



Pre-budget 2025-26  
Scrutiny - Third Sector  
Funding Principles |  
SIAA's Response

August 2024



Scottish  
Independent  
Advocacy  
Alliance

# SIAA' Response to "Pre-budget 2025-26 Scrutiny - Third Sector Funding Principles " | August 2024

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## 1. Information about your organisation

### **Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance and our members**

The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance (SIAA) advocates for independent advocacy. As the only national organisation with a remit to promote, support and advocate for independent advocacy we have been examining the provision, quality, availability, and accessibility of independent advocacy for over two decades. Our aim is to raise awareness about the value and impact of independent advocacy, and influence decision makers with the aim of widening access to quality independent advocacy for all who need it in Scotland.

SIAA is a membership organisation that has members providing independent advocacy across Scotland. SIAA members are a diverse range of organisations and groups that provide independent advocacy to different people and groups in a variety of settings including:

- individual independent advocacy in the communities, hospitals, forensic mental health, and prison settings;
- organisations specialising in citizen advocacy;
- carers advocacy organisations;
- collective advocacy groups based in hospitals, care homes and the community, and
- organisations providing independent advocacy to remote and rural communities.

Each SIAA member works to the Independent Advocacy Principles Standards and Code of Best Practice, which is the foundational document for independent advocacy in Scotland. The Principles and Standards are provided in Appendix 3. We will provide more detail on how independent advocacy, both individual and collective, works in practice in our response. The Independent Advocacy Principles Standards and Code of Best Practice are intrinsically linked to the principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and equality, Empowerment and Legality (PANEL). Independent advocacy groups have a human rights-based approach that support individuals and groups to consider how human rights laws may apply to their specific circumstances.

### **Models of Independent Advocacy**

#### *Individual or one-to-one advocacy*

This includes professional or issue-based advocacy. It can be provided by both paid and unpaid advocates. An independent advocate supports an individual to represent their own interests or represents the views of an individual if the person is unable to do so. Advocates provide support on specific issues and provide information, but not advice. This support can be short or long term.

Another model of individual advocacy is citizen advocacy. Citizen advocacy occurs when an ordinary citizen is encouraged to become involved with a person who might need support in the community. The citizen advocate is not paid. The relationship between the citizen advocate and the advocacy partner is on a one-to-one, long-term basis. It is based on trust between the partner and the citizen advocate and is supported, but not influenced, by the advocacy organisation. The citizen advocate supports the advocacy partner through natural

skills and talents rather than being trained in the role. For many people their Citizen Advocate is the only person not paid to be in their life. Citizen Advocates provide essential support for local people at key times of vulnerability and need. A key part of many partnerships is the support citizen advocates provide, whether by ensuring their partner has the information they need to make choices, by sharing activities to widen opportunities and by ensuring their partner understands the legal processes they are part of.

### *Collective advocacy*

Collective advocacy creates spaces for people to get together, support each other to explore shared issues and find common ground. It supports people to speak up about their experiences, values, and expectations. It enables people to find a stronger voice, to campaign and influence the agendas and decisions that shape and affect their lives. Collective advocacy also takes the onus off the individual to solely address a human rights issue, the collective voice means people do not have to continuously reshare difficult experiences to make change happen and improve systems.

Collective independent advocacy provides opportunities for people to have a meaningful voice in legislative processes, policy making and strategic planning, combating discrimination, inequality and enables people to take part as active citizens.

Collective advocacy can help planners, commissioners, service providers and researchers to know what is working well, where gaps are in services and how best to target resources. It helps legislators and policy makers to create opportunities for people to challenge discrimination and inequality. Collective advocacy groups benefit from skilled help from an independent advocacy organisation and with the support of resources. However, it is important to note that collective advocacy groups cannot be 'mandated' into existence, they must continue to emerge from the needs, wants and views of their potential members. Collective advocacy groups are run by their members, who set their own agendas.

## 2. Longer-Term Funding Impact: How would a shift to longer-term funding of three years or more support your organisation?

As a note of caution this consultation asked us in a previous question to rank the importance of elements of Fair Funding. They are all important and interdependent of one another. Due to this SIAA was not able to rank aspects of fairer funding for SIAA or its members.

SIAA want to see a shift to longer term funding of three years or more for both SIAA and our members who provide direct independent advocacy across Scotland. Currently SIAA and many of our members only receive year on year funding with no guarantee of continued funding. This affects the sustainability of the independent advocacy sector in Scotland and makes it challenging for planning future delivery of independent advocacy (and our support to the membership).

SIAA supports SCVO calls for progress towards Fair Funding. The principles of fair, flexible, sustainable, and accessible funding would enable SIAA and our members to provide high

quality sustainable independent advocacy that enables people in Scotland to understand and access their everyday human rights, which in turn would support the Scottish Government towards their priorities in eradicating child poverty and supporting high quality public services

### 3. Longer-Term Funding Impact: What specific challenges do you foresee in transitioning to such a funding model?

Long term funding on its own will not incorporate all the fairer funding principles which also state the importance of inflation-based uplifts, and proportionate, transparent approaches to monitoring and reporting.

Some of our members stated in our SIAA Advocacy Map: Sustainability of Independent Advocacy in Scotland that recent increases in the cost of living and changes to core funding has made it increasingly difficult for funding to cover the true costs of delivering independent advocacy. To manage this, some independent advocacy organisations have had to reduce their advocacy resource or tap into their reserves which further affects the sustainability of independent advocacy and reduces independent advocacy available to the public. 45% of our members who responded to the survey said their funding either stayed the same or funding was reduced at a time where demand for independent advocacy had increased.

SIAA has seen no increase in our core funding for many years and now there is intimation of potential significant cuts over the horizon affecting the future sustainability of specifically SIAA. Many of our members (ourselves included) are having to spend significant time on securing additional funding to support our core or project work - taking time away from delivering our core objectives.

One member highlighted this week that they had funding for a specific project which was due to continue to march next year. Their project was providing vital independent advocacy to children and young people with eating disorders. With only three months' notice they have been told that the funding is to end, well before the original funding term previously agreed - the results will be a complete loss of this important work. The end of this funding also affected 3 other charitable organisations out with our membership. So even when funding is secured there is no guarantee that funding will continue throughout the term agreed. These situations have a very real impact both the public receiving these vital services and the charities delivering independent advocacy.

SIAA echoes SCVO insights that 'without uplifts organisations may be unable to offer cost-of-living salary increases, resulting in the loss of skilled employees and the experience and expertise that they provide'. So, while SIAA agree that long term funding is import, inflationary cost of living need to be factored in as well as transparent contracts that are fulfilled as agreed.

Another real challenge we have seen for members moving from short term funding to longer term funding is the way the tenders have been written in their own local authority areas. Our members are grassroots charities based within their community or community of

interest, varying from smaller charities to larger charities. Over the last few years some members have not been able to tender for their own contracts due to the funding thresholds that charities are required to hold/or previously managed stated within tender. Some smaller charities have fallen below the stated thresholds and have been omitted for applying for tenders within their local area. Other members have been able to work with other local independent advocacy organisations to pool resources. However, this is often not an option for rural independent advocacy organisations who are often the only provider in their local authority area. This has increased the significant risk for smaller charities rooted and based in their own community competing with national UK wide charities with significant funding and tendering resources.

Members have also highlighted that the trend towards arrears funding has been problematic. Some charities do not hold significant reserves and do not have the free reserves required to cover the work until the funding is released. Arrears funding has also excluded some members applying for local tenders. SIAA would encourage the Scottish Government and other funders to consider these issues to and make progress towards Fair Funding to ensure fair, flexible, sustainable, and accessible funding for grassroots charities working and delivering vital independent advocacy in their own communities.

#### 4. Longer-Term Funding Impact: If relevant, please provide any specific examples of how your organisation has been affected by a lack of longer-term funding certainty

Short term funding impacts on planning for the future developments of the charity and the independent advocacy sector. When making long term commitments and plans you have to factor in the possibility that funding is either reduced or may come to an end.

Securing the best costs for external services is also a challenge. Often external organisational support such as rent can be sourced at a better rate if you secure a three-year contact. Not having guaranteed funding makes it challenging to commit to longer term contracts as often they have high exit fees if the funding was to reduce or come to an end. Which means that charities may be paying higher rates for short term external services. Recruiting and retaining staff is also problematic when no guarantee of longer-term funding can be given. Within the independent advocacy sector, we are seeing our members seeking additional funding to support their work. However, due to the statutory nature of the work members cannot source additional core funding meaning they will look for short term project work additional to their statutory work.

In our report “Advocacy Map: The Sustainability of Independent Advocacy”, we highlighted that 64% of the organisations who responded to the survey were sought additional funding. Of this number 64% secured additional funding. In the report we posed exploratory questions to try and understand the impact of seeking additional funding on the wider independent advocacy sector.

- How are organisations managing to balance contract requirements with organisational aims and strategy?

- Do we understand the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of the promotional and income generation work we do?
- Are there other unplanned benefits (and costs) of seeking additional income (for example, impacting capacity for innovation)?
- How can we collectively raise our profile to ensure the true costs and impact of our work are understood?

SCVO also highlighted in their response to this consultation that the additional resources required to secure additional funding can impact on delivery of services to the public.

## 5. Flexibility and Core Funding Needs: In what ways would flexible, unrestricted core funding enhance your organisation's operational effectiveness and governance?

As an intermediary organisation SIAA would benefit from flexible, unrestricted core funding to enable us to flexibly respond to the changing needs and requirements of the membership. As we don't deliver front line services it is challenging to secure additional funding due to the nature of our work. SIAA is actively looking for additional funding to support our core work.

SIAA is fundamental in creating a sustainable and consistent independent advocacy sector in Scotland. Recommendations from the Mental Health Law Review highlighted the importance of strengthening the sustainability and infrastructure of independent advocacy. SIAA has been identified as core to the development in quality consistent independent advocacy practice and developing and delivering core learning in co-production with our membership. Indeed, SIAA has been working with the membership to develop both consistent impact measurement and learning across the sector.

It has been intimated to SIAA there is a potential for significant cuts to our modest grant making developing these future supports to strengthen independent advocacy challenging. We are delighted to see independent advocacy in policy areas such as the National Care Service and Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodivergence Bill. SIAA is often a bridge to the wider membership. SIAA have supported the Scottish Government by hosting roundtables and feeding in views from the wider sector into consultation and policy developments. It seems counterproductive and potentially costly to consider cutting the intermediary charity providing the infrastructure support to the sector.

Our members have also highlighted the challenges to the restricted funding they receive. At present, only some people have the right to access Independent Advocacy dependent on the specific legislation. The Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003 gave people the most significant right to Independent Advocacy. However, as highlighted by the Mental Welfare Commission in The Right to Advocacy 2018 report, the way the funding has been distributed in Scotland often means people subject to statutory processes under this legislation are prioritised in their access to Independent Advocacy. Meaning that people not subject to compulsory treatment may have to wait or may not even have access to Independent Advocacy at all.



This was reinforced in the Independent Review of Learning Disabilities and Autism in the Mental Health Act (Dec 2019) which highlighted that although autistic people and those with a learning disability have the right to access Independent Advocacy under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003, the reality is that people do not have equal access to Independent Advocacy. SIAA's research for The Advocacy Map shows there are significant gaps in the provision of independent advocacy across Scotland, including:

- children and young people;
- people with dementia;
- people with learning disabilities;
- autistic people;
- people within the prison system;
- unpaid carers.

Unrestricted sustainably resourced funding may enable members to provide flexible independent advocacy when required.

## 6. Flexibility and Core Funding Needs: What specific challenges do you foresee in transitioning to such a funding model?

SIAA do not foresee any challenges to flexible core funding as this would enable SIAA and members to respond to the actual needs of the membership and communities.

## 7. Flexibility and Core Funding Needs: If relevant, please provide any specific examples of how your operational effectiveness and governance have been affected by a lack of flexibility in your core funding.

Members at present are under resourced and funding needs to be of a level that meets the actual need of the local communities in which they operate. Restricted funding means that some people have to wait longer for independent advocacy or may not be able to access independent advocacy at all. If people cannot access timely independent advocacy they may reach a crisis, where if they were able to access independent advocacy these crises could have been averted.

## 8. Sustainable Funding and Inflation Adjustments: How critical are inflation-based uplifts and full cost covering, including core operating costs, to the sustainability of your organisation?

Some of our members stated in our SIAA Advocacy Map: Sustainability of Independent Advocacy in Scotland that recent increases in the cost of living and changes to core funding has made it increasingly difficult for funding to cover the true costs of delivering independent advocacy. To manage this some independent advocacy organisations have had to reduce their advocacy resource or tap into their reserves which further affects the sustainability of independent advocacy and reduces independent advocacy available to the



public. 45% of our members who responded to the survey said their funding either stayed the same or funding was reduced at a time where demand for independent advocacy had increased.

Members have highlighted the challenges with hiring new staff especially if wages cannot be competitive. Some members have discussed having to make crucial roles part-time to save money.

SIAA has seen no increase in our core funding for many years and now there is intimation of potential significant cuts over the horizon affecting the future sustainability of specifically SIAA.

Many of our members (ourselves included) are having to spend significant time on securing additional funding to support our core or project work - taking time away from delivering our core objectives.

We still need to understand the true cost of delivering quality independent advocacy across Scotland. Having inflation-based uplifts and full cost covering, including core operating costs, would support the independent advocacy sector be more sustainable and fully resourced. Currently this feels like a long way off.

However, in the ideal world of sustainably resourced independent advocacy this would enable organisations to meet the needs of the local community by delivering the much-needed independent advocacy support required.

9. Sustainable Funding and Inflation Adjustments: What impacts have you observed or anticipate without these adjustments in your funding?

10. Sustainable Funding and Inflation Adjustments: If relevant, please provide any specific examples of how your organisation's sustainability has been affected by a lack of inflation uplifts and/or full cost covering.

The following text answers both question 9 and question 10.

As previously mentioned, SIAA has seen no inflationary adjustments over many years, and it has been intimated there could be future significant cuts to our core grant. If we cannot secure other funding which as previously mentioned is challenging for intermediary organisations, we would need to significantly reduce the work we do and our support to the membership. This will impact the current infrastructure of independent advocacy in Scotland and will hinder the development of core learning, quality work, peer support and policy development. SIAA have worked hard to reduce the overheads of the organisation and now work more agile to support the work, directing most of our funding to direct staff costs. This means that we now have little additional for overheads and reduced opportunity for innovation in responding to the changing needs of the membership.

Our members have already highlighted through the Sustainability of Independent Advocacy report that for some members there has been reductions in funding or funding that has stayed static which in real terms is a reduction in funding. Members have told us they have had to reduce their resources to continue to deliver independent advocacy, this could be through reduction in staff hours, redundancies or restricting the independent advocacy provided to those people affected by statutory processes. Some members have also told us they have had to access their reserves to keep going. Like SIAA, some members have had to seek additional funding to continue their work. SCVO highlights this is both unethical and unsustainable.

Independent advocacy members have reported an increase in demand for support as the communities in Scotland feel the impact of reduced public services, austerity and the long-term impacts of Covid-19 pandemic. One member recently highlighted they are seeing people's human rights affected significantly by the effects of austerity.

### 11. Real Living Wage Commitments: What challenges does your organisation face in ensuring all staff are paid at least the Real Living Wage?

SIAA are committed to and pay all staff the real living wage - most of our funding covers staff costs. This is our single biggest overhead. SIAA are committed to the Fair Work principles.

Most of our members would be committed to paying the real living wage but as costs increase and if there are no inflationary rises this will become more challenging. Due to the year-on-year funding for SIAA and some members this makes security of employment challenging. Although SIAA staff have permanent contracts this is dependent on our continued funding.

### 12. Real Living Wage Commitments: How would improved funding arrangements support your organisation to meet this commitment?

Funders need to understand the true cost of delivering quality independent in Scotland and ensure it is adequately resourced. SIAA know the financial challenges facing the Scottish Government but sustainably funded independent advocacy will support the people of Scotland make their human rights a reality. Independent Advocacy is essential in supporting people understand and access their human rights, fully participate in all aspects of their lives and have access to justice.

SIAA would value that our core costs continue to be covered by our Scottish Government grant. We will still seek additional funding but this would enable us to plan and prepare for the core of our work, plan for the future and continue to support the independent advocacy sector.

### 13. Efficiency in Funding Processes: What improvements in the application, reporting, and payment processes could make the funding system more efficient for your organisation?

SIAA support SCVO in their response that "Funding processes could be made more efficient through providing clearer guidance, simplifying the approach to monitoring and reporting, and making timely decisions".

As previously mentioned, some of our members have not been able to apply for their own grants, this does not seem fair or equitable. This is creating the potential that Scottish independent advocacy could see a mass change in community-based grassroots independent advocacy. The independent advocacy sector in Scotland has over 30 years of experience in the practice and delivery of independent advocacy, responding to the specific needs of their communities. There is a real threat to this landscape by the way funding applications and payments are currently administered at a local and national level.