



Onside Independent Advocacy and the role of the Advocate

You will have heard people talk about the use of an Advocate but may be uncertain as to what the Advocate can do. The role of an Advocate is to offer independent support to individuals who feel they are not being heard, to ensure they are taken seriously and that their rights, views, and wishes are respected in all conversations and decisions about their support plans, care, or treatment.

They are there to give support and ensure a person has the tools to make an informed decision about their situation, their care, living environment or medical treatment. The Advocate does not make any decisions for the person but represents and informs them so that they can make their own decision.

Local Authorities such as Worcestershire County Council are required to commission (put contracts in place) to provide independent advocacy services to support people who may require it. In the case of Worcestershire, the Local Authority has formed a partnership with Onside Independent Advocacy to provide these services.

There are different types of Advocates available to support individuals in different circumstances. For example

For individuals who have been formally assessed as 'lacking capacity' and are unbefriended (i.e., does not have someone suitable to support them); an **Independent Mental Capacity Act Advocate (IMCA)** can work with them.

For individuals who are deprived of their liberty in a care home or hospital; a **Relevant Persons Representation (RPR)** can represent them to ensure their rights under the Mental Capacity Act are respected.

For individuals detained under the Mental Health Act in a secure mental health unit; an **Independent Mental Health Act Advocate (IMHA)** can work with them.

For individuals who have substantial difficulty understanding their care, support, or treatment and who do not have anyone appropriate available to support and represent them; a **Care Act Advocate** can be involved to represent the persons wishes.

In the case of the Care Act Advocate, this was brought into effect in 2014 to strengthen the voice of people who use services in social care and healthcare, as well as to strengthen the voice of their carers during the process of assessments, in the preparation of care and support plans and in the review of any such care plans. The Care Act Advocate is not to be used to resolve disputes within a family about a persons' care.

It is important to remember that to qualify for a Care Act Advocate two specific conditions must be met:

- the person has **substantial difficulty** in being fully involved in these processes.
- there is **no one appropriate available** to support and represent the person's wishes.

The final Advocacy service to mention is **Independent Health Complaints Advocacy (IHCA)**. If anyone in Worcestershire wishes to make a complaint about their care or treatment within the NHS, social care, or dentistry they can also approach Onside Independent Advocacy for support with making their complaint.

If you would like to know more about Advocacy Services and how an Advocate could represent you or a family member/friend, please visit the following websites:

www.onside-advocacy.org.uk

www.worcestershire.gov.uk

Joy Ireland

Head of Services, Onside Independent Advocacy