

ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL

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REPORT TO :	Scrutiny
DATE:	24.07.14
SUBJECT :	Regional Commissioning of Children and Young People's Advocacy Service
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Regional Commissioning of Children and Young People's Advocacy Service

1.0 Purpose of Report

To provide information regarding the commissioning arrangements for advocacy services and the process of tendering for a regional independent professional advocacy service for children and young people known to Social Services in North Wales. This collaboration includes the six North Wales local authorities.

2.0 Issues for Scrutiny

Anglesey Social Services Department currently commission an independent professional advocacy service for children and young people, in collaboration with the other North West Wales Authorities. This contract comes to an end in March 2015.

In accordance with Welsh Government guidance and recommendations by the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the six North Wales local authorities have agreed to commission independent professional advocacy on a regional basis.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide independent professional advocacy for Looked After Children and Children in Need under the Children Act 2004 Wales and Children Act 1989.

This report outlines the proposal that Anglesey Council Social Services Department commissions advocacy for children and young people known to Social Services in collaboration with the other five North Wales local authorities. This would require the tendering process to commence in July 2014 with a view to commission the service from April 2015. This option also provides an opportunity to make savings and to address some issues identified through the service specification.

3.0 Background

The Welsh Government issued a new model for delivering and commissioning advocacy services. It is statutory guidance issued under section 25(8) of the Children Act 2004. The model includes guidance on the commissioning of Integrated Specialist Advocacy Services through a partnership and regional approach, and states that commissioning agencies should agree to pool budgets for advocacy service with partners.

The Welsh Government guidance lists the vulnerable groups of children and young people which have a statutory right to independent advocacy.

The Children's Commissioner for Wales has undertaken a study on the current provision of advocacy for children and young people¹ and makes a number of recommendations for local authorities and the Welsh Government regarding current shortcomings in provision. The Commissioner's report concludes:

"Services are not effectively promoted to all those they should be reaching. They are not well understood by children and young people and the professionals working with them. There is an inconsistent funding and resourcing of services across Wales. They are ineffectively regulated and inspected." (All local authorities have responded individually to this report.)

In response to the above, a regional project was set up in May 2013, with a task group of members from the six North Wales local authorities, Health and the voluntary sector. An officer from Conwy CYPP is leading on the project and task group, with support from the regional family support officer.

The main aim of the project is to address the gaps which currently exist in statutory provision for vulnerable children and young people. Other aims include improved consistency, parity of access, accessibility, and efficiency.

Through a mapping exercise we have identified gaps and duplication in the provision of independent advocacy for vulnerable groups of children and young people as listed in the Welsh Government guidance.

The North Wales Family Support Group was presented with a number of commissioning options to address these. The options were based on

¹ Missing Voices: A review of independent advocacy services for looked after children and young people, care leavers, and children in need in Wales (2012)

monitoring data, population data, mapping, consultation results, and evidence gathered during the first stage of the project. The North Wales Family Support Group chose the following commissioning option, as a staged approach (bringing Education on board for April 2016).

Commission advocacy for children and young people known to Social Services across North Wales (merge the North East and North West contracts). In addition, a contribution from Health for advocacy services for children and young people wishing to make a complaint in a hospital or primary care setting (exclusion – Mental health advocacy is commissioned separately by BCUHB).

Work has been undertaken with the North Wales Heads of Children's Services to agree budgets and to develop the service description and specification.

Consultation exercises have been held with:

- North Wales Heads of Children's Services
- The Clinical Programme Group Lead in BCUHB
- A workshop and one-to-one interviews have taken place with looked after children. Their input will be included in the service specification. Young people will be involved in the tendering interviews.
- Officers from Social Services, Health, Education and the voluntary sector are proactively involved in the regional task group.
- Welsh Government Advocacy Unit, and the chair of the Ministerial Expert Group on Advocacy

Resource implications

The financial commitment to the current contract between Conwy, Anglesey and Gwynedd is £116,475, which is comprised of

Conwy	£38,967
Anglesey	£29,278
Gwynedd	£48,230

The financial commitment to the current contract between Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham is £95,868, which is comprised of

Denbighshire	£26,266
Flintshire	£33,652
Wrexham	£25,950

The service was accessed by 82 children and young people from Anglesey Social Services for Issue Based Advocacy during 2012/13. Figures vary across the other five local authority areas. The advocacy provider also made monthly visits to residential units, supported the Looked After Children's forum, and provided an Independent Visitors service (befriending). Savings have been identified for the next contract, for example excluding the participation element which can be run in-house.

A great deal of discussion has taken place regarding funding allocations, based on various formulas. This has proved challenging given the complexity of population trends, referral trends, and calculating a unit cost per case.

The Heads of Children's Services agreed to a budget ceiling of £100,000 for the contract and base their budget contribution on a percentage of the RSG grant. This means that the following financial commitment will be made by each local authority

Anglesey	-	£10,450
Gwynedd	-	£19,220
Conwy	-	£16,110
Denbighshire	-	£15,770
Flintshire	-	£20,440
Wrexham	-	£18,020

This will be clarified through a collaboration agreement between the six counties and will be based on an equitable service, which will be clarified through the tendering process.

This arrangement will release some resources to enable the Service to strengthen the local arrangements for advocacy and participation. It is our intention to establish a part time Young person's participation/advocate post for Anglesey and a further option appraisal report on this will be submitted in due course.

4.0 RISK

The collaboration will be based on the assumption that the current quantity and quality of service can be replicated for each partner in a regional commission. The risk of dilution of the service is considered minimal and can be mitigated by robust monitoring procedures which will be a required element of the contract arrangement.