



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Social
Justice
Scottish Government

Social Justice and Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Via email only

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27 April 2023

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

VoiceAbility – progress on independent advocacy services

The Social Justice and Social Security Committee welcomes you in your new role as Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice. We are looking forward to working with you on progressing ongoing and future work on social justice issues.

The Committee's remit includes the scrutiny of the progress in the implementation and delivery of benefits by Social Security Scotland. As part of this work, the Committee has been considering the independent advocacy services provided by VoiceAbility to support disabled people access devolved benefits.

At the [Committee meeting on 30 September 2021](#), the Minister for Social Security and Local Government announced that, following a regulated procurement process, the Scottish Government had awarded a four-year contract for the provision of an independent advocacy service to VoiceAbility.

The Committee understands that the service is aimed at people specifically requesting advocacy support with devolved benefits that are delivered by Social Security Scotland and is delivered exclusively by VoiceAbility. Dr Ruari Sutherland, Supporting Access to Social Security Team Leader, Social Security Policy Division, Scottish Government added—

“Clients will be able to choose whichever service they want in terms of the support that they receive but, as the minister has said, the funding will now be exclusively for VoiceAbility advocacy services.”

The Committee would be grateful if you could indicate whether, when awarding the contract to a sole provider, the Scottish Government considered the potential impact on other providers of advocacy and if a year after VoiceAbility started delivering its services, issues have been reported by organisations.

On [24 November 2022](#), the Committee held an evidence session with VoiceAbility and heard about the service they have been delivering since February 2022 and how they were expanding their workforce according to the demand for their services.

The Committee understands that the Scottish Government will review the services provided by VoiceAbility during its initial two year-contract and that reporting on that period will feed into decisions on extending the contract for two more years beyond that.

The Committee seeks clarification about how the contract will be reviewed, what reporting requirements have been set and what aspect of performance are monitored and assessed.

Additionally, the Committee would be keen to establish how data about clients' journeys is recorded to assess how successful they have been at claiming benefits. VoiceAbility provides a service and support for part of that journey, but clients might have been referred to VoiceAbility by a range of organisations and services and might also use further services to go through the tribunal process. Therefore, information on the monitoring and evaluation of the clients' journey would there be welcome.

It would be helpful to receive a response by 31 May 2023 to inform the Committee's further scrutiny of VoiceAbility's services.

A copy of this letter is provided to Social Security Scotland and VoiceAbility for their information.

Yours sincerely,



Collette Stevenson MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee