

Helen Mary Jones AM
Chair
Children and Young People Committee
National Assembly for Wales

Dear Helen Mary Jones,

Re: 16th September report on children's advocacy services in Wales by the Children and Young People Committee of the National Assembly for Wales

As Chair of the National Independence Advocacy Board I am responding to your recent Committee report on children and young people's advocacy services. Since taking up my appointment at the beginning of the year, I have obviously had to become acquainted and familiar with my colleagues on the Board (who are all experts in their own right, in different ways) and with the current situation regarding advocacy for children and young people in Wales.

The Board recognises and respects the concerns of your Committee regarding the continuing lack of universal, independent advocacy services in Wales, and the slow pace of development and progress towards that aspiration.

In the context of your criticisms and concerns, however, I would – on behalf of the Board – like to draw your attention to the following, rather more positive perspectives:

- A significant step forward towards the provision of a National Advocacy and Advice Service has been the establishing of 'meic', a universally available helpline that is scheduled to move towards 24/7 provision in the near future
- The imminent publication of the statutory guidance for consultation
- The start of robust service mapping, as you suggest. The Board met, in August, with representatives of both the Partnership Support Unit and the advocacy providers' group, to secure a picture of the different forms of advocacy provision across local authorities in Wales.
- At the end of September, the National Independent Advocacy Board met to agree a mid-term work plan. This includes the monitoring of 'meic', defining (under the auspices of the statutory guidance) the terms of engagement by which relevant bodies should be securing Specialist Integrated Advocacy Services via the Children and Young People's Partnerships, ensuring greater communication and contact with other relevant bodies, and reporting to the Minister and informing others of progress and concerns. By next February, we intend to produce a formal report – to be communicated both verbally and in writing – for the Minister for Children in the Welsh Assembly Government, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the Children and Young People Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, and other stakeholders with an interest in and commitment to enabling and ensuring appropriate advocacy support for all of our children in Wales.
- We will be looking to utilise appropriate methods to be as transparent as possible in communicating the intentions, functions and achievements of the Board.