

**A  
Stronger  
Voice**

# **Developing new models of provision and commissioning**

**ASV efficiency strand**

January 2012

**GAIN**



**Gateshead Advocacy  
Information Network**

# Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Models of provision/commissioning</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Focus on an advocacy network – GAIN</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Focus on a merger – VoiceAbility</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Focus on hub and spoke – Advocacy (Essex) Services Ltd</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Focus on hub and spoke – Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Closing comments</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>20</b>

# Introduction

---

**Gateshead Advocacy Information Network (GAIN), together with Gateshead advocacy providers and local authority and Primary Care Trust (PCT) commissioners, has developed a commissioning strategy for independent advocacy within the setting of personalisation. Advocacy organisation members of A Stronger Voice, GAIN's three-year Department of Health funded project, have been exploring new and emerging models of advocacy provision and commissioning, to develop a commissioning strategy which both plays to their collective strengths and provides a broader model for advocacy in terms of striving to meet gaps in provision. This report focuses on some of the new and emerging models of collaboration for advocacy provision. It highlights four case studies that demonstrate the importance in the current climate of independent advocacy and increasingly of services working together, rooted in local communities and responsive to local needs and opportunities.**

At the time that GAIN's bid to the Department of Health was being developed, collaborative models of commissioning independent advocacy were becoming increasingly popular. Evidence of local authorities' intentions to commission collaborative model services (in many cases hub and spoke particularly) was highlighted in reviews of services in Northamptonshire, Wrexham, Essex and Liverpool:

- Northamptonshire's 2009 joint commissioning review recommended the development of a model "that combines the hub and spoke model with generic advocacy" (p3)
- Wrexham's 'Advocacy Works' (2007) consultation document agreed that "a hub and spoke or network model is best suited to local need" where "advocacy schemes retain their specialisms but collaborate to share a range of functions for mutual benefit and maximum efficiency" (p9)
- Essex County Council promoted a hub and spoke model which was "thought to be the best suited to meet need in Essex" and "would enable existing advocacy schemes to retain their specialisms...[requiring a] single point of contact to manage workflow and maintain quality standards"
- Liverpool's 2008–11 Integrated Commissioning Strategy identified its number one priority to "invest in the infrastructure creating a hub and spoke approach to improve the co-ordination and delivery of advocacy support: the creation of Advocacy Plus" (p.4)

In March 2011, GAIN's steering group, comprised of managers of Gateshead independent advocacy projects, agreed to take steps towards formalising their relationships with each other and with GAIN. This report explores some

of the models of provision other advocacy projects have developed nationally, and presents learning for other advocacy organisations thinking about undertaking a similar change.

## **Models of provision/commissioning**

---

This report focuses on some of the new and emerging models of collaboration for advocacy provision, including:

### **Networks**

A network is often based around information and good practice sharing. Networks do not have a separate legal status: they tend to be based on an informal partnership agreement where there is a loose affiliation and some agreement to work towards a common aim, although often this is not a written agreement.

### **Merger**

The Charity Commission defines a charity merger as one of the following: 1) a charity dissolving and passing its assets to one or more other charities; 2) an incorporation, where an unincorporated charity dissolves and passes its assets to a newly formed charitable company; or 3) where two or more charities dissolve and pass their assets to a new charity.

### **Consortium**

The Charity Commission defines a consortium as “a group of organisations that have a written agreement to work together.” A consortium “does not have to be formally constituted, although it might be, nor do a large number of organisations have to be involved. A consortium might comprise as few as three organisations working together (two organisations might be better termed a partnership) and could have a range of possible structures.”

### **Hub and spoke**

Hub and spoke is one such possible consortium structure. Hub and spoke structures tend to be managed by a lead agent (the hub), which might have a range of functions but where the main role is generally contract management and contracting with spoke providers. The lead agent could be an entirely new entity or formed by the existing spokes; it is a legal entity in its own right. Often the management structure is designed so that the hub’s trustees are managers of the spoke organisations.

# Focus on an advocacy network – Gateshead Advocacy Information Network

---

## Background

GAIN is a project of Gateshead Voluntary Organisation Council (GVOC) and was formed twelve years ago after Gateshead Council identified a need to develop and support local independent advocacy. GAIN has its own steering group, comprised of managers of local independent advocacy organisations. GAIN currently supports nine local advocacy projects:

- Age UK Gateshead - older people 50+, older people's mental health 65+, advocacy support group which aims to encourage good mental health
- Alzheimer's Society Gateshead – dementia
- Gateshead Access Panel – physical disabilities
- Gateshead Carers Association – carers of adults with learning disabilities
- Gateshead People – learning disabilities group advocacy
- Pathways Advocacy – mental health, IMHA
- Sight Service – visual impairment
- Skills for People – IMCA
- Your Voice Counts – learning disabilities, case and citizen advocacy, BME learning disability service

## The key functions of GAIN

GAIN is a local infrastructure project which seeks to:

- Lead on the role of advocacy and personalisation
- Build on the Gateshead Independent Advocacy Code of Practice
- Develop outcomes-based advocacy services
- Promote advocacy and its benefits
- Plan and develop new advocacy services
- Develop and deliver training opportunities

GAIN is committed to supporting advocates to provide excellent advocacy services in Gateshead. GAIN facilitates the Gateshead Advocacy Support Network, which meets monthly to discuss case issues, developments in the advocacy field and reflect on practice. A group for new advocates has been running since April 2011 to complement the advocates' induction to advocacy in Gateshead.

## The benefits of an advocacy network

GAIN seeks to respond to the needs of advocates. Examples of GAIN's responsiveness to the needs of both advocates and their projects have included:

- **Delivering efficiencies (and building on the skills base)** – securing the delivery of the Independent Advocacy Qualification in Gateshead at a significantly reduced cost through the local authority's Adult Learning and Skills team
- **Supporting advocate's learning and development** – delivering sessions for new advocates and refreshers for experienced advocates on non-instructed advocacy, developing outcome drop-ins over lunchtimes for advocates to discuss complex cases and issues with measuring outcomes
- **Developing outcome focussed services** – developing an outcome tool to capture the added value of independent advocacy, particularly in personalisation but with a wider application to all cases
- **Supporting collaborative opportunities, facilitating strategic development and funding opportunities** – facilitating conversations between statutory bodies, advocacy projects and other stakeholders to develop new and existing services and develop services to bridge gaps in provision, exploring new models of commissioning
- **Providing policy and practice support** – keying into the wider conversations taking place in the advocacy sector, developing a high level view of opportunities and potential weaknesses to develop quality services which can respond quickly to change; developing a local Code of Practice for independent advocacy

Furthermore, GAIN seeks to increase the impact of independent advocacy in the borough:

- **Advocating for advocacy** – to ensure that advocates are involved in, and advocacy is considered in, the development of local consultations impacting on vulnerable adults to ensure advocacy is built into local strategic plans
- **Developing a stronger voice for vulnerable adults** – promoting the important role independent advocacy plays in safeguarding vulnerable adults in changes to adult social care, in particular changes to service provision. Working as a network to develop the capacity of projects to produce consistent monitoring information which allows GAIN to identify trends across services and feed this back to the local authority and PCT
- **Strategic development of advocacy services** – as a result of low numbers of referrals to advocacy in personalisation, GAIN designed a set of Action Learning Sets for local authority assessing staff, aimed at resulting in

higher numbers of referrals to independent advocacy. These focussed particularly on personalised assessments and support, but also more generally on safeguarding and other social care issues. Feedback from these events helped GAIN and Gateshead Council to understand why referral numbers have been low and start to develop some interventions to support an increase

- **Developing services and gaps in provision** – identifying gaps in provision and trying to develop new and existing services, identifying funding opportunities and developing the potential for pilot projects to demonstrate need

## **Collaborating as a network**

Previously, Gateshead advocacy projects have collaborated on an ad hoc basis to respond to need, to tender for new services, to support the individual budgets pilot in Gateshead, and to support GAIN to secure funding.

A Stronger Voice, the partnership project led by GAIN and comprising of seven Gateshead advocacy projects and local authority and PCT commissioners, has been a successful example of projects collaborating to develop local services, their own services, and learning for the wider advocacy sector.

This partnership project was of a much bigger scale. It has seen projects successfully work together to develop the role and value of advocacy in personalisation, to develop outcome focused monitoring and evaluation, to share sensitive and high level information to develop efficiency measures and, most recently, to try to develop a more formal collaborative relationship.

## **Next steps for GAIN**

GAIN, together with Gateshead independent advocacy projects, is exploring a range of options for formalising the way we work together, learning from other organisations such as VoiceAbility, Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group and Advocacy (Essex) Services.

These organisations have already developed new models for collaborative working. These developments have not taken place in isolation; hence the reports from individual organisations highlight their learning and experience from current developments in the environment that projects operate in, including personalisation and the context of funding cuts.

# Focus on a merger – VoiceAbility

---

## The journey to VoiceAbility

VoiceAbility is the organisation that developed out of a merger between Speaking Up and Advocacy Partners in April 2010. VoiceAbility supports a wide range of individuals and groups to speak up, including people with mental health problems, learning disabilities, physical or sensory impairments, autism, older people and carers. VoiceAbility provides services that are rooted in local communities from Kent to Northumberland. This 'Focus on...' report summarises their journey to VoiceAbility and offers some key lessons for other advocacy organisations considering a merger.

“Don't forget about the reason for doing it... to do the very best for the people we are here to provide support to”

The merger between Speaking Up and Advocacy Partners developed out of a discussion between Craig Dearden-Phillips of Speaking Up and Jonathan Senker of Advocacy Partners. They began to explore the potential benefits of a merger in 2008, at a time when the two organisations were thinking about the future and how much more they could achieve, particularly to be in a position to make the most of the opportunities brought by personalisation. Both organisations wanted to do the very best for the people they existed to provide support to. A merger would allow them to reach more people, expand the services provided, deepen the quality of these and offer greater value for money.

“The people who used our services would be facing a pretty hard time and would need additional support to get through it”

Although these initial discussions took place before the financial crisis was clear to anyone and were borne out of a desire to improve and increase advocacy service provision, as the financial crisis loomed this added a further incentive to the merger: both organisations could stand a better chance of survival and increase efficiencies. More importantly, at a time when the people who used advocacy services would be facing hardship, more people could receive the support they needed.

The merger was formalised on 1 April 2010, under the interim name Advocacy Partners Speaking Up. This was a conscious decision taken to allow time to develop a new vision, brand and mission for the organisation, together with the people who used their services and staff.

A series of events was held to find out what these people and other stakeholders valued about both organisations and how these values could be reflected in the new organisation. The brand VoiceAbility was developed and finally launched in December 2010 to symbolize the new direction of the organisation.

## **Key learning from VoiceAbility's experiences**

### **“Have a clear rationale and don't forget why you exist in the first place”**

Speaking Up and Advocacy Partners both existed to do the best for the people they were there to provide support to. The merger strengthened this, enabling VoiceAbility to provide improved and increased services.

VoiceAbility sees the merger as “a means to an end, not an end in itself”; the end result was better services for the people they support. This mission was kept at the heart of the merger process so that the organisations “ensured things were being done for the right reasons”.

### **“Build on the best”**

In the year before the merger between Speaking Up and Advocacy Partners, the two organisations' combined capacity saw them support 8,500 people between them. In 2010–11 VoiceAbility worked with 17,000 people. Aside from the clear benefits of scaling up and building organisational capacity, VoiceAbility was also keen to clearly demonstrate its impact and was awarded the Advocacy Quality Performance Mark in May 2011.

That VoiceAbility has “built on the best” of both organisations is clearly demonstrated in the new services that it has successfully established. Before the merger, Advocacy Partners had greater engagement with the personalisation agenda and Speaking Up had deeper experience of delivering advocacy to children and young people, and in mental health. Merging these skills and organisational experience enabled VoiceAbility to build an even stronger profile, providing a stronger offer that enabled it to take on new services and win contracts on the strength of its combined skills base.

### **“Communicate change clearly and early”**

Once it was clear to Advocacy Partners and Speaking Up that merger was likely they made staff and other key stakeholders aware of the possible changes. VoiceAbility highlights the “importance of communicating openly, both internally and externally”. Mergers are often decided entirely behind closed doors to minimise the impact if the merger does not go through, but VoiceAbility advocates “taking people with you” on the journey, keeping strong lines of communication open throughout the process.

## **“Get professional legal advice, but try to control the cost”**

Finally, VoiceAbility advises seeking professional legal advice, controlling the cost and avoiding duplication where feasible by seeking advice jointly.

This ‘Focus on...’ was produced following an interview with Jonathan Senker, Chief Executive of VoiceAbility. We would like to thank Jonathan for sharing VoiceAbility’s experiences and learning with us.

## **Focus on hub and spoke – Advocacy (Essex) Services Ltd**

---

### **Background**

The move by Essex County Council towards single gateway commissioning led in 2008 to the formation of Advocacy (Essex) Services Limited (AES Ltd), a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. AES Ltd commission advocacy services from a wide range of Essex-based providers including:

- Action for Family Carers
- Age UK Essex
- The Royal Association for Deaf People
- Tendring Mental Health Support
- BATIAS
- Essex Carers Support
- Independent Living Advocacy
- Cornerstone Trust

### **Drivers for moving towards a hub and spoke model**

Pre-tender guidance from Essex County Council highlighting preferred models of advocacy provision encouraged a focus on a hub and spoke model which was “thought to be the best suited to meet need in Essex” and “would enable existing advocacy schemes to retain their specialisms... [requiring a] single point of contact to manage workflow and maintain quality standards.” This was the key driver for the development of AES Ltd, based on the hub and spoke model. This pre-tender guidance highlighted that there were some issues with access to independent advocacy, particularly coverage for disadvantaged groups and a need to make independent advocacy accessible to all.

**“Local providers would be better placed to deliver services and ensure their future development and sustainability through joint collaboration”**

It was widely felt that this model would enable Essex advocacy provision to be run as a truly independent service by local providers genuinely committed to providing high quality advocacy provision to Essex communities often

perceived as the most vulnerable – the disabled, sensory impaired, older people and carers. It was acknowledged early in the development of AES Ltd that through such a hub and spoke model local providers would be better placed to deliver services and ensure their future development and sustainability through joint collaboration.

“A belief that we had quality service providers that would only improve by coming together, [whilst] saving money” – AES Ltd board member

There was concern prior to the setup of AES Ltd that the local knowledge and genuine commitment to support Essex communities could be lost if the upcoming tender opportunity encouraged large outside agencies into Essex. The hub and spoke model was developed as an entity that could scale up local provision, preserving existing local services, promoting improved services and requiring joint working across these services. This has been achieved and all the spoke organisations continue to have their own autonomy and independence.

## The key functions of the hub

AES Ltd is the managing agent and central point of contact, co-ordinating the demand and supply of advocacy services in Essex. AES Ltd is comprised of a staff team of project manager, contract manager and administrator and seven AES Ltd board members. AES Ltd provides the local authority with a gatekeeping service, managing the advocacy budget and referring and signposting individuals to the most appropriate source of support. AES Ltd contracts with the various spoke organisations and spot purchase providers and ensures that all required key performance indicators are met.

## Managing referrals across services

AES Ltd has an automated referral system in place which is connected to the AES database. This manages all data relating to service delivery including case files, signposting, supervisions and client feedback. All AES Ltd commissioned providers are required to use this system, which has been developed in close collaboration with them. It collates all required contractual key performance indicators and all related data reports can be generated by the hub and spoke organisations as required. AES Ltd assigns referrals according to an agreed matrix based on the geographical location of the person and his or her service user group. In addition to referrals from a diverse cohort of professionals, 340 self-referrals and 146 referrals from family members were received last year via the AES website ([www.advocacyessex.co.uk](http://www.advocacyessex.co.uk)). Spoke organisations can also internally input referrals made directly to them into the system.

### **Working together to deliver contracts**

AES Ltd contracts with advocacy service providers and will spot purchase advocacy services as needed to ensure that the service is available, accessible and responsive to demand.

AES Ltd is committed to ensuring its contracted providers are engaged in supporting people to make informed choices: assisting 'vulnerable' people to achieve their utmost potential and to live fulfilling lives as valued citizens and members of their community; supporting people in times of crisis and change in their lives; and empowering people to speak out, to take control and change their lives. Furthermore, AES Ltd has written a set of quality standards based around six key principles of advocacy that state what the service users and other key stakeholders can expect from an advocate contracted and supported by AES Ltd, which also enable an advocate to work creatively within the standards.

AES Ltd also requires spoke organisations to provide a service which, in addition to other requirements, builds and maintains effective partnership work with key local contacts and agencies that will assist in the ongoing development of the service. Services are provided to assist service users to participate in their assessment, care planning and self-directed support and to represent their views when necessary. Spoke organisations also identify issues of importance raised by service users accessing the service from their views and experiences, and promote these through local service user and carer groups.

### **“Developing and extending citizen advocacy partnerships to enable a greater level of social inclusion within local communities”**

AES Ltd has a clear focus on the wider benefits of advocacy, developing social inclusion and services rooted in local communities. There is a commitment that spoke organisations develop and extend citizen advocacy partnerships to enable a greater level of social inclusion within the local community. AES Ltd is keen to ensure that service users accessing services are able to assert their rights, are supported to self-advocate whenever possible, and are encouraged to explore their potential to the full, to take risks and maintain or regain control over their daily lives. Furthermore, the development and increase of self and citizen advocacy is written into AES Ltd's contracts with spoke organisations, along with a commitment from AES Ltd to offer county-wide support to promote and develop further self-advocacy and citizen advocacy provision.

## **Working together to develop services**

Although there is no formal code of practice in place between the AES spoke organisations for working together there is an expectation that spoke organisations will build and maintain effective partnership work. There have been many examples of joint working which include collaboration through various AES Ltd working groups and the development of key AES Ltd initiatives, including training and development, the facilitation and implementation of a complex case panel and peer review mechanisms. AES Ltd and the spoke organisations also worked together on the production and development of the AES Ltd database which recently led to the introduction of client evaluation and feedback arrangements.

There is also an extensive training and development programme in place and AES Ltd has taken forward a number of initiatives responding to any service gaps or needs. To date these have included setting up a complex case panel, developing a policy for block service booking, developing a Citizen Advocacy Good Practice Guide and organising an advocacy conference in partnership with the national campaigning charity 'Liberty'.

## **Key performance indicators for the delivering of independent advocacy in Essex**

There are spot checking arrangements in place that regularly assess service delivery to ensure that it meets the requirements of the contract. All service providers are required to collate information relating to the service that they provide. Performance requirements include:

- Number of hours advocacy delivered, number of individuals supported, number of open cases, average of hours per case
- Breakdowns of referral sources, referral issues, service user groups
- Time from referral to first contact with service users
- Time from first contact to case closure
- Breakdown of unmet need
- Identified training completed by staff
- Customer satisfaction survey results
- Number of complaints/compliments received

## **Developing AES Ltd**

In the three years that AES Ltd has been in operation it has developed its capacity to provide over 85,000 advocacy hours to disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Essex. The company was formed in 2008 and has developed over its first two years. During this time AES Ltd has revised its staffing and governance attracting new board members, produced key

strategy documents including business and marketing plans, and diversified its operations as a management agent, for example, temporarily hosting the Essex and Southend Local Involvement Network (LINK). AES Ltd has been responsive to all enquiries from the national interest it has attracted, sharing 'lessons learnt' and promoting the company's genuine commitment toward local services for local people. The referral and management system AES Ltd developed has received positive acclaim and the company is considering ways to market this software for mutual benefit.

## **The external environment - personalisation**

Some AES Ltd board members felt that the personalisation agenda hasn't really percolated through, for example, in older people's provision. This is certainly being reflected nationally, for example, 'The State of Personalisation 2011' (Community Care in association with Unison) highlighted that "several client groups, including older people, continue to face barriers in gaining personal budgets". AES Ltd has been proactive in promoting the value of advocacy in personalisation. It facilitated a number of presentations and workshops highlighting the importance of advocacy, particularly as the personalisation agenda begins to be rolled out pan-Essex and impacts upon individual residents and communities.

## **The external environment - sustainability**

The effects of the funding cuts are evident in Essex. As in many areas the effects of the cuts have not yet been realised to their fullest effect, however there continues to be a high demand for advocacy and AES Ltd's 'complex case panel' highlighted recently not just the complexity but also the diversity of recent referrals. Further to this, one of the Essex advocacy spoke organisations announced its closure in March 2011 following the withdrawal of funding.

## **Key lessons and recommendations**

Advocacy provision "should be the same if you are old, ill, have a learning disability or are profoundly disabled" – AES Ltd board member

### **Maintain a focus on advocacy**

While winning contracts and delivering on them is essential to the existence of AES Ltd and the spoke organisations, it recommends also paying attention to the collaborative aspirations the services started out with and maintaining a commitment to consistent quality of service delivery. One AES Ltd board member highlighted the importance of consistency of quality, saying that

advocacy provision “should be the same if you are old, ill, have a learning disability or are profoundly disabled.”

### **Continue to increase collaborative initiatives**

One AES Ltd board member reflected that AES is still in its infancy around knowledge sharing and collaborative endeavours, however it also recognises that joint working around good practice, training and events has been very successful whilst still enabling the spoke organisations to continue to have their own independence and autonomy.

This ‘Focus on...’ was produced with information and learning kindly provided by Advocacy (Essex) Services Ltd, with particular thanks to Rosalind Peek (former AES Ltd Contract Manager) and Carole Houghton (AES Ltd Chair) for sharing their learning with us, and the AES Ltd board for their thoughtful feedback.

## **Focus on hub and spoke – Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group**

---

### **Background**

Hampshire advocacy projects have met since the 1990s, joining together to form Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group (HARG) in 2002. The core HARG members are:

- Speakeasy Advocacy (Basingstoke)
- Just Advocacy (North East Hampshire)
- East Hampshire Advocacy Scheme (East Hampshire)
- Connect Advocacy (Gosport and Fareham)
- Choices Advocacy (Eastleigh, South West Hampshire and Southampton)
- Winchester District Advocacy Project (Winchester, Andover and Test Valley)

### **Drivers for moving to a hub and spoke model**

Hampshire advocacy schemes had met informally since the 1990s. They later joined together as Hampshire Advocacy Reference Group with the shared aim of promoting advocacy across Hampshire and providing mutual support, shared good practice and opportunities for the exchange of information between local advocacy projects. In recognition of the geographical location of these advocacy schemes working across Hampshire, HARG later changed its name to Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group. In 2007–8 member schemes decided to formalise their working arrangements and HARG was registered as a company in 2007, gaining charitable status in 2008.

## The key functions of the hub

HARG is the lead agency supporting projects to form consortia to bid for contracts and tenders, and sub-contracting to the member schemes. HARG is structured as a hub and spoke; however HARG recently adapted its visual representation of its structure. Originally this structure was displayed visually with HARG at the centre and the member organisations set at a distance. HARG has developed this visual as a 'petal' model, with HARG in the centre, and the advocacy projects joined to HARG. This represents that HARG was created by the member organisations and is governed by six trustees who are each the manager of an independent advocacy organisation in a different part of the county.

In the main, HARG's member projects support adults with learning disabilities. However, there are also two generic advocacy projects and HARG itself is currently delivering two advocacy projects – an older person's project called Your Voice Advocacy and a deaf advocacy project. In recent years HARG secured the Hampshire IMCA contract, Southampton IMCA contract, advocacy and person-centred planning in Hampshire for adults with learning disabilities, person-centred reviews and advocacy to support the Hampshire County Council transformation of in-house services project, and self-advocacy in Portsmouth.

HARG member schemes, together with Winchester Mencap, currently provide person-centred planning services for adults with learning disabilities across the county, with person-centred planning facilitators working as part of their teams. HARG recognises that although this work is not strictly speaking advocacy the guiding principles of person-centred planning are very similar and it has found these services complement each other well.

In October 2009 HARG was accredited by City and Guilds as a training centre for the delivery of the National Advocacy Qualification. This training was piloted in-house and it was HARG's intention to be in a position to offer qualification training to other organisations later in 2011.

## Roles and responsibilities

There are three tiers of membership in HARG: trustee, member and associate member. Trustees make a commitment to attend bi-monthly trustee meetings, play an active role in running HARG, deal with information sensitively and not use it to financially disadvantage any other membership scheme, and keep matters raised at trustee meetings confidential. All members sign up to the HARG code of practice, statement of independence and advocacy standards.

## Working together to deliver contracts

HARG identify a range of benefits to working as a consortium, for example, in 2009–10 HARG made a successful joint bid on behalf of its member organisations to Hampshire's Learning Disability Development Fund for core project funding. The member organisations were able to offer a single point of contact. HARG identified that “such joined-up consortium working is increasingly important in the changing funding climate, where county-wide contracts are awarded to large single providers. In working as a consortium, HARG has been very successful at protecting otherwise potentially vulnerable smaller advocacy schemes and in doing so, fulfils an important role protecting independent, locally based advocacy in Hampshire” (HARG annual report March 2009)

“Local communities deserve good quality advocacy... the more we do together the better”

HARG employs a staff team which includes people piloting new advocacy projects. Where gaps in provision are identified that cannot be met by existing providers HARG seeks to create new projects, seeking funding where appropriate to develop projects that might at a later stage float off to become autonomous advocacy schemes in their own right.

Many of HARG's projects have a lead based within one of the member schemes. This strengthens the consortium model and increases quality of delivery. As HARG highlights, it would be difficult for these projects to be delivering quality if the lead was removed from advocacy practice.

“When you work together like this you have to buy-in personally, as well as buying-in for your organisation”

HARG's trustees are managers of busy advocacy schemes and identify that the additional responsibility of being involved in the running of a hub organisation requires both personal buy-in as well as organisational buy-in to ensure the success of the consortia.

## The external environment - personalisation

In the areas HARG works across the impact of personalisation has been felt by advocacy services, but HARG feels that this has not yet been transformative for service users, as reflected by other projects in this report. HARG reports several key concerns which are echoed in GAIN's 'The journey to self-directed support' report. HARG has become aware of people who have a personal budget without their knowledge and of families/carers at the

supported self-assessment stage who are reticent to give a true picture of the challenges facing them and are reluctant to say that they cannot cope with their current levels of care provision. Advocates' workloads, as well as referrals, were also noted to have increased as advocates are increasingly supporting people to challenge their assessments.

## **The external environment - sustainability**

Like other advocacy organisations, HARG reported increases in referrals, and the impact of tightening eligibility criteria and cuts in services increasing the pressure on advocates to support people to do things that would in some cases be seen as outside the advocacy role.

## **Key lessons and recommendations**

### **Be clear about your expectations**

When formalising collaboration it is important that you buy in, both personally and for your organisation. Although collaborative working can make more work for you personally the benefits for your organisation and the communities you support can be huge. HARG advises thinking carefully about what your ideal for collaborative working is and building your model around it. HARG has also found that projects have been successful where project leads have been based within existing organisations as they are closer to advocacy practice.

### **Agree on your value base and standards**

HARG created its own code of practice, statement of independence and advocacy standards to set an agreed value base. HARG advises thinking ahead to possible scenarios and issues that might come up in the future when setting a value base to ensure that honest and open conversations are encouraged between members. HARG also advises focusing meetings at a very practical level, supporting each other around practice issues and having mechanisms for resolving disputes because when bringing several schemes together there are inevitably issues about the quality of advocacy provision and it is important to agree about what quality services look like.

### **Have partnership agreements in place for joint working**

HARG acknowledges that the practical side of working together can be quite challenging but having open and honest conversations is ultimately very rewarding, and encourages partners to bring things to the table early if they see something they are not quite sure about. HARG's standards are very clear about working together, and as such also include an anti-poaching clause to encourage trust amongst member schemes.

## Be prepared to respond quickly to opportunities

When opportunities arise it is important to be in a position to respond quickly. While it is always ideal to take the time to develop a working model, you don't often have the luxury of time. In recognition that it's essential to prepare some of the ground work for future contracting arrangements, HARG developed a costing model centrally that had to be developed very pragmatically, so they have an agreed cost, for example, for a day of advocacy provision for a year. Although different projects might choose to manage their proportion of funding in different ways giving them flexibility, the quality of service has been agreed centrally and so projects ensure that they deliver the equivalent agreed service for the funding agreed.

This 'Focus on...' was produced with information and learning kindly shared by Hampshire Advocacy Regional Group (HARG) with particular thanks to Amanda Kent (HARG Chair and Chief Executive of Speakeasy Advocacy) for sharing her learning with us.

## Closing comments

---

At the time of this report being published GAIN, together with Gateshead advocacy organisations, had agreed to formalise our working arrangements, developing a Memorandum of Understanding and a strategy for independent advocacy in Gateshead which recommends that local commissioners "invest in the infrastructure, creating a consortia approach to improve the co-ordination and delivery of advocacy support: the creation of Gateshead Advocacy Consortium... this approach will ensure easier access for potential users of the advocacy services as well as providing professionals with a 'gateway' to refer people to, knowing the most appropriate service will be offered." Both of these documents build on learning from A Stronger Voice, and the three organisations which kindly agreed to share their learning with us to inform this report.

Although each of the case studies alone highlight learning which will be of interest to the wider advocacy community, GAIN feels it is important to draw some common themes from the experiences shared by the other organisations included in this report, which will inform a final end of A Stronger Voice project report to the Department of Health. This learning highlights the steps the advocacy community has taken to build on quality services, commitment to delivering efficiencies, the importance of services rooted in local communities, and some of the challenges facing advocacy projects in the current financial climate.

Firstly, all of the services interviewed highlighted the importance of independent advocacy rooted in local communities and responsive to local needs. Although the drivers for formalising working arrangements varied

across organisations, all of the organisations interviewed highlighted examples of collaborative working to increase efficiencies and to better meet gaps in provision to deliver a stronger 'offer' of independent advocacy to the communities they support. Quotes across all organisations highlighted a commitment to "build on the best" a "belief that we... would only improve by coming together" and a belief that "the more we do together the better."

Organisations also highlighted areas of learning for other organisations thinking about collaborating, particularly around taking the time to develop a clear rationale and buy-in for collaboration, but also recognising the need to be responsive to opportunities as they arise. Opportunities around personalisation were highlighted by some organisations, as well as challenges to overcome around how genuine the offer of choice and control being made to service users is. This is highlighted in GAIN's forthcoming 'The journey to self-directed support in Gateshead' report, both as an opportunity for advocates to demonstrate their role and value and for projects to explore new areas of work, but also as a challenge for advocates and advocacy projects at a time where cuts to services are seeing increased pressure on limited resources, and nationally projects report working with increasing numbers of vulnerable adults. This is highlighted in Action for Advocacy's recent 'Advocacy in a Cold Climate' report which found that "up to 66,000 people could be affected by advocacy service cuts" (p.5) and reported services operating waiting lists, staff working unpaid hours, and turning service users away.

Maintaining a focus on quality advocacy services is something that comes out in all case studies, and particularly on the continuous improvement of services. Organisations have developed a variety of materials to inform the way they work together and to ensure that stakeholders and providers are clear on what good quality advocacy looks like; developing their own quality standards, documentation for collaborative working, and codes of practice. This informed GAIN's decision to develop a Memorandum of Understanding for working together, building in clauses on working together on tenders, staged levels of membership, sharing good practice and respecting the work of partners, and not bidding for new work in another partner's service user area of expertise except by prior agreement.

Finally, GAIN would like to thank all of the organisations interviewed for sharing their experiences with GAIN and the wider advocacy community.

## References

---

Action for Advocacy (2011) 'Advocacy in a Cold Climate' available from [http://static.actionforadvocacy.org.uk/opendocs/Advocacy\\_in\\_a\\_cold\\_Climate\\_Booklet.pdf](http://static.actionforadvocacy.org.uk/opendocs/Advocacy_in_a_cold_Climate_Booklet.pdf)

Charity Commission (2011) 'Consortia for the Delivery of Public Services' available from [www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/rs26\\_consort.aspx](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/rs26_consort.aspx)

Essex County Council (2008) advocacy presentation

Gateshead Advocacy Information Network (2009) 'Gateshead Independent Advocacy Code of Practice' available from [www.gain.org.uk/CoP.htm](http://www.gain.org.uk/CoP.htm)

Liverpool (2008) 'Advocacy Plus 2008–2011 Integrated Commissioning Strategy'

Northamptonshire Council and PCT (2009) 'Review of the Commissioning of Advocacy Services in Northamptonshire' available from [www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/asc/services/disabilities/Documents/PDF%20Documents/NorthamptonshireAdvocacyReviewFinal%20July%202009.pdf](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/asc/services/disabilities/Documents/PDF%20Documents/NorthamptonshireAdvocacyReviewFinal%20July%202009.pdf)

Wrexham CBC (2007) 'Advocacy Works' available from [www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/word\\_files/social\\_services/consultation/advocacy\\_plan.doc2011](http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/assets/word_files/social_services/consultation/advocacy_plan.doc2011)