

Meeting of:	CABINET COMMITTEE CORPORATE PARENTING
Date of Meeting:	29TH OCTOBER 2025
Report Title:	REGIONAL CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY SERVICE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CLAIRE MARCHANT CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	RAEANNA GRAINGER, GROUP MANAGER, MASH, IAA, IRO SERVICE
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules
Executive Summary:	Summary of annual service delivery for 2024-25 of statutory advocacy for children & young people. 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. Tros Gynnal Plant (TGP) provides advocacy services across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. They are a well-established provider across Wales. 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.

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 services, Tros Gynnal Plant. Detailed performance reports are included as appendices as follows:

Appendix 1:

Appendix 2: Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) Regional Annual Advocacy Report 2024-2025

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 the Cwm Taf Morgannwg (CTM) region. 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 (RCT), on behalf of the CTM region. RCT 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.
- 3.2** In BCBC, during 2024/2025, 132 children and young people became eligible for the AO. 94 were eligible due to becoming subject to child protection procedures and 38 were eligible due to becoming care experienced. Out of the 132 eligible for AO, 66 were referred to the service. This equates to 50% of the eligible cohort being referred, compared to 27% in the previous year, and demonstrates an overall

increase in the percentage being referred. Of those children and young people refusing the AO, there are a number of reasons 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.

- 3.3 Of the total number of AO referrals, 39% were for care experienced children and young people and 61% were for those who had become subject to child protection procedures.
- 3.4 With regards to demographics of those accessing the AO during 2024/2025, 34 were female and 32 were male. The 6-11 age group represented the highest number of referrals at 32, closely followed by the 12-16 age group at 30. There was 1 referral from the 0-5 age group and 3 from the 17-19 age group.
- 3.5 Following the referral, 60% of children and young people received the AO 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.
- 3.6 Of the 66 children and young people referred, 54 AO meetings took place. 39 accepted the AO and subsequently received IBA.
- 3.7 During 2024/2025, 133 children and young people accessed the IBA service, presenting with 172 issues. The number has decreased slightly compared to the previous year, where 145 accessed the service. The Authority expected to see a reduction following the implementation of the Signs of Safety practice model as this places much greater emphasis on direct work between the child and their Social Worker and puts their voice at the centre of any intervention. This in many cases has negated the child's wish to be supported by an advocate.
- 3.8 Of the 133 children accessing IBA, 81 were care experienced, 29 were subject to child protection procedures, 13 were open to the Authority on a care and support basis and 10 were care leavers over the age of 18. This represents a continued increase in the number of Care Experienced children and young people referred for IBA and a decrease in the number of children and young people subject to child protection procedures. However it must be noted our numbers of children subject to Child Protection processes has significantly decreased in this period, leading to an overall reduction in referrals to advocacy.
- 3.9 In 2024/2025 with regards to gender, 76 referrals for IBA were female and 57 were male. The 12-16 age group represented the majority of referrals with 58, followed by the 6-11 year age group which was 43. The 0-5 age group had 4 referrals for IBA, 17-19 year olds accounted for 23 referrals and 20-25 year olds equated to 5 referrals.
- 3.10 With regards to the referral source for IBA, the majority of these were self-referrals with 73 of the 133 overall total. The second highest referral source was from social services at 49. This demonstrates good awareness of the service amongst the young people it is designed for.

- 3.11 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 34 children and young people requesting support with this issue. 29 young people raised issues relating to their placement and 23 with issues relating to social services.
- 3.12 One role of an advocate is to support young people to share their views, wishes and feelings at meetings. Support at meetings was highlighted 26 times during 2024/2025, however, advocates supported children and young people at 59 meetings. The type of meetings young people were supported with include Child Protection Conferences, Care Experienced Children Reviews, Core Group meetings, Planning meetings and School meetings. It is positive to note that advocates have seen an increase in young people's attendance at meetings this year.
- 3.13 TGP continues to be responsible for facilitating young people's participation and consultation groups in Bridgend - 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 provide a Residential Visiting Advocacy Service (RVA) to BCBC's children's residential homes. During visits, the advocate supports young people living in the homes to share their views, wishes and feelings with home managers and has supported them to access the BYV forum if they wish.
- 3.15 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.
- 3.16 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.
- 3.17 TGP have recruited to a number of posts to its CTM team during the year including a casual advocate to take over the RVA role and two new part time Independent Professional Advocates. Training completed by the team includes but is not limited to Non-Instructed Advocacy, Restorative Engagement, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training, and Personal Safety and Lone Working.

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. 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 three 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 and Nature 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

Bridgend Annual Advocacy Report 2024-2025