

Role Profile

Job title	Council Tax & Benefits Officer
Grade	Level 1 – Grade C Level 2 – Grade D
Reports to	Council Tax, Benefits & Welfare Team Leader
Politically restricted post	No
DBS requirement	Basic

Team Summary
<p>The Council Tax, Benefits & Welfare Team has a focus on delivering an efficient and effective service to customers. Working as an empowered and multi-skilled team to provide a professional and efficient first point of contact for council services relating to Council Tax and Benefits across all access channels – online forms, emails, telephone calls, web chat, written correspondence, back office workflows and in person. The team process enquiries and applications using technical knowledge, business rules, statutory guidance, policies and internal procedures. Additionally, the team are skilled in providing advice and guidance to customers, to signpost to third party agencies where appropriate and to support and enable customers to transact online.</p>
Role Purpose
<p>To be responsible for the accurate processing, collection and recovery of Council Tax within the statutory requirements.</p> <p>To ensure that customers entitled to Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Reduction receive prompt and accurate payment.</p> <p>To provide a professional and helpful first point of contact service to all customers in relation to Council Tax billing, collection and recovery, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction applications and enquiries.</p> <p>To provide support and cover to the Customer Access Point if required.</p>
Key Tasks and Responsibilities
<p>All Levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To be the first point of contact for all customer enquiries and transactions relating to Council Tax and Benefits, seeing requests through to completion or referring to the relevant officer as appropriate. ➤ To ensure that all enquiries and applications are processed in an efficient, accurate and professional manner in line with statutory requirements, the Council's business needs, policies, objectives and service delivery objectives. ➤ To ensure customers are encouraged and supported to self-serve through the Council's and other organisations websites. ➤ To maintain strict confidentiality and ensure that data protection regulations are consistently adhered to. ➤ To be proactive in identifying any changes to systems or processes which will improve the customer journey and/or streamline service by providing efficiencies and more robust ways of working. ➤ To proactively participate in any relevant cross training or upskilling within the service area to develop areas of knowledge and provide an ongoing commitment to personal development. ➤ Signpost customers to other organisations or agencies for assistance where relevant ie. Money Advice Service, Refer Net, National Debt Line, Citizens Advice Bureau, Kent County Council, Porchlight, Shelter etc. ➤ To proactively prioritise and manage juggling different work types ie ensuring that telephone wait times are kept to a minimum whilst adhering to standards in other work. ➤ To share information, knowledge and best practice with other team members in order to promote an ethic of continual improvement within the team. ➤ To promote a positive team spirit by working well with other team members, sharing responsibility of common goals and understanding different roles and responsibilities.

- To carry out other duties commensurate with the grade, skills, experience and qualifications of the post holder as directed and as may be required from time to time.
- To identify and prioritise safeguarding concerns, as per the council's safeguarding policy.
- To actively demonstrate the values and behaviours of the Council.

Level 1:

- Respond to relatively straightforward customer enquiries and undertake cases that will require some understanding of the relevant service processes, regulations and legislation.

Level 2:

- Fully competent in undertaking all aspects of more complex cases independently and across all mediums.
- Train and mentor new staff in specific areas.

Initially, staff will undertake the duties that they transfer into the team with, but in time they will undertake training to be able to undertake other similar level tasks to provide capacity and resilience to the team. Progression through the levels / grades will be in line with the agreed performance framework.

Specific Tasks and Responsibilities

Duties undertaken by the team will include:

- To process all Council Tax administration quickly and accurately in line with current legislation and the operating procedures of the service.
- To assess and process all Housing Benefit applications quickly and accurately in line with current legislation and the operating procedures of the service.
- To assess and process all Housing Benefit applications quickly and accurately in line with current legislation and the operating procedures of the service.
- To calculate changes of circumstances to HB and CTR cases promptly and accurately to maximise subsidy and reduce days to process.
- To process and manage tasks such as Citizens Access in an accurate and timely manner.
- To process DWP notifications, such as ATLAS, VEP and UC notifications in an accurate and timely manner. Reporting to DWP as required.
- To process claim and account reviews as required.
- Adhere to DWP data sharing arrangements and the appropriate use of systems such as Searchlight and VEP.
- To handle with customer call enquiries and web chat and resolve queries as applicable.
- To maintain a prompt response to telephone, e-mail and written queries concerning specific cases raised by Landlords/Housing Associations and other outside bodies.
- To calculate apportionments, discounts, exemptions, reliefs and refunds on Council Tax accounts, including credit transfers.
- To assist customers in making arrangements, applying for Benefits and giving general debt advice on recovery notices to prevent formal enforcement action.
- To set up new properties, reporting to the Valuation Office, liaising with Visiting Officers, planning and Valuation Office. Processing valuation schedules and maintenance of all property listings.
- To process all matters relating to Direct Debit to comply with the BACS rules and ensure collection is prompt and effective.
- To monitor recovery arrangements, attachments to earnings or attachments to DWP benefits and investigate any queries.
- To assist and advise customers on applications for Discretionary Housing Payments, Exceptional Hardship Payments and applications under Section 13A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and ensuring supporting evidence is supplied and adequate information is collected for a decision to be made. Refer if necessary to outside agencies for further help i.e. Kent County Council for crisis payments, Family Mosaic for funding, Step Change for debt advice etc.

- To offer accurate signposting and welfare support as applicable, including to the Council's own internal support schemes.
- To identify and refer irregularities of information to the Investigations Officer or the relevant Team Leader/Manager for further investigation.
- To assist with face-to-face support in the Customer Access Point as required.
- To manage Breathing Space applications as directed by Team Leaders.
- To actively promote e-billing and other online measures to landlords and residents.
- To take personal responsibility for managing your workload and have a flexible approach in supporting the Team Leaders/Manager to manage resources throughout the day.
- To work in partnership with the Corporate Debt Team, Housing, Systems, Visiting Officers and other relevant departments to provide an efficient, joined up Council Tax, Benefits and Welfare Service and to share information to ensure shared records are kept up to date.
- To demonstrate an on-going commitment to personal development and by attending training courses as agreed with Team Leaders/Manager and completing E-Learning modules as required.
- To be proactive in identifying ideas that may improve service delivery to the Team Leaders/Manager and Benefits Officers such as testing and developing of new systems i.e. digital delivery or automated systems. Sharing information, knowledge and best practice to promote an ethic of continual improvement within the team.
- Assisting the Team Leaders/Manager and Compliance & Development Officers in ensuring that operational procedures are kept up to date and to train and/or mentor staff development in collaboration with the relevant officers.
- To promote a positive team spirit by working well with other team members, sharing responsibility of common goals, understanding different roles and responsibilities develop good working relationships across the Council to have respect for other team members.

Corporate Expectations

- Adhere to the Council's safeguarding policies and procedures and undertake relevant training in order to help protect children and vulnerable adults within the district.
- To comply with legislation, council policies and procedures including the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act, Information Security Policy, the Code of Conduct for Officers and to participate in any Emergency Planning activities as required.
- To actively demonstrate the values and behaviours of the Council.
- To ensure our customers are valued by taking into account their views and needs in all that we do.
- To contribute to the development and achievement of relevant corporate and service objectives by suggesting ideas for service improvements.
- To communicate openly and honestly with colleagues, members and customers.
- To undergo any training necessary to be able to fulfil the requirements of the job.
- To carry out other duties commensurate with the grade, skills, experience and qualifications of the post holder as directed and as may be required from time to time.

Qualifications

Level 1: Good standard of education with a minimum of 5 GCSE's (A-C standard or equivalent (including Maths & English)), Level 2 literacy and numeracy (or equivalents) or recent and relevant experience that demonstrates proficiency in English and Maths. NVQ2/3 Business Administration or Customer Services would be desirable.

Level 2: Good standard of education with a minimum of 5 GCSE's (A-C standard or equivalent (including Maths & English)), or equivalent is essential, educated to A Level / NVQ Level 3 standard or equivalent with a relevant qualification such as IRRV Technician Award or NVQ would be desirable.

Knowledge, Skills & Experience

All Levels:

- Ability to work as part of a team.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Attention to detail and accuracy.
- Competent user of IT, particularly Microsoft Office, with an ability to learn new systems quickly
- Proactive and committed to continued service and personal development.
- Ability to adapt and organise work to meet deadlines whilst maintaining high standards.
- Professional and customer focused approach.
- Ability to build working relationships at all levels.
- The ability to research, assimilate and explain complex information, including relevant legislation and its effect on specific cases

Level 1:

- Understanding of customer focussed, support service roles with ideally a minimum of one years' experience of working in a similar customer service type role learning administrative skills.
- Ability to analyse and respond to requests with an understanding of when to seek assistance and when to escalate an enquiry.
- Experience of operating MS Office systems such as Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook.
- Recent and relevant administrative experience
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Level 2:

- Demonstrable experience (ideally at least 2 years) of working in a similar Council Tax or Benefits environment or in an equivalent customer focused type role.
- Experience of dealing with more complex enquiries and providing multi-disciplinary support.
- Ability to work with minimal supervision.
- Knowledge of Council Tax and/or benefits legislation and experience of its application.

