




The Older People's Advocacy Alliance

ANNUAL REPORT 2024-2025

March 31, 2025



MEETING DEMAND



It is with great pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I introduce this year's annual report for OPAAL. The past year has been one of both challenge and opportunity, as we continue to witness an increasing demand for our services. This growing need underscores the essential role we play in supporting older people and ensuring they have access to independent advocacy when they need it most.

The rising demand is a testament to the trust placed in us by those we serve. It is also a reflection of the complex challenges facing older people today—challenges that require a steadfast commitment to ensuring that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, has their voice heard and their rights upheld. As more individuals seek our support, our responsibility to signpost them to appropriate help has never been stronger.

This year, our dedicated staff, volunteers, and partners have worked tirelessly to meet this growing demand. We have expanded our reach, strengthened our partnerships, and explored innovative approaches to advocacy, all while maintaining the person-centred ethos that defines OPAAL. The resilience and commitment of our team have been truly inspiring, ensuring that even as demand increases, our standards of service remain unwavering.

Yet, with this growth comes the need for sustainable investment in our work. We must continue to develop our resources, secure long-term funding, and engage with stakeholders who share our vision of a society where older people receive the advocacy and support they need. Collaboration will be key in the years ahead, and we call upon our partners, funders, and policymakers to stand with us as we rise to meet these challenges.

As we look ahead, I remain optimistic about OPAAL's future. Our impact is evident in the lives we touch, the voices we empower, and the systems we help to improve. We are growing because the need is growing—now, more than ever, we must ensure that no one faces their challenges alone.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our work this year. Your dedication makes a difference, and together, we will continue to be a powerful force for advocacy, compassion, and change.

Dave Bradshaw
Chair of Trustees

WHAT WE DID

Helping older people advocate for themselves

(Completed enquiries Jan-Dec 2024)

The numbers of members of the public needing our help, who are struggling to be heard on a wide variety of issues, continues to rise.

We have experienced a 30% increase in demand for our help this year.

Often, organisations seem to believe that they can simply ignore an older person's request for information or assistance.

We find that when we call on an older person's behalf, with our professional titles and the backing of our organisation, we get a far better hearing. This has to change.

Healthcare support -including an increase in mental health issues

35%

Housing issues

31%

Finances

15%

Bereavements

13%

Complaints

4%

Legal issues

2%

Resolution rate

88%



Championing advocacy for older people receiving health and social care services

On 9 November 2022, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence issued guidance on advocacy services for adults with health and social care needs ([NG227](#)).

In the NG227 Guidance, NICE asks all those involved with the provision of health and social care sector to,

“Offer advocacy to people who are not covered by the legal entitlement, but who would otherwise not be able to express their views or sufficiently influence decisions that are likely to have a substantial impact on their wellbeing or the well being of someone they have caring or parental responsibility for.” [NG227 1.2.1]

Furthermore as the guidance continues it states,

“Local authorities and advocacy providers should collaborate to make it clear how people can access advocacy and how they can provide support to help them to do so if they:

- are supported outside of their home area or*
- are carers who care for someone outside their area.” [NG227 1.4.11]*

15 months after the issuance of the NG227, the Older People’s Advocacy Alliance (OPAAL) conducted a survey of local authorities in England and Wales, to examine how many local authorities have information on their websites that would meet the requirements of NG227.

Furthermore, 18 months after the issuance of the NG227, the Older People’s Advocacy Alliance (OPAAL) began conducting a survey of Care Home Groups in the UK, to examine how many Care Home Groups have information on their websites, or, once having been written to, could provide evidence to show that their policies and procedures would meet the requirements of NG227.

The findings of each of those investigations is as follows:

Championing advocacy for older people receiving health and social care services cont.

Key findings from OPAAL's review of Local Authority website's compliance with NICE Guidance NG227.

- *It is very difficult to find a reference to independent advocacy for older people on the majority of Local Authority websites.*
- *It is highly unlikely that vulnerable older people, who may not know about advocacy, and in some instances may not have anyone in their life who can help them speak up about their needs and wants, will get the support they need to fully express themselves about decisions that directly affect the quality of their lives.*
- *The vast majority of Local Authorities in England and Wales are not complying with the NICE Guidance NG227.*

OPAAL is calling upon all the Local Authorities in England and Wales to take the following actions:

- *To provide information on independent informal advocacy, what it is, how it could help older people (and others), and how it can be accessed.*
- *Information on independent advocacy should be provided **prominently** on the pages that older people, or those that support them, are likely to visit when dealing with health, social care or housing issues.*
- *Local Authorities should provide links to organisations that can either provide some form of informal advocacy, or advice/information/resources on how to self advocate **prominently** on the pages that older people, or those that support them, are likely to visit when dealing with health, social care or housing issues.*

Championing advocacy for older people receiving health and social care services cont.

Key findings from OPAAL's review of Care Home Group websites' compliance with NICE Guidance NG227.

- *It is very difficult to find a reference to independent advocacy for older people on the majority of Care Home Group websites, with the one notable exception of Brancaster Care Homes.*
- *It is highly unlikely that older people living in care homes, who may not know about advocacy, and in some instances may not have anyone in their life who can help them speak up about their needs and wants, will get the support they need to fully express themselves about decisions that directly affect the quality of their lives.*
- *The vast majority of Care Home Groups are not demonstrating that they are complying with the NICE Guidance NG227, specifically.*

"Offer advocacy to people who are not covered by the legal entitlement, but who would otherwise not be able to express their views or sufficiently influence decisions that are likely to have a substantial impact on their wellbeing or the well being of someone they have caring or parental responsibility for." [NG227 1.2.1]

OPAAL is calling upon all Care Home Groups in the UK to take the following actions:

- *To provide information on independent advocacy; what it is, how it could help older people (and others), and how it can be accessed.*
- *Information on independent advocacy should be provided **prominently** in the places and online sites that older people, or those that support them, are likely to visit when considering if a care facility is right for them.*
- *Care Home Groups should **prominently** signpost older people in their care to organisations that can either provide some form of formal or informal advocacy, or can provide advice/information/resources on how older people can self advocate.*

Using influence and effective partnership working

2024 to 2025 has been another rich year for collaborative working. We have been able to deepen our understanding of the challenges older people face, in a great variety of circumstances and environments, where an understanding of independent advocacy would be helpful.

We have taken all our knowledge and understanding of advocacy can benefit all parties and shared good practices as widely as possible, and as a result, we have been delighted to benefit from the shared objectives with the following organisations.

1. LawWorks: Sharing our insight about how older people could best benefit from pro bono legal support.
2. HMRC; working to ensure that older people can navigate the complexities of tax liabilities and get their returns in on time.
3. Glasgow CAB; supporting their campaign to signpost older people to help and support.
4. Greater Manchester Older People's Network; raising awareness and dealing with enquiries.
5. The Elfrida Project; gaining insight and sharing knowledge about older people with learning disabilities and autism.
6. Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman; attending round tables, building networks and sharing knowledge..
7. National Coalition for Advocacy Services; promoting and supporting human solidarity.
8. National Development Team for Inclusion: promoting informal advocacy for older people.
9. South Shropshire Village Halls; attending in person events to promote our services and conduct outreach signposting support.
10. Lung Cancer Specialist Nurses; promoting our services to people living with this challenging condition.
11. Bournemouth University; participating in a round table event to help landscape the provision of advocacy in the UK.
12. Big Brother Watch; participating in protecting the interests of older people in the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill.
13. Father Hudson's Church; attending the round table work to protect the interests of older people living with disabilities within the diocese Father Hudson's Church covers.
14. The Patient's Association: sharing their work on campaigning for improvements in health and social care for patients

We are so grateful to all the organisations above for their time in listening to us and for their fantastic support in enabling older people to live as they choose in later life.

We have also been delighted to contribute to the valued research work undertaken by London Funders. We are very grateful for the opportunity to speak up on behalf of the older people that we engage with.

In order to further increase our reach we have sent promotional posters to over 2,200 charities that refer to older people in their charitable objectives.

Financial statement

(Part 1)

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2024					
	Restricted funds £	Unrestricted funds £	Note	31.3.24 Total £	31.3.23 Total £
Current Assets					
Cash at bank	3502	4917		8419	9140
Debtors	0	200		200	200
	3502	5117		8691	9340
Current liabilities					
Creditors and accruals	(830)			(830)	(1177)
Net current assets	2672	5117		7789	8163
Financed by:					
Capital and reserves b/f		8163		8163	19117
I & E Account	2672	(3046)		(374)	(10954)
Total capital and reserves	2672	5117		7789	8163

Financial statement

(Part 2)

Income and Expenditure Report at 31 March 2024			
	Actual to 31.3.24 Restricted	Actual to 31.3.24 Unrestricted	Actual to 31.3.24
Income			
Donations	0	0	0
Awards for All - Community Fund	10000	0	10000
Total Income	10000	0	10000
Expenditure			
Travel	15	0	15
External Support	2145	533	2678
Stationery	0	13	13
Subscriptions	0	35	35
Social Media - Promotional Work	5138	1500	6638
Bank Service Charges	0	72	72
Insurance	0	489	489
Website/IT Maintenance	0	404	404
Partnership Research	30	0	30
TOTAL Overheads	7328	3046	10374
TOTAL Expenditure	7328	3046	10374
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	2672	(3046)	(374)

We are extremely grateful to:

- ***The National Lottery Commision Community Fund***
- ***The Allen Lane Foundation***

for their financial support that has made this project possible in 2024/2025

Trustees and team members

Chair

Dave Bradshaw

Vice Chair

Janet Cullingford

Trustees

Pamela Hill

Eileen Rudden

Betty Machin

Kay Steven

Director

Colette Isaaks

Operations Lead

Sharon Jenkins

Finance

Anne Smith

Members Activites

As part of our ongoing commitment to our membership, we send out frequent newsletters detailing current topics of interest, training and partnership opportunities, or fundraising opportunities.

We also consult our membership each year to gain their feedback on our activities. The membership reported this year that they wanted more paper based training of the differences between formal and informal advocacy. We complied and delivered training to all our members as part of our 2025 March newsletter.

OPAAL members 1

We are delighted to have welcomed 5 new members to OPAAL this year

East Midlands

- Age UK Derby & Derbyshire
- Alzheimer's Society Leicester
- LAMP - Leicestershire Action for Mental Health
- Mind in Derbyshire
- POhWER

East of England

- POhWER
- Age UK Cambridgeshire
- Age UK Essex
- Age UK Norfolk
- South Essex Advocacy Services
- VoiceAbility

London

- Advocacy First
- Advocacy in Barnet
- Age UK Croydon
- Age UK Harrow
- Centre 404
- City and Hackney Mind
- DASH- Disablement Association Hillingdon
- Hammersmith, Fulham, Ealing and Hounslow Mind
- KAG Advocacy
- LawWorks - The Solicitors Pro Bono Group
- Mind in Barnet
- Mind in Enfield
- **My Care Consultant**
- Nubian Life Resource Centre
- POhWER (London)
- Rethink
- Staywell
- The Advocacy Project
- **The Elfrida Society**
- VoiceAbility (London)
- Guardian Carers

Bold type denotes a new member for 2024/25.

OPAAL members 2

North East

- Advocacy Centre North
- Age UK Gateshead
- Age UK Sunderland
- Alzheimer's Society (Gateshead)
- Stamp Revisited

North West

- Advocacy Focus
- Age Concern Central Lancashire
- Age UK Cheshire
- Age UK Manchester
- Age UK Salford
- Age UK South Lakeland
- Age UK Wigan Borough
- Age UK Wirral
- Better Lives
- Empowerment
- Greater Manchester Older People's Network
- I-CANN
- Knowsley Council
- Manchester Advocacy Hub/The Gaddum Centre
- Mental Health Independent Support Team (MhIST)
- n-compass Advocacy Service
- Rochdale and District Mind
- Sefton Pensioners Advocacy Centre
- Shared Lives Plus
- Vegetarian for Life

Bold type denotes a new member for 2024/25.

OPAAL members 3

South East

- Age Concern Slough
- Age UK Berkshire
- Age UK Tunbridge Wells & District
- Age UK West Sussex
- Anne Robson Trust
- Getting Heard (previously Oxfordshire Advocacy)
- Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group (HARG)
- Matrix Advocacy Services
- Mind in Brighton & Hove
- POhWER (South East)

South West

- Adaption Consultancy and Training
- Age Concern Okehampton and Torridge
- Age UK Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
- Age UK Mid Devon
- Age UK Somerset
- Age UK Torbay
- Dorset Advocacy
- Dorset Mental Health Forum
- Improving Lives
- Swan Advocacy Network

Bold type denotes a new member for 2023/24.

OPAAL members 4

West Midlands

- Age Concern Keele
- Age UK Coventry
- Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin
- Age UK Walsall
- Age UK Wolverhampton
- Asist
- Beth Johnson Foundation
- Betty Machin - Freelance Advocate
- Independent Advocacy (Warwickshire)
- Onside Advocacy
- POhWER (West Midlands)
- Sandwell Advocacy
- Shropshire Peer Counselling & Advocacy Service (PCAS)
- **Solihull Advocacy**
- Solutions2Care Services

Yorkshire and the Humber

- Advocacy Alliance (Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale)
- Age UK Calderdale & Kirklees
- Age UK Leeds
- Age UK Wakefield and District
- Cloverleaf Advocacy
- **Handa Training**
- North Yorkshire Advocacy
- OCAY - Older Citizens Advocacy York
- **Sheff Care**

Bold type denotes a new member for 2024/25.

OPAAL members 5

Scotland

- *Borders Independent Advocacy Service*
- *Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance - SIAA*

Wales

- *Advocacy Services North East Wales (ASNEW)*
- *Advocacy Support Cymru*
- *Age Connects Cardiff & The Vale of Glamorgan*
- *Age Connects North Wales Central*
- *Age Connects North Wales Central: (SpeakUP Project)*
- *My Care My Home*
- *Mental Health Matters Wales*

Statement of public benefit

When planning our activities for the year, the trustees have considered the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and acted accordingly.

PRINCIPLE 1:

There must be an identifiable benefit or benefits

Principle 1a: It must be clear what the benefits are

Activities Undertaken: The relief of older people in the United Kingdom through the promotion and development of independent advocacy services and the establishment of standards and quality frameworks for the deliver of such advocacy.

Principle 1b: The benefits must be related to the aims

Activities Undertaken: The above benefits are tied specifically to the aims and objectives of the organisation and these are achieved through a referral system, a membership system, providing resources and training and by working with key partners to provide innovative support to older people and those in their lives, to help them articulate and realise their needs and wants in later life.

Principle 1c: Benefits must be balanced against any detriment or harm

Activities Undertaken: There is no identified detriment or harm with the achievement of the objectives of the organisation.

PRINCIPLE 2:

Benefit must be to the public or a section of the public

Principle 2a: The beneficiaries must be appropriate to the aims

Activities Undertaken: Beneficiaries are as per stated in the objectives of the charity. OPAAL supports older adults to make known their needs and wishes in order to obtain appropriate services and adjustments to their lives, and so increase their quality of life.

Principle 2b: Where benefit is to a section of the public, the opportunity to benefit must not be unreasonably restricted (a) by geographical or other restrictions or (b) by ability to pay any fees charged

Activities Undertaken: No such restrictions occur

Principle 2c: People in poverty must not be excluded from the opportunity to benefit

Activities undertaken: Not applicable

Principle 2d: Any private benefits must be incidental

Activities undertaken: Not applicable

