

“So you want to  
work in the Council?  
a recruitment toolkit”





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## “So you want to work in the Council - a recruitment toolkit”

We were very pleased to be asked to contribute to the B-Equal programme as its aim of combating discrimination through creative and innovative approaches is very close to the Council's own key priorities.

The B-EQUAL vision of working in partnership to identify and promote innovative ways of combating discrimination and inequality in the labour market is an approach the Council has long been committed to and we are happy to join with B-Equal's many partners in furthering it.

This booklet aims to boost the volume of applicants for posts within the Council from under-represented groups through developing a closer understanding of the processes the Council and other large organisations use in selecting candidates for employment from amongst the many applications we receive.

The booklet aims to build an awareness of standard Council documentation and the important role it plays in the recruitment processes we follow. Our current recruitment practices were adopted to ensure equality of access but we are aware that some of the processes we use can prove challenging to people unfamiliar with them. Hence our enthusiasm for producing the recruitment toolkit to take unfamiliar applicants through the key stages involved, using a series of examples drawn from two specific posts.

The approach taken in producing this booklet is also very significant as it is the result of activity involving many partners. The booklet initiated by Council officers, who were also responsible for the text, was piloted with a range of voluntary organisations, the Careers Advisory staff and individual students of Bradford University. The graphics and format of the resulting recruitment toolkit is the work of Brijesh Modi, a talented graphic designer currently on placement with the Council.

All partners made significant contributions towards the Toolkit which we hope will prove helpful and supportive to future candidates for Council posts, helping us to contribute to our aim of creating a more representative workforce which is better able to serve our customers and market the Council as a good employer.

Val Grant, Head of Service, Employee and Workforce Development

# The B-Equal Project

B-Equal is a project part-funded by the European Social Fund through the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme. The focus of the project is on equality and diversity issues associated with gender, disability, race, ethnic origin, religion or belief, age and sexual orientation.

The vision of B-Equal is to identify and promote innovative ways of combating and eliminating discrimination and inequality in the labour market, with the aim of promoting a workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the Bradford District.

The key aim of the booklet is to create an awareness of the processes used for recruitment within the Council. The Council's detailed recruitment process can appear challenging at first sight. Therefore, this toolkit has been designed to take the applicants through each stage of the process, using relevant examples. This will help applicants to find fulfilling, and rewarding work, whilst enabling the Council and other organisations to benefit from a diverse workforce, reflecting the rich diversity of the Bradford District.

For further help and information about where to look for Council vacancies, please refer to the Useful Contacts Page 47

## Contact details

Rizwan Rehman  
Department of Policy & Performance  
Equalities Service  
B-Equal  
7th Floor  
Jacobs Well  
Bradford  
BD1 5RW

Tel: 01274 432034  
Website: [www.b-equal.com](http://www.b-equal.com)

# What does the Council do?

## Range of responsibilities

The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council to give its formal name is responsible for managing the delivery of a wide range of services to the people of Bradford and District. These range widely from providing Education to services such as Street Cleaning, Personal Social Services and many others. Changes in Government focus mean that the Council is increasingly concerned with contracting for services from other bodies and ensuring that value for money is achieved through a cost efficient service.

This range of responsibilities ensures that many different types of work are carried out by Council employees; from countryside wardens working on Ilkley Moor to solicitors in City Hall, roadside recycling collectors to road junction planners. Currently the Council workforce numbers some 18,000 people, making it easily Bradford's biggest employer so it makes sense to try to keep informed about what range of jobs are currently on offer.



## Our vacancies policy

We do not allow word of mouth advertising and our vacancies are advertised for open competition as outlined below and opposite.

All our vacancies are posted on our [www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk) website and notified to Jobcentres and the Keighley and Shipley Information Centres.

Some are also advertised in our own advertisements in the Telegraph and Argus, local free press and other local newspapers.

Professional and management posts are usually advertised in appropriate professional publications as well as the national / local press.

Jobs, particularly those suitable for young people are also advertised in the Careers Office.

## Job Share

All full time posts are available for job sharing unless otherwise stated.

## Equal Rights in Employment

The Council is an Equal Opportunities Employer. Amongst other things, this means that applicants for jobs within the Council will be considered solely on their individual merits and suitability for the post for which they have applied. We are committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination and to creating equality of opportunity for every one whatever their gender, race, disability, culture, religious beliefs, age, sexual orientation, class, economic or other status.

## Support for disabled applicants

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has provided protection from discrimination in employment for disabled people since 1995. Under the Act, a person is considered disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

The Council embraces it's legal duty not to treat a disabled person less favourably than another person, on account of their disability, unless this is justified due to the defined needs of a job.

The Council also considers whether a 'reasonable adjustment' to premises, working practices or other aspects of a job might enable a disabled person to enter or remain in employment. Examples of 'reasonable adjustments' might include a change in working hours, the reallocation of some duties to another worker, or the provision of a piece of specialist equipment.

## Age no Barrier

The Council is committed to promoting age diversity within the workforce by valuing the contributions of employees whatever their age and / or stage of working life, challenging “ageism” at work and seeking to eliminate age stereotyping from the workplace.

The Council seeks to ensure that employment opportunities, career progression and employee support systems are all equally accessible to people regardless of their age throughout the organisation. It is the individual’s contribution and effectiveness which are valued.

## How to get vacancy Information

Increasingly applicants are applying using our on line application form accessible at [www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk) Quick links - Council vacancies.

All jobs are shown on the Bradford Council website, which is updated fortnightly. Job Descriptions and Personnel Specifications can be downloaded and Application Forms completed on line. These are available through our website [www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk).

Computer access is available through all Council Libraries and many Community Centres.

“Jobs” the Council’s Jobs Bulletin is available at most public buildings throughout the District, including Libraries and Information Centres. All Jobcentres receive a copy.

Vacancies are also accessible through the Access to Print Unit at Central Library and large print copies are sent to all libraries.

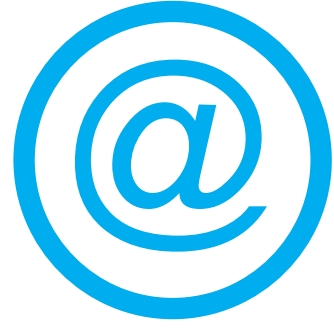
“Jobs” is available in Braille, large print and on tape by contacting 01274 434233.

For further information please refer to page 47

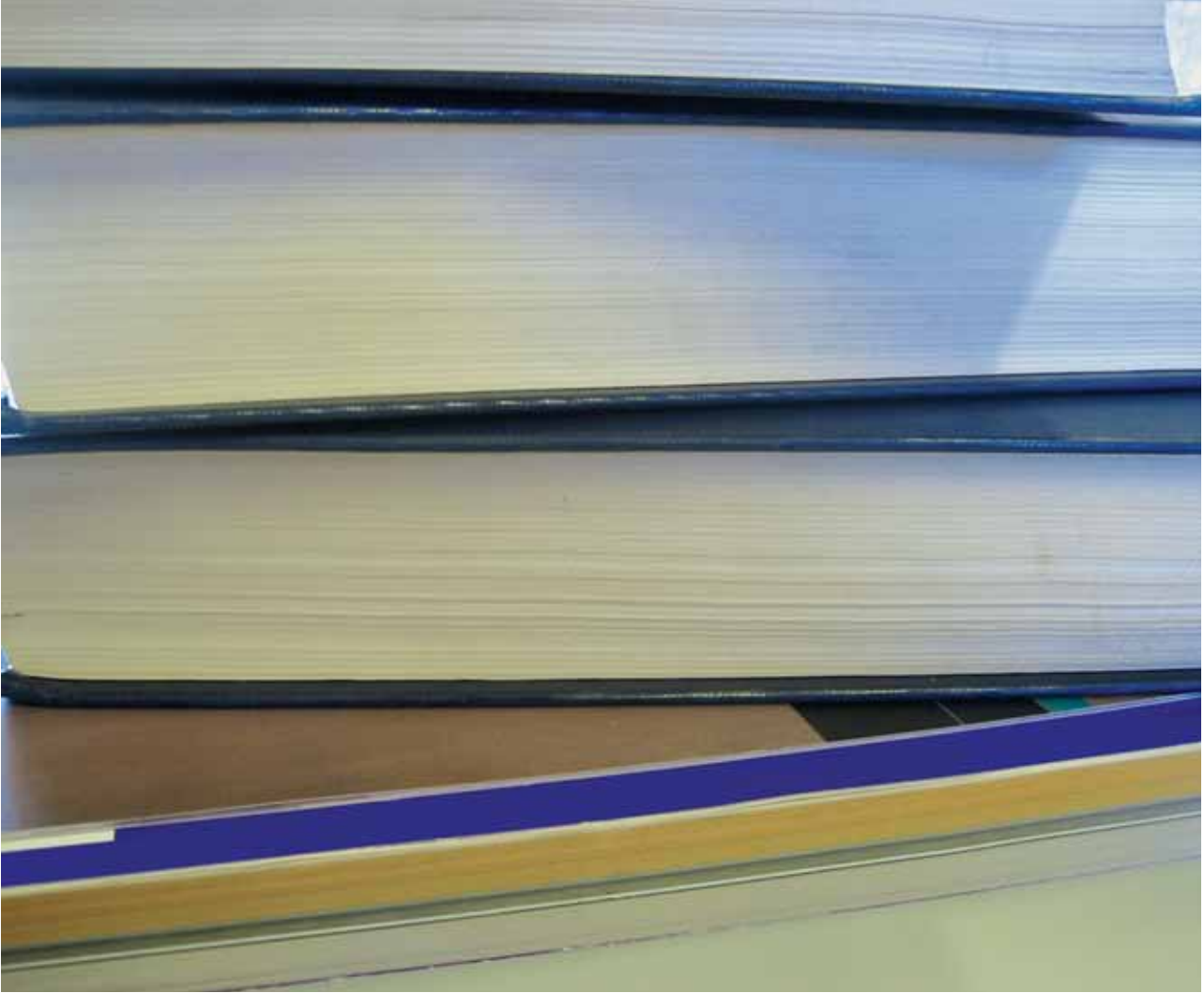




# Applications



Applications



## “Applications”

“This section shows how large organisations like the Council draw up very detailed Job Descriptions and Personnel Specifications to identify what skills, knowledge and experience the job requires. You will need to understand this if you are to complete an application form which demonstrates these attributes.”



# Making Successful Job Applications

Applying for a job is a phased process.

## First

You need to really put some effort into identifying exactly what kind of skills, knowledge and experience the employer has decided that their new employee will need to possess in order to do the job properly. This is set out in the Job Description which outlines the range of duties the job will require the successful applicant to carry out. In Councils and other large organisations this can be very detailed. It is usually broken down into a number of sections :-

- 1 Prime Objectives of the post**  
outlines the main duties involved
- 2 Supervisory and Managerial responsibilities**  
what responsibilities for managing staff the post involves
- 3 Supervision and Guidance**  
who is responsible for managing and providing support to the postholder
- 4 Range of decision making**  
what day to day decisions the post holder is directly responsible for
- 5 Responsibility for assets**  
what materials, including confidential information the postholder is responsible for keeping secure
- 6 Contacts**  
what level of contact with Councillors, senior members of staff or others the postholder will have as part of their day to day duties
- 7 Range of Duties**  
outlining the main duties in greater detail

Once you have carefully gone through this you will have a very clear idea of what is required in the job you are going to apply for.

Further information on the precise combination of skills, knowledge and experience the employer is seeking from the person who will become their new employee is set out in the Personnel Specification. This will have been drawn up especially for the post.

This is also very detailed and outlines, under the various headings listed below, the capacities which will be required of the successful candidate :-

- **Experience** - usually drawn from previous jobs or voluntary work the candidate has done
- **Qualifications** - what professional qualifications the candidate should hold
- **Training** - preferably certificated courses that the candidate has attended
- **Special Knowledge** - which the candidate can bring to the post
- **Personal Circumstances** - as the Council tries not to be intrusive this usually refers to the candidates ability to occasionally work outside of the 9.00-5.00 timeslot
- **Equal Opportunities** - demonstrating an understanding of and commitment to the Council's approach
- **Disposition and Attitude** - demonstrating important personal characteristics such as maturity, motivation or commitment
- **Practical and Intellectual skills** - which the candidate will need to use in the job eg interpersonal skills
- **Physical and Sensory** - able to carry out all tasks required in the job with reasonable technical adjustment if required.

These capacities are broken down into **Essential** capacities ie those which the candidate must have in order to be selected for interview and **Desirable** ones ie which it would be useful for the candidate to have but whose absence would not prevent the candidate from being selected. In a strong field candidates would need to meet both essential and desirable capacities.

The **Personnel Specification** also clearly shows how the candidate is expected to demonstrate that they have these capacities. For example by listing them on the application form.

Obviously it is essential for you as a candidate for a job to know what the employer wants from a successful candidate and how it expects the candidate to demonstrate these things.

In the following sections we will provide examples of how this can best be done through focusing in considerable detail on the Customer Service Advisor post.

## Second

It is also important that you spend some time going over your previous work history and career to date, looking at old CV 's, hunting out your exam certificates and pulling all the material together so that you can match up what you have got to offer with the requirements outlined in the Job Description and Person Specification.

Once you start filling in the **Application Form** you can then simply outline how you meet the criteria required and also keep checking that the information you are entering onto the application form fully meets the employers requirements, both essential and desirable, listed in the Job Description. Once you have completed the Application Forms it is good practice to keep copies of it for two reasons:-

- 1 If you get called to interview you know exactly what information you have given the interview panel about your previous skills, knowledge and experience.
- 2 If you are completing a number of application forms you can pull sections out of previous ones particularly where you think you have summed up something really well or used a particularly good way of describing it. This will make the process of filling in the forms easier and will raise the standard of what you produce as you do not have to start from scratch each time. But make sure that the material is relevant for the new job as you do not want to save time in completing the form only to find that you have not met the selection criteria.

## Third

Once you get into the habit of thinking through job criteria and filling in application forms it gets easier as you understand more about what information is required. Repeated practice at applying will mean that you become better at it and more likely to succeed.

Further information on applying to the Council for work can be found by visiting [www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk) to locate the information booklet for job applicants.



# City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council

[www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk)

## PERSONNEL SPECIFICATION

**Post Title:** Customer Advice Officer - Level 2

### Department:

[Post Reference:](#)

Bradford is an Equal Opportunities Employer and requires its employees to carry out its policies concerning racial and sex equality and the rights of people with disabilities both in terms of equal opportunity for employment and access to the Council Services. Job Share applicants welcome for all full-time posts unless otherwise stated in the advertisement

We are committed to making reasonable adjustments to the job role and working environment so that disabled people have access to job opportunities or current employees can continue at work should they develop a disabling condition.

### ATTRIBUTES

#### **ESSENTIAL**

#### **EXPERIENCE**

A minimum of two years experience in a customer service environment, either telephony or face to face, involving advice, information and decision making; or  
A minimum of 12 months working experience in one of the following services:- Council Benefits; Council Tax; Housing; Environmental Protection and Waste Management; Social Services.  
**and**  
Experience of working with ethnic minority communities and disadvantaged groups.

#### **DESIRABLE**

Experience of processing credit/debit cards details for customers in a call centre environment.  
Experience of cash handling and accounting procedures.

#### **HOW IDENTIFIED**

Application form and Selection process

### QUALIFICATIONS

5 GCSE grade A-C or equivalent

Qualification relating to dissemination of information or communication.  
Qualification relating to Customer Care

Application form and Selection process Certificates.

ATTRIBUTES	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	HOW IDENTIFIED
<u>DISPOSITION/ADJUSTMENT/ATTITUDE</u>	<p>Ability to contribute to and work as part of a team in the provision of customer care and to work on own initiative within specified guidelines.</p> <p>Ability to work in a multi functional environment with partners from different organisations and agencies.</p> <p><b>Ability to deal with customers in a polite manner and to respect and keep confidential information.</b></p> <p>Be sensitive and sympathetic to customers needs.</p> <p>Ability to work in a busy customer service environment remaining calm under pressure.</p> <p>Ability to deal with stressful situations and abusive customers and make decisions in those circumstances.</p> <p>Demonstrate a flexible attitude towards job related functions/tasks and be prepared to undertake different duties within the remit of the role.</p> <p>Demonstrate support of management and respect for Corporate decisions.</p> <p>Positive commitment to Equal Opportunities and Customer Service.</p>	Responsive to new ideas	Selection process
<u>PRACTICAL AND INTELLECTUAL SKILLS</u>	<p><b>Ability to pay attention to detail and be neat, accurate, literate and numerate.</b></p> <p><b>Ability to demonstrate computer awareness and keyboard skills (min 30 wpm)</b></p> <p>Ability to work to a high level of accuracy within a busy environment.</p> <p>Ability to assimilate detailed/complex instructions and information and follow verbal /written instructions.</p> <p>Ability to explain complex information in a way that is easily understood by customers</p> <p>Ability to communicate clearly both verbally and in writing.</p> <p>Good interpersonal and organisational skills.</p>	Application forms and Selection process	
<u>TRAINING</u>	Must be prepared to undergo further training as required as part of the job	Will have undertaken some personal development or special skills training relating to handling or dissemination of information and Customer care	Application form and Selection process

ATTRIBUTES	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	HOW IDENTIFIED
<u>SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE</u>	<p>Current working knowledge of one of the following areas of Local Government provision:- Council Benefits, Council Tax, Housing, Environmental Protection &amp; Waste Management, Social Services.</p> <p>Current working knowledge of Bradford Council's complaints procedure.</p> <p>Knowledge of the principal of Customer Care.</p> <p>Understanding of the ethnic minority communities and disadvantaged groups.</p>	<p>Knowledge of the Council's structure and the services provided.</p> <p>Knowledge of relevant computer systems and software packages.</p>	<p>Application form &amp; Selection process</p>
<u>EQUALITY</u>	<p>Candidates should indicate an acceptance of and commitment to the principles underlying the Council's Equal Rights policies and practices</p>	<p>Knowledge of the Council's structure and the services provided.</p> <p>Knowledge of relevant computer systems and software packages.</p>	<p>Selection process</p>
<u>CIRCUMSTANCES- PERSONAL</u>	<p>Must be legally entitled to work in the UK.</p> <p>No contra-indications in personal background or criminal record indicating unsuitability to work with children/young people/vulnerable clients/finance (CRB check required as appropriate.)</p> <p>If driving is a feature of this post – must be licensed and appropriately insured (e.g. business use)</p>	<p>NONE</p>	<p>Selection process.</p> <p>Sight of appropriate documentation as specified in interview letter</p>
<u>PHYSICAL / SENSORY</u>	<p>Must be able to perform all duties and tasks with reasonable adjustment, where appropriate, in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.</p>		<p>Selection process</p>

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS**

Management requires that the following checks be carried out as part of the recruitment process.

If applicable - GOQ and Section of the Act that applies. (Wording for advertisement)

Exempt from job share. Exemption registration number:

Occupational Health check required.

Any other special conditions.

Compiled by:

Grade Assessment Date:

Post Grade:

**FOR USE BY HUMAN RESOURCES ONLY**

I confirm this PS has been checked and is appropriate and up to date.

Signed:

Date:

## Other information you may be required to disclose

There are a number of additional documents which you may be required to complete at interview and if this is the case they will be posted out to you with your interview information. You will certainly be required to complete them before the Council can legally offer you a job.

NB: You will also be required to declare if you have any other employment.

## CRB Checks

Depending upon the area of work you are seeking it may be necessary for the employer to carry out a Criminal Records Bureau check. This will certainly be required should you be seeking to work with children or vulnerable adults. This will involve you completing a Disclosure Application form, supplied by the employer and including details about your past which also authorises the Council or other large employer to seek information on your background. You will also be required to supply details of a referee who has known you personally or professionally for at least two years. Any criminal conviction will be highlighted regardless of how long ago it was imposed. It is important to complete the document truthfully as it could affect your employment and we will receive the correct information from the Criminal Records Bureau, who are an executive agency of the Home Office.

## Asylum and Immigration Act 1996

All shortlisted candidates are required to provide documents which demonstrate that they are in fact eligible to work in the United Kingdom. Any employer who does not comply with this legal requirement could be fined £5000. It is therefore important for an employer to obtain information which will demonstrate that all its new employees meet the eligibility rules. In practice this means that every candidate who is shortlisted for interview is required to bring to interview with a new prospective employer documents which confirm their eligibility to work in the United Kingdom. The Home Office have specified a number of documents which it considers acceptable eg National Insurance Card, Passport or U.K Birth certificate. You must bring an original ie not photocopied version of one of these specified documents with you. Failure to produce a specified document will mean that we are not able to offer you employment. When you are invited to interview you will be sent a full list of documents which are acceptable, the interviewer will examine and take a copy of the document endorsing the form to show that it has been witnessed.

## Taking up References

Should you be successful at interview the Council or other large employer will take up references from the individuals you nominated on your application form. They should not be family members but be able to be objective about the skills you have demonstrated, preferably in an employment context. You should always ask their permission in advance before nominating them as referee. If the Council has difficulty contacting them you may be requested to supply alternatives as the Council cannot proceed to appointment without adequate references. If the reference is unsatisfactory you may not be offered the job.

# Example One

## Job Description and Personnel Specifications

They may seem very complicated but you need to understand why the Council and other large organisations use **Job Descriptions** and **Personnel Specifications**. This is an essential stage in the process of applying for jobs with the Council as the information they contain is crucial to your understanding of the job you are applying for. This section is based on a **Customer Service Advisor Level 2 post Job Description and Person Specification**.

### First stage

As we outlined earlier the **Job Description** is intended to outline the duties and responsibilities of the post and is broken down under a number of headings :-

- 1 Prime Objectives of the Post outlining what the post holder will be required to do
- 2 Supervisory / Managerial Responsibilities outlining what responsibilities the post holder has for supervising or supporting others, for example, to support less experienced Customer Advice Officers, by providing expert advice, including practical assistance when dealing with complex enquiries or situations as outlined in the Customer Service Advisor Job Description
- 3 Supervision and Guidance outlining who the post holder reports to
- 4 Range of Decision making outlining what is required of the post holder in carrying out the job -interpreting legislation and procedures, applying them to customer's situations. Making decisions of a complex nature and advising individuals on courses of action which will affect their personal situation, and provide assistance in their dealings with other agencies and departments as outlined in the Customer Service Advisor Job Description
- 5 Responsibility for assets, materials which the post holder must exercise Access to confidential and sensitive documentation and personal information relating to the residents of the Bradford District as outlined in the Customer Service Advisor Job Description.

## Second Stage

The Personnel Specification. This is drawn up to show what combination of skills, knowledge and experience the Council thinks that the successful candidate should have

### Suggested Activity

Look over the Customer Advice Officer Level 2 Post Personnel Specification and draw up a list of what skills, knowledge and experience you think the successful candidate would have to demonstrate and how. You will need to draw from both the **essential** columns - ones you absolutely must have and **desirable** columns - ones which we would prefer you to have to make certain that you are invited for interview.

**NB:** The employer could short list on desirable criteria also if there is a particularly strong field of candidates for a job.



Try to establish clearly:-

What tasks does the successful candidate have to do if they get the job?

and What previous skills, knowledge and experience is the successful candidate expected to have?

This is split up in the specification as outlined below and is always presented in the same way in all Council Personnel Specifications. Once you have learnt how it works for the post of Customer Service Advisor you can apply it to any other post the Council advertises so any time spent at this stage of job search is time well spent.

**Skills** This heading includes the practical and intellectual skills, disposition and attitude sections which outline what the successful candidate should **be able to do or what personal characteristics they should have**.

**Knowledge** This heading includes the Special Knowledge, Qualifications, Training, Equal Opportunities sections which outline what the successful candidate **should know**.

**Experience** includes only the Experience sections outlining what the successful candidate **should already have done**.



- **Skills**

Just to start you off the first few have been filled in for you already.

Taken from the Practical and Intellectual Skills Section.

The successful candidate should be able to demonstrate the ability to use a computer and type 30 words in a minute as a minimum

They should be able to understand detailed or complex information and to explain it clearly in simple language to the customer

Now add another one you have found in the Customer Service Advisor Personnel Specification

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- **Disposition/Adjustment/Attitude Section**

They should also be able to work in a busy customer service environment remaining calm under pressure ie despite the ringing of phones and large numbers of angry /anxious customers needing help and support

Now add another one you have found



- In the **Knowledge section** candidates are also required to demonstrate:-

Taken from the Special Knowledge Section

Current knowledge about how the Council's complaints procedure works-

If you do not already work for the Council this information is also available through the internet on the Council website or as a leaflet through main Council offices.

Knowledge of the Council Structure and the range of services provided –

If you do not already work for the Council this information is available through the internet on the Council website. As a Council service user you may have first hand experience of some Council services.

- **Physical Section**

Any strenuous physical activity which is required of the candidate



- **Experience**

Minimum of 2 years experience in a customer service environment

Now work through the:

- **Qualifications**

.....

.....

- **Training**

.....

.....

- **and Equal Opportunities sections**

.....

.....

Once you have completed all the sections look across at the end column, headed "How identified" as this shows you what information the recruitment panel will use as evidence that you can meet these criteria. The most common means are through the Interview or Application Form but they can also use a set test such as a typing test to make sure that for example you can meet the 30 words per minute requirement referred to earlier in the Personnel Specification.

**Q:** How do you best show that you have the skills, knowledge and experience required?

Through the standard application form which most large organisations use for recruitment to all posts.

# Extracts from the Customer Advice Officer Post set out in standard Council Job Description format.

## **PRIME OBJECTIVES OF THE POST:**

To provide an accurate and knowledgeable, user friendly information, enquiry, advice, complaints and advocacy service throughout the Bradford District at a wide variety of service delivery points and differing access channels.

To provide a personal, first point of contact to all customers requiring assistance with all Council Services, statutory and voluntary agencies and other local activities; with particular responsibility for a defined set of services as outlined in the Competency-based Criteria.

To provide a referral service to Council Departments and statutory organisations for clients, where appropriate and as required.

To assist in the promotion of Council Services and partnerships by ensuring that all current and relevant leaflets and displays are made available to clients at all times.

To assist in the development and promotion of the Corporate Customer Services Strategy and associated policies.

To promote and participate in joined-up and partnership working.

To ensure proper validation and verification of documents received.

## **SUPERVISORY/MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES:**

To take personal responsibility to attend customer service points during the agreed contracted hours. To take personal responsibility for representing the Customer Advice Team and the Council in a professional and positive manner at all times. To be primarily responsible for the day-to-day organisation of own workload. To maintain a working knowledge of the appropriate key areas of work as identified in the competency based progression criteria.

## **SUPERVISION AND GUIDANCE:**

Directly responsible to the Customer Advice Team Managers, who will set work priorities, objectives and give guidance where appropriate. The post holder will be expected to work with minimal supervision and to use their own initiative and discretion in dealing with a wide range of enquiries from a multi cultural customer base. Will be expected to work unsupervised on a regular basis in a variety of situations and locations.

## **RANGE OF DECISION MAKING:**

Expected to show a high degree of personal initiative and sensitivity in dealing with individual customers from a wide range of backgrounds.

Interpreting legislation and procedures, applying them to customers' situations. Making decisions of a complex nature and advising individuals on courses of action, which will affect their personal situation, and provide assistance in their dealings with other agencies and departments.

Day to day decisions within established guidelines referring only more complex matters to senior staff or relevant specialists. To participate in decisions relating to the successful and efficient operation of the Customer Advice Team and to the promotion and development of the Customer Service Strategy.

Extracts from the separate guidance notes supplied

Please note that the Range of Duties are outlined in 4 parts as follows:-

- SECTION 1. Those duties which are relevant to all Customer Advisor Officers.**
- SECTION 2. Those duties which are relevant to the telephony posts only.**
- SECTION 3. Those duties which are relevant to the face-to-face posts only.**
- SECTION 4. Those duties which are subject to the Competency Based Criteria for progression to more senior posts.**

**In certain circumstances, the post holder will have responsibilities for:-**

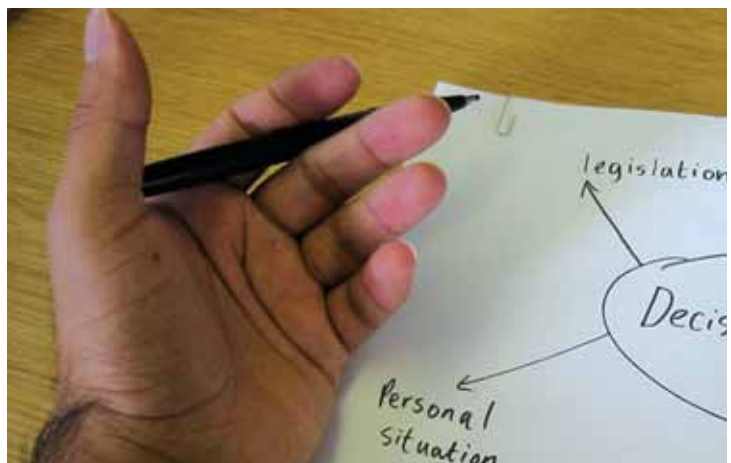
- telephony duties only or**
- face-to face duties only or**
- both telephony and face-to-face duties.**

## RANGE OF DUTIES:

### SECTION ONE – RELATING TO ALL POSTS

- 1 To provide an accurate and knowledgeable personal enquiry, advice and first stage complaints service to customers accessing the Council through the channels of access within the responsibility of the Customer Relations Service.
- 2 To provide advice and information on existing Council Services, and those developed in the future; other statutory and voluntary agencies; other local services; Council-wide and local activities, referring customers to appropriate agencies and departments as necessary.
- 3 To provide added value to customers and working in depth with them on a wide range of issues, where necessary. To provide a holistic service wherever possible.
- 4 To use effective communication to determine the appropriate action. Provide an informed referral service between clients and divisions/directorates, arranging appointments where necessary. Speak to other agencies on behalf of the customer, where appropriate.
- 5 To complete and assist in form filling and to issue query letters where appropriate. To issue claim forms, leaflets and other appropriate documentation to customers, according to their needs.
- 6 To ensure all claims, documents and requests for service are processed correctly within specified timescales and in compliance with relevant legislation, procedures and Service Level Agreements.
- 7 To maintain confidentiality of information held and ensure that the data protection requirements are properly enacted.

**NB: Shows only 7 of a total of 33 duties**



## SECTION TWO – CUSTOMER ADVICE OFFICER (TELEPHONY)

- 1 To process advance and confirmed customer bookings by telephone for Council Departments by using appropriate computerised systems.
- 2 To collect and balance accurately payments made for services by credit and debit cards.
- 3 To undertake telephone surveys and consultation with Service Users.
- 4 To ensure that callers are advised of the progress of their enquiry, where appropriate and, in particular, where there has been a service failure on the part of the Service Providers.

## SECTION THREE – CUSTOMER ADVICE OFFICER (FACE-TO FACE)

- 1 To ensure that all documentation received at enquiry offices are properly validated and verified in compliance with government instructions.
- 2 To scan original documents and claim forms into the relevant Document Imaging systems and assist with the indexing of such documents.
- 3 To ensure that all relevant documents received at district offices and other specified locations are accounted for and securely transported to the central scanning section or mail room.
- 4 To attend service delivery access channels, throughout the district as required.
- 5 To provide an accessible customer service in customers' homes by undertaking Home Visits.
- 6 To sell tickets, issue Passports to Leisure and other permits as required, and be responsible for cash handling, banking and building security in the absence of the Senior Officer (Customer Advice Services).
- 7 To promote the service by talking to groups and participating in publicity events, exhibitions, displays and visits.
- 8 To ensure that display and information stands are displaying accurate and up to date information and that the overall appearance of the enquiry office is smart and attractive.

**NB: shows only 8 of a total of 11 duties**

## SECTION 4 – CUSTOMER ADVICE OFFICER LEVEL 4

- 1 To assist in the day-to-day organisation of the enquiry function as required.
- 2 To assist in the supervision of a team of up to 15 Customer Advice Officers in the absence of the Team Manager.
- 3 To provide support to less experienced Customer Advice officers with expert advice and guidance, including practical assistance when dealing with complex enquiries or situations.
- 4 To assist in developing the Customer Advice Team by providing high quality advice, training, coaching and mentoring.
- 5 To assist in identifying training needs within the Customer Advice Team and identify and promote the sharing of good practice.
- 6 To check and monitor input to and output from the on-line computer systems and take appropriate action to ensure that the levels and standards of accuracy and productivity required are attained.

### RANGE OF CONTACTS

Members of the Council, Members of the Public from a wide range of backgrounds, Community groups and leaders. Council Officers across a wide range of services. Senior Officers of the Council. Contact with other statutory and voluntary agencies. Solicitors and Accountants outside the authority, other Local Authorities, Housing Associations, Private Landlords, Rent Officer.



## Examples of good practice

As outlined earlier large organisations like the Council use a standard format application form to make sure that they recruit in a fair and transparent manner so it is important for you to spend some time finding your way around it. Fortunately the work you have already done on the Job Description and Personnel Specification will really help you with this as it will identify the essential and desirable criteria you will need to demonstrate in order to get an interview.

### Just a couple of general points

Fill in application forms carefully making sure that you have met all the essential criteria - the ones that you must have in order to be short listed - and as many of the desirable ones as you can. This is important as the recruitment panel can choose not to select candidates who do not meet desirable criteria even if you have met all the essential ones, this is particularly likely if they have a large number of applicants.

Do not include a separate CV as this will not automatically be read, just concentrate on filling in the form itself in sufficient detail to show that you can meet the criteria.

To be selected for interview you must ensure that you demonstrate in the application form that you meet the skills, knowledge and experience requirements which have been established for the post and are more closely detailed in the Personnel Specification.

**Using the Customer Service Advisor Post Job Description we have prepared some examples of good practice for your information.**

### Experience

Both the Essential and Desirable requirements can be met by the following statement in the Additional Information section of the Application Form although it will obviously depend upon your own personal experience. The following extract from a specimen application form is intended for example only as applicants should not invent experience, qualifications etc which they do not possess.



"I feel confident in applying for this post as my three years' previous experience at Anytown Telesales and my other customer service experience demonstrates that I can work successfully in a Customer Advice setting. I have experience of processing credit/debit card transactions in a call centre environment and have also handled cash transactions both at Anytown telesales and in my previous job at The Crown Hotel. Prior to this I had worked in processing customers telephone orders when I worked for Pizza Ranch as a student. This also provided good practice in dealing with difficult customers as some of the callers were placing orders after they had been out on a Friday and Saturday night and were not as clearly spoken as they might have been. Some of them were also rather drunk and occasionally abusive."

Similarly under the Disposition, Adjustment, Attitude heading, as an example, this could be met by the following statement drawing on the applicants own experience

"Through the different jobs I have done at the Pizza Ranch, the Crown Hotel, Anytown Telesales and the Council I have built up experience of working with customers in a variety of different work contexts and feel that I can respond appropriately to requests for a range of different services. I have experience of working with customers both face to face and over the telephone, also of working both on my own and as part of a close knit team.

I feel that I can demonstrate an ability to work in a multi functional environment through my work with the Council and also in the Hotel, where I did both reception and reservations duties plus also occasionally helping out as a waitress at large functions. I worked closely with partners eg external party organisers and florists for weddings, booked hire cars and follow - on accommodation with other hotels in our group for guests."

Finally the Practical & Intellectual Skills could be met by the following statement :-

"I have well developed keyboard skills and am an accurate word processor user who can meet your 30 wpm requirement. My work experience to date shows my ability to work accurately in a busy environment and to complete records clearly either by hand or using a keyboard. I can follow written or verbal instructions and am able to rapidly understand and apply new work instructions. I am also able to explain complex information, eg travel directions, the hotels' room bookings and discounts policy in a way customers understand".

## Please note:

All information submitted in an application form should be factually correct and drawn upon the applicants own personal experience. As outlined in an earlier section serious action would be taken if it was discovered that an applicant had mis-represented their experience or invented qualifications and experience which they did not possess. As standard practice all candidates are required at interview to produce original copies of certificates for any qualification they claim to hold.

Now that you understand how to fill in a standard Council Application form have a go at filling in the blank one you can download from the website. You would probably find it most useful to concentrate on the sections which refer to your Education & Qualifications, and previous Employment History as they will relate to a number of posts.





# Preparing for Interviews-One

## Interview Preparation

### The Third Stage

Now that you have got through the application form stage successfully the next step is to prepare for the interview. Many people get really worked up at the prospect of going for interview but you need to recognise that it is your best opportunity to demonstrate that you are the right person for the job. You need to be well prepared in advance of the interview so that you know what you are going to say and how you are going to present yourself as being the candidate with the right skills, knowledge and experience needed to do the job. But how can you know what the interviewer wants and what they will ask you? The Council together with many big employers uses a system called behavioural interviewing. **This is a way of drawing up and asking questions which aim to find out how you typically behave or react to a given situation and so establish how well you are suited for the job you are applying for.**

These sort of questions typically ask you how you would respond if a certain situation happened and they describe the situation in some detail. For example you might be asked to describe a difficult situation you handled which required you to use a sensitive approach or the panel might describe a situation and ask how you would deal with it and why you would do it that way to see how you react. For example relating to the Customer Service Advisor post one possibility might be the following question "If you are working in a customer service unit and you get a caller who is speaking aggressively and using strong language how would you handle the situation? Why would you do it that way, please tell us your reasons for taking that approach?"

All the questions asked should be based on the requirements of the Job as outlined in the Job Description or Personnel Specification.

It might be useful at this point to work out some questions you think might be used for the Customer Advice Officer Post.

## Some typical interview questions

Here are some typical interview questions we have already produced to give you a start so try to answer them before you move on to developing some of your own questions.

- 1 What experience have you got of doing work which required you to pay attention to detail and be neat and accurate?
- 2 Tell me about any previous work you have done where you needed to understand complex information and explain it simply to other people?

- 3 If you took a call from a member of the public who sounded elderly and quite confused, how would you try to manage the call to make it easier for both of you?
- 4 What do you understand by the phrase Customer Care? Why is it important?
- 5 What is your understanding of confidentiality? Can you give me some examples of information which you would regard as confidential? Name some common confidential documents?
- 6 What do you think might be the challenge of responding to queries from people from ethnic minority communities whose first language isn't English? What might you do to make yourself more easily understood?
- 7 What experience have you got of working in a Customer Service Environment, either by telephone or through face to face contact, which involved giving advice, information or decision making?

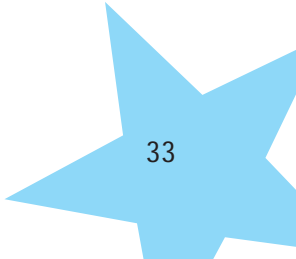
Now try to produce some further questions of your own

8 .....

.....

9 .....

.....



## Some specimen answers

We have developed some specimen answers to some of our questions which are outlined below. Try comparing our answers with your own and see how you did, have you learnt anything which you can use in preparation for other interviews?

- 1 Adding information into a pre-set template on a computer, transferring data between two different forms, carrying out customer surveys.
- 2 Examples might include explaining laws, rules, Health & Safety regulations, do it yourself instructions, etc.
- 3 Speak slowly and clearly and leave pauses for their answers or for them to ask further questions before requiring any information from them. Offer to send out information or arrange a home visit if appropriate. Arrange to ring back later when someone else might be in who could help out.
- 4 Customer Care is about ensuring that customers have a good experience of using the service by putting the customer's needs before those of the service and not operating in a bureaucratic way. It is important because delivering a more efficient service which meets customer expectations is both what council's are here to do and more cost effective with a service that's easier to contact and use.

## Know your potential employer

When you are going for interview it is important to research the organisation first. Try to find out more about them and what they are doing. Why are they offering the job you are applying for? Is it part of an expansion plan or are they delivering a new service? It can help you to sound more informed and could help you answer general questions like “why do you want to work for this company?” “What do you know about us?” It’s better to prepare in advance than have to rely on the tried and tested responses like “it sounds like a good company to work for” or even worse “it’s a job isn’t it?”

Background research will also provide material to help you answer the typical end of interview question: “Is there anything you want to ask us?” You can ask about your prospects for promotion or what the employers approach to training is but make sure you can justify the course you want to do.

You can also use this section of the interview as an opportunity to introduce any skills you have got which have not been referred to so far. For example “I am a fluent speaker of X, would that be useful in the job?” Or “I am good at using X IT package, am I likely to be using it in the job?”

The important thing is to work out what you think your strongest points are as a candidate for the job and plan out how you are going to introduce them. This is why it can be particularly useful to have thought through the interview in advance and tried to anticipate the questions the employer might ask. If they use a behavioural interviewing approach you should be able to do this by drawing on the Job Description and Personnel Specification for the post.



# Example Two

## Interview Preparation

Extracts from the Job Description of Policy Officer,  
Research & Consultation Service, Department of  
Policy & Executive Support to help in the following exercise.

### Range of Duties

- 1 To undertake Policy Development in the designated area including:
  - Research and environmental scanning
  - A customer focused approach including needs analysis  
Options appraisals and cost benefit analysis
  - Securing approval from the Senior Policy Officer to undertake specific areas  
of work involving internal and external partners
  - Project planning, monitoring and evaluation
  - An understanding of the political divisions/sensitivity of the post
  - A clear link between policy development and implementation.
- 2 To assist the Senior Policy Officer in a diverse range of policy development  
matters often involving complex issues and breaking new ground in Local  
Government through management of a portfolio of work often involving  
complex issues.
- 3 To undertake research and consultation activities in the development of policy  
as appropriate.
- 4 To regularly give advice and support to the Senior Policy Officer.
- 5 To attend and present reports to Council Committees, Area Panels,  
Neighbourhood Forums and other partnerships as required.
- 6 To represent the Authority and give presentations at local, regional, national  
and other external forums.

**NB: Shows only 6 out of a total of 10 duties**

- **Experience**

**Essential**

A minimum of one year's experience in Policy Development, including voluntary and paid work experience.

Experience of undertaking research and consultation, project management, monitoring, evaluation.

**Desirable**

Experience of managing small project teams.

Two year's experience of policy or strategy development.

- **Special Knowledge**

**Essential**

An understanding of current issues and likely developments in the policy context

For example, A technical understanding and experience of web programming and design, A technical understanding of developing GIS applications- ideally on the web, skills in database design and the handling of large data sets, ideas as to how web and GIS technology can be harnessed to deliver information effectively to users.

**Desirable**

Awareness of issues facing large, complex organisations.

- **Practical & Intellectual skills**

**Essential**

Must have demonstrable interpersonal skills, and an ability to communicate in verbal and written contexts.

Evidence of research and consultation skills and an understanding of a variety of techniques.

Ability to demonstrate problem solving and options appraisal and project planning.

**Desirable**

Ability to write clear and concise reports.

Web programming and GIS skills.

# Preparing for interviews-Two

## Interview Preparation

Many people get really worked up at the prospect of going for an interview but it is your best opportunity to demonstrate that you are the right person for the job. The thing is to be well prepared in advance of the interview so that you know what you are going to say and how you are going to present yourself as the candidate with the right skills, knowledge and experience needed to do the job.

But lets take a step back, how do we know what the interviewer wants? What are they looking for in terms of your skills, knowledge and experience?

How can you make sure that you come up with the goods? By checking out the Job Description and Person Specification for the post. It will outline what the employer has decided they need from the person doing the job. They have identified the precise blend of skills, knowledge and experience the ideal candidate must have. You have understand what you need to demonstrate in the interview and how so it is your job to study this.



## What questions may an employer ask at interview and why?

They are the employer and they have the job on offer so they do it their way. You have to fit in with their requirements and do what they want. As an employer the Council uses an approach called behavioural interviewing. This approach uses a particular type of question which encourages the candidate to describe an example from their past showing behaviour which the interviewer can use to assess whether the candidate has a particular skill or knowledge. Usually all questions will be drawn from the Person Specification.

Often behavioural questions ask for examples of particular events and how the candidate reacted to them. As a Council we are keen to establish how a candidate typically reacts to a situation as it is a good general indicator of the behaviours they will display once in post.

Examples might include :-

- Q: Please describe a difficult situation you have handled which required you to use tact and sensitivity?
- Q: Give me an example of a time when you have had to motivate others in order to achieve a goal? Why did you do it that way?

Behavioural questions can also determine whether the candidate possesses characteristics such as being able to use their initiative eg:

- Q: Can you tell me about a time when you had to take a significant decision or course of action without referring to your manager?

Sometimes the interviewer will seek contrary evidence if they are trying to check out impressions they are getting from candidates about their typical approach, particularly if the candidate makes a potentially damaging statement. eg if a candidate makes much of the speed at which they work the interviewer might want to check that they were also capable of showing a close attention to detail. In this case they might ask:

- Q: "Can you tell me about an aspect of your work where attention to detail is essential?"

However do not assume that interviewers are just trying to catch you out, some of their questions may be about clarifying what you have said or in trying to gain a more balanced picture of you and your abilities. Sometimes they may actually be on your side and giving you prompts because one of your answers is a bit light and they feel that you have more to give.

## Behaviour Interview Practice

It would be useful for you to have a go at drawing up and answering some behavioural interview questions you would expect to be asked at interview for a Policy Officer Post. If you apply to the Council or another large organisation which uses behavioural interview questions expect some experience based questions which draw on your past such as “what did you do when ?” and some hypothetical ones “how would you respond to a given scenario?” which draw on your personal or interpersonal skills. These questions are put to demonstrate that you can respond logically to a given situation with a range of appropriate behaviours.

### Suggested Activity

Have a go at drawing up some additional questions similar to the ones given below. Then try to answer them without looking at the specimen answers we have prepared for a few questions over the page.

- 1 What experience have you of working within a policy or strategy environment? What do you think are the key challenges you might face?
- 2 What experience have you of preparing summaries and briefing notes from technical documents? What types of documents have you worked with so far?
- 3 What experience do you have of undertaking research and in what fields?
- 4 What research and consultation techniques are you familiar with?
- 5 What experience of project management do you have? What were the constraints you worked under?

- 6 How did you evaluate and monitor your project?
- 7 What issues are you aware of which might affect the operation of Local Government? How do you keep yourself up to date?
- 8 What do you think are the main issues facing large organisations?
- 9 What experience have you had of presenting reports? To what audience?
- 10 What do you understand by the phrase quality systems development? What do you think are the difficulties of implementing quality systems in a large organisation?
- 11 What do you consider the key aspects of Options Appraisals and Cost Benefit Analysis?
- 12 Have you had experience of dealing with sensitive material? What do you understand are the protocols for accessing, releasing and storing sensitive material? What kinds of material do you think could be regarded as sensitive and why?

Also expect some generic attitudinal questions relating to your commitment to your own personal growth and continuing development, and your commitment to the Council's Equal Rights and Diversity Policy.

It can be useful to discuss your own interview experiences with someone you know well and trust as interviews are an area where it is possible to learn from other people's approaches and tactics.

## Here are some specimen answers to the questions

- 1 Change, consolidating change, structuring, managing and planning change, keeping pace with changes to the working environment, Government Policy, life itself. Taking people with you when policy shifts suddenly and they are personally committed to the previous policy and you need to re-establish buy in.
- 2 Draw upon your own personal experience to answer this question.
- 3 Draw upon your own personal experience to answer this question.
- 4 Action Research, Surveys, Case Studies, Correlational research, Triangulation, Role Playing, Interviews, Personal Constructs, Meetings, Questionnaires, Focus groups etc.
- 5 Time, cost, resource allocation etc.
- 6 Performance prism approach, against established criteria, against timescale, budget and other established targets for success.
- 7 Regional Assemblies, Community Charge capping by Central Government, E Government Agenda for on line service delivery, Local Government Modernisation, Waste reduction initiatives etc.
- 8 Internal communication difficulties, development of departmental silos, growing beyond Optimum Business Unit Size, drive to broker and not deliver services, potentially slower response times than a smaller organisation, responding to changes in its operating environment Equality and Diversity issues re representativeness.
- 9 Draw upon your own personal experience to answer this question.

- 10 Standardisation of a practice across the organisation to establish a common standard, revision and updating of the standards once implemented. Introductory costs, costs of obtaining information. Appropriateness of quality standard chosen i.e best fit with organisation size and function.
- 11 Options appraisals “A structured and rational approach to thinking about alternative ways of using limited resources to best effect so as to achieve objectives”. Establishing a range of credible alternatives and clear basis for evaluating the costs and impacts of implementing the various alternatives. Cost Benefit, “a means of taking into consideration what it would cost to implement a proposal and identifying the realistic financial advantages likely to accrue from its implementation.”
- 12 Protocols should be based on data protection regulations and should ensure that information is not disclosed inappropriately. Material should include individuals personal records:- sickness, disciplinary etc, any financial records, politically sensitive information. All have the potential to cause embarrassment to the organisation.

### Continuing Reinforcement-

Make plans to apply for particular areas of work and draw up lists of your relevant skills, knowledge and experience which relate to them. Try to project behavioural interview questions which may be asked.

# Some Practical Interview Tips

## In advance

- Do your homework - establish precisely where your interview is and how long it will take to get there
- Look over your application form again
- Establish the key points you want to get across in support of your candidacy
- Project questions you might be asked and convincing answers to them
- Prepare questions to ask of the interviewer - especially about future prospects with the company but do not be dismissive about the post you are going for
- Research the company, obtain brochures etc
- Set up a file of all relevant documents to take with you.

## Immediately prior

- Have an early night
- Prepare your interview outfit in advance - aim to look professional and feel comfortable
- Make sure that your personal grooming is adequate
- Set off in good time - allow for delays.

## Pre interview

- Do not use your mobile phone to chat to friends
- Be polite but professional with the receptionist
- Try find out about the company by looking at displays and reading their trade literature
- Do not drink too much coffee etc prior to the interview
- Do not get unpleasant if the interviewers are running late.



## During the Interview

- Greet the Interviewer politely and if appropriate shake hands
- Get the pronunciation of their name right - check in advance
- Try to maintain eye contact with the interviewer but do not stare
- Let the Interviewers direct the questions and control the pace etc
- Do not interrupt the interviewer in mid question
- Do not be afraid to ask for a question to be re-phrased if you do not understand it
- You can ask to come back later to any questions you find difficult
- Answer questions simply and directly
- Show commitment and enthusiasm for the job
- Do not criticise your previous company or manager
- Do not make unrealistic claims about your abilities
- Try to avoid one word answers
- Demonstrate versatility, flexibility and a positive attitude
- Refer back to things the interviewer said earlier to demonstrate you were listening
- Sit forward in your chair, paying attention to the questions you are being asked
- Use your answers to stress your strengths as a candidate
- Watch the interviewer's body language, particularly when they are indicating they want to move onto another question.

## Post interview

- Ask for feedback if you did not get the job, it is a learning opportunity and helps you to raise your game
- Try to work out where you lost ground and do it differently next time  
Learn from your mistakes.









# Useful Contacts

All Council jobs are advertised through the following;

- Telegraph & Argus – Wednesday edition
- Job Centres
- Local free press
- Careers office
- The Council's job bulletin -[www.bradford.gov.uk](http://www.bradford.gov.uk)

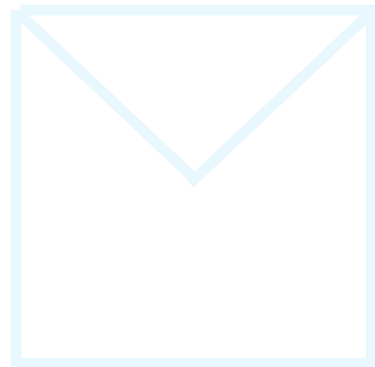
Depending on the type of job we may also use the local or national press

Information is also available on [www.jobsgopublic.com](http://www.jobsgopublic.com).

Application forms and further details about the posts are available from:

**JOBS**  
Department of Human Resources  
6th Floor  
City Exchange  
61 Hall Ings  
Bradford  
BD1 5SG

Tel: 01274 437085  
E-mail: [jobs@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:jobs@bradford.gov.uk)











## Contact

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Equalities Service  
B-Equal  
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BD1 5RW

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REF: 014

