



Camden Advocacy Policy

Introduction

People in Camden should be able to choose who they want by their side in their conversations with the Council. Advocates do important work in helping people to be heard when they might otherwise face barriers. The Council wants to ensure that advocacy arrangements are safe, effective and underpinned by a common understanding.

This resource provides guidance for staff, residents and for people who wish to advocate for themselves or on behalf of others. It doesn't replace the policies of other organisations who may be involved, but supports their efforts to make advocacy safe and effective. It may be especially helpful for people involved in informal advocacy.





Understanding advocacy

Having the option to bring friends, relatives or professionals into conversations can be a huge help for people in their interactions with the Council. It means there is an additional supportive voice in the room, and this can help the Council to understand people's lives and ambitions more fully.

When advocacy is conducted safely and effectively it helps everyone to be fully heard, especially those who face additional systemic barriers, while also protecting residents, advocates and Camden staff from harm.


This is how safe and effective advocacy helps Camden to tackle injustice and inequality, which is central to We Make Camden - our shared vision for a fairer, more inclusive borough.

What does an advocate do?

An advocate can be a great help for residents who are in conversation with the Council, both within and between meetings.

The advocate can:

- Listen to the resident's views and concerns.
- Help to explore options and rights, without pressure.
- Provide information to help the resident make informed decisions.
- Help the resident to contact relevant people.
- Support the resident practically in meetings to make sure all the points they want to talk about and the questions they want to ask are covered.
- Support the resident emotionally during a meeting, for example asking for a break if they find the meeting upsetting, or too long, or need space to consider what's been discussed.

 An advocate is different to an interpreter or translator, who can enable discussions to happen but doesn't offer the other types of support listed above.

Types of advocacy

An advocate can be a friend, family member or carer, a community volunteer or an employee of an advocacy organisation. Advocacy can be provided by an individual or an organisation.

The two key types of advocacy are:

Statutory advocacy

In certain circumstances Camden has a legal duty to appoint an advocate. For more information see the ‘frequently asked questions’ on pages 10-11.

Non-statutory advocacy

This covers situations where there is no specific legal duty to provide an advocate. This includes ‘informal advocacy’, when a person asks someone they know, such as a family member, friend, carer or someone in similar circumstances to themselves, to speak up or take action for them.

Ways of Working

Across the following pages (6-9) are the standards that residents, advocates and staff are expected to adhere to, to help ensure that advocacy arrangements are safe and effective, and ensure the best outcomes for residents.



Everyone has a part to play in this.

Behaviours

These are everyone's responsibility



Respect: All parties treat others with respect. This includes listening to each other and allowing others to speak, while accepting that points of view will differ at times.



Resolution-seeking: All parties seek timely resolutions to issues and avoid escalation, or unnecessary delay, wherever possible.



Focus: All parties focus their efforts on the resident and the case at hand, and do not use individual advocacy to advance wider or unrelated disputes.



Case confidentiality: All parties keep information about a case confidential, in line with data protection regulations.



Right to privacy: All parties respect everyone's right to privacy. For example, details about staff members' lives should not be shared publicly, including via social media.



Participation: An advocate is there to support, rather than replace the resident. Wherever possible the resident should lead and control conversations, being supported to do so. Conversations shouldn't generally take place without the resident's involvement.

Camden's responsibilities

- Encouraging and valuing the involvement of advocates to support people with finding the right solutions for their lives.
- Helping advocates who find themselves in complex or stressful situations to access support, should they need it.
- Ensuring that residents remain the core focus of conversations with advocates.
- Ensuring that residents without an advocate are still heard and not put at a disadvantage.
- Communicating in ways that are sensitive and easy for residents and advocates to understand.
- Keeping residents, advocates and staff safe, particularly where difficult decisions are being made about important parts of people's lives: their families, their care and support, their homes.
- Considering whether informal advocacy is the best fit for a resident, or whether a specialist advocate is required.



Resident's responsibilities

- Ensuring the Council knows who their advocate is and providing written consent for Council staff to speak to them.
- Remaining in communication with the Council, for example to confirm understanding of case decisions or reconfirm consent.
- Understanding that advocates cannot achieve things that go beyond what is possible for residents without an advocate. The usual rules of fairness and who qualifies still apply.
- Considering whether an advocate is acting in their best interests. People with their own open case or ongoing dispute with the Council may not always be good candidates for acting as advocates for other residents, due to the complexities this brings. Residents can share any concerns with the Council.



Safety measures

Consent

The Council requires initial consent from a resident to engage with an advocate and may re-seek consent at any time to ensure the resident remains well-informed about discussions and decisions.



Unreasonable behaviour

The Council will not tolerate unreasonable behaviour from an advocate.

Should an advocate behave unreasonably, including preventing the Council from following standard processes, the Council will act according to its Unreasonable Representative Behaviour Procedure.

The procedure sets out what constitutes unreasonable behaviour and what action will be taken to protect residents and staff.


Frequently Asked Questions

How can a resident get an advocate to support them?

A resident who is in conversations with a Camden service, for example about a social work case or housing issue, can speak to the staff member or team they usually deal with about being supported by an advocate such as a friend, family member or community member.


Some adult residents who do not have anyone appropriate to act as an advocate for them may qualify for non-statutory advocacy support.

Further information is available on the Camden Care Choices website:


 <https://camdencarechoices.camden.gov.uk/care-and-support-rights/advocacy/>

Some further service-specific guidance on advocacy is also available below:

Further guidance for Camden children's social work service

 <https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/1006758/Advocacy+information+leaflet+new+%281%29.pdf/97e24866-ed9b-c639-c906-8c4d6ba3b4bb?t=1655985128789>

Further guidance for Camden adult social care

 <https://camdencarechoices.camden.gov.uk/care-and-support-rights/advocacy>

Q How can a resident raise a concern about their advocate?

A resident who is in conversations with a Camden service can raise any concerns about an advocate with the Camden staff member or team that they usually deal with.

Q How long does an advocacy arrangement usually last?

Statutory advocacy arrangements typically last for the duration of the process that the advocate is supporting with. Non-statutory (including informal) advocacy can last for as long as the resident wants support, and will vary depending on the situation. For example, a one-off housing meeting might require a few hours of support, whereas a longer-term social work case might involve ongoing help over weeks or months.

Further reading

- National Standards for the Provision of Children and Young People's Advocacy Services
➡ https://consult.education.gov.uk/children-in-need/f-revisions-to-the-national-standards-and-statutor/supporting_documents/Revised%20National%20Standards%20for%20the%20Provision%20of%20Children%20and%20Young%20Peoples%20Advocacy%20Services.pdf
- National Care & Support Statutory Guidance
➡ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-act-statutory-guidance/care-and-support-statutory-guidance>

