

## **New Service Framework for the Future Provision of Advocacy Service for Children in Wales**

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**Jane Hutt, Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and  
Gwenda Thomas, Deputy Minister for Social Services**

The Welsh Assembly Government has a long-standing commitment to provide universal access to effective advocacy services for all children and young people in Wales. The right of children and young people to be heard directly on matters that affect them is a key component of our approach to developing policy that is firmly grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is particularly important that children and young people have every opportunity to seek redress when things go wrong and that service providers learn from the experience of service users in order to truly become citizen focussed.

We therefore have great pleasure in announcing today new measures to strengthen the voice of children and young people in the provision of public services in Wales. The Government intends to put in place a *New Service Framework for the Future Provision of Advocacy Service in Wales*. The new framework will be implemented over the next two years. At the heart of the Framework will be a new;

- National Independent Advocacy Board. *The Board will take an independent, strategic overview of the development and delivery of advocacy services in Wales and will make recommendations to the National Assembly and to the Welsh Assembly Government. The Board will have a key role in advising on the regulatory framework for advocacy services; promoting best practice and identifying and developing the evidence base. Critically, the Board will also advise Welsh Ministers on the commissioning arrangements for advocacy at national, regional and local level and publish an opinion on arrangements made by the statutory Children and Young People Partnerships to commission and secure the provision of integrated specialist advocacy services. The Board will also consider the existing statutory framework and advise on whether this should be amended to allow for the continuing development of advocacy services.*
- *The Board will be supported in its work by the Advocacy\_Development and Performance Unit that will be established within the Assembly Government. The Unit's key function will be to commission, manage and monitor an all-Wales Advocacy and Advice Service and, in consultation with National Independent Advocacy Board, to develop the regulatory framework for the service and the occupational standards and training provision for staff working in the service.*

The advocacy service itself will comprise:

- a new *National Advocacy and Advice Service* to provide a single point of contact via telephone or text 7, days a week for all children and young people in Wales. This will ensure universal access to first line advocacy and support on the full range of concerns expressed by children and young people. The national service will make the necessary links with other support services such as Childline Cymru, NSPCC and, where appropriate, will make referrals to the local/regional specialist integrated advocacy services and school based counselling services. The new service will be in operation in 2009/10.

- a locally/regionally commissioned *Integrated Specialist Advocacy Service* covering health services, social care services and education, with a particular focus on providing statutory advocacy and broader support to assist vulnerable children and young people. The integrated specialist service model will be commissioned locally or regionally through the Children and Young People Partnerships, beginning later this year.

In devising this framework the Welsh Assembly Government has given particular consideration to the recommendations contained in the recent report of the Children and Young People Committee. We are very grateful for the careful, serious and thoughtful examination that the Committee gave to this important topic. We agree with much of what the Committee has recommended, especially in respect of developing a skilled advocacy workforce. We wish to pay tribute to the work of the Committee and to their commitment to strengthen the voice of all children and young people through the development of robust advocacy arrangements for those who are most disadvantaged and vulnerable. The Government will be making a detailed response to the Committee's report in due course.

Alongside the Committee's report we have also considered evidence and views from a wide range of stakeholders; including respondents to our consultation last summer, and most importantly, to the contributions of children and young people themselves.

Central to the concerns of most stakeholders and to the Committee was the question of the independence and the perceived independence of specialist advocacy services. The Government shares the underlying principles on which the Committee has made its recommendation for a national commissioning body for such services but also notes the challenge that differing notions of independence present. There continues to be a difference of views on what constitutes an independent service.

The key strength of the service framework that we intend to put in place is the link it will make between the voice of the child or young person and mainstream services for children and young people. The Assembly Government sees the provision of advocacy services as an opportunity to develop awareness of children's rights amongst service providers, to challenge those occupational and local cultures that do not effectively engage children and young people in the design and delivery of services and to ensure, wherever possible, the speedy resolution of difficulties. In this way, local responsibility for resolving grievances or remedying service deficiencies is not undermined.

However, these arrangements will need to have the confidence of children and young people. They will have an important role on the National Independent Advocacy Board which will oversee the arrangements that we intend to put in place. It is our intention that the Independent Advocacy Board will provide a unique, informed and fully independent account of the quality of advocacy services for children and young people in Wales to a degree that is unparalleled elsewhere in the UK or Europe. We also intend, by regulation, to require local/regional arrangements to be commissioned on at least a three-year basis.

The Welsh Assembly Government also respects the need to have a continuous programme for improving the independence of services to strengthen the voices of children and young people and to ensure there is sufficient capacity and flexibility in the law so as to allow the Welsh Assembly Government and future Governments to respond to an ever-changing environment and expectations.

Wales already has an international reputation for innovation, working in partnership and for placing the voice of the child at the heart of its policies and programmes. The *New Service Framework for the Future Provision of Advocacy Service in Wales* represents a major step

forward in Wales' promotion of Article 12 of the UNCRC to ensure the rights of children and young people to have a say in what they think should happen when adults are making decision about them and to have their opinions taken into account.

For further information see key publications listed below at the National Assembly for Wales website.

*The Welsh Assembly Government consultation document and report on the outcomes of the consultation on A New Service Model for Delivering Advocacy Services for Children and Young People (April 2007)*

[Http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenandyoungpeople/childrenfirst/](http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenandyoungpeople/childrenfirst/)

*The Minister for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills oral statement to plenary (11 December 2007)*

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-chamber/bus-chamber-third-assembly-rop.htm?act=dis&id=68595&ds=12/2007#rhif5>

*The Children and Young people Committee report - Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales (March 2008)*

<http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-committees/bus-committees-third-assem/bus-committees-third-cyp-home.htm>