



# Policy: Referral and Prioritisation Policy

**Date reviewed by Governance Board: Feb 18**

**Review Date: Feb 2021**

**Staff annual check : Feb 2019**

## Introduction

Brighton and Hove Speak Out is aware that demand for the advocacy can be high and advocates will need to assess and prioritise referrals. We recognise that often referrers and service users contacting us will feel that their issue is urgent and when assessing and prioritising referrals Speak Out advocates will follow a clear protocol and take into account a range of factors.

Speak Out receives referrals for advocacy from different sources including external agencies, family members and self-referrals from people with a learning disability. Referrals may also come internally from other Speak Out services.

- All referrals will be dealt with via the same process. Speak Out staff will respond to referrals in line with Speak Out's Equalities and Diversity policy and also follow these guidelines.
- All referral information will be treated as confidential and information will be stored securely in line with Speak Out's Data Protection policy.
- Any third party referrals (this includes other statutory and voluntary agencies, service user friends and families) can only be accepted into Speak Out's Advocacy Service if the service user has agreed to the referral.
- If the service user lacks the Mental Capacity to agree to this referral (assessed under the Mental Capacity Act 2005) then a referral will be accepted in accordance with Speak Out's Non Instructed Advocacy policy.
- Any information disclosed by a third party regarding a service user will be shared with that person by the Speak Out advocate.



## Receiving and processing referrals

- Enquiries can be made by phone or email.
- Issue advocacy referrals are accepted on Speak Outs general referral form (this is available on the Speak Out website [www.bhspeakout.org.uk](http://www.bhspeakout.org.uk), or can be requested from the Speak Out office).
- Self-referrals can also be made by phoning the Speak Out office. People with learning disabilities will be offered support to self-refer (accessible self-referral forms are available).
- All Care Act referrals **must** use the Brighton and Hove Advocacy Partnership Care Act referral form and can only be accepted from authorised parties following appropriate eligibility checks for Care Act Advocacy and are emailed to: [Info@bhspeakout.org.uk](mailto:Info@bhspeakout.org.uk) or to the advocate directly: [jeanettegoodman@bhspeakout.org.uk](mailto:jeanettegoodman@bhspeakout.org.uk)

## Speak Out will respond and acknowledge all enquiries about advocacy within 2 working days

When acknowledging referral receipt the advocate may request further information about person's situation, perceived need for advocacy and any risks.

The referrer will be informed about the process for prioritising and allocating advocacy (also likely the waiting time if the project is at capacity and has a waiting list).

The referrer will be given information, if necessary about the role of an advocate and the different advocacy services available from Speak Out and other local advocacy providers.

## Prioritising and allocating advocacy

All new referrals will be reviewed alongside any others on the waiting list. We try and avoid running a waiting list where at all possible.

Statutory Care Act referrals will take priority over non-statutory advocacy and every effort made to meet the target response times.

## Care Act and Issue Advocacy Target response times:

- Target time for acknowledging an accepted referral – **2 days**
  - Target time for initial contact with Care Act service user - **within 5 days**
  - Target time for allocating non-statutory issue advocacy - **within 2 weeks**
- Individuals are prioritised for non-statutory advocacy considering the following criteria:



- Level of need and time scales around the issue
- Whether there other sources of support available to the individual.
- The individual's ability to self-advocate on identified issues
- Length of time they have been waiting for advocacy support
- Advocates capacity and availability (complex issue advocacy cases will be dealt with by a qualified paid advocate. Longer term or non-crisis support may be allocated to a trained volunteer issue advocate)

An advocate will contact the referrer to inform them whether advocacy will be offered to the person or whether they will be put on a waiting list or referred to another delivery partners if appropriate.

Self -referrals from an individual requesting repeat advocacy support, revisiting the same issue will be discussed on a case by case basis. If appropriate Speak Out will support the person to tackle the underlying issue causing them to repeatedly self-refer for advocacy (for example it may be appropriate to refer them for longer term support from a volunteer).

### **Waiting lists**

We try to avoid running a waiting list. In circumstances where we do have to hold a waiting list every effort will be made to assign an advocate to the individual as soon as possible.

Establishing a waiting list for issue advocacy may be necessary in order to prioritise Care Act referrals and meet statutory deadlines.

Waiting lists are reviewed monthly by the advocate and regularly in line management supervision where management of demand is discussed.

Regular supervision provides opportunities for advocates to discuss and reflect on case work and support advocates to sensitively limit the duration of cases in line with identified outcomes.

### **Signposting**

The referrer will be informed if the person is to be signposted to another project internally i.e. to a drop-in where short term advocacy can be accessed quickly or a self-advocacy group for longer term support.

The referrer will also be informed if the person is to be signposted externally to another agency e.g. another member of the Brighton and hove Advocacy Partnership (BHAP).

Speak Out advocates are well informed about local organisations to signpost on to specific crisis support if needed.



## **Providing advocacy**

If advocacy is offered the referrer will be asked how the advocate should contact the person in question. They will also be asked if there any issues around risk that the advocate needs to be aware of, and whether the service user might want the referrer (or another person) to be present at the initial meeting.

An initial risk assessment will always be carried out before an advocate meets with the individual (see Lone working policy). Risk assessments forms will be completed in full following a meeting with the service user.

The 1-1 advocacy process for opening a new case will be followed. Records will be stored securely and regularly updated in Charity Log (see guidelines for Case Management and recording).

All Speak Out advocates work in ways to promote self-advocacy and aim to empower the individual by ensuring they are fully informed and able to understand their options, enabling them to do as much for themselves as they can themselves.

## **Missed or cancelled appointments**

Advocates will work with service users to avoid missed appointments though ensuring that expectations are clear and service users can choose convenient appointments times and receive appointment reminders by text, phone or email.

There may be circumstances where a service user is unable to keep an appointment. Whenever possible the service user should contact the advocate to cancel the appointment to enable the appointment to be offered to someone else. Repeated failure to notify of a cancellation may result in Speak Out closing the referral/case.

## **Citizen Advocacy**

Speak Out supports a limited number of long term citizen advocacy partnerships. Each year a number of new volunteer advocates are recruited and trained and new partnerships set up. This service will be offered to people who meet the following criteria:

- Do not have an urgent need for advocacy support
- Would benefit from the long term involvement of a volunteer advocate to support them to self-advocate and build support networks in the community



When prioritising people for Citizen Advocacy the same criteria as above are used, considering:

- Level of need
- Whether there other people involved in the individuals life
- The individual's ability to self-advocate on identified issues to a greater or lesser extent.
- Length of time they have been waiting for advocacy support
- Availability of a suitable volunteer advocate

Target time for allocating long term Citizen Advocacy - **within 6 months**

Where someone remains on the waiting list for a volunteer advocate for several months Speak Out staff will ensure that the individual and/ or referrer are asked to contact Speak Out if their circumstances change. For example, if a specific issue arises it may be appropriate to provide issue advocacy in the short term, or the individual may benefit from attending a drop-in or taking part in another Speak Out service.

Speak Out staff will ask for an update on the situation of people waiting for a volunteer advocate every **2 months**.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Our monitoring and evaluation systems provide information for advocates and managers to analyse and better understand the demand for our services. This helps us to maximise resources and make the best use of advocate's capacity.

Monitoring reports are collated quarterly for the commissioner (BHCC), via the Brighton and Hove Advocacy Partnership (BHAP) and Speak Out's Governance Board