



The Older People's Advocacy Alliance

ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

March 31, 2026



MEETING DEMAND

The year 2025–2026 has been one of heightened need, intensified advocacy, and renewed purpose for OPAAL. Across the UK, older people and their families have faced growing financial insecurity, rising living costs, and increasing complexity in navigating public services. As a result, demand for OPAAL’s casework, and support services has risen significantly, reflecting both the scale of the challenges faced by older people and the trust placed in our organisation to respond.

Throughout the year, our team and volunteers have worked tirelessly to ensure that older people are not left behind. We have supported a wide range of individuals to understand their rights, access entitlements, challenge unfair decisions, and maintain dignity and independence in later life. Behind every enquiry and case is a person seeking clarity, security, and reassurance at a time of increasing uncertainty.

Alongside this frontline support, OPAAL has continued to play a vital role in shaping the policy landscape. In 2025–2026, we intensified our efforts to influence key legislative developments with long-term consequences for older people, particularly the PAFER Bill and proposed pensions reform.

Drawing on evidence from our casework and the lived experiences of pensioners, we have worked with partners, policymakers, and stakeholders to highlight risks, propose amendments, and advocate for fairer, more inclusive outcomes.

Our engagement with the PAFER Bill focused on safeguarding access to essential support and ensuring that reforms do not disproportionately disadvantage older people on low and fixed incomes. Similarly, our work on pensions reform has centred on protecting pensioner poverty safeguards, addressing inequalities, and ensuring that changes to the system recognise the realities faced by today’s and tomorrow’s retirees.

This annual report reflects a year of rising demand, determined advocacy, and collective effort. It demonstrates OPAAL’s continued commitment to standing with older people, amplifying their voices, and working for a society in which everyone can age with security, respect, and dignity.

Dave Bradshaw
Chair of Trustees



WHAT WE DID

Helping older people advocate for themselves

(Completed enquiries Jan-Dec 2025)

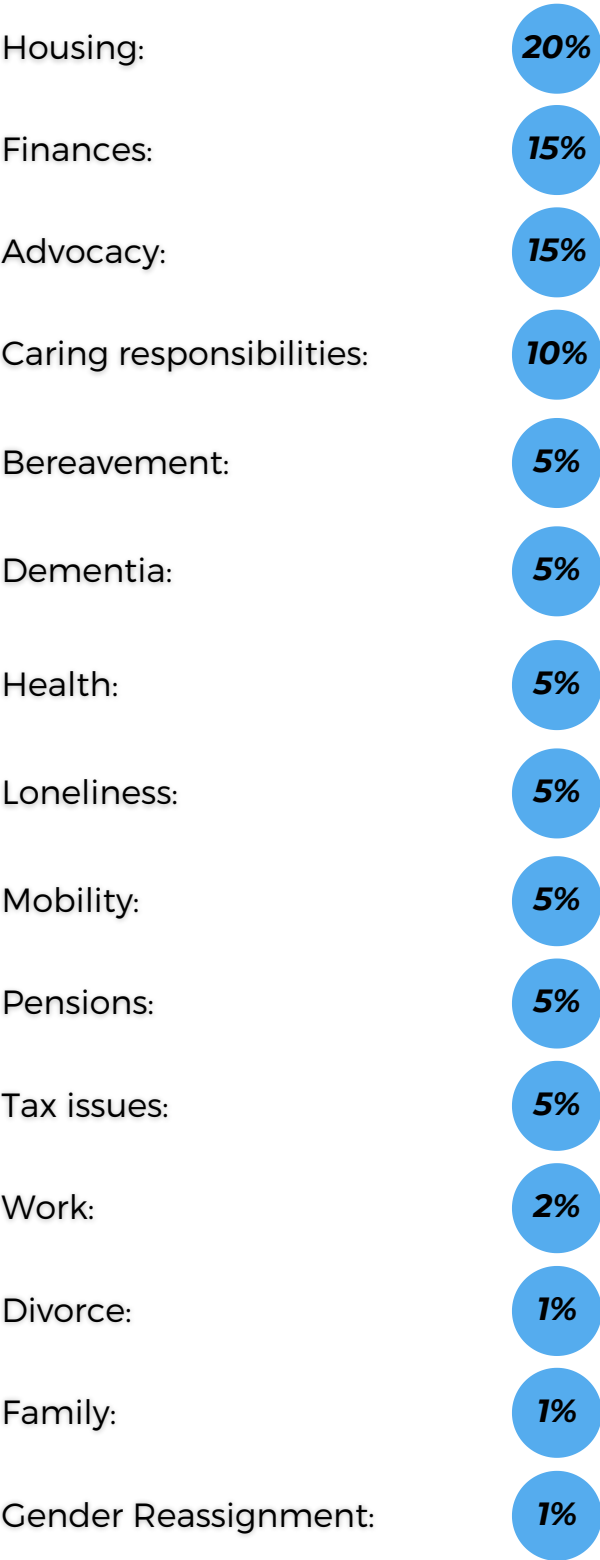
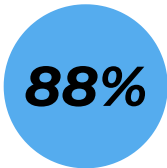
For the third year in a row the numbers of members of the public needing our help, who are struggling to be heard on a wide variety of issues, continues to rise.

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

We still experience, organisations seeming to believe that they can simply ignore an older person's request for information or assistance.

We again 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.

Resolution rate



Speaking truth to power - Standing up for older people

Throughout 2025–2026, OPAAL has remained steadfast in its commitment to speaking truth to power on behalf of older people. In a year marked by significant policy debates and structural reform, we have ensured that the lived experience of older people has been heard clearly, consistently, and constructively at the highest levels.

Influencing Legislation and Public Policy

OPAAL played an active role in scrutinising and contributing to debate around the PAFER Bill, pressing for stronger safeguards, clearer accountability mechanisms, and meaningful inclusion of older people's voices in implementation frameworks. Our evidence and briefings emphasised the importance of protecting rights, ensuring access to justice, and preventing unintended harm to vulnerable groups.

On pensions reform, we engaged with policymakers and regulators to raise concerns about adequacy, transparency, and risk transfer in the evolving pensions landscape. In discussions involving the Pensions Insurance Corporation and others, we highlighted the long-term implications of removing surpluses from defined benefit scheme members, calling for improved communication and independent oversight to protect pensioners' interests.

We also engaged in dialogue with officials from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), ensuring that the realities faced by older people—were reflected in policy development.

Promoting Accountability and Transparency

OPAAL engaged with the Legal Services Ombudsman and contributed evidence and commentary concerning access to redress and complaint handling for older people navigating legal and advice services. We emphasised that accountability systems must be accessible, understandable, and responsive to age-related vulnerabilities.

Our participation with the Transparency Task Force's network, strengthened calls for greater clarity in financial services, particularly around pension charges, governance, and conflicts of interest. We supported efforts to promote systemic transparency as a means of preventing detriment before it occurs.

Speaking truth to power Standing up for older people cont.

OPAAL also engaged with Big Brother Watch on issues of digital exclusion, surveillance, and data rights. As more public services move online, older people risk being marginalised or exposed to disproportionate scrutiny. We advocated for safeguards that protect privacy while ensuring equitable access to essential services.

Leadership at The Care Show 2025

At The Care Show 2025, OPAAL provided thought leadership on the intersection of law, care provision, and older people's rights. Our contribution focused on strengthening advocacy pathways within care settings and ensuring that legal protections keep pace with service redesign and workforce pressures. We challenged complacency and encouraged sector leaders to embed rights-based approaches in commissioning and regulation.

Building Constructive Relationships

Speaking truth to power requires both challenge and collaboration. Over the past year, OPAAL has engaged constructively with MPs, peers, civil servants, regulators, and industry leaders. Through roundtables, consultations, written submissions, and direct meetings, we have consistently brought forward the voices and experiences of older people—grounded in evidence, independent analysis, and lived reality. Our approach remains principled and non-partisan. We will continue to scrutinise policy, question assumptions, and press for fairness wherever older people's rights and wellbeing are at stake.

Educating new generations

We are also extremely grateful to Independent Education Publishers who have used one of our articles as a case study for young people across the world, informing them about issues affecting older people.

In 2025–2026, OPAAL has demonstrated that independent advocacy matters. By holding institutions to account and ensuring that decision-makers hear directly from those affected, we reaffirm our core purpose: to secure justice, dignity, and respect for older people in every sphere of public life.

Using influence and effective partnership working

2025 to 2026 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. The Patient's Association: Sharing our insight about how older people could best benefit from health advocacy.*
- 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. Manchester Advocacy Alliance; working in partnership and raising awareness.*
- 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. The Transparency Task Force; campaigning for legal and financial fairness for all.*
- 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. The PiLLaR Network; working to reduce financial fraud for older people.*
- 11. The Pensions Insurance Corporation (PIC); campaigning on pensions reform and attending in-person events.*
- 12. Big Brother Watch; participating in protecting the interests of older people in the Public Authorities (Fraud, Error and Recovery) Bill*
- 13. The Older People's Commissioner for Wales*
- 14. The Covid 19 Enquiry*
- 15. Aphra Brandreth MP for Eddisbury*
- 16. Stuart Anderson MP South Shropshire*
- 17. The Network of Non-Profit Digital Support*
- 18. Independent Educational Publishers*
- 19. The Department for Work and Pensions*
- 20. Freebird Travel*
- 21. Community Foundation North East*
- 22. Legacy Trail; supporting older people manage their affairs in advance of a dignified autonomous death*
- 23. Hoopers; probate genealogists, providing support to those left behind*

Using influence and effective partnership working cont.

24. *The Legal Services Ombudsman; working to make the legal complaints process fairer and more accessible for all*

25. *VCSE Barometer; measuring the health of the voluntary sector*

26. *Silver Voices*

27. *Centre for Better Ageing*

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.

Financial statement

(Part 1)

Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2026					
	Restricted funds £	Unrestricted funds £	Note	31.3.26 Total £	31.3.25 Total £
Current Assets					
Cash at bank	7318	926		8244	22416
Debtors	0	0		0	0
	7318	926		8244	22416
Current liabilities					
Creditors and accruals	(888)	(6)		(894)	(945)
Net current assets	6430	920		7350	21471
Financed by:					
Capital and reserves b/f	20432	1039		21471	7789
I & E Account	(14002)	(119)		(14121)	13682
Total capital and reserves	6430	920		7350	21471

Financial statement

(Part 2)

Income and Expenditure Report at 31 March 2026				
		Actual to 31.3.26 Restricted	Actual to 31.3.26 Unrestricted	Actual to 31.3.26
Income				
Allen Lane Foundation	Balance at 31.3.25 £2565 used in 25/26	0		0
Awards for All - Community Fund		0		0
Total Income		0	0	0
Expenditure				
Travel		493	0	493
External Support				0
Subscriptions	0		47	47
Social Media - Promotional Work		9574	0	9574
Enquiry Service		2400	0	2400
Bank Service Charges		0	72	72
Insurance		582	0	582
Website/IT Maintenance		952	0	952
TOTAL Overheads		14001	119	14120
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)		(14001)	(119)	(14120)

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 2024/2025/2026

Trustees and team members

Chair

Dave Bradshaw

Vice Chair

Janet Cullingford

Trustees

Pamela Hill (Resigned September 2025)

Eileen Rudden

Betty Machin

Kay Steven

Akshey Kalra (Appointed December 2025)

Director

Colette Isaaks

Operations Lead

Sharon Jenkins supported in a voluntary capacity by Alice Grocott

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 have also refreshed our website to make it even easier to find a member for anyone seeking advocacy support. And of course we continue to signpost people to all the valuable work our membership undertakes each year.

We also consult our membership each year to ensure that our activities still meet their requirements.

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 2025/26.

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 2025/26.

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
- **Legacy Trail**
- Swan Advocacy Network

Bold type denotes a new member for 2025/26.

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 2025/26.

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

