

Statement of Service

What services do we offer?

Age UK Northumberland provides information and advice to people over the age of 50 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 state pension 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.

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 01670 784800 option 2 from Monday to Thursday between 10am and 1pm. This call will be charged at a local rate. If you ring outside of opening hours, or if our advisor is busy, you can leave a voicemail and one of advisors will call you back.
- **Office appointments:** we provide office appointments for support with benefit, housing or social care enquiries. To arrange an appointment please call us on 01670 784800 option 2 and speak to an advisor. Due to high levels of demand there is often a waiting list for this service, so providing us with as much notice as possible is beneficial.
- **Local community venues:** we are aiming set to up some community outreach venues in the near future.
- **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 us on 01670 784800. We often have a substantial 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 Northumberland, please ask them to remain outside and ring us on 01670

784800. We will confirm if the person works or volunteers for Age UK Northumberland 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 welfare benefits advice to anyone under state pension age (currently), 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. We 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 Northumberland's Data Protection policy. A copy of our data protection policy can be requested by calling 01670 784800 and can be sent electronically or by post. You have a right to view any data we hold on you and can request to view it by completing an access request form and returning it to us. You can request an access request form electronically or by post by calling us on 01670 784800.

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. The Information & Advice Service operates in compliance with Age UK Northumberland's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy. A copy of the policy can be requested by calling 01670 784800 and can be sent electronically or by post.

Our service is as accessible as possible for older people.

Our offices are suitable for people with disabilities, we have disabled parking bays, lift, accessible toilet facilities and hearing loops in some interview rooms. 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. The Information & Advice Service operates in compliance with Age UK Northumberland's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

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, Alison Wilson, either in writing at Age UK Northumberland, The Round House, Lintonville Parkway, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9JZ or at alison.wilson@ageuk-northumberland.org.uk or by telephone on 01670 784800

If you wish to make a complaint, please follow Age UK Northumberland's complaints procedure. The organisation will attempt to deal with any initial concerns informally and as quickly as possible. It will not be necessary for the complainant to put their complaint in writing as it is hoped that most concerns will be resolved at this stage. If the service user is still dissatisfied, the Head of Charitable Services will nominate an investigating officer within the organisation who will investigate the complaint and report back to the service user. It is best at this stage if the complaint is put in writing and the organisation will assist in this process where necessary. A copy of the policy can be requested by calling 01670 784800 and can be sent electronically or by post

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. 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 – It is easy to make a donation to help older people in Northumberland and there are lots of ways to do it. You can make a

donation online through our JustGiving page or by sending a cheque to Age UK Northumberland, The Round House, Lintonville Parkway, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9JZ. You can visit our JustGiving page at: www.justgiving.com/ageuk-northumberland

Please make it clear when you make your donation if you wish to donate specifically to the Information & Advice service. If you are a tax payer, please ask us about 'gift aid'.

- Volunteer – There are a range of volunteering opportunities with Age UK Northumberland in areas such as Day Services, Lunch Clubs, I&A, Advocacy, Fundraising and Reception. Please contact our volunteer co-ordinator, Susan Chrisp on 01670 784800 if you would like to find out more.
- Provide a case study of your experience of our Information & Advice service and the difference it has made to you – this can be done over the phone with your advisor or by post, please send postal case studies to: Alison Wilson, Age UK Northumberland, The Round House, Lintonville Parkway, Ashington, Northumberland, NE63 9JZ.
- 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: Alison Wilson on 01670 784800
- Join in with our activities. Age UK Northumberland provides a range of activities for older people – Including exercise classes at the Round House and out in the community, social groups, day centres, lunch clubs, craft groups and more. Please contact us for any information about our activities.
- Tell others about our service and recommend us to your friends.