

MISSING VOICES: RIGHT TO BE HEARD



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



Background information about the Children's Commissioner for Wales

The Children's Commissioner for Wales is an independent children's rights institution established in 2001. The Commissioner's principal aim, under the Care Standards Act 2000, is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. In exercising his functions, the Commissioner must have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), as stipulated in regulation 22 of the Children's Commissioner for Wales Regulations 2001. The Commissioner's remit covers all areas of the devolved powers of the National Assembly for Wales insofar as they affect children's rights and welfare.

Some legislative context

The Children Act 1989 first placed a statutory duty on local authorities to establish a procedure for considering complaints and representations by a child or young person who is being 'looked after' or 'in need'.

In 1991 the UK Government ratified the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (UNCRC). The Convention includes two specific rights related to the voice of the child:

- Article 12: You have the right to say what you think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect you, and to have your opinions taken into account.
- Article 13: You have the right to get, and to share, information, so long as the information is not damaging to yourself or others.

In 2004, the Welsh Assembly Government adopted the UNCRC as the basis of all policy making for children and young people and in 2011, Welsh Government passed the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure.

Introduction by Keith Towler, Children's Commissioner for Wales

It is two years since I published "Missing Voices", my review of independent professional advocacy for looked after children and young people, care leavers, and children in need in Wales. At that time I had concluded that this group of children and young people who wanted the support and advice of an independent professional advocate to help them have their voice heard were being badly let down. Services were not being effectively promoted to all those they should be reaching, services were not well understood by children and young people and the professionals working with them, services were inconsistently funded and resourced, services were ineffectively regulated and inspected and Welsh Government's early commitment and enthusiasm to provide a beacon of excellence in relation to this key service had waned and faltered in recent years. In that report I made a number of recommendations which I hoped would reinvigorate national and local partners to get Wales back on track to deliver its aspiration for vulnerable young children and young people.

In May 2013 I published a follow up review of Missing Voices – “Missing Voices, Missing Progress” which looked specifically at the commissioning arrangements for independent professional advocacy services. Local authorities had indicated to me in their responses to the recommendations of “Missing Voices” that they were looking at different models of commissioning services and how they might remodel their existing services. I was disappointed at the slow rate of progress that this review discovered and made further recommendations to Welsh Government and the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy about what needed to change.

At this time I also convened a round-table meeting between Welsh Government officials, the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), the Chair of the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy, and representatives of the Advocacy Providers. I wanted to ensure that all those agencies and organisations that had a responsibility for getting advocacy back on track, were both committed to, and understood what they needed to do. A further round-table meeting was convened in October 2013 to check upon progress towards the commitments that had been made at the initial meeting.

I had notified my intention to undertake a full review of the recommendations of Missing Voices in the conclusion to "Missing Voices – Missing Progress" and this report reflects what has been achieved in those two years. I wanted the report to focus upon the views of children and young people and their experiences of independent professional advocacy. I have had many reassurances from the professional agencies responsible for providing and co-ordinating this service to children and young people that things are improving and moving in the right direction, but was concerned that my Advice and Support service was still regularly contacted by children and young people who were unaware of and not receiving the support that they should have been entitled to. I wanted to reassure myself that the progress talked about by the professionals was reflected by the lived experiences of children and young people.

Earlier this year Jeff Cuthbert, the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty, and Gwenda Thomas, the Deputy Minister for Social Services, issued a ministerial statement on Advocacy for Looked After Children, Care Leavers and Children in Need¹ stating:

¹ Written Statement – Statement on Advocacy for Looked after Children, Care Leavers and Children in Need (Welsh Government Jan 2014)

“The last year has seen significant attention focused on inquiries and investigations into cases of historic child abuse. These serve as a stark reminder of the importance of being constantly vigilant in protecting the most vulnerable members of our society. A common theme in these cases was that children simply were not listened to, or not believed. We cannot change the past, but we have to learn from it... We cannot emphasise enough the importance that should be placed on advocacy to ensure we listen to our children and young people when they say that things are not right, when they want help, when they want to be heard, when key decisions are being made that affect them, and when they need someone on their side... the provision of advocacy services must be absolutely central to the arrangements that local authorities operate to promote the well-being of children... local authorities must also assure themselves that the quality of the advocacy services provided is sufficient to ensure the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and that these vulnerable children and young people are able to access the services they deserve”.

I could not agree more with the sentiments expressed in this statement. The message is very clear, which is why I am disappointed and concerned that for a significant number of vulnerable children and young people their experience in relation to advocacy does not reflect the good intentions outlined above and for them little appears to have changed since "Missing Voices" in 2012.

Methodology

This review has been conducted utilising my powers and functions derived from the Care Standards Act (2000) and the Children's Commissioner for Wales Regulations (2001), which enables me to review the procedures that Welsh Minister and Local Authorities have in place in relation to providing children and young people with advocacy services.

To collect the views and opinions of children and young people I asked local authorities to facilitate and co-ordinate the completion of interactive surveys that were designed by a company already known and employed by a number of local authorities. The company specialises in creating on-line surveys that work for children and young people, and each survey would take between 10 and 30 minutes to complete. The web based surveys would be easily accessible to children and young people of different ages who were able to access appropriate digital communication devices. Local authorities were able to access both technical support and individual local authority management information from the organisation providing the on line survey.

The survey asked children and young people about their understanding, knowledge and experience of independent professional advocacy. Children and young people were able to select a character and different theme for the survey which was interactive and had a "talk to me" option with speech. Children and young people got to play a short computer game as a reward for completing the survey.

I had made the assumption that children and young people would be able to readily access computers / laptops / tablets/ phones through home, school, youth services, or their contact with professionals.

In an age where we assume that the vast majority of young people will have access to electronic communication it was surprising that of those children and young people completing the survey 13% said they had no access to the internet at home, 29% had very limited access to the internet at home and 21% had no access to a mobile phone. A number of children and young people completed paper versions of the survey that were then inputted by adults working with them.

I wanted to try and get a large representative sample of eligible children and young people completing the survey. I set each local authority a target number of surveys to be completed representing 5% of their 2012/13 Children in Need population.

Each local authority was also sent a questionnaire in which they were asked to self- assess themselves against the recommendations of "Missing Voices". All 22 local authorities completed questionnaires. Similarly, Welsh Government completed a self-assessment questionnaire in respect of recommendations that were made about them.

I also undertook two evidence exchanges with key professionals that I hoped would enable me to have a more holistic view of what was happening at an operational level. I met with managers from the three advocacy services who currently provide independent professional advocacy to looked after children, care leavers and children in need, and met with Independent Reviewing Officers who have an important part to play in ensuring that the voice of the child is heard at reviews, Child Protection Conferences and other settings.

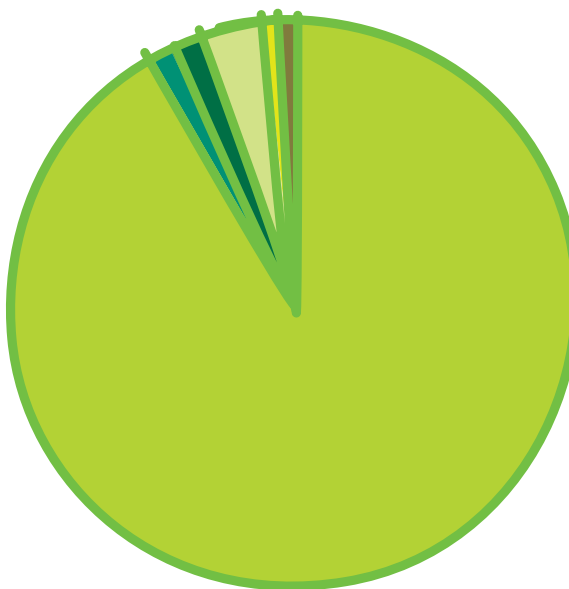
Finally I have had regular contact and discussions with the Chair of the Ministerial Expert group on Advocacy, which was set up following Welsh Government disbanding of the National Independent Advocacy Board.

What children and young people told me?

I was disappointed with the number of surveys returned by local authorities (see appendix 1). Only 3 out of 22 local authorities met their targets (Ceredigion, Flintshire, Anglesey) whilst three local authorities achieved less than 10% of their target (Neath Port Talbot, Newport, and Rhondda Cynon Taff). Despite this I am encouraged that the views and opinions of a large number of looked after children, care leavers, and children in need are reflected in this report. A total of 424 people opened the survey with 398 completing the first few questions about personal details. A total of 384 children and young people went on to complete questions about advocacy with 321 completing the full survey. Of the 384 children and young people that completed questions about advocacy 219 (57%) were female and 165 (43%) were male.

Ethnicity of respondents

Which of these best describes you?



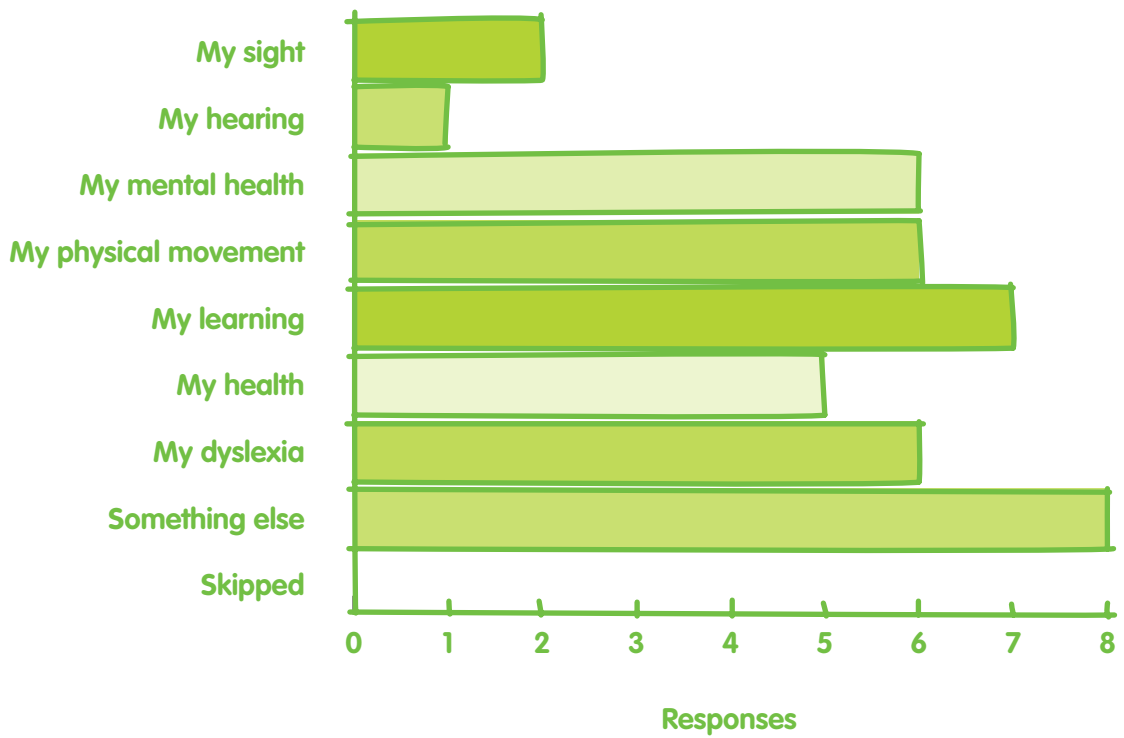
Age	Number completing	%
Under 10	29	8
10-12	50	13
13-15	109	28
16-18	147	38
19+	49	13
Total	384	100

Responses	Count	%
White, or White British	365	92
Black, or Black British	4	1
Asian, or Asian British	8	2
Mixed Background	14	3.5
Chinese	0	0
Gypsy/Romany/ Traveller	2	0.5
Other ethnic group	4	1
skipped	0	0
Total (Responses)	397	100

What children and young people told me?
Continued...

I was also encouraged that a number of children and young people with a disability were able to express their views. 27 children and young people with a disability completed the survey and identified the following as their disability. 27 users identified a total of 41 different disabilities.

What is your disability?

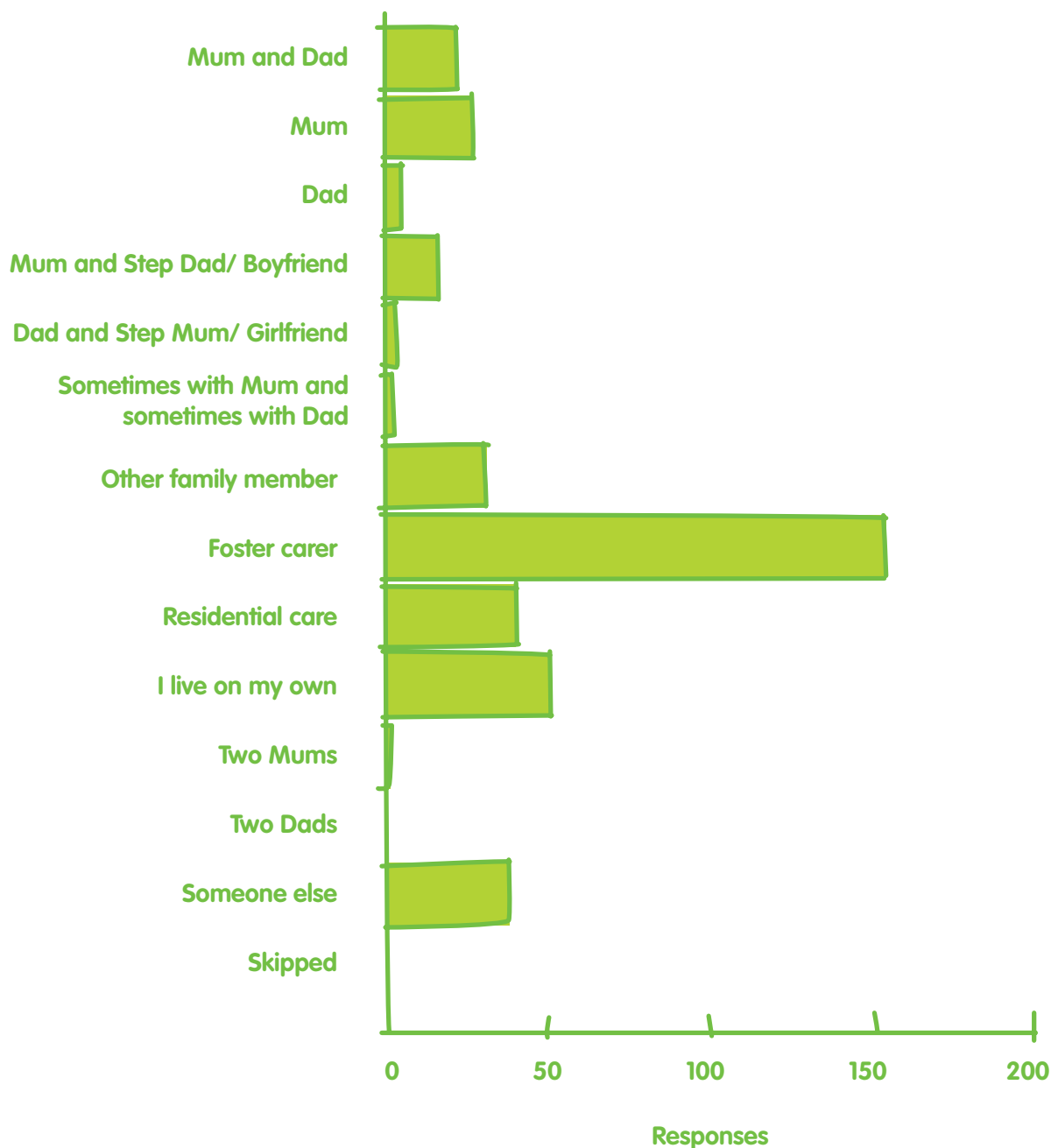


Total (Responses)
41

What children and young people told me?
Continued...

Completed surveys also indicated that children and young people living in a variety of different situations were represented. A significant number were living in care or living on their own.

Who do you live with?



Total (Responses)
389

Key Messages

38% of the children and young people completing the survey said they had never heard of advocacy.

48% of children and young people did not know or were unsure as to what advocacy was.

63% of children and young people did not know who their advocacy provider was.

51% of children and young people did not know or were unsure about how to contact their advocacy provider.

52% of children and young people did not know or were unsure as to whether they had an advocate in their area.

44% of children and young people did not know how to get in touch with an advocate.

42% of children and young people did not know or were unsure about how an advocate helps young people.

40% of children and young people said they were not regularly reminded about their right to have an advocate and a further 20% were unsure about this.

34% of children and young people said they had never been asked if they wanted an advocate.

29% of children and young people who have not had an advocate said that they would like one.

What children and young people told me?

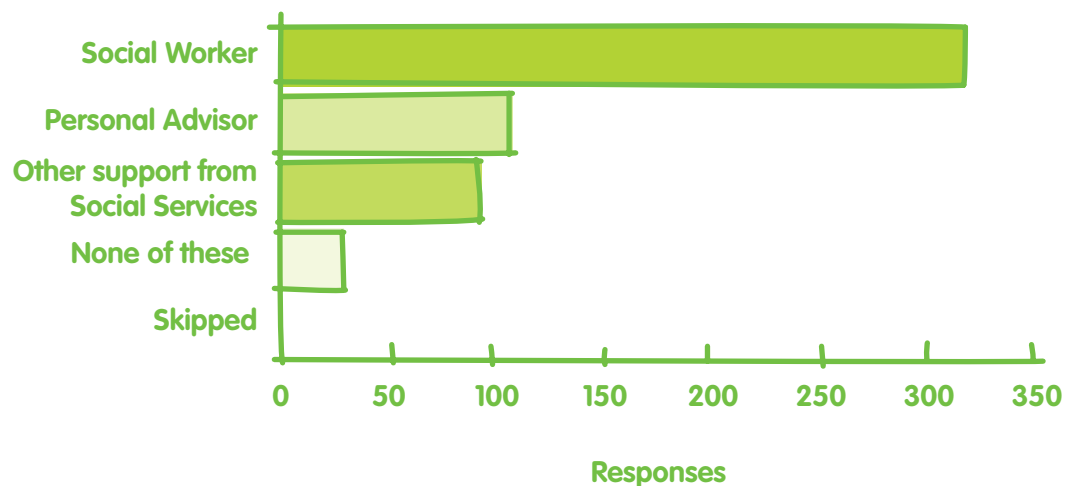
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I am extremely disappointed that significant numbers of vulnerable children and young people are still reporting that they don't know what advocacy is, they don't know how to access advocacy, and they are not reminded about their right to have an advocate. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of those responding to this survey were in contact with relevant professionals.

Professional Support

Do you have any of these?

Please select ALL that apply.



Total (Responses)

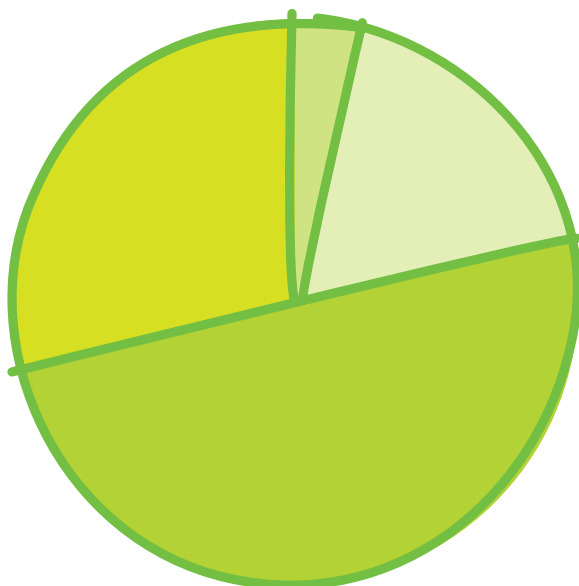
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What children and young people told me?
Continued...

I appreciate that not all vulnerable children and young people will want the support of an independent professional advocate but my survey indicated that 1 in 5 felt that they were not listened to when important decisions were being made about their lives.

Do you think you are listened to?

Do you think your views are listened to when important decisions are being made about you?



Responses	Count	%
Not at all	15	4
Not really	63	17
Most of the time	182	50
Yes, definitely	104	29
Skipped	0	0
Total (Responses)	364	100

Quite frankly this is not good enough. Services need to ensure that they can demonstrate that the voice of the child or young person has been listened to, and can demonstrate that when decisions are made that are different from what the child or young person wants, that an explanation has been given to the child or young person about why this is the case.

I had originally recommended in "Missing Voices" that all children and young people be automatically allocated an advocate when they came into the care system as I thought that this would at least ensure that they would not miss out on the opportunity of advocacy. Monmouthshire local authority currently operate a system where all children and young people coming into the care system are automatically contacted by an advocate, and they report a high take up of advocacy as a result of this practice. Monmouthshire's independent reviewing officer thought that Social Workers seem to feel less threatened by this happening automatically as part of the process of a child or young person coming into care, and helped to dispel notions that advocacy was just about complaints. However I am mindful that not all children and young people wish to have such contact and this has been borne out in my survey responses.

Would you be happy for your Social Worker to share your contact details with your local advocacy provider so they can make contact with you?

Responses	Count	%
Yes	174	52
Not sure	74	22
No	87	26
Skipped	0	0
Total (Responses)	335	100

What children and young people told me?

Continued...

Local authorities and advocacy providers will have to ensure that they employ alternative measures to ensure that an active offer of advocacy is made to all eligible children and young people. It is not acceptable that 95 children and young people who responded to my survey, who had not previously had an advocate, said they would like to have contact with an advocate now. Why haven't they been offered advocacy or referred to an advocate before?

Of equal concern to me is that 10 % of children and young people think that they can be stopped from speaking to an advocate and therefore may not even bother to try and access such support. Clearly there is still much more work to be done around the promotion and understanding of advocacy amongst children and young people. Those children and young people who had had contact with advocacy services (151 who responded to the questionnaire) were generally very positive about them:

"The advocate was very easy to talk to and helpful."

"My experiences have always been very pleasant and the team were nice and helpful."

It is experiences such as these that all eligible children and young people should be able to access wherever they live in Wales and whoever their contact with Social Services is with.

Progress in relation to Local Authorities

Each local authority was sent a questionnaire requiring them to self-assess against the recommendations of "Missing Voices". Specific information was sought in relation to each of the recommendations. All 22 local authorities returned questionnaires although in one case this did require the intervention of the Chief Executive.

It was clear that from what was being reported there had been some significant progress made within local authorities in relation to the issues I had raised in "Missing Voices." Information was shared about a wide range of good practice and I shall refer to examples of this throughout this section of the report. Unsurprisingly practice varied across Wales as did the pace of change. This was confirmed during my evidence exchange with independent reviewing officers, some of whom were able to report that there had been some significant positive changes, which had led to increases in children and young people accessing advocacy. Others reported little change over the two years since the publication of "Missing Voices". Concerns were raised about the impact of cuts to local authority budgets which had in some cases led to cuts to the advocacy provider's budgets with uncertainty about the longer term future of advocacy contracts. In some authorities this had led to waiting lists for the provision of independent professional advocacy and concerns that there were insufficient advocates to meet demand.

Perhaps what was most striking is that the positive progress reported by all local authorities was not reflected in what significant numbers of children and young people were saying in their response to the advocacy survey. The experiences of children and young people in contact with Social Services would indicate that very little has changed since the publication of "Missing Voices", particularly in respect of their knowledge and understanding about advocacy.

Awareness and understanding amongst children and young people

Children and young people are still reporting in significant numbers that they have never heard of advocacy and they don't know or are not sure what it is, despite the fact that advocacy providers and local authorities are reporting that they are using a variety of different mediums to promote the services, and are involving children and young people in the design of promotional material.

Blaenau Gwent local authority reported that NYAS, their local advocacy provider, has produced a DVD which is given to children and young people when they first become looked after. Other written materials have been produced in partnership with children and young people.

Merthyr local authority have produced two age appropriate leaflets that have been designed by children and young people. For the younger age group the pictorial leaflets explain that advocacy is independent (explained) and is confidential (explained) whilst the leaflet for teenagers includes information about rights and complaints.

Ceredigion local authority's advocacy provider, Tros Gynnal Plant, has produced a leaflet in symbols for children and young people with communication difficulties.

Neath Port Talbot local authority children and young people have helped develop the NPT website providing generic information about services. It has become apparent through that exercise that websites, apps and the use of social networking is a preferred means of communication with young people rather than the use of traditional leaflets. Neath Port Talbot are considering the development of appropriate and accessible information as part of a new revised contract with their advocacy provider.

There were many good examples provided of clear language and explanations for what advocacy is and what it is able to provide:

"An advocate is someone who will listen to you and help you to have your say."

"They can go to meetings with you, help with complaints, explain things and help you to understand whats going on..."

"It can help you to make decisions and then to speak out for what you want and need. It aims to make sure that your rights are respected and that other people understand your wishes and feeling."

However there were also a number of examples where the explanation was less clear and the language used was dense and difficult to understand. Four local authorities indicated that they were in the process of revamping their materials as their current materials were not sufficiently clear.

I was disappointed that 10 of the 22 local authorities reported that they did not seek feedback from children and young people about the materials they produced even if those materials had been developed by other children and young people. It would seem to me that listening to what children and young people might have to say about promotional material would be an effective means of assessing how effective those materials were and it is not a difficult thing to do.

Denbighshire local authority are planning to systematise feedback from all children and young people who have had a service from them, including advocacy services, by getting their business development officer to ask that they complete a form seeking their views about the quality and delivery of services and suggestions for improvements for future service users.

Adopting such a process will hopefully provide the type of information that Merthyr currently collect which can be used to provide rich information and which will ensure that materials are produced that children and young people easily understand and help them to access services. Merthyr children and young people had feedback that information leaflets were:

“Easy to understand – the pictures say what you do”

“...my advocate did the same as the pictures – and really helped me”

“When I had a look at the leaflet I knew I’d be able to talk to the advocacy service”

“When I saw the leaflet I understood you were the right people to ring”

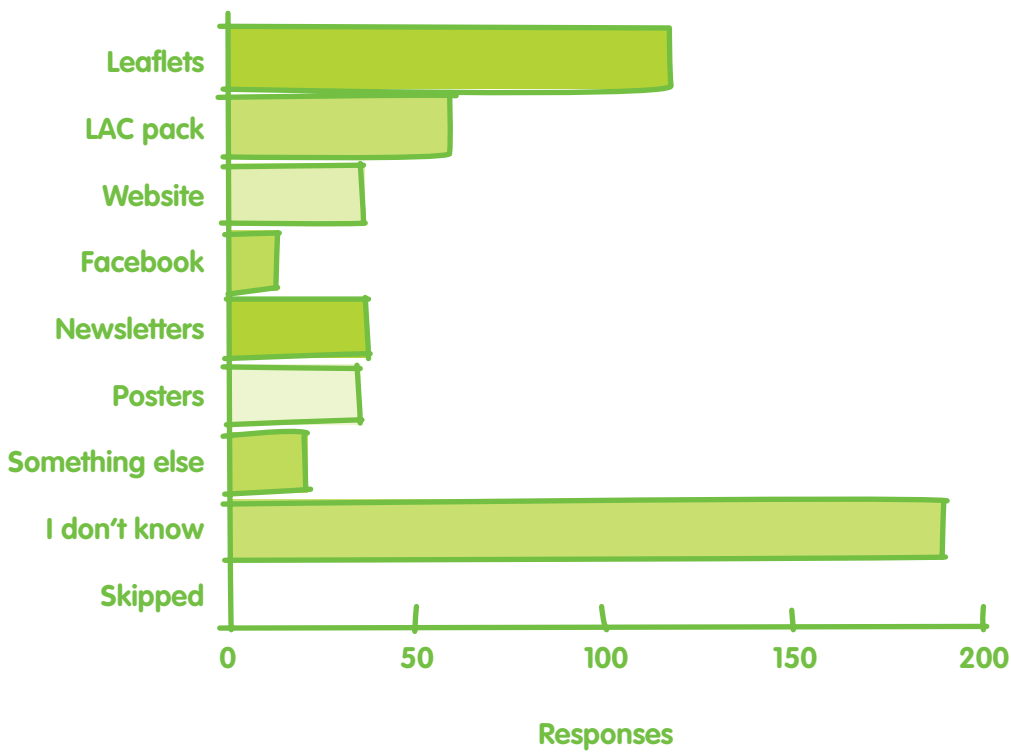
Local authorities had been asked to include within their service level agreements with advocacy providers appropriate operational procedures and protocols for information to be provided to children and young people. It was unclear from a number of local authorities whether this information had been included, or where it had been included the responsibility seemed to rest just with the advocacy provider and was not seen as a joint responsibility with the local authority. There were examples of good practice and:

Carmarthenshire local authority provided details of information in their service level agreement that included posters, leaflets, the council website, MEIC, information from Social Services for looked after children, attendance at annual events and youth forums and through participation with children and young people.

Cardiff local authority detailed bi-lingual and multi lingual leaflets co-produced by service users, quarterly newsletters, and a Facebook page for care leavers co-produced by service users.

Children and young people responding to my survey identified the following ways in which local authorities and advocacy providers promoted themselves.

How does your advocacy service promote itself?



Total (Responses)
507

Active offer of advocacy to children and young people

In "Missing Voices" I had expressed concerns that there were children and young people in the care system who did not know about advocacy. I recommended that all children and young people be allocated an advocate at the point at which they entered the statutory child care system. Following representations from local authorities about the difficulties in meeting this recommendation, and concerns that this may not be in the best interest of the child or young person who may not want contact with yet another professional, I agreed that making an active offer of advocacy to each child and young person would ensure they at least knew about advocacy and how they could access the service locally.

I specifically asked local authorities to provide me with information about how this active offer was made, and how they recorded this information. Only one local authority in Wales allocates an advocate to each new child that comes into the child care system (Monmouthshire) with all other authorities stating that they actively offer advocacy. However common practice in making an active offer is for the child's social worker to provide the child or young person with a looked after children (LAC) pack or similar at the point at which they enter the child care system. In many authorities this does not appear to be followed up with an active discussion about advocacy and how advocacy differs from the support that can be provided by a Social Worker.

I am extremely concerned that half of the local authorities in Wales do not record that an active offer of advocacy has been made to the child or young person, and are therefore unable to report on practice in this respect. It is therefore not possible for them to counteract the views of children and young people who have told me they do not know about advocacy and have never had it discussed with them. I therefore have to assume that what I am being told by children and young people is an accurate reflection of what is happening in local authorities. This is not acceptable and concerns me greatly. Little or no progress has been made since the publication of "Missing Voices". Local authorities should be able to report against this recommendation and indeed there are a number who have changed their practice or recording systems to ensure that this is the case.

Gwynedd local authority have changed their recording documents for case conferences and children in need reviews to show if advocacy has been offered and taken up.

Neath Port Talbot local authority have added two boxes to their electronic case management system to record if advocacy has been offered and if advocacy has been taken up. The change has been in place since February 2014 but will allow them to report about this in the future.

Monmouthshire local authority's independent reviewing officer provides Action for Children, who provide their advocacy service, with a list of all new children and young people who have entered the childcare system. Action for Children then make contact with all the children and young people and report take up of advocacy within their quarterly reports to the local authority.

Participation of children and young people in the development of services

I have been presented with some very good examples of children and young people's involvement in the development of services and the following examples serve to demonstrate how local authorities can meaningfully involve children and young people in the development of services.

Bridgend local authority took the lead for a project that sought to establish a regional advocacy project across a number of the South Wales authorities. The involvement of children and young people was a key part of each stage of the project. The project established a participation task and finish group that produced an action plan in line with the National Participation Standards², which established how the project would involve children and young people. Children and young people were involved in an indicator voting exercise to establish the percentage of children and young people across the region who reported that they were taken seriously and listened to when decisions were being made that affected their lives, children and young people who had received an advocacy service were consulted about their experiences of the service, a consultation was undertaken with children and young people on the commissioning plan priorities, children and young people were involved in the development of specifications for the commissioned service. This included outcome focused performance measures for the new provider including collecting evidence from children and young people about the quality of the advocacy service they had received as well as information about the difference the service had made to their lives. Children and young people are also to be involved in annual service reviews, the management board for the organisation and in the development of annual reports.

Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly local authorities also detailed how children and young people had been involved in the development of the advocacy service including participating in the contracting and commissioning process, sitting as members of the interview panel for the new service, becoming involved in a peer advocacy project, and being involved in a task and finish group that considered the recommendations of a report prepared for the local authority by their advocacy provider into the views and experiences of LAC aged 10-18 years.

In Cardiff, the newsletter and care leavers group attended the Children and Young People's scrutiny committee to make representations to Cardiff councillors regarding the future of participation work in Cardiff. Tros Gynnal Plant, the local advocacy provider, invited Cardiff parenting panel to their offices to meet with young people to assist the parenting panel in their evaluation of the advocacy service. Tros Gynnal have also involved young people in a consultation event for their Young Person Advisory group.

2 National Standards for Children and Young Peoples Participation – Welsh Government (January 2007)

Despite this good practice there are still a number of authorities who do not involve children and young people in service development although state that they intend to do so in the future. Two years after the publication of "Missing Voices" I do not think the following statements are acceptable;

We are looking to form a children and young people's group which will include looking into future commissioning plans in relation to advocacy.

We have not had a way of consulting with children and young people as a group although this is now under development as a priority.

The contract for advocacy is currently being re-tendered on a regional basis and it is planned that once this is achieved young people will be fully involved in the shaping and ongoing review of the service

Whilst the majority of authorities do actively involve children and young people in the development of their services, and I am confident that the experiences of those children will have been very positive, I am unsure about the impact that this is having on the wider group of children and young people who are eligible for independent advocacy services but are telling me that they do not know about, do not understand, and are not able to access independent advocacy. Local authorities need to work with children and young people to develop outcome based performance measures that will make a difference to their lives and involve them in monitoring performance and contributing to an understanding about why outcomes may not be being achieved.

Local authority monitoring of services

I had recommended that local authorities should review the local take up of independent professional advocacy services to eligible children and young people in their area and to investigate any patterns of low take up. Whilst it was clear from the local authority returns that they monitored the take up of advocacy services on a regular basis this tended to be in most cases through the quarterly returns that their local advocacy provider sent them. There was little evidence that local authorities were actively looking at take up of services in relation to the size of their looked after and children in need populations although there were exceptions to this.

In Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority they have quarterly advocacy operations meetings which are attended by a range of officers from the authority. Patterns of low take up of advocacy are reviewed and actions identified to improve understanding or promote awareness.

In Gwynedd local authority at the quarterly monitoring meeting with the advocacy provider referrals are reviewed in relation to gender, age, legal status, referral source, issue and living arrangements. This allows for informed discussion about any identifiable patterns or problems. This analysis indicated that there were difficulties in relation to low referral rates which led to a number of awareness raising sessions amongst staff. The analysis had shown that self-referrals were relatively high

In Neath Port Talbot local authority the current IT system was updated in February 2014 to include information confirming that each child coming into the LAC system had been advised about the independent advocacy service, and the system was able to track the numbers of children and young people taking up advocacy. It is intended that this information will be reported quarterly from the provider to members, Principal Officers and Team Managers.

I had also sought information from local authorities about the review of information for children and young people placed out of county but had very little information provided about this. Given the vulnerability of this group of children and young people this is unacceptable.

Staff awareness

A key task for advocacy providers is to ensure that all Social Workers know about, understand, and are aware of their service and how to access that service for the children and young people they are working with. At the time that "Missing Voices" was published it was clear that this was very far from the case. To this end I made recommendations that I thought would improve the knowledge and understanding of Social Workers and increase the likelihood that they would refer appropriate cases to the advocacy provider.

I had recommended that all induction programmes for Social Workers and Youth Offending Team staff should include a clear understanding of the benefits and practice of independent professional advocacy. I would have thought that this would be an easy recommendation to implement and would contribute positively to the professional development of new staff. I find it hard to believe that nine out of the 22 local authorities in Wales have not implemented this recommendation and that in seven of those authorities Social Workers did not have any direct input about advocacy as part of their induction programmes. Staff being encouraged to visit their advocacy provider as part of their induction rather than required to visit does not to my mind constitute a clear message from the top that advocacy and the voice of the child is important and should be taken seriously by all new staff. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) had reported to me that in some local authorities the Social Workers understanding and knowledge about independent professional advocacy was limited and meant that Social Workers were unable to understand why an IRO was suggesting the need for an advocate or independent visitor.

I was more encouraged by the information I received in relation to raising staff awareness across the childcare teams within local authorities. The majority of local authorities were actively engaging their advocacy provider to raise awareness with staff about their service and in a number of authorities it was reported that this extended to more than just visiting teams.

Anglesey local authority reported that advocacy is now part of the agenda for team meetings, supervision sessions with staff, service meetings, operational meetings and senior management meetings.

Pembrokeshire local authority reported a number of events at which advocacy was promoted, including a speed information workshop with all children's services staff, attendance at a secondary school information sharing event, foster care workshops, and LAC forum workshops.

Conwy local authority also reported an impressive number of events that their advocacy provider had attended including corporate parenting panels, a corporate parenting event, mental health advocacy event, individual councillor presentations, homeless protocol workshops, and volunteer networks.

What became clear from this feedback and from the evidence exchange that I had with advocacy providers is the importance of including time and resources in the advocacy contract to undertake this important work. Promotion of the work that they undertake and regular engagement with staff and other professionals is key to ensuring that staff are reminded about the importance of advocacy. Advocacy providers reported that some local authorities take this responsibility seriously and work jointly with the advocacy provider to provide training and staff engagement opportunities whilst other local authorities place the burden for all engagement firmly and squarely with the advocacy provider.

I had recommended in "Missing Voices" that advocacy providers quarterly reports should be copied to all children and family services staff to help raise awareness of the service and to act as a gentle reminder to staff to discuss advocacy with the children and young people they were working with. Advocacy providers were also expected to ensure that they there should be regular attendance at team meetings to ensure a clear understanding of local practice and process.

There is a mixed picture across local authority areas in respect of this recommendation. Eight local authorities admit that they do not send copies of the quarterly report to teams. A further six local authorities distribute the report to managers and expect them to cascade the report to staff. No-one reported whether they monitor this to ensure that that happens.

Denbighshire local authority have a more systematic approach to the distribution of the quarterly report, placing it on their working documents store which all members of staff in the children and families services have access to. The main issues highlighted in the service provider's quarterly monitoring report are captured in the Children and Family Services Quality Assurance Programme progress report which is then discussed at management team and service level meetings every quarter.

Whilst the majority of local authorities were able to detail the number of visits that advocacy providers had made to their Social Work and Youth Offending Teams three local authorities reported that during the period 1 April 2012- 31 March 2014 no visits were undertaken by their advocacy provider to any of their Social Work / Youth Offending Teams. It is interesting to note the differences that exist across Wales in terms of the active engagement of the advocacy provider with social services staff.

Awareness amongst parents / foster carers / guardians

Awareness of advocacy is not only important for Social Workers and other professionals to have but also for those with whom children and young people are living. I had recommended in "Missing Voices" that parents, foster carers and guardians should be routinely provided with clear information and training about professional independent advocacy. It is important that those who spend the most time with the child or young person are fully aware of the supports that are available and not to see an advocate as a potential threat or someone that might undermine their own caring role. Whilst carers may see themselves as the natural advocate for the child, the child may not share this view and may prefer to have someone completely independent to help them express their viewpoint. Indeed, I would expect parents/carers and guardians as being key to explaining and reinforcing to the child or young person the potential benefits of having an advocate.

This is not a view that would appear to be shared by all local authorities. Some clearly tried to promote advocacy in a variety of ways through information being included in children's guides, parent's information packs, on local authority websites, on Family Information Service websites, or through newsletters. Other local authorities admitted to doing little or nothing at all to promote to parents or carers other than foster carers. Whilst there appeared to be a lot of engagement with foster carers there was little or no information provided about how the local authority engaged with parents of other carers other than through general leaflets or the Independent Reviewing Officer or Complaints Officer.

I had recommended in "Missing Voices" that advocates should be responsible for explaining their role to the child's parent, foster parent or guardian in order to ensure that a proper understanding about advocacy would ensure that they were less likely to feel threatened by advocacy and consequently more likely to promote advocacy. The majority of local authorities (14 out of 22) do not have in place a system for monitoring if this takes place whilst others tend to rely on the advocacy provider to report on this in their quarterly reports to the local authority. It is not good enough for local authorities to pay such scant attention to those who can provide the encouragement and support to children and young people to access advocacy and more needs to be done to effectively engage parents and carers in the promotion of advocacy to their children.

Corporate parents

The role of the corporate parent is crucial in championing and recognising the importance of advocacy for children and young people. I had made a number of recommendations in "Missing Voices" to address concerns that I had that there was insufficient understanding and knowledge about advocacy by elected members, and insufficient scrutiny of the service that was provided locally. It had appeared to me that there was a distinct lack of robustness in respect of the scrutiny of advocacy services.

There does appear to have been genuine attempts by local authorities to ensure that corporate parents are informed about and have received training about their local advocacy service. However the provision of training and information does appear to vary considerably across authorities.

Pembrokeshire local authority include advocacy as part of their corporate parenting training programme for all new elected members. Materials used in the training are available electronically to all elected members via an elected member development site.

In Cardiff advocacy is included in elected member briefings on improving outcomes for Looked After Children, advocacy provision is considered by the Children and Young Peoples scrutiny committee on an annual basis and committee members have planned listening events with children and young people that are co-ordinated by the advocacy provider. The Corporate Parenting Panel meet with the advocacy provider and children and young people who receive an advocacy service annually, and they also undertake site visits to the advocacy provider to meet with advocates and children and young people.

In Swansea, training for all elected members on their role as corporate parents is run each year and on the last occasion young people ran part of the session. Information for elected members on their role as corporate parents is available on the intranet including a copy of the Welsh Government/Welsh Local Government Association publication "If this were my child...a councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent."

Whilst it would appear that initial training and information is being provided to newly elected members they are far less likely to receive information on an ongoing basis about the performance of their local advocacy service. 14 local authorities have ignored the recommendation I made about copying the advocacy providers quarterly report to all elected members. There would also appear to be a considerable variation in the attendance and engagement of the advocacy provider at Corporate Parenting Panels. In some authorities the advocacy provider will be a member of the Corporate Parenting Panel and will provide regular updates about their service, whilst in other authorities they might attend on an annual basis, or in some authorities have no engagement with the Corporate Parenting panel at all.

I had recommended in “Missing Voices” that local authorities should ensure that the elected member with statutory responsibility for children’s services act as a local champion of advocacy and provide strong leadership in this area. Five local authorities were unable to detail how their elected member championed advocacy. However a significant number of the remaining authorities were able to provide detail about how this responsibility was taken forward and the key aspects of effective engagement and championing of advocacy seem to me to be demonstrated by the following examples:

In Carmarthenshire local authority the elected member chairs the corporate parenting panel of which the advocacy provider is a member, attends participation events that involve children and young people, and attends the annual LAC Awards event.

In the Vale of Glamorgan the elected member with responsibility for children and young people is also the elected member for Education and chairs the Corporate Parenting Panel.

In Ceredigion local authority the elected member is chair of the service provider’s forum for children and young people, is chair of the local service board executive group for children and young people, and sits on the corporate parenting panel. They are also a member of the Ceredigion Council cabinet.

In Bridgend local authority the elected member was a contributing partner to the regional advocacy project. They also initiated and chaired the dedicated training session for all members of the authority about the project. They have also ensured that the councils cabinet and its cabinet committee on corporate parenting receive progress reports and makes decisions about the development of the advocacy service.

In Neath Port Talbot local authority the elected member with the portfolio for children and young people’s services has a wide ranging interest in supporting and working with children and young people. They have worked as a volunteer with CVS / YOT, are vice chair of governors in two primary schools, are an active supporter of and have regular contact with the manager of the children’s rights unit in Neath Port Talbot and is a director and volunteer with Baglan Youth Forum.

Despite commitments such as these I remain concerned about the level of the scrutiny arrangements that are in place in relation to advocacy. I had asked local authorities to provide me with information about which scrutiny committee scrutinises independent professional advocacy. 14 local authorities state that they are not regularly scrutinised by local authority members in relation to the provision of advocacy whilst others reported that the scrutiny of independent professional advocacy is a responsibility of the corporate parenting panel. Much of the information that I received from local authorities in relation to this question was vague and lacking in detail. Examples of good practice included:

Cardiff's children and young people's scrutiny committee who discussed advocacy related issues at three different meetings in 2013, in May to consider a report providing the outcomes from a listening event with looked after children undertaken in partnership with the councils advocacy service, In June when the committee scrutinised the children's services business plan which included actions and priorities specifically relating to the advocacy service and in July for the pre-decision scrutiny of the collaborative regional advocacy commissioning plan.

Caerphilly's Health Social Care and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee have listened to a presentation about their role as corporate parents from a member of Caerphilly's Shout Out Group, have had a presentation on the authorities response to "Missing Voices", and have also had a presentation from NYAS the authorities advocacy provider about the work that they do and the issues that have been raised with them by children and young people.

In Pembrokeshire local authority advocacy and participation are part of the remit of the Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Following a full independent review of Advocacy and Participation arrangements in Pembrokeshire in March 2013 advocacy has featured on the agenda of that committee on three occasions.

Progress in relation to Welsh Government

In “Missing Voices” I was critical of what I perceived to be as a lack of strategic leadership and direction at a national level in relation to the development and implementation of an advocacy framework for children and young people that had promised so much, but which was in danger of becoming marginalised and forgotten about within a much wider changing policy context for children and young people.

I made a number of very specific recommendations to Welsh Government as to what I thought they should be doing to address the issues I had raised.

Strategic Leadership

I am pleased that a Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy and a Young Person's Expert Group has been established, taking over the mantle of the disbanded National Independent Advocacy Board. The Ministerial Expert Group has already produced, in December 2013, a very clear and powerful report on Commissioning provision for Ministers and I am aware that the Deputy Minister for Social Services has recently written to local authorities and advocacy providers, urging partners to give due consideration to implementing the recommendations made within the report. In these letters, issued during June 2014, the Deputy Minister asserts how she believes 'the effective provision of statutory advocacy services to be vital to improving outcomes for children and young people in Wales'. It would seem to me that the Ministerial Expert Group has started to provide Ministers with the advice and guidance that will enable them to make the important decisions about the future commissioning and delivery of advocacy services that need to be made if there is to be a step change in the experiences of children and young people.

I remain concerned on the pace of change at a local level, and as can be seen from the views of children and young people in the two years since the publication of "Missing Voices", their experience, understanding and knowledge about advocacy appears little changed. I acknowledge that the Deputy Minister for Social Services has issued a number of formal communications to local authorities reminding them about their responsibilities in relation to advocacy – May 2012, December 2012, December 2013- and that the joint ministerial statement previously referred to in this report provided a clear and unequivocal message to local authorities about the importance of advocacy, but I remain unconvinced that these letters and statements have had the desired impact. I welcome the Deputy Minister's recognition in her most recent letter concerning local authorities allocated budgets towards advocacy, that the returns have 'laid bare the significant discrepancies in funding across Wales'.

Whilst some local authorities clearly prioritise the importance of the voice of the child with all that that entails, others appear less committed and this is having a negative impact upon children and young people. Knowing the significant impact that advocacy has on children and young people's lives means that one child who does not have their voice heard in decisions that have an impact on their future care is one child too many. There now needs to be a mechanism in place for holding local authorities to account for the provision of this vital service and it is the role of Welsh Government through the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales to raise standards, improve quality and promote best practice across the social care sector.

Monitoring, Inspection and Regulation

The Deputy Minister has stated that she wishes to bring advocacy within the regulatory regime and that this will be achieved within the scope of the forthcoming Regulation and Inspection Bill. I see this as a real opportunity for advocacy services to be properly recognised with the importance that they deserve and for regulation and inspection to play a key part in contributing to the standardisation of services across Wales. I am concerned though at the length of time that it is taking to progress this. As the Regulation and Inspection Bill is unlikely to come into effect until 2017 there clearly needs to be interim arrangements in place for monitoring the delivery and regulation of advocacy services.

I welcome the recent publication of 'The National Outcomes Framework for people who need care and support, 2014-15'³. I consider this to be an important step in ensuring that services are developed in a way that will provide tangible evidence of the difference that they make to the lives of children and young people. Key changes should ensure the principle of social services is based on the well-being of children who need care and support, through empowerment by greater voice and control. I am aware that the revision of a 'National Standards and Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People's Advocacy Services in Wales'⁴ is still being undertaken. I look forward to seeing how parity between these outcome frameworks will contribute to both the monitoring of children's well-being and also toward the development of service standards through which advocacy may become a regulated service. However unless some mechanism is put in place to hold local authorities and advocacy providers to account for the provision of such services then it is unlikely that the current experiences of children and young people will change.

In "Missing Voices" I had made it clear that I thought that Welsh Government should re-establish a distinct Advocacy Unit with a remit to promote best practice and to ensure the delivery of a consistent service by engaging with and supporting local delivery against national standards across Wales. I had recommended that such a unit develop and share with key stakeholders an annual work programme. It had been clear to me that without this focus from central government including appropriate accountability then the situation at local level was unlikely to change significantly. I had assumed that the voice of the child and the upholding of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as key drivers of Welsh Government policy for children and young people would ensure that the concerns that I had raised about advocacy would be addressed by the work of a dedicated advocacy unit.

To date I see little evidence that this recommendation has been progressed. There is no dedicated advocacy unit although I am encouraged that there is an imminent recruitment process for a fixed term employee to work closely with local authorities to help promote consistent best practice across local government. "Missing Voices" highlighted the need for capacity and priority to be given within Welsh Government on advocacy and I welcome the establishment of this secondment post to assist in providing leadership in an enabling role.

3 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dhss/publications/140624NOFen.pdf>

4 <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/phhs/consultation/130318childrenconsultationen.pdf>

The focus on advocacy for children and young people has also not been helped by organisational change within Welsh Government that has seen the portfolio for advocacy falling between two ministers and their respective departments. At the time of the publication of "Missing Voices" the remit for advocacy sat within the Empowering Children and Young People Branch of Welsh Government reporting directly to the Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services. Following an internal reorganisation advocacy now sits between the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty – in relation to children's advocacy, children and young people's rights and entitlements, and the UNCRC – and the Deputy Minister for Social Services – in relation to the statutory provision of advocacy in relation to looked after children, care leavers and children in need.

The Empowering Children and Young People's Branch sitting within the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty portfolio are assuming responsibility for organising the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy and organising the national advocacy conference, although the remit for this element of advocacy sits within the Deputy Minister for Social Services. Part of the reason for recommending the establishment of a dedicated advocacy unit focusing on advocacy was that I would be provided with a copy of their annual work programme which would enable me to see what work was being planned and undertaken in relation to the concerns that I had raised, and would enable me to monitor progress towards the achievement of those objectives utilising my powers under the Care Standards Act 2000. I have been unable to do this and think that the division of responsibilities between the two branches of government with civil servants working to different Ministers with different priorities has affected the focus that I wished to see being placed on advocacy.

As the independent human rights institution for children and young people in Wales, matters of internal Government arrangements do not concern me unless they have an adverse effect on the realisation of children's rights which are enshrined by the UNCRC. In undertaking such a statutory review as I have done with 'Missing Voices' then I am legally directed to focus on whether the procedures followed by those subject to the review are effective in safeguarding and promoting the rights and welfare of children⁵. My remit allows me to make recommendations following a 'Review of Functions' and also enables me to publish when an organisation has failed to follow recommendations that I have made. Therefore I do not make these calls lightly as I urge Welsh Ministers to answer my calls and take immediate action in order to prioritise children and young people receiving their statutory entitlements to independent advocacy services.

5 Care Standards Act 2000

Conclusion

Two years ago I produced a report that set out my concerns about a group of vulnerable children and young people who I felt were being badly let down by a system that they probably didn't wish to be part of, and which failed to properly listen to what they wanted. This wasn't because there wasn't the infrastructure, or guidance in place to provide this service but because services were not effectively being promoted to all those they should be reaching, they were not well understood by those who should be receiving them, and they were inconsistently funded and resourced. They were also ineffectually regulated and inspected.

I made a number of recommendations (see Appendix 2) to Welsh Government and to local authorities that I thought would help to address the concerns that I had raised and which would reinvigorate national and local partners to get Wales back on track to deliver its aspirations for vulnerable children and young people.

To date I feel we have failed those vulnerable children and young people. I can't deny that there has been some progress but it has been patchy and it has been slow. Local authorities have chosen not to implement seemingly straightforward recommendations that would allow them to know if their services had improved. Welsh Government have not provided the necessary drive and determination to push forward change at an appropriate pace. There have been too many excuses for why change has not happened more quickly and in the meantime the situation for children and young people remains much the same as it was two years ago. The situation described by the chair of the National Expert Group on Advocacy in his report to ministers on Commissioning Provision fairly sums up the current situation in Wales:

“There are examples of good practice but the overwhelming impression is one of a post code lottery in which the promotion of advocacy to children and young people, their understanding of it and ease of access to it, the quality and quantity of commissioning and provision and the monitoring of outcomes differs markedly from one local authority to another. It seems largely dependent on a temporary meeting of minds of those in charge of children’s services and is based on “finger in the wind” calculations rather than any more scientific estimation of need”.

For there to be any discernable change in the future we need to think about a new way of delivering this service. The current model of commissioning by local authorities, whether that be individually or working regionally, is not working effectively. I am not convinced that a service that represents such a small part of the local authority Social Services budget will ever assume the priority that should be afforded to it if commissioning remains at the local level. Without significant change this local model of commissioning is likely to perpetuate the well documented shortcomings of current provision. It is time to move towards a national model of commissioning that would hopefully provide the focus, impetus, and accountability structures that appear to me to be lacking at the moment.

We have already started to strengthen regional leadership to deliver a transformational change in social care in Wales, and I see no reason why the same approach can't be taken for advocacy⁶. We should not sell our children short in creating new services which aim to meet their care and support needs, and I agree with the Deputy Minister's recent statement which affirms that 'our ability to deliver transformation for people is dependent on our national and regional leadership'⁷. The work that Dr Mike Shooter has completed with the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy has been appraised of the good practice of a national model in Northern Ireland and the benefits it brings to children receiving the service. A cultural shift of this kind would be particularly timely as the National Adoption Service will be rolled out across Wales later this year. This is a partnership model between Welsh Government, the WLGA and ADSS which is reliant on delivery by regional collaborations, so advocacy services in Wales could easily follow the precedent that has been set by this new national service.

6 <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/healthandsocialcare/2014/140626regional-leadership/?lang=en>

7 Ibid

I am conscious that there has been, and will continue to be, new legislation and guidance in implementing the Sustainable Social Services Framework⁸, that continues to modernise children's social services in Wales. We must recognise the current statutory framework that is in place, but is not meeting the needs of children and young people who have the right to have their voice heard in matters that impact upon their lives. There is no starker reminder than the emergence of the fresh allegations of historic abuse in North Wales and the establishment of Operation Pallial and the Macur Review. The current prominence of historic child abuse scandals demonstrates the immediate need to get advocacy right for children and young people today. Advocacy enables us to create a climate where we listen to children and young people, a culture where we can better protect our children. In short, advocacy safeguards children and young people.

8 <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/guidance1/services/?lang=en>

The central recommendation from 'Lost in Care: the Waterhouse report' was for the establishment of an independent Children's Commissioner for Wales whose duties should include ensuring children's rights are respected through oversight of the operation of children's advocacy⁹. My role and that of my office is interdependent with the principles behind advocacy as a primary safeguarding service and we cannot accept the current situation where access to, and quality of, advocacy is a post code lottery for our most vulnerable children and young people.

9 Lost in Care, 2000
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/publicationsandstatistics/publications/publicationspolicyandguidance/DH_4003097

Recent actions by Welsh Ministers on advocacy have highlighted the importance of continued strong, strategic leadership. Though my frustrations have continued to be apparent as outlined within this report, I am confident following recent meetings with Ministers that we can, as a priority, build upon this momentum and get advocacy services for those children and young people with a statutory entitlement to a better place than I have found it to be during my tenure as Commissioner. Advocacy can and does improve children's lives- I have seen and heard of the impact it has on children's lives throughout my time in office. The current state of affairs which finds the principle safeguarding mechanism for looked children and young people unfit for purpose in 2014 is not acceptable and the time for action is now. We cannot be in a position where on March 1st 2015 the next Commissioner is coming in to be faced by the same problems and issues that I have been frustrated with throughout my tenure.

Recommendations

These recommendations should be read in conjunction with those within 'Missing Voices' and 'Missing Voices: Missing Progress' (see Appendix 2).

Recommendation 1:

Call on Welsh Government to develop a national model of commissioning independent professional advocacy services with outcome focused service specification.

Recommendation 2:

Call on Welsh Government and CSSIW to ensure interim arrangements are in place to provide monitoring and regulation of the delivery of advocacy services during the development of the regulation and inspection framework.

Recommendation 3:

Call on Local Authorities to make an active offer of advocacy toward a child or young person at the earliest possible time following entry to the statutory childcare system. This offer should take place through a face-to-face meeting between the child or young person and an independent professional advocate so that service users are fully informed of their rights and entitlements and are provided with information, advice and assistance on the role of independent advocacy. The active offer should remain ongoing throughout a child or young person's time in care, and monitored through their statutory reviews by the Independent Reviewing Officer. (This Recommendation replaces recommendation 2 from 'Missing Voices').

Recommendation 4:

Call on Local Authorities to ensure they institute recording procedures that identify that there has been an active offer of advocacy made, and records whether the offer has been taken up.

Recommendation 5:

Call on Local Authorities to ensure that a senior representative from their commissioned independent professional advocacy service is a member of the corporate parenting panel.

Appendix 1

Local Authority	Target	Number completed
Blaneau Gwent	26	15 (58%)
Bridgend	57	15 (26%)
Caerphilly	68	42 (62%)
Cardiff	118	53 (45%)
Carmarthenshire	57	6 (11%)
Ceredigion	22	29 (132%)
Conwy	27	18 (67%)
Denbighshire	30	23 (77%)
Flintshire	21	22 (105%)
Gwynedd	33	12(36%)
Anglesey	19	19 (100%)
Merthyr	28	11 (39%)
Monmouthshire	24	14 (58%)
Neath Port Talbot	72	1 (1%)
Newport	54	7 (13%)
Pembrokeshire	27	22 (81%)
Powys	36	7 (19%)
Rhondda Cynon Taff	94	10 (11%)
Swansea	84	39 (46%)
Vale of Glamorgan	32	13(41%)
Torfaen	50	7 (14%)
Wrexham	32	13(41%)

Appendix 2

Recommendations from “Missing Voices” (2012)

Issues raised in the report	Recommendations for Welsh Government
Lack of strategic leadership	<p>Welsh Government should provide clear strategic direction to local authorities to ensure that all children who have statutory eligibility for independent professional advocacy wherever they live in Wales are able to access such a service through clear and consistent procedures and practice (Recommendation 15)</p> <p>As a matter of urgency, Welsh Government must publish statutory guidance, standards and an outcomes framework for delivering advocacy services for children and young people without delay. (Recommendation 23)</p> <p>Welsh Government should disband the National Independent Advocacy Board with immediate effect. (Recommendation 24)</p> <p>Welsh Government should re-establish a distinct Advocacy Unit focusing on advocacy, with a strengthened remit to promote best practice and to ensure the delivery of a consistent service by engaging with and supporting local delivery against national standards across Wales. The work programme for the Unit to be developed and shared annually with commissioners, providers, inspectorates and the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for Wales. (Recommendation 26)</p> <p>The re-launched Advocacy Unit should bring commissioners, providers and other key stakeholders to an annual meeting to examine progress against the national standards, to share best practice and to identify developmental goals that could inform improvement and take up of services. (Recommendation 27)</p> <p>Welsh Government should issue clear and definitive guidance on commissioning independent advocacy to local authorities. (Recommendation 11)</p> <p>Welsh Government should give consideration to the development of a national funding formula to inform the hypothecation of a portion of the Social Services budget for independent professional advocacy according to locally identified need. (Recommendation 13)</p> <p>Welsh Government should provide a national framework to ensure that there is consistent promotion of information about advocacy across Wales. (Recommendation 19)</p>

Recommendations from "Missing Voices" (2012)

Issues raised in the report	Recommendations for Welsh Government
Lack of monitoring, inspection and regulation	<p data-bbox="416 495 1292 600">Welsh Government should establish an appropriate and robust accountability mechanism in relation to advocacy within Government. (Recommendation 25)</p> <p data-bbox="416 640 1292 819">A means of regulation and inspection must be established as a matter of urgency. Welsh Government and CSSIW should be tasked with incorporating advocacy in the regulatory and inspection framework for Children and Family Services and should establish a process to register advocacy providers. (Recommendation 28)</p> <p data-bbox="416 860 1292 996">Welsh Government and CSSIW should consider placing a requirement on residential settings for children and young people to have arrangements in place for independent professional advocacy. (Recommendation 29)</p>

Recommendations from “Missing Voices, Missing Progress” (2013)

The following recommendations are made in accordance with my powers and functions derived from the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales Regulations 2001. The recommendations are supplementary to those made in “Missing Voices” and are directed to Welsh Government. I would expect actions in relation to these recommendations to feature in Welsh Government’s action plan for developing independent professional advocacy services:

- 1 Welsh Government to issue guidance on their preferred model for delivering advocacy services through publication of updated statutory guidance.**
- 2 Welsh Government to commission primary research into the effectiveness of its model for delivering advocacy services to help determine if its model provides the best outcomes for children and young people.**
- 3 The Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy to monitor on an annual basis the commissioning and funding arrangements that are in place across the 22 local authority areas to ensure that appropriate independent professional advocacy services are available for children and young people who have a statutory entitlement to an advocacy service.**
- 4 Welsh Government and the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy to promote the use of a “funding formula” to determine how much local authorities should be spending on providing advocacy services, so that there is consistency in approach across Wales.**



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