

JOB DESCRIPTION

Post Title: Homelessness and Housing Options Officer		Director/Service/Sector: Housing		Office Use		
Grade: 7		Workplace: Countywide Service		JE ref: 2149		
Responsible to: Senior Housing Services Officer (Homelessness)		Date: Oct 2018		Manager Level:		
<p>Job Purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To interview clients who are homeless and or potentially homeless to carryout a thorough and comprehensive assessment of their housing need and make legally binding decisions where necessary under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002 and as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017). ● To prevent such clients from becoming homeless by providing housing information, advice and assistance and supporting such clients on an ongoing basis. This could be beyond 5 months. To provide support and information to licensees, tenants, landlords and accommodation agents and owner occupiers with regard to security of tenure, harassment and illegal eviction, terms of lease, repairs etc. ● To support the Senior Housing Services Officer (Homelessness) in developing new preventative initiatives, reviewing emerging policies and best practice, researching the suitability of these locally and where appropriate working towards their implementation across the county ● The postholder will be committed to the primary council objectives to ensure that a customer focused service is provided and that service delivery is to the highest standards of customer care and quality. ● To comply with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in relation to the management of council records and information. ● To comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. 						
Resources		Staff	Support junior staff, via mentoring and coaching trainees or learners as appropriate and advocating for the service.			
		Finance	Utilise strict adherence to financial regulations for up to £85,000 Homeless Prevention budget and the authority for the allocation of funds to an agreed limit.			
		Physical	Responsible for confidential valuable documents e.g. personal, financial and benefit documentation. And provision of accurate data for government returns.			
		Clients	Daily contact with vulnerable people who require complex support, advocating for clients, with mental health and drug and alcohol issues, by liaising with partners, support organisations and colleagues, internal and external providers.			
<p>Duties and key result areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Adhere to the new Homelessness Reduction Act requirements and all relevant government legislation. ● To assist non-priority single homeless customers in Northumberland where resources allow, including promoting to end rough sleeping through initiatives such as No Second Night Out. ● To represent the council at relevant bodies (e.g. Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), attend LMAPS meetings and Social Services Child protection meetings. Complete referrals to the safeguarding team when safeguarding issues arise, attend safeguarding meetings and have an awareness of PREVENT and the procedures involved in these processes. Ensuring sensitive and confidential information is handled and recorded appropriately and confidentially. 						

- Identify suitable refuge for victims in fear of domestic violence, carry out checks with Social Services and the Police and where appropriate make the necessary referrals. Also work closely with the Local Refuge to assist applicants. Continue effective partnership working with local police force to ensure safeguarding of our vulnerable at risk clients, those in an emergency and to establish safer estate outcomes in line with agreements in place.
- Utilise the prevention fund to prevent or relieve homelessness. This can be across all tenures. Proactively look to utilise new resources.
- Deliver the Housing Options service ensuring the provision of a high quality, responsive and customer focused service, which meets Council objectives.
- Comply with all Council policies. Enforce policies and procedures as required by the Senior Housing Services Officer (Homelessness) and Housing Services Manager that will contribute to the development of the service and ensure continuous improvement.
- Respond to enquiries, providing advice to customers in relation to housing advice, homelessness and homelessness prevention. Mediate between clients and family/friends and other agents when appropriately required. Carry out risk assessments on clients due to be interviewed by the Homelessness and Housing Options Officer either in an office location or in prison, probation, and or in other unknown locations. Interview all applicants claiming to be homeless or threatened with homelessness and carry out comprehensive enquiries to determine their claim and the duty owed under legislation, ensuring that all aspects of the legal responsibilities in responding to homelessness applications are met.
- To work on own initiative, independently and intensively on an ongoing basis with all clients who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Work with more complex clients with numerous challenging issues, with an increased high risk client groups in mind. This includes clients with unstable mental health conditions, drug and alcohol issues and criminal convictions.
- To devise a Personal Housing Plan for individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, in order to reflect an individual's housing needs and to accommodate any support required to achieve this. Regularly engage and communicate with applicants by reviewing their Personal Housing Plan, amending or adding tasks.
- Be self aware and constantly risk assess and manage situations that either pose or can increase risks or threats of harm to Officers. Report violent incidents and near misses that occur via the Council system.
- Effective management of the housing register which will include: Processing applications for applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Correct assessment in accordance with agreed policy and law. Update the housing system on a regular basis.
- To issue notice letters when customers breach licence agreements in temporary accommodation.
- To refer customers with disrepair issues to relevant agencies such as Environmental Health.
- Respond to new HRA Duty to refer requests.
- Liaise with the Housing Benefit department for customers in order to resolve any issues obstructing benefit payments and accessing the Discretionary Housing Payment fund (DHP).
- Engage with voluntary and statutory agencies whilst promoting joint working initiatives in the Private Rented Sector. Refer applicants into the RDGS.
- To work closely with temporary accommodation providers, including negotiating with these providers when dealing with clients with complex needs such as mental health issues. Arranging Temporary accommodation placements.
- Take action to prevent homelessness occurring and to use agreed housing options toolkits to minimise the need for Temporary Accommodation. Develop the prevention / housing options toolkit and maintain it on a regular basis.
- On call for out of office hours emergency calls for homeless applicants. In extreme occasions due to staff shortages assist the Temporary Accommodation Officer by covering the out of hours emergency calls for Temporary Accommodation and also admit applicants into LA temporary accommodation.
- Work closely with G4S, when applicants have been granted asylum, and confirm immigration status, in order to secure accommodation.

- Ensure the accurate recording and reporting of data and customer information to ensure high level of performance and standards of customer service at all times. Maintain increasing caseloads with good organisational and time managements skills, ensuring that all communication, both written and oral, with clients is appropriate and issued within the tight deadlines.
- Continue to develop effective and constructive relationships with colleagues and external contacts in order to promote effective partnership arrangements for the delivery of high quality services.
- Interpret, explain County Court regulations ensuring appropriate procedures are followed, that parties have a proper understanding of their position and attempting to reach legitimate, mutually agreeable solutions through negotiation. Attend court when necessary.
- Work effectively with customers, stakeholders and partners to ensure effective engagement in the service and to ensure that key service objectives are met. Assist the Senior Housing Services Officer in strategically working with other agencies to promote joint working and assist in the development of associated strategies.
- Deliver an educational programme to school children as appropriate.
- Maintain accurate records for the service budget in line with required procedures to ensure effective monitoring.
- Promote the prevention service through outreach work in partnership with other agencies. Attend training sessions during team meetings with support providers/agencies to gain insight and additional knowledge on key services to utilise within our service.
- Assess completed Welfare Benefits calculations in order to address client's financial status on affordability.
- Adopt agile working in order to meet customer demands and utilise resources to ensure more effective and efficient practices.
- Proactively seek out information and apply judgement to identify solutions using own initiative.
- Offer Registered Social Landlord tenants pre-court and pre-eviction appointments. Negotiate/advocacy with partner Landlords and Private Sector Landlords on behalf of Clients to prevent/maintain current tenancies. Provide good quality advice to Landlords and tenants relating to good practice and legal rights, duties and responsibilities. Working with Landlords and tenants to try and resolve any conflict at an early stage. Referring cases to the Councils Legal Team when recommending enforcement action against Landlords when appropriate.
- Take reasonable care of the health and safety of self, other persons and resources whilst at work, ensuring that the responsibilities placed upon the Company under the Health and Safety at Work Act are performed.
- To liaise with statutory and non-statutory agencies regarding housing needs issues, signposting clients and making referrals for a service.
- To coordinate information on local housing support services and advice agencies and to act as an information point for staff on services that are available locally.
- To think laterally and adopt innovative approaches to prevent homelessness.

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

Physical Requirements:
Transport requirements:

Working patterns:
Working conditions:

Ability to drive
The work involves the need to visit sites countywide on a regular and routine basis. Flexible working from multiple locations and the ability to work occasional evening or weekend.
Post predominantly based indoors, however does involve having to visit homeless persons on the street.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Post Title: Homelessness and Housing Options Officer	Director/Service/Sector:	Ref:
Essential	Desirable	Assess by
Qualifications and Knowledge		
<p>Educated to Degree / HND or equivalent level and/ or relevant professional qualification Understands the diverse functions of a large complex public organisation. An active appreciation of the procedural and practical issues relating to the service. An active awareness of and active interest in the current issues facing the service. Actively undertaking ongoing continuous professional and personal development. Detailed knowledge of Matrimonial Law, Children Act and Safeguarding Detailed working knowledge and understanding of relevant legislation including Housing Act 1996, Homeless Act 2002, Homeless Reduction Act 2017, Deregulations Act 2015, Landlord and Tenant Law, Protection from Eviction Act and associated housing law. Understanding of the Council's housing management and lettings policies. Provide specialist advice and guidance. Sound understanding of housing policies and procedures in a public sector environment. Ability to provide initial advice regarding finance and welfare benefits. Understands the relationship between costs, quality, customer care and performance and actively monitors progress within the Department.</p>	<p>Understand needs of vulnerable, under-represented and hard to reach groups.</p>	
Experience		
<p>Thorough Knowledge and experience in a relevant context and service. Evidence of work experience in selecting and applying the full range of professional methods, tools and techniques in a wide range of work situations. An evidenced track record as a successful advisor. Experience in engaging effectively with others and building productive partnerships. Experience in contributing to the development and implementation of projects to successfully achieve set objectives. Good understanding of Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and associated benefits.</p>	<p>Experience in a particular relevant specialist area. Relevant experience in designing and drafting policies, procedures and other technical documents.</p>	
Skills and competencies		
<p>Excellent IT skills and ability to understand and develop the use of ITC to achieve work objectives. Confident and competent in expressing own views and an active participant in internal and external meetings. Excellent communication, oral and written. Negotiating and interpersonal skills. Listening skills. Numerate and able to analyse business related statistics. Ability to work methodically and systematically. Able to work alone using own initiative as well as part of a team. Ability to use initiative and to make appropriate decisions in line with guidance and regulations. Adopts a collaborative approach to work. Clear understanding of the needs of customers. The ability to gain relevant information quickly and effectively. Prepares written, verbal and other media to best professional standards. Is an effective advocate for the Directorate both within and externally. Maintains a professional demeanour in stressful and difficult situations. Support colleagues and demonstrate relevant work processes. Able to handle problems and difficult situations calmly and sensitively.</p>	<p>Advanced skills in Microsoft Office.</p>	

<p>Have the ability to deal with more complex clients with numerous challenging issues, with an increased high risk client groups in mind. Ability to deal sympathetically with customers in stressful circumstances.</p>		
<p>Physical, mental, emotional and environmental demands</p>		
<p>Normally works from a seated position with some need to walk, bend or carry items. Need to maintain general awareness with lengthy periods of enhanced concentration. Daily contact with difficult public/clients in distress. An awareness of issues faced by people who are vulnerable and who have complex needs. Some exposure to working outdoors. Work in a highly pressured and stressful environment on a daily basis, with challenging high risk customers. Adopt an agile working approach to meet customer demands and deal with complex clients with high support needs and risks. Be self aware and constantly risk assess and manage situations that either pose or can increase risks or threats of harm to Officers.</p>		
<p>Motivation</p>		
<p>Customer focused and able to deliver within tight timescales. Demonstrates and encourages high standards of honesty, integrity, openness and respect for others. Helps to create and encourages a positive work culture, in which diverse, individual contributions and perspectives are valued. Proactive and achievement orientated Able to work with minimum supervision. A strong corporate orientation and a commitment to tackling issues in a non-departmental manner. Dependable, reliable and keeps good time. Flexible and Highly motivated.</p>		
<p>Other</p>		
<p>Able to meet the transport requirements of the post</p>		

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