**CITIZENS ADVICE STAFFORDSHIRE NORTH & STOKE ON TRENT**



**BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR**

**JOB APPLICANTS**

*Thank you for your interest in our job vacancy. This information is*

*intended to give a brief outline of our organisation.*

**The Organisation**

Citizens Advice Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent is one of the country’s largest and most dynamic advice agencies with a national reputation for exciting and ground-breaking innovations. We have been at the cutting edge of most major developments in advice work during the last 35 years whether pioneering tribunal representation and debt advice in the early 1980s, or inventing casework support to the victims of race harassment in the mid-1990s, leading the field in advice services to refugees and asylum seekers and other excluded groups in the ‘noughties’ or piloting digital and developing telephone advice as we do now.

We are an independent local charity, led by a Trustee Board of local volunteers with a wide range of skills and experience. As such, we respond swiftly to emerging local needs and base our service development very firmly on the issues faced by our local communities.

As members of Citizens Advice (the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux) we are also committed to giving accurate, free assistance to any member of the community and, having done that, we use the experience of social problems brought to us by our enquirers to responsibly influence the social policies that have caused those problems.

Because we want to be as available as possible to all members of the community, we are careful to maintain a style which is completely impartial so we do not have any underlying political or social aims or ideologies as an organisation, and we attempt to keep our personal views from compromising that impartiality.

Our mission statement requires us to empower individuals who are poor or who suffer discrimination, and to inform policy makers of how they can combat poverty and inequality. This involves us in robust use of the media (locally and nationally) and in work with other organisations and groups. We actively participate in a wide range of local partnerships.

**Structure and Responsibilities**

We are a large organisation, operating primarily across the districts of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle under Lyme and in the Biddulph area of the Staffordshire Moorlands. We employ some 120 paid staff and about 80 volunteers. To ensure that those staff are used as effectively as possible we have invested significant resources in the management of the organisation. Day to day running of the organisation is the responsibility of the Chief Executive, and a Management Team of five operational Managers.

We stress the need for people to work co-operatively rather than competitively and we believe that decisions can be improved if those affected by them are consulted and we do this wherever it is practical to do so.

Volunteers work mainly as generalist advisers, although some work occasionally in specialist advice areas or assist with administrative tasks and reception. Our Trustees are all volunteers.

Paid staff work in specialist areas of advice, or deliver projects under contract to funders, or supervise and support volunteers.

**Workload**

Enquirers are able to access our services in a variety of ways. They can call in person at

any of our three permanent sites, or visit one of our outreach clinics or projects that operate across the area. Alternatively they can contact us through the CA service’s national Adviceline.

In 2017/18 we helped 13,142 unique individuals, mainly from North Staffordshire, deal with over 40,000 new advice enquiries. 60% of these involved welfare benefits or debt, which reflects the serious levels of poverty experienced by our enquirers.

Generalist advisers advise on a wide range of subjects from straightforward benefit and debt queries through housing issues, to consumer and personal problems. As a generalist advice agency we aim to offer a holistic service to help people cope with the whole spectrum of their problems whether they are physical or emotional. This service is delivered face to face and by telephone.

The Legal Aid Agency funds us to offer specialist casework in a housing (including a court advice desk) and immigration (asylum) and we offer debt advice funded by the Money Advice Service as well as local funders. We also offer welfare benefits advice funded by project funders and have a growing range of financial capability activities.

Increasingly we are working in partnerships on a range of projects, either with other local Citizens Advice or with a wide range of local voluntary organisations many of whom deliver complementary services. These partnerships allow us to deliver advice as part of wider packages of support and to access people who might otherwise not visit us.

We are currently the only local Citizens Advice delivering large scale support to victims of crime through the Staffordshire Victim Gateway and the Staffordshire Restorative Justice Hub. In 2017/18 18,517 victims of crime were given information and advice to help them cope with and recover from their experience, 1,160 were referred for ongoing support within our team and 2,500 were referred to partner agencies.

In April 2017 we launched a 24 seat contact centre as one of 8 local Citizens Advice delivering the national consumer helpline, aiming to deal with 135,000 calls a year.

**Systems and Quality**

We strongly believe that high quality, consistent advice needs to be given systematically. For many years we have encouraged staff to develop and use special advice systems. We are continually reviewing these systems and developing new ones. This has now progressed to the adoption of various electronic systems including the CA service’s case management package Casebook. We have recently invested heavily in a new ICT system to support staff.

**Premises**

Our headquarters, Advice House in Stoke-on-Trent’s city centre, has been renovated and extended to provide one of the largest and best equipped advice centres in the country.

We have always believed that the poorest and most socially excluded members of our communities, who make up the majority of our enquirers, deserve to be seen in smart, well equipped premises; and that the professionalism and the quality of our work should be reflected in the premises from which we operate.

We also have bases in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Biddulph, both of which have been upgraded and adapted to provide modern advice facilities and we have a 24 seat contact centre on Festival Park. We also operate from a number of other sites such as housing offices, community centres and church halls.

**The Area**

Stoke on Trent is a city that has had a bad press recently and the deprivation arising from the decline of its traditional industries (pottery, coal and steel) certainly make it a challenging place in which to work. However, it does enjoy some of the lowest house prices in the country, a thriving city centre with excellent cultural and leisure facilities, extremely good transport links especially to Manchester and Birmingham and it is close to the Peak District, Staffordshire Moorlands and Shropshire countryside.

The population of the city is predominantly white and working class. Traditionally the largest minority ethnic group has been those of Punjabi speaking Pakistani origin. However, the city has seen significant changes in the composition of its local population in recent years. The well-established African Caribbean and South Asian Communities have been joined by new migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Newcastle-under-Lyme is a market town with a strong mining heritage too and while it shares many of the city’s demographic characteristics has a wealthy rural hinterland. Biddulph is a former mining community on the north eastern fringes of Stoke-on-Trent and the rural Staffordshire Moorlands.

**The Candidate**

The requirements of this particular post are detailed on the attached job description and person specification, against which all candidates will be tested. Primarily though we are looking for someone who cares and we feel it is important that people who join us should be highly motivated.

Working in our team you will be paid on our local pay scale and this involves working at least 37.5 hours per week if you are full time. We believe, however, that commitment cannot be measured in hours alone. If we are to help the public we need to grow as individuals in order to respond to the challenge of improving the lives of some of the poorest and most disadvantaged residents in the area.