



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE	Written Statement from the Welsh Government in response to 'Missing Voices' - the Children's Commissioner's Report on his review of independent professional advocacy services for looked after children and young people, care leavers and children in need.
DATE	30th March 2012
BY	Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services

In Wales we have created a unique and increasingly rights based approach to policy and we recognise that advocacy sits firmly within children's rights as a way for children and young people to be heard when they want someone on their side, someone to help them be safe, to participate and to have access to provisions.

The Welsh Government and the Children's Commissioner have the same aim, which is to ensure that children and young people have the best possible support to overcome the challenges and barriers they experience in their lives.

We would like to acknowledge the time and effort the Commissioner and his staff have taken to produce *Missing Voices* - the Children's Commissioner's Report on his Review of Advocacy Services for this group of vulnerable children and young people.

The report sets out 29 key recommendations. Where the recommendations are directed to partners including local authorities and advocacy providers, action is being taken to draw the recommendations to their attention.

By law, every local authority must provide an independent professional "voice", also known as an advocate, for every looked after child and young person, care leaver and child in need. They should have access to an advocate when decisions are being made about them or if they want to make a complaint. The Welsh Government has issued clear guidance for local authorities on providing advocacy services – *Providing Effective Advocacy Services for Children and Young People Making a Representation or Complaint under the Children Act 1989*

We will be asking local authorities to consider the report carefully and to report back to the Welsh Government.

I have already written to the Chair of the Children and Young People's Committee, who has consistently shown their interest in Advocacy, to ask them to contribute their views to the recommendations.

Safeguarding children and young people is central to all we do and the Welsh Government has demonstrated its commitment to the sustained development of and increased access to advocacy for all children and young people, especially those most vulnerable. The Welsh Government therefore welcomes the report and while it would agree that there are areas that need to be addressed and where we can make improvements, we should also acknowledge the considerable amount of positive developments that have also been achieved.

Wales is leading the way by investing in information, advice and advocacy services to ensure that children and young people are protected are able to participate and have access to provision. This includes MEIC our Advocacy and Advice helpline for children and young people 24 hrs a day 7 days a week. MEIC is the only helpline of its kind on a national level in the UK and has received 7000 contacts by children and young people to date. This has provided invaluable support for children and young people. If children and young people have positive experiences they are more likely to achieve sustainable positive change throughout their lives.

This Review by the Children's Commissioner has identified a number of important issues and the Welsh Government will be responding to these in due course.