



Social Services and Housing Directorate

Advocacy Protocol

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Author: Dawn Cousins
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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

ADVOCACY PROTOCOL

Advocacy Statement

The Isle of Wight social services and housing directorate is committed to supporting Advocacy for vulnerable people, including children, who are users, or potential users, of its services.

Advocacy benefits the service user by giving them a voice and the means to make appropriate and informed choices.

Advocacy is helpful to the organisation because of the contribution the service user can make to service delivery. It offers the opportunity to involve customers in the planning and provision of services and enables an increased awareness of the issues that are important to them.

To this end, the social services and housing directorate provides financial support to some formal Advocacy groups so that their service users can access advocacy.

In spite of this support, any Advocacy remains independent of the social services and housing directorate.

Code of Practice

In order to ensure the quality of the provision, there is a code of practice which all advocacy groups / agencies are expected to work to in order for support to be given and so that there can be confidence in the advocacy being provided to service users.

The code of practice, accepted by most advocacy groups, is as follows :-

- Advocates are accountable to those who use their services
- Advocates for service users should be independent of the authority providing the service.
- Advocates should not be recent (within five years) ex-employees of the agency.
- There will be no charge to the user for advocacy services.
- Conflicts of interest must be declared.
- Service users should have a choice about who acts as their advocate.
- Advocates should include people of different genders, ages and ethnic identities.
- Service users are at liberty to dispense with their advocate, or choose another, at any time.
- Advocates should ensure that users are clear about when they are available and how to contact them.

- Premises should be accessible and convenient.
- There should be a clear constitution, a complaints process and information on charity status.
- There should be planned training and supervision of all advocates.
- Any paid advocates should be recruited using equal opportunity procedures.
- Employees should have the usual rights of employees such as health and safety policies, grievance procedures etc.
- Advocates will only speak on the user's behalf as the user wishes. The key aim is to help people regain their power and independence.
- Advocates must be careful not to make assumptions based on their own preconceptions about what is good for service users.
- Service users have a right to be present whenever the advocate is discussing them.
- The advocate should make no decisions or choices on behalf of the service user. The service user must be helped to understand the options and make considered choices.
- Advocates should not give advice or counselling nor influence the user in their choices.
- Advocates will disclose to service users all communications concerning them, but they will not disclose any information about them to others without their consent.
- Advocates will act ethically and behave towards service users with honesty, courtesy, discretion, respect for their dignity, confidentiality and privacy will be expected of all advocates.
- Service users using advocacy services have the right to expect advocates to uphold their human rights as citizens at all times.
- Advocates must not hold users' money or valuables, without giving a proper receipt and making a verified record. There must be clear accountability, and procedures adhered to in respect of money and property.
- Advocates must be careful about gifts. In general personal items and keepsakes should be refused or held in trust openly for person concerned.
- Advocates must not make promises or commitments they do not, or cannot, fulfil.
- Advocates must work within the law.
- Advocates must respect codes of practice and complaints and other mutually agreed procedures in the interests of the service user, justice and human rights.

- Advocates must reflect continually on their practice to ensure they work positively with service users, to listen to them and not to become judgmental.
- Advocates must maintain a policy of equal opportunities for all.

Choice of Advocate

Although service users can choose their own advocates who may not be attached to a recognised group or agency, it is important that the service user is aware of the directorate's expectations of their advocate, by referring to the code of practice above. This is in order to protect the interests of service users when sharing confidential and sensitive information.

It is therefore important that the role of staff is kept separate from advocacy arrangements. Also, due to possible conflicts of interest, it is not appropriate for ex-members of social services staff to act as advocate for a service user.

Authorisation

When an advocate is used there should be some form of authorisation provided by the individual prior to discussion/meeting or sharing information with the advocate.

Where a child is under sixteen it is particularly important that careful consideration is given to sharing information with someone who has not been cleared through the normal system for those working with children and whose parents may be unaware of their involvement. A balance between the rights of the child and their need for protection should be the aim.

For other vulnerable people it is also important that the person with whom information is to be shared has been checked out, or is part of an agency who routinely undertakes necessary checks.

The authorisation should be seen by social services staff prior to any involvement with the advocate and, where possible, checked out with the service user. A copy of the authorisation should be kept on file.

Relationship between social services and advocacy agencies

It is important that advocates are seen as independent of the services which are being provided or commented on. Procedures for information sharing between the two agencies needs to be made clear at the point of any contract, and the service user should be made aware of the information which will be shared.

Appendix 1 shows a draft protocol regarding the relationship between advocacy and social services staff.

Publicity

It is important that social services are aware of the opportunity for service users to have advocates and to promote those services.

Appendix 2 shows a draft leaflet which could be used for service users.

Contracts/Performance Indicators

It is important for social services to feel confident about the services they promote to service users and to have a system of review regarding the services they financially support.

Appendix 3 shows a draft of the possible performance indicators for use in evaluating advocacy services.

Advocacy - relationship with social services staff

- There needs to be clarity of roles between staff and advocate. Whilst staff may speak out for people, they cannot be independent advocates. Whilst advocates may make people feel better they are not therapists.
- Staff should not only recognise the person's right to an advocate, they have a duty to encourage advocacy and to acknowledge self-advocacy as a positive action, not label it as a symptom of distress.
- Staff should acknowledge the independence of the advocate, and the value of advocates as an independent resource for people with whom they may be able to form an alliance to improve care practice. Advocates may be able to raise issues that staff cannot.
- Advocates should be introduced to staff so that staff are aware of their right to information.
- Staff should have training in the role of an advocate and explore boundary issues.
- Staff have a vital role to play in the provision of good quality, user friendly, information. Advocates may be able to help them with information strategies.
- Staff have an obligation to respond courteously and to act, both on issues concerning an individual service user, and wider issues raised by people using the service. The advocate's role in providing feedback, without necessarily identifying complainants, should be recognised.
- Managers should recognise that listening is not enough, but should be able to evidence action taken as a result of raising issues. A regular meeting between advocates and managers may aid this process.
- Regular monitoring of the relationships between staff and advocates should take place in order to deal with any developing problem and to agree roles and codes of practice.
- It should be clear that advocates are not members of staff and therefore should not use offices, staff rooms etc.
- It needs to be recognised that a healthy dialogue is likely on most issues. Tensions and differences of perspective are inevitable in order to achieve empowerment on both sides.

Advocacy Leaflet

ADVOCACY

How can it help?

Introduction

The Isle of Wight social services and housing directorate is committed to supporting **Advocacy** for vulnerable people, including children, who use their services, or are potential users of their services.

Advocacy aims to provide or assist persons who need assistance to obtain his or her full rights and privileges as a citizen.

Advocates can help to ensure people have a voice.

What can Advocates do?

- ◆ Attend meetings with, or in place of the service user.
- ◆ Advise about user rights.
- ◆ Liaise with professionals.
- ◆ Negotiate services and support.
- ◆ Offer support in dealing with procedures.
- ◆ Help formulate and make a complaint.
- ◆ Participate in policy making/planning.

Are Advocates independent?

Advocates need to be independent of the agency providing the service.

Social services sometimes provide financial support to **Advocacy** services, but they remain independent from the delivery of **Advocacy**.

How can I get an Advocate?

The following can help with providing an **Advocate**:

101% Advocacy and Appropriate Adult Services

34 The Mall
Carisbrooke Road
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 1BW
Tel: (01983) 528827

The Youth Trust

1 St Johns' Place
Newport
Isle of Wight
Tel: (01983) 529569

Other useful addresses:

Citizens Advice

Exchange House
St Cross Lane
Newport
Isle of Wight
Tel: (01983) 522611

Voice for the Child in Care

Unit 4
Pride Court
80-82 White Lion Street
London N1 9PF
Tel: (0171) 833 5792

Childline

2nd Floor
Royal Mail Building
Studd Street
London NI 0QW
Tel: 0800 1111

Can I choose my own Advocate?

Most **Advocacy** groups/agencies aim to provide an **Advocate** you will feel comfortable with and therefore allow some choice.

You can choose a friend or relative, not linked to a group or agency, to be your **Advocate** but they should be made aware of the expectations of an **Advocate** when dealing with social services for example the code of practice. (See over). This is to protect the service user when sharing sensitive and confidential information with the **Advocate**.

How could an Advocate help me?

An **Advocate** could help you:

- ◆ Tell the service what you need,
- ◆ Find out important information,
- ◆ Help you understand what services are on offer,
- ◆ Help you understand your options,
- ◆ Give you the opportunity to talk,
- ◆ Help you talk to professionals,
- ◆ Find out what your rights are,
- ◆ Ensure you are treated fairly,
- ◆ Make a complaint, if necessary.

Are there standards for Advocates?

The following code of practice is accepted by most **Advocacy** groups :-

- **Advocates** are accountable to those who use their services
- **Advocates** should be independent of the authority providing the service
- There should be no charge
- Conflicts of interest must be declared
- People should be able to choose to change their **Advocate** at any time
- Premises must be accessible and convenient
- **Advocates** should be supervised and trained
- There should be a complaints process and clear information about the group
- **Advocates** should only speak on the user's behalf as the user wishes
- **Advocates** should not make assumptions based on their own views
- **Advocates** should not make decisions or choices on behalf of the service user
- **Advocates** should not disclose any information about the service user without their permission
- **Advocates** should act ethically and behave with honesty and discretion
- **Advocates** must not hold user's money or valuables without giving a receipt and making a verified record
- **Advocates** should not make promises or commitments they can not or should not keep
- **Advocates** must work within the law
- **Advocates** must respect the codes of practice of other agencies
- **Advocates** should maintain a policy of equal opportunities for all

Each **Advocacy** group/agency will have their own code of practice and standards.
At the time of contacting them ask if you can see these.

APPENDIX 3

Possible performance indicators for evaluating advocacy services.

General

- Has the service set aims and objectives that have been agreed by senior managers and elected members?
- Does the service have an annual work plan?
- What has the service achieved in the last year?
- What areas of work have been particularly difficult over the past year?
- How can these difficulties be addressed in the forthcoming year?
- What relationship has the service established with local authority service providers?
- What contacts have been made with other organisations providing services for vulnerable people?

Recording

- Has the service a satisfactory and confidential system for recording referrals and enquiries?

Accessibility

- Is the service physically accessible?
- Is the service accessible 24 hours a day?
- Can the manager of the service be contacted by bleep or mobile phone when out of the office?
- Is there an agreed response rate from the time of contacting the office to the time of personal contact?
- How has the service performed against these response times?
- Is the office open at suitable times for the service users for example evenings.

Confidentiality and Protection

- Has the service an agreed policy on confidentiality
- Has the service an agreed policy on service user protection?

Delivery of Service

- Has the service a method of recording all requests for advocacy?
- Has the service a method of evaluating services to individuals on an ongoing basis - questionnaires or personal contact?
- Does the service have a way of recording outcomes from individual advocacy?
- Have service users contributed to the development of the service?
- How has the service performed over the last year?
- Is there a system for feeding back issues to service providers?

Information to Service Users

- Has the service provided information for the service users explaining how they can access the service and what types of support are available?
- Is this information available for all service users ie. children, disabled people, those with sensory and sight loss etc?

- Have service users been involved in the production of this information?
- Is the information up-to-date?
- How do people receive this information?
- Is the distribution of leaflets etc wide enough?

Legislation, Conventions etc

- What steps are taken to promote the UN convention on the rights of the child?
- Has other legislation, citizen charters etc been considered?
- Have service users been helped to become involved in consultation of new legislation/ services?

Annual Report

- Has the service produced an annual report?
- Were service users involved in the production of the report?
- Has a summary been produced for service users?