- Key action: establish a dedicated Revenues and Benefits LGR plan covering systems, data, staffing, policy harmonisation, collection risk, customer communications and legal assurance.



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Legal Issues of Note

Social security fraud and error penalties: enforcement, compliance and local welfare implications

Core facts and policy position

- DWP's penalties policy covers enforcement action for suspected benefit fraud, including penalties and possible referral for criminal prosecution.
- It also covers penalties where an overpayment arises from claimant error.
- The policy applies to social security benefits including Universal Credit, State Pension, Pension Credit, ESA, PIP, DLA, Jobseeker's Allowance, bereavement benefits and Maternity Allowance.
- Local authorities remain responsible for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction schemes and outstanding issues from Council Tax Benefit, including their own local enforcement policies in those areas.
- DWP enforcement options for benefit fraud include prosecution referral, administrative penalties, recovery of proceeds of crime, loss of benefit penalties and recovery of overpayments.
- Claimant error cases may lead to a civil penalty and recovery of the overpayment.
- Criminal investigations are undertaken by DWP's Fraud and Error Service, with prosecution decisions made independently by CPS in England and Wales or COPFS in Scotland.
- DWP will normally refer more serious cases for prosecution, including cases involving overpayments of £5,000 or more, false identities, forged documents, organised fraud, abuse of trust or previous benefit fraud.

Social security fraud and error penalties: enforcement, compliance and local welfare implications

Impacts for Revenues and Benefits, financial position and operational risk

- Revenues and Benefits services need local enforcement policies that align with DWP principles while recognising local authority responsibilities for Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Council Tax Benefit legacy issues.
- Service delivery impacts include the need for clear triage between error, suspected fraud, compliance activity, overpayment recovery and prosecution referral.
- Resourcing pressures may arise where councils need experienced officers to investigate, make defensible decisions, prepare evidence and liaise with DWP, CPS or legal teams.
- Performance risks include delays in overpayment decisions, recovery action, CTR reassessments, appeals, complaints and fraud referrals if processes are not clearly separated.
- Compliance risks are high: councils must maintain audit trails, lawful decision making, correct use of powers, data protection compliance, equality considerations and fair treatment of vulnerable claimants.
- Customer impact will depend on clear communication, especially where an error has occurred but there is no evidence of fraud.
- Fraud and error controls should distinguish between deliberate misrepresentation, claimant negligence, delayed reporting, official error and genuine misunderstanding.
- Financial implications include recovery of overpayments, possible penalties, deterrence effects, investigation costs and the risk of unrecoverable debt where recovery is poorly timed or hardship is not considered.
- Key action: review local HB, CTR and legacy CTB enforcement policies to ensure they are current, proportionate, legally grounded and operationally understood



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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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Revenues Technical Manager (NEC)



Until 31st March 2027 | £351.00 per day (umbrella) | Hybrid

Location: Hybrid working (office attendance will be required in the South 2 days per week)

Job Purpose

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

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

What we're looking for:

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

- Be a skilled Northgate NEC user
- Minimum 5 years experience on both Business Rates and Council Tax
- IRRV qualification
- Detailed knowledge of Business Rates and Council Tax legislation
- Credible track record of achieving high collection rates on both Business Rates and Council Tax

To find out more or to apply

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Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits (Civica OPENRevenues)



12 weeks | £550 per day (umbrella) | Hybrid

We want someone who has previous experience of working at senior leadership level as this role is leading a high performing service, overseeing the full scope of statutory Revenues and Benefits functions including Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Benefits, Local Council Tax Support and the Council's Corporate Fraud Team.

There will be a strong focus on the collection fund, policy development and service transformation. The successful candidate will act as the Council's lead expert on Revenues and Benefits legislation, advising senior leadership and driving performance, compliance and financial stability across a large and complex service.

What we're looking for:

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

- Be a skilled Civica OPENRevenues user
- A proven track record of working at a senior level within a Revenues & Benefits Service
- A real understanding of how to apply digital tools within services.
- A strong communicator, negotiator and team player who's outcome-focused, tenacious, and always thinking broadly.
- Energy, resilience, and a focus on delivery – even when the going gets tough.
- Authenticity. Leading teams with integrity and treating others with respect.

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Revenues Officer (NEC)



3 months initially | £23 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

We are seeking multiple experienced Revenues Officers for a 3-month interim assignment. Successful candidates will support the administration and collection of council tax and business rates, using Civica OpenRevenues. This is a fast-paced role requiring accuracy, strong customer service skills, and prior experience within a local authority setting.

Key Responsibilities:

- Administer council tax and/or business rates accounts using Civica OpenRevenues
- Process moves, discounts, exemptions, and reliefs in line with legislation
- Handle customer enquiries via phone, email, and correspondence
- Support billing, recovery, and enforcement processes
- Maintain accurate records and ensure data integrity
- Liaise with internal departments and external agencies where required

What we're looking for:

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

- Experience using Civica OpenRevenues
- Experienced in the Billing, Collection and Recovery of Council Tax or Business Rates

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Revenues Officer (MRI/Academy)



3 months initially | £25 per hour (umbrella) | 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. Tasks such as:

- 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;
- Actioning Direct Debit recalls in order to understand the customer's circumstances and establish an appropriate payment method going forward;ating to sole and main residency;

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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Housing Benefit Officer (MRI/Academy)



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

Our good client is seeking a fully-remote, full-time Housing Benefit Officer for a period of 9-12 months.

The main job brief is to be assessing applications for HB/CTR

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 2006
- Be a skilled MRI/Capita One (Academy) user
- Good working knowledge of Microsoft Office applications (Word, Excel and Access)
- Knowledge of framework and priorities for local government benefits services

To find out more or to apply

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Housing Benefit Appeals Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)



3 months initially | £32 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

We are looking to recruit an experienced Appeals Officer to provide short-term specialist capacity to progress a defined set of Housing Benefit appeals relating to Specified Accommodation (Exempt Accommodation).

Many of the appeals are identical and will be progressed using a test case approach (i.e., preparing a sample of cases for submission to the First-tier Tribunal, with consistent submissions/bundles to support the wider cohort).

Due to the length of the contract (3 Months), the post-holder is not expected to represent the Council at First-tier Tribunal hearings. The focus of the role is on preparing Tribunal-ready submissions and bundles to the required standard and timescales. statutory/procedural deadlines.

What we're looking for:

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

- Substantial experience in Housing Benefit administration, with a strong focus on appeals or dispute resolution.
- Proven experience preparing appeals for the First-tier Tribunal (Social Entitlement Chamber), including drafting submissions and compiling evidence bundles.
- Strong working knowledge of Specified Accommodation / Exempt Accommodation, including the care, support and supervision tests and how to evidence findings.
- Ability to interpret and apply Housing Benefit legislation, relevant guidance and case law to produce defensible decisions and submissions.

To find out more or to apply

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Benefits System Officer (NEC)



Until 31st March 2027 | £30 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

The Benefits Systems Officer/Analyst is responsible for the technical administration, integrity, optimisation and development of the Council's Housing Benefits, Council Tax Support and associated welfare systems.

This role is responsible for the daily maintenance and monitoring of the NEC software system, providing an accurate and quality technical service to the Benefits Service, including:

- Operational systems administration for all software applications used by the Benefits service
- Ensuring payment allocation and other Benefits processes are run on time to ensure recipient systems are up to date, fit for business and reconciled
- Prompt and accurate production of Direct Debit and BACS income collection files to maximise income collection and protect the authority's interests in relation to Housing Benefit overpayments
- Maintaining system integrity and optimisation by adhering to housekeeping routines for Benefits
- Implementing new and updating existing software and robustly testing systems, functionality used by the Benefits services and in co-ordination with the System Development and Monitoring officer document new procedures as soon as practicable

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
- Be a skilled NEC(Northgate) user with at least 3 years experience
- Have good technical skills
- Have a good understanding of Housing Benefit Subsidy

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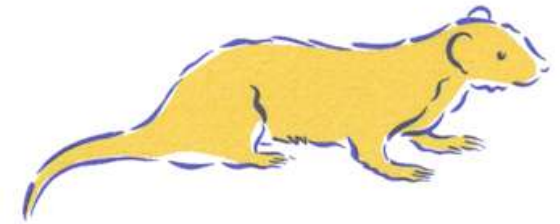
Congratulations to Ben and the team !"

#TeamBSS Client – Simon Rosser





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our training services:

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



our products:

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



our platforms:

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



our customers:

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

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

entitledto

independent | accurate | reliable

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

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

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

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

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



Ascendant Solutions
data management

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

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

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

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

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

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

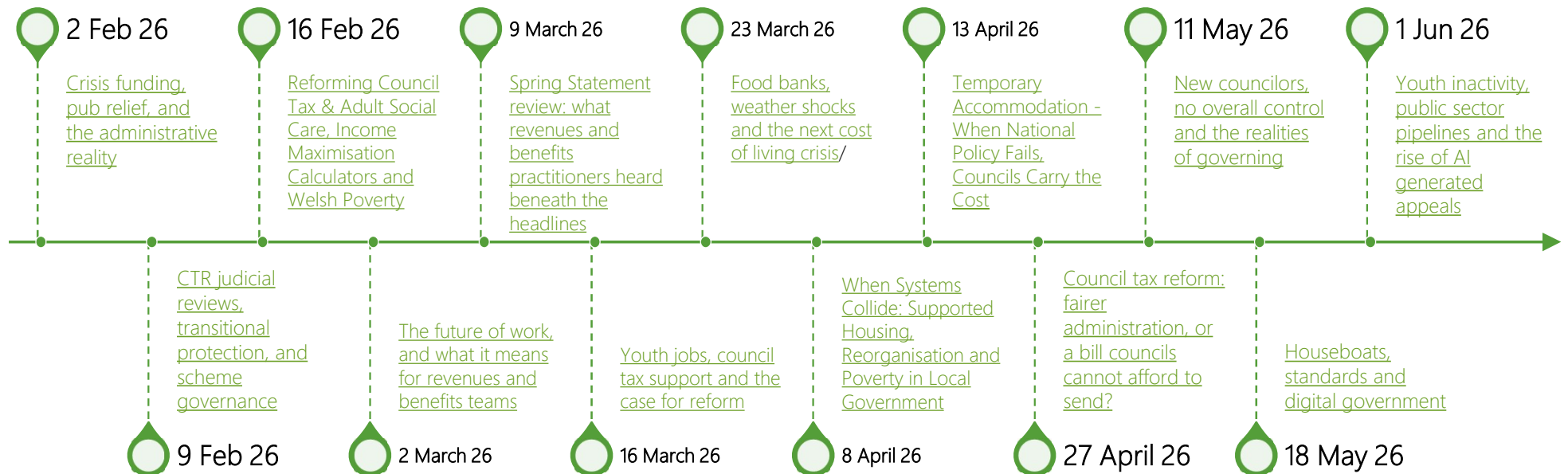


Apply4.Online®



Session Information

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](#)

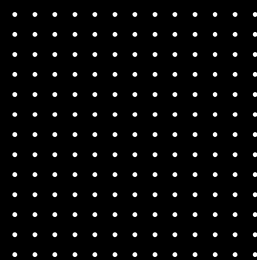
[The Case for Plain English Council Tax Reduction Schemes by Paul Howarth](#)

<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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Blogs & Reports

[The UK has become more equal but ethnic minorities still earn less than their White counterparts](#)

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: Id 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.

Out of area homelessness placements and cross council service pressures

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Around 1,300 homeless households moved out of London by councils in the year to March 2025.
- 670 homeless households moved out of London in the year to March 2023.
- The number of homeless people forced out of London has doubled in two years.
- London accounts for more than half of England's homeless people.
- A 2023 report found only 2% of private properties in London were affordable to someone receiving Housing Benefit.
- Croydon signed a £1m contract with Reloc8 to move homeless households out of the borough.
- Croydon expects to move about 110 homeless households under that contract.
- Croydon estimates savings of about £5,000 per placement.
- Enfield has paid more than £894,000 to Reloc8 since August 2023.
- In 2023, 94% of Enfield's offers to homeless families were outside London, with 59% in north east England.
- Reloc8 says it has moved more than 400 homeless households out of London, including 180 in one six-month period.

References

- The Guardian, Josh Halliday and Priya Bharadia, "Vulnerable families illegally 'dumped' hundreds of miles away by London councils", published 7 June 2026, last modified 8 June 2026.
- Housing Act 1996 provisions on homelessness accommodation duties, as referenced in the article.
- Official homelessness placement figures to March 2025, as cited by The Guardian from GOV.UK statistics.

Social housing shortfall, homelessness pressure and local welfare impact

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- 119 years: estimated time to clear social housing waiting lists at the current building rate.
- 1.3 million plus: households on social housing waiting lists in England.
- 12,198: new social homes built in England last year.
- 110: households waiting for every new social home delivered.
- 64%: fall in annual new social rent homes over 15 years.
- 155%: increase in homeless households in temporary accommodation over 15 years.
- 20%: council areas with no social homes built in the last two years.
- 30%: council areas with fewer than 10 social homes built in the last two years.
- £29bn: housing debt Shelter says is constraining councils.
- 90,000 a year for 10 years: Shelter's proposed social rent housing requirement.
- 300,000: government commitment for new social and affordable homes.
- 180,000: number expected to be for social rent under the government commitment.
- £39bn: Social and Affordable Homes Programme cited by government.

References

- The Guardian, Jessica Murray, "Social housing lists 'would take 119 years to clear at current building rate'", published 7 June 2026, last modified 7 June 2026.
- Shelter research on social housing waiting lists, delivery rates, temporary accommodation and council housing debt, as reported by The Guardian.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government statement on the Social Housing Bill and Social and Affordable Homes Programme, as quoted by The Guardian.

DWP consultation on releasing Defined Benefit pension scheme surpluses

Key numbers and dates

- Consultation published: 10 June 2026.
- Consultation closes: 2 September 2026.
- Expected implementation: April 2027.
- DB schemes in surplus: around four in five.
- Estimated aggregate DB surplus: around £160bn.
- Member notification period before payment: at least three months.
- Post release funding test: expected to remain fully funded on a low dependency basis for three years.
- Payment timing: within five working days of final actuarial certification.

References

- Pensions Age, “DWP launches consultation on DB surplus release regulations”, 10 June 2026.
- GOV.UK, “Surplus Flexibilities for Defined Benefit Pension Schemes: Unlocking Value for Employers and Scheme Members”, published 10 June 2026.
- GOV.UK, “Government response: Options for Defined Benefit schemes”, 29 May 2025

Rising essential bill debt and low awareness of support

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- More than £7bn owed to water, broadband and energy companies by March 2025.
- Household energy debt up 118% since 2021.
- Only one third of eligible broadband customers aware of social tariffs.
- Only 39% of struggling water customers aware of social tariffs.
- Energy customers on repayment plans owed £1,000 less on average than customers in debt without a repayment plan.
- Debt reported across three regulated sectors: energy, water and broadband.
- Regulators reviewed: Ofgem, Ofcom and Ofwat.

References

- BBC News, Kevin Peachey, “Bill debt soars but many don’t know help is available”, published 10 June 2026.
- National Audit Office report referenced in the BBC article on consumer debt and support in energy, water and telecoms.
- Regulators referenced in the article: Ofgem, Ofcom and Ofwat.
- Commons Public Accounts Committee comments from Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, as quoted in the article.

DWP fraud and error reviews across major benefits

. Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Five benefits under review in 2026/27.
- Benefits in scope: Universal Credit, pension age Housing Benefit, Pension Credit, State Pension and PIP.
- Expected publication of review results: May 2027.
- Total benefit expenditure in 2025/26: £308.6bn.
- Total overpayments in 2025/26: 3.2%, equivalent to £9.9bn.
- Total underpayments in 2025/26: 0.4%, equivalent to £1.2bn.
- Fraud overpayment rate in 2025/26: 2.2%.
- Claimant error overpayment rate in 2025/26: 0.6%.
- Official error overpayment rate in 2025/26: 0.4%.
- Universal Credit overpayments reported by GB News as £9.5bn, or 10.5% of Universal Credit expenditure.
- State Pension overpayments reported as 0.2%, equivalent to £230m.
- PIP is paid to more than 3.9 million claimants across England and Wales, with payments between £121.20 and £778.40 every four weeks.

References

- Daily Record, "DWP to review five major benefits for fraud and error this year", article link supplied. The page could not be fully fetched, so the summary is supported by accessible search snippets and cross checked against other sources.
- GB News, "DWP benefits crackdown: Universal Credit, PIP and Pension Credit among payments under fresh review", 15 May 2026.
- GOV.UK, DWP, "Fraud and error in the benefit system: Financial Year Ending 2026 estimates", published 19 May 2026.
- GOV.UK, DWP, "Background Information and Methodology Note: Fraud and error in the benefit system: financial year ending 2026 estimates", published 19 May 2026.

Social housing tenancy fraud and the need for stronger data and audit controls

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- £8m: estimated cost of social housing tenancy fraud and misuse in Northern Ireland in 2024/25.
- 134,000: approximate number of social homes in Northern Ireland.
- 4,000: estimated number of properties potentially affected by tenancy fraud or misuse.
- 284: social homes recovered in 2024/25 due to tenancy fraud and misuse.
- £40m plus: reported temporary accommodation expenditure in 2025.
- 2013: previous NIAO report on social housing tenancy fraud.
- Six months: recommended timeframe for establishing an evidence-based baseline estimate.
- Two main social housing sectors affected: Northern Ireland Housing Executive and registered housing associations.

References

- Public Finance, Rachel Willcox, “NIAO says inconsistent data on housing fraud is slowing clampdown efforts”, 5 June 2026.
- Northern Ireland Audit Office report on social housing tenancy fraud and misuse, as reported in the article.
- Northern Ireland Assembly Public Accounts Committee inquiry following the 2013 NIAO report, as referenced in the article.
- Northern Ireland Audit Office report on homelessness and temporary accommodation pressures, as referenced in the article.

Local government pay dispute and workforce pressure

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- 3.3%: National Employers' full and final pay offer.
- 10%: union pay claim submitted in November 2025.
- £3,000: minimum cash increase sought by unions, if greater than 10%.
- £15 an hour: minimum pay rate sought by unions.
- 16 years: period over which unions say the real value of local government pay has been eroded.
- March 2026: employers made the 3.3% offer.
- 2026/27: pay award year under dispute.
- Three unions involved in the original claim: Unite, Unison and GMB.

References

- Public Finance, Simone Rensch, "Unions 'firmly reject' local government pay offer", 3 June 2026.
- National Joint Council for Local Government Services Trade Union Side joint letter, as reported in the article.
- Local Government Association response, as quoted in the article.

Ageing population: whole system planning and local welfare impact

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- England's population aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 3.3 million in the next 20 years.
- By 2065, 26% of England's population is projected to be aged 65 and over, and 46% aged 50 and over.
- The number of people aged over 85 in England is projected to double to 2.6 million over the next 25 years.
- In adult social care, 1.4 million people made 2 million new requests for support in 2024/25.
- Of those making adult social care requests in 2024/25, 868,000 were aged 65 and over, representing 64% of people making requests.
- Most adult social care requests came from the community, with 17% linked to hospital discharge.

References and links

- Public Finance, "National conversation' needed on ageing population", 10 June 2026.
- Centre for Ageing Better, "Our Ageing Population: The State of Ageing 2025".
- The Health Foundation, "Our ageing population".
- The King's Fund, "Social Care 360: Access", 8 April 2026.

Youth Guarantee, employment support and local welfare demand

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- More than 1 million young people are not in employment, education or training.
- Without urgent action, the number of young people who are NEET is projected to rise from 1 in 8 to 1 in 6 within five years.
- This would represent 1.25 million young people.
- The Youth Guarantee is backed by £2.5 billion investment.
- The Youth Guarantee is intended to support 1 million young people, including those with disabilities or health conditions.
- Movement to Work has delivered more than 200,000 opportunities for 16- to 30-year-olds facing barriers to work.
- Sir Charlie Mayfield's Keep Britain Working review has gained support from around 150 organisations, employing 1.5 million people across 24 sectors.

References and links

- GOV.UK, "Former M&S Chief Executive hired to spearhead Government drive to help young people into work", 30 May 2026.

Restart Scheme: employment outcomes and local welfare impacts

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- £2.9 billion: original three-year Restart programme announced at Spending Review 2020.
- £1.7 billion: revised projected cost after demand was reassessed.
- £1.1 billion: additional funding announced in Autumn Statement 2023 for two further years of referrals.
- 1.2 million: individuals referred by the end of April 2026.
- 1.1 million: starts on the scheme by the end of April 2026.
- 87%: national referred to starts rate, varying from 85% to 90% across contract areas.
- 430,000: participants achieving first earnings from employment.
- 280,000: participants achieving a job outcome, compared with 310,000 expected under the Tender Performance Level and 240,000 under the Minimum Performance Level.
- 840,000: participants had the opportunity of 12 months of support by April 2026; 44% achieved first earnings and 30% achieved a job outcome.

References and links

- Department for Work and Pensions, “Restart Scheme statistics to April 2026”, updated 10 June 2026.

Information Commissioner
suspension: governance,
data protection and
regulatory continuity

Key numbers and dates

- 26 February 2026: John Edwards voluntarily stepped back from his duties.
- 10 June 2026: Local Government Lawyer reported that Edwards had been suspended following the investigation.
- July 2025: the ICO Scheme of Delegation was last reviewed and approved by the Commissioner.
- December 2021: Edwards was appointed Information Commissioner.
- February 2014 to December 2021: Edwards served as New Zealand Privacy Commissioner.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, “Information Commissioner suspended following workplace investigation”, 10 June 2026.

Council tax arrears, court action and recovery reform

. Key numbers and quantified impacts

- 1,430,726: court summonses issued for unpaid council tax in 2024/25, based on GMB's FOI responses.
- Nearly 200: local authorities responded to GMB's FOI requests within the statutory deadline.
- 4.6 million: council tax accounts identified as being in arrears.
- 3.2 million: accounts where debt management proceedings had been launched.
- £4.6bn: unpaid council tax owed to councils.
- 63 days: proposed minimum period before liability order action can begin after a reminder under the reforms from April 2027.
- £100: proposed cap on liability order costs in England.
- April 2027: expected implementation date for the main council tax recovery reforms.

References and links

- LocalGov, "1.5m people taken to court over council tax debt, union reveals", 9 June 2026.
- The Independent, "At least 1.5 million people taken to court over unpaid council tax", 9 June 2026.
- GOV.UK, "Council tax shake up to protect the most vulnerable households", 15 April 2026.
- GOV.UK, "Modernising and Improving the Administration of Council Tax", Written Statement, 15 April 2026.

AI investment boom, adoption pressures and public service implications

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- S&P 500 up nearly 80% over five years.
- 41 AI related stocks account for nearly half of the S&P 500's market value.
- Estimated AI spending: \$765bn in 2026.
- Estimated AI spending by 2031: \$1.6tn.
- Business AI adoption: 33% in 2023, rising to nearly 80% now.
- ChatGPT reported monthly active users: 1bn.
- OpenAI GPT-5.5 token pricing cited: \$5 per million input tokens and \$30 per million output tokens.
- Datacentre capacity under construction globally in 2025: 23GW.
- Forecast additional datacentre capacity between 2026 and 2030: 100GW.
- Forecast equivalent datacentre growth: around 1,200 datacentres.
- AI model capability, based on METR's coding task measure, reported as doubling every four months.
- US GDP growth: 2.1% in 2025 and 1.6% in Q1 2026.
- One estimate suggests information processing equipment and software accounted for 92% of US GDP growth in the first half of 2025.

References

- The Guardian, Dan Milmo and Aisha Down, graphics by Ana Lucía González Paz, "Billions spent and hypothetical returns: the AI boom explained with six charts", published 7 June 2026.
- Goldman Sachs estimate on AI spending, as cited in the article.
- McKinsey AI adoption figures, as cited in the article.
- Sensor Tower ChatGPT usage data, as cited in the article.
- Kentik internet traffic analysis on Claude, ChatGPT and Gemini, as cited in the article.
- Bloomberg datacentre construction estimate, as cited in the article.
- JLL datacentre capacity forecast, as cited in the article.
- METR research on AI model capability, as cited in the article.
- US Bureau of Economic Analysis GDP figures, as cited in the article.

Rising AI costs and pressure to prove return on investment

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- Anthropic changed its Claude Code subscription model twice in 2026.
- Microsoft teams affected reportedly include Windows, Outlook, Microsoft Teams and Surface.
- Gartner expects total AI costs to rise even where individual token prices fall, because agentic AI increases overall compute use.
- Zylo's 2026 SaaS Management Index reports average organisational spend of \$1.2m on AI native apps.
- Zylo reports this as a 108% year on year increase.
- Zylo also reports that 78% of IT leaders surveyed had unexpected SaaS charges linked to consumption based or AI pricing models.
- ChatGPT was reported by Zylo as the most expensed app by number of transactions in its 2026 report.
- 16% of the 50 most expensed applications were AI native apps.

References

- Computing, "Rising costs are limiting AI use", 29 May 2026.
- Zylo, "AI Pricing: What's the True AI Cost for Businesses in 2026?", cited for wider SaaS and AI cost management figures.

AI regulatory sandbox: legal services, assurance and public sector adoption

Key numbers and dates

- 9 June 2026: Local Government Lawyer reported the legal sector's selection for the AI sandbox programme.
- Summer 2026: AI Growth Lab expected to open to applications.
- 4 regulators identified: Council for Licensed Conveyancers, Solicitors Regulation Authority, Information Commissioner's Office and Legal Services Board.
- First sector chosen: legal services.
- Main policy focus: responsible testing, regulatory clarity, access to justice, public trust and removal of unintended barriers.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, "Legal sector chosen as first participant in Government AI 'sandbox' programme", 9 June 2026

AI wealth gap: adoption, capability and inequality risk

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- 55% of college graduates said they were familiar with current AI trends.
- 60% of postgraduates said they were familiar with current AI trends.
- 38% of those with a high school education said they had stayed up to date with the latest AI news.
- Acemoglu's paper estimated AI related total factor productivity gains of no more than 0.71% over 10 years, and possibly below 0.55%.
- The paper also warns that AI may widen the gap between capital and labour income.
- One AI practitioner quoted in the article estimated that only 10% to 20% of their time was spent on strategic work before using AI to reduce coordination burdens.

References and links

- Innovating with AI, "Is there a new AI wealth gap?", Toni Matthews-El, 2 June 2026.
- MIT Shaping the Future of Work, Daron Acemoglu, "The Simple Macroeconomics of AI", April 2024, revised May 2024.

Fiscal devolution roadmap: implications for local taxation and welfare

Key numbers and quantified points

- Autumn 2026: target date for the Chancellor's fiscal devolution roadmap.
- 8 Mayoral Strategic Authorities contributed through the Devo Next Initiative.
- 6 design principles are proposed:
 - genuine flexibility
 - strategic coherence
 - fairness and equalisation
 - resilience
 - accountability
 - system readiness
- Business rates retention is identified as one possible basis for basic fiscal devolution.
- The paper argues that readiness criteria should include institutional maturity, analytical capacity, governance structures, economic forecasting, investment planning and revenue administration.

References and links

- Re:State, "Design principles for the fiscal devolution roadmap", 8 June 2026.
- Re:State, "Design principles for the fiscal devolution roadmap", full PDF, June 2026.

Westmorland and Furness faces Section 114 risk without major savings

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- £40m: savings and efficiencies required over three years.
- £30m plus: savings already included in the 2026/27 revenue budget.
- £5m: additional savings reported as required in the current year.
- £15m: minimum savings target from the transformation programme over three years.
- 21 days: period within which a council must meet after a Section 114 notice is issued.
- Three years: period within which officers warn the authority must change course to avoid severe financial consequences.

References

- The MJ, “Council faces ‘inevitable’ bankruptcy without £40m savings”, 10 June 2026.
- Penrith Town, “Council going Bankrupt Inevitable in 36 Months Unless It Can Make £40 Million in Savings”, 8 June 2026.
- House of Commons Library, “What happens if a council goes bankrupt?”, 13 September 2023.
- Institute for Government, “Local government section 114 notices”, updated 7 August 2024.

County councils challenge the rationale for Local Government Reorganisation decisions

Key numbers and dates

- 16 councils signed the letter.
- Three quarters of county councils in line for reorganisation signed.
- 25 March 2026: date of government decisions criticised in the letter.
- 15 new unitary councils to be created across four areas.
- July 2026: further reorganisation decisions expected for remaining areas.
- April 2028: planned inception date for new councils.
- At least four potential judicial review challenges are reported.
- Essex, Hampshire, Suffolk and Norfolk county councils have sent pre action protocol letters to MHCLG.
- Councils warn that transition may require hundreds of millions of pounds in central government funding.

References

- Local Government Lawyer, “County councils urge PM to reveal rationale for reorganisation decisions”, 4 June 2026.
- County Councils Network letter to the Prime Minister, as reported by Local Government Lawyer.
- MHCLG statement in response, as quoted by Local Government Lawyer.

New Forest rules out judicial review over Local Government Reorganisation

Key numbers and dates

- 25 March 2026: Government decision to proceed with Option 1A.
- Two new unitary councils: New Forest District Council's current footprint would be split between them.
- Four unitary authorities: planned for Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton overall.
- One standalone authority: Isle of Wight Council remains separate.
- Two independent legal opinions: Jane Oldham of 11KBW and Richard Harwood KC of 39 Essex Chambers.
- Four county councils reported as having sent pre action protocol letters to MHCLG: Hampshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk.
- Hampshire County Council was due to consider whether to pursue further legal advice on a possible challenge.

References

- Local Government Lawyer, "District council rules out legal challenge over local government reorganisation", 4 June 2026.
- Legal advice and counsel opinions reported by New Forest District Council, as cited by Local Government Lawyer.
- New Forest Together campaign response and wider potential legal challenges, as reported by Local Government Lawyer.

Suffolk issues pre action letter over Local Government Reorganisation

Key numbers and dates

- March 2026: MHCLG backed the proposal to divide Suffolk into three unitary authorities.
- Three unitary authorities: Government's preferred model for Suffolk.
- One unitary authority: Suffolk County Council's preferred model.
- 2 June 2026: Local Government Lawyer reported Suffolk's pre action letter.
- Suffolk was reported as the latest confirmed council to issue a pre action protocol letter.
- Essex had already issued a pre action letter challenging plans to split Essex into five unitary authorities.
- Norfolk had also issued a pre action letter and was understood to be aiming to pursue judicial review.
- Hampshire had issued a pre action letter in late April and was awaiting the Secretary of State's response before deciding next steps.

References

- Local Government Lawyer, "Suffolk becomes latest council to issue pre action letter over reorganisation", 2 June 2026.
- MHCLG response quoted in Local Government Lawyer, confirming receipt of the pre action letter and restating the Government's position on reorganisation.

Devolution, prevention and the redesign of local public services

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- No specific financial figures or quantified savings are provided in the text.
- The report refers to structural change across England, including:
 - a new regional tier;
 - unitary council reorganisation;
 - boundary realignment;
 - integrated settlements for combined authorities;
 - potential devolution of NHS England responsibilities to regions.
- Main quantified gap: prevention is widely supported in principle, but the article states that few areas have realised the shift in practice.

References

- Public Finance, Rachel Willcox, “Devolution ‘could fuel public services shift towards prevention’”, 3 June 2026.
- Re:State think tank report on devolution, localism and prevention, as reported in the article.

Place based devolution, fiscal powers and prevention first public service reform

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- No quantified financial impact, savings figure or implementation cost is provided in the text.
- Key structural elements identified:
 - emerging strategic authorities;
 - Local Government Reorganisation;
 - councils;
 - ICBs;
 - transport bodies;
 - other local public service partners.
- Fiscal devolution roadmap expected alongside the Autumn Budget later in 2026.
- Proposed revenue raising routes include income tax or VAT distribution.
- Recommended reform model: whole place, prevention first delivery.
- Recommended governance change: minimum national standards for scrutiny.

References

- Localis study on devolution, local economic context and fiscal devolution, developed with Local Partnerships.
- Comments from Sandy Forsyth, Localis senior researcher.
- Comments from Adele Gritten, chief executive of Local Partnerships.
- Public Finance article reporting the Localis study and Rachel Reeves' expected fiscal devolution roadmap.

Local government reorganisation: criteria, legal challenge and transition risk

Key numbers and dates

- 9 June 2026: Alison McGovern gave evidence to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.
- 10 June 2026: Local Government Lawyer reported the Minister's comments.
- At least four councils are involved in legal challenges.
- Sixteen county councils have called for publication of the Government's rationale.
- New Forest District Council is cited as an example of a district area being split between two new unitary councils.

References and links

- Local Government Lawyer, "Minister insists reorganisation decisions made within criteria as MPs question breakup of districts", 10 June 2026.

Social security fraud and error penalties: enforcement, compliance and local welfare implications

Key numbers and quantified impacts

- £5,000: recoverable overpayment threshold at which DWP will normally refer a case to CPS or COPFS, subject to other factors and discretion.
- 50%: administrative penalty rate for offences from 8 May 2012, subject to minimum and maximum limits.
- £350: minimum administrative penalty.
- £2,000: maximum administrative penalty stated for the post May 2012 regime in the policy, with later policy intention to increase the maximum to £5,000.
- £50: civil penalty for claimant error where a recoverable overpayment arises through negligence, failure to provide accurate information, or failure to report a change without reasonable excuse.
- 14 days: reconsideration period after accepting an administrative penalty.
- 13 weeks: loss of benefit penalty for a first benefit fraud conviction from April 2013.
- 26 weeks: loss of benefit penalty for a second conviction.
- 3 years: loss of benefit penalty for a third conviction within the prescribed period, or serious or organised benefit fraud.
- 4 weeks: loss of benefit penalty where an administrative penalty or caution is the outcome.

References and links

- GOV.UK, "Penalties policy: in respect of social security fraud and error", Department for Work and Pensions, updated 2 June 2026



VISIONARY NETWORK

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