Our priorities: What is essential advocacy work?

This document was written on 17 March 2020 as internal guidance for VoiceAbility staff. We are now sharing it publicly in the hope that it might be of some assistance to others, especially advocacy organisations, and ultimately to people who rely on the support we all provide. It was written in good faith based on the best information available at a particular point in time. No liability is accepted for any adverse consequences of reliance upon it. We welcome feedback to CV19@voiceability.org

Key messages

- We are prioritising work to ensure that we can focus resources on those with the greatest advocacy need. Managers will use our priority list to allocate referrals and active cases.
- We are prioritising safeguarding work and IMCA for decisions about serious medical treatment; followed by work related to detention and other critical decisions.
- Some lower priority work will only be done if we have capacity and can maintain social distancing, but this will be constantly reviewed.

About this list

We will prioritise the services which we provide. This prioritisation list will ensure that we can focus resources on those with the greatest advocacy need. Managers will use this as a set of working priorities from now onwards. We will keep this under review and welcome your comments on this at cv19@voiceability.org

We recognise that we provide many important services aside from advocacy. Your manager will discuss these with you on a service by service basis.

Where capacity is reduced due to staff sickness, managers will ask part-time staff if they would consider working overtime or ask people to consider rescheduling leave.

Referrals and active cases will be allocated by managers to available staff using the following priority list.

For the time being work classed in categories high risk, detention and critical decisions are considered essential in the terms of this guidance.
Priority list

High Risk
1. Safeguarding children or adults
2. Serious Medical Treatment (IMCA)

Detention
3. 39A (IMCA)
4. Section 2 (IMHA)
5. Support for Tribunal (for people on all Sections) (IMHA)
6. RPR where the person is or might be objecting

Critical decisions
7. Decisions which may result in a change of accommodation
8. Care Act Assessment (when this is the first assessment or in case or in urgent need or access to/ change in service only)

Other statutory duties (only where possible to work at a distance and only if capacity allows)
9. Any other statutory advocacy case which can be progressed without in person meetings with the client. This includes:
   - RPR where meaningful contact with the client is possible remotely or where there are significant concerns and short durations
   - Care Act processes not mentioned above,
   - IMCA 39c and IMCA 39d,
   - Looked after Children's complaints,
   - NHSCA cases that can be handled over the phone/email.

Until we have greater clarity, the following will only be done if we have capacity and can maintain social distancing and reduce the spread of coronavirus. This is because such work is likely not to be practicable and appropriate, or reasonable when considering the benefits versus the risks, in relation to wellbeing of all involved. This will not be on a blanket basis, in that exceptional circumstances will be considered on a case by case basis.

10. Any other advocacy case which cannot be carried forward without meetings with the client. This may include:
   - RPR (when for short duration with conditions)
   - Care Act processes not mentioned above,
• Non statutory mental health advocacy
• IMCA 39c and IMCA 39d,
• Looked after Children's complaints.
• NHSCA cases which cannot be handled over the phone/email by the home-based working team (other than seeking to extend any deadline if necessary).
• Non-statutory advocacy cases that require in-person advocacy.

This is not a blanket restriction. Instances of exceptional need will be considered on a case by case basis. This may include non-statutory mental health advocacy where the client might be considered to be in practice compulsorily detained, or to have an urgent and vital need.