

POST TITLE: Benefits and Housing Needs Officer

DIRECTORATE: Finance and Resources

SERVICE: Benefits and Housing Needs

GRADE: SO2

LOCATION: Hackney Service Centre; or any other appropriate location

RESPONSIBLE TO: Operations Manager (4th Tier)

RESPONSIBLE FOR: Service Delivery relating to Benefits and Housing Needs including the assessment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction; discretionary payments; welfare reform; homeless prevention and the provision of housing advice; homeless assessments and reviews; the Council's Housing Register; Lettings and the allocation of social housing and related initiatives; Housing supply and procurement; the management and maintenance of temporary accommodation and associated financial monitoring, payments and income collection; complaints, Member enquiries and FOIs.

PURPOSE OF THE JOB:

- To perform all functions within the Benefits and Housing Needs Service namely the processing of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments, welfare reform support including discretionary schemes, homelessness prevention and advice, homeless assessment, housing register applications, lettings of housing, housing supply and procurement, management and maintenance of temporary accommodation, financial monitoring and maintenance, payments, complaints, members and mayoral enquiries and FOI requests.
- To deliver an efficient, high quality and customer-focussed service for a diverse client group including high numbers of vulnerable and disadvantaged households.

- To mentor both new members of staff and staff from other areas in legislation, practice, procedures, performance of duties and guidance on complex case work.
- To protect the public purse and assets of the Council by identifying and preventing fraud and error in all duties.
- To apply the relevant legislation, procedures, caselaw, guidance, audit recommendations, to conduct rigorous, robust and accurate assessments.
- To identify holistic and cost effective solutions through casework and joint working with other services, stakeholders, partners and agencies.
- To assist with the development of initiatives to meet all aims of the service, including increasing supply of properties, contract management and monitoring, mobility and re-location, with pan- London and regional partners where necessary.
- To work co-operatively across the Benefits and Housing Needs Service to promote an effective, efficient and holistic service to residents in the borough.
- To offer support and advice to customers and signpost to partners.
- To conduct visits to customers and properties to fully carry out statutory and corporate duties, including residency checks and assisting vulnerable members of the community.

KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES AND MAIN DUTIES:

- Process accurate and timely payment of Housing Benefits and Council Tax Reduction to all those in the borough that are entitled to financial support to pay their rent and Council Tax in line with legislation. The consideration of revisions of decisions. Administering discretionary awards and payments.
- Ensuring the most appropriate resolution to housing need in the borough. Preventing homelessness by the provision of comprehensive housing advice to members of the public.
- The timely assessment of homelessness applications and reviews ensuring the provision of temporary accommodation where appropriate.
- Representation at court as appropriate.
- To have and maintain a detailed working knowledge of law, practice, council policy and guidance relating to either:

- Housing Benefit
 - Council Tax Benefit and Council Tax Reduction
 - Housing
 - EEC/EEA
 - Asylum and Immigration
 - Welfare Reform
 - Family and Matrimonial
 - Tenancy
 - Lettings
 - Regeneration
 - Mortgage arrears
 - Benefits advice
 - Debt and money management
 - Income maximisation
 - County Court
 - Civil remedies
 - Possession proceedings
 - Security of tenure
 - Disrepair
 - Family mediation
 - Discretionary schemes
 - East London sub-region and Pan London region
 - Standing orders and finance accounting
 - Procurement
- Administration, management and accuracy of the Council's Housing Register.
 - Lettings of social housing and related initiatives.
 - Timely assessment of medical questionnaires to inform the appropriate priority of Housing Register applicants, the lettings of properties and appropriate Temporary accommodation.
 - Housing procurement and supply. To monitor the acquisition of properties and framework contract performance of partners in the provision of a range of properties from the private rented sector.
 - Management and maintenance of temporary accommodation ensuring health and safety requirements are met at all times. Resettlement and move on to settled accommodation.
 - Financial administration and income maximisation functions within Housing Needs, and promote high standards of financial probity. Identify opportunities to contain and reduce expenditure and deliver services more efficiently.

KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES:

- Assist with monitoring all financial transactions within the service area and ensure that these are consistent with corporate finance policies and procedures. Delivery of safe, secure, prompt and efficient arrangements for devolved income and expenditure processing within the service.
- To ensure written replies to complaints and enquires from the Ombudsman, Councillors, Members of Parliament and other stakeholders are of the highest standard and dealt with in accordance with prescribed guidelines and within agreed timescales, through a “learning from complaints” approach.
- To deal with casework and information sensitively and to observe the need for confidentiality at all times and that information is only disclosed in appropriate circumstances and in regard to Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and Human rights Act.
- Ensure that a high standard of customer care is provided at all times and that customers are dealt with courteously and professionally.
- To be self-motivated and have the ability to work on your own initiative with the minimum of supervision.
- To contribute towards the development and achievement of the annual business and service plans as well as policies and procedures to ensure that the service is effective, efficient and of a high standard.
- To provide cover for colleagues as and when required.
- To represent the Benefits and Housing Needs Service in person and through written communication when necessary, at internal and external meetings, acting as an ambassador for the Council and reflecting Council policies and objectives.
- Work to meet personal, team and service targets set during appraisals and contained within the Service plan.
- Interview customers to assist, identify, verify and provide solutions including at their home.
- Conduct outreach and take up work where necessary.
- Record statistics, case notes and thought processes swiftly and accurately on the relevant databases to ensure comprehensive monitoring can be conducted and audit trails are in place.
- Respond swiftly and appropriately to all enquiries, from all channels.

- To undertake such additional tasks and/or duties as may from time to time be assigned.
- To adhere in full to the Council's Code of Conduct, Diversity and Equality policies and Health and Safety procedures.



Knowledge, Skills and Experience:

1. Extensive knowledge and substantial experience of at least one of the following disciplines:
 - Homeless assessments and reviews;
 - Homeless prevention and housing advice;
 - Temporary Accommodation management, maintenance, income collection and financial monitoring and payments;
 - Housing Supply and procurement;
 - Lettings, Allocations and the Housing Register;
 - Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction schemes;
 - Discretionary payments and Local Welfare Support;

And the legislation, regulations, policy, guidance, and practice associated with these disciplines.

2. Ability to manage conflicting priorities in a pressurised working environment that are subject to frequently changing circumstances in order to achieve targets within challenging timescales.
3. Good organisational skills and the ability to prioritise your workload to deliver to tight deadlines, targets and performance standards.
4. Excellent verbal and written communication and presentation skills and the ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences including partner services and agencies and the ability to explain complex legislative in simple language. Ability to represent the Council at court.
5. Experience of effective partnership working with agencies and stakeholders and the proven ability in engaging, negotiating and consulting with a wide range of audiences.
6. Substantial experience and detailed knowledge of the use of IT systems, including data processing, finance and Microsoft systems.
7. Ability to mentor staff in relation to all service delivery roles.
8. Ability to travel around the borough in order to conduct visits to customers and landlords.
9. Experience of working flexibly to meet the needs of the service and its customers.
10. Experience of assisting vulnerable and challenging customers.

11. Ability to mediate and negotiate effectively.
12. Experience of dealing with and advising customers in a professional manner.
13. Ability to adapt to new legislative, technological and financial developments whilst maintaining services outcomes in periods of change
14. Ability to analyse and understand complex information.
15. Experience of building positive relationships with a range of both internal and external customers and stakeholders.
16. Experience of cross-organisational working, taking into account the views of others and arriving at solutions of mutual benefit.
17. Be available to work outside normal working hours including at weekends if required
18. Must demonstrate an understanding and be committed to the Council's Equalities policy carrying out all duties with regard to the policy.
19. Must demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the importance of confidentiality.
20. Must demonstrate an ability to carry out research independently using electronic communication systems and other sources of relevant information.
21. Ability to work on projects and contribute to shared outcomes.
22. Officers involved with Benefits and discretionary awards processing will comply with the required security checks for the Department for Work and Pensions and Cabinet Office.
23. Officers will be required to complete a declaration of interests' submission for this post.

Desirable

1. Membership of the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation and/or Chartered Institute of Housing.