



## **The All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group**

### **Context**

This paper has been developed by the All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group, coordinated and managed by Children in Wales, in advance of the

- Children's Commissioner for Wales Round Table Discussion on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2013
- First meeting of the WG Ministerial Advocacy Expert Group on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013

The Round Table Discussion will be attended by the Chair of the Group together with the Group's representative on the Welsh Government's Ministerial Expert Group on advocacy services for children and young people in Wales

**This paper has been developed in the context of Missing Voices and the parameters of that review and recommendations.**

### **Introduction**

The All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group welcomes the opportunity to meet with the Children's Commissioner and other stakeholders to collectively agree key actions that will deliver our aspiration to provide consistent, high quality advocacy provision for children and young people in Wales in the context of the Missing Voices statutory review.

The All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group have been proactive and welcomed the opportunity to influence and support the development of Advocacy provision since the launch of the Missing Voices enquiry. These have included -

- Discussing, agreeing and submitting a written response to the recommendations of Missing Voices
- Discussing the recommendations of Missing Voices with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, senior officers in his team and Welsh Government

officials in meetings of the All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group

- Providing input towards the Welsh Government's Advocacy Conference in February 2013 and regularly engaging with Welsh Government officials on our priorities and concerns
- Developed and submitted briefings of the Group key issues to the National Independent Advocacy Board.

In the context of Missing Voices and the statutory provision of advocacy services for children and young people in Wales, the All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group have identified the following key priorities

### **The Consistent Provision of Advocacy Services across Wales**

The Welsh Government's consultation entitled "Delivering advocacy services to children and young people 0 – 25 in Wales" aimed to reinforce existing guidance and legislation in respect of those groups of children and young people who have a statutory entitlement to independent advocacy (Annex 1). The consultation closed in April 2011 but no guidance was subsequently issued. This has, in part, left the provision of advocacy in limbo and led to inconsistency of provision across Wales.

We believe that it is important to get the provision of advocacy for those most vulnerable, including Looked after Children right. This has to be the priority and Annex 1 of the consultation provides the framework for identifying those priority groups. The other parts of the 'advocacy jigsaw', including the ambitions for a universal service for all children and young people, whilst laudable, must not distract from the task of ensuring that those groups of children who need advocacy the most can access a service.

The Welsh Government forthcoming policy statement on the future of independent advocacy provision provides an opportune moment to reinforce statutory obligations for local authorities and their partners, and to outline the necessary actions in relation to monitoring arrangements with the aim of achieving consistency and equitability of service provision across Wales. It is essential that face to face independent provision are prioritised and compliment not replace MEIC and other helpline services.

### **Resources and Funding for Advocacy Provision**

No additional funding has been allocated to local authorities to enhance advocacy services for vulnerable children. In essence, budgets have been cut even though potential demand is increasing. Some advocacy providers have found that the amount of funding they receive has decreased by 50% while the number of LAC requesting advocacy has increased by a similar amount. Advocacy services currently have no additional resources which could potentially subsidise poorly funded services. Some existing funding arrangements are not sustainable in the immediate

term if we are truly to achieve our shared outcomes and enable all children and young people who have a statutory entitlement to be able to access

One way forward would be for the Welsh Government to inject capital into advocacy provision to create stability. Funding could also be provided centrally and all stakeholders could work together to devise a plan which could stabilise current provision and also result in a 5 or 10 year plan to deliver advocacy for vulnerable children.

### **An Independent Advocacy Service**

The All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group has consistently lobbied and raised concerns over existing commissioning arrangements and the lack of true independence between funder and service provider. Previous reports from the NAFW Children and Young People's Committee enquiries into advocacy services have also reflected our concerns. Further discussions should take place to begin to discuss and seek solutions for some of the challenges services face under existing arrangements.

### **Commissioning of Advocacy Provision**

The current process of commissioning advocacy services results in providers taking part in a competitive tendering process. This takes up a great deal of time and can be divisive. Advocacy Providers, through the creation of the All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group and for some members, through the joint tendering for the MEIC Helpline service have demonstrated a commitment to work together.

Regional commissioning has provided many opportunities for joint working between local authorities but presents a number of threats for existing providers and services. Regional models should not be developed as a way of saving money and compromising the quality of service providers can provide and children can receive. A way forward would be to centrally commission advocacy or replace the current tendering process with the allocation of a grant. Also clarity on what sort of advocacy should be commissioned is needed.

### **Quality of Advocacy Provision**

Currently CSSIW are inspecting social services use of advocacy provision instead of inspecting and validating the benefits a child gains through accessing advocacy. This needs to change and we would welcome further discussion with the inspectorate as to how this can be improved

### **Participation**

Advocacy is a key component of children's rights approach which the Welsh Government have to date demonstrated their commitment to. Within a children's rights framework sits Article 12 which provides for children and young people to have a say and for their opinions to be taken into account. It is essential that this commitment forms part of any forward planning for the future of advocacy services in Wales. This is essential if the recommendations from the Waterhouse review are to be fully implemented and young people fully protected

## **Social Services and Well-Being Bill**

Members of the All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group have previously identified the need for the Social Services and Well-Being Bill to be seen as a key vehicle for taking forward and strengthening existing statutory duties on local authorities and their partners. Presently, the draft Bill makes reference to advocacy in the context of complaints which we all acknowledge only forms part of an advocates role.

We would wish to see advocacy more prominent in the Bill and would welcome dialogue around this.

**We have given this some thought and happy to share our ideas with Welsh Government and others**

**Children in Wales**

**(on behalf of the Children and Young people's Advocacy providers Group)**

**April 2012**