

Citizens Advice Sandwell Supporting Inclusion and Equality (CASSIE)

Background

At the year end of 2019/20 the Board agreed to purchase a mobile unit from reserves, with a designated amount of £30,000, with a view to seeking funding to staff the unit during the financial year. When the pandemic struck, we recognised that there was a more urgent need and potential funding from the Coronavirus Community Response Fund (CCRF) in year.

In August 2020 we purchased the unit. CASSIE is a Peugeot Boxer 3.5 Tonne Box Van. Purchased from Torton Bodies Telford.

Originally CASSIE was owned by The Alzheimer's Society as an exhibition vehicle and was already converted. A 2011 vehicle with 144k miles on the clock, 12 months MOT and serviced. Offered for sale at £20,000 plus VAT. Plus £5000 plus VAT for alterations. Due to the size of the vehicle (under 3.5 tonnes) it can be driven by someone with an ordinary Full Driving Licence. We opted for one with a ramp rather than a lift as the maintenance costs are lower.

Costings

Item	Monthly Cost
Insurance	£116.00
Vehicle Tax	£23.00
Vehicle Service	£21.00
Generator Service	£21.00
Fuel	£50.00
MOT	£3.00
Cleaning	£100.00
Depreciation	£500
Monthly total	£834
Annual total (after purchase)	£10,008

We were successful in the CCRF which funded a driver/adviser, plus 2 WTE advisers. The CCRF was a six month project. We have re-applied, however the decision is not going to be known until September 2021. Therefore we fund a full time driver/adviser from reserves until September 2021. The other advisers are from a mixture of projects and volunteers.

Outputs

On average, from October 2020 - March 2021 we saw approximately 80 clients per month.

The top 5 issues are:

Benefits & tax credits

Benefits Universal Credit

Debt

Housing

Consumer goods and services

It is notable that of the Benefits enquiries 95% of them relate to Personal Independence Payments

Venues

Supermarket car parks

Local Parks

Community Centres

Residential Estates

Food Banks

Job Centre car park (pending)

Community events (pending)

Client Feedback

"Brilliant Service, Very Helpful. Very satisfied with the help. More days for the unit, would be a great asset for Tipton"

'Very happy with service, will come back next time'

Happy with what was done for me'

'Found the service to be really friendly and very helpful'

'Happy and satisfied with the help, very knowledgeable'

Practicalities

There is a generator on Board, we have a router, a wifi printer, and general information leaflets.

CASPER will be run from a battery, will have a router and room for a printer. Also boiling water tap for hot drinks on Board.

We regularly use a gazebo for seeing clients (in all weathers)

Below is a press release sent out last year:

1st October 2020

For immediate release

Mobile advice unit CASSIE takes Citizens Advice into Sandwell's communities

Citizens Advice Sandwell is taking to the road to deliver services where people need them the most with CASSIE, its new mobile advice unit.

CASSIE (Citizens Advice Sandwell Supporting Inclusion and Equality) is a van that transforms into a fully accessible mobile office, allowing Citizens Advice workers to meet people at community locations across the six towns of Sandwell, and provide vital outreach services.

For people who would normally use a Citizens Advice drop-in centre, particularly those who struggle to use the phone or internet, CASSIE will allow advisers to provide them with safe, face-to-face support. For those who usually access the internet at a library or internet café –many of which have been closed since March– CASSIE also provides a welcome computer and wi-fi connection, allowing them to apply for benefits, search for jobs or register for housing online.

CASSIE has been created with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, and Citizens Advice Sandwell is working closely with Public Health Sandwell and other local community services to ensure it can support as many people as possible. Venues where you can expect to see CASSIE include hospitals, GP Practices, hostels and sheltered housing.

CASSIE Programme Lead **Michelle Smitten** says,

"We know there are large pockets within our community that have not accessed our support and advice services during the pandemic – in fact, there has been a 50% drop off in clients seeking help for debt issues in Sandwell. This is often due to having no access to IT, but it could also be because of literacy issues, mobility issues, language barriers, or fear and uncertainty around travelling.

"We are expecting a huge spike in people seeking help with debt in the coming months as debt recovery services get back to normal. We are also aware that utility debt was already running at high levels prior to the pandemic and is only going to get worse over winter.

"CASSIE means that we can provide support and advice to those who need it the most, even while our centres are closed. By taking our services into the community, we can offer people somewhere close to home where they can get professional advice, have a safe, socially distanced chat, and make a much-needed connection."

*****ENDS*****

Photos of CASSIE



Cassie on the Road



Fully Assembled



Interview Room



The Waiting Room

We are now buying a second unit, which is a smaller (ish) panel van. CASPER - Citizens Advice Supporting Peoples Economic Recovery.

This cost £10,000 purchase price and is a 2017 model. It is an L3/H2 van - L3 = length / H2 is height

It is currently being converted at a cost of £10,000

The drawings are here:

