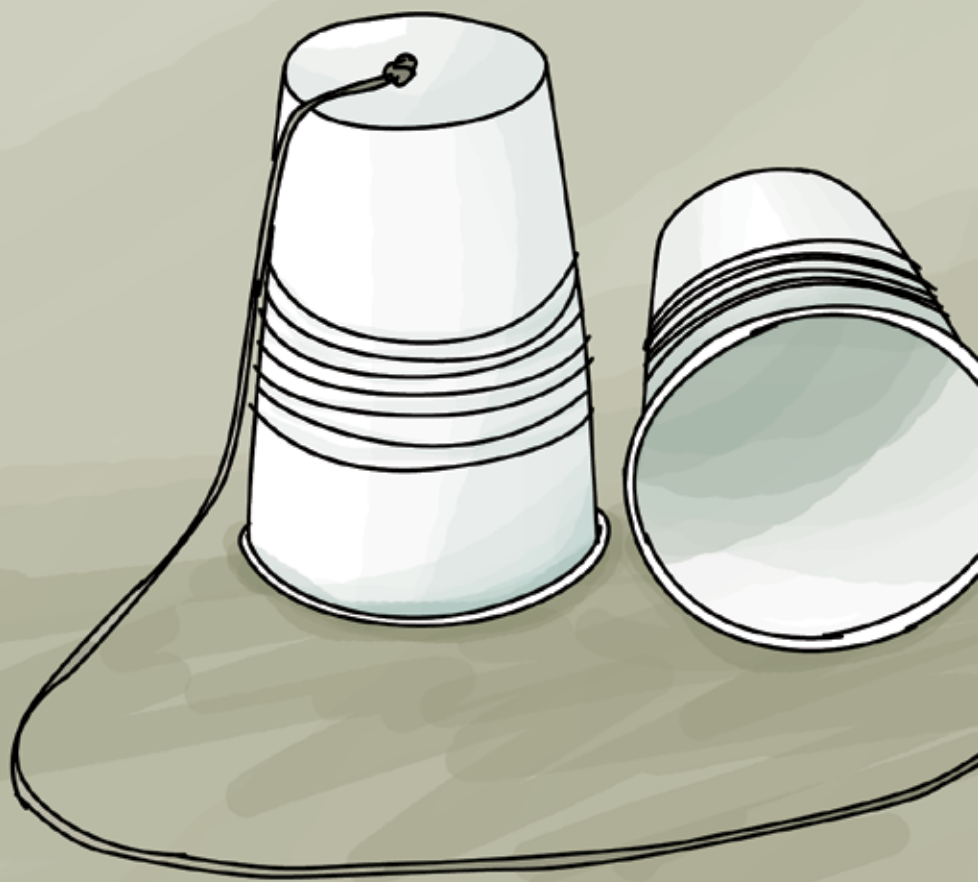


Missing Voices

Best Practice Casebook



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales



This report is available in alternative formats by phoning us on 01792 765600 or emailing us at publications@childcomwales.org.uk

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In 2011/12, the Children's Commissioner for Wales undertook a statutory review of independent professional advocacy services for looked after children and young people, care leavers and children in need in Wales.

This was the first time the existing Commissioner, Keith Towler, exercised his powers and functions derived from section 73 of the Care Standards Act 2000. The purpose of the review was to ascertain to what extent the arrangements are effective in safeguarding and promoting the rights and welfare of children and young people.

The review covered the delivery of advocacy arrangements by Welsh Ministers and local authorities in Wales and the terms of reference outlined the arrangements of the review (a copy of which can be downloaded from www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

‘Missing Voices’, the review’s report, was published in March 2012 and contained 29 recommendations for Welsh Government, local authorities and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales.

The information contained within this casebook has been drawn from the questionnaires all local authorities completed as part of the review in 2011 as well as from their written responses to the review’s recommendations.

Following its publication, the Office hosted four seminars for key practitioners during which the Commissioner's team agreed to provide a casebook of best practice. The aim of this casebook is to disseminate the information and insight gained during the process of the Review and to identify practice from local authorities and advocacy providers, which the Office feels would be helpful to share. It has been shaped to coincide with key elements of the review, including:

- **Understanding of Advocacy**
- **Children and Young People's Involvement in Developing and Reviewing Services**
- **Access to Advocacy**
- **Strategic Leadership**
- **Regulation, Inspection and Monitoring**

It is hoped the contents of this casebook and the review's report will help shape future practice across Wales to ensure independent professional advocacy services are as effective as possible in strengthening and promoting the rights and safeguarding the welfare of these vulnerable children and young people.

1. Understanding of Advocacy

The review concluded that lack of awareness and understanding of the term 'advocacy' applied to children and young people, professionals and those adults caring for children and young people.

1.1 Children and young people's understanding

Many of the children and young people responding to the review did not understand what the term 'advocacy' means.

"Never heard of it – it sounds like a disease"

"I know what it is cos I watch CSI Miami"

"An avocado?"

"I didn't know just by "Advocacy" what it meant. It had to be explained to me"

Review Recommendations

For local authorities, see recommendations: 1, 2, 14, 18 (www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

Good Practice

Here's a selection of how some local authorities and advocacy providers promote advocacy to children and young people.

How local authorities and providers promote...

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

have produced a promotional DVD, developed in partnership with children and young people.

Carmarthenshire County Council has enabled a group of looked after children and young people from across the county to produce training materials for foster carers, social workers and teachers. They have produced two PowerPoint presentations with backing music, including one about KICCIT! - a charter for looked after young people to raise awareness of their rights and to help people understand how they can have their say. The children and young people use the term 'stand up, speak out' to describe 'advocacy'. To accompany the PowerPoints and to help raise awareness of 'stand up, speak out' they have developed graffiti posters.

Denbighshire County Council is planning to consult with children and young people who have used their advocacy service to identify a new way of describing the role of an advocate. The authority will use the suggestions gleaned via the consultation to introduce the service to children and young people who may need the support of an advocate in the future.

Flintshire County Council regularly runs consultation events with children and young people where fun quizzes are used to check whether children and young people understand the role of an advocate. The local advocacy provider, NYAS, also give away goodie bags at these events with promotional materials, including pens, radios, teddies and leaflets, which appeal to a range of different ages. NYAS also publishes a newsletter twice yearly as part of its contract with the authority. This is circulated by post to all looked after children and young people and care leavers, combining educational and fun materials.

How local authorities and providers produce accessible materials...

Carmarthenshire County Council – requires its advocacy provider – currently Action for Children – to meet with eligible children and young people to explain the service and the role of an advocate. It has proven an effective mechanism in assisting children and young people to understand the difference between the support offered by the Social Worker and the support that can be offered by an independent professional advocate.

Caerphilly County Borough Council and Conwy County Borough Council both produce a range of specialist information for children and young people with learning disabilities and communication problems in formats that they will be able to understand. Leaflets are presented in symbol and widget form. Caerphilly County Borough Council also employs a specific advocate, with communication skills and specialist toolkits, for children and young people with disabilities.

Pembrokeshire County Council provides all children who are excluded from school with information about their right to advocacy and how to access the locally commissioned service. Details of how to access the independent advocacy service is included in letters sent out as part of the exclusion process. An advocacy notice board is also provided within the authority's pupil referral unit.

Swansea City & County Council has, in consultation with children and young people, developed a range of age-appropriate information leaflets, which are part of the Swansea Cares Pack. The information is also available on the authority's care leavers' website: www.swansealeavingcare.com

Wrexham County Borough Council has provided Plain English training to assist staff who support customer information functions. It has also worked with the Children in Care Council to support the design of child-friendly documentation.

1.2 Professionals' understanding

Whilst professionals have a key role both in promoting access to, and understanding, of independent professional advocacy, the review identified a need to improve understanding the benefits of independent professional advocacy. This would appear to be bourn out by low referral rates across the country and evidence from children and young people that they would like to have accessed a service but weren't aware of its existence.

Review Recommendations

For local authorities, see recommendations: 3,4, 8, 9, 21 (www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

Good Practice

Here's a selection of how some local authorities and advocacy providers promote advocacy to new and existing staff and to other professionals.

How local authorities and providers promote...

Anglesey County Council is developing a consultation and participation strategy that will detail how it will maximise advocacy, consultation and participation at each level of involvement with children and young people.

Caerphilly County Borough Council sees its local advocacy provider, NYAS, deliver induction training for social work, foster care, youth offending and residential staff.

NYAS also has notice boards in key areas, including children's homes, foster care team bases and schools. Publicity material is extensively distributed across team bases and special mail boxes have been set up to enable social workers to post suggestions on service improvements.

Conwy County Borough Council sees its local advocacy provider attend the foster carer locality groups to keep the profile of advocacy high and to raise awareness of the service amongst new carers.

Flintshire County Council requires its advocacy provider to deliver annual children's rights training to staff and foster carers. NYAS, the advocacy provider, involves children and young people in the training to help make it both compelling and memorable.

Social work teams across the county are also consulted prior to the review of its advocacy service, to obtain both positive and negative feedback.

Merthyr County Borough Council informs its foster carers and kinship carers of advocacy as part of its assessment process. Advocacy also forms part of the authority's six-weekly supervision agenda between the foster / kinship carer and the supervising social worker.

Monmouthshire County Council and Conwy County Borough Council both require their social workers to meet with the advocacy provider as part of their induction programme. This provides the opportunity for the benefits of advocacy to be discussed in full and the right of children and young people to access advocacy services to be understood fully by all social workers.

Pembrokeshire County Council has ensured its Childcare Policy and Procedures manual has specific references to advocacy within the policies and procedure relating to child protection conferences, LAC reviews, Independent Visitors and complaints against foster carers.

Powys County Council sees its advocacy provider, Tros Gynnal, attend key children's services meetings in order to promote the service i.e. the Children with Disabilities sub group of the Children and Young People's Partnership, the corporate parenting meeting, the independent residential providers meeting. The provider also supports the work of the junior Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Eat Carrots and Be Safe from Elephants.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

has requested its advocacy provider Tros Gynnal to make contact with the school-based counselling service, 'Eye to Eye', to ensure children and young people who might require an advocate are made aware of the service during their contact with the school-based counsellor.

Swansea City & County Council has produced a child and family practice manual to assist the authority's social workers with key areas of practice. The manual includes a chapter on advocacy in which the purpose and benefits are explained and a link is provided to national standards.

Torfaen County Borough Council intends to ensure that advocacy is specifically addressed as a standing item with foster carers through their supervision and support groups.

1.3 Corporate parents' understanding

During the review meetings were held with elected members with cabinet responsibility for children and young people. Whilst all members interviewed knew about their local advocacy service, their knowledge and understanding about the service varied considerably.

Review Recommendations

For local authorities, see recommendations: 5, 6, 16 (www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

Good Practice

Here's a selection of how some local authorities and advocacy providers promote advocacy to corporate parents

How local authorities and providers promote...

Ceredigion County Council sees its advocacy provider, Tros Gynnal, as full members of the corporate parenting group. The provider also presents quarterly reports to the group.

Carmarthenshire County Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council, and the Vale of Glamorgan Council also indicated that their local advocacy provider attended their respective corporate parenting panels.

Flintshire County Council hosts an annual 'Pride of Flintshire' awards ceremony for looked after children and young people and care leavers to which all county councillors are invited. Meeting face to face with children and young people and hearing their stories of personal achievement has helped raise the profile of corporate parenting and understanding around the challenges that some children and young people face.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council delivers training to all its elected members on corporate responsibilities as part of its member induction programme. **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Wrexham County Borough Council** and **Caerphilly County Borough Council** also indicated that advocacy was included as part of their corporate parenting training.

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council sees its local advocacy provider, Tros Gynnal, attend members' open days and meets with members with relevant portfolios.

Vale of Glamorgan Council provides every elected member with a corporate parenting handbook which includes a specific section on advocacy.

2. Children and Young People's Involvement in Developing and Reviewing Services

The national standards for the provision of advocacy for children and young people highlights that:

“Advocacy is led by the views and wishes of children and young people; children and young people are given help only if they want it. It is very important that children and young people have control over the advocacy relationship.” (Welsh Government Advocacy Standards, 2003)

Review Recommendations

For local authorities, see recommendation: 17 (www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

Good Practice

Here's a selection of how some local authorities and advocacy providers ensure that children and young people are involved in all aspects of advocacy service development and review.

Anglesey County Council has asked its advocacy provider to develop quarterly meetings with a panel of children and young people to promote their voice and to ensure feedback is given to the authority about the effectiveness of its advocacy provision.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has commissioned NYAS, its current advocacy provider, to undertake discussions with all looked after children and young people, aged 10 -18 years, to report their views to children and family service staff.

Bridgend County Borough Council has seen its regional participation task and finish group develop a SMART action plan in line with the national participation standards which clearly establishes how children and young people will be involved in the development of the advocacy service. A care leaver is a member of the project board.

Cardiff City Council invites children and young people to take part in the corporate parenting panel's annual review of the advocacy service and in the corporate parenting panel's visit to the advocacy provider.

Tros Gynnal, the current advocacy provider, facilitates a care leavers' forum and has recruited a former member of the forum as a facilitator for the forum. This provides continuity and the benefit of a service user perspective ensuring that work is steered and led by young people. The forum produces a looked after children and young person's newsletter, which is sent out quarterly to all looked after children and young people aged over 11.

The forum also engages in some innovative projects including work with a local art gallery on a community arts project where members of the group helped to create artworks in a variety of different formats that were then exhibited at the gallery for the public to see. Two members of the Cardiff Advocacy team met with 33 young people from nine different European countries in Brussels to discuss and present how children and young people experience poverty. Together they developed key messages for decision makers presenting them to representatives of different EU institutions through film, animation, and graphic design.

Carmarthenshire County Council is going to locate its independent advocacy service as part of a children's rights unit they are developing. **Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council** has already established a children's rights unit which works with children, young people and other stakeholders to raise awareness of children's rights.

Caerphilly County Borough Council has seen its 'Shout out group', jointly facilitated by its current advocacy provider, NYAS, and its children's rights officer, develop a children's charter, training for professionals and consultation events for staff and members.

Flintshire County Council has its Complaints Officer as a standing member of the authority's young persons' participation group. The officer also attends 'speak out' consultation events with looked after children and young people and care leavers. In **Swansea City & County Council** a Tros Gynnal advocate attends the Swansea participation group 'Fe-Fi-Forum' for looked after children between 11 and 16.

A large number of local authorities including **Wrexham County Borough Council, Torfaen County Borough Council, Pembrokeshire Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Anglesey County Council, Gwynedd County Council, Flintshire County Council, Denbighshire County Council, Ceredigion County Council,** and **Cardiff Council** involve young people in the interviewing and selecting of their advocacy provider.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has invested in a number of posts to strengthen the commissioning of services for children and young people. The posts will ensure that children and young people will have the opportunity to influence the development of service commissioning and the delivery of specific contracted services. Children and young people will have the opportunity of feeding back their views to someone who is independent of their assessment process and independent of the service provider.

Torfaen County Borough Council in conjunction with its current advocacy provider, NYAS, is piloting a peer advocacy programme. The peer advocacy group was set up in response to requests from children and young people who had taken part in a consultation event run by NYAS, 'Taking Care of the Future'. The advocacy provider has worked closely with the leaving care team to identify young people to undertake a qualification in peer advocacy.

3. Access to Advocacy

The review concluded that some of Wales' most vulnerable children and young people are unaware of their statutory right to an independent professional advocate. Access, to a large extent, was dependent on a child, young person or their social worker making a referral into the advocacy service.

Review Recommendations

For local authorities, see recommendations: 10, 12, 20 (www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

Good Practice

Here's a selection of how some local authorities attempt to fulfil its statutory obligations by actively offering the service to looked after children and young people, care leavers and children in need.

Bridgend County Borough Council will be putting plans in place to develop and implement protocols and procedures that ensures an automatic offer of advocacy is made to all children and young people at the point at which they become involved with children's services teams. These plans will include a requirement that the offer of advocacy is then repeated at each review meeting and practitioners will be required to record these discussions, including the decision made by the child or young person as to whether or not they want the support of an advocate. **Pembrokeshire County Council** also require the offer of advocacy to be recorded on the child or young person's electronic file.

Carmarthenshire County Council invites all eligible children and young people to an annual programme of events where they are able to meet with and talk to the independent advocacy provider Action for Children.

4. Strategic Leadership

The national strategic lead for the provision of independent professional advocacy rests with Welsh Government. In addition, crucial to the success of advocacy provision is the leadership shown by senior officers at local authority level; leadership that enables a culture of listening to the voices and views of children and young people to flourish.

Good Practice

Welsh Government in 2010 established Meic, which aims to provide universal access to advocacy for children and young people in Wales. This national helpline is a source of national information, advice and support and makes necessary links to local regional independent professional services when a more specialist face-to-face service is required. Its development has been hailed a significant and pioneering achievement for Welsh Government.

Carmarthenshire County Council expects the corporate parenting chair, who is lead member for children and young people, to provide leadership in this area. Relevant elected members are also expected to visit children and young people and the services that they access and to attend participation and consultation events regularly.

Monmouthshire County Council ensures that all eligible children and young people are referred to their advocacy provider, currently Action for Children, by the Independent Reviewing Officer. Every child and young person is then contacted by the advocacy provider to explain the services that it offers.

Wrexham County Borough Council commissions a completely separate service from provider Second Voice, over and above its contract to satisfy its statutory obligations, to provide an universal service for all children and young people living in the county.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

has recently appointed a Commissioning and Partnership Manager post specifically for children and young people's services, whose remit includes championing the voice of the child and young person, and ensuring there are opportunities for children and young people to influence the development of services.

Pembrokeshire County Council has tasked the newly appointed cabinet spokesperson for safeguarding and children's services with being the local champion and to provide strong leadership.

Powys County Council operates a multi-agency project management board to oversee advocacy provision in Powys. The service in Powys is jointly funded by social services, health, and education and the management board reflects the different organisations. The Head of Children and Families Services plays an active role in championing advocacy for children and young people.

5. Regulation, Inspection and Monitoring

A critical recommendation of the review was to ensure that as services continue to develop and grow, that appropriate structures are maintained to ensure services are appropriately challenged about their performance.

Review Recommendations

For local authorities, see recommendation:
7 (www.childcomwales.org.uk/en/advocacy)

Good Practice

Here's a selection of how some local authorities monitor and evaluate their local advocacy service.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council ensures advocacy features prominently on the corporate parenting panel, of which the overview and scrutiny chairs are members. An annual advocacy report will be presented to the scrutiny committee, outlining activity and performance around advocacy.

The authority's Children's Participation and Rights Officer will attend all contract compliance meetings with the advocacy provider and will provide direct feedback to relevant elected members, including the lead member for leisure and young people and the lead member for social services.

Bridgend County Borough Council will be adopting, via its lead commissioner for regional collaboration of local authorities in south Wales, an outcome-focused commissioning model and outcome-focused performance measures to help drive up the quality of the service delivered by providers.

Employing results based accountability, the authority will utilise a 'turning the curve report' to audit the effectiveness of the plans. One of the indicators that will be used to analyse advocacy provision will be the % of looked after children taking up their entitlement to advocacy. Similar data will be collected for children in need and those on the child protection register. The data collected will enable action to be taken to remedy any barriers to access.

Newport City Council has ensured its corporate parenting strategy sets out a number of pledges to all looked after children and young people in the area.

The strategy has been developed with looked after children and young people, and reflects issues that are important to them. Advocacy is one of the threads that run through these pledges. The corporate parenting forum provides the opportunity for elected members to be briefed on the progress of the strategy and the delivery of the pledges by lead officers and gives members the opportunity to raise issues in respect of advocacy.

Useful Contacts

Contacts for featured local authorities

COUNCIL	CONTACT NAME	CONTACT DETAILS
Anglesey	Anwen M. Hughes Head of Children's Services	(01248) 751801 anwenmhughes@anglesey.gov.uk
Blaenau Gwent	Chris Bradley Service Manager	(01495) 355795 christopher.bradley@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk
Bridgend	Clare Lane Principal Officer Commissioning	(01656) 642455 clare.lane@bridgend.gov.uk
Caerphilly	Beverley Mills Planning Manager	(01443) 864529 millsb@caerphilly.gov.uk
Cardiff	Angela Bourge Operational Manager – Resources	(02920) 873817 a.bourge@cardiff.gov.uk
Carmarthenshire	Catherine James Children and Young People's Partnership Manager	(01267) 246430 cejames@carmarthenshire.gov.uk
Ceredigion	Euros Healy Coordinator for Children and Young People's Rights and Quality Assurance	(01545) 574107 euros.healy@ceredigion.gov.uk
Conwy	Anne Flanagan Strategic Commissioning Manager	anne.flanagan@conwy.gov.uk

COUNCIL	CONTACT NAME	CONTACT DETAILS
Denbighshire	Rhian Allen Commissioning Officer	(01824) 712978 rhian.allen@denbighshire.gov.uk
Flintshire	Lin Hawtin Commissioning Manager	01352 701448 lin.hawtin@flintshire.gov.uk
Gwynedd	Marian Parry Hughes Senior Manager Children and Family Service	(01286) 679379 marianhughes@gwynedd.gov.uk
Merthyr	Suzanne Griffiths Head of Children's Services	(01685) 724693
Monmouthshire	Gill Cox Service Manager	(01633) 644770
Neath Port Talbot	Deborah Smith Commissioning and Partnership Manager	(01639)686477 d.smith@npt.gov.uk
Newport	Phil Jones Commissioning Contracts Team Manager	(01633) 233415
Pembrokeshire	Liz Blazey Policy Planning and Change Manager, Children's Social Services	(01437) 776199 liz.blazey@pembrokeshire.gov.uk
Powys	Amanda Lewis Head of Children's Services	(01597) 827084 amanda.lewis@powys.gov.uk

COUNCIL	CONTACT NAME	CONTACT DETAILS
Rhondda Cynon Taf	Jayne Thomas Complaints Manager	(01443) 425449 jayne.thomas@rctcbc.gov.uk
Swansea	Dave Howes Head of Children and Family Services	(01792 636243) dave.howes@swansea.gov.uk
Torfaen	Bernadette Anderton Group Manager, Children Services	(01633) 648571 bernadette.anderton@ torfaen.gov.uk
Vale of Glamorgan	Colette Limbrick Operational Manager	(01446) 725229 climbrick@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk
Wrexham	Audrey Somerton- Edwards Head of Service – Corporate Parenting	(01978) 295360 audrey.somerton-edwards@ wrexham.gov.uk

Useful Contacts

Contacts for featured advocacy providers

ADVOCACY PROVIDER	NAME	CONTACT DETAILS
Action for Children	Different contacts for each local project. Contact Head Office for up to date information	(02920) 222127
NYAS	Different contacts for each local project. Contact Head Office for up to date information	(0151) 649 8700 main@nyas.net
Tros Gynnal	Different contacts for each local project. Contact Head Office for up to date information	(02920) 396974 www.trosgynnal.org.uk

www.complantcymru.org.uk
www.childcomwales.org.uk