Evaluation of the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance’s Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot

Conducted by the Scottish Health Council

September 2015
Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

This report highlights the key findings of an evaluation of the Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance’s (SIAA) Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot project. The Scottish Government sponsored the pilot and requested the Scottish Health Council to evaluate the pilot project.

The aims of the evaluation of the Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot are to:

- determine the quality of outputs from the project for both the advocacy organisation and commissioner, and
- give feedback and guidance to the Scottish Government and SIAA to improve the Advocacy Quality Assurance project, should it continue.

The evaluation will achieve this by:

- reviewing feedback from advocacy organisations, commissioners and evaluators that took part in the pilot, and
- reviewing the final reports of each pilot project against objectives and outcomes contained in the Project Initiation Document (highlighted in section 2).
2 Background – Aim of Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot

Advocacy enables people to be involved in decisions which affect their lives. It helps them to express their views and wishes, to access information, to make informed choices and to have control over as many aspects of their lives as possible. In order to be able to ensure the individual’s views are heard and understood and that they receive support to ensure their rights are not infringed, it is important for advocates to be as free as they can be from conflicts of interest. Advocacy organisations are required to be independent from NHS and local authorities under the Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003.

NHS and local authority commissioners of advocacy services should ensure that advocates and advocacy organisations commissioned to provide independent advocacy services in their area comply with the Principles and Standards for Independent Advocacy (see Appendix 1) to ensure the provision of good quality advocacy.

Over recent years there have been increasing calls from statutory bodies for quality assurance of independent advocacy. This was previously conducted by the Advocacy Safeguards Agency which was disbanded in 2006. There has been ongoing debate and consultation, over several years, within the advocacy movement on how to quality assure advocacy. SIAA and members were keen to have an evaluation process in place and a working group was set up in 2008 which undertook consultation and discussion with members and commissioners over a number of years. That debate and discussion has led to the development of a plan by the Scottish Government to sponsor SIAA to develop a method of quality assurance of advocacy provision in Scotland.

SIAA was chosen to deliver the advocacy quality assurance pilot to ensure that:

- quality assurance can be specifically tailored to advocacy
- a consistent and cost effective approach to evaluating advocacy can be developed (rather than having NHS Boards and local authorities developing different quality assurance systems), and
- the hiring of freelance consultants (which can be expensive) is avoided.

At the outset the Scottish Government and SIAA’s member organisations expressed some concerns around a potential conflict of interest on the basis that SIAA was leading the pilot and would be evaluating its own member organisations. However, the Scottish Government felt SIAA should still continue with the pilot given there was no other agency in a position (with sufficient understanding of advocacy) to conduct quality assurance. Sessional evaluators were hired as a way to try and ensure there was as little conflict as possible, rather than simply get an employee of SIAA to conduct the pilot. SIAA also ensured that the evaluators were from different parts of the country to where the advocacy organisations were based, thus avoiding the potential of evaluators using another advocacy organisation’s best practice in a tender situation. The evaluators had no active involvement in delivery of advocacy.
The quality assurance model SIAA has adopted is based on ‘Independent Advocacy: An Evaluation Framework’\(^1\) which in turn links to SIAA’s Principle’s and Standards for Independent Advocacy\(^2\). The pilot evaluations included reviewing the following areas of the participating advocacy organisation:

- the advocacy relationship and impact
- recruitment, training and support of advocates and other staff (paid and unpaid)
- managing the organisation
- external relationships, independence and conflicts of interest, and
- funding and commissioning.

The following information was identified in the Project Initiation Document (PID) highlighting the anticipated aims, objectives and outcomes of the Advocacy Quality Assurance pilot project.

**Purpose:**

- to establish a pilot quality assurance project to measure the quality of advocacy provided in Scotland
- to ensure clear, transparent and cost effective use of available resources in the delivery of advocacy, and
- to identify appropriate means of delivering an advocacy quality assurance project in Scotland.

**Project Objectives:**

- to design and test a pilot quality assurance project for advocacy in Scotland
- to recruit and train a pool of sessional evaluators to carry out evaluations under the pilot, and
- to provide and report on evidence to commissioners and participating advocacy organisations on the quality of advocacy practice they currently have in place.

**Desired outcomes:**

- ensure that people who use advocacy services have confidence in the advocacy providers and experience consistent good quality advocacy
- produce reports for each commissioner and participating advocacy organisation with recommendations and action plans where appropriate, and
- identify areas for improvement and support for organisations to address these.


3 Evaluation of Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot - Method and Approach

This evaluation of SIAA’s Advocacy Quality Assurance pilot was undertaken by the Scottish Health Council conducting a total of 25 interviews with evaluators, commissioners and advocacy organisations involved in the following pilot projects.3

Interviews were conducted with:

- Advocacy Highland
- Ceartas (East Dunbartonshire)
- Advocacy Orkney
- Advocacy Services Aberdeen, and
- The Advocacy Project, North Lanarkshire.

A list of people interviewed in each pilot evaluation is contained in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Interviews undertaken with pilot evaluation stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy Project</th>
<th>Commissioner</th>
<th>Evaluators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager, Advocacy Highland</td>
<td>NHS Highland</td>
<td>Two evaluators and project Co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Executive, Ceartas (East Dunbartonshire)</td>
<td>No response from East Dunbartonshire Council</td>
<td>Two evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Manager, Advocacy Orkney</td>
<td>NHS Orkney (2 NHS Commissioners) Orkney Islands Council</td>
<td>Three evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager, Advocacy Service Aberdeen</td>
<td>NHS Grampian</td>
<td>Three evaluators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director, The Advocacy Project (North Lanarkshire)</td>
<td>North Lanarkshire Council</td>
<td>Three evaluators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two project co-ordinators were included in the above list as they were also involved directly with some of the evaluation visits for the pilot project. Two additional interviews were undertaken with the Director of SIAA and project sponsor from the Scottish Government’s Patient Support and Participation Team. A review of the reports for each of the above pilots was also undertaken as well as a review of time and cost of each pilot from project data provided by SIAA. The evaluation also

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3 Appendix 1 Highlights the cross section of evaluators, commissioners and advocacy organisations interviewed
included a review of the aims, objectives and outcomes of the pilot highlighted in section 2 above.
4 Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot – Process

The pilot project was funded by the Scottish Government to the sum of £63,000. In order to implement the project SIAA hired two part-time project co-ordinators and a pool of sessional evaluators who undertook the majority of the evaluations.

There were three key stages to the Advocacy Quality Assurance pilot:

- start-up period
- evaluation period, and
- review period.

The intended process of each of these periods of the pilot are summarised below and feedback from stakeholders’ perceptions is included after the process is outlined.

4.1 Start-up period

The start up period for the pilot lasted eight months from October 2013 to May 2014.

4.1.1 Recruitment of advocacy organisations to take part in pilot

Advocacy organisations participating in the pilot were recruited either via an advert in SIAA’s news bulletin or approached directly by the project co-ordinators. There was a mix of organisations from urban, rural and remote areas of Scotland. Five evaluations were completed and one was partially completed by the end of the pilot. These were:

- Advocacy Highland (partially completed)
- Ceartas (East Dunbartonshire)
- Advocacy Orkney
- Advocacy Services Aberdeen
- The Advocacy Project (North Lanarkshire), and
- Independent Advocacy Perth and Kinross.

Two advocacy organisations were identified as likely to take part in the pilot but withdrew from taking part at short notice. One organisation withdrew due to staff sickness and the other due to an upcoming tendering process. This resulted in the Scottish Government extending the timeline of the pilot to June 2015.

All of the advocacy organisations that participated in the pilot are members of SIAA. Two of the organisations are represented on SIAA’s Board and one of these was also represented on the pilot reference group. One of the evaluators also represented the commissioning organisation of one of the pilot organisations.

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4 Independent Advocacy Perth and Kinross was the last organisation to take part in the pilot, however, this was not included in the interview part of this evaluation due to time constraints.
Feedback

From the stakeholder feedback, three of the five advocacy organisations felt they received appropriate information to take part and were fully aware of what was involved before committing to the evaluation. Two of the advocacy organisations felt they could have had more information about what was required of their organisation for the evaluation, particularly about the amount of time involved to participate. Two of the four commissioners also felt they had a lack of understanding about their involvement in the evaluation and more information would have been useful.

4.1.2 Reference group

A reference group was established as a consultative and advisory body with the aim of informing the work of the Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot Project. The purpose of the reference group was to:

- inform the work of the Quality Assurance Pilot
- be involved in the external evaluation of the project
- support the development of relationships with all stakeholders, and
- represent the work of the project at events as agreed with the project co-ordinators.

The reference group comprised of the project co-ordinators, commissioner of advocacy services, advocacy provision experience (one of which was a participating advocacy organisation in the pilot although did not work in the area that was evaluated) and a Scottish Government representative. The reference group aimed to meet six times throughout the life of the pilot, although only met three times – once before the evaluation visits started, once after the first evaluation visit, and once at the end of the pilot when all the evaluation visits were complete.

4.1.3 Sessional evaluators and evaluation resource pack

As highlighted in section 2 there were concerns that there could be a conflict of interest between SIAA and the advocacy organisation being evaluated. This resulted in the pilot structure using SIAA project co-ordinators and hiring sessional evaluators on an ad hoc basis to conduct the evaluations with the advocacy organisations.

Sessional evaluators were recruited via a combination of an advert in SIAA’s news bulletin and approached by the project co-ordinators who have strong networks in the advocacy field. There were seven sessional evaluators recruited and these fell into the following three categories:

- service users (two)
- commissioners of advocacy (two), and
- people previously involved in providing either advocacy services, mental health or learning disability services (three).

The service users and people previously involved in providing advocacy services were paid a daily fee for their involvement and the organisations which
commissioners worked for (both from NHS Boards) provided their time free of charge. All received travel and accommodation expenses.

The project co-ordinators also took part in the evaluation visits as evaluators in three of the pilots due to evaluator sickness absence

The sessional evaluators received a training day as well as an evaluation resource pack which highlighted a framework in which to conduct the evaluation of advocacy organisations. The sessional evaluators took part in the evaluation visit which lasted three days and between three and four evaluators attended each of these visits.

An evaluation resource pack consisted of:

- outline of evaluation process
- the steps in the evaluation
- question schedules for each of the evaluation stakeholders
- approximate interview timings
- template consent forms
- reporting template
- evaluators task checklist, and
- a guide to evidence (for evaluators).

**Feedback**

All evaluators thought the training was good and that they benefited from receiving advice on the evaluation resource pack. Some of the evaluators stated that the framework could have been clearer and would have benefited from fewer questions. The training allowed the team to get to know each other before the evaluation visits. Feedback from the service user evaluators highlighted that they could have benefited from a bit more information about the purpose and benefit of advocacy.

One service user commented how their own confidence improved by taking part in the evaluation. One of the commissioners also felt that they had benefited from personal and professional development by seeing another side to the advocacy field other than their own. However, the commissioner also highlighted a downside was having to take time out of their day to day work during the evaluation visit and struggled with capacity when it came to the reporting element of the role. One of the project co-ordinators stated that there needed to be more support built into the evaluation for the service users to take part.

**4.2 Evaluation period**

This section details the intended process of the specific pilot evaluations and summarises feedback from stakeholders on their perceptions of this process.

**4.2.1 The evaluation agreement**

The first step in the process was to agree the scope and focus of the evaluation with the Advocacy Manager and the main statutory sector commissioners. This is when the start date, duration and timescale for reporting was to be agreed.
Feedback

Three of the advocacy organisations felt they had appropriate information to take part although this proved difficult for two of the pilot projects who, although they took part, stated that they would have benefitted from having more information. One of the commissioners did not take part in one pilot and another commissioner stated that they were not involved as much as they would have liked. In a separate pilot both the advocacy organisation and commissioner stated they were not involved to the extent they would have liked and dropped out of the process after the draft report was submitted.

4.2.2 Self-assessment tool and practical arrangements

Self-assessment tool

The advocacy organisation completed and submitted a self-assessment form, with accompanying evidence, to the project co-ordinators. This evidence was based on SIAA’s Advocacy Evaluation Framework. This was then reviewed by the evaluation team and contributed towards the final report and provided background information for the evaluation visit. An example of the information provided is outlined in Appendix 2.

Practical Arrangements

As part of the pilot project the advocacy organisation needed to invest considerable time both before and during the evaluation visit, to assist with its co-ordination. In particular advocacy organisations had to:

- submit the self-assessment information
- develop an anonymised list of clients and referrers for the evaluation team to choose for interview
- gain consent from advocacy clients to take part in interview
- arrange the timetable of interviews with:
  - advocacy service users (15-20) or an agreed % if this was more appropriate.
  - Advocacy Manager
  - advocates and other staff, both paid and unpaid (individual and group interviews as appropriate)
  - referrers and other relevant agencies (six face-to-face/telephone and additional through email/postal questionnaire)
  - Commissioners and other funders (all face to face or telephone)
  - Board/Management Committee (group interview)
- allocate a private space for the evaluators to work in
- allocate time to be made available during the evaluation visit to look at office systems and other resources held in the office
- provide maps/directions for all interviews and venues, and
- ensure that someone was available during the evaluation visit to respond to any concerns as necessary.
Feedback

There was strong feedback from all advocacy organisations and commissioners that the amount of self-assessment information provided by advocacy organisations was excessive. A few organisations felt that they understood the need for this information as part of a quality assurance process but queried the need for this volume of information requested and whether it was sustainable if the pilot was rolled out further.

All advocacy organisations also felt that there was a lot of work involved to carry out the practical arrangements during the evaluation visit whilst also trying to deliver an advocacy service.

4.2.3 The evaluation visit

The following paragraphs highlight the intended process for the evaluation visit to the advocacy organisation.

The evaluation team visited each pilot advocacy organisation for around three days. In this time each team met the previous afternoon/evening before each evaluation started. The evaluation team conducted interviews with key stakeholders throughout the three-day visit. The evaluation team met the Advocacy Manager briefly at the start of the first day of the visit. There was a debriefing session at the end of each day to collate evidence and identify common themes and follow up specific issues of enquiry. The final time slot of the evaluation was spent giving verbal feedback to advocacy organisations and their commissioners.

Verbal feedback was given at the end of the evaluation visit; this was intended for advocacy organisations, commissioners and Board/Management committee members. The feedback gave an overview of the main themes that emerged from the evaluation visit, commenting on strengths, issues and areas for development or change along with recommendations and suggestions about how these could be addressed.

Feedback

Most of the evaluators felt that they worked well together as a team but the evaluation visit was intense and very busy. Some evaluators queried the need for so many interviews and so many questions in each interview.

There were a number of comments from both the advocacy organisations and commissioners about the strength of the evaluation team regarding their knowledge of advocacy. They felt that there was a good mix of experience in the team and that they were knowledgeable about advocacy. It was noted that having a service user on the evaluation team was of benefit when it came to engaging with advocacy clients.

One of the advocacy organisations in the pilot felt that the evaluation team was inexperienced at undertaking evaluations of this kind. They were dissatisfied with the process and withdrew after submission of the draft report. As a result there was no final report for this pilot.
Few stakeholders commented about the verbal feedback session at the end of the evaluation visit. Not all stakeholders were able to attend and one commissioner stated that they were not invited.

4.2.4 Written report

The written report expanded on the information given during the verbal feedback session using a template format from the evaluators resource pack. There was a commitment to send the advocacy organisation and commissioner a draft report within four weeks of the evaluation visit to be checked for factual accuracy. There was a commitment to produce a final report within two weeks of receipt of any factual corrections. It is expected that at least the summary report will be made available to the wider advocacy movement and other interested parties.

Feedback

Feedback on the reporting element of the evaluation was rather mixed. Positive feedback on the reporting included the following themes:

- it was encouraging for staff to see positive comments
- it was good to hear of the difference advocacy makes (relating to positive impact), and
- helpful recommendations which are useful for advocacy planning.

Some of the more negative feedback on the reporting included themes around:

- some of the recommendations are fairly basic and no linkage between the evaluation findings, recommendations and principles and standards for advocacy
- the length of time it took for advocacy organisations and commissioners to receive the report (however some organisations and commissioners did take additional time to provide feedback
- there was insufficient reporting on client feedback, and
- the number of inaccuracies in the draft report was reported by one advocacy organisation and two commissioners.

4.3 Review period

Follow-up visit

It is intended that there will be a follow up visit from a member of the Quality Assurance Team six months after the final report is submitted. This visit will provide an opportunity to:

- discuss any actions resulting from the recommendations including how any impact will be assessed
- consider any challenges or barriers faced
- discuss any recommendations that haven’t been taken forward and why
- discuss priorities and plans for the future, and
- identify any support required from SIAA.
So far at the time of writing (August 2015) four follow-up visits have taken place with advocacy organisations and two with commissioners, and action plans with these organisations have been developed.
5 Feedback on strengths and weaknesses

The advocacy organisations, commissioners and evaluators were all asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation approach, this section outlines a summary of the themes from the feedback.

5.1 Strengths

Stakeholder feedback about the pilot quality assurance project identified a number of positive themes including the following.

- Some of the advocacy organisations highlighted that the evaluation was a holistic and a thorough review of the advocacy service and was welcomed by most organisations.

- Most advocacy organisations stated that the positive feedback they received about their service helped raise staff morale.

- Most of the advocacy organisations stated that the evaluation team worked well and were very knowledgeable about advocacy. There were a number of positive comments about the makeup of the team (a service user, a commissioner and someone with an advocacy background).

- Commissioners gave their time free of charge which reduced the overall costs of the project.

- There were a number of positive comments about the balanced mix of approach between telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews; there was a good cross section of stakeholders interviewed; and the evaluation team spent considerable time ‘on site’ with the advocacy organisation. The way in which advocacy clients were randomly selected for interview and not handpicked by the advocacy organisation was also seen as a strength.

- Most of the evaluators stated that they had gained experience from undertaking the evaluation and that improvements were made on subsequent pilot evaluations. As previously mentioned one service user in particular and one of the commissioners felt they had gained personal and professional development from their role as an evaluator and taking part in the pilot.

- Three of the advocacy organisations stated that the positive experiences of advocacy (from client interviews) highlighted the benefits of advocacy and proved the advocacy service they were providing was making a positive impact on both the individual receiving advocacy as well as health and social care organisations.
5.2 Weaknesses

After each pilot evaluation feedback was gathered from evaluators and advocacy organisations by the project team with the aim of improving the process as the pilot progressed. The two main themes for improvement were related to the amount of time the advocacy organisation was required to input to the evaluation and issues relating to the reporting of the evaluation.

5.2.1 Capacity to undertake the evaluation

- The most common theme that was highlighted by the three different sets of stakeholders was that of the amount of time the project took and how onerous the self-assessment process was, particularly for smaller advocacy organisations. Many felt that the pre-visit self-assessment information could be streamlined to some extent. The amount and length of interviews the evaluators undertook was also highlighted as intense and onerous. All the advocacy organisations stated that the documentation could be condensed and comments from evaluators highlighted that preparation and project management took too long. Three of the advocacy organisations estimated the time they input to the pilot. Their responses were:
  - 4-5 full working days
  - 2-3 weeks (on and off), and
  - 145 hours.

  These are significant time inputs from advocacy organisations that are continuing to provide their day-to-day service to clients.

- Some interviewees mentioned that the pilot could be more tailored to the organisation by assessing where improvements could be made and focusing the evaluation around these rather than undertaking an assessment of all areas of the evaluation framework.

- Another suggestion included omitting assessment on aspects of the organisation which had already recently undergone assessment from other quality assurance systems. The example highlighted here was not to re-evaluate the organisation on the same issues Investors in People covers when an advocacy organisation had just undergone an assessment. This was implemented after feedback from the first evaluation.

- Another issue around capacity was that more time needed to be built into the evaluation for support for the service user evaluators.

5.2.2 Evaluation reporting

- Three of the advocacy organisations (as well as some of the evaluators) stated that the length of time taken from the evaluation visit to receiving the draft report was too long (around six months). This could be linked to the issues highlighted above on the amount of information being collected throughout the evaluation.
• Three of the evaluators stated that there needs to be more time devoted to reporting. One evaluator highlighted that perhaps five days should be spent on the reporting rather than two as stated in the project initiation document.

• Three of the advocacy organisations felt that there were too many recommendations and some of the recommendations were at a fairly basic level. Some comments included that there was little linkage between the evaluation findings and the recommendations nor the recommendations and the principles and standards for advocacy. There was no clear reporting of whether the advocacy organisation in question had met the principles and standards of advocacy.

• Three of the advocacy organisations commented that they would have liked to have had more reporting on the feedback from service users which was seen as an important element of the evaluation.

• One commissioner disagreed with the accuracy of some of the recommendations in the report and felt that there was a conflict of interest between SIAA and the advocacy organisation’s Director who sits on SIAA’s Board. It is important to point out however that SIAA’s Board of Directors were not involved in any operational aspect of the project concerned.

• Finally, a comment made by one of the project co-ordinators was that there was some inconsistency in report writing and style of the reports due to the fact each evaluation team was different with different people writing the reports.
6 Feedback on changes required if pilot continued

People were asked what changes were required if the pilot project was to be continued and whether it would be sustainable moving forward. There was some repetition from the response on weaknesses highlighted in 5.2 above; however, the following themes were identified:

- All the advocacy organisations and commissioners agreed in principle that some form of advocacy quality assurance or evaluation is necessary to monitor and maintain the standards of advocacy provision. However, all organisations stated that there needs to be an element of proportionality built into the pilot process and for the process to be streamlined and more manageable from the advocacy organisation’s perspective as well as to make the evaluation more cost effective. Some commented on the need to balance the scope of the evaluation with the size of organisation being evaluated.

- Most advocacy organisations, as well as some commissioners and some evaluators, stated that having three evaluators was perhaps a luxury and the work, if more streamlined, could be conducted by two evaluators. This would reduce the cost of the evaluations as well as reduce the work involved for advocacy organisations.

- There were a number of comments relating to the method and approach and that it could be more cost effective by undertaking telephone or Skype interviews rather than face-to-face interviews. A downside to this was mentioned by one commissioner who stated that this may detract from the quality of the process.

- A few comments related to other quality assurance systems and in particular Investors in People. If an advocacy organisation had also been through another quality assurance process then this should negate the need to go through a particular aspect of the Advocacy Quality Assurance process.

- Some of the advocacy organisations and commissioners felt that there needs to be more emphasis on capturing and reporting service user feedback.

- Improved reporting was also seen as a change required, in particular linking the principles and standards of advocacy to the practice - linking the findings from the evaluation and the recommendations to the principles and standards.

- Additional support required for service user evaluators should be built into the evaluation process in future.
7 Costs

The pilot project was funded by the Scottish Government to the sum of £63,000. In order to implement the project this funding hired two part-time project co-ordinators and a pool of sessional evaluators who undertook the majority of the evaluations. There were travel and accommodation costs associated with the evaluation visits.

The total cost of the Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot was £67,000. Start-up costs, including all training and related expenses for sessional evaluators, were approximately £12,500; the costs for the six evaluations was close to £49,000 and the review period costs are expected to be approximately £5,800. There were no administrative costs built into the budget and SIAA had to cover this within its own resources. A breakdown of costs is given below comparing the estimates in the PID to the actual costs in the pilot.

Table 2: Costs of Advocacy Quality Assurance Pilot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anticipated costs identified in Project Initiation Document</th>
<th>Actual costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start-up costs</td>
<td>£5,890</td>
<td>£12,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation costs</td>
<td>£53,600 for 8 evaluations Ave cost = £6,700</td>
<td>£48,687 for 6 evaluations Ave Cost = £8,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Period</td>
<td>£4,600</td>
<td>£5,800 (estimate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>£64,100</td>
<td>£66,987</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the evaluation costs and review period are included together, then the average cost of each evaluation is £9,081. This is around 25% higher than the original PID estimate of £7,275.
8 Timescales

The overall time taken to complete the pilot projects, from the time the evaluation was agreed to completion of the final report, ranged between seven and nine months while the average time taken was around eight months. Timescales for each pilot are highlighted in Table 3 below. There were various delays in most of the projects due to a variety of circumstances including sickness absence, jury duty, and delays in receiving feedback from some advocacy organisations and commissioners.

Table 3: Timescales taken for each pilot project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advocacy Project</th>
<th>Evaluation Agreement</th>
<th>Visit</th>
<th>Final Report</th>
<th>Approximate time taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Highland</td>
<td>8 April 2014</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
<td>Not completed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceartas (East Dunbartonshire)</td>
<td>5 August 2014</td>
<td>8-10 Sept 2014</td>
<td>17 March 2015</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Orkney</td>
<td>5 August 2014</td>
<td>6-8 Oct 2014</td>
<td>1 April 2015</td>
<td>8 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocacy Service Aberdeen</td>
<td>22 July 2014</td>
<td>25-27 Nov 2014</td>
<td>28 April 2015</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advocacy Project (North Lanarkshire)</td>
<td>1 Oct 2014</td>
<td>10-12 Nov 2014</td>
<td>28 April 2015</td>
<td>7 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Conclusions

This section highlights conclusions based on the findings of the feedback as well as a review of the purpose, objectives and outcomes based on the five pilot reports.

9.1 The pilot process

There was some confusion and a lack of understanding with two advocacy organisations and two commissioners about their involvement and the scope of the pilot. Both the advocacy organisation and commissioner should have a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities before participating in the evaluation. These should be made clear to both parties before agreeing to take part.

There was a lack of clarity around the reporting arrangements between SIAA, the project co-ordinators and the reference group and how issues of concern (such as conflict of interest, disagreements in evaluation findings, conflict of interest, disagreements in evaluation findings between evaluators and advocacy organisations and commissioners, and the quality of reporting) were addressed. It may also have been useful for the reference group to have met more often throughout the pilot as envisaged in the terms of reference.

There appear to be strengths and weaknesses to the approach of using sessional evaluators. The strengths include the experience of the team on the subject of advocacy and having a service user on the team helping with engaging the advocacy clients during the interview process. However, continuity of the work may be difficult and capacity to follow through after the visit and write up the reports to the required standard. The skill set of the evaluation team tends towards advocacy experience rather than experience of evaluation.

The consistency and quality of reporting was mixed with little emphasis put on whether the advocacy organisation met the principles and standards of advocacy. There should be clear links in the reporting between evaluation findings, recommendations and the principles and standards. This will allow both the advocacy organisation and its commissioners to determine the quality of advocacy provision.

The pilot method and approach appeared onerous and not proportionate enough to the task of evaluating the quality of the advocacy the organisations were delivering. This was particularly the case for smaller advocacy organisations as was the amount of work the advocacy organisation had to undertake during the visit process. Most of the evaluators questioned the need for the quantity of interviews and questions asked during the interviews. This all added considerable pressure to most of the advocacy organisations at a time when they were also delivering an advocacy service.

There were a number of strengths highlighted in the feedback most notably the positive feedback from service users about the advocacy service received and also the number of examples of the positive impact which advocacy has provided. There were also positive impacts on some of the evaluators in terms of personal and
professional development. The evaluation team was also viewed as very experienced in the field of advocacy. There may be merit in producing a summary report on the benefits of advocacy provision based on the feedback from service users from the five pilot projects. SIAA is in the process of doing this.

One of the reasons for SIAA to undertake the pilot was to ensure that costs were kept to a reasonable level, however, the average cost of the pilot evaluations was approximately £9,000 each. This was higher than the estimated cost of £7,275 and in line with a private consultancy rate. There is probably a question mark around the sustainability of this should the pilot be extended.

There were also concerns about the length of time to undertake the pilot evaluations with each taking, on average, around eight months.

9.2 Review of purpose, objectives and outcomes from pilot reports

The purpose, objectives and outcomes of the pilot were evaluated by reviewing the five reports on the pilot projects as well as taking consideration of the feedback from advocacy organisations, commissioners and evaluators.

9.2.1 Purpose

- to establish a pilot quality assurance project to measure the quality of advocacy provided in Scotland
- to ensure clear, transparent and cost effective use of available resources in the delivery of advocacy, and
- to identify appropriate means of delivering an advocacy quality assurance project in Scotland.

After a review of the reports it is difficult to conclude whether the pilot has achieved its aim in terms of measuring the quality of advocacy provision provided by the pilot advocacy organisations. The purpose of assessing the advocacy organisations against SIAA’s Evaluation Framework was to link the evaluation findings (and recommendations) to the Principles and Standards for Advocacy. None of the reports state whether the advocacy organisations have either met, exceeded or fall short of these standards. In other words there is no consistent measure of quality contained in the reporting.

In addition to the above there was very little in any of the reports relating to whether the advocacy organisation achieved the aim of ensuring clear, transparent and cost effective use of available resources in the delivery of advocacy.

While the pilot has attempted to identify an appropriate means of delivering an advocacy quality assurance project the pilot has only tested (and refined) one approach and it is not clear how this would compare to other approaches. While this was not the intention of the pilot it is worth considering that other approaches could prove useful. These are highlighted in section 9.3.
9.2.2 Project Objectives

- To design and test a pilot quality assurance project for advocacy in Scotland.
- To recruit and train a pool of sessional evaluators to carry out evaluations under the pilot.
- To provide and report on evidence to commissioners and participating advocacy organisations on the quality of advocacy practice they currently have in place.

The first objective was met to a certain degree although the evaluations did not specifically measure against a set of quality measures and only one model was tested.

The second objective of establishing a pool of sessional evaluators was met.

The third objective has been achieved to some extent but again the quality of advocacy practice has not been specifically measured and reported on to both advocacy organisations and commissioners.

9.2.3 Desired outcomes

- Ensure that people who use advocacy services have confidence in the advocacy providers and experience consistent good quality advocacy.
- Produce reports for each commissioner and participating advocacy organisation with recommendations and action plans where appropriate.
- Identify areas for improvement and support for organisations to address these.

In terms of achieving the above stated outcomes, it would be difficult to ascertain whether the first has been achieved across all the pilot advocacy organisations. While each of the reports highlights some form of confidence by service users in the advocacy providers this is not explicitly reported and consistency on the quality is questioned in one of the reports. There were also comments from advocacy organisations that there was not enough reporting on advocacy client feedback.

The second outcome was achieved in terms of reports produced (with the exception of one of the pilots) but the quality and consistency of reporting was questioned by a number of stakeholders. An action plan was produced in one of the reports.

Areas for improvement were identified in the recommendations of the reporting and, as mentioned in section 4.3, four of the organisations (at the time of writing in August 2015) have developed action plans following up on the recommendations from the reports.

9.3 Further comments

As highlighted in sections 5 and 6 there were strengths and weaknesses in this advocacy quality assurance pilot as well as suggestions for improvement. This is to be expected since it is a pilot exercise with a view to learn how best to implement an advocacy quality assurance model.
It is worth reiterating that all the advocacy organisations and commissioners agreed in principle that some form of advocacy quality assurance is necessary to monitor and maintain the standards of advocacy provision. However, all organisations stated that the process needs to be streamlined and an element of proportionality built into the project.

Should the pilot be rolled out further then consideration should be given on how to produce a more proportionate model while retaining the benefits of the approach and addressing the weaknesses. Consideration should be given to the following.

- Establishment of a programme board\(^5\) arrangement which would involve SIAA more directly. This would give SIAA a stronger role in addressing any concerns raised by the quality assurance project while staying at a certain arms length on a project by project basis.

- Whether all policies and procedures need to be reviewed or a random sample of policies can be reviewed (as is the case for selecting service users to interview). If evaluators are concerned about particular policies or procedures during the evaluation visit then they can also ask to review those particular policies in addition to the self-assessment sample.

- Reducing the number of interviews and questions asked during the interviews.

- Focusing on particular areas of the advocacy service rather than all of it. This could be done by mutual agreement between the advocacy organisation and the commissioner.

The above suggestions would reduce the amount of information required which would also reduce the time taken to conduct the evaluation as well as reduce the costs. This would, in addition, mean less information for evaluators to collect and analyse and therefore make reporting easier. This could help to develop a more sustainable approach to evaluating the quality of advocacy in future.

Consideration could also be given as to how the learning from individual evaluations might be aggregated nationally, in order to facilitate the sharing of good practice. This could be of value to advocacy organisations, commissioners and ultimately to people who are using advocacy services and SIAA is progressing with this.

Appendix 1 The Principles and Standards for Independent Advocacy

Principle 1: Independent advocacy puts the people who use it first

Standard 1.1 Independent advocacy is directed by the needs, interests, views and wishes of the people who use it
Standard 1.2 Independent advocacy helps people to have control over their lives and to be fully involved in decisions which affect them
Standard 1.3 Independent advocacy tries to make sure that people’s rights are protected
Standard 1.4 Independent advocacy values the people who use it and always treats people with dignity and respect

Principle 2: Independent advocacy is accountable

Standard 2.1 Independent advocacy is accountable to the people who use it
Standard 2.2 Independent advocacy is accountable under the law
Standard 2.3 Independent advocacy is effectively managed

Principle 3: Independent advocacy is as free as it can be from conflicts of interest

Standard 3.1 Independent advocacy cannot be controlled by a service provider
Standard 3.2 Independent advocacy should be provided by an organisation whose sole role is independent advocacy or whose other tasks either complement or do not conflict with, the provision of independent advocacy.
Standard 3.3 Independent advocacy looks out for and minimises conflicts of interest

Principle 4: Independent advocacy is accessible

Standard 4.1 Independent advocacy reaches out to the widest possible range of people, regardless of ability or life circumstances
Appendix 2  Example of list of evidence submitted as part of the self-assessment and other key evidence viewed by the evaluation team

Reviewed by all evaluation team members

- Evaluation agreement
- Self-assessment form
- Service Level Agreements/contracts
- ASA Biennial Report 2008 – 2010
- PFPI handout
- Evaluation of Children & Young People’s service; transcripts of interviews with clients
- Statistics April 2013 – March 2014
- Mission/aims/objectives from page 1 of Strategic Plan and from Clause 3.1 of Memorandum of Association
- Organisational chart
- Complaints procedure
- Code of confidentiality
- Publicity info
- Referrer’s evaluation forms
- February 14 referrers

Reviewed by individual team members (as allocated by Evaluation Team Leader)

Section 1  The Advocacy Relationship and Impact

- Referral procedure
- Prioritisation procedure
- Record keeping
- Referral form
- Lone working
- Guidelines for clients
- Non-directed advocacy guidelines

Section 2  Recruitment, Training and Support of Advocates and other staff (paid and unpaid)

- Recruitment and selection
- Staff support policy
- New volunteer training pack
- Training records
Section 3 Managing the organisation

- Adults at Risk policy
- Child Protection policy
- Data Protection policy
- Equal Opportunities policy
- ASA Memorandum of Association
- ASA Articles of Association
- Health & Safety policy
- Strategic plan 2012–15
- Board minutes
- Reports to Board
- Strategic plan
- Biographies of two Board members

Managing staff (paid and unpaid)

- Lone working
- Professional conduct
- Grievance procedure
- Disciplinary procedure
- Volunteer policy
- Volunteer code of practice
- Job descriptions/person specs for some staff
- Training records for paid staff

Section 4 External Relationships, Independence and Conflicts of Interest

- Questionnaires from a number of referrers

Section 5 Funding and Commissioning

- Accounts 12/13
- Accounts 13/14
- Reports to funders

Additional evidence reviewed by evaluation team member(s) during or after the visit

- Information re Complaint made in early 2014 (identifying details redacted)
- Report of Monitoring visit by Aberdeen City Council 2013
- Notes of Volunteer Support Meetings 2013/14
- Schedule of internal Policies and Procedures, including review dates
- Policy on use of Company email and the internet
- Health & Safety Policy Risk Assessment procedure
- Additional job descriptions/person specifications
- Grampian Independent Advocacy plan
- Biographies of two Board members – more have been made available since the visit
- Reference form used for prospective Director
- ‘Directors and Confidentiality’ declaration form for signature by Directors.
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