

July 2024

Dear Applicant

Housing and Welfare Benefits Paralegal

Thank you for your interest in this post.

I am pleased to enclose:

- Organisation Summary and context of the post
- Job Description and Person Specification for the role of Housing and Welfare Benefits Paralegal

Please apply to recruitment@swllc.org by forwarding your CV together with a covering letter of no more than two pages of A4 setting out how you meet the person specification and why you would like to work with South West London Law Centres.

Please note that applications without a covering letter will not be considered.

The final closing date for applications to this role is 5pm on Friday 2 August, however, we will be evaluating applications as we receive them and so you are advised to submit your application as soon as possible.

If you would like to have a brief informal chat to discuss the role, please contact us at recruitment@swllc.org

Yours faithfully

Patrick Marples CEO
South West London Law Centres

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES
Legal Action for Local Communities

JOB ADVERT – Housing and Welfare Benefits Paralegal

South West London Law Centres (SWLLC) is one of the largest Law Centres in the country and we are seeking a housing and welfare benefits paralegal to join our housing team. You will support Merton residents to access legal advice about their housing rights and develop a caseload of early housing legal advice cases under the HLPAS scheme.

We are looking for someone who can work full time. Our housing team is highly specialist and well respected. The Law Centre is well known and highly regarded, winning the Legal Aid Firm/Not for Profit in the 2020 LALY Awards.

You will work with colleagues to deliver housing advice, resolve housing issues through casework, and to begin to develop skills as a legal aid housing lawyer. You will show care and attention to our clients and the command of detail which is a hallmark of our work. This is an exciting opportunity for someone who wants to take the next step in their legal career and to make a real difference within the community.

We can offer flexible working and generous benefits.

POST:	Housing and Welfare Benefits Paralegal
Salary:	£24,720 p.a, plus 4% pension contributions.
Reports to:	Housing Solicitor, Head of Legal Practice
Line Manages:	Volunteers assigned to the project
Term:	Permanent (subject to funding, which is currently in place for two years)
Based at:	Hybrid working, with a permanent base at our Merton office.
Hours:	Full time – 35 hours per week.

The final closing date for applications to this role is 5pm on 2 August 2024, however, we will be evaluating applications as we receive them and so you are advised to submit your application as soon as possible. If you would like to have a brief informal chat to discuss the role, please contact us at recruitment@swllc.org. Please see above for how to apply.

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES

Legal Action for Local Communities

ORGANISATION SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POST

SWLLC is a community based legal practice and a registered charity. Our history dates back to 1974 when the first Law Centres in Wandsworth were created. We became SWLLC in 2004 through the merger of a number of Law Centres in South West London

We now work across six South West London boroughs (Croydon, Merton, Kingston, Richmond, Sutton and Wandsworth). In doing so, we address the root causes of social injustice – poverty, family breakdown, unemployment and exploitation. SWLLC provides full legal casework, representation and advice in the following areas of social welfare law – Community Care, Debt, Employment, **Housing**, Immigration & Asylum and Welfare Rights. In 2022/23 we assisted 6778 people. We represent clients in all courts and tribunals and worked on 2,609 cases in 2022/23.

We continue to run one of the largest pro bono clinic services across England, we deliver around 100 free clinics appointments per week offering initial advice on a wide range of civil / legal problems over 400 pro-bono lawyers helped 2,954 clients last year.

We have a strong emphasis on quality – we are accredited to the Law Society’s Lexcel standard for excellence in legal practice management and client care and our Immigration Team has been rated as “Excellent” in a Legal Aid Peer Review for three years running.

Working at South West London Law Centres

South West London Law Centres has served the communities of South West London for 50 years. Today, we continue to meet the needs and address the disadvantage of around 7,000 clients per year. They include women fleeing domestic violence, people who are in housing crisis, people with no income or recourse to public funds, those with complex benefit challenges, and people mistreated by unscrupulous employers.

Joining the law centre is a chance to be a part of the law centres movement and to make a real impact with every case.

As an employer we offer hybrid working and support a range flexible working arrangements, including compressed hours to a four day week or nine day fortnight. We welcome applications from those wishing to work part time.

We have a generous leave allowance at 29 days per calendar year, rising to 34 days after five years’ continuous service as well as a range of discretionary leave to cover emergencies.

We offer opportunities for training and progression and support staff wellbeing through an employee assistance programme.

Our offices are centrally located close to transport hubs.

The context of the post

Our 10 person housing team is made up of five solicitors, three paralegals and two trainees. The work of the team is highly specialised Legal Aid casework within which each team member has their own specialism, but there is a large element of possession casework undertaken. SWLLC has one housing court duty contract and shares another. We have bid for more court duty contracts in the current LAA bidding round.

We developed this role in response to rising community need for housing advice and in order that we can carry out early legal advice under the HLPAS contract. This is an entry level legal role suitable for someone with some knowledge of housing law who wants to develop their experience and knowledge with a view to specialising in this area.

As well as working on housing cases, you will answer calls on our weekly housing advice line and attend community locations to deliver housing advice on an outreach basis.

As you progress in your role we will support you to develop your skills and to progress your legal career.

SOUTH WEST LONDON LAW CENTRES
Legal Action for Local Communities

JOB DESCRIPTION

POST:	Housing and Welfare Benefits Paralegal
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Reports to:	Housing Solicitor, Head of Legal Practice
Line Manages:	Volunteers assigned to the project
Term:	Permanent (subject to funding, which is currently in place for two years)
Based at:	Hybrid working, with a permanent base at our Merton office.
Hours:	Full time – 35 hours per week.

Purpose of job:

To support the community within Merton with advice and casework in relation to housing and welfare benefits.

The beneficiaries of the service will be those living within the London borough of Merton, focusing on supporting clients to stay in their own homes through a mix of legal advice, support, welfare benefits, housing and debt work.

Key Tasks:

1. Monitoring a weekly housing advice line, offering one off advice to Merton residents and VCSOs in Merton on a range of housing issues, particularly focused on those who are not eligible for legal aid and those in the private rental sector.
2. Undertaking housing casework to support those facing eviction within Merton, including early advice on Notices, defences to eviction and advice on disrepair issues
3. Undertaking outreach at community spaces such as Commonside's New Horizon Centre and Wimbledon Guild.
4. Referring those who need more specialist housing advice who are eligible for legal aid to our legal aid caseworkers.
5. Supporting those who are eligible for legal aid with collating the documents to evidence their eligibility
6. Referring those in need of income maximisation to our crisis team

7. Booking those who need help with return of rental deposits into our pro bono clinic; undertaking casework for those who require it.
8. Making direct referrals for those who need representation at tribunal for benefits appeals to our pro bono project with Simmons & Simmons.
9. Supporting our welfare benefits caseworker with casework in relation to those who need tribunal representation for welfare benefits issues under legal aid.
10. Train a small team of volunteers on elements of the role and supervise their work.
11. To keep up-to-date at all time with changes in housing and welfare benefits law by reading, attending training events and using computer for reference purposes.

Duties & Responsibilities

- 1 To ensure that all advice, assistance and representation complies with the requirements of our Lexcel quality mark and accreditation.
- 2 To regularly participate in team and staff meetings
- 3 To carry out file reviews in accordance with Lexcel requirements.
- 4 To provide training and talks to Law Centre staff, volunteers and to front line advice agency staff within the Law Centre's catchment area at least once per month.
- 5 To be responsible for your own word processing, filing and case recording using Clio.
- 6 To help develop relationships and work arrangements with local partners to develop referrals
- 7 To attend meetings of coordinating bodies as required.
- 8 To provide cover for colleagues during absences.

Project Record Keeping and Reporting

- 1 Maintain relevant client databases and produce returns to the Senior Management Team so we can provide grant monitoring reports to funders.
- 2 Search for and collect missing data to enable complete monitoring returns
- 3 Work with the Communications Manager to provide case studies and client voices.
- 4 Assist with the development and maintenance of a database of standard documents and paragraphs to aid in the efficiency of delivery of housing and welfare rights advice

Training and professional development

- 5 To attend courses on new legislation, specialist skills and the use of information technology.
- 6 Keep abreast of changes in legislation, practice and caselaw.
- 7 To discuss regularly with the Manager your job performance and personal career development.
- 8 To be appraised regularly and to engage fully in this process to further personal development and maximise your contribution to SWLLC.

- 9 Attend relevant training courses and appropriate internal and external meetings, to enhance skills as a crisis navigator.
- 10 Consult relevant colleagues to ensure that working practice is consistently of a high quality.
- 11 Provide feedback to trainers, team members and Manager on the effectiveness of informal and formal learning activities
- 12 Take part in regular supervision meetings with Manager and other caseworkers and obtain informal support as necessary.
- 13 To be appraised regularly and to engage fully in this process to further personal development and maximise your contribution to SWLLC.

Supervision and Support

- 14 Participate in supervision of volunteers and file/peer review of colleagues and volunteers
- 15 Assist with the Volunteer and Pro Bono Coordinator in maintaining a group of volunteers to assist with the project.
- 16 Train and oversee volunteers work so that they gain skills in appropriate case management and file maintenance practises including the use of our case management system.
- 17 Train volunteers in law, practices and procedures to deliver the service and make use of external help and resources in delivering this.

Social Policy and Service Development

- 18 To be alert at all times to the social policy implications of issues presented by clients.
- 19 To take appropriate action to influence social policy in regard to these issues.

Equal Opportunities

- 20 To have regard at all times in the planning and execution of duties to SWLLC's Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Other Duties

- 21 Play a full role in the organisation supporting colleagues to maximise their effectiveness.
- 22 Travel to meetings and other events across SW London as required.
- 23 In addition to the tasks and duties listed in this job description to undertake such duties as may be identified and which are generally compatible with the functions of the post.

Working Hours

24 This post may require some evening working providing advice at events or occasional evening advice sessions for workers. You may also work with our partner organisations providing outreach in their offices. You may also be required to work the occasional weekend for one off events

Location

You will be based in our Merton office but may be expected to undertake some of your initial training at our Croydon or Battersea offices. You will also be required to attend regular outreach sessions across the borough of Merton. The locations of our offices are on our website

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PERSON SPECIFICATION

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Knowledge

1. Legal Practice Course, SQE1 or relevant experience in legal/advice environment
2. Familiarity with welfare systems including benefits, debt, health and social care services.
3. Commitment to Social Welfare Law
4. Experience of delivering housing law advice and an understanding of housing law
5. Understanding of the needs presented by our client base.
6. Experience of delivering telephone and face to face advice.
7. Experience of working to targets

Interpersonal & Communication

8. Self-motivated
9. Ability to prioritise work, manage cases and maintain files efficiently
10. An understanding of and commitment to equal opportunities issues and its relevance to legal advice
11. Ability to communicate effectively with the organisation's client group
12. Excellent and clear written communication skills

13. Ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines

14. Ability to work as part of a team

Other

15. Excellent IT skills

16. Ability to work to project targets and project objectives

17. A positive, proactive and flexible approach to working with colleagues, clients and partners

18. Ability to work in other SWLLC offices

Desirable

1. Experience of working under the legal aid scheme (Legal Help and certificated) and the exercise of delegated functions or an understanding of what Legal Aid is

2. Experience of working with volunteers

3. Experience of time recording