

## Information & Advice Service Statement of Service

### Information about Age UK Plymouth`s

#### Information & Advice service for its customers

##### What type of service do we offer:

Age UK Plymouth can provide you with information and advice on a range of issues relating to older people, their rights and entitlements, local services and support available to them and those who care for and support them. In particular we specialise in:

- Welfare Benefits advice for those over retirement age including working out if you are entitled to benefits and assisting people to complete the claim forms
- Helping people to identify care and support services appropriate to their needs, accessing Social Services and advising on how you can pay for care and support
- Advising older people on housing issues including the maintenance and up keep of a property and considering different types of housing that might be appropriate as you get older, might need more support or want to move nearer to family
- Advising older people on the services, support, group, activities and concessions available locally
- Helping people who are finding it hard to make ends meet or are struggling to pay their bills

Our service has achieved the national Advice Quality Standard and passed the Age UK Information & Advice Quality Programme ensuring that the service meets recognised Advice Sector standards of practice and that the information and advice we give is of high quality and accurate.

Our service includes:

- **Information guides and factsheets** on a wide range of subjects affecting older people and those who care for and support them
- **Telephone advice** Monday to Friday between 9.00 am and 4.30 pm. Please ring us on 01752 256020. This call will be charged at a local rate. If you ring outside of our opening hours or our adviser is busy your call will be diverted to an answer machine and you will be called back within 4 working days.
- **Office appointments** We ask that clients contact us to arrange an appointment rather than 'dropping in' so that we can ensure that you will be seen without having to wait and that we can tell you about any documentation that we would need you to bring along to the appointment. Appointments will be arranged by our office administrator.

- **Home visits.** We will visit older people in their own homes for certain types of advice that can't be provided over the telephone when it would be difficult for the older person to attend the office. For example we regularly visit people to complete welfare benefit application forms. Home visits are expensive and time consuming so we do ask that our clients at least consider options for attending the office before requesting a home visit. You will be asked about alternative ways we could provide the service to you when you ask for a home visit. Often we have a two to three week waiting list for home visits.

### **What will happen if we cannot provide the service you require?**

Sometimes people will come to us with problems that we do not have the expertise or knowledge to help them with or that we do not have the appropriate licence to enable us to provide advice. We are unable to provide consumer debt advice, financial advice or immigration advice because we do not hold the appropriate licences.

We can provide you with basic information on almost any issue commonly experienced by older people but if you require advice we may have to direct you to another organisation. Where possible we will give you a selection of organisations that you can choose from and we will either 'signpost' or 'refer' you to them.

When 'signposting' we will give you the organisation's contact information so that 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 seek your consent before referring you to another organisation.

Sometimes when advising you we will reach a point where we do not have the expertise to pursue your case further. This most commonly happens when there is a need to challenge a welfare benefit decision. In these circumstances we will refer you onto another local advice service that has the appropriate expertise.

### **How our service treats its clients**

In delivering the service we follow four key principles:

- That the service is provided **free of charge**. You will not be charged for any of the information and advice you receive from this service. If we signpost or refer you onto another organisation we will tell you if there is any charge for their service. While we provide the service 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 that a client can make to help us maintain our service will be greatly accepted. 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 service. We will always, where possible, provide you with a choice of alternatives and provide you with help to make an informed choice. Our service is not bound by local or national government policies and we will always seek to advise you as to what is in your best interest rather than that of the council, the Department for Work and Pensions, Age UK or any other organisation. However we will not advise a client to take an action that is illegal or fraudulent. If a client insists on pursuing an illegal or fraudulent course of action we will immediately cease to advise them and may notify the appropriate authorities.
- We will treat all of your information as being **confidential**. Any information that we keep about you is stored securely and will only be viewed by information and advice staff and volunteers involved in advising you or third parties that you have consented to us sharing the information with. We will not discuss your case with anyone outside of our service without your consent or if they have been granted responsibility to act on your behalf by the Court of Protection or Department for Work and Pensions. We will seek consent from you before sharing your information with other parties. Common examples of third parties that your information may be shared with, following your consent, are external auditors that check the quality and accuracy of our work, organisations that we are referring your case onto and agencies that we are dealing with on your behalf (for example the DWP or an energy supplier). There are three circumstances in which we may share your information without your consent. They are :
  - if a client insists on taking an illegal or fraudulent course of action
  - if we are contacted by a statutory body about a client we have advised who is suspected of taking an illegal or fraudulent action and is being investigated
  - if we are concerned that an individual, that is involved in a case that we are advising on, is at risk of significant harm. In such cases we may notify a relevant statutory body of our concern, for example social services or the police. Such disclosures will be done following the local agreed 'No Secrets' procedures that our staff and volunteers have been trained in.
- We will always treat our clients with **respect** and expect that our clients will treat our staff and volunteers in the same way. We will not judge our clients based on their age, disability, gender, sexuality, race or religion. We will not judge our clients based upon the circumstance they find themselves in and we will not seek to influence the decisions you make following our advice. Sometimes clients will make a decision that we would generally consider not to be in their best interest, we will inform them of this and aim to provide enough information and advice to help them make an informed choice. We will respect whatever decision they then make. Where clients have difficulties accessing or understanding our information and advice, for example because of a disability or language issue, we will attempt to take all reasonable steps to provide our service in a manner that is 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 above statement is included on the Age UK Plymouth`s website Information & Advice page, on the wall in all areas of Age UK Plymouth`s premises that Information & Advice is delivered from and is available as a printed or electronic document on request from an existing or potential client.*

*The statement is reviewed regularly (at least every six months) and updated if there are any changes to the nature of the service (e.g. a change to opening hours). Once updated the new version replaces the previous document:*

- *On the Age UK Plymouth website*
- *Available as electronic copy ready to print in the shared drive for Information & Advice*
- *Available to read in poster version on notice board at Head Office.*