

[REDACTED]
Assistant Clerk
Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Sent by email:
[REDACTED]

Jonathan Senker
Chief Executive
c/o Sayer Vincent
Invicta House
108-114 Golden Lane
London
EC1Y 0TL

19 December 2022

Dear Laetitia,

Please convey our thanks to the committee for the opportunity to speak with them. We were pleased to be able to discuss the development of the Scottish Social Security Advocacy Service.

Thank you also for your email summarising the further information which the committee is looking for. We hope that our response below is helpful to the committee and that its members will not hesitate to ask if there is further information which would assist.

During the meeting, Miles Briggs MSP asked if you could provide further information on where advocates are based and what regions they are covering, in particular when they are working across NHS Boards areas. The Committee would be grateful if you could provide current data and ongoing updates as the organisation recruits more advocates.

Our advocacy service is flexible and provides coverage across the whole of Scotland, so that we are able to provide advocacy to anyone in Scotland no matter where they live. We have not had any problems in supporting people across the geography.

We currently have 19 advocates in total, comprising 17 advocates who are assigned to specific NHS Scotland regional health board areas, plus two Referral and Information Advocates who provide flexible coverage across the country. Our arrangements ensure that all areas and all clients are well covered by a responsive service.

I can confirm that the information provided at the time of the committee meeting - that we had just one health board, which did not have a dedicated advocate - was correct. That health board was Dumfries and Galloway. It was being covered by our Referral and Information advocates and our advocates from the neighbouring area, and will be so until a new post-holder starts shortly. This is how we cover any temporary changes.

I am pleased to reassure the committee that our staffing capacity has not at any point been a limiting factor to the number of people we can support, nor to the reach and availability of our service.

Meeting future demand

In connection with the staffing numbers and the discussion at the committee about recruitment and scaling up the service, it may be helpful to emphasise our commitment, outlined in our tender submission, to increase the number of advocates based on demand and the roll-out of new devolved benefits. We continuously review the uptake of our service and its trajectory, so that we can ensure that we always have sufficient staff to meet current and future demand. We also ensure sufficient staff to do all that we practicably can to generate awareness and understanding of the service, its availability and how to access it.

To keep ahead of staffing requirements, we have organised a recruitment campaign for the new year. We will continue to report staffing levels through the Scottish Government's contract monitoring mechanism and would be pleased to keep the committee informed in whatever way would be most helpful to it.

As discussed at the committee, whilst we work hard to raise awareness of the service, it is also vital that Social Security Scotland's information provision, forms, systems and processes help people to know about our service and to access it. Recognising Social Security Scotland's commitment to enhance access to advocacy, we also noted that work to embed the offer of advocacy into their information, systems, processes and training does now need to gather pace so that people get advocacy support when required.

When asked about the organisation's budget and staffing plans, Jonathan said he would come back to the committee to confirm the number of staff planned under the £24M budget. A confirmation of the figures would be helpful.

I noted to the committee that I recalled that expenditure of £20.4 million was based on the staffing complement reaching 100 members, and that I would revert to the committee if that was not correct. I am happy to confirm that the information which I provided was accurate.

Regarding the Speak Out forum, you offered to send examples of instances when people's voices were heard and lessons learnt. The Committee would welcome sight of these.

We are due to convene the Speak Out Forums in the new year. The forums will provide the opportunity for people who draw on our services and people who claim benefits to talk about their experiences and enable us to seek their views and feedback.

We will collate insights arising from this and share the information with the Scottish Government, and with other parties where this is helpful. We would be very happy to provide further information to the committee in due course.

When discussing VoiceAbility's relationship with other advocacy services in Scotland, you offered to send a list of the advocacy, disability and carers organisations you have been in touch with across Scotland.

We have contacted an extremely high number of stakeholders across Scotland, including advocacy, disability, and carers organisation, health, social care, advice agencies, together with community centres, councillors, schools, voluntary organisations and many more.

Please find aside a list of advocacy, disability, and carers organisations which we have been in touch with (appendix 1). (Some organisations on this list will have a remit which includes, but is not limited to these functions, and we may have left some off from our much larger list, where we did not mark them as advocacy, disability, or carers' organisations).

As we mentioned at the committee, Kaukab Stewart MSP is kindly sponsoring an event in Parliament about the service in February, and we very much look forward to the opportunity for people to learn more about our service.

We would be delighted to arrange for individual committee members to meet with our advocates and clients in their constituency or regional area at a drop-in or community event. Emily Johnston, our operations manager, would be very pleased to arrange this for you. Emily can be contacted at [REDACTED].

Now that our service has been running for a few months, we are starting to gather stories from our clients about their experience of advocacy and the impact the support had on their experience of accessing social security benefits. We would be delighted to collate some of these and share them with the committee as we pull these together, if that is of interest to the committee.

Thank you again for the opportunity to meet the committee.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Senker
Chief Executive

Appendix 1:

List of advocacy, disability, and carers organisations we have contacted

Scotland-wide organisations

- Action for ME
- Action in Mind
- Alzheimer Scotland
- ARC Scotland
- Autism Understanding Scotland
- Befriending Networks
- CAB – numerous local branches
- Capability Scotland
- Care Solutions Scotland
- Carers Scotland (Carers UK)
- Carers Trust
- Caring for Carers
- Christian Against Poverty
- Circles Network
- Citizens Advice Scotland
- Coalition of Care and Support Providers Scotland
- Contact Scotland BSL
- Cornerstone
- Crisis
- Crossroads Caring Scotland
- Deafblind Scotland
- Dyslexia Scotland
- Enable
- Epilepsy Scotland
- Headway
- Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland
- Independent Living Fund Scotland
- Leonard Cheshire
- MECOPP (Minority Ethnic Carers of People Project)
- Mental Health Network
- MIND
- Money Advice Scotland
- Penumbra
- Quarriers
- Remploy
- RNIB
- Scottish Autism
- Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance
- Self-Directed Support Scotland
- Shelter Scotland
- Support in Mind Scotland
- Who Cares Scotland?

Aberdeenshire

- Advocacy North East

Aberdeen City

- Aberdeen Action and Disability
- Aberlour Child Care Trust
- Advocacy Services Aberdeen
- Autism and Neurodiversity North Scotland
- Bipolar Aberdeen
- DEP (Disabled Equity Partnership)
- Learning and Disability Group of Aberdeen and Shire
- Mental Health Aberdeen
- North East Sensory Services
- The Association of Disabled Professionals
- The Society of Advocate Aberdeen
- Y Suffer in Silence Emotional Listening Services

Ayrshire and Arran

- ACA (Ayrshire Council and Alcohol)
- Addictions South Ayrshire Recovery
- Aims Advocacy
- Arms Advocacy
- Ayrshire Cancer Support
- Ayrshire Independent Living
- CHAP (The Michael Lynch Care Centre for Enterprise)
- Disability Resource Centre
- East Ayrshire Carers Centre
- Kilmarnock Carers Centre
- Salus

Argyll and Bute

- A&B Health and Social Care Partnership
- A&B Social Work Team Leaders Disabilities
- Helensburgh & Lomond Autism
- Helensburgh & Lomond Carers
- Lomond & Argyll Advocacy Services
- Multiple Sclerosis Centre
- PASS (CAB Patient Advice Service)
- We R With You A&B Community Link Workers

Dumfries and Galloway

- D&G Advocacy Service
- D&G Mental Health Association
- Disability Equality Scotland D&G
- Dumfries Welfare Rights
- Gretna Day Centre
- Stewart Health and Wellbeing
- The Bridge

Edinburgh and Lothian

- Borders Care Voices
- Bridge Project
- Carers of East Lothian
- CHAP (free, impartial advice to anyone facing benefit, housing, or money issues)
- Crossroads Counselling Lothian
- Cyrenians
- EARS Advocacy
- ECAS
- Edge Autism
- Eric Liddell Centre
- Lothian Centre for Inclusive Living
- Maggie's Centre
- Mental Health Advocacy Project
- Places for People
- Ramblers
- The Welfare Rights Team (The Advice Shop - Edinburgh Council)

Borders

- BANG (Borders Additional Needs Group)
- Bipolar Scotland Borders
- Borders Independent Advocacy Service
- Bridge to Support Health in Mind
- Broxburn Autism Support Group
- Carers of West Lothian
- Dunbar Day Centre
- EARS Independent Advocacy
- Gullen Day Centre
- Haddington & District Day Centre
- Headway East Lothian
- Partners in Advocacy
- West Lothian Financial Inclusion Team Network

Forth Valley

- Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel
- Forth Valley Advocacy
- Quarriers Stirling
- Stirling Carers

Fife

- Addaction
- Advocacy for Older People
- Airlie Cancer Care Group
- Arthritis Support Against Pain
- Autism One Stop Shop
- Autism Rocks
- Circles Network Agency
- Citizen Advice & Rights Fife

- Crossroads Befriending
- DAPL
- Disabilities Fife
- Dunfermline Advocacy
- Families Affected by Autism
- FEAT
- Fife Carers Centre
- Fife Health and Social Partnership
- Link Fife Mental Health Befriending Project
- MacMillan Fife Welfare Benefit Partnership
- Penumbra

Glasgow

- Drumchapel Money Advice
- Financial Inclusion Renfrew
- Flourish House
- GAINS
- GAMH NW Carers Centre
- GEMAP Money Advice Glasgow
- Glasgow Care Foundation
- Glasgow City Health & Social Care Partnership
- Glasgow Disability Alliance
- Glasgow West Carers Centre
- Inverclyde Carers Centre
- NW Carers
- Partners in Advocacy
- Social Security Scotland Consortium
- The Advocacy Project (Scotland)
- Welfare Advice & Support Workers at Kingsway Community Connections

Highland

- Autism Right Group
- Birchwood Highland
- Blythswood Care
- Connecting Carers
- Highland Action on Disability
- Highland Advocacy
- Highland Senior Citizen Network
- MacMillan CAB Raigmore
- MAV Make Autism Visible
- Mikeysline
- Moray Council Welfare Rights
- MS Centre Portree

Lanarkshire

- Clydesdale Resource Network (Mental Health Team)
- Equal Say Advocacy
- Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health

- North Lan Carers Together
- North Lan Disability Group
- North Lan Social Work
- Reach
- The Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments

Moray

- Caring Community Circle
- Children's 1st Elgin Young Peoples Advocacy
- Circles Network Moray

Perth and Kinross

- Advocacy Perth and Kinross
- Independent Advocacy Perth and Kinross
- Perth Autism Support
- Welfare Rights

Tayside

- AddAction
- Advocacy Together
- Angus Carers
- Angus Dementia Resource Centre
- Angus Health & Social Care Partnership
- Angus Independent Advocacy
- DEAP
- Disabled Children's Association
- Dundee Independent Advocacy
- Dundee Mental Health Carers Fawk
- Partners in Advocacy
- Pause
- Positive Steps

West Dumbartonshire

- Aspire To (Mental Health Group)
- Dementia Resource Centre
- Health and Social Care Partnership Dumbarton Council
- PASS Patient Advice & Support Services

Western Isles

- Advocacy Western Isles
- Ardseileach Respite Unit
- Cobhair Bharriagh
- Crossreach Care Harris
- Crossreach Care Lewis
- Learning Lochs & Harris
- Learning Support Uist
- Penumbra
- Tayse Uist

- Western Isles Association for Mental Health
- Western Isles Community Care Forum
- Western Isles Sensory Centre