



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

**RE: The All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group  
one year update to the RECOMMENDATIONS for Advocacy Provider  
Organisations included in the Children's Commissioner for Wales review of  
independent professional advocacy services for looked after children and  
young people, care leavers and children in need in Wales'**

### **Recommendation 14**

**Local authorities and advocacy providers must provide opportunities to raise awareness about the purpose of advocacy among all staff working with children and young people. This should include developing an understanding of how to access advocacy and working relationships with advocacy provider managers and advocates.**

RESPONSE: Agree in principle. There are key resource implications for advocacy providers in respect of publicity with resources having to be found within reduced funds through existing service level agreements. Dedicated time for publicity could compromise delivery if resources are channelled away from direct work with children and young people. With reduced contracts, there is less scope for raising awareness to be seen as a priority in the current climate and this is regrettable. Advocacy providers would of course welcome further opportunities to raise awareness about the purpose of advocacy among all staff working with children and young people and are routinely engaged in this as resources and capacity allows. There would be resource implications if advocacy provider services were required to extend this service within existing SLA without this impacting on operational work directly with children and young people.

### **Recommendation 18**

**Local authorities and advocacy providers should establish appropriate operational procedures and protocols within a service level agreement for information to be provided to children and young people about advocacy services.**

RESPONSE: Agree in principle: There should be protocols within service level agreements. However, it is imperative that other social care staff e.g. social workers are not excused from undertaking their responsibilities. In the current climate, it has to be a joint responsibility to promote advocacy services. We agree that there is a need for greater consistency and a unified approach across Wales to enable this to be realised. We believe that links could be made with Recommendation 19 as part of a broader national framework for Wales.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The advocate allocated to a child or young person should be responsible for explaining their role to the child's parent, foster parents or guardian.**

RESPONSE: Our comments to the Recommendation firstly centred around our concern of the notion of an advocate being 'allocated' to a child or young person (Recommendation 2). Following discussions with the CCFW and his team, we welcome the retraction of the term 'allocated' for the reasons given in our response. We still have concerns around any consideration being given to a child's advocate having 'responsibility' for explaining their role to the child's parents, foster parents or guardian. In our experience, many young people do not wish for their parent(s), guardian(s) or foster carers to know that an advocate is providing independent support and there can be valid reasons for wishing to retain confidentiality, including issues around potential safeguarding. A core principle of advocacy is that it is child and young person led, and it is our belief that this should be maintained and not be compromised in any way or form.

Advocacy providers continue to engage with parents, guardian and foster carers and do provide both written and verbal information on their role so as to enhance and extend awareness and understanding of their services. However we do not support any element of **compulsion** for this to always happen and would look to the allocated social worker to provide this role as part of Recommendation 8.

### **Recommendation 4**

**Advocacy providers' quarterly reports to local authorities should be copied to all children and family social services teams to raise awareness of the service and to inform staff how advocacy services are being used. There should be regular attendance at local authority team meetings by the advocacy provider to ensure a clear understanding of the local practice and process**

RESPONSE: Different arrangements operate across local authority areas. A number of projects now produce bi-annual reports due to reduced capacity and the costs involved in

compiling more frequent reports. Whilst we continue to support this Recommendation in principle, we would suggest that care is taken to ensure that confidentiality isn't compromised or broken and sensitive information is not shared. To avoid some information being shared which would result in the child or young person being easily identifiable, we would suggest that a version of the report should be circulated which captures aggregated numbers rather than the details. The report could therefore be in 2 distinct parts, with one section for higher level management only and a second section for children and family social services teams

Regular attendance at team meetings is fine in principle, but a resource issue at present. There would be further resource implications if advocacy provider services were required to attend more team meetings than at present without this impacting on operational work directly with children and young people. We would suggest that it is important to meet on at least a biannual basis

A key concern for future arrangements are in respect of regional commissioning models, with local authorities still expecting separate reporting in regard to financial matters. With the potential for reduced staffing levels to cover a number of local authority areas, the capacity to undertake this will be stretched further.

### **Recommendation 5**

**Advocacy providers' quarterly reports to local authorities should be copied to all elected members to raise awareness of the service and to inform members of how advocacy services are being used. There should be regular visits by the advocacy provider to the corporate parenting panel to ensure a clear understanding of the local practice and process.**

RESPONSE: Agree in principle and support all elected members being copied into Reports to raise awareness of the service and to inform members of how advocacy services are being used. More capacity would be needed to 'regularly' attend corporate parenting panels.

### **Recommendation 20**

**Local authorities and advocacy providers must promote the independent relationship between the commissioning process and the delivery of advocacy to individual children and young people.**

RESPONSE: There remains an on-going concern around the relationship between commissioning local authorities and advocacy providers. We do not consider current commissioning arrangements to be 'independent' and have been consistent in raising

concerns around this. Advocacy providers can share examples of where there has been conflict and their position has been compromised

We still believe this is a key area for further discussion and would wish to see robust consideration being given beyond this recommendation. Our concerns centre on the principle that at present, independence is compromised. Advocacy services may act independently but are not independent from the inconsistent commissioning process. *'Promoting the independent relationship'* is problematic if the relationship between the commissioning process and advocacy service is not independent to begin with.

We would welcome discussion around the issue of independence and the potential for establishing an independent national centrally commissioning service and arrangement which would build on the reports and recommendations from the enquiries undertaken by the NAFW Children and Young People's Committee review into advocacy services and the CCfW enquiry 'Telling Concerns'. Proposed moves away from local authority commissioning structures to arrangements through Children and Young People's Partnerships did not resolve this issue and with the Welsh Government's 'simplification' agenda, partnership arrangements are currently in a state of flux.

We believe that establishing an independent national centrally commissioning service should be fully explored and that this area of work should now be urgently prioritised by the newly established Expert Group.

**Advocacy providers have committed to reminding local authorities of the recommendations in Missing Voices**

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**Developed by Children in Wales on behalf of the All Wales Children and Young People's Advocacy Providers Group**