

**STAFFORDSHIRE  
& CHESHIRE**

# **SALARY & RECRUITMENT GUIDE 2026:**



Wage Alignment, Skill Shortages  
and Practical Planning

**appointments.**  
Recruitment. It's in our DNA



# Table of Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>WELCOME</b> .....	<b>03</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>KEY MARKET SNAPSHOT</b> .....	<b>04</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>KEY INSIGHTS</b> .....	<b>05</b>
	Statutory Wage Movement.....	05
	Hiring Patterns.....	06
	Benefits.....	07
	Working Arrangements.....	08
<b>4</b>	<b>MANUFACTURING</b> .....	<b>09</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>ACCOUNTANCY &amp; FINANCE</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>OFFICE SUPPORT</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>RECRUITMENT IN 2026</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>SALARY TABLES</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>KEY TAKEAWAYS</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>THANK YOU</b> .....	<b>24</b>

# Welcome

If the last few years have shown us anything, it's that the labour market rarely stays the same for long. But the conversations we're having with employers across Staffordshire and Cheshire this year feels noticeably different.

Twelve months ago, much of the focus was on the transition from remote and hybrid working back to more office-based environments, alongside ongoing concerns around the availability of quality candidates. Many businesses were still adjusting to changing workplace expectations while trying to attract and retain the right people. Those pressures haven't disappeared entirely. But what we're hearing from many local businesses now is a shift in focus.

With the April statutory wage increase approaching, most employers already understand the headline figures. The bigger question we're hearing in conversations is what those changes mean for the wider pay structure. For many SMEs, this isn't just about updating minimum pay levels, but carefully considering how those increases affect progression, supervisory pay gaps and the overall affordability of their salary structures. Not just for entry-level roles, but across teams.

Many SMEs are stepping back and reviewing how pay aligns across roles, looking at supervisor differentials, progression bands, and whether existing structures still make sense once the new rates take effect. In other words, the conversation is becoming less about simply filling roles, and more about making sure the structure behind those roles still works.

At the same time, employees continue to weigh more than salary alone. Flexible working is top along with job satisfaction, stability and the working environment.

This guide reflects what we are seeing locally, not just in data, but in the practical realities of hiring and retention across our region. We've combined national context with regional insight to help you review structure calmly and confidently.

## This guide will help local employers:

- Benchmark salaries across Staffordshire and Cheshire
- Understand the impact of April wage changes
- Review pay progression and internal salary structures
- Plan recruitment strategy for the year ahead

As always, if you would like to discuss what this means specifically for your business, we're here to help.



**Kerry Bonfiglio-Bains**  
Founder

**Emma Bonfiglio**  
Managing Director

# Labour Market Snapshot — 2026

A quick overview of the key figures shaping hiring and pay decisions across our region this year, drawn from our regional employer and employee surveys combined with national labour market data.

## 60%

Local employers say recruiting experienced staff remains difficult

## 1 in 4

Employees considered moving jobs in the last 12 months

## 6–8 wks

Average time to recruit professional roles

## 40%

Employees prefer hybrid working arrangements

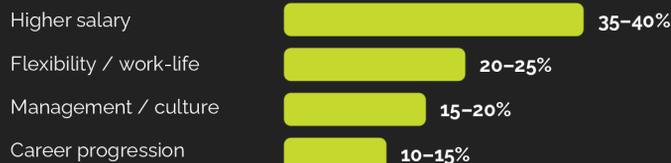
## 77%

Employers expect wage increases to impact cost base

## £26,400

Approximate annual salary at NLW from April 2026

### Why employees are leaving — a mix of factors



### What We Are Seeing Locally

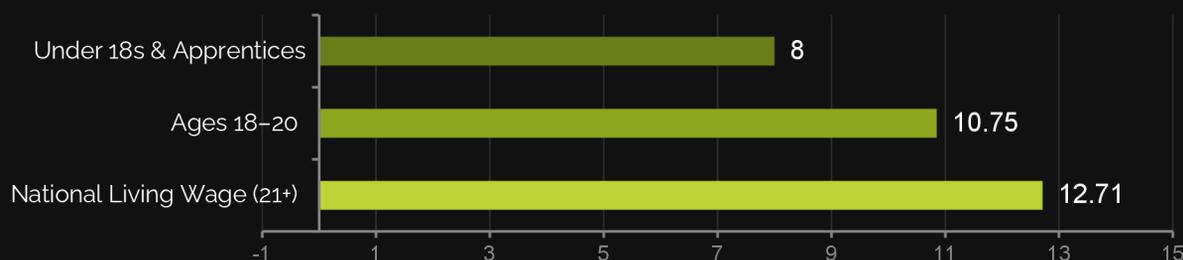
- Average hours: 37.5 for office support, 40 for manufacturing
- More flexible start/finish time arrangements
- Annual leave aligning with 25 days minimum; sell/buy-back schemes growing
- Professional roles: mid management upwards expect flexibility and at least 1 to 2 days working from home.
- Smaller businesses increasingly valuing medical cover as a benefit

# Key Insights

## 1. Statutory Wage Movement

From 1 April 2026, new minimum wage rates apply.

### National Minimum Wage Rates from 1 April 2026



Source: ACAS – National Minimum Wage Entitlement

### Annual salary at NLW (£12.71/hr) by working pattern:

**£24,783**

37.5 hrs/wk

**£26,435**

40 hrs/wk

**£28,087**

42.5 hrs/wk

*\*Data drawn from 12 months of recorded placements and locally gathered rates across Staffordshire and Cheshire*

The headline rate of £12.71 per hour moves entry-level full-time pay above £26,400 annually. For many local employers, the challenge isn't the uplift itself. It's how that uplift interacts with existing pay bands and the overall cost impact this creates across teams and departments. As entry pay rises, the space between levels naturally tightens. That prompts sensible questions around progression, supervisor differentials and internal fairness, particularly where businesses are balancing competitive pay with the realities of operating costs.

At the same time, the new baseline is also shaping candidate expectations. As statutory pay rises, many skilled candidates increasingly view this level as a starting point rather than a differentiator, placing greater emphasis on progression opportunities, job stability, working environment and overall reward packages. This year, wage movement is influencing structure just as much as it is influencing recruitment budgets.

## 2. Hiring Patterns

Recruitment activity locally remains active, but the focus has shifted. Entry-level roles often generate applications. Skilled and supervisory roles continue to require more targeted effort.

For skilled and supervisory roles, candidate movement has slowed significantly. Experienced professionals are less likely to move without a compelling reason, making these positions harder to fill and requiring more proactive recruitment approaches.

### Employers are increasingly prioritising Long-term fit, Stability, Progression potential, and Cultural alignment

Rather than simply filling vacancies quickly, many businesses are thinking more carefully about the shape of their teams.

Hiring cycles may not feel chaotic, but they are more selective.

**58%**

Of employers planned to increase headcount (2025 survey)

**8 weeks**

Average time to hire for professional roles, up from 6 weeks

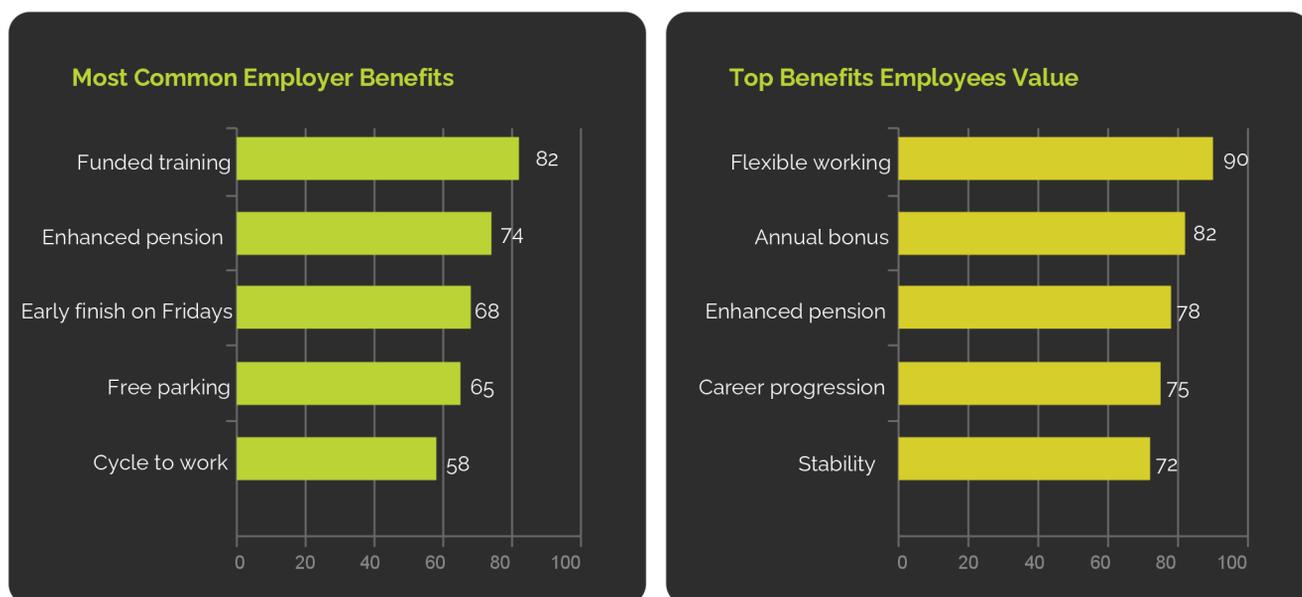
### Hiring Insight

*Over half of local employers report losing candidates or existing staff. The reasons are increasingly mixed – higher salary offers remain a factor, but hybrid working expectations, hours and overall working conditions are all contributing to staff movement. Speed and clarity in the hiring process have become competitive advantages.*

### 3. Benefits

Salary remains important, but benefits continue to influence decision-making in ways that are not always obvious at first glance.

Our regional survey data highlights a gap between what employers commonly offer and what employees most value. This tells an important story.

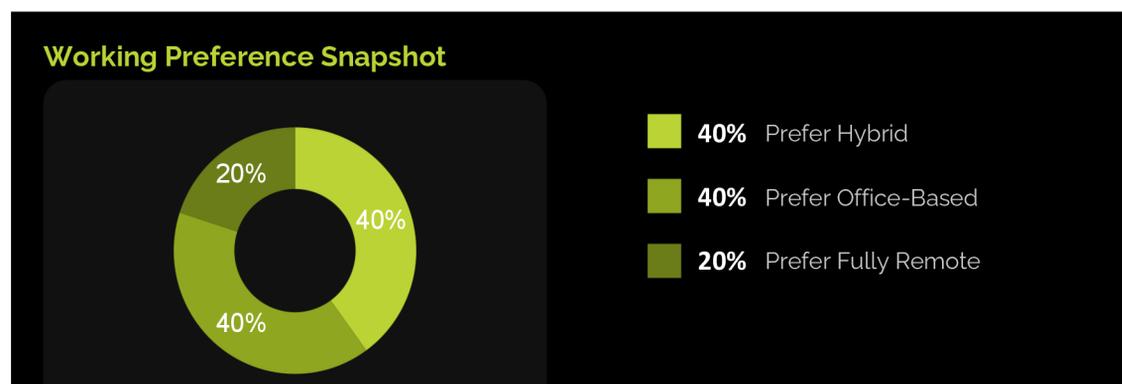


Many employers are already offering thoughtful benefits, but what employees consistently prioritise is flexibility and visible progression. At the same time, there is often a careful balance for businesses between what they can realistically offer and the expectations candidates may bring to the table.

The difference between attraction and retention often lies in how clearly those benefits are structured, communicated and aligned with both business realities and employee expectations.

## 4. Working Arrangements: No Single Model Wins

Working preferences across the region remain split, with very few candidates locally now seeking fully remote roles.



Interestingly, while national discussions still reference fully remote working, our local experience tells a slightly different story. **Over the last 12 months, we have taken on no fully remote vacancies, reflecting how most businesses in the region continue to operate with either office-based or hybrid models.**

For local SMEs, that balance presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Some roles, particularly in manufacturing and production, naturally require on-site presence, while others allow greater flexibility.

Where possible, it is increasingly important for businesses and candidates to meet somewhere in the middle on flexibility, as this can help prevent employers from losing strong, skilled candidates to organisations able to offer a more adaptable working pattern.

What appears to matter most is clarity. When expectations are clear from the outset — whether fully on-site or hybrid — dissatisfaction reduces. When working models feel inconsistent or reactive, movement increases.

In many cases, stability and transparency outweigh the exact number of remote days.

# Manufacturing Workforce Pressures

Manufacturing employers across Staffordshire and Cheshire continue to face skills shortages, rising wage expectations, and increasing payroll costs.

The National Minimum Wage increase is driving a reset in market expectations. Most businesses are planning 5–8% pay increases to remain competitive. We are also seeing a clear shift in candidate perception: **Anything below £13 per hour is increasingly viewed as “minimum wage,” weakening employer positioning.**

## Impact on Pay Structures

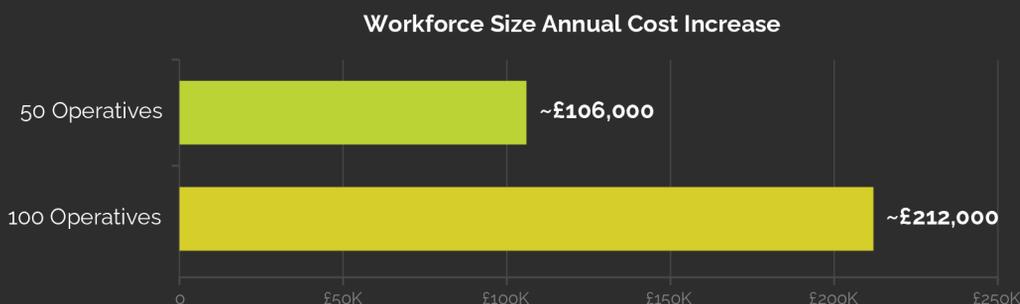
Traditional progression (Operator → Senior → Team Leader → Supervisor) is under pressure as wage gaps narrow. Employers are needing to: uplift entry-level rates, maintain progression differentials and balance attraction, retention, and internal equity.

### Payroll Impact Illustration — April 2026

The example below shows the annual payroll impact of an 8% increase, assuming a base pay rate of £12.71 per hour.

#### Assumptions:

- 8% uplift = £1.02 per hour
- 40 hours per week, 52 weeks
- Excludes employer NI and pension



**Key Takeaway:** Even modest increases can result in significant cost growth, making pay strategy critical.

# Accountancy & Finance

*Steady demand, selective candidates*

The finance market locally has remained steady rather than volatile.

Demand continues for Management Accountants, Finance Managers and commercially aware part-qualified candidates. The difference in 2026 is candidate selectivity.

Professionals are evaluating opportunities carefully. Reporting lines, exposure to decision-making, study support and progression clarity are increasingly central to decision-making.

Salary remains important, but structure and transparency carry significant weight.

*We are also seeing hiring cycles extend. **Where recruitment once concluded in six weeks, eight weeks is increasingly common.** For SMEs without extensive internal HR resource, that extension can feel frustrating, particularly when operational pressure remains constant.*

## Accountancy & Finance Hiring Conditions

**8 weeks**

Current Avg. Time-to-Hire

**6 weeks**

Previously

Source: TotalJobs  
Hiring Trends 2025

*Where roles are clearly structured and decision-making is decisive, hiring tends to progress smoothly. Where reporting lines or progression feel unclear, strong candidates may hesitate.*

Transactional finance roles such as Purchase Ledger, Sales Ledger, Accounts Assistant and Credit Control, are proving exceptionally difficult to fill locally. Demand is high, salaries are increasing, and there is a genuine shortage of candidates.

We are placing transactional roles starting from 28k upwards. In particular, we are seeing challenges where employers expect candidates with strong transactional finance experience for salaries around £27,000.

With the National Minimum Wage now sitting much closer to that level, many candidates feel the gap between entry-level pay and skilled transactional roles is no longer sufficient and are therefore seeking higher salaries to reflect their experience and responsibility.

For employers, this means benchmarking these roles carefully and recognising that what may have been considered entry-level positions now require competitive salaries and clear role definitions to attract suitable candidates.

## What this means for finance hiring locally

### 1. Candidates are choosing, not chasing

Strong finance professionals are weighing up multiple opportunities. If a role lacks structure, visibility or progression, they will quickly lose interest.

### 2. Delays are costing you hires

Hiring timelines may be extending overall, but slow decision-making between stages is where candidates are being lost to more decisive employers.

### 3. "Entry-level" expectations need to reset

Transactional roles are in short supply and high demand. Competitive salaries and clearly defined roles are now required to attract and retain the right people.

# Office Support

*Roles have broadened—has benchmarking kept pace?*

Office Support roles across Staffordshire and Cheshire have broadened quietly.

What was once primarily administrative now frequently includes systems oversight, CRM management, reporting and cross-team coordination.

Where benchmarking has not kept pace with that expanded scope, vacancies tend to remain open longer than expected.

## General Admin / Office / CS

Typically office-based. Employers expect these roles to be in the office full-time. Standard hours of 37.5 per week are common.

## Marketing / HR / Senior Admin

More specialist roles where hybrid working is increasingly expected. Candidates for these positions typically expect 2 days at home, 3 in the office.

## Client vs Candidate Expectations

We are seeing a significant gap between what employers expect and what candidates want. Employers often want full-time office presence and broad multi-tasking.

Candidates want flexibility, clear role boundaries, and salaries reflecting expanded scope of modern office support roles. Bridging this gap is one of the biggest recruitment challenges in this sector locally.

## Practically, what this means for local SMEs

It's worth reviewing these roles based on responsibility rather than historical title.

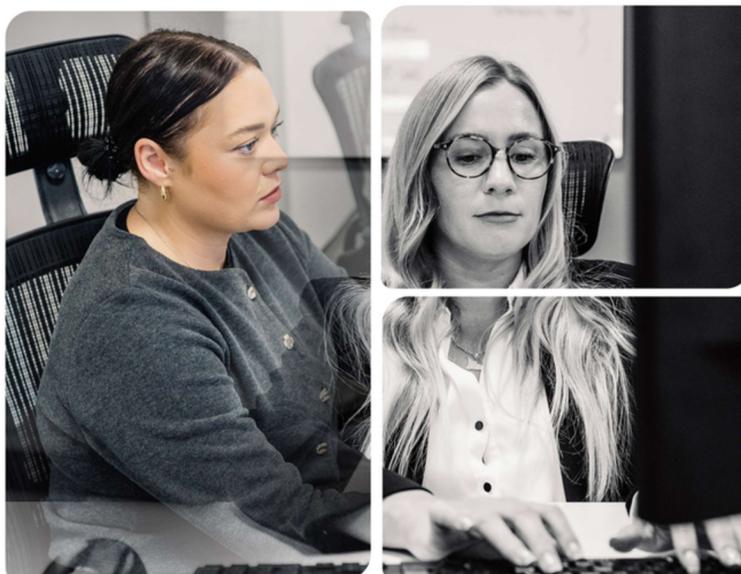
If administrative roles now include systems management or reporting accountability, ensure that is reflected clearly in both benchmarking and advert copy.

Where flexibility is operationally possible, even small adjustments can widen your candidate pool.

And as with other sectors, clarity and structure consistently outperform vague role definitions.

### What we are seeing locally in Office Support

- Roles expanding beyond traditional admin into systems and reporting
- Benchmarking often lags behind actual responsibility
- Hybrid flexibility significantly widens candidate pools



# Recruitment in 2026

## *More Applications, More Complexity*

Online job boards have made advertising vacancies easier than ever. Many employers now begin their recruitment process by posting roles on platforms such as Indeed, often receiving a large number of applications within a short period.

However, while application numbers have increased, the process of identifying and securing the right candidate has become significantly more complex.

Applying for roles now takes only a few minutes, which means candidates often apply for multiple positions simultaneously. Employers frequently need to review a large volume before identifying a small shortlist of suitable candidates.

Across many roles locally, employers report that only around 20–30% of applications meet the core requirements, meaning significant time must be spent screening before interviews begin.

### The Reality of Hiring in 2026

**10–15%**

Meet criteria

**Over 47%**

No-shows

**30%**

Offers declined

### Why This Matters for Employers

While posting a vacancy online may take only a few minutes, the recruitment process that follows can require significant time and coordination.

Employers who approach recruitment with a clear process, realistic timelines and well-defined roles are far more likely to secure the right candidate before opportunities are lost.

# SALARY TABLES

The salary tables that follow are designed to support structured pay reviews and recruitment planning ahead of April's statutory changes.

They should be used to:

- Review internal pay alignment
- Model compression exposure
- Benchmark specialist roles
- Plan recruitment strategy for hard-to-fill positions

**Employers who prepare early and benchmark carefully will be better positioned over the coming year.**

## NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE

CATEGORY	NMW RATE FROM APRIL 2026	INCREASE (£)	INCREASE (%)
National Living Wage (21 and over)	£12.71	50p	4.1%
18-20 Year Old Rate	£10.85	85p	8.5%
16-17 Year Old Rate	£8.00	45p	6.0%
Apprentice Rate	£8.00	45p	6.0%

# ACCOUNTING & FINANCE

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Finance Director	£79,014.60	£87,794.00	£100,963.10
Financial Controller	£52,705.80	£58,562.00	£67,346.30
Finance Manager	£40,219.20	£44,688.00	£51,391.20
Group Finance Manager	£44,688.00	£47,482.00	£51,391.20
Management Accountant	£37,930.50	£42,145.00	£48,466.75
Financial Analyst	£41,184.00	£45,760.00	£52,624.00
Finance Officer	£32,741.00	£33,317.00	£38,314.55
Bookkeeper	£26,384.40	£29,316.00	£33,713.40
Accounts Assistant	£27,000.00	£28,811.00	£33,132.65
Credit Controller	£27,520.00	£28,378.00	£32,634.70
Purchase Ledger Clerk r	£26,725.00	£27,473.00	£31,593.95
Payroll Specialist	£30,752.10	£34,169.00	£39,294.35
Payroll Coordinator	£30,039.50	£31,155.00	£35,828.25

# MANUFACTURING

## Engineering

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Quality Engineer	£34,783.20	£38,648.00	£44,445.20
Electronics Design Engineer	£40,389.30	£44,877.00	£51,608.55
Technical Support Engineer	£32,910.00	£34,169.00	£37,846.50
Field Service Engineer	£44,170.00	£46,827.00	£53,851.05
Service Engineer	£33,057.00	£36,730.00	£42,239.50
Design Engineer	£34,668.00	£38,520.00	£44,298.00

## H&S & Quality

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Quality & Sustainability Manager	£43,136.05	£47,969.00	£55,164.35
Health, Safety and Environment Officer	£32,594.40	£36,216.00	£41,648.40
Quality Coordinator	£34,214.00	£36,451.00	£41,918.65
QHSE Officer	£39,882.60	£44,314.00	£50,961.10

## Manufacturing & Production

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Factory Manager	£60,031.80	£66,702.00	£76,707.30
Warehouse Manager	£32,570.00	£35,812.00	£41,183.80
Production Manager	£43,743.60	£48,604.00	£55,894.60
Production Supervisor / Team Leader	£30,281.40	£33,646.00	£38,692.90
Warehouse Supervisor / Team Leader	£30,264.00	£32,405.00	£37,265.75
Production Planner	£30,330.00	£33,700.00	£38,755.00

## MANUFACTURING (CONT.)

### Manufacturing & Production (cont.)

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Production Scheduler	£30,330.00	£33,700.00	£38,755.00
Maintenance Technician	£32,847.30	£36,497.00	£41,971.55
CNC Operative	£27,829.00	£29,587.00	£34,025.05
Production Operative	£26,978.00	£28,420.00	£32,683.00
Warehouse Operative	£26,919.00	£27,952.00	£32,144.80
Sprayer	£27,978.30	£31,087.00	£35,750.05
Welder	£26,602.20	£29,558.00	£34,600.00

# OFFICE SUPPORT

## Customer Service/Contact Centre

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Head of Customer Care	£55,131.30	£61,257.00	£70,445.55
Customer Service Manager	£35,713.00	£41,090.00	£47,253.50
Customer Service Specialist	£27,923.00	£30,470.00	£35,040.50
Sales and Customer Service Advisor	£27,800.00	£29,470.00	£33,890.50
Logistics Customer Services Coordinator	£27,120.00	£30,148.00	£34,670.20
Customer Service Advisor	£27,059.00	£28,124.00	£32,342.60
Customer Service / Sales Administrator	£26,325.00	£27,120.00	£30,273.75

## Office Support

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Executive Assistant	£40,459.00	£46,527.85	£53,507.03
Office Manager	£30,405.00	£32,673.00	£37,573.95
Office Administrator	£28,932.00	£29,303.15	£33,698.62
Logistics Coordinator	£27,338.40	£30,376.00	£34,932.40
Transport Administrator/Planner	£27,027.00	£30,030.00	£34,534.50
Order Processor	£27,004.00	£28,081.00	£32,293.15
Warehouse Administrator/Coordinator	£29,530.80	£32,812.00	£37,733.80

# HUMAN RESOURCES

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
HR Director	£68,184.00	£75,760.00	£87,124.00
HR Business Partner	£45,797.00	£52,666.00	£60,565.90
HR Manager	£37,252.00	£42,839.00	£49,264.85
Talent/Resourcing Manager	£37,562.40	£41,736.00	£47,996.40
Training Manager	£35,457.00	£39,064.00	£44,923.60
HR Officer	£28,601.00	£32,172.00	£36,997.80
HR Advisor	£29,106.00	£32,340.00	£37,191.00
Talent/Resourcing Advisor	£28,846.00	£32,607.00	£37,498.05
HR Coordinator	£30,121.00	£33,377.00	£38,383.55
HR Assistant/Administrator	£27,763.00	£31,642.00	£33,388.00

# MARKETING

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Marketing Director	£78,934.50	£87,705.00	£100,860.75
Marketing Manager	£45,264.00	£53,000.00	£62,147.00
Marketing Coordinator	£28,631.00	£32,925.00	£37,863.75
Marketing Executive	£27,334.00	£29,261.00	£33,650.15
Digital Marketing Manager	£41,156.00	£44,430.00	£47,751.00
SEO Manager	£34,284.60	£38,094.00	£43,808.10
Social Media and Marketing Executive	£26,759.00	£28,808.00	£30,772.85
Content Marketing Specialist	£28,676.00	£29,640.00	£34,086.00

## SALES & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

JOB TITLE	LOWER	AVERAGE	UPPER
Sales Director	£69,398.10	£77,109.00	£88,675.35
Sales Manager	£44,459.10	£49,399.00	£56,808.85
Internal Sales Manager	£33,801.30	£37,557.00	£43,190.55
Business Development Manager	£35,022.60	£38,914.00	£44,751.10
Sales Executive UK	£32,214.60	£35,794.00	£41,163.10
Technical Sales Estimator	£36,087.30	£40,097.00	£46,111.55
Product Brand Manager	£36,099.90	£40,111.00	£46,127.65
UK B2B Account Manager	£30,907.80	£34,342.00	£39,493.30
Technical Sales Advisor	£28,115.00	£29,303.00	£32,332.25
Internal Sales Executive	£28,749.60	£31,944.00	£36,735.60
Appointment Setter	£27,359.10	£30,399.00	£34,958.85
Sales Administrator	£26,400.00	£27,359.00	£31,462.85
Sales Coordinator	£26,400.00	£27,269.00	£31,359.35

# Key Takeaways & Recommendations

**1****Review pay structures, not just minimum salaries.**

April wage increases are compressing pay bands, so progression gaps between entry-level, supervisory and skilled roles should be reviewed carefully.

**2****Expect stronger salary expectations in skilled support roles.**

As National Minimum Wage rises, candidates in transactional and operational roles increasingly expect a clearer financial step above entry-level pay..

**3****Balance competitiveness with affordability.**

For many SMEs the challenge is not simply increasing salaries, but managing the wider cost impact across teams while maintaining fair internal pay structures.

**4****Clarity improves hiring outcomes.**

Roles with clear reporting lines, progression routes and working expectations consistently attract stronger engagement from candidates.

**5****Flexibility where possible supports attraction and retention.**

Fully remote roles remain rare locally, but employers able to offer structured hybrid or flexible arrangements may widen their candidate pool and reduce hiring friction.

# Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to read our 2026 Staffordshire & Cheshire Salary & Recruitment Guide.

We appreciate the insight and feedback we continue to receive from employers and employees across the region. Your openness helps shape guides like this and keeps them grounded in local reality.

If you would like to review your salary structure, benchmark a specific role or simply sense-check your recruitment plans for the year ahead, we are always happy to have a conversation.

**Kerry Bonfiglio-Bains**  
Founder

**Emma Bonfiglio**  
Managing Director

