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Revenues and Benefits Discussion Group

[Meeting Link](#)

9 February 2026

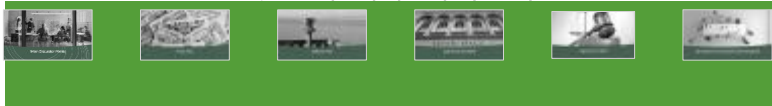
R.I.P. John Roberts

It is with great sadness that we share the news that John Roberts passed away on 6 February at 20:20 after a long illness.

John was a friend to many, former Revenues and Benefits Manager at Thanet Council, and editor of the IRRV magazines.

John will be remembered for his kindness, his musical skill, and his wealth of knowledge in revenues and benefits. Our thoughts are with his wife Gill, his family and all who knew him.





Meet the panel

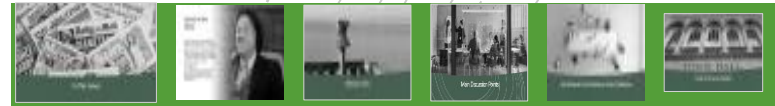
(not everyone is available every week)

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

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

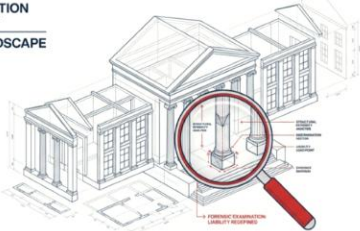
CTR Schemes

Resourcing



Discussion Points

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION & UNIVERSAL CREDIT
THE LITIGATION LANDSCAPE



The Judicial Autopsy
Analysis of R (Bleakley) v Three Rivers DC and the 2026 Legal Precedents

February 2, 2026 marks a turning point for Local Authority liability. The High Court has redefined the boundaries between administrative efficiency and discrimination.

Council Tax Support: Provision for Terminally Ill Claimants

A strategic appraisal of legal routes, operational risks, and implementation recommendations.

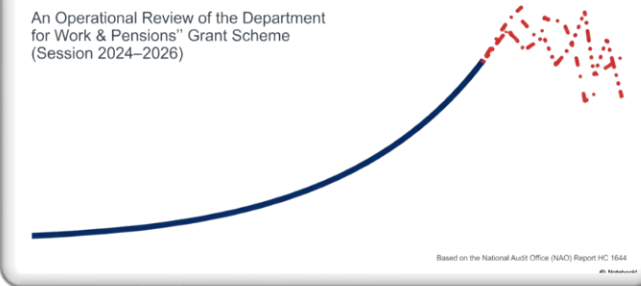
Executive Summary

- The Goal:** To determine if/how the CTS scheme should provide specific relief for households with a terminally ill member.
- The Conflict:** While the moral case is strong (dignity/fairness), the implementation is technically complex.
- The Choice:** Decision-makers must choose between a Discretionary approach (Section 13A(1)(c)) or a Main Scheme Integration (Section 13A(1)(a)).
- The Risk:** Policies must avoid indirect discrimination against other disability groups (citing Trafford and Somerset considerations).

Legislation Reference: Local Government Finance Act 1992

ACCESS TO WORK: A SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

An Operational Review of the Department for Work & Pensions' Grant Scheme (Session 2024–2026)



Kent County Council: cost cutting claims, Dolge controversy, and cabinet resignation

- Matthew Fraser Moat resigned from Kent County Council's cabinet role as head of the council's Department of Local Government Efficiency (Dolge) initiative after comments reported in the Financial Times.
- He was quoted as saying the authority had "not actually made any cuts", and that frontline service reductions were limited to changes already planned under the previous Conservative administration.
- Fraser Moat said his words were "twisted", acknowledged a "lapse of judgement", and stated continuing in the role was "not sustainable", while remaining a councillor.
- The council said the Financial Times reporting did not reflect its position and stated the administration had embedded a value for money culture and had identified savings in the draft budget.
- The Dolge initiative was launched in June and was explicitly framed as a local government efficiency drive, inspired by similar "efficiency" branding used in US politics.



AI IMPACT

Practical sessions for Revenues and Benefit Teams in February

CLARITY

Writing clearer reports and papers enhances understanding and decision-making quality across all services involved.



EFFICIENCY

Managing workload effectively allows teams to handle inquiries faster and improve stakeholder communication through AI integration.



GOVERNANCE

Ensuring governance and information security builds trust while utilizing AI tools safely and responsibly in services.



REGISTER NOW

Secure your spot for this transformative series today!



Arriving in February 2026 Using AI in Revenues and Benefits Services

A practical series of 60-to-90-minute online sessions designed for council Revenues and Benefits teams who want to use AI safely and effectively to save time, improve consistency, and strengthen resident support, without losing professional judgement or accountability.

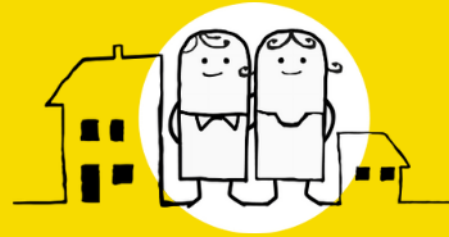
We will cover practical use cases such as:

- writing clearer reports, briefings, and committee papers in plain English
- drafting letters, emails, and decision notices that are accurate, consistent, and tone appropriate
- managing staff workload, task prioritisation, and quality checking
- handling enquiries faster, including scripts for contact centres and casework prompts for officers
- improving communication with stakeholders, preceptors, advice agencies, landlords, and internal teams
- designing take up campaigns and targeted messaging, including segmentation ideas
- analysing data, spotting patterns, and turning caseload information into insights
- reducing avoidable revisions, appeals risk, and repeat contact
- governance, information security, and practical guardrails for day-to-day use

Ideal for heads of service, team leaders, system administrators, performance and policy leads, and front-line officers.

Register your interest at info@visionarynetwork.co.uk

Redesign your CTR scheme with ease



Opportunity

The Inbest CTR Design Tool is an online application to help Revenues & Benefits teams design Council Tax Reduction Schemes.

Upload your anonymised CTRS caseload and use our analytics and modelling features to design schemes that meet the council's budget requirements, simplify administration, and protect vulnerable households.

This tool provides the following features to support you through every step of the CTRS design process.

Resident Insights

Get a clear understanding of your caseload by analysing your residents' circumstances and financial situation.

Use these insights—such as the number of residents with capital above certain thresholds or those out of work—to identify opportunities for savings while ensuring continued support for those in need.

CTRS Modelling

Set up different CTRS options and assess their impact using your caseload data.

Then, you can use our analytics dashboard to view potential savings, see how changes affect different segments of residents, and assess the risk of arrears.

Each simulation takes only a few seconds, and you can run as many as needed, refining them until you find the perfect fit for your council.

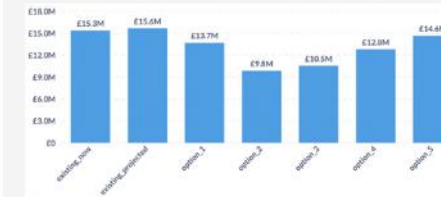
Automatic Reporting

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

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

Our dashboard provides the insights you need to make informed decisions

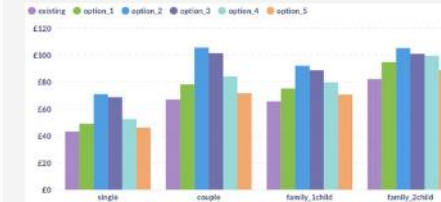
Total annual cost options



Detailed analysis per CTR band

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

Average CT payment by households



Identification of impacted residents

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

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

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

Penny Mitchell, Council Tax Service Manager at Salford Council

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

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

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

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

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

Lucie White, Operational Finance Manager at Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

HB Subsidy Audit 2024/25: No More CAKE, and the Slice Just Got Smaller

There are now only **a very few firms** willing to audit Housing Benefit subsidy claims — and all face tougher conditions.

The 2024/25 audit brings:

- The **end of CAKE**, meaning no more easy reconciliations
- A **£50 de minimis** (a penny used to be an error)
- **Increased scrutiny** and fewer people who still understand the process

For many councils, that means **more risk, more rework, and higher costs**.

Our **subsidy support service** helps you stay audit-ready and compliant without the stress.

We'll:

- Review your subsidy claim before submission (or even complete it for you)
- Identify and resolve problem areas early
- Liaise with your auditors to minimise queries
- Provide targeted advice from experienced subsidy specialists

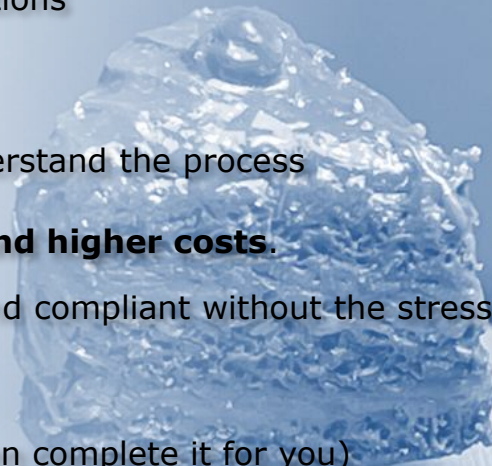
Don't go hungry without CAKE.

Let us take the weight of the subsidy audit off your plate.

Contact us to discuss a fixed-fee support package tailored to your authority. [**info@visionarynetwork.co.uk**](mailto:info@visionarynetwork.co.uk)



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The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network



End



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The Independent Local Tax and Welfare Network

MALG
MEMBER

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



Join the discussion

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

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

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

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

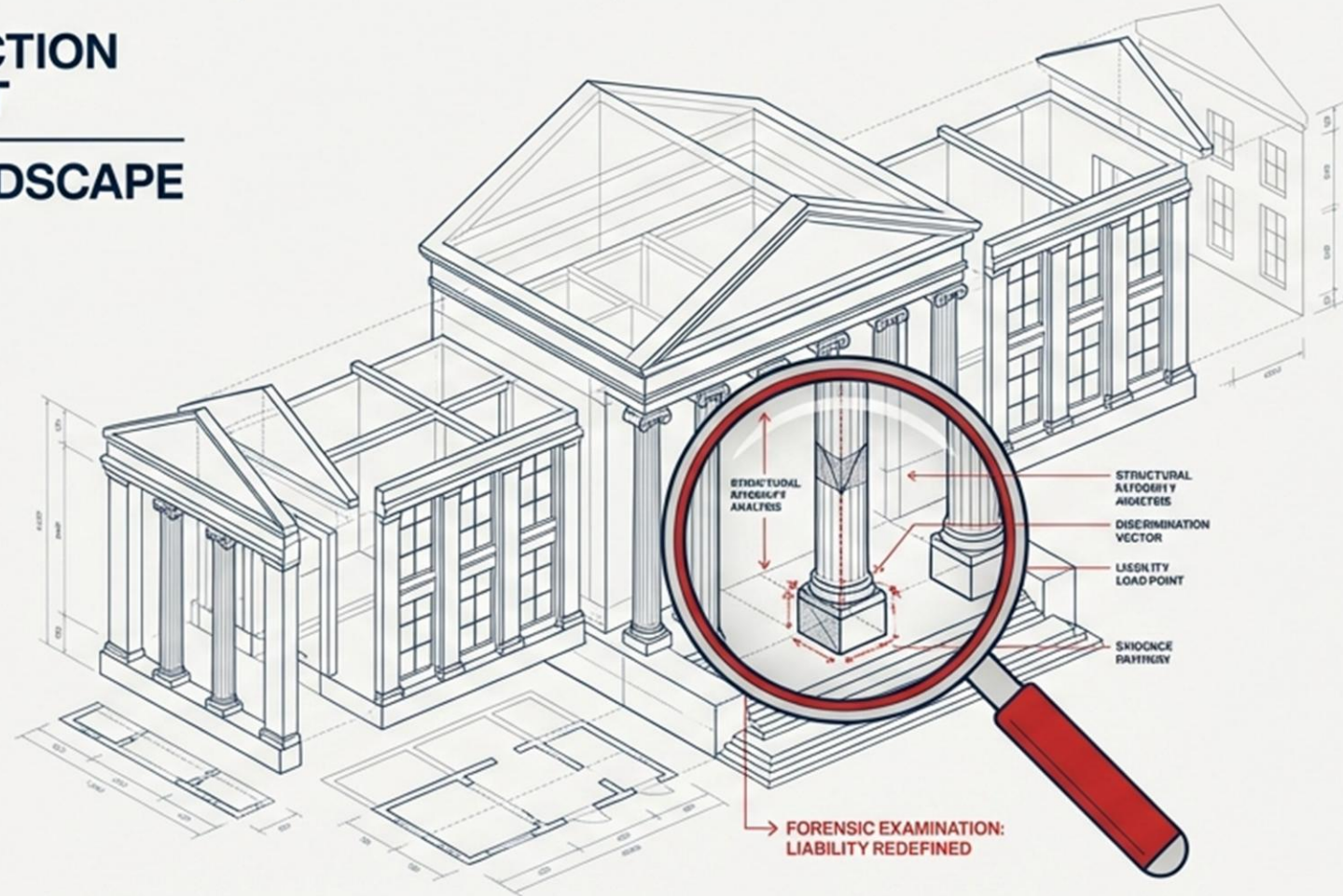
To sign up just email Info@visionarynetwork.co.uk with your name, organisation and email address. We are inclusive because sharing information and good practice is essential. You don't have to attend every session; recordings will be available.



Main Discussion Points

COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION & UNIVERSAL CREDIT

THE LITIGATION LANDSCAPE



The Judicial Autopsy

Analysis of R (Bleakley) v Three Rivers DC
and the 2026 Legal Precedents

February 2, 2026 marks a turning point for Local Authority liability. The High Court has redefined the boundaries between administrative efficiency and discrimination.



THE HIGH COURT DRAWS A RED LINE ON TRANSITIONAL PROTECTION

Executive Summary: The Bleakley Ruling

CASE DETAILS

- **Primary Case:** R (Bleakley) v Three Rivers DC
- **Judgment Date:** Feb 2, 2026
- **Verdict:** **Unlawfully Discriminatory** 

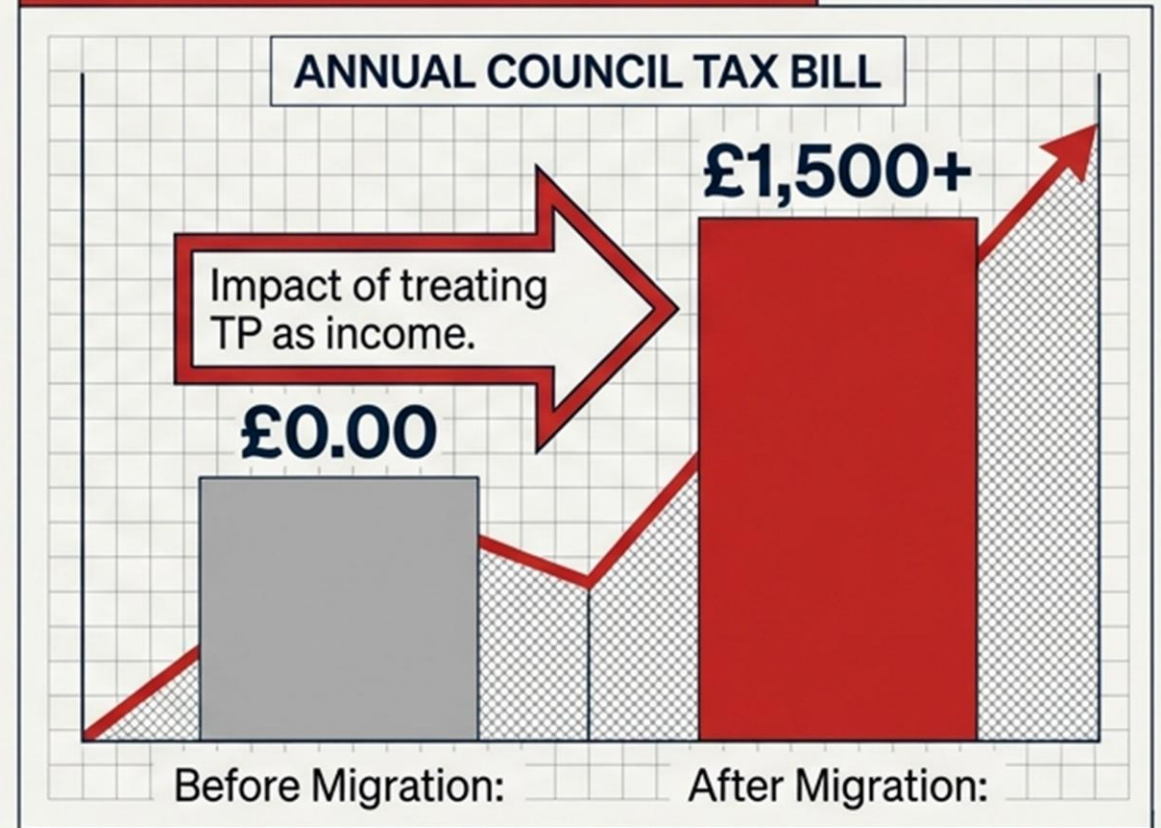
The Context:

- ~1 million households are undergoing 'managed migration' to Universal Credit. They receive 'Transitional Protection' (TP) payments to ensure their income remains static during the switch.

The Violation:

- Three Rivers DC treated this disability-linked TP as 'surplus income' rather than a maintenance of the status quo.

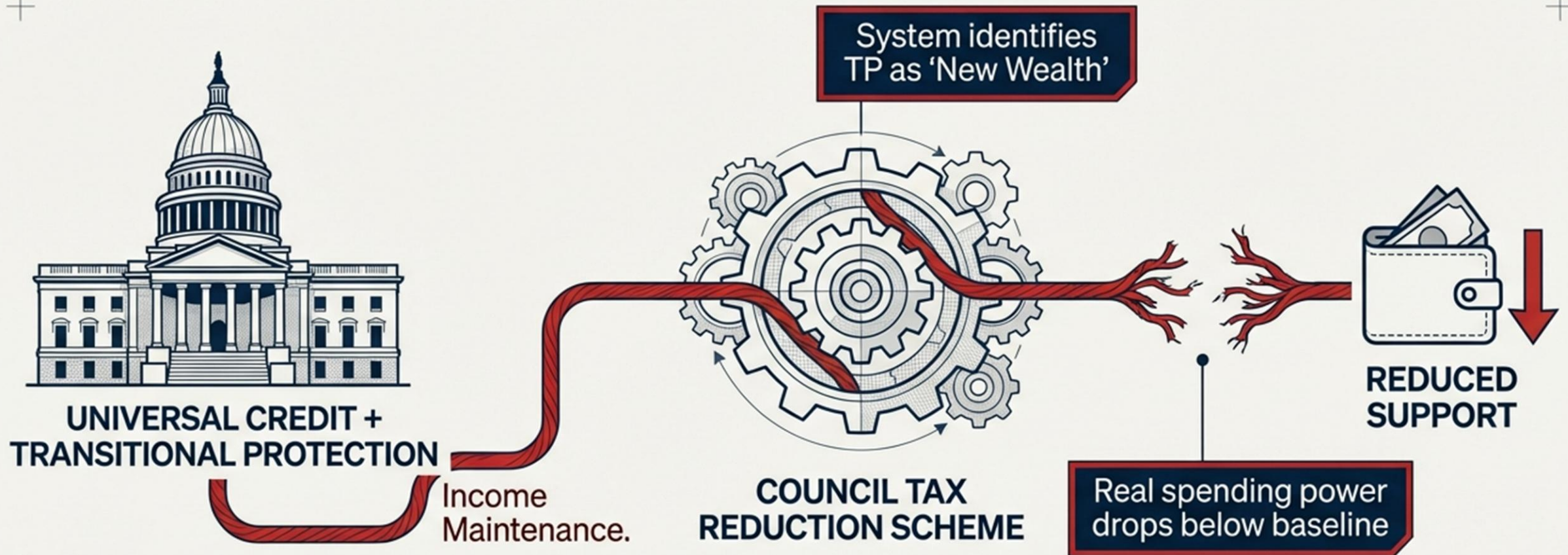
VISUAL DATA: IMPACT ANALYSIS



The High Court ruled that penalizing protected characteristics via administrative definitions is unlawful.

DEFINING WEALTH WHERE NONE EXISTS PENALIZES THE VULNERABLE

The Mechanism of Discrimination



The Court ruled that treating disability-linked protection as disposable income creates a 'mechanism of discrimination' contrary to the Equality Act.

AUTOMATED SYSTEMS ARE CREATING ARTIFICIAL INCOME INFLATION

The Double-Counting Trap (Trafford Case)



**Universal Credit
Award**



Legacy Benefit
(e.g. Carer's Allowance)



**DOUBLE
COUNTED
INCOME**



CASE STUDY: TRAFFORD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL (Sept 2025)

The Math Error:

- The Council's software counted the same money twice—once as part of the UC element, and again as the original legacy benefit.

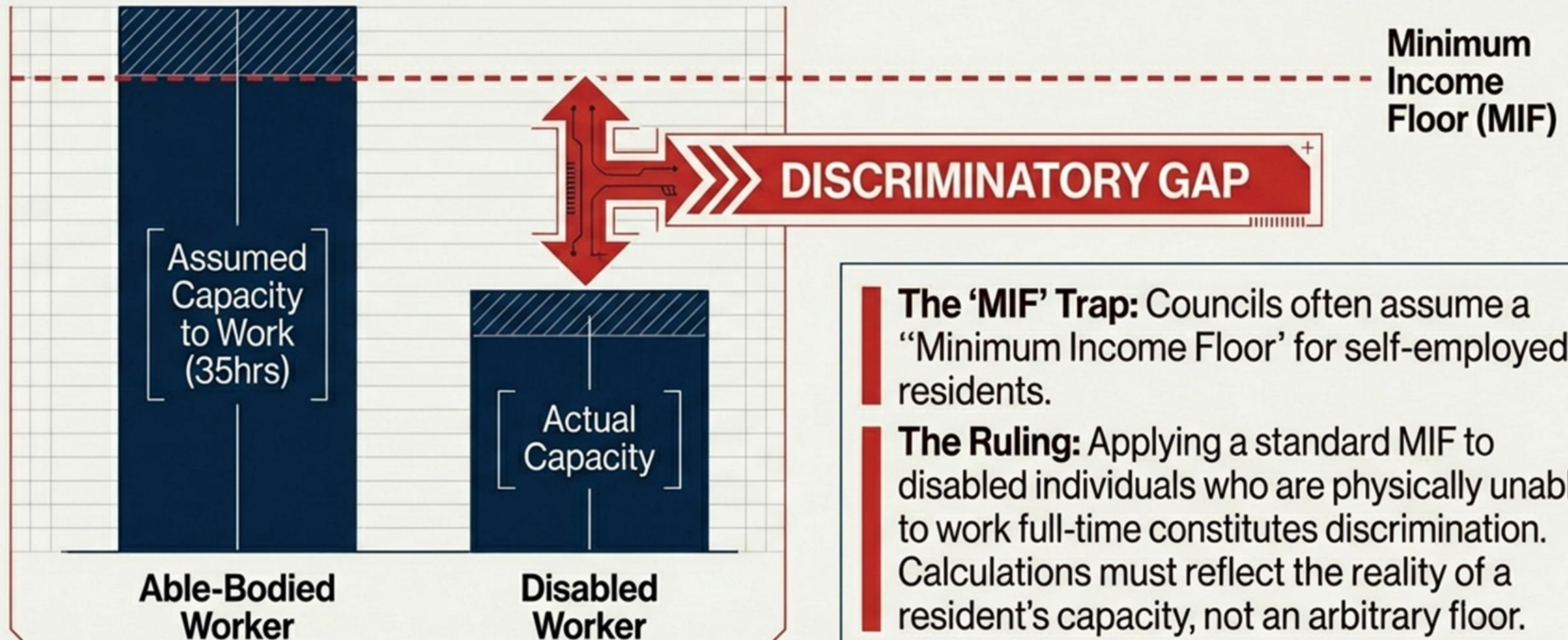
The Consequence:

- The entire scheme was quashed by the court. Furthermore, the scheme was found 'unlawfully adopted' because it bypassed the Full Council vote.



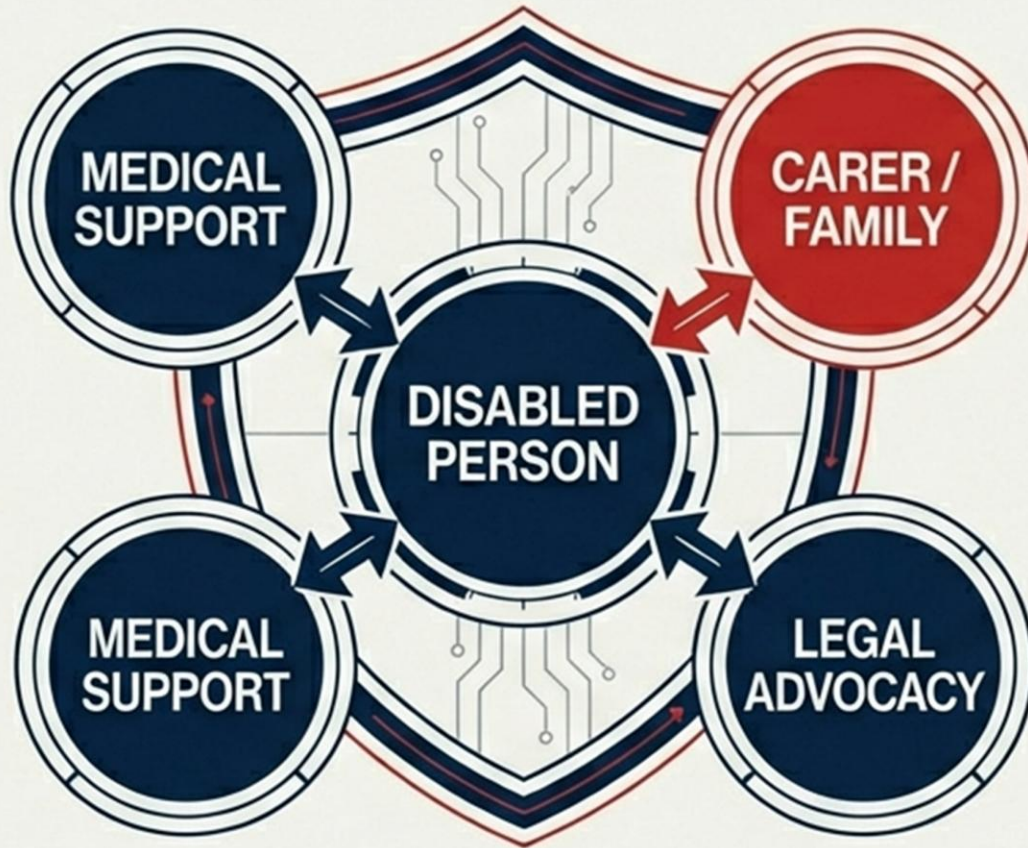
RIGID INCOME ASSUMPTIONS UNLAWFULLY TARGET THE SELF-EMPLOYED

R (Osman) v Croydon & The Minimum Income Floor



LEGAL PROTECTIONS EXTEND TO THE CLAIMANT'S SUPPORT NETWORK

Associative Discrimination (s.19A Equality Act)



- **The Precedent:** Established via the *Trafford* ruling.
- **Core Message:**
 - Discrimination law is not limited to the disabled individual. If a carer is penalized financially because of their association with a disabled person (e.g., losing support due to the double-counting of Carer's Allowance), the scheme is unlawful.
- **Takeaway:**
 - CTR schemes must act as a shield for the entire household unit impacted by disability, not just the disabled individual.

THE TAIL CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO WAG THE DOG

Dismantling the IT Defense

The Defense:

- 'Our IT system limitations forced this calculation.'
- 'The software cannot handle the exception.'



The Ruling:

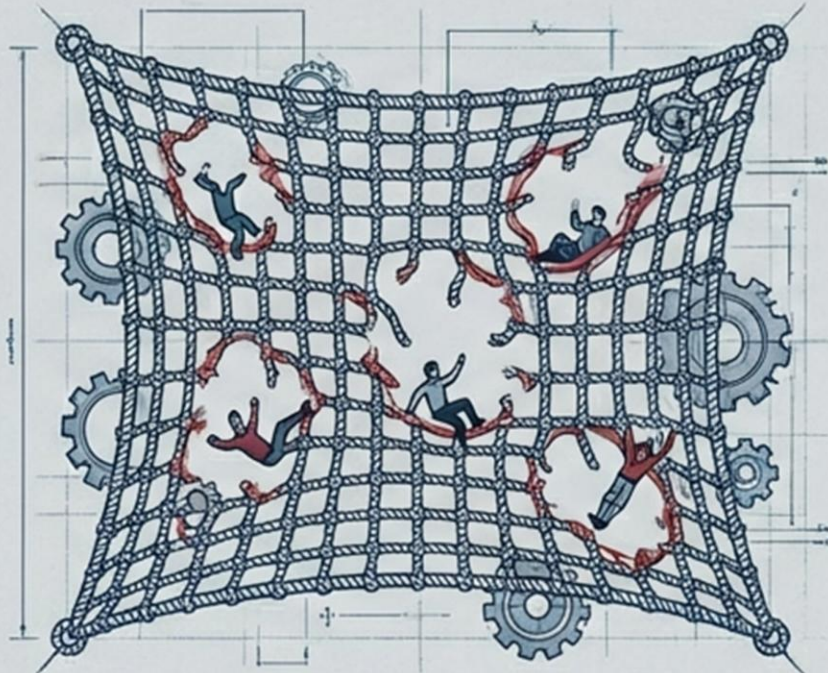
Policy must dictate IT, not vice versa. If a compiogram produces an irrational result—such as the Somerset case where Andy Mitchell dropped to **£2/week** support—the Council remains liable.

→ **Conclusion:** System limitations are never a valid legal defense for discrimination.

Discretionary funds cannot cure a discriminatory primary scheme

The Discretionary Fallacy

The Council's Shield



"We have a Discretionary Hardship Fund to catch anyone who falls through the cracks."

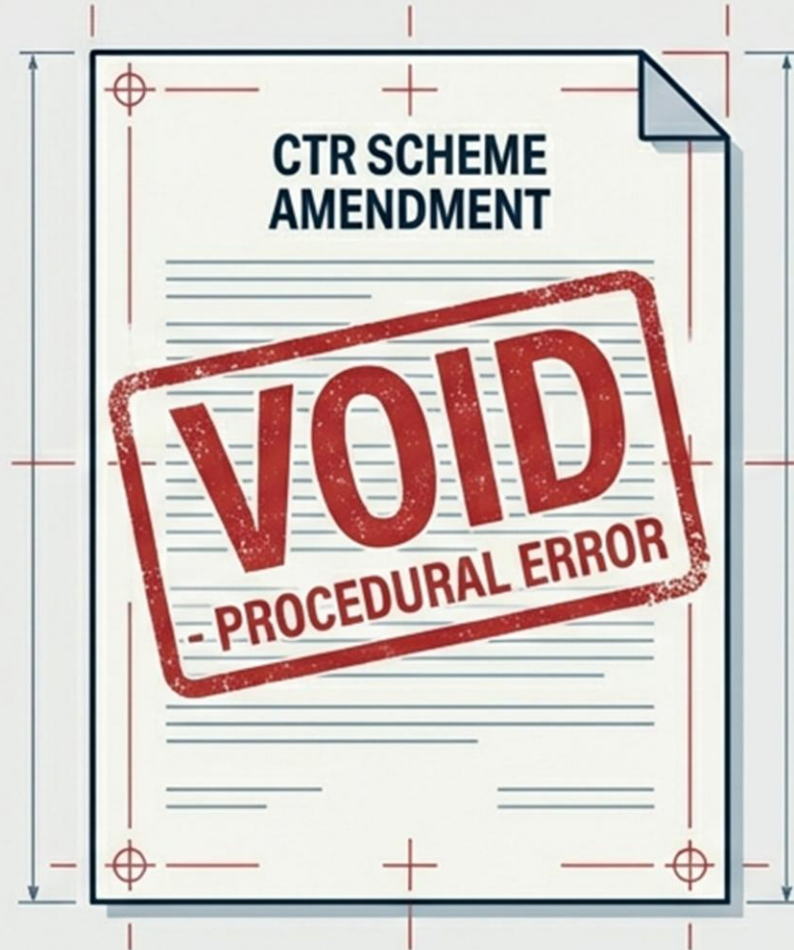
The Court's Sword



Support must be a **right** within the primary scheme, not a **favor** granted through a secondary application. A structural defect cannot be excused by a complex discretionary fix.

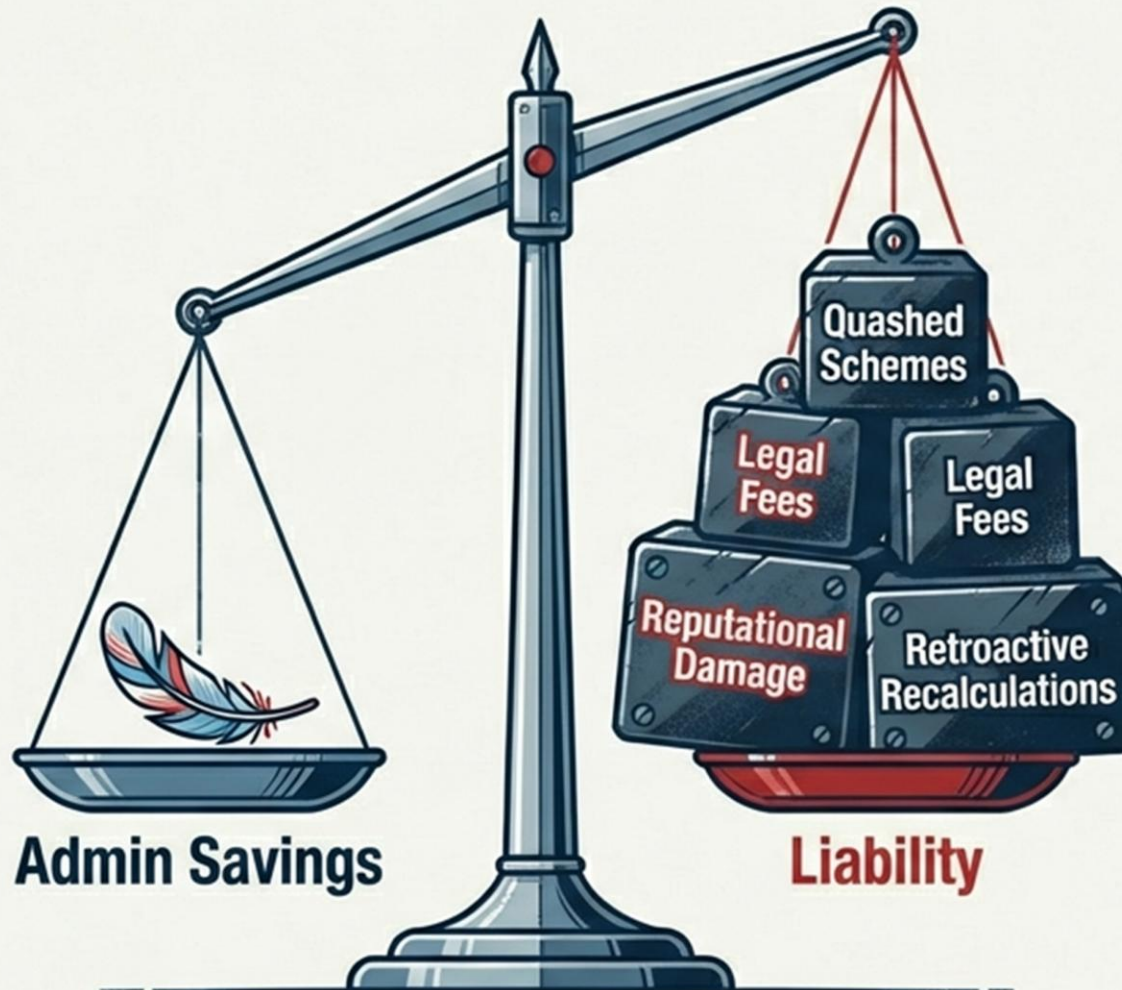
Procedure is as critical as the policy itself

Governance and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)



- **1. The 'Trafford' Error:** The scheme was quashed because it was signed off by the Executive/Cabinet. It **must** be voted on by the **Full Council**.
- **2. The PSED Trap (s.149):** Councils must 'have due regard' to eliminating discrimination *before* a decision is made. Retro-fitting a justification or treating PSED as a 'tick-box' exercise is unlawful.

The False Economy of Administrative Savings



The 'Somerset' Warning: The judicial review in Somerset highlighted that 'rationality' is a requirement. Reducing support to £2/week for a vulnerable resident to save on software complexity is economically irrational and invites costly litigation.

Insight: Shifting the tax burden onto the most vulnerable to save admin costs is a fiscal failure.

Strategic Audit: Is your scheme currently lawful?

Diagnostic Risk Matrix

Question	Assessment	Risk Level	
Transitional Protection: Does the scheme disregard UC Transitional Protection as income?		No? → HIGH RISK	●
Governance: Was the specific scheme voted on by the Full Council?		No? → VOID	●
Self-Employment: Is a Minimum Income Floor applied to disabled residents?		Yes? → DISCRIMINATORY	●
Data Integrity: Does the software 'double count' legacy benefits deducted from UC?		Yes? → IRRATIONAL	●

Compliance requires aligning software with reality

Immediate Action Items

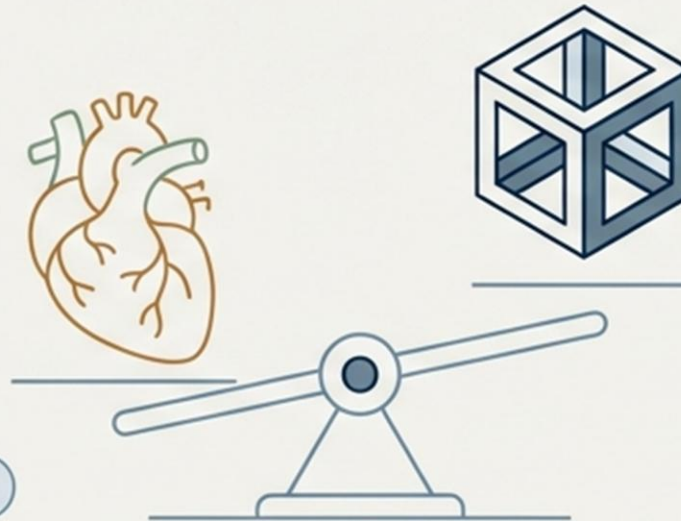
- 01. Audit UC Migration Logic**
Ensure Transitional Protection is isolated and disregarded in income calculations.
- 02. Review Governance**
Confirm all scheme amendments have Full Council ratification.
- 03. End Reliance on Discretion**
Integrate 'hardship' protections into the main scheme rules as rights, not favors.
- 04. Protect Carers**
Audit for associative discrimination in household calculations.

"A lawful scheme is one that reflects the reality of the resident's means, not the limitations of the Council's software."

Council Tax Support: Provision for Terminally Ill Claimants

A strategic appraisal of legal routes, operational risks, and implementation recommendations.

Legislation Reference: Local Government Finance Act 1992



Executive Summary



The Goal: To determine if/how the CTS scheme should provide specific relief for households with a terminally ill member.



The Conflict: While the moral case is strong (dignity/fairness), the implementation is technically complex.



The Choice: Decision-makers must choose between a Discretionary approach (Section 13A(1)(c)) or a Main Scheme integration (Section 13A(1)(a)).



The Risk: Policies must avoid indirect discrimination against other disability groups (citing Trafford and Somerset considerations).

The Case for Intervention

The Moral & Systemic Argument



Fairness and Dignity: Preventing Council Tax from becoming 'distress debt' during end-of-life care.



National Alignment: Mirroring the benefits system 'Special Rules' to fast-track access for those with a prognosis of 12 months or less.



Risk Management: Reduces crisis contact, complaints, member referrals, and late-stage enforcement costs.

Counter-Arguments & Risks



Operational Burden: Without a clear 'end of life' marker, requesting clinical evidence can be intrusive.



Precedent: Adding a new protected group creates pressure to extend similar treatment to other severe circumstances.



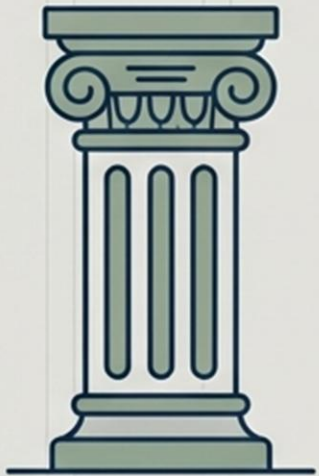
Coherence: Must sit logically alongside existing disability provisions to avoid legal challenges regarding 'rationality'.

Structural Options: Main Scheme vs. Discretionary Relief

There are two workable routes to implementation under the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

The Main Scheme Approach

Section 13A(1)(a)



Mechanism: Create a defined disregard, higher maximum support, or a protected group exemption within the working-age CTR scheme.

Nature: Statutory entitlement; part of the core rules.

The Discretionary Approach

Section 13A(1)(c)



Mechanism: Create a separate, specific discretionary Council Tax relief policy for terminal illness.

Nature: Stand-alone policy; often time-limited; case-by-case application process.

Note: This is the approach currently taken by some councils in formal member reports.

Operational Analysis: Weighing the Trade-offs

Route A: Main Scheme (Section 13A(1)(a))

PROS



Clear entitlement and consistent awards.
Provides "Right based" security for claimants.
Less reliance on individual officer discretion.

CONS



Harder to define and evidence.
Requires intense modeling, equality analysis, consultation, and careful drafting before implementation.

Route B: Discretionary (Section 13A(1)(c))

PROS



Quick implementation.
Can be tightly targeted.
Allows for budget capping.

CONS



Feels less 'secure' for claimants.
Risk of inconsistent outcomes between decision-makers. High administrative burden due to repeat applications.
Potential for evidential disputes.

Critical Design Challenges: Definition & Evidence

The Definition Problem

'Terminal Illness' is not a protected characteristic. Vague definitions invite fraud or inconsistency.



Vague definitions invite fraud or inconsistency.

The Recommended Benchmark

Adopt National 'Special Rules' (Social Security).



Standard: A 12-month life expectancy test.

The Evidential Pathway

Anchor evidence to existing benefit awards or clinical confirmation (e.g. SR1 Form).



Anchor evidence to existing benefit awards or clinical confirmation (e.g. SR1 Form).

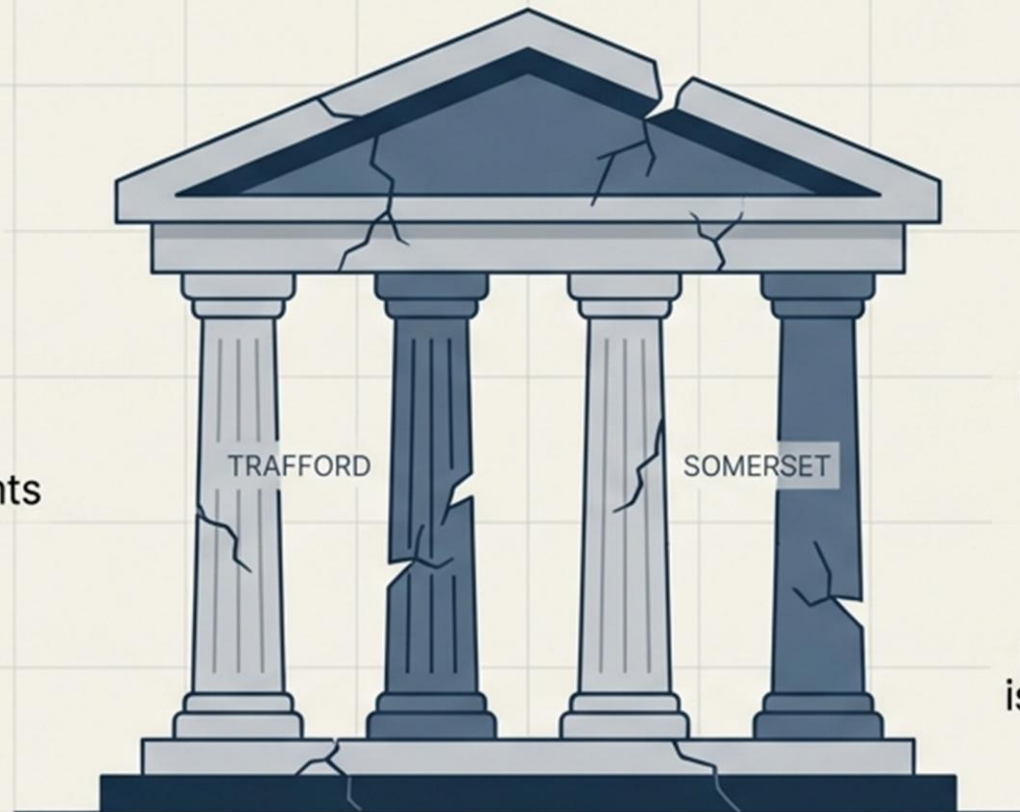
Decisions become fast and repeatable.

The Legal Landscape & Risk Profile

Context & Scrutiny

Recent High Court CTR cases turn on unlawful adoption and discriminatory effects on disabled people.

Live challenges frame arguments around the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and rationality.



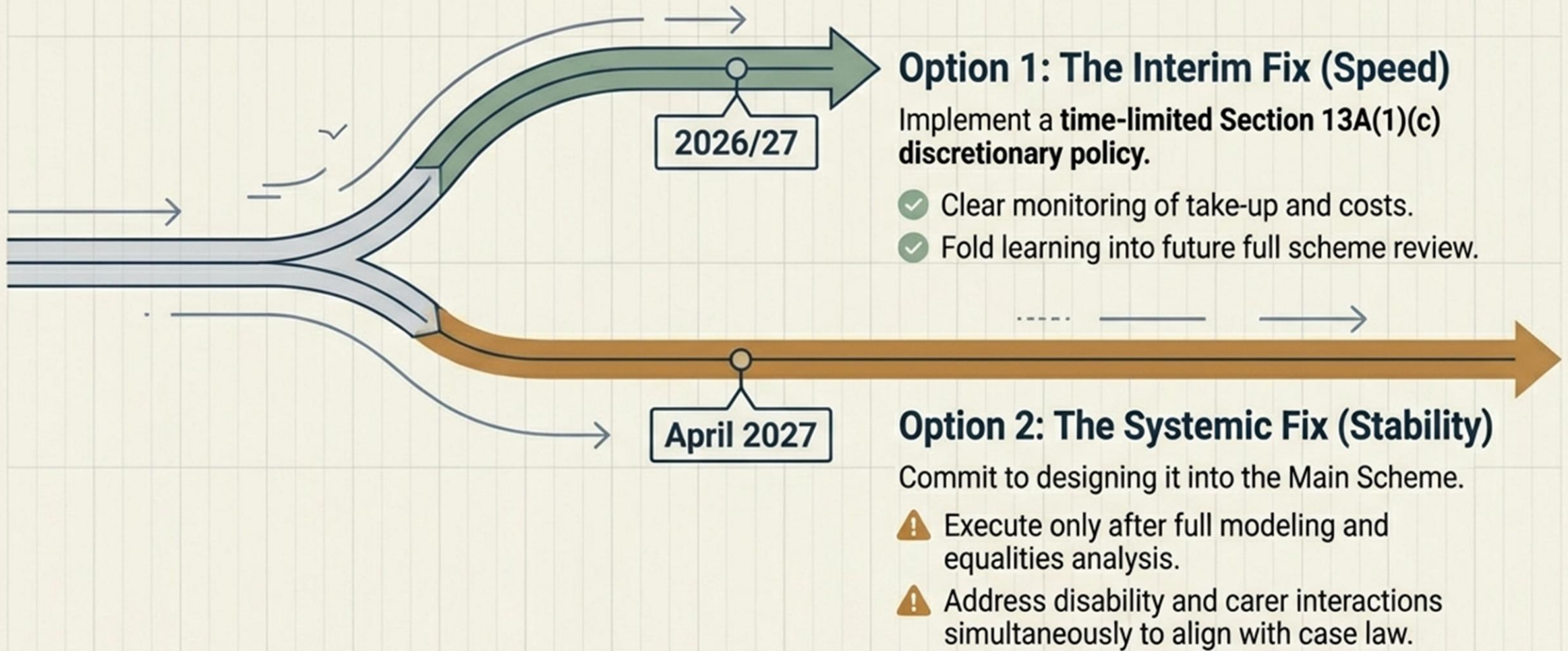
The Implication

Adding a provision is lower risk than cutting support, BUT courts scrutinize whether impacts were properly assessed.

Requirement: Any change needs clean decision logic, a clear evidence basis, and a proper equalities assessment to prove it isn't a 'token' gesture that ignores broader disability impacts.

Key Takeaway: A terminal illness policy must not ignore the wider disability context.

Strategic Recommendations



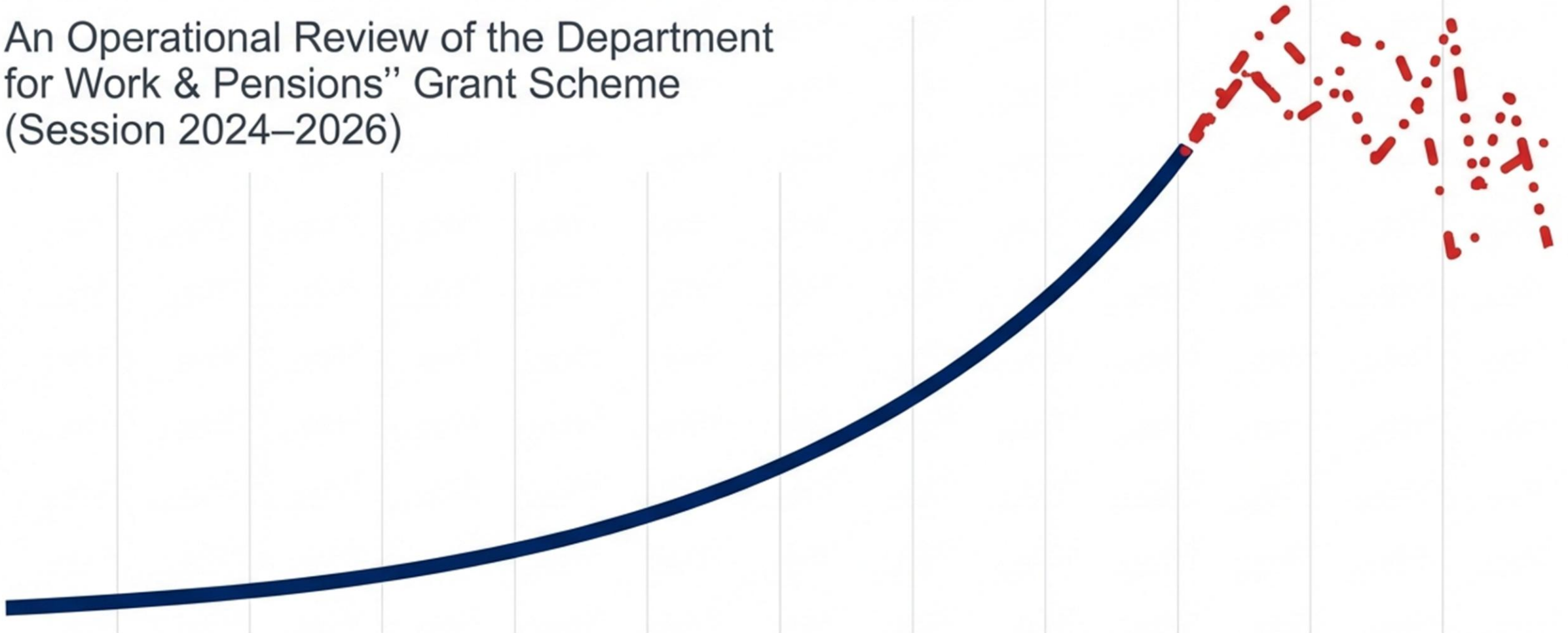
Final Considerations for Committee

- ☐ **Select the Legal Route:** Discretionary (Interim) vs. Main Scheme (Long-term). 
- ☐ **Confirm the Definition:** Adoption of '12-month life expectancy' rule to align with National 'Special Rules'. 
- ☐ **Confirm Evidence Standard:** Reliance on clinical confirmation/Benefit anchors to minimize intrusion. 
- ☐ **Verify Compliance:** Has the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) been addressed to mitigate Trafford-style challenges? 

Closing Thought: The objective is to balance administrative simplicity with human dignity. A clear policy reduces crisis contact and prevents "distress debt" at the most critical moment in a resident's life.

ACCESS TO WORK: A SYSTEM UNDER STRAIN

An Operational Review of the Department
for Work & Pensions' Grant Scheme
(Session 2024–2026)



Based on the National Audit Office (NAO) Report HC 1644

Executive Summary: A vital lifeline struggling to scale.

While funding reach has expanded, operational bottlenecks are endangering job security for applicants.

THE SURGE (DEMAND)

- Applications have more than doubled since 2018-19 (76k to 157k).
- A massive shift in user profile: 51% of recipients now claim for mental health or learning conditions, complicating case complexity.

THE STRAIN (OPERATIONS)

- Wait times have exploded to 109 working days against a target of 25 days.
- The backlog has tripled to 62,100 outstanding cases.
- Operational productivity is stalling despite staff numbers doubling.

THE VERDICT (SUSTAINABILITY)

- Spending has reached £321m (96% real-terms increase).
- Crucial Finding: The scheme effectively supports those who navigate it, but the 'entry door' is blocked, creating a barrier to employment.

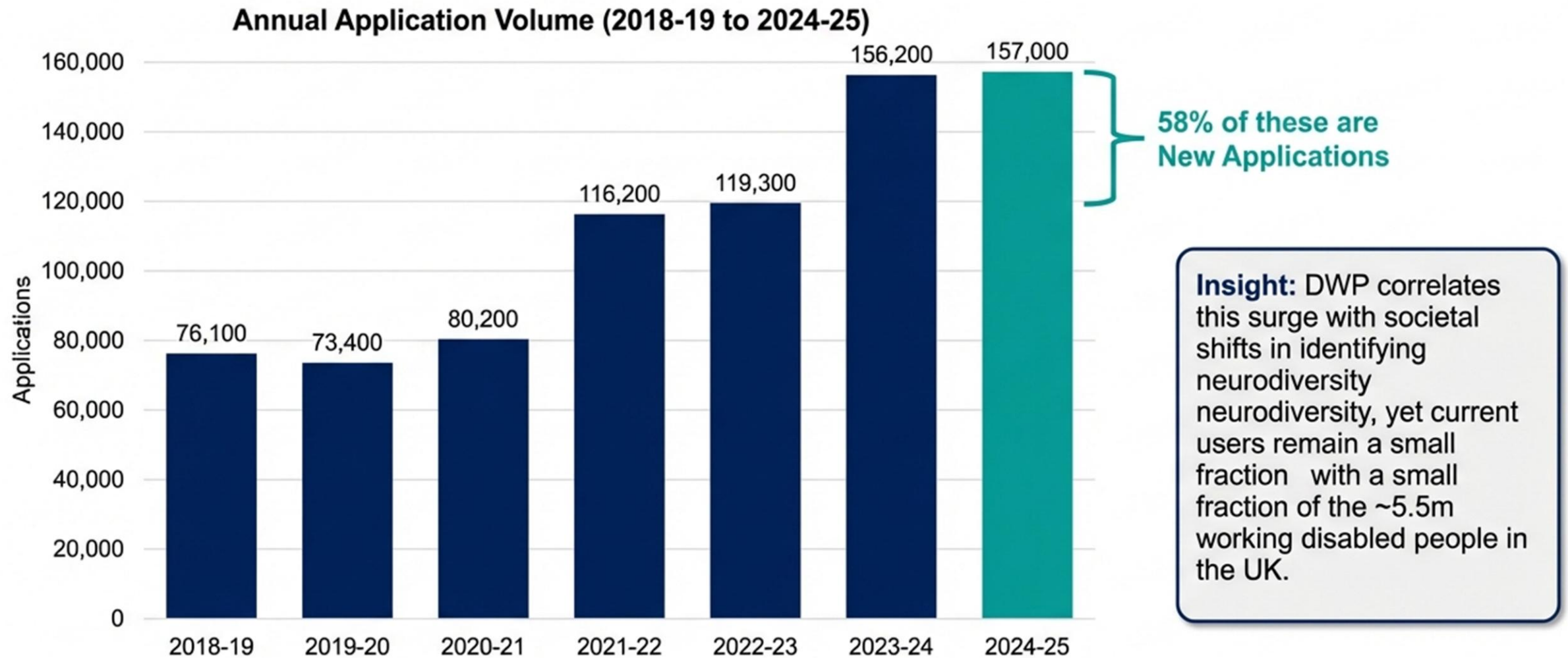
Government Modern meets High-End Consultancy

The Mandate: Bridging the gap between legal duty and workplace reality

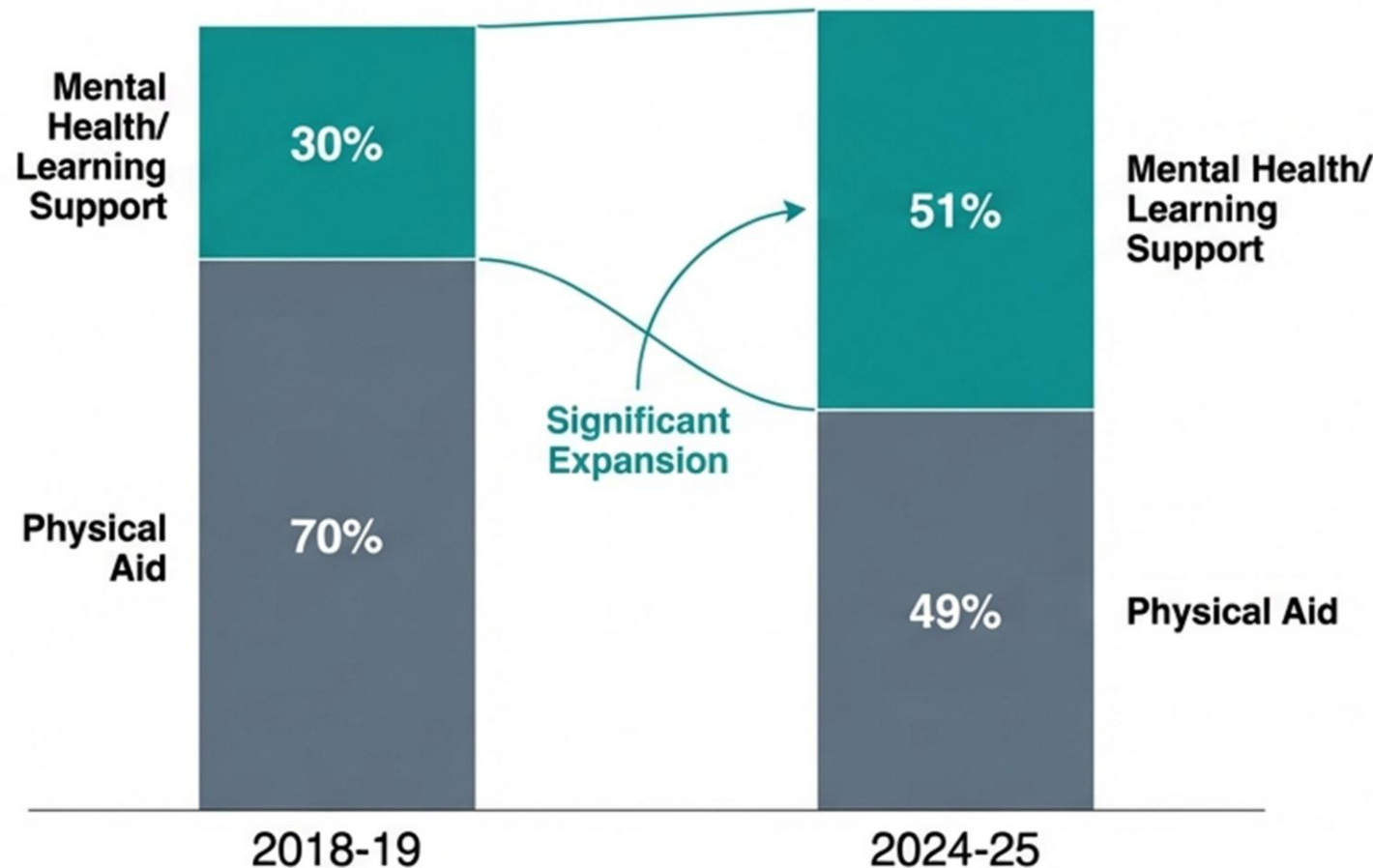


Government Modern meets High-End Consultancy

Applications have doubled in six years, driven by new market entrants



The customer profile has pivoted from physical aid to mental health support



The 'Neurodiversity' Factor

The 'Other' category captures many neurodivergent conditions (Autism/ADHD), which are rapidly increasing in prevalence. These cases are less binary and more complex to adjudicate than physical equipment requests.

The queue for support is growing faster than DWP can process it.

62,100

People waiting for a decision (March 2025).
Up from 21.7k in 2022.



Delays have quadrupled, putting employment offers at risk.



The Long Tail: 30% of applicants now wait between **140 and 199 days** for a decision.



Job Offers
Withdrawn



Employees falling
into debt



SME cashflow strain due
to reimbursement delays

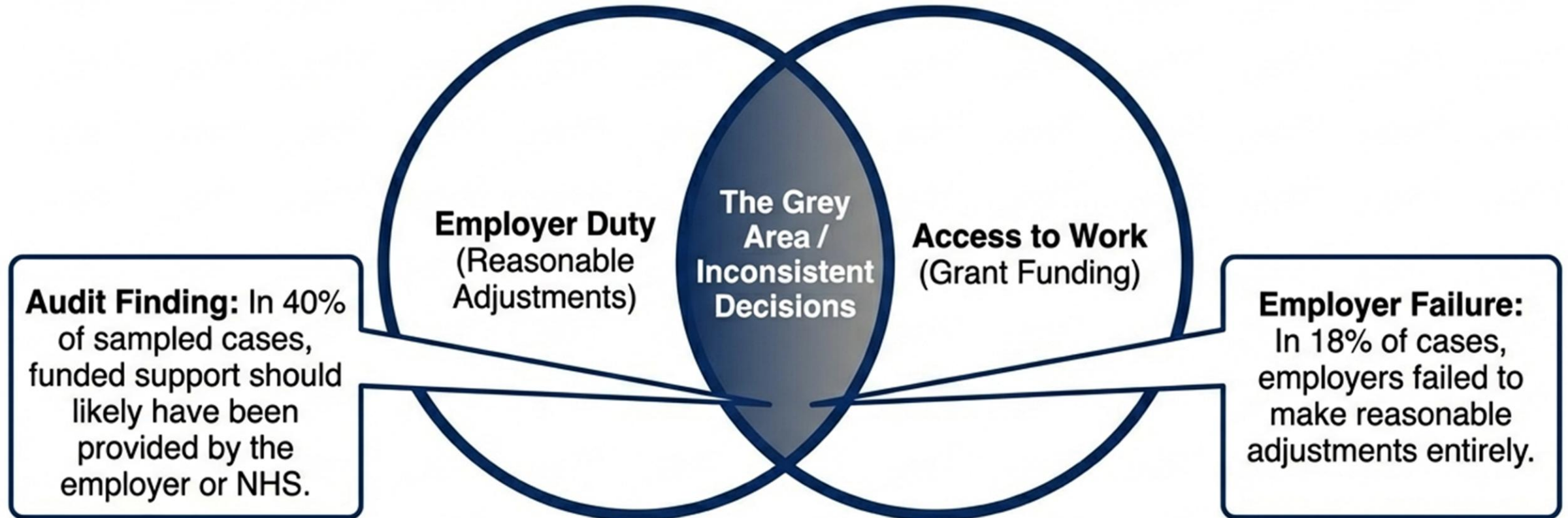
The Productivity Paradox: Staffing doubled, yet efficiency declined.



Root Causes of Inefficiency

- **Antiquated IT:** Manual copy-pasting across systems.
- **High Turnover:** New staff take 6 months to reach competence.
- **Reconsiderations:** Appeals jumped from 194 to 1,575, diverting resources.

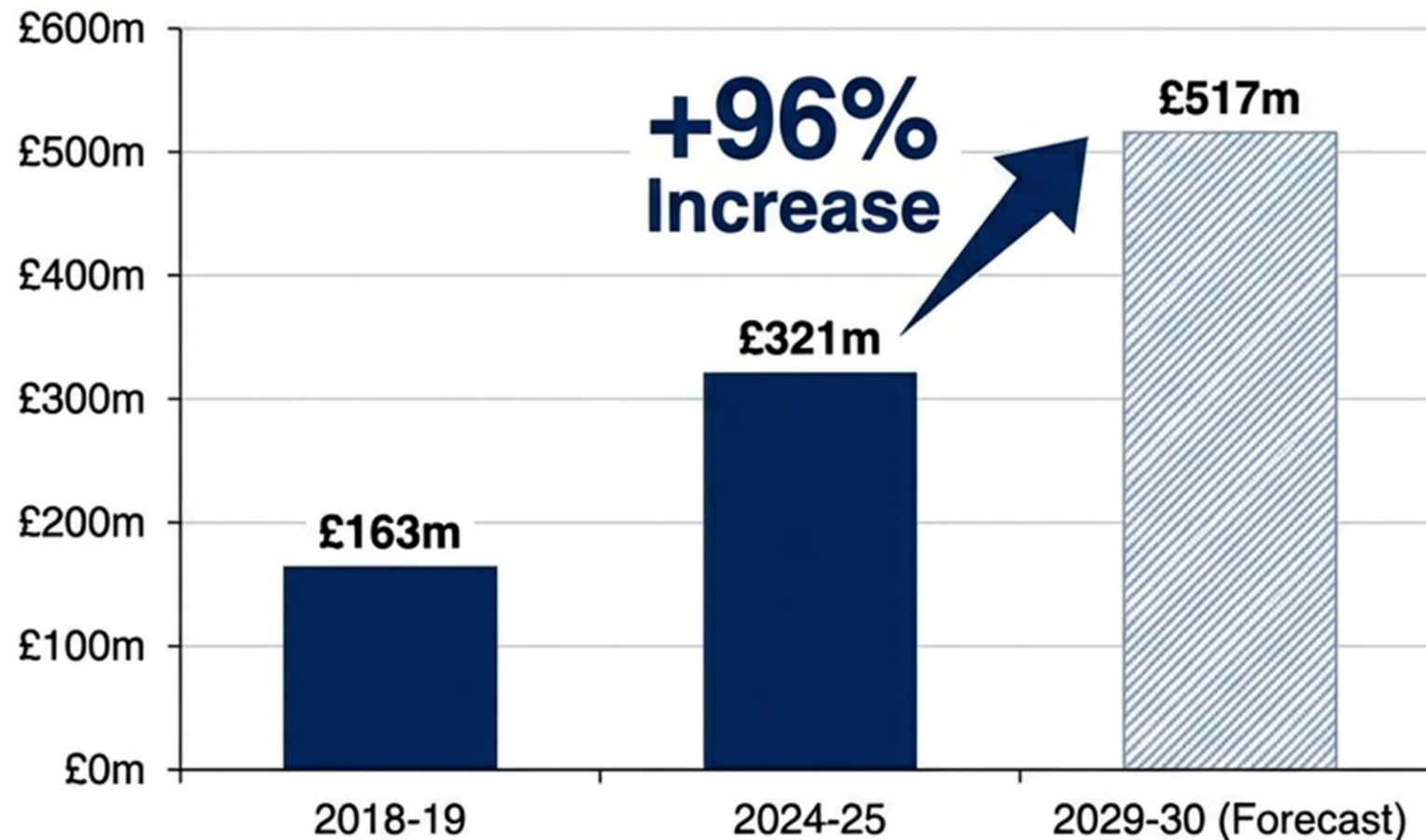
Vague boundaries are blurring the line between grant funding and employer duty.



Consequence: When DWP tightens rules, users with identical circumstances see funding cut, eroding trust.

Government investment has doubled to capture the workforce's needs.

Total Spending (Real Terms)



Funding Structure Risk

Access to Work is Demand-Led but funded from Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL).

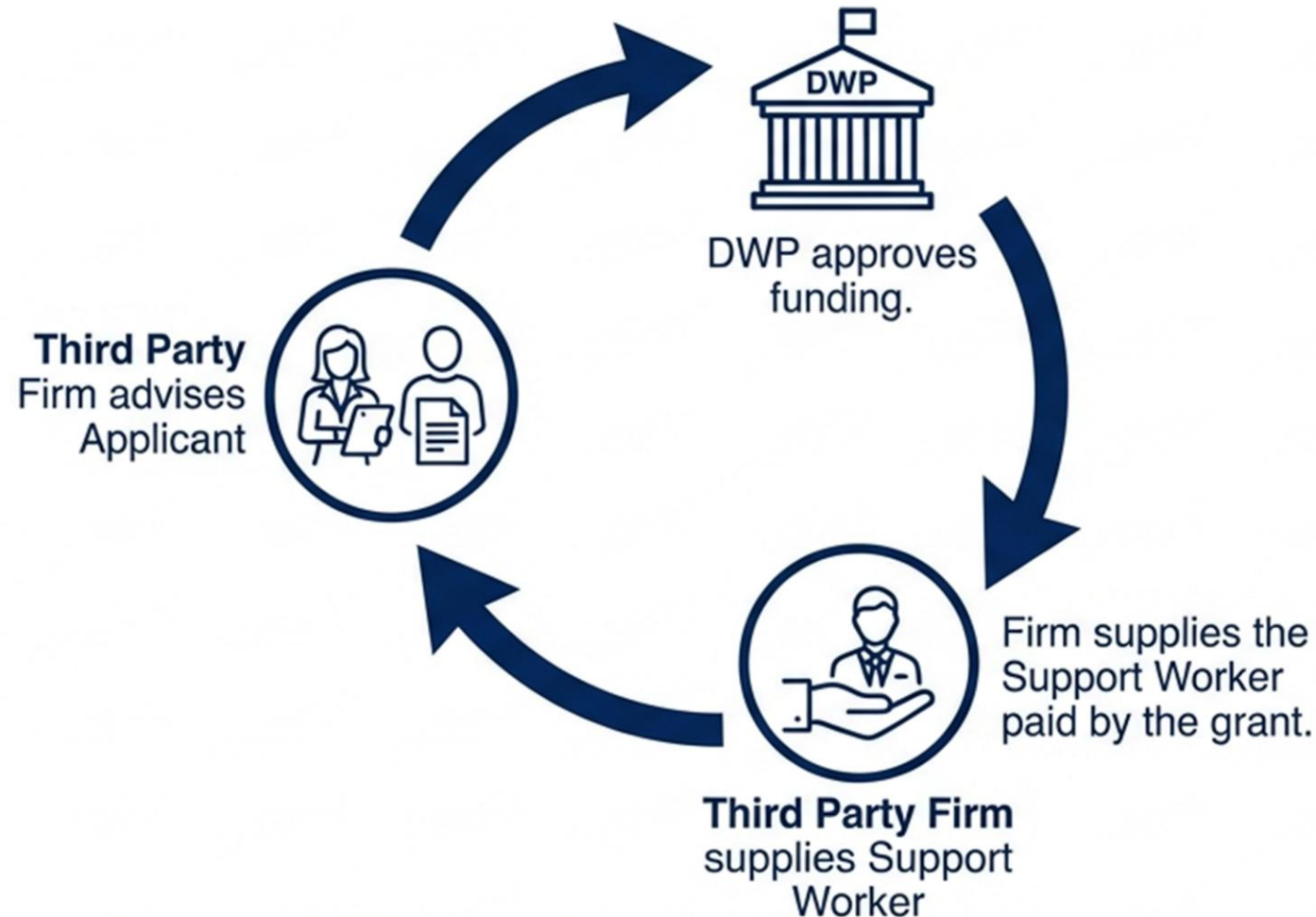
Overspends force cuts elsewhere in DWP.

Spending is heavily skewed toward human support.



Mental Health Services are the fastest growing provision type, but Support Workers remain the dominant cost driver.

The rise of intermediaries challenges the scheme's integrity.



The 'Job Aide' Spike

Spending on Job Aides jumped from £6m to £64m.

Risk of subsidizing standard employee duties (admin/supervision) rather than disability support.

Current tactics are slowing the backlog's growth, but not reversing it.

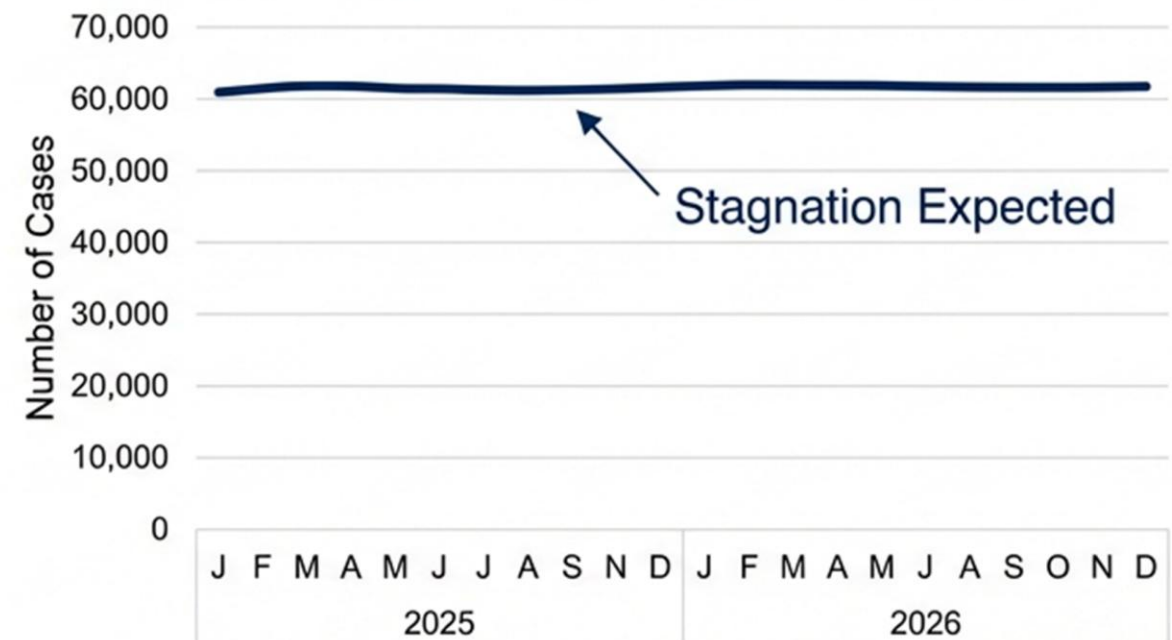
Travel-to-Work Streamlining

Removed medical evidence requirements (80% faster decisions).

Banded Rates

Standardized rates for support workers to eliminate quote reviews.

Backlog Forecast (2025-2026)



Trade-off: Removing evidence requirements speeds processing but weakens fraud and error controls.

Strategic recommendations for a sustainable future.



Digital Transformation

- Move away from paper reimbursement.
- Implement Process Mining to fix workflow bottlenecks.



Data & Value

- Establish quantitative evidence of ROI.
- Track outcomes: Does support actually sustain employment?



Clarity & Definitions

- Rigidly define 'Reasonable Adjustment' to stop subsidizing employers.
- Tighten guidance on Third Party intermediaries.

Conclusion: Access to Work is essential, but unsustainable in its current form.

	The Good: 74,200 people supported; vital for the modern neurodiverse workforce.
	The Bad: 62k backlog and 109-day wait time are blocking the front door.
	The Issue: No evidence of Value for Money; Obsolete IT; Spiraling 'Job Aide' costs.

Reform is not optional. To clear the queue and protect the public purse, the scheme must modernize its operations to match the modern scale of demand.

Kent County Council: cost cutting claims, Dolge controversy, and cabinet resignation

- Matthew Fraser Moat resigned from Kent County Council's cabinet role as head of the council's Department of Local Government Efficiency (Dolge) initiative after comments reported in the Financial Times.
- He was quoted as saying the authority had "not actually made any cuts", and that frontline service reductions were limited to changes already planned under the previous Conservative administration.
- Fraser Moat said his words were "twisted", acknowledged a "lapse of judgement", and stated continuing in the role was "not sustainable", while remaining a councillor.
- The council said the Financial Times reporting did not reflect its position and stated the administration had embedded a value for money culture and had identified savings in the draft budget.
- The Dolge initiative was launched in June and was explicitly framed as a local government efficiency drive, inspired by similar "efficiency" branding used in US politics.



Kent County Council: cost cutting claims, Dolge controversy, and cabinet resignation

Impacts on administration of services

- Budget governance and assurance: public tension between political messaging and what is evidenced in budget papers increases the need for tighter definitions of “savings”, audit trails, and sign off processes for public financial claims.
- Communications and public confidence: high profile resignations and contested narratives can increase resident contact and member enquiries; this pulls capacity into comms handling, briefings, and complaint management rather than service delivery.
- Programme management overhead: where an “efficiency” programme is positioned as a flagship initiative, officer time tends to be absorbed by reporting cadence, evidence collation, and scrutiny responses, especially when external challenge intensifies.
- Delivery focus: the council position, as reported, is that budget savings rely more on system efficiencies and service redesign than on discovering obvious “waste”; that shifts administrative effort towards transformation governance, benefits realisation tracking, and service-based cost drivers (for example adult social care and SEND transport).



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deduction
schemes

Bristol City
Council Case
Study

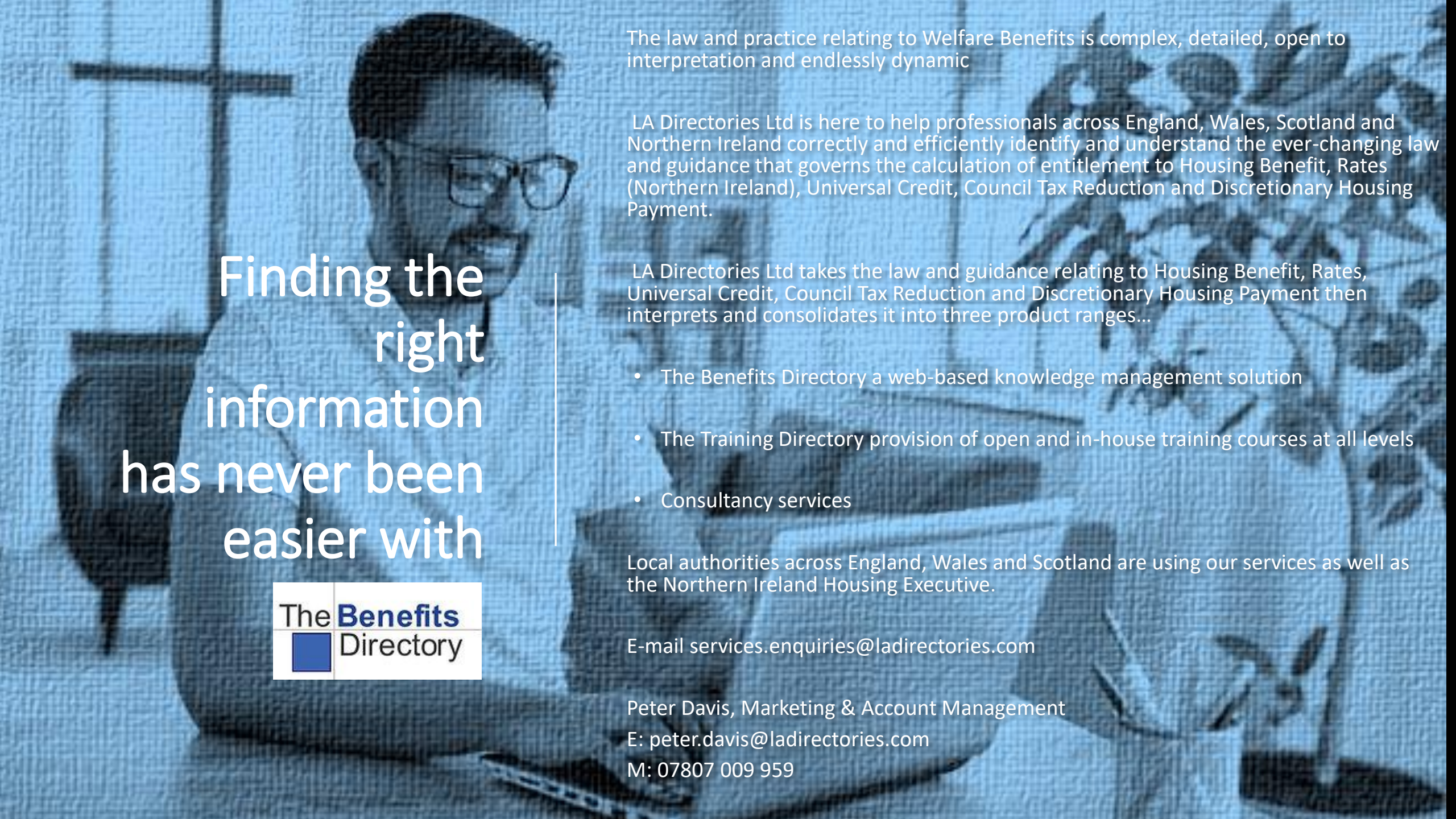
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Ferret Information Systems Ltd



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:

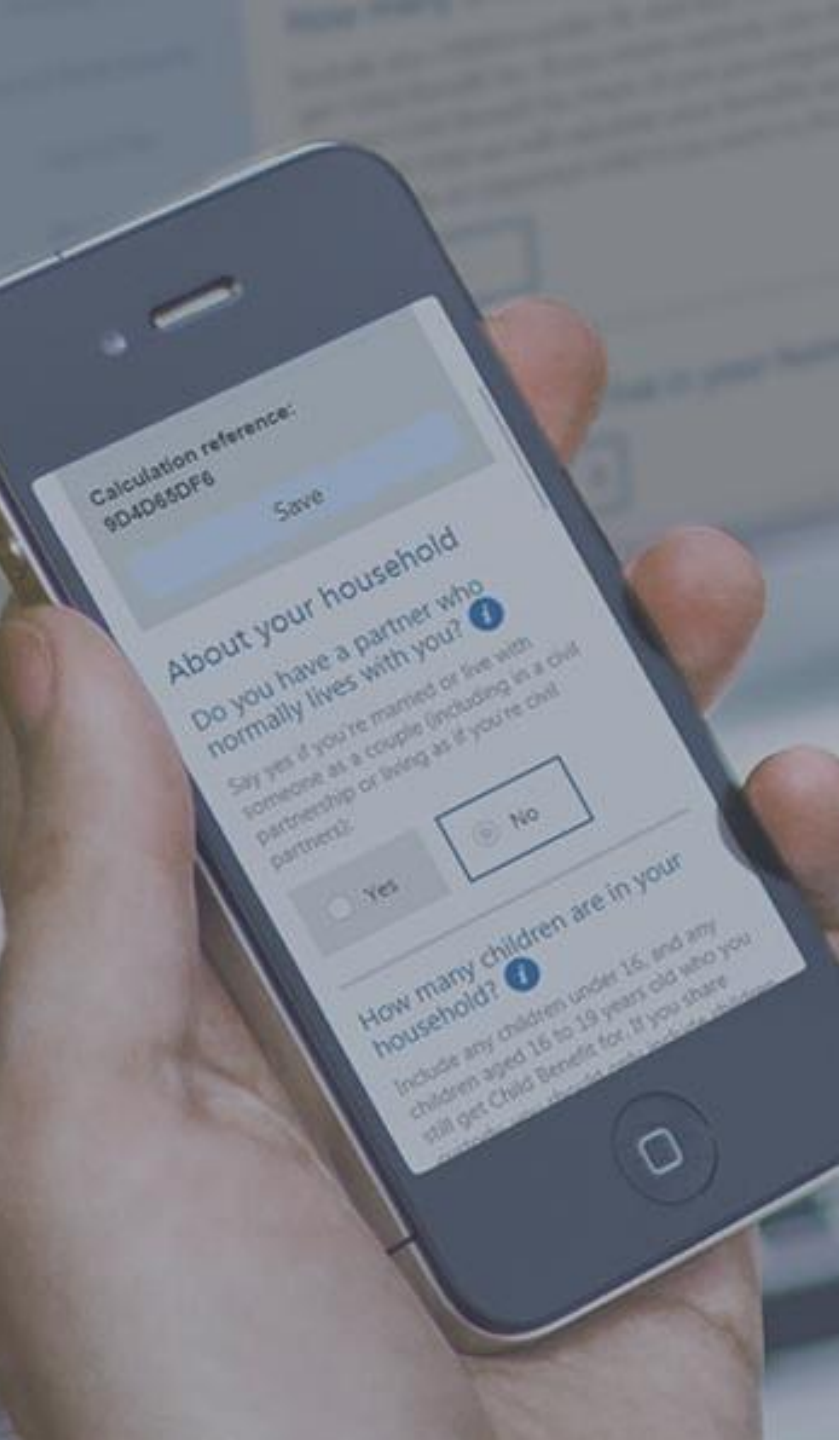
Systems supported include network, desktop, laptop, mobile devices, Internet and Intranet systems, and a public access system in multi-lingual, multi-media form for touch screen kiosks and public access PC's.



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

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

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

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

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



Ascendant Solutions
data management

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

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

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

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

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

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



Apply4.Online®



In the news

SEND high needs deficits: statutory override cliff edge and budget risk for councils

- The LGA says the SEND system is placing councils at risk of financial crisis unless high needs deficits are dealt with and the system is reformed.
- Councils are currently using a statutory override to keep Dedicated Schools Grant high needs deficits off their main balance sheets; the override is due to end in March 2028.
- In an LGA survey, around four in five responding councils said they would be unable to set a balanced general fund budget in 2028 to 2029 if deficits transfer on to their books as planned.
- The LGA is urging government to write off historic high needs deficits in the final Local Government Finance Settlement, and to pursue wholesale reform so deficits do not rapidly rebuild.
- The government is expected to set out SEND reform proposals in a forthcoming schools white paper.

SEND high needs deficits: statutory override cliff edge and budget risk for councils

- Budget setting and resilience: finance teams face significant uncertainty for 2028 to 2029, requiring scenario planning for the end of the override, including impacts on reserves, s151 assurance, and medium-term financial strategy.
- Programme and governance overhead: deficit management and recovery plans increase reporting burden, scrutiny cycles, schools forum engagement, and audit evidence requirements.
- SEND operational pressure: rising demand drives workload in assessment, EHCP timeliness, commissioning, placement management, and tribunal casework, with knock on effects for customer contact and complaints handling.
- Commissioning and cost control: if reforms aim to support more children in mainstream provision, councils and partners will need stronger inclusion planning, consistent banding and top up approaches, and tighter contract and market management to control costs without service failure.
- Service planning risk: the LGA argues that without system reform, even a one off write off would not solve the underlying drivers, meaning councils could face repeated cycles of deficit build up and emergency financial management.



Bank of England

Bank of England
holds Bank Rate
at 3.75% and
signals possible
cuts

Decision and rationale

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted to keep Bank Rate unchanged at 3.75%.
- Vote split was close; 5 members supported holding rates, 4 preferred a cut.
- The MPC noted inflation had eased, with CPI inflation falling from 3.8% (September) to 3.4% (December).
- The MPC said the risk of persistent inflation had become less pronounced, but flagged risks from weaker demand and a loosening labour market.
- The Governor indicated inflation is expected to return to around 2% by spring; if conditions remain favourable, there may be scope for rate reductions later this year

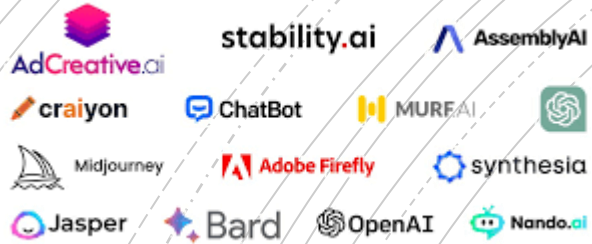


Bank of England

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holds Bank Rate
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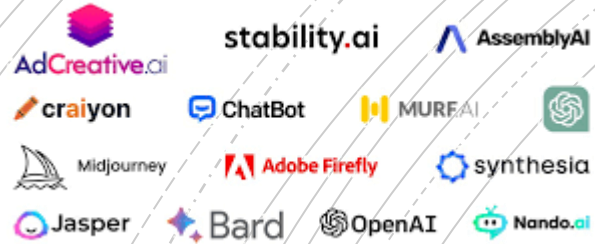
Operational and administrative impacts for services

- Household finances and demand: unchanged rates keep borrowing costs higher for longer, which can sustain pressure on household budgets; this may increase demand for welfare support, debt advice, discretionary support, and crisis assistance.
- Council tax and arrears workload: higher borrowing costs and wider cost pressures can increase arrears risk; expect continued need for early intervention, payment arrangement management, and vulnerability handling.
- Supplier and contract pressures: businesses continue to cite labour costs as a major pressure and many expect to raise prices; councils may see continued cost pressures in commissioned services and contracts, with increased variation and renegotiation activity.
- Budget planning and forecasting: the signal that cuts “could be on the way” increases uncertainty across the year; teams may need to run multiple scenarios for demand, income collection, and inflation linked contract uplifts.
- Front line communications: more resident queries are likely if rates are held while inflation falls; ensure clear scripts for customer services on what the decision means, and what support routes exist.



AI driven fraud: rising risks and required controls for public sector bodies

- Public sector bodies are facing faster, more sophisticated fraud as criminals use AI to scale attacks and improve the quality of deception, while organisations are often forced into a reactive posture.
- Reported fraud techniques include deepfake enabled social engineering and the use of generative AI to produce convincing forged documents and synthetic identities.
- A stated method is combining leaked personal data with AI generated identity documents, plus supporting “proof” such as fabricated utility or council tax bills, creating a frontline verification challenge.
- Data sharing and improved detection technologies can help (for example, detecting patterns across councils, such as tenancy fraud), but adoption needs to keep pace with attacker innovation.
- There is also a risk that rushed AI deployment increases exposure, including cyber-attacks that target AI enabled systems and the data they rely on.



AI driven fraud: rising risks and required controls for public sector bodies

Impacts on administration of services

- Customer contact and verification: higher volumes of realistic forged documents increase manual checking, escalation rates, and call handling time; teams will need clearer verification scripts and thresholds for second line review.
- Evidence handling and casework: greater risk of manipulated documents increases workload for scan to case processes, document validation, and audit ready decision records, especially in high volume benefits, council tax, housing, and grants workflows.
- Cross organisation working: stronger data sharing becomes more operationally important, requiring agreed data standards, lawful sharing routes, and join up across services and with partners.
- AI governance and assurance workload: councils adopting AI will need defined data provenance, access controls, regular assurance testing (including red teaming), and robust audit trails with clear ownership; these are ongoing admin tasks, not one off set up activities.
- Security and resilience: higher likelihood of targeted probing of controls means more frequent control reviews, staff awareness refreshers, and incident triage, with implications for training capacity and prioritisation

Barnsley “tech town” pilot: applying AI in local public services and skills

- Barnsley has been positioned by the government as the UK’s first “tech town”, intended as a demonstrator for how AI can be applied to everyday public services and local productivity.
- The initiative involves major US technology firms (reported as Microsoft, Google, Cisco and Adobe) supporting local activity to apply AI across schools, health services (including hospitals and GP related activity), and businesses.
- Barnsley Council is presented as an early adopter, with reported use of AI assistants in adult social care and children’s services, and technology enabled refuse vehicles scanning for potholes.
- The offer described includes free AI and digital training for residents, support for businesses to adopt AI, trials in the local hospital (check in, triage, outpatient pathways), and testing in schools and Barnsley College focused on attainment and teacher workload.
- The role and funding model for the technology firms is described as uncertain in parts; some support is reported as pro bono, with questions raised about whether government funding will follow.

Barnsley “tech town” pilot: applying AI in local public services and skills

Impacts on administration of services

- Delivery governance: a place-based pilot will require clear programme governance, agreed success measures, and consistent sign off on what is being tested, where, and why (to avoid fragmentation across services).
- Information governance and cyber controls: using AI in health, education and social care increases the need for robust data controls, supplier assurance, and clear boundaries on access and reuse, especially where large external vendors are involved.
- Workforce and change management: free training and service trials increase demand for internal training coordination, digital support, staff comms, and operating procedures to manage new tools alongside business as usual.
- Service redesign overhead: pilots in triage, outpatient workflows, and school settings tend to generate additional work in process mapping, risk assessment, incident handling, evaluation, and benefits tracking before any scale up is justified.
- Public trust and customer contact: local concerns about whether AI is “a force for good” suggest additional workload in engagement, transparency, and complaint handling, alongside the need to demonstrate that core service basics are not being deprioritised



Department for Work & Pensions

Child poverty projections in low- income households (UK), FYE 2025 to FYE 2031

- This is the Department for Work and Pensions' current best estimate of future child low-income poverty trends, based on the policy position after Budget 2025.
- These are projections, not a forecast; they are produced under a specific set of assumptions and are subject to a high degree of uncertainty.
- The central headline is 4.2 million children in relative low income after housing costs (AHC) in FYE 2030, described as a reduction of 500,000 across the Parliament period (FYE 2025 to FYE 2030).
- Projections are provided for four measures: relative and absolute low income, each before and after housing costs (BHC and AHC).
- The publication notes a large fall between FYE 2026 and FYE 2027 in both sets of projections, linked to removal of the two-child limit.



Department for Work & Pensions

Child poverty projections in low- income households (UK), FYE 2025 to FYE 2031

Impacts on administration of services

- Demand planning and targeting: even where the overall trend is downward by 2030, the profile includes year to year changes; councils, schools and partners will need to plan capacity and targeting for fluctuating demand (for example, crisis support, local welfare help, free school meal uptake, and family support).
- Assurance and communications: because the figures are modelled and rounded, teams will need clear briefing lines explaining that projections are indicative, not a precise forecast, and that levels can change materially at future fiscal events even without policy changes.
- Data and performance reporting: the methodology applies projected changes to the latest HBAI baseline (FYE 2024) and states FYE 2025 levels are projected; this matters for how services report trends, compare to local datasets, and explain differences between administrative data and survey-based measures.
- Partnership coordination: the series will be used in local strategies and needs assessments; councils may face increased requests to evidence how local plans align with projected need, particularly for children's services, housing support, and cost of living responses.



UK Government

Two child limit legislation and Crisis and Resilience Fund: new national approach to child poverty and local crisis support

- The government says legislation to end the two-child limit has reached second reading in Parliament (3 February 2026).
- Local authorities in England are to receive a new £1 billion Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), described as a major investment in local crisis support.
- The CRF launches in April 2026 and runs on a multi-year basis until 31 March 2029, intended to replace annual funding cycles with longer term certainty.
- The CRF replaces the Household Support Fund and incorporates housing support funding, including bringing Discretionary Housing Payments into a single consolidated grant for England.
- The department has issued CRF guidance for local authorities and separate management information and combined reporting requirements.



UK Government

Two child limit legislation and Crisis and Resilience Fund: new national approach to child poverty and local crisis support

Impacts on administration of services

- Scheme redesign and transition: councils will need to migrate from Household Support Fund processes and align housing support activity within the new CRF framework, with updated local policies, eligibility pathways, and decision-making controls.
- Planning and governance overhead: the multiyear settlement supports longer term programme design, but also requires stronger delivery planning, governance, and evidence of local targeting and outcomes.
- Reporting and assurance: the reporting requirements introduce ongoing administrative work to produce delivery plans and management information returns, with a need for robust audit trails and consistent categorisation across preventative and crisis spend.
- Joined up support delivery: guidance signposts interventions such as debt advice, support to access entitlements, help with housing cost shortfalls, and holiday support for children; this increases the need for coordinated referral routes across council teams and commissioned providers.
- Operational demand effects: removal of the two-child limit is intended to reduce child poverty pressures over time; in the short term, councils should expect heightened resident contact and enquiries as national changes and new local support arrangements go live



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP PSCS API uprating: April 2026 requirements for HB and local Council Tax Reduction

- DWP is responsible for sharing uprated Pension Strategy Computer System (PSCS) amounts with local authorities each year when PSCS hosted benefits (for example State Pension) are uprated.
- All local authorities should use the PSCS Application Programming Interface (API) uprating solution for annual bulk uprating and claim maintenance.
- Using accurate PSCS uprating amounts when reviewing Housing Benefit and local Council Tax Reduction awards helps prevent overpayments and underpayments.
- Authorities should not apply a blanket percentage increase to PSCS amounts for each claim; this can result in incorrect awards.
- For April 2026 uprated details retrieved via the PSCS API, the effective date to use is 17 April 2026; this is to ensure all retrieved records have been uprated because payment dates can fall on any day of the week.
- PSCS uprating guidance for local authority users is on Glasscubes



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP PSCS API uprating: April 2026 requirements for HB and local Council Tax Reduction

Impacts on administration of services

- Process and system compliance: teams must align annual uprating activity to the PSCS API workflow, including bulk uprating routines and claim maintenance processes, to avoid reliance on manual percentage-based methods.
- Quality assurance and error reduction: using API derived uprated figures should reduce miscalculations, cutting the downstream workload associated with correcting awards, revising bills, and handling dispute and complaint volumes.
- Timing and operational planning: the mandated effective date of 17 April 2026 needs to be built into local schedules, scripts, and supplier run books to prevent partial uprates and rework.
- Training and guidance uptake: staff who review pension income evidence will need a consistent approach and familiarity with the Glasscubes guidance; supervisors will need to monitor adherence and address exceptions.
- Customer contact and recovery: fewer overpayments and underpayments should reduce recovery casework and resident contact, but any deviation from the API process risks spikes in adjustments, arrears work, and explanations to claimants.

Quote of the Week

“We made some assumptions that we would come in here and find some of the craziness that [Musk’s] Doge found in America ... and that was wrong, we didn’t find any of that.” - Paul Chamberlain

Paul Chamberlain is a Reform UK councillor on Kent County Council for the Herne Bay East division, elected in May 2025. He serves as Deputy Cabinet Member for Corporate and Traded Services.

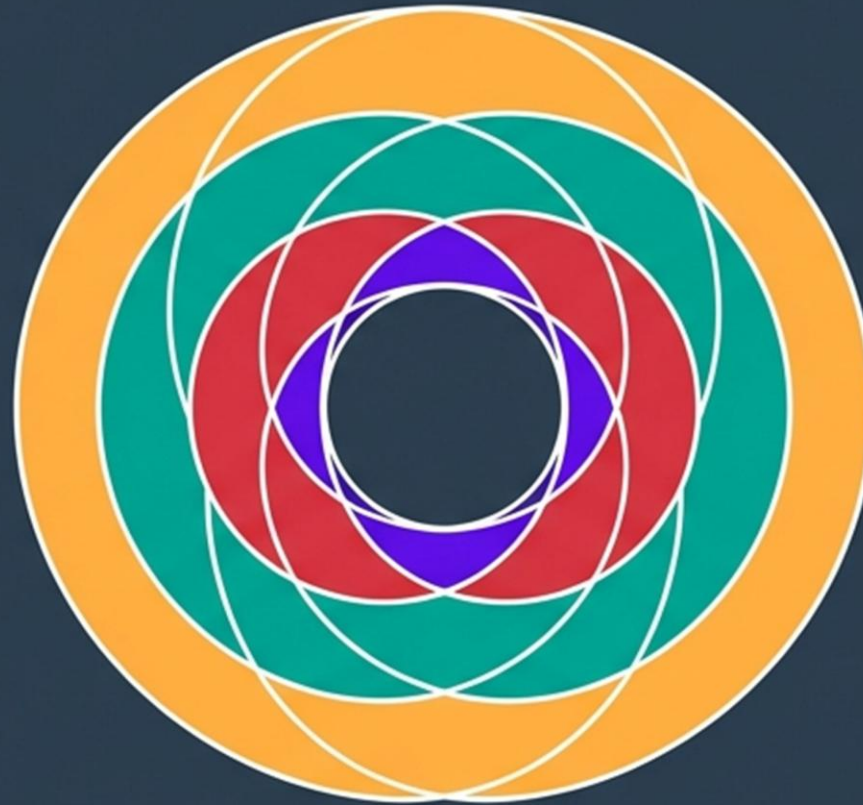




Sideway View

Fairness in Focus: A Compliance Framework for Council Tax Reduction Consultations

Operationalizing the Gunning Principles for robust decision-making.



OPERATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR COUNCIL OFFICERS AND LEGAL TEAMS

The necessity of genuine consultation

Council Tax Reduction (CTR) schemes are high-impact and frequently litigated. Fairness is tested against the common law standards set in *R v London Borough of Brent (Gunning)*, endorsed by the Supreme Court in *R (Moseley) v London Borough of Haringey*.

Key Insight: Fairness is not a box-ticking exercise; it is a legal requirement to ensure the decision-maker is fully informed before finalizing a scheme.

“

Consultation must be fair and allow for meaningful public influence.

— Ref: *R (Moseley) v London Borough of Haringey*



The Four Gunning Principles



1. Formative Stage

Consult while proposals are still formative. The decision-maker must not have a closed mind.



2. Sufficient Information

Give enough reasons and information for an intelligent response. People must understand the practical effects and the trade-offs.



3. Adequate Time

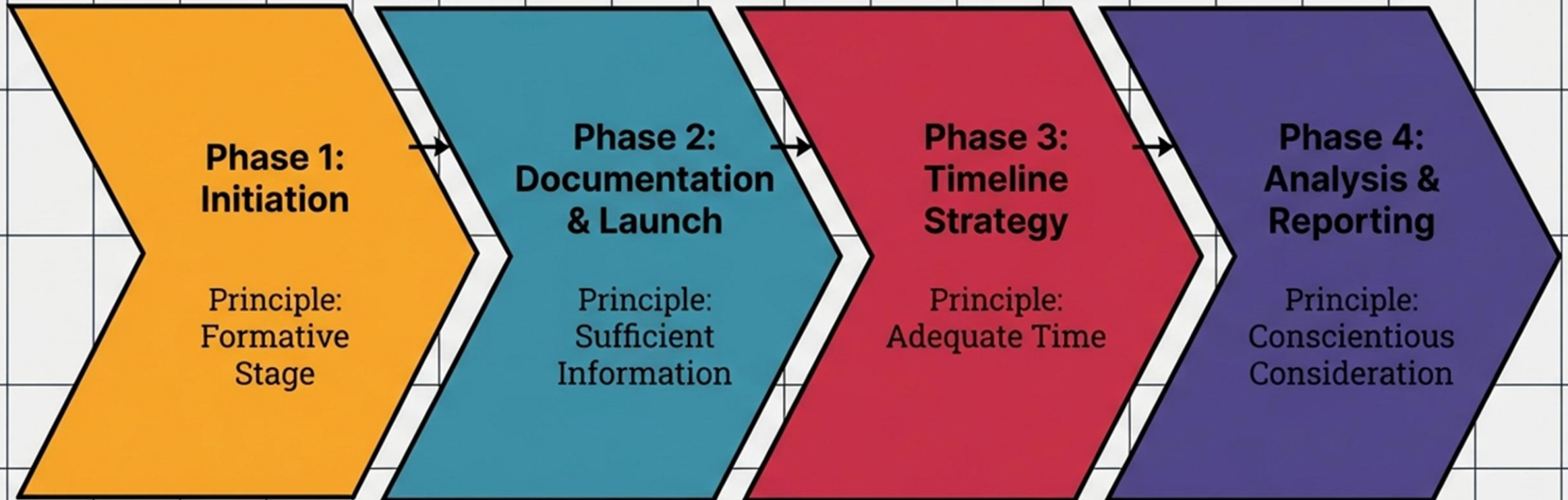
Allow adequate time for consideration and response. Timeframes must be proportionate to complexity and audience.



4. Conscientious Consideration

Conscientiously take responses into account. The final report must show how feedback influenced the decision.

Mapping the principles to the project lifecycle



The following slides provide specific checklists for each of these operational phases.

Phase 1: Project Initiation and Parameters

Linked Principle: Formative Stage



Is the proposal
genuinely
formative?

Approval to Consult Prompts

- ✓ **Open to Change:** Define variables (e.g., tapers, disregards, band edges, transitional support, implementation timing).
- ✓ **Fixed Constraints:** Define what is non-negotiable (e.g., financial envelope, statutory constraints, protected classes).
- ✓ **Material Evidence:** Identify what evidence will influence the decision (e.g., equality impacts, admin feasibility, collection risk).

The Evidence Trail

- Minutes or decision notes must confirm no final decision has been taken.
- Include a 'decision points and parameters' section in the approval report.



Roboto Slab

Is there sufficient
information for an
intelligent response?

Phase 2: Drafting the Consultation Document

Linked Principle: Sufficient Information

Inter

Document Content Prompts

- ☐ **Current vs. Proposed:** Describe the current scheme in plain English and set out proposed changes precisely (what, who, when).
- ☐ **The Why:** Explain the problem being solved and the rationale for the change.
- ☐ **Alternatives:** Include realistic alternatives considered, with brief pros/cons, and why the preferred option is recommended.

Inter

Good Practice Attachments

- Short, plain English summary (2-4 pages).
- Technical annex with rules/assumptions.
- FAQ and Easy Read versions.

Phase 2: Impact Data and Worked Examples

Linked Principle: Sufficient Information (Continued)



Can the public understand the financial impact?

Realistic Impact Information

- ☐ **Worked Examples:** Scenarios for typical households showing financial changes.
- ☐ **Headline Numbers:** Total households gaining, losing, or unaffected.
- ☐ **Ranges:** Data on weekly changes (e.g., £0–£2, £5+) and changes to minimum payments.
- ☐ **Equality:** Indicative equality impacts and mitigations, with a statement of limitations.

Red Flag



Avoid technical jargon. Rules detail belongs in an annex; the main document must focus on practical effects.



Roboto Slab

Strategic Question:
Is the time allowed
proportionate and fair?

Phase 3: Setting the Consultation Timeline

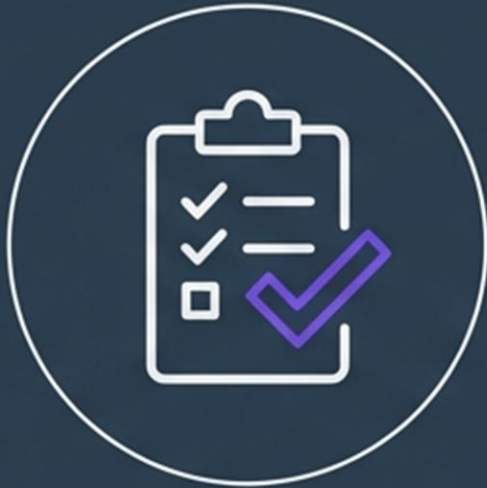
Linked Principle: Adequate Time

Inter Timeline Prompts

- ☐ **Duration:** For CTR, 8 weeks is often treated as a sensible minimum.
- ☐ **Timing:** Avoid low-engagement periods (major holidays) or add mitigations (extensions, targeted outreach).
- ☐ **Internal Buffers:** Build time for accessibility checks before launch and equality assessment updates post-response.

Inter Record Keeping

Document the rationale for the chosen length and specific mitigations used to support accessibility and engagement.



Strategic Question:
Are responses being
addressed, not just
counted?

Phase 4: Analysis and Consideration

Linked Principle: Conscientious Consideration

Analysis Prompts

- ☑ **Methodology:** Define how responses are captured (online, paper, email) and analyzed (themes vs. volumes).
- ☑ **Substance:** Ensure substantive points are addressed specifically.
- ☑ **Governance:** Define the route for changes (who decides, what additional modelling is needed).

Required Outputs

- A **consultation log** (issues raised vs. council response).
- A '**You Said, We Did**' summary.
- **List of amendments** made or **rejected** (with reasons).



Strategic Question:
Is the decision-making
process defensible and
transparent?

The Decision Report: Proving Compliance (Part 1)

Required sections for the final Cabinet/Council Report.



A. What was consulted on

State preferred proposal and alternatives. Confirm constraints and that no final decision was taken prior.



B. Information given

Link to main documents, summaries, and impact assessments (gainers/losers). Summarize the rationale and key trade-offs.



C. Timescales and engagement

Dates, duration, and accessibility steps (translations, formats). **Explain why the period** was adequate.

The Decision Report: Proving Compliance (Part 2)

The response to feedback.

D. Responses received

Total sources and key themes (balanced summary including opposition).
Avoid only presenting percentages without addressing substance.

E. Impact on Proposal (Critical)

Table of main issues raised and the council's response. Clear statement of changes made, changes rejected (with reasons), and mitigations added.

F. Equality & Mitigation

Summary of impacts, proportionate mitigations, and monitoring commitments.

G. Implementation

Statutory deadlines, publication plans, and systems readiness.

Common Pitfalls and Red Flags

DON'T



Pre-determination: Consulting after the political decision is effectively taken.

Opacity: Using overly technical materials with no real impact information.

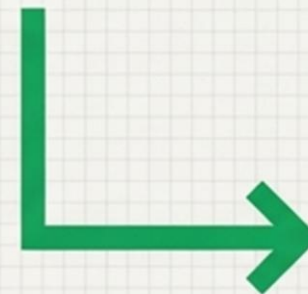
Bad Timing: Consulting during holidays without compensating steps.

Superficial Reporting: Summarizing response statistics without engaging with the substantive arguments.

THE FIX



Ensure the decision trail explicitly links feedback to outcomes.



The You Said, We Did Approach

The Compliance Scorecard

	☒ Formative: Minutes exist confirming the decision was open.
	☒ Informative: Plain English impact data (gainers/losers) and alternatives were published.
	☒ Timely: 8+ weeks allowed, avoiding holiday dead-zones.
	☒ Conscientious: Final report details specific changes made (or reasons for rejection) based on feedback.

If it isn't written down, it didn't happen. Ensure the evidence trail is complete.



· TOWN · HALL ·

LGR & Finance Watch

- Government has scaled back the statutory intervention at Nottingham City Council, citing significant progress since commissioners were appointed in February 2024.
- Commissioners began stepping back from November 2025 as the council took increasing ownership of day to day operations.
- Commissioners will conclude their work on 22 February 2026, with decision making powers returning fully to the council when the February 2024 Directions end.
- Government position is that progress is real but fragile; the council is judged not yet meeting its Best Value Duty in two areas: Continuous Improvement and Service Delivery.
- A reduced package of statutory support is proposed for 18 months, to be reviewed after 12 months; oversight would be through two ministerial envoys acting in an advisory capacity, without commissioner decision making powers

The background of the slide is a photograph of a row of historic, multi-story brick buildings in Nottingham, likely the City Council's offices. The buildings feature traditional architecture with multiple windows and gabled roofs. A green semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the title text.

Nottingham City Council: Government intervention scaled back as commissioners step down

Impacts on administration of services

- Governance and decision pathways: return of powers to the council should reduce delays associated with commissioner sign off, but requires robust internal assurance to avoid regression.
- Continuous improvement administration: expectation of a Continuous Improvement Plan, external input and regular reporting will continue to draw management capacity into programme governance, reporting cadence, and evidence management.
- Financial management processes: finance function redesign, simplified processes and more regular financial reporting should improve budget monitoring and in year control but needs sustained compliance from budget holders.
- Workforce and training: mandatory budget holder training creates a measurable delivery task for HR, finance and directorates; uptake monitoring and skills maintenance become ongoing requirements.
- Service improvement focus: government explicitly flags children's and adults' services as needing transformational change; this typically increases demand for performance management, improvement planning, audit trail quality, and consistent operational controls.

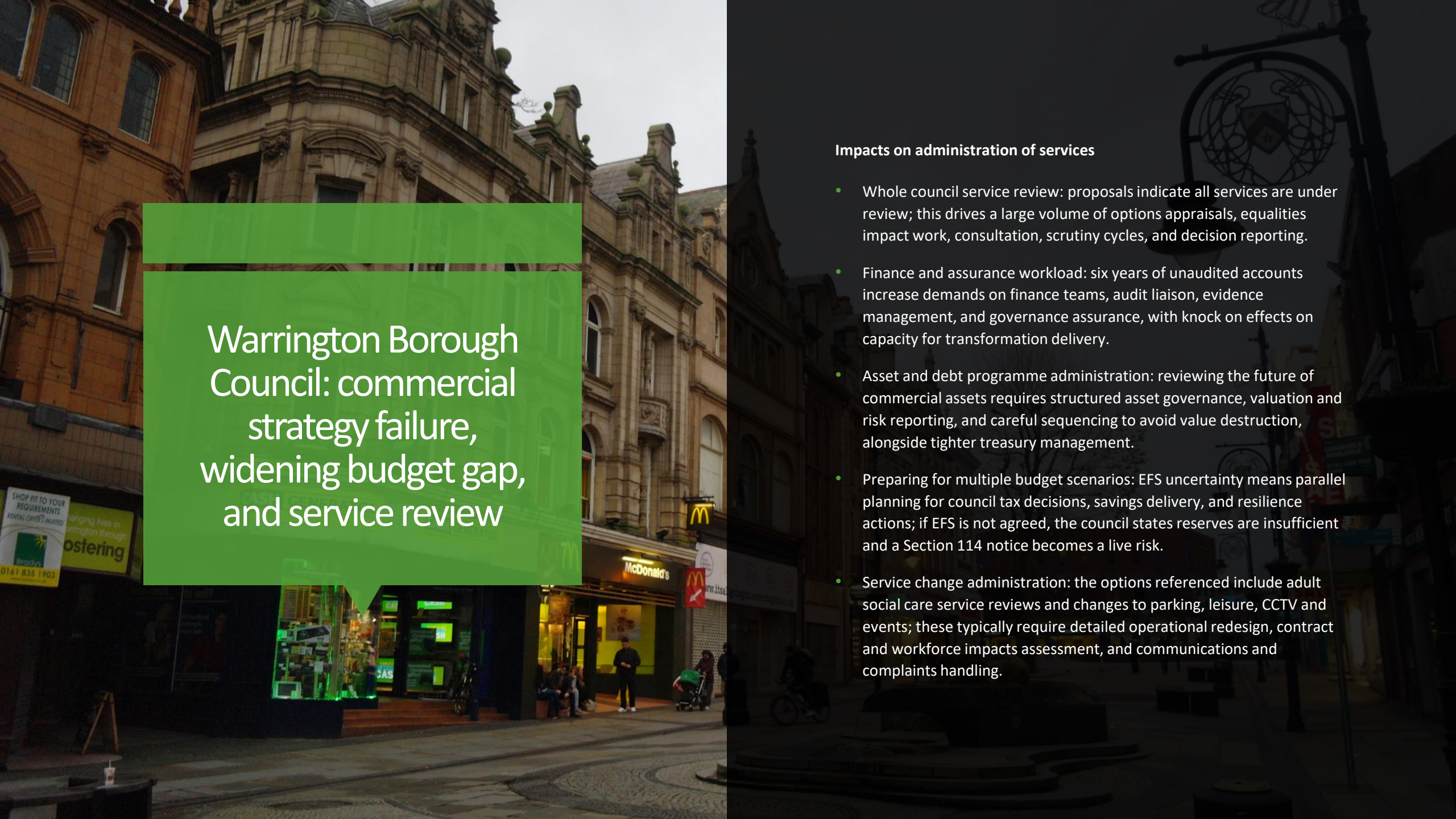
The background of the slide is a photograph of the Nottingham City Council building, a large, ornate red-brick structure with multiple stories, many windows, and a prominent central tower with a spire. The image is slightly blurred and has a dark overlay on the left side where the text is located.

Nottingham City
Council: Government
intervention scaled
back as commissioners
step down



Warrington Borough Council: commercial strategy failure, widening budget gap, and service review

- Warrington Borough Council says its commercial approach has failed; the council states it borrowed too much and took on too much risk and will now assess the future of all commercial assets.
- The council's estimated funding gap has widened to £130m (revised from an initial £90m), with an additional £40m budget shortfall identified and savings proposals being developed.
- The council reports around six years of unaudited accounts, which is contributing to uncertainty and to the scale of the challenge.
- The council says the portfolio has declined significantly in value, creating a potential liability of around £275m; it says there will be no "fire sale" of assets.
- The council has applied for exceptional financial support (EFS) from government; it expects the outcome in late February 2026, ahead of budget setting in early March 2026.

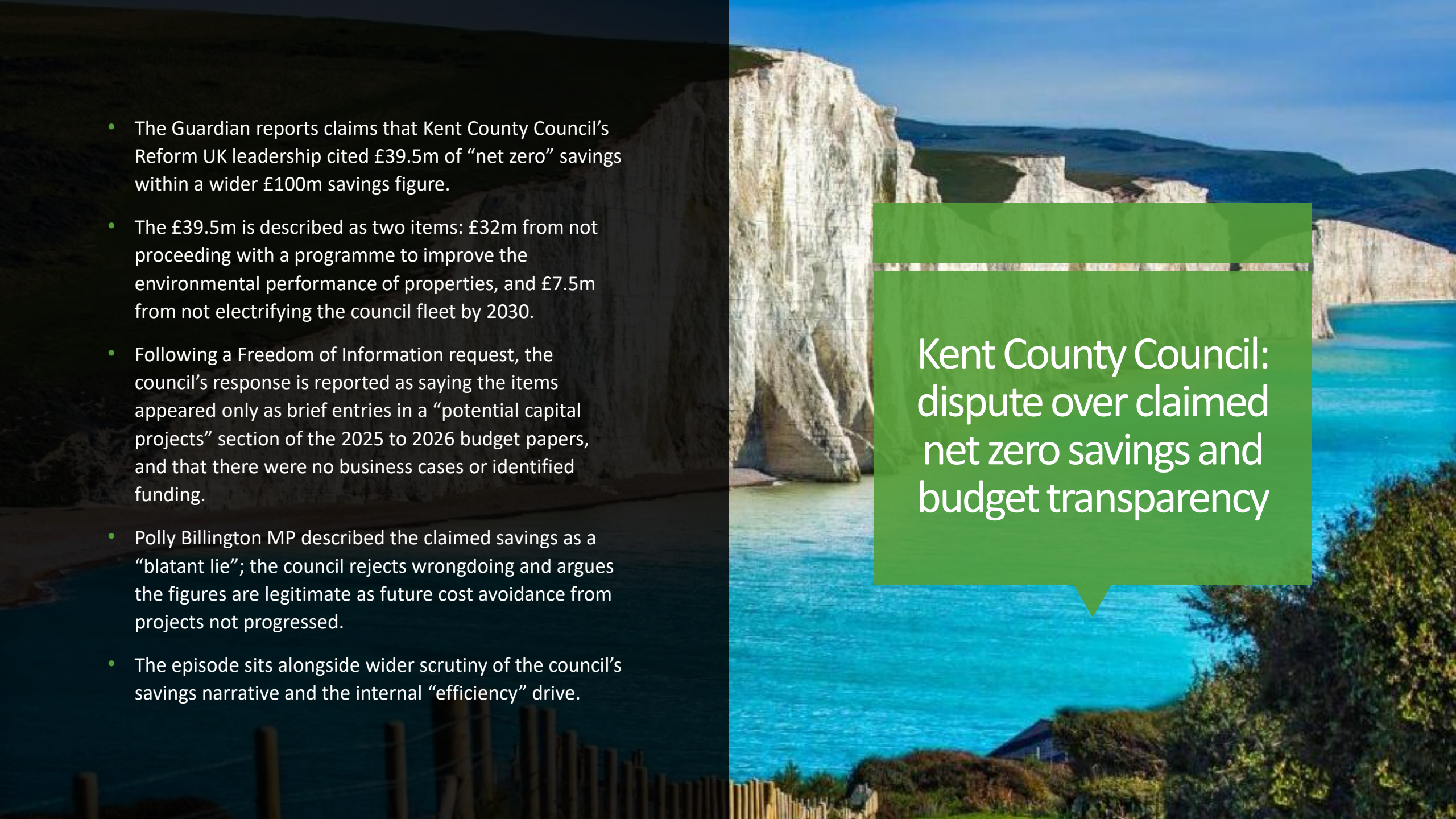


Warrington Borough Council: commercial strategy failure, widening budget gap, and service review

Impacts on administration of services

- Whole council service review: proposals indicate all services are under review; this drives a large volume of options appraisals, equalities impact work, consultation, scrutiny cycles, and decision reporting.
- Finance and assurance workload: six years of unaudited accounts increase demands on finance teams, audit liaison, evidence management, and governance assurance, with knock on effects on capacity for transformation delivery.
- Asset and debt programme administration: reviewing the future of commercial assets requires structured asset governance, valuation and risk reporting, and careful sequencing to avoid value destruction, alongside tighter treasury management.
- Preparing for multiple budget scenarios: EFS uncertainty means parallel planning for council tax decisions, savings delivery, and resilience actions; if EFS is not agreed, the council states reserves are insufficient and a Section 114 notice becomes a live risk.
- Service change administration: the options referenced include adult social care service reviews and changes to parking, leisure, CCTV and events; these typically require detailed operational redesign, contract and workforce impacts assessment, and communications and complaints handling.

- The Guardian reports claims that Kent County Council's Reform UK leadership cited £39.5m of "net zero" savings within a wider £100m savings figure.
- The £39.5m is described as two items: £32m from not proceeding with a programme to improve the environmental performance of properties, and £7.5m from not electrifying the council fleet by 2030.
- Following a Freedom of Information request, the council's response is reported as saying the items appeared only as brief entries in a "potential capital projects" section of the 2025 to 2026 budget papers, and that there were no business cases or identified funding.
- Polly Billington MP described the claimed savings as a "blatant lie"; the council rejects wrongdoing and argues the figures are legitimate as future cost avoidance from projects not progressed.
- The episode sits alongside wider scrutiny of the council's savings narrative and the internal "efficiency" drive.



Kent County Council: dispute over claimed net zero savings and budget transparency

Impacts on administration of services

- Budget governance and assurance: disputes over whether figures represent deliverable savings or uncommitted cost avoidance increase the need for clear definitions, stronger audit trails, and consistent treatment in budget papers, scrutiny reports, and public statements.
- Finance team workload: Freedom of Information requests and evidence challenges create additional demands on finance, legal, information governance, and communications teams; delays and contested disclosures add to administrative burden.
- Decision making discipline: where items are listed as indicative or “potential” capital projects, stronger internal controls are needed on when, and how, such items are cited as savings, including sign off routes and supporting documentation standards.
- Reputational risk management: public disputes about financial claims tend to increase member and officer time spent on responding to challenge, clarifying terminology, and maintaining trust with residents and partners, which can distract from operational delivery.
- Medium term planning clarity: framing choices as cost avoidance rather than cashable savings affects how services plan delivery, because it changes assumptions about what is actually available to spend, save, or reallocate.

A scenic photograph of a coastline with white cliffs and a blue sea. A green speech bubble is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text 'Kent County Council: dispute over claimed net zero savings and budget transparency'.

Kent County Council:
dispute over claimed
net zero savings and
budget transparency

Local government
reorganisation:
consultations launched
on 52 unitary proposals
in 14 areas

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has launched statutory consultations on 52 local government reorganisation proposals across 14 areas.
- The 14 areas are: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough; Derbyshire and Derby; Devon, Plymouth and Torbay; Gloucestershire; Hertfordshire; Kent and Medway; Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen; Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland; Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Northeast Lincolnshire; Nottinghamshire and Nottingham; Oxfordshire; Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent; Warwickshire; Worcestershire.
- The government position is that this programme will replace two tier local government with unitary councils, aiming to reduce duplication and improve clarity for residents.
- Ministers have carried out a preliminary assessment of submissions but will not complete a full assessment against the published criteria until after consultation closes, so all evidence can be considered.
- Consultation is open to residents, organisations and businesses and is being run via the department's Citizen Space platform, with responses also accepted by email or post.

Local government
reorganisation:
consultations launched
on 52 unitary proposals
in 14 areas

Impacts on administration of services

- Programme and governance load: councils will need dedicated capacity for consultation management, evidence collation, option appraisal, member governance, and audit trails that demonstrate local engagement and rationale.
- Operating model transition planning: proposals for new unitaries typically require early work on service integration, senior structures, governance arrangements, and the design of customer access, complaint handling, and democratic support.
- Finance, assets, and workforce administration: reorganisation planning tends to increase workload on financial modelling, reserves and debt treatment, harmonisation of fees and charges, contract management, workforce consultation, and HR casework.
- Digital and data implications: councils will need plans for system consolidation, information governance, records retention, data matching and migration; this includes ensuring consultation materials are accessible to digitally excluded groups.
- Interdependencies: proposals may include boundary change requests and will need to align with wider devolution arrangements; this can add complexity to planning, governance, and stakeholder management.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](#)

Legal Issues of Note

Court of Appeal clarifies HMO licensing exemption for cooperative housing providers

- Nottingham City Council has succeeded in the Court of Appeal in litigation about whether Housing 35 Plus Limited (H35) could rely on a cooperative society exemption from HMO licensing under the Housing Act 2004.
- The council had issued civil financial penalties of £15,000 in relation to two properties for operating unlicensed HMOs, which H35 appealed.
- The First tier Tribunal initially upheld H35's appeal; Nottingham then succeeded in the Upper Tribunal, which found H35 did not meet the legal conditions for the exemption (in particular, that the rules did not "secure" that all management decisions were taken by members at a general meeting).
- H35 appealed to the Court of Appeal; the appeal was dismissed, confirming the properties are not exempt from HMO licensing on the basis argued.
- The matter is reported as returning to the First tier Tribunal to consider remaining issues, including any reasonable excuse and whether the penalty amounts were appropriate.

Court of Appeal clarifies HMO licensing exemption for cooperative housing providers

Impacts on administration of services

- Licensing workload increase: councils are likely to see more properties and providers falling within licensing, increasing application processing, inspections, compliance follow up, and case management demand.
- Enforcement evidence standards: where a provider asserts an exemption, teams will need tighter documentary checks of governance and decision-making arrangements, and clearer evidence packs for tribunal resilience.
- Tribunal and legal casework: the case illustrates the time and resource intensity of complex enforcement; councils may need to plan capacity for appeals, witness evidence, and ongoing litigation management.
- Communications and landlord engagement: the ruling provides a clearer basis to brief landlords, agents, and supported housing operators on when the co operative exemption does, and does not, apply, reducing repeat disputes but increasing initial engagement activity.
- Cross service coordination: more licensed properties typically means higher throughput for property standards, safeguarding referrals, anti social behaviour interfaces, and data sharing between housing enforcement and neighbourhood teams



Other Workshops



Replay: Public Finance x Visionary Network 2 April 12:00

Title: Crisis, Cuts & Community: Rethinking Local Tax & Support in the 114 Era

Link: <https://view6.workcast.net/register?cpak=6070531364001666>

Access the recording





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Moreton**

CEO



**Mark
Thomas**

Operations



**Chris
Sharratt**

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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



Revenues Manager (Academy)



3 months initially | £450 per day Umbrella | Hybrid

Purpose and impact:

The role of the Revenues Manager is to ensure delivery of a high-quality Council Tax and Business Rates (NDR) billing and recovery service in line with customer requirements and regulations and to drive forward cost-efficient digital services and performance. As part of the Management Team the role holder will deputise for the AD and provide strong professional leadership and management for the Revenues service for West Northamptonshire Council.

Accountable to:

As part of the Revenues and Benefits Team in the wider Finance Directorate, the role holder is accountable to the Assistant Director of Revenues and Benefits, responsible for the direct line management of 7 Team Leaders.

What we're looking for:

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

- Management experience is essential as this role will be managing 7 direct reports
- Needs somebody who has experience dealing with poor performance
- Strong technical and management skills
- Extensive knowledge of Council Tax and Business Rates legislation
- Up to date knowledge of current best practice in both Council Tax and Business Rates
- Proven track record of finding creative solutions to a wide range of people management challenges
- Knowledge of local government policies and procedures

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

Revenues Manager (MRI/Academy)



Until 31/03/2026 initially | £350 per day Umbrella | Hybrid

Hours per week: 37

Location: Hybrid working (office attendance will be required in the midlands)

Job Purpose

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

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

What we're looking for:

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

- Strong technical and management skills
- Strong MRI/Academy user
- Extensive knowledge of Council Tax and Business Rates legislation
- Up to date knowledge of current best practice in both Council Tax and Business Rates
- Proven track record of finding creative solutions to a wide range of people management challenges
- Knowledge of local government policies and procedures

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

Revenues & Benefits Officer (Civica OpenRevenues)



Permanent | Circa £30,000.00 per annum | Remote

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

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

Duties include:

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

What we're looking for:

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

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

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

Court/Council Tax Officer (MRI/Academy)



12 Months | £27.97 per hour (umbrella) | London

Location: 2 days remote, 3 days in the office. This role includes representing the Council at Magistrates', County and High Court hearings as part of the statutory recovery process. Court lists may run beyond scheduled times, and the post holder must remain until all cases conclude. While most hearings occur within the borough, occasional travel to courts outside the borough is required. Flexibility with working hours on court days is essential to support effective enforcement and recovery actions.

Main Purpose of the job:

Administer Council Tax accounts and other revenue streams in line with legislation. Prepare and represent the Council in the Magistrates Court, County Court, High Court and Tribunals. Efficiently and effectively recover debts due to the Council. Assist with the management and monitoring of the Enforcement Agents and other collection agents. Maximise collection in accordance with Financial Procedures and statutory regulations. Provide a high standard of service to customers.

What we're looking for:

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

- 5 years Revenues (Council Tax) experience
- Must be a trained Court Officer, with the ability to represent the LA at Liability Order hearings
- 2 years MRI/Capita(Academy) system experience

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



Trainee Enforcement Agent

Permanent | £25,000pa (basic) | London (area)

About Us

An award-winning, nationwide Enforcement company, with a Head Office based in the Midlands and employees working up and down the UK and Wales. Our clients are largely local authorities for whom we collect unpaid council tax debt, business rates and more. We are a family run company with roughly 90 employees located across England and Wales. Due to the growth of the business, we are looking for driven, proactive and hard working Enforcement Agents to join our team in and around the South East.

Core responsibilities of the role include:

- Undertaking field based/Classroom training to learn the necessary skills to become a Certificated Enforcement Agent
- Travelling to various addresses, observing and job shadowing certificated Enforcement Agents
- Completion of training course resulting in Level 2 qualification in Taking Control of Goods
- Completion of the Level 2 Taking Control of Goods examination
- Attending the County Court, either in person or virtually to demonstrate that you are a fit and proper person to be certificated

What we're looking for:

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

- No experience is required as all training will be supplied
- Ideal candidates will have worked in relevant roles including Civil Enforcement, Armed Forces, Security, Police, Parking/traffic Management, and jobs where Customer Service is a key element of the role
- Full clean UK driving license is required (minimum of 2 years)

Working Hours: 40 hours per week, Flexible working arrangements between the hours of 6:00am and 9:00pm Monday to Saturday, working at least one late night per week

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

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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.



"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





Session Information

Previous Recordings





Dates where there will be no sessions





Stats & References

Kent County Council: cost cutting claims, Dolge controversy, and cabinet resignation

Key numbers and dates

- Draft council tax increase: 3.99% for 2026 to 27 (as set out in Kent's draft budget documentation and council communications).
- Band D, county council share: £1,758.60 (draft budget report).
- Publication date of the resignation coverage: 4 February 2026.

References and links

- Financial Times: "Reform councillor steps down as head of Kent's cost cutting drive" (4 February 2026).
- Financial Times: "Reform UK admits Kent council's Musk inspired cost cutting drive found little waste" (early February 2026).
- Kent County Council: Draft Revenue Budget 2026 to 27 and Medium-Term Financial Plan report (PDF, January 2026).
- Kent County Council: "KCC announces 3.99% council tax charge in draft budget proposals" (8 January 2026).
- The Municipal Journal: "Kent Dolge head resigns over 'lapse of judgement'" (4 February 2026).

END high needs deficits: statutory override cliff edge and budget risk for councils

Key numbers and dates

- Statutory override end date: March 2028.
- LGA survey: 79% of responding councils said they would not be able to set a balanced general fund budget in 2028 to 2029 if deficits moved on to the books.
- OBR forecast: cumulative high needs deficits reaching £14bn by end of 2027 to 2028.
- Prevalence of deficit: 95% of councils responding reported high needs DSG deficits.
- EHCP volume: 638,745 EHC plans as at January 2025 (often rounded to nearly 640,000).

References and links

- Local Government Association: “SEND crisis: vast majority of councils warn of insolvency and call for reform amid huge deficits” (news release).
- OBR: Economic and fiscal outlook, November 2025 (includes DSG deficit forecast and risks).
- DfE statistics: Education, health and care plans, Reporting year 2025 (January 2025 EHC plan count).
- Financial Times reporting on the LGA survey and the statutory override cliff edge.
- IFS analysis on the statutory override expiry and fiscal risk.

Bank of England holds Bank Rate at 3.75% and signals possible cuts

Key numbers and stats

- Bank Rate: 3.75% (held).
- MPC vote: 5 to hold, 4 in favour of a cut.
- CPI inflation: 3.8% (September) to 3.4% (December).
- MPC central expectation as quoted: inflation returning to around 2% by spring, with an MPC forecast suggesting return to target by April.

References and links

- Christian Doherty, “Bank of England keeps rates unchanged”, 6 February 2026
- Bank of England, Monetary Policy Committee decision, statement, minutes, and Monetary Policy Report, 6 February 2026
- IPPR comment attributed to William Ellis, senior
- British Chambers of Commerce comment attributed to David Bharier, Head of Research

AI driven fraud: rising risks and required controls for public sector bodies

Key numbers and stats

- 77% of anti-fraud professionals reported an acceleration in deepfake social engineering over the past two years.
- 83% expect these AI enabled schemes to increase further in the next two years.
- Less than one in ten feel well equipped to respond (as reported in the article).

References and links

- Public Finance analysis by Rachel Willcox, “AI is changing the fraud risks facing public sector organisations” (26 January 2026).
- SAS press release summarising early findings previewing the Anti Fraud Technology Benchmarking Report (16 November 2025).

Barnsley “tech town” pilot: applying AI in local public services and skills

Key numbers and dates

- Barnsley population referenced: around 250,000 people.
- National AI skills ambition referenced alongside the story: upskilling 10 million workers by 2030 (AI Skills related programme).
- Barnsley Council reported to have used AI assistants in adult social care and children’s services for the last couple of years.

References and links

- The Guardian, Robert Booth, Barnsley rebranded UK’s first “tech town” as US giants join AI push (3 Feb 2026).
- UK Government (DSIT), Free AI training for all, programme expands to provide 10 million workers with key AI skills by 2030 (28 Jan 2026).
- techUK, AI Skills Boost and courses on the AI Skills Hub (28 Jan 2026).

Child poverty projections in low- income households (UK), FYE 2025 to FYE 2031

Key numbers and stats (UK)

Relative low income, after housing costs (AHC), children:

- FYE 2025: 4.6 million (32%)
- FYE 2026: 4.8 million (33%)
- FYE 2027: 4.3 million (30%)
- FYE 2030: 4.2 million (29%)
- Change FYE 2025 to FYE 2030: minus 500,000, minus 3 percentage points

Other measures, change FYE 2025 to FYE 2030:

- Relative low income BHC: minus 400,000, minus 3 percentage points
- Absolute low income AHC: minus 400,000, minus 2 percentage points
- Absolute low income BHC: minus 400,000, minus 2 percentage points

References and links

- DWP, Low income poverty projections for children, FYE 2025 to FYE 2031, February 2026 (published 3 February 2026).
- Methodology links within the publication: “How low income is measured in households below average income statistics” and “Household below average income series: quality and methodology information report FYE 2024”

Two child limit legislation and Crisis and Resilience Fund: new national approach to child poverty and local crisis support

Key numbers and dates

- Crisis and Resilience Fund: £1 billion; England only; Fund period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029.
- Claimed child poverty impact of removing the two-child limit (as stated in the release): “lift 450,000 children out of poverty in the final year of this parliament”; the same release also refers to “lifting 550,000 children” (in the Minister quote).
- Delivery plan requirement (for relevant authorities): delivery plan for the Fund period due to DWP by 1 July 2026.
- Allocations: multiyear allocations are published within the consolidated grants allocations tables for 2026 to 2027 through 2028 to 2029.

References and links

- DWP news release, “£1 billion resilience fund and next step towards removal of two child limit provide safety net for families” (3 February 2026).
- DWP, “The Crisis and Resilience Fund: Guidance for local authorities in England (1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029)”.
- DWP, “Crisis and Resilience Fund: management information combined reporting requirements”.
- MHCLG, “Allocations tables for all consolidated grants from 2026 to 2027 to 2028 to 2029” (includes CRF allocations).
- House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee correspondence from the Minister (includes allocation approach detail)

DWP PSCS API uprating: April 2026 requirements for HB and local Council Tax Reduction

Key numbers and dates

- Required effective date for April 2026 PSCS API uprating retrieval: 17 April 2026.
- Scope: annual bulk uprating and claim maintenance affecting HB and local Council Tax Reduction where PSCS hosted benefits are in payment.

References and links

- DWP communication: “Pension Strategy Computer System Application Programming Interface uprating solution” (content provided).
- PSCS uprating guidance for local authority users (Glasscubes, internal).

Nottingham City Council: Government intervention scaled back as commissioners step down

Key numbers and dates

- Commissioners appointed: February 2024.
- Commissioners stepped back from day to day: from November 2025.
- Commissioners conclude: 22 February 2026.
- Reduced statutory support: 18 months, with a review after 12 months.
- Oversight model: two ministerial envoys, advisory capacity, no decision making powers.
- Council leader statement (reported): debt reduced by 64%, budget balanced without exceptional financial support.

Slide 4: References and links

- GOV.UK: Nottingham City Council, Ministerial response to the Commissioners' fourth report (published 4 February 2026).
- GOV.UK: Nottingham City Council, Letter to the Chief Executive
- UK Parliament, Hansard / Written ministerial statement on Local Government Best Value (4 February 2026).
- GOV.UK collection: Statutory intervention, Nottingham City Council
- Local Government Lawyer summary of the reduced package and envoys proposal (4 February 2026).

Warrington Borough Council: commercial strategy failure, widening budget gap, and service review

Key numbers and dates

- Debt linked to commercial investments: about £1.8bn (as reported).
- Funding gap: revised from £90m to £130m; additional £40m savings requirement identified.
- Portfolio risk / potential liability: around £275m.
- Key dates in the council's budget process: scrutiny 16 February 2026; cabinet 18 February 2026; full council budget 2 March 2026.
- EFS decision expected: late February 2026.

References and links

- Warrington Borough Council, "Explaining the Council's budget challenges" (6 February 2026).
- Warrington Worldwide, "Council budget will 'draw line in sand' ... to plug £130m funding gap" (6 February 2026).
- Warrington Worldwide, "Council to sell key assets including Birchwood Park... critical financial position" (6 February 2026).
- AOL syndicated coverage of the BBC report, "Commercial approach has failed, says council" (published 8 February 2026).

Kent County Council: dispute over claimed net zero savings and budget transparency

Key numbers and dates

- Kent County Council annual budget: about £2.5bn.
- Claimed savings headline: £100m total; £39.5m linked to two net zero related items.
- Breakdown cited: £32m (property environmental upgrades) and £7.5m (fleet electrification by 2030).
- Article published: 7 February 2026 (13:34 GMT).

References and links

- The Guardian, Peter Walker, "Reform run Kent council accused of fabricating £40m net zero savings", 7 February 2026.
- Financial Times, reporting on Kent's cost cutting drive and related claims, early February 2026.
- The Guardian, "Reform UK claim to have saved £331m at English councils, but do the numbers stack up?", 24 November 2025.

Local government reorganisation: consultations launched on 52 unitary proposals in 14 areas

Key numbers and dates

- Number of proposals consulted on: 52.
- Number of areas covered: 14.
- Consultation launch date: 5 February 2026.
- Consultation closing date: 26 March 2026 (Citizen Space consultation pages show “Closes 26 Mar 2026”).
- Context example: Surrey decision announced October 2025 to move from 12 councils to two unitaries (East Surrey and West Surrey).

References and links

- GOV.UK news release: “Major local government shakeup in 14 areas opens for views” (5 February 2026).
- GOV.UK publication: “Local government reorganisation: letter to council leaders” (5 February 2026) and attached PDF letter.
- UK Parliament written statement on Local Government Reorganisation (5 February 2026).
- Example consultation page (Citizen Space) showing close date and response routes (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough).
- Surrey context (unitary decision confirmation).

Court of Appeal clarifies HMO licensing exemption for cooperative housing providers

Key numbers and case stats

- Financial penalties referenced: two penalties of £15,000.
- Indicative scale in Nottingham (as stated by the council): licensing may be required for at least 70 properties.
- Court of Appeal hearing listed: 14 January 2026 (Judiciary live hearing listing) with the appeal being from the Upper Tribunal judgment dated 14 November 2024.

References and links

- West Bridgford Wire report (2 February 2026): Nottingham City Council wins significant housing case at Court of Appeal regarding HMO rules.
- Local Government Lawyer (early February 2026): summary of the Court of Appeal outcome and background.
- Judiciary live hearing listing: Housing 35 Plus Ltd v Nottingham City Council (Court of Appeal), hearing 14 January 2026.
- HMCTS case tracker entry (case details): Housing 35 Plus Limited v Nottingham City Council.
- Upper Tribunal judgment (14 November 2024) coverage and context: Nottingham City Council v Housing 35 Plus Ltd (requirements of paragraph 2B, Schedule 14, Housing Act 2004).



Blogs

Thoughts from the panel

Blogs



Budget 2025: Impacts on Revenues & Benefits Administration, Housing and Local Government Finance by Malcolm Gardner

[Budget 2025: Impacts on Revenues & Benefits Administration, Housing and Local Government Finance – Visionary Network](#)

Why We Should Not Be Surprised That Reform UK's Councils Are Struggling by Malcolm Gardner

[Why We Should Not Be Surprised That Reform UK's Councils Are Struggling – Visionary Network](#)

The Appointment of McFadden to DWPS by Malcolm Gardner

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/09/06/the-implications-of-pat-mcfaddens-appointment-to-work-pensions-and-skills/>

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

<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/06/19/the-case-for-plain-english-council-tax-reduction-schemes/>

Reform UK's "Department of National Efficiency": A High-Stakes Gamble in Local Government Reform By Malcolm Gardner

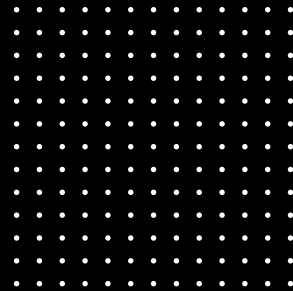
<https://visionarynetwork.co.uk/2025/06/09/reform-uks-department-of-national-efficiency-a-high-stakes-gamble-in-local-government-reform/>

<https://benefitsinthefuture.com/>



Benefits in the Future

Blogs



- 'tis the season to be jolly... misleading, in the Daily Mail
- Lies, Damned Lies and the Telegraph
- Big differences in Pension Credit take-up revealed – Benefits in the Future

Blogs

- [Benefit take-up may be getting worse, but it's hard to know](#) by Phil Agulnik
- Move to UC - Stats Update 12 August 25 by Phil Agulnik
 - [Move to UC - Stats Update 12 August 25](#)
- Could settling disputes through back-pay put benefits at risk? By Phil Agulnik
 - <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/blog/2023/january/could-settling-disputes-through-back-pay-put-benefits-at-risk>

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independent | accurate | reliable

Blogs & Reports

Stairway to headroom Putting the Autumn Budget 2025 decisions on tax, spending and borrowing into context

by [Hannah Aldridge](#) and [Mike Brewer](#) and [Elliott Christensen](#) and [Tom Clark](#) and [Alex Clegg](#) and [Nye Cominetti](#) and [Adam Corlett](#) and [Ruth Curtice](#) and [Julia Diniz](#) and [Sophie Hale](#) and [Lindsay Judge](#) and [Zachary Leather](#) and [Jonathan Marshall](#) and [Charlie McCurdy](#) and [Louise Murphy](#) and [Simon Pittaway](#) and [Hannah Slaughter](#) and [James Smith](#) and [Imogen Stone](#) and [Greg Thwaites](#) and [Lalitha Try](#)

The localisation era Assessing the post-2013 rise of localised social security by [Alex Clegg](#)

This report is part of the project [Safety Nets: social security for families in a devolved UK](#), funded by the Nuffield Foundation. It examines the growth of *localised social security* in the UK from 2013, focusing on how responsibilities for discretionary support and Council Tax Reduction (CTR) have shifted from the UK government to local authorities. Localised support makes up only a small share of overall social security spending, but it has expanded significantly, driven first by the 2013 localism reforms and later by the Covid-19 pandemic. The report evaluates when local delivery works well, where it falls short, and what principles should guide any future reform.

What the latest Universal Credit Health data tells us about benefit claims across Britain by Louise Murphy

[What the latest Universal Credit Health data tells us about benefit claims across Britain • Resolution Foundation](#)

A healthy State? Putting the 2025 Spending Review into context by RF Staff

[A healthy State? Putting the 2025 Spending Review into context by RF Staff](https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/healthy-state/hy State?) • Resolution Foundation



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VISIONARY NETWORK

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- 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.

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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.