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This document was produced as a working document to enable the independent advocacy sector to consider how it might choose to address certain strategic priorities in the future. The document, and the work underpinning it, were funded by contributions from the advocacy sector.

This document is not intended as a blueprint or set of recommendations, but rather as a focus for reflections on the views currently being expressed within the sector. Therefore this document is not intended or expected to be shared widely beyond advocacy organisations.

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Executive Summary

This report describes a project to scope out views and options about a national voice for the advocacy sector in England and Wales.

In 2014 the Mental Health Foundation (incorporating the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities) was commissioned by a group of advocacy provider organisations to undertake the project and Martin Coyle was employed as a consultant to do the work. The scoping exercise included an online survey and interviews with members of the sector. Findings were based on 159 respondents to the survey and 20 telephone interviews.

There is a strong sense that the advocacy sector does want some mechanism for a stronger voice. There is general agreement that this voice needs to facilitate better understanding and awareness of advocacy, that it needs to enable greater engagement with policy makers and that it needs to have some means of working with or relating to commissioners of advocacy services.

There is a concern within the sector that any such mechanism should not be hosted within a large advocacy provider, and a desire to have some degree of ownership or control by members. However, there is also a feeling of urgency that something needs to be created quickly to respond to a rapidly changing policy environment (including the implications of the Care Bill) if the advocacy sector is to be able to exert more control over its own future. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be an existing mechanism which could be used to develop this function as it would require dedicated time and resources.

Therefore, it would seem appropriate to consult the sector on what mechanism would best suit its immediate needs and where such a mechanism could be housed. This would allow an initial response to the current environment, establish a baseline presence and provide a mechanism for more detailed and slower development of long term development goals. Three options are proposed for both the nature/location of a voice for advocacy and for the sources from which to seek funding.

Organisational model	Funding options
A stand alone organisation	Funded solely by the sector only
A purchased function	Seeking match funding for sector contribution
Project hosted by an organisation that does not provide advocacy services	Seeking significant external funding

A final set of consultation questions are proposed – please respond to these by and a final event will be held in central London on **Thursday 26th June 2014**.

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Mental Health Foundation 2014

Introduction

The advocacy sector in health and social care has grown significantly over the last 25 years. Advocates work in a diverse range of settings, for a wide variety of advocacy organisations (some of which are solely advocacy providers, others of which may also provide care and support services), providing advocacy to various different groups including people with mental health problems, learning disabilities, and dementia. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 placed advocacy on a statutory footing for the first time and this was followed soon after by the reform of the Mental Health Act 1983, which also included a statutory right to advocacy. The Care Bill that is currently going through Parliament extends a statutory right to advocacy even further. Meanwhile, despite the impact of cuts in public spending, non-statutory advocacy is still being provided in many places.

Up to 2012 Action for Advocacy provided a national voice and development function to promote the role of advocacy and support advocacy providers. The closure of Action for Advocacy in 2012 has led to a perceived gap in the advocacy sector at a time that the sector is undergoing a period of rapid and dramatic changes. Sources of funding are altering, with funding from charitable sources being significantly reduced. Meanwhile, funding pressures on local authorities are bearing down on advocacy provision.

Issues of fundamental importance to the advocacy sector are currently being discussed at a government level without any representation from a sector wide organisation. There is no central point of information for advocacy groups and policy makers to use for consultation purposes. There is also no formal or comprehensive mechanism through which the sector can talk internally, and a means by which the sector can come together on issues that affect the people they support. No one is currently bringing together data from across the advocacy sector in a way that could demonstrate the work of the sector, inform policies that affect those who are supported by advocacy or simply provide information to people seeking advocacy support. In short, the sector's ability to influence its own future is weak.

To this end, a number of interested parties from across England and Wales attended a meeting in London in October 2013 to discuss possible ways of addressing the problem. Participants of that meeting agreed on the need for some organisational response to strengthen the voice of advocacy. It was agreed that further work was required to explore how an effective collective voice could be developed for the advocacy sector, including the priorities, model, financing, staffing, etc. for this, and each of the organisations present agreed to pledge funds to carry this work out. Following a call for expressions of interest, The Mental Health Foundation (incorporating the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities) was asked to undertake a scoping exercise.

This report sets out the findings of that exercise, sets out potential models which may be used to address the challenges identified, and lists the questions which the sector can use to define the desired way forward at a meeting in June 2014.

Methodology

An online survey was developed, asking key questions relating to a voice for advocacy, and this was hosted by the Mental Health Foundation survey software. Links to the survey were distributed via a mailing list and disseminated through social media. This resulted in completion by 161 respondents, 159 of which could be analysed. Following initial analysis, the survey was followed up by interviews with 20 respondents).

Interviewees came from the advocacy sector and were selected to represent a range of size of providers, and a range of client groups. The focus of the interview section was to clarify issues arising from the survey data. Interviews were conducted in an informal manner, using a conversational style to promote the most natural and unaffected responses. However, all discussions included a focus on the following questions:

1. How urgent is it to develop a voice for advocacy?
2. What is the minimum useful function that a voice for advocacy would perform?
3. Where might a voice for advocacy sit organisationally?
4. How would you define the primary role of a voice for advocacy?

The findings and development options are set out below, and these sit within the context of realistic development options, the current financial situation and the perceived willingness of advocacy organisations to contribute towards developing a voice for advocacy.

Online Survey - Findings

What does the sector think is vital?

The survey listed 10 roles which a voice for advocacy function might take on and asked respondents to rate each as either vital, important, useful or not important. All 10 roles were said to be either vital or important by over 70% of respondents (figures are shown below.)

Role	Vital	Important	Combined
Influencing commissioning	62%	35%	97%
Dialogue between policy makers and organisations	51%	40%	91%
Lobbying influencers	59%	29%	88%
Campaign against bad commissioning	53%	35%	88%
Campaigning for advocacy organisations	56%	31%	87%
Maintenance of standards and code of practice	74%	20%	84%
Campaign on advocacy issues	57%	27%	84%
Collating data from the sector	39%	38%	77%
Networking function; link advocacy providers together	29%	44%	73%
Engagement with service user organisations	34%	38%	72%

It is important to note that it would be virtually impossible for an organisation to fulfil all of these roles, particularly on limited resources. The full range of these roles is greater than the remit or achievements of Action for Advocacy, and therefore it is important to identify the most urgent and valued roles desired.

The role that scores highest on the rating “Vital” is the maintenance of standards and the Code of Practice for Advocates. This role will be partly continued by NDTi, who have now taken over the running of the Quality Performance Mark (QPM), although any voice for advocacy project would need to have good relationships with the holder of QPM.

The roles seen as most important when combining ratings “Vital” and “Important” are the relationship with commissioners and policy makers. In fact, the top 5 responses could be grouped together under this broader heading. This focus was also reflected in interviews (see later section), and do seem to form the core, consensus of desired role for a voice for advocacy.

It is slightly surprising to see that engagement with service user organisations comes out as the lowest priority despite a need for people who may benefit from advocacy services to have greater involvement in the strategic aspects of their design, funding and delivery. This may reflect the degree of urgency created by changes to funding or policy. Responses to a later question on links with stakeholders shows strong support for links with self advocacy organisations and with centres for independent living, so there is not an unwillingness to engage in dialogue, however the advocacy sector may need to review and strengthen its relationship to service user or expert groups at a national and strategic level if it is to maximise its function in making voice and control a reality in the longer term.

A free text question was also available for people to set out other roles that might be necessary for a voice for advocacy to develop. Grouping these responses into the key themes expressed (and allowing one response to fall into more than one theme) showed the following ranking of roles that a voice for advocacy might undertake:

Roles	Frequency
Widening access to advocacy	10
Providing resources for advocacy providers	9
Promoting advocacy	7
Supporting standards	7
Supporting a full spectrum of advocacy (self/peer/paid/volunteer...)	6
Training	6
Having an overview of / influence on monitoring	5
Influencing policy	4
Providing access to funding	3
Working with commissioners	3
Networking between advocacy providers /advocates	3
Supporting / informing research about advocacy	3
An advocacy finder function	2

The issue of widening access to advocacy relates both to gaining more resources for advocacy provision and ensuring that advocacy is accessible to more people. The role of supporting a full spectrum of advocacy provision comes from the view that there is a real danger that something could be lost from the sector if tightly case managed, issue-based advocacy is the only model supported. It also relates to the need to make sure that there is some relationship between independent advocacy and self/group advocacy. It also relates to the need to ensure there is information easily accessible to people seeking advocacy support.

This echoed some of the successes for advocacy that have been made possible through lobbying activities relating to the Care Bill by members of the Care & Support Alliance. The other significant response stated a concern with the term a 'voice for advocacy', as “

“it sounds like the primary conversation could be about advocating for services where a voice is needed is for those being advocated for”.

This again raises the question of how the sector relates to those who use advocacy services at a strategic level, and what it is doing to raise specific issues which arise repeatedly within advocacy casework. These are issues which the sector should keep in mind if it develops a voice for advocacy function.

What relationship would you imagine advocacy providers having with such a body?

The responses to this question broke down as follows;

	subscribers receiving a service	subscribers defining the work	subscribers contributing to the work	Subscribers collaborating
Preferred	23%	31%	30%	45%
Acceptable	48%	42%	49%	36%
Unacceptable	11%	8%	3%	3%
Blank	18%	19%	18%	16%

Of the types of subscription models defined, the preference appeared to be for a model where members by subscription contribute to or collaborate on the work of the body, only 3% of respondents stating that such a model would be unacceptable in each case. However this sits slightly ill at ease with responses to the results of “What would respondents be willing to contribute?” which are given in the table below.

Professional intelligence	Finances	Donations In kind	Topline data	case studies + links	Time to develop the body	external contacts
76%	13%	48%	35%	60%	32%	28%

Here, there is a disparity between the desired functions of a voice for advocacy, the expressed willingness to contribute or collaborate to make these functions possible and the resources that would be contributed to make the functions possible.

There is an understandable reticence about committing resources to anything that is in any way vague, and indeed some of the free text responses highlighted the problem of deciding whether something might be worth paying for before it exists and before its precise function is known. Interviews suggest that it is this multiplicity of variables that make it difficult for organisations to decide what they might commit to the project. However it is clear that in straitened financial circumstances organisations will be looking to commit relatively small amounts and to get a tangible benefit for this.

However, it should be noted that a collection of advocacy providers were willing to underwrite the funding of this project, raising £8,000 from 30 organisations. This speaks of a tangible commitment from the sector which might be built on. It suggests that a budget for a voice for advocacy function could be accessed, although this budget is likely to be small (at least to begin with). Therefore, it may be more worthwhile to look in more detail at the capacities which would be necessary to perform the desired functions; namely dissemination, communication and influencing routes, links to frontline groups, professional intelligence and some form of web presence.

With which external stakeholders should there be a relationship?

In response to the above question, the survey showed the following results:

Stakeholder	
National service user groups	82%
Care Quality Commission	80%
Self advocacy organisations	79%
Health organisations (e.g. Healthwatch, PALS, NHS Confederation)	78%
Advocacy bodies in other sectors	76%
Department of Health	73%
Association of Directors of Adult Social Services	65%
Ministry of Justice	62%
Alliances with shared interests (e.g. Care & Support Alliance)	59%
National, non-advocacy providing charities	51%
Centres for Independent Living	51%
Others	13%

It is heartening to see that links to national service user organisations rate highest in the priorities of respondents, with links to self advocacy groups also scoring highly.

Links to local and national health bodies score highly, something which echoes past involvement of the advocacy sector. However, the call for better links with CQC is slightly different. Given the recent support of CQC for advocacy, and its potential to highlight failings in access to or commissioning of advocacy, and its wider regulatory function, this link is highly worth further development.

It is interesting that links to ADASS rate considerably lower than links to health organisations, despite the significant role that local authorities play in the commissioning of advocacy services. The rating of 65% is only 3% higher than the rating of desire for links with the Ministry of Justice, something which would be a relatively new direction for the advocacy sector to consider. Links to campaigning alliances also rank close to this, something which might have been expected to be higher given the role of the Care and Support Alliance in lobbying for the inclusion of advocacy within the Care Bill, and its potential to strengthen the lobbying and influencing capability of any voice for advocacy.

Of those respondents who indicated other stakeholders with whom links could be developed, the most common responses related to better links to the children's sector (including advocacy services who work with children and young people), the Department for Work and Pensions and academic institutions. Also notable was the call for links to relevant Welsh bodies such as the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and Welsh Government.

Where should a 'voice for advocacy' project be housed?

The raw data for the answers for this question was distributed as set out below (% have been rounded up/down from the nearest decimal point so totals may not always be 100).

	Desired	Preferred	Possible	Disliked	Unacceptable
Hosted project of a non advocacy provider charity	11%	8%	42%	28%	11%
Hosted project of an advocacy provider charity	22%	21%	28%	17%	12%
Hosted project of a social enterprise	7%	15%	49%	26%	3%
Hosted project of a statutory body	5%	8%	24%	28%	34%
Separate organisation governed by members	35%	28%	25%	9%	2%
Separate organisation developed by shareholders	12%	14%	39%	25%	11%
Part of a wider alliance of advocacy organisations	35%	30%	26%	7%	1%
Fee charging body to which you subscribe	14%	19%	46%	15%	7%

The data gives a mixed view of where a voice for advocacy might be housed, and therefore additional analysis was undertaken to try to provide greater clarity. It was decided to collapse down the ratings of these options as 'ok' (combining 'desired', 'preferred' and 'possible') or 'not ok' (combining 'disliked' and 'unacceptable'). The results for all respondents are given below.

All respondents condensed	OK	Not OK
Part of a wider alliance of advocacy organisations	91%	8%
Separate organisation governed by members	88%	11%
Fee charging body to which you subscribe	78%	22%
Hosted project of an advocacy provider charity	71%	29%
Hosted project of a social enterprise	71%	29%
Separate organisation developed by shareholders	65%	35%
Hosted project of a non advocacy provider charity	61%	39%
Hosted project of a statutory body	38%	63%

In addition, as a significant amount of funding may need to come from the advocacy sector itself, it is worth clarifying the preferred option of the advocacy provider organisations that responded to the survey. Addressing the figures in that way leads to the following result:

Respondents from advocacy providers in an organisational capacity	Ok	Not OK
Separate organisation governed by members	90%	10%
Fee charging body to which you subscribe	89%	11%
Part of a wider alliance of advocacy organisations	87%	13%
Hosted project of a social enterprise	71%	29%
Separate organisation developed by shareholders	65%	35%
Hosted project of an advocacy provider charity	63%	38%
Hosted project of a non advocacy provider charity	59%	41%
Hosted project of a statutory body	39%	61%

At the initial Voice for Advocacy meeting (in October 2013) significant numbers of advocacy providers said they would not financially support a model based on an advocacy provider hosting the project, primarily because of concerns about governance and fairly representing the sector. This initial view was borne out by interview data.

The remaining options are for a voice for advocacy to be:

1. an organisation governed by members or shareholders;
2. a fee charging body;
3. part of a wider alliance.

The first option is only really practicable if people believe that there is no urgency in creating the voice for advocacy vehicle as this would take some time to establish but this does not reflect the data from interviews. The second option creates a mechanism for fast action without resolving the final question of the placement of that body. The third option is somewhat nebulous and, unless it held some tangible input or resource, would leave the representation and linking of advocacy providers to those outside the sector.

Interview data

Interviews were conducted with 20 respondents to explore in more depth the issues that arose from the survey data. Those interviewed were given a brief, verbal summary of the findings of the survey and were invited to give their view of the findings and what this might mean for the development of a voice for advocacy. Within this discussion, there was a focus on discovering data relating to the following questions;

1. How urgent is it to develop a voice for advocacy?
2. What is the minimum useful function that a voice for advocacy would perform?
3. Where might a voice for advocacy sit organisationally?
4. How would you define the primary role of a voice for advocacy?

Results relating to these questions, and some additional views from providers are set out below.

Urgency

There was a general consensus that the absence of a national sector-wide body was a problem for the sector, and that this needed to be addressed relatively quickly. The degree of perceived urgency were as follows;

Urgency	
High	14 respondents (70%)
Medium	6 respondents (30%)
Low	0

Some respondents identified the need for some degree of urgency in relation to the amount of time since Action for Advocacy went out of operation, usually setting this next to a feeling of being disconnected and/or unsupported in the sector.

However, the strongest responses to this question came from respondents whose reply related to policy changes currently in process. One respondent, having begun discussing the Care Bill and some changes in commissioning stated,

“It feels like a scary time to be without a body like this. Who are the government going to be speaking to about advocacy?”

Another respondent flagged up the 2015 general election as a focus for action, saying,

“Every single policy that relates to advocacy may be up for review in the next 12 to 18 months. We need to have some voice in those discussions”.

Another interviewee said that the urgency was also underpinned by a feeling of not being sure what was happening at a strategic level,

“I keep hearing whisperings about a national framework for advocacy, but I don’t know who is being consulted about this or even if its happening. I’m too busy with the day to day delivery of advocacy to find out, and there isn’t anyone really to ask.”

For some respondents this was an issue in and of itself, with one respondent stating that

“It’s embarrassing that there’s no-one to whom we can direct other people; no other sector would be without some organisation of that kind”.

Role and minimum function

Having established that there is a degree of urgency about the development of a voice for advocacy, respondents were clear that they wanted this to happen for two main reasons; the first being to support policy consultation and engagement, the second being to enable some networking facility within the advocacy sector.

One interviewee did state that they thought that a voice for advocacy should not start from the point of view of policy but rather of resources, citing the recent work of the Older People’s Advocacy Alliance (OPAAL) as an effective and innovative model here.

Sitting alongside both of these functions was a belief that there needed to be a published and accessible list of advocacy services that support the voice for advocacy function. As one respondent put it,

“You need to have a list of members to show your credibility and your mandate; to show why you should be a point of contact for consultations.”

Other interviewees stated that a list of organisations that are members/subscribers to the voice for advocacy project could start to replace the advocacy finder function of the Action for Advocacy website, enabling individuals and advocacy providers to find relevant contacts in different parts of the country. One interviewee put it like this;

“The advocacy finder is the key. That takes the list of organisations to consult and makes it public so that it can give an immediate benefit. It would make [the voice for advocacy project] visible and credible, and place it at the centre of a web of connections.”

Whether externalised in the form of a website or not, the heart of all functions of any voice for advocacy project is a database of advocacy organisations and their contact details, without which it would be difficult for an organisation to claim to represent or link to the sector, or for individuals to find advocacy support.

Making this accessible, and tying the listing to a commitment to work to certain standards and principles could make the project more credible to influencers or policy makers as a consultation portal, relevant for people looking for advocacy, and provide some public statement about the nature, principles and standards of independent advocacy. Of the 20 people interviewed, 11 said that this function was needed and the other 9 said it could be useful.

Where might a voice for advocacy sit?

As noted above, the three most popular options for the siting of a voice for advocacy from the online survey were;

1. as part of a wider alliance
2. a fee charging body
3. an organisation governed by members

Discussions in interviews brought this more sharply into relief. The idea of this function sitting as a part of a wider alliance was not popular. It seemed merely to place the problem of the sector’s representation outside of the sector, and no credible means of maintaining the function in that way were provided.

The idea of an organisation governed by members was better received, but a number of interviewees pointed out the time lag that this would create. One response encapsulated many of the views put forward in this area of discussion;

“It’s a nice idea, but who is actually going to put in the time and resources to make it happen? Unless it’s someone’s responsibility to drive that, to consult on it and bring people together, it just won’t happen.”

Far more popular was the idea of starting a voice for advocacy as a project with the aim of strengthening this either through embedding it permanently in another organisation or by using

some time in the initial period to develop a steering group that might take on a more formal governance role.

Some interviewees could see this role being taken on as a paid function of an organisation or as a purchased piece of work from a consultant. In that light they said,

“If you do it like that the accountability is simple, if things don’t get done they don’t get paid for”.

However, others felt that such an arrangement might appear too fragile and lacking in resilience. As one person said whilst talking about their preference for a voice for advocacy to be housed within an established organisation,

“After the closure of Action for Advocacy there might only be one chance to get this right again before people think that it can’t work. People are going to want to have confidence that this will work, that it will last.”

Within these conversations a number of organisations were named as potential hosts. No-one interviewed thought that it would be acceptable for an organisation that provides advocacy to host the project. The organisations most frequently mentioned as potential hosts were the Mental Health Foundation (which incorporates the Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities), British Institute of Human Rights, OPAAL, British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) and the National Survivor User Network. Some respondents also suggested NDTi, but this option has already been ruled out by that organisation (see below).

Additional considerations

Who might be interested in this work outside the sector?

An ability to find, contact and engage with the advocacy sector would be of advantage to a variety of government departments, professional organisations, funders and policy makers. Better use of advocacy data could be of interest not only to health and social care providers, but also to campaigners, regulators and charitable funders with a focus on social justice. Informal discussion with one voluntary sector funder indicated interest in this strategic aspect of a voice for advocacy issues.

In addition, a better means for ensuring a co-production approach to advocacy at a strategic level is increasingly gaining ground. As well as support from over 70% of respondents to ensure better links to service user/survivor/expert groups, there could be interest from external sources to fund this aspect of a voice for advocacy; allowing a coherent means of engagement at the strategic and developmental levels.

Could the voice for advocacy function sit alongside the Quality Performance Mark?

Many respondents talked of the need for the voice for advocacy to relate to quality standards and the code for practice for advocates. The National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) have completed their review of the QPM and will be delivering the QPM henceforth. However, following

discussions on the matter, NDTi have indicated that they will be focusing purely on the provision of QPM rather than having any wider involvement in the advocacy sector. It has been recognised that some of the desired roles of a voice for advocacy will require an effective working relationship with the holder of the QPM, particularly the way in which the sector can talk to commissioners about quality.

Timelines

It will not be possible for any organisation to go from a standing start to meeting all the desired outcomes of a voice for advocacy; in fact those desired outcomes are greater than the tasks that Action for Advocacy was able to achieve. Therefore, the sector needs to prioritise what is most essential, what is most urgent, and what is most affordable. Within this discussion the sector must consider whether there needs to be some form of voice for advocacy within the next 6-12 months, or whether it might be preferable to wait longer with the aim of developing a match funding proposal involving fundraising from external sources combined with member contributions.

Structural Models – Pros and Cons

Stand alone organisation

The core functions of the voice for advocacy could be provided as a stand alone organisation; albeit one that would be initially operating on minimal resources and which could be very fragile financially. Such an organisation would require a clear purpose and mission, a strong governance structure, an engaged membership and the ability to collect and utilise resources effectively, efficiently and transparently. This would require a new organisation to be established, with the associated governance, management and administrative facilities needing to be established before any work could properly commence. Individuals willing to take on this governance role for a new organisation would need to be established if this were to be a viable option.

Requirements

- Development of a legal entity; social enterprise or charity
- Individuals willing to take on development and governance functions
- Support of a significant proportion of the advocacy sector
- Ability to employ staff or contract some paid input

Advantages

- A clear identity
- Defined and limited aims and objectives
- Knowledge that this organisation exists independently and thus will not allow its mission to be compromised
- Sector "buy-in"
- Could represent the sector in established alliances.

Disadvantages

- Mechanism for recruiting, consulting and establishing the framework falls to key individuals - who is willing and able to donate time to this enterprise?
- Potential delay in becoming operational, unhelpful if there is a perceived need for more rapid action
- Potential fragility - will the sector buy in to something that could appear less than robust? What is the cost to the sector if such an enterprise should fail?

Costs

This option appears low cost initially. However, the establishment of an operating base, constitutional development, and supporting trustee expenses would begin accruing before the organisation would be able to collect any money. There would need to be some paid time for developing a web presence, developing a searchable list of advocacy providers, producing email updates and responding to queries. This could be achieved through a series of pieces of consultancy managed by the trustees, or by recruitment of a worker on minimal hours to keep the process ticking over and on track.

Timescales

It is difficult to envisage the creation of a new entity happening in less than 6 months. How quickly it would then be able to deliver on its functions is dependent on the level of resources it can utilise, and the direction of those resources to achieving clearly stated goals.

A purchased function

Alternatively, these functions could be delivered by an organisation and purchased by the sector. Such a model may not offer the level of certainty and stability that would best suit the aims which were outlined by survey respondents.

Requirements

- A set of individuals willing to contribute time to scoping, setting and tendering out the required work
- A mechanism for selecting those individuals and holding them to account
- An organisation willing and able to collect, distribute and monitor financial resources
- An organisation willing and able to deliver the work programme as agreed and at the required price

Advantages

This model would not require the creation of a new legal entity. It could be done quickly and would not necessitate long term commitment from members or individuals on the steering group. The notion of the sector coming together to identify and pay for the functions it requires might facilitate a greater level of networking than currently exists.

Disadvantages

One organisation would have to be responsible for the maintenance of some membership function if the identification of work and resources were to be delivered smoothly. Member organisations may well be competitors, and this could present a barrier to maintaining an effective membership register.

This model might be said to relocate or disguise governance issues. Such a lack of transparency may be undesirable. The networking aspect of this model may incur costs which are difficult to maintain, and any shortfall in engagement from the sector could fundamentally undermine the enterprise. Such a model may not offer the level of stability that would be requested by some survey respondents. Furthermore, as previously indicated, there would be concerns from the sector if this function was purchased from an advocacy provider but being hosted by a non-advocacy provider was also one of the less popular suggestions in the survey. Although the organisation might be part of established alliances it might also be difficult for the organisation to represent both its own interests and the interests of the sector in any alliance work it was involved with.

There is an issue of size of advocacy organisations which needs to be addressed. The majority of funding for any projects is likely to come from larger organisations in this model. This poses the question of whether smaller organisations would see a benefit in collaborating, as their individual purchasing power is relatively small. This difference of scale and input, unmediated by a more formal membership system, might fracture rather than uniting organisations in their potential membership.

Costs

Effectively, the initial costs for this model are solely those the internal costs of time and resources incurred by members (particularly those belonging to any steering group). Beyond that, costs are defined by what members are willing to contribute to specific pieces of work. However, the costs of identifying, contracting for and monitoring work must fall somewhere.

Timescales

This model could happen as soon as some organisations came together and decided to combine resources for a shared goal. It does not require all functions to develop simultaneously. However, the scale of work that could be undertaken initially may well be quite limited.

A hosted project

It could be possible to have a voice for advocacy housed and maintained by an organisation that does not provide advocacy services. This could begin with a database of advocacy organisations linked to a web presence and regular news / policy updates going to member organisations. It would create a point through which people interested in advocacy (whether commissioners, policy makers or service user groups) could contact a large proportion of the sector. Such an organisation would already have in place governance arrangements, employment/contracting abilities and administrative resources. After an initial development phase, this could be further developed by the hosting organisation or floated free to independent status should further resources be forthcoming.

Requirements

- A willing and trusted host, able to demonstrate financial sustainability
- A means of engaging with the sector to identify and be accountable for its work
- An understanding of and commitment to independent advocacy

Advantages

Hosting the function within an established organisation would allow the short term focus of the project to be clearly on the delivery of functions rather than the development of policies and governance frameworks. A perceived level of stability could inspire confidence from within the sector and, potentially, from funders beyond the sector. A distinct, hosted project could also ensure that the sector's interests were represented in any relevant alliances that the host organisation was a member of.

Consideration could also be given to building into the project a long term plan for it to explore opportunities to 'float free' from the host organisation and establish itself as a stand alone body, representing the sector.

Disadvantages

There is always a risk that the advocacy message and focus could get lost in a wider organisation, particularly if the challenging nature of independent advocacy were seen to conflict with or threaten other aspects of that organisation's business. To mitigate this any organisation would need to have aims and objectives which are clearly congruent with independent advocacy and have a commitment to ongoing engagement with the sector; effectively putting a premium on the membership aspect of delivering the voice for advocacy functions.

Conversely, organisational size could present a barrier to effectively delivering the voice for advocacy function. One option for avoiding dilution of rights-based messages of advocacy would be to place a voice for advocacy as a project or function of another rights-based organisation.

Being hosted by a non-advocacy provider was also one of the less popular suggestions in the survey.

Timescales

Should it be invited to take on the voice for advocacy function, an existing organisation could begin development work very swiftly, although to deliver on the substantive roles identified would still require additional funding, either from the sector or from an external source (unless the host organisations could contribute its own funding).

Funding models

No external funding

Using this model funding would come only from the advocacy sector via contributions, subscriptions or some other fee charging model. The limits of this funding (a useful working figure would be a budget of £15,000) would allow mainly sector-facing activity. Linking to commissioners and policy makers would need to be via a fairly rudimentary distribution list, potentially with some resources developed to provide a limited guidance function for commissioners and individuals seeking advocacy support. Some responses to external questions would be possible. This model would most likely require a part time member of staff in a host organisation/ or an independent consultant employed to do this work

Match funding

It might be possible to match the funding contributions from the sector with funding from an external source. This would boost the ability of a voice for advocacy to deliver a presence without requiring an external funder to take all the risk of funding such a body. It would also allow a voice for advocacy to show a resilient (if somewhat slim) central function should other funding dry up. This would require greater time to establish than a subscription-based model, however it might be possible to establish a minimal function using no external funding with an aim to developing this into a matched funding model. Getting to a full match funding position would effectively double the impact of funding from advocacy services. It is likely that a host organisation would be needed to secure match funding for this project in the short/medium term, and some level of resource would need to be devoted to identifying and securing match funding.

Significant external funding

It is possible to envisage a bid to an external funder for the development and maintenance of a sector wide organisation, and such funding would need to be at a significant scale. However, to be credible this bid would need to come from an existing organisation with a strong track record of managing and developing similar projects. Such funding might lead to a greater initial capacity for the organisation, though the date from which the organisation could start operating would be out of the control of the sector. There is also a risk with this model that a lack of core resources coming from the sector would always leave it at risk of changes in funding priorities.

Consultation questions

The next steps in deciding the future shape of a voice for advocacy will be taken at a meeting in central London on **Thursday 26th June 2014**. To bring focus to this meeting we want your feedback on the questions given below (all responses will only be shared with others anonymously). An online survey has been set up to collect your responses. The survey will close on 5th June and a summary of responses will be circulated to inform the meeting. [go straight to survey](#)

The meeting will run from 12 to 3pm to make it as easy as possible for people from outside London to attend, and a light lunch will be provided. Please indicate whether someone from your organisation would wish to attend.

- 1 How urgently must a voice for advocacy be able to demonstrate some form of presence?
 - As soon as possible - operating within 6 months
 - A delay is acceptable - operating within 12 months
 - A moderate delay is acceptable - operating within 12-18 months
 - Other timescale (please state)

- 2 In the short term, should the financial term model for a voice for advocacy rest on resources solely from within the advocacy sector?
 - No – this would not work. It requires external funding.
 - Only in the short term
 - Matched funding should be sought before work begins
 - The long term model should be for all financing to come solely from the advocacy sector
 - Other options (please state)

- 3 Where should a voice for advocacy operate from in the short/medium term?
 - A new organisation which would need to be developed
 - A function purchased from an organisation or consultant
 - A project to be hosted by an existing organisation which may become independent in the future
 - Other options (please state)

- 4 Would your organisation be willing to be a paid subscriber / financial supporter of a voice for advocacy? (with level of contribution dependent on number of advocates)
 - No
 - Yes – (please indicate likely annual financial contribution)

- 5 Would you be willing and able to contribute time as a member of a steering / advisory / governance group of a voice for advocacy?
 - Yes
 - Possibly
 - No