

Housing Accommodation Officer Candidate Pack



Housing Accommodation Officer

Salary for this position is £28,367 to £31,077

Working in local government is a highly satisfying and rewarding experience in so many ways. In return for the contribution you'll make to the local community, we are a great employer to work for, with great benefits to offer.

This is an exciting opportunity to join the Housing Advice Service as a frontline Housing Accommodation Officer. Homelessness is high on the national agenda and we are offering an exciting permanent role to join our newly formed Accommodation Service, which is part of the wider Housing Advice Service. The successful candidate will have the responsibility for managing and providing temporary accommodation and make use of all available accommodation options to discharge the Council's homelessness duties.

You will support the work across the Housing Advice Service to deliver on our range of legal responsibilities, focusing on the private rented sector and clients in temporary accommodation. The Housing Advice Service reacts to needs of the client group, the right candidate will find that there are never two days which are the same.

The Homelessness Reduction Act requires the Council to boost its focus on homelessness prevention and strengthen our proactive service to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This role involves a range of tasks to support the accommodation service as well as direct interaction with our clients and key partners, so strong customer service skills are needed.

You will have excellent oral and written communication skills with the ability to produce accurate and concise information. We are looking for someone who is flexible and resilient, a supportive team player who is able to remain calm and to work effectively under pressure.

The right candidate will enjoy team work and enthusiastically embrace our proactive housing options approach, which aims at preventing homelessness and finding real solutions for people in housing difficulties. You will be a self-starter who is able to work on your own initiative and organise your own workload with a positive and flexible attitude.

You will be responsible for coordinating our Landlord Incentive Scheme and working with landlords to maximise the Council's access to assured short hold tenancies, through relationship building,

negotiation and creative problem solving. You will have experience of working with letting agents and landlords, be driven and be able to adapt and manage a demanding workload.

We are seeking a motivated and innovative person, with good attention to detail, who can work proactively with customers and partners to find creative housing solutions.

You will also be working with the Housing Advice Service and HERO (Housing, Energy & Retraining Options) service to market, develop and improve the Council's private rented offer. This post reports directly to the Accommodation Team Leader.

In return you will be valued, supported and provided with an environment where you can foster ideas to develop the service and put the customer at the heart of what you do.

How to get to us

Sevenoaks is only half an hour from central London by train. You will be based at the Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HG
A free staff car park is available on site.

How to apply

To apply online please visit our website
www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/jobs

Closing date: 23:55 on Monday 18 January 2021



About the Council

Sevenoaks District Council is a unique place to work. It's a place where positive and passionate people deliver some of the very best services in local government. We are honoured to be recognised as one of the most efficient, well managed councils in the country, an achievement we work hard to maintain.

There are very few councils that still collect all the rubbish and recycling every week using their own team of people. We are exceptionally proud that the people who work here care deeply about what they do, that they are creative, embrace risk and work hard to deliver exceptional services to our customers and to improve the Sevenoaks District. It's our team of people that makes Sevenoaks District Council unique.

We've worked hard to develop a no 'blame culture' among the people that work here. It's a place where staff take responsibility for the work they do and are empowered to take the decisions that help them to do their job effectively. We encourage new ideas and innovation and provide people with the support and training they need to become the very best at what they do.

Our mantra of 'the customer is anyone who isn't me' helps to grow strong and positive working relationships across our council services, and ensures our residents, businesses and partners receive the very highest quality of service each time they contact us.

Recruiting the right people to our team is incredibly important to us and instrumental to our success. We value personal qualities as much as we do the skills and knowledge to do the job. We want people who can embrace our culture, that have ambition and determination and have the ability to shape our future.

Our vision

We're committed to delivering excellent services. This means we are ambitious for our staff, our customers and our Council. Together we work to shape the District for future generations to make it a great place to live, work and enjoy.

Our mission

To work smarter with an empowering culture, a focus on wellbeing and a dynamic and innovative approach.

The Sevenoaks District provides a great range of housing options whether you are looking to rent or buy.

Many of our staff live outside of the District. With excellent links by road and rail it makes Sevenoaks District Council an employer that is accessible from most parts of Kent and further afield.

The Council is fortunate to have its own car park which, increasingly rarely, is free to all staff to use. The council also supports car sharing and is a member of the cycle to work scheme.

Much of the District is surrounded by beautiful countryside, but our towns and villages have excellent transport links, good schools and a vibrant local economies.

Amongst the national chain stores are thriving local businesses, there are great places to eat and drink and a wonderful range of attractions for days out with friends and family.

The Sevenoaks District has three leisure centres, a range of local sports clubs and its own theatre. So if you have an interest in sport, film, comedy and stage there is something for you.

Transport

Sevenoaks mainline train station is a short walk from the Council offices and regular trains take approximately 30 minutes into central London.

The M25, M20 and A21 are all within a short drive of the Council offices.

Gatwick airport is just over a 30 minute drive and Heathrow airport is just over an hour's drive away.

Sevenoaks town

The Council's offices are based a short stroll away from the heart of Sevenoaks town. Sevenoaks is a busy town centre with a wide variety of shops, restaurants and cafes. There is a regular weekly market, as well as a choice of supermarkets, a theatre and a cinema.

The town also has the advantage of the wonderful Knole Park, including its deer, just a few minutes walk from the door of the offices for those that like to get away from it all during their lunch break.



S

Strong sense of pride in our district

E

Enthusiastic and committed

V

Valuing others, valuing each other

E

Empowered to achieve

N

No blame culture

O

Open to new ideas; dedicated to developing talent

A

Ambitious with our community

K

Keep learning; keep improving

S

Sharing services; working closely with others

Annual Leave

You will be given 27 days annual leave plus any Bank Holidays. An extra five days leave is accrued after five years Continuous Local Government Service as at 1 April. Bank Holidays are pro rata (for part time staff) based on the amount of hours you work. You will be eligible to buy additional leave or have an increased salary by selling annual leave.

Pension

We are part of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). There is a 50/50 section which enables a member to pay half rate contributions for half the benefits. The LGPS is a contributory scheme that requires contributions from both employer and employee. The rate Sevenoaks as the employer currently pays is 18.7%. Your contribution rate would be 6.5%.

Health and wellbeing benefits

Free and confidential employee assistance programme

Confidential and expert advice in many areas, including family, legal, financial and consumer issues.

Regular onsite health check appointments available

We regularly offer mini health checks with our onsite Occupational Health Advisor, who offer checks on blood pressure, 'Know your numbers', body mass index, weight, risk of diabetes, stress management tips and 'Take a Walk' tips.

We also offer onsite free flu vaccinations and discounted osteopathy treatments.

Eye care

We offer eye care vouchers on request every two years to staff who use computers for a significant part of their work.

Financial benefits

Free staff car parking

On-site staff car park, free of charge to everyone.

Cycle to work scheme

You can get a new bike for a significantly reduced cost by saving on tax and National Insurance (and paying for it monthly through your salary).

Staff Benefits

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Season ticket loan

We offer season ticket loans up to a maximum of £5,000, repayable over 12 months.

Car loan

You can apply for a loan up to a maximum of £10,000 to purchase a car, repayable over a maximum of five years at a low rate of interest.

Professional fees

Staff in roles where ongoing membership of a recognised professional body, (where this membership is gained through a qualification), is an essential requirement in the person specification for their job can claim the cost of one membership fee per year.

Recognition, Learning and Development

We believe all our employees have the potential to grow, both in their work role and personally, and endeavour to provide opportunities for this growth. We work within recognised good practice guidelines, including Investors in People, to ensure both the quality and quantity of training and development is relevant and “fit for purpose”.

The Talent in Me (TiM)

TiM is open to everyone and there are more than 60 courses available to choose from. Courses are ‘bite-sized’. Each one takes one to two hours to complete and are delivered by our own in-house service experts or external providers.

E Learning

We offer e-learning courses that enable you to train at your desktop, working at your own pace wherever and whenever you want.

Coaching

We offer a tailored coaching programme with a number of professionally trained internal volunteer coaches, designed specifically to support staff performance and development and our culture, with a focus on specific skills and goals.

Apprenticeships

Any member of staff can apply to undertake an apprenticeship. There are now over 200 new apprenticeship standards with more in development.

Family friendly polices

Maternity leave

Staff who have worked for us for more than 12 months, receive enhanced maternity pay of the first six weeks paid at 90% of the weekly salary, followed by 12 weeks paid at 50% of the weekly salary, followed by 21 weeks at a statutory rate.

Paid paternity leave

Employees who have worked for us for more than 12 months receive enhanced paternity pay of two weeks at 90% of the weekly salary.

Flexible working

We are proud to offer a range of flexible working arrangements to all of our staff. We are happy to consider reduced hours, job shares, home working and more, ensuring the needs of the organisation continue to be met.

Other staff benefits

We participate in the Kaarp Benefits Scheme, a voluntary benefit scheme for local authority employees. The Benefits change regularly but include:

- Activities - discounted theme park entry and/or hotel rooms.
- Finance - special deals, insurance and personal finance.
- Health - money off many sports and fitness centres and golf courses.
- Motoring - discount car club, reduced breakdown cover, car servicing/MOTs and money off driving lessons.
- Shopping - many deals and offers.
- Travel - A travel club, discounts on holiday insurance, hotels and airport parking.
- Local discounts – these include many offers and discounts for restaurants, hotel rooms, hairdressers, dry cleaners and more.

Staff Benefits

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Title of post: Housing Accommodation Officer

Section: Homelessness Prevention Team, People and Places

Band: D

Reports to: Accommodation Team Leader

Purpose of post: To be responsible for the delivery of an effective and efficient allocations and lettings service. This will include key procedures in relation to the day to day administration and management of the Housing List, client / property matching, records maintenance, client suitability and authentication checks and property allocation and lettings processes.

To monitor households in temporary accommodation and make use of all available accommodation options to discharge the Council's homeless duties.

To provide an effective and professional private sector liaison service to private landlords to develop, implement and manage the landlord incentive scheme; improving access to, and increasing, successful take up of sustainable private sector options for customers of the housing options service.

Key activities

- To manage all temporary accommodation, liaising with the companies that provide properties, ensuring effective and timely communication between the Council and providers regarding move-ins and move-ons.
- To carry out regular unannounced inspections of temporary accommodation provision and deal with any complaints from the customer or proprietor.
- To make efficient and cost effective use of temporary accommodation ensuring that voids are kept to a minimum and processes are adhered to; abiding by legislation regarding the length of time families and young people can be placed by a local authority in Bed & Breakfast and Hotels.
- To move on applicants from temporary accommodation, maximising re-housing opportunities.
- To actively contribute to the development and implementation of a private sector offer which will enable better access to the private rented sector, letting agents and facilitate improved engagement with private landlords, including marketing, liaison, events management and presentations.
- To support the establishment of a network of private landlords who would be willing to accept those who are homeless/threatened with homelessness as tenants.

- To work in conjunction with the Housing Advice officers to secure appropriate tenants for properties secured under the scheme and where suitable facilitate discharge of homelessness duties into the private sector.
- To provide a support service to landlords where successful placements are made and mediate between tenant and landlord should difficulties arise. Establish procedures with landlords for early notification and response to tenants getting into difficulty which could ultimately result in the loss of the accommodation
- To identify households who will require housing related support during the course of their tenancy.
- To carry out entrance and exit inspections of private sector properties with prospective applicants when required, ensuring applicants are provided with clear advice on the property and range of services available.
- To liaise with and make appropriate referrals to statutory, voluntary, private sector and other agencies including team members and internal departments to ensure that relevant support mechanisms are in place for all customers.
- To ensure that when the Council makes an offer of accommodation in order to discharge its duty that the property is suitable. That the offer is made in writing, setting out how the offer meets the suitability criteria.
- To support allocating properties in strict accordance with the Council's Allocation Policy and Local Lettings Policies.
- To maintain a good knowledge of social housing stock within the Sevenoaks District, and be aware and prepare for new Build social housing properties coming through the Choice Based Lettings systems.
- To complete allocations and direct lets through the processes set up on Kent Homechoice (Kent's Choice Based Lettings Scheme) within agreed procedural timescales.
- To ensure that nominations are completed accurately and promptly to keep voids to a minimum.
- To carry out all final pre-allocation checks in line with procedure and within timescales, liaising with relevant internal and external parties.
- To carry out home visits to applicants on the housing list to verify applications in line with Allocations procedures.
- To ensure when shortlisting that there are clear reasons for an applicant being bypassed.
- To ensure that all adverts are fully checked



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and published in accordance with the Council's Allocations Policy.

- To deal with written and verbal enquiries in connection with all housing allocations, Choice Based Lettings and related matters, from applicants, social services and social landlords etc.
- To assist the Accommodation Team Leader with implementing a move on strategy for households with an accepted duty in temporary accommodation.
- To ensure that when the Council's Housing Duty has been discharged through a Part VI, Social Lettings Agency or Private Sector offer the discharge paperwork is completed accurately and systems are updated.
- To support the resettlement of refugee families within the Sevenoaks District, as part of the Government's UK Resettlement Scheme.
- To create and maintain accurate and up to date records of client's details and circumstances through IT recording systems according to guidance and established procedures.
- To assist the Accommodation Team Leader and other housing sections with the induction/training of new staff by mentoring and job shadowing.
- To provide duty cover for the Housing Advice Team as required.
- To work out of hours as necessary to deliver the services required by the Council for example during the evenings or weekends.
- To undertake any other duties as required which are commensurate with the level and nature of the post.

Dimensions

- Supporting a housing list of around 700 people.
- 75% of homeless applications are from individuals with housing issues as a result of complex personal issues including mental health, substances misuse, offending history, unemployment, domestic abuse etc.
- Sourcing and securing properties at affordable rent, an increasing challenge within today's private rental market.

On a day to day basis:

- Make decisions on which Housing List Applicants to nominate to, or by-pass for, social housing properties using the Choice Based Lettings System and in line with the Council's Allocation Policy.
- Shortlist and offer households with an accepted duty in Temporary.

- Accommodation, such as Bed & Breakfast and Hotels, move-on to available self-contained temporary accommodation or direct let of social housing.
- Decisions on the provision of Rent Deposit and Rent-in-Advance support.
- Decisions on referring customers to HERO and voluntary & statutory agencies e.g. Social Services.
- Make recommendations for Reasonable Preference and Exceptional Circumstances.
- Discharging of the Council's duty to accommodate.
- Decide whether or not the Council should or should not work with a private sector landlord.
- Assist in managing the Council owned Temporary Accommodation including sign ins and sign outs.
- Prepared to work outside of usual working hours to cover emergencies.
- Be part of duty rota team as required.
- Based at Argyle Road, Sevenoaks with regular travel to other sites, including properties and home visits.

General responsibilities

- To embrace the values and behaviours of the Council.
- To comply with the Council's Safeguarding policy.
- To comply with the Council's Equal Opportunities policy, and to actively promote equality of opportunity wherever possible.
- To comply with the Council's Health & Safety policy.
- To participate in any relevant training for the duties of this post and to achieve the key objectives of the Council.
- To participate fully in the Council's staff appraisal scheme.
- To participate in any relevant training for the duties of this post and to achieve the key objectives of the Council.
- To carry out any other related duties which may be directed by the Accommodation.
- Team Leader or Homelessness Prevention Manager.

Location

Council Offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1HG. With travel to other sites, including property/home visits.

Qualifications

Essential

- Good basic education to GCSE A-C standard or equivalent (including Maths & English).



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Desirable

- NVQ level 2 Housing or Customer care or equivalent.

Knowledge, skills and experience

Essential

- At least 2 year's experience of working in a local authority housing environment.
- Experience of Choice Based lettings systems.
- Experience of giving advice to housing applicants and dealing with allocations policies.
- Good working knowledge of all information technology systems relating to allocations work including the Choice Based Lettings system.
- Comprehensive working knowledge of working with Council Allocation Policies.
- Thorough understanding of the Housing Act 1996 Part VI in relation to the allocation of accommodation; as well as an awareness of the Housing Act 1996 Part VII.
- Experience of working with vulnerable customers.
- Experience of operating MS Office systems such as Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook.
- Excellent customer satisfaction skills.
- Keeping of accurate and appropriate notes and records.
- Driving license.

Approach

Essential

- A helpful, customer and outcomes focussed approach.
- A can-do approach.
- Ability to work as part of a team.
- Ability to operate on own initiative.
- Able to organise and prioritise work effectively in order to meet deadlines and maintain high standards at all times.
- Ability to build constructive partnerships and networks with landlords and other agencies.
- Good empathic listening skills
- Ability to make sound, non-judgemental decision.
- Committed to personal and professional development.
- Ability to work outside normal office hours when required.
- The ability to travel around the district in an efficient and effective manner.