

# IHAG's Money Advice Service

January 2016



## 1 Introduction

Ipswich Housing Action Group is a registered charity, which was formed in 1976 by a group of community activists in response to the shortage of accommodation for single people in Ipswich.

Forty years later and IHAG is a professional service provider with 55 tenants in 14 properties throughout the town. With a team of 43 paid staff, 15 volunteers, and a turnover of nearly £1.25 million, we provide accommodation, move-on, campaign and research, and money advice.

IHAG plays a central role promoting and identifying the needs of single homeless people in Ipswich. We have close ties with Ipswich Borough Council, are consulted widely and campaign regularly.

## 2 A Background History

Nineteen years ago the IHAG Money Advice Service (IMAS) was set up as a new venture to provide money and welfare rights advice direct to IHAG's client group. By setting up its own in-house service, IHAG believed it would increase the chance of our tenants making a successful transition to independence.

The aims and objectives of the service are to provide debt & welfare rights advice to support IHAG's clients. This provision has been extended by way of a formal referral system to other hostels and agencies in Ipswich and Suffolk.

## 3 Money Advice Service Team

The Service Manager heads up our team of 1 Senior Money Adviser, 4 Money Advisers, a full time Service Administrator, 2 part time Admin Staff, 1 trained Volunteer Money Adviser and 1 Volunteer Admin Assistant/Trainee Money Adviser.

## 4 Volunteer Admin Workers

Volunteer Admin Workers work closely with all the team as our busy service relies on the foundation of good admin support. **We are currently looking to support and train Admin Volunteers** who are able to assist our Service Administrator and Money Advisers with a variety of tasks including answering the phone, talking to our clients and/or creditors, updating our database, filing, photocopying, handling post, writing letters and even making the tea; although even the Manager makes tea on occasion!

Although we do not require you to have specific experience or qualifications for this role, we ask that you are hardworking and accurate, have basic computer skills and a willingness to learn, and you are able to volunteer for a minimum of half a day per week. In return you will be given an opportunity to learn new skills as well as develop existing ones, increase your confidence and gain valuable admin experience in a small but busy and friendly office environment.

## **5 Volunteer Money Advisers**

If you can demonstrate a good level of literacy, numeracy and communication skills, and are confident in the use of IT and able to accurately input information, then you may be interested in the role of becoming a Volunteer Money Adviser.

We are looking to train Volunteers to give money advice to our clients. If you are able to commit to 2 days per week for at least one year, we will provide you with the necessary support and training in order to develop the skills and expertise needed to provide debt and welfare benefits advice to our clients.

In this role, you will need to be able to communicate clearly with clients from a wide range of backgrounds, many of which are vulnerable with complex needs such as homelessness, mental health or substance misuse issues and/or domestic violence.

The work would also involve making sure people are on the right benefits, completing benefit and grant forms, dealing/negotiating with creditors, looking at people's income and expenditure, completing financial statements/budget plans and looking at different options for addressing debts.

## **6 Why Volunteer?**

Volunteering provides people with a valuable opportunity to learn new skills, develop confidence and meet new people, as well as give something back to the community; our current Volunteer Admin Worker is a former client and appreciates having this opportunity to help people in a similar situation to what she was in.

The role of Volunteer Money Adviser is a particularly challenging but rewarding one. Successful applicants will receive full training and support, and eventually be able to take on their own caseload of clients. Providing experience in so many different areas enable our Volunteers to successfully develop careers in a number of avenues, including in the voluntary and advice sector. Although we make no guarantees of a paid job, many of our Volunteers have gone on to secure paid employment either at IHAG or with another agency; in fact, 2 of our current Money Advisers previously volunteered at IHAG, and a former Volunteer Money Adviser is currently being paid to deliver our Financial Capability Training.

We recognise that it may not be financially viable for people with childcare responsibilities to volunteer for such a large proportion of their week, even if they are wanting to. This is why we have agreed to pay childcare costs for suitable applicants who wish to train to become a Volunteer Money Adviser.

We are committed to giving all our Volunteers the training and experience opportunities they need to play a vital part in IHAG's success. Please do not hesitate to contact us on 01473 213102 (option 1) should you wish to discuss any of our Volunteering opportunities.