

Job Description

Job title	Housing Options Officer
Directorate	PLACE : Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Division	Strategic Housing
Range	MPR 4
Reports to	Housing Options Team Leader

Main purpose of the job:

To provide specialist housing solutions casework and advice for persons with housing needs to include, but not exclusively, the following: -

Options to prevent homelessness - partnership and joint working with other specialist agencies e.g. young person's joint assessments, children and adult services, voluntary housing support organisations and advocacy and mediation.

Actively support clients to relieve their homelessness by securing alternative accommodation and assessing suitability and affordability of new homes.

Homeless applications and the issuing of decisions - to assist the Housing Options Team Leader in promoting joint working and partnerships with housing providers, including Registered Social and Private Sector landlords, to increase the availability and quality of settled accommodation

To provide a customer focused, pro-active service to help residents secure their housing choices.

Liaise with stakeholders in a way that promotes the [One Medway Council Plan](#) and embeds our [values and behaviours](#).

Accountabilities and outcomes:

Provide emotional and practical support to those suffering from homelessness.

Responding to housing emergencies

To provide a comprehensive frontline service to customers seeking advice and assistance with regards to their housing needs, irrespective of tenure, either in person or by telephone aimed at assisting members of the public in finding appropriate housing solutions, providing information in a variety of formats on a broad range of alternatives from house purchase, low-cost home.

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Undertake assessments with client that are approaching as homeless or threatened with homelessness or require housing assistance and are completed in accordance with Pt 7 duties and the department processes, ensuring they are conducted in a timely manner, with adequate preparation and all admin tasks are completed within the departments procedures and homeless legislation guidelines ensuring that we are legally compliant

Maintain effective prevention intervention and relief work, including via joint working with social and private landlords, negotiations with family/friends and/or housing providers, comprehensive welfare benefits information, detailed debt advice, negotiations with creditors/financial institutions and referrals to mortgage rescue schemes and defending possession proceedings using the N244 procedures.

Makes recommendations to the Senior Housing Options Officer for payments under the council's Homelessness Prevention Fund, and DHP Deposit Scheme in accordance with approved policy and procedure Proactively pursue steps to prevent and relieve homelessness in order to avoid the provision of temporary accommodation and maximise the successful outcomes for clients

To provide customers with expert, professional, comprehensive advice and information on all aspects of housing options work specific to their assessed needs: including undertaking basic financial and benefits assessments and signposting to appropriate services.

To produce Personal Housing Plans following assessment of needs; to monitor customers' actions and to perform the authority's actions.

To help customers access a range of housing opportunities, including social housing, private rented accommodation, supported housing and shared/home ownership and to assess customers' suitability for the Council's One Medway Lettings Scheme. Make recommendations to the Senior Housing Options Officer for payments under the council's Homelessness Prevention Fund

To liaise, establish, maintain and develop links with Social Care teams, health providers, Registered Providers, private landlords and other statutory or voluntary agencies as appropriate and ensure that referrals are made as necessary, recorded and followed up as required. Build and maintain relationships with both clients and team members.

To attend case conferences and joint assessment interviews with Social Care teams or other organisations as necessary.

To undertake formal investigations under Pt V11 Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and associated guidance and legislation when homelessness cannot be prevented, and to issue cogent s184 decision letters within required timescales. ensuring Prevention, Relief and Main Duty decisions are completed within the provided timescale) compiling detailed case reports recommending a final decision for approval by the Senior Housing Options Officer

Manage individual client cases to a high standard, making adequate enquiries to evidence the duties owed and that there is consistent contact and support to ensure the clients are adequately informed of the reasonable steps they can take to resolve their housing issue.

Maintain accurate recording of all documents, data and notes using the councils case management system and thus adhering to the GDPR and data control guidelines and ensuring there is accurate HCLIC reporting

To take appropriate action, in line with Council Policy, to minimise the average length of stay of homeless households in temporary accommodation and facilitate move on.

To take on and develop relevant specialist roles and to provide support and guidance to colleagues.

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Working with internal teams - Identifies members of the public in acute and urgent housing need, making referrals to the Allocations Team Leader for further investigation with regard to the award of special case status on the council's Housing Waiting List in accordance with the approved allocations policy.

May be required to attend outreach housing surgeries at other locations throughout the district as and when necessary. May also be required to represent the Housing Needs Section at meetings, working groups etc.

Maintain awareness and knowledge of Safeguarding issues and as per the service procedures complete referrals and or escalate as appropriate.

At the discretion of the Head of Service, such other activities as may from time to time be agreed consistent with the nature of the job described above.

Key Corporate Accountabilities:

To work with colleagues to achieve service plan objectives and targets.

To understand and actively keep up to date with GDPR responsibilities, including completing regular refresher training.

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility: all employees are required to act in such a way that safeguards the health and well-being of children and vulnerable adults.

As a corporate parent, all council employees are responsible for ensuring the well-being and positive outcomes of Medway's care-experienced children and young people.

To participate in the Performance Appraisal process and contribute to the identification of own and team development needs utilising the Career Progression Framework.

Work in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Promoting equality of opportunity, fostering good relations and improving the quality of life and opportunities for everyone living and working in Medway.

To ensure full compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Council's Health and Safety Policy and all locally agreed safe methods of work.

To fully understand and be aware of the commitment to the duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to prevent crime and disorder.

Promote the Medway Carbon Neutral by 2050 commitment; supporting the Council action plan to ensure we play our part in addressing the climate emergency.

Medway Council is a Category One responder in relation to the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) and as a result all staff working for the Authority may be asked to carry out Category One response duties or stand into the role of another member of staff who is responding to a Major Civil Incident.

Organisation:

This role reports to the <Homeless Team Leader .

The post holder will not be required to line manage others but may be required to direct, coordinate or train other employees.

The post holder will be required to liaise with all stakeholders both internal and external to the organisation.

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Working Style:

HYBRID - a flexible working arrangement whereby an employee can undertake their work either in the office and/or partially or mainly from home on a temporary or permanent basis in line with the requirements of the service.

Person specification

All criteria at level A are considered essential unless stated otherwise.

Qualifications

Level A

- A good standard of general education (e.g. Level 2, GCSEs) including Maths and English or
- Equivalent housing qualification at Level 2

Level B (in addition to level A criteria)

- Evidence Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

Level C (in addition to levels A and B)

- Completion of relevant Level 3 Chartered Institute of Housing qualification or equivalent qualification e.g. CIH Level 3 Certificate in Providing Homelessness Services
- Evidence of up-to-date training on relevant case laws relating to homelessness and social housing allocation

Knowledge

Level A

- Working knowledge of the duties owed to homeless persons under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended) and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities
- Understanding of the causes and impact of homelessness and current best practice in preventing homelessness
- Working knowledge of options available to households at risk of homelessness
- Working knowledge of the Landlord and tenant law.
- Working knowledge of other agencies, both statutory and voluntary providing relevant advice that offer support to prevent homelessness
- Knowledge of Safeguarding, Safety planning, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Exploitation
- Understanding of Data Protection, customer confidentiality and information sharing as it relates to this role
- Knowledge of the equalities and diversity and how it impacts on homeless households
- Good negotiating and interpersonal skills.

Level B (in addition to level A criteria)

- Detailed and extensive knowledge of the current legislation and duties owed to homeless persons by the Council under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, Localism Act 2011 and its application.
- Detailed and extensive knowledge of the current Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, Relevant Case Law and its application.
- Knowledge of Landlord and Tenant Legislation, the Housing Act 1985, Protection from Eviction Act 1977 and Protection from Harassment Act.
- Extensive knowledge of homeless prevention initiatives and their application and effectiveness
- A detailed understanding and application of the terms and conditions contained in the range of tenancy agreements across all tenures.
- Knowledge of the private rented sector regulations

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Level C (in addition to levels A and B)

- Knowledge of housing policies, regulations and case laws including Part VI of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended)
 - Knowledge of trauma informed practice
 - Knowledge of defending possession proceedings and evictions in court including harassment and illegal evictions
 - Understanding of court procedures for defending possession and eviction claims in court
 - Understanding of relevant associated statutory guidance, legislation and regulations that impact homelessness prevention e.g. Children's Act
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Experience

Level A

- Experience of "front line" interviewing
- Experience of dealing with the public, often in difficult and stressful situations
- Experience of working in a demanding frontline facing service
- Experience of carrying out housing needs and affordability assessments and creating personal support plans to help households avoid homelessness
- Experience of working with vulnerable households to prevent homelessness
- Experience of actively working with other agencies to prevent homelessness
- Experience of writing letters and reports to customers, professionals and partner agencies
- Experience of keeping good and accurate records

Level B (in addition to level A criteria)

- Experience of working in a housing service preventing homelessness
- Experience of conducting in-depth interviews to obtain relevant information and validate evidence to complete accurate assessments
- Experience of writing and issuing detailed, legal and robust s184 decision letters
- Proven experience of successfully negotiating with excluders using best practice to prevent homelessness
- Proven experience of casework management, joint working and interagency liaison.
- Experience of managing a complex caseload

Level C (in addition to levels A and B)

- Experience of assisting and being present in Court on housing related matters
 - Experience of leading on specialist and complex areas of work
 - Proven experience of successfully providing a high performing service that demonstrate effective employee behaviours
 - Demonstrable experience of initiating, building relationships with and working positively in partnership with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies
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Skills

Level A

- Able to work on own initiative
- Able to prioritise workloads and meet deadlines

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- Excellent communication skills at all levels
- Developed negotiating skills
- Good written and oral communications skills
- Be confident and competent with standard IT packages
- Proven decision-making skills
- Good numeracy skills
- Able to work as part of a team and share/learn best practice, knowledge and expertise with/from colleagues
- Able to show a commitment to a high level of customer care and the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy
- Develop the ability to cope with and control confrontational situations
- Able to take responsibility for your own development
- Able to manage a caseload
- Friendly, tactful, approachable, non-judgemental, empathic and customer focused.

Level B (in addition to level A criteria)

- Ability to work within legal, political and policy constraints and to follow internal procedures
- Demonstrable ability to use well developed communication skills to present complex/sensitive information in an understandable way, to a range of audiences
- Demonstrable ability to handle and process cash/documentation relating to small financial amounts (i.e. up to £250 per day)
- Ability to deal with high levels of work-related pressure, for example from deadlines, interruptions or conflicting demands.
- Demonstrable ability to analyse and interpret complex information and situations

Level C (in addition to levels A and B)

- Demonstrable ability to work independently within defined procedures, and work outside of procedures, making decisions without referring to a line manager, where necessary.
- Adopts an imaginative and innovative approach.
- Demonstrable ability to supervise, co-ordinate or train other employees where required
- Promote good performance, developing clear, structured and efficient ways of managing workload and delivering results, challenging themselves and others to perform well, and to adhere to the Council's performance management systems
- Demonstrate the effective and efficient use of the full range of training resources for self-development and efficiency within the role