In Partnership with

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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

31 August 2026

Meeting Link

VISIONARY NETWORK

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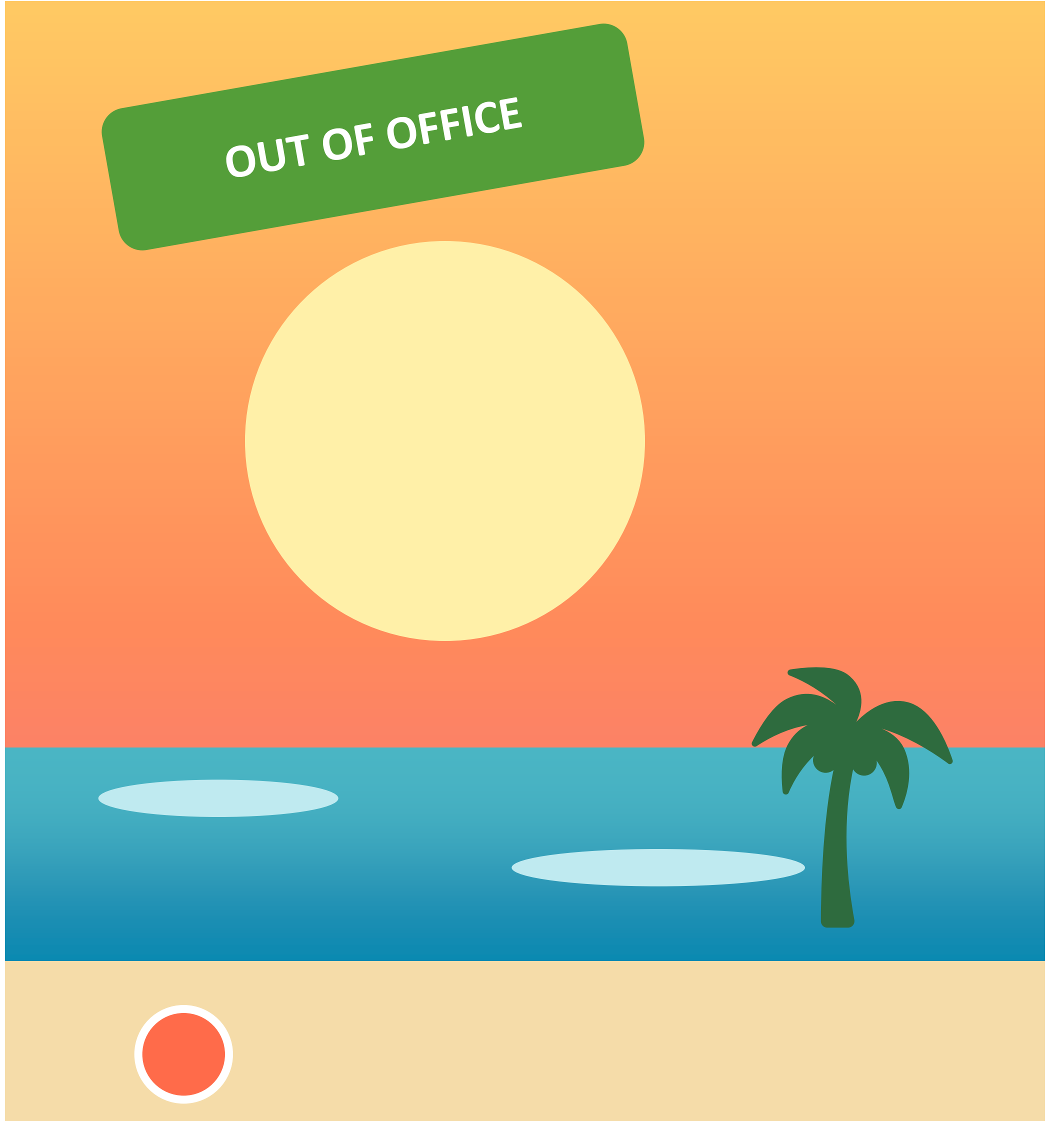
Gone sunny.
Back 7 Sept.

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.



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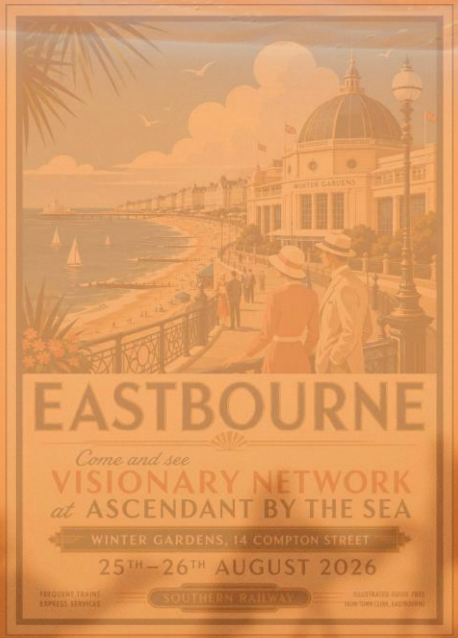
Visionary on Tour 2026



VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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Malcolm Gardner, Visionary Network Director

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Book a meeting with Malcolm: Book Time with MG

VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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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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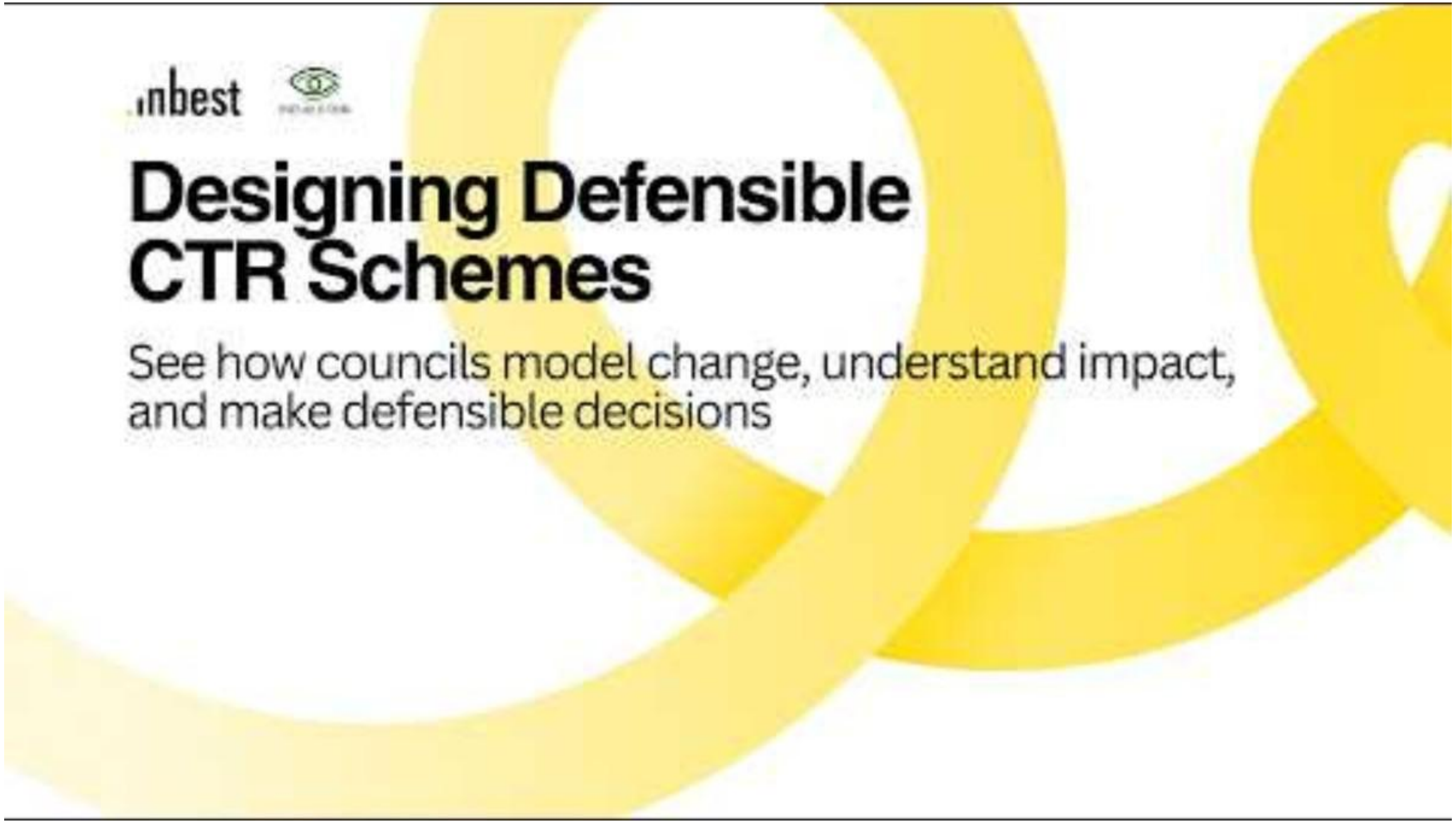

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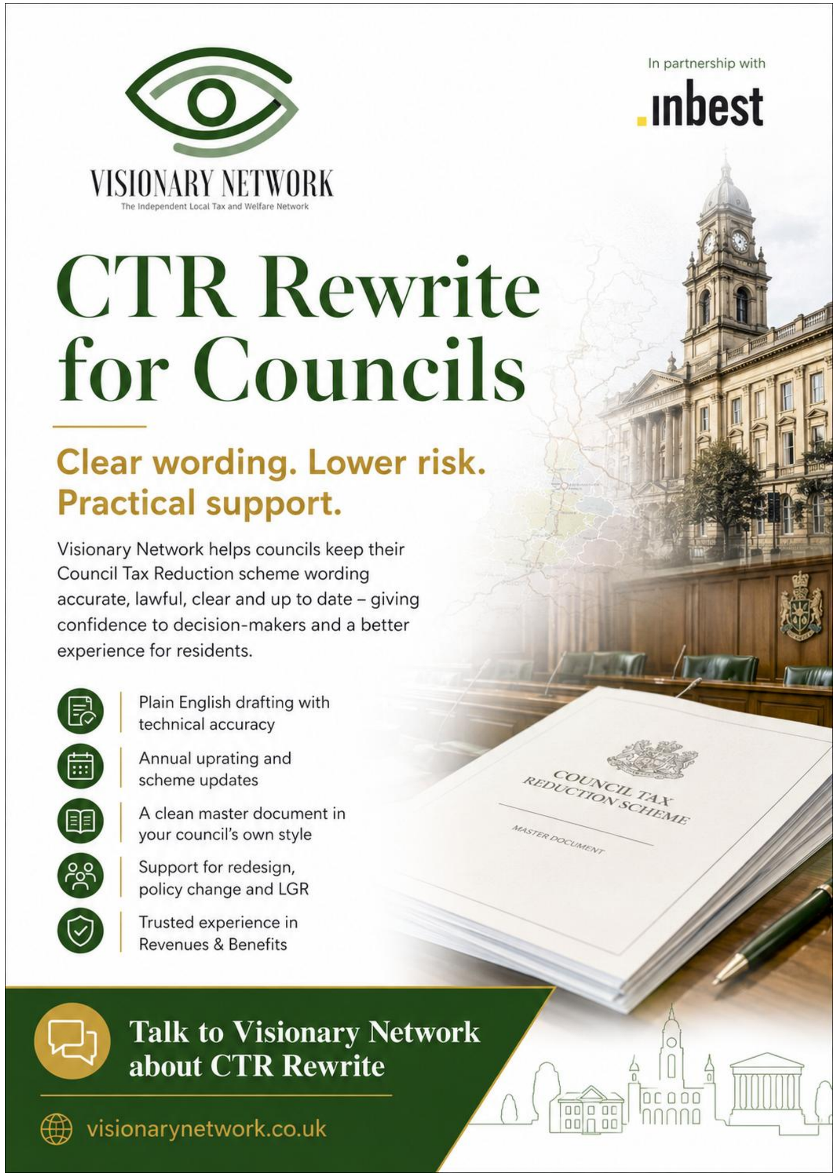

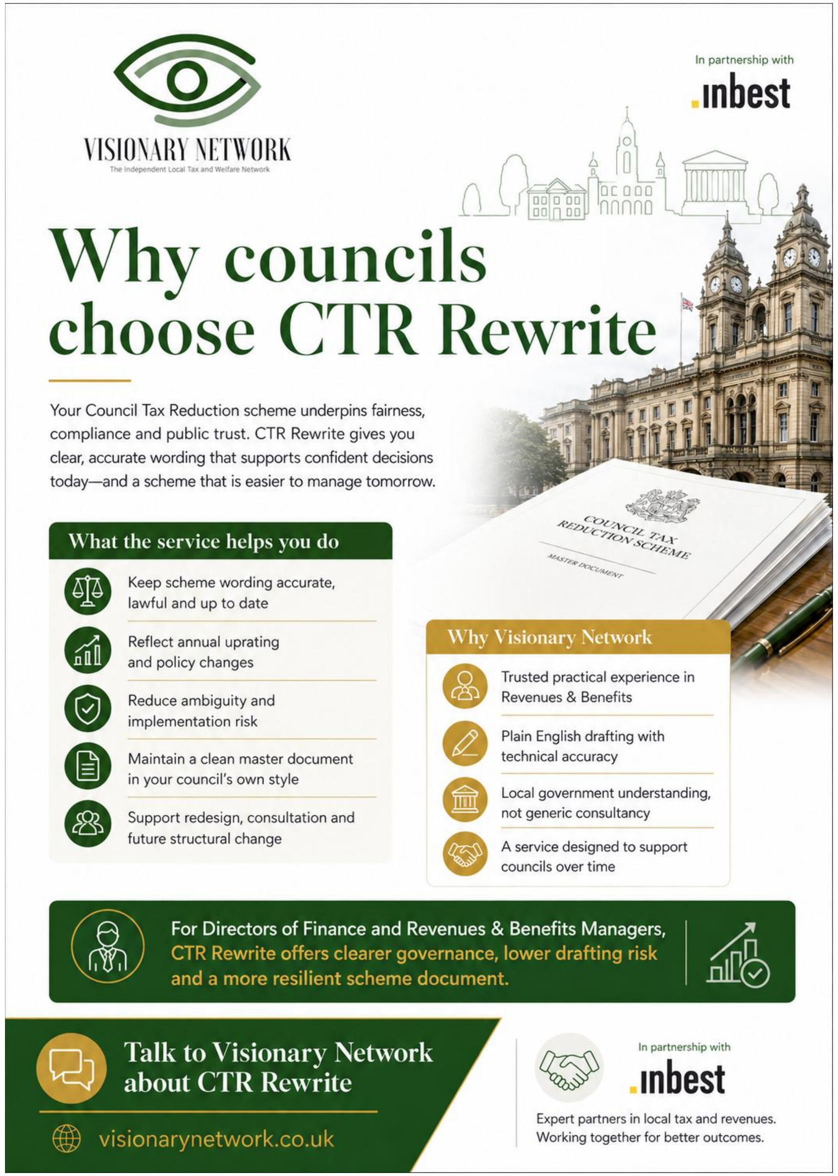

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In the news

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New NRPF guidance clarifies council duties and discretionary boundaries

- Home Office published cross-government guidance for councils in England on migrants subject to No Recourse to Public Funds.
- Guidance explains how immigration status affects eligibility for benefits, services and other support.
- It covers EU Settlement Scheme benefit entitlements, statutory duties and discretionary powers or limitations.
- Relevant departments include Home Office, MHCLG, DfE, DWP and DHSC.
- R&B teams must distinguish local welfare, homelessness, social care and benefits eligibility consistently.
- Action: align front-door scripts, decision records and referral routes for NRPF cases.

Home Office

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

NRPF decisions sit at the boundary of benefits, housing and local welfare.

Inconsistent triage risks unlawful refusal, delay, or unfunded discretionary support.

Financial impact depends on local welfare and accommodation demand.

Source: Local Government Lawyer / Home Office cross-government NRPF guidance

Ombudsman: inaccessible communication is causing distress and financial harm

- PHSO warned disabled people are being let down by poor or inaccessible communications across public services.
- Cases included missed calls, unavailable formats, lack of interpretation and failure to make reasonable adjustments.
- One HMRC case contributed to a disabled person missing £5,600 of SEISS grants.
- The Ombudsman highlighted confusion, distress and financial harm where services failed to communicate clearly.
- R&B letters, bills, benefit notices and digital portals must be accessible and responsive.
- Action: review alternative formats, callback standards, reasonable adjustment flags and audit evidence.

Parliamentary
and Health Service
Ombudsman

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Communication failure becomes a service failure, not a presentational issue.

Customer impact includes missed entitlements, arrears, complaints and compensation.

Accessible design should be built into demand management and recovery practice.

Source: Local Government Lawyer / Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

PIP reassessment test expands to around 4% of assessment volume

- DWP began testing a transformed PIP decision-making approach on 16 March 2026 in areas covering around 1% of assessment volume.
- The test expanded on 1 June 2026 to areas covering around 4% of national PIP assessment volume.
- DWP says the change aims to free assessment provider capacity and improve decision quality.
- The work sits within the Health Transformation Programme and is subject to programme governance.
- R&B should monitor knock-on effects on disability indicators, premiums, passporting and customer evidence flows.
- Action: track local enquiry volumes and benefit change notifications where PIP decisions change.

Department for Work & Pensions

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Any PIP operational change can alter local welfare demand and vulnerability indicators.

Timeliness matters where PIP decisions affect CTR, discretionary help and arrears.

Financial impact is indirect: support levels, hardship demand and collection vulnerability.

Source: WalesOnline report, UK Parliament written answer and DWP position

Reform UK welfare proposals: large savings claimed, limited implementation detail

- Coverage reported Reform UK proposals to reduce the welfare bill by around £50bn.
- Proposals included abolishing PIP and the health element of Universal Credit for working-age adults.
- A new health security allowance was described for people who are gravely ill or severely challenged.
- Lower-level cash support could be replaced by local disability support accounts for equipment, adaptations or transport.
- Existing claimants would reportedly be reassessed over three to four years.
- Key risk: local delivery implications are material but methodology, eligibility rules and hard-case discretion are unclear.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Localising support accounts would shift delivery pressure toward councils and R&B-adjacent services.

Large-scale reassessment could increase enquiries, appeals, hardship and vulnerability work.

Financial risks depend on funding formulae, administrative burden and claim migration.

Source: BBC link reviewed with corroborating ITV coverage due BBC access limits

House price growth remains modest despite resilient activity

- Market commentary describes modest growth with significant regional variation and price sensitivity.
- Rightmove reported average asking prices fell 1.0% in July to £372,359, larger than the normal seasonal dip.
- Nationwide reported annual house price growth of 2.2% in June, up from 1.7% in May.
- Lloyds reported average prices up 0.2% in June, with annual growth of 0.6%.
- Zoopla reported 1.4% annual growth in June and sales agreed 7% lower than a year earlier.
- R&B should watch council tax base assumptions, empty homes, moves and local recovery affordability.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Housing market softness can affect council tax base growth and collection resilience.

Regional divergence matters for local forecasting and arrears vulnerability.

Income risk is indirect unless volumes, exemptions or collection performance change.

Source: The Negotiator / Kate Faulkner market commentary

UC sanctions: interview failures dominate adverse sanction decisions

- DWP statistics to May 2026 show a Universal Credit sanction rate of 5.2% among regimes where sanctions can apply.
- Around 24.4% of UC claimants were in sanctionable conditionality regimes, approximately 2m people.
- Failure to attend or participate in a mandatory interview accounted for around 90% of adverse sanction decisions.
- There were 53,000 adverse sanction decisions in April 2026; January 2026 was the highest point in the time series.
- Completed sanction durations most commonly fell in the over four to 13 week band.
- R&B should watch sanction-driven hardship, CTR change reporting and recovery vulnerability.

Department for Work & Pensions

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Sanctions can quickly increase local welfare demand and council tax arrears risk.

Customer contact may rise where income drops suddenly or deductions interact.

Collection strategy should recognise income shocks and vulnerability flags.

Source: DWP Benefit Sanctions statistics to May 2026

UC reaches 8.4m people as managed migration nears completion

- DWP statistics show 8.4m people on Universal Credit in May 2026, the highest level recorded.
- Move to UC accounted for 73.2% of the increase between May 2025 and May 2026.
- Around 7.2m households were on UC; 6.7m received a payment in May 2026.
- Around 51% of UC claimants were in the no work requirements conditionality regime.
- Around 3.3m households, 47%, had deductions from their UC payment in May 2026.
- R&B should align CTR caseload monitoring, data matching, deductions advice and vulnerability triage.

Department for Work & Pensions

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

UC migration affects CTR, housing cost enquiries, deductions and arrears management.

A high no-work-requirements share points to health/disability complexity.

Deductions create collection risk and increase need for affordability-based recovery.

Source: DWP Universal Credit quarterly statistics to 14 May 2026

Polling shows concern about young people’s access to work and skills

- DWP/Ipsos polling surveyed 2,180 UK adults aged 16 to 75 between 31 July and 5 August 2026.
- Half of respondents thought young people have fewer opportunities than previous generations.
- Top perceived causes of NEET rises included limited apprenticeships or entry-level jobs, motivation, and fewer early work opportunities.
- Respondents prioritised apprenticeships, skills training, work experience and help into suitable jobs.
- Young adults were more likely to cite limited early work opportunities and economic conditions.
- R&B should consider youth employment as part of poverty prevention, CTR support and local welfare demand.

Department for Work & Pensions

Ipsos

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Youth labour market weakness can become a local welfare and council tax vulnerability issue.

Early intervention links employability, debt prevention and household resilience.

Financial impact is indirect through benefit dependency and collection affordability.

Source: DWP General Population Polling: Young People and Work

Government adds winter rough sleeping support as homelessness pressure persists

- Public Finance reported additional winter funding to tackle rough sleeping; government announcements refer to a wider £442m package.
- The stated aim is that people sleeping rough are offered a route off the streets by Christmas.
- Funding includes support for settled homes, targeted local projects and accessible provision, including for women.
- Councils will need to coordinate housing, homelessness, welfare support and voluntary sector pathways.
- R&B should expect hardship, CTR, discretionary housing payment and crisis support interfaces.
- Action: align local welfare triage with homelessness prevention and winter pressure planning.

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Rough sleeping interventions create demand across housing, benefits and local welfare.

Funding may help, but delivery depends on local capacity and referral speed.

Financial pressure sits in emergency accommodation, support packages and prevention work.

Source: Public Finance report and official government rough sleeping announcement

Vacancies fall to a five-year low as hiring slows

- ONS data for May to July 2026 showed vacancies fell by 6,000, or 0.8%, versus the previous quarter.
- Vacancies were down by 19,000, or 2.7%, compared with a year earlier.
- Falls were recorded in nine of 18 sectors, with notable reductions in education and health/social work.
- Vacancies were reported at around 707,000, the lowest for more than five years.
- A softer jobs market can slow exits from benefit, increase hardship and affect collection affordability.
- Action: monitor arrears, CTR caseload movement and recovery arrangements alongside local employment data.

Office for
National Statistics

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Labour market cooling can increase demand for CTR and local welfare.

Lower hiring reduces customer resilience and repayment capacity.

Council tax collection assumptions should reflect affordability and employment trends.

Source: Public Finance report, ONS Labour Market Overview and Guardian coverage

UK GDP grows 0.4% in Q2, with GDP per head also up

- ONS reported UK real GDP grew by 0.4% in Quarter 2 2026, after 0.6% growth in Quarter 1.
- GDP per head also grew by 0.4% in Quarter 2 and was 1.0% higher than a year earlier.
- Services grew by 0.5%, construction by 0.3%, while production was flat.
- Household consumption and investment supported expenditure growth; government consumption fell by 0.3%.
- Macro resilience does not remove household stress where welfare, housing and labour market pressures persist.
- Action: keep local performance forecasts grounded in local caseload and collection evidence, not headline GDP alone.

Office for National Statistics

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

GDP growth helps the fiscal backdrop but does not guarantee collection improvement.

Per-head growth is positive, but household distribution matters for R&B.

Financial planning should combine macro signals with local arrears and CTR data.

Source: Public Finance report and ONS GDP first quarterly estimate

Record numbers of households and children in temporary accommodation

- Official homelessness statistics showed 135,580 households in temporary accommodation on 31 March 2026.
- The same release recorded 177,530 children in temporary accommodation, up 5.2% on a year earlier.
- There were 86,460 households with children in temporary accommodation.
- Around 1,900 households with children were in bed and breakfast accommodation, including 1,000 beyond the statutory six-week limit.
- This creates significant customer harm and local financial pressure through accommodation and support costs.
- R&B should align housing benefit, CTR, DHP, arrears prevention and vulnerability support.

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Temporary accommodation is a major intersection of benefits, debt and hardship.

Timeliness of benefits and local welfare decisions directly affects stability.

Financial position is exposed through accommodation costs and wider support demand.

Source: Public Finance report and MHCLG statutory homelessness statistics

Council capacity could limit Renters’ Rights Act enforcement

- Public Finance highlighted capacity risk for councils implementing Renters’ Rights Act enforcement.
- Government guidance says councils should understand and use tenancy enforcement measures under the Act.
- MHCLG has announced funding to support councils as new enforcement duties come into force.
- London support included £40,000 to help councils train officers on responsibilities under the Act.
- Enforcement activity could increase demand for housing advice, welfare support and joined-up casework.
- Action: connect private rented enforcement intelligence with homelessness prevention and R&B vulnerability pathways.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B may feel the impact through rent instability, homelessness prevention and arrears risk.

Capacity gaps can delay enforcement and increase downstream support costs.

Financial benefit depends on prevention and recoverable enforcement funding or penalties.

Source: Public Finance report, MHCLG guidance and government funding announcements

Councils gain stronger powers over vape shops and gambling premises

- Government plans would require vape shops and adult gaming centres to obtain planning permission.
- Ministers also intend to revoke the Gambling Act “Aim to Permit” rule for betting and adult gaming centres.
- The stated purpose is to give communities and councils greater control over high street uses.
- This mainly affects planning and licensing, but there are wider public health, place and deprivation implications.
- R&B relevance is indirect: local economies, vulnerable residents and household financial harm can affect welfare demand.
- Action: share intelligence across licensing, planning, public health, debt advice and local welfare teams.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Financial harm from gambling and local decline can surface in R&B caseloads.

Planning/licensing changes are not R&B functions but shape the prevention environment.

No direct collection impact is evidenced, but deprivation risks are material.

HM Treasury

Source: Public Finance report and official government high street / planning announcements

Analysis warns future graduates face heavier repayment burden

- Guardian reported Intergenerational Foundation analysis of England's student loan reforms.
- Plan 5 borrowers were estimated to repay much more over their lifetime than earlier cohorts.
- Lower earners are projected to face a markedly higher repayment burden than under Plan 1.
- The analysis argues the public contribution to university costs has fallen sharply over time.
- High effective marginal rates can reduce disposable income and early-career resilience.
- R&B relevance is indirect: younger households may have less headroom for council tax, rent and debt repayment.

Intergenerational Foundation

Source: The Guardian / Intergenerational Foundation analysis

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

Graduate debt is not an R&B function, but it affects household affordability.

Disposable income pressure can influence council tax collection and local hardship.

Financial impact depends on local demographic profile and arrears trends.

Cross-council fraud exposed verification gaps

- £313,043 was paid through 51 false Housing Benefit claims.
- Stolen identities and forged evidence were used.
- The 2015–22 activity touched 32 councils.
- DWP traced devices, accounts and cashpoint CCTV.
- Action: Match identities, tenancies and payment details.

Department for Work & Pensions

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Combined controls must connect prevention, detection and recovery.

Customer / compliance: Share intelligence across authority boundaries.

Financial position: Recover overpayments and support confiscation.

Source: Civil Service World / DWP benefit-fraud sentence

Rural temporary accommodation costs have trebled

- Demand and local funding pressure are rising across county areas.
- 23,000 children were in rural temporary accommodation.
- Rural homelessness assessments reached 116,000.
- Council spend rose from £124m to £373m in five years.
- Action: Join R&B, housing and prevention at first contact.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Revenues and Benefits should be embedded in early prevention.

Customer / compliance: Plan CTR, local welfare and DHP referral capacity.

Financial position: 2011 LHA reimbursement caps leave local shortfalls.

Source: Local Government Lawyer / Rural homelessness warning

War-driven inflation threatens another income squeeze

- Higher energy costs and weaker wages are expected to hit households.
- CEBR estimates a £2,400 real-income hit by end-2027.
- The total household loss is put at £70.4bn.
- Energy inflation and weaker wages drive the squeeze.
- Action: Model higher CTR and local welfare demand.

CEBR
COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN BIOREGIONS

Source: The Guardian / Iran war and household incomes

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: A renewed squeeze may increase hardship and payment risk.

Customer / compliance: Monitor Council Tax arrears and affordability.

Financial position: Collection-income risk is plausible, not quantified.

Edinburgh paused its four-times second-home charge

- The council page records a temporary return to the 100% premium.
- The planned 300% premium was suspended.
- Revised 2026/27 bills use the 100% premium.
- A survey informed further consideration of impacts.
- Action: Rebilling and refunds create short-term workload.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Second-home bills reverted from four times to twice the standard charge.

Customer / compliance: Apply discretion and exceptions consistently.

Financial position: Forecast premium income only after policy is confirmed.

EDINBVRGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Source: City of Edinburgh Council / Edinburgh second-home Council Tax

Trial allegations underline grant-control weaknesses

- The reported allegations concern the handling of councillor grant funding.
- Prosecutors allege misuse of public grant funding.
- The case includes 12 fraud and four tax charges.
- All charges are denied; the trial was continuing.
- Action: Verify organisations and intended beneficiaries.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Control lessons apply, although no direct R&B impact is identified.

Customer / compliance: Separate approval, payment and cash handling.

Financial position: No direct R&B or collection impact is evidenced.

Ashfield DISTRICT COUNCIL

Source: Nottingham Post / Ashfield grant-fraud trial report

Funding cuts could trigger exceptional Council Tax rises

- Three London boroughs intend to challenge the new settlement.
- Wandsworth says its annual loss could reach £84m.
- It warns Council Tax may need to rise by up to 160%.
- The borough expects to consult residents.
- Action: Model bills, CTR cost and affordability together.

Wandsworth Council

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Billing, support and collection assumptions need joint modelling.

Customer / compliance: Prepare clear billing and consultation messages.

Financial position: Higher yield may be offset by arrears and hardship.

Source: The Standard / London borough funding challenge

October energy cap deepens winter affordability risk

- The typical capped bill rises again as winter approaches.
- The cap rises 4% in October to £1,723.
- This follows a 13% increase in July.
- Cornwall Insight forecasts £1,872 from January.
- Action: Expect more local welfare and CTR enquiries.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Energy debt will compete with Council Tax and other essentials.

Customer / compliance: Use vulnerability data to target signposting.

Financial position: Competing energy debt may weaken Council Tax payment.

CORNWALL INSIGHT

Source: The Guardian / October energy price cap

Pension Credit reviews risk loss of passported help

- DWP is targeting error while large numbers still miss entitlement.
- DWP aims to save £370m by April 2031.
- About 10,700 could lose £1,400 this year.
- 761,000 eligible people may not claim Pension Credit.
- Action: Update CTR/HB when Pension Credit awards change.

Department for Work & Pensions

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: R&B must manage award changes without weakening take-up.

Customer / compliance: Support evidence requests and hardship referrals.

Financial position: Balance fraud/error work with take-up activity.

Source: The Independent / Pension Credit review letters

Affordable homes plan keeps a mixed-tenure model

- The first £10bn is expected to support around 70,000 homes.
- Around 60% are intended for social rent.
- The balance covers other affordable tenures.
- £16bn remains to be allocated in later rounds.
- Action: More social rent may ease welfare and TA pressure.

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Benefits may emerge over time rather than immediately.

Customer / compliance: Mixed tenure still requires affordability planning.

Financial position: No immediate R&B collection impact is evidenced.

Source: The Guardian / Affordable homes programme

The care cliff at 18 is linked to avoidable deaths

- A review found severe risks around isolation and lost support.
- The review covered 112 deaths of care leavers aged 18–24.
- Their death rate was three to four times higher.
- One fifth of deaths occurred at age 18.
- Action: Start CTR, rent and welfare support before 18.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Local taxation and welfare support should start before independence.

Customer / compliance: Use proactive handovers, not referral-only pathways.

Financial position: £25m housing funding may support connected provision.

Care Quality Commission

Source: The Guardian / Care-leaver deaths review

Graduate vacancies have nearly halved in one year

- Entry-level opportunity has contracted sharply across the UK.
- Graduate vacancies fell 45% year on year.
- Adzuna listed 8,383 roles, versus 15,397.
- Competition rose to 2.14 jobseekers per vacancy.
- Action: Expect longer transitions into stable earnings.

adzuna

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Longer transitions into stable earnings may increase support needs.

Customer / compliance: Join welfare referrals with skills and employment.

Financial position: No direct R&B financial impact is quantified.

Source: BBC News / Graduate vacancy decline

Benefit-cap caseload rose 7% over the year

- 115,000 households were capped in February 2026.
- The caseload was 6% higher than November 2025.
- 79% had children; 66% were lone-parent households.
- The mean cap was £238 a month.
- Action: Only 160 capped households remained on Housing Benefit.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Direct Housing Benefit administration is now very small, but need remains.

Customer / compliance: Target CTR, DHP and welfare support to families.

Financial position: Do not use withdrawn off-flow outcomes for performance.

Department for Work & Pensions

Source: GOV.UK / Benefit cap statistics to February 2026

Temporary accommodation hit another record high

- Lower new duties have not yet reduced the accommodation caseload.
- Temporary accommodation reached 135,580 households.
- It included 86,460 families and 177,530 children.
- Main homelessness duties fell 6.3% year on year.
- Action: Link R&B arrears signals to prevention activity.

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: R&B data and contact should support earlier homelessness prevention.

Customer / compliance: Prioritise high-rate areas and families with children.

Financial position: Record TA pressure; no national cost total is published.

Source: GOV.UK / Statutory homelessness, Jan–Mar 2026

A quarterly NEET fall does not reverse the trend

- The total dipped below one million but remains higher than a year ago.
- 981,000 young people were NEET in April–June 2026.
- The total fell 30,000 quarterly but rose 30,000 annually.
- Starter jobs have fallen 49% over a decade.
- Action: Join welfare, skills and employment pathways.

Office for National Statistics

Source: Public Finance / Young people not in employment or education

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Local welfare and employment pathways need to work as one route.

Customer / compliance: Measure sustained outcomes, not one quarterly change.

Financial position: No direct revenue-collection effect is quantified.

Ageing intensifies the case for property-tax reform

- IPPR argues that demographic pressure requires a new fiscal settlement.
- Ageing may drive almost 80% of new pressure by 2075.
- Over-65s could rise from 18% to 27% of the population.
- Pension, health and care may add almost 10% of GDP.
- Action: IPPR proposes replacing Council Tax with property tax.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: A proportional property tax would fundamentally reshape R&B.

Customer / compliance: R&B would need new valuations, systems and support.

Financial position: This is a think-tank proposal, not government policy.

IPPR

Source: Public Finance / Ageing and future fiscal strain

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

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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

ESERVED

AI Watch

VISIONARY NETWORK

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Claude legal watermark highlights AI disclosure and evidential audit risks

- Article notes EU AI Act transparency rules became operational on 2 August 2026 for relevant AI output used in the EU.
- Public-interest text generated or substantially manipulated by AI may need disclosure unless properly human-reviewed and controlled.
- Anthropic has introduced an imperceptible text watermark and file metadata feature, according to the article.
- Watermarking may persist through editing, translation or summarisation, creating traceability issues.
- For R&B, AI-assisted policy text, consultation material and public guidance need clear ownership and review records.
- Action: record human editorial control, AI use, source checking and final sign-off.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

AI disclosure is becoming part of governance and evidence management.

Consultation documents, decision papers and customer guidance need defensible provenance.

Financial exposure is mostly legal, reputational and rework cost.

Claude

Source: Lex Academic article on EU AI Act and Claude watermark

£100m AI competition opens a public-service route

- Sovereign AI will fund demonstrators ready for live testing.
- £100m will fund British AI demonstrators.
- First challenges exclude Revenues and Benefits.
- Upfront payments may support smaller suppliers.
- Action: Prepare evidence-led R&B problems for later rounds.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Potential is real, but no first-round R&B funding is evidenced.

Customer / compliance: Test fraud, access and productivity use cases.

Financial position: Budget for data, cyber, assurance and scaling.

SovereignAI Beta

Source: GOV.UK / £100m Sovereign AI competition

LGR & Finance Watch

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Cancelled LGR support raises capacity risk

- Norfolk cancelled external reorganisation support worth up to £6.3m.
- Eight councils are due to become three unitaries.
- Partners said they were not consulted on cancellation.
- No penalty applies, but completed work is payable.
- Action: Protect R&B harmonisation and migration capability.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Savings must be weighed against delivery and migration capability.

Customer / compliance: Use shared governance for jointly funded decisions.

Financial position: Short-term savings may raise timetable and backlog risk.

Source: BBC News / Norfolk LGR support contract

Hampshire's budget relies more heavily on reserves

- The authority is balancing a £3.3bn budget with higher tax and reserves.
- Reserves contribute £108.5m; savings total £40m.
- Band D rises 4.99% to £1,690.11.
- Government grant falls £10.9m in 2026/27.
- Action: Council Tax requirement rises to £929.5m.

Hampshire County Council

Source: Basingstoke Gazette / Hampshire budget gap

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Collection performance becomes more financially material.

Customer / compliance: Monitor collection against the higher requirement.

Financial position: Track affordability and CTR administration pressure.

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Legal Issues of Note

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Transparency breach in DWP procurement: no damages awarded

- High Court found DWP breached transparency by introducing extraneous material during re-moderation.
- Claimant had challenged exclusion from a £16.2m digital collaboration tools procurement awarded to Accenture.
- Court held the breach did not cause loss and would not have changed the outcome.
- Separate issues on URL masking and conflict of interest meant the claimant was not entitled to damages.
- Procurement records, scoring discipline and conflict handling remain critical to defend decisions.
- Action: keep audit trails for evaluation reasoning, moderation changes and supplier clarifications.

Department for Work & Pensions

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B procurements need disciplined scoring, records and conflict checks.

Poor transparency creates challenge risk even where no damages follow.

Financial exposure sits in delay, legal cost and procurement rework.

Source: Local Government Lawyer / High Court DWP procurement report

SRA warning: AI use needs human oversight and confidentiality controls

- SRA issued a warning after 42 reports of potential AI misuse in legal work over July 2025 to July 2026.
- Risks include hallucinated legal authorities, inaccurate citations, weak supervision and confidentiality breaches.
- Recent court cases show professional responsibility remains with the practitioner, not the AI tool.
- AI can support research, drafting, review and administration, but output must be checked before use.
- Action: maintain approved tools, prompt discipline, redaction rules and documented human review.
- Governance should cover staff training, quality assurance and escalation for high-risk advice.

Solicitors Regulation Authority

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B teams using AI for policy, letters or appeals need formal assurance.

Weak controls could create wrong advice, data leakage or complaint exposure.

Cost benefit depends on safe automation, not uncontrolled productivity claims.

Source: Local Government Lawyer / Solicitors Regulation Authority warning notice

Deleting records to avoid FOI brings personal liability

- Deleting or diverting an email did not remove disclosure risk.
- A former chief executive was convicted on two charges.
- Deletion aimed to prevent an FOI disclosure.
- A £1,500 fine was imposed; an appeal is planned.
- Action: Retain records across official and private channels.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: R&B records must remain complete, retrievable and auditable.

Customer / compliance: Use legal holds and auditable deletion controls.

Financial position: No direct collection or service cost was reported.

Source: Local Government Lawyer / Email deletion and FOI conviction

Every Council Tax decision must signpost appeals

- Poor signposting can cause customers to miss strict tribunal deadlines.
- More than 1,600 Council Tax complaints were made last year.
- Tribunal deadlines can be one or two months.
- The tribunal is free; lawyers are not required.
- Action: Add appeal routes to each relevant decision notice.

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Correct routing protects rights and avoids wasted recovery activity.

Customer / compliance: Triage complaints separately from statutory appeals.

Financial position: Flag live challenges before recovery escalates.

Local Government OMBUDSMAN

Source: Local Government Lawyer / Council Tax tribunal signposting

Undeclared partner case shows evidence value

- A claimant admitted failing to report a partner and £14,385 was overpaid.
- The overpayment covered September 2025 to May 2026.
- Bank, insurance and social media evidence was used.
- Sentencing was listed for 8 September.
- Action: Use proportionate residency and relationship checks.

Isle of Man Government
Reiltys Ellan Vannin

SERVICE AND FINANCE LENS

R&B service: Evidence-led checks must remain proportionate and jurisdiction-aware.

Customer / compliance: Recover overpayments only after due process.

Financial position: Isle of Man rules do not directly govern UK councils.

Source: IOM Today / Isle of Man benefit-fraud case

Other Workshops

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Meet The Team

Ben Moreton

CEO
Co-Founder

Mark Thomas

Operations
Co-Founder

Chris Sharratt

Talent Partner

Leanne Carey

Contracts Manager

Trustpilot

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

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

#TeamBSS - Sam Goddard

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

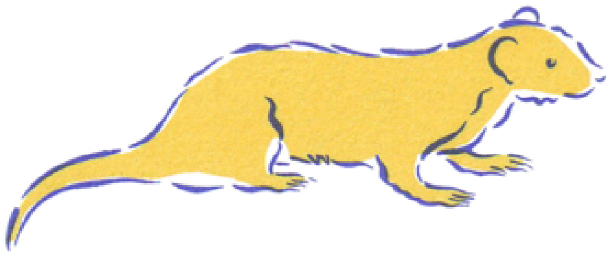
"BSS has provided us with excellent support since 2022. The range of expertise they have on their books is second to none, and they are without doubt my first choice when looking for staff.

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

EQUITY RELEASE AWARDS 2015 WINNER BEST TECHNOLOGY PROVIDER

Ferret Information Systems Ltd



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

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our training services:

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

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our products:

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

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our platforms:

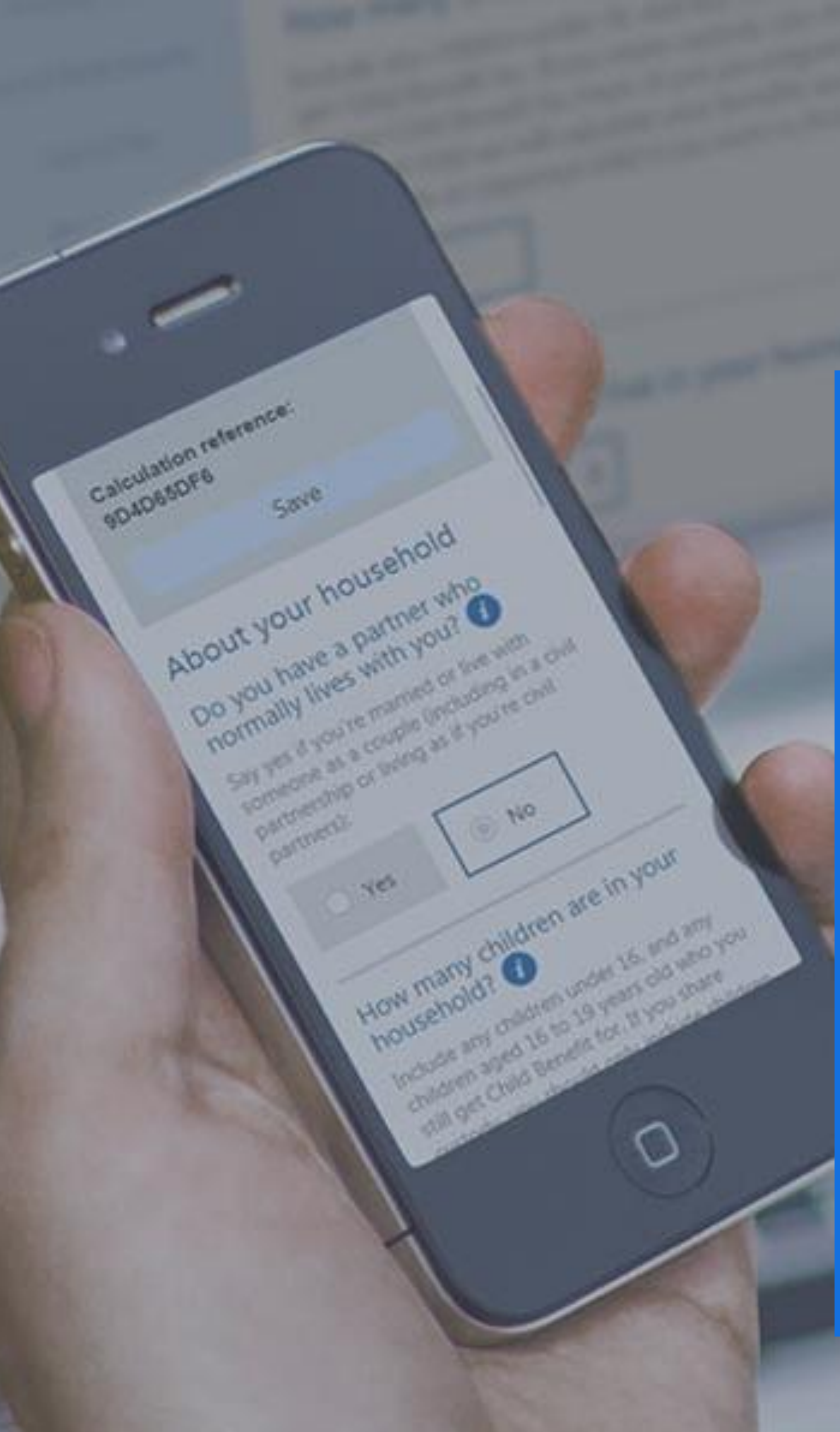
Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

our customers:

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

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



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.

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

Story Links

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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
17 Aug 26	Mid-break update: a busy summer for Revenues and Benefits

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Dates where there will be no sessions

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

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Blogs

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Blogs

VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

- Reflections on Ascendant by the Sea: Why Community Still Matters – Visionary Network
- Reform's £50 Billion Welfare Plan: A Costing Is Not a Social Contract
- 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

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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

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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

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About Visionary Network

VISIONARY NETWORK

The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

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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.

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Visionary Network Partnership

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

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

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