



greater
manchester
older
people's
network

Housing options information for older people in Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester Older People's Network (GMOPN)
Report

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Executive summary

Key findings and recommendations

The aim of the research was to examine the housing options information for older people provided by each of the local authorities in Greater Manchester, with particular focus on older co-researchers' experiences.

The research focused on three questions:

1. The process of getting through to a person who can provide housing options information and advice in the local authority, and focus on the use of websites to provide information
2. The type and quality of information and advice provided over the telephone
3. How the older co-researchers described the quality of the interaction they had over the phone

The findings show there is a gap between the rhetoric and the front-line experience of older people. Greater Manchester has an opportunity to lead the way on integrated provision of information and

advice for people wishing to make well informed housing, care and financial decisions in later life. There is also a need to raise awareness among older people about the housing options and support that is available to them locally, and what information and advice should be provided for them.

Background & policy context

Greater Manchester's Older People's Network developed a Housing Manifesto in 2017. This included a recommendation that older people "need access to free, independent and impartial advice about all ... housing options across all tenures". The importance of independent, impartial and free advice about housing options is included in social care policy. The Care Act 2014 includes a duty for local authorities to ensure that information and advice about care and support is available for all, including information and advice about housing and finance.

The provision of information and advice to support older people to plan their future housing, care and support is an ongoing issue.

The government launched a white paper on social care in December 2021 (Department of Health and Social Care 2021), which highlighted the important role of housing as a key part of care and ‘Making every decision about care a decision about housing’. It includes a promise to improve access to user-friendly information and advice that enables planning for future housing, care and finances.

In Greater Manchester, the Housing, Planning and Ageing group published a ‘Framework for Creating Age-Friendly Homes in Greater Manchester, 2021-24’, which establishes a vision and delivery plan for ensuring more older people in the city are living in homes and communities that suit their needs and aspirations, (Greater Manchester Combined Authority 2021).

This includes the aim of promoting proactive decisions about whether people should ‘Improve or Move’, with high quality information and advice available to older people to support them in making these decisions.

Unfortunately, this information is not currently as easily accessible as it should be. A previous review of the websites of the local authorities in the North West, (Future North West 2015) about the information they provided about housing and care in later life

showed that information and advice was not easy to find on council websites, and it was often out of date. A recent research project, (Harding et al. 2020) found that solely providing generic information to older people was not enough for them to plan their future housing and care. In interviews with older home-owners, they were found to value opportunities to discuss and deliberate their options with an impartial, well informed person.

Providing housing options information and advice over the phone is particularly important for the nearly 2 million of over 75 year olds who are digitally excluded, (Age UK 2021). Having the internet as a default option for providing housing options information and advice is exacerbating inequalities for disadvantaged older people.

Research approach and data

Members of GM Older People’s Network took part in the project as co-researchers, being involved in the design and development of the project, conducting the research telephone calls, and contributing to data analysis and dissemination. The project focused on the needs of older people for whom the use of the internet is a barrier, and the telephone is their main means of communication.

A total of 45 research calls were completed to the 10 local authorities within Greater Manchester. Data includes structured notes about the phone calls, and focus group discussions with the co-researchers.

Key findings:

The process of getting through to a person who can provide housing options information and advice in the local authority

- The aspects that made the system work well included clear options in the automated message and information about waiting time or place in queue.
- The older co-researchers encountered challenges when calling many of the local authorities, including: waiting times: 44% of all the calls made were not answered within 30 minutes. Other findings included: lack of clarity of which option to choose from the options in the automated answer service; getting cut off, and the call not being answered at all.

The type and quality of information and advice provided over the telephone

- The advice and information regarding what support older people can access about their housing and any related care was focused on those at a crisis point, rather than supporting older people who want to plan ahead.
- There was limited support offered for homeowners
- The services the older co-researchers received from the local authorities was varied and inconsistent – even when repeat calls were made to the same local authority they sometimes provided different information and the overall customer service experience was very variable



How the older co-researchers described the quality of the interaction they have over the phone

What made the call a good experience

The person on the call	How the call made the co-researcher feel	Technical issues
Friendly and polite	Positive feeling on the call	The automated message included information about waiting time or place in queue
Empathy		
Understanding	Not rushed	
Good communication skills		
Age friendly approach, e.g. speaking calmly and clearly	Being listened to	

What made the call a poor experience

The person on the call	How the call made the co-researcher feel	Technical issues
Abrupt	Rushed	Unclear what option to choose from automated message
Unhelpful	Out of comfort zone	
Giving out complicated information, hard to understand	Not feeling confident	Call getting cut off

A call to the local authority can be a positive experience, even if the person on the phone cannot provide the information or advice the caller is looking for.

Recommendations

- Action is needed to improve provision of housing information and advice for older people across Greater Manchester
- Local Authorities need to recognise that only being able to access information via the internet is a barrier to many older people, particularly those who are more disadvantaged, thereby exacerbating inequalities
- Local Authorities need to consider their strategy for supporting people who are not online. For many accessing services via a website is not an option and so the provision of a good telephone advice service remains an important part of their duty to provide information and advice under the Care Act 2014
- Local Authorities need to ensure that call handlers are well trained and made fully aware of relevant housing information and advice and of housing related service provision available for older people
- Each call to a local authority must be a positive experience, particularly so for a vulnerable person. If they have a bad experience, they are less likely to ask for help or advice again

The project was led by Liz Jones at Macc and Dr Emma Koivunen, Care & Repair England, with Dr Sophie Yarker, MICRA (University of Manchester) & Dr Mark Hammond, Manchester School of Architecture (Manchester Metropolitan University) as advisors. Members of the Greater Manchester Older People's Network's Housing and Neighbourhoods working group took part as co-researchers.

The project received funding from British Society of Gerontology's The Averil Osborne Award.

Introduction

The Greater Manchester Older People's Network produced a Housing Manifesto in 2017 (Greater Manchester Older People's Network 2017). One of its recommendations was that older people "need access to free, independent and impartial advice about ... housing options". In order to take action on this recommendation the GMOPN Housing and Neighbourhoods Working Group proposed conducting "mystery shopping"-based research to examine the current breadth and quality of information available to older people across Greater Manchester.

There has been a movement over the last decade to improve the information around housing options for older people. In Greater Manchester, this has been approached in different ways by each local authority. However, the experience of some members of the GM Older People's Network suggests that this advice can be difficult to access and negotiate.

The aim of the research was to examine the housing options information provided by each of the local authorities in Greater Manchester, with particular focus of older co-researchers' experiences of the pathways to information about housing options information in Greater Manchester.

This report details findings about three questions:

1. The process of getting through to a person who can provide housing options information and advice in the local authority, and focus on the use of websites to provide information
2. What information was provided over the telephone
3. How the older co-researchers described the interaction they had over the phone

This project does not include a comprehensive review of the quality of the housing options information provided by the different local authorities across Greater Manchester.

Background and policy context

As people grow older, their needs and abilities change, and what they need from their home can change. To support independence and quality of life, an older person might need to adapt their current home or move to a different property. Getting impartial and independent advice about housing, care and finance options is a crucial part of supporting older people to plan ahead.

Greater Manchester's Older People's Network developed a Housing Manifesto in 2017. This included a recommendation that older people "need access to free, independent and impartial advice about all ... housing options across all tenures". The importance of independent, impartial and free advice about housing options is included in social care policy. The Care Act 2014 includes a duty for local authorities to ensure that information and advice of care and support is available for all, including information and advice about housing and finance (for more information see Adams & Green 2015).

The role of information and advice and supporting older people to plan their future housing options is an ongoing issue. The government launched a white paper on social care in December 2021 (Department of Health and Social Care 2021), which focused on the role of housing as part of care. It includes a promise to improve access to user-friendly information and advice that enables planning for future housing, care and finances.

However, research shows that the information is not as easily accessible as it should be. A recent study about telephone based housing options service described the advice provided as "too 'light touch' to empower older people" (Harding et. al. 2020). In interviews with older home-owners, they were found to value "continued discussion, deliberation and exchanging views, but did not attain this from the service". The paper found that solely providing generic information to older people was not enough for them to plan their future housing options.

A review of the information provided on their websites by local authorities in the northwest to help their citizens in later life (Future North West 2015) showed that often the information was difficult to find and/or out of date.

Some councils do provide a good service, but the information about this is not available on their website. Providing housing options information and advice over the phone is particularly important for the nearly 2 million of over 75 year olds who are digitally excluded (Age UK 2021). Having the internet as a default option for providing housing options information and advice is exacerbating inequalities for disadvantaged older people.

Ageing in Greater Manchester

The older population of Greater Manchester is growing in size and diversity, with significant inequalities between older people across the city-region. 454,000 Greater Manchester residents are aged 65 and over, but this is due to rise to 650,000 by 2039. While the majority are owner occupiers of their homes, 21% are social tenants and 5% are private renter (Office of National Statistics 2016).

Compared to the national averages, there are high numbers of older people in poor health and who are living alone, and by 2035 it is projected that over a third of residents over 65 will be in one person households.

The most significant change to Greater Manchester's older population over the last decade is its increased ethnic diversity. The minority ethnic population in Greater Manchester population grew by 80% between 2001 and 2011: from 299,232 to 540,841. Based on inward migration and a large number of minority ethnic people in mid-life choosing to remain in the city-region, we expect the next census to show another significant increase in older people from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Office of National Statistics 2016).

The Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission has set out the stark inequalities facing people in the city region, often as a result of intersectional and cumulative disadvantages (Marmot et al. 2021; Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission 2020).

50,000 people in Greater Manchester are affected by 'Pensioner Poverty' as a result of cumulative inequality arising from low-incomes, high levels of long-term unemployment, and poor health. In Greater Manchester, significant health inequalities mean that healthy life expectancy is 20.4 years lower in deprived neighbourhoods compared with more affluent parts of the city-region (ONS, n.d.). The Covid-19 pandemic had exacerbated long-standing inequalities faced by older people in GM, particularly for those living in deprived urban neighbourhoods and ethnic minority communities (Yarker et al. 2020).

Based on a long history of ageing programmes within the ten constituent local authorities, GMCA set up the GM Ageing Hub in 2017 to coordinate activity within local government, business and third sector around a series of key themes. The GM Ageing Hub programme adopted the World Health Organisation's 'Age-Friendly Cities and Communities' approach, and was recognised as the UK's first Age-Friendly City Region in 2018. One of the six core themes of the GM Ageing Hub is 'Housing, Planning and Ageing', with an ambition to

increase the supply of housing for older people and to develop ways of supporting 'ageing in place' within existing homes and communities (Greater Manchester Ageing Hub 2018).

In 2021, the Housing, Planning and Ageing group published a 'Framework for Creating Age-Friendly Homes in Greater Manchester, 2021-24', which establishes a vision and delivery plan for ensuring more older people in the city are living in homes and communities that suit their needs and aspirations (Greater Manchester Combined Authority 2021). The framework, along with accompanying guide for urban design professions (Hammond and Saunders 2021), argues that a coherent local housing strategy needs to support citizen-led approaches to ageing, in which the views, ideas and aspirations of older people are at the centre of policy, strategy and deliver. One of five core concepts in the framework is promoting proactive decisions about whether people should 'Improve or Move', with high quality information and advice available to older people to support them in making these decisions.

The framework recognises the need for this to be part of a coordinated offer between various institutions and agencies working in partnership.

Set within this policy context, this research project examined what is the current state of housing information and advice provision for older people across the different local authorities in Greater Manchester.

Methodology

This project was developed through a partnership approach, with members of the Housing and Neighbourhoods working group of Greater Manchester Older People's Network (GM OPN). The project's origins are in a Housing Manifesto developed by the Working Group members in 2017. Members of the GM OPN Housing and Neighbourhoods Working Group and other interested older people were invited to take part in the project. Through a series of remote working meetings in Spring and Summer 2021 the project team collaborated with the co-researchers

to develop the research approach and the scripts used in the research phone calls. The co-researchers were provided training and completed practice phone calls.

Co-researchers were able to participate in the project in different ways and as suited them best. These included developing the research approach, completing the research phone calls, helping with data input, discussing the initial findings and steering how the findings were presented and participating in dissemination from the project. Eight older people took part in different aspects of the co-research process.



Research process and data collection

The research team developed the initial plan for the data collection, which was developed further with the co-researchers. The data collection was completed by the co-researchers, who rang each of the local authorities in Greater Manchester, asking for advice on behalf of a friend who was starting to get concerned about their housing situation but was not in a crisis situation.

The co-researchers were calling to support a friend who wanted to plan for their future as they get older. This research examined the level and type of service the local authorities provided to help an older person to plan ahead. The team used two scripts, in one the 'friend' was an older person who considered moving from their current home, and in the other they did not want to move (See Appendix 1 for details of the personas used).

Each of the co-researchers was asked to complete 10 calls, one to each local authority, and potentially up to 10 further calls, to any external services they were signposted to, such as Age UK or the local Home Improvement Agency. For these calls the reporting procedure followed the same structure

as the calls made to local authorities. If a local authority signposted a person to more than one external service, they were asked to record the details of these.

The calls each co-researcher made were always about the same persona. The co-researchers were given a script for the calls, with scenarios they should outline. The script also included additional information they could provide if asked, and troubleshooting information for potential problems – including advice to say 'I don't know' or 'I'll need to check with my friend' for any other questions.

Part of the training included practising using the script in calls. The co-researchers were advised to follow the script to ensure the data collected by each co-researcher was comparable. They were also given an opportunity to tailor the script slightly, including deciding the name and gender of the 'friend' they were calling about, and changing the wording slightly to be sure they were comfortable using it.

To ensure the data collection process was rigorous, the co-researchers were advised to follow the same process (see Appendix 2 for further details). The co-researchers were provided with troubleshooting information to help them, and members of the research team were available to support them via phone calls or email. The co-researchers filled in detailed call sheet about each of the phone calls (see Appendix 3 for the call sheet).

Data

A total of 45 research calls were completed to the 10 local authorities within Greater Manchester. For persona A (who might need to move in future), a total of 18 calls were completed by 2 co-researchers and between 1 and 2 calls were made to each local authority. For persona B (who does not want to move), a total of 27 calls were completed by 3 co-researchers and between 2 and 3 calls were made to each local authority.

Local authority	Persona A call to LA	Persona B call to LA	Total calls to LA
Bolton	1	2	3
Bury	2	3	5
Manchester	2	2	4
Oldham	2	3	5
Rochdale	2	3	5
Salford	2	3	5
Stockport	2	2	4
Tameside	2	3	5
Trafford	2	3	5
Wigan	1	3	4
Total calls	18	27	45

There were a total of eight meetings held with the co-researchers, four before the research calls and four after the calls were completed. Anonymised notes from those meetings are also used as data for the project.

Findings

The findings section is divided into four parts, firstly about the process of getting through to a person who can provide housing options information and advice in the local authority, then about the focus on using websites for sharing housing options information, and the type and quality of the information that was provided over the telephone to the older co-researchers. In the last section we discuss how the older co-researchers described what made the calls either a positive or a negative experience.

The time to wait for the call to be answered varied from “seconds” / “almost immediate” to 36 minutes. Other challenges included difficulty understanding which option to choose via the automated answer systems and either getting cut off or not being answered at all.

“I just found the whole thing a pain. When I got to speak to someone I was cut off so gave up.”

Getting through to the local authority

The aspects that made the system work well included the provision of clear options in the automated messages and information about waiting time or place in queue. There were several challenges the older co-researchers encountered when calling the local authorities. Only 66% of the calls to the different local authority switchboards were answered within 30 minutes.

Websites for sharing housing options information

The project was planned from the point of view of older people who do not use the internet – unfortunately this can prove to be a significant barrier for accessing information:

“[I was told to go to the] council website and fill in application, when I reminded the person my friend isn't online. [They] replied 'everything is online'”

“Website was stressed again and again. To get the help you need [to be] on the internet”

The co-researchers were directed to a website for more information on 63% of the calls. The websites the callers were directed to were typically either the local authority's generic website or a website to apply for social housing. In some cases the co-researchers were directed to a website with information about adult social care and adaptations, or about support for living at home.



Several co-researchers reported they found it challenging to hear and write down the website information:

"[They] spoke too quick to get details"

One call responder stated that while there was information on the council website, all follow up communication and assessments would be done over the telephone.

The type and quality of information and advice provided over the phone

The information provided on the calls included signposting to other services such as adult social services, occupational therapists, local housing associations and older people's charities, information about adaptations services and how to apply for social housing.

However, the information provided was not consistent, even in calls to same local authority.

In some calls the co-researchers were told there was no advice provided to help with planning ahead and that the friend should contact them when they need the help:

"I was told straightaway there is nothing they can do or provide now for future planning. There are no leaflets or literature available for planning ahead in terms of housing options. Cannot provide any recommendations ahead of time as every single person's circumstances are different. They can only provide relevant information at the time when my friend actually needs the help".

What information was provided	% of the calls
Signposting to other services	40% calls
Adaptations service (for Persona B)	60% of calls about Persona B (who does not want to move house in future)
Website to apply for social housing	11% calls
No useful advice provided or told LA does not offer support for home owners	9% calls

On some calls co-researchers reported they were given no useful advice and in some cases they were told that the local authority does not provide support for home owners. In some cases they were signposted to other services, in one case they were told to contact estate agent and in another to get legal advice.

“No info if you own your home. Try estate agents”

“No service provided to home owners. Advised to phone Age Concern”

When called about Persona B, who does not want to move but is worried about being able to manage in their home in the future, in 60% of the calls they were told that when the person needed help, they can contact adaptations service, to assess their home and discuss what equipment can be provided and if they might have to pay for it. In a few cases the co-researcher was given a detailed description of what support would be available, how to get referred to it and the funding available for it e.g. a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), means testing or getting a loan.

“For aids and adaptations, an Occupational Therapist will be involved, e.g. access to property, hand and grab rails, aids to help getting in/out of bath. Also any major adaptations, e.g. stair lift, downstairs bathroom/wet room or wheelchair access to property will need to be assessed by OT first and recommendations given.”

What does good – and poor - service over the phone look like for an older person

A call to the local authority can be a positive experience, even if the person on the phone cannot provide the information or advice the caller is looking for. In 63% of the calls the co-researchers described the call as a positive experience.

In the table below we illustrate how the older co-researchers described what made the call a positive, or a negative experience.



What made the call a good experience

The person on the call	How the call made the co-researcher feel	Technical issues
Friendly and polite	Positive feeling on the call	In the automated message told about waiting time or place in queue
Empathy		
Understanding	Not rushed	
Good communication skills		
Age friendly approach, e.g. speaking calmly	Being listened to	

What made the call a poor experience

The person on the call	How the call made the co-researcher feel	Technical issues
Abrupt	Rushed	Unclear what option to choose from automated message
Unhelpful	Out of comfort zone	
Giving out complicated information, hard to understand	Not feeling confident	Call getting cut off

Reflections about co-research

When asked what the co-researchers gained from being involved in the project, they described that they now know more about housing options and where to access information that they could either use for themselves in future or share this with other people. Co-researcher described the sense of satisfaction in feeling they were involved in an important piece of research that had the potential to make changes. This was particularly helpful during covid, as they weren't seeing other people much, this project gave them something to focus on and the sense of being part of something bigger.

Having older people as co-researchers conducting the "mystery shopping" research phone calls provided a realistic picture of the type of information and support that is currently available for the people accessing the services. It also highlighted the important point that a 'one size fits all' approach to the provision of support or information is not always appropriate as the needs and expectations of service users can vary considerably.

For example, for one person being provided with a phone number to follow up is useful but for another person they may feel they are not given enough information and support.

"It was useful regards getting the two contact telephone numbers for housing options advice."

"Very limited, only given [phone] numbers. They didn't ask for anything else"

Having older people as co-researchers ensured the research gathered relevant insights into how the information and advice services are received by the intended service users. As one of the co-researchers described doing the research:

"It's a good way to find out what's not working".

Recommendations

Process of getting through to a person who can provide housing options information and advice in the local authority

There is a need to improve the navigation through the automated switchboard systems with clearer options and a recognition that customers may need longer to be able to select the right options. The aspects that made the system work well included the provision of clear options in the automated messages and information about waiting time or place in queue. There also needs to be options in other language and for those with hearing impairments and/or other communication challenges.

Internet shouldn't be the default option

Local authorities need to recognise that only being able to access information via the internet is a barrier to many older people,

particularly those who are more disadvantaged, thereby exacerbating inequalities. For many accessing services via a website is not an option and so a good telephone advice service remains an important part of their duty to provide information and advice under the Care Act 2014.

The type and quality of information and advice provided over the telephone

Local authorities need to consider their strategy for supporting people who are not online. Access to services should be easily accessible via telephone. Call handlers should be trained accordingly and be made fully aware of the housing options information and advice, and how to find it. Call handlers should also be trained in age friendly communication.

How the older co-researchers described the quality of the interaction they had over the phone

Project partners

This research was funded by the British Society of Gerontology Averil Osborn Award. The Averil Osborn Award seeks to promote and support work which enhances the participation and leadership of older people in research.

The research project was led by Liz Jones from Macc and Dr Emma Koivunen from Care & Repair England. The project advisors were Dr Sophie Yarker (MICRA, University of Manchester) and Dr Mark Hammond (Manchester School of Architecture).

Eight older people from The Greater Manchester Older People's Network (GMOPN) took part as co-researchers. They are: Elaine Unegbu, Elizabeth Lynskey, Jamil Abdulkader, Amira Hashmi, Judie Collins, Ralph Moses, Amy Muthra Shah and Flick Harris.

The GMOPN is a growing network of older people and organisational representatives, with over 350 members across the city region. (www.gmopn.org.uk) The network aims to ensure that older people can get their voices heard and that they are able to influence strategy and policy that affects older people.

Each call to local authority must be a positive experience, particularly so for a vulnerable person. If they have a bad experience, they are less likely to ask for help or advice again. Action is needed to improve provision of housing information and advice for older people across GM in order to achieve the stated informed housing decision making objectives in the GM Framework for Creating Age-Friendly Homes in Greater Manchester, 2021-24.

The findings show there is a gap between the rhetoric and the front-line experience of older people. Greater Manchester has an opportunity to lead the way on integrated provision of information and advice for people wishing to make well informed housing, care and financial decisions in later life. Improved housing options information and advice service could also be used to provide residents of Greater Manchester with information and guidance about retrofitting homes and making changes in preparation for climate change and net zero targets. There is also a need to raise awareness among older people about the housing options and support that is available to them locally, and what information and advice should be available to them.

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Appendix 1: Script, Persona A and B

Before you start the project decide on a first name and gender for the person you are calling about. Choose a first name only. Choose a name that you are very familiar with and stick with it for the whole project so that you don't get confused.

Before you make the call, check information from the Step-by-Step guide, that you have everything in place.

Script for Persona A. (Thinking they might need to move in the future)

1.Call the main council switchboard

a)If you get through to a person immediately

"Hello. I'm calling to ask for some advice. I've got a friend who lives in (name of area) who is wanting some information about managing in their home. They're in their 70s and worried they won't be able to manage in the future.

I said I would call the council for them to see what information or services you would recommend to help them think about this more. Could you put me through to the best person to help please."

Then when you are put through to someone, say

"Hello. I'm hoping I've got through to the right person to help me.I'm calling to ask for some advice.I've got a friend who lives in (name of area) and wants some information about managing in their home.

They're in their 70s and live alone. They're starting to think about if they will be able to manage in the future. I said I would call the council for them to see if you can help. Is there any information or services that you would recommend to help them think about this more? They're thinking that they might like to move in the future as they were saying that the house is quite big for one person but I think they would like to stay in (name of area). They aren't on the internet so they'd need to speak to someone or have some information sent to them."

b) If you get through to a recorded message with a list of options choose the one that seems to fit best

and as soon as you get through to someone say:

“Hello. I’m hoping I’ve got through to the right person to help me. I’m calling to ask for some advice. I’ve got a friend who lives in (name of area) and wants some information about managing in their home. They’re in their 70s and live alone. They’re starting to think about if they will be able to manage in the future. I said I would call the council for them to see if you can help. Is there any information or services that you would recommend to help them think about this more? They’re thinking that they might like to move in the future as they were saying that the house is quite big for one person but I think they would like to stay in (name of area). They aren’t on the internet so they’d need to speak to someone or have some information sent to them.”

If you are asked to repeat any of this information, provide the specific details again.

Persona B – Thinking they might need to make changes to their house

2. Call the main council switchboard

a) If you get through to a person immediately

“Hello. I’m calling to ask for some advice. I’ve got a friend who lives in (name of area) who is wanting some information about managing in their home. They’re in their 70s and worried they won’t be able to manage in the future. I said I would call the council for them to see what information or services you would recommend to help them think about this more. Could you put me through to the best person to help please.”

Then when you are put through to someone, say

“Hello. I’m hoping I’ve got through to the right person to help me. I’m calling to ask for some advice. I’ve got a friend who lives in (name of area) and wants some information about managing in their home. They’re in their 70s and live alone. They’re starting to worry about the future and whether they’ll be able to manage.

I said I would call the council for them to see if you can help. Is there any information or services that you would recommend to help them think about this more? They want to stay in their house but they are starting to worry about maintaining the property and think they might need to make changes in some parts of the house if they find it more difficult to get around as they get older.

They aren't on the internet so they'd need to speak to someone or have some information sent to them."

b) If you get through to a recorded message with a list of options choose the one that seems to fit best

and as soon as you get through to someone say:

"Hello. I'm hoping I've got through to the right person to help me. I'm calling to ask for some advice. I've got a friend who lives in (name of area) and wants some information about managing in their home. They're in their 70s and live alone. They're starting to think about if they will be able to manage in the future. I said I would call the council for them to see if you can help. Is there any information or services that you would recommend to help them think about this more?

They want to stay in their house but worry that they might need to make changes in some parts of the house if they find it more difficult to get around as they get older. They're also starting to worry about maintaining the property.

They aren't on the internet so they'd need to speak to someone or have some information sent to them."

If you are asked to repeat any of this information, provide the specific details again.

Supplementary information for the calls

If you are asked additional questions about the person or their situation:

These are the things that you know:

- Home owner
- Gender (you can choose)
- First name (your choice)
- No risk involved (homelessness/safeguarding/self care)
- Not in any crisis issue at all
- Just wanting information to plan for the future

If you are asked for any further details than those above:

- Do not make up any additional details
- Just say: "I don't know" or "I'd have to find out"

At the end of your conversation, if you have not been given any other numbers to contact, ask,

"Is there another housing advice service that I can contact?"

And "Could I have a telephone number please?"

Appendix 2: Step by step guide to the research

Thank you for taking part as a co-researcher. We hope you find the experience interesting and useful. This step-by-step guide explains what you need to do for the research calls.

The aim of the research is to assess the housing options information provided by each of the local authorities in Greater Manchester.

We will do this by making telephone calls to the council, calling as a friend of an older person who needs information. You are calling to support someone who wants to plan for their future as they get older. This research will help demonstrate what level of service each local authority offers to help someone plan in this way.

You will need to make 10 calls to different local authorities and further calls (up to 10 in addition) to any services they tell you about.

We would ideally like you to complete the research calls by 10th September 2021. However, if you need longer to complete the calls it should be possible to extend this. Just let us know if you need more time.

All the calls you make will be about the same Persona. The script for the calls is included in your research and based on the Persona that you will concentrate on.

To get accurate information about the services the local councils provide, it is important that

- They don't know about the research – to them, your call is a regular resident calling for advice

- The calls are all done in the same way: please follow the script, do not include any additional information that is not on the script (although it's ok to vary the style to make it feel more natural to the way you talk)
- The information is recorded accurately: please fill in the recording sheet after each call, making notes as you go along

Making the call

In your packs you have been provided with a checklist with numbers for each of the Local Authorities. After you have made each call, tick the box against the local authority to keep track of the calls as you make them.

When to make the call

We want to make sure that the project works for all our researchers so it is up to you when you make the calls. However, we are also trying to make sure that the calls are made at different times of the day. We have therefore suggested that you make your calls either in the morning or in the afternoon, taking into account any preference you suggested earlier.

Your time for making calls (either morning or afternoon) is on the Checklist with local authority numbers in your research pack. However, please don't feel tied to this and if you that time isn't working out for you or you feel like making a call at a different time of day this is ok.

Before each call

Make sure you know the information from the script.

Check which local authority you are calling to and the neighbourhood for that area.

Read through the recording document for what information you need to write down.

Note the date of the call and the time you are starting.

Have with you:

- Pen and paper
- The recording sheet
- Persona sheet

During the call

The script has all the information you need for the call.

You will first call the main switch board. Explain to them that you are looking for information about housing for an older person (if needed, you can tell them more from the script).

Write down details on the call (e.g. websites, organisation names etc). If you want to, you can say to the person you are speaking to that you'll have to write the information down so you can tell your friend afterwards.

After the call

Note the time you finish the call – fill in on the recording form how long it took.

- Include details of how long it took to wait for the switchboard to answer. Also include details of how long it took to answer when you were transferred.

Fill in all the information on the recording sheet before doing another call.

Follow up call to services you've been signposted to

If the Local Authority gives you details of an external service (such as Age UK, local Care and Repair etc), call them and follow the same procedure as the call to the Local Authority.

If the Local Authority recommends more than one service to call and provides more than one number, please note all services recommended. However, just choose one service to make a follow up call.

Troubleshooting

- **If the person asks for your details to call back...**

- say that you will call back and ask for the best time.

- **If the person offers to send you some information by post or email (?)**

Ask what information they can send?

-Say you'll speak to your friend and that you will call back if they want this information (you won't actually need to call back)

- **If you are having problems writing everything down**

- say “please can you repeat that. I’m taking some notes so I want to make sure I get all the information down”.

- **If they suggest social services,**

record the information as you would normally. However, ask the following additional question:

“Are you sure that it’s social services that I need to talk to? They’re managing ok at the moment. Is there someone different that they should speak to about housing options for older people in their situation, trying to plan for the future?”

- **If they ask if you are doing a research project**

This is very unlikely, but if they do you can say yes you are, you’re a volunteer with GM Older People’s Network doing research about Housing Options Information in Greater Manchester.

- **If you have other problems or wish to talk to someone about calls**

Either Liz or Emma will be available to provide support for the duration of the research by phone (Tuesday – Thursday).

Please leave a message if we can’t pick up straight away.



Appendix 3: Call sheet recording document

Co-researcher name Local Authority Persona A / B
Date & day of week..... Time you started the call.....
Time you ended the call.....

Call to switchboard:

Was your call still unanswered after 30 minutes? Yes / No

**If yes do not continue to hold. You do not need to call this local authority again.
If no,**

How long did you have to wait for the call to be answered?

Notes – e.g. if you were cut off / had to call again etc

Switchboard Options

Was it clear which option to choose? Yes/ No

Notes and comments

Did a recorded message suggest that you go to a website instead? Yes / No

Were you offered a call-back? Yes / No **(Do not take the option of a call back if offered)**

Main call

Who were you transferred to (role / dept) – e.g. housing options officer

1. What information was offered?

What did they tell you about the information or support your friend could get through the council?

a) Was a one to one advice service offered? Yes / No

b) Did they offer to send written information through post? Yes / No

If yes, what information did they offer to send?

c) Were you directed to websites? Yes / No

If yes, please record which websites

d) Were you signposted to other services or organisations (for example, Age UK, Housing Information Service/Care and repair? Yes / No

If yes, which service or services were you directed to?

Did they explain what support or advice the service or services could offer? Yes / No

Were you asked specific supplementary information about the person you were calling about? (Please tick any information asked for).

- Home owner
- Gender
- Living alone or with other people
- Any risk involved? (homelessness/safeguarding/self care)
- What area they live in
- What area wanting to live in.

Did they ask anything else and if so what? (Don't forget you need to answer "I don't know" if they do.) _____

a) Did the issue of confidentiality come up?

b) Was it hard to get information for a friend because the advisor wanted to talk to the person themselves?

3. What was the information offered like?

a) Do you feel the information was useful? Yes / No

b) Do you feel the information was comprehensive? Yes / No

c) Was the call a positive experience overall? Yes / No

d) Was the first person you were directed to able to help you? Yes / No

If not, were you immediately directed to someone who could?

e) Do you have anything else to add or general reflections about the call?

Appendix 4: : Further data

How the information was provided – follow up questions

Was the first person you spoke to able to help you?

Yes = 46% of the calls No = 58% of the calls

Was one to one advice service offered?

Yes = 42% of the calls No = 58% of the calls

Where you offered a call back?

11 = yes

19 = no

14 = empty or n/a

Did they offer to send written information through post?

Yes = 46% of the calls No = 54% of the calls

The information offered to be sent was general information about health and social care contact information, and wellbeing and adult services – nothing specific to help with planning for future housing options.

Was the information provided comprehensive?

The co-researchers were asked if the information they received on the calls was comprehensive. In 48% of the calls, the co-researchers reported that the information they received was not comprehensive. For 52% of the calls completed they felt it was.



Join our network!

The Greater Manchester Older People's Network is all about getting older people's voices heard from right across Greater Manchester. Membership is open to individuals aged 50 and over and to organisations that support older people.

Our members receive a monthly newsletter, invitations to our events and information about training and participation opportunities. It's up to you to get involved in the network as much or as little as you would like.

For further information or to become a member please contact Liz or Beth on 0161 834 9823 or email GMOPN@macc.org.uk

Website: www.gmopn.org.uk

Twitter: @GMOPN1