SOUTH KESTEVEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

Job Description

Job title	**Benefits officer**	Hours	37 hours per week
Department	Revenues, Benefits and Customer Service	Salary	Up to SK9 (£31,911 per annum)
Location	A hybrid of home and office based working	Contract	Permanent

Main Job Purpose

To work under the direction of the Benefits Team Leader or Senior Benefits Officer to make timely and accurate assessments of entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

To award entitlement to Housing Benefits / Council Tax Support where appropriate and manage a caseload of complex claims, ensuring that payments are made promptly and in accordance with Government guidelines and Departmental procedures. This will involve contact with claimants calling in person, face to face, by telephone and by correspondence.

This role is not politically restricted.

Main Statement of Responsibilities

1**. Carry out the assessment of benefit claims in accordance with current legislation and in line with the standards laid down by the Department of Works and Pensions, as adopted by the Council and taking into consideration all changes arising from the Government's Welfare Reforms. These duties include:**

- Ensure own knowledge of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support is sufficient to undertake all related duties.
- Develop and maintain and in-depth knowledge of Revenues ICT systems and other ancillary ICT applications
- Develop and maintain a good level of knowledge and understanding of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support legislation to ensure that assessment work is carried out to the standards required. Also taking into account separate rules for working age, vulnerable and pensionable claims.
- Develop and maintain sufficient levels of knowledge and understanding of council tax legislation to accurately establish chargeable occupation and liability. To issue council tax bills accordingly on all accounts linked to council tax support. Process moves, changes, apply discounts and exemptions and update deceased claims.
- Keep up to date with legislation relating to Housing Benefit Administration and Welfare Reforms by undertaking and successfully completing relevant internal and external training, reading, and understanding benefit circulars and bulletins, and implemented changes to procedures and office processes including the use of new technology as required for the purposes of the post holder's duties and responsibilities
- Support the Senior Benefits Officer in the maintenance processes and procedures within the benefits office in relation to financial matters and overpayment recovery.

2. Carry out all ancillary activities associated with the benefit claim process. These duties include:

- Advising and assisting claimants via the use of the telephone or in person on the Benefits Enquiry desk(s), with an emphasis on the "Customer First" ethos. This may involve working, as directed, from time to time at another location within the Council's area.
- Assist in the completion of new benefit claim forms, verifying supporting documents and crosschecking information provided to determine the evidence necessary for the assessment and award of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.
- Terminate Benefit entitlement promptly on all relevant claims in line with Department of Work and Pensions notifications and other sources of information.
- Gather and help maintain claim records and evidence to support the benefit award decision, in accordance with general DWP guidance and office procedures.
- Support as necessary the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments and other grants which may be announced by Government including applying any mandatory or discretionary reliefs as they are brought in throughout the year.
- Refer claims to Rent Officer when required and action when decision is received.
- Suspend and resume benefits payments.
- Action "extended payment claims" and "Transitional Housing Benefit payments"
- Download and process claims relating to VEP Alerts and HBMS.
- Undertake annual housing benefit reviews and liaise with the DWP to identify errors or fraud and make any corrections as necessary.
- Carry out claim reconsideration requests in line with current benefit legislation and Council Tax Support rules.
- Consider any backdating requests using guidance relating to 'good cause'.
- Process underlying entitlement, including claims relating to diminishing capital.
- Process claims relating to Universal Credit, both new claims, stops and changes received via LCTR.
- Update information received via CIS queue.
- Indexing files and emails as required and assist BSU with their indexing at busier times.
- Identify and make referrals to the Food Bank as appropriate.
- Undertake any other responsibilities aligned with the overall purpose and grade of the role.

3. Ensure that Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support claims are assessed correctly and accurately. Identify overpayments of Housing Benefit and undertake initial recovery action as appropriate

- Achieve a high level of accuracy in cases being assessed for which the calculation of the awarded benefit amount is correct
- Accurately complete requests for write off of overpayments of benefit.
- Undertake accurate assessments of Housing Benefit, identifying correct subsidy classifications.
- Ensure billing of council tax is correct and accurate, in accordance with legislation.
- Ensure relevant information is shared with the council tax and rents officers thereby assisting in the council tax billing process, to enable the authority to bill promptly and accurately and the recovery of rent for LAHRA properties.
- Work with other officers to maintain accurate and up to date benefit records to ensure that the benefits information held on file and in the benefits system in relation to household composition correctly matches information held within the Council Tax system.
- Amend claims following Subsidy Audit as directed by Technical Support or External auditors

4. Ensure GDPR and the Council's Data Protection procedures and policy are fully adhered to

- NOT to disclose, without prior authority so to do, to any member of the public or authorised source, confidential or personal information about the Council's work or any individual or group obtained whilst the post holder is carrying out their duties.

5. Maintain information and system security

- Ensure security of information taken via Searchlight and VEP for use within claims including ongoing training and awareness of prosecution in regard to improper/incorrect use of DWP systems.

6. Liaise with customers, internal teams, and outside agencies:

- Liaise with members of the public by telephone, correspondence and face to face as required
- Handle all enquiries in a polite and professional manner, providing accurate advice by telephone, letter, and face to face To respond appropriately to correspondence, enquiries, and letters
- Advise claimants of shortcomings which preclude their claim from being processed and communicating with other interested parties and provide additional support and advice to maximise income.
- Visit claimants addresses when required – such as when an exceptionally large overpayment has been created, to give advice and support face to face.
- Work closely with the Revenues Team to provide a wholistic service for the customer .
  Liaise with other teams, sections, departments, and outside bodies to enable the team to carry out its commitment to customers and the wider Council.

Core values

Our vision is to "be the best district in which to live, work, and visit." To achieve this promise, we are building an organisation with a strong internal culture. Our values determine how we behave and deliver services to our residents and businesses and how we interact with each other, and we believe that our values are just as important as skills.

They focus attention on six areas:

Trust

- We act with credibility, professionalism and integrity in all that we do.
- An important guiding principle in the Council's operations and decision-making process, Trust is found in all relationships; from colleagues, Members and building our resident's trust.

Empowerment

- Committed to creating an environment where colleagues are encouraged and supported to take initiative.
- A culture of collaboration and teamwork where everyone is encouraged to share ideas, contribute and work together.

Accountability

- Taking responsibility for our actions and operating in a transparent manner.
- Being responsible for our own performance.

Making a Difference

- Addressing the complex challenges we face with innovative solutions.
- Driven by a purpose to create a positive impact and improve the lives of residents and the community of South Kesteven.

Supportive to All

- Putting residents at the heart of everything we do.
- Being an inclusive Council that values and celebrates diversity.

Kindness

- Empathy and understanding of others.
- Treating everyone with respect.



Flexibility

Some flexibility in the working hours will be required from time to time. This job description is not intended to be exhaustive. The post holder will be expected to adopt a flexible attitude to duties which may have to be varied (after discussion with the post holder) subject to the changing needs of the organisation.

Person Specification

Relevant Experience, Skills and Knowledge

Essential

- Experience of working in a Benefits' based environment, preferably in an assessor or Customer Services role
- Effective customer care skills, both face-to-face and via the telephone.
- Must be capable of organising own workload to meet targets and deadlines
- Needs to be logical, flexible, and able to work under pressure especially when face to face.
- Effective written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to work efficiently and effectively in a very busy and challenging environment
- Evidence of previous experience of using computerised databases and other information technology
- Experience of dealing with the general public and at times dealing with difficult customers
- Able to analyse and interpret complex information to accurately process claims for benefit or discount
- Evidence of current knowledge of Adult and Children's safeguarding, basic health and safety within the Authority, fire procedures and equality and diversity
- Able to confidently multi task
- Experience of providing high quality, customer focused services

- Experience of working in a performance driven organisation
- Experience of working with a diverse range of vulnerable customers

Desirable

- Effective knowledge of Housing Benefit legislation, Council Tax Support Schemes, and the Welfare Reforms
- Knowledge of subsidy classifications and understand of implications of subsidy
- Evidence of successful partnership or multi-agency working

Relevant Qualifications

Essential

- 5 GCSE's (or equivalent) at Grade C or above (to include maths and English)
- Full UK driving licence or ability to make suitable arrangements
- Knowledge and understanding of computer packages specifically Microsoft Office

Desirable

- Relevant professional IRRV qualification in Benefits
- Working knowledge of Benefits IT Systems, preferably Northgate
- Working knowledge of document management preferably Civica or similar

Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Essential

- Accountable and willing to take responsibility for own actions
- Willingness to work as part of a team with flexibility in terms of hours, location, and duties
- Ability to work unsupervised using own initiative
- Willingness to undertake further training
- Able to exercise discretion and act with complete confidentiality, upholding the principles of legislation such as Data Protection Act/GDPR etc
- Ability to remain calm in pressurised situations working in an un-confrontational and professional way.
- Awareness of equality issues
- Be pro-active and make effective decisions
- Good people and interpersonal skills
- Able to communicate complex messages in a simple and empathetic way to customers
- A flexible approach in terms of place, hours, location and duties and cross-organisation working
- Able to work fairly and ensure legislation and policies are applied consistently for decision making
- Have a collaborative approach to working with colleagues, external organisations, and partners
- Contribute ideas and learning to support the Council as a learning organisation