

ADVICE & INFORMATION SERVICE

STANDARDS OF SERVICE

1. Introduction

We aim to provide local older people and their carers with high quality appropriate advice and information, so they are more able to deal with issues that arise and gain access to services and support to which they are entitled.

2. Principles

The provision of the Advice and Information service is founded on a number of principles:

- 2.1 As an independent registered charity we offer an impartial service working solely for the benefit of our service users and all advice and information provided is independent.
- 2.2 All advisers are expected to be non-judgemental, fair and to not let their own feelings; opinions and prejudices affect their work, complying with the organisations Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Policy at all times.
- 2.3 All older people and their carers have a right to dignity, independence and respect
- 2.4 All older people and their carers have a right of access to information and advice to enable them to make informed choices
- 2.5 The information and advice we give should be sensitive to our users' needs, enabling them to make their own decisions and act for themselves wherever possible
- 2.6 The needs of particular groups and those with additional needs are recognised and responded to when planning and delivering the service.

3. Information governance, confidentiality and data protection

- 3.1 Service users have a right to expect that all their enquiries will be treated confidentially. Age UK Blackburn with Darwen has its own Confidentiality, Data Protection and Record Keeping Policy, and Information Governance Policy, which are available on our website and in hard copy by request through any of our services.
- 3.2.1 Information about users and their enquiries is collected, recorded, stored and used in line with current data protection regulations. Information is collected only as necessary to enable the enquiry to be dealt with, and to enable statistical monitoring of the service. Any sharing of the information is to be agreed with the user and recorded. Statistical data is only used anonymously. The user has the right of access to the information relating to their personal details.

- 3.2.2 Our service recording system is provided through an organisational database which is hosted by an external provider. All agreements include responsibilities regarding information governance, data protection and confidentiality. In addition access rights will be set to ensure confidentiality.
- 3.3 Details of clients, enquiries, case records and referrals, both electronic and hard copy are kept secure and confidential using the methods set out in our Information Governance Policy and staff handbook.
- 3.4 Confidentiality is between the user and the organisation, not the individual adviser.
- 3.5 Interviews will be held in as quiet and confidential a setting as possible. Due to layout of offices, however, this may be compromised on occasions and users should be offered an appointment or other suitable arrangement if they are concerned about this. This option will be publicised in each office.

4. Record-Keeping/Monitoring

- 4.1 Systems for recording enquiries and the profile of users are laid down and will be followed by all advisers.
- 4.2 Such systems enable the service to be monitored so we can see how we are responding to local people's needs and to identify gaps in service provision.
- 4.3 Case records should be completed as soon as possible after interviews and be as clear, concise and easy to understand as possible, using the agreed format. Case records will be formally reviewed on a regular basis and procedures for any corrective action will be followed as detailed in the System for Information, Advice and Case Recording, Management and Review document.
- 4.4 Record-keeping systems will be kept under regular review so that Age UK, both locally and nationally, may more effectively extrapolate and analyse statistical information about the enquiries we get.
- 4.5 Customer User Surveys are distributed to all case work customers following the closure of a case and to a random sample of at least 10% of other service users. This process gathers valuable feedback on various aspects of service provision and accessibility and also aims to gather some basic outcome information. It is also one mechanism to support the identification of any areas for improvement. In addition, other methods of monitoring user satisfaction, such as telephone call backs may be implemented from time to time.
- 4.6 Details of the organisation's Complaints and Comments Procedure are displayed at each office, on our website and made available to users as appropriate.

5. Availability and Accessibility

- 5.1 The Advice & Information Service is a clearly identified department of Age UK Blackburn with Darwen. Customers with an advice enquiry will be assisted only by trained staff and volunteers who work to these standards and who have access to a range of information resources. All Age UK staff and volunteers receive information at induction and through regular reminders that all enquiries must be referred to the Advice and Information service to be dealt with by trained advisers.

- 5.2 The service is provided free of charge.
- 5.3 The service can be accessed in a variety of ways including personal visit to an office, telephone, home visit, letter, video call platforms, email and via our website. These options will be advertised widely.
- 5.4 The hours, times, days and location of services will be clearly stated and widely advertised.
- 5.5 It is recognised that as some older people may be unable to travel to our offices in Blackburn and Darwen, that we should endeavour to take services out to wider communities. Sessions and talks will be organised in neighbourhood areas depending on demand and the resources available. Home visits will be made where necessary to advise those who are housebound and require face-to-face or in-depth advice. Advice of the highest possible quality will be given by telephone and via video call platforms.
- 5.6 Particular groups in the community may need special provision in terms of surgeries, translations or specialist equipment. Every effort will be made to publicise our service to all sections of the community and to offer flexible, appropriate services, taking these needs into account.
- 5.7 Both offices have disabled access and are dementia friendly. Particular access routes for those with disabilities will be clearly signposted. Advisers have access to Language Line and BSL if required. Identified additional communication needs of individual service users should be recorded on the CRM system to facilitate easier access to the service.
- 5.8 We will endeavour to provide adequate, safe and comfortable space for callers to our Advice & Information offices.

6. Information Resources

- 6.1 Advice is available on both local and national issues, which affect older people. With reference to a wide library of information, including the full catalogue of Age UK factsheets and information guides, we will endeavour to offer comprehensive advice on a range of issues.
- 6.2 Where we cannot advise, or where more specialist or appropriate support is available from other sources, this will be clearly explained to users, and either a referral made, with their consent, or the user signposted to another relevant service (refer also to our Signposting & Referral Statement).
- 6.3 Accurate and up-to-date national and local information is the backbone of our service and systems are in place to ensure that advisers can access this wherever the service is being delivered from. Advisers are kept up-to-date with significant changes and additions, through a variety of written and verbal communications, including written memos; emails to all advisers; and specific training sessions to update on changes to laws, service provision or systems.
- 6.4 All advisers refer to our information resources when giving advice and sources are noted on casefiles. Where further research is required or where information may be more limited, a user may have to be contacted later to be given full service on their enquiry.
- 6.5 All information referred to can be shared with the enquirer as necessary.

7. Advisers: Recruitment, Training and Support

- 7.1 Paid staff adviser roles all have a job description and person specification which are used at the recruitment stage and which clearly outline the skills, knowledge and experience required
- 7.2 The time and commitment required of volunteer advisers will be stated clearly upon recruitment, as will the back-up and support they will receive. The skills required and tasks involved will be clearly stated in the Volunteer Role Outlines.
- 7.3 All advisers (paid and voluntary) receive a full, comprehensive induction and are expected to and must be willing to undergo a period of initial training, followed by ongoing training and supervision.
- 7.4 Advisers will be given training on the general work of Age UK and on issues affecting older people. Ongoing training will cover common areas of enquiry including welfare benefits, community care and housing options etc. Training in skills, such as case recording, interviewing and the use of IT systems will also be given.
- 7.5 Support and supervision will be available for all advisers and individual time will regularly be made available to discuss any worries or problems. An annual review system is also in place throughout the service.
- 7.6 Enquiries are dealt with on the following basis:
 - for office based contacts all initial enquiries are dealt with by the trained advisers who are on duty for that session which may be paid staff or volunteer advisers. These advisors will deal with the enquiry either until it is completed or until they reach their maximum competency level. If an enquiry is too complex for the advisor they will either seek advice from the Advice and Information Manager or refer it to them. Depending on the nature of the enquiry the manager will either coach the advisor to be able to respond to the enquiry or take over dealing with it directly.
 - for outreach enquiries the service manager or Advice and Information Manager will deal with the initial enquiry and ascertain what is required and therefore which advisor it is appropriate to refer the enquiry to.

8. Management of the Service

- 8.1 The Advice & Information Service is an integral part of Age UK Blackburn with Darwen and must therefore operate within its general policies and legal obligations.
- 8.2 Adequate insurance cover, particularly professional indemnity insurance will be maintained.
- 8.3 Overall, management and development of the service rests with the Chief Executive and day-to-day operation, management and development is the responsibility of the Advice and Information Manager, working with the staff team in their specific areas. A team approach to advice work is encouraged between all advice staff and volunteers and team meetings are held regularly.
- 8.4 Regular analysis (at least quarterly) of the numbers and nature of enquiries is carried out to aid planning and development of the service.
- 8.5 Age UK Blackburn with Darwen recognises the importance of a good quality Advice & Information Service and will seek to obtain adequate financial support to maintain and enhance the service.

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