



JOB DESCRIPTION

Directorate:	Housing and Wellbeing
Job title:	Homelessness Assessment Officer
Location:	The Guildhall, Northampton
Grade:	6
Salary:	£29,636 - £33,798
Section:	Housing Advice and Options
Reports to:	Homelessness Assessment Team Leader

JOB PURPOSE

To provide an efficient, high quality advice and assessment service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, ensuring that customers' circumstances are investigated and their housing and support needs are assessed and met, in accordance with the homelessness legislation, statutory guidance and the Council's policies and procedures.

To provide customers with advice on their housing options, taking into account their needs and aspirations, their eligibility for assistance under the homelessness legislation, their priority on the Housing Register and their ability to sustain a tenancy in the private sector.

To contribute positively to the development of new working practices and initiatives, and the improvement of existing practices, that help to prevent homelessness, increase the take-up of housing options and minimise the use and cost of temporary accommodation.

KEY RESULT AREAS

To provide an efficient, high quality advice and assessment service for people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, ensuring that customers' circumstances are investigated and their housing and support needs are assessed and met, in accordance with the homelessness legislation, statutory guidance and the Council's policies and procedures.

In doing this, the Homelessness Assessment Officer will:

1. Interview people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness and undertake detailed enquiries into their circumstances in order to establish the nature and extent of the Council's duties towards them under the homelessness legislation.

2. Undertake home visits, as part of the homelessness investigations, to confirm that the applicant is residing in the property, assess the suitability of their accommodation for occupation and determine the reasons why they are threatened with homelessness.
3. Ensure that all homelessness applications are rigorously investigated, careful consideration is always given to the possibility of collusion and fraud, and the Council only accepts an interim or rehousing duty for those applicants to whom it owes a duty.
4. Provide customers with comprehensive advice on their housing options, taking into account their overall financial situation, their needs and aspirations, their eligibility for assistance under the homelessness legislation, their priority on the Housing Register and whether or not they will be able to sustain a tenancy in the private rented sector.
5. Negotiate with private landlords and rental agents, in situations where the tenancy is being brought to an end, in order to secure either the renewal of the tenancy or enough time for the tenant to obtain alternative accommodation without the need for the household to go into temporary accommodation.
6. Ensure that an accurate, detailed record is kept of all interviews and the follow-up action taken (and that files are maintained to a high standard) in order to assist monitoring, decision-making and effective case management.
7. Make optimum use of the opportunities to prevent or relieve homelessness, including the use of the Homelessness Prevention Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments and the supply of private rented accommodation secured through the Social Lettings Agency.
8. Ensure that each customer has a comprehensive personalised housing plan that is kept under review and that, subject to the relevant permissions being given, the contents of the plan are shared with Children's Services and Adult Social Care.
9. Complete all casework and homelessness prevention and/or relief activity (including research and information gathering, record keeping, assessments, the production and ongoing review of personalised housing plans, and timely decisions and notifications) in accordance with Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, guidance and case law, and the Council's policies and procedures.
10. Ensure that all data entry and case recording is accurate and complete, and that it is undertaken in a timely manner and within agreed timescales, in order to assist performance monitoring, the analysis of trends and the completion of internal and external returns, including the government's quarterly HCLIC return.
11. Produce comprehensive, high quality homelessness decisions, ensuring that they meet the requirements of the homelessness legislation and that, where the decision is unfavourable, it is robust and able to withstand challenge and scrutiny.
12. Meet regularly with the Homelessness Assessment Team Leader to review performance in order to ensure a consistently high standard of work and customer care, an equitable distribution of the workload and effective monitoring of performance against targets.

13. Develop and maintain close working relations with a broad cross-section of Council services and local organisations in order to encourage joint working, facilitate the flow of information and secure the help and support that is needed to prevent homelessness and resolve customers' housing problems.
14. Maintain a good understanding of the Council's policies and procedures for safeguarding children, vulnerable adults and people affected by domestic violence, and alert Children's Services and/or Adult Social Care if it is suspected that a child or vulnerable adult might be being abused, neglected or harmed.
15. Actively consider new and innovative ways of doing things, recognising and promoting the positive benefits of change as a means of improving services and achieving goals.
16. Maintain an extensive, up-to-date, in-depth knowledge of relevant legislation, guidance and case law, and share learning with colleagues, in order to ensure that the Council meets its statutory obligations towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and that only those households for whom the Council has a duty are provided with accommodation.
17. Contribute positively to the development of new working practices and initiatives that help to prevent homelessness, increase the take-up of housing options and minimise the use and cost of temporary accommodation.
18. Work proactively with Social Services to ensure that the Council's response to intentionally homeless families, homeless 16 and 17 year olds, and people with special needs reflects good practice and is appropriate and properly co-ordinated.
19. Support and promote Northampton's Homelessness Forum as a useful and effective way of co-ordinating advice and support services, improving liaison, encouraging multi agency working, identifying unmet needs and developing new services.
20. Represent the Council on a variety of forums and working parties for the purpose of exchanging information, improving joint working, developing strategy, delivering better outcomes for service users, and enhancing the reputation of the Council.
21. Work proactively with colleagues and other stakeholders to increase efficiency, improve service delivery and value for money, encourage multi agency working, develop strategy and policy, and agree new and more innovative ways of working.
22. Ensure the accurate recording of data and information relating to the work of the Homelessness Assessment Team in order to assist the monitoring of performance, forecast future need for the service and implement agreed service improvements.
23. Support the investigation and analysis of customer complaints, and contribute to the drafting of responses to Freedom of Information requests and enquiries from Councillors and MPs, taking appropriate action to address procedural failings.
24. Work in a safe manner and contribute positively to the creation of a safe and healthy working environment, strictly in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures, to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements and legislation.

25. Maintain professional competence and keep abreast of developments through research and reading, and by attending relevant courses, meetings and supervision.
26. Create and maintain accurate records (using manual and computer systems) on all aspects of the service to ensure compliance with agreed reporting arrangements and provide management with the information it requires to monitor performance and service standards in accordance with Council policy and current legislation.
27. Perform any other duties (appropriate to the grading of the post) that are required by the Housing Advice & Options Manager in order to ensure the delivery of a high quality, responsive and caring Homelessness Assessment Service.

Job descriptions will be subject to review and possible change on an annual basis subject to corporate and service plan priorities.

PEOPLE AND RESOURCES

The Homelessness Assessment Officer is not responsible for the management of any budgets or the supervision, management and direction of any employees.

Other people both external and internal

- (i) The Postholder will act on behalf of the Council (as an ambassador, subject lead and/or negotiator, as appropriate) in relation to:
 - Other local authorities and public bodies including governmental organisations
 - Organisations representing private landlords, tenants and homeless people
 - Organisations representing carers and people with disabilities
 - Charities, social landlords, supported housing providers and other non-governmental organisations
 - Other key stakeholder groups – including local advice and support providers.
- (ii) The Postholder will work with Councillors, Managers and employees of the Council to meet the Council's aims and objectives.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITIES

- To ensure that the services delivered by the Council are designed to meet the needs of Northampton's diverse customer base and are delivered to the highest possible standards.
- To make a positive corporate contribution, including contributing to or leading on corporate projects and initiatives which may cross cut service boundaries.

- To positively work with partners in the best interests of Northampton promoting a “Team Northampton” approach.
- To work with the Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team in the delivery of the Council’s priorities expressed in the Corporate Plan and Service plans.

DATA PROTECTION ACT / FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Working with manual and computerised systems, the Postholder will need to be fully aware, at all times, of their responsibilities under the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Acts of 1998 and 2018 for the security, accuracy and relevance of personal data held on such systems, and to be conversant with the implications of the Freedom of Information Act. The Postholder will also be required to be fully aware of, and comply with, the Council’s Data Quality procedures to ensure that all management information is accurate and fit for purpose.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

	Essential/Desirable ?		Methods of Assessment (Yes = Y)			
	E?	D?	Application Form	References	Interview	Other
KNOWLEDGE						
Sound understanding and awareness of housing and homelessness	E		Y		Y	
In-depth knowledge of the homelessness legislation (including the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017), guidance and case law, and experience of successfully applying them when making homelessness decisions	E		Y		Y	
Extensive experience of investigating and determining homelessness applications	E		Y	Y	Y	
Experience of developing and sustaining effective working relationships, and works successfully in partnership with other services and organisations	E		Y	Y	Y	
Experience of managing a range of complex tasks, with competing demands, and successfully responding to changing circumstances and priorities	E		Y	Y	Y	
Proven experience of successfully managing a large caseload, undertaking research and meeting agreed standards and objectives	E		Y		Y	
Experience of using IT applications, including Microsoft and specialist housing and/or homelessness systems	E		Y		Y	
An understanding of equality and diversity	E		Y		Y	

An understanding of the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation	E		Y		Y	
An understanding of the requirement to ensure accurate data entry into record keeping systems for the purpose of producing statistical returns	E		Y		Y	
SKILLS						
Good standard of literacy and numeracy	E		Y			Y
Effective team player with a proven ability to develop positive relationships with colleagues, managers and other services and organisations	E		Y	Y	Y	
Excellent communication skills (verbal and written) and the ability to influence a variety of audiences, including customers, landlords, lenders and the courts	E		Y		Y	
Ability to interpret and explain complex legislation and guidance, to a variety of audiences, and to make clear, consistent decisions.	E		Y	Y	Y	
Excellent negotiating and advocacy skills, and the drive and commitment to achieve positive outcomes for customers	E		Y		Y	
An effective problem-solver with an organised and imaginative approach to work and the ability to manage difficult situations	E		Y		Y	
Ability to work on own initiative and make clear, consistent decisions	E		Y	Y	Y	
Ability to work well under pressure, prioritise work and meet tight deadlines	E		Y		Y	
Ability to look critically at existing practices, evaluate options and recommend better ways of doing things	E		Y		Y	
Ability to provide service users with a range of options to suit their needs	E		Y		Y	
Ability to maintain accurate records and case files in electronic and paper format	E		Y		Y	
ATTRIBUTES						
A self-starter who is outcome focused and target driven	E		Y	Y	Y	
Full driving licence and access to own transport for work purposes	E		Y		Y	Y

REVIEW AND SIGNATURES

This document will be reviewed from time to time to ensure that it continues to reflect our vision, values and priorities.

Prepared by:	Emma Forbes
Job title:	Housing Advice & Options Manager
Date:	December 2018 (Pay scale updated to 2019/20)

Name of job holder:	
Job holder's signature:	
Date:	