

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	20 JULY 2023
Report Title:	REGIONAL ADVOCACY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	RICHARD THOMAS, COMMISSIONING OFFICER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules
Executive Summary:	<p>Summary of annual service delivery for 2022-23 of statutory advocacy for children and young people. The information and data shows a continually improving level of service delivery in Bridgend, favourably comparable to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) region as a whole.</p> <p>The ongoing recovery from the Covid pandemic is demonstrated in the increasing number of children and young people who are accessing the advocacy service. There is good evidence of an increase in delivering the ‘Active Offer’ of advocacy, which is a key requirement of the national service model.</p> <p>There is evidence of the service provider working as a proactive and innovative regional partner in delivering statutory advocacy, alongside other services that help children, young people or their families.</p>

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to highlight the key aspects of service delivery from our regional provider, Tros Gynnal Plant. Detailed performance reports are included as appendices as follows:

Appendix 1: Bridgend Annual Advocacy Report 2022-2023

Appendix 2: CTM Regional Annual Advocacy Report 2022-2023

2. Background

- 2.1 Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM). TGP has delivered advocacy services in Bridgend for many years and is a well-established provider locally, as well as being the largest provider of advocacy to children and young people in Wales.
- 2.2 This regional service is based on the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA), which is prescribed by Welsh Government.
- 2.3 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) receives an element of Welsh Government funding towards this service, which is administered by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT CBC), on behalf of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. RCT are also the contracting authority for this regional service.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 Detailed quarterly performance reports are provided by TGP. TGP also provide an annual report for both Bridgend locality and the CTM region. They cover the key service aspects of Issue Based Advocacy, and the Active Offer of advocacy.
- 3.2 During the year, 224 young people accessed the Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) service, presenting with 275 issues (see **Appendix 1**). This represents a notable increase in young people accessing IBA when compared to the previous year, and the year before that, maintaining a positive trend in increasing referrals. It also represents 47% of total IBA referrals (476) within the CTM region (see Appendix 2), meaning the Bridgend service compares very favourably.
- 3.3 Some 123 young people accessed the IBA service for the first time, compared to 67 in the previous year (**Appendix 1**). Most children and young people referred for IBA this year were in the Child Protection arena, with over 50% of IBA referrals. The majority of IBA referrals continue to be made for young people aged between six and 11, although referrals for young people aged 12-16 more than doubled from 40 last year, to 97 this year.
- 3.4 'Self-referral' continues to be the most established route into the IBA service, followed by social services referrals. This demonstrates good awareness of the service amongst the young people it is designed for. There were also 26 IBA referrals made by third sector organisations, mostly TGP Cymru's Family Group Conferencing and Restorative Approaches Service (which sit separate to the statutory advocacy service).
- 3.5 There are a wide range of issues that young people need support with, but 'contact' with family or issues with 'home life' continue to be the most prevalent. Contact issues may be where a young person wants more, or sometimes less, contact with a parent or family member.
- 3.6 An 'Active Offer' (AO) of advocacy is a core element of the statutory service, where all eligible children and young people, which includes Children Looked After and those over the age of 4 who are on the Child Protection Register, should be made

aware of their right to advocacy, via an 'Active Offer'. The majority of young people referred for AO in Bridgend last year were aged between 6 and 11.

- 3.7 **Appendix 1** sets out that 310 children and young people became eligible for the AO during the year, 101 were referred, meaning 33% of those eligible were referred. The percentage in Bridgend is consistent with the CTM region as a whole (Appendix 2), and represents an increasing trend, where 19% of eligible young people in the region were referred for AO in the previous year. There has been ongoing work between TGP and BCBC in making this offer to as many eligible young people as possible. Partnership work continues to raise this proportion further still.
- 3.8 TGP, like most social care service providers, have experienced some challenges with recruitment and retention. However, they have used their regional capacity to ensure the service continues to be delivered, and importantly have ensured some crucial elements of the service are in place, namely Independent Visiting, where a volunteer acts in a befriending capacity to young people in care who may have minimal or no contact with family or friends, and also Residential Visiting Advocacy, where advocates make regular visits to children's residential homes to ensure young people can express themselves and have their voices heard in relation to the support they receive.
- 3.9 TGP continues to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend, now called Bridgend Youth Voice Forum, or 'BYV' Forum. The aim of the group is to allow care experienced young people and care leavers to have a voice in wider Bridgend forums, including the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Board.
- 3.10 TGP continue to develop new and innovative ways for young people to provide feedback to help improve the advocacy service, e.g. through the use of a QR code that they can scan from their mobile phones and which links to a short questionnaire.
- 3.11 TGP have noted that social workers are not always able to respond to some case communications, resulting in some young people's advocacy cases remaining open longer than they need to be. This is noted in both the local Bridgend report (Appendix 1) and the regional report (**Appendix 2**). The volume of work being managed in statutory children's services will have impacted and focused work to safely reduce caseloads will assist in improving responsiveness.
- 3.12 Following recent changes in BCBC Children's Services, including the appointment of a new Responsible Individual (whose role is to promote, monitor and improve service quality, TGP has met and engaged with BCBC on a number of levels to further develop working relationships and improve awareness and understanding of referral processes for advocacy. TGP's Advocacy team manager attended the Bridgend Corporate Parenting Pledge event in March, where the following promise was made:

"Care experienced children and young people in Bridgend, along with care leavers, are able to access good quality and responsive advocacy services at a time and place that suits them."

This promise has been written into the new Bridgend Corporate Parenting Strategy.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver wellbeing outcomes for people. The following is a summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report.

Long Term. The operation of a statutory advocacy service is prescribed by Welsh Government and the service operates in a similar way across Wales and into the long term.

Prevention. Advocacy includes providing people with information, advice, and support to help people prevent issues from escalating further.

Integration. The regional service operates across the 3 CTM local authority areas as a single service.

Collaboration. The regional authorities work in close partnership with our service provider.

Involvement. One of the basic principles of advocacy services is the inclusion and involvement of the children and young people who use the service.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 Beyond necessary staff travel and operational administration activities, there is no direct impact on Climate Change through the provision of this advocacy service.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 The provision of statutory advocacy is a key element in ensuring the safety and welfare of children and young people.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the content of the report.

Background documents

None