



## Job profile

### Housing options officer



Homelessness is increasing with the number of people councils have a duty to house rising by over 50 per cent since 2010. Rough sleeping has more than doubled and more families are facing lengthier stays in temporary accommodation.

As it becomes increasingly difficult for people on low incomes to find and keep a home they can afford, more and more people are turning to their local authorities for help to resolve their housing problems. We know that proactive, preventative approaches to tackling homelessness are more effective than just reacting to crises. But benefit changes, high rents in the private rented sector and a declining number of social rented homes present increasing challenges to local authorities in their efforts to help as many people avoid homelessness as possible.

So housing options advice plays an important role in the way that local authorities meet their statutory homelessness functions and is a crucial part of a prevention focused approach to tackling homelessness. In this context, a job that helps people to avoid homelessness by exploring and understanding their housing options can be very satisfying.

#### **What might a housing options officer job involve?**

There are likely to be some variations between local authorities but a housing options officer role is likely to involve the following duties:

- Assessing the housing needs of people (and their households) who are in some form of housing difficulty and help them explore a range of housing options to suit their individual circumstances
- Providing a range of advice and support to help people avoid becoming homeless
- Giving accurate legal advice relating to housing rights and landlord/tenant law
- Negotiating with landlords or family members to reach an agreement that means someone can remain in their home
- Explaining the process for making a statutory homeless application and what this could mean for the applicant
- Making referrals to other organisations that could help with providing specialist advice on a range of topics including money advice, domestic abuse, substance misuse counselling or immigration rights etc
- Referring people to supported accommodation providers
- Helping to find suitable alternative accommodation in the private rented sector
- Assessing someone's needs in line with the local housing allocation policy
- Accessing financial assistance to help someone retain existing accommodation or to secure a suitable alternative
- Helping someone access employment support where maximising income via earnings would help someone avoid becoming homeless
- Investigating applications for homelessness assistance and providing written notifications in line with legal requirements and with due regard to relevant codes of guidance

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- Creating and maintaining accurate and up to date records of applicants' details through both manual and IT recording systems to support a defence to legal challenge and to help produce accurate statistical reports and returns
- Maintaining a sound knowledge and practical understanding of homelessness and housing law
- Taking part in and actively contributing to multi-agency meetings to explore and agree a coordinated approach to supporting a person/ family who is homeless or who is at risk of becoming homeless

#### **What qualifications are you likely to need?**

Most organisations will look for someone who has been educated to at least A-level standard and/or holds a relevant professional qualification. Organisations may also prefer candidates with suitable relevant experience of working in a statutory homelessness role, preferably in prevention or a housing options setting.

#### **What skills and experience might you need to do the job?**

- Experience of working in a customer facing environment, preferably giving housing options advice
- The ability to monitor your own performance in line with statutory requirements and local policies/ procedures
- Experience of working in partnership with colleagues and external organisations at an operational level
- Ability to use a variety of IT applications to write and store correspondence and to accurately and efficiently store/ retrieve data
- Experience of liaising with a wide range of people at a variety of levels
- Be a confident communicator with the ability to understand and relay complex information in a range of ways including in meetings, interviews, telephone, letter and email
- A strong awareness of current homelessness and relevant housing policy issues
- Interviewing skills and the ability to deal with difficult situations
- The ability to solve problems
- Ability to work on your own initiative
- Strong negotiation skills
- Be numerate and literate
- Excellent organisational skills
- The ability to show empathy and compassion balanced with a firm but fair communication style
- Able to work flexibly across different geographies and travel to sites
- Self-reliant and able to work independently, with minimal supervision

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