

Oxfordshire County Council

**Review of Children and Adult's  
Advocacy Services:  
Executive Summary of Key Findings**

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## 1. Introduction

This review of children and adults' advocacy services was conducted to look at demand, existing resources<sup>1</sup> and make recommendations, based upon the qualitative and quantitative data collected, to inform future commissioning intentions. The council needs to consider how these services should be provided in the future at a time when the VIVA service requires review<sup>2</sup> and to ensure that ongoing arrangements are in place for advocacy services when the Oxfordshire Advocacy contract with 'Getting Heard' ends in March 2019<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Process

Oxfordshire<sup>4</sup> has a good history of engagement with involving users of services when developing and shaping services and this review of Advocacy services was one of several projects targeted to build upon our learning about the challenges and opportunities of incorporating a co-production approach across our commissioning cycle. This review was undertaken with the involvement of advocacy service providers, advocates, people who have used/ may use advocacy services, people who refer to services and other interested parties<sup>5</sup>.

## 3. Review Findings

### 3.1 Key Messages about Oxfordshire's Advocates

The advocates in Oxfordshire were described as passionate about the work they are doing, as being supportive and doing a good job. However, it was recognised that advocacy services are mainly delivered by volunteers which can cause challenges around availability, as well as ensuring a consistent approach.

### 3.2 Key Messages about Oxfordshire's Advocacy Services

The feedback on the delivery of advocacy services in Oxfordshire is very positive and it was identified that if you already know something about advocacy services, then further information and support is available to you. However, it was recognised that if you had never come across advocacy services before, then it was difficult to know what it was all about. It was reported that if people don't know about their 'right to advocacy' that they often don't understand what it is and how it works.

There were concerns raised about increasing demand, about meeting the diversity of emerging needs, and people being aware of the advocacy services available in Oxfordshire and how to access them.

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<sup>1</sup> OCC currently delivers children's advocacy services (VIVA) in-house, adult's advocacy services through Getting Heard, some Self- Advocacy through My Life My Choice and appropriate adult service for young people and adult's in custody through the Youth Justice Service.

<sup>2</sup> The current arrangements for the VIVA service are not sustainable, both in terms of independence from the council and in managing the growing demand for the service. In 2015/16, VIVA experienced a 55% increase in the number of young people they supported

<sup>3</sup> Although there is the option to extend for 2 years in the existing contract if the review and subsequent business case demonstrates that this is the preferred option

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, to other Local Authorities, Oxfordshire County Council has a duty to deliver a range of advocacy services for vulnerable children and adults to support them to get their voice heard and ensure that they are being listened to or taken seriously.

<sup>5</sup> Stakeholder feedback was gathered through surveys, face to face at events, via telephone and email. Desktop research was conducted of best practice, advocacy delivery models used by other local authorities, alongside performance information about our existing providers.

### **3.3 Key Learning About Co-production**

This review consolidated that using this approach requires additional time as there is the need to build good working relationships, discuss and plan things with a larger group, with everyone having the same level of influence. It is vital that there is transparency from the outset about which parts of the process would best suit good engagement with users of services and where co-production should be incorporated. There also needs to be transparency with the people involved about their role, the time commitment and where they will influence an area of work and to what degree. There is evidence to suggest that people are using the term 'co-production' and this means different things to different people and there isn't always understanding of the difference between engagement activities and co-production.

This review identified that co-production provides those people involved with a different experience due to the shared level of influence within the group, which you cannot get from engagement activities. Co-production can offer community members the opportunity to develop alternative skills which may not often be possible through engagement activities i.e. chairing meetings. Co-production can offer the opportunity to be part of the full process rather than just one part of it. This can create better understanding, consistency and commitment from group members.

### **4. Recommendations**

The table below outlines the key recommendations from this review, as well as proposing the actions required and timeframe for implementation:

Service Area	Recommendations	Evidence Base	Actions/Deliverables	Initiation Timeframe
<b>Advocacy Services-adults and Children</b>	Undertake a piece of work to forecast future demand based upon current activity levels <sup>6</sup> , unmet demand and population projections and invest additional resources into advocacy services where required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desktop research</li> <li>• Contract monitoring/ performance reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projection of future demand.</li> <li>• Resource requirements and budget implications identified.</li> <li>• Paper developed for DLT and Gateway review panel (if required) for approval.</li> </ul>	March 18
<b>Advocacy Services-adults and Children</b>	Ensure that specialist advocacy provision continues to be delivered by advocacy organisations with the appropriate level of expertise and this is reflected in the service specifications when tendering for future services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desktop research</li> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> <li>• Contract monitoring/ performance information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective in tender and evaluation documentation when commissioning work.</li> </ul>	March 18
<b>Advocacy Services-adults and Children</b>	Develop an online advocacy training tool <sup>7</sup> for frontline staff to encourage them to continue providing generic advocacy support to an individual or family that they are working with, but to ensure that the advocacy support is high quality and consistent across the workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online training tool developed and cascaded to staff for completion.</li> </ul>	March-April 18
<b>Advocacy Services-adults and Children</b>	Support advocacy providers to work together to develop a coherent and consistent message <sup>8</sup> to better explain what advocacy is and the support available. Providers should look at access into their services and streamline the approach between providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> <li>• Desktop research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate provider network meetings which are then facilitated by providers going forward.</li> </ul>	March 18
<b>Advocacy Services-adults and Children</b>	Insert a field within framework-/liquid logic which a professional will need to populate to demonstrate that they have considered any advocacy needs of an individual or family and made appropriate arrangements in response to any need arising.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to measure advocacy support being offered.</li> <li>• Vulnerable service users are offered and provided with advocacy support.</li> </ul>	March 18
<b>Children's Advocacy</b>	Complete an options appraisal of the VIVA service to consider if the service should be commissioned or remain internal to the county council and shape the service to meet increasing demand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance reporting</li> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> <li>• Historical service reviews.</li> <li>• Desktop research</li> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioning manager to develop VIVA options appraisal for DLT to consider and identify approach for future service delivery.</li> </ul>	February 18
<b>Co-production</b>	OCC should continue to increase awareness of co-production across the workforce (employees and partners) using one coherent approach and encourage staff to consider how they can incorporate it within their practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desktop research</li> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training for the workforce is rolled out.</li> <li>• Support and professional challenge is provided by people experienced with this approach.</li> </ul>	This work is already underway.
<b>Co-production</b>	When co-production is used by individuals and teams, that learning about this approach is captured centrally to inform future work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desktop research</li> <li>• Feedback from stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Central log to be developed and held by one team who are responsible for keeping it up to date and staff made aware of this.</li> </ul>	March 18

<sup>6</sup> Including community IMHA cases as demand has been steadily increasing. These cases traditionally incur additional advocate input so the increase has an impact on the capacity of the team.

<sup>7</sup> This training tool would also raise awareness about the advocacy organisations who can provide advocacy support where a professional is unable to provide this and meet the individual/ family's advocacy support needs.

<sup>8</sup> This may include developing a joint communication strategy and including an Advocacy Awareness Raising Campaign.