

Fylde Borough Council Annual Report

Period covered: 1st April 2021 – 30th September 2021

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General Update

Age UK Lancashire continues to deliver a high quality, confidential Information & Advice service across Lancashire for people aged 65+ and their carers. The support from Fylde Borough Council contributes towards our Information and Advice team via our St Annes office, and face-to-face community delivery in the area. The office on St Georges Road reopened to the public in July 2021, in line with government guidelines.

In recent months we have seen the easing of government restrictions relating to Covid 19 precautions. However, taking into account our client demographic, we have been cautious in returning to previous ways of working. We have evaluated what worked well and what worked as a 'temporary fix' during the pandemic and lockdowns. Two teams contribute towards the Information and Advice (I&A) delivery; our 0300 Call Handling Team and our community focussed I&A Team. The I&A Team support volunteers to deliver home visits, surgeries and support with applications for blue badges and Attendance Allowance in addition to offering direct advice to customers themselves.

The first point of contact into the service is often our 0300 number where our customer service advisers can help immediately with a simple enquiry or triage clients appropriately. This last year, **445** people from Fylde contacted us this way. This alongside our internal services acting as referral agents, **217** people were referred for more detailed advice support. Our I&A Team would usually endeavour to recruit and train community volunteers, and thus increase their presence through outreach and engagement. However, the restrictions due to Covid-19 have meant volunteer recruitment has been on hold, and outreach events have not yet returned to normal. Although not being attended face to face, though some events have adapted to being delivered on-line, and we have endeavoured to maintain a presence through these.

Since April 2021, 16 Fylde residents received full welfare benefit checks, and we supported 26 clients with completing claim forms. An additional 26 clients came into Fylde office since it reopened at the end of July and were given information or signposted to other organisations.

While we had noticed a reduction in requests for some services in 2020, most notably for the blue badge application service, demand does appear to be increasing again as residents become more confident about leaving their homes, and this service is in high demand.

Our Information and Advice service moved to telephone appointments only during the pandemic. We have gradually opened up other methods of delivery as restrictions have eased. However, telephone appointments – rarely used prior to lockdown – proved to be an efficient use of time, and for many clients, a much easier way of receiving help. Because of this, we are continuing to use telephone appointments wherever we can. The method used to deliver our service is agreed with our clients taking their needs into account.

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Regardless of the method of service delivery, all clients can expect that their enquiry is fully explored, and they will receive comprehensive advice followed up with a confirmation of advice letter with details of the information and advice we have given and any steps they should take to achieve the desired outcome.

Since April in Fylde Borough we delivered the following services:

- Information & Advice including case work
- Hospital Aftercare – practical support for people including take home and settle and up to 6 weeks of practical and emotional support following a hospital stay.
- Home Help service – providing cleaning, shopping and other errands
- Removing Barriers – supporting veterans and their families to access services
- Age of Opportunity – supporting people aged 50+ back into employment
- Good Day Calls – regular chats and ‘check-ins’ for clients who are lonely and/or isolated (set up in response to Covid-19)
- Art of Isolation and Veterans Art of Isolation projects – encouraging individuals to submit examples of creativity during the pandemic
- Access to local number for all customer enquiries

Information & Advice

Age UK Lancashire provides a comprehensive Information & Advice service to clients over the age of 65 years and their carers throughout the Fylde area. This is a free, one-to-one service supporting, informing and advising older people and their carers, often at the most vulnerable times in their life. Our services include: signposting and referral to other agencies, providing information and advice, form filling and casework. There has been decreased demand for the home-visiting element of our service which supports older people who are housebound since lockdown last year, but we are starting to see numbers increasing again.

In the reporting period 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021, we received 445 calls via our Customer Services team from Fylde residents. Though many of these calls were for information and signposting,

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more in depth advice was provided to 42. During those appointments we explored topic areas such as welfare benefit entitlements and income maximisation, access to social care and the assessment process, housing options for older people. We consider the client's circumstances on an individual basis and can then tailor our service as needed.

As part of our holistic service we extend our service to the immediate family and carers of our clients where appropriate

We support all enquiries that are within our area of expertise and will actively refer to other specialist advice services where appropriate such as Citizen's Advice for debt advice and Welfare Rights for benefit appeals.

Our Customer Services Advice Line service is well established, offering older people and their carers a contact point for information or signposting. The team can also refer into our services as required.

Our most common enquiries usually include:

- Welfare Benefits
- Travel and leisure (including Blue Badge applications)
- Local services and activities
- Community and social care
- Housing options

The service can usually be accessed by calling in to the Age UK Lancashire office in St George's Rd, St Anne's, by telephone, email, letter, referral from other community services or via one of Age UK Lancashire's other services. Home visits are usually provided for people unable to access the office, complex cases and lengthy form-filling. Our telephone and email service operates Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm (via our 0300 303 1234 number) with an out of hours answerphone facility which gives the customer the option of ringing the Age UK National Advice Line for support out of hours (open 8am-7pm, 365 days per year).

The service works in partnership with a number of local key partners, including the Department for Work and Pensions, Welfare Rights, Pension Wise, Disability Information, Community Mental Health Team, Extensive Care Team, New Fylde Housing, Fylde CA, Care & Repair, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, Hospital Discharge Team, Trinity Hospice, Social Services, Stroke Association, Alzheimer's Association, Parkinson's Society, Alzheimer's Society and Lytham Hospital Dementia services.

The service provided by Age UK Lancashire during this 6-month period has identified over £539,448.00 per annum in unclaimed benefits across the county, with £128,467.72 of that figure being for Fylde residents of State Pension age. This money is most often spent in the local economy.

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Further Background

Our Fylde based adviser retired in April, so the service manager is covering provision with the support of a part time senior administrator. We are offering office-based appointments and home visits for those clients who are unable to come to us.

We have also recruited a volunteer who supports the team by 'meeting and greeting' clients who come into the office. She can offer information and signposting and will refer to the I&A team for any clients requiring further help.

Age UK Lancashire has a comprehensive mandatory training plan for both staff and volunteers. We have invested in a high quality online training resource via ME Learning which enables many more staff and volunteers to access up-to-date training and undertake courses at their convenience. Regular meetings are usually held with all the volunteers to update them and provide general support. We make sure they are familiar with the standards, policies and procedures set by the Information and Advice Quality Standard. Training includes Basic Life Support, Safeguarding Adults level one, Safeguarding Children level one, Dementia Awareness, Information Governance, Mental Capacity Act, and Fire Safety Awareness. We have recently updated our mandatory training to include LGBTQ Awareness, PREVENT, and Infection Control, as well as further training on safeguarding adults who may be at risk of self-harm.

The Information and Advice staff also undertake training on Pension Age Welfare benefits, Social/Community Care, Housing, Charity Log (in house Database), Information & Advice Quality Program training meetings, The Care Act, and General Data Protection Regulation.

Quality

We continue to hold the nationally recognized Age UK Information and Advice Quality Programme (IAQP) which was successfully renewed in April, and the Advice Quality Standard which are rigorous and robust processes to ensure we are delivering a service that meets all their requirements. We are in the process of renewing this accreditation. We also hold the ISO 9001 and the Age UK organisational standard.

Promotion and Engagement

We continue to support the Older People's Forum and the FAB group and we keep in contact with the social groups in the area. We participate in fortnightly Dementia Hub zoom meetings and are hopeful that face to face meetings can resume in August. We continue to refer people to Just Good Friends in St Annes, Lancashire Carers, Carers Count and Alzheimer's Singing For The Brain.

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As restrictions ease, we are looking at events we can attend to promote our services and engage with our clients. We are hosting an afternoon tea event at Lytham Hall in September, which we expect to be well attended.

Campaigns

Age UK Lancashire has supported the following national campaigns:

- Care In Crisis
- Winter Warmth and Winter Health
- Painful Journeys
- Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness
- Switched off, saving the free TV license for older people
- Campaign with Ed Balls raising awareness of social care systems and costs, particularly relating to dementia
- Digital Inclusion
- Work with Good Things Foundation to provide on line training through Learn My Way

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Appendices

Appendix A – Case Study

Case study attached as a separate document

Appendix B - Profile Data for Fylde 2021 Q1-2

TOPIC OF ENQUIRY	NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES
Age UK Services	2
Benefits	83
Community Care	10
Consumer	4
Health Conditions	1
Health Services	2
Housing	3
Legal	5
Leisure and Social Activities	7
Residential Care	2
Travel	11
Nationality and Immigration	0
Grand Total	130

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Client feedback

Our clients are issued with a feedback form at the end of their service. The results of these during this reporting period are that:

Your benefit claim was successful – 87.5 % agreed

Your general wellbeing has improved – 57.14 % agreed

You feel more independent or less isolated – 71.43 % agreed

Your knowledge of where to go for advice has increased - 100 % agreed

You were satisfied with the service and would recommend it to others - 100 % agreed

Average score 1-5

Staff were friendly and knowledgeable - 5 out of 5

I was treated with respect – 5 out of 5

My privacy and confidentiality were ensured - 5 out of 5

The service met my expectations – 5 out of 5

I received the service at the right time for me - 5 out of 5

How likely are you to recommend our service? - 5 out of 5

Client comments

“I got the help when I needed it most.”

“I felt it was someone to help me and it was easy to do so. Thank you”

“The assistance I received could not have been better.”

“I couldn't be more pleased. The service I received was excellent.”

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