

Citizens Advice Rotherham

Rotherham Borough has dealt with some challenging times over the past 10 years, but Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) has turned a lot of the negatives into positives and as a consequence of some great leadership there is a real drive for change and a sense of positivity in the future of our town. The Rotherham Plan is in place and there are now huge investments being made by the council and central government in the town centre and outlying areas. We are seeing more new businesses moving into the area, creating new jobs and training opportunities for local people. A good example of this is the opening of the Gulliver's World, a new theme park being built on regenerated land, that was formerly a factory site. The cost of housing is low, compared to national averages, making Rotherham a really affordable place to live and work.

Founded in 1969 Citizens Advice Rotherham is very much at the heart of our community, supporting local people to access free, independent, confidential and impartial advice and working in partnership with statutory and voluntary sector agencies to make a difference across the borough. We have a strong relationship with RMBC, from whom we receive £212,000 per year core funding to provide a modern advice service, five days per week between 9 and 5pm.

Over the last four years we have been on a mission to improve our advice service offer in order to help more people, focusing much of our service development on hard to reach groups and communities. In 2015/16 we supported about 4500 unique clients, this year we are hoping to support over 12,000. This uplift has been achieved from the hard work and dedication of our paid staff and volunteer team, who work together to deliver a great service. We have also spent time reviewing the client journey and analysing how clients come into contact with us, especially in light of the pandemic and a move to home working that it forced upon us. This has resulted in changes in our advice model to digital by default, allowing us to dramatically cut down waiting times and increase appointment numbers. This has been coupled with an investment in our telephone advice team, allowing us to join the Single Queue pilot run by the national Citizens Advice's Adviceline team, which resulted in a lift of calls answered from 50 per month to 300. We have set an ambitious target of answering 600 calls per month by March 2022.

The last 24 months has seen an increase in the number of projects and new services we are delivering. In April 2020 we were awarded the contract to run Healthwatch Rotherham, supporting local people to really have a voice in the development of their health and social welfare services. We have a new partnership project, working with RotherFed, beginning in January 2021 and funded by the Big Lottery Foundation to support local people to Make their Money Go Further. We were also awarded a 3 year contract to support local people affected by the 2019 South Yorkshire floods.

We are an innovative organisation, constantly looking at how we can develop new advice and information services, to help more vulnerable local people.

Chief Executive Nick Bussey

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Our management team recognises the importance of our people and we invest a lot of time and effort into their welfare and happiness. During the lockdown we have worked hard to help integrate our staff and volunteers into the wider organisation, while working from home. We have done this through morning team zoom meetings, weekly welfare hours, newsletters and ten minute 121's, all of which give us a chance to get to know each other in ways that probably didn't happen when we were all office based. All of this has been well received by our people, resulting in good moral, low staff sickness and high levels of job satisfaction.

As a service we have adopted Generous, Innovative and Responsible as our values and our leadership team works hard to demonstrate those values every day. Before the pandemic hit we would run numerous events eg: we took all our people for a fun awayday to Chatsworth House in the summer, we had a bring your dog to work week and we celebrated our success by having a week of lunches, where every day of that week we provided all our people with a free lunch which we ate together, this made sure part time staff are included. With lockdown curtailing these kind of activities we moved them online, running a big Christmas party via Zoom, where we had a company come in a host a murder mystery event, followed by an online bingo session and everyone was sent a small hamper of food and drink to enjoy on the day. It was a great success.

We want to make Citizens Advice Rotherham a great place to work, but we also want to have fun while we work. It's fair to say that our volunteers and staff support one another, we have a common mission and we work well together as a team to deliver an amazing service to our local community. We hope you want to join us as we seek to help people living and working in Rotherham with good quality advice and information.

Nick Bussey
CEO
17 Dec 2020