

Coram Voice provided 68 advocacy episodes to 62 Children and Young People during the year; 6 young people were re-referred. There were 44 new referrals and 53 closures in the reporting period.

In addition, 8 children and young people were provided with advocacy funded by Coram Voice Outreach and Always Heard.

In Q4, Coram Voice provided Issue based advocacy to 25 Children and Young People, with 13 new referrals and 12 closures.

Service Overview

Independent advocacy advice and support provided by Coram Voice advocates via our free phone advocacy support line, face to face in the community in Camden, but also across the country via our national team of advocates.

Our service is designed to be as accessible as possible, via: our free phone helpline, text; website, outreach, referrals from professionals and carers, and promoted with age specific and translated promotional materials. All Camden young people have access to telephone interpretation where English is not their first language. Our specialist advocates for children with disabilities and young people 16+ means our service is well equipped to support children and young people with specific needs. Advocates will also make initial referral visits for young people unable to communicate verbally via our helpline service.

Coram Voice advocacy is wishes and feelings based and led by the young people who request our support, where they have capacity and are able to instruct the service directly. If capacity is lacking on any particular issues, the service uses a non-instructed advocacy model whereby the advocate will liaise with those people who know the young person; visit them in all available settings, ascertain as much as possible about what the young person is communicating through non-verbal communication and present a non-instructed advocacy report highlighting findings and whether all rights and entitlements are being met.

Our advocates aim to empower Camden young people by giving them information on their rights and entitlements in order to make informed decisions, also about ways in which they can engage with Children's Services and speak out about their wishes and feelings. The advocate will not seek to influence the child or young person with regard to their decision-making, and operates a confidential service in regards to all personal information unless safeguarding risks identified which will be shared.

Our advocacy is undertaken in line with the *National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services*. The practice of our advocates depends on the needs of Camden children and young people, but is likely to include phone calls and other correspondence with their social worker, supporting them at meetings and reviews, and helping them through the Children's Act complaints process if they request this. As our advocacy is child-led Coram Voice advocates always explore how the child or young person would like this support to take place.

Coram Voice advocates work in an open and transparent way, so will always tell children and young people about any conversations they have had with professionals. However, they also understand that there may be times when it would be harmful, or inappropriate, for them to share particularly sensitive information, which the professional needs to take time and care to communicate.

Types of Advocacy Cases

All young people are supported to explore options for resolving their concerns via informal resolution and representation or via the complaints process. Cases have been marked as complaint cases where substantive advice and complaints work has been undertaken and there are instances where a complaint has not been submitted due to issues being resolved informally or the young person changing their mind.

Period 2022/2023 (2021/2022 shown in brackets)	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year to date totals
Number of new cases regarding a complaint where an advocate has been allocated	2 (0)	1 (3)	1 (2)	1 (1)	5 (6)
Number of new cases where representation has been allocated (not related to a complaint)	6 (4)	10 (7)	11 (12)	12 (16)	39 (39)

Outcome s , reflections and projections

Please also refer to *Coram Voice Camden Advocacy Final Q4 monitoring Data 2022- 2023*

Based on the reports of young people and advocates, over the year the main issues identified were:

- **Housing:** high number of care leavers sought advocacy support throughout the year seeking support with housing issues for a variety of reasons, namely wanting to move out of semi-independent accommodation, falling into rent arrears and living in unsuitable accommodation. Coram Voice recommend that Children’s Services develop a robust joint working protocol with the Housing service to ensure a smooth transition for young people leaving care, setting out all of the accommodation and support options available to care leavers including how they will be accessed. In addition, it is of vital importance that the local authority has in place contingency plans to support young people through crisis, for example, when facing eviction and/ or when their personal circumstances significantly change, such as becoming a parent. Young people are exercising their right to seek legal advice on housing and accommodation.
- **Concerns about SW/ PA:** some children and young people required advocacy representation to address concerns about allocated social workers and personal advisors. Young people have shared their dissatisfaction with the low level of contact with social workers/ personal advisors and/ or perceived inaction of allocated workers. Children’s Services could consider implementing a regular drop-in service for young people where team managers and heads of service would be available to listen to young people and address some of their concerns. These drop-ins could include professionals from other services, such as housing and education, to enable young people to pose questions about their personal circumstances.

- **Finance benefits and debt:** There have been a number of young people seeking advocacy for issues around finances, including subsistence monies not being received in timely way; confusion and delays in applications for Universal Credit; young people’s understanding of processes for and access to Setting Up Home and Allowances.

In reporting and discussing the themes arising in our advocacy with children and young people, the local authority is provided with rich detail of their day-to-day lived experiences in Camden. This offers a valuable opportunity to listen, reflect and respond to what they say about their relationships with local authority staff; the homes where they live; the planning around the care and support they receive; the resources provided to them; etc. Advocates reflections on Camden’s policy and practice in the borough also provides independent feedback on their experiences with empowering children by giving them information about their rights & entitlements; getting their voices heard about decisions being made about their care and having these taken into account by the local authority.

Young people accessing advocacy

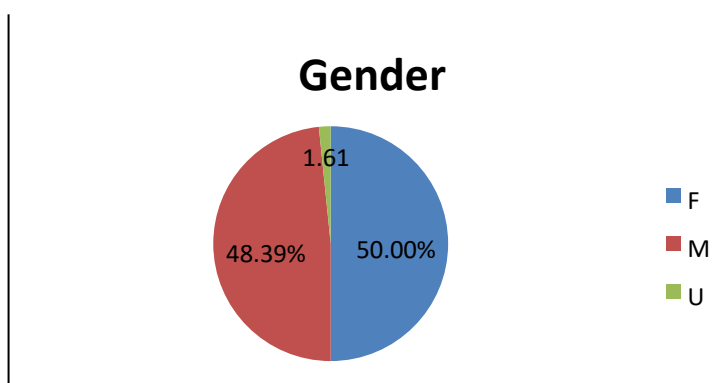
Coram Voice is committed to providing an advocacy service that meets the needs of the full diversity of the children and young people in Camden eligible for the service.

In Q4 2022/23, 25 young people were open for advocacy with 13 new referrals and 12 closures.

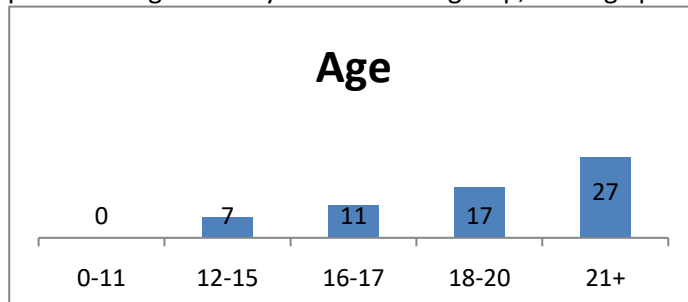
In the year 2022 – 2023, there were 68 advocacy episodes open, 44 new referrals and 53 closures.

We provide the following annual data to allow us to work with Camden to ensure that we can identify areas where we need to develop our local model of service to ensure that ours is a truly representative service. The annual graphs exclude the 6 re-referrals.

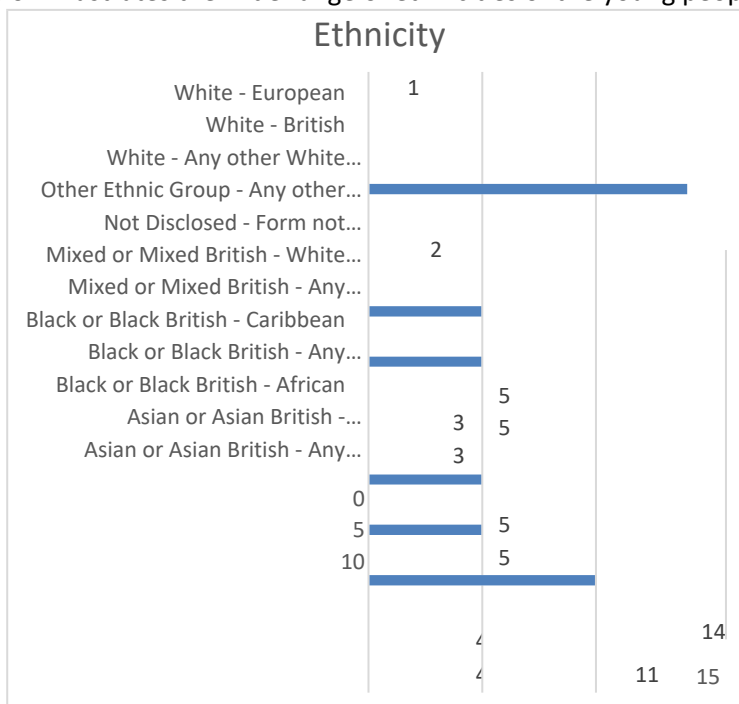
Gender: The gender breakdown of children and young people accessing the service was **48.3% male (30)**, **50% female (31)**, and **1.61% Not known (1)**.



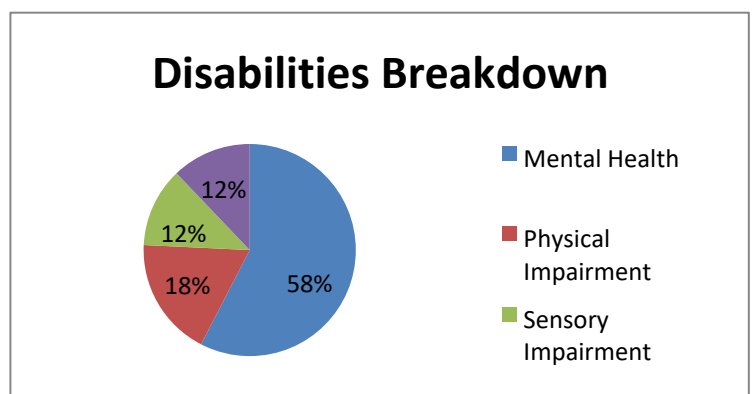
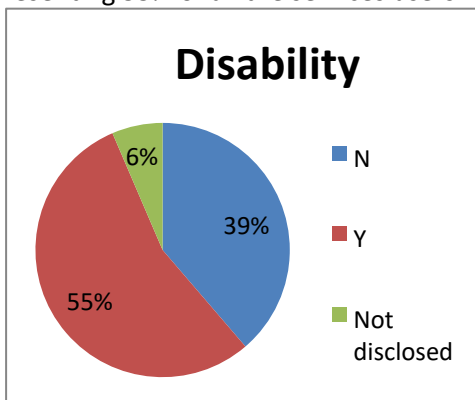
Age: The data on age breakdown of children and young people accessing the service shows that the majority of children and young people accessing advocacy are in the 18+ group, making up 71% of the referrals received.



Ethnicity: The chart below illustrates the wide range of ethnicities of the young people accessing the service.



Disability: 34 young people accessed Advocacy in the quarter that self-identify as having a disability, representing 55% of all the services users. 24 young people (39%) identified as not having a disability.



Quality Assurance

All advocates working with Camden young people have casework supervision on a monthly basis. Coram Voice also undertakes casework and supervision audits to ensure that both are compliant with our internal expectations and with those required by this contract. Advocacy is monitored on the hours used for each case as well as hours recorded against total available hours to ensure we become as efficient and effective as possible.

Outcomes for Young People

Coram Voice recognises that the issue based outcomes wanted by the young people cannot always be achieved, might be unrealistic, may change or even be beyond the scope of an advocate. As a result, they are not always reliable indicators of high quality advocacy. We therefore measure the impact on young people of having advocacy support by measuring how far they “travel” whilst the support is in place.

Young people self-assess against a range of indicators of how they felt at the start and then at the end of the advocacy relationship. This helps provide a sense of what the young person has gained because of advocacy.

The indicators we use are:

Motivation I feel that I can achieve the aims and ambitions I have in my life **Safety**

If something happened I was not happy with I would be able to tell someone

Wellbeing I feel positive about my life.

Being Responsible I feel able to make decisions for myself

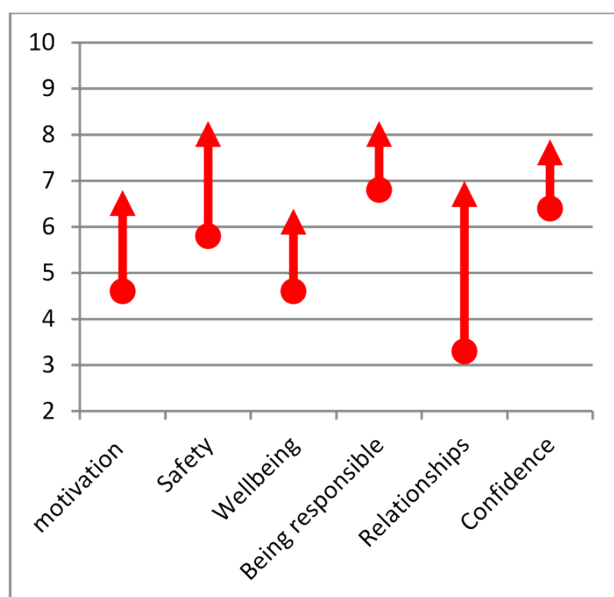
Relationships I feel I have a good relationship with the professionals and carers in my life

Confidence I am able to speak up for myself in meetings

Young people score themselves out of 10 concerning how they felt at the start of the advocacy relationship and again at the end.

It is important to note that outcomes charts measure soft outcomes and that information about advocacy issues outcomes is provided in the data-monitoring sheet *Coram Voice Advocacy Q4 2022-23 Camden data*. Of the 53 young people who closed during the year, 10 young people completed the outcomes chart. The reasons for non-completions are reported quarterly.

The chart below shows improvement across all the measured areas for the young people that completed the outcomes questionnaires over the year across all indicators.



Feedback and evaluation

Feedback is gathered from a variety of sources including closure summaries completed with young people by their advocate, day to day conversations during advocacy support provided, outcomes charts completed with young people at the closure of advocacy support and feedback forms. Quarterly reports collate and share feedback gathered throughout the year. The following feedback was received in 2022/23:

Young person, feedback to Advocate,

“My advocate was the only person who really helped me; she was very productive, very helpful and genuine person.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate – partially instructed advocacy,

“The service is brilliant...not just for me; for other people who need it as well.”

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

“I find it difficult to understand all the information given by social workers and how to respond as I find it hard to be able to explain myself and remember what I want to say.”

Foster Carer of young person above, described the Coram Voice advocacy service as: *“Someone who can get a sense of his world; who can be there.”*

Foster Carer of young person above says to the advocate,

“You’ve been professional in your approach but also person-centred”.

Young Person, closure summary

“I did not feel supported by PA; I had to sort out my housing myself. Local authority would not listen. They did not support me with my mental health; which got worse because of leaving me in a house which I should not have been in in. They did not support me with my training needs. If it had not been for my Advocate ... She really supported me and helped me.”

Young Person, closure summary

“I didn’t want to move too soon but I think the plan is good now.”

Young person, feedback to Helpline Advocate,

"You are giving me good information which I need."

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

"Thank you, I really appreciate your support and teaching me how to communicate with Camden. You're great at what you do and really changing people's lives."

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

"Thank you for everything you have done for I really appreciate it and I'm very lucky. I'm so grateful. My twenties have been amazing so far."

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

"I've learnt a lot from you and really appreciate all the help you've given me, I'm in a much better place now."

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

"I feel just as able to say what I want and feel confident about this."

Young Person, closure summary

"The service is brilliant...not just for me; for other people who need it as well."

Young Person, closure summary

"I waited a long time until I got my place, they kept pushing it back and telling me the wrong things and this had a bad effect on me. I'm happy now I have my place, I wish it was sooner."

Young Person, closure summary

"Young person expressed feeling that local authority were not taking her concerns seriously and not listening to her. Significant delays until permanent accommodation arranged despite young person complying and fulfilling criteria."

Young Person, closure summary

"My advocate has really done a lot for me to make sure I get what I'm entitled to. If Children's Services would have done this sooner it would have been easier for me."

Young Person, closure summary

"Young person pleased with the outcome and thanked me for supporting him. Young person said he has referred his friend to Coram Voice as he also needs advocate support."

Young Person, closure summary

*"They could have listened and put support in place needed and not discriminated against me. Social services did eventually listen to some things raised by my advocate on my behalf. Advocacy support made a difference as it was someone to speak out for me and social services did listen in the end. Should be able to receive advocacy for me for Child Protection plan in place for my baby as well as advocacy for when I was a
looked
after child."*

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

"This has improved and I feel more confident with self-advocacy."

Young Person, feedback to Advocate, Outcomes Chart

"My advocate helped me how to put my point of view across and who to tell it to. She was good at asking me what I thought about decisions and what I could do if I didn't think decision was good for me."

Young Person, closure summary

“Children’s Services could have done meetings sooner and put me in placement sooner. Since I got new social worker, things been better and things happening sooner, new social worker is good and is helping a lot.”

Young Person, closure summary

“The mediation they have offered has been ok. I wanted to be moved but I was told that I couldn’t as it wouldn’t be easy. I feel that they could have done a bit better and given more support and offered more support in moving out even if they couldn’t pay for it.”

Young Person, closure summary

“They said they would let me know if I could change my social worker and never told me. When they said I couldn’t if it wasn’t for my advocate then I wouldn’t have known to ask why.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person was living out of borough due to safety concerns which were confirmed by the police. Local authority initially refused out of borough accommodation but overturned decision following complaint. Local authority must be responsive to young people’s needs in standard working practices to avoid complaint submissions. Once accommodation was agreed, there was a 4-month delay to this being arranged after young person refused one property. This was only overturned once complaint submitted. Young person has now been housed.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“One month after the stage one complaint had been submitted; the complaints department said they would submit the claim as a ‘formal complaint’ because it had exceeded the 10 day time frame. The complaint had been submitted as a formal stage one complaint from the date of submission, and this was clear, and it should have been responded to as such. It took almost three months to receive the formal response to the stage one complaint (submitted on 19/03/22, response delivered on 8/06/22). Action to move it forward was only taken when the young person requested moving the matter directly to a stage two complaint. The advocate found the complaint process hard to navigate as phone calls/emails to chase up a response took a number of attempts/were not answered until late in the process, and the department did not seem to know who the complaint had been forwarded to. Team Manager communicated well with advocate once appointed to keep young person updated on progress. A thorough response was given, which young person is happy with.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person states that she is angry and does not accept concerns of Children’s Services and rational for not being able to live with parent. If there was a better relationship with Children’s Services and concerns had been better explained and allowance given for YP to respond to concerns and to be listened to, perhaps young person would not require advocacy. However, social worker has stated that they have tried to explain concerns several times, but it’s clear that perhaps another professional may have been beneficial to mediate between young person and Children’s Services.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person was unclear about her housing status but has since been housed. Young person believes this is because of complaint which although was not acknowledged formally, appears to have had an impact on her being housed. Young person feels much more settle and is now able to focus on pursuing her studies, which have been impacted significantly.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Local authority provided limited response or responded very slowly, several attempts to set up meetings received no response from local authority”.

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person unhappy in current accommodation and breakdown in relationship with personal advisor. In addition to unpaid rent arrears, young person unable to move on at present. Work with young person was slow to start as YP did not respond to texts and calls to assist with complaint and had some unrealistic expectations of Children’s Services. Young person expressed difficulties completing a complaint despite attempts from advocate and young person eventually did this with support staff at accommodation. YP is more proactive in addressing the issues in recent weeks and matters are progressing. PA appears to have ceased work with young person and young person wishes to address this in his forthcoming complaint.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Children’s Services perhaps could have acted sooner and accommodated young person sooner as they were sofa surfing”.

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“More alternatives could have been explored in regards to young person living independently. But also feel that a piece of work could have been done with Mother to address issues at home and improve this situation.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person felt that he wasn't being listened to. He felt he wasn't included in the decisions and felt he had goals that the local authority dismissed. He understood and accepted that some of the decisions but was keen to engage in areas that he could challenge and welcomed advocacy support. Local authority was very reluctant to keep advocate updated. Advocate had to challenge local authority as they failed to respond to young person about his wishes and feelings in a timely manner.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Responses from Children’s Services and social worker were often slow or delayed and only some of the issues raised were responded to and others not. Fuller explanations as to why Children's Services couldn't provide support being requested should have also been given.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person was grateful for opportunity to re-engage with LA to challenge decision about not having new social worker, however, local authority are failing to update young person”.

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Issues were addressed by local authority in a timely manner. There has not been any feedback from the local authority on why the young person was only allowed out of the home for only one hour per day in his previous placement. Although, the young person has since moved placements, it would have been helpful if the local authority responded to the query so best support could be given to the young person around this issue. The issue of legal representation for immigration needs to be more rigorously pursued by local authority”.

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person has had ongoing maintenance issues at placement. The placement has had intermittent problems with water for the past three months leaving young person without access to a shower. LA have a duty to ensure that the properties that are contracted to house young people are fit for purpose and meet health and safety requirements. This environment had a detrimental impact on young person’s wellbeing who already has complex mental health needs. It is not sufficient for the onus to purely be on the placement to resolve the matter. Action needs to be taken at senior management level to agree a plan with the placement to resolve this issue and prevent it from repeating.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“This is a case that took far longer than the timeline set out in Camden's complaint procedure, which caused the young person a great deal of distress and had an impact on both her wellbeing and her education. There were a number of delays due to issues such as staff sickness/pandemic related issues and also due to senior members of staff not turning up for the review panel at stage 3. These issues could have been better communicated to the young person and advocate. I am pleased that some of the young person's desired outcomes were met, though not that a solicitor recommended a higher amount of compensation than what was offered (in line with remedy guidelines). I am aware of similar cases where, rather than spend significant funds on a lengthy investigation process, the Local Authority has agreed to compensate the young person to cover the cost of a specific need related to their complaint - I wonder whether this approach might have delivered a more satisfactory outcome for both young person and Camden.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person expressed frustrations around his current placement and lack of clarity from Personal Advisor regarding plans for move on placement. Young person obtained refugee status one year ago and feels that he has not progressed since. It is important for pathway plans to be reviewed within time with the direct involvement of young person with specific details and actions agreeing steps moving forward.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Social Worker has been clear about reasons for move and transitioning into post 18 support. Reasonable time has been allocated for changes to not overwhelm young person.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Local authority have been responsive and supportive - provided good communication to advocate.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Local authority have been responsive to young person’s complex needs and looked into alternative housing options as well as presenting case to panel. Local authority changed panel meeting with one hour’s notice meaning advocate was unable to support young person - this is not positive practice and local authority must make sure meetings are planned appropriately to allow young people to have support as per their wishes.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person went abroad for work for 2 weeks and placement terminated despite young person explaining reasons and giving dates – Local authority must use their discretion to balance placement rules and young people’s professional development to prevent unnecessary barriers being placed on young people.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Young person reports poor response from local authority in regards to her rights and entitlements until advocacy involvement.”

Advocate, Reflections to Local Authority, quarterly summary

“Complaints procedure complicated and unresponsive, several emails for complaints department and difficult to get a response from.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person was given poor advice by local authority and accrued arrears £4,000- due to be cleared. It is important that local authority provide accurate, thorough, tailored advice when supporting vulnerable young people to ensure that the appropriate support is in place and young people are set up to live independently successfully. Payment agreed- young person waiting to receive this and happy to follow up independently.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person was waiting to be moved to new placement for 2 months - new placement was arranged then fell through - this created distrust and frustration for young person. Young person was invited to panel meeting to share his views directly giving him an opportunity to express his concerns with senior professionals - good practice. Young person has since moved to new placement.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“The complaints procedure in this case showed poor practice and exceeded all statutory guidelines for time frames. Examples being: No acknowledgement of complaint until followed up by advocate on several occasions; One month after submission, the complaint was then 'processed' as being a Stage One complaint and forwarded to appropriate person.

It took almost three months to receive the formal response to the stage one complaint (submitted on 19/03/22, response delivered on 8/06/22). Action to move it forward was only taken when the young person requested moving the matter directly to a stage two complaint. The advocate found the complaint process hard to navigate as phone calls/emails to chase up a response took a number of attempts/were not answered until late in the process, and the department did not seem to know who the complaint had been forwarded to. However, Team Manager, communicated well with advocate once appointed to keep young person updated on progress. A thorough response was given, which young person is happy with. Local authority initially denied the young person a PA to support her post 18, despite her request for this support as a vulnerable young person, and her legal right for this service. It is of concern that advocacy support was needed to achieve this basic right especially as she came into care due homelessness/family breakdown, has complex health needs, and was on a CP plan and a CIN prior to coming into care. She is a young person very much in need of ongoing support as identified by the IRO who supported the fact that a post 18 service was required The original assessment did not appear to acknowledge her needs beyond housing.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“There were significant delays to Children’s Services providing accommodation to a homeless young person, which has in turn impacted care leaver rights. Children’s Services must act lawfully, provide support in line with young people’s rights, and use discretion to secure care leaver rights when this has not happened. Legal challenge on-going.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Local authority have been slow in responding to young person’s request for section 20 and social worker has been unresponsive to advocate’s emails requesting update on section 17 assessment. I would strongly encourage good communication to ensure best practice and strong support for vulnerable young people.”

Advocate, feedback to Local Authority, closure summary

“Young person had issues with Children's Guardian and did not feel her views were being put across - it would be helpful for social workers to support young people in liaising with guardians to ensure the correct processes are followed and young people are adequately supported.”

Further information

The Coram Voice lead for the Camden advocacy service is:

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