

I&A Service Statement of Service

Information about Age UK Waltham Forest Information & Advice Service

What services do we offer?

Age UK Waltham Forest 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.

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 020 8558 3404 from Monday to Friday between 10am and 2pm. 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 Waltham Forest to call you back
- **Office appointments.** To arrange an appointment at our office please telephone 020 8558 3404. 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.** We provide I&A service in Priory Court Community Centre in Walthamstow. To arrange an appointment call our main number 020 8558 3404.
- **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 020 8558 3404. 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 Waltham Forest, please ask them to remain outside and ring us on 020 8558 5512. We will confirm if the person works or volunteers for Age UK Waltham Forest 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, 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 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. You have the right to withdraw consent.

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 abuse or harm or there is a possibility of abuse or harm to others. 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 about you is processed in accordance with data protection legislation and Age UK Waltham Forest's Data Protection policy. A copy of our data protection policy is available at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/walthamforest/> or by calling **020 8558 5512**. You have a right to view any data we hold on you and can request to view it. To exercise this right, employees and clients should make a Subject Access Request. We will comply with the request without delay, and within one month unless, in accordance with legislation, we decide that an extension is required. Those who make a request will be kept fully informed of any decision to extend the time limit.

No charge will be made for complying with a request unless the request is manifestly unfounded, excessive or repetitive, or unless a request is made for duplicate copies to be provided to parties other than the employee making the request. In these circumstances, a reasonable charge will be applied.

Further information on making a subject access request is contained in our Subject Access Request policy.

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, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex or sexual orientation. 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 Waltham Forest's Equalities and Diversity Policy. A copy of the policy is available at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/walthamforest/> or by request from Emma Tozer CEO.

Our service is as accessible as possible for older people.

Our offices are suitable for people with disabilities, we have step free access, ground floor interview facilities and toilets, grab rails, hearing loops. 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 Waltham Forest's Equalities and Diversity Policy. A copy of the policy is available at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/walthamforest/> or by request from Emma Tozer CEO