

Information for clients about our Information & Advice Service

What services do we offer?

Age UK Cheshire East provides information and advice on a range of issues relating to older people and those who care for and support them. In particular, we specialise in:

- welfare benefits advice for those over retirement age, including working out benefit entitlements and offering assistance to complete claim forms
- helping people identify the care and support they need, including help accessing Social Services and advice on how to pay for care and support
- advising on housing issues, including help with maintaining a property and advice on the different types of housing for older people who need more support or want to move nearer to family or friends
- advising on the services, support, groups, activities and concessions available locally
- advising those who are finding it hard to make ends meet or are struggling to pay their bills
- helping people to make complaints or challenge decisions about welfare benefits, social services, health services and energy providers

Our service is being reviewed as part of the Age UK Information & Advice Quality Programme. This ensures we comply with recognised Advice Sector standards of practice and means our information and advice is accurate and high quality.

How do we provide help?

- **Information guides and factsheets.** These cover a wide range of subjects affecting older people and those who care for and support them
- **Telephone advice.** Call us on 01625 612958 from Monday to Friday between 9.00am and 4.30pm (closed for lunch 1.30pm – 2.00pm). The call will be charged at a local rate. If you ring outside of opening hours, or if our advisers are busy, you can leave a message and we will return your call
- **Office appointments.** To arrange an appointment at our office you can call reception on Monday to Friday 9.00am and 4.30pm (closed for lunch 1.30pm – 2.00pm) on 01625 612958. Arranging an appointment in advance lets us prepare for your visit and gives us an opportunity to tell you if there are any important documents we need you to bring along. This means we make the best use of our

staff and volunteers' time and can hopefully avoid people having to wait in the office for an appointment

- **Home visits.** If it would be difficult for you to visit us, we will visit you at home for certain types of advice that can't be provided over the phone. For example, we regularly visit people to complete welfare benefit application forms. However, home visits are difficult to resource effectively so we will ask you about alternative ways we could help. If you would like to arrange a home visit, please contact reception on Monday to Friday 9.00am – 4.30pm.

We often have a two to three week waiting list for home visits. When we visit we will always arrange the time with you in advance and our adviser will carry identification. If you have any concerns about someone turning up at your door who claims to be from Age UK Cheshire East, please ask them to remain outside and ring us on 01625 612958. We will confirm if the person works for Age UK Cheshire East and whether an appointment has been made with you

What will happen if we can't provide the service you require?

Sometimes people come to us with problems that we do not have the expertise or knowledge to help with. For example, we are unable to provide consumer debt advice, financial advice or immigration advice.

In these cases, we can provide you with basic information and direct you to another organisation for further help. Where possible we will give you a selection of organisations to choose from and we will either signpost or refer you to them.

When signposting we will give you the organisation's contact information so you can contact them yourself. When referring we will contact the organisation on your behalf, arrange an appointment and provide them with copies of any documents already completed by our service. We will always get your permission before referring you to another organisation.

Sometimes when advising you we will reach a point where we don't have the expertise to pursue your case any further. This most commonly happens when there is a need to challenge a welfare benefit decision. We will refer you to another local advice service that can help you if this happens.

How our service treats clients

We follow five key principles when delivering our service.

1. The service is provided free of charge

You won't be charged for any of our information and advice. If we signpost or refer you onto another organisation we will tell you if there is any charge for their service. Whilst

we provide help free of charge, the cost of running the Information and Advice Service is borne entirely by the Charity, and therefore any donation you can make will be greatly appreciated. If you wish to donate, please ask one of our staff or volunteers about Gift Aid.

2. The information and advice we provide is independent of any outside influence

We will never recommend a service or provider to you, including Age UK Cheshire East's own services. Where possible we will always provide you with a choice of alternatives and help you make an informed decision. We're not bound by local or national government policies and will always advise you on what's best for you rather than what's best for the Council, the Department for Work and Pensions, Age UK Cheshire East or any other organisation. We will never advise someone to do anything illegal or fraudulent. We will immediately stop advising anyone carrying out illegal or fraudulent actions and may notify the appropriate authorities.

3. All information is confidential

Any information we keep about you is stored securely and only viewed by staff and volunteers involved in advising you or other people that you have allowed us to share this information with. These may be external auditors that check the quality and accuracy of our work, organisations we are referring your case on to and agencies we are dealing with on your behalf (such as the DWP or an energy supplier). We won't share your information or discuss your case with anyone outside of our service without your consent unless they have been given responsibility to act on your behalf by the Court of Protection or Department for Work and Pensions.

We may share information about someone without their consent if:

- they insist on taking an illegal or fraudulent course of action
- we are contacted by a statutory body about a client who is being investigated for suspected illegal or fraudulent activity
- we are concerned that someone involved in a case is at risk of significant harm. In this case we may notify a relevant statutory body, for example social services or the police. These disclosures will be done following Adult Safeguarding procedures that our staff and volunteers have been trained in.

Any data we hold on you is in accordance with GDPR legislation and Age UK Cheshire East's Data Protection policy. A copy of our data protection policy is available by calling 01625 612958. You have a right to view any data we hold on you and can request to view it by contacting the Chief Executive.

4. Clients are treated with fairness, dignity and respect and we expect clients to treat our staff and volunteers in the same way

We won't judge anyone based on their age, disability, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion or marital status. We won't judge anyone based upon the circumstances they find themselves in and we won't try to influence the decisions you make following our advice. Sometimes clients will make a decision that we don't think is in their best interest. We will tell them if this happens and aim to provide enough information and advice to help them make an informed choice. We will respect whatever decision they then make. The Information & Advice Service operates in compliance with Age UK Cheshire East's Equality and Diversity Policy. A copy of the policy is available by request by calling 01625 612958.

5. Our service is as accessible as possible for older people

Our offices are suitable for people with disabilities with step-free access, ground floor interview facilities and toilets and hearing loops. We can also offer information and advice in other languages with prior notice, and in large print.

Where clients have difficulties accessing or understanding our information and advice, for example because of a disability or language issue, we will take all reasonable steps to provide our service in a manner that is accessible and appropriate to your needs or circumstances, and we will always aim to give you as much time as you need when we see you. The Information & Advice Service operates in compliance with Age UK Cheshire East's Equality and Diversity Policy.

How to make a complaint, compliment or suggestion about our service

If you would like to complain, compliment or make a suggestion about our Information & Advice service please contact 01625 612958 and ask for a copy of our comments and complaints leaflet. Alternatively, the information is also available on our website www.ageukce.org

What we expect of our clients

In return for providing information & advice we expect you to:

- treat our staff and other clients with courtesy and respect
- provide us with accurate and truthful information about your circumstances
- attend appointments or let us know in advance if you can't, if possible
- inform us of changes in your circumstances which may be relevant to your case
- provide us with information or paperwork that we need for your case
- not negotiate on your own behalf or respond to information requests that relate to your case without first discussing it with us

How you can help us

Our Information & Advice Team gain satisfaction from our work and the positive impact we have on our clients. We don't expect any further form of recognition or gifts. While chocolates, cakes, biscuits and other thank you gifts are lovely to receive, there are a number of other way you can support us so we can continue to provide the service.

- Make a donation to Age UK Cheshire East, Henderson Street, Macclesfield, SK11 6RA. Please make it clear when you make your donation if you wish to donate specifically to the Information & Advice service. And if you are a tax payer please ask us about 'gift aid'
- Volunteer – contact us on 01625 612958 to find out how
- Provide a case study of your experience of our Information & Advice service and the difference it has made to you – for more information contact the Information and Advice Coordinator who supported you on 01625 612958
- Campaign for us by writing to your councillor or MP to tell them how helpful you found us. From time to time we run local and national campaigns. If you would like to support us in our campaigning work contact 01625 612958 or visit www.ageukce.org
- Donate to, or buy from, our charity shops or Furniture Showroom – we have shops in Macclesfield, Congleton, Poynton, Alderley Edge and Knutsford www.ageuk.org.uk/cheshireeast/our-services/our-shops/
- Join in with our activities. Age UK Cheshire East provides a range of activities for older people – including practical support, health and wellbeing services and Dementia Day Services. Visit www.ageukce.org or call 01625 612958 for further information
- Join Age UK's weekly lottery and have the opportunity to win up to £25,000 while also financially supporting our charitable work – for more information visit <https://play.ageuk.org.uk/lottery> or contact 01625 612958
- Tell others about our service and recommend us to your friends



Damon Taylor,
Chief Executive,
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