

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB DETAILS

Directorate: Corporate Services

Post title: Benefit Assessing Officer

Post number: *****

Post grade: F

Section: Revenues and Benefits

Responsible to: Benefit Manager

Responsible for: N/A

MAIN PURPOSE OF JOB

The main purpose of a Benefit Assessing Officer is to determine eligibility and calculate the amount of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction that individuals or households are entitled to based on their financial situation, housing costs, and relevant legislation.

Housing Benefit is a government financial assistance program designed to help people with low incomes pay their rent.

Council Tax Reduction is a local discount that is designed to help people on low incomes or who are in financial hardship to reduce the amount of council tax they must pay. The reduction is available to people who meet specific eligibility criteria, which vary depending on local council policies, as the scheme is administered at the local level.

Review applications for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction from tenants or applicants. This involves verifying details provided by the applicant, such as income, savings, household composition, housing costs and Council Tax liability.

Using established formulas and guidelines, calculate the amount the applicant is entitled to receive.

The role requires knowledge of current benefit rates, rent levels, and eligibility criteria in respect of Housing Benefit and local policy in respect of Council Tax Reduction.

Maintain accurate records of all applications, decisions, and communications, following data protection and confidentiality guidelines.

To assist the Benefit Manager and Head of Service as required.

Staff will ensure that all work undertaken is in accordance with law, regulations and guidelines and managed promptly and efficiently.

To ensure the reduction of fraud and error to protect and maximise subsidy.

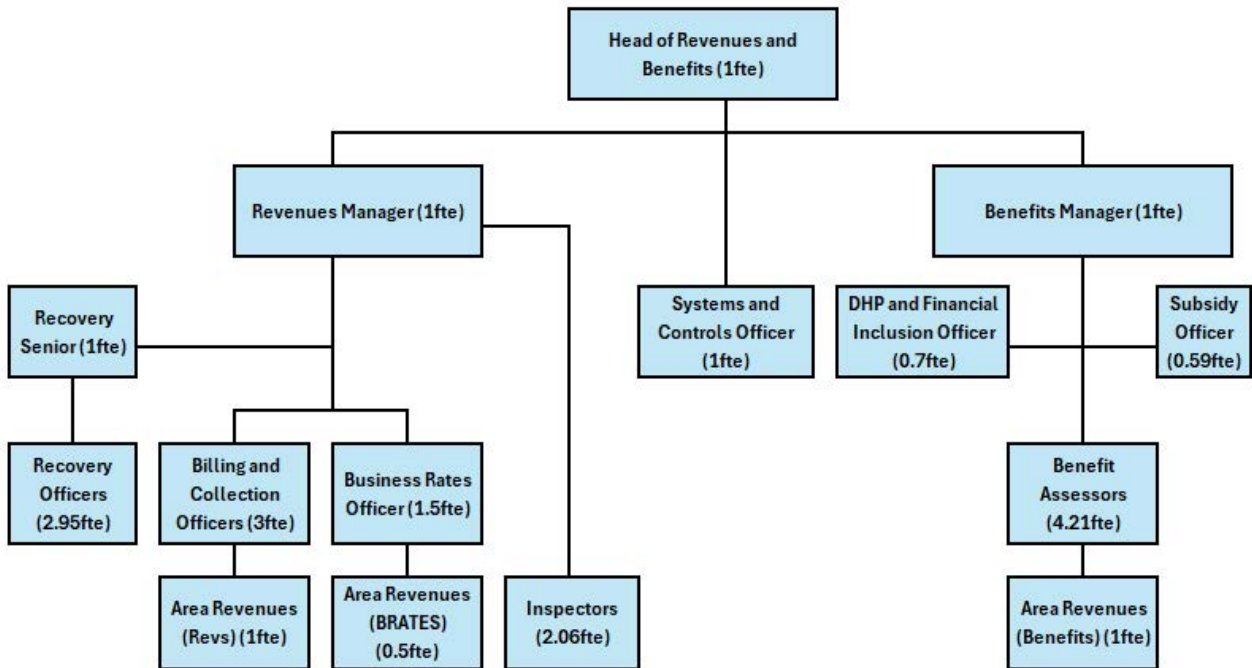
To provide an excellent level of customer service in line with Tewkesbury Borough Councils customer charter.

The role requires a good understanding of welfare benefits, strong attention to detail, and the ability to interpret and apply regulations fairly and consistently. It also requires good customer service skills, as the officer may need to deal with complex and sensitive cases.

SPECIFIC DUTIES

- Maintain up-to-date knowledge of Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Support regulations, as well as other relevant benefit legislation, by attending training, reading DWP circulars, and staying informed about changes.
- Ensure that benefit claims are assessed in line with legislation and use knowledge to interpret legislation where required, particularly in complex or exceptional cases.
- Evaluate new claims, change of circumstances, and temporary accommodation claims using a benefit database, ensuring entitlement is awarded correctly within prescribed timeframes.
- Process Homeless claims, Supported and Exempt Accommodation claims, VEP (Verification of Earnings and Pensions), HBAAI (Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support data), and Universal Credit downloads.
- Ensure that all types of claims, including those for changes in circumstances, are reviewed and updated as required.
- Obtain necessary information for claims through phone, letter, and face-to-face interactions, ensuring a professional and courteous approach as per the customer service standards.
- Assist in the preparation and issuance of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support notification letters and annual billing documentation.
- Review reconsideration requests thoroughly, ensuring all aspects of a claim are considered and that the claimant is informed of their appeal rights.
- Identify potentially fraudulent claims and escalate them to the Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit for further investigation.
- Understand the financial impact of claims processing on council subsidies and minimize the risk of penalties by ensuring accurate processing.
- Understand the various categories of overpayments, calculate underlying entitlement, and ensure claimants receive the correct benefit amounts, preventing errors that could lead to overpayments.
- Produce, process, and analyse reports, including updating, suspending, or canceling claims as needed to ensure accurate records.
- Work with internal and external stakeholders (e.g., landlords, housing associations, DWP) to maintain up-to-date and accurate data.
- Ensure all data handling complies with GDPR and council policies for personal data protection.
- Provide support to less experienced team members and share best practices for effective claim assessments.
- Take responsibility for personal professional development, seeking additional training when necessary to stay current with procedures and legislation.
- Contribute to achieving both individual and team targets for processing claims and ensuring efficient service delivery.
- Use initiative to prioritise tasks effectively, ensuring timely and accurate processing of all claims, while utilising digital platforms where appropriate.
- Deal with queries from customers, external agencies, and other departments (e.g., Housing Associations, CAB, DWP) regarding benefits claims.
- Collaborate with Revenues, Customer Services, and other internal departments to ensure an efficient, joined-up service delivery.
- Follow Health and Safety policies, ensuring that all duties are conducted safely and in accordance with current legislation.
- Ensure that work is conducted in accordance with council policies, including Equal Opportunities, and adhere to all relevant workplace regulations.

ORGANISATIONAL CHART



KEY WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Internal – Head of Service, Team Leaders, Revenues department, Customer Service, Finance, Housing, Electoral Services

External – Claimants, Councillor's, Jobcentre plus, Department for Works and Pensions, Housing Associations, Landlords, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit (CFEU), food bank, other support charities/networks

RESOURCES

Access to confidential or sensitive data required to determine eligibility to Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction must be treated securely and in line with GDPR and Department for Works and Pensions Memorandum of Understanding.

The post holder will have a responsibility to determine the correct level of Housing Benefit and assist with protecting the Local Authorities yearly subsidy claim by ensuring fraud and error is avoided.

The Welfare Officer will be responsible for signposting claimants for other assistance to help with their current circumstances, ensuring residents receive the maximum benefit they are entitled too.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

Ability to manage an elevated level of customer contact, always remaining professional and courteous.

Requirement to sit at a desk in front of a computer for extended periods for most of the week.

The role involves making sure our residents and housing associations/landlord are aware of the application process – this will involve attending various community groups, housing associates to provide clear instructions on the application process and guidance.

The emotional demand involved with assisting our most vulnerable residents, including those residents on very low incomes, facing homelessness or suffering from domestic violence, may affect physical health and the post holder will need to have the ability to identify and raise any concerns they have around stress and effect on mental health, so that support can be provided to assist the post holder.

MENTAL DEMANDS

The role requires the post holder to assist some of our more vulnerable residents within the Borough, this can regularly involve upsetting conversations, which may result in challenging customer situations.

The post holder will need to understand and process constantly changing complex legislation and be able to explain the information in an understandable manner.

The role involves working to tight deadlines and is often stressful due to the nature of the post, the post holder will need to be able to prioritise workload and identify critical situations to ensure Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction is awarded without delay.

The post holder will be required to remain calm and empathetic to customers' requirements and can manage telephone calls and respond to emails/written correspondence in a compassionate manner.

The post holder will be required to discuss options for customers facing financial difficulty and this will/can lead to conflict and confrontation on a regular basis. The post holder will be required to remain calm and clear when resolving enquiries.

The position will be supported by the Revenues Manager and Head of Service; however, the post holder will be required to extensively use their initiative and must possess good decision-making skills to resolve situations independently.

Due to the nature of the post, the post holder may be made aware of safeguarding situations, and they will need to understand the process of reporting these in a confidential and sensitive way and signpost/guide staff as and when required.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The post is hybrid and will involve working 60% of the time in the office and 40% home working.

The role involves occasions when the behaviour of others may be challenging, and the post holder will be provided with support to help manage these situations.

The post holder may on occasions be required to attend visits within the Tewkesbury Borough area to verify entitlement to benefit or reductions.

Occasional duty cover will be required involving face to face visits from our residents to the office.

ALL STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

To adhere to all Council Policies, in particular Equal Opportunities.

To undertake any other duties properly assigned from time to time by your line manager which are appropriate to the grade and character of the post.

To be committed to the principles of equality, diversity, and the ability to treat everyone who you encounter with dignity and respect.

Tewkesbury Borough Council is committed to the principles of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children, young people, and vulnerable adults; therefore, all employees have a responsibility and duty of care to report safeguarding issues they become aware of or witness.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ensuring that services are delivered in compliance with existing and new Health and Safety legislation and the Council's Health and Safety Policy and ensuring that duties are pursued in a safe manner with due regard to the Health and Safety of yourself and others.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

QUALIFICATIONS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	ASSESSMENT METHOD
A good basic education including English and Math's	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application form
IRRV Tech	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Application form
NVQ or similar qualification in customer services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Application form
EXPERIENCE	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	ASSESSMENT METHOD
Experience of working within a Revenues and Benefit, financial environment, or other government department	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Experience in a customer service environment with experience of delivering elevated levels of customer service, working under pressure.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Evidence of decision making and working independently in a similar role	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interview
Experience of managing sensitive data and a good understanding of GDPR	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Experience in a similar administrative role managing elevated levels of data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
SKILLS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	ASSESSMENT METHOD
Excellent communication skills, including the ability to manage customers understanding of complex legislation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview

Ability to communicate complex legislation clearly in writing/email	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Ability to work to a high degree of accuracy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Excellent organisational skills, including the ability to prioritise tasks	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Ability to work in a demanding environment with pressure to meet deadlines.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
Strong analytical and critical thinking skills with the ability to identify issues and implement appropriate solutions.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and interview
BEHAVIOURS / ATTRIBUTES	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	ASSESSMENT METHOD
Builds effective and professional working relationships with staff, customers, internal and external stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and Interview
Embraces and helps to support others through periods of change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and Interview
Remains fair and consistent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Application and Interview
Excellent attention to detail and the ability to listen and understand customers' requirements	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interview
An excellent collaborator, to be able to work collaboratively and supportively with colleagues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interview
A positive attitude to change and the ability to support others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interview
Commitment to own development and a willingness to undertake training where required	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Interview