



Brighton and Hove Speak Out

Policy: Referral and Prioritisation Policy

Date agreed by Governance Board: October 25th 2021

Staff annual check: October 2022

Next full board review: October 2023

1. 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 from other statutory and voluntary agencies, service users' friends and families) can only be accepted by 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.

2. Receiving and processing referrals

- Enquiries can be made by phone, email or via a drop-in
- Self-referrals can 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).
- Issue advocacy referrals are accepted on Speak Out's general referral form (this is available on the Speak Out website www.bhspeakout.org.uk, or can be requested from the Speak Out office). Referrals can be made via the website or sent to referrals@bhspeakout.org.uk
- There is a separate referral form for advocacy relating to parents with a learning disability
- All Care Act referrals **must** use the Sussex Advocacy Partnership Care Act referral form and can only be accepted from authorised parties, following appropriate eligibility checks for Care Act Advocacy. The referral form can be obtained from pohwer.net/brighton-and-hove and sent to referrals@bhspeakout.org.uk

Speak Out will respond and acknowledge all enquiries/ referrals for advocacy within 2 working days

A member of the 1-1 advocacy team will contact the service user or referrer within 5 working days

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

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

3. Prioritising and allocating advocacy

All new referrals will be reviewed alongside any others on a 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 – **within 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**
- Target time for allocating Transitions Advocacy – **within 3 months** (this support is longer term, consideration will be given to any pressing issues/ meeting dates)

Individuals are prioritised for non-statutory advocacy considering the following criteria:

- Level of need and time scales around the issue
- Whether there are 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 advocate. Some cases will be referred to Speak Out's drop-in advocacy service if appropriate).

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 partner 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).

4. 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 regularly by the 1-1 advocacy Team Leader and any issues are brought to line-management supervision where management of demand is discussed.

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

5. 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 Sussex Advocacy Partnership (SAP).

Speak Out advocates are well informed about local organisations to signpost on to if specific crisis support is needed or support outside the advocacy remit.

6. 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 Speak Out's Lone Working Policy) and a summary of any risk is recorded in Speak Out's database. If a risk is identified, a risk assessment form will be completed following a meeting with the service user. This form will be stored in the individual's record in the database.

The 1-1 advocacy process for opening a new case will be followed. Records will be stored securely and regularly updated in the database, Salesforce (see Guidelines for Case Management and Recording). Consent will be sought and recorded (in line with Speak Out's Data Protection Policy).

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.

7. Missed or cancelled appointments

Advocates will work with service users to avoid missed appointments through 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.

8. Drop-in advocacy

Speak Out offers immediate short term advocacy support from staff or volunteer advocates via weekly drop-in sessions (face to face, via Zoom or over the phone).

Service users can attend a drop-in session and ask for advocacy support with an issue. They will be offered a slot in that drop-in session. They can also book a slot via email, over the phone (via Speak Out's Helpline) in advance of the drop-in. If the drop-in is very busy and there are no slots available in a session the service user will be booked in for the next available drop-in session. **There is not a waiting list for Drop-in advocacy.**

Service users are offered up to **5 half hour drop-in advocacy sessions** to deal with an issue. If the issue cannot be resolved in this time frame or is more complex and requires an advocate to attend meetings or support the advocacy process outside the drop-in times, the case will be referred for issue advocacy and will be allocated following the process above.

9. Speak Out's Helpline

Speak Out's Helpline is widely promoted as a means that people with learning disabilities can contact the organisation for support. Helpline support may involve talking through an issue over the phone, providing information, signposting to external agencies for support. The helpline also operates as a point of triage for advocacy support within Speak Out.

People may in the first instance be referred from the Helpline for drop-in advocacy (and supported to book an advocacy slot or a call back from an advocate). In some cases, they will be referred directly for issue advocacy case work.

10. Citizen Advocacy

Speak Out is only funded to support a small number of long-term citizen advocacy partnerships. New volunteers will be recruited, trained and new partnerships set up when there is capacity within this project.

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 are other people involved in the individual's 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 the for allocating Citizen Advocacy - **within 6 months once identified for CA.**

People will not be added to the waiting list unless there is likely capacity to provide a volunteer within the next 6 months.

Once someone has been identified for a Citizen advocate, if they remain on the waiting list for several months Speak Out staff will ensure that the individual and/or referrer is 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 **3 months**.

11. 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.

Referral data is recorded in our Salesforce database in line with GDPR requirements. Monitoring reports are collated quarterly for the commissioner (BHCC), via the Sussex Advocacy Partnership and for Speak Out's Governance Board (Operations subgroup).