

Job Description

POST TITLE:	Strategic Lead - Benefits and Homeless Prevention
DIRECTORATE:	Climate, Homes and Economy
SERVICE:	Benefits and Homeless Prevention Services
GRADE:	PO10
LOCATION:	Multiple Place Based Working
RESPONSIBLE TO:	Assistant Director Benefits and Homeless Prevention
RESPONSIBLE FOR:	All Service Delivery Teams (50+ directly employed staff, including remote workers, with responsibility for oversight of staff from partner services and agencies, contract commissioning, monitoring and management)

PURPOSE

This role will head one of the six areas listed below delivering the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service which is responsible for creating, developing and implementing the Council's strategy for homelessness prevention, housing allocations, and reducing poverty through benefit administration, income maximisation and benefit take up.

- Complaints, Policy and Rough Sleeping
- Benefits Processing
- Lettings, Downsizing and Rehousing, Medical and Housing Register
- Housing Supply and Temporary Accommodation
- Money Hub
- Advice and Homeless Prevention

KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES AND MAIN DUTIES OF ALL MANAGERS

All Strategic Leads will:

1. Jointly be responsible for creating, developing, leading on and implementing the Council's strategy for homelessness prevention, housing allocations, reducing poverty through income maximisation and benefit take up.

2. Maintain an up-to-date knowledge of legislation and policy developments relevant to the postholders' specific areas of responsibility for the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service, using this to analyse and assess the impact of changes in their area of responsibility. Identify, recommend and implement appropriate strategic and operational actions in response to changing conditions, disseminate information to the Mayor, elected members, scrutiny and governance, Community Land Trust and officers within the Council and recommend appropriate further development of the Council's Strategic Plan and activities.
3. Provide expert advice and the most informed judgement on the postholders area of responsibility giving strategic policy guidance and direction of travel to the Mayor and elected members, Chief Officers and senior managers on complex poverty, health and welfare reform and homelessness issues that will have major implications for the borough, the Council, and other partners.
4. Development of strategy and policy ensuring political commitment, including manifesto commitments, are embedded into all change management outcomes.
5. Develop new initiatives to improve service delivery including the use of new technology and IT systems, changes to working practices and procedures and collaborate with other Services or Local Authorities to achieve more cost-effective and efficient services; to act as an effective change agent in responding to change and instigating service improvements.
6. To lead and work strategically with partners and stakeholders from a range of other Services and agencies to maximise the effectiveness of the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service aims to prevent homelessness and reduce poverty and to ensure mechanisms are in place to monitor the effectiveness of these partnerships.
7. Post holders must have local, sector and legal knowledge of their area of expertise to enable them to represent the Council involving disputes at all legal agencies from ombudsman and judicial reviews up to Supreme Court level.
8. Represent the Council externally, at all levels and to take the lead sub-regionally with agencies including Northeast London Integrated Care Board, East London Housing Partnership, East London NHS Foundation Trust, Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference, Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements, PAUSE, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Department for Work and Pensions, Local Government Association, Greater London Authority and London Councils.
9. To compose and lobby Central Government when requested for the Mayor and elected members.

10. Managing and monitoring of one or more components of the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service with gross revenue expenditure of £54 million, net expenditure of £20 million, £22 million operating budget and timely administration of £250m pa of Housing Benefit.
11. Be responsible for providing a range of financial and performance management information, statistics, reports and performance activity reports to enable effective monitoring and management of the division's performance.
12. Provide robust solutions and mitigations to issues that may arise as a result of budget monitoring, minimising financial loss and reputational impact.
13. Lead on commissioning, procuring and tendering services (including partnering arrangements) and bid assessment in line with LB Hackney's corporate procurement strategies and rules. Act as client for such arrangements when in place.
14. Development and sign-off of Service Business Impact Analysis and Business Continuity Plans.
15. Jointly ensure the resilience of the Service in response to internal and external audits, inspections and any other forms of external scrutiny, including the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, Regulator for Social Housing, Supported Housing Government Panel, commissioned external reviews, and central government inspections and to prepare for and participate in these exercises as necessary.
16. Lead public consultations on national or local policy as it relates to the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service aims, engaging appropriately with colleagues across the council, residents' groups and other stakeholders and ensure that the views expressed are taken account of in the development of strategies, selection of projects and the procurement process.
17. Lead and set direction for managers motivating staff to deliver excellent services, developing and maintaining an effective culture of performance management and ensuring that adequate staffing levels are always maintained.
18. In the absence of the Assistant Director Benefits and Homeless Prevention, to participate with other managers in deputising arrangements to maintain responsiveness and communication for relevant service areas.

KEY ACCOUNTABILITIES AND MAIN DUTIES DEPENDING ON AREA OF SPECIALISATION

- Develop, embed and own the Council's relationship with housing and homelessness partners, and actively engage them in homelessness and rough sleeping strategy development and implementation.

- Design the strategic direction, leading, and commissioning with partner agencies the Councils response to rough sleeping observing adult safeguarding and preventing early death for the most vulnerable.
- Maximise use of specific grant funding to identify, create innovative accommodation schemes and write bids for further funding from Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Levelling Up, Communities and Housing, Local Government Association, Greater London Assembly, Department of Education, Department of Health and Social Care and London Councils for service specific initiatives and projects involving both the Council and partner agencies and to report back to central government on usage of grant funding and outcomes as required.
- Construct and compile cross departmental bids for grants to secure additional revenue and capital funding to support the Councils financial position and support the strategic plan on tackling homelessness.
- Responsible for the timely and comprehensive responses to customer enquiries, complaints, members', mayoral and MP's enquiries, Ombudsman investigations, reviews and appeals, and Freedom of Information requests.
- In conjunction with ICT colleagues, responsible for the control and backend support of IT software systems for the division and the management of contracts with third party suppliers.
- Accountable for ensuring the management and testing of new software releases, templates and any interfaces that may be developed, including the formulation of test plans and systematic testing of new or amended software.
- Lead and develop the software system automation programme for the Service to reduce costs and free up staff resources to high value activities in line with value for money best practice approach.
- Responsible for the accurate and timely administration of £250m pa of Housing Benefit.
- Design and administration of the Councils Housing Register to ensure fair, transparent, equitable and anti-racist practice
- Design, setting and implementation of the Council's main allocations policy for social housing to ensure that the statutory Part 6 Housing Act functions are compliant and delivered.
- Responsible for the provision of medical assessments/outcomes for residents in settled and temporary accommodation and occupational therapy assessments of housing needs.

- Responsible for ensuring the layout of properties meets the needs of residents according to their level of disability, mobility or impairment and joint working with planning/architects to discuss community needs, desired areas and design for wheelchair accessible/adaptable new builds.
- Knowledge and understanding of housing supply, allocations and future housing needs on large scale Local Authority regeneration developments and housing supply schemes from conception to completion.
- Responsibility for the implementation, delivery and administration of Local Lettings Plans across estate regeneration programmes and housing supply program sites in the borough.
- Responsible for the overall management and maintenance of Hackney temporary accommodation hostels housing highly vulnerable adults and children, mitigating and managing associated risks.
- The procurement of new temporary accommodation for the borough via various methods, negotiating on behalf of the Council to secure the best deal whilst observing Pan London agreements and taking into account the effect on local housing markets.
- Contract management, property management, maintenance, health and safety management and monitoring (including fire safety) of the Council's temporary accommodation portfolio c. 3400 units.
- Procurement and allocation of privately rented properties to homeless residents ensuring a negotiated best price deal for the Council with landlords.
- Accountable for the delivery of the out of hours emergency service for hostels.
- Corporate lead on the administration of the Council's Discretionary and Crisis funds, Income Maximisation and Benefit Take Up (namely the Money Hub) aims in line with the Council's Poverty Reduction Framework.
- Responsible for the strategic delivery of the Council's statutory Part 7 Housing Act 1996 and Homeless Reduction Act 2017 functions, ensuring compliance with the Government's code of guidance to prevent and relieve homelessness whilst protecting the public purse and avoiding the need for costly temporary accommodation.
- Developing ambitious and innovative borough wide programmes to ensure a preventative approach to homelessness with partner agencies, both statutory and non statutory, large and small to ensure there is a borough focus on homelessness prevention. To include the Metropolitan Police, Probation Services, NHS, ELFT, HCVS etc.
- Responsible for the compilation and accurate and timely submission of the Housing benefit subsidy claim, worth in excess of £200m p.a. including leading

on the annual external audit, involving negotiation to best protect the Councils financial position.

- Prepare and deliver the annual and learning development plan for the Service as well as delivering training for other directorates and leading on the 'Customer Excellence - The Hackney Way' corporately and maintaining the accreditation with the Institute of Customer Service.

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITIES

Corporate Responsibilities

1. Actively contribute to the leadership of the Council in a way that promotes a 'one organisation' approach.
2. Develop and maintain positive relationships with elected Members to ensure the Council and directorate strategic priorities are effectively implemented and to support Members to undertake their strategic monitoring role.
3. To promote equality, diversity and anti racist approach among all staff, and ensure that services are delivered in a non discriminatory way, that is inclusive of disadvantaged groups.
4. Deputise for the Director when required.
5. Participate in the SILVER rota as directed by the Director to ensure emergency planning and business contingency arrangements are in place throughout the Council.
6. To have a comprehensive understanding of major strategies/issues including the Council's Community Strategy 2018-2028 and Strategic Plan.

Service

1. Actively consider new and innovative ways of delivering services that provide high quality and good value for money. Research and benchmark to establish most effective delivery methods.
2. Drive the implementation of consistently high quality service standards and levels of customer service, establish and monitor performance using Council project management and service review approaches.
3. Facilitate effective integration of related services within and across Directorate and the Council, ensure the contribution of partner and contractor organisations is appropriately harnessed.
4. The postholder is expected to work outside of normal office hours, including attendance at evening meetings or committees.
5. The postholder will be expected to undertake additional duties or responsibilities consistent with the role as allocated by the Corporate Director.

People

1. Work collaboratively with the Council's partners to inform strategic decisions, making sure that this supports the delivery of specific corporate programmes and the community strategy.
2. Establish clarity around expected outcomes and standards, providing clear lines of accountability and delegated authority.
3. Establish and promote a culture of learning and workforce planning that enables staff to realise their potential, manage their careers and therefore improve outcomes for Hackney residents.
4. Manage staff performance appropriately by providing constructive feedback and taking action where performance falls below the expected standard.

Finance

1. Sign off and contribute to the financial strategies and plans / budgets that support the effective delivery of strategic priorities.
2. Monitor the service budget and ensure it is effectively controlled within cash limits, driving down spend where appropriate.
3. Hold managers to account to provide services that are delivered or procured that represent value for money.

Hackney Vision and Values

- Support and deliver the Hackney Vision and Values
- PROUD of what we do, of the Council, of each other and of Hackney.
- AMBITIOUS for Hackney, and for ourselves, always seeking to be the best at what we do, and to get the best for the people of Hackney.
- PIONEERING and INNOVATIVE, always seeking new solutions and making space to be creative, to learn and to share ideas.
- OPEN, HONEST and ACCOUNTABLE, working with others, listening, showing trust in each other and in our residents.
- PROACTIVE and POSITIVE in the way we approach problems and challenges, and take up the opportunities that come our way.
- INCLUSIVE, both as an employer and a service provider, celebrating diversity, and treating colleagues and residents with respect and with care.

Person Specification

Knowledge, Skills and Experience:

- Experience of leading services responsible for delivering some or all of the functions of the Benefits and Homeless Prevention Service.
- An understanding of Local Government finance with extensive knowledge of the financial arrangement applicable to Housing Benefits and council Tax Discretionary Scheme legislation, regulations and working practices
- An understanding of the learning and development requirements in a complex organisation and the ability to apply this at both strategic and operational level.
- An understanding of the control aspects in the use of IT systems including the application and testing of new software and the introduction of new systems
- Comprehensive knowledge and experience of applying relevant housing law and regulation to social housing, lettings and voids.
- Management of a number of staff across a range of grades and employment status and the ability to successfully deal with employee relations issues.
- Extensive knowledge of one of the following, and a working knowledge of the other (or extensive knowledge of both): homelessness and allocations legislation and related legislation, guidance, policy and practice; Housing and Council Tax legislation, regulations, policy and practice and welfare legislation.
- Excellent verbal and written communication and presentation skills and the ability to communicate effectively with a range of audiences including partner services and agencies, staff groups, stakeholders including residents' groups, and external professional forums and the ability to successfully apply this at both strategic and operational level
- Experience of effective partnership working with agencies and stakeholders and the proven ability in relating to, engaging, negotiating and consulting with a wide range of audiences.
- Ability to manage conflicting priorities and to work in a pressurised working environment to achieve targets within challenging timescales.
- Ability to adapt to new legislative, technological and financial developments and to devise and lead on the required change programmes required to implement such, whilst maintaining and developing services in periods of change]

- Ability to demonstrate a track record of applying strong analytical skills and lateral thinking to develop creative and innovative service solutions whilst considering information from a wide range of sources and applying it to make practical recommendations for service delivery and development.
- Experience of drafting and presenting reports on Council's position for Chief Officers and senior managers, the Mayor and elected members.
- Comprehensive knowledge and experience of applying relevant housing law and regulation to social housing, lettings and voids.

Qualified in or equivalent relevant experience

- Membership of the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation and/or Chartered Institute of Housing
 - Educated to degree level and/or has obtained a relevant professional qualification
 - Evidence of continuing professional development
 - Degree in Housing and/or Membership of Chartered Institute of Housing
- or**
- To have or be working towards an appropriate level housing management qualification regulated by Ofqual equivalent to a Level 4 or 5 Certificate or Diploma in Housing, or a foundation degree from the Chartered Institute of Housing.

Accountability

- Political awareness with proven experience of building positive relationships with elected Members to balance political drivers with strategic priorities.
- Experience of creating a culture of learning, to maintain a capable and high performing workforce.
- Experience of providing leadership within a dynamic and changing environment.

Delivery

- Experience of interpreting vision and strategy to drive delivery through strong and effective leadership.

- Experience of setting service standards that will enhance the reputation of the Council and empowers others to deliver.
- Experience of leading and delivering successful organisational and cultural change programmes.

Decision Making

- Experience of making difficult decisions through the analysis of relevant information and risk assessment.
- Making decisions at the appropriate time, taking into account the needs of the situation, priorities, constraints, known risks, and the availability of necessary information and resources.
- Keeping commercial considerations continually in mind when taking actions or making decisions.

Working Together

- Experience of establishing and facilitating cross organisational working that shapes and influences the benefits of having a diverse workforce.
- Experience of developing services that takes account of the needs of diverse stakeholder groups.