

INFORMATION SHEET

The Children's Rights and Advocacy Service, Children in Care Council and Independent Visiting Service for Wokingham

August 2018



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

- Advocacy
- Children in Care Council
- Interviewing
- Facilitation of complaints by children/young people about services they receive from Wokingham Borough Council
- Independent Visiting

The Children's Rights and Advocacy services are 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.

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.

Who do Advocates work with?

- Children in care
- Care leavers up to the age of 25
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People (pre and post-18)
- Children and young people, over the age of 5, who have child protection plans.
- Any child or young person wanting to make a complaint. All children and young people considering making a complaint must be referred to this service.

What does an Advocate do?

- Provides support to children and young people to give their views at meetings held about them, for example: their Child in Care and Pathway Plan Reviews.
- Helps children and young people decide 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.
- Works exclusively for the child/young person, confidentially and upon their instruction.
- Provides support to those making complaints and helps to solve problems through representations/mediation/negotiation



Making a referral for Advocacy in Wokingham

Advocacy referral for Children in Care:

The Social Worker will provide the child/young person with the information they need about being in the care of Wokingham Borough Council and let them know 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.

They will agree with the child/young person who is going to help them get their thoughts together for their review meetings.

Independent Reviewing Officer's (IROs) will meet up with the child/young person prior to their first Child in Care Review (as per the IRO Handbook) to introduce themselves and explain their role, and plan the forthcoming review. When meeting with the child before every review, the IRO is responsible for making sure that the child understands how an Advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one. Advocacy is an option available to children whenever they want such support **and not** just when they want to make a formal complaint. Some children will feel sufficiently confident or articulate to contribute or participate in the review process without additional help; others may prefer the support of an Advocate.

The child/young person can self-refer to the service or can be referred by anyone working with them.

The Advocate's involvement with children and young people will be issue based. They will work with the young person in respect of the particular issue that they are concerned about, help them achieve resolution and withdraw. Where they are involved to enable a young person to participate in their review – part of the task will be to give young people strategies to help them express themselves and self-advocate. For the majority of young people, there will no longer be an expectation that the Advocate will help them present their view at every statutory review. It will be the responsibility of the social worker and IRO to ensure that the child/young person has sufficient and appropriate support to work out what they want to say at their review, the IRO will meet with the young person before the review to work out how they would like to present their view.

The intention of the above is to ensure that the right children/young people have access to independent representation as and when they need it and to allow social workers and IRO's to have the opportunity to develop their relationship with the young person as per their role and responsibility.



Advocacy in Child Protection

Advocacy is not a substitute for good social work practice and neither does it negate the crucial role social workers and others have in speaking up for children and protecting their rights. The Advocate is there just for the young person and focuses exclusively on their wishes and feelings, they have no decision making responsibility.

Advocacy referral for children who are the subject of child protection conferences

The Social Worker will provide the child/young person with the information they need about the processes around Child Protection and gather their voice, wishes and feelings about their situation and their lived experience in their family as part of their assessment. They will also let them know about the Advocacy Service in the event that they want/need independent assistance in making their voice heard in Child Protection meetings or would like support to attend the meetings (depending on their age – usually secondary school age children) and the appropriateness of attending - this decision is made by the Child Protection Chair in conjunction with the social worker).

If Advocacy is required for a child/young person, the child and their parent(s) must give their consent for this work to take place. This consent is to be sought by the Social Worker.

The Advocate will meet with the child before the child protection meetings and work with them to ensure their voice is captured independently, they will then support the child if they are old enough to attend the meeting or they will present on behalf of the child if they are not able to attend the meeting.

The Advocacy Service currently works with children once they have been made the subject of a Child Protection Plan, however, the service is flexible and responsive to individual need and will where necessary work with children before Initial Child Protection Conferences.

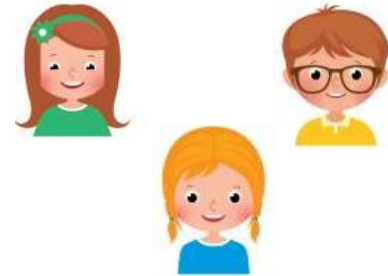
The Advocate takes no part in the decision making in the Child Protection Conference as they are the voice of the child.

In working with any child or young person, the Advocate has access to IT equipment which they may use to help the children and young people express their views, wishes and feelings, using the resources on the device/from the internet to write/draw/produce what they would like to say to the people making decisions about them in their meetings. This will be shared by the Advocate/child/young person at their meetings (Child in Care Reviews/Child Protection Conferences).

**To make a referral to the Advocacy Service, please email
debbie.laflin@wokingham.gov.uk or call on 07801 664370**



The Children in Care Council – Your Second Voice



ALL of Wokingham children and young people in care are members of Children in Care Council – we believe it is important that everyone is automatically a member so that they are given every opportunity to have their voices heard and contribute to the decision making processes relevant to them. Children are still able to remain involved after their 18th birthday if they wish to do so.

The Children in Care Council has an Executive Committee consisting of a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and between 2 and 4 committee members. Children and young people can nominate themselves or others for these positions and all applications will be considered.

All children and young people as members of the Children in Care Council will be invited to take part in focus/consultation groups during the year. These groups will look at common themes applicable to children and young people in care, individuals will be invited to the groups that are most relevant to them. However, they are also entitled to ask to be included on any of the focus groups, which will be widely advertised. The groups will be activity based and will give children and young people the opportunity to socialise and have fun, as well as exploring and sharing their views and opinions. During 2018-19 the follow groups are proposed, details will be circulated nearer to the event.

- **August 2018 – FOCUS GROUP 1 – The Local Offer for Care Leavers**
- **November 2018 – FOCUS GROUP 2 – What should your child in care review look like?**
- **February 2019 – FOCUS GROUP 3 – What do you want from your Social Worker or Foster Carer?**
- **May 2019 – FOCUS GROUP 4 – I'm not different from my peers – challenges faced by children in care**

The Executive Committee of the Children in Care Council meet monthly, they will act as consultants to decisions makers and formulate responses to the agenda items being presented to the Corporate Parenting Board. The aim of this group is to influence and inform leaders and council members, contributing to the design of services and increase the awareness of issues affecting the lives of children in care and care leavers.

Each year the Children in Care council carries out an annual survey of children in care and care leavers to test out whether the council is keeping the promises it's has made in the Children in Care and Care Leavers Pledge. The next survey will take place in February 2019.

The results of the survey are shared with the Corporate Parenting Board and senior officers and the Executive will monitor the progress of any areas identified.

Children in Care Council Website

The Children in Care Council have their own website, which can be found by typing **childrenincarecouncil.wokingham.gov.uk** into a web browser.

The website has information about being a child/young person in the care of Wokingham Borough Council.

To find out more about the Children in Care Council, please visit our website or contact the Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer on 07801 664370 or email on debbie.laflin@wokingham.gov.uk



The Corporate Parenting Board

The Children in Care Council give a monthly update of their activity to the Corporate Parent Board. Membership of the Board includes the Lead Member for Children's Services, the Director of Children's Services, the Assistant Director of Children's Services and Early Intervention, other council members who have a particular interest in children in care and care leavers, along with various other leaders who have a role in service delivery for children in care.



Young Interviewers

Young Interviewers are care experienced children and young people, who take part in the recruitment of frontline, managerial and directorial posts within Children's Services. The Young Interviewers construct questions to test for a particular attribute or skill. Young interviewers gain valuable insight into the recruitment process and are able to improve their own interview skills. They receive training and payment for this valuable service.

The recruiting service/manager is responsible for arranging payments, lunch and transport for the Young Interviewers.

If you are or know of a young person who would like to become a Young Interviewer, please email debbie.laflin@wokingham.gov.uk



Facilitation of complaints by children/young people about services they receive from Wokingham Borough Council

If a child/young person (either who is looked after by Wokingham Borough Council, is a Care Leaver or is a child/young person who accesses services through Wokingham Borough Council) wants to make a complaint about the services they receive, please ask them to contact the Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer on 07801 664370 or email debbie.laflin@wokingham.gov.uk



Independent Visitors for Children in Care

Who can have an Independent Visitor?

A local authority should assess whether it would be appropriate to appoint an independent visitor for the child they are looking after if:

- It appears that communication between the child and parent has been infrequent;
- The child has not been visited (or has not lived with) a parent or any person who is not the child's parent but who has parental responsibility for the child, during the preceding 12 months;
- If it is the best interest of the child to do so

The local authority should consider the following factors when deciding if it is the child's interests to consider appointing an Independent Visitor as there are conflicting demands on the service:

- Whether the child is placed at a distance from home;
- Whether the child is unable to go out independently or experiences difficulties in communication and building positive relationships;
- Whether the child is likely to engage in behaviour which puts them at risk as a result of peer pressure or forming inappropriate relationships with older people;
- Whether a child placed in a residential setting would benefit from a more individualised experience; and
- Whether it would make a contribution to promoting the child's health and education.

UASC and children with disabilities can particularly benefit from have an Independent Visitor.

Independent Visitors Scheme in Wokingham Borough Council

NYAS are commissioned to provide Independent Visitors for Wokingham's children in care where ever they may live. Independent Visitors are volunteers who befriend a child in care. Children are matched with volunteers who have similar hobbies and interests. 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.

If you would like to refer your child/young person for an Independent Visitor, please contact the IV Co-ordinator directly; Helen on 07739 317367 or email helen.caddock@nyas.net

