



Post Specification

Date	April 2024
Post Group Number	8203
Post Title	Interim Strategic Lead - Benefits
Job Family	Regulation and Technical
Job Family Role Profile	RT17
Final Grade	Grade 17

To be read in conjunction with the job family role profile

Service Area description

On 21 July 2021, the Secretary of State announced plans for the reorganisation of local government in Cumbria. Local government in the county has now transitioned from the previous tiered structure with the county council and six district councils providing different services, to two new unitary councils from 1 April 2023. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape the county's local government services for the better.

This role provides an exciting opportunity to shape the way Westmorland and Furness Council delivers its Benefits service to residents, to provide a consistent, effective and customer-focused service at all times.

The Revenues and Benefits service sits within the Resources Directorate, specifically within the Finance service, and is responsible for the professional, timely and accurate collection, recovery and enforcement of monies due, and for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support to our residents.

The Revenues and Benefits service is responsible for the following key functions:

- Council Tax
- Business Rates
- Debt Recovery
- Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support
- Housing Benefit overpayment recovery

Housing Benefit broadly consists of:

- Rent allowances – private rented dwellings
- Rent rebates – Council owned dwellings
- Supported accommodation
- Temporary accommodation
- Subsidy claims submitted to the Department of Works & Pensions
- Discretionary Housing Payments

The current Housing Benefit caseload is over 5,800.

Council Tax Reduction broadly consists of:

- The provision of, and administration of local support in compliance with the Westmorland and Furness Council Tax Reduction scheme

The current Council Tax Reduction Scheme caseload is over 13,000.

Purpose of this post

- To provide effective management of the Benefits function, providing efficient Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Housing Benefit overpayment recovery services, taking into account relevant legislation, policies and performance targets with the objective of providing a responsive, efficient, high quality, inclusive and sustainable Benefits service
- To drive, manage, and undertake a proactive, hands on, and lead role in transformational and organisational change, including the alignment of the provision and administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction across Westmorland and Furness, including the development of policy, procedures and service planning activities to develop the service and harmonise ways of working, continuously evaluating and monitoring performance and ensuring the most effective resources are utilised
- To be an active member of the Revenues & Benefits Management Team, with collective responsibility for the leadership of the service, providing clear advice, guidance and direction which promotes and develops a culture of continuous improvement, compliance and efficiency, whilst also which promotes the vision, values and behaviours of the council
- To support the Interim Service Manager for Revenues & Benefits in planning and managing the delivery of a high quality, inclusive, efficient and cost-effective benefits service across Westmorland and Furness and to ensure the Council fulfils its statutory and discretionary duties, deputising for the Interim Service Manager for Revenues & Benefits as and when required
- To protect public funds and the council's financial standing by ensuring that the amount housing benefit subsidy claimed is accurate and timely, and the development and implementation of robust plans and procedures to reduce the risk of errors and improve accuracy
- To collaborate with Interim Leads and Service Manager within the Revenues & Benefits Service and colleagues within other Directorates to ensure a high quality, consistent, customer focused service is delivered that is responsive to customer needs
- To lead and contribute to a range of projects and build relations with both internal and external partners and stakeholders in order to achieve specified outcomes
- Develop business cases and strategies to shape how the service will be delivered by the Council, in line with the vision and objectives of the Council Plan. Cross directorate working will be critical in shaping how services will be delivered in a safe, cost effective and efficient manner
- To ensure cost effective provision of comprehensive services to meet strategic responsibilities and make decisions that align with the Council Plan and priorities and take account of local factors
- To lead and advise senior managers, members and new areas of legislation and to ensure these are reflected in the Councils policies and strategies

Key job specific accountabilities

- To take a hands on approach and a significant role in the integration of 3 legacy Benefits teams into a single team.
- To plan, develop and implement the operational alignment of all aspects of the benefits service provision across Westmorland and Furness Council, ensuring successful delivery of the service against its statutory responsibilities, including the development of new, harmonised and aligned policies and procedures, including those related to temporary and specified accommodation.
- Be a principal technical and procedural advisor for the Benefits service, providing advice, guidance and support to a variety of internal colleagues, including Directors, Members, partners and stakeholders, maintain a thorough and up to date knowledge of all Benefit related matters.
- Manage day to day operational activities, within the Benefits teams through effective leadership and line management.
- To maintain and monitor Service Level Agreements with appropriate third parties, both internal and external.
- To ensure accurate and timely administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction across Westmorland and Furness.

- To ensure that the current Benefits systems (NEC and Capita) are maintained and used effectively and to ensure that together with the Interim Revenues & Benefits Systems Lead, that all relevant IT support systems are kept under continuous review.
- To work closely with, and deputise for the Interim Service Manager Revenues and Benefits as and when required.
- To execute people and performance management, leading and promoting a culture of continuous development and improvement.
- Timely and accurate translation and communication of revised legislation, policy, guidance and system changes into operational practice and process to a variety of audiences.
- To manage and develop training programmes for the Benefits Team to ensure that all colleagues receive appropriate training and development in all areas of benefits administration, legislation and systems, systematically training, coaching, mentoring and developing colleagues to achieve their potential.
- Contribute to service planning including development of comprehensive business and operational work plans.
- Review quality and accuracy across the teams and design and implement processes and procedures that protects and maximises Council income and public funds.
- To co-ordinate, manage and oversee the accurate and timely completion of Benefits statistical returns, including compilation and submission of subsidy estimates and claims, management information and end of year processes.
- To ensure that all statistical records in respect of each function of the service (including caseload, payment information, speed of processing and management information data) are maintained together with relevant Managers.
- To be the key point of contact for internal and external audits, including the Housing Benefit Assurance Process.
- Play a key role in service transformation and project delivery, including implementation of a single system, digitisation and planning and implementation of change, in line with the Council's vision, values and strategic objectives, and service plans.
- Identification of, and management of operational risks associated to the benefits service.
- Undertake analysis, evaluation and interpretation of data and information and production of reports.
- Keep accurate and up to date records in relation to resources within the service.
- Keep accurate records of financial information that will form part of ongoing budget management by the Interim Service Manager.
- Recommend debt write off schedules for submission to the Assistant Director of Finance or Section 151 Officer or appropriate committee, in accordance with Financial Rules and authorise the writing off of small balances where appropriate in the interests of economy and efficiency.
- Oversee quality and accuracy of the service's forms, literature, web content and customer communications.
- Ensure professional, timely and accurate management and responses to sensitive, complex or contentious cases, including FOIs and complaints.
- Build constructive, collaborative relationships with colleagues, third parties, organisations and agencies as appropriate.
- To provide support to future procurements relating to the service.
- To support existing Managers with recruitment and selection .

These duties are illustrative and not exhaustive. The post holder will be expected to become involved in a range of work to enable the service to respond effectively to the changing requirements of the Council and changes affecting the workforce.

Please note annual targets will be discussed during the appraisal process

Key facts and figures of the post

Budget Responsibilities

No direct budget responsibility.

Staff Management Responsibilities	Management responsibility for the Benefits service across Westmorland and Furness Council, which will include diverse and disparate teams and approximately 40 colleagues.
Other	Working closely with the Interim Service Manager, Members, Portfolio Holder, external partners and Trade Union colleagues.

Essential Criteria - Qualifications, knowledge, experience and expertise

Qualifications

- Relevant professional qualification or demonstrable equivalent experience in a Benefits environment.

Knowledge

- Extensive technical, IT (including Capita or Northgate Revenues & Benefits systems), legislative and specialist knowledge in a Benefits environment.

Experience and Expertise

- Significant experience of working in a local authority (or similar) Revenues and Benefits Service environment.
- Management experience and associated skills in leading multi-disciplined teams.
- Excellent ICT skills and the ability to use a variety of IT systems.
- Experience of developing and implementing policies, procedures and innovation to support and improve service delivery.
- Experience of complex decision making taking into account technical issues and customer expectations that deal with wide ranging issues.
- Experience of delivering strategy and policy across operational services.
- Experience of producing reports for performance monitoring purposes.
- Experience in compiling and submitting data for statutory returns.
- Ability to lead, manage and motivate others to deliver service plans, and through significant periods of change.
- Ability to operate in a complex and changing service environment.
- Hands on, innovative and proactive approach to service delivery.
- Ability to promote values and behaviours and promote positive working relationships within and between services.
- An excellent, clear and constructive communicator at all levels.
- Strong negotiation, influencing and persuasion skills.
- Ability to make recommendations, make decisions and take responsibility for actions.
- Excellent interpersonal skills: a strong networker able to build relationships with mutual confidence, honesty and respect.
- Ability to see the 'Bigger picture'.
- Strong team player with the ability to take a hands on approach to meeting the demands of the service.
- Ability to challenge constructively.
- Ability to work accurately, to deadlines whilst under pressure.
- Outstanding organisational and planning skills and a demonstrable ability to create work schedules, prioritise and prepare in advance.
- The ability to think creatively to plan and examine business processes and operating models and to develop a range of creative and original solutions that meet organisational and customer needs.

Disclosure and Barring Service – DBS Checks

- This post requires a DBS check.
- The level of check required is -
- Basic DBS check

Job working circumstances

Emotional Demands

- Will involve working on multiple priorities at the same time.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in a decision making, which may receive strong opinion and / or opposition from those potentially affected and the wider community. • Will require strong personal and emotional resilience when dealing with affected staff groups particularly when advising significant change. • Will require strong personal and emotional resilience when dealing with vulnerable customers in distressing situations and under difficult circumstances.
Physical Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal
Working Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional requirement to work outside of normal office hours
Other Factors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Revenues and Benefits service has anchor buildings in Barrow in Furness, Penrith and Kendal and there will be a requirement for regular travel to each site and attendance at meetings within and outside of Cumbria. • Working closely with the Interim Service Manager, Members, Portfolio Holder, external partners and Trade Union colleagues 	