



LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON
ENVIRONMENT AND REGENERATION DEPARTMENT
JOB DESCRIPTION

POST TITLE: Principal Planner – Development Management

Grade: ME15

**DIVISION/SECTION: Development Management and Building Control,
Sustainable Communities**

Location: Civic Centre, Morden

Responsible to: Area Manager - Development Management

Responsible for: Planners as allocated – up to 7 plus Apprentices

Date: December 2021

Job Purpose

The Development Management Service's focus is on delivering high quality, robust and transparent decision making within tight time frames to ensure that Merton's Planning Service is recognised as delivering an excellent planning experience for all our customers.

The Principal Planner will act as a professional specialist/expert and will be the highest level of planning specialist reporting to the Area Manager. The Principal Planner will provide professional advice for the Council and Members, creating and applying best practice and delivering successful planning outcomes.

As lead specialist, the Principal Planner will attend Planning Appeals as an expert witness which could reduce the likelihood of significant costs being awarded against the Borough.

The Principal Planner will deputise for the Area Manager in his/her absence and will take a lead role in the delivery of a high quality, speedy development management service for our customers, utilising effectively IT and team members to ensure that corporate and national targets are met and exceeded.

In addition, they will be responsible for leading and line managing a team of professional and technical officers as allocated, identifying priorities, allocating workload, monitoring performance, reviewing and signing off case officers' reports.

Specific Duties and Responsibilities

1. Responsible to the Area Team Manager for taking the lead on and personal responsibility for the full range of development management case work including negotiation of planning performance agreements, pre-application advice, the processing of highly complex and high-risk applications and correspondence, ensuring it is effectively and efficiently carried out to identifiable deadlines in a manner which is successful in meeting corporate targets and objectives.
2. Deputise for the Area Team Manager as required, including taking a lead role at Planning Applications Committee and attendance at evening meetings.
3. Proactive in identifying issues and proposing improvements and creative solutions within the context of current and future service requirements in order to continually deliver high quality, customer focused planning services to customers and managers.
4. Take a lead in implementing identified agreed projects to deliver organisational objectives, continual improvements and efficiencies in ensuring a high quality customer focused service.
5. Ensure that all delegated and committee reports, and correspondence are well written, accurate and set out coherent and robust recommendations based on relevant planning policies and other material considerations.
6. Ensure that the electronic copy of the planning application, pre-application advice and correspondence is the master copy and that all electronic and paper copies of own case work and that of the team are up-to-date before any decision is made.
7. Coach and facilitate more junior members of the team and assist in training so that team members are able to be self-reliant in dealing with technical and people issues.
8. Present to the Planning Application Committee and any other internal and public meetings on complex and/or controversial planning decisions in a clear

and concise manner including providing expert professional advice to Members and the public.

9. Provide advice and guidance on complex or high risk issues particularly where precedent is less readily available, including that of new legislation and initiatives relating to technical, operational, and contractual aspects of development management.
10. Proactively support the Area Team Manager in ensuring key performance indicators, targets and customer service standards are fully up-to-date using service wide electronic recording and monitoring systems and that proactive action is taken to ensure that those performance indicators, targets and standards are met.
11. Take the lead on and personal responsibility for the preparation of evidence in respect of appeals including presenting evidence at Public Enquiries, Hearings and in writing, taking a project management role including briefing and commissioning Counsel and specialist advice as necessary.
12. Investigate complaints received by the team regarding performance; decisions and other matters, including speaking to the case officer and preparing a response within agreed Council deadlines.
13. Initiate, participate in and take the management lead on matters relating to compliance and enforcement matters taking responsibility for effective negotiation and conflict resolution to ensure high quality innovative outcomes that reflect Council-wide objectives and policies.
14. Demonstrate an ability to build and develop strong working relationships both inside and outside the service in order to deliver departmental and corporate objectives and to mitigate risk and to be an ambassador for the planning function in these interactions.
15. Maintain an up-to-date knowledge of relevant legislation and take a proactive approach to relevant changes in legislation, recommending revised procedures and practices and managing the implementation of those revision.
16. Respond on behalf of the Head of Development Management & Building Control to complex enquiries and complaints from councillors; members of the public; businesses; community groups and developers.
17. Participate in Planning Training for Councillors as required.

Generic Responsibilities

- To contribute to the continuous improvement of the services of the London Borough of Merton.
- To comply with relevant Codes of Practice, including the Code of Conduct and policies concerning data protection and health and safety.
- To adhere to security controls and requirements, procedures and local risk assessments to maintain confidentiality, integrity, availability and legal compliance of information and systems.
- To promote equality, diversity, and inclusion, maintaining an awareness of the equality, and diversity policies and work to create a safe, supportive and welcoming environment where all people are treated with dignity and their identify and culture are valued and respected.
- To carry out any other duties appropriate to the grading of the post as required by senior management.

Additional Information

- To assist as required with the management of budgets, including ensuring that all necessary processes and procedures are carried out in a timely and effective manner.
- To provide supervision as required to assigned staff and take responsibility for the allocation and checking of work by staff.



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PERSON SPECIFICATION

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Knowledge	
Comprehensive knowledge and understanding of Planning legislation, policy guidance and circulars, practice and case law and the ability to apply that knowledge in negotiating and delivering highly complex and high risk planning applications within agreed timeframes in order to deliver a responsive, high quality service at speed.	
Knowledge and understanding of effective customer relations and customer care practices.	
Understanding of planning enforcement practice and appeals case law and ability to apply that knowledge to delivering a high quality and responsive service.	
Knowledge of regulations and policy relating to Tree Management and Listed Building Applications	

Experience	
Experience in dealing with a wide range of planning applications including those that are complex and controversial.	
Experience in negotiating S106s	
Experience of mentoring and advising junior team members	D
Significant experience delivering Development Management including Major Applications	
Local Government Town Planning experience	D
Experience of working with elected Members	D
Experience of presenting at Committee	
Skills	
Clear understanding of IT systems generally including Microsoft Office, measuring software and planning database system and document management systems	
Excellent inter-personal skills	
Articulate in written and oral communication skills with particular reference to report and letter writing, public speaking, presentation skills and communicating with elected Members; the public; planning agents; and others	
Ability to organise own workload and that of any allocated team members and agency staff including Planning Performance Agreements, pre-application advice and the delivery of the full range of development management casework within agreed timeframes to ensure that key performance indicators, targets and customer service standards are met and that a high quality of work and decision making is maintained.	
Ability to work effectively to meet challenging deadlines and manage competing and changing priorities	
Ability to assist in identifying need for change and to introduce and manage changes designed to improve service delivery.	
Qualifications	
A degree in Town Planning or other appropriate professional qualification	
Chartered Member of the RTPI	D