

Advocacy for children and young people

Advocacy is about speaking up for children and young people and helping them take part in decisions that affect their lives. It involves making sure their rights are respected, and their views and wishes are heard, listened to, and acted upon. Advocacy makes a difference to children's lives.

In Wokingham, we have a commitment to advocacy being provided for children and young people when they need it and providing this service in-house enables flexibility and timeliness.

Wokingham offers the following independent services, which give children and young people in receipt of children's social care their own voice:

- Advocacy
- Information and advice around children and young people's rights
- Facilitation of complaints by children/young people about services they receive from Wokingham Borough Council
- Independent Visiting

Advocacy

The service is available to:

- Children we care for
- Care leavers up to the age of 25

- Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) and Young People (pre-18 and post-18)
- Children and young people, over the age of 5, who have child protection plans
- Children with disabilities
- Children in need who require advocacy support
- Young parents who are in children's services processes with their own children
- 16/17-year-olds presenting to the council as at risk of homelessness
- Any child or young person wanting to make a complaint.

What does the Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer do?

- Works exclusively for the child/young person, confidentially and upon their instruction
- Represents children / young people's voices in meetings – supporting them to give their views at meetings held about them, for example: their Child in Care and Pathway Plan Reviews
- Supports Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) at age assessments as independent person
- Attends the first and last child in care review meetings for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children



The Children's Rights and Advocacy Offer for Wokingham

- Supports young people in court
- Supports children and young people in deciding what they want child protection conferences to know about their life at home and goes with them to present their views at the conference or other important meetings
- Helps children and young people understand and receive their rights and entitlements.

Children's Rights

The Children's Rights and Advocacy service is part of the Quality Assurance and Safeguarding Standards Service. Whilst sitting within the Children's Directorate, they retain independence from the social work teams and their line management.

The Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer supports young people aged 16/17 at risk of homelessness to understand their rights and provides specialist advice regarding children's rights: such as legal proceedings, and young people seeking asylum.

The Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer sits on the Corporate Parent Board to represent rights and advocacy of children in care.

Complaints

The Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer will facilitate complaints from children and young people about services they receive from Wokingham Borough Council and provide support to those making complaints and help to solve problems through representations, mediation or negotiation.

Independent Visitors (IVs) scheme for Wokingham children in care

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) are commissioned to provide IVs for Wokingham's children we care for, wherever they may live. IVs are volunteers who befriend a child we care for. Children are matched with volunteers who have similar interests / hobbies. During their monthly visits, the volunteer and young person go out and undertake a variety of activities depending on their interests and the age of the young person.

Independent Visitors Referrals for the IV service can be made by social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, the Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer or to directly to the local NYAS coordinator. Further information is available on the NYAS website - www.nyas.net

How to access these services:

Complaints

If a child/young person wants to make a complaint they should contact

ChildrensServicesComplaints@wokingham.gov.uk

Advocacy and Children's Rights

Referrals for advocacy can be made by the child or young person themselves, the Social Worker, the IRO or any other professional working with them. The advocacy team can be contacted by email at childrensadvocacy@wokingham.gov.uk

For children we care for, the Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) will provide the child/young person with the information they need about being in the care of Wokingham Borough Council, and about the Advocacy Service. They will let them know how to contact the Advocate in the event they need assistance in getting their voice heard or in taking part in decisions that affect their lives, or if they feel that their rights are not being respected and they are not getting the service they are entitled to.

Advocacy is an option available to children whenever they want such support and not just when they want to make a formal complaint.

