

4th February 2013**Agenda Item: 11****REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE
AND PUBLIC PROTECTION****BENEFITS, TRAINING AND ADVICE SERVICE – PERMANENT
ESTABLISHMENT OF A SENIOR BENEFITS ADVISER POST****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of the report is to seek approval to establish on a permanent basis 1 fte Senior Benefits Adviser post in the Adult Access team at the Customer Service Centre.

Information and Advice

2. In October 2011, the Benefits Training and Advice Team was established with a Senior Benefit Adviser post on a temporary basis until 31st March 2013, subject to review.
3. The Benefits Training and Advice Team offers specialist telephone advice, training and information on benefits on behalf of the Council. The team provide the following services:
 - a. Production of web information relating to welfare benefits, tax credits and advice provision.
 - b. Undertake promotional campaigns to inform residents in Nottinghamshire and relevant Nottinghamshire County Council staff of welfare benefit related issues.
 - c. Provide guidance to Customer Service Centre staff on welfare benefit matters.
 - d. Develop and deliver a training programme for staff on welfare benefit matters.
 - e. Provide telephone benefit advice to customers where Customer Service Centre staff establish specialist advice is appropriate.
4. The Senior Benefits Adviser post is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the service. The post offers professional support and supervision to the three Benefit Advisers within the team and advice to the Finance Officers employed by the County Adoption Service. The Senior Benefits Adviser post also represents the Council on the executive board of Nottinghamshire Advice Network, the Local Government Association advisers Forum, Department for Work and Pensions Local liaison meetings and the County Housing Benefit / Council Tax Benefit managers meetings. This post reports to the team manager of the Adult

Access Team, who manages a service comprising of 21 fte posts plus a project of 7 fte posts.

5. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 will introduce the most far reaching change to the benefits system for twenty-five years with wide ranging implications for the Council. The main changes to the welfare as a result of the act include; the introduction of Universal Credit, changes to Housing and Council Tax Benefit, the replacement of Disability Living Allowance with Personal Independence Payment, the abolition of the Social Fund, and the Act enables the Government to put a cap on the total benefits a person is entitled to. The Senior Benefits Adviser post will support the changes to the welfare system through providing up-to-date information and training to the Council and liaising with District Councils.
6. From April 2013, the Council will be responsible for distribution of funds to alleviate hardship to the citizens of Nottinghamshire abolition of the Department for Work and Pension administered Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. The Senior Benefits Adviser post will play a key role in supporting the implementation of the discretionary Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme which will locally replace Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. The model for delivery of the Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme would be a third party organisation in the first year and the Senior Benefits Adviser post would oversee the delivery of this service. Learning from the first year would enable a review and development of the provision in year two with consultation with key stakeholders such as the voluntary and community organisations and District Councils. The Senior Benefits Adviser post would be responsible for the review and implementing recommendations on future delivery beyond year two.

Other Options Considered

7. The implications of the Welfare Reform Act necessitate this post and the work could not be absorbed by other existing posts or would there be the necessary professional expertise in the area of benefits.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

8. It is recommended that the Senior Benefits Adviser post in the Adult Access team at the Customer Service Centre is established on a permanent basis. The post is required to:
 - a. Deliver day-to-day operations of the service
 - b. supervise three Benefit Advisers
 - c. represent the Council at a strategic level on Welfare Benefit forums
 - d. support and provide professional expertise on the implementation of the capital Nottinghamshire Local Welfare Assistance Scheme
 - e. oversee the delivery of the scheme
 - f. review and develop future options.

Statutory and Policy Implications

9. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder and users. Where such implications are material, they have been brought out in the text of the report. Attention is, however, drawn to specifics as follows:

Human Resources Implications

10. The human resources implications are contained within the body of the report.
11. The Trade Unions have been consulted. Unison supports the appointment of a Senior Benefits Adviser post and welcomes the development of the welfare benefits team which can give real help to vulnerable adults in Nottinghamshire. Unison have consistently supported having this service and vigorously opposed the closing of the Welfare Rights team some two years ago.

Financial Implications

12. The cost of 1 fte (37 hours) Senior Benefits Adviser, Pay Band B, scp 34-39 per annum (full year costs) from April 1st 2013:

		£
1 fte Senior BTIA scale point 39		41,640
casual car user		800
Training		300
TOTAL		42,740

13. Funding for the post has been identified within the base budget.

Equal Opportunities Implications

14. These proposals will help empower the most vulnerable members of society by enabling them to access welfare benefit information and advice.

Implications for Service Users

15. These proposals will enhance the provision of advice on benefits for residents of Nottinghamshire.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that following the outcome of the review that the following post be established on a permanent basis:

- 1) 1 fte (37 hours) Senior Benefits Adviser post, Pay Band B, scp 34-39 (£28,636 - £32,800 per annum) in the Adult Access team at the Customer Service Centre and the post continue to be allocated casual car user status.

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Constitutional Comments (KK 18/01/2013)

16. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Adult Social Care and Health Committee.

Financial Comments (KAS 22/01/2013)

17. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 12 and 13 of the report.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- a. Delegated decision Record - Disestablish the Welfare Rights Team and establish the Benefits Training and Advice Team.
- b. [The Welfare Reform Act 2012](#).
- c. [Social Fund Guide](#) – Department for Work and Pensions – May 2012.
- d. [Government Response Local Support to replace Community Care Grant and Crisis Loans for Living Expenses in England](#) – June 2011.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

ASCH91