

Northumberland County Council  
**JOB DESCRIPTION**

Post Title: Welfare Rights Team Manager		Director/Service/Sector: Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing Directorate/Welfare Rights		Office Use	
Band: 9 scp 34-38		Workplace: County Hall / Eddie Ferguson House		JE ref: 3975	
Responsible to: Senior Manager (Policy)		Date: November 2024			
<b>Job Purpose:</b> To provide management and development of the Welfare Rights Team, ensuring a range of systems are in place to provide advice, training and guidance about welfare rights across the Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing Directorate and the Council. The postholder requires the ability to work with a high degree of autonomy and initiative to promote the take up of welfare benefits through training, guidance and targeted initiatives and to develop and maintain systems of information and communication to ensure appropriate links with colleagues within and outside the AA&W directorate and the Council. To support the development of coherent County-wide arrangements for welfare rights advice, including advice provided by third sector organisations and other public bodies.					
Resources		Staff	• 5 staff (Welfare Rights Officers and Admin Assistant)		
		Finance	• Hold a delegated budget for costs associated with relevant activities related to the work of the welfare rights team. • Responsible for purchasing specialist reference materials and training. • Required to be authorised signatory for expenditure in line with agreed budget headings		
		Physical	• Responsible for equipment and training materials used for training programmes		
		Clients			
<b>Duties and key result areas:</b>					
<b>Communications and Relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present highly complex information about disabled people's health conditions and the impact that these have on their daily lives, and about the interpretation of social security law, to benefits assessors and tribunals who may need to be persuaded of eligibility for benefit in unusual circumstances or in circumstances where prejudicial assumptions about people with particular conditions or lifestyles may affect their decisions, both in person and by overseeing and guiding the work of welfare rights officers</li><li>• Present complex information about the benefits system and social security legislation, and about how these interact with other aspects of the social care and wider welfare system, to large groups of staff and to external organisations which may find the information hard to absorb because they disagree with the assumptions which underlie the benefits system</li><li>• Present highly complex information about the outcome of benefit claims and Social Security Tribunals to individual disabled people, in circumstances where they may find this information hard to accept, and where empathy and skills at reassurance may be required to enable them to do so.</li><li>• Represent the Council/the Council's Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing Directorate as appropriate at management and officer groups and in meetings with non executives, elected Members and external organisations at local, national and provincial level, providing advice and information on highly complex technical issues about the operation of the benefits system and social security benefit law as required.</li><li>• Address difficult situations with staff, colleagues and directly with clients</li><li>• Negotiate with third sector providers of advice and related services about joint working arrangements and on other issues as they arise, such as grant agreements.</li></ul>					
<b>Analytical Skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assess highly complex issues about the likely application of benefits law to individuals or to groups of people in particular situations, making judgements and giving advice in cases where there may be no unambiguous precedents or expert consensus, where all options may involve risks, and where different elements of the situation may suggest conflicting interpretations.</li></ul>					

### **Planning & Organisational Skills**

- Develop plans for the response of the AA&W Directorate and/or the wider Council to significant changes in benefits law, and adjust these plans as circumstances change, taking account of conflicting expert opinion or potential complex interactions between several components of change

### **Client care**

- Some direct contact with residents and service users to provide advice on benefits issues.

### **Policy & Service Development**

- Bring to the attention of Senior Managers emerging issues about the impact on Council and AA&WB Directorate functions of changes to the welfare benefits system and related areas of national policy.
- Responsible as required for policy development and implementation in discrete areas where the development of operating models for adult social care services such as ensuring the design of schemes maximises the financial benefits for residents and the Council through appropriate claims for, and use of, social security benefits.
- Responsible for liaison and partnership with other Council Directorates including Children's services relevant to care leavers, family placement and disabled young people to ensure the maximisation of financial benefits for families and young people receiving support through the Council.
- Support the strategic management and development of welfare rights and welfare advice across the Council, the AA&WB Directorate and the third sector.
- Liaise with Managers across the AA&WB Directorate to ensure that its strategic direction and aims are supported by the work of the Welfare Rights Team.
- Ensure that the Welfare Rights Team functions on the basis of continual improvement.

### **Human Resources**

- Responsible for day to day management of welfare rights staff in the team
- Support and develop staff through 1:1 supervision, appraisal, training, and development programmes
- Responsible for planning and delivering training, about welfare benefits to staff at all levels in the AA&W Directorate and the Council, and where required to elected Council Members.
- Responsible for the development of Welfare Rights team members including identification of training needs.
- Undertake annual staff personal development reviews for the team.
- Provide line management and professional supervision in line with organisational policy.
- Lead recruitment and selection of staff to the team and implement appropriate induction and ongoing training of new staff.
- Identify and respond appropriately to issues in relation to capability, disciplinary and grievance.
- Promote and ensure safe working practice for all team members both within the office environment and in the wider community at all times-lone working policy, health and safety policy, risk assessments, moving and handling assessments etc.

### **Information Resources**

- To be responsible for the audit of welfare rights enquiry records and case files.
- To be responsible for reference material relating to welfare rights issues
- There is frequent requirement to record information electronically e.g. report writing
- Ability to analyse, interpret and process data received electronically.
- Occasional requirement to use computer software to develop or create statistical reports requiring formulae (e.g. statistical analysis of welfare rights work for annual and other reports)

### **Research & Development**

- Undertake surveys or audits, as necessary regarding the work of the postholder and the team
- Actively seek up to date information and disseminate this to the team, senior managers and Council staff, external organisations and elected Members.

- Actively seek out information about changes to the welfare benefits system including developments in legislation, case law and policy and assess the impact of any changes for the Council.

#### **Freedom to Act**

- Overall goals for welfare rights work will be defined by legislation and by national and local policy, but the postholder will be required to decide how they are best achieved, guided by best practice within advice services and other relevant frameworks.
- Responsible for all activities and tasks within Welfare Rights team, including allocation of the team's work, managing own workload
- Work assessed through periodic supervision meetings with line manager
- Postholder is lead specialist for welfare rights in Northumberland

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:	Travel to work sites, area offices, meetings or other venues throughout the County and region and further afield on occasion.
Working patterns:	May include weekends and evenings. Mainly office based but some travel required.
Working conditions:	Mainly indoors. Occasional exposure to working outdoors. Office based, with some travel – exposure to unpleasant conditions is rare.

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**PERSON SPECIFICATION**

<b>Post Title:</b>	<b>Director/Service/Sector:</b>	Ref:
Welfare Rights Team Manager	<b>Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing / Welfare Rights</b>	<b>Assess by</b>
<b>Essential</b>	<b>Desirable</b>	
<b>Qualifications and Knowledge</b>		
Training and experience to equivalent of degree level <b>or</b> evidence of extensive experience of successfully representing benefit claimants at tribunals and of identifying errors of law in tribunal decisions which have formed the grounds for appeals to upper tribunals.	Educated to MA level in a subject relevant to welfare rights (e.g. law or advice)	a i
<b>Experience</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several years' experience in rights-based work including challenging benefit decisions to First tier Tribunal level</li> <li>• Knowledge of social security and social care legislation.</li> <li>• Understanding of the needs of ill and disabled people and the range of services and benefits provided to support them.</li> <li>• Understanding of the public sector</li> <li>• Understanding of the independent/voluntary sector</li> <li>• Knowledge of the operation of statutory social care services and experience in working alongside them</li> <li>• Experience of delivering training in different formats</li> <li>• Experience of developing and organising a programme of training</li> <li>• Supervisory experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience of preparing appeal submissions for Upper Tribunal level</li> <li>• Experience of managing a team of staff</li> <li>• Experience of managing quality and monitoring of standards.</li> <li>• Knowledge of housing legislation</li> <li>• Experience of working with adult social care Service Users and Carers</li> </ul>	a i t
<b>Skills and competencies</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to manage change within the team setting</li> <li>• Ability to work on own initiative and as part of the strategic team</li> <li>• Ability in development of systems and processes to ensure effective provision of training and casework</li> <li>• High level of interpersonal and communication skills</li> <li>• Ability to produce written material to a high standard, for example in reports, training materials or for briefings to senior managers</li> <li>• Ability to compile and analyse data relevant to requirements</li> <li>• High level of negotiation and organisational skills</li> <li>• Skilled at analysing/reasoning with complex legal arguments, including preparing or guiding the preparation by others of submissions to decisionmakers at all levels in the benefits system, including tribunals, on the application of the law to the circumstances of individuals.</li> <li>• Persistence in applying a methodical approach to problem solving.</li> <li>• Ability to develop productive relationships within the County Council and with external partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to develop standards of service for health and social care services</li> </ul>	A l t

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to develop positive relationships with third sector organisations, including the management of grant or contractual arrangements</li> <li>• Ability to manage stressful situations and support team members to function effectively under stress</li> <li>• Ability to ensure that the team meets deadlines and manages workload effectively</li> <li>• Ability to plan and carry out detailed and comprehensive work plans for the team</li> <li>• Ability to work effectively on a range of tasks, concurrently</li> <li>• Ability to manage the team and implement difficult and unpopular decisions</li> <li>• Ability to write and present reports relevant to context and target audience</li> </ul> <p><b>Physical Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainly office based, sitting at a desk</li> <li>• Daily PC use requiring standard keyboard skills</li> <li>• Some travel required</li> </ul>		
<b>Physical, mental, emotional and environmental demands</b>		
<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The post will mainly involve desk-based activity, meetings, and driving between locations. There may be occasional light physical effort.</li> </ul> <p>Mental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent periods of concentration required to analyse complex issues about benefits law, which are likely to arise unpredictably, with occasional need for prolonged concentration on complex documents such as benefit tribunal submissions or reports to committees or management groups.</li> </ul> <p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occasional exposure to emotional or distressing circumstances – e.g. when giving benefits advice to service users who are terminally ill, or who are concerned that their mental health and ability to cope with life are endangered by loss of benefits</li> </ul>		a i
<b>Motivation</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enthusiasm and high level of motivation</li> <li>• Commitment to high level of effectiveness and collaborative working</li> <li>• Confident and able to work with senior colleagues effectively</li> <li>• Able to establish and develop positive working relationships with colleagues at all levels</li> <li>• Able to establish and develop positive working relationships with managers, staff and volunteers in external organisations</li> <li>• Requirement to work with minimal supervision and using own initiative to identify and implement service improvements.</li> </ul>		i

Other		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capable of discharging the full duties of the post</li> <li>• Office and Home based within the Council's Hybrid and Flexible working arrangements. Occasional need to work outside of normal working hours as required.</li> <li>• Able to meet the transport requirements of the post - some travel throughout Northumberland, regionally and nationally on occasion.</li> <li>• Models and encourages high standards of honesty, integrity, openness, and respect for others</li> </ul>		A i

Key to assessment methods; (a) application form, (i) interview, (r) references, (t) ability tests (q) personality questionnaire (g) assessed group work, (p) presentation, (o) others e.g. case studies/visits