

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Ymchwiliad i Eiriolaeth Statudol | Inquiry into Statutory Advocacy
Provision

SAP 16

Ymateb gan : Llywodraeth Cymru
Response from : Welsh Government

Introduction

1. This paper is to inform the Committee Inquiry into Statutory Advocacy Provision, by providing an update on the current position in relation to the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children and Young People.
2. The Welsh Government has tasked Local Government to work in partnership with providers and children to bring forward proposals to deliver improved access and understanding of advocacy for looked after and other vulnerable children.
3. Developing a National Approach encompasses a range of components that will deliver consistency of entitlement, commissioning, delivery and awareness of statutory advocacy provision in Wales. I fully support the development of a National Approach to advocacy as it will ensure that the children who have a statutory entitlement to advocacy are receiving it.
4. I continue to take a personal interest in following the progress of the development and implementation of the National Approach, to make advocacy services for children and young people in Wales as accessible and effective as possible.
5. Many individuals require advocacy to enable personal outcomes to be communicated and achieved. Welsh Government has been clear that the Part 10 Code of Practice on Advocacy, issued under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, should be read in conjunction with all relevant codes of practice issued under the Act to require local authorities to consider people's needs for advocacy where a local authority exercises a specific function in relation to that person.
6. This evidence outlines progress to date.

Evidence/Background

7. The invitation from Ministers to Local Government to bring forward a model for securing a National Approach to statutory advocacy for looked after children, children in need and other specified individuals in the summer of 2014 provided the strategic stimuli needed to begin a comprehensive review of commissioning and delivery of independent professional advocacy services.
8. A Strategic Leadership Group, (SLG) chaired by the Director of Social Services and Integration Directorate and comprising representatives from the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS Cymru), the Children's Commissioner's Office and the Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advocacy was established to identify a coherent and sustainable approach to securing children's rights to statutory advocacy.
9. An advocacy Task and Finish Group (T&FG) was established to take this work forward, and consisted of representatives from ADSS Cymru, including a Director of Social Services and number of Heads of Children's Services, the Children's Commissioners Office, Welsh Government, Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), WLGA, and Advocacy Providers, and is chaired by ADSS Cymru.
10. The remit of the T&FG was to look at the provision of Independent Professional Advocacy (IPA) as commissioned by Local Authorities for Looked after Children (LAC), children in need and other specified individuals. It was also tasked with identifying and developing the key components of a National Approach to Advocacy and delivering via lead authorities within what were then Social Services Regional Improvement Collaboratives, now the Regional Partnership Boards.
11. A key principle underpinning the Group was to ensure the involvement and engagement of children and young people at key stages during the development and delivery of the National Approach. This has been taken forward through members' engagement, consultation and participation with existing children and young people's groups at local and regional levels.
12. The Group proposed that the National model was delivered through lead authorities within the Regional Partnership Boards. The Welsh Government provided the resource of a seconded post, to undertake the role of the project manager.

The group identified and developed the following key components which were presented in a Business Plan;

- **National Standards and Outcomes Framework** including an approach to the 'active offer' of advocacy identified in 'Missing Voices' and a mapping of the National Standards and Outcomes Framework to the Well-being Statement that underpins the Act.
 - **National Approach - Regional Service Specification** Providing consistent specifications for commissioning of services.
 - **National Approach - Regional Performance Reporting Template** delivering the evidence and statistics identified within the National Standards and Outcomes Framework for service quality and performance monitoring purposes. .
 - **A Range and Level Assessment mechanism (Service Capacity)** which when applied to the eligible population locally and regionally assists with gauging service capacity requirements and associated costs.
 - **A Commissioning Framework** – aligned to the Standards and Outcomes Framework.
13. In June this year ADSS Cymru and WLGA wrote to Cabinet Members and Director of Social Services in each local authority identifying the potential financial implications for authorities if they were to adopt the National Approach. They sought views on whether the proposals, as set out in the business case, were supported.
 14. ADSS Cymru and WLGA met with Welsh Government on 3 August to discuss the outcomes of their correspondence. As a consequence ADSS Cymru and WLGA agreed to produce an Implementation Plan to progress the National Approach.
 15. On 26 September I wrote to WLGA requesting a copy of the Implementation Plan by 30 September.
 16. My previous response to this inquiry set out my continued commitment to the National Approach and my anticipation of receiving the implementation plan which will inform next steps. The Committee asked specific questions in relation to the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy for Children and Young People as well as what impact Part 10 of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 will have on children and young people.
 17. A copy of my response is included at Annex 2 which has been published on the National Assembly for Wales's website as evidence number SAP 09, as one of the 14 responses received in the Inquiry which closed on 11 November.

18. From other evidence submitted I note that responses support the opportunity to improve the provision of advocacy services for all children in Wales to meet the requirements of the United Nations Rights of the Child.
19. Welsh Government currently funds MEIC the information, advice and advocacy service for children and young people. An independent evaluation of MEIC commissioned by Welsh Government reported MEIC to be a valued, effective and proficient service that should continue but also reflected upon the opportunities to align MEIC to the wider advocacy landscape
20. The introduction of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the development of a national approach and DEWIS (online citizen portal for care and support) will influence the nature, scope and location of the MEIC service going forward. Officials are considering options for alignment within this developing landscape.
21. Additionally, to support the implementation of advocacy, Welsh Government has commissioned two projects under the Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant.
22. The Golden Thread Project by Age Cymru is for 3 years and aims to:
 - a. improve the well-being of adults through advocacy to give them a stronger voice
 - b. improve the availability of advocacy services to adults, and
 - c. work with local authorities and service providers to support the development and commissioning of advocacy services for adults.
23. *The Children and Young People Advocacy – National Results from a National Approach project* by Tros Gynnal will provide support for Children and young people up to the age of 24 throughout Wales who are eligible for statutory advocacy services in line with the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014 and support implementation of the National Approach.
24. Tros Gynnal Plant has already delivered a workshop on advocacy involving children and young people at a joint Care Council and Looked After Children Network event at Glyndwr University for residential child care workers and foster carers on 15 September.
25. The Care Council is developing the national training plan to support the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act

2014, with the overall aim to support the workforce gain the knowledge and skills they need to implement the new legislation.

26. Advocacy is a core element of these training materials. The Care Council invited third sector organisations to bid for funding under a co-production grant to develop specific materials on advocacy as laid out in part 10 of the Act. Age Cymru and Tros Gynnal Plant were successful.

Conclusion

27. We are continuing to work with partners on ensuring a collaborative approach. On 24 November I met with ADSS Cymru, WLGA and the wider SLG for advocacy to discuss progress and proposals for implementation of the National Approach.
28. I will provide the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an oral update of that meeting when I attend on 14 December.
29. It is proposed that the National Approach to delivering Statutory Advocacy will be rolled out early next year and further information is set out in the recent Implementation Plan from local government.

**Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children
November 2016**