

Report of Head of Council Tax & Benefits

Report to Chief Officer Customer Access & Welfare

Date: 8th August 2019

Subject: Approval to Regrade Benefit Assessors from B3 to C1 Council Tax and Benefits Officer

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues:

1. On 21st June 2019 Chief Officer Customer Access & Welfare was presented with a proposal to integrate the Council Tax & Benefits Service.
2. Early Trade Union consultation around this proposal took place and as part of this, and to address Trade Union views that Benefit Assessors should receive higher pay for the work they undertake, an immediate commitment was for a redrafted Benefit Assessor job description to be completed and job evaluated.
3. A draft Council Tax and Benefits Officer job description was submitted for job evaluation and evaluated (Ref:2202) at C1 grade (Appendix 1).
4. Following further Trade Union consultation 29th July 2019, it was proposed that the increase in grade be effective from 1st February 2019 (SCP22 old pay spine, 1st April 2019 assimilated to point 12 new pay spine) with a further incremental point 1st August 2019 (SCP 13).

Recommendations:

5. The Chief Officer Customer Access & Welfare is requested to approve the proposal as set out in this report and regrade the present Benefit Assessors from B3 to C1

(Council Tax and Benefits Officer) effective from 1st February 2019 (SCP 22 old pay spine) 1 April 2019 assimilate 12 new pay spine (no increment); incremental point from 1st August 2019 (SCP 13), their next incremental point being 1st April 2020 (SCP 14).

1.0 Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 This report seeks Chief Officer Welfare & Benefits approval to regrade Benefit Assessors currently at B3 grade to C1 (Council Tax and Benefits Officer) effective from 1st February 2019.

2.0 Background Information:

- 2.1 On 21st June 2019 Chief Officer Customer Access & Welfare was presented with a proposal to integrate the Council Tax & Benefits Service from the Head of Council Tax & Benefits.
- 2.2 Early Trade Union consultation around this proposal took place and as part of this, and to address Trade Union views that Benefit Assessors should receive higher pay for the work they undertake, an immediate commitment from Management was for an updated Benefit Assessor job description to be completed and the role evaluated.
- 2.3 A draft Council Tax and Benefits Officer job description was submitted for job evaluation and evaluated (Ref:2202) at C1 grade (Appendix 1).
- 2.4 Following further Trade Union consultation 29th July 2019, it was proposed that the increase in grade be effective from 1st February 2019 (SCP22 old pay spine, 1st April assimilated to point 12 new pay spine) with a further incremental point 1st August 2019 (SCP 13), the next incremental grade being 1st April 2020 (SCP 14). This offer was formally proposed by the Chief Officer 30th July 2019.

3.0 Main Issues:

- 3.1 The decision to award from the 1st February 2019 is based around when the Trade Unions formally engaged with the Department regards this issue. Where a role is evaluated the grade is applied from the date of evaluation, however, as the Service supports that some staff have been doing elements of the role but not all of the duties' it would therefore not be unreasonable to apply the backdate in this circumstance.
- 3.2 Arising from this increase in grade is an increase in spend this year within the Benefits Service. The costs are expected to be fully met from within this year's Benefit Service budget.
- 3.3 There will also be an additional budget cost in 2020/21 however the present recruitment freeze within the Benefits Service as the City transitions to Universal Credit is expected to continue and therefore through natural turnover it is anticipated that this additional cost will be met.
- 3.4 Not discounting the above, the Head of Service is seeking to integrate both the Council Tax Benefits Service and in doing so is seeking to reduce overall costs in delivering this integration.

4.0 Corporate Considerations:

4.1 Consultation and Engagement:

4.1.1 Consultation has taken place with both HR and Finance.

4.1.2 Consultation has also taken place with the relevant Trade Unions and staff. Comments have been received and noted from the Trade Unions. The main comment being, the request 'to assimilate staff to the appropriate pay point within the grade....if they were already at the top of B3 they would assimilate straight to the top of C1. If they were midway through B3 they would assimilate to midway through the C1 grade.'

4.1.3 The Trade Union request has been considered and appropriate advice taken. The Benefit Assessors role has been regraded (from B3 to C1). Where a job role has been regraded pay policy states, staff receive at least one spinal column point in excess of the salary they would have received on the old grade. Therefore, in line with policy Benefits Assessors will be placed at the minimum point of C1, SCP22 (1st February 2019).

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration:

4.2.1 There are no perceived equality & diversity/cohesion and integration issues arising from the proposals within this report.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities:

4.3.1 The Benefits Service assists in several of the ambitions set out in the Best Council Plan.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money:

4.4.1 The additional costs arising from this approval is £104k in 2019/20 based on their being 57 full time equivalent B3 Benefit Service staff. There will also be additional overtime expenditure due to the increase in the basic pay rate however this figure is minimal with only £14k worked within the Benefits Service at a range of grades this year.

4.4.2 The proposals in this report aim to support the continuation of an efficient Benefits Service that reflects the expectation of the Benefit Assessor role and will help the Service transition into Universal Credit.

4.4.3 It is anticipated that the additional costs in 2020/21 of £134k will be met from the Benefits Service budget through the recruitment freeze and natural turnover, also the intended Council Tax & Benefits integration.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In:

4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report and it is not subject to call in or publication.

4.6 Risk Management:

- 4.6.1 In agreeing to get the Benefit Assessor job description updated it was in the knowledge that it would subsequently go for job evaluation. The outcome was as expected and therefore Management are committed to support the decision. Whilst this means increased costs, it is at a time that the Benefits Service work force reduces in numbers due to a recruitment freeze as the City transitions to Universal Credit. As such, the full cost of the regrade is mitigated as the Service is currently in forecast underspend for this year.
- 4.6.2 Not supporting the job evaluation would likely have met with Trade Union challenge. Additionally, not supporting the review may have led to increased numbers of staff leaving the Benefits Service for higher grades. This would have been further exacerbated with the Service now having relocated to the City centre.

5.0 Conclusions:

- 5.1 The outcome is deemed right and appropriate and in supporting the proposal to have the Benefit Assessor role evaluated it serves to recognise the importance and changing role of the Council's Benefits Service.
- 5.3 A small degree of additional training will be required for some staff but by nature of the role they all undertake presently, the staff affected by this proposal will be able to undertake additional duties with minimal training and support.

Recommendations:

- 6.1 The Chief Officer Customer Access & Welfare is requested to approve the proposal as set out in this report and regrade the present Benefit Assessors from B3 to C1 (Council Tax and Benefits Officer) effective from 1st February 2019 (SCP 22 old pay spine) 1 April 2019 assimilate 12 new pay spine (no increment); incremental point from 1st August 2019 (SCP 13), their next incremental point being 1st April 2020 (SCP 14).

7.0 Background Documents:

None.