

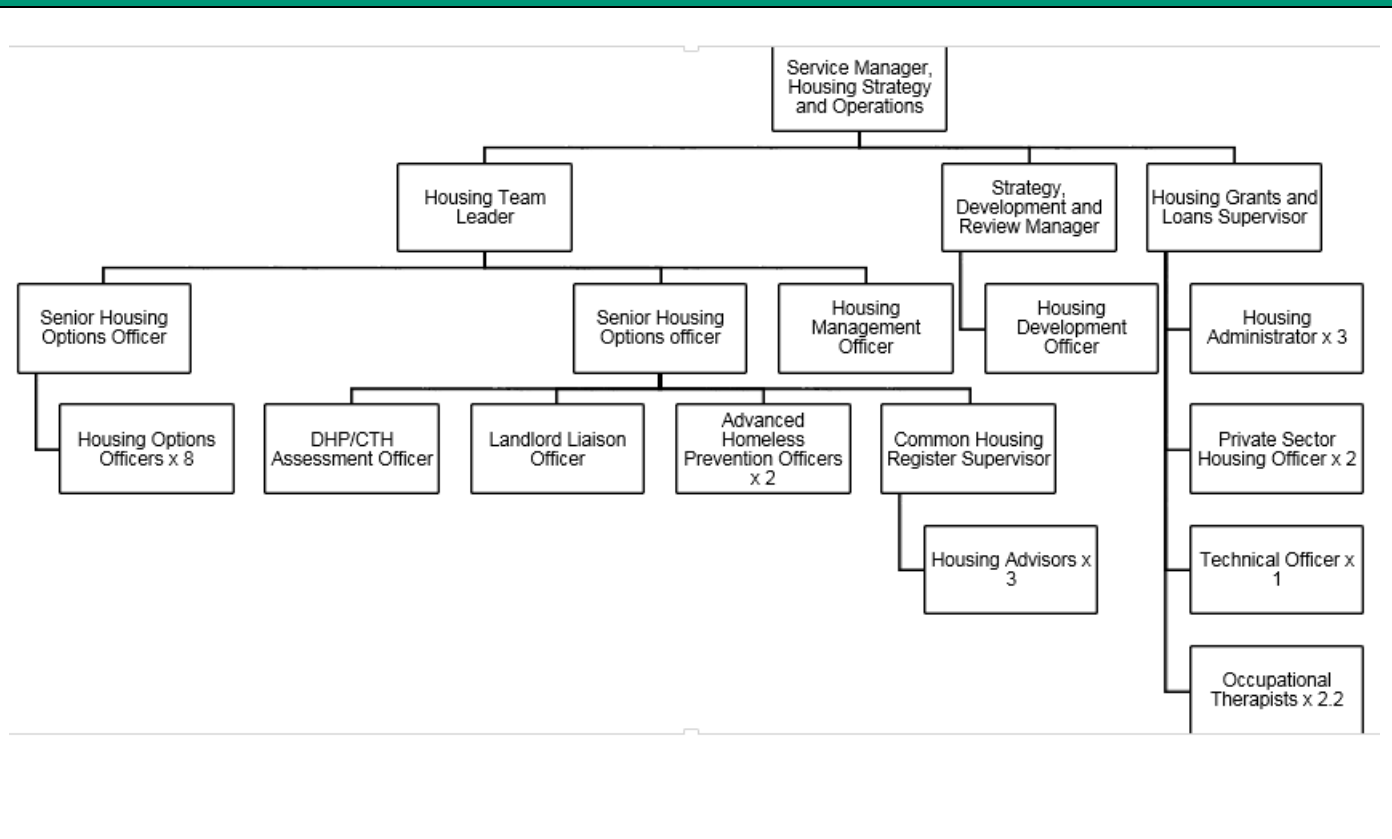
Job Description and Person Specification

Job title:	Housing Options Officer
Directorate:	Environment
Service:	Development & Planning
Team:	Housing Operations
Post number:	04684
Salary grade:	F-H Qualification Bar @ SCP 25
Work location:	Market Street
Reports to:	Senior Housing Options Officer
Supervises:	N/A

Job Purpose

1. To provide housing advice and assistance to prevent homelessness
2. To investigate Homelessness applications
3. To assist in assessing housing applications and deciding on nominations and allocations to permanent housing.
4. To work in partnership with outside agencies, RPs and other departments to resolve clients' housing problems.

Structure Chart



Main Duties and Responsibilities

To promote equality as an integral part of the role and to treat everyone with fairness and dignity.

To recognise health and safety is a responsibility of every employee, to take reasonable care of self and others and to comply with the WBC Health and Safety policy and any service-specific procedures / rules that apply to this role.

1. To offer advice and assistance to applicants to enable them to maintain their accommodation and/or prevent homelessness either in person, on the telephone or in writing. To participate in the POD reception, Duty and Supporting Officer services on a rota basis.
2. To contribute towards the prevention of homelessness by giving appropriate housing advice to applicants, to include the Common Housing Register, Mutual Exchange, Transfers, Help to Buy, Shared Ownership, Mortgage Debt, Privately Renting, Sheltered and Supported Accommodation options and Discretionary Housing Payments.
3. To assist applicants in accessing privately rented accommodation by liaising with private landlords, inspecting properties, dealing with initial Housing Benefit forms and administering the Threshold Loan, Rent Deposit Guarantee and Discretionary Housing Payment Schemes.
4. To give appropriate advice to maximise income, including advice around welfare benefits, Housing Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payments, to conduct benefit calculations as appropriate and to give advice on changes being implemented as part of the Welfare Reform.
5. To provide wide-ranging housing advice on the law relating to landlord and tenant relationships, prevention of eviction, harassment, anti-social behaviour, disrepair, domestic violence, grants and proactive housing advice on a range of other issues.
6. To provide excellent standards of customer service at all times.
7. To maintain confidentiality, particularly when handling sensitive personal information regarding applicants' details, in accordance with the Council's confidentiality policy and protocol, acting at all times within the highest standard of professional practice.
8. To investigate medical or social circumstances through liaison with medical professionals, Social Services, the Community Mental Health Team and other professionals in health and social work.
9. To attend multi-agency case conferences and meeting to represent the Housing Service. These may include Child Protection Conferences, Signs of Safety meetings, discharge

Main Duties and Responsibilities

planning meetings, the Young Persons Housing Panel, the Integrated offender Management meetings, the Mental Health Housing Panel, the Homelessness Forum, the Rough Sleepers Task and Targeting Group, MARAC, MAPPA and other meetings as and when necessary.

10. To liaise with outside organisations, including the Citizens Advice Bureau, the Department for Work and Pensions, Shelter, the Police and schools on issues relating to housing applications and homelessness.
11. To conduct home visits and attend professionals meetings in order to verify information regarding an applicant's housing need.
12. To support applicants with defending possession proceedings in court and assist with preparation of their file for review by the judge.
13. To determine Homelessness Applications from applicants who are homeless or threatened with homelessness under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, placing in suitable temporary accommodation and discharging the full duty, where appropriate.
14. To maintain a high level of professional knowledge of current legislation and best practise/case law.
15. To actively participate in reducing rough sleeping within the district by giving appropriate housing options advice, liaising with the Outreach Worker and other relevant services, such as Probation, Swanswell and the Community Mental Health Team.
16. To assess the needs of approaching rough sleepers or potential rough sleepers and to accommodate under the Council's Prison Release Scheme or No Second Night Out Scheme, as appropriate.
17. To calculate homelessness applicant's contribution towards their accommodation costs, take payments and issue receipts.
18. To proactively contribute to the Housing Unit Service Plan and Housing and Homelessness Strategies, meeting the targets identified through a performance management system.
19. To undertake research work leading to recommendations for changes to policy or operational procedures and generally participate in discussions on policy and procedural issues, proactively contributing to the continuous improvement of the Service.

Main Duties and Responsibilities

20. To maintain database records using excel, word and other network databases, including filing, general housekeeping and completing statutory returns.
21. To circulate relevant information throughout the district, including other Council buildings, by post, email, courier or in person as and when required.
22. To contribute to the post-holder's personal and career development and to the development and improvement of the Housing Service.
23. To assist with the preparation of the Council's case in appeal hearings against decisions made on Homelessness Applications.
24. To carry out interviews 'under caution' in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) procedures in cases of suspected fraud, illegal eviction or harassment and to prepare files for prosecution in conjunction with the Councils Legal Team.
25. To participate in out of hours functions in the event of an emergency or major incident, including developing and staffing rest centres and manning the Emergency Operations Centre as required.
26. To conduct site visits to the Council's Gypsy and Traveller site to offer support and check for maintenance issues, as and when required.
27. To work as part of a team providing a front line service to customers from main reception.
28. To carry out other duties, as and when required, including flexible working to support the Housing Service.
29. To own and operate your own vehicle and to use this vehicle for Council business as this is an essential car user post.

Scope (impact on/control of resources, people, money etc)

Assessing the scope of this job is best achieved using qualitative statements: the context of the work is the rationing of scarce resources, i.e. there are not enough affordable homes in West Berkshire.

- **Assessing applicants presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness:** Initial assessment and advice to all applicants presenting at the Local Authority as homeless or threatened with homelessness. The job requires identification and investigation of current circumstances and the ability to assist the applicant to remain safely in their current accommodation or in securing alternative suitable accommodation.

- Assist with the allocation decisions relating to temporary accommodation:**
 The quality of decisions will impact on the efficient and effective use of the Council's temporary accommodation, Housing Association temporary accommodation and the avoidance of the use of bed and breakfast accommodation. It will also impact on the efficient management of the temporary accommodation in terms of the mix of tenants, e.g. the insensitive allocation of potentially violent or vulnerable tenants.
- Threshold Loan Applications:**
 The decision here is whether or not to commit the Council to a loan or guarantee to the maximum of £1,500 per applicant to assist them with the advanced rent and deposit required by private landlords. Default on loans and guarantees leads to a financial loss to the Council but, more importantly, undermine the credibility of the scheme with private landlords.
- Assessing homeless applications** under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. This job requires assessing clients' eligibility, homelessness, priority need, whether they've done anything deliberately to make themselves homeless, and whether they've got a local connection. It also involves maintaining a database, informing applicants of decisions made and dealing with appeals.
- Developing excellent relationships with local landlords** in order to reduce the risk of homelessness to residents and to increase the supply of good quality, affordable privately rented accommodation

Person Specification

Qualifications	Essential/ Desirable
Educated to at least GCSE grade C or above (or equivalent), particularly in English and Maths.	E
Educated to degree level in a Housing-related subject	D
Professional membership of the CIH	D
Experience	
Experience in negotiation and influencing people	E
A minimum of two years experience in a front line customer service	E
Experience in multi-agency working	D
Some experience of working with households with complex needs, social, medical or mental health issues	E
Experience of working in a fluid environment and the ability to adapt to meet current needs	E
Knowledge and understanding	
Good understanding of housing advice, options and homelessness, including law relating to landlord and tenant relationships, prevention of eviction, harassment, basic guidance on money advice, the Matrimonial Homes Act, domestic violence, Children Act, proactive advice on other housing issues, e.g. disrepair, grants.	D
Good working knowledge of the role and services offered by other internal and external agencies	D
Some experience of working with clients who have alcohol and drug related issues, or mental health issues	D
Understanding of housing legislation and the Common Housing Register	D

Skills and abilities	
Ability to use Email and Outlook and to use a web browser to access information	E
Basic ability to use Microsoft Office software	E
Will possess good oral and written communication skills and will be able to communicate effectively at different levels with different client groups.	E
Ability to analyse written information and establish/revise procedures	E
Ability to manage own workload and balance competing demands in a highly pressurised environment	E
Ability to take control of challenging situations instructing clients and/or outside organisations	E
Ability to work effectively as a team member	E
Able to undertake multi-agency work and negotiate support for clients	E
Ability to apply legislation policy, procedures and good practice and to make decisions	E
Ability to assimilate information quickly, assess situations and make recommendations and decisions	E
Able to understand information systems and have good keyboard skills	E
Ability to empathise with applicants facing in difficult circumstances	E
Work-related personal qualities	
High degree of self motivation and initiative	E
A reliable and flexible attitude to work	E
Able to manage own workload with limited supervision	E
This role has been identified as public facing in accordance with Part 7 of the Immigration Act 2016, and therefore the ability to fulfill all spoken aspects of the role with confidence in English will be required. Conversing at ease with members of the public (including pupils), providing advice and using any specialist terminology appropriate to the role is essential for the post	E
Other work-related requirements	
Full clean UK driving licence and use of a car for work purposes	E
Ability to work flexibly to attend evening meetings with landlords, clients and within the Council	