Our vision

We have a vision of a world in which older people flourish. This means a world in which older people will:

• be equal citizens with equal rights
• have enough money for a secure and decent life, and have access as consumers to the products and services they need at a price they can afford
• have access to the healthcare and social care they need
• have the opportunity to live healthier, longer lives and to enjoy a sense of wellbeing
• live in homes and neighbourhoods that are safe and comfortable and which enable them to lead fulfilling lives
• have opportunities to participate and contribute as volunteers, active citizens, good neighbours, family members and workers
• enjoy the benefits of longer life, wherever they are in the world.

Age UK’s role

To meet our vision Age UK is a powerful voice campaigning for change. With our partners, we also:

• deliver trusted information and advice to more than 6 million people each year
• enable many more people to benefit from new technologies
• provide practical support to help people stay independent at home
• create local opportunities for people to enjoy life, stay well and beat isolation
• address market failures with age-friendly services, products and business partnerships
• commission research to tackle ill-health and boost quality of life
• work globally to help over a million people and their dependants in developing countries.

Food Shopping in Later Life

Barriers and service solutions
Acknowledgements

Age UK is grateful to the many people who contributed to this report.

Charlotte Jones who undertook the literature research and surveys with local Age UKs, and drafted the report.

Phil Wells, Gwen Glover, Yvonne Lee, Ellie Boon, Richard Stowell and Nicky Openshaw who completed our survey on the shopping services offered by local Age UKs.

The older people who attended the focus groups held in Oxford and Newcastle in 2010 and those attending the focus group in Southwark in 2012.

Paul Cann of Age UK Oxfordshire, Sue Pearson of Age UK Newcastle and Ros Blockstrom-Mulder of Southwark Pensioners’ Centre for arranging and hosting the focus groups.

June 2012

Contents

Introduction 2

Recommendations 4

Barriers to food shopping for older people 6

Difficulties in getting to food shops 6

Difficulties in-store 7

Shopping for one 8

Age-unfriendly packaging 9

Bad weather 11

Online shopping 11

How local Age UK food shopping services can help 12

Types of shopping service provided by local Age UKs 14

Age UK Norwich: shopping service 16

Age UK Isle of Wight: Good Neighbour Scheme 18

Age UK Oldham: shopping service and Safe at Home 21

Age UK Bromley & Greenwich: shopping service 24

Age UK Berkshire: Easy Shop 28

Age UK York: Net Neighbours 30

Notes 33
Introduction

We need to eat well as we get older. Being in control of what you eat and the food you purchase is an important part of living independently.

The majority of older people are independent and able, and increasing numbers continue to live in their own homes. Currently, approaching 2.5 million people aged 75 and over live alone. However, for some older people, living alone can lead to isolation, depression and difficulties in getting access to food.

The consequences of eating badly or not eating enough can be very serious for older people. Weight loss and low body weight is a form of malnutrition. It is not an inevitable effect of ageing, but many changes associated with ageing can promote malnutrition. For example, many older people have a poor appetite.

It is estimated that as many as one in ten over-65s living in their own homes are at risk of malnutrition. Malnutrition has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of older people. It increases the risk of getting ill and being admitted to hospital. It also slows recovery and can even be fatal.

Being able to shop for food is an important aspect of staying well and independent as we age. It is also a chance to get out and about. However, 19 per cent of people aged 65 and over report that they have a longstanding illness that prevents them from shopping or makes it difficult for them.

This report looks at some of the barriers to food shopping facing older people, and at some of the shopping services run by local Age UKs to help older people surmount these barriers. It also looks at the part that retailers can play. Many retailers are committed to investing in their local communities through their corporate social responsibility programmes. On pages 4–5 we recommend some simple steps that the retail industry can take to make life a little easier for their older customers.
Almost one in five of the UK population is now over State Pension age, and older households spend £109 billion each year. Retailers can attract and retain older customers by using the following measures.

**Making stores fully accessible**
- Review store designs to make them easier to get around and reduce the risk of slips and trips.
- Out-of-town stores should consider offering transport to their stores.
- Train staff about the needs of older customers – for example, helping them to read labels, getting items from top and bottom shelves and from deep freezers.
- Provide more rest areas and toilets, and ask customers where they would find them most helpful.

**Helping older people to buy online**
- Offer internet training for older people in the local area.
- When delivering orders, offer to help older people put shopping away.
- Structure minimum spends and delivery charges so that they do not deter older people who may not spend large amounts at one time.

**Using retailers’ buying power to meet older people’s needs**
- Consider special offers targeted at older people (and others) who cannot benefit from multi-buy discounts.
- Offer smaller packages of perishable food to suit single households.
- Changes to food packaging could make it easier to open.
- Important information such as cooking instructions and ‘use by’ dates should be in a font and colour contrast that make it easily readable.

---

**Working with your local Age UK**
Local Age UKs offer different services to meet the needs of local people, but some ideas to consider include:
- opening up a store to a local Age UK shopping service – e.g. Age UK Oldham and their local Co-op store (see page 21)
- advertising volunteer opportunities to store staff
- raising awareness of Age UK services through store notice boards or other communication
- hosting information and advice sessions
- offering a retail loyalty scheme for Age UK shopping services
- providing a severe weather service whereby vulnerable older people in the local community are provided with food essentials when they are unable to get out to food stores.
**Barriers to food shopping for older people**

**Difficulties in getting to food shops**

While only 8 per cent of those aged 60–64 have difficulty shopping for groceries, this rises to 19 per cent for those aged 80–84 and 60 per cent for those aged over 90. Six per cent of those aged 70 years and over have mobility difficulties. For many older people it can be difficult getting to a shop, particularly for those living in rural areas as they have further to travel. Only 52 per cent of those aged 70+ hold a full driving licence and many struggle using free public transport facilities and find taxis largely unaffordable. Bereaved women are particularly likely to be affected by this issue, as they may previously have relied on their partner to drive them to the shops. Twenty-three per cent of people aged 65 and over have difficulty accessing a bus stop and 25 per cent have problems finding a seat on buses and standing up for long periods of time. Furthermore, carrying goods can be difficult: 41 per cent of older people have difficulty carrying their shopping home. These mobility difficulties can influence a switch in loyalty between different types of store. Older people who find it difficult to get to large out-of-town supermarkets are likely to use local corner shops.

**Difficulties in-store**

Once in-store, older people may have difficulty with poor store layout, particularly narrow aisles and poor shelf signposting, shelves that are too high or low, a lack of adequate rest and toilet facilities and deep trolleys and freezers that make it difficult to get shopping out. These findings were confirmed in all the focus groups we ran for this project. ‘After shopping I sometimes need to sit down for a minute or need to sort my bags out before carrying them home, but there are often not enough seats.’ In larger stores, older people reported having some difficulty in finding a member of staff who is willing to help them. As a result, groceries may be purchased at an outlet with a higher level of service quality in comparison to other retailers even if prices are higher. Many people in the focus groups did not like to ask staff for help but when they did their experience with staff helpfulness varied. ‘Staff often point to or give directions to products but it would be better if they could take me to them.’ A particular problem highlighted by the focus group in Southwark was feeling unsure when using self-service checkouts. They felt there were not enough staff available to give them confidence to use them.
Shopping for one

Over one-third of people aged 65 and over (3.7 million people), and half of everybody aged 75 and over live alone, compared to 16 per cent of all adults. Yet the retail world appears to be targeted at larger household units, increasing the costs for single people. A particular example that causes much dissatisfaction among older people is the widespread use of buy-one-get-one-free offers (BOGOF) and similar multi-buy deals that offer discounts for buying in bulk. For those who either live alone or aren’t able to carry a lot, these offers are seen as making food shopping more expensive and increasing the difficulty of shopping in small quantities.

BOGOFs came in for particularly virulent criticism in the focus groups. The Southwark group, which only had single pensioners, was critical that such offers were impractical for them to purchase because as well as adding weight they often could not be consumed within the sell-by date.

This group also found that food was often sold in portions too large for older people living on their own. As a result they often have to have the same food for three days in a row to avoid wastage. While this mainly related to fresh produce such as meat, fruit and vegetables, some members also found the same applied to some tinned produce. ‘I want to eat a healthy diet and know it is important to eat a variety of foods but the size of the portions foods are sold in makes this difficult to do.’

The retail world appears to be targeted at larger household units, increasing the costs for single people.

Over one-third of people aged 65 and over (3.7 million people), and half of everybody aged 75 and over live alone.

Age-unfriendly packaging

Many older adults find there is too much packaging on products and find it hard to open their purchases. Opening jars and tins is particularly problematic. All the focus groups confirmed they had problems opening packaging. Cans, vacuum sealed containers, cartons, and childproof bottles were all given as examples of products that are hard to open. Some also found ring-pulls difficult despite the fact that these are supposed to make tins easier to open: ‘It would be great to have a gadget to help me open products, particularly those products with child-safety devices.’

All the focus groups agreed they had difficulty with information and instructions on food packaging. As well as the print being too small, the Southwark group commented that many of the use-by dates are printed too faint or there was insufficient colour contrast.

Many older adults find there is too much packaging on products and find it hard to open their purchases.

Yoghurt and cream were cited as examples where there was poor colour contrast on packaging, making people unsure whether they were still safe to eat. The group also commented that the cooking instructions were often hard to locate on the packaging.

All the focus groups commented on the language used on the packaging. The Southwark group were particularly health-conscious and obviously read the ingredients on the labels before buying. Many of them were frustrated by the fact that the ingredients were written in complex scientific language, making it difficult to know what the food actually contained, thus preventing them pursuing a healthy lifestyle: ‘I’d much prefer it if all food products stated the ingredients of produce clearly and put how much fat, sugar and salt there is in the food in a large bold print.’
Bad weather
More older people are admitted to hospital with malnutrition in the winter than in other seasons. This increase in malnutrition may be due to the fact that older people simply cannot get out of the house or are afraid to go shopping due to the increased risk of falls. Research has found that a large number of people stated that they had difficulty getting to and waiting at bus stops in bad weather. Furthermore, those that rely on food deliveries from others are less likely to receive them.

A large number of people stated that they had difficulty getting to and waiting at bus stops in bad weather.

Online shopping
Shopping online has become commonplace but 41 per cent of people aged 65–74, and 72 per cent of those aged 75+ have never used the internet. The cost of equipment and internet charges may be prohibitive for some older people, while problems with poor eyesight and arthritis or other dexterity issues also play a part.

Even those who are able to use online shopping may fear online scams and therefore veer away from these services. Furthermore, these online shopping methods often lack the social interaction experienced in-store that older people value greatly.

One member of the Southwark group used a telephone delivery service mainly due to sight deterioration and not being able to use the internet service. This service was very valuable to them because they had no real alternative to doing most of their shopping in person.

However, with both online and telephone shopping, older people ordering small quantities will have to pay a delivery charge that adds to the cost of food, particularly if they, as many do, order weekly: ‘Some services only offer free delivery with a £100 shop. I don’t spend enough to qualify for this as I live alone and eat less now I am older.’
Many local Age UKs run shopping services, some examples of which are given in Chapter 5. They provide a range of benefits to the people that use them, including the following.

**Prevention of malnutrition** – These services play a vital role in keeping malnutrition at bay by overcoming the difficulties older people face that often contribute to under-nourishment, such as lack of transport, store inaccessibility and social isolation.\(^\text{19, 20}\)

**Reduction in social isolation** – Many of the people using food shopping services are housebound or live alone and have little social interaction with others. The examples in this guide show that feelings of loneliness and isolation are reduced by having regular contact with Age UK project workers, supermarket delivery workers or by meeting other older people who also use the food shopping scheme.

**Monitoring** – Many of the food shopping services cited here also play a key role in monitoring and maintaining the wellbeing of their clients. Many services will help individuals put their shopping away, talk to them about any problems and refer them to other services if necessary. Often Age UK employees and volunteers or supermarket delivery staff will check for environmental hazards and personal safety.

**Enabling independence** – Shopping services allow older people to remain living in their own homes without depending on friends or family to do their food shopping for them. This is particularly important for those living in rural areas.

As well as the benefits to older people in the community, local retailers also benefit from these schemes. Age UK food shopping services are usually loyal to their nearby stores and often use them many times a week.

However, shopping services face a number of challenges.

**Funding** – Many services struggle to provide a high-quality service while keeping the cost down for clients. Many have either lost or had their funding reduced recently due to local authority spending cuts. Additionally, those that receive funding often have contracts with fixed time limits. As a result, when the funding period is coming to an end there is considerable uncertainty regarding the future of the service.

**Restricted reach** – Because of the funding difficulties, shopping services may struggle to meet demand, or – conversely – fail to reach those who may benefit because of a lack of money to advertise their services. Many service providers believe that backing from local retailers would increase their reach and impact, while also providing sustainable income for the retailer.

**Costs of small orders** – Shopping is often made more expensive for service users, many of whom live alone, because in-store offers are often multi-buys, making shopping in small quantities difficult and more expensive. Age UKs that run internet-based services also report that delivery charges are often too high for older people on a limited budget who do not buy enough to qualify for free delivery. Many of the Age UK shopping services have to charge administration fees on top of the store delivery fee in order to fund the service, thereby increasing the cost.
There is no single model of Age UK shopping service. In this chapter we give six examples of shopping services, but overall they fall into three broad categories.

1 Escorted services – Many local Age UKs run escorted food shopping services for those who are mobile enough to go out and do their own shopping but just need a little extra assistance with transport to and getting around food stores. These services can be one-to-one schemes whereby Age UK staff assist one client with their shopping or alternatively, group shopping trips for older people. As well as help with shopping, they give older people, particularly those that live alone, the opportunity to get out and interact with others.

2 Home delivery services – Some older people are housebound and unable to do their own shopping. Age UK home delivery services allow these people to remain living in their own homes, while relieving isolation and loneliness.

3 Internet shopping services – Some local Age UKs have developed food shopping services utilising supermarkets’ online stores. The order is placed on behalf of the older person and delivery is made to the older person’s home by the store. This allows older people to reap the benefits of internet shopping even if they do not themselves have internet access, and ensures a regular food delivery over which they have control.
Age UK Norwich: shopping service

About the service

Age UK Norwich runs a food shopping service that provides transport for older people who have difficulty using public transport and cannot afford taxis. The transport is provided to and from two large, out-of-town Tesco supermarkets. Fifty-two clients currently use the service, some opting for fortnightly trips and some monthly. Clients are referred to the service by a relative, GP or social housing agency, or may self-refer. The service focuses largely on social interaction as well as food shopping and for this reason clients are sometimes referred to the service mainly for the social aspects of the scheme. For example, the only item one lady had on her shopping list on one occasion was a lipstick but she still used the service to get out and talk to others of a similar age from the local area. The service is currently run by one part-time project co-ordinator and eight volunteers who accompany clients on shopping trips.

How the service is delivered

The service runs eight shopping trips within a two-week cycle. It picks clients up from Norwich and the surrounding areas using the service’s minibus, which takes them to a large Tesco store. Clients take their own shopping list and are assisted with their shopping by a volunteer. They pay for their own shopping and volunteers are discouraged from handling clients’ cash or cards. However, on occasion this is necessary and in these cases a full cash-handling policy is in place.

As social interaction is important in this service, clients meet in the café of the supermarket after doing their shopping to have a chat. It picks clients up from Norwich and the surrounding areas using the service’s minibus, which takes them to a large Tesco store. Clients take their own shopping list and are assisted with their shopping by a volunteer. They pay for their own shopping and volunteers are discouraged from handling clients’ cash or cards. However, on occasion this is necessary and in these cases a full cash-handling policy is in place.

Costs

Clients are charged £3–£4 per shopping trip to cover the cost of the minibus.

Challenges

Project co-ordinators found that the service was unsustainable in its previous form as the minibus they had was getting older and becoming less economical to run. As longstanding clients have become frailer and require wheelchairs, there was less space on the minibus and thus fewer clients could be transported per visit. Age UK Norwich developed a partnership with Norfolk Community Transport under which they provide a minibus and driver during the middle of the day (between day centre runs). Age UK Norwich provides volunteer escorts and supports local groups to develop and promote new shopping trips.

Initial pilot runs were popular and successful and, providing an average of ten clients can be found, trips are sustainable at a similar cost. The new format is now rolled out and the old minibus has been pensioned off!

Benefits

• Regular contact with local people of a similar age.
• Maintaining independence, as clients can still go and do their shopping despite needing a bit of help.
• Clients are more assertive when in a group and find the experience enhances their confidence.
• The minibus provides transport to two large Tesco stores and therefore service users have a wide range of produce to choose from.
• As the same two stores are used by the scheme, the store gains regular custom from the clients.
• The partnership with Norfolk Community Transport means that clients are picked up from a smaller area such as one sheltered housing site at a time, allowing them to get to know their neighbours better.

Contact details

Phil Wells, Boardman House, Redwell Street, Norwich NR2 4S; tel: 01603 496 321; email: phil.wells@ageuknorwich.org.uk
About the service
Age UK Isle of Wight currently runs the Good Neighbour Scheme. One service offered via this scheme assists older people with food shopping either by doing and delivering shopping for the client or by escorting individuals, on a one-to-one basis, to the shops. This service has been running since November 2010, although a shopping service has been provided by the organisation for approximately 11 years. The service has a project co-ordinator and shopping is carried out by 44 volunteers who currently serve 56 service users.

This is a vital service for clients as they often struggle using public transport and carrying produce home, particularly if they live in rural areas. At present, the Good Neighbour Scheme operates in about one-third of the island, but is continually developing due to increased demand. Existing shopping volunteers continue to carry out shopping for the clients they had under the old service whether or not they live in an area served by the Good Neighbour Scheme. Ultimately, the project co-ordinator hopes the service will expand to cover the entire island. Referrals to the service come from individuals themselves, social services, the local hospital and mental health team, carers and relatives. Referrals are also made internally within Age UK Isle of Wight's services.

How the service is delivered
Volunteers for the Good Neighbour Scheme are assigned to particular clients and help them with their food shopping by delivering the food to the client’s home and helping them put it away, or escorting them to the store. Clients write their own shopping list and normally purchase their shopping from the nearest supermarket. An alternative supermarket may be used as long as the volunteer is willing to travel further afield and the client agrees to pay the extra mileage. If a volunteer is shopping on behalf of the client, they will pay only by using cash the client has given them and provide the client with a receipt and change on the delivery of their shopping. This service is delivered weekly or fortnightly depending on the individual client’s needs. Furthermore, the service can be used by those who have been recently discharged from hospital as often as they require. Additionally, volunteers endeavour to sit down with the clients and have a chat and cup of tea with them on each visit. This provides clients not only with social interaction that they greatly value but can also be used to assess the clients’ wellbeing and whether they should be referred to other services.

Costs
The service receives funding from a variety of sources, including Comic Relief and the Lloyds TSB Foundation, and this is secured until 2013. Furthermore, it receives ad hoc grants from parish councils and other interest groups. The hope is to secure funding from the local authority also, but this is difficult due to the spending cuts they are currently making.

The service is free to clients. However, they usually pay volunteers’ petrol costs.
Challenges

• The service needs more staff in order to expand as the number of service users is gradually increasing. However, this is not possible without additional funding.

• Fewer people are qualifying for social care support and more people are therefore turning to the voluntary sector. Cuts in social service spending also mean that the local authority is referring clients to voluntary-sector services, when in fact some of these individuals actually need specialist care, e.g. mental health services.

• In previous years a local supermarket provided a van for shopping delivery. This involved Age UK Isle of Wight taking shopping orders on a Monday and shopping and delivering to clients on Tuesdays. However, this arrangement no longer exists.

Benefits

• The service has improved clients’ feelings of independence and confidence.

• The personal service is important to clients as many of them are isolated and housebound and just need a bit of help to do their own shopping.

• Access to the food shopping service means that clients are able to remain living in their own homes.

• Volunteers are assigned to service users and as a result form relationships with them. This is something that is greatly valued by clients. Furthermore, volunteers have coffee mornings and are invited to bring their clients along with them. This enhances clients’ opportunities to get out and meet others.

• The service is looking to ensure they have a procedure in place so that food shopping deliveries can be made in times of severe weather.

Contact details

Gwen Glover, 14 Pyle Street, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 1JW;
tel: 01983 525 282; email: gwen.glover@aciw.org.uk

19% of people aged 65+ report that they have a longstanding illness that prevents them from shopping or makes it difficult for them.

Age UK Oldham: shopping service and Safe at Home

About the shopping service

Age UK Oldham runs a home delivery shopping service for older people who are unable to do their shopping by any other means and are living in the Oldham borough. It took over this failing service from a disabilities organisation in 2006 and is partly funded by the local authority. Two hundred people currently use the service on a weekly or fortnightly basis, with some being short-term service users after discharge from hospital. Clients come to use the service via self-referral or referral from social services or district nurses. The service is also hoping to gain referrals from GPs. The service is currently run by five part-time paid members of staff.

How the service is delivered

Clients have an initial meeting in their home with a member of the shopping service team. At this point they are assessed and if the staff member considers other services to be more appropriate they can refer the client on. The client is also given a summary of some commonly purchased items to give them an idea of what they will be able to purchase and to prompt them with their food choices.

Two hundred people currently use the service on a weekly or fortnightly basis.

The service is run from the Co-operative supermarket in Lees, near Oldham, which receives approximately £200,000–£250,000 turnover per annum in custom from this service. The supermarket provides the service with an office, their own checkout, a fridge and freezer to store clients’ food in and they also pay the utility bills for the office. The service is run Tuesday to Friday, and generally conducts two to three deliveries per day. Age UK staff telephone clients and take their orders the day before their delivery is due. Staff inform the clients of any relevant promotional offers in-store, prompt them on essential items, give them the Co-op’s monthly magazine and encourage them to sign up to the Co-op’s membership scheme, which sends them money-off vouchers. The store sells homeware and electrical products, which can also be purchased by clients. For example, one client desperately needed a microwave after being in hospital and this was delivered the following day.
Clients can pay in cash or by cheque on delivery of their shopping and are given a receipt. Alternatively, relatives or carers can be invoiced and if the client’s finances are being managed by the local authority, they will be sent the invoice.

The scheme also incorporates a preventive element (i.e. Safe at Home service). All new clients receive a home visit before they commence the service, the purpose of which is to ensure that all the client’s details, needs and requirements are documented for monitoring purposes. On delivery of the shopping, staff monitor the client for: personal neglect (e.g. not using the food ordered); financial neglect (e.g. not having enough money to pay for the food); personal safety (e.g. leaving the door unlocked); environmental risks (e.g. risk of falls); and social isolation. The service keeps records of each client and delivery staff complete a progress sheet. Emergency numbers and relatives’ or carers’ contact details are stored in case of problems. In addition, those with dietary requirements and health conditions such as allergies and diabetes are noted and staff monitor their food selection. During severe weather the service advertises on the local radio and newspaper to reach those who may need food delivered on a temporary basis. During winter 2010, staff borrowed 4x4 vehicles and walked through waist-deep snow to ensure that all clients received their shopping.

**Costs**
- In 2011/12 the service cost £76,000 for the year (including £17,000 support costs) and customer charges generated £31,500. The local authority contributed £39,000, leaving Age UK Oldham with a shortfall of £5,500.
- The Co-op store in Lees, near Oldham provides the service with a small office/storage space and phone line. Age UK Oldham staff process all the shopping at a designated checkout.
- Clients pay £6 for the delivery of two bread-trays of food with additional trays costing £2.50 each.

**Challenges**
- Project co-ordinators have discovered issues such as malnutrition to be prevalent in those who are referred to the service. Some clients were previously eating the same foods every day or could not cook certain food products as opening them was difficult.
- Marketing – the number of people using this service has declined slightly despite this model working very efficiently, as existing customers become more frail and go into full-time care. The service would like to expand to reach more vulnerable people in the local area.
- There are times of funding uncertainty for the present level of service due to local authority spending cuts.

**During winter 2010, staff borrowed 4x4 vehicles and walked through waist-deep snow to ensure that all clients received their shopping.**

**Benefits**
- The service reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness of older people. Clients are highly dependent on it, as most are housebound and all are incapable of shopping for themselves.
- As well as providing clients with their food shopping, the service checks on clients’ wellbeing and makes referrals to other services if necessary. Clients have been found by staff members after having falls at home.
- Clients receive a reliable and regular service. They are prompted on their food choice if they have forgotten items that they usually order and are informed of any special offers, ensuring they get value for money. They are called by the service so there is no chance of them forgetting to place their orders.

**Contact details**
Yvonne Lee, Age UK Oldham, 10 Church Lane, Oldham OL1 3AN; tel: 0161 633 0213; email: yvonne.lee@ageukoldham.org.uk or info@ageukoldham.org.uk
Age UK Bromley & Greenwich: shopping service

About the service
Age UK Bromley & Greenwich runs both home-delivery and internet food shopping services. This work was previously funded by the local authority and so was free to older people in need of help. However, funding ceased in July 2011 and Age UK now runs a chargeable service. The services are used by older people in the local area who are unable to do their own food shopping either because they are not mobile enough to do so, struggle using public transport, or find it difficult to navigate around large supermarket stores. There are also a number of clients who have memory problems or lack mental capacity – in these situations, there is always someone who has power of attorney or an appointee in place who manages their finances.

The scheme currently has 30 clients using the home-delivery service and ten using internet shopping. Numbers using this service since it has become chargeable have decreased but are gradually beginning to rise again. When this new model is well established, the scheme has another staff member ready to take on new clients.

Referrals to the service come from multiple sources such as social services or from older people themselves or their relatives. The service has one paid member of staff who collects and delivers clients’ shopping and one volunteer who calls clients weekly to take their shopping orders.

How the service is delivered
Clients using the home delivery service are called every Monday and their shopping list is taken by a volunteer. Between Tuesday and Friday a paid staff member shops for all the clients’ items at the local Sainsbury’s store, which the scheme has always used. Although there is no fixed arrangement with this store, there is an informal arrangement whereby staff sometimes help the Age UK worker to collect the shopping. The Age UK staff member pays for all the shopping on the project credit card and clients pay by cash or cheque when it is delivered to them. To be part of the home delivery scheme clients must sign up to use the service weekly so that the project can cover its costs. As the service is new it is currently making a loss by running this scheme.

The local supermarket benefits through weekly custom from the service.

The internet service run by Age UK Bromley & Greenwich enables older people to make use of online food shopping services. However, to use this service, clients must be able to put all their shopping away themselves, as supermarket delivery staff do not help with this. Clients who sign up to this service have an initial appointment in their home with Age UK staff and they are helped to set up an online supermarket account using the service’s laptop (all ten clients currently use Sainsbury’s). In doing this, service users’ bank account details are entered into the online application form by the clients themselves and thus Age UK staff do not need to handle clients’ bank details, cash or cheques.

Costs
The service charges £12 per home delivery of food and £5 for online shopping delivery in addition to the store delivery charge. These charges are made via weekly standing order to Age UK Bromley & Greenwich.

70% of people aged 65+ do their main shop in a large supermarket.
Challenges

• Obtaining funding to run the service has proved difficult since support from the local authority ceased.

• As clients pay weekly via standing order complications can occur. For example, if a client is admitted to hospital the service has to refund their payment. Additionally, when a client joins or leaves the scheme the time taken to set up or cancel standing orders can lead to confusion or an incorrect payment.

• Occasionally staff deliver food shopping and find a client has been admitted to hospital. Therefore the food purchased often goes to waste – the store cannot take it back.

• Older people using the service are often unable to use online food shopping facilities themselves, but like to be able to order their own food even if they are housebound. The service formerly encouraged older people to use Iceland’s telephone-based service, in which customers could place food shopping orders over the phone and have them delivered to their home. However, this service no longer runs, despite being very popular.

• The service had to begin charging clients after funding was lost and as a result many service users stopped using the scheme. Project co-ordinators worry about what these individuals do now to acquire food shopping. It is likely there is unmet need in the area.

Benefits

• The service provided allows older people within the local area to remain living in their own home.

• Clients feel they still have a level of independence as they do not have to rely on family or friends to fetch food shopping for them.

• When the client receives their shopping the Age UK staff member helps them to put it away. Additionally, she keeps an eye on clients, clears out out-of-date food and can refer clients to other services if necessary.

• The local supermarket benefits through weekly custom from the service.

Contact details

Ellie Boon, Age UK Bromley & Greenwich, Community House, South Street, Bromley, Kent BR1 1RH; tel: 020 8315 1850; email: eboon@ageukbandg.org.uk
Age UK Berkshire: Easy Shop

About the service
Easy Shop is an internet-based food shopping service for older people in the Berkshire area. In particular, it serves those living in rural locations where access to supermarkets can be more problematic for those with mobility and transport issues. The service has been running four afternoons a week for three years and currently has 50 service users and one member of staff supported by three to four volunteers. The number of people using the service is gradually increasing, possibly because older people are finding internet services more acceptable. Use of the service has also increased due to referrals of older people on personal budgets from sheltered housing services and West Berkshire Council. It is more economically viable for them to refer to older people to Easy Shop as opposed to allocating these individuals to a care worker.

In the future the service hopes to move to a new location that will allow it to extend its operating hours. This would provide more flexible hours for volunteers and therefore hopefully aid recruitment of new volunteers. As a result of these changes, project co-ordinators hope to attract more clients and cover a wider area.

How the service is delivered
Clients receive an initial appointment with a member of the team who visits them in their own home and sets up an online account with the client’s chosen supermarket. Clients are then called weekly/fortnightly and their shopping orders are taken. At this time they are also made aware of any special offers available at their chosen supermarket. Using the client’s online account, Age UK staff place the client’s order and this is delivered by the supermarket staff.

Costs
Funding for this service previously came from West Berkshire Council. However, since this contract ended, clients have been charged £5 per week for the service, which is paid via standing order to Age UK Berkshire.

Challenges
• Attracting enough clients to break even, or gaining funds to finance the service. The service requires 60 clients per week in order to break even.
• Getting local retailers involved in their scheme has proven to be difficult.
• Supermarket packages of perishable food, meat, for example, are often too large for an older person living alone. The service has attempted to encourage clients to use a local farm shop that was selling individual portions of meat. This has not yet taken off.
• Obtaining time slots for shopping delivery by the supermarket can be difficult at busy times such as Christmas, but the service tries to book these a long time in advance to ensure that clients receive their groceries.

Benefits
• Clients are called by the service so there is no chance of them forgetting to place their orders.
• Clients are informed of special offers within their chosen supermarket. This helps them get the best value for money.
• Delivery staff are aware of older clients using the scheme and take time to help put the shopping away. As there is a finite number of delivery staff, they become a familiar, friendly face for clients and provide social interaction for those who are housebound.
• During the severe weather of winter 2010/11 the local supermarket delivery services prioritised older people to ensure that they received their shopping order.
• The service helps clients to remain living in their own homes. This is particularly valuable to clients living in rural areas.

Contact details
Mike Allen, Age UK Berkshire, Huntley House, 119 London Street, Reading RG1 4QA; tel: 0118 959 4242; email: mikea@ageukberkshire.org.uk
About the service
Age UK York has been running its Net Neighbours scheme for the past six years. The scheme evolved from its Home from Hospital service, which provides shopping for those recently discharged from hospital for a period of six weeks. The project co-ordinators found that clients needed further support after this six-week period and no other organisations in the local area provided this kind of service. As a result, Net Neighbours was formed. The service places food shopping orders using retailers’ online stores and the shopping is then delivered to the clients’ homes. As a result of this scheme, Age UK York has also developed an additional service whereby staff shop for and deliver food to older people in the area. These clients are normally suffering from dementia, have a terminal illness, or have poor eyesight or hearing.

The project currently has 70 Net Neighbours clients using the newly developed home delivery scheme. The service is currently run by three members of staff and 22 volunteers.

How the service is delivered
Clients are visited in their home for an initial assessment. This identifies the clients’ needs when it comes to food shopping, but is also used to refer them to other services if necessary. Staff set up an online account with each client’s chosen supermarket and call clients weekly to take their shopping orders and have a chat with them. Staff place clients’ food orders using supermarkets’ online facilities and arrange a suitable time for the shopping to be delivered to each client’s house. All payments are made through the project’s bank account and once the shopping is received by the client they send a cheque to Net Neighbours for the cost of the shopping plus a £2 administration fee. Staff have also been able to train clients to use supermarkets’ online services if they have some prior level of computer literacy. This is done either by going out to the client’s home or at their computer training facility. However, this is not always straightforward as factors such as arthritis, poor eyesight, or the expense of computer equipment and broadband services may prevent older people using internet services even if they have the knowledge to do so.

Age UK York also have an Extreme Weather Watch programme, whereby vulnerable service users are contacted in times of severe weather (hot or cold) to make sure they have sufficient food supplies, as well as checking for environmental hazards such as having inadequate heating.

Costs
• The service receives a £9,700 council grant and £3,000 from the primary care trust every year.
• Client administration fee of £2 per delivery.

Challenges
• Although the project has received funding from the local council under a three-year contract, the contract can be broken at any time, and in 2011 the service received a 3 per cent funding cut from the council. The local Primary Care Trust has also provided some funding until April 2013. However, this is shared with the Home from Hospital scheme.
• Project staff are often online at midnight when the online delivery slots are released by supermarkets in order to ensure that clients get their food deliveries. These difficulties often occur at busy times such as Christmas. Furthermore, they have found that one supermarket has a minimum spend of £25, which often deters clients from using this service. They have also found that a supermarket charge of £6 per delivery for purchases under £40 is too high for their clients, who rarely spend enough to qualify for free delivery.
• The bank used by the project regularly stops credit card payments (often on a weekly basis) due to small regular amounts going to the same stores from the client’s bank account. This makes it difficult to place orders and the bank calls weekly to do a fraud check, despite Age UK York informing the bank of the service.
Benefits

- The scheme has a befriending aspect: volunteers call clients to take their shopping order, but also have a chat with them. This reduces feelings of isolation and ensures that referrals to other services are made if necessary.
- The service allows older people to remain living in their own home.
- Older people can make use of internet food delivery services despite not having a computer or not being able to use the internet.
- Staff call clients to take their shopping order. This means that there is no chance of service users forgetting to place their order and as a result no one goes without food.

Contact details
Nicky Openshaw, Age UK York, Norman Collinson House, 70 Walmgate, York YO1 9TL; tel: 01904 726 191; email: netneighbours@googlemail.com

Notes

2. National Diet and Nutrition Survey Years 1 and 2 2008/09 and 2009/10, UK Data Archive Study No. 6533, Department of Health
3. ELSA Wave 3 core respondents; weighted percentages
5. ELSA Wave 3 core respondents; weighted percentages
7. Agenda for Later Life (2011) Age UK, p. 16
9. As note 8
15. Increase in Malnutrition Risk on Admission to UK Hospitals (2011) BAPEN Winter Screening Survey
16. Local Bus Services and Travel Concessions: Experiences and views of older people (2006) Help the Aged
17. Internet access, Quarterly Update Q4 (2011) Office for National Statistics
20. Malnutrition among Older People in the Community: Policy recommendations for change (2006) European Nutrition for Health Alliance, BAPEN and ILC-UK,

Source for all highlighted statistics
National Diet and Nutrition Survey Years 1 and 2 2008/09 and 2009/10. UK Data Archive Study No. 6533, Department of Health