



## ENGAGEMENT PROTOCOL

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# Engagement Protocol

## Purpose

This Engagement Protocol details how seAp governs interactions with staff, Local Authorities, partner organisations and all other statutory and voluntary organisations agencies we work with.

Detailed contractual arrangements describing the expected and agreed level of service to be delivered by seAp are separately agreed between seAp and our Commissioners and Partner organisations.

Organisational targets and KPIs will not ever conflict with seAp's stated aims and objectives, seAp will not deliver services that are outside its remit and work within the principles of advocacy as defined by the Advocacy Charter, namely:

- Confidentiality
- Independence
- Empowerment
- Putting people first
- Clarity of purpose
- Equal opportunity
- Accountability
- Accessibility
- Supporting advocates
- Complaints

Robust arrangements are put in place via the formal agreements seAp has in place with all service delivery partners.

seAp's Area and Team Managers are responsible for ensuring that the engagement arrangements are discussed and agreed with local commissioners and providers. Where local Engagement Protocols exist, it is desirable that all aspects of this Protocol are covered and any departures reported to the seAp Management Team for further action.

## **Review**

This Protocol will be subject to formal review by the Senior Management Team and will be liable to amendment in light of operational experiences.

Regular contract monitoring meetings will be held with an appropriate seAp member of staff representing their service e.g. Area Manager, the local Team Manager and or Supervising Advocate and the appropriate lead within the service which advocates are working with. Ongoing liaison will occur between seAp's locality manager Commissioners and any sub-contracted delivery partners, reinforced by quarterly formal sub-contract monitoring and review meetings.

## **Operational Delivery of Advocacy Services**

The nature of the advocacy service provided is addressed within the detailed contractual service level agreements that constitute the formal contract and / or sub-contract arrangements or any subsequent agreed service level agreements or Key Performance Indicators KPIs.

1. All staff should take all appropriate steps to avoid conflicts of
  - a. interest occurring in their work with clients. Where a conflict of
  - b. interest\* does arise, it should be declared to the line manager and
  - c. advice sought as to how to proceed
2. Advocates should be free to act according to the wishes and needs of service users. They should not be threatened, compromised or
  - a. harassed whilst carrying out their duties within agreed boundaries set
  - b. out in the Advocates' Code of Practice. Where such harassment does occur, this should be reported to the line manager at the earliest opportunity
3. seAp advocates should maintain the independence of the service from all persons and agencies. Whilst remaining polite and pleasant towards staff in an establishment, advocates should maintain a certain distance and must not get drawn into discussions about individual people without their consent.

4. seAp advocates will work to, and within, policies and procedures that are specific to specialist establishments such as prisons, hospitals and secure units.
5. Advocates provide an additional safeguard for clients who are subject to the Mental Health Act and Mental Capacity Act and the Care Act
6. Advocates help clients to obtain information about, and understand their rights as described in advocacy principles, action planning guidelines and the roles and responsibilities of an advocate.
7. Not all issues raised with the advocate by clients will be best addressed through seeking resolution via formal complaints procedures. Many issues can be resolved at a more basic local level. This distinction should not be seen as precluding the client's right to instruct the advocate, for example in supporting them to make a formal complaint in the first instance should they so wish.
8. All information relevant to the client received by the Advocate in whatever way will be shared with the client.

### **Conflict of Interest**

Conflict of interest includes but is not limited to: breach of confidentiality; abuse of trust; personal gain; divided loyalty (e.g. providing personal care and advocacy to the same person), competing priorities, (e.g. seeking preferential treatment for a friend or family member.)

In certain circumstances, a seAp independent advocate may become aware of issues that relate to more than one client, or that are raised by groups of clients In these cases the advocate is expected to bring these issues to the attention of their line manager or senior manager as soon as is possible, including matters which they judge as requiring urgent attention.

### **Service Complaints Against seAp**

Complaints against seAp's advocacy service will be referred in the first instance to the line manager of the member of staff being

complained about who will investigate the complaint using seAp's complaints procedure, with the option to keep the next line manager informed if necessary. Line management processes would be shortened if the issue being complained about was very serious, or where it is assessed there is a potential risk to the contract or seAp's reputation.

Clients are made fully aware of the complaints process, which includes timescales for responding and reporting back to them. Formal complaints are also reported internally to seAp's Senior Management Team by Area and Team Managers monthly reports and reported to Commissioners and external partners via quarterly commissioning reports and meetings.

### **Incident Management & Reporting**

Any incident which gives a client cause to complain which involves an advocate will be reported to their line manager or another senior manager as soon as possible. The nature, investigation and learning from the incident will then be discussed at individual staff supervision, and locality team meetings both of which are held monthly, unless the incident is so serious that the continued delivery of the advocacy service is compromised, in which case seAp's area manager will call an extraordinary contract review meeting.

Advocates are encouraged and supported to seek advice and guidance from their Supervising Advocate, Team or Area Manager or any member of the seAp Management Team. All seAp staff have access to a free 24/7 Employee Assistance Scheme.

### **Access to Information**

Information given to advocates will be stored in line with the Data Protection Act and Caldicott Guardian Rules. This will ensure that all routes of information to and from the client will remain within the approved channels and that no breaches of security and the Data Protection Act occur.

seAp will regularly update advocates of changes made to policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines.

## **Advocate's Conduct**

Advocates working for seAp will be expected to conduct themselves in accordance with seAp's Advocacy Code of Practice, seAp's 'Code of Practice for Working in Prisons and Secure Units' and all other Codes of Practice relating to their specialist advocacy practice i.e. IMHA, IMCA, Care Act, etc.

Should any advocate become the subject of **serious concern** about their conduct and discharge of duties, then it is expected the advocate will be suspended from providing services (not necessarily all duties), following discussion and supervision (if not an urgent and immediate concern). Should the concern be that of the Commissioners, then a formal documented complaint is to be made to seAp. All conduct concerns will be dealt with via seAp's Disciplinary and Capability Policies.

## **Confidentiality and Information Sharing**

seAp staff are bound by seAp's Confidentiality Policy, which is communicated to clients upon first contact with the service. All Commissioners and Partners are made aware of our policies and procedures for sharing Information.

Only in exceptional circumstances will client confidentiality need to be breached, these are:

- a. Intent to harm self or others, including danger to life
- b. Intent to break security rules (secure hospitals, prisons)
- c. Intent to commit a crime
- d. Any information relating to an offence which the advocate has reason to believe has not previously been disclosed
- e. Child Protection issues (Safeguarding)
- f. Vulnerable Adults issues (Safeguarding)
- g. Acts of terrorism

All clients are advised of seAp's confidentiality policy verbally, informing them of the areas of conversation which cannot be kept

confidential, using the client's leaflet or in a form which the client can understand. This process may have to be repeated until the client understands it.

Commissioners and external Partners are made aware of the seAp organisational policy through the tendering process and post contact discussions.

### **Information sharing**

When taking decisions about what information to share, seAp will consider how much information we need to release. The Data Protection Act 1998 requires us to consider the impact of disclosing information on the information subject and any third parties. Any information shared must be proportionate to the need and level of risk. Only information that is relevant to the purposes shall be shared with those who need it.

Information shall be adequate for its purpose and of the right quality to ensure that it can be understood and relied upon.

Information shall be accurate and up to date and will clearly distinguish between fact and opinion. If the information is historical then this will be explained.

Information shall be shared in a timely fashion to reduce the risk of harm. Timeliness is key in emergency situations and it may not be appropriate to seek consent for information sharing if it could cause delays and therefore harm to a client or others.

Wherever possible, information will be shared in an appropriate, secure way.

Information shared externally will be recorded on the seAp database.

### **Disputes between Agencies, Partners and other Statutory Bodies**

In the event of any disputes arising, formal resolution and escalation procedures are in place between the organisations involved.

These include arranging a meeting between the relevant parties as soon as is practicable, and both parties should use their best endeavours to resolve the dispute as amicably as possible. If the issues are not resolved at this first meeting, then the parties should agree to either: refer the dispute to more senior members of each organisation, or refer to independent mediation.

Any mediation should be conducted in the strictest confidence. If the parties reach agreement this should be recorded in writing and once signed by both organisations, remains binding upon them.

The costs of mediation and any expenses incurred shall be shared equally between the parties.