



Cynulliad National  
Cenedlaethol Assembly for  
Cymru Wales

# **Advocacy services for children and young people in Wales**

**March 2008**

**Children and Young People Committee**

**Easy Read Version**

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**This is an Easy Read version of the main document:**

**'Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales'  
Children and Young People's Committee, March 2008**

## What is advocacy?

Sometimes children and young people need help to have their **voices heard**.

Children and young people sometimes need the help and support of an advocate to represent their views and wishes to:

- Get something to happen
- Get something to change
- Get something to stop

## Who may need advocacy?

Some children and young people may:

- Be living in care
- Be about to leave care or have already left care
- Be receiving services from their local authority
- Have contact with Social Services.

## How is advocacy provided now?

Under current law, **local authorities** must arrange advocacy for children and young people. **Local authorities** provide services in the county you live in such as education, council services and social services.

Local authorities can:

- Provide the advocacy themselves or
- Make an arrangement for another organisation to provide it, such as a voluntary organisation. **This is called Commissioning.**

**This report is about proposing new ways of providing advocacy services to children and young people in Wales.**

# Background to this report on why new ways of providing advocacy are needed

## 1990s - Abuse of children was uncovered

In the late 1990s it was found that some children who are looked after in children's homes were abused.

## Abuse was looked into and suggestions for advocacy were made

Reports were written that said that **independent advocacy is needed** so children and young people get their voice heard such as when they are unhappy about the service they are getting.

They said that children and young people need advocacy as a source of protection and as way of making sure their views are heard.

Later reports also put forward a wide range of suggestions about how to provide advocacy services.

## March 2007: Welsh Assembly Government produced proposals for providing advocacy

In response to these reports, Welsh Assembly Government produced their own proposals called

**'New Service Model for delivering advocacy services for children and young people'.**

In this document they propose:

**Providing advocacy services on a regional basis through the Children and Young People's Framework Partnerships.**

Between March and July 2007 people gave their **views** on this consultation. People had different views on how advocacy should be provided.

Because people's views were so different, more research was needed to see what is the best way to provide advocacy services.

## **March 2007 – March 2008:**

### **Children and Young People Committee looked closely at the Welsh Assembly Government's proposals and people's different views**

#### **What is the Children and Young People Committee?**

The committee is part of the National Assembly for Wales.

The National Assembly for Wales makes laws and looks closely at the Welsh Assembly Government's policies and how it uses its budget.

The Welsh Assembly Government governs Wales.

The Committee heard opinions from a wide range of people including:

- Advocacy commissioners (those who make arrangements for others to provide the service and provide funding for them to do so)
- Advocacy providers (those who provide the service)
- Voluntary organisations
- Children and young people

### **March 2008: Children and Young People Committee produce the document:**

**'Advocacy Services for Children and Young People in Wales', March 2008**

This document makes proposals to the Welsh Assembly Government on action that needs to be taken on providing advocacy services to children and young people in Wales.

The report looked at 4 important needs. The need for:

**1. Independent Advocacy**

**2. Advocates who are well trained and are good at their job**

**3. Advocacy services that are easy to find out about**

**4. Advocacy services that can be relied on and are always funded**

These 4 important areas will be looked at in the rest of this document.

The Children and Young People's Committee's then put forward 12 proposals which can be seen under each heading.

They are in the colour **light blue**.

# **1. The need for Independent Advocacy**

**Everybody** agreed that advocacy services needed to be Independent, so young people can be confident about the service and trust the service.

## **What is independent advocacy?**

Advocates are completely separate from the organisations who provide services.

Independent advocates do not answer to managers in social work, health, housing, education, or any of the other services that young people depend on.

Independent advocates act only on the wishes of the child or young person.

They do not take their own view of what is best or try to influence the child or young person to make a different choice.

As said before, people had different views on how advocacy should be provided and what would truly provide an independent service.

**The difference in views are in 3 possible methods of providing advocacy:**

## **Method 1: Welsh Assembly Government Proposal: Providing advocacy on a Regional basis through the Children and Young People's Partnerships**

### **What is a Children and Young People's Partnership?**

Each of the 22 local authorities in Wales has a Children and Young People's Partnership.

They work to improve services for children and young people.

They are made up of different organisations such as social services, schools, voluntary organisations, health, police, employment.

### **People told the Committee the reasons why they liked the regional method**

There are 3 main reasons:

- As the Children and Young People's Partnership and advocacy provider are in the same county they are able to talk to each other easily
- As the regional method is based on local authority areas, it meets the needs of local children and young people at a local level
- Regional advocacy can be independent because advocates do not have to answer to the local authority

However, people did say that the model would need to be improved to make sure it:

- is managed well
- it is checked to see if it is working properly

## **Method 2: A mixture of regional and national advocacy**

Some people were in favour of arranging most services at a **regional level**.

Where there are specialist needs, such as children and young people seeking a home in Wales that have come from another country (this is known as people seeking Asylum), then a **national approach** may be better.

## **Method 3: National Advocacy**

National Advocacy is when different advocacy services are arranged from one central point in Wales.

### **People told the committee the reasons why they liked the National method:**

These are the reasons:

- Providing national advocacy would allow services to be **funded independently**. Money would come from Welsh Assembly Government to a National organisation which is independent from local authorities.

This organisation would then commission local advocacy services for different local areas.

### **People who liked the National method told the committee the reasons why they did not like the Regional method:**

- They did not think that the regional method would provide independence because advocacy providers would still be funded by those they may have to challenge.

This may happen when advocacy providers need to challenge social services (funders).

There is a difference between how social services work and advocacy providers work.

**Social services** have to act in a **child's best interests** and wellbeing.

**Advocates** have to speak on **behalf of the child**, even when the child's wishes may be not be good for their wellbeing.

- If local authorities hold the money they may decide that they cannot afford to fund advocacy services.
- Children and Young People's Partnerships do not have experience of arranging advocacy services. The organisations in the partnership work in different ways.
- Other services in Wales are run well by national organisations who arrange for local providers to provide the services.
- If a national organisation arranged local advocacy services, it would always be done in the same way across the whole of Wales.

## **Committee's Views and Proposals on Independent Advocacy**

The Committee looked at everyone's views on the three possible methods of providing advocacy.

The Committee came to the view that **independence** is the most important part of providing advocacy.

### **The Committee thought that commissioning advocacy through a National Organisation is the best way to provide independent advocacy**

The local knowledge of the Children and Young People's Partnership will be useful in **providing advice about the local area** when advocacy services are arranged.

Removing existing duties from local authorities to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy services could involve a **change in the law**.

Proposal 1: Welsh Assembly Government to **set up and fund a National Advocacy Organisation** which will be in charge of arranging independent advocacy services in local areas in Wales.

Proposal 2: **Children and young people should be involved** in deciding who will run the organisation.

## 2. The need for Advocates who are well trained and are good at their job

### Views of organisations and young people

Many people believe that Advocacy should be a recognised job. At the moment Advocates do not need to have a qualification.

**Training for advocates** is very important so they do a good job.

A National Advocacy Organisation could provide training on a national basis which would give them a qualification.

However, people did not think that it was necessary for advocates to have a social work qualification or college qualifications.

Some people believed advocates should know how to **listen well and be good at providing advice**. This is important as often the advocate will be emotionally involved with the child or young person.

Advocates needed to be able to **follow things through** and stick by the child or young person.

**Lay advocacy** is important. *This is a more casual type of advocacy where advocates are people someone knows in their community and may help them over a short period of time.*

**Peer Advocacy** is important. *This is where the advocate is a young person themselves and has shared similar experiences to the child or young person.*

**Self Advocacy** is important. This is when a child or young person is able to speak up for themselves.

# Committee's Proposals on training advocates so they can do a good job

Proposal 3: The National Advocacy Organisation should provide a **Training Programme for Advocates** including a range of skills, to also include listening, understanding, relationship building and counselling skills. The training should involve former users of advocacy and children and young people.

Proposal 4: The National Advocacy Organisation should provide **training to lay advocates**. These people may be from the community including teachers, counsellors, doctors and cleaners.

Proposal 5: The National Advocacy Unit should provide **training to local advocacy services** to assist them in helping children and young people to speak up and represent themselves.

Proposal 6: Welsh Assembly Government should **check how the National Advocacy Organisation is doing** and how local advocacy providers are doing. The people who check the services should be independent of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Proposal 7: The checking of advocacy services should include how well **skilled advocacy providers are**.

### 3. Making sure Advocacy services are easy to find out about

#### Views of organisations and young people

Many children and young people found it difficult to find out that advocacy services were available.

There was lack of information given to children and young people about advocacy services. **Posters and flyers** need to be in places where they can be seen such as schools and youth clubs.

The committee thought it was important to make sure children and young people are aware of advocacy services.

Children and young people leaving a care home should automatically be given **telephone numbers** for advocacy services.

Children and young people thought that Welsh Assembly Government's proposal to create a **free phone and text service** was good.

Some children and young people **did not have a choice on who their advocate was**.

Children and young people wanted their advocate to be someone who is easy to get to see and who is easy to contact on the phone.

It should be clear when information given by the child or young person to the advocate is:

- **private or**
- **when it can be shared with other people.**

Children and young people wanted to be able to talk to their **advocate on their own, without others knowing.**

## Committee's Proposals on making sure advocacy services are easy to find out about

Proposal 8: Welsh Assembly Government should involve children and young people in setting up a **free phone and text service**. This should be free to use from a mobile phone as well. This service should be available 24 hours a day.

Proposal 9: Welsh Assembly Government should **involve children and young people** in developing the advertising around the new phone and text service.

This should explain what advocacy is and how it can help children and young people.

Proposal 10: Welsh Assembly Government should make sure that children and young people get to **choose their advocate**.

Proposal 11: Welsh Assembly Government should make sure that comments made by the child or young person to the advocate are kept private.

The only time it should not be private is when it means that keeping to themselves puts the child or young person at risk of danger or harm.

### What is risk of danger or harm?

This can be:

- **physical harm** – such as hitting, shaking or burning
- **sexual harm** – such as forcing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities
- **emotional harm** – not treating a child or young person well so they don't feel well in the mind
- **neglect** – not looking after a child such as not keeping a child or young person warm or not providing any or enough food

## **4. The need for a service that can be relied on and always has enough money**

Advocacy services are often funded under an agreement for 1 year, 2 years or 3 years. Some people said this is not good because:

- It does not allow advocacy providers to be sure they can continue their service
- They are not able to plan ahead

**Proposal 12:** National Advocacy Organisation should fund advocacy services for a **minimum of 3 years**, with opportunity to extend the funding.

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