

Information sheet C1 – Advice and Needs Assessment

If you need help from other people to do things that matter to you, or to stay safe, you have a right to advice or an assessment of your needs. In Northumberland, these are provided by Northumbria Healthcare, on behalf of the County Council. This information sheet explains how you can get advice or an assessment.

■ Who has a right to advice or a needs assessment?

Anyone who needs care and support has a right to advice or a needs assessment. This includes people who need care and support because of physical or mental health problems or any kind of disability or long-term condition. Family members or friends providing care also have similar rights, explained in Information Sheet C4.

■ What is the difference between advice and a needs assessment?

A needs assessment is a detailed discussion with a trained member of staff, which will produce a written statement of what your needs are, and what you can do to reduce them, or prevent them from getting worse. If your care and support needs are having a significant impact on your wellbeing, a needs assessment may tell you that you are entitled to assistance from the Council.

You don't have to have a needs assessment to get advice about what support may be available. Unless it is clear that you are going to have an ongoing need for services arranged or paid for by the Council, you may prefer to start by asking for advice. You will then be able to make an informed decision about whether a full needs assessment would be worth your while at present.

■ What does a needs assessment involve?

Needs assessments can be carried out in a number of different ways. If you are able to, we would encourage you to start a needs assessment by writing out yourself your own view of your needs and the solutions that you have found for them. We will also ask what outcomes you want from the assessment, and how your needs are affecting your life.

Writing out your own answers to these questions is called "self-assessment". Family members or friends may be able to help you with this. If you can use the internet, or if someone can help you to, we will soon have an online form which can guide you through the questions. If starting with a "self-assessment" is difficult for you, we can arrange to collect this information in a different way – for instance on the phone, or face to face.

We will usually then need to discuss what you have told us with other professionals who know about your health conditions or disabilities, such as doctors or nurses. We will ask your permission before we do this. We will also talk to any of your family or friends who have been giving you care and support, or who are planning to do so in future.

We will be aiming to make sure that we understand why you need help with particular tasks, or why you are at risk. Where possible, we will suggest things you can do so that you won't need help any more – for instance changes to your routines, or equipment that you could use to make tasks easier, or to make sure you get help in an emergency.

■ What would I get at the end of a needs assessment?

Everyone who has a needs assessment will get a detailed written statement describing their needs and giving advice about how to manage them. This will also say whether you are eligible for care and support services arranged or funded by the County Council. Information Sheet C3 explains how we decide whether people are eligible for this.

If we decided that you were eligible, we would also work with you to draw up a “care and support plan” for these services (see Information Sheet C6). Usually the care and support plan will be partly funded by the Council and partly by contributions which you will have to make yourself. How much you will have to pay depends on your financial circumstances; some people pay the full cost of services themselves; others pay smaller weekly sums or sometimes nothing at all. Information Sheet C8 describes how charges are set, and will give you an idea of whether you would be likely to get financial support from the Council.

Wherever possible, we encourage people to take control of their own care and support arrangements, and manage the money themselves. (Many people use an agency to deal with the details of paying for their care and support, particularly if they are employing care workers themselves, so this is not as complicated as it sounds.)

■ Do I have to have a needs assessment?

A needs assessment is essential if you want the Council to pay for long-term care and support services, such as support from a home care agency, or accommodation in a residential care home or a nursing home. We can't offer those kinds of support without carrying out a needs assessment. If you intend to make private arrangements for your care and support, or if all you need is advice, or urgent short-term help, or perhaps some equipment or adaptations to your home to help you manage independently, you don't have to have a full needs assessment. You still have a right to one if you choose, but you may decide that advice or immediate practical help are all you want.

You don't have to decide whether to have an assessment immediately – you can ask for advice first. And if you decide not to have an assessment just now, you can change your mind at any time.

■ What help can I get without a needs assessment?

You can get advice about organisations that might be able to help you, and things you can do to prevent your needs from increasing, or make them easier to manage. We may also be able to arrange equipment or adaptations to your home to help you stay independent, or urgent support in a crisis, or while you recover from an accident or illness.

■ How do I ask for advice or a needs assessment?

- Phone us on 01670 536 400
- Or email socialcare@northumbria.nhs.uk

You don't have to decide in advance whether you want advice or a needs assessment – you can ask for a discussion about that when you contact us.