Recruitment Information Pack

Job Title	Advanced Collections Officer
Reference No	510.89
Location	The Jim Walker Partnership Centre
Hours	36 hours
Salary	£35,851 - £38,779
Status	Permanent

Thank you for your interest in this post, if you have any questions in relation to the recruitment process or if you are disabled and require any adjustment to the recruitment process please contact our recruitment team on 01506 28 22 22 or email recruitment@westlothian.gov.uk.

Privacy Notice – HR Services - Recruitment

Information held about you.

West Lothian Council will hold the following personal information:

- Full name
- Home address
- Email address
- Employment history
- Training/qualifications
- Registration with professional bodies
- Equal opportunities monitoring information (gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion and disability)
- Criminal convictions (if applicable)
- Pre-employment checks (health screening, references and PVG check if applicable)

Who is processing my information?

All personal information is held and processed by West Lothian Council in accordance with data protection law.

How will we use information we hold about you?

Personal information held by West Lothian Council will be used in the following ways:

- To assess the suitability of applicants for the job they have applied for
- Equal opportunities monitoring information will be used to monitor the councils compliance with equality legislation
- To populate the HR Payroll system for successful candidates (see privacy notices on performance of contract of employment for further details)

Who we will share your information with?

We will not share your information with any external bodies.

How long do we keep your records?

If your application is successful we will keep your information for a period of 6 years after you leave employment with the council. Information stored on the Myjobscotland website will be retained for 7 years from the date of your application.

If your application is unsuccessful, all information will be kept for a period of 6 months, following which it will be securely destroyed. Information stored on the Myjobscotland webstie will be retained for 5 years from the date of your application.

Your rights

You have a number of rights under data protection law, including the right to request your information and to request that the information be amended or, in some circumstances, erased if incorrect.

To request your records, you will need to put your request in writing to HR Services, West Lothian Civic Centre, Howden South Road, Livingston, West Lothian, EH54 6FF

Email – hrsupport@westlothian.gov.uk

You also have a right to make a complaint about our handling of your personal information to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about how your information is used, please contact Data Protection Officer, West Lothian Council, West Lothian Civic Centre, Howden South Road, Livingston, West Lothian, EH54 6FF or email DataProtectionOfficer@westlothian.gov.uk

More information about data protection and how it applies to you is available from the Information Commissioner's Office.

West Lothian Council is committed to paying its employees a fair wage and, as part of this commitment in April 2016, the Council became a Living Wage accredited employer. This means that the council pays the Living Wage rate to all employees earning less than £8.75 per hour and has made an on-going commitment to ensure that it continues to pay the Living Wage in years to come

About Finance and Property Services

Finance and Property Services is one of the council's key enabling services, ensuring that the council can continue to provide high quality front line service, deliver outcomes and fulfil the needs of communities.

Audit, Risk and Counter Fraud Unit

Audit and Risk Management is responsible for ensuring that there is a corporate framework in place to enable the council to effectively manage its key risks. The unit also audits key risks, performance information and reviews matters of concern, this includes investigations into allegations of fraud or irregularity. Following an audit action plans are agreed with each service to address any identified issues.

Financial Management Unit

Financial Management Unit provides a wide range of financial services and is responsible for both short and long term financial strategy for both revenue and capital resource. Other core activities support and enable service delivery across the council and include insurance cover and advice, VAT and treasury management, accounts payable as well as budget preparation and monitoring.

Property Services

Property Services delivers a range of asset management services for internal and external customers, from the strategic direction of the council's property portfolio through to management of utilities and operational property budgets. The unit is also involved in the development of property to promote economic activity in support of local business and industry. Professional services include valuation of land and property, as well as maintenance of property records. It also provides multi-disciplinary professional and technical construction related services, with a strong corporate approach to the lifecycle management of the council's assets.

Revenues Unit

The Revenues Unit is responsible for council tax and business rates billing and collection, the administration of housing benefit, council tax reduction scheme and the Scottish welfare fund. The unit provides a front line service to recipients of benefits which includes, processing claims, assessing benefits as well as payments to claimants and landlords. The unit is responsible for rent collection and all miscellaneous income.

Advice Shop

The Advice Shop is a free, impartial and confidential service to help the people of West Lothian with a focus to alleviate poverty and to promote inclusion and equality through advice assistance and advocacy.

Council Strategies

Finance and Property Services has responsibility for the development and implementation of the council's Revenue Budget Strategy, Capital Strategy, Asset Management Strategy, Corporate Procurement Strategy and Risk Management Strategy.

Equality and Diversity

Equality is relevant to us all. Addressing discrimination and promoting equality are everyone's core business.

We want a West Lothian in which all people and communities have a say in their future and an equal opportunity for health, safety, education, fulfilling work, and a high quality of life. West Lothian Council has published equality outcomes, equality information on our workforce and our progress on mainstreaming equality. This reflects our commitment to promoting equality and eliminating discrimination as well as fulfilling our statutory duties under legislation.

The council recognises and values the diverse range of talents, skills, experience and perspectives that exist within society and believes that those qualities and attributes should also be reflected within the composition of its workforce, its employment practices and in the planning and delivery of its services.

Central to the council's Equality and Diversity agenda, is the prevention of discrimination, victimisation and harassment against service users and employees on any grounds, but particularly in relation to the following protected characteristics:

- age;
- disability;
- sex (gender)
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnership;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sexual orientation

In addition, prevention of discrimination, victimisation and harassment in relation to gender identity, gender expression, non-binary identities, language, social origin, employment status, political belief, trade union membership or activity, or responsibility for dependants is key to ensuring we have a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the communities we serve.

West Lothian Council is a Stonewall Diversity Champion and is committed to advancing LGBT equality and this is reflective in all our policies which are inclusive of all protected characteristics

How to apply

Our preferred method of receiving applications is on line. In the interests of equality we do not accept C.Vs.

All applications must be received by the closing date stated on the advert and any late applications will not be accepted. . If you have started to apply for a post on line and the closing date is changed you will receive an email alert informing you of the revised closing date.

We do not keep copies of application forms on file for any future similar vacancies and therefore you will need to complete a separate application form for each post that you apply for. However, when applying on line the system will remember your core details.

If you apply for a post on line we will contact you using the email address you have provided. If you do not have an email address, you can sign up for a free account through internet providers such as Yahoo, Hotmail or Googlemail.

The information you provide in your application is used to determine whether or not you should be shortlisted for interview. It is therefore in your interest to complete the form fully and carefully. Your application form should contain sufficient information to demonstrate that you have the skills and experience required for the post.

What happens next?

Following consideration of your application you will be notified as to whether or not you have been selected for interview.

If you are selected for interview you will receive an email from us confirming this and asking you to log in to the Myjobscotland website and select a suitable interview time. If you are not selected for interview you will receive an email confirming this.

Successful Candidate

The successful candidate will receive a conditional offer of employment, pending completion of the following checks, as appropriate.

- Pre-employment health check
- References
- PVG
- Eligibility to work in the UK

A formal offer of employment will be issued only when all checks have been satisfactorily completed.

If you have any questions please email recruitment@westlothian.gov.uk

Terms and Conditions of Employment for Employees

Conditions of Service	Conditions of Service are those of the Scottish Joint Council for Local Government employees as adopted and amended by West Lothian Council
Hours of Work	Hours of work for a full time post are 36 hours per week. The standard working hours are Monday – Thursday 8.30 – 5.00, Friday 8.30 – 4.00.
Pay	Employees are paid by bank transfer on the last Thursday of the month. Where appropriate you will receive an annual increment on the 1st April each year, until you reach the top of the grade.
Annual Leave	Depending on length of service you will be entitled to either 26(187.2 hours) or 31 (223.2 hours) days annual leave, this will be pro-rated for part time employees. The leave year is 1st January to 31st December.
Public Holidays	There are 7 paid public holidays. Part time employees will be given a pro -rated entitlement to reflect their particular working arrangements.
Sickness Absence	Your entitlement to sickness allowance will be in accordance with the Scheme of Sickness Absence set out within the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service for Scottish Local Government employees.
Pension	You are legally required to make provision for your pension. Employees with permanent contracts, or temporary contracts for 3 months or more, will automatically become members of the Local Government Pension Fund, unless they apply to opt out. Pension contributions are based on your salary.
Appraisal Development Review	All employees are entitled to an annual review with their manager, to identify any development needs and set objectives for the coming year.

Employee Benefits	The council has negotiated discounts for employees with over 90 local businesses and over 1,000 businesses nationally. Childcare vouchers are offered and employees can take advantage of 20% off membership and free joining fees with West Lothian Leisure. To promote the council's commitment to having a healthy workforce, counselling and physiotherapy are also offered to employees.
Pool Cars	The council provides access to pool cars for employees who need to drive as part of their job.
Trade Union	The council supports collective bargaining and you have the right to join a trade union and take part in its activities and are encouraged to do so.
Health and Safety	The council is committed to ensuring a healthy and safe working environment for all employees. Health and safety responsibilities are set out in the Occupational Health and Safety Supplementary Policy and Safety Arrangements booklet for your workplace.

West Lothian Council

Job Description

Job Title	Advanced Collections Officer
Reports to:	Senior Section Leader – Advanced Collections
Location:	The Jim Walker Partnership Centre

Purpose of the Job

Maximise income due to the council through the provision of a corporate and aged debt service including service accounts. Provide a one-point service to debtors who have multiple debts due to the council and to front-line staff to discuss the different customer debts & recovery stages.

Demonstrate a joined-up approach by working together with other front-line services, using contact opportunities to engage customers to deal with council debts.

Negotiate with customers to make sustainable arrangements for all debts due to the council based on the individual circumstances and refer cases to welfare or money advice if appropriate.

Work with customers and their families who have complex needs and engage other service providers as and when required.

Where appropriate maintain contact using a variety of communication channels, which will include visits and external meetings.

Assist in the administration and collection of council debts. Liaise with service units, outside agencies and members of the public in relation to such matters.

Manage cases that are escalated to the team for advanced recovery action, while attempting to engage the customer to find a solution to all of their debts. Where appropriate processing cases for court or other advanced recovery action.

Routinely analyse information and reports, updating systems to ensure records are up to date and to advance stages of recovery.

Contribute to the continuous improvement of the service processes approach and to the performance of the team.

Work in a manner that contributes to the delivery and outcomes of the Anti-Poverty Strategy and contributes to the continuous development and performance of the team.

Job Scope

Working as part of a team the Advanced Collections Officer will:

Provide a one-point corporate and aged debt service including service accounts to customers who have multiple debts due to the council, contributing to the development of the service and identifying strategies to deal effectively with council debt.

Provide a point of contact for staff dealing with customers who have debts due to the council.

Assist in the administration and collection of council debts and be able to identify and amend inaccuracies in records across relevant council systems

Manage cases that are escalated to the team for advanced recovery action. This will involve assisting customers who engage to maximise benefits and to address debts going forward.

Identify and prepare cases for legal action, managing the case until decree is obtained and the paperwork is returned to the housing manager to facilitate the eviction process. Attempting engagement through a variety of means, including telephone, text, visits etc.)

Reporting to the Senior Section Leader, they will be expected to prioritise their own workload and generally work on an unsupervised basis assessing cases and situations and, based on their knowledge and experience, act accordingly.

Accountable for the achievement of the council's statutory and key performance indicators. Actively participate and contribute to the team's development and contribute to the overall performance targets and identified outcomes.

Work in partnership with families, individuals and when there are complex needs, other relevant agencies and stakeholders to access the required support to ensure sustainable payment arrangements are agreed to address all debts due to the council.

Be aware of the council's corporate responsibilities in terms of child and adult protection and the associated duties of care.

Work on routine tasks that support the corporate approach to debt, including analysing information and reports and updating systems as appropriate.

Principal Accountabilities / Key Tasks

Maximise the income due to the council through the effective control and management of its debt portfolio.

Ensure liability for council charges have been correctly assessed in accordance with the relevant legislation and council policies.

Considering a wide range of circumstances, often complex in nature, ensure the most appropriate recovery action is taken in relation to individual and multiple debt cases. Ensure these actions are taken in accordance with the relevant legislation and council policies.

Manage a caseload of debtors who engage with the council to set appropriate and sustainable payment arrangements to address all their debts due to the council.

Identify and prepare individual and multiple debt cases for appropriate legal action including insolvency and DAS work. Instruct council solicitors on actions to be taken and liaise closely with them, other service units and Sheriff Officers to ensure actions are progressed effectively and within appropriate timescales.

Where required, represent the council at court hearings under the guidance of the council's solicitor.

Negotiate with debtors to agree the most appropriate debt payment arrangement. Debt payment negotiations will take account of debtor's circumstances, often complex and wide ranging in nature, and will be in accordance with council policies. Ensure debt payment arrangements are properly recorded and monitored with default action being taken without delay.

Undertake visits to engage customers and where appropriate provide outreach services to ensure customers with debt due to the council can access our services.

Carry out a detailed financial assessment of a debtor's position in order to determine their circumstances and disposable income for debt repayment arrangements. Where appropriate, refer the debtor to a Welfare Rights Officer/Money Advisor for further assistance. In addition, collect and verify evidence to assist with benefit and money advice cases.

Liaise closely with other council services and outside agencies in relation to debt and the impact of debt. (e.g. Housing Needs Officers, Housing Managers, Anti-Poverty Service, Citizens Advice Bureau, Social Work, Mental Health Agencies, Addiction Agencies etc.)

Communicate with debtors and/or their representatives in a clear and concise manner across a range of communication methods, (e.g. in writing, face to face, telephone, text, email).

Identify and interrogate debt cases across a wide range of different computer systems and analyse reports produced from these systems.

Routinely analyse information and reports, updating systems to ensure records are up to date and to advance stages of recovery.

Identify and administer debt cases via the council's Corporate Arrears Recovery System. Identify system development opportunities and participate in the system testing of new developments.

Manage and monitor the performance of the council's contracted debt agency partners (e.g. trace and collection, Sheriff Officer etc.)

Ensure that all invoices raised by the service units are done so in line with best practice guidance and legal requirements, instructing service areas to correct any anomalies

Work proactively with other service areas to develop and improve practices and procedures.

Prioritise own workload on a daily basis.

Contribute to the development and improvement of the service, developing Service Level Agreements and identifying best practice, performance improvement measures, efficiency measures and strategies to deal effectively with multiple debts.

Provide a high quality service in relation to the collection of debts in compliance with statutory time scales and performance targets/standards.

Carry out duties in accordance with Health and Safety requirements paying particular attention to relevant risk assessments and safe systems of work.

Report any adult/child protection concerns to the Corporate Debt Team Leader.

Prepare and deliver training to council staff and outside agencies.

Any other duties appropriate to the grade as the work develops.

Knowledge / Qualifications / Skills

Essential

Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) qualification / SVQ Level 3/ Chartered Institute of Housing Level 4 or be able to demonstrate an equivalent level of knowledge and experience.

An in depth knowledge of relevant legislation, council policies and procedures relating to local taxes, the benefit scheme and the collection of debt.

Excellent communication, negotiation and organisational skills.

Ability to demonstrate practical experience of working unsupervised with the ability to schedule and prioritise own workload.

Experience of working on own initiative and ability to make decisions in complex cases.

Experience of explaining complex information to customers and external agencies across a range of communication methods, (e.g. in writing, face to face, telephone, email etc).

Effective at working within a team environment.

An awareness of other related services within the council.

Practical experience in office systems and use of computer systems.

Ability to deal with confrontational situations.

Desirable

Extensive working knowledge of housing and associated legislation.

Knowledge of welfare benefits.

Effective at working in partnership with others.

Experience of handling sensitive and confidential issues.

Other Essential Information

The Revenues Service is an ever-changing environment and the Advanced Collections Officer will be expected to provide a flexible approach to the provision of the service. The Advanced Collections Officer will be allocated to a particular section at any one time and participating in a development process that will allow them to provide cover for or placement in other sections.

Through effective organisation and control of the workload and with the assistance of our various systems, the Advanced Collections Officer will ensure the delivery of an efficient and effective service of high quality to our customers, including compliance with statutory timescales and performance requirements and contribute to the development of new working practices.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Requirements (E = Essential; D = Desirable)	E	D
Education/Training/Qualifications		
Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) qualification / SVQ Level 3/ Chartered Institute of Housing Level 4 or be able to demonstrate an equivalent level of knowledge and experience.	E	
Previous Experience (Paid & Voluntary Work)		
Experience of working on own initiative and ability to make decisions in complex cases.	E	
Practical experience in office systems and use of computer systems.	E	
Experience of explaining complex information to customers and external agencies across a range of communication methods, (e.g. in writing, face to face, telephone, email etc).	E	
Experience of working in partnership with others.		D
Experience of handling sensitive and confidential issues.		D
Skills/Abilities/Knowledge		
An in-depth knowledge of relevant legislation, council policies and procedures relating to local taxes, the benefit scheme and the collection of debt.	E	
Excellent communication, negotiation and organisational skills.	E	
Effective at working within a team environment.	E	
Ability to deal with confrontational situations.	E	
Ability to demonstrate practical experience of working unsupervised with the ability to schedule and prioritise own workload.	E	
Awareness of other related services within the council.	E	
Extensive working knowledge of housing and associated legislation		D
Knowledge of welfare benefits		D