My Say, My Way in Medway

A strategy for advocacy services that provide a voice for vulnerable people

2009 to 2012

- Consultation Draft Version 2-
Medway Council wants its customers to be at the heart of everything that we do. To make sure this happens, we need to ensure that every citizen has the opportunity to:

- participate in consultations
- access services
- uphold their rights

By enabling every citizen to have these opportunities, we will provide a foundation for a more cohesive community where every citizen’s contribution is shared and valued.

The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that a number of outcomes for adults are achieved. These include

- Vulnerable adults are able to make life-changing decisions
- Vulnerable adults are equal citizens in Medway when accessing services and opportunities
- Vulnerable adults are supported so that they can tell their story in the way that suits them
- Improved community cohesion through people being involved in shaping the place they live and the services that they receive

I hope that you will sign up to and champion these aspirations. I look forward to your support and participation, where you can, in working with the Council to ensure that there are stronger voices for the under-represented or vulnerable groups in Medway.

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Cllr Tom Mason
Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care
Background

Introduction
Advocacy is about ensuring that people have the chance to be heard in terms of their needs, wishes and aspirations.

The Council is committed to community involvement in our commissioning activity. Involvement from the community will ensure that their experiences will shape our future work programmes of commissioning and transformation.

The advent of the government’s agenda of active participation is set out in the White Paper, *Communities in Control: Real people, real power*. Its aim is to pass power into the hands of local communities – and this should mean the whole community.

Anecdotal feedback from service users sets out their experiences in accessing services. Vulnerable adults, older people and carers often describe experiences that they find demeaning and/or discriminatory.
What is advocacy

There are different forms of advocacy:

- **Self-advocacy** is about people being supported to speak up for themselves.
- **Peer advocacy** is about a person being supported by another individual who has similar experiences.
- **Citizen advocacy** describes a long-term process whereby a campaigning organisation represents the interests of an individual or a group of people.
- **Short-term or issue based advocacy**, also known as crisis advocacy, whereby a volunteer or paid, but independent, advocate supports the person to resolve a particular issue.

Who is this strategy for

We have developed this strategy for all vulnerable people and carers. Vulnerable people are a wide ranging group and include:

- Adults living with a disability
- Older People
- Older people with mental health needs
- Adults with long term conditions

However, it is important to emphasise that an older person or an adult who has a disability do not automatically need an advocate or an advocacy organisation to secure their rights or articulate their views.
This strategy is also for the organisations and community groups that either:

- campaign on behalf of individuals or groups; or
- provide support to individuals so that they can articulate their views and needs

It is important that this strategy takes into account the degrees of need for advocacy support. This is so that we can provide the appropriate support to people at the right time. Advocacy services should enable people to be independent rather than creating dependence that requires further support. All citizens should be treated with dignity and respect; free from discrimination or harassment; and have the opportunity to positively participate in their community by making their views or needs known.

**Community involvement in developing this strategy**

This strategy and its priorities incorporates input from discussions with a number of stakeholders including vulnerable people and carers, voluntary sector organisations, community groups and other statutory organisations.

The Council are grateful to the following organisations that hosted consultation workshops about this strategy:

- Age Concern Gillingham
- Age Concern Strood
- Alzheimer’s & Dementia Family Support
- Alzheimer’s Society Support Group
- HACO
- Kent Autistic Trust
- Medway Carers
- Medway Older People’s Partnership
- Medway & Swale Advocacy Partnership
- POP
- Shout Out
- Valiant
Vision and priorities

The vision for advocacy services in Medway

Vulnerable people and carers to live healthier and fulfilling lives, enabled to achieve their hopes and aspirations. This means that these individuals will access services and take advantage of opportunities that other citizens take for granted.

In order to achieve this vision we will:

Make available in Medway a range of advocacy services that encourage people to express their thoughts, exercise choice, make decisions and uphold their rights.

Our pledge is to:

☞ Put in place services that enable vulnerable people and carers to have their say in Medway

☞ Work with organisations to deliver this service while respecting their independence

Priorities for achieving the Vision of this strategy

We have four key priorities to help us achieve our vision for advocacy services in Medway. These are:

• Accessing services and upholding my rights
• Sharing my views and making a difference
• Known and accessible services
• Confidence in the service and independence of the support
Accessing services and upholding my rights

Why is this important
Vulnerable people and carers often feel that their right and entitlements are denied to them in stressful situations such as medical and housing situations. At a time when they are most vulnerable, people are asked to make life-changing decisions about their medical treatment, where they want or need to live and how they want to be supported. At these stressful times it is important that the decisions are based on people making an informed choice and this means feeling confident to question or challenge the options or information that is being offered to them.

Vulnerable people can need support when being the subject of a criminal investigation. Therefore, in accordance with the Police and Criminal Evidence (PACE) Act, a vulnerable adult may need an appropriate adult to support them through the investigation at the police station.

What are we doing

Advocacy for people with learning disabilities
There are two services for advocacy available to people with a learning disability. One is a self-advocacy and peer advocacy group and the second is a citizen advocacy service.

Advocacy services for people with mental health problems
This advocacy service is available to people with mental health problems, it provides both citizen advocacy and short-term advocacy.
Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy
The Council has commissioned this service in partnership with Kent County Council. It is an issue-based advocacy service that is enshrined in law.

The Council's Welfare Benefits Unit
The Council also funds a Welfare Benefits Unit that supports both vulnerable people and carers in realising their entitlement to benefits. This support includes advocacy in the form of representation at tribunals.

Medway’s Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB)
The Council funds Medway CAB to provide general legal advice and in particular debt advice. These two services are the primary sources of advocacy regarding economic well-being and the Council has recently created a forum to understand the volume of providers and capacity of support available to the people of Medway.

The Appropriate Adult Service
The Appropriate Adult service is a service that supports minors and vulnerable people when in custody at a police station and detained under PACE.

What will we do
1. The Council has a variety of services available to people living with disabilities or mental health problems. Medway does not currently have an advocacy service for older people – who are the Council’s largest client group with respect to adult social care. Some older people have low expectations of their lives and
entitlements. The Council is committed to ensuring that these low aspirations do not compound the lives of people who may already be experiencing disadvantages. Therefore the Council will ensure that there is access to advocacy services specific to the needs of older people

Outcomes

- Vulnerable people will maximise their income so that they have more choice in their lives
- Vulnerable people are able to make life-changing decisions
- Vulnerable people are equal citizens in Medway when accessing services and opportunities
- Vulnerable people are supported so that they can tell their story in the way that is appropriate for them and justice is seen to be done

How we will know that we are achieving this

- Reporting from organisations receiving Council funds that confirm the amount of additional income achieved for vulnerable people
- Reporting from organisations receiving Council funds that confirm the number of carers supported to remain in employment
- Survey of service users about their experience
- An increase in the number of people living with, or survivors of, abuse who are prepared to make a statement to the police
Sharing my views and making a difference

Why is this important

Campaigning
Vulnerable people and carers can face barriers to accessing mainstream services. They can also face discrimination and harassment from the wider community or in the workplace.

Organisations that campaign on behalf of various client groups to raise awareness about the issues facing vulnerable people are key to promoting community cohesion and making Medway a good place to live if you are an older person, vulnerable adult, person living with a disability or a carer.

There are particular groups within the community that either do not access, or experience barriers (intentional or otherwise) in accessing, health and social care services. If these groups also lack the confidence or skills to communicate their needs, wishes or aspirations then the Council will not achieve its aim of commissioning inclusive services.

Engagement
The Council and other organisations are recognising that there is a need to tailor engagement and consultation events to reflect the needs of the communities or groups that they are seeking to work with and for.

Whilst the format of engagement is changing, statutory organisations must demonstrate civic leadership by ensuring that meaningful advocacy is available at such events.
Central government requires that each local authority have a user-led organisation by 2010. Medway does not currently have an organisation that meets this definition.

**Saying the unthinkable**

Vulnerable people and carers can be the subject of abuse. It is important that in these circumstances that the person can ensure that this abuse stops by being able to say what has happened to them or is happening to them.

**What are we doing**

The Council is focusing on the development of a user-led organisation that may include delivering advocacy services. The Council is committed to the development of an organisation that is universally owned and valued by the community.

Local Involvement Networks have duties and powers to influence the delivery (and commissioning) of health and social care services. In order for Medway LINk to exert this influence, they should be representative of the community’s diverse views. The Council funds Medway LINk to undertake its duties and exercise its powers so that health and social care services continuously improve and become more inclusive to all groups within the community. This means that there is a need for all parts of the community to have an opportunity to participate in the activities of Medway Link.

Medway has a number of local organisations that campaign on behalf of specific groups. These organisations include Medway’s Older People Partnership, the Pensioner Forum, the Ethnic Minority Forum and the
Medway Access Group. This is not an exhaustive list and the Council does not fund all of these types of organisations (either directly or indirectly). The Council is committed to ensuring that there is a sustainable environment for these types of organisations to flourish and promote the rights and needs of groups that are ‘seldom heard’ within the community.

There are a number of advocacy services available to the people of Medway that are not funded by the Council. These include support from national charities like Help the Aged, Age Concern England, Counsel and Care, UK Advocacy Network, MENCAP, MIND and SCOPE.

**What will we do**

1. The Council will map the organisations that campaign on behalf of vulnerable groups and identify an appropriate method of supporting niche organisations that represent the specific issues for the people of Medway or of seldom heard groups within the area.

2. The Council will continue to work with Medway LINk so that it fulfils it role in influencing commissioning the services of Health and Social Care services. As part of that commitment the Council has commissioned the LINk to identify individuals who would undertake mystery shopping of care services in Medway.

3. The Council will ensure that there is a framework regarding consultations that ensures that advocacy is available at such events.

4. The Council will ensure that that there is advocacy available to
support the survivors of abuse telling their story

5. We will work with groups that provide advocacy so that funding is coordinated to maximise outcomes for the community.

6. We will work with groups that provide advocacy so that services are inclusive and reflect the diversity of Medway.

Outcomes

- People know where to go to get support
- Improved community cohesion through people being involved in shaping the place they live and the services that they receive
- People are supported at the right time

How we will know that we are achieving this

☑️ Survey of service users about their experience
Known and accessible services

Why is this important

People can only access services if they are widely promoted within the community. Equally, people can only achieve the proposed outcomes from these services if the services are accessible in terms of location and opening hours.

In order to ensure that the whole community is involved, independent advocacy must be easily accessible. In providing such services it is critical that these services meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community. Services must be both culturally sensitive and, where appropriate, representative of the community that it serves.

There is an increasing demand for advocacy support for older people with mental health needs. The commissioning strategy for dementia identifies the anticipated increase in demand for dementia services. This anticipated increase is because people are living longer and the overall population of Medway will expand due to being part of the Thames Gateway. The challenge for the Council is to meet this demand.

What are we doing

The Adult Social Care Handbook includes an editorial about the Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy service. There is also a web page on the Council’s website dedicated to the advocacy services funded by Council.
The Council is working with NHS Medway (the Primary Care Trust) to develop a specification for an expanded family support service for people living with dementia.

**What will we do**

1. The council and NHS Medway will jointly commission a service to support families living with dementia so that there is increased capacity to meet the anticipated increase in demand.

2. The Council is committed to ensuring that voluntary sector organisations and community groups that represent vulnerable people should have the opportunity to host accredited advocates within the organisation. The Council will fund the training and supervision of these advocates with the expectation that a minimum number of hours of advocacy are delivered free at the point of delivery.

**Outcomes**

- People are heard and their views are taken into account
- People can be part of the justice system and ensure that they hold their abusers to account

**How we will know that we are achieving this**

- Survey of service users about their experience
Confidence in the service and Independence of the support

Why is this important

It is important that the community are confident that the advocate who is representing them are providing support without any influence or direction from the Council. The Council is committed to not interfering in the micro-delivery of advocacy. However, the Council must ensure that the advocates who support individuals within the community have the right competencies and skills to ensure that the advocate is expressing the views and needs of individuals without interpretation or self-interest.

It is important that advocates ensure that people are enabled to express themselves. However, an advocate must also support people to understand their responsibilities as a citizen and the possible outcomes of their representation.

It is important that the organisations that may work with advocates treat them with respect and engage with them so that there is a meaningful outcome for the vulnerable person or carer.

What are we doing

We are working with contracted advocacy organisations so that they work towards ensuring that all advocates - paid or unpaid are accredited by Advocacy in Action UK.

Advocacy in Action UK is a training and consultancy organisation that delivers training and other support services to individuals and
organisations within local communities across the UK. They validate the valuable work and experience of Advocates (paid or unpaid) who make a valuable contribution to their community. Visit www.advocatetraining.org.uk for more information.

Advocacy in Action UK’s aims are in accordance with the outcomes of this strategy, i.e. ensure access to welfare, education, health, social care and community development. The National Open College Network (N.O.C.N.) accredits their training programmes and the accreditation is equivalent to a level 3 professional qualification.

What will we do

1. The Council will ensure that all contracts confirm that the organisation is independent with reference to representing the individual needs of the people that they support.

2. Funding accredited training for advocates in Medway. It is intended that funding such training will give organisations that work with advocates, confidence in the abilities and independence of the advocate.

Outcomes

- People are fully represented without interpretation or editing of their views or needs
- Statutory organisations treat advocates with respect and fully engage with the role
- People are confident that their advocate is an independent person from an independent organisation in spite of how the service is funded.
How we will know that we are achieving this

- Survey of service users about their experience
- Survey of advocates about their experience with statutory organisations
The Council considers that there are three tiers of advocacy. The Council are keen to strengthen and widen Tier 1 of advocacy provision so that people can uphold their rights and influence the community and place that they are part of.

**Tier 1**
Issue-based or short-term advocacy
Representation at tribunals, IMCA, someone advocating on your behalf

**Tier 2**
Self-Advocacy and Peer advocacy
Organisations and groups that meet to provide support in accessing services uphold rights

**Tier 3**
Citizen advocacy
Organisations and groups that campaign on behalf of groups or individuals so that they influence community cohesion
In order to increase the capacity and range of opportunities for support available to the people of Medway, the Council’s commissioning intentions are as follows:

1. **Increase the capacity of advocacy for families affected by dementia**
   There is currently an advocacy service available to families affected by dementia. However, there is a need to increase the capacity of this service to reflect the anticipated figures in the Older People with Mental Health Needs strategy. It is anticipated that this expansion will be jointly funded with NHS Medway.

2. **Advocacy for survivors of abuse**
   One of the early outcomes locally from the national consultation about reviewing the ‘No Secrets’ guidance confirms the need for
advocacy services to support the survivors of abuse. The Council will ensure that there is advocacy available to support the survivors of abuse telling their story.

3. Advocacy for older people
The Council want to ensure that older people are able to access services and uphold their rights with appropriate support in the form of advocacy. It is the Council’s intentions to commission this support by older people organisations hosting advocates.

4. Improving the accessibility and inclusiveness of advocacy
The Council is committed to ensuring that voluntary sector organisations and community groups that represent vulnerable people should have the opportunity to host accredited advocates within the organisation. The Council will fund the training and supervision of these advocates with the expectation that a minimum number of hours of advocacy are delivered by each advocate.

5. Working with Medway Council for Voluntary Services (Medway CVS)
The Council will map the organisations that campaign on behalf of vulnerable groups. The Council will work with Medway CVS to identify and develop an appropriate method of supporting niche organisations that represent the specific issues of Medway or of ‘seldom heard’ groups within the area.

6. Organisations maintaining independence
The Council funds services so that they exist for the benefit of Medway’s citizens. Therefore, the Council respects and observes the need for organisations such as advocacy services to maintain
their independence. Nonetheless, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that the service being delivered to the community is:

- of high quality (for the individual’s experience)
- responsible (to the community and the individual in managing expectations and ensuring that the individual’s views are shared without interpretation or editing)
- value for money (effective and efficient delivery so that the Council’s limited resources supports as many people as possible)

Contact Details for this Strategy

**Lead Officer:** Genette Laws

**Direct Dial No:** 01634-331345

**Email address:** genette.laws@medway.gov.uk