



Trustee Board Members Role Description and Person Specification

Coventry Independent Advice Service (CIAS)

Many people in our city are making difficult choices between putting food on the table and paying bills. Many have disabilities and are struggling to meet the additional costs they face. Many are working but find that their low paid and insecure job will not keep their family home properly heated or will not pay for everyday essentials. Many are out of work as a result of illness, redundancy or lack of opportunity. Whatever their situation, and the story behind it, CIAS is here to help make a difference. And we would like you to work with us to help us make that difference.

What we do

Our charity provides free advice, predominantly on benefits and debt issues. We help identify secure their rights to social security, to challenge unfair decisions, to sort out problem debt and to find sources of support if we are not the most appropriate people to help. We are also part of local and national networks, which means we can use the evidence gained from our activity and our impact to influence policy development.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, this service was delivered via community outreach across Coventry. Since March 2020, we have been offering advice and support by telephone and online. We are considering the most effective ways to integrate these new services into our future service offer.

CIAS was formed from the amalgamation of neighbourhood advice centres who have over 30 years' experience of delivering advice and information in Coventry. We operate city-wide and work closely with partners, including libraries, Family Hubs and community centres, to deliver the advice that people need, where they need it.

Our Trustee Board

Good governance is crucial to ensuring we are effective as a charity and that we have a real impact. We also think that boards whose trustees have different backgrounds and experience are more likely to encourage debate and to make better decisions. With your help, we want CIAS to make an even bigger difference

CIAS is governed by a board of trustees, which comprises:

- the chair
- the treasurer
- up to ten other trustees.

The trustee board appoints a vice chair from among the trustees.

The Charities Act 2011 defines charity trustees as those responsible under the charity's governing document for controlling the administration and management of the charity. The role of the trustee board is to receive assets from donors, safeguard them and apply them to the charitable purposes of CIAS. The trustee board must always act in the best interests of CIAS, exercising the same standard of duty of care that a prudent person would apply if looking after the affairs of someone for whom they have responsibility. The trustee board must act as a group and not as individuals.

In addition to being a registered charity, CIAS is a company limited by guarantee and our trustees are registered as directors at Companies House.

Duties as a trustee

CIAS takes good governance seriously. Each individual member of the trustee board has a responsibility to contribute to the discharging of the board's duties. The statutory duties of the board are to:

- ensure that CIAS complies with its governing document (its Articles of Association), charity law, company law and any other relevant legislation or regulations
- ensure that CIAS pursues its objects as defined in its governing document
- ensure CIAS applies its resources exclusively in pursuance of its objects. For example, it must not spend money on activities which are not included in the objects, however worthwhile they may be
- contribute actively to the board of trustees by giving firm strategic direction to CIAS, setting overall policy, defining goals, setting targets, and evaluating performance against agreed targets
- safeguard the good name and values of CIAS
- ensure the financial stability of CIAS.

In addition to the above statutory duties, each trustee should use any specific skills, knowledge or experience they have to help the board of trustees reach sound decisions. This may involve leading discussions, identifying key issues, providing advice and guidance on new initiatives, and evaluating or offering advice on other areas in which the trustee has particular expertise.

This is a voluntary role and trustees receive no remuneration. Trustees are entitled to claim expenses in line with CIAS's expense policy for attendance at board meetings and other CIAS events necessary for the fulfilment of the trustee's duties.

Minimum time commitment

We would normally expect trustees to commit the equivalent of at least four days each year for board meetings, time for reading papers and for our annual general meeting (AGM). New trustees will take part in an induction process and should expect to allocate half a day for this.

We normally hold board meetings six times a year. All board and committee meetings are currently being held virtually due to the social distancing measures introduced by the

government to stop the spread of Covid-19. Ordinarily, board meetings are held at our office in Coventry during office hours. One longer board meeting each year includes the board's away day and is allotted to strategic planning.

Trustees are expected to attend all board meetings. Papers are distributed one week in advance of meetings. Trustees are also invited to the AGM of CIAS, which usually takes place during the daytime in October.

Person specification

Each trustee must have:

- a commitment to the mission of CIAS, including a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion
- a willingness to meet the minimum time requirement
- integrity and good, independent judgement
- an ability to think creatively and strategically
- a willingness to speak their mind
- an understanding and acceptance of the legal duties, responsibilities and liabilities of trusteeship
- an ability to work effectively as a member of a team and to take decisions for the good of CIAS.

The board of trustees collectively needs skills and experience in the following areas.

- Financial management, income generation and marketing
- Public policy and public affairs
- The local voluntary sector
- Lived experience of marginalised groups
- Local government and statutory bodies
- Relevant legal frameworks
- Delivering digital products and services
- Human resource management
- Volunteering leadership and management
- Impact reporting

Why be a Trustee?

- Being a trustee is a unique form of volunteering that can bring a range of challenges and rewards.
- It can help your professional and personal development, offering an opportunity to develop skills while helping a charity that has real meaning for you.
- You will work with a range of people from different backgrounds, thereby helping to extend your networks and bring a sense of fulfilment.

If you have read this far and are still interested, please email alan.markey@covadvice.org.uk to set up an informal discussion.