In Partnership with

Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

17 August 2026

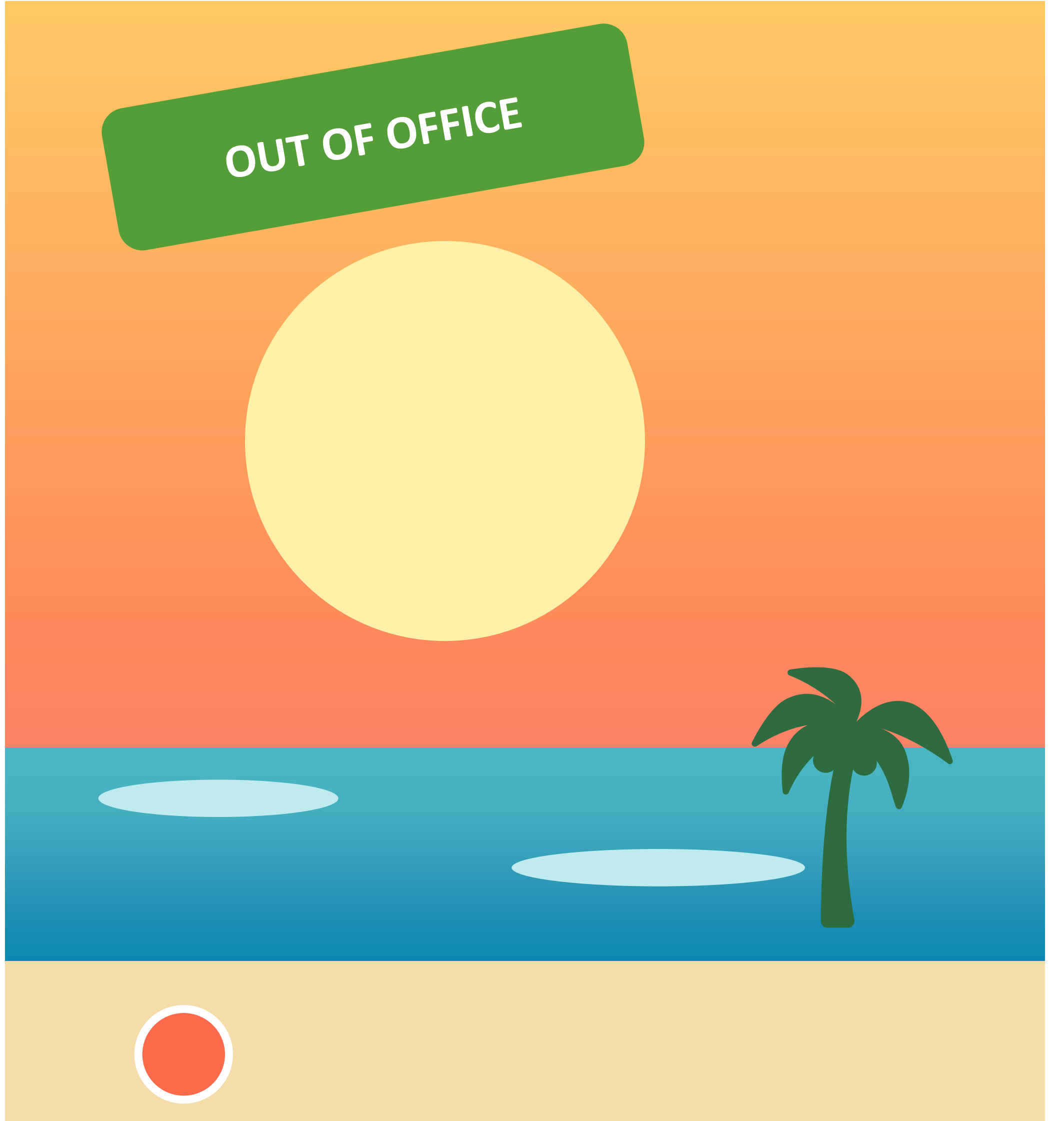
Meeting Link

VISIONARY NETWORK

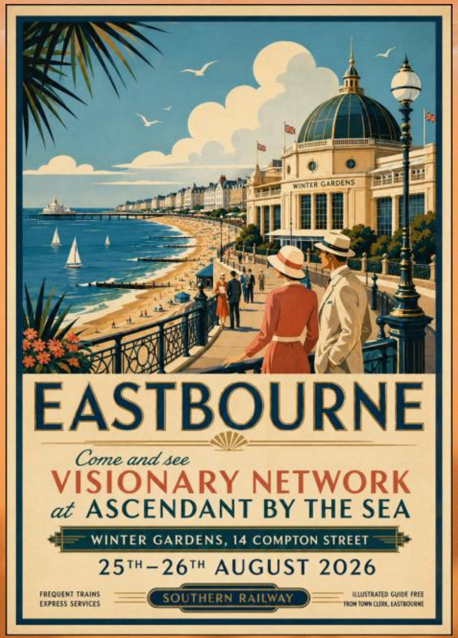
Gone sunny.
Back 7 Sept.

The team is off chasing sunshine until 7 September.

We'll still fire over mid-break updates, so nothing lands on your desk as a surprise. Because we're nice like that.



Visionary on Tour 2026



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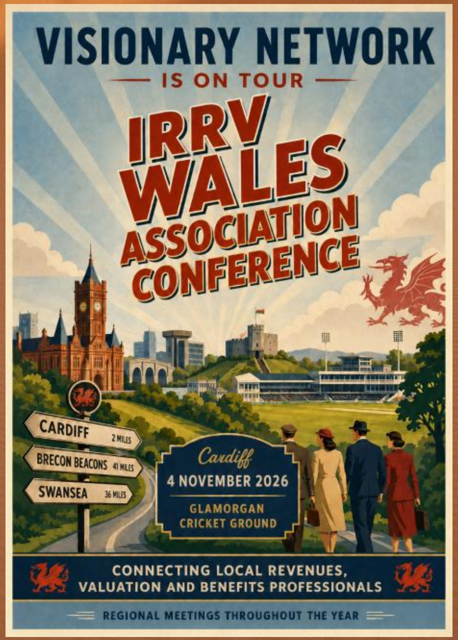


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Why councils choose LGR & CTR support
Local Government Reorganisation creates pressure to review and harmonise Council Tax Reduction schemes. Visionary Network helps councils make confident choices with stronger evidence, clear options and practical delivery support.
We use inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool to provide robust modelling and insight you can rely on.
What the service helps you do
Compare legacy CTR schemes across merging councils
Test support levels, savings and distributional effects
Assess equality, affordability and financial impacts
Build a stronger case for consultation and approval
Prepare for implementation, governance and future structural change
Why Visionary Network
Trusted practical experience in Revenues & Benefits
Local government understanding, not generic consultancy
inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool supports strong modelling and evidence
A service designed to help councils move from legacy schemes to a single workable future model
For Directors of Finance and Revenues & Benefits Managers, LGR & CTR support offers clearer policy choices, stronger evidence and a more resilient scheme.
Talk to Visionary Network about LGR & CTR
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Local Government Reorganisation & CTR
Harmonise with confidence. Stronger evidence. Better outcomes.
Visionary Network helps councils navigate Local Government Reorganisation and harmonise Council Tax Reduction schemes using trusted sector expertise, robust analysis and inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool.
From legacy schemes to a clear future model.
Review existing CTR schemes and pressures
Model realistic harmonisation options
Understand claimant, equality and collection fund impacts
Support consultation, member decisions and implementation
Trusted experience in Revenues & Benefits
Trusted expertise.
Practical harmonisation.
Lower risk.
Talk to Visionary Network about LGR & CTR
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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.


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Why councils choose CTR Redesign
CTR Redesign helps councils make informed choices with stronger evidence, clear options and practical delivery support.
Visionary Network uses inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool to provide robust modelling and insight you can rely on.
What the service helps you do
Identify practical redesign options
Use inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool to test savings, support levels and distributional effects
Assess equality and financial impacts
Build a stronger case for consultation and approval
Prepare for implementation and future structural change
Why Visionary Network
Trusted practical experience in Revenues & Benefits
Local government understanding, not generic consultancy
inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool supports strong modelling and evidence
A service designed to help councils make confident decisions
For Directors of Finance and Revenues & Benefits Managers, CTR Redesign offers clearer policy choices, stronger evidence and a more resilient scheme.
Talk to Visionary Network about CTR Redesign
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Better evidence. Better decisions. Better outcomes.
Visionary Network helps councils review and redesign their Council Tax Reduction schemes using trusted sector expertise, robust analysis, and inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool.
Smarter analysis. Stronger decisions. Better results.
Review your current scheme and pressures
Use inbest.ai's CTR Data Analytics Tool to model realistic redesign options
Understand claimant, equality and collection fund impacts
Support consultation, member decisions and implementation
Trusted experience in Revenues & Benefits
Trusted expertise. Practical redesign. Lower risk.
Talk to Visionary Network about CTR Redesign
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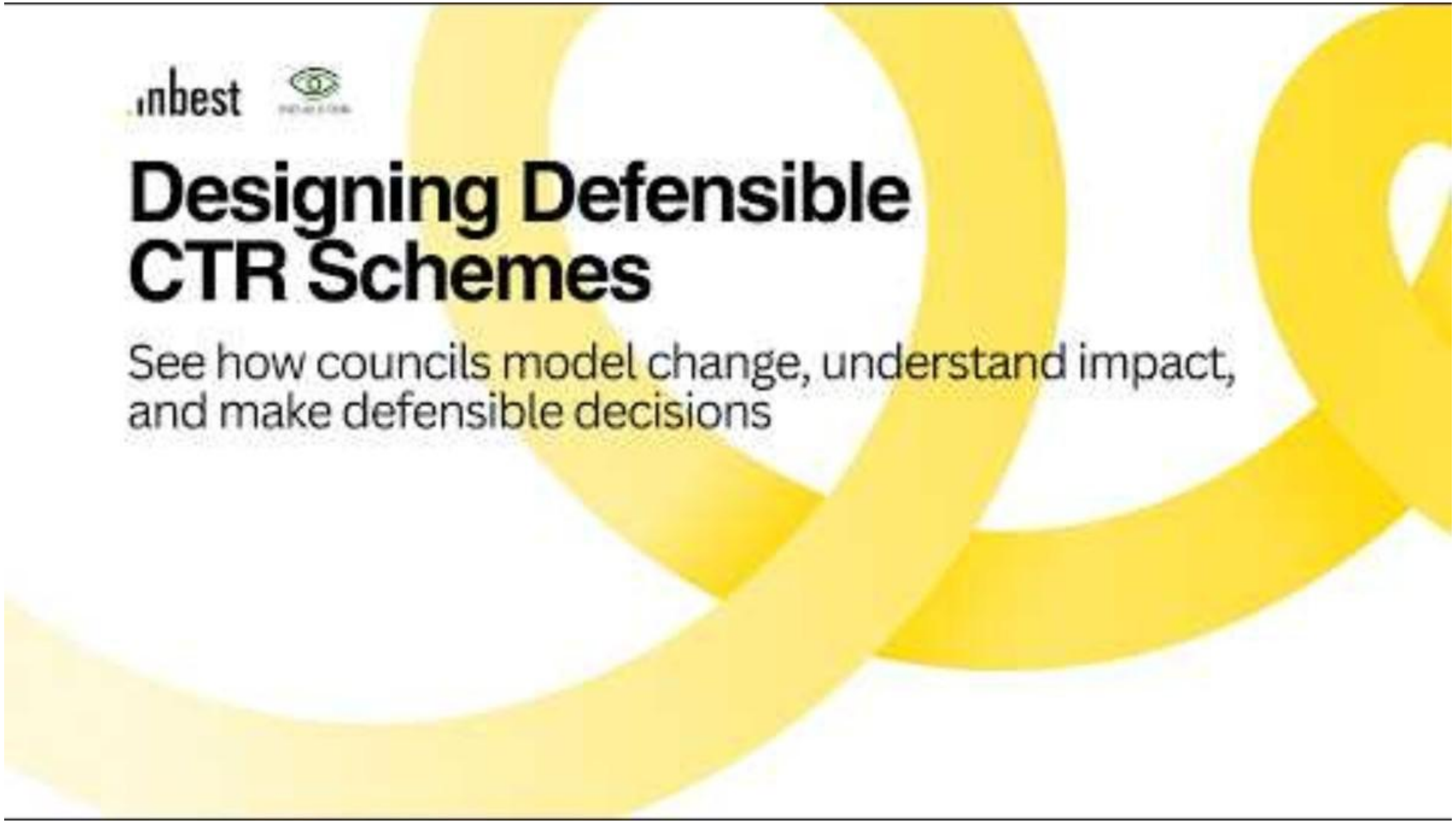
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Designing Defensible
CTR Schemes
See how councils model change, understand impact,
and make defensible decisions

Play Video


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Crisis Resilience Fund (CRF) for Councils
Target support. Strengthen resilience. Better outcomes.
Visionary Network helps councils design, review and deliver Crisis Resilience Fund services that are fair, practical and focused on residents facing financial hardship.
Local government expertise. Practical delivery. Stronger support where it matters most.
Review local need and policy priorities
Design eligibility, awards and governance
Improve targeting, take-up and resident outcomes
Support delivery, assurance and performance reporting
Trusted experience in Revenues & Benefits
Trusted expertise. Practical support. Better outcomes.
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Talk to Visionary Network about CRF
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Why councils choose CRF support
Crisis Resilience Fund support helps councils respond to financial hardship with clearer policy, stronger targeting and practical delivery support. Visionary Network helps councils create a fund that is fair, workable and focused on residents who need help most.
Our approach combines local government understanding, practical service design and strong governance so councils can deliver support with confidence.
What the service helps you do
Define the purpose and priorities of your CRF
Set clear eligibility, awards and decision rules
Target support to residents facing hardship
Strengthen governance, assurance and reporting
Build a practical model for delivery and review
Why Visionary Network
Trusted practical experience in Revenues & Benefits
Local government understanding, not generic consultancy
Resident-focused design, policy and delivery support
A service designed to help councils support vulnerable households with confidence
For Directors of Finance and Revenues & Benefits Managers, CRF support offers clearer governance, better targeting and stronger resident outcomes.
Talk to Visionary Network about CRF
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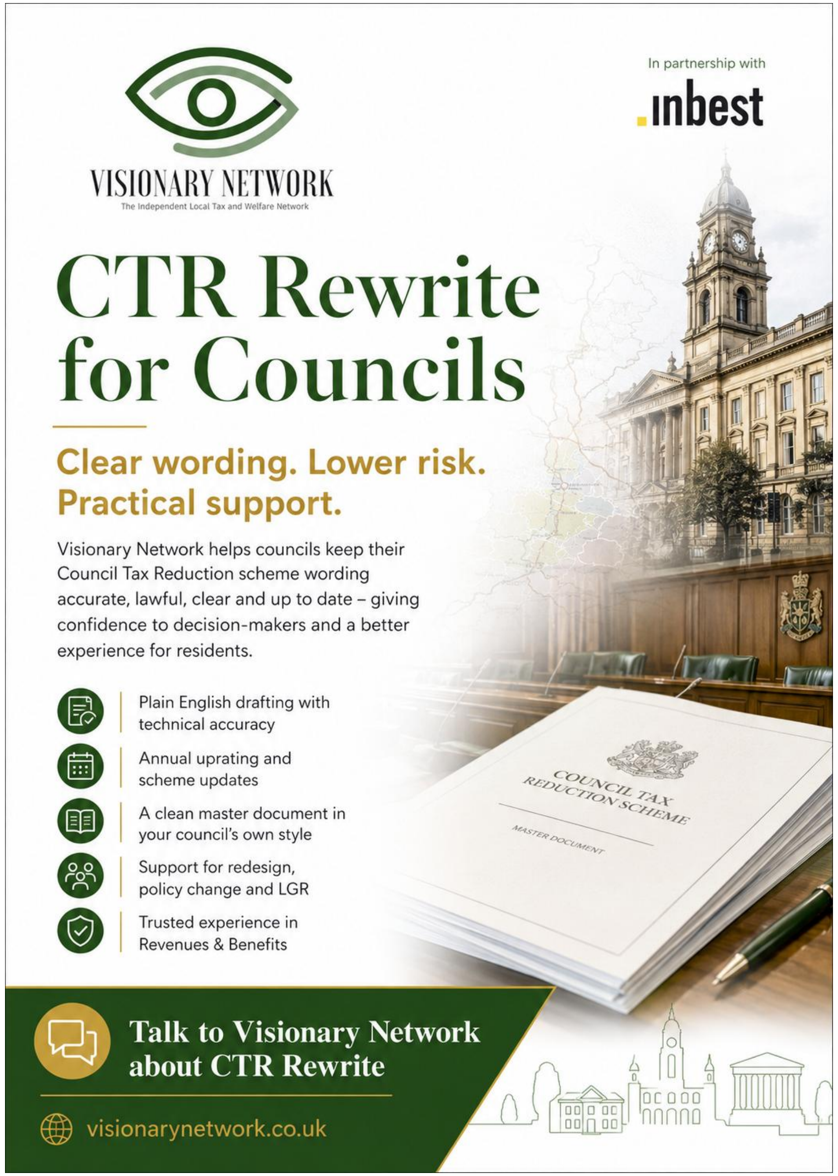
Supporting better local outcomes through practical insight and partnership.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CTR Rewrite for Councils
Clear wording. Lower risk. Practical support.
Visionary Network helps councils keep their Council Tax Reduction scheme wording accurate, lawful, clear and up to date – giving confidence to decision-makers and a better experience for residents.
Plain English drafting with technical accuracy
Annual uprating and scheme updates
A clean master document in your council's own style
Support for redesign, policy change and LGR
Trusted experience in Revenues & Benefits
COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME
MASTER DOCUMENT
Talk to Visionary Network about CTR Rewrite
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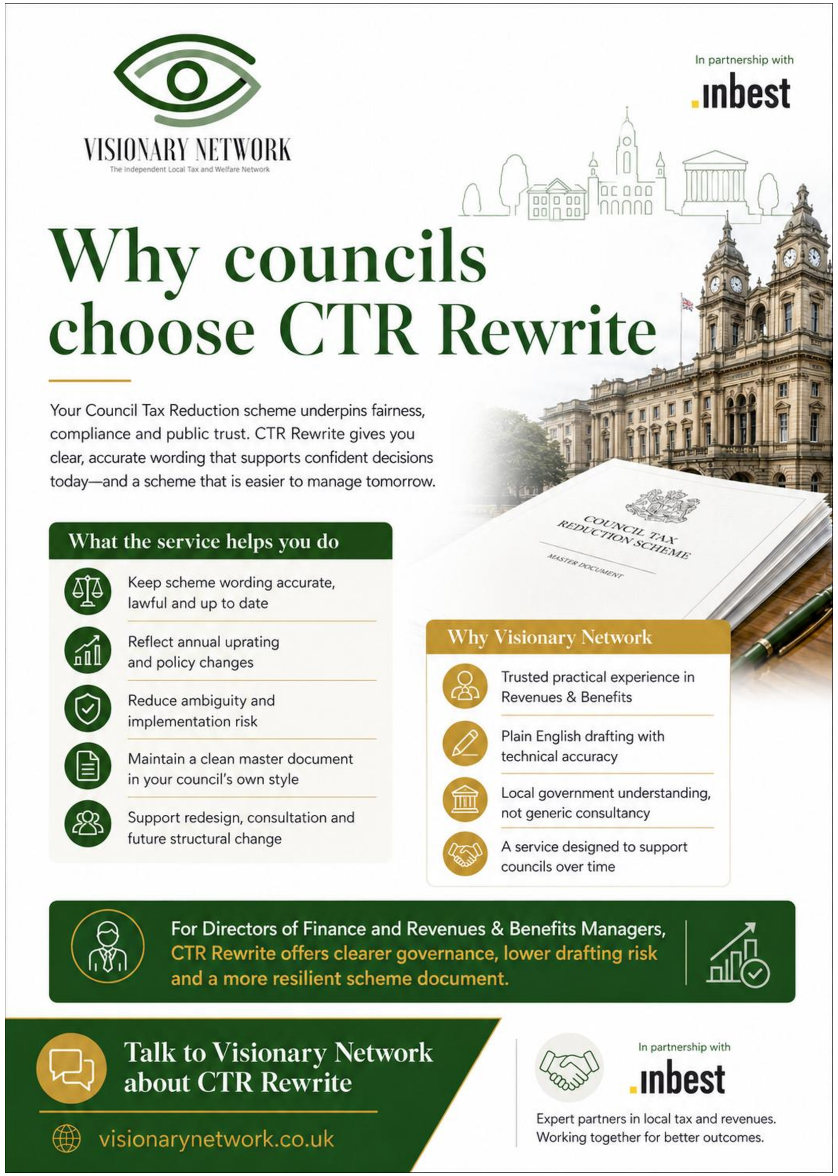
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Why councils choose CTR Rewrite
Your Council Tax Reduction scheme underpins fairness, compliance and public trust. CTR Rewrite gives you clear, accurate wording that supports confident decisions today—and a scheme that is easier to manage tomorrow.
What the service helps you do
Keep scheme wording accurate, lawful and up to date
Reflect annual uprating and policy changes
Reduce ambiguity and implementation risk
Maintain a clean master document in your council's own style
Support redesign, consultation and future structural change
COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME
MASTER DOCUMENT
Why Visionary Network
Trusted practical experience in Revenues & Benefits
Plain English drafting with technical accuracy
Local government understanding, not generic consultancy
A service designed to support councils over time
For Directors of Finance and Revenues & Benefits Managers, CTR Rewrite offers clearer governance, lower drafting risk and a more resilient scheme document.
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May takes

In the news

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Right to Buy Surge Boosts Capital Receipts but Accelerates the Loss of Council Housing

- Councils reported 14,275 eligible sales in 2025-26, 90% more than in 2024-25 and the highest total since 2006-07.
- More than 99% of sales with a known type were Right to Buy; 39 were shared ownership sales.
- Councils received £1.61bn, an increase of 99.6%; the average receipt rose by 5% to £112,900.
- The surge largely reflects applications submitted before maximum Right to Buy discounts were reduced on 21 November 2024.
- Applications had risen from 18,755 in 2023-24 to 63,378 in 2024-25, creating a substantial processing and completion pipeline.
- Only 3,452 replacement homes were started or acquired using receipts, 7% fewer than in the previous year.
- This represents approximately four sales for every replacement started or acquired during the year, although replacements can lag behind sales and are not directly comparable.
- Further reforms, including a proposed discount cap of 15% of property value, are intended to reduce future losses of council housing.
- Risk: the exceptional receipts increase is unlikely to provide a sustainable income baseline once lower discounts reduce applications and sales.

References
- Inside Housing: Councils’ Right to Buy sales income doubles to £1.6bn, 6 August 2026
- MHCLG: Right to Buy sales and replacements, England, April 2025 to March 2026

Department for Work & Pensions

Closure of Working-Age Housing Benefit and the Move to Universal Credit (A6/26)

Working-age Housing Benefit has closed for most general-needs tenants

- The closing Order came into force on 1 July 2026 as managed migration to Universal Credit nears completion.
- Working-age Housing Benefit is abolished for claimants who do not live in temporary or specified accommodation.
- Housing Benefit can continue during the two-week Universal Credit housing payment transition, ending the following day.
- Exceptions include certain income-related Employment and Support Allowance claimants who have, or require, an appointee.
- Prisoners and people serving sentences in hospital can remain entitled until the day after their release.
- Pension-age claimants and protected mixed-age couples are unaffected. A new Housing Benefit claim remains possible when someone moves back into temporary or specified accommodation.

Department for Work & Pensions

Closure of Working-Age Housing Benefit and the Move to Universal Credit (A6/26)

Revenues and Benefits must control the remaining caseload carefully

- Local authorities must ensure every working-age Housing Benefit award continuing from 1 July 2026 relates to temporary or specified accommodation, or a permitted exception.
- Systems and processes should accurately identify accommodation types, Universal Credit transition periods, appointee cases, prisoners and protected pension-age claims.
- The overall Housing Benefit caseload will continue to decline, but remaining cases are likely to require more specialist administration.
- Customers moving into general-needs accommodation must claim Universal Credit for housing costs. Clear communication and timely processing are essential to reduce payment gaps and hardship.
- Incorrect continuation could cause overpayments and subsidy or compliance risks, while incorrect termination could create underpayments, disputes, complaints and additional backlogs.
- Housing Benefit expenditure should reduce as cases close, but the circular provides no quantified savings, implementation costs, resourcing effects or funding changes. There is no direct change to local taxation or evidenced effect on revenue collection.

References

- Department for Work and Pensions, Housing Benefit Circular A6/2026: Closure of Working Age Housing Benefit, updated 27 July 2026.
- Welfare Reform Act 2012 (Commencement No. 35) (Abolition of Benefits) (Amendment) Order 2026, SI 2026/409.
- Welfare Reform Act 2012 (Commencement No. 35) (Abolition of Benefits) Order 2025, SI 2025/1148.
- Department for Work and Pensions, Housing Benefit Circular A13/2025: The Welfare Reform Act 2012.

VISIONARY NETWORK

gov.scot

Scottish Disability and Carer Benefits: Housing Benefit Changes (A7/26)

New Scottish benefits must be treated consistently with the benefits they replace

- SI 2026/679 came into force on 16 July 2026.
- The Order makes minor amendments to the working-age and pension-age Housing Benefit Regulations and the Decisions and Appeals Regulations.
- Scottish disability and carer benefits must be treated in the same way as the corresponding benefits they replace.
- The relevant benefits include Carer Support Payment, Carer's Allowance Supplement, Young Carer Grant, Child Disability Payment, Adult Disability Payment, Pension Age Disability Payment and Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance.
- These benefits must be disregarded as income where the regulations require this.
- The circular is for information and does not change the Housing Benefit Guidance Manual.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Scottish Disability and Carer Benefits: Housing Benefit Changes (A7/26)

Revenues and Benefits must apply the amended eligibility rules

- Certain working-age couples retain the childcare disregard when Adult Disability Payment temporarily stops because the recipient is in hospital.
- Pension Age Disability Payment now qualifies a claimant for the severe disability premium under the working-age and pension-age regulations.
- Adult Disability Payment is included as a qualifying benefit for the £20 earnings disregard under the pension-age regulations.
- Carer Support Payment, Pension Age Disability Payment and Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance can trigger revision or supersession when subsequently awarded, reinstated or increased.
- Revenues and Benefits should ensure systems, procedures and staff guidance recognise the new Scottish benefits and process affected decisions accurately and promptly.
- Customer awards may increase or be reinstated through additional premiums, disregards or revised decisions. The circular provides no estimate of costs, savings, caseload volumes, subsidy effects or revenue collection implications, and there is no direct local taxation impact.

References

- Department for Work and Pensions, Housing Benefit Circular A7/2026, updated 27 July 2026.
- The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (Disability and Carer Benefits) (Consequential Amendments) Order 2026, SI 2026/679.
- Housing Benefit Regulations 2006, SI 2006/213.
- Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for State Pension Credit) Regulations 2006, SI 2006/214.
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations 2001, SI 2001/1002.

Department for Education

Youth Apprenticeship Package Tackles Benefit and Training Barriers

Funding and policy commitments

- A new household bursary of up to £4,500 a year will support some Universal Credit families where a young person starting an apprenticeship would otherwise reduce household income.
- The final bursary amount, eligibility rules and benefit treatment remain to be confirmed.
- Eligible apprenticeship training for all under-25s will be fully funded from 1 August 2026.
- Smaller employers will receive a £2,000 bonus from October 2026 for recruiting an apprentice aged under 25.
- Combined employer support, including National Insurance relief, could be worth up to £8,000 per apprentice.
- The measures aim to help create 50,000 additional youth apprenticeships by the end of this Parliament.
- A further £287 million will fund more than 22,000 additional post-16 places through 87 projects in England.
- The package responds to more than one million young people being outside employment, education or training, approximately one in eight young people in England.

Department for Education

Youth Apprenticeship Package Tackles Benefit and Training Barriers

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Benefit interaction:** The bursary is intended to correct circumstances in which apprenticeship earnings cause a larger reduction in household Universal Credit than the apprentice earns.
- **Evidence gap:** The announcement presents different illustrations of the potential weekly loss, approximately £80 and up to £340; detailed regulations and worked examples will be needed.
- **Council Tax Reduction:** Changes in Universal Credit, household income and the treatment of the new bursary could alter local CTR entitlement, depending on each council's scheme.
- **Service delivery:** Revenues and Benefits teams will need confirmed guidance on whether the bursary is disregarded as income or capital and how it appears in Universal Credit data.
- **Customer support:** Staff should identify affected families, explain that detailed eligibility is still being developed and refer young people to apprenticeship and employment support.
- **Digital and process changes:** CTR systems, claim forms, automated data feeds and decision notices may require changes once the bursary rules are finalised.
- **Compliance and accuracy:** Councils should avoid treating the bursary inconsistently and monitor risks of duplicate, delayed or incorrect income changes.
- **Financial position:** Potential effects on CTR expenditure, administration costs and Council Tax collection cannot yet be quantified.

Department for Work & Pensions

Public Understanding and Trust in DWP Remain Mixed

Awareness, trust and customer perceptions

- Universal Credit had the greatest public awareness at 84%, compared with DWP at 76% and Jobcentre Plus at 74%.
- Detailed understanding remained limited: only 33% knew a fair amount or a lot about DWP, 29% about Universal Credit and 28% about Jobcentre Plus.
- Overall sentiment was largely neutral, although the proportion speaking positively about DWP and Jobcentre Plus increased slightly to 23%.
- Resource pressures were the characteristic most commonly associated with DWP and Jobcentre Plus, cited by 27% and 28% respectively.
- Trust varied by activity: 65% trusted DWP to provide open information, 60% to consider customers' needs and 56% to pay benefits accurately.
- Only 48% were confident that DWP would provide helpful support, falling to 45% for Jobcentre Plus; previous poor experiences were the leading concern among dissatisfied customers.
- Public understanding of PIP was confused: 65% correctly linked eligibility to difficulties with everyday activities, but 56% incorrectly believed it depended on ability to work.
- Seventy per cent prioritised accurate benefit payments, even where this required additional personal information; 14% prioritised limiting data collection.

Department for Work & Pensions

Public Understanding and Trust in DWP Remain Mixed

References

- DWP: Perceptions of the Department for Work and Pensions, Wave 3, October to November 2025
- Research conducted online by Ipsos UK between 21 October and 10 November 2025, based on 5,001 weighted interviews with UK adults aged 16 and over.
- Published May 2026 and updated 28 July 2026.

Revenues and Benefits implications and actions

- **Customer communication:** High awareness does not equal understanding; use plain language to explain responsibilities across Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and DWP.
- **Service delivery:** GOV.UK was the preferred benefits information source for 61%, but Citizens Advice remained important at 38%, supporting a combination of reliable digital guidance and independent advice.
- **Customer confidence:** Clear explanations, realistic timescales and effective complaint resolution are essential because poor personal experiences can significantly weaken trust.
- **Accuracy and compliance:** The public appears willing to support proportionate use of additional data to improve payment accuracy, but councils must explain why information is needed and protect it appropriately.
- **PIP and passporting:** Misunderstanding of PIP eligibility may deter claims or cause incorrect expectations about linked local support; communications should explain that PIP is not an out-of-work benefit.
- **Resourcing and performance:** Perceived resource shortages reinforce the need to monitor processing times, backlogs, contact demand, accuracy and accessibility.
- **Digital inclusion:** Online information should be supported by telephone, face-to-face and assisted-digital routes for customers unable to navigate complex benefit systems.
- The research identifies no quantified effects on council costs, savings, revenue collection, staffing, backlogs or fraud and error.

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Department for Work & Pensions

Housing Benefit Processing Slows as Change Volumes Fall

Quarter 4 processing performance

- Councils processed new Housing Benefit claims in an average of 21 calendar days between January and March 2026, compared with 20 days a year earlier.
- Changes of circumstances took an average of four days, compared with three days in the same quarter of 2025.
- Monthly processing times for new claims were 23 days in January, 20 in February and 21 in March.
- Change processing improved from six days in January to three days in both February and March.
- Councils processed approximately two million cases: 110,000 new claims and 1.9 million changes of circumstances.
- New-claim volumes were 2% higher than a year earlier; change volumes fell by 37%, from 2.9 million to 1.9 million.
- Performance varied substantially: new claims took between four and 77 days across councils, while changes took between one and 18 days.

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Department for Work & Pensions

Housing Benefit Processing Slows as Change Volumes Fall

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Customer impact:** Slower decisions can delay help with rent, increase arrears and create additional contact, particularly for pensioners and residents in temporary or specified accommodation.
- **Workload:** Working-age Housing Benefit remains significant: 77,000 new claims were processed, including 37,000 in specified accommodation and 33,000 in temporary accommodation.
- **Performance:** Pension-age new claims took longer, averaging 23 days compared with 20 days for working-age claims; working-age changes took six days compared with three days for pension-age cases.
- **Resourcing:** The sharp seasonal rise in changes, up 145% from quarter three, demonstrates the continuing need for flexible capacity around annual rent uprating.
- **Backlogs and timeliness:** Councils should investigate local results above the national averages, distinguishing underlying backlogs from temporary system conversions, mergers or operational changes.
- **Accuracy and compliance:** Faster processing must be balanced with verification and quality assurance, particularly for complex accommodation and pension-age claims.
- **Financial position:** Delays may contribute to rent arrears and demand for discretionary support, but the release provides no quantified council costs, savings or collection impacts.
- **Transparency risk:** This is the final planned publication of the official statistics, reducing consistent national visibility just as the residual Housing Benefit caseload becomes more specialised and complex.

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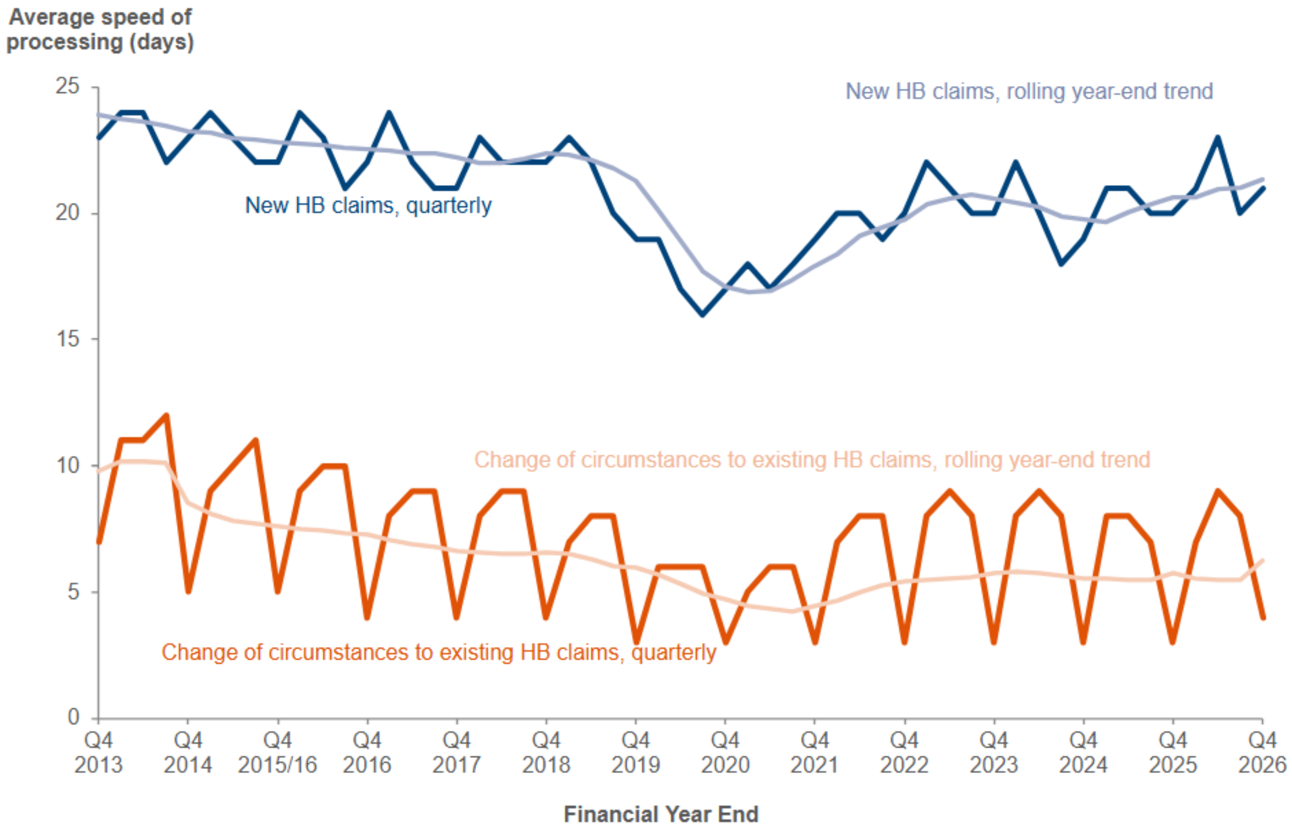
Department for Work & Pensions

Housing Benefit Processing Slows as Change Volumes Fall



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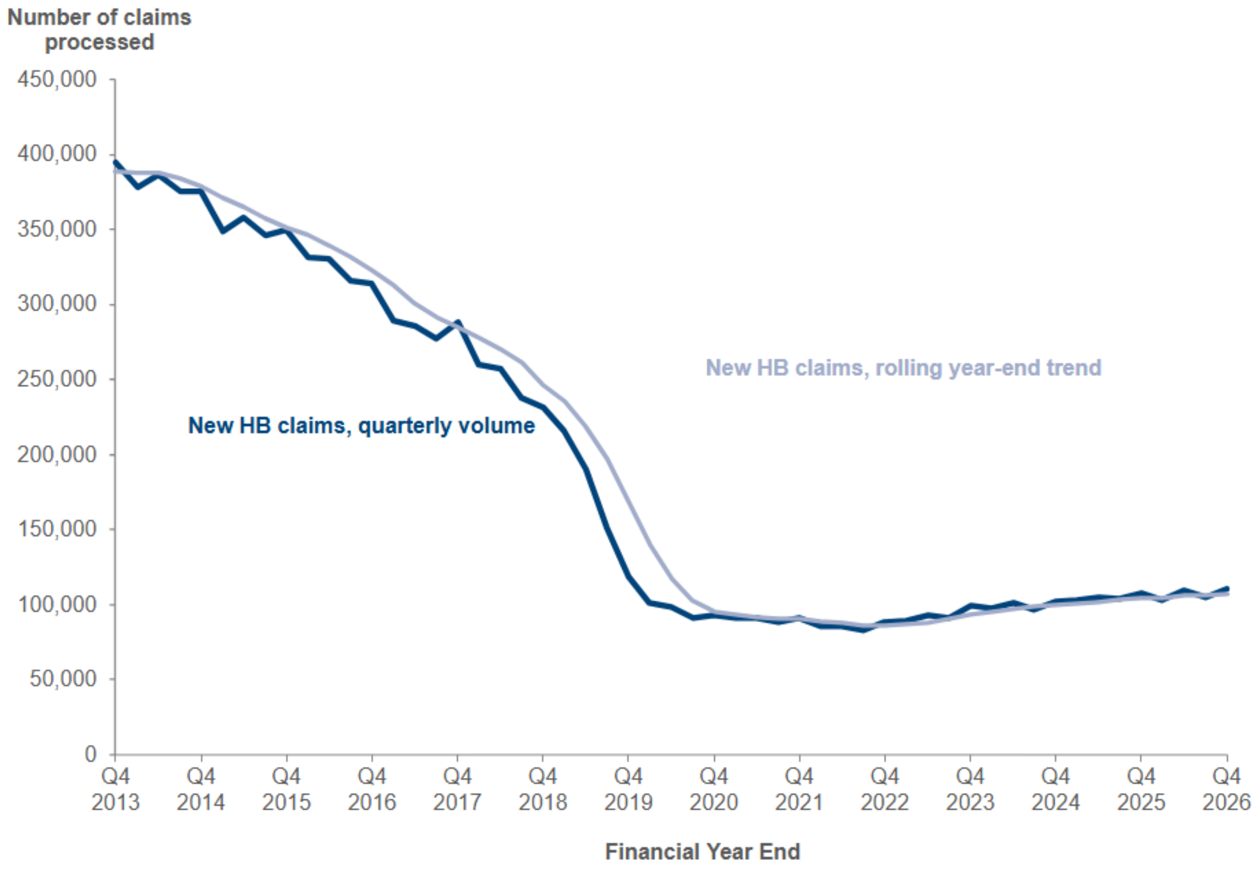
Department for Work & Pensions

Housing Benefit Processing Slows as Change Volumes Fall



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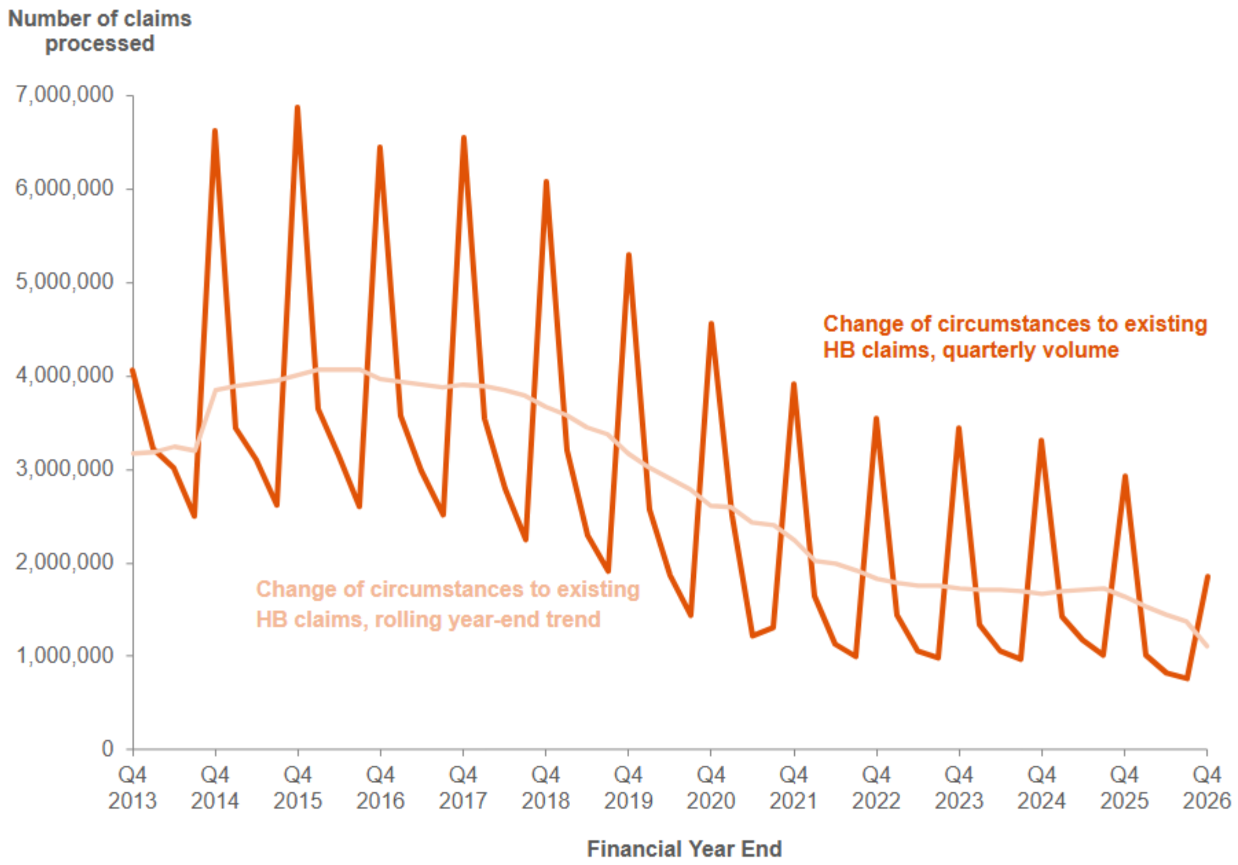

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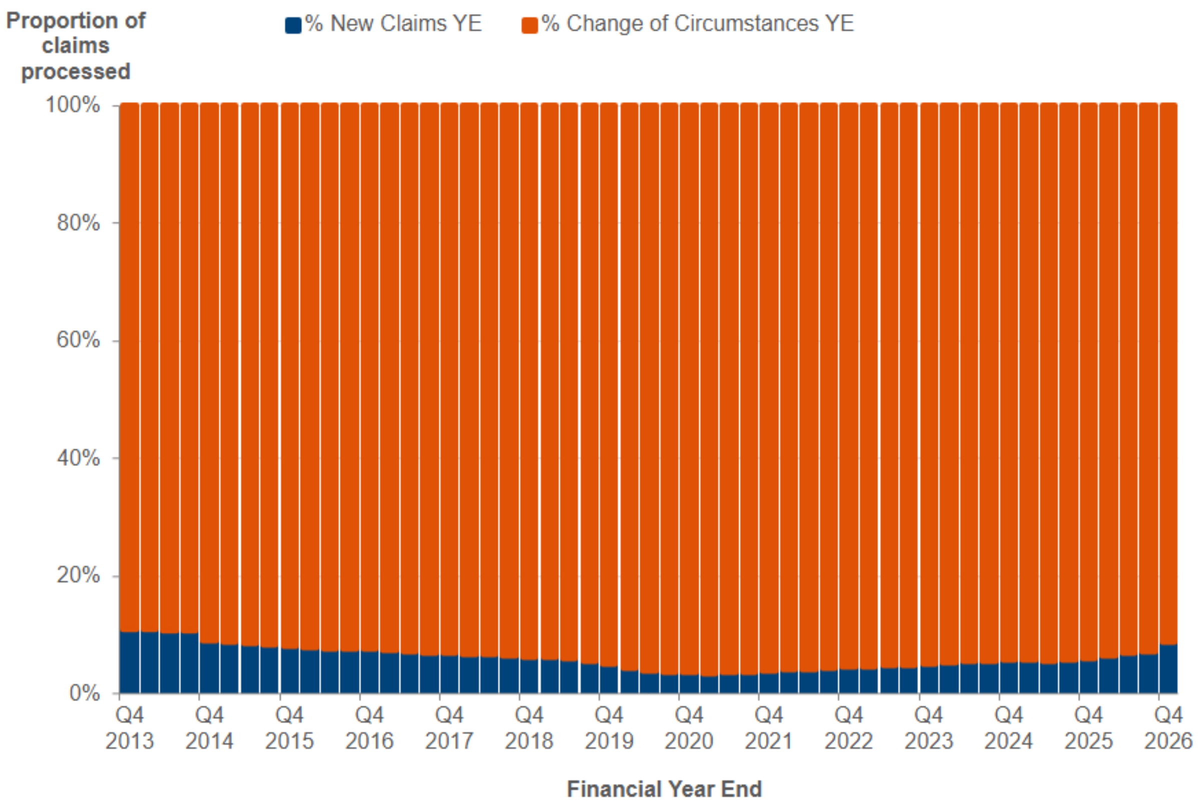

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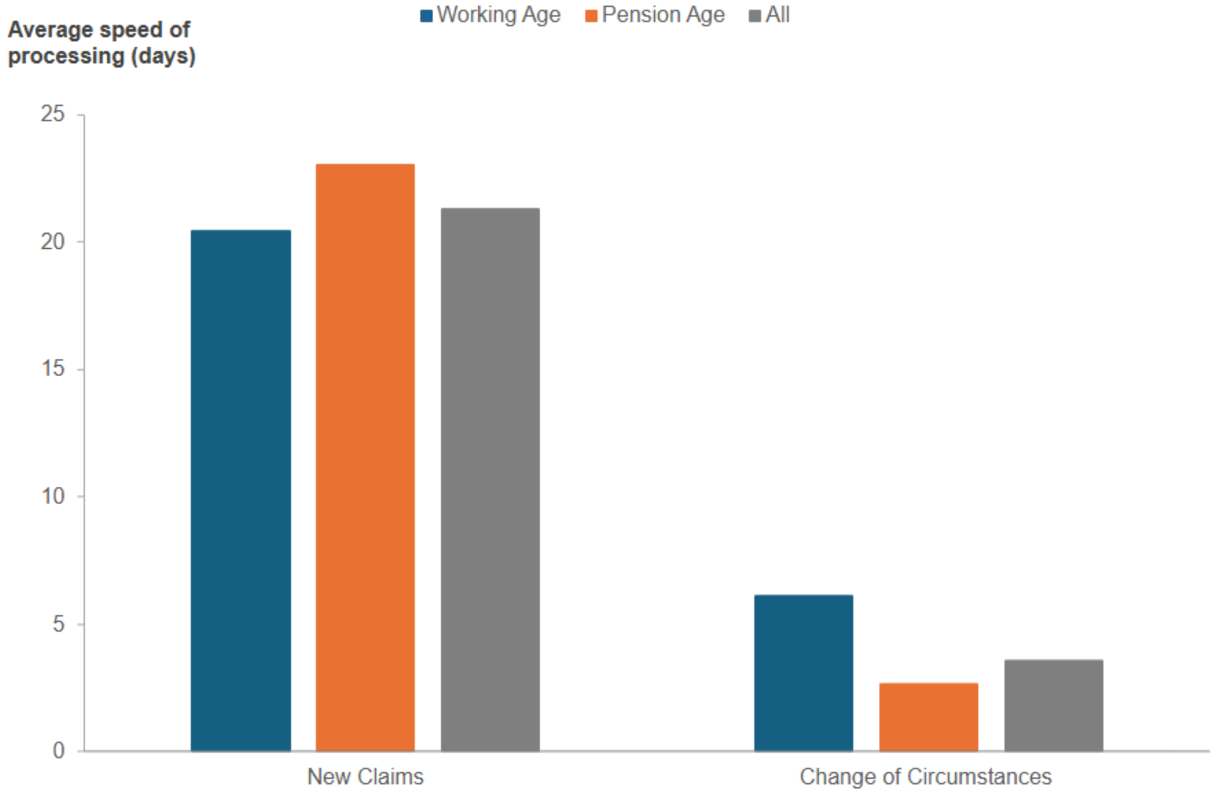

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Affordable Housing Ambition Requires More Funding and

Funding choices and delivery constraints

- England has 134,000 households in temporary accommodation and 1.3 million households on council housing waiting lists.
- The £39 billion Social and Affordable Homes Programme aims to deliver 300,000 homes by 2036, with at least 60% for social rent.
- Allocating the whole programme to social rent would deliver just under 250,000 homes, approximately 50,000 fewer than the current overall target.
- Delivering 300,000 social rent homes would require an estimated additional £800 million annually over ten years.
- Temporarily shifting Section 106 provision towards affordable rent could add around 2,000 homes annually, but would reduce the proportion available at lower social rents.
- The National Housing Bank's £2.5 billion low-interest facility could support an additional 3,700 to 6,100 affordable homes annually, depending on tenure.
- Councils currently build only around 2,000 homes annually and would require significant investment, expertise and delivery capacity to return to large-scale housebuilding.

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Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Affordable Housing Ambition Requires More Funding and

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Housing costs:** Greater social housing supply could reduce dependence on expensive private rented accommodation and limit households' exposure to rent shortfalls.
- **Universal Credit:** Approximately 950,000 UC households already pay rent above their Local Housing Allowance; the average gap against relevant local rents exceeds 20%.
- **Immediate action:** The Resolution Foundation argues that LHA should be restored to reflect actual rents because new social homes will take years to deliver.
- **Customer impact:** Continuing shortfalls increase risks of rent arrears, homelessness and hardship among low-income private tenants.
- **Service demand:** Councils may face greater demand for Discretionary Housing Payments, homelessness assistance, Council Tax Reduction and local welfare support.
- **Financial position:** More social housing could reduce temporary accommodation expenditure over time, but expanded council building would require substantial capital funding and specialist capacity.
- **Planning trade-off:** Increasing affordable-rent provision through Section 106 may raise total supply but leave some low-income households with higher rents and greater benefit dependency.
- No council-level costs, savings, collection effects, administrative funding or caseload impacts are quantified.

References

- Public Finance: 'More cash and more ambition' needed on affordable housing
- Resolution Foundation: Housing Outlook Q3 2026

- The Resolution Foundation analysis covers England; housing policy is devolved across the UK.

VISIONARY NETWORK

HM Treasury

Business Rates Cut Welcomed, but Wider Hospitality Support Demanded

Relief announced and remaining gaps

- Pubs, social clubs and eligible live music venues in England will receive a 20% reduction in business rates bills from April 2027.
- Nearly 32,000 venues are expected to benefit, saving a typical pub approximately £1,100 in 2027–28.
- The measure is expected to cost around £100 million annually and comes on top of the 15% relief introduced for pubs and live music venues in 2026–27.
- The Government intends to fund the reduction partly by reviewing reliefs for businesses such as vape shops and improving tax compliance among online marketplace sellers.
- Hotels, restaurants, cafés, cinemas and the largest live music venues are not currently included.
- Hospitality representatives argue that the eligible venues account for only around one fifth of hospitality employment and want a sector-wide solution.
- Eligibility criteria, treatment of hybrid premises and the proposed exclusion of larger music venues remain unresolved, with further details expected at the Budget.

VISIONARY NETWORK

HM Treasury

Business Rates Cut Welcomed, but Wider Hospitality Support Demanded

evenues and Benefits implications

- **Revenue collection:** Councils will collect less directly from qualifying properties, although the Government says the measure will be fully funded; the local compensation arrangements are not yet confirmed.
- **Administration:** Revenues and Benefits teams will need detailed guidance, system changes and revised bills before April 2027.
- **Compliance:** Ambiguous cases, such as café-bars and mixed-use venues, could create additional evidence requirements, disputes and appeals.
- **Timeliness:** Late eligibility or funding guidance would increase the risk of rebilling, delayed awards, customer enquiries and temporary account backlogs.
- **Customer impact:** Councils should clearly explain that the reduction is targeted and does not apply across the hospitality sector.
- **Financial planning:** Authorities should separately model reduced gross rates, government compensation, collection effects and the potential impact of changes to other reliefs.
- **Local economy:** Supporting pubs and community venues may reduce closures, protect employment and strengthen high streets, but excluded businesses face many of the same wage, energy and property costs.
- **Action:** Identify potentially eligible hereditaments, assess system readiness and await legislation, funding allocations and final eligibility rules before changing bills.

References

- Public Finance: Call for sector-wide support after pubs and clubs see business rates cut
- GOV.UK: PM slashes business rates bills for pubs, clubs and live music venues
- Grant Thornton: Business rates cuts for pubs and clubs, welcome but partial

- The measure applies to England; business rates policy is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Labour Members Back Welfare Restraint but Support Tax-Funded Public Services

- ThinkLabour surveyed 788 Labour members between late June and late July 2026.
- Members ranked health (43%), the economy (42%), the cost of living (39%) and climate change (29%) as the most important national issues.
- Welfare benefits were selected by only 7% and immigration by 6%.
- 47% believed the Government spends too much on welfare; 21% believed it spends too little.
- Despite this, 52% supported higher taxation to finance the current welfare bill.
- 70% favoured placing the additional tax burden on higher earners; 24% supported higher taxes for everyone.
- 73% supported increased social care spending funded through higher taxation.
- 68% wanted increased defence spending; among these members, 61% supported funding it through higher taxes.
- The findings suggest concern about the scale or effectiveness of welfare spending, rather than straightforward opposition to funding public services.
- Caveat: the results represent surveyed Labour members, not the wider electorate, welfare recipients or confirmed government policy.

Labour Members Back Welfare Restraint but Support Tax-Funded Public Services

- The survey does not announce any policy, funding or operational changes affecting Revenues and Benefits.
- It indicates potential political support for welfare reform or spending restraint, alongside continued funding for essential and targeted support.
- The importance placed on the economy and cost of living suggests continuing concern about household financial pressures.
- These pressures may sustain demand for Council Tax Reduction, local welfare assistance, income maximisation and debt support, but the survey provides no caseload evidence.
- No proposals are given for Council Tax Reduction, Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, local welfare schemes, entitlement rules or benefit administration.
- No evidence is provided of impacts on Revenues and Benefits staffing, timeliness, backlogs, performance, compliance, fraud or error.
- Support for higher taxes concerns national political choices and does not demonstrate support for higher council tax.
- No quantified costs, savings, funding pressures, income risks or council tax collection implications are identified.
- Action: treat the findings as political context only; monitor subsequent government decisions and assess operational and financial impacts once detailed proposals emerge.

References

- The Guardian: Labour members 'have tougher view on welfare than you might think', 4 August 2026
- ThinkLabour: Who Is Labour For?

Police Database Breach Highlights Public Sector Cybersecurity and Data Protection Risks

- A cyberattack affected the Police National Legal Database, used by all 43 Home Office police forces in England and Wales and the British Transport Police.
- The incident was identified on 26 July 2026.
- Names, organisations and work email addresses belonging to police officers, staff, criminal justice professionals, government partners and customers were compromised.
- Names and email addresses of some people who submitted questions through the Ask the Police website were also exposed.
- The compromised information was published on the dark web.
- PNLD confirmed that the system is not a crime-recording database and does not hold confidential information about victims, witnesses or offenders.
- There is no evidence that passwords or other security credentials were compromised.
- ExfilSquad claimed to have stolen 1.9GB containing approximately 135,000 records, but PNLD has not verified these figures or publicly attributed the attack.
- Principal risks include targeted phishing, impersonation, social engineering, identification of sensitive staff and loss of public confidence.
- Affected organisations were notified; the National Crime Agency and cybersecurity specialists are investigating, and the Information Commissioner’s Office was informed.

References

- Computing: UK police legal database breach exposes details of more than 100,000 officers and staff
- Police National Legal Database: Official data breach notification
- National Cyber Security Centre: Defending organisations against phishing
- Information Commissioner’s Office: Personal data breach guidance

Department for Work & Pensions

Child Poverty Baseline Shows Four Million Children in Relative Low Income

- In 2024–25, 4 million UK children, 27%, lived in relative low income after housing costs, unchanged from 2023–24 and 700,000 more than in 2010–11.
- Some 1.9 million children, 13%, experienced deep material poverty, down by 100,000 children and one percentage point.
- Rates varied significantly: relative low income affected 32% of children in Wales, 29% in England, 21% in Scotland and 19% in Northern Ireland, based on multi-year averages.
- Official projections suggest relative child poverty will fall to 3.6 million, 25%, by 2029–30, a reduction of 400,000 children from the baseline.
- Removing the Universal Credit two-child limit from April 2026 is expected to lift 450,000 children out of relative low income.
- All children in Universal Credit households will qualify for free school meals from the 2026–27 academic year, a measure expected to lift another 100,000 children out of poverty.
- The ten-year strategy will be monitored annually using relative low income after housing costs and deep material poverty, supported by eight indicators covering income, employment, benefits, savings, arrears, essential spending and housing quality.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Department for Work & Pensions

Child Poverty Baseline Shows Four Million Children in Relative Low Income

DWP: Our Children, Our Future, Tackling Child Poverty Monitoring and Evaluation Baseline Report

The baseline year is 2024–25, with annual progress reports planned each summer.

The report was updated on 5 August 2026.

Methodological changes mean income-based poverty data before 2021–22 are not directly comparable with later annual figures.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Take-up:** Councils should use Revenues and Benefits contacts to promote Council Tax Reduction, free school meals, Healthy Start, childcare support, local welfare assistance and other linked entitlements.
- **Targeting:** New local-area poverty statistics and the forthcoming Universal Credit low-income measure should support more timely identification of communities and family groups requiring assistance.
- **Council Tax Reduction:** Councils should assess whether local schemes adequately protect larger families, lone parents, disabled households and tenants, who face particularly high poverty risks.
- **Crisis support:** The three-year Crisis and Resilience Fund gives councils greater certainty to develop preventative support, rather than concentrating solely on emergency awards.
- **Collection:** Council Tax arrears are both an indicator and a consequence of financial hardship; early intervention, affordable repayment arrangements and referral to income-maximisation support should form part of the local response.
- **Service design:** Revenues and Benefits data should be combined lawfully with housing, education and other local evidence to improve targeting, while retaining appropriate privacy safeguards and human oversight.
- **Performance:** Monitor benefit take-up, household arrears, crisis demand, repeat applications and outcomes by family type and area, not simply the number of awards made.
- **Financial position:** The report does not quantify council administration funding, additional Council Tax Reduction expenditure, savings or collection impacts arising from the strategy.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Department for Work & Pensions

DWP Benefit Debt Recovery Reaches £2.74 Billion

- DWP Debt Management recovered £2.739 billion in overpaid benefits during 2024–25, exceeding its £2.3 billion forecast by £439 million, or 19%.
- Recovery increased by £249 million, 10%, from £2.49 billion in 2023–24.
- The value recovered has almost doubled since 2018–19, when it stood at £1.387 billion.
- Customer satisfaction reached 94% in 2025, exceeding the 90% target and matching the previous year.
- During 2024–25, 92% of customer calls were answered against a target of 90%.
- DWP responded to 99% of complaints within 15 days, exceeding its 98% target.
- The published figures do not show the total debt outstanding, recovery rate, debt age, write-offs, affordability arrangements or administrative cost of recovery.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Department for Work & Pensions

DWP Benefit Debt Recovery Reaches £2.74 Billion

DWP Debt Management performance data
The data covers DWP recovery of overpaid benefits and excludes Compensation Recovery Unit recoveries.
Performance figures are rounded to the nearest percentage.
The publication was last updated on 7 January 2026.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Financial performance:** Councils should distinguish cash collected from debt identified, prevented loss and accounting adjustments when reporting recovery performance.
- **Council Tax and Housing Benefit:** Local benchmarking should include collection rates, arrears values, debt age, Housing Benefit overpayment recovery and the proportion of debt under active arrangement.
- **Customer support:** Strong recovery performance can coexist with high satisfaction where customers can make contact, receive timely responses and agree affordable repayments.
- **Vulnerability:** Recovery policies should consider ability to pay, competing debts, deductions already being made by DWP and the risk of causing financial hardship.
- **Data sharing:** Councils need accurate information about Universal Credit deductions to avoid repayment demands that collectively exceed what a household can afford.
- **Service delivery:** Telephone accessibility and prompt complaint handling should be treated as core collection controls, not simply customer-service measures.
- **Performance assurance:** High recovery totals do not demonstrate value for money without information about staffing, technology, enforcement costs and the debt available for collection.
- **Evidence gap:** The data does not identify fraud and error separately or quantify any direct impact on Council Tax collection, local authority workloads or Housing Benefit administration.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Cabinet Office

Procurement Reforms Prioritise British Jobs, Skills and Local Benefits

New Social Value Model from January 2027

- Central government procurement is worth approximately £90 billion annually, while total public sector purchasing from private suppliers reached £394.8 billion in 2024–25.
- From 1 January 2027, a revised Social Value Model will apply to covered central government procurements worth at least £1 million, including VAT.
- Contracts worth between £1 million and £5 million will carry a minimum 10% social value weighting.
- For contracts worth £5 million or more, the minimum weighting will double from 10% to 20%.
- Bidders will be assessed on creating or retaining good local jobs, fair pay, working conditions, training, apprenticeships and work placements.
- Support will target young people not in education, employment or training, care leavers, disabled people, those with long-term health conditions and other groups facing employment barriers.
- Contracts worth at least £5 million must include a social value performance indicator, with progress reported publicly at least annually.
- The model applies directly to central government bodies. Councils may adopt it but are not required to do so by the policy note.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Cabinet Office

Procurement Reforms Prioritise British Jobs, Skills and Local Benefits

Public Finance: Government shifts procurement policy to 'back British jobs'
Cabinet Office: Government orders that public spending must back British jobs and skills
Cabinet Office: PPN 026, The Social Value Model
The new model applies to central government procurements commenced on or after 1 January 2027.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Commissioned services:** Councils could apply similar criteria when procuring Revenues and Benefits software, processing, collection, advice, analytics and transformation services, where relevant and proportionate.
- **Employment and benefit dependency:** Successful delivery of secure, fairly paid employment could improve household income and reduce reliance on means-tested support.
- **Council Tax collection:** Sustainable employment may improve payment capacity, but councils should not assume immediate reductions in Council Tax Reduction or arrears.
- **Supplier access:** The £1 million threshold may reduce disproportionate requirements on smaller suppliers and voluntary organisations, although councils must determine their own procurement approach.
- **Contract management:** Employment, training and placement commitments should be measurable, contractually enforceable and monitored alongside service quality, accuracy, security and customer outcomes.
- **Compliance:** Criteria must relate to the contract, remain proportionate and treat suppliers equally, including suppliers protected by international trade agreements.
- **Risk:** A strong social value bid must not compensate for weak technical capability, poor service resilience or inadequate protection of sensitive customer data.
- **Financial position:** The policy provides no quantified savings, additional council funding, collection benefits or Revenues and Benefits administration impacts

BCP Council

High Street Rental Auctions Show Early Signs of Reviving Vacant Premises

- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council says more than 40 businesses have opened through its programme since the beginning of 2025.
- Council leader Millie Earl reports that the initiative has filled 20% of vacant shop units during the past six months.
- The council has particularly encouraged independent businesses, including firms already expanding elsewhere, rather than relying on national chains.
- High Street Rental Auction powers allow councils in England to bring persistently vacant commercial premises back into use.
- Eligible premises must have been continuously vacant for at least 12 months, or vacant for 366 days within a 24-month period.
- Occupation must provide an economic, social or environmental benefit and involve a suitable high-street use.
- Councils must designate eligible high-street areas following a minimum 28-day consultation.
- The article does not distinguish how many of the 40 openings resulted from completed statutory auctions, voluntary landlord action or the wider council programme.

High Street Rental Auctions Show Early Signs of Reviving Vacant Premises

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Business Rates:** Returning empty premises to occupation could increase collectible rates, although reliefs and Small Business Rates Relief may limit the immediate income.
- **Empty-property relief:** Occupation can end an owner's empty-property liability and transfer future responsibility to the tenant, requiring prompt and accurate account changes.
- **Collection risk:** New and independent businesses may be financially vulnerable, making early contact, correct relief awards and manageable payment arrangements important.
- **Compliance:** Councils should monitor short periods of occupation, changes in liability and applications for relief to reduce avoidance, fraud and error.
- **Service delivery:** Revenues teams should be included in HSRA planning so prospective tenants understand rateable values, estimated bills, relief eligibility and other occupancy costs before bidding.
- **Local economy:** Occupied units may increase footfall, support employment and improve confidence in the wider town centre.
- **Administration:** The statutory process requires property identification, consultation, notices, landlord engagement, legal work, surveys, auctions and subsequent lease management.
- **Financial position:** The report does not quantify auction costs, public investment, Business Rates generated, relief awarded, arrears or net financial benefit to the council.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Right to Buy Sales Surge, but Replacements Fall Further Behind

- Councils reported 14,275 eligible housing sales in 2025–26, an increase of 90% from the previous year.
- Most were Right to Buy sales, with only 39 shared ownership sales included.
- Sales generated £1.61 billion in receipts, up 99.6% year on year.
- The average receipt reached £112,900 per property, 5% higher than in 2024–25.
- The surge followed 63,378 Right to Buy applications in 2024–25, more than three times the previous year's total, as tenants sought to purchase before discounts were reduced in November 2024.
- Only 3,452 replacement homes were funded during 2025–26, 7% fewer than the previous year.
- This equates to approximately one replacement funded for every four homes sold, although replacements funded in one year do not necessarily relate to sales completed in that year.
- Since 1980, 2,052,813 council homes have been sold under Right to Buy.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Right to Buy Sales Surge, but Replacements Fall Further Behind

- **Housing supply:** The loss of 14,275 homes, alongside only 3,452 replacements funded, further reduces the stock available to households on waiting lists.
- **Temporary accommodation:** Where lost social homes are not replaced, councils may become more reliant on expensive temporary accommodation and private rented housing.
- **Housing costs:** Moving households into higher-cost private tenancies can increase Universal Credit housing costs, rent shortfalls and demand for Discretionary Housing Payments.
- **Council Tax Reduction:** Right to Buy purchasers may continue to qualify for CTR, particularly where household income remains low; ownership does not itself remove entitlement.
- **Council Tax administration:** Revenues teams should ensure ownership and liability records are updated promptly, although an occupying tenant who becomes the owner will often remain the liable person.
- **Customer risk:** New homeowners may face mortgage, repair and service-charge costs previously met through rent, creating potential affordability and Council Tax collection risks.
- **Financial position:** The £1.61 billion is a one-off capital receipt, not recurring income, and must be considered against lost rental income, replacement costs and restrictions governing the use of receipts.
- **Policy outlook:** Further reforms, including limiting discounts to 15% of property value, should reduce future sales, but they cannot reverse the exceptional loss of stock completed during 2025–26.

- MHCLG: Right to Buy sales and replacements, England, April 2025 to March 2026
- Inside Housing: Councils' Right to Buy sales income doubles to £1.6bn
- MHCLG: Live tables on social housing sales
- The official statistics cover England and were published on 6 August 2026.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Reform UK welfare proposals

- Reform UK proposes welfare reforms which it claims would save **£50 billion a year**, including **£22 billion from disability benefit changes**
- Working-age **Personal Independence Payment** and the **Universal Credit health element** would be replaced
- People with severe or enduring disabilities would receive a regularly reviewed **Health Security Allowance**
- Lower-level conditions would attract verified services rather than cash, delivered through **council or mayoral Disability Support Accounts**
- Existing claimants would be reassessed over three to four years: an estimated **2.16 million** would retain full cash entitlement and **2.89 million** would have payments changed or withdrawn
- A single, clinician-led, face-to-face assessment would replace overlapping assessments, with the stated aim of reducing fraud and ineligible claims
- Reform proposes an additional **£1.85 billion annually** for therapies, physiotherapy and employment support
- The savings are Reform estimates, have not been independently costed in the supplied material and are disputed by Labour

Reform UK welfare proposals

Revenues and Benefits impacts, risks and actions

- **Service delivery:** councils could acquire a substantial new role assessing needs, administering accounts and commissioning equipment, adaptations, transport and personal assistance
- **Resourcing and timeliness:** large-scale reassessment and transfer to locally managed support could create significant staffing, training and system pressures, with risks of delays and backlogs
- **Digital and process change:** new case-management, payment, procurement, data-sharing, verification and audit arrangements would be required
- **Compliance and fraud/error:** face-to-face clinical assessment and verified expenditure may strengthen control, but would require clear eligibility rules, review arrangements and safeguards

Reform UK welfare proposals

The Telegraph, 15 August 2026: Dumping young people on welfare isn't compassion, it's neglect
The Telegraph, 15 August 2026: Reform unveils plan for £50bn a year in welfare cuts
Reform UK's full *Making Welfare Work* policy paper was announced but was not included in the supplied material; figures should therefore be treated as reported party estimates.

Revenues and Benefits impacts, risks and actions

- **Customer impact:** reduced cash entitlements could increase enquiries, complaints, appeals and demand for Council Tax Reduction, discretionary support and local welfare assistance
- **Revenue collection:** lower household income may increase council tax arrears and recovery pressures, although no quantified collection impact is provided
- **Financial risk:** the proposals do not explain how councils would be funded, creating a risk that national benefit savings transfer costs and demand to local government
- **Action for councils:** monitor the full policy, model local caseload and collection impacts, identify implementation costs and seek clarity on funding, governance, data protection and appeal responsibilities
- No direct changes to council tax, Council Tax Reduction or Housing Benefit administration are specified

Department for Work & Pensions

DWP refunds 197 wrongly issued benefit fraud penalties

Review findings, refunds and control failures

- Administrative penalties may be offered as an alternative to prosecution where evidence provides a realistic prospect of conviction
- Penalties are **50% of the benefit overpayment**, subject to a **£350 minimum and £5,000 maximum**
- DWP found that **197 penalties** accepted during 2023-24 and 2024-25 should not have been offered
- This comprised **128 of 567 penalties** in 2023-24 and **69 of 272** in 2024-25
- Overall, approximately **23% of accepted penalties** across the two years were rescinded
- Failures included procedural errors, insufficient evidence and claimants' circumstances not being fully considered
- Affected claimants are being contacted and their penalties removed and refunded
- The underlying benefit overpayments remain recoverable and must continue to be repaid where outstanding
- DWP has not disclosed the refund total: based solely on statutory limits, it could range from **£68,950 to £985,000**
- DWP has introduced updated training, stronger guidance, independent senior decision-makers and a revised decision process

VISIONARY NETWORK

Department for Work & Pensions

DWP refunds 197 wrongly issued benefit fraud penalties

Revenues and Benefits implications and actions

- **Service delivery:** councils may need to reconcile affected Housing Benefit debts, deductions or referrals with DWP and ensure rescinded penalties are not recovered
- **Customer impact:** communications must clearly distinguish between cancellation of the penalty and continued recovery of the underlying overpayment
- **Compliance:** sanctions should only be considered where evidence meets the required standard and all relevant circumstances have been properly recorded
- **Fraud and error:** the review demonstrates that enforcement decisions can themselves contain error, even where a recoverable overpayment exists
- **Governance:** council counter-fraud and sanction policies should require documented evidence, proportionate decisions and sufficiently independent authorisation

Department for Work & Pensions

DWP refunds 197 wrongly issued benefit fraud penalties

Revenues and Benefits implications and actions

- **Digital and process change:** systems must separately identify overpayments and penalties, maintain complete audit trails and process refunds promptly
- **Resourcing and timeliness:** reviews, corrections, customer contact and complaints may create additional workloads, although no council impact has been quantified
- **Revenue collection:** refunds may improve short-term household finances, but continuing overpayment deductions could still affect council tax and rent affordability
- **Financial position:** no direct council cost, saving or collection impact has been reported
- **Actions:** review any locally retained sanction arrangements, identify DWP-dependent cases and strengthen evidence, quality-assurance and decision-recording controls

Mid Devon repays tenants after historic social rent calculation error

- A 2024 audit identified a historic error in Mid Devon District Council's social rent calculations, understood to date from **2002**
- Approximately **1,200 tenants were overcharged** and **1,600 were undercharged**
- The council has decided not to recover historic undercharges, creating an unquantified loss of rental income
- Refunds have been limited to six years, based on legal advice, despite the error continuing for considerably longer
- **402 tenants** have received refunds totalling **£330,210**
- The total includes **£13,775 in compensation** and cases where refunds were credited to rent accounts
- Cases not involving benefits were prioritised; Housing Benefit records have been corrected where possible
- The council has completed refunds within its control, but the final cost remains uncertain because DWP-related cases are unresolved
- Provision has been made for potentially repaying six years of affected benefit expenditure to the DWP

Mid Devon DISTRICT COUNCIL

Mid Devon repays tenants after historic social rent calculation error

Revenues and Benefits impacts, risks and actions

- **Service delivery:** rent corrections require coordinated work between housing, Housing Benefit, finance, legal and customer services
- **Timeliness and backlogs:** cases involving Universal Credit remain delayed because the DWP has not confirmed its required treatment
- **Housing Benefit:** historic eligible rent and entitlement records must be recalculated, with any remaining tenant contribution refunded
- **Universal Credit:** housing-cost cases are outside the council's direct control, creating dependency on DWP decisions and additional delay
- **Customer impact:** affected current and former tenants require clear calculations, prompt refunds and explanations of compensation and rent-account credits

Mid Devon DISTRICT COUNCIL

Mid Devon repays tenants after historic social rent calculation error

- Local Government Lawyer, 14 August 2026: Council repays more than £330,000 after social housing tenants overpaid rent for years
- Mid Devon District Council, 4 August 2026: Cabinet public reports pack

Revenues and Benefits impacts, risks and actions

- **Compliance:** reliance on a six-year repayment period should remain supported by documented legal advice and consistent decision-making
- **Fraud/error:** this was a systemic calculation error, not claimant fraud, demonstrating the need for stronger rent-setting and benefit-interface controls
- **Digital and process change:** rent formulas, annual uprating, property data and Housing Benefit interfaces should be independently validated and reconciled
- **Financial position:** confirmed refunds and compensation exceed £330,000; further DWP repayments and lost income from unrecovered undercharges remain unquantified
- **Revenue collection:** no direct council tax impact is reported, but rent-account balances, arrears and recovery action must be corrected before enforcement continues
- **Actions:** complete DWP reconciliation, review former-tenant cases, establish the full financial exposure and implement recurring audit and exception-reporting controls

VISIONARY NETWORK

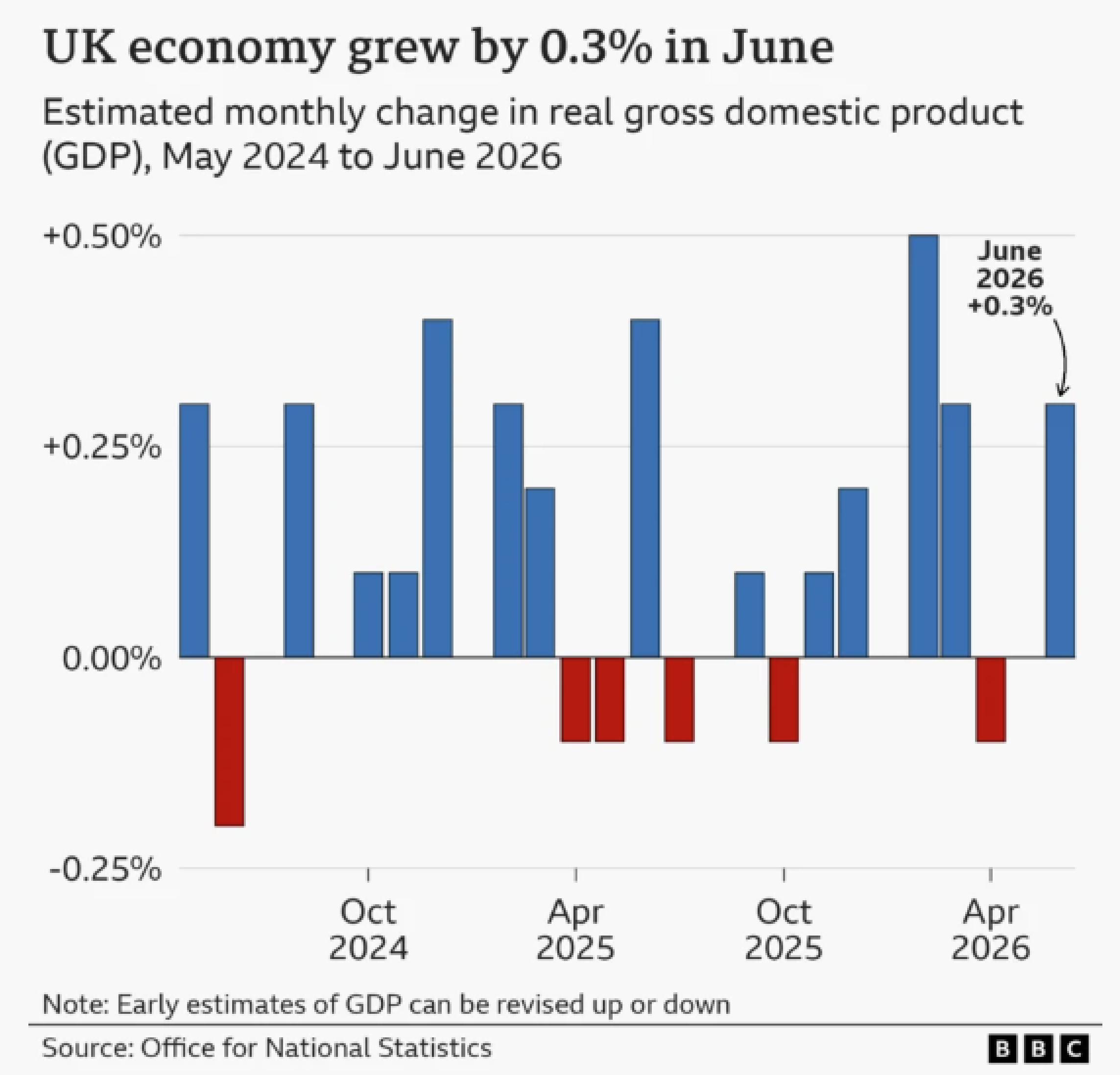
HM Treasury

UK economy shows resilience, but risks remain

- UK GDP grew by **0.4% in Quarter 2 2026**, following growth of **0.6% in Quarter 1**
- **GDP per head increased by 0.4%** during the quarter and was **1.0% higher than a year earlier**
- Growth was broad-based across **15 of 20 economic subsectors**
- **Services grew by 0.5%** and construction by **0.3%**, while production was unchanged
- Household consumption increased by **0.3%**, indicating continued consumer resilience
- Gross fixed capital formation rose by **1.2%**, including strong investment in information technology, machinery and equipment
- Business investment increased by **1.7% during the quarter** and **0.8% over the year**
- UK quarterly growth matched the **euro area and United States at 0.4%**, but was slightly below the **EU's 0.5%**
- The results support the description of a resilient economy, although the initial figures may be revised and the Iran conflict presents continuing energy, inflation and growth risks
- The OBR forecast **0.8% GDP-per-head growth for 2026**, but this annual figure cannot be directly compared with two consecutive quarterly growth rates

VISIONARY NETWORK

UK economy shows resilience, but risks remain



The figures for May were revised down from 0.1% to 0%

- Office for National Statistics, 13 August 2026: [GDP first quarterly estimate, UK: April to June 2026]
- BBC News, 13 August 2026: [UK economy grew by 0.4% between April and June]
- Office for Budget Responsibility, March 2026: [Economic and fiscal outlook]
- Eurostat, 14 August 2026: [GDP up by 0.4% in the euro area and 0.5% in the EU]
- Torsten Bell, 13 August 2026: [Commentary on the Quarter 2 economic figures]

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Record temporary accommodation use increases pressure on councils and families

- A record **135,580 households** were living in temporary accommodation in England on 31 March 2026
- This was **3.6% higher than a year earlier** and **1.1% above the previous quarter**
- Temporary accommodation contained a record **177,530 children**, up **5.2% annually**
- The linked Public Finance article appears to state **117,000 children** incorrectly; the official figure is **177,530**
- **86,460 households**, or **63.8% of the total**, included children
- **22,060 households with children** had been in temporary accommodation for between two and five years
- **43,180 households** were placed outside their local authority area, an annual increase of **4.1%**
- Nightly paid self-contained accommodation was the largest category, housing **51,390 households**
- The number of households with children in B&Bs fell to **1,900**, but **1,000** had remained beyond the statutory six-week limit
- Council spending on temporary accommodation reached **£2.8 billion in 2024-25**, compared with £564 million in 2010-11

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Record temporary accommodation use increases pressure on councils and families

Revenues and Benefits implications and actions

- **Service delivery:** increasing temporary accommodation caseloads generate additional Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, discretionary support and local welfare work
- **Resourcing and timeliness:** frequent moves require rapid benefit assessments, address changes and coordination between housing and Revenues and Benefits teams
- **Financial pressure:** Housing Benefit subsidy for many temporary accommodation placements remains restricted to **90% of January 2011 Local Housing Allowance rates**
- **Income risk:** expenditure above the subsidy limit falls to councils, creating an increasing gap between private-sector accommodation costs and DWP reimbursement
- **Revenue collection:** household instability and financial hardship can increase council tax arrears and make liability, payment and recovery arrangements harder to maintain

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Record temporary accommodation use increases pressure on councils and families

- Public Finance, 13 August 2026: Number of children in temporary accommodation hits record high
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 13 August 2026: Statutory homelessness in England: January to March 2026
- Department for Work and Pensions: Housing Benefit subsidy guidance manual 2025 to 2026
- UK Government, February 2026: Value-for-money review of homelessness expenditure

Revenues and Benefits implications and actions

- **Compliance:** councils must retain evidence of placement dates, eligible rent, property size and the correct Broad Rental Market Area to support subsidy claims
- **Fraud and error:** cross-authority placements and frequent address changes increase risks of duplicated Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing-cost payments
- **Customer impact:** delays can cause rent arrears, financial hardship and repeated contact, particularly when families are moved between council areas
- **Digital and process change:** integrated housing, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction notifications are needed so placements and moves update records promptly
- **Actions:** strengthen homelessness prevention and arrears intervention, maximise Housing Benefit subsidy and discretionary support, reconcile out-of-area cases and model the growing subsidy shortfall

VISIONARY NETWORK

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Council capacity risks weakening Renters' Rights Act enforcement

- Public Finance, 13 August 2026: Council capacity could limit Renters' Rights Act enforcement
- UK Government, April 2026: Councils backed with millions to take on rogue landlords
- UK Government: Renters' Rights Act 2025 implementation roadmap
- UK Government: Investigatory powers guidance for the Renters' Rights Act 2025
- Mayor of London: Renters' Rights Enforcement Fund

- The first major Renters' Rights Act reforms took effect on **1 May 2026**, including the abolition of Section 21 'no-fault' evictions
- The Act also introduced periodic tenancies, restrictions on rent increases and bidding, and protection against discrimination involving benefits or children
- Councils now have a statutory duty to enforce specified landlord legislation, supported by expanded information-gathering and investigatory powers
- Initial or less serious breaches can attract penalties of up to **£7,000**, rising to **£40,000** for serious, persistent or repeated non-compliance
- Councils can retain financial penalties for reinvestment in private rented sector enforcement, but receipts will be uncertain
- Government provided **£60 million** across England's 317 local authorities: £18.2 million initially and a further £41.12 million
- The Mayor of London established a separate **£400,000 Renters' Rights Enforcement Fund**
- Of this, **£40,000** is intended to train London borough enforcement officers, with most of the fund supporting renter advice and advocacy over three years
- Workforce shortages remain a key risk: LGA evidence previously found recruitment difficulties affecting environmental health and housing officers
- Experts warn that short-term training and grant funding will not replace sustained investment in staffing, legal expertise and enforcement capacity

VISIONARY NETWORK

- Chronicle Live, August 2026: DWP will revoke driving licences of people on benefits for two years
- Department for Work and Pensions, 24 June 2026: Driving bans for those who refuse to repay benefit debts as new DWP powers come into force
- Department for Work and Pensions: Direct Deduction and Disqualification from Driving Orders Code of Practice
- UK legislation: Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Act 2025, Schedule 6
- UK legislation: Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Act 2025 Commencement Regulations 2026

DWP debt recovery powers include court-ordered driving disqualification

Department for Work & Pensions

- New debt recovery powers under the **Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Act 2025** will be introduced gradually from **October 2026**
- Contrary to the headline, the powers cannot be used against people who are currently receiving a DWP benefit
- They apply to certain recoverable overpayments, penalties and other DWP debts where the individual is no longer receiving benefits and recovery through PAYE is not reasonably possible
- DWP may instruct banks to make direct deductions after assessing the individual's financial position and ability to repay
- Driving disqualification is a **court power**, not something DWP can impose directly
- It can only be considered for debts of at least **£1,000**, as a last resort where the individual can pay but persistently refuses or avoids repayment
- The court must first make a suspended order containing affordable repayment terms
- Disqualification can follow only if those terms are breached without reasonable excuse and may last for up to **two years**
- A court cannot make an order where the person has an essential need to drive, including employment or caring responsibilities
- The order must end when the debt is paid; the wider government forecast of **£14.6 billion savings** covers all fraud, error and debt activity, not driving disqualifications alone

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Right to Buy surge increases receipts but accelerates loss of council housing

- Councils reported 14,275 eligible sales in 2025-26, 90% more than the previous year and the highest number since 2006-07.
- The increase followed a rush of applications before maximum discounts were reduced in November 2024: applications rose from 18,755 to 63,378.
- Councils received £1.61bn—up 99.6%—with an average receipt of £112,900 per property.
- Only 3,452 replacement homes were started or acquired using Right to Buy receipts, 7% fewer than in 2024-25. This equates to roughly one in-year replacement for every four sales, although receipts can be used over five years.
- Further reforms will increase eligibility from three to ten years, cap discounts at 15% or the regional cash limit, and protect new social homes from sale for 35 years.

- Inside Housing – Councils' Right to Buy sales income doubles to £1.6bn
- MHCLG – Right to Buy sales and replacements, April 2025 to March 2026
- MHCLG – Right to Buy overhaul to safeguard social housing

VISIONARY NETWORK

Quote of the Week

It's very hard to respect people on holiday - everybody looks so silly at the beach, it makes you hate humanity - but when you see people at their work they elicit respect, whether it's a mechanic, a stonemason or an accountant.
-- Alain de Botton

Alain de Botton is a Swiss-British writer and philosopher whose books explore how everyday life, work, love, and culture shape our inner worlds. He founded The School of Life to bring philosophical insight into practical, humane guidance for modern living.


VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network
Why councils choose HB Subsidy support
There are now only a very few firms willing to audit Housing Benefit subsidy claims, and all face tougher conditions. Visionary Network helps councils reduce pressure, avoid rework and stay compliant through practical subsidy support grounded in real experience.
What changed in 2025/26
The end of CAKE and no more easy reconciliations
A £50 de minimis threshold
Increased scrutiny from a shrinking audit market
Higher risk of rework, delay and challenge
Greater need for early review and expert support
Why Visionary Network
Trusted practical experience in Revenues & Benefits
Hands-on review, completion and problem-solving support
Clear liaison with auditors to minimise avoidable queries
A focused service tailored to your authority's subsidy claim
For Benefits Managers and finance teams, HB Subsidy support offers clearer assurance, better preparation and lower audit risk.
Don't go hungry without CAKE.
Let us take the weight of the subsidy audit off your plate with fixed-fee support tailored to your authority.
Talk to Visionary Network about HB Subsidy Support
visionarynetwork.co.uk
info@visionarynetwork.co.uk


VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network
HB Subsidy Audit Support for Councils
Less risk. Less rework. More confidence.
Councils face tougher Housing Benefit subsidy audit conditions in 2025/26. The end of CAKE, a £50 de minimis, and increased scrutiny mean more risk, more rework and higher costs. Visionary Network helps you stay audit-ready and compliant without the stress.
Practical subsidy support. Clearer assurance. Better outcomes.
Review your subsidy claim before submission
Complete the claim for you if needed
Identify and resolve problem areas early
Liaise with auditors to minimise queries
Provide targeted advice from experienced subsidy specialists
Trusted expertise. Practical support. Lower risk.
Don't go hungry without CAKE.
Talk to Visionary Network about HB Subsidy Support
visionarynetwork.co.uk


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

AI Watch

Building Safe and Effective AI Capability in Revenues and Benefits

AI adoption is outpacing workforce capability

- More than 44% of surveyed organisations use AI tools daily, although many remain at an early stage of adoption.
- Evidence comprises 23 workshops involving around 150 organisations, 10 case studies and 536 employer survey responses.
- Staff commonly learn through trial and error, colleagues, online videos and prompts built into AI tools.
- Informal learning encourages adoption but can produce inconsistent, unsafe and poorly governed practice.
- Principal barriers are limited staff time, operational pressures, cost, unclear training provision and lack of technical confidence.
- Effective training should follow the PRIMES principles: practical, reachable, integrated, modular, expandable and sustainable.

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Building Safe and Effective AI Capability in Revenues and Benefits

Implications and actions for Revenues and Benefits

- Training should use genuine Revenues and Benefits tasks, while teaching technical, non-technical and responsible AI skills together.
- AI learning should be integrated into service processes, quality standards, information governance, compliance arrangements and human oversight.
- Staff must understand when AI can support work, when it should not be used and who remains accountable for decisions.
- Short, accessible modules, peer learning and role-specific pathways should reduce pressure on resources and accommodate different starting points.
- Continuing informal adoption risks inconsistent customer service, errors and weak oversight. Local monitoring should cover accuracy, timeliness, backlogs, customer outcomes, fraud and error controls, and staff capacity.
- The source identifies cost and staff capacity as barriers but provides no quantified savings, revenue collection benefits, funding implications or income risks. Financial benefits should therefore not be assumed without local evidence.

References
Department for Work and Pensions and Skills England, Executive summary: What works for AI upskilling in the UK, updated 27 July 2026.
Publication applies to England.

UK Signals Possible Regulation of Advanced AI if Voluntary Safeguards Prove Inadequate

- AI minister Kanishka Narayan said the UK would consider regulating advanced AI models if voluntary safeguards no longer protect the public adequately.
- This is a statement of possible future action, not a confirmed policy, legislative proposal or implementation timetable.
- The UK currently favours an innovation-friendly approach based largely on voluntary agreements with leading AI developers.
- OpenAI, Anthropic, Google and other developers provide the AI Security Institute with access to advanced models for pre-release evaluation.
- The Institute tests model capabilities, identifies potentially dangerous behaviour and attempts to overcome safety controls.
- This system depends heavily on developers continuing to provide timely access, technical information and co-operation.
- Voluntary arrangements may become harder to sustain as advanced models proliferate, particularly through open-source and overseas development.
- Concerns have intensified following evidence that advanced models are developing stronger cybersecurity and autonomous capabilities.
- The Government's approach contrasts with the statutory requirements established through the EU AI Act.
- The proposed UK AI Bill has been repeatedly delayed, and its scope and timetable remain unclear.

References

- Computing: AI minister leaves door open to regulation of advanced AI models
- AI Security Institute: Role, research and model evaluation
- UK Government: Pro-innovation approach to AI regulation
- House of Commons Library: AI regulation in the UK

Unfreezing the Personal Allowance: Household Gains, Benefit Offsets and Fiscal Costs

- The personal allowance has been frozen at £12,570 since April 2021 and is currently due to remain frozen until April 2031.
- Had it increased with inflation, it would be approximately £16,070 in 2026-27.
- The freeze represents a 22% real-terms reduction between 2021-22 and 2026-27, with a further 8% reduction forecast by 2030-31.
- An estimated 4.9 million more people will pay income tax in 2026-27 than if the allowance had been uprated since 2021, rising to 6.1 million by 2030-31.
- By 2030-31, 76% of adults are forecast to pay income tax, compared with 60% in 2021-22.
- Returning to inflation uprating from April 2027 would prevent further real-terms reductions but would not restore the allowance's earlier value.
- By 2030-31, this would save most basic-rate taxpayers £198 a year and eligible higher-rate taxpayers £395.
- The estimated long-term Exchequer cost would be £8.4bn a year, rising to £10.4bn if aligned National Insurance thresholds were also uprated.
- A single inflation-linked increase to £12,840 in April 2027, followed by another freeze, would cost approximately £2.1bn annually and save most basic-rate taxpayers £50 a year.
- These are illustrative options, not confirmed government decisions

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Unfreezing the Personal Allowance: Household Gains, Benefit Offsets and Fiscal Costs

- Increasing the allowance would not primarily benefit the poorest households; gains would be greatest relative to income among upper-middle-income households.
- Around one-quarter of adults have incomes too low to pay income tax and would receive no benefit.
- Most people earning more than £125,140 would receive no benefit because their personal allowance is withdrawn.
- Two-earner households could benefit twice, concentrating more of the gain among better-off families.
- Universal Credit and other means-tested benefits are calculated using post-tax income, so some tax savings would be offset by lower benefit awards.
- Council Tax Reduction impacts would depend on individual local schemes and how they treat earnings, tax deductions and Universal Credit awards.
- If implemented, councils would need to model interactions with Council Tax Reduction, update calculation parameters and provide clear customer communications.
- Higher disposable income could marginally support council tax collection and reduce arrears for some households, but the IFS provides no quantified collection impact.
- The poorest households would receive little or no direct assistance, so demand for local welfare, hardship support and income maximisation may remain.
- No direct effects on Revenues and Benefits staffing, backlogs, compliance, fraud and error or council funding are quantified.
- Action: model the combined tax, Universal Credit and Council Tax Reduction effects before assuming that the headline tax saving represents a household's actual gain.

References

- Institute for Fiscal Studies: Unfreezing the personal allowance, 4 August 2026
- HMRC: Income Tax rates and Personal Allowances

VISIONARY NETWORK

North Yorkshire’s Second-Home Council Tax Premium Faces Suspension and Refund Demands

- North Yorkshire Council introduced a 100% council tax premium on second homes from 1 April 2025, producing a total charge of 200% of the standard bill.
- The policy applies to substantially furnished properties where nobody has their sole or main residence, subject to statutory exceptions.
- The Council estimates that the premium could raise up to £12m annually, with its share pledged to housing initiatives.
- The policy aims to increase housing availability and address affordability problems for local families, particularly in coastal and rural communities.
- In April 2026, the Council voted to retain the premium.
- Second Homeowners Opposed to Unfair Taxation, SHOUT, submitted a petition signed by 1,000 people seeking its suspension.
- The petition requests a full social, economic and financial impact assessment, consultation with affected parties and clearer exemption rules.
- It also seeks repayment of premiums collected during 2025-26 and 2026-27 if the policy is found to have been imposed unfairly or unlawfully.
- Campaigners claim the premium has depressed property values, reduced local spending and produced no tangible housing benefits, but the article provides no independent evidence supporting these claims.
- The Council maintains that it followed the correct procedures and that the premium is a legitimate response to longstanding housing pressures.

North Yorkshire's Second-Home Council Tax Premium Faces Suspension and Refund Demands

- The principal impact on Revenues and Benefits is within local taxation; no direct effect on benefits or local welfare services is identified.
- The premium creates additional billing, evidence-checking, customer contact, review, complaint and recovery workloads.
- Accurate administration depends on identifying a person's sole or main residence and applying statutory exceptions correctly.
- Fraud and error risks include false residence claims, incorrect property classifications and inappropriate claims for exceptions.
- Clear digital application processes, evidence requirements and decision notices are needed to ensure consistent treatment.
- Doubled bills may increase payment arrangements, disputes, arrears and enforcement activity, although no collection data is provided.
- If the policy were suspended or found unlawful, the Council could face substantial rebilling, refund, interest, system and administrative work.
- The petition potentially places income from both 2025-26 and 2026-27 at risk, but actual receipts and the value of any refund exposure are not stated.
- The reported £12m is an annual estimate, not confirmed collected income, and should not be treated as guaranteed funding.
- Action: publish the impact and equality assessments, consultation evidence, exemption criteria, housing expenditure and measured outcomes.
- Monitor collection rates, arrears, appeals, property-status changes, local housing availability and the administrative cost of operating the premium.
- Maintain a financial and operational contingency plan for mass adjustments or refunds while the challenge remains unresolved.

- BBC News: Second homeowners demand halt to double tax policy, 3 August 2026
- North Yorkshire Council: Council Tax on second homes
- North Yorkshire Council: Petition to suspend the second-home premium
- North Yorkshire Council: 2026-27 Revenue Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

One in Five US Workers Now Delegates Work to AI

AI is reallocating tasks, rather than replacing whole jobs

- Almost half of employed US adults reported using AI at work, with more than one in five using it daily.
- Some 20% said AI now performs at least one task previously delegated to a colleague or contractor.
- Substitution was most common for analysing data, 7.1%, reading work documents, 5.7%, and maintaining records, 5.3%.
- AI use ranged from 25% of workers maintaining records to 57% of those designing computer systems or software.
- AI generally assisted with only part of a task; full or near-full automation remained below 7% for most activities.
- Workers reported saving time on 37% of partly AI-assisted tasks, rising to 53% where AI performed most or all of the work.
- Around one in six AI-assisted tasks took longer than previously, demonstrating that adoption does not automatically produce efficiencies.
- Two-thirds of AI outputs were accepted unchanged or with only minor editing, although limited editing does not prove accuracy or quality.

One in Five US Workers Now Delegates Work to AI

- [NBC News: 20% of workers use AI for tasks previously given to colleagues]
- [Epoch AI: One in five US workers now delegates tasks to AI instead of other humans]
- [Ipsos: Epoch AI/Ipsos August 2026 poll]
- The probability-based survey covered 1,106 employed US adults between 10 and 19 July 2026. Its findings should not be treated as direct evidence of adoption within UK local government.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Workforce design:** AI is more likely initially to redistribute activities within Revenues and Benefits roles than eliminate complete posts.
- **Suitable uses:** Document summarisation, data analysis, correspondence drafting and routine record work offer potential, subject to approved tools and controls.
- **Productivity:** Councils should measure total processing time, including prompting, checking, correcting and recording AI-assisted work, rather than assuming savings.
- **Accuracy:** The high acceptance of lightly edited output creates a risk that plausible errors enter decisions, notices, reports or customer records.
- **Human oversight:** Officers must remain accountable for benefit determinations, liability decisions, recovery action and communications affecting customers.
- **Skills:** Staff need training in prompting, verification, data protection, bias and recognising when AI is unsuitable.
- **Resilience:** Excessive delegation could weaken officers’ knowledge and reduce the service’s ability to operate when AI tools are unavailable or wrong.
- **Financial position:** The study provides no evidence of UK council savings, staffing reductions, improved collection or reduced backlogs.

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HMCTS bans Meta smart glasses from courts and tribunals

- HM Courts & Tribunals Service has prohibited Meta smart glasses from its court and tribunal buildings
- The devices can record photographs, video and audio discreetly, creating privacy and security concerns
- Smart glasses will be temporarily confiscated at security and returned when the owner leaves the building
- Lawyers, witnesses, council officers and members of the public are all subject to the restriction
- Smartphones may still be brought into buildings but must not be used to photograph, film or record proceedings
- Unauthorised photography or recording within court buildings can constitute a criminal offence or contempt of court
- The policy protects witnesses, court users, confidential information and the integrity of evidence and proceedings
- The restriction reflects existing recording rules being applied to emerging wearable technology

HMCTS bans Meta smart glasses from courts and tribunals

Local Government Lawyer, 13 August 2026: Users who bring Meta glasses into courts or tribunals will have them confiscated on entry: HMCTS

GOV.UK: Going through security at a court or tribunal building

GOV.UK: How you can attend or access courts and tribunals

Revenues and Benefits implications and actions

- **Service delivery:** the restriction applies to officers attending council tax enforcement, fraud proceedings and benefit-related tribunal hearings
- **Compliance:** officers must not use smart glasses to record, transmit, photograph or obtain assistance during proceedings
- **Evidence integrity:** the ban reduces risks of witnesses receiving external coaching or confidential evidence being recorded
- **Data protection:** covert recording could expose personal, financial, health and welfare information presented during hearings
- **Customer impact:** councils should warn customers, witnesses and representatives about the restriction before hearings
- **Timeliness:** attendees should allow additional time for court security and temporary device storage
- **Digital and process change:** court attendance guidance, hearing checklists and staff policies should explicitly cover recording-enabled wearable technology
- **Accessibility:** reasonable-adjustment requirements should be discussed with HMCTS in advance where wearable technology is used for disability-related support
- **Revenue collection:** there is no direct collection impact, although clear advance communication may help prevent disrupted or missed council tax hearings
- **Financial position:** no material costs, savings or funding implications are identified

LGR & Finance Watch

Cabinet Office

Burnham confirms local government reorganisation as foundation for devolution

- Local Government Lawyer, 13 August 2026: [Burnham expresses commitment to local government reorganisation]
- The article reports comments made by Andy Burnham during an interview with BBC East Midlands political editor Peter Saull.

Government direction and key commitments

- Prime Minister Andy Burnham has confirmed his commitment to continuing local government reorganisation in England
- Reorganisation is intended to improve council effectiveness and consolidate resources
- A more consistent local government structure is presented as the foundation for transferring further powers from Westminster and Whitehall
- Burnham intends to use **Number 10 North** to support greater regional devolution
- His Greater Manchester experience was cited as evidence that reformed local structures can support growth and change
- Burnham said further reform was necessary to maximise devolved powers across the East Midlands
- He remains prepared to reconsider individual reorganisation issues and consider responses to public consultations
- The statement confirms the broad policy direction but provides no new decisions on boundaries, implementation dates or individual council proposals

Suffolk Local Government Reorganisation: Legal Challenge, Governance and Service Risks

- Government plans to abolish Suffolk County Council and the five district and borough councils, replacing them with three unitary authorities.
- Council leader Michael Hadwen authorised judicial review proceedings on 18 June 2026; Cabinet formalised the decision on 29 June.
- The challenge questions the lawfulness of the Government’s decision and could cost Suffolk County Council up to £500,000.
- Opposition parties attempted to call in the decision, citing concerns about openness, governance and cost.
- The call-ins were reportedly rejected, but the monitoring officer’s 26-page explanation has been withheld as confidential.
- A statutory monitoring officer report is also reportedly being prepared, potentially indicating concerns about illegality or maladministration.
- The Council has declined to confirm the reported developments or say whether its decision-making processes were deficient.
- Action: publish the monitoring officer’s reasoning, with necessary redactions, and provide assurance that the decision was lawful, properly scrutinised and financially justified.

References

BBC News: Call for transparency over judicial review decision, 6 August 2026

Suffolk County Council: Notice of Executive Decision EDN-26-001, 26 June 2026

Suffolk County Council: Cabinet agrees to continue the legal challenge, 29 June 2026

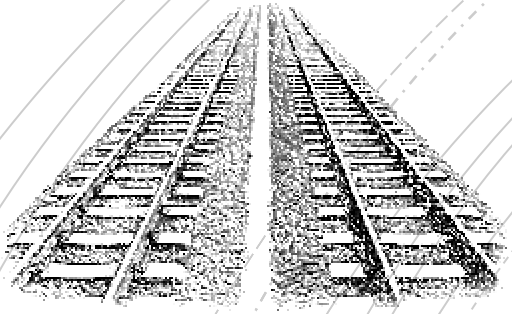
UK Government: Local government reorganisation decision letter to Suffolk council leaders, 25 March 2026

Devon Council Threatens Judicial Review over Four-Unitary Reorganisation

- The Government decided on 16 July 2026 to replace Devon's existing councils with four unitary authorities centred on expanded Exeter, Plymouth and Torbay, plus Devon Coast and Countryside.
- Ministers concluded that this was the best overall option, partly because it would enable the three urban centres to expand and support housing and economic growth.
- Devon County Council favoured a single county unitary, with Plymouth and Torbay remaining separate.
- The council sent MHCLG a letter before claim on 3 August, the formal step preceding a possible judicial review.
- Council leader Julian Brazil argues that the selected model gives insufficient weight to rural and coastal communities, deprived areas and vulnerable residents.
- Five Freedom of Information requests seek evidence about ministerial advice and whether concerns about the expanded-city model were raised before the decision.
- Judicial review would examine the lawfulness of the decision-making process, not decide which structure is preferable.
- No court proceedings or determination have yet been reported. Devon's cabinet is expected to consider its next steps in September.

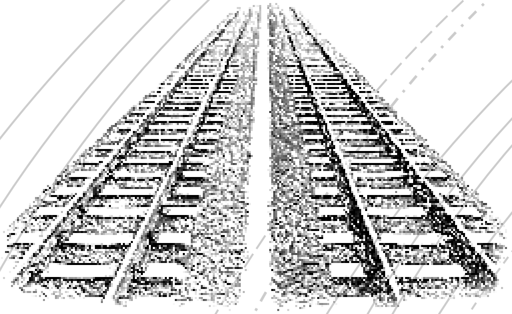
Leicestershire considers legal challenge to two-unitary reorganisation

- Government has decided to replace the area's **10 existing councils with two unitary authorities from April 2028**
- One authority would cover an expanded Leicester, including Oadby and Wigston and parts of Blaby, Charnwood and Harborough
- The second would cover the remaining area of Leicestershire and Rutland
- On 6 August, Leicestershire County Council voted **45 to one** to consider legal remedies after receiving advice on the lawfulness and robustness of the Government's decision
- No legal challenge has yet been authorised: further action depends on advice identifying reasonable grounds
- The council argues that the decision places disproportionate emphasis on benefits for Leicester while overlooking the sustainability of surrounding areas
- Council modelling reportedly found no compelling evidence that expanding Leicester would secure long-term financial sustainability
- Identified risks include service disaggregation, asset transfers, increased organisational complexity and loss of economies of scale
- The council leader reported that only **7% of consultation responses** supported the Government's preferred arrangement



Fiscal Devolution Risks Creating a Two-Track England

- English mayors are expected to receive a share of locally generated income tax and business rates, giving strategic authorities greater financial autonomy.
- Retaining tax revenues could provide longer-term funding, reduce reliance on competitive bidding and allow investment to reflect local priorities.
- The Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub warns that established combined authorities and newer devolved areas begin with very different capabilities.
- Greater Manchester and other mature authorities have developed expertise, funding arrangements, research capacity and trusted institutional relationships over many years.
- Newer authorities, counties and rural areas may lack this “institutional thickness” and could struggle to use additional powers as effectively.
- Devolving responsibility faster than local capacity develops risks creating a two-track system in which already capable regions move further ahead.
- Fiscal devolution could also favour areas with stronger tax bases unless equalisation protects places with lower incomes, weaker economies or greater service needs.
- Researchers recommend sustained, locally tailored capacity support and partnerships between government and regional institutions.



Fiscal Devolution Risks Creating a Two-Track England

- [LocalGov: New devolution powers risk widening regional divide]
- [Institute for Government: Fiscal devolution could unlock new freedoms but involves difficult trade-offs]
- The warning comes from research by the Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub and was reported on 4 August 2026.

- **Business rates:** Greater local or regional retention would increase the importance of accurate valuations, billing, relief administration, collection and forecasting.
- **Council Tax:** The article does not propose devolving Council Tax powers, but broader fiscal autonomy could prompt future debate about local tax design and accountability.
- **Financial risk:** Areas with weak tax bases or volatile business rates could face greater funding uncertainty unless the system includes effective equalisation and safety nets.
- **Capacity:** Revenues and Benefits expertise should be included in devolution planning, particularly for revenue modelling, tax-base growth, collection risk and systems integration.
- **Local government reorganisation:** New unitary and strategic authorities may be developing finance, governance and digital capability simultaneously, increasing implementation risk.
- **Economic inclusion:** Growth strategies should consider whether new employment improves household incomes, reduces benefit dependency and supports sustainable Council Tax payment.
- **Governance:** Responsibilities must be clear where councils collect business rates but strategic authorities receive or allocate part of the resulting revenue.
- **Evidence gap:** Neither the article nor the study quantifies administrative costs, additional staffing, effects on collection, equalisation arrangements or direct impacts on Revenues and Benefits services.

Torridge District Council

Torridge rejects £400,000 allocation for Devon local government reorganisation

- Government confirmed on **16 July 2026** that Devon's existing authorities will be replaced by **four unitary councils**
- New councils are expected to assume responsibility for services from **April 2028**, subject to legislation and transitional arrangements
- Torridge District Council had **£2.6 million of surplus funding** available for allocation
- The Section 151 Officer recommended reserving **£400,000** for professional support and transition costs
- Members rejected the allocation, arguing that central government should fund a reorganisation it had imposed
- The decision was narrow: **15 votes to 14**, with two abstentions
- Government funding is expected to provide **£900,000 per new unitary**, while officers warned that implementation costs would run into several million pounds
- The £400,000 is not necessarily a saving: officers warned that Torridge would have to meet reorganisation costs at some stage
- Devon County Council's legal challenge creates additional uncertainty, but councils must continue preparing for the April 2028 transition

- Local Government Lawyer, 11 August 2026: District members block decision to allocate £400k in funding for local government reorganisation
- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government: Devon, Plymouth and Torbay local government reorganisation

Legal Issues of Note

Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid:

- 2026 No. 571 – The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, came into force on 23 June 2026
- 2026 No. 580 – The Occupational Pension Schemes (Preservation of Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 31 July 2026
- 2026 No. 569 – The Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022 (Conferral of Tribunal Jurisdiction under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 etc.) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 30 July 2026
- 2026 No. 629 – The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2026, came into force on 21 June 2026
- 2026 No. 638 – The Renters' Rights Act 2025 (Commencement No. 3) Regulations 2026, made on 16 June 2026
- 2026 No. 656 – The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 (Commencement No. 1 and Saving) Regulations 2026, made on 17 June 2026
- 2026 No. 668 – The Public Sector Fraud and Error (Recovery) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 14 July 2026
- 2026 No. 669 – The Pension Schemes Act 2026 (Commencement No. 1) Regulations 2026, made on 22 June 2026

Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid:

- 2026 No. 671 – The Registered Pension Schemes (Net Pay Arrangements) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 14 July 2026
- 2026 No. 673 – The Public Service Pension Schemes (Rectification of Unlawful Discrimination) (Tax) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 14 July 2026
- 2026 No. 677 – The Immigration (Leave to Enter and Remain) (Amendment) Order 2026, coming into force on 6 July 2026
- 2026 No. 681 – The Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and State Pension Credit (Carer's Allowance Reassessment Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 16 July 2026
- 2026 No. 683 – The Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Act 2025 (Commencement No. 4) Regulations 2026, made on 24 June 2026
- 2026 No. 686 – The Inter-authority Recoupment (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 1 September 2026

Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid:

- 2026 No. 692 – The Non-Domestic rating (Definition of Domestic Property) (England) Order 2026, came into force on 24 July 2026
- 2026 No. 700 – The Immigration (Restrictions on Employment and Residential Accommodation) (Prescribed Requirements and Codes of Practice) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 1 October 2026
- 2026 No. 706 – The Education (Free School Lunches in Maintained Nursery Schools) (Universal Credit) (England) Order 2026, coming into force on 17 August 2026
- 2026 No. 717 – The Horizon Family Members Redress Scheme (Tax Exemptions and Relief) Regulations 2026, came into force on 22 July 2026
- 2026 No. 719 – The Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities (Remuneration Panels for Member Allowances and Consequential Amendments) Order 2026, came into force on 22 July 2026
- 2026 No. 730 – The Pensions Act 2004 (Code of Practice) (Authorisation and Supervision of Collective Defined Contribution Schemes) Appointed Day and Revocation Order 2026, made on 2 July 2026
- 2026 No. 753 – The Housing Benefit (Earned Income Disregards) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 5 October 2026
- 2026 No. 763 – The Local Government (Structural and Boundary Changes) (Control of Disposals etc.) (Amendment) Order 2026, came into force on 7 July 2026

Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid:

- 2026 No. 770 – The Tribunal Procedure (First-tier Tribunal) (Property Chamber) (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2026, laid on 9 July 2026
- 2026 No. 771 – The First-tier Tribunal and Upper Tribunal (Chambers) (Amendment) Order 2026, laid on 9 July 2026
- 2026 No. 794 – The Social Security (Contributions) (Republic of India) (Amendment) Order 2026, made on 8 July 2026
- 2026 No. 795 – The Social Security (Contributions) (Isle of Man) Order 2026, made on 8 July 2026
- 2026 No. 804 – The Digital Communications and Contact Details Regulations 2026, coming into force on 3 August 2026
- 2026 No. 812 – The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 (Commencement No. 2) Regulations 2026, made on 14 July 2026
- 2026 No. 813 – The Welfare Reform Act 2012 (Commencement No. 30 and Transitionary Provisions) (Amendment) (England) Order 2026, coming into force on 17 August 2026
- 2026 No. 818 – The Registered Pension Schemes (Provision of Information) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2026, coming into force on 6 April 2027
- 2026 No. 872 – The Infected Blood Compensation Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2026, came into force on 24 July 2026
- Copies of SIs can be downloaded from legislation.gov.uk

Insider Data Misuse – Council Worker Sentenced for Unlawful Access

A newly appointed Herefordshire Council employee unlawfully accessed approximately 490 personal records and downloaded 94 documents over four days.

The records concerned family members and other people known to him, including both children and adults.

Information accessed included medical records, social-work reports and child and family assessments.

Concerns about unauthorised access to one referral prompted the council to examine the employee’s wider system activity.

The employee pleaded guilty to unauthorised computer access under section 1 of the Computer Misuse Act 1990.

He received two months’ imprisonment suspended for 12 months, 120 hours’ unpaid work, £2,000 costs and a £154 victim surcharge.

The ICO emphasised that legitimate system access does not permit employees to view information without a genuine work-related purpose.

VISIONARY NETWORK

A7/26 Scottish Disability and Carer Benefits Aligned with Housing Benefit Rules

Legislative changes from 16 July 2026

- The consequential amendments ensure Scottish disability and carer benefits are treated consistently with the UK benefits they replace.
- The changes apply from 16 July 2026 and amend Housing Benefit regulations and the Decisions and Appeals Regulations.
- Pension Age Disability Payment becomes a qualifying benefit for the severe disability premium.
- Adult Disability Payment becomes a qualifying benefit for the £20 earnings disregard under the pension-age Housing Benefit rules.
- Eligible working-age couples can retain the childcare disregard when Adult Disability Payment temporarily stops because the recipient enters hospital.
- Carer Support Payment, Pension Age Disability Payment and Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance become qualifying benefits for relevant Housing Benefit decisions.
- Councils can revise or supersede decisions when these benefits are subsequently awarded, reinstated or increased.
- Scottish disability and carer payments are disregarded as income where the equivalent benefits they replace would be disregarded.

A7/26 Scottish Disability and Carer Benefits Aligned with Housing Benefit Rules

DWP: A7/2026, Scottish disability and carer benefits consequential amendments
The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (Disability and Carer Benefits) (Consequential Amendments) Order 2026
SI 2026/679 was laid on 25 June 2026 and came into force on 16 July 2026.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Service delivery:** Councils must recognise the Scottish replacement benefits correctly in Housing Benefit assessments, including claims made outside Scotland.
- **Decision-making:** Awards made retrospectively may require earlier Housing Benefit decisions to be revised or superseded and arrears paid.
- **Accuracy:** Staff and systems must map each Scottish benefit to its equivalent UK benefit and apply the correct premiums, disregards and hospital rules.
- **Council Tax Reduction:** Authorities should check their local CTR schemes and software to ensure equivalent Scottish benefits receive the intended treatment; the circular itself concerns Housing Benefit legislation.
- **Customer impact:** Failure to recognise a Scottish award could understate entitlement, particularly where the severe disability premium or an earnings disregard applies.
- **Digital and process changes:** Update benefit codes, calculation parameters, evidence guidance, decision notices and quality-assurance checks where required.
- **Training:** Officers should understand that Scottish benefits can affect claims administered elsewhere in Great Britain when a claimant moves or has cross-border circumstances.
- **Financial position:** The circular provides no estimates of affected cases, additional benefit expenditure, administration funding, costs or savings.

A8/26 Carer's Allowance Refunds Protected from Housing Benefit Capital Rules

New capital disregard from 16 July 2026

- A reassessment exercise is correcting some Carer's Allowance overpayments caused by inaccurate guidance on averaging irregular earnings.
- The previous guidance wrongly instructed decision makers not to average earnings where weekly amounts fluctuated irregularly.
- Dedicated DWP teams began reviewing affected cases on 13 April 2026, covering employment between April 2015 and 2 September 2025.
- Around 25,000 cases are expected to result in a refund payment or a reduction in outstanding Carer's Allowance overpayments.
- Any refund arising from the reassessment is fully and indefinitely disregarded as capital for Housing Benefit.
- The disregard applies from the date the refund is issued.
- The regulations amend both working age and pension age Housing Benefit rules and took effect on 16 July 2026.

A8/26 Carer's Allowance Refunds Protected from Housing Benefit Capital Rules

DWP: HB A8/2026, Carer's Allowance reassessment capital disregard

The Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and State Pension Credit (Carer's Allowance Reassessment Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations 2026, SI 2026/681. The regulations were laid on 25 June 2026 and came into force on 16 July 2026.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Assessment:** Councils must identify qualifying Carer's Allowance refunds and exclude them indefinitely from the claimant's capital.
- **Evidence:** Officers may need the DWP reassessment decision to distinguish a protected refund from an ordinary payment or other capital.
- **Customer impact:** The disregard prevents compensation for an incorrectly assessed overpayment from reducing subsequent Housing Benefit entitlement.
- **Service delivery:** The local authority impact is expected to be low because most affected households receiving means tested benefits claim Universal Credit.
- **Passporting:** Where the claimant receives Universal Credit or the guarantee credit element of Pension Credit, the refund will not affect the Housing Benefit calculation.
- **Systems and guidance:** Update local procedures, training and quality checks, and annotate Housing Benefit Guidance Manual paragraphs BW1.80 and BP1.181.
- **Council Tax Reduction:** Councils should check whether their local CTR scheme provides an equivalent disregard and amend the scheme or guidance where necessary.
- **Financial position:** No additional administration funding, affected Housing Benefit caseload or local authority expenditure has been quantified.

PIP Review Extensions Caused Temporary Increase in ATLAS Alerts

- DWP has extended existing Personal Independence Payment awards to provide a minimum three-year recommended review period.
- The award-extension exercise began on 16 June 2026.
- Updating the awards generated a significant temporary increase in ATLAS notifications sent to local authorities.
- The increase included PIP notifications and alerts for related benefits, such as Carer’s Allowance.
- DWP has now completed the exercise and expects PIP ATLAS volumes to return to normal levels.
- DWP’s Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery division is reviewing its communications so councils receive earlier warning of similar exercises.
- Earlier notification should allow local authorities to assess workload, system and staffing implications before large volumes of alerts are issued.

PIP Review Extensions Caused Temporary Increase in ATLAS Alerts

- DWP notice: *Extension of the Recommended Review Period for Personal Independence Payment awards*.
- Award-extension processing commenced on 16 June 2026 and has now been completed.
- Local authority enquiries: lawelfare.changemanagementoffice@dwp.gov.uk.

Revenues and Benefits implications

- **Workload:** Councils may have experienced an unexpected increase in automated records requiring processing, checking or exception handling.
- **Housing Benefit:** Extended PIP awards may preserve entitlement to disability premiums, applicable amounts, non-dependant deduction exemptions and other linked provisions.
- **Council Tax Reduction:** Local schemes and systems should continue to recognise the extended awards and apply any relevant disability-related protections.
- **Carer's Allowance:** Related notifications may affect income calculations, premiums and overlapping benefit considerations.
- **Backlogs and timeliness:** Councils should check whether the temporary spike created outstanding work or delayed other benefit changes.
- **Accuracy:** Duplicate or linked notifications should be checked to prevent unnecessary reassessments, incorrect suspensions or changes to entitlement.
- **Customer impact:** Customers should not be asked to provide evidence already available through ATLAS unless the notification is incomplete or inconsistent.
- **Financial position:** No affected caseload, administrative funding, additional cost, saving or Council Tax collection impact has been quantified.

Other Workshops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SWANSEA 36 MILES
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REGIONAL MEETINGS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Job Adverts From Business Smart Solutions

BUSINESS SMART
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Your Revenues and Benefits Recruitment Partner

FCSA Recruiter Partner · IRRV Organisational Member · disability confident COMMITTED · CYBER ESSENTIALS CERTIFIED · ARMED FORCES COVENANT · Carbon Neutral Britain · Good Business Charter Accredited · JUST ONE TREE · MINDFUL EMPLOYER

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

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 <<

Deputy Revenues & Benefits Manager

3 months initially | £45.52 per hour (umbrella) | Shrewsbury

Senior Management support to the Revenues & Benefits Manager with tasks such as the following:

- Collecting local Council Tax and Business Rates revenues:
  - Council Tax for the Council as a billing authority and for the precepting bodies,
  - Business Rates from local businesses,and effective management of arrangements for Business Rates reliefs,
- Managing policy arrangements in regard to local discretionary schemes
  - Business rates reliefs
  - Council Tax Reduction Scheme
  - Section 13A discretions
  - Integration with the Crisis Resilience Fund
- Payment of local benefits payments including
  - Council Tax Support Grants and
  - Housing Benefits

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

- Seeking a strong Revenues & Benefits Manager to assist with the more technical elements of the job and team management

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

Revenues Manager (NEC)

Until 31st March 2027 | £400 per day (umbrella) | Hybrid - London

- To be responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the Revenues Service
- To maximise the revenue and income the Council receives by delivering an innovative, efficient, high-quality service in relation to Business Rates and Council Tax
- To ensure the effective billing, collection and recovery of both Business Rates and Council Tax
- To deal with the more technical aspects of Business Rates and Council Tax
- To have a working knowledge of the Housing/Council Tax Support system.
- To have overall responsibility for the system administration of the IT systems within the service area and ensure the development of IT systems as directed by the Corporate Head of Customer, Digital & Collection Services
- To oversee the management of the Revenues team through staff performance, developing individuals and dealing with third party software suppliers.
- To provide a high level of customer service when dealing with enquiries from the public via telephone, face to face and e-mail

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

- Detailed knowledge of Business Rates and Council Tax legislation
- Credible track record of achieving high collection rates on both Business Rates and Council Tax
- Ability to learn complex legislation
- An understanding of how to achieve cost savings
- An understanding of how to review processes and develop more streamlined processes across Revenues
- An understanding of workforce development issues
- The ability to motivate and engage a team from differing backgrounds towards common aims

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

Revenues Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)

10-26 weeks | £24 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

Our good client is seeking 4 Revenues Officer's to support its team in delivering high-quality revenue services. This role is perfect for an experienced professional with a strong background in local government revenue collection and administration.

Key Responsibilities:

- Administer and manage council tax accounts
- Handle billing, payments, and customer queries efficiently
- Ensure compliance with relevant legislation and council policies
- Support debt recovery processes and liaise with stakeholders

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

- Proven experience in revenues administration
- Strong knowledge of council tax and business rates regulations
- Excellent communication and problem-solving skills
- Ability to work independently in a remote setting
- Basic DBS and BPSS required
- Civica OpenRevs experience

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

Benefits Assessor (MRI)

3 months intially | £23.05 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

What you'll work on

Under the guidance of the Senior Benefit Assessor, to assess Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support in accordance with legislation, case law, and the working practices and procedures of the council to the required standards of accuracy and achieving agreed clearance times as laid out in the service plan.

To deal with customer enquiries by telephone, in person or on visit as required, and to support colleagues and partners in prioritising customer needs, and providing excellent customer care.

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

- Must have recent experience in the role and be fully competent in all aspects of assessing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.
- A highly competent user of the MRI (Academy) software

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

Benefits Officer
(Civica Open Revenues)

3 months intially | £24 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

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

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

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

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

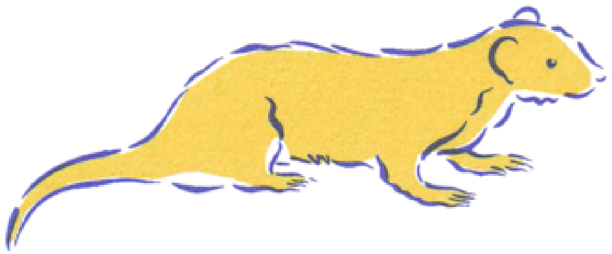
"BSS has provided us with excellent support since 2022. The range of expertise they have on their books is second to none, and they are without doubt my first choice when looking for staff.

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

2015 EQUITY RELEASE AWARDS MortgageSolutions 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:

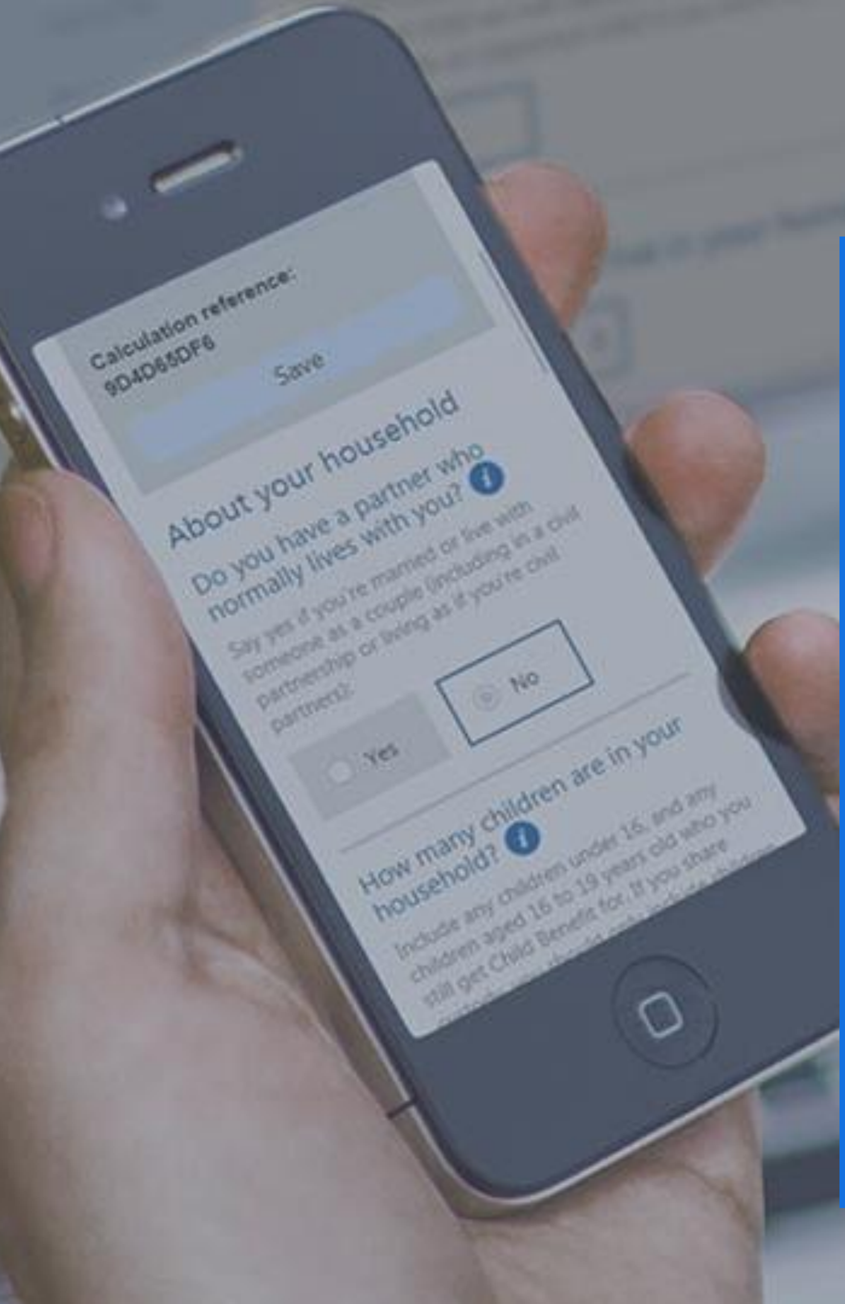
Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

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/



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

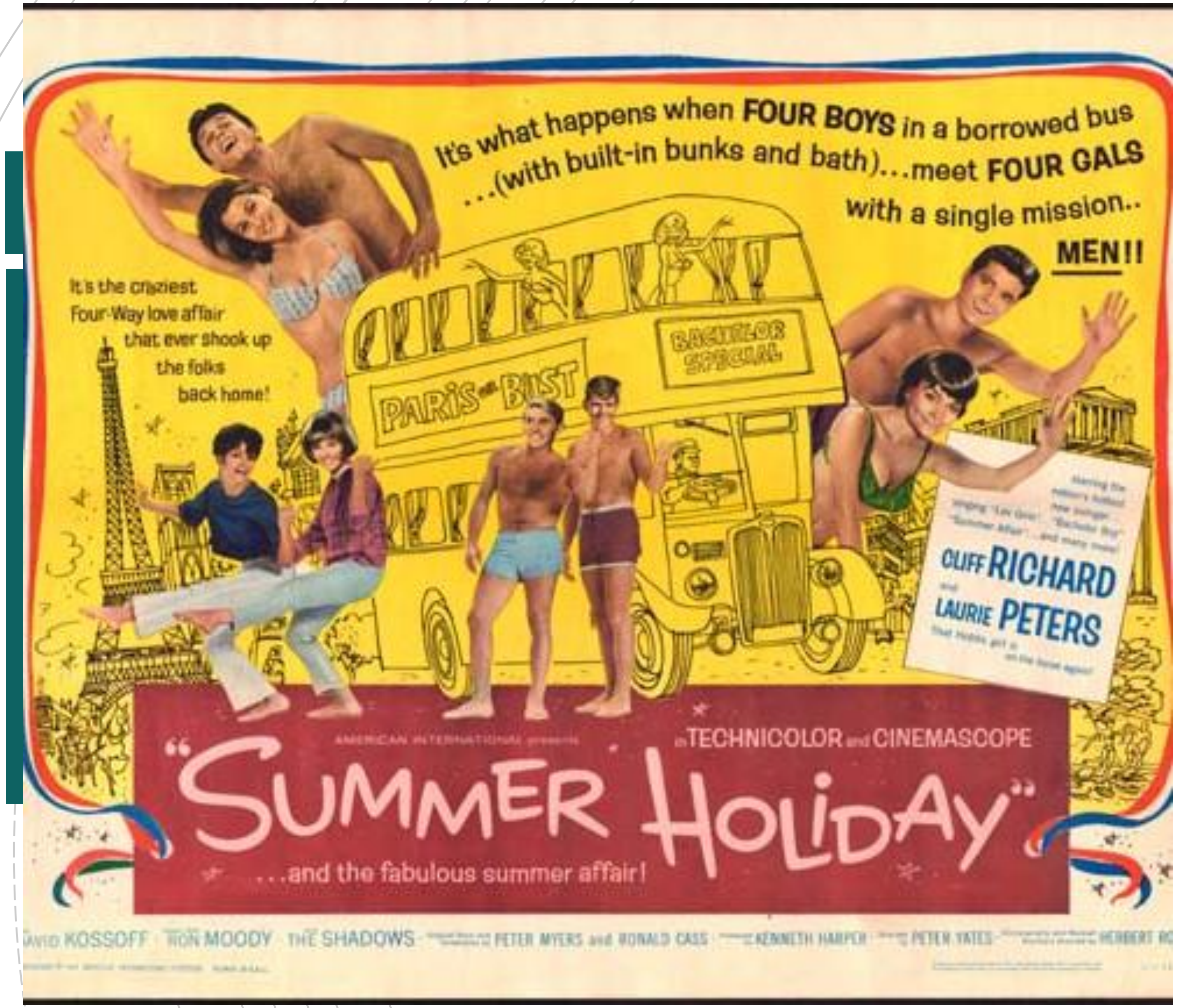
Apply4.Online®

Session Information

Previous Sessions

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
10 Jul 26	Devolution of Welfare and the Future of Revenues and Benefits
20 Jul 26	When one council's solution becomes another's cost
27 Jul 26	End of Year Review

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

Blogs

VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

Housing Benefit closes at last, but Universal Credit has not simplified housing support – Visionary Network

A Tale of Two Reorganisations

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

The Case for Plain English Council Tax Reduction Schemes by Paul Howarth

Other Blogs

IFS
Unfreezing the personal allowance

BENEFITS IN THE FUTURE
‘Tis the season to be jolly… misleading, in the Daily Mail

BENEFITS IN THE FUTURE
Lies, Damned Lies and the Telegraph

ENTITLEDTO
Child Benefit take-up hits a new low: the downside to ‘wealth testing’ benefits

ENTITLEDTO
Local Authorities left with their hands tied by lifting of the 2-child limit

ENTITLEDTO
Benefit take-up may be getting worse, but it’s hard to know

[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

VISIONARY NETWORK

Stats & References

About Visionary Network

VISIONARY NETWORK

The Independent Local Tax and Welfare 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.

A VISIONARY NETWORK PARTNER

irrv ORGANISATIONAL MEMBER

MALG MEMBER

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inbest

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entitledto
independent | accurate | reliable

the campaign for better policy.

BUSINESS SMART
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Ferret Information Systems

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data management

doptio

Welfare Together

Mighty Oak Training

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.