

Information about Age UK Manchester's Information & Advice Service

What services do we offer?

Age UK Manchester 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 working towards achieving the national Advice Quality Standard and will soon be assessed against the benchmarks 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 0161 833 3944 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday between 9am and 4.30pm. This call will be charged at a local rate. If you ring outside of opening hours, or if our adviser is busy, your call will be diverted to Age UK's national Advice Line who will either help with your query or arrange for an adviser from Age UK Manchester to call you back
- **Office appointments.** To arrange an appointment at our office you can call our Information and Advice office, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm on 0161 833 3944. 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.

- **Local community venues.** Advice is available from our Wythenshawe Shop (10 The Birtles, Wythenshawe) on Friday mornings. This is by appointment only and appointments can be arranged by calling us on 0161 833 3944.
- **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 expensive and time consuming so we will ask you about alternative ways we could help. If you would like to arrange a home visit, please contact our Advice Team, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday or Friday 9.00am to 4.30pm on 0161 833 3944. 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 Manchester, please ask them to remain outside and ring us on 0161 833 3944. We will confirm if the person works or volunteers for Age UK Manchester and has an appointment 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. 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, 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 appeal a welfare benefit decision. Where possible, will refer you to another local advice service that can help you if this happens.

How our service treats its clients

We follow five key principles when delivering our service.

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. While we provide help free of charge, running the Information and Advice Service is expensive and only some of the money to do this comes from external funding. 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.

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'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 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.

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 done so in accordance with data protection legislation and Age UK Manchester's Confidentiality Policy. A copy of our confidentiality policy is available by calling 0161 833 3944. You have a right to view any data we hold on you and can request to view it by writing to Ray Gridley, Chief Executive, Age UK Manchester, Canada House, 3 Chepstow Street, Manchester, M1 5FW. There may be a small administrative charge for producing the information.

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. 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.

Our service is as accessible as possible for older people.

Our offices are suitable for people with disabilities with lifts available to access our main offices in Manchester and ground floor meeting room availability at our other venue.

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 their needs or circumstances and we will always aim to give you as much time as you need when we see you.

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

If you would like to compliment or make a suggestion about our Information & Advice service please contact the service manager, Jennifer Gregory, either in writing at Age UK Manchester, Canada House, 3 Chepstow Street, Manchester, M1 5FW or at advice@ageukmanchester.org.uk or by telephone on 0161 833 3944.

If you wish to make a complaint, please follow Age UK Manchester's complaints procedure. A copy of the full complaint procedure is available by request from Jennifer Gregory on 0161 833 3944.

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

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. And while chocolates, cakes, biscuits and other thank you gifts are lovely to receive, there are a number of other ways you can support us so we can continue to provide the service.

- Make a donation – We are able to take one off or regular donations online via Virgin Money Giving (please see our website for more details). Alternatively we can accept donations by post to our Canada House address. And if you are a tax payer please ask us about 'gift aid'.
- Volunteer – Age UK Manchester warmly welcomes volunteers throughout our services and many of our volunteers are older people. Please speak to your Advice Worker should you be interested in volunteering with us.
- Provide a case study of your experience of our Information & Advice service and the difference it has made to you.
- Donate to, or buy from, our charity shops – you can arrange a collection of goods for donation by calling 0161 817 2358 or you can donate in person to our shops in Withington, Chorlton, Gorton or Wythenshawe.
- Tell others about our service and recommend us to your friends.

*Jennifer Gregory, Advice Manager
December 2016*