



## Obtaining References - Guidance

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance supplements the Recruitment Policy and managers should note that references are only one of several pre-employment checks that are essential before any offer of appointment can be confirmed. Managers are therefore referred to the Recruitment Policy.

### 2 Take up of References

- 2.1 References are generally (but not always) requested following the interviews when a selection decision has been reached and would be for the successful candidate. For appointments to posts based in schools references should be obtained prior to interview.
- 2.2 References taken up prior to the interview should not be examined until an appointment decision has been made. An exception exists where the post concerned involves the care of children and/or other vulnerable people. In these cases managers are advised to follow the requirements of the Safer Recruitment Policy.
- 2.3 References must be taken up in writing for both internal and external applicants. Where an external applicant has previously worked for Hounslow Council, a reference should be sought from an appropriate manager, where possible, within the service area.
- 2.4 At least two references should be obtained for the successful applicants. A copy of the job description and employee specification must accompany the letter seeking references. A standard reference form exists which can be used.
- 2.5 If additional references are considered necessary i.e. other than the two referees identified on the application, it is good practice to seek the agreement of the applicant. Where the applicant does not give their agreement, the reasons should be sought and considered as appropriate.

### 3 Referees

- 3.1 One of the references should be from the candidate's current employer, or if unemployed from their most recent employer. If the applicant is a school/college leaver or recent graduate applying for their first job references from their school/college or university will suffice.
- 3.2 Character references from relatives or people writing solely in the capacity of friends are not acceptable.

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- 3.3 The references should cover the last three years of employment (or education). For social worker posts the reference(s) should cover the last five years of employment. Where this is not the case, further references should be sought with the candidate's agreement (see 2.5)

#### **4 Considering references**

- 4.1 Once received the references are to be "signed off" by the Chair of the recruiting panel or the recruiting manager. This will be prior to the contract of employment being issued to the appointee.
- 4.2 In deciding whether references should be "signed off" as satisfactory managers should consider the following:
- Given the employee's employment history have references been obtained from appropriate previous employers or organisations (e.g. last two employers, school, college or university)?
  - Do the references cover three years or five years (see 3.3) employment history
  - Have these references been provided by persons within the organisations that are suitably qualified to comment on the candidate's employment history?
  - Do any of the comments made in the references cause concern about:
    - The candidate's ability to carry out the job role in Hounslow?
    - The employment history disclosed on the application form (i.e. dates they worked for previous employers; posts held in previous employment)
    - The candidate's qualifications as stated in their application form
    - Performance or disciplinary issues
  - Are any gaps in the candidate's employment history adequately explained?
- 4.3 Sickness absences that are beyond the trigger points used in the Council's Management of Absence Policy will normally result in a reference being considered unsatisfactory. However clarification should be sought from both the referee and the applicant before a final decision is made. This is particularly important in the case of an applicant with a disability or a woman whose sickness may have been pregnancy related. A record should be kept of these discussions.
- 4.4 When reviewing references it is important to note that employers are increasingly providing limited information on references fearing challenge from their current or former employees about the content of references.

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- 4.5 There may be potential performance issues that are not explicitly highlighted in a reference. It is therefore important that all new starters are properly induced to the Council and that the monitoring of new employees during their probationary is carried out in accordance with the Probationary Policy.

## **5 What to do if there are concerns about a reference**

- 5.1 If managers have concerns about any aspect of a reference they should seek advice from their HR Advisory team and discuss the options available to them.
- 5.2 These may include:
- The Council reserves the right to take up further references and additional references from other former employers may be sought
  - Seeking clarification by telephone on points made by any referee. Any additional information provided which influences the decision to deem the reference satisfactory or not, must be noted and retained in the recruitment file.
  - Discussing any concerns about attendance records with Occupational Health
  - Issuing the contract and undertaking close monitoring during the new employee's six month probationary period

## **6 Sign off**

- 6.1 When the reference has been considered the manager should record their decision on the recruitment file as requested by their HR Advisory team.

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