

Northumberland County Council  
**JOB DESCRIPTION**

<b>Post Title:</b> Welfare Advice & Support Officer	<b>Director/Service/Sector</b> Place, Housing & Public Protection, Housing Services		<b>Office Use</b>	
<b>Band:</b> Band 6	<b>Workplace:</b>		<b>JE ref:</b>	<b>3531</b>
<b>Responsible to:</b> Income Manager	<b>Date:</b> January 2019	<b>Manager Level:</b>	<b>HRMS ref:</b>	
<b>Job Purpose:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responsible for providing a high quality,comprehensive service to enable minimising financial hardship and maximizing rental income by ensuring tenants claims for Housing Benefit are assessed appropriately.</li><li>• Responsible for assisting with appeals and challenging Benefit assessments where anomalies are identified.</li><li>• Responsible for being the point of contact within the housing service for any housing benefit issues associated with rents and service charges.</li><li>• Provide support and advice to tenants to enable them to sustain their tenancy.</li><li>• Responsible for supporting all initiatives to prevent and minimise rent debt, by providing high quality written and verbal information.</li><li>• Work in partnership with all other agencies in order to ensure tenants have access to support and advice whether it be financial or otherwise.</li><li>• Responsible for investigating all weekly housing benefit suspensions.</li><li>• Contribute to the development and implementation of measures to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform/Universal Credit</li></ul>				
<b>Resources</b>	<b>Staff</b>	None		
	Finance	Maximise rental income by ensuring tenants are provided with the support they require in relation to their income.		
	Physical	Responsible for the safe keeping of valuable documents e.g. financial and benefit documentation and personal sensitive data		
	Clients	Daily contact with Council tenants, Citizens Advice Bureau, staff in Revenues and Benefits and Council tax		
<b>Duties and key result areas:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To lead in specialist area of Housing Benefit, by maintaining knowledge of Housing Benefit regulations and keep up to date with legislative changes.</li><li>• Advise and assist colleagues in the Income Management Team in relation to complex Housing Benefit cases.</li><li>• Negotiate and advise customers on housing benefit matters and make decisions on individual cases where the policy framework is inappropriate because of individual circumstances.</li></ul>				

- Carry out home visits to discuss individual claims and circumstances
  - Provide any training to staff in relation to the use of the Housing Benefit and Council tax benefits computer system in order to develop an understanding of the interfaces with NPS system
  - Record year on year savings identified through assisted housing benefit appeals for customers.
  - Contribute to the development and implementation of measures to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform/Universal Credit
  - Report and co-operate on responses to potential fraudulent activity when appropriate evidence exists.
  - To ensure that tenants are able to maximise their income by ensuring take up of any entitlement to welfare benefits.
  - To assist tenants with the completion of Housing Benefit Claims, ensuring that they are aware of what they need to provide in order to have their claim processed and to liaise closely with the Housing Benefit Team to highlight claims requiring urgent attention.
  - Due to the nature of this role, the ability to advocate effectively for clients with creditors and at court is essential, as is the ability to write high quality, detailed and accurate case records, letters, reports and statements in plain English.
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- Liaise with the DWP and residents regarding Universal Credit, carry out assessments where possible and give appropriate advice and assistance for timely and full rent payments.
    - To attend any additional court hearings when necessary and to fully prepare evidence files for such cases.
  - To deal with members of the public, welfare rights agencies and Money Advice agencies regarding customers with financial and/or personal difficulties.
  - To deal with other external professional agencies e.g. courts, solicitors, bailiffs, Official Receiver and Insolvency Practitioners.
  - Exchanging orally and in writing complex and contentious information with a range of audiences, including non specialists and assisting in the compilation of recovery claims.
  - Assist in delivering targeted financial inclusion schemes to help households maximise their income and become more financially resilient.
  - As the Benefits Advisor, provide a specialist advice service to clients in all areas relating to debt and welfare benefits. Client focussed and managing a caseload of tenants who are experiencing financial hardship, responsible for advising them through various channels, including 1:1 appointments and supporting on their telephone advice line, as well as conducting home visits and other outreach sessions as required ,responsible for dealing with continuous and complex debt advice problems including, rent arrears, repossession cases, and council tax issues such as supporting clients at the Magistrate Courts

The duties and responsibilities highlighted in this Job Description are indicative and may vary over time. Post holders are expected to undertake other duties and responsibilities relevant to the nature, level and extent of the post and the grade has been established on this basis.

Work Arrangements	
Transport requirements: Working patterns: Working conditions:	Involves travel to work sites, area offices throughout the County and further afield on occasion. Normal office hours but flexi-hours may apply. Potential significant exposure to difficult situations involving customer complaints and disputes.

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**PERSON SPECIFICATION**

<b>Post Title:</b> Welfare Advice & Support Officer		<b>Director/Service/Sector</b> Housing Services	Ref: 3531
<b>Essential</b>		<b>Desirable</b>	<b>Assess by</b>
<b>Knowledge and Qualifications</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Good standard of education to NVQ Level 3 or equivalent</li><li>● In depth working knowledge of professional theory,practice and procedures</li><li>● In depth working knowledge of housing law and current housing issues specifically in relation to rent recovery.</li><li>● In depth working knowledge of Benefit and Welfare Reform Legislation.</li><li>● Understands the diverse functions of a large complex public organisation.</li><li>● An active awareness of and active interest in the current issues facing the service.</li><li>● Understands the relationship between costs, quality, customer care and performance and actively monitors progress within the Department.</li><li>● Actively undertaking ongoing continuous professional and personal development.</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Evidence of on-going personal development</li><li>● A relevant housing qualification or equivalent.</li></ul>	
<b>Experience</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Extensive enforcement experience in a rent or revenues environment</li><li>● Experience in applying relevant enforcement methods, tools and techniques</li><li>● Experience of dealing effectively with others</li><li>● Competence in using Microsoft Office, Oracle applications, word processing, spreadsheets and database systems.</li><li>● Thorough knowledge and experience in a relevant context and service.</li><li>● An active desire to provide effective customer centred services.</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Court prosecutions</li><li>● Experience of collaborative working</li><li>● Experience of building partnerships</li><li>● Experience of setting targets and monitoring performance</li></ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of working under pressure, being creative to solve complex issues within diverse communities</li> </ul>		
<b>Skills and competencies</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent Interpersonal skills to develop effective working relationships with a diverse client range.</li> <li>• Able to deal effectively with confrontational/threatening situations</li> <li>• Effective IT skills and ability to understand and develop the use of ITC to achieve work objectives.</li> <li>• Confident and competent in expressing own views and an active participant in internal and external meetings.</li> <li>• Persistence in applying a methodical approach to problem solving.</li> <li>• Negotiation skills and able to persuade others to an alternative point of view.</li> <li>• Numerate and able to analyse complex business related statistics.</li> <li>• Ability to organise and plan own workload.</li> <li>• Ability to work independently and on own initiative, able to make decisions when needed out on site</li> <li>• Ability to write reports as necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court prosecution skills</li> </ul>	(
<b>Physical, mental and emotional demands</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally works from a seated position with regular need to walk, bend or carry items.</li> <li>• Need to maintain general awareness, with lengthy periods of enhanced concentration.</li> <li>• Regular contact with public/clients in dispute/negotiation with the County Council..</li> <li>• Regular contact with vulnerable clients from a complex backgrounds</li> <li>• Working in a highly pressured and stressful environment on a regular basis</li> <li>• On occasions may be subject to potential threats of physical violence</li> </ul>		)
<b>Other</b>		

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hold a valid driving licence and have use of a vehicle</li></ul> |  |  |
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