

Role Title	Benefits Officer
Job Family	
Competency Level	All Colleagues
Scale	Scale 6/SO1/SO2
Purpose To provide a customer focused service and accurately process Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support, Free School Meals and all discretionary schemes administered within the service including those introduced under Local Welfare provisions. To deliver all aspects of Housing Benefit overpayment recovery, Corporate Debt Recovery and Financial Assessments. The role may be within a Benefits processing team, Housing Benefit Overpayment Recovery Team, Corporate Debt Recovery Team or Financial Assessment Team, depending on service requirements.	
Generic Accountabilities	End Results/ Outcomes
Scale 6 Communicate effectively with internal and / or external customers/ service users. Act as point of contact for the service. Provide information and resolve problems, within scope of role, escalating to line manager as required. Additional SO1/SO2 Manage escalated or complex customer issues within the specialist area.	Resolve non-routine customer/service queries. Customers are satisfied with the response, or aware that issue has been escalated. Assess and prioritises telephone and personal callers and responds appropriately. Relevant, accurate, understandable and timely information is provided. A positive image of the Council is promoted. Expert advice, information and support are provided on the full range of issues within the field of expertise. Queries / complaints are effectively managed. Appropriate action is taken to resolve the issue.
Scale 6 To work with colleagues and team leaders to identify areas for improvement, ensuring the support offer remains appropriate for all service users. Additional SO1/SO2 Work closely with others to clarify changing customer / organisational requirements.	Service users express satisfaction with service provided. Customer requirements are identified and

	documented. Improvement opportunities are identified and recommended.
Scale 6 Organise and maintain records and documents using the appropriate council process / system. Additional SO1/SO2 Analyse and interpret complex information, for input into reports.	Received documents, correspondence etc. are recorded, distributed and processed correctly. Photocopying, faxing, shredding, enveloping, franking etc. are completed to required standards and productivity. Records /information are well organised and accessible. Records are kept up-to-date. Follow-up with internal/external customers to obtain missing/outstanding records. Accurate, complete and relevant information / records / reports are provided for internal and/or external use.
Scale 6 Create document, reports, correspondence from the information provided, using standard formats and software Additional SO1/SO2 Develop specialist documents / materials / activities to support / promote the service area.	All materials are produced to the required legislative and or Council standards and timescales. Recorded information is accurate. Communications are clear, well planned and effectively targeted.
Scale 6 Database maintenance – access and update relevant databases and generate reports for management information. Additional SO1/SO2 Contribute to the development of these systems.	Reports are accurate, complete and meaningful. Changes to systems, are identified and recommended. Systems meet operational requirements

Scale 6 and SO1/SO2 Carry out all duties and responsibilities with reasonable care for the health and safety of self and others and report any potential hazards or unsafe practices to line manager.	Work is carried out in a way that is safe and without risks to health.
Scale 6 and SO1/SO2 Act in accordance with all policies and procedures which apply to the job and understand the reasons for this.	All policies and procedures are complied with.
SO1/SO2 Deliver a specialist aspect of service delivery, which engages customers / stakeholders and enables them to make effective use of the service.	The service is delivered to the quality, organisational and professional standards required Customer / stakeholder expectations are managed in relation to what can be delivered. The service meets organisational requirements and reflects customer / stakeholder requirements / needs, within organisational constraints.
SO1/SO2 Develop good working relationships, develop community links and communicate effectively with internal / external organisations / partners and stakeholders. Represent specialist area internally and / or externally.	Specialist work area reputation is maintained or enhanced. Stakeholders are engaged with activity relevant to them. Positive feedback is received from stakeholders.
SO1/SO2 Act in accordance with all policies and procedures which apply to the job and understand the reasons for this.	All policies and procedures are complied with.
Job Specific Accountabilities:	

All Assist with progressing and increasing the use of automation across the service in relation to the core processing and document management systems and robotic processing.	All Increased opt in of e-notification. Increased automation across the service leading to greater efficiency and accuracy. Processing output from robots are accuracy checked. New workflow documents and processes are introduced to identify priority work. Increased use of auto-indexing including e-mails. Errors identified and reported back to developers/the project lead. Additional SO1/SO2 New areas for robotic processing identified, recommended/agreed, and introduced.
All Accurate processing of: Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support Free School Meals including pupil premium and all discretionary schemes administered within the service including those introduced within LWA provisions.	All Accurate awards of benefit/ support, benefit on 2 homes and discretionary schemes are made including updating Council Tax liability and applying single person discount where appropriate and setting up Creditors where applicable. Possible fraudulent cases identified and referred where appropriate to the relevant fraud team. All awards and revision requests responded to within service target time with priority given to emergency/urgent cases. LA error overpayments remain below lower threshold and other areas of subsidy loss avoided. Feedback provided to colleagues where processing errors are identified Accuracy, performance reports and high-risk subsidy areas are checked to ensure the caseload accuracy is maintained or improved. Pupil premium received by schools is maximized by identifying ordinary free school meal entitlement. A comprehensive support service is provided to schools, including engagement to promote the

	administration offer of pupil premium take up run by the service. Internal and external auditors supported to view and extract relevant system information. Cases reviewed as required such as HBMS, Full Claim Review, Self Employed annual review, Universal Credit 6-month review. Additional SO1/SO2 Over £3,000 payments are authorized in the absence of or as requested by the Principle Officer or a manager. Cases in pending checked in the absence of or as requested by the Principle officer or a manager. Daily allocation of work to officers occurs in the absence of or as requested by the Principle Officer or a manager.
All Prompt decisions are made throughout all areas of assessment including all discretionary schemes Work output is maximized to achieve service objectives	All Subsidy risk is reduced by the reduction in administrative delay overpayment created. Reduction in avoidable contact from customers and payments received in good time. Performance targets are consistently met across the service. Additional SO1/SO2: Work trays checked regularly to identify delayed work processes and feedbacks issued where appropriate. Reports run regularly and delayed work issues highlighted to the PO1 and team manager
All Government changes to Welfare Benefits, Council Tax Support, Free School meals and Discretionary Schemes understood and applied to all decision making. Assist with updating procedures across the service as new legislation or work process is	All Correct decisions made in relation to legislation and procedures. Correct information provided to customers within benefit decision letters and correct information requested from customers when additional

introduced Assist with identifying and updating letter and e-mail templates Additional SO1/SO2 Develop new policies and working practices across the service	information/evidence is required. Discretionary awards made when appropriate Areas lacking in policy or working practice are identified and procedures drafted. Additional SO2 Revision requests against discretionary scheme decisions made. Discretionary schemes expenditure monitored in the absence of the PO1
All Training, coaching, and buddying new starters and colleagues to use Benefits processing system, Benefits and Council Tax legislation, and anything else which aids the effective administration of benefits	All Training plans are created, and training delivered to apprentices. Internal work policies and procedures identified and recommended for updating based on training needs.
	Additional SO1/SO2: Training plans created and delivered to apprentices, scale 6 and SO1 officers. Induction plans completed and delivered for new starters New starters mentored with advice provided to achieve service outcomes Substantial support provided across the service Additional SO2 Training plans created and delivered to improve customer care and letter writing skills.

All Complete financial assessments and reassessments in accordance with legislation, Council policy and service procedure	All Accurate financial assessments completed within service timescales. Appropriate customer contributions calculated. Evidence reviewed and verified in accordance with procedures. Customers provided with clear information regarding assessment outcomes.
All Collection and recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments and Corporate Debts.	All Correct rate of HB deductions made across the caseload. Attachment of Earnings and Benefits recovery maximised through use of robotics Recovery levels regularly reviewed to maximise recovery. Underlying entitlement calculated where relevant Large overpayments monitored and recovery method changed to maximise collection where appropriate. Accounts referred to Enforcement agents and debt collection agencies where applicable. Cases identified for charging orders to be placed on owned properties. Cases referred for court action where applicable. Blameless tenant recovery maximised. Offsetting credits and recovery from rent accounts undertaken. Tracing activities undertaken including using external tracing tools to locate absconders Recovery action is undertaken in accordance with the Corporate Debt Recovery Policy and relevant legislation. Repayment arrangements are negotiated and monitored where appropriate. Corporate debt recovery performance supports the Council's income collection objectives.

SO1/SO2 Monitoring of enforcement agent and debt collection levels of recovery.	Regular monitoring meetings arranged and attended. Schedules regularly checked for activity undertaken. Debtor's vulnerability identified and write offs considered where appropriate.
All Identify and submit Housing Benefit Overpayments and Corporate Debts for write off in line with the Scheme of Delegation and Council policies.	All Unrecoverable debts are recommended for write off and documented to meet Audit and internal requirements. Uneconomical debt recommended for write off. Unrecoverable debt due to official error overpayments are reclassified to remove outstanding debt. Approved write offs are processed or authorised in accordance with authorisation limits.

Nature of Contacts

Involves supporting and guiding residents, stake holders and third parties to ensure a successful service

Will involve direct contact with members of the public including dealing with challenging situations where influence may be needed.

Liaise with and/or advise senior members of staff regarding service issues, problems and processes.

Deal with people at all levels confidently, sensitively and diplomatically.

Will involve direct contact with private landlords, Housing Associations, the Housing Department, government bodies such as Department for Work and Pensions, HMRC, UK Visa's and Immigration and internal departments such Resident Financial Services, Care Leavers, Families and Audit and Fraud.

The role on the Housing Benefit overpayment team will involve contact with enforcement agents.

Key Facts and Figures

Procedural Context

Reports to Benefits Team Manager

Act within guidelines and standard procedures with discretion to allocate or otherwise organise work to meet service delivery requirements. Works within laid down procedures but needs to deal with day-to-day problems without always referring to others.

To deal with more complex cases making decisions through knowledge/referral to relevant legislation and case law.

Decisions will be made based on Council procedures, policies and legislation.

This post demands a high level of flexibility, a positive attitude and ability to adapt to changes due to service needs.

This post is office based, with homeworking available.

Occasionally the post will be expected to work from other locations and attend Courts or the Library as requested.

Resourcing

Budget Responsibilities: Nil

Supervisory Responsibilities: Nil

Knowledge, Skills and Experience

Knowledge Benefits and Housing Benefit overpayments:

Specific Knowledge Scale 6

- Housing and Council Tax Benefits/Support legislation, understanding of Housing Benefit overpayment legislation including recovery options and processes as well as having a working knowledge of other welfare benefits
- Free School Meals and Discretionary Housing Payment and an understanding of Discretionary Council Tax Hardship or Section 13A legislation
- A document management system and a core processing system used for Benefits
- Basic knowledge of Corporate Debt Recovery processes and Financial Assessment procedures.

Specific knowledge SO1:

- Detailed knowledge of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and/or Housing Benefit overpayments including assessing all types of claims for a processing team and all aspects of recovery for Housing Benefit overpayment team.
- Detailed knowledge of Corporate Debt Recovery processes and Financial Assessment procedures.

Specific knowledge SO2:

- Comprehensive knowledge of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and/or Housing Benefit overpayments including assessing all types of claims for a processing team and all aspects of recovery for Housing Benefit overpayment team.
- Comprehensive knowledge of Corporate Debt Recovery processes, Financial Assessment procedures and associated legislation, policies and guidance.
- Some knowledge of Case law relating to processing of benefit claims

Specific Experience scale 6 and SO1:

- Significant experience of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support and/or Housing Benefit overpayments including assessing all types of claims for a processing team and all aspects of recovery for Housing Benefit overpayment team.
- Interpreting Housing and Council Tax Support legislation and applying this to decision making
- Using a computerised Benefits calculation system and analysing complex information and resolving problems
- Experience of undertaking debt recovery activities, financial assessments or related customer account work.

Specific Experience SO1

- Experience of giving advice on complex issues to team members

Specific Experience SO2

- Knowledge of case law related to benefits processing
- Experience of preparing paperwork for Court Team to present at County Court for any hearings or disputes
- Experience of dealing with reviews both evidence based and disputes.
- Experience of managing complex debt recovery and/or financial assessment cases.

Other experience

- Experience of having worked in a fast paced, customer focused environment.
- Excellent knowledge and application of IT systems and software packages.
- Relevant legislative and or procedural knowledge for specialist area.
- Ability to work with minimum supervision, using problem solving skills and initiative to provide a customer focused support service.
- Excellent levels of literacy and numeracy.
- Ability to work flexibly, balancing competing priorities and meeting deadlines whilst understanding the needs, timescales and deadlines of others
- Ability to deal diplomatically and confidentially with a wider range of stakeholders internally and externally
- Ability to identify improvements to processes and systems and to share the recommendations with the wider team.

Indicative Qualifications

English and Math GCSE grade 4 or above or equivalent qualification

Relevant NVQ Level 2 or 3 qualification

The above profile is intended to describe the general nature and level of work performed by employees in this role. It is not intended to be a detailed list of all duties and responsibilities which may be required. This role profile will be supplemented and further defined by annual objectives, which will be developed in conjunction with the post holder. It will be subject to regular review and the Council reserves the right to amend or add to the accountabilities listed.

