

Report to Cabinet

20 July 2022

Subject:	Outcome of the Review of Generic Advocacy Service
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Adults, Social Care and Health – Councillor Suzanne Hartwell
Director:	Director of Adult Social Care Rashpal Bishop
Key Decision:	Yes
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1. That approval be given to decommission the Generic Advocacy Service as from 1 October 2022.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet approved the re-procurement and award for the Advocacy Services Contract on 9th September 2020, the commencement of the review of the Generic Advocacy Service, and that the findings of the review would be reported back to Cabinet.



- 2.2 The Advocacy Services contract started on 1 April 2021 and is due to expire on 31 March 2023, except for the Generic Advocacy Service part of the contract, which was due to expire on 31 March 2022. The contract included the option to extend by up to two further periods of 12 months each, which was previously agreed by Cabinet on 9th September 2020.
- 2.3 The Generic Advocacy Service part of the contract was extended for 6 months in April 2022 to allow the consultation and decision to be taken on the future of the service.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>People live well and age well Generic Advocacy and other services in the community helps to address issues presented by service users and thus contributes to their health and wellbeing.</p>
	<p>Strong resilient communities Generic Advocacy and other services in the community strengthens the voice of vulnerable people and builds their resilience against issues.</p>

4 Background

- 4.1 The non-statutory Generic Advocacy Service provides issue-based advocacy for Sandwell residents in relation to Social Care, Health, Child Protection, Housing, Immigration, and other issues.
- 4.2 The statutory advocacy services in the Advocacy Services Contract including Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy, Independent Mental Health Advocacy, NHS Complaints Advocacy and Care Act Advocacy are not affected by the recommendations in this report.
- 4.3 Cabinet approved a review to look at the purpose and eligibility criteria for the non-statutory Generic advocacy element with a view to bringing it closer in line with the purpose and criteria for Care Act Advocacy. For this reason, the Generic Advocacy Service part of the contract was awarded for 12 months, with two 12 months extensions. Their use was dependent on the outcome of the review.



- 4.5 Delayed by the Pandemic, the 12-week consultation period commenced on the 14 February 2022 and ended on 9th May 2022 and was conducted in line with the Council's policy on consultation.
- 4.6 Surveys were sent to POhWER to share with current service users, with their advocates and managers. Surveys were sent to those who refer to the service including The Local Authorities Care Management staff, NHS staff, Public Health Community Vaccination Leaders Network. Referrers from the voluntary sector were engaged through Sandwell Council Voluntary Organisations.
- 4.7 The consultation received 17 responses from people currently or recently having accessed the service. It was noted that the main reasons for people seeking support from the service was in connection with health or mental health services, support for parents undergoing child protection court proceedings, housing, and access to care services. 13 clients stated that they had asked for support from another organisation before presenting at POhWER and felt that they had not or partly been supported.
- 4.8 Examples of the most frequent presenting issues by service users are listed below:

Care and Support:

“There has been a change in how my son has been in supported living, his mental health has declined and he talks to himself. The professionals didn't inform me of son's declining health. My advocate supported me to communicate my feelings to the social worker as I felt that she was not getting back to me. My advocate helped me in a meeting with the care home to say how worried I was”.

Health

“I had issues with my GP and could not understand letters. Advocate helped me to understand letter and make appointment to talk with practice nurse. Now feel better about treatment”.



Parenting/Child Protection

“I wasn't told what was going on and it was confusing. I did not know I was able to get a solicitor and the relationship with my social worker was rubbish. My advocate helped me say what I needed to say and showed me how to show them the changes I had made for my family. I think without an advocate my children would have been taken into care”.

Mental Health

“I was referred twice to mental health services but could not attend the clinic due to anxiety, then discharged. I tried to explain but no one listened. My advocate spoke with the services and explained why attending a physical meeting would not work. We arranged an online assessment. My advocate talked me through how to install and use the technology and attended the meeting with me. I was accepted for support and arranged a home visit, given a CPN and now get support. I doubt I would be here without the service”.

Housing

“I stopped paying my rent because the landlord refused to make changes to the home that would make it suitable for me and my disabled child. I was under threat of eviction. My advocate supported me to write letters and meet with the housing provider. I am still waiting for some adaptations but my situation is much better”.

5 Alternative Option(s)

5.1 The following options have been considered. These options were:

Option 1: Extend this element of the contract with the existing provider for a further 6 months to deliver a Generic Advocacy Service, then decide on the future Contract.

Option 2: To continue with the Generic Advocacy Service

Option 3: Decommission the service.

Option 3 is the recommended option for the following reasons:



The evidence supported that the needs can be met by other services in the voluntary sector many of which are already funded or provided by the council to provide the identified support or where there is a statutory responsibility placed on those services to support people with reasonable adjustments.

People contacting POhWER for support, previously provided by Generic Advocacy, would in future be referred to organisations whose role it is to support people with such issues or back to organisations who have a statutory responsibility to provide support under the Equality Duty.

6. Implications

Resources:	The Generic Advocacy and Care Act Advocacy contract combined costs £100,000 per annum with Generic Advocacy taking up half of this budget at £50,000 per annum. The proposal will deliver annual savings which have been reflected within the approved Adult Social Care budget for 2022/23.
Legal and Governance	Unlike the other forms of Advocacy, Generic Advocacy is a non-statutory which means the Council is not legally required to provide this service. However, the Equality Act places a responsibility to ensure reasonable adjustments are made to ensure protected groups are supported where they may have difficulty in participating in a process or accessing services.
Risk	There are no significant risks in decommissioning the service. The Corporate Risk Management Strategy has been updated to identify and assess the risks associated with this Contract.
Equality	An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the Cabinet report process to identify any adverse impacts or issues of concern for protected groups because of the proposals in this report. There are no adverse impacts on any group.



Health and Wellbeing	The consultation enabled service users to give their views on the usefulness of the service. The service users can use other services in the community which can contribute to their health and wellbeing.
Social Value	The Advocacy Services Contract is delivered by a charitable organisation. By contracting with this organisation, the Council is supporting the resilience and capacity of the voluntary sector. There is social value in staff working from home and using virtual tools for advocacy, and volunteering.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Survey responses summary

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

8. Background Papers:

- Consultation and Procurement of Advocacy Contracts - Report to Cabinet 9 September 2020.
- Commissioning Board – Paper on Extension of Community Advocacy Contract

