

Stevenage Borough Council

Welfare, Benefits and Debt Advice Procedure

Date created	February 2024
Approved by	Assistant Director/SLT
Owner	Sarah Pateman
Version	1
Author	Tania King
Business Unit and Team	Community, Advice and Support
Next Review Date	February 2026
Equality Impact Assessment Completed	February 2024

Contents

2.	Legal Background	3
3.	Responsibilities	3
4.	Procedure.....	3
5.	Governance.....	4
6.	Health and Safety	4
7.	Background Documents	5
8.	Version History	5

1. Introduction

This purpose of this procedure is for staff Welfare, Benefit and Debt Advice department who work with service users to support them around their needs.

2. Legal Background

Stevenage Borough Council's Housing department adopts the following Government legislations to support vulnerable residents:

- Welfare Reform Act 2012
- The Protection from Eviction Act 1977
- The Human Rights Act 1998

3. Responsibilities

Job title	Team	Contact information
Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer	SADA/ Welfare Benefits and Debt Advice Team	01438 242666 Tania.king@stevenage.gov.uk
Welfare Benefits and Debt Advisor x 3	Welfare Benefits and Debt Advice Team	01438 242666 Welfare.Benefit@stevenage.gov.uk

The role of the Domestic Abuse Liaison Officer is to manage the Welfare Benefits and Debt Advice Team

The Role of the Welfare Benefit and Debt Advisor is to support customers of Stevenage Borough Council is to maintain tenancies, so they give advice and support in maximising their income by making claims for benefits or looking at debt solutions.

4. Procedure

The Welfare, Benefits and Debt Advice team provide support to vulnerable residents to help them maximise their income and get their full entitlement to welfare benefits.

Once a referral has been received by the team, an officer will contact the resident within 5 working days, for urgent referrals contact will be made within 2 working days.

For any unsuccessful initial contact attempts, officers will make 2 additional attempts to make contact.

The process is designed to be in a way which is most suitable for the service user and the team will work directly with the resident in a way that is convenient to them, this can include telephone, email, letter, or face to face appointments.

An officer will carry out an initial assessment with a resident, including a Benefit calculator check and income and expenditure forms. From this assessment, the officer will identify the required support needs and start to implement suitable support based upon those needs. This may include, but is not limited to:

- Providing Food Vouchers.
- Complete application for benefits.
- Complete mandatory reconsideration.
- Help open a bank account.
- Help with securing a grant.
- Help with white goods/furniture.
- Provide budgeting advice.
- Access Housing Support Fund.
- Council tax arrangements/bailiffs.
- Giving debt advice.
- Negotiating with creditors.
- Challenging/appealing benefit decisions.
- DHP applications.

Once all support is completed, an officer will look to close the case and complete a satisfaction survey with the service user.

A service user may be referred back into the service in the future should their circumstances change, and they require support again.

5. Governance

This policy will be reviewed every two years, unless legislation, business, sector developments, or wider council strategies and policies require an earlier review. This is to ensure that the policy continues to meet its objectives and takes account of good practice development.

The next scheduled review will be in February 2026.

6. Health and Safety

When officers complete home visits they are required to wear a personal safety alarm and check in with management team to update them as to their movements.

The home visit is to be listed in the officer's calendar along with the full home address of the visit. For any households that have previously raised concerns, these visits will be treated as a two to attend.

Staff have also been trained to use the trigger sentence over the phone when required to obtain support when in a dangerous situation; "I have forgotten the green folder".

7. Background Documents

- Housing Income Policy
- Rent Arrears Procedure
- Service Standards
- Corporate Debt Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Under- occupation Policy

8. Version History

Date	Outlined Amendments	Author
01/03/2024	First Draft	Chloe Stewart