



Independent  
**ADVOCACY**

*Giving voice to people in need*

# Summary Business Plan



## Introduction

Independent Advocacy is a charity with a history of delivering high quality personal support to our clients in Warwickshire and neighbouring areas. The charity has largely operated under contract to provide services to local authorities, but has developed some services that are delivered privately. In the last two years the charity has experienced a period of considerable change and disruption. These changes have included the retirement of the long standing Chief Executive, the transition to new systems of contracting, considerable staff turnover amongst our main Local Authority partners, legislative change and the loss of some significant contracts.

These changes have had a major impact on Independent Advocacy. Income to the charity has dropped and this has necessitated a restructuring exercise as well as the TUPE transfer of some staff members to other organisations. The focus in the last 12 months has been on working with our major partners to get clarity on how contracts are expected to work, embedding the new structure and working to stabilise our finances. The range of challenges has been considerable and it is therefore notable that the Financial Year 2014/15 ended with a modest trading loss of £10,000 and in 15/16 we estimate a trading profit of c£50,000.

This background is the starting point for the work done to prepare a plan for the organisation for the next three years.

## Mission, Vision, Values and Strategic Aims

The mission, vision and values of the organisation were reviewed in 2014.

The trustees view is that they are still appropriate and relevant in guiding the work of the organisation over the next three years.



### Vision

However challenging the environment, Independent Advocacy will empower vulnerable people to live a full life, enabling them to make choices and have a voice that will be heard

### Mission

To provide advocacy, appointee and support services so that vulnerable people can make known their needs and access resources to improve their quality of life

### Values

- We are **professional** and always seek to achieve high standards
- We ensure our services are **independent**
- We act with **integrity** with an open style of management and communication
- We are **fair** in our dealings and ready to explain our reasons
- We are **responsive**, so far as we are able, to the needs of those with whom we interact
- We show **respect** to others, even when we do not share their values
- We honour our commitments to **confidentiality**



## Strategic Aims

1. To shape our services in partnership with those who need who need them
2. To deliver effective services with integrity, efficiency and due diligence
3. To create and identify opportunities to increase the range of services and the level of financial support to the business
4. To promote IA locally, regionally and nationally and seek opportunities to work with other agencies and organisations
5. To develop and implement a culture based on open communications with policies and procedures that support and develop the workforce

**These strategic aims will form the structure of the business plan and we will look to make progress in all these areas.**

## Research and Analysis

**A key part of the planning process has been to review the environment we are operating in.**

This included looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation, changes to legislation and how that is affecting vulnerable people, mapping developments in placing contracts and how other charities are responding.

## Competitors

The assessment of our major competitors identified the following issues:

- The resources of the large national operators are being applied very successfully to winning tender competitions through the submission of professional tenders. If we do not significantly improve the quality of our submissions we will not win tender competitions
- There are a number of small local competitors that are well embedded in their area, but most of these are facing financial pressures and some are making trading losses

## Challenges and Priorities

The assessment of our strengths and weaknesses identified the following priorities:

- Keeping our existing contracts by delivering excellent service and re-establishing links with new people and structures (such as CCG's).
- Broadening the income base will require work in several areas and the need to rebuild networks of contacts.
- The lack of success in winning tender competitions in 2015/16 shows how competitive the environment is and indicates an urgent need to develop a skill set in relation to contracting and tenders.
- The need for investment in several areas including IT and training.
- Identifying partners to work with that will supplement the charity's areas of weakness
- Rethinking the management structure to ensure that business development is prioritised and bids for new business are successful.

The aim is to address each of these challenges during the life of the plan.



## The Financial Plan

**The trustees view is that the charity should plan to grow the income base to a turnover of £1m and has challenged the management team to produce a business plan that achieves this aspiration.**

This turnover figure was selected in order to ensure that the charity is not too dependent on a few contracts, can generate resources to invest in the skills of the staff, can invest to develop new services and can consider offering services to some clients at no cost – in line with its charitable purpose.

The driving force for IA is not about generating income. IA has a long history of delivering flexible, caring, responsive services to vulnerable people and IA wants to continue to do that for more people. Nevertheless, without a sound financial base the organisation cannot deliver.

The business plan has therefore been fully costed and is supported by a robust budget process that has been reviewed by the trustees. The next three years will be challenging but IA is confident that it can succeed with a combination of income from existing work and generating income from a wider range of services.

The financial projections indicate that these sources of income will provide a turnover of £1.1m by 2018.

## Contracts

IA has analysed the contract timetable for the next three years and identified contracts that the charity should bid for. The trustees view is that IA should vigorously defend and improve our position in relation to existing contracts and be proactive in identifying new opportunities. The selection of contracts to bid for has been based on an assessment of the particular strengths of the charity and geography.

## Growing Existing Services

Over the last two years the charity has done well in some areas. For the future, we wish to achieve planned and sustainable (year-on-year) growth through the generation of new business in appointee services, support services and parental support. We will research the market opportunities and explore the development a service model for mediation services and we will work with charitable foundations to develop services aimed at getting autistic adults into employment.

## New Services

An analysis has been done into areas that could be developed and work will start on these in the second year of the plan. The charity will also invest in building relationships with business and developing unrestricted income.



## Other Strategic Priorities

The financial plan will be supported by work and investment in several other areas. These are as essential as developing income as they are designed to develop a stronger, sustainable and resilient organisation.

### Service User Involvement

This is a priority for the Board as IA does not have the right level of service user involvement in the organisation.

As an organisation, we obtain feedback from clients and react to that feedback appropriately, but more can be done. The plan is to establish an Advisory Board that will meet four times per year and feed into our service design. IA will also develop service user feedback by working with volunteers.

### Partnerships

Independent Advocacy believes that the future for smaller advocacy providers lies in the formation of partnerships. This is seen as the best way to maintain the advantages of being local and flexible with the geographic coverage and complementary strengths of other organisations. These partnerships would take the form of “working agreements” between the respective Boards of the organisations rather than anything more formal.

### A new approach to volunteers

One of the areas of difference that emerged from the analysis of our competitors is that most, but not all, of our competitors make much more use of volunteers in the operation of their charities. IA has concluded that the organisation should make a commitment to expanding the volunteer team and the plan assumes an investment to support this development.

## Upgrading our Tendering and Bidding Skills

The experience of preparing bids in late 2015 highlighted the fact that IA does not have the experience that is required to submit top quality professional bids. The plan provides for development work in this area as well as a provision to bring in specialist personnel if and when they are needed.

### Marketing

The public profile of Independent Advocacy has been identified as a weakness for the last three years. The organisation has not been in a position to tackle this properly, as priority has been given to stabilising the business. An equally important priority is to develop the network of contacts and supporters that can provide feedback, insight and guidance to IA. The level of restructuring in the sector has meant that many of our contacts and champions have moved on and we need to rebuild. The development of a Communications and Marketing plan will be a priority in 2016/17 and some modest investment will be made in this area.

### Investment in IT

There are two significant business issues that make this investment a priority. The organisation needs to ensure that it has the financial systems to support developments such as personal budgets and it needs to work with commissioners to develop complementary systems that deliver on data security.



## Skills and Manpower

The research on future developments identified the fact that commissioners may prefer to work with a single provider in the future. IA is well placed to respond to this but needs to invest in some key areas of training for staff. This has been planned and costed and will be complete by 2017.

It is also appropriate to review the structure of the organisation in order to ensure that IA can devote the resources needed to developing the business. A review of the management structure will take place in 2016/17.

Investment in these areas will be provided from the reserves of the charity. The intention is to invest in areas that will support the charity in the long term. Each investment will be carefully assessed and monitored in order to ensure that IA is achieving its charitable aims.

## Conclusion

**The trustees see the 3 year period covered by the plan as one of opportunity. IA has started to adapt to the new environment and has a clear view about what the organisation should focus on. The intention is that we preserve and defend the quality of our service and our commitment to clients while responding to the new and changing demands of commissioners. It will be a challenge, but the business plan will help the organisation rise to that challenge.**



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