

Real-life story - Lorna Robinson

Lorna works in environmental health on a wide range of issues relating to pollution, housing and public health. "A myth about this job," says Lorna, "is that we inspect kitchens - but that is only one side of environmental health."

Lorna Robinson

Senior environmental health officer

Employer or university

Rossendale Borough Council

Salary range

£25k-£35k

Lorna Robinson

I really do enjoy my job. I'm still as enthusiastic and happy as I have always been.

How I got into the role

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I was 17 years old doing A-levels and had no idea of what I wanted to do after college. I went along to a careers event looking for inspiration and luckily an environmental health officer (EHO) was giving a talk about his job. He brought along a stuffed rat and an array of equipment (such as a damp meter, noise level meter, surface swabs, and electric socket tester), talked about the variety of work, and gave examples of funny and interesting stories; and when I found out about the good salary I was hooked. It was the first time I'd come across an EHO, and I knew then it was the job I wanted to do. I got the required grades in my exams and got accepted to study a degree in Environmental Health at Manchester Metropolitan University. I was also successful in obtaining a

student training place at Manchester City Council so I was able to work there in the holidays and for the two mandatory six-month work experience placements.

After graduating in 1997, I got a job working at Manchester City Council working in the Pollution Control section. I later moved nearer home to Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council, where I worked in public health dealing with blocked drains and dirty houses. I then wanted a change and got a job at East Devon District Council working in pollution, housing and public health. Missing the North, I got a job at Rossendale Borough Council, starting in the Private Sector Housing team dealing with houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and property standards, and later moving to the Environmental Health department to do my current job.

What I do

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My current role at Rossendale Borough Council involves pollution, housing and public health. I mainly deal with people and domestic property. The scope of work is vast, including neighbour noise complaints, private rented property condition complaints, immigration inspections, filthy and verminous property, anti-social behaviour, air quality management, and public funerals.

I am usually out of the office at some point most days doing different things such as assessing planning applications, installing noise equipment, carrying out property inspections, surveying the district for nuisance etc. I work with a wide range of people and organisations including the Police, Fire Service, Environment Agency, Social Services, United Utilities, and networking is a very important part of the job.

The best bits and challenges

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Since gaining my first job after my degree, I have never looked back. I know I'm in the minority and am lucky enough to be able to say genuinely that I really do enjoy my job. I'm still as enthusiastic and happy as I have always been.

The thing I like most about the job is the variety of work on a day-to-day basis and making a difference to people's lives. I also really like the fact that I have been able to move around the country working in different local authorities. A highlight of my job was

being the lead officer for a long and complicated case involving the council, and being successful in obtaining an interim management order for a 20-bedroom house in multiple occupation that had a great number of health and safety concerns. The property is now managed by a Registered social landlord and the quality of life of the residents has been vastly improved.

A myth about this job is that we inspect kitchens, which is only one side of environmental health. The pollution, housing and public health sides of the job don't tend to feature as highly in the public's mind as much as "checking kitchens."

Because our work is mainly reactive, people don't always know about us until they have a problem - then they're pleased we're here.

There is talk here at Rossendale of EHOs becoming more generic and working across both residential and commercial sides of the job, so I'm looking forward to getting more involved in the food and health and safety inspections.

Life outside work

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I really enjoy my work but I also really enjoy my free time. I keep busy mainly with yoga, open water swimming, horse riding and walking. Yoga helps me stay calm after a busy day, open water swimming makes me feel alive and connects me back to nature and the environment. Horse riding reminds me of the importance of relationships and good partnerships, and I like the simplicity of walking.

Career plans and top tips for others

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To widen my remit and knowledge I'm planning on studying the commercial side of environmental health and I'm interested in developing the use of the anti-social behaviour legislation. I'm also interested in the behaviour change agenda coming from the government and how we can use our influence to tackle the wider determinants of public health.

I would say that a big part of the job is diplomacy and the ability to negotiate and be a good listener. Doing nuisance and anti-social behaviour work you need to be able to get both sides of a story before making a decision and have to be confident with the decision.

you make. You need to be flexible and organised and be a people person.

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