

Petition Response:

The implementation of the Care Act 2014 has meant changes in the law to enable many more people than ever to have entitlement to an independent advocate to help them understand information about the services and options which are open to them so they can access the right support.

All local Councils were therefore required to set up independent advocacy services to provide vulnerable children, young people and adults with help to navigate public services and ensure their views and wishes are heard and that they are treated fairly and equally.

In Cornwall, the Council worked with the Council for the Isles of Scilly and NHS Kernow Clinical Commissioning Group to commission a new independent advocacy service. The new service began in June 2016 and was designed to provide a single point of contact to allocate eligible individuals to the right support. This prevents people having to contact a number of different agencies and organisations.

The Council tendered the provision of advocacy support to meet its statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. In designing this, a multi-agency working group produced an agreed service specification. This included input from individuals who would use the service. Stakeholder events and attendance at the Council's partnership boards by commissioners to explain these changes and to explain what the Council would commission under a contract for independent advocacy.

A comprehensive evaluation of the independent advocacy tenders took place and contracts were awarded. Cornwall People First did not submit a tender because the specification did not fit with their charitable aspirations. The Council has worked over an 18 month period with Cornwall People First to support them to see what changes to their business model could be identified to ensure its future sustainability and to explore alternative funding sources to reduce the financial risk to the organisation.

The aim of the new service is to ensure that people receive the right information and support at the right time so they can be at the centre of making decisions about their own lives. Information on the criteria for receiving the service is clearly set out at the beginning of the process. Anyone who is not eligible for contracted independent advocacy services will be given information on how to contact other organisations, including Cornwall People First, who can offer information, advice and guidance to help prevent needs from escalating.

Where appropriate, individuals receiving the new service will be supported in being able to self-advocate, removing the need for paid advocacy support in the future.

Independent advocacy providers are also being asked to create peer advocacy groups in local communities by identifying people who have used independent advocacy services in the past. This will increase the depth of knowledge of the specific role of the independent advocate and enable people to support each other through peer networks.

Advocacy in Cornwall is led by seAp Advocacy in partnership with Age UK Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Enable in Cornwall Ltd and Penwith Community Development Trust. Advocates have skills and knowledge to support people using the service and also for people with learning difficulties. All our organisations have local roots and many years' experience of delivering services across Cornwall.

Further, the Council has agreed to provide a significant grant to Cornwall People First, secure for the next three years. In addition, the Council will be working closely with Cornwall People First so that they can develop new ideas to generate other income by expanding and developing key services which people value and are known to support the direction the Council is taking to help more people with a disability remain in their communities. These discussions are ongoing.

Together, we are looking forward to offering a clear pathway to advocacy for the people of Cornwall.

For more information and to make a referral:

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