

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

30 JULY 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING

The development of a national approach to statutory advocacy for looked after children, children in need and other specified individuals.

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee of the development of a national approach to statutory advocacy for looked after children, children in need and specified individuals in Wales.

2 Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report links to the following Corporate Improvement priorities:
- Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement;
 - Working with children and families to tackle problems early;
 - Working together to help vulnerable people to stay independent;
 - Working together to tackle health issues and encourage healthy lifestyles.

3 Background

- 3.1 In October 2014, Welsh Ministers reviewed a range of evidence provided by recent reports and concluded that there was a need to bring refreshed focus and impetus to securing children's rights and entitlements ahead of the implementation of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 and the extended focus on advocacy for all ages. Advocacy for Looked After Children and others specified falls under Part 10 of the Act. A draft code of practice for advocacy under Part 10 and other relevant provisions of the Act has also been issued for consultation. The advocacy code specifies when local authorities must consider the advocacy needs of an individual, together with the range of circumstances where an individual may face additional risks or barriers that can heighten their needs for advocacy support. There are various Welsh Government work streams ongoing which will continue to inform each other to ensure consistency and coherence, and will influence the final version of the relevant codes which will be laid before the National Assembly for Wales towards the end of 2015. The entitlements of Looked After Children (and other specified people) to assistance (advocacy) currently exists under the Children Act 1989 and will continue to do so until the relevant the final codes of practice have been approved by Welsh Government.

- 3.2 Key stakeholders including the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS Cymru), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), Chair of Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy (MEGA), the Children's Commissioner and the Welsh Government Lead on Statutory Advocacy were invited to form a Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) for Advocacy.

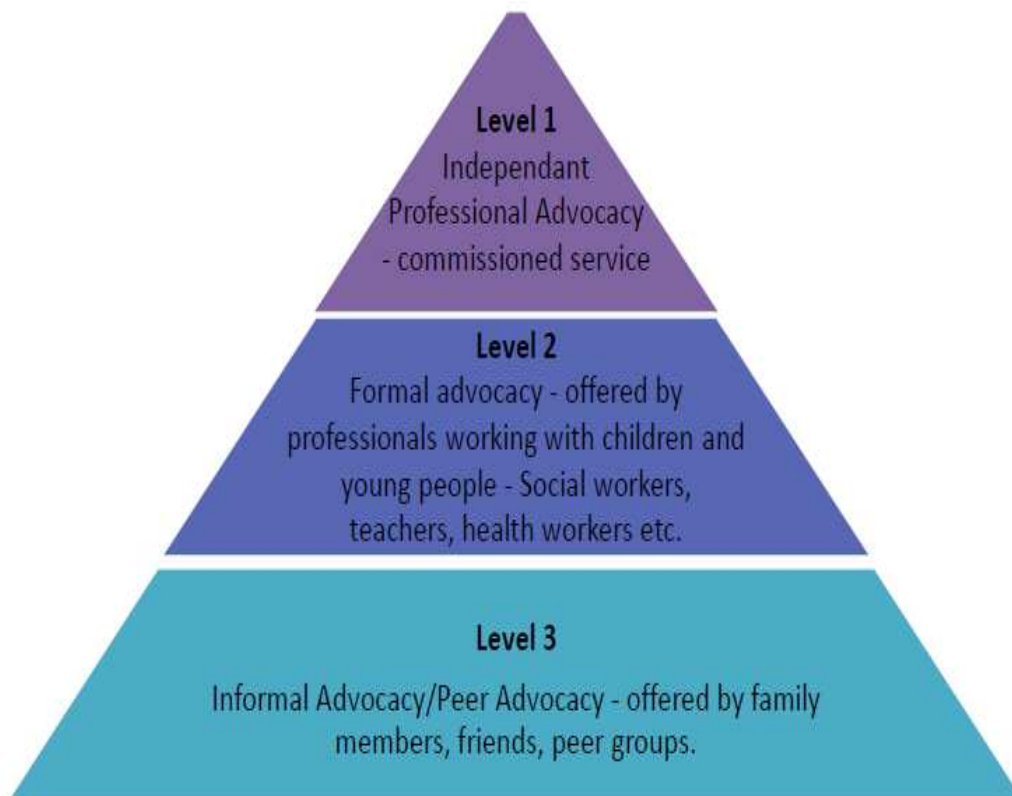
4 Current situation/proposal

- 4.1 A Task and Finish Group has been established, chaired by Colin Turner, Head of Safeguarding and Family Support at Bridgend County Borough Council, on behalf of the ADSS Cymru. The membership includes representatives, from WLGA, Welsh Government, CSSIW, each of the Social Service Collaboratives and a number of Advocacy Providers within Wales. The group is tasked with:
- Identifying and developing the key components for a National Approach to Advocacy
 - Delivering via lead authorities within Social Services Regional Collaboratives

4.2 Involvement of children and young people

A key principle underpinning the work of the Strategic Leadership Group and the Task and Finish Group is to ensure the involvement and engagement of children and young people at key stages during the development and delivery of the National Approach. This will be taken forward through engagement, consultation and participation with existing groups at a local, regional and national level by:

- Heads of Services via local/regional children and young people groups;
 - The Advocacy Providers representatives who will undertake engagement, consultation and participation with groups participating in advocacy services across Wales;
 - The Project Manager who will undertake engagement with the national Young People's Expert Group (YPEG);
 - The Office of the Children's Commissioner for Wales who will undertake engagement, consultation and participation with other groups of children and young people.
- 4.3 Whilst it is recognised that the role of an advocate can function at several different levels (see diagram below), the remit of the Task and Finish Group is to look specifically at the provision of Independent Professional Advocacy (Level 1) as commissioned by local authorities for Looked After Children, Children in Need and other specified individuals.



- 4.4 The group will drive forward the delivery of the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy through the development of the following key components;
- a performance management framework and a common reporting template
 - an agreed approach to the 'active offer' of advocacy
 - common and consistent implementation plans
 - National and Regional Governance arrangements
 - a communications strategy, which includes regular information updates
- 4.5 Children and young people will be at the heart of the National Approach to Advocacy. A fundamental principle underpinning the work of the Group is to ensure the **involvement of children and young people** at key stages throughout the development and delivery of the National Approach.
- 4.6 ADSS and Government officials are aiming to deliver the National Approach by 1 April 2016.
- 4.7 The "Active Offer" (which seeks to ensure that every child eligible for independent professional advocacy is actively offered this) will be rolled out as part of the National Approach from 1 April next year. Between now and then, regular information updates will be produced and issued to ensure key stakeholders, including Members and children and young people, are kept informed of developments and progress. There is already a wide circulation list but as Members, if you would like to ensure you receive timely regular updates on progress, please email: ann.robinson@wales.gsi.gov.uk.

4.8 The Task and Finish Group are currently exploring the development of a pilot approach to the Population Needs Assessment for those children and young people with a statutory entitlement to advocacy which LHB's and LEA's will be invited to engage with once ready.

4.9 Work on the Model for delivering the National Approach on a local, regional and national level is underway. Key to deliberations is to ensure children and young people are empowered to have a voice and participate in service development, delivery and review at all levels.

5 Effect upon Policy Frameworks and Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no impact.

6 Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 This has been considered but as the report is for information and discussion purposes only at this stage, an assessment is not deemed necessary at this stage.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 As this report is for information purposes only, there are no financial implications to consider at this time.

8 Recommendations

8.1 Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee note the information considered within this report.

Susan Cooper, Corporate Director of Social Services and Wellbeing
June 2015

9 Contact Officer: Colin Turner, Head of Safeguarding and Family Support
Telephone: (01656) 642073
E-mail: Colin.turner@bridgend.gov.uk

10 Background documents
None.