



The Echo

The Magazine of the Elders Council

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25 years of the Elders Council

The Elders Council – harnessing the voices of older people

The roots of the Elders Council go back to 1998, when the Better Government for Older People programme started asking for the direct engagement of older people in helping to shape future policy. Up until that point, the perspectives of older people were often presented by staff (usually younger people) from age sector agencies. At last, older people were being given a platform to speak for themselves, giving the impetus for the formation of the Elders Council.

The Elders Council set out to find interesting ways to engage people and encourage them to have a say. These have ranged from discussion groups and focus groups to creative writing, collage and drama. Everyone's experience and expertise counts. We've led by example, breaking the mould of ageist stereotypes. We've worked hard and had fun but have always kept our eyes on the prize of making a difference to the lives of older people now and in the future.

We've never tried to go it alone but have sought partnerships and collaborations with academics, public and private organisations, national and international networks. We've used every opportunity to learn from others and to share our insights.

**'Old Spice', new bathrooms, 'the Hoppings',
- a cornucopia of delight!**



The most notable partnership was the Quality of Life Partnership, which brought together Newcastle City Council, Age UK Newcastle and the Elders Council. Together, we developed [InformationNOW](#), an online information resource which is now well established and widely used by older people and agencies.



We also collaborated on developing *Everyone's Tomorrow*, Newcastle's Strategy for an Ageing Population, which was published in 2007. This work led to the Elders Council playing a lead role in Newcastle's commitment to become an [age-friendly city](#).



Covid could have scuppered us. How were we going to work when we usually met in person? But we learned to use Zoom and Teams to keep the work going, even hosting webinars online. We telephoned members and signposted them to help if they needed it. And we sewed laundry bags for care homes!

It can sometimes feel as though we are trying to turn a tanker around but, as we reflect on the past 25 years, we can record many successes. Above all, we can take heart in knowing that there is much greater recognition of the value of older people's hands and voices in driving change for the better.

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Using drama to influence thinking about old age

by Julie Irvine

Some readers will remember a group of Elders Council members calling themselves **Old Spice** who used drama to challenge thinking and combat negative stereotypes about old age – particularly to health and social care professionals.



As a former social work educator, I remember Old Spice working with students at Northumbria University. I was so impressed by their creativity and use of comedy to raise awareness of ageism and the impact of being at the receiving end of services.

One sketch which stands out in my memory was about a social worker

coming to someone's house to carry out an assessment for help in home care. It started with the social worker character saying, "Mrs Livingstone, I presume" to the "old person" in a very patronising manner. It definitely demonstrated how NOT to carry out a professional assessment! This was followed by a "hot seating" exercise with the "social worker" sitting on a chair at the front. The students were asked to come up with suggestions as to how she could have carried out her role differently. This could mean asking more sensitive questions or not speaking to the daughter over the service user's head. These sessions were followed up with poems (see page 4) and even a few keep-fit exercises which the students had to do sitting on their chairs.

Old Spice always remembered that being creative, writing had to have a wider purpose than simply personal enjoyment, and drama was the method to give out important messages about getting old.

Vera, Shiela, Eileen, Billie and Betty – thank you.

Old Spice wrote their scripts and this is one of the poems.

Don't

Don't ask them too many questions
You won't get the answers.
Don't ring for them to assist you
You'll get their backs up.
Don't make any comments about the way
You are being treated.
I keep quiet as a mouse.

Don't ask to go to your room in the middle of the day
They won't let you.
Don't confide in Lottie over there.
She knows everyone's business.
Don't leave your teeth or your glasses lying around.
You'll never get them back.
Billie a member of the Old Spice team



When, in 2007, the Elders Council got a telephone call from Community Broadcast Initiative Tyneside (CBIT) asking us whether we'd like to add a radio programme to our communications portfolio, we jumped at the chance. We knew that quite a few of our members were isolated at home and we thought that a radio programme would help us to reach out to them.

From the beginning, we decided that a magazine format is what would be a good way to engage our intended audience: information and a mixture of talk and music. We got together a group of volunteers (much easier to do then than it is now) and started broadcasting.

A couple of us had been on radio before but none of us had any technical experience of radio when we started; so, two of us went on a CBIT course about putting a show together and off we went.

CBIT assigned us a marvellous mentor – Elaine Parker – who showed us how to “run the desk” (manage all the knobs and dials that you need to control the output), for we did our programmes live from a CBIT studio in those early days. We've gone from 30 minutes a month to an hour weekly, and, since covid, we now record all our programmes at home via Zoom.

We have a team of ten Elders Council members. We boast that we're the only radio magazine programme in the UK (and, we think, in

Europe) to be produced entirely by older people themselves. Our median age is 83 and we have two 90-year-olds in the team.

But we're always looking for fresh blood. Please listen to our past programmes by going to mixcloud.com/LLARC or listen live at **six o'clock** every Wednesday on Radio Tyneside on wavelength 93.6fm. If you like what you hear, please ring the office on 0191 208 2701 and ask me to ring you. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Welcome to Don Jenkins, our new Creative Co-ordinator

Don Jenkins has joined the Elders Council team. He is community poet, writer, event producer, workshop facilitator, proud Westender and the new Creative Coordinator for the Elders Council Book Project.



He loves to rant and rhyme and has performed at Glastonbury Festival and the Royal Albert Hall. He is widely published in journals, magazines and anthologies.

Don is also a qualified youth & community worker and English teacher and has twenty-seven years' experience of engaging community groups in a variety of settings. Most recently, he has been

coordinating a project with Elders Council members to write and honour the stories of people buried in Elswick's Victorian cemeteries: www.storiesofthestones.com - [Tales from Westgate Hill & St John's Cemetery, Elswick, Newcastle.](#)

In his role as Creative Coordinator for the Book Project, Don will be working with the Elders Council Owls Group and running outreach workshops to collect the stories of you and other Elders Council members to create a book to celebrate twenty-five years of the Elders Council.

If you have written a poem, short story or memory that retells or reflects on your life living in Newcastle, be sure to submit it to Don at bookproject@elderscouncil.org.uk for a chance for it to be included in this important publication. Don't worry if you have never written before or would like ideas on what to write for this project;

Don will be running a series of fun, accessible workshops in person and online in the near future. He will support you to create your next written masterpiece. Watch out in our Bulletin for information or drop Don an email at bookproject@elderscouncil.org.uk

Two new trustees began their terms of office in September. We welcome Stella and John who write a brief biography.

Stella Simbo

I'm inspired by the Elders Council's Connect, Activate, and Influence framework, which aligns closely with my values. I believe older people have a vital role in shaping a caring and progressive society, and – in line with my cultural background and heritage - I'm passionate about ensuring their voices are heard and valued. I welcome the opportunity to contribute my knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics to an organisation whose mission resonates deeply with me.



While I find all aspects of the Elders Council's work meaningful, I'm particularly drawn to areas that align with my passions: supporting ageing research, promoting digital inclusion, engaging in representation and consultation, and contributing to the Age Proud Network. These areas reflect my commitment to lifelong learning, equity, and community empowerment.

John Thomas White

I served on Newcastle City Council Residents' and Tenants' groups. I support charitable organisations. Recently I completed the 'Ageing with Purpose', course and learned more about the Elders Council.



Currently I am involved with SEARCH a charity supporting older people in the west end of Newcastle. I believe there is a role to play in promoting older people's views and contributing to society. I am interested in communication, news by magazine. I've written

articles for previous Elders Council magazines and enjoyed my interview on Older Voices radio. I believe in liaising with local authority and working in partnership with other organisations.

Research and Impact Group (RIG)

By Barbara Douglas

The name may sound a bit daunting, but the reality isn't. The RIG is a group of Elders Council members who are willing to put in a bit of time and effort to explore the key issues that are affecting our daily lives and working with partners across the city to try to bring about change.



We work with academics to ensure that research is grounded in our lived experience and focuses on the issues that matter to us. We also undertake our own investigations into how services are working and identify where improvement is needed. We are currently focusing on gaining a better understanding of aids and adaptations and on finding out what current support and information is available in Newcastle.

We also support our representatives on the digital inclusion group, working to ensure that we have opportunities to update our digital skills, but also that there are alternatives to digital when we need to speak to a person or read something on paper.

As Newcastle City Council has made a commitment to become a Marmot city ([Newcastle becomes a Marmot City to improve public health | Newcastle City Council](#)), we are keen to support this work and to explore how it aligns with our commitment to become an age friendly city.

If you are interested in giving a bit of time to engage in the work at the heart of the Elders Council, why not come along to a meeting to find out more?

**Contact the Elders Council office for more information.
Details for contact on the back page.**

This next article comes from Lloyd Alter, who teaches sustainable design at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Falls kill more people than guns or cars, but nobody wants to talk about it.

Lloyd had read an academic paper (from the USA) about the causes of falling over in older people. He became, frustrated and angry as they blamed the victim for getting old!

He said the article stressed the medical problems and digital solutions like fitness trackers, and vital-sign monitors and blamed



people for getting old rather than looking at problems other than medication that would help prevent many people falling over. This is something the Elders Council have been saying for some considerable time. That is that

environmental problems are a constant problem and are not properly addressed. These are

poor lighting, uneven surfaces and slippery floors that actually cause the falls. What's needed are better bathrooms, safer streets, walkable communities, appropriate housing, and universal design.

This isn't just a problem of people being old and frail; it's a design problem. It's an interior design problem, a building design problem, an urban design problem, a maintenance problem, and an attitude problem of blaming the victim.

Lloyd sounded pretty angry and the article cited the statistics showing more people in the USA die from falling over than from gunshots and that's a lot of people!

The Elders Council have spent time working on many of these issues. We have worked with housing developers, architects, interior designers and occupational therapists on these subjects. There are some improvements but it is slow. It is worthwhile continuing to repeat and repeat the problems design faults can cause and continue to press for improvements.

Research and what you can gain by taking part

by Anne Raffle

Earlier this year I saw a research opportunity in the Elders Council e-bulletin, for a new project called PERFORM (Personalised Exercise-Rehabilitation for People with Multiple Long-term Conditions), a collaboration with the National Institute of Care & Research, University of Leicester and Northumbria University.

Three years ago, I was in hospital for seven weeks and I've been attending a weekly session of seated tai chi (Chi Me). However, I felt that I needed more to help my mobility and balance, so decided that I would like to give this research a try: after all, what do I have to lose?

I was accepted onto the programme with Healthworks Newcastle. My journey began in July and will last around 12 months. The first session was completing paperwork to provide an update on my ability, both physical and emotional. Then I did a lot of walking back and forth so that they could assess my mobility.



I commenced an eight-week, two-hour, twice-a-week session, which was half exercise and half educational. There were around nine of us on the course and it has been good to make new friends, share our own stories of recovery and how we have resolved particular issues we live with on a daily basis.

We also had the benefit of two participants who have clinical backgrounds and their knowledge and expertise has been a great opportunity to ask more questions. I cannot guarantee this on every occasion though!

The first eight weeks are finished and I'm waiting for the next assessment in three months' time. I have seen an improvement in myself, having been reminded of how to self-manage my pain.

I would absolutely recommend that, if you are able, you consider helping researchers if there is a project that caters for your needs.

Don't be shy, they value your assistance and input into their work. So often you both get something valuable out of the experience.

<https://www.healthworksne.org.uk/service/perform-trial/>

Getting a little help to stay put

Many of us find that our balance is not as good as it once was or our body seems to be getting older despite our best efforts to keep mobile! We know there has been a lot of talk about keeping safe but how easy is it to find out more? Lots of different terms are used to describe adaptations, aids and equipment in the home and increasingly "telecare" is being talked about – using electronic or digital devices to allegedly "keep us safe".

A group of Elders Council members decided to find out what support and advice is available in Newcastle. Here are some starting points:

InformationNow

This is the information website for Newcastle. it has an easy-to-understand page on adaptations and equipment, where to get local advice, and help with several links:

<https://www.informationnow.org.uk/article/home-adaptations-equipment-and-aids/>

Age UK also has a useful national webpage

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/care/housing-options/adapting-home/making-home-comfortable/>

It has a free Helpline for information and advice: 0800 678 1602.

Independent Age also has a national webpage and Helpline

<https://www.independentage.org/get-advice/housing/home-adaptations>? Tel: 0800 319 6789

Newcastle City Council

The council website has a lot of information but we found it was not always easy to navigate. However, you can get specific advice by contacting Adult Social CarePoint 'for a chat' (Tel. No. 0191 278 8377) or by email: ASCP@newcastle.gov.uk

Disability North

Disability North provides information, advice and support to disabled people. This includes equipment, aids and adaptations and second-

hand equipment on its website: <https://www.disabilitynorth.org.uk>. For information, telephone 0191 284 0480.

Talk about a missed opportunity

by Sandra Broadbent

I had just had an exchange of emails to organise a Platform 60 meeting where one topic mentioned was that, at a recent Pro-Palestinian demonstration, over 50% of those arrested were over 60. I thought about the campaigning carried out by WASPI women and remembered that I came to the conclusion a few years ago that the government of the day had disturbed the “sleeping giant”. Since that time, there has been so much more to be concerned about: broken promises and u- turns, older people feeling targeted by government. It's not surprising that older people have had enough and they have the time to take to the streets to say so.



The next email was from an online retailer with the same name as a river in South America. This email urged me to check out the range of products identified as essential for older people. So, I looked. Every page included items such as incontinence pants, walking sticks, grabbers and grippers and wallets for bus-passes. Now some of this stuff will be very useful when you are standing outside parliament with the wind from the Thames whistling up your trousers and there isn't a seat to rest weary bones. What was missing though were horns, whistles and rattles, poster paints for banners, chains for railings, a map to navigating the underground or a guide to representing yourself in court. I wonder if retailers will ever recognise that their cosy view of older people is so far from reality that they run the risk of being irrelevant. Older people don't just contemplate bladder weakness; they are also engaged with the world as a whole and not afraid to say so.



(Platform 60 <https://platform60.org.uk/> is a website for older people by older people, just like the Elders Council. They focus on activism and much of what they advocate is often a duplicate of what the Elders Council strives for.)

A Neighbour creates problems

For five years after lockdown, I was subjected to harassment and bullying from neighbours. I am an older woman and I was aghast that during lockdown my neighbours were partying and ignoring the rules in place to stay vigilant to not spreading the virus. I contacted the police about them. They were warned of their actions, and since then they kept up a vendetta towards me.

Parking my car was always an issue if my exit was blocked by them. Rather than approach them I didn't use my car. I once parked across the street to make space for a delivery van. The man across the street started to let the tyres down on my car after shouting abuse at me.

In December 2024 as I was parking my car the man across the street pulled up behind making it difficult for me to park on my drive. As I got out of my car he shouted misogynistic threatening abuse at me. I was frightened about what would happen next as I live alone and I contacted the police.

When the police officer asked the neighbours if they had seen anything, they denied it. They had seen the incident because I had seen them watching from their window.

However, the police officer was vigilant in pursuing a community action against the offending neighbour. He admitted to the offence after being served with a community service order. He opted for the lesser order to write me a letter of apology to me, which he did.

The police supported me throughout the ordeal and beyond. They class abuse and threats of harm to a woman from a man as a crime. Consequently, I was referred to the Safeguarding Team in Social Services who gave me support in making me feel valued and heard. I was regarded as a vulnerable adult who needed protecting. I felt relieved to have their support and assurance.

The police and I agreed to close the case after things settled down with no further incidents. The option to go to court I considered unnecessary as the situation was resolved.



In conclusion I recommend that any incident of threatening abuse directed towards a person be reported to the police for them to ascertain what action can be taken in support to the victim.

People can be of the opinion that the police don't take incidents of threatening abuse towards women seriously, however I can assure you that is not the case. I can only say that the changes in recognition of intended threats of harm towards women is a valued progression in the law.



Editor: We haven't published the name of the writer of this article at her request. She has written her experience of a very difficult situation and we are pleased to publish it. She advocates that if you experience similar problems do contact the police.

A Brave New World of high technology?

Some Elders Council members recently went to visit Longevity House, a Newcastle flat that is showcasing high tech designed to help us all live more independently. You may have seen about it on TV.

First impressions were good: we were shown special devices to put on our smartwatch (if you can afford one) that would notify someone if you fell and couldn't get up. There was a very clever automatic multiple pill dispenser that would eject the right pill at the right time and would beep until you remembered to take it! Did you know that IKEA has a side table that is also an air purifier, or a special shelf that will charge up your smart phone without plugging it in? We saw light bulbs that follow the human circadian rhythm (I think that means it follows natural lighting, which has a better impact on our health). Apparently, all of us older people know how to operate our new smart TVs! You can therefore have an app called "Care Messenger" that will work like texting or video calling on your mobile phone. Not much use to someone like me who finds it difficult enough to remember which buttons to press on which remote control!

Some of the gadgets looked really useful, like the rod for pulling down a blind or the circadian light bulb. However, some didn't work;

either the batteries needed replacing or the tech didn't work as it should. A lot of the equipment is still being developed and could be expensive, either to buy or to run. Who wants higher electricity bills these days? Many gadgets seemed quite complicated to use.

But what was worse, and completely unacceptable, was finding out



that the flat was not accessible for wheelchair users. We were mortified when one Elders Council member couldn't even get in the front door as it was not wide enough. How does this "embrace the world of future living" when you can't even get in? Watch this space!

Letter from Hong Kong: Caring for Mum during the summer

by Paul Wong

Paul is one of the graduates from the EC's recent 'Ageing with Purpose' course he will be back in the UK in the Autumn.

Dear friends in Newcastle,

August in Hong Kong continues to be hot and humid, with temperatures often reaching over 33°C. Unlike the gentle warmth of Newcastle summers, here the air feels heavy and still. The city buzzes with life, from the clinking of dim sum restaurants to the constant hum of air conditioners. Each week, I accompany my mother to her clinic visits and hydrotherapy sessions to help with her ageing legs. I push her in her wheelchair to appointments, and we chat along the way. These small journeys to the hospital, the therapy pool or back home have become precious time we share.

Though tiring, this closeness feels like a quiet blessing. Public transport here is fast and efficient but crowded, especially in the heat. In contrast, I miss the calm pace of Newcastle buses and quieter streets.

The green spaces around Jesmond or the riverside walks along the Tyne feel a world away from the dense high-rises and narrow alleys of old Kowloon.



We've begun applying for a live-in helper from Indonesia, someone who can care for Mum when I return to Newcastle. It's a decision made with both love and necessity. Though far from you all, I carry with me the warmth and strength I received from our Elders Council community.

Wishing you a peaceful end to summer

The photo from Paul is a summer evening in Hong Kong

The next items are from members who are part of the OWLS (Older Writers- Legacy & Spoken word) writing group.

William Mitford, songwriter performer 1788-1851

By Darlene Lambert

William Mitford was born in North Shields on 10 April 1788. His parents both died when he was very young. However, his uncle brought him to Newcastle and he became a shoemaker's apprentice on Dean Street. He moved on to the licensing trade and ran his own pub in Spital Tongues called The North Pole, now The North Terrace. This public house was very close to the local pit entrance.

William would entertain and perform, singing his own songs for his customers. *Cappy the pitman's dog* was a favourite song of pitmen and their wives. You can see Peter Armstrong on YouTube performing his version of the song at the Bridge Hotel, Newcastle.

The earliest record of Mitford appears in a budget chap book, Newcastle songster series, 1866. He had 11 songs published.

The Newcastle songster was printed by John Marshall down the Bigg Market, giving the lyrics to local, now historical, songs. These books



were very popular and were mass produced and sold for less than a penny.

When Richard Grainger the architect set out his redevelopment ideas for Newcastle city centre, Mitford wrote a protest song, long before protest songs were invented. The song began: "Where's the wee shop that once held Jack the Barber? Gone to make way for the fish brought from the harbour."

Mitford was said to be of good character, a jovial guy with a big voice and certainly a quick wit. He was said to have written hundreds if not thousands of songs during his life. A great performer, he sang with confidence; he would get his audience involved, inviting people to join in and clap along.

He moved from the pub in Spital Tongues around 1834 to the Tailors Arms near the quayside. He retired to Oyster Shell Lane near Bath Lane. He died aged 63 on 3rd March 1851 and is buried at Westgate General cemetery, Newcastle upon Tyne.

The Hoppings has been and gone: another successful week for Newcastle culture

by Rob Armstrong

The Hoppings are here again; here comes the rain.

I remember that, when I was a boy of 10, my mother, my sister and I all got jobs at the funfair. My mother on the prize bingo, my sister on the ping pong balls, calling out, "put the balls into the goldfish bowl".



I was on the cans. Customers would have to knock them off the shelves; I would shout, "Three balls for a tanner!"

We worked the full week, making the most of it. Most of the money went straight back into the family household. However, I used to sneak the odd tanner down my wellies to buy something nice for myself – a nice toffee apple or candy floss. Happy days!

After the fair was gone, we would walk around looking for money left from revellers who went on the big wheel.

There were coconuts and dead fish left, an old bumper car and coin machine. I took the coin machine home with me – memories of my childhood days.

Alison's new bathroom/wet room

by Alison Blackburn

I listened with interest to John Telfer's account of moving house (summer 2025 edition). About 12 years ago, I had spinal trouble and have had surgery. Prior to the surgery we needed a new bathroom. We did research and the prices were astronomical. I have several health problems so my partner and I decided to have a wet room.

We spoke to social services, who told me that, as I'm blind, they would pay for the wet room to be installed (this was some years ago). What they offered was basic and I wasn't too keen but I thought, "Well, you have the money to put a proper bathroom in, why not use that money to put a room in that you really want?"

We had a shower installed and the bath removed. The flooring is tactile and non-slip. We decided to have a chair-height toilet and it's fabulous: so easy to get on and off and no need for toilet seat raisers that look so awful. We included a bidet, but I forgot get a higher one! The builders did all the work and completed on time. I left my partner watching the contractors and I went on holiday for a week – very nice, thank you!

Have I ever regretted putting a wet room in?

No, because I'm not as mobile or as fit as I used to be so it has come into its own.



And next time round I'm considering a Japanese toilet. These warm the seat and when you finish there's a spray of warm water that cleans you both back and front. Finally, a warm breeze of air comes and dries you off; what's not to like? Probably the price! The council still do disability adaptations grants so maybe you could have a half-

and-half, where they pay for the heavy work to be done and you pay for perhaps some of the niceties.

Would I do it again? Without hesitation.

Looking at the illustration, you can also have music Alison! (editor)

Information

Adult Social CarePoint has moved to a new phone system

Adult Social Care is part of Newcastle City Council's services. It is all about helping people who have care needs to stay independent, safe and well. It now has a new phone system.

You can now contact us by phoning Newcastle City Council on 0191 278 7878 and asking for "Adult Social Care Point".

You'll be asked: "Is that Adult Social Care Point?"; please answer "Yes" to then speak to the next available person.

If the system doesn't catch what you say, it will ask you to repeat which department you would like to speak to. If it still can't understand, you will be put through to our Customer Contact Centre

Adult Social CarePoint at Newcastle City Council

Phone: [0191 278 7878](tel:01912787878); ask for Adult Social CarePoint

Open: Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm

Email: ASCP@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: www.newcastle.gov.uk/AdultSocialCare

Dementia Connections Newcastle



Families across Newcastle living with dementia can now receive vital specialist support thanks to the launch of a new dementia service, "**Dementia Connections Newcastle**". The service is launched through a partnership between, Search Newcastle, Age UK North Tyneside and Dementia UK. It has also been made possible with additional funding from the

Ballinger Trust, Dementia UK and with a generous donation from The Barbour Foundation.

This Partnership builds on the support and social opportunities provided by Search and introduces Admiral Nurses to the city.

Age UK North Tyneside has been delivering Admiral Nurse support to the North Tyneside region and is proud to offer this service in Newcastle as well. Admiral Nurses are registered nurses who specialise in dementia and provide expert guidance, clinical care and emotional support to carers and families affected by dementia. They help people living with dementia stay independent for longer and support their families in navigating the complexities of care, their loved one's diagnosis, and the health systems and support options available. Admiral Nurses not only work directly with carers and people living with dementia but also support health professionals and care providers, ensuring joined-up care for families across services. They work closely with families to build resilience, provide education and ensure they have the tools and confidence to manage day-to-day challenges.

The new service aims to reduce crisis points, hospital admissions and delays in accessing support. The Admiral Nurse model is proven to reduce pressure on local health services, improve outcomes for carers, and enhance quality of life for people living with dementia.

For more information contact 0191 4066674

Staying Steady

If you are concerned about your balance or have fallen recently and lost a bit of confidence, why not enquire about the Staying Steady programme run by Healthworks

([Staying Steady and Falls Prevention - Healthworks](#)).



This free programme is 28 weeks long and includes exercise sessions as well as information and advice to help you to stay steady. For more information complete the on-line form or call 0191 272 4244

Can you slash your water bill?

As you can't switch between firms, the most important decision is **how** you're billed. There are two ways:

Your bills are estimated, so you pay a fixed amount depending on your home's size. Your bill will be based on your home's "rateable value".



You have a water meter, so you pay only for what you use. Since 1990, all new homes have been fitted with water meters and you can get one for free on request.

If you're in England or Wales, to see if a water meter is right for you, first of all you need to work out if a meter is financially worthwhile. Here's a rule of thumb:

- **If there are more bedrooms in your home than people, or the same number, check out getting a meter.**

How much can you save?

It varies depending on your household's usage, but also your water company. Remember, you can always try it to see if it saves you money: <https://www.nwl.co.uk/myaccount/water-meters/apply-for-a-meter/> You are given time to see if it works for you. You can change back free of charge – so, if it doesn't work out, ditch it.

Check if you qualify for a low-income discount

If you're on a low income (up to about £26,000 a year), you may be able to access a low-income discount. Northumbria Water has one and it can slash as much as 40% off your bill by lowering or even capping what you pay, whether you have a water meter or not. Nationally, around 1.6 million households are eligible but have yet to claim, missing out on an estimated average of £160 a year.

Apply by contacting your water company. It will assess your circumstances by asking about your income and situation, and it'll make sure you get the support you're entitled to. This is the link you need to check if you qualify:

<https://www.nwl.co.uk/lowincomediscount>



We're pretty sure you all know what to do but we'll give you the main points again in case all the lovely summer weather made you forget!

- Wear plenty of thin layers to trap the warm air rather than a big thick jumper: warm yourself not the room
- Wear bed socks and thermal underwear
- When you go out, wear a coat, hat, scarf and gloves and warm shoes or boots (with good grip)
- Keep the room/s you use warm and try to reduce draughts
- Have warm drinks and food
- Try not to sit for more than an hour at a time. If you can't move about easily, stretch your arms and legs
- Get vaccinated against flu. Covid 19 vaccine is for 75+ only
- Keep in touch with family, friends and neighbours so you can help each other if needed.
- If you are on a low income, check you are receiving everything to which you are entitled.

Warm Home Discount reminder

The UK Government is reminding people on some benefits to check they are **named on their electricity bill** to make sure they get £150 off their energy bill this winter. Every household where the billpayer receives an eligible means-tested benefit will now be in line for the discount, after the government removed restrictions that previously excluded many who needed help with bills.

Households in receipt of Housing Benefit, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit and Universal Credit can claim the automatic discount.

The scheme opened in October, when energy suppliers automatically matched customer records (such as being named on an electricity bill) to apply the discount. After this date, eligible households will still be able to get the discount, but they will need to wait for a letter to arrive later in 2025.

The Warm Home Discount will apply automatically to over six million people in the UK. However, you might not be named on their electricity bill if you have recently moved house or changed supplier.

People on pre-payment meters who use a key or card to top up will also need to check that their household's account is registered in their name.

Read more about this on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

West End Warmers

Search provide free energy advice, home energy assessments and can install small energy saving measures in your home for free, these include reflective radiator foils, LED Light bulbs and draft exclusion seals. We can also help with energy saving tips, energy debt, billing issues, warm home discounts, priority registration and act on your behalf when challenging an energy provider.



If you live in NE4, NE5 or NE15 and you are concerned about rising energy costs this winter contact Meg our Energy Advisor on 0191 2737443.

Mary Nicholls

Mary has been the co-ordinator of the Elders Council communications team for the last 7 years. But she has now left Newcastle to return to her roots across the other side of the country.

She started the e-bulletin, thought up the name for our get-out-and-about leaflet – *EC Rider* – and has been leading the editorial group which puts together *The Echo* (another name she thought of). This is her last edition.

She commissioned and collated all the articles which come in and put the magazine together into its final shape – a lot of work, for which the Elders Council is very, very grateful.

Thank you, Mary!



Ways to Donate and a Unique Opportunity

Your donation will help us provide information to our members by printing and posting this magazine.

Each magazine costs over £3 to print and post.

We post hundreds out each quarter and prices just keep on rising.

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www.giveasyoulive.com Log on to every time you shop online and nominate the Elders Council as your chosen charity. It costs you nothing and we receive a small percentage of the sale.

Chair Vacancy, Elders Council of Newcastle (Volunteer Role)

Are you over 50 and passionate about your community in Newcastle upon Tyne? We are looking for a new **Chair** to help lead the Elders Council into its next chapter and strengthen our work with and for older people across the city.

If you have skills in **governance, fundraising, community work, digitalisation, or communication**, we'd love to hear from you. Training is available.

For more information, contact **Victoria Morley** on **0191 208 2701** or **victoria.morley@elderscouncil.org.uk**

Magazine Information

Magazine articles

Do you have a great article or an idea for one or an axe you want to grind for the next magazine? Then please send it to us by **Friday 12 December 2025**, to us at info@elderscouncil.org.uk. You may also post articles to us at the address below. Articles that are typed or word-processed are really appreciated but hand-written articles are fine. **Please note the editor reserves the right to alter, adapt or change articles submitted to the magazine.**

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Reminder If you move, change your email address or telephone number, please let us know so that we can keep our records up to date.

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