

Disability reforms and devolved employment support: What does good look like?

Wednesday 27 August 2025

Housekeeping

- Audio check
- Please ask questions throughout
- Short survey
- Aim to finish by 11.45
- Slides and recording will follow
- Connect with us on LinkedIn and X ([@policy_practice](#))

We empower people

Policy

£23 billion of support is unclaimed each year

[Read our analysis](#)

Practice

Smart products help our clients efficiently close this unclaimed support gap

[View our Better Off platform](#)



Today's speakers



Deven Ghelani
Founder and
Director,
Policy in Practice



Jonathan Portes
Professor of Economics
and Public Policy,
King's College London



Zoe Tyndall
Head of Debt and
Financial Resilience,
London Borough of
Camden



Sam Fathers
Head of Commercial
Development
(South and Wales)
Policy in Practice

- **Employment: Policy context**

Deven Ghelani, Founder and Director, Policy in Practice

- **Employment support and incapacity benefits**

Jonathan Portes, Professor of Economics and Public Policy, King's College London and former Chief Economist at the Department for Work and Pensions

- **Increasing voluntary engagement with Employment Support**

Zoe Tyndall, Head of Debt and Financial Resilience, London Borough of Camden

- **Using the Better Off Platform to identify & engage with out of work households and track effectiveness of interventions**

Sam Fathers, Head of Commercial Development (South and Wales), Policy in Practice

- **Open discussion and Q&A**

Deven Ghelani

Founder and Director,
Policy in Practice

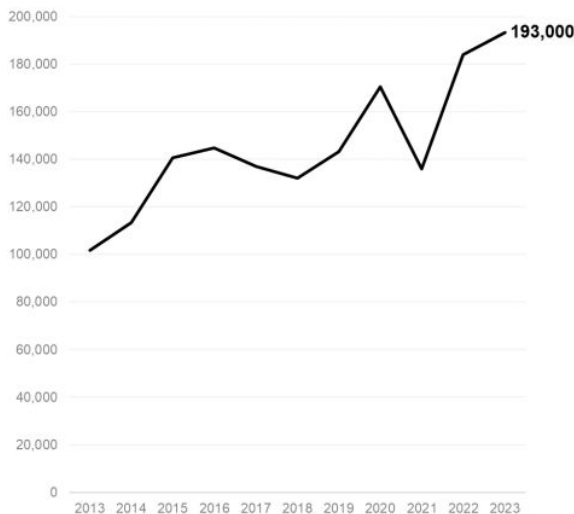
Employment: Policy context

policyinpractice.co.uk



National context

Figure 5: The number of young people in the UK aged 18-24 who are economically inactive because they are long-term sick¹³³



- 2.8 million people are out of work due to long-term sickness
- 800,000 more than before the pandemic
- One in eight young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET)
- The government say that “nothing less than radical reform is required” to tackle economic inactivity

Disability reforms: What's changed?

The [Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment bill](#) was scaled back:

- **Personal Independent Payment:** All reforms and changes for the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) have been halted, until the outcome of the [Timms Review](#).
- **Health element of UC:** People currently receiving the health element (LCWRA) of Universal Credit (UC) will see their support protected, while new claimants will see their support halved, then frozen, with access via the PIP assessment and limited to 22yo.
- **Standard allowance** for all claimants will rise above inflation, giving single claimants over 25 around £21 more per month by 2029/30.
- **Other changes:** New legal 'right to try' work without risking benefits, contributory benefits merged into new time-limited scheme

Disability reforms: So what?

Policy in Practice doesn't think the reforms in their current form are sustainable

- **We have lost an important marker for illness:** Planned merger Merger of PIP and the health element of UC removes the distinction between disability and illness.
- **A two-tier system for the health element of UC:** People on UC LCWRA today will be protected, while new claimants will get half. We think current awards should be treated like other transitional protection under UC.
- **Local authorities will have significant responsibilities:** Helping people to access social care, including aids and adaptations to stay active and independent, and move into work through economic inactivity trailblazers and future pathways to work.

Get Britain Working

A package of reforms to support people into work, along with devolution to local areas.

- £170m to Economic Inactivity and Youth Guarantee Trailblazers in MCAs / CAs
- £115m via Connect to Work to 43 local areas

How can local areas prove that devolution works?

Accountable Body for Local Get Britain Working Plans	£
Buckinghamshire Council	100,000.00
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority	100,000.00
Cheshire West and Chester Council	150,000.00
Cornwall Council	125,000.00
Cumberland Council	125,000.00
Devon and Torbay Combined County Authority	125,000.00
Dorset Council	125,000.00
East Midlands Combined County Authority	100,000.00
East Sussex County Council	100,000.00
Essex County Council	150,000.00
Gloucestershire County Council	100,000.00
Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined County Authority	100,000.00
Greater London Authority	100,000.00

[Download a breakdown of programmes and funding allocations by local authorities here](#)

Given the proposed policy changes around disability benefits, what are your plans to support vulnerable households?

Over half planned to use in house teams and a quarter were planning to work with their VCS

Previous poll results

Previous poll



77 responses

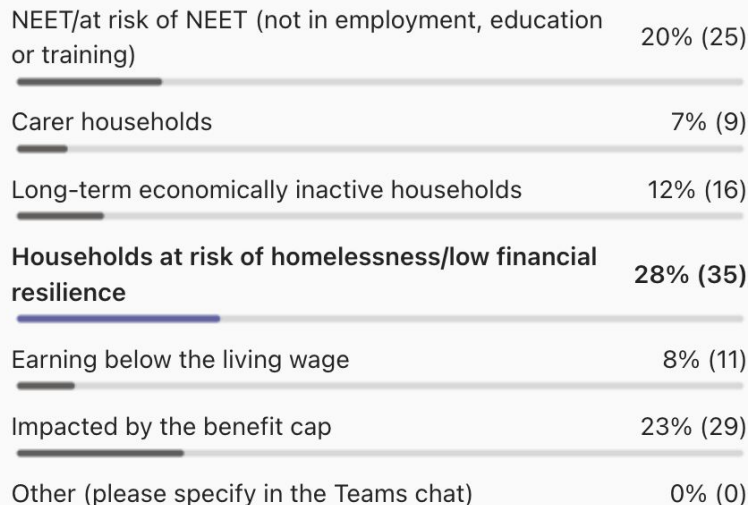
What groups in your area will you be engaging with on employment support?

Homeless or at risk of homelessness
Young people not in employment

Relatively few areas were focused on the long term economically inactive, despite being well placed to help.

Previous poll results

Previous poll



53 responses

Which have you found most helpful?

- **Disability:** how national reforms affect your area
- **Missing Out:** unclaimed benefits in your area
- **Policy:** Summaries and blogs
- **LIFT Community:** Insights from other councils
- **Data:** Using your data to track outcomes
- Other (share in the chat)

£113m is unclaimed in Camden		
29,000 people are not claiming support		
Benefit type	Amount	Claims
Total amount unclaimed in Camden	£112,882,227	57,593
Universal Credit amount	£67,233,091	5,102
Pension Credit amount	£13,968,729	3,621
Carer's Allowance amount	£7,186,889	1,688
HB (pensioner) amount	£10,808,569	1,809
Child Benefit amount	£3,279,531	1,704
FSM amount	£1,660,050	616
Healthy Start amount	£915,705	630
Water social tariffs amount	£216,640	1,441
Broadband amount	£5,703,740	28,519
WHD amount	£1,565,360	10,436
Free TV Licences amount	£343,922	2,029

Select your local authority >	Camden
Personal Independence Payment (PIP) impacts	
People expected to lose PIP through re-assessment by the end of this parliament	2,571
Economic impact of changes to the PIP to the local economy	£11,998,653
Limited Capability for Work Related Activity (LCWRA) impacts	
People expected to be impacted by changes to LCWRA	8,768
The expected economic impact of changes to LCWRA entitlements and eligibility criteria	£11,590,803
People impacted rank	115/356, with 48 in every thousand people impacted
Local economy impacted rank	348/356, with 0.06% of the local economy at risk
2571 people are expected to lose PIP worth between £3,850 and £5,740 upon reassessment	
6281 people currently on LCWRA will be impacted by the freeze, worth over £500 per year in real terms by the end of this parliament	
1632 new recipients of LCWRA are set to be awarded the lower amount, losing £47 per week, or £2,450 per year	
855 people in receipt of both PIP and LCWRA could lose both PIP and LCWRA, worth £97 per week or £5,000 per year	

Jonathan Portes

Professor of Economics and Public
Policy, King's College London

Employment support and incapacity benefits





The **UK** in a **Changing Europe**

Employment support and incapacity benefits
August 2025

Jonathan Portes
King's College London & UKandEU

@jdportes

UKandEU.ac.uk



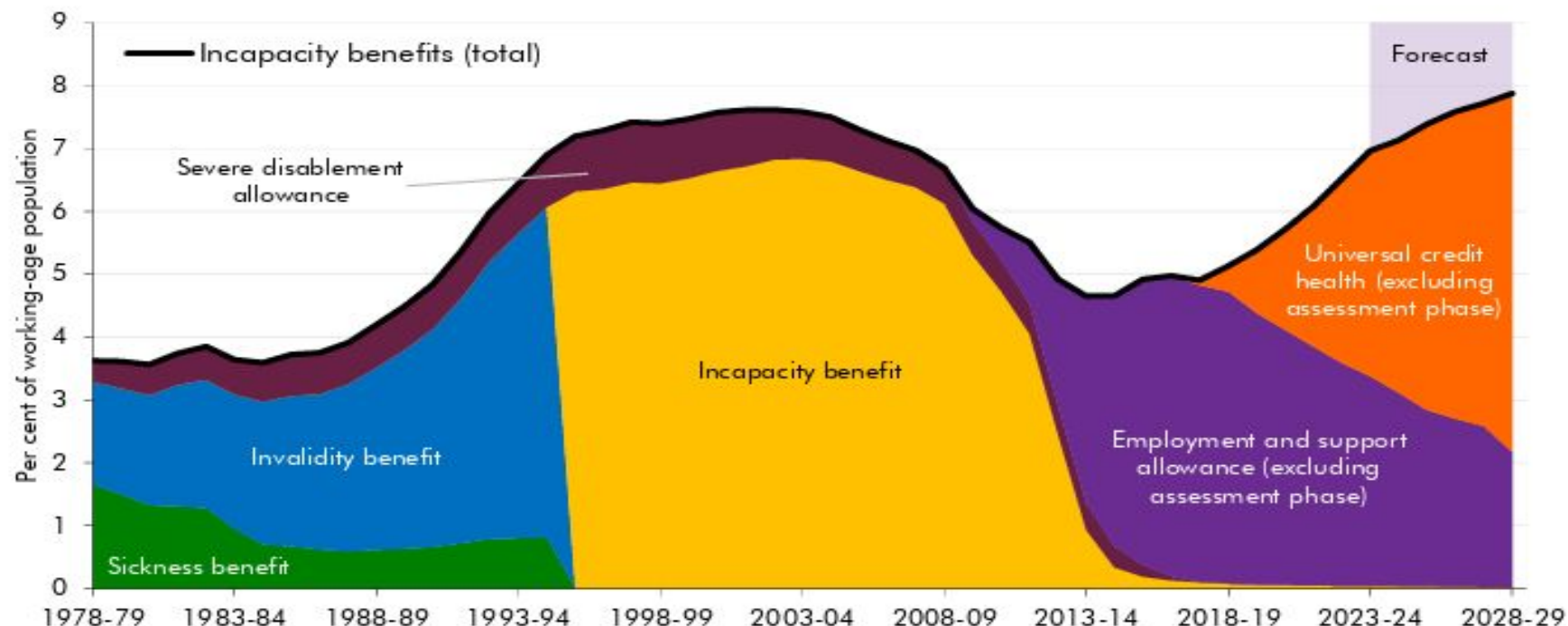
Historical background

Large rise in incapacity benefits began in early 1980s – but *accelerated* from about 1987

Big shift in active labour market policies from mid 1990s with introduction of Restart etc

But little policy focus on incapacity benefits until early 2000s with introduction of NDDP

Chart 1: Caseload prevalence of incapacity benefits



Note: Universal credit is a benefit paid to households rather than individuals. We estimate the number of individuals on the forecast UC health caseload based on the relationship between households and individuals on the UC health caseload in outturn, which increases the number of individuals counted on UC relative to the predecessor ESA system. UC/ESA dual claims are counted as ESA claims and we exclude income support (incapacity/sick and disabled) because almost all income support claimants also receive one of the other benefits listed above.

Source: DWP, ONS, OBR

What did we learn/what do we know

Voluntary programmes – low take-up, but positive impacts

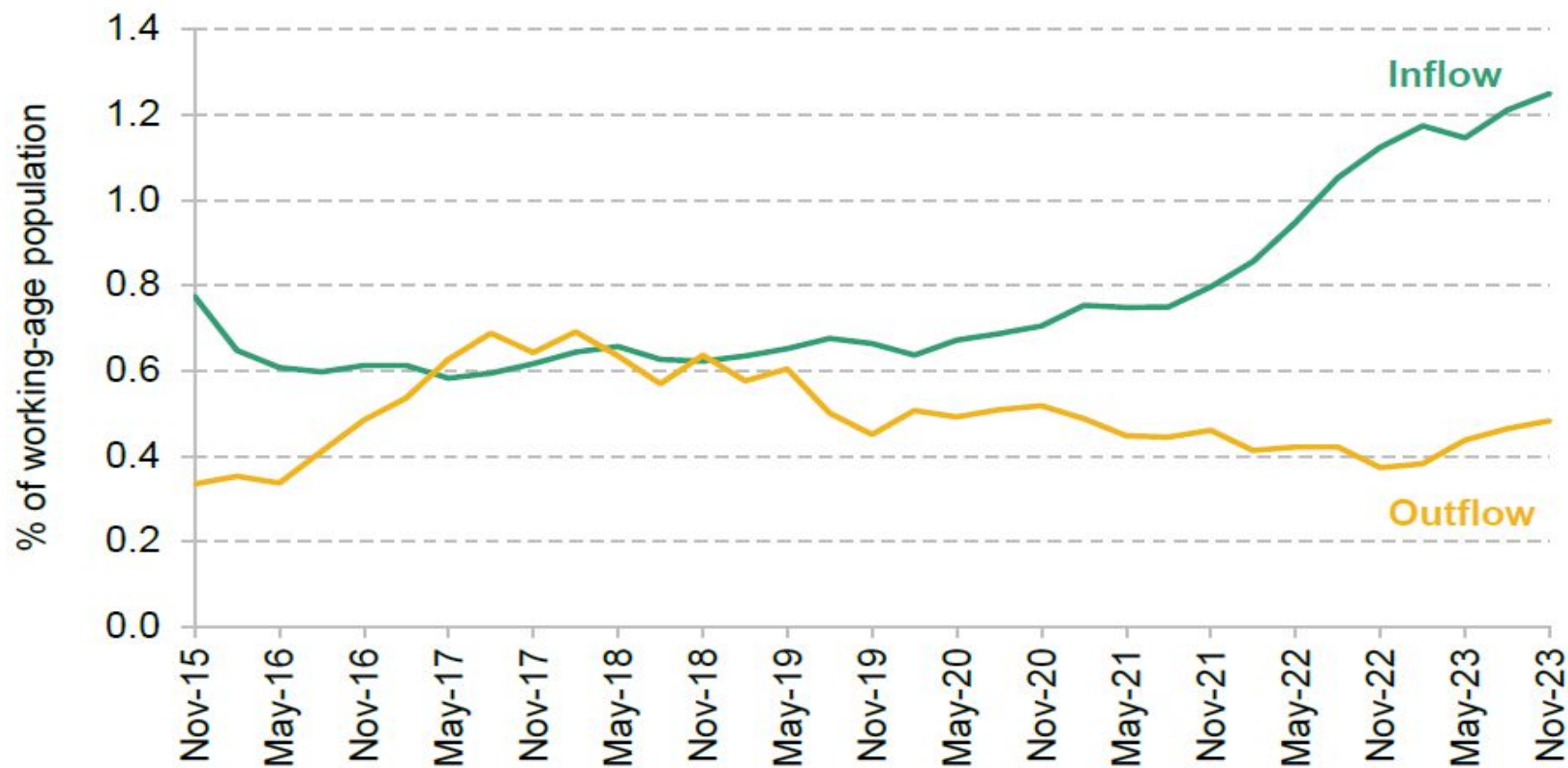
Compulsion – small impact on claims, little impact on employment

Neither central prescription nor payments-by-results are very effective

Risk/loss aversion

Distrust

Figure 5. Annual flows into and out of working-age disability benefits as a share of working-age population



What do we need/big evidence/practice gaps?

Engagement

De-risking

Social networks

Local labour markets

Inflows



The **UK** in a **Changing Europe**

Employment support and incapacity benefits
August 2025

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Policy in Practice

Zoe Tyndall

Head of Debt and
Financial Resilience,
London Borough of Camden

Increasing voluntary engagement with Employment Support

policyinpractice.co.uk





Increasing voluntary engagement with Employment Support

Camden Council and New Economics Foundation



Camden

Key principles

- Voluntary engagement not more conditionality
- Holistic support not employment first
- Proactive not responsive



What we did



Weeks 1 - 4

Discovery

22 research interviews and content testing with people



Weeks 5 - 8

Experiment

Contacted **750** people on LCWRA
Support chats with **78** people
Connected **35** with employment advisors



Weeks 9 - 12

Analysis

Research interviews with **18** of the participants 2-4 weeks later

Danny*



Danny is a 44-year-old man who lives alone.

Danny has **bipolar disorder and autism, COPD and severe asthma, anxiety and depression.**

He **worked for many years as a chef** before his health conditions made it impossible to keep working.

Danny was pleased we'd got in touch - he had **just been served a S21 (no-fault) eviction notice and didn't know where to turn**, so our text came at a good time. He was open to going back to work, but was clear he couldn't engage until he'd sorting his housing situation.

He reflected that he's **now very overweight and would struggle to go back to such a demanding role as being a chef.** But would like to retrain and find accessible exercise options to begin recovering his health – but has no idea where to start.

Outcomes:

- We linked him to housing options information
- We organised an appointment to get him a cost of living grant and benefits check
- We signposted to local exercise groups
- We connected him with Good Work Camden, so he could talk to an advisor about training options which are right for him, at his own pace

Chloe*



Chloe is a 26-year-old woman, who has **anxiety, depression, PTSD and depersonalisation syndrome**.

She was previously **homeless and struggles to leave the house without someone with her**. She previously had a lot of support from services but feels like everything dropped off when she turned 25 which made her ***"feel a bit bitter...I almost gave up"***.

She previously worked as a pharmacy dispenser, and did try to return to work a few times but couldn't maintain it. **She has looked for work, made applications and was invited to an interview** that she wasn't able to attend because she couldn't leave the house that day.

She was engaged in the conversation and happy to be connected with an employment advisor **once she was convinced that they would be adaptable to her needs**. Despite her willingness and motivation to work, it is clear that she will need adequate mental health support before she is able to get or sustain a role.

Outcomes:

- Did an application for a Cost of Living Grant
- Referred her to welfare rights team to review her PIP award level
- Signposted to low cost therapy services
- Connected her with Good Work Camden to talk about a range of flexible options

Barry*

Barry is a 53 year-old male resident living in a Council bedsit on the second floor. **There is no lift in the building, and due to his mobility issues, he would like to move.**

This was the primary reason he requested the support call. Barry suffers from arthritis in both knees, however his major health concern is **stage 2 chronic kidney disease.**

While housing was his primary concern, the holistic conversation was able to highlight multiple opportunities that can support him, including a chat with an employment advisor

Outcomes

- Refer to Adult Social Care for a care needs assessment and occupational therapy
- Signpost to housing advice
- Refer to Money Advice Camden for welfare rights advice
- Signpost to community activities
- Connect with talking therapy and low-cost mental health services
- Refer to Employment Support for an introductory chat



What we learned

To run effective voluntary engagement schemes you need to:

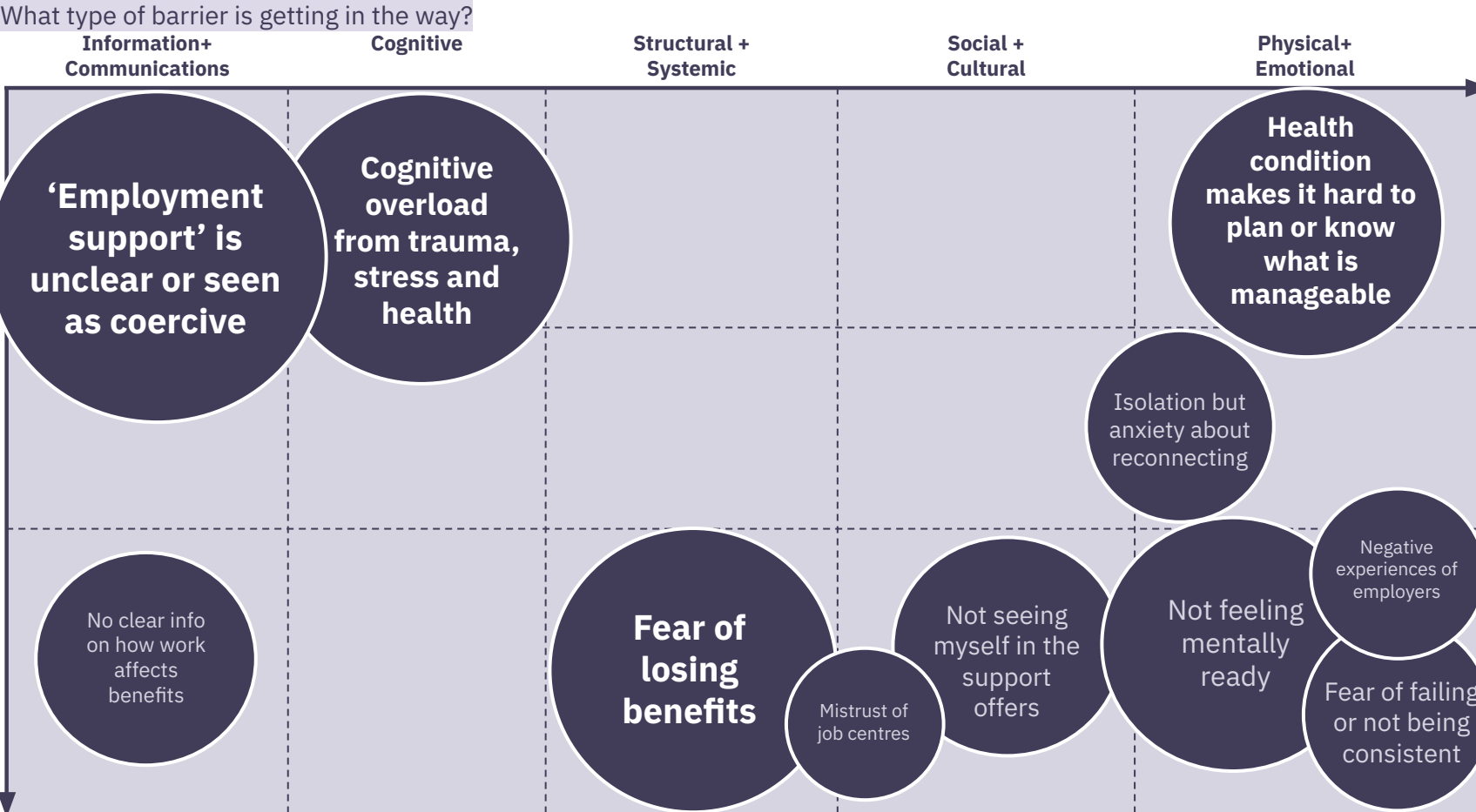
- 1. Design support based on deep understanding of the real barriers to engagement**
- 2. Focus on quality of communications and staffing**
- 3. Deliver locally**

With this approach, we can be reasonably confident in good ROI – we estimated £2.5 return for every £1 spent

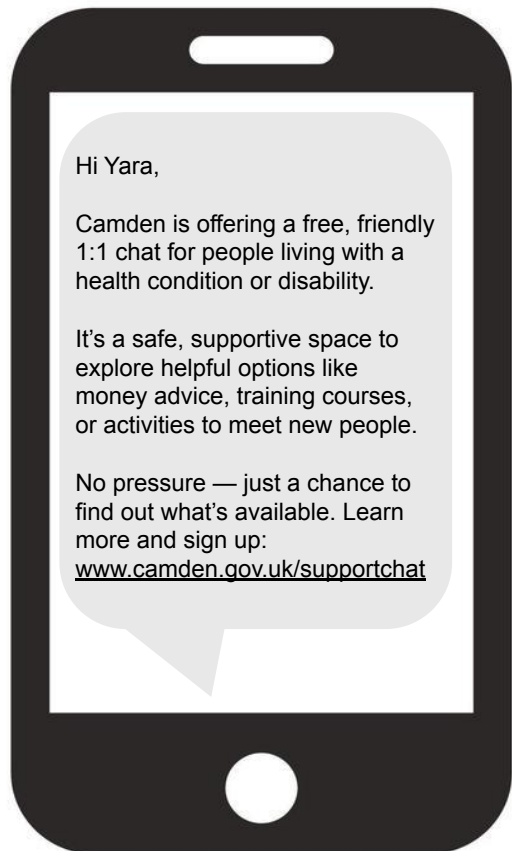


Understanding the real barriers:

KEY: Size of bubble indicates prevalence of barrier



Focus on quality of communications and staffing



Services

[Home](#) > [Benefits and financial support](#)

Find support that's right for you with a one-on-one chat

If you're managing a health condition or disability, we know it can be hard to know what support is available to you and how to access it.

We're offering a friendly one-off chat to help people on health-related benefits take the first step to getting the support you need.

There's no pressure to commit to anything, and nothing you need to prepare. We'll go at your pace.

[Sign up for a chat >](#)

If you need any help filling out the form please email supportchat@camden.gov.uk.

Focus on quality of communications and staffing

Meet the team

Read a bit about the people you'll be talking to.

Constance



Hi, I'm Constance. I'm a Senior Welfare Rights Adviser at Camden Council. I used to work as a nurse and have lots of experience supporting people in the community, including in disability-led organisations focused on work support. I'm also a new dog owner and love taking breaks to walk him in the local parks.

Richard



Hi, I'm Richard. I'm a Welfare Rights Advisor for Camden Council. I previously worked for 20 years for charities supporting adults with disabilities, particularly with adults with acquired brain injuries. When I am not at work I enjoy spending time with my family, watching sport and playing tennis.

Be able to deliver support at each rung of the ladder

Actively thinking about work in mid/near future

Help looking/applying for suitable roles (CV writing, job matching, training)

Education or training (not necessarily related to work aims)

Structured and regular volunteering

Building confidence and day to day structure

Building social confidence: social activities, ad-hoc volunteering, hobby groups

Building wellbeing: exercise classes, talking therapy

Freeing up bandwidth to think about future

Tackling practical blockers: home adaptations, transport, support with caring

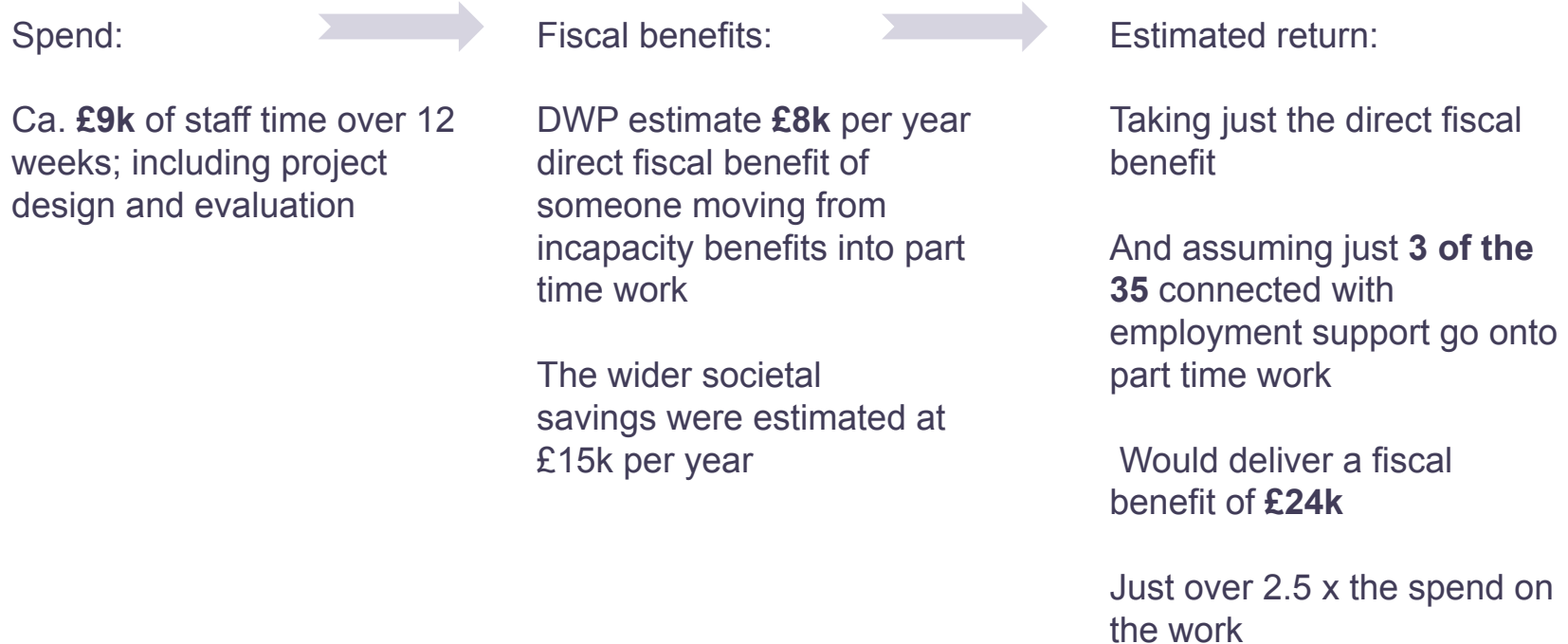
Accessing all relevant benefits

Stabilising day to day

Dealing with crisis: debt problems, housing insecurity

With this approach we can be reasonably confident in good return on investment

We estimate £2.5 fiscal benefit to £1 spent



To build on this work

- **Share data better across organisations to strategically time and target the offer:**
 - Utilise GP process and fit notes to access people who have recently stopped work and add in an employment rights element to help people stay in work
 - target people after X months on LCWRA
- **Target younger LCWRA residents:**
 - Our cohort skewed older, but the few younger residents we engaged with often lacked clarity or confidence about where to start.
 - There may be a valuable window to reach this group earlier, before they disengage entirely.
- **Work with trusted community partners or the NHS:**
 - Local delivery doesn't mean local government - understand how trust and prior relationship in the institution changes engagement levels and how this varies by demographic.

Toolkit

Increasing Engagement with Employment Support

A Test and Learn Toolkit

About this toolkit

This toolkit pulls together practical tips, templates and learnings from a 12 week test and learn pilot at Camden Council trialling how we might support those people on health benefits who can and want to, in taking steps towards finding work.

We hope it will be useful for other local, regional and national government teams and related organisations who are thinking about how best to support those in this group and would like to replicate or build on this initiative.



Part 3: Reaching out

3.1 Designing how to reach out to people and what to say

Once you have your data and have wrapped up any research you want to do, the next stage is the experiment itself – reaching out to people on LCWRA to see if they'd like a 1:1 support chat.

What we did

Setting some principles for how we'd speak to residents

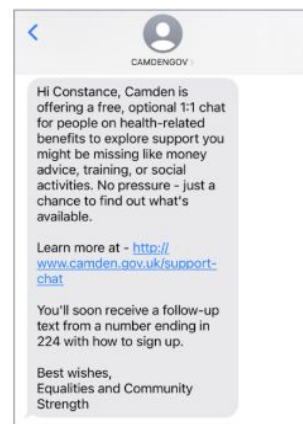
"The word 'support' caught my eye. It didn't sound like someone was going to question me or make me feel bad. It sounded like help."

"It's so important to say that it's no pressure, we'll go at your pace"

Before creating our communications, we tested examples with residents to understand the best language to use in our messages – whether in writing or in person.

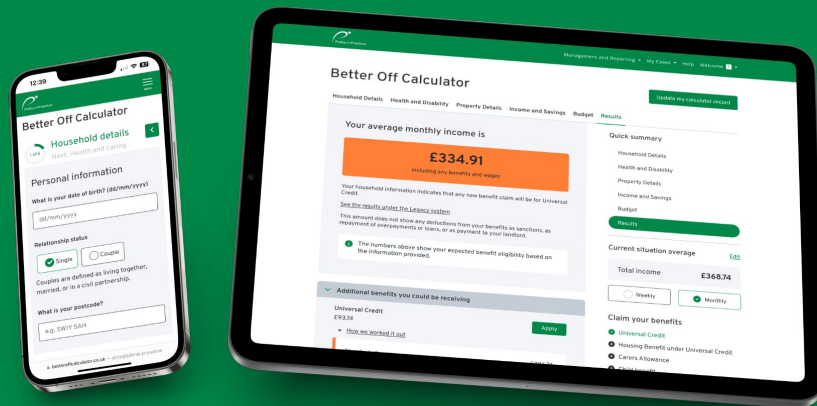
Appendix 3: SMS and Email Templates

Initial Text



Sam Fathers

Head of Corporate
Development (South & Wales),
Policy in Practice



Using the Better Off Platform to identify & engage with out of work households and track effectiveness of interventions

The Better Off Platform

More Than Just Data

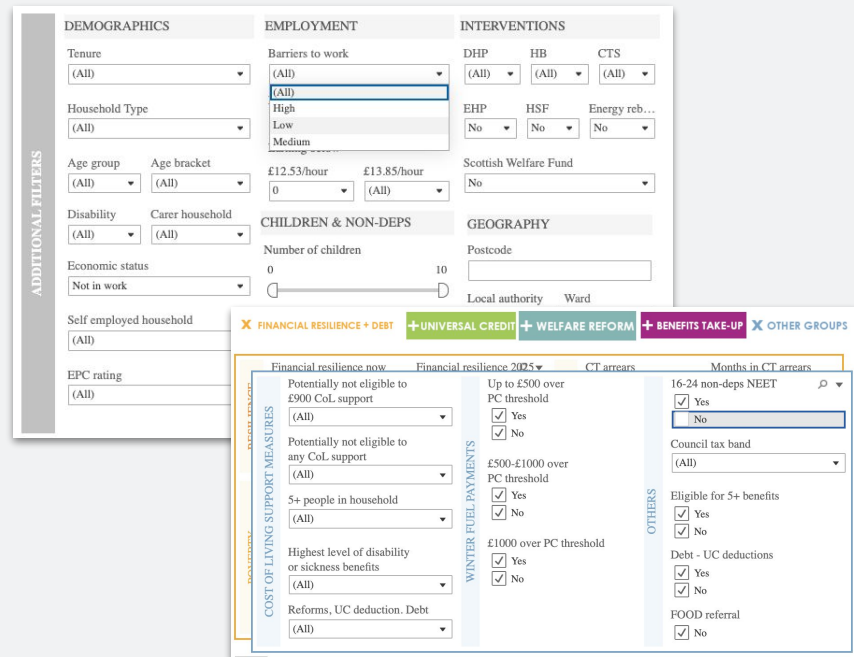
- Track Effectiveness
- Evidence the people better off in work
- Support with targeted interventions
- Maximise effective support
- Tools to automate and remove duplication
- Streamline processes

Household numbers	Main changes between Aug 2020 and May 2022			Only include households who are in the data at both the start and end date	
64,618 total households	CORE OUTCOME (REDUCTION IN)			INCOME AVERAGES	
2,602 of which have data at selected start and end dates	Arrears of £250+	23% to 65%	▲ +42%	Income after costs	£614 to £855 ▲ +£241
	Cash shortfall	14% to 5%	▼ -8%	Take home income	£2,346 to £2,163 ▼ -£184
	Unemployment (working age)	20% to 0%	▼ -20%	Earned income	£781 to £1,000 ▲ +£219
	Temporary accommodation	10% to 11%	▲ +1%	Benefits income	£1,512 to £1,082 ▼ -£430



How LIFT can support your residents

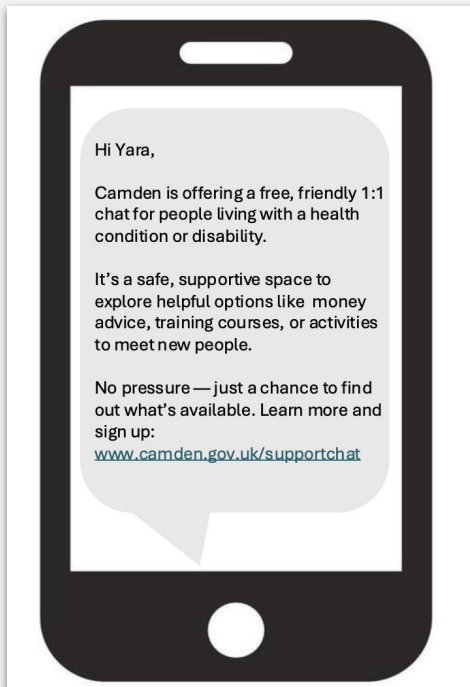
- Key metrics in LIFT will assist your officers in targeting employment support
- Metrics by Ward
 - Unemployment
 - Cash shortfalls & debt
 - Impacts of Welfare Reform
 - NEETs
- Quality work
 - Earnings under the National and London Living Wage
- Identify barriers to work



The screenshot displays the LIFT system interface, which is used for targeting support. It features several sections:

- ADDITIONAL FILTERS:** A vertical sidebar on the left containing filters for Tenure, Household Type, Age group, Age bracket, Disability, Carer household, Economic status, Self employed household, and EPC rating.
- DEMOGRAPHICS:** Includes dropdown menus for Tenure (All), Household Type (All), Age group (All), Age bracket (All), Disability (All), Carer household (All), Economic status (Not in work), Self employed household (All), and EPC rating (All).
- EMPLOYMENT:** Includes dropdown menus for Barriers to work (All), High, Low, Medium, £12.53/hour, £13.85/hour, and Number of children (0 to 10).
- INTERVENTIONS:** Includes dropdown menus for DHP (All), HB (All), CTS (All), EHP (No), HSF (No), Energy reb... (No), Scottish Welfare Fund (No), and Geography (Postcode, Local authority, Ward).
- CHILDREN & NON-DEPS:** Includes a dropdown menu for Number of children (0 to 10).
- Financial resilience now:** Includes dropdown menus for Potentially not eligible to £900 CoL support (All), Potentially not eligible to any CoL support (All), 5+ people in household (All), Highest level of disability or sickness benefits (All), and Reforms, UC deduction. Debt (All).
- Financial resilience 2025:** Includes dropdown menus for Up to £500 over PC threshold (Yes/No), £500-£1000 over PC threshold (Yes/No), and £1000 over PC threshold (Yes/No).
- CT arrears:** Includes a dropdown menu for 16-24 non-deps NEET (Yes/No) and a dropdown menu for Council tax band (All).
- Months in CT arrears:** Includes a dropdown menu for 16-24 non-deps NEET (Yes/No) and a dropdown menu for Council tax band (All).
- Eligible for 5+ benefits:** Includes checkboxes for Yes/No.
- Debt - UC deductions:** Includes checkboxes for Yes/No.
- FOOD referral:** Includes checkboxes for Yes/No.

Better Off Platform used for employment support



Hi Yara,

Camden is offering a free, friendly 1:1 chat for people living with a health condition or disability.

It's a safe, supportive space to explore helpful options like money advice, training courses, or activities to meet new people.

No pressure — just a chance to find out what's available. Learn more and sign up:
www.camden.gov.uk/supportchat

[Home](#) > [Benefits and financial support](#)

Find support that's right for you with a one-on-one chat

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[Sign up for a chat >](#)

If you need any help filling out the form please email supportchat@camden.gov.uk.

The kind of support we can talk about

We'll listen to you about what's going on and explore support that could make life a bit easier. If anything feels right for you, we can help you get connected to services.

You can choose what you want to talk about - whether it's just one topic or a few things that matter to you. This could be:

- taking up exercise that feels manageable and inclusive
- accessible travel options or help with transport costs
- starting training or education that suits your pace and interests
- opportunities to meet new people and feel more connected
- exploring gentle first steps toward work, if and when you're ready
- benefits issues - like claiming everything you're entitled to, or questions about recent news stories on health benefits

Read more about [the different types of support we can help you access](#).

Who you'll be talking to

You'll be speaking with either Constance or Richard. They're both trained in welfare benefits advice and have a background in health conditions and disabilities.

They have lots of experience helping people access the right support and feel more confident about their options.

[Meet the team](#)

- LIFT & BOC can be used together to maximise outcomes
- Allows for different supports to different cohorts
- Maximise ROI
- Prioritise support for those who need it
- Use technology to remove pressure on officers



LIFT Campaign Manager & BOC makes everything easier

The LIFT campaign manager automates identification, outreach & impact tracking for take-up campaigns and support

LIFT is used by over 120 councils across the UK

Take-up campaigns have included Pension Credit, Healthy Start, Free School Meals, Attendance Allowance, Social Tariffs and many more.

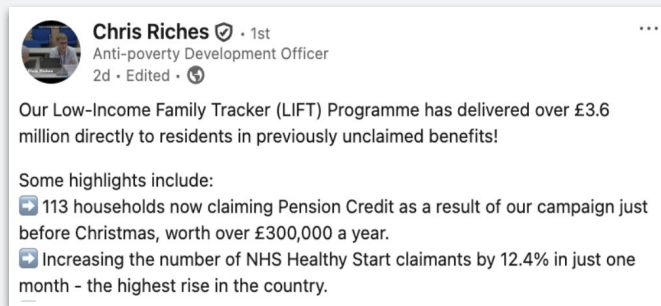




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10 October 2024

Mayor extends successful campaign that has unlocked over £17million in unclaimed Pension Credit for older Londoners on lower incomes

- £9.5m of previously unclaimed Pension Credit has been claimed by Londoners in the past year alone, thanks to support from the Mayor
- A further 2,174 older Londoners on lower incomes have claimed Pension Credit they are entitled to in the past year, with an average of £4,394 per claim
- The Mayor has announced he will extend the scheme for another year to help Londoners struggling with the cost of living

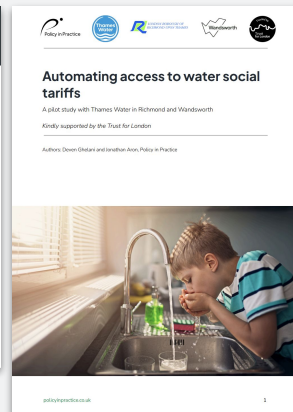






 **Chris Riches** ✓ • 1st
Anti-poverty Development Officer
2d • Edited • 

Our Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Programme has delivered over £3.6 million directly to residents in previously unclaimed benefits!

Some highlights include:

- ➡ 113 households now claiming Pension Credit as a result of our campaign just before Christmas, worth over £300,000 a year.
- ➡ Increasing the number of NHS Healthy Start claimants by 12.4% in just one month - the highest rise in the country.




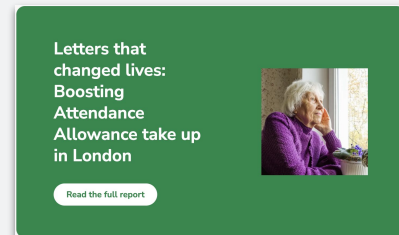
Automating access to water social tariffs

A pilot study with Thames Water in Richmond and Wandsworth
Kindly supported by the Trust for London


Authors: David Oldham and Jonathan Jones, Policy in Practice



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Letters that changed lives:
Boosting
Attendance
Allowance take up
in London




[Read the full report](#)





Councils save on staff costs by automating campaigns


 Campaign Manager

This tool will enable yo

 Choose nam
Create a nan
pension cred

 Choose Mon
This will be ti




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We currently


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By clicking s
in Practice fo

Campaign Details

"I didn't have to ask the analysts or mess around with spreadsheets myself, I could focus on the follow up conversations with residents. It was a really positive experience because the calls were very welcome. I learned a lot from just speaking with them. Sometimes it's just a case of getting stuck in."

IFT Snapshot
024-01





nfield Council
Civic Centre
Silver Street
Enfield
EN1 3XA

enfield.gov.uk
20 8379 5525

<<date2>>

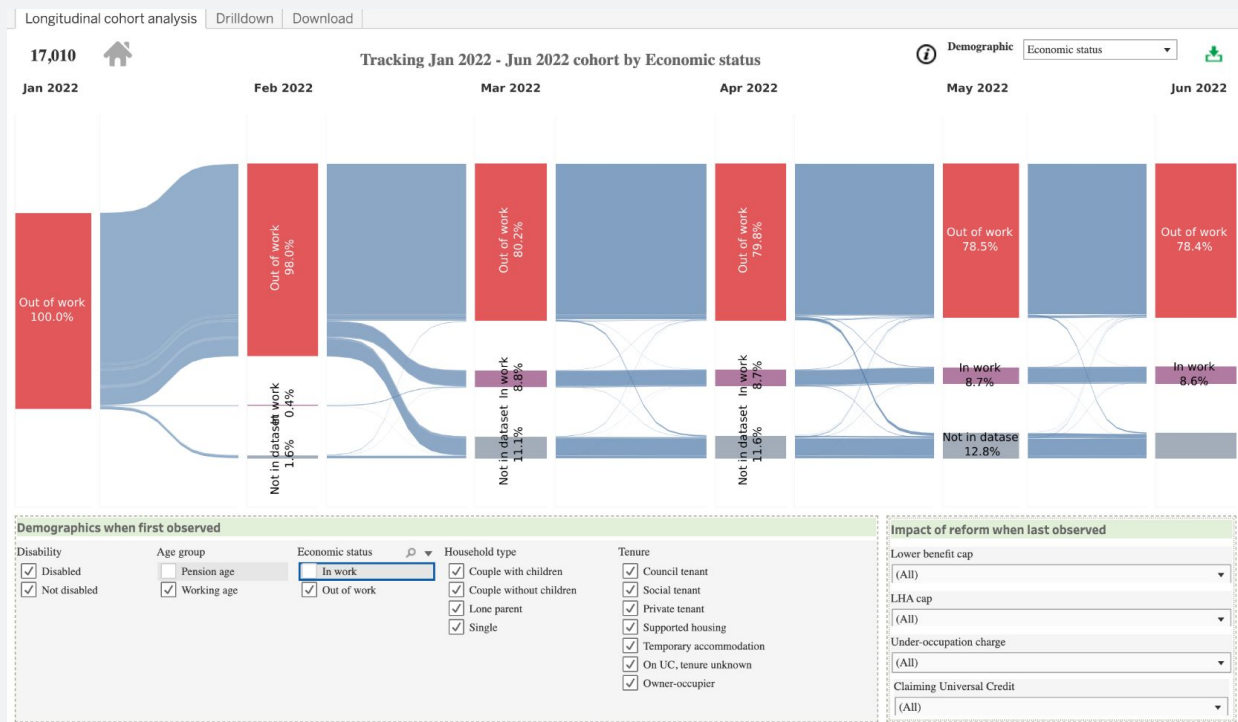
Reminder: Possible unclaimed Pension Credit

We are contacting you because we think you may be eligible for Pension Credit that you aren't yet claiming. If this is the case then it's likely your income is lower than it should be. Please ignore this letter if you have recently been awarded Pension Credit

Send for Review



LIFT can track outcomes over time



- Easily and visually track households work journeys
- Track impact in your targeted and untargeted cohorts
- One click to see the impact of campaigns on households



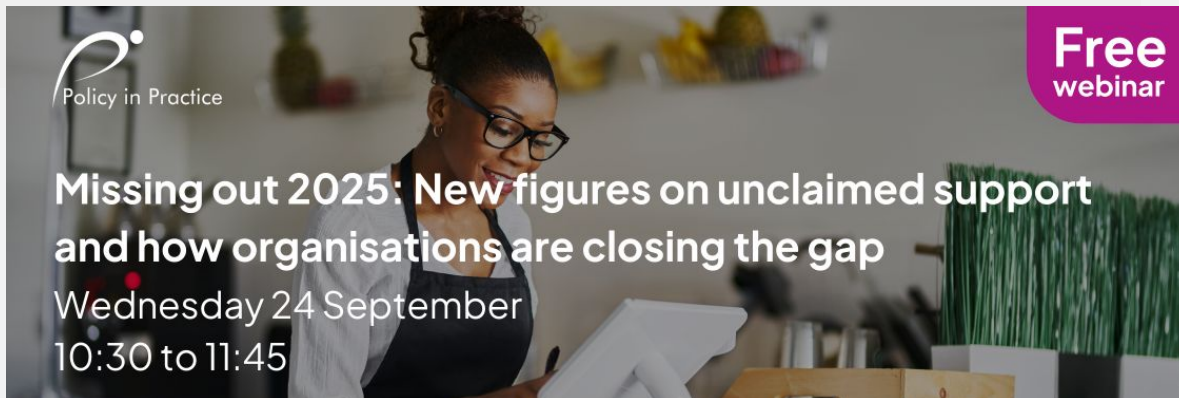
Discussion and Q&A


What's next

If you have more questions or are keen to collaborate, feel free to **book a chat with us** using the QR code or the link in the chat



Register for our next free webinar:



 Policy in Practice

**Free
webinar**

**Missing out 2025: New figures on unclaimed support
and how organisations are closing the gap**

Wednesday 24 September
10:30 to 11:45

Thank you to our guest speakers

Zoe Tyndall, Head of Debt and Financial Resilience, London Borough of Camden

Jonathan Portes, Professor of Economics and Public Policy, King's College London
and former Chief Economist at DWP

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