

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	4 SEPTEMBER 2024
Report Title:	REGIONAL CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY SERVICE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	SHEREE DIXON, GROUP MANAGER CASE MANAGEMENT AND TRANSITION
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 2023-24 of statutory advocacy for children and young people.</p> <p>The National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA) was introduced by Welsh Government in July 2017. The overall aim was to provide a consistent and standardised approach to the delivery of advocacy services and ensure that all children and young people whose care planning is underpinned by statutory guidance and regulation have access to this.</p> <p>Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides advocacy services across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. They are a well-established provider across Wales.</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 this report is to provide the Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting with a summary report to highlight the key aspects of service delivery from our regional provider of advocacy service, Tros Gynnal Plant. Detailed performance reports are included as appendices as follows:

Appendix 1: Bridgend Annual Advocacy Report 2023-2024

2. Background

- 2.1 The regional service is based on the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA), which is prescribed by Welsh Government. The National Approach to Statutory Advocacy (NASA) for children and young people in Wales was introduced in July 2017. The national approach ensures that children and/or young people whose care planning is underpinned by statutory guidance and regulations have a clear entitlement to the offer of advocacy services. This enables children and young people to have an increased voice in their planning and to have their rights upheld under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The national approach aims to standardise advocacy, its eligibility criteria, and provision across Wales.
- 2.2 When a child or young person aged five and over becomes care experienced or subject to child protection proceedings, they are eligible for the Active Offer of Advocacy (AO) and there are statutory responsibilities to ensure that all eligible children and young people are made aware of their rights to access this service. For children under five years of age, a referral to advocacy services is determined on a case-by-case basis following the social workers assessment of their ability to understand the information shared within the meeting. The Issue Based Advocacy (IBA) element of the advocacy service is intended to provide support to a child or young person to address a particular issue or situation.
- 2.3 Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides a regional advocacy service in Cwm Taf Morgannwg. 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.
- 2.4 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 (RCTCBC), on behalf of the CTM region. RCTCBC are also the contracting authority for this regional service. TGP provides quarterly and annual reports both to individual local authorities and across the region as a whole. Additionally, there are quarterly meetings to discuss their content, service development and provide opportunities for partnership working to continuously improve service delivery.

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 the Active Offer (AO) of advocacy and Issue Based Advocacy (IBA).
- 3.2 In BCBC, during 2023/2024, 262 children and young people became eligible for the AO. 216 were eligible due to becoming subject to child protection procedures and 46 were eligible due to becoming care experienced. Out of the 262 eligible for AO, 71 were referred to the service. This equates to 27% of the eligible cohort. 65% of the total number of referrals were for care experienced children and young people and 35% were for those who had become subject to child protection procedures. Of the 71 children and young people referred, 64 AO meetings took place. 56 accepted the AO and subsequently received IBA. In comparison to the previous year, whereby 33% of those eligible were referred, this does demonstrate a decrease in the overall referral rate. There are a number of reasons for children and young people refusing the AO which are reported to be including, but not exclusive to, feeling they are able to share their own wishes and feelings and a preference for their allocated social worker to support them in this area. Children and young people also have requested that they have further discussions regarding advocacy services at a later date so wish to take the time to consider the offer It should also be recognised that BCBC have seen an improved picture in relation to staffing within the social work teams over the past year. There has been an improved performance across teams which relates to stability in the workforce and less reliance on agency staff. This has therefore resulted in consistency of social workers for children and young people with increased opportunities to develop relationships with social workers who they feel can advocate on their behalf.
- 3.3 With regards to demographics of those accessing the AO during 2023/2024, 38 were female and 33 were male. The 12-16 age group represented the highest number of referrals at 33, closely followed by the 6-11 age group at 30. There were 4 referrals from both 0-5 and 17-19 age group.
- 3.4 Following the referral for the AO, 63% received this within 5 working days. Where there were delays to the AO being received, the primary factors for this were due to requests from children, young people and carers to meet at timescales outside of this.
- 3.5 During 2023/2024, 145 children and young people accessed the IBA service, presenting with 172 issues. Of the 145 children, 56 were subject to child protection procedures, 65 were care experienced, 18 were open to the LA on a care and support basis and 6 were care leavers over the age of 18. This has been a shift from the previous year whereby the majority of children and young people who accessed IBA were subject to child protection procedures.
- 3.6 The number of children and young people accessing IBA has decreased significantly compared to the previous year, whereby 224 accessed the service. The number accessing IBA in 2023/2024 is however more closely aligned to the two years preceding where 155 and 135 children accessed the service in those years.
- 3.7 In 2022/2023 there was a particularly high number of children who were care experienced and subject to child protection procedures which is likely to have contributed to significant increase in referrals to the IBA service for this year in

particular. This coincided with the challenges being faced within Children's Social Care linked to staffing and recruitment issues.

- 3.8 In 2023/2024 with regards to gender, 80 referrals for IBA were female and 65 were male. The 12-16 age group represented the majority of referrals with 79, which was almost double the second highest number of referrals per age group for 6-11 years which was 40. The 0-5 age group had 5 referrals for IBA, 17–19-year-olds accounted for 16 referrals and 20–25-year-olds equated to 5 referrals.
- 3.9 With regards to the referral source for IBA, the majority of these were self-referrals with 79 of the 145 overall total. The second highest referral source was from social services at 47. This demonstrates good awareness of the service amongst the young people it is designed for.
- 3.10 A total of 172 issues were recorded across the IBA referrals. There were a wide range of issues that young people need support with but contact with family was the most prevalent with 37 children and young people requesting support with this issue. 34 young people raised issues relating to their placement and 33 with issues relating to home life.
- 3.11 One role of an advocate is to support young people to share their views, wishes and feelings at meetings. Support at meetings was highlighted 21 times during 2023/2024, however, advocates supported children and young people at 62 meetings. The type of meetings young people were supported with include Child Protection Conferences, LAC Care-Experienced Children Reviews, Core Group meetings, and Family Group Meetings.
- 3.12 There has been ongoing work between TGP and BCBC in relation to ensuring the offer of advocacy is made to aa eligible young Partnership work continues to raise awareness and ensuring that all eligible children and young people are aware of their rights to advocacy services.
- 3.13 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, whilst sharing their views, wishes and feelings in relation to what matters to them with the overall aim to support with service design and delivery.
- 3.14 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. They have also introduced a monthly prize draw whereby children and young people who provide feedback have the chance to win a gift voucher.
- 3.15 There is a close partnership working between TGP and BCBC with a view to improving service delivery and develop strategies which will support an increase in the take up of the service. This has included TGP attending relevant team meetings to raise awareness of the service, discuss referral routes and the roles and responsibilities of staff within this process. The performance team are liaising with team managers on a quarterly basis to share information on those who have become eligible for the AO and gather data on the response to the offer, whether

the referral has been made and any reasons for refusal. TGP are also raising any particular issues with the Group Manager for Case Management and Transition directly to ensure that these are addressed promptly.

- 3.16 TGP, like most social care service providers, have experienced some challenges with recruitment and retention. However, they have used their regional capacity to ensure service continues to be delivered and have now successfully appointed to a number of key vacancies.

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. Voice and choice are key principles of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, and the overall aim of advocacy services is to achieve this.

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 Cabinet Committee Corporate Parenting considers and notes both Annual reports in relation to the regional advocacy service.

Background documents

None