

# Moving the Advocacy Project Forward

## Purpose

1. This report will:
  - a) update people on the progress of the advocacy project so far;
  - b) begin to describe some of the trends that have been emerging during the consultation and research; and
  - c) set out some thoughts on developing a strategic context for these trends.

## Introduction

2. The Advocacy Network Project Coordinator started work in May. An initial report setting out the starting point, together with some broad aims and objectives and an action plan was produced in June. Throughout the first six months of the project, the Coordinator has been:
  - actively engaging a wide range of local stakeholders
  - supporting the Advocacy Network Steering Group
  - researching current guidance and legislation on advocacy and developing a set of local standards
  - beginning to work out what role the project might play in Wakefield District in the future.
3. There has been a great deal of positive interest in the project and in advocacy more widely. General awareness of advocacy has increased considerably amongst many people. This is more true in the west of the District than the east, due to capacity and location of the Coordinator.
4. This project wants to distance itself from a common interpretation of advocacy as 'representing' people's views and 'advocating' ('campaigning') 'on their behalf.' Advocacy schemes can do this, but the focus is primarily about empowering individuals (or groups) to speak up for themselves and develop confidence in accessing services.
5. Another issue that needs to be addressed can be described as the 'casework' view of advocacy. For example, 'my client needs an advocate for her review meeting.' Although advocates can work in this way, the casework approach is modelled on social work practices, whereas advocacy is based on, and is most effective in, longer-term partnerships.
6. The primary emphasis from feedback and discussions in the first months of this project has been on the need for development work, rather than simply providing a supportive networking space. An advocacy development project would be able to provide networking opportunities as well as contributing more practically to developing the capacity and quality of local advocacy services, and helping people to access them.

## Action Plan Progress

7. Any new project like this inevitably follows a winding and unpredictable path. The beauty of this lies in the hidden secrets we find on the way. This project has had numerous lucky breaks, and we have almost successfully passed our first three milestones:
  - a) The Steering Group has agreed a terms of reference;
  - b) The Project Coordinator has moved into an office close to the advocacy providers in the city of Wakefield;
  - c) A partial draft set of standards has been circulated and has generated some interest and positive engagement for the project. The timescale for this work looks as if it will need to be extended by a month or two, however the work on the standards has already been a relative success.
8. The Project Coordinator is currently concentrating on engaging with local stakeholders. There will be a Stakeholder Day in Sandal Rugby Club on Tuesday 30 November, which is being supported by Cllr Loosemore. This will feed back to everyone who has given feedback to the project, outline a rough way forward (as begun in this report), and conclude the initial 'consultation and research' phase of the project.
9. The next phase, as set out in the initial action plan agreed in July, will focus on developing a strategy and then a business plan for the advocacy project to move forward over the next three years. An analysis of current provision will be developed and integrated with the feedback from local stakeholders. Priorities will be outlined and assessed, and local partners, including the Wakefield District Partnership, will be consulted on potential solutions.
10. The strategic options will be narrowed down, resource implications will be worked out, and following agreement the business plan will be presented to the Advocacy Conference on Wednesday 2 March 2005.
11. Assuming the strategy and business plan are accepted, the final few months of the project will be spent beginning to implement it, establishing the new structure, working to secure funding, beginning to recruit staff, etc. This phase is looked at again in the section on resources below.

## Where is the Advocacy Project going?

N.B. In this section of the report, all references are to the advocacy project *after* the initial 12 month development phase.

12. Rather than simply setting up a network, the basic need for local people is to have more ready access to an independent advocate. While this project does not aim to provide advocacy services directly, there are many ways in which it could support advocacy developments to meet this need.
13. This is not a departure in any way from the proposals agreed by the Directorate in June, but a recognition that the project could deliver these initial proposals in a more appropriate and efficient way, while also taking a more proactive role in supporting new developments.

14. The Project has already successfully worked with service users, advocates, and commissioners to improve the new MH Advocacy Contract before it went out to tender. It is expected that this type of work will continue in the future.
15. Other work with statutory agencies in the District will include:
  - providing awareness training to staff who could refer clients or work with advocates;
  - developing engagement protocols to ensure smooth working relationships between services and advocacy schemes;
  - developing an Advocacy Plan for the District.

There is already a recommendation that Local Authorities produce such a plan in the context of learning disabilities, but this project may well be able to support a more holistic approach.

16. There is a bias currently in the District towards advocacy schemes being commissioned by Social Services and Health to provide professional advocacy for strictly defined user groups. The field of independent advocacy is varied however, and research has repeatedly stressed that different people benefit from different models of advocacy. This is already reflected in the Mencap advocacy contract to a certain extent (they are developing a volunteer advocate scheme), but the Advocacy Project still expects to have a role in increasing diversity.
17. One suggested focus in the future would be to support more volunteer or community advocates. These would:
  - work with and complement existing schemes;
  - be a cost effective way of broadening provision;
  - have all the usual advantages for volunteers and the District (workforce and skills development, empowerment and the resulting health improvements, etc.);
  - act as a 'seedbed' to create conditions for future developments;
  - provide meaningful opportunities for (ex-) service users, and people who already provide informal advocacy within their communities.
18. An innovative approach to this would be to consider the development of a scheme for Registered Community Advocates. This has local parallels in the existing Community Counselling Service, the freelance Associate Advocates who work for Cloverleaf Advocacy in Kirklees and Calderdale, and the freelance interpreters used by SS&H Language Services.
19. The Community Advocates idea has been broadly welcomed by everyone who has been consulted so far. There would need to be a well developed system of training, accreditation, supervision, and referral, but there are no insurmountable obstacles. A more detailed analysis will be developed in the strategy papers over the next few months.

## Engagement and promotion

20. Given a project staff of one, a careful balance has to be sought between short and medium term objectives, and between consultation and delivery. It has nevertheless been possible for the Project Coordinator to get out to a wide range of groups including mental health user groups, learning disability groups, disabled people, old people, young people, people across the district, people in schools, community groups, and a range of staff from Wakefield Council and other agencies.
21. While this project has endeavoured to remain as open as possible and to consult on any issues that come up, the overriding interest of participants has been in 'what is advocacy' and it has been difficult to engage people in more strategic points. Additionally, many professionals have been too busy to commit much energy or resources while the project is still in its initial development phase.
22. One particular gap has been in engaging people in the east of the District and in more outlying areas. This isn't an issue that is limited to this project, and one respondent argued persuasively that it was vital to have a designated worker with responsibility for the Five Towns and the South East of the District.
23. There has been a clear commitment to local black and minority ethnic communities since the beginning of this project, although it has been difficult to engage with groups and obtain feedback. Faith groups are now being contacted, including the local mosques, the Inter-Faith Forum, and some local church groups.
24. A website and online discussion forum have now been set up to encourage more, and different kinds of, debate. Go to [www.freewebs.com/advocacy-action/](http://www.freewebs.com/advocacy-action/)
25. As mentioned above, the main engagement phase of this project will culminate with the Stakeholder Day. Stakeholders will be brought together again for the Advocacy Conference next Spring. After this, ongoing training, awareness raising, consultation and research will continue across the District under the auspices of the new organisation.

## Resources

26. This is the point in the project where future resource implications need to be looked at in more detail. There are three main headings, which inter-relate:
  - Projected project budget
  - Sources of funding
  - 'Administration' - including running the project by strategically and creatively accessing and effectively combining different resources
27. A projected budget will be developed during the business planning phase in January/February. This will be based on options identified in the strategy paper in December/January - a development of this report. All budget items will need to be realistically assessed and strategically justified (e.g. developing a community advocate scheme, organising training programmes, continuing to engage stakeholders, etc.).

28. A holistic approach will be taken to secure the necessary funds from a variety of sources. Potential funding sources include:
- Wakefield Council and the local Health Trusts, possibly through the Wakefield District Partnership, the Learning Disability Partnership Board, the Mental Health Partnership Board, or similar bodies.
  - Statutory funding through Regional, Central Government, or European grant schemes, e.g. Futurebuilders, European Social Fund, etc.
  - Charitable Trust funding, National Lottery, specific advocacy development grants (e.g. Dept of Health through the British Institute of Learning Disabilities, BILD), etc.
29. It is important for any project to aim to generate income somehow, rather than to rely on grant funding for all costs. One potential way for this project to generate income in the future could be to negotiate contracts to provide staff training in advocacy awareness for Wakefield MDC, the local Health Trusts, and possibly other organisations. There are precedents for this: the Barnsley Advocacy Development Project delivered training to 400 staff members over three years. This training will be most effective if it is linked to the development of more advocacy resources in the District for staff to call on when the need arises.
30. There are a wide range of existing resources in the District, including expertise, models of good practice, and projects and organisations with similar aims to the advocacy project. Part of the strategy and business planning process will be exploring ways that these resources can be properly acknowledged and utilised.
31. One of the key principles of independent advocacy is, as the name suggests, independence. Advocacy schemes strive to maintain their independence from service providers so that they can remain properly loyal to the individuals they work with. This includes the goal of financial independence from the local authority and health trusts. This project will seek to find a balance on this issue, and recognises that in the first instance successful implementation is the main aim. Well targeted support from Wakefield Council will be greatly appreciated, and should lead to additional funds being secured from other sources outside the District.
32. Any future project will have to ensure it is able to be responsive and accountable to the demands of a wide range of partners and funders. An important part of this is establishing a corporate identity - a legal structure that will enable the organisation to enter into contracts and agreements in its own right, and will reassure potential partners that its aims and practices are properly charitable.
33. It can take several months to establish such an identity - negotiating with the Charity Commission or other registering body, and waiting for all the bureaucratic processes to be completed. The lead in time for accessing most funding sources is also at least a few months, and maybe more depending on the application deadlines. Two unfortunate examples are the advocacy development grants offered through the Department of Health (after five years, the final application deadline is just about to be missed), and we have also

missed the deadline for the new Government 'Futurebuilders' funding scheme which could have been ideal for this project.

34. Given that most discussions are about the fine details of the future project's work rather than whether or not it should be implemented, it would seem appropriate to use the Stakeholder Day at the end of November to gain some consensus on beginning this administrative work. It is proposed to ask delegates to:
  - Decide on a name
  - Decide to register an organisation (e.g. as an Industrial and Provident Society or a charity)
35. This will have the following advantages:
  - It will make the project more responsive to funding and other opportunities, and avoid unnecessary delays in the future.
  - It will begin to make the project more open and accountable to all its partners.
  - A name will give the project a sense of permanence and reliability, and will open up many new opportunities for engaging some of the more difficult to reach stakeholders (e.g. by getting people to design logos, etc.)
36. There is a financial implication: depending on the structure chosen and the registration route, legal fees could be up to £950.00. There are positive precedents for making this investment however.

### **Monitoring**

37. This project aims to be a model of good practice, as well as supporting good practice across the District. Detailed and appropriate monitoring procedures will be developed as part of the strategy and business plan.
38. Already a lot of good work has come out of this project. In particular it seems to be well planned and documented. After the Advocacy Conference in February/March, and before the project is due to end at the end of April, there could well be an opportunity to document the work that has been undertaken and present it in a form that other local authorities or advocacy networks could learn from, either through some of the national advocacy networks, or through the Local Government Association or IDeA for example.