

Spread the Warmth

Keep West Sussex Cosy this Winter

December 2011

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Introduction

Winter can be especially hard for many older people. Age UK West Sussex has launched a campaign called Spread the Warmth in conjunction with the national charity. It aims to tackle the problems that winter brings and make it easier for thousands of older people in need to manage during the colder months.

Some older people find it difficult to pay their heating bills and keep their homes warm enough. They have to make difficult choices between daily basics - heating and eating. Here at Age UK, we believe that this must change.

We all struggle to get out and about when the weather takes a turn for the worse, and it can be particularly difficult for people who are disabled, in poor health or lonely. Many older people become isolated and more vulnerable.

We want to make winter better for older people. Working with the national charity, we will be delivering practical services like home visits, befriending and providing information and advice about staying warm and healthy this winter.

By failing to protect vulnerable people from the cold, tens of thousands of lives are endangered every winter.

— 2009 Report of the Chief Medical Officer

1. Key Points & Summary

This report sets out to raise awareness about excess winter deaths and highlight the stark reality of heating versus eating faced by some older people within our county. Age UK West Sussex carried out research of older people in the county and found that:

- a quarter of older people in West Sussex wear outdoor clothing inside to keep warm
- over one in ten people 65 and over stay or live in just one heated room of their house
- 55% of older people across West Sussex feel having their heating on as much as they need without the worry of the cost, would make a huge difference this winter
- a third (33%) of people 65 and over worry about keeping warm at home this winter
- a quarter of people 65 and over would turn their heating off to save money
- 51% of older people are feeling concerned about paying for their heating bill this winter and are more likely to go to bed early to save on heating costs
- 53% of people in later life rely on the Winter Fuel Payment to afford or lower their heating bill.

2. Spread the Warmth Campaign

Too many older people are suffering and dying needlessly during winter because of the effects of cold weather. Age UK West Sussex, along with the national charity will be raising awareness of excess winter deaths and fuel poverty on a local and national level. We are working with local newspapers and radio stations to promote this campaign and to raise awareness.

This year's campaign includes a whole host of activities we'd like people to get involved in over the winter period.

Action

We are calling on all residents of West Sussex to make sure they take the necessary steps to keep themselves and their home warm this winter, whilst not worrying about paying their heating bills. The local and national campaign will run until March 2012 and also focuses on neighbourhood and community awareness – looking out for an elderly neighbour during this winter period.

But Spread the Warmth is more than helping with fuel bills and warm clothes. We want to provide isolated and vulnerable older people with the support they need. We provide specialist information and advice on keeping well during the winter, and we deliver practical services, such as home visits, shopping services, befriending and emergency winter action plans. Winter 2010, saw Age UK West Sussex contact over 1500 older people with a courtesy call to check on their well-being and deliver emergency food parcels, where needed, to snow-bound residents across the county. We open during Christmas and New Year.

We are working with the Herald and Gazette group to promote the campaign and asking people across the county to 'Donate a Coat' to help raise vital funds for Age UK West Sussex and Worthing Churches Homeless Project . To take part, we are asking people to take unwanted coats to the Age UK charity shops in Littlehampton and Shoreham.

Fuel poverty is a major issue linked to poor housing, inefficient heating systems and low incomes. A household is said to be fuel poor if it needs to spend more than ten per cent of its income on fuel to maintain an adequate level of warmth. Older people form the largest proportion of those affected by fuel poverty.

The Hills report (Professor John Hills, 2011) looks at the link of rising energy bills and fuel poverty deaths. The findings show there are 27,000 extra deaths in the UK each winter compared to other times of the year, most of which are due to the cold weather. This figure is one of the highest in Europe and worse than Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Norway and France.

Making Homes Energy Efficient

Energy prices are high, but heating homes is easier and cheaper if they are well insulated and the central heating works properly. Age UK West Sussex is working with local authorities to promote Government or energy supplier grants to insulate homes and make them more energy efficient, through cavity wall, pipe and loft insulation.

We are also encouraging all older people to contact their energy supplier and ask about their Priority Service Register – a service that includes free annual gas safety checks (certain criteria applies).

Our findings show that 64% of people over 60 have made their home more energy efficient yet 52% of older people have not considered switching energy supplier because of the time, effort and complexities in doing so.

Financial Support

It is important that all older people claim all the financial support that they are entitled to. In our findings, 22% of people over 65 years did not know they were entitled to the Winter Fuel Payment. On a national level, between £3.2 and 5.4 billion of means-tested benefits that should rightfully go to older people in Great Britain went unclaimed in 2008-09 (*Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-up in 2008/9*, Department for Work and Pensions, 2010).

During a seven month period in 2010, our Information & Advice team helped clients to claim benefits they were entitled to, totalling £208,333.

Practical Tips

As energy bills rise, it is more important than ever to make sure older people keep warm indoors and out during the winter months. We are encouraging everyone to follow these useful tips; wear several layers, eat regular hot meals, keep moving and draught-proof all doors and windows.

For further advice, please see <http://www.ageukwestsussex.org.uk/18/campaigning/>

Cold Weather Alerts

During the winter, we will be working with the Met Office as part of the national Cold Weather Plan to provide targeted information to older people who are most at risk, when a cold snap is imminent. These alerts will be issued if mean temperatures are below 2°C for 48 hours or longer and if there is heavy snow or widespread ice.

Age UK West Sussex will be notifying all clients and members of the public through radio stations and their website. We'll also keep in touch with local voluntary organisations to ensure we reach as many older people as possible.

3. Survey Findings

We asked all respondents to select from multiple choice answers that best described their situation. Where applicable, many respondents chose more than one option. The questions within the survey were broken down into sections that looked at coping with the cold weather, heating the home and paying for fuel bills.

Coping with Winter Weather

Respondents were asked to select from a choice of options to show what would make a big difference to them this winter – ranging from being able to have their heating on as much as they need to having access to extra clothing/coats and heaters.

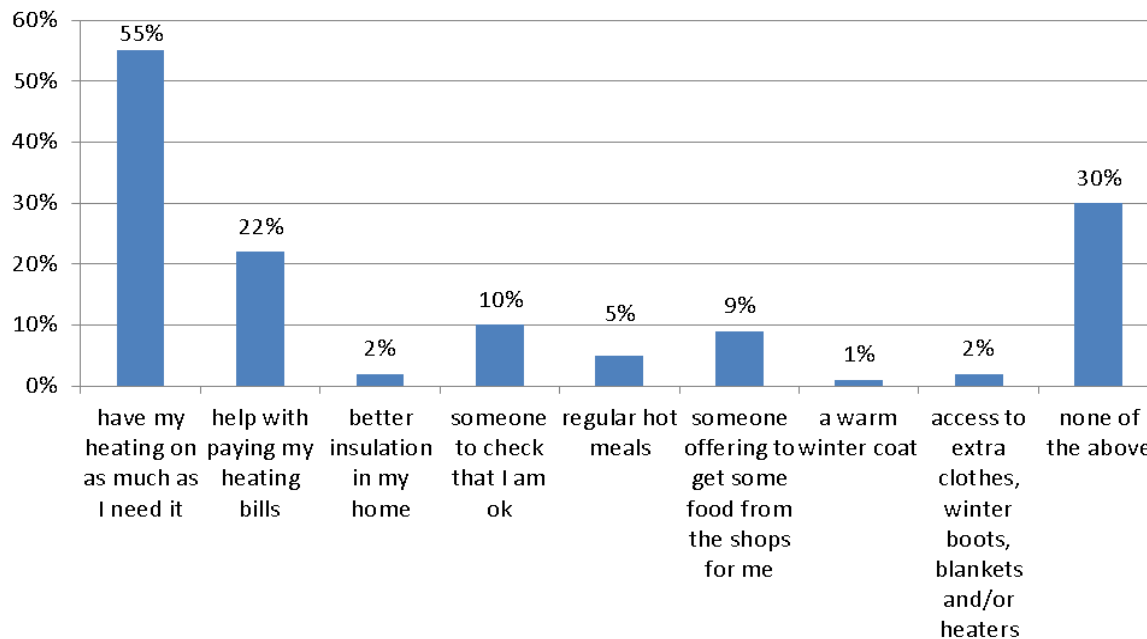
Over half of those who responded felt that having their heating on as much as they needed without the worry of the cost would make a huge difference to them this winter.

Based on temperatures last winter and with the rising cost of energy prices, this would understandably make a huge difference. 22% felt they needed help with paying their heating bills.

Social isolation is heightened during the winter months and can be made worse when the weather is poor. Maintaining social contact with older people across the county is hugely important – our survey shows that nearly a fifth of older people would like some form of social interaction during the winter months in the form of shopping and checking that they are ok.

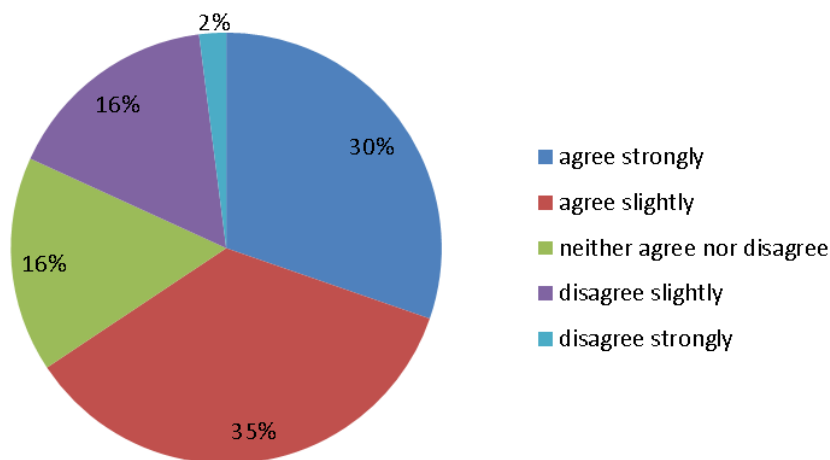
The chart below shows the breakdown of how respondents answered this question.

Figure 3.1: making a difference this winter



During the winter months when the weather is bad and people can't get out, Age UK West Sussex carries out extra telephone calls and visits to clients and those who require our assistance. We asked respondents to tell us how they feel about the cold weather and whether or not they are concerned about paying for their heating bills this winter.

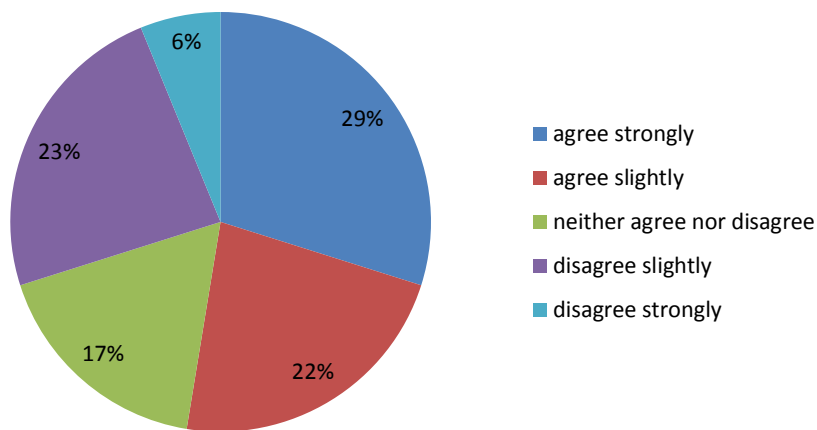
Figure 3.2: I dread the cold weather in the winter



The chart above shows that 65% of older people across West Sussex dread the cold winter weather.

On a national scale, figures for the UK show over a third (34%) of people aged 65+ say they are dreading the cold weather in winter. This is higher than in Sweden (Ipsos/MORI survey for Help the Aged and British Gas of 3246 people aged 65+ in 3 countries (UK, Sweden and Germany), 2006).

Figure 3.3: I am concerned about being able to afford my heating bills this winter



The chart above shows more than half of those surveyed are concerned about paying their heating bills this winter.

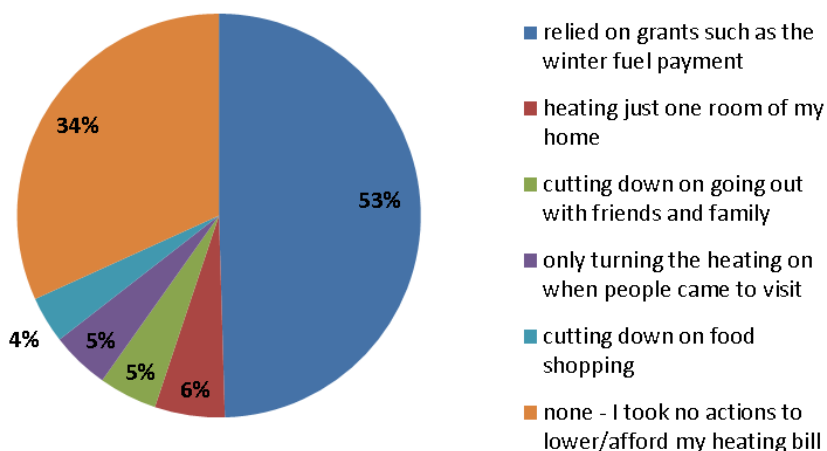
When asked what actions people took last winter to keep warm, we found:

- 25% of older people wore outdoor clothing inside
- 11% stayed or lived in just one heated room of their house, whilst
- 9% went to public places to stay warm – attending our activity centres

At home last winter, 45% of people over 65 either woke up at night because they were cold or could not get warm in their home.

The chart below shows over 50% of respondents rely on the Winter Fuel Payments to pay for their winter heating and a high proportion of respondents feel that they would not be able to afford their winter fuel bills should this benefit not be available.

Figure 3.4: At home last winter, what actions did you take in order to lower or afford your heating bill.



However, there are still concerns around the take-up of benefit entitlements. Figures show that one in three eligible people in later life do not claim Pension Credit.

There are concerns too about the affordability of fuel, with growing numbers of people living in homes they cannot afford to heat. This includes people who are owner occupiers in large homes but on low fixed incomes. In West Sussex, poverty affects one in five older people and 10% of the population aged 60 and over live in low income households (WSCC, JSNA, 2009).

Fuel Poverty

Whilst this research was not ascertaining whether or not an individual was deemed fuel poor, it is apparent from the figures shown above that a significant percentage of older people are worried about paying their winter fuel bills. 69% of respondents are aged 60 and over, live alone and have one fixed income. Fuel poverty is defined as a household which needs to spend 10% or more of its income on maintaining an acceptable level of heating throughout the whole property. Severe fuel poverty is spending 15% of income to achieve the same level (National Energy Action website <http://www.nea.org.uk/fuel-poverty-and-energy-efficiency/>). Risk of fuel poverty generally increases with age.

In England, according to the latest official figures released by government – DECC (Trends in Fuel Poverty England 2009, DECC 2011), there are 3,964,000 households in fuel poverty, over half of which (1,720,000) contain someone aged 60 or over as the oldest person in the household.

Professor John Hills' interim report on fuel poverty calculates that there are likely to be 4.1 million households (of all ages) in England in fuel poverty in 2011, but, given recent energy price rises, this could well be even higher.

Between 2003 and 2009, average household gas bills doubled and average electricity bills rose by 60% (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/spread-the-warmth/reducing-winter-deaths/>).

The World Health Organisation suggests indoor temperatures should be maintained at 21°C in the living room and 18°C in bedrooms.

The Marmot Review concluded that the direct health impacts of cold housing and fuel poverty are:

- a strong relationship between cold temperatures and cardio-vascular and respiratory diseases
- mental health is negatively affected by fuel poverty and cold housing for any age group
- cold housing increases the level of minor illnesses such as colds and flu and exacerbates existing conditions such as arthritis and rheumatism.

Figure 3.5: Do you worry about keeping warm in your home

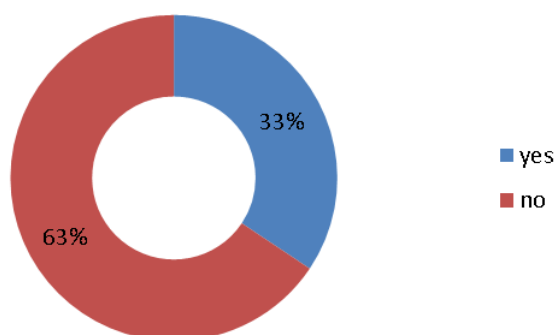
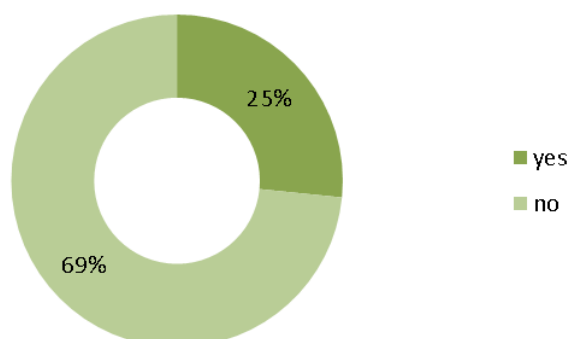


Figure 3.6: Do you ever turn off your heating/fire in winter because it is too expensive



A third (33%) of older people in West Sussex are worried about keeping warm in their home this winter and 25% would turn off their heating because it is too expensive.

Excess Winter Deaths

It is clear to see that poorly heated housing and fuel poverty combined will impact hugely on a person's physical, general and mental health. In the winter of 2009/10, there were an estimated 26,156 excess winter deaths of people aged 65 and over in the UK, 23,100 of them in England. About 90% of winter deaths are of people aged 65 and over (Aggregate of figures for 65 and over excess winter death statistics, from Office for National Statistics (England and Wales), GROS (Scotland), and NISRA (Northern Ireland), 2009/10).

As winter is defined by the Office for National Statistics as December to March (121 days in a non-leap year such as 2010), the average daily excess winter deaths for people aged 65 were 216 for the UK and 191 for England in 2009/10.

The latest figures show that last winter, 2010/11, there were almost 22,000 additional deaths among people over the age of 65 in England and Wales. For every additional winter death, there are an estimated eight admissions to hospital, 32 attendances at outpatient care and 30 social service calls (<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/preventing-winter-deaths/>).

4. Survey Methodology

During the summer, a winter warmth questionnaire was distributed across eight of our services. We received 160 responses from members, clients and customers to give a sample snapshot of coping tactics during the winter months and how our older population feel about rising energy prices.

The report gives a flavour of how older people prepare for winter and the actions they take to stay warm and safe in their home. Furthermore, this report is about encouraging all older people to get the practical help they need to make their homes more energy efficient and to seek additional benefits they may be entitled to. The findings have been collated from the questionnaires and one-to-one / group discussions over a period of one month.

Demographics

The questionnaire covered most of the county reaching Adur, Arun, Chichester, Crawley, Mid Sussex and Worthing, across eight projects – all five activity centres – Tamarisk, Laburnum, Silver Birch, Redwood and Cherry Tree, Good Neighbours Service, Help at Home and the Network Forums.

Figure 4.1: gender of respondents across the county

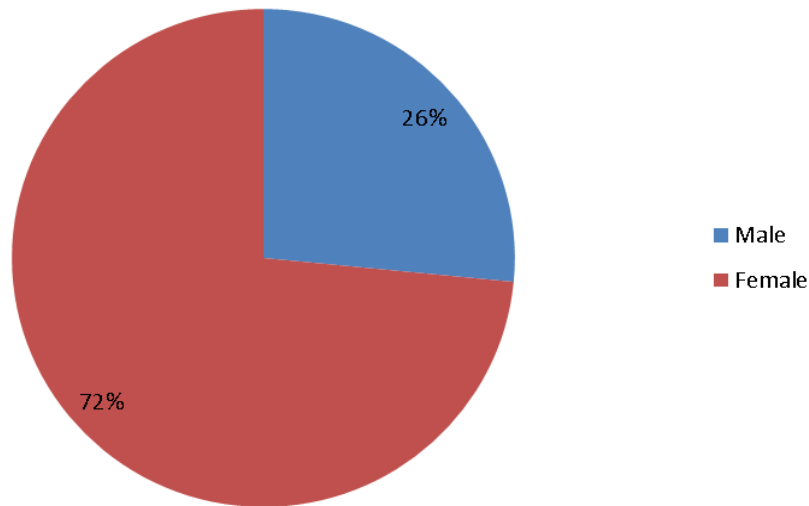
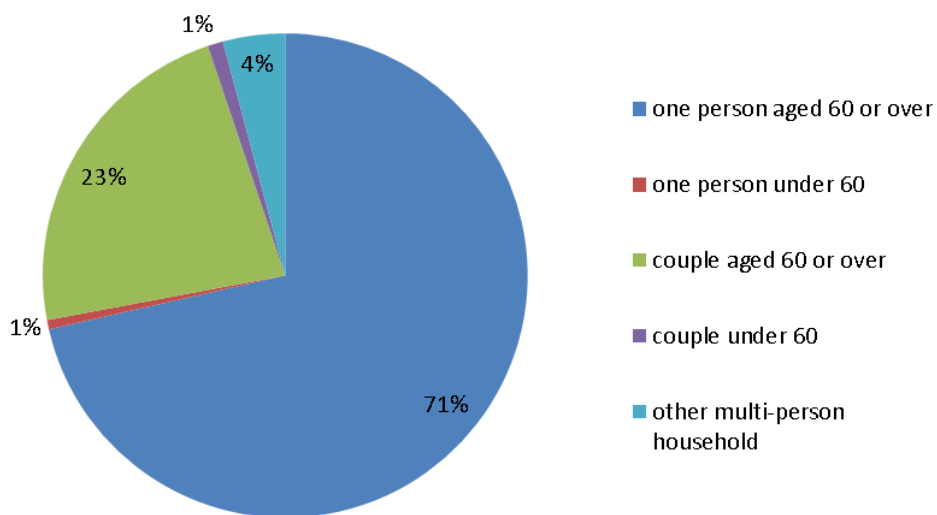
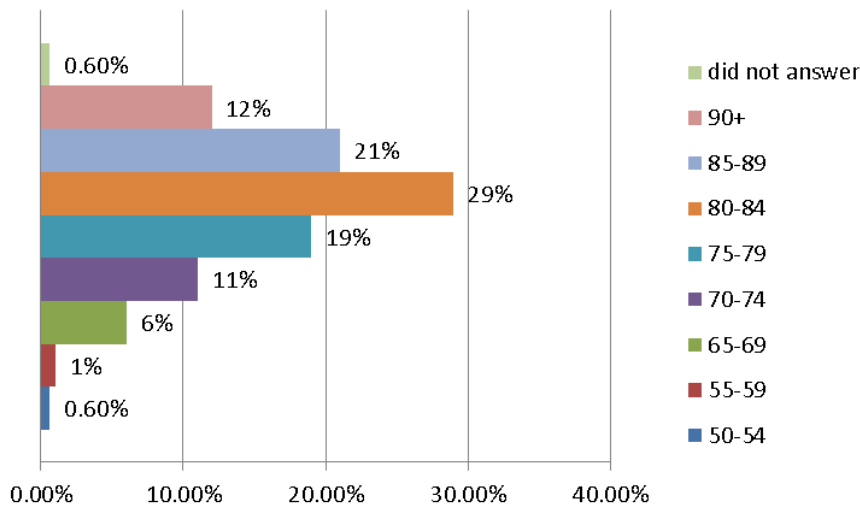


Figure 4.2: household type



The gender split for respondents was 26% male and 72% female and 71% live alone aged 60 or over. The highest age range attributing to 29% of those surveyed was 80-84 years, followed by 21% 85-89 years.

Figure 4.3: age bands of respondents across the county



The ethnic origin of respondents was 97% White British, 1% Asian or Asian British Indian and 1% Black or Black British Caribbean.

5. Conclusion

Each year in England and Wales, many thousands of people aged 65 and over die needlessly in the winter months. This is often because older people can't afford to heat their homes and they are more susceptible to illness caused by cold and damp. Our campaign, along with the national charity hopes to raise awareness and help to reduce the number of excess winter deaths.

In the 21st century, this is a national tragedy. Many of the deaths are avoidable. The Spread the Warmth campaign is calling for change. We believe that older people should:

- receive all the benefits they are entitled to
- feel warm in their homes
- not have to worry about the cost of heating bills during the winter months.

Age UK West Sussex will be spreading this message across the county during the winter months and hope to use their local partnerships to do so. Our aim is to ensure we reach as many older people as possible to reduce social isolation and fuel poverty.

Contact:

Age UK West Sussex

Information & Advice Helpline	0800 019 1310
Head Office	01903 731800
Tamarisk Centre, Littlehampton	01903 730007
Laburnum Centre, Bognor Regis	01243 827185
Redwood Centre, Haywards Heath	01444 450248
Cherry Tree Centre, Burgess Hill	01444 236497
Silverbirch Centre, Crawley	01293 544144
Age UK West Sussex in Midhurst	01730 816267
Chichester Office	01243 528346

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