

Recruitment

Assistant Director of Affordable Workspace

Candidate Pack | December 2025



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Welcome

Dear Candidate, thank you for your interest in the role of Assistant Director of Affordable Workspace at Islington Council.

Islington is known as a place of creativity, culture and opportunity. That story is true for some, but not for all. Alongside areas of great affluence, we have some of the highest levels of child and pensioner poverty in the country, and too many residents still experience deep and persistent inequality. It is our job to change that.

Over the last few years, we have built one of the most established and high-performing Affordable Workspace portfolios in the country. We have transformed how the council uses planning, procurement and social value to secure genuinely affordable space for local businesses, social enterprises and charities and this work has generated millions in social value, supported new and growing enterprises, and helped residents access opportunities they would otherwise be locked out of.

We are now entering a new phase, one that requires strong commercial acumen, confident negotiation, and a robust understanding of how to build, operate and sustain a complex workspace portfolio in a challenging market.

As Assistant Director, you will lead a growing pipeline of high-value workspace schemes, including complex, high-profile projects where we must make critical decisions about financial viability, business models, lease terms, rates, service charges and long-term sustainability.

You will sit across negotiations with developers from the earliest planning stages, ensuring the council secures the right space, on the right terms, and with the right operator. You will need to understand when a space will work...and when it won't. You will play a key role in shaping a high-quality portfolio, working with operators to strengthen their business plans and ensuring every workspace we take forward is backed by a credible, commercially sound model.

You will also help us maintain what makes Islington unique: our commitment to inclusive growth and community benefit. Social value remains important, and the next generation of our programme combines this with a sharper commercial focus. This is about securing spaces that are financially sound and deliver meaningful outcomes for local communities, not one at the expense of the other.

You will also play a major role in shaping future policy and direction, advising senior officers and Members, and ensuring our approach remains one of the leading models in London and the UK.

This role is perfect for someone who enjoys complexity, thrives in negotiation, and brings both commercial confidence and a commitment to social impact. Whether your background is in local government, the private sector, real estate, workspace operations or consultancy, what matters most is your ability to balance commercial discipline with the values of public service.

If you are excited by the opportunity to help shape a commercially robust and socially meaningful workspace portfolio, and to make a real impact on the lives of our residents, I would be delighted to receive your application.

Warm regards,



Caroline Wilson
Director of
Inclusive Economy
Islington Council



#OurTalent

Our Values

At Islington, how we work is just as important as what we deliver. Our **CARE Values** guide how we lead, collaborate and serve our communities:



Collaborative

We're more effective when we work together as one team, with our partners, our colleagues, our managers and with residents.

Ambitious

We will challenge ourselves to be the best and we are ambitious in creating new solutions that deliver the best for our communities.

Resourceful

We will look for ways to make things happen, especially when faced with new or difficult situations, by making the most of what we have, coming up with solutions, thinking creatively in our approaches, and finding ways to effectively and sustainably use our resources.

Empowering

Empowering. We respect our differences and champion inclusion in our workplace. We invest in a high performing workplace by providing opportunities for colleagues to learn and develop their skills and experience. We empower every colleague to be their best for our residents.

Join us and help change the future



Watch our video



https://youtu.be/ULQaMkrU3w8?si=CN5844N_oumU5GDY

Key facts about life in Islington

Inequality is a defining feature of life in Islington. For many people in Islington, differences in access to wealth and opportunity mean that they often feel as if they lead parallel lives to those around them, even those who live on the same street. We know that not only is this a moral failing, but that this disparity has very real impact on the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our residents and our borough.

↑19%

The population of Islington is estimated to be 216,767 in 2022. **This is an increase of approximately 19% (39,189 people) since 2011.**



It is estimated that the population of Islington will grow by 2.7% (6,600 people) between 2022 and 2032. **The biggest population increases are expected in those over 65 years.**



33% of Islington's residents are from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic group.

16,699 people **1km²**

Islington is the most densely populated local authority area in England and Wales, with 16,699 people per square km. This is almost triple the London average and more than 38 times the national average.

3rd

Islington is the third smallest borough in London covering 15km squared.



Only 13% of the borough's land is green space, the second lowest proportion of any local authority in the country.

24th → 53rd

Islington has moved from the 24th most deprived local authority in England in 2015 to the 53rd most deprived in 2019 (out of 317 local authorities). **Islington is now the 6th most deprived local authority in London (it was 5th in 2015).**



There are approximately 32,000 micro businesses, 2,440 small businesses, 964 medium businesses, and 500 large enterprises operating in Islington. This shows the borough's economy is heavily driven by micro and small enterprises, which make up the vast majority of its business landscape. Key sectors include: professional, scientific and technical activities, wholesale and retail trade, and information and communication, reflecting a strong service and tech-based economy.



Men living in the most deprived areas in the borough are expected to live 9.8 years less than those who are the least deprived in Islington. This is higher compared to London (7.2 years).

↑80%

There is 80% higher death rate from avoidable causes amongst the most deprived in Islington. Black communities are more likely to die prematurely of cardiovascular disease.



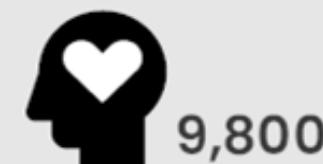
34% of adults aged 60 or over are living in income deprived households – more than double the average for England (14%) and 11% of Islington households experience fuel poverty.



Young people as a group are more likely to live in deprivation than the rest of the population. **28% of children aged under 16 live in income deprived families** – the highest percentage in London and 10th highest in England.



On average, rent accounts for about 70% of gross earnings in Islington.



Islington had had the highest proportion of working age population claiming sickness and disability benefits (approx. 9,800 people) in London in February 2020 – the main reason being mental ill health.

Nationally and globally, we are facing tough times – an economic downturn and a cost of living crisis which are likely to push many more of our residents into poverty. National research has shown that the cost of living crisis is likely to continue to drive inequality – as the Runnymede Trust has revealed, people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are 2.2 times more likely to be in deep poverty than White people, and drilling down, Bangladeshi people are more than 3 times more likely.

The picture is stark, but we need to understand what we are up against. This is the moment when strong leadership is most important. We are committed to standing with our communities and using all of the power and resources at our disposal to help them through these challenging times.



@Better Space

The Opportunity

Join us and help build a thriving borough! Assistant Director, Affordable Workspace

Islington is a vibrant and wonderfully diverse inner London borough, home to over 215,000 residents. We are determined to create a more equal Islington – a place where everyone has an equal chance to thrive.

We are seeking bold, innovative leaders to help us deliver a more inclusive economy, redirecting wealth into the local economy and back into the hands of our people and businesses. Following a recent service reorganisation, we have created a new Assistant Director role to shape our Affordable Workspace offering to support economic policy and practice in one of London’s most dynamic boroughs.

There has never been a better time to join us.

You will provide strategic leadership to drive the commercial strategy and operational excellence for our high-profile Affordable Workspace programme. Your work will blend commercial success with community impact, by enabling local small businesses to access high-quality spaces, and supporting residents to start and grow their own businesses. You will play a key role in:

- Negotiating and securing high-value partnerships with leading developers, landlords, and operators to shape a thriving workspace ecosystem.
- Overseeing a diverse portfolio of projects from inception to delivery, ensuring commercial viability and long-term sustainability.
- Designing and implementing a borough-wide Social Impact Strategy that sets new standards for inclusive growth and innovation.

What we are looking for

We want leaders who are:

- Strategic and visionary, with strong corporate leadership skills to improve outcomes for all residents.
- Collaborative, with a proven track record of delivering results through partnership.
- Governance-savvy, ensuring robust organisational performance.
- Innovative and solutions-focused, driving inclusive growth and economic transformation.
- Empowering, creating a culture where everyone can thrive.
- Committed to equality, delivering first-class services and ready to champion a more equal Islington.

Join us and help shape a borough where opportunity is shared, and everyone can prosper.

For a confidential discussion, contact:



Bruna Varante

on 07858 306725 or email:
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Mark Baldwinson

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Pete John

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pete.john@penna.com

**Role Closing
Date: Sunday 11th
January 2026**

SPACE

**Proud to be a fairer
Islington workspace**



HM Government

SUPPORTED BY

MAYOR OF LONDON

LEAP



ISLINGTON
For a more equal future

@Space4

The Role

Assistant Director of Affordable Workspace

Service area: Community Wealth Building

Grade: CO4 £86,754 - £105,113

Reports to: Director of Inclusive Economy

Your team: Affordable Workspace

Work style: Hybrid, with minimum 3 days working in-borough

Our mission

We are determined to create a more equal Islington, where everyone who lives here has an equal chance to thrive. To do this, everyone who works at Islington Council lives by a set of values which guide us in everything that we do: collaborative, ambitious, resourceful, and empowering.

Key responsibilities

1. Strategic Leadership & Vision

Provide strategic leadership and direction for the Council's innovative Affordable Workspace agenda, aligning it with the borough's Community Wealth Building strategy and inclusive growth ambitions. Translate political and corporate priorities into long-term, high-impact programmes that promote prosperity, sustainability, and equality across the borough.

2. Corporate Advisor & Policy Shaper

Act as the Council's principal advisor on Affordable Workspace, shaping borough-wide

policy and influencing regional and national agendas. Lead the development of innovative strategies that respond to emerging economic, social, market and spatial challenges.

3. Programme Accountability & Performance

Lead the development and delivery of a complex portfolio of affordable workspace programmes, partnerships and contracts. Ensure robust performance management, risk mitigation, and continuous improvement to maximise social and economic value for residents and local businesses.

4. Asset Strategy & Portfolio Management

Oversee the strategic management of the Council's affordable workspace assets. Ensure compliance, optimise resource utilisation, and align asset use with corporate objectives and policy, delivering long-term financial sustainability and community benefit.

5. Commercial & Contractual Leadership

Lead high-value negotiations and commercial partnerships with developers, landlords, and workspace operators in a dynamic market environment. Ensure that procurement, planning, and legal frameworks are leveraged to secure favourable outcomes for the council and mitigate risk. Scan the external environment and anticipate market impacts.

6. Cross-Departmental Collaboration

Champion cross-council collaboration, working closely with senior leaders in Property, Planning, Legal, and Finance to ensure integrated delivery of workspace initiatives and develop creative approaches as demanded by changing market environment. Foster a culture of shared ownership and innovation.

7. Social Impact & Inclusive Growth

Develop and implement an innovative borough-wide Social Impact Strategy for affordable workspace. Ensure measurable outcomes in job creation, community development, and support for underrepresented groups, in line with the Council's inclusive economy agenda.

8. External Engagement & Influence

Represent the Council at senior forums, partnerships, and networks. Build strategic relationships with government bodies, industry leaders, and community stakeholders to advance the borough's inclusive economic ambitions.

9. Governance & Decision-Making Lead the preparation and presentation of high-quality reports and recommendations to senior officers, Executive Members, and Committees. Ensure transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making.

10. Programme & Project Leadership

Provide senior leadership across the full lifecycle of major affordable workspace projects. Ensure delivery to time, cost, and quality, while aligning with broader regeneration and economic development goals.

11. Team Leadership & Development

Lead and develop a high-performing team, inspiring a culture of excellence, innovation, and continuous learning. Ensure the service is resourced and structured to meet current and future demands.

12. Financial Stewardship

Oversee strategic financial planning for the affordable workspace portfolio. Ensure robust budgeting, forecasting, and commercial analysis to support sustainable investment and delivery.

Leadership

As a member of the council's management team, to contribute proactively to the collective leadership for the council, working collaboratively with Members, services across the council, partners and stakeholders to deliver the council's objectives and priorities.

To drive positive cultural change, embodying and promoting the values and behaviours of the council and empowering staff to reach their full potential.

Ensure that the performance and development framework is effective for all staff.

To lead on and ensure the effective implementation of corporate initiatives and transformation programmes that cut across the whole or part of the council's activities.

Lead and support on the Council's Community Wealth Building ambitions relating to all affordable workspace matters.

Provide outstanding leadership and direction to the service, driving service transformation and ensuring excellent joint working with Members and other stakeholders.

Driving performance by setting high expectations, encouraging continuous improvement, and supporting the team to reach their goals.

Holding regular team meetings and one-on-one discussions to review performance, including addressing challenging conversations when needed.

Resources and Financial Management

Ensure effective Financial Management, cost controls and income maximisation in an ever-changing environment, fluctuating demands and priorities.

Ensure resources are well managed and effectively deployed to the best possible effects assuring value for money in all activities.

Ensure resources are well managed and effectively deployed to the best possible effects assuring value for money in all activities.

Continuously improve, budget monitoring, ensuring the corporate estate meet legislative requirements, and stakeholder management.

Ensure robust and detailed budgetary monitoring systems are in place for commercial income.

Assist with ensuring a proactive strategy is implemented in respect of key council initiatives including Net Zero Carbon, energy efficiencies and accessibility to our built estate.

Liaising with relevant Planning officers as part of the statutory planning process and subsequently the commissioned workspace operators to ensure operational facilities are fit for purpose for service delivery including proactive opportunities across the portfolio to support other property needs and objectives. Effectively managing a revenue budget of up to £4 million.

Continuously improve, budget monitoring, ensuring the corporate estate meet legislative requirements, and stakeholder management. Compliance, and ensure legal, regulatory and policy compliance under GDPR, Health and Safety and in area of your specialism identifying opportunities and risks and escalating where appropriate.

Person Specification

You should demonstrate on your application form how you meet the criteria. Please ensure you address all the criteria as this will be used to assess your suitability for the post.

Essential criteria	Criteria description	Assessed by
Qualifications		
E1	Degree, postgraduate qualification or equivalent in a relevant field (e.g. Urban Planning, Economic Development, Real Estate, Estate Management, Public Policy, Business Administration).	Application/Interview
E2	Relevant professional qualification (e.g. RICS, RTPI, or similar).	Application/Interview
E3	Evidence of continuing professional development.	Application/Interview
Experience		
E4	Strategic Leadership: Proven experience in leading complex programmes or services at a senior level within local government, economic development, regeneration, or a related field.	Application/Interview
E5	Affordable Workspace or Property Portfolio Management: Demonstrable experience managing commercial or community property portfolios, including lease negotiations, asset optimisation, and compliance.	Application/Interview
E6	Cross-Sector Collaboration: Experience working across departments and with external partners (e.g. developers, workspace operators, community organisations).	Application/Interview
E7	Contract and Performance Management: Track record of managing high-value contracts, mitigating risk and ensuring delivery of social and economic outcomes.	Application/Interview
E8	Policy Development: Experience in shaping and implementing policy in areas such as inclusive growth, economic development, or urban regeneration.	Application/Interview

Essential criteria	Criteria description	Assessed by
E9	Programme and Project Delivery: Experience leading multi-disciplinary teams to deliver complex, high-profile projects on time and within budget.	Application/Interview
E10	Social Value Delivery: Proven experience in commissioning, managing, or evaluating services or programmes that deliver social value outcomes. This includes setting KPIs, monitoring impact, and aligning delivery with broader community and economic goals.	Application/Interview
Skills		
E11	Strategic Thinking: Ability to translate political/corporate priorities into long-term, high-impact strategies.	Application/Interview
E12	Commercial Acumen: Strong understanding of financial planning, investment appraisal, and commercial negotiations.	Application/Interview
E13	Influencing and Negotiation: Skilled in building consensus and influencing senior stakeholders, both internally and externally.	Application/Interview
E14	Analytical and Problem-Solving: Ability to interpret complex data, assess risk, and make evidence-based decisions.	Application/Interview
E15	Leadership and People Management: Ability to inspire, lead, and develop high-performing teams.	Application/Interview
E16	Social Value Leadership: Demonstrated ability to embed social value principles into contracts, programmes, and partnerships. Skilled in designing and evaluating initiatives that deliver measurable community benefits.	Application/Interview
E17	Communication: Excellent written and verbal communication skills, including report writing and presenting to senior leaders and elected members.	Application/Interview

Essential criteria	Criteria description	Assessed by
Special requirements of the post		
E18	This role will require you to obtain a Basic satisfactory clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service.	Application/Interview
E19	This post is subject to the council’s policy on pecuniary and personal interest.	Application/Interview

Our accreditations

Our accreditations include: the Healthy Workplace award; Timewise; London Living Wage Employer; Disability Confident Committed; The Mayor’s Good Work Standard; Stonewall Diversity Champion; and Time to Change.



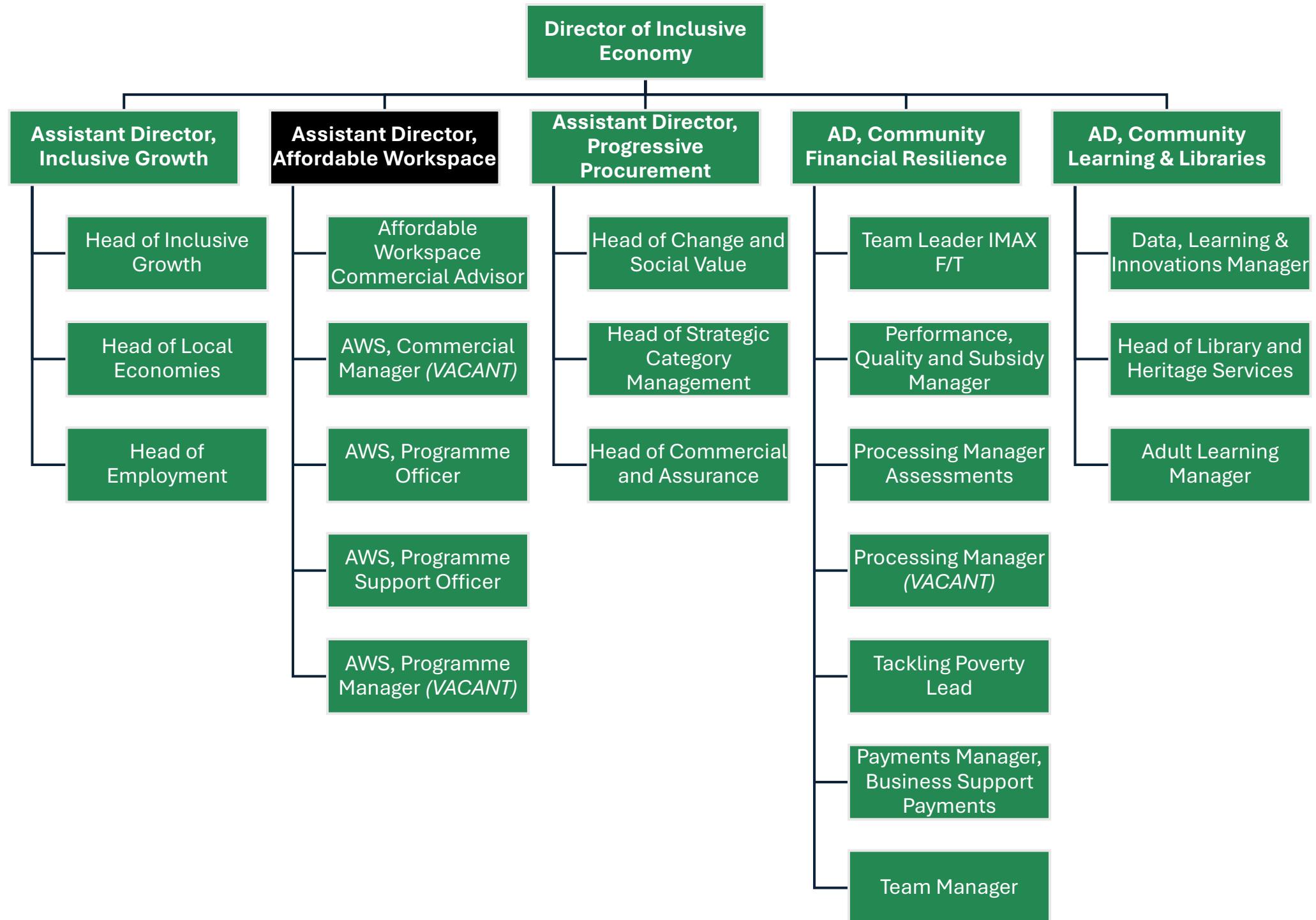
FC DESIGNER WORKSPACE

STUDIOS 1-12, 9 DURHAM ROAD, LONDON N77FB



#Opportunities

Organisation Chart



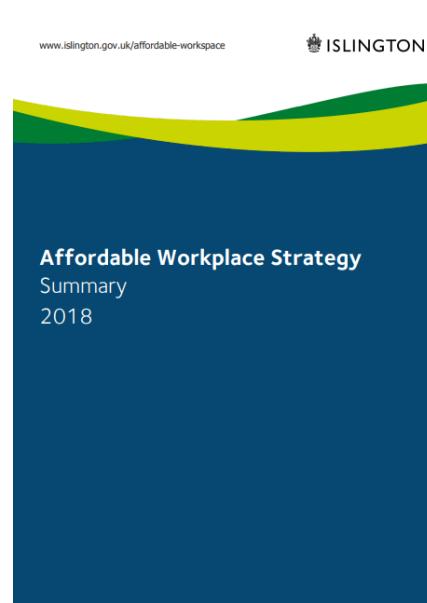


#NewBusinesses

Further Reading & Listening



Islington Together



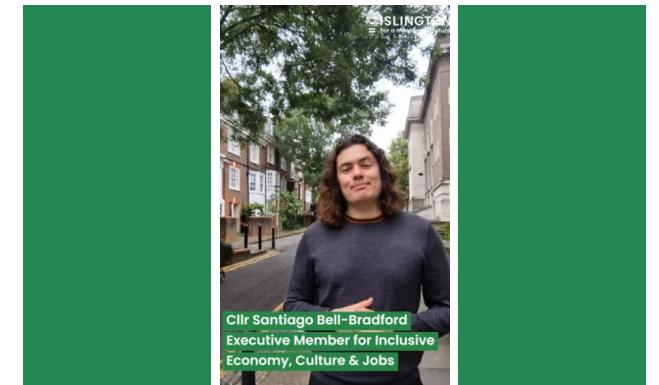
Affordable Workplace Strategy



Delivering impact Social value in Islington's Affordable Workspaces April 2020 – April 2022



Creating a thriving local economy in Islington



What is Community Wealth Building?



Garrett Street Video Tour

Please note: These links will take you to external browsers.

How to Apply?

This guidance contains important information to help with your application:

Please apply by submitting a CV and Cover Letter (no more than four sides of A4 in length per document aligned to the person specification). Please also include your contact details.

Please ensure your full employment history is outlined in your CV; where there are essential criteria, competencies and/or qualifications please make clear how you meet these. We may wish to verify this information during the recruitment process.

Please provide the details of two referees. Note that we will only approach referees for candidates proceeding to final selection and only with your permission. Please clearly indicate whether we can approach each referee before the selection date.

Please share with us in your Supporting Statement the values and behaviours that you bring to your leadership, and how you will transfer your skills and experience into this role.

Please complete the Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form when you upload your details via our website.

Please upload your application by the closing date – no applications will be accepted once the long listing process has begun.

Following long-listing, you will be contacted directly by a Penna consultant to update you on the status of your application.

Asking for adjustments: we're committed to making our recruitment practices barrier-free and as accessible as possible for everyone. This includes making adjustments or changes for disabled people, neurodiverse people or people with long-term health conditions. If you would like us to consider doing anything differently during the application, interview, or assessment process, including providing information in an alternative format, please contact us.

To apply for this role, please visit the following link to upload your CV and Cover Letter: <https://execroles.penna.com>

Date	Stage
11/01/2025	Applications Deadline
w/c 12th Jan	Longlist Meeting
w/c 19th Jan	Technical Interviews
w/c 26th Jan	Shortlist Meeting
w/c 2nd Feb	Final Interviews

For questions or an informal discussion, please contact:



Bruna Varante
on 07858 306725 or email:
bruna.varante@penna.com



Mark Baldwinson
on 07764698139 or email:
mark.baldwinson@penna.com



Pete Jogn
on 07858 306725 or email:
pete.john@penna.com

Penna Executive Search

Inclusive Leadership ...Redefined!

At Penna, we specialise in connecting outstanding professionals to senior leadership roles that shape the future of local government.

Our decades of experience working with local authorities set us apart. We understand the demands of political leadership, the importance of corporate plans, and the skills needed to navigate complex, challenging environments.

We work with integrity, imagination, and determination to ensure every placement is the right fit. Whether you are looking for leaders who can deliver major change initiatives, champion high performance cultures, or build stronger partnerships with communities and stakeholders, our specialist team will help you find the talent who can turn vision into reality.

At Penna, we want to build leadership that delivers stronger, fairer, and more sustainable communities.

www.penna.com



Thank you for your
interest in the role!

