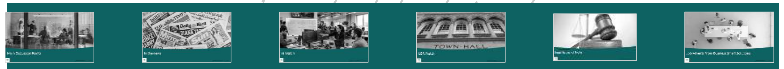
In Partnership with

Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

7 September 2026

Meeting Link

VISIONARY NETWORK



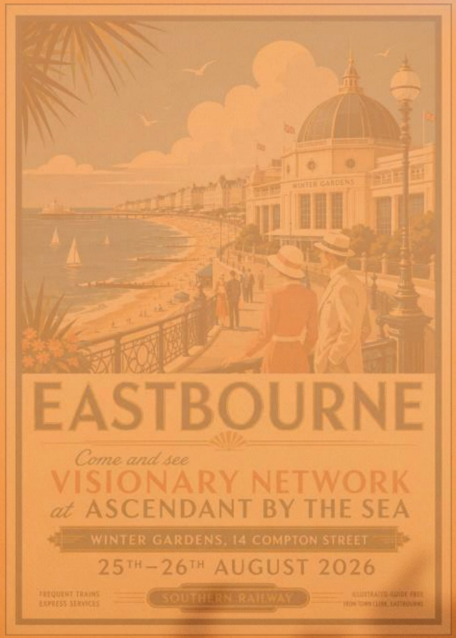
Meet the panel

(not everyone is available every week)

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

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

Visionary on Tour 2026



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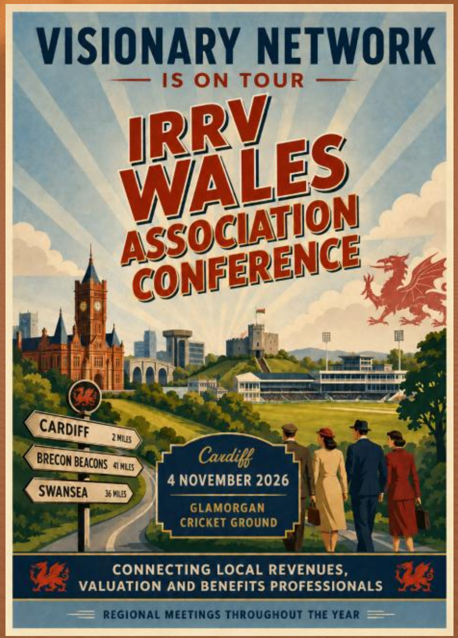
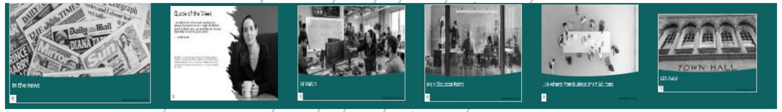
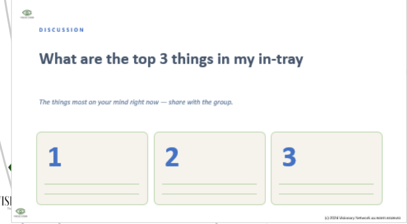
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network





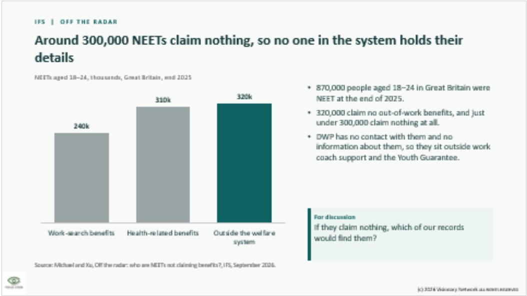
Discussion Points

Top Three Things In Your In-tray



Whyte & Co

Why So Many NEETS



Boxes


VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network
In partnership with
.inbest.ai
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
visionarynetwork.co.uk
In partnership with
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Expert partners in local tax and revenues.


VISIONARY NETWORK
The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network
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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
visionarynetwork.co.uk
In partnership with
.inbest.ai

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
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The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network
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CTR Redesign for Councils
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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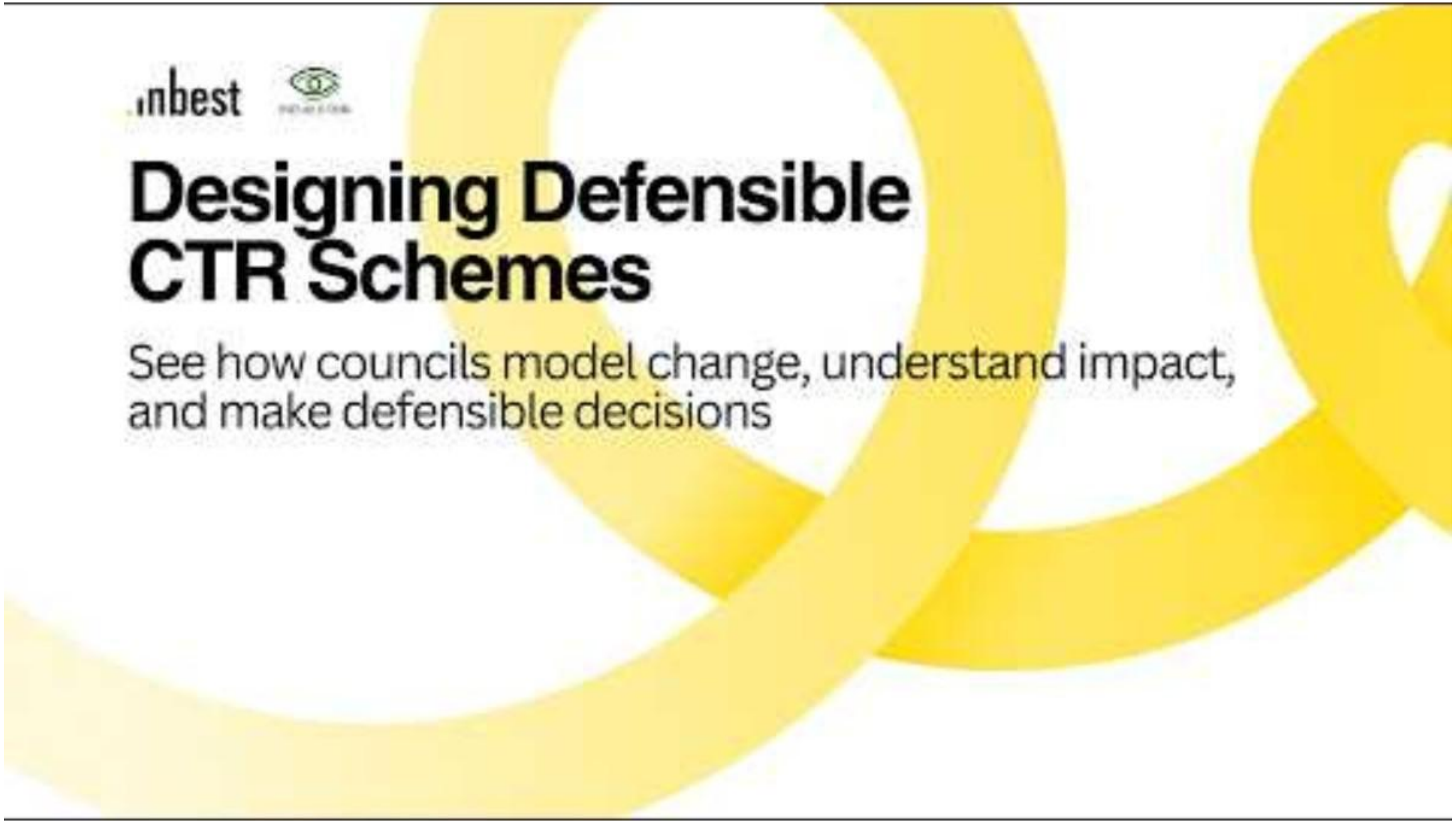

inbest
Designing Defensible
CTR Schemes
See how councils model change, understand impact,
and make defensible decisions

Play Video

Main Discussion Points

Whyte & Co stopped trading in September, three months after re-registering as Sevenoak Investigations

Public record and observed activity, June to September 2026

June 2026

Companies House name change: Whyte & Co Enforcement Services Ltd becomes Sevenoak Investigations Ltd. Enforcement drops out of the trading name.

Late August 2026

Exhibiting at a sector conference with new large-format electronic display stand.

September 2026

Company website states the business has closed down and stopped trading. No transfer arrangements published.

Position now

Outstanding notices and live cases referred back to the instructing authority. The debt itself is not written off.

For discussion

Which of our live cases and open notices still name Whyte & Co as the instructed agent, and who is answering for them today?

Source: Whyte & Co / Sevenoak Investigations Limited company website and Companies House register, accessed September 2026. Conference attendance from our own observation.

The agent's authority ends on appointment, but the debt and the obligations behind it do not

Consequences of an enforcement agent entering administration

What stops

- Authority to take enforcement steps under the warrant lapses
- Case handling, visits and payment collection cease
- Certificated agents and staff disperse, so case knowledge goes with them
- Contract performance passes to the administrator, not the firm

What continues

- The debt is not written off; it returns to the instructing authority to recall or reassign
- Case data, payment histories and open complaints still need a lawful custodian
- Money collected before closure must still be reconciled and remitted
- Debtors contacted in the old name are exposed to impersonation and scam demands

For discussion

Who holds the case data and the part-paid balances now, and on what legal basis do we get them back?

Source: Whyte & Co / Sevenoak Investigations Limited website closure notice, September 2026; Taking Control of Goods regulations on warrant authority.

The rebrand came three months before closure, and the outward spending never changed

Evidence held and evidence still needed on what the directors knew

Visible from outside

- Enforcement removed from the trading name in June, three months before trading stopped
- Closure announced on the website with no published transfer of cases
- New large-format electronic display stand at a conference two weeks before closure
- No advance notice to instructing authorities that we are aware of

Not yet evidenced

- No administrator's appointment notice or statement of affairs obtained
- Last filed accounts and any late filing history not yet reviewed
- Date of insolvency, and whether the June rebrand moved work or value, unknown
- Whether the conference spend was committed months earlier is unknown

For discussion

Do we obtain the filing history and statement of affairs before forming a view, and does the June name change change how we read the rest?

Source: Companies House register and company website, accessed September 2026. Items in the right column are open questions, not findings.

VISIONARY NETWORK

Sector pressure explains thin margins; it does not explain a rebrand and a conference stand weeks before closing

Competing explanations, and the indicators to test the rest of the panel against

Financial environment

- Compliance-stage work paid on collection, so cash follows recovery rates
- Debtor affordability limits how much of the caseload ever pays
- Contracts won on fee competition leave little headroom
- Staff, vehicle and body-worn video costs rise regardless of yield

Business decisions

- Discretionary spend maintained while the balance sheet was failing
- Restructure and rename rather than an orderly wind-down of cases
- Growth by contract volume without matching collection capacity
- No transition plan offered to instructing authorities

Indicators to monitor

- Late or overdue accounts at Companies House
- Name, director or ownership changes
- Remittance delays and reconciliation queries
- Falling collection rates and rising complaint volumes
- Certificated agent turnover and unfilled rounds

For discussion

Which of these indicators do we already see in the other agents on our panel, and who checks them?

Note: drivers listed are hypotheses for discussion. No financial statements for Whyte & Co have been reviewed.

Our exposure sits in live cases and unremitted collections, not in the contract itself

Contract position, immediate actions and the decisions we need today

Where we are exposed

- Cases at compliance and enforcement stage with no agent able to act
- Collections taken but not yet remitted to us
- Debtor data and payment arrangements held by a firm that has stopped trading
- Complaints and appeals in progress with no respondent
- Contract termination, novation and step-in rights untested

Actions and decisions

1 Recall all live cases and suspend further referrals

2 Reconcile collections received against cases placed

3 Serve notice under the contract and register as a creditor

4 Notify affected residents and publish scam warning

5 Decide: reassign to an existing panel agent or bring in-house

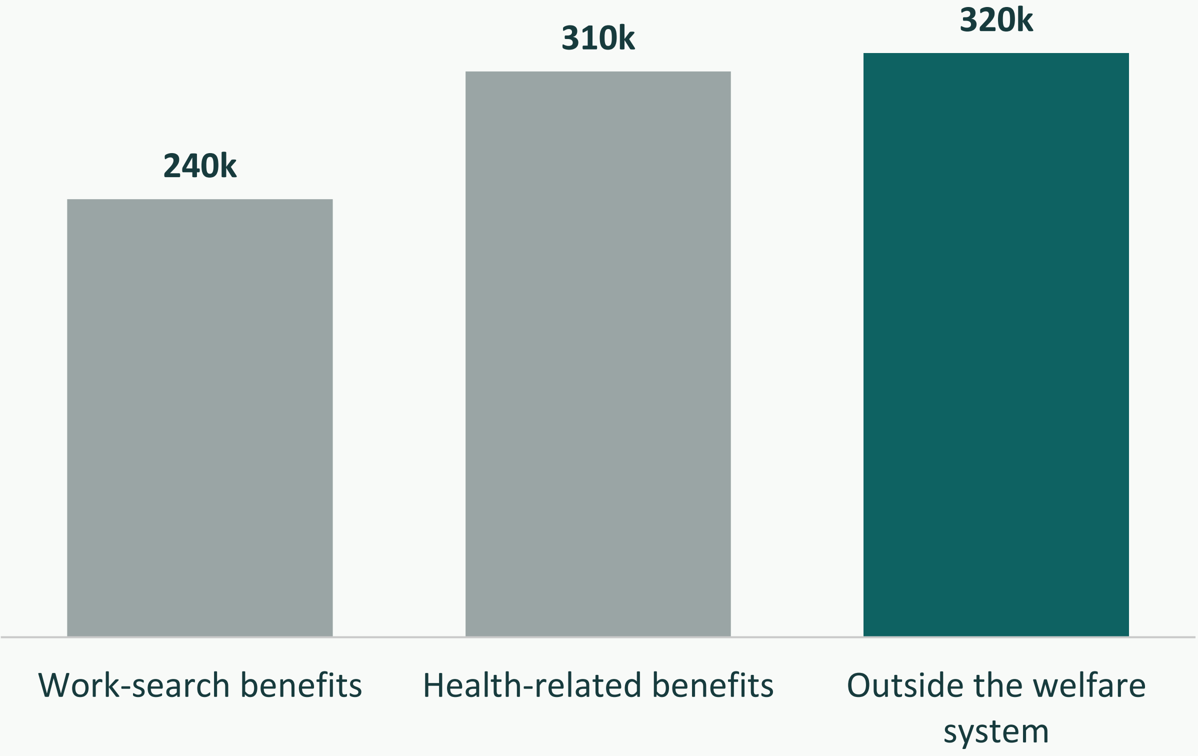
Decisions needed today

Do we recall and reassign the caseload this month, and do we apply financial standing checks to the whole panel before the next referral round?

Note: case volumes and unremitted balances to be confirmed from our own case management and finance records.

Around 300,000 NEETs claim nothing, so no one in the system holds their details

NEETs aged 18–24, thousands, Great Britain, end 2025



- 870,000 people aged 18–24 in Great Britain were NEET at the end of 2025.
- 320,000 claim no out-of-work benefits, and just under 300,000 claim nothing at all.
- DWP has no contact with them and no information about them, so they sit outside work coach support and the Youth Guarantee.

For discussion

If they claim nothing, which of our records would find them?

Source: Michael and Xu, Off the radar: who are NEETs not claiming benefits?, IFS, September 2026.

Hidden NEETs are closer to work than the claimants we already see, and come from better-off homes

Claiming nothing

Around 300,000

- 74% are unemployed and looking for work; 2% are out of work through ill health
- 57% have been out of work less than six months
- 54% hold a degree, close to those in work or study
- 37% from the top third of household incomes, 30% from the bottom third
- Four in five live with parents; 28% report a disability

Claiming benefits

Around 550,000

- 54% are looking for work; 27% are inactive through ill health
- 16% have been out of work less than six months
- 12% hold a degree; 76% have nothing above GCSEs
- 6% from the top third of household incomes, 72% from the bottom third
- Disability and poor mental health run at around twice the rate

For discussion Our advice, take-up and support offers are built around the profile on the right. What would we change for the group on the left?

Source: Michael and Xu, Off the radar: who are NEETs not claiming benefits?, IFS, September 2026. Ages 22–23, Millennium Cohort Study; the 550,000 is the two claimant groups combined.

Hidden NEETs miss at least £4,000 a year, yet report less hardship than claimants

£4,000+

a year missed: the basic universal credit rate for a single person under 25, more with a health condition or housing costs

7% find it very difficult to manage financially, against 12% of NEETs on benefits

- Family money substitutes for benefits: four in five live with parents, and a third of those living alone get help with living costs from relatives.
- 52% had a parent in a managerial or professional job at 14, so this is not the disadvantaged group the debate assumes.
- 18% say they are living comfortably, against 11% of NEETs on benefits and 24% of those in work or study.

For discussion Unclaimed entitlement on this scale would normally trigger a take-up push. Does less reported hardship change where we aim it?

Source: Michael and Xu, Off the radar: who are NEETs not claiming benefits?, IFS, September 2026. Ages 22–23, Millennium Cohort Study.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR US

The IFS case is to target the long-term minority, not to track everyone

TRACKING EVERYONE

IFS finds large-scale efforts to track and engage all hidden NEETs would give limited returns. Most move into work without help.

THE LONG-TERM MINORITY

43% have been NEET for more than six months and 19% for more than 18 months. This group would gain from support.

ELIGIBILITY TIED TO CLAIMS

The Jobs Guarantee needs 18 months on universal credit and the £3,000 Youth Jobs Grant six months, so non-claimants are shut out.

WHERE A COUNCIL COMES IN

These are households we already bill and often advise. Advice and referral need no claim, and IFS suggests testing eligibility on PAYE records instead.

For discussion Could we spot the long-term group from records we already hold, without building anything new?

Source: Michael and Xu, Off the radar: who are NEETs not claiming benefits?, IFS, September 2026; widening access also recommended by the Work and Pensions Committee, 2026.

PANEL DISCUSSION

Questions for the panel

1. IFS says tracking every hidden NEET has limited returns. Do we agree, given what we see locally?

2. The 43% out of work for over six months are the group worth finding. Could our records identify them?

3. Is a take-up push worth it when 7% report severe hardship, against 12% of our claimants?

4. Four in five live with parents, so what do we say to a bill payer about their adult child?

5. If eligibility moved to PAYE records instead of benefit duration, what would that ask of us?

Source: Michael and Xu, Off the radar: who are NEETs not claiming benefits?, IFS, September 2026.

How “box-shifting” worked, and why the court stopped it

- **The rule:** an empty commercial property gets a short period of full rates relief. Once the property has been genuinely occupied again, a fresh relief period can start.
- **The scheme:** a company leased empty offices and moved boxes of paper in for a few weeks, then took them out. On paper the building had been occupied, so relief was claimed again.
- **The loop:** repeating the cycle kept an empty office paying little or no rates for years, with the saving shared between the owner and the scheme provider.
- **The ruling:** the Court of Appeal held that storing boxes with no commercial purpose is not occupation, so the relief was never due.
- **Why it matters:** councils keep a share of the rates they collect, so relief granted on artificial occupation is lost income. The City of London put its exposure at £35m a year.

SO WHAT?

Occupation has to have a real commercial purpose. Boxes in a room are not enough.

Local Government Lawyer, 4 September 2026

How do you handle artificial occupation today?

- How many properties in your area do you think are under box-shifting or similar occupation schemes?
- What evidence of occupation do you require before granting empty property relief, and who inspects?
- Who owns avoidance work: revenues officers, a dedicated team, or legal?
- How much rates yield do you estimate is at risk each year?
- Where have you already challenged a scheme, and what was the outcome?

ROUND THE TABLE

Two minutes each: what you do now, and where you know the gaps are.

What will you change as a result of the ruling?

- Which relief decisions will you revisit, and how far back will you go?
- What occupation evidence will you require from now on, and who signs it off?
- Will you withdraw relief retrospectively, and how will you handle recovery and appeals risk?
- What do you need from legal, the VOA or MHCLG to act with confidence?
- Who owns the review in your authority, and when will it report?

BEFORE WE MOVE ON

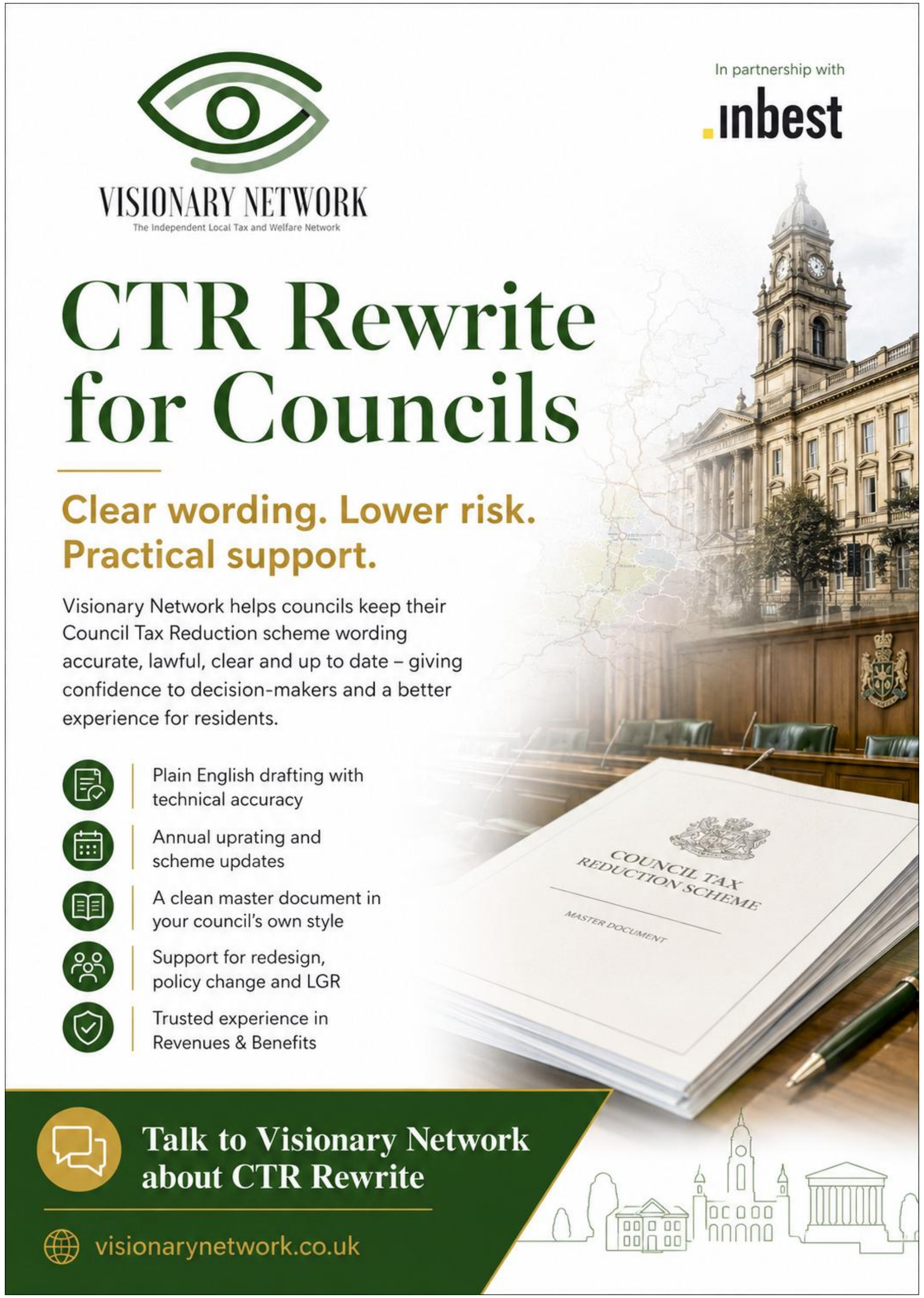
One action and one owner from each authority.

DISCUSSION

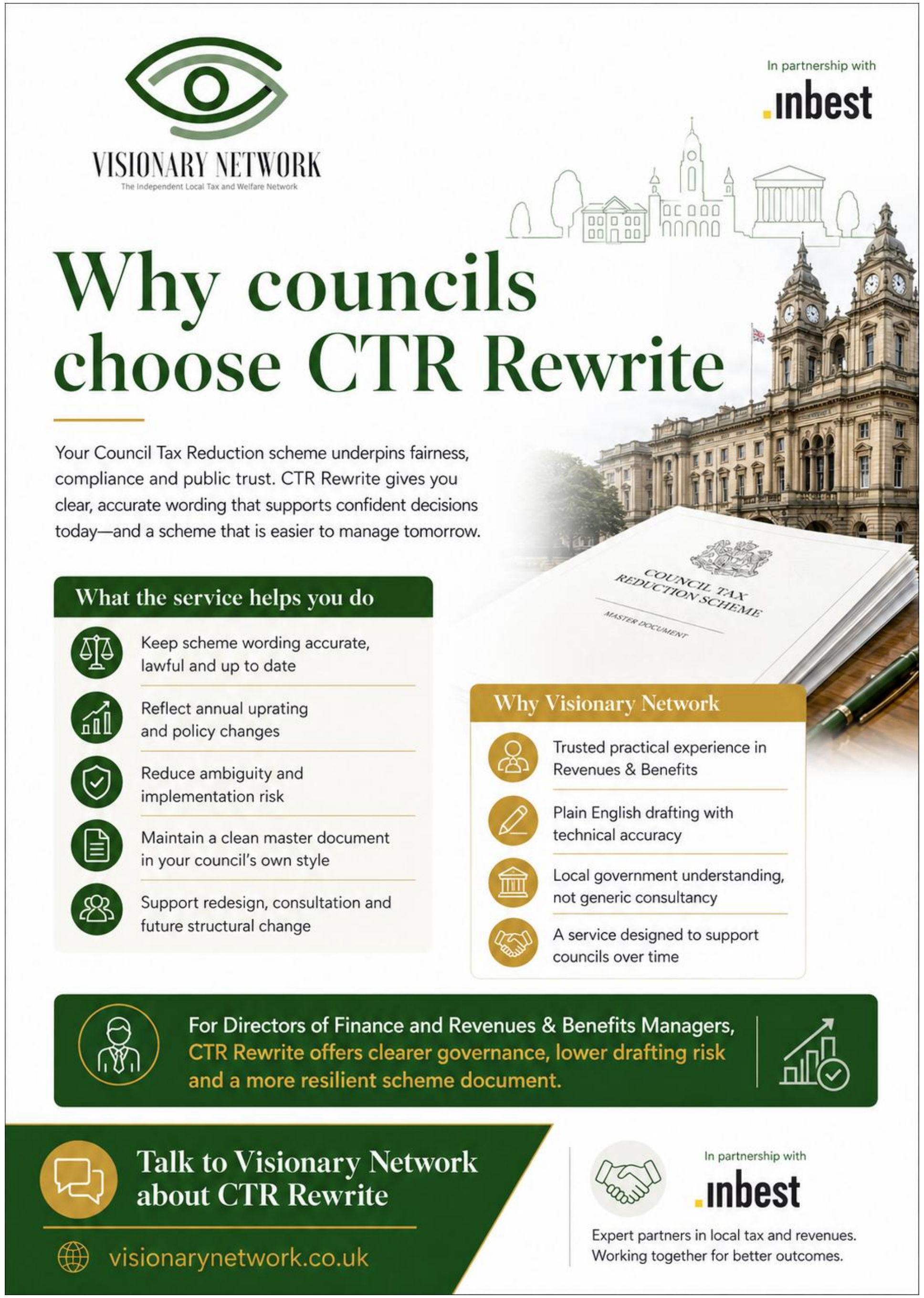
What are the top 3 things in my in-tray

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

1	2	3



Bristol City Council Case Study



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Unmissable summer comedy

In the news

Mandatory bailiff oversight will reshape recovery assurance

- Government announced mandatory independent oversight for private bailiffs in England and Wales.
- Bailiffs must be accredited by the Enforcement Conduct Board or work for an accredited enforcement firm to obtain or renew certificates.
- The aim is consistent professional standards and an independent complaints route for people facing enforcement.
- Enforcement firms are not currently required by statute to be Enforcement Conduct Board accredited.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: council tax and business rates recovery contracts may need updated procurement terms, KPIs, vulnerability standards and complaint escalation.
- Financial position: stronger oversight may reduce reputational and maladministration risk, but could affect collection processes, contract management and enforcement capacity.

ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT BOARD

SO WHAT?

Contract management of enforcement agents will need to align with statutory oversight and vulnerability safeguards.

Local Government Lawyer, 28 August 2026

HB overpayment debt continues to fall, but recovery remains material

- DWP's final HB debt recovery release covers April 2025 to March 2026 across Great Britain.
- Local authorities identified £420m Housing Benefit overpayments, £9m less than the previous year.
- Local authorities recovered £425m, £12m less than the previous year, and wrote off £100m, £18m more.
- Outstanding overpayments at the start of Q4 2025 to 2026 were £1.39bn, £134m or 9% lower than a year earlier.
- London held £510m of outstanding HB overpayments, 37% of the GB total, and recovered £105m, 25% of the GB total.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: legacy HB debt remains material even as Universal Credit migration reduces caseload.

Department for Work & Pensions

SO WHAT?

Legacy HB debt still requires disciplined recovery, write-off governance and local performance visibility.

DWP, 2 September 2026

End of HB debt statistics creates data visibility risk

- DWP says this is the final Housing Benefit Debt Recovery statistics release after consultation found no continuing public need for publication.
- The data comes from local authority finance systems and quarterly HBDR returns.
- From Q3 FYE 2017, totals use actual returns rather than imputed estimates because return rates improved.
- Comparisons are limited because debt can be identified, recovered and written off in different periods, with retrospective revisions affecting balances.
- IT conversions, cyber-attacks and data quality issues can affect returns and sometimes require data omissions.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: local MI will need to track HB debt, write-offs, recovery performance and risks without a national public benchmark.

SO WHAT?

Councils may need local dashboards as national debt recovery comparators disappear.

DWP, 2 September 2026

Department for Work & Pensions

Local government pay settlement adds cost pressure but reduces strike risk

- Joint unions accepted the 3.3% employers' offer for council and school staff for 2026 to 2027, with back pay from 1 April 2026.
- The settlement applies to National Joint Council local government services and runs to 31 March 2027.
- UNISON said ballot results meant the union would not pursue strike action, although members accepted the offer reluctantly.
- The ballot involved around 200,000 staff at about 500 employers, mainly councils and schools.
- Financial position: the pay award adds to base budget pressure and affects service cost assumptions across councils.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: reduced strike risk helps operational continuity, but recruitment, retention and workload risks remain live for specialist teams.

SO WHAT?

The settlement gives payroll certainty, but recruitment and retention pressures remain unresolved.

Public Finance; corroborated by UNISON and LocalGov, August to September 2026

Scottish public service reform signals structural and welfare change

- The Scottish Government Programme for Government 2026 to 2031 focuses on child poverty, the economy, climate and sustainable public services.
- Public service reform includes replacing 14 territorial health boards with two strategic health boards and reviewing special health boards.
- Government plans broader rationalisation of more than 130 public bodies to remove overlap and duplication.
- It will engage over the next three months with local government and others on local governance, regional local government and social care reform.
- Welfare and cost of living measures include childcare expansion, Scottish Child Payment increase for eligible children under one and £205m winter heating payments.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: although Scotland has separate welfare and local tax arrangements, the direction of travel signals stronger prevention and integrated services.

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

SO WHAT?

The Scottish programme links public service reform, prevention and anti-poverty measures.

Public Finance; corroborated by Scottish Government and Public Sector Executive, September 2026

Quote of the Week

I can tell you that when you're counting every penny, knowing that you are a single bad decision away from bankruptcy, you inevitably lose focus on what really matters for your business.

— Maelle Gavet

Maëlle Gavet is a French technology executive known for leading major global companies, including Ozon and Techstars, with a focus on responsible innovation and operational discipline. She’s also the author of *Trampled by Unicorns*, where she critiques Silicon Valley excesses and argues for a more humane, accountable tech industry.

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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
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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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AI Watch

AI use by legal professionals is mainstream, but accuracy risk remains

- A LexisNexis survey of 543 legal professionals found 94% use AI for legal work and 34% use it daily.
- Main uses are legal research at 69%, document summarisation at 62%, and drafting and document review at 53%.
- The top concern is inaccurate or fabricated information at 83%, ahead of confidential data leakage at 53% and over-reliance at 52%.
- 77% believe AI is causing clients or the public to misinterpret the law.
- The SRA received 42 reports of potential AI misuse between July 2025 and July 2026 and reminded lawyers that accountability remains.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: councils using AI for policy, recovery or appeals need source-grounding, human review, data protection controls and audit trails.

SO WHAT?

AI can support policy and legal work, but councils need controls that preserve professional accountability.

Local Government Lawyer, 3 September 2026

Public use of AI legal advice highlights access and quality risk

- JUSTICE and the Administrative Fairness Lab surveyed 3,287 UK people; nearly half had experienced a legal dispute in the previous two years.
- Among those with a recent legal issue, around one in six had used an AI chatbot for help, advice or information.
- Common topics included housing, employment, debt, consumer and family law, many of which sit outside legal aid scope.
- Users asked AI to explain jargon, check advice, draft complaints and emails, and provide emotional reassurance.
- Only 6% relied solely on AI, but chatbot users were less likely to have obtained help from a solicitor or barrister than non-users.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: customers may arrive with AI-generated arguments or documents, requiring clear signposting, plain English explanations and consistent triage.

ADMINISTRATIVE FAIRNESS LAB

JUSTICE

SO WHAT?

Customers may increasingly rely on AI before contacting councils, so clarity and triage matter.

Local Government Lawyer, 1 September 2026

LGR Watch

LGR legal risk expands as councils seek disclosure

- Hertfordshire County Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council sent pre-action letters to MHCLG seeking clarity on LGR decisions.
- Hertfordshire wants evidence, analysis and financial assessments, including sustainability, Fair Funding Review implications and population size.
- Hertfordshire says this is not yet a judicial review and not an attempt to stop LGR.
- Newcastle-under-Lyme is challenging the evidence behind merger with Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands into a North Staffordshire unitary in spring 2028.
- Financial position: Newcastle cited Stoke-on-Trent's £791m debt and almost £70m exceptional support as risks to council tax, services and liabilities.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: uncertainty may affect harmonisation planning, system design, staffing assumptions and council taxbase planning.

Hertfordshire

NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME
BOROUGH COUNCIL

SO WHAT?

LGR timetables may continue, but councils need contingency plans for legal uncertainty and delayed clarity.

Local Government Lawyer, 3 September 2026

South Kesteven challenges Lincolnshire LGR criteria

- South Kesteven District Council has issued a pre-action letter over the Government's Lincolnshire LGR decision.
- The July decision would create two new unitaries from April 2028: Lincoln Council at around 207,000 people and Lincolnshire Council at around 580,000.
- North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire would remain as separate unitary councils.
- South Kesteven argues the preferred proposal does not meet the Government's own criteria and splits existing local authority boundaries.
- A decision on judicial review will depend on the Government's response to the letter.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: maintaining day-to-day services while planning future tax, benefits and customer systems will require dedicated capacity.
- Financial position: no quantified council finance impact is given; taxbase, funding and implementation assumptions should be tested as boundaries change.

SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

SO WHAT?

Boundary design and evidence transparency are becoming live delivery risks, not just governance arguments.

Local Government Lawyer, 4 September 2026

Derbyshire LGR creates major transition cost and workforce risk

- Replacing Derbyshire’s ten existing councils with two new authorities is expected to cost about £66m, with a stretch case over £81m.
- An initial implementation budget of £16.225m is proposed: county £10.17m, city £3.51m and districts £2.54m.
- District contributions are expected to be calculated partly by council tax base.
- The largest estimated cost is more than £26m for staff exits, including redundancy and pension costs, although no redundancy numbers are agreed.
- Other costs include around £12m for technology and IT, £6.5m transition support, £4.1m buildings and £2m communications and culture change.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: system convergence, workforce retention, customer communications and policy harmonisation must compete with corporate change capacity.

SO WHAT?

LGR savings cases depend on upfront investment, staffing choices and successful operational convergence.

Derbyshire Times; corroborated by Ilkeston News, 3 September 2026

DERBYSHIRE County Council

Legal Issues of Note

Sanctions are not a council tax exemption

- The High Court refused permission for judicial review by a claimant under sanctions who challenged council tax liability.
- The claimant argued that sanctions and an asset freeze made the liability and enforcement unlawful or disproportionate.
- Islington said the proper route was sanctions review or a specific licence, not exemption from council tax.
- The judge found no realistic prospect of success and held that sanctioned status is not a ground to stay enforcement.
- Financial position: the judgment reinforces council tax as funding for local public services where no lawful exemption applies.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: officers should record section 13A discretion decisions carefully and signpost alternative remedies.

SO WHAT?

The ruling supports firm, lawful recovery, but decisions on discretion still need careful reasoning.

Local Government Lawyer, 2 September 2026

Business rates relief avoidance comes under review

- MHCLG wrote to billing authorities after the City of London won a Court of Appeal case on “box-shifting” rates mitigation.
- The scheme placed boxes in vacant offices to claim occupation, then sought further empty property rates relief.
- The Court of Appeal found the boxes were not occupation where the sole aim was rate mitigation and there was no commercial purpose.
- MHCLG told councils to review box-shifting and other occupation schemes where the object is rates avoidance.
- Financial position: City of London had estimated losses of £35m a year from the scheme, so review may protect business rates yield.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: business rates teams should evidence occupation, review relief decisions, withdraw relief where appropriate and manage appeals risk.

SO WHAT?

Relief decisions based on artificial occupation should be actively reviewed to protect the rates yield.

Local Government Lawyer, 4 September 2026

Unlicensed HMO ruling reinforces licensing and enforcement value

- A Muswell Hill tenant was awarded £7,884.84 rent plus £341 fees after a tribunal found the property was an unlicensed HMO.
- The case followed Haringey Council enforcement team investigation into mould, fire hazards and a collapsed ceiling.
- The property was occupied by three people from separate households and required an HMO licence throughout the tenancy.
- The tribunal found the landlord had committed an offence by managing an unlicensed HMO and noted a previous rent repayment order.
- Revenues and Benefits impact: private sector enforcement intelligence can support housing, benefits and safeguarding teams where poor housing affects vulnerable households.
- Financial position: no direct council savings or income effect is quantified; the evidenced monetary impact is £7,884.84 rent plus £341 fees for the tenant.

SO WHAT?

Housing enforcement can produce direct redress and useful intelligence for wider local welfare work.

Local Government Lawyer, 3 September 2026

Other Workshops


VISIONARY NETWORK
STAND 27
IRRV
Conference
TELFORD
29–30 SEPT 2026
TELFORD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HALL

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The Scheme
Every council has one. Not every council can explain it.
12 OCTOBER 2026
ONE AFTERNOON ONLY · LONG EATON
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FEATURING COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE WELFARE REFORM REORGANISATION
NO SLIDES WERE HARMED IN THE MAKING OF THIS SESSION QUESTIONS TAKEN AT THE END
VISIONARY NETWORK
SUITABLE FOR ALL REVENUES AND BENEFITS PROFESSIONALS

Four new short-format seminars, run twice daily in September

Short-format seminars covering techniques already proven by other authorities: revenue and benefit recovery, data capture, and e-billing sign-up.

Timings
11am, repeated at 3pm. 40 minutes on MS Teams, cameras on. Slides shared with attendees.

Why attend
For revenues and benefits professionals in local government looking for cost savings from simple changes to recovery and engagement.

Booking
Places are limited, first come first served. Contact Elle Gardner, elle.gardner@telsolutions.co.uk

Telsolutions

Seminar dates

Generative AI: virtual assistants, theory to practice
Monday 14 September, 11am and 3pm

Letter replacement strategies
Tuesday 15 September, 11am and 3pm

Open banking and banking app payments
Thursday 17 September, 11am and 3pm

Data enrichment and e-billing promotions
Friday 18 September, 11am and 3pm

VISIONARY NETWORK

Job Adverts From Business Smart Solutions

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Leanne Carey

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"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

Benefits Assessment Officer (Academy)

16 weeks initially | £28.07 per hour (umbrella) | Remote

Benefits Officer required to process Housing Payments and Crisis Support Payments as part of our CRF Scheme. The role includes follow-up work in which we try to maximise residents income and reduce their expenses.

Purpose of the role
To deliver a targeted, customer-focused service as part of the Council's Crisis Resilience Fund (CRF), supporting residents experiencing or at risk of financial hardship.

The postholder will be responsible for administering Crisis Support Payments and Housing Payments, while proactively engaging residents to maximise income, reduce outgoings, and improve long-term financial resilience.

The role will also contribute to wider service delivery, including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support processing and, where required, debt recovery activities.

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

- At least 3 years Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support / Discretionary Scheme administration experience
- Be a MRI(Capita/Academy) user

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 <<

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 <<

CT Revenues Officer (NEC)

3 months intially | £29.84 per hour (umbrella) | London / Hybrid

We are seeking 3 experienced Revenues Processing Officers to support the delivery of an efficient and accurate Council Tax service. The successful candidates will be responsible for processing Council Tax accounts, determining liability, assessing discounts and exemptions, and maintaining accurate records in accordance with legislation, council policies and service standards.

This role is suitable for an experienced local authority revenues professional who can quickly become operational and manage a high-volume caseload with minimal supervision.

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

- Recent experience working within a Local Authority Council Tax service.
- Proven experience processing Council Tax accounts.
- Good working knowledge of Council Tax legislation.
- Experience assessing discounts, exemptions and liability matters.
- Experience using NEC Revenues (Northgate).

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

Revenues Officer (NEC)

3 months intially | £19 per hour (umbrella) | Fully remote

Administer Council Tax accounts ensuring accurate and prompt billing, collection, and recovery of accounts.

- Obtain and assess information to determine local taxation liability in accordance with legislation. This includes determination and allowance of discounts, reliefs, and exemptions
- Accurately update and maintain the revenues databases to ensure prompt and accurate billing, collection, and recovery of accounts
- Respond appropriately to enquiries received from citizens, businesses and agents and action amendments to accounts
- Agree repayment plans and determine appropriate recovery action that takes account of the person's circumstances whilst maximising collection
- Contribute to the review of working practices, procedures, and documents by making suggestions for improvement in service delivery and performance
- Take part in the training or coaching of other colleagues either on a one-to-one basis or in a formal training environment e.g. to assist with the induction of new staff

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

- 1. Experience of NEC(Northgate) and Info@Work essential
- 2. A thorough knowledge of local taxation law or experience which demonstrates the ability to absorb and understand complex legislation
- 3. Able to process 7.7 documents per hour at a 98% and above accuracy rate

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

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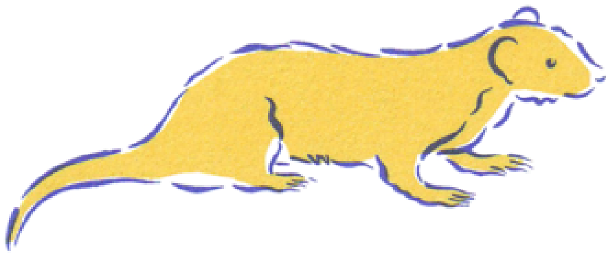


Ferret Information Systems was established in 1987 and is the largest company in Europe in the field of law dealing with welfare benefits and similar areas of determinative, compliance, and regulatory law.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

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:

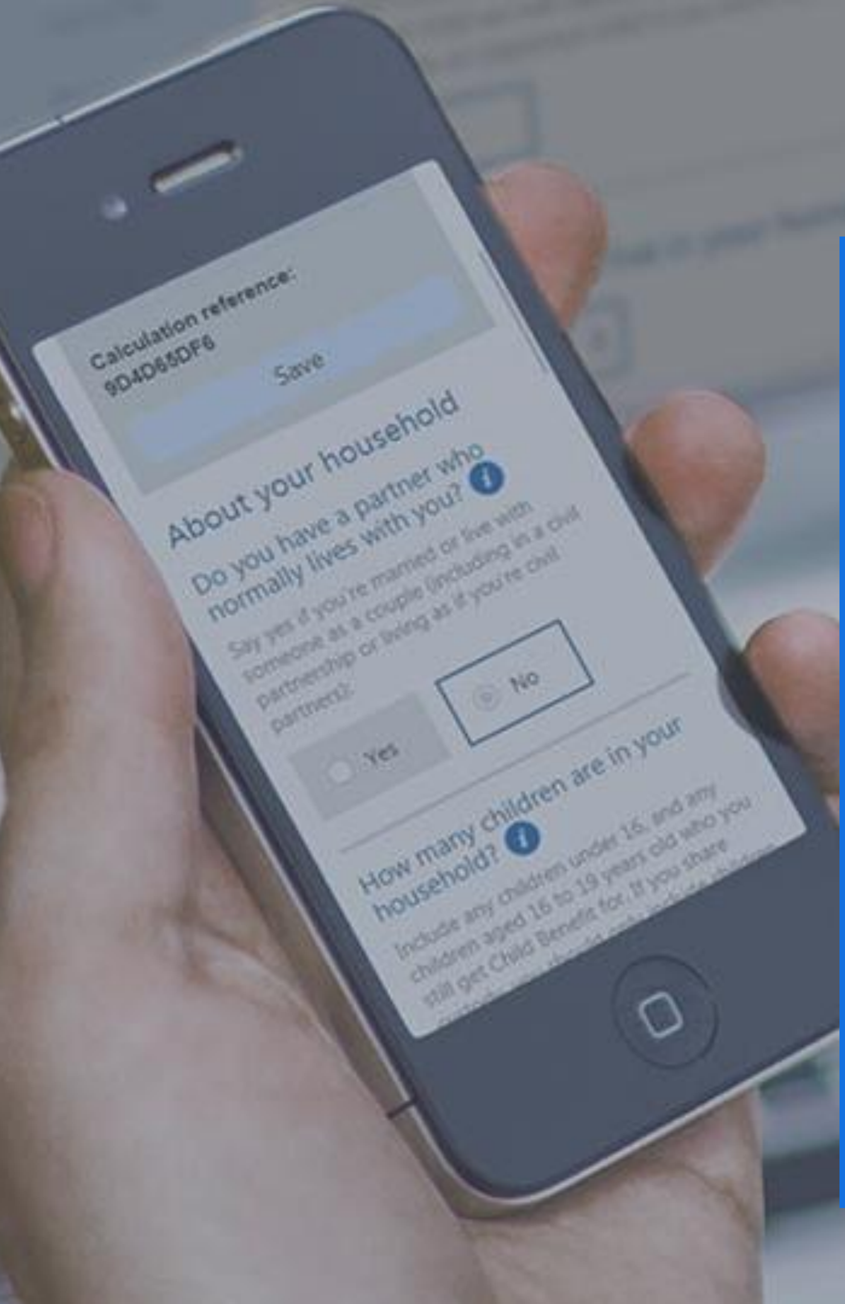
Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

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

References and links 1

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3. **UNISON: Council and school pay, joint unions accept offer**

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4. **LocalGov: Local government workers reluctantly agree 3.3% pay boost**

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Previous Sessions

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
17 Aug 26	Mid-break update: a busy summer for Revenues and Benefits
31 Aug 26	Mid-break update: Revenues and Benefits face widening financial and operational pressures

VISIONARY NETWORK

Dates where there will be no sessions

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

Blogs

VISIONARY NETWORK

Blogs

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

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

Podcasts

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?

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.

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.