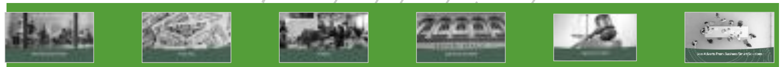
In Partnership with

Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

Meeting Link

6 July 2026

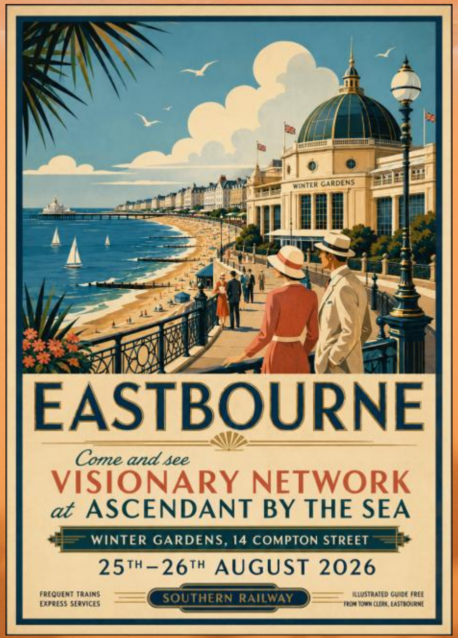


Meet the panel
(not everyone is available every week)

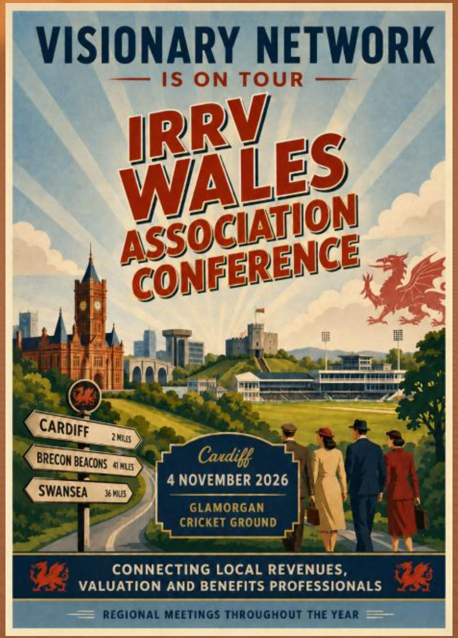
Any comments made by panellists are their own personal views and do not necessarily reflect the positions of their organisations.

- 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

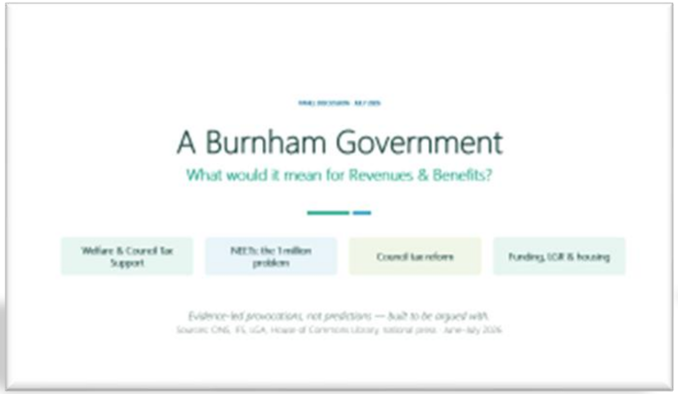
Visionary on Tour 2026



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network



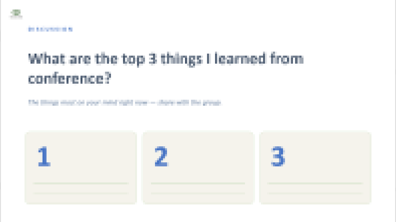
Burnham



Redistribution of Homeless

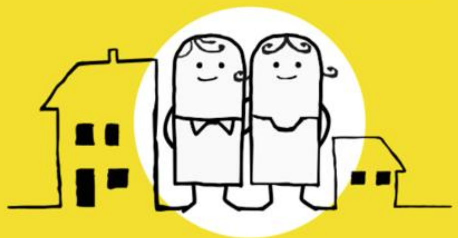
Discussion Points

Top Three Things In Your In-tray



.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

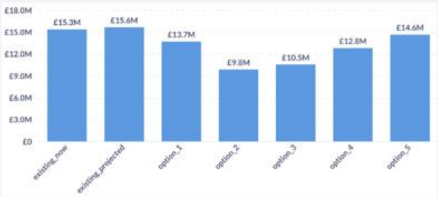
The tool generates a detailed impact report and the information you need for your Equality Impact Analysis.

This report presents clear, data-driven insights to elected members, supports internal reviews, and informs consultations for confident decision-making.

Visit us: https://inbest.ai | **Write to us:** info@inbest.ai

Our dashboard provides the insights you need to make informed decisions

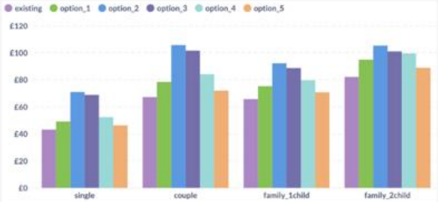
Total annual cost options



Detailed analysis per CTR band

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

Average CT payment by households



Identification of impacted residents

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

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

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

***Penny Mitchell,** Council Tax Service Manager at Salford Council*

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

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

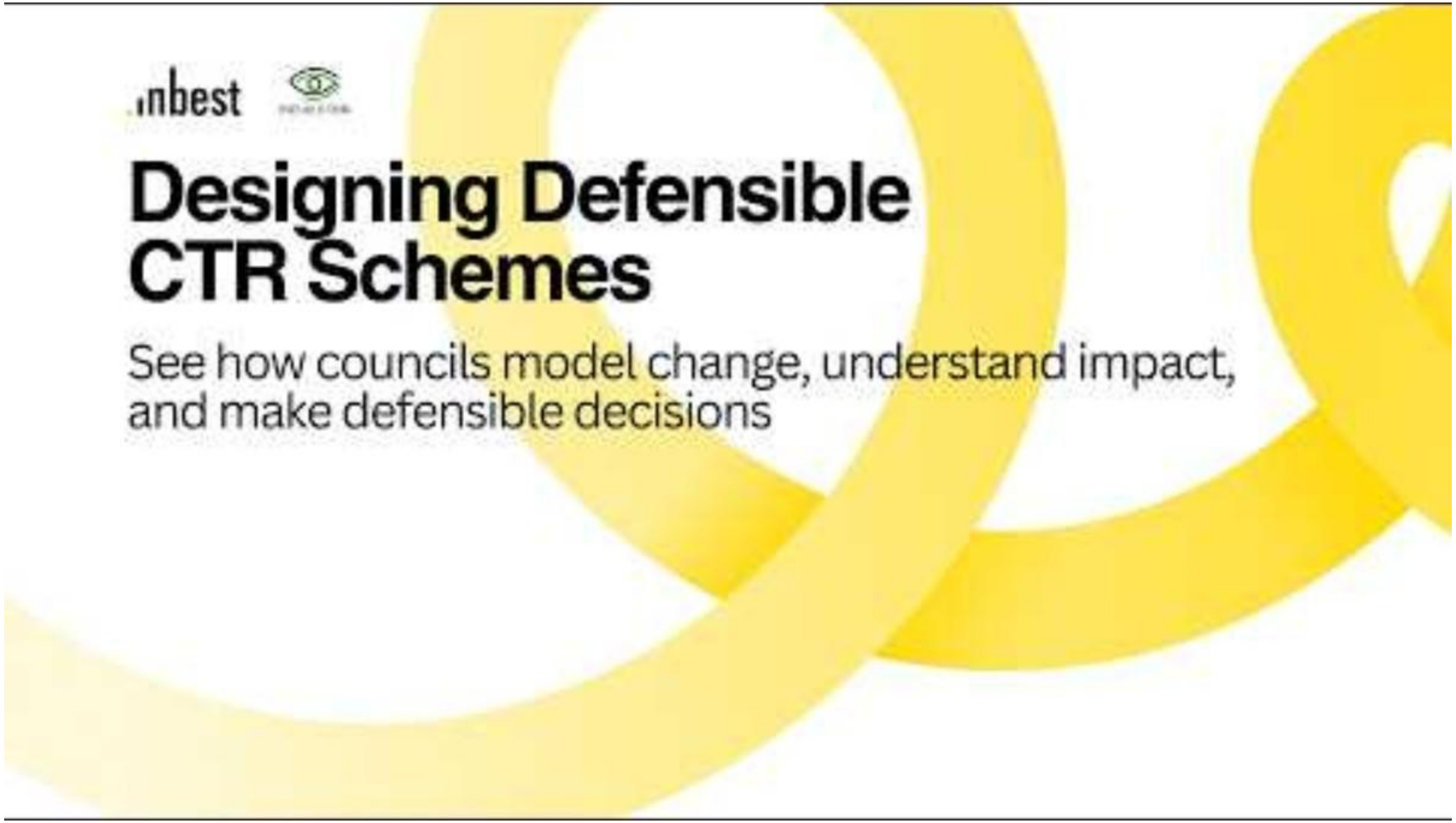
Nick Houlton, Finance Manager (Revenues and Benefits) at London Borough of Barnet

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

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

Lucie White, Operational Finance Manager at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Visit us: https://inbest.ai | **Write to us:** info@inbest.ai


Designing Defensible
CTR Schemes
See how councils model change, understand impact,
and make defensible decisions

Play Video

End

- 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 · JULY 2026

A Burnham Government

What would it mean for Revenues & Benefits?

Welfare & Council Tax Support	NEETs: the 1 million problem	Council tax reform	Funding, LGR & housing

Evidence-led provocations, not predictions — built to be argued with.

Sources: ONS, IFS, LGA, House of Commons Library, national press · June–July 2026

Three weeks that reshaped Whitehall

1

18 JUNE 2026
Wins the Makerfield by-election with a majority of over 9,000 — back in Parliament and eligible to lead.

2

22 JUNE 2026
Starmer announces his resignation after historic local election losses; over 100 MPs had been preparing to move.

3

JULY 2026
Only major declared candidate; Wes Streeting endorses him. Reports suggest he could be PM by mid-July.

WHY IT MATTERS HERE

The first PM to arrive from a metro mayoralty — nine years running Greater Manchester, not a Whitehall department.

His platform — devolution, a “preventative state”, council housebuilding, property tax reform — lands squarely on revenues & benefits desks.

Expert view — Bennett School of Public Policy (Cambridge): his “Manchesterism” proposes a fundamental shift from centralised, top-down mandates to place-based delivery — and he has openly questioned whether national bodies like Homes England and Skills England should exist at all.

FOR THE PANEL A Prime Minister forged in local government — a genuine asset for our sector, or false comfort?

“Manchesterism”: the operating model he would bring to No 10

A PREVENTATIVE STATE

Spend upstream to cut the welfare bill downstream.

- Welfare that “builds people up rather than knocks them down” — his words at the NEF benefits-rethink launch.
- Housing First, youth zones and repaired homes framed as welfare savings, “fair and lasting”.

RADICAL DEVOLUTION

Power and funding shifted from Whitehall to place.

- “No 10 North” in Manchester; a Senate of regions and nations replacing the Lords.
- Has questioned whether Homes England and Skills England should exist — housing and skills are “inherently local”.

PUBLIC CONTROL OF GROWTH

Housing, transport, energy: control first, growth follows.

- Bee Network cited as proof: regulated buses running about a third cheaper per km with a £2 fare cap.
- Sees public control as a prerequisite for growth — not a reward for it.

The caveat for the panel: none of this is yet a costed programme. Commentators note he has committed to current fiscal rules and to the 2024 manifesto tax pledges — the gap between doctrine and budget is where our services live.

FOR THE PANEL If policy moves to mayors and town halls, does accountability for benefits and local taxation follow — and are we ready to own it?

“No crude cuts” — the welfare bill is going up, not down

THE DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

- Has ruled out “crude” cuts to the welfare bill — pledging instead to spend more to move young people into work.
- The two-child limit is already gone (April 2026) — a change he campaigned for; CPAG says removal lifts 350,000 children out of poverty for c. £2bn.
- Allies are now pressing him to axe the benefit cap — the next fight after the two-child limit.
- Backed the NEF “National Living Income” campaign led by his policy chief: replace Universal Credit, abolish every cap and sanction — costed at c. £90bn extra a year — and piloted the thinking in Greater Manchester.

“Let us rethink the entire benefits system… an empowering system that builds people up rather than knocks them down.” — Burnham

THE BENEFIT CAP, TODAY

122,000
households have their benefits capped (DWP)

−£61 / week
average income lost by capped families (CPAG)

71%
of capped households are single parents — half with a child under five

Cap levels (£22,020 outside London) remain below their 2013 launch value.

FOR THE PANEL If dependency is reframed as prevention, does R&B become the delivery arm of a living-income experiment — and who funds the admin?

The quiet pressure cooker in every billing authority

£2.5bn
working-age CTS spend in England (IFS / Resolution Foundation, 2024-25)

3.7m
claimants supported by English schemes — the largest devolved means-tested benefit

2013
localisation came with a funding cut — generosity has been eroded ever since

WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE GROUND

- Councils are still cutting: North Somerset trimmed support 8% across all bands this year; many schemes cap support at 80% of the bill.
- The two-child limit reversal is rewriting UC awards — and with them CTS entitlements — mid-year, generating rebills and confusion.
- The IFS brands localised CTS a "postcode lottery" with a heavy design and admin burden falling on councils.

THE BURNHAM COLLISION

- A "National Living Income" or softer national welfare regime would sit on top of 300+ different local CTS schemes.
- Every national change cascades into local scheme redesign, consultation and rebilling — costs no one funds.

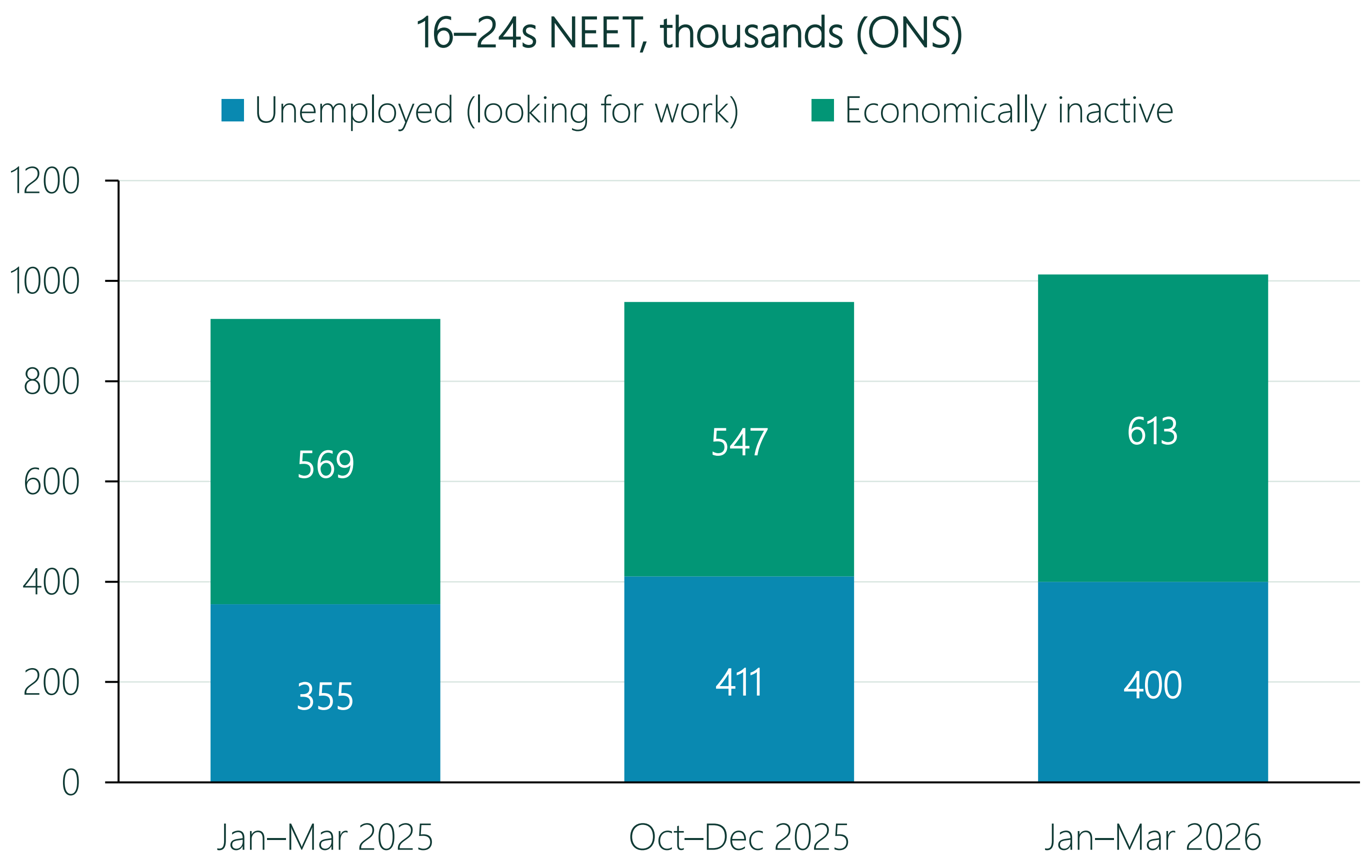
FOR THE PANEL If Burnham rethinks Universal Credit nationally, can c. 300 local CTS schemes survive — or should the sector demand renationalisation on his terms?

One million young people, and rising

1,012,000

16–24s NEET, Jan–Mar 2026 — 13.5%, the first time above 1m since 2013 (ONS)

- Up 89,000 in a single year.
- 613,000 are economically inactive — the highest since records began in 2001, driven by long-term sickness and mental ill-health.
- Milburn review of youth inactivity reports this summer; Youth Guarantee "New Deal" announced March 2026.



FOR THE PANEL One in seven 16–24s is NEET and most are now economically inactive, not job-seeking. Is the benefits system managing this — or manufacturing it?

Spend-to-save: his answer to the NEET million

1

Youth zones & a Youth Guarantee

Pledged youth zones in Makerfield and backs the March 2026 “New Deal” for young people — guaranteed earning or learning routes.

2

Devolved skills & employment support

Questions whether Skills England should exist at all — skills and job support commissioned by mayors and councils, on the Greater Manchester model.

3

Health-first, not sanctions-first

Milburn review (final report this summer) frames youth inactivity as a mental-health and disability issue — expect support offers, not tougher conditionality.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR R&B TEAMS

More young adults cycling between earnings, UC and CTS means constant reassessment churn; local Youth Guarantee delivery will lean on councils — and on the data held in revenues and benefits systems — to find and verify the cohort.

FOR THE PANEL If employment support goes local, should benefits teams be in the room — co-located, data-sharing, even jointly targeted on NEET numbers?

“Highly regressive” — the tax we collect is on notice

“You can be paying much more council tax in a Band D house in Greater Manchester than in some of the very wealthiest parts of London.”
Andy Burnham, by-election launch, May 2026

“I've long been persuaded of the argument for a land value tax... It's a highly regressive tax.”
Burnham, The Times, 22 May 2026

WHAT’S ON THE TABLE

- 1991 valuations: 35 years old and, in his words, “not justifiable” — revaluation is the minimum implied.
- Fairer Share PPT: he is a listed supporter — a 0.48% annual levy on current value, replacing council tax and stamp duty; 75% of households claimed to pay less.
- Momentum: six Labour MPs backed reform in June; Paul Johnson (ex-IFS) says a serious government would put it “top of its agenda”.
- Already coming: the £2m+ High Value Council Tax Surcharge lands 2028–29 — new liability, new billing, regardless of who is PM.

But: no detailed Burnham policy paper exists yet — rate, transition and local retention are all open questions.

FOR THE PANEL Is council tax politically dead? And if so, what should this room lobby for — revaluation, a proportional property tax, or land value tax?

If it happens, it lands on your desks first

1

Revaluation & rebilling at scale

First national revaluation since 1991 — or a wholly new tax base. Every account re-banded or re-assessed, every bill re-issued, every direct debit re-profiled.

2

Transition schemes & new reliefs

Any reform creates losers — expect transitional relief, deferral schemes and hardship funds, all locally administered on top of existing discounts and exemptions.

3

Collection & arrears risk

Losers pay more: recovery policy, court costs and write-offs all move. Fairer Share modelling says 75% pay less — the other 25% call your contact centre.

4

Systems, data & CTS redesign

Billing systems, VOA interfaces and banded CTS schemes are all anchored to 1991 bands. Expert caution (Duncan & Toplis): valuation capacity and regional skew are real constraints.

Benchmark: Wales revalued in 2003 with nine bands and is preparing a further revaluation — England has never done it. The 2028–29 £2m surcharge will be the first live test of valuing and billing on current values.

FOR THE PANEL Honestly: could your service rebill every property in your district within one Parliament — while running business as usual?

Fair Funding 2.0: redistribution, not new money

£3.4bn

new grant over 3 years — in the first multi-year settlement for a decade

⅓ per year

new needs-based allocations phased in thirds, 2026–27 to 2028–29

50–100

councils expected to seek Exceptional Financial Support for 2026–27 (LGC)

WHAT IT MEANS

- Money moves to deprived, mostly northern and urban areas; business rates growth is reset. Rural counties and parts of London lose — Hertfordshire alone expects £40m+ a year off grant by 2028–29.
- The 2.6% real annual rise in core spending power assumes every council takes the 3% council tax rise plus 2% ASC precept, every year.
- LGA: cash floors "do not protect councils from real terms cuts" — and not every council gets the floor.
- From April 2026 the Crisis & Resilience Fund (£842m/yr) absorbs Discretionary Housing Payments — local welfare is being restructured around us.

THE BURNHAM ANGLE

He inherits this settlement mid-flight — and his instinct is more redistribution and more local control, not less.

Expect pressure to let gainers keep gains, devolve pots to mayors, and lean harder on local tax bases.

Tony Travers: focus will fall on whether "winners" deliver value — or hold down council tax.

FOR THE PANEL The settlement prices in maximum council tax rises every year. Is collection performance now the difference between balance and a Section 114?

Who sets your tax base in 2030?

WHITEHALL

Status quo: caps, referendum limits and precept rules set nationally; council tax carries the settlement. The centre keeps control of the biggest local tax.

THE MAYOR

Reeves floated fixed shares of national taxes for mayors (March 2026); Re:State proposes 2.5p of basic-rate income tax. Burnham built his platform on exactly this direction of travel.

THE TOWN HALL

LGA wants wider local tax freedoms — tourist levies, fees, charges. Land value tax or a PPT could be set (or shared) locally. Nothing formally proposed by Burnham — yet.

Commons Library (July 2026): Burnham has not yet proposed new mayoral tax powers — but the trailblazer deals already let Greater Manchester keep business rates growth through the reset. The architecture for fiscal devolution is being laid now.

FOR THE PANEL Whitehall, the town hall or the mayor: who do you want setting the rules you administer — and would 40 local property taxes be better or worse than one bad national one?

LGR: reform lands mid-reorganisation

Mar 2026
Essex (5), Hampshire & Solent (5) and Norfolk & Suffolk footprints decided; 21 two-tier areas, 70+ proposals in play

Summer 2026
Decisions due for the remaining 14 areas — from Kent to Lancashire

Apr 2027
East & West Surrey go live — the accelerated template for everyone else

1 Apr 2028
Vesting day for most new unitaries; shadow elections May 2027

THE R&B REALITY

- Merging district billing systems, harmonising council tax levels and unifying CTS schemes — on vesting-day deadlines.
- Staff transfer and restructure while collection targets keep running.
- Transition costs come from existing budgets and capital receipts — no new money.
- c. 20 million residents affected across the 21 areas.

FRICTION — AND BURNHAM

Norfolk, Suffolk, Hampshire and Essex county councils are pursuing judicial reviews; elections were postponed, then reinstated.

Burnham's devolution agenda doubles down: the English Devolution & Community Empowerment Act makes reorganisation easier to force, not harder.

FOR THE PANEL Mid-LGR, mid-FFR, possibly mid-council tax reform: can one revenues service absorb all three at once — and what should we ask a Burnham government to sequence differently?

The “housing trap” — promise vs cost

1 Too few council homes

c. 1.5m lost since the 1980s; only 6% of people now live in council housing

2 Benefits chase private rents

“We are forced to chase rents in the private rented sector through the benefits system”

3 LHA frozen to control cost

Freezes “make families homeless” — record numbers of homeless children in temporary accommodation

4 Unfunded TA pressure on councils

“Britain’s housing crisis is having a ruinous impact on its public finances”

HIS ANSWER

- “The biggest council housebuilding programme since the post-war period” — delivered by devolved regions, on vacant public land.
- A national Housing First approach, on the Finnish model, replacing the temporary accommodation treadmill.
- 1.3m households sit on social housing waiting lists today.

THE EXPERT CHECK

Inside Housing: funding is unanswered within his fiscal rules — post-war output averaged 100,000+ homes a year vs 18,000 social-rent starts a year planned now.

Meanwhile Homes England is asking landlords to re-profile bids — risking 17,000 fewer starts.

FOR THE PANEL Housing Benefit subsidy loss on temporary accommodation is eating budgets now. Would council housebuilding fix it faster than any efficiency plan — or arrive a decade too late?

Five provocations to close

1 **Welfare** — "No crude cuts" wins the party, but who pays? If a living-income pilot lands, is R&B its delivery arm — or a bystander?

2 **Council Tax Support** — One national income guarantee vs 300 local CTS schemes: should this room be lobbying to renationalise support?

3 **NEETs** — A million young people are outside work and learning. Should benefits teams sit inside the employment-support front line?

4 **Council tax** — If revaluation or a proportional property tax is announced next spring — could you rebill your whole district within one Parliament?

5 **Funding, LGR & housing** — Maximum council tax rises are priced in, LGR is mid-flight and housebuilding takes a decade. What single ask would you put to PM Burnham first?

The through-line: more localism, more building, softer welfare — and every one of those lands on Revenues & Benefits first.

Sources: ONS (May 2026) · IFS · LGA · Commons Library · LGC · Inside Housing · reported statements, May–July 2026

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.

VISIONARY NETWORK

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.

VISIONARY NETWORK

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.

VISIONARY NETWORK

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

£843m Conselidated Grant

Replacing HSF & DHPs

Mandatory 6-Monthly Reporting (3U+ Data Tables)

Navigating the New £B42m Consolidated Grant

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

The Nudge

inbest

A Cost-Neutral Solution for Smarter Delivery

The inbest CMS automates CRF delivery by identifying eligible residents and tracking outcomes, importuntly, CRF guidance permds 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 werkflows and communication templates for email or text.

3 Proactive Resident Outreach

Reach residents via SMS or WhatsApp with personalized liuks to a pre-fkled benefits calculator to check eligibility in minutes.

4 Flexible Case Management

Support self-serve or advice-ied delivery with a structured audit trail for recording advice, actions, and referral outcomes.

5 Reach Previously Unknown Households

NEW

Deploy web-based landing pages to reach households not currently receiving Council Tax Reduction or Housing Benefit.

6 Automated MI Reporting

DWP

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 aliminate the ueed for manual cpreedsbeats and data gathering.
- Improved benefit take-up and financial resilience. Direct impact on resident income through automated eligibility abacks and warm referrals.
- Reduced administrative burden through digital workflews. Automation of follow-ups and reminders to increase efficiency for internal teams.
- Cast-neutral implementation using CRF admnictrative 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.al to begin. Get in touch to start your council's transition to data-driven CRF delivery.

.inbest

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The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Welcome to a new era of council tax deduction schemes

Bristol City Council Case Study

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION

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- Improve efficiency
- Help vulnerable citizens
- Build trust

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In the news

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Council Tax Enforcement Reform: Pre-Enforcement Steps and Recovery Risk

- MHCLG has opened a technical consultation on improving council tax enforcement in England; consultation runs from **1 July to 29 July 2026**.
- Scope is limited to **council tax collection and recovery processes**; it does **not** reopen fundamental reform of council tax.
- Government proposes statutory steps councils must take before formal enforcement, supported by non-statutory guidance on wider best practice.
- Key proposal: councils should provide at least **one reminder notice and one final notice** before moving to formal enforcement.
- Final notice proposal:
  - cannot be issued until at least **14 days after the latest reminder notice**
  - cannot be issued earlier than **41 days after the missed instalment**
  - taxpayer then has **21 days to pay**
  - full year's bill becomes due on day **63** if payment is not made.
- Notices should use **simple, factual and non-threatening language**, with earlier letters focused on engagement, help and support rather than enforcement threats.
- Government is considering whether to prescribe letter content or templates to improve consistency across England

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Council Tax Enforcement Reform: Pre-Enforcement Steps and Recovery Risk

- Revenues and Benefits will need to review recovery timetables, reminder/final notice wording, automation rules and escalation points.
- Service delivery impacts:
  - longer pre-enforcement period before liability order action
  - more emphasis on early engagement and sustainable repayment
  - increased signposting to debt advice, discounts, exemptions, reductions and local welfare support
  - greater need to identify vulnerability and hardship before enforcement.
- Resourcing and process risks:
  - additional staff training or capability may be required
  - IT system and digital process changes may be needed
  - administrative complexity and recovery workflow changes are likely
  - communication and accessibility issues will need to be managed.
- Performance and timeliness risks:
  - government recognises reforms could slow recovery timelines
  - councils report possible impacts on in-year collection rates and cash flow
  - delayed escalation may increase pressure on year-end collection performance.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Council Tax Enforcement Reform: Pre-Enforcement Steps and Recovery Risk

- Customer impact:
  - taxpayers in difficulty should receive clearer information, more time and earlier support
  - reforms aim to reduce avoidable debt escalation and disengagement
  - councils must still distinguish genuine hardship from deliberate non-payment.
- Compliance and fairness:
  - reforms align with fair, proportionate and sustainable debt collection
  - Public Sector Equality Duty impacts must be considered, particularly for groups more likely to face financial disadvantage.
- Financial position:
  - potential risk to cash flow and in-year collection performance
  - possible increase in administrative and staffing costs
  - government has committed to a **new burdens assessment** and may request further data from councils.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Cabinet Office

Identifying and Supporting Vulnerable Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET

- Government has announced further support for councils to identify and support vulnerable teenagers who may be at risk of becoming NEET: not in education, employment or training.
- New council-reported data shows **32,100 "Phantom NEETs"** are not properly accounted for in local data on 16- and 17-year-olds.
- Official statistics show an estimated **57,000 16- and 17-year-olds** are NEET.
- Data quality varies significantly by area:
  - North Lincolnshire reported missing information for nearly half of 16- and 17-year-olds
  - four councils reported knowing the whereabouts of all 16- and 17-year-olds.
- Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson is writing to all councils setting expectations for improving identification and support of young people at risk.
- A separate letter will go to **26 councils** facing the greatest challenges, where activity is unknown for **3% or more** of teenagers.
- Improvement plans are expected over the next six months, supported by new tools and guidance.
- A new **Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI)** tool is being rolled out to councils, using factors such as poor attendance, special educational needs and care experience.
- New guidance for schools and colleges is also being published to help identify and support young people at risk of dropping out.

Cabinet Office

Identifying and Supporting Vulnerable Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET

- Revenues and Benefits relevance: increased importance of joined-up local data to identify vulnerable households
- potential links with Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit, local welfare, Discretionary Housing Payments and crisis support
- need to recognise families where young people are disengaged, vulnerable or at risk of future financial hardship
- opportunity to support wider prevention work through data insight and referral pathways
- Service delivery impacts: stronger need for cross-service working between Revenues and Benefits, education, children's services, employment support and welfare teams
- possible role in identifying households already known through benefit or council tax support records
- increased demand for clear referral routes where financial hardship, housing pressure or welfare issues are present
- Data, digital and process changes: government focus is on more accurate, timely tracking of young people's status
- councils may need improved data-matching, case-flagging and information-sharing arrangements

VISIONARY NETWORK

Cabinet Office

Identifying and Supporting Vulnerable Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET

- Customer impact: earlier identification should help vulnerable young people receive support before they fall out of education, employment or training
- targeted support may include securing a college place, mental health support or taster sessions to re-engage young people.
- Resourcing and performance risks: councils with poor data coverage may face additional improvement activity over the next six months
- incomplete data could create hidden demand, delayed intervention and poorer outcomes
- staff may need support to interpret risk indicators and coordinate responses across services
- Fraud/error and compliance: no direct fraud or error issue is identified in the announcement
- compliance focus is more likely to relate to lawful data sharing, accurate records, safeguarding and equality duties
- Financial position: no direct council tax, Housing Benefit or local welfare funding impact is specified
- wider government youth employment reforms are backed by £2.5bn, with a further £3.5bn by the end of the decade to support young people with health conditions into work.
- potential medium-term benefit if earlier intervention reduces future welfare dependency, homelessness risk or crisis demand, but this is not quantified in the article

VISIONARY NETWORK

Cabinet Office

Youth Employment Grants: Local Welfare Prevention and NEET Support

- Employers in Great Britain will be offered **£3,000** for every eligible long-term unemployed young person they hire.
- The scheme is aimed at helping **60,000 people aged 18 to 24** into work over the next three years.
- Employers in **England, Scotland and Wales** can access the grant where they hire an eligible young person who has been out of work for **six months or more**.
- The scheme forms part of a wider push to reduce youth unemployment, tackle the NEET crisis and reduce welfare spending.
- Alan Milburn's government-commissioned review found around **1 million people aged 16 to 24** are NEET, roughly **one in eight** young people.
- Britain is reported as an outlier internationally, with only Romania having a higher NEET rate than the UK in 2025.
- The first employer named as backing the scheme is **Merlin Entertainments**, which plans to create **300 jobs** for young people over three years.
- A separate jobs guarantee pilot supports eligible 18- to 24-year-olds who have been claiming Universal Credit and looking for work for **18 months**.
- Under that pilot, government funds **100% of employment costs** for up to **25 hours a week** at the relevant minimum wage.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Scotland Council Tax Pressure: Rising Bills, Reform Demands and Collection Risk

- Scotland's long period of council tax freezes and caps has ended, allowing councils greater scope to increase bills. Between April 2007 and April 2025:
  - average Band D council tax in England rose by £850
  - average Band D council tax in Scotland rose by £269.
- In 2025, 27 of Scotland's 32 councils increased council tax by at least 8%. Falkirk increased bills by more than 15% in 2025.
- Double-digit increases were also imposed by Aberdeenshire and Moray this year.
- Average Scottish Band D council tax is reported at £1,653, compared with £2,392 in England.
- Scottish bills have risen by 26% on average since the 2021 election. Local government funding has increased in cash terms, but Accounts Commission figures suggest real-terms growth has effectively been flat. Funding is predicted to stand still over the next three years, equivalent to a 3.8% real-terms cut.
- Council tax reform is described as "long overdue", with the system still based on 1991 property valuations. Institute for Fiscal Studies analysis suggests more than half of Scottish properties are now in the "wrong band" when compared with current values.
- Main political positions:
  - SNP, Labour and Liberal Democrats: seek cross-party consensus on reform
  - Greens: immediate revaluation and replacement with a proportional residential property tax
  - Reform: scrap planned new bands for homes over £1m
  - Scottish Conservatives: no explicit council tax proposal reported.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Scotland Council Tax Pressure: Rising Bills, Reform Demands and Collection Risk

- Revenues and Benefits service impacts:
  - increased billing pressure following large council tax rises
  - higher risk of customer contact, disputes, complaints and affordability queries
  - greater need for clear explanations of liability, banding, premiums and recovery options
  - increased pressure on council tax support, welfare advice and hardship pathways.
- Customer impact:
  - households face sharp bill increases after years of restraint
  - residents may compare rises with lower historical bills and see increases as unfair or political
  - higher bills may increase non-payment risk among financially stretched households.
- Performance and timeliness risks:
  - larger bills may create greater collection challenge
  - arrears risk may increase if rises exceed household ability to pay
  - recovery teams may face more complex affordability conversations.
- Compliance and process issues:
  - reforms or revaluation would require accurate property, occupancy and liability data
  - councils may need to review notices, digital accounts, explanatory material and customer scripts
  - any new tax model would require strong governance, equality assessment and transitional planning.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Scotland Council Tax Pressure: Rising Bills, Reform Demands and Collection Risk

- Second home and premium impacts:
  - Scottish councils can now apply uncapped second home premiums
  - Midlothian has applied a **500% premium** to some empty homes and second homes
  - Highland has applied a **300% premium**
  - second homes make up around **1%** of Scotland's housing stock and fell by around **13%** between 2023 and 2025.
- Financial position:
  - higher council tax rates may support local income but increase collection and affordability risk
  - Midlothian expects only around **£200,000** from its 500% premium policy, suggesting limited yield in some areas
  - flat real-terms funding increases pressure to raise local taxation
  - unresolved reform creates uncertainty for future taxbase, billing and collection planning.
- Fraud/error and data risks:
  - no direct fraud issue is identified in the article
  - risk relates more to inaccurate banding, outdated valuations, second home classification and potential movement into short-term lets.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Leeds Equal Pay Claims – Corporate Financial Risk and Service Planning Implications

- GMB claims Leeds City Council faces equal pay claims potentially worth **hundreds of millions of pounds**.
- More than **4,000 women** have joined the claim, according to GMB.
- The claim concerns alleged structural pay differences between mainly female roles, such as teaching assistants, and mainly male roles, such as refuse collection.
- Leeds City Council and GMB settled **specific elements** of equal pay claims in November 2025, but more complex elements remained outstanding.
- The council says it has not yet reached settlement on the outstanding elements but remains keen to continue talks.
- Key risk: major compensation liability could place significant pressure on council budgets, reserves and future savings decisions.

Ministry of Defence

Defence Investment Plan: The Proposed Changes

- **Additional funding –** an extra £15bn confirmed for defence between 2026-27 and 2029-30.
- **Total plan –** Defence Investment Plan spending set at £298bn over four years.
- **Rising spend –** annual defence spending expected to reach almost £80bn by 2029.
- **Funding gap –** £10.3bn identified so far; the remaining £4.7bn to be confirmed at Budget 2026.
- **How it is funded –** mainly by reallocating capital budgets across government departments, not additional borrowing.
- **Departmental contributions –** all departments expected to contribute 1% of capital budgets, with larger contributions from transport and energy.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Defence

Defence Investment Plan: Unintended Consequences

- **Capital diverted –** funding is reallocated away from infrastructure and other departmental investment programmes.
- **Unidentified cuts –** £6.8bn expected from unspecified cuts to departmental investment, with a further £4.7bn still unaccounted for (The Guardian).
- **Net jobs risk –** defence investment could create around 10,000 jobs by 2029-30, but cuts elsewhere could cost nearly twice as many (Transition Security Project).
- **Lower jobs return –** transport, energy and net zero spending create more jobs per £1m invested than defence.
- **Government view –** defence remains an engine for growth, supporting jobs, apprenticeships, exports and national security.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Fraud Case: Tenancy Fraud, House-Sitting Theft and Public Service Lessons

- Ariana Rose, 40, of no fixed abode, was jailed for five years for fraud, theft and perverting the course of justice.
- The offending spanned nearly a decade and included tenancy fraud, illegal sub-letting and theft from properties while house-sitting.
- Rose admitted seven fraud offences, five theft charges and one charge of perverting the course of justice.
- She took £30,337 in fraudulent rent and fees, deposited £101,000 into three bank accounts over three years, and was also claiming Universal Credit.
- One victim, Caroline Evans, faced £43,000 in rent arrears, spent £6,000 on civil eviction/private prosecution action, and said public authorities had failed to act.
- A financial investigation is underway to assess Rose's ability to pay compensation.

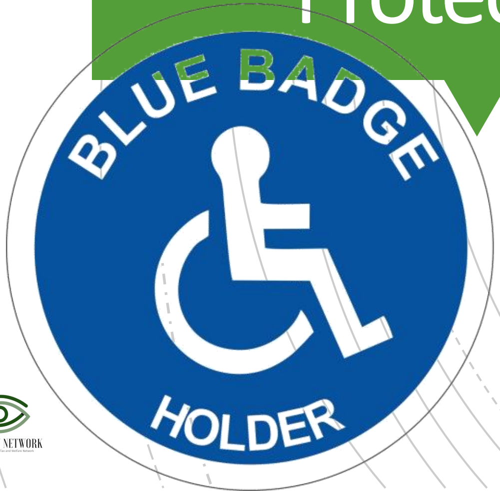
Fraud Case: Tenancy Fraud, House-Sitting Theft and Public Service Lessons

- Fraud/error risk: the case highlights the importance of cross-checking income, tenancy, occupation and benefit-related information where lawful and proportionate.
- Customer impact: tenancy fraud and rent scams can create financial harm, housing insecurity and pressure on local welfare support routes.
- Compliance: Universal Credit is administered by DWP, but councils may need clear referral routes where local evidence suggests wider fraud, false occupation or undeclared income.
- Resourcing: complex fraud cases can require coordinated work across benefits, housing, legal, fraud, police and prosecution bodies.
- Financial position: the article identifies private losses, rent arrears, proposed compensation and potential reimbursement of prosecution costs, but no direct council funding pressure.
- Action needed: review fraud referral pathways, evidence-sharing protocols, tenancy verification processes and escalation routes for cases that risk being treated as “civil” rather than criminal.

Fraud Case: Residency Rules, Detection and Benefit Compliance Risk

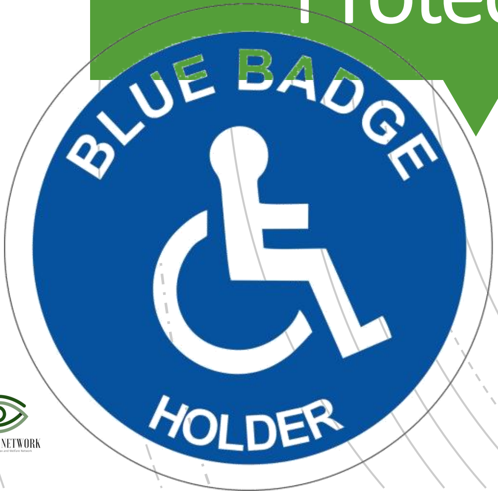
- Dawna Bird, 66, from Alvaston, Derby, was sentenced after admitting fraud linked to Personal Independence Payment.
- She wrongly claimed more than **£14,000** in PIP while living in Greece.
- PIP claimants are required to tell DWP if they leave the UK for more than **28 days**.
- The case covered periods between **2019 and 2023**, with more than **1,000 days** spent abroad.
- Evidence included Facebook posts showing activity in Greece, including advertising as a childminder.
- Bird received a **five-month prison sentence**, suspended for **12 months**.
- She is repaying the money in smaller instalments.
- Her husband, Harry Bird, had previously been dealt with by the courts after claiming an additional **£70,000** in payments; he received a **nine-month sentence**, suspended for **two years**.

Blue Badge Fraud: Data Matching, Enforcement and Local Welfare Protection



- 459 unauthorised Blue Badges were cancelled by Wirral Council after permits issued to deceased residents were found to still be in use.
- The operation was carried out with the Public Sector Fraud Authority using the National Fraud Initiative data matching tool.
- Wirral Council data was matched against central government records held by DWP to identify high-priority cases for investigation.
- The cancellations are reported to have saved taxpayers over £363,000 between 2024 and 2025.
- Nationally, the estimated value of cancelled Blue Badges was over £34m across the past two years.
- Wirral traffic wardens will carry out targeted patrols, including roads near schools, with powers to confiscate badges on the spot.
- Misuse following the death of a badge holder may lead to warning letters and fines of up to £1,000.

Blue Badge Fraud: Data Matching, Enforcement and Local Welfare Protection



- Fraud/error: the case shows the value of data matching across council and DWP records to identify misuse, deceased cases and potential fraud.
- Service delivery: councils may need stronger links between Blue Badge administration, customer services, fraud teams, parking enforcement and death notification processes.
- Customer impact: removing misused badges protects access to parking for disabled residents who genuinely need support.
- Compliance: clear audit trails, lawful data sharing, consistent warning letters and proportionate enforcement action are required.
- Financial position: the article identifies over £363,000 in local taxpayer savings for Wirral and wider national prevention value, but no direct R&B funding change.
- Action needed: review NFI match handling, deceased customer processes, Blue Badge cancellation workflows, enforcement powers and referral routes into corporate fraud teams.

Abri–Curo Merger Talks: Larger Housing Provider and Local Service Implications

- Abri and Curo have entered partnership / merger talks to form a larger housing association group.
- The proposed partnership would support around 142,000 customers and own or manage more than 73,000 homes and community assets across the South and South West of England.
- Curo owns and manages more than 14,000 homes, mainly around Bath and Bristol.
- Abri owns more than 58,000 homes in the South of England.
- Both boards say they are exploring options, with a final decision expected later in 2026.
- A formal customer consultation and agreement by both boards to a final business case are required before the proposal proceeds.
- The stated rationale is greater resilience, more investment in homes, improved services and increased capacity to build affordable homes.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Government Finance 2026: Council Tax, Collection and Benefit Pressures

- Council tax remains a main source of locally raised income for many local authorities, helping fund the gap between planned spending and income from other sources.
- Average Band D council tax in England increased from £1,818 in 2020-21 to £2,280 in 2025-26; annual increases were 5.1% in 2023-24, 5.1% in 2024-25 and 5.0% in 2025-26.
- Chargeable dwellings rose from 24.326m in 2021 to 25.056m in 2025, increasing the council tax base and billing workload.
- Dwellings subject to council tax premiums increased sharply from 120,000 in 2024 to 323,000 in 2025, including 170,000 second homes charged a premium.
- Local authority income in 2024-25 was £225.198bn in real terms; council tax accounted for £41.222bn and retained business rates for £20.329bn.
- Grants fell as a share of total local authority income from 50% in 2020-21 to 45% in 2024-25, increasing the relative importance of locally raised income

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Government Finance 2026: Council Tax, Collection and Benefit Pressures

Revenues and Benefits service impacts, risks and actions

- Council tax receipts collected in the financial year increased from £32.176bn in 2020-21 to £41.240bn in 2024-25.
- In-year council tax collection remained broadly flat: 95.7% in 2020-21, 96.0% in 2022-23, and 95.9% in both 2023-24 and 2024-25.
- Collection continues after year end until recovery is no longer practical or cost-effective, so arrears management remains a continuing workload, not simply an annual billing issue.
- In-year collection rates exclude arrears payments and future-year prepayments, so headline collection rates do not show the full recovery challenge.
- COVID-19 reduced council tax receipts in 2020-21 through increased local council tax support, discretionary discounts and lower collection; recovery action was also paused or reduced.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Government Finance 2026: Council Tax, Collection and Benefit Pressures

Revenues and Benefits service impacts, risks and actions

- Revenues and Benefits implications:
- increased billing, discount, exemption and premium administration
- sustained recovery and arrears workloads
- need for accurate taxbase, liability and collection data
- customer affordability and council tax support pressures
- risk that stable in-year collection masks growing historic debt

- Housing Benefits expenditure fell from £18.041bn in 2020-21 to £13.193bn in 2024-25, with a 2025-26 budget of £12.190bn; this reflects a continuing change in benefit caseload and funding profile.

- Financial position implications:
- council tax requirement budgeted to rise to £42.730bn in 2025-26
- collection fund surplus reported at £381m in 2024-25 and budgeted at £233m in 2025-26
- income risk remains where collectable debit rises faster than household ability to pay
- business rates receipts remain affected by reliefs, appeals and prior-year adjustments.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Private Rent Reform: Risk of Rent Hikes and Homelessness Pressure

- Labour's **Renters' Rights Act** came into force on **1 May 2026**.
- The Act abolished **section 21 "no-fault" evictions**.
- Landlords now rely mainly on **section 8 eviction grounds**, which require a specific legal reason, such as persistent rent arrears.
- A cross-party committee of MPs warned that some landlords may use large rent increases as a form of **"economic eviction"**.
- MPs reported examples of tenants facing very large rent increases.
- Tenants can challenge above-market rent rises at the **First-tier Tribunal**.
- Concerns were raised that many tenants may not know how to use the tribunal process.
- Generation Rent warned that some landlords may use unaffordable rent increases as a replacement for no-fault eviction.
- Shelter called for stronger limits on excessive rent increases.
- The Housing Minister rejected rent caps, arguing they could encourage routine rent rises and push landlords out of the market.
- The National Residential Landlords Association argued that rent controls could reduce supply and worsen affordability.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Private Rent Reform: Risk of Rent Hikes and Homelessness Pressure

- Revenues and Benefits relevance:
  - increased risk of rent arrears, homelessness presentations and housing instability
  - potential increased demand for Housing Benefit, Universal Credit housing cost advice, Discretionary Housing Payments and local welfare support
  - greater need for early intervention where tenants face unaffordable rent increases.
- Customer impact:
  - tenants may remain legally protected from no-fault eviction but still be priced out through unaffordable rent rises
  - households may need advice on challenging rent increases and sustaining tenancies
  - vulnerable tenants may be least able to navigate tribunal routes.
- Service delivery impacts:
  - more referrals between benefits, housing options, homelessness prevention and welfare advice teams
  - increased need to identify households at risk before rent arrears or eviction action escalates
  - front-line staff may need clear guidance on rent increase challenges, tribunal signposting and DHP support.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Private Rent Reform: Risk of Rent Hikes and Homelessness Pressure

- Performance and timeliness risks:
  - delayed advice or support could increase homelessness demand
  - rent hikes may create faster movement from affordability pressure to arrears and eviction risk
  - DHP and crisis support budgets may come under greater pressure.
- Fraud/error and compliance:
  - no direct fraud issue is identified in the article
  - compliance risk relates mainly to accurate advice, lawful decision-making and consistent signposting.
- Financial position:
  - average UK rent reported at **£1,383 in May 2026**, up **3.3%** year on year
  - no direct council funding is identified in the article
  - potential indirect pressure on homelessness budgets, DHPs, temporary accommodation and local welfare support if rent hikes increase housing insecurity.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Resolution Foundation

Young Adults Living at Home: Housing, Work and Welfare Risk

- Resolution Foundation report focuses on today's under-30s, particularly young adults born between **1996 and 2005**.
- Living with parents is now a major feature of young adult living standards:
  - **63%** of people aged **20-24** now live at home, up **12 percentage points** since 2011
  - **24%** of people aged **25-29** live at home, up from **19%** since 2011.
- The main driver is housing cost and affordability:
  - private renting remains the main alternative for young adults
  - private renting is described as the most expensive and worst-quality tenure
  - more young people are choosing, or being forced, to remain at home rather than rent independently.
- Household income figures can overstate young adults' living standards because parental income is included:
  - half of apparent income progress for young adults aged 20-29 comes from other household members, not the young person themselves.
- Some income progress is genuine:
  - people born between 1996 and 2000 had benefit-unit incomes **15% higher** than those born between 1986 and 1990 at the same age
  - earnings gains have been supported by a stronger labour market and minimum wage increases.
- Risks remain:
  - more than **1 million** young adults are now NEET: not in employment, education or training
  - report warns against relying only on further youth minimum wage rises to improve living standards.
- Home ownership remains substantially weaker for younger adults:
  - ownership among benefit units headed by someone aged 19-29 fell from **22% in 1989** to **11% in 2023**
  - wealth gaps between younger and older generations have widened sharply.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Resolution Foundation

Young Adults Living at Home: Housing, Work and Welfare Risk

- Revenues and Benefits relevance:
  - increased need to understand multi-generational households in Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit legacy cases, local welfare and hardship support
  - more adult children living at home may affect household composition, non-dependant deductions, liability assumptions and customer advice
  - risk that apparent household income masks individual hardship among young adults.
- Service delivery impacts:
  - front-line teams may see more complex household enquiries involving parents, adult children, students, young workers and NEET young adults
  - increased need for clear advice on household changes, benefit entitlement, council tax liability, discounts and support
  - stronger referral links needed between Revenues and Benefits, housing, homelessness prevention, employment support, education and local welfare.
- Customer impact:
  - young adults may delay independence because private renting is unaffordable
  - parents may face additional household costs from adult children remaining at home
  - young people without parental housing or financial support may face greater risk of hardship, rent arrears or homelessness.
- Data, digital and process changes:
  - councils may need better use of administrative data to identify young adults at risk of financial hardship, homelessness or worklessness
  - local dashboards could combine CTR, arrears, DHP, housing and employment indicators
  - careful governance is needed where data is used to target support.
- Fraud/error and compliance:
  - no direct fraud issue is identified in the report
  - error risks may arise where household composition, residency, student status or non-dependant circumstances are not kept up to date.
- Financial position:
  - no direct council funding change is identified
  - indirect pressures may arise through homelessness prevention, local welfare, DHPs, council tax support and debt advice demand
  - longer-term risk if NEET levels increase welfare dependency, arrears and crisis intervention costs
  - policy response needs to join up housing, employment, wages and wealth-building, not treat living standards as a benefits issue alone

VISIONARY NETWORK

Quote of the Week

*“*Having children is like living in a frat house—nobody sleeps, everything's broken, and there's a lot of throwing up.” — *Ray Romano*

Ray Romano is an American comedian and actor best known for creating and starring in the hit sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*, where his dry warmth and everyman timing turned domestic chaos into Emmy-winning comfort TV. He’s since expanded into dramatic roles, standout voice work in the *Ice Age* films, and a steady career as one of comedy’s most relatable storytellers.

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.*
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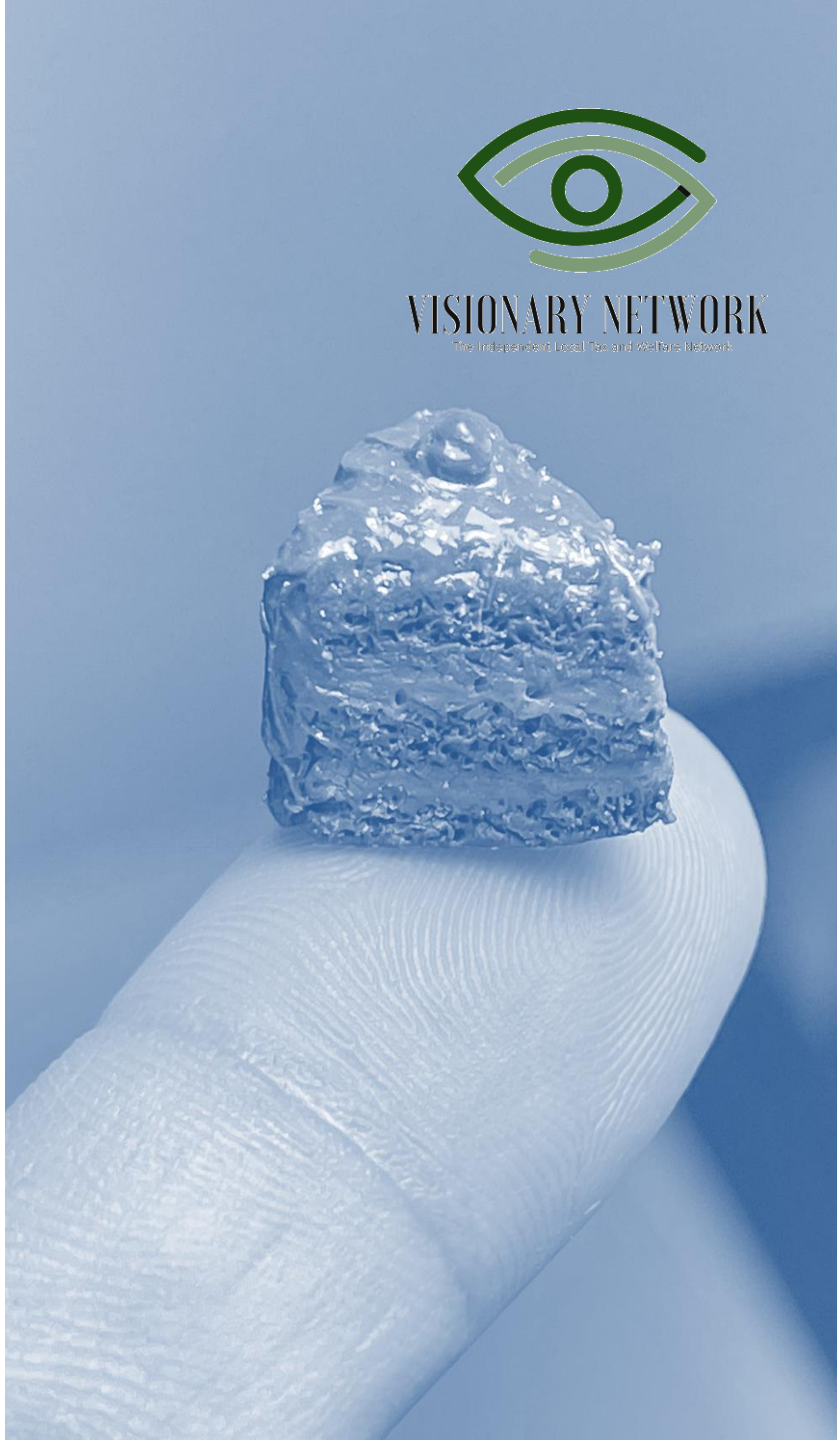


EPOCH 43: Accuracy 96.2%
Neural Net
Training data
AI Model Development Roadmap
Time

AI Watch

AI Agents in Marketing: In-Housing Risk and Service Redesign Lessons

- Agencies are moving rapidly into **AI agents** to improve campaign planning, media buying, e-commerce development and marketing workflow.
- Digiday reports that **Dentsu** and **Dept** are placing AI agents at the centre of their market offers.
- The same technology creates a competitive threat: brands may use AI agents to bring work in-house rather than rely on external agencies.
- Hyundai is cited as an example of a brand testing agentic media capability, showing how large advertisers may reduce dependence on agencies.
- World Federation of Advertisers data cited by Digiday says **71%** of in-house teams are implementing AI in marketing operations and **93%** expect to invest further in AI over the next **12 to 24 months**.
- Dept's approach is to productise AI agent implementation, offering faster and more rigorous bespoke AI builds than many internal teams may manage alone.
- Dept used AI agents built with Google's Gemini and Antigravity suites for Blackroll, a Swiss fitness equipment brand, completing an e-commerce platform redesign **3.8 times quicker** than estimated without agents.
- Dentsu has also launched AI-enabled creative tools with Google Cloud, showing how major agencies are embedding generative AI into client delivery.
- Wider market risk: AI reduces the value of scale alone, so agencies and consultancies must show judgement, governance, creativity and implementation capability, not just access to tools.

AI Agents in Marketing: In-Housing Risk and Service Redesign Lessons

- Revenues and Benefits relevance:
  - councils may use AI agents to improve analysis, workflow, customer communication and case triage
  - external suppliers must show added value beyond tools councils may be able to buy or build themselves
  - AI capability may accelerate the trend towards partial in-house delivery of analytics, automation and service improvement.
- Service delivery impacts:
  - potential use cases include arrears segmentation, CTR modelling support, customer contact drafting, evidence review, performance reporting and workflow prompts
  - AI agents could support routine analysis but still require officer judgement, audit trails and quality assurance
  - specialist providers may remain valuable where they combine domain expertise, legal understanding and implementation discipline.
- Resourcing and performance risks:
  - AI may reduce manual effort in reporting, data preparation and first-draft analysis
  - risk of over-reliance where staff treat AI outputs as decisions rather than support
  - councils need skills to specify, test, challenge and govern AI-enabled services.
- Data, digital and process changes:
  - effective use depends on clean data, secure access, clear permissions and defined workflows
  - councils will need policies on confidentiality, personal data, human review and record keeping
  - agentic systems should be introduced through controlled pilots before operational use.

AI Agents in Marketing: In-Housing Risk and Service Redesign Lessons

- Customer impact:
  - AI could improve speed, consistency and clarity of communications
  - poor implementation could create errors, unfairness or insensitive messaging
  - human escalation remains essential for vulnerability, hardship, disputes and complex benefit issues.
- Fraud/error and compliance:
  - AI may help identify anomalies, missing evidence or inconsistent records
  - risks include inaccurate outputs, weak auditability, data leakage and untested automated recommendations
  - compliance requires transparency, human oversight and documented decision-making.
- Financial position:
  - potential savings from faster analysis, automation and reduced manual workload
  - upfront costs likely for tools, integration, training, governance and supplier support
  - income/recovery benefits may arise if AI improves targeting of arrears, discounts, exemptions and fraud/error checks
  - risk that poorly governed AI creates rework, complaints, legal challenge or reputational damage.

LGR & Finance Watch

English Devolution: Integrated Settlements, Funding Flexibility and Accountability Risk

- NAO report reviews whether MHCLG is implementing English devolution funding and accountability in a way that supports better outcomes for local people.
- Integrated Settlements bring multiple central government grants into a single settlement for eligible Mayoral Strategic Authorities, replacing separate grants and reporting routes.
- £15.9bn of Integrated Settlement funding has been announced for 2025-26 to 2029-30, including £14.8bn multi-year funding from 2026-27 to 2029-30.
- Funding is grouped under six themes: transport and local infrastructure; housing and strategic planning; economic development and regeneration; environment and climate change; skills and employment support; and health, wellbeing and public service reform.
- Seven Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities are covered: Greater London, Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, North East, South Yorkshire, West Midlands and West Yorkshire.
- NAO finds the model is broadly welcomed and supports longer-term, more coordinated spending decisions, but capacity and accountability arrangements remain key risks

English Devolution: Integrated Settlements, Funding Flexibility and Accountability Risk

- Revenues and Benefits: no direct change to Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, fraud/error, backlogs or day-to-day statutory service delivery is identified in the report.
- Service risk: wider devolution may increase pressure on councils to align local welfare, employment support, public service reform and financial support activity across larger strategic authority footprints.
- Resourcing risk: newer or less mature authorities may face capacity and capability gaps in governance, finance, legal and delivery functions as responsibilities increase.
- Performance and compliance: Outcomes Frameworks were not finalised until March 2026, limiting authorities’ ability to finalise contracts before the 2026-27 financial year.
- Assurance risk: local scrutiny and local audit need strengthening if devolved funding is to be locally accountable and less dependent on central departmental monitoring.

English Devolution: Integrated Settlements, Funding Flexibility and Accountability Risk

- Financial position: the model offers greater flexibility, including movement between themes, years, and revenue/capital spend, but NAO says reporting burdens are higher than expected and underperformance arrangements remain untested.
- Action needed: monitor local devolution arrangements, assess any impact on R&B capacity and welfare support links, and ensure finance, performance and audit evidence can support future Outcomes Frameworks.

Other Workshops

Annual Conference 2026

PUBLIC FINANCE LIVE

15-16 July
Olympia, London

VISIONARY NETWORK - FIND US ON THE FLOOR

Public Finance Live is back in London at 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 lead event 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.

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Meet The Team

Ben Moreton

CEO
Co-Founder

Mark Thomas

Operations
Co-Founder

Chris Sharratt

Talent Partner

Leanne Carey

Contracts Manager

Trustpilot

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

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

Revenues & Benefits Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)

Permanent | Circa £31,022.00 per annum | Remote

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

Roles are offered on a remote basis with the understanding you may be asked to work from the office 1 day per month, and initially for the first few days for training & set-up.

Duties include:

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

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

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

To find out more or to apply
>> Click here to view the full advert <<

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.

To find out more or to apply
>> Click here to view the full advert <<

Benefits Officer (MRI/Academy)

5 weeks initially | £25 per hour (umbrella) | Fully Remote

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

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

Rate: £25.00ph (umbrella)
Term: 6 weeks initially
Location: Fully remote

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

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

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

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

Business Rates Manager

Permanent | Circa £32,000 - £39,00 per annum | Nationwide

This role will involve, but not be limited to:

- Daily operational management of one large complex client portfolio or multiple smaller portfolios.
- Verification of rates bills issued by billing authorities in respect of properties throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Resolving queries where rates bills are not approved.
- Liaising with clients and with billing authorities to correct matters relating to occupational changes, changes to the rating list and exemptions and reliefs.
- Obtaining information from clients and responding to queries.
- Ensuring all portfolio movement is actioned appropriately.
- The creation and delivery of quality and accurate reports to clients and senior management.
- The development and maintenance of client relationships, including attendance at client meetings when appropriate.
- Meeting all KPIs as set out in Client Contracts and Service Level Agreements to agreed deadlines and to standards agreed with the Client Director and Line Manager.
- Assisting in carrying out one-off audits of historic rate payments.
- Explaining the functions of the Client Monies service to clients and colleagues and undertaking Client Monies tasks when appropriate.

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

- A good understanding of the complexities of calculating rate liabilities together with rating appeal and rate relief application processes in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire and the Channel Islands.
- Working knowledge of business rate legislation and case law and able to explain this clearly to clients and junior colleagues.
- Excellent negotiating and reasoning skills when dealing with billing authorities, utilising knowledge of business rate legislation and case law to support their requests.

To find out more or to apply
>> Click here to view the full advert <<

Business Rates Administrator

Permanent | Circa £26,000 to £31,000 per annum | Birmingham

Your role will involve, but not be limited to:

- Providing administration assistance in the operational management of a large complex client portfolio or multiple smaller portfolios under guidance from a senior colleague.
- Verification of rates bills issued by billing authorities against data held in the internal Information Management System in respect of properties throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Resolving queries where rates bills are not verified, which may involve assistance from a senior colleague.
- Liaising with billing authorities to correct matters relating to occupational changes, changes to the rating list and exemptions and reliefs.
- Ensuring all portfolio movement is actioned appropriately.
- Obtaining information from clients and responding to queries.
- Assisting in delivery accurate reports to clients and senior management.
- Meeting all KPIs as set out in Client Contracts and Service Level Agreements to agreed deadlines and to standards agreed with the Client Director and Line Manager.
- Assisting with Client Monies tasks when appropriate.

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

- An understanding of business rate legislation and significant case law.
- Able to compare rate demands etc. to the internal Information Management System for verification and, where demands do not match the Information Management System, able to understand why this is the case.
- Good interpersonal skills in dealings with clients and colleagues and able to present themselves well in meetings.
- Good numeracy skills.
- A basic understanding of the functions of the Client Monies Service.

To find out more or to apply
>> Click here to view the full advert <<

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

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

✨ Start your journey today – register now!

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

Contact us here

Payroll Solutions

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

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

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

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

Trustpilot

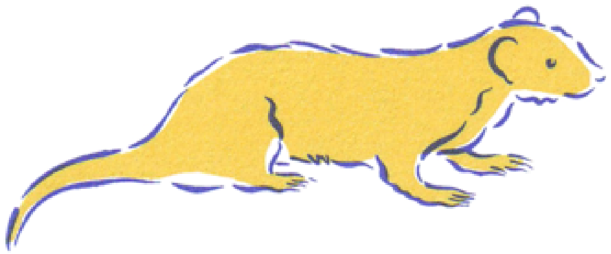
"BSS has provided us with excellent support since 2022. The range of expertise they have on their books is second to none, and they are without doubt my first choice when looking for staff.

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

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

EQUITY RELEASE AWARDS 2015 WINNER BEST TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER

Ferret Information Systems Ltd



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

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our training services:

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

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our products:

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

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our platforms:

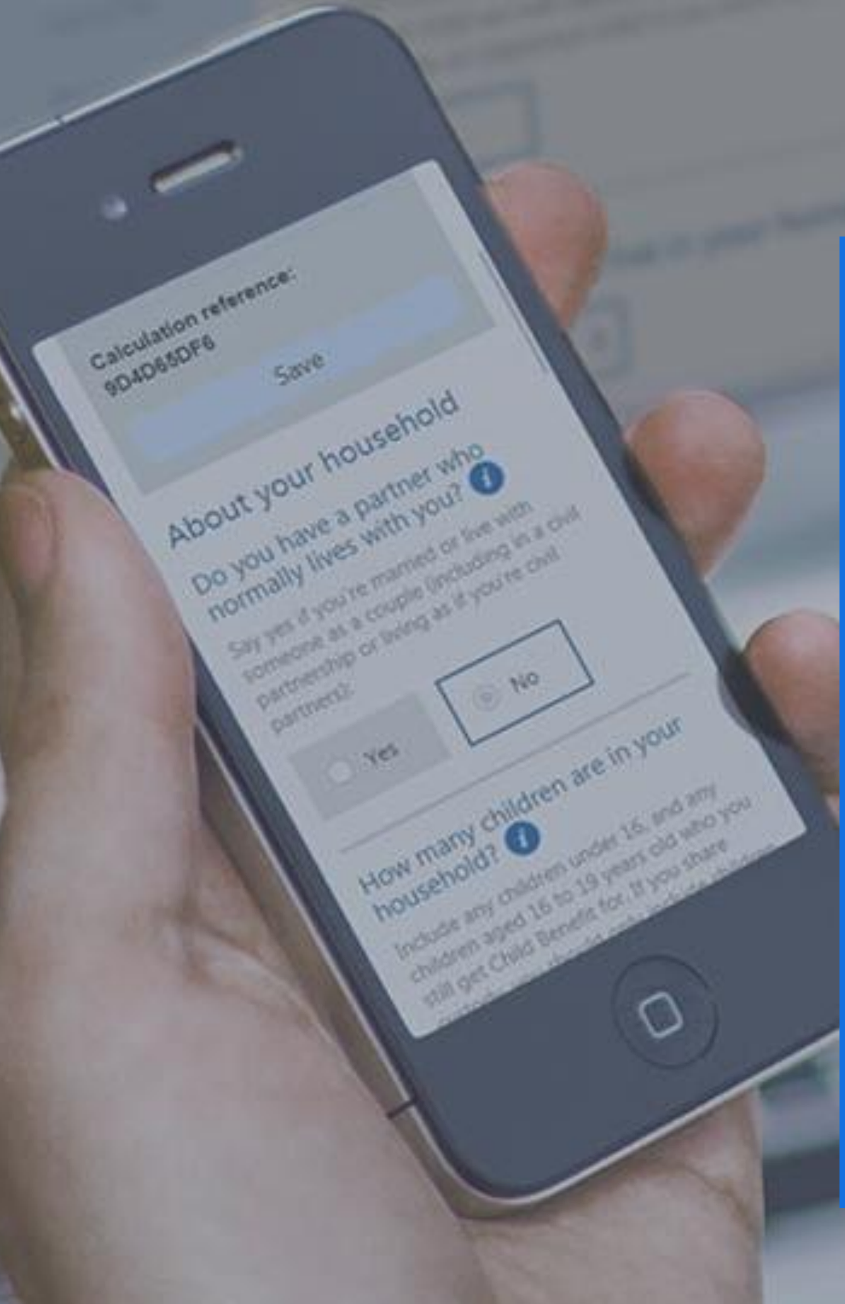
Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our customers:

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

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



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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.

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

Session Information

https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/blog/

Previous Recordings

- 16 Feb 26 — Reforming Council Tax & Adult Social Care, Income Maximisation Calculators and Welsh Poverty
- 2 March 26 — The future of work, and what it means for revenues and benefits teams
- 9 March 26 — Spring Statement review: what revenues and benefits practitioners heard beneath the headlines
- 16 March 26 — Youth jobs, council tax support and the case for reform
- 23 March 26 — Food banks, weather shocks and the next cost of living crisis/
- 8 April 26 — When Systems Collide: Supported Housing, Reorganisation and Poverty in Local Government
- 13 April 26 — Temporary Accommodation - When National Policy Fails, Councils Carry the Cost
- 27 April 26 — Council tax reform: fairer administration, or a bill councils cannot afford to send?
- 11 May 26 — New councilors, no overall control and the realities of governing
- 18 May 26 — Houseboats, standards and digital government
- 1 Jun 26 — Youth inactivity, public sector pipelines and the rise of AI generated appeals
- 15 Jun 26 — Local government reorganisation, council tax and social care
- 29 Jun 26 — Council Tax, Data Quality and the Growing Arrears Crisis

VISIONARY NETWORK

Dates where there will be no sessions

- August Summer Break: 3–31 Aug. 26
- Winter Festival Break: 7 Dec. 26 – 4 Jan. 27
- Easter Monday: 29 Mar. 27
- Spring Early May Bank Holiday: 3 May 27

Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

Blogs

VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

- 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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Resolution Foundation

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

[IFS: How unequal is Britain?]

[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

VISIONARY NETWORK

About Visionary Network

Visionary Network

VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Visionary Network is a not-for-profit organisation, whose objective is to encourage thought leadership and good practice in the field of public service.

We are independent and will draw on views, ideas and practices from any practitioner and/or organisation committed to public service.

We encourage debate, and the fair exchange of ideas, viewpoints and philosophies.

Any products we do produce will be for the betterment of society, public sector led and if costed will reflect our not-for-profit values.

Our focus is on improving the knowledge, health, environment and lives of our citizens through better administration and access to services.

A nonprofit organisation is a type of organisation that is formed for a specific social or charitable purpose rather than for profit. Its primary goal is to serve the needs of a particular community, cause, or interest, and any profits or revenue generated are reinvested back into the organisation to further its mission, rather than being distributed as profits to owners or shareholders.

Visionary Network Partnership

A dynamic consortium of private sector companies is uniting to transform public service delivery across the nation. By harnessing cutting-edge technologies and innovative methodologies, this partnership is dedicated to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector performance. Their focus is on optimising the use of resources and budgets, ensuring that every pound of public funds is directed towards improving citizens’ lives. This group is at the forefront of digital transformation, leveraging data analytics and advanced technological solutions to streamline operations and reduce waste, ultimately supporting a more responsive and agile public sector.

Working closely with public sector organisations and collaborating amongst themselves, the partnership fosters a culture of innovation and disruption. By pooling their diverse expertise, the companies involved can tackle longstanding challenges with fresh, inventive approaches that deliver measurable improvements in service delivery. Their cooperative efforts not only drive substantial cost savings but also set a new benchmark for how the public sector can benefit from private sector ingenuity. In doing so, they reaffirm their commitment to ensuring that public funds are utilised to create a tangible, positive impact on the community.